

A TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH NEWS REPORTS

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Abstract

This research explores the linguistic construction of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistani English news headlines, acknowledging the central role of the media in framing public opinion. Using Transitivity analysis based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study analyzes five DAWN News reports (2024-2025) to determine how common process types and participant roles construct the ideological representation of GBV. The analysis implies that Material processes are dominant, with actors often constructed as institutions, and GBV related phenomena are frequently the Goal. Relational processes play a crucial role in creating the character of the problem, and verbal processes are used to enact an official narrative through which victims tend to be constructed as dative Goals of material actions or as Sayers whose agency is limited to reporting events. The research shows that these news reports frame GBV as a critical societal and systemic issue that necessitates an immediate institutional overhaul. This study highlights the significance of certain linguistic choices in media language to both represent and actively contribute to public comprehension of GBV in the Pakistani scenario.

Keywords: gender-based violence (GBV), transitivity analysis, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), Pakistani English news, media representation, agency, ideological framing, critical discourse analysis

Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) encompasses harmful actions specifically targeting individuals due to their gender identity. This means violence can occur because someone is identified as a woman, man, girl, or boy, or because that person does not conform to traditional societal notions of what a man or woman "should be." While men and boys can also be victims, GBV disproportionately impacts women and girls (Akram & Yasmin, 2023). It is crucial to understand that GBV is not limited to physical assaults; it includes a broad spectrum of abuses, such as: domestic violence: Abuse within the home, by a partner or family member. Sexual assault and harassment: It encompasses a spectrum of non-consensual sexual behaviors, ranging from unwelcome comments and advances to physical acts. Harmful traditional practices: Practices such as child marriage, honor killings (violence against someone, usually a woman, believed to have brought shame to the family), or acid attacks (Un Nisa et al., 2023). Psychological and emotional abuse: Verbal and behavioral actions that inflict psychological harm, such as threats, insults or controlling behavior (Shaheed & Gah, 1998). Economic abuse: Attempting to control someone else's access to money or resources (Shaheed & Gah, 1998).

In this context, the media, particularly Pakistani English-language news reporting, plays a pivotal and complex role. News outlets are not passive conduits of information but

active creators and shapers of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fairclough, 1995). They are essential tools for educating society about the prevalence and severity of GBV, stimulating public conversation, and influencing policy. The specific methods of reporting the selection of language, emphasis on certain details, and framing of events profoundly shape public perception of this critical social problem (Entman, 1993; Hall, 1997).

Language is never neutral; it is a potent instrument that both mirrors and constructs our understanding of the world (Fowler, 1991). In GBV coverage, linguistic strategies can construct a particular narrative by attributing responsibility, defining victims, and shaping opinions on the issue's severity or solvability (Boyle, 2004; Cuklanz, 2000). Such reporting can reinforce or subvert stereotypes, affect policy responses, and expose the underlying societal ideologies that sustain violence (Van Dijk, 2015). Previous studies confirm that media framing powerfully impacts public attitudes toward GBV, with the language of news coverage significantly shaping perception and reinforcing bias (Akram & Yasmin, 2024; Thacker, 2017).

This study, therefore, seeks to fill a specific gap by applying a rigorous linguistic analysis to the representation of GBV in a prominent Pakistani English-language newspaper. While prior research has examined media portrayals of violence in Pakistan (Abbas & Talaat, 2019; Akram & Yasmin, 2024), a more focused investigation using the detailed framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly Transitivity analysis, is needed. This approach allows for a granular deconstruction of how agency, responsibility, and victimhood are grammatically constructed at the clause level. By focusing on English-language reports an influential medium in Pakistan's media, education, and official spheres, this research explores how specific linguistic choices construct the realities of GBV (Wang, 2023). Analyzing the linguistic options and ideological underpinnings of this coverage is critical to understanding how these narratives are created and what social and political work they perform.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically framed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Halliday's theory of language as a social semiotic (Halliday, 1978). SFL suggests that language is organized to serve three concurrent "metafunctions": the ideational (representing experience), the interpersonal (enacting social relations), and the textual (organizing messages) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This study concentrates on the ideational metafunction, which is investigated through the grammatical system of Transitivity.

