

CLASHING STANCES: DISCOURSES ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN
KAZAKHSTAN

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Clashing Stances: Discourses on Violence Against Women in Kazakhstan

A. Introduction

1. Background

Violence against women (VAW) is a critical issue in Kazakhstan, as the cases of sexual violence, domestic abuse and murder are grave. The report by Human Rights Watch (2019) highlights the inadequate protection and justice for violence victims. According to the head of the Union of Crisis Centers of Kazakhstan, an overarching organization that contains 16 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), domestic violence takes place in one out of eight families leading to the deaths of 400 women annually (KTK, 2018).

The issue of VAW gained particular attention in 2024, with the viral “Saltanat’s case” in which ex-minister Kuandyk Bishimbayev had publicly beaten his wife, Saltanat Nukenova, to death in a restaurant. The case enraged and enflamed the public in the country, and was actively discussed on various social platforms, promoting public solidarity and encouraging other victims of violence to speak up. It dominated the online media for several months. Saltanat's tragic story has sparked calls for reform, a petition was signed by more than 150,000 people, leading to the enactment of "Saltanat's law" to criminalize domestic violence that was signed on April 15, 2024 (Tokoeva, 2024). Previously, in 2017, domestic violence was decriminalized in Kazakhstan.

Karabay, Akhmetova, and Durrani (2024) analyzed reported incidents of domestic violence in Kazakhstan between 2007 and 2022. They demonstrated a general increase in the number of cases, with sporadic but significant drops. For example, in 2015, the number fell from 140,000 to approximately 65,000. However, in 2016, reports rose again to 120,000. The researchers also argue that the decriminalization of domestic violence in 2017 led to the cases being underreported and silenced. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of

domestic violence increased by 21%. Although the rates declined in later years, the overall level of domestic violence remained high even in 2024. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan, police received approximately 100,000 complaints related to family violence in 2024. In response, they issued 72,000 protective orders and delivered court rulings in 16,000 cases (Kursiv Media Kazakhstan, 2024).

While violence against women (VAW) is a global issue, the case of Kazakhstan is particularly notable due to the high levels of public engagement and discourse on the topic. In contrast to societies where such issues are silenced or ignored, they generally tend to be publicly debated and discussed in Kazakhstan, especially on digital platforms. Although historically the level of openness around such topics was much lower, recent years have shown a growing societal willingness to engage in public conversations, hold criminals accountable, and push for systemic change and justice. Public debates regularly erupt in response to emerging incidents, with news reports, social media posts, and comments shaping the national conversation. This rising openness provides an important context for analyzing how society negotiates meanings, culture, gender norms, blame, and support around such events.

In this paper, I am going to contribute to the study of VAW in Kazakhstan by examining these discourses from the perspective of critical discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. This study focuses on four recent high-profile cases of VAW in Kazakhstan between 2023 and 2024, each of which functioned as a discourse event: that is, incidents that triggered significant media coverage and public commentary online. The main aim would be to explore the patterns in people's reactions, the dynamics of their stances, how they express their positions through language and what is the dominant discourse on this topic. My analysis of news and social media and comments shows that there are two competing overarching discourses within it – 'victim-

blaming' vs. 'supportive'. While the first one usually entails transferring responsibility for violence on the victim (i.e. blaming women for being victims of an assault), the latter involves supporting and protecting the women and appealing to the government for the punishment to the criminal. However, in Kazakhstan, a promising and surprising trend is that support for women is far more dominant as a primary responsive discourse to cases of VAW.

Trigger Warning: This paper discusses real-life cases of domestic abuse, sexual violence, murder, and other forms of violence against women. It also includes reactions to such incidents. Some readers may find the content distressing. Please proceed with care.

2. Main analytic focus

The main goal is to identify how opposite discourses – such as those supporting gender equality versus those endorsing traditional gender norms – are formed, when online discussion participants frame their opinions and stances through identifiable linguistic properties of their comments. The comments are analyzed in terms of the media outlets they were retrieved from, the sexes of the commenters, the languages they use (both literally—Kazakh and Russian—and figuratively, in terms of style and rhetoric), and the underlying themes that they touch upon. My goal was to see if there were significant correlations between the sociological groups of the commenters, and the discursive stance they most aligned with on the topic of violence against women in Kazakhstan. Essentially, I will employ a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. For example, the sex of the commenter might be an important factor, as previous research on this topic has shown that males are more likely than females to hold conservative views and oppose gender equality. While quantitative (statistical) analysis is applied to explore general patterns and correlations, the qualitative analysis ensures the in-depth linguistic analysis of the public

commentary. If significant correlations are found, this data will illustrate how ideological opposition on this social and political issue is created and perpetuated in online discussions. Because such social issues are discussed widely in the national context, it is important to understand how discursive stances can be formed and solidified, and what related frames of reference citizens refer to, in their use or justification of such positions.

3. Preview / explicit question or hypothesis

The research examines the methods through which social media users in Kazakhstan portray their discussions about violence against women (VAW). The central research question guiding this research is: *How are public discourses on violence against women framed on social media in Kazakhstan, and what are the dominant patterns in terms of sentiment, themes, and engagement across different platforms?*

The research extensively explores multiple subordinate questions to answer its overarching question. First, how do men and women differ in their stance on VAW as expressed in Instagram comments? Specifically, can the sex and language of the commenter be related to the stance they take on the issue? Second, what is the role of linguistic features such as language use, emotional tone, the media outlet, and the content of the original post in shaping the stance of a comment? And finally, what kinds of narrative themes emerge in these discussions (e.g. calls for justice, personal stories, or referring to gender expectations) and how do they contribute to the broader framing of VAW in the public sphere?

Based on these questions, I identified the preliminary hypothesis regarding that:

- H1: The stance of a commenter is significantly associated with variables such as sex, language, theme, emotion, the media outlet, and the original text.

- H0: There is no significant association between the commenter's stance and these variables.

Quantitative analysis will allow for the identification of significant correlations, and the null hypothesis will be tested with the intent to reject it in favor of the alternative hypothesis. I will do exploratory data analysis in R in order to seek for significant patterns.

B. Literature review

Linguistic stances and identity

The concept of stance, or stancetaking, is fundamental in discourse analysis, as it provides a lens for understanding how language indexes speakers' positions in a conversation and negotiates social identities. Stance is not only linguistic, but a socio-discursive phenomenon that unravels social dynamics and human interactions across different spheres. This research project heavily relies on this concept, as people take a stance in the discourse on violence against women (VAW) by sharing their thoughts, critiques, and emotional responses. Kiesling (2022) emphasized that stance is inherently dynamic and constantly negotiated in the conversation. One of the key functions of language is that it indexes stances, which in turn shape identities, although the relationship between the two is fluid. Kiesling (2022, p. 411) notes that "people of any identity can take virtually any stance," highlighting the non-fixed nature of stancetaking.

Moreover, the scholar suggests two ways of categorizing stance – epistemic and affective (interactional). While epistemicity refers to a speaker's knowledge and degree of certainty (as expressed through modals, adverbs, etc.), affective stance encompasses a person's feelings, attitudes, and emotions in the context of language socialization (Kiesling, 2022, pp. 416-417).

