

Domestic Terrorism in 2020: a Report of the Israel Observatory on Femicide

16/02/2021

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Weil S. (2021), *Domestic Terrorism in 2020: a Report of the Israel Observatory on Femicide*, in «Cambio. Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali», OpenLab on Covid-19. DOI: 10.13128/cambio-10383

Introduction

This article will describe the establishment of the Israel Observatory on Femicide (IOF) in November 2020, and document all the femicide cases perpetrated in Israel during 2020. It is the first report of its kind in Israel. Special attention will be paid to the connection between femicide and covid-19 during this difficult year.

Background on the IOF

On 25 November 2020, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Israel Observatory on Femicide (IOF) was established.¹ In 2015, Dr. Dubravka Simonovic, the Special Rapporteur at the United Nations on violence against women, its causes and consequences, had already called to establish a “femicide watch” or observatory on gender related killings of women. “The aim of this initiative is to focus on the prevention of femicide through the collection of comparable data on femicide rates at the national, regional and global level, through an analysis of femicide cases by national multidisciplinary bodies, from a human rights perspective, in order to determine shortcomings within national laws and policies, including their lack of implementation, and to undertake preventive measures”.²

From 2013-7, this author chaired a COST (Cooperation on Science and Technology) Action IS1206 entitled “Femicide across Europe” (Weil 2015); one of the final outputs of the Action was the establishment of the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF) at Malta University (Weil and Naudi 2018). In 2019, the EOF moved to Cyprus and Germany.³ In 2017, the President of Georgia asked me to help set up a femicide observatory in his country, and in 2018, I was party to setting up an observatory in Macedonia. The Israel Observatory on Femicide, in the country in which I reside, was

¹See: www.israelfemicide.org

² Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/FemicideWatchCall2020.aspx>

³See: <http://eof.cut.ac.cy>

long overdue. The Israel Observatory aims to be that country's official body providing qualitative and quantitative data on femicide in Israel.

Femicides in Israel in 2020

At the end of December 2020, the IOF released its first report, summarizing the characteristics of femicides in Israel in 2020.⁴ The data was gathered from media and internet reports, Google alerts and reports from women's organisations, and crosschecked with other databases,⁵ parliamentary reports, and more. It should be pointed out that there is large variation between all these data.

Although there are many theoretical debates as to the definition and essence of femicide (cf. Corradi et al 2016), femicide is generally defined in the literature as the intentional killing of women because they are female. Therefore, in the Israeli IOF report, the numbers of women murdered for other reasons, such as accidental murder or involvement in crime, were omitted, as were two cases of murder-suicide. Femicide was restricted to age 18 and above. There were some cases where a restraining order was in effect, and therefore some information may be missing.

The report characterized 21 of the 25 murders of women committed in Israel during 2020 as femicides; one of these was a matricide (in which a son killed his mother). The average age of the victim was 39.6. The youngest victim was 19 years old and the oldest was 66.

The researchers know the identities of all the femicide victims, while the details of the killer are known in 81% of the cases; in the three cases where the name of the murderer has not been made public, it is known that he was an Israeli Arab. Twelve of the 21 femicide victims, or 57% of all femicide cases in 2020, were Israeli Arabs, six of whom were Bedouin, although Arabs only constitute c.20 percentage of the total Israeli population. One victim was an immigrant from Ethiopia and four were immigrants from former Soviet Union countries. In 17 of the 18 cases where police knew the identity of the perpetrator, the murderer was a male relative, and in 13 cases it was the victim's partner/spouse.

The report also looked at the weapons used in the murders. Of the 20 cases where that information was available, seven women were stabbed, and six were shot to death. Two died as a result of blunt force trauma, two were strangled, two were beaten to death, and one victim was thrown to her death. Authorities had received previous complaints about domestic violence in one third of all the cases. So far, only seven indictments have been filed over these murders.

The Effect of Covid-19 on Femicide in Israel in 2020

COVID-19 has impacted negatively upon domestic violence and femicide in Israel, as in the rest of the world (Weil 2020). Early on in the history of the coronavirus, countries reported a global increase in domestic violence, and femicide rates were on the rise, even in China, where statistics are sometimes unreliable.⁶ In 2020, the United Nations issued a report in which they noted that "... accompanying the crisis has been a spike in domestic violence reporting, at exactly the time that services, including

⁴The report was compiled by Shalva Weil with Noam Keshet, a doctoral student in the School for Business Administration at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁵ For example, the Haaretz newspaper has a database: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/st/c/prod/heb/global/homicide/->. For 2020, they have 16 femicide cases, as opposed to the 21 cases we documented. It should be noted that the website is still called 'homicide'.

⁶Source: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005253/domestic-violence-cases-surge-during-covid-19-epidemic>

rule of law, health and shelters, are being diverted to address the pandemic. With families isolated in their homes, children are also facing the rapid increase of online child abuse” (UN 2020). The closure of women’s shelters meant that some women and their children were thrown back to live with their assailants in frightening circumstances. With greater isolation, women were less in touch with social networks and support groups, and helplessness was increasing. Women, who were suffering both mental and physical violence at the hands of abusive partners, inundated hotlines in Israel with complaints. Additional cases of severe domestic violence probably remained unreported, in situations in which the only way to inform the authorities was by internet or by phone, and these may have been banned or confiscated by an abusive partner.

In 2020, there were 1.8 cases of femicide on average per month in Israel, in a population of 8.8 million people. However, March 2020, the month in which the coronavirus pandemic erupted in Israel in full force and in which Israel imposed its first nationwide lockdown, was the deadliest month for women, claiming five victims. There is no other month in 2020 with such high incidents of femicide.

Conclusions

This is the first time that the Israel Observatory on Femicide has published an independent report on femicide from the beginning of a calendar year to the end. Unfortunately, the Israeli government has not taken the threat of femicide seriously either during the covid-19 pandemic or prior to it. While Israel knows how to target terrorism, Israel appears ineffective in tackling issues of “domestic terrorism”.

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