

REWRITING WIDOWHOOD: DISRUPTING PATRIARCHAL FAMILY IDEAS THROUGH DIGITAL FEMINIST NARRATIVES

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Abstract. Widows in Indonesian society often face social stigma shaped by patriarchal norms and traditional expectations of women's roles within the family. They are frequently associated with negative stereotypes that portray them as immoral, socially disruptive, dependent, or incompatible with dominant family ideals. While previous studies have explored widowhood stigma through interviews, field observations, and media analysis, limited research has examined how stigma and resistance are constructed through organizational digital discourse. This study analyzes how narratives of widowhood are represented and challenged through Instagram captions published by @yayasanpekka between 2018 and 2025. The captions were compiled into a textual corpus and analyzed using AntConc to identify dominant keywords and recurring narrative patterns. Corpus-assisted analysis was combined with qualitative interpretation and Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory to examine how widows' lived experiences are articulated as feminist knowledge. The findings show that keywords such as *perempuan* (women), *desa* (village), *mereka* (they), *keluarga* (family), and *kelompok* (group) reflect women's agency, rural community, family responsibility, and collective solidarity. The analysis further reveals that @yayasanpekka reconstructs widowhood from a stigmatized marital status into an active social identity by representing widows as dignified women, family leaders, knowledge producers, and members of a collective social movement. The study concludes that Yayasan PEKKA's Instagram account functions not only as an informational platform, but also as a digital feminist space that resists misogynistic representations and reshapes public perceptions of widowhood in Indonesian society.

Keywords: widowhood, social stigma, digital feminist discourse, digital humanities, @yayasanpekka

Introduction

In many societies, widows often face persistent social stigma shaped by cultural expectations surrounding gender roles and family structures. In Indonesia, the term "widow" is frequently associated with negative stereotypes that go beyond marital status. Sofyan et al. (2021) explain that widows are often labeled as immoral, socially disruptive, or personally unsuccessful, reflecting deeply rooted patriarchal norms within society. Media representations also contribute to this stigma, as widows are sometimes portrayed through sensationalized or sexualized narratives that reinforce negative public perceptions (Nuzula & Rizkiantono, 2021).

These stigmatizing views are closely related to dominant cultural beliefs about women's roles within the family. Social norms often position women primarily as wives who support their husbands, making widowhood appear as a deviation from the perceived ideal family structure. According to Rachman et al. (2023), widows, especially those who become female heads of households due to divorce, are frequently associated with shame and social disgrace, which may reduce their social standing within the community.

The stigma surrounding widowhood also reflects broader structural inequalities experienced by female-headed households. Putri and Darwis (2015) state that women who lead households often face economic vulnerability and limited institutional recognition, as their roles are not always adequately acknowledged within legal or policy frameworks. In addition, Leopold (2018) shows that families headed by divorced women often experience greater and longer-lasting welfare challenges compared to male-headed households. Low income leads to economic difficulties within the family, making it challenging to achieve

family well-being (Dar, 2018). Economic pressure may also be influenced by factors such as geographical differences, educational level, and available financial resources, as explained by Sabania and Hartoyo (2016).

Despite these challenges, women who become heads of households often demonstrate resilience, agency, and leadership in managing their families and communities. From the perspective of Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory, knowledge can emerge from marginalized social positions. Harding (1986) argues that individuals who experience social marginalization possess unique perspectives that can reveal power relations embedded within dominant social structures. In this context, widows' lived experiences provide an important standpoint from which patriarchal assumptions about family roles and gender expectations can be critically examined.

Digital media platforms have increasingly become spaces where marginalized groups can express their experiences and challenge dominant narratives. One notable example is the Instagram account of Yayasan PEKKA, an organization dedicated to empowering women heads of households. Through visual storytelling, testimonials, and advocacy campaigns, the platform provides a space where widows and female heads of households can share their experiences, build solidarity, and reshape public perceptions about their social roles.

