

# Understanding Femicide from the Perpetrator's Perspective: Narratives around gender, violence & identity in Buenos Aires

Ellie Fahs, MPH, Martín Hernán Di Marco, PhD & Dabney P. Evans, PhD, MPH

SVRI Forum  
19-23 September, 2022  
Cancún, México

# Femicide in the Argentinean Penal Code

Gender-based killing of a woman, specially perpetrated by a man, on account of her gender. <sup>(1)</sup>

- Typified in 2012.
- Modifying the law of intentional homicide.



# Epidemiology: Femicide in Argentina

- Between 2007-2017: 2,638 <sup>(7)</sup>
- Since 2016: average of 312.5 <sup>(8)</sup>
- In 2020: 162 femicides occurred in 5 months <sup>(9)</sup>
- Majority intimate femicides
- High rates of urban areas.

## Risk Factors for Experiencing Violence

Perpetration by men	Victimization of women
<b>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL</b>	
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low income</li> <li>• Low education</li> </ul>	<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young age</li> <li>• Low education</li> <li>• Separated/divorced marital status</li> </ul>
<b>EXPOSURE TO CHILD MALTREATMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual abuse</li> <li>• Intra-parental violence</li> </ul>	<b>EXPOSURE TO CHILD MALTREATMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intra-parental violence</li> </ul>
<b>MENTAL DISORDER</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antisocial personality</li> </ul>	<b>MENTAL DISORDER</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depression</li> </ul>
<b>SUBSTANCE USE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmful use of alcohol</li> <li>• Illicit drug use</li> </ul>	<b>SUBSTANCE USE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmful use of alcohol</li> <li>• Illicit drug use</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of violence</li> </ul>
<b>RELATIONSHIP LEVEL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple partners/infidelity</li> <li>• Low resistance to peer pressure</li> </ul>	
<b>COMMUNITY LEVEL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak community sanctions</li> <li>• Poverty</li> </ul>	
<b>SOCIETAL LEVEL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional gender norms and social norms supportive of violence</li> </ul>	

(CDC, 6)

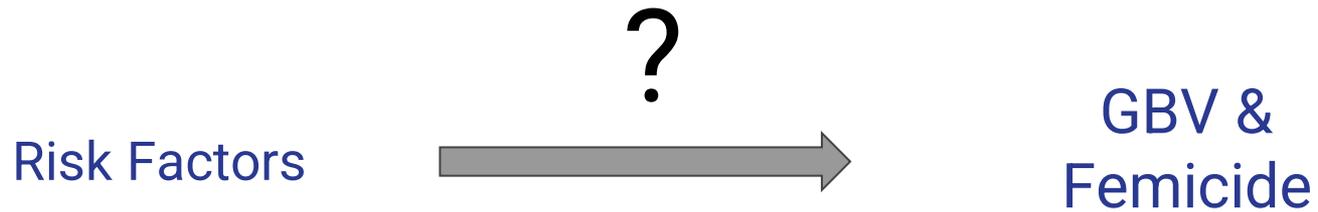
# General methodological challenges

- Definitions vary (especially operational)
- Under-reported phenomenon
- Researchers' reluctance and institutional barriers
- Lack of qualitative emic data



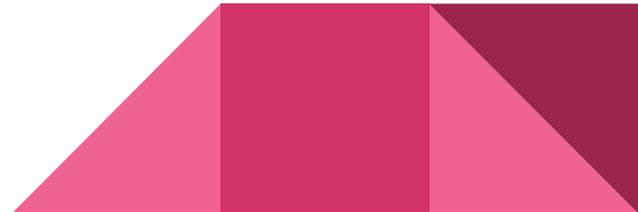
# Purpose and Research Gap

**Purpose:** explore the relationship between risk factors and gendered narratives that enable femicide to occur among male perpetrators of femicide in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, Argentina.



# Methods

- Parent Study <sup>(15)</sup>
- Inclusion criteria:
  - Cis-gender men who committed femicide
- Secondary narrative analysis
  - MAXQDA 20
  - Codebook development (inductive and deductive)
    - Codes of interest: identity, gender, violence, & health
- IRB UBA and Emory University.



