

Media narratives and linguistic agency: The role of language in framing perpetrators of violence against women and children in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Language plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, especially in news reporting. This study examines how grammatical constructions are used to frame perpetrators of violence against women and children in Indonesian social media news. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it focuses on four types of sentence structures—active voice, passive voice, nominalization, and subordinate clauses—to uncover how language influences the representation of agency and accountability. A total of 15 news articles published between 2023 and 2024 from seven online media outlets (Detik.com, BBC.com, Kompas.com, Liputan6.com, Sumbar.Suara.com, Kompas.com, and Andika TV) were analyzed qualitatively. The results show that passive constructions dominate, followed by active voice, subordinate clauses, and nominalization. Active sentences highlight perpetrators and institutional actions, while passive and nominalized constructions often obscure agency and shift attention toward victims or events. Subordinate clauses emphasize victims' experiences, evoking empathy but weakening perceptions of offender responsibility. These linguistic patterns reveal how news discourse can influence emotional and moral judgments about gender-based violence. The findings emphasize the need for journalists to adopt clear, active, and ethical language use and for media educators to integrate discourse awareness into journalism training to promote responsible and balanced reporting.

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Introduction

Language plays a vital role in human life as it is the primary tool for communication. People use language to express ideas, share messages, and interact with others, both in speech and writing. For communication to be clear, it is essential to use language correctly, including choosing appropriate words, phrases, sentences, and discourse structures (Berrabah, 2020). One of the most important uses of language is in news reporting, where it helps convey information and ideas to the public (Sekhar, 2014). According to Halliday (1972), language has three primary functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These functions apply to news writing, where language is used to present ideas and perspectives from journalists and other people involved in news production.

Globally, the role of language in mass media has been widely discussed. However, language in the media is not neutral. In many countries, journalists' ideologies and interests can significantly influence how they present the news. For example, in the United States, media outlets like Fox News and CNN have been known to portray political events with distinct biases that align with their target audiences' values and opinions (Hu, 2023; Gündüz, 2017). In the UK, the way the BBC covers international conflicts often reflects

national interests and governmental perspectives (McQueen, 2008), while in countries like Russia and China, state-controlled media heavily shape public perceptions to support political agendas (Wang, 2023).

This use of language in news reporting can shape public opinion, making it more crucial to understand how language is used to frame certain events, especially sensitive topics such as violence against women and children. In many cultures, including those in Brazil and India, media outlets often underreport or sensationalize cases of violence, influencing how the public perceives these issues (Carvalho et al., 2012; Pande, 2021). Journalistic ethics call for neutrality, balance, and truthfulness in reporting (Price et al., 2021; Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). However, the language choices made in news reports can still reflect underlying biases and perspectives, making it essential to critically analyze how such issues are framed across different media platforms.

The language used in news reports does more than just present facts. Jost & Viehmann (2018) explains that news is often shaped by the interests and viewpoints of the journalists or media organizations that produce it. This aligns with the constructivist view, which suggests that language does not merely inform; it also influences how events are perceived by the audience. Mokherian et al. (2020) further argues that language in news cannot be separated from the people who write it, as their personal ideologies and perspectives affect how information is framed and presented.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a useful method for studying how language works in context (Brown & Yule, 1983; Ghanizadeh et al., 2020; Stubbs, 1983), especially in news reporting. CDA helps uncover hidden meanings behind word choices and sentence structures, revealing the underlying ideologies and power dynamics present in the news. A significant area of CDA research is in analyzing how language is used to describe cases of violence against women and children, a topic that appears frequently in news reports worldwide. For example, studies by KhosraviNik (2010) in the UK, Lloyd & Ramon (2016) in UK, and Alfaqara (2024) in the Middle East have shown that media language can often frame such violence in ways that reflect societal biases and influence public perceptions of these issues.

The increasing prevalence of social media as a primary source of news has raised serious concerns about how violence is represented in digital discourse. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms allow anyone to disseminate news rapidly, often without professional editorial oversight. As a result, the language used to describe incidents of violence—particularly against women and children—may carry implicit biases that shape public perception. The frequent exposure to such biased narratives can desensitize audiences or distort their understanding of gender-based violence, turning acts of cruelty into normalized social phenomena.

This study responds to that problem by examining how news reports on social media construct meanings about violence through specific sentence structures. Drawing on van Gerven Oei's (2021) typology of sentences—active, passive, interrogative, and declarative—it investigates how these grammatical choices influence the framing of violence against women and children. For instance, the use of passive voice may obscure the perpetrator's responsibility, while active constructions may foreground agency and accountability.

Previous studies in critical discourse analysis have explored the representation of violence or gender bias in traditional news media (e.g., newspapers and television). However, there remains a gap in understanding how sentence transformations—particularly shifts between active and passive constructions—function within social media news discourse, where immediacy and user interaction significantly affect meaning-making. This study offers a novel contribution by focusing on micro-level syntactic analysis in the context of digital journalism, revealing how subtle linguistic structures can reinforce or challenge social power relations. The findings are expected to enrich critical discourse studies, enhance journalistic awareness of language use, and support educational efforts to promote media literacy and gender sensitivity in digital communication.

