

## FEMICIDE

Femicide is the intentional killing of women and girls because they are women and girls<sup>1</sup>.

Femicide is a human rights violation and a crime against humanity. Yet, this global health and human rights concern often goes unpunished.

We use the term femicide in this newsletter. Unlike the gender-neutral terms murder and homicide, femicide conveys the "misogynistic and sexist motivation" behind much of the killing of women

and girls<sup>2</sup>. For example, men that kill women may be "motivated by the socially constructed right to do so, their superiority over females, pleasure or sadistic desires toward women, or the assumption of ownership over women."<sup>3</sup>

Women's male partners are the most frequent perpetrators of femicides. Other perpetrators include other family members, friends, acquaintances, johns, colleagues, and strangers<sup>4</sup>.

**"The vast majority of all murders of women are femicides."**

Dr. Diana Russell, 2013

### THE IMPACTS OF FEMICIDE

Femicide tragically robs a girl or woman of life. In addition to the finality of this cruel and intentional act, many girls and women experience multiple acts of violence, degradation, psychological and physical isolation, fear, and terror in the hours, months or years before they are killed. Their experience is one of profound suffering; then they are forever silenced and forever lost.

The suffering does not end with the femicide of an individual woman or girl. Women live their lives in relationship with others. They are daughters, mothers, partners, sisters, friends, coworkers, and neighbours. Femicide causes immeasurable loss and suffering for those who laughed with, loved, cared for and relied on their relationship with this woman. In some situations, families and friends do not know the fate of their loved one who is missing or do not have their loved one's body to honour through their preferred death and burial customs. Loss, traumatic grief, poor health, compromised functioning at school or work, and loss of income are some of the impacts experienced by those affected by the murder of a woman or girl close to them.

In addition, femicide has an impact on all women and girls, not just those personally impacted by a death. "Women learn that there is a series of boundaries in

the physical and social worlds which they must not cross if they wish to remain safe"<sup>5</sup>. By adulthood, the impact of the possibility of violence against women is notable:

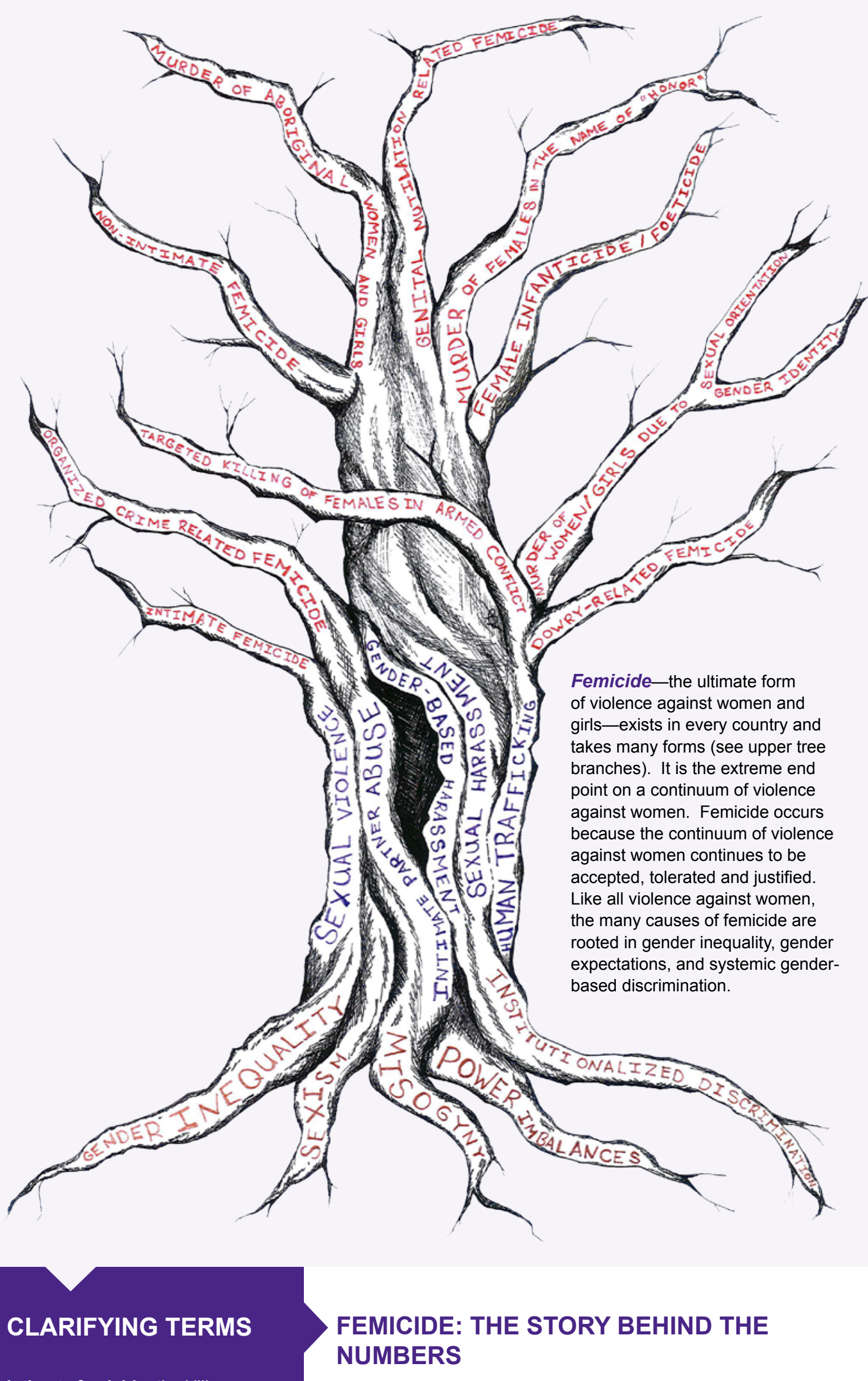
- about two-thirds of Canadian women (64%) report feeling worried while waiting for public transit alone at night, while only 29% of men share this concern.
- 41% of women, but only 12% of men, expressed fear of walking at night in their neighbourhood<sup>6</sup>.