## Results

- 33 interviews with 13 participants
- Ages 18-48 ( $\bar{x} = 32$ )
- Victim profile
  - 9 partners
  - 2 ex-girlfriends
  - 2 acquaintances

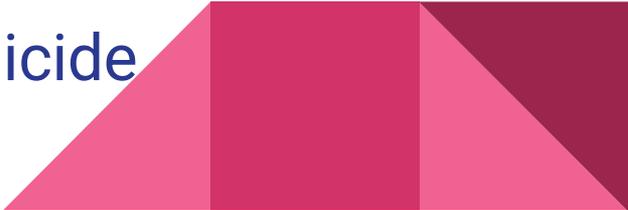
## Themes

1. Abandonment/loss as a narrative that triggers possessiveness
  2. Perpetrators do not view themselves as violent
  3. Violence is a transference of emotional pain (moral righteousness)
-

# Theme 1: Abandonment triggers possessiveness

*“She wanted to leave. She wanted to leave my house. And I said no. And that’s what happened. **It was that she was leaving,** she was putting things together, which I had also bought. And **I said no. That she couldn’t leave whenever she wanted.** That it was my house. And she wasn’t going to leave, just like nothing from one day to the next....**You can’t do that to someone.** You can’t get out of here, move on up and then grab your panties and leave. And so we are at the end of it.”*

Vincent. 20 years old at the time of femicide



# Discussion of theme 1: abandonment triggers possessiveness

- Experiences of abandonment manifest as controlling & possessive behaviors in future relationships:
  - Femicide as a result of men panicking at partner's potential departure – *phenomenological domain*
  - Draws on a specific culturally-available ideas of the effect on lives that this event has, as a means of managing moral character and motive – *narrative domain*
  - In the prospect of loss, violence is seen as a valid and legitimate resource – *neutralization domain*
- Behavioral economics in defending the status quo
  - Violence as restorative<sup>(16)</sup>



## Theme 2: Perpetrators do not view themselves as violent



Subtheme 1: Denial of a gendered motive

Subtheme 2: Understanding the context

## Theme 2: Perpetrators do not view themselves as violent: denial of gendered motive

*"I mean, it didn't look good. And you see that what matters is that it looks good, that they create the story to say it in some way. It doesn't matter that... there was really no intention of hurting her or that something like this had never happened, something so heavy. No. It just matters how they fit things in the situation. And besides, we must not lose sight of this happening at the moment when they bring to light this [thing] of femicide and want to make it an important issue, then they need cases. And I'm not a scapegoat, because what happened happened, but it wasn't femicide. It wasn't that I wanted to kill her because of her status as a woman. I don't know what that means. But to be honest, I feel like I'm a victim of this shitty context."*

Joaquin. 39 at the time of the interview

## Theme 2: Perpetrators do not view themselves as violent: denial of gender motive

- Differentiation with “others” and problematic groups (rapists, “actual violent men”)
- “Unreasonability” of gender-based violence



## Theme 2: Perpetrators do not view themselves as violent: understanding the context

- Referencing context to:
  - Frame the conversation
  - Convey a sense of legitimacy or emotional understanding of the event
  - Used context as a rationale for self-impunity when referencing anti-feminist movements
- Neutralization – Condemning of condemners



## Theme 3: Violence as a transference of emotional pain

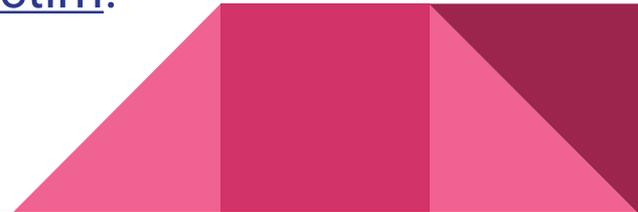
*“It was like I was gathering smoke. And I exploded. I erupted. I grabbed a jar and threw it at her. With all the strength I had. I didn’t think, I just wanted to unload. And I threw a bottle at her. She broke down and started crying and screaming. And I hit her. I wanted to unload. I wanted her to understand what I felt inside. Like that rage.”*

Marcos. 30 at the time of the femicide



# Discussion of Theme 3: Violence as a Transference of Emotional Pain

- Traditional gender norms → underdeveloped emotional regulation skills in young men (10,20)
- Feeling entitled to be violent with a female partner (21)
- Learned stories about:
  - Sentimental response to prior wrongful act
  - Violence is performed on a blameworthy victim.



# Conclusions

- Three main themes structured their accounts:
  - Showed the stories which sustained violence and justified the femicide (harm-inducting narratives)
  - Relate to risk factors
  - Possessiveness, denial of responsibility and diverting blame are instrumental in the use of violence as a valid resource when power is perceived to be in jeopardy
- Even though time lapse! – Deeply-engrained narratives

# Recommendations & Public Health Implications

- Primary prevention that targets perpetrators & potential perpetrators of violence – targeting stories
- Violence prevention
  - Emotion regulation, healthy communication skills and equitable relationships
- Support for Ni Una Menos & ProMundo (22, 23)



# Next Steps

- Violence and Gender
- Future research
  - Larger sample size
  - Include other data sources
  - Conceptualization of sentence



- **Pool data analysis project**





Thanks!  
¡Gracias!

Contact Martín: [mh.dimarco@gmail.com](mailto:mh.dimarco@gmail.com)

Twitter: @MartnDiMarco2

Contact Dabney: [devan01@emory.edu](mailto:devan01@emory.edu)

Twitter: @DabneyEvans