DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF NEWS REPORTS ON PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS IN MALAYSIAN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: As one of the most common trustworthy sources, online newspapers have been regarded as the primary source of knowledge among the public to obtain reliable and unbiased information. However, in the context of media coverage of people with mental illness, they are often portrayed negatively and regarded as unpredictable and dangerous, resulting in increased stigma and misunderstanding among the public at large. This study examines the discursive strategies used in Malaysian news articles in portraying mental illness and the linguistic devices used to successfully implement these strategies.

Methodology: This study investigated 43 news articles published in popular Malaysian online newspapers to examine how issues related to mental health-related illnesses are discursively constructed and the linguistic elements that were employed to represent the complexities of the cases from a discourse analysis perspective.

Findings: The results show that the local media use nomination, predication and argumentation strategies to legitimise people with mental illness. They are portrayed negatively and through various linguistic elements, primarily as perpetrators and offenders.

Contributions: The study provides media professionals with nuanced information on responsible reporting of mental health issues and uses the media as a platform to destigmatise mental illness among the general public.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, online newspapers, mental illness, media practice, stigma.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

People with mental illness are among the most stigmatised, discriminated against, marginalised, underprivileged and vulnerable members of society (Johnstone, 2001). They are seen as unpredictable, unintelligible, irrational and dangerous (Hyler et al., 1991; Wahl, 1995; Thomson et al., 2002; Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006; Green et al., 2003). As a result of this discrimination, people suffering from mental illness seek social solitude. This circumstance can reduce life satisfaction, diminish self-esteem and adversely affect help-seeking behaviour, treatment adherence and the overall recovery process (Link et al., 2001; Stuart, 2006; Hawke et al., 2013). Due to the prevalence of stigma, a significant portion of the Malaysian population is uninformed and lacks understanding of the many mental health issues in the country. This has also led to many Malaysians being unaware of and misunderstanding the country's mental health situation. Therefore, there is an urgent need to intensify efforts to raise awareness in society and disseminate relevant information on mental illness. The media is one medium through which these stigmatising and discriminatory attitudes are developed and perpetuated.

The media is often seen as a critical stakeholder in the provision of healthcare services, exerting considerable influence on public opinion. They are considered the main source of information about mental illness and play an important role in shaping public views and perceptions of mental illness (Wahl, 2004; McQuail, 2010). The public relies on the media as a primary source of knowledge about mental illness (Bilić & Georgaca, 2007; Reavley et al., 2011; Balfour, 2020). There is a widespread belief that people suffering from mental illness is more likely to engage in violent or hostile behaviour. It has been argued that the media often portrays mental illness negatively by associating it with crime, violence and hazardous circumstances (Sieff, 2003). Since the media has a global reach, consumers are constantly

exposed to real-life violence associated with mental illness. Consequently, rather than receiving first-hand experiences, the public receives information from the media that shapes their opinions and attitudes towards people with mental illness. In response to this concern, extensive research has been conducted on mental illness and media issues.

As technology advances, new media is emerging, and information is delivered with a few clicks of the mouse. One of the main reasons why online news portals have become the medium of choice for many in various current affairs is the steady increase in internet connectivity among Malaysians. According to Reuter's Report (2017), online news portals have become Malaysians' favourite source of information. These online news portals are considered trustworthy and authoritative sources, as is the printed version. Previous research conducted in the country has primarily focused on examining media coverage of other critical social issues, such as suicidality (see Johari et al., 2017; Fong, 2021; Yang & Victor, 2021), with little attention paid to mental health issues explicitly related to violent offences. Although there is some research on the representation of mental illness in Malaysia, the availability of literary sources has yet to be determined.

In light of the above, the primary objective of this current study is to investigate a wide range of newspapers, encompassing three widely read English newspapers, from January 2017 to July 2021, a period of three and a half years. Taking a discourse analytic perspective, this study scrutinises the discursive construction of mental illnesses in Malaysian online newspapers. The study aims to analyse the discursive strategies employed within mental illness-related news articles and the linguistic devices utilised to implement each discursive strategy effectively. Therefore, this study can contribute to the scant literature on mental health-related issues and media in Malaysia.

This study examines the discursive strategies used in Malaysian news articles in portraying mental illness and the linguistic devices used to successfully implement these strategies. Specific questions include the following:

(a)   How are people with mental illness (PWMI) named and referred to linguistically?
(b)   What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to these social actors with mental illness?
(c)   What arguments are used to rationalise the representations of people with mental illness?

Therefore, this study draws on the discourse analysis of Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) framework

for discursive strategies, in particular nomination, predication and argumentative strategies.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mental Illness and Media

Despite advances in therapy and a better understanding of disease processes, negative attitudes towards mental illness persist. People suffering from mental disorders are often seen as a threat to themselves and society or as childish and unable to care for themselves (Sieff, 2003; Hannigan, 1999). The media generally has a significant negative influence on the public perception of people with mental illness. The media has been shown to have a significant impact on the creation and perpetuation of stereotypical attitudes towards people with mental illness that are prevalent in society (Stout et al., 2004; Whitley & Berry, 2013). However, the portrayal of socio-culturally sensitive issues in the media, such as mental illness, has been analysed and criticised for years, with little progress being made. The sensationalist style of the news as well as the highlighted focal points create a basis for stigmatisation (Sateesh Babu, 2011; Boke et al., 2007; Smith, 2015). The media's portrayal of this socio-culturally sensitive topic as a mental illness has long been analysed and criticised. However, there has been little progress in addressing this issue. In this section, we discuss the key concepts of the study, namely mental illness and its relationship to media representation.

The general population relies on the media to inform them about mental illness (Balfour, 2020; Reavley et al., 2011). The media is widely recognised as playing an important role in the dissemination of health services as it significantly influences public perception. According to Wahl (2004), this source is widely recognised as the primary means of obtaining information about mental illness. It has a significant influence on public attitudes and beliefs on the subject. There is a widespread belief that people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are more likely to be violent and hostile. According to Sieff (2003), the media often portrays mental illness in a bad light by associating it with criminal behaviour, violence and dangerous situations. Because of its global reach, the media repeatedly exposes consumers to the real-life violence associated with mental illness. As a result, people tend to form their opinions and attitudes towards people with mental illness based on mass media rather than personal experience.

