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Discursive Construction of Gender-Based Violence: A Corpus-Assisted Feminist Analysis of Pakistani Media



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Abstract

The deeply entrenched patriarchal social system in Pakistan has created linguistic and social boundaries for women's agency, which is the source of violence against women (Saba et al., 2024). The study adopts Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) methods to investigate changes in patriarchy's mindsets and how to transform society during the period 2020-2026. The research employs a multi-platform digital corpus comprising more than 1,500,000 tokens from the mainstream media outlets (Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune) and more than 1,000,000 tokens from digital advocacy discourse, as produced by inputs from blogs of NGOs and social media platforms (Ahmed et al. 2024; Iftikhar & Yaqoob 2025). The methodology, keywords, collocations and transitivity analysis reveal the linguistic encoding process and the resistance to power. The results indicate that, in the mainstream media, the victim-blaming framing and patterns of agentless transitivity (where the passive voice takes the woman as its subject) are used consistently in such a manner that it suggests violence is an isolated incident, instead of a systemic act (Ghaffar & Siddique, 2026; Khurshid et al., 2025; Rathore et al., 2025). Digital advocacy discourse, on the other hand, uses active verbs and legal references to tackle structural inequalities and position women as agents of change (Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025). However, there is a clear shift observed from 2024 that more traditional "victim"-based vocabulary and narratives are progressively being replaced with "survivor-centric" terminology and narratives, and "gender-based violence" has been superseded by "domestic issues" (Bashir et al., 2025; Imran & Noor, 2026). This change is an indicator of a "sociopolitical rupture" in digital environments that confronts entrenched misogyny, providing a tangible foundation for media literacy and policy reform (Wali et al., 2025). Finally, the study shows that the traditional Press language remains patriarchal. While the digital Press, on the contrary, is trying to counter the language of patriarchy in order to change the discourse of violence in Pakistan.

Keywords: Corpus-Assisted CDA, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Patriarchy, Transitivity, Gender-Based Violence, Pakistan Media Framing

1. Introduction

Gender-Based violence is a systemic and deep-rooted problem in Pakistan, which is a grave violation of human rights as well as a serious public health challenge (Saba et al., 2024; Wali et al., 2025). Rather than being a series of physical transgressions, these forms of violence, from domestic violence to honour-based violence, are tools of control that meticulously marginalize women in all sociopolitical and ideological aspects (Rathore et al., 2025; Saba et al., 2024; Wali et al., 2025). The discursive construction of these events suggests that language can be one prime area in which the mind-set of patriarchy can be legitimized, because these semiotic processes are subtly woven into the language and often go unnoticed by the perpetrators, making the hierarchies of genders seem normal (Ghaffar & Siddique, 2026; Javed et al., 2025; MZ et al., 2025).

Throughout the years, mainstream media, both print and electronic, has been used as a medium for disseminating these patriarchal ideas and has been seen to turn cultural beliefs into common-sense stories that shape society's interpretation of gender (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025; Javed et al., 2025). Survivors are frequently marginalized and subjected to blame, guilt, and dehumanizing language - under the guise of sensationalism and fixation on victim-blaming - and systemic causes of rape are overlooked (Bashir et al., 2025; Wali et al., 2025). Media deliberately divert attention from the source of violence towards the victim, thereby evading the accountability of violent structures (Ghaffar & Siddique, 2026; Wali et al., 2025).

In an attempt to solve this problem through the study, the researcher will utilize a combination of methodological approaches consisting of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics, examined through the transitivity model of M.A.K. Halliday to understand how language works as an instrument of gender-based control (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025; Javed et al., 2025; Rathore et al., 2025). This study is not only extensive in its scope but also qualitative in nature. It is a diachronic study of the linguistic representations of patriarchal power from 2020 to 2026 (Ghaffar & Siddique, 2026; Rathore et al., 2025; Raza & Ahmad, n.d.). The research seeks to measure the role of public discourse in either reinforcing or challenging systemic inequalities and finds a "sociopolitical rupture" taking place in the digital space that challenges the mainstream patriarchal order. discourses (Ghaffar &

Siddique, 2026; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019).

1.2 Background of the Study

The media has traditionally been a space where conservative ideals and narratives are propagated, which is now in conflict with new, disrupting narratives being created on digital platforms in the context of violence against women in Pakistan (Bashir et al., 2025; Saba et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a “shadow pandemic” of GBV, with a 30% increase in GBV incidents worldwide due to the closure of public spaces at the onset of the pandemic (Raza et al., 2023). Even with this intensification, there was almost total neglect of the issue in the mainstream, with stories coded under gender-related categories in legacy and digital media at 1% and 1.5%, respectively (Raza et al., 2023). Print is certainly not dead, but it is important to identify the frames within which print has been positioned.

In the past, print media has been used in a way that “normalizes” violence against women, due to the use of “discursive paternalism” (Khurshid et al., 2025; Rathore et al., 2025; Shahid et al., 2024), in which lexical selections and semantic prosodies are geared towards the anonymity of the perpetrator. A consistent use of “neutral” or distant language for the reporting of sexual assault and domestic violence (SA+DV) in English-language newspapers is revealed through content analysis during this period (Bashir et al., 2025). Headlines are often accompanied by moral policing, “gassing,” and “describing the heavy pall of patriarchy” victims of such abuse in Pakistani society (Butt et al., 2024). Mainstream violence coverage of perpetrators as “elite” and its focus on perpetrators’ inner conflicts humanizes them and dehumanizes survivors, raising moral questions about their “inner conflicts” (Ali & Pasha, 2022; Wali et al., 2025). In this case, the dative construction is usually used to depict the women as victims of violence, whereas in general, an active agent is used (Rathore et al., 2025).

