

# Portraying Iraqi Women's Abuse In Local News Reports / A Critical Discourse Analysis To Explore The Suffering Of Iraqi Women

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## **Abstract**

*The media in general and the press in particular are responsible to highlight the role of Iraqi women and enhance their social and cultural status at all levels because women are considered to be a cell in the body of Iraqi community and a reflection of the society's overall achievements and future goals. Hence, it is prominent to shed light on the press regarding women issues. This study showed that the Iraqi press, and through its general daily newspapers, dealt with women's issues and the violation of their rights fairly well. The researcher chose a regular sample of the daily newspapers Al-Sabah and Al-Zaman and studied 124 press reports over a span of six months (January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 till June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021). The study resulted in several outcomes. One of these outcomes is that the issue of domestic violence was one among the topics covered by the public daily newspapers. Other categories and topics were also noticed like divorce, alimony, early marriage, death threats, rape, poverty, dropping out of school, violation of rights and freedom, and suicide. Al-Sabah and Al-Zaman newspaper dealt with these categories in fluctuating frequencies due to the philosophy of each newspaper towards these groups. As Al-Sabah newspaper is one of the official semi-governmental newspapers, while Al-Zaman newspaper is an independent newspaper that expresses the viewpoint of the Iraqi street towards the issue of violating the rights of Iraqi women.*

**Keywords:** *Specialized Journalism, Critical Discourse Analysis, News Reports, feminist journalism, press coverage, women's issues*

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1. Feminist journalism**

Feminist journalism has been advanced in the world, and it has acquired many characteristics. It has not been limited to designing and directing, but it has gone beyond the arts of editorial and journalistic drafting. The feminist press in many countries has gained cultural, entertainment and artistic sites, constantly taking the audience to the worlds of modernity and the enlightened awareness of it. The feminist press appeared in the Arab world early in the history of the Arab press, but during its first decades, it was poor then it gradually rose. This fact was also obvious when it comes to dealing with women's press in Iraq. As a matter of fact, this research sheds light on the press coverage of everything related to women in the Iraqi press by subjecting Al-Sabah newspaper and Al-Zaman newspapers as a model for the research requirements. Hence, the research was divided into 5 sections putting women issues in the Iraqi press under the microscope.

### **2.1. A brief overview of the history of feminist journalism:**

The feminist press emerged independently and became an entity of its own with the establishment of the ladies' house Curtis magazine (Abdul Hilal, 2016) at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe, which was published and edited by Edward Burke, the most popular editor in the history of feminist magazines (Mas'sra, 2008). Sources indicate that the Arab feminist press appeared in Egypt in 1892 and was not known for any other Arab country. Because Egypt witnessed a press renaissance that the Arab countries did not know before, and because most of the owners of the news organizations and the bearers of the press are from the Levantine, it was natural for their women to seek the establishment of newspapers that deal with women's issues imitating their male peers. Hind Nofal, a Lebanese young lady, established the first women's periodical magazine in Alexandria, Egypt and called it: Al-Fatat magazine (Ghazi, 2006).

Moreover, Layla magazine, which was issued by Mrs. Paulina Hassoun, is the first feminist magazine in Iraq. The first issue of it was released on October 15, 1923 AD (4 Rabi' al-Awwal 4, 1342 AH) in 48 pages, and its cover had the following header "for the sake of the renaissance of the Iraqi women". This magazine focused on everything that is useful and new in science, art, literature, meeting and housekeeping (Mohammed, 2006).

Layla's first issue was published in 1923, and its final issue was published in 1925. After that, feminist press publications disappeared for a while until the publishing of the weekly Al-Nas supplement issued by Al-Nas Al-Basriyah Newspaper headed by Ms. Victoria Noaman. This supplement was followed by The Modern Woman

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Magazine in 1936 and then The Iraq Girl in the same year. After that, the newspaper Fatah Al-Arab was founded in 1937 and was owned by Maryam Narmah, who was considered to be the first journalist in Iraq to practice journalism. Fatah Al Arab was followed by the magazine Women's Liberation in 1946, then Al-Rehab Magazine owned by Akdas Abdul Hamid in 1946, Bint Al-Rasheed by Dora Abdel Wahab in 1948, The Women's Union in 1949, The Red Crescent in 1951, The Iraqi Women's Union in 1960, and The 14th of July Magazine in 1959.

