

FEMICIDE

1. Definition

The word “femicide” (a contraction of the words femme and homicide) means the murder of a woman or a girl because of their gender, i.e. because they are female¹. In general, these murders are committed by men, so women often die at the hands of a partner or an ex-partner². The term femicide was popularized by two feminist authors, Jill Radford and Diana Russel, following the publication of their book, *Femicide, The Politics of Woman Killing* in 1992³.

Femicides are the most extreme form of violence that can be directed towards a woman or a girl, and in many cases, it happens after several years of intimidation and physical and sexual violence from their partner or ex-partner.

The World Health Organization recognizes a few types of femicides⁴ :

- **Intimate femicide:** a woman being murdered by a former or current intimate partner (husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend). More than 35% of femicides are committed by a partner.
- **“Honor” crimes:** a woman being murdered by a member of her own family (male or female) who accuses her of bringing dishonor to herself and her family by being an adulterous woman, having intercourse, getting pregnant or getting raped. Honor crimes are estimated at 5,000 each year in the world⁵.
- **Dowry femicides:** a woman being murdered because of conflicts between families about the dowry, especially for bringing too low a dowry to the partner’s family.

¹ Radford, Jill et Diana E.H Russel. *Femicide, The Politics of Woman Killing*, 1992, Twayne Publishers, p.3.

² OMS. « Le fémicide », 2012. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/86253/WHO_RHR_12.38_fre.pdf;jsessionid=BE8E44E027B76DCBDF3D07D03BC37EF7?sequence=1

³ Durand Anne-Aël. « Qu’est-ce que le « fémicide » ? », 2nd February 2018, *Le Monde*. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/02/02/qu-est-ce-que-le-femicide_5251053_4355770.html

⁴ OMS. « Le fémicide », 2012. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/86253/WHO_RHR_12.38_fre.pdf;jsessionid=BE8E44E027B76DCBDF3D07D03BC37EF7?sequence=1

⁵ Amnesty International. « 4.6 Les crimes d’honneur ». Available on : <https://www.amnesty.be/veux-agir/agir-localement/agir-ecole/espace-enseignants/enseignement-secondaire/dossier-papiers-libres-2004-violences-femmes/article/4-6-les-crimes-d-honneur>

- **Non-intimate femicides:** a woman being murdered by a person with whom she does not have an intimate relationship. Non-intimate femicides often happen after sexual assault and are mainly impacting women with non-traditional jobs, such as sex workers.

2. Prevalence in the world

Femicides are not exclusive to one country or one continent, to one religion or one ethnic group in particular. In 2017, almost 50,000 women were killed by an intimate partner or a member of their family in the world⁶. The Asian continent has the highest count of femicides, with 20,000 women murdered that same year⁷. The situation is still critical on other continents, as in Africa, where 19,000 femicides were committed in 2017. If that number is higher in Asia compared to Africa in terms of absolute value, they are more significant in proportion in Africa if one compares the size of their respective populations (4,463 billion people in Asia⁸ for 1,293 billion in Africa⁹).

In South America, and especially in Mexico, approximately 10 women get killed per day (in 2019, there were 3,800 femicides¹⁰). In Europe, 3,000 femicides were committed in 2017¹¹. A quick reminder that in France, in 2019, 126 women were killed by their partner or ex-partner¹².

⁶ Alves Sabrina. « Féminicides : état des lieux de la situation dans le monde », 25th November 2019, UN Women France. [En ligne]. [Consulted on the 24th May 2020]. Available on : <https://www.onufemmes.fr/nos-actualites/2019/11/25/feminicides-etat-des-lieux-de-la-situation-dans-le-monde>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ PopulationData.net. « Asie », 14th February 2019. [Online]. [Consulted on 26th May 2020]. Available on: <https://www.populationdata.net/continents/asie/>

⁹ PopulationData.net. « Afrique », 14th February 2019. [Online]. [Consulted on 26th May 2020]. Available on: <https://www.populationdata.net/continents/afrique/>

¹⁰ France 24. « Au Mexique, le fléau national des féminicides », 8th March 2020. [Online]. [Consulted on 26th May 2020]. Available on : <https://www.france24.com/fr/20200308-au-mexique-le-fl%C3%A9au-national-des-f%C3%A9minicides>

