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The Shadow Pandemic. An Analysis of Femicide in British News Coverage

Abstract This study investigates how femicide is represented in the UK's Daily Mail throughout 2021. Despite ongoing institutional and governmental efforts to combat this gender-based crime, media coverage often perpetuates narratives that obscure the complex socio-cultural factors involved, presenting femicide as a series of isolated events driven by individual motives. With the United Nations highlighting the alarming rise in femicides as a "Shadow Pandemic", it is crucial to examine how these incidents are framed and challenge misleading narratives. Drawing on a corpus from the UK's *Daily Mail*, this study applies Bacchi's (2009) "What is the Problem Represented to Be" framework alongside Critical Discourse Analysis and Thematic Analysis to explore the portrayal of femicide in this outlet and assess the broader implications of such framing. Through this analysis, the study contributes to challenging dominant media representations and advocate for more responsible and sensitive reporting practices.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis*, *thematic analysis*, *femicide*, *United Kingdom*, *news coverage*, *victim-blaming*, *hate-speech*

1. Introduction

Femicide, one of the most extreme manifestations of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), can broadly be defined as the intentional killing of a woman committed on the grounds of gender-related factors.[1] These can encompass misogyny, societal norms surrounding masculinity, and the belief that men must assert control over women by suppressing, discouraging, and punishing behaviours deemed unacceptable for women. Despite concerted efforts to combat this crime, it remains a persistent issue worldwide, reinforcing cycles of hatred, harm, and trauma across societies.[2]

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention to this issue, exposing not only the vulnerabilities within national and global healthcare systems but also a disturbing rise in violence against women (VAW), which the UN has termed a "Shadow Pandemic".[3] As nations struggled to contain the spread of the virus through lockdowns and movement restrictions, the unintended consequences on GBV became increasingly apparent. The pandemic served as a catalyst, intensifying existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, especially for women already living in precarious situations. Confinement in limited living spaces, enforced isolation with abusers, and the disruption of support networks exacerbated these challenges, leading to increased levels of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. At the same time, access to essential services and support systems became severely restricted, leaving many women with nowhere to turn.[4]

However, what is particularly troubling is the surge in femicides observed in some countries following the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions. As societies attempted to return to a sense of normalcy, the number of femicides rose sharply in 2021 and has since shown no signs of decline.[5] Globally, nearly 81,000 women and girls were killed in 2021, a figure that climbed to 89,000 in 2022—

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[1] Diana Russell and Nicole Van De Ven, "Crimes Against Women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal" (1976), www.ojp.gov.

[2] Shalva Weil, Consuelo Corradi, and Marceline Naudi, eds., *Femicide Across Europe: Theory, Research and Prevention* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2018).

[3] UN Women, "'The Shadow Pandemic': Violence Against Women During COVID-19" (2020), www.unwomen.org.

[4] Ibid.

[5] EIGE, "'Femicide': Name It, Count It, End It!", *European Institute for Gender Equality* (2021), www.eige.europa.eu.

the highest annual toll in the past two decades. In 2021 alone, approximately 45,000 of these victims (56%) were murdered by an intimate partner or family member.[6] In Great Britain, the focus of this study, the number of women killed in 2021 was 33% higher than the previous year, increasing from 110 to 146.[7] This trend has been partially attributed to the fact that during the period of prolonged, close contact with their abusive partners, many women became acutely aware of their intolerable situations and sought to escape their abusive environments as soon as restrictions were lifted. This transitional phase led to an escalation in violence: the desire for newfound autonomy and liberation from oppressive, misogynistic relationships was perceived by violent men as a direct challenge to traditional power dynamics. As noted by Siguenza, "given the greater freedom of women, which in a macho perspective means 'loss of control', the aggressors became out of control and reacted more violently".[8]

Unfortunately, the press has largely failed to convey the complex socio-cultural factors underlying these crimes, often representing femicides as isolated incidents driven by individual motives such as jealousy or temporary insanity.[9] By framing these tragedies as the result of personal impulses, exacerbated by the extraordinary circumstances of the time, the media overlooked the broader systemic issues and entrenched patterns of gender-based violence that contribute to femicide.[10] The main problem with such portrayals is that they not only undermine efforts to combat GBV but also contribute to a culture of impunity surrounding perpetrators, since news coverage may function as an echo-chamber for hatred and misleading representations of VAW.[11]

Against this backdrop, this study aims to address this gap by examining the representations of femicide in British news coverage. By analysing a corpus of data from the UK's Daily Mail, this research applies Bacchi's[12] "What is the Problem Represented to Be" framework and Discourse Analysis to investigate how femicide is framed in this news outlet. This study aims to deepen understanding of femicide and highlight the media's role in preventing violence by raising awareness of all forms of hatred and GBV. It also advocates for promoting gender equality and dismantling harmful stereotypes, recognising the media as a crucial agent in these efforts.

2. The Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions on Femicides

The discourse surrounding femicide during the COVID-19 pandemic has received significant scholarly attention, revealing the complex interplay of societal, cultural, and systemic factors that underpin misogyny and GBV.[13] In 2020, Dubravka Simonovic, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against

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[6] UN Women, 'The Shadow Pandemic'.
[7] Karen Ingala Smith, "2021. Counting Dead Women", *Karen Ingala Smith* (blog), Monday 8 February 2021, www.kareningalasmith.com, accessed 4 May 2024.
[8] Carmen Siguenza, "Los Asesinatos Machistas se Disparan en España tras el Final del Estado de Alarma", *EFEMINISTA* (blog), Tuesday 1 June 2021, www.efeminista.com, accessed 4 May 2024.
[9] Michele Lloyd and Shula Ramon, "Smoke and Mirrors: UK Newspaper Representations of Intimate Partner Domestic Violence", *Violence Against Women*, 23.1 (2017), 114-139, DOI: 10.1177/1077801216634468; Antonella Napolitano, "'A Pandemic within the Pandemic': A CDA of Social Media Comments on Domestic Violence during COVID-19", *Lingue Culture Mediazioni - Languages Cultures Mediation,* 10 (2023), 201-228, DOI:10.7358/lcm-2023-002-napa.
[10] Mariana Aldrete et al., "Media Representations of Femicide. A Systematic Review of Literature in English and Spanish", *Annals of the International Communication Association* (2024), 1-37; DOI: 10.1080/23808985.2024.2336924.
[11] Vasu Goel et al., "Hatemongers Ride on Echo Chambers to Escalate Hate Speech Diffusion", *PNAS Nexus*, 2.3 (2023), 1-10, DOI:10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad041.
[12] Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (Richmond, AU: Pearson Higher Education, 2009).
[13] John Boman and Owen Gallupe, "Has COVID-19 Changed Crime? Crime Rates in the United States during the Pandemic", *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45.4 (August 2020), 537-545, DOI:10.1007/s12103-020-09551-3; Caroline Bradbury-Jones and Louise Isham, "The Pandemic Paradox: The Consequences of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence", *Journal of Clinical Nursing* (2020), 2047-2049, DOI: 10.1111/jocn.15296; Eduardo Cocco et al., "The Devil in the Details: Changes Under Stable Trends of Femicide in Italy During COVID-19 Lockdowns", *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 40.2 (2024)**,** DOI: 10.1177/10439862241245890; Antonella Napolitano, "'A Pandemic within the Pandemic'; Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo, "'Mine

Women and Girls, highlighted the global surge in GBV, aptly labelling it a "shadow pandemic".[14] While some studies[15] have pointed to an increase in non-lethal domestic violence incidents during lockdowns worldwide, others have noted that certain areas experienced stability or even a decrease in their femicide rates.[16] These trends have been attributed to fewer women attempting to leave their partners during lockdowns and the increased difficulty and risk for ex-partners to reach their intended victims.[17]

