
Representations of Domestic Violence in the Series “The Glory” (2023): A Charles Sanders Peirce Semiotic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the portrayal of domestic violence in the 2023 Korean drama series "The Glory." A comprehensive data set was collected from the series, with a particular focus on episodes 1, 3, 11, and 13. The selection of these episodes was guided by a focus on domestic violence portrayals. The collected data were then subjected to a thorough analysis, employing the semiotics proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce. The analysis yielded three categories of domestic violence: physical violence, negligence, and perseverance. The manifestation of physical violence is exemplified by the victim's emotional dynamics and social indifference. Meanwhile, negligence is displayed by abandonment of finance and education, as well as hostile behavior. Finally, the manifestation of domestic violence victim perseverance is evident in the following forms: a bold appearance, a planned homicide, and a survivor syndrome. The study's findings underscore the need for effective preventive strategies and comprehensive healing methods for victims of domestic violence, emphasizing the need to address this persistent and pernicious problem. The study further emphasizes the necessity for diverse media formats and platforms to raise awareness about the detrimental impact of domestic violence on individuals' physical and mental well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, there were 514,006 calls for crisis counseling and emergency assistance related to domestic violence, an increase of 8 percent from the previous year, according to Korean government data cited by The Korean Times. About 80 percent of these cases were perpetrated by current or former male partners. However, domestic violence is often difficult to measure accurately because most cases are hidden (Kyung Hee, 2023). The figures show that domestic violence is a serious problem in South Korea, affecting many individuals and families.

Similar to Korean condition of domestic violence, the Indonesian annual record (a.k.a. *CATAHU*) reported that domestic violence or the personal sphere continues to top the list, reaching 75.4% of the total cases of violence, surpassing other spheres. The most dominant form of violence against women in the personal sphere is physical violence, with 4,783 cases. Out of a total of 11,105 cases, 6,555, or 59%, were cases of violence against wives. There was a 13% increase in cases of violence against girls and domestic workers (retrieved

from Kompas.id on May 15, 2024). Within two weeks, there were cases of female murder in four different locations: Bandung Regency, Karimun, Ciamis, and South Minahasa. These atrocities were horrifying, especially since all the perpetrators were the husbands of the victims. Murder is the culmination of incidents of domestic violence. This means that the woman is likely to have experienced other forms of violence before becoming a murder victim.

The devastating statistics on domestic violence is also represented in media formats, including series. Unlike movies, series have a narrative format that requires viewers to follow the story sequentially from one episode to the next, creating a continuous connection and continuation of the story (Laili, 2023). Television series also use the power of audio-visual and narrative to achieve the desired effect.

One of the the most popular series in Indonesia comes from South Korea. Based on data compiled by Statista.com, Indonesia ranks first in the category of countries that watch Korean series or dramas the most in 2020. The popularity of Korean dramas in Indonesia can be attributed to various factors that make them more desirable than local series. One of the most important aspects is the detailed attention to visual quality. Actors and actresses in Korean dramas often have attractive looks and impressive acting skills, which greatly enhances the visual appeal for Indonesian audiences (Valenciana & Pudjibudojo, 2022). In addition, Korean drama productions often emphasize high-quality cinematography, the use of exotic locations, and sophisticated artistic settings, all of which contribute to a more engaging viewing experience.

"The Glory" (2023), a Korean drama series, deals with the issue of domestic violence in a deep and complex way. In this way, dramas function not only as entertainment, but also as an educational and counseling medium that can raise public awareness about important issues in everyday life. "The Glory" (2023) tells the story of domestic violence and the revenge of a victim of bullying. The main character, played by Song Hye Kyo as Moon Dong Eun, wants to take revenge on the bully and is helped by a woman who has experienced domestic violence, Kang Hyeon Nam, played by Yeom Hye Ran. Kang Hyeon Nam is always treated cruelly by Lee Suk Jae, her husband.

