



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



OSSERVATORIO DI RICERCA
SUL FEMMINICIDIO

RESEARCH OBSERVATORY ON FEMICIDE

Reflecting On Public Discourse

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THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMICIDE



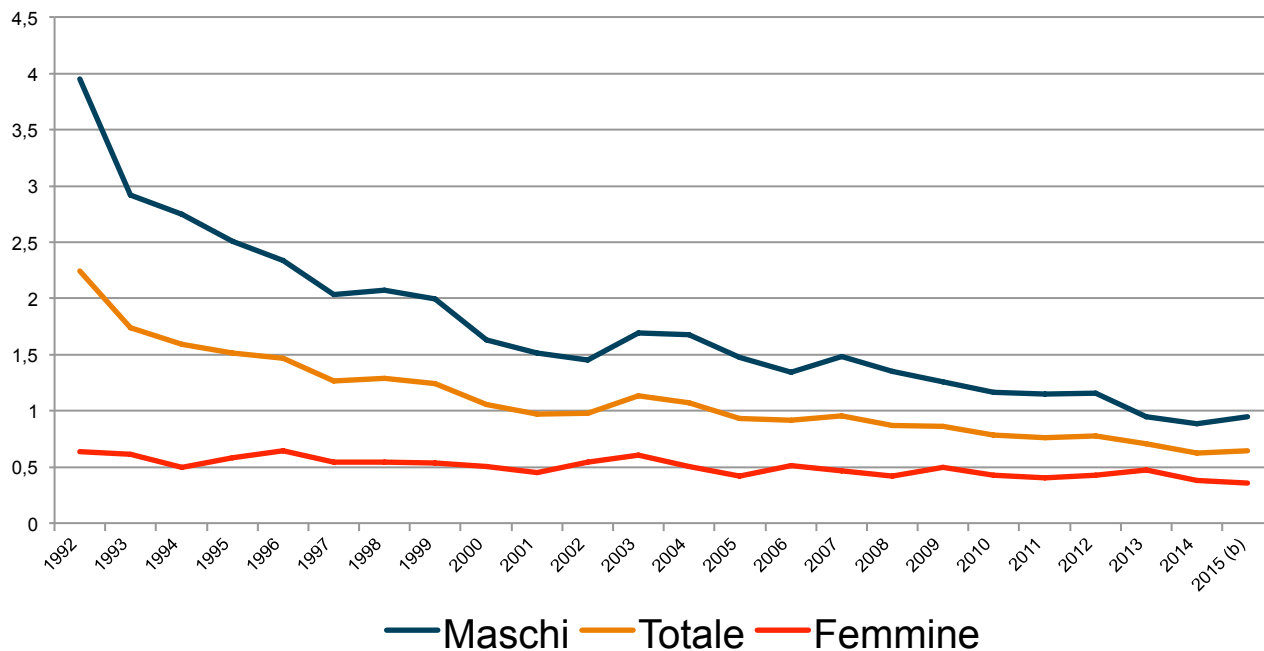
The Research Observatory on Femicide belongs to a national project questioning some public discourse about the killings of women in our country.

It aims to be a common space for sharing information, research and analysis useful to reconstruct a detailed view on femicide

5 research units from different Italian universities collected data on crime news in local and national newspapers on 3 years of coverage (2015-2017), with focus on Intimate Partner Femicide, on news about gender politics against violence in national broadcasting and newspapers, and on 370 law sentences on female murdering along 10 years



WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT WOMEN KILLINGS?



VICTIMS OF MURDERS IN ITALY BY SEX 1999-2005 PER 100.000 CITIZENS

(source: ISTAT, 2017)

IT APPEARS AS IF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF CRIME PREVENTION HAVE SUCCESSFULLY TARGETED MALE HOMICIDES WHILE, ON THE CONTRARY, WOMEN KILLINGS APPEAR TO BE ALMOST IMMUNE TO CHANGE



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What is the focus of the research?

