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## News media depictions of people with mental disabilities in Indonesia: A corpus-assisted discourse study

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### Abstract

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions, often contributing to the reinforcement of stereotypes and the dissemination of misinformation about people with mental disabilities. This article aims to reveal how individuals with mental disabilities have been linguistically and discursively constructed by Indonesian online news media over a ten-year period, from 2011 to 2020. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, the study integrates corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) and van Leeuwen's social actor network framework (van Leeuwen 2008), alongside news media models of disability drawn from Disability Studies. The findings reveal a dominant medicalised framing, portraying people with mental disabilities as patients or sufferers, and also a recurring tendency to link them to crime in sensationalised narratives. These representations are linguistically realised through *functionalisations*, frequent collocates related to medical terms, and passivation that backgrounds agency, and discursively sustained through role allocations that depict them predominantly as passive patients or as active perpetrators. These portrayals reinforce harmful stereotypes, emphasising danger and deviance, while underrepresenting perspectives that highlight discrimination, stigma, or structural barriers. The analysis suggests that this media coverage is likely to be shaped by commercial imperatives and news values that prioritise profit over progressive reporting. Consequently, narratives aligned with civil rights or social models of disability are marginalised. The persistence of these portrayals contributes to public stigma, limits access to support, and discourages help-seeking behaviour among individuals with mental disorders. The article advocates for more balanced journalism that amplifies real lived experiences, systemic issues, and recovery stories to promote inclusive and equitable representations of mental health in the media.

**Keywords:** *corpus-assisted discourse studies, social actor network analysis, mental disability, inclusive society, stigmatisation, news media representations*

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## Изображение людей с психическими отклонениями в новостных СМИ Индонезии: корпусное дискурсивное исследование

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### Аннотация

Средства массовой информации играют ключевую роль в формировании общественного мнения, часто способствуя укреплению стереотипов и распространению дезинформации о людях с психическими отклонениями. Цель данной статьи — выявить, как индонезийские онлайн СМИ (с 2011 по 2020 год) создавали образ людей с психическими отклонениями через язык и дискурс. Используя междисциплинарный подход, авторы проводят корпусное дискурсивное исследование с применением концепции акторов социальной сети (van Leeuwen 2008), а также модели ограниченных возможностей в новостных СМИ. Результаты показывают, что доминирующим является представление людей с ментальными расстройствами как пациентов или больных, в сенсационных нарративах их часто связывают с преступностью. Лингвистически эти представления реализуются через функционализацию, частое использование словосочетаний, связанных с медицинскими терминами, и пассивизацию, которая ставит возможность повлиять на ситуацию на второй план. Дискурсивно они поддерживаются через распределение ролей, в которых люди с психическими отклонениями изображаются преимущественно либо как пассивные пациенты, либо как активные преступники. Подобные изображения закрепляют пагубные стереотипы, подчеркивая опасность и девиантность, в то время как дискриминации, стигматизации или структурным барьерам уделяется недостаточно внимания. В статье делается предположение о том, что такое освещение в СМИ определяется коммерческими соображениями и ценностями, которые ставят прибыль выше прогрессивного репортажа. В результате нарративы, связанные с гражданскими правами или социальными моделями, оказываются на периферии. Сохранение таких представлений способствует общественному стигматизированию, ограничивает доступ людей с психическими расстройствами к поддержке и получению помощи. Авторы статьи выступают за более сбалансированную журналистику, которая описывает реальные жизненные ситуации, освещает системные проблемы и рассказывает об историях выздоровления, способствуя таким образом инклюзивному и беспристрастному освещению вопросов психического здоровья в СМИ.

**Ключевые слова:** корпусное дискурсивное исследование, анализ социальных сетей, психические отклонения, инклюзивное общество, стигматизация, новостные СМИ

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## **1. Introduction**

Mental disorders rank among the most prevalent health conditions globally, impacting individuals across diverse populations (Dziurkowska & Wesolowski 2021). According to the World Health Organization (2022), approximately 1 in 8 people worldwide lives with a mental health condition, highlighting the widespread nature of the issue. Despite their prevalence, individuals with mental disabilities frequently encounter significant barriers in key areas of life. These include limited access to quality education (Paul 2018), difficulties in securing and maintaining employment (Østerud 2023), challenges in forming and maintaining social connections (Krupchanka et al. 2018), discrimination in intercultural communities (Parrish-Sprowl 2015), and disparities in accessing sufficient healthcare services (Nugent et al. 2021, Sickel et al. 2016). A critical factor underpinning these challenges is the pervasive stigma surrounding mental disorders, which perpetuates discrimination and exclusion (Clement et al. 2015).

