

Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls

What are gender-related killings of women and girls?

Gender-related killings are those killings that have as main motive or cause gender-based discrimination. Terms such as femicide and feminicide, among others, have been used to define such killings.

The most obvious examples of gender-related killings include, *inter alia*, rape-murder, intimate-partners violence escalating into murder, dowry-deaths, so-called "honour killings" and deaths arising from harmful practices or neglect.

Gender-related killings tend not to be isolated incidents that arise suddenly and unexpectedly, but rather they often are ultimate act in a continuum of gender-based discrimination and violence.

While manifestations differ, they all have in common the socio-political and economic disempowerment of women and systematic disregard for the equal enjoyment of human rights by women.

Are gender-related killings human rights violations?

As acts of extreme gender-based violence against women, gender-motivated killings constitute a serious violation of human rights.

Any act of violence against women perpetrated in the private or public sphere, whether by state or non-state actors, invokes the due diligence obligations of States to prevent, investigate, punish and provide compensation for all acts of violence.

Human rights treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders have condemned specific forms of gender-related killings, including femicide, honour-related killings, systematic killings, disappearances and witchcraft-related killings of women. They have also raised concerns in relation to the significant obstacles for women in accessing justice, the climate of impunity surrounding such cases, and the systematic failure of States to investigate or provide redress.

Did you know?

Although comprehensive statistics are not available, existing studies and research point to the fact that globally, the prevalence of different manifestations of gender-related killings is increasing.

Women subjected to continuous violence are always on "death row, always in fear of execution".

Ms. Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences (A/HRC/20/16)

- Globally, 38% of all murders of women are committed by their intimate partners
- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that 5,000 women globally are murdered by family members each year in so-called "honour killings"
- The killing of women accused of sorcery/witchcraft is reported as a significant phenomenon in countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands. For example In Papua New Guinea, cases of torture and murder of an estimated 500 women accused of practising sorcery/witchcraft have been reported.
- Dowry-related murders continue to be a widespread practice in some South Asian countries. For example, statistics for the period 2007 to 2009 show that there have been between 8,093 and 8,383 reported cases of dowry deaths in India
- Female infanticide remains a critical concern in a number of countries today. In recent decades, sex-ratio imbalances in favour of boy children have grown in a number of Asian countries, and there is a broad agreement concerning the problem of gender-biased sex selection.
- In Mexico and Central America, the growing phenomena of organized crime, human and drug trafficking and the proliferation of small arms have brought a considerable increase in the rates of killings of women. Some estimate that approximately 740 "femicides" (as gender-related killings are commonly referred to in Latin America) occurred between 1993 and 2009 in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

How can gender-related killings be addressed?

The concept of gender-motivated killings of women and girls is linked to the existence of a system of structural discrimination against them. Stopping gender-motivated killings require therefore a holistic approach including legal, administrative, policy, and other measures to address the social political, economic, cultural and other factors that perpetuate discrimination and violence.

Such approach also encompasses: promoting societal transformation, including the eradication of harmful stereotypes; developing information systems and good quality data on gender-motivated killings; ensuring adequate enforcement by police and the judiciary of civil remedies and criminal sanctions; and ensuring an adequate provision of services for women victims of violence.

An aspect to which OHCHR is devoting specific attention is the need to address impunity. Reasons for impunity vary. However, some basic steps to fight impunity include:

- Addressing the culture of discrimination within law enforcement and judicial institutions and the lack of capacity which often result into negligent investigations and a lack of sanction for perpetrators. This can be done through adequate institutionalized training and the development of internal manuals/protocols and related discipline and sanction mechanisms. Ensuring adequate representation of women in these institutions is also crucial. Creating special police units or courts is another promising practice.
- Ensuring an adequate legal framework to prosecute different forms of gender-related killings and the elimination of discriminatory provisions in the legislation, including mitigating factors for "crimes of passion".
- Ensuring prevention and protection measures for victims, witnesses and their families, allowing for participation in the criminal process.

The work of OHCHR

OHCHR's work attaches great importance to addressing impunity for gender-related killings. To this end, in the Latin American region, OHCHR has assisted the development of relevant legal frameworks and supported efforts to strengthen investigations and judicial responses.

- OHCHR has supported the development of special laws on violence against women, including gender-related killings (or "femicide") in El Salvador and in Bolivia. In Mexico, in 2009, the OHCHR Office issued a publication on femicide providing guidance as to the development of related national legislation.
- In 2011, the OHCHR Regional Office in Panama supported the elaboration of the Protocol for the investigation of femicide in El Salvador, which was approved by the Attorney General.
- A Model Protocol for the investigation of femicide in Latin America region is currently being developed jointly by OHCHR and UN Women. This Protocol aims at ensuring that gender-specific aspects are taken into account in formulating hypothesis, in analysing the crime scenes and in identifying necessary expert evidence.
- A number of OHCHR Offices are monitoring the decisions of the recently established specialized tribunals and are providing courts with technical assistance, including training of judges on international standards and principles regarding women's rights. In the Dominican Republic, OHCHR is undertaking an analysis of current judicial decisions regarding killings of women with a view to identifying possible obstacles to adequate judicial responses.

OHCHR was asked to report to the 29th session of the Human Rights Council on good and promising practices to effectively prevent, prosecute and punish gender-related killings of women and girls. OHCHR works closely with UNODC and UN Women in this endeavour.

Normative standards and further reading

- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), [General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against Women \(1993\)](#)
- [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) (1993, A/RES/48/104)
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General Recommendation No. 28: the Core Obligations of States Parties \(Article 2\) \(2010\)](#)
- Human Rights Committee, [General Comment 28: equality of rights between men and women \(2000\)](#)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, UN Doc. [A/HRC/10/16 \(focused on gender-related killings of women\)](#)
- World Health Organization, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council- [Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence \(2013\)](#)