

What is the gender motive? A comparison of the main approaches used in femicide statistics and communication

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Abstract: Despite the widespread use of the term “femicide”, there are no agreed guidelines to define the phenomenon. This has led to frequent statistical contradictions. In recent years, two main approaches have emerged: the broad-range one, in which victims are often defined by the mere fact that the murderer was male, while motives are only auxiliary; in the second, instead, gender motives play the main role, following middle-range theory perspective. The aim will be to provide a new set of indicators to identify victims of femicide more precisely, distinguishing them from other female murders. The use of precise indicators is not limited to the classification of victims, as it can also enable more appropriate prevention programmes and more respectful communication.

Keywords: femicide, domestic violence, gender-based violence, feminism, statistics.

ES ¿Qué es el móvil de género? Comparación de los principales enfoques utilizados en las estadísticas y la comunicación sobre feminicidios

Resumen: No existen directrices consensuadas para definir el feminicidio. Esto ha dado lugar a frecuentes contradicciones estadísticas. Se encontraron dos enfoques principales: el de largo alcance, en el que las víctimas suelen definirse por el mero hecho de que el asesino fuera varón, mientras que los motivos son sólo auxiliares; en el segundo, en cambio, los motivos de género desempeñan el papel principal, siguiendo la perspectiva de la teoría de rango medio. El objetivo será proporcionar un nuevo conjunto de indicadores que permitan identificar con mayor precisión a las víctimas de feminicidio, distinguiéndolas de otros asesinatos. El uso de indicadores precisos no se limita a la clasificación de las víctimas, ya que también puede permitir programas de prevención más adecuados y una comunicación más respetuosa.

Palabras clave: feminicidio, violencia doméstica, violencia de género, feminismo, estadísticas.

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1. Introduction to the two main approaches

Those who deal with statistics on femicides have often conceived of the operational translation of the phenomenon in markedly different ways. Indeed, many definitions developed over the years still do not allow for an accurate description. Despite being pointed out by EIGE (2017, p. 28), the situation has not changed (Cecchi et al., 2022). This paper will

compare the two main theoretical and methodological perspectives that have emerged: the broad (Boudon, 1991) and the middle-range approaches (Merton, 1968, pp. 39-72).

The first perspective seems to be by far the most widespread. According to the first approach, a femicide is the intentional murder of a woman committed by a man, or the result of the violence she suffered.

This generalisation derives from a conception of society in which interactions between individuals are always based on a role system (Boudon, 1979, pp. 55-56). It is precisely gender roles that are always considered salient. The problem is that this epistemological attitude flattens reality by making it seemingly predictable (*Ibidem*). Consequently, if gender roles are so decisive in every context, then all murders of women committed by men can be explained uniquely through the specific lens of femicide. The characteristics of the victims and the context they experience, consequently, take a back seat, along with the motives: women are lumped together only based on the identity of their aggressor, although this perspective is in partial contradiction to what Russell (2012) clarified. The feminist pioneer of studies on the phenomenon argued that a woman killed in a robbery, even if by a man, should not be considered a victim of femicide. In some circumstances, in fact, according to Russell, gender is not relevant.

The second approach, the middle-range one, emerged at the international level mainly through the work of two UN bodies (UNODC & UN Women, 2022), which adapted what had already been legislated in Mexico with the recently updated Article 325 of the Penal Code (2023). The most successful attempt to operationally define femicide, however, comes from the annual reports of the Italian National Police, which provided very different results from other institutional statistics.

The fundamental distinction lies in the fact that the middle-range approach uses much more precise indicators, referring to situations in which femicide can occur or be recognised as such, even in doubtful cases. In other words, it is not enough that a man kills a woman: this crime must occur because of a motive in which the gender dimension is salient. It is precisely the restriction of the phenomenon to certain observable and regular behaviour (Merton, 1968) that allows us to distinguish it from the broad-range approach.