However, the easing of lockdown restrictions in 2021 triggered a sharp rise in femicides, notably in the United Kingdom, where the number of recorded victims increased by 33%, escalating from 110 to 146.[18] From a discursive standpoint, it is crucial to analyse how the media have depicted this surge, as biased narratives might reinforce misogynistic stereotypes, inspire emulation, and minimise the broader societal factors that contribute to this crime.[19]

It is undeniable that the psychological toll of lockdowns—intensified by stress, fear, frustration, isolation, and financial instability—has contributed to increased risk factors for domestic violence and femicide globally.[20] However, this work suggests that news reporting on femicide may have skewed the readership's understanding of this reality, potentially framing pandemic-related stressors as justifications for fatal violence. When reports highlight men citing stress as a motive for their actions, they may inadvertently obscure the deeper dynamics of abuse, offering excuses that shift responsibility away from perpetrators and divert attention from the underlying societal issues.[21] This analysis will therefore challenge the reductive narratives often presented in such reporting, advocating for a more thorough exploration of the ingrained inequalities, gender norms, and power imbalances that perpetuate GBV.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi's "What is the Problem Represented to Be?" approach as its theoretical frameworks. CDA examines how language and discourse both shape and reflect power relations, social structures, and ideologies.[22] It seeks to uncover hidden meanings, underlying assumptions, and power dynamics within texts and discourse practices, highlighting the role

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or No One Else's': An Analysis of the Representations of Femi(ni)cide in Italian News Reporting", *International Journal of Language Studies,* 16.2 (April 2022), 50-71.

[14] UN Women, 'The Shadow Pandemic'.

[15] Boman and Gallupe, "Has COVID-19 Changed Crime?"; Bradbury-Jones and Isham, "The Pandemic Paradox"; Cocco et al., "The Devil in the Details".

[16] Marcelo Aebi et al., *Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2021: Key Findings of the SPACE I Report* (Council of Europe, 2022); Schröttle, Monika, et al., "Comparative Report on Femicide Research and Data in Five Countries: Cyprus, Germany, Malta, Portugal, Spain", *FemUnited Project* (2021), www.repositorio-aberto.up.

[17] Siguenza, "Los Asesinatos Machistas se Disparan en España tras el Final del Estado de Alarma".

[18] Karen Ingala Smith, 'Coronavirus Doesn't Cause Men's Violence Against Women', *Karen Ingala Smith,* Tuesday 15 December 2020, www.kareningalasmith.com, accessed 4 May 2024.

[19] Boman and Gallupe, "Has COVID-19 Changed Crime?"; EIGE, "Measuring Femicide in the United Kingdom" (2024), www.eige.europe.eu; Siguenza, "Los Asesinatos Machistas se Disparan en España tras el Final del Estado de Alarma".

[20] Gunes Asik and Efsan Nas Ozen, "It Takes a Curfew: The Effect of Covid-19 on Female Homicides", *Economics Letters,* 200.C (2021), www.econpapers.repec.org; Carmen Vives-Cases et al., "Coping with Intimate Partner Violence and the COVID-19 Lockdown: The Perspectives of Service Professionals in Spain", *PLOS ONE,* 16 (October 2021), DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0258865.

[21] Amber Sutton and Haley Beech, "The Impact of Stay-at-Home Orders on Safety and Stability for Women: A Topical Review of Intimate Partner Violence and Intimate Femicide in the United States During the Initial Phase of COVID-19", *Journal of Family Violence*, 39.5 (2024), 811-825, DOI:10.1007/s10896-023-00530-w.

[22] Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse Semantics and Ideology", *Discourse & Society,* 6.2 (1995): 243-289, DOI: 10.1177/0957926595006002006; Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach", in *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), 1-14, DOI:10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi116.

of language in constructing social realities and perpetuating dominant ideologies.[23] This makes CDA an invaluable framework for analysing media representations, policy documents, and various forms of discourse, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these elements contribute to the framing of social issues.

Bacchi's "What is the Problem Represented to Be" (WPR) approach,[24] initially designed to assess how legislators conceptualise and frame issues, offers a structured methodology for analysing problem representations, drawing on principles from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA).[25] The approach consists of a series of six key questions, outlined in Table 1, which guide a critical examination of how problems are constructed within policy discourse. These questions explore the origins of problem representations, the underlying assumptions driving them, what aspects are left unaddressed or silenced, the effects produced by these representations, and how alternative perspectives can challenge or replace them.

"What's the Problem Represented to Be?" Approach

1.	What's the "problem" represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?
2.	How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
3.	What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the "problem"?
4.	What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?
5.	What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
6.	How has the problem been questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

Table 1: Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" Approach

Through Questions 1-3, Bacchi[26] argues that every policy embodies a constructed representation of the 'problem', which inherently involves certain assumptions. For instance, if a policy aimed at improving women's status focuses on education and training, it presupposes that the primary barrier to women's advancement is their lack of skills, overlooking other significant factors such as sexism or hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, if femicide is depicted as a series of isolated incidents driven by individual mental health issues, this portrayal neglects and dismisses the broader socio-cultural factors underpinning the crime.

Questions 4 and 5 address the silences within the problem representation, focussing on whose 'voices' are omitted, marginalised, or excluded, and the impacts of these omissions and what is omitted in the representation. For instance, discussions concerning VAW frequently marginalise the experiences of black, lesbian, transgender, and disabled women.[27] This neglect hinders a full understanding of VAW and results in policies and support services that fail to address the unique needs of these groups, thereby perpetuating systemic inequalities. Finally, Question 6 investigates how the prevailing problem representation can be questioned, challenged, and redefined, opening avenues for critical intervention and more inclusive solutions.

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[23] Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis", *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2015), 466-485.

[24] Bacchi, *Analysing Policy.*

[25] Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3.2 (2006), 77-101, DOI:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa; Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis", *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12.3 (2017), 297-298.

[26] Bacchi, *Analysing Policy.*

[27] Thomas J Billard, "Writing in the Margins: Mainstream News Media Representations of Transgenderism", *SocArXiv* (preprint 2018), DOI:10.31235/osf.io/4q8f3.

While the WPR framework is predominantly used for evaluating policies, its application to media discourse and news coverage remains relatively unexplored.[28] Nevertheless, its focus on deconstructing problem representations and exploring alternative viewpoints is highly pertinent for analysing media representations of femicide. This framework offers valuable insights into how language and framing shape public understanding of femicide and its broader social and cultural contexts. As previously noted, the language employed in news reporting profoundly influences public perceptions by reinforcing specific narratives about femicide.[29] Consequently, applying both Discourse Analysis and the WPR framework to the examination of femicide in British news coverage can reveal the underlying socio-cultural power dynamics associated with this issue and demonstrate how alternative representations could foster greater social awareness and understanding.

4. Corpus and Methodology

The corpus under examination (henceforth 'DM2021') encompasses the coverage of femicides by the UK's Daily Mail[30] throughout 2021.This source was chosen due to its prominence as the most widely read online news source in Great Britain during that year, indicating its substantial influence on public opinion and its potential to shape widespread perceptions of femicide.[31] However, it is crucial to recognise that the Daily Mail is a right-wing tabloid newspaper, characterised by its sensationalist approach and often polarised reporting. This editorial style may affect the framing of stories, the language used, and the selection of incidents covered. While this style undeniably drives its popularity, it also risks distorting the public's understanding by spreading biases and reinforcing preconceptions. The fact that it resonates with so many readers suggests that its framing of issues not only reflects but also reinforces what its audience already believes—or is inclined to believe. Thus, while DM2021 provides valuable insights into public discourse on femicide, the inherent biases typical of tabloid journalism, such as an emphasis on dramatic or emotionally charged elements, must be considered. These factors are crucial when interpreting the findings, as they may not fully represent the broader media landscape or the more nuanced perspectives found in other publications.