Because media images of mental illness perpetuate stigma (Stout et al., 2004), they have a significant impact on public perceptions of people with mental illness (McKeown & Clancy, 1995). Negative portrayals, for example, can contribute to the stigma surrounding mental illness and reduce the likelihood that people in need will seek help. News reports are

often sensationalised and contain dramatic descriptions of violent attacks and murders deliberately committed by people with mental disorders (Srivastava et al., 2018). These sensationalist and misinformed portrayals perpetuate stigmatising attitudes. At the same time, negative perceptions of people with mental illness exist both among the general public, who have little or no experience with it, and among healthcare providers who have experience with mental illness (Aci et al., 2020; Sieff, 2003; Ryan et al., 2001; Wahl, 1999). Therefore, if society wants to change the way people view mental illness, it must first change the way these illnesses are portrayed in the mass media.

Interest in mental illness and media has expanded rapidly since the difficulties have been interconnected in the past decades. Ma (2017) has compiled a narrative overview of 41 empirical studies on mental illness and the media from 2003 to 2015. Despite the poor portrayal of mental illness in the media, she found that entertaining educational programmes and web-based media contribute significantly to reducing stigma and improving mental health literacy. On the other hand, Whitley and Wang (2017) reported a significant improvement in the "positive tone" of recent Canadian news media coverage, which has featured more people with mental illness, despite the contradictory fact that coverage of crime and violence is increasing. Carmichael et al. (2019) compared the tone and content of mainstream television coverage of mental illness with educational videos created by citizen journalists with lived experience. Citizen journalism by people with mental illness was found to be more effective at educating the public and eliminating stigma than television pieces that focused on crime, violence or legal issues. Meanwhile, Ross et al. (2019) conducted a systematic study on the influence of media coverage of severe mental illness on stigmatisation and prejudice. They discovered that portrayals of people with severe mental illness are negatively coloured, such as reinforcing notions of violence and dangerousness, thereby reinforcing stigmatising opinions. Antebi et al. (2020) assessed Canadian news media's adherence to the criteria for responsible reporting on suicide by conducting a descriptive study of the tone and content of 47 Canadian news sources from April 2019 to March 2020. In general, a significant majority of publications adhered to standards for reporting on suicide; however, criteria that include seemingly useful information are often overlooked. On the other hand, Ross et al. (2019) examined a media intervention with journalism students on reporting on mental illness in the context of violence and crime. The aim is to promote media literacy and eliminate stigmatising reporting on people with mental illness. As a result, significant improvements were found in attitudes towards serious mental illness, understanding of best reporting practises, intention and confidence to consistently

adhere to best practise standards in reporting, and performance on an editorial task to assess compliance with the rule.

Research in Malaysia on mental illness and the media is relatively limited. In Malaysia, it has been observed that the portrayal of mental illness in Malaysian newspapers is mostly derogatory, hurtful and misleading (Johari et al., 2017; Razali et al., 2018). In 2004, Malaysia adopted a set of guidelines to promote responsible reporting. These guidelines were developed following media training, with a focus on reporting on suicidality rather than mental illness as a whole (Johari et al., 2017). When reporting such news, the current guidelines should emphasise the use of appropriate terminology and wording. The extent to which Malaysian media guidelines are followed has yet to be fully documented (Fong et al., 2018). The extent to which Malaysian media practitioners adhere to the existing norms of the media guidelines remains controversial (Johari et al., 2017). Wang's (2012) study, conducted a few years after the guidelines were introduced in 2004, provided evidence that the implementation of the guidelines could potentially influence the way media reports are presented, leading to a shift towards a more positive tone. This shift is, in turn, linked to a partial decrease in stigma. Fong et al. (2018) provide a concise overview of the impact of media coverage of suicide on suicidal tendencies, as well as the interventions used in the realm of suicide prevention to mitigate this impact. The study highlights the current practices of media suicide reporting in Malaysia, the approaches used to promote ethical suicide reporting in the media and the challenges faced in terms of awareness and stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless, further research is needed to provide a solid evidence base for effective strategies to increase stakeholder awareness, engagement and implementation of responsible media coverage of suicide.

Johari et al. (2017) started began their research on the media coverage of suicide cases in Malaysia by examining the perceptions of the media, in particularly online newspapers, on the topic of suicide. They found that in newspaper articles in Malaysia, suicide is portrayed negatively rather than positively, with sensationalised headlines of actual suicides revealing the exact details of the person attempting to commit suicide and illustrating or clearly describing the method of suicide, which is constantly used in news reporting. However, there is no scholarly discussion on how media portrayal affects suicide in this country. In Malaysia, the way in which suicide stories are portrayed is more harmful than beneficial (Johari et al., 2017). Based on the prevailing belief that there is a social stigma attached to mental illness in Malaysia (Ab Razak, 2017), the narratives are portrayed through lurid headlines and a mostly pessimistic tone (Johari et al., 2017). In another study, Fong et al. (2018) examined the impact of suicide reporting in the media on both suicide behaviour and suicide prevention. The study

shows that current practices of suicide reporting in the media were identified, strategies for responsible suicide reporting in the media were developed, and barriers among stakeholders in terms of knowledge and participation were identified. The existing structures of stakeholder participation were recognised. Existing research suggests that implementation and adherence to media guidelines are limited at the local level.

