

Distorted Meanings, Misplaced Justice: A Socio-Legal Approach of the Delegitimization of Domestic Violence Law in Pekalongan, Indonesia

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Keywords:

Distortion of
meaning;
Domestic violence;
Delegitimization of
law;
Public perception;
Socio-legal studies.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.19109/nurani.v25i2.30585>

Submitted:

July 31, 2025

Accepted:

December 28, 2025

Published:

December 31, 2025

Pages: 671 - 689

Abstract: Domestic violence remains a persistent social problem in Indonesia despite the enactment of the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Law No. 23/2004). The persistent discrepancy between legal norms and their enforcement, evidenced by low reporting levels and reliance on non-legal dispute resolution, signals a crisis of legal legitimacy. This study aims to identify public meaning distortions regarding domestic violence in Pekalongan, Central Java Indonesia and analyze their implications for the delegitimization of the law. Employing a socio-legal approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and questionnaires involving 50 informants in Pekalongan. The findings identify four principal forms of distortion: domestic violence is perceived as a private family matter (38%), a means of discipline or instruction (20%), a source of social disgrace (18%), or an act that is not considered criminal (14%). Only 10% of informants defined it as a legal crime. Consequently, respondents preferred family mediation (34%) or divorce (26%) over court proceedings (10%). Symbolic Interactionism analysis reveals that social interactions prioritize symbols of family harmony and honor over victims' rights, diverting cases from the judicial system. Viewed through the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, the study finds that social interactions often prioritize family harmony and social honor over the rights of victims, which ultimately diverts cases from the formal justice system. The study concludes that legal ineffectiveness stems from deep semiotic conflicts, underscoring the need to reconstruct public meanings to align domestic violence with criminal justice principles.

Introduction

The issue of domestic violence has gained significant public attention (Abidin et al., 2025; Hasanudin et al., 2023; Rohani et al., 2023), particularly following the widely publicized case involving Indonesian celebrity Lesty Kejora, who became a victim of domestic violence committed by her husband, Rizky Billar (Rachmad & Rohmah, 2022). Domestic violence remains a compelling subject of study due to its global prevalence and its classification as a serious, unique, and specific crime. It is widely recognized as a grave violation of fundamental human rights, an affront to humanity, and a crime that can result in death (Neves et al., 2022), physical harm (de Souza et al., 2023; Tuncez et al., 2021), and severe mental health problems (Anez et al., 2021; Syahrin et al., 2021; Shaheen et al., 2020).

Domestic violence is considered distinctive due to its unique characteristics, such as its occurrence within the domestic sphere, the specific location of incidents within the home, and the involvement of close family members as both perpetrators and victims (Isailă et al., 2022; Jyothsna et al., 2023). This latent nature contributes to its perception as a hidden crime, leading to a lack of reliable data and a tendency toward underreporting (Khaerul & Siti Chadijah, 2021). Domestic violence is also recognized as a persistent form of criminal behavior (Moreira & Pinto Da Costa, 2021), and its existence has been closely linked to the formation of families and the institution of marriage throughout history.

Data from the National Commission on Women in 2023 revealed a significant increase in cases of domestic violence, with 63% occurring within the household. This indicates that domestic violence remains a serious threat despite the existence of a legal framework (Br Siregar, 2022; Maharani & Galih, 2021), with women being the victims in most cases (Hamdy & Hudri, 2022). Meanwhile, data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection indicate that the majority of violence cases, amounting to 79.6 percent, involve women as victims (Triadi et al., 2023). The Ministry's Online Information System on Women and Child Protection reported 25,050 cases of violence against women in Indonesia throughout 2022. This phenomenon further reinforces the urgency of understanding the root causes of problems in law enforcement (Nova & Elda, 2024). Data from the Religious Court (Badan Peradilan Agama/BADILAG) recorded 327,629 cases. These figures illustrate a significant 50% increase in gender-based violence (GBV) against women to 338,496 cases in 2021 (from 226,062 cases in 2020). BADILAG's data indicates a substantial increase of 52%, with 327,629 cases recorded. A study by Purwanti found that 33.4% of women aged 15 to 64 had experienced physical and sexual violence in their lifetime, with sexual violence accounting for 34.4% of reported incidents (Purwanti et al., 2024). These figures not only illustrate the alarming prevalence of violence but also underscore the systemic inability to deliver substantive justice for victims (Modiano, 2021). Furthermore, the data above demonstrate that domestic violence has become a serious problem in Indonesia, resulting in significant social and humanitarian impacts.