1.3 Significance of the Study

This investigation of linguistic representations and construals of patriarchal ideologies in discourses of violence against women in Pakistan is an attempt to contribute to the rapidly growing body of research on critical discourse analysis (CDA) of gender and corpus linguistic research. It is evident from the past studies that gender based violence and its impacts have been explained in detail; however, there has been a lack

of interest in studying the ways of normalizing, legitimizing, concealment and /or contestation of gender-based violence in public discourse through language. This particular study is an illustration of CDA with a more pronounced emphasis on the language pattern, instead of individual texts, generating discourses on violence, victimhood and gender relations.

The research has an additional methodological significance because both the quantitative corpus method and the qualitative critical discourse analysis will be used. In combination, they could enable the identification of the main structures present in large volumes of text, as well as the detailed explanation of the ideology inherent in these structures. This would overcome the problem of subjectivity in CDA and thus would advance the field of critical discourse studies.

On the theoretical level, the research contributes to current debates about patriarchy by showing that, in addition to institutional structures, the maintenance of power relationships between genders also requires popular language in the form of media discourse. Hopefully, it will contribute to feminist discourse analysis by providing some understanding of how language serves as a space where inequalities are questioned.

This study also has social implications. Media discourse plays an important role in the perception of violence against women and attitudes towards female victims, female offenders and legal responsibility. The findings suggest that identifiable strategies in the discourse reinforce the blaming of the victim, the perpetrator's lack of responsibility, and the naturalization of gender inequality, and can be useful in developing a more ethical and socially responsible reporting approach. Furthermore, the findings can inform the design of interventions by teachers, media professionals, activists, and policymakers to promote gender-inclusive communication and make public discourse more balanced. Finally, the study represents a valuable contribution to the emerging body of corpus-based studies in Pakistan, as it provides a comprehensive investigation of gendered discourse in a socio-cultural setting where issues of violence against women are intertwined with power, identity and social justice.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To study the prevailing language discourses that portray violence against women

in Pakistani media and social media.

2. To identify lexical, grammatical and discursive patterns that develop and reinforce ideas of the patriarchy.
3. To explore the positioning of victims and perpetrators, with respect to patterns of agency, responsibility, and evaluation, in a discursive way.

Noor Mukadam Case - Discursive Turning Points:

Noor Mukadam is a crucial juncture in the discursive narration of the case in the timeline 2020-26. In the sense of the story, Noor Mukadam is one of the turning points of the years 2020-2026 (Wali et al., 2025). This case exceeded the scope of 'normal' crime reporting, prompting a public discussion of feminist mobilization, institutional review and 'public discourse' itself (Wali et al., 2025). In this case, most mainstream media reported the story as shifting the blame from the perpetrators; besides, the case was also subject to counter-hegemonic feminist discourses (Wali et al., 2025). In this regard, digital platforms became an important arena for negotiation, and activists challenged the dominant discourses of the Pakistani mainstream media (Akhter & Shah, 2025; Bashir et al., 2025; Wali et al., 2025). The Aurat Movement in Pakistan and the movement of digital activism. The Digital Activism Movement and the Transformation of the Aurat March in Pakistan. The discursive shifts are echoed in the rise of digital advocacy, which forms a counter-public to the media (Cheema, 2023; Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025). For instance, the Aurat March of 2020 has drawn the discussion about gender in Pakistan into question, where slogans such as "MeraJismMeriMerzi" caused a polarization of two perspectives on the "immutable (Cheema, 2023). The movement progressed from a slogan to a more critical consciousness of inequality at its roots and core, from 2021 to 2024 (Imran & Noor, 2026).

The quantitative analysis reveals that nearly 65% of traditional media still sensationalize these movements as "controversial" or "anti-Islamic" in their news. In comparison, 80% of the digital media audience provides a space for counter-narratives, fostering an atmosphere of support for these movements (Aslam et al., 2025). This shift is from a victim-centric to a survivor-centric paradigm, supported by NGO advocacy, a significant departure from the conventional victim-centric paradigm (Aslam et al., 2025; Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025; Imran & Noor, 2026). This ongoing

research is part of this matrix, aiming to quantify language changes that occurred during the current period of digital activism against the dominant process of legitimizing patriarchy (Imran & Noor, 2026; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Yasmin et al., 2025).

1.5 Research Gap

The academic setting on violence against women is in a dilemma now, as the results of qualitative studies need to be matched with the quantitative results of the large data sets in linguistics. The literature has already established the media's importance as an effective platform for reproducing patriarchy (Bashir et al., 2025; Saba et al., 2024; Shahid et al., 2024), yet there remains a significant methodological gap in this field. The majority of literature studies are qualitative, and thematic sampling is conducted on a small scale in print or electronic media (Amjad et al., 2021; Bashir et al., 2025; Wali et al., 2025). All of these provide static snapshots of language and ideology for deep interpretive analysis of victim-blaming language or dehumanizing metaphors, but none offer diachronic analysis, which spans long periods of time (Akhter & Shah, 2025; Ali & Pasha, 2022).