On the other hand, Fong (2021) examined the portrayal of suicide in Malaysia, focusing on the way the media characterises the issue and advocates for potential solutions. The research revealed a notable discrepancy in the narrative styles used when discussing the issue of suicide and potential solutions. In addition, it was found that most stories dealing with suicide had a simple news format and often portrayed suicide in a bad light. News coverage linked suicide to mental health, interpersonal, financial and professional challenges. The research also found a significant difference between the narrative styles on problems and solutions to suicide. Practical implications of the findings include media involvement in suicide awareness, institutional prevention and intervention, and a more rigorous interpretive approach. Yang and Victor (2021) analysed the extent of suicide coverage in The Star, a well-known English-language daily newspaper in Malaysia known for its wide readership. They analysed the coverage over five years (2014-2018) to determine whether it complied with Malaysian guidelines for media coverage of suicide. They found that the Star's suicide coverage was primarily straight reporting, offering facts or quotes without the journalists' perspective. The authorities, such as the police and government officials, were the main sources. The Star's compliance with Malaysian suicide reporting requirements was inconsistent. Compliance was high for certain guidelines (>60%) but very low for others (<18%). The findings have practical implications for media suicide reporting standards, journalist education and training, and the interface between media and mental health. Thus, the significance of Yang and Victor's (2021) study is that it can provide media professionals with recommendations for reporting on mental illness and the use of online newspapers to destigmatise mental illness in the Malaysian setting.

2.2 Discursive Strategies

Discursive strategies include conscious methods to achieve certain goals or convey a certain perspective (Igwebuike, 2018; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). Discursive strategies are the conscious actions that a social actor undertakes to shape and manipulate reality in order to achieve certain goals. Discursive strategy refers to a linguistic utterance that is practised to either support or oppose certain political actions (Küçükali, 2015). Therefore, linguistic features form the basis for analysing discursive strategy. In the context of this study, the focus is on examining the

discursive methods used by Malaysian online newspapers to disseminate news about events related to mental illness. Kwauk (2012) asserts that discursive strategies effectively direct focus, reinforce and normalise the ideological perspectives of a particular viewpoint. Individuals' representation of an event within society is subject to the effects of their interests, connections, preferences and values (Carvalho, 2005). Discursive strategies can manifest themselves in discourse through different modalities and can be reinforced by different means among actors. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) have outlined a framework that delineates the different discursive strategies, including nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification and mitigation. These forms are described in detail in Table 1.

Table 1: Forms of discursive strategies by Reisigl and Wodak (2009)

No.	Form of Discursive Strategies	Description	Questions to Approach Discursive Features
1	Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events and actions.	How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically in the discourse in question?
2	Predication	Discursive characterisation of social actors, objects, phenomena, events processes and actions.	What characteristics or qualities are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions mentioned in the discourse?
3	Argumentation	Persuading addressees of the validity of specific claims of truth and normative rightness.	What arguments are employed in discourse?
4	Perspectivisation	Positioning the speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance.	From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?

| 5 | Intensification and mitigation | Modifying the illocutionary force of utterances concerning their epistemic or deontic status. | Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified or mitigated? |

However, this study focuses on the three discursive strategies in news articles about mental illness: referential, predicative and argumentative. The researchers believe that nomination and predication strategies are subordinate to the representation of mental illness in 'selling' the analysed news articles about mental illness. Furthermore, argumentation strategies are the formal or substantive justifications that link the argument(s) to the conclusion. They can rely on fallacies and topoi. The reason for choosing these three strategies is their fundamental importance for analysing the account. Although the other two strategies, perspectivisation, intensification and mitigation, are not the focus of this study, they also influence the referential, predication and argumentation strategies. The strategies of perspectivisation and intensification/mitigation are not a separate analytical category but can occur at any level. Thus, analysing these three strategies will help to understand how newspapers construct and communicate news about mental illness to society. In addition, this paper will also pave the way for investigating the discursive construction of the topic and explore the complexity of representation by examining the linguistic elements in news articles from different online newspapers.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

The data were qualitatively analysed using three discursive strategies (nomination, predication and argumentation) proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009). The first strategy is the referential or nomination strategy, which is specifically used to identify the linguistic components used to identify or label a person or a group. These elements often use a positive or negative membership categorisation to construct a positive or negative representation. In addition, predication strategies are used to linguistically describe or categorise people, events and many other things, regardless of whether they are abstract or tangible, after they have been constructed or identified. Predication strategies also include the expression of evaluative attributes or characteristics that can be conveyed either positively or negatively through the linguistic structure of implicit or explicit predicates. Predication strategies are crucial for achieving certain results.

Conversely, argumentation is a discursive strategy to validate positive and negative representations. It can make use of metaphor, fallacies and topoi. The reason for choosing these three strategies is their fundamental importance for analysing representation. However, the strategies of perspectivisation and intensification/mitigation, which aim to determine the reaction of people with mental illness to their representation in the media, are not examined in this study. These strategies are not feasible when examining marginalised populations such as those with mental illness, as their perspectives and influence on media representation are absent in the media.

3.1 Criteria of Data Selection

The material comes from Malaysian English-language newspapers, which have the largest readership and occupy a privileged position in the Malaysian media landscape. These online newspapers published in two different languages are used as primary data to avoid bias. In this study, 43 news articles from The Malay Mail (MM), The Star (TS), and New Straits Times (NST) were analysed.

The news articles focus on the story of a person who was thought, suspected or accused of being mentally ill. In addition, the headlines should contain keywords related to 'mental illness'. Following Wahl's (1992) recommendation, the keywords for news selection consist of general terms and specific diagnostic terms related to mental illness - "mentally ill", "run amok", "commit suicide", "depression", "hallucination", "insanity" and "mental problem/disorder" for English newspapers. Only articles in which a person was described as mentally ill are included in this analysis. For example, the keywords "ran amok" and "commit suicide', which are not commonly referred to as mental illness, were not included in the analysis.

In addition, the database spans four years, from January 2017 to December 2021. The justification for the chosen timeframe is that the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Malaysian Mental Health Association (MMHA) have made serious efforts to reduce discrimination against people with mental illness since 2017-2021. Therefore, the authors believe that with all the efforts by the authorities to reduce prejudice against people with mental illness, the media should also change the way they portray the issues to the public. In addition, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Malaysia in 2019 has affected people's mental health and led to a surge in the number of mental illnesses in general, due to the economic impact and the movement control order (MCO) (Hassandarvish, 2020; Beckstein et al., 2021). This situation has led to mental illness becoming a health issue and impacting at a societal level. Therefore,

it is important to examine how newspapers portray news about mental illness in society. This
study examines how newspapers report news about mental illness in the selected time period.