In this way, the prospect or possibility of gender-based violence alone impacts the activities, choices and concerns of all women.

Femicide also harms communities and society as a whole. Gender expectations and gender-based violence violate the rights and limit the opportunities available to fully one-half of our population – that is women and girls. The continuum of violence against women prevents girls and women from reaching their potential and from contributing to the familial, social and economic well-being of themselves and their communities. This very real loss affects every member of society.

### TRACING THE ROOTS OF FEMICIDE

We hope the following tree serves as a reminder that efforts to understand and prevent femicide cannot be separated from the broader context and root causes of violence against women.



**Femicide**—the ultimate form of violence against women and girls—exists in every country and takes many forms (see upper tree branches). It is the extreme end point on a continuum of violence against women. Femicide occurs because the continuum of violence against women continues to be accepted, tolerated and justified. Like all violence against women, the many causes of femicide are rooted in gender inequality, gender expectations, and systemic gender-based discrimination.

### CLARIFYING TERMS

**Intimate femicide:** the killing of women by current or former partners; can also include women killed by other family members.

**Non-Intimate femicide:** the killing of women "by someone without an intimate relationship with the victim"; includes femicides involving sexual aggression and serial killings motivated by misogyny/hatred of women.

**Murder of women and girls in the name of 'honor':** the killing of women because their lived experience (e.g. engaging in premarital sex) is judged as a violation of gender and/or family expectations.

**Female infanticide and gender-based sex-selective foeticide:** the intentional killing of female infants or fetuses because they are female.

**Genital mutilation related femicide:** the killing of girls resulting from complications associated with female genital mutilation.

**Dowry-related femicide:** the killing of a woman by the groom's family because the dowry (e.g. money, property) provided by her family is judged as inadequate.

**Organized crime related femicide:** the killing of women associated with gangs, drug and/or human trafficking, and gun proliferation.

Learn more in Learning Network Brief 29: *Forms of Femicide*.

### FEMICIDE: THE STORY BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Statistics have an important role in describing and understanding complex social phenomena. Available statistics on femicide can provide an important indication of its severity and widespread nature.