Transitivity analysis is a powerful tool for discourse analysis as it examines the clause as a representation of experience, modeling the world into a manageable set of process types. It investigates "who does what to whom, and under what circumstances," revealing how writers encode their interpretations of events (Thompson, 2014). The system consists of three core components: Processes (events or states, typically verbs), Participants (entities involved), and Circumstances (background details).

The Six Process Types in SFL

SFL identifies six main process types, each constructing a different kind of reality with distinct participant roles (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Material Processes: These processes define the physical activity (doing and happening). They have an Actor (the doer) and, frequently, a Goal (the affected entity). In "The government launched a campaign," "The government" is the Actor and "a campaign" is the Goal. The choice of active ("The man assaulted the woman") over passive voice ("The woman was assaulted") is ideologically significant, as the passive form tends to obfuscate or suppress the Actor, and thus the agency of the perpetrator.

Mental Processes: These processes identify internal state (thinking, feeling, perceiving etc). They require a Sayer (a conscious being) and a Phenomenon (something sensed). For instance, "Campaigners believe change is possible." They are fundamental to expressing psychological states and influencing public sympathy.

Verbal Processes: These are processes of 'saying' or symbolic communication. They involve a Sayer (the speaker), a Verbiage (what is said), and sometimes a Receiver. For example, "The official denied the allegations." The choice of Sayer in news reports is critical, as it determines whose voice is given authority.

Relational Processes: Relational processes are linguistic structures, typically using verbs of "being" and "having," that serve to classify and identify phenomena. They function in two primary ways:

- **Attributive:** This process assigns a characteristic or quality to the one that has a real and independent existence. For example, "GBV is a serious problem" attributes the quality of "a serious problem" to the entity "GBV."
- **Identifying:** This process defines the reality by equating it with another. For illustration, "He's the main suspect" establishes the identity of "He" as "the main suspect."

The ideological power of these processes lies in their ability to frame subjects in a particular light, presenting definitions and classifications that can be mistaken for objective reality.

Existential Processes: These processes represent that something 'exists' or 'happens,' typically signaled by "there." They involve one participant, the Existent. For example, "There was evidence of a struggle."

Behavioural Processes: Behavioural processes occupy a middle ground between purely physical actions (Material) and internal thoughts (Mental). They describe physiological and psychological activities, such as crying, watching, dreaming, or breathing. These processes are characterized by having a single participant, the "Behaver," who both senses and acts. For instance, the sentence "She trembled as she recounted the event" illustrates this concept: "trembled" is a physical manifestation of an internal psychological state.

Ideological Framing through Transitivity

The selection of these process types and participant roles is ideologically motivated. As Fowler (1991) argues, linguistic structures are instrumental in shaping a particular version of reality. Transitivity choices can foreground or background participants, assign or deflect agency, and construct social actors in specific ways. For instance, consistently casting victims as the Goal in Material processes reinforces their passivity. Conversely, omitting perpetrators through agentless passives is a powerful ideological move that can render them invisible, minimizing their culpability.

This framework is strengthened by critical discourse analysts like Teun A. van Dijk (2015), who argues that news reports often reflect elite perspectives and can perpetuate negative stereotypes. The linguistic choices identified through transitivity analysis are the mechanisms through which this ideological work is accomplished. By systematically analyzing these choices in Pakistani English news reports on GBV, this study uncovers the underlying assumptions being promoted, revealing how the media contributes to the social construction of this critical issue.

Research Objectives

- To identify and quantify the prevalent process types and their associated participant roles in a corpus of Pakistani English news reports detailing incidents of gender-based violence.

- To analyze the typical assignment of participant roles to individuals and entities (e.g., perpetrators, victims/survivors, and institutions) involved in reported incidents of gender-based violence in these news reports.
- To critically examine how the identified transitivity patterns (choices of processes and participant roles) contribute to the ideological framing of gender-based violence in Pakistani English news media, focusing on the construction of agency, blame, and societal perceptions of the issue within the Pakistani socio-cultural context.

