



Mini Review

Volume 24 Issue 1 - October 2022  
DOI: 10.19080/JGWH.2022.24.556129

J Gynecol Women's Health

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Declan McKeown

# Women's Health, Intimate Partner Violence and Femicide



**Declan McKeown\***

*HSE Public Health and Epidemiology, Dublin, Ireland*

**Submission:** July 19, 2022; **Published:** October 18, 2022

**\*Corresponding author:** Declan McKeown, HSE Public Health and Epidemiology, Dublin, Ireland

## Introduction

Gender-based violence is an international phenomenon and is a major factor in inequality of health outcomes between men, women and LGBTQ+ people. The disturbing prevalence of this form of violence may be based on society's gender divisions, which marginalise women politically, socially and culturally. Women also face bias in the determinants and delivery of health. The specific inequalities that women face in terms of reproductive and maternal care, for example, have been thrown into sharp relief by the recent US Supreme Court ruling in *Roe vs. Wade* [1], but across the board, women experience differences in accessing health care [2], and are more exposed to gender-based violence [3], eating disorders [4] and depression [5]. This article will concentrate on gender-based violence, but it must also be remembered that concurrent health inequalities due, for example, to race, disability, age and material deprivation will amplify those inequalities with which women around the world are already struggling.

## Harassment and Abuse

Despite employment and equality legislation, girls and women are still subjected to significant harassment and abuse in everyday work and social settings. Workplace harassment, for example, is simply another form of gender-based violence [6]. Orla O'Connor of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) states that such abuse has a "devastating impact on women's and girl's lives, limiting their freedoms and preventing them from participating in society in the way they would wish [2]". She goes on to add that fear of online abuse is preventing women, particularly those who are younger or from ethnic minority backgrounds, from running for public office. This further prevents those women who are most marginalised from having an effective legislative voice.

## Intimate Partner Violence

The World Health Organisation estimates that, across their lifetime, one in three women are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or sexual violence from a non-partner. Such violence is not only pervasive, but starts at a young age: one in four women aged 15-24 years who have been in a relationship will have experienced intimate partner violence by their mid-twenties [7]. According to a 2021 UN survey, almost one in four adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband [8]. Physical violence is almost always accompanied by emotional abuse [9].

In the EU, 47% of women aged 18 to 29 years have experienced psychological violence by a partner since age 15 [10]. One fifth (20%) of women in the EU aged 18 to 29 years have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner since age 15. In the US in 2011, 43% of dating college women reported having experienced violent and abusive behaviour including physical, sexual, cyber, verbal or controlling abuse within an intimate relationship [11]. One in 11 female high school students have reported experiencing physical dating violence and one in nine female high school students have reported experiencing sexual dating violence in one year [12].

The global COVID lockdown has further exacerbated this grim statistic, the public health efforts to stem viral transmission unfortunately putting women in vulnerable family situations at greater risk of domestic abuse [13].

**Femicide**

Femicide can be broadly defined as the killing of women and girls by men, for the sole reason that they are women or girls. It differs specifically from homicide as most cases of femicide are committed by partners, ex-partners [14] or family members [15]. The Council of Europe contends that femicide is both a cause and a result of gender inequality and discrimination, both of which are root causes of all violence against women [16]. Femicide is often

accompanied by ongoing abuse, be it sexual, physical, emotional or financial, and often includes coercive control perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner.

**Categories of Femicide**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2019 publication "Global study on homicide: gender-related killing of women and girls [15] categorises femicide as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Categories of femicide (adapted from UN Office on Drugs and Crime [15]).