Method

This study uses a qualitative research approach with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. The main focus of this study is how language is used in news reports on social media. In particular, this study looks at three important aspects of language: activation, passivation, and nominalization in sentence structures. Activation refers to how people or groups are presented as active subjects in a sentence, while passivation refers to how they are presented as passive subjects or even omitted. Nominalization is when actions or events are turned into nouns instead of verbs, which can affect how the information is understood. The data for this study comes from news texts that were published on different social media platforms.

For data collection, the researcher used the document analysis method. This means that news reports from social media platforms were collected and examined based on their linguistic structures and framing

patterns. A total of 15 news reports published between 2023 and 2024 were analyzed. These reports were selected purposively to represent cases of violence against women and children that gained public attention and were shared widely across digital platforms.

The data sources were obtained from well-known online media outlets such as Detik.com, BBC.com, Kompas.com, Liputan6.com, Sumbar.Suara.com, and Andika TV. These outlets were purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) high readership and public engagement on social media platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter); (2) frequent coverage of gender-based violence cases; and (3) accessibility of full-text news reports for linguistic analysis.

The selection process followed a purposive sampling technique, focusing on news texts published between 2023 and 2024 that explicitly reported cases of violence against women and children. Only verified media with active social media dissemination were included to ensure representativeness of online discourse.

The researcher acted as the main instrument in the data collection process, making all decisions regarding inclusion, analysis, and interpretation of the news texts. To enhance analytical validity and minimize subjectivity, peer debriefing and inter-rater checking were conducted with two independent linguists familiar with Critical Discourse Analysis. Discrepancies in coding or interpretation were discussed until consensus was reached. No additional automated tools or software were used in data selection or linguistic analysis to maintain qualitative depth and contextual sensitivity.

The list of analyzed news reports is presented in Table 1 to ensure traceability and transparency of the data sources.

Table 1. List of Analyzed News Reports

No.	News Title	Source	Year
1	Honorar Puskesmas Banting Calon Istri gegara Baju Lamaran Terancam Dipecat (<i>Health Center Contract Worker Slams Fiancée Over Engagement Dress, Faces Dismissal</i>)	Detik.com	2023
2	Herry Wirawan, pemerkosa 13 santriwati tetap dihukum mati usai kasasi ditolak MA (<i>Herry Wirawan, Rapist of 13 Female Students, Remains on Death Row After Supreme Court Rejects Appeal</i>)	BBC.com	2023
3	Penculik bocah di Gunung Sahari ditangkap, 'pelaku profesional, korban diyakini bukan satu-satunya' (<i>Child Kidnapper in Gunung Sahari Arrested: 'Professional Perpetrator, Victim Believed Not the Only One'</i>)	BBC.com	2023
4	Polisi Ungkap Motif Suami Bunuh Istri di Bogor karena Ajakan Rujuk Ditolak (<i>Police Reveal Motive of Husband Killing Wife in Bogor After Reconciliation Request Rejected</i>)	Detik.com	2024
5	Kasus dugaan pelecehan seksual di Universitas Pancasila, korban: 'Tidak apa-apa saya buka aib, asal mendapatkan keadilan' (<i>Alleged Sexual Harassment Case at Universitas Pancasila, Victim Says: 'It's Okay to Expose Shame, As Long As I Get Justice'</i>)	BBC.com	2024
6	Dipukul Pacar karena Tak Beri Uang, Perempuan di Sumbawa Lapor Polisi (<i>Woman in Sumbawa Reports Boyfriend to Police After Being Beaten for Refusing to Give Money</i>)	Kompas.com	2023
7	Ketua Bawaslu Payakumbuh Rio Gustrinanda Resmi Tersangka Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (<i>Head of Payakumbuh Election Supervisory Board Rio Gustrinanda Officially Named Suspect in Violence Against Women Case</i>)	Sumbar.Suara.com	2024
8	Armor Toreador Ditetapkan Jadi Tersangka, Lakukan KDRT pada Cut Intan Nabila Lebih dari 5 Kali Sejak 2020 (<i>Armor Toreador Named Suspect After Committing Domestic Violence Against Cut Intan Nabila More Than Five Times Since 2020</i>)	Liputan6.com	2024

9	Bocah di Pontianak Dibunuh Ibu Tiri, Jasadnya Disembunyikan Dalam Karung (<i>Child in Pontianak Killed by Stepmother, Body Hidden in Sack</i>)	Detik.com	2024
10	Kronologi Bocah 6 Tahun Dalam Karung di Pontianak Dibunuh Ibu Tiri (<i>Chronology of Six-Year-Old Found in Sack in Pontianak, Killed by Stepmother</i>)	Detik.com	2024
11	Terekamnya Jerit Ketakutan 3 Balita Saat Disiksa Ayah di Cianjur (<i>Terrifying Screams of Three Toddlers Recorded While Being Abused by Their Father in Cianjur</i>)	Detik.com	2024
12	Diduga Depresi, Seorang Ibu di Kediri Habisi Nyawa Kedua Anaknya (<i>Suspected of Depression, Mother in Kediri Kills Her Two Children</i>)	Andika TV	2023
13	Siswi SMA di Situbondo Dipukul Kakak Kelas Pakai Helm, Polisi Ungkap Motifnya (<i>High School Student in Situbondo Beaten with Helmet by Senior, Police Reveal Motive</i>)	Kompas.com	2023
14	Cut Intan Nabila Mantan Atlet Anggar Jadi Korban KDRT, Terungkap dari CCTV Dipukuli Suami Berkali-kali (<i>Former Fencing Athlete Cut Intan Nabila Becomes Victim of Domestic Violence, CCTV Shows Husband Beating Her Repeatedly</i>)	Liputan6.com	2024
15	Heboh Video Gadis Ditelanjangi-Dipukul, Dua Pelaku Ditangkap (<i>Viral Video Shows Girl Stripped and Beaten, Two Perpetrators Arrested</i>)	Detik.com	2024