Research Questions:

- What are the dominant process types (material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural, and existential) and their associated participant roles (e.g., Actor, Goal, Senser, Sayer) employed in selected Pakistani English news reports covering gender-based violence?
- How are participant roles (e.g., Actor, Goal, Senser, and Behaver) typically assigned to perpetrators and victims/survivors within the transitivity structures of Pakistani English news reports on gender-based violence?
- In what ways do the prevalent transitivity patterns (process types and participant configurations) in Pakistani English news reports construct and reflect particular ideological perspectives on gender-based violence, including the portrayal of agency, responsibility, and victimhood/survivorship in the Pakistani context?

Literature Review

SFL views language as a tool for making meaning in social contexts. Within this framework, the ideational metafunction helps us understand how language represents experiences, primarily through the transitivity system. This system categorizes actions and states into six types: material (actions like kill or beat), mental (feelings or thoughts like love or see), relational (states of being like is or become), behavioural, verbal and existential. Each process involves specific participant roles, such as actor/goal for material process or senser/phenomenon for mental ones. These linguistic choices are not neutral; they carry significant ideological weight. For instance, as Fowler (1991) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) have extensively argued, by omitting the doer in a passive construction (e.g., "a woman was killed" instead of "a man killed a woman"), a writer can deflect attention from the perpetrator and focus on the victim, a common strategy in crime reporting that has profound implications for the assignment of blame and responsibility.

In the domain of news reporting, transitivity analysis has proven exceptionally useful in uncovering how events, especially violent ones, are framed. Studies across various cultural and linguistic contexts consistently indicate that material processes dominate the reporting of crime and violence, often reinforcing existing social hierarchies. For instance, in a study of Nigerian news headlines on crime, Akinmusuyi (2023) found that 96–97% of the processes were material, overwhelmingly positioning men as active doers (Actors) and women as passive recipients (Goals) of violence. Such linguistic patterns do more than just report events; they actively reinforce gender stereotypes, presenting men as inherently agentive perpetrators and women as natural victims. This kind of usage does not just sensationalize violence but also subtly shapes public perception about gender roles and accountability, often exaggerating women's suffering while simultaneously underplaying the agency and culpability of the abuser.

Transitivity in Pakistani GBV Reporting

In the context of Pakistani media, particularly in the influential English-language press, the choice of transitivity often betrays underlying ideologies rooted in patriarchal social structures. Utilizing Halliday's framework, researchers demonstrated how headlines and articles subtly frame gender-based violence. For example, in their analysis of headlines from newspapers such as Dawn, Abbas and Talaat (2019) noted a recurring pattern where

males were predominantly presented as the Actors in material processes, with verbs like rape or kill, while females were consistently portrayed as the passive recipients or Goals. Such a linguistic pattern, they argue, reinforces patriarchal norms by habituating readers to view victims and perpetrators through a predetermined and unequal lens of power.

Building on this, Fatima's (2023) research examined comprehensive news reports to understand how the application of diverse "process types" (for example, material, mental, or relational processes) influences public comprehension of events. Her study underscored the idea that linguistic decisions within news articles are highly significant, as they play a crucial role in shaping how incidents are understood and how accountability is assigned. Notably, Fatima's work specifically focused on Dawn, a prominent English daily newspaper, acknowledging its substantial readership and its potent capacity to impact public opinion and policy discourse in Pakistan. Her findings suggest that the media's representational strategies are not accidental but are part of a larger discursive practice that constructs social reality.

Ideological Framing of Victims and Perpetrators

Researchers highlight that the ideological framing of victims and offenders extends beyond mere verb types. This framing often involves the passivization of victims, as seen in common phrasings like "Woman was stabbed," which grammatically obscures the perpetrator's agency and implicitly diffuses blame across a vague, unspecified social space. Moreover, media narratives sometimes place undue emphasis on a victim's personal characteristics, location, or actions, subtly suggesting their culpability. This is a particularly concerning trend in cultural contexts where concepts like "honor" heavily influence social discourse and are often invoked to justify violence against women.

