

# When gender kills: Russell's conceptualization of femicide and its empirical analysis in Italy

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## Abstract

This article aims to provide an updated and detailed overview of femicide in Italy, following the feminist conceptualization advanced by Diana E. H. Russell (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992). To do so, the study draws on an original dataset covering all femicides committed in Italy in 2023, based on information reported by the media.

First, the paper outlines the different types of lethal episode that fall within the scope of femicide as defined by Russell, emphasizing the role of institutional, cultural, and social contexts in shaping both the legal status and operational definition of this crime. It then examines national and regional trends over the past quarter-century, before delving into the details of each reported case of femicide: number of individuals involved, victim-alleged perpetrator relationship, presence of witnesses and other victims, location, weapon and *modus operandi*, age, citizenship, and legal and criminal histories of both victim and alleged perpetrator. Additional details considered include any prior romantic involvement, decisions and timelines regarding separation, previous threats and violence between the victim and the alleged perpetrator, as well as the perpetrator's sex, post-crime behavior, timing of arrest, and post-arrest conduct.

The findings indicate that femicides in Italy almost invariably occur in intimate or romantic relationships, whether ongoing or over. The intimacy between perpetrator and victim is underscored by several characteristics of these crimes. While many cases involve individuals with no previous criminal background, some alleged perpetrators had already embarked on a deviant career, marked by threats and violence against the women they ultimately killed. A particularly

striking feature is the frequent decision of alleged perpetrators to take their own lives after committing the crime.

The concluding reflections emphasize that adopting an intersectional approach can be advantageous in developing an operational definition of femicide and enhancing our understanding of it.

**Keywords:** femicide, Diana E. H. Russell, Italy, violence against women.

## Introduction

The concept of femicide stands out as one of the most significant contributions of feminist thought to criminology – and arguably the most crucial for homicide research specifically. This term – often employed, as we will see, with a degree of ambiguity and lack of precision – was introduced by feminist sociologist Diana E. H. Russell (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harmes, 2001) to describe the misogynistic murders of women committed by men, or, in Russell’s own words, the killing of women by men *because* they are women. According to Russell, femicide is the ultimate outcome of sexist violence, which can escalate into full-blown terrorization. Using such a specific term is essential for both scientific and political reasons: in Russell’s view, the generic label of homicide is excessively neutral, glossing over the deeply gendered dynamics that often drive the killing of women.

From an analytical standpoint, Russell’s conceptualization of femicide can be unpacked as the killing of women by men, rooted in gender inequalities and power imbalances in society. At the heart of these crimes may lie misogynistic intent, or possessive control, or a drive to assert male dominance and entitlement, or a sexual, even sadistic, impulse toward women (Todesco, 2024; see also Grzyb et al., 2018; Dawson & Mobayed Vega, 2023). While these elements often overlap in individual cases of femicide, it is analytically useful to distinguish between them.

To the best of the authors’ knowledge, official sources do not currently provide data on femicide as conceptualized by Russell. The reason for this is straightforward: in the statistics produced by national and supranational institutions, information regarding the motive behind homicides – essential for an accurate classification of femicides – is often unavailable. Even when it is, it still fails to capture the true relevance of gender dynamics in the commission of the crime (see, for example, in the case of Italy, ISTAT, 2024b, 7, fig. 6). More broadly, it has been noted that capturing sex/gender motivations behind a homicide presents a significant challenge: “Identifying variables that can unveil gender motivations is extremely complex” (Zecha et al., 2023, p. 98).

A debate has been unfolding over the past several years (see EIGE, 2017; 2021b; 2021c; UNODC & UN-Women, 2022) regarding the development of a global, shared operational definition of gender-related killings of women and girls – a term which distinctly echoes Russell’s conceptualization – and the essential data required to quantify the phenomenon in all its varied dimensions. However, this goal remains somewhat elusive, and the path ahead is far from free of challenges (for further reflections, see Sciarrino & Todesco, 2025). With regard to the collection of quantitative data, the ongoing work of the European Observatory on Femicide is particularly significant, as it aims to integrate data from various sources (see Naudi et al., 2023).

Pending more favorable developments, one viable option for research on femicide, as conceptualized by Russell is to rely on datasets constructed from media-reported information. This approach is well-trodden in the broader homicide literature (see, among many others, Flynn et al., 2016; Liem & Koenraadt, 2007; Malphurs & Cohen, 2002; Salari, 2007; Solinas-Saunders, 2024; Tosini, 2020) and has also been adopted by the European Observatory on Femicide. This method offers clear advantages, yet it is not without its significant limitations (on this point, see Todesco, 2024; in press)<sup>1</sup>. Chief among these is the high proportion of missing data across many key variables<sup>2</sup> – whether because the information did not reach the media or was not made public. Notably, the European Observatory on Femicide highlights persistent gaps in crucial data, particularly regarding the breakdown of the relationship between victim and perpetrator, prior threats, violence and stalking by the latter, and any institutional involvement preceding the lethal episode (see Naudi et al., 2023). Other critical variables, such as the social class of those involved, are inherently difficult to capture through media sources (for an in-depth discussion of the challenges in operationalizing this concept, see Wirth, 2023). To mitigate these issues as much as possible, best practice dictates using media-based data only when official statistics are unavailable, and exclusively for those variables that are more straightforward and reliably reported by the press.

## Defining the research object

This article seeks to offer an incisive, up-to-date, and as exhaustive as possible portrait of femicide in Italy, approached through the feminist framework articulated by Diana E. H. Russell (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harmes, 2001). On a couple of occasions, we allow for minor deviations from this conceptualization – carefully justified – which do not materially alter

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative approach that is sometimes adopted (see, for example, Dobash & Dobash, 2015; 2020), involves referencing case files. For a discussion of the pros and cons of this choice, see the concluding remarks in Todesco (2024).

<sup>2</sup> Variables that, however, are not available in the official data.

the core findings presented here. The analysis builds on a dataset compiled by one of the authors, covering the universe of intentional homicide cases in Italy in 2023, and assembled through a systematic review of national and local online media sources, including newspapers, magazines, news sites, and aggregated news platforms.

The analysis presented in the following pages refers to 64 femicide cases committed by 68 alleged perpetrators. While the population size is relatively small, it still allows for a cautious use of percentages. The limitations due to this fact will be discussed in the concluding remarks, but it is important to note that research on specific types of homicide often faces the challenge of working with low numbers. To cite but a few examples: Tosini's (2020) study on familicide draws upon 90 cases spanning nearly a quarter of a century; Dayan's (2021) work on female honor killings examines 58 cases over a period of six years; and Condry and Miles's (2023) research on parricide is based on 57 cases recorded between 2002 and 2017.

The main contribution of this study lies in providing a detailed, up-to-date portrait of femicide in Italy. The only other academic work with similar characteristics (for a non-academic report, see the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Femicide, 2022) focused on Italy is based on data that stops at 2017 (see Todesco, 2021), nearly a decade ago.

This study's key improvements over Todesco (2021) include a greater depth of analysis and the use of a primary analysis – based on a survey specifically designed by one of the study's authors, from the outset of the data collection phase, to address the research questions of interest – rather than a secondary analysis relying on a pre-existing data matrix. In Todesco (2021), femicides were classified post-data collection, using an operational definition based on certain crime characteristics, which inevitably carries some limitations. By contrast, classification in this study is performed at the outset, during data collection: each homicide is thoroughly analyzed, for classification purposes, looking at the role played in its execution by gender inequalities. Only those incidents in which such inequalities fully, or predominantly, account for the killing are classified as femicides. Cases where there is insufficient evidence to establish this connection are excluded from the femicide count.

