

# Gendered Language and Stigma: A Corpus-Based Analysis of ‘Man’ and ‘Woman’ in Albanian Media Discourse

Eriola Qafzezi<sup>1</sup>, Dorela Kaçani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education and Philology, Fan S. Noli University, Korça, Albania

Correspondence: Eriola Qafzezi, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education and Philology, Fan S. Noli University, Korça, Albania.

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## Abstract

This paper examines how the Albanian lexical items *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) function in Albanian media discourse as carriers of stigma and gendered meaning. The study forms part of the national research project *STI(G)MA: A Comparative Analysis of Stigmatization Patterns in Albanian and English Media Discourse Using Information Technology and Digitalization* (2024–2026), supported by AKKSHI/NASRI. Using a purpose-built corpus of opinion articles (2021–2024), the analysis combines frequency profiling, thematic concordance analysis, and collocational tendencies to trace how masculinity and femininity are discursively constructed. The results show a marked asymmetry: *burrë* is predominantly linked with authority, political leadership, and criminal agency, while *grua* is tied to victimhood, domestic roles, and moral evaluation. These lexical environments reveal entrenched gender stereotypes and mechanisms of stigmatization that naturalize social hierarchies and normalize inequality. By applying a corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach, the study demonstrates how everyday media language in Albania reinforces gender bias, while also emphasizing the importance of critical media literacy and gender-sensitive journalism.

**Keywords:** stigma, gender, media discourse, critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, Albanian language, stereotypes

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction of the Problem

Language is a central site where gender identities and social hierarchies are constructed, contested, and reproduced. In media discourse, lexical choices are not merely descriptive; they shape public perceptions, reinforce cultural norms, and often perpetuate social inequalities. Terms as seemingly neutral as *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) are imbued with cultural meanings that extend beyond biological categorization. They frequently occur in evaluative or stigmatizing contexts, encoding assumptions about morality, power, agency, and social worth.

In Albanian media, these representations carry particular weight because opinion articles and commentary remain influential in shaping narratives around politics, crime, family, and social life. Yet despite the significance of such discourse, there has been little systematic corpus-based research into how *burrë* and *grua* are used in Albanian media and how these lexical items contribute to the reproduction of gender stereotypes and stigma. While global scholarship has long documented the gendered nature of language, the Albanian context remains underexplored, leaving a gap in evidence-based analysis of how everyday discourse sustains asymmetries between men and women.

### 1.2 Importance of the Problem

Understanding how men and women are represented in public discourse is crucial for several reasons. Media discourse is one of the most pervasive sources of information in Albanian society and functions as a powerful mechanism of socialization. Representations of men as strong, agentive, or criminal, and of women as dependent, victimized, or dishonorable, directly influence how gender roles are perceived and enacted in everyday life. Linguistic stigmatization in the media reinforces structural inequalities by naturalizing exclusionary categories, legitimizing discrimination, and undermining social cohesion.

In the Albanian context, where gender equality is an explicit national policy goal, examining and critiquing stigmatizing discourse is not only a matter of academic interest but also a contribution to broader societal efforts toward equity and inclusion. This study is conducted within the framework of the national project *STI(G)MA: A Comparative Analysis of*

*Stigmatization Patterns in Albanian and English Media Discourse Using Information Technology and Digitalization* (2024–2026), financed by the Albanian National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (AKKSHI/NASRI). The project maps and analyzes linguistic patterns of stigma in media discourse through purpose-built corpora, providing a digital evidence base for critical debate and educational reform. By focusing specifically on the Albanian lexical items *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) in an Albanian media corpus (2021–2024), this paper addresses a significant gap and offers empirical insights into how gendered discourse contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities.

### 1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

The study of gendered language and stigma in media discourse draws on four interrelated traditions: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), stigma theory, language and gender research, and the methodological tools of corpus linguistics. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual and analytical foundation for the present investigation.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) treats discourse as a form of social practice, highlighting how linguistic choices both reflect and reproduce power relations, ideologies, and inequalities. Fairclough (1995, 2003) emphasizes the dialectical relationship between text, discursive practice, and social practice, offering a model for examining how media language normalizes dominant views of gender. Van Dijk (1998) similarly stresses that discourse is a key site where social cognition and power are enacted, making CDA indispensable for analyzing the ideological work performed by seemingly ordinary lexical items.