3.2 Approach to Analysis

Data analysis consists of three phases: Identification, interpretation and explanation
(Fairclough, 1995). This study was conducted because it is able to unveil the use of discursive
strategies employed in the discourses and to show the complexity of language use in the
realisation of each discursive strategy. The discursive analysis guide was applied throughout
the identification process (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The methodology used to analyse the data
is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Procedure for data analysis

No.	Phases	Description	Example of Data	Analysis
1	Identification	The researchers read the articles carefully and examined the linguistic aspects (discursive features) that indicate the discursive strategies of selected data and highlights the discursive features. The elements examined include choices of vocabulary, pronouns, metaphors, sentences, etc. The guiding question at this stage is: what linguistic elements represent discursive strategies?	**Mentally-ill man** attacks senior citizen with knife. Furious when advised to be patient after jumping a queue at a convenience store here today, a man, believed to be mentally unsound, flew into a rage and injured an elderly customer with a knife.	Identification of discursive strategies: **Nomination – The use of blanket term through pre-modified noun** *"Mentally-ill man"*
2	Interpretation	The researchers categorised data that have similarities in one theme, provided a description of the linguistic feature and interprets the meaning. Statements were interpreted according to the context of the discourse.		The phrase 'mentally ill' is repeatedly used in news articles as a reference to PWMI in the news, especially in a group of news items with content that

3	Explanation	The researchers explained in macro analysis the situational aspect and social context that may underlie and affected due to the text production and relate them to PWMI

presents PWMI as dangerous and unpredictable.

In criminalising PWMI, news articles tend to use blanket terms to describe their mental health, which can be detrimental as it oversimplifies their diverse conditions. In this condition, PWMI were positioned not only as someone who had committed a crime but also as someone diagnosed with a mental illness. This may result in a diminished capacity for empathy and comprehension towards those with mental illness. When discussing mental health issues in newspapers, it is advisable to switch from the usage of blanket term, "mentally ill man", as the term, to a post-modifying noun phrase such as 'people with mental illness', which is more precise and empathetic language. The use of blanket term through pre-modified nouns in conjunction with the high levels of stigma that the public already associates with mental illness may

amplify unfavourable perceptions about this vulnerable population.

3.3 Ethical Consideration

One of the main concerns surrounding Internet-based research (IBR) is the demarcation between 'public' and 'private' settings, which has significant implications for the need for informed consent. Scholars such as Sudweeks and Rafaeli (1995) and Walther (2002) argue against the notion that researchers should seek permission for publicly available archived material on the Internet, particularly in academic research. In addition, some scholars have argued that although certain data is available to the public, Internet users expect the information they provide to be kept confidential (Sharf, 1999; Elgesem, 2002). Conversely, according to Convery and Cox (2012), there may be less responsibility to protect individual privacy when the study focuses on archives or environments that are publicly accessible or designed to be public or performative by their creators or participants. In some publicly accessible platforms, such as newsgroups and bulletin boards, obtaining informed consent may not be a general requirement. The internet is often seen as a public space where the norms of public behaviour only sometimes require explicit, informed consent. Nonetheless, it is essential to carefully examine the diversity and complexity of online communication before embarking on Internet-based research (IBR) (Watson et al., 2007).

Therefore, when considering ethical research practises from different perspectives, the position is taken that any publicly available or freely accessible Internet material should be considered fair use and author permission is not required. Considering that newspaper articles posted online are freely accessible, it is important to note that the author's consent is not required.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis, three predominant discursive strategies were identified. The results of the study are based on the three elements of discursive strategies, nomination, predication, which have been explained in the previous section. The following is a description of the research findings. People with mental illness are referred to in the news articles in various ways, with both positive and negative evaluations.

4.1 Nomination and Predication Strategies

Nomination strategies include the many methods used to designate entities within the context of a written discourse. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) enumerate many linguistic elements that fall inside this category, such as nouns, verbs, deictic expressions, and metaphors. This study focuses on the language references used to describe individuals, actions, and events associated with mental illness within the dataset. In this study, it was found that media practitioners tend to use noun phrases to refer to people with mental illnesses. The study identified three nomination strategies used in noun phrases: (a) blanket terms (e.g. mentally ill man), (b) identification nouns (e.g. a man, a 53-year-old daughter and her husband), and (c) criminal terms (e.g. the suspect). Table 3 illustrates the frequency of each nomination strategy for referring individuals with mental illnesses.

Table 3: Frequency of nomination strategy

No	Nomination Strategy	Frequency
1	Blanket terms	10
2	Identification nouns	
	i. Gender category	27
	ii. Age category	6
	iii. Kinship noun	11
3	Criminal Terms	29

In the news, people with mental illness (PWMI) are named ten times with blanket terms that emphasise their mental health condition and associate them with criminal events. These blanket terms such as mentally ill man, mentally unstable man, mentally ill woman, mentally ill patient and mentally ill husband are used to distinguish PWMI but are often derogatory and sensationalised. These terms can be seen as problematic because they draw attention to a person's psychiatric condition rather than their identity as an individual. This problem was identified in a dataset in which blanket terms were used ten times, as reported through pre-modifying noun phrases. This can be seen in Excerpts 1 and 2:

1. **Mentally-ill man** attacks senior citizen with knife. Furious when advised to be patient after jumping a queue at a convenience store here today**, a man**, believed to be mentally unsound, flew into a rage and injured an elderly customer with a knife. The 67-year-old victim suffered cuts to his shoulder, chin and neck, and is reported stable at Pekan hospital here.