Similarly, Giaxoglou and Johansson (2020) and Langlotz and Locher (2012) view the stancetaking as a social act and explore the interplay between emotions and stancetaking in online discussions on social media. The former work shows how emotions are networked through social media, reinforcing the idea that social media play a key role in shaping diverse stances and their interactions. Emotional expressions in these studies were produced as a reaction to real tragic events. This statement is essential, as the discourse on violence against women (VAW) is often shaped by dreadful events and is deeply emotionally charged – constituting affective stances mentioned above. Langlotz and Locher (2012) add a further focus on emotions in online disagreements, identifying strategies like explicit expressions (e.g., *HAHA!*), implicit cues (e.g., sarcasm), and emotional descriptors (e.g., *horrible*). Emotions are framed in a wide variety of ways, and they are closely connected to stances, identities and ideologies underlain the text.

Regarding the overarching notion of ideologies, van Dijk (2012) contributes with the discussion of the ideological discourse structures, showing how participants ideologically polarize the discourse into “Us” and “Them”, usually emphasizing positive traits for the in-group (Us) and negative ones for the out-group (Them) or de-emphasizing negative traits for the former and positive traits for the latter. This polarization underlies much of the online debate on VAW, shaping narratives of blame, justification, and resistance.

Gendered discourse and violence against women:

Gendered discourse around violence against women often reflect patriarchal ideologies deeply entrenched in our society. The study conducted by Aragbuawa & Ojo (2022) examine women's discursive resistance to male oppression, particularly virtual resistance and how it strengthens the agenda of domestic gender equality. The analysis of the comments was correlated

with their ideological stances and the discourse structures included victimization and the polarization – positive representation of self (Us) and negative interpretation of others (Them) that mirror van Dijk's (2012) theory.

Similarly, Bou-Franch & Garcés Blitvich (2014) also demonstrate how Us/Them polarization in the conversations on violence against women, as they identified patriarchal discursive strategies used in such interactions – minimizing abuse, denying its existence, and blaming women. The content of the comments was linked to their social identities; the in-group (men) was considered to be innocent and unprotected, while the out-group (women) was constructed as the one to manipulate and trick men. Concealing the responsibility of abusive men and putting the fault on the women is evident in Berns (2001) as well, where she conceptualized it as patriarchal resistance. Berns identifies two key strategies employed by this movement: (1) degendering the problem and (2) gendering the blame. The former is about removing gender from the issue of the violence, picturing it as a human issue that affects men as well, which ignores how domestic violence disproportionately affects women. At the same time, the blame of the violence becomes gendered – women are often held accountable through victim-blaming. The paradox reveals deeply rooted prejudices that shape VAW discourse, including those present in Kazakhstan.

Violence against women (VAW) and the socio-political situation in Central Asia:

Violence against women is a grave issue in Central Asia and has its roots in patriarchal norms, cultural traditions and socio-political realms. Juraev (2022) provides a regional overview, highlighting specific forms of violence like bride-kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, suicide of women in Tajikistan, requirement for 'bride virginity' in Uzbekistan. According to the statistics, 20% of Kazakhstani women and 30% of Kyrgyzstani women experience abuse, predominantly at the

hands of their husbands. While there is no data in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, one in five women in Tajikistan is a victim of domestic violence (pp. 6-7). The main causes of domestic violence in Central Asia are patriarchal norms, misinterpretation of religion, abuse of traditions, and prejudice. Karabay, Akhmetova, and Durrani (2024) further examine how crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, intensify gender inequality and exacerbate instances of domestic violence. They focused on the challenges that VAW organizations faced in Kazakhstan during the pandemic – limited capacity, cut in funding, increased demand, and need to shift to remote service. They propose strengthening legal protections and raising public awareness as essential measures for addressing the crisis.

VAW is rarely considered an isolated phenomenon. It is examined through the intersection with ethnicity and socio-political identity in Kazakhstan, highlighting some cultural tendencies as well. Snajdr (2007) demonstrated how different stakeholders ethnicized the subject of domestic violence differently to either justify or counteract the abuse. For instance, police officers referred to Kazakh cultural traditions and observations of Kazakh upbringing that normalize domestic violence, while the Society of Muslim Women ethnicized the problem to solve it – they position Islamic identity as a protective force against violence, attributing blame to past Russian influence for promoting behaviors, such as alcoholism, that contribute to domestic abuse.

The connection between the Kazakh culture and VAW is also traced in the study by Arystanbek (2022), where she introduces the notion of hegemonic femininity in Kazakhstan and claims that Kazakh society had high and strict standards of femininity and idealizes the women's roles as mothers, daughters and wives. This leads to the reinforcement of the patriarchal norms and justifies violence against women when they do not conform to these norms. Therefore,

women get victim-blamed and their bodies become an idea of preserving cultural or national values.

A similar study on feminist activism and public opinion in Kyrgyzstan, identifying a polarized social media discourse where conservative and progressive voices clash was carried out by Butrimaitė (2020). The results revealed that the majority of male commenters hold conservative views, while the majority of female commenters are part of the cultural change advocacy movement that support women empowerment. Given the methodological similarities, Butrimaitė's study offers a valuable comparative framework for this research.

Across the literature, we see the strong emphasis on how people perform identity and negotiate their stances through language – especially in the discussions of emotionally charged topics like violence against women. Studies have shown that gendered discourse often results in polarization, where people divide into opposing ideological positions as “Us” and “Them”, appealing to emotions, cultural norms, and social positions. So, building on this foundation, this research which explores whether similar competing discourses are evident in Kazakhstani context, probably consisting of nationalist/traditional and feminist/activist agendas. Additionally, it examines how people belonging to each ‘camp’ express their stances. As previous research also highlighted the role of the gender norms and the difference among male and female commenters, it would be interesting to know if there is a significant correlation between sex and stance in the context of Kazakhstan? What is the emotional layer of this discourse – what emotions are mostly expressed and in what ways?

C. Research Design

This research will combine both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative part, I decided to focus on exploratory data analysis – exploring patterns and interactions between variables. Although the results of this analysis cannot be generalized to the population, I still used some tools of inferential statistics – like a binary logistic regression model. So, the quantitative analysis reveals general tendencies and patterns.

The qualitative analysis is responsible for micro-level analysis of the linguistic content – what is in the comments? What language(s) do people use? What themes are prevalent and how they are expressed? What are the power dynamics behind this?

As mentioned above, the discourse on VAW in Kazakhstan is recurring. People debate on this issue each time a new case takes place, gets news coverage and public reactions. The analysis is based on the dataset that contains people’s reactions to such four notorious discourse events in Kazakhstan.

Cases

1. “Saltanat’s case”

The case that gained both local and international attention. Ex-minister who was previously charged for corruption had beaten his wife, Saltanat Nukenova, to death in a luxurious restaurant at night. The murder took place November 9, 2023. The forensic report presented in court revealed that Saltanat suffered a brain injury caused by external bruises, wounds, and abrasions. It noted 230 milliliters of blood between her skull and brain surface, along with evidence of strangulation. There was [CCTV footage](#) that captured Kuandyk Bishimbayev hitting

Saltanat, dragging her by hair and kicking; the audio recordings of him humiliating her. Despite numerous evidence and testimonies, the road to justice was challenging and tiresome. Saltanat's brother, Aitbek Amangeldi, fought for justice and founded the Saltanat Nukenova Memorial Foundation and a volunteers' network to help survivors of gender-based violence (Tokoeva, 2024; UN Women, 2024).

