



Management of the Impression of Maintaining Sakinah Family Image and the Reality of Hidden Economic Violence: A Qualitative Study of the Phenomenon of Domestic Violence in Wives of Public and Informal Sector Workers

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Abstract

Background. Domestic violence (KDRT) is often only identified as physical abuse, while economic violence (economic abuse) and verbal-psychological terror are frequently hidden, especially when driven by the pressure to maintain a prestigious family image in society.

Aims. This study aims to analyze the mechanisms of economic and psychological violence experienced by wives from different socio-economic backgrounds, and how they perform "impression management" to maintain the illusion of an ideal family image (*sakinah*) in public spaces.

Methods. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth and unstructured interviews with three key informants: an entrepreneur married to a civil servant (PNS), a mobile salted egg vendor married to a construction worker, and a female civil servant (ASN) married to an informal entrepreneur. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions using Erving Goffman's Impression Management framework.

Result. The study reveals that economic violence occurs across social classes through forms of financial deprivation, exploitation of wives' income, and forced debt. However, a major finding shows that wives experience a structural dilemma: they perform a front-stage performance (*front stage*) by displaying a happy, religious, and successful family image, while their real life on the back stage (*back stage*) is filled with economic trauma and manipulation. This choice is driven by the social stigma of divorce and the desire to protect the husband's social status.

Conclusion. Economic and psychological domestic violence is heavily sustained by the structural traps of public impression management. The urgency to look "successful" and "harmonious" prevents victims from seeking legal help or leaving abusive relationships.

Implementation. In practice, this research emphasizes the importance of integrating digital economic literacy and providing safe institutional counseling spaces for female workers. Academically, this study extends Goffman's Dramaturgy theory to a cross-class sociological analysis of hidden domestic violence in Indonesia.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Economic Abuse, Impression Management, Dramaturgy, Cross-Class Family.



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INTRODUCTION

Domestic Violence (KDRT) is a humanitarian issue and human rights violation whose manifestations are often reduced to the dimension of physical violence. In fact, referring to the provisions of Law Number 23 of 2004 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence (PKDRT Law), the scope of violence also includes psychological, sexual, and domestic violence, including economic *abuse*. Economic violence occurs when one partner manipulates, restricts, or exploits the other partner's financial resources to take full control of the marital power relationship (Aziz & Wica, 2024).

In Indonesia, this phenomenon of economic violence often runs in silence and turns into a *hidden crime*. This is exacerbated by the community's cultural norms and religiosity, in which household disgrace must be closely covered to maintain dignity and social status. The family is positioned as a sacred institution that must appear harmonious (*sakinah, mawaddah, warahmah*) in public spaces. The pressure to present the image of the ideal family is what forces many women victims of domestic violence to do very strict *impression management*, hide their suffering backstage, and perform false happiness performances on the *front stage* (Goffman, 1959).

Previous research on domestic violence has generally focused on community groups with low economic status who are vulnerable to financial stress (Yunita, 2022). However, the reality on the ground shows that economic violence knows no social class boundaries. Both the wives of State Civil Apparatus (ASN/PNS) who have a measurable income and women who work in the informal sector as mobile traders have a high vulnerability to financial exploitation by their husbands.

This article aims to dissect *the State of the Art* (SoA) on how unequal power relations trigger economic and psychological violence across social classes, as well as how wives engage in impression management to maintain their family image. Through Erving Goffman's dramaturgy approach, this study identifies a narrative gap between the public masks displayed by victims of domestic trauma and the actual domestic trauma they experience on a daily basis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dramaturgy Theory and Impression Management

Erving Goffman (1959), in his monumental work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, explained that social interaction is like a theatrical performance. Humans are actors who seek to manage public impressions through the division of two main spaces:

- **Front Stage:** A place where actors perform performances that have been prepared in such a way as to meet the audience's expectations. On this stage, social norms, politeness, and ideal image are strictly maintained.
- **Backstage:** Where the actor takes off his or her role mask. It is in this private space that the real reality unfolds, including conflicts, weaknesses, and actions that run counter to what is shown on the main stage.

In the context of personal public relations and family sociology, *impression management* is used by victims of domestic violence to construct the narrative that their marriage is going perfectly in order to avoid social stigma as a "failed wife" or a "broken family" (Nafi'ah, 2022).