### **2.1.1. The concept of feminist journalism**

The concept of feminist journalism includes two main disciplines. The first discipline is: women's pages in daily newspapers and weekly and monthly general magazines, and the second discipline is: magazines specialized in women's affairs, whether they are weekly, monthly, or quarterly (Moustafa, 2015).

The first discipline was known in the feminist press at an early period in the history of journalism; however, the second discipline first saw light during the era between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> in Europe and America.

### **2.1.2. Feminist Press**

The feminist press is defined as the press that deals with women's affairs, problems and issues even if it is worked and issued by men. According to this definition, feminist journalism is divided into two types: the general feminist press and the specialized feminist press.

#### **2.1.2.1. The general feminist press**

This means the journalistic activity that is based on the issuance of newspapers and magazines directed to a general audience, including the women's sector as well as other sectors. It also combines the specialized feminist content that addresses various public and private women's issues.

#### **2.1.2.2. Specialized feminist press:**

It means the journalistic activity that is based on the issuance of newspapers and magazines that are directed to a homogeneous audience, the women's sector, and carries a homogeneous feminist content specialized in women's issues.

## **2.2. Terms and Concepts**

**2.2.1. Press coverage:** It is the procedure of coming up with information and details of a specific event, the information related to it, the understanding of its causes, the place of its occurrence, the names of the participants in it, and how it occurred. Along with other information that makes the event meet the requirements of for (Sabah, 2008). It also means the presence of journalists on the site of the event to obtain information about it, whether from their personal observations or from various sources, such as officials, official spokespersons and eyewitnesses. (Hafsa, 2015).

**2.2.2. Women's issues:** These are all issues related to women as they play a prominent role in the social, economic, intellectual, and cultural life (Abdul Rahman, 2013).

**2.2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** It is amongst the most advanced methodologies in the study of discourse that deals with language as a form of social practice and studies how text and speech contribute to creating social and political power. It is difficult to give a single definition of discourse analysis as a method used in scientific research, as Fairclough notes that discourse analysis is a difficult concept because there are quite a lot of conflicting and overlapping definitions caused by different theories and fields (Fairclough, 1992). Therefore, it is a group of methods and theories applied in the study of used language, social language and context, critical linguistics and post-structuralist discourse analysis, image analysis, semiological analysis, and critical discourse analysis (Gulam, 2010).

### **Chapter Tow: The methodological framework of the research**

The research is based on the theory of critical discourse analysis of newspapers, which helps the researcher measure the journalistic topics and materials of media coverage regarding women's issues raised during a certain period of time. Robert Entman described it as "choosing and focusing on a certain number of elements related to a topic and avoiding some others." According to this description, the framework is the main idea that gives the event its meaning and identifies the subject of the dispute and the essence of the issue. Also, the formation is the selection of some aspects of the truth to make it more explicit, to give it a logical explanation, a moral evaluation, and a way of treatment (Baysha, 2004).

Irving Goffman has identified the basic premise of the framework theory that the media's way of organizing, classifying and presenting events affects the ideas and the reaction of the audience to them. Robert Entman also referred more specifically to the concept of framework as the process by which specific meanings are given to different issues and events (Entman, 1993). In journalism, frameworks are a daily routine for journalists that allow them to quickly identify and categorize information (Scheufele, 1999). Frameworks represent a stereotype of specific events within more general explanatory categories in which these events acquire or do not acquire a priority (Norris, 1995).

