

LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND CRIME: REPRESENTING FEMALE PERPETRATORS IN INDONESIAN DIGITAL NEWS

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Abstract

The way media represent female perpetrators can reveal the extent to which gendered norms and expectations influence news reporting in Indonesia. The way news is framed can shape public perception of female criminals. This study aims to examine how female perpetrators are represented through social actor choices in Indonesian digital crime news. It employs a Critical Discourse Analysis approach using the Social Actor Network framework introduced by van Leeuwen. The data source of this study is the digital media *detikcom*. The corpus consists of 20 criminal news texts published in 2025-2026. The findings of this study show that female perpetrators in Indonesian digital media are represented through the strategies of Classification, Activation, and Exclusion. The gender identity of female criminals is highly foregrounded in news texts through the use of Classification. Through Activation, criminal acts committed by women are made explicit without the use of linguistic hedging. Exclusion is used to remove actors from the text, though its impact is not severe since female perpetrators are clearly identified elsewhere in the same texts. These strategies position female criminals as deviant social actors in Indonesian crime news, as their behavior is judged against prevailing gendered norms. Theoretically, this study reveals the linguistic mechanisms underlying the representation of female perpetrators through the Social Actor Network in the context of Indonesian digital media. Accordingly, media outlets in Indonesia need to reflect on how their linguistic choices shape the gendered representation of female perpetrators.

Keywords: gender, crime, female perpetrators, digital media, Social Actor Network

Abstrak

Cara media merepresentasikan pelaku kejahatan perempuan dapat mengungkap sejauh mana norma dan ekspektasi gender memengaruhi pemberitaan di Indonesia. Cara pembedaan berita ini dapat membentuk persepsi publik terhadap perempuan pelaku kejahatan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana pelaku kejahatan perempuan direpresentasikan melalui pilihan aktor sosial dalam berita kriminal pada media digital Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis dengan kerangka Social Actor Network yang diperkenalkan oleh van Leeuwen. Sumber data penelitian ini adalah media digital *detikcom* dengan korpus berupa 20 teks berita kriminal yang diterbitkan pada tahun 2025-2026. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pelaku kejahatan perempuan di media digital di Indonesia direpresentasikan melalui strategi Klasifikasi, Aktivasi, dan Eksklusi. Identitas gender pelaku kejahatan perempuan sangat ditonjolkan dalam teks berita dengan penggunaan Klasifikasi. Melalui Aktivasi, tindakan kriminal yang dilakukan perempuan diperjelas tanpa penggunaan hedging. Eksklusi digunakan dalam teks berita untuk menghilangkan aktor meskipun dampaknya tidak signifikan karena pelaku kriminal perempuan tetap teridentifikasi dengan jelas di

bagian lain dalam teks yang sama. Strategi-strategi ini memosisikan pelaku kriminal perempuan sebagai aktor sosial yang menyimpang dalam pemberitaan kriminal di Indonesia, karena perilaku mereka dinilai berdasarkan norma gender yang berlaku di masyarakat. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini mengungkap mekanisme linguistik yang mendasari representasi pelaku kejahatan perempuan melalui Social Actor Network dalam konteks media digital Indonesia. Dengan demikian, media di Indonesia perlu merefleksikan kembali bagaimana pilihan kebahasaan yang digunakan turut membentuk representasi perempuan pelaku kejahatan.

Kata kunci: *gender, kejahatan, pelaku kejahatan perempuan, media digital, Social Actor Network*

INTRODUCTION

Men are more likely to be involved in various criminal activities across many contexts and types of offenses. In the United States, statistics show that 90% of prison inmates are male, although the percentage of incarcerated women has also been rising since 1980 (Western & Wildeman, 2009). Similarly, in the Netherlands, rates of violent offending are also higher among men than women (Block et al., 2010). This male dominance in criminal statistics, observed across different national contexts, has shaped a broader public perception that men are the “typical” perpetrators of crime. Unlike men, whose crimes are often considered “normal,” crimes committed by women are viewed as a disruption of social norms. Women who break the law face a double sanction, or “double deviance,” in which they are seen as violating both the law and the norms associated with femininity as upheld by society (Carlen, 2019; Seaman & Lynch, 2023). Because women commit crimes less frequently than men, criminal cases involving female perpetrators carry newsworthiness as they are considered sensational (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002).

Sensationalism in crime news involving female perpetrators is not presented neutrally. In framing crime news with female perpetrators, media tend to favor dramatic narratives that place blame on the female perpetrator rather than explaining situational causation such as economic factors, social environment, gender inequality, or other conditions that influence crime (Sandman, 2022). When news is delivered repeatedly, society gradually considers it as something natural, neutral, and unquestionable (Fairclough, 2013). Accustomed to this kind of framing, the public will also get used to judging female perpetrators more negatively than male perpetrators even though the crimes committed by both may be comparable.

Such framing is constructed through non-random discursive strategies by media (Fairclough, 2013). Crime news not only reports facts but also constructs public opinion through the way media represents social actors involved in criminal cases. Studies on social actor representation find that who is foregrounded and how they are described in a text can shape readers’ perceptions of who is responsible (Alkaff & McLellan, 2018). Such representational choices are never neutral.

Within the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis, language is understood as a social practice that is never neutral, as it carries particular values and interests (Fairclough, 2013; Richardson, 2007). The discursive practices embedded in news texts carry ideological content that cannot be ignored. The representation of female perpetrators in crime reporting is therefore an important area of inquiry, as the discursive strategies employed by media determine how society interprets criminal events.

