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## **Symbolic Violence Against Women in Medan's Patriarchal Culture**

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## SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MEDAN'S PATRIARCHAL CULTURE

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### Abstract

*The study on symbolic violence against women is limited. There is still a significant degree of suspicion and stigma in society around the notion that women are weak and helpless compared to men and that women are continually the victims of patriarchal symbolic violence in terms of language, social economics, and others. This research aims to investigate how and why symbolic violence is performed against women in patriarchal cultures, the kinds of symbolic violence against women, the determinants of symbolic violence in this instance, and the effects of linguistic-symbolic violence on women in Medan Tembung. This qualitative research included seven individuals between the ages of 15 and 35. Observations and interviews were employed to collect data for this investigation. The acquired data was then examined using sociological methodologies to disclose the field phenomena and interview outcomes precisely. Furthermore, this research employs the theory of Pierre Bourdieu to comprehend symbolic violence in society. This study's results demonstrate that symbolic violence persists in society, particularly in meetings and in the form of language. The results of this research support this concept by providing evidence of symbolic violence in the form of language or particular terminology that women are not permitted to use, although males are permitted to do so, and which seem to be prevalent in daily life.*

**Keywords:** Gender; Symbolic Violence; Women; Linguistic Aspects.



## A. Introduction

In Indonesia, society as a whole should have a notion of gender based on the curriculum they have been exposed to since they began school, and this knowledge has created the basis for character development (Sociology of Religion Curriculum, n.d.). For instance, Banks (2010) states that gender roles are performed via the execution of certain tasks. Characters may be imparted via the educational process at school, the learning process (Kanji et al., 2019; Suardi et al., 2019), and it can be combined with local knowledge through social cooperation models (Suardi, Agustang, & Sahabuddin, 2020). However, character education must be examined (Kanji et al., 2019) because it is influenced by both supporting and inhibitory elements (Kanji et al., 2020). Despite this assumption, children continue to experience symbolic violence in their daily interactions, especially in language use. This symbolic violence often occurs in patriarchal cultures. The current pandemic of violence has invaded almost every aspect of social life, from politics to culture and education, as seen by the pervasiveness of sexual assault against kids (Nursalam et al., 2018).

Violence against women is seen as a pervasive societal phenomenon. Understanding the existence of systematic violence "on the horizon of social imagination", members of certain groups, in this instance, women, learn that they may experience it at any moment "just because they belong to that group" (Young 1990). The definition of violence does not only include physical assaults but extends to humiliation, harassment, intimidation, and stigmatization. Systemic violence harms women just because they are women, despite their gendered experiences being determined by color, class, sexual orientation, age, and nationality (Collins 2015).

In other words, male control over females, which has become characteristic of patriarchal societies, is the basis of symbolic violence. Women are disproportionately portrayed as victims of violence (Macharia, 2015) and are more likely to be personified, shot in close-ups, or sensationalized (Carter and Weaver, 2003; Geiger, 2008; Marin et al., 2011). Female victims are represented as "helpless", "weak", or even held responsible for their

victimization, but male offenders are portrayed as "monsters", as driven by "pathological obsessions", or as "guys who could not help themselves" (Almansa and Postigo, 2003; Byerly and Ross, 2006; Geiger and Wolf, 2014; Geiger, 2008; Meyers, 1997; Marin et al., 2011).

Violence has become a recurring aesthetic in advertising and globally recognized fashion images (Castillo Martn, 2008: 126). This kind of symbolic violence is so subtle that the victim cannot perceive it (Alfian, 2021). The marginalization, subjugation, and negative classification of female subjects are a form of symbolic violence against women (Alfian, 2022a, 2022d; Dayanti, 2006). By means of patriarchal marketing, women are devalued and stripped of their identities in their entirety. Nonetheless, it is understood that this prevalent marketing portrayal of women as housewives, mothers, and sex objects is harmful and out of step with contemporary society (Gurrieri et al., 2019). Women are the targets or victims of this symbolic violence because, in patriarchal societies, women lack a firm and reliable strategy or position to prevent the attack (Bourdieu, 2001).

