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# LearningNetwork Brief 29

## Forms of Femicide

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## Forms of Femicide

Femicide is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as ‘the intentional killing of women because they are women; however, a broader definition includes any killings of women and girls.’<sup>i</sup> Femicide is the most extreme form of violence against women on the continuum of violence and discrimination against women and girls. There are numerous manifestations of femicide recognized by the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office.<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note that the following categories of femicide are not always discrete and may overlap in some instances of femicide.

### Intimate Femicide

Intimate femicide refers to the killing of women by current or former partners; however, it can also include women killed by other family members (e.g. sons, fathers). Globally, women are much more likely than men to be assaulted, raped, or killed by a current or former partner. Intimate femicide most often occurs within relationships where there is a history of intimate partner violence.

### Non-Intimate Femicide

Non-intimate femicide involves the killing of women ‘by someone without an intimate relationship with the victim’. It can involve sexual femicide and/or serial killing. **Sexual femicide** involves sexual aggression; however, it should also be noted that the sexual aspect of the homicide may not be evident through investigation which could lead to cases being classified incorrectly. **Serial killings** of women often motivated by misogyny or hatred of women, classifying these murders as femicide.

### Murder of women and girls in the name of “honor”

Murders in the name of “honor” refer to the killing of women/girls because their behavior (e.g. choice of partner, education, employment; dressing “inappropriately”; premarital sex) is viewed as having casted shame upon their family. Honor, from the perspective of the murderer, is seen as restored to the family only upon the death of the woman or girl. These killings are usually perpetrated by male family members and take many forms, including: stoning, stabbing, burning, beheading; forcing women/girls to commit suicide; and disfiguring women/girls with acid, resulting in death. Killings frequently take place in public to influence other women in the community.

We have chosen to refer to murder in the name of “honor” as such based on the Academic Council on the United Nations System’s report on femicide. However, there is debate regarding the use of this term. Groups opposed to its use feel that it categorizes the murder of women and girls by the perpetrator’s rationale, and prefer the use of the term ‘femicide’ or ‘family femicide’. It is important to note that there is no ‘honor’ in murdering women and girls.

### Murder of women and girls because of their sexual orientation or gender identity

Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women and girls are subject to high levels of physical violence, often exceeding the level of violence present in other hate crimes, and resulting in death.<sup>iii</sup> Sexual assault

may also be used in these crimes as a method of persecution against women who are viewed by perpetrators as having violated traditional sexual or gender norms.<sup>iv</sup>

### Murder of Aboriginal women and girls because of their gender

Aboriginal women and girls experience exceptionally high levels of violence, with a greater risk of femicide than all other women in Canada. The increased risk of violence for Aboriginal women and girls is rooted in colonial and patriarchal values, residential schools, and intergenerational trauma. Precarious situations, such as economic insecurity, are also experienced as a result of these systemic issues, leading to a greater likelihood of violence.<sup>v</sup>

### Female infanticide and gender-based sex-selective foeticide

Female infanticide refers to the intentional killing of female infants because they are female. It usually occurs by suffocation, drowning, neglect, or exposure to other dangers. When female fetuses are aborted because they are female, it is considered gender-based sex-selective foeticide. These types of femicide are reflective of “the lower ‘value’ of women in patriarchal societies”.<sup>vi</sup>

### Genital mutilation related femicide a

Female genital mutilation involves the partial or full removal and/or injury of female genitalia for non-medical purposes. It is typically performed on girls between infancy and fifteen years of age. Infections incurred as the result of unhygienic operations frequently result in loss of life, which is considered an acceptable outcome.

### Dowry-related femicide

A dowry is a cultural tradition where the family of the bride provides money and/or property to the family of the groom. When a larger dowry is requested following the marriage of the bride and groom, or when the groom’s family is dissatisfied with the dowry given to them, the woman starts to be considered an ‘unsuitable wife’. Women are then murdered or forced to commit suicide through torture and harassment by the groom’s family.

### Organized crime related femicide

Organized crime related femicide involves femicides associated with gangs, drug and/or human trafficking, and gun proliferation. This type of killing can involve abduction, torture and sexual assault, murder and mutilation, decapitation, and ‘the public display and/or dumping of naked bodies and/or body parts in empty wastelands’. Violence against women in drug culture symbolizes gang cohesion and masculinity, and serves to threaten the enemy. Women are also viewed as disposable objects in drug culture, reinforced by their use as drug mules without concern for their well-being.

### Targeted killing of women in armed conflict

Both state and non-state actors perpetrate physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women and girls as a ‘weapon of war’. Such actions are intended to ‘punish or dehumanize women and girls, and to persecute the community to which they belong’. They are also used as a method of instilling fear, domination, and control. Targeted killings are premeditated, with lethal force intentionally used against selected victims.

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<sup>i</sup> World Health Organization (2013). Understanding and addressing violence against women: Femicide.

<sup>ii</sup> Laurent, Claire (2013). Femicide: The Killing of Women and Girls Around the World. Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Rothman, E.F., Exner, D., & Baughman, A. (2011). The prevalence of sexual assault against people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the United States: A systematic review. *Journal of Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 12(2), 55-66.

<sup>v</sup> ONWA (2014). Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. Retrieved from <http://www.onwa.ca/upload/documents/missing-and-murdered-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Academic Council on the United Nations System. (2013). Femicide: A global issue that demands action. Vienna: Author.