Stigmatisation can be understood as a social process through which undesirable attributes or marks associated with an individual or group reduce them from being perceived as “whole and usual” to being regarded as “tainted” or “discounted” (Goffman 1990: 2). This process tends to begin with the labelling of human differences, followed by the application of negative stereotypes to interpret these differences (Link & Phelan 2013). As a result, those labelled are categorised as fundamentally distinct from the normative majority (Link & Phelan 2013), a practice that canonically provokes adverse emotional reactions and reinforces social divisions (Corrigan & Watson 2002). The media significantly influences this process by shaping public perceptions and emotional responses through persuasive communicative strategies (Zappettini et al. 2021). Ultimately, stigmatisation not only marginalises individuals at the interpersonal level but also perpetuates social inequalities and becomes embedded within broader institutional and societal structures.

One significant avenue through which structural stigma manifests is the news media (Corrigan et al. 2005). The mass media plays a central role in shaping societal attitudes toward mental disorders, significantly influencing how the general population perceives individuals living with these conditions (Bilkay et al. 2024, Pratiwi et al. 2018). As a primary source of information on mental disabilities (Aci et al. 2020), the media can perpetuate misconceptions and prejudices about individuals with mental illnesses, fostering a culture of misunderstanding and marginalization (Whitley & Berry 2013). Thus, understanding how individuals with mental illnesses are represented in the media is crucial, given its profound impact on shaping public opinion and reinforcing stigma (Whitley & Berry 2013).

Studies on media constructions of individuals with mental disabilities have been conducted across various cultural and national contexts, including Canada (Whitley & Berry 2013), France (Lampropoulos et al. 2017), Germany (Sittner et al. 2024), Portugal (Rodrigues-Silva et al. 2017), Saudi Arabia (McCrae et al. 2019), the United States (Gwarjanski & Parrott 2018), the United Kingdom (Bowen et al. 2019), and Turkey (Aci et al. 2020, Bilkay et al. 2024). Despite variations in cultural and societal norms, these studies reveal a consistency in the media's portrayal of people with mental disabilities (PwMD), emphasizing negative traits such as danger, violence, criminality, and unpredictability. Such portrayals shape public perceptions, fostering fear, social rejection, and a broader sense that individuals with mental disabilities pose a threat to societal stability, which in turn perpetuates a cycle of stigma, reinforcing existing prejudices and discrimination (Bilkay et al. 2024, Whitley & Berry 2013). Cross-national studies also highlight similarities in how media across different countries depict mental illness. For instance, Zilberstein and Shomron (2024) analysed news media depictions of individuals with schizophrenia in the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Israel. They found that, irrespective of cultural or national context, people with schizophrenia were routinely depicted as violent and dangerous perpetrators.

However, it should be noted that in developing and middle-income countries, including in Indonesia, there is little information about the portrayal of people with mental disabilities in the mass media (Grandón et al. 2022). This may be paradoxical as 82% of PwMD reside in developing countries (WHO 2022). In Indonesia, a recent mental health survey found that 1 in 3 adolescents have mental disorders, equal to around 15.5 million people (Wahdi et al. 2022). They also face social stigma, which negatively affects how they experience their illness and access existing mental health services (Wahdi et al. 2022). A correlational analysis conducted by Hartini et al. (2018) emphasises that increased knowledge about mental disorders in Indonesia is linked to reduced public stigma toward individuals with mental disabilities. This finding seems to underscore the prominent role of the news media, as a primary source of information, in shaping public understanding and attitudes toward mental disability. Nevertheless, despite the high number of PwMD and the prevalence of stigma toward them, there is no large-scale study that conducts critical analyses on how Indonesian news media portray individuals with mental disorders. To fill this gap in the literature, this study aims to find out how Indonesian online news media have linguistically and discursively constructed PwMD over a ten-year period, from 2011 to 2020. While most previous studies used content and framing approaches, the present study employs linguistic-based approaches, which are corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) (Baker & McEnery 2015) and van Leeuwen's social actor network framework (van Leeuwen 2008), combined with news media models of disability from Disability Studies (Clogston 1994, Haller et al. 2016). Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How are people with mental disabilities (PwMD) linguistically and discursively represented in Indonesian online news media between 2011 and 2020?

2. What social roles and identities are attributed to PwMD through linguistic patterns and discourse strategies?

3. To what extent do these representations align with traditional or progressive models of disability in the media?

The findings of this study are expected to enhance the existing body of knowledge regarding the representation of PwMD in the news media by offering insights from Indonesian contexts, where such research remains limited.

## **2. Literature review and theoretical framework**

Previous studies across various national contexts (e.g., Whitley & Berry 2013, Rodrigues-Silva et al. 2017, Aci et al. 2020) have consistently shown that people with mental disabilities are portrayed negatively in the media, often being framed as violent, dangerous, or criminal. These portrayals contribute to social stigma, reinforce public fear, and marginalise individuals with mental disabilities in broader societal discourse. An increasing number of studies have also started to explore how representations are discursively constructed, focusing on the role of language in shaping social attitudes and reinforcing power relations (e.g., Balfour 2023). However, while these studies highlight important patterns, many adopt a thematic content or framing analysis approach (Zilberstein & Shomron 2024) and focus on clinical diagnoses, such as schizophrenia (Balfour 2023). Moreover, research in this area remains concentrated in Global North contexts, with limited attention paid to Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, where different cultural and institutional ideologies may influence media discourse.