Stigma theory provides a lens for understanding how language constructs processes of exclusion and marginalization. Goffman’s (1963) seminal work conceptualized stigma as an attribute that reduces individuals “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (p. 3). Building on this foundation, Link and Phelan (2001) identify five interconnected components of stigma, labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination, all of which unfold within unequal power relations. Applied to media discourse, this framework reveals how words such as *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) can be mobilized in ways that carry stigmatizing associations and reinforce gendered hierarchies.

Language and gender scholarship has long demonstrated that gender is not a fixed trait but a discursive construct. Cameron (1992, 2005) argues that linguistic practices shape and reflect ideologies of gender and sexuality, while Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 2013) show that gender is continuously negotiated in interaction and that lexical choices, stance-taking, and style are central to this process. Within media contexts, Lazar (2005) advances the perspective of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, highlighting how discourse sustains patriarchal structures and normalizes gendered inequalities.

Corpus linguistics provides methodological rigor by enabling the systematic identification of lexical patterns and collocational associations across large datasets. Baker (2006, 2014) demonstrates the value of combining corpus methods with CDA to uncover subtle but significant patterns of representation. Partington, Duguid, and Taylor (2013) formalize this approach as Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), stressing the importance of integrating quantitative evidence with qualitative interpretation.

Synthesizing these traditions, the present study employs a corpus-assisted CDA approach to examine how the words *burrë* and *grua* are represented in Albanian media discourse. CDA offers the interpretive framework for analyzing ideology and power; stigma theory explains the mechanisms of labeling and marginalization; language and gender scholarship situates these mechanisms within broader social constructions of gender; and corpus linguistics supplies the tools to identify empirical patterns of usage. This combined framework ensures that the analysis is both theoretically grounded and methodologically robust. It also represents an innovation in the Albanian research context, where systematic corpus-based investigations of gendered discourse remain scarce.

By integrating corpus linguistics, CDA, and gender theory, the research provides a systematic account of how ordinary lexical items function as carriers of stigma in Albanian media discourse. The findings contribute to scholarly debates on gender, stigma, and media representation, while also offering practical insights for promoting more responsible and equitable language use in the Albanian public sphere.

## 2. Methodology of Research

This study investigates the discursive construction of gender through the lexical items *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) in Albanian media discourse. The research design follows a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, integrating quantitative techniques—frequency counts and collocational profiling—with qualitative examination of concordance lines. The approach is grounded in the assumption that media language contributes to the reproduction of social meanings, stereotypes, and stigmatization.

The analysis is guided by the following objectives: (1) to identify the distributional patterns and semantic associations of the two target lexical items; (2) to examine the discursive environments in which they occur; and (3) to interpret these environments within the framework of CDA and stigma theory. Based on prior research and preliminary observations, the study hypothesizes that *burrë* (man) will be associated more frequently with domains of authority, agency, and public action,

while *grua* (woman) will appear more often in contexts relating to domesticity, vulnerability, and moral judgement. A further hypothesis is that these asymmetrical distributions reveal systematic discursive tendencies in Albanian media.

To test these hypotheses, a purpose-built Albanian media corpus was compiled within the STI(G)MA project. The corpus, referred to as *ALMEDICO* (Albanian Media Discourse Corpus), consists of opinion articles published between 2021 and 2024 in two major Albanian newspapers: *Gazeta Shqip* and *Bota Sot*. Opinion articles were selected rather than news reports because they offer extended argumentative discourse where evaluative language is more explicit and ideologically marked. The final corpus for this research contains approximately 497,936 tokens. All texts were collected in digital format, stripped of metadata, processed into UTF-8 encoded plain-text files, and uploaded to Sketch Engine for analysis.

