

Mainstream News Media's Engagement with Friedrich Engels's Concept of Social Murder

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Abstract: Literature now exists on how the media reports on health inequalities. One compelling concept as to the sources and impacts of health inequalities is “social murder” as articulated by Friedrich Engels in his 1845 volume, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, whereby the capitalist economic system sent workers prematurely to the grave to serve the profit motives of the bourgeoisie. There is a reemergence of the concept in the academic literature in response to growing social and health inequalities, but is this material being reported to the public? We examine news content since the turn of the 21st century and find a significant increase since 2017 in reporting that evokes the social murder concept in relation to the Grenfell Tower Fire, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the imposition of austerity in Canada and the UK. We consider these developments in relation to journalists' roles and their reporting on health inequalities.

Keywords: social murder, Friedrich Engels, health inequalities, capitalism, news media

1. Introduction

There is increasing news reporting on health inequalities and their sources. One particularly compelling concept as to the sources and impacts of health inequalities is “social murder” as articulated by Friedrich Engels (1845/2009) in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Engels laid out what he saw as the fundamental cause of health inequalities: the capitalist economic system and its sending workers prematurely to the grave to serve the profit motives of the bourgeoisie (Engels 1845/2009). There have been other conceptions of social murder such as rape (Winkler 1991) and settler colonialism (Wolfe 2006), but in this article we focus on the concept as elaborated by Engels in his 1845 work.

Engels's concept of social murder contains four elements: a) capitalism creates living and working conditions that kill; b) ruling authorities and the bourgeoisie are responsible for these conditions; and c) since they are aware of these effects, yet do nothing to change them; d) are guilty of social murder (Engels 1845/2009). Growing inequalities in health and the skewing of the distribution of economic and social resources that drive them has spurred renewed academic interest in the social murder concept.

Medvedyuk, Govender and Raphael (2021) documented the reemergence of Engels's concept of social murder in the academic literature in response to growing social and health inequalities. They found Engels's concept of social murder was infrequently used in 20th-century academic literature. Since 2000, however, there has been a revival of the social murder concept in academic journal articles, with growth especially

evident in the UK over the last decade as a result of the Grenfell Tower Fire (GTF), the effects of austerity imposed by successive Conservative UK governments, and governmental mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two primary concepts of social murder were identified. The first is true to Engels's conception that social murder is driven by the capitalist economic system with its inevitable exploitative social relations. The second sees social murder as resulting from problematic public policy without explicit reference to capitalist exploitation. In the first case, the issue is capitalist extraction of surplus value and its impact on workers, while the second case concerns public policy within a neoliberal economic setup.

Both concepts consider social murder as resulting from adverse living and working conditions, and more recent conceptualisations identify the adoption of neoliberal approaches to governance, deregulation and imposition of austerity as creating these conditions. Medvedyuk, Govender and Raphael suggest:

For those of us who see 21st century capitalism as causing the health inequalities that kill, evoking Engels's concept of social murder with its implications for shifting power and influence from those who profit from these structures and processes is the preferred option for building a movement to change the economic system that is "killing people on a large scale" (2021).

However, for this movement to occur there must be dissemination of this information to the public. A primary means of doing so would see printed and online news media carrying stories evoking the social murder concept. Historically, the news media has avoided especially contentious ideas such as social murder, but this may be changing due to the same events contributing to increases in the academic literature. This article evaluates whether this change in news and media reporting has occurred by examining print and online news content from the turn of the 21st century to the present.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Background

We see four threads in the communications literature as relevant to our research. These are provided in order of increasing complexity from older work on media influence upon public opinion to more recent work examining the various roles journalists play in democratic societies.

2.1. Agenda Setting

McCombs and Valenzuela (2020) consider how public awareness is raised by media reporting, which itself is shaped by public relations firms, political leaders, and the personal predilections – attitudes, values, and knowledge – of journalists. An important finding from this literature is that media coverage stimulates public interest in and understanding of a wide range of issues (McCombs et al. 2011), spurring research into how the media communicates the problem of health inequalities and the means of reducing them (Niederdeppe et al. 2013).

2.2. Media Logic

Altheide (2004, 294) defines media logic as "the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium", with format, flow, and grammar being its core components. Format is the most important component as it determines the selection, organization, and presentation of information and requires reporting to be "evocative, encapsulated, highly thematic, familiar to audiences, and easy to use" (2004, 294).

Hinnant et al. (2017) conclude that media logic leads to reporting on individual issues and solutions, rather than thematic framings examining societal forces and structural issues. Reporting on structural determinants of health is difficult as these are complex, controversial, and less politically safe, with fewer immediate suggestions for action.

2.3. Critical Journalism

Herman and Chomsky's (2002) Propaganda Model sees the media as fulfilling a very specific role of imbuing the public with the values, beliefs, and behaviours endorsed by ruling elites: "In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda" (1).

