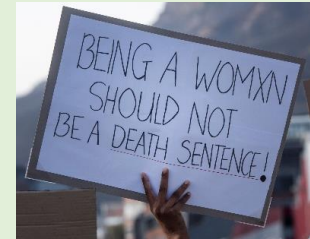




Femicide and Intimate Partner Violence in South Africa – recent findings 29 July 2022

Gender-based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) has become an unfortunate part of the South African landscape and affects scores of women on a daily basis. Print, electronic and social media report and reflect cases on an almost daily basis.



At the release of the 2021/22 fourth quarter crime statistics in February 2022, the Minister of Police remarked that there have been significant decreases in crimes such as sexual assault, attempted sexual offences and contact sexual offences. In response the Portfolio Committee on Police remarked that despite the marked decline in numbers, the high number of GBVF cases remained cause for concern. Looking at the comparative numbers year on year, it does appear that there was a decline, however comparing the numbers for rape, sexual assault and attempted sexual assault from April 2021 to March 2022, it appears that these have increased on a quarterly basis. As an example, Sexual Assault cases increased from 1 900 in quarter one to 2 165 in quarter four. Domestic Violence related cases have also seen an increase.

Recently the South African Medical Research Council released the findings of the third National Femicide Study, which examined women murdered in 2017. Previous studies were undertaken in 1999 and 2009. The 2017 study focused on whether there is any evidence that the national efforts to combat GBV are having any impact on the problem of femicide.¹

Using multiple imputation techniques alongside data from medico-legal mortuaries, autopsy reports and police interviews and dockets, it was estimated that a total of 2 407 women aged 14 years and older were murdered in South Africa in 2017. SAPS data for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, indicates that a total of 2 930 women aged 18 and older were murdered, as well as 294 girls.

Table 1: Femicide rates across the three studies: per 100 000 female population*

	1999 Rate (95% CI)	2009 Rate (95% CI)	2017* Rate (95% CI)
Femicide overall	24.7 (17.7; 31.6)	12.9 (9.3; 16.5)	11.2 (10.2; 12.2)
Intimate partner femicide	8.8 (6.2; 11.2)	5.6 (4.0; 7.2)	4.8 (4.2; 5.3)
Non-intimate partner femicide	8.6 (6.2; 11.1)	4.2 (3.0-5.5)	4.4 (3.8; 4.9)

*Age standardized rates

** In 1999 and 2017 the IPF and NIPF rates do not add up to the overall Femicide rate (2009 adds up) because of missing information mainly as result of not locating murder dockets within the SAP's System. In 2017 murder dockets could not be located for 220 cases and COVID-19 conditions increased the number of interviews that could not be completed (160). This is despite months of trying to set up meetings with Investigating Officers.

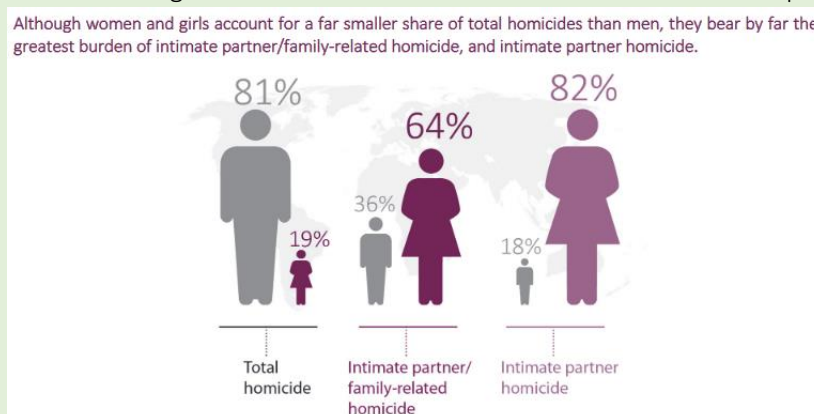
¹ South African Medical Research Council, 2022, Decrease in Femicide in South Africa – three national studies across 18 years

The SAMRC study found that the overall femicide rate, as well as the intimate partner femicide rate has decreased between 1999 and 2017, however the non-intimate partner femicide rate has increased between 2009 and 2017. While it is clear that the femicide figures have declined, it must be noted that the average rate for South Africa as compared to the global rate is alarming.