The representation of social actors by employing reference to their state of health has derogatory and alienating effects (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The phrase 'mentally ill' is a blanket term that is repeatedly used in news articles as a reference to PWMI in the news, especially in a group of news items with content that presents PWMI as dangerous and unpredictable. In criminalising PWMI, the news articles tend to highlight them through the blanket term by describing their mental health state. In this state, PWMI were not only seen as someone who had committed a crime, but also as someone who had been diagnosed with a mental illness. The use of diagnosis as a means of categorisation (e.g. mentally ill) can therefore perpetuate unfavourable prejudice (United Spinal Association, 2011) and reinforce what Snow (2007) describes as "a powerful attitudinal obstacle", whereby these "attitudinal barriers'," resulting in part from the use of disability-focused language, create additional barriers that are even more disabling than the diagnosis itself (Snow, 2007), ultimately influencing perceptions and negatively impacting on behaviour. Disability-inclusive language therefore means acknowledging the impairment before attributing it as a cause for the perpetuation of stigma and unfavourable attitudes towards people with disabilities (Lynch et al., 1994). The use of blanket terms such as 'mentally ill' therefore largely coincides with stigmatising labels for mental health reported elsewhere (Rose et al., 2007).

Newspapers should refrain from using the term "mentally ill" when reporting on people with mental illness, as this can increase the stigmatisation and misunderstandings associated with the condition. Critics have pointed out that the portrayal of mental illness in the media can lead to an unfavourable perception of people with mental disorders as hostile, dangerous and moody due to the predominance of violent and dangerous elements. This can lead to a diminished capacity for empathy and understanding towards the mentally ill. When talking about mental illness in newspapers, it is advisable to move from using a pre-modified noun such as "mentally ill person" to a post-modifying noun phrase such as 'people with mental illness', which is more precise and empathetic language. The use of pre-modified nouns in conjunction with the high level of stigma the public already associates with mental illness can reinforce unfavourable perceptions of this vulnerable population. One possible application of the post-modifying noun "person with a mental illness" is to emphasise the inherent humanity of those affected and the shared experience of being affected by an illness similar to any other person struggling with a health problem. In addition, the use of more precise terminology such as "schizophrenia," "depression," or "anxiety disorder" can help to reduce the social stigma attached to mental illness by more accurately visualising the condition in question.

On the other hand, the nomination strategy also utilised identification nouns (n:44) defined in terms of what they are, such as the gender category (n:27) (i.e.: a man), the age category (n:6) (i.e.: '53-year-old daughter) and the kinship noun (n:11) (i.e.: her husband). These identification nouns are the most frequently found nomination strategy in the entire data set. The use of these identification nouns is, as shown in Excerpts 1, 2 and 3.

2. <u>A housewife sustained severe injuries when she was attacked</u> by **her mentally-ill husband** at a hut in Sungai Sangan, Tatau, near here, early Tuesday. The woman sustained slash wounds on her neck and a gunshot wound on her right arm in the 4 pm assault. It was learnt that the woman was sleeping when she was attacked by **her husband**, <u>who was armed with a parang and homemade pump gun</u>.

3. An elderly woman was beaten to death in Lahar Kepar here on Friday night (May 22), allegedly by **her daughter** who is believed to be suffering from mental illness. Seberang Perai Utara district police chief ACP Noorzainy Mohd Noor said the victim, Loh Foh Mooi, 90, was found bleeding with injuries to her face and hands following a heated exchange with her 53-year-old **daughter**.

The media practitioners also utilised nomination strategy through relational identification nouns, where PWMI is presented as a social actor in relation to kinship, such as 'her husband' (excerpt 2) and 'her daughter' (excerpt 3). In both Excerpts 2 and 3, the referent 'husband' and 'daughter' are used for PWMI based on the relationship status between them and the victim. If the victim of an offence is related to the person of interest who is their next of kin with a mental illness, this can have a profound impact on the victim's family. Dealing with the legal and emotional consequences of a close relative suffering from a mental illness can be difficult for the victim and their family. The complexity of kinship language in these situations highlights the delicate interaction between family obligations, social responses and the well-being of all affected individuals (Paradis-Gagné et al., 2020). The use of kinship terms has an impact on how the reader perceives the case and the people involved (EL-Sakran, 2023). The kinship terms "husband" and "daughter" often carry unspoken meanings that can trigger an emotional response. This situation occurs because these terms are usually associated with certain behavioural norms and rules, which reinforces the reaction. The linguistic choices that media professionals make when reporting on crimes related to PWMI as the accused and which take place in the family environment can contribute to readers developing a heightened hostility towards the offenders. For example, kinship terms evoke a stronger emotional response

because they are almost always associated with cultural codes of behaviour and conventions (El-Sakran, 2023).

It has been observed that media practitioners sometimes reveal the age of PWMI as a premodifier to identify them (e.g. a 53-year-old daughter). In addition to the kinship noun in Excerpt 3, the media practitioner used the age category as an identifying noun to label PWMI. The head noun is modified by a definite determiner (the) and a descriptive adjective that uses an age category (53 years old). These pre-modifying noun phrases condense information into a single word that presupposes their existence. By constructing noun phrases that provide information such as age, the writer portrays PWMI as a grown-up or mature daughter who is involved in a familial altercation with her mother that eventually leads to the mother's death. The information that the daughter is 53 years old is taken for granted and is unlikely to be questioned by the reader. However, the tendency of readers to accept information without questioning can make them vulnerable to manipulation (Tabbert, 2013). Therefore, it is unnecessary to use descriptive adjectives that reveal identity, such as the age of people with mental illness (PWMI) or accused parties in news articles about crimes that do not require such details. When people with mental illness are involved in encounters with the police, disclosing their information can violate their privacy and dignity, which can affect how law enforcement treats and perceives them (Livingston, 2016; Wood et al., 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to keep the information about people with mental illness reported in crime news confidential to protect their rights, prevent social stigmatisation and ensure fair treatment. It has also been observed that PWMIs are often portrayed in news articles using criminal terms. This is particularly evident when the term "suspect" is used, which occurs frequently in the dataset (n:29). This can create an unfair and negative impression of PWMIs, portraying them as they are portrayed as suspects or persons of interest in criminal cases. According to Richardson (2017), the choice of noun phrases used to name the accused can contribute to portraying them as offenders. The choice of nouns reinforces pre-existing assumptions about the seriousness of the situation.