In the study of gender and feminism, patriarchal discourse is violent because it places women in a subordinate or inferior position by permitting males to dictate how they perceive, feel, think, and behave in society (Haryatmoko, 2010). In addition, Lerner emphasized that from the past to the present, patriarchal standards have permeated every element of society and have become a way of life (Frasetya & Nasution, 2021). In social community activities, the patriarchal system and its related issues are made to look natural and normal. In the framework of this study, communication science students who comprehend gender discourse nonetheless encounter symbolic violence, particularly in the sphere of language, due to their patriarchal society.

This study examines how women in society perceive gender-related symbolic violence. In order to offer an initial overview, the researcher will discuss several prior studies and indicate the position of the current study in this part. Multiple individuals have conducted several gender-focused studies on society. Evi Fatimatur Rusydiyah on Islamic education and gender equality (Rusydiyah, 2016) and Rustan Efendy on gender equality in education completed comparable studies on gender equality (Efendy, 2014).



Diah Ariani Arimbi did a similar study, which she described in a research paper on women and religiosity (Arimbi, 2011). In addition, prior research demonstrates that society, particularly the world of education, cannot be separated from symbolic violence due to the accumulation of economic, cultural, and social capital, such as student symbolic violence in the lecture process (Suardi, Agustang, & Jumadi, 2020a) and violence against students in the education process in schools (Suardi, Agustang, & Jumadi, 2020b). Both research findings indicate that symbolic violence results from distinct capital accumulations. Nonetheless, what separates the conclusions of this study is the investigation of religious capital accumulation as a novel kind of capital accumulation, such that this study provides “unique” findings. It is crucial to explore because it will add to current research in the field of capital accumulation, which includes not only economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital but also religious capital. Religious capital consists of private school pupils’ personalities, which are always shaped via social cooperation (Suardi, Agustang, & Sahabuddin, 2020). Muhammad Faried Nabil also studied polygamy tales among Muslim women campus preachers in Yogyakarta (Nabil, 2019). Other gender-related research has also been undertaken in the educational setting. Asrul Ismail has conducted a study on the characteristics of pharmacy students and graduates at UIN Alauddin Makassar, focusing on gender problems (Ismail, 2020). In a patriarchal society, no prior study has explicitly addressed the symbolic-linguistic violence faced by women, especially female students at UIN North Sumatra.

This study aims to investigate and discover solutions to topics such as how and why symbolic violence is perpetrated against women in patriarchal cultures, particularly that experienced by women in society. From the problems that arise above, the researchers investigated to answer the problem of what forms of symbolic violence against women in the city of Medan Tembung, what factors cause the violence, and the consequences arising from linguistic-symbolic violence against women in the city of Medan Tembung.

This research is crucial to studying symbolic-linguistic violence against women in patriarchal cultures, in this example, against women in





Medan. It is due to the prevalence of symbolic violence in society, particularly towards women, which discriminates against them. The establishment of patriarchal culture, which legitimizes male supremacy over women, has disadvantaged women. Due to the rise of patriarchal culture, especially among women in society, women are ultimately denied the same space and methods as male. Through the use of language, or what is known as the symbolic side of violence, one may see this patriarchal society and the space battle. As will be further examined in this research, specialized language (which incorporates patriarchal logic) commonly promotes superior male attitudes. Therefore, this study is crucial to address why symbolic-linguistic violence against women is so prevalent in patriarchal cultures.

## **B. Method**

This study is a sort of qualitative research with a descriptive focus. In other words, this research accurately describes the characteristics of social phenomena, including individuals, groups, and specific social situations (Creswell, 2017). Due to the process of investigating problems that occur with women in the community, particularly in the Medan Tembung area of North Sumatra, this study is based on painting a holistic or complete picture with words and presenting in-depth views of informants. Therefore, the strategy or methodology used by researchers is a sociological approach. The objective is for researchers to comprehend the symptoms experienced by women in the Medan community, particularly in Medan Tembung. This study identifies, describes, and analyzes symbolic-linguistic violence against women.

The researchers' experimental subjects in this study were women aged 12 to 35. This investigation occurred in the Medan Tembung District of Medan City, North Sumatra. This study was undertaken by considering that most women in the region broadly understood gender discourses, forms of discrimination, and other relevant topics. Meanwhile, the selection of the title about symbolic violence against women in Medan Tembung City is because women who have experienced symbolic violence and understand that



patriarchal reasoning that glorifies male domination over women is a source of symbolic violence against them, are still in the minority.