The analytical procedure combined three complementary steps. First, raw and relative frequency counts of *burrë* and *grua*, including their inflected forms, were generated to establish their distribution across the corpus. Second, collocational profiles were examined to identify recurrent adjectival, verbal, and nominal associations, which were subsequently grouped into thematic and discursive categories. Third, concordance lines were analysed qualitatively to interpret how these items function in context, focusing on evaluative meanings, relational patterns, and discursive positioning. *Sketch Engine* was used for frequency and collocational analysis, while *AntConc* supported fine-grained concordance exploration. This combination of quantitative evidence and qualitative interpretation aligns with established principles of corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Baker, 2006; Partington et al., 2013).

By integrating corpus methods with the theoretical insights of CDA, this methodological design ensures both empirical robustness and interpretive depth, enabling a systematic investigation of how everyday lexical items participate in constructing and reinforcing gendered meanings and stigmatizing representations in Albanian media discourse.

### 3. Results

The comparative analysis of the keywords *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) across their inflected forms in the *ALMEDICO* corpus (2021–2024) reveals a striking asymmetry in Albanian media discourse. Men are predominantly represented as active agents in the public sphere, often linked to politics, leadership, or criminality, where their actions are framed in terms of authority, strength, or deviance. Women, by contrast, appear more frequently in relational and evaluative contexts, framed as victims of violence, mothers and caregivers, or subjects of moral judgment. While *burrë* encodes agency and responsibility, whether positive (as a “man of honor” or “man of the state”) or negative (as a “violent man” or “criminal actor”), *grua* is discursively tied to vulnerability, sacrifice, or dishonor. These linguistic patterns not only reveal entrenched gender stereotypes but also demonstrate how stigma operates differently across the two categories: by glorifying or condemning men’s actions in public life, and by constraining women to roles of dependence, morality, or victimhood. Taken together, the findings highlight how everyday media discourse naturalizes gendered hierarchies and contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities.

#### 3.1 Frequency Profile

To begin, the distribution of inflected forms of *burrë* and *grua* was examined in order to establish their overall frequency and prominence in the corpus. Table 1 shows the breakdown of singular and plural forms, with definite and indefinite usage, highlighting the more than twofold dominance of *grua* over *burrë* in raw frequency. This quantitative imbalance already points to the salience of gendered references to women in Albanian media discourse, a pattern that becomes more pronounced when thematic and collocational tendencies are considered in the following sections.

Table 1. Frequency of “*burrë*” and “*grua*” in the Albanian media corpus (2021–2024)

Lemma	Form	Raw tokens
burrë	burrë (singular, indefinite)	27
	burra (plural, indefinite)	22
	burri (singular, definite)	18
	burrat (plural, definite)	15
	burrave (plural, dative)	12
	burrin (singular, accusative)	3
	burrit (singular, dative/gen.)	3
Total		100
grua	gratë (plural, definite)	78
	grua (singular, indefinite)	53
	grave (plural, genitive/dative)	49
	gra (plural, indefinite)	22
	gruaja (singular, definite)	22
	gruan (singular, accusative)	16
	gruaje (singular, genitive.)	7
Total		247

The raw frequencies indicate that references to *grua* and its forms (247 tokens) outnumber those to *burrë* (100 tokens) by

well over double. This quantitative difference already signals the prominence of gendered references to women in Albanian media discourse, often tied to recurring discussions of violence, family roles, and moral evaluations. By contrast, men appear less frequently but are more often framed in public, political, or agentive roles. These tendencies, further examined through collocational and concordance analysis, illustrate how gender is discursively constructed in ways that naturalize asymmetries between men and women.

### 3.2 Thematic Profiles and Illustrative Concordances

Beyond frequency, thematic analysis of concordance lines reveals the contrasting discursive environments in which *burrë* and *grua* appear. Men are repeatedly framed in relation to politics, leadership, and crime, whereas women are tied to domestic roles, moral evaluation, and collective victimhood. The examples below, drawn directly from the corpus, illustrate how these lexical items encode stereotypes and stigmatizing associations in practice.

#### 3.2.1 Politics and Public Leadership (*burrë*)

The notion of *burrë* is often invoked in political contexts, either as an ideal of leadership or as a critique of its absence.

Example 1: Political leadership framed through masculinity (*burrë*)

“Po të ishte *burrë* shteti, Rama do të kishte pranuar dështimin, do të jepte dorëheqjen...” (Bota Sot, Maj 2024)

[If he were a statesman, Rama would have admitted failure, he would have resigned...]