World Bank data on intentional homicides of females indicates that as at 2018, the global average per 100 000 of the female population was 2.2 – the figure for South Africa was reported at 9.5 per 100 000 women.² The 2017 SAMRC study reports an overall femicide rate of 11.2/100 000. Further verification by AfricaCheck found that for 2017/18 the adult female murder rate was 15.2 – this relates to a woman being murdered every 3 hours in South Africa during that period.³ Recent research by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on 2020 global estimates relating to the killings of women and girls by intimate partners or family members reveals a global rate of 1.2 per 100 000 of the female population – the rate is highest in Africa at 2.7 per 100 000 of the female population.⁴

The UNODC highlights that:⁵

- Only one in five homicides at the global level are perpetrated by an intimate partner or other family member, yet women and girls make up the vast majority of those deaths. Victim/perpetrator disaggregation reveals a large disparity in the shares of male and female victims of homicide committed by intimate partners or other family members: 36 per cent male versus 64 per cent female victims.
- Women also bear the greatest burden in terms of intimate partner violence. The disparity between the shares of male and female victims of homicide perpetrated exclusively by an intimate partner is substantially larger than for victims of homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members: roughly 82 per cent female victims versus 18 per cent male victims.
- Some 47,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members in 2020. This means that, on average, a woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes.
- Africa is the region with the highest femicide level relative to the size of its female population.⁶



² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.FE.P5?end=2020&start=1990&view=chart>

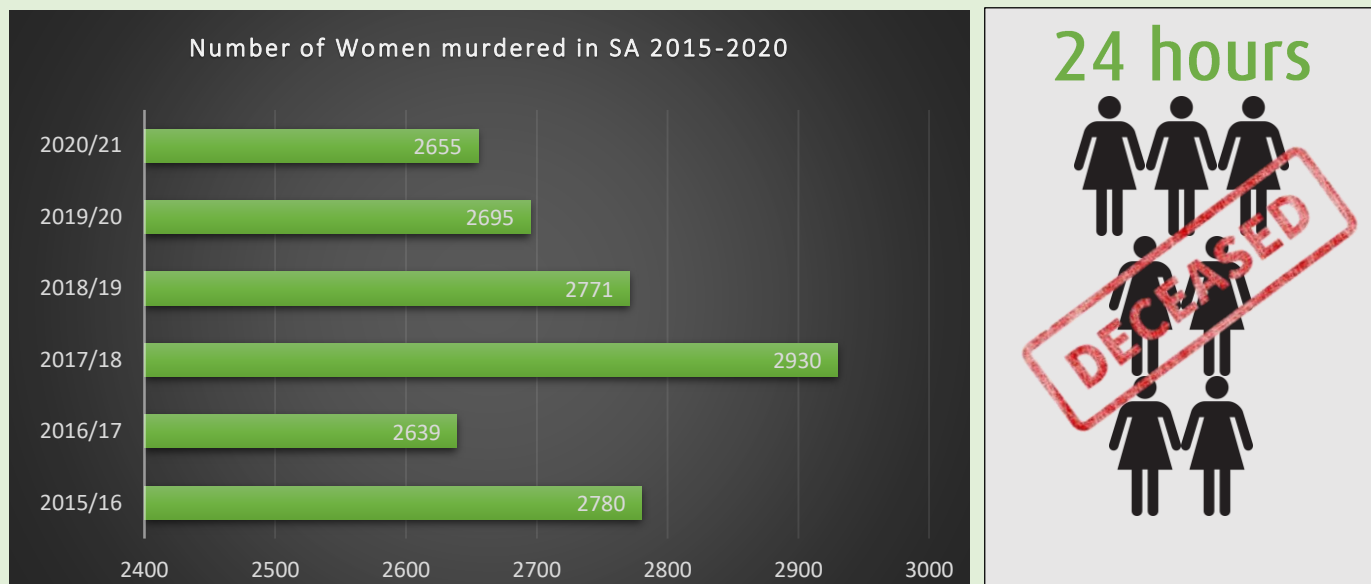
³ <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/five-facts-femicide-south-africa>

⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021, Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members, Global estimates 2020

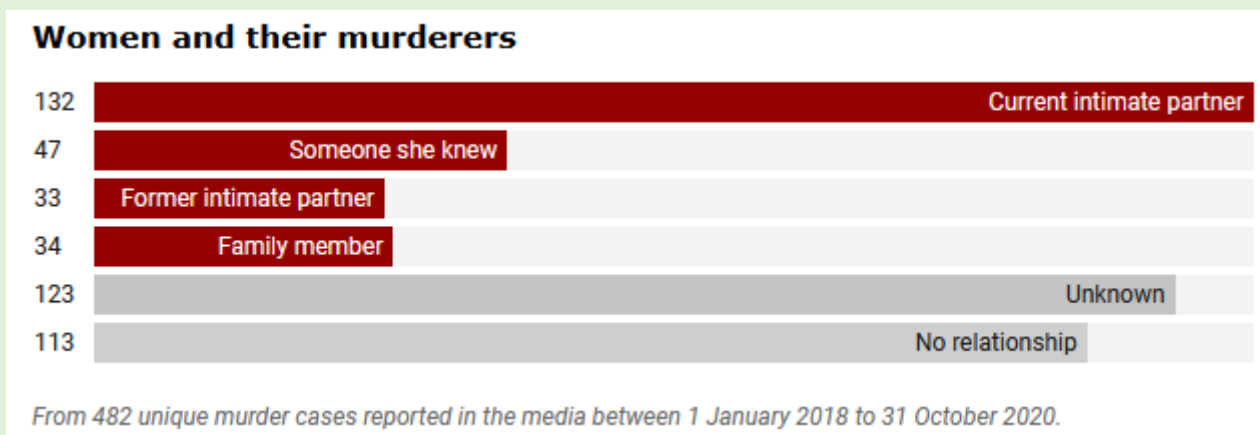
⁵ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf - UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2019 (Vienna, 2019)

