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Narrating harm before the law: victim testimony, evidential voice, and the linguistic construction of legal injury in Indonesia

Suaidi
Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Victim testimony in Indonesian legal discourse is not simply a record of suffering, but a mediated linguistic process through which harm must become evidentially recognizable before law. **Objective:** This study examines how victim harm is narrated, how evidential voice authorizes or constrains testimony, and how lived injury is translated into legally actionable injury in Indonesian legal texts. **Method:** This study applies qualitative legal discourse analysis to publicly accessible Indonesian court-related documents, contextual legal materials, and selected scholarly literature, using narrative harm mapping, evidential voice typology, and credibility–legal translation analysis. **Results:** The analysis shows that harm is most legible when it is organized through bodily injury, cognitive impairment, reproductive consequence, restitution, witness narration, and institutional corroboration. Victim voice rarely operates alone, because medical, scientific, judicial, LPSK, witness, and reported-responsibility voices mediate how suffering becomes evidence. Legal injury emerges through translation pathways that stabilize, quantify, reconstruct, or attribute harm within procedural categories. **Implication:** This study demonstrates that victim-centered justice requires attention not only to whether victims speak, but also to how their speech is revoiced, classified, and made credible. **Novelty:** This study offers an integrated framework linking victim testimony, evidential voice, and linguistic construction of legal injury in Indonesian legal discourse.

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Corresponding Author:

Suaidi
Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Indonesia
Jl. Raya Panglegur KM. 4, Tlanakan, Pamekasan, Jawa Timur, 69371, Indonesia
Email: suaidisyafiie1922@uinmadura.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Legal injury in Indonesia is increasingly contested not only as a matter of criminal fact but as a linguistic process through which suffering must be narrated, mediated, and made evidentially recognizable. Komnas Perempuan's CATAHU 2025 [1] recorded 376,529 cases of gender-based violence against women in 2025, a 14.07% increase from the previous year, with 337,961 cases, or 89.76%, occurring in the personal sphere; its complaint data also identified sexual violence as the most frequently reported form of violence. LPSK reported 10,217 protection applications in 2024, up from 7,645 in 2023, indicating growing institutional demand for victim and witness protection [2]. Indonesia's Sexual Violence Crime Law [3] also explicitly regulates prevention, handling, protection, and recovery of victims. These figures show that victim testimony is not peripheral to justice; it is a crucial medium through which harm enters legal knowledge.

Existing scholarship has examined victim testimony as a legally constrained narrative form, especially in international criminal law, where victim-participant testimony may be admitted while simultaneously disciplined by evidentiary categories [4], [5]. Studies on victim-witness testimony have also shown how

institutional expectations may silence, fragment, or reformat accounts of suffering [6], [7]. In narrative inquiry, victimization has been analysed through positioning, self-representation, and moral accountability [8], while legal discourse studies have traced attitudinal stance in judgments and the construction of victims in Indonesian defamation verdicts [9], [10]. However, less attention has been given to how Indonesian legal texts transform victim testimony into legal injury through evidential voice, reported speech, credibility assessment, and institutional paraphrase. This gap matters because legal injury is not merely found; it is linguistically assembled.

This study therefore investigates how victim harm is narrated before Indonesian legal institutions and how such narration becomes attached to evidentiary authority. It asks three connected questions: first, how are bodily, psychological, social, and economic harms linguistically represented in victim-related legal texts? Second, what forms of evidential voice—direct testimony, indirect reported speech, medical corroboration, police reconstruction, prosecutorial framing, judicial paraphrase, or expert mediation—authorize or constrain victim accounts? Third, how do courts and legal actors translate lived suffering into recognizable categories of legal injury? These questions are addressed through a qualitative legal discourse design focused on publicly accessible legal documents, statutory contexts, and victim-related institutional materials. The inquiry builds on forensic linguistic work on Indonesian verdicts, judicial reasoning, legal power, interpreter mediation, and gendered credibility [11], [12], [13], [14], [15].

This study advances the argument that victim testimony in Indonesian legal discourse should be read as an evidentially mediated narrative rather than as a transparent record of experience. Harm becomes legally intelligible when it is sequenced, attributed, corroborated, paraphrased, and evaluated within institutional genres that privilege certain voices over others. This does not imply that courts invent harm, nor that testimony lacks factual value; rather, it suggests that legal institutions recognize injury through linguistic operations that shape credibility, relevance, and admissibility. Work on linguistic discrimination, legal identity, and procedural inequality shows that unequal access to authoritative language may affect how persons are heard within law [16], [17], [14]. By linking victim narration, evidential voice, and legal injury, this study offers a framework for examining how justice depends not only on evidence, but on the language through which evidence becomes speakable.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Victim testimony

Victim testimony is best understood as an institutionalized narrative of harm rather than a simple transfer of experience into law. In legal discourse, testimony must do more than recount suffering; it must organize events, identify agents, locate responsibility, and satisfy evidentiary expectations. Studies of victim-participant testimony before international courts show that victims' narratives are admitted through legal procedures that may narrow the experiential complexity of suffering [4], [5]. Similar concerns appear in work on victim-witness testimony in anti-trafficking interventions, where statements are shaped by legal, bureaucratic, and protection regimes [6], [18]. Thus, testimony is both voice and institutional object.