To analyze the data, the study follows the Critical Discourse Analysis model developed by Fairclough (1998). This model consists of three main dimensions. The first dimension is Text Analysis, where the researcher carefully examines the language used in the news reports, identifying specific words, phrases, and structures. The second dimension is Discourse Practice, which focuses on how the language in the news reports relates to the way the news was produced, such as whether the text was written in a way that supports a certain viewpoint or hides certain details. The third dimension is Socio-Cultural Practice, which connects the way language is used to larger social and cultural issues. This helps explain why certain words or structures are chosen and how they affect the audience's understanding of the news.

The process of analyzing the data follows three steps. The first step is Description, where the researcher identifies and categorizes different language features in the news reports, such as whether the news uses activation, passivation, or nominalization. The second step is Interpretation, which looks at how these language choices affect the meaning of the text and how they may influence the reader's perception. The final step is Explanation, where the researcher connects the findings to the broader social and cultural context to understand why these language choices were made and what impact they may have.

By using this method, this study aims to explain how news media on social media platforms use language to shape public opinion about people accused of violence against women and children. The study seeks to understand whether the news presents these individuals in an active or passive way, how their actions are described, and whether the language used influences how the audience perceives the situation. This research helps to highlight the role of language in shaping public discussions on serious social issues.

Results and Discussion

The structure of sentences in news texts can be changed in different ways. Sentences can be rearranged, replaced, added, removed, or combined with other sentences. These changes can affect how information is presented, sometimes making the perpetrator less visible in the news. Below is an example of sentence transformation found in news texts.

Activation

One type of transformation that highlights the perpetrator of an action is activation, or the use of active sentences. In an active sentence, the perpetrator appears at the beginning of the sentence as the subject, making their role more visible to readers. In this study, five news texts were identified as using active constructions to emphasize the perpetrators' actions. These texts were drawn from four different online news sources, namely Detik.com, BBC.com, Kompas.com, and Liputan6.com. Such use of activation

demonstrates how language structures can direct readers' attention toward those responsible for acts of violence. The following example illustrates this pattern:

- (1) "Honorer Puskesmas Unaaha, Afdi Subianto (26) di Konawe, Sulawesi Tenggara (Sultra) terancam dipecat negara membanting calon istrinya, Irma Utari (26)."
(Source: www.detik.com)

This news was taken from detik.com, reporting a case of violence by a health worker against his fiancée in Southeast Sulawesi. The sentence in the example is a compound sentence, meaning it is made by combining two simple sentences:

1. "*Honorer Puskesmas Unaaha, Afdi Subianto terancam dipecat.*" (The contract worker at Unaaha Community Health Center, Afdi Subianto, is at risk of being fired.) – Passive sentence.
2. "*Honorer Puskesmas Unaaha, Afdi Subianto membanting calon istrinya, Irma Utari.*" (The contract worker at Unaaha Community Health Center, Afdi Subianto, slammed his fiancée, Irma Utari.) – Active sentence)

Even though these two sentences have different structures (one is passive and the other is active), both place the perpetrator at the beginning as the subject. This placement draws the reader's attention to the perpetrator rather than the victim. As a result, readers are more likely to feel antipathy toward the perpetrator.

News media use this sentence structure to emphasize the actions of the perpetrator. This frames the story in a way that makes the audience focus on the violence committed, rather than the victim's situation. By doing this, the media can influence public opinion, making the perpetrator seem more responsible for the crime.

- (2) *Herry Wirawan mendapat vonis hukuman mati dari hakim Pengadilan Tinggi Bandung, yang mengabulkan banding dari jaksa, atas kasus pemerkosaan 13 santriwati.* ("Herry Wirawan was sentenced to death by the Bandung High Court judge, who granted the prosecutor's appeal, for the rape of 13 female students.") - bbc.com

The data above is taken from news about the case of a pesantren caretaker who raped 13 female students. In this sentence, the focus is placed on the perpetrator, Herry Wirawan. The use of an active sentence makes readers pay more attention to the criminal rather than the victims. As a result, readers feel strong antipathy toward the perpetrator and may even feel satisfied with the death sentence given by the court.

This kind of sentence structure is often used by the media to reduce the visibility of the victims in the news. By focusing on the perpetrator, the role of the victims is minimized, which may be an attempt to protect their identity and prevent social stigma.