Several previous studies have examined the representation of social actors in Indonesian media news using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, though those studies have focused mainly on socio-political events in general (Hanafiah et al., 2026; Nasution et al., 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2024). Research specifically uncovering the representation of female criminals in Indonesia does exist but remains very limited. Pribadi et al. (2024) dan Fitri & Nurrahmi (2021) found that in representing female perpetrators, media reports on their criminal acts while also foregrounding their gender identity. In a Western context, Berrington & Honkatukia (2002) compared representations of violence committed by women in British and Finnish media. They found that the media emphasized gender as a central aspect of reporting and that sensationalism functions as an ingredient that can boost readership (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002). Based on this literature review, it is apparent that the linguistic mechanisms underlying the representation of female perpetrators in Indonesian media using the Social Actor Network framework (van Leeuwen, 1996) have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. This study seeks to address this gap by answering the research question: “How are female perpetrators represented through social actor choices in Indonesian digital crime news?” In doing so, it contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis scholarship in the context of Indonesian digital media, particularly by uncovering the linguistic mechanisms behind the representation of female perpetrators. The findings of this study offer insight into how language constructs the representation of women in criminal discourse in Indonesian digital media reporting.

THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) is an approach that examines how language constructs, maintains, and challenges social meaning, identity, and power relations. This approach investigates how discourse contributes to social inequality, injustice, and power relations that are enacted through language use (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996; van Dijk, 2008). The goal of CDA is to analyze how these power relations manifest in texts and conversations, and how discourse reflects and reproduces values and ideologies that society holds about particular issues (van Dijk, 2009). Language is never neutral, as it is always connected to social practices and broader power relations (Fairclough, 2013; Richardson, 2007). Because language is part of social life, social change can be understood by examining language and its use in discourse. Discourse not only responds to change but also becomes part of the process of change itself (Dahlborg et al., 2024), particularly in the era of modern capitalism where discourse increasingly governs social life (Fairclough, 2003). For example, the government frames a policy with certain word choices so that it is perceived more positively. The government does not say “raising fuel prices” but “adjusting fuel prices”. The government does not use “budget cuts”, but “budget efficiency”. All these examples refer to the same policy but when worded differently, public reception will differ. Therefore, language influences public perception. The choice of discursive strategies is not merely motivated by stylistic reasons, but by the ideology and interests behind the text (Fairclough, 2003).

Representation of Social Actors

The representation of social actors in discourse is a significant issue in Critical Discourse Analysis because it relates to ideology, power relations, and social identity. The way text producers choose

language to represent social actors, including who does what, who is named, and who remains unnamed in discourse, can legitimize or delegitimize those who perform certain actions (Gong et al., 2023; Heaton et al., 2023). The representation of social actors is one way that ideology, power, and social norms are reproduced through texts. Van Leeuwen (1996) introduced the Social Actor Network framework, arguing that grammar should be understood from the perspective of its meaning-making capacity rather than merely as a rigid set of linguistic rules. Van Leeuwen (1996) proposed a number of categories within this paradigm and explained their sociological relevance (See Figure 1).

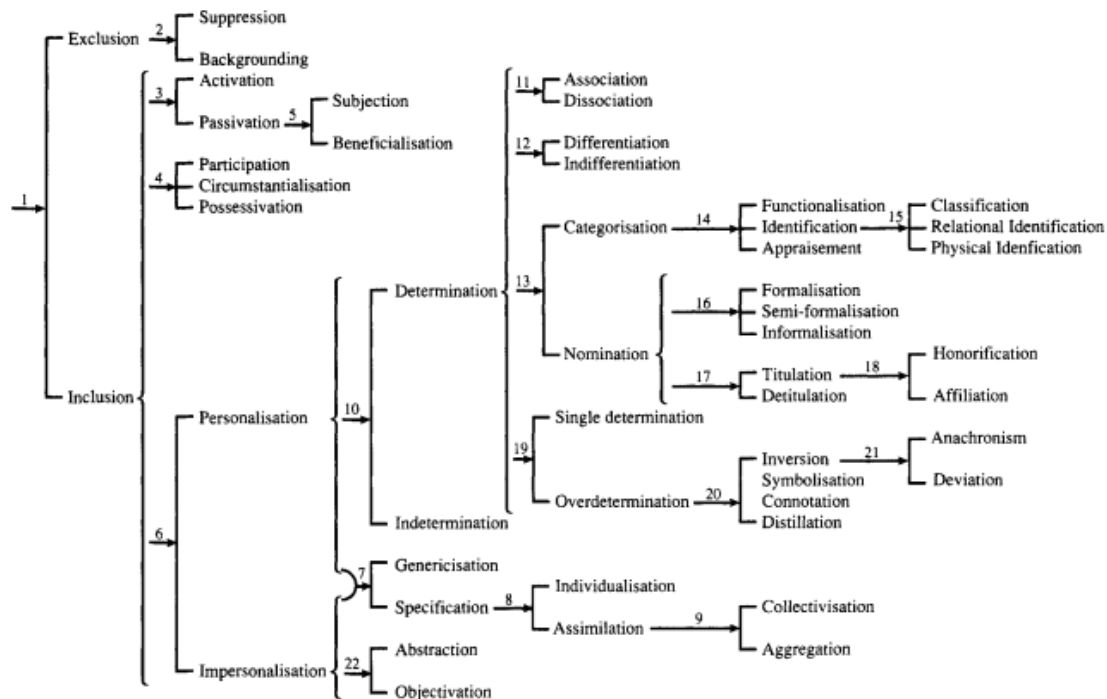


Figure 1. The representation of social actors in discourse: a system network (van Leeuwen, 1996)

Broadly, the Social Actor Network is divided into two dimensions: exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion occurs when social actors are not represented in a particular social practice. Inclusion occurs when a social practice recognizes or involves social actors. Among the many categories in the Social Actor Network, this paper focuses on three dominant categories found in the texts to reveal the representation of female criminals in digital media: Classification, Activation, and Exclusion.

