What is Femicide?

Femicide is broadly understood as the killing of women and girls by men. It differs from male homicide in specific ways as most cases of femicide are committed by partners or ex-partners. It is a term used to describe killings of women and girls precisely because they are women and girls. Femicide is both a cause and a result if gender inequality and discrimination, both of which are root causes of all violence against women. Femicide is often linked to ongoing emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse as well as coercive control perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner against the woman. The understanding of femicide as the murder of a woman because of her gender is important. We know that although men are much more likely to be victims of homicide in general at the hands of a wide range of perpetrators, women who are murdered are highly likely to have been murdered by an intimate partner, ex-intimate partner or family member.

Why Do We Track Figures on Femicide?

Domestic violence kills women. The types of abuse and behaviour that precedes intimate partner femicide mirrors what we hear from women each day on our 24hr National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900 and our one to one support services. We know just how dangerous domestic abuse can be and that unfortunately, the horrendous catalogue of incidents that women disclose to us every day are just the tip of the iceberg. More public awareness of the signs, signals and patterns that lead to femicide is needed. We record these killings to illustrate the danger posed to women and to better understand how to increase protection of women and children. Our aim is to continue to try and break the pattern of male violence against women in the hope of preventing any further loss of life.


18 Women have died in their own homes (62%), meaning that women are more likely to be killed in their own homes than anywhere else.

Women of any age can be victims of femicide, however women under the age of 35 account for 50% of cases in Ireland.

The most common method of killing was stabbing with knives or other sharp objects (34%)

In almost all murder suicide cases (21 out of 22), the killer was the woman’s partner or ex.

In the 22 cases where a woman was killed by a male relative, 18 were killed by their sons (82%).

4 Women’s Aid started recording female homicides in 1996.
5 This figure includes two women (killed in 2014 and 2015) added late to the records, 1 woman killed in December 2019 and 3 women killed in 2020 as of 16 November 2020.)
The International Context

The 2019 Global Study on Homicide estimated that a total of 87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. 50,000 (58%) were killed by intimate partners or other family members, of which 30,000 were killed by intimate partners. This means that 82 women across the world are killed by an intimate partner every day. Globally, homicide rates in general are decreasing, yet intimate partner or family-related homicide rates have remained stable. The global rate of total female homicides in 2017 was estimated to be 2.3 per 100,000 female population, the global female intimate partner or family-related homicide rate was 1.3. The female intimate partner homicide rate was estimated at 0.8 per 100,000 female population. In Europe the female intimate partner homicide rate is 0.6 and the intimate partner/other family member rate is 0.7 per 100,000 population.

Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) Recommendations

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) are tribunals set up in order to better understand and learn from domestic homicides to improve systematic and service responses. In relation to the establishment of a DHR in Ireland, we recommend the prioritisation and passing of the Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017 without further delay. We also recommend free, quality, accessible counselling for families affected by femicide. Training for community networks on supporting families bereaved by femicide should also be established as well as an investigation into the adequacy of financial supports for surviving children and their carers. The DHR mechanism should have a statutory basis and be comprised of statutory and non-statutory agencies with specialist domestic violence services and networks of the victim and perpetrator included in the process. A review of data protection legislation so that data is accessible within the DHR process is needed and family members of the victim should be offered advocacy and support to facilitate their involvement in the DHR process.

Reporting Recommendations for the Media

We recommend that the Press Council in partnership with domestic violence experts agree on guidelines on the reporting of domestic violence and femicide. Efforts should be made to represent the victim and the legacy of her life rather than focussing on the graphic manner of her death, her relationship with the killer, reasons for the perpetrators actions, victim-blaming of the woman or the socio-economic or ethnic background of the woman and the perpetrator. Media should also avoid using stock imagery that portrays only the physical side of domestic homicide and domestic violence. The prevalence of femicide should be recognised and linked to the broader issue of violence against women in Ireland and families and communities of victims should be given privacy and dignity. Murder-suicides involving a woman should be looked at not just from a mental health perspective but in terms of domestic violence too. Journalists should build their understanding on the issue of violence against women and receive training on the impact of such abuse, they can contact us on the 24hr National Freephone helpline, or see our website for more information.

Dedication

There is no greater violation of a woman’s human rights than the right to life itself. Each woman murdered is an outrage. An absolute tragic loss of life resulting in utter heartache and trauma for her loved ones left behind. Our Femicide Watch is dedicated to the women whose voices in court, police statements and newspaper reports are silenced as the perpetrators write the story of their deaths. Women’s Aid stands in solidarity with families, friends and communities of women murdered and with women currently living with abuse. We remember those women murdered but where no perpetrator has been charged and the other cases yet to come to trial. Our thoughts are with their families who are waiting for justice. We will continue this work to bring to light the extent and impact of men’s fatal violence against women in Irish society.


7 Ibid

See here for more information on femicide.