Previous studies have examined the social stigma experienced by widows and female heads of households in Indonesian society. According to Salsabila and Budhi (2024), negative perceptions toward widows are strongly influenced by patriarchal cultural norms, which often portray widows as socially vulnerable and incompatible with the dominant ideal of family structures. Their findings indicate that widows are frequently associated with negative assumptions that marginalize their social roles within the community. These stigmatizing views are also reinforced through media representation. Yusuf (2020) argues that widows and divorcees are negatively portrayed in Indonesian popular media, including mainstream films, dangdut songs, and news coverage. The study reveals that widows are commonly depicted through stereotypical attributes such as seductive, dependent, inferior, or socially problematic, which contributes to the continuation of stigma in society. In a similar vein, Zumiarti et al. (2024) point out that widows frequently become targets of prejudice and discriminatory treatment within digital platforms such as TikTok. Their results show that patriarchal and misogynistic narratives dominate digital discourse, although some counter-narratives of empowerment begin to appear and challenge these stigmatizing representations. Meanwhile, Ramadhany (2022) examines how women within the PEKKA community navigate social stigma and economic challenges. Her findings demonstrate that female heads of households actively assume leadership roles in their families, develop economic strategies, and reconstruct their social identities, thereby challenging the stereotype that widows are weak or dependent.

However, these studies primarily rely on qualitative interviews, field observations, or media content analysis and rarely examine how stigma and resistance narratives are constructed within organizational digital media discourse. Moreover, limited research has analyzed how digital feminist narratives on social media platforms contribute to the reconstruction of public perceptions toward widowhood, especially through collective voices represented by community organizations. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by applying a digital humanities approach to analyze narrative patterns within Instagram captions published by Yayasan PEKKA. By combining corpus-assisted analysis with feminist standpoint theory proposed by Harding (1986), which emphasizes that marginalized women's lived experiences provide critical knowledge to challenge dominant patriarchal perspectives, this research aims to explore how widows' voices are articulated in digital narratives and how these narratives challenge patriarchal family ideals.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of digital humanities. This approach is appropriate for exploring social phenomena through textual data and describing meanings conveyed in digital narratives. According to Margaret Sandelowski (2000), qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive summary of events derived from the data. In addition, the digital humanities framework enables the integration of computational tools with interpretative analysis to examine social and cultural meanings in digital texts, as discussed by David M. Berry (2012). Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing captions from Instagram posts published by Yayasan PEKKA as digital feminist narratives.

The dataset consists of captions collected from Instagram posts published between 2018 and 2025. These captions were compiled into a textual corpus to allow systematic linguistic analysis. The textual data were analyzed using AntConc, a corpus analysis software designed to identify word frequencies, collocations, and concordance patterns. As explained by Laurence Anthony (2022), AntConc facilitates corpus-based

analysis by enabling researchers to examine recurring lexical patterns in discourse. This tool was used to identify dominant keywords and linguistic patterns related to women's empowerment and social representation.

Keyword analysis was conducted to identify recurring lexical patterns within the dataset. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis allows researchers to detect thematic tendencies that may not be immediately visible through manual reading. According to Paul Baker (2006), keyword frequency analysis can reveal dominant themes and underlying ideological patterns in textual data. The analysis identified several prominent keywords such as *perempuan* (women), *desa* (village), *mereka* (they), *keluarga* (family), and *kelompok* (group). These keywords indicate thematic emphasis on women's agency, community solidarity, and collective identity.

To complement the corpus analysis, qualitative interpretation was applied to selected captions to examine the narrative meanings presented within the posts. This interpretative step allows linguistic patterns to be contextualized within broader social and cultural discourses. Through the combination of corpus-assisted digital analysis and qualitative interpretation, this study aims to reveal how narratives surrounding widows are constructed and represented within digital feminist discourse. This methodological design enables the study to examine both linguistic patterns and the social meanings conveyed within digital narratives.

Results and Discussion

Dominant Keywords and Narrative Patterns

The corpus analysis of Instagram captions published by Yayasan PEKKA between 2018 and 2025 identified five dominant keywords: *perempuan* (women), *desa* (village), *mereka* (they), *keluarga* (family), and *kelompok* (group). The keyword *perempuan* appeared 754 times, followed by *desa* with 377 occurrences, *mereka* with 340 occurrences, *keluarga* with 310 occurrences, and *kelompok* with 294 occurrences. The frequency of these words shows that PEKKA's digital narratives consistently center on women's experiences, rural communities, family responsibility, and collective participation. Therefore, the keyword pattern provides an initial indication that PEKKA's Instagram discourse is not only informational but also ideological, as it constructs widowhood through the themes of agency, solidarity, and social contribution.

In corpus-assisted discourse analysis, recurring keywords are significant because they reveal themes and values that repeatedly appear within a body of text. Baker (2006) argues that keyword analysis can help identify dominant meanings and ideological tendencies in discourse. Based on this perspective, the high frequency of *perempuan* indicates that women are positioned as the central subjects of PEKKA's advocacy. The recurrence of *keluarga* shows that family remains an important site of struggle and representation, while *kelompok* and *mereka* emphasize collective identity rather than individual experience. Meanwhile, *desa* situates these narratives within rural social contexts where many women heads of households live and organize their daily lives. Thus, these keywords suggest that PEKKA's digital narratives are shaped by the intersection of gender, family, community, and rural empowerment.