First, Classification refers to how social actors are referred to using categories that society or institutions employ to distinguish individuals based on different classes or social groups (Ernanda, 2025). These categories include age, gender, origin, social class, wealth, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so forth (van Leeuwen, 1996). Through Classification, the identity of a social actor is made explicit. In this study, Classification is the category used to examine how the gender identity of female perpetrators is constructed through social categories in news texts.

The second category is Activation. Activation represents an agent who actively performs an action (van Leeuwen, 1996). An actor is depicted as the initiator of an activity. This category is significant because whether an actor is represented as actively performing an action, or as

passively affected by it, can influence how readers understand reality. Compare the active sentence “The governor embezzled public funds” with the passive construction “Public funds were embezzled” — both convey the same information but carry different meanings. The actor who committed the act is clearly identified in the active construction, but not in the passive one. Additionally, this study draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) to complement the Social Actor Network analysis (van Leeuwen, 1996, 2008). While van Leeuwen explains how social actors are included or excluded in discourse, SFL provides the grammatical tools, particularly transitivity and participant roles, to show how those representational choices are realized at the level of the clause. Furthermore, agency within Activation has implications for which actor is held responsible for the criminal act.

Third is Exclusion. Exclusion is a discursive strategy in which social actors are not represented in the text (van Leeuwen, 1996). This strategy can be implemented by removing an actor entirely from the text (suppression) or by not explicitly naming the actor while still allowing them to be identified elsewhere in the text (backgrounding). Through Exclusion, certain powerful actors — dominant social groups or powerful institutions — can be “shielded” from responsibility for their actions, while other social actors — minorities or marginalized groups — can be further marginalized (Cotal San Martin, 2021; Lien, 2024; Ozdora-Aksak et al., 2021). Text producers can construct particular social realities by choosing who is visible and who is invisible in a text. This discursive strategy can legitimize the policies of those in power, justify actions, and delegitimize perspectives that differ from those preferred. In criminal discourse, Exclusion removes actors from the text in order to obscure the perpetrator.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine how female perpetrators are represented through social actor choices in Indonesian digital crime news. This qualitative study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, which views language as a social practice that is never neutral and therefore requires discourse analysts to uncover the construction of social reality underlying texts. To examine the linguistic representation of social actors — in this case, female perpetrators — the study employs the Social Actor Network framework (van Leeuwen, 1996, 2008). To analyze constructions involving the Activation category in greater depth, the study draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly the transitivity system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

The data were obtained from *detikcom*, an Indonesian digital media outlet established in 1998 under CT Corp that provides current news and lifestyle content (detikcom, 2021). This study selected *detikcom* as the data source because this digital media outlet extensively covers criminal cases and receives more than 17 billion page views in a year (detikcom, 2021). Data collection was conducted by manually browsing the headlines of criminal news on detikcom and by keyword searches applied to article headlines (e.g. *perempuan*, *wanita*, etc.). All identified articles whose headlines indicated a female perpetrator were included in the corpus, with no restriction on the type of crime reported. This process resulted in a corpus of 20 news texts published between 2025 and 2026.

The twenty selected news texts were then read repeatedly to gain a thorough understanding of their content. Coding was conducted by the researcher based on inclusion and exclusion categories within the Social Actor Network framework as shown in Figure 1 (van Leeuwen, 1996, 2008). The unit of analysis encompassed phrases, clauses, sentences, and

combinations of sentences that are relevant to the representation of social actors. The identified excerpts were then analyzed in depth to examine how female perpetrators are represented through social actor choices in Indonesian digital crime news. While van Leeuwen's (1996) Social Actor Network framework comprises several categories, this study focuses specifically on Classification, Activation, and Exclusion to allow for greater analytical depth, rather than covering all categories at a surface level. We identified these as the most prominent categories based on qualitative observation during repeated readings of the texts – an approach common in CDA research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section answers the research question: How are female perpetrators represented through social actor choices in Indonesian digital crime news? The analysis of twenty criminal news texts from *detikcom* covering the 2025-2026 period found three dominant strategies utilized to represent female perpetrators, namely Classification, Activation, and Exclusion. These three social actor representation strategies are discussed within the Social Actor Network framework. Some selected data are analyzed using Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Classification

The first strategy is Classification, one of the prominent strategies found in the news texts. Through this strategy, perpetrators are referred to using social categories that operate within society (van Leeuwen, 1996), including gender categories. The majority of the data show that the media use Classification to describe perpetrators as female. Even in news headlines, information about gender is foregrounded, as seen in examples such as *Dua Perempuan* 'Two Women', *Wanita Pencuri Duit Takziah di Jaktim* 'Woman Who Stole Condolence Money in East Jakarta', *Perempuan di Tasikmalaya* 'Woman in Tasikmalaya', *Ibu Tiri* 'Stepmother', *Dua Wanita Pembunuh Pria Disabilitas Subang* 'Two Women Who Killed a Disabled Man in Subang', and *Emak-emak di Mataram* 'Middle-Aged Women in Mataram'. Female gender identity thus becomes a foregrounded piece of information from the very first moment a reader reads the text.

