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The Portrayal of High-Risk Crimes in News Media:
A Comparative Study between the UK and Norway

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the portrayal of people who have been involved in cases of high-risk crimes in the news media of the UK and Norway, evaluating the extent to which these portrayals reflect punitive or rehabilitative approaches. Given that media narratives can significantly impact public opinion and policy, the depiction of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Drawing on Entman's framing theory (1993), this research analyses 260 news articles published between 2023 and 2024 from various newspapers in both countries through qualitative content analysis, identifying two distinct frames: the "insane beast" and "people in need of help". Although both frames appear in each country, their prominence differs. UK media predominantly employs the "insane beast" frame, characterized by sensationalized coverage, derogatory language, and victim-centred narratives designed to elicit strong emotional responses. This framing reinforces negative stereotypes and may contribute to public demands for harsher penalties. Conversely, Norwegian media emphasizes the "people in need of help" frame, which prioritizes privacy, anonymity, and the potential for reintegration. Norwegian coverage often adopts a more evaluative tone, considering broader societal contexts and balancing the perspectives of both victims and individuals involved in high-risk crimes. The findings highlight key differences in media framing: UK media tends to foster a more punitive stance among the public, whereas Norwegian media promotes a more rehabilitative and inclusive outlook on individuals who have committed high-risk crimes. This study underscores the importance of responsible journalism in influencing attitudes and shaping policies within the criminal justice system.

Keywords: news media; United Kingdom; Norway; newspapers; high-risk crime; offending individuals; media framing

Introduction

Media play a pivotal role in shaping and influencing public opinion, especially in shaping perspectives on political issues and crime (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Politicians and journalists predominantly communicate through mass media, such as television and newspapers, meaning that most political and crime-related information is mediated through these outlets. Media attention is critical for setting the political agenda, reflecting policy beliefs while simultaneously participating in shaping narratives through advocacy coalitions. Public opinion can directly affect policy implementation, driven by the electoral competition that forces governments to align with public sentiment to maintain electoral success (Burstein, 2003; Page & Shapiro, 1983). This dynamic underscores media's dual role in policy development: as both a mirror of existing political beliefs and an active participant in framing those beliefs (Shanahan et al., 2011).

Framing theory suggests that media do more than just highlight events; they also shape the way they are understood. When media outlets decide what to include or exclude in a story, they “frame” the information to present a specific perspective (An & Gower, 2009). Framing involves selecting particular aspects of an issue to emphasize, guiding public interpretation (Koning et al., 2024). Entman (1993) offers a widely cited conceptualization of framing, defining it as “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (see also Weaver, 2007, p. 142; Moy et al., 2016, p. 117; De Vreese, 2005, p. 52). This definition underscores how framing does not merely highlight issues but actively shapes the interpretive lens through which audiences understand them.

Conveyed information, often through the presentation of one-sided stories, exhibits bias (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). This bias may manifest in ideological forms or a disproportionate focus on either the positive or negative aspects of an issue. Such biased framing can affect public perception, influencing political engagement and behaviour. These frames are not only biased but may also be incomplete or stereotypical, leading to policies that inadequately address critical societal concerns (Koning et al., 2024). As epistemological tools, media shape the public's understanding of the social and political world, influencing both the reflection and construction of societal knowledge (Hoffman, 2013).

Media coverage is also a primary source of information on the topic of crime for the public, yet its primary goal is to sell stories, often resulting in sensationalized crime reporting (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018). Sensational characteristics strongly influence article prominence, predicting front-page placement, the inclusion of photographs, and article length (Wong & Harraway, 2020). Sensationalism amplifies the perceived impact of fear-inciting homicides, even though such homicides are not inherently sensational. This focus heightens awareness of specific homicide types, distorts public perceptions of violent crime, and magnifies fear. This fear of crime drives governments toward more punitive responses, as public sentiment increasingly favours stringent measures (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018).

This article explores the portrayal in news media of individuals who have been involved in cases of high-risk crimes in the UK and Norway, focusing on the differences between their rehabilitative and punitive approaches. Norway, known for its focus on rehabilitation, while in the UK a more punitive prison system has recently shifted towards rehabilitation. The article first presents theoretical notions on the coverage of crime, newsworthiness and the impact on reintegration. Then, the penal climate of both the UK and Norway are discussed followed by a description of the data collection process and qualitative document analysis before presenting the findings and discussion.

The Interplay of Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing in Crime Reporting

Agenda-setting, framing, and priming together explain how media shape not only which issues are most salient but also how these issues are interpreted and evaluated. Agenda-setting theory emphasizes that media attention determines what the public perceives as important, while second-level agenda-setting extends this logic to the salience of specific issue attributes (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002; Weaver, 2007). Priming occurs when these media emphases influence the standards people use to evaluate political actors, institutions, or policies (Moy et al., 2016). Framing extends beyond salience by embedding issues in interpretive packages that define problems, assign responsibility, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993; De Vreese, 2005). Together, these theories demonstrate that crime reporting not only raises public awareness of criminal activity, but also constructs interpretive contexts that reinforce particular political and moral understandings of crime.

Empirical studies illustrate these effects in practice. Graziano and Percoco (2016) found that crime coverage in Italy elevated perceptions of insecurity and influenced voting behaviour, even when actual crime rates were declining. Park, Holody and Zhang (2012) showed that media coverage of school shootings racialized perpetrators by highlighting ethnicity in some cases, linking individual acts to broader group identities. Son and Fielding (2024) demonstrated that thematic coverage of violence against women was more likely to trigger political agenda-setting than episodic, event-focused reporting. These findings underscore that the type of frame has consequences for shaping public concern and policy responses.

High-risk crimes such as terrorism, mass shootings, or violent sexual assaults intensify these mechanisms. Coverage of such crimes is frequently disproportionate to their actual prevalence, elevating them on the public agenda and amplifying fear (Graziano & Percoco, 2016). This heightened salience primes audiences to evaluate political leaders and justice institutions primarily through the lens of security and punishment (Moy et al., 2016). At the same time, framing strategies shape interpretation: sensational, episodic coverage emphasizes individual culpability and moral outrage, while thematic frames situate these crimes within broader social or institutional contexts (Son & Fielding, 2024).

Media Coverage of Crime and Impact on Reintegration

The sensationalism of crime stories is closely tied to the concept of newsworthiness, where only certain crimes, typically violent and involving specific demographics, receive substantial media attention (Gekoski et al., 2012). Crimes involving young or elderly victims, white or high-status victims, and those with multiple victims or unfamiliar perpetrators tend to dominate media coverage. Elevating the newsworthiness are crimes that involve an “ideal victim” which is characterized by innocence, vulnerability, and a lack of responsibility for the crime (Christie, 1987; expanded by Duggan, 2018). Victims who do not fit this archetype often receive less media coverage, as their plight does not challenge the public’s belief in a just world, where people “get what they deserve” (Lerner & Miller, 1978). This belief system reinforces media’s selective attention to crime, as only crimes that disrupt this perception garner significant public and media attention (Gekoski et al., 2012).

Selective media attention also extends to the portrayals of individuals involved in crime, with men often depicted as violent and women as more amenable to rehabilitation (Saavedra et al., 2019). In cases that involve individuals who commit sexual offenses, Da Silva et al. (2023) observed that media often focuses on extreme cases, depicting individuals involved in the act as monstrous and irredeemable, which skews public opinion and undermines rehabilitation efforts. Media representations of those involved in sex offenses are often age- and gender specific, with child victims portrayed in graphic, sexualized terms, while those involved in sex offenses tend to be older. Media coverage often focuses on violent crimes committed by persons who been involved in (such a) crime before, particularly those involving multiple victims and cases where the perpetrator and victim

have no prior relationship (DiBennardo, 2018). These representations perpetuate gendered stereotypes and justify different control practices within the prison system.

Media framing plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, particularly concerning people who have been involved in cases of high risk crimes, whose reintegration often faces intense scrutiny (Liem & Weggemans, 2018). With the rise of digital media, those individuals are more easily identified, further compounding the challenges they face upon release. This stigmatization process aligns with labelling theory, where individuals are marked as deviant based on their past behaviour (Davis, 1972). Once labelled, they often internalize this identity, making reintegration more challenging. The media's role in this labelling process can perpetuate social exclusion and marginalization, hindering rehabilitation efforts. This stigmatization is also closely linked to the concept of "othering", where specific individuals are depicted as fundamentally different and dangerous, which dehumanizes them and makes reintegration even more difficult (Jensen, 2011). Media portrayals of formerly imprisoned individuals reinforce this narrative, further distancing them from society and reducing their chances of successful re-entry.