This example links *burrë* to political agency, responsibility, and moral courage. The conditional structure frames “being a man” as a prerequisite for legitimate leadership. From a CDA perspective, the phrase *burrë shteti* (statesman) naturalizes a masculine ideal of governance, reinforcing the notion that political competence is gender-coded.

Example 2: Masculinity as strength and decisive action

“Albini, pash Zotin, rrëzohu vet, bëhu *burrë* i fortë dhe jap vetë dorëheqjen...” (Bota Sot, Mars 2024)

[Albini, for God’s sake, step down yourself, be a strong man and resign yourself...]

Here, masculinity appears as a moral command. Being a “strong man” is equated with decisive political action. The evaluative *burrë i fortë* (strong man) constructs strength as a gendered virtue and positions political assertiveness as inherently male. CDA reveals how political discourse uses masculinity to legitimize or delegitimize leaders.

Both examples show how political strength is discursively gendered: being a “real man” is equated with courage, responsibility, and authority.

#### 3.2.2 Crime and Violence (*burrë*, *grua*)

Another recurrent theme is violence, where *burrë* appears as the active agent and *grua* as the victim.

Example 3: Violence framed through male agency and female vulnerability

“Një *burrë* që ushtron dhunë ndaj një gruaje – është shprehur Papa – përfshihet në diçka që është pothuajse ‘satanike’.” (Bota Sot, Janar 2024)

[A man who uses violence against a woman – said the Pope – engages in something that is almost ‘satanic’.]

This example explicitly casts the man as the agent of violence and the woman as its recipient. The evaluative label *satanike* (satanic) intensifies moral condemnation but maintains the gendered structure: men act, women are acted upon. CDA highlights how such constructions normalize gendered power asymmetry by repeatedly assigning active and passive roles along male–female lines.

Example 4: Femicide as normalized reporting frame (*grua*)

“Populli... është bërë edhe... kriminel që vret *gruan*.” (Gazeta Shqip, Janar 2024)

[The people... have also become... a criminal who kills the woman.]

The phrase *kriminel që vret gruan* (criminal who kills the woman) reduces femicide to a familiar narrative, embedding violence against women in a generalized social script. CDA shows that such phrasing reproduces women’s vulnerability as a predictable, almost routine phenomenon, contributing to the discursive normalization of gender-based violence.

Example 5: Reporting domestic homicide

“Në maj, një *grua* u vra në Gjykatën e Rrethit Elbasan pas seancës së divorcit.” (Gazeta Shqip, Prill 2022)

[In May, a woman was killed in the District Court of Elbasan after the divorce hearing.]

Women appear as victims in institutional spaces where protection should be guaranteed. The passive construction *u vra* (was killed) erases the perpetrator, amplifying the discursive trend in which women’s deaths are foregrounded but male

agency disappears. CDA identifies this as part of a wider pattern of depersonalizing perpetrators and foregrounding only the female victimhood.

Such concordances highlight the asymmetry: men are discursively portrayed as perpetrators of aggression, while women are recurrently constructed as victims of femicide and domestic abuse.

### 3.2.3 Social and Economic Inequality (*gra* vs. *burra*)

The contrast between men and women is also made explicit in economic and professional contexts.

Example 6: Economic inequality as a gendered norm

“Kur bëhet fjala për të investuar para në fonde apo aksione, *gratë* shpesh druhen dhe ua lënë këtë gjë burrave.” (Gazeta Shqip, Janar 2023)

[When it comes to investing money in funds or shares, women often hesitate and leave this matter to men.]

This excerpt constructs economic competence as male and financial reluctance as female. The verb *druhen* (hesitate) attributes hesitation to women as a collective tendency, reinforcing stereotypes of women as financially dependent and risk-averse. CDA reveals how such language naturalizes economic inequality as a behaviorally “expected” gendered division.

Example 7: Structural inequality presented as a statistical fact

“*Gratë* paguhen mesatarisht më pak se burrat dhe *gratë* janë më të rrezikuara nga varfëria.” (Gazeta Shqip, Janar 2023)

[Women are paid on average less than men and women are more at risk of poverty.]