Category	Comment
1. Killings of women and girls as a result of intimate partner and domestic violence	Family (or domestic) homicides include killings perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members: siblings, parents, children, other blood relatives and other members of the family.
2. "Honour"-related killings of women and girls	"Honour"-related killings of women and girls are usually committed by family members when they consider that the behaviour of female family members has brought shame on the family and needs to be sanctioned [17]. This kind of killing is very strongly associated with a patriarchal society.
3. Dowry-related killings of women	Dowry-related killings have been reported in South Asian countries [12]. One illustration of this is the wife's death by burning, reported to the authorities as an accident caused by a faulty kitchen stove [18].
4. Killings of women in the context of armed conflict	The United Nations has condemned the use of sexual violence against women during armed conflict, calling it "a weapon of war [19]". The mass rape and murder of women and girls was documented in the conflicts in Rwanda in 1994 and more recently in Ukraine as a result of the Russo-Ukraine war [20-22]. Mass killings of Yazidi women by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are reported to have taken place in recent years in the Sinjar District in Iraq [23].
5. Gender-based killings of aboriginal, First Nation and indigenous women	The report issued in 2012 by the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women categorises the killing of aboriginal and indigenous women as a form of femicide [24]. Their political, social and economic marginalisation makes them more vulnerable to violence.
6. Extreme forms of violent killings of women	Organised crime, drug-dealing and human trafficking provide a dangerous environment in which women often face profound dangers. Human trafficking affects both genders, but women are predominantly trafficked for sexual exploitation [25]. Female gang members also face violent victimisation of a sexual nature in addition to the more general risk of gun violence faced by their male counterparts [26].
7. Killings as a result of sexual orientation and gender identity	Gender-related killing as a result of sexual orientation and gender identity is included within the definition of femicide. Killings in this category reflect controlling behaviour in which heterosexual norms influence the behaviour and biased judgment of the perpetrator [27].
8. Killings of women due to accusations of sorcery or witchcraft	The intentional killing of women due to sorcery- or witchcraft-related accusations has been reported in Africa [28], Asia [29], Papua New Guinea [30] and India [31]. Studies in Africa indicate that, although killings related to accusations of witchcraft can occur at any age, older women face the greatest risk [32]. This also applies to women living alone or who are financially dependent on male family members.
9. Other forms of gender-related killings of women and girls	Some practices such as female genital mutilation, child marriage and son preference are practiced around the world under the guise of cultural and/or religious norms or beliefs. These practices direct violence against women and girls [33], and when they result in death, they represent another form of gender-related killing. While abortion may not be considered a crime in many countries, sex-selective abortions favouring male children is considered a form of femicide by some observers [34].
10. Killing of female sex workers	The UN defines "prostitute" in the context of trafficking and sexual exploitation, whereas the term "sex worker" is used more broadly. Female sex workers have the highest homicide victimisation rate of any group of women [35]. Research in the US suggests that the risk of homicide of active female sex workers is almost 18 times higher than women of similar age and race who are not involved in sex work [36]. This is a conservative judgment, however, and estimates of risk as high as 60 to 120 times that of female non-sex workers have been posited [37].
11. Random gender-based murder	Isolated, tragic acts of apparently random physical violence against women are sometimes due to the perpetrator's hatred of, or fear of women [38].

### Victim and Perpetrator Characteristics

As with many other human conditions, epidemiological pat-

terns can be evoked which help society to identify those most at risk of femicide, as well as perpetrator traits. Some of these are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Femicide victim and perpetrator characteristics.

Characteristics	Comment
Violence is not random or spontaneous	Research shows that the killing of women and girls by intimate partners does not result from random or spontaneous acts [39]. It is useful to study the epidemiology to understand men's motivations in perpetrating violence and femicide, including possessiveness, jealousy and fear of abandonment, while motivations reported by women for retaliatory violent acts relate to extended periods of suffering physical abuse [40].
History of violence in current or former relationship	It is estimated that the majority of such femicides (up to 80%) involved men killing a current or former intimate partner. One Australian source suggests that a quarter of such men were known to the authorities for having been violent towards their intimate partners in the past and that almost half of the men killed their partner within three months of the relationship ending [41].
Age difference between victim and perpetrator	On average, both victims and offenders in intimate partner homicide are older than victims of non-intimate partner homicide. Female victims of intimate partner violence are younger than their assailants [42], as female victims are often in relationships with older men. Couples with large age discrepancies were found to be at a particularly high risk for this type of homicide, especially when the male partner was around 15 years older than the female partner [43].
Other sociodemographic factors	Male perpetrators of intimate partner homicide in the United States have been seen to be disproportionately poor, young and members of minority ethnic groups, often with a history of violence and substance abuse [44]. Men who kill their intimate partners tend to be more "conventional" than men who kill other men [45]. One UK study suggested that such offenders also achieved a higher level of school education and were less likely to be unemployed than perpetrators of other types of homicide [46].

