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Patriarchal discourse, episodic journalism, and ideological stances in newspapers' femicide news in Türkiye: A case study of Başak Cengiz murder



Türkiye'de kadın cinayeti haberlerinde eril söylem, epizodik habercilik ve gazetelerin ideolojik duruşu: Bir vaka analizi olarak Başak Cengiz cinayeti

Rukiye Serttaş¹ & Barışkan Ünal²

¹ Public Servant, Ankara, Türkiye

² Journalist, Ankara, Türkiye

Abstract

News coverage of violence against women frequently employs patriarchal discourse that implicitly justifies male perpetrators, especially in cases involving known relationships. Violence against women is also legitimized by focusing on victim-blaming notions, such as women's attire and behaviors. This study examines whether patriarchal discourse persists in Turkish news coverage even when victim and perpetrator have no prior connection and discriminatory justifications based on women's attire are irrelevant. Additionally, recognizing the significant role of framing in news stories in shaping public discourse, this study explores framing strategies adopted by Turkish newspapers in reporting femicide and investigates whether these frames differ according to newspapers' ideological orientations. Integrating van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis and Iyengar's framing approach, this study analyzes news stories from 12 national newspapers regarding the murder of Başak Cengiz by an unfamiliar male perpetrator. Findings reveal that patriarchal language consistently, legitimizing male violence irrespective of the relationship between the parties. In the absence of traditional victim-blaming narratives, the press constructed alternative myth centered on perceived female vulnerability. Furthermore, the analyzed newspapers predominantly utilized episodic framing with thematic framing primarily observed in left-leaning newspapers. Some right-wing newspapers chose not to report on the femicide unless they have political relevance.

Öz

Kadın cinayetleri haberlerinde kadın ile erkek arasında tanıdıklık bağı olduğunda erkeği haklılaştıran ve masumlaştıran söylemlerin baskınlığı dikkati çekmektedir. Aynı zamanda, kıyafeti gibi kadına yönelik suçlayıcı yaklaşımın olduğu da görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada, taraflar arasında tanıdıklık bağı olmadığında ve kadının görünümü gibi meşrulaştırma araçları olmadığında haberlerde ataeril söylemin devam edip etmediğinin araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Ayrıca, haberlerin çerçevelenme şekli olayların kamuoyu tarafından nasıl algılanacağını etkilemektedir. Araştırma, bu konudaki haberlerin hangi çerçevede ele alındığının ve çerçevelemenin gazetelerin ideolojik duruşuna göre değişip değişmediğinin incelenmesi de amaçlanmıştır. Bu noktada, Başak Cengiz'in tanımadığı bir erkek tarafından öldürülmesine dair 12 ulusal basındaki haberler, Van Dijk'in söylem analizi ve Iyengar'ın haber çerçeveleme yaklaşımıyla incelenmiştir. Araştırmada, kadın cinayeti haberlerinde medyanın erkeği masumlaştıran ve meşrulaştıran dilinin kurban ile saldırgan arasında tanışıklık olmadığında da değişmediği ve kadının dış görünüşüne dair ayrımcı söylemler inşa edilemediğinde, bu kez 'kadının zayıflığı' mitinin devreye girdiği tespit edilmiştir. Türk basınının, kadın cinayetinde epizodik habercilik yürüttüğü, tematik haberciliği daha çok sol eğilimli gazetelerin sergilediği, bazı sağ/muhafazakâr eğilimli gazetelerde kadın cinayeti konusunun siyasetin konusu olmadıkça yer dahi bulmadığı görülmüştür.

Keywords

Femicide • Basak Cengiz • Turkish press • discourse, framing.



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Corresponding author | Sorumlu Yazar: Barışkan Ünal bariskan_unal@hotmail.com



Anahtar Türk basını • kadın cinayeti • Başak Cengiz • çerçeveleme • söylem.
Kelimeler

Patriarchal discourse, episodic journalism, and ideological stances in newspapers' femicide news in Türkiye: A case study of Başak Cengiz murder

As Violence Against Women (VAW) is a deeply embedded in gender norms reinforced by patriarchal structures and perpetuated through myths and narratives surrounding male-female relationships, discourse and framing of the press significantly influences societal perceptions, influencing public responses to VAW and femicide. In Türkiye, research highlights the frequent use of familial or relational justifications in news narratives for male violence, particularly in cases involving intimate partners or relatives (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Basdogan, et al., 2021). Additionally, discriminatory narratives rooted in societal stereotypes, such as references to the woman's attire, are employed to legitimize VAW (Bayhantopçu, 2017; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Binark & Bek, 2007; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Alat, 2006), as it were raised in some femicide cases in Türkiye (Bayhantopçu, 2017; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Binark & Bek, 2007; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Alat, 2006). These context prompts important questions: does similar patriarchal discourse persist in news coverage of femicide in Turkish media when the victim and perpetrator are strangers, called as stranger femicide, and are discriminatory justifications still employed when narratives based on the victim's attire or appearance are irrelevant?

This study addresses these questions through an analysis of news coverage concerning the murder of Başak Cengiz, chosen specifically because the perpetrator was unknown to her and she was a young conservative woman wearing a headscarf, precluding traditional discriminatory justifications based on appearance. Employing van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines the enactment, reproduction, and legitimization of social inequalities through media texts (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 466), and Iyengar's (1990) framing theory, highlighting how news framing influences public perceptions, this research investigates initial reporting by CDA, and follow-up stories by framing strategies and the impact of newspapers' ideological orientations.

This research contributes to academic literature by analyzing patriarchal language in an atypical femicide scenario, and shedding light on journalistic practices on framing in Türkiye, and enriching scholarly dialogue on media representations, journalistic responsibility, and societal responses to VAW.

State of Violence Against Women

The United Nations (United Nations, 1993) defines VAW as any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, whether occurring in public or in private life. In Türkiye, Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of VAW explicitly defines it as "gender-based discrimination directed against a woman just because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately, and any attitude and behavior violating the human rights of women" (Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye, 2012). VAW manifests in various forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse (Kara & Uluç, 2019, p. 1569). In Türkiye, VAW and femicide is common as more than 2.500 women died from VAW between 2016 and 2021 (We Will Stop the Violence, 2016-2021).

Various theoretical approaches explain VAW, including biological explanations, feminist theories (liberal, radical, Marxist, decolonial), psychological theories (e.g., psychopathology, personality disorders, negative self-concept), and sociological theories (e.g., social learning, social deterrence). Feminist theories often link violence to masculinities, viewing violence as a method men use to assert and maintain control over women (Carrabine et al., 2009, p. 200). Sociologists attribute the roots of violence to environmental factors and social structures (Aytaç et al., 2016, p. 278), associating it with men's physical dominance and distorted societal perceptions of women's roles and status (Ghanbarlou, 2020, p. 61). Psychological theories propose that the actions of perpetrators are the result of childhood experiences (e.g., being abused as a child); personality traits (e.g., extreme need for power and control); personality disturbances (e.g., borderline personality disorder); suffering head injuries; psychopathology (e.g., antisocial personality disorder); or other psychological issues such as posttraumatic stress disorder, poor impulse control, or poor self-esteem (Niyas, 2023). Corradi et al. (2016) also categorize the different research approaches to femicide as follows: a feminist approach confronting patriarchal domination while investigating femicide; a sociological approach examining specific features distinguishing femicide; a criminological approach defining femicide as a unique category within homicide studies; a human rights approach expanding femicide beyond lethal acts to include extreme gender-based violence; and a decolonial approach analyzing femicide within contexts of colonial domination, such as "honor crimes" (p. 979).

The causes of VAW and femicide are situated within the relationships between women and men embedded in patriarchal systems, compounded by economic, cultural, and sociological factors (Akkaş & Uyanık, 2016, p. 37). While patriarchal norms significantly influence issues related to VAW, other social factors—including learned and internalized norms and societal myths—also play a crucial role. Hence, theories should be approached as a cohesive and interconnected framework.