To highlight the innovativeness of this study, it is important to add a few more points. There is a vast body of academic literature on femicide, which cannot be fully addressed here due to space limitations (for instance, see the monumental recent work by Dawson & Mobayed Vega, 2023). However, as noted in a review of this literature (EIGE, 2021a), a significant proportion of the articles on this topic use the term *femicide* to refer to the killing of women, predominantly in the context of intimate partner violence. Other scholars (Zecha et al., 2023) emphasize that femicide research has typically adopted one of two approaches: (1) a focus on all killings of women and girls, and (2) a focus on intimate partner femicide, the most prevalent subtype.

Two key insights emerge here. First, it is apparent that the conceptualization and use of the term *femicide* in the scientific community are plagued by a degree of ambiguity and indeterminacy – and this also resonates throughout public discourse. This is due to the absence of a universally accepted and unequivocal definition of the term (see Sosa, 2023). Second, there is a significant gap in our knowledge regarding the prevalence and characteristics of femicide as conceived in its original Russellian framework, which is the specific focus of this study. Nevertheless, it is undeniably important to adhere to Russell’s scientific and political definition of femicide, as it unequivocally acknowledges that “patriarchy, and the resultant gender inequality that pervasively continues to exist, are at the root of the problem” (Grzyb et al., 2018, pp. 28-29; for a similar argument see also Naudi et al., 2023), thereby broadening the analytical lens far beyond isolated lethal incidents.

The coverage of femicides in the dataset employed here can only be inferred by referencing the coverage of the broader phenomenon of homicide, for which official data is available. In this respect, the findings are largely satisfactory. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2024b), a total of 334 intentional homicides were recorded in Italy in 2023, with 217 male victims and 117 female victims. The numbers derived from this study are 339, 220, and 119, respectively. When comparing the data from both sources, the results are strikingly similar, or perfectly identical, even when broken down by victims’ age and citizenship (detailed results available upon request)<sup>3</sup>.

The structure of this work unfolds as follows. The third paragraph delves into the various forms of homicide encompassed within Russell’s conceptualization of femicide. Moving on, the fourth paragraph shifts focus to explore how this crime is addressed within the legal frameworks of distinct institutional, cultural, and social contexts, as well as the role these contexts play in shaping the operational definition of the crime. The fifth paragraph marks the start of the empirical analysis of femicide in Italy, examining its prevalence over time and across different regions. The sixth paragraph takes a closer look at the circumstances surrounding these crimes, as well as their key characteristics. The seventh paragraph zeroes in on the profiles of both victims and alleged perpetrators, while the eighth presents some concluding reflections, largely developed through an intersectional approach.

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<sup>3</sup> To understand the reasons behind these minor discrepancies – which, though they have minimal impact on the overall substance, are occasionally found even in official data – see Todesco, in press).

## Inside Russell's femicide: Exploring gender-motivated killings

The framework of femicide as conceptualized by Russell (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harnes, 2001) encompasses a range of homicides (see Todesco, 2024; and for a comprehensive review that also considers non-Western contexts, Dawson & Mobayed Vega, 2023, sect. 5). The empirical analyses presented in the following pages refer to this varied array of crimes. First, we encounter homicides occurring within romantic relationships or otherwise in intimate relationships (see Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2023). In these cases, there is a deep emotional bond, and the act of murder is driven by dynamics arising from the gendered structure of society embedded in cisgender and heterosexual intimate relationships: the victim refuses to submit to the perpetrator's authority, the woman seeks greater autonomy and independence, or she threatens to end the relationship.

However, the profound bond underlying femicide is not confined to romantic/intimate relationships. Consider those episodes occurring in the familial network, where a woman may be killed by her father – or, as we shall shortly see, by her mother as well – her brother, or an uncle in order to restore the family's honor (see, for instance, D'Lima et al., 2020; Gill, 2023)<sup>4</sup>. This broader context spans instances of women murdered for defying family traditions, customs, or male authority, as well as women killed after being raped and impregnated by a family member, in an attempt to cover up incest (see, for instance, Faqir, 2001), or killings linked to the oppressive practices surrounding dowries (see, for instance, Oldenburg, 2002).

Femicide also occurs when deep, intimate bonds are shattered. Take, for example, a man who kills his ex-partner because she refuses to rekindle the relationship. On a broader scale, two central elements have been singled out (Block & Block, 2012; Brookman, 2005; Carlsson et al., 2021; Dobash & Dobash, 2015) – both direct by-products of the patriarchal cultural model – that underpin the conflictual dynamics leading to femicides, not only between former partners: an overwhelming male possessiveness, often accompanied by extreme jealousy, and the woman's refusal to continue or initiate an intimate relationship.

Femicides also occur between acquaintances outside of the couple and family circle, such as colleagues, friends, or neighbors, in situations where a woman rejects a man's romantic advances – or sexual propositions – and is punished with death for doing so.

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<sup>4</sup> In the interest of brevity, this paper will not enter into the extensive and intricate debate surrounding the multifaceted concept of honor-based killing and its connection to femicide. For a comprehensive discussion, see, among others, Chesler (2021), Ertürk (2009), and Jiwani (2014).

Furthermore, femicides can occur between strangers: a man who rapes and murders a woman, a client who kills a sex worker, or a serial killer driven by sexual desires and/or deep misogyny, and so on (see, for instance, Kisubi Mbasalaki, 2023).

Lastly, femicides can also arise in the realm of criminality: a sex worker murdered by her exploiter for refusing submission; a murder committed during another crime, such as theft or robbery, and accompanied by sexual violence; targeted killings of women carried out in gang-related activities (see, for example, Juárez Barrios et al., 2023)<sup>5</sup>.

For the purposes of this study, Russell's original conceptualization of femicide has been theoretically expanded – though, as we will see, almost nothing changes in terms of empirical analysis. Here, the conceptualization includes cases in which women kill other women, when such acts are driven by the same underlying gender inequalities. In fact, there are instances where women themselves perpetuate the patriarchal cultural model, even going as far as committing murder in its name. Consider, for example, the previously mentioned femicides driven by honor or linked to dowry practices; such acts may very well be perpetrated by women, either in collaboration with or independently of male relatives<sup>6</sup>. This perspective is shared by Grzyb et al. (2018) and Todesco (2024). Also, the UNODC/UN-Women operational definition of femicide – which we will return to shortly – explicitly acknowledges that women too can commit this crime (UNODC & UN-Women, 2022, p. 8); likewise, the Vienna definition of femicide, produced in the framework of a UN symposium (see Laurent et al., 2013, p. 4), does not specify the sex of the perpetrator.

## **Framing femicide: The role of social, cultural, and institutional contexts**

An intriguing element regarding femicide is its legal classification across different countries. This comparative framework invites reflection on the interplay between gender and criminality in diverse institutional, cultural, and social contexts. In Latin American countries, a significant shift occurred from 2007 onwards with the so-called criminalization of femicide: this crime has been recognized as a distinct criminal offence, subject to harsher penalties than other forms of homicide (Toledo Vásquez, 2023).