The main aspects of victim testimony include narrative sequencing, self-positioning, relational attribution, affective disclosure, and institutional uptake. Narrative scholarship demonstrates that violent victimization is articulated through shifting positions of self, perpetrator, witness, and authority [8]. Legal anthropology further shows that trial speech may produce "audio-visibility," making suffering publicly audible while still subjecting it to procedural discipline [19]. Research on silence and silencing adds that absence, hesitation, or fragmented narration may be legally consequential, not merely communicative failure [7]. Indonesian studies on gendered credibility and court-constructed victims reinforce that testimony is interpreted through institutional expectations of coherence, respectability, and plausibility [15], [10].

2.2. Evidential voice

Evidential voice refers to linguistic forms through which knowledge claims are attributed, authorized, and evaluated in legal settings. It differs from testimony because it concerns not only what victims say, but how their accounts are revoiced by police, prosecutors, judges, experts, interpreters, or documents. In legal discourse, voice may appear as direct quotation, indirect report, paraphrase, evidential summary, expert corroboration, or judicial reasoning. Work on police interrogation and forensic linguistic evidence shows that institutional records may reshape speakers' agency through questioning formats, transcript conventions, and evidentiary framing [20], [11]. Studies of synthetic speech evidence further show that voice itself has become a site of authentication and uncertainty [21].

The indicators of evidential voice include source attribution, modality, reporting verbs, evidential hierarchy, corroborative layering, and shifts between lay and expert language. Judicial discourse often privileges voices that appear institutionally neutral, such as medical findings, procedural summaries, and legal reasoning, while victim voice may be filtered through reported speech. Comparative work on bilingual

judgments shows that attitudinal positioning can be embedded in seemingly technical legal language [9]. Research on interpreter mediation and indigenous language representation demonstrates that linguistic access affects whether testimony is heard as legally competent [14], [17]. Linguistic discrimination scholarship similarly warns that credibility may be unevenly distributed across accents, registers, and institutional language norms [16].

2.3. Legal injury

Legal injury refers to harm that has been translated into a legally recognizable category of damage, violation, loss, trauma, coercion, or entitlement to remedy. This concept differs from lived suffering because not every injury becomes legally legible, and not every legally recognized injury preserves victims' experiential meaning. Indonesian legal studies on restitution, revenge porn, discrimination damages, and restorative justice show that injury is negotiated through statutory categories, evidentiary thresholds, and remedial imagination [22], [23], [24], [25]. Studies of legal power and judicial reasoning also suggest that legal injury is constructed through authoritative discourse, not merely discovered as factual residue [12], [13].

The indicators of legal injury include bodily harm, psychological suffering, reputational damage, economic loss, coercive control, social stigma, procedural vulnerability, and remedial recognition. However, literature on plain legal language shows that institutional intelligibility does not automatically produce substantive justice; simplification may clarify legal meaning while leaving unequal evidential authority intact [26], [27]. Work on transgender-police relations and forced marriage similarly shows that trust, trauma, safety, and religious authority shape how victims can speak before law [28], [29]. This study therefore positions victim testimony, evidential voice, and legal injury as interdependent discourse processes through which harm becomes legally hearable, credible, and actionable.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis is the legally relevant textual segment in which victim harm is narrated, attributed, evaluated, or translated into legal injury. This study distinguishes three corpus layers: primary court decisions, contextual legal-institutional documents, and secondary scholarly references. Primary data provide courtroom-related discourse; contextual data explain the legal architecture of testimony, restitution, protection, and victim recovery; secondary data support conceptual interpretation. This separation prevents statutory context or literature from being treated as empirical findings. The corpus is organized by document code, data type, institution, legal domain, period, verification status, and analytic function, as summarized in Table 1.

This study uses qualitative legal discourse analysis supported by structured corpus management. The design is appropriate because the research object is not victim experience itself, but how victim experience is represented in legal language. It therefore avoids causal inference and treats legal texts as institutional artifacts. The approach combines narrative analysis, forensic linguistic attention to reported speech, and critical legal discourse analysis. This design follows scholarship showing that victim testimony may be admitted while still being narrowed by evidentiary form, procedural relevance, and institutional authority [4], [5], [20], [11].