For example, Akram et al. (2025) demonstrated in their study of the Asma Aziz case how transitivity patterns in news reporting frequently perpetuated rape myths by diminishing the husband's role as a perpetrator and concentrating on the woman's behavior and choices. Similarly, reporting on the Lahore-Sialkot motorway rape case often sensationalized shocking details or framed the victim as partially responsible for being in the "wrong place at the wrong time," reflecting and reinforcing broader societal attitudes that engage in victim-blaming.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis is instrumental in exposing such biases revealing how women are frequently cast in participant roles like Goal or Affected, often through passive constructions that depict them as powerless and devoid of agency. Conversely, male perpetrators, when mentioned, are commonly portrayed as Actors in material processes, a choice that underscores their agency but can also be framed in a way that normalizes male aggression. As Van Dijk (2015) notes, the press can systematically reproduce racism and sexism through subtle linguistic choices that become normalized over time. Additionally, other linguistic features such as nominalizations (e.g., using "the attack" as a noun instead of "he attacked her") and the use of loaded adjectives and adverbs subtly influence how readers interpret events and assign responsibility. Nominalization, in particular, can transform a dynamic action into a static event, further obscuring who did what to whom. This body of literature confirms that a detailed transitivity analysis is a critical method for deconstructing the ideological work performed by news media in the representation of GBV.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design with a quantitative component to investigate how language in news reports reveals media perspectives on crimes against women. It focuses on the ideational function of language that how words represent ideas, events, and participants. The methodology is a mixed-method content analysis, incorporating

both qualitative interpretation of linguistic patterns and quantitative frequency counts for a comprehensive analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

A corpus of five news reports published between June 2024 and March 2025 was purposively selected from the official website of Dawn newspaper. This outlet was chosen for its extensive readership among Pakistan's educated and policy-making elite, its influential role in shaping public discourse, and its detailed coverage of GBV-related events. The small sample size is appropriate for the depth required by a clause-by-clause transitivity analysis, which is an intensive process. The aim is not broad generalization but an in-depth, qualitative exploration of linguistic mechanisms in a key publication.

The analytical framework is Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory. The analysis involves meticulously deconstructing each clause to identify the Process type (material, mental, verbal, relational, existential, behavioural), the Participant roles (e.g., Actor, Goal, Sensor, Sayer), and accompanying Circumstances. The analytical procedure was as follows:

- **Clause Identification:** Each news report was broken down into individual clauses.
- **Process and Participant Analysis:** Each clause was analyzed to identify the main process type and corresponding participant roles, adhering to the criteria outlined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014).
- **Quantitative Tallying:** The frequency of each process type and key participant roles was counted across the articles to identify dominant patterns.
- **Qualitative Interpretation:** The identified patterns were interpreted qualitatively, examining how the choice of processes and assignment of participant roles constructed agency, attributed responsibility, and framed the issue of GBV.

Data Analysis

This section presents a detailed transitivity analysis of the five selected news reports. The analysis is guided by Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) framework of the ideational metafunction, which examines how language represents different kinds of actions, events, and states of being. By breaking down each clause into its constituent processes, participants, and circumstances, this analysis reveals the underlying ideological viewpoints embedded in the news reports.

Transitivity Analysis of DAWN Newspaper Article 1:

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
Lahore became the latest stop for UN Women Pakistan's groundbreaking campaign...	Carrier: Lahore Attribute: the latest stop...	Relational (Attributive)	became	Purpose: for UN Women Pakistan's groundbreaking campaign
...which seeks to ignite conversations and inspire collective action...	Sensor: which (the campaign) Phenomenon: to ignite conversations and inspire collective action	Mental	seeks	Manner: against gender-based violence (GBV)
...the educational institutes transform into powerful	Carrier: the educational institutes	Relational (Attributive)	transform into	—