Additionally, activation is sometimes used to highlight the success of government institutions in handling criminal cases. This can be seen in the following example:

- (3) *Kepolisian menangkap pelaku penculikan anak di Gunung Sahari, Jakarta, setelah penyelidikan selama hampir satu bulan.* ("The police arrested the child abduction suspect in Gunung Sahari, Jakarta, after an investigation that lasted almost a month.") - bbc.com

This sentence is taken from news about a child abduction case in Gunung Sahari, Jakarta, which was successfully solved by the police. In this example, the police are positioned as the subject of the active sentence, which directs the reader's attention to their role. Because the sentence emphasizes the success of the police, readers are likely to appreciate their efforts.

The media often use this strategy to improve the image of law enforcement. By focusing on the police's achievements, negative perceptions of the police can be countered. However, this strategy may also blur the role of the actual perpetrator, making them less noticeable in the news.

This pattern of emphasizing law enforcement's success can be seen in other cases as well.

- (4) *Polisi mengungkap motif Reza Maulana membunuh istrinya, Nurul Azmi, yang ditemukan tewas bersimbah darah di Kedungwaringin, Tanahsareal, Kota Bogor.* ("The police revealed the motive behind Reza Maulana murdering his wife, Nurul Azmi, who was found dead covered in blood in Kedungwaringin, Tanahsareal, Bogor.") - news.detik.com

The sentence above is taken from a news report published by *news.detik.com*. It describes how the police successfully uncovered the motive behind a husband murdering his wife in Bogor.

In this sentence, the active voice is used to emphasize the role of the police in solving the case. Similar to previous examples, the focus of the sentence is placed on law enforcement, making them the central

subject. By positioning the police at the beginning of the sentence, the news directs readers' attention to their success in uncovering the crime.

Although the name of the perpetrator, Reza Maulana, is mentioned, he is placed as the object in the sentence, meaning he is not the main focus. Instead, readers are encouraged to appreciate the work of the police. This strategy is often used by the media to create a positive image of law enforcement by highlighting their efforts in solving crimes.

However, by focusing on the police, the role of the perpetrator may be blurred. The attention shifts away from the crime itself and the victims, making the readers less engaged with the experience of the victim. This approach can serve to shape public perception by emphasizing law enforcement achievements rather than the details of the crime.

Passivization

Among the types of sentence transformations, passivization is one that removes or hides the perpetrator of the action. While in activation the perpetrator is highlighted, in passivization the focus shifts to the victim or the event itself, making the doer less visible or entirely omitted. In this study, six news texts were identified as using passive constructions to obscure or background the perpetrators' roles. These texts were obtained from four different online media sources—Detik.com, BBC.com, Kompas.com, and Sumbar.Suara.com. Such linguistic choices often redirect readers' attention toward the victims' experiences or the incident rather than the individuals responsible for the violence. The following examples illustrate this pattern:

- (5) *Dugaan pelecehan seksual yang terjadi di Universitas Pancasila disebut sebagai "kasus pertama yang menjerat pejabat tertinggi di kampus".* ("The alleged sexual harassment that occurred at Universitas Pancasila is referred to as 'the first case that involved the highest official at the campus'.") – bbc.com

This data is taken from a news report on social media sourced from *bbc.com*. The news reports a sexual harassment case involving the highest official at Universitas Pancasila using a passive sentence. By using the passive voice, the perpetrator of the sexual harassment at Universitas Pancasila is not shown. The focus of the reader's attention when reading this news is on the incident at the university, not on the person responsible. This type of reporting often happens when public officials are involved in legal violations. When a public figure is involved in wrongdoing, the news tends to focus on the case or event itself rather than the person who committed the act. As a result, the perpetrator is often removed from the public spotlight.

- (6) *Mandiara (39) dipukul hingga babak belur di kepalanya oleh sang pacar berinisial JN (33) gara-gara korban tidak bersedia memberikan uang.* ("Mandiara (39) was beaten until her head was badly bruised by her boyfriend, JN (33), because she refused to give him money.") – compass.com

This data is taken from *compass.com*. In this case, the passive sentence is used to highlight the victim of the beating, rather than the perpetrator. In this sentence, the victim, Mandiara, functions as the subject, making her the focus of the reader's attention. This structure draws the reader's sympathy toward the victim, rather than creating a sense of antipathy toward the perpetrator. However, in some cases involving public officials, passive sentences are used in a way that still draws attention to the perpetrator, as shown in the following example.

- (7) *Ketua Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum (Bawaslu) Kota Payakumbuh, Rio Gustrinanda, telah resmi ditetapkan sebagai tersangka oleh penyidik Satreskrim Polres Payakumbuh.* ("The head of the General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) in Payakumbuh, Rio Gustrinanda, has officially been named a suspect by the investigators of the Payakumbuh Police Criminal Investigation Unit.") – sumbar.suara.com

This data is taken from a news report on the social media news source *sumbar.suara.com*. The report discusses an alleged case of domestic violence involving the head of the General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) in Payakumbuh. Unlike the previous examples, in this case, the passive sentence emphasizes the perpetrator of the action, namely the head of Bawaslu. The focus of the reader's attention, therefore, is on the perpetrator, not the incident or the event of the abuse.

