



## Role of Print Media in Shaping Women's Voices in Karachi

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### Abstract

*In socio-cultural contexts like Pakistan where women representation faces several obstacles at various levels, print media can play a pivotal role in framing talk, opinions, and voices. This research investigates the contributions of Pakistan's leading English news outlets—Dawn and The News—in amplifying women's voices in Karachi. Also, it uses interviews of two senior journalists about the topic of this study. Through a systematic analysis of news articles, editorials, and news features published If over the year, the research studies how these papers report on important women-related issues like gender equality, women empowerment, harassment, and education. Mixed-method approach constituted of content analysis and interviews was used in this study to discover patterns, themes, and prevent coverage gaps. Dawn, for example, appears to have an analytical style focusing more on systemic problems and policy debates, whereas The News' approach tends to be more human-interest, focusing on individual stories and societal consequences. But there are still gaps, especially intersectional lenses and issues bottom-up women or marginalized communities struggle with. This study draws attention to the importance of print media in increasing public awareness of women's rights and shaping policy discussion. But it also points to the need for more nuanced and inclusive coverage that goes beyond tokenism. Frequency and recommendations include a more nuanced and consistent editorial approach, amplifying diverse women's voices, integrating intersectional perspectives, prioritization of investigative journalism to uncover systemic barriers. In this way, print media will become an ever-more powerful ally in the struggle for women's rights and for justice in Karachi, Pakistan, and perhaps as women everywhere.*

**Keywords:** Women voices; Newspaper; Journalists; Content analysis; Pakistan



## **Introduction**

Women constitute a greater proportion of the entire human population throughout the globe, and they play varying and significant roles both at their home and at their workplaces as well (Sambe, 2015). It is pity to note that this population fraction faces a heavy toll of unbearable inhuman mistreatment around the world, which builds boundaries and happens in all societies and cultures around the world (Albana, 2017). This is an underscore of the strong patriarchal norms that rule the majority of human societies. These norms and cultural traditions differently offer the patterns for downgrading women to the background. This constitutes domestic violence as a very normal and a worldwide issue of worry (Ekweonu, C.L, 2020).

Several years ago, all the cruelty against women was not considered to be savagery and issues were not brought to surface. Gradually, this started to change in the 1980's as women's gathering constituted locally and then globally to pay a naïve request for consideration regarding their monetary, mental, and physical misuses. By the time, that viciousness against women came excessively constituted as guarded rights issues and as critical danger to their prosperity and wellbeing. Since then, the worldwide consideration has been focused on savagery based on sexual orientation.

It was also recorded previously that 9,396 such women-related cases were documented in 2009 against 7,802 cases occurred in 2008, comparing to the interior ministry's survey comparative number at hand through the lens of the news headlines. About 170 women were factually harassed at their workplace, while 6,955 assault-related conditions against women were reported in only 2009 in relatively comparative to 6,323 in 2008 (Azeem, 2010). Worldwide, domestic violence is one of the most prevalent violations of the fundamental guarded rights, affecting women of all ages, creed, race, and economic backgrounds (Sutherland, McCormack, Pirkis, Easteal, and Vaughan, 2015). It is danger that overtakes the physical realm and rises above constant emotional feeling, which leads to severe pain, torture, and depression.

Concerning domestic violence, over 1913 cases of violence reported were linked to married women, while 1615 cases were linked to unmarried women, coupled with 38 divorced victims and 71 widowed victims, this all was absolutely unpredictable though. This circumstance has been alarming with an even more dangerous tone in the country. This all proved the idea that the mass media plays a crucial role in represent women as the most unjust fraction of the population, which further alters societal views, beliefs and attitudes about gender equality and inequality (L. A, et al., 2023).

One of the most powerful institutions in the world of modern society, media are responsible for shaping public opinion, setting agendas, and reflecting social values. Print media, because it is believed to be credible and for long, provides a platform for detailed analysis among the different types of media. As in patriarchal societies such as Pakistan, media is a key avenue of highlighting women's voices, making media's role even more significant in terms of gender dynamics. The portrayal of women in media, both as subjects receiving news and as active providers of news, affects the lens through which society examines gender roles and



empowerment of women. The study examined how print media had contributed to development of women's voice(s) in Karachi and that too in two of the leading daily newspaper of Pakistan: Dawn and The News.