A review of the extant literature reveals four predominant trends in the study of domestic violence. First, scholars examine the legal construction and substantive content of domestic violence regulations enacted within a country (Golovko et al., 2021), as well as the implementation of law enforcement (Oliinychenko, 2021). Second, research addresses the diverse and contextual factors causing domestic violence, including cultural influences (Mahson et al., 2022), community traditions (Antonyan, 2020), environmental factors (Wahhab et al., 2023), the personality and negative character traits of perpetrators (Hui & Maddern, 2021), and religious interpretations (Fall, 2002). Third, studies focus on the impacts on victims (Maher et al., 2021; Musa & Ebraheem, 2021; Wilde et al., 2024) and their families (Orr et al., 2023). Fourth, there is research on efforts to prevent and respond to domestic violence (Sarah & Lana, 2021).

Although Indonesia has a comprehensive legal framework, particularly Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, its

implementation is frequently undermined by distorted public perceptions and cultural resistance, which weaken the legitimacy of the law (Aminah & Rafsanjani, 2023; Cahyatunnisa, 2023; Saepullah & Hopipah, 2023; Nuroniyah et al., 2025). This confirms that, despite legal efforts to address domestic violence through extensive education, literacy, and advocacy programs (Saimima et al., 2022), significant challenges to effective implementation persist, particularly at the local level (Lakamau & Wibowo, 2021). Factors such as penal mediation (Busroh, 2021), and the restorative justice approach used in resolving domestic violence cases (Halawa et al., 2023) can actually reduce legal protection for victims, especially women and children (Ashady, 2020), and place victims in a subordinate position within the judicial system (Arief, 2021).

This situation indirectly reveals the failure of the existing legal system to provide adequate protection for victims of domestic violence. A study by Manson et al. in Pekalongan shows that domestic violence is mostly perpetrated by husbands against their wives, and that cases tend to be resolved through mediation (Mahson et al., 2022), and customary practices. The increasing adoption of non-litigation approaches to resolving domestic violence cases, including criminal mediation and customary law mechanisms, reflects a shift away from formal judicial processes (Makleat, 2020), has significant implications for the effectiveness of law enforcement. This trend is compounded by socially constructed biases that often blame victims and reduce domestic violence to a private domestic affair, which diverges from the core principle of legal protection (Rahayu et al., 2025). Such misconceptions not only deprive victims of justice but also systematically weaken the enforcement of domestic violence laws (Husna, 2023).

Extant literature indicates that resolving domestic violence cases through penal mediation often undermines legal protections for victims and perpetuates the subordination of women within the judicial process (Putra et al., 2022). These circumstances underscore a disjunction between formal legal frameworks and prevailing socio-cultural practices, undermining both the effectiveness and legitimacy of legal regulations addressing domestic violence. This study responds to these issues by arguing that the weakening legitimacy of domestic violence law in Pekalongan is rooted in the complex interaction of distorted public perceptions. Specifically, the research examines how the widespread misperception of domestic violence as a private matter obstructs legal intervention and exacerbates victims' vulnerability. Furthermore, the study investigates how the misapplication of religious values and communal norms serves to rationalize acts of violence, thereby further eroding legal protections for victims. Accordingly, this research aims to comprehensively analyze the various forms of public misperception regarding domestic violence in Pekalongan and to assess their implications for the delegitimization of relevant legal frameworks.