It is important to clarify that these legislations do not categorize all murders of women as femicides. To qualify as this specific crime, an episode must be characterized by a set of elements, which vary from country to country. These may include, for example, the relationship between the

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<sup>5</sup> An additional form of femicide considered here – one that only partially falls within Russell's original conceptualization, but undoubtedly warrants further reflection – refers to specific instances where the perpetrator kills a woman due to the unbearable weight of life circumstances. This issue will be addressed in the seventh paragraph.

<sup>6</sup> A similar argument applies to murders related to reproductive coercion (see, for example, Grace & Anderson, 2018).

perpetrator and the victim (primarily, whether they are intimate partners), prior instances of violence committed by the former against the latter, the method of murder, and victim characteristics such as certain occupations, pregnancy, or vulnerability. It should be noted, however, that these elements do not always authentically reveal the gendered nature of the episode. Rather, they often refer to the social impact that characterizes certain crimes: for instance, the killing of a vulnerable woman due to her disability does not necessarily imply that she was killed specifically because she was a woman (Toledo Vásquez, 2023; see also Pasinato & de Ávila, 2023), as envisioned in Russell's original conceptualization of femicide (see Radford and Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harmes, 2001).

The criminalization of femicide in Mexico and South American countries is due to the endemic prevalence of particularly intense violence against women, and the widespread climate of impunity surrounding those who commit these acts (see again Toledo Vásquez, 2023). A telling example of this is the case of Ciudad Juárez, internationally infamous as a symbol of organized crime and for the hundreds of young girls who were kidnapped and murdered between 1994 and 2005; all of this transpired amidst a chilling indifference – and, in some cases, outright complicity – on the part of both local and state authorities (see Mobayed Vega et al., 2023). It is no coincidence that the concept of '*feminicidio*' was coined in this context (Lagarde, 2005), which complements the concept of femicide: feminicide refers to those specific crimes where widespread impunity prevails, and where local and state authorities bear a significant and often damning responsibility.

On the contrary, none of the European Union (EU) member states – a context that is institutionally, culturally, and socially very different from Mexico and South America – recognize femicide as a criminal offence distinct from homicide (Zecha et al., 2023). However, some of these countries have incorporated gender-related aggravating factors that apply to all crimes – not just homicide and are framed in gender-neutral terms, meaning they apply not only to female victims (Toledo Vásquez, 2023). For instance, the Austrian Penal Code provides for an aggravating factor in cases of violence committed against a family member, an ex-partner, a cohabitant of the perpetrator, or where the perpetrator holds a position of authority over the victim. In certain countries (for example, Spain and Italy), the fact of sexual assault against the victim is considered an aggravating circumstance in cases of homicide; in others (Croatia and France, for example), the victim's pregnancy is treated as such.

The institutional, cultural, and social context not only influences the legal classification of femicide but also shapes the operational definition applied to this concept in order to quantify its prevalence. In 2022, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) developed an operational definition of femicide at the request of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNODC & UN-Women, 2022), which was immediately applicable to available official data. Since a significant



proportion of femicides occur in the family, according to the UNODC/UN-Women definition, femicide includes those incidents where women are killed by partners, ex-partners, or other members of the family, including those related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Nevertheless, a study conducted in Italy (Sciarrino & Todesco, 2025) has clearly shown how the portion of the UNODC/UN-Women operational definition relating to incidents committed between family members and relatives outside of intimate partnerships is truly problematic. In this country, such occurrences seldom arise from gender-based inequalities or dynamics between the sexes. The UNODC/UN-Women definition appears more fitting in settings where women are killed by family members for reasons related to ‘honor’, or in circumstances where gender remains a pivotal factor such as, for instance, those linked to the aforementioned dowry practices. However, not a single case of this type is recorded in the data presented by Sciarrino and Todesco (2025). This underscores the fact that the institutional, cultural, and social context cannot be overlooked when refining the operational definition of femicide; a similar conclusion has been reached by various studies addressing the broader issues of violence against women (see Merry, 2011).

## The spread of femicide in Italy over time and space

In Italy, femicides – understood according to Russell's conceptualization (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harmes, 2001) – account for well over the absolute majority of homicides with female victims: in 2023, we are talking about 64 cases out of 111, almost 58% of the total<sup>7</sup>. This percentage is essentially identical to the one previously reported elsewhere (see Todesco, 2024). Therefore, women who are victims of homicide primarily lose their lives due to dynamics in which gender inequalities and relationships play a leading role; to put this into perspective, the second most common motive – long-standing arguments and misunderstandings – accounts for less than 13% of homicides of women<sup>8</sup>.

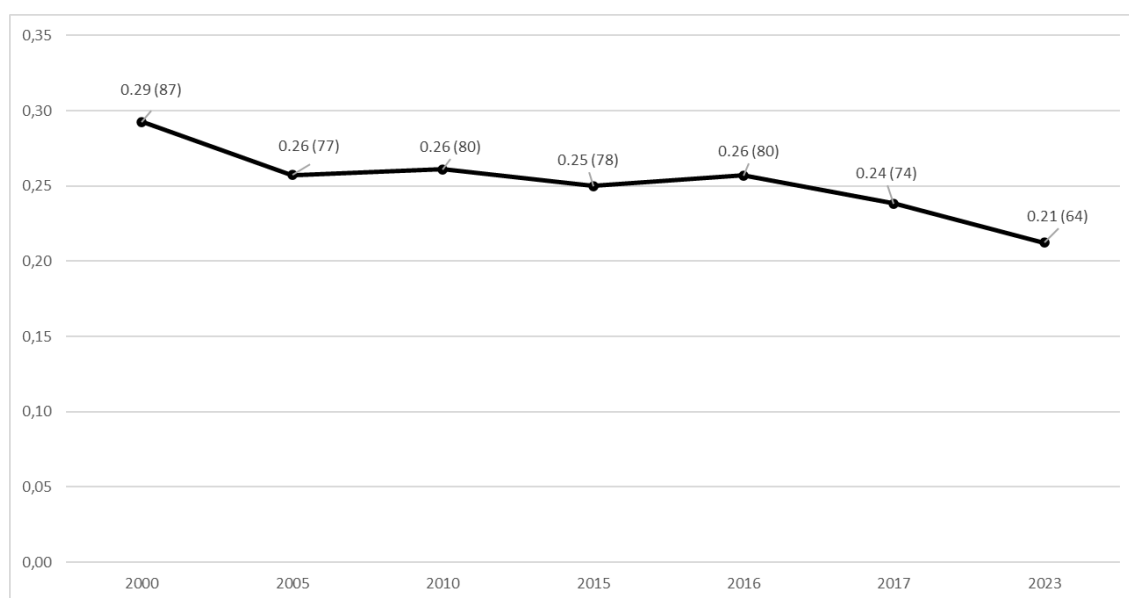
It is hardly surprising that the victims of femicide are almost always killed by men: among the 68 suspected perpetrators, only one is a woman, involved alongside a group of men in a crime that

<sup>7</sup> Here we refer to the 111 cases of the 119 fatal incidents involving women as victims in Italy in 2023 that can be considered intentional homicides with a high degree of certainty.