Unfortunately, feasibility is the main problem. In industrialised countries, the available data almost always make it possible to trace the motive, but in other parts of the world it becomes problematic. In addition to this, another pitfall is reductionism, on which some examples will be given, with the recommendation to avoid it because it would risk excluding some victims from the statistics. Indeed, the salience of the gender dimension may sometimes not be immediately explicit in some motives.

Compared to other organisations that fall under this approach, the Italian National Police gives far greater weight to the gender motive, applying it even in situations where the concept is usually taken for granted. For instance, if for UNODC and UN Women (2022), every woman killed in a family context is a femicide, then for the Italian National Police, this is not the case. Although a large proportion of femicides occur within the family, giving precedence to the motive allows a much more precise relational dimension to reconceptualise.

Middle-range theories provide a smaller victim count, as they classify femicide as a sub-type of female homicide, rejecting the almost total overlap

that occurs in the broad-range approach. The lower number of victims is one possible reason why the middle-range theory has been taken up much less in the communication and study of the phenomenon. A lower number of victims, however, stems from the aim of providing more precise indicators to identify the gender motive. This data is pivotal to victim classification and prevention: we can recognise risk factors from those behaviours included in the index.

1.1. Methodology

This work will aim to elaborate specific indicators for the construction of the gender motive to clarify what distinguishes femicides from other murders of women, considering the best contributions offered by both theoretical orientations, with a predominance of the middle-range one. To do so, statistical and theoretical frameworks were compared, over the last 12 years, from:

- official documents from institutions and large international organizations;
- scientific papers;
- reports and online archives compiled by groups dedicated to feminist activism, mainly in Italy, Spain and England, three countries where the discourse on femicide has undergone important development in recent years.

Wherever possible, as will be seen, the analysis focused on indicators, although the explicit use of them is fairly recent in the discourse on femicide. However, their semantic comparison allows us to define what is in common with the subset of homicides to define as femicides: the will to subject women to an authority (also state authority, as can occur, for instance, in theocratic regimes), which can set limits to their sentimental self-determination and sexual conduct.

2. The broad-range approach

This first part aims to highlight some operational choices deriving from the broad-range approach, which, although being questioned in recent years, has occasionally provided insightful indications. This occurred when it began to look for more precise indicators, a choice typical of middle-range theories. An example of this hybridisation is represented, as will be seen, by the EIGE reports. To facilitate the analysis, we will start with the perspectives strictly definable as broad-range theories and then move on to the more hybrid ones, which will already introduce some salient issues of the middle-range approach.

2.1. Methodological objections and communicative opportunities

In the reports of the anti-violence shelter *Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza* in Bologna, there is a definition that is particularly representative of the broad-range approach: "The subject of this research is the killings of women from violence perpetrated by men, and that, therefore, is ascribable to the power relationship between genders, which remains a factor that orders our society today."¹ (Apone *et al.*, 2021,

¹ Author's translation.

p. 6). In other words, every woman who has been reported in the press as having died because of violence by a man is included in their list of femicides. Thus, there is total overlap between femicide and a woman who is the victim of an intentional homicide or violence resulting in her death if committed by a man. Motives are related in an almost ancillary manner: the salience of gender motivation is always assumed, even when the motives for the crime are unknown (Apone *et al.*, 2022, p. 16; Apone *et al.*, 2021, p. 15). As a further example, even the case of Maria Luisa Fassi was included (Beraldo *et al.*, 2016, p. 34), who died after a robbery, without evidence of any sexual violence (Neirotti & Numa, 2015), again contradicting Russell (2012).

Because of this approach, such a complex phenomenon is subordinated uniquely to the dimension resulting from the combination of the gender of the victim and that of the aggressor. In Italy, this perspective is familiar to activist groups and the press (ANSA, 2023; *la Repubblica*, 2019; Zangarini, 2016), sometimes with only small variations in the total count of victims. Outside Italy, an almost identical perspective is taken by the Femicide Census reports². In Spain, a similar approach is that of feminicidio.net which, while making some distinctions, also includes very different motives among femicides, achieving an almost total overlap between murdered women and victims of femicide. From the institutional perspective, the situation is almost similar. In the official reports of the Spanish government, the aforementioned approach is followed³.