Economic Abuse in Domestic Violence

Economic violence is defined as a controlling behavior that limits a partner's ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources (Coombs, 2019). Its manifestations include:

1. *Financial Deprivation:* Not providing mandatory maintenance or withholding financial information unilaterally.
2. *Financial Exploitation:* Forcibly taking money from a partner's work or using it as a commodity for personal gain.
3. *Economic Sabotage:* Hindering the sustainability of the partner's business or career through destructive actions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach to explore in depth the lived *experiences* of women victims of domestic violence. The selection of informants was carried out by *purposive sampling* with the criteria of wives who work/own businesses independently and experience economic and psychological violence from their husbands with varying social class backgrounds.

The three main informants who were successfully interviewed in *depth* were:

1. **Mrs. Kelsi (50 years old):** A successful catering entrepreneur, wife of a Civil Servant (PNS).
2. **Mrs. Lina (35 years old):** A traveling salted egg trader (informal sector), wife of a construction worker who is often unemployed.
3. **Mrs. Hayati (45 years old):** a State Civil Apparatus (ASN), once married to an informal businessman/study colleague.

Secondary data collection is carried out through documentation studies and reliable digital references. Data analysis was carried out inductively through the stages of data reduction, narrative presentation of data, and drawing conclusions whose validity was tested through source triangulation techniques (Machsunah et al., 2023). The research was carried out from January to April 2026.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with the three informants, the researcher found a highly structured pattern of economic and psychological violence, which was then responded to by the victims by managing strong impressions in public spaces.

Cross-Informant Case Analysis

Mrs. Kelsi: Financial Exploitation Behind the Social Status of Civil Servant Husbands

Ms. Kelsi (50 years old) represents the middle social class and is economically independent through a catering and pastry business. However, the backstage of her life was marked by *financial deprivation* and *economic sabotage* by her husband, Mas Nano, a civil servant.

Husbands never provide salary support transparently and completely under the pretext of "deductions before marriage". Furthermore, the husband sabotaged the economy by taking merchandise (cigarettes) at Mrs. Kelsi's grocery store without paying until the store went bankrupt, and did not hesitate to take the money from the merchandise unilaterally. On the front stage, Mrs. Kelsi struggles to maintain her marriage because of the impression management motive: she wants to be considered a successful catering entrepreneur because she has the support of a civil servant husband who is known to be friendly and gentle out there. There is a fear of losing social validation, although behind the scenes, she has to deal with emotional betrayal (husband cheating) and verbal

pressure from her mother-in-law, who always demands that she be grateful to have a civil servant husband.

Lina's mother: Double Burden and Trappings of the Informal Sector

Lina's mother (35 years old) represents the lower class, layered with vulnerability. As a former waitress and widow of two children, she initially saw the softness of Ang Yayan (a construction worker) as an escape. However, when the husband is unemployed, the entire domestic economic burden falls on Mrs. Lina.

The form of economic violence experienced by Mrs. Lina is extreme labor exploitation. She had to walk tens of kilometers selling salted eggs without capital while carrying her three-year-old child. After returning from trading with minimal profits (Rp 50,000–Rp 70,000) that immediately ran out on basic needs, she still had to do the total service in the background: handling domestic affairs, her husband's bedding, and facing verbal abuse from her in-laws who demanded special food services.

Ibu Lina's choice not to divorce is no longer just a matter of social status, but an absolute limitation in life choices (*no choice*). Her backstage is locked by the structural poverty of her family of origin who are unable to accommodate her back, so she is forced to maintain this oppressive reality.

Biological Mother: Financial Extortion and Manipulation of Religious Image

The case of Ibu Hayati (45 years old) is the most extreme example of cross-class economic exploitation. As an ASN with a fixed income and an inherited house, she was an easy target of financial extraction by her husband, Mas Gibran. Under the guise of a fake business investment (basic necessities, motorcycles, and coal), Mas Gibran extorted Mrs. Hayati's finances, forcing her to take out a bank loan to buy an operational car.