This study extends the scope of analysis by articulating the pivotal role of the socio-legal context in the implementation of domestic violence law in Indonesia. It elucidates the complex interaction between statutory legal provisions and the wider social, cultural, and political milieu, emphasizing how these factors collectively influence the effectiveness of legal protections. Specifically, this research examines the phenomena of "distorted meaning" and

“misplaced justice” as indicated in the document’s title, and demonstrates how these issues emerge from the interaction between formal legal norms and dominant societal attitudes. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the delegitimization of domestic violence law within Pekalongan, a non-metropolitan locality, through a rigorous socio-legal perspective. By foregrounding the impact of cultural resistance, misinterpretation, and practices such as penal mediation, the study reveals how these elements actively undermine the authority and practical application of the law. This comprehensive approach yields a sharper analytical lens than previous studies, which have predominantly addressed general implementation obstacles or have been confined to urban contexts.

Method

This study uses an empirical juridical approach (Noor, 2023), within a socio-legal studies framework (Wheeler, 2020), which views law not only as law in the books but also as a living social phenomenon that interacts with the reality of society (law in action). This approach was selected because domestic violence cannot be comprehensively understood through a purely normative analysis of legal provisions. It also requires an examination of how these norms are implemented, perceived, and negotiated within the social context of the Pekalongan City community. Pekalongan was chosen as the research site because it is known both as the Batik City and the Santri City (Rohmah et al., 2022), and is often labeled a dynamic coastal community. Nevertheless, domestic violence still occurs even though domestic law socialization programs are carried out continuously and involve many parties (Mahson et al., 2022).

The data presented were obtained from primary sources through a series of data collection methods, namely observation and in-depth interviews. Observations were conducted by examining elements of the informants’ daily lives and the broader social contexts in which they are situated. Interviews were carried out with 10 informants selected through purposive sampling, based on criteria including residence in Pekalongan, a minimum educational background of high school, and prior participation or non-participation in domestic violence awareness programs. Interviews, accompanied by questionnaires, were used to explore the informants' profiles, participation in the DV awareness program and its organizers, and the public's misconceptions about DV.

Meanwhile, secondary data were collected through document studies of various legal regulations (such as the 1945 Constitution, the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Act No. 23 of 2004), and other related regulations), books, journals, and other literature. Triangulation techniques, namely data source triangulation and method triangulation (Ali, 2022). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from various informants. The information provided by one source was checked for consistency with other sources. Meanwhile, method triangulation was performed by the researcher using various data collection methods, namely in-depth interviews, observation, and literature study. Findings from one method were confirmed by other methods. Data analysis techniques involved continuous and repetitive efforts carried out during and after the data

collection process. The study employed an interactive analytical model, which functions through three interrelated cycles of activity that occur continuously. First, data presentation: researchers compile and present data in the form of narratives, tables, or thematic categories so that patterns and relationships are easily visible. Second, data reduction: researchers select, focus, and simplify data by removing irrelevant information, thereby sharpening and focusing the analysis. Third, drawing conclusions: researchers formulate meanings, findings, and patterns that emerge from the data, which are then re-verified with previous data. These three processes do not run linearly but rotate interactively until a complete and valid understanding of the phenomenon being studied is obtained (Asipi et al., 2022; Miles & Huberman, 2014).

A general description of the characteristics of the informants, including gender, age, religion, level of education, marital status, and involvement in organizations, is presented along with information regarding the organizers and location of the socialization activities as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Informant Profiles and Socialization Locations for the Elimination of Domestic Violence

Aspects	Category	Amount
Gender	Male	24
	Female	26
Age (in years old)	15-25	7
	26-35	13
	36-45	14
	46-55	10
	>56	6
Religion	Islam	40
	Christian	7
	Catholic	3
Education	Junior high school & High school	21
	Diploma & Bachelor	25
	Postgraduate	4
Marital status	Marriage	27
	Un marriage	23
Status of organization	Administrator	12
	Member	18
	Neither	20
Socialization Organizers	Government agencies	15
	Community organizations & NGOs	13
	Schools/universities	8
Socialization Venues	Government offices	15
	NGOs	13
	Schools/universities	6
	others	11

Source: processed by researchers.