Shifting to the communicative sphere, the strong activist propensity of the broad-range approach has sometimes had the merit of reporting names, surnames, and descriptions of the situations of each case in greater or lesser depth. Despite the criticism about the indicators, due to a broad extension of the concept of femicide, some of these reports should serve as an example of an in-depth communication of the history of each case. This choice is almost absent in the middle-range approach, which only gives operational indications and rarely refers to concrete cases.

2.2. A first hybridisation of the broad-range approach

Despite an excellent job of gathering the various definitions (EIGE, 2017, pp. 17-27), some of the conclusions drawn by the EIGE still seem to be linked to a generic conception of femicide, as in the following case (*Ibidem*, p. 28).

The killing of a woman by an intimate partner and the death of a woman as a result of a practice that is harmful to women. Intimate partner is understood as a former or current spouse or partner, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.

It was also reused in a more recent work (EIGE, 2021, p. 15). A problematic issue in the EIGE definition is quite common when it comes to violence against

women: the focus is mainly shifted to the aggressor without sufficient reference to contexts, motives, and the role possibly imposed on the victim. Most of the definition, in fact, tries to describe what an intimate partner is, leaving in the background fundamental elements to study the phenomenon, also from the victim's perspective.

Another problematic aspect arises from the fact that, following this definition, there is a risk of excluding from the count women killed by persons who are not intimate partners, even if the motives are similar to those typical of femicides. For instance, it would exclude those cases of women killed by family members for refusing an arranged marriage, but also those killed by stalkers with whom they did not have a romantic relationship, or by clients in prostitution. However, the EIGE (2021) made additions referring to other situations in which femicides may occur. This update to the study of the phenomenon denotes a certain tendency to narrow down the operational definition of femicide and move away from a broad-range approach. Precisely in view of the hybrid and increasingly in-depth trend of the EIGE, an attempt will be made in the following Subsections to offer a comparison between this perspective and the middle-range one.

2.2.1. Cases of mental illness and mercy killings

An objection to the EIGE definition could be raised since not all partners commit femicide when they kill their partner (Cecchi *et al.*, 2022). It is the case of mercy killings, for example, when an elderly man kills his terminally ill wife. Another example where we might not be dealing with femicides concerns murders committed by persons suffering from certain delusional forms of depression (Coryell, 2023).

To establish the actual salience of the gender motive and, thus, of femicide, it would be useful to look for indicators compatible with it and referring to the relationship, as shown in Table 3 in Section 4.1. For the mercy murder, in fact, even if the man's intention is to end his partner's suffering, a history of violence may be a convincing indicator that their relationship was characterised by a form of domination, which extended to the willingness to decide on the life or death of the sick woman. The major limitation lies in the data concerning the couple's past, in sentences or journalistic content, may often be absent. In a recent paper (Cecchi *et al.*, 2022), it is argued precisely to exclude mercy murders from the category of femicide. However, although right in principle, this runs the risk of reductionism for the reasons expressed so far. The recommendation is to exclude these cases from femicides only when there is no evidence of a gender motive linked to the context of the murder or the couple's past.

Regarding the more general category of homicides due to delusional depression, they may not be closely linked to a gender motive. We refer to cases in which these individuals, crushed by unbearable worries, such as those due to economic ruin, sometimes commit murders of loved ones (Yardley *et al.*, 2013). A choice that, from the perspective of

² Site link: <https://www.femicidecensus.org/> (accessed 22/10/2023).

³ The methodological notes can be found at the following link: https://violenciagenero.igualdad.gob.es/violenciaEnCifras/victimas-Mortales/notas_metodologicas/notas_metodologicas.htm (accessed 22/10/2023).

the depressed person suffering from this type of delusion, may even constitute an “altruistic act”: a gesture aimed at not prolonging the suffering of people for whom they have future worries. One way to help in the classification of these cases is similar to that mentioned above: the search for evidence that can be traced back to the gender motive, especially if referring to the past, is crucial.