In cases of legal violations involving public officials, some media outlets tend to highlight the perpetrator of the crime. This approach can create embarrassment for the public official involved, as they are supposed to be a role model, but they have committed a negative action. This method can also serve as a lesson for public officials to act according to the norms and ethical standards expected of them. If the violation of ethics or norms by a public official is made public by the media, it can be damaging for the person involved. Such media coverage can be seen as a form of character assassination of the perpetrator.

This also occurs in cases of domestic violence, where passive sentences are used to diminish the perpetrator's role and shift attention to the victim. This effect is seen in the following example.

- (8) *Armor Toreador telah ditetapkan sebagai tersangka kasus kekerasan dalam rumah tangga (KDRT) pada istrinya, Cut Intan Nabila.* ("Armor Toreador has been named a suspect in a domestic violence case against his wife, Cut Intan Nabila.") - *liputan6.com*

This data is taken from a news article published by *liputan6.com*. The report discusses a case of domestic violence involving former Indonesian fencing athlete Armor Toreador. In the sentence, the subject is Armor Toreador, but he is positioned as the recipient of the action—being named a suspect. The actual agent (the person or institution naming him a suspect) is not mentioned in the sentence.

Since the suspect is placed at the beginning of the sentence and functions as the subject, the reader's attention is automatically focused on him. However, this focus does not generate sympathy for him. Instead, readers are more likely to feel relieved or satisfied, as the suspect of domestic violence is facing legal consequences. This kind of framing makes the perpetrator the center of attention but does not create an emotional connection of empathy.

In contrast, in cases involving child violence, passive voice is often used to completely remove the perpetrator from the narrative. The following example demonstrates this effect.

- (9) *Bocah bernama Ahmad Nizam Alfahri (6) di Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat (Kalbar) ditemukan tewas di dalam karung usai dilaporkan hilang oleh ayahnya, Ichan (37).* ("A child named Ahmad Nizam Alfahri (6) in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, was found dead inside a sack after being reported missing by his father, Ichan (37).") - *detik.com*

This data is taken from a report published by *detik.com*. The article discusses a case of violence against a six-year-old child by his stepmother. This tragic incident, which occurred in August 2024, became a major news story on various social media platforms.

The sentence uses passive voice, placing the victim (*Ahmad Nizam Alfahri*) as the subject of the sentence. Because of this, the reader's attention is immediately drawn to the child rather than the perpetrator. This framing creates a strong feeling of sympathy for the victim, rather than outrage toward the person who committed the crime.

Additionally, the perpetrator is not mentioned at all in the sentence. By omitting the perpetrator's role, the news report shifts focus entirely to the victim's suffering while making the person responsible for the crime disappear from the narrative. If the sentence were rewritten in active voice, with the perpetrator in the subject position, it would create a different effect by making the reader more aware of who committed the crime.

- (10) *Ibu muda bernama Iftahurrahman (24) di Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat (Kalbar) yang tega menganiaya anak tirinya, Ahmad Nizam Alfahri (6) hingga tewas telah menjalani pemeriksaan.* ("A young mother named Iftahurrahman (24) in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, who cruelly abused her stepchild, Ahmad Nizam Alfahri (6), to death, has undergone investigation.") - *detik.com*

This sentence is an active voice transformation of a previously passive sentence. In passive voice, the perpetrator is often hidden, making the crime seem more distant. However, in this active sentence, the perpetrator (*Iftahurrahman*) is mentioned at the beginning as the subject.

Placing the perpetrator at the start of the sentence changes the focus of the reader. Instead of concentrating on the victim, readers now pay more attention to the person responsible for the crime. This shift in focus makes readers feel more negative emotions, such as anger or disgust, toward the perpetrator rather than sympathy for the victim. Since the perpetrator is clearly named and placed at the center of the sentence, the report makes the reader more aware of who committed the crime.

In contrast, some news articles use passive voice to completely remove the perpetrator from the narrative. The following example shows how this affects the reader's perception.

- (11) *Jerit kesakitan tiga anak balita terdengar memilukan dari sebuah video yang diputar di layar ponsel.* ("The painful cries of three toddlers were heard in a heartbreaking video played on a mobile phone.") - *detik.com*

This data is taken from a news report about child abuse committed by a father against his three toddlers in Cianjur, West Java. The sentence is written in passive voice, using the verb *terdengar* ("were heard") to describe the suffering of the victims.

By using passive voice, the perpetrator is completely removed from the sentence. The reader's focus is directed entirely toward the victims—the three toddlers—and their suffering. This type of sentence

structure creates strong feelings of sympathy for the victims, but it does not make readers feel anger or blame toward the perpetrator.

When news reports remove the perpetrator from the sentence, they reduce public awareness of who is responsible for the crime. This can make it easier for the perpetrator to avoid public criticism and accountability. In contrast, when news reports use active voice and name the perpetrator, they ensure that the reader understands who committed the crime, making it harder for them to escape public judgment.

