

Femicide: When Homicide Has a Gender

Honour killings, crimes of passion, dowry murders, female genital mutilation, female infanticide, forced marriages resulting in death

Gender-based violence is a social phenomenon rooted in relations of dominance between genders, and simultaneously a powerful mechanism for perpetuating those relations. It is a phenomenon that is both historical, appearing across all periods of human history, and global, affecting all cultures to varying degrees. It is also systemic: both a condition and a product of patriarchy, a system deeply embedded in ideology, politics, economics and society, which shapes all personal and social relationships. Historically, femicide has been exploited by the patriarchal system to secure male dominance and female subordination.

The most extreme form of gender-based violence is femicide: the intentional killing of women by men because of their gender. It carries a dual nature, being at once a violent taking of human life and the most extreme expression of gender-based violence.

Globally, approximately 83,000 women and girls are murdered each year, with around 50,000 of them killed by an intimate partner or a family member. Home, a place of refuge for most people, becomes for many women the most dangerous place for their safety and even their lives. Translated in stark everyday terms, an average of 137 women are killed every day, one every ten minutes. These figures expose a grim gendered reality that demands immediate and effective policies of prevention and response. One cannot speak of the rule of law, democracy and human rights when the very right to life is placed at risk on the grounds of gender.

Geographical variation does not negate the universality of the problem. Africa records the highest rate of deaths from gender-based violence, at approximately 2.9 per 100,000 women, followed by the Americas, Oceania and Asia. Europe shows comparatively lower rates, around 0.5 per 100,000 women, yet even there the picture remains incomplete, since many countries do not officially record femicides as a separate crime category. Subsuming femicide within the broader category of homicide amounts to a form of concealment.

Despite institutional resistance to recognising femicide as a distinct form of gender-based killing, societies have moved forward, largely through pressure exerted by women's and feminist movements, and have begun to name it. On an almost daily basis, the media report on femicides, yet they frequently reproduce sexist patterns in doing so, presenting female victims through photographs that reflect deeply sexist conventions.

Greece

Greece is no exception to this reality. Femicide is not recognised as a distinct offence in the Penal Code, which means that incidents are documented primarily through journalistic investigations, civil society organisations and independent networks. According to aggregated data, 202 women were murdered in Greece between 2010 and 2023, while 19 femicides were recorded in 2025 alone, a figure higher than in 2024. Recorded cases of domestic violence exceeded 22,000 in 2024. These data are not merely numbers: they reveal the failure of institutions to prevent violence before it reaches its most extreme point.

The Wider Landscape of Femicide

Femicides are not confined to the so-called private sphere, nor are they purely individual in character. Women are not only at risk from a current or former partner, or by a stranger who treats

them as his property. Women's lives are threatened collectively through systemic crimes rooted in mentalities, customs and traditions that persist because of social indifference or outright tolerance. These are mass femicides,

Honour killings represent a major category of mass femicide. These are killings carried out by members of a woman's own family with the aim of "restoring honour" to a family that feels it has been "shamed" by the behaviour of one of its female members. In Pakistan, approximately 110 such crimes were recorded in 2025 in the province of Sindh alone.

The same logic appears in other forms of mass femicide, such as **dowry deaths** in South Asia. In India, more than 20,000 femicides were recorded in 2022, of which nearly 8,000 were linked to a family's inability to meet dowry demands. In 2023, 428,000 crimes against women were also recorded, with deaths resulting from abuse by a husband or his relatives exceeding 133,000.

Acid attacks constitute another form of extreme violence against women. In such attacks, 80 to 91 per cent of victims are women, and perpetrators often act to punish a woman's rejection of a marriage proposal or relationship. India records approximately 200 to 300 such attacks each year, while Bangladesh documented around 3,000 victims between 1999 and 2011. Where these attacks do not result in death, they leave permanent disfigurement or blindness, making them one of the most brutal expressions of the punishment of female "disobedience."

In certain regions, violence takes even more extreme forms through practices such as **stoning**. In Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq, women have been stoned to death for adultery or for relationships deemed "improper." These femicides reveal the depth to which gender-based violence can become embedded within particular legal or cultural systems.

Female genital mutilation is practised extensively across approximately 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and affects millions of women, many of whom die as a result. More than 230 million women and girls have undergone this inhuman practice, while 4 million girls are at risk of being subjected to it each year, usually before the age of 15. For those who survive, the consequences are extremely serious: complications in childbirth, chronic pain, sexual dysfunction and psychological trauma. Despite international campaigns, the practice persists. It is bound up with social notions of honour and purity that are, at their core, inseparable from attitudes towards female sexuality and the control of women. The female body is treated as a vessel for reproduction rather than as belonging to the woman herself. Mutilation is intended to reduce sexual desire, ensures virginity before marriage and guarantees fidelity to a husband.

Female infanticide, the deliberate killing of newborn girls on account of their gender, also occurs on a mass scale in countries such as India, China and Pakistan. In India and China combined, an estimated 2 million such deaths occur annually, through gender-selective abortions or killings immediately after birth. The elimination of girls continues into early infancy: in India, approximately 239,000 girls are estimated to die each year as a result of nutritional neglect and denial of healthcare.

Forced marriage of young girls also leads many of them to systematic abuse and death. Globally, approximately 640 million women were married before the age of 18, and 12 million girls are forced into marriage each year, meaning that a girl is married somewhere in the world roughly every three seconds. Child marriages occur most frequently in South Asia, which accounts for nearly 45 per cent of all such cases worldwide, as well as in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and East Asia. These marriages, often to men much older than the girls involved, are accompanied by physical and sexual violence. The consequences can be fatal: it is estimated that more than 22,000

girls die each year from pregnancy and childbirth complications linked to child marriage, representing more than 60 deaths per day, with the majority of cases recorded in West and Central Africa and South Asia.

The sexual exploitation of minors is one of the darkest dimensions of gender-based violence. Thousands of girls aged between 10 and 17 are caught up in networks of sexual exploitation and trafficking, particularly in parts of South and South-East Asia. In India, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 girls are held in conditions of sexual exploitation; in Bangladesh, approximately 2,000 to 3,000; and in Thailand, as many as 40,000. Deaths resulting from violence, illness or psychological trauma are common but rarely recorded officially.

This overview of gender-based violence does not exhaust all possible cases. Its purpose is to bring to light crimes against women that do not take place on our doorstep, yet condemn thousands of women to a slow or swift death. These, too, are femicides, and we are obliged to include them in any accounting of the women who lose their lives because of their gender. The burning of “witches” in the past has given way to repeated crimes against women, attributed at different times to madmen, to lovesick men, to wronged men, or to cultural beliefs and practices. The patriarchal system denies the systemic and deeply political character of this phenomenon and urges us not to take a “morbid interest” in such atrocities. This denial of the systemic and political content of male dominance serves to perpetuate it, keeping women weak, vulnerable and afraid. Those labelled “madmen” who commit these acts of brutality embody the logical conclusion of the hatred of women that permeates the entire culture of patriarchy.

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