The model has two main hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that the media will reflect the consensus amongst the corporate and political elite on a particular issue, excluding rival viewpoints. The second is that where the mass media is under corporate rather than state control, its reporting will be shaped by a 'guided market system' of government officials, leaders of the corporate community, elite media owners and executives, and others in positions of power. This suggests that communicating the concept of social murder would be challenging as it contradicts the values and ideologies of the elites that dominate societal discourses and control the media.

2.4. Placing the Social Murder Concept within Journalism's Roles

Christians et al.'s (2009) typology of *monitorial*, *facilitative*, *collaborative*, and *radical* roles provides a basis for understanding how the media would engage with a contentious concept like social murder. Reporting of the social murder concept in relation to adverse health outcomes only occurs in the *radical* role as it focuses on exposing abuses of power, problems of wrongdoing, inequality and the necessity for change.

For Christians et al. (2009), barriers to carrying out the radical role include the power and influence of governing authorities, economic and commercial aspects of publishing where pleasing advertising clients is important, and media logic where emphasis is placed on reporting events rather than complex or abstract issues. Within most other roles we can expect to see little reporting of complex and contentious concepts like social murder. All these threads suggest that printed and online news reporting of health issues within Engels's concept of social murder would require exceptional circumstances. The GTF, conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, including mishandling of it by governmental authorities, and the adverse health effects of austerity in the UK may currently be providing such opportunities.

3. Methods

We followed Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage approach for conducting scoping reviews: 1) formulating the research question; 2) examining relevant sources; 3) selecting these sources; 4) charting of data; and 5) collating, synthesising, and reporting findings.

We searched Dow Jones' Factiva™, as "Factiva is one of the largest news aggregators and archives in the world" (ProQuest 2021), effectively covering international news (Johal 2009). Using the search term "social murder", we reviewed all returned printed and online news articles dating from 1994 to August 2021.

It is sufficient for academic writers to provide a theoretical and/or empirical rationale for their work, relating it to previous research. Contrastingly, for the news media, it is necessary to provide a news 'hook', the critical piece of newsworthy information that draws the audience's attention and awareness (Yopp et al. 2010). Therefore, through

consensus, the present authors identified the news hook and the concept of social murder that each article employed. We also identified temporal trends and the countries of origin for these news reports.

4. Findings

We identified 134 print and online news articles from 1994 onwards in which the term ‘social murder’ appeared in relation to health, illness, or well-being. These are provided in a supplementary file available from the authors. However, 41 of these were unrelated to Engels’s concept of social murder as either capitalist exploitation, problematic public policy, or some other structural aspect of society constituting social murder. This left 93 articles as our focus.¹

Our analysis reveals three main findings. There are a few recent key stimuli for print and online news reporting employing the term ‘social murder’. Reporting that employed the social murder concept profoundly increased during 2016–2017 and this trend continues (see Figure 1). Finally, news and online print reports differ to the extent they employ Engels’s full concept of social murder as capitalist exploitation versus problematic public policy or some other aspect of society.

¹ Of these 41 excluded articles, 24 dealt with aspects of death/dying unrelated to Engels’s concept: we found 15 on suicide and nine on mass shootings, and single instances of homicide, capital punishment, gender-based death, death due to illegal alcohol, and stigma. Of the remaining 17, six saw cancel culture and four saw COVID-19 lockdowns and mask mandates as social murder. There were single instances on rape, social media, firing practices, online attacks, political trials, marketing hot sauce, and a birthday announcement for libertarian Walter Block.

