



## **A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Gendered Violence in the Noor Mukadam Case**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the construction of gendered violence alongside patriarchy and resistance of Noor Mukadam in the Pakistani media context, law and public discourse. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is followed to highlight the role that different types of communication play in shaping public discourse about violence against women, and, at the same time, offers insights into the influence on understandings of blame, justice and responsibility. Responses included victim-blaming, making moral judgments, justifying the offender's actions and/or using soft or indirect language to describe violence. A qualitative method is employed to study court decisions, media, opinion articles, social media. The discourse of media and the public presents stereotypical expectations about how women do and should behave, and their moral and social role. The study also uncovers the emergence of feminist counter-discourses. The stories are counter-hegemonic, do not record the "victim" as being responsible and call for accountability and structural change. They also represent the social media as a significant area of feminist resistance and collective voice. The outcomes reveal not only that the legal institutions may at times achieve legal justice but that dominant discursive and cultural norms in many instances can scurry inequalities towards gender. Overall, this research argues that gender-based violence is not simply a physical issue but also a discursive one, that comes into play when a language, ideology and power dynamics between men and women in Pakistan. This research highlights the importance of critically discussing the media, legal system and societal portrayals of violence against women and aims to dismantle sexualized stereotypes and create more equitable and just reporting.

**Keywords:** Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Gendered Violence, Patriarchy, Media Discourse, Legal Discourse, Victim-Blaming, Pakistan, Noor Mukadam Case

### **Introduction**

Gender based violence is still one of the most prevalent social and human rights problems in Pakistan. In spite of legal protection, constitutional guarantees and international commitments, in society there is still violence against women in an obvious and normalized way. In addition to physical violence, there is an issue of representing, interpreting and discussing violence in the media, legal systems and public discourse. Violence against women is not just described as an event but is also narrated in terms of morality, culture and ideology in many cases. These stories tend to focus on the victim by emphasizing what the victim did, what he or she might have done, or the victim's character. As a consequence of this, often survivors face a process of victim blaming, moralizing and social condemnation. The case of Noor Mukadam who was murdered in Islamabad

in 2021 was one of the most talked about cases of gendered violence in Pakistan. The case eventually went to court, where an unlikely conviction was obtained, but the news coverage of the case revealed entrenched notions of patriarchy. The media, public opinion and the social media gave a range of narratives, including the voice of justice or victim-blaming and justifications of violence. In a feminist way of looking at it, such depictions aren't pure. They are embedded in broader ideologies that shape and impact views of gender, power and violence in society. From this perspective, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) proves useful as it looks at language construction and maintenance of gendered power relations. Gender based violence in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the social systems, norms and unequal power dynamics that are based on patriarchy. Although laws exist to protect the rights of women, there is no uniformity in implementation of such laws and women survivors remain vulnerable to institutional stigmatization, belief or bias. Media, the judicial system and digital platforms are key to the public perception of such instances. It is not simply a reporting of reality, but a building of reality with language that these institutions do. This builds often uses rape myths, victim blaming narrative and selectively presents facts regarding gender-based violence. The case of Noor Mukadam stands out as a particularly important case as it was brought to the national and international spotlight in part because of the victim's background as well as the brutality of the crime. This case is thus significant to explore how discourses in media, law and society build up the meaning of violence against women and how this meaning reinforces or undermines the ideology of patriarchy. Tensions between the law and social narratives are clear in high-profile cases, like that of Noor Mukadam's murder. The justice system could sentence someone to jail, but a sentiment of victim-blaming, moral policing and the implicit endorsement of violence is common in public and media discourse. Often, the stories rehash the victim's behavior, appearance or character in such a way that they suggest that the victim somehow contributed to the crime. There are also linguistic strategies that are commonly employed in texts of media and law, namely euphemism, relexicalization and passive form. The use of terms like "incident" or "tragedy" in place of other more direct references to violence like murder or femicide make that violence seem less serious and less political. Thus, the legal responsibility and the discursive representation of gender violence seems to call for a critical analysis of the constructions of language. Any study of law, legal justice and how to surmount inequalities, cannot overlook such legal talk and discourse. In Pakistan, while gender-based violence in terms of media, sociology, and law perspectives has been studied in great detail, there is limited research that analyses the interplay of multiple discourses (media, legal, and public) that help form the meaning of gender on high-profile gender based violence cases. Moreover, though digital activism has been recognized as a means of feminist resistance, less consideration has been paid to digital activism's relationship with institutional narratives, like court rulings and mainstream media coverage. Rarely, if ever, in legal commentaries does the emphasis lie on the process of justice itself, with the emphasis rather being on the product of justice. Little research has been done to explore how these discursive spaces intersect to create meanings of violence, justice and gender. This study will fill that void by combining the three discourses media, legal, and digital feminist activism in one FCDA. It does this by providing a more complex picture of the reproduction and contestation of patriarchy in modern-day Pakistan.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How gender-based violence is discursively constructed in the media coverage of Noor Mukadam case in Pakistan?
- What is the legal language and arguments about this case telling us about the role of cultural norms and patriarchy?
- How do social media and public narratives reinforce or challenge with regard to this instance of victim-blaming and rape myths?