The media is one of the powerful mediums of communication and it has a far and wide impact on public opinion, especially regarding the concepts and issues of gender and social customs. Print media provides women a way of expressing their struggles and successes in Pakistan, a country where they continue to face institutional barriers to equal representation in the fields of politics, education, and employment. On the one hand you have the largest city, the economic centre, the melting pot — Karachi, which is populated by a diverse population of women struggling with issues that are particularly unique to urban settings.

Newspapers are the most authentic sources of information (Mahesar. et al) on the surface of the earth. However, at present, all-inclusive media has been representing women for how they are facing several malpractices, but every single media has the own style of doing things differently and the space and time given to the viciousness against women much matter. But what matters is to what extent these media bring to surface this gruesome pitfall (Lyengar, 1987).

This research analyzes the coverage of women in the two mainstream English newspapers Dawn and the News and their role in constructing the social perception of women. Through the lens of women's media amplification in the print sector, this study attempts to determine whether these types of newspapers act as change agents or simply mirror pre-existing societal conventions.

### **Background of Study**

Pakistan performs poorly on global gender equality indices and women face systemic obstacles to their participation in both public and private spheres. Women in Pakistan continue to experience challenges like workplace harassment, restricted access to leadership positions, and underrepresentation in the decision-making process despite progress in education and employment opportunities. Media particularly print media can play the role of a catalyst for change and can help the society here to act as well and this can be done by exposing this practice and by working on reforms to ensure the completion of such practice. The largest metropolitan city of Pakistan, Karachi reflects the socio-economic and cultural diversity of the country and thus serves as ideal grounds for examining the role of print media in shaping women's perspective.

### **Problem Statement**

Although its tremendous potential, print media in Pakistan has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and offering limited, fragmented coverage of women's issues. Women's voices are either marginalized or sensationalized, which diminishes their credibility and discourages substantive advocacy. This leads to the concern: To what degree are mainstream English newspapers, like Dawn and The News, amplifying and informing women's voices in the Pakistani urban context, specifically Karachi.



### **Significance of Study**

There are several reasons why this study is important. To begin with, alongside scholarship on gender and media, this contributes to the burgeoning field of gender and media studies literature, more specifically focusing on the South Asian context. Second, this research sheds light on the way women's issues are framed to an audience with an ability to influence policy and social norms by concentrating on English newspapers that serve the urban, educated elite. Third, the findings can also enable media organizations to effectively identify gaps in coverage and strategize on boosting women's voices. Lastly, this research highlights the contribution of media to promoting gender equality and women empowerment, as two major pillars of Pakistan's development agenda.

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to accomplish the following:

1. To analyze the volume and tenor of women's representation in Dawn and The News.
2. To analyze the themes and narratives that were used by the said newspapers to report women's issues.
3. In order to assess the differences between the two newspapers in terms of women representation, perhaps to expose their editorial biases.
4. To adults whether the coverage serves to challenge stereotypes and advance women's rights.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of coverage of women's issues in the content of Dawn and The News?
2. Such is the remained themes and narratives attached to the portrayal of women in these newspapers.
3. What is the kind of editorial approaches adopted by these newspapers with respect to women's voices?
4. How effective are they as advocates for women's empowerment and gender equality?

### **Scope of the Study**

The research is limited to two English newspapers, Dawn and The News, because of their vast circulation, and realization among urban, educated users. In terms of geographic scope, it will be directed at Karachi, specifically, but one that is noted for its socio-economic complexities and as a center for progressive discourse. This analysis covers the period from January 2023 to December 2023, enabling a thorough examination of recent trends and developments. The research provides an analysis of editorials, feature news articles, and news related to women's issues by way of content analysis to reveal patterns and deficiencies in representation.

