



## **Input to the Special Rapporteur: Femicide in the context of Palestinian society in Israel**

Submitted by Kayan Feminist Organization

April 2021

### Background and Statistics

Violence affects Palestinian women's daily lives in Israel in multiple and devastating forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, economic, social, and political. The number of femicide cases in Palestinian society in Israel has soared over the past decade. In the period from 2011-2020, 95 Palestinian women in Israel were murdered by their partners or other male relatives. According to statistics from the Israel Police, in the period from 2015-2020, 149 women were murdered in Israel. Of these, 65 victims (44 percent) were Arab women, while Arab women represent only 21 percent of all women in Israel. According to these statistics, Arab women are murdered at double the average rate of femicide in Israel. This phenomenon is part of a broader problem of violence, including gender-based violence, in Palestinian society in Israel, which was further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, reported gender-based violence in Arab society in Israel in 2020 increased by 40% compared to the previous year. According to a study by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 25 women were murdered in Israel in 2020; 21 of these murders had gender-based motives and can be classified as femicides. Out of these 21 femicides, 12 victims (57 percent) were Arab women, representing an increased rate compared to previous years. Thirty-five percent of these cases featured women whose situations of domestic abuse were already previously known to the state authorities (the police or social welfare offices), and 20 percent of victims had previously filed police reports against their eventual murderer. Charges were filed against the perpetrator in only 33 percent of cases. According to the Knesset Research and Information Center in 2020, between 2019 and 2020, 35 percent of femicides were perpetrated by the victim's husband, and 60 percent were perpetrated by either the husband or a male family member.

### Kayan's Research Report on Femicide

In April 2021, Kayan published an in-depth research report on the phenomenon of femicide in Palestinian society in Israel called, "Femicide: a grim reality and possibilities for resistance" (full report [here](#)). This report addresses previously unexplored perspectives on femicide, and is based on a comprehensive research study performed in 2020. The report sheds light on the phenomenon of femicide of Palestinian women by analyzing these crimes from a feminist and societal point of view. It is an important contribution to the existing body of research on violence against women and also offers recommendations for addressing the problem of femicide in the future.

Kayan's research study on femicide was the first ever investigation of its kind focused on Palestinian society in Israel. One of the main viewpoints explored in the research was the perspective of the families and friends of femicide victims – a viewpoint that contributes to a better understanding of the political, societal, and economic structures that contribute to the perpetuation of femicide. In addition, Kayan's report also explores the attitudes and shortcomings of state authorities, chiefly the Israel Police, in confronting femicide in Palestinian society. It also explores Israel's compliance with international treaties concerning violence against women, especially the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).



### Societal Factors that Contribute to Femicide

Femicide itself is a distinct crime: its key motive is linked to a patriarchal social structure that perpetuates women's inferiority and subordination to men, which subsequently legitimizes violence directed at women, including the ultimate violence: murder. Research suggests that a common motive in femicide cases is the woman's decision to pursue independence from her abuser (spouse or male family member). This is considered a threat to the structure of male society which sees a woman as a dependent property and not an independent personality. Kayan's study confirmed that the phenomenon of femicide does not result solely from personal motives, but rather reflects a patriarchal social system that legitimates men's control of women's bodies.

In the specific context of Palestinian society in Israel, a patriarchal social environment intersects with oppressive policies from the Israeli state that fuel violence in Palestinian society. Palestinian women thus encounter overlapping oppressions: as a marginalized minority in a discriminatory and increasingly religious-nationalistic Jewish state, and as women in a patriarchal society. The contribution of the political conflict also cannot be underestimated, as legitimated violence and colonialism often turn women and their bodies into an arena for conflict resolution.

Finally, studies and surveys also show a connection between the economic situation and the level of education and the increase in violence against women. A survey by the Al-Jalil Association (2013) showed that the lower the level of men in terms of income and education, the greater the violence against women.

### Family Perspectives

Kayan's field researchers conducted 22 interviews with families and close friends of 14 women who were murdered over the past five years. The responses ranged from identifying and empathizing with the victim to blaming the victim for her own murder (for her silence or because she transgressed social norms). Some responses greatly empathized with the women who were murdered and directed the blame at society in general, while still disregarding the particular dynamics and motives underlying the murders. In most cases, family members did not take serious steps to attempt to end the situation of violence before the murder took place, due to social norms regarding this type of violence as "normal," fear of the aggressor, or skepticism that any change would occur. Interviewees harshly criticized the work of police and of welfare authorities, as they were most often well aware of existing domestic violence in the vast majority of cases and yet did nothing to protect the women. Interviewees all pointed to complaints being ignored and scorned despite repeated filings.

