

## Framing the Narratives of Violence Against Women: Assessing Bangladeshi Media Reports through UNDP Guidelines

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### ABSTARCT

Violence against Women (VAW) is a widespread societal concern, stemming from unequal power relations between men and women. Instances of VAW often attract considerable attention from the global media landscape due to their inherent news value. However, the content of news media frequently misrepresents the issue, failing to catalyze social change. This study analyses how Bangladeshi media, particularly national dailies, report on VAW through the lens of UNDP guidelines, as well as their framing techniques. Employing a mixed-method research approach, this study examines a year-long news coverage of four prominent national dailies of Bangladesh, namely Bangladesh Pratidin, Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, and Daily Sun. These newspapers were selected primarily based on their circulation through a purposive sampling approach. Findings from the summative content analysis reveal that Bangladeshi national dailies have limited compliance with the guidelines, often engaging in victim-blaming, providing details of violence, revealing the identity of victims, justifying violence, and sensationalising news, largely ignoring the educational role, particularly regarding imbalanced gender power and firearms misuse. Notably, compliance frequency was higher in English newspapers compared to Bangla newspapers. Additionally, the coverage was largely dominated by news articles of episodic frame over thematic frame. Such portrayals not only undermine the media's potential to drive social change but also have adverse effects on victims. This study underscores the critical imperative for media outlets to report mindfully, fostering informed public discourse and supporting efforts to combat VAW.

**Keywords:** *VAW, news framing, UNDP guidelines, social responsibility, Bangladesh.*

### INTRODUCTION

The United Nations defines Violence against Women (VAW) as any gender-based act causing physical, sexual, or mental harm to women, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, in both public and private settings (Blanchfield et al., 2016). VAW or gender-based violence (GBV), originates from entrenched gender inequalities that prioritize masculinity over femininity (Krantz & García-Moreno, 2005). This pervasive issue affects women globally, regardless of economic status (Heise et al., 1994), with around 30% experiencing physical or sexual violence-translating to approximately 736 million women worldwide, with 27% aged 15 to 49 (World Health Organization, 2024). In addition to intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) and practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced early

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marriages disproportionately impact women and girls (Impe, 2019). These issues are rooted in societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality and hinder women's full societal participation, resulting in physical, psychological, and economic repercussions (Kaur & Garg, 2008; Sutherland et al., 2019).

In Bangladesh, patriarchal norms such as child marriage, son preference, dowry, economic dependency, and purdah (female seclusion) reinforce male authority, entrench gender inequality from birth, and legitimize violence as a culturally tolerated practice (Ara, 2020; Zaman, 1999). The 2015 VAW Survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics found that nearly 73% of married women experienced spousal abuse, with varying forms including physical (49.6%), controlling behavior (55.4%), mental (28.7%), sexual (27.3%), and economic violence (11.4%) (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Non-partner violence and sexual assault also affect women, though many suffer in silence due to fear and stigma (Sakib, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, increasing domestic violence by 29.78% (Sakib, 2021). Recent reports of sexual violence and femicide underscore the severity and persistence of the crisis (Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 2023).

Additionally, the rise of digital media has further complicated the landscape of VAW, with online harassment becoming increasingly prevalent (Council of Europe, 2023). Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and driving social change, yet often misrepresents VAW, treating it as a minor issue or sensationalising it (Jukić, 2016; Sutherland et al., 2019). Effective media coverage can transform public attitudes and behavior regarding VAW (Sutherland et al., 2016b; Morgan & Politoff, 2012). In response, the UNDP's 2019 "Guidelines on Media Reporting on VAW" aims to improve media practices by emphasising respect for survivors, avoiding sensationalism, and providing essential resources (United Nations Development Programmes [UNDP], 2022). However, Bangladeshi media has faced criticism for failing to include expert commentary and female voices, often focusing on isolated incidents rather than systemic issues (Tasneem, 2023). This research seeks to examine how Bangladeshi national dailies frame VAW, assess their adherence to UNDP guidelines, and compare compliance between Bangla and English dailies through the following questions:

1. How do Bangladeshi national dailies frame VAW narratives?
2. Which framing techniques are predominantly utilised?
3. To what extent do Bangladeshi news outlets adhere to the UNDP's ethical standards in reporting cases of violence against women?
4. What are the key differences between Bangladeshi media narratives on VAW and the guidelines provided by UNDP for responsible reporting?
5. Which dailies, Bangla or English, demonstrate greater compliance with the guidelines?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Global concerns over how VAW is portrayed in the media, and its impact on societal attitudes, are increasing (Sutherland et al., 2016a). Research across countries demonstrates that media coverage often remains sensationalised and fragmented, relying on episodic framing and victim blaming that privilege spectacle over analysis and obscure the structural causes of gender inequality (Sutherland et al., 2015; Scheufele, 1999). This event-driven approach, shaped by commercial imperatives and the time-bound, conflict-oriented conventions of contemporary

hard news journalism (Reinemann et al., 2012; Marhia, 2008), limits opportunities for critical reflection and accountability. Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, and Australia reveal that brutality and spectacle frequently dominate coverage, while survivor experiences, judicial processes, and broader social contexts remain marginalised (Jukić, 2016; Gilbertson & Pandit, 2019; Sutherland et al., 2019). Similarly, in Turkey, media often blame women for their victimisation and sensationalise their experiences (Alat, 2006), reinforcing patriarchal attitudes that normalise violence rather than challenge it. Such narratives exemplify blame-framing, a discursive strategy that implicitly exonerates perpetrators and sustains gendered power hierarchies (Dwyer et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2011).