Several semi-structured interviews with women were conducted by the researcher in order to gather data for the study. The researchers interviewed a total of six individuals. There were four ladies with the initials H, F, T, and P and two males with the initials B, R, and S.

*Tabel 1. Participants*

Initial Participants	Gender		Age	Status
	Man	Woman		
B	√		27	Married
F		√	25	Single
H		√	15	Single
P		√	30	Married
R	√		21	Single
S	√		35	Married
T		√	25	Married

The researchers chose the sources mentioned above because they consisted of individuals who understood gender equality in society, and of the many people in the Medan Tembung city area, only a few were willing to provide information. The participants above consisted of three men and four women, with two men under 30 and one man around 30. The 21-year-old man is unmarried, and the remaining two are married. Other participants consisted of four women. Two women are still single, and one of them, who is 15 years old, is still attending high school. Other participants consist of two women aged 25 years old and one aged 30 years old.

The researcher approached several individuals willing to be interviewed and then asked them semi-structured research questions. In addition, to collect answers or complete data related to the study problem, the researcher tried to trace or evaluate previous studies, such as journal articles and books on linguistic-symbolic violence against women in a patriarchal culture. The technique for obtaining this data is that the researcher traces various sources containing scientific publications on this issue and then classifies the articles most relevant to this research topic. Researchers also





conducted an observation, which consists of data collection procedures that include observations of the phenomenon under study.

For data analysis, researchers used Pierre Bourdieu's theory. As Bourdieu asserts, "Symbolic power is an invisible power that can only be used with the involvement of those who do not want to realize that they are vulnerable to it or even that they are using it themselves" (Bourdieu, 1991). Symbolic violence, often known as invisible violence, is carried out daily by those who do not want to be aware they are being targeted (Recuero, 2015). The habitus idea put forward by Bourdieu cannot separate from symbolic violence. Habitus consists of one's knowledge and understanding of the universe, which contributes to the world's reality. For symbolic violence to function effectively, it needs a deep-rooted habitus.

### **C. Result and Discussion**

This study found several findings from the perspectives of perpetrators and victims, namely the perpetrator's motivation in committing symbolic violations against women in the surrounding environment.

#### **1. Result**

##### **a. Symbolic forms of violence against women in the hamlet of Medan Tembung**

In the social contacts of women in Medan Tembung, the usage of words and phrases is comparable to that of males. However, there are several terms and phrases that males employ to subordinate women, and the following words often emerge in everyday interactions:

##### **1) The word "midget (*cebol*)"**

The word "midget (*cebol*)" is a word that refers to a person's body shape. This word is often expressed when someone wants to insult, irritate, want to fight, or fight. The word "midget" is also used as a joke. Men in the community around Medan Tembung often use the word "midget" as a joke when talking to their peers. It seems to be normal because being said by men. Based on the results of an interview with one of the informants who said that.



Initials B: *“Ultimate words like “midget” are commonplace when spoken by boys, and this word is often used as a joke or when we meet familiar peers. Sometimes we don't call them by their names, but rather by the word “midget”. However, when a woman utters the word “midget” then she is considered a woman who is impudent, has no feelings and so on”.*

From these interviews, we can conclude that men own freedom of language while women are restricted by certain languages. In short, if a woman says certain words like “midget”, she will get a negative image from the people around her.

## 2) The word “Stupid (Paok)”

The term “paok” is used to ridicule or complain about someone or something. In Medan, “paok” means lousy, idiotic, stupid, and uncool. This word is often used in conversations among Medanese people, both young and older people. This word has become a common word spoken by today's society. According to the source below.

Initials H, F, T, and S: *“The word “paok” is very often used by men to insult or as a joke to describe the limitations of one's abilities. Men often cast this language freely both for women and for men when talking. Meanwhile, this word is very limited for use by women, because if they use this word, the woman seems naughty, her mouth is not open enough, and so on”.*

From the interview results above, it can be concluded that the limitations of women, in this case, are due to a code of ethics that limits the use of language by women when they want to talk to men or fellow women, even when they are angry or just joking. Most women in the city of Medan Tembung and its surroundings can only surrender and accept the insults and words of their male friends.