In some cases, however, a particular type of delusional disorder seems to be etiologically akin to the typical cultural matrix of the gender motive. In Italy, for example, the acquittal of Antonio Gozzini (ANSA, 2022), an elderly man who allegedly killed his wife Cristina Maioli out of delusional jealousy (Tammenga, 2020), has caused controversy. Elvira Reale, in reference to this case, argues that we should be aware that cultural heritage is a key issue in understanding the aetiology of femicide (Siviero, 2022). This is because it is unlikely that a man would only be obnubilated by such possessive thoughts following the aggravation of a psychiatric pathology. For these reasons, it is advisable to classify these cases as femicides even in the absence of information about the couple's past. The same argument applies to acquittals: if a delusional jealousy killing implies a mental defect for the law, it is nevertheless an indicator of a problem that has a cultural root and can therefore be regarded as femicide for sociology. The indicators in Section 4.1, in fact, will not refer to the mental condition of the aggressor, precisely for the reasons expressed by Reale.

2.2.2. Other types of murders of elderly women

In the new work of the EIGE (2021, pp. 41-44), cases involving women aged 65 years or older were also included as femicides, if they were victims of any kind of intentional homicide or violence resulting in their death. The EIGE argues that, for these types of killings of elderly women, the category of femicide should be used because, due to their gender, they are perceived as more fragile (Ibidem, p. 41). The doubts concerning this choice are evident when looking at the use of sources made by the EIGE (2021): among the studies examined, in fact, Dobash and Dobash's (2015) is mentioned. There are a couple of premises to make in this regard. The first is that the data provided by the two authors cannot offer a global perspective to the phenomenon, being mainly referred to England, Wales, and Scotland, even though it is absolutely accurate and equally useful work. The second concerns the fact that this study, while citing some sources relating to femicide, never uses it as a concept, unlike what the EIGE wants to imply when it speaks of the classifications made by the two authors (EIGE, 2021, p. 7).

In the work of Dobash and Dobash (2015, p. 201), it is pointed out that the longer life expectancy of women could be one of the factors why certain types of crime more often have older women as victims, for instance because they are left alone. Remember that women tend to choose older partners, besides the fact that men already have a shorter life expectancy. As it turns out, they are killed more than twice as often as elderly males (17% the former, 8% the latter). Part of the incidence, therefore, could be due to a spurious factor, making it difficult to argue that gender

is decisive in all crimes involving elderly women. The latter, in fact, account for a minority of homicides (Ibidem).

A closer look at the data on the violence experienced, thus following a middle-range approach, allows us to clarify when an older woman is a victim of femicide. According to the UN document (UNODC & UN Women, 2022, p. 10), we should consider as femicides all cases of women who have suffered sexual violence. According to the data of Dobash and Dobash (2015, p. 202), elderly women for whom signs of sexual violence of any kind have been found are just over half. Consequently, the number of those who have not experienced any kind of sexual violence becomes much closer to the number of murders of older men, i.e. around 8%. This numerical similarity, combined with the previously mentioned spurious factor, is a further element suggesting that, for about half of these cases, gender does not seem to be a salient factor: we could hardly say that we are dealing with femicides. This is not to deny the fragility of elderly women, but before speaking of a gender motive and, therefore, of femicides, more in-depth observations should be made.

It's important to check whether the presence of other indicators could refer to femicide: the exclusion of sexual violence is not enough. We can understand this not only from the disaggregated quantitative data, but also from the motives and the interviews with the murderers, so that it is necessary, when possible, to invest in qualitative investigations as Dobash and Dobash have done (Ibidem, pp. 221-244), also to clarify any doubtful cases.

2.2.3. Attempts to define variables following a broad-range approach

The variables proposed by the EIGE (2021, p. 14) can be a partly useful starting point for defining the gender motive.