These tendencies align with what framing theory describes as selective emphasis—the process through which media shape meaning by highlighting certain aspects of an issue while omitting others (Entman, 1993; Hoffner & Hamilton, 1998). By focusing on isolated incidents and individual behaviour, journalists construct narratives that obscure the systemic roots of gender-based violence. This is particularly evident in coverage that relies heavily on law enforcement sources or emphasises perpetrators' nationality and culture (Meltzer, 2023), reproducing gendered and cultural biases rather than challenging them. For instance, Swedish media often frame perpetrators as “non-Swedish,” creating the illusion that gender-based violence is external to the dominant culture (Karlsson et al., 2020).

The absence of expert commentary and survivor voices further limits the depth and ethical quality of reporting. Studies from Pakistan, the United States, Germany, and Kenya reveal that news coverage often excludes informed analysis and relies disproportionately on official or police sources (Agha & Ahmed, 2018; Bullock, 2007; Wagunda, 2023). This practice narrows the interpretive frame of stories and aligns with what social responsibility theory critiques as the media's failure to fulfil its duty to inform the public truthfully and responsibly (Siebert et al., 1956; Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). When journalists prioritise profit and sensational appeal over ethics, they compromise their social mandate to promote justice, equality, and informed citizenship (Uzuegbunam, 2015; Ullah, 2015).

Cultural and gender stereotypes also remain pervasive. Studies show that women are often portrayed as passive, weak, or emotionally unstable, reinforcing social hierarchies that legitimise male dominance (Mardikantoro et al., 2022; Barlow, 2020). Media representations frequently categorise women into reductive archetypes—the “mad,” “bad,” or “sad”—which sustain gendered myths and obstruct empathy (Ali & Pasha, 2022). In countries like Pakistan and Indonesia, such portrayals intersect with institutional and cultural norms that silence women's voices and trivialise harassment (Ahmed, 2016; Mardikantoro et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, scholars acknowledge that media can be agents of change when guided by ethical and socially responsible practices. Evidence from Australia and Pakistan suggests that balanced, contextual, and survivor-centred reporting can challenge stereotypes and encourage public dialogue about accountability and justice (Richards et al., 2014; Ahmed, 2016). Similarly, social media platforms have created new spaces for advocacy, amplifying survivors' voices and mobilising “affective publics” that bring visibility to violence against women (Bas et al., 2022). Yet, these digital platforms also risk reproducing new forms of online harassment and symbolic violence (Easteal et al., 2015).

Within South Asia, and particularly in Bangladesh, research reveals sporadic and ethically inconsistent coverage of VAW. Reports often downplay the severity of incidents through euphemistic language, fail to link events to gender inequity, and rarely include survivor or expert perspectives (Ahmed et al., 2019; Mowri & Bailey, 2022). Despite global guidelines promoting responsible reporting—such as the UNDP’s Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence Against Women (2021)—Bangladeshi media often fall short of these standards.

This study, therefore, addresses a critical research gap by examining how Bangladeshi print media represent violence against women through the lenses of framing theory and social responsibility theory. By assessing the extent to which leading national dailies adhere to international ethical guidelines and contextual reporting practices, the study contributes to understanding how news framing either supports or undermines gender justice and social accountability.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Framing Theory*

Sociology and psychology are foundational to framing theory (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015), which is extensively applied across social sciences, particularly in media and communication studies (Bryant & Miron, 2004). This theory explores how media emphasise certain aspects while reporting events, although the concept lacks a fixed definition (Abdullah, 2022). Erving Goffman introduced framing in 1974 as "Frame Analysis," describing it as a primary framework through which people interpret their surroundings (Goffman, 1974). Later, Entman (1993) expanded on this by highlighting how framing emphasises specific elements to shape meaning. Journalists often use keywords, symbols, and images to create news frames (Entman, 1991). Hoffner and Hamilton (1998) and Tankard et al. (1991) further explored framing as the selective emphasis of information. Parenti (1993) emphasised the role of packaging, exposure, and presentation tone in framing, while D'Angelo (2017) noted its role in contextualising media messages. As one of the most prevalent theories in media research (Chong & Druckman, 2007), framing provides a crucial framework for understanding media coverage.

### *Social Responsibility Theory*

Social responsibility theory in mass communication was introduced by the Hutchins Commission in the U.S., which released the report "*A Free and Responsible Press*" in 1947. This report emphasised that the press has a duty to serve the public interest, uphold ethical standards, and act as a watchdog over government and powerful entities (Paul & Kabiru, 2019). In 1956, Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm expanded on this in "*Four Theories of the Press*," stressing the media's responsibility to provide truthful information and maintain ethical journalism (Siebert et al., 1956). Okunna and Omenugha (2012) argued that press freedom should be balanced with responsibility. Bittner (1989) described social responsibility theory as operating within the framework of ethical codes and guidelines. The media is expected to adhere to professional standards, including accuracy, truthfulness, and cultural diversity (Uzuegbunam, 2015; Ullah, 2015). This theory also highlights the media's role as a societal watchdog, ensuring accountability and assessing whether media outlets meet their societal obligations. It reveals the narratives and perspectives in media content and how issues are presented to the public.