## Literature Review

Lazar (2005) claims that discourse is influenced by patriarchal's ideology and is normalizing unequal gender relations in the media, institutions and in daily communication. FCDA is an extension of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which focuses on the power analysis and puts "gender" at the center of the analysis. Language is a social construction, both reflecting and contributing to social structures (Fairclough 1992, 1995); Discourse plays an important role in the reproduction of ideology and social dominance (van Dijk, 1993). Wodak (2001) also highlights the role of historical and socio-political contexts in discursive meaning structures. In this context, patriarchy is not only a social system, but also a language-based and system of institutions. Women bear the moral burden and family honor in South Asian societies to which their behavior, mobility and sexuality are often subjected to control. Another theory that bestows support to the FCDA perspective is that developed by Butler (1990) who claims that gender identities are constantly negotiated through repetition of social and linguistic acts. These discourses often portray women as responsible entities as well as re-normalize or legitimize male violence towards women. In this way, FCDA offers a valuable perspective of the reproduction of gendered power relations through discourse. The concept of victim-blaming, rape myths, and strategies of gendered violence in rape discourse are explored. Burt (1980) explains that rape myths are "the beliefs that are shared by society that excuse sexual violence, blame the victim and deny responsibility of the perpetrator. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) state that these myths are perpetuated in the media, culture and institutional discourse. Women are often stereotyped as the cause of violence, both by their actions and appearance, how they relate to others and even their morals; men's aggression is often described as emotional or out of control. The differences in these narratives are shown to be reproduced linguistically using the methods of moral judgement, presupposition and evaluative language, among others, by FCDA scholars. This is facilitated by a number of recurrent rhetorical patterns. When it comes to victim-blaming, it takes the focus away from the offenders to the victims and when it comes to perpetrator mitigation, it takes the focus away from the victims to the offenders and suggests that the perpetrators are emotionally unstable and/or psychologically distressed. The term deceptive language of "relexicalization" refers to the use of neutral language like "incident" or "tragedy" instead of more specific terms like "murder" or "femicide," which helps to downplay the nature of violence. Likewise, agency is taken away from the perpetrator with expressions like "she was killed" instead of "he killed her." These strategies work together to create a re-enforcement of patriarchal notions of violence and a reduction of accountability. The relationship between media, legal discourse, and the construction of gender-based violence is explored. The connection between media, legal discourse, and the construction of gender-based violence is discussed. The framing process influences how the events are selected, emphasized and interpreted as described by Entman (1993). One risk of media reports on gender inequalities to accountability is that they frequently shift the focus away from structural gender issues and cast judgment on the blame-laden victim, rather than trying to understand their situation, in terms of their moral conduct, actions or decisions. According to Fairclough (1995) media discourse plays a role in ideological reproduction in the form of normalization or social acceptance of those discourses. Additionally, Santoniccolo et al. (2023) note that sensationalism, emotional coverage and framing, and selective news coverage about topics of news continues to reinforce and propagate gender stereotypes in media. Violence is further exaggerated, portrayed in dramatic terms, and women's and other issues of injustice and inequality are not discussed in public arena. The wording of the law could appeal to reason, but might also be formal and abstract, concealing the social realities, according to Tiersma (1999). In addition, responsibility and victimhood are negotiated in the context of legal discourse, which is affected by institutional power and history as pointed out by Wodak (2001). Such a neutral tone is common in legal language regarding gender-based violence and is usually accompanied by a neutralization of the category 'gender' that results in a de-gendering of the discourse on violence. As a result, women who win their court trials may