AGENDA SETTING

NEWSWORTHINESS



IN 4 ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

Data from femicide cases covered by the press in 2015-2017
with a focus on *intimate partner femicides**

*femicides perpetrated by the victim's partner or ex-partner



2015-2017

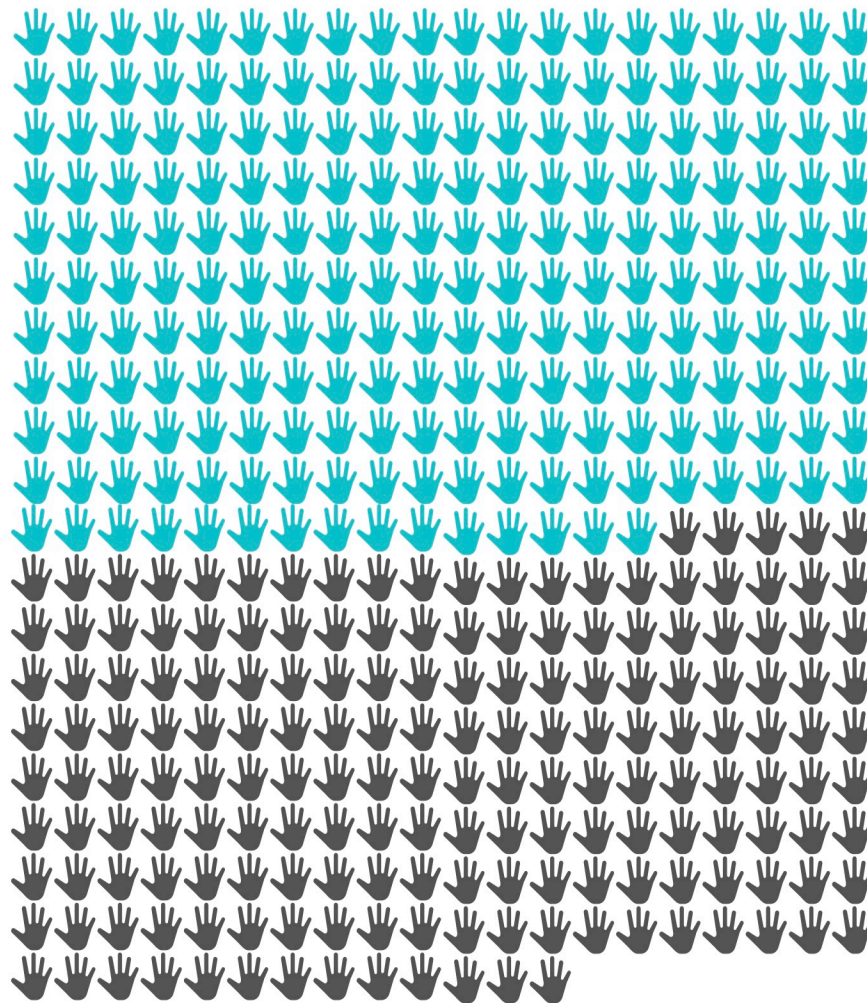
408 female murders