Public support is crucial for successful rehabilitation efforts, as community inclusion significantly reduces the likelihood of reoffending (Fox, 2015), yet the media plays a role in shaping broader societal views on rehabilitation and reintegration. Sotirovic (2001) found that media framing can simplify complex issues, such as the death penalty and prisoner rehabilitation, leading to more extreme public opinions. In contrast, balanced news coverage can promote more nuanced thinking and foster support for rehabilitative policies. Berlin and Malin (1991) further demonstrated the media's impact on public perceptions of psychiatric rehabilitation, highlighting how selective reporting on failures distorts public views on treatment effectiveness. This distortion can similarly affect perceptions of rehabilitation programs, leading to reduced public support for such initiatives.

In summary, the impact of media portrayals of crime and individuals involved in crime shape perceptions of reintegration from prison and rehabilitation efforts. Specifically for individuals who have been involved in cases of high-risk crimes, these portrayals emphasize societal distrust towards ex-offending individuals, media distortion concentrating solely on treatment failures, gendered representation, and the resultant effect on policy effectiveness. Media portrayal of formerly imprisoned individuals, particularly those involved in high-profile cases, exacerbates their stigmatization, making reintegration more difficult (Geiger, 2006). Overall, these findings highlight the negative impact of media attention on the reintegration of those who have been involved in cases of high-risk crimes.

Penal Climate the United Kingdom and Norway

Sentencing, Incarceration and Reconviction Rates

In 2023, the average prison sentence in the United Kingdom for all offenses was 22.8 months (Ministry of Justice, 2024a) and in Norway around eight months (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024). Life sentences in the UK are imposed for the most serious crimes, such as murder, while other severe offenses like rape or armed robbery can also warrant life imprisonment (GOV.UK, 2020). Norway's maximum prison sentence is 21 years, except in cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, or severe terrorism, where the sentence can extend to 30 years (The Penal Code, 2005; Kriminalomsorgen, 2024). Preventive detention cases allow for extensions of up to five years, ensuring that prisoners can be held if they pose a continued threat (The Penal Code, 2005, section 40-43).

In the UK, the incarceration rate in 2023 was 146 per 100,000 inhabitants, with a total of 83,844 individuals in prison (Prison Insider, 2023a). The homicide rate was 11.7 per 100,000 inhabitants. In Norway, the incarceration rate in 2023 was 57 per 100,000 inhabitants, with a total of 3,068 individuals in prison (Prison Insider, 2023b). The homicide rate was 0.57 per 100,000 inhabitants. In 2020, the reconviction rate for

individuals released from prison in the UK was 38.9%, with the majority of reconvictions occurring within a two-year follow-up period (Yukhnenko et al., 2023). Notably, adults released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months had a significantly higher proven reoffending rate of 56.6% (Ministry of Justice, 2024b). In 2018, the recidivism rate in Norway was 17.6%, based on a two-year follow-up period after the conviction and serving of a prison sentence (Yukhnenko et al., 2023). In 2020, this number dropped to 16%. However, this decrease may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a fewer registered crimes and reduced activity in prosecutions and courts, potentially affecting the reconviction rate for that year (Kristoffersen, 2024, p. 60).

Reform and Rehabilitation

In 2021, the UK introduced long-term goals for its prison system, focusing on creating safe environments and deterring crime, while also providing conditions that promote prisoner reform (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Rehabilitation programs are based on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) principles, which target factors associated with criminal behaviour and provide interventions that are tailored to individual needs (Ward et al., 2007). In Norway, the implementation of prison sentences is aimed to reduce recidivism by promoting behaviour reform (Execution of Sentences Act, 2004). This process is guided by the principle of normality, which strives to make prison life as similar to life outside as possible and incarceration should not impose additional punishment beyond the deprivation of liberty (Høidal, 2018; Kriminalomsorgen, 2024).

Although the Norwegian prison system seems to be based on normalisation principles, data indicates that one in four prisoners spends over 16 hours per day confined to their cells on weekdays, with even longer periods of isolation on weekends (Todd-Kvam, 2022). Such conditions are particularly detrimental to individuals serving longer sentences, as extended isolation weakens their ability to reintegrate effectively into society. Also in the UK, over half (53%) of prisoners spend more than 22 hours per day confined to their cells; a figure that rises to 69% on weekends.

Both countries deal with several shortcomings in their prison system. In the UK, there is a lack of sufficient educational and work opportunities, which are essential for successful rehabilitation (Shepherd & Regan, 2023). These deficiencies are largely due to staffing shortages and a lack of experienced personnel. Access to work and training programmes remains scarce, further impeding efforts to prepare individuals for reintegration into society. The situation is particularly dire for vulnerable populations (Shepherd & Regan, 2023). Only 35% of prisoners with mental health issues receive adequate support, and merely 32% of those requiring addiction treatment complete such programs within prison settings. In Norway, the lack of coordination among institutions and government levels leads to gaps in service provision and inconsistent follow-up support for ex-prisoners (Todd-Kvam, 2022; Andvig et al., 2021). While prison services are obligated to provide individualized release preparation, these programs often fail in practice, leaving many without adequate assistance upon release. Furthermore, prisons often fail to prepare inmates for the modern labour market. Training programs focus on outdated skills, such as ferry work or ecological agriculture, and are largely irrelevant in today's economy (Andvig et al., 2021). These gaps in support in both UK and Norway significantly undermine the potential for rehabilitation and contribute to recidivism.

Current Study

The central research question of this study is: “*How does the media portrayal of individuals who were involved in cases of high-risk crimes differ between the UK and Norway, and to what extent do they reflect a rehabilitative or punitive approach?*” This comparison offers insights into public perceptions and potential policy implications regarding those who were involved in cases of high-risk crimes, either as a suspect or being

convicted. Given that rehabilitation is crucial for these individuals, the study will also explore how reintegration is presented in the media and how these portrayals may influence public opinion and policymaking in both countries.

Methodology

Qualitative Content Analysis

This study employs qualitative content analysis, a systematic approach to analysing documents, such as news articles and interviews, to understand how meaning is communicated (Christensen, 2018). Examining mass media messages allows scholars to identify recurring themes and categories that provide insight into public perceptions of high-risk offending individuals (Bachman & Schutt, 2018). Themes, defined as unifying threads across categories, help reveal underlying societal and cultural attitudes (Lindgren et al., 2020). This method is particularly useful for analysing the data collected in this study to answer the research question which are media frameworks in the UK and Norway. The analysis aims to uncover how these frameworks shape public attitudes and reflect cultural differences between the countries, offering a deeper understanding of media portrayals and their impact on perceptions of rehabilitation and punishment.

Data Collection

The newspapers were chosen to ensure comparability between the UK and Norway, as both countries offer a diverse press landscape that combines broadsheets, tabloids, and public broadcasters. This allowed the sample to reflect a broad spectrum of political orientations, journalistic styles, and audience reach across the two contexts. Finance-focused outlets and newspapers requiring full article payment were excluded to maintain accessibility and thematic relevance¹.

Five outlets were selected from each country. In the UK: The Telegraph (right-leaning broadsheet), The Sun (the largest tabloid), The Mirror (a left-leaning tabloid), BBC News (the national public broadcaster), and The Guardian² (left-leaning broadsheet) (The Telegraph, 2019; Fischer, 2024). Correspondingly in Norway: Aftenposten (right-leaning broadsheet), VG (the largest tabloid), Dagbladet (a left-leaning/liberal tabloid), NRK (the state-financed national public broadcaster), and TV2 (a commercial public broadcaster).

This selection ensured a balanced and comparable dataset, representing serious journalism, tabloid reporting, and political diversity in both countries, thereby capturing multiple socio-political perspectives on high-risk crime and reintegration. Tabloids were included in both countries to capture their wide readership and influence on public discourse. In the UK, *The Sun* (right-leaning, populist) and *The Mirror* (left-leaning, progressive) represent contrasting tabloid perspectives on crime and reintegration. Similarly, in Norway, *VG* (the largest tabloid) and *Dagbladet* (left-leaning/liberal) provide mass-market viewpoints that differ from broadsheet and broadcaster coverage. Their inclusion means that the dataset reflects not only elite journalism but also the popular framings that shape broader public attitudes toward high-risk crime and rehabilitation.

To locate relevant articles, specific search terms derived from the research question were employed. First, since most high-risk crimes result in prison sentences, general terms related to (individuals in) prisons were included to ensure the search words were sufficiently representative of the topic, such as “Prison”,

¹ To access articles from certain newspapers, such as The Telegraph UK and Aftenposten, a free trial was utilized. These newspapers typically require a subscription for full access.

² Although The Guardian and TV2 differ in format, both are highly influential in delivering news to the general public. Their societal role as agenda-setting outlets makes them comparable, even though they have no direct structural counterparts in the respective media systems.