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021, Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members, Global estimates 2020

Between April 2015 and March 2021, a total of 16 470 women were murdered in South Africa – this is an average of 2745 per year or approximately 7 women per day.⁷



A study looking at online media reporting/coverage of women murdered in South Africa between 2018 and 2020, found that only 4% of the official cases showed up on online media platforms – a total of 482 murders were reported on. The study further found that half of the victims were allegedly murdered by someone they know, while 1 in 4 was murdered by her current intimate partner.⁸



“Although eight out of 10 of all homicide victims are men or boys, women and girls are the primary victims of lethal violence at home in every part of the world, accounting for six out of 10 killings committed by intimate partners or other family members.”⁹

⁷ Own calculations based on annual crime statistics released by South African Police Services

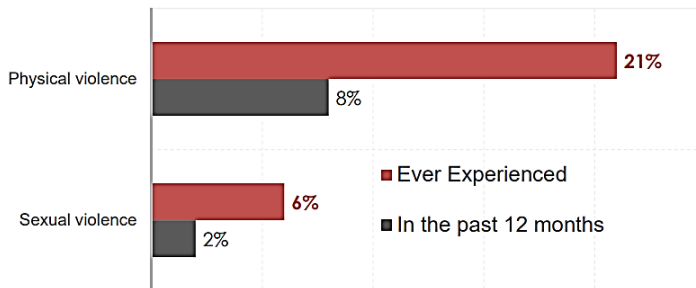
⁸ <https://bhekisisa.org/article/2021-04-14-sayhername-the-faces-of-south-africas-femicide-epidemic/>

⁹ https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2021/November/unodc-research_-2020-saw-every-11-minutes-a-woman-or-girl-being-killed-by-someone-in-their-family.html

Statistics presented by Statistics South Africa in 2020 highlight the following:¹⁰

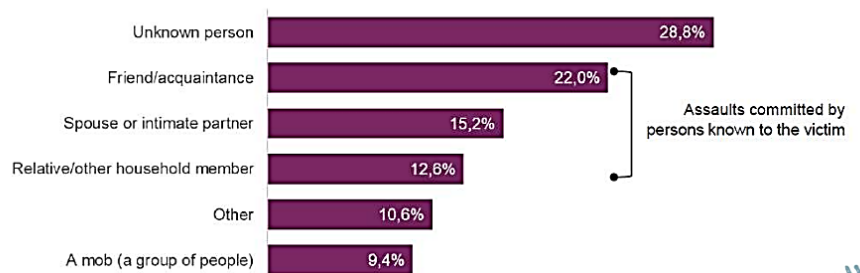
One in five (21%) partnered women has experienced physical violence by a partner (Ever Experienced)

Experience of violence by any partner, women 18+ years



Almost 50% of the assaults were committed by someone close such as a friend or acquaintance (22%), a spouse or intimate partner (15%), a relative or other household member (13%). About 29% of the assaults were committed by unknown persons.

Percentage of assaults committed by a specified perpetrator, 2018/19



The above is a clear indication that women are vulnerable everywhere – even in private spaces and in the company/presence of persons they know. The UNODC echoes this by noting that “Lethal violence experienced by women in the private sphere appears to be a more intractable problem than lethal violence outside the home”.¹¹

Going back to the SAMRC research question of whether there is any evidence that the national efforts to combat GBV are having any impact on the problem of femicide, just looking at the numbers it would be easy to say that since there is a decline in figures and rates there must be a positive impact on the problem. However, the numbers are nowhere near reflective of the high levels of violence and trauma women experience every day. While (thankfully) not every incident of violence results in death, levels of domestic abuse and sexual assault against women have been increasing at alarming rates. For the first 3 months of 2022, more than 10 000 cases of rape have been reported, nearly 900 women have been murdered, 134 murders occurred in domestic violence settings – this is an indication that much more needs to be done to combat gender-based violence and femicide.

¹⁰ https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/1_Stock/Events_Institutional/2020/womens_charter_2020/docs/30-07-2020/A_Statistical_Overview_R_Maluleke.pdf

¹¹ https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2021/November/unodc-research_-2020-saw-every-11-minutes-a-woman-or-girl-being-killed-by-someone-in-their-family.html

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