Classification based on gender is carried out through the addition of numerative specifiers such as *dua wanita* 'two women' and *seorang perempuan* 'a woman' to convey information about the number of perpetrators. The inclusion of numbers in news can provide knowledge about the scale of a criminal act and enhance the credibility of the writing, producing an impression of objectivity (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Paglinawan, 2021). Additionally, adjectives are added to provide further description of female perpetrators, such as the adjective *muda* 'young' in the phrase *perempuan muda* 'young woman' (Excerpt 1), serving to provide a more concrete sociological profile based on age that readers can more readily visualize.

Excerpt 1

Aksi seorang perempuan muda yang diduga melakukan percobaan pencurian di sebuah toko beras di kawasan Citeureup, Kabupaten Tasikmalaya, terekam kamera pengawas (CCTV) pada Rabu (15/4/2026).

'The actions of a **young woman** suspected of attempting to steal at a rice shop in the Citeureup area of Kabupaten Tasikmalaya were captured on CCTV on Wednesday.'

The foregrounding of gender is also achieved not only by explicitly naming the gender but also through relational identification (van Leeuwen, 1996), such as *seorang ibu tiri* ‘a stepmother’ to describe the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (her stepchild) (Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2

Seorang ibu tiri di Siak, Riau berinisial SAS (27) ditangkap dan ditetapkan sebagai tersangka.

‘A **stepmother** in Siak, Riau, with the initials SAS (27), was arrested and named a suspect.’

In a criminal context, this relational identification adds a heavier emotional and moral dimension, as the crime was committed within a family setting that should constitute a safe space for its members (UNICEF, 2025). The data also contains an element of connotation, in that the term *ibu tiri* ‘stepmother’, in the context of popular culture — particularly fairy tales and folklore — can evoke associations with cruelty and malevolence (Bahn & Hong, 2019; Fitriarti & Trisari, 2022), thereby emphasizing the tragic nature of the event.

The third excerpt, *kedua gadis Subang* ‘The two girls from Subang’, is an instance of Classification that foregrounds the perpetrators’ status as unmarried women (Excerpt 3). The use of the gender identity *gadis* ‘girl/unmarried young woman’ in this case carries a sharp moral judgment because culturally, *gadis* is often connoted with purity, vulnerability, and compliance, qualities that make the bearer appear ‘safe’ and non-threatening (Smith, 2010). Therefore, the use of the term *gadis* in describing criminal behavior that tragically caused the victim’s death emphasizes the deviation from social expectations.

Excerpt 3

Kedua gadis Subang tersebut saat ini sudah diamankan untuk dilakukan pemeriksaan lebih lanjut.

‘**The two girls from Subang** have now been secured for further investigation.’

A similar strategy is found in Excerpt 4 where the Classification *emak-emak* ‘middle-aged women/mothers’ portrays the perpetrator as a mature woman who is usually married. The term *emak-emak* in Indonesian culture carries the implication of a maternal figure who serves as a nurturing caregiver within the family and upholds domestic morality (Ernanda, 2023; Ginting-Carlström, 2025). When this term is applied to a criminal perpetrator, it creates an expectation mismatch in which readers understand the gendered role embedded in the term but encounter a report of crime committed by someone bearing that identity. Furthermore, the phrase *emak-emak asal Karangasem itu* ‘the middle-aged woman from Karangasem’ simultaneously conveys the perpetrator’s gender, age, social role, and region of origin. Identities attached to a person, such as race and sex, can interact simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989; Moradi et al., 2020) and each identity mentioned adds stigma toward other women who share the same characteristics.

Excerpt 4

Emak-emak asal Karangasem itu ditangkap setelah kedapatan mengoplos LPG 3 kilogram (kg) alias gas melon ke tabung LPG 12 kg dan 50 kg.

‘**The middle-aged woman from Karangasem** was arrested after being caught illegally refilling 3-kilogram LPG cylinders ('melon gas') into 12-kg and 50-kg LPG tanks.’

The Classification strategy carries different implications in Excerpt 5 where the noun phrase *terduga pelaku berjenis kelamin perempuan* ‘suspected female perpetrator’ contains the post-modifier *berjenis kelamin perempuan* ‘of female sex’, that asserts gender identity as the primary attribute for identifying the perpetrator amid a police investigation. The post-modifier does not grammatically need to be included, as the subject noun phrase remains acceptable without it, yet the news writer chose to include it. The same noun phrase contains the pre-modifier *terduga* ‘suspected’ which functions as hedging to indicate that the perpetrator's guilt has not yet been established (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Meanwhile, the post-modifier *berjenis kelamin perempuan* ‘of female sex’ confirms the perpetrator's gender. This implies that “We are not yet certain she is the perpetrator, but we are certain she is a female.” Gender labeling persists even though the perpetrator's criminal status is still at the suspicion stage. Portraying the perpetrator as *berjenis kelamin perempuan* can create ‘newsworthiness’ by highlighting the deviation between the criminal act (stealing jewelry) and society's expectations of traditional female behavior which is the opposite (Chen & Liu, 2024).