## METHODOLOGY

This research utilised a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine the extent to which news articles adhered to UNDP guidelines and to evaluate framing techniques used in media coverage. A summative content analysis was conducted on a sample of 1,394 news articles, including editorials, opinions, features, and interviews concerning violence against women (VAW). These articles were published across four prominent Bangladeshi national dailies—Bangladesh Pratidin, Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, and Daily Sun—between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023. The newspapers were selected based on their wide circulation and prominence (Department of Films and Publications [DFP], 2024). Each article served as the unit of analysis, and a deductive coding approach was employed, guided by predefined guidelines, frames, and codes. The coding process was divided into three sections. The first section examined descriptive elements of the news articles, including publication frequency, placement, size, inclusion of photos, and types of violence reported, as well as classified each article as hard news. Hard news refers to timely, event-driven, and fact-based reporting that focuses on political, institutional, or public-interest issues, prioritising immediacy, conciseness, and factual clarity (Patterson, 2000; Reinemann et al., 2012). In contrast, soft news comprises human-interest or feature-based stories that emphasise emotion, personalisation, and narrative appeal, using broader storytelling styles designed to engage wider or less politically attentive audiences (Baum, 2002; Reinemann et al., 2012). The second section, inspired by UNDP guidelines and previous research (Arafat et al., 2020; Armstrong et al., 2018), categorised codes into positive and negative elements, evaluating whether articles followed best practices in reporting. Positive elements included aspects like acknowledging gender power imbalances, while negative elements involved practices like victim-blaming and sensationalism. Only guidelines relevant to content were analysed, excluding those for editing, interviewing, and online reporting. The third section focused on framing analysis, distinguishing between episodic frames, which focus on specific incidents, and thematic frames, which provide broader social context (Anik et al., 2021; Sutherland et al., 2019; Scheufele, 1999). The news articles were collected from the printed edition of the newspapers manually, ensuring a thorough and careful selection of relevant content. To verify the reliability and credibility of the data, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted. A random selection of seven days of coverage from the sampled newspapers was made for this test. The coders independently coded the articles, and using Holsti's method, they achieved a reliability score of 0.90, indicating a high level of reliability, as scores of 0.90 or above are considered excellent (Mao, 2017). Throughout the study, the researcher ensured the protection of human rights, authenticity of information, and transparency regarding potential conflicts of interest.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 1,394 news articles were published on VAW over the span of one year. Bangladesh Pratidin led with 32% (444) of the articles, followed by Prothom Alo 28% (386), The Daily Star 22% (308), and Daily Sun 18% (256). The average daily publication across all newspapers was 3.9 articles, with Bangladesh Pratidin having the highest daily average at 1.3 articles. It points to consistent yet uneven media attention, with Bangla-language outlets showing stronger engagement on VAW issues.

Table 1: Descriptive and demographic information of news articles

News Genre (n=1394) %(n)	Usage of Photos (n=1394) %(n)	News Placement (n=1394) %(n)	Folder Wise Placement (n=1394) %(n)	Usages of Column (n=1394) %(n)	Bylined News (n=261) %(n)
Hard news (93%)	News with photo (15%)	Front page (15%)	Upper folder (71%)	One (74%)	Female reporters (28%)
Soft news (7%)	News without photo (85%)	Inside + Back page (20%)	Lower folder (29%)	Sum. of two-six (26%)	Male reporters (72%)

Table 1 illustrates various descriptive information and characteristics of news articles. A predominance of hard news over soft news was observed in the coverage, reflecting an event-focused approach with limited contextual depth. Only a small proportion of articles included photographs, and most used a single-column layout, suggesting a preference for concise reporting, potentially at the expense of more detailed and interpretative analysis. The majority of reports appeared on inside pages and in upper folders, indicating moderate editorial importance. A notable gender imbalance was also evident, as most byline articles were written by male reporters. This under-representation of female journalists suggests that media outlets have overlooked the importance of women’s participation in reporting on VAW, a gap that may influence both framing and sensitivity in coverage.

Table 2: Types of violence reported in news articles, and overall compliance of with the guidelines

Types of Violence Reported in News Articles (n=1394) %(n)	Reports Complied With all UNDP Guidelines (n=1394) %(n)	Reports didn’t Comply with at Least One Guideline (n=1394) %(n)
Physical assault	394 (28%)	Bengali newspapers 71 (5%)
Rape	316 (23%)	Bengali newspapers 759 (54%)
Sexual harassment	143 (10%)	
Cyber violence	57 (4%)	English Newspapers 481 (35%)
Blackmailing	41 (3%)	
Financial abuse	32 (2%)	
Murder	366 (26%)	
Others	45 (3%)	Total 154 (11%)
		Total 1240 (89%)

Table 2 presents the types of VAW reported by newspapers and their compliance with the guidelines. The findings indicate that newspapers prioritise visible and sensational cases such as physical assault, murder, rape, and sexual harassment, while giving limited attention to less overt but equally harmful forms of violence like cyber abuse, blackmailing, and financial exploitation. This selective focus indicates the media’s failure to act as socially responsible institutions and draw attention to the structural and psychological dimensions of violence. As a result, public perception is shaped to view only physical violence as ‘real’ abuse, weakening discourse on the other critical dimensions of VAW.