### The Role of the Media

One of the aspects addressed by Kayan's report is the local Arab media's coverage of femicide. Analysis showed that the media prefers to focus on the "action" and "drama" of femicide cases but evades confronting social norms and structures – and in doing so, perpetuates them. In addition, examination of media coverage showed that most media outlets preferred a narrative description of the crimes based on police announcements concerning the cases and did not attempt to analyze or explore the true or more profound reasons or circumstances for the murder. In most cases, Arab media did not convey responses by the victims' families and ignored them. The media also failed its duty to present important and relevant context for recognizing and addressing the phenomenon of femicide, while assuming patriarchal jargon and terminology in its coverage. These findings are crucial



for the study and prevention of femicide and broader social change given the media's influence over public discourse and issues for debate, and its capacity to lead to perceptual and conceptual change.

### The Role of Israeli State Institutions

Kayan analyzed the role of Israeli state institutions, including the Israel Police, the Office of the State Attorney, and the Ministry of Justice. Testimonies collected through field interviews revealed a disturbing reality of faulty police work and disregard for complaints. Some interviewees even accused the police of collaborating with the perpetrators. These testimonies underscored a nationwide trend of institutionalized discrimination within the police in cases of violence in Palestinian society and specifically against Palestinian women. These flaws are reflected in practices such as early parole for murderers; consistent failure to provide protection to women subjected to threats; and plea bargains that reduce the sentence during trial. Statistics also confirm that most cases of violence and murder of Palestinian women remain unsolved and unresolved, compared to the speed with which criminals are indicted when a Jewish woman is murdered (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2020).

Kayan also directed requests under the Freedom of Information Law (1998) for data on femicides in Palestinian society to all three institutions mentioned above. To the police, Kayan requested information on 58 Palestinian women murdered between 2015 and 2020. Unfortunately, the police refused to provide any information regarding these 58 cases besides general figures showing the total number of Israeli women murdered as well as the number of "non-Jewish" women murdered in a given year (see the following table).

Year	Total number of women murdered	Number of "non-Jewish" women murdered
2013	32	2
2014	22	4
2015	28	16
2016	28	16
2017	21	9
2018	29	17
2019	18	10
2020 (prior to July 15, 2020)	16	8

Upon requests for clarification as well as for specific data on Arab women, the police claimed that part of the data was not digitized and that therefore providing the requested information would require intensive resources, resources it was not required to allocate under the Freedom of Information Law. The police referred Kayan to the Ministry of Justice for data regarding indictments. The Ministry too replied it was unable to provide the information due to the unreasonable efforts it would require. Because the Israel Police and the Ministry of Justice failed to provide the necessary information, Kayan petitioned the Jerusalem District Court to oblige both bodies to provide precise details regarding the cases referred to in the freedom of information request. This work is ongoing.



## Recommendations

Kayan's report presented several recommendations, which are summed here:

1. Femicide of Arab women must be addressed from the special perspective of the victims' families because of their knowledge of and close relationship with the victims. In this context, new research must be undertaken; new data and findings can shape new practices for addressing these crimes.
2. In-depth research projects must be undertaken with women who survive the agonizing experience of domestic and other gender-based violence. Personal accounts may suggest effective new paths for future action.
3. Educational programs and discourse at all levels of Arab society in Israel are necessary, including training for journalists and media workers to raise awareness of issues related to femicide.
4. It is imperative to reshape reporting on femicide by media and civil society institutions. Reporting and documentation must cease to rely on police reports and announcements and their dictation of a specific narrative, which in turn perpetuates the hegemonic social attitudes justifying murder – overtly or implicitly.
5. The report offers several findings in terms of the work of state authorities regarding inadequate treatment and poor response to violence against women. In this context, our recommendations include training police officers who deal with cases of violence against women, while increasing and institutionalizing collaboration between police and welfare authorities.
6. Collaboration between human rights organizations and journalism organizations to limit the frequent use of gag orders in investigations of femicide of Arab women. Unrestricted use of gag orders undermines the public's right to know, and the public interest in conducting an investigation and finding the offenders must be balanced with the public's right to know, which enables public scrutiny of state authorities, especially in the age of technology when there is limited control over the flow of information.
7. This report also suggests practices designed to increase oversight on state institutions and subject them to active public scrutiny. Focused recommendations for improving police and state attorney's office operations include creating a digital database incorporating all relevant information about violence against women: identity, age, nationality, social status, and gag orders; obligating the courts and state attorney's office to update police regarding any protection order; increasing individual communications with threatened women; use of electronic bracelets for abusers; and granting legal status to women's organizations.

## Conclusion

Femicide in Palestinian society in Israel is a serious and under-addressed problem that all sectors of society should participate in fighting against. It is an urgent issue that not only endangers the lives of Palestinian women but threatens society as a whole. We recommend further research and exploration of the issue, as well as action from both civil society and state institutions to address the conditions that contribute to this phenomenon.

*Kayan's full report on femicide can be found at:*

<https://www.kayanfeminist.org/publications/femicide-grim-reality-and-possibilities-resistance>