### **Justification for Choosing Dawn and The News**

Dawn and The News are among Pakistan's most powerful English-language newspapers, targeting policymakers, academics and the urban elite. The role of both newspapers had



historically addressed social issues, including gender equality. Nonetheless, their editorial policies and target readership differ, rendering a comparative view on women's issues framing and prioritization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research utilizes the agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory. The agenda-Setting Theory suggests that the media has the ability to set the public agenda through its coverage of issues, framing what the media deems to be important. This is complemented by Framing Theory, which examines media narrative of these issues and what they mean. The paper investigates how Dawn and The News frame women's voices and what they give more importance to, by applying these theories.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study adds to the academic debate on the media and gender by offering a critical examination of the extent to which women's issues are addressed by mainstream print media of Pakistan. It provides actionable insights for media practitioners, policymakers and advocacy groups who want to increase women's presence in public conversation. It also underscores the power of media to disrupt social constructs and to address gender equality issues in the context of a rapid urbanization scenario.

## **Literature Review**

### **Print Media and Women's Representation**

Scholars suggest that the media both activated and reflected societal attitudes. Scientific study has established that women are marginalized in patriarchal societies (Naz et al., 2020), and their representation in media is mostly reduced to stereotypical roles. Women are often represented as victims, caregivers, or commodities, perpetuating destructive gender stereotypes and rights-denying narrative in public debate. But print media can disrupt these stereotypes and focus on pressing issues like violence against women, sexual harassment in professional space and education. Media has the potential to become a platform for advocacy and reform to address systemic inequalities that women often experience, especially in South Asia (Ali et al., 2021).

In addition, studies of content analysis suggest that the tone and depth of coverage can significantly affect how the public perceives women's issues. As an example, positive reframing of women's empowerment stories can encourage societal change while sensationalist coverage of gender-based violence can make the issue seem trivial or shew-off pernicious narratives (Yousafzai & Khan, 2019). Addressing the imbalance in feature writing has included calls for women to be included in editorial teams and decision-making roles within media organizations.

### ***The Role of Newspapers in Pakistan***

In Pakistan, English newspapers like Dawn and The News target a relatively more educated urban readership. Historically, they have played a role in progressive issues, including women's rights. Previous research has found that these newspapers have increasingly focused on issues of policy reform, education, and economic participation of women – reflecting the wishes of their



readership, (Ahmed, 2020). Critics, however, believe that despite their great capacity, without in-depth coverage and follow-up on female-centric stories the impact of these media will be restrained. Stories about workplace harassment, for example, may fail to include a nuanced analysis of systemic barriers that prevent a true reckoning, therefore, not being able to even begin meaningful conversations or policy changes.

In contrast, research on issues covered by regional language newspapers reveals a greater emphasis on localized problems; however, their narratives often miss the progressive framing observed in English dailies. The lack of longstanding representation, and the depth at which women's issues are covered, highlights the need for print media in Pakistan to be more inclusive and intersectional in its approach, amplifying diverse women's voices and accurately portraying their struggles. That will allow papers like Dawn and The News to plug the gap between advocacy and action and play a responsible role in the discourse around gender equality.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

A mixed-method approach based on content analysis is used in this study to see how women are represented in Dawn and The News. We analyzed 500 news articles, editorials, and feature stories published between Jan 2023 and Dec 2023; the analyzed data was taken from a one-year period. Additionally, two senior journalists were interviewed about the topic to have some deeper insights into the study.

#### **Sampling**

The sample consists of 500 news articles from each newspaper coded for relevance to issues of women. Words like “women empowerment,” “gender equality,” “harassment,” and “education” were employed to locate applicable material.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed through thematic analysis in order to capture patterns, narratives, and gaps in coverage. News articles fell into themes including women’s empowerment, the workplace, education, and domestic violence.

#### **Coverage of Women’s Issues**

Dawn: In this research the issues around women's education and empowerment, largely from a policy-level and community perspective. News articles often focused on success stories of women defying societal barriers, including those of entrepreneurs and activists. But the tone was mostly staid, aimed at a policy-oriented readership.