According to the site, director Ahn Gil-ho and screenwriter Kim Eun-Sook describe stories of violence in schools, households, and all kinds of past traumas in such detail that it can make the audience feel uncomfortable while watching. The story is based on true events that took place in 2006 (Afkarina & Aminuddin, 2023). The gruesome scenes of violence in the series have only recently been revealed to be true stories. Previously, viewers criticized the scenes for being too brutal and cruel in the story. However, it turns out that the scene actually happened. In the scene, a woman's arm was burned with a hair iron by a group of bullies at her school. It turns out that the incident occurred in May 2006 at a South Korean high school in Cheongju, North Chung Cheong.

Although the focus is on bullying, the author wants to highlight the issue of domestic violence in the series. Cited from the site, "The Glory" received a rating of 8.1/10 on IMDb, 83% on Rotten Tomatoes, and 98% on Google. The series also received the first spotlight as the most popular show among viewers in Indonesia in Netflix. The series was broadcast from December 30, 2022 until January 5, 2023.

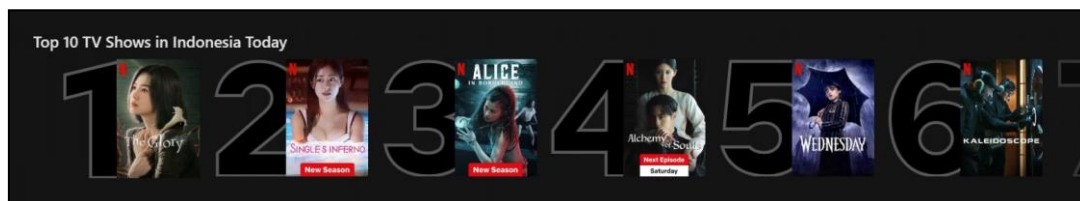


Figure 1. The Glory became the first streaming highlight on Netflix Indonesia
Source: Dreamers.id

The series displays abandonment of children as an act of domestic violence. Law of Elimination of Domestic Violence defines domestic violence as physical, psychological, and sexual violence, as well as domestic neglect. In the series, Kang Hyeon Nam experienced physical and psychological violence from her husband, while Moon Dong Eun experienced psychological violence and child neglect from her mother.

Domestic violence is a pervasive societal issue that extends beyond physical and emotional harm, influencing cultural narratives and media representations. Television series addressing domestic violence often encapsulate complex semiotic structures that both reflect and shape societal attitudes. Semiotic analysis, particularly through the lens of Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of sign theory—comprising the sign, object, and interpretant—offers a robust framework for dissecting the cultural, psychological, and communicative dimensions of these portrayals' interpreters (Thellefsen and Friedman, 2023). This study seeks to explore how semiotic elements in television series construct, reinforce, or challenge societal understandings of domestic violence.

Peirce's semiotic theory emphasizes the interpretive process inherent in sign communication, positioning signs not merely as carriers of meaning but as dynamic entities that evolve through interaction with interpreters (Thellefsen and Friedman, 2023). Applying this perspective to television series enables researchers to analyze how visual, auditory, and narrative signs generate interpretants that may perpetuate stereotypes, evoke empathy, or provoke critical reflection on domestic violence. As media representations have the power to influence public opinion and policy (Onwuka et al, 2024, Bust, Whyte, & Olivier, 2023), examining their semiotic dimensions is crucial for understanding and addressing the broader cultural implications of domestic violence.

Existing research of "The Glory" highlights the audience perception of bullying (Weningsih, 2024), female masculinity (Anrial, Valentine, & Tantri, 2023), and the main actor's conflict in building curiosity (Rifqi, 2023). However, the nuanced interplay of signs within domestic violence representations remains underexplored. By employing Peirce's semiotic framework, this study aims to fill this gap, offering a deeper understanding of how television series communicate and mediate the complex realities of domestic violence. This approach not only enhances academic discourse but also contributes to developing more sensitive and impactful media narratives.

The importance of this investigation lies in its potential to bridge semiotic theory and practical media analysis, shedding light on how television series can be leveraged as tools for social awareness and change. By decoding the semiotic mechanisms underlying these portrayals, this study aspires to foster a critical dialogue on the ethical responsibilities of media producers and the interpretive agency of audiences in addressing domestic violence.