Although descriptive, this statement consolidates the discursive association of women with economic precarity. Women are framed as structurally disadvantaged, further emphasizing gender asymmetry. CDA notes that such statements, while factual, contribute to the reproduction of normative assumptions linking women to economic vulnerability.

The examples testify how discourse naturalizes men as economic actors and women as dependent or disadvantaged.

### 3.2.4 Domestic and Relational Roles (*grua*)

Many occurrences of *grua* appear in family contexts, underscoring relational and domestic roles.

Example 8: Women in domestic and sacrificial roles

“Nuk e ka ndër mend të sakrifkohet si *gra* të tjera për burrin e saj.” (Gazeta Shqip, Prill 2024)

[She does not intend to sacrifice herself like other women for her husband.]

The phrase *gra të tjera* (other women) implies that women sacrificing themselves is a normative, collective expectation. CDA identifies this as a discourse of relational obligation tied to femininity, aligning womanhood with self-denial and emotional labor within the family.

Example 9: Violence as a relational outcome

“Mendohet se shkak i divorcit me *gruan* ka ardhur si pasojë e ushtrimit të dhunës ndaj saj.” (Gazeta Shqip, Prill 2023)

[It is thought that the cause of divorce with his wife came as a result of violence against her.]

This example again foregrounds the woman as the passive recipient of harm. The evidential *mendohet* (it is thought) distances the writer from responsibility, creating an impersonal tone that obscures male agency. CDA shows how such constructions dilute accountability while reinforcing women’s position as victims. Such examples reinforce cultural expectations of women’s sacrifice and suffering in the family domain.

### 3.2.5 Collective Victimhood (*gratë*, *grave*)

Women also appear as a collective, often anonymized and framed statistically, reinforcing their portrayal as a social category of victims.

Example 10: Women framed as collective victims

“Është aq indiferente, sa që nuk ka dënuar... të dënojë së paku vrasjen e *grave* shqiptare e dhunën në familje.” (Gazeta Shqip, Nëntor 2024)

[It is so indifferent that it has not even deigned... to condemn at least the killing of Albanian women and domestic violence.]

Women appear as a pluralized, anonymized group (*gratve shqiptare* – *Albanian women*), emphasizing collective

victimhood. CDA identifies this as a discursive strategy that highlights the scale of violence but simultaneously erases individuality, portraying women as a homogeneous category of sufferers.

Example 11: Statistical de-individualization

“Një numër më shumë në regjistrin e *grave* të dhunuara në polici, një kronikë më shumë në një redaksi...” (Gazeta Shqip, Gusht 2021)

[One more entry in the register of abused women at the police, one more report in a newsroom...]

The enumeration reduces violence against women to bureaucratic accounting. CDA highlights how numerical framing obscures personal narratives and contributes to the normalization of abuse as a recurring, expected event.

This way of framing women emphasizes numbers and categories, reducing individual identity to collective victimhood.

### 3.2.6 Moral and Evaluative Framing (*grua*)

Finally, women are discursively evaluated in terms of morality, dignity, or dishonor.

Example 12: Moral evaluation of women

“Hermoso... u tregua jo si atletja fitimtare që ishte, por si një *grua*, e nënshtruar dhunës dhe tekave të burrave.” (Gazeta Shqip, Shtator 2023)

[Hermoso... was shown not as the victorious athlete she was, but as a woman, subjected to the violence and whims of men.]

Femininity here is defined through subordination. The contrast between *atletja fitimtare* (victorious athlete) and *një grua* (a woman) implies that womanhood overrides professional identity. CDA reveals how femininity is discursively constructed as vulnerability, even in contexts of personal achievement.

Example 13: Suffering as a moral performance

“E, tek dëgjoni... sagën fundore të dhimbjes së kësaj *gruaje* të fortë, kupton se vuajtja e dinjitetshme e Fatmirës vjen si një leksion morali për të gjithë ne.” (Gazeta Shqip, Tetor 2022)

[And, as you listen... to the final saga of this strong woman’s suffering, you understand that Fatmira’s dignified pain comes as a moral lesson for all of us.]