Results and Discussion

The Types of Distortions in Public Perceptions of Domestic Violence

Data for this study were obtained through interviews, direct observations, and questionnaires administered to 50 informants. This approach facilitated the acquisition of comprehensive information regarding public perceptions of domestic violence and community preferences in resolving such cases. The distribution of these perceptions and preferences is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distorted Public Perceptions of Domestic Violence and Public Preferences for Resolution

Aspects	Category	Amount
The types of public interpretation of domestic violence	Domestic violence as a crime	5
	Domestic violence as an internal household affair, others do not need to interfere	19
	Domestic violence as media education (parents/ husband/wife) to other family members	10
	Domestic violence as a disgrace that must be covered up in domestic life	9
	Domestic violence as husband's abuse of wife or children or parents abuse of children	7
The public preference for resolving domestic violence	Divorce	13
	Mediation by family members	17
	Mediation through a third party	6
	Forwarded to the District Court	5
	Do not know	9

Sources: Processed by researchers

Table 2 shows that public perceptions of domestic violence (DV) in Pekalongan vary greatly. Table 1 also shows that there are four types of distorted public perceptions of DV, namely as a private domestic issue, a means of education within the family, a social disgrace that must be covered up, and violence by husbands against wives or by parents against children. Only a small proportion of respondents interpret domestic violence as a criminal act. Of the 50 informants, only 5 individuals (10 percent) classified domestic violence as a criminal offense. Meanwhile, 19 informants (38 percent) perceived it as a private household matter that should not be interfered with by external parties. A total of 10 informants (20 percent) regarded it as a form of disciplinary education by parents or spouses. Another 9 informants (18 percent) considered it a disgrace that must be concealed, and 7 informants (14 percent) understood it as violence in the form of abuse committed by husbands against wives or parents against children.

Quantitatively, this means that 90% of the social meaning of domestic violence is not connected to the category of crime, but rather to the category of

private matters. The meaning is that domestic violence is an internal family matter that should not be interfered with by outside parties.

Table 2 illustrates the considerable diversity in public perceptions regarding domestic violence (DV) in Pekalongan. The findings indicate that there are four prevalent misperceptions: DV is commonly regarded as a private domestic matter, a form of familial education, a source of social shame that must be concealed, and as violence committed by husbands against wives or parents against children. Only a small fraction of respondents recognize DV as a criminal act. Specifically, out of 50 informants, only 5 individuals (10%) identified DV as a crime. In contrast, 19 informants (38%) viewed it as a purely internal household issue that should not involve outside parties; 10 informants (20%) considered it a means of education within the family; 9 informants (18%) perceived it as a disgrace that ought to be hidden; and 7 informants (14%) understood it as violence perpetrated by husbands against wives or parents against children. These findings quantitatively indicate that 90 percent of respondents do not associate domestic violence with criminal behavior, but instead place it within the realm of private or internal family matters.

This predominance of non-criminal interpretations suggests that societal attitudes in Pekalongan still strongly adhere to traditional norms that regard domestic violence as an internal affair, thereby hindering external intervention or legal action. In conclusion, the data from Table 2 reveals that misperceptions about domestic violence are widespread in Pekalongan, with most people failing to recognize it as a crime. This has serious implications for efforts to prevent and address domestic violence, because prevailing attitudes may reduce the effectiveness of interventions and sustain a culture of silence and inaction.

This finding is reinforced by the results of the interview points which say: "There is no such thing as domestic violence, there are only arguments between husband and wife" (R, 41 years old, teacher); "It's just a family matter, so it's natural if there are shouts, pinches, slaps, and punches because of uncontrolled emotions from the partner" (St, 32 years old, soldier); "Our next-door neighbors often argue using hurtful words and even hit each other, but that is their internal affair, we as neighbors cannot interfere" (W, 41, entrepreneur). The distortion of meaning from several informants in the concept of social interaction in Blumer's theory (Blumer, 1986; Subiakto, 2020), shows that the meaning of domestic violence is formed and maintained in social interactions that place the family as a private entity, where outsiders, including legal institutions, should not interfere.