Moreover, attitudes toward VAW are shaped by various factors at all levels of society (Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 137), and prevalent societal attitudes justify, tolerate or condone VAW, frequently blaming women for the violence they experience (World Health Organization, 2012, p. 3) to sustain gender roles and hierarchical structures within societies (Antmen, 2023, p. 504; Flood & Pease, 2009, p. 128). Therefore, widespread "harmful beliefs" perpetuate VAW and are cited as justifications for VAW, such as "improperly" performing household chores, not being submissive and deliberately disobeying, appearing in public unaccompanied, perceived malice, dressing "provocatively," having "incorrect" behavior, etc. (Hortaçsu, et al., 2003; Özçakır et al., 2008; Ercan, 2009; Flood & Pease, 2009; van Veen et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2012).

Media plays a critical dual role—as both a significant influencer capable of raising public awareness about VAW and femicide, and as a potential perpetrator of those harmful beliefs, and patriarchal ideologies. This highlights the importance of examining how media portrays VAW.

Violence Against Women in the Turkish media

The media plays a critical role in informing the public about social issues. While universal principles such as accuracy, objectivity, and impartiality are emphasized in news reporting, news are not merely information, but stories that convey societal narratives, and construct myths and discourses through framing and choice of language. Myths have long reinforced societal norms and rules, and Lule (2001) describes daily news as the "primary vehicle for myth in our time." He notes, "Other mass media can tell myth, but the news, when studied carefully, reveals numerous, numinous links to myth" (p. 19). Journalists, consciously or unconsciously, "draw upon the universally understood stock of archetypal stories" (Lule, 2001, p. 33) to contextualize news. Therefore, the "reality" constructed by the media is "designed and reproduced within economic, cultural and societal frameworks" (Atuk, 2021, p. 268), and often embodies a patriarchal perspective (Arslan, 2017, p. 143).

Driven by circulation concerns, media frequently presents news related to violence sensationally—a practice dating back to the era of "yellow journalism" (Ünal, 2021, pp. 52-54). In Türkiye, VAW is typically categorized as "page three news," written sensationally, with presenting overwhelming majority (82%) as isolated incidents (Altun & Bek Gencel, 2013; İnam & Şahin, 2020; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020). The Turkish press often provides excessive details about the violent act itself, employs passive language concerning women, and neglects the societal, economic, cultural, and legal dimensions of VAW (Arslan, 2017; Binark & Bek, 2010; İnam & Şahin, 2020; Uçak, 2020; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020). Besides, news stories about VAW rely heavily on police or judicial sources (Altun & Bek Gencel, 2013, p. 9), information is also gathered from neighbors or male acquaintances of the victim (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015, p. 178). Given that perpetrators may offer self-justifying narratives, news stories often inadvertently reflect the perpetrator's narrative and justifications.

Familial ties are emphasized both in headlines and content, reinforcing traditional gender roles (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015, p. 180). When victims and perpetrators are acquainted, factors such as infidelity, the woman's wish to divorce, or her refusal to conform to traditional domestic roles, such as not cooking or doing laundry are cited as justifications for violence (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015, pp. 179-180; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020, p. 136; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015, p. 43; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022, p. 92; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019, p. 951; Basdogan, et al., 2021). Besides, news stories associate male violence with appearance, actions, or words of women, suggesting that women create environments conducive to violence, particularly if women are perceived as stepping outside of societal norms, implicitly legitimizing perpetrators (Binark & Bek, 2007, p. 167; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015, p. 178; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019, p. 951, 954; Alat, 2006, p. 303; Bayhantopçu, 2017, p. 89; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013, p. 1846; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020, p. 135). For example, in the case of the murders of Münevver Karabulut and Özgecan Aslan, discussions in mainstream and social media focused on women's attire, whereabouts, and the time of day when the murders occurred. Through these narratives, news conveys messages to all women about "how their lives could end if they fail to conform to traditional roles as wives or kin" (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015, p. 177).

Radford (1992) points out that misogynistic motivations behind femicide are often ignored by the media, which instead may blame women or deny the humanity, and therefore the masculinity frequently portraying him as a "beast or an "animal" (p. 4). Common terms in the Turkish press such as "brute," "horrible," "mad," "mentally unstable," "snapped," "crazy," or "having lost control," which are used to describe perpetrators, fail to capture the magnitude of the violence, thus exonerating the perpetrator (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015, p. 42; Aydın et al., 2016, p. 65; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022, p. 92). Additionally, framing violence solely by linking it to men's psychological issues overlooks its broader societal context (Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019, p. 952; Alat, 2006, p. 303). Meyer (1997) indicates that all these narratives style make the news as "the part of the problem" (p. 117).

Collectively, portraying VAW in this manner limits the public's understanding of the broader and deeper societal roots of VAW (Altun & Bek Gencel, 2013; Binark & Bek, 2007; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Dursun, 2010; Güncel Bek & Binark, 2010; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Timisi, 1997; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; İnal, 2003). Although the media is not a direct source of violence, it functions as a normalizing, desensitizing and legitimizing tool of such violence (Çiçek, 2017; Özer, 2017). The consistency of findings from previous research highlights the continued relevance of examining how VAW and femicide are represented in news coverage in the Turkish press.

Aim and methodology

While femicide happens in various forms, including racist, marital, femicide committed by strangers in public spaces, serial, and mass femicide (Radford, 1992, p. 7), studies in Türkiye have found that VAW and

femicide are predominantly perpetrated by current or former intimate partners or relatives (Yıldız & Erdoğan, 2023; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022; Silsüpür & Karadere, 2022). News stories on those incidents frequently justify perpetrators' actions through narratives of infidelity, emotional outbursts, anger, or jealousy, simultaneously emphasizing women's role within the relationship (Altun & Bek, 2013; Bezirgan Arar, 2017; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Ilgın & Karagül, 2023; Kafadar, 2018; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Tekeli, 2016; Uçak, 2020; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020). Besides, media uses "harmful beliefs" that were mentioned in literature review, such as dressing "provocatively," having "incorrect" behavior to justify violence (Bayhantopçu, 2017; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Binark & Bek, 2007; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Alat, 2006). Given this context, it is crucial to examine how news media portray femicide when there is no prior relationship between perpetrators and victims, and when traditional victim-blaming on appearance is irrelevant.

Aim

This study analyzes news stories about the murder of Başak Cengiz, who was killed by Can Göktuğ Boz, a man unknown to her, in November 2021. This case was selected because: (1) she was murdered by a stranger, and (2) she was a young conservative woman wearing a headscarf, precluding traditional discriminatory justifications based on appearance.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How did selected newspapers portray the murder of Başak Cengiz when no prior relationship exists between the male perpetrator and the female victim?
- 2) Did selected newspapers still employ any victim-blaming justifications?

Furthermore, critical theories emphasize the role of media ownership, political influence and ideological alignment in shaping news narratives (Lule, 2001), highlighting media discourse variation based on ideological positions. Existing studies in Türkiye have analyzed mainstream media and the most-read newspapers or their online platforms (Altun & Bek Gencel, 2013; Muratoğlu Pehlivan & Atalay, 2022; Uçak, 2020; Sallan Gül & Altındağ, 2015; Yılmaz & Ören, 2021; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Gündüz, 2018; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Silsüpür & Karadere, 2022; Karabulut et al., 2020). Studies directly examining the impact of editorial policies on the representation of femicide remain limited and focused on small samples (Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Avcı & Güdekli, 2018; Aydın et al., 2016; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020). Moreover, news language is also significantly depended on framing, since frame "suggests how the issue should be thought about and understood" (Nelson & Kinder, 1996, p. 1057). And newspapers' ideological positions significantly influence their framing and narratives. Therefore, this study also addresses the following research questions:

- 3) Which framing did newspapers use in their stories about the murder of Başak Cengiz?
- 4) Did the language and framing of news stories about VAW differ based on the ideological stance of newspapers?

Sampling

With the keyword 'Başak Cengiz,' the print editions of the newspapers, published between November 11 and 19, 2021-when daily press coverage of her murder ceased- were analyzed. Opinion columns and online news were excluded. On November 11, 2021, after the murder, 20 newspapers reported on the incident. Among them, 12 national newspapers were chosen based on both their circulation figures and ideological orientations. These newspapers are as follows: *Sabah*, *Hürriyet*, *Sözcü*, *Milliyet*, *Birgün*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Evrensel*, *Millî Gazete*, *Yeni Akit*, *Yeniçağ*, *Türkgün*, *Takvim*.