393 committed by men

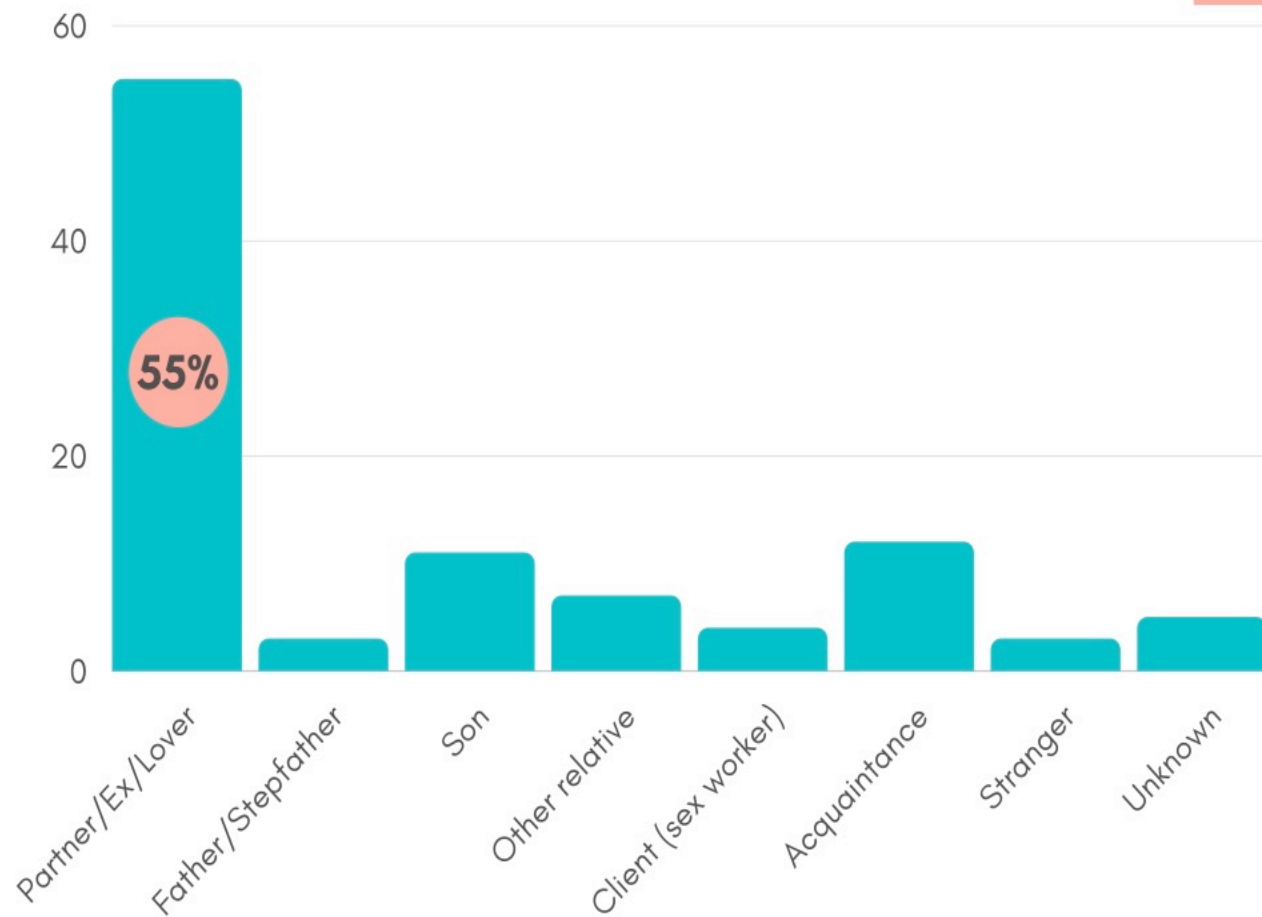


**215 committed by
partners/ex-partners**





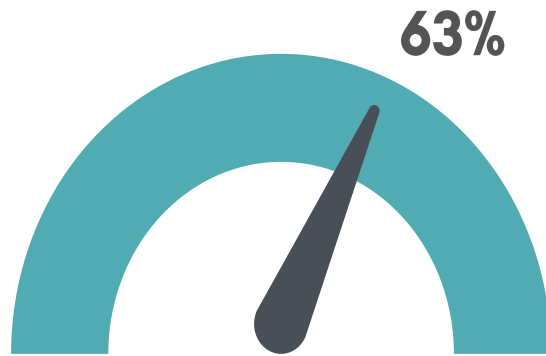
Female victims by relationship with male perpetrator 2015-2017



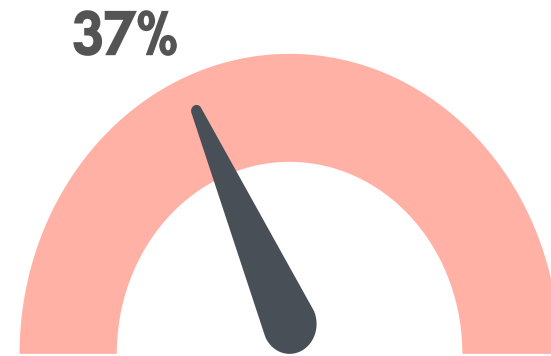
% on 393 victims



How many femicides are newsworthy?