not be aware of the wider structural conditions which underpinned the violence. It is important to take into account class, privilege and social power as they intersect with gendered violence in order to fully understand it. The theory of intersectionality as developed by Crenshaw (1989) helps to understand the impact of multiple identities on the experiences of violence and justice that individuals face. The notion of symbolic capital by Bourdieu (1986) is also an example of the institutional recognition and visibility that is linked to social status. In Pakistan, violence cases are frequently given greater coverage in the media, sympathy in the public eye and legal attention based on class privilege. Violence against marginalized women is often unnoticed and perpetrators are not held accountable, while that of elite victims is often covered and institutionalized. This produces unequal access to justice, and perpetuates social inequalities. In the meantime, digital media is an important area of feminist opposition. Social media offers a way to rapidly mobilise and challenge narratives in the contemporary social movements, according to Tufekci (2017). Digital activism – examples include #JusticeForNoor and #SayHerName – counters the victim-blaming story, and instead sees the victim as a symbol of collective action to stop the system from committing violence. But, despite being considered technology spaces, feminisms are not a unified presence; there are still feminist and misogynistic discourses, online harassment, and victim-blaming that persist (Silva et al., 2023). These are all obstacles, yet digital activism has emerged as an important tool to challenge patriarchy and hold perpetrators accountable for gender-based violence.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study is a qualitative study with Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as a theoretical lens to investigate the discourse construction of gendered violence, patriarchy, privilege and resistance in the case of Noor Mukadam in Pakistan. The qualitative approach is suitable because it aims to interpret meanings, ideologies and power relations within language, not to measure patterns of number. Using the approach, the researcher studies not just the content of the message, but how the language used creates a larger system of inequality. Noor Mukadam case offers a good discursive context to explore the connection between media discourse, legal discourse and digital feminist activism in the Pakistani socio-cultural environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The main theoretical framework used in this study is Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) suggested by Lazar (2005). At FCDA, discourse is considered as one of the important ways gender inequalities is reproduced and challenged. The framework opens up opportunities for the identification of normalizing linguistic patterns that reflect patriarchal values as well as patterns of resistance. In addition, the analysis is informed by rape myth theory (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), media framing theory (Entman, 1993), and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) as conceptual frameworks to understand victim-blaming, representation, privilege, and resistance.

### **Data Collection**

The study uses purposive sampling of discourse relevant to the Noor Mukadam case, which is retrieved from publicly available sources. The purpose is to select texts that are directly associated with the research goals and are informative of the construction of gendered violence, for which purpose purposive sampling was used.

Data was gathered in the following three areas:

#### **i. Media Sources**

Media data comprises news reports, editorials, opinion articles and features published by leading national, and international, news sources. The sources comprise Dawn, The Express Tribune, BBC,

Al Jazeera and other prominent media covering the case that played a significant role in public discourse.

**ii. Legal Discourse**

Legal sources providing information on public court cases, court opinion points and court proceedings related to the Noor Mukadam case. A special focus was on the products of the Islamabad High Court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

**iii. Social Media Discourse**

Archives collected from social media include public tweets, Facebook posts, and YouTube comments, any digital campaign by feminists. However, activist groups, such as #JusticeForNoor and social media commentary on the issue were addressed and became part of the public discussion.

**Time Frame**

This study targets the discourse that occurred from the time of Noor's murder until the year 2021–2025, during which the case went to court, was discussed in the media, and was discussed in the public sphere.

The corpus has been developed from a selection of media reports, legality texts and public discourse, according to a fixed criterion. The analysis only included those texts directly referring to the Noor Mukadam case.

Selection criteria of texts included:

- All references to the Noor Mukadam case
- A conversation about gender, violence, justice, responsibility, or moral or resistance
- Concordance with the research goals and theory
- A ready supply in the desired time period

Table 3.1 Research Corpus

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Dawn	News Articles	10
Express Tribune	News Articles	8
BBC and International Media	News Articles	5
Supreme Court / Islamabad High Court	Judgments and Legal Documents	2
Twitter/X	Public Posts and Hashtags	50
Facebook	Public Discussions and Comments	30
YouTube	Public Comments	20

**Coding and Thematic Categorization**

The collected data were analyzed through a thematic coding process informed by FCDA. During repeated readings of the corpus, recurring linguistic and ideological patterns were identified and grouped into broader thematic categories.

