



FEMICIDE IN ARMENIA: A SILENT EPIDEMIC

**COALITION TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
2016**



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COALITION
TO STOP VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN

FEMICIDE IN ARMENIA: A SILENT EPIDEMIC

2016

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This report is dedicated to all the victims of domestic violence in Armenia and around the world. With a heavy heart, we pledge to remember our fellow sisters who tragically died at the hands of their intimate partners and family members. In honoring those who have passed, we hope also to change outcomes for future victims. We dream of a world where no woman is subjected to torture and violence by family members and intimate partners.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary of Terms	6
Foreword	7
Introduction	9
Terminology	11
Local Context	13
Batterer Lethality Risk Factors	15
2010-2015 Overview	20
Impunity and Injustice	34
Policy Recommendations	45
About the Coalition	48
References	50

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Domestic violence	All acts of physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence within the family or between former or current spouses or partners.
Family violence	Abuse directed toward a member of the person's family that causes fear about his/her personal wellbeing or safety.
Femicide	The killings of women and girls based on their gender as a result of gender inequality, discrimination, and economic disempowerment.
Gender-based violence	Violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations and unequal power relationships associated with each gender.
Gender equality	A human rights issue that refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men regardless of whether they are born male or female.
Gender mainstreaming	The process of including women and girls in planned actions, legislation, policies, or programs in an effort to achieve gender equality.
Intimate partner violence	Abuse by an former or current intimate partner that causes physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm.
Misogyny	Scorn and dismissiveness towards women as a group due to the assumption that women are less deserving than men.
Sexism	Discrimination based on gender and the attitudes, stereotypes, and cultural elements that promote this discrimination.

FOREWORD

Published by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, this report records the death of women killed by intimate partners and family members and sheds light on the manifestations of gender-related killings and acts of violence that are uniquely experienced by women in Armenia.

We choose to use the term femicide in this report as opposed to the more gender-neutral term homicide, which overlooks the unique systems of inequality and oppression that women face. Domestic homicides in Armenia are largely carried out by men, and in the rare instances that they are carried out by women against male intimate partners, it is often in self defense. Thus, the gendered context and impact of domestic abuse warrants its own unique category.

As a result of the Coalition's effort to raise awareness on domestic violence and its consequences, more cases have begun to surface and been given media attention. Still, cases of femicide are woefully underestimated due to poor reporting mechanisms and a conscious effort to conceal cases by authorities and perpetrators' families. To date, there exists a dearth of information on domestic homicides and no national agency that collects comprehensive data on cases in Armenia.

In this report, we give detailed information on the thirty known cases registered in the period of 2010-2015 and make note of certain unregistered cases that have been classified as "suicide" or not classified whatsoever. Because we rely on public information and cannot be certain that we have not missed deaths, we use the phrase "at least" when describing the number of women killed by intimate partners. Though other forms of violence against women

fit within the UN definition of femicide, including female feticide, this report focuses only on domestic homicides.

This report is intended to be used as a tool for change in the community. We describe the risk factors, lethality of domestic violence, and systemic impunity and injustice in an effort to improve institutional and other mechanisms to support victims and punish perpetrators.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-related killings are the most extreme manifestation of violence against women and constitute a gross violation of women's right to life, humane treatment, personal liberty, and non-discrimination (ACUNS 2013). While the greatest danger for men is to experience physical violence or be killed by other men in the public sphere, violence against women primarily takes place by male intimate partners or family members in private spaces and typically involves ongoing abuse in the home, threats or intimidation, cruelty and torture, sexual violence, and extreme power imbalances (UNODC 2011; WHO 2012).

The term femicide is used when describing the misogynistic killing of women and girls motivated by socially-constructed superiority of men and ownership of women (WHO 2012). For a case to be considered femicide, there must be an implied intention to carry out the killing and a connection between the crime and the female gender of the victim (ACUNS 2013). These killings may be indirect, as prolonged exposure to intolerable levels of violence often leads victims to commit forced suicide (ACUNS 2013).

Worldwide, roughly 66,000 women and girls are violently murdered each year, accounting for approximately 17% of all victims of intentional homicides (ACUNS 2013). Though there has been a reduction in the overall number of homicides at the global level, this is primarily representative of a gradual decrease over time of male victims of homicide outside of the home (UNODC 2011). There is, thus, evidence to suggest that femicides are making up a greater share of all homicides, as women are disproportionately affected by family and intimate partner violence (UNODC 2011).

Available data for Europe that 35% of female victims of homicide were killed by spouses or ex-spouses, and 17% by relatives, whereas only 5% of all male victims of homicide were killed by spouses or ex-spouses and 10% by other family members (UNODC 2011). Data from various other regions of the world show similar results, with 40-70% of female murders linked to intimate partner and family-related violence (UNODC 2011; WHO 2012).

Femicide is deeply rooted in historical power imbalances that are embedded in society, inextricably linked to harmful gender stereotypes and institutionalized barriers that legitimize violence. It occurs more frequently in environments where gender-based violence is accepted and normalized by societal norms and there exists a lack of political will at the highest levels of government to prosecute those responsible (ACUNS 2013). Thus, when we speak of femicide, we are not only referring to isolated incidents but rather a continuous pattern of violence perpetuating an entire system that condones such murders.

TERMINOLOGY

While the practice has been around since time immemorial, the term “femicide” was coined during the 1970’s feminist movements by American writer Carol Orlock and broadly defined as the killing of women (Kaye 2007). Feminist author Diane Russell publicized the term femicide at the Crimes Against Women Tribunal in 1976, defining it as “the killing of females by males because they are females”, emphasizing the sexist motives behind these acts that were motivated by misogyny, false superiority over females, sexual pleasure, or presumed ownership over women (Russell and Harmes 2001).