Evaluation against the UNDP reporting guidelines indicates that the majority of the articles failed to adhere to at least one guideline. In fact, 89% of news articles did not fully adhere to UNDP reporting guidelines, while only 11% complied completely. Both Bangla and English newspapers exhibited similar shortcomings, revealing a widespread neglect of socially responsible reporting, regardless of linguistic or editorial differences. This deviation from the notion of social responsibility theory underscores the media's duty to uphold ethical standards, protect vulnerable populations, and promote public welfare, highlighting the urgent need for greater accountability and the adoption of gender-sensitive reporting practices across all platforms.

Table 3: Analysis of news articles through the lens of UNDP guidelines

Code Name <sup>1</sup>	Guidelines	(n=1394) %(n)
<b>Negative Elements</b>		
Identity reveal	In a media report, as long as court proceedings are underway, the identity of the survivor/victim and her family members should not be revealed.	504 (36%)
Victim-blaming	In a media report, responsibility for the violence should not be shifted from the perpetrator to the survivor/victim.	238 (17%)
Justifying violence	A media report must not contain information that could justify an act of violence by external circumstances or the perpetrator's personal characteristics.	219 (16%)
Details of violence, & irrelevant statements	A media report must not contain the details of the act of violence/murder, or interlocutors' statements that are not relevant to the act.	958 (69%)
Sensationalist or stereotypical expressions	A media report must not contain sensationalist or stereotypical expressions referring to violence, the survivor/victim, the perpetrator.	346 (25%)
Diminishing violence, & doubting victim	A Media report must not diminish/ridicule violence and should not express doubts about the survivor's/victim's honesty.	177 (13%)
Inadequate & stereotypical visual	A media report should not be accompanied by photographs/video footage that depicts violence, survivors/victims and perpetrators in an inadequate and stereotypical manner.	116 (8%)
<b>Positive Elements</b>		
Acknowledging imbalanced gender power	A media report should clearly indicate that VAW is a social problem stemming from unequal power relations between men and women.	91 (7%)
Educational responsibility	A media report should fulfil an educational role as well.	101 (7%)
Educational role on firearms misuse	The media should also fulfil their educational role when reporting on VAW committed through firearms misuse.	0 (0%)

<sup>1</sup>Code name was created by the researcher to facilitate data collection, analysis, and presentation, aiming to streamline the process and ensure consistency, especially considering the length of the guidelines.

The assessment of news articles based on the guidelines revealed the level of compliance of news articles. The guidelines were divided into two categories: positive and negative elements, focusing on the aspects they address. Positive elements encompass potentially helpful elements, while negative elements encompass potentially harmful ones in news articles. According to the guidelines, media should incorporate positive elements while avoiding negative ones during reporting.

The analysis indicates negative elements were more frequent in the coverage, revealing major ethical gaps. The identity of victims and their family members was revealed in a substantial 36% of news articles. This exposure occurred mainly through details such as their names, ages, occupations, addresses, fathers' or husbands' names, and sometimes by revealing the identity of the perpetrator known to the victim. For instance, an article from *Prothom Alo* covering a rape case, disclosed the identity of the victim by revealing her husband's name. The article reads, "*On Sunday, a Dhaka court sentenced three individuals to death for raping a housewife in the Mirpur area of the capital in 2021. Mohasen Hossain, the husband of the victim, lodged a complaint with the Mirpur Model Police Station on June 25, 2021.*" Similarly, *Bangladesh Pratidin*, covering a sexual assault incident, states, "*A woman was sexually assaulted in the Safipur area of Gazipur's Kaliakair Upazila in December last year. The victim was identified as Masuma Khatun, 42, mother of two children and wife of Nizamuddin, a rickshaw puller.*" In this article, the victim's identity was explicitly revealed through her name, age, husband's name and occupation, and the number of her children. Framings like this not only violate privacy but also heighten victims' vulnerability and reinforce social stigma, compounding the harms they experience. This pattern reflects a breach of the media's normative duty, as outlined by social responsibility theory, to protect vulnerable populations and uphold socially responsible reporting.

A significant trend of victim-blaming was evident in 17% news articles, where responsibility for the violence was shifted from perpetrator to victim. Blame was primarily shifted onto victims by focusing on their actions—such as their extramarital affairs, outgoing nature, social media activity, aggressive demeanour, involvement in prostitution, employment status, disobedience to husband or family, and negligence in household chores—particularly in reports on murder and rape cases. For example, a *Daily Sun* article, on a father killed his daughter reads, "*A man allegedly murdered his daughter in Kushtia yesterday over posting offensive photos and videos on Facebook.*" shifting blame to the victim by emphasizing her social media activity." Likewise, *Bangladesh Pratidin*, covering an incident where a husband killed his wife noted, "*But when Mahfuz left for Malaysia, his wife Asma got involved in an extramarital affair with his friend Tariqul. Returning to the country in December last year, he found out about his wife's affair with his friend. Later, Mahfuz stabbed his wife Asma to death in a fit of rage due to her extramarital affair,*" transferring responsibility onto the victim by emphasising her 'extramarital affair.' Such representations illustrate how framing shapes moral interpretation, shifting accountability from perpetrators to victims and normalising blame that excuses offenders and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes.