### Governments' Collective Response to Femicide and Intimate Partner Violence

The pervasive nature of violence against women argues for a whole-of-society approach, which addresses attitudes and belief at a local, national and international level, and ensures legislation and strategy to combat the issue. The most visible responses have come from the World Health Organisation and the United Nations.

#### WHO Response to Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence is a complex and pervasive phenomenon, but the World Health Organisation has submitted five recommendations to combat its impact in the international community [7]. The first entails sound gender policies including funded childcare and equal pay, all to be placed on a legal footing. This would have the effect of reducing social and economic gender inequalities. The second is a more receptive health system response with rapid referral to the most appropriate service. The third is intervention in schools and educational establishments to challenge discriminatory attitudes and beliefs. The fourth is targeted investment in sustainable and effective evidence-based prevention strategies at local, national and international levels. The fifth and final recommendation is around strengthened data collection and investment in high-quality surveys on violence against women, in order to better understand the causes and impacts, and to provide

an evidence base for more effective interventions.

#### UN Response to Femicide

The United Nations General Assembly adopted two resolutions on gender-related killing of women and girls, one in 2013 [47] and the second in 2015 [48]. Leading on from this, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime made a series of recommendations designed to improve the prevention, investigation, prosecution and punishment of gender-related killing [49] and these were contained in the report of the Secretary-General on "Action against gender-related killing of women and girls", issued in 2015 [50]. The Special Rapporteur called upon member states to establish active surveillance and monitoring of gender-related killings in order to further develop preventive measures and to guide policymaking in this area.

#### Conclusion

Gender-based violence and femicide are a complex phenomenon, rooted in patriarchy, discrimination and marginalisation of women. Combatting this issue requires a whole-of-society approach, and is becoming increasingly recognised by the legislators and educators. The health service needs to improve its awareness of, and data collection around, gender-based violence if it is to respond to what is one of the most pervasive inequalities in health today.

