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An analysis of self-reported triggers for femicide perpetrators in three countries

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Abstract

An analysis of self-reported triggers for femicide perpetrators in three countries

By Brielle Berkowitz

Femicide, the gender-based killing of women, is an underreported and understudied issue. Gaps in data, particularly data on perpetrators limit the ability to understand triggers, and upstream factors behind this phenomenon in order to prevent its occurrence. The purpose of this research was to examine the life history and narratives of femicide perpetrators and identify triggers and how their connection to the act of femicide and gender roles. The qualitative data sources were derived from independent studies yet shared a similar qualitative methodological approach examining the life histories and narratives of femicide perpetrators. Sixty-one (n= 61) interviews derived from 43 men included in the pooled dataset were analyzed using MAXQDA. The data exposed a clear relationship between the perception of gender roles and femicide triggers. The two triggers were identified, Trigger 1: Perpetrators are triggered when they believe their partners violate unspoken rules in their relationship and Trigger 2: Perpetrators are triggered when they feel their sense of identity, grounded in their familiar relationships, is threatened by their partners. Notable prior lived experiences among perpetrators included divorce, adverse childhood events, and learned family dynamics including violence between intimate partners and family violence. While not indicative of causation, these factors serve as explanatory rationalizations for the perpetration of violence against women. Additional research is needed on early intervention for femicide prevention including gender norms transformation and the deconstruction of patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes.

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Introduction

Gender-based violence is a public health and human rights issue that includes femicide (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). Femicide, the gender-related murder of women and girls (UNDOC, 2022) is largely grounded in deeply ingrained patriarchal social norms. As a result, women experience discrimination, violence, and exploitation globally due to gender values. Femicide is prevalent worldwide with as many as 87,000 women's deaths attributed annually to the phenomenon (UNDOC, 2018). Existing research on femicide has been largely focused on risk factors instead of perpetrators and their motives. Understanding femicide perpetrators can contribute to a greater understanding of gendered violence against women, effective prevention strategies, and early intervention programs to identify men who are at risk of committing femicide. A global study of male perpetrators may identify common motives of men and add to a greater understanding of the global burden of femicide.

A trigger is defined as the cause of an event or situation to happen or exist (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). Triggers can be examined to illustrate the reasoning and sensemaking behind femicide. An analysis of triggers can aid in preventative interventions and bring more awareness to this understudied form of violence. Interventions aimed at reducing femicide will be shaped by the results of studies focusing on its' root causes. Through these interventions, policies, and programs will be created to prevent femicide and empower women who are experiencing relationship violence.

Chapter 1: Literature Review:

Burden of Femicide

Femicides are categorized as intimate or non-intimate femicide. Non-intimate femicide is committed by someone without an intimate relationship with the woman, these murders could be considered random or acts of sexual aggression (WHO, 2012). This study will focus on intimate partner femicide, which has a higher burden of mortality. Intimate partner femicide (IPF) is the murder of a woman by an intimate partner, either current or former (UNDOC 2022). Male-perpetuated intimate partner femicide, the focus of this study, is the murder of a previous or current intimate female partner by a man (Eckhardt, 2014). There is a large underestimation of the true burden of intimate partner femicide. Four out of ten female homicides in 2021 could not be classified as femicide due to uncollected contextual data overall impacting a precise estimate of the true prevalence of femicide (UNDOC, 2021). Due to poor data collection, each country's resources devoted to femicide, and incomplete case investigations the state of femicide is likely higher than what is documented (Stöckl, 2013). Still, as of 2021, 45,000 women and girls annually are estimated to have been murdered by intimate partners or family members, although this is likely an underestimate due to underreporting (UNDOC, 2022).

There are several contributing factors that can describe the potential causes of femicide. Frequently cited reasons for male perpetrated intimate partner femicide are jealousy, infidelity, a sense of ownership, and hate (Zara, 2019). There are several risk factors that contribute to the possible perpetration of IPV on the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. Behaviors that contribute to this are anger, low self-esteem, poor behavioral control, hostility towards women, acceptance of violence, antisocial personality traits, and emotional dependence (CDC, 2021). In context of a relationship dominance, control, jealousy, separation, and tension

are behaviors that can contribute to possible perpetration (CDC, 2021). Threats to kill with a weapon and forced sex are additional factors of importance (Di Marco and Evans, 2021). Communities with high unemployment, violence, crime, poverty rates and communities with easy access to drugs and alcohol are additional community factors (CDC, 2021). Overall societal traditional gender norms, cultural norms that support violence, gender inequality all support perpetration of IPV or femicide (CDC, 2021).