<sup>8</sup> In the following pages, not all the data presented will be shown in tables, for reasons of expositional economy. The complete tabular apparatus is available upon request. Given the predominantly descriptive nature of the analysis, a discursive approach will be used to present the data, where not all modalities of the variables under consideration will necessarily be commented on. Consequently, the sum of the percentages presented in the text may not necessarily add up to 100. It should also be specified that the percentages are calculated including cases where the data is missing, as it was not reported by the media sources used to construct the dataset on which this work is based. This choice has been made for transparency reasons and to provide the reader with data that is as reliable, realistic, and comprehensive as possible, based on the totality of homicides. In the following analyses, only variables with a limited number of missing data, or in rare cases, where such data is not predominant, will generally be considered.

was materially committed by one of them. After all, in Italy, women who commit homicide regardless of the motive are extremely rare (Todesco, 2024; in press). Moreover, when they do commit murder, it is almost never in the name of the patriarchy: as we have seen, the femicides in which women are more frequently involved as perpetrators – those committed in the family for reasons of honor, or linked to gender dynamics – are a true rarity in Italy.

Figure 1. Femicide rate (per 100,000 women) in Italy and, in brackets, the number of femicides. Years: 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2023.



Source: 2000-2017, Todesco (2021); 2023, authors' own calculation based on homicide data from the survey on voluntary homicides committed in Italy in 2023, and population data from <https://demo.istat.it/> (section: Main structural characteristics of the population).

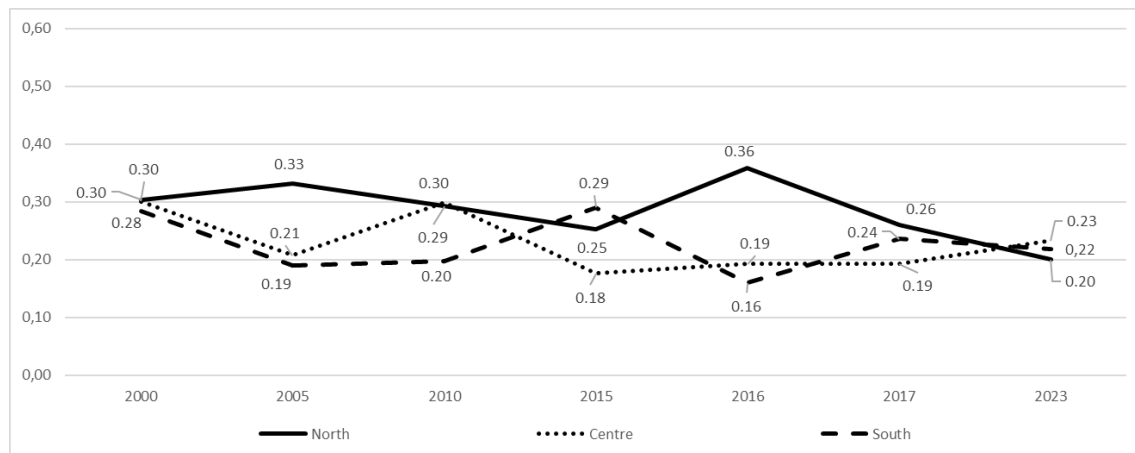
Considering the data available from the dataset collected by one of the authors and those presented in Todesco (2021), a historical series can be constructed on the trend of femicide in Italy, spanning almost a quarter of a century (Fig. 1)<sup>9</sup>. During this period, annual cases ranged from 87 (in 2000) to 64 (in 2023); in terms of rates, this corresponds to between 0.29 and 0.21 femicides (in the years in question) per 100,000 women. This figure is significantly lower than the homicide rate (in 2023, 0.57, see ISTAT, 2024b), which remains one of the lowest in Europe and the world, both for male and female victims (ISTAT, 2024b; Todesco, 2024). The data on femicide alternates between periods of stability and slight decreases. Over the entire period considered, there is a modest absolute contraction (0.08 points, meaning a decrease of less than one femicide per one

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the data were not always collected using the same methodology. As previously mentioned, the figures for femicides from 2000 to 2017 result from an *ex post* operationalization based on pre-existing data; by contrast, the 2023 figure is defined *ex ante*, using data collected by one of the authors.

million women), but a significantly more notable relative reduction (-28%). In evaluating this latter figure, two contrasting factors must be considered. On one hand, the rarity of the phenomenon means that even small shifts are proportionally sizeable. On the other hand, the less widespread a phenomenon is, the harder it becomes to achieve further reductions.

The trend in femicide broadly follows that of overall homicide, though the latter has seen a sharper decline over the past quarter-century, both in absolute terms (1.3 incidents per 100,000 inhabitants in 2000, down to 0.6 in 2023, a drop of 0.7 points) and in relative terms (-54%)<sup>10</sup>. For femicide, a clearer pattern emerges as regards its share on total homicides, which has increased markedly over time as the overall number of killings has fallen: from less than 12% in 2000 to around 20% in the most recent three years available<sup>11</sup>. This latter figure echoes one of Verkko's two 'laws' – well known at least to those who study homicide (Verkko, 1951; 1967): in countries – or periods – where homicide is more prevalent, the proportion of cases involving women, whether as perpetrators or victims, remains low; conversely, this proportion rises as lethal violence decreases.

Figure 2. Femicide rate (per 100,000 women) in Italy, by geographical area. Years 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2023.



Source: 2000-2017: Todesco (2021); 2023: authors' own calculation based on homicide data from the survey on voluntary homicides committed in Italy in 2023, and population data from <https://demo.istat.it/> (section: Main structural characteristics of the population).

<sup>10</sup> Source: 2000-2005: ISTAT (2021, supplementary tables, fig. A1); 2006-2023: authors' calculation based on data on completed and attempted homicides reported by law enforcement agencies to the judicial authorities, retrieved from <https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories> (section: Justice and Security - Criminal Justice), and data on the resident population retrieved from <https://demo.istat.it/> (section: Main Structural Characteristics of the Population).

<sup>11</sup> Source: for the number of femicides in 2000-2017, Todesco (2021); for the number of femicides in 2023, survey on voluntary homicides committed in Italy in 2023; for the number of homicides in 2000 and 2005, ISTAT (2021, supplementary tables, fig. A1); for the number of homicides in 2010-2023, <https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories> (section: Justice and Security - Criminal Justice).

Shifting the focus to the geographical distribution of femicide reveals a pattern that differs markedly from that for homicide. In Italy, homicide is more prevalent in the South than in the North and Center (ISTAT, 2024b), and the sharp decline recorded over the past quarter-century, mentioned above, has primarily affected the southern regions of the country (Todesco, 2024). Femicide, by contrast, shows a more fluctuating pattern, with no clear trend (see fig. 2); at times, though not consistently, it has been more widespread in northern Italy<sup>12</sup>. The most recent data, as well as the earliest figures, indicate a phenomenon that is fairly evenly spread across the country's regions – mirroring the broader pattern of violence against women (pending the release of updated data from the Survey on Women's Safety, see ISTAT, 2015, Table 11). In the distribution of femicide across Italy, the institutional, cultural, and social context – which, as we have seen, plays a major role in the legal framing and operational definition of this phenomenon – does not appear to exert the same significant influence. This is likely because, at the end of the day, we are observing different geographical areas that still play according to the same national rulebook.

The data on the geographical distribution of femicide confirms the second of Verkko's 'laws' (1951; 1967), which states that trends in homicide rates across time and space are primarily driven by incidents involving men, while cases that also – or exclusively – involve women tend to remain comparatively stable across different contexts and periods.