Justifications of violence were comparatively less prevalent, present in only 16% of news articles. However, frequently portrayed the act of violence as influenced by external circumstances or the personal struggles of the perpetrator, either directly or indirectly. Commonly mentioned factors included poverty, unemployment, addiction to drugs or gambling, mental health issues, anger management problems, and familial conflicts. For instance, *The Daily*

*Star* covering an incident of homicide reads, "Javed Ali had been unemployed for several months and was struggling financially. Shakil Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station said, Javed killed his wife and daughter due to financial inconsistency." This redirects attention to his financial difficulties, subtly justifying the action. Another article *Bangladesh Pratidin* covering a case where a mentally ill husband killed his wife states, "The police official said that familial dispute and psychological disharmony led him into depression, which might have triggered him to kill his wife," depicting "familial dispute and psychological disharmony" as a catalyst. Such framing diminishes the accountability of the offender and normalise gender-based violence, thus downplaying the seriousness of the offence and its effects on victims.

Detailed descriptions of violence and irrelevant statements appeared in a striking 69% of articles, with reports often moving beyond factual narration to vividly reconstruct events and quote individuals sympathetic to the perpetrator. Such practices compromise ethical reporting standards and risk retraumatizing survivors by prioritising lurid details over sensitivity. Detailed accounts were most evident in cases of murder, rape, physical assault, and sexual harassment. A report in *Prothom Alo* covering a gang-rape incident narrated, "While returning home by walking through the road inside the Ghazari forest, Mosaddek Hossain, a local troublemaker, grabbed the woman's mouth and took her into the bushes. There he raped the woman by tying her hands and feet with her own veil. After that, Mosaddek called two of his friends on the phone. They also raped the woman and recorded the incident on a mobile phone. The three youths left the woman and fled after threatening to release the video on social media if she told anyone about the rape incident." This narration provided unnecessary specifics, turning the violence into a spectacle that contribute little to public interest while amplifying the dramatic nature of the act. Similarly, *Bangladesh Pratidin* reported on an incident where a father murdered his daughter for marrying against his will. The report narrates: "That day, Quddus Khan did not take Parul to his own house but first took her to his friend Mokaddes Mandal's house in Bhuyapur. From there, they proceeded to the side of a river in the Panchbibi area of Joypurhat. Parul, Quddus, and his friend Mokaddes walked along the bank of the river in the darkness of the night. At one point, Quddus pushed his daughter, then cut her veil into two pieces and tied her hands with one piece, while Mokaddes tied Parul's leg with the other piece. In this situation, Quddus killed the girl by twisting a towel around her neck. Later, he threw Parul's body into the river and returned to Tangail." This reconstruction traces the crime step by step, providing minute details that could serve as a blueprint for similar acts of violence.

Sensationalist or stereotypical portrayals of violence, victims, or perpetrators were present in 25% of the news articles. These portrayals were constructed through the deliberate exaggeration of events and the dramatic presentation of violence, often employing emotive or sensationalised terms in headlines, leads, and the body of the text—such as "brutal," "mysterious," "unspeakable," and "forcibly raped." In addition, narratives frequently positioned victims as poor and weak, while depicting perpetrators as strong, influential, or powerful, thereby reinforcing entrenched social stereotypes. *Bangladesh Pratidin*, reporting on a rape incident, stated, "When she screamed, Arif grabbed her mouth and forcibly raped her," a description that amplifies the drama by emphasizing the physical restraint ('grabbed her mouth') and by employing the term "forcibly," which is redundant as rape is inherently coercive. Similarly, *Prothom Alo* covering an incident, where a female student was tortured by political leaders,

states, "After a few days of admission to the university, a female student became a victim of the brutality of the leaders of the Chhatra League." The term 'brutality' intensifies the perceived severity of the act, while the reference to a political organization situates the perpetrators within a framework of social and political power. Another example is a headline from *The Daily Star* that reads, "Mysterious death of women who sued AL leader for rape." The word "mysterious" sensationalises the event by creating suspense, while the mention of the political party "AL (Awami League)" portrays the accused as a powerful entity. Collectively, the use of sensationalised and stereotypical framing dramatizes violence, obscures its structural causes, and reinforces power hierarchies. This represents a breach of socially responsible reporting, which requires ethical journalism that fosters informed and constructive understanding of sensitive issues.

Although limited in number, 13% of the reports diminished the gravity of violence by romanticising the violence, portraying it as trivial incidents, and including details that questioned the sincerity of the victims and the severity of their suffering. For example, an article from *Prothom Alo* included a comment from the police stating, "The murder happened mainly because of a love triangle, added the police," thereby romanticising the act as jealousy-driven within the context of personal relationships rather than recognising it as a criminal offence. Similarly, *The Daily Star*, covering a rape case, cited a UP chairman: "Noor said, I was informed by the female member that it was a minor incident. I asked the woman in public whether Kaiser raped her. She admitted in front of everyone that she was not raped," casting doubt on the victim's credibility. Another article from *Bangladesh Pratidin* portrayed the violence as a minor incident, "In Fatulla, in-laws have been accused of attempting to burn a housewife by pouring kerosene over a trivial incident." Such framing minimises the seriousness of violence and delegitimises victims' experiences, reinforcing harmful narratives that obstruct justice and accountability.