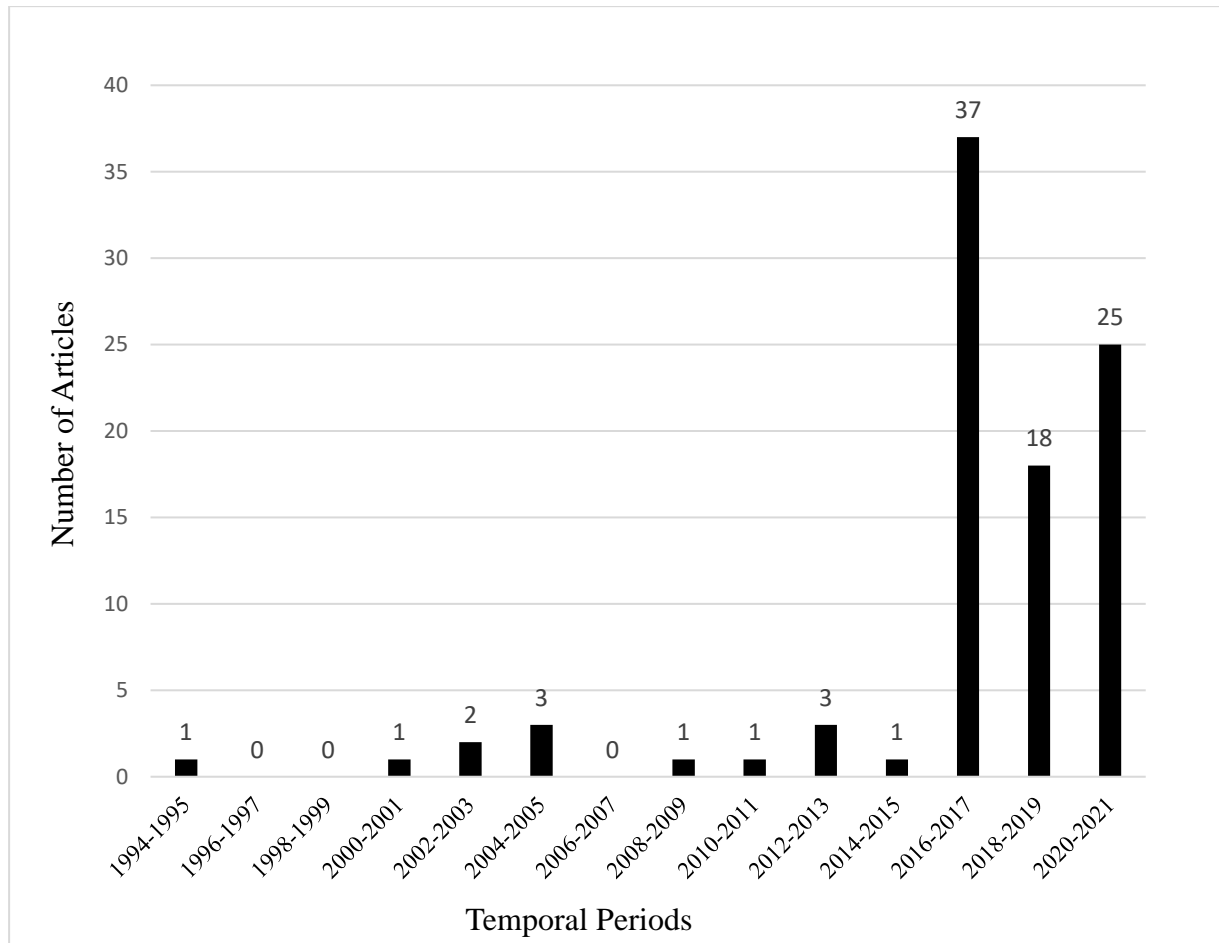


Figure 1: Number of instances of the term 'social murder' in news sources related to Engels's concept from January 1994 to August 2021 by two-year intervals

4.1. News Hooks for Engels's Social Murder Concept

We identified five primary news hooks evoking the social murder concept: 1) GTF as social murder, including politicians citing the GTF as social murder and reactions to this; 2) conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic including governmental responses to the pandemic; 3) austerity and social security policy as social murder; 4) instances of social murder related to job precarity from the Republic of Korea; and 5) other public policies as social murder. Table 1 provides an overview of these findings.

News Hook	N	Concept	N	Summary Description
1. GTF	40			
1a. GTF as Social Murder	16	Capitalist Exploitation	7	These articles discussed the relevance of Engels's concept of social murder to the GTF, citing issues of growing inequalities between the working class and elites, deregulation, political neglect, and housing inequality.
		Problematic Public Policy	9	These articles focused on austerity measures such as cuts to

				emergency services and Grenfell Tower residents' being ignored regarding building renovations and safety.
1b. Politicians Citing GTF as Social Murder	24	Problematic Public Policy	3	These articles reported John McDonnell's view that the GTF was a result of political decisions that failed to address the housing crisis, funding cuts to fire services and lack of local government oversight for building inspections.
		Reaction	21	These articles covered the responses and backlash to John McDonnell's claim that the GTF was social murder.
2. Conditions Arising During COVID-19 as Social Murder	20	Capitalist Exploitation	3	These articles discussed digital capitalism and digital labour exploitation in relation to Fuchs' (2021) journal article, life-threatening working conditions faced by the working class during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to Abbasi's (2021) BMJ editorial, and ecological exploitation.
		Problematic Public Policy	15	These articles discussed a lack of benefits for vulnerable populations during lockdowns, Abbasi's (2021) editorial in the BMJ about the mishandling of COVID-19, political decision-making that has led to avoidable and preventable deaths, and a focus by governments on reactive public health policies such as lockdowns and restrictions instead of preventative measures.
		Reaction	2	These articles critiqued the use of 'social murder' by politicians to describe governmental policy responses to COVID-19.
3. Austerity and Social Security Policy as Social Murder	13	Capitalist Exploitation	2	These articles discussed austerity-driven policies in relation to capitalist exploitation and poor health outcomes, government welfare and benefit cuts in relation to Grover's (2019) journal article, and child homelessness.
		Problematic Public Policy	8	These articles examined life expectancy rates during periods of austerity, poverty rates, health inequalities, reduction in disability benefits and

				other social benefits as a result of conservative political agendas.
		Reaction	3	These articles critiqued the use of 'social murder' in relation to austerity-driven conservative politics.
4. Instances of Social Murder from the Republic of Korea	8	Capitalist Exploitation	3	These articles discussed worker suicides in relation to increasing rates of irregular work, industrial restructuring and mass layoffs, and capitalism.
		Problematic Public Policy	5	These articles examined suicides due to growing rates of poverty in relation to economic meltdowns, labour insecurity, layoffs, and the lack of a social safety net.
5. Other Public Policies as Constituting Social Murder	12	Problematic Public Policy	12	These articles examined governmental abuse of power, deregulation, poor economic and political climates, lack of worker protections, climate change, inflation, low standards of living, citizen protests against fuel prices, and economic redistribution.