2. The 16-year-old girl from Kyzylorda

The second case is about the 16-year-old girl from Kyzylorda, who was held in sexual slavery by her classmates for six months through beatings, torture, extortion, threats, and forced drug use. She was isolated from her parents and threatened with the possibility of their harm or death if she failed to comply with the instructions. She was forced to prostitution and more than a thousand people, including some government officials, sexually assaulted her over the period of six months. According to Tengrinews.kz, when passing the sentence, the court took into account as mitigating circumstances the fact that some of the perpetrators are underage and some of them expressed sincere remorse. No aggravating circumstances were identified. Defendants M.N., A.Zh., and Q.D. were sentenced to 6 years and 8 months of imprisonment. Defendant B.A. received 4 years and 8 months of imprisonment; defendants T.U. and Q.A. also received 4 years and 8 months. Defendants T.A., B.A., and T.D. were sentenced to 7 years and 6 months of imprisonment (“Скандал с секс-рабством школьницы в Кызылорде: объявлены приговоры”, 2025). The first occurrence of this case was on August 14, 2024, and the final court decision was released on April 3, 2025.

3. Karina Mamash

The next case has one thing in common with the “Saltanat’s case” – Karina Mamash’s husband is also a politician. In May 2024, Karina Mamash, the wife of the ambassador of Kazakhstan in UAE, shared that her husband had been physically abusing her for the last 10 years. She [shared photos](#) of her bruises and gave interviews about her issue. This case came after “the Saltanat’s case”, so the comments frequently compare two instances and express public fatigue. After the news, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan recalled Mamash from his position and later announced his dismissal. Karina Mamash shared that they divorced in October 2024. After almost a year-long the necessary forensic examinations and collecting evidence, the court decided to detain Mamash as a preventive measure while the case proceeds. This [news](#) was released on April 4, 2025.

4. Al-Beine Zaripova

Al-Beine Zaripova, a 43-year-old woman was murdered by her husband. Her body was found in the basement of her home on January 31, 2024. However, the case was [discussed](#) in the media only in August 2024. Sabyrzhan Zaripov, her husband of 15 years, stabbed her 10 times and killed her. After the murder, he transferred 4.7 million tenge from her account to his own using her phone. He then took all the documents and brought their 12-year-old daughter to his sister’s house. He later admitted his guilt but used the argument that he was in a state of emotional distress to reduce his sentence. This case stands out because it involves a child, the murderer’s sister being aware of the crime, and, in addition to the murder, theft was also committed. On September 25, 2024, the Almaty court [delivered](#) its verdict -- 15-year prison sentence in a medium-security facility. The court dismissed the defense's claim that the crime

was committed in a state of temporary insanity, as the evidence of his actions being pre-planned were provided. In addition to the sentence, the court ordered Zaripov to pay 20 million tenge as a moral compensation to the victim's family.

Dataset

[The dataset](#) consists of 678 comments reacting to eight posts on the cases of VAW. For all four cases, two posts were selected – one of them in the Kazakh language and one in the Russian language. The decision to include posts in both languages was made to ensure the linguistic diversity and representativeness of public reactions – the posts in different languages cover different audiences. I tried to choose the post that captured the immediate reactions of the citizens – the ones that delivered the news first. For Kazakh language posts, @kaz_tengrinews and @_stan.kz were chosen, because they had the most engagement compared to other media outlets. The posts in Russian were from @batyrjamal and @ztb_kz, known for their consistent coverage of gendered issues and active comment sections. These media outlets may differ in their audiences, so the selection was made to capture a broad spectrum of public reactions and potentially explore whether the correlation between the media outlet and the dominant stance could be made.

The comments under each post are extracted via <https://exportcomments.com/>, which randomly extracts up to 100 comments under the post. All comments are stored in one spreadsheet, categorized by the source they refer to.

Each entry in the *comments* dataset includes:

IV - the Independent Variable

DV - the Dependent Variable

- **Medium:** Instagram
- **Post** [IV, categorical]: the original poster/media outlet
- **Username** of the commenter
- **Sex** [IV, categorical]: it was inferred from the page of the commenter if possible¹
- **Comment:** the content itself
- **Stance** [DV, categorical]: position of the commenter (support/victimblaming)
- **Theme** [IV, categorical]: overarching themes to see the patterns
 - Justifications & Blame (JB); Patriarchy & Gender Expectations (PGE); Moral & Religious Frames (MRF); Systemic Critique & Calls for Justice (SCCJ); Emotional & Personal Reactions (EPR); Dismissive & Deflective Strategies (DDS)
- **Sub-theme:** underlying micro-theme that helps in qualitative analysis
- **Emotion** [IV, categorical]: emotions that the comments involved
- **Language** [IV, categorical]: the (primary) language of the comment (when the commenter code-switches, the dominant language was chosen for the ease of analysis)

¹ For the sake of the study, the distinction between sex and gender was not provided, as I could identify it solely based on the Instagram accounts of the commenters – their usernames, names, photos, and, if available, pronouns. In case of the fake accounts or the ambiguous ones, the field was marked “NA” and dropped from the statistical analysis. Similarly, when some of the categories were irrelevant, they were marked “NA” as well.

- **Text** [IV, categorical]: the original text/post ID [from 1 to 8]
- **Case** [IV, categorical]: Case/discourse event ID[from 1 to 4]

The emotions were coded and assigned manually based on the Ekman’s classification of emotions, where six basic emotions are identified: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise. The Ekman model is the basic model that is most frequently adopted in sentiment analysis (Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Initially, I tried to analyze based on the Plutchik’s wheel of emotions, which includes primary, secondary, and tertiary emotions and allows for a more nuanced understanding of affective states. However, this model proved inefficient for my research, because most of the Instagram comments are short and does not have enough context to distinguish more nuanced emotions like annoyance and anger or trust and acceptance.

So, Ekman’s basic emotions were more suitable. For the comments that were difficult to assign a single emotion or contained more complex ones like cynicism – the ‘ambiguous’ category was added as an umbrella term. Earlier, the dataset was coded not only for basic, but also secondary-level emotions; however, I simplified for ease of analysis and pattern recognition.

Quantitative analysis (in R)

For the analysis of the correlations between the IVs and the DV, the dataset was cleaned and prepared. The variables with “IV” above were selected, as they are more likely to predict the stance of the commenter – the DV. The statistical test chosen for the analysis was binary logistic regression – as the dependent variable, **Stance**, has only two levels: blame and support. It explores the relationships between the dependent variable and independent variables and their combinations. For this test, all the missing values, NAs, had to be deleted, so I used the *na.omit()*

function to achieve that. The clean dataset consisted of 389 entries. The summary of its content is shown below:

	POST	SEX	STANCE	THEME	EMOTION	LANGUAGE	TEXT
_stan.kz	: 80	Female:316	blame : 77	DDS : 14	ambiguous: 92	Kazakh :206	7 :71
batyrjamal	:104	Male : 73	support:312	EPR : 84	anger :110	Russian:183	1 :61
kaz.tengrinews	:107			JB : 43	disgust : 73		5 :51
ztb_kz	: 98			MRF : 42	fear : 34		2 :47
				PGE : 60	joy : 4		4 :46
				SCCJ:146	sadness : 71		8 :43
					surprise : 5		(Other):70
CASE							
1:	108						
2:	79						
3:	88						
4:	114						

Figure 1. The summary of the cleaned dataset

For better triangulation, I additionally applied CART (Classification and Regression Trees) and Random Forest methods to analyze **Stance**. CART constructs a single decision tree for classification, making it easy to interpret the relationships between predictors and the dependent variable (DV), including informative visualizations. However, it is prone to overfitting data and having some inaccuracies. In contrast, Random Forest performs better in this context, as it generates multiple decision trees and bases its predictions on their collective results. Additionally, it identifies the most important variables in the model.