## 3) The word “Yatim” and “Piatu”

The word “yatim” in Indonesian means someone who no longer has a father because he died, and a “piatu” does not have a mother because she died too. This word is prevalent among young people in their



teens and twenties to joke and insult someone whose one of their parents has died, or both have died. According to the source below.

Initials B, S, R: *"We very often use the words "yatim" and "piatu" to just joke with peers or younger people, and sometimes we also use them to insult when we feel angry".*

Initials H, F, T, P: *"The two words "yatim" and "piatu" are very rarely used when women want to make jokes. This is because women generally feel respect for their deceased parents, but not infrequently, this word also appears as an insult when women get carried away with emotion".*

Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of this word appears to be shared among men, as three male interviewees admitted that they were accustomed to using it in jokes and insults, although this word is restricted to women due to a code of ethics that restricts the use of women's language when communicating.

#### **b. Factors Contributing to Symbolic Violence Against Women in the City of Medan Tembung.**

Symbolic violence occurs among women who believe they are communicating with their interlocutors outside of a forum where rules do not apply or where there is freedom of expression. Several factors contribute to symbolic (linguistic) violence in patriarchal cultures, including.

##### **1) Emotion**

Emotions are a person's response to a situation or another individual. Someone will say inappropriate things when venting his wrath or when his emotions peak. As stated by the sources.

Initials H, F, P: *"Rough language or words uttered by men are commonplace, and these words are said when he is angry or emotional, so he utters harsh words like "paok", and so on. It is influenced by the surrounding environment".*

Initials B: *"A word that is often spoken by men is often interpreted as a harsh word by women, even though this word has become a common word among men when expressing anger towards something".*



The informants' explanations lead us to conclude that the use of patriarchal language (sarcasm) is influenced by the surrounding environment, which has a devastating effect on the lives of new students and their ability to acclimate to their new surroundings. Sometimes uncontrollable emotions result in the use of language that should not be spoken primarily in a campus environment.

## 2) Joke

According to the interviewee, one of the causes of angry speech is joking when a person perceives that his social environment is too serious; harsh words are then used to break the tension or stiffness.

Initial B, S, R: *"Since I am unable to manage my emotions, when I am angry, I use foul language such as "dog", "bodat", "longor", and "paok" Yet, I often use harsh language as a joke to defuse uncomfortable situations. Extreme rigidity in the dialogue is undesirable. It is different when I use strong language with my male pals, even if it is intended as a jest".*

It is possible to draw the following conclusion based on the findings of these interviews: males, in terms of language, seem to be free and like-minded, and politeness standards and conventions seldom restrict them.

## 3) Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is a degree that a person possesses based on the capacity to satisfy their daily needs with their money or income, such that it influences their social status within the framework of society. Several of the following interviewees disclosed.

Initials H, F, T, P: *"Most husbands and men insult or humiliate their spouses since their socioeconomic standing is greater than that of their partners, and men who are employed see women as inferior to them".*

From the preceding statement, it can be inferred that all cited sources agree that women whose primary responsibility is caring for the family and who are typically confined to the home are always discriminated against in cases of socioeconomic status committed by men or their partners.



#### 4) Disappointed

According to the interviewee, a person frequently felt dissatisfied when harsh terms such as dog, pig, taik, bodat, etc. were used, because they had been promised something, only to have their attitude abruptly alter and be lied to.

Initials F, T: *"There are times when I use strong words, such as "dog, pig, and cretin", because I am frustrated. Since I placed myself in a position to receive unpleasant remarks, I did not believe it would hurt. Yet I recognized that my statements were incorrect since they would create rifts in friendships and lead to unethical behavior. I am also perplexed as to why ladies in the city of Medan Tembung seem to be constrained on the basis that they must be elegant and unpleasant if they utter such term".*

It can be concluded that the rules and norms of politeness severely restrict women's use of language.

### **c. Implications of Symbolic Violence against Women in Medan Tembung City**

Some of the impacts arising from symbolic violence against women in the Medan Tembung city area are as follows.