**For instance, it is estimated that about 66,000 women are killed every year across the globe<sup>7</sup>.**

Yet, existing statistics do not tell the whole story. Some instances of every social problem go unrecorded. Accordingly, there is a difference between the number of recorded incidents of the social problem and the true number of incidents.

Data collection on femicide is further complicated by the fact that femicide is not an official term for many police or government agencies. The term femicide is used by well-informed sociologists, criminologists and feminist researchers. Accordingly, statistics on femicide are considered to be "secondary" data.

Also, femicide's complexity and causes are rooted in deeply engrained societal structures (e.g. gender inequality, sexism, misogyny, power imbalances) that contribute to the problem being substantially underestimated. For example, not all instances of the murder of women are even recognized as a crime (e.g. women and girls who are killed in the context of war who were victimized for political and territorial reasons). Many incidents of femicide may go unreported to or unrecorded by officials. Accordingly, the implications of femicide are made invisible.

Additional challenges in obtaining the true number of femicide incidents include:

- Inconsistent documentation due to variation across time periods and locations (e.g. recording processes, data availability).
- Characteristics of victims not always known or recorded (e.g. sexual orientation and/or gender identity).
- The clandestine nature of particular activities (e.g. organized crime, armed conflict) makes it difficult to identify the number of women killed.
- Under-investigation of instances of femicide (e.g. deaths of Aboriginal women and girls are not always adequately investigated, resulting in the incorrect classification of these deaths as accidental).

There is a need for improved data collection to enhance data quality and comparability and generate an effective evidence base to inform programs and policy. There also needs to be improved understanding of gender oppression and how it informs femicide.

### ACTIONS TO END FEMICIDE

#### Data and Documentation

- ◆ Strengthen data collection and analysis to generate an effective evidence base that can inform programs and policy.
- ◆ Where data on femicide is less available, raise awareness and perform advocacy work to encourage improved data collection.
- ◆ Train officials to improve documentation of femicide cases and surrounding circumstances.
- ◆ Increase research on violence against women prevention and intervention.

#### Awareness

- ◆ Raise awareness about violence against women (VAW) and all forms of femicide.
- ◆ Raise awareness about the attitudes and motivations underlying VAW, including femicide.
- ◆ Develop public education campaigns to empower women and girls and to engage men and boys in preventing VAW.
- ◆ Engage in activist efforts to protest every time a woman or girl is murdered.
- ◆ Increase awareness of risk factors for victimization and perpetration of all forms of femicide.

#### Prevention

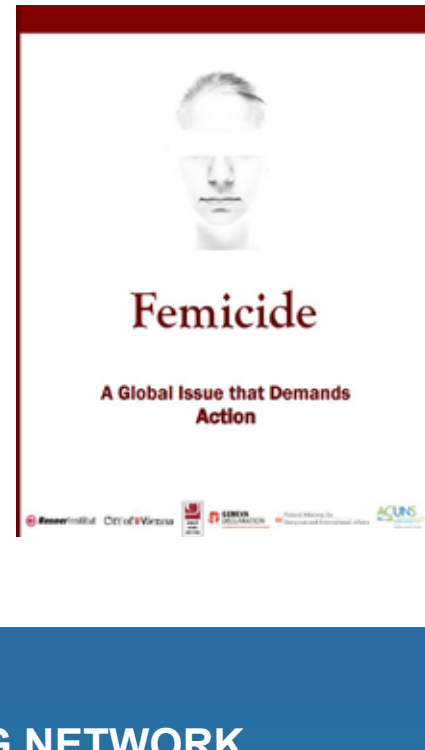
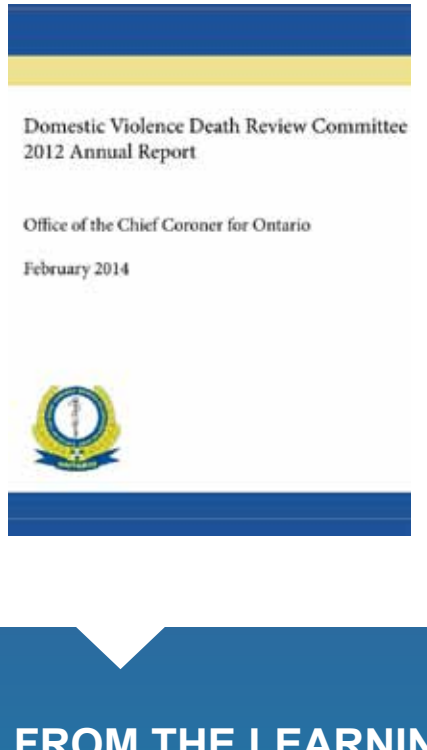
- ◆ Advocate for human rights for all women and girls.
- ◆ Enhance availability of and access to services offering protection to women and girls.
- ◆ Improve early detection of severe intimate partner violence through appropriate assessment, safety planning, and risk management training to reduce the risk of femicide and other harm.
- ◆ Implement programs to break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse.
- ◆ Support Aboriginal communities in developing community safety plans and enhance the economic independence of Aboriginal women.