Demographics of Femicide Perpetration

Sociodemographic variables among 220 perpetrators in a 2003 case-control study concluded that perpetrators had high unemployment and limited education (Campell, 2003). The strongest risk of femicide in Campell's research was determined to be lack of employment and were five times more likely to commit femicide over men who had employment (Campell, 2003). A study comparing male-perpetrators to controls observed a significant difference in the amount of disposable income, only 10% of perpetrators had a high disposable income compared to the controls at 29% (Carlsson, 2021). A protective factor for femicide was when the abuser had a college education, and men with a high school diploma or lower would be at a higher risk of perpetrating femicide (Campell, 2003) Overall research on all aspects of male perpetrated intimate femicide research is extremely vital to determine its causes and risk factors.

Childhood and Environmental Risk Factors

Perpetrators of abuse and femicide often have childhood experiences that become predisposing factors to violence. Childhood experiences that can increase the risk of developing violent tendencies include having emotionally detached parents, abuse, and parental death (Matthews, 2014). Traumatic childhood events and exposure to violence are also risk factors for male femicide perpetration (Clare, 2021). Traumatic childhood events such as abuse and neglect

were found to increase the odds of male teen dating violence perpetration (Espelage, 2022). Other childhood traumatic events like childhood abandonment of a parent, particularly their father, can generate mistrust in relationships later on in their life. (Matthews, 2014). Growing up in a hostile home environment is associated with sexual harassment perpetration (Campbell, 2003). In addition to a hostile home environment, witnessing parental violence is a strong indicator for future femicide perpetration (Di Marco and Evans, 2021; Flaming, Mcclear-Skills, et al., 2015, p. 11).

Additional Risk Factors

Common risk factors for intimate femicide are substance abuse, maltreatment of female partners during pregnancy, and threats to harm their partner (Garcia-Vergara, 2022). A consistent risk factor for IPV is marital conflict in the relationship (Krurg, 2002). Violence against a partner may be precipitated or exacerbated by attempted suicide, access to a firearm, or having a child in the home that was not the perpetrator's (Campbell, 2003). Firearm access has been shown to be an extreme risk factor for femicide, with femicide three times more likely to occur when a firearm is kept in the home (Clare, 2021). In addition to access to a firearm, the use of illicit drugs is strongly associated with a higher risk of femicide (Campbell, 2003). Drug abuse is associated with patterns of intimate partner violence that can increase femicide risk (Campbell 2013).

Control & Patriarchal Values Affecting Femicide

Toxic masculinity and patriarchy adversely affect women and contribute to male control over economic, reproductive, and individual autonomy (Kruger 2014). Men with such rigid definitions of masculinity and beliefs around gender roles use these beliefs to control their partners by employing authoritative acts and unequal power dynamics in their relationships,

contributing to a capacity for violent behaviors (Presser, 2003). Rigid gender beliefs and traditionally defined notions of masculinity can create an environment in an interpersonal relationship where perpetrators resort to threats of violence and murder to gain control of the relationship and their partner (Testoni, 2020). Threats of violence are used to regain control over their partner when they believe their partner has broken the perpetrator's self-imposed rules (Dobash & Dobash, 2020). Some perpetrators may believe when their masculinity is threatened violence is used to regain a sense of control over a situation (Presser, 2003). Femicide and violence are employed as a strategy to enforce men's power in their intimate relationships (Testoni 2020).

Male perpetrated intimate partner femicide can be seen as a final act to regain control that the perpetrator has believed to be lost (Matthews, 2014). In research focusing on adolescent murder-suicide, conventional masculinity served as possible role that increased the risk of femicide (Adhia, 2019). A way to explain this phenomenon is that male perpetrators actions are gendered. Their actions are in response to a rejection or perceived failure that must be amended by violence to assert their masculinity (Adhia, 2019). The association between masculinity and power influences intimate relationships that can lead to unequal power between partners thus increasing the risk of violence and femicide. The belief that women are supposed to be subordinate, and men are their superiority contributes to this risk. Men who strongly believe in this value try to maintain this level of superiority and can be fatal as men try to maintain their status within their family through violence (Garica-Vergera et al., 2022).

Gender Norms & Femicide

The perception of gender and the gender roles of women are well-established factors in femicide perpetration (UNDOC, 2022). Beliefs, norms, and stereotypes that are embedded deep

into society and culture often promote inequality of women, exposing them to abuse, and dependence on men or family members financially (Stewart, 2021). Women's autonomy in a relationship is influenced by gender differences depriving them of their freedom and authority. This is because women are often perceived of as caretakers and expressive of emotions and men viewed as powerful and ambitious which impacts women's autonomy in a relationship. (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). Forced gender roles create a relationship that has rules to follow and when rigid beliefs are broken, this can result in violence. Due to gendered norms that often support men's justifications for violence against women, men have imposed violent tendencies (Steward, 2022). Gender inequality is the basis of violence and explains why women are being killed at higher incidence than men (Garcia-Vergara et al., 2022).