Russell’s definition of femicide, however, is not universally accepted among scholars, and other definitions have been discussed in various cultural contexts. Some scholars emphasize that one must be able to show intentionality – that is, the intentional killing of females by males – in order for the femicide label to be used (Ellis and Dekesedery 1996). Others, in contrast, have argued that motive is not always empirically possible to measure and, as such, the term femicide should be used in cases where intentionality is implied but cannot be determined (Campbell and Runyan 1998). Furthermore, in recent years, scholars have begun to include female-perpetrated femicide within the definition of femicide, despite the comparative rarity of this phenomenon (Russell and Harmes 2001).

According to the 2012 Vienna Convention, femicide is defined as the killing of women and girls because of their gender, which can take the following forms: 1) intimate partner homicide against women; 2) torture and misogynistic murder; 3) killing of women and girls in the name of “honor”;

4) targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict; 5) dowry-related killing of women; 6) murder of women and girls because of their sexual orientation or gender identity; 7) killing of indigenous women and girls because of their gender; 8) female infanticide and gender-based sex selection feticide; 9) death related to female genital mutilation; 10) killing of women due to accusations of sorcery or witchcraft; 11) murder of women and girls connected with organized crime, drug dealing, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms (ACUNS 2013).

In this report, we choose to use the broader definition of femicide, which is understood to involve any killings of women and girls. We acknowledge that not all femicides are committed by current/former partners and family members; however, given the lack of data in Armenia, we only document cases of domestic homicide.

LOCAL CONTEXT



Coalition members stage a public action to raise awareness and commemorate victims who lost their lives to domestic abuse.

Domestic violence, largely prevalent in the Armenia context, is a heinous manifestation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. According to research conducted in 2011 by the Proactive Society Human Rights NGO as commissioned by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 60% of female respondents were subjected to one or more forms of domestic violence during their lifetimes, and nearly 40% reported domestic violence within the last two years at the time of the survey (OSCE 2011).

In 2015, Armenian security forces recorded 784 domestic violence reports. This number does not take into account those classified as “irreconcilable families” or those not reported at all. Each year, Coalition member organizations alone receive more than 2,000 calls about domestic violence cases. Given the extremely high rate of under-reporting of violence against women, the actual number of women who experience violence within the home is thought to be significantly higher.

In the last five years, at least 30 women were killed due to violence from a current or former intimate partner and their children left motherless as a consequence of these murders. Impunity for the killings of women is a global concern. Trends in data show that the highest levels of femicide correspond to regions with the highest overall rates of lethal violence; however, this is not the case with post-Soviet countries, many of which have disproportionately high rates of femicide with respect to intentional homicide (UNODC 2011, Smit et al 2012).

The only known national statistics reveal that 10.5% of the total reported homicide victims in Armenia in 2012 were females killed by intimate partners or family members, whereas significantly fewer males (2.9%) were killed by intimate partners or family members (UNODC 2013). It is important to keep in mind that these numbers only represent documented cases of intentional homicide; thus, they do not take into consideration cases not reported or documented as such.

BATTERER LETHALITY RISK FACTORS

The deaths of battered women are not unpredictable, isolated events without context or warning. Most of the victims whose murders we discuss in this report reached out for help from family, friends, and local authorities. Yet, with a cultural acceptance of domestic violence, stigma of leaving one's partner, and a lack of institutionalized support, the abuses were allowed to continue and ultimately culminated in murder.

In this report, we pay special attention to the risks for potential lethality as developed by researchers in the field. Although it is impossible to predict with certainty which batterers will become lethal, there are well-documented factors identified in femicide. We focus on warning signs that have been repeatedly identified as significant in reviewed cases and which, if addressed, have the potential to reduce the number of domestic violence-related deaths in Armenia. These include the perpetrator's history of violent episodes, the victim's attempts to leave the abuser, previous threats to kill the victim, and a show of obsessive and/or possessive behavior on behalf of the perpetrator.

Though each case of femicide was subject to unique circumstances, lethality factors were present in all cases of intimate partner domestic homicide. While these themes are not exhaustive, they represent some of the major risk factors for perpetration and victimization. A more complete analysis of public records and interviews with victims' loved ones would likely yield further information about these cases and others like them that could be used to inform public policy and intervention strategies.

History of Violence

An abuser's former history with past abuse is considered among the highest risk factors for homicide. Women are at increased risk of violence, particularly lethal attacks, when they are with an abuser who has a criminal history and/or has abused other intimate partners. Among the registered thirty cases of domestic violence homicide, nearly all of the perpetrators had a documented history of violence that was corroborated by police reports or interviews with family, friends, or bystanders.



Members of the Coalition hold a candlelight vigil for victims on October 1st, the National Day to Combat Domestic Violence.

Separation

While conventional wisdom may hold that leaving an abuser will bring a battered woman to safety, the reality is that leaving the relationship often precipitates the last violent attack that leads to a victim's death. This is because batterers will step up their efforts to use power and control against victims when they threaten or attempt to leave. Thus, it stands that the most dangerous time for a woman who is being abused is when she tries to leave. Among the registered thirty cases of domestic violence homicide, at least four victims made an attempt or had already left the relationship at the time of the murder. In the case of 20-year old Maro Guloyan, her abusive husband murdered her just hours after she made it clear that she wanted to divorce him. Though authorities deemed the death a suicide by hanging, Maro's family and human rights defenders alike insist that this was a case of femicide as there were no signs of a hanging but rather finger marks, suggesting that her husband suffocated her (SWV 2016).

Obsessive or possessive behavior

A display of manipulative behavior, including being overly obsessive or possessive, is another warning sign that a perpetrator may be capable of homicide. When a man feels that he has ownership over his partner, which in traditional societies is often the case, he may become insanely possessive, especially when he fears losing her. Obsessive or possessive behavior was likely present in most if not all of the registered femicide cases.