“Inmates”, “Prisoners”. Then, terms that represent individuals who have committed high-risk crimes were added to refine the search, such as, “Murderer”, “Killer”, “Murder”, “Terrorists”, “Violent Criminals”, “Sex Offenders”, and “Rapist”. Although we are aware of the stereotyping in these search terms, their inclusion was necessary to reflect the terminology commonly used in media reporting and public discourse on high-risk crimes. Using these terms helps ensure that the search strategy remains comprehensive and aligned with the linguistic frames through which such crimes are typically represented, while the acknowledgment of their limitations maintains methodological transparency. To minimize the risk of specifically searching for sensationalism in media reporting, terms such as ‘paedophiles’, ‘brutes’, or ‘threats’ – frequently employed to provoke strong emotional reactions – were excluded from the search criteria. This decision reduced the potential for bias when examining negative portrayals and derogatory statements and ensured that the search strategy remained focused on high-risk crimes rather than on sensationalist portrayals. Nevertheless, when such language appeared in the articles included, it was analysed to evaluate how individuals who have committed high-risk crimes are framed in the media. This approach facilitated a balanced and transparent search process while still enabling a critical examination of potentially biased language.

Furthermore, the terms “Rehabilitation”, “Reintegration”, and “Parole” were used, as the initial crime- and prison-focused terms are often politically charged and primarily emphasize risk, whereas the additional terms aimed to capture not only the punitive stance of the countries but also their rehabilitative perspectives.

For Norwegian articles, equivalent translations like “Fengsel”, “Innsatte”, “Fangene”, “Morder”, “Drapsmann”, “Drap”, “Terrorist”, “Voldsforbryter”, “Seksualforbryter”, “Voldtektsmann”, “Rehabilitering”, “Reintegrering”, and “Prøveløslatelse” were applied. These terms were selected to facilitate consistency across both countries, focusing on individuals involved in high-risk crimes – those that pose the most harm to society, including sex offenses, violent crimes, and acts of terrorism (Van Ginneken et al., 2019).

Articles specifically discussing individuals who were involved in cases of high-risk crimes were included in the sample, with a minimum length of three paragraphs to provide a basic amount of detail and depth in the discussion of the offending individual, allowing for sufficient analysis of the topic. The articles were primarily drawn from the *News*, *Crime*, and *Society* sections of the newspapers, as these sections were most likely to yield relevant coverage of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes and to provide insight into the ways in which rehabilitation and reintegration are framed in public discourse. Articles from Norway were translated into English using DeepL to facilitate text analysis.

The articles selected must have been published between January 1st, 2023 and May 17th, 2024. The choice of the data collection period was based on recent changes in the UK’s rehabilitation policy for people in prison, with additional investments announced for rehabilitation programs. As a result, the most recent articles reflect the current media perspective on imprisoned individuals returning back to society, up until the point when data collection ended in late May. The start date of early 2023 was selected to gather a sufficiently large number of articles that are both recent and relevant.

All articles retrieved by entering the search terms, both collectively and individually, into the newspapers’ search engines were compiled in Excel and assigned a unique number. All articles were manually reviewed to ensure they specifically focused on individuals who were involved in cases of high-risk crimes, with any irrelevant articles excluded from the analysis. Due to the large number of articles found (1,182 articles), a randomized number generator was used to randomly select the news articles from each country for analysis. Random sampling was employed to avoid selection bias and to provide a final dataset that was not skewed by researcher choice. This method provided a broad representation across newspapers while keeping the dataset manageable for in-depth qualitative analysis. A total of 140 articles were selected for the UK and 120 articles for Norway (see Table 1). The difference in the number of selected articles reflects the larger volume of articles identified for the UK during the search process. To address this discrepancy, a proportionally higher

number of UK articles was included, aiming for balanced representation across sources. These randomly generated numbers were then marked yellow to select the cases (Figure 1).

Table 1. Sampled articles from UK newspapers and Norwegian newspapers.

	Source	Total articles (N=1164)	Sampled articles (N=260)
UK	The Telegraph UK	208	39
	The Guardian	130	29
	The Sun	67	18
	The Mirror	199	25
	BBC News	136	29
	Total UK	740	140
Norway	Aftenposten	101	28
	VG	68	20
	Dagbladet	93	26
	NRK	89	26
	TV2	73	20
	Total Norway	424	120

Figure 1. Excel spreadsheet collected articles

	A	B	C	D
237	Couple jailed for life over murder of Wigan man they accused of rape	Couple jailed for life over murder of Wigan man they accused of rape	2023	
238	Man sentenced to life in jail for murdering woman on her doorstep in Blackburn	Man sentenced to life in jail for murdering woman on her doorstep in Blackburn	2023	
239	Former Met police officer jailed for rape of female colleague and 16-year-old girl	Former Met police officer jailed for rape of female colleague and 16-year-old girl	2023	
240	Lucy Letby sentenced to whole-life jail term after murdering seven babies	Lucy Letby sentenced to whole-life jail term after murdering seven babies	2023	
241	Lucy Letby may have harmed dozens more babies, police fear	Lucy Letby may have harmed dozens more babies, police fear	2023	
242	Nurse Lucy Letby guilty of murdering seven babies at Chester hospital	Nurse Lucy Letby guilty of murdering seven babies at Chester hospital	2023	
243	Lucy Letby joins grim list of Britain's most notorious serial killers	Lucy Letby joins grim list of Britain's most notorious serial killers	2023	
244	Five men found guilty of sexually exploiting two girls in Rochdale	Five men found guilty of sexually exploiting two girls in Rochdale	2023	
245	Martial arts enthusiast guilty of fatally stabbing partner in north London	Martial arts enthusiast guilty of fatally stabbing partner in north London	2023	
246	Ex-TikTok influencer and her mother guilty of murdering two men	Ex-TikTok influencer and her mother guilty of murdering two men	2023	
247	'Two different lives': how TikTok fame swept up mother who killed lover	'Two different lives': how TikTok fame swept up mother who killed lover	2023	
248	Jacob Crouch's stepfather jailed for life for baby's murder	Jacob Crouch's stepfather jailed for life for baby's murder	2023	
249	Man jailed for life for murder of Tyson Fury's cousin in Greater Manchester	Man jailed for life for murder of Tyson Fury's cousin in Greater Manchester	2023	
250	Far-right satanist on terrorist watch jailed for making child abuse image	Far-right satanist on terrorist watch jailed for making child abuse image	2023	
251	Twins hit charity cyclist with truck then hid body in carcass pit, Glasgow court told	Twins hit charity cyclist with truck then hid body in carcass pit, Glasgow court told	2023	
252	Killer of Met police officer Sgt Matt Ratana given whole-life sentence	Killer of Met police officer Sgt Matt Ratana given whole-life sentence	2023	
253	Man guilty of sexual assault and murder of teenage sister near Glasgow	Man guilty of sexual assault and murder of teenage sister near Glasgow	2023	