The relationship among these keywords also shows that PEKKA does not represent widowhood as a private or isolated condition. Instead, widowhood is narrated as part of broader social realities involving family leadership, economic responsibility, and community participation. This finding is in line with Amelia et al. (2024), who argue that alternative media can provide space for women's voices and experiences that are often marginalized in mainstream media. In this context, PEKKA's Instagram account functions as an alternative digital space where widows and female heads of households are represented through collective strength rather than social shame. Therefore, the dominant keywords become the foundation for understanding how PEKKA reconstructs widowhood as a social identity, a source of knowledge, and a form of resistance against patriarchal family ideals.

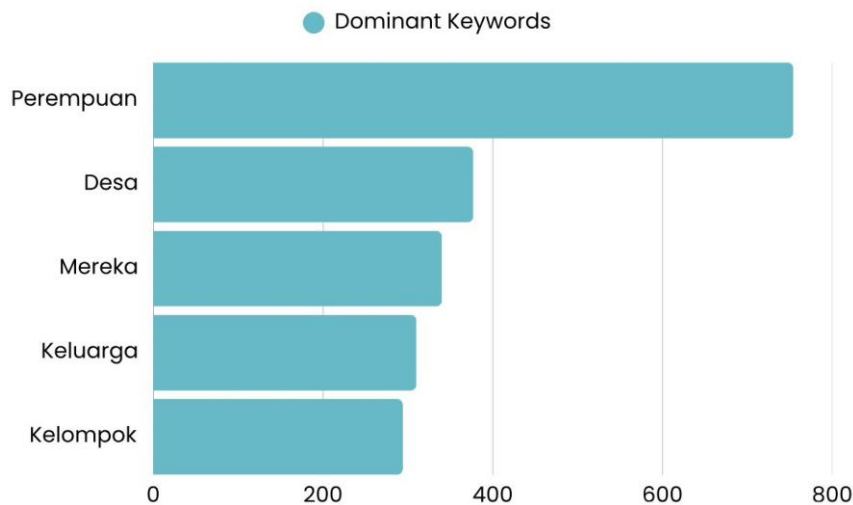


Table 1. Dominant Keywords
Instagram account @yayasanpekka [source]

From Widowhood as Status to Social Identity

One significant finding of this study is that PEKKA's narratives shift the meaning of widowhood from a stigmatized marital status into an active social identity. In Indonesian society, widows are often judged primarily through their marital condition, while their roles as family leaders, workers, caregivers, and community members are frequently overlooked. This reflects what Goffman (1963) describes as "spoiled identity," in which a single negative label dominates how a person is socially perceived. In the case of widows, the label *janda* often reduces women's identities to stigma and moral suspicion, rather than acknowledging their lived realities and contributions. This indicates that widowhood stigma is not merely an individual experience, but a social construction that limits women's recognition within family and community life.

PEKKA challenges this construction by offering a different way of understanding widowhood. Rather than avoiding the term *janda*, PEKKA directly confronts its negative meaning and redefines it through the language of role, leadership, and social movement. This can be seen in Data 1.

Data 1.

"Merubah narasi janda yang erat dengan stigma negatif di masyarakat Indonesia menjadi lebih dari sekedar status, tetapi peran yang mereka jalani sebagai pemimpin dalam keluarga dan sebuah gerakan sosial."

[Changing the narrative of widows, which is closely associated with negative stigma in Indonesian society, into more than merely a status, but a role they carry out as leaders in the family and as part of a social movement.]

This caption is important because it explicitly contrasts *status* with *peran* (role). The word *status* suggests a passive condition assigned by society, while *peran* emphasizes action, responsibility, and social function. By describing widows as *pemimpin dalam keluarga* (leaders in the family) and part of *sebuah gerakan sosial* (a social movement), PEKKA connects widowhood with leadership and collective transformation rather than shame or failure. Therefore, this caption shows that PEKKA does not simply defend widows from stigma, but actively reconstructs widowhood as a meaningful and socially valuable identity.

This narrative shift is closely related to feminist efforts to challenge patriarchal assumptions about women's roles in the family. Patriarchal culture often defines women's social value through their relationship to men, particularly as wives within a male-headed household. When women become widows or heads of households, they are frequently positioned outside the ideal family structure and treated as socially incomplete.