## **The circumstances and characteristics of femicide: A closer look at Italian cases**

As outlined in the introduction, a close analytical "unpacking" of Russell's conceptualization of femicide (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harmes, 2001) reveals four distinct yet tightly interwoven strands: misogyny; possession; the assertion and legitimization of male power and superiority; and a pleasure-driven impulse. These forces, entangled in shifting constellations, come sharply into focus in the empirical examination of femicide in Italy. Based on the review of media-reported information, clear evidence of misogyny was found in 26 out of 64 cases (40.6%); possession in 35 cases (54.7%); assertion and legitimization of male power and superiority in 43 cases (67.2%); and a pleasure-driven impulse in only 2 cases (3.1%). Moreover, in 19 cases (29.7% of the total), the alleged perpetrator's obsessive control over the victim prior to the femicide was recorded. The two cases involving a pleasure-driven impulse are also – predictably enough – those with a sexual motive. It is worth noting that, despite the extensive media attention

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<sup>12</sup> This nonlinear pattern can also be attributed to the small number of cases on which the rates are based, meaning that shifts of just a few cases – potentially random from one year to the next or between geographical areas – can be disproportionately amplified in statistical analyses.

given to such cases, a sexual background is almost entirely absent from the landscape of femicides in Italy, as well as from the broader category of homicides (Todesco, 2024; in press).

In analyzing the characteristics of femicide, one element of particular significance is undoubtedly the relationship between the victim and the alleged perpetrator – a factor that reveals much about the context in which the crime takes place. As discussed in the third paragraph, femicide can manifest in highly heterogeneous ways; however, the data show that almost all cases occurring in Italy in 2023 (57 out of 64, nearly 90%) were confined to intimate relationships: 26 (40.6%) were committed between spouses, 11 between cohabiting partners (17.2%), one between non-cohabiting partners (1.6%), two between casual partners (3.1%), and 17 between ex-partners (26.6%). In short, it is the so-called “intimate” femicides – those which, as Brookman (2005) puts it, are rooted in personal relationships – that overwhelmingly dominate the picture; a trend highlighted in previous research (Commissione Parlamentare di Inchiesta sul Femminicidio, 2022; Todesco, 2021; 2024).

Intimate femicides are often committed in long-term relationships. In 31 of the 57 cases – an outright majority – the relationship had lasted over a decade; in 24 of these, more than 20 years. Killings in newly formed or brief relationships (less than a year) are rare, with only 5 cases (8.9%). The dynamics leading to intimate femicide in Italy thus often appear to unfold over extended periods, echoing the processual nature of this crime noted by other scholars (see Enander et al., 2022; Enander et al., 2021). As Jane Monckton Smith (2020, p. 1271) points out, intimate femicides can be seen as “part of a journey where the motivation to abuse (need for control) is linked with the motivation to kill (loss of, or threat to, control)”.

One notable element concerns whether the crime took place in an ongoing or ended relationship: 19 of the 40 victims who were still in some form of relationship with the alleged perpetrator had expressed a wish to leave, or the relationship was marked by frequent tension and conflict. As noted in the third paragraph – and as the literature consistently shows (for instance, Carlsson et al., 2021; Dobash & Dobash, 2015) – the breakup (real or threatened) of a relationship is a critical trigger for male violence against women.

Focusing on killings between ex-partners, in 3 out of 17 cases we observe what Dobash & Dobash (2015, p. 49) describe as a change of project from ‘keeping’ to ‘destroying’: during the fatal episode, the man first attempts to persuade the woman to rekindle the relationship, only to kill her after she firmly refuses. In the perpetrator’s eyes, this is the ultimate punishment the woman ‘deserves’ for having destroyed both their lives by ending the relationship – and sometimes, by dating someone new (see Enander et al., 2022). The data confirm that it was almost always the woman who initiated the breakup (16 out of 17 cases), and she was more likely than him to have started a new relationship at the time of the killing (9 vs. 3 cases out of 17). Notably, several of

these murders occurred soon after the separation: in 7 cases within 3 months, and in another 3 within 6 months.

Stepping outside the sphere of intimate and sexual relationships, 2 cases involved family members – as noted in the previous paragraph, a true rarity – and the same number involved strangers (one victim was a sex worker). This confirms that in Italy, women are almost never killed by someone they do not know, with this trend showing a clear downward trajectory over time (see Todesco, 2024).

The intimate nature that characterizes femicides in Italy emerges clearly when examining other features of this crime. Nearly all cases (57 out of 64, almost 90%) involve a single alleged perpetrator and a single victim, with virtually no additional injuries reported (only 2 cases). Moreover, over 80% of incidents (52) occur in a private residence: 38 in the shared home of the alleged perpetrator and the victim, 11 in the victim's home, and only 3 in the perpetrator's. This last location is one that victims may actively avoid, especially in cases of turbulent separation and/or previous episodes of violence, which, as we will see, are not uncommon in femicide cases. Even in the home, the crime scene is overwhelmingly the space of ultimate intimacy: the bedroom (22 out of 52 cases, 42.3%), followed – at a distant second – by the dining or living room (7 cases). Outside the domestic sphere, femicides almost always take place in open spaces (11 cases, 17.2% of the total, including one in a vehicle); in these cases, it is often ex-partners who kill (7 cases), exploiting their familiarity with the victim's routines and movements.

The intimate nature of femicides often leads them to be committed away from prying eyes: witnesses are present in 18 out of 64 cases, just over 28%. This is a much lower percentage compared to male homicides, which typically occur in open spaces, potentially with a high flow of people (see Todesco, in press). The witnesses to femicides are evenly split between those who are very close to the victim – the children, in 8 cases – and those who are far removed – strangers, in 8 cases as well. Given that these episodes often unfold in the home, it is not surprising that children are frequently witnesses to the crime. A tragic fact that strongly characterizes femicides – differentiating them from male homicides, but also from those of women (see Todesco, in press) – is the significant number of minors present: they are found in 9 of the 18 femicides with witnesses.

Another important piece of data to consider is related specifically to the victim's underage children: in 4 femicides that occurred without witnesses, the children were still intensely involved in the crime, either because they were near the crime scene or because they discovered the mother's body. When considering both the children who witnessed the murder and those who were nonetheless deeply affected, a total of 21 minors were involved in the 2023 femicides. Expanding the scope to all minors who lost their mother due to femicide, the total rises to 27 cases. These are highly significant and sensitive data that deserve further exploration in future studies, possibly by examining the phenomenon over multiple years to provide a stronger basis for analysis.

In analyzing the characteristics of femicides, another key piece of data is certainly the weapon used: it says a lot about the micro-context of the crime, its planning, and the relationship between the victim and the alleged perpetrator. In Italy, knives are the most common lethal weapon used in femicides, employed in 22 out of 64 cases (34.4%); after all, this is a tool commonly found in daily life, present in every home. For this reason, it is readily available to would-be killers outside criminal circles, for whom obtaining a firearm might be more difficult. As we will see, alleged femicide perpetrators often have no prior contact with criminal circles. The same logic applies to the 4 cases involving improvised weapons – everyday objects that, when used with violence, can be deadly.

After knives, firearms are the second most common lethal weapon (19 cases, just under 30%). Following closely are suffocation/strangulation (8 cases, 12.5%) and combined methods (6 cases, 9.4%): two lethal means that show some similarities. Suffocation/strangulation is certainly not highly effective and requires a perpetrator able to physically overpower or stun the victim; it is also characteristic of expressive, impulsive crimes that reflect the murderer's emotions. These elements are widely present in femicides, which are almost always committed – as noted earlier – by partners or ex-partners, with all the fury that often arises from this specific circumstance (see Todesco, 2021; 2024) – driven by a man's powerlessness when unable to establish intimate terrorism over a woman through coercive control (for the meaning of these concepts, see Johnson, 2008; 2011). Combined methods may be a *modus operandi* for particularly violent episodes; intense violence that, as we will soon see, can be found in femicides, due to the reasons just mentioned regarding suffocation/strangulation. The same logic applies to episodes committed with bare hands (3 cases) or by fire (a single case).