Information sources are selected according to their analytic function. Court decisions supply primary discourse because they record testimony, evidentiary reasoning, injury description, and judicial evaluation. Regulations provide contextual norms on protection, restitution, compensation, sexual violence, and procedural recognition of victims. Institutional documents from LPSK, Komnas Perempuan, and Kemen PPPA situate victim testimony within a broader protection ecology. Scholarly sources are used to frame concepts such as testimonial admissibility, narrative harm, silencing, credibility, linguistic discrimination, and legal translation [6], [7], [15], [16]. Each source type is stored separately to preserve evidentiary boundaries.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Period	Quantity	Characteristics
PRI-IDL-001	Primary	JDIH MA / PN Jakarta Selatan	2023	1	Criminal assault, child victim, restitution
PRI-IDL-002	Primary	JDIH MA / PN Semarapura	2024	1	Child protection, sexual/reproductive harm
PRI-IDL-003	Primary	JDIH MA / PN Jakarta Selatan	2021	1	Homicide, state violence, witness testimony
PRI-IDL-004	Primary	JDIH MA / PN Jakarta Selatan	2022	1	Homicide, witness testimony
PRI-IDL-005	Primary	JDIH MA / PN Jakarta Selatan	2022	1	Digital evidence obstruction, criminal process
PRI-IDL-006	Primary	JDIH MA / PN Jakarta Selatan	2022	1	Civil/reputational injury, witness testimony
CTX-IDL-001	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2022	1	Sexual violence law, victim recovery
CTX-IDL-002	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2026	1	Witness and victim protection
CTX-IDL-003	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2014	1	Amendment to witness/victim protection law
CTX-IDL-004	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2006	1	Foundational witness/victim protection law
CTX-IDL-005	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2017	1	Restitution for child victims
CTX-IDL-006	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2018	1	Compensation, restitution, assistance
CTX-IDL-007	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2020	1	Amendment on compensation and assistance
CTX-IDL-008	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2022	1	Supreme Court regulation on restitution
CTX-IDL-009	Context	BPK Regulation Database	2024	1	Coordination for sexual violence handling
CTX-IDL-010	Context	LPSK	2024	1	Protection and assistance institution
CTX-IDL-011	Context	Komnas Perempuan	2025	1	Gender-based violence monitoring
CTX-IDL-012	Context	Kemen PPPA	2022	1	Victim policy communication
SEC-IDL-001–007	Secondary	Journal articles	2021–2026	7	Testimony, harm, credibility, silencing

Data collection followed a transparent documentary procedure. First, official repositories were identified and searched using Indonesian keywords such as "*saksi korban*," "*keterangan korban*," "*restitusi*," "trauma," "*kerugian*," "*visum et repertum*," "*perlindungan korban*," and "*alat bukti*." Second, candidate documents were screened for explicit victim-related testimony, harm narration, evidentiary voice, or legal injury. Third, metadata were recorded, including title, code, year, jurisdiction, source, URL, document type, and sensitivity note. Fourth, duplicate items were removed through normalized titles, case numbers, and URLs. Finally, ethically sensitive excerpts were anonymized or paraphrased where necessary.

Data analysis proceeds through three linked tools. Narrative Harm Mapping identifies how injury is sequenced through event chronology, bodily or cognitive damage, psychological suffering, economic loss, memory, silence, and future consequence. Evidential Voice Typology classifies who speaks for harm: victim, witness, judge, expert, police, LPSK, document, or digital trace. Credibility and Legal Translation Matrix examines how harm is accepted, qualified, contested, or converted into offence elements, restitution, compensation, or other legal remedies. Figure 2 operationalizes these stages as a flowchart. Together, these tools allow this study to explain how harm becomes legally hearable without claiming direct access to victims' lived trauma.