#### 1) Causing Heartache

Women in Medan Tembung, who come from various villages or regions, bring their ethnicity and language into the new environment where they communicate daily. Nonetheless, as time passes and society evolves, language has an effect, particularly on adolescents and students. Particularly among women in the urban environment of Medan Tembung, the use of patriarchal language demonstrates a tendency to dominate. The following are the results of the informant interviews.

Initials F: *"Sometimes the utterances he utters frontally to his interlocutors unknowingly cause bad effects and cause hurt feelings".*

However, the use of offensive language appears to have become commonplace and seems natural and unrestricted among (male) students. This is unlike female Sociology of Religion students, whose language use are extremely limited.



## 2) Bad Habits in Interacting

In a particular area or environment, there are rules for speaking or saying words, some are polite, and some are impolite, or even there is inappropriate language to say in public or when speaking harshly. For example, in Medan city, Tembung is considered impolite when said by a woman. When words like “dog, pig” and so on are said, the image of someone to the other person will be bad or impolite. From the results of interviews with sources below.

Initials P: *“Actually, we should not use harsh language such as “dog, pig, bodat, longor, pit”, and others, because that makes us considered impolite, impolite, and so on”.*

From the interviews above, we can conclude that using dirty or abusive language such as “dog, pig, bodat, longor, paok”, and others when interacting will create bad habits because it will generate negative responses from other people.

## 3) Negative Labeling

When someone uses foul or offensive language with another person, the other person will respond negatively. According to the source cited below.

Initials F, H, P: *“Dirty remarks or words such as “the pig, the dog, the paok” and so on that are said by a woman towards an older person (senior) then she will be labeled as a person who is not polite. It’s impolite because they consider women are gentle and polite. Women are not even allowed to say dirty words”.*

From the preceding explanation, it can be concluded that if a woman uses foul or offensive language or words, she will receive a negative label because women are not permitted to use words such as “dog”, “pig”, “paok”, etc.

## 2. Discussion

In the patriarchal society in Medan Tembung and its environs, symbolic violence against women is still prevalent. It is shown by the fact that types of symbolic violence against women in the community of Medan





Tembung continue to interact using improper language. Several terms are used often and have become as ubiquitous as “midget”. This term describes the physique of someone with a small stature. This term is now often used to disparage women. This term is often used when someone intends to offend, annoy, quarrel, or fight. In actuality, the term “midget” is used in jest. Males in Medan Tembung frequently use “midget” in jest while conversing with friends. Women are subject to norms that determine what the body should be like, not only in its visible configuration but also in its demeanor and presentation, because of the lack of knowledge and disguise used to establish social relations of inequality between the sexes. It means that women are subject to norms determining what the body should look like (Bordieu, 1983). In this case, males certainly see women as objects of their sexual desire, a perception that might be interpreted as a kind of symbolic violence towards women. It is critical to bring attention to the need to shift the focus of the discussion away from the reduction of women as objects of violence, which is manifested in exclusive victimization, and toward the promotion of women as subjects who are experiencing situations that involve violence. This shift should be rooted in a gender-relational perspective (Gomes, 2003).

The surroundings influence this incidence of symbolic violence. Stroem et al. (2022) said that teenagers who lack familial support would seek approval from their peers. If the current peer environment gives negative support, this will undoubtedly have a negative effect. It also strengthens the connection of educational institutions as formal entities with student issues (Horn & Poteat, 2022). Learning the proper use of words should be a priority at this time. In this study, words like “paok” become a very natural word. This term describes a person's cognitive capabilities or limitations. In Medan, “paok” refers to anything terrible, foolish, and uncool. This term is often used in interactions between young people and their parents. This term is now often used in contemporary life. However, this term is harsh since it is often used as an insult by males towards women. In addition, the words “yatim” and “piatu” have historically represented aggression against women. This term is often used by junior- and senior-level students, and its use in academic



contexts is not unusual. The term is often used in jest but inadvertently becomes an insult. Due to a code of ethics restricting the use of women's language in communication, this word seems to be a frequent term among males since three male interviewees acknowledged using it in jokes or insults. However, it is a word that is exclusive to women.