Table 3.2 Coding Framework

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Discursive Indicators</b>
Victim-Blaming	Moral judgment, questioning victim behavior, and responsibility reversal
Perpetrator Mitigation	Mental health explanations, emotional justification, and agency reduction
Legal Neutralization	Passive voice, nominalization, abstract terminology
Media Sensationalism	Graphic descriptions, emotional intensification, spectacle framing
Feminist Resistance	Hashtag activism, collective agency, accountability demands
Gendered Moral Regulation	Respectability discourse, behavioral policing, moral evaluation

The coding process focused on identifying discursive features such as presupposition, modality, passivation, relexicalization, agency deletion, nominalization, evaluative language and framing strategies. These features were examined to determine how language constructs particular understandings of violence, victimhood, accountability, and justice.

**Analytical Procedure**

The analysis was carried out in four steps:

First, all texts selected were analyzed several times to discover common elements, such as themes and linguistic features. This was the time when the representation of victims, perpetrators, institutions and social actors was discussed.

Second, texts were coded following the thematic structure that was constructed based on the findings from the FCDA literature review and the study's research questions.

Third, a comparison of the linguistic features (lexical choices, agencies, modals, passives, framing) was carried out to investigate the ways in which meaning was negotiated in different discursive situations.

Last, the patterns found were analyzed in terms of broader socio-cultural and ideological contexts to establish how discourse reinforces or undermines patriarchal structures. The analysis was directed toward the understanding of how language plays a role in the construction of social realities around gender-based violence.

Discourse extracts were selected from the media, legal and public statements, in order to improve analytical transparency, as representative of the Noor Mukadam case. The examples show some of the typical kinds of structures found across the corpus.

Table 3.3 Representative Discourse Extracts

<b>Discursive Pattern</b>	<b>Representative Extract Type</b>	<b>Source Category</b>
Victim-Blaming	Questions regarding the victim's decisions, mobility, and relationships	Social Media Commentary
Victim-Blaming	Narratives linking victim behavior to responsibility for violence	Social Media Commentary
Perpetrator Mitigation	Explanations emphasizing emotional instability or psychological distress	Media Commentary
Perpetrator Mitigation	Narratives framing violence as a loss of control	Public Discourse
Gendered Regulation	Moral Evaluations of the victim's morality, lifestyle, or conduct	Social Media Commentary
Media Relexicalization	Use of neutral terms such as "incident" or "event" instead of direct references to murder	News Reports
Legal Neutralization	Formal legal descriptions emphasizing procedural neutrality	Court Documents
Feminist Resistance	Calls for accountability through hashtags and activist campaigns	Digital Activism

The representative extract types mentioned in table 3.3 are only illustrative of the overall tendency of the discourse and are given for purposes of illustrating the linguistic tendency to be examined in the study. Triangulation of data collection was used to increase the credibility of the research, in which the data were examined through the media, legal documents and social media. Discourse analysis across various sources was enhanced by pattern comparisons that increased the reliability of interpretations and lessened reliance on a single source of discourse.

The study recognizes the chances of subjectivity of the researcher's interpretation and thus attempts to be transparent and coherent in methodology.

## **Data Analysis**

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses how gendered violence, patriarchy, privilege, and resistance were discursively constructed in the Noor Mukadam case. The results illustrate the role of language in shaping the concept of victim, accountability, morality, justice, and resistance in the present Pakistani society.

### **Victim-Blaming as a Mechanism of Social Control**

The most notable pattern of discourse in the corpus is that of victim-blaming. In the aftermath of an extremely violent act, Noor Mukadam's education was so often the focus of the public discussion, rather than the crime committed, that attention was drawn away from her perpetrator and instead towards her personal behavior, mobility, relationships, and lifestyle.

One recurring theme in the press was that of doubt over Noor Mukadam's residence in the perpetrator's home, instead of the violence being done to her.

“She ought to have taken care of her companionship of others”

“It would not have happened if she had followed the social norms.”

These statements are deontic modals and evaluative as morals. This suggests both that the victim should have been more careful, and that violence is a product of behavior that is not social, rather than criminal. The emphasis on responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim is linguistically manifested in the presupposition and evaluative judgment. From the FCDA (Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis) point of view, this discourse is the instrument of patriarchal control. This discourse is not a questioning of male violence, it is a monitoring and disciplining of female behavior. Women are given a role of being responsible for averting violence, and men's actions take a back seat. This is consistent with Burt's (1980) rape myths premise that women's conduct is a cause for their victimization. Like Lazar (2005), women are also frequently framed as moral subjects to whom women's actions are constantly judged. Honor-based discourse is another form of evidence of victim-blaming.