The front stage built by Ibu Hayati was greatly influenced by their religious identity, which was brought together through an Islamic study forum. She sacrifices her financial well-being to maintain the image of "the family of sakinah, mawaddah, warahmah" so that the title of a righteous wife does not disappear from her, because whenever she charges for financial transparency, her husband will immediately drop the psychic label of "disobedient wife".

This back stage collapsed dramatically (*dramatic breakdown*) when the front stage was intervened by an outsider (his older sister, Mbak Nungki) who caught Mas Gibran having an affair – which turned out to be polygamy without permission – in the car bought from Ibu Hayati's bank debt. Mbak Nungki's anger in public destroyed the dramaturgical performance that Mrs. Hayati had so carefully guarded. The divorce finally occurred not on the victim's personal initiative at first, but because of the intervention of the family structure that could not bear to see the victim dry up due to bearing the burden of debt and emotional manipulation.

Theoretical Discussion: Integration Across Social Classes

If we compare these three cases through a dramaturgical matrix, we can see a clear common thread regarding how economic violence works:

Characteristics	Informant 1 (Mrs. Kelsi)	Informant 2 (Lina's mother)	Informant 3 (Biological Mother)
Social Class	Intermediate (Catering Entrepreneur)	Bottom (Traveling Trader)	Upper Secondary (ASN & Asset Owner)
Forms of Violence	Sabotage of stalls, exploitation of business results, infidelity.	Total diversion of the burden of maintenance, domestic/sexual exploitation.	Extortion of investment modes, forced bank debt, illegal polygamy.
Front Stage	Image of a successful businessman's wife with a friendly civil servant husband.	An image of an obedient wife who accepts fate for the sake of the integrity of the child.	The image of the Sakinah family is the result of the formation of an Islamic Studies Forum.
Backstage	Stall bankruptcy, emotional numbness, in-laws pressure.	Extreme physical fatigue, entangled in the debt of neighboring stalls.	Bank debt pressure, verbal violence, dry thinness due to stress.
Motivation to Survive	Social prestige and validation of public success.	Structural economic powerlessness (<i>no choice</i>).	Fear of religious stigma and the label of "unrighteous wife".

The above exploration proves that impression management functions as an instrument of violence prevention. The stronger a wife's desire to maintain her front stage performance to look ideal in the eyes of society, the greater the husband's chances of perpetuating economic violence on the back stage without fear of being reported legally (Coombs & Holladay, 2020).

Research novelty

This research makes several new contributions to the development of sociological communication studies:

1. **Deconstruction of Cross-Class Concepts:** Shows that economic violence is not only triggered by poverty (as in the case of Ibu Lina), but also occurs in the established working class (civil servants and entrepreneurs such as Mrs. Kelsi and Ibu Hayati) as a result of the pathology of patriarchal power relations.
2. **Religious-Based Domestic Violence Dramaturgy:** Found that labels of religiosity in public spaces (e.g., "sakinah family", "righteous wife") are often used as a weapon of psychic manipulation (*gaslighting*) by perpetrators to lock victims in order to survive financial exploitation.
3. **Impact of "Dramatic Breakdown" by Third Parties:** Explains that the recovery of domestic violence victims trapped in impression management often requires destructive intervention from *external actors* to forcibly destroy the fake front stage so that objective reality can be resolved.

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence in the economic and psychological dimensions is a dark reality whose sustainability is strongly supported by the impression *management* practices of its victims. Wives, both in the formal (ASN) and informal sectors (businessmen and traders), are often caught in a structural dilemma: performing harmonious, successful, and religious front stage performances to avoid social stigma, while on the back stage they experience financial extortion, neglect, and verbal violence. Cultural pressure to maintain the illusion of the ideal family has been shown to obscure objectivity and hinder the courage of victims to take legal action or break away from the cycle of violence.

Implementation

Practically:

The government and public relations institutions need to provide counseling spaces that are safe, integrated, and free from social stigma in government agencies and market communities for working women. Education is also needed on legal financial literacy (separation of property

and understanding of marital financial rights) so that wives are not easily manipulated under the guise of investment or religious obedience.

Academically:

This research strengthens and expands the relevance of the application of Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory to the realm of family sociology and cyber-conventional gender communication, especially in dissecting cases of domestic hidden crimes in Indonesia.

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