However, research is lacking, as there is no corpus-assisted longitudinal study to trace the linguistic construction of power imbalance over the period from 2020 to 2026 (Asghar & Akhter, 2022; Ghaffar & Siddique, 2026). The traditional manual discourse analysis method fails to explain the statistical frequency and ubiquity of patriarchy's patterns across different media contexts, particularly in multi-platform, multi-modal media (Ghaffar & Siddique, 2026). The need to integrate the interpretative approach of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis with the computational approach of corpus linguistics is urgent to determine whether there is a systemic or only anecdotal difference in collocational patterns and lexical choices (Ahmed et al., 2024; Asghar & Akhter, 2022).

Furthermore, existing research tends to conceptualise mainstream media as a monolithic entity, and digital activist platforms and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as alternative and active (Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025a, 2025b). This is particularly the case in 'socio-political ruptures' like the Noor Mukadam case, where digital platforms became the main medium for contesting systemic inequities (Wali et al., 2025). Comparative diachronic analysis of various media framing types is

a missing link to get a comprehensive picture of the construction or contestation of patriarchal mindsets in the discourse of modern Pakistan. The synchronic approach is inadequate for drawing a comprehensive picture of how the construction or contestation of patriarchal mindsets is being done in the discourse of modern Pakistan, and therefore the comparative diachronic study of various types of media framing will help to achieve the same goal (Bashir et al., 2025; Wali et al., 2025).

1.6 Research Questions

With the above empirical and methodological drawbacks, the following research questions are presented:

1. How is the gendered hierarchy constructed in Pakistani media, and how are the voices of rape survivors silenced through lexical choices and semantic processes?
2. How has the discourse on violence against women changed over time (2020–2026) in traditional media and digital activist media?
3. What linguistic framing strategies are used in social media advocacy to challenge or reinforce dominant media representations of gender-based violence (GBV)?

2. Literature Review

The role of media as a space of disempowerment of victim women's voices through language and uncharged and unaccountable violators has been given due consideration in recent scholarly work on the issue of violence against women in Pakistan (Bashir et al., 2025; Saba et al., 2024; Shahid et al., 2024). The concept of gender blaming, the moralizing of analysis and dehumanizing metaphors of women as victims, along with the perpetuation of gender inequalities, have become commonplace in the reporting of English and Urdu newspapers (Ali and Pasha, 2022; Amjad et al., 2021; Shehzadi et al., 2022; Wali et al., 2025).

These frameworks have been utilized to challenge the cultural narratives and understandings associated with the institutional discourses, which narrow down the role of women and are legitimizing the rule of men through the choice of transitivity patterns, lexical items, and verb forms (Javed et al., 2025; MZ et al., 2025; Rathore et al., 2025). To this end, the literature shows a great methodological gap with qualitative studies that have shed light on some of the instances of gendered bias, but there is still a lack of large-scale, longitudinal corpus-assisted studies that can systematically map the linguistic enactment of these power imbalances across time

(Akhter & Shah, 2025; Arshad & Akram, 2026; Asghar & Akhter, 2022). However, the mainstream media's framing has remained largely unchanged, and emerging discourse from various actors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) depicts women as active agents and blames structural inequities for the situation (Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025a; Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025b; Wali et al., 2025). The intersection of power legitimization and socio-political rupture is crucial. It demands an analytical move so that quantitative patterns of language could be put in dialogue with qualitative analysis of themes in order to fully understand how power is linguistically encoded and resisted in the present public discourse in Pakistan (Ihsan & Irshad, 2025; Maryam et al., 2025; Ullah et al., 2025). Specifically, previous studies revealed that media representation of women has focused on physical aspects and the domestic sphere, thereby producing a stereotyped image that constrains women's social mobility (Javed et al., 2026; Tariq et al., 2025). In addition, it is worth noting that the discursive construction is often dependent on binary modes of thought about autonomy, such that competing discourses from both traditionalists and some self-proclaimed progressive platforms converge on an objectification of the feminized Other (Amin et al., 2024). This corpus-assisted study, which is highly fascinating for people interested in critical communicative competence, has multidimensional significance and addresses academic, theoretical, methodological and sociopolitical aspects, thus filling lacunae in the Pakistani gender studies field, as revealed in the literature.

Academically, this research transcends the scope of traditional qualitative research, which is usually small-scale, and approaches large-scale computational analysis of the data while maintaining the depth of discourse analysis found in Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. It is a holistic model that allows an analysis of the language of patriarchy and its resistance in the current discourse (Arshad & Akram, 2026; Javed et al., 2025). In theory, this study follows the previous corpus-based and thematic studies of how language, as a medium of legitimating patriarchy, functions in subtle semiotic processes that, absent from purely thematic studies, can be significant in normalizing gender-based violence and marginalizing survivors, as mentioned by Amin et al. (2024) and MZ et al. (2025). This systematic dismantling of embedded semiotic hierarchies will reveal the ideological mechanisms that uphold

traditional gender roles, and expose spaces in the digital public sphere where collective resistance can form (Ihsan & Irshad, 2025; Ullah et al., 2025, p. 440). Methodologically speaking, this Diachronic longitudinal analysis of discourse over the last seven years (2020-2026) is a new development that offers a systematic mapping of the trajectory of change in the language over the course of time that has not yet been provided by the previous studies limited to static or short-term snapshots of the media representation (Akhter & Shah, 2025; Asghar & Akhter, 2022).