Nominalization

News articles sometimes use nominalization to describe violent events without explicitly mentioning the perpetrator. Nominalization involves transforming a verb into a noun, thereby shifting the focus from the person committing the act to the event itself. This linguistic strategy can make the crime appear more neutral, impersonal, or distant. In this study, one news text was identified as using nominalization to depersonalize the act of violence. The data representing this category was obtained from one media source, namely Andika TV. The following example illustrates how nominalization is employed in news reporting to obscure agency and emphasize the event rather than the actor:

- (12) *Peristiwa pembunuhan terjadi di Kelurahan Manisrenggo Kota Kediri. Peristiwa pembunuhan bermula sekitar jam 3 dini hari tadi.* ("A murder incident happened in Manisrenggo, Kediri City. The murder incident began around 3 a.m. today.") – ANDIKA TV

This news report was taken from social media, originally aired by ANDIKA TV. In this example, the word *pembunuhan* ("murder") is a noun. Instead of saying *membunuh* ("killed"), which is an active verb that clearly shows an action being done by someone, the report uses a noun (*pembunuhan*) to describe the event.

By using the noun *pembunuhan*, the sentence removes the perpetrator from the focus. Readers only see that a murder happened, but they do not know who committed it. If the sentence were changed into an active voice, such as "*Seseorang membunuh korban di Kelurahan Manisrenggo Kota Kediri*" ("Someone killed the victim in Manisrenggo, Kediri City"), then the focus would shift to the person responsible for the crime.

Since the original sentence uses a noun (*pembunuhan*) and places it at the beginning, the attention of the reader is directed toward the *incident*, not the *perpetrator*. This way of writing makes the crime seem like an event that simply happened rather than something caused by a person.

Subordinate Clauses

Another way news articles remove the perpetrator from focus is by using subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause provides additional or descriptive information—often about the victim—which directs readers' attention toward the victim rather than the perpetrator. This linguistic technique shifts the focus away from who committed the violence and instead emphasizes what happened to the victim. In this study, three news texts were identified as using subordinate clauses to highlight the victims and background the perpetrators. These texts were collected from three online media sources, namely Kompas.com, Liputan6.com, and Detik.com. The following examples demonstrate how subordinate clauses are employed to evoke sympathy for the victims while minimizing the visibility of the perpetrators in the news narrative:

- (13) *TR (15), siswi salah satu SMA Negeri di Situbondo, Jawa Timur (Jatim), menjadi korban pemukulan menggunakan helm.* ("TR (15), a student of a public high school in Situbondo, East Java, became a victim of being beaten with a helmet.") – *kompas.com*

This sentence was taken from a news report about a high school student who was beaten. The subordinate clause *siswi salah satu SMA Negeri di Situbondo* ("a student of a public high school in Situbondo") is used to describe the victim in more detail. By placing the victim at the beginning of the sentence, the reader's attention is immediately focused on her, not on the person who committed the violence.

Since the perpetrator is not mentioned, the reader naturally feels sympathy toward the victim instead of anger toward the attacker. This makes the act of violence seem less about the person who committed it and more about the victim's suffering. The same pattern is seen in cases of domestic violence, as shown in the next example.

- (14) *Seorang mantan atlet anggar, Cut Intan Nabila, baru-baru ini menjadi korban dari KDRT yang diduga dilakukan oleh suaminya.* (English translation: "A former fencing athlete, Cut Intan Nabila, recently became a victim of domestic violence, allegedly committed by her husband.") – *liputan6.com*

This sentence comes from a news report about domestic violence involving a former national fencing athlete. The subordinate clause *seorang mantan atlet anggar* ("a former fencing athlete") is placed at the

beginning, making the victim the main focus. The mention of the perpetrator is delayed and softened by the phrase *yang diduga dilakukan oleh suaminya* ("allegedly committed by her husband").

By structuring the sentence this way, the article highlights the victim's identity and suffering rather than the perpetrator's wrongdoing. This pattern is common in reports of violence against women and children. Since the victims are often from vulnerable groups, media narratives tend to emphasize their suffering, which increases public empathy toward them while reducing attention on the perpetrator.

This technique is also found in cases of child abuse, where the use of subordinate clauses helps obscure the role of the perpetrator.

- (15) *Video seorang ABG berusia 15 tahun ditelanjangi dan dianiaya oleh dua wanita dewasa heboh di media sosial. Polisi sudah mengamankan kedua pelaku penganiayaan.* ("A video of a 15-year-old teenager being stripped and abused by two adult women went viral on social media") – www.detik.com

"Video seorang ABG berusia 15 tahun ditelanjangi dan dianiaya oleh dua wanita dewasa heboh di media sosial", employs a passive structure that places the "video" as the subject. This construction shifts readers' attention to the recording of the violent act rather than the perpetrators themselves. By positioning the victim's experience at the forefront through passive voice, the sentence naturally evokes reader sympathy toward the teenager who suffered the abuse.

If we transform the sentence into an active structure: "Dua wanita dewasa menelanjangi dan menganiaya anak ABG berusia 15 tahun" (Two adult women stripped and abused a 15-year-old teenager), the impact changes significantly. This active construction immediately identifies the perpetrators as the primary agents of violence, directing readers' anger and condemnation toward the two women responsible for the abuse. The difference in emotional response between these two constructions demonstrates how grammatical choices can influence public reaction to violent incidents.