To address these limitations, this research is grounded in the Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) framework (Baker & McEnery 2015), which enables a systematic and linguistically informed analysis of large-scale media texts. CADS defines discourse as “set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr 2015: 74). In the last two decades, it has been widely and effectively used to analyse semiotic data, including news articles, to identify representations or discourses of a particular social group to deliver ‘voices’ for the minority and underprivileged (Nartey & Mwinlaaru 2019). CADS stems from corpus linguistics, an empirical methodology that examines authentic examples of written or spoken language (Bowker 2018). Its integration into discourse analysis is particularly valuable due to the specialised analytical software used, which allows for both quantitative and qualitative analysis of larger, more representative datasets (Brookes & Harvey 2016). This study also incorporates van Leeuwen’s (2008) Social Actor Network model within the broader framework of CADS to support the qualitative analysis. As a framework for analysing the representation of social actors in texts (Bednarek 2020), van Leeuwen’s model provides a socio-semantic inventory that systematically categorises the different ways social actors can be constructed in discourse. Rather than beginning with grammatical or linguistic features, the model first establishes the sociological and critical dimensions of representation across various categories (van Leeuwen 2008: 23). These categories

will be introduced and elaborated upon during the analysis. In addition, the study draws on established theoretical models from Disability Studies that focus on media representations of individuals with disabilities (Clogston 1994, Haller 1995). These models distinguish between traditional and progressive portrayals. Traditional models include the medical, social pathology, supercrip, and business models (Clogston 1994, Haller 1995), while progressive models encompass the minority or civil rights model, the cultural pluralism model (Clogston 1994), as well as the legal and consumer models (Haller 2000). These models are employed to interpret the findings from the linguistic analysis, allowing the study to move beyond surface-level description toward a more critical understanding of how individuals with mental disabilities are constructed in news discourse (Potts et al. 2023), focusing on the social roles and identities attributed to PwMD, and the extent to which these representations align with traditional or progressive models of disability. These models will be discussed as relevant to the analysis.

### 3. Data and methodology

The data for this study comprises a specialised corpus of news articles published between 2011 and 2020, focusing on individuals with disabilities, including mental disabilities. This decade was selected to capture sustained patterns in media discourse over a significant period, enabling the analysis of long-term representational trends rather than isolated or short-term trends. The articles were sourced from widely read Indonesian online news platforms such as *kompas.com*, *detik.com*, *pikiran-rakyat.com*, *suara.com*, *jpnn.com*, *sindonews.com*, *merdeka.com*, and *tempo.co*. These websites rank among the top 20 most visited Indonesian news portals (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>1</sup> and are owned by various media companies, ensuring broad societal influence and diverse linguistic data. To construct the corpus, first, news URLs were collected from the selected sites based on their inclusion of one of the terms referring to disabled individuals, including *gangguan mental* ('mental disorders'), "*orang gila*" (crazy people, derogatory term for individuals with mental disorders), and "*gangguan jiwa*" (mental disorders). The URLs obtained from each news site were reviewed to remove duplicates and confirm the inclusion of terms related to PwD. BootCat software (Baroni & Bernardini 2004) was then used to extract news texts automatically from the verified URLs. The resulting corpus contains 10,688 news texts, and a total of 3,979,662 words.

The data were analysed using a corpus-based approach to discourse studies or CADS (Baker 2023, Baker & McEnery 2015). The analysis process can be broadly divided into four stages after determining the topic of investigation. The first stage involves identifying and describing linguistic patterns through corpus linguistic techniques, with this study employing collocation analysis. Collocation refers to the frequent co-occurrence of one word within the linguistic environment of another (Balfour 2019). From an ideological perspective, collocates are particularly

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<sup>1</sup> similarweb.com 2022

significant; when two words are repeatedly associated, their relationship may become reified and accepted as unquestionable (Stubbs 1996: 195). LanksBox software (Brezina et al. 2015), specifically its GraphColl tool, was utilised to identify collocates within a span of five words on either side of the node *gangguan jiwa*. This phrase is selected as it is the most frequent term used to refer to people with mental disability in the corpus. Table 1 describes the frequency of each term used to refer to PwMD. Collocates are included in the analysis if they meet a minimum logDice score of 8 and a frequency threshold of 10. The identified collocates were then manually categorised according to their thematic groups, with grammatical terms (e.g., *tentang/about*, *dalam/in*) and other collocates that provided little insight into the representation of individuals with mental disabilities excluded from the analysis.