Excerpt 5

Terduga pelaku berjenis kelamin perempuan tadi yang menyembunyikan salah satu gelang emas tersebut di bawah tasnya.

‘**The suspected female perpetrator** hid one of the gold bracelets under her bag.’

The female gender Classification strategy employed in news texts carries a long-term discursive effect known as naturalization (Fairclough, 1989). Through sufficiently frequent repetition, what initially was merely an assumption gradually comes to be regarded as natural and normal, such as classifying criminal perpetrators by their gender first, before motives or other information. News producers highlight gender as an important variable in the criminal acts being reported. Readers are guided to process the criminal act through the lens of gender. By foregrounding female gender, public inquiry shifts from ‘Why did this person commit a crime?’ to ‘Why did this woman commit a crime?’. Gender then becomes the emphasized point, simultaneously obscuring other factors such as poverty, mental health, social inequality, and a range of other possible explanations. When context is absent from the news text, the public does not receive the information needed to understand the root cause of the problem. And when the public does not understand the root cause, policymakers face no pressure to provide solutions, such as improved economic access, legal protection from domestic violence, or support for women within the justice system.

A further consequence of foregrounding gender Classification is double deviance (Carlen, 2019; Seaman & Lynch, 2023). Carlen (2019) explains double deviance as a concept in feminist criminology referring to the situation in which female perpetrators are judged not only for breaking the law, but also for violating gender norms. When a woman commits a criminal act, she is considered to have committed two violations simultaneously: first, a breach of formal law

(a criminal act), and second, a breach of social expectations about how a woman ought to behave (femininity). When news texts foreground the gender of a female perpetrator, this strategy automatically activates that double standard. Readers process not only information about crime but also about the incongruity of a woman's gender with the role of criminal perpetrator, and sometimes this gender factor provokes a moral outrage from the public that is disproportionate to the offense actually committed.

Activation

Another prominent strategy is Activation, in which perpetrators are portrayed as actively performing an action or as the primary initiators of an activity (van Leeuwen, 1996). To illustrate the Activation strategy, the following analysis draws on several constructions from specific news texts. In a sentence, participants — persons or objects — hold particular roles referred to as participant roles within the transitivity system proposed by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004).

Excerpt 6

*Pelaku diduga **menggunakan** pola yang sama, **menyasar** rumah duka dan **memanfaatkan** situasi berkabung untuk **melancarkan** aksinya. Berdasarkan penyelidikan sementara, pelaku **datang** ke rumah duka dengan **berpura-pura mengenal** keluarga almarhum. Dia kemudian **berbaur** dengan para pelayat lain agar tidak menimbulkan kecurigaan. Saat kondisi lengah, pelaku diduga **mengambil** uang sumbangan takziah yang dikumpulkan dari para tamu.*

'The perpetrator is suspected of **using** the same pattern, **targeting** funeral homes and **taking advantage** of mourning situations **to carry out** her actions. Based on preliminary investigations, the perpetrator **came** to the funeral home **pretending to know** the family of the deceased. She then **blended in** with other mourners so as not to arouse suspicion. When the situation became less guarded, she is alleged **to have taken** condolence money collected from the guests.'

All sentences in Excerpt 6 are in the active voice, with active verbs in which the female perpetrator occupies the subject position. The perpetrator is rendered as an actor performing a series of activities in material processes — *menggunakan* 'using', *menyasar* 'targeting', *memanfaatkan* 'taking advantage', *melancarkan* 'carrying out', *datang* 'coming', *berbaur* 'blending in', *mengambil* 'taking' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The sequence of verbs implies that the perpetrator acted consciously, deliberately, and with calculated premeditation. This pattern discursively constructs the perpetrator not as someone who acts impulsively, but as someone who has planned her criminal act. Furthermore, the behavioral process adds the dimension that the perpetrator was not merely acting physically. She also engaged in behavior involving mental and social aspects (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), as in *berpura-pura mengenal* 'pretending to know' and consciously controlled how she was perceived by others to minimize suspicion. The use of these verbs reinforces the construction that the perpetrator is a strategic agent exercising a high degree of control over her actions (Fairclough, 1995).

Deliberate agency is further evidenced in Excerpt 7, which also foregrounds the perpetrator's identity through explicit naming.

Excerpt 7

*Fauziah Priati Ningsih (47), diduga **membunuh** suaminya di Jombang, Jawa Timur. Terlapor **membeli** racun tikus dan potas... Fauziah akhirnya **menyerahkan diri** ke Polres Jombang...*

‘Fauziah Priati Ningsih (47) is suspected of **murdering** her husband in Jombang, East Java. The suspect reportedly **bought** rat poison and potassium... Fauziah eventually **surrendered herself** to the Jombang Police.’