To wrap things up, we will shine a spotlight on a series of rare elements that can appear in a femicide, and which, when they do, are often sensationalized by the media because of their potential for attracting interest in the case. These dramatic details tend to skew the public's perception, creating an exaggerated sense of their frequency in femicides, as well as in homicides. Only a few femicides feature desecration, mutilation, dismemberment, or destruction of the body, as well as the discovery of the body partially or fully unclothed. Likewise, it is rare for a femicide to occur while the victim is asleep or bound, blindfolded, or gagged. Circumstances such as the alteration of the crime scene and the concealment of the body are equally rare. Among these characteristics, the concealment of the body and the attack on a sleeping victim are the most common *modus operandi*, but they occur in only 5 out of 64 femicides, less than 8%. Even rarer are the cases where the victim is pregnant: 2 such cases, which, unsurprisingly, received significant media attention. By contrast, no cases are recorded in which victim precipitation occurs – that is, instances where the victim is the first to resort to violence against the person who will ultimately kill her.

Moreover, alcohol abuse and drug consumption make a fleeting appearance in femicides. It is worth noting, however, that this information often comes to light only after toxicological analysis, sometimes long after the crime, meaning it is not always covered by the media<sup>13</sup>. Only 4 of the 68 alleged perpetrators (5.9%) kill, and just 3 of the 64 victims (4.7%) meet their end, under the influence of these substances. Drugs and alcohol, it seems, feature more frequently in homicides between men, particularly those involving strangers for trivial disputes (see Todesco, in press).

More notably, though still a minority (10 cases out of 64, 15.6%), are instances of overkilling – where the violence inflicted on the victim's body goes far beyond what would be needed to end her life. As noted by Todesco (2024; in press), this practice is more frequent in femicides than in male homicides, because of the deeper currents of rage and control often found in these crimes.

Lastly, nearly a third of femicides (19 out of 64) seem to be premeditated to some extent – not in the strict legal sense, but based on what we can infer from media reports.

## The profiles of victims and alleged perpetrators in Italian femicide cases

To truly grasp the complexities of femicide, it is essential to explore not only the circumstances in which these crimes unfold, but also the characteristics of victims and alleged perpetrators. Classic sociological theories of deviance have long zeroed in on the traits of those who commit crimes; this perspective is enriched by the vital contribution of victimology, the criminological branch that seeks to understand the victims of crime and everything that surrounds them (for a classic take on this, see Von Hentig, 1948).

A key aspect to consider is undoubtedly age, as it is well known that, under certain conditions, it can be correlated with the risk of both killing and being killed (see, for Italy, Colombo, 2011; Todesco, 2024; globally, Rennó Santos & Testa, 2018). Figure 3 illustrates a trend in the femicide rate based on this characteristic, showing similarities in shape between female victims and male perpetrators<sup>14</sup>. However, for women, the different trends tend to emerge at later ages than for men. As mentioned, nearly all femicides occur in the context of a romantic or intimate relationship, a setting where women are typically younger than men (see, for example, with regard to marriages and civil unions, ISTAT, 2024a). Before diving into the details of the findings, it is important to bear in mind that femicide rates by age are calculated on the basis of a very limited number of cases.

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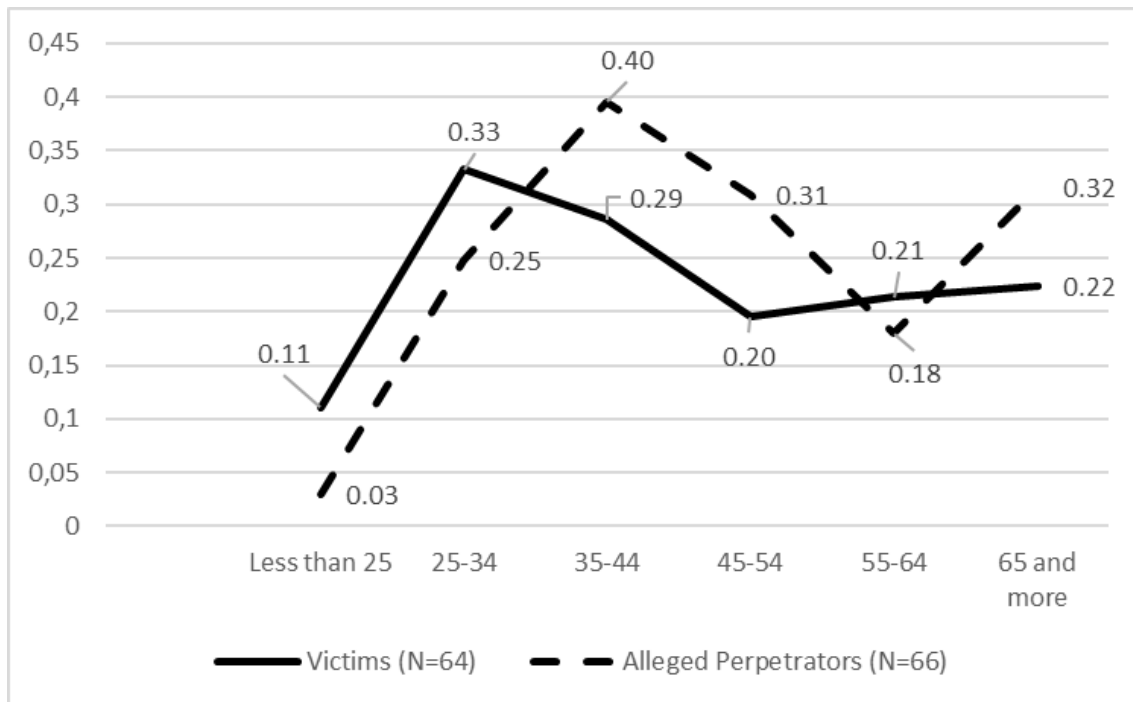
<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the following data should be approached with caution and revisited in future studies focused on the topic. For a deeper dive into the relationship between homicide and substance use, see Bye (2012).

<sup>14</sup> The only alleged female perpetrator of femicide has been excluded from the analysis. For one alleged male perpetrator, age data is missing.



Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this analysis should be approached with caution and reassessed in light of future studies based on a larger number of incidents<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 3. Victims and alleged perpetrators of femicide per 100,000 inhabitants in Italy, by age group. 2023.



Source: Authors' own calculation based on homicide data from the survey on voluntary homicides committed in Italy in 2023, and population data from <https://demo.istat.it/> (section: Main structural characteristics of the population).

Focusing on the victims, the rate increases rapidly, peaking between the ages of 25 and 34 (0.33 incidents per 100,000 women), and then remains largely stable in the subsequent age group: between 35 and 44 years, there is only a slight decrease. It is after 45 that the rate drops significantly, reaching 0.20, before stabilizing again in the following age groups. It should be noted that between the ages of 25 and 44, when women are at the highest risk of femicide, there are also high rates of legal separation<sup>16</sup> – highlighting the role of the breakdown in the relationship between victim and perpetrator in the dynamics of femicide, as mentioned earlier.