Threats to kill

Prior threats to kill a victim is one of the strongest lethality risk factors. We know that in several of the documented cases, perpetrators had threatened to kill their victims. In the case of Zaruhi Petrosyan, she had left her abusive husband to live with her sister. It was at this time that her husband visited the home and abused her more violently. Zaruhi sustained a head injury, fractures, and bruises all over her body. She died later in a hospital from intracranial hematoma. According to her sister, Zaruhi's abuser would brag about his cousin who held a high-ranking position with the Etchmiadzin police, saying that he could do anything he wanted to his wife, even kill her, if he wished (SWV 2016).

Cultural acceptance of domestic violence

Cultural norms or expectations of behavior often encourage violence and can have deadly consequences. In the Armenian context, the aforementioned lethality factors – ones that are seen globally – may not be present, yet femicide can still occur. We can attribute this phenomenon to the overarching cultural legitimization that fosters lethal violence.

**AT LEAST 30
WOMEN DIED
AT THE HANDS
OF INTIMATE
PARTNERS AND
FAMILY MEMBERS
IN THE PERIOD
OF 2010-2015.**



2010-2015 OVERVIEW

The data below was gathered by Society Without Violence within the framework of their Rapid Response Unit. Below, we provide descriptions of twenty-eight of the known femicide cases within the period of 2010-2015 as well as important trends that these cases have in common.* In the absence of population-based studies or accurate homicide, police, hospital, court, and mortuary statistics, we are limited to verbal accounts and newspaper articles. Thus, the data we present is an undercount and incomplete representation of the true number of domestic violence-related fatalities, as cases mistakenly classified as suicides, accidents, or unresolved cases are not taken into account. Furthermore, the cases we present are reflective only of family and intimate partner violence; however, there may be other cases of femicide that do not fall under this category.



Zaruhi Petrosyan

(1990-2010) – Zaruhi, an orphan and mother of one daughter, lived with her husband and his family in the town of Masis in the Armavir region. She was incessantly abused by her husband and mother-in-law. After attempting to leave the relationship, her husband found where she was staying and violently abused her. She

suffered a series of blows that lead to a brain hemorrhage and left her with broken fingers and bruises all over her body. A few days later she died in the hospital from an intracranial hematoma brought on by her head injury. Zaruhi's case was the first covered extensively by

mass media and prompted backlash from civil society. Her husband received a 10-year prison sentence, which he is currently serving.



Maro Guloyan

(1992-2012) – Maro, a mother of one and pregnant with her second child, lived with her abusive husband in Arinj, a village in the Kotayq region. Her husband killed her as she was attempting to escape the relationship. Her death was labeled as a suicide, though there is no evidence that she used a belt to hang herself.

Instead, finger marks found on her neck suggest that she was strangled to death by her husband, who may have used his ties with members of Parliament to get away with the crime.

Mariam Sargsyan (1975-2012) – Mariam was killed in her home in Yerevan by her husband after an argument. He used a souvenir knife to stab her to death. No other information is available about her and her case.

Anjela Dashyan (1987-2012) – Anjela, mother of two, was killed by her husband in her Kakhakn village home in the Gegharkunik region after a heated argument concerning his mistress. He cut her throat with a kitchen knife and attempted to flee until he was caught by a neighbor, after which time he confessed his murder to the police. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison. In an attempt to justify his behavior, her husband was quoted as saying, “I killed her because she was jealous”. Anjela’s mother testifies that he was planning on killing her all along, having instructed her to call her relatives and say goodbye to them before carrying out the murder.

Anahit Babayan (1962-2012) – Anahit, mother of three, lived with her abusive husband in the village of Aghavnadzor in the Vayoc Dzor region. Her husband used a slab of concrete and a wooden stick to kill her in their garden and was sentenced to 10 years in prison.



Diana Nahapetyan (1977-2012) – Diana, a mother of two daughters based in Ararat city in the Ararat region, was severely beaten with a vase and violently stabbed 21 times with a knife and murdered by her husband in front of their children. During the recent criminal case, her husband got off on a mere 3 years and 8 months in prison after the prosecutor insinuated

that Diana was cheating on him and that he committed the murder while not in the right “state of mind” due to his jealousy.

Vardush Gharakhanyan (unknown - 2013) and Zemfira Matsakyan (unknown - 2013) – Vardush and Zemfira were killed by the same perpetrator in their Vanadzor home. On the night of the deadly attack, Vardush was hit repeatedly on her head, neck, and chest with an axe by her husband. Zemfira, the perpetrator’s daughter-in-law, was also murdered in a similar fashion when she attempted to assist her mother-in-law. A forensic examination has been carried out and investigation into the case continues.

Tsoghik Ayvazyan (1986-2013) – Tsoghik, who lived in the village of Artik in the Shirak region, was suffocated to date. We believe that this is a case of femicide. No other information is available about her case.

Anonymous (1986-2013) – Based in the Shirak region, this femicide victim was beaten and strangled by her husband in their kitchen. She unsuccessfully attempted to defend herself with a knife. A criminal case was initiated but there has been no verdict as of yet in regards to this case.

Anonymous (1983-2013) – A woman from Akunq village in the Kotayq region, was stabbed by her husband. Their two daughters were unfortunately caught in the crossfire as well and were wounded by stabbings but survived their mother.

Anna Avetisyan (1985-2013) – Anna lived with her husband in Urtsadsor village in the Ararat region, who strangled her to death after a dispute and later harmed himself. A criminal case has been filed against him, though the outcome remains to be seen.



Lusine Davtyan

(1977-2013) – Lusine, a mother of two based in Musaler village in the Armavir region, was stabbed by her husband in their home in front of their daughter as she attempted to escape years of physical and psychological abuse. A criminal case was filed, though the perpetrator's family is actively trying to lower his

sentence by proving that he was insane at the time of the murder.