Notions of gender are often created during childhood through the distribution of family responsibility. Often, cultural norms can lead to the woman serving as the keeper of the house, with expectations to submit to their partner (Mathews, 2014). Specific gender roles work against women, creating an environment where abuse is justified due to patriarchal norms. Childhood experiences are impactful to create an environment where abuse is justified, the most predicting factor being witnessing parental violence (Di Marco & Evans 2021; Flaming, Mccleary-Sills, et al., 2015, p.11). Transmission of violence has been observed across generations, connecting that exposure to violence as a child can become cyclical (Di Marco & Evans 2021; Flaming, Mccleary-Sills, et al., 2015, p.11).

Perpetrators' Narratives

The way perpetrators speak about their narratives is through their own personal memories and are biased in multiple ways. Sense-making and self-narratives are ways perpetrators explain their violence and their justifications (Evans, 2023). In a systematic review, Evans et. al found

perpetrators make sense of their violence by avoiding responsibility, rationalizing their actions, viewing themselves as the victim, and using gendered norms that promote controlling behavior and violence that can escalate to femicide (Evans, 2023). In Evans' research, during their self-narratives men presented how "being as man" was important to their identity and how non-normative gender behaviors resulted in the femicide (Evans, 2023). Justifications for violence were cited because of panicking from their partners' attempts to leave them and this would result in losing possession and control in the relationship (Fahs, DiMarco, & Evans, 2023). They also reported that femicide perpetrators believed that they do not see themselves as violent men, and disconnected themselves from the femicide (Fahs, DiMarco, & Evans, 2023). How perpetrators convey their actions is a crucial aspect of research to determine the triggers of femicide because they are the main drivers of femicide (Evans, 2023). The analysis of their narratives is of extreme importance to determine root causes to be used in prevention and risk factor identification.

An Israeli study of perpetrators found that men believed what they did was justified due to perceived betrayal, their partners' intention to leave them, or insubordination (Elisha, 2010). In another study, convicted perpetrators attempted to control their narrative by presenting themselves as masculine or trying to shift their blame from themselves (Presser 2003). This attempt to control the narrative shows the importance of control and the power perpetrators feel they need to maintain despite being convicted. This notion of control or power in the interviews connects to their previous acts of violence against their partners. Perpetrators in this study describe their violence as gendered, explaining they had been socialized to disrespect women; thus, their crimes were seen as a personal accomplishment in upholding their masculinity (Presser 2003).

Accounts Of Violence: Justification Using Neutralization

The way men talk about violence and justify their violence is referred to as ‘discourses of violence’ (Gadd, 2000). These are the arguments men use to justify their murders can negate their actions. Neutralization of perpetrators’ crimes serves to reduce the importance of violence itself. This neutralization can appear as victim-blaming, blaming third parties, understating the violence, or complete denial (Presser, 2005).

Di Marco and Evans defined four archetypes for how men explain the femicide they committed. A man may explain his experience as being a victim society or their environment, even with frequent relationship violence the discourse of a participant posing as the victim are nuance (Di Marco & Evans, 2021). A perpetrator presenting as the victim archetype will blame their environment or the lack of financial security, have limited personal agency, and victims are secondary characters to their narrative (Di Marco and Evans, 2021). Men that are still focused on themselves but will present more about the victim after they describe the femicide are described as the redemption archetype (Di Marco & Evans, 2021). They will focus on the individual level and reference gender-violence interventions often (Di Marco & Evans, 2021). Men who see women as a threat and the protagonist in their interviews are the outburst archetype, and victim blaming becomes more misogynistic in these cases (Di Marco & Evans, 2021). Another archetype was the exceptionality archetype, men who detach from the act of murder, explained that no previous violence had occurred, and this act of violence was an extreme action (Di Marco & Evans, 2021). The archetypes defined by Di Marco and Evans provide insight into the discourses of how men talk about violence and neutralize their actions.

Perpetrators’ violence can be motivated by violations of their own rules or gender norms and perpetrators may also highlight their perceived role of the victim in her death. This may

manifest itself through attacks on the behavior or personality of the victim (Berggren et al., 2020). Perpetrators may blame the victim because they were unfaithful or disobedient (Presser, 2005). The process of neutralization contributes to sense-making allowing the perpetrator to neutralize the murder and counteract the extent of their violence.

In the discourse of femicide, blaming victims is a common neutralization pattern rather than taking responsibility for their actions (Presser, 2005). The perpetrators may take some responsibility, but they do not believe themselves to be the sole or primary cause of the femicide. Others, such as the victims and family members, are often invoked as reasons for femicide. Someone who blames the victim is unable to take full responsibility for the murder they committed (Presser, 2005). Male perpetrators will accept they have violated the law and committed a crime, but often lack agency for their actions.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this research was to examine the life history and narratives of femicide perpetrators and identify triggers and how their connection to the act of femicide and gender roles. A secondary qualitative analysis of 57 interviews from femicide perpetrators in 3 countries was conducted to explore the connection between gender roles and triggers of femicide.