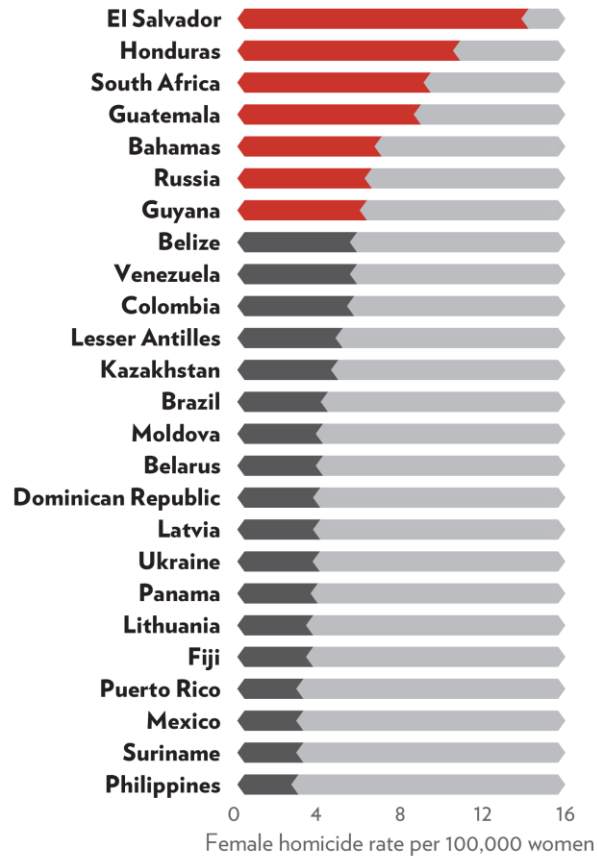
¹¹ Alves Sabrina. « Féminicides : état des lieux de la situation dans le monde », 25th November 2019, UN Women France. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on : <https://www.onufemmes.fr/nos-actualites/2019/11/25/feminicides-etat-des-lieux-de-la-situation-dans-le-monde>

¹² Europe 1. « Au moins 126 féminicides en France en 2019, selon un décompte AFP », 11th January 2020. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: <https://www.europe1.fr/societe/au-moins-126-feminicides-en-france-en-2019-selon-un-decompte-afp-3942338>

Average High and Very High Female Homicide Rates

2007–2012

- ◆ “Very high” > 6 female homicides per 100,000 women
- ◆ “High” 3–6 female homicides per 100,000 women



Source: Global Americans. « Femicide and International Women’s Rights – An epidemic of violence in Latin America », 2020. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: <https://theglobalamericans.org/reports/femicide-international-womens-rights/>

3. Causes

Femicide is deeply intertwined with gender inequality issues and with male domination, the latter still structuring relationships between genders on all continents. According to Marcela Lagarde, a professor at the National Autonomous University in Mexico, “it has been confirmed that significant inequalities between men and women and violence as a condition of masculinity make plain the fact that so many men can commit homicides on women”¹³. Normalising and tolerating violence against women in numerous societies explains that men commit this crime more easily than women do¹⁴. About honour crimes: “tradition” is often considered a legitimate excuse for femicide, especially in the Middle East and some Asian countries¹⁵. The motives put forward by partners for their crime vary (a breakup, jealousy, adultery, etc.) but they all are symptomatic of male dominance being perpetuated for generations. Violence against women comes off as systemic and anchored in society, because the man often considers that he has a so-called “right” of life and death over his partner¹⁶.

4. Femicides in an institutional context

Legal action has been taken at the international level to fight violence against women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly¹⁷. According to some feminists, states have to take specific measures to incriminate femicides perpetrators.

As of today, the word “femicide” has made its place into societal debates in Europe and Latin America, but its legal application has yet to be enforced. South-American countries were the first ones to introduce femicide as a crime into their criminal law, like in Mexico (2007), Guatemala (2008), and Bolivia (2013)¹⁸. In Europe, only Italy (2003) and Spain (2004) have integrated the

¹³ Devineau, Julie. « Autour du concept de fémicide/féminicide : entretiens avec Marcela Lagarde et Montserrat Sagot », Problèmes d'Amérique latine, vol. 84, no. 2, 2012, pp. 77-91.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bigelow Carolina Sherwood. « Addressing the global prevalence of femicide and its causes », 10th June 2018, The Borgen Project. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: <https://borgenproject.org/addressing-the-global-prevalence-of-femicide-and-its-causes/>

¹⁶ Campistron Marie. « Mais au fait, qu'est ce qu'un féminicide ? », L'Obs, 1st February 2018. [Online]. [Consulted on 26th May 2020]. Available on : https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20180201_OBS1592/mais-au-fait-qu-est-ce-qu-un-feminicide.html

¹⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 18th December 1979, came into effect on the 3th September 1981.