“Parents need to monitor daughters in order to safeguard their honor”

“Why, if the girls would have followed the rules, this would not have happened.”

These sayings are especially important as they are used to build women as bearers of family honor. The word “must” indicate obligation and authority, whereas the causative structure “this would not have happened” is a direct connection between female behavior and violence. The message is that violence makes sense, or can be stopped, when women behave according to social norms.

With this linguistic tactic, the reproduction of patriarchal power is achieved, as women's freedom is defined as a social risk. The violence is not read or understood as a result of male aggression, but as a result of the non-compliance of the female. FCDA shows that such discourse imposes gender hierarchy in regulating women's behavior and in the meanwhile blinks men's responsibility. The results thus indicate that the victim-blaming attitude is not only a personal attitude, but also an ideological discourse which creates patriarchal power relations. Rather than condemn violence, public discourse raises questions about women's choices and reinforces the normalcy of gender inequality, and ongoing control of female autonomy.

### **Discursive Mitigation of Perpetrator Responsibility.**

A further key discourse pattern that occurs in the corpus is a mitigation of the responsibility of the perpetrator. A different narrative developed, one that was not victim-blaming, but one that sought explanations, context or humanization of Zahir Jaffer's actions, as if those actions were not his fault. Most of the media and public narratives of the murder utilized psychological, emotional and social explanations of the killer, rather than treating it as a deliberate act of gendered violence.

The statements can be categorized as a depiction of discursive mitigation of perpetrator responsibility (Wali et al., 2025).

“Zahir was a quiet young man, troubled.”

“He was an elite upbringing, and he had pressures.”

“He lost his temper in a moment of anger”

These statements use linguistic maneuvers that deflect responsibility for crime and divert attention from the accountability of criminals. The use of the adjective “troubled” brings sympathy, and makes the perpetrator sound more like a troubled person rather than a violent one. Likewise, “elite upbringing with pressures” diverts the attention from the actual killing itself to the social environment of the killer.

From the perspective of FCDA, these lexical options play an important role from the perspective of the ideology. They develop a narrative around violence that makes it seem to be a response to private problems instead of power relations between men. This results in the possibility of empathy for the offender, and less attention to the experiences of the victim.

The statement “he lost control in a moment of anger” is particularly revealing. The expression lost control is an idiomatic phrase which means 'lost control', with a diminished agency. The term is not about intentional actions but, a short emotional breakdown. Linguistic structure is violence as an accident, the spontaneous, the inevitable.

There is no neutral discourse, but rather an active participant in social constructions of responsibility and power (Fairclough,1995). In the context of the mitigation discourse, murder is not a sign of domination and violence, but rather an emotional experience. The perpetrator turns into an individual that needs to be comprehended, not condemned.

The results also show a significant difference in the portrayal of Noor Mukadam and the portrayal of Zahir Jaffer. The victim had to be the subject of much moral examination while the perpetrator was talked about as being psychologically distressed, or under family stress, or under the influence of drugs and alcohol. This is an unequal treatment that shows how the discourses of the patriarchy circulate the accountability in a disproportionate manner between genders.

concept of ideological polarization is useful in explaining this pattern. Often, dominant discourse has the intent to include powerful social actors in positive terms and to focus on criticism of less powerful groups (Van Dijk,1998). In the Noor Mukadam case, there was a tendency to focus on aspects of the story that would make the perpetrator appear normal, while at the same time doubting the veracity of the victim.

The results are thus indicative of perpetrator mitigation as an ideologically motivated approach that legitimizes male violence, rendering it normal or even exceptional. This discourse does not question the social systems that allow women to be harmed, but rather makes it an individual issue, and decreases public demands for accountability.

### **Construction of Female Morality and Respectability**

The analysis also showed that cultural norms and values around femininity, morality and respectability had a significant impact on the discussion around Noor Mukadam.

The statements are examples of how violence against women is often defined and explained using a moral lens.

“It is the duty of women to abide by the norms of the society or else they will face tragedy”

“The control of the daughters by the parents is essential to protect the honor of the family”

“Girls need to be mindful of their rules, this could not have occurred”

Women's role is discussed as being responsible for upholding social order and a process of compliance to cultural norms.