The newspapers with the highest circulation were *Sabah* (193.872 copies), *Hürriyet* (185.870), *Sözcü* (174.090), and *Milliyet* (120.559) (Medyaradar, 2021). Among these, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* were classified as mainstream/centrist, *Sabah* as right-leaning, and *Sözcü* as left-leaning. *Takvim*, a mainstream tabloid focusing on crime and judiciary news, was also included. The remaining newspapers were categorized by ideological orientation as follows: *Birgün*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Evrensel* as left-leaning; *Millî Gazete*, *YeniÇağ* and *Yeni Akit* as right-leaning/conservative; and *Türkün* as nationalist-leaning.

Method

This study employs van Dijk's CDA alongside Iyengar's framing approach, providing a comprehensive methodological framework for examining the portrayal, framing choices, and ideological positions of newspapers concerning VAW. The analysis is conducted in two phases: initially, news stories published on November 11 were analyzed employing CDA, followed by an examination of news texts published between November 12 and November 19 using the news framing technique.

Van Dijk (1995) proposes Micro and Macro structures as core dimensions within the CDA framework, as follows:

Table 1

Model of van Dijk's CDA

MACRO STRUCTURE				
Thematic Structure	Super Structure (Schematic)			
Summary	News Story			
Headline(s)	Situation		Comment	
Leads	Episode	Background	Evaluation	
Photographs	Main event	Context History	Expectations	
	Causes/condition	Circumstances		
	Consequences	Previous events		
MICRO STRUCTURE				
Syntactic analysis	Semantic analysis	Local coherence	Stylistic	Rhetoric
Passive/active sentence	Implications	Conditional relationship	Choise of words	Metafor
Simple/complex sentence	Meaning and reference	Functional relationship		Persuasiveness
Pnonouns		Implicational relationship		Deletion

Source: Adapted from Van Dijk, 1988, p.25-29, 31, 53-56, 59, 61, 64.

However, van Dijk, describes that all those structures are also integrated with each other (1988, p. 29). In analyzing the news stories, specific definitions are necessary. The 'harmful beliefs' that perpetuate VAW, as outlined in the literature review, are rooted in societal attitudes. Henceforth, this study collectively refers to these harmful beliefs as 'justification myths for VAW and femicide,' or simply as 'the justification myths.' Additionally, an evaluation of existing literature on Turkish media indicates that the Turkish press reinforces these 'justification myths' within news texts with some common language choices, as illustrated below:

Table 2*Discourse in Turkish press news texts reinforcing the 'justification myths'*

MACRO STRUCTURE	Thematic structure	Headline(s) / Leads	Sensationism Emphasizing familial ties
	Schematic Structure	Situation	Main event / Causes / Consequences
			Page-three news; isolated event Dramatic narratives Perpetrator-focused narratives Excessive details about the violent act
			Neglecting the societal, economic, cultural, and legal dimensions of the violence
		Background	Context / Previous events
			Portraying incidents as isolated cases
MICRO STRUCTURE	Syntactic analysis	Passive or active sentence / Simple/complex	Passive language concerning women Active language concerning perpetrators
	Semantic analysis	Implications / meaning/ reference	Blaming victims (attire, lifestyle, actions) Rationalizing perpetrators Domestic, private problem
	Local coherence	Conditional / Fuctional / Implicational relationship	Women's attire Actions, behaviors, or words of women Whereabouts The time of day Familial ties
	Stylistics	Choice of words	Depicting perpetrators as "beasts", "mentally unstable", "crazy", "mad", "having lost control" Emphasizing mental health conditions or masculinity Depicting incidents as "brute," "horrible"
	Rhetoric	Persuasive information	Neighbors or male acquaintances of the victim, health reports
		Deletion	Not much societal, economical, historical context
		Metefor	Presenting news in an eyewitness-style format

Source: Adapted from the findings of Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Binark & Bek, 2007; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Basdoğan et al., 2021; Bayhantopçu, 2017; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Alat, 2006; Yıldız & Erdoğan, 2023; Silsüpür & Karadere, 2022; Altun & Bek Gencel, 2013; Bezirgan Arar, 2017; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Ilgın & Karagül, 2023; Kafadar, 2018; Tekeli, 2016; Uçak, 2020.

Considering Table 2, this study examined and compared whether the news language reinforcing 'the justification myths' in the Turkish press persist in reporting, even in cases lacking a prior relationship between the parties and absence of justifications concerning women's attire. Accordingly, the following six dimensions guided the CDA undertaken in this research: News format, portrayal of victim, portrayal of perpetrator, depiction of crime scene and timing, perceived causes of violence, centrality of the victim or perpetrator in the narrative.

Framing also significantly influences both macro- and microstructures in news texts. Iyengar (1991; 1996) states that framing refers to the effects of presentation on judgment and choice (p. 61). As framing is essential for determining the discourse constructed within a story, discourse analysis and framing must be conducted together to examine news texts. For instance, headlines, leads, and narratives of news stories framed thematically differ significantly from those framed episodically. Similarly, syntactic structures, word choices, and background details vary depending on the chosen frame. Therefore, news stories about the murder of Başak Cengiz published between November 12 and 19 were analyzed using the news framing technique, as follow-up stories may vary in content and tone.

Iyengar (1996) distinguishes between two primary news frames: "episodic" and "thematic." Episodic framing depicts events as specific instances, emphasizing individual experiences, eliciting reader empathy, but frequently omitting broader societal contexts. This approach often promotes solutions at the individual-level (Iyengar, 1996, p. 62). Conversely, thematic framing situates events within broader historical,

geographical, or systemic contexts, fostering analytical thinking and societal-level solutions, though it may lack the emotional immediacy of episodic framing.

Acknowledging Iyengar's (1991) approach that news stories typically blend elements of both episodic and thematic frames, this study has adopted the following categories to facilitate an in-depth examination of news framing:

- **Thematic news stories:** Framing the Başak Cengiz murder beyond an isolated incident, explicitly linking it to broader societal issues about VAW and femicide. The presence of key thematic indicators qualifies stories as thematic; the inclusion of every thematic element is not required.
- **Episodic news stories:** Focus narrowly on the murder, victim, and perpetrator without connecting the event to broader societal or systemic issues.
- **Episodic-thematic news stories:** Primarily event-focused yet incorporating elements of public or civil society reactions.
- **Episodic news stories with thematic highlights:** Contains an episodic structure, such as focusing a person, theme but includes references to the societal context of femicide. However, thematic frame is only limited with speakers without extensively exploring the subject with other these dimensions in the news.

Regarding the ideological stance of the newspapers, considering prior findings indicating that newspapers frame events according to their ideological alignment—and given that Cengiz wore a headscarf—this study also examined whether the ideological perspectives of the newspapers influenced how they reported on her murder. For example, newspapers such as *Akit* and *Milli Gazete* have historically taken strong stances against the headscarf ban previously enforced in Turkish public institutions, including the Grand National Assembly, universities, and public offices. Besides, the study examined whether sensationalism driven by circulation concerns outweighs ideological positioning in widely-read mainstream newspapers.

This study constitutes a situational assessment. Since the analysis is limited to a single femicide case across 12 national newspapers, the findings specifically pertain to discourse and framing patterns found in the coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder within this selected sample. Besides, photographs were mentioned in the analysis; however, a detailed visual analysis was not conducted.

The authors independently reviewed and analyzed the news stories, continuing the process until complete consensus was achieved:

Findings

This section first discussed the discourse surrounding news coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder, followed by an analysis of framing choices adopted by different newspapers. Lastly, ideological stances of the newspapers were examined.

Discourse analysis of newspaper coverage of the Başak Cengiz Murder

Among 12 newspapers on November 11 (Appendix 1), nine published dedicated news stories about the murder of Başak Cengiz, while three provided only brief references within coverage related to politicians. Recurring patterns emerged regarding six dimensions, and news language reinforcing 'the justification myths.'