- i. Background/risk factors, such as gender inequalities and dependencies, economic situation/deprivation, prior domestic violence
- ii. Victim's intent to break up the relationship
- iii. Pregnancy
- iv. Conflict over custody of children
- v. Child who is not the offspring of the perpetrator
- vi. Economic problems
- vii. Jealousy
- viii. Possessiveness
- ix. Controlling behaviour
- x. Prior history of violence against women
- xi. Hate motivated (lesbian, transgender victim)
- xii. Alleged reasons of honour, family reputation, religious beliefs
- xiii. Other criminal activity involved
- xiv. Interfering with the enjoyment and exercise of women's/human rights

However, this study remains much more bound to the broad-range approach, due to the redundancy of the variables and their generic traits or, with reference to the indicators, resulting from an overly extensive conception of femicide. For example, what does “other criminal activity” mean, and why should it always indicate a gender motive? As for redundant variables,

how do we distinguish possessiveness from jealousy, or from controlling behaviour? Should all cases of homotransphobia be included indiscriminately among femicides, or is it better to use more precise indicators to clarify which of these also fall under femicides? Following the path traced by the EIGE, the risk can lead to the inclusion of almost every murder of a woman among femicides. In other words, we are in front of an attempt that is more symbolic than operationally useful, but it must be acknowledged that it marks a considerable discontinuity in the broad-range approach: we finally have explicit variables.

If the aim of the EIGE (2021, p. 11) was to provide variables to distinguish femicide from non-femicide, a better effort on gender motive variables would probably have achieved this goal. Moreover, the mutual exclusivity of the categories (EIGE, 2021, p. 12) might invalidate the possibility of carrying out some studies, even exploratory ones.

3. Middle-range theories

It can be assumed that the emergence of the middle-range approach is partly due to the need to increase the intension of the concept of femicide, which is still too generic, as seen in the broad-range approach. This choice makes it possible to give relevance not only to the action of the aggressor, but also to the context and experience of the victim, distinguishing her from others who are involved in other types of murders. Increasing intention at the expense of extension, in this specific case, is not only a choice related to the classification of victims: it can be of great use, in fact, when it comes to creating early intervention programmes. Indeed, through certain indicators, risk factors are also worked out more precisely.

To collect good quality data on each case, several paths could be followed: analysing the content of news stories, sentences, interviews with murderers (see Subsection 2.2.2) and checking for complaints. While these comparisons and in-depth analyses allow for more accurate and occasionally up-to-date statistics, they also allow for more accurate and careful reporting of the phenomenon. On the other hand, the pitfalls of the middle-range approach, as already mentioned, concern reductionism and thus the risk of excluding cases that should be considered as femicides.

3.1. Reports from the Italian National Police

A particularly useful definition is that of the Italian National Police (2018, p. 11).

It's common sense that femicide is the killing of a woman by a man because she is a woman, as an extreme act of prevarication, an ultimate assertion of superiority, an aberration of possession, not including, therefore, murders that occurred in other contexts and with other motives [...] it has been agreed that, at least for purely operational and police purposes, the expression should be limited only to cases of commission of an extreme criminal act that characterises a model of male-female relationship declined according to the canons of supremacy/submission and to any act of

violence, leading to murder, perpetrated against a woman "because of her gender"⁴.

What is immediately noticeable is the attempt to provide an operational definition to the popular and now abused expressions like "the killing of a woman as such" and "because of her gender". Indeed, it provides some observations on the cultural roots of femicide but clarifies the need to exclude cases where those elements are not salient. The perspective is no longer focused on the identity of the aggressor because a distinction based on the cultural reasons for the motive is made explicit. In fact, it starts from the macro-social reality, i.e. the persistence of the cultural roots of femicide, to the investigation of the "relationship model" of each case reviewed.

In the report in which this definition appears, the Italian National Police reports a far lower casualty count than that provided by other sources over the same period (see Section 2.1). It is also a further approach that argues against including mercy killing among femicides (Italian National Police, 2018, p. 12). This is only partly acceptable, for which we refer to the arguments already given against this approach, which, in some cases, risks being too reductionist (see Subsection 2.2.1).