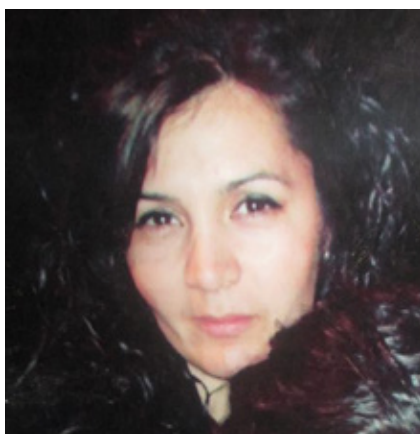
Gohar Chilingaryan (unknown-2013) – Gohar, a mother of one, was killed in her Yerevan home by her son, who hit her multiple times on the head in a drunken state after she attempted to persuade him not to buy more

alcohol. A criminal case against her son has been filed, though there is no verdict at this point in time.

Nelly Aghayan (1959-2013) – Nelly, a mother of four, was murdered by her husband, who stabbed her 18 times in their home in Agarak village in the Syunik region. She had complained about the abuse to the police on a number of occasions, though the measures taken to ensure her safety were insufficient. Her husband is being taken to court, and the verdict remains to be seen.

Hasmik Zaqaryan (1988-2014) – Hasmik, a mother of two, was killed by suffocation at the hands of her husband, who worked in the military. She was based in Tavush village in the Tavush region. No other information is available about her case.

Ofelya Movsesyan (1960-2014) – Ofelya, a mother of two, was killed by her ex-husband, who set her house on fire in Aratashen village in the Armavir region and burned her to death. Her current husband suffered injuries as he tried to rescue her from the fire. A criminal case was filed, but there is no verdict yet on the case.



Araksya Martirosyan (1979-2014) – Araksya, a mother of two, was killed by her husband after he hit her with a stone on multiple parts of her body and cut her throat open at a village cemetery in the Armavir region. Though there is no verdict yet, a criminal case has been opened. The perpetrator's family is trying to lower the sentence by

attempting to prove that he was insane at the time of the incident.

Zhenya Harutyunyan (1971-2014) – Zhenya was murdered by her husband in, who hit her body multiple times with a garden rake and her head with a metal stick. She was based in Mayisyan village in the Armarvir region. Her husband was found guilty of the murder, though charges are pending.

Liana Manukyan (1986-2014) – Liana, a mother of one based in Gyumri, was killed by her husband in front of their young son by stabbing her 16 times in the neck and chest after finding out that she had registered to a social network. Showcasing the deliberateness of his actions, he retrieved a second knife after the first one with which he used to stab her broke. A criminal case has been opened; however, the verdict remains to be seen.

Hermine Chilingaryan (1984-2014) – Hermine, a mother of three, was killed by suffocation at the hands of her husband, who worked as a contractual soldier in Itsakar village in the Tavush region. Little information is available on her case.

Varduhi Grigoryan (unknown – 2014) – Varduhi was shot twice and killed by her husband in his car and her body was buried in close proximity to a nearby cottage in Nor Kyurin village in the Ararat region. No other information is available on her case.

Alvina Darbinyan (1949-2014) – Alvina, an elderly mother based in the Shengavit district of Yerevan, was hit over the head multiple times and killed by her son, who was charged with the crime. It is yet to be seen what the verdict will be.

Julieta Eghishyan (1952-2014) – Julieta was killed by her husband in the bedroom of their home in the Tavush region. A criminal case was opened, though there is no verdict yet.

Melania Poghosyan (unknown-2014) – Melania, a mother of two, was killed by her husband in a murder

and attempted suicide in the Erebuni district of Yerevan. Her husband's case is being tried in court.

Melanya Poghosyan (unknown-2014) – Melanya, a mother of one, was killed by her husband, who stabbed her on multiple areas of her body. The case has been taken to court, though there is as of yet no verdict.

Anahit Zakevosyan (1964-2015) – Anahit was found dead in her Parakar village home in the Armavir region after she was stabbed multiple times with a piercing tool. It is unclear as of yet who committed the murder.



Heghine Darbazyan (1977-2015) – Heghine, a mother of two based in Yerevan, was subjected to psycho-logical and physical violence throughout her marriage. She reached out to the police on a number of occasions but did not receive the proper assistance. She left her partner and had lived apart

from him from one year before he came into her workplace and stabbed her to death. Investigations into the murder have been carried out, and trial hearings have recently begun.






*Disclaimer: In this report, we choose to highlight cases that civil society at large has deemed as femicide. This being said, there is not yet a legal ruling for the majority of cases; thus, we cannot say with absolute certainty that all are cases of femicide.

**SINCE 2010
THE MAJORITY
OF FEMICIDE
PERPETRATORS
HAVE NOT YET
BEEN CHARGED
OR SENTENCED
TO PRISON.**







CHARACTERISTICS & TRENDS

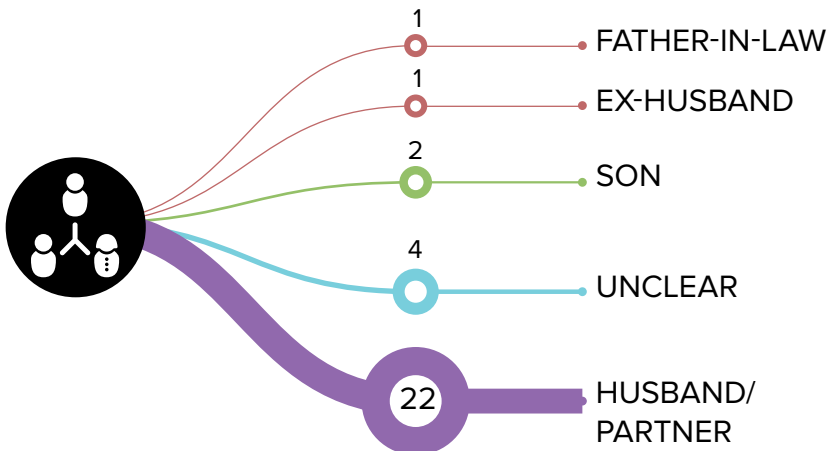
CAUSE OF DEATH IN FEMICIDE CASES

STABBING/ THROAT CUTTING	12	
BEATING WITH A BLUNT OBJECT	7	
STRANGLING/ SUFFOCATING	5	
UNKNOWN	4	????
BURNING	1	
SHOOTING	1	