### **Chapter Three**

#### **3.1. Research problem**

The problem is defined as an ambiguous situation that raises the researcher's concern and generates a desire to reveal this mystery (Farouq, 2000). It is also defined as a phenomenon that needs explanation or as an issue which is debatable and requires conducting a research process to its essence (Hameed, 2004). Accordingly, this research encounters a critical, analytical media problem that is highly significant and has an impact on the society. This fact is depicted in women issues mentioned in a sample of Baghdad newspapers. Such issues include the violation of women's rights and freedom which affects a main human sector that has an influential role in life. This role is obvious as women are considered to be the main focus of the family, one of the main assets of generations, and one of the basic pillars for the continuity and sustainability of life.

#### **3.2. Research questions**

The researcher identified a set of questions that the research aspires to answer. The questions are as follows:

**3.2.1.** What are the categories that the Iraqi newspapers dealt with through their reports regarding the issue of violating women's rights?

**3.2.2.** Have the Iraqi daily newspapers achieved the functions of the media regarding handling the violation of women's rights and freedom?

#### **3.3. Importance of research**

The prominence of the research is derived from the significance of the role played by some newspapers that shed light on certain topics and their reflection on the reader and the society in general. This research deals with women issues as women represent a significant position in the media, either through the image presented by the media itself about women or through women's participation in the media process. The research focuses on the categories that are presented on the different pages of newspapers which are unique in publishing everything related to women along with other topics.

#### **3.4. Research objectives**

Each research has specific goals that it aspires to reach throughout its stages and treatment procedures. The following goals have been set for this research:

- 1- Revealing the press coverage of women's issues according to the geographical location (the capital, Baghdad, the central governorates, the western governorates, the southern governorates, and the northern governorates)
- 2- Recognizing the most important categories on which the press shed light regarding women's issues in the newspapers chosen as a sample
- 3- Identifying the gender of writers, i.e., editors of women's topics
- 4- Illustrating how to analyze the critical discourse of the sample categories of news reports

#### **3.5. Research Hypothesis**

The Iraqi media has played an important role in portraying women's issues through reports in local news.

### **Chapter Four: Methodology**

The descriptive analytical method is the most appropriate scientific method for this research as it contributes to obtaining accurate descriptions of the phenomenon studied in order to answer the questions that the research poses (Moayad, 2006). The unit of analysis (the subject unit) has been defined as a unit of analysis as it is a complete natural unit in the communication material, and it determines the meaning of the category that may be a sentence, a phrase or an idea around which the subject of analysis revolves (Shukria, 1999).

#### **4.1. Research sample:**

The researcher chose a regular sample, which was characterized by: wide spread, simplicity, low costs, as well as low exposure to errors (Nabil, 2003). Al-Sabah and Al-Zaman newspapers are chosen for the research as the studied sample, and the total amount of both newspapers is 124 (48 and 76 respectively).

#### **4.2. Practical framework for research:**

##### **4.2.1. Al-Sabah daily newspaper:**

Issue (zero) of Al-Sabah newspaper was published on 05/17/2003 by the Iraqi Media Network that was established by the occupation authority, which was the ruling authority in Iraq as stipulated by the United Nations resolution on 5/22/2003 (Mohammed, 2015).

##### **4.2.2. Al-Zaman Newspaper:**

Al-Zaman newspaper was issued in its international edition in London on the tenth of April 1997 as a foundation for press, publishing and information under British laws. It has been published ever since then with the same edition, which

is headed by its editor, Dr. Fateh Abdel Salam, as “the international edition”. It is good to mention here that the Foundation's Board of Directors is chaired by Mr. Saad Al-Bazzaz.

**Chapter Five: Results Analysis**

A dimensional classification was built based on the analysis of the critical discourse on the issue of women and the violation of their rights and freedom through the published press reports. The identification of the main categories of units of analysis, which were specified through the follow-up and the reading of 124 topics published by both Al-Sabah Newspaper and Al-Zaman Newspaper (48 news reports and 76 news reports respectively) from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 till March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 are shown in the following table:

Seq.	Newspaper	Repetition	percentage
1	Al-Sabah newspaper	48	38.70
2	Al-Zaman daily newspaper	76	61.29
<b>Total</b>		124	100%