Figure 1: Images from reviewed articles of four newspapers

Analysis of the photographs revealed that image inclusion in the articles was uncommon, aligning with established guidelines and thus reassuring. Only 8% of news articles featured inadequate and stereotypical photographs of violence, victims, or perpetrators, appearing mainly in reports on murder, rape, and sexual harassment. However, the dailies often breached ethical standards by using metaphorical illustrations portraying women as vulnerable or powerless—depicted with sealed lips, crying, cowering in corners, surrounded by grasping hands, or overshadowed by men wielding fists or knives. Some articles also included images of victims and their family members, though this was not widespread. Such portrayals reduce women to symbols of fragility, reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, and normalise gender-based violence. Instead of addressing the complexity of gender-based violence, these images sensationalise suffering and risk re-traumatising survivors, prioritising visual impact over ethical responsibility. For instance, in ‘image 01’ from *Bangladesh Pratidin*, accompanying a rape report, the female figure is shown weak and cowering, while a large hand tries to grab her against her will, depicting the victim as weak and powerless. Image 02 from *Daily Sun*, illustrating a report on sexual harassment, shows a distressed woman surrounded by invasive hands, fear and tears in eyes, reinforcing notions of helplessness. Image 03 from *The Daily Star*, accompanying a report on sexual harassment in public universities, employs a symbolic illustration where hands inappropriately touching a female figure—perpetuating the idea of women as constant victims of male aggression. Image 04 from *Prothom Alo* includes the photograph of a rape and murder victim of 2016, revealing her identity and violating ethical standards by exposing her to posthumous stigma and sensationalising her tragedy. In contrast, a socially responsible journalistic approach, as outlined in social responsibility theory, should emphasise dignity, agency, and systemic accountability, fostering awareness and sensitivity without perpetuating harm.

Bangladeshi media rarely acknowledged unequal gender power dynamics, overlooking a crucial aspect of public awareness and prevention. Only 7% of news articles situated VAW within the broader context of entrenched discrimination and power imbalances. In these few cases, violence was framed not as isolated incidents but as manifestations of systemic inequality. An example in *The Daily Star* examined the persistence of the dowry system despite its illegality, noting, “Empirically, we found that both the bride and groom's families know that dowry is illegal and a punishable offence. Nevertheless, under the guise of gift-giving, the practice still goes on, aiming to keep the groom's family happy to ensure the bride's future security, as observed in the chars of Sirajganj, Kurigram, Rangpur, Khulna, and Satkhira”. By framing dowry as a cultural practice to secure a woman’s future, the report highlighted the gendered power imbalances and societal norms that sustain this form of exploitation. It reveals how framing can perpetuate cultural acceptance of inequality, pointing to the necessity of more reflective and socially responsible reporting that exposes the systemic foundations of VAW.

Similarly, an article from *Prothom Alo* explored the societal roots of VAW, featuring expert commentary that linked slander and abuse to a pervasive culture of contempt toward women. It emphasised that in Bangladeshi society, men often grow up witnessing the degradation and mistreatment of women, internalising these behaviours and sustaining cycles of oppression. The article conceptualized VAW as a structural issue rooted in patriarchal discrimination and unequal power dynamics, calling for a shift in perspective that encourages collective advocacy and

systemic reform. These outcomes highlight the importance of framing VAW within its broader socio-cultural and structural context. To foster meaningful public understanding and prevention, the media must move beyond event-based reporting and adopt a more comprehensive approach that interrogates the underlying cultural attitudes and institutional inequalities sustaining gender-based violence

Fulfilling the educational responsibility was also uncommon among the dailies as well, with only 7% of the coverage fulfilled this role. The failure to fulfill educational responsibility undermines the media's social responsibility function, which includes promoting informed citizenship and social reform. However, many articles still highlighted the prevalence of violence, provided statistical evidence, incorporated expert opinions, and listed contact details of organisations and institutions where victims could access medical treatment, counselling, and legal assistance. For example, *Daily Sun*, in reporting on cyber violence sates, "*Of late, Bangladeshi women fall victim to a new type of crime-cybercrime. Criminals are committing this sort of crime following the misuse of information technology (IT). Because of such crime, the personal lives of thousands of women have turned miserable. The life of a victim is just as miserable as it is emotionally damaged. If such an accident happens to a woman, she has no way to move normally outside the home. According to the Cyber Unit of the Police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID), they receive at least 3,000 cybercrime complaints every month, with the majority of them being filed by women.*" The report highlights the prevalence and seriousness of cyber violence, its emotional impact on victims, and the urgency of addressing the problem, reinforced by quantitative data. Another example is found in Prothom Alo, which provides information on where and how victims can access medical treatment and legal support, detailing comprehensive services for women and children facing physical abuse, sexual violence, and burn injuries. The article reads, "*The One-Stop Crisis Centres (OCCs) and One-Stop Crisis Cells (OCC-CELLs) have been established in government hospitals across the country as part of the Multisectoral Programme under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. These centres provide comprehensive services to women and children who are victims of various forms of violence, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and burning. Services offered by OCC and OCC-Cells include medical treatment, DNA testing, police and legal assistance, counselling, and rehabilitation.*" By outlining the available resources, the report fulfils media's social responsibility, equipping readers with practical knowledge and guidance to support victims.