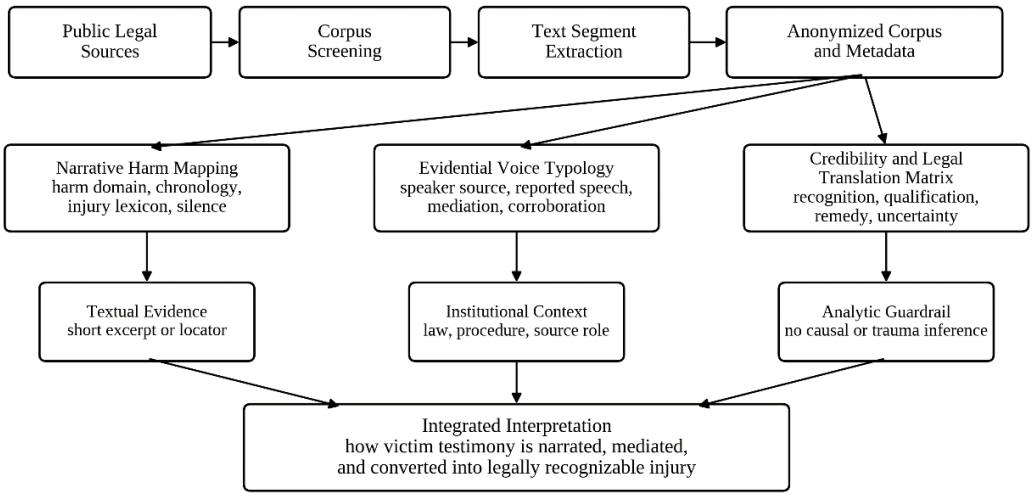


Figure 1. Operational Analysis Matrix

4. RESULTS

4.1. Narrative form of legal injury

Legal injury appears most strongly where harm is not narrated as a single event but as a sequence of bodily damage, institutional calculation, relational vulnerability, and evidentiary mediation. The highest concentration is bodily/cognitive injury, which accounts for four of nine coded primary segments, followed by sexual/reproductive/social harm with three segments and fatal harm with two segments. This distribution does not measure prevalence in Indonesian courts; it maps how selected public legal texts linguistically organize harm. The category structure follows the corpus design by treating each segment as a unit where injury is narrated, attributed, or made legally recognizable. The table therefore shows how victim-related legal discourse moves from experience to recordable injury.

The dominant pattern is the legal conversion of harm into institutionally stabilized language. In PRI-IDL-001, injury is not presented only as violence but as cognitive impairment, medical condition, future care need, and restitution. The phrase "*Pasien mengalami kondisi amnesia*" shifts harm into medical evidential language, while the judicial order to pay restitution converts suffering into legal remedy. PRI-IDL-002 shows a different pattern: harm is narrated through relational inducement, affective reaction, pregnancy, responsibility, and scientific corroboration. Fatal harm differs because victim voice is absent; testimony reconstructs the victim through witnesses, as in "*Saksi kenal dengan korban*." Across these segments, legal injury depends on mediated voices rather than direct victim narration alone.

This pattern supports a view of victim testimony as evidentially mediated narrative, not a transparent reproduction of lived suffering. D'hondt et al. [4], [5] show that victim accounts may enter legal procedure while being constrained by admissibility and evidentiary form. Hatavara and Presser [8] similarly emphasize positioning in violent victimization narratives, while Montoya [7] reminds us that silence and partial speech can be legally meaningful. In Indonesian legal discourse, Maham [15], Setiyawan [11], and Zifana et al. [10] help explain why credibility, reported speech, and institutional paraphrase matter. This study therefore treats harm as legally hearable when narrative form, evidential voice, and institutional translation converge.

Table 2. Narrative form and distribution of legal injury across coded primary segments

Main Category	Subcategory	Linguistic Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Textual Evidence
Bodily/cognitive injury	Medical memory impairment	Injury narrated through medicalized loss of memory	1	11.1%	"*Pasien mengalami kondisi amnesia…*"
Bodily/cognitive injury	Restitution/economic injury	Harm converted into quantified remedy	2	22.2%	"*membayar restitusi…* sebesar Rp25.140.161.900,00"
Bodily/cognitive injury	Projected care cost	Future-oriented harm calculated by institutional actor	1	11.1%	"*perhitungan dengan situasi terburuk*"
Sexual/reproductive/social harm	Affective relational inducement	Harm narrated through affect, intimacy, and reported speech	1	11.1%	"*benar sayang*"; "*berdebar atau deg-degan*"
Sexual/reproductive/social harm	Pregnancy/responsibility narrative	Injury framed through responsibility, consequence, and relational obligation	1	11.1%	"*bersedia bertanggung jawab*"
Sexual/reproductive/social harm	Scientific corroboration	Victim narrative linked to laboratory/legal confirmation	1	11.1%	DNA evidence recorded as corroborative voice
Fatal harm	Witness-mediated fatality	Deceased victim reconstructed through witness account	1	11.1%	"*disuruh keluar, ditiarapkan…*"
Fatal harm	Relational reconstruction	Victim identity rebuilt through prior social relation	1	11.1%	"*Saksi kenal dengan korban…*"