**Table 1**

The main categories of the news reports of the daily Al-Sabah newspaper regarding the topics of violations of Iraqi women’s rights and the analysis of the critical discourse of the categories are as the following:

Seq.	Main Categories	Repetition	percentage
1	family violence	12	25
2	Early marriage	9	18.75
3	Divorce and alimony	7	14.58
4	Threats to kill and rape	5	10.41
5	Violation of rights and freedoms	5	10.41
6	leave school	4	8.33
7	Low financial return	4	8.33
8	suicide	2	4.16
<b>Total</b>		48	100%

**Table 2**

It is clear from Table (2) that the category of domestic violence was ranked first in terms of the frequency and percentage through what was published in news reports in the Al-Sabah daily newspaper regarding the phenomenon of violating the rights of Iraqi women. While the category of early marriage came as a new situation for the Iraqi society in recent years, which exacerbated the problems that women suffer from in Iraq due to weak public awareness and the spread of societal crimes and economic problems experienced by Iraqi families with low incomes.

As for the category of divorce and alimony, it came in the third place as one of the phenomena related to the above-mentioned societal problems that accompanied Iraqi women. The other categories, like murder threatening and rape and the violation of freedom and rights, came in a close sequence in terms of the number of recurrences and percentages, with frequency 5 and a percentage of 10.41. This is because the two categories are linked to the legal position when it comes to dealing with the concept and limits of freedom for Iraqi women, which constitutes weak legislation to address the fundamental problems that women suffer from in Iraq. Both, the educational drop out and low financial return categories, came with a similar frequency and percentage because of the impact of one on the other to a large extent. The suicide category came last in terms of frequency and percentage.

By analyzing the categories and the quality of the critical discourse addressed by the two newspapers (Al-Sabah and Al-Zaman) through their news reports, it becomes clear that there is a discrepancy in the focus on the different categories. This is due to the nature of the media philosophy that controls the newspaper and directs it in one direction or another.

Table No. (3) Shows the number of recurrences for the writer's gender for women's topics and for all their categories.

Seq.	The writer	Repetition	percentage
1	Man	78	62.90
2	woman	46	37.09
<b>Total</b>		124	100%

**Table 3**

Table 4 shows that people who are concerned about women’s issues are actually men (62.9%). This fact proves that it is not necessary to be a woman in order to shed light on women’s sufferings which is a healthy indication.

## Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary

According to what was found throughout the research, it has become obvious that the Iraqi press, and through the levels of the feminists' press called the women's pages within the pages of the daily public newspapers, has recorded a remarkable progress in the press coverage of topics related to the violation of rights and freedom. Also, the critical discourse analysis of this phenomenon related to women was characterized by the abundance of diversity and plurality due to the inclusion of this phenomenon to various extents towards women and the family in general. The researcher chose a sample of the daily newspapers that continue to publish the topics related to women's sufferings. After choosing a regular sample and having 124 press reports, that include the concept of violating the rights and freedom of women and that were approved by the Iraqi constitution for the year (2005) in the daily newspapers (Al-Sabah, Al-Zaman), subject to study and critical analysis, it has become clear that the most discussed categories related to women were the issues of domestic violence against women in the first place, early marriage, divorce and alimony, violation of liberties and rights, educational drop out, low financial return, and threats of death and rape consecutively. According to frequencies and percentages, the results also showed that the man is involved in writing about women in public newspapers more than women themselves. Having men more involved in such an act does approve the necessity of the presence and continuity of women's role in life, as they represent an essential pillar of the family and its survival.

### 5.2. Research limitation

**5.2.1. Thematic spatial domain:** The subject area of the Iraqi press was determined after the use of the regular sample, so the two newspapers that were chosen to be the sample of our research are: Al-Sabah and Al-Zaman.

**5.2.2. Time Range:** The period of time from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to June 30, 2021 was set as the time span for the research. This time represents an important stage in the life of the Iraqi press due to the democratic transformations that Iraq has been going through, and many societal problems have turned into the field of social media to be the closest field to the citizen in spreading news and for citizen journalism to appear as an easier alternative to know what is happening in the society.

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