PEKKA's narrative disrupts this logic by showing that women's identity and dignity do not depend on marital attachment to male authority. Thus, PEKKA's digital discourse reframes widowhood as a position of agency, responsibility, and leadership within both family and society.

Widows as Subjects of Knowledge

Another important finding is that PEKKA's narratives reposition widows from passive objects of representation into active subjects of knowledge. In many public and media discourses, widows are often talked about by others rather than given space to define their own experiences. They may appear as objects of pity, suspicion, or moral judgment, but their perspectives are rarely treated as legitimate sources of social understanding. Nurfaiza and Ihsani (2024) state that widowed women continue to face negative stigma on digital platforms, even though online spaces provide more opportunities for self-expression. This suggests that digital visibility alone is not enough unless marginalized women are also recognized as speaking subjects.

PEKKA addresses this issue by centering the lived experiences of women heads of households in its Instagram narratives. The frequent appearance of *mereka* and *kelompok* shows that widows are not represented as isolated individuals, but as members of a collective community with shared struggles and shared forms of agency. Through narratives of family responsibility, economic survival, leadership training, and community organizing, PEKKA presents widows as women who produce knowledge from their own lived realities. Their experiences reveal how family life operates when women become the main decision-makers and providers. Therefore, PEKKA's narratives transform widows from objects of social concern into subjects whose experiences carry political and social meaning.

This finding is strongly connected to Harding's Standpoint Theory, which argues that marginalized social positions can produce critical knowledge about dominant power structures (Harding, 1986). From this perspective, widows and female heads of households are not merely vulnerable groups, but social actors whose experiences expose the limitations of patriarchal assumptions about family and gender roles. Their everyday practices challenge the belief that family stability depends on male authority. By making these experiences visible through digital narratives, PEKKA treats widows' voices as a valid standpoint for understanding inequality and resistance. Thus, PEKKA's Instagram captions function not only as advocacy texts but also as a platform for producing feminist knowledge from the perspective of marginalized women.

Digital Feminist Narratives as Resistance

This study also finds that PEKKA uses Instagram as a space of resistance against misogynistic and stigmatizing narratives about widows. Digital platforms can provide opportunities for marginalized groups to speak, organize, and build solidarity, but they can also reproduce discrimination and gender-based stereotypes. Singh and Parashar (2024) explain that digital spaces are not neutral because they may contain both empowerment and oppression. In this context, PEKKA's use of Instagram should not be understood merely as social media communication, but as a feminist strategy to challenge harmful public narratives. Therefore, PEKKA's digital presence becomes part of a broader effort to resist the normalization of widow stigma. This form of resistance is clearly shown in Data 2.

Data 2.

"Kami menolak segala bentuk kampanye yang mengandung narasi misoginis, termasuk yang merendahkan janda."

[We reject all forms of campaigns that contain misogynistic narratives, including those that degrade widows.]

The caption is significant because it uses direct and collective language. The pronoun *kami* (we) constructs resistance as a shared position, showing that PEKKA speaks not only as an organization but also as part of a wider community of women heads of households. The verb *menolak* (to reject) indicates active refusal rather than passive disagreement, while the phrase *narasi misoginis* (misogynistic narratives) directly names the structure of discrimination being challenged. By explicitly mentioning narratives that demean widows, PEKKA refuses to soften the issue or treat it as ordinary social prejudice. Therefore, this caption functions as a public act of feminist resistance that confronts misogynistic discourse in the digital sphere.

The act of naming misogyny is important because it shifts the problem from individual insult to structural inequality. When negative narratives about widows are identified as misogynistic, they are no longer

seen as harmless jokes, cultural habits, or personal opinions. Instead, they are exposed as part of a broader patriarchal discourse that regulates women's identities and social positions. Ndlovu (2024) argues that publicly naming oppressive structures can become a form of resistance because it refuses silence and forces dominant narratives to be questioned. Thus, PEKKA's Instagram narratives resist widow stigma by turning digital space into a site of collective voice, public refusal, and feminist counter-discourse.

Challenging Patriarchal Family Ideology

The most important finding of this study is that PEKKA's narratives challenge patriarchal family ideology by redefining who can become a legitimate family leader. Patriarchal norms often position men as natural heads of households, while women are associated with supportive and domestic roles. Within this ideology, a family led by a woman may be viewed as incomplete, vulnerable, or socially deviant because it does not follow the dominant model of male authority. This is one reason widows often experience stigma not only as individuals, but also as heads of households. This indicates that the marginalization of widows is closely tied to the patriarchal belief that family leadership should belong primarily to men. PEKKA's digital narratives challenge this belief by presenting women heads of households as capable, dignified, and socially important leaders. This can be seen in Data 3 and Data 4.