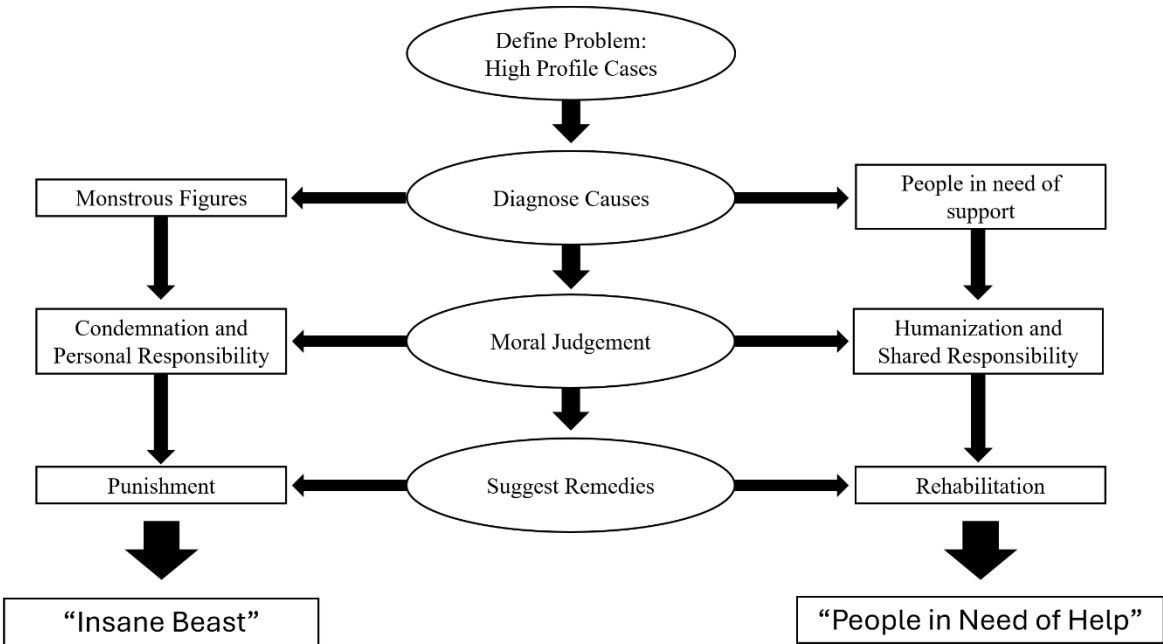
Data Analysis

Media articles were analysed using Atlas.ti 24, a software that supports coding and visualization of qualitative data. To protect the confidentiality of victims mentioned in the articles, names were excluded from the analysis to maintain anonymity, as these individuals had not provided consent to be included in the research. The articles from the UK and the translated articles from Norway, using DeepL, were imported into Atlas.ti for a hybrid form of inductive and deductive coding. The analysis included not only the text but also images, titles, and headlines, which were coded as positive or negative in relation to their portrayal of individuals who were involved in cases of high-risk crimes. A portrayal was considered positive when it emphasized humanization, rehabilitation, or active reintegration, and negative when it reinforced stigma, dehumanization, sensationalism, or punitive framings that depicted those involved in crime as threats to society. Predefined codes were created and applied to the data, focusing on key aspects such as personal information about formerly imprisoned individuals, sentence lengths, connotations (positive or derogatory), discussions on rehabilitation, and discussions on risk assessment (which assesses or mentions the risk of recidivism or likelihood of reoffending either through reference to formal assessment tools, institutional evaluations, or general statements regarding the risk of committing new crimes) (Appendix A). As the analysis progressed, additional codes were developed to construct patterns, including perspectives on victims and the visual portrayals of those involved in high-risk crimes. Photographs used in the articles were incorporated and systematically coded based on their content and what they depicted. Through axial coding, categorized results were generated in Atlas.ti, enabling a systematic interpretation of the media's portrayal of high-risk crimes and the offending individuals involved.

The analysis investigated whether the media adopted a predominantly positive or negative stance and examined the key aspects emphasized in discussions of high-risk cases. This was guided by Entman's media framing theory (1993), which explains how the media organizes and presents information to shape public perception. According to this theory, framing serve four functions: 1) defining problems by identifying the actions of a causal agent and assessing their costs and benefits in terms of cultural values; 2) diagnosing causes by attributing responsibility to specific actors or forces; 3) making moral judgments by evaluating the actions and effects of the causal agent; and 4) suggesting remedies by proposing and justifying solutions while predicting their outcomes.

Using this theoretical framework, two primary themes were identified to compare portrayals in the UK and Norway: (A) "Insane Beast", and (B) "People in Need of Help" (Figure 2). These interconnected themes provided critical insights into the media's framing of individuals involved in high-risk cases and their influence on public interpretation and will be discussed more in depth below.

Figure 2. Thematic map, showing the themes identified from the analysis of the high-profile cases.



Validity and Reliability

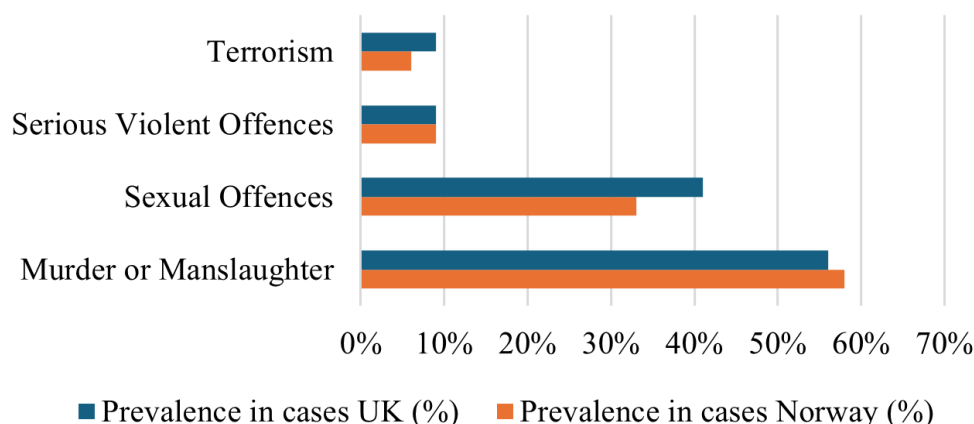
To enhance the reliability of this study, potentially relevant articles were read multiple times to check for relevancy and selection criteria were recorded to safeguard methodological integrity. The coding process was conducted by the first author, but to strengthen reliability, the second author coded a part of the data with the codebook created by the first author. The codebook was developed in an iterative process: initial categories were derived deductively from the research question and relevant literature, and subsequently refined inductively as new patterns were created during the analysis. In cases of uncertainty, discussions were held between the authors. For validity purposes, we applied triangulation and compared patterns in the data with findings from previous research on media framing and representations of high risk populations (Jewkes, 2015). To facilitate transparency and potential reuse in future research, the coding materials such as codebook, memos, and list of articles have been archived (Koning et al., 2024). This study used data that were (to a certain extent) publicly available so there were no direct ethical considerations regarding actual participants. Ethical concerns included self-protection of the researchers when dealing with harmful media articles and awareness of the possibility of stereotyping in newspaper articles given the search terms. Preserving a critical stance when analysing the framing of individuals involved in high risk crimes was important and to minimize bias, the authors discussed the findings frequently to ensure they were based on the used dataset and not shaped by assumptions.

Findings

The analysis included 260 articles addressing various high-risk offenses. Among the 140 UK articles, 56% focused on murder or manslaughter, 41% on sexual offenses (e.g., sexual assault, rape, and child

pornography), 9% on serious violent offenses, and 9% on terrorism. There are some minor differences among the 120 Norwegian articles: 58% addressed murder or manslaughter, 33% focused on sexual offenses, 9% on serious violent offenses, and 6% on terrorism. Notably, some articles covered multiple cases, resulting in cumulative percentages exceeding 100% for each country (Figure 3).

Figure 3. High-risk cases discussed in the news articles.



Note. Some cases discussed multiple high-risk crimes.

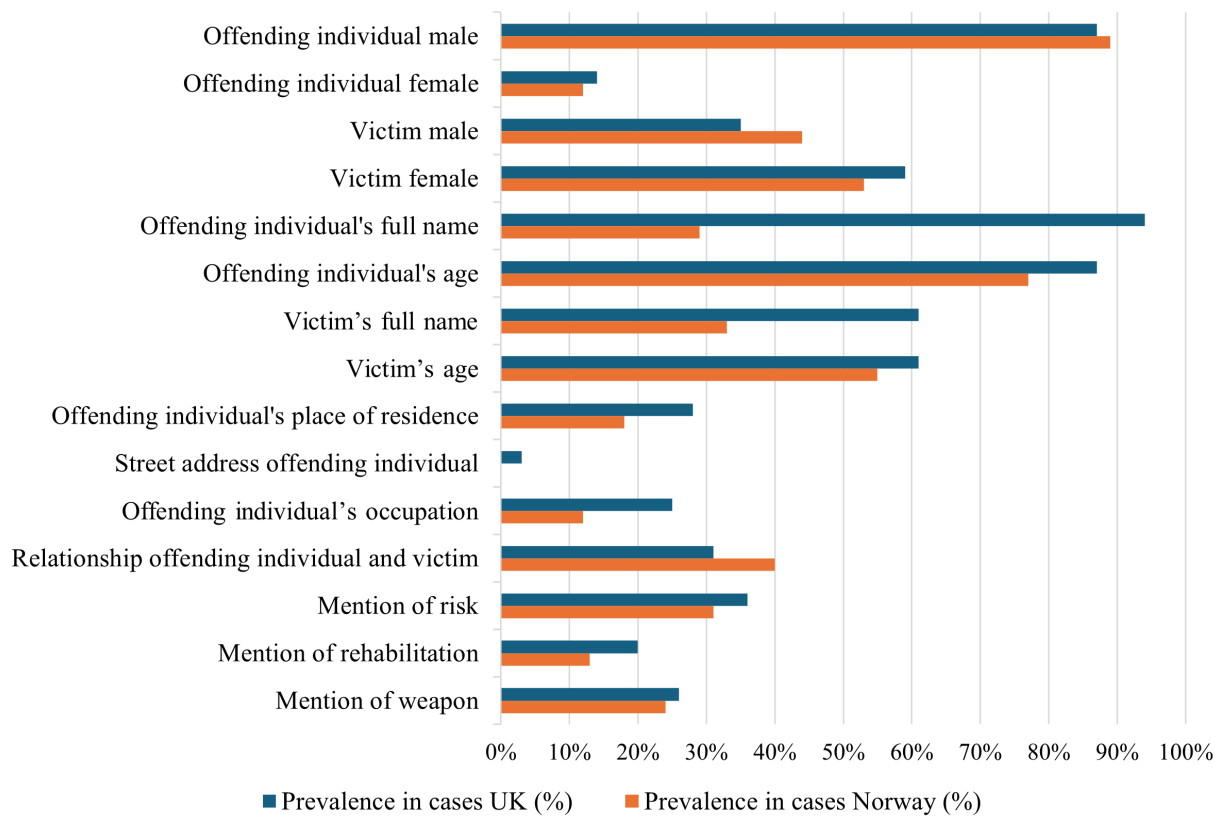
The analysis of the news articles revealed distinct patterns in the representation of individuals involved in high-risk crimes, but also of the victims (Figure 4). For those involved in high-risk crimes, males constituted the majority, reported in 87% of UK cases and 89% of Norwegian cases, while females were mentioned in 14% and 12% of cases, respectively. Male victims were identified in 35% of UK cases and 44% of Norwegian cases, whereas female victims were reported in 59% and 53% of cases. The disclosure of the full name of individuals involved in cases of high-risk crimes occurred in 94% of UK cases but only 29% of Norwegian cases, while the age was mentioned in 87% and 77% of cases, respectively. Similarly, the victim's full name was reported in 61% of UK cases and 33% of Norwegian cases, with their age included in 61% and 55% of cases. Additional personal information of those involved in high-risk crimes, such as the place of residence, appeared in 28% of UK articles and 18% of Norwegian ones, while their specific street address was rarely disclosed (3% in the UK and none in Norway). Other details, such as mentions of weapon use were relatively similar, appearing in 26% of UK cases and 24% of Norwegian cases.