The communication choices of the Italian National Police have not been homogeneous over the years, even though the operational methods seem to be the same. If we compare with a more recent report (Italian National Police, 2021), we notice that it was preferred to indicate percentages graphically (Ibidem, p. 16). In another one, (Italian National Police, 2022) both the number of victims and the percentage of femicides were included (Ibidem, p. 24). In the latter case, the reference that the Italian National Police reports as a definition is not the one presented in 2018 but is an interpretation they made of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011), even though the latter document never mentions the word "femicide". The Italian National Police is therefore advised to communicate in a more coherent manner, besides the fact that it would be a good practice to make the indicators used explicit. As regards the publication of the report, every 25 November or close to that day, it would be preferable to provide data based on the processing of the entire previous year, instead of changing the number of months each time, as was done in the reports mentioned in this work. This would also allow enough time to interpret some doubtful cases, or at least attempt to obtain sufficient data from the investigations.

As mentioned above, the most innovative aspect of the work of the Italian National Police lies in the fact that context is not the only element to consider when deciding whether to include a victim among femicides. Simply limiting oneself to the fact that it took place within the family, in fact, risks concealing the motives that led to that outcome. The choice behind this mode of classification could derive from a reflection, which can only be hypothesised here: it is not deontologically correct to hide victims behind the gender of their aggressor or the generic characteristics of the context, because the motive is another key element to reconceptualise the relational dimension, including the role imposed on the victims.

⁴ Author's translation.

3.2. The UN report

For the gender motive, UNODC and UNWOMEN (2022) provide eight variables, inspired by femicide legislation in Mexico:

- i. the homicide victim had a previous record of physical, sexual or psychological violence/harassment perpetrated by the author of the killing;
- ii. the homicide victim was a victim of a form of illegal exploitation, for example, in relation to trafficking in persons, forced labour or slavery;
- iii. the homicide victim was in a situation where she was abducted or illegally deprived of her liberty;
- iv. the victim was working in the sex industry;
- v. sexual violence against the victim was committed before and/or after the killing;
- vi. the killing was accompanied by mutilation of the body of the victim;
- vii. the body of the victim was disposed of in a public space;
- viii. the killing of the woman or girl constituted a gender-based hate crime, i.e. she was targeted because of a specific bias against women on the part of the perpetrator(s).

The variables of the two UN bodies are particularly useful for clarifying certain doubtful cases, for instance, when the aggressors are unknown, or for identifying practices that in some cultures might be frequent in femicides (as seems to be the case with the sixth and seventh variables).

The two UN bodies also made some clarifications, marking a further discontinuity with the EIGE. In fact, it is made explicit that a woman can also commit femicide, i.e. she can act on the basis of gender motives (Ibidem, p. 9), similar to what the WHO (2012) also claims.

The main difference between the approach of this report and that of the Italian National Police concerns the family dimension. UNODC and UN Women, in fact, consider as femicides all homicides of women committed within the family, regardless of the motive. This generalisation is made because, on the basis of the evidence collected by UNODC and UN Women, gender-related killing are common in the family context (p. 13). As much as we agree that many femicides occur within the family, a distinction of contexts would have made the work of the two UN bodies more complete. As discussed so far (Italian National Police, 2018; Cecchi et al., 2022), some killings of women in the family context have too different characteristics than typical femicides. It is not correct to obfuscate the victims behind the context they experienced, as is the case when considering all killings of women in the family as femicides. If the motive is taken for granted, then the specific characteristics of the relationship the victim had with her attacker are also called off.

4. Results: how to improve gender motive variables

The *dimension* from which one must start to reason about these variables must focus on a particular expression of the will to hinder female self-determination: sexual or sentimental domination, which still today sanctions certain critical points in the

relationship between women and men. Talking about self-determination in a generic way (Cecchi et al., 2022), in fact, is not sufficient, as it can be expressed in many different ways.