Data 3.

"Janda adalah perempuan bermartabat yang memikul tanggung jawab besar sebagai pemimpin keluarga yang berperan penting dalam masyarakat."

[Widows are dignified women who carry great responsibility as family leaders and play an important role in society.]

Data 4.

"Perempuan Kepala Keluarga Punya Kesempatan Belajar Jadi Pemimpin bagi Diri, Keluarga dan Masyarakat."

[Women heads of households have the opportunity to learn to become leaders for themselves, their families, and society.]

In Data 3, the word *bermartabat* (dignified) is placed before the explanation of responsibility and leadership. This word choice is important because it establishes dignity as something widows already possess, not something they must prove through marriage or male recognition. This interpretation is relevant to Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma, in which a negative social label can reduce a person's identity in society. The caption then connects dignity with responsibility by describing widows as *pemimpin keluarga* (family leaders) who play an important role in society. Therefore, this narrative challenges the patriarchal assumption that women's social value depends on their position as wives within male-headed families.

Data 4 further strengthens this challenge by showing leadership as a skill that women can learn and practice in different areas of life. The phrase *kesempatan belajar* (opportunity to learn) suggests that leadership is not a quality naturally attached to men, but a capacity that can be developed through experience and empowerment. This is in line with Putri and Darwis (2015), who emphasize that women heads of households need recognition and empowerment because they hold important responsibilities in both family and social life. The movement from *diri* (self) to *keluarga* (family) and then to *masyarakat* (society) shows that women's leadership extends beyond the domestic sphere. Through this caption, PEKKA presents women's leadership as beginning with personal growth, continuing through family responsibility, and expanding into community participation. Thus, the caption broadens the meaning of family leadership and positions women as active agents in both private and public life.

These findings support Harding's Standpoint Theory because the lived experiences of women heads of households reveal alternative ways of understanding family, leadership, and social responsibility (Harding, 1986). Through their everyday roles, widows demonstrate that family stability does not depend solely on male authority. Their experiences challenge the dominant patriarchal model by showing that women can lead, provide, organize, and make decisions for their families and communities. By circulating these narratives through Instagram, PEKKA makes marginalized women's standpoints visible within digital public discourse.

Therefore, PEKKA's digital feminist narratives not only reject negative stereotypes about widows but also propose a more inclusive understanding of family leadership based on dignity, agency, and women's lived experience.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that Yayasan PEKKA's Instagram narratives actively rewrite widowhood by challenging the patriarchal assumption that women's social value and family legitimacy depend on male authority. Through AntConc-assisted analysis and Harding's Standpoint Theory, this study shows that PEKKA's captions do not merely represent widows as vulnerable subjects, but reposition them as family leaders, knowledge producers, and members of a collective social movement. In this way, widowhood is reconstructed not as a sign of failure or social incompleteness, but as a standpoint from which women articulate dignity, responsibility, and resistance.

The recurring keywords, particularly *perempuan* (women), *keluarga* (family), *kelompok* (group), *desa* (village), and *mereka* (they), reveal that PEKKA's digital narratives consistently place widows and women heads of households within broader networks of family, community, and collective agency. These patterns show that PEKKA does not frame widowhood as an isolated personal condition. Instead, widowhood is narrated as part of women's everyday practices of sustaining families, organizing communities, and participating in social change.

This reconstruction directly disrupts patriarchal family ideology by questioning the belief that the ideal family must be centered on male leadership. PEKKA's captions present women-headed households as legitimate and meaningful family structures sustained through women's care, decision-making, economic responsibility, and community participation. By describing widows as dignified women and family leaders, PEKKA challenges the stigma attached to *janda* and replaces it with a narrative of capability, leadership, and social contribution.

Therefore, PEKKA's Instagram account functions not only as a platform for advocacy but also as a digital feminist space where marginalized women's lived experiences become a source of counter-knowledge. The study contributes to feminist digital discourse by showing how organizational social media narratives can resist misogynistic representations and produce alternative meanings of family beyond male-centered norms. Although this study focuses only on Instagram captions from one organization, it demonstrates that widowhood can be understood not as a deviation from the ideal family structure, but as a critical standpoint from which women redefine family, leadership, and social legitimacy.

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