Beyond these tests, I was planning to arrive at an explanation for **the competing discourses on VAW** by analyzing *the frequency lists (words and phrases), themes, and sentiments* in R.

- Frequency lists – collection of items/words often appearing together: collocations, phrases, etc. The most frequently used words will gain more explanation.

Due to the inability of R to perform theme and sentiment analyses in the Kazakh and Russian languages effectively, I coded them manually as demonstrated above.

Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis is aimed at providing micro-level insights and in-depth analysis of the variables. I will look at the underlying themes in the discourse and look at sample comments to analyze the linguistic properties:

1. Justifications & Blame (JB);
2. Patriarchy & Gender Expectations (PGE);
3. Moral & Religious Frames (MRF); \
4. Systemic Critique & Calls for Justice (SCCJ);
5. Emotional & Personal Reactions (EPR);
6. Dismissive & Deflective Strategies (DDS)

In addition, cases will be explored separately to see if a particular case triggered a specific reaction. What case(s) generated more victim-blaming comments than the others? What are the possible reasons for that? Finally, the media outlets and their audiences are also important to consider, as the public reaction differs not only based on the case, but also based on the original media and the post. The data for this section is quite limited, but it is still interesting for observing patterns.

C. Presentation of Primary Data

Based on the dataset and methods described above, the preliminary results are below. The data visualization is included.

1. Quantitative analysis

1.1 Dataset summary

Based on the Figure 1, we can infer that the discourse of VAW in Kazakhstan is mostly female dominated – 81.23% of the commenters in the dataset are females. The dominant STANCE is “supportive” consisting of 312 comments (80.2%) supporting the victims of violence. The dominant theme was the category of “Systemic Critique & Calls for Justice (SCCJ)” (37.53%), while the emotions that were assigned the most were “anger” (28.28%) and “ambiguous” (23.65%)

1.2 Visualizations of the relations between STANCE and predictors

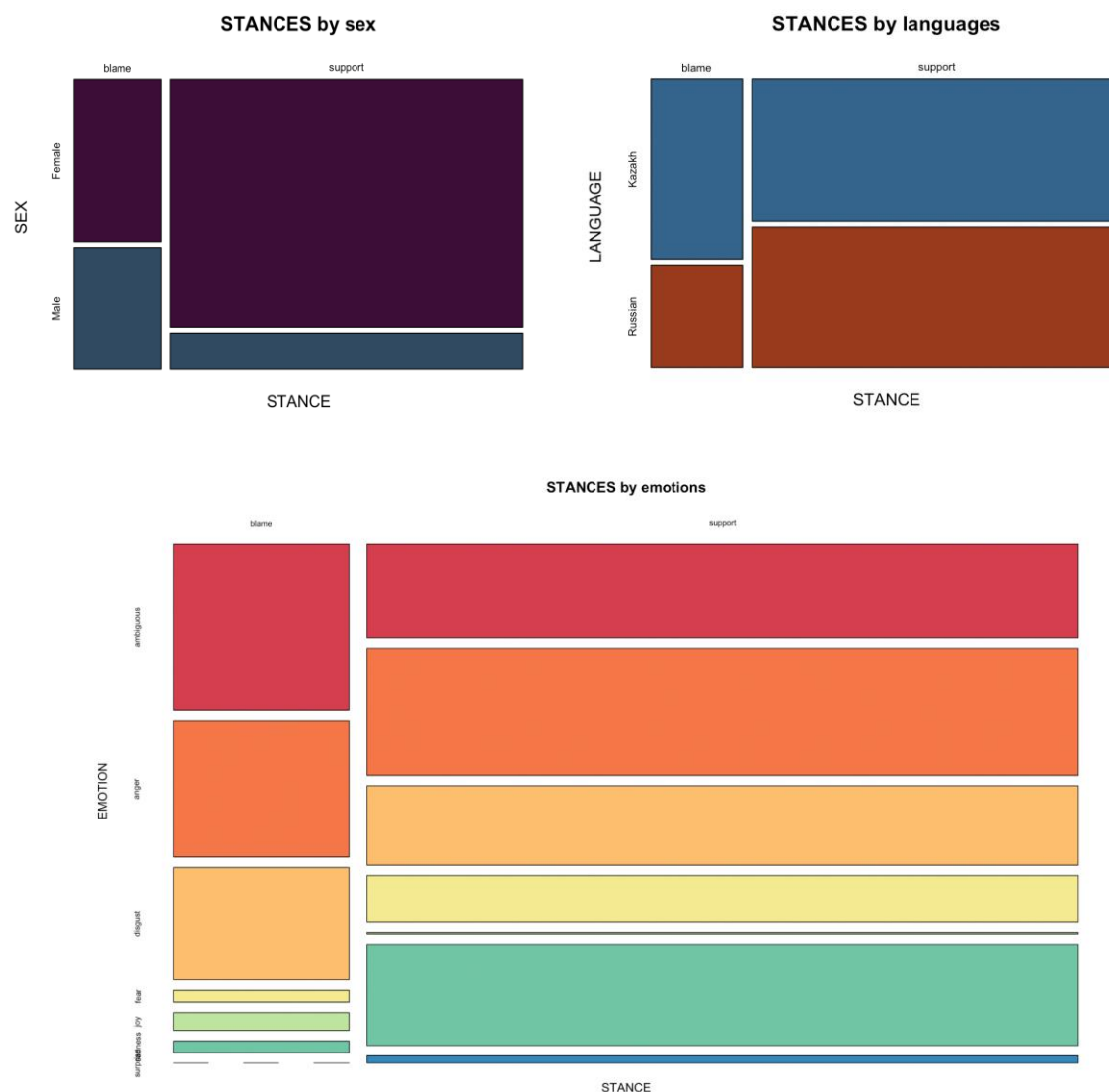


Figure 2. STANCE by SEX; STANCE by LANGUAGE; STANCE by EMOTION

As shown in these graphs, the relationship between the predictors (SEX, LANGUAGE, EMOTION) and the dependent variable (STANCE) is really interesting. Overall, the supporting stance is dominant in all categories. However, we could infer that men are more likely to have a victim-blaming stance compared to women (Figure 2). This finding aligns with the other studies like Butrimaitė (2020). Regarding the languages, the comments in Kazakh had more blame than

the ones in Russian. The emotions graph is much more evenly distributed for both sides, but we can see that blaming comments were mostly ‘ambiguous’ in terms of emotions, while the supporting side was assigned ‘fear’ and ‘sadness’ much more than the other group.