The modal verb “should” be an important aspect in this process. It creates duties for women and sets up a utopia of the woman image. Women should be careful, submissive, modest and socially controlled. Any failure to meet these expectations opens up the possibility for public debate and critique. Likewise, the term 'control daughters' signifies a patriarchal notion of control and ownership. The discourse assumes that threats to the autonomy of women are social threats and they are to be dealt with by surveillance and restricting. Women thus are subject, rather than free and safe people.

FCDA sees such discourse as a process of reproducing ideology. In a way, it is through repeated language practices that the patriarchy becomes normalized and seems made up of natural and self-evident values. Obedience, honor and morality bring attention to girls' behavior, instead of males' violence.

Gender is not a given identity; it is a process of behaviors produced continuously through the expectations and discourse of society. The set of expectations for appropriate female behavior are also reinforced in statements and help to shape women's identities as per the theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990).

The results thus illustrate how, when discussing gender-based violence, the conversations often turn into conversations about female morality. Whereas violence is understood as a result of structural inequality interpreted as evidence of moral failure, thus reinforces patriarchal understandings of gender and power.

### **Legal Neutralization and Erasure of Gender**

An analysis of legal talk highlighted the recurring pattern of institutional neutrality and abstraction in the portrayal of violence against women. Legal judgments are expected to be objective and have been found to be accurate in procedure, but the results of the case studies also indicated that this objectivity can mask the gendered aspects of violence.

Violence is usually discussed in legal texts in technical and procedural terms. The victim is often called “the deceased” and the perpetrator “the accused” or “the offender”. Likewise, violence is frequently depicted in legal terms, and not explicitly in terms of gendered violence. This kind of linguistic manipulation makes it look as if there is the impression of being impartial, but also eliminates the socio-cultural context in which the violence took place.

On a linguistic level, nominalization acts to abstract actions into abstract events. The elimination of the actor in the sentence with the phrase “the incident occurred” takes focus away from agency. Likewise, “the body was found” emphasizes the result over the perpetrator of the crime.

Abstraction is a common feature of institutional discourse that Fairclough (1992) believes is used to ensure authority and to establish legitimacy. But this abstraction can also be an ideological masking because it constructs issues in society as isolated legal occasions instead of as issues of structural inequality.

FCDA questions the neutrality of the law. In the field of law, it appears that the objective is being pursued, but that objective is still influenced by prevalent social ideologies and institutional practices. The lack of words like “femicide”, “gender-based violence”, and “patriarchal violence” diminishes the potential of the legal discourse to acknowledge the structural nature of crimes against women.

The results thus indicate that the law simultaneously produces and constrains justice. Legal entities can effectively determine who is to blame for the crime, but it can be difficult to explain the wider gendered setting in which the violence takes place. As a result, violence against women is seen as a private crime and not an issue of gender inequality.

### **The sensationalism of media and the commercialization of violence.**

One of the other important revelations was that of the influence of media sensationalism on public perception of the Noor Mukadam case. The analysis shows that, for the most part, the news reporting focused on graphic details, emotional intensity and shocking imagery, and turning the case into a very public media event.

The lexical choices in the mentioned below sentence are emotionally intensified and framed in a dramatic manner.

“She was brutally tortured, and at last was beheaded”

The words gruesome, brutally and grim are evaluative words that are used to create a strong emotional response from the reader (Akram & Yasmin, 2023).

The lexicological amplification is the basis of sensationalism in the discourse analysis. The crime is depicted very graphically, in terms of horror, shock, and spectacle, etc. Such reporting can raise awareness of violence to the public, but it can also make violence a "media food item".

The term "brutally tortured and finally beheaded" describes how one experiences hyper-visualization. Readers are asked to visualize the actual elements of violence, and stir up an emotional reaction. But this preoccupation with the visual image can lead the way toward neglecting the social and cultural and institutional conditions that can perpetuate violence against women. According to FCDA, sensationalism has two contradictory functions. Firstly, it will bring it to the public's attention and may be able to get the community to rally behind a demand for justice. Secondly, it is a commercialization of suffering to make violence a consumable spectacle. The results also show that sensationalized news coverage can often personalize violence. Due to the lack of media awareness to the issue, individual cases of violence against women in Pakistan are reported and never presented in a broader context, i.e., only cases of exceptional violence, elite status and dramatic detail are reported. This framing puts the emphasis on the special tragedy and not the systemic inequality. This implies that media sensationalism is one of the causes of 'ideological distraction' as described by FCDA. Public consciousness is drawn to the sensational facts, and there is little discussion of more fundamental issues, such as patriarchy, institutional responsibility and gender justice. The analysis thus shows that the media discourse is a discourse that has a dual purpose. It at the same time exposes violence and hides its structural causes. Media exposure of the case of Noor Mukadam has sensitized the public but sometimes the reporting was sensational and opportunities for in-depth discussion of broader issues of gender-based violence in Pakistan were limited.