In Excerpt 7, the perpetrator is identified by her full name, Fauziah Priati Ningsih, without any attempt at anonymization. She occupies the subject position and functions as Actor in material processes consisting of the criminal act *membunuh* ‘murdering’, the preparation for the killing *membeli racun* ‘buying poison’, and her post-incident response *menyerahkan diri* ‘surrendering herself’. The final action is self-surrender, which is a reflexive material process in which the perpetrator is simultaneously Actor and Goal. This construction discursively implies that the act of surrender was of her own volition, not the result of external pressure. Furthermore, this news text states that the perpetrator who killed her husband had frequently been subjected to physical and verbal domestic violence by her husband. Such acts align with the findings by Reisig et al. (2006), who found that women tend to commit violence against family members or close associates who had previously subjected them to domestic violence. The conditions that may serve as the context for this intimate partner homicide are mentioned but not foregrounded. This information is presented from the perspective of law enforcement rather than from the perpetrator's own viewpoint, as seen in the following excerpt: *Kasat Reskrim Polres Jombang AKP Margono Suhendra mengatakan, rumah tangga Lukman dengan Fauziah renggang sejak 2019 karena KDRT fisik maupun verbal. Menurutnya, Fauziah mengaku kerap dipukuli maupun dimarahi oleh suami sirinya itu* (‘The Head of Criminal Investigation at the Jombang Police, AKP Margono Suhendra, stated that the marriage of Lukman and Fauziah had been strained since 2019 due to physical and verbal domestic violence. According to him, Fauziah admitted that she was often beaten and verbally abused by her unregistered husband.’). In this news text, the voice of the female perpetrator is thus silenced.

Excerpt 8 further illustrates the Activation strategy through an even more explicit construction of agency.

Excerpt 8

*A dan T tanpa ampun **menghujam** pisau dapur ke tubuh korban hingga membuat korban mengalami 27 luka tusukan. Usai menusuk, kedua pelaku **meninggalkan** korban dengan kondisi sekarat.... Namun tak sampai di situ. Kedua pelaku justru **kembali** lagi dan **menusuk** korban lagi hingga benar-benar tak bernyawa.*

‘A and T mercilessly **stabbed** the victim's body with a kitchen knife, leaving the victim with 27 stab wounds. After the stabbing, both perpetrators **left** the victim in a dying condition. However, it did not end there. The two perpetrators in fact **returned** and **stabbed** the victim again until he was completely dead.’

Excerpt 8 shows Activation and presents an exceptionally unambiguous portrayal of the perpetrators and their actions. Perpetrators A and T occupy the subject position and function as

Actor for material processes—*menghujam* ‘stabbing’, *meninggalkan* ‘leaving’, *kembali* ‘returning’, *menusuk* ‘stabbing’. Unlike typical criminal news, where hedging is used in describing the perpetrators’ actions (Bednarek & Caple, 2012), this text contains no linguistic mitigation, no use of terms such as *diduga* ‘allegedly’, *diperkirakan* ‘it is estimated’, *diduga telah* ‘is alleged to have’, or similar expressions. The perpetrators are constructed as having certainly and indisputably committed the mentioned actions even before the legal process has concluded (van Dijk, 1995). The repetition of the word *menusuk* ‘stabbing’ reinforces that the perpetrators acted consciously in carrying out their repeated attacks with deliberate intent. The adverb *justru* ‘in fact’ reinforces the perpetrators’ agency in actively deciding to return and stab again (Martin & White, 2005). The phrase *tanpa ampun* ‘mercilessly’ intensifies the perpetrators’ brutal and merciless actions. The text offers a negative evaluation of how the act was carried out. Viewed from a gender perspective, Hornsveld et al. (2018) found that cruelty, anger, and forms of physical and verbal aggression among violent perpetrators do not differ significantly between men and women. However, the violence committed by female perpetrators in this text tends to be depicted very explicitly and without mitigation, compared with general patterns in crime reporting.

The implementation of the Activation strategy across the three excerpts above is not merely a stylistic choice, since language is never neutral and always carries ideological content (Fairclough, 2013; Richardson, 2007). The Activation strategy constructs female criminals as agents who are active, premeditated, and fully empowered. The data above show how women are represented as overt sources of criminal agency. At the same time, the conditions underlying their actions are systematically excluded from the news.

Exclusion

In contrast to the preceding strategies that foreground perpetrators, the third strategy is Exclusion, in which social actors are removed from the text (van Leeuwen, 1996). By not naming an actor, the text conceals agency and the party responsible for an event. Although it appears to be the opposite of the other strategies, Exclusion functions in a complementary manner alongside them in constructing social actors. Two Exclusion strategies were identified in the corpus: Nominalization and Middle Voice. As this study focuses specifically on the representation of the female perpetrator, our analysis of Exclusion is limited to instances in which the perpetrator herself is excluded from the clause.

Nominalization

Nominalization is the process of converting verbs into nouns so that participants — particularly perpetrators — who would otherwise occupy the subject position of a sentence, are removed from the text (Billig, 2008; Shahzad, 2024). Within the CDA framework, Nominalization is an ideological practice (Fairclough, 2003). This process abstracts a criminal event into an autonomous entity that occurs without an actor to cause it.

Excerpt 9

Kasus **penganiayaan** hingga Rahmat Sadewa (67) meninggal itu terjadi pada Sabtu (18/4/2026).

‘The case of **abuse** that led to Rahmat Sadewa’s (67) death occurred on Saturday’

Excerpt 10

Pemukulan dilakukan dengan kayu bulat sepanjang 30 cm.

‘The **beating** was carried out using a 30 cm cylindrical piece of wood.’

Excerpt 11

Aksi pembunuhan tersebut diketahui terjadi pada Sabtu (22/1) malam sekitar pukul 22.00 WIB di pematang sawah dekat Jalan Pertamina.

‘The **killing** is known to have occurred on Saturday (22/1) night at around 10 PM in a rice field embankment near Jalan Pertamina.’

Excerpt 12

Tim kami, Ditkrimsus Polda Bali, mengungkap kegiatan pengoplosan.

‘Our team, Ditkrimsus Polda Bali, uncovered an **illegal** LPG **refilling** operation.’