1.3 Akaike information criterion and binary logistic regression

The number of dependent variables in the dataset and the combination of them for the statistical analysis are various. So, I decided to opt for the AICc analysis first. AICc stands for the Akaike information criterion, a metric used to compare several regression models. AICc balances model fit with complexity, helping to avoid overfitting – i.e., selecting a model that fits the current data very well.

Then, within the top-performing models, interpretation focused on predictors that were statistically significant, as indicated by p-values. P-values allow us to see how statistically grounded the relationships among the tested variables are.

From both characteristics and out of 27 variations, the best-performing model was STANCE ~ LANGUAGE*THEME. It explored how well the main effects of LANGUAGE and THEME separately and their interaction predict the STANCE. The output is shown below:

```
Model:
STANCE ~ (LANGUAGE * THEME)
      Df Deviance   AIC   LRT Pr(>Chi)
<none>      168.69 192.69
LANGUAGE:THEME  5   182.48 196.48 13.796  0.01696 *
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1
```

Figure 3. Output of the drop1() function for LANGUAGE*THEME interaction

The drop1() function revealed that the interaction between LANGUAGE and THEME is significant for explaining the data. The pchisq() test confirmed the significance, as the p-value was very low ($=1.117819e-40$). The accuracy of the model was 93.32% or 0.9332.

1.4 Tests: CART and Random Forest

CART (Classification and Regression Trees) studied the effects of SEX+EMOTION+LANGUAGE and POST+SEX+LANGUAGE on STANCE. The accuracy of these tests was 93.3%.

The visualizations of the CART results are shown below.

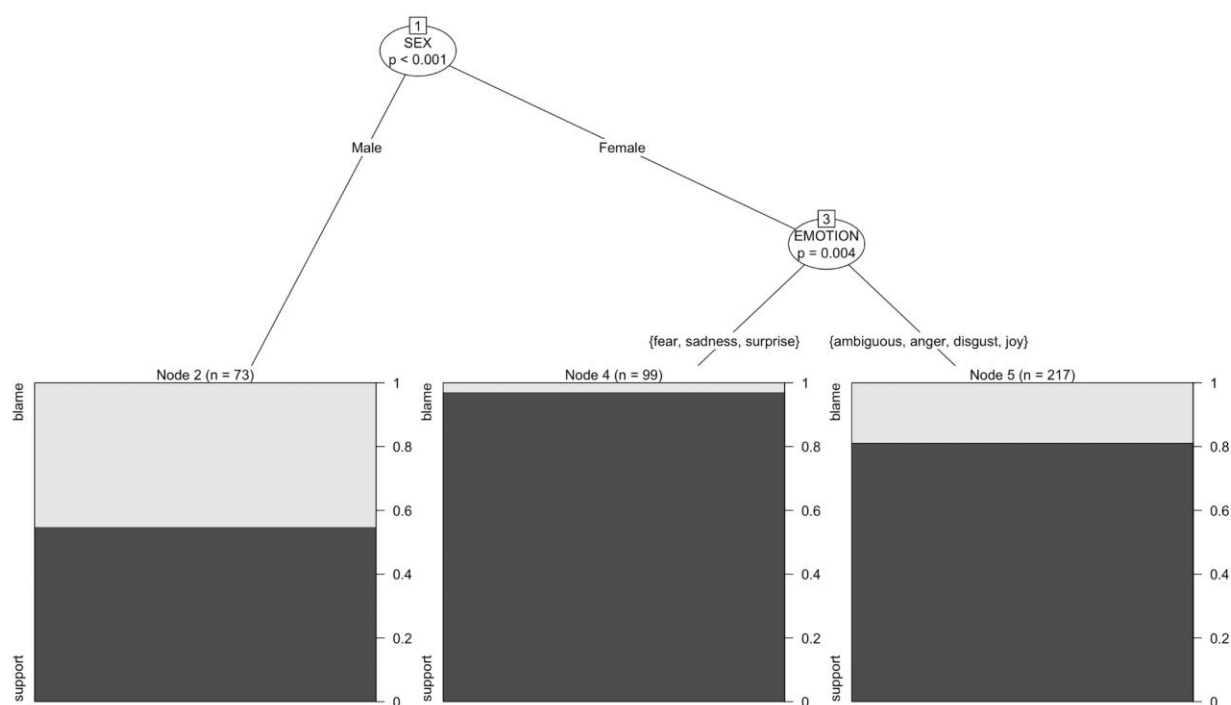


Figure 4. STANCE and SEX+EMOTION+LANGUAGE

This tree shows how well SEX and EMOTION predict STANCE. The main predictor is SEX. As stated earlier, males were more likely to blame than females. Emotions mattered for females – women expressing fear, sadness, or surprise overwhelmingly supported victims; Women who expressed anger, disgust, or joy were more likely to blame than those expressing fear/sadness.