Emotional factors also contribute to symbolic violence against women in Medan Tembung. Someone uses inappropriate language when expressing rage or when his emotions are at their pinnacle. Someone can also do it as a joke. When a person perceives that his social situation is dire, he may joke to release tension or stiffness in the setting. The socioeconomic situation of women is a significant element that manifests as symbolic violence in the form of words. This violence always happens in the home or family setting. Women in the Medan Tembung region often do not work and care for their families while staying at home; yet, their employment is seen as menial since the males who function as breadwinners are more critical and deemed higher.

Moreover, based on the findings of the interviews with the informants mentioned above, all participants agree that women who are often exclusively at home and concentrate on caring for the family are constantly discriminated against when males or their spouses conduct socioeconomic status crimes. The last element is dissatisfaction. A person often feels dissatisfied when harsh terms such as dog, pig, taik, bodat, etc. are said due to being promised something, having their attitudes suddenly changed, and being lied to.

Heartache motivates the connotation of symbolic violence against women in Medan Tembung. The interaction of women in the community, particularly in Medan Tembung, who come from a different village or region, carry their ethnicity and language to their new surroundings, which they utilize as a form of communication in their daily lives. However, as time progresses and society evolves, language also has an impact, particularly on adolescents and students.

Following the findings of this study, victims of symbolic violence find it difficult to express what they are experiencing, such as fear, shame, and guilt, or a lack of understanding on the part of victims about what they are

experiencing (Gerwitz, 2020), indicating the need for counseling. Thus, the prevention and treatment of offenders of this symbolic violence must be included. Often, victims of this violence do not disclose what they are suffering because they fear the males who are suspects in this case, resulting in a delay in reporting (Alagia et al., 2019). Hence, it is crucial to anticipate the atmosphere that would offer a safe area for victims to share their experiences.

The usage of patriarchal language in society reveals a predisposition for dominance among women. Based on the findings of the interviews, it was determined that the use of this abusive language seemed widespread and considered normal and unrestricted to males. Next is poor social behavior. There are guidelines for speaking or uttering words in a certain region or context; some are polite, others are unpleasant, and there is also terminology unacceptable to use in public or while speaking forcefully. For instance, in the Medan metropolitan region, it is considered disrespectful or unfriendly for a lady to say *Tembung*. When terms such as “dog” and “pig” are used, the other person will have a negative or disrespectful impression of the speaker. Nasty or unpleasant vocabulary such as “dog, pig, bodat, longor, paok”, and others, when used in conversation, will lead to poor behaviors since it provokes unfavorable reactions from others.

Finally, there is the derogatory categorization of women. When someone uses foul or offensive language with another person, the other person will respond negatively. According to F, H, and P's answers from the interviews above, if a woman uses foul or harsh language or terms, she would get a bad label from other people; hence, women cannot use words such as “the dog”, “the pig”, “the pitta”, and others.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Forms of language violence and discrimination experienced by women, such as using offensive language such as “midget, orphan, dog, pitta”, and others are only more likely to be carried out by men. When women say these words, they will get an image in their society or community. In addition, subordination also occurs in language or linguistics, where women are often referred to by words that demean themselves as women. Emotional factors,



jokes, socioeconomic status, and disappointment cause symbolic violence against women in patriarchal language culture. These words are spontaneously spoken by men to women when they are emotional, and women take them for granted without feeling that it is violence against women.

This study found seven cases of patriarchal symbolic violence against women involving teenagers, adults, and married women. This research found that the main problem of the symbolic violence experienced by women is related to the patriarchal culture which always places women as “second” and labels them negatively. It happens in the broader community. Language is essential for interacting with people and the opposite sex. However, in reality, women are very limited regarding freedom of speech when speaking. They are limited because women do not deserve to speak like men if they want to communicate using language that they think is natural. It is this language limitation that makes the position of women or female students of the Sociology of Religion always feel humiliated. When women or female Sociology of Religion students say sentences that are considered inappropriate, they are then judged negatively by men in their society.

Research on symbolic violence against women in Medan Tembung City still has limitations, such as limited references and a limited number of interviewees. Nonetheless, this qualitative-based research has revealed the answers to the research questions. In short, the authors also feel the need to emphasize that because this research was conducted explicitly on women in the Medan Tembung city area, the study's results certainly cannot be used as a universal basis or benchmark for the topic of linguistic-symbolic violence against women in the wider community. A different reality could have occurred, but this research contributed to a new discourse on symbolic violence against women.

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