## References

1. Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Statement from the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists on the overturning of the Roe v Wade ruling by the US Supreme Court, USA.
2. National Women's Council of Ireland. Realising women's right to health.
3. World Bank (2019) Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls).
4. OASH Office on Women's Health (2022) Anorexia nervosa. US Department of Health and Human Services, USA.
5. Albert PR (2022) Why is depression more prevalent in women? *J Psychiatry Neurosci* 40(4): 219-221.
6. National Women's Council of Ireland (2022) Orla O'Connor: we must recognise harassment for what it is - gender-based violence.
7. World Health Organisation (2022) Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence.
8. UN Women (2021) Facts and figure: ending violence against women.
9. (2020) Women's Aid. One in Five.
10. (2012) European Union Fundamental Rights Agency. Survey on violence against women.
11. Knowledge Networks (2011) College dating violence and abuse poll.
12. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) Preventing Teen Dating Violence.
13. Bradbury-Jones C, Isham L (2020) The pandemic paradox: The consequences of COVID-19 on domestic violence. *J Clin Nurs* 29(13-14): 2047-2049.
14. (2012) World Health Organisation. Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women.
15. (2019) United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. Gender-related killing of women and girls.
16. Council of Europe (2011) Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
17. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) (2015) National Inquiry Report on Factors and Causes of Rape and Honor Killing in Afghanistan.
18. Shaha KK, Mohanthy S (2006) Alleged dowry death: a study of homicidal burns. *Medicine, Science and the Law* 46(2): 105-110.
19. United Nations Human Rights Council (2022) "I lost my dignity": Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/37/CRP.3).
20. Ferris-Rottman A (2022) Ukrainians are speaking up about rape as a war crime to ensure the world holds Russia accountable.
21. (2022) Domi T In Ukraine, Russia is using rape as a weapon of war. Haaretz.
22. Hinsliff G (2022) Russia's mass rapes in Ukraine are a war crime. Its military leaders must face prosecution.
23. United Nations Human Rights Council (2016) "They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis (Conference paper).
24. United Nations General Assembly (2012) Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo.
25. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2016) Global report on trafficking in persons, 2016.
26. Gartner R, McCarthy B (2014) *The Oxford Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Crime* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014).
27. Kelley K, Gruenewald J (2015) Accomplishing Masculinity through Anti-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Homicide: A Comparative Case Study Approach. *Men and Masculinities* 18(1): 3-29.
28. Ashforth A (2022) Witchcraft Justice, and Human Rights in Africa: Cases from Malawi. *African Studies Review* 58: 5-38.
29. Australian National University (2022) Seeking solutions to sorcery and witchcraft.
30. BBC News (2022) Young woman burned alive for "sorcery" in Papua New Guinea.
31. Yasmin S (2022) Witch Hunts Today: Abuse of Women, Superstition and Murder Collide in India.
32. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa.
33. United Nations General Assembly (2006) In-depth study on all forms of violence against women; Report of the Secretary-General.
34. Sathar ZA, Rashida G, Hussain S, Hassan A (2015) Evidence of son preference and resulting demographic and health outcomes in Pakistan.
35. Brewer DD, Dudek JA, Potterat JA, Stephen QM, John MR, et al. (2006) Extent, trends, and perpetrators of prostitution-related homicide in the United States. *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 51(5): 1101-1108.
36. Potterat JJ, Brewer DD, Muth SQ, et al. (2004) Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women. *Am J Epidemiol* 159(8): 778-785.
37. Salfati CG, James AR, Ferguson L (2008) Prostitute homicides: a descriptive study. *J Interpers Violence* 23(4): 505-543.
38. World Health Organisation (2021) Violence against women.
39. Adams D (2007) *Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners* (Nashville, Tennessee, Vanderbilt University Press, 2007).
40. Belknap J, Larson D-L, Abrams ML, Christine G, Anderson-Block K, et al. (2012) Types of intimate partner homicides committed by women: self-defense, proxy/retaliation, and sexual proprietariness. *Homicide Studies* 16(4): 359-379.
41. Australian Domestic and Family Violence (2018) Death Review Network 2018 data report.
42. Szalewski A, Huff-Corzine L, Reckdenwald A (2019) Trading places: Microlevel predictors of women who commit intimate partner homicide. *Homicide studies* 23(4): 344-361.
43. Garcia L, Soria C, Hurwitz EL (2007) Homicides and intimate partner violence: a literature review. *Trauma Violence Abuse* 8(4): 370-83.
44. Kadiani A, Chaudhury S, Saldanha D, Neha P, Preethi M, et al. (2020) Psychosocial profile of male perpetrators of domestic violence: A population-based study. *Ind Psychiatry J* 29(1): 134-148.
45. Kivivuori J, Lehti M (2012) Social correlates of intimate partner homicide in Finland: distinct or shared with other homicide types? *Homicide Studies* 16(1): 60-77.
46. Dobash RE, Dobash RP, Cavanagh K, Lewis R (2004) Not an ordinary killer - just an ordinary guy; When men murder an intimate woman partner. *Violence against Women* 10(6): 577-605.
47. United Nations General Assembly (2022) Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 18th December 2013. 68/191. Taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls.

48. United Nations General Assembly (2015) Note by the Secretariat.

49. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2014) Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Group Meeting on gender-related killing of women and girls.

50. United Nations General Assembly (2015) Action against gender-related killing of women and girls Report of the Secretary-General.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License  
DOI: [10.19080/JGWH.2022.23.556130](https://doi.org/10.19080/JGWH.2022.23.556130)

### **Your next submission with Juniper Publishers will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats  
**( Pdf, E-pub, Full Ttext, Audio)**
- Unceasing customer service

**Track the below URL for one-step submission**  
<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>