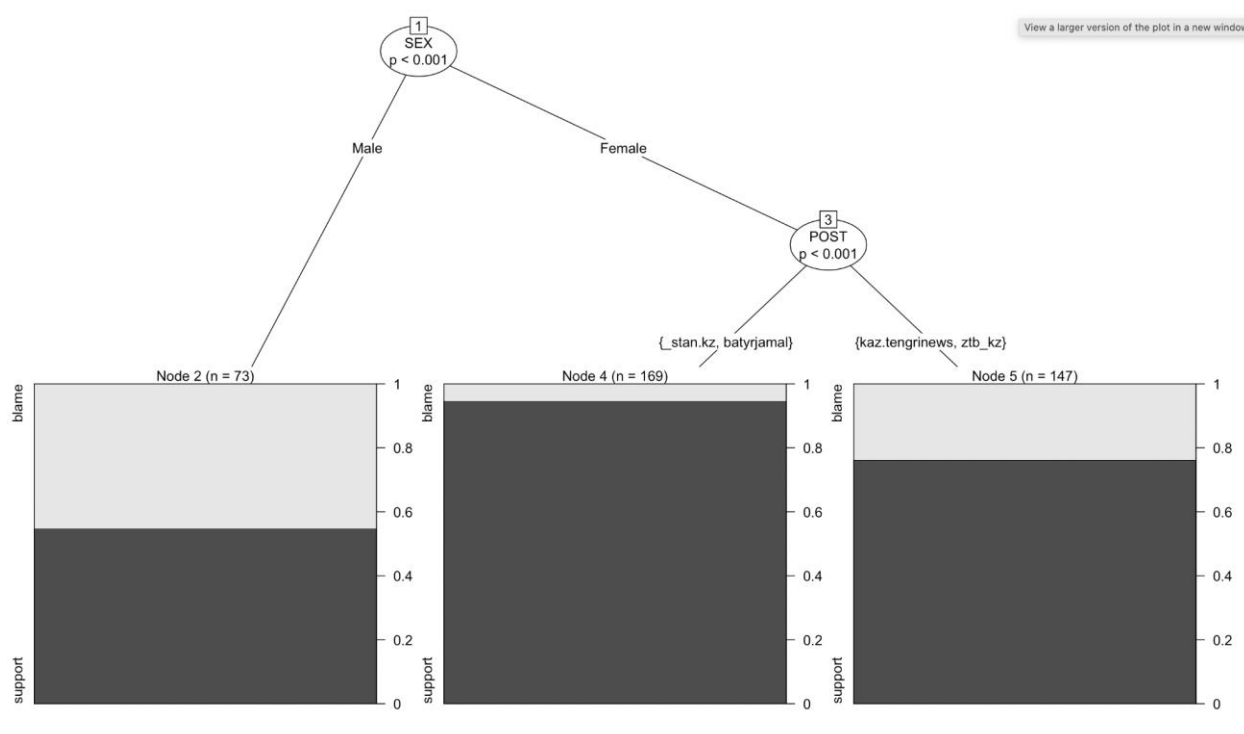


Figure 5. STANCE and POST+SEX+LANGUAGE

Here, the relation of SEX and STANCE is also proved. However, interestingly, POST variable had some divergence. Posts from Stan.kz & BatyrJamal generated stronger support, while posts from Kaz.TengriNews and ZTB_KZ attracted more blaming comments, although supportive stances remained dominant overall. This could be explained in terms of the audiences of the media outlets and their framing strategies that might affect the reactions. Stan.kz & BatyrJamal

may emphasize victim support. Kaz.TengriNews & ZTB_KZ may present information in a way that allows for more victim-blaming narratives.

The Random Forest tested the importance of variables like LANGUAGE, CASE, POST, SEX, EMOTION.

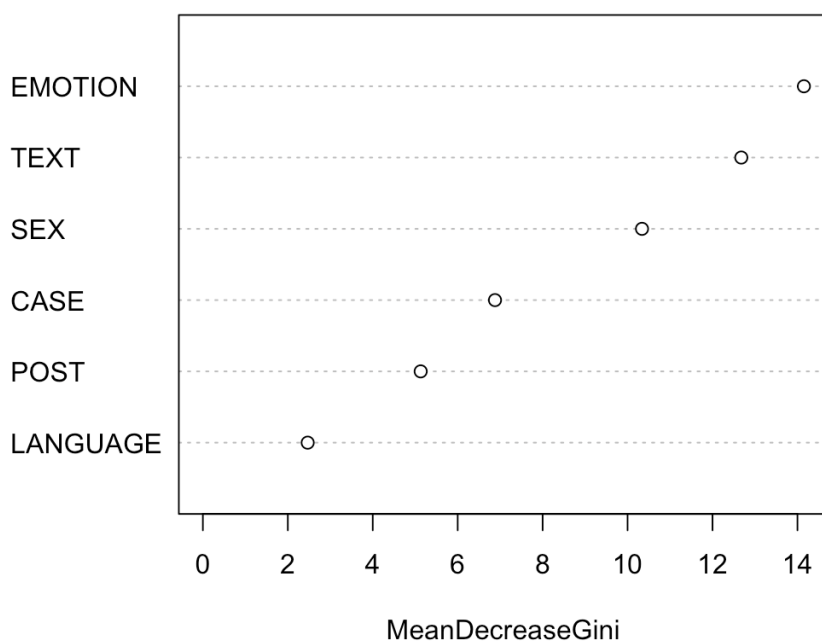


Figure 6. The Random Forest test output

The results suggest that EMOTION, TEXT and SEX are important predictors of STANCE, while LANGUAGE was the least significant compared to other variables. The accuracy of this test is 80.71%, which is decent for making conclusion about the importance of the variables.

Overall, the quantitative analysis reveals that the stances (supportive & victim-blaming) are consistently correlated with variables like EMOTION, SEX, and TEXT. Women, who make up 81.23% of the dataset, overwhelmingly hold a supportive stance, while men are more likely to

blame the victim compared to women. Emotionally, fear and sadness align with the supportive stance, while anger or ambiguous categories appear in blaming contexts more.

LANGUAGE emerged as a complex factor. While Kazakh-language comments generated more blame than Russian-language ones, LANGUAGE performed poorly on AICc rankings, which leads to the conclusion that it doesn't explain STANCE effectively by itself. Only in interaction with THEME (LANGUAGE * THEME) it became significant ($p \approx 1.12e-40$) and highly accurate (93.32%), meaning that LANGUAGE has only an indirect effect in certain contexts.

The quantitative analysis proved that stance toward VAW is not random, it rather structured and potentially follows certain patterns – reflecting social dynamics in linguistic and thematic settings. It would be extremely interesting to re-run such analysis on a larger sample.

2. Qualitative analysis

2.1. Themes

a) Systemic Critique & Calls for Justice (SCCJ)

As shown in Figure 1, this theme was the most prevalent one in the [cleaned] dataset with 146 entries in total. In this category, the commenters highlighted structural issues, criticizing systemic failures and demanding social and legal reforms. Some examples illustrating this tendencies are below:

CI: Кінәлілерге аяушылық болмасын, қатаң жазалу керек

[There should be no mercy for the guilty; they must be punished harshly.]

C2: Президент қатаң сондай заң шығармаса көбейебереді

[If the President doesn't introduce a strict law like that, it will only keep increasing.]

C3: Он заранее запломбировал все!!!!Разве экспертиза не может выявить в состоянии аффекта убивал или нет?!Тут же даже дураку понятно что он все запланировал!!!Следователь,Прокуратура и эксперты разве не видят?!!!

[He sealed everything off in advance!!!! Can't the forensic experts determine whether he killed in a fit of passion or not?! Even a fool can see that it was all premeditated!!!

Don't the investigator, the prosecutor, and the experts see it?!!!]

There was a general tendency to demand harsh punishments for the criminals as in C1, calling for legislative reforms as in C2, and questioning the government and justice system as in C3. Due to the level of corruption in Kazakhstan, social justice is not an easily-accessible right – people do not believe the government anymore.

In Kazakh language, the demand and obligation are expressed through the word *kerek* ‘need, required to’. According to the frequency list, there are 67 occurrences of this word, including collocations like ату керек ‘need to shoot [the criminals]’ (4 occurrences), жазалау керек ‘need to punish [the criminals]’ (4 occurrences). Russian words associated with the punishment: надо ‘need to’ (17), наказание ‘punishment’ (4), наказать ‘to punish’ (4), пожизненное ‘life-long sentence’ (4).

b) Emotional & Personal Reactions

The category of emotional expression, without bringing other themes, is in this section. The discourse of VAW is a highly emotional conversation, especially when people share their first reactions. As I illustrated above, there are various emotions like anger, sadness, and fear being prominent in the commentary. Some instances of emotional expression and personal reactions are here:

C4: Это ужас

[This is horrifying.]

C5: Мал сорлы

[animal]

C6: Иманды болсын...

[May (she/he) rest in peace... (a religious condolence in Kazakh).]

The first example, C4, shows fear, C5 – anger, and C6 – sadness. In this category commenters are most likely to explicitly show their emotions. The condolences like in C6 are also very frequent.