Participants and Sample

After conducting a systematic review exploring femicide perpetrators narratives the researchers reached out to the authors of each study to inquire about whether they would be willing to share their data. The pooled dataset was initially derived from a created using a previous systematic review (n=14) where the articles contained analysis of (primary) previous life story interviews (Evans, 2023). Authors of the articles included in the systematic review were invited to share their data. The data were obtained from researchers who agreed to participate and included in a data set for the secondary pooled analysis.

The population of interest was men that have committed femicides. The interviews' methods were unstructured or semi-structured interviews conducted among femicide perpetrators.

Interviews in this dataset were conducted in three countries: Namibia, Israel and South Africa.

Instrument

Because the data were derived secondarily, each set of interviews utilized a unique interview guide. All of the interviews were semi-structured but had different research questions. The South African interviews were the longest and were about an hour to an hour and a half long. The researcher wanted to know deeply about their childhood upbringing and their perception of their

partner. The Namibian interviews were short and had direct questions. The Israeli interviews focused on prevention of femicide and the biography of the perpetrator. Femicide perpetrators from Namibia and Israel were interviewed only once. The researcher who conducted interviews in South Africa interviewed their subjects more than once.

Codebook

A deductive codebook was created by the team of researchers to analyze the interviews. When writing the codebook, the past systematic review was used to create the deductive codes. The systematic review found four archetypes of male femicide perpetrators from previous research and used characteristics from these archetypes as codes. Codes that examined how participants explained their femicide were influenced by criminological narrative interview research and previous neutralization research. Deductive codes included |: Biography, Femicide, Previous Relationships, Family Members, Index/Femicide Relationship, Self-narrative, Femicide, Violence (outside of violence with femicide partner), Prevention, Neutralization techniques, Excuses, Justifications, Concessions (acceptance to forgiveness), Feelings, and Family.

Close reads and memoing were used to develop inductive codes. As coding progressed inductive codes were added such as, 'Social Supports', 'Triggers', 'Paranoia'. Once an inductive code was created the student reviewed past interviews and recoded with the new codebook. The final codebook was created and reviewed by the team and sent to the primary researchers. At the conclusion of the coding, analysis began of the codes and the memos.

Procedures

Interviews in the dataset were provided in English and Hebrew. Data that was in English were coded in the original language using the codebook. The interviews in Hebrew were translated

into English using Google translate and verified by the researcher who provided and collected the data from Israel. The transcripts were reviewed, and quality checked once they were coded. This quality check would be conducted as a research team when the person who was coding would present their interviews and verify if the sections of the interview corresponded to the correct code definition. Transcripts were uploaded into MaxQDA for coding and analysis. To prepare for analysis, memos and comments were used to optimize the context behind the triggers and the gender norms that were broken.

To conduct this analysis of perpetrator perspective MaxQDA software was utilized to code specific quotes from the interviews from the codebook. The coding process was to identify quotes that represented the codes created from the codebook.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by examining each code and the portions of the interview that were highlighted to match the code. The interviews were summarized by the researcher and stand out observations were noted. After each interview was coded, the researcher began to examine the output of the codes. They created lists of each code and in the list was the list of quotes that matched the code. Codes that were used to define potential triggers were: 'Description of Femicide', 'Presentation of Victim', "Expressed Reasons", "Explanation", "Agency", and "Notions of Masculinity and Gender". The quotes of each code were analyzed by the researcher to determine the possible triggers of the event of interest. This was determined by examining what the perpetrator described as his expressed reasons, his thoughts before the femicide, and the partners' actions directly before the femicide. These elements of the interview explained the perpetrators' motivations and immediate reason for their actions. Using previous literature, the

researcher examined prior motivations that have been identified and found two patterns in the data that aligned with literature and the discourses of gender.

Ethical Considerations

This analysis was exempt from IRB approval because of its nature as a secondary analysis. Prior to data collection, all portions of the were reviewed by Emory University's Institutional Review Board (IRB00002551) and determined to meet the criteria for exemption.

Chapter 3: Results

Fifty-eight unstructured in-depth interviews with 43 perpetrators from three countries, Israel, Namibia, South Africa were included in this analysis. Perpetrators average age at the time of interview or femicide was 34 years (n= 28 participants); no age was reported for 15 participants. All participants were convicted of femicide. The mean duration of the relationship was seven years with data unavailable from 7 participants. Nineteen perpetrators (59 %) of the sample were employed at the time of the murder, although some cases (n=11) did not report employment status. Most (n= 33) interviews were between one to two hours.