4. It is learnt that the victim and her husband were performing terawih prayers at the hall when they were approached by **the suspect**. **The suspect** had come out from his room holding two knives and pointed one each at his parents. His father managed to push the suspect, but the knife hit his mother's hand," he added. Based on statements from the victim, **the suspect** has been suffering from mental illness since 2016 and is currently under treatment.

In Excerpt 4, the writing style encourages the reader to interpret the content based on their broad understanding of mental illness as a condition associated with aggressive and dangerous individuals. The noun phrase, the suspect, leads the reader to believe that people with mental illness are aggressive, violent and dangerous. The news stories in the excerpt are structured to describe people with mental illness as "criminal, aggressive, violent and potentially dangerous to others". The choice of these nouns confirms preconceived ideas about the severity of the situation. This use of language can contribute to the negative stereotypes associated with mental illness and can reinforce the belief that people with mental illness are criminals (Seale, 2003; Sieff, 2003). Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the language used in news articles and to ensure that media practitioners do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes about people with mental illness.

On the other hand, predication is the second strategy to find out which salient qualities are attributed to social actors, PWMI. One way to do this is to attribute qualities, traits or characteristics in order to positively or negatively evaluate social actors, the PWMI.

Table 4: Frequency of predication strategy

No	Predication Strategy	Frequency
1	Explicit Predicate	10
2	Relative Clauses	8
3	Presupposition	5

Table 4 presents the frequency of predication strategies used in this study. These strategies comprise linguistic devices such as explicit predicates (n:10), relative clauses (n:8), and presuppositions (n:5). The author used a metaphor, 'flew into a rage' as an explicit predicate as in (Excerpt 1), which includes a verb of motion to express anger. The metaphorical expression such as 'a man who was believed to be mentally unsound, 'flew into a rage' means that PWMI suddenly becomes angry. At the same time, the relative clauses 'who was armed with a parang and homemade pump gun' (Excerpt 2) describe PWMI. The predication strategy in both excerpts supports the description that both social actors who are PWMI are violent, lunatic and dangerous. Here, the PWMI are depicted as aggressive and perilous. Therefore, the pre-modified noun phrase 'mentally ill man/husband' elicited more negative judgements, especially when they were further characterised as mostly aggressive and dangerous by using action verbs such as 'attacks/attacked' (Excerpts 1 and 2) to convey the judgement or method of causing harm to the victim in the incident. It describes PWMI as 'violent homicide' and portrays the

perpetrators (PWMI) as murderers. In both Extract 1 and Extract 2, PWMI are portrayed as actors with a negative labelling, particularly in relation to their identity as individuals who are portrayed through the somatisation "mentally ill man/husband" as an adjectival noun to represent the actor(s) who have been subjected to criminalisation.

In addition, media practitioners also use compound sentences as explicit predicates. These sentences consist of two or more independent clauses linked by coordinating conjunctions such as 'and' (Excerpt 4). The explicit predicates underlined in Excerpt 4 convey negative attributions through compound sentences. In these compound sentences, conjunctions such as 'and' connect PWMI's actions and mental state. The conjunction 'and' connects words, phrases, clauses or synonymous sentences with the same syntactic meaning. It often connects clauses of the same grammatical class, e.g. phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses, adverbs with adverbs and nouns with nouns (Unubi, 2016). In Excerpt 4, the conjunction 'and' is used in the predicate to connect two negative actions and attributes, holding two knives and pointing one each at his parents; has been suffering from mental illness since 2016 and is currently under treatment, indicating a sequential relationship between the actions and the health condition of PWMI. This type of description or attribution of PWMI as a predicate in reporting can allow readers to imagine the defendant's action, unintentionally perpetuating stigmatising attitudes and reinforcing preconceived notions about people with mental illness.

5. **A mentally unstable man** <u>suspected of causing the death of his six-month-old baby</u> at his house in Kampung Baroh here has been remanded on Wednesday (May 29). Perlis police chief Datuk Noor Mushar Mohamad said **the 44-year-old suspect** <u>smacked the baby girl after a quarrel with his wife</u>, who told him to take his medication for his mental illness last Saturday.

On the other hand, in Excerpt 5 PWMI was labelled negatively by placing it in a context of criminal behaviour: 'A mentally unstable man suspected of causing the death of his six-month-old baby'. The authors use presupposition as a predication strategy through the verb 'suspected' to legitimise him as the perpetrator of the crime. The pre-modified noun via identification, such as the age category of the social actor, 'the 44-year-old suspect', represents a convicted criminal who unpredictably attacked his daughter after an altercation with his wife. PWMI is characterised as a violent criminal, using the action verb 'smacked', which cannot be interpreted as coincidental or accidental but purposeful. This portrayal suggests that the mentally ill person is not only "mad" but also "bad". He is characterised as an offensive criminal who has violently assaulted his daughter (a six-month-old baby). Here PWMI is perceived as someone who is

unpredictable, violent and hot-tempered, as he 'smacked' his daughter because his wife asked him to take his medication for his mental illness. This statement supports the view that describes PWMI as violent, as the subsequent offence is the death of a baby. The account corresponds with the hostile act 'hit the little girl after an argument with his wife' to describe PWMI as a suspect in a criminal event. Therefore, a person's mental health status is not relevant when a reporter writes about them in the context of a criminal offence; what is essential is the person's behaviour.

4.2 Argumentation Strategies

Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) argumentation strategy offers insights into the ways in which fallacies and topos were used in the discursive construction of news articles about mental illness in Malaysian online newspapers. To rationalise the negative portrayal of PWMI, the author employed several argumentative strategies, namely fallacies (a faulty or erroneous argument based on poor premises and an illogical conclusion) and topos (a particular recurring element or idea used to convey a particular message or meaning). Table 5 exemplifies argumentation strategies found in the news articles. Two prominent linguistic devices are fallacies of presumption (n=8) and topos of blame (n=9).