Table 1: 'Social murder' hooks and concepts in news reports, 1994–2021 (n = 93)

4.1.1. Grenfell Tower Fire (GTF) as Social Murder

Almost all the 40 news sources discussing the GTF as social murder came from the UK (n = 35) with an additional two from China, two from the USA and one from Australia. The 13 news sources focused on the GTF itself were evenly divided between those seeing capitalist exploitation as behind the GTF and those seeing problematic public policy as its cause.

GTF as resulting from capitalist exploitation: Seven articles consider how Engels's concept of social murder as capitalist exploitation is relevant to the GTF and other aspects of contemporary life. From the UK, Chakraborty (2017) states: "The victims of Grenfell Tower didn't just die. Austerity, outsourcing and deregulation killed them – just as Victorian Manchester killed the poor then". Jones (2020) reports that British society disregards working-class people such that racialised groups are disproportionately disadvantaged, as in the case of the GTF. Jones argues that the Grenfell Tower disaster resulted from deregulation and political neglect within the context of profit-driven enterprises. The GTF is an example of "politics at its most distilled and violent: how a society has become structured to make the avoidable mass deaths of its citizens possible" (Jones 2020).

From China, Jin, Gu and Zhang write that Engels's concept of social murder explains how austerity is widening the gap between the rich and poor: "Marx's social critique has enjoyed a revival as the public realized that the financial crisis was essentially triggered by capitalist greed and a resurgence in neo-liberalism" (2018, 1). Alain Khan is quoted: "The rising support for the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn is the best proof that Marx's critique of the capitalist economics is pretty solid and still holds today" (2018, 1).

Also from China, an interview with British writer Jonathan Schofield outlines how the GTF and the COVID-19 pandemic reveals “a greater inequality in British society, which also in a way shows that Engels’s books on how capital works are still relevant” (Jarvis 2020). A class-action lawsuit against the manufacturer of the cladding panels used in the Grenfell Tower renovations states that the GTF: “demonstrates that capitalism takes more seriously the threat to investors’ finances than the lives of the working class” (Class Action Reporter 2019, 21).

Finally, two stories, one Australian and one American, draw upon the GTF to illustrate how capitalist exploitation is driving global housing inequalities. Farrelly (2017) concludes that, in Australia, neoliberal governance in collusion with corporate developers is responsible for the lack of fire safety regulation in social housing which “reduces everything to dollar value”. For Bisrat (2018), the housing situations in Baltimore, USA and GTF illustrate the problematic economic relationship between renters and landlords, constituting structural violence.

GTF as resulting from problematic public policy: Nine articles report on problematic austerity-related cuts to emergency services (Gye 2017b; Ungoed-Thomas 2017); the ignoring of resident concerns regarding the poor quality of Grenfell Tower renovations (Ungoed-Thomas 2017); the failure to provide basic services to GTF survivors in a timely manner (Kennedy 2017a; Kennedy 2017b); and how funding cuts for the local press resulted in a lack of news coverage concerning fire safety concerns prior to the GTF (Bell 2017). d’Ancona (2017) argues that the GTF is more than just a consequence of austerity and inequality, but a result of social division in which some experience risk, impoverishment, and death. Three articles make mention of McDonnell’s remarks in relation to student debt (Maidment 2017a; 2017b; Zeffman 2017).

4.1.2. Politicians Citing the Grenfell Tower Fire as Social Murder

Politicians citing the GTF as ‘social murder’: The news hook in 24 news articles – more than the number specifically reporting on GTF as social murder – was UK politician John McDonnell’s statements that the GTF deaths constituted social murder. Of these, three reported McDonnell’s claim that the GTF resulted from funding cuts to fire services and policy decisions that forced cash-strapped local governments into inadequate property inspections (Barnes 2017; Minelle 2017; Wheeler 2017).

Reactions to the use of ‘social murder’: Against the three reports of McDonnell’s initial statements, 21 news sources reported on the backlash from critics of his evoking the social murder concept. Examples include Philip Hammond, the Chancellor at the time calling McDonnell’s remarks “a disgraceful suggestion” (Gye 2017a) while MP Jess Phillips stated that politicians’ language “can be passionate without the potential to incite” (Hunt 2017). Hinsliff (2017) writes that McDonnell’s suggestion of social murder was “provocative, regardless of whether it was referencing Engels’s concept of social murder” while Goodhart (2018) refers to it as the “politics of rage”. All 21 reports are identified in a supplementary file available from the authors.