The pattern across Excerpts 9–12 is fairly consistent: verbs describing criminal acts — *menganiaya* ‘to abuse’, *memukul* ‘to beat’, *membunuh* ‘to kill’, *mengoplos* ‘to refill illegally’ — have been nominalized into *penganiayaan* ‘abuse’, *pemukulan* ‘beating’, *pembunuhan* ‘killing’, and *pengoplosan* ‘illegal refilling’, so that no social actor is required to be responsible for the event. The verb becomes a noun that no longer demands an agent in the construction. The abuse event loses the actor-perpetrator who would otherwise occupy the subject position, while the victim, Rahmat Sadewa, is brought into view (Excerpt 9). The beating event in Excerpt 10 removes the social actor performing the action and instead highlights the instrument used — the 30 cm cylindrical piece of wood. The beating instrument becomes more concrete than the one who delivered the blows. Excerpt 11 describes a known killing event, yet neither the agent who carried out the killing nor the agent who came to know of it is named in the text. In Excerpt 12, the law enforcement agency is presented as agent — *Tim kami, Ditkrimsus Polda Bali* ‘Our team, Ditkrimsus Polda Bali’ — while the perpetrator of the illegal LPG refilling remains unnamed. This Nominalization strategy obscures the causal relationship between the perpetrator and the criminal act (Billig, 2008). Nevertheless, even though the female perpetrator is removed from these particular sentences, she remains explicitly identified elsewhere in the same text.

Middle Voice

The second Exclusion strategy is Middle Voice. Through Middle Voice, an event performed by an agent is represented as an intransitive event without an agent (van Leeuwen, 1996). An event appears to occur spontaneously and naturally, without a human agent initiating the action. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) add that middle voice in the transitivity system is a construction that does not involve an external cause.

Excerpt 13

Kematian Lukman pun terungkap.

‘Lukman's death was revealed.’

Excerpt 14

Pembunuhan tersebut terjadi pada Sabtu.

‘The killing occurred on Saturday.’

Excerpt 15

Korban mengalami kerugian sekitar Rp 52 juta.

‘The victim suffered a loss of approximately Rp 52 million.’

In Excerpt 13, the middle voice construction removes two agents: the agent who caused Lukman's death and the agent who revealed it. Death in this context appears to be something that occurred naturally. The verb *terjadi* ‘occurred’ in Excerpt 14 removes the perpetrator of the killing while the time of the event — Saturday — is foregrounded (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). By foregrounding the time of the event, the text redirects the reader's attention to when the event occurred rather than to who caused it. Excerpt 15 places the victim in the subject position as Experiencer. While the verb *mengalami* ‘suffered’ functions as an experiential process that is grammatically distinct from the middle voice in Excerpts 13 and 14, it produces a similar effect: the female perpetrator is removed, so that there appears to be no actor responsible for the financial loss.

The Nominalization and Middle Voice strategies operate at different grammatical levels but produce the same effect: deagentification, in which the agent-perpetrator is erased from the criminal event (Fairclough, 2003). The key difference lies in their mechanisms, as Nominalization removes the perpetrator by transforming a process into a noun, while Middle Voice removes the perpetrator by constructing an event as something that occurs intransitively. The use of Exclusion does not mean that the female criminal disappears entirely from the text. For instance, in the article from which Excerpt 9 is drawn, the perpetrator is named elsewhere in the same text: YA (37), *perempuan yang aniaya ayah kandungnya hingga tewas sudah ditetapkan sebagai tersangka*, ‘YA (37), the woman who abused her biological father to death, has been named a suspect’. This confirms that the exclusion observed across the corpus is local to specific clauses rather than total across the text.

Discursive Construction of Female Criminal Perpetrators

The three strategies — Classification, Activation, and Exclusion — collectively construct the discourse of crime news texts featuring female perpetrators. The three strategies are interrelated within the discourse being built. The Classification strategy, which clearly identifies the gender of the criminal perpetrator, makes the perpetrator's femininity a foregrounding element and the first lens through which readers encounter a criminal event. The Activation strategy constructs female criminals as agents who commit criminal acts deliberately and with calculated intent, through a sequence of active verbs. The perpetrator is positioned as someone who is fully responsible and fully volitional in the commission of a crime. Meanwhile, Exclusion, although removing actors in certain clauses, does not prevent the perpetrator's identity from being known to readers, as she appears elsewhere in the news text. These three strategies are not isolated devices but co-occur within the same texts to jointly construct a particular, gendered representation of female perpetrators.

This is illustrated in a news article entitled “*Oplos Ratusan LPG 3 Kg, Emak-emak di Denpasar Raup Rp 100 Juta per Bulan*”. Excerpts 4 and 12, discussed earlier in this paper, are drawn from this article. The following is the occurrence of the three strategies in one article. First, the female perpetrator is introduced by Classification where a gendered label *Emak-emak* ‘The middle-aged woman’ is used, as discussed in Excerpt 4. An example of the Activation strategy is also found in the text even though it is not discussed in this paper, ... *Eli menjual LPG 12 kg*

kepada warga ‘Eli sold 12 kg LPG (cooking gas) canisters to residents’. The female perpetrator is an Actor for the material process *menjual* ‘to sell’ which clearly depicts what crime she committed. Exclusion occurs somewhere else in the text, which is already portrayed in Excerpt 12 by employing Nominalization, *pengoplosan* ‘an illegal LPG refilling operation’. This illustration shows how the three strategies construct the representation of the female perpetrator in the same text.