The second sentence, "Polisi sudah mengamankan kedua pelaku penganiayaan" (The police have arrested both abuse perpetrators), uses active voice to highlight law enforcement's swift response. This construction emphasizes police effectiveness in handling the case, potentially boosting public confidence in law enforcement institutions. The active structure here serves a positive purpose by showcasing successful police action, which may increase public trust and appreciation for law enforcement's role in addressing violence against minors. Through this analysis, we can observe how grammatical choices in news reporting significantly influence public perception and emotional response to incidents of violence. The strategic use of passive and active voice can either highlight victim suffering, emphasize perpetrator responsibility, or showcase institutional effectiveness in addressing such crimes.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that passive sentence constructions (passivization) are the most dominant linguistic structures used in news reports about violence against women and children on social media. Out of the fifteen analyzed news texts, six employed passive constructions, followed by five using active voice (activation), three using subordinate clauses, and one employing nominalization. This pattern shows that journalists tend to use passive voice more frequently, which often results in the concealment or backgrounding of the perpetrators while highlighting the victims or the events themselves. Such tendencies indicate that news discourse about violence in Indonesia often prioritizes neutrality or emotional distance rather than explicitly exposing accountability.

The language used in news discourse must follow the rules and norms that align with journalistic ethics. One important aspect of journalistic ethics regarding language is that journalists must pay attention to language rules. This helps avoid ambiguity in interpreting sentences in the news discourse (Monsumova, 2022; Harada et al., 2005). In this research, the sentences used by journalists in reporting cases of violence against women and children include active sentences, passive sentences, the use of subordinate clauses, and sentences containing nominalization. According to Djourelova (2023), the language chosen by journalists in the mass and social media has an impact on readers. The language used is not neutral; it has a specific purpose and interest.

Nothias (2020) mentioned that events or situations can be represented in different ways. This is because journalists have certain ideologies they wish to promote. Sholikhati (2017) studied news discourse in Metro TV and Net TV. Her research showed that journalists use aspects of vocabulary and grammar to obscure the events or meanings they want to convey. The way journalists represent events is done through the selection of sentences used in the news discourse. The use of active sentences or activation is employed by journalists when delivering information to highlight the perpetrators. This is because the subject appears at the beginning of the sentence.

Active sentences in news reports play an important role in making the reader understand who is responsible for an event (Qasim, 2018; Harjanti et al., 2024). For example, the sentence "Two adult women

abused a 15-year-old girl" focuses directly on the perpetrators and their actions. This helps the reader immediately know who caused the harm. By using active sentences, the responsibility is clearly placed on the doers of the action. This direct approach often leads to stronger emotional reactions, such as anger or outrage, as the reader can easily identify who is to blame. The active voice makes the situation feel more immediate and personal, encouraging a greater emotional involvement from the audience (Chan & Maglio, 2019).

An example of this is seen when a report says, "The police have secured the two perpetrators of the abuse." Here, the police are the main focus of the sentence, showing them as the ones taking action. This construction directs the reader's attention to the positive steps taken by the authorities. It also makes the reader feel reassured, as they see justice being pursued. Active sentences like this often create a sense of approval for those who are doing the right thing, like the police in this case. By emphasizing the role of the police, the report encourages readers to appreciate the actions taken to address the situation.

From a psychological perspective, using active sentences helps readers form strong opinions about both the wrongdoers and the heroes in a situation (Chan & Maglio, 2019). When the perpetrators' actions are described clearly, readers are more likely to feel empathy for the victim and anger toward the aggressors. This approach can also encourage readers to demand justice and become more involved in the issue. Active voice in news reporting makes the story feel more vivid, and it can motivate readers to take action or think more critically about the situation (Westerwick & Taylor, 2008). This stronger emotional connection to the story may influence how the public perceives the event and those involved.

Passivization is a grammatical structure where the focus is shifted from the doer of the action to the action itself or its recipient. In news articles, using the passive voice often removes the focus from the perpetrators of a crime, making the victim the central point of attention (He & Wittenberg, 2019; Wesely et al., 2020). For example, in the sentence "A 15-year-old girl was abused by two adult women," the focus is on the victim, which can lead to more sympathy from readers. By omitting the perpetrators entirely, such as in "A 15-year-old girl was abused," the emotional impact is further intensified, as readers are drawn solely to the victim's suffering rather than the actions of those responsible. This manipulation of focus can influence the emotional response of readers, often leading to stronger feelings of empathy for the victim.

Psychologically, passivization can also affect how responsibility is assigned. When perpetrators are not emphasized or are omitted, readers may subconsciously reduce the sense of accountability for the crime (Spangher et al., 2022; Meluzzi et al., 2021). In cases where law enforcement is mentioned in passive constructions, such as "The perpetrators have been arrested," attention is redirected to the authorities rather than the crime itself, potentially creating feelings of reassurance or approval of the justice system. This subtle use of language shapes public perception and emotional response, making readers more likely to feel compassion for the victim while possibly downplaying the anger they might feel toward the perpetrators. Understanding the psychological impact of passivization helps readers critically engage with media narratives and recognize the ways language influences our perceptions.

Journalists use nominalization in news articles to hide the identity of the perpetrator. This means that instead of mentioning who committed the violence, the focus is placed on the event itself. In news about violence against women and children, nominalization is often used to emphasize the incident rather than the person responsible (Keller, 2019; Yang et al., 2024). For example, some news reports highlight the murder event rather than stating who committed the crime (data 12).