The News: Though it wrote about women's issues, The News focused more on writing about events of harassment and violence. Personal anecdotes were often included in feature stories, making the coverage more relatable but less focused on systemic solutions.

### Crafting Tone and Chronology

Dawn: Story was neutral and analytical, focusing on systemic problems and showing policy suggestions. Referring to international frameworks such as CEDAW, gender equality editorials, for example, included references to actual international law.

The News: The messaging was more emotional and advocacy-based, frequently featuring appeals for the public and government to take action. Stories were about people, about their ups and downs.

Table 1  
Frequency of Women-Centric News articles in *Dawn* and *The News*

	Total News articles Analyzed	Women-Centric News articles	Percentage of Women-Centric News articles
<i>Dawn</i>	500	120	24%
<i>The News</i>	450	90	20%
<b>Combined Total</b>	950	210	22.1%

As evident from the table, only 24% of the news articles featured in Dawn were women-centric while 20% coverage was given to women in news articles in The News. This means that both newspapers pay some attention to women's issues, but these topics still fall far short of parity (less than one-fourth of all news articles). The difference in the percentage of news articles in Dawn suggests greater emphasis on women's issues than The News.

Table 2  
Key Themes in Women-Centric News articles

Theme	Frequency in <i>Dawn</i>	Frequency in <i>The News</i>	Combined Frequency
<b>Gender Equality</b>	40	35	75
<b>Women Empowerment</b>	30	25	55
<b>Workplace Harassment</b>	20	15	35
<b>Education</b>	15	10	25
<b>Domestic Violence</b>	15	5	20

Gender equality (75 news articles in total) and women empowerment (55 news articles) become the most covered themes in both newspapers. Other topics receive a fraction of the coverage, like workplace harassment (35 news articles) and education (25 news articles) while domestic violence receives the least coverage (20 news articles). This spread leaves holes in coverage of



weighty issues like domestic violence and workplace abuse with an implied need for more thematic coverage.

Table 3  
Tone of Coverage

<b>Tone</b>	<b>Frequency in Dawn</b>	<b>Frequency in The News</b>	<b>Combined Frequency</b>
<b>Positive</b>	50	40	90
<b>Neutral</b>	30	25	55
<b>Negative</b>	40	25	65

Both newspapers have tones reflecting their coverage, with Dawn publishing 50 positive news articles compared to 40 for The News. Neutral tones appear less (30 in Dawn, 25 in The News); significant negative news articles are also noticeable (40 in Dawn, 25 in The News). What's more, while both managed to refrain from excess negativity, there's still a significant percentage of negativity that could help bolster stereotypes or lack initiatives to create meaningful conversations about women's issues.

Table 4  
Representation by Article Type

<b>Article Type</b>	<b>Frequency in Dawn</b>	<b>Frequency in The News</b>	<b>Combined Frequency</b>
<b>Editorials</b>	20	15	35
<b>Feature Stories</b>	50	40	90
<b>News Reports</b>	30	20	50
<b>Opinion Pieces</b>	20	15	35