METHOD

The study employed Peirce's semiotic analysis to examine the signs and symbols present in the images and text of the series. The collected data were organized into three primary categories: sign, object, and interpretant. For this analysis, the authors selected six episodes from the series *The Glory* (2023)—specifically episodes 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, and 13. A total of 7 scenes were analyzed, focusing on settings, dialogues, and shot types that depict acts of domestic violence as defined by the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

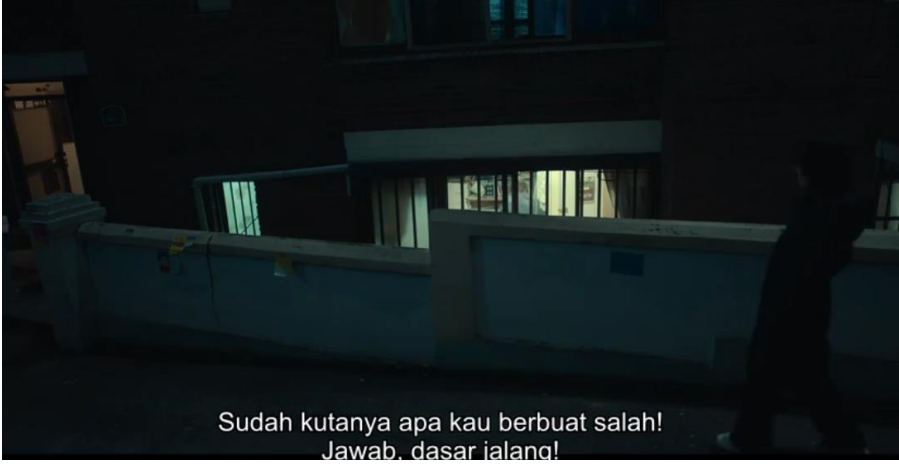

Findings

Every film features diverse characters who collaborate to convey various messages. Similarly, in the series *The Glory* (2023), characters from different frames within the scenes are carefully identified to depict domestic violence. The analysis of domestic violence representations in *The Glory* is elaborated below.

1. Physical Violence

a. Child's emotional dynamics

Table 1. Child's emotional dynamics

Setting	 <p>Sudah kutanya apa kau berbuat salah! Jawab, dasar jalang! Setting of domestic violence</p>
Dialogue	<p>Lee Sun-ah says "Stop hitting her! Stop! I'll kill you!" "I'll do it. I have to, Mom! You can survive, I'm a kid. I'll be fine. Get out of my way, Mommy!" in a high-pitched sobbing and trembling voice.</p>
Shot Type	 <p>Sudah kutanya apa kau berbuat salah! Jawab, dasar jalang! Close-up shot to show Lee Sun-ah's trembling facial expression</p>

Source: Researcher (2024)


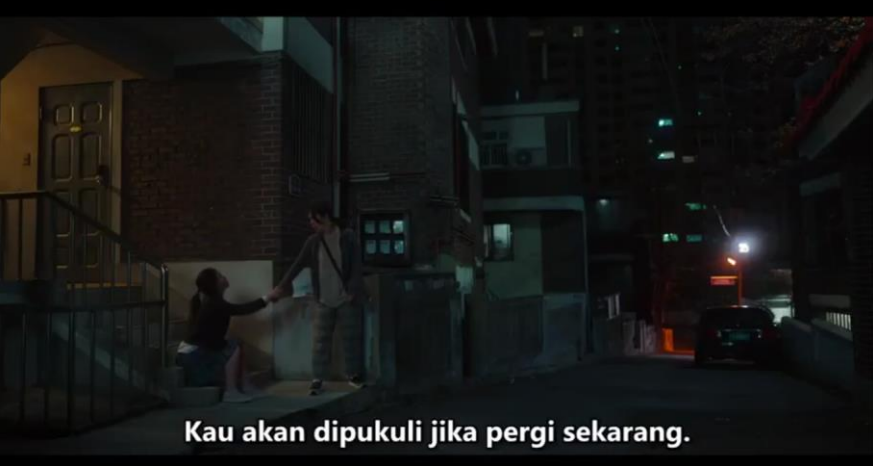
This scene shows an act of domestic violence in the form of physical abuse received by Kang Hyeon Nam and Lee Sun-ah. Lee Sun-ah as the victim who has cuts and bruises on her face while wearing school sportswear, sits on the side of the road while looking up the child as if she is about to break the law. Children have always been victims when the perpetrator of domestic violence is their biological father. A teenager who should be living a normal life by studying and playing, Sun-ah did not experience, she had to fight against her father who abused her and her mother. This affected Lee Sun-ah's emotions and psychology.