In the compilation of DM2021, the cases reported in the Daily Mail were systematically cross-referenced with Karen Ingala Smith's "Counting Dead Women" project[32] to ensure comprehensive coverage. This project, annually acknowledged in the UK Parliament on March 8th, provides a detailed list of women killed over the previous year. For this study, each case of femicide listed in Ingala Smith's project was manually verified against the Daily Mail's online archives to confirm whether it was reported. This process involved a detailed manual search of the newspaper's website, with the first article published for each case being selected to maintain consistency in the analysis.

From a preliminary analysis, it was observed that, unlike past patterns identified by Meyers[33] at the turn of the millennium, when violence often went underreported in national news, the Daily Mail covered a substantial majority of femicide cases. Specifically, it reported on 82% of these cases, publishing 119 articles out of a total of 146 cases.

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[28] Myrna Dawson and Michelle Carrigan, "Identifying Femicide Locally and Globally: Understanding the Utility and Accessibility of Sex/Gender-Related Motives and Indicators", *Current Sociology*, 69.5 (September 2021), 682-704, DOI:10.1177/0011392120946359.

[29] Bacchi, *Analysing Policy*, 7.

[30] *Daily Mail Online*, www.dailymail.co.uk.

[31] Charlotte Tobitt and Aisha Majid, "National Press ABCs: Impact of latest UK lockdown on circulation", *Statista,* Tuesday 23 February 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/529970/uk-online-newspaper-market-by-daily-average-unique-browsers/, accessed 4 May 2024.

[32] Smith, "2021. Counting Dead Women".

[33] Chen Reis and Sarah Meyer, "Understudied and Underaddressed: Femicide, an Extreme Form of Violence against Women and Girls", *PLoS Medicine* 21 (18 January 2024): e1004336, DOI:10.1371/journal.pmed.1004336.

Once the DM2021 corpus was compiled, it was annotated with metadata for each case, including the victim's name, age, relationship with the perpetrator, the perpetrator's age, stated motives, the weapon used, references to the perpetrator's criminal history, and any relevant comments.[34] This data was then organised and analysed using a combination of manual coding and the text analysis software QDA Miner[35]. Developed by Provalis Research, QDA Miner is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis tool that offers a range of features for organising, coding, retrieving, analysing, and visualising qualitative data.

To apply Bacchi's framework, a thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's multi-phase analysis process[36]. Initially, the analysis involved familiarising with the corpus by noting the primary topics covered in the Daily Mail's coverage of femicide. The second phase entailed querying the corpus for metadata and relevant terms related to femicide and annotating the data using QDA Miner. In the third phase, these codes were manually organised into overarching themes until saturation was achieved. During the final phase, the themes were then synthesised into key macro-themes according to Bacchi's framework (Q1-6). QDA Miner's quantitative analysis tools were then employed to quantify the frequency of recurrent codes, revealing prominent patterns in how femicide was framed. For ethical considerations, all sensitive information was anonymised, ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of individuals discussed in the coverage.

DM2021	
Number of articles	119
Time-Span	January 1st -December 31st 2021
Types	7706
Tokens	115714

Table 2: Corpus DM2021

5. Results

5.1 *What is the 'problem' represented to be (Q1), how it has come about (Q2), and what assumptions does this representation of the 'problem' imply (Q3)?*

To address the first three questions, the corpus was coded to categorise the causes of femicide explicitly mentioned within the texts. This process involved examining how the 'problem' of femicide was represented in the corpus (Q1), with a particular focus on the explanations provided for its occurrence (Q2) and the underlying assumptions implied by these representations (Q3).

In DM2021, the 'problem' of femicide is predominantly framed as a series of isolated criminal incidents perpetrated by individual men often sentimentally linked to their victims. These crimes are frequently attributed to the perpetrators' psychological distress, mental health issues, or personal and emotional motives.

5.2 *Femicides as Isolated Criminal Acts*

Each case in DM2021 was individually reviewed to extract and categorise data on victim-perpetrator relationships. The initial extraction and categorisation of relationship data were conducted manually to

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[34] Please note that due to space constraints, the detailed results of the metadata analysis and thematic coding have not been included in this paper. Interested readers are welcome to contact the author directly for access to this information.
[35] Provalis Research, Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software, available at: https://provalisresearch.com.
[36] Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology" and "Thematic Analysis".

ensure accuracy. The data was then entered into QDA Miner, where it was organised and analysed using the software's quantitative tools to generate the statistics presented in Table 3.

Victim's Relationship with Perpetrator	%
Significant Other (Husband, Boyfriend, Partner)	47%
Ex or Lover (Ex partner, ex-husband, ex-boyfriend, extramarital relationship)	18%
Family (Son, Grandson, Brother, Brother-in-law)	13%
Acquaintances (Acquaintances, friends, Neighbours)	12%
Strangers (Stranger, Date)	8%
Other/Not provided/Unknown	2%

Table 3: Victim-Perpetrator relationships in DM2021

The analysis revealed a strong correlation between femicide and intimate relationships. Nearly two-thirds of the cases (65%) involved current or former partners, emphasising the endemic nature of femicide within domestic contexts. This finding is consistent with the literature on intimate partner violence (IPV).[37] Moreover, the involvement of family members in 13% of cases underscores the broader familial and societal factors contributing to these crimes.[38] The COVID-19 pandemic, with its associated lockdowns, likely intensified pre-existing vulnerabilities, creating conditions conducive to lethal violence.

However, a thematic and discourse analysis of the Daily Mail's coverage revealed a contrasting picture. The newspaper often portrayed the 'problem' of femicide (Q1) as one of isolated incidents of domestic violence, rather than acknowledging them as part of a wider societal problem rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances. This narrow focus obscures the complex interplay of factors contributing to femicide, including social attitudes, economic disparities, and insufficient support services.

Despite these findings, the thematic and discourse analysis of the corpus revealed a contrasting picture. The newspaper often portrayed these cases as isolated incidents of domestic violence, rather than acknowledging them as part of a wider societal problem rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances. This narrow focus obscures the complex interplay of factors contributing to femicide, including social attitudes, economic disparities, and insufficient support services. Some examples have been provided below (Examples 1-4):

(1) We are in the very early stages of our investigation; however at this time 'we believe this to be an isolated incident' and a man has been arrested on suspicion of murder. (DM2021-11)[39]

(2) 'This is an isolated incident' and 'there is no wider risk to members of the public'. Our neighbourhood teams will continue to support and speak to local residents. (DM2021-78)

(3) We know our communities will be shocked and saddened by these events, but 'we wish to reassure them that there is no risk to the general public' at this time and we are supporting our colleagues. (DM2021-14)

(4) Police are not looking for anyone else in connection with the death of the woman and 'there is no risk to the community'. (DM2021-2)

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[37] Eve Waltermaurer, "Measuring Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): You May Only Get What You Ask For", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 20.4 (2005), 501-506, DOI: 10.1177/0886260504267760.

[38] Nancy Glass et al., "Female-Perpetrated Femicide and Attempted Femicide: A Case Study", *Violence Against Women*, 10.6 (2004), 606-625, DOI:10.1177/1077801204265016.

[39] The cases are referenced in the examples as DM2021, followed by the case number reported by the Daily Mail since the beginning of the year.