From a psychological perspective, this writing style can change how readers understand and emotionally react to the news. When the perpetrator is not mentioned, readers may feel confused or less emotionally engaged with the case. Without a clear person to blame, it is harder for readers to feel anger or demand justice. Instead, they may focus only on the tragedy itself.

Tenriawali (2018) analyzed news texts in *Tribun Timur* and found that journalists use nominalization strategies to represent victims of violence. Her research also showed that victims are not only women and children but also men. In his findings, news articles in *Tribun Timur* tend to mention all victims involved in violent incidents. However, in this study, journalists use nominalization to hide the identity of the perpetrator.

This writing strategy can shape public perception of violence. When nominalization is used, it may make it seem like violence just happens naturally rather than being caused by specific individuals (El Biadi & Zih, 2022; Langston & Peti-Stantic, 2014). This can lead to less public pressure for justice or weaker emotional responses from readers. Additionally, when the focus is only on the event, readers may see violence as a common and unavoidable part of society. This can lead to desensitization, where people become used to reading about violence without feeling the need to take action or demand change. Thus, nominalization is a powerful tool in media reporting. While it can be used to make news reports sound more neutral, it can also reduce emotional reactions, hide accountability, and influence how readers perceive violence in society.

Subordinate clauses are also used to remove references to the perpetrator. In many news reports about violence against women and children, subordinate clauses are used to emphasize the victim instead of the person responsible for the crime (data 13, 14, 15). This happens because subordinate clauses can replace the subject of a sentence. Katz (2020) explains that subordinate clauses can function as a subject, object, or additional information in a sentence. When a subordinate clause replaces the subject and is placed at the beginning of the sentence, the perpetrator disappears from the news. As a result, the focus shifts entirely to the victim instead of the person who committed the crime.

From a psychological perspective, this writing style affects how readers think and feel about violence. When a news article only highlights the victim, readers may feel sympathy and sadness, but they may not feel anger or demand justice because the perpetrator is not clearly mentioned. Without a clear person to blame, the public reaction may be weaker, and there may be less pressure for legal action.

This strategy can also influence how society understands violence. If the media always presents victims without mentioning the perpetrator, people may see violence as something that just happens naturally rather than something caused by individuals. This can lead to a situation where readers become less critical and do not ask why violence happens or how to prevent it. Furthermore, by focusing only on victims, the media may unintentionally create fear and anxiety among readers. When readers see repeated stories of victims without knowing who is responsible, they may start to believe that violence is uncontrollable and that anyone can become a victim at any time. This can increase feelings of insecurity in society.

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The language used in news discourse must follow the rules and norms that align with journalistic ethics. One important aspect of journalistic ethics regarding language is that journalists must pay attention to language rules. This helps avoid ambiguity in interpreting sentences in the news discourse (Monsumova, 2022; Nurhaliza et al., 2023). In this research, the sentences used by journalists in reporting cases of violence against women and children include active sentences, passive sentences, the use of subordinate clauses, and sentences containing nominalization. According to Djourelova (2023), the language chosen by journalists in the mass and social media has an impact on readers. The language used is not neutral; it has a specific purpose and interest.

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Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how linguistic structures in news reports—particularly in social media coverage—frame perpetrators of violence against women and children in Indonesia. By applying the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, the research explored how activation, passivation, nominalization, and subordinate clauses are strategically employed to shape readers' perceptions of violence and accountability. The findings reveal that active voice is commonly used to highlight perpetrators or institutional responses, thereby directing reader attention toward either individual responsibility or law enforcement efforts. In contrast, passive constructions, nominalization, and subordinate clauses tend to obscure the role of the perpetrator, emphasize victim suffering, or neutralize violent acts as impersonal events. These grammatical choices significantly affect public opinion and emotional reactions, often generating sympathy for victims or deflecting blame from offenders. This study contributes to the growing body of work in media linguistics and discourse analysis by providing concrete evidence of how journalistic language shapes perceptions of gender-based violence. The research offers practical insights for journalists, editors, and media ethics committees, emphasizing the importance of clear and just language use. It also responds to the academic gap regarding sentence-level analysis of social media news texts in the Indonesian

context, especially concerning violence-related narratives. However, the study is limited by its qualitative design and its reliance on news articles collected from a specific period and region. The exclusion of audience reception studies also means that interpretations are based on linguistic analysis rather than empirical responses from readers. Future research could expand the dataset to include a broader range of national and regional media outlets or explore cross-cultural comparisons. Studies could also involve reader perception analysis to validate how different sentence structures influence public attitudes and emotional responses to violence-related news. In closing, this research underscores the non-neutral role of language in media. News reports do not merely inform; they construct meaning and influence societal judgment. By choosing responsible language, the media can contribute to justice, raise awareness of gender-based violence, and support the protection and dignity of victims.

Declarations

- Author contribution** : Fransisca Dwi Harjanti managed the entire research project, led the manuscript writing, and worked collaboratively with the second author. Roely Ardiansyah collected, transcribed, and analyzed the data, as well as revised the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.
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- Conflict of interest** : Both authors declare that they have no competing interests.
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- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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