**Femicides covered by online
newspapers**

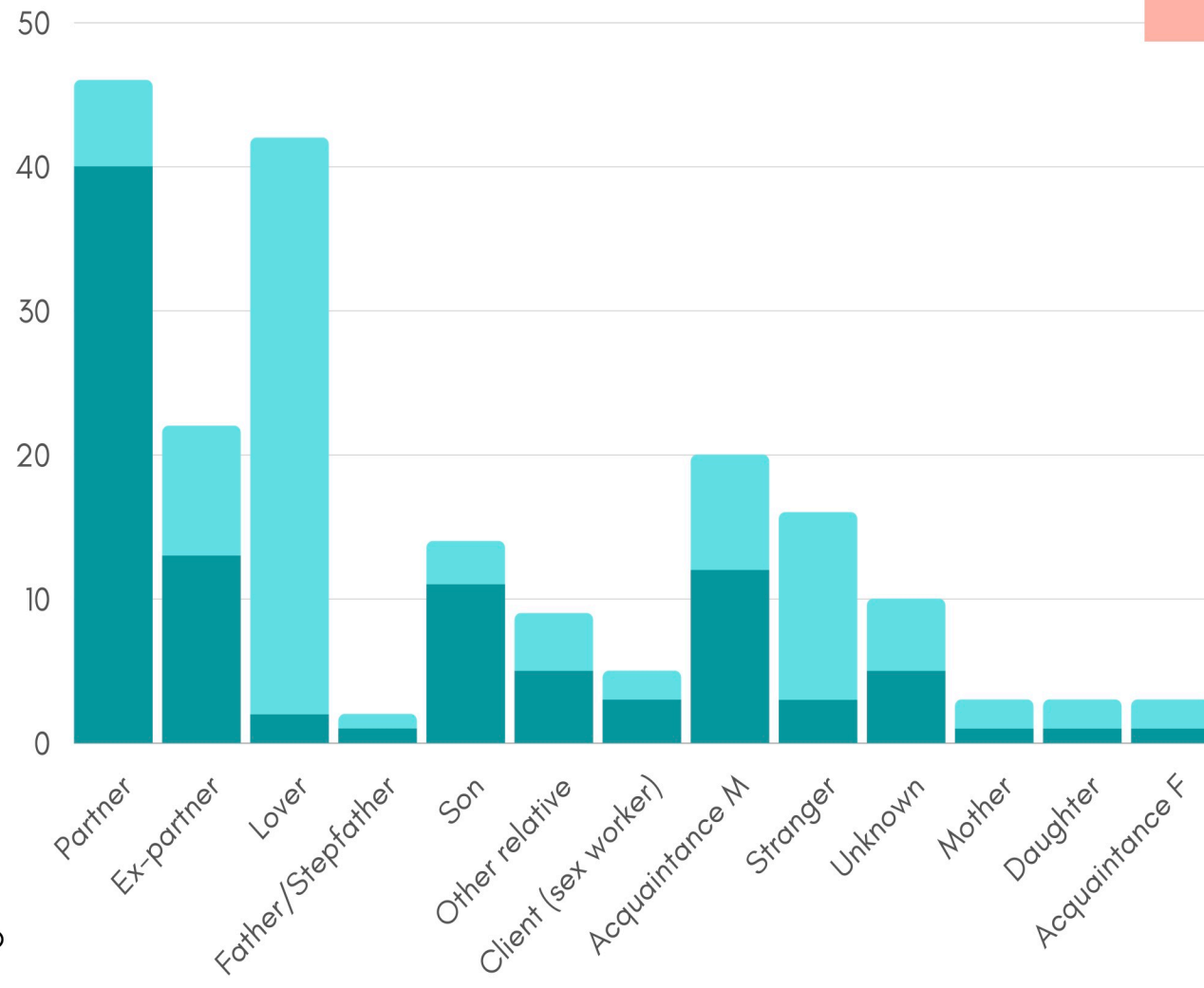


**Femicides covered by print
newspapers**



Is there any link between "news value" and the relationship victim- perpetrator?

 % on 387 events
 Rate n. of stories/relationship





Murders committed by **partners** are higher in number but receive less coverage compared to murders committed by ex-partners or occasional partners

The 8 cases of murder by **occasional partner or in an extra-marital affair** receive the most prominent coverage

The 14 murders of **sex workers** are the least covered

Despite representing a far rarer occurrence, **murders committed by strangers** receive on average a much greater coverage



Intimate partner femicides in the national press

We identified three types of coverage

Female murders
with **greater**
coverage

Female murders
with **smaller**
coverage, and
characteristics that
are considered outside the
issue of gender

"Typical"
coverage of
"typical" femicides



1. High-profile femicides: *the murder mystery*

A small number of femicides tends to receive special attention and is narrated as a "murder mystery"

Intense media coverage for
several days



Tabloidization



Detailed account,
elaborate story, "feuilleton"

Heinous homicide, more than one
victim or "scandalous" details



Young victims or murderers



Long hunt for the
perpetrator



2. "Tragedies of solitude"