As regards the alleged perpetrators, the risk of committing femicide increases rapidly with age, peaking (0.40 per 100,000 men) between 35 and 44 years old. This is an age range where the early portion still represents relative youth, and it is at a younger age that men more often commit homicide (see Todesco, in press). During this period of the male life course, moreover, legal

<sup>15</sup> A similar point applies to the citizenship-specific rates, which will be discussed shortly.

<sup>16</sup> Source: authors' calculation based on data on legal separations from <https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories> (section Population and Families - Separations and Divorces) and data on the resident population from <https://demo.istat.it/> (section Main Structural Characteristics of the Population).

separation rates are also among the highest<sup>17</sup>. Unlike female victims, the rate does not stabilize at high levels in the subsequent life course phase but declines immediately, reaching the second lowest level between 55 and 64 years old (0.18). Afterward, the rate almost doubles in the final age range, reaching the second *highest* level overall (0.32).

This last finding, which is uniquely characteristic of femicide (see Todesco, in press, fig. 2), can be understood by looking at a specific set of cases (8 out of 20 with perpetrators over 65), where crimes emerge from the overwhelming burden of life's circumstances. On one hand, we have the so-called 'compassionate' murders (7 cases), where the victim, in the eyes of the perpetrator, is enduring unbearable suffering. On the other hand, there is a single case where the murderer feels overwhelmed by the burden of providing physical, material, and emotional care to a victim in a fragile condition. These are crimes where the perpetrator is often of advanced age, and, in our opinion (see Sciarrino and Todesco, 2025), they can be fully considered femicides, even if they partially deviate from the original Russellian conceptualization: at their core, there lies a paradoxical dynamic tied to gender inequalities and the relationships between genders<sup>18</sup>.

On the one hand, one of the triggering factors may be the man's profound sense of inadequacy: not only in facing the burdensome demands of caregiving, but also in managing both the suffering of the woman he cares for and his own distress. These skills are seldom – if ever – nurtured within the mold of traditional male socialization and the construction of normative masculine identities (see, for instance, Jackson, 2021; Ranson, 2015); it is thus reasonable to hypothesize that gender inequalities themselves deprive men of the competencies that might otherwise help prevent such killings. On the other hand – and this brings us back to Russell's conception of femicide – a woman who is ill and/or disabled may find herself unable to fulfil the traditional roles ascribed to her by the gendered social structure; thus, betraying both her partner's expectations and those prescribed by the patriarchal order, and ceasing to be 'useful'. This circumstance, in its most extreme manifestations, may cost a woman her life as, no longer able to embody the role prescribed for her gender, she is *no longer* regarded as a woman at all. This reflection resonates with the work of Grand'Maison and Murillo Lafuente (2022), who coined the concept of 'dys-femicide' in sharp critique of the literature on femicide and activism against it that has disregarded disability as a crucial lens through which to unravel the complexities of women's oppression.

A noteworthy empirical datum supporting the inclusion of these episodes in the broader framework of femicide specifically regards 'compassionate' killings: the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2023) reports that in 2022, despite a high number of women killed by men for

<sup>17</sup> See previous note.

<sup>18</sup> Our choice undoubtedly calls for further reflection within the scientific community, to which the insights presented here hopefully contribute. In any case, the characteristics of femicides discussed in this paper remain largely unchanged even excluding the 8 episodes in question from the analysis (data not shown, available upon request).

this specific motive, no cases were recorded with the roles reversed. It is therefore plausible to hypothesize that the very competences stereotypically associated with femininity, as mentioned above, may play a significant role – both as a protective and as a risk factor – in influencing the prevalence of homicides stemming from the unbearable weight of certain life-course circumstances.

Another notable characteristic of individuals involved in femicide, which receives considerable attention in public discourse, is citizenship. The data – which emerges with great clarity and is also confirmed by previous research on both femicide and the broader phenomenon of homicide (see Todesco, 2021; 2024; in press) – shows that foreign citizens are at a sizably higher risk of being killed or committing femicide. The femicide rate for female victims is 0.17 among Italians, but it increases 3.7 times to 0.63 among foreigners. Similar patterns are observed with regard to male perpetrators, with rates of 0.16 and 0.81, respectively (5.0 times higher).

Two important points must be emphasized regarding these findings. First, the rates for foreigners are calculated on the basis of the population legally residing in Italy; thus, they are slightly overestimated, as they do not account for irregular migrants. Even when recalculating the rates using estimates for the irregular population – as has been done in previous studies (see Todesco, 2021; 2024) – the substance of the data remains the same: the gap between Italians and foreigners, unfavorable to the latter, persists, and it is too large to be bridged by including those who are not legally residing in the country. It is also worth noting that – based on media investigations – incidents involving irregular migrants in Italy are almost nonexistent (only one single perpetrator). Given the media appeal of such cases, it is safe to say these cases would have been headline news if they were more common.

Second, immigration, whether regular and irregular, has not led to an increase in femicides in Italy. Between 2000 and 2023, as shown by the historical data presented earlier (see fig. 1), there has been a modest decline in this crime, despite a sharp rise in both regular immigrants (from 1,562,000 to 5,253,658, +236%<sup>19</sup>) and irregular ones (from 188,000 to 519,000, +176%<sup>20</sup>). The higher prevalence of this crime among foreigners may have, at most, slightly slowed the decline in femicides, similar to the trend observed for the broader phenomenon of homicide (see Colombo, 2011; Todesco, 2024).

Another relevant factor to consider in analyzing femicide relates to the extra-legal activities and criminal records of those involved in the crime. Generally, homicide can be the tragic outcome of a deviant career previously undertaken, primarily by the perpetrator, but sometimes by the

<sup>19</sup> Source: for the data regarding 1/1/2000, <https://www.ismu.org/dati-sulle-migrazioni/> (section on Irregular Presence, Repatriations, Rejections); for the 2023 data, <https://demo.istat.it/> (section on Main Structural Characteristics of the Population).

<sup>20</sup> Source: <https://www.ismu.org/dati-sulle-migrazioni/> (section on Irregular Presence, Repatriations, Rejections); the most recent available data refers to 1/1/2021.

victim. In the case of femicide, however, this almost never applies to the women who are killed: only one woman is involved in extra-legal activities, and she is also the only case with a criminal record. As for the alleged perpetrators, the numbers are significantly higher: 10 out of 68 (14.7%) are involved in extra-legal activities, and 15 (22.1%) have criminal records. For both groups, the offenses mainly concern crimes against the person. Combining the two variables, we see that nearly a third of the male alleged perpetrators of femicide (22 out of 68) are in some way linked – whether or not formally adjudicated by a court – to illegal activities. In any case, these numbers are lower than those generally recorded for men accused of homicide (for a comparison, see Todesco, in press).

Alongside these figures, one detail must be borne in mind: some alleged perpetrators of femicide may have begun their criminal careers with the future victim, often in the home. As stated above, femicide can be the tragic culmination of a process that involves threats, violence, and stalking. According to information available from media reports, in more than one in three femicides (22 cases out of 64), the alleged perpetrator made threats toward the victim or one of her loved ones; in 9 cases, these threats were known to the victim's social circle, and in 11 cases they were reported. The same numbers are almost identical (22, 8, and 12, respectively) for actual instances of violence. It is worth noting that these figures likely understate the occurrence of threats and violence unknown to the victim's social circle and unreported, as the media would have no access to such information. Notably, the report by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into Femicide (Commissione Parlamentare di Inchiesta sul Femminicidio, 2022) includes only data on reported violence, which, incidentally, is roughly consistent with the findings presented here.