Table 1. The frequency of terms in reference to PwMD

Terms	Frequency
<i>Gangguan jiwa</i> (mental disorder)	5448
<i>Autisme</i> (autism)	3506
Bipolar	2701
<i>Autis</i> (autism/autists/autistic)	2433
<i>Skizofrenia</i> (schizophrenia)	2242
<i>Gangguan mental</i> (mental disorder)	2044
<i>Orang gila</i> (crazy people/psycho/lunatic)	1532
<i>Hiperaktif</i> (hyperactive)	692
<i>Gangguan kepribadian</i> (personality disorder)	647

The subsequent stage involved detailed concordance analyses of selected collocates to explore how they contribute to the representation of PwMD. This process examined the broader co-text surrounding the collocates to develop a nuanced understanding of their usage and significance, drawing on van Leeuwen’s social actor network categories (van Leeuwen 1996, 2008). The next stage of the analysis examined the descriptive and interpretive findings within a broader socio-political context. This phase aimed to contextualise the identified language patterns and their implications for representing PwMD. It also situated the findings within established models of disability representation in the news media, as outlined by Clogston (1994) and Haller (2000). The final phase critically evaluates the findings, exploring the implications of language use in representing PwMD. It also offers recommendations for best practices, alternative approaches, or changes in language to foster more inclusive and empowering depictions of PwMD.

#### 4. Findings

The analysis found that PwMD are predominantly represented in discourses of medicalisation, crime, and violence. Table 2 displays the collocates of *gangguan jiwa* (mental disorder), organised according to their thematic classifications.

Table 2. Collocates of *gangguan jiwa* (mental disorder)

Thematic category	Collocates	logDice	Freq
Medicalisation	<i>penderita</i> (sufferer)	10.80	443
	<i>pasien</i> (patient)	10.78	562
	<i>pengidap</i> (sufferer)	9.15	104
	<i>warga</i> (resident)	9.07	155
	<i>gejala</i> (symptom)	9.04	136
	<i>penyakit</i> (disease)	8.72	131
	Diagnosis	8.53	64
	<i>pengobatan</i> (treatment)	8.40	73
	<i>penanganan</i> (treatment)	8.27	58
	<i>faktor</i> (factor)	8.25	65
	<i>kecanduan</i> (addiction)	8.14	51
	<i>Berat</i> (severe)	10.41	306
	<i>ringan</i> (mild)	8.24	53
	<i>sembuh</i> (recovered)	8.08	52
	<i>dirawat</i> (treated/nursed)	8.41	67
	<i>menangani</i> (treat/handle)	8.37	60
	<i>merawat</i> (treat/nurse)	8.10	51
Crime and violence	<i>pelaku</i> (perpetrator)	9.80	201
	<i>korban</i> (victim)	8.13	76
	<i>pria</i> (man)	9.18	154
	<i>Diduga</i> (suspected)	10.28	247
	<i>diketahui</i> (found)	8.65	92
	<i>disebut</i> (said)	8.63	85
Process of having mental disorders	<i>mengalami</i> (experience)	11.49	1,206
	<i>mengidap</i> (suffer)	9.73	169
	<i>menderita</i> (suffer)	9.44	150
	<i>alami</i> (experience)	9.40	128
	<i>memiliki</i> (have)	8.65	188
Others	<i>dipasung</i> (shackled/chained)	9.30	112
	<i>mengatakan</i> (say)	8.48	125
	<i>stigma</i>	8.71	73

#### 4.1. Medicalisation

As shown in Table 2, six nominal collocates that belong to medicalised discourses reflect what van Leeuwen calls *functionalisations*. This category represents individuals with mental disorders in terms of their activities or roles (van Leeuwen 2008). The terms '*penderita* 'sufferer' (443 occurrences) and *pengidap* 'sufferer' (104 occurrences) are employed to describe individuals with mental disorders by highlighting their role as sufferers. These terms carry negative connotations, as they are value-laden expressions that evoke pity and suggest notions of tragedy, weakness, and illness (Haller et al. 2006). They also imply a heightened severity of the condition, as they underscore the active experience of suffering (Price 2022). Moreover, the term *pasien* 'patient' (562 occurrences) is used to designate individuals diagnosed with mental disorders with a focus on their



status as recipients of medical care. This term reflects a medicalised perspective of mental disabilities (Price 2022), portraying affected individuals as passive and dependent on treatment. Concordance analyses of these three collocates reveal their frequent occurrence in articles discussing medical interventions for individuals with psychotic disorders, aligning with the medical model of disability (Clogston 1994). Excerpt 1 illustrates an example of this depiction.

- (1) *Pemerintah daerah juga menyiapkan fasilitas rawat inap khusus bagi para penderita gangguan jiwa. Fasilitas medis tersebut berada di satu atap dengan Puskesmas Karanganyar di Kecamatan Gandusari (detik.com, 2016).*

The local government has also prepared special inpatient facilities for **sufferers** of mental disorders. **These medical facilities** are located under the same roof as the Karanganyar Community Health Center in Gandusari District (detik.com, 2016).