LIVING ARRANGEMENT

WAS LIVING WITH THE PERPETRATOR	21	
WAS FLEEING THE RELATIONSHIP	4	
HAD ALREADY LEFT THE RELATIONSHIP	3	
UNCLEAR	2	

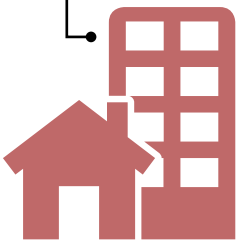
RELATIONSHIP OF PERPETRATOR TO VICTIM



LOCATION OF MURDER

26

INSIDE OF
THE HOME



2

OUTSIDE OF
THE HOME

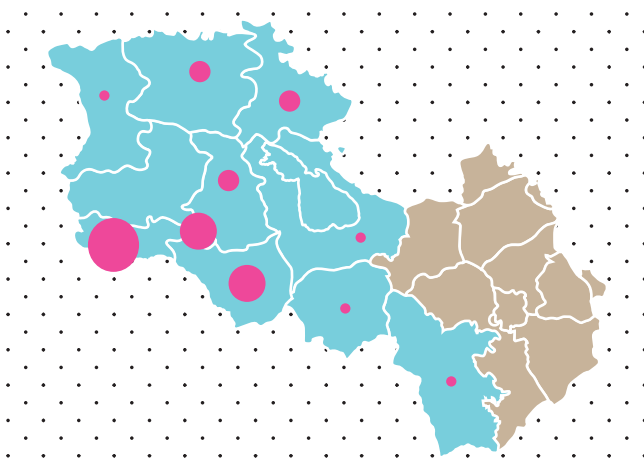


2

UNKNOWN



FEMICIDE ACROSS ARMENIA

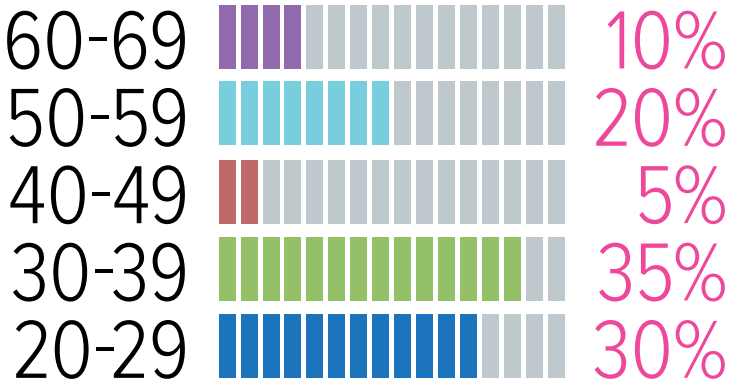


63%
DIED IN
A RURAL
AREA

37%
DIED IN
AN URBAN
AREA*

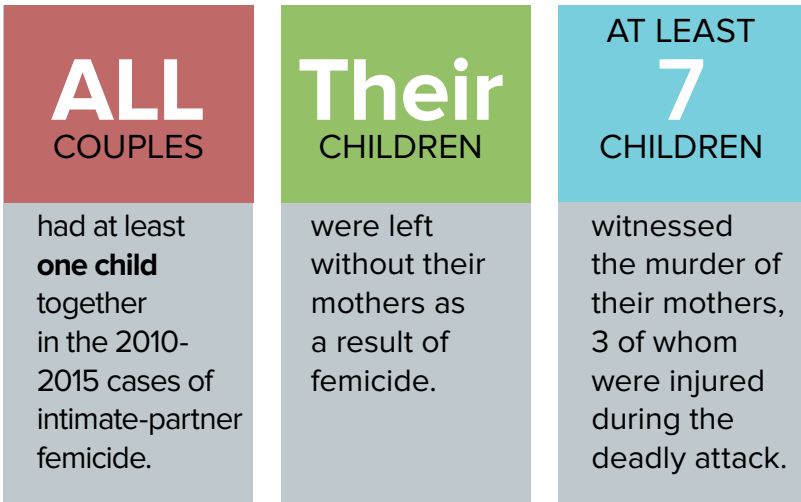
**The figure does not take into account certain cases where the dwelling was unknown.*

AGE OF VICTIM WHEN FEMICIDE OCCURED

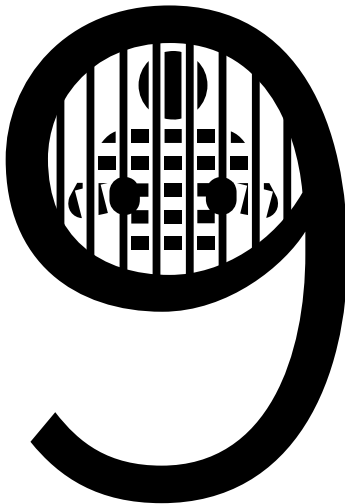
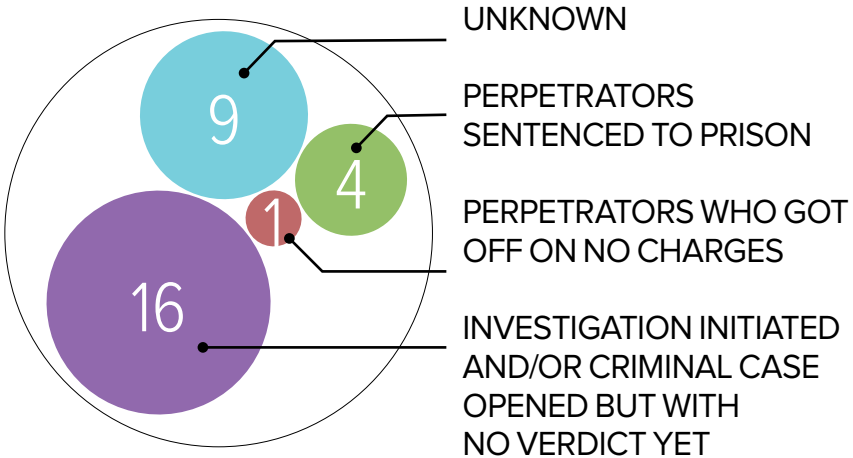


**The figure does not take into account certain cases where the age of the victim was unknown.*

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN



CRIMINAL CHARGES



9 YEARS IS THE AVERAGE JAIL SENTENCE FOR THOSE CONVICTED OF DOMESTIC HOMICIDE.

FEMICIDE HAS
A LASTING
IMPACT ON
THE FATE
OF VICTIMS'
CHILDREN.