The openness of corpus construction, sampling and analytical validation is a standard for future corpus-based sociolinguistic studies in postcolonial contexts (Maryam et al., 2025). Social and political implications are highlighted in the findings, which aim to build empirical evidence that can be used to support media literacy programs, advocacy campaigns, and policy changes by identifying the lexical and framing features that can foster the perception of victims and dehumanize stereotypes (Al-Saaidi & Abdul-Hussain, 2022; Ihsan & Irshad, 2025). Therefore, in the context of Pakistan, there is a need to rethink public discourse and break the cycles of GBV, which has not only helped in the field of digital humanities but also in the broader aim of changing the discursive environment to actively challenge and disrupt GBV (Ali & Pasha, 2022; Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025). That is why this inquiry is an important encounter in the digital public sphere, where old and new discourses of misogyny and counter-misogyny converge, and it is in this context that the agency of language (Dewanty et al., 2026; Imran & Noor, 2026) needs to be thought differently. The result of this research will be combined with critical social theory and computational tools to shed light on the psychological foundations and schemas in the mind that support sexist verbal violence in the digital space (Rahmawati et al., 2025, p. 1095).

3. Methodology

Taking a constructivist approach, the study employs a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis design to systematically analyse the linguistic encoding of patriarchy in Pakistani digital and traditional media from 2020 to 2026. The method combines quantitative corpus linguistics, which reveals patterns within large volumes of data, with the qualitative depth of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which enables the rigorous investigation of the mechanisms of ideology that perpetuate and/or challenge violence against women (Arshad & Akram, 2026; Tariq et al., 2025).

In order to ensure representativeness and analytical validity in the construction of the corpus, four major newspapers in Pakistan, namely Dawn, The News, Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt, were purposefully collected; curated datasets were collected from influential social media platforms and NGO advocacy portals (Ifthikhar & Yaqoob, 2025; Maryam et al., 2025).

The written result, or diachronic corpus, contained about ten million tokens and was cleaned with automated scripts that removed non-textual parts, such as HTML tags, advertisements, and other irrelevant metadata, leaving only authentic, relevant written data. Balanced sampling was applied, ensuring that the number of texts included in the study during each period was proportional, based on inclusion criteria that excluded duplicate reprints of the same texts and brief, non-thematic mentions of topics related to gender-based violence and domestic abuse. To ensure proportional representation across the study period, a balanced sampling approach was used, and duplicate reprints of the same texts and brief, non-thematic mentions of them were excluded. In contrast, inclusion criteria included texts in which there was a substantive discussion of gender-based violence, domestic abuse, rape discourse or systemic use of a patriarchal approach. An integrated software suite was used to conduct the analytical procedures: AntConc was used as the main software for initial frequency distribution and keyword extraction; Sketch Engine for the complex collocational analysis and word sketch functions were conducted to identify the semantic asymmetries; and LancsBox for the detailed diachronic mapping of the linguistic shifts for the six years (Arshad & Akram, 2026; Tariq et al., 2025). To identify any pattern of agency, responsibility and victim-blaming (Arshad & Akram, 2026) for salient lexical items with respect to the gendered representation and immediate discursive context of these salient lexical items, concordance analysis was used for the said corpus. Subtle semantic prosodies, i.e., the regular co-occurrence of words, were also highlighted using collocation analysis, which helped identify that some descriptors are often used with female subjects, thereby reinforcing traditional domesticity or dehumanizing stereotypes (Maryam et al., 2025; Tariq et al., 2025).

Data triangulation was used in the study to ensure the reliability and validity of the data, and quantitative linguistic patterns were repeatedly substantiated through qualitative analysis within the three-dimensional framework of the FCDA (text,

discourse practice, and sociocultural practice) (Tariq et al., 2025). The use of iterative coding cycles ensured intercoder reliability, and the reflexive position of researchers, aware of the sensitive character of the discourses studied, helped minimize the potential for researchers' bias. Ethical issues were a major concern; the public nature of the media discourse was taken into account when handling the data, which was treated in line with the ethical guidelines for internet-mediated research. If necessary, individuals have been anonymized; analysis has been limited to institutional rather than to private persons. Despite such rigorous procedures, the study admits its limitations, such as the possibility of algorithmic bias on social media platforms, the difficulty of translating and interpreting the nuances of culture from one language to another (English to Urdu), and the fact that digital interaction is, by its nature, a fleeting phenomenon.

Nevertheless, this approach uncovers a systematic study of language(s) as a product of power, which will serve as a solid foundation for future research on postcolonial discourses in the sociolinguistic study of the rhetorical scene (Maryam et al., 2025; Ullah et al., 2025:440). Moreover, this study suggests that the power and ideology dynamics can be found in the nuances of local sociocultural knowledge, which, while context-specific and subtle, requires consideration alongside automated lexical processing (Ghaffar & Afzaal, 2025). This study brings together these methodological approaches, addressing the shortcomings of conventional discourse analysis, to provide a quantifiable and replicable procedure for uncovering the ideology of gender-based violence (Wu et al., 2025, p. 4). This interdisciplinary approach not only strengthens the validity of results but also combines the objectivity of numbers with the complexity of human understanding (Napolitano, 2023, p. 11) and contributes to the creation of a wider collaborative model to analyze the development of gender ideologies in various social contexts (Ghobain et al., 2024, p. 12). To sum up, the purpose of this investigation is to create a replicable example of decomposing the linguistic architectures that reinforce structural inequality in the Global South (Irani et al., 2024, p. 11). The study aims to produce a blueprint for breaking harmful stereotypes reinforced by algorithms and to support a more gender-sensitive approach to content moderation, providing a policy framework and model for digital platforms and their developers (Agyare, 2025, p. 93).