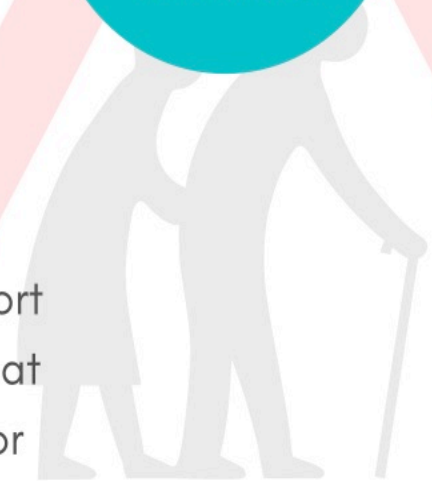
ILL OR DISABLED ELDERLY WOMEN
MURDERED BY THEIR SPOUSES



THEY REPRESENT
25% OF WOMEN
KILLED BY THEIR
PARTNERS



But the news media narrative interprets these cases as *individual tragedies born out of loneliness*, covered by short articles, revealing how the underlying social expectation is that care-giving is less tolerable for men than it is or should be for women





3. The "**typical**" femicide story

The focus is kept on **single episodes that are apparently very similar to each other** and are narrated through two main interpretative frames:

SICK LOVE

**LOSS OF
CONTROL**

This narrative presents **femicide as the result of individual or incidental circumstances** (jealousy, rage, reaction to rejection)

BUT there is no mention of **inequalities** in the relation between men and women



HOWEVER

NEWS TEND TO EVOKE THE EXISTENCE OF PREVIOUS COMPLAINTS OR VIOLENCE IN AN **AMBIVALENT** WAY

**VICTIM
BLAMING**

BLAMING THE LACK OF
COMPLAINT
SECONDARY
VICTIMIZATION

**INSTITUTIONAL
BLAMING**

BLAMING POLICE OR
PUBLIC PERSECUTOR
THAT HAVE NOT ACTED
TO PREVENT THE
MURDER

BUT IT IS A **NEW FRAME**
ANCHORING THE
FEMICIDE
TO A LONG STORY OF
VIOLENCE

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

ELEMENTS OF NOVELTY ARE EMERGING IN THE 2015-2016-2017 RESEARCH



"FEMICIDE" SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME AN **ESTABLISHED QUASI-ROUTINIZED WORLD** FOR JOURNALISTS. THE WORD APPEARS SEVERAL TIMES IN THE TITLES OR IN THE ARTICLES DESPITE THE FACT THAT SOME JOURNALISTS DISLIKE THE TERM WHICH, IN THEIR OPINION, SOUNDS BADLY AND APPEARS TO BE TOO TECHNICAL

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

AS FEMICIDE IS BEING “NORMALIZED”
AS NEWS, **SOME TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS
OF CRIME REPORTING JOURNALISM** ARE
EMERGING

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES PLAY A
MAJOR ROLE IN THE CONSTRUCTION
OF THE STORIES, AND ARE OFTEN USED
AS **PRIMARY INFORMATION SOURCES**



AS SIGNIFICANT BUT AMBIVALENT DIRECT RESULT, THE TOPIC OF **PREVIOUS
ABUSE** AND/OR THE **PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF A REPORT FIELD BY THE
VICTIMS** IS EMERGING AS AN ELEMENT OF INTEREST FOR THE NEWS. THIS
SPECIFIC TOPIC WAS ALMOST NONEXISTENT IN OUR PREVIOUS RESEARCH IN
2012



WHAT HAS CHANGED?



SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE ALSO BECOME AN IMPORTANT INFORMATION SOURCE

IF PRESENT, THE SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES OF BOTH VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS ARE BEING EXTENSIVELY USED BY JOURNALISTS TO GATHER PICTURES, COLLECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION OR DETECT ELEMENTS THAT COULD PROVIDE SOME EXPLANATION FOR THE CRIME

SOMETIMES IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO GIVE “VOICE” TO THE MURDERED WOMAN, BUT IT DEMANDS NEW DEONTOLOGICAL RULES FOR JOURNALISM



WHAT HAS CHANGED and WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED?



THE “NORMALIZATION” OF FEMICIDE AS A NEWS STORY CAN NOT YET AVOID TO USE AN EXPLANATION OF IPF THAT OFTEN **LOOKS AT THE SPECIFICITIES OF THAT PARTICULAR STORY**, RATHER THAN AS THE MANIFESTATION OF A SYSTEMIC SOCIAL ISSUE CONCERNING GENDER INEQUALITIES

NEWS STORIES OFTEN TEND TO **INDIVIDUALIZE** THE CRIME, BUT ALSO TO UNDERLINE THE INCAPACITY OF THE **INSTITUTIONS** TO PREVENT IT WHEN A **SINGULAR VIOLENT** OR **INSANE** MAN IS DETECTED, AND ALSO OFFERING A NEW CONCRETE ANCHORING TO PREVIOUS STORIES OF MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN





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