A significant feature that strongly characterizes femicides, both in relation to other murders of women and those of men (see Todesco, 2021), is the post-crime behavior of the alleged perpetrators: 41.2% of them (28 out of 68) self-harm, either taking their own lives (23 cases) or attempting to do so (5 cases). This act generally occurs immediately after the crime or, at the latest, within 24 hours. It is a striking statistic. On one hand, these men – as many scholars have pointed out (see, for a review, Todesco, 2024) – are often obsessively possessive, if not abusive, and hold a virilist and machista conception of masculinity; on the other hand, they are unable to continue their lives after committing the crime. The second most common post-crime behavior (24 cases, 35.3%) is to attempt to avoid capture: fleeing, hiding, or resuming daily life as if nothing had happened. Next, we find (10 cases, 14.7%) those who choose to surrender to the authorities. In general, the post-crime behavior of those who commit femicide aligns with Luckenbill's (1977) theory of murders as situated transactions: when the bond between the victim and the perpetrator is strong – as is almost always true of cases of femicide – only a minority of those who kill leave the crime scene, trying to get away with it. However, it is worth noting that some alleged murderers

– 13 out of 68, almost all concentrated among those trying to avoid capture (10 cases) – also actively mislead the investigations.

Lastly, an interesting and positive aspect of the femicide phenomenon – one often ignored by the media for its lack of sensational appeal – concerns the identification and apprehension of alleged perpetrators: all 68 individuals accused of femicide in Italy in 2023 have been identified, with only two still at large. This is a straightforward outcome, perfectly in line with the exceptionally high clearance rates recently recorded for female homicides (see Todesco, 2024). On the one hand, women are almost invariably murdered by someone close to them; a pattern that holds true not only for femicides, but also for other forms of lethal violence against women (Todesco, in press). This means the judiciary and law enforcement have a clear starting point for investigations. On the other hand, as observed above, femicide perpetrators are rarely embedded in criminal circles or well-versed in illicit activities. As a result, they typically lack the know-how to execute such a grave crime cleanly – and are even less likely to have the nerve to carry on as if nothing had occurred.

In line with the above, alleged femicide perpetrators are generally arrested swiftly: over 70% (31 out of 44 alleged offenders who did not take their own lives before apprehension) are brought to justice within 48 hours of the crime, with only four cases dragging on for more than four months. Notably, those who commit femicide often do not seem eager to cooperate with the authorities – at least in the immediate aftermath of their arrest: in the largest share of cases, suspects exercise their right to remain silent (16 out of 44), deny the charges (6 cases), or state they had no homicidal intent (3 cases). Only 14 alleged perpetrators fully confess their crime.

## Closing remarks

This study has sought to provide not merely an updated snapshot, but a detailed and as exhaustive as possible exploration of femicide in Italy – framed through the feminist lens compellingly put forward by Diana E. H. Russell (see Radford & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Russell & Harmes, 2001). It is now time to present some final considerations, starting with the limitations of this study, moving through the powerful value of an intersectional approach to understanding femicide, and wrapping up with the far-reaching implications this perspective holds for how we operationalize the concept itself.

The two main limitations of this study are clear. First, the analysis presented here is not based on official data, which is not available for femicide in the Russellian sense. Second, the number of cases under consideration is relatively small. While these are population data rather than sample-

based, this does not eliminate the issue of occasional fluctuations – those not driven by real structural, cultural, or interactional dynamics – that can distort the findings when case numbers are limited. In this context, even small variations in the phenomenon under investigation can lead to large discrepancies in the statistical outputs. The most effective approach to addressing this issue is to analyze data over multiple years; however, this requires significant additional work, constructing the empirical source through a review of cases reported by the media. Therefore, in order to conduct a thorough analysis of femicide, it is essential to collaborate in a research team, as the European Observatory on Femicide is already doing (see Naudi et al., 2023). The data produced from such efforts could be a game-changer for research on this serious crime.

The need for a substantial number of femicide cases ties directly to a crucial shift in research: the adoption of an intersectional approach to studying this crime (see Sosa, 2023). The women kidnapped and murdered in Ciudad Juárez shared certain characteristics: they were young, from lower social classes, often employed as factory workers or students, and frequently migrants (Sosa, 2023). In Italy, as we have seen, femicide victims are predominantly foreign rather than Italian; and homicide data – while not specific to femicide – reveal that less-educated women are at far greater risk of being killed than their more educated counterparts (Todesco, 2024). Gender, as emphasized in Russell’s concept of femicide, intersects with other axes of oppression, creating complex, layered forms of exclusion, discrimination, and violence: ethnicity, age, education, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and non-conforming bodies. Recognizing this intersection of factors is crucial both scientifically and politically, much as Russell’s original conceptualization of femicide was in its time.

Embracing an intersectional lens to explore femicide unfolds across two key dimensions. First, a substantial number of cases is essential to conduct disaggregated analyses based on some of the vulnerability and discrimination factors mentioned earlier. This enables a deeper understanding of how gender interacts with these factors, and the formulation of tailored containment and control policies suited to each specific context. The dataset used in this study, for instance, gathers information on all of these factors, yet falls short in terms of providing numbers for disaggregated analysis. Second, it is important to note that the hierarchy among different systems of oppression cannot be predetermined (Sosa, 2023). Hence, to quantify femicide according to Russell’s conceptualization, it is necessary to collect data that provides an understanding of gender’s salience in relation to other factors of vulnerability and discrimination. This calls for classifying femicides right from the data collection stage – as was done in this study – using sources such as media reports, police records, and court files.

The question of how femicides are classified is closely intertwined with the operational definition of the concept, which enables it to be quantified. In this regard, the intersectional approach introduces yet another thorny challenge – this time, a methodological one. The

classification adopted in this study rests on the victim's biological sex, leaving gender identity unaccounted for; in doing so, it inevitably glosses over the complex interplay between sex (of the victim), gender (as it informs the motive), and gender identity (of the victim). Capturing this latter variable is far from straightforward, as transgender individuals do not always disclose their gender identity. Despite this challenge, UNODC and UN-Women (2022, p. 15) include gender identity among the key variables to be collected for a comprehensive analysis of femicide. But can the murder of a transgender woman assigned male at birth be considered femicide? And what about that of a transgender man assigned female at birth? The operational definition of femicide proposed by UNODC/UN-Women (2022, p. 7) takes a clear-cut stance, referring exclusively to the victim's gender identity (where available) as female, regardless of sex assigned at birth. By contrast, Argentine legislation takes a markedly different approach, criminalizing a specific form of gender-based killing fueled by hatred towards gender identity and its free expression: travesticide or transfemicide (Toledo Vásquez, 2023). This approach, supported by activists and scholars, draws attention to the particular plight of transgender and transvestite women, shedding light on and addressing the social and structural violence they endure. When a trans person's murder is classified as femicide, it emphasizes the victim's identity; however, when categorized as a travesticide or transfemicide, the focus shifts to the marginalized group to which the victim belongs. Both classifications hold analytical and political legitimacy, yet they must be contextualized within the specific circumstances of the case. By making a classification at the data collection stage, one can assess whether to prioritize the salience of gender dynamics over those related to transphobia. In any case, travesticide/transfemicide and femicide are concepts that can be considered analogous in their political and analytical relevance; thus, they should be examined side by side and in dialog for a fuller understanding of lethal violence driven by intersecting, yet distinct, dynamics.

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