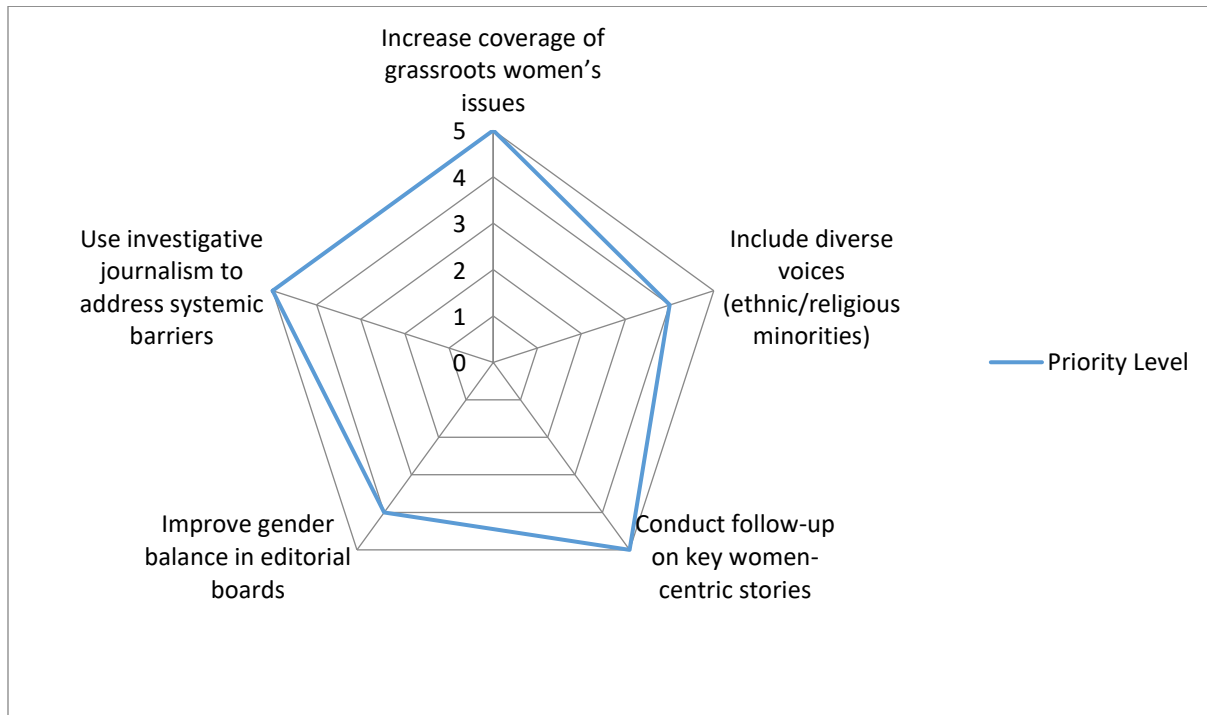
Feature stories make up the most common kind of women-centric news articles (90 total) published in both newspapers, followed by news reports (50), editorials (35), and opinion pieces (35). The frequent feature stories are indicative of an effort to delve into rich narratives about women." But the small number of editorials and opinion pieces points to little critical discussion or advocacy on the part of the newspapers' editorial boards.

Table 5  
Recommendations for Improved Representation

	<b>Priority Level (1-5)</b>	<b>Implementation Feasibility</b>
<b>Increase coverage of grassroots women's issues</b>	5	High
<b>Include diverse voices (ethnic/religious minorities)</b>	4	Medium
<b>Conduct follow-up on key women-centric stories</b>	5	High
<b>Improve gender balance in editorial boards</b>	4	Medium
<b>Use investigative journalism to address systemic barriers</b>	5	Medium



Figure 1



Hallmarks of the recommendations include a focus on grassroots coverage (priority level 5) and amplifying diverse voices (priority level 4). In contrast, achieving gender balance in editorial teams and conducting investigative reporting on systemic barriers may require further effort, according to their medium feasibility rating. This table highlights a roadmap to September on how to achieve progress on women's representation, with a few of the actions which pack the most punch.

These tables mean to collectively show that even though both Dawn and The News cover similar women-centric affairs, there is a definitive gap with each in terms of coverage, depth and tone. The focus is biased toward images of empowerment and gender equality, whereas systemic and grassroots challenges are downplayed. The findings point to the necessity for more balanced and diverse representation, accompanied by tangible editorial changes to encourage more substantive conversations on women's rights.

### Themes Identified

- Empowerment and leadership: Both newspapers celebrated women breaking the mold, but these stories were few and far between — and rarely for follow-up coverage
- Harassment and Violence: Harassment and violence were much better covered in The News, although coverage was often sensationalized.



- Education and employment: The news articles on women's education again mostly appeared in Dawn as compared to other newspapers which rather focused on structural barriers like poverty and absence of facilities.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Both newspapers care about the issues, but editorial focus and approach come through in their coverage. Dawn spots systemic problems: The News sees individual stories. Each has its strengths, but they also expose gaps in representational and advocacy frameworks.