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
platforms...	Attribute: powerful platforms...			
Anwar Qureshi... emphasised the campaign's transformative impact.	Sayer: Anwar Qureshi Verbiage: the campaign's transformative impact	Verbal	emphasised	—
...we aim to spark dialogue, foster empathy and empower communities...	Senser: we Phenomenon: to spark dialogue, foster empathy and empower communities	Mental	aim	Means: Through creative platforms like Rolling Resistance
Gender-based violence is not just a women's issue...	Carrier: Gender-based violence Attribute: not just a women's issue	Relational (Attributive)	is	—
...one in three women experiences violence in her lifetime.	Actor: one in three women Goal: violence	Material	experiences	Time: in her lifetime
The University of the Punjab is proud to host this campaign.	Senser: The University of the Punjab Phenomenon: to host this campaign	Mental	is proud	—
The audience actively participated in post-performance discussions...	Actor: The audience Goal: in post-performance discussions	Material	participated	Manner: actively
The Women Development Department is proud to support initiatives like Rolling Resistance...	Senser: The Women Development Department Phenomenon: to support initiatives like Rolling Resistance	Mental	is proud	—
...initiatives like Rolling Resistance... not only spotlight the pervasive issue... but also inspire collective	Actor: initiatives like Rolling Resistance Goal: the pervasive issue / collective	Material	spotlight, inspire	—

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
action.	action			

Transitivity Analysis of DAWN Newspaper Article 2:

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has released its annual report for 2023...	Actor: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Goal: its annual report for 2023	Material	has released	—
The report notes that civic rights in the province continued to be neglected...	Sayer: The report Verbiage: that civic rights... were neglected	Verbal	notes	—
...civic rights in the province continued to be neglected...	Goal: civic rights(Agent is implied)	Material (Passive)	continued to be neglected	Location: in the province
...interim government persisted beyond its mandate...	Actor: interim government	Material	persisted	Extent: beyond its mandate
Violent protests broke out...	Actor: Violent protests	Material	broke out	—
...a corps commander's house was attacked...	Goal: a corps commander's house(Agent is implied: protesters)	Material (Passive)	was attacked	—
...the state's excessive use of force... was a far cry from restoring public order.	Carrier: the state's excessive use of force Attribute: a far cry from restoring public order	Relational (Attributive)	was	—
...(PTI) workers and leaders were subjected to a brutal crackdown...	Goal: (PTI) workers and leaders(Agent is implied: the state)	Material (Passive)	were subjected to	Manner: in the form of raids, arbitrary detentions
The report documents a surge in gender-based violence...	Actor: The report Goal: a surge in gender-based violence	Material	documents	—

Transitivity Analysis of DAWN Newspaper Article 3:

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
...women face a troubling new reality: technology-facilitated violence.	Actor: women Goal: a troubling new reality	Material	face	—
Digital platforms... have also become instruments for gender-based abuse.	Carrier: Digital platforms Attribute: instruments for gender-based abuse	Relational (Attributive)	have become	—
This threat... is an assault on women's digital freedom...	Carrier: This threat Attribute: an assault on women's digital freedom	Relational (Attributive)	is	—
...85 per cent of women worldwide report experiencing some form of online harassment...	Sayer: 85 per cent of women Verbiage: experiencing some form of online harassment	Verbal	report	Location: worldwide
This abuse impedes women's access to education...	Actor: This abuse Goal: women's access to education	Material	impedes	—
...45pc of working women face online abuse...	Actor: 45pc of working women Goal: online abuse	Material	face	—
...15pc leaving their jobs as a result.	Actor: 15pc (of working women) Goal: their jobs	Material	leaving	Cause: as a result
Victims report depression, anxiety, and isolation...	Sayer: Victims Verbiage: depression, anxiety, and isolation	Verbal	report	—
Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), 2016, was introduced to address cybercrimes...	Goal: Pakistan's... Act (Peca), 2016 (Agent is implied: the government)	Material (Passive)	was introduced	Purpose: to address cybercrimes
...it lacks explicit provisions for TFGBV...	Carrier: it (Peca) Attribute: explicit provisions for TFGBV	Relational (Possessive)	lacks	—
Addressing TFGBV in Pakistan requires a collaborative	Actor: Addressing TFGBV in Pakistan Goal: a collaborative	Material	requires	—