This distortion of meaning is the result of a process of joint action, repeated interactions within and around the household that produce a definition of a particular situation. DV is subordinated under the symbols of "husband-wife quarrels," "other people's internal household affairs," or "not our business," "outsiders have no right to interfere." The distortion of public meaning in Pekalongan is consistent with Su's findings in China. Many people there also consider domestic violence to be an internal family matter, causing outsiders not to want to get involved in its prevention or resolution, which also occurs in China (Su et al., 2022), resulting in a lack of reporting of cases. Wallace states that the public perception of domestic violence as a family

matter or a common domestic dispute significantly reduces the tendency of victims to report it (Wallace et al., 2019), leading to a cover-up of information and neglect of victims' rights. This condition shows that social norms that consider the family to be a private space make it difficult for the community to recognize violence as a violation of the law that requires external attention.

Domestic violence is considered a form of education or learning for family members. This finding is reinforced by interview data points that say: "I am strict in educating my children, so it's okay if I get angry and hit them, so they will be disciplined in praying and studying, so they won't become naughty children" (T, 39 years old, police officer); "To educate my wife to be obedient, not wasteful, and focus on the children, so I don't allow her to work, I control the finances with a monthly allowance" (A, 32 years old, employee); "as the head of the household, the family must follow the rules that I apply, so that my children and wife become better people. If words don't work, then it's not wrong for me to take firm action as punishment" (C, 51 years old, employee). In this context, indicators of violence such as shouting, slapping, threats, and economic restriction are not perceived as forms of oppression, but rather interpreted as disciplinary measures or forms of education.

The meaning of domestic violence is not only seen as a form of abuse, but also as a legitimate way to regulate the behavior of family members, especially children or spouses. Symbols such as "hitting for the good of the child," "anger because of love," "wives must obey," and "husbands are the head of the household" have reduced violence to a moral and responsible act. In the context of Pekalongan, the meaning of violence is redefined as a means of education and is considered a normal rule in the family. According to Lanchimba, this condition represents an effort to normalize violence, constructed through social interactions that frame violence as a legitimate tool for disciplining family members (Lanchimba et al., 2023). Victims of domestic violence often engage in internalized blaming and accept violence as a consequence of failing to fulfill their expected gender roles (Murvartian et al., 2024).

This view shows the existence of a social construct that allows the use of violence in educating children or controlling partners, which is often seen as part of legitimate social arrangements within the family. Patriarchal power relations and cultural habits place women and children as parties who are naturally controlled, even with violence, in the name of discipline and family stability (McKinley et al., 2021). Welsh's research indicates that cycles of intergenerational violence frequently persist because violence is perceived as a legitimate component of parenting or relationship practices, which are subsequently transmitted to the next generation (Welsh, 2022). This illustrates how social interactions can reinforce distorted perceptions of domestic violence and normalize violence in family relationships.

The perception of domestic violence as a shameful secret that must be covered up illustrates the social stigma surrounding it. This finding is reinforced by points from the interviews that say: "My niece was abused by her uncle, it's a family disgrace so it wasn't reported" (W, 35 years old, employee); "I had a bad experience, I was touched by the owner's son, I didn't tell my parents, I was ashamed and afraid because it was my disgrace, for the sake of

my good name, so I just kept quiet and moved out“ (N, 25 years old, student); ”a neighbor's child was once a victim of sexual abuse, but because it did not escalate to sexual intercourse, the case was settled amicably, for the sake of the good name and future of the perpetrator, who was also a minor“ (Z, 54 years old, lecturer). The situation in Pekalongan indicates that sexual violence is frequently regarded as a source of disgrace, which leads to concealment and non-reporting in order to safeguard family honor and future prospects. In symbolic interactionism theory, the social meaning of shame and honor is formed through social interactions that place great importance on how families and individuals are viewed by society.