IMPUNITY AND INJUSTICE

Femicides take place in every country of the world, as they continue to be accepted, tolerated, and justified. While femicide is indicative of a strong culture of violence against women in Armenia, we have yet to see a strong effort in all sectors of Armenian society to stem gender-based violence and improve equality indicators between women and men. Below, we list some of the barriers that continue to drive injustice and violence against women as well as recommendations that have the potential to increase safety for victims and strengthen mechanisms for holding abusers accountable, ultimately reducing domestic violence incidents and related deaths.

A lack of institutional support

In Armenia, there exists a lack of proper legislation to prevent and address violence against women and punish perpetrators. Often, death threats and other warning signs are overlooked, as officials lack the capacity to carry out appropriate risk assessments or are unwilling to do so. Many victims of femicide had implored the police to assist them on a number of occasions, but to no avail. Authorities have yet to use general, suicide and homicide risk assessment questionnaires, something that domestic violence service provision centers have used in their practice for several years.

Perpetrators of femicide have been largely unpunished or subject to light sentences and only a handful have been jailed, contributing to the perpetuation of gender-based violence in the country. In the court room, it is not uncommon for perpetrators' sentences to be reduced due to mitigating circumstances, as was the case recently with Diana Nahapetyan, who was

stabbed 21 times and murdered by her husband in front of her two children. The forensic investigation was thought to be highly corrupted, as initial psychiatric examinations that showed no signs of abnormal affective behavior were overturned by follow-up examinations carried out by a different investigator who claimed that the abuser suffered from temporary insanity.

Further showing how culturally-embedded this practice is in Armenia's social fabric, judges often impose less severe sentences when children are in the picture, wrongly believing that the children should be raised by the single parent they have left or live with those who offer the best physical living conditions. Despite an abuser's history of abuse culminating in murder, there are no laws which permit or necessitate the removal of children from unsafe homes, even when there is established danger to their lives. An unfortunate reality, many authority figures are either not cognizant of or strongly opposed to improving women's rights. This lack of political will hampered by those in government encourages institutionalized sexism and an atmosphere of impunity and indifference.

Initiated by the Women's Rights Center in collaboration with local and international experts, a draft law was submitted and rejected by the Government of the Republic of Armenia in 2009. In 2010 the seven-member Coalition joined forces to submit a revised version of the draft law to the RA Government and National Assembly. The draft law was rejected in 2013 by the Ministry of Justice with the reason that it was "unconstitutional" and members of the ministry insisted that the government did not have the resources to enforce the law, which included opening and maintaining shelters.

To date, there is still no legislation on domestic violence and the status quo continues to obstruct women's access to their fundamental human rights to safety and protection.

Each year the Coalition submits letters to the RA Government and Ministry of Justice, urging them to adopt the draft law. The state is obligated under international law, including CEDAW and the European Convention on Human Rights, to take effective steps to protect domestic violence victims and hold perpetrators accountable. When they fail to do so, this sends a harmful message to society that male violence against women is both acceptable and inevitable, further perpetuating patterns of violent behavior.

Globally, it has been shown that femicide cases significantly decline when a law against domestic violence is passed (Richards and Haglund 2015). Armenia has to strengthen its state response and mandate legislation prohibiting domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. Public institutions, including police forces, prosecution officers, and courts, must be accountable for delivering safety and justice for women and girls through emergency barring and protection orders, prosecution and appropriate punishment of perpetrators to end impunity, and support services that empower victims. It is also important to develop and implement specific legislation that distinguishes killings that are gender-motivated in an effort to critically examine patterns and design appropriate responses to femicide (ACUNS 2013).

Comprehensive trainings with social workers, police, health providers, medical examiners, court officials, and others interacting with domestic violence victims should be carried out to build on their capacity to identify intimate partner violence, be cognizant of the risk factors as they present, and take immediate steps to provide proper care to victims and make referrals as necessary. In this regard, the Coalition members have worked to build the capacity of government social workers, police, and civil society to respond to cases and make appropriate referrals. However, much remains to be done to strengthen

the state response, and capacity building must be carried out in parallel with efforts to develop and implement legislation.

A lack of surveillance and screening

Statistics on intimate-partner femicide are not easily obtainable in the former Soviet Union, including Armenia, as most state agencies do not disaggregate data on violence in the family based on gender. There are serious gaps in our understanding of this phenomenon and no systematic processes for accurately documenting domestic abuse, fully investigating cases, making appropriate referrals, and issuing protection orders and other legal instruments.

National statistics exclude assaults leading to death, assistance with suicide, justified killing, or non-intentional killing. Even when data is available, the links between homicides and prior violence cannot be easily made, as they may not be formally documented, and medical examiners are known to work in a corrupt manner, accepting bribes to cover up crimes. Moreover, the use of inexact categories for the classification of murders, such as “crimes of passion” or “crimes of jealousy”, results in misidentification and underreporting of femicides. Thus, the actual number of women in Armenia killed by intimate partners and family members each year remains unknown.