Trigger 1: Perpetrators are triggered when they believe their partners violate unspoken rules in their relationship

Perpetrators feel threatened when their partner violates an implicit rule in their relationship, or they believe they have done so. These rules define what behavior or expectations are acceptable in their relationship, and violation is seen as a perceived threat or disregard for relationship rules or expectations. A common example was when perpetrators' partners left or threatened to leave them. It did not make a difference if the victim did not break a rule at times, it was reliant on the perpetrators' perception. If he deemed her unfaithful or they believed she was going to leave this was also a precursor to violence.

One participant thought his partner was cheating on him and explained how, "she needed to answer the things that she was saying." Few perpetrators would seek out their ex or current partner for "explanations" for their rule-breaking or poor behavior. Behaviors identified were, for example, drinking too much, going out without informing him, and/or not coming home at a certain time. However, this apparent search for meaning in their partners' behaviors was used to

focus their emasculation and rage on their partner. Perpetrators expected monogamy, although they themselves may not have adhered to this rule.

In two cases, custody disputes were the mentioned trigger for the murder, although this was uncommon in the sample. Divorce situations often included mothers taking their children away, asking for what was perceived as too much money as alimony, or protracted legal processes that the perpetrator attributed to their partner. These behaviors violated unspoken rules that enraged the perpetrator and scared them. When a child was involved, perpetrators would also use this trigger to demonize their victims, explaining that they were acting to save their child from their mother.

Some behaviors that violated rules involved partners directly questioning or challenging the perpetrators' views. These behaviors included scolding or words perceived as personal attacks. These actions were described by perpetrators as surprising and viewed as a betrayal or threat. Before the femicide, one perpetrator expressed how their partner opposed them, “we started arguing, she kept insulting me and asking me to go.” Another perpetrator described that he believed his partner had to, “listen to what I say,” and a different perpetrator described the cause of his situation was attributed to, “the damage to my ego.” When the perpetrators perceived their partner as opposing them or threatening their ego, the perpetrator felt as if they had to defend themselves through violence.

Interviewees expressed frustration, sadness, and anger when their partner's behavior violated their expectations or norms within their relationship. For example, when perpetrators felt or suspected that their partner had betrayed them, they would describe feeling sick and it was as if they did not know their partner. They would also describe extreme rage leading to the violent attack. The perpetrators' responses included jealousy and profound sadness. Violence

sensemaking was achieved by using traditional gender roles and how they defined violence in their relationship. One participant explained that he would never hurt her until she started “it,” and that he would not hurt his partner unnecessarily. From his point of view, it was up to him whether he believed his violence was necessary at all. His native definition of violence was that violence was okay if these other actions were present, namely, his partner breaking a rule.

Few perpetrators disclosed that they hit their partner. When perpetrators admitted they abused their partner, the admission would either be justified by native definitions of violence or gender roles. On the other hand, perpetrators would present their abuse as a one-time occurrence where the situation got out of control. Several participants would justify their violence by demonizing their partner and would describe her as the one that deserved their punishment. In these instances, many participants identified rule-breaking behaviors of their partners that would necessitate violence in order to uphold their values. Few perpetrators would describe their partners as loving and kind. Many participants would demonstrate how their partners’ etiquette became a trigger for their violence. One participant shared, “My wife would be always seeming of alcohol. I cannot understand why I loved her so much. I was against alcohol and against a woman who uses alcohol, and this is what I cannot understand.” The participants would not accept their partner if their mannerisms, such as alcohol use, continued and would use this behavior as justification, often saying “she would choose alcohol over the family.” “She used alcohol a lot.” “She was not allowed to drink.”

In these perpetrators’ minds, violence served to punish their partner and reclaim dominance in the relationship. The femicide and related violence towards their partners was linked to their interest in regaining respect and control. Most perpetrators had no remorse for their violence and were apathetic towards the victim because they believed she deserved it. On

the other hand, when men were not apathetic, perpetrators described being surprised by their partners' actions. Participants frequently reported thinking, "why was she doing this to me?" "I didn't know why she was acting like this." "I had to defend myself." Subsequently, many presented themselves as victims and perceived the woman as an attacker. In one case, the perpetrator's partner was raped when she was drunk. He blamed her for allowing the rape to happen and blamed her for its occurrence.

Trigger 2: Perpetrators are triggered when they feel their sense of identity, grounded in their familiar relationships, is threatened by their partners.

Perpetrators' identities were highly grounded in their intimate and familiar roles and relationships. When perpetrators perceived that their partners were rejecting them, they described experiencing a broken sense of self, an inability to control emotions, intense emotional pain, or a loss of reality. Most perpetrators felt that if they lost their partners, they could not live without them because their identity was so deeply tied to them. They expressed being unable to achieve happiness without their partners. Some perpetrators felt they could not lose their partner, often objectifying them rather than seeing them as a person that could make independent decisions. One interviewee explained his partner's rejection by saying, "I was a family man. My wife and child were my whole world." In this instance, his identity was linked to him being the caretaker of his family where his wife and child were possessions.