These findings reinforce the study by Childress et al. that domestic violence as a shameful secret is the clearest sign of the process of privatization and moralization of violence (Childress et al., 2024). In Blumer's terms, the symbols of “shame” and ‘disgrace’ define a very powerful situation in which victims, perpetrators, families, and even authorities act to preserve “honor” rather than uphold rights. “Shame,” “fear of damaging the family's reputation,” and “a culture of silence” are the main factors that make victims reluctant to report, so that domestic violence remains latent in official statistics (Dickson et al., 2023). At this point, formal law experiences delegitimization because it does not enter into the horizon of meaning that is considered important by the actors involved. A study by Cipto shows that shame, fear of stigma, and concern about damaging the family's reputation are the main factors that make victims reluctant to report (Cipto, 2018). The social stigma attached to domestic violence further exacerbates the situation, because victims often feel isolated and fear being negatively labeled by society (Svégel, 2023). This fact, according to Blumer, shows that individuals act based on how they are perceived by others in their social interactions. Mukerji states that the social meaning of shame attached to domestic violence limits victims from seeking help or reporting the incident (Mukerji et al., 2023), so that domestic violence is referred to as a hidden crime that is covered up by the logic of privacy and family honor (Ciriaka, 2021).

The final interpretation is that violence is abuse by a husband against his wife or by parents against their children. Findings from the interview points state that: “When arguing with my wife, because of my emotions, I unconsciously cursed my wife with harsh and insulting words, causing my wife and children to cry and be afraid.” (A, 29 years old, private employee); “When my child is naughty, I often scold, pinch, and sometimes hit him so that he will not be naughty anymore” (R, 41 years old, housewife); “My father often yells and curses at my mother and me when he comes home drunk” (M, 25 years old, student). The phenomenon in Pekalongan indicates that domestic violence is interpreted as an unequal power relationship, manifested through acts such as verbal abuse, insults, pinching, and physical assault perpetrated by husbands against wives and children or by parents against their children.

In Blumer's theory (1986), the meaning of this violence is also shaped by social interactions that illustrate power imbalances in domestic relationships. Deeply entrenched patriarchal cultural norms further aggravate this situation, often positioning women and children in particularly vulnerable circumstances in relation to domestic violence (Batista et al., 2023). The symbol

of power underlying this view shows that domestic violence is understood as a form of abuse by those in power against those who are weaker, which in this case are often women or children (Franjić, 2023). However, as found in Lu's research, even though violence is recognized as abuse, society often does not fully understand the rights of victims to report or obtain legal protection (Lu, 2024). These findings are in line with Franjic's observation that the social meaning of unequal power in the household is reinforced by existing social interactions (Franjić, 2023), and because of this ignorance, many victims remain reluctant to report even though they realize they are experiencing violence.

These findings indicate that the distortion of understanding that exists in the Pekalongan community regarding domestic violence clearly shows a wide gap between the law and reality. The perception of domestic violence as a private matter, a form of family education, a source of disgrace, or an expression of power abuse between spouses and parents toward children reflects a substantial gap in public understanding regarding individual rights and the protective role of the law for victims. Thus, the distortions found in public perceptions of domestic violence are not only the result of ignorance, but also the product of broader social processes involving the formation and reproduction of social meanings in everyday interactions.

Public Distortions and the Delegitimization of Domestic Violence Law

Table 2 also shows data indicating that the public's understanding of domestic violence in Pekalongan is not only factually incorrect, but has also influenced public preferences regarding the resolution of domestic violence cases. The results of these preferences are manifested in the choice of action, as follows: 17 informants chose family mediation (34%), 13 informants chose divorce (26%), 6 informants chose mediation through a third party (12%), only 5 informants chose to go to court (10%), and 9 informants even stated that they did not know (18%). Quantitatively, around 72% of respondents preferred non-judicial channels (family mediation, third-party mediation, divorce outside the criminal justice system), only 10% explicitly chose the district court, while 18% did not even have a clear course of action. This data shows that the majority of the public directs conflicts outside the realm of formal criminal law. Domestic violence is frequently regarded as an occurrence that is inherent to family life and occurs exclusively within the family unit. Consequently, cases of domestic violence generally remain confined within the family circle. This perception, which frames domestic violence as a purely internal household matter, significantly influences the preferred model of case resolution.

The choice of mediation by the family and third-party mediation together shows the dominance of the informal justice system. Data from interview points states that: "My husband has a temper. When we fight, he often uses harsh words and likes to hit me, but eventually he apologizes. However, this happens again and again, so the family persuades us to reconcile for the sake of our children." (L, 45 years old, soldier); "Cases of sexual abuse that occur within the family are a disgrace to the family, especially if the perpetrator and victim are still children. It is best to resolve it within the family, for the sake of their reputation and future" (U, 53 years old, employee).