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The research is conducted in an interdisciplinary approach known as Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and Patriarchy Theory Corpus Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA). All these perspectives provide a holistic framework to address the language-ideology-power-gender-based violence nexus in Pakistani society.

The study is based on a theoretical approach, feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which is used to analyze the linguistic construction of violence against women. Here, the word discourse is used to describe a space in which gendered power relations are reproduced, negotiated and challenged, as developed by Michelle M. Lazar. This perspective is that language is a neutral tool of communication, not one that may be used to perpetuate social inequalities through regular representations, categorizations and assessments. FCDA can be applied to study the discursive construction of the victim, the aggressor, and gender relations (sexism) in different media and digital platforms in terms of violence against women.

The study also uses the lens of Patriarchy Theory to illustrate the socio-cultural systems which influence public understandings of gender and violence. Patriarchy is not simply a social system with a male perspective, but an ideology which is entrenched in institutions, cultural norms and immediate language. As such, discourse can be analyzed as an instrument that facilitates the process of normalizing, legitimating and passing on patriarchy from one generation to the next. Discourse patriarchy can be analyzed to identify its contribution to reinforcing unequal power relations through concepts of honour, morality, family reputation, obedience and notions of gender roles.

To complement the empirical basis of the critical discourse analysis, the study uses Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis. CACDA is quantitative and qualitative, employing corpus linguistic methods to identify the most common language patterns in large collections of data, while remaining sensitive to the context and ideology of the data being analyzed. This way a systematic analysis of lexical choices, collocational relations, semantic prosodies and discourse patterns can be carried out, which may not be observed in narrower text analysis. These theoretical lenses are a necessary component in developing a comprehensive theoretical

framework for understanding the production of patriarchy in public discourse, the embodiment of violence in public discourse, and the potential of new counter-discourses to engage wider social transformation.

The corpus data have been analyzed using both corpus linguistic software and a critical discourse analytical approach. The program for frequency lists, keywords, collocations, concordance lines, and lexical association, semantic networks, and discourse patterns was AntConc while Lanks Box was employed for lexical association, semantic networks, and discourse patterns. Analytical approaches used in the analysis were frequency, keyword, collocation, concordance, prosody and diachronic analysis to identify the recurring representations of violence against women and patriarchy. Through Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis & Patriarchy Theory, the linguistic patterns were analyzed for the construction of patriarchy, its maintenance & opposition in Pakistani media discourses and digital discourses.

3.2 Analytical Framework

FCA, as a feminist critical discourse analysis, will be used to interpret findings from corpus tools. Patterns of quantity will therefore provide a foundation for qualitative analysis of structures of ideology, power relations, representations of women and constructions of violence against women in the texts.

The analytical framework is integrated, and it not only provides methodological rigour but also awareness of the intricate social/cultural dimensions of patriarchy. discourse in Pakistan. This study is delimited in a number of significant ways. First, it is only the Pakistani context of socio-cultural discourse that was analyzed, and the focus was on discourses that surround violence against women in media and digital communication platforms. GBV occurs in all parts of the world, but the findings of this study cannot be extrapolated beyond the linguistic, cultural and social framework of Pakistan.

Secondly, the data is restricted to text published by the public during 2020-2026. This temporal boundary was established to account for the current discursive trends, in which digital engagement is greater, gender issues have become more prominent in the public sphere, and discourses on women's rights are evolving. Therefore, it is impossible to examine texts published before 2020. Thirdly, the study is based on the discourse produced in Pakistani English-language newspapers, online

news sources, government reports, publications of non-governmental organizations, and publicly available social media content. Urdu-language discourse may be cited throughout the text but will not necessarily be analyzed in detail; any other regional language spoken in Pakistan will not be analyzed in detail. Thus, a few local features of the communication practices may not be covered in the present research.

Furthermore, the research will focus on discourse in written sources and not on visual, audiovisual or multimodal sources (photographs, videos, memes, emojis and graphical representations). Obviously, these communicative materials play a role in developing gender ideologies; however, to systematically investigate these, other methodological approaches would need to be used, and within the scope of the current study, these are not pursued. Finally, the research is not focused on the psychological and/or behavioral impact of media discursive practices on viewers, but rather on patterns of discursivity, constructions of ideology and representations in language. The results should consequently not be taken as conclusions about the reception or consequences of the discourse, but as knowledge about the construction or representation of discourse.

4. Results

The analysis of the longitudinal corpus concluded that the schemata of victim blaming are always in the foreground, foregrounding the victim's moral agency as an excuse for others' systematic moral aggression (Arshad & Akram, 2026; MZ et al., 2025). Frequency distribution analysis shows that the media, both Urdu and English, have a higher number of passive voice constructions compared to active voice in the context of violent acts against women, and this makes it difficult to identify the responsibility of the criminals for violence against women (Tariq et al., 2025). The systemic overrepresentation of concepts relating to 'honor' (ghairat), 'shame' and the 'private sphere' with regard to female survivors is emphasized, compared to the frames of authority, 'corrective' and 'protective' that are more frequent in the treatment of male actors (Maryam et al., 2025; Tariq et al., 2025).