Another problem stems from considering every woman killed within a family context or by a partner as a victim of femicide (UNODC & UN Women, 2022). It is deontologically important to emphasise that a woman killed by a possessive partner is in a very different situation from, for example, the terminally ill woman killed by her husband, especially if there is no evidence of previous violence (see Subsection 2.2.1).

4.1. New indicators

A proposal for new indicators (Table 1) must also consider the context with which they are associated. According to the division made by UNODC and UN Women (2022), appropriate indicators (Table 2) will be selected to detect a femicide committed:

- 1) by a partner or ex;
- 2) by another family member;
- 3) in all other cases, including those that oscillate between the public and private dimensions (Ibidem), as in the case of caregivers.

The presence of at least one of the resulting variables allows us to include a homicide of a woman among femicides. The properties of the indicators should be elaborated from the studies done so far by the EIGE, UNODC and UN Women, as well as others. For instance, indicator number 6 in Table 2 could have two properties: "refusal of an arranged marriage" and "dowry-related killing" (EIGE, 2021, p. 14). Similarly, the eighth indicator, referring to hate crimes against women, may have two properties: "serial" or "terrorist". In the first case, it can include killings carried out by serial killers who predominantly or exclusively target women. In the second case, it includes massacres with a high prevalence of female victims, such as the 2018 shooting in Tallahassee (Long, 2022) or, following the work of Russel and Radford (1992), the 1989 Montreal massacre. For these attacks, the count of victims and injuries, divided by gender, is crucial to understanding whether we are dealing with femicide or other types of crimes.

Several variables related to femicides can be recorded in the same case, for instance in the case of a crime where there are both signs of sexual violence (indicator 1) and evidence of economic violence (indicator 2). This is useful if more in-depth work is to be carried out, even if it is exploratory analyses. The following list is not meant to be exhaustive: some indicators could be added based on the ways in which femicide manifests itself in the local contexts under study. In any case, one would first have to ask whether these additions should be made to the properties of the indicators, rather than to Table 2. What we want to avoid here is the redundancy and abstractness that has already been pointed out especially in the case of the EIGE, but we also want to provide more insight into the motives in the family context, which have not been explored in depth by UNODC and UN Women.

Table 1. New proposals for gender motive indicators

1) Signs of sexual violence.
2) Past economic violence.
3) Past physical violence.
4) Stalking linked to a sexual or romantic interest.
5) Real or alleged unapproved relationships.
6) Consequence of a marriage practice to the detriment of female self-determination.
7) Consequence of a repressive action against female self-determination by a regime.
8) Hate crime against women.
9) The victim was killed in a context of prostitution.
10) Consequence of dangerous traditional practices mainly performed on females.

Table 2. Indicators associated with the three contexts of femicide discussed so far, according to the type of relationship between victim and aggressor or instigator of the murder

Relationship between victim and aggressor or instigator of the murder	Associated indicators
Partner or former	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9
Other family members	1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10
All other contexts	1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10

A common mistake, as we have seen with previous reports (UNODC & UN Women, 2022; EIGE, 2021), is to make a one-size-fits-all list of gender motives, but without giving any real importance to the contexts within which they can be recorded. Table 3 allows us to exclude from femicides those victims who were killed in situations where gender is not considered to be a salient element, even if the crime took place within a couple. This methodological choice has an important deontological implication: the victims are no longer homologated on the basis of the role the aggressor had in their lives but are classified according to the reconstruction of the motive appropriate to the type of context, which also gives back a part of the victims' history, including the condition imposed on them.

In contrast to the approach of the EIGE (2021, p. 14), it is not very useful to talk about a femicide due to the victim's intention to end the relationship: this is not optimal from a preventive perspective and is also quite vague for a classification. It is obvious that many femicides occur because the victim is about to end the relationship or does not want to re-establish relations with the former partner, but this is a reconstruction based on a collection of evidence and statements about the murder, already translated into the appropriate indicators: past violence, persecutory behaviour and more.