### **Feminist Counter-Discourses and digital resistance**

Even though this study showed that the majority of stories told had a victim-blaming, moral regulatory and perpetrator mitigation angle, it also highlighted the rise of strong feminist counter-discourses that challenged the patriarchal narrative of the Noor Mukadam case. These counter-discourses were particularly strong within the digital realm, where activists, journalists, civil society and citizens mobilized on social media to contest hegemonic discourses and to demand accountability. One of the key places of digital protest was the hashtag #JusticeForNoor. Feminist discourse, instead of paying attention to the choices made by the victim, shifted its focus to systemic problems, such as misogyny, gender inequality, institutional failures and violence towards women. Examples of those found so far are:

The following statements do not assess Noor Mukadam's actions in comparison to victim-blaming statements.

"Justice for Noor."

"Stop killing women."

"Raise better men."

"We refuse silence."

"Let us breathe." Instead, they look elsewhere for responsibility, at the broader social and institutional landscape. The language used is strong imperative and collective, and there are fewer familiar words in their vocabulary.

The sentence "Stop killing women" has an extra significance due to the fact that it shifts the lens from one instance of violence towards a much wider issue of violence against women. The imperative "stop" implies a need for social intervention and the plural noun "women" make Noor Mukadam's case an example of gendered violence. The catch cry "Raise better men" similarly calls into question a key tenet of patriarchy. The traditional narratives of a victim are usually about how to regulate women's conduct. In contrast, this statement is shifting responsibility to the socialization of men. The discourse thus turns the logic of patriarchal governance upside down and reveals the structural causes of violence. We refuse silence exemplifies the power of group agency

in feminist discourse. Through the use of the word "we", solidarity is constructed between women and allies and individual pain becomes a collective struggle. The discourse of feminism is not the same as the discourse of law, which tends to be institutional neutral, but is rather a discourse that openly confronts the power relationships and calls for a change in society. Certain counter-discourses, from an FCDA point of view, can be seen as attempts to challenge dominant discourses. Lazar (2005) states that feminist discourse is a critique as well as a resistance. Feminist activism is about challenging the assumptions of victim blaming and patriarchal narratives, in order to define new understandings of violence for women. The findings also reveal the "double-edged sword" of digital platforms. Social media was a space for much misogynistic text, but also for resistance and mobilization. Digital activism enabled individuals to challenge the media, challenge the inadequacies of those institutions and maintain public interest throughout litigation. This finding corroborates the notion of Tufekci (2017) that networked platforms became a space of social justice movements. With hashtags such as #JusticeForNoor, social media has become a powerful medium to express political views and intervene in the feminist context within Pakistan. Thus, the feminist counter-discourses are important and necessary to challenge the dominant patriarchal discourses and develop alternative discourses that are grounded on accountability, justice and gender equality.

### **Privilege, Visibility, and Access to Justice**

Social class, privilege and visibility in the development of public discourse, and in legal outcomes were also identified. One theme that emerged in the media discourse was the focus on elite identity and social status. Noor Mukadam was often described as a former diplomat's daughter and the background of both the victim and the perpetrator were emphasized in these reports. The media more frequently focused on high-profile social situations of sexual violence against women than on larger trends. The words in sentences mentioned below are important because they build up the case as being exceptional. The constant focus on the elite status of the incident sets it apart from numerous other incidents of violence towards women that get minimal publicity.

“Diplomat’s daughter murdered.”

“Murder in the luxury neighborhood of Islamabad.”

“Murder in the prestigious area of Islamabad.”