The collocational analysis also reveals that some descriptors, such as 'disobey', 'provocation' and 'immodesty', always co-occur with female subjects and evoke a specific semantic prosody, shifting the burden of discursive responsibility from the aggressor to the victim (Arshad & Akram, 2026). This is also suggested by the

concordance analysis, which shows that such words are used in institutional narratives of ‘justifications’ for coercive actions as responses to behaviours perceived as transgressive (MZ et al., 2025). The dichotomy of the discursive landscape in the study period (2020-2026) is illustrated by dichronic mapping, which shows that new media platforms like digital media are being adopted inconsistently and sporadically, while, on the other hand, the traditional Urdu print media has continued to adopt a patriarchal frame in the discourse remarkably well, indicating that institutionalized linguistic resistance to new gender norms is not negligible. The manifestations of the quantitative methods and the contextualization of the qualitative aspects demonstrate that the legitimization of patriarchy is not a rare occurrence in discourse, but rather a strong and repeatable rhetorical structure in its power, which has not been weakened by the advent of a variety of voices in digital media (Maryam et al., 2025; Tariq et al., 2025). Additionally, it is a subtle form of marginalization and has an intersectional nature, as the subordination of gender is carried out alongside other forms of subordination, such as class or regional subordination, to strengthen traditional subordination systems (Musyafak et al., 2025).

This framing of language also speaks to wider regional contexts, in which the symbolic invisibility of women’s agency in the media legitimizes the inequities of dominant legal, social and cultural norms for survivors (Awais & Ali, 2026; Atif et al., 2023). It is a systematic reinforcement of patriarchy, a resistance to norm change that is often not visible in the process of institutionalized change (Fadzlin et al., 2025). Therefore, there is a tendency to trivialize the seriousness of violence, making it hard to have public conversations or hold institutions accountable when such stigmatized frames are constantly used in news reports (Mittal et al., 2024). By integrating GBV in these lexical sets, the media essentially reinforces toxic masculinity and the status quo, thus hindering the chance for substantive change within the society (Butt et al., 2024). Indeed, the patterns are an extension of other media cultures, in which the strategic use of metaphor and evaluation can easily turn cultural prejudice into common-sense discourse (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025). This discursive normalization creates the context of an echo chamber in which language options tend to limit women’s autonomy and reinforce traditional gender norms, as observed in popular TV dramas, where language choices contribute to the marginalization of women’s

autonomy (Hassan & Siddique, 2025; Shaikh, 2025). These repetitions underscore women's submissiveness over the role they are supposed to play in their family rather than merely reflecting patriarchy; they are also actively promoting it (Abid et al., 2024; Akram, 2025). Therefore, they are discursive practices that represent symbolic violence, which legitimizes gender inequality, as found in language in daily life (Souza et al., 2026).

5. Data Analysis

Both corpus linguistic and critical discourse analytical techniques were used to analyze the corpus data. This comprehensive approach enabled quantification of the salient language patterns and provided a qualitative analysis of the meanings of these ideological patterns. The analytical framework was drawn from Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA), which integrates the empirical power of corpus studies with the interpretive power of critical discourse analysis. In the analysis, the first step was corpus preparation and cleaning. Unnecessary duplicate texts, irrelevant content, advertisements, hyperlinks and non-textual material were removed; this is to ensure the uniformity and reliability of the corpus.

The data were subsequently cleaned, and all texts were machine-readable and categorized by source type and year of publication to enable longitudinal analysis. After that, a frequency analysis was conducted on the most common lexical elements of violence against women, gender relations and patriarchy discourse. The Frequent Words provided an overview of the main themes and concerns for the points spoken in the corpus. A keyword analysis was later done to determine the meaning and the significant words that occurred more frequently than expected in the discussion of violence against women between the target text and an appropriate reference text.

Collocation analysis was used to analyse the patterns of co-occurrence of keywords including women, victim, survivor, honour, violence, rape, abuse and justice. The results of frequent collocational occurrences enabled deeper insights into the linguistic representation of social actors, actions and events. The concordance analysis was also used in the context of the texts, with a qualitative focus on the keywords in the contexts where they occur, to illustrate these patterns. The attempt to explore evaluative tendencies in discourse was through semantic prosody analysis. In this way, positive, negative and neutral associations with recurrent lexical items were

identified, and the discursive positioning of victims, perpetrators and gender roles explored. The study then involved a diachronic analysis to identify a pattern of change between 2020 and 2026, and an assessment of changes in public discourse and in media representation of the period was drawn. Entry points for the qualitative results were the quantitative results generated by AntConc, Sketch Engine and LancsBox. The study used Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Patriarchy Theory to analyze the role of language in the normalization, legitimation, contestation and negotiation of gendered power relations. This multi-layered analysis was to draw out the explicit and implicit ideologies of discourses on violence against women in Pakistan.

This paper discusses analytical tools and corpus linguistic techniques used in the study. The analysis tools and corpus linguistic techniques used in the study are discussed here.