Focus in headlines: Not femicide but the weapon and sensationalism

The Turkish Journalists Association (2016) advises journalists against sensationalizing violence in headlines; however, coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder predominantly highlighted the violent act itself. The terms 'samurai sword' or 'sword' appeared in the headlines of all nine newspapers. *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Sabah*,

and *Takvim* exclusively focused on the weapon in the headlines, without explicitly identifying the crime as femicide. The thematic structure of these headlines indicates that central focus on the weapon used. While five newspapers explicitly stated that the victim was a woman, only *Birgün* and *Evrensel* described the perpetrator as a 'man,' thus explicitly highlighting the gender-based dimension of the violence. The omission of this detail from the original news story by Doğan News Agency (Doğan News Agency, 2021) shows a deliberate editorial choice unique to these two newspapers. Another notable feature of the headlines is the use of terms such as 'atrocities,' 'slaughter,' and 'horror' to sensationalize the incident. *Birgün*, *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, and *Sözcü* highlighted the public nature of the crime using phrases like 'on the street' or 'in the middle of the street.' Six newspapers incorporated subheadings containing sensational quotes from the perpetrator.

These patterns demonstrate that most newspapers perceived the newsworthiness of the incident as arising from an unusual weapon used, a sword, the brutality of the act, terms used such as 'atrocities,' 'horror,' 'massacre,' and its occurrence in a public setting, as 'on the street,' rather than highlighting it as gender-based violence.

Sublines and leads: Centering the perpetrator over the victim

Of the seven newspapers that included subheadings, only *Cumhuriyet* and *Yeniçağ* positioned Başak Cengiz as the primary subject of the sentence. Four newspapers structured their subheadings around the perpetrator, employing active voices. In *Sabah*, which featured two subheadings, the victim appeared as the subject of the first, while the focus shifted to the perpetrator in the second. *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Sözcü*, and *Takvim* explicitly highlighted the perpetrator's justification—"wanting to kill a woman"—in their subheadings. Some subheadings emphasized the victim's location as "on the street," subtly implying 'the justification myths' for the violence. Others noted the victim's age, profession, and lack of prior acquaintance with the perpetrator. The leads, which means opening paragraphs frequently emphasized specific details such as the weapon used, the public setting of the attack, and the fact that the victim was targeted by a stranger. Some newspapers excessively sensationalized the event by detailing graphic aspects, including the length of the sword as 75 cm, the number of strikes as 15, in *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Sabah*, and *Takvim*. Additionally, *Cumhuriyet* highlighted the perpetrator's mental instability.

Therefore, many newspaper subheadings and leads are disproportionately centered on the perpetrator, and by highlighting his mental instability the press employed the 'justification myths.'

Main text: Sensationalizing and 'seasoning' the crime

Journalistic guidelines advise against clichéd sensationalism, melodrama and excessive details in order to avoid creating a "pornography of violence" (Binark & Bek, 2010; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Sayın, 2003). The Turkish Journalists Association (2016) calls those approach as "seasoning" and "embellishing" the news (p. 61). The micro structural analysis of news coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder reveals that numerous newspapers adopted to 'embellish'ing and 'season'ing by using active sentence structure and presenting the incident as if journalists were eyewitnesses. Sensational language such as 'horror,' 'shocking,' blood-curdling event,' and 'murderer' appeared 33 times, 'sword' was mentioned 74 times, along with graphic descriptions contributing to the 'pornography of violence.' The perpetrator's name appeared 51 times, compared to 49 mentions of the victim's name.

Sabah employed vivid phrasing such as 'blood-curdling event,' 'the sword pierced the young woman's back,' and 'the attacker continued his blows even after she fell.' Further dramatization appeared with lines like 'the family, receiving the lifeless body of their only child, wept tears.' Similarly, *Hürriyet* included explicit details such as '15 stabs with a knife' and 'after Başak Cengiz fell to the ground covered in blood, Boz

walked away but returned shortly after to strike her again with the sword.' *Milliyet* employed phrases like '15 sword strikes' and 'blood-curdling testimony.' *Yeniçağ*, despite sourcing from the Anadolu Agency —known for avoiding sensationalism—added dramatic touches. *Sözcü* used sensationalist language such as 'the murderer stabbed the sword into the stranger Başak Cengiz,' and referred to the victim as 'the unfortunate woman' who 'was struck by 10 sword blows, lost her life.'

Takvim provided the most extreme example of sensationalism with its headline 'Kılıç,' combining English 'kill' and Turkish 'kılıç (sword).' Furthermore, the word 'Canavar' (monster) was visually split into 'can,' which is the name of the perpetrator, and 'avar' in different colors. The imagery included a smiling photo of the victim in a wedding veil, a picture of the perpetrator with his head lowered and face obscured, and an image of the samurai sword described extensively across the page. The news story further dramatized the event with vivid descriptions such as 'stabbed repeatedly.'

Collectively, these examples illustrate sensationalism in news coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder, shifting attention away from the systemic issue of VAW toward sensationalized crime reporting.

Portrayal of the perpetrator: Mentally ill

Constructing narratives based on the perpetrator's statements risks portraying him as less culpable or even innocent. The Turkish Journalists Association (2016) specifically cautions against justifications of femicide based on the psychological states or self-reported motives of perpetrators. However, micro structure analysis reveals widespread disregard for these guidelines. Newspapers highlighted the perpetrator's personal history, emotions, or mental health status in news stories. Such narratives often perpetuate 'the myth of the perpetrator's abnormality,' subtly reinforcing 'the justification myths.'

The highlighted details include the perpetrator's name, his status as a stranger to the victim, and his psychological condition. His mental health status was mentioned 12 times; the ages of the victim and perpetrator 9 times; education level as having two university degrees 7 times; notes and weapons found at his home 7 times; and his profession once. *Hürriyet* included comments from neighbors labeling him 'psychopathic,' as well as details about his drug use and psychological treatment history. *Milliyet* featured statements from the perpetrator, such as "It was a moment of anger," "I didn't mean to do it," and "I underwent treatment at 18 years old for drug use," under the headline 'Chilling Confession.' The mother, Nejla Yomraloğlu, a lawyer, remarked about his son's psychological treatments.

Takvim highlighted the perpetrator's history of psychological treatment and mentioned nonsensical notes found at his home, such as "Run zigzag to dodge bullets, looking slightly behind you." *Cumhuriyet*, similarly, underscored the perpetrator's 'illness' through a neighbor's observation: "Everyone accepted him as mentally ill, taking his medications and harmless," and stressed his 'abnormality' by describing phrases found written on the walls at his home like "set a trap" and "stab them in the stomach."

As Altun and Bek Gencel (2013) caution, employing language that fosters a sense of closeness between the reader and perpetrators risks justifying the perpetrators' behavior (p. 18). Even though headlines depicted the murder of Başak Cengiz as horrific, the text body often undermined the severity of the murder. Highlighting the perpetrator's illness diverts the narrative away from the victim, cultivating reader empathy for the perpetrator, and detracting from accountability due to his mental state.

Context of femicide: An isolated judicial case

References to the psychological condition of the perpetrator, the testimonies of the neighbors, and details from searches of his home collectively portray the crime as 'an act committed by a mentally unstable individual' rather than VAW. The use of active narrative styles, perpetrator-focused narratives and emphasis

on mental illness frames femicide as an isolated incident rather than a systemic societal issue. Only *Birgün* and *Evrensel* explicitly framed the incident within a broader context of femicide by using the term 'male' to refer to the perpetrator. They also avoided sensationalist descriptions. They framed the incident as a 'male violence.'

Causes of violence: The victim's 'weakness', public and evening setting

The news coverage frequently characterized Başak Cengiz by highlighting her age, as using term 'young woman,' mentioned 12 times, profession, as using term 'architect,' mentioned 21 times, relationship status, as using term 'engaged,' 8 times, and recent relocation to Istanbul for work, 26 times. Additionally, the context of the attack was strongly emphasized: 'in the evening after work' 8 times, on the street' 13 times, and 'by a stranger wielding a samurai sword.' The resulting narratives emphasize a young woman murdered in public, after working hours, by an unfamiliar man/stranger. Considering discourse in Turkish press news texts reinforcing 'the justification myths,' word choices such as 'street,' 'after work,' 'stranger,' 'brutality,' and 'murder' dominate news stories in this incident, as well.