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
approach...	approach			

Transitivity Analysis of DAWN Newspaper Article 4:

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
A civil society organisation... has highlighted the concerning scale of gender-based violence (GBV)...	Actor: A civil society organisation Goal: the concerning scale of GBV	Material	has highlighted	Location: in a report
The report... provided a province-wise analysis...	Actor: The report Goal: a province-wise analysis	Material	provided	—
...a total of 32,617 cases of GBV were reported nationwide in 2024.	Goal: a total of 32,617 cases of GBV (Agent is implied)	Material (Passive)	were reported	Location: nationwide Time: in 2024
...conviction rates remained critically low...	Carrier: conviction rates Attribute: critically low	Relational (Attributive)	remained	Location: across all provinces
Punjab recorded a total of 26,753 registered cases.	Actor: Punjab Goal: a total of 26,753 registered cases	Material	recorded	—
...only two convictions were made.	Goal: only two convictions (Agent is implied: the judicial system)	Material (Passive)	were made	—
Sindh registered 1,781 GBV cases...	Actor: Sindh Goal: 1,781 GBV cases	Material	registered	—
...no justice was served in terms of convictions.	Goal: no justice (Agent is implied)	Material (Passive)	was served	Manner: in terms of convictions
Syed Kausar Abbas... said the report was based on data...	Sayer: Syed Kausar Abbas Verbiage: the report was based on data	Verbal	said	—
“We need to strengthen police investigations...”	Senser: We Phenomenon: to strengthen police	Mental	need	—

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
	investigations			
...deep-rooted challenges... severely undermine justice for GBV survivors.	Actor: deep-rooted challenges Goal: justice for GBV survivors	Material	undermine	Manner: severely

Transitivity Analysis of DAWN Newspaper Article 5:

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
The Punjab government has decided to launch a four-year project...	Senser: The Punjab government Phenomenon: to launch a four-year project	Mental	has decided	—
The project aims at strengthening the provincial mechanisms...	Senser: The project Phenomenon: strengthening the provincial mechanisms	Mental	aims at	—
...Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has declared it a 'red line'.	Sayer: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Verbiage: it a 'red line'	Verbal	has declared	—
...a number of GBV cases are not being reported...	Goal: a number of GBV cases(Agent is implied: survivors/society)	Verbal (Passive)	are not being reported	—
...the Punjab Social Welfare... Department has launched the four-year project...	Actor: the Punjab Social Welfare... Department Goal: the four-year project	Material	has launched	—
The project activities will be implemented in four selected districts...	Goal: The project activities(Agent is implied: the government)	Material (Passive)	will be implemented	Location: in four selected districts
The project... would help lessen the sufferings of survivors...	Actor: The project Goal: the sufferings of survivors	Material	would help lessen	—
The project would benefit the district women protection officers...	Actor: The project Recipient: the district women protection officers	Material	would benefit	—
The JICA... had	Actor: The JICA	Material	had worked	Time: during

Clause	Participant(s)	Process Type	Process	Circumstance(s)
worked with the social welfare department...	Client: the social welfare department		with	2021–23
...and established a transitional home in Faisalabad...	Actor: (The JICA)Goal: a transitional home	Material	established	Location: in Faisalabad Manner: as a pilot project

Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the findings from the transitivity analysis of the five news reports. The results are organized thematically to address the research questions, integrating quantitative data with a qualitative discussion of their ideological implications.

Dominance of Material and Relational Processes:

The first research question sought to identify the dominant process types. A quantitative summary provides a foundational overview of how GBV is linguistically constructed.

