



## Femicide: The Consummate Expression of Violence Against Women

Our first newsletter of 2017 has been timed to coincide with International Women's Day. We have already touched upon many aspects of Violence Against Women (VAW), but in this issue, we will shed light on the pandemic of femicide around the world.

The United Nations (UN) defines femicide as: the killing of a woman because she is a woman, or the killing of a girl because she is a girl. Simple. The UN recognizes that "Violence Against Women is institutionalized through family structures, social and economic frameworks and cultural and religious traditions", and that because it is institutionalized, it is easy for people to overlook the fact that this type of violence is in fact a crime, committed with impunity. In 2013, the UN published a document called "Femicide: A Global Issue that Demands Action". The paper included an in-depth analysis of the situation and the alarming number of femicides around the world. Femicide is at the extreme end of the continuum in the VAW spectrum. It doesn't happen suddenly; it is usually preceded by other forms of violence and very often at the hands of an intimate partner or a family member of the victim.

For this issue, we collected a few articles that discuss femicide in different countries. The Canadian context has the extreme example of the disappearance of women in First Nations communities. In Mexico, there is an alarming number of women's disappearances and murders. In Russia, trafficking of women for the sex trade to the rest of Europe and other places often ends in femicides and impunity. Different places, different contexts, and different social, economic and cultural aspects make these women vulnerable to violence. And yet, when we look deeply into the ideas that support the structures that allow for this violence, we can find a common thread: hegemonic masculinity.

### Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

The subject of "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada" is a social issue that has received a great deal of attention by the media and the government. According to the Ontario Native Women's Association, Aboriginal families and communities have pointed to the high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada for many years. Aboriginal women make up 16% of all murdered women, and 11% of missing women, yet Aboriginal women only comprise 4.3% of the female population in Canada. The exact number of Indigenous women and girls that have gone missing or have been murdered in Canada over the past 30 to 40 years is in dispute, with some estimating 500 missing women, and others citing statistics of 1,100. The Native Women's Association of Canada has gathered information on 582 cases, but believes the number of missing and murdered women to be much higher. Aboriginal women and girls are the most at-risk group for experiencing violence in Canada. This must be understood in the context of a colonial strategy that sought to dehumanize Aboriginal women. The impacts of colonization, residential schools, involvement with child welfare and intergenerational trauma are factors that put Aboriginal women and girls at risk. These systemic issues have directly caused poor physical and mental health, economic insecurity, homelessness, lack of justice, addictions and low educational attainment levels for Aboriginal women and girls.

In Ottawa, on June 29, 2016, the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States formed a North American Working Group on Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls. This group represented a commitment to coordinate action to address the disproportionate levels of violence faced by Indigenous women and girls. The three countries would exchange knowledge of policies, programs and best practices to prevent and respond to violence against Indigenous women and girls through increased access to justice and health services, with a human rights and culturally-responsive approach. This increased cooperation would address violent crimes against Indigenous women and girls, including human trafficking, within or outside of their communities and across our borders. It would also enhance the response of our justice, health, education, and child welfare systems to violence against Indigenous women and girls.



**Mexico: The Case of Juarez.** Throughout Mexico, the vast majority of violence against women cases are no different than cases occurring in Canada and the United States. Most women suffering violence do so at the hands of an intimate partner. As in the rest of North America, most femicides in Mexico are perpetrated by the victims' current or past intimate partners. The case of Juarez's femicides is very different from the rest of the country. Juarez is an industrial city situated at the border with the United States of America (USA). It is well known that the most dangerous cities in Mexico, with the most drug cartel activity and the most violent crimes, are those along the border with the USA. Femicides in Juarez are no exception to this rule; this border city has the highest ratio of missing women and femicides reported in all of Mexico. Also, femicides in this border town are different in that they are not linked to an intimate partner, but to organized crime; organized abduction of women and femicide. The anecdotal accounts of witnesses and of women who have been able to escape from an attempted abduction, link those incidents to organized crime and to random abductions of women on the street. The bulk of the cases of women reported missing and of human remains found that have been identified as those missing women, also appear to be part of an organized ring of the trafficking of women and the sex trade. It is important to mention that this pandemic of femicides in Juarez is worsened by the authorities' lack of control and unwillingness to investigate and prosecute. Like many other cases of murders linked to organized crime, the authorities in border cities are unable to stand up to the cartels. The cartels usually resort to intimidation and coercion to keep the authorities from getting involved. Cartels in Mexico have far more resources than local prosecutors and law enforcement. Something very important to stress here is that regardless of who the perpetrators of violence against women and femicides are, and the particular circumstances of each case, all violence against women and femicides stem from the same root cause. They are all a consequence of patriarchal ideas that support the hegemonic masculinity that continues to plague our societies. No matter how advanced we think our civilization is, as long as we have gendered crimes, these pervasive ideas are at the core of our social fabric and will perpetuate these insidious crimes.

### Russia – Silence of the Victims

There are over 13 million victims of violence every year in Russia. One of the most worrying aspects is silence: 60 to 70% of victims are not seeking help, 97% do not report the abuse, and only 3% of those who report to authorities, manage to get to trial. In the early 2000's an estimated 50,000 Russian prostitutes who were working abroad were sex slaves. Many had been duped by leaders of organized prostitution rings who attracted them with newspaper ads for positions of models, waitresses, nannies and dancers. Members of one Russian prostitution ring, that reportedly earned \$450 million a year, kept women in hostage-like conditions and beat and raped them.

All attempts to deal with this problem through legislative interventions have been ineffective. Information from secondary sources, interviews with officials, and international conferences have attributed the role of social disorganization, normative violence, and gender inequality for the high rate of spousal homicide and disproportionate female murders in Russia.

The Russian situation illustrates the prominent role of social disorganization in the cases of spousal homicide. However, the contradictory status of women in Russia appears to contribute to the high ratio of female murders in that country.



### India - Systemic Annihilation of Females

Over 3 generations, about 50 million women have been systematically annihilated from India's population, targeted only because they were female. The methods of elimination of females in India are many. They include female feticide, infanticide, starvation of little girls, dowry related murders, "honor" killings, and maternal mortality through repeated and forced abortions. A report published in 2011 in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, from a study conducted jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Harvard School of Public Health, established that girls under five years in India were dying at an abnormally high rate because of the prevalence of domestic violence in their homes that were targeting females. A study gathered data of live births, from 1985 to 2005 and concluded that over the last two decades 1.8 million girls under the age of six years had been killed in India. This genocide is occurring across all sections of society in India, among the illiterate and the educated, among the poor, the middle-class and the wealthy. There is no correlation between female genocide and education, economics, culture and religion. It is not the result of poverty or ignorance, but of extensive and aggressive lawlessness, due to the apathy of the country's system of law and order.



Peel Institute on Violence Prevention | Family Services of Peel  
Monica Riutort BSc. B.A. M.A. **Manager**, Peel Institute on Violence Prevention  
Tel: 905.270.2250 Ext 227 | Email : mriutort@fspel.org | Web: www.fspel.org