Another significant aspect of the coverage was the explicit focus on the perpetrator's stated justification—his deliberate choice to 'kill a woman.' Newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Sözcü*, and *Takvim* prominently featured the perpetrator's reasoning that he targeted a woman specifically because she 'couldn't resist' was 'easier to kill,' and that 'a man might resist.' Two key themes emerge from this narrative: the lack of a prior relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and the perpetrator's perception of inherent female vulnerability. Given 'the justification myths,' these themes construct two discourses in news coverage: (1) women are inherently defenseless and weak, and (2) consequently, public spaces during evening is dangerous. Such implications subtly reinforce 'the justification myths.' Therefore, in the absence of other 'justification myths,' such as a 'provoking' dress, the myth of the 'weakness/vulnerabilities of women' is constructed in the news coverage. This approach minimizes the responsibility of perpetrators. Therefore, considering previous research, having no relationship between perpetrator and victim minimally influences constructing 'the justification myths' in the news.

These news stories illustrate that even in femicide cases without a personal connection between the victim and perpetrator, and a reference to women's attire, male-centric discourses, and 'the justification myths' persist in media coverage.

Tablo 3*The discourse of the Turkish press regarding the murder of Başak Cengiz:*

MACRO STRUCTURE	Thematic structure	Headline(s) / Leads	Employing sensationalism, "seasoning", and "embellishing" the news Emphasizing the weapon rather than focusing on the victim or the act of femicide Highlighting the brutality of the act through terms like "atrocious," "horror," "massacre," and noting the public setting ("on the street")	
	Schematic structure	Circumstances	Main event / Causes / Consequences	Featured as page-three, sensational news ("page-three" type coverage) Utilizing dramatic narratives Including excessive, graphic details about the violent act Emphasis on perpetrator's statements like, "It was a moment of anger," "I didn't mean to do it," and "I received treatment at age 18 for drug use"
			Context / Previous events	Overlooking societal, economic, cultural, and legal aspects of the violence Presenting incidents as isolated events rather than part of broader patterns Reliance on police and court reports
		Evaluation	Sources / Evaluations / Expectations	Information from neighbors or relatives of both the victim and the perpetrator
MICRO STRUCTURE	Syntactic analysis	Passive or active sentence / Simple/complex sentence	Using active voice and language concerning perpetrators Incorporating sensationalized language and sentence structure	
	Semantic analysis	Implications / meaning/ reference	Women's perceived vulnerability Man's perceived strength, and abnormality Isolated case	
	Local coherence	Conditional / Fuctional / Implicational relationship	Highlighting the perpetrator's justification: "wanting to kill a woman" Stressing the public nature of the attack ("on the street") and the evening timeframe Emphasizing lack of prior acquaintance between perpetrator and victim ("stranger," "unknown to victim") Mentioning personal details about the perpetrator's history, emotional state, or mental health	
	Stylistics	Choice of words	Frequent using of emotionally charged terms such as "horror," "shocking," "blood-curdling event," "murderer," "lifeless body," "wept tears," "15 stabs with a knife," "strike her again," "blood-curdling testimony," "the unfortunate woman," "stabbed repeatedly," and "mentally ill"	
	Rhetoric	Persuasive information Deletion Metefor	Use of persuasive accounts from witnesses such as the victim's mother or neighbors Presentation of news in a vivid, eyewitness-style narrative	

Framing analysis of newspaper coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder

Among news stories published between November 12 and 19, 15 of them were thematic and 28 were episodic. Including the initial news stories from nine newspapers on November 11, the total number of episodic news stories increased to 36. Between November 12 and 19, 34 news stories featured statements from political figures about the murder, which falls into an 'episodic news stories with thematic highlights' category. Only four focused on reactions from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and civil society organizations, which has mix of episodic-thematic news.

Episodic news: An individual incident perspective of femicide

Episodically framed news stories (Appendix-2) typically presented the case as an isolated incident centered on the murder and the mental health of the perpetrator. Subsequent developments—such as the funeral, statements from the perpetrator's lawyer mother, discussions of his psychological condition, the mother's withdrawal from the case, and reactions from the family members of the victim—were covered through the perpetrator-focused lens. Even new developments were consistently framed as individualized events. For example, detailed information regarding items found during a search of the perpetrator's home and messages written on the walls in his house were prominently reported in *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Milliyet*, and *Takvim*.

Altun and Bek Gencel (2013) argue, "elements such as dramatization and sensationalism in news stories are among the key mechanisms that undermine social dimensions" (p. 28). The sensational and perpetrator-centered coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder reduced the issue to an individualized tragedy, failing to address societal implications or to raise broader awareness about gender-based violence. Some headlines in news stories appeared thematic, yet their content remained episodic. For instance, *Milliyet*'s November 13 headline, "How Did the Killer Obtain Those Swords?" promises broader discussion, but merely includes

reactions from Cengiz's parents. Similarly, headlines in *Sabah* and *Evrensel*, such as "Başak Cried for Murdered Women" imply societal context yet focused solely on Cengiz's individual experience. Most news stories thus failed to engage with socioeconomic or structural drivers of femicide, leading audiences to feel pity for both the victim and the mentally ill perpetrator without prompting deeper reflection on underlying causes.

Gökulu (2018) emphasizes, "the media, by consistently highlighting specific crime events, can amplify individuals' fear of crime" (p. 591). This underscores the emotional impact of episodic journalism on the audience. Öztürk's (2015) study with female university students demonstrates that episodic coverage of femicide fosters anxiety among society and women (p. 260). As seen in the Başak Cengiz murder and similar femicide news, portraying femicide as isolated incidents diverges attention away from discussing broader systemic issues and instead incites individual fear and self-protection strategies.

Thematic news: Limited and restricted femicide coverage

Among thematic news (Appendix-3), *Hürriyet*'s coverage on November 12 and 13 critically addressed sword sales, citing legal experts and focusing on the ease of purchasing such weapons. The coverage on November 13 also highlighted public reactions to mental health as a mitigating factor in cases of VAW and femicide, referencing well-known cases such as the murder of Ceren Özdemir. On November 19, *Milliyet* published a front-page story titled "22 Women Killed in 18 Days. Who Will Stop the Violence?" The news story continued on page 19, featuring photographs of 14 murdered women, quotes from sociologists, statistics on the use of Women's Emergency Support App in Türkiye hotline, and remarks from civil society representatives. By incorporating data, expert comments, and retrospective analysis, this news story provided a clear thematic framing and emphasized the scale of femicide.

Birgün consistently adopted thematic framing. Its November 12 front-page news story titled "We Are Very Sad, Very Angry," and page three headline "Başak Cengiz Bid Farewell in Tears," covered not only Cengiz's murder but two additional femicides. Public reactions on social media and statements from NGOs were also included. It highlighted thousands of protesters. On November 13, *Birgün* published a news story titled "Not Male Justice, Real Justice," quoting Cengiz's mother and activist Zennure Ünal, who criticized judicial leniency, referred to as 'suit discounts' toward perpetrators. The news story highlighted calls for justice for families of murdered women. The news coverage on November 15 under the titles "Know That the Fire Burns Beyond Its Place" and "We Could Have Been in the Grave Like Başak Cengiz," documented memorial gatherings and statements from women's organizations. On November 17, *Birgün* published the headline "One Step Away from Deadly Weapons," which continued on the inside page with the subheading "Free Shipping on Swords." The news story critically examined easy access to weapons and provided data on weapon-related deaths alongside expert commentary. On November 18, a news story titled "Femicide Is Not Stopping" highlighted the concerns of women's groups and discussed recent femicide across the country. Moreover, *Birgün* consistently emphasized that the perpetrator was a 'man' in Cengiz's case, reinforcing the discourse of the case as VAW. *Evrensel* also offered some thematic coverage. On November 13, the paper's front-page news titled "Femicide Is Increasing and Becoming More Brutal" addressed the rise in protection orders and violence over the last decade. A follow-up news story included legal analysis by a lawyer. *Türkgün*, on November 17, published a news story titled "Together, Always Together" highlighted a proposal by Nationalist Movement Party leader Devlet Bahçeli and his party to combat violence.

Despite some examples of thematic framing in the news coverage of the murder of Başak Cengiz, this study shows that truly and comprehensively thematic framing employed by only a few outlets, like *Birgün*, and *Evrensel*.