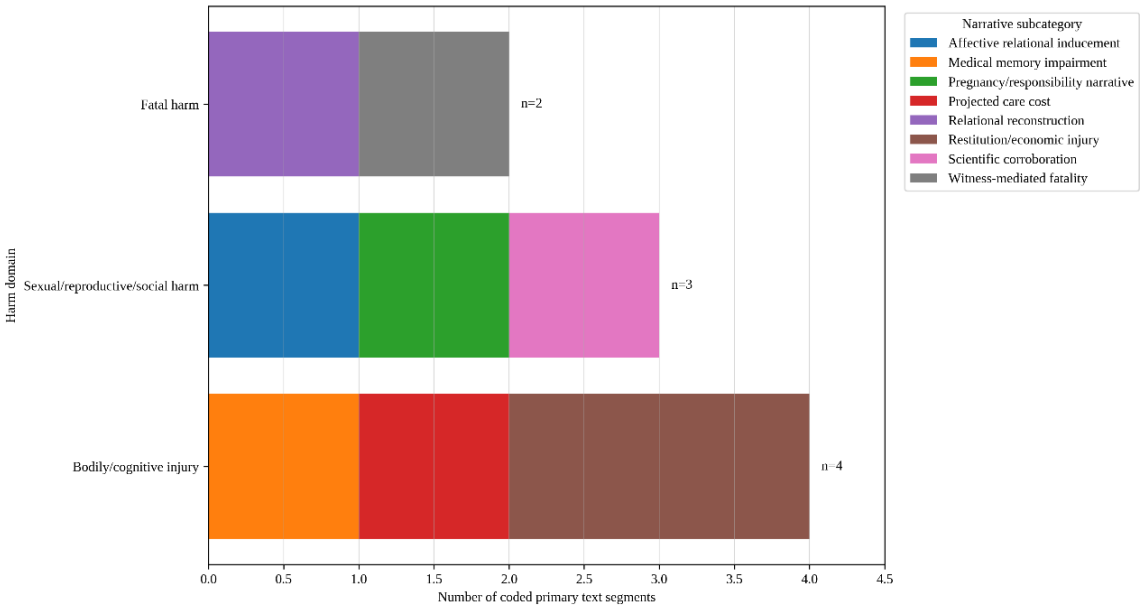


Figure 2. Narrative harm mapping of legal injury

4.2. Evidential voice in the legal construction of harm

Harm enters legal discourse through a hierarchy of voices rather than through victim speech alone. The same nine primary text segments used in the previous mapping show that institutional remedial voice is the most frequent category, appearing in three segments, followed by medical/scientific expert voice and witness-mediated voice, each appearing in two segments. Victim-positioned experiential voice and reported responsibility voice appear once each. This distribution indicates that legal injury is often made recognizable by actors or documents surrounding the victim: LPSK, judges, medical experts, laboratories, and witnesses. The table therefore shifts attention from what kind of harm is narrated to how harm acquires evidential authority.