4.1.3. Conditions Arising During the COVID-19 Pandemic as Social Murder

Of the 20 reports on conditions arising during COVID-19 as social murder, five were from the UK, three each from India, Russia, and the USA, two from Turkey and one each from China, France, New Zealand, and Nigeria.

Capitalist exploitation: Of three articles, two were from the US and one from New Zealand. One US article discusses Fuchs’s (2021) journal article on how digital labour exploitation during COVID-19 leads to social murder (Global Views – Communication

and Mass Media 2020). In the other, Foster and Suwandi (2021) link the COVID-19 pandemic and increased ecological destruction to the global capital economic model that generates excess mortality amongst the working class and poor, constituting social murder. Lastly, Peters (2021) shows how the death of miners at New Zealand's Pike River disaster was a result of government officials and the trade union bureaucracy colluding with those benefiting from the capitalist economic system, thereby constituting social murder.

Problematic public policy during the COVID-19 pandemic: Fifteen articles discuss governmental responses to COVID-19 as social murder without referencing capitalist exploitation. Of these, six mention Abbasi's (2021) *British Medical Journal* editorial *COVID-19: Social Murder, They Wrote – Elected, Unaccountable, and Unrepentant* in relation to problematic public policy.

From France, Galey (2021) discusses Abbasi's (2021) assertion that politicians worldwide are responsible for the preventable deaths that resulted from mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. From China, Chow (2021) highlights Abbasi's (2021) concept of accountability for Hong Kong being stuck in reactive policy measures of restrictions and lockdowns. From India, Cherian (2021) cites Abbasi's (2021) use of the term 'social murder' in a discussion of vaccine shortages.

The three remaining news sources specifically focus on Abbasi's (2021) description of the Conservative British government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as social murder. From the UK, Meyerson (2021) argues that politicians "placed the nation's wealth over the nation's health". From *Sputnik News Service*, Cunningham (2021) reports on the lack of remuneration for UK nurses and other frontline health workers and Sheridan (2021) reports that the unlawful awarding of UK governmental COVID-19 contracts constitute as social murder.

Of the nine news sources discussing governmental responses to COVID-19 as social murder without mention of Abbasi's (2021) journal article, two pre-date Abbasi's article. Makinde (2020) examines the role of COVID-19 lockdowns in Nigeria, finding growing rates of food insecurity among the vulnerable. In the UK, Sim and Tombs (2021) critique the Conservative government "forcing sections of the population to live in conditions which have inevitably led to avoidable, premature deaths, and will continue to do so".

The seven remaining news sources were published after Abbasi's (2021) journal article but make no mention of it. In the Indian context, Mannathukkaren (2021) argues that: "By participating in the state's abdication of responsibility, one is fostering conditions of social murder" while Babu (2021) states the avoidable "immense loss of life and livelihoods" during the pandemic is due to political leadership being "guided by political interests rather than the well-being of people" (1).

Four articles came from Turkey. Two critically assessed the government's partial lockdowns and lifting of restrictions in relation to surges in COVID-19 infections and deaths (bne IntelliNews 2021a; 2021b). Sebnem Korucu Fincanci, the head of the Turkish Medical Association, critiqued the government's policy approach: "We called this a 'social murder' because they already know what will cause these deaths, they do not have any preventative measures" (Butler and Gumrukcu 2021). A BBC article quoted the Turkish Medical Association: "insistence on wrong health policies is social murder" (BBC Monitoring Europe 2021, 1). Lastly, an article from *Sputnik News Service* (2021b) reports on Labour MP Zarah Sultana's argument that inadequate PPE for health care workers and not testing people discharged into care homes constitutes social murder.

Reaction to terming governmental responses as social murder: One UK news article critiqued the use of ‘social murder’ by the Labour party to describe the Conservative government’s COVID-19 response (The Sun 2021a) while another reported Conservative MP Richard Holden attacking Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn’s accusation of social murder (The Sun 2021b).

4.1.4. Austerity and Social Security Policy as Social Murder

Of these 13 news sources, seven were from Canada, five from the UK, and one from Russia. Only two referenced Grover’s (2019) journal article equating UK social policy to social murder.

Capitalist exploitation. The two articles citing Grover’s (2019) article – one from the UK and one from Russia – reference capitalist exploitation as the cause of the health effects of welfare cuts. UK writer Bloom (2018) reports on how Grover revived Engels’s concept of social murder in regard to the adverse health effects of benefit cuts. Sheridan (2019) references Grover’s research in regard to growing numbers of deaths due to malnutrition and homelessness.

Problematic public policy. Of these eight news sources, four were UK-focused. Farragher (2017) argues that failure to address older persons’ needs constitutes social murder. Bloom (2018; 2019) sees changes to disability benefits that increase suicide rates as social murder. Grover (2020) states that Britain’s social security policies cause avoidable deaths. Reade (2018) mentions Grover’s work on austerity policies as social murder.