Women are positioned as moral exemplars through suffering. The phrase *vuajtja e dinjitetshme* (dignified pain) transforms pain into a virtue, reinforcing culturally embedded narratives that tie femininity to endurance, morality, and sacrifice. Such representations show that femininity is discursively tied to moral evaluation, endurance, and symbolic lessons for society.

Taken together, the thematic distribution of *burrë* and *grua* reveals the deep asymmetries in Albanian media discourse. Men are represented as leaders, political actors, and perpetrators of violence, while women are framed as victims, dependents, or moral exemplars. These discursive tendencies contribute to the reproduction of gendered hierarchies and the normalization of social inequalities.

### 3.3 Collocational Tendencies

Finally, collocational profiles of *burrë* and *grua* confirm and reinforce the thematic asymmetries observed in concordances. While *burrë* is most often paired with terms denoting political authority or strength, *grua* co-occurs with descriptors of violence, morality, and victimhood. Table 2 summarizes the most frequent adjectival, verbal, and compound associations, illustrating how collocational environments contribute to the reproduction of gendered hierarchies.

Table 2. Collocational patterns of *burrë* and *grua* in Albanian media discourse (2021–2024)

Lemma	Adjectival collocate	Verbal collocates	Noun compounds/fixed phrases	Discursive function
<i>burrë</i>	i fortë, shteti, serioz	jep dorëheqjen, tradhton, ushtron dhunë	<i>burrë</i> shteti, burrat e Evropës	Authority, leadership, agency, or deviance
<i>grua</i>	e vrarë, e pafajshme, imorale, e dhunuar	u vra, u dhunua, u vra në familje	<i>grua</i> e fortë, gratë e dhunuara, <i>grua</i> e vrarë	Victimhood, domesticity, moral evaluation, collective suffering

Description: The collocational profiles of *burrë* and *grua* illustrate how gendered meanings are reinforced in Albanian media discourse. *Burrë* tends to cluster with terms of political authority and strength, producing compounds such as *burrë shteti* that idealize leadership, while also appearing in contexts of deviance and violence. By contrast, *grua* collocates with descriptors of victimhood and morality, most often as *grua e vrarë* or *gratë e dhunuara*, which foreground suffering and vulnerability. Even when women are described positively as *gratë e forta*, the context typically emphasizes resilience through pain rather than active agency. These asymmetric collocational patterns underline the ways in which discourse

naturalizes male authority and female subordination. The asymmetry lies not only in frequency but also in the evaluative weight of collocations: masculinity is linked to power and accountability, whereas femininity is bound to victimhood and morality.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of this study provide strong support for the initial hypotheses. The analysis demonstrates that *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”) are distributed asymmetrically across Albanian media discourse, both in terms of frequency and in the discursive environments in which they appear. While references to *grua* and its forms are more than twice as frequent as references to *burrë*, these mentions overwhelmingly cluster around contexts of violence, family, and morality. By contrast, *burrë* is less frequent but appears more consistently in agentive and public roles, linked to political leadership, collective action, and criminal agency.

Thematic concordances (Section 3.2) clearly show this asymmetry. The term *burrë* is used to frame ideals of political leadership (*burrë shteti*, *burrë i fortë*) or to critique the failure to embody such ideals, whereas *grua* is frequently tied to narratives of domestic violence, femicide, and relational dependency (*grua e vrarë*, *gratë e dhunuar*). Even when women are positively evaluated (*grua e fortë*), the context emphasizes moral endurance through suffering rather than autonomous agency. These thematic patterns reinforce the hypothesis that Albanian media discourse constructs masculinity as active and public, and femininity as vulnerable and relational.

The collocational profiles (Section 3.3) confirm this divide. Compounds like *burrë shteti* and modifiers such as *i fortë* or *serioz* reinforce masculinity as a site of authority and strength. Meanwhile, collocates such as *e vrarë*, *e dhunuar*, and *pafajshme* fix women in contexts of violence, morality, and vulnerability. Such recurrent pairings are not linguistically neutral; they constitute discursive patterns that naturalize male authority and female subordination.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998), these findings highlight how media discourse reproduces social hierarchies. The language of authority and leadership is attached to men, while the language of morality and suffering is attached to women. Stigma theory (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001) offers further insight into how these constructions contribute to symbolic marginalization: by representing women primarily as victims or moral exemplars, discourse strips them of individual agency and reduces them to social categories. Conversely, men are discursively valorized or condemned as public actors, reinforcing the perception that masculinity belongs in the public sphere.