While the data does show that most femicides were linked to instances of IPV (65%), the Daily Mail's emphasis on "reassuring" (Example 3) that most cases were due to individual and personal circumstances with no reference to the systemic nature of such violence fails to address the broader cultural and societal norms that perpetuate male dominance and control over women. The implicit (21%) or explicit (26%) framing of these incidents as "isolated incidents" (Examples 1-2) that represented "no risk" (Examples 3-4) for the general public contributes to a minimisation of GBV, since it suggests that femicides are rare anomalies rather than recurring events rooted in a culture that often condones or ignores male violence against women. By not acknowledging the widespread and interconnected nature of these acts, the Daily Mail's reporting might have inadvertently reinforced the very social and cultural conditions that allow such violence to continue.

Moreover, approximately 18% of the cases involved men who had previously been in a romantic relationship with the victim. This high incidence of ex-partners committing femicide, second only to current partners, reveals the continuing threat posed even after a relationship has ended and underscores the persistent danger women face from those men who view them as possessions. It reinforces the necessity of understanding femicide as a continuation of control and power dynamics that extend beyond the boundaries of the relationship. However, even in these instances, the Daily Mail failed to critically address the connection between leaving an abusive relationship and escalation to femicide. Of the 77 cases perpetrated by (ex) spouses, partners, or boyfriends, 46 (60%) were not examined in this context. This is illustrated by the following examples (Examples 5-7):

(5) David Maggs, 71, told police officers 'he had sat on her bed and asked to talk with her about the financial aspects of their divorce', but she had told him to 'Get out and leave it to the solicitors'. 'This made him angry', he said; however, he claims he does not recall what happened next. (DM2021-16)
(6) Nigel Diakite, 20, 'launched a brutal attack' on young mother N'Taya Elliott-Cleverley 'after she planned to leave him'. (DM2021-68)
(7) A husband killed his new bride before stuffing her body into a suitcase 'after she told him she had bipolar disorder and wanted a divorce', a court heard. Thomas Nutt, 45, is accused of murdering Dawn Walker, 52, after her body was found 'dumped' in undergrowth at the back of his house four days after they were married. (DM2021-16)

Across these examples, the discourse often centres on the victim's actions as potential triggers for violence, which can inadvertently imply causality or assign blame. When femicides are described as resulting from a woman's decision to leave a relationship, without adequately highlighting the perpetrator's accountability, it problematically suggests that the victim's actions or attitude provoked the violence. For instance, Example 6, depicting the man as having "launched a brutal attack" … "after she planned to leave him" indirectly implies that her intention to leave was the catalyst for the brutality, rather than focussing on the perpetrator's possessiveness. Similarly, framing a couple's financial issues related to divorce as causing men to become "angry" (Example 5) can suggest that such issues trigger violent reactions.

This narrative oversimplifies the complexities of abusive relationships and fails to address the need for comprehensive policy measures and societal change to prevent such tragedies. It inadvertently normalises and excuses violent behaviour by implying that men's violent responses are justified by emotional distress or a sense of loss, treating such violence as a natural consequence of relationship breakdowns. By presenting causative links between leaving an abusive relationship and femicide without sufficient explanation, these representations risk conveying the dangerous notion that staying in an abusive relationship might be safer than leaving, as leaving could result in death. This perspective

detracts from addressing the broader societal norms that normalise violence against women, as well as the inadequate legal protections and lack of support systems for those trying to escape abusive situations.

5.3 *Femicides as a Result of Mental Distress/Disorders*

In response to Q2 on the causes of femicides, an analysis of perpetrator metadata alongside the reasons cited in DM2021 reveals that, although it's impossible to pinpoint a single motive for these crimes, certain patterns do emerge. A substantial portion of cases (43%) are described as resulting from the man's temporary insanity, sudden anger, or mental disorders. These factors are often intertwined with sentimental issues, such as jealousy and the inability to accept abandonment, which account for 23% of the reported cases. This indicates a recurring narrative in DM2021 that frames femicide within the context of intense emotional and psychological disturbances, frequently connected to relationship dynamics, as can be seen in Table 4 below:

Reasons	%	Example
Mental issues and anger	43%	"Her husband was becoming angry and obsessed about small things". (DM2021-46) "He described hearing a 'Voice encouraging him to do this'". (DM2021-47)
Jealousy/non acceptance of abandonment	23%	"He was a jealous and controlling husband and she was deeply unhappy". (DM2021-62)
Not mentioned	11%	
Financial distress	6%	"He was in financial need because he was in debt to drug dealers". (DM2021-119)
Other	6%	
Sex/rape	5%	"He killed the teenager after she rebuffed his sexual advances". (DM2021-140)
Drugs/alcohol	4%	"He was drunk at the time and could remember why he attacked her". (DM2021-30)
Suicide pact	1%	"A husband who killed his terminally-ill wife in a suicide pact has told how they shared a last drink together before going to the bottom of the garden to end their lives". (DM2021-46)
Honour	1%	"Was Iranian mother's death an 'honour killing'?" (DM2021-136)

Table 4: Reasons for Femicides Provided in DM2021

Most femicides in DM2021 are framed as the result of uncontrolled anger or mental health issues (43%). The problem with this type of representation is that by medicalising femicide and linking it to mental health, the crime is portrayed as an anomaly caused by illness or distress, rather than as a foreseeable consequence of deeply rooted hatred and gender inequalities. This framing shifts focus away from systemic factors, such as societal tolerance of male aggression, and instead associates femicide with temporary or permanent (often self-diagnosed) mental dysfunctions, as can be seen in examples 8-12:

(8) During our investigation, it was determined that 'Kaushik Solanki was suffering from an abnormality of mental functioning which led to him taking his wife's life'. (DM2021-48)
(9) Throughout the trial 'Virtosu claimed to have been hearing voices and suffering a psychotic disorder'. He claimed that his sister-in-law had appeared to him as having devil-like shining red eyes to support a defence of diminished responsibility, but he did not convince the jury. (DM2021-62)

(10) 'Self-confessed psychopath jailed for life' after killing neighbour 'because he didn't like her'. (DM2021-19)

(11) Franklin McLeod, 55, stabbed 53-year-old Marlene Coleman through the neck 'in a fit of jealous anger' on June 16 last year in their shared flat in Lewisham, southeast London. (DM2021-77)

(12) See told a nurse he had harboured 'terrible thoughts' of killing his mother in a use fire while 'feeling low'. 'He described hearing a voice encouraging him to do this'. (DM2021-91)

These appeals to (self-diagnosed) distress ("he was feeling low"-Example12), experiencing psychotic episodes ("he was hearing voices"-Example 9) or other forms of mental anguish ("psychopath" killed his neighbour "because he didn't like her"-Example 10) are a recurring pattern in which perpetrators of femicide strategically invoke assertions of mental illness to lessen their accountability. The danger of these representations lies in their potential to create an echo-chamber for emulation, encouraging perpetrators to seek diminished responsibility under the UK's Mental Health Act[40] rather than facing full culpability for their actions.[41]

These appeals address not only chronic mental illnesses but especially temporary insanity and anger triggered by "jealousy". Representing femicide as a crime of passion rooted in jealousy can romanticise possessive behaviour and intimate partner violence.[42] Once again, this framing presents this form of violence as an irrational, emotional reaction rather than a symptom of deeper societal issues and entrenched hatred, as illustrated in Examples 13 and 14:

(13) 'A jealous boyfriend' has been jailed for life after he brutally murdered his partner moments after having sex with her because 'he thought she had cheated on him'. (DM2021-47)

(14) A dancer was stabbed to death by her 'jealous boyfriend' when 'she went to break up with him' after they fell out over an episode of Love Island after 'she told him she found one of the contestants attractive'. (DM2021-111)

When femicides are depicted as the result of sudden, individual outbursts of anger and jealousy ("he thought she had cheated on him"-Example 13) often triggered by trivial reasons (e.g. "she told him she found one of the contestants attractive"-Example 14), the prevailing perception is that these incidents are inherently unpredictable. Most importantly, this narrative importantly shifts responsibility away from the perpetrators, implying that such acts occur spontaneously and without warning, making them difficult to foresee and prevent.[43] Consequently, this viewpoint may undermine prevention and education efforts, rendering them ineffective. Alongside factors like financial disputes (6%) and intoxication (4%), these narratives suggest that femicide stems from immediate, solvable issues linked to women's actions, rather than from deep-seated systemic power imbalances.