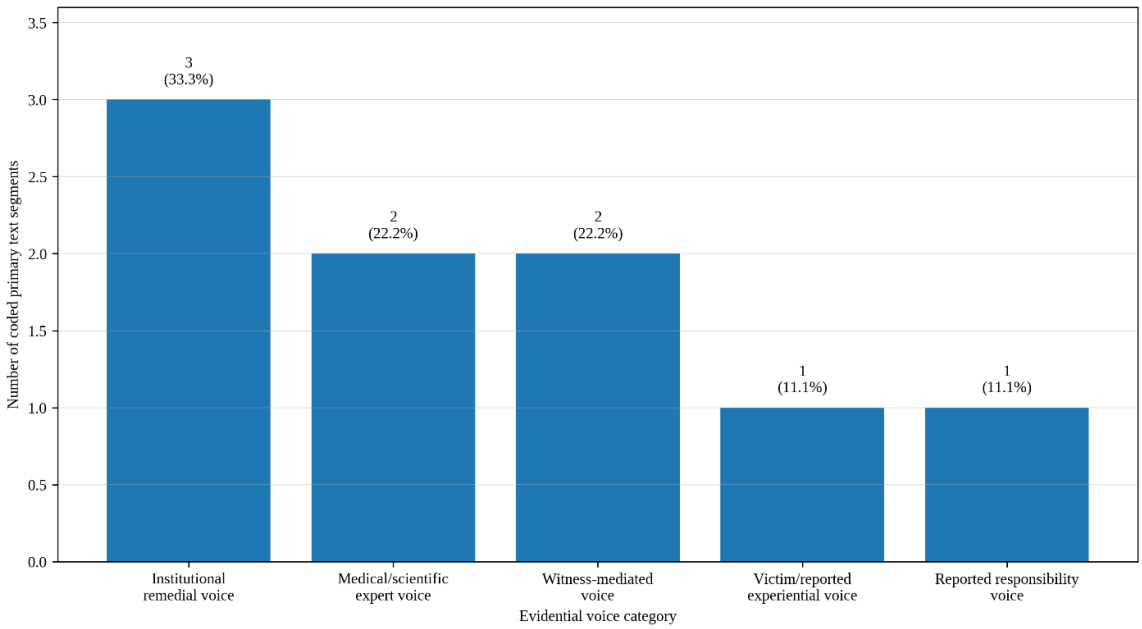


Figure 3. Distribution of evidential voice across coded text segments

Table 3. Evidential voice categories in the legal construction of harm

Evidential Voice Category	Source Position	Linguistic Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Evidential Function	Textual Evidence
Institutional remedial voice	LPSK / judicial remedy	Restitution, calculation, future care projection	3	33.3%	Converts harm into compensable legal injury	"*membayar restitusi*… sebesar Rp25.140.161.900,00"; "*perhitungan dengan situasi terburuk*"
Medical/scientific expert voice	Medical or laboratory authority	Diagnosis, physical condition, scientific corroboration	2	22.2%	Stabilizes harm through expert evidential language	"*Pasien mengalami kondisi amnesia*"; DNA evidence recorded as corroborative voice
Witness-mediated voice	Witness testimony	Victim reconstructed through another speaker	2	22.2%	Replaces unavailable or limited victim voice with observed account	"*disuruh keluar, ditiarapkan*…"; "*Saksi kenal dengan korban*…"
Victim/reported experiential voice	Victim-positioned account	Affective and embodied reaction reported in legal text	1	11.1%	Preserves experiential trace within institutional narration	"*benar sayang*"; "*berdebar atau deg-degan*"
Reported responsibility voice	Perpetrator-positioned speech	Responsibility narrated through reported utterance	1	11.1%	Links relational harm to legal accountability	"*bersedia bertanggung jawab*"

The dominant pattern is the movement from experiential harm to institutionally authorized harm. In PRI-IDL-001, "*Pasien mengalami kondisi amnesia*" gives injury medical status, while "*membayar restitusi*… sebesar Rp25.140.161.900,00" converts injury into a compensable legal remedy. In PRI-IDL-002, affective experience appears in reported form through phrases such as "*benar sayang*" and "*berdebar atau deg-degan*," but this voice is later strengthened by responsibility language and scientific corroboration. In the fatality-related segments, the victim cannot speak directly, so injury is reconstructed through witness accounts: "*disuruh keluar, ditiarapkan*…" and "*Saksi kenal dengan korban*…." The pattern is therefore not silence versus speech, but layered mediation.

These findings align with legal discourse scholarship showing that testimony becomes evidential through revoicing, filtering, and institutional uptake. D'hondt et al. [4], [5] argue that victim narratives may be admitted into legal process while being narrowed by evidentiary rules. Ansori [20] and Setiyawan [11] similarly show that Indonesian investigative and courtroom records reshape speakers' agency through institutional formats. Montoya [7] helps explain why partial, mediated, or displaced voice should not be read as communicative absence, while Kadamehang [14] and Drożdżowicz and Peled [16] show that access to authoritative language affects procedural equality. This study therefore treats evidential voice as a legal mechanism that authorizes harm by redistributing who may speak for injury.

4.3. Credibility and legal translation of injury

Legal credibility is produced through translation pathways that connect injury to recognizable evidentiary forms. The most frequent pathway is remedial quantification, with three of nine coded segments, followed by scientific/medical stabilization, relational accountability, and witness reconstruction, each with two segments. This pattern remains consistent with the same nine primary segments used in the previous analyses, but it reorganizes them according to how legal credibility is built. The movement from testimony to legal injury is therefore not merely narrative; it is classificatory. Harm becomes actionable when it can be attached to expert documentation, institutional remedy, reported responsibility, or witness reconstruction.