Furthermore, risk assessments (which referred to the possibility of recidivism or risks to the public in general), were discussed in 36% of UK cases and 31% of Norwegian cases, while rehabilitation and reintegration were mentioned in 20% of UK cases and 13% of Norwegian cases. Interestingly, references to rehabilitation appeared more frequently in the UK sample. However, these references often related to the inclusion of 'rehabilitation days' in sentencing, formally known as Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) days, which are court-mandated days requiring convicted individuals to participate in activities such as treatment programmes, skills courses, or other structured interventions as part of a community or suspended sentence (Ministry of Justice, 2019). They could also refer to claims that individuals had not been rehabilitated sufficiently, rather than to substantive discussions of rehabilitation itself.

The use of images varied significantly between UK and Norwegian news articles (Figure 5). UK articles consistently included at least one image in colour placed at the beginning of the article, with photographs of individuals involved in high-risk crimes appearing in 81% of cases. Among these, only 1% were made

unrecognizable (Figure 5). Victim photographs were featured in 51% of UK cases. In contrast, Norwegian articles contained images less frequently, 17.5% of articles did not include images; however, when photographs were included, they too were typically placed at the beginning of the article. Photographs of individuals involved in high-risk crimes were present in 33% of cases, with 28% of these images rendered unrecognizable (Figure 6). Victim photographs appeared in 20% of Norwegian cases. Additionally, Norwegian articles exhibited greater diversity in their visual content by incorporating images of police officers, prosecutors, and lawyers.

Figure 4. Specific characteristics of offending individuals, victims or cases mentioned in the news articles.



Note. Some cases have overlapping aspects with multiple offending individuals and victims.

Figure 5. Photographs used in news articles.

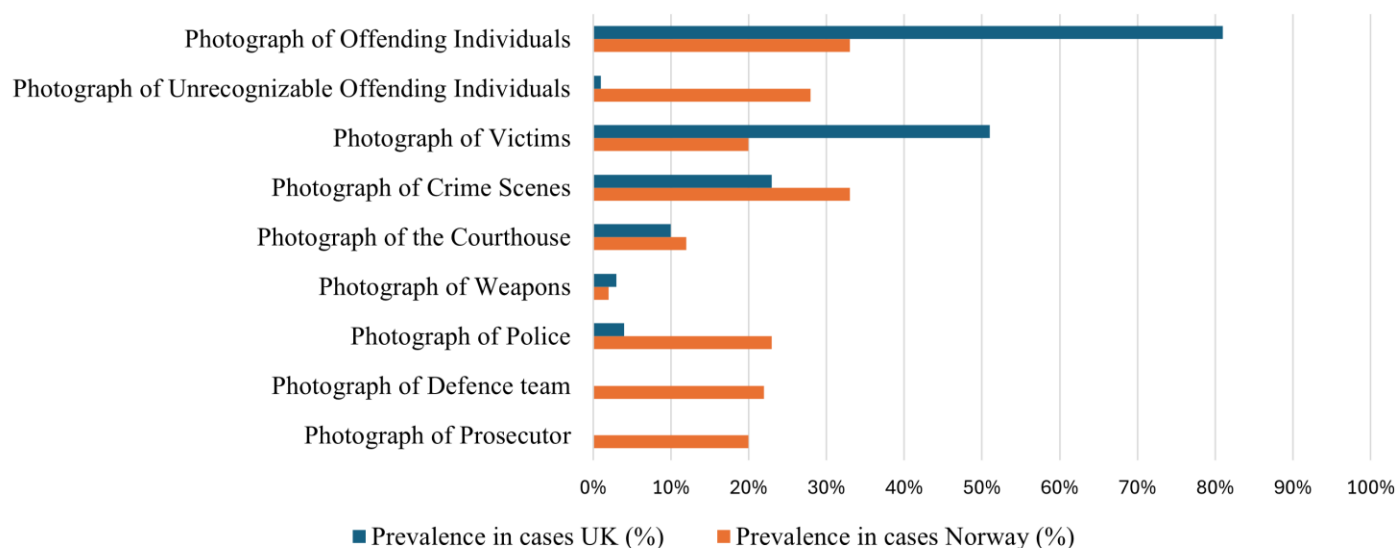
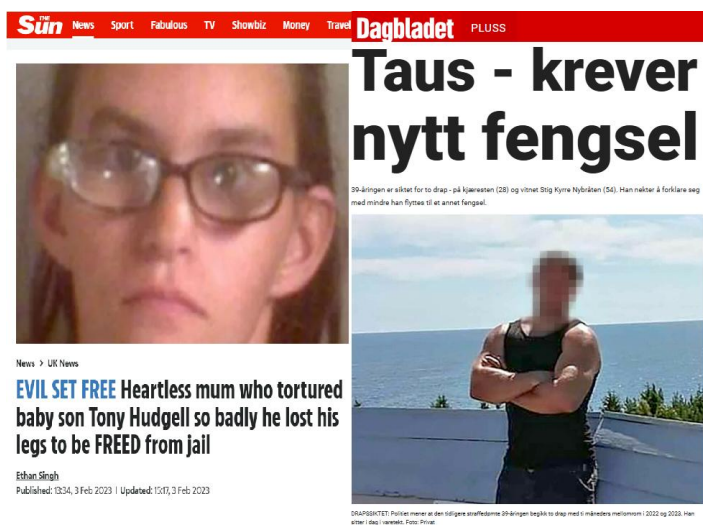


Figure 6. Individuals involved in high-risk crimes depicted in two tabloids: The Sun (UK) vs. Dagbladet (Norway)



Note. Translation of Dagbladet title: “Silent - Calls for a New Prison”

The analysis of positive and negative portrayals revealed a clear imbalance in both countries. In Norway, we identified 25 instances of positive language emphasizing humanization or rehabilitation, compared to 36 derogatory terms, 54 instances of negative language directed at those involved in high-risk crimes, and 51 instances describing the acts in negative terms (e.g., horror, fear). In the UK sample, positive portrayals were similarly limited, with only 39 instances of positive language, while negative framings were far more frequent: 191 derogatory terms, 181 instances targeting those involved in high-risk crimes, and 156 instances describing

the acts negatively. Overall, these results demonstrate that portrayals were dominated by negative tone in both countries, though the effect was particularly pronounced in the UK.