From Canada, Raphael (2018) relates current austerity-driven policies in Ontario to social murder. Similarly, Mahoney (2018) quotes a retired manager of community services in Hamilton, Ontario: “I hope we call it (the premature death that can come with poverty) what it is – social murder”. An article from *Health and Medicine Week* (2009) examines how Chernomas and colleagues apply the concept of social murder to the effects of conservative economic policies. Lastly, one article mentions Raphael’s (2018) use of the social murder concept in a briefing review of news stories (Duggal 2018).

Reaction to use of the term: Three news sources from Canada critiqued Raphael’s (2018) use of the term ‘social murder’ to describe conservative austerity politics. Tishman (2018) claimed terms such as ‘social murder’ are polarising, demonising, and poisoning political atmospheres. Eisen (2018) states that terms like ‘social murder’ are “reckless rhetoric” and “wild accusation” (A19). Soupcoff (2018) argues against Raphael’s (2018) support for minimum-wage increases.

4.1.5. Instances of Social Murder from the Republic of Korea

We found eight instances of social murder in relation to structural inequalities in Korea, seven from Korea and one from China. Their unique focus on precarity in Korea merits their separate mention.

Capitalist exploitation: Of these three articles, one article from the *Korea Times* (2004a) linked increasing suicides in the industrial sector to a “growing dependence on the irregular workforce” (1) by the government and management. From Hong Kong, Chambers (2004, 3) reported on how a South Korean temporary worker left a suicide note stating “To live as an irregular worker means to give up being a human being, to live as a modern-day slave and to live a sacrificial life to feed the wealthy”. Lastly, a news source from the *Korea Times* (2012a) discussed worker suicides in relation to mass layoffs and restructuring in the automobile industry as social murder.

Problematic public policy: Suicides due to poverty were examined in five news sources. Yong-shik (2003) described the situation as an “epidemic” (1) while another writer quoted Rep. Lee Won-hyung: “Poverty-led suicides are soaring to a serious level. Such deaths are equivalent to social murder” (Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies 2003, 1). The *Korea Times* (2004b) reported increasing suicides and poor mental health while another article argued “leaders should stop acts of ‘social murder’” (Korea Times 2012b, 1) and a third linked suicides due to mass layoffs and a weak social safety net as social murder (Yonhap English News 2014).

4.1.6. Other Public Policies as Constituting Social Murder

Of these 12 news sources, four were from the UK, three from Pakistan, two from Bulgaria, and one each from Canada, Russia and South Africa. Ten examined social murder in relation to problematic public policy without a critique of exploitation under capitalism, one considered the use of polemic, and another was a biographical sketch.

A 1995 UK article examined how Margaret Thatcher and successive conservative governments “have got away with political and social murder since 1979” (Keegan 1995, 2). Doward (2016) calls for greater attention to issues of health and safety, pollution, and food poisoning as state neglect facilitating social murder. Nicolson (2019) sees governmental abuse of power as responsible for “current structural violence and social murder”.

In Pakistan, increases in petroleum prices and other commodities is referred to as the social murder of the working class (Pakistan Press International 2001). Bin Saleem (2013) describes problematic policymaking as causing social murder. Shah (2016) reports that workers are calling for government action, as loss of work results in social murder.

In Bulgaria, citizens are asking the government to stop “the social murder of Bulgaria” (Bulgarian News Agency 2018b) resulting from cost-of-living increases, poor living standards, poverty and corruption. A “No to social murder in Bulgaria!” slogan is appearing on car stickers and protest signs (Bulgarian News Agency 2018a).

In Canada, another *Health and Medicine Week* (2010) article discussed Chernomas’s work on social murder. *Sputnik News Service* (2021a) interviewed Chris Hedges about the failure of the ruling elite class to address climate change.

From the UK, May (2019) states that polemics can incite left or right supporters to violence. Another article from South Africa uses the term ‘social murder’ when discussing the work of political activist Martin Hani (Mahlatsi 2021). Table 2 provides quotations illustrating the five primary hooks and three primary concepts identified in this study.

News Hook	Concept	Illustrative Quotations
1a. GTF as Social Murder	Capitalist Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spending cuts, deregulation, outsourcing: between them they have turned a state supposedly there to protect and support citizens into a machine to make money for the rich while punishing the poor [...] Class warfare is passed off as book-keeping [...] Let’s get clear what happened to them: an act of social murder, straight out of Victorian times (Chakraborty 2017).

