

Tracing back the steps. Using life histories of intimate partner femicide perpetrators in Latin America to identify prevention points

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Background

- Femicide: The killing of women or girls based on their gender
 - Heterogeneous legal frameworks/definitions (Dawson, 2022)
 - Under-reporting (Monckton Smith, 2022)
 - Reluctance to conduct research with perpetrators (Brookman, 2015)
 - Institutional barriers
- Research Foci
 - Statistical patterns, risk factors, legal protections & risk assessment
 - Emphasis on criminality and pathologization/mental health of perpetrators (Bieras, 2021)
 - Limited recent on perpetrator narratives (sense making) (Duff, Tree, Mathews, Abrahams, Presser, Segato) and life-course (background factors)(Dobash, Mathews, Johnson) (Evans et al, 2022)

Context: Latin America

- Uprise in social movements
- National laws
 - Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and others.
- Persistent statistical trend
 - Plateau in the femicides rate for the last decade in the region (UNODC, 2022)
 - 6.8 (LatAm), 4.7 (Honduras), 1. 7 (Argentina) per 100,000



Research Questions and Methods

If femicide is the extreme end point in a violent relationship, and victim and perpetrator do not live in social isolation...

- Action: What strategies are being used by offenders to manage and camouflage their violent behaviors before the femicide?
- Discourse: What narratives sustain these practices throughout the relationship?

Crime in Latin America (CRIMLA)

Narrative approach

Open-ended and sequential interviews: 3 sessions (120 min. each)
Life timelines

Sample:

Frame: quota sample (crime, age group and country)
Femicide: purposive sample

Participants:

Male femicide perpetrators (in prison)
Language and age group were not exclusion criteria

Analysis:

MAXQDA 20
Initial deductive coding (pre-established codebook)
Open/inductive coding and later axial coding
Thematic analysis: about practices and narratives




Results

- 41 cases (123 sessions) from men in Argentina (n=20), Brazil (n=6), Chile (n=3), Honduras (n=4), Mexico (n=5), Venezuela (n=3)
- Age: Range=18-55; Mean=36
- Intimate femicides: 35 partners, 6 former partners

Warning: Sensitive content and quotes

Results

Strategies over time in the relationship and severity of harm



THEMES	ACTIONS	NARRATIVES
Breaking up bonds (close networks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fights and conflicts with victim's networks• Strategies to convince• Neutralisation and rationalisation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Me or them• Jealousy and possession• Loss and abandonment
Conflicts with the 'outside' world	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weakening of spaces of socialisation• Changes in intimate and relationship dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Me or them• Jealousy and possession• Loss and abandonment
Targeting the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Body control strategies• Locking strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Losing/Lack of control• Help
Blocking access to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of patriarchal notions of women's inclusion in labour market• Construction of tensions between intimate and working life• Direct threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resetting the balance of power• Abandonment
Blocking access to (healthcare) institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intervening in usual care practices• Blocking access to violence-specific programs• Prohibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Denial of injury• Victimisation• The problematic outside
Strengthening bonds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reciprocal construction of legitimation of IPV	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support networks

1. Breaking up bonds

Practices

- Fights and conflicts with the victims' networks (friends, family, colleagues, and neighbours)
 - Tension with key people in victim's circle
- Strategies to convince
 - Actions guided to convince, manipulate or, in some cases, coerce women.
- Strategies of neutralisation and rationalisation
 - Use of prevailing discourses to explain and justify the conflict with people

Narratives

▪ Me or them

“I told her that deep down she had to choose between her cousins or me. Not because he wanted her to get away from his family, but because there was no way, there was no way (raises his voice) for us to be together” (Matías, 36, Arg.).

2. Conflict with the outside

Practices

- Weaken the places of socialisation (outside of the relationship)
 - Actions guided to limit the interaction with the 'outside'
- Change in the intimate and relationship dynamics
 - Transformation of the socialisation circuits, the leisure activities, etc.

Narratives

- Jealousy and possession
 - *"I am jealous, I know that, but I recognise it; but just thinking that she might be with one of her male friends drives me crazy"* (Darío, 29, Arg.).
- Loss and abandonment
 - *"I lived afraid of being abandoned, like my mom did, and I think I acted like that because of that (...). I felt I was going to die if that happened"* (Héctor, 47, Chi.).

3. Targeting the body

Practices

- Strategies to control the body
 - Development of strategies to control the victim's body (forced medication, insults and criticism of her body, comments about her outfits)
- Strategies to lock her in (house, neighbourhood, etc.)
 - Development of direct strategies to lock her up

Narratives

- Lack/losing control
"I think that when one is out of one's mind, I mean, I loose any control of myself, of the things I do. I felt in that trap" (Antonio, 38, Ven.).
- Help
"I always had her in my mind, to love her, to take care of her. All of the things I did were thinking of her and trying to make her life better" (Héctor, 47, Chi.).

4. Blocking access to work

Practices

- Pushing patriarchal ideas about women in the workplace
 - Use of dominant discourses against women in workplace (performance, children, emotionality)
- Stating a tension between intimate and work lives
 - Stating that her work life threatens their intimate life (usual dynamics, sexual life, family arrangements)
- Direct threats
 - Direct confrontation about her work

Narratives

- Disempowerment

“In a relationship responsibilities are divided, agreed on and she did not take care of her part. Because she was greedy” (Luciano, 51, Chi.).
- Abandonment

“They (women) start working and then they stop caring about you. They destroy themselves that way. Our family was never the same after she started teaching” (Matías, 29, Arg.)

5. Blocking access to (healthcare) institutions

Practices

- Distancing her from usual healthcare practices
 - Progressive block of her usual care practices
- Distancing and blocking of violence-specific programs
 - Complot against these programs and any risk assessment
- Prohibition
 - Direct prohibition to contact programs/professionals

Narratives

- Denial of harm
 - *“There was nothing wrong with her, she was OK (...), the relationship was not actually violent” (Luciano, 51, Chi.).*
- Victimisation
 - *“She did it just to hurt me (raises voice). She did it to manipulate me, because she knew that if she would go (to the hospital) they would think the evil one was me” (Marcos, 41, Chi.).*
- Conflict with the ‘outside’
 - *“Why would she want to create more problems? We had enough and no one, no one would be able to help us, but ourselves” (Sergio, 45, Ven.).*

6. Strengthening bonds with peers

Practices

- Reciprocal construction of legitimation of IPV
 - Neutralisation of aggression is encouraged and harm is veiled (re-signified)
- Seeking strategic support from friends
 - Offenders request Friends to cover directly or indirectly their aggression

Narrative

- Support narrative
“I tell you, without them I would have gone mad, they were a touchstone. Like escaping a storm, and realising that everything had gone terribly bad” (Matías, 29, Arg.).
- Scape goat/Condemning the condemners
“My friends told me they (judges) used my case to increase the number of femicides in the country” (Matías, 29, Arg.).
- Himpathy/Collusion
“Guillermo knew that if she made a formal claim, both would lose. So he ended up helping me” (Horacio, 40, Arg.).

Limitations

- Discursive data
- Sample and context factors (prison, specific battering men programs)
- Stigma and labels
- Despite these limitations this analysis:
 - Allows to link actions and discourses
 - Provides nuance to pre-existing literature
 - Provides first-hand data of femicide cases

Conclusions

- Practices and narratives
 - Commonality in spite of different contexts
 - Actions are connected to wider and legitimised discourses
- Prevention points
 - Unaware institutions?
 - Male peers as accomplices
 - Time

Thank you!

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Interamerican Network against Femicide (RIAF): <https://riaf.red/>