

FEMICIDE OR FEMINICIDE?

On International Women's Day, Peel Institute on Violence Prevention dedicates this newsletter to denounce the global pervasiveness of femicide. The term "femicide" has been broadly defined as a homicide in which the victim is female. The use of the term "femicide" has been introduced and mainly defined by social sciences and by feminist organizations, not by legal systems or criminal codes.

We will start by looking at the term "homicide", which is generally defined as the killing of one human being by another human being. Some sources add "unlawful", "purposely," and/or "deliberate" to the definition, but in general terms, it means the killing of one person by another. Defining the term "femicide" is a little more complex.

The term "femicide" was first introduced publicly in 1976 by feminist and activist Diana Russell, at the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women. Her intent was to call people's attention to the violence and discrimination perpetrated against women. Russell's definition of femicide evolved and changed a couple of times over the last four decades. The latest definition is the following: Femicide is the killing of one or more females by one or more males because they are female.

The Mexican feminist, anthropologist, and congresswoman Marcela Lagarde translated the term femicide to Spanish as feminicidio (feminicide). After reading the book "Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing", by Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell, she thought it was important to introduce the concept of femicide to the Latin-American context. At first, the Spanish word "feminicidio" was meant to be used merely as a translation of femicide. The term "feminicidio" (or in English – feminicide), evolved to define the murder of women as a result of societal structures that disproportionally place women at risk and in vulnerable positions. The term also alludes to the lack of adequate response by the state, law enforcement, and prosecutors to find, process, and convict the perpetrators.

The difference between the two terms has been the subject of discussion in feminist circles in Latin America. For this reason, Diana E. H. Russell has argued against the use of the word feminicide in English. She suggests that the term "femicide" include the indication of misogyny in those murders and that it should be the only term utilized. She acknowledges that feminicide includes the distinctive component of impunity in its definition, but she thinks only one term, femicide, should still be used. To summarize, femicide has been defined as the violent killing of women because they are women or the assassination of women because of their gender. The term feminicide evolved to indicate two distinctive elements of the murder of women: the misogynistic societal structures that allow for these murders to occur and the impunity with which these murders are addressed.



FEMINICIDE IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT – MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Though its origins are from the Global South, femicide has roots and applications in North American culture as well. Within the Canadian context, the concept of femicide can be used to dissect the current epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women, whose cases have largely gone uninvestigated. Wania Pasinato describes femicide as occurring because of the “silence, omission, negligence, and expediency of authorities” Diana E. H. Russell also defines femicide according to the state’s reaction (or lack thereof) to pervasive violence against women. We expand on these central tenets by including the social conditions within society which allow femicide to prosper. How then can we connect this to the plight of Indigenous women in Canada in getting the support and resources they deserve in their time of need? In Canada, over 600 Indigenous women have been murdered or are currently missing, with little regard or concern from law enforcement agencies. This statistic joins countless other homicides that were able to occur because of systemic disregard toward Indigenous women. Only in recent years have social activists captured the attention of the criminal justice system in launching inquiries into this matter.

There are several aspects of femicide present in the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The systemic failure of the criminal justice system to investigate or take seriously any of the complaints brought forward by the loved ones of these women speaks directly to a culture of femicide. In addition to institutions such as law enforcement agencies, the media plays a large role in the exclusion of these issues. Paulina Garcia-Del Moral argues that in Canada, the media frames Indigenous women as disposable. They are thus rendered invisible to the violence perpetrated against them through both gender and racial-specific discourses. These perspectives are largely upheld by the violent history of colonization still deeply embedded in our society. Indigenous women have suffered discrimination and disproportionate mistreatment by other institutions as well, including healthcare, the education system, correctional facilities, and more. Indigenous women face simultaneous hyper-visibility through their criminalization and invisibility in discussions of violence against women – this combination has proven lethal for their livelihood in Canada.

While femicide is a gender-based concept, it is important to combine it with analyses of race and socioeconomic status, as well. It is integral to understand the experience of Indigenous women through the lens of gender, in combination with other systemic oppression's to gain a holistic understanding of their intersecting identities. Women’s rights are human rights – Indigenous rights are no exception to this framework. A culture of femicide has allowed violence against Indigenous women to flourish, and to counter this, we must deconstruct the social conditions in societies which have allowed such violence to occur.

FEMICIDE: AT A GLANCE

- Vast majority of all murders of women are femicide
- 148 women and girls were killed in Canada in 2018; 36% were Indigenous women
- The rate of Indigenous femicide is 2.5x higher than non-Indigenous femicide
- Canadians collectively spend \$7.4 billion toward the aftermath of spousal violence
- Two-thirds of Canadian women report feeling worried while waiting for public transit alone at night, 2.2x more than their male counterparts
- 41% of Canadian women, nearly 4x more than their male counterparts, feel fearful walking alone at night in their neighbourhoods
- According to the Annual Femicide List, as curated by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Homes, 47 women and 1 young boy died between November 25, 2017 and November 24, 2018, in Ontario, as a result of femicide.



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@fspeel.org - **Web:** www.fspeel.org



FAMILY SERVICES OF PEEL
Since 1971

Editors: Monica Riutort, Aida Carlos. **Collaborators:** Chandra Coomaraswamy, Madeleine Beam, Yagana Samim, Chuck MacLean, and Sandra Rupnarain. **Graphic Designer:** Yagana Samim. We welcome volunteer writers, reports, artists, cartoonists, photographers, and distributors.