However, reporting on the misuse of firearms in VAW was entirely absent, with none of the articles (0%) fulfilling the educational responsibility in this regard. This gap leaves the public unaware of the specific risks and preventative measures regarding firearms.

Table 4: Comparative analysis of compliance with the guidelines between Bangla and English newspapers

Guidelines (code name)	Bengali newspaper (n=830) % n	English newspapers (n=564) %n
<b>Negative Elements</b>		
Identity reveal	1353 (43%)	151 (27%)
Victim-blaming	161 (19%)	63 (11%)
Justifying violence	143 (17%)	31 (5%)
Details of violence, & irrelevant statements	593 (71%)	365 (65%)
Sensationalist or stereotypical expressions	306 (37%)	40 (7%)
Diminishing violence, & doubting victim	109 (13%)	68 (12%)
Inadequate & stereotypical visual	85 (10%)	31 (5%)

<b>Positive Elements</b>		
Acknowledging imbalanced gender power	39 (6%)	49 (9%)
Educational responsibility	52 (5%)	62 (11%)
Educational role on firearms misuse	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

A comparative analysis of Bangla and English newspapers indicates that Bangla newspapers are more prone to ethical guideline violations, thereby perpetuating harmful narratives, than their English counterparts. They more frequently disclosed victims' identities, engaged in victim-blaming, and justified violence through external or personal circumstances of the offender, reflecting a tendency to normalise gender-based violence. Bangla outlets also displayed greater sensationalism and stereotypical expressions, often including excessive details and irrelevant statements. Moreover, Bangla reports diminished the severity of violence or questioned the victim's honesty and used inadequate or stereotypical images more frequently, which highlights persistent gender biases and superficial coverage. These practices undermine ethical reporting and perpetuate harmful narratives that obscure the structural and societal roots of VAW.

Although acknowledgement of gendered power imbalances and fulfilment of the educational role were limited across both categories, English newspapers performed slightly better, showing greater attention to the structural causes of VAW and a stronger commitment to educational reporting than their Bangla counterparts. However, a critical gap remains, as neither group addressed the misuse of firearms in VAW, reflecting a missed opportunity to advance public understanding and prevention. Overall, while English newspapers performed comparatively better, both categories fell short of the expectations of socially responsible journalism.

Table 5: Application of Framing Techniques in Coverage

	<b>Episodic Framing (n=1394) %(n)</b>	<b>Thematic Framing (n=1394) %(n)</b>
Bangladesh Pratidin	403 (29%)	41 (3%)
Prothom Alo	322 (23%)	64 (5%)
The Daily Star	234 (17%)	74 (5%)
Daily Sun	201 (14%)	55 (4%)
Total	1160 (83%)	234 (17%)

A predominant reliance on episodic framing (83%) was observed, with reports presenting events in isolation rather than linking them to broader social or structural contexts. In contrast, only 17% of articles employed thematic framing, which situates violence against women within wider social, cultural, and institutional frameworks. This imbalance diverges from UNDP guidelines that advocate a thematic approach to enhance public understanding and promote collective, policy-oriented responses. The consistent use of episodic framing across all four newspapers reflects a narrow journalistic tendency to depict violence as a series of discrete events rather than manifestations of entrenched gender inequalities. Such framing limits public awareness of the underlying structural factors that perpetuate violence and constrains opportunities for informed dialogue, prevention, and sustainable social change.

Anchored in UNDP's media reporting standards, this study offers important perspectives on how Bangladeshi newspapers report on violence against women (VAW). The findings reveal a pervasive ethical deficit: only 11% of articles demonstrated full compliance with UNDP's guidelines. This points to a systemic problem in the journalistic treatment of gender-based violence, whereby reporting often reproduces harmful norms rather than catalysing public awareness and reform. Comparable shortcomings have been documented in Bangladeshi coverage of child sexual abuse (Anik et al., 2021), in Indonesia's sexual-violence reporting (Maharani, 2018), and in Australian VAW-specific coverage (Sutherland et al., 2019).

Prevalent negative elements, including identity reveal, victim-blaming, justifying violence, details of violence and irrelevant statements, sensationalist expressions, diminishing violence and doubting victim, inadequate and stereotypical visuals were present in 89% of articles. Such portrayals can infringe on victims' dignity and inspire further violence (UNDP, 2021). Particularly, victims' identities were disclosed in 36% of articles, increasing risks of stigma and further victimisation (Jones et al., 2010; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). These practices reflect problematic framing patterns in media reporting, indicating how journalistic choices in language and imagery may shape the public's understanding of social issues (de Vreese, 2005). Similar patterns were observed in Pakistani (Ahmed, 2016) and Indian (Gilbertson & Pandit, 2019) media, where coverage often reflects sensationalism and moral judgment. Portrayals like this not only diminish victims' dignity but can also re-traumatise survivors and discourage others from coming forward.