According to the frequency list, the word *ужас* “terror” has 15 occurrences, while the condolence example *иманды болсын* has 20 occurrences. So, the emotional reactions are mostly shared, and there are frequent words and phrases that they use in expression.

c) Patriarchy & Gender Expectations (PGE)

Interestingly, the theme of Patriarchy & Gender Expectations was not the most dominant in the discourse, as we could expect based on the previous studies. It had 60 entries in the dataset, which is 2.4 times less than the first theme. Here, people discuss gender norms, masculinity, and culturally embedded power imbalances. The examples are shown below:

C7: Нормальный мужик повернется и уйдет, а для недомужиков норма бить и унижать

[A real man will walk away, but for 'halfmen', it's normal to beat and humiliate.]

C8: Видно же женщина очень красивая, умная совсем простая, она совсем не похожа на распутную легкого поведения женщину.

[It's clear that the woman is very beautiful, intelligent, and very modest; she doesn't look like a promiscuous woman at all.]

C9: «біздің жігіттер»)))

[«our men»)))]

C10: вы сами себя порочите. Нормально ведите себя ,а не как малы

[You're disgracing yourselves. Behave properly, not like animals.]

Although holding and promoting gender expectations is a toxic tendency in general, in this category people use them mostly on the core of the intention of defending women. They subconsciously rely on patriarchal ideas. The idea of a “real man” behaving certainly

as in C7 or protecting the victim by emphasizing her "proper" behavior and appearance, contrasting her with a "promiscuous woman" as in C8 are examples of how ambiguous the boundaries between stances in real life are.

From the point of discursive strategies, there is a clear similarity to Aragbuawa & Ojo (2022), in a way that gendered arguments show features of polarization and victimization. Van Dijk's framework Us/Them or in-group/out-group dichotomy is also highly relevant. Within this theme, the in-group, women, are victimized as opposed to the out-group – men. So, the in-group presents themselves from a positive light and naturally showcases "them" from a negative side. The wordings like *недомужики* 'half-men', *еркексымақтар* 'fake-men', *кухонный боксер* 'kitchen boxer', *малы* 'animals' illustrate how perpetrators are criticized linguistically. C9 also shows the instance of sarcasm and reference – "біздің жігіттер" is a line from the song by a Kazakh singer, Yerbolat Kudaibergen, where the lyrics praise Kazakh men, their power, and dignity. Therefore, this comment sarcastically reminds of this song, hinting on the real face of the Kazakh men abusing women and committing crimes.

d) Moral & Religious Frames (MRF)

The theme covering the judgements based on moral, cultural, and religious worldviews was also significant. There were 43 entries in the dataset with this theme assigned. There are some examples shown below:

C11: Очень страшно ! Женщину забили до смерти в общественном месте и никто не пришёл на помощь, не вызвал полицию !!! Как так??? /sad-face/

[Very scary! A woman was beaten to death in a public place and no one helped, no one called the police!!! How is that possible??? /sad-face/]

C12: Мәселе ақша болғанда, аямайды ешкімди адамдар

[When it's about money, people spare no one]

C13: Құдай сақтасын осындай сұмдықтан!

[May God protect us from such horror!]

Commenters were inclined to frame the issue of VAW in Kazakhstan as a consequence of moral crisis, condemn or support based on their religious views, and ask for divine protection. The comments were overwhelmingly supportive, with the criticism toward general moral decay of society (C12) or towards specific people – perpetrators or passive bystanders as in C11.

Many comments, especially in Kazakh language, were asking for God's protection and justice, as shown in C13. In the frequency list, the collocations like “Құдай сақтасын” (7) and “Алла сақтасын” (10) were notable.

e) Justifications & Blame (JB)

The section with 43 entries, and probably one of the most significant ones – Justifications & Blame. This theme is characterized by blaming the victim, their choices, family, and lifestyle. These commenters tend to justify violence and assign blame to the victim or other external factors, leaving the perpetrator out of the discussion. The examples are:

C14: Сама виновата

[It's her own fault]

C15: наверное бабам надо бежать, если их бьют! А они сидят, как дворняжки держатся за мужей обеспеченных, а потом ноют, что их истязают /laugh-laugh-laugh/

[Maybe women should run away if they are being beaten! But they stay like strays clinging to their wealthy husbands and then whine that they are being tortured /laugh-laugh-laugh/]

C16: Әйелдер тіліне ие болса, бүкіл әлемде бейбітшілік орнайды. Басқа пәле тілден !!!!!

[If women controlled their tongues, there would be peace in the world. All trouble comes from the tongue!!!!]

C17: Не просто так

[It didn't happen for no reason]

C18: Мас күйнде киім ауыстырып жатқан дегенін тусинбедім. 16 жаста ішін жүрсе ози де мәз емес

[I don't understand the part about changing clothes while drunk. If she's 16 and already drinking, she's not so innocent herself.]

As shown in the examples, the overall argument is that women's behaviour provoked violence and they should have behaved in a certain way to avoid it. Also, they often claim that it is women's responsibility to leave the men who beat, so if they do not leave, it is their choice. The comments above are classic examples of victim-blaming.

In this case, van Dijk's (2012) polarization works vice versa – women are criticized and blamed for the violence, as the other group claims that they deserved violence based on their actions.

Blame is an important concept in the overall discourse of violence against women, as the public always seeks for the one to place blame on. Sometimes it is on the perpetrator both morally and legally, but otherwise people justify the violence and blame the victim herself. Berns (2001) previously discussed the phenomenon that people are inclined to degender the problem – “everyone is affected by it, not only women” – and gender the blame – “if women behaved properly, they would not be beaten”. In our case, the ‘gendering the blame’ part is clearly present. Arystanbek's (2022) notion of hegemonic femininity also aligns with these examples, as they show high standards for women in Kazakh society, and the fact that women get accused for not conforming to gender norms.

Moreover, the comments belonging to this theme contained some slur words or words with negative connotations about women like *қатын* (7 occurrences) and *баба* (3 occurrences). Both of these words are considered disrespectful towards women.

f) Dismissive & Deflective Strategies

Finally, the comments that undermined the seriousness of the issue and tried to redirect it were grouped into this category. There were only 14 comments under this theme.

C19: Подстава сияқты.

[Looks like a setup.]

C20: Не удивлюсь, если на этом фоне "случайно" подорожает газ((((

[I wouldn't be surprised if gas prices 'accidentally' rise because of this.]

C21: Новый сериал.

[A new series.]

C22: Почему то резко увеличилось число избиваемых дженшин)) Они что уже сами себя бьют? laugh/ Эту страну умом не понять

[All of a sudden, the number of beaten women has increased)) Are they beating themselves now?/ laugh/ You can't understand this country with logic.]

As shown above, such comments frequently used sarcasm and humor to mock or trivialize the issue. In C19, the commenter suggests the situation is staged, implying the accused might be innocent or falsely accused. The commenter in C20, similarly comes up with their own conspiracy that the incident is a distraction from more important economic or political issues. C21 and C22 rely on sarcasm, framing the crime as a show and expressing joy and disbelief.

Such instances of humor could be connected to public fatigue due to the waves of negative news on social media. The number of incidents is high to the extent that people get detached and numb to the issue despite its graveness.