These results align with broader scholarship on language and gender (Cameron, 2005; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Lazar, 2005), while also reflecting specific socio-cultural dynamics in Albania, where media coverage of femicide and gender-based violence has intensified in recent years. The portrayal of women as collective victims (“grave të dhunuar”, “gra të vrara”) underscores how media discourse both recognizes and normalizes violence, presenting it as a recurring social fact rather than as an aberration.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, they underline the urgent need for ethical and gender-sensitive journalism in Albania, where lexical choices carry powerful ideological weight. Second, they demonstrate the potential of corpus-assisted discourse analysis for providing empirical evidence of how gender asymmetries are reproduced through everyday media language. By combining frequency analysis, thematic concordances, and collocational profiles, this study not only documents linguistic patterns but also situates them within the broader context of social inequality and stigma.

In conclusion, the analysis of *burrë* and *grua* in Albanian media discourse demonstrates how language not only reflects but also actively reproduces gendered hierarchies. Men are discursively constructed as leaders, political actors, or perpetrators of violence, while women are framed as victims, dependents, or moral figures. These asymmetries reveal how media discourse normalizes social inequality and perpetuates stigma through everyday lexical choices. By grounding the study in corpus-assisted methods, the findings contribute to a clearer understanding of how gender is encoded in media texts and point to the need for greater critical awareness in journalism and public communication.

#### 5. Conclusions

This study examined the discursive construction of gender in Albanian media discourse through a corpus-assisted CDA analysis of the lexical items *burrë* (“man”) and *grua* (“woman”). The findings confirm all three research hypotheses and reveal consistent asymmetries in how men and women are represented across opinion articles published between 2021 and 2024. The corpus analysis showed that *burrë* is overwhelmingly associated with domains of authority, agency, rational decision-making, and moral strength. Collocations such as *burrë shteti* (statesman) and *burrë i fortë* (strong man) construct masculinity as a marker of legitimacy in political and public life. Even in contexts of wrongdoing, men tend to appear as active agents whose actions shape events. These patterns reinforce culturally dominant ideologies of masculinity as power, leadership, and control.

In contrast, *grua* appears primarily in contexts of vulnerability, victimhood, domesticity, and moral judgement. Women

are frequently represented as passive recipients of male action, especially in cases of violence, where the perpetrator is often backgrounded or erased through passive constructions. Additional collocational patterns reveal that women are linked to domestic sacrifice, economic precarity, and moral discourse, reinforcing gendered expectations deeply embedded in Albanian cultural narratives. Women are frequently pluralized and collectivized as victims, further normalizing gender-based violence as a societal pattern rather than an individual crime.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate how everyday lexical choices contribute to the reproduction of gender stereotypes and asymmetric power relations. The systematic recurrence of evaluative frames, authority for men, vulnerability for women, reveals a media landscape in which linguistic practices naturalize unequal gender hierarchies and sustain stigmatizing representations. By combining corpus methods with critical discourse analysis, this study highlights the ideological work performed by seemingly ordinary words, revealing the importance of language awareness in media production and reception. Future research may extend this corpus to additional genres or explore diachronic shifts in gendered discourse as Albanian media continues to evolve.

### **Ethical Note**

This study analyzes publicly available media texts without involving human participants. Some examples include references to sensitive topics such as femicide and domestic violence. These are cited verbatim from the original publications (*Gazeta Shqip*, *Bota Sot*) for the purpose of linguistic analysis. The use of such examples is intended solely for research and does not imply endorsement of the perspectives expressed in the source material.

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### **Authors contributions**

Prof. Eriola Qafzezi was responsible for data collection, data handling, corpus processing, analysis, and drafting the manuscript. Prof. Dorela Kaçauni contributed to data collection, participated in drafting sections of the manuscript, and revised the final version for intellectual content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Both authors contributed substantially to the work, and no special agreements concerning authorship apply. The authors contributed equally to the conceptual development of the study.

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### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

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### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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