Studies (Mardiyati, 2019) argue that children who witness or experience violence tend to experience emotional disturbances such as excessive fear, anxiety, and extreme anger. Sun-ah's decision to take extreme action, which shows that children who grow up in violent environments tend to adopt violence as a way of protecting themselves, considering it a natural response (Aksoy et al., 2022). This can

blur children’s understanding of right and wrong, making violence part of their way of thinking. Sun Ah’s response illustrates how the trauma of domestic violence affects child’s emotional development, making her feel trapped in a cycle of violence with no other solution.

b. Social Indifference

Table 2. Social Indifference

Setting	 <p style="text-align: center;">Deserted residential streets and dense, stacked buildings</p>
Dialog	<p>Lee Sun-ah's dialog “No, you’ll get beaten up if you leave now. He won't help us, hhe bought 4 bottles of soju” implies Sun Ah's concern for her mother's safety.</p>
Shot Type	 <p style="text-align: center;">Long Shot to show the solidity of deserted and densely populated buildings</p>

Source: Researcher (2024)

This scene depicts Lee Sun-ah's terrified expression as she endures physical violence from her father, while Kang Hyeon Nam, just returning from work, hurriedly approaches her with a concerned look. The scene reflects the social environment of their neighborhood, characterized by apathy toward the struggles of those around them. In South Korea, particularly in densely populated cities like Seoul, factors such as urban planning policies, high housing costs, and cultural norms have led to the prevalence of cramped and even underground housing (Shin et al., 2019).



Despite living in a crowded area, Kang Hyeon Nam and Lee Sun-ah receive no assistance in escaping the violence they face. Their community exhibits a strong sense

of individualism, treating domestic violence as a private issue that does not warrant external intervention. Sociological research (Jun, 2018) highlights that following South Korea's 2008 economic crisis, societal focus shifted toward competition and personal achievement, deprioritizing collective concerns. This shift led to social fragmentation, weakening communal ties and reinforcing the perception of domestic violence as a private matter. This dynamic is vividly portrayed in *The Glory* (2023), where the lack of neighborly intervention underscores the dominance of individualistic norms in their densely populated neighborhood.

2. Negligence

a. Abandonment of finance and education

Table 3. Abandonment of finance and education

Setting	 <p>VIP room of the restaurant that has been set up to be a closed meeting place</p>
Dialog	<p>Hyeon Nam said, "We couldn't go to the Philippines and eat mangoes, but we ended up in the sea. I wore the clothes you chose for the last time. What do you think? Did I wear it well?"</p> <p>She continued, "Don't worry about Sun Ah, don't forgive me either. May you rot in the cold sea for a very long time, dear,"</p>
Shot Type	 <p>Tulis nama di situ, dan alasannya bagi kami.</p> <p>Medium Shot to show the fancy clothes and earrings that Hong Yong Ae is wearing</p>



Source: Researcher (2024)



According to Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18, including fetuses or unborn children. Similarly, South Korea's Law No. 19409 establishes that a person attains adulthood at the age of 19. As Jung Mi Hee accepted a bribe while Moon Dong Eun was still in high school, Dong Eun was legally classified as a child at the time. Jung Mi Hee's acceptance of the bribe and her approval of Dong Eun's expulsion from school, leading to Dong Eun's displacement, constitute domestic violence in the form of neglect, as defined by Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence.