4.2. Clarifications and exclusions

A first clarification to be made concerns the age from which it is possible to speak of femicide. In the West, it would generally be adolescence, precisely because of the characteristics of the relationship between victim and aggressor, which in the case of children may be oriented by other power dynamics and would therefore need separate analysis. This, at

least hypothetically, excludes deaths from infibulations from the count of femicides, given the difficulty in establishing a prevalence of female victims regarding these practices: the estimates regarding child victims of male circumcision (Bollinger, 2010), in fact, show a problematic picture also for males. Despite this, if infibulation were found to be much more practised in some countries than male circumcision, there would be nothing to prevent female victims of this practice from being included among the femicides. In any case, abortions related to the phenomenon of missing women (Amartya, 2003) should be excluded from the victim count. Although it is one of the many ways in which female discrimination takes shape, it is not directly linked to a form of domination over the sexual or sentimental self-determination of the victims. This phenomenon, precisely because of its characteristics and extent, deserves a separate study that gives it due weight.

The exposure of the victim in a public space, proposed by the UN, might be a way through which femicide is recognisable only in certain parts of the world or in certain cultures. After careful evaluation, the exposure of the victim in a public space might not be an indicator of femicide, but a property of the *modus operandi* in some parts of the world, especially in doubtful cases. Another useful reference may be something very similar with what has already been done in the case of the ICCS (UNODC, 2015).

In contrast to the EIGE report, homophobic hatred is not mentioned, because it can be detected from several variables, such as the gender and sexual orientation of the victims. To give a concrete example, look at the case of Maria Paola Gaglione (ANSA, 2020), killed by her brother who did not approve her relationship with a trans person. We are in front of a femicide by non-approved relationship, corresponding to the fifth indicator, but also characterised by a further motive, namely transphobic hatred. The same could be said for honour killings: instead of being an indicator, it would be better to consider them as a detectable dimension through indicators 5 and 6.

For war crimes, however, the situation is much more nuanced and problematic. Rape and killings are committed on both women and men, often as war tactics. Finding the gender motive in these cases requires a more in-depth discussion, including comparisons of the estimated numbers of male and female victims.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, reasons were given as to why femicide should be understood as a killing with the aim of domination over the female sexual and sentimental sphere. Two main approaches to femicide were found: the broad-range and the middle-range theories. The main difference lies in the fact that the former generally consider any killing of a woman by a man as femicide. On the other hand, middle-range approaches try to identify more precise indicators. Consequently, this choice allows victims to be classified according to the context they have experienced and the extent of their relationship with the aggressor. In this paper, it is argued that the best expression of middle-range theories on femicide can be achieved through a methodologically adequate construction

of indicators on gender motive. Those who have attempted to do so, such as the EIGE (2021), unfortunately ran into some errors in their index construction, including redundancy. UNODC and UN Women (2022), on the other hand, could have made more effort in the definition of indicators about the family sphere.

Following the middle-range approach, the number of victims is lower, because it gives greater relevance precisely to their experience. The new proposal for indicators is focused on the interdependence of gender motives and the type of relationship between the victim and the aggressor, or the instigator of the murder. In fact, to define femicide, both elements are crucial, because their combination is one of the best ways to translate the context of the murder in a statistical framework. Consequently, some gender motive indicators are suitable for all types of relationships between women and killers, such as where there is proof of sexual violence, but others are limited to more specific contexts, such as cases of hate crimes against women, typical of rare mass murders targeting women. This femicide indicator should be

used only when the killer and the victims do not have any noteworthy relationship. The same is true for the killing of women due to repressive action against female self-determination by a regime. Otherwise, it seems that past economic or physical violence from non-partner family members is not linked to femicide, although further investigation on these cases is necessary.

Victims should not be classified merely on the basis of the gender of the aggressor, but through the reconstruction of the context, resulting also from the combination of gender motive and type of relationship, which provides a better representation of their history and the role imposed on them. Outside the scope of classification, an adequate construction of the gender motive index has useful implications for prevention programmes.

For those who still have doubts about the middle-range approach, there is a question they should ask themselves. It is perhaps not operationally useful, but it's still deontologically important: can we really talk about respect when every victim becomes just the same as another one?

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