The Frame of the “Insane Beast”

The Monstrous Figure

The depiction of individuals involved in high-risk crimes as monstrous figures is a prominent theme in crime reporting in both countries, however with distinct variations in framing between the UK and Norway. In the UK, tabloid newspapers like *The Sun* adopt an overtly sensationalist approach, employing short, provocative titles designed to elicit strong emotional reactions. Common headlines include terms such as “child rapist”, “beast”, “monster”, “predator”, and “sick in the head” presented in bold, capitalized text. This language serves to amplify public fear and moral outrage, framing individuals involved in high-risk crimes as inherently evil and dangerous. While broadsheets like *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* take a more restrained tone, they still incorporate emotionally charged language, such as “beyond sadistic murder” or “exceptionally brutal and sinister”, to highlight the severity of crimes and their impact on victims. This calculated framing could ensure that even ostensibly factual reporting contributes to the moral condemnation of those involved in high-risk crimes.

In UK media, those involved in high-risk crimes are frequently named and labelled with terms like “vile”, “coward”, “sick criminal”, “monster”, and “psychopath”, even in situations where suspects have not yet been found guilty by a judge. Such descriptions reinforce the image of individuals involved in high-risk crimes as irredeemably cruel and unrepentant, portraying their actions as “heinous”, “horrific”, or “brutal”. The emphasis on (permanent) incarceration, reflected in phrases like “behind bars” or “throwing away the key”, underscores the narrative that these individuals are beyond reform. Visual elements further solidify this portrayal, with unflattering photographs of those involved in high-risk crimes juxtaposed against flattering images of victims, especially in cases involving sexual assault or murder. These visual and linguistic strategies collectively dehumanize individuals involved in high-risk crimes, heightening their perception as monstrous threats. Norwegian articles exhibit a more restraint use of derogatory terms. When such terms do appear, they are less frequent and more contextually justified, with a stronger emphasis on exploring the social and psychological factors underpinning criminal behaviour. Nonetheless, moral condemnation remains present, particularly in cases of violent or egregious crimes, in which the suspects are on occasion referred to as “monsters” or “paedophiles”.

The concept of the “ideal victim” plays a pivotal role in shaping the portrayal of both individuals involved in high-risk crimes and their actions. In UK media, victims are often depicted as innocent, vulnerable, and entirely blameless, amplifying the moral chasm between the victim and those involved in high-risk crimes. This dichotomy reinforces the monstrous framing of the perpetrator. Norwegian media also engage with the idea of the ideal victim but often place greater emphasis on societal contexts, focusing on how systemic issues contribute to crime and victimization.

Linguistically, UK media frequently identify individuals by their crimes, using terms like “rapist”, “murderer”, or “terrorist” instead of personal identifiers. This dehumanization is further intensified in tabloids, which rely on emotionally charged language and sensational imagery. By contrast, Norwegian outlets, while occasionally employing negative descriptors, tend to prioritize explanations of the causes behind criminal behaviour, including discussions of rehabilitation potential. This distinction reflects Norway’s broader focus on reformatory justice, although severe crimes still elicit negative portrayals.

Moral Judgment: Condemnation and Personal Responsibility

Crime reporting in the UK and Norway reveals overlapping patterns in portraying individuals involved in high-risk crimes, particularly concerning moral judgment. Both nations' media employ emotive language and vivid imagery to emphasize condemnation and personal responsibility, though the intensity and framing differ. In the UK, newspapers – especially tabloids – frequently use terms like “horror”, “fear”, and “terror” to depict crimes, reinforcing moral reprehensibility. Descriptions often liken those involved in high-risk crimes to predatory animals, using phrases such as “keep them behind bars”, suggesting they require confinement. This framing is intensified with labels like “monster”, “predator”, and “psychopath” in tabloids like *The Sun* and *The Mirror*, dehumanizing people and emphasizing culpability. Norwegian media also utilize strong language to convey the gravity of crimes, employing descriptors such as “brutal”, “sinister”, and “disgusting”. While terms like “hunting” or “ruthless” appear occasionally, they are less frequent than in UK reporting. Norwegian outlets focus more on societal and systemic factors that may contribute to criminal behaviour, but the moral judgment remains clear, particularly for severe crimes.

Both UK and Norwegian media amplify moral condemnation through their choice of language. UK outlets frequently describe acts as “chilling”, “sadistic”, or “barbaric”, signalling a clear disapproval of the individuals' actions. Norwegian outlets like *Dagbladet* and *Aftenposten* similarly use terms like “ruthless” or “horrific” to convey disgust and condemnation. Media in both nations emphasize the role of the justice system in holding individuals involved in high-risk crimes accountable. UK newspapers like *The Guardian* focus on the legal processes and police actions, framing the justice system as essential for societal protection. Norwegian outlets like NRK and VG also report on legal outcomes, contrasting the prosecutor's depiction of individuals involved in high-risk crimes as dangerous with the defence's arguments for rehabilitation. In this context, rehabilitation is sometimes framed in UK reporting not as an opportunity for reintegration, but as an indicator of continued dangerousness: relief is expressed when release is denied on the grounds that the individual is still far removed from rehabilitation. A lack of rehabilitation is equated with an enduring personal failure. These discussions consistently portray those involved in high-risk crimes as individuals who must face the consequences of their actions, reinforcing moral judgment through the lens of institutional accountability.

The portrayal of victims further shapes the moral judgment of those involved in high-risk crimes. Victims are often depicted as vulnerable, innocent, and deserving of protection. In the UK, descriptors such as “schoolgirl” or “mum-of-two” highlight their vulnerability and evoke empathy, creating a stark contrast with the monstrous image of those involved in high-risk crimes. Norwegian media employ similar strategies, using terms like “underage girl” or “minor” to underscore victims' need for protection. These portrayals amplify the emotional impact of crimes and deepen condemnation of individuals involved in high-risk crimes. Victim impact statements and narratives of grief are frequently included, particularly in UK tabloids, to elicit emotional responses. Norwegian media similarly highlight the emotional toll on victims and their families, reinforcing the moral divide between innocent victims and culpable ‘offenders’.

Furthermore, both UK and Norwegian media occasionally reference the mental health of individuals involved in high-risk crimes, offering some explanation for their actions without absolving responsibility. UK outlets often mention conditions such as addiction or psychiatric disorders as contributing factors, framing them as impairments that complicate but do not excuse personal accountability. Similarly, Norwegian media discuss mental health issues, contextualizing crimes within broader societal or psychological challenges. However, this framing often stigmatizes individuals, portraying them as dangerous and unpredictable, even while acknowledging potential vulnerabilities.

The Remedy for Monstrous Figures: Punishment

In both the UK and Norway, crime reporting underscores the role of punishment as a remedy for individuals involved in high-risk crimes, particularly those considered monstrous or irredeemable. Media in both countries highlight public safety and the perceived necessity of punitive justice, framing those involved in high-risk crimes as societal threats that must be removed to protect communities. While both emphasize punishment, the tone and framing differ. In the UK, media outlets adopt a highly emotive and punitive tone when reporting on punishment. Tabloid newspapers frequently use phrases such as “keep them behind bars” and “caged” to emphasize the need for prolonged incarceration. Headlines like “evil set free” or “FREED from prison” are often deployed to portray parole as risky and undesirable, reinforcing public fears of recidivism. This language amplifies moral outrage and positions long-term incarceration as the most appropriate response to serious crimes. Rehabilitation can also be seen as an instrumentalized part of this punitive framework: it is quantified – for example, through a fixed number of rehabilitation activities or days to be completed, when a prison sentence is suspended – and presented as an additional burden imposed by the justice system rather than as an opportunity for reintegration.

The media’s focus on punishment extends to its coverage of those with histories of reoffending or committing heinous acts. Reports highlight individuals’ past crimes and perceived lack of remorse, strengthening the argument for their continued imprisonment. Victim impact statements are prominently featured to justify harsher sentences, framing leniency as a failure to honour victims’ suffering. Public sentiment is central, with media critiquing what it perceives as overly lenient sentencing decisions and celebrating stricter punitive measures.

Norwegian media also emphasize the role of punishment, particularly for those who have been repeatedly involved in (violent) crimes. Their approach, however, tends to be more measured and grounded in legal principles. Outlets such as NRK and Aftenposten adopt a fact-based approach, analysing criminal histories, recidivism risks, and parole decisions. Rather than resorting to emotionally charged narratives, these reports adopt a more fact-based tone, presenting a nuanced perspective on the necessity of punishment. When addressing parole or the potential release of imprisoned individuals, public concerns are highlighted regarding community safety. Articles commonly examine the risks of reoffending or tampering with evidence, framing these issues as legitimate grounds for denying parole. This coverage reflects a broader societal expectation that punishment fulfils dual purposes: retribution for the crime and deterrence against future offenses. The underlying narrative underscores the importance of holding individuals accountable for their crime(s) while simultaneously safeguarding societal well-being.