This scene highlights social inequality and underscores the critical role of education in shaping parental behavior and responsibility. Already burdened by severe bullying at school, Moon Dong Eun's situation worsens when her mother agrees to her expulsion solely in exchange for money from Hong Yong Ae. Jung Mi Hee's lack of awareness about the gravity of her actions is evident when she remarks, "I don't have a signature; can I just write my name?" Her inability to properly sign the agreement reflects her limited educational background, which hinders her understanding of the significance of official documents and their legal implications.

This scene also illustrates how financial hardship can easily compromise parental responsibilities. Jung Mi Hee's immediate willingness to accept the bribe demonstrates her vulnerability in the face of difficult social conditions, where financial gain outweighs her child's well-being. This aligns with existing research, which suggests that parents with lower educational attainment are less likely to be actively involved in their child's development, emphasizing the broader societal impact of education on family dynamics and decision-making (Nasution et al., 2023).

b. Hostile behavior

Table 4. Hostile behavior

Setting	 <p>Aku tak mau pergi!</p> <p>Moon Dong Eun's messy room because Jung Mi Hee is drinking with a man</p>
Dialog	<p>"Why did you quit your job? You could have made a lot of money if you could have held on for a while"</p>
Shot Type	 <p>Aku tak mau pergi!</p> <p>Wide Shot to show the messy condition of Moon Dong Eun's room</p>

Source: Researcher (2024)

This scene portrays the hostility within a strained mother-daughter relationship. Jung Mi Hee's actions reflect her sense of entrapment in a difficult and hazardous situation, where poor choices, such as alcoholism, further erode the bond between her and her daughter. While she may possess a maternal instinct to see her child succeed, the burdens of life lead her to make harmful decisions that damage their relationship.

Ineffective communication is a key factor in deteriorating parent-child relationships. When children perceive that their parents do not listen to or understand them, it can create tension and conflict, ultimately influencing the child's behavior negatively (Suryani, 2022). The lack of healthy communication within a family can lead to unresolved conflicts and cause adolescents to feel lost or disconnected. This is evident in Moon Dong Eun's behavior, as her prolonged resentment stems from the mistreatment and neglect she experienced. As an adult, she embarks on a path of revenge, fueled by the lack of guidance and support from her mother during her formative years.



Without proper communication, children struggle to discern behaviors that deviate from social norms or violate the law. Effective communication is essential for providing children with the affection, self-esteem, and understanding they need from

their mothers (Kusumawardani, 2013). Jung Mi Hee’s indifference and harmful actions during Dong Eun’s childhood not only contribute to her daughter’s long-standing feelings of betrayal but also foster a complex and vengeful attitude. Additionally, Moon Dong Eun’s unstable mental state and deep-seated traumas are direct consequences of her mother’s failure to fulfill her parental responsibilities, underscoring the profound impact of neglect and poor communication.

3. Preserverance

a. A bold appearance

Table 5. A bold appearance

Setting	 <p>The condition of Kang Hyeon Nam's house that has fallen apart</p>
Dialog	<p>Sign: Kang Hyeon Nam said “I’ll wear a red lipstick and a leather jacket,” when she is beaten up by Lee Seok Jae.</p>
Shot Type	 <p>Aku akan memakai lipstick merah.</p> <p>Close up shot to highlight Kang Hyeon Nam's expression of pain</p>

Source: Researcher (2024)

This scene symbolizes the resistance of domestic violence victims through the use of red lipstick and leather jackets. When Lee Seok Jae resorts to physical violence, such as hitting and kicking, Kang Hyeon Nam remains composed and declares that she is no longer afraid. She expresses her intent to wear red lipstick and a leather jacket as powerful symbols of her resilience and defiance against the violence she has endured. The red lipstick, often associated with courage and determination (Listiani et al., 2023), highlights Hyeon Nam’s spirit of resistance. As noted in *The Feminist Politics of Choice: Lipstick as a Marketplace Icon*, lipstick serves as a potent symbol of

resistance, providing women with a means to express themselves, empower their identity, and challenge patriarchal norms (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019).