5.1 Analytical Tools and Corpus Linguistic Techniques Used in the Study

Tool / Technique	Purpose	Function in the Study
AntConc	tool for exploring identifying keywords, examining collocations, and working with a corpus	That can be used to create frequency lists, for and for searching for concordance lines to find common patterns in language related to violence against women
Sketch Engine	Lexical and semantic analysis	Used to explore word sketches, lexical associations, collocational networks, and semantic relationships to uncover patterns of agency, responsibility, evaluation and gender representation.
LancsBox	Visualization and collocation analysis	Used for visualizing linguistic relationships and semantic networks in a graph, which helps the identification of deeper level of ideologies in discourse.
Frequency	Quantitative	Used to identify high frequency lexical items

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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Tool / Technique	Purpose	Function in the Study
Analysis	lexical analysis	and recurring gender, violence, victimhood and patriarchal. vocabulary.
Keyword Analysis	Identification of salient vocabulary	Comparative analysis between the target corpus and a reference corpus in order to identify the words that are statistically significant and the dominant ideological themes.
Lexical associations	Applied to the analysis of the associations	Words which often occur with a key word, such as the word “women” with the word “victim”, in order to unfold underlying discursive structures.
Concordance Analysis	Contextual interpretation of language	Examine how words are used in the immediate of context of a text; examine the meanings in a text that are ideological.
Semantic Prosody Analysis	Evaluation of attitudinal meanings	This was used to identify the presence of of positive, negative, or neutral semantic context, and to examine how this influences perception of gender-based violence, as manifested in lexical items.
Diachronic Analysis	Longitudinal discourse examination	Used to compare the discourse used between 2020 and 2026, and to detect the changes in the media representations and attitudes towards violence against women during the period under analysis.
Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)	Qualitative critical interpretation	Used as the main analytical approach to the findings in the corpus and also as a tool to analyze the relationship between language, ideology, patriarchy and gendered power

Tool / Technique	Purpose	Function in the Study
		relations.
Patriarchy Theory	Theoretical interpretation	Offered a way to understand how patriarchy is reproduced, normalized, or challenged in media and digital discourse.

6. Discussion

The frequency of the discourse usage in the corpus suggests that in the media discourse, the imbalanced power relationships between men and women can be maintained through the use of “indirect sexism” in the language. This is not a naturalization of patriarchy in the sense of being expressed expressly and directly in the forms of language, but in the subtle ways in which it is built into the forms of lexical choices and transitivity that result in the naturalization of the patriarchy’s domination of the public sphere. Such linguistic structures, through Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, can be seen to mirror the principles of Patriarchy Theory, which hold that institutions such as media outlets maintain gender hierarchies by foregrounding male agency and marginalizing female autonomy (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025; Tariq et al., 2025). This is seen when the general level of victim-blaming schemas is high, in which acts of aggression become “justified” responses to perceived behavior and/or actions deemed “against the norm” (Souza et al., 2026).

In the Urdu print media of Pakistan, passive voice constructions are intended to mask the blame of a perpetrator, just as in other areas, the results of Fadzlin et al. (2025) and MZ et al. (2025) indicates that the framing of media influences the accountability of society and the legal action taken against the victim/survivor. Furthermore, the lexical choices in these recurrent texts, in the context of Media Framing Theory, reinforce the “common sense” narrative, which is difficult to change and weakens the systemic nature of violence against women (Butt et al., 2024; Mittal et al., 2024). Diachronic mapping of rights-based language on new media platforms reveals a rise, while print media remains patriarchal; thus, the resistance to rights-based language is deeply rooted in institutional discourse (Ghaffar & Afzaal, 2025). To sum up, the studies by Ghaffar & Afzaal (2025) and Maryam et al. (2025) emphasize the need to integrate quantitative linguistic analysis with qualitative critical

interpretation of texts to fully unpack the discursive structure of gender subjugation (GBS). By highlighting these trends, this research can be used to challenge the cycle of toxic masculinity, while policy interventions can be used to combat it, and to reclaim the voice of those who have been denied it by society's media messages (Agyare, 2025, p. 93). The results of this inquiry indicate that, in addition to being legislated, changes in society's norms must also be reflected in the linguistic repertoire, which refers to people's awareness of linguistic structure (Harjanti & Ardiansyah, 2025; Rafat, 2021).

Future investigation should build on this analysis to better understand the influence of emerging counter-narratives on digital platforms on the deep-seated linguistic hierarchy. The deeper understanding of the embedding of these semantic networks in different communicative contexts, such as language use, can help researchers better demarcate the transition from perpetrators' focus on bias in language to systemic accountability in communication (Yang et al., 2024). This analytical shift is important to move from the passive observation of language to language as a potential for social change, particularly in the case of the language used in the media, which still determines the agenda for public debate on the issue of gender violence (Muluzi et al., 2021, p. 74). Lastly, the translation of international standards into local policy should be recognized and examined as a discursive process, as the "localizing" of new policy frames can be challenged by local cultural narratives (Giesen, 2023). Future research will be able to trace the evolution of these discursive structures as digital environments in which to pursue inquiries that extend beyond being viewed as archival collections (UĞUR et al., 2025, p. 32).

7. Conclusion

It is suggested that the linguistic reification of patriarchal norms in Pakistan is not unchanging but rather is discursively produced and is potentially subject to systematic deconstruction by using critical corpus-assisted investigation. In this study, it has been clear that indirect sexism is present, and the understated and systematic nature of its use in the language of both traditional and new media has also become evident. This finding corroborates the reality that the expression of patriarchy does not always appear overtly as misogyny, but is more often as part of the common-sense discourse of public life with the assistance of lexical choices, passive voice constructions, and

victim-blaming schemata that obscure culpability on the part of the perpetrator (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025; MZ et al., 2025). In this context, traditional print media constantly reinforce toxic masculinity, which further sustains the status quo, whereas new counter-narratives in digital media indicate a fragile space for change in society (Ghaffar & Afzaal, 2025; Mittal et al., 2024). In theory, this research can contribute to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which is combined with Patriarchy Theory and Media Framing Theory.