Table 1:

Frequency of Process Types Across News Reports

Process Type	News 1	News 2	News 3	News 4	News 5	Total	Percentage
Material	12	11	24	25	12	84	46.4%
Relational	4	2	11	11	3	31	17.1%
Verbal	2	3	3	4	1	13	7.2%
Mental	2	0	2	1	0	5	2.8%
Existential	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.5%
Behavioral	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.5%
Mixed/Embedded	3	0	10	0	0	13	7.2%
Non-Finite	1	1	11	0	0	13	7.2%
Passive Material	0	2	2	10	3	17	9.4%
Passive Verbal	0	0	2	0	0	2	1.1%
Total Processes	24	21	65	51	19	181	100%

Note: "Mixed/Embedded" refers to clauses with multiple distinct processes (e.g., Relational + Material). "Non-Finite" and "Passive" clauses are separated for specific analytical focus but are primarily Material in nature.

As shown in Table 1, Material processes are overwhelmingly dominant (46.4%). This is significant, as Material processes represent actions and events. Their prevalence suggests that the news reports frame GBV and its responses primarily in terms of concrete actions, such as campaigns being launched ("The Punjab government has decided to launch a four-year project"), reports being released ("HRCP has released its annual report"), and violence being perpetrated ("One in three women experiences violence").

The second most frequent type is Relational processes (17.1%), which function to classify, define, and describe states of being. These are crucial for establishing the "facts" of the situation. Clauses like "Gender-based violence is... a human rights crisis" (News 1) and "conviction rates remained critically low" (News 4) use Relational processes to define the

problem's nature and severity, lending an air of objective, factual authority to the reporting. Verbal processes (7.2%) are also notable, almost exclusively used to attribute statements to authoritative sources like officials, NGOs, and reports, thereby legitimizing the information.

Assignment of Participant Roles: Institutional Agency and Victim Passivity:

The second and third research questions concern the assignment of participant roles and the ideological perspectives this constructs. The analysis reveals a distinct and consistent pattern.

The Primacy of Institutional and Abstract Actors

A striking pattern is the assignment of the Actor role in Material processes to institutions, organizations, and abstract concepts, rather than to individuals.

- **Institutional Actors:** Government bodies and NGOs are consistently positioned as the primary agents of action. Examples include: "The Punjab government has decided to launch..." (News 5), "HRCF has released..." (News 2), and "SSDO provided a province-wise analysis..." (News 4). This framing constructs the response to GBV as a top-down, institutional endeavor.
- **Abstract Actors:** Equally significant is the use of abstract nouns as Actors. In News 3, "This rise in TFGBV... mirrors a troubling global trend" and "This surge in abuse has exposed critical gaps." This linguistic strategy, nominalization, transforms processes (rising, surging) into things. The ideological effect is profound: it objectifies the problem, giving it a life of its own while obscuring the human agents responsible.

The Obscuring of Perpetrator Agency

While institutions are foregrounded as Actors in the response to GBV, the perpetrators of the violence are systematically backgrounded or omitted. This is achieved primarily through two mechanisms:

- **Passive Voice:** The use of passive Material clauses is dominant when describing violence. For example: "PTI leader Imran Khan was arrested" (News 2) and "PTI workers and leaders were subjected to a brutal crackdown" (News 2). The Goal (the person affected) is placed in the subject position, and the Actor (the one doing the action) is omitted, shifting focus away from the perpetrator.
- **Nominalization:** As mentioned, abstract nouns often take the Actor role. In the clause "the state's excessive use of force... was a far cry from restoring public order" (News 2), the Actor is not "the state" but the nominalized concept "the state's excessive use of force."

This systematic obscuring of perpetrator agency is a critical ideological finding. It constructs a narrative where violence is a phenomenon that happens to victims, rather than an act committed by perpetrators, which can inadvertently diminish individual accountability.

The Construction of Victimhood and Survivorship

Victims and survivors are most frequently cast in passive participant roles.

- **Goal of Material Processes:** Women and survivors are overwhelmingly positioned as the Goal of negative Material processes. They are recipients of action, not initiators: "women face a troubling new reality" (News 3), "One in three women experiences violence" (News 1).
- **Carrier in Relational Processes:** When describing consequences, survivors are often the Carrier linked to an Attribute of suffering: "Victims report depression, anxiety, and isolation" (News 3).
- **Sayer of Suffering:** When given a voice (the Sayer role), it is typically to report their plight or the statistics of their suffering: "85 per cent of women worldwide report

experiencing some form of online harassment" (News 3). Their agency is confined to reporting their own victimization.