¹⁸ Durand Anne-Aël. « Qu'est-ce que le « féminicide » ? », 2 février 2018, Le Monde. [En ligne]. [Consulté le 24/05/2020]. Disponible sur : https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/02/02/qu-est-ce-que-le-feminicide_5251053_4355770.html

notion of “gender violence” into their legislation to fight femicides¹⁹. In France, the word as such is not mentioned in the *code pénal*²⁰. Many women’s rights associations and activists are demanding a law specific to this crime.

5. Toward the end of femicides

For a few years now, women have been on the front lines to protest against gender-based violence, and femicides more specifically. That is the case in Latin America, where the slogan “Ni Una Menos” has went viral. In 2015, 300,000 Argentinian women hit the streets of Buenos Aires to denounce violence and demand adequate public policies²¹. More recently, in late 2019, a feminist choreography entitled “El violador eres tu” (meaning “the rapist is you”) from Chile, was reprised in a few countries in the world and the song became an anthem against violence against women²².

To put an end to femicides, states have to reinforce their laws by integrating a specific legal framework for this crime. Condemning femicides perpetrators is not enough though. Training and educating healthcare professionals and the police is also essential in order to better the documenting and filing of femicides²³. These trainings could also improve the process of taking care of children whose mothers were killed, in connection with childhood protection services.

Insisting on the prevention of violence against women, and more specifically of domestic violence is another lead. To be as efficient as possible, education must start at a young age, at school, in order to make children understand what is at stake when we talk about equality between men and women. Many organisations have made it their mission to put an end to violence against

¹⁹ Goupil Mathilde. « Féminicide : pourquoi ce mot s’est imposé dans le débat (mais pas dans le droit) », 3 septembre 2019, L’Express. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on : https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/feminicide-pourquoi-ce-mot-s-est-impose-dans-le-debat-mais-pas-dans-le-droit_2096264.html

²⁰ Durand Anne-Aël. « Qu’est-ce que le « féminicide » ? », 2nd February 2018, Le Monde. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/02/02/qu-est-ce-que-le-feminicide_5251053_4355770.html

²¹ Legrand Christine. « Les Argentines, fer de lance du féminisme sud-américain », 9th March 2017, Le Monde. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: https://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2017/03/09/les-argentines-fer-de-lance-du-feminisme-sud-americaain_5091897_3222.html

²² Franceinfo. « « Le violeur, c’est toi ! » : une chorégraphie féministe chilienne contre les violences faites aux femmes reprise dans le monde entier », 6th December 2019. [online]. [Consulted on 26th may 2020]. Available on: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/spectacles/danse/le-violeur-c-est-toi-une-choregraphie-feministe-chilienne-contre-les-violences-faites-aux-femmes-reprise-dans-le-monde-entier_3732993.html

²³ OMS. « Le féminicide », 2012. [Online]. [Consulted on 24th May 2020]. Available on: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/86253/WHO_RHR_12.38_fre.pdf;jsessionid=BE8E44E027B76DCBDF3D07D03BC37EF7?sequence=1

women thanks to workshops and advocacy actions. In France, the Fondation des Femmes launched a campaign in 2018 titled #TuSerasUnHommeMonFils (#YouWillBeAManSon) to talk about how important education is for the youth in order to promote gender equality and foster behavioural change²⁴. In Argentina, the association La Casa del Encuentro organises trainings for the general public and for professionals on prevention and accompaniment for women who are victims of violence.²⁵

²⁴ Fondation des Femmes. « #TuSerasUnHommeMonFils ». Available on : <https://fondationdesfemmes.org/video-tu-seras-un-homme-mon-fils/>

²⁵ La Casa del Encuentro. Site web : <http://www.lacasadelencontro.org/>

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