For most, there was intense emotional pain leading up to the femicide. Some reported how lonely they felt that it hurt too much, and that they were lost without their families. One participant shared, "I was angry, I was boiling. I saw it as something that was against the laws of nature, something that was too cruel. I felt more abandoned, even more lonely, that it was even harder for me in the world." Most perpetrators were afraid of being alone; their partner provided

them with comfort, pride, power, and control. When their partner threatened to leave or left, the action threatened their entire sense of self, serving as the trigger for the femicide.

Following the perceived rejection of their identities, perpetrators entered a melancholic state. This state lasted for months among the perpetrators, and interviewees expressed an extreme and unbearable emotional discomfort. One perpetrator expressed, “Six months I’ve been a sleepwalker, can’t find myself.” Another described not taking care of themselves after their partner left them, “I would not leave the house...I had long beard and long hair, like three months I wouldn’t go out at all. I was depressed.” Many described being depressed, as they perceived the relationship changing or falling apart. One perpetrator explained, “that why I did such a thing (femicide) because I cannot stay alone and that’s why I wanted to kill myself with a tie.” The fear of being alone for him was too much that he wanted to kill himself and his wife. Out of 25 cases where a lost sense of self was identified as the trigger, seven perpetrators attempted or considered suicide.

Some men presented the victim as an object and a representation of their personal success. A unique aspect of this behavior was the lack of remorse participants had towards their partners’ feelings and wellbeing, and that they became resentful of their partners. In these cases, women were referred as neglectful, unfit mothers, or gold diggers. Unlike the first trigger, perpetrators’ lack of guilt was attributed to their lost sense of self and the objectification of their partner. This meant that they experienced a sense of abandonment, lack of clear direction and goals, and no sense of life fulfilment, while talking about women as passive actors in their stories. In these instances, men losing their identity served as a trigger. Participants wanted revenge against their partner and to get retribution for their partner's real or perceived actions. Some participants would explain how heartbroken they felt, how they still loved her, or they

wished it never happened. This interview behavior could be perceived as genuine or disingenuous depending on the perpetrator. In most interviews the perpetrators would have little agency or guilt about the incident, but still claimed they loved her. Few perpetrators would express guilt and the narratives came across as more genuine than the former.

Few perpetrators expressed no remorse, in this context they would vilify the victim and believe she deserved what occurred. In these cases, perpetrators claimed the femicide was an accident, or someone else was responsible for their murder. Men would deny any claim of aggressive violence. They explained it using phrases such as "all I did was touch her, and she attacked", "by accident I stabbed her", and that "she died." This discourse was frequently present when the victim tried to leave or wanted to be with someone else, they objectified her and pushed the blame off themselves. They would objectify their partner saying, "women always get their way with women's rights, men are supposed to take out their frustration on women." Some perpetrators expressed that they would feel it was their right to take out their emotions or non-emotions on their partners. An outlier in this subset was that one perpetrator believed it was his genetics that caused him to murder his partner.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the life history and narratives of femicide perpetrators and identify triggers and how their connection to the act of femicide and gender roles. In the context of femicide, triggers are an event that precipitated the act of violence resulting in femicide. They may align with the expressed reasons or justifications the perpetrator believes, or they can be something else entirely. Based on the narratives two triggers and several salient factors have been identified. First, men were triggered when they observed or believed their partners violated unspoken rules in the relationship. Second, perpetrators reported being triggered when their sense of identity grounded in their familiar relationships were threatened by their partners.

Men were triggered when they observed or believed their partners violated unspoken rules in their relationships. These rules reflected strict gender norms and a sense of control over their partner. Strict adherence to rigid gender norms and notions of masculinity resulted in an overemphasis of these norms where perceived deviations within the context of relationships may act as trigger for violence. Prior research has supported that leaving their partners or mentioning leaving is a risk for femicide (Garcia-Vergara, 2022). In a study of women who survived an attempted femicide victims most of the cases occurred when the women were attempting to leave the relationship (Nicolaidis et al., 2013). Separation or attempted separation is a well-known risk factor of femicide and was evident in many of the cases of our study (CDC, 2021).

Within the context of violent relationships, leaving or threatening to leave was considered a norm violation interfering with perpetrators' coercive control over their partner. Coercive control aims to compel obedience or enforce rules on their partner by using physical, mental, economic

abuse (Johnson et al., 2019). Coercive controlling violence is almost always perpetrated by men and is gendered using physical and sexual violence, intimidation, fear, and injury (Johnson et al., 2019; Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Myhill, 2015). Coercive control was often used before the femicide to enforce these rules in the narratives interviews most commonly using threats, physical abuse, and fear.