It is notable that DM2021 explicitly identifies only one case as an 'honour killing'. This case, involving an immigrant woman from Iran, raises significant questions about whether her death was driven by "cultural reasons" associated with "honour" and shame (Example 15):

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[40] UK Parliament, "Mental Health Act 1983", Statute Law Database (1983), www.legislation.gov.uk.

[41] End Violence Against Women, "Breaking Down Violence Against Women", *End Violence Against Women* (blog) (2024), www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk, accessed 4 May 2024.

[42] Alessia Forciniti and Emma Zavarrone, "Data Quality and Violence Against Women: The Causes and Actors of Femicide", *Social Indicators Research* (pre-print 2023), DOI: 10.1007/s11205-023-03254-y.

[43] Lucia Busso, Claudia Roberta Combei, and Ottavia Tordini, "The Mediatization of Femicide: A Corpus-Based Study on the Representation of Gendered Violence in Italian Media", *Analisi Linguistica e Letteraria*, 28.3, 29-48; Gosse Minnema et al., "Responsibility Framing under the Magnifying Lens of NLP: The Case of Gender-based Violence and Traffic Danger", *Computational Linguistics in the Netherlands Journal* 12 (2022), 207-233.

(15) Was Iranian mother's death an 'honour killing'? Police probe whether woman, 47, found dead in Liverpool home was killed 'due to cultural reasons'. (DM2021-136)

While this instance sheds light on the issue of 'honour killings' prevalent in certain countries,[44] it also risks reinforcing stereotypes that some communities are more prone to such violence, potentially overshadowing the universal nature of GBV.[45] This dichotomy underscores the need for nuanced and culturally sensitive reporting on femicides, to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and acknowledge the broader societal factors contributing to GBV. Furthermore, the Daily Mail's portrayal of 'honour killings' as foreign to the UK context, contrasted with the depiction of domestic cases as mere 'individual' disputes, creates a form of othering.[46] However, it is essential to recognise that the Daily Mail is a right-wing tabloid newspaper known for its sensationalist approach and often polarised reporting. Therefore, its editorial style significantly influences the framing of stories, the language used, and the selection of incidents covered. This inherent bias means that the data derived from DM2021 does not offer a comprehensive cross-section of British news but rather reflects the particular viewpoints and tendencies of the Daily Mail. Consequently, while DM2021 provides valuable insights into public discourse, its portrayal of issues such as 'honour killings' and domestic femicide may reinforce stereotypes and biases, given its status as a widely read yet ideologically skewed publication. This factor must be taken into account when interpreting the findings, as they do not fully represent the broader media landscape or the more nuanced perspectives found in other types of publications.

From a broader perspective, it is important to recognise that representations of femicide in news coverage, as exemplified by the Daily Mail in this study, are shaped by a range of factors. Primarily, the media's focus on sensational and dramatic narratives often emphasises the mental state of perpetrators, creating a more compelling and engaging storyline for public consumption. These biases reflect wider societal norms and prejudices, which influence media coverage and perpetuate inequalities in representation.[47]

Additionally, the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions has heightened awareness of domestic violence, leading to increased media reporting on such incidents.[48] However, since news coverage frequently functions as an echo chamber,[49] adopting a more critical and proactive approach to reporting on femicide could enable news outlets to question and potentially reshape the prevailing narrative, rather than merely amplifying it. This could help prevent the emulation of such acts by perpetrators who might use mental distress as a justification, which can lead to a mitigation of their sentences. This shift could not only foster a deeper understanding of the root causes of femicide but also promote more effective prevention and education strategies, ultimately helping to reduce its occurrence.

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[44] EIGE, "Measuring Femicide in the United Kingdom".

[45] Recep Doğan, "Is Honor Killing a "Muslim Phenomenon"? Textual interpretations and cultural representations", Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 31.3 (2011), 423–440, DOI: 10.1080/13602004.2011.599547; Aisha Gill and Avtar Brah, "Interrogating Cultural Narratives about 'Honour'-Based Violence", European Journal of Women's Studies, 21.1 (2014), 72-86, DOI: 10.1177/1350506813510424.

[46] Revital Sela-Shayovitz, "'She Knew He Would Murder Her': The Role of the Media in the Reconstruction of Intimate Femicide", Journal of Comparative Social Work, 13.1 (2018), 11-34, DOI:10.31265/jcsw.v13i1.157.

[47] Mariana Aldrete et al., "Media Representations of Femicide. A Systematic Review of Literature in English and Spanish", Annals of the International Communication Association (2024), DOI: 10.1080/23808985.2024.2336924.

[48] Ana Santos, "Humanizing without Sensationalizing: Investigating Femicide", Global Investigative Journalism Network (2023), www.gijn.org, accessed 4 May 2024.

[49] Seth Flaxman et al., "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption", Public Opinion Quarterly, 80.1 (2016), 298-320, DOI:10.1093/poq/nfw006.

5.3.1. *Femicides as a problem of 'men killing women', not 'women being killed'*

To further investigate the implied attribution of accountability to perpetrators (Q3), the analysis included a grammatical examination of headlines within the corpus. This approach was chosen to determine whether perpetrators were depicted as active subjects or if victims were presented as passive subjects, with or without reference to their perpetrators. This focus on headlines is particularly relevant because headlines serve as the first point of engagement for readers and are crucial in shaping initial perceptions of responsibility and agency. Unlike the full articles, which may contain nuanced discussions, headlines often distil the core message into a few words, making them particularly powerful in influencing public perception. The analysis builds on previous studies conducted in other countries,[50] such as Italy,[51] which have shown that passive constructions in news headlines (e.g., "*la donna è stata uccisa*" > "the woman was killed") often divert attention away from the perpetrator, compared to active forms (e.g., "*l'uomo ha ucciso la donna*"> "the man killed the woman"), which more directly attribute blame.

Analysing these choices is essential as they reveal how agency, responsibility, and victimisation are conveyed through the grammatical structure of headlines, thereby uncovering biases and informing more balanced and responsible reporting practices. Since headlines play a crucial role in shaping readers' perceptions and setting the tone for the entire article — and often are the only part some readers engage with — they not only capture attention but also provide a framework for understanding the narrative. Therefore, it is imperative that headlines accurately and responsibly reflect these core issues.

Contrary to the aforementioned studies,[52] the headlines in DM2021 predominantly present perpetrators as agents and subjects (67%). This framing might be influenced by the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure of English and this language's preference for active sentences,[53] but it bears the effect of highlighting perpetrators' culpability. This should not be underestimated, since this framing has the effect of implying and presenting the issue of femicide more as a problem of "men killing women" rather than as "violence against women", regardless of the reasons given for the crime. The three categories of grammatical structures found in the corpus are presented in Table 3 below:

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[50] Sally Johnson and Astrid Ensslin, "'But Her Language Skills Shifted the Family Dynamics Dramatically'. Language, Gender and the Construction of Publics in two British Newspapers", *Gender and Language*, 1.1 (2013), 229-254, DOI:10.1558/genl.v1i2.229; Michele Lloyd and Shula Ramon, "Smoke and Mirrors: UK newspaper representations of intimate partner domestic violence"; Paul Mason and Jane Monckton-Smith, "Conflation, Collocation and Confusion: British press coverage of the sexual murder of women", *Journalism*, 9.6 (2008), 691-710, DOI: 10.1177/1464884908096241; Louise Wattis, "Analysing Local Newspaper Coverage of Murders Involving Street Sex Workers", *Feminist Media Studies*, 22.2 (2022), 425-440, DOI:10.1080/14680777.2020.1804975.