This consistent positioning constructs an identity of passivity and suffering. While effective in highlighting the severe impact of GBV, it offers a limited representation of survivors' resilience or resistance. The agency for "saving" or "empowering" them is linguistically handed over to institutional Actors.

Ideological Implications: A Discourse of Systemic Failure and Institutional Response

Taken together, these transitivity patterns construct a coherent ideological perspective on GBV in Pakistan. The discourse is not primarily about individual crimes but about a systemic crisis and institutional responsibility. The dominance of Material processes enacted by institutional Actors and Relational processes defining the problem frames GBV as a large-scale, measurable, public policy issue. The problem is defined by its statistics ("32,617 cases," "0.5 per cent conviction rate"), and its solutions are presented as institutional interventions ("urgent reforms," "strengthening mechanisms").

This perspective is valuable for advocating for policy change. However, by backgrounding perpetrator agency and casting survivors primarily in passive roles, the news reports create a narrative curiously devoid of human-level conflict. The struggle is not between a survivor and a perpetrator, but between an abstract "surge in abuse" and an institutional "need for reform." This depersonalizes the violence and may inadvertently contribute to a public perception of GBV as an intractable societal condition rather than a series of preventable criminal acts for which individuals are responsible.

Conclusion

This study conducted a transitivity analysis of Pakistani English news reports to deconstruct the linguistic representation of gender-based violence. The findings reveal a consistent narrative strategy that frames GBV not as an interpersonal crime, but as a large-scale systemic crisis demanding an institutional response. The analysis demonstrated a dominance of Material and Relational processes, which constructed the issue in terms of concrete actions by institutions and objective-seeming facts about the problem's severity. Government bodies, NGOs, and abstract concepts were consistently positioned as the primary Actors, foregrounding institutional agency.

Crucially, the assignment of participant roles revealed a systematic ideological pattern. Perpetrators of violence were consistently backgrounded or rendered invisible through agentless passives and nominalizations, deflecting agency from the individual aggressor. Conversely, victims and survivors were predominantly cast in passive roles as the Goal of negative processes or the Carrier of suffering, their agency largely confined to reporting their own victimization.

Limitations

The findings of this study, while insightful, should be considered in light of several limitations inherent in its design. Firstly, the scope of the analysis is confined to a small, purposively selected corpus of five news articles from a single English-language newspaper, DAWN. While this small sample size facilitated a deep, qualitative, and clause-by-clause analysis, it limits the generalizability of the findings across the broader Pakistani media landscape. Secondly, the focus on an English-language publication means the results may not be representative of the framing of GBV in Urdu-language press, which commands a much larger national readership and may employ different discursive strategies. Lastly, this study relies exclusively on Transitivity analysis. Although this tool is highly effective for examining the representation of events and agency, it does not capture other important

aspects of discourse, such as the use of evaluative language (Appraisal) or the visual elements (multimodality) that contribute to the overall meaning of a news report.

Future Implication

The limitations of this study open up several avenues for future research. **Comparative and Longitudinal Studies:** Future research could conduct a large-scale comparative analysis between English-language and Urdu-language newspapers to investigate how GBV is framed for different audiences. A longitudinal study, analyzing news reports over several years or decades, could provide insights into potential shifts in reporting styles and ideological stances over time. **Expansion of Analytical Frameworks:** Researchers could build upon this study by incorporating other analytical tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics. For instance, an Appraisal analysis could reveal how news reports use language to evoke emotion and convey evaluative stance, while a multimodal analysis could examine how images, headlines, and page layout interact with the written text to construct meaning. **Audience Reception Studies:** This research focuses on the textual construction of meaning. A crucial next step would be to conduct audience reception studies to investigate how Pakistani readers interpret these news reports. Such research would help determine whether the ideological framing of institutional agency and victim passivity identified in this analysis is perceived and internalized by the public, thereby bridging the gap between textual analysis and its real-world social impact.

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