The next set of nominal collocates that reflects the medical model of disability includes *gejala* ‘symptom’ (136), *penyakit* ‘disease’ (131), *diagnosis* ‘diagnosis’ (64), *pengobatan* ‘treatment’ (73), *penanganan* ‘treatment/handling’ (58), *faktor* ‘factor’ (65), and *kecanduan* ‘addiction’ (51). The occurrence of these medical-related terms indicates an emphasis on conceptualising mental disabilities as medical conditions that require appropriate medical and therapeutic responses. Two adjectival collocates, *berat* ‘severe’ and *ringan* ‘mild’, describe the intensity of symptoms. The term *gangguan jiwa* ‘mental disorder’ co-occurs with *berat* ‘severe’ 306 times but only 53 times with *ringan* ‘mild’. This disparity aligns with findings by Wahl et al. (2002) and Balfour (2023), which suggest that media coverage of mental illnesses often highlights the most severe and alarming aspects. Another adjectival collocate, *sembuh* ‘recovered’ (52), appears in contexts discussing recovery or improvement, signalling positive mental health outcomes, whether full recovery or progress towards betterment. By highlighting cases of recovery, the news media can foster hope, reduce stigma, and promote a more optimistic and supportive perspective towards PwMD (McGinty et al. 2015). However, the limited frequency of the collocate *sembuh* (recovered), with only 52 occurrences, suggests that recovery remains a minority discourse. This echoes the findings by McGinty et al. (2016) and Whitley et al. (2015), which indicate that recovery is one of the least reported topics in the US and Canadian press. In addition, verbal collocates that further reinforce the medical discourse surrounding PwMD are *dirawat* ‘treated’ (67), *menangani* ‘treat’ (60), and *merawat* ‘treat’ (52). These verbs present PwMD as passive subjects, highlighting their role as recipients of medical care. Like other collocates linked to the medical model, they predominantly appear in articles discussing the treatment of PwMD in psychiatric hospitals or medical facilities.

#### 4.2. Violence and crime

The next group of collocates pertains to violence and crime. The nominal collocates, *pelaku* ‘perpetrator’ (201 occurrences) and *korban* ‘victim’

(76 occurrences), frame PwMD in the context of criminal activities, positioning them either as perpetrators or victims of crime ‘functionalisation’. A detailed examination of the concordances for the term *pelaku* ‘perpetrator’ reveals that PwMD are frequently depicted as offenders involved in sadistic or violent crimes, as illustrated in Excerpt 2. Moreover, the verbs associated with these acts of violence are notably precise, detailing the nature of the violence, such as *bacok* ‘slash/hack’, *banting* ‘slam’, *tikam* ‘stab’, and *penggal/memenggal* ‘behead’ (refer to Excerpt 2). The employment of highly descriptive verbs to portray violence in news reports may correspond with Jewkes’ notion of “visual spectacle and graphic imagery” (Jewkes 2015: 63–66). Although Jewkes primarily referred to visual modes (e.g., images and videos) when conceptualising this news value, language can similarly evoke vivid mental imagery for readers (Balfour 2023). Hence, through the use of verbs such as *bacok* ‘slash’, *banting* ‘slam’, *tikam* ‘stab’, and *penggal/memenggal* ‘behead’, news reports appear to create sensationalised and attention-grabbing narratives, maximising the newsworthiness of the story, while diverting focus from arguably more critical aspects of the story, such as the mental condition of the perpetrator, systemic failures in mental health services, and the perpetuation of stigma (Molek-Kozakowska 2013). This approach may also result in an overemphasis on the violent actions of individuals with mental disorders, thereby perpetuating negative stereotypes that portray PwMD as inherently dangerous. This finding aligns with prior research conducted across various social contexts (e.g., Aci et al. 2020, Balfour 2019, Bowen et al. 2019, Whitley & Berry 2013), which has consistently identified a tendency in news media to depict individuals with mental disorders as violent offenders or perpetrators of violent acts.

- (2) *Kapolsek Kalianda, AKP Effendi Kotto mengungkapkan, dugaan sementara Yanto telah **memenggal** kepala ayah kandungnya hingga putus karena mengalami **gangguan jiwa*** (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>2</sup>.

The Kalianda Police Chief, AKP Effendi Kotto, revealed that the initial suspicion is that Yanto **beheaded** his biological father due to experiencing **mental disorders** (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, when *gangguan jiwa* (mental disorder) collocates with *korban* ‘victim’ (76 occurrences), only 46 concordances depict PwMD as victims. This appears paradoxical, given evidence from several studies indicating that individuals with mental disorders tend to be victims of aggression or violence rather than perpetrators (Nawková et al. 2012, Prince 2022). The limited occurrence of the collocate *korban* in reference to PwMD as victims, therefore, prompts inquiries regarding the potential neglect of this aspect in news coverage. A detailed qualitative analysis of the concordances demonstrates that PwMD are more commonly depicted as victims of suicide (17 out of 46 occurrences), in contrast to other types of victimisations, such as persecution (7) or rape (5). The recurring

<sup>2</sup> merdeka.com, 2014

<sup>3</sup> merdeka.com, 2014

portrayal of individuals with mental disabilities as having committed suicide can make an implication that their condition is unbearable (Balfour 2023). This representation may reinforce the perception that PwMD endure tragic and hopeless lives, further perpetuating negative stereotypes and the stigma associated with mental health disorders. When PwMD are portrayed as victims of violent crime (14 instances), the action is largely downplayed, typically using verbs like *die* or passive constructions, which obscure accountability. Additionally, violence towards PwMD is frequently depicted as a result of their own aggression (see Excerpt 3), reinforcing the misconception that individuals with mental disorders are inherently violent and reducing the responsibility of those who commit the acts.