For Kang Hyeon Nam, lipstick represents strength and bravery in the face of violence, emphasizing that even in oppressive circumstances, women possess the potential to fight back and reclaim their agency. Historically, lipstick has been a tool of self-expression, allowing women to assert their identity and challenge societal expectations (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019). Similarly, the mention of a leather jacket by Hyeon Nam signifies resilience and toughness (Sari, 2020). Leather jackets, often associated with traditional masculinity, evoke characteristics such as rebellion, independence, and strength. They symbolize values like fortitude, confidence, and self-reliance, often represented in cultural depictions of masculinity, such as motorcycle gang communities or metropolitan masculinity (Prasanti & Indriani, 2017).

By referencing these symbols, Kang Hyeon Nam attempts to embody their connotations of strength and resistance in the midst of her vulnerable situation. Her intention to wear red lipstick and a leather jacket signifies a transformative moment—her assertion of identity and liberation from the cycle of violence she has endured. These items, absent from her daily life as a victim, become emblematic of her freedom and empowerment in reclaiming control over her life.

b. A planned homicide

Table 6. A planned homicide

Setting	 <p data-bbox="488 1480 1329 1547">The ship that was used in the ceremony of sowing Seok Jae's corpse in the middle of the sea.</p>
Dialog	<p data-bbox="459 1588 1348 1682">Hyeon Nam said, "We couldn't go to the Philippines and eat mangoes, but we ended up at the sea. I wore the clothes you chose for the last time. What do you think? Did I wear it well?"</p> <p data-bbox="459 1688 1348 1753">She continued, "Don't worry about Sun Ah, don't forgive me either. May you rot in the cold sea for a very long time, dear,"</p>

Shot Type	 <p data-bbox="459 694 1362 772">Close-up shot which highlighted Kang Hyeon Nam's tearful expression but gave a flat face</p>
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Source: Researcher (2024)

The scene in *The Glory* where Kang Hyeon Nam scatters Lee Seok Jae's ashes highlights how planned murder can become an extreme measure for domestic violence victims seeking to escape the cycle of abuse. It underscores the profound psychological toll such experiences inflict on victims, who are often trapped in trauma and emotional exhaustion. Hyeon Nam's initial passivity toward her husband's violence reflects symptoms of PTSD, where fear of retaliation worsening the abuse often prevents victims from taking action (Shary, 2019). Her behavior aligns with Munahi's research, which indicates that individuals with PTSD may experience a strong desire for retaliation, driven by feelings of helplessness and the injustice they have endured. For many victims, revenge represents a means of regaining control over their lives and addressing the suffering inflicted upon them.

Kang Hyeon Nam's decision to wear a shirt given to her by Seok Jae while scattering his ashes reflects an emotional ambivalence, balancing sadness with relief. In her case, the act of retaliation was not impulsive but carefully planned after enduring years of domestic violence. This calculated response demonstrates how victims of prolonged abuse may resort to premeditated actions as a way to release the pain and anguish they have carried for so long. The scene poignantly illustrates the complex psychological impact of domestic violence and the drastic measures victims might feel compelled to take when all other avenues of escape seem unavailable.

c. A survivor syndrome

Table 7. A survivor syndrome

Setting	
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	The corridor of a psychiatric hospital where Jung Mi Hee will be treated
Dialog	Moon Dong Eun said "This is all I can do for you mom, because I'm your only family".
Shot Type	 <p>Close-up shot that highlighted Moon Dong Eun's expression</p>

Source: Researcher (2024)

This scene illustrates how Moon Dong Eun's actions may outwardly appear as complete indifference toward her mother, but beneath her cold demeanor and resolute behavior, she might carry deep feelings of love and a sense of responsibility as her daughter. While she seems strong and composed as she distances herself from her mother, she is likely aware of the emotional difficulty in severing ties with the person who gave her life, despite the pain it has caused her.

From this perspective, her decision to place her mother in a mental hospital can be seen not merely as an act of retaliation but as a complex expression of love. Moon Dong Eun may view this as the best way to ensure her mother receives the care she needs, even though it may outwardly seem neglectful. This act reflects the enduring presence of family ties in her heart, even as she chooses a difficult path to protect herself from further harm.