[51] Lucia Busso, Claudia Roberta Combei, and Ottavia Tordini, "Narrating Gender Violence A Corpus-Based Study on the Representation of Gender-Based Violence in Italian Media", in *Language, Gender and Hate Speech: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (2020), 39-58, DOI:10.30687/978-88-6969-478-3/002; Nicoletta Mandolini, "Il Femminicidio Raccontato. Il Discorso Narrativo Italiano sulla Violenza Letale di Genere tra Giornalismo e Letteratura" (Doctoral Thesis), University College Cork, Ireland (2018); Erica Pinelli and Chiara Zanchi, "Gender-based Violence in Italian Local Newspapers: How Argument Structure Constructions can Diminish a Perpetrator's Responsibility", in *Discourse Processes between Reason and Emotion: A Post-Disciplinary Perspective* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 117-143; Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo, "'Mine or No One Else's'".

[52] See notes 51 and 52.

[53] Alireza Jalilifar and Zohre Shooshtari, "Active or Passive: That Is the Question", *BRAIN: Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 2.4 (2011), 29-38, DOI:10.62145/ces.v2i2.52; Yusri Ali Lubis, Reysha Miranti, and Yani Lubis, "Passive Voice and Active Voice in Sentence Structure", *Journal of Psychology, Counselling and Education*, 2.1 (2024), 59-64, DOI:10.62145/ces.v2i2.52.

Structure	%	Frequency
Perpetrator as the Agent	67%	"Man, 42, murdered his mother by setting fire to their flat, court hears". (DM2021-64) "Husband, 46, brutally murdered his wife in her home while their daughter was in the next bedroom". (DM2021-67)
Victim in a Passive Sentence with the Agent	9%	"British woman, 62, is beaten to death with a shovel by her toyboy lover". (DM2021-18)
Victim in a Passive Sentence with No Agent	24%	"Mother-of-two, 43, who was found dead at road junction with stab wounds". (DM2021-31) "Mother-of-five strangled to death in murder-suicide had complained to police she was being harassed". (DM2021-32)

Table 5: Subject and Agent patterns in DM2021

The pattern "Perpetrator-as-Agent" (67%) directly associates the murderer with the action of committing the crime, as can be seen in Examples 16 and 17:

(16) Man [S], 42, murdered [V]his mother [O] by setting fire to their flat, court hears. (DM2021-64)
(17) Husband [S], 46, brutally murdered [V] his wife [O] in her home while their daughter was in the next bedroom (DM2021-67)

This structure is used in DM2021 exclusively when the accused perpetrator has been formally charged with the crime, likely due to considerations surrounding the presumption of innocence. Textually, this approach fosters a more direct and engaging narrative, which effectively captures readers' attention.

In 9% of the headlines, the victim is presented within a passive structure while still referencing the perpetrator as the agent [S/recipient + passive verb + by + agent]. This choice keeps the victim central, emphasising her experience and evoking sympathy, while also conveying crucial information about the perpetrator, thus ensuring a sense of justice and accountability. DM2021 typically uses this approach in particularly brutal or sensationalised cases, where focusing on the victim's suffering creates a strong emotional impact and sustains public attention on the gravity of the crime, as illustrated in Examples 18 and 19 below:

(18) British woman [S/RECIPIENT], 62, is beaten to death [VOICE +pass] with a shovel by her 'toyboy lover' [AGENT]. (DM2021-18)
(19) Schoolgirl [S/RECIPIENT], 15, allegedly murdered [VOICE +pass] by brother [AGENT], 19, died after she was strangled, inquest hears. (DM2021-74)

The use of passive structures in this category may serve a double purpose: first, it foregrounds the victim's suffering and directs readers' attention to their plight to evoke sympathy. For instance, highlighting brutal or sensational details like being "beaten to death with a shovel" (Example 18) or being "strangled" (Example 19) amplifies the emotional impact of the headlines. This framing taps into readers' emotions, particularly given the tabloid nature of the Daily Mail, where such approaches may be driven by commercial interests rather than a commitment to responsible journalism. This practice certainly runs contrary to the International Federation of Journalists' Guidelines on reporting femicide, which caution against exploiting victims' suffering for sensationalism.[54]

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[54] International Federation of Journalists, "International Guidelines on Reporting on Violence Against Women" (2021), www.ifj.org, accessed 4 May 2024.

Moreover, the identification of the perpetrators as "toyboy lover" (Example 18) and "brother" (Example 19) suggests that the choice to use the perpetrator as the rheme of these headlines might be intended to add a sensational element. The term "toyboy lover" implies an age-discrepant, potentially scandalous relationship, while the mention of "brother" highlights the betrayal and horror of fratricide. These sensational details make the stories more emotionally charged and relatable for readers, but they also serve as strategies to attract and retain readership by focusing on dramatic aspects, often overshadowing broader social issues and potentially leading to victim-blaming. Unfortunately, this editorial approach is characteristic of the *Daily Mail*'s sensationalist tabloid style.[55]

24% of the headlines concentrate exclusively on the victim or the crime itself without referencing the perpetrator (S, VOICE +pass). This approach frequently emphasises the tragedy of the incident, which may sometimes indicate either a lack of available information, as illustrated in Examples 20 and 21:

(20) Mother-of-two [S], 43, who was found dead [VOICE +pass] at road junction with stab wounds. (DM2021-31)
(21) Mother-of-five [S] strangled to death [VOICE +pass] in murder-suicide had complained to police she was being harassed. (DM2021-32)

In DM2021, this type of headlines results from ongoing investigations and highlight the need for justice or the continuing threat posed by a perpetrator who is still at large or not convicted yet. This can create a sense of unease and urgency in the readership, prompting public interest and concern while awaiting further developments in the case.

Therefore, the data reveals that the articles in DM2021 frequently position the perpetrator as the agent in active sentences, thereby emphasising their accountability and the dramatic nature of the crime. This approach aligns with a narrative style that values clear and direct storytelling, potentially enhancing reader engagement. While it is unclear whether this preference for active voice is a deliberate journalistic choice or simply a characteristic of the English language structure, it undeniably results in the perpetrator's role being prominently highlighted. Even when the Daily Mail contextualises some cases as involving transient mental instability, the headlines still effectively underscore the perpetrator's responsibility. In comparison with news coverage in other countries, such as Italy, where passive constructions might be more prevalent due to slower investigative processes or differing journalistic priorities, the active voice in UK articles, such as "X killed the woman", serves to foreground the perpetrator's actions. This contrast suggests that, regardless of intent, the use of active sentences in DM2021 implies and contributes to a focus on the perpetrator and reinforces the themes of crime and justice.

5.4 *What is Left Unproblematic in this Problem Representation? Where Are the Silences? What Effects are Produced by this Representation of the Problem?*

The analysis of femicide reporting in DM2021 reveals several critical omissions that reflect a broader narrative 'silence'. This silence includes both the failure to address femicide as a systemic issue, as discussed earlier, and the neglect of specific categories of female victims, thereby shaping a skewed and incomplete understanding of the issue.

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[55] Christian von Sikorski and Melanie Saumer, "Sexual Harassment in Politics. News about Victims' Delayed Sexual Harassment Accusations and Effects on Victim Blaming: A Mediation Model", *Mass Communication and Society,* 24.2 (2021), 259-287, DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2020.1769136; Alessia Tranchese, *From Fritzl to #metoo: Twelve Years of Rape Coverage in the British Press*, Palgrave Studies in Language, Gender and Sexuality (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023).