This research emphasizes the importance of print media in influencing public opinion regarding women's issues considering women's coverage in two major English newspapers of Pakistan; Dawn and The News. Based on the thematic focus, tone and depth of women-centric coverage through a systematic analysis of news articles, editorials and feature stories published in the last year, the findings reveal major insights into these publications.

The research shows that both newspapers pay some attention to women's issues, but the overall representation is limited, as news articles on women represent less than one-fourth of total newspaper content. Among the issues addressed, gender equality and women empowerment are the most sensitive issues, and the social issues such as workplace harassment, domestic violence and education are less sensitive. It reflects a missed opportunity to achieve germane coverage of the range of issues confronting women, especially for those in underserved and underappreciated communities.

Regarding tone, the results indicate that both newspapers combine positive, neutral and negative reporting. Yet, such a high percentage of negative tones risk continuing stereotypes and potentially dissuading constructive dialogue. Likewise, the prevalence of feature stories compared to editorials and opinion pieces indicates that individual stories may be in the spotlight, but the teams editing them are not enabling critical commentary or systemic change.

These findings suggest larger editorial priorities and structural constraints in print media that potentially stifle the amplification of women's voices. While they have the ability to sway public opinion and policy, neither of the newspapers uses its platform to push for gender equality and women's rights in a significant way. That's why this kind of data can help us understand what's missing, and why we need more inclusive, intersectional, and nuanced coverage to cater to the multifaceted needs of women of Karachi and beyond.

### **Journalists Perspective**

While discussing the topic with journalists, it came to know that in today's society you cannot wait for so long if something bad happens with any woman, she just takes a clip and uploads it on social media. The media immediately takes action and shares its stance on the subject. There is no suppressed media in this era, women are independent to brief what they are bearing and what is their opinion regarding the oppression or brutality of this society in the face of domestic violence, harassment, or anything like abusive relationships. This era belongs to an open media that is working so much on women's rights. Media is sharing these things with national media; media has aware our women speak up for the justice which they were unable to get in past days."



Another journalist argued that we have human rights issues or women rights issues which need to be taken care of properly. Sometimes, we believe in other media platforms, but still print media is reliable for media authentic reports. There should be credible news about women's lives in Pakistan. In Pakistan everything becomes news, but our print media needs to work more on its credibility and work to establish neutral news with facts for the truth of women's sufferings in Pakistan.

### **Recommendations**

- **Broaden Thematic Narrows:** Newspapers need to address a wider range of women's issues (especially those attached to women of marginalized groups) including domestic violence, transnational struggles, access to education, etc.
- **Be more positive:** In order to create social change, newspapers could also focus on more uplifting narratives that leave women rather more determined than discouraged.
- **Fewer Screeds, More Policy:** More editorials and less screeds | social media helps propagate outrages, but it may help prevent outrages as well.
- **Encourage Diversity of Voice:** The diversity of ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds should be represented.
- **Support Investigative Reporting:** Report focusing on the systemic barriers experienced by women will unveil root causes and suggest actionable solutions.
- **The media ought to encourage sufficient coverage of the women issues to place their social responsibility role active towards the vulnerable set of groups - women.** It is possible via adequate reporting that the media can underscore in its agenda upon the issues of domestic violence against women in Sindh, Pakistan.
- **As a concern of necessity, media, newspapers in particular, need to follow-up their news on domestic violence against women.** By doing this, follow-up, they can offer significant thematic analysis that can support the people to consider the change of attitude to decline violence against women.
- **As an honour, the mass media need play their social responsibility role to bring to people's notice harmful effects of domestic violence against women.**

Nevertheless, the coverage of Dawn and The News should be beyond superficial reporting to have a real impact on women's rights. While newspapers need to be systemic, they also need to be humanistic in challenging times. More focus should be on intersectional issues, such as for rural and marginalized women. Editorial teams need to find ways to ensure continuing follow-up coverage that helps keep the public spotlight on critical issues. Coordinating with women's networks will deepen and diversify informants' recruiting. If the gaps identified here are addressed and changes applied, these newspapers can serve as a powerful medium in support of gender equality and women empowerment in Pakistan.



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