- (3) *Tiba-tiba korban yang mengalami gangguan jiwa mendatangi keduanya sembari marah-marah. Keduanya sempat menghindari namun korban menarik kerah baju Brigadir E. Melihat kejadian tersebut, Brigadir R spontan menyerang hingga terjadi penganiayaan* (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>4</sup>.

The **victim**, who was experiencing a **mental disorder**, suddenly approached the two while yelling angrily. They initially tried to avoid the situation, but the victim grabbed Brigadier E's collar. Witnessing this, Brigadier R attacked spontaneously, leading to an assault (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>5</sup>.

Individuals with mental disabilities are also categorised by gender, with the collocate *pria* 'man' (154 occurrences) suggesting a particular focus on male individuals in the context of mental disorders. This refers to the *classification* category of van Leeuwen's social actor network, in that, social actors are portrayed according to the major categories given by a society to distinguish between groups of people, including age, gender, and religion. This construction may highlight a gender disparity in the representation of PwMD. A similar gender imbalance has been observed in news coverage of other mental disabilities, such as autism, where there is a predominant emphasis on boys and men (Karaminis et al. 2023). Therefore, this finding further supports the notion that news media tend to prioritise men when depicting PwMD. Additionally, analysis of the concordances of *pria* (man) shows that 62% (95/154) of occurrences depict men with mental disorders involved in criminal activities, especially violent acts (see Excerpt 4), while approximately 15% (23) present them in passive roles, as subjected or beneficialised actors. This aligns with Whitley et al.'s (2015) study, which revealed that media coverage of men with mental illness tends to be more stigmatising, with a stronger emphasis on crime and violence. This discourse may reinforce the stigma that men primarily face mental health challenges, and that men with mental disabilities are more dangerous. Such portrayals could impact mental health care, support, and access to resources, potentially resulting in gender-based disparities in treatment and understanding (Price 2022).

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<sup>4</sup> detik.com, 2020

<sup>5</sup> detik.com, 2020

- (4) Sudi (40), **pria yang diduga mengalami gangguan jiwa** di Desa Kasembon, Kecamatan Bululawang, Kabupaten Malang, Jawa Timur tiba-tiba mengamuk. Sembari menggunakan senjata tajam, Sudi membunuh balita berinisial V (1,5) (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>6</sup>.

Sudi (40), a **man suspected of experiencing a mental disorder** in Kasembon Village, Bululawang District, Malang Regency, East Java, suddenly went on a rampage. Armed with a sharp weapon, Sudi killed a toddler identified by the initials V (1.5 years old) (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>7</sup>.

The next three verbal collocates, *diduga* ‘suspected’ (247), *diketahui* ‘found’ (92), and *disebut* ‘said’ (85), are used to indicate varying degrees of certainty or sources of information about an individual’s mental disorder. Notably, these verbs are typically used in the passive voice, which obscures or minimises the role of the agents (those who suspect, find, or say). Concordance analyses show that these verbs mainly appear in news articles discussing crime or violent behaviour (see Excerpt 4). The employment of the passive voice with these verbs may divert attention from the individuals or entities accountable for articulating suspicions or declarations regarding mental diseases, potentially diminishing accountability in reporting. An analysis of concordances for the collocate *diduga* (suspected) in crime and violence news articles (183 occurrences) indicates that only one article features medical professionals as the background agents confirming the diagnosis of the perpetrator or the individual’s mental disorder. This highlights the commonality of lay diagnoses by non-medical individuals, who frequently consider aggressive behaviour as a primary sign of possible mental illness. This portrayal risks oversimplifying the complexities of an individual’s mental health condition, potentially leading to misinformed conclusions among the public or readers.

#### 4.3. Process of having mental illness

Six verbs are frequently used to describe the experience of having mental disorders: *mengalami* ‘experience’ (1,206), *mengidap* ‘suffer’ (169), *menderita* ‘suffer’ (150), *alami* ‘experience’ (128), and *memiliki* ‘have’ (188). These collocates reflect varied representations of mental illness in Indonesian news media, including experiencing, suffering from, or possessing it. While all these verbs activate social actors as having mental disorders, they convey distinct nuances in how such conditions are portrayed. The verbs *experience* and *have* are generally preferred over *suffer* in news media when discussing PwMD or other disabilities (Haller et al. 2006, Price 2022). *Experience* conveys a more neutral tone and suggests a sense of learning or adaptation, implying that through experience, individuals may become better equipped to handle similar challenges in the future

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<sup>6</sup> suara.com, 2020

<sup>7</sup> suara.com, 2020

(Price 2022). In contrast, *suffer* diminishes agency, framing individuals as victims of circumstances beyond their control (Price 2022: 207).