Within the Critical Discourse Analysis framework, language — and likewise, strategies of perpetrator representation in media — is understood to be non-neutral (Fairclough, 2013; Richardson, 2007). The media make choices about who is shown, who is highlighted, and who is removed in a text. The three strategies discussed in this study collectively shape the representation of female perpetrators. Female gender is heavily foregrounded as the identity of the criminal. This media discursive construction — gendered news framing — frames criminal events through a narrative that highlights or normalizes a particular gender, such that public perceptions of perpetrators, victims, and sources of threat are influenced by gender norms, stereotypes, and social power hierarchies. Echoing Jewkes (2015), reporting that exposes female gender as the most important element in news texts is often reinforced by misogynistic views that condemn women who do not conform to cultural beliefs about ‘ideal womanhood.’ Women who commit criminal acts are often considered to have committed double deviance (Carlen, 2019; Seaman & Lynch, 2023): they are seen as having violated not only the law but also social norms and expectations regarding feminine behavior, such as nurturing and gentleness.

Femininity is usually associated with gentleness and assumes specific roles of motherhood and caregiving. Women’s roles in Indonesian culture are shaped by *Ibuism* (Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, 1992; Ernanda, 2023), which places them in the domestic domain. They are seen as ideal *Ibu* ‘mother’ when they prioritize the needs of their husband, children, and family. This deliberately constructed *Ibuism* ideology was reinforced by state regulations and policies, such as *Dharma Wanita* (Women’s Duty) and *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* or *PKK* (Family Welfare Programme), which regulate women’s roles, such as faithful assistance for her husband, mother for children, and coordinator of the household (Wieringa, 2001). Our data capture how gendered labels associated with women’s roles are employed in representing female perpetrators, such as *ibu tiri* ‘stepmother’ in Excerpt 2 and *emak-emak* ‘the middle-aged woman’ in Excerpt 4. These labels are not neutral, since they carry the charge of femininity or motherhood. Thus, when a female perpetrator is labeled this way, she is punished not only as a lawbreaker but also as a woman who failed to fulfill her motherhood and caregiving roles as reinforced by society. In the context of online crime reporting, these labels make the perpetrator’s gendered identity more salient. This may contribute to a more sensational style of reporting, thereby increasing the story’s newsworthiness (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002).

The same finding was reached by Pribadi et al. (2024) and Fitri & Nurrahmi (2021), who found that women in crime news experience double deviance. This gender inequality does not stop there: Mann et al. (2014) found that prison sentences imposed on women whose criminal acts bear a masculine character — such as violence — are longer than those imposed on women whose crimes are considered to fall within the feminine domain according to traditional gender role dichotomies.

This pattern of representing female perpetrators carries ideological implications, as news can influence the way people think about the world (van Dijk, 1998). The way media represents these actors gives the impression that gender is a natural scientific explanation for crime. Female

criminals are treated as ‘naturally different’ from male criminals. Issues rooted in social systems — such as poverty, domestic violence, and legal injustice — that may well underlie criminal acts do not appear in the news texts. It is implied that there is nothing wrong with the system. News texts foreclose the possibility of questions such as ‘Did poverty play a role?’, ‘Was there domestic violence?’, or ‘Is access to justice unequal?’. The absence of this information leaves the public with little incentive to think about the root causes of the problem, and in turn reduces public pressure on policymakers to provide large-scale, structural solutions — such as improved economic access, legal protection from domestic violence, and support for women within the justice system.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the representation of female perpetrators in Indonesian digital media is carried out through three strategies: Classification, Activation, and Exclusion. Gender is the salient and central identity marker in the news, even though it is not legally relevant to the crimes committed by the female perpetrator. This finding underscores that the representation of female perpetrators in Indonesian media is not neutral; it is a discursive practice in which women are represented as actors who break the law and fail to conform to societal expectations of femininity, consistent with the concept of double deviance (Carlen, 2019; Seaman & Lynch, 2023). More broadly, this confirms that the use of language in society is neither neutral nor transparent (Fairclough, 2013; Richardson, 2007). This non-neutrality can be exposed through textual analysis.

As demonstrated by the findings of this study, the reality constructed by media reflects underlying gendered norms and expectations. These patterns of gendered representation, interpreted through the lens of double deviance, serve as a reminder for media practice to reflect on how linguistic choices shape the representation of female perpetrators. In representing social actors, media outlets should refrain from foregrounding a particular gender and should apply hedging strategies regardless of the perpetrator’s gender when constructing criminal news narratives.

This study has limitations in terms of its corpus, as it focuses on only one media outlet and draws on only twenty news texts, and therefore the findings may not be generalizable to broader Indonesian media discourse. As with many qualitative studies using purposive sampling, our search process, based on manual browsing and keyword searches applied to article headlines, was suited to building a focused corpus for in-depth discourse analysis, though it may not capture articles in which the perpetrator’s gender was not indicated in the headline. Furthermore, the analysis is confined to news texts and does not incorporate the perspectives of journalists or readers. These limitations point to several directions for future research. Future research could expand the corpus to include multiple media outlets, a larger number of texts, or full-text screening rather than headline-based search, to provide a more comprehensive picture of how female perpetrators are represented in Indonesian media. Future research could also examine the representation of criminal perpetrators from the perspectives of journalists and readers to gain a fuller understanding of how such representations are produced and interpreted.

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