2.2. Cases

As mentioned above, the dataset consists of four high-profile cases. Each of them had different proportions of blame/support comments. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of stances across cases:

Table 1

The distribution of stances by cases

STANCE	Saltanat's case	16 y.o. girl from Kyzylorda	Karina Mamash's case	Al-Beine Zaripova's case
Blame	27	14	33	3
Support	81	65	55	111

Proportion-wise, Karina Mamash's case had the most number (37.5%) of victim-blaming comments, while Al-Beine Zaripova's case gained overwhelmingly supportive (97.4%) comments. Saltanat's case and the case of the 16-year-old girl from Kyzylorda had mostly supportive reactions, the percentage of blaming comments were 25% and 17.7% respectively.

Table 2

The distribution of themes by cases

THEME	Saltanat’s case	16 y.o. girl from Kyzylorda	Karina Mamash’s case	Al-Beine Zaripova’s case
DDS	3	1	10	0
EPR	31	1	8	44
JB	7	12	21	3
MRF	6	14	6	16
PGE	12	4	30	14
SCCJ	49	47	13	37

One of the possible reasons why Karina Mamash’s case gained much more victim-blaming comments compared to other cases was timing. The news with her photos were published in May 2024 – just after the long court trials of Saltanat’s case. Consequently, substantial number of comments compared these two cases – some expressed their surprise and sadness, while some demonstrated public fatigue and cynicism. Themes distribution shown in Table 2 also suggests that PGE (Patriarchy & Gender Expectations), JB (Justifications & Blame), and DDS (Dismissive & Deflective Strategies) were quite prominent as a reaction to this incident. One of the comments is shown below:

C23: Тренд болдыма бұл ишс?

*[Did it become a trend ***?]*

This comment is highly sarcastic and illustrates how detached people can become a result of fatigue. Interestingly, many commenters also assumed that the reason why the woman did not speak up earlier is money.

C24: Он жыл не үшін шыдап отырған, байлыққа қызығып па? Пока өлтірмегенше жүре береді екен ещә бала туып...

[What was she enduring it for all those ten years? Was she tempted by money? Seems like she would've kept living with him until he killed her... even having more children.]

Such narrative was prominent for both Karina Mamash's and Saltanat's cases, as their husbands were public figures with wealth and power, so some commenters attempted to justify the violence by portraying the women as 'gold diggers'.

Regarding the case that gained support the most, Al-Beine Zaripova was killed by her husband in her own house, while her daughter was in another room. The combination of murder, the theft that followed it, and the presence of the child made this case highly intolerable.

Therefore, SCCJ (Systemic Critique & Calls for Justice (SCCJ) and EPR (Emotional & Personal Reactions) were dominant themes in the comment section reacting to respective posts (Table 2).

The example is below:

C25: Это даже читать страшно /sad-face/ Пытал, истязал, хладнокровно убил... пожизненное только

[It's terrifying even to read this /sad-face/ He tortured, tormented, and cold-bloodedly killed... only a life sentence is appropriate.]

Consequently, the harsher is the circumstances of the case, the more likely it was to generate more support than blame. This is also true for the case of the 16-year-old girl from Kyzylorda – her young age and the fact that she was held in sexual slavery for half a year shocked the public and triggered highly emotional reactions.

2.3 Media outlets

Every media outlet frames the issue in their own way and do differ in the audiences that they cover. The distribution of blaming/supporting stances across media outlets in the dataset is presented below:

Table 3

The distribution of stances by media outlets

Media outlet	Blame	Support	Total	Blame %	Support %
_stan.kz	16	64	80	20.0%	80.0%
batyrjamal	2	102	104	1.9%	98.1%
kaz.tengrinews	32	75	107	29.9%	70.1%
ztb_kz	27	71	98	27.6%	72.4%

According to Table 3, the clear tendency is the supportive stance being dominant. However, the degree varies significantly. The comment section under [BatyrJamal](#) consists of 98.1% supportive comments, while [Kaz.TengriNews](#) has about 70.1%.

What distinguishes BatyrJamal from the other media outlets is that it is positioned as an independent media outlet with a focus on women rights, safety, and self-worth. So, its coverage is made from a feminist perspective and its audience primarily consists of feminist-leaning people. The other three media outlets, Kaz.TengriNews, Stan.kz, and [ZTB_kz](#), are mainstream, privately owned news sources covering a broader and more ideologically diverse public, thus involving people holding a victim-blaming stance as well. Another characteristics of [Stan,kz](#) and Kaz.TengriNews is that they publish their reports fully in Kazakh, which may also affect the audience they attract.

While a more detailed analysis of each post's framing and the media outlets' audience statistics would offer deeper insights, such an analysis is limited due to the deletion of certain posts and unavailability of comprehensive audience information. Therefore, the present analysis is limited to observable patterns in the comment sections.

D. Discussion

Although the vast majority of previous research like Aragbuawa & Ojo (2022), Snajdr (2007), Butrimaite (2020), and Berns (2001) emphasized the extreme polarity of the discourse on VAW, the findings in this paper suggest that the discourse of VAW in Kazakhstan is still mostly dominated by supporting-the-victim agenda. Moreover, as it turns out, gendered arguments and the issue of blame were not the dominating theme in the discourse, as systemic critique and emotional reactions appeared to be more prominent in the discussions. A possible explanation is that commenters were more inclined to criticize the overall government or society rather than focusing on specific participants. This could be an interesting feature of Kazakhstani discourse on VAW that contradicts with the previous studies on other discourse communities.

Regarding the concept of stancetaking in the discourse of VAW, the study does show the flexibility of stances – and the fact that there are no clear-cut boundaries in stancetaking. The paradox is that the commentary might be attempting to defend the victim, but also rely on toxic gender expectations, reinforcing them even more. I also observed that the stances might appear ambiguous and vague – sometimes it is impossible to guess what group does the commenter belong to or do they form another 'camp'? On top of that, as mentioned in Kiesling (2022), people can take different stances regardless of their identity. For example, the significant portion

of victim-blaming comments were also from female commentators, although women are expected to support other women-victims on this issue.

E. Conclusion

This study examined stancetaking in discourse on violence against women (VAW) in Kazakhstan, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore how social media users express support and blame in response to high-profile cases.

A key strength of this research was the usage of the mixed methodology. Through quantitative tools it was possible to check if variables like sex, media outlet, and emotion could be correlated to the stance of the commenter; while qualitative analysis allowed to have a micro-level approach to the comments, paying attention to the linguistic layer and covering certain contradictions in the ways that commenters articulated their stances. Their combination efficiently unraveled the layers of the discourse, and demonstrated how stance is shaped and expressed within the conversation.

In Kazakhstan, the discourse on VAW is female-dominated, mostly supportive, reform-oriented, and highly emotionally charged. The findings do not totally align with the expectations that were shaped by the reviewed literature, but they raise an important question about the relationships between the public discourse and social attitudes. One possible interpretation is that the visibility of the cases of VAW online could contribute to the publicly empathetic response – the wide dissemination of cases and their resonance allows people to react, communicate, support and dispute – may be reinforcing a norm of victim support. This tendency could serve as a mechanism against gender-based violence.

Further research could consider having a larger sample size and implementing machine learning mechanisms for efficient textual analysis of big data. Moreover, it would be insightful to have a more detailed approach to the ideological cues in the comments, the discursive strategies that express them, and possibly the features of media framing that trigger the reaction.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Link to the dataset

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1laUY2I6gG1Y3JkqYjeY23XR-btFQ_rJ27FzVoda2rmc/edit?gid=0#gid=0

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