



The Persistence of Indolence: Femicides in Puerto Rico, 2014-2018 Executive Summary

This report is in reaction to the marked and systematic indolence exhibited by the government authorities (the Police Bureau, Department of Justice, Court Administration Office, Department of Health, and Bureau of Forensic Sciences) when it comes to thoroughly documenting the femicide situation in Puerto Rico, disclosing it to the people, and implementing preventive measures.

This report intends to document femicides in Puerto Rico using international comparison standards and to promote public policy recommendations aimed at the reduction or eradication of the phenomenon. The study was conducted from a public health perspective; we analyzed femicides by applying concepts and methods typically used to detect patterns and trends in mortality.

We define femicide following the classification recommended by the European Institute for Gender Equality: the killing of a woman by an intimate partner or the death of a woman as a result of a practice that is harmful to women, regardless of motive. (EIGE, 2017, p. 5) Under this definition we also include women murdered by partners, ex-partners, or strangers.

We identified and analyzed 266 femicide cases from 2014-2018, using different sources of information such as: news reports, mortality data from the Puerto Rico Registry of Vital Statistics, and demographic information from the United States Census. We were not able to include the Police Bureau's data, due to their unwillingness to disclose individual case information. We were, however, able to compare their aggregated statistics on murdered women to the data that we gathered. We found that the Police Department reported between 11% and 27% fewer cases female murder cases annually than the results of this investigation. Such substantial mistakes year after year suggest that the Police Department neither updates nor is interested in checking the validity of their own records.

In Puerto Rico, 1 femicide takes place every 7 days. This is equivalent to an average femicide rate of 3.00 femicides for every 100,000 women. According to the classification used in the report titled *Global Burden of Armed Violence, Every Body Counts*, rates exceeding 3.00 femicides for every 100,000 women are considered high. In fact, it was evidenced that Puerto Rico is among countries with high femicide rates, like the Dominican Republic (3.2) and Peru (3.3). Puerto Rico was also compared to the United States, where the federal government does not classify based on the concept of femicide. Nevertheless, we observed that Puerto Rico had higher femicide rates than the United States from 2014-2017. When compared to the 50 states and Washington DC, Puerto Rico has the thirteenth highest rate, tied with the state of Tennessee.



Women with a low educational level have femicide rates almost 5 times higher than other women in their age group, and women between the ages of 25-34 are at greater risk. Femicides occur mainly in the women's homes or in the homes of their family members, and 58% of the women killed are murdered with firearms.

As a discipline, public health demands that we identify and promote courses of action aimed at reducing and eventually eradicating femicides. Backed empirical evidence, we conclude this report with 6 recommendations aimed at promoting the reduction and eradication of femicides in Puerto Rico:

- Create a femicide surveillance system
- Train healthcare personnel and other professionals
- Train the personnel of the Police Bureau, the Courts, and other law enforcement agencies
- Increase femicide research and prevention
- Reduce weapon availability and possession
- Promote social and gender equality and a culture of nonviolence