In both countries, removing dangerous individuals from society is a recurring theme. In the UK dehumanizing language is used, especially in tabloid media, to reinforce the notion that individuals involved in high-risk crimes are inherently dangerous and incapable of rehabilitation. This framing aligns with a broader punitive justice narrative, emphasizing lifelong incarceration as a means of ensuring public safety. Even more neutral outlets, such as The Guardian or the BBC, often reflect public sentiment that prioritizes punishment over reintegration, particularly for individuals involved in violent crime. Norwegian media, while less emotive, also emphasize the necessity of confinement for individuals who have involved in high-risk crimes. Outlets like TV2 and Dagbladet balance public concerns about safety with discussions of the legal context. Despite the differences in tone, the underlying message is consistent: punishment is essential to protect society from people who pose a significant threat.

The Frame of “People in Need of Help”

People in Need of Support

The portrayal of individuals involved in high-risk crimes in the media reflects differing societal attitudes toward crime and justice, influencing whether they are viewed as people requiring support or primarily as subjects of punishment. In both Norwegian and UK media, those involved in high-risk crimes are sometimes framed as people whose actions are influenced by social, psychological, or systemic factors, though the depth of this perspective varies. Norwegian media frequently adopt a neutral and contextualized approach, emphasizing their humanity and the broader circumstances influencing their actions. Outlets such as NRK, VG, and TV2 often highlight factors such as mental health issues, addiction, and socioeconomic conditions that may contribute to criminal behaviour. This framing suggests that individuals could benefit from targeted interventions, such as therapy, education, or rehabilitative programs. For example, discussions about people involved in crime may include references to personal histories, such as experiences of trauma or systemic marginalization, which help contextualize their behaviour within broader social frameworks. Anonymity is another key feature of Norwegian reporting, with individuals involved in high-risk crimes often identified only by gender and age. This practice helps reduce stigmatization and allows for a more impartial view of their actions. By avoiding sensationalism, Norwegian media foster a narrative that focuses on the possibility of reform rather than on punitive measures.

Norwegian reporting also discusses the role of the justice system in addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour. Articles often focus on the availability of support services within the criminal justice system, such as mental health care and rehabilitation programs. By presenting these solutions, Norwegian media encourage a view of ‘offenders’ not as irredeemable figures but as individuals with the potential for positive change if given adequate support. The focus on legal processes reinforces this perspective, emphasizing fair trials and individualizing sentencing.

While UK media often emphasize punishment, some instances frame individuals involved in high-risk crimes as people in need of help. Reports in outlets like The Guardian occasionally discuss systemic issues such as mental health crises, addiction, and social inequality, recognizing these as contributing factors to criminal behaviour. For example, articles may highlight how untreated mental health disorders or substance abuse problems influenced an individual’s actions, implicitly suggesting the need for societal and systemic responses to prevent similar cases in the future. However, this framing is less prevalent in UK news media compared to Norway. Discussions of support or reform are often overshadowed by a focus on public safety and punitive justice. When specific circumstances are mentioned, they are frequently presented as secondary to the crime, limiting engagement with the systemic causes of criminal behaviour. Although the need for mental health services or rehabilitation is acknowledged, these discussions are often brief and lack the prominence they receive in Norwegian reporting.

Moral Judgment: Humanization and Shared Responsibility

The moral judgment of individuals involved in high-risk crimes in the media is a nuanced issue, with portrayals in Norwegian and UK outlets addressing themes of humanization, shared responsibility, and the broader societal context of crime. Both countries' media balance sensationalism and condemnation with the need to educate the public about the criminal justice system and to engage with the complexities of crime and punishment.

In Norway, media outlets, such as VG and NRK, take a more neutral and factual approach when covering crime, emphasising broader political and legal issues over the individual. For instance, Norwegian

media report on systemic issues like prostitution and the complexities of prosecuting cases posthumously, often including educational segments to help readers understand the legal context of these cases. This approach seeks to humanize individuals involved in high-risk crimes by considering the socio-political factors that contribute to criminal behaviour, rather than merely condemning individuals. The media's reluctance to sensationalize the actions of individuals involved in high-risk crimes and their families helps shift the focus away from stigmatization, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for societal problems, such as the need for reforms in the criminal justice system.

This broader educational focus is mirrored in UK media, especially in publications like *The Guardian*, which regularly highlights systemic issues, such as law enforcement failures and the importance of social policies in preventing crime. *The Guardian* tends to frame crime not just as an individual failing but as a reflection of broader social and political issues. However, UK outlets generally lack the same depth of legal education or delve into the stigmatization of people in crime as Norwegian media. Still, *The Guardian* and some Norwegian media emphasize the shared responsibility of society in addressing crime and the need for rehabilitation and systemic reform.

Important distinctions between the portrayal of victims and individuals involved in crime arise within both media environments, especially when it comes to the possibility of shared responsibility or the degree of humanization afforded to each group. In the UK, publications like *The Mirror* occasionally take a more neutral tone when discussing international or complex cases. For example, in cases involving teens or random acts of violence, *The Mirror* focusses more on the societal impacts, such as community responses or public fundraising efforts, rather than personalizing the individual in crime. This broader perspective shifts the emphasis away from the person and towards a more collective understanding of crime. Additionally, when victims are accused of committing crimes or when there are complex circumstances surrounding an offense, the media's portrayal may reflect a more empathetic stance, particularly in cases involving well-known individuals or where self-defence is considered. The language used in such cases tends to be less derogatory, and the focus is often placed on understanding the circumstances surrounding the crime.

In Norwegian media, a similar trend can be observed, particularly when the victim's role in a crime is scrutinized. Victim-blaming occurs, for example, when there is a possibility that the victim may have been a perpetrator as well, or when the legitimacy of their presence at the crime scene is questioned. This can lead to an implication that the victim shares responsibility for the crime. The notion of “deserving” versus “undeserving” victims is debated in such cases, which complicates the moral judgment against individuals involved in (high-risk) crime and points to the broader societal and relational factors at play. Norwegian media, like their UK counterparts, may also shift the focus to broader themes such as motives or preventative measures, especially in cases involving sexual assault or domestic violence.

In both countries, there is a tendency to humanize individuals involved in high-risk crimes to varying degrees by exploring the systemic causes of crime, though this humanization is more apparent in certain media outlets than in others. Norwegian outlets are more consistent in framing those involved in high-risk crimes within a broader socio-legal context, highlighting systemic causes and potential remedies, such as mental health support and rehabilitation. UK media, while often more emotive and punitive, also contain elements of systemic critique, particularly in outlets like *The Guardian*. The media's role in shaping moral judgment is therefore crucial in determining how individuals involved in crimes are perceived – not just as individuals who have committed crimes, but as part of a wider social and legal context that requires collective action.

The Remedy for People in Need of Support: Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation emerges as a central theme in Norwegian media's portrayal of individuals involved in high-risk crimes, particularly for those with mental health challenges. This reflects an emphasis on addressing

underlying issues contributing to criminal behaviour, positioning rehabilitation as a cornerstone of the justice system. Norwegian media, including Dagbladet, NRK, and VG, highlight the need for tailored therapeutic interventions, emphasizing mental health care as a critical component of rehabilitations. Clinical terms like “depression”, “psychosis”, or “personality disorder” are often used to frame these issues within a medical or psychological context, underscoring the importance of targeted rehabilitation programs that address specific needs of the individual. For instance, Dagbladet delves into detailed discussions about mental health, emphasizing the necessity of specialized therapeutic interventions. This framing shifts the narrative from punishment to support, highlighting how mental health care can serve as a pathway to reducing recidivism. Similarly, NRK and VG adopt neutral and fact-based language to report on the conditions of individuals involved in crime, avoiding sensationalism and instead focusing on the systemic support required to aid rehabilitation.

While Norwegian media generally support rehabilitation as a key remedy, the tone and approach vary across outlets. NRK and VG maintain balanced reporting, emphasizing the role of mental health support in rehabilitation and the importance of a humane approach to imprisonment. These outlets frequently discuss how prison environments can be designed to reflect normal life, facilitating the rehabilitation process. In contrast, Dagbladet occasionally adopts a more sceptical tone, particularly when addressing imprisoned individuals who are perceived as resistant to rehabilitation. Articles may suggest that part of the population in prison are unlikely to benefit from therapeutic interventions, raising questions about the limits of rehabilitation. This perspective contrasts with the broader narrative of reintegration but highlights public concerns about the effectiveness of rehabilitative measures.

Norwegian media also emphasize the integration of rehabilitation into sentencing. Outlets such as Aftenposten focus on the judicial process, reporting on how sentences balance punitive and rehabilitative goals. NRK and VG offer detailed coverage of imprisonment conditions, often discussing how these conditions align with the broader aim of preparing imprisoned individuals for eventual reintegration into society.