Divorce, separation, or threats of separation were identified as risk factors for femicide; even when there was no actual separation, the threat alone put the female partner at risk. Elements of this trigger were that perpetrators felt righteous in their actions, had no remorse, became surprised at their partners' actions, and felt they were reclaiming their masculinity or re-establishing respect. Existing literature supports the idea that the lack of remorse is due to perpetrators wanting to "dispose" of their partner because they wished to eliminate them from their life without a loss of property or reputation. (Dobash & Dobash, 2009 p 217) Many perpetrators felt disrespected or "treated like a fool" and when their partner disobeyed them and their rules. Prior research supports this finding in that victims have often been described by perpetrators in other studies as having contributed to their victimization by being disloyal or otherwise disobedient (Dobash & Dobash, 2001))

An Israeli study of perpetrators found that men believed what they did was justified due to perceived betrayal, their intention to leave them, or insubordination (Elisha, 2010). In another study, convicted perpetrators attempted to control their narrative by presenting themselves as masculine or trying to shift their blame (Presser 2003). This attempt to control the narrative shows the importance of control and the power perpetrators feel they need to maintain. This notion of control or power in the interviews connects to their previous acts of violence against their partners. In another study perpetrators describe their violence as gendered, explaining they

had been socialized to disrespect women; thus, their crimes were seen as a personal accomplishment in upholding their masculinity (Presser 2003). Strict notions of gender and gendered cultural norms create an environment where men have collective support of their violence against women and are encultured to believe they are entitled to women (Berggren et al., 2020).

Some perpetrators felt this disrespect as a threat to their masculinity and their position in society. Men that adhere to strict gender norms are likely to use violence against their partner due to their belief that men should dominate women. (UNDODC, 2018). An unequal balance of power in their relationships is created by these gender norms and contributes to a higher risk of violent behaviors (Presser, 2003). The link between harmful notions of masculinity and coercive control has been widely established as, “an institutionalized system of subordination.” (Presser 2006; Caringella-MacDonald & Humphries, 1991; Estrich, 1987) Perpetrators used violence to maintain control and authority over their female partners, as one of the frequent cited reasons for femicide is a sense of ownership of their partners (Zara, 2019). In our sample, female partners were expected to abstain or limit alcohol consumption, be home at an expected time, and be monogamous; however, these relationship expectations were not reciprocal. Such rules align with masculine beliefs that men should control all aspects of their partners’ economic, reproductive, and individual autonomy (Kruger, 2014). In studies of justifications for violence in the literature perpetrators used violence to regain control when they believed a rule in their relationship was broken (Dobash & Dobash, 2010). In this sample it was common that the men would not hold themselves to the standards or rules they were expecting of their partners. While these expectations are not violent actions, these controlling behaviors have been shown to correlate with higher incidence of intimate partner violence (Nicolaidis et al., 2003). Controlling

behaviors that are a result of toxic masculinity can contribute to violence in the relationship using threats of violence and murder to gain control over their partners (Testoni, 2020).

Suicidal ideation and/or attempts appeared in numerous accounts especially when men perceived their partners as breaking relationship rules. Men would describe themselves as feeling weak and their attempt to take their own life was due to extreme guilt. In few cases men would say they felt weak in their attempt to kill themselves and would explain this attempt as a desperate moment that they regretted immediately after. This observation of suicide attempts or ideation is an area that needs more research. Suicide has also been a reported risk factor that can lead to a higher risk of violence when there is an attempt (Campbell, 2003).

Participants were triggered when they felt their sense of identity, grounded in their familiar relationships, was threatened by their partners. The femicides that were caused by a potential identity loss objectified their partner and experienced a perceived loss of control. Identity loss as a trigger is supported in the literature as an identified typology of perpetrators that have a dependency on their partner where a breakup or mention of separation is a trigger for homicide (Vignola-Levesque, 2022). In this context, the leaving or mention of leaving led to an identity loss that triggered a loss of control and objectification of their partner. However, a sense of self being compromised leading to loss of control and/or objectification of their partner has not yet been explored or established.

In a study by Mathews, many of the male femicide perpetrators viewed their self-worth as reflected through their partner, thus winning and keeping the “perfect” partner was critical to their often very fragile self-esteem (Matthews et al, 2015). This trigger included two elements: deep intense emotion and the objectification of the female partner. Di Marco and Evans previously found that the objectification of partners was common among femicide perpetrators

who fell into an outburst archetype; among these perpetrators, women were described as having no agency, unseen and were seen as objects rather than humans (Di Marco & Evans, 2021).

