UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Countering the femicide epidemic in Honduras

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Abstract

This paper analyses the crimes committed against women around the world and provides the reader with a both region-based and a worldwide look at the epidemic of femicide in Honduras and around the world. It further suggests possible reasons behind this issue and shows which measures have previously been taken by states and other non-state actors. This paper itself may not be sufficient for the delegates to help them write a resolution, yet it introduces the topic in a comprehensive way. Therefore further research is highly recommended.

Introduction

Femicide is the gender-based hate crime towards women, which is becoming a serious epidemic in various countries around the world. Even though statistically 79% of the intentional homicide victims are men, in the context of family and intimate relationships, women tend to have a higher risk of being murdered. Furthermore, 95% of homicide perpetrators are men, which is statistically consistent worldwide. This article will deal with the issue of Femicide both worldwide and on a regional basis in the shadow of Honduras, analyze the fundamental reasons behind it and help delegates propose possible solutions for the problem.

Key Vocabulary

Homicide: (an act of) murder

Femicide: the crime of killing a woman or women; an occasion when this happens. The neologism made by merging the two words “feminine” and “homicide”, meaning the murdering of a woman

Hate Crime: A crime, typically one involving violence, that is motivated by prejudice on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds.

Infanticide: the crime of killing a child

Overview

“Femicide” is an alternative to the term “homicide” in order to contrast the situation of being murdered for being a woman. This distinction is not made in order to render the homicide of males invisible, but instead, it is to highlight the phenomenon of being intentionally murdered as a result of sexual violence, abuse, enforcement of cultural dogmas or due to other various criminal activities regardless of the status of the perpetrator.
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The definitions and manifestations for “femicide” can vary greatly. Any act of sexual terrorism that causes the death of a woman can be defined as femicide. The acts of femicide are exemplified by the feminist author Diana Russell as intimate partner femicide, femicide due to sexual orientation (i.e. lesbicide), racial femicide, mass femicide, honor and dowry killings in many cultures. Most commonly, women are victimized by their former or current intimate partners, which accounts for the 35% of the femicides worldwide.

Worldwide, 66,000 women are being murdered annually. The femicide rates vary in different regions and countries, however, Latin America is the region with the highest femicide rates, including the number one in the world, namely El Salvador. Overall, it is hard or sometimes impossible to gather data and information regarding femicides, because genders often are not differentiated in murder statistics by the respective countries they take place in or they are just underreported.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNODC is an office established under United Nations in Vienna, Austria in 1997. It was founded with the aim of assisting UN in responding comprehensively with coordination to issues intertwined with each other such as drug abuse and crime prevention, inter alia money laundering, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, organized crime and political corruption.

On November 26, 2012, the Symposium on Femicide was held in the Vienna office of United Nations. The most important outcome of the symposium was that the Vienna Declaration on Femicide, submitted by the Academic Council on the United Nations System, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, was later recognized by the Economic and Social Council in the Resolution 1996/31.

The Vienna Declaration:


United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime exemplifies acts of femicide as:
the murder of women as a result of intimate partner violence
the torture and misogynist slaying of women
the killing of women and girls in the name of “honor”
targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict
dowry-related killings of women
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- the killing of women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity
- the killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender
- female infanticide and gender-based sex selection foeticide
- genital mutilation related deaths
- accusations of witchcraft
- other femicides connected with gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, human trafficking and the proliferation of small arms.

Honduras

Honduras is a Central American country experiencing extremely high rates of criminality, inter alia violence and homicide along with its western neighbors El Salvador and Guatemala. Homicide in Honduras has reached its peak in 2012 with 20 homicides a day on average. This violence can be related to the high rates of illegal drug trafficking. Among these homicides, femicides make the 9.6% of them with 3,923 femicides between 2002 and 2013. Moreover, 53 women were murdered on average every month and 90% of the crimes remained unprosecuted. Before the murders, the women were either raped, burned or tortured. Because more than 90% of the homicides were carried out against men, femicides continue to occur due to the lack of investigations.

El Salvador

El Salvador, the southwestern neighbor of Honduras, is the deadliest country in the world that is not in a state of war, due to gang violence. Gangs dominate daily life in El Salvador with approximately 25,000 gang members at large and 9,000 in prison. The Central American country is also considered the epicenter of the gang crisis in the so-called Northern Triangle that consists of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. In 2016, 5,280 homicides were carried out and in 2017 3,605 homicides, 524 and 429 of which were femicides respectively, according to the report of Amnesty International and The New York Times. Moreover, abortion continued to be banned under any circumstances until a very recent bill in Salvadoran Parliament, which allowed women, whose life is at risk, and minors, who are victims of rape to abort their pregnancies. Furthermore, crimes against women are underreported, such as rape, domestic abuse and verbal harassment due to cultural factors and social pressure.