The findings above reaffirm that domestic violence cases in Pekalongan are predominantly resolved through mediation.

From Blummer's perspective, the choice of family mediation as the dominant option can be understood as an action that stems from the symbol of "family" as a sacred, private space whose integrity must be maintained. The family is not merely a biological unit, but a *symbolic object* imbued with "family values," "covering up family disgrace," and "maintaining reputation." From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the mediation forum is an arena for the production of new meanings, because violence, through an approach of advice and deep talk, is redefined as "ordinary domestic conflict" and "forgivable mistakes." Sari's study shows that actors in conflict tend to choose a resolution model that allows for direct negotiation of meaning within their immediate social circle, and mediation is positioned as a reasonable mechanism for saving face for all parties. Expressions of apology and assurances not to repeat the violence are often considered sufficient to conclude the case (Sari & Afdal, 2020). Mediators also often encourage victims to forgive for the sake of their children and family honor, and rarely emphasize the victim's right to legal protection (Sukendar et al., 2023).

Empirical studies on the enforcement of the Domestic Violence Law also confirm that the status of complaint offenses and the strong push for family reconciliation make law enforcement officials more likely to encourage mediation and reconciliation rather than pushing for criminal proceedings until a verdict is reached (Zurnetti et al., 2021; Zurnetti & Muliati, 2022). Families, community forums, and local institutions tend to promote peace for the sake of social harmony and shared reputation, even at the expense of victims' rights and the principle of formal justice (Ezema et al., 2023). In short, mediation is not just a procedure, but a symbolic process that shifts the category of domestic violence from crime to family trouble. At this stage, what seems to be a peaceful resolution is, in reality, a reproduction of meanings that ultimately disadvantage the victim.

Divorce is a solution to domestic violence. Data from the interview points indicate: "Rather than me and my children living in a state of depression, traumatized by my husband's violence, I chose to divorce" (U, 26 years old, housewife); "For the sake of the children, divorce is the best solution for us, rather than sending my husband to prison" (T, 32 years old, teacher); "Marital disputes are the cause of the failure of our marriage" (R, 34 years old, employee). The findings above suggest that divorce constitutes one of the most effective solutions for putting an end to domestic violence. "For the sake of the children," "the good name of the family," "choosing to divorce," "no harmony," "marital failure" are narratives of public acknowledgment that domestic violence has occurred, leading to divorce. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, divorce is interpreted as a social symbol that represents liberation from a relationship full of violence and injustice.

This finding is in line with view that divorce is a way out for many victims of domestic violence who feel they have no other choice to end the violence in their households (Zainuddin et al., 2022; Musawwamah, 2022). Divorce is often positioned by victims as a last resort after repeated violence and other formal mechanisms fail to provide adequate protection. Many Arab

Palestinian women in Israel also choose divorce, indicating that it serves as a form of resistance against violence, although this decision is frequently made under conditions of intense social stigma and economic vulnerability (Meler, 2023).

The fact that only five informants chose to take their cases to the District Court highlights the subordination of criminal law in the social perception of the community. Data from the interview points stated that: “My niece is traumatized, her uncle has abused her many times and the neighbors already know, so it was finally reported to the police” (S, 57 years old, employee); “To provide a deterrent effect, the domestic violence case had to be reported because the perpetrator, who was often drunk, had repeatedly committed acts of violence that endangered the health and lives of family members” (W, 48 years old, teacher). In Pekalongan, reporting domestic violence to the criminal justice system is a last resort when domestic violence can no longer be tolerated. “Endangering the safety of the family,” “providing a deterrent effect,” and “for the sake of justice for the victim” are narratives that domestic violence is not just a domestic conflict, but a violation of the law.