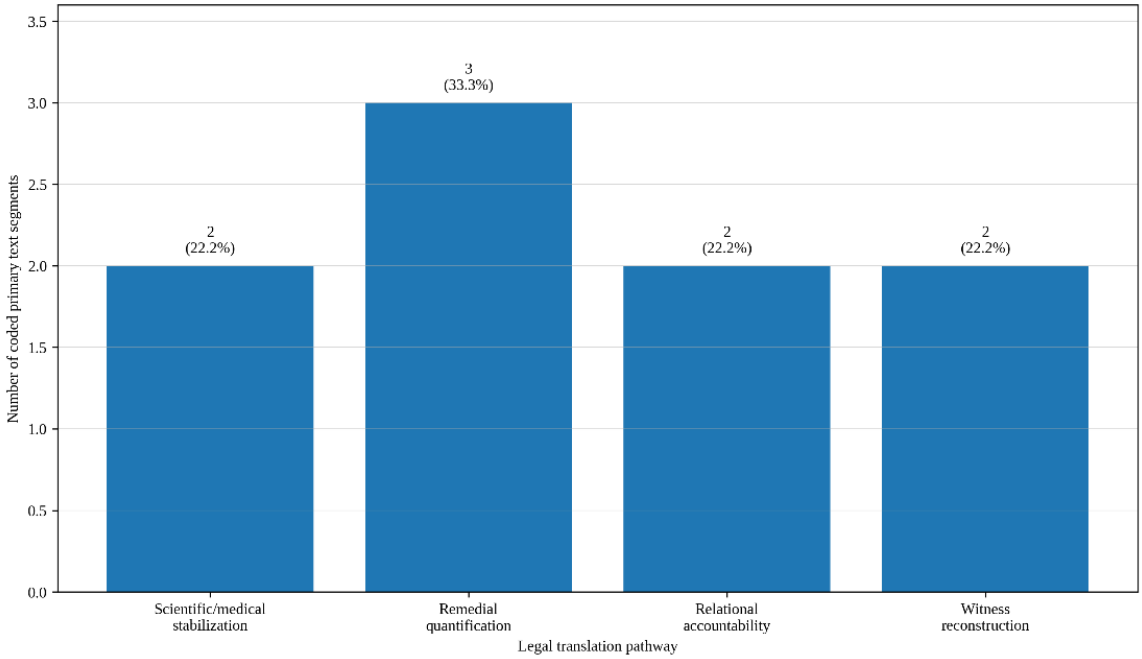


Figure 4. Credibility and legal translation pathways

Table 4. Credibility and legal translation pathways of legal injury

Legal Translation Pathway	Credibility Mechanism	Linguistic Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Textual Evidence
Scientific/medical stabilization	Expert or documentary authority	Injury is made credible through diagnosis, laboratory confirmation, or evidentiary documentation	2	22.2%	"*Pasien mengalami kondisi amnesia*"; DNA evidence recorded as corroborative voice
Remedial quantification	Institutional remedy authority	Harm is converted into calculable restitution, compensation, or projected care cost	3	33.3%	"*membayar restitusi…* sebesar Rp25.140.161.900,00"; "*perhitungan dengan situasi terburuk*"
Relational accountability	Reported relational speech	Injury is translated through responsibility, inducement, affect, and obligation	2	22.2%	"*benar sayang*"; "*berdebar atau deg-degan*"; "*bersedia bertanggung jawab*"
Witness reconstruction	Witness narration	Harm is reconstructed through third-party narration where victim voice is absent or limited	2	22.2%	"*disuruh keluar, ditiarapkan…*"; "*Saksi kenal dengan korban…*"

The clearest pattern is that legally recognized injury often gains force after being translated away from the victim's immediate voice. In PRI-IDL-001, "*Pasien mengalami kondisi amnesia*" stabilizes injury through medical language, while "*membayar restitusi…* sebesar Rp25.140.161.900,00" turns harm into a remedy that the court can order. In PRI-IDL-002, affective and relational statements such as "*benar sayang*," "*berdebar atau deg-degan*," and "*bersedia bertanggung jawab*" connect vulnerability to accountability. In fatality-related segments, legal recognition depends on witnesses who reconstruct the victim's condition and identity through phrases such as "*disuruh keluar, ditiarapkan…*" and "*Saksi kenal dengan korban….*" These patterns show credibility as mediated recognition.

The distribution reinforces the argument that legal injury is not identical with lived injury; it is a legally organized form of harm that becomes intelligible through authorized language. D'hondt et al. [5] describe how narratives of suffering may be constrained when they enter evidentiary procedure, while Ramachandran [6] shows that victim-witness testimony is shaped by institutional intervention. In the Indonesian context, Maham [15] and Zifana et al. [10] help clarify how credibility and victim construction are embedded in judicial discourse. Sadani [12], Setiaji [13], and Setiyawan [11] further suggest that legal reasoning, power, and forensic evidence are discursively organized. This study therefore frames credibility as the institutional translation of narrated harm into legally usable injury.

5. DISCUSSION

The distribution of narrative harm shows that legal injury functions as an organized form of suffering, not as a mere factual residue of violence. Bodily, cognitive, reproductive, relational, and fatal harms become legally meaningful when they can be placed into a recognizable narrative sequence: event, injury, evidence, consequence, and remedy. This matters because victims do not enter legal discourse only as persons who have suffered; they enter as narratable subjects whose suffering must be made intelligible within procedural grammar. The productive function of this process is that law can stabilize otherwise dispersed experiences into actionable claims. Its dysfunction, however, is that harms without clear chronology, visible injury, expert confirmation, or remedial calculability may become less audible. This finding extends D'hondt et al.'s [4], [5] argument that legal procedure admits victim narratives while narrowing their experiential density, and it resonates with Montoya's [7] concern that legal communication may both voice and silence suffering.

The underlying structure of this narrative pattern lies in the evidentiary expectations of legal genres. Court decisions are not designed to preserve victims' lived experience in full; they are designed to justify legal reasoning, establish relevance, and connect facts to offence elements or remedies. For this reason, harm is narratively rearranged into forms that can travel across police records, prosecution arguments, medical documents, judicial reasoning, and remedial orders. This does not mean that legal institutions distort harm in every case; rather, it indicates that institutional recognition depends on narrative compatibility. Hatavara and Presser's [8] work on positioning in violent victimization helps explain why victimhood is constructed through relational placement among self, perpetrator, witness, and authority. Zifana et al. [10] similarly show that victims in Indonesian verdicts are discursively constructed, not merely described. Thus, injury becomes legally available when narrative form fits institutional uptake.