In the UK, rehabilitation is also integrated into sentencing, but in a more formalized way through the inclusion of “rehabilitation days”. Rehabilitation days therefore also represent an institutional recognition that individuals involved in crime require structured opportunities to address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour. Although references to rehabilitation in UK media often highlight these days in sentencing reports rather than broader debates about rehabilitative philosophy, their inclusion demonstrates that rehabilitation is considered an essential remedial component with clear needs.

Public sentiment regarding rehabilitation is another focal point in media coverage. For instance, TV2 often includes public reactions to sentencing, highlighting the tension between societal demands for justice and rehabilitative goals. While some outlets, like Dagbladet, emphasize dissatisfaction with lenient sentences or inadequate rehabilitation programs, others aim to educate the public about the long-term benefits of rehabilitation in reducing recidivism and fostering community safety. A recurring theme in Norwegian media is the acknowledgment of rehabilitation as essential to reintegration. Reports often highlight the dual role of rehabilitation in safeguarding the rights of individuals in prison and preparing them for a productive return to society. Media discussions emphasize that rehabilitation is not solely about addressing individual behaviour but also about fostering societal stability by reducing repeat offenses.

Conclusion and Discussion

The media holds a precarious yet crucial role within the criminal justice sphere, influencing public perception, policy-making, and the transparency of criminal proceedings (Burstein, 2003; Shanahan et al., 2011; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). An essential aspect of this influence is the portrayal of individuals involved in crime, which can significantly affect public attitudes towards crime and justice policies. This study has

examined the portrayal of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes in the UK and compared it to that in Norway and to what extent they reflect a more punitive or rehabilitative approach. This examination is particularly relevant given the recent shift in the UK's criminal justice approach, moving away from harsh penalties towards a greater emphasis on rehabilitating and reintegrating (formerly) imprisoned individuals (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Meanwhile, Norway has long emphasized rehabilitation and reintegration within its criminal justice system (Amnad, 2018).

The media coverage of individuals involved in high-risk crimes in both the UK and Norway demonstrates a complex interplay of frames that reflect each country's cultural and societal perspectives on crime and punishment. While both countries incorporate aspects of both the “insane beast” and “people in need of help” frames, a distinct pattern emerges when examining their overall approaches. The UK media predominantly adopt the “insane beast” frame, portraying those involved in high-risk crimes as dangerous individuals who pose a threat to society and emphasizing the need for punishment, often with a focus on retribution and public safety. This frame is reinforced through sensationalized language, emphasis on the risk individuals involved in high-risk crimes pose to the public, and a punitive approach to justice. At the same time, UK media acknowledge rehabilitative efforts, particularly through coverage of rehabilitation days that reflect targeted interventions for individuals' specific needs.

In contrast, Norwegian media lean more heavily towards the “people in need of help” frame, emphasizing the importance of rehabilitation, mental health support, and societal reintegration for individuals involved in high-risk crimes. While they do not completely shy away from discussing their criminal actions, Norwegian outlets are more likely to explore the underlying causes of criminal behaviour, focusing on the potential for rehabilitation and the need for mental health treatment. The emphasis on understanding the psychological conditions and capacity for rehabilitation reflects a more compassionate and supportive approach to criminal justice.

Ultimately, while both media landscapes recognize the need for punishment, the UK's portrayal aligns more with a punitive model that views individuals involved in high-risk crimes as irredeemable threats, whereas Norway's portrayal centres on the potential to be treated and rehabilitated, highlighting their status as individuals in need of support. This divergence in framing underscores the broader differences in criminal justice philosophies between the two countries, with the UK prioritizing public safety and deterrence, while Norway stresses rehabilitation and societal reintegration.

Furthermore, according to Christie's (1987) theory of ideal victims, UK media highlight the vulnerability of victims, portraying them as “ideal victims” who are innocent and helpless. This makes crimes more emotionally compelling and emphasizes the moral difference between the victim and the ‘offender’. In contrast, Norwegian media use neutral language, focusing on the legal process and the need for protection, rather than emphasizing emotional distress. Victim-blaming in UK media also varies based on social status, with more scrutiny of victims in certain cases. Norwegian media, however, are less prone to victim-blaming, focusing instead on legal and factual aspects of the crime (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018).

When covering individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes, UK media often depict them using emotive language, detailed personal information, and dramatic visuals, heightening public fear. Risk assessments are framed with high-emotion language, which supports the narrative of the individuals involved as dangerous. In contrast, Norwegian media emphasize rehabilitation, with a focus on mental health and reintegration. Their reporting is more factual and balanced, avoiding sensationalism and encouraging public understanding of the legal system and the rehabilitation process (Waggoner, 2015).

These media portrayals align with the broader political cultures in the two countries. The UK's focus on sensationalism reflects a “culture of control” and a shift towards punitive criminal justice policies (Garland, 1995). The emphasis on risk assessment and a punitive approach to crime prevention is linked to societal fears and political demands for harsher penalties. Conversely, Norway's media reflect high levels of trust in the

government and a focus on rehabilitation. Public perception in Norway is more empathetic, with an emphasis on supporting reintegration into society. This is reinforced by a broader welfare state and a commitment to social solidarity (Snacken, 2010).

The contrasting portrayals of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes in the UK and Norway highlight the cultural and systemic differences in their criminal justice systems. UK media, with their sensationalist focus on the “insane beast”, foster a punitive culture, while Norwegian media, by framing the individuals involved as “people in need of help”, promote a more rehabilitative and supportive approach to justice. These differences have profound implications for public perception and policy-making, with the UK’s media contributing to a culture of fear and punishment, while Norwegian media encourage empathy and a focus on rehabilitation.

Strengths and Limitations

This qualitative content analysis aimed to compare media portrayals of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes in the UK and Norway, considering their divergent criminal justice systems. By examining multiple newspapers with distinct reporting styles, the study enhances its reliability and validity. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, translating Norwegian articles using DeepL may have led to the loss of subtle cultural or contextual meanings, which could affect the reliability of the findings. While DeepL is generally reliable, nuances and emotional connotations might not have been fully captured, potentially affecting the findings. Misinterpretations due to translation limitations are a potential risk. Second, the reliance on freely available articles may have limited the scope of the study. Paid newspapers, which were excluded, might offer differing editorial styles and societal perspectives that could influence the representation of those who have been involved in high-risk crimes. This gap could have impacted the outcome of the research. Third, the timing of elections may influence the way of portrayal. The articles analysed from the UK were published in the period leading up to national elections, which may have resulted in a heightened focus on crime. In contrast, the articles from Norway were published outside of an election period, potentially reflecting different media priorities.

Future Research and Policy Recommendations

Future research could explore how different media reporting styles relate to public perceptions of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes. While this study identifies differences in portrayals, it does not establish a relationship between media coverage and public opinion. More quantitative studies could manipulate sensationalized and neutral storytelling to assess their impact on attitudes of the general public toward punitive measures. Pre-existing opinions may complicate such findings, but this area remains valuable for further investigation. Additionally, understanding how media exposure affects the reintegration of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes is crucial. Comparing those who have received extensive media coverage with those who have not, and for example qualitatively interviewing them, may reveal whether public shaming hinders their chances of successful rehabilitation. Greater anonymity in media coverage, particularly through less derogatory language, might improve their prospects for employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism.

Moreover, it would be interesting to examine whether the UK’s recent investment in rehabilitation programs will shift media coverage of individuals who have been involved in high-risk crimes toward a more rehabilitative focus. Increased funding alone may not suffice if societal attitudes and media perspectives do not also evolve. Monitoring whether this shift in public attitudes is reflected in media narratives will be key to understanding the broader impact of these reforms.

From this study a few policy recommendations can be made as well. To support offender reintegration, “naming and shaming” practices in media reporting should be reduced. Guidelines aimed at fostering factual, objective reporting could help mitigate sensationalism and reduce the reinforcement of punitive attitudes. However, these guidelines must balance the need for ethical reporting with the protection of free speech. Training programs for journalists are essential to raise awareness about the negative effects of sensationalism and derogatory language. Such initiatives should prioritize the dissemination of accurate information and public education, emphasizing the importance of rehabilitation and reintegration over retribution.

Public awareness campaigns could also help shift societal attitudes. Highlighting successful rehabilitation efforts and real-life examples of reintegrated individuals could promote the societal benefits of rehabilitation. These campaigns are critical in emphasizing the long-term advantages of supporting formerly imprisoned individuals and enhancing community safety.

In conclusion, the contrasting media portrayals in the UK and Norway reflect broader societal attitudes toward criminal justice. UK media’s sensationalism fosters a punitive mindset, while Norway’s objective reporting promotes rehabilitation and reintegration, contributing to more positive societal outcomes.

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