Table 5: Frequency of argumentation strategy

No	Predication Strategy	Frequency
1	Fallacy of presumption	8
2	Topos of Blame	9

4.2.1 Fallacy of Presumption

In this study, fallacy was found to be related to preconceived ideas and emotions and conviction on people of a certain group, rather than rational arguments, by generalising to the situation of PWMI. In the context of the study, the fallacy of presumption is also known as an argumentative strategy used by the media to legitimise the negative portrayal of PWDs. This fallacy of presumption appears eight times in the data set. The portrayal is made through a hasty generalisation in which people with reduced mobility were generalised based on their actions. This category was formed without any evidence. An example of this is the comments of a speaker who was individualised as Police Chief Deputy Superintendent, Mohd Haris Ibrahim:

6. <u>Police are **assuming** that the naked man found strolling at Jalan Bundusan here is mentally ill.</u> District police chief Deputy Superintendent Mohd Haris Ibrahim said to date they had not received any report regarding the man. "There is no report. Otherwise, we would have taken action. There is no information to be shared," he said, adding it would be easier if there was a report. <u>Haris said people **assumed** that the man, whose photo went viral, was likely to be insane as normal people would not do what he did.</u>

Based on the speaker's claim, it was assumed that the man in the scene was 'mentally ill' because he undresses in public and looks crazy, because normal people would not behave like this. As can be seen in Excerpt 6, the verb 'assuming/assumed' makes the authority's statement a fallacy as he is assuming what "normal people" would or would not do, suggesting that it is considered abnormal for a man to perform this type of act (being naked) in public. It is also mentioned that those who act this way are considered "insane" as "normal people" would not act this way. There is a polarised representation that supports a division between "them", who are mentally ill, and "us" (the readers), who are not (Olstead, 2002). This distorted portrayal of offenders with mental illness suggests a division between those with mental illness and those with mental wellness. Readers may therefore gain the impression that people with mental illness are always different from people with mental well-being. Although this claim was unsubstantiated, the reference to the speaker's position and authority as Police Chief Deputy Superintendent provides credence and legitimises the claim made. Ultimately, the public will accept these claims as facts and not as assumptions or personal views, even if there is no evidence to support the claim.

Misinformation about the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders can be spread and harmful stereotypes can be perpetuated through inaccurate portrayals of mental illness (Salleh, 2023). Therefore, this presumption of symptoms and diagnoses of mental illness, as in Excerpt 6, contributes to the stigma associated with mental illness, both through the dissemination of misinformation that can lead to the spread of misconceptions and falsehoods about mental health. To help people with mental disorders and counteract stigma, the media needs to portray mental illness in a better light by avoiding inaccurate, misleading and ambiguous terms or statements when discussing mental illness.

7. <u>Malaysian Tamilar Kural president David Marshel, who spoke on behalf of the family, said they **believe** the boy had suffered from some form of depression after being allegedly "targeted"</u> by certain teachers at school.

In Excerpt 7, a family representative claims that a suicide victim died due to depression caused by conflicts with his teachers. This news was released as a direct message and conveyed a negative attitude by linking depression and suicidal behaviour. The family believes that the teenager died by suicide to escape the grief and loss caused by depression. This allegation was made without any medical evidence or diagnosis from a medical professional. Furthermore, Excerpt 7 triggers a factual presupposition because it arises from information conveyed with words or phrases that show facts believed to be true and statements that use the word "believe" It is believed that the boy suffered from depression and died by suicide because he was targeted, bullied and humiliated by his teachers.

4.2.2 Topos of Blame

Another form of argumentative strategy that becomes clear in the news article is the use of "topoi of blame". A topos of blame is an adaptable line of argumentation that can be applied to many topics and target groups in order to assign responsibility to an individual or a collective. In this study, people with mental illness are blamed for their condition. Similar to the fallacy of presumption, the topos of blame also appears nine times in the data set. The justification of mentally ill people as criminals in the dataset often relies on the topos of blame, as evidenced by direct quotes from authorities, eyewitnesses or victims.

8. CID Othman said on Sunday, the victim, who is a former lecturer, and his wife were at the market parking section about 10.30am when a man approached them. "Suddenly, the individual stabbed **the victim** with a knife before he fled the scene. The victim fell to the ground and was taken to the Urban Transformation Centre clinic nearby. "**He suffered serious injuries to the stomach** and was rushed to HTAA. **The victim had to undergo surgery** and **is treated at the ICU unit**," he said.

In Excerpt 8, the media activates PWMI as the perpetrator at the crime scene. In this situation, the word 'suddenly' indicates PWMI's unexpected act (stabbed) and justifies PWMI as a criminal. As a result, PWMI is subjected to legal penalties while the victim is portrayed as the innocent recipient of the 'stabbing' action. The police chief of the Criminal Investigation Department is used as evidence to blame mentally ill people for the victim's serious condition. This can be seen in phrases such as "*He suffered serious injuries to the stomach and was rushed to HTAA. The victim had to undergo surgery and is treated at the ICU unit.*"

9. **Two houses were gutted in a fire** <u>believed to have been caused by a mentally-ill woman</u> **who was burning rubbish inside the home**, in Kampung Nechang here. The victim's aunt, Che Romoh Adam, 68, who lives next door, said she *suspected* her niece as **she had set fire inside the house three times before. "Before this, the fire incidents were small and were easily noticed** *but* **this time it burned my house down**," she said when met by reporters at the scene.