	Problematic Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> David Collins, former chairman of the Grenfell Tower Residents Association, said: “They were unwilling to listen to what we were telling them about the appalling manner and quality of the construction works” (Ungoed-Thomas 2017).
1b. Politicians’ Citing of the GTF as Social Murder	Problematic Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> McDonnell, asked to explain who the murderers are, said: “I think there’s been a consequence of political decisions over years that have not addressed the housing crisis, that have cut back on local government so proper inspections have not been made, 11,000 firefighter jobs have been cut as well” (Wheeler 2017, 2).
	Reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shadow chancellor John McDonnell was branded a “disgrace” today after he repeated claims that the victims of Grenfell Tower were “murdered” (Express News UK 2017).
2. Conditions Arising during COVID-19 as Social Murder	Capitalist Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since communicable diseases, due to the unequal conditions created by capitalism, fall heaviest on the working class and the poor, the system that generates such diseases in the pursuit of wealth can be charged with social murder (Foster and Suwandi 2021, 17).
	Problematic Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [To UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson] You failed to be honest about your government’s level of preparedness, failed to prevent infections coming in from abroad, failed to lead by example by shaking hands and not wearing a mask, failed to provide us with adequate PPE, failed to be transparent and not corrupt by giving PPE contracts worth billions to friends and donors without any experience (Meyerson 2021).
	Reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calling the toll [of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK] “social murder”. Idiotically demanding cops charge Boris Johnson with “corporate manslaughter”. These are not the actions of serious politicians, merely of student union rabblers playing to a hard-Left gallery (The Sun 2021a, 10).
3. Austerity and Social Security Policy as Social Murder	Capitalist Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boris Johnson [...] and others [...] are guilty of cold and callous policies designed to impoverish and punish the poorest and most vulnerable in society for the benefit of the rich and powerful (Sheridan 2019).
	Problematic Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those in positions of power, however, choose to ignore their responsibilities in demanding policies that are harming disabled benefit

		recipients, and willfully refuse to urgently overhaul a benefits system that routinely leads to hardship and, for some, to ill-health and death (Grover 2020).
	Reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Referring to the article by Raphael] perhaps his reckless rhetoric will remind anyone interested in public policy that there's a wide range of legitimate views on most issues, and we can debate them without hurling wild accusations such as "social murder" at those with whom we disagree (Eisen 2018, A19).
4. Instances of Social Murder from the Republic of Korea	Capitalist Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's been decades since economic globalization, aided by breakneck technological advance and industrial sophistication, tilted the balance between capital and labor toward the former one-sidedly (Korea Times 2012a, 1).
	Problematic Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Rising suicide rates among the poor and underprivileged are a product of the rapid collapse of the middle class due to an economic meltdown," Cho Geung-ho, professor of social psychology at Sogang University, said. "At this point in Korea, suicide should be considered 'social murder' in many cases" (Yongshik 2003, 1).
5. Other Public Policies as Constituting Social Murder	Problematic Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This is not about rules, regulations and red tape," Tombs said. "It is about lives lost and shortened and the health of communities, workers and consumers made poorer. This is avoidable business-generated, state-facilitated social murder" (Doward 2016, 14).

Table 2: Quotations illustrating the five primary 'social murder' news hooks

5. Discussion

5.1. News Hooks and Social Murder

News hooks – usually an event, a politician's statement, or the publication of an article – act as stimuli to journalists presenting the social murder concept. Our analysis revealed a rather small number of such hooks, with the majority of reports focused on the GTF and conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Serious or catastrophic events appear to provide a window of opportunity for journalists – and those who wish to influence journalists – to present a potentially transformational concept such as social murder.

Many news reports engaged with the concept of social murder because an authority used it. Examples include British politician John McDonnell's statements – and responses to these – depicting the GTF as social murder, and the president of the Turkish Medical Association's critique of governmental policy towards the COVID-19 pandemic as social murder.

Also facilitating news coverage of the social murder concept were the two academic journal articles depicting the imposition of austerity in the UK (Grover 2019) and

government responses to the pandemic as representing social murder (Abbasi 2021). These findings suggest that researchers and advocates provide academically sound analyses of the relevance of the social murder concept to contemporary issues. Having prominent figures apply the concept seems to contribute to news coverage.

5.2. Capitalist Exploitation versus Problematic Public Policy

The identification of two primary concepts of social murder paralleled findings of the social murder concept in academic journals (Medvedyuk et al. 2021). In academic journals, use of social murder as capitalist exploitation far exceeded the problematic public policy concept, while in the news media, the opposite occurred: 15 news sources were coded as capitalist exploitation and 45 as problematic public policy. Only 20 of the 93 news sources referenced Engels's work and even fewer cited Engels's 1845 volume. As shown in Figure 2, the GTF elicited the largest number of articles incorporating the capitalist exploitation concept and references to Engels and his 1845 volume. COVID-19 articles were overwhelmingly concerned with problematic public policy as leading to social murder.