This pattern can be seen in the work of Crenshaw (1989) who theorized intersectionality. Gender is not autonomous of other social factors class, privilege and status. Visibility of Noor Mukadam's case can't be detached from her social position and the public recognition that comes with her family background. The research results suggest that the visibility of media is symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1986) theorizes that symbolic capital helps some people/ groups to gain recognition, legitimacy, and institutionalization. In this instance, widespread media attention and public pressure helped to drive calls for accountability. The results indicate that the critical issue of access to justice is not just about legal processes, but also visibility in public discourse. This observation is an indication of an important paradox. Noor Mukadam's case came to symbolize justice being meted out and was yet another example of differences in treatment of gender-based violence. Despite being victims of similar types of violence, many victims from marginalized groups continue to be overlooked in the national discourse. FCDA stresses the importance of discourse in making certain stories visible and others marginal. Media institutions are capable of constructing public discourses on who suffers and who is recognized. Thus, the results indicate that privilege is a major factor in the access to justice, public sympathy, and visibility. Though the Noor Mukadam case has brought light from the dark and a legal triumph, it also shows how unequal structures remain that continue to determine how to respond to violence against women in Pakistan.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study all confirm that gender-based violence is not just a physical phenomenon but a discursive one that is constructed through language, ideology and power relations. Competing

discourses attempted to delineate responsibility, morality, victimhood, and justice in media coverage, in the legal arena, and in public debates. The analysis showed that blaming the victim is still one of the most prevalent ways by which the patriarchy is perpetuated. Women remain judged on their moral and behavioral traits and their behavior, such as their acts of violence and exploitation, is still judged in terms of morality, obedience and respectability. This type of rhetoric is used to shift the responsibility from the aggressor and to continue systems of gender control. Meanwhile, the results showed the high level of perpetrator mitigation. Psychological distress and emotional instability or social pressure were emphasized in stories to minimize responsibility for the offender and to gain sympathy. Such discursive practices helped to make male violence normalized and present it as an exceptionality, a feeling or a necessity. The study also found that the language used in the law often reinforces the structural dimension of gender-based violence, which can be further marginalized by the legal language. The process of abstraction, nominalization and institutional language help to neutralize violence and to present it as a process instead of an expression of inequality of power of men. The contradiction in the media discourse was identified. However, a significant amount of reporting took place and the public became more aware and retained interest in the case. On the other hand, sensationalist framing often rendered violence as a performance and a focus on emotions over a systemic analysis. Significantly, the results also reveal the beginnings of 'feminist' opposition. Digital activism and hashtag and collective action by feminists problematized and challenged the dominant discourse and also offered alternative discourses on accountability, structural change and gender justice. The counter-narratives reveal discourse to be a site of power as well as power and powerlessness to be a site of resistance and transformation. Lastly, the study highlighted the need for an intersectional approach to the study of violence towards women. But not only gender, but privilege, class and social status determined Noor Mukadam's visibility. The case thus demonstrates the interplay of various types of social power. To sum up, the Noor Mukadam incident reflects the impact of language on public perception of violence, justice and gender in the current context of Pakistan. The findings suggest that victim-blaming and moral regulation were among the most persistent discursive strategies identified within the corpus. At the same time, feminist resistance emerged as the most significant counter-discursive force challenging patriarchal interpretations of violence and justice.

## **Conclusion**

This study used Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) in examining the discourse construction of gendered violence, patriarchy and resistance in the Noor Mukadam case. The research analyzed the language used in media reports, in the courtroom and on social media to investigate how language contributes to the construction of public understandings of violence against women, and how competing constructions of language construct responsibility, victimization, morality and justice. The results show that the role discourse played in reproduction of gendered power relations is central. In many of the discursive contexts, violence against women was often reframed in terms of narratives that diverted the focus from the perpetrator and onto the victim. The study also identified perpetrator mitigation strategies. Public discussion often defused ideas of responsibility, via talk of psychological unsteadiness, emotional upset and outside pressures. Using legal discourse analysis, it was found that institutional language often has a neutral surface but also suggests a change in gender aspects of violence. Consequently, justice is also not administered with a full awareness of social or patriarchy conditions, which may allow for women to be harassed, beaten and treated violently. A contradictory nature of the media discourse was captured. There was extensive reporting and a high degree of public consciousness and interest in the case, but sensationalized reporting had created a spectacle of violence. More substantive discussions of the nature of patriarchy, misogyny, and institutional change were marred by emotional language, graphic descriptions and narratives of the exceptional. The study also found the emergence of robust feminist counter discourses. Digital activists and collective

advocacy on social media aided in challenging the prevailing discourse and in changing the conversation on gender justice, accountability and systemic inequality. The possibility of resistance and social change in the site of discourse was demonstrated by these counter-discourses, which were as well as a power of domination. In general, the study concludes that the issue of gender-based violence in Pakistan can only be apprehended as not just a physical phenomenon but also a discursive phenomenon.

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