Politician-centered News: Covering femicide when politicians are involved

Some newspapers predominantly framed the Başak Cengiz murder through politicians' involvement, placing politicians at the center (Appendix-4). For instance, news stories about President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his wife Emine Erdoğan's condolence visit to the Cengiz family primarily emphasized the visit itself. In fact, the main focus of the news stories was unrelated topics. The headline in *Sabah* on November 17 was "Erdoğan: The Key to the Election is Our Youth;" in *Hürriyet* "Not the Y-Z Generation, but Asım's Generation;" in *Milliyet* "Reconciliation Response: Only a Temporary Fix;" and in *Yeni Akit* "We Need a Teknofest Generation, not a Y-Z Generation." In these news stories, the Başak Cengiz murder is reduced to a minor detail, only in the context of the president's meeting the family. The coverage of Justice Minister Abdülhamit Gül's visit followed a similar pattern, focusing on his interactions with the family and a phone call from President Erdoğan (*Sabah*, *Hürriyet*).

In some newspapers, the coverage was limited to statements by politicians. Remarks from the Republican People's Party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Nationalist Movement Party leader Devlet Bahçeli, İYİ Party leader Meral Akşener, The Peoples' Democratic Party co-chair Pervin Buldan, Memleket Party leader Muharrem İnce, and Justice and Development Party spokesperson Ömer Çelik were published in the context of femicide but lacked a deeper thematic approach.

Some newspapers completely ignored the murder case, underscoring the perception that femicide becomes newsworthy only when part of political agendas or speech. *Yeni Akit* first reported the incident on November 14, 2021, under the headline "Justice Minister Gül's Condolence Visit to Başak's Family," placing the focus on the minister rather than the murder. In *Millî Gazete*, the incident was briefly mentioned on November 13, within the context of a press conference held by Saadet Party Vice Chairman Cafer Güneş. Similarly, *Türkgün* newspaper reported with the headline "I Will Be Following the Case Closely," accompanied by a photograph of Başak Cengiz, explicitly linking the news to Bahçeli's condolence message to the victim's family. Newspapers like *Yeni Akit* chose not to mention the incident.

This pattern demonstrates how newspapers such as *Yeni Akit*, *Millî Gazete*, and *Türkgün* only covered the murder of Başak Cengiz when it intersected with political agendas, thereby failing to recognize femicide as inherently newsworthy. Such coverage marginalizes the victim and diminishes the significance of the broader issue. Other newspapers, including *Türkgün*, *Yeniçağ*, and *Millî Gazete*, exhibited a similar pattern, mentioning the incident only in connection with visits of the political figures to the family.

Even when thematic elements emerged in politicians' statements, newspapers failed to elevate their coverage to a broader discussion of femicide. Instead, these news stories merely echoed political statements without addressing systemic issues. This shows that even news stories containing thematic content ultimately retained an episodic framing, neglecting the broader societal implications of femicide.

Thematic-episodic news: Limited coverage of NGO and public responses

The analysis of news stories covering NGOs and public reactions to the murder of Başak Cengiz shows a predominance of the 'daily news' formatting (Appendix-5). *Sabah*'s news story on November 16, titled "Women's Cry for Başak: We Are Anxious, We Are Afraid," highlighted societal reactions but was limited to event-specific details. Similarly, the news story on November 17 solely focused on the event of naming a Women's Education and Culture Center after Başak Cengiz.

Hürriyet's news story on November 15 described a commemorative event where local women and members of women's associations placed carnations on the street where Başak Cengiz was killed. The story also featured statements from Övgü İnal, who spoke on behalf of the neighborhood residents. *Cumhuriyet* newspaper's front-page story on November 15, titled "Let Başaks Not Wilt," covered a memorial at a crime

scene. On page 3, the continuation, "They Shouted in the Streets for Başak Cengiz: 'There Is Femicide,'" integrated Kılıçdaroğlu's condolence visit to the Cengiz family and the reactions of women's organizations against VAW.

Evrensel newspaper's November 15 front-page news story, titled "We Will Never Stop Defending Our Right to Live," continued on page three under the headline "We Could Have Been in Başak's Place, in the Grave," including statements from İzmir Women's Platform members about their upcoming demonstration for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25. The news story on November 19 further discussed the planned demonstration and activities of the Women's Solidarity Association.

These news stories indicate that the media coverage of NGOs and societal reactions failed to address societal dimensions, historical context, potential solutions, or preventive measures. Instead, news coverage confined to immediate events and reactions, and presented through a 'daily news lens.'

Ideological analysis of newspaper coverage for femicide

The existing literature demonstrates that studies analyzing newspaper coverage focus on mainstream media, examining either individual newspapers, the most widely circulated outlets, or their online platforms (Muratoğlu Pehlivan & Atalay, 2022; Uçak, 2020; Sallan Gül & Altındağ, 2015; Yılmaz & Ören, 2021; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Gündüz, 2018; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Silsüpür & Karadere, 2022; Karabulut et al., 2020). These studies frequently conclude that mainstream media, driven by circulation motives, sensationalize events and perpetuate patriarchal narratives. Analyzing three newspapers with distinct editorial policies, Yıldırım and Dudu (2015) observed that left-leaning newspapers give more visibility to VAW, emphasizing societal dimensions compared to right-leaning or conservative newspapers. However, they concluded that editorial stance does not significantly alter the fundamental narrative of VAW and "regardless of newspapers, women are ultimately confined to patriarchal narratives" (p. 34, 46). Avcı and Güdekli (2018), in their analysis of the Özgecan Aslan femicide case, argued that coverage often disconnects femicide from its broader societal context, transforming it into a political issue. They noted that despite ideological differences, all analyzed newspapers share similar gendered stereotypes in their portrayal of women (p. 490). Examining three newspapers from diverse ideological perspectives, Aydın et al. (2016) found that mainstream and right-leaning/conservative newspapers frequently resort to dramatization and sensationalism, while left-leaning newspapers adopt a relatively neutral tone. Two key conclusions can be drawn from these previous studies: Firstly, the ideological positions of newspapers influence and politicize the femicide. Second, irrespective of ideological stance, patriarchal narratives and sensationalism prevail across various media platforms about VAW and femicide.

The analysis of 12 national newspapers also reveals that the most widely read newspapers, regardless of their ideological positions, persistently used sensational and patriarchal narratives about the murder of Başak Cengiz. *Sabah* addressed the murder episodically, focusing on the sensational elements and neglecting the broader societal implications. Despite describing the ease of access to weapons, *Hürriyet* did not sufficiently explore the socio-economic and systematic foundations of femicide. *Takvim*, a tabloid outlet, consistently provided purely episodic coverage. These findings indicate that the most-read newspapers neither approach nor discuss femicide as a societal issue nor analyze it from an ideological perspective; instead, they view the subject primarily as an alluringly violent and sensational story.

Distinct patterns emerged among left-leaning newspapers. *Sözcü*, despite its political stance, followed mainstream sensational patterns without providing thematic approach. *Cumhuriyet* also displayed tendencies toward sensationalism and patriarchal rhetoric similar to mainstream newspapers. Conversely, the sharply left-leaning newspapers *Birgün* and *Evrensel* explicitly framed the murder as femicide and addressed

societal dimensions. They refrained from employing patriarchal rhetoric. These newspapers provided the most coherent and comprehensive societal perspective on the topic.

Right-leaning/conservative and nationalist newspapers displayed limited interest in the murder of Başak Cengiz, even when the victim was a young conservative woman and there were no current 'justification myths' for the murder, such as her attire. Newspapers such as *Yeni Akit*, *Millî Gazete* and *Türkgün* initially neglected the coverage of the murder, later provided minimal coverage only once the incident became a political topic, framing it solely around politicians' statements. Similar patterns were observed in *Akit* and *Yeniçağ*.

Discussion and conclusion

VAW and femicide remain pervasive issues globally and in Türkiye, deeply rooted in societal norms. This study identifies the social norms rationalizing VAW as 'the justification myths.' Media narratives significantly influence whether violence is perceived as isolated incidents or broader societal problems. The dominance of patriarchal discourse in the Turkish press reinforces 'the justification myths' by implicitly or explicitly rationalizing men's violence.