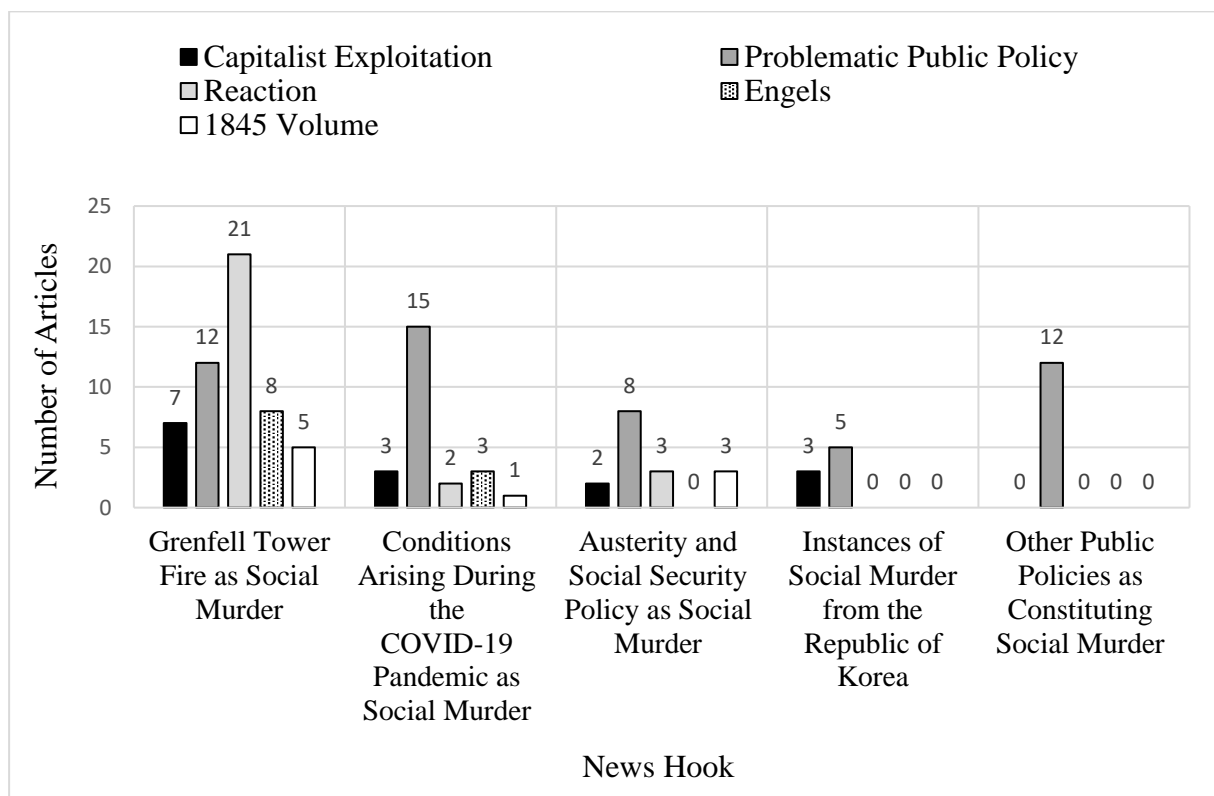


Figure 2: Number of news sources by news hook, social murder concept and reference to Engels and his 1845 volume

We found Engels's concept of social murder applied to tragedies such as the GTF, labour and ecological exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic, austerity measures and benefit cuts in the UK, and growing rates of suicide in Korea due to poor working conditions and labour insecurity. In all these cases the working class and poor were identified as disproportionately disadvantaged so as to benefit the capitalist economic model.

There are numerous reasons why most articles did not evoke the capitalist exploitation concept. It is only in the radical role that journalists embrace this concept, and

the critical journalism approach suggests – taking corporate domination of the media into account – that this role is rarely assumed. Against this is the increasing awareness of the global adverse effects of neoliberal approaches to policymaking and governance. This suggests a need to bring to the attention of the media these adverse effects of public policies.

5.3. Critique of Use of the Polemics of Social Murder

A significant number of articles examined critiqued the use of polemics and the term social murder. Of 93 publications, 30 – almost one third – saw the use of such language as polarising. Journalists should expect such pushback, yet any coverage – positive or negative – can help to disseminate the social murder concept to the public.

5.4. Towards the Future

News reporting can educate and mobilize the public. Christians et al. (2009) suggest the inverse situation that the media may come to cover issues perceived as resonating amongst their public. Three avenues of increasing media coverage are suggested: 1) raising the concept through social media and bringing these to the attention of “digital” and/or “social media” reporters who monitor such content; 2) informing the media about publications in academic journals evoking the social murder concept; and 3) having prominent spokespersons apply the social murder concept to the contemporary scene.

6. Conclusion

There appears to be increasing willingness among journalists to engage with the concept of social murder as espoused by Engels to explain the causes and effects of growing social and health inequalities. Such reporting runs up against entrenched barriers due to media logic, traditional journalist roles, and powerful economic and political interests that control the media.

Despite these barriers, increasing interest in the social murder concept amongst academic researchers, greater willingness of prominent spokespersons to evoke the concept, and the adverse effects of neoliberal governance are spurring such reporting forward. Researchers and advocates must continue to engage with the news media to encourage reporting of these important health issues.

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