Notably, the dataset shows a disproportionate focus on younger victims compared to national statistics, with older women significantly underreported. This discrepancy suggests a selective focus in the Daily Mail's coverage, which aligns with broader media patterns of marginalising certain groups.[56] Furthermore, despite a growing international consensus on the use of the term 'femicide'[57] to denote these crimes, the Daily Mail's avoidance of this terminology undermines the recognition of these acts as a form of GBV.

5.4.1 *Selective Reporting*

While the national data shows a considerable number of femicides among older women, DM2021 presents fewer cases involving this demographic, indicating a possible bias in news reporting that may reflect societal ageism.[58] The analysis of women killed in 2021, categorised by age groups, revealed a peak in fatalities among those aged 20 to 50 (51% of DM2021). This suggests heightened vulnerability within this demographic, potentially influenced by factors such as increased exposure to risky environments and higher rates of domestic violence. However, even if there is a discernible decline in fatalities with advancing age, significant numbers of victims persist across older age groups, emphasising the need for comprehensive strategies to address VAW across all ages. Yet, it is interesting to note that while DM2021 reports on the majority of cases that occurred in 2021, those it did not report on are mainly cases involving older women. Table 6 shows the number of femicides reported in national data compared to the number of cases reported by the Daily Mail, highlighting a prevalence of unreported cases in the 50+ age range (-21% compared to national statistics).

Age Range	National Data	Daily Mail
15-20	9	9
21-30	24	23
31-40	26	20
41-50	25	18
51-60	18	12
61-70	20	17
71-80	13	11
81+	11	9

Table 6: Comparison between National Data and Daily Mail news coverage based on victims' age

These omissions highlight the silences inherent in the Daily Mail's narrative. By focusing primarily on younger victims and neglecting older victims, it presents a skewed understanding of femicide, which fails to reflect the full extent of GBV in the UK. This selective reporting leads to an underestimation of the prevalence and impact of femicide on these overlooked groups, hindering efforts to address systemic issues and provide adequate support and resources for all victims of GBV.

It must be said that the Daily Mail's omissions concerning the killings of older women reflect a significant issue with the categorisation of femicides in the UK. Until 2019, victims over the age of 59

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[56] Camelia Bouzerdan and Jenifer Whitten-Woodring, "Killings in Context: An Analysis of the News Framing of Femicide", *Human Rights Review* 19 (2018), 211-228, 10.1007/s12142-018-0497-3.

[57] UN Women, "'The Shadow Pandemic': Violence Against Women During COVID-19".

[58] Merve Basdogan, Zulfukar Ozdogan, and Lesa Huber, "How Ageist and Sexist Framing Is Used in Turkish Media to Normalize Femicide: A Content Analysis", *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021), 3089–3114; Sarmitė Mikulionienė and Ilona Tamutienė, "Perceptions of Domestic Violence against Older Women: When Sexism Is Compounded by Ageism", *Violence Against Older Women, Volume I: Nature and Extent* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019),15-39.

were not included in the Crime Survey for England and Wales.[59] In 2021, the age-cap was raised to 74, but this still excluded femicides committed in institutions such as care homes and refuges. This selective categorisation impacts the perception of which cases should be recognised as instances of VAW and might influence news reporting as well. According to a study by Bows,[60] one in four domestic homicides involve people over 60, with the vast majority being female, representing 25% of the total and the fastest-rising domestic homicide rate in the UK. Additionally, one in six older people experience abuse each year. Despite this data, a 2020 poll conducted by the charity Hourglass[61] revealed that 30% of the public did not view harmful behaviour towards older people, such as hitting, as abuse. This highlights a troubling lack of awareness and recognition of the abuse and femicides affecting older women. As explained by Bows:[62]

> When you look at police data on abuse, rape and murder, older women aren't there. If a crime is looked at, at all, it's treated as a safeguarding issue, gender neutral, 'elder abuse' with no perpetrator. If you are found at the bottom of the stairs at 40, the police are probably going to ask questions. Deeply entrenched ageism means that if you are 80, it's, 'Well, she probably fell.'

Therefore, these deliberate decisions made by the Daily Mail could reflect and reinforce societal biases concern ageism, valuing younger women more or perceiving older women's lives as less significant or less impacted by violence.

Similarly, the underrepresentation of foreign women in DM2021 suggests another layer of 'silence'. The omission of cases involving women from diverse racial and national backgrounds potentially reflects a broader pattern of exclusion in media narratives, which might contribute to reinforcing stereotypes and neglecting issues related to race and immigration status.[63] This selective reporting can skew public perception of who is considered a 'typical' victim of femicide, further marginalising these already vulnerable groups. The omission of 11 cases involving foreign women highlights a concerning silence regarding issues related to race, nationality, and potentially immigration status. It must be remembered that the UK signed the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence[64] only in 2022 and it reserved the right not to be bound by Article 59. This article requires states to protect migrant women whose residency depends on an abusive spouse or partner, including suspending deportation to facilitate applications for residence permits.[65] Although no direct link can be established between this governmental stance and the Daily Mail's reporting gaps, the selective coverage may influence public perceptions of who qualifies as a 'typical' or 'newsworthy' victim of femicide. Such omissions, unless reported sensationally as in the 'honour killing' case discussed, contribute to the marginalisation of foreign women in media narratives. This selective attention risks overlooking these groups in policy responses, support services, and advocacy efforts,

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[59] Office for National Statistics, "Crime Survey for England & Wales" (2024), www.crimesurvey.co.uk, accessed 4 May 2024.

[60] Hannah Bows, "Considering Older Victims and Survivors - Hannah Bows", White Ribbon UK, 2024, www.whiteribbon.org.uk, accessed 4 May 2024.

[61] Yvonne Roberts, "End Femicide: 278 Dead. The Hidden Scandal of Older Women Killed by Men", *The Guardian*, Sunday 7 March 2021, www.theguardian.com, accessed 4 May 2024.

[62] Bows, "Considering Older Victims and Survivors".

[63] Mariana Aldrete and Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol, "Framing Femicide in the News, a Paradoxical Story: A Comprehensive Analysis of Thematic and Episodic Frames", *Crime, Media, Culture* 20.3 (2024), 231-249, DOI:10.1177/17416590231199771; Floretta Boonzaier, "Spectacularising Narratives on Femicide in South Africa: A Decolonial Feminist Analysis", *Current Sociology*, 71.1 (2023), 78-96, DOI:10.1177/00113921221097157.

[64] Council of Europe, "The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)" (2011), www.coe.int.

[65] Amnesty International, "UK: Istanbul Convention Finally Comes into Force but the Government Stops Short of Protecting All Women" (2022), www.amnesty.org.uk, accessed 4 May 2024.

sending a troubling message that their lives are less significant and reinforcing existing prejudices and systemic inequalities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, upon examining the terminology and referencing practices within DM2021, it is extremely concerning that the term 'femicide' appears only once. This single mention (Example 22) refers to the UK's 'Femicide Census' statistics,[66] which underscores the alarming frequency of women killed by men over the past decade. This reference is not even linked to a specific case:

(22) The most recent 'Femicide Census' from 2020 found that during the last decade a woman was killed by a man every three days.

The omission of the term 'femicide'—despite international advocacy for its inclusion in news reporting[67]—diminishes the recognition of these crimes as manifestations of GBV and may undermine public awareness and policy responses. Legally, UK criminal law does not specifically define femicide; rather, such cases fall under the broader categories of murder or manslaughter.[68] International bodies such as the United Nations and the European Union stress the importance of addressing GBV, including femicide, through initiatives designed to identify femicides (Name it), enhance understanding (Know it), and develop effective measures to eradicate it (Stop it).[69] In light of these recommendations, journalists have the opportunity to incorporate the term 'femicide' into their reporting, ultimately leading to a more informed public discourse and effective policy responses.