This study analyzed news coverage from twelve Turkish national newspapers on the murder of Başak Cengiz, employing van Dijk's CDA and Iyengar's framing theory to investigate whether the press reinforces 'the justification myths' even when traditional justifications, such as victim's attire or relationship dynamics, are absent. Additionally, it examined framing strategies and how newspapers' ideological stance influenced their reporting.

The study has yielded significant findings that differ from those reported in previous research, and contributes to the field. First, the findings from previous studies (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Binark & Bek, 2007; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Basdoğan, et al., 2021; Bayhantopçu, 2017; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Binark & Bek, 2007; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Alat, 2006; Yıldız & Erdoğan, 2023; Silsüpür & Karadere, 2022; Altun & Bek, 2013; Bezirgan Arar, 2017; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Ilgın & Karagül, 2023; Kafadar, 2018; Tekeli, 2016; Uçak, 2020) (Table-2) and the results of this research (Table-3) on the language of the press exhibit some similarities. Most newspapers featured on the murder of Başak Cengiz page three, focused on the weapon used and sensationalist details of the crime without explicitly describe the murder as femicide. The news stories were often crafted to appear as eyewitness account, and centered heavily on the perpetrator's actions, words, thoughts, and situations, thereby diverting attention from the victim. Despite occasional public demands for harsh punishment and explicit rejection of mental health justifications, repeated references to the perpetrator's psychological state implicitly legitimized his actions. Only two newspapers, *Birgün* and *Evrensel*, explicitly identified the perpetrator as a 'man,' emphasizing the femicide dimension. However, those similarities reveal an important factor that was not indicated and examined in previous studies. This study demonstrates that Turkish press utilizes certain languages on VAW regardless of relational contexts between the victim and perpetrator, and 'the justification myths' persist even in all type femicide, including stanger femicide, as an answer to the first research question.

Second, the study reveals that the reinforcement of what the authors term "the justification myths," as previously identified in the literature (WHO, 2012; Flood & Pease, 2009; Antmen, 2023; Hortaçsu, et al., 2003; Özçakır et al., 2008; Ercan, 2009; van Veen et al., 2018), and their reproduction through specific language choices in the Turkish press (Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022; Güneş & Yıldırım, 2019; Basdoğan, et al., 2021; Binark & Bek, 2007; Kara & Uluç, 2019; Alat, 2006; Bayhantopçu, 2017; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Aydın et al., 2016; Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022) persists regardless of women's actual behaviors or lifestyles. Simply being 'woman' was sufficient for embedding 'the justification myths.' Third, in cases lacking traditional 'justification myths,' such as victim's attire, lifestyle, media

narratives highlight 'women's perceived vulnerabilities,' emphasizing men's alleged strength. Therefore, this study proposes that such portrayals construct 'the notion of women's vulnerability' as another 'justification myth' in stranger femicide cases, as an answer to second research question.

As an answer to third research question, given that previously studies have not extensively explored framing in Turkish press coverages of VAW and femicide, particularly regarding Iyengar's approach as episodic and thematic framing, the study demonstrates that the news coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder is predominantly episodic. The news coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder shows that Turkish press tends to confine such news to 24-hour news cycles approach. This episodic approach limits public comprehension of the societal, economic, political, or historical dimensions of femicide, thereby restricting comprehensive understanding of its significance as systematic issue. Thematic journalism appeared primarily in sharply left-leaning and some centrist newspapers. Interestingly, some right-leaning outlets only addressed the murder when politically relevant, indicating that femicide is overlooked unless tied to political agendas. Although previous studies noted ideological differences in femicide reporting, this research demonstrates that such variations cannot be explained solely by ideological alignment. Mainstream, right/conservative, and most-read left-leaning newspapers, regardless of their political stance, exhibited similar patterns, employing 'the justification myths,' while neglecting socioeconomic contexts. Therefore, this study significantly contributes to the existing literature by examining how Turkish press portrays VAW through episodic and thematic framing, and by integrating discourse analysis and framing approach.

As an answer to forth research question, while these findings support previous research indicating that ideological positions shape newspaper coverage (Muratoğlu Pehlivan & Atalay, 2022; Uçak, 2020; Sallan Gül & Altındağ, 2015; Yılmaz & Ören, 2021; Gökulu & Hosta, 2013; Gündüz, 2018; Yazıcı & Şahbaz, 2020; Coşkun & Köse, 2018; Silsüpür & Karadere, 2022; Karabulut et al., 2020; Yıldırım & Dudu, 2015; Avcı & Güdekli, 2018; Aydın et al., 2016), the limited coverage observed in conservative-leaning newspapers—despite ideological similarities between the victims and their readership—, the extensive thematic coverage in markedly left-leaning newspapers, and the sensationalist approach adopted by widely-read newspapers across ideological spectra highlight that simplistic generalizations based solely on political alignment are insufficient for analyzing VAW.

In summary, this study further reveals that;

(1) 'The justification myths' persist even without relational contexts between the victim and perpetrator, (2) Victim-blaming myths endure despite the absence of justifications related to the victim's appearance. Therefore, simply being 'woman' was sufficient for embedding 'the justification myths.' (3) Therefore, this study proposes that in the absence of other victim-blaming myths, 'women's perceived vulnerability' is created as an 'justification myth' in stranger femicide cases. (4) The study reveals that the news coverage of the Başak Cengiz murder is predominantly episodic in Turkish press and propose a discussion on whether Turkish press predominantly uses episodic framing in reporting in all VAW cases. (5) Although prior studies have identified ideological differences in femicide reporting, the present research demonstrates that these variations cannot be solely attributed to ideological alignment, The deeply embedded and internalized 'justification myths' within society must also be considered, regardless of ideological perspectives. (6) This study contributes to the existing literature by examining media coverage of violence against women through the integration of discourse analysis and Iyengar's framing theory. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the language, approach, and ideological stance adopted by the Turkish press in addressing VAW.

The findings raise the question of whether Turkish press predominantly uses episodic framing in reporting VAW. Türkiye has 28 newspapers classified as national or widespread. However, the media sector is shrinking (TURKSTAT, 2022). There are 6.687 intellectual workers across local and national media in Türkiye

(Press Advertising Agency, 2022), including reporters, technical staff, and printing personnel. The actual field reporter number in national print media is significantly lower. Most newspapers operate with limited correspondents, who frequently cover multiple areas daily. Additionally, journalists typically work over 45 hours per week under low-wage conditions and limited professional development opportunities (Turkish Journalists' Union, 2023). Such challenging conditions compel journalists to prioritize daily news production over deeper reports. Episodic framing is driven by sector downsizing, reduced workforce, and multitasking pressures. Additionally, routine reporting formats, particularly in police and judiciary coverage, rely heavily on standardized templates (Anadolu Agency, 2024, p. 100-101) and official statements, leading to journalistic fatigue regarding VAW stories. Addressing these challenges necessitates a transition toward thematic journalism, improving journalist trainings, and systematically reforming problematic media language concerning VAW. Therefore, this study advocates shifting from episodic to thematic journalism to enhance coverage of VAW in Turkish media. Moreover, Flood and Pease (2009) emphasize that men are more likely than women to endorse beliefs supportive of VAW, perceive fewer behaviors as violent, and demonstrate less empathy toward victims (p. 127). Considering that police and judiciary correspondents are predominantly male, targeted journalist training programs are necessary to raise awareness.

In conclusion, this research uniquely identifies persistent patriarchal framing even in cases lacking traditional victim-blaming myths, and relational contexts, highlighting media's subtle yet profound role in perpetuating 'the justification myths' on VAW. Confronting and transforming those myths through thematic journalism, comprehensive journalist training, and increased public awareness is crucial, not only for ethical journalism but also for fostering societal attitudes actively opposing VAW.

Nonetheless, further research is essential to validate and generalize all findings of this research. Further studies should combine CDA and framing to examine ideological influences across various media reporting on VAW and femicide. Investigating whether media framing and 'the justification myths' vary according to victims' sociocultural backgrounds, status, lifestyle, or if they predominantly stem from their gender identity alone would deepen understanding and enhance generalizability.