The significantly higher frequency of *mengalami* ‘experience’ (1,206) compared to *mengidap* ‘suffer’ (169) and *menderita* ‘suffer’ (150) in the corpus suggests that Indonesian news media may favour language emphasising the experiential aspect of mental disorders rather than focusing on suffering. However, a collocation analysis of *mengalami gangguan jiwa* (experience mental disorders) reveals a frequent and significant association with *pelaku* (perpetrator) (128 instances), indicating its predominant use in crime-related news involving PwMD (see Excerpt 4). In this way, while *mengalami* (experience) is more frequently used, offering a more neutral tone, the significant association of *mengalami* with criminal or violent behaviour highlights a persistent and troubling link between PwMD and negative stereotypes in media portrayals.

#### 4.4. Restraint, voice, and stigma

The collocate *dipasung* ‘shackled’ (112) indicates the passivation of PwMD. It is mainly used in stories where PwMD are physically restrained or shackled, reflecting a concerning practice in some Indonesian communities where individuals with mental health conditions are subjected to physical restraints, often by families attempting to manage violent behaviours or symptoms. These stories focus on efforts, particularly by the government, to release PwMD from shackling or narratives that can evoke pity (see Excerpt 5), referencing the social pathology model of disability. Meanwhile, only 8 out of 73 articles (11%) address the broader systemic issues related to shackling, such as the lack of psychiatric hospitals, medical professionals, high treatment costs, and societal stigma. Research by Hunt et al. (2023) and Baklien et al. (2023) has highlighted that the continued practice of shackling (*pasung*) in Indonesia stems from inadequate mental health care access and societal stigmatisation. Thus, the limited coverage of systemic issues in these articles may hinder a fuller understanding of the root causes and complexities of shackling PwMD in Indonesia.

The verbal collocate, *mengatakan* ‘say’ (occurring 125 times), typically appears in statements quoted within news reports. The social actors linked to *mengatakan* are predominantly medical professionals, experts, police officers, and other stakeholders. These individuals are cited mainly in articles discussing the medical dimensions of persons with mental disorders, except for police officers, who are featured primarily in reports concerning crime or violence. This pattern aligns with earlier findings indicating that medical professionals are rarely cited in news coverage of violent crimes allegedly involving PwMD. Instead, such reports often prioritize law enforcement perspectives, reinforcing stigmatising associations between mental illness and criminal behaviour. Moreover, concordance analysis reveals a notable absence of voices from individuals with direct experience of mental disorders. This exclusion mirrors Wahl et al.’s (2002) finding that people with mental illnesses are rarely given a platform to share their perspectives in media narratives. The absence of such firsthand accounts further marginalizes these

individuals, limiting opportunities to present more nuanced and empathetic portrayals of their experiences.

- (5) *Tiga orang dengan **gangguan jiwa** (ODGJ) yang telah **dipasung** selama bertahun-tahun di Kecamatan Jatilawang, Kabupaten Banyumas, Jawa Tengah dibawa ke rumah sakit* (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>8</sup>.

Three people with **mental disorders** (ODGJ) who had been **shackled** for years in Jatilawang District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java, were taken to the hospital (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>9</sup>.

- (6) *Persepsi negatif atau **stigma** masyarakat Indonesia terhadap penyakit gangguan jiwa merupakan **kendala utama** bagi para penyintas untuk dapatkan bantuan yang layak* (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>10</sup>.

The negative perception or **stigma** of Indonesian society toward mental illness is a **major obstacle** for survivors to receive proper assistance (ENA, August 25, 2025)<sup>11</sup>.

The final collocate, *stigma* (73 occurrences), highlights the societal stigma faced by individuals with mental disabilities. This stigma is depicted as a critical barrier that impedes access to appropriate and adequate mental health treatment, as illustrated in Excerpt 6. The portrayal of stigma in this context aligns with the minority model of disability, which emphasises the role of societal attitudes and systemic barriers in marginalizing individuals with disabilities. The minority model underscores the need for societal change to address prejudice, discrimination, and structural inequities. Nevertheless, it should be noted that collocates which indicate progressive models are limited, compared with others that suggest medicalised discourses or those that refer to violence and crime.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis of collocates for *gangguan jiwa* (mental disorder) reveals that individuals with mental disorders are primarily framed within a medical perspective, portraying them as sufferers, patients, and recipients of medical treatment. This narrative emphasises symptoms, diagnoses, and treatments, reinforcing the perception of mental health challenges as purely medical issues. Additionally, the media canonically associates individuals with mental disabilities with criminal activities, predominantly as perpetrators. Their actions are frequently sensationalised with vivid language and lay-diagnoses focus on violent behaviour as an indicator of mental disorders, perpetuating negative stereotypes and fears about their potential danger. Less common representations include portraying individuals with mental disorders as victims of discrimination or stigma, aligning with the civil rights or minority model of disability. However, instances where they

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<sup>8</sup> kompas.com, 2020

<sup>9</sup> kompas.com, 2020

<sup>10</sup> sindo.com, 2020

<sup>11</sup> sindo.com, 2020

are depicted as victims of shackling largely reflect the social pathology model of disability. Only a few articles explore the systemic and societal factors shaping the experiences of people with mental disorders, leaving these broader contexts underexamined. This scarcity of progressive reporting limits public awareness of the structural challenges faced by individuals with mental disabilities and undermines efforts to foster more inclusive and equitable societal attitudes.