#### Legislative and Policy Reform

- ◆ Implement policies and programs aimed at improving gender equality in education, government, labour force participation, and earnings.
- ◆ Advocate for an international zero tolerance policy on violence against women and girls.
- ◆ Implement policies increasing support and reparation for woman/girl survivors of violence.
- ◆ Advocate for the implementation of legislation to investigate and adequately prosecute femicide.

### RESOURCES

CLICK EACH IMAGE TO LEARN MORE



### FROM THE LEARNING NETWORK

#### New Resources

**Learning Network Brief 28: Cyber Misogyny**  
This Brief examines cyber misogyny targeted at women and girls via the Internet.

**Learning Network Brief 29: Forms of Femicide**  
This Brief defines femicide and its various manifestations.

**Learning Network Brief 30: Sexual Femicide**  
This Brief explores the motivations behind and impacts of sexual femicide.

**Femicide Network Area**  
To view over 15 resources on Femicide, please visit the Learning Network's website.

#### Upcoming Webinar

**Drawing the Line on Workplace Sexual Harassment**  
September 24, 2015 | 10:00am - 11:00am EST

In this webinar, sexual violence survivor advocates Julie Lalonde and Nicole Pietsch will discuss several topics including:

1. Seeing beyond the individual incident or harasser
2. Taking leadership
3. Drawing The Line on Sexual Harassment

**Nicole Pietsch, B.A.,**  
Coordinator, Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

**Julie Lalonde, M.A.,**  
Project Manager Draw-the-line.ca Campaign

Register here: [vawlearningnetwork.ca/drawing-the-line-workplace-sexual-harassment-webinar](http://vawlearningnetwork.ca/drawing-the-line-workplace-sexual-harassment-webinar)

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization (2013). *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Femicide.

<sup>2</sup>Russell, Diana (2013). "Femicide"—The Power of a Name. In Claire Laurent, Michael Platzer and Maria Idomir, Editors. *Femicide: A Global Issue That Demands Action*. Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office.

<sup>3</sup>Laurent, C., Platzer, M. & Idomir, M (Eds)(2013). *Femicide: A Global Issue That Demands Action*. Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>Russell, Diana (2013). "Femicide"—The Power of a Name. In Claire Laurent, Michael Platzer and Maria Idomir, Editors. *Femicide: A Global Issue That Demands Action*. Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office.

<sup>5</sup>Pain 1991, as quoted in King, M. 1999. Keeping People In Their Place: An Exploratory Analysis of the Role of Violence in the Maintenance of Property Rights in Race and Gender Privileges in the United States. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 31(3): 1-11: 7.

<sup>6</sup>Roberts, J. V. November 2001. Fear of a Crime and Attitudes to Criminal Justice in Canada: A Review of Recent Trends." *Public Safety Canada*. Online: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/rep/2001-02-fer-crme-eng.aspx#4>.

<sup>7</sup>Alvazzi del Frate, A. (2011). When the Victim is a Woman. In GD (Geneva Declaration) Secretariat. *Global Burden of Armed Violence: Lethal Encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 113-44. [http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/GBAV2/GBAV2011\\_CH4.pdf](http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/GBAV2/GBAV2011_CH4.pdf).

**Please evaluate us!**

Let us know what you think. Your input is important to us. Please complete this brief survey on your thoughts of this newsletter: <http://fluidsurveys.com/surveys/crevaw/femicide-newsletter-issue-14/>

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