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Author Details	Rukiye Serttaş
Yazar Bilgileri	¹ Public Servant, Ankara, Türkiye  0009-0001-8247-0086
	Barışkan Ünal
	² Journalist, Ankara, Türkiye  0000-0001-5434-6363  bariskan_unal@hotmail.com



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Appendix | Ek

Table 1
News structures of the murder of Başak Cengiz

The first news on Başak Cengiz murder in November, 11, 2021										
	BİRGÜN	CUMHURİYET	EVRENSEL	HURRIYET	MİLLİYET	SABAH	SOZCÜ	TAKVİM	YENİÇAĞ	
PAGE	Third-page	The Front Page + Third-Page	Third-page	The Front Page + Third-Page	The Front Page + Third-Page	The Front Page + Third-Page	Third-page	Third-page	The Front Page + Third-Page	Third-page
HEADLINE	A Woman Murdered (Killed Woman with a Sword with a Sword in the Middle of the Street)	Killed Woman with a Sword with a Sword in the Middle of the Street	Woman Attacked with a Sword Dies	Killed with a Samurai Sword	Samurai Sword Horror (Front Page)	Samurai Sword Horror (Third Page)	Samurai Sword Brutality on the Street (Front Page)	Killed a Young Woman with a Samurai Sword on the Street	"Killing" (Front Page)	Female Architect Killed with a Samurai Sword
SUBLINE		A Woman Murdered with a Sword in the Middle of the Street in Istanbul	"I Wanted to Kill a Woman" (Front Page)	In Atasehir, Can Gökünk Boz brutally murdered architect Başak Cengiz, who was walking on the street, with a samurai sword. Fifteen sword wounds were found on the woman's body. (Third Page)	In Atasehir, Can Gökünk Boz brutally murdered 28-year-old architect Başak Cengiz, who was walking on the street, with a samurai sword. Fifteen sword wounds were found on the young woman's body. (Third Page)	In Istanbul, 28-year-old architect Başak Cengiz, who was walking on the street, was murdered with a samurai sword by a stranger, Can Gökünk Boz. The suspect, who was apprehended, stated, 'I wanted to kill someone.' (Third Page)	Following the horrific murder in Istanbul, the killer was found in his home with 16 swords, and his statement was chilling. The suspect said, 'I chose to kill her because it is easier to kill a woman.'	(In bold black font) The college killer brutally murdered architect Başak, whom he didn't know, with a samurai sword on the street. His statement was horrifying. (In bold red font) "I left home to commit murder" (Front Page)	Can Gökünk Boz murdered architect Başak Cengiz, whom he didn't know, with a sword in the middle of the street. His chilling statement was: "I left home to commit murder. I attacked a woman because I thought a man might resist." (Front Page)	Başak Cengiz, an architect working on a project at the Financial Center under construction in Atasehir, was attacked with a samurai sword by a stranger, Can Gökünk B., while walking from the construction site to the hotel where she was staying. While Başak Cengiz succumbed to her injuries at the hospital, Can Gökünk B. was arrested.
LEAD	In Istanbul's Atasehir district, 28-year-old architect Başak Cengiz, who was severely injured by a sword attack from a samurai sword in the middle of the street. On the street the previous day, passed away in the hospital yesterday	In Istanbul's Atasehir district, Gökünk Boz, who was alleged to be mentally unstable, attacked 28-year-old architect Başak Cengiz by attacking her with a samurai sword on the street.	In Atasehir, a man named Gökünk B. severely injured architect Başak Cengiz by attacking her with a samurai sword on the street.	In Atasehir, Can Gökünk Boz attacked architect Başak Cengiz, a passerby he didn't know, with a samurai sword. The killer, who struck the young woman 15 times with the sword, was caught at his home. In his statement after being arrested, Boz said, "A man could have resisted; I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	In Istanbul's Atasehir district, 27-year-old attacker Can Gökünk Boz brutally murdered 28-year-old architect Başak Cengiz, whom he did not know, with a samurai sword on the street. Fifteen sword wounds were found on the young woman's body. The killer, who was found with 16 swords in his home, was arrested. (Front Page)	Architect Başak Cengiz was brutally murdered with a samurai sword by a stranger in Istanbul after leaving work. The attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, stabbed the sword into the young woman's back and continued striking her even after she fell on the ground. The assailant stated, "I was feeling down. I wanted for a woman who wouldn't resist to pass by. She appeared, so I killed her." (Front Page)	Architect Başak Cengiz (28) from Ankara had come to Istanbul on a temporary assignment. Photo caption: 28-year-old Başak Cengiz had come to Istanbul for two months to work on a project. (Third Page)	The horrific incident took place in Atasehir. The killer, Can Gökünk Boz, approached architect Başak Cengiz from behind and stabbed her multiple times with a 75-centimeter samurai sword. The confession of the university student left everyone in shock: "I left home to commit murder. I attacked a woman because a man might resist." (Front Page)	The blood-curling event occurred the previous evening in Istanbul's Atasehir district. (Inside Page)	In an incident that took place in Istanbul's Atasehir district, architect Başak Cengiz (28), who had come from Ankara to Istanbul for a project, was attacked with a samurai sword by Can Gökünk B. (27) while walking from the construction site at the Financial Center to the hotel where she was staying.
SUBHEADLINE	"I was influenced by TV series."	"He Had Planned the Murder Before Leaving Home / She Had Come to Istanbul for Training."	"Tamed Back and Struck Neighbors: He Was a Psychopath / He Must Not Get Away with This."	"Confronted the Police with a Knife."	"I Chose a Woman Who Couldn't Resist."	"I Don't Know How to Stop."	"Father is an Engineer, Mother is a Lawyer."			
SMALL BOX-HEADLINE										

Table 2
Episodic News about the murder

	BİRGÜN	CUMHURİYET	EVRENSEL	HURRIYET	MİLLİYET	SABAH	SOZCÜ	TAKVİM	TÜRKÜM	YENİÇAĞ	MİLLİ GAZETE
HEADLINE	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)	The news story titled "I Want to Kill a Woman" featured on the first page, contains a quote from the attacker, Can Gökünk Boz, who said, "I wanted to kill a woman." (Front Page)
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SUBHEADLINE	"I was influenced by TV series."	"He Had Planned the Murder Before Leaving Home / She Had Come to Istanbul for Training."	"Tamed Back and Struck Neighbors: He Was a Psychopath / He Must Not Get Away with This."	"Confronted the Police with a Knife."	"I Chose a Woman Who Couldn't Resist."	"I Don't Know How to Stop."	"Father is an Engineer, Mother is a Lawyer."				
SMALL BOX-HEADLINE											



Table 3
Thematic News about the murder

[illegible]

Table 4
Episodic political news with thematic highlights

[illegible]

**Table 5***Episodic-thematic news*

BİRGÜN	
CUMHURİYET	
EVRENSEL	
HÜRİYET	The news story titled "A Memorial with Carnations," featured on page three, includes a tribute to the victim held with carnations by women residents who live on that neighborhood where the murder occurred, alongside members of women's associations. It highlights the community's reaction to the murder with slogans and applause. The news story also includes a statement by Övgü İnal, speaking on behalf of the residents: "Ataşehir, which we considered one of Istanbul's safest neighborhoods where we let our children roam freely day and night, was not a place where our beautiful daughter came to be dismembered, murdered, or to die by a sword. Başak Cengiz paid the heaviest price, but this attack was directed at all of us." (14 November 2021)
MİLLİYET	The news story titled "Remembered at the Place She Was Killed," featured on page eighteen, reports that residents of the area and women's associations held a memorial for the victim at the site of the incident, honoring her with carnations. (15 November 2021)
SABAH	The news story titled "Women's Cry for Başak: We Are Worried, We Are Afraid," announced on the front page and continued on page twelve, covers a protest organized by civil society organizations at the site where the victim was killed. The news story also includes a mention of KADEM Chair Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar's condolence visit to the family. The story focuses solely on the details of a single protest. (16 November 2021)
SÖZCÜ	The news story titled "Her Name Will Live On in the Women's Education and Culture Center," featured on page twelve, reports that Başak Cengiz's name will be given to a cultural center dedicated to women in a local district. (17 November 2021)
TAKVİM	
TÜRKGÜN	
YENİ AKİT	
YENİ ÇAĞ	
MİLLİ GAZETE	