The prevalence of traditional models of disability may be influenced by newsworthiness, a key driver of media sales and advertising revenue. Articles that discuss structural issues, such as those aligned with the minority or civil rights model of disability, are frequently sidelined in favour of more “newsworthy” themes, such as depictions of medical aspects, vulnerability or social pathology (Grue 2016). These approaches align with audience expectations and the media’s profit-driven objectives, frequently at the expense of nuanced and progressive representations. In Indonesia, the media landscape has been heavily influenced by economic shifts following the 1998 *Reformasi* era, with large corporations increasingly dominating the market (Sukmayadi 2019). This consolidation has driven a focus on profitability and commercial imperatives, at the cost of the media’s social responsibilities (Ida 2011, Sukmayadi 2019). Consequently, disability-related content is shaped by commercial considerations, reflecting traditional models of disability that align with business goals rather than challenging societal norms (Abwao & Mishra 2021). Online news platforms, in particular, tailor their content to attract broad audiences, presenting disability-related issues in ways that conform to established notions of “newsworthiness”. This approach reinforces traditional portrayals, such as depictions of medicalisation, crime, and tragedy, while largely ignoring narratives that emphasise systemic barriers, equity, and rights-based perspectives. Consequently, the portrayal of individuals with mental disabilities in Indonesia remains constrained by a commercial bias that prioritises profitability over the advancement of inclusive and progressive disability representations.

Media practitioners must be aware of the far-reaching consequences of negative representations of individuals with mental disabilities. Such portrayals significantly shape public perceptions, often reinforcing deep-seated stereotypes and fuelling stigma (Balfour 2023, Potts et al. 2023). Thus, they may experience further marginalisation, both socially and economically, limiting their opportunities for education, employment, and community participation. Moreover, these traditional portrayals can discourage affected individuals from seeking professional mental health care or social support (Bilkay et al. 2024). This not only perpetuates stigma but may also contribute to an internalised sense of shame or fear of discrimination, leading individuals to avoid disclosing their conditions or accessing the necessary treatment and services (Clement et al. 2015), worsening mental health conditions (Price 2022). The consequences of such media narratives extend beyond the individual level, influencing policies, healthcare practices, and broader societal attitudes toward mental health. Therefore, to address this issue, media professionals must strive for a more balanced and accurate portrayal of individuals with mental

disabilities. This requires efforts to feature stories that highlight the systemic barriers PwMD encounter, such as inadequate access to mental health services. Increasing news coverage of successful recovery stories can also play a crucial role in changing public perceptions. By reporting PwMD who have overcome challenges and led fulfilling lives with the right support and treatment, the media can contribute to promoting a more hopeful and realistic view of mental health conditions (McGinty et al. 2015). Journalists should also actively seek to quote PwMD to provide a more accurate and varied understanding of the lived experience of PwMD (Balfour 2023). Additionally, reducing the association of PwMD with criminal narratives in news reports and highlighting stories that reflect the everyday realities of those living with the condition can help to counteract the fear and prejudice that frequently arise from sensationalised or misleading depictions (Balfour 2023).

## 6. Conclusion

This study addresses how Indonesian mass media portray people with mental disabilities through the choice of words in their broadcasts from 2011 to 2020. Through a combination of CADS, van Leeuwen's social actor network framework, and disability media models, the findings reveal the persistent dominance of medical and criminalising discourses, while progressive portrayals that emphasise rights, agency, and systemic challenges remain scarce. By primarily framing them as either patients in need of treatment or as dangerous individuals involved in criminal activities, the media reinforces stigmas that marginalise and misrepresent this group. Overall, these representations align predominantly with traditional models of disability, particularly the medical and social pathology models, while showing minimal alignment with progressive models such as the minority/civil rights model. This study argues that these patterns are shaped by commercial interests and notions of newsworthiness, which prioritise sensational narratives over nuanced and rights-based reporting. However, the study is not without limitations. The analysis focuses on a specific set of collocates and is restricted to online news sources in the Indonesian language, potentially overlooking alternative discourses in other media formats and languages. Future research could expand by incorporating multimodal analysis and comparing representations across different media platforms. Also, considering the scope of this research is confined to the Indonesian media, future research involving media from other developed countries could provide valuable insights and further substantiate the current findings.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Muchamad Sholakhuddin Al Fajri:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Arina Isti'annah:** Methodology, Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing.



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