The pattern of evidential voice has a distinct implication: victim testimony gains legal force through mediation, yet this mediation may also redistribute authority away from victims. Institutional, medical, scientific, witness, and reported-responsibility voices strengthen legal recognition because they corroborate, translate, or stabilize claims of harm. Such layering can protect victims from being left alone as unsupported narrators, particularly where injury is contested or where trauma makes full narration difficult. At the same time, mediation can subordinate experiential voice to voices deemed more neutral, technical, or procedurally trustworthy. This finding both supports and complicates existing scholarship. Ansori [20] and Setiyawan [11] emphasize how investigative and courtroom records shape evidentiary language, while Dave [19] shows that trials can produce public audibility for suffering. Yet audibility is not identical with authority. A victim may be heard, while institutional voices determine what that hearing legally means.

The structural reason for this redistribution of authority is that evidential voice operates through hierarchy. Legal discourse tends to rank voices according to institutional location, documentary form, technical expertise, and procedural usability. Medical statements, laboratory confirmation, LPSK calculations, and witness testimony often appear more legally portable than affective or fragmented victim speech. This hierarchy does not simply reflect bias; it also reflects law's need for verifiability, accountability, and reasoned judgment. However, linguistic discrimination scholarship warns that procedural standards may unevenly privilege speakers who already possess institutionally recognizable forms of expression [16]. Kadamehang [14] and Dwany [17] further show that language rights, interpreter mediation, and legal identity shape access to legal voice in Indonesia's multilingual legal environment. This study therefore suggests that

evidential hierarchy is both a safeguard against arbitrariness and a mechanism through which testimonial inequality may persist.

The credibility and legal translation pattern has another implication: legal injury becomes actionable when harm is converted into categories that courts can recognize, calculate, or attach to responsibility. Scientific stabilization, remedial quantification, relational accountability, and witness reconstruction each perform a different legal function. They make harm documentable, compensable, attributable, or reconstructable. This is institutionally necessary because law cannot remedy suffering that remains outside its categories. Yet this necessity creates a representational cost. Injury may become clearer as a legal object while becoming thinner as lived experience. This finding aligns with Adamullah and F. [22] on restitution, Ayuningtyas et al. [23] on victim-centered legal justice, and Rusydi [24] on damages ambiguity in Indonesian civil decisions. It also resonates with Ramadhan [26] and Damayanti [27], who suggest that legal intelligibility is not merely linguistic simplification but a question of meaning preservation within institutional translation.

The deeper structure behind legal translation is the tension between recognition and reduction. Law must reduce complexity to decide, compensate, punish, or protect, but reduction can exclude injuries that resist quantification, corroboration, or stable narration. This tension explains why victim-centered justice cannot depend solely on adding more testimony to legal records. It also requires attention to how testimony is transformed once recorded. Maham [15] shows that credibility is shaped by gendered narratives and institutional power, while Sadani [12] and Setiaji [13] demonstrate that justice and legal authority are constructed through reasoning and discourse. This study does not claim that Indonesian legal texts erase victim harm. Rather, it argues that harm becomes legally effective through a chain of narrative, evidential, and translational operations. The central implication is methodological as well as normative: legal discourse analysis must examine not only whether victims speak, but how their speech becomes injury before law.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that legal injury in Indonesian victim-related legal discourse is not merely recorded after harm occurs; it is linguistically constructed through narrative sequencing, evidential mediation, and institutional translation. Its central lesson is that victim testimony becomes legally powerful when suffering is made hearable through recognizable forms: bodily injury, cognitive impairment, reproductive harm, restitution, scientific corroboration, witness narration, and judicial reasoning. The strength of this study lies in shifting attention from testimony as content to testimony as a mediated legal process. By linking narrative harm mapping, evidential voice typology, and credibility–translation analysis, this study refreshes legal discourse inquiry with a framework capable of examining how harm is transformed into actionable injury without reducing victims' experiences to procedural categories alone.

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly accessible legal texts, which means that courtroom interaction, oral delivery, emotional hesitation, interpreter intervention, and extra-textual institutional negotiation cannot be fully observed. Its corpus also privileges documents that have entered formal legal archives, leaving less visible forms of victim narration outside official record. Future research should therefore combine judgment analysis with courtroom ethnography, interview-based legal anthropology, interpreter-mediated data, and comparative studies across regions, case types, and languages. Further inquiry may also examine how gender, age, class, disability, and linguistic background shape credibility assessment. Such work would deepen understanding of how justice depends on both evidence and the language through which injury becomes legally speakable.

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Suaidi: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible court decisions, contextual legal-institutional documents, and secondary scholarly references.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible court decisions, contextual legal-institutional documents, and secondary scholarly references, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of publicly accessible court decisions, contextual legal-institutional documents, and scholarly materials analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Suaidi is affiliated with Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Indonesia, where his work engages legal discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and forensic linguistics in Indonesian legal settings. His current research examines how victim testimony, evidential voice, and legal injury are linguistically constructed in Indonesian legal texts. He can be contacted at email: suaidisyafiie1922@uinmadura.ac.id