Reporting indicates that the victim, or the reporting party, reinterprets the violent situation not merely as a domestic dispute, but as a violation of the law (Batista et al., 2023; Nisa, 2021). This process also involves negotiations between the victim, the community, and law enforcement officials regarding what constitutes justice and protection for the victim (Purba & Koswara, 2023). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the decision to report to the police or court is a symbolic act that radically breaks the traditional meaning of domestic violence as a private matter and family disgrace as a crime.

The above explanation shows that the preference for resolving domestic violence in Pekalongan reflects the existence of shadow justice in the handling of domestic violence. Koshan states that shadow justice in the handling of domestic violence occurs when informal mechanisms are prioritized over substantive protection and justice for victims, so that the justice produced is only superficial and does not touch on the root causes of violence (Koshan, 2023). In addition, the situation in Pekalongan reveals a hierarchy of meaning in which family and social harmony occupy the highest position, followed by informal mediation and divorce, while criminal courts remain at the lowest level and are rarely utilized. Domestic violence as a *hidden crime* is protected by the logic of shame and family honor, so it tends to be transferred to informal justice mechanisms. This construction defines domestic violence as a private matter that should be resolved within the family, not in the public sphere or through the law. The public's preference for non-litigation in domestic violence cases is not merely a local phenomenon or a pragmatic choice; it reflects a deep symbolic conflict between formal law and social norms (Mahson et al., 2022). When private, patriarchal, and family honor norms continue to dominate social interpretation, criminal law and judicial institutions fail to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

This phenomenon creates a crisis of legal legitimacy for the elimination of domestic violence. Such delegitimization of the law not only reduces the number of reports but also allows domestic violence to continue to recur in private spaces without structural consequences (Chan & Xiao, 2021). The

failure of the law to secure legitimacy within everyday social interactions results in legal institutions and law enforcement agencies being unable to fulfill their function as guardians of public justice. As a result, even though legal regulations exist, the role of the law in eliminating DV remains limited. Domestic violence is not seen as a violation that must be processed legally, but rather as a problem that must be handled privately by the family or community. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the proposition that the delegitimization of DV law works through the symbolic realm, not just through institutional weaknesses.

The community acts logically according to the meanings they adhere to: protecting the family, covering up shame, restoring harmony. However, in the framework of victims' rights and the state's obligations, this logic results in misplaced justice, justice that shifts from the bodies and experiences of victims to the abstractions of "family" and "social order." The challenge for future policy is not simply to increase awareness of the law, but to intervene in the production of meaning: redefining reporting as an act of dignity, reinterpreting mediation not as a mechanism for closing cases but as a bridge to protection, and shifting the symbol of "family shame" to "intolerable violation of rights." In Blumer's terms (1986), the definition of the situation within mediation settings shifts the emphasis from violations against the victim's body and rights to perceived damage to the family's image. As a consequence, justice becomes misplaced, prioritizing the symbolic stability of the family rather than the victim's recovery.

Conclusion

This study shows that in Pekalongan, domestic violence is not predominantly interpreted as a criminal act, but is reduced to a domestic issue, a mechanism of education within the family, and a disgrace that must be covered up. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this shows that the meaning of domestic violence is formed and reproduced through daily interactions within the family, community, and religious spaces with the main framework of maintaining family harmony and honor, rather than protecting the rights of victims. As a consequence, the normative categories established by the law do not serve as the principal reference point when the community interprets and responds to domestic violence. The distortion of the meaning of domestic violence shifts the paradigm from criminal wrongdoing to domestic disobedience, which weakens the function of the law as a protector of victims. In short, the findings in Pekalongan show that the main problem with the implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence is not only the gap between law in the books and law in action, but also a crisis at the level of law in meaning.

The direct implication of this distortion of meaning is the substantive delegitimization of the law on the elimination of domestic violence. The preference for solutions that emphasize family mediation, informal mediation, and divorce, alongside the limited use of criminal mechanisms and formal protection, indicates that state law is not regarded as the primary arena for pursuing justice. The law operates as a formal and abstract normative framework, but lacks symbolic authority in social practice. Thus, the main

problem is not the absence of regulation, but the failure of the law to change the social definition of DV from a private matter and family disgrace to a violation of rights and a public crime.

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