As noted by Kusumawardani, family interactions significantly influence a child's behavior toward others and society. Parents bear a critical responsibility in fostering communication with their children, as it profoundly impacts their development and future relationships. Despite the challenges and conflicts that may arise, family bonds remain vital and cannot be easily severed, as they continue to shape an individual's emotional and social foundation (Kusumawardani, 2013).

Discussion

The drama series *The Glory* (2023) explores various themes of revenge, domestic violence, and abuse. The authors focus particularly on the issue of domestic violence, highlighting physical abuse and neglect within families. Domestic violence can have long-lasting and devastating effects, leading to victim suffering and further deteriorating relationships within the family unit.

Based on the findings, the series portrays domestic violence in ways that align with real-life situations. These representations include physical violence, depicted through the emotional dynamics of children, and the social indifference surrounding such abuse. Domestic neglect is illustrated through economic conditions, educational backgrounds, and hostile behaviors. Additionally, the victims' resilience is shown through bold actions, planned homicide, and the survivor syndrome, reflecting their resistance to continuous violence and their complex expressions of love toward those they consider "family perpetrators."

The Glory provides insight into the emotional struggles of Sun-ah, a victim of domestic violence inflicted by her father. Her emotional turmoil is portrayed through her anxiety, seen in her trembling voice and shaking hands when interacting with her father—symptoms of anxiety, where the body reacts to fear and emotional distress (Aditya, 2020). The psychological consequences of such violence can lead to chronic anxiety disorders, where victims feel constantly threatened despite no immediate danger. Children who suffer from both physical and verbal abuse often experience depression and feel powerless to resist the violence. Such experiences can have long-term effects on mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships in the future (Hapsari, 2016).

The study also highlights a key moment when Kang Hyeon Nam expresses resistance to the violence she endures. In one episode, she initially appears to surrender as she is beaten and cursed by her husband. However, her later statement indicates her determination to break free from the violence. The red lipstick and leather jacket she chooses symbolize her resistance. Lipstick, in this context, serves as a symbol of empowerment for women, offering a means of self-expression. Makeup can enhance women's self-perception and boost confidence (Diniz & Ferreira, 2020), with lipstick symbolizing a transformation into a stronger, more confident individual who dares to express her identity freely (Listiani et al., 2023). Kang Hyeon Nam's statement about the leather jacket aligns with research on the symbolic role of leather jackets in cultural contexts, such as in the movie *The Wild One*, where the leather jacket became a symbol of masculinity and rebellious youth (Sulistiawan, 2024). In that context, it reflected the spirit of post-war youth in the 1950s, who used fashion to assert their individuality and challenge societal norms.

Furthermore, *The Glory* contrasts the circumstances of Jung Mi Hee and Hong Yong Ae, particularly in terms of fashion and behavior, which highlights how economic conditions can contribute to neglecting parental responsibilities. According to the research article *The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations*, the right to parent is not simply a personal desire but entails the ability to provide adequate care and create a stable environment for children. This responsibility involves a collective effort to maintain conditions that support effective and compassionate parenting (Gheaus, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The series *The Glory* (2023) emphasizes the profound emotional and psychological toll that domestic violence inflicts on victims, who often feel trapped in a state of helplessness and anxiety. This trauma can drive victims toward symbolic acts of resistance or even further violence as a form of perseverance. The portrayal demonstrates how violence undermines a person's mental stability, leading to severe, long-term consequences in their lives. Additionally, the series highlights the social isolation that victims endure in an indifferent society, which further exacerbates their trauma. The depiction of domestic violence also illustrates the neglect of children due to parental abandonment, which negatively impacts their emotional development. The lack of communication and understanding between parents and children deepens the conflict, perpetuating a cycle of violence and suffering that continues without intervention.

The findings highlight the urgent need for effective preventive measures and comprehensive healing approaches for domestic violence victims, stressing the importance of addressing this ongoing and harmful issue. The study also underscores the necessity for various media formats and platforms to increase awareness about the severe physical and mental consequences of domestic violence on individuals. Future research examining the effectiveness of TV series, particularly those addressing domestic violence, as a medium for raising awareness about the issue is valuable and warrants further investigation.

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