Strengthening surveillance and screening requires homicide data to be aggregated by sex and important information included in reports about the victim-perpetrator relationship and circumstances around the death. Relevant agencies should cooperate on such reports in an effort to properly identify instances of femicide as they occur. Moreover, standardized guidelines and categories for identifying and

documenting cases of femicide are desperately needed. It is also possible to use innovative methods such as verbal autopsies, which involve interviews with individuals close to the victim, to determine the circumstances of deaths and how they may have been prevented (ACUNS 2013). Creative methods of data collection are especially important for limited-resource settings like Armenia, where there are incomplete or missing reports and the inability or unwillingness of police to investigate such murders (PATH 2009).

In an effort to crack down on femicides and gender-based violence, anecdotal accounts have been gathered by international agencies, including the Advocates for Human Rights and Global Rights for Women, as well as local member organizations of the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women. These accounts have put into question police responses to suicide and undocumented cases, suggesting that these crimes are purposefully covered up by family members and authorities alike.

Accurate information on femicide is absolutely crucial to understanding its characteristics and developing sound, evidence-based responses to enhancing security for women and punishing perpetrators. The poor quality of data and gaps in information systems are not only barriers to adequately investigating femicides and responding to them, they also pose as barriers to developing meaningful strategies to prevent such deaths and advocate for improved policies. Research that focuses on victims and perpetrators of femicide as well as near-fatal cases will help elucidate the risk and protective factors that may be specific to the Armenian context, which will assist service providers better understand the needs of survivors and characteristics of perpetrators in an effort to prevent femicide. There is also a need to understand more about

potentially at-risk populations, such as orphans, sexual minorities, elderly women, and women with disabilities.

Alternative methods, such as fatality reviews, proxy interviews, and verbal autopsies can be used to develop an understanding on the nature of femicide, but ultimately, significantly improving the surveillance and the data collection process requires the existence of national homicide databases that maintain national-level collection of data on homicides from police, mortuary, court, and medical records. Moreover, even with better surveillance, statistics on femicide would still not accurately reflect the rate of violence, as many women do not report domestic assaults to police or prosecutors, nor do they pursue any legal remedies to protect their human rights, an issue that goes back to gaps within the legal and justice systems. Until the system itself is free of corruption, there will always be cases that are swept under the rug. Therefore, little progress can be made in this regard without an overhaul of the criminal justice system and a move to end the status quo as it stands.

Poor media coverage

The mass media plays a fundamental role in constructing and perpetuating social constructs and narratives of violence for audiences to consume. Television is watched by the vast majority of Armenians and, thus, has far-reaching impact in shaping our perceptions and attitudes regarding a number of issues. Many of the most popular television programs reinforce misogynistic and patriarchal norms and entertain ideas of controlling women through violence and oppressing them. Cases of femicide have been sadly downplayed in the media and among society. They have often been presented as deviations from the norm or family tragedies rather than as a trend resulting from a system of gender domination.

The often cited trope of men being incapable of controlling their emotions translates to a further legitimizing of male partner violence. Published articles on femicide in Armenia attribute the killing of female partners to “crimes of passion”, “jealousy”, or refers to the use of drugs or alcohol, entirely disregarding the undergirding reality that abuse stems from male power and control and harmful patriarchal views about the relative value of women.

At worst, media sensationalism engages in victim-blaming. In some cases, not only have men been depicted as justifiably unable to contain their rage, as in cases where a partner is labeled as jealous or suffering from mental illness, women were depicted as somehow provoking their anger and their sexual histories presented as a motive for their murder. The use of victim blaming and misrepresentation of cases as isolated incidents disregards the underlying connection between violence and the broad social problem of femicide, further exacerbating the societal reactions to killings of women by male intimate partners.

Using television and other forms of media as an influential medium to provide contextual information on femicides and cases of gender-based violence, instead of using it to perpetuate misogynistic and violent programming, would help distinguish cases of femicide from those of homicides and encourage the public to take action to reverse these trends. Articles, reportages, and media campaigns on this serious issue must directly inform and warn the public that killing female intimate partners under the auspices of “jealousy” are crimes against women, powered by the patriarchy and notions of female inferiority, and should entail just penalties.

Female homicides have undeniably gained more social and media attention in recent decades, and this is due in large part to the work of the Coalition and other advocates in defending domestic violence survivors and femicide victims in court and speaking out about human rights abuses. The Coalition has brought high profile domestic violence cases to court and used public trials to leverage mainstream media coverage. As a result of trial monitoring and efforts to bring cases to justice, we have been able to bring domestic violence into the public eye. Just a decade ago, there were practically no articles or television programs dedicated to the serious issue of femicide and domestic violence, whereas today an average of fifty articles and television programs are broadcasted per month. The Coalition has also conducted trainings with journalists and media representatives on how to represent domestic violence in the media, though much work remains to sensitize the media through awareness raising and skill strengthening with a particular emphasis on gender mainstreaming.

A lack of support services

Women often do not report cases of domestic abuse due to a lack of support services as well as numerous cultural, legal, and institutional barriers, putting them at greater risk of homicide by intimate partners and family members. Deep-rooted beliefs about traditional family values enforce the notion that men should be dominant and women subservient and submissive. Too often, women feel a tremendous amount of pressure to stay in abusive relationships, as they are told that they are bringing shame to the family if they decide to speak out. Therefore, justifications for violence translate into a learned behavior, and this acceptance of domestic abuse hinders women's ability to escape violent relationships.

Even in extreme situations, women seldom view the legal system as a source of assistance, and the issue of domestic violence is kept shrouded in secrecy. Often cases that do enter the system are withdrawn during the process. Women withdraw cases of domestic violence after complaining to the police for a variety of reasons. These women may fear breaking up the family or being on their own. Given the cultural norms, they may be overcome by stigma and shame. They may face pressure from their families or husbands. In the current economic climate, they may be unable to support themselves and their children alone.