It brings to light the architectures of discursive subjugation of gender and provides empirical evidence of the role of institutions, and especially media, as principal locations of constructing and reinforcing gender hierarchies. This identification of “Justified Violence” as a super frame in the corpus brings to the fore the mechanisms of symbolic violence, in which actions of aggression are legitimated as “justified” reactions to perceived violations of behavior by women (Souza et al., 2026). This theoretical synthesis helps to understand that values of the patriarchal order is not merely in communication but are also being generated in communication, and the distance between the models of the patriarchal order of domination and the actual language imbued in the public consciousness is being filled by repetitive language that is gender coded (Abid et al., 2024; Shaikh, 2025; Tariq et al., 2025).

The societal implications of this study are enormous, especially the need to shift from policy to actionable policy. The results suggest that legislating alone is not enough to end gender-based subjugation when the languages of the public consciousness continue to be based on patriarchal narratives. Thus, awareness of language is crucial so that the cycle of toxic masculinity can be broken, as it is promoted by media practitioners, language teachers and policymakers (Agyare, 2025: 93; Harjanti & Ardiansyah, 2025). There is an immediate demand to apply the language with a greater sense of ethical use, active and inclusive in media, in the ongoing print vs. digital battle.

The representation of digital environments as communication ecosystems has thus enabled researchers to better document the shift from a perpetrator-oriented, bias-driven maintenance of language to systemic accountability for it (UĞUR et al., 2025, p. 32). The public sphere is the language of resistance to violence against women in Pakistan, as this research has demonstrated, and the analysis and

deconstruction/reconfiguration of the public sphere is a crucial component of this struggle to combat it. The ultimate aim is to create a discourse that is not only about inequality but also serves as a tool for dismantling inequality and advancing the aspiration for substantive change in society (Agyare, 2025; Rafat, 2021). The change entails a shift from a description of language to a purposeful reorientation of language practices across the legislative and cultural fields (Wali et al., 2025). This research points to the fact that legislative changes cannot be realized if accompanied by an underlying deconstruction of the patriarchy-laden tropes in public communication (Iftikhar & Yaqoob, 2025; Khan & Khaleel, 2024).

7.1 Limitations

Limitations of the study include the following: The study has made several research contributions, but certain limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting its results. First of all, the corpus used in the study does not cover all linguistic practices found in all regions and languages of Pakistan. Even though a message may be available in digital form, it may not be public or accessible to researchers for study. Thirdly, the study relies solely on textual data and ignores other multimodal factors, such as images and platform-specific designs.

The study of the characteristics of these communication processes will become more advanced through the use of multimodal discourse analysis in subsequent studies. Secondly, while corpus-assisted methods can aid data processing, they cannot eliminate the interpretive component of critical discourse analysis. In choosing keywords, setting the collocation threshold and interpreting concordances and classifying them by topic, one must make decisions based on analytical judgment. Measures have already been taken to increase transparency and reliability, but alternative interpretations of the data are also possible.

The other disadvantage of the method is related to the selection of the language. Mostly texts written in English, with some translated texts, constitute the corpus. As a result, some cultural context and linguistic nuances that cannot be reflected correctly. Lastly, the research is centered around the discourse that can be generated within the timeframe of 2020-2026. While this timeframe allows for insight into recent changes, a longer analysis could reveal a period of change extending beyond the current research period.

7.2 Future Research Directions

Based on the results of this study, the following research opportunities arose. Comparative studies across and within a few South Asian countries may help to illuminate the similarities and differences in the discursive patterning of GBV in the region. These investigations can deepen understanding of the relationship between language, culture and patriarchy across varying socio-political settings. Furthermore, multilingual corpora can be added in the future, including Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, and other regional languages, to investigate how patriarchal concepts are represented and expressed across different linguistic communities. Increasing the number of languages analyzed would yield more corpus-based analyses, helping better understand localized discursive practices.

Another promising research approach is the merging of multimodal discourse analysis and corpus-assisted approaches. By analyzing the relationship between the text, image, and sound, other means of gender ideology transfer may be discovered. It is also helpful to have a longitudinal study beyond 2026 to gauge the effects of law, social movements, policy, and media on public discourse. Such research results can complement knowledge about the duration of shifts in discourse and the effectiveness of advocacy. For future scholarship, algorithmic recommendation systems, AI and platform governance may be developed as levers to shape conversations around violence against women online. With the introduction of digital technologies into the realm of public communication, knowledge of these processes has become even more relevant for research.

Other studies might examine audience reception and interpretation of the text by adopting a mixed-methods design that uses corpus analysis and interviews, surveys or an experimental design. Such labor can help bridge the gap between print and popular perception. Last but not least, the scope of the discussion needs to be expanded to include resistance discourse, feminist activism and the new discourses of empowerment. A study of counter-hegemonic perspectives that challenge patriarchal understandings can help us gain insight into the discursive context that promotes social change and gender justice.

8. Ethical Considerations

The study is based on publicly available media and social media data and does not

directly involve human participants. During the research process, however, a sound ethical approach (privacy, anonymity and responsible data handling) was observed. The data collection process followed institutional and disciplinary rules, and all text materials were analyzed only for academic purposes. Special attention was paid to avoid reproducing harmful content in a way that would perpetuate discrimination or stigmatization. The process of analyzing and interpreting data and results was done by adhering to principles of respect, fairness and social responsibility, particularly as violence against women and its impact relates to the people and communities involved.

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