The victim-blaming frame was evident in 17% of articles, often conveyed through gendered messaging, mirroring findings by Islam and Siddique (2023). Justifications for violence appeared in 16% of articles, with factors such as poverty and mental illness, which aligns with prior analyses by Sims (2008) and Exner and Thurston (2009). Detailed accounts of violence and irrelevant interlocutor statements appeared in 69% of reports, consistent with Bangladesh-based studies of CSA and suicide coverage that document frequent inclusion of ethically questionable detail (Anik et al., 2021; Arafat et al., 2020). Sensationalist language was found in 25% of articles; exaggerated terms contributed to skewed perceptions of violence, echoing Ahmed (2016) and Jackson (2012) and suggesting that newsworthiness is prioritised over ethical responsibility—reflecting a broader tension between commercial imperatives and social responsibility (McManus, 1994; Hamilton, 2004). Even at lower rates—diminishing violence (13%) and stereotypical imagery (8%)—the pattern endures, echoing critiques of minimisation (Morgan & Politoff, 2012; Barnett, 2012) and harmful visual tropes (Mowri & Bailey, 2022).

English-language newspapers showed stronger adherence to reporting guidelines than Bangla newspapers. They were less likely to reveal victims' identities (27% vs. 43%), engage in victim-blaming (11% vs. 19%), or justify violence (5% vs. 17%), and displayed less sensationalism with more appropriate imagery. However, both fell short of their educational role. Only 11% of English and 5% of Bangla articles signposted victim support services (Richards et al., 2014), and just 9% and 6%, respectively, acknowledged gender–power imbalances—overlooking the broader structural and gendered roots of violence against women (Sutherland et al., 2015, 2019). Neither type included educational content on firearm misuse, an omission consistent with the persistent silences noted in previous media studies (Easteal et al., 2015). Collectively, these findings reveal a clear deviation from social responsibility theory's call for ethical, public-interest reporting (Siebert et al., 1956; Paul & Kabiru, 2019), as many outlets perpetuate stigmatising narratives that compromise journalism's educative and ethical mandate.

Coverage relied overwhelmingly on episodic framing (83%) rather than thematic framing (17%), mirroring global patterns that depict VAW as isolated incidents rather than systemic issues rooted in gender inequality (Bou-Franch, 2013; Sutherland et al., 2019). Although the few thematic pieces offered broader context, their scarcity signals a persistent lack of gender-sensitive reporting (Agha & Ahmed, 2018). Consistent with framing theory, which holds that journalists highlight specific aspects of events to shape audience interpretations (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993; Hoffner & Hamilton, 1998), such incident-focused coverage tends to obscure the structural drivers of gender-based violence in Bangladesh. Unexpectedly, the low rate of female bylined reporting on VAW (28%) contrasts with global trends linking higher female participation to more nuanced coverage (Bullock, 2007; Morgan & Politoff, 2012). This disparity likely reflects male-dominated newsroom hierarchies in Bangladesh, underscoring how internal gender dynamics may shape external framings of gender and violence (Internews, 2021).

The findings highlight an urgent need for capacity-building and gender-sensitive training for journalists and editors, especially in Bangla-language newsrooms. Collaboration among regulatory bodies, media councils, and academic institutions is essential to embed clear ethical reporting standards (e.g., UNDP-aligned guidance). Newsrooms should adopt a more gender balanced. Newsrooms should adopt survivor-centred protocols that ensure privacy, include help-seeking information, and provide expert context, supported by pre-publication checklists and thematic journalism that situates violence VAW within cultural, economic, and legal frameworks than treating incidents in isolation.

However, the study's scope was limited to four national dailies and excluded regional, television, and digital outlets. It relied on content analysis, without examining newsroom practices or audience responses. Future research should broaden media samples, observe editorial workflow, and test framing effects on public attitudes. Despite these limitations, the evidence confirms that ethical reporting on VAW is not merely a journalistic concern but a social responsibility demanding accountability and reform.

## CONCLUSION

The study has effectively addressed all its objectives and provided empirical evidence. Results revealed that providing detailed accounts of violence, victim-blaming, identity revelation, sensationalism, ridiculing, and justifying violence were common practices among dailies. These prevalent practices highlight a significant ethical lapse in the reporting of gender-based violence. Additionally, the reports were heavily dominated by episodic news coverage, presenting violence as individual or discrete events while failing to capture the broader social context underlying gender-based violence. This dominance further exacerbates the issue by neglecting the systemic nature of such violence, thereby undermining efforts to combat it. Moreover, this approach reinforces harmful stereotypes, spreads misinformation, and fosters stigmatisation. It is imperative for print media to enhance adherence to ethical standards to play a constructive role in addressing gender-based violence, fostering informed public discourse, and ultimately contributing to societal change. While the research demonstrates significant strengths, including a robust dataset from year-long coverage in four prominent Bangladeshi dailies, a mixed-method approach, and the use of UNDP guidelines as ethical benchmarks, its scope is limited to four dailies and one year of coverage, excluding local media and insights into editorial decision-

making. Future studies should expand to diverse media platforms, incorporate qualitative methods, and examine long-term trends to provide a more comprehensive understanding of media portrayals of violence against women.

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