Moreover, Excerpt 9 shows the topos of guilt in which a mentally ill person is held responsible for the fire incident by using the relative clause '...who burnt rubbish in the flat' as a modification of the noun 'mentally ill woman'. This explained that a mentally ill woman had carried out an arson attack on a house, which was thought to have caused the burning of two houses. The use of subjectification through the process of circumstantialisation, which occurs through the prepositional phrase "by". In this way, PWMI's position as an actor is made the subject of the discussion. The author uses the phrase '*believed to have been caused by a mentally ill woman*' as if this event does not occur and people without a diagnosis of mental illness do not commit the offences. Here, the phrase '*believed to have been'* indicates no objective evidence that the event is due to PWMI's action. The use of the passive voice as a syntactic structure in the portrayal of people with mental illness and the consequences of the crime appears to serve to avoid accusations or being accused of bias. This syntactic structure can shift the focus to the object and emphasise its importance. Passive verbs emphasise the recipient, the victim, over the doer of the action (Krueger, 2016). This can help to perpetuate the misconception that mental illness is a major factor in violent behaviour.

In Excerpt 9, which is similar to Excerpt 8, the author uses the account of the eyewitness, who was also the victim of the incident, as evidence of PWMI's culpability. This topos of blame is evident in phrases such as '*she suspected her niece as she had set a fire inside the house three times before*', followed by a direct quotation: "*Before this, the fire incidents were small and were easily noticed, but this time it burned my house down*". Nonetheless, the use of the words '*suspected*' and '*but*' seems to mitigate the blaming language rather indirectly; this typically occurs after an assault on the 'other', which is often achieved through a projection of guilt or a 'turning the tables' (Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2004). The topos of blame — blaming those who suffer from mental illness for their condition — can be harmful. It can lead to discrimination, stigmatisation and prejudice, resulting in a reluctance to seek treatment and difficulties in many facets of life.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study examines the discursive strategies used in Malaysian news articles in portraying mental illness and the linguistic devices used to successfully implement each of these strategies. The study found that the media frequently use strategies such as nomination, predication and argumentation to portray mentally ill people primarily as offenders. In the strategy of nomination, media practitioners utilise blanket terms as one of the most common linguistic devices to legitimise the social actor's mental illness. The use of blanket terms in the above excerpts from news articles has a significant impact on the public perception of mental illness as it perpetuates negative stereotypes and stigma. The use of blanket and stigmatising terms such as 'mentally ill' as a catch-all phrase to describe people with different mental illnesses can therefore be detrimental. This type of language can significantly influence the public perception of mental illness and lead to a misrepresentation of people with different mental illnesses. The use of terms that refer to a person's health condition can have a derogatory and alienating effect (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Therefore, it is important to use specific language that takes into account the nuances of individual experiences and illnesses.

Another prominent linguistic device used in the nomination strategy is the identification of nouns. Here, PWMIs were named in terms of who they are through identification, such as age categories, gender categories, and kinship nouns. Another linguistic device that is commonly used to name PWMI via a criminal term such as 'suspect'. This term was used frequently in news articles to refer to PWMI as a person of interest (POI). Meanwhile, as offenders, PWMI were presented as convicted criminals through negative predication strategies. This representation was materialised semantically through negative lexical items in referring to their actions and the use of fallacy and topos of blame as strategies to legitimise the claim that PWMI is a convicted criminal.

These limited and negative portrayals harm PWMI and, at the same time, contribute to stigma towards these people. If PWMI continues to be portrayed negatively, this can also affect their progression and prognosis and exclude them from society. These findings suggest that people with mental illness are different from the general population. The results consistently show that the news media exaggerates, dramatises and inaccurately portrays mental illness, emphasising risk, criminality and unpredictability. In addition, they act as role models for negative reactions to people with mental illness, such as fear, rejection, shame and ridicule. There have also been news articles speculating on the "reason" for the erratic behaviour and offending without a clinical diagnosis from experts. Without professional evidence, labelling someone as mentally ill can be damaging. This assumption reinforces prejudice against people

with mental illness, limits help-seeking and affects self-esteem (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Staniland et al., 2022). As a result, misconceptions and fear of mental illness have led to people being excluded from their communities and often find it difficult to find housing, employment and participate in social activities (Drake & Whitley, 2014; Mannarini & Rossi, 2019). These circumstances can have a significant impact on the self-esteem and quality of life of those affected.

The findings also show that the Malaysian media has not practised careful and responsible reporting of such news. Inaccurate reporting and portrayal of people with mental illness, such as linking it to violence, dangerousness or blaming those affected, is a major factor in the spread of stigmatisation and stereotypes about mental illness among the public (Hanafiah & Van Bortel, 2015; Chen & Lawrie, 2017; Pendit & Choo, 2020). Journalists should adhere to the utmost regard for the legal right to privacy of Persons with Mental Illness (PWMI).

While this study has accomplished its objectives, it is essential to note that several factors may limit the findings. Firstly, the study only considered data from three English major newspapers. However, this data is seemingly sufficient to thoroughly analyse discursive construction on mental illness, including discursive strategies and linguistic devices. Besides, the researcher only examined one language, English, in newspapers. Since Malaysia is a multiracial and multi-ethnic country, the conclusions drawn from this study may not be representative of other races and ethnicities.

To conclude, the media has the potential to significantly reduce the existing stigmatisation of people with mental illness through informative and responsible reporting, thus enabling their active participation in society. This approach therefore has the potential to change social attitudes and at the same time improve the treatment of people with mental illness. It can promote more compassion and eliminate the negative biases that have prevented society from being fairer and more unbiased. Therefore, it is crucial to revise and update the content code and recommendations for a more strategic approach to media implementation in Malaysia (Johari et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2021). Thus, the findings of this study show that responsible reporting on mental health issues in Malaysia can be improved. Further research could be conducted to explore how mental illness is constructed in discourse on various social media platforms, including X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram. Such investigations could help determine whether the patterns observed in the current study are consistent or divergent across different media. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of these constructions on marginalised communities, it may be helpful to conduct interviews with media professionals and individuals with lived experience of mental illness.

Additionally, it would be fascinating to examine how mental illness is portrayed in other languages, given the cultural diversity of places like Malaysia. Countries with diverse populations may exhibit subtle variations in the portrayal of mental illness due to the influence of different cultural traditions.

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