Guatemala

Women in Guatemala make 51.2% of the population and has the third highest femicide rate in the world after El Salvador and Jamaica with 1-2 murders a day on average, with only 2% of the committed crimes being punished and the rest remaining in impunity. Moreover, femicides figure as the third most common crime that results in death in Guatemala. According to the report of United Nations Human Rights Committee on Violation of Women’s Rights in Guatemala, this Central American country is failing to deal with its femicide issue and failing to pass and enforce laws
Countering the femicide epidemic in Honduras due to femicide not being a low priority to government officials. On the other hand, Guatemala established the Presidential Commission Against Femicide and created the Anti-Femicide unit in their National Police. Consequently, these reforms helped women to report the crimes committed against them, however, it is still in question whether the law enforcement is yet effective and justice for femicide perpetrators is achieved. Gender inequality and femicides are socially tolerated in Guatemalan society. Male judges and government officials tend to be sympathetic to the actions of men, since the issues, such as domestic violence and femicides are private matters belonging to the respective families and houses. Even though the legislation passes laws

**Colombia**

Colombia is among the countries that are dangerous for women with a femicide rate of one murder in every two days. In 2014, 871 women in total were victims of acid attacks only. Furthermore, domestic violence is another issue that needs addressing in Colombia. Cali is the most dangerous Colombian city, which also has the highest femicide rates and the second highest homicide rates in Colombia. The inequality of power between men and women and the lack of resources keep the Colombian women from seeking safety and help. Recently, Colombia has passed laws that define femicide as a crime on its own with a defined punishment of 20 to 50 years of jail time. Acid attacks result in the maximum sentence of 50 years for the perpetrator and the victims get to have better treatment options such as reconstructive surgery and psychological therapy.

**United States**

4 women are murdered every day on average in the United States, however, the femicide rates vary throughout the country. Most femicides take place in southwest and southeast of the US. Femicides tend to take place in neighborhoods with increasing poverty. Availability of weapons is also a negative effect on the rates since most of the murders were carried out with firearms and knives.

**Russian Federation**

Homicide rates in Russia have been rising since the dissolution of Soviet Union. Factors such as extreme poverty, unemployment and unpaid wages caused a tremendous increase in homicides due to organized crime and the Russian mafia in 1990’s, along with many other former socialist states.

**People’s Republic of China**

The practice of female infanticide spans over 2000 years in PRC and its predecessor states as a method of population control. Buddhists believe that the act of murdering a child brings bad karma to the perpetrator, however, the belief of reincarnation eased the guilt over female infanticides and helped Chinese society to condone the murders.
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The Confucian stance on the female infanticides is juxtapositional as well. On one hand, the filial piety lessens the value of children whilst saying that the elderly are more important, the Confucian virtue of Ren emphasizes the importance of being altruistic and that the practice of female infanticides would disrupt the balance between yin and yang. The latter idea was supported by Confucian intellectuals. When the Christian missionaries arrived in China in the 16th century, they witnessed various types of female infanticides throughout China and it was documented that the main reason for this was poverty. Even though the infanticide rates had declined in the 19th century, the introduction of one-child policy during Mao Zedong’s reign reemerged the practice of this crime.

Currently, Chinese families still prefer to have sons rather than daughters, because only the boys will continue to preserve their surnames and they'll financially support the family; conversely, daughters are expected to get married and leave the family upon marriage, partially or completely detach from her own parents and care only for her husband’s family. (Image: baby burials in China, 1865)

Consequently, due to female infanticides and gender-selective abortions, it is estimated that there are 30-40 million more men in the country than women. However, it is also argued that this imbalance is a result of underreported births, especially of females. Even though female infanticides are outlawed in these days, the imbalance between the two gender, the deficit of women, will expectedly cause a wide range of financial, social and political problems.

Turkey

Women in Turkey are facing significant violence and gender-related discrimination. The participation of women in the labour force and access to education is relatively low. The practice of domestic violence, honour killings, forced marriages (especially childhood marriages), sexual and verbal assault, trafficking and violence based on their choice of clothing is widespread, especially in central and eastern regions of the country and the metropolitan cities with high immigration rates..

Turkish constitution bans any discrimination against women as it states: “Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds.” Moreover, the Turkish Civil Code of 1926 acknowledges the equal rights of men and women, bans polygamy and women further possess the legal right to perform abortions.

On the other hand, rates of crime against women have skyrocketed by 1400% between 2002 and 2009. According to official figures, 28,000 women were assaulted, 214 of which were murdered. Also according to a report of the Izmir Bar Association, the crimes against women are not just increasing, but also getting more brutal day by day. The existing feudal societal structure in eastern and southeastern Anatolia and the fact that crimes against women are underreported in the country does not help improve the quality of life for women in Turkey.
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Previous attempts at resolving the issue

One of the most important issues that needs addressing is that even if the legal rights of women are defined in most constitutions around the world, they sometimes might not be implemented thoroughly or not at all executed. This leaves many women around the world vulnerable and helpless in case they are victimized.

In various Central American countries, such as Mexico, Brazil, El Salvador and Guatemala, the so-called “pink” public transportation lines have been established in order to provide women with safer public transportation experiences. El Salvador has established many government centers that specifically provides services for women. However, this system is criticised because it is in a sense gender segregation.

Many Latin American countries now recognize femicide as a crime on its own and it is being punished with 20+ years of jail time. Incorporating femicide in constitutions as a specific crime is an important legal measure, however, many of those countries face serious problems due to not being able to implement them properly.

Further Readings

This study guide provides the reader with a comprehensive overview on the topic that should show the reader the points that they should consider and address to, however, it alone may not be sufficient to help the delegates to write resolutions on their own. Thus, further researching is noteworthy. Should you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact the writer via eden.efe@outlook.com.

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