The lack of economic safety nets is particularly harsh for women-headed households. Sharing children is often a significant factor for victims' inability to leave abusive relationships and support themselves and their families apart from abusers. Women who leave their abusers have difficulty enrolling their young children in school programs so they may work simultaneously. Sometimes, they are even forced to place them in orphanages or night schools and are under constant threat of losing custody. The lack of societal or legal support for victims of domestic violence often leaves women with little recourse but to remain in abusive relationships.

The association between pregnancy and abuse has been studied extensively. Intimate partner violence is the cause of a significant percentage of maternal mortality cases in several cultural contexts (MacFarlane et al 2002, Campbell et al 2009, WHO 2012). Among the 68 new cases that presented to the Women's Support Center in Yerevan in 2015, upwards of 70% had been physically battered during pregnancy and, in several cases, women had experienced miscarriages. Maro Guloyan, a case of unidentified femicide, was murdered while four months pregnant with her second child. Women subjected to gender-based violence must have access to services that protect and empower them to escape the cycle of

abuse. Law enforcement and service providers must coordinate efforts to best serve women victims of domestic violence and their children. Comprehensive services should include psychological, social and legal interventions aimed at increasing their level of autonomy and self-esteem as well as safe houses to reduce the risk of violence and support their reestablishing in society.

Currently, the only two domestic violence shelters in the country are run by the Women's Support Center and Women's Rights Center, both of which are Coalition member organizations. Together, they can provide shelter to only 15 women and their children. When both shelters are at full capacity, Coalition member organizations provide rent and services free-of-charge to beneficiaries in place of public support. The lack of shelter support, especially outside of the capital, directly translates to fewer women seeking help and exacerbates the risk of women being abused and murdered, as often they have no choice but to continue living with their abusers. For this reason, it is absolutely imperative that the government work side-by-side with civil society to open and run shelters throughout the country and provide funding for support services.

Exposure to domestic violence affects all children differently; however, for many, living in an abusive household can result in serious emotional and behavioral issues and increases the risk that they will become victims and abusers in future relationships. The presence of a supportive and loving adult is an important protective factor in helping children recover from the trauma of losing their mothers.

It is abhorrent that children victims continue to live in fear of their safety. Authorities must ensure that no child be left with a perpetrator and that all secondary victims receive the necessary counseling and follow-up care they need. All those who have been exposed to domestic violence or

have survived the death of a parent or child should receive counseling and support services for their emotional wellbeing.

A focus on prevention

The most effective way to eliminate all forms of violence against women is to stop it from happening in the first place. As the issue of lethal domestic violence is steeped in a strong patriarchal tradition and stems from a cultural acceptance of gender-based violence, greater efforts must be made to challenge such belief systems and mobilize communities to support, develop, and implement educational programs and strategies to combat harmful gender stereotypes.

Over the last five years, the Coalition has carried out numerous awareness raising initiatives, including but not limited to public actions on the National Day to Combat Domestic Violence, the 16 Days Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, and International Women’s Day. We have used community activism and multi-media platforms to address the undergirding social norms that allow violence against women to proliferate in Armenian society. Still, significant hurdles remain to improving the situation of women in Armenian society, including a lack of comprehensive programs at the state level.

Femicide cannot be fully addressed without tackling misogyny and patriarchy at a foundational level that permeates much of Armenian society. Strong efforts must be made to engage with local communities and develop educational programs that mainstream a gender perspective and legislation that addresses structural violence at the local and national levels and improves women’s opportunities to find well-paid work, acquire wealth, and achieve advancement into positions of power.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- A law criminalizing domestic violence and mechanisms for referral and treatment of domestic violence cases is absolutely crucial in sending a strong message that criminalized behavior is unacceptable in Armenian society.
- There should be a system in place for assessing which abusers represent the greatest danger for victims and subsequent steps taken to protect those victims.
- In order to serve as an effective deterrent to abuse, perpetrators should face jail time on the first conviction.
- Restraining orders and monitoring of abusers in pending criminal domestic violence cases should be required.
- A countrywide approach of designating victim advocates to follow up with women and children in homes where domestic violence is registered should be adopted.
- Child custody should not be granted to perpetrators, and child protective services should monitor cases during a designated transition period.
- Officials and service providers must take part in comprehensive trainings programs to delve deeply into the complexities of domestic violence, including its manifestations, causes, effects of trauma, risk assessments, and safety plans.

- Law enforcement and service providers must coordinate efforts to provide psychological, social, and legal counseling and safe houses as well as initiatives aimed at empowering and reestablishing victims in society.
- A public registry of offenders and a designated team tasked with studying domestic violence homicides in an in-depth, comprehensive manner should be established.
- Authorities must ensure that secondary victims receive counseling and follow-up care and are not exposed to violent perpetrators.
- Strong efforts to engage with local communities and introduce educational programs that mainstream a gender perspective must be carried out in tandem with legislation on domestic violence.

**BECOME AN
ADVOCATE AND
JOIN US IN OUR
MISSION TO
END DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE IN
ARMENIA.**



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ABOUT THE COALITION

The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women was established in response to the tragic death of 20-year old Zaruhi Petrosyan, a case of femicide that shed light on the seriousness of domestic abuse in Armenia and gave rise to public outrage. Our mission is three-fold: to raise awareness on violence against women among the public and change existing mentalities, defend and support women victims of abuse, and advocate for legislature to protect victims and punish perpetrators. Our vision is to help create a society where there is true equality, not discrimination and violence.

The Coalition member organizations offer consultations and services free-of-charge for victims of violence. You can reach them at the following numbers:

Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women – 094-48-84-80

Women’s Support Center domestic violence hotline – 099-88-78-08

Women’s Rights Center domestic violence hotlines – 010-54-28-28/0-800-80-850

Women’s Resource Center Sexual Assault and Crisis Center hotline – 0-800-01-280

Women’s Resource Center office – 094-56-56-26

Society Without Violence Rapid Response Unit – 091-42-81-92

Public Information and Need for Knowledge office (PINK) – 060-37-72-77

Real World Real People office – 010-24-93-18

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