Among the perpetrators in this study, when this deep intense emotion occurred, they would say how they only saw black because they were blinded by their anger. Their anger was an act of revenge because they wanted to inflict the emotional pain their partner had inflicted upon them; this notion of emotional transference aligns with an analysis of femicide perpetrators narratives from Argentina (Fahs, Di Marco, & Evans, 2023). Among our sample anger was explained as an inability to control themselves and they lost themselves in their anger. However, in an analysis of men's accounts of violence outside of this research, an inability to control their emotions and overwhelming anger was not supported as a valid thesis (Dobash & Dobash, 2009). The reasoning behind this is that the idea that in fits of rage, men just “snapped” and committed femicide is not valid due that most men had ongoing conflicts and other risk factors (Dobash & Dobash, 2009).

Limitations

The data analyzed in this analysis came from a pooled data set derived from studies developed and conducted independently. As a result, the interviews did not use the same interview guide, specific methodology, or data collection procedures. However, all data were qualitative in nature and conducted among the same sample, namely men incarcerated because of perpetrating femicide of an intimate partner. All interviews focused on the motivations and descriptions of the femicide. Moreover, this was an analysis of secondary data. While the researchers who collected the primary data were included in planning, they did not participate in coding or analysis. Some of these studies that were included in the literature review were also the same datasets used in

this research. Therefore, when comparing our results to the literature previously published is a limitation because it is the same data being analyzed.

Data were limited to single victim femicides. We only looked at male-perpetrator homicides and not suicide-homicides or other gender dyads. This study only examined what was ruled a femicide and not murder-suicides. As a result, these data do not include the perspectives of perpetrators who killed multiple victims (ie partner and child) or those who committed murder suicide.

We did not have access to any legal files, psychological evaluations, police records, or hospital records to verify the information given during the interviews. Therefore, these narratives were our only report of the described femicides and were only examined from the perpetrators' perspectives. Future research including supporting information other than interviews could provide insight to if there was any previous intimate partner violence in the relationship reported outside of the interview, risk factors such as substance abuse, and other perspectives of the relationship.

In addition, only English language data were include in this analysis. Although our larger data set includes Spanish language interviews this analysis was delimited to interviews conducted in English and Hebrew based on the language skills of the first author. An analysis of the full data set is necessary to gain greater understanding of perpetrators' motivations and triggers.

Chapter 5: Public Health Implications

Implications

The research has focused on prevention, awareness, and education. The researchers aimed to provide important information to better inform interventions and stressed the utmost importance of preventing femicide. Femicide has serious, long-lasting physical, psychological, and social consequences that affect women, their families, and their communities. Surviving children experience the loss of their mother, and the perpetrator may end up in jail or commit suicide (Stöckl, 2013). Future research can utilize interview data that aims to focus on the rationalities of aggressors and the triggers for their actions, allowing for a nuanced comprehension of the reasons behind femicide. The impact of this new research demonstrates the importance of recognizing the triggers of male-perpetrated violence, and increasing literature to understand these behaviors will lead to more effective interventions. The culture, society, and family impose gendered rules on women, so prevention must be enacted at every level. Programs focused on family welfare to decrease stress in the household could help with the escalation of violence, as victims have reported violence during big changes in their lives like unemployment (Stöckl, 2013).

Gaining access to participants for perpetrator interviews posed a significant challenge due to multiple bureaucratic processes and ethical considerations that needed to be addressed to ensure safety. Different forms of government, political interests, and cultural views on gender in various countries also presented a varying array of obstacles, with some not recognizing femicide as a crime. Identifying men at risk for femicide perpetration involved speaking with their partner or

someone else in the community, which was difficult since victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) often feared for their safety and did not report abuse.

Moreover, research on femicide perpetration was limited, with most studies examining gender inequality on a broader scale. To prevent femicide perpetration on an interpersonal level, further research was needed to gather a larger dataset using a similar codebook to examine triggers, emotions, gender, and third-party documents like court rulings and police documents. This approach would allow for more focused results on global femicide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where regional differences in femicide burden and prevention efforts were influenced by the quality of homicide investigation, data availability, and identification of femicide as a crime (Stöckl, 2013).

Therefore, future studies should conduct a primary global investigation of male femicide perpetrators using an inductive codebook that incorporates both variables already proven by literature and those yet to be explored. Additionally, including murder-suicides in the account for femicide cases would provide a more accurate measure of the true burden of global femicide.

Conclusion

This study shows that, when male perpetrators narrate the crime, male triggers were aligned with expressed reasons or justifications but were also connected on norms of gender identity. The purpose of this research was to identify triggers. Two triggers were identified, when men feel like a spoken or unspoken rule was broken, or their sense of identity grounded in their familiar relationships were threatened by their partners. Femicide is inherently gendered, these triggers identify the nuances of gender that are being used to justify and rationalize perpetrators' actions.

Rules that were perceived as broken were linked to gender norms in the relationship. When the identity was threatened it created objectification of women and viewed them as a possession.

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