Overall, the analysis of femicide reporting in DM2021 reveals significant omissions that expose a broader narrative 'silence'—affecting not only 'who' is reported but also 'what' remains unaddressed. The underreporting of older women can be linked to ageist biases that trivialise their experiences, rendering them as less significant or impactful. Similarly, the lack of coverage for foreign women may reflect racial and immigration-related prejudices, marginalising their victimisation and promoting a limited view of femicide that ignores the intricate intersections of race, nationality, and gender. Such omissions obscure the systemic nature of femicide, often rooted in misogyny and power dynamics that transcend age and race. By focusing on individual perpetrators or specific victim profiles, reporting can reinforce harmful stereotypes and hinder a comprehensive understanding of this issue. A broader perspective is essential to effectively address femicide and drive meaningful social change.

5.5 Conclusions: How Can the Problem be Questioned, Disrupted, and Replaced?

The analysis of the Daily Mail's coverage reveals a persistent tendency to frame femicide as an isolated act perpetrated by mentally disturbed individuals. By focusing on perpetrators' mental health and employing narratives of 'love gone wrong',[70] the tabloid obscures the systemic roots of these crimes in misogyny and gender inequality. This approach perpetuates harmful stereotypes and undermines public understanding of femicide as a form of gender-based violence. As one of the UK's most widely read newspapers, the Daily Mail holds significant influence over public opinion. Therefore, its framing of femicide not only reflects but also reinforces prevailing biases, contributing to a distorted public perception that downplays the broader societal factors at play.

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[66] Yvonne Roberts, "End Femicide".
[67] EIGE, "Measuring Femicide in the United Kingdom".
[68] Ibid.
[69] OHCHR, 'Femicide Watch Initiative', OHCHR (2015), www.ohchr.org, accessed 4 May 2024.
[70] Gabriela Torres, "Writing Terror on the Bodies of Women: Media coverage of violence against women in Guatemala", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 52.4 (2020), 837-838, DOI: DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X20001054.

While The Daily Mail generally excels in using active voice constructions to name perpetrators and hold them 'grammatically' accountable—thereby framing femicide as an issue of 'men killing women' rather than 'women being killed by men'—its selective representation of victims and its failure to explicitly recognise femicides as a distinct crime leave a gap in the portrayal. This framing both reflects and reinforces a broader societal reluctance to acknowledge femicide as GBV, marginalising certain categories of victims and failing to present a complete picture of the crime. To address this issue, a more inclusive reporting approach is needed, one that ensures all victims, regardless of age or ethnicity, receive attention. This would highlight the widespread nature of femicide and ensure that marginalised groups are not overlooked, fostering a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the issue.

To "question, disrupt, and change" this problematic representation (Q.6), there must be a shift towards news coverage that contextualises femicide within the broader framework of gender inequality and societal norms. This entails recognising and highlighting patterns and commonalities across cases, rather than treating them as isolated incidents. By portraying each femicide as an individual event with no broader implications for the general public, the Daily Mail's representation suggests that "gender-based violence is merely a by-product of complicated and challenging relationships between equals".[71] This perspective diminishes the systemic nature of gender-based violence and obscures its root causes.

What is left unspoken is that before punishment, there could be prevention. News outlets, including the Daily Mail, often prioritise sensationalised reporting of femicides after they occur, rather than proactively educating the public on how to prevent them.[72] In the case of the corpus under examination, this approach might have been influenced by the Daily Mail's right-wing perspective, which can lean more towards retribution than preventative measures.[73] However, it is important to emphasise that since news coverage can function as an echo chamber, news reporting could be used as a weapon against the dominant public representation of femicides and of gendered violence as a whole. Paraphrasing the Council of Europe's campaign against sexism, once violence is "seen", it should be "named" for what it is, and also "stopped".[74]

In this regard, the International Federation of Journalists' Guidelines[75] provides critical insights on how to disrupt the problematic representation of femicide. To achieve this, journalists should employ accurate, non-judgmental language, avoiding sensationalism and excessive details while ensuring sufficient information is provided to maintain the integrity of the case. News coverage should consciously avoid all forms of victim-blaming, whether implicit or explicit, and should not suggest that the tragedy is inevitable.[76] Instead, journalists should frame femicide as a manifestation of deeply entrenched social issues. Upholding confidentiality and respecting victims is paramount, yet it is equally important for reporters to engage with experts and women's organisations to provide comprehensive, informed perspectives. Articles should also include information about accessing local support networks. This would allow news reporting to promote an alternative narrative that emphasises prevention and support, reinforcing the understanding that femicide is a preventable structural issue rather than an inescapable tragedy.[77]

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[71] Council of Europe, "*Guidelines on Gender Equality and Violence against Women for Armenian Journalists and Media Workers*" (2020), www.rm.coe.int, accessed 4 May 2024.

[72] Monica Gerber and Jonathan Jackson, "Authority and Punishment: On the Ideological Basis of Punitive Attitudes towards Criminals", *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* (2015), 1-28, DOI: 10.1080/13218719.2015.1034060.

[73] Darren Kelsey, "Defining the 'Sick Society': Discourses of Class and Morality in British Right-Wing Newspapers during the 2011 England Riots", *Capital & Class* 39.2 (2015), 243-264, DOI:10.1177/0309816815583393.

[74] Council of Europe, "Sexism: See it, Name it, Stop it", *Human Rights Channel* (2020), www.coe.int, accessed 4 May 2024.

[75] International Federation of Journalists, "International Guidelines on Reporting on Violence Against Women" (2021).

[76] Ibid.

[77] Caterina Peroni, "Gender-Based Violence and 'Feminicide' in Queer Italian Movements: Questioning Gender, Sexuality, and the (Hetero)normative Order", *Oñati Socio-legal Series*, 5.6 (2015), 1557-1579.

While this study does not explore the link between the psychological impacts of COVID-19 and VAW, it is plausible that the lockdowns gave women more opportunity to reflect on their relationships and consider alternative futures. The pandemic has raised concerns about its potential to exacerbate existing triggers, which, rather than serving as mere excuses, may have intensified the challenges faced by individuals in abusive situations. Lockdown measures, intended to control the virus, inadvertently restricted women's access to support networks and options for escaping abusive environments. However, it is important to recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic did not create new tendencies towards violent behaviour in individuals who were not previously predisposed to such actions. Instead, it likely intensified existing dynamics of control, hatred, abuse, or violence within relationships.[78] Thus, while acknowledging the heightened risks posed by the pandemic, particularly for women and children who endured confinement with an abuser, attention must remain on addressing the underlying dynamics of intimate partner violence beyond the immediate context of the pandemic.

This study does not claim to be exhaustive or representative of all UK news reporting. However, the corpus analysed provides valuable insights into dominant narratives about femicide and highlights the potential for widespread harm through widely accessible media outlets. While the Daily Mail's coverage shows some alignment with the UN's call for local 'femicide watches'[79] in terms of reporting frequency and perpetrator identification, it continues to predominantly frame these crimes as driven by jealousy, mental illness, or victim/institutional blame. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these issues are not exclusive to the Daily Mail, underscoring the necessity for broader media analysis. The prevailing media landscape highlights the significant work needed to foster a more nuanced and gender-sensitive representation of femicide and violence against women, which is fundamental to addressing the underlying societal causes.

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[78] Ingala Smith, "Coronavirus Doesn't Cause Men's Violence Against Women".
[79] OHCHR, "Femicide Watch Initiative".