
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Violence Against Women (VAW) as Gendered Hate Crimes

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| ABSTRACT

Violence against women (VAW) is a deeply rooted form of misogyny that has always been universally predominant. It targets women and girls from all socio-cultural backgrounds and impacts their self-fulfillment at the personal and professional levels. The utmost manifestation of gendered hatred and sexism, VAW has evolved into a pandemic phenomenon. This paper is based on two main premises. Gender is a risk factor in crimes that women are exposed to, such as rape, femicide or even domestic violence. For this reason, violence against women in all its forms should be legally dealt with under the scope of hate crimes. This article aims at defining the various types of VAW and studying their in-depth impact on the victims. It analyses some statistics based on the United Nations and the World Health Organization reports. It historicizes the concept of hate crimes scrutinizing its relationship with VAW. It argues for the legal relabeling of violence against women (more particularly, femicide and rape) as subcategories of hate crimes, hence the urgency to a legal reform that would protect women worldwide from such a social plight.

| KEYWORDS

Violence, Women, Gendered crime, Hate crime, Rape, Femicide

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 11 April 2023

PUBLISHED: 18 April 2023

DOI: 10.32996/ljahs.2023.3.2.4

1. Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) is a global issue. It is one of the most widespread violations of human rights, which has developed into a social health problem that affects the world's societies. Women and girls, regardless of their age, class or ethnicity, are exposed to all forms of violence, ranging from physical and sexual to psychological and emotional assaults. Based on the United Nations' "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women", violence against women or VAW is defined as:

"any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

Violence against women consists of three generic forms, namely sexual, physical and psychological. These categories are divided into various subcategories. Sexual violence against women is broadly defined as any form of non-consensual sexual intercourse. It is the act of subjecting a woman to forced or deviant sexual activity. This includes coercive vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a woman's body, either with a bodily part or an object or both ways. This involves being raped by a stranger, a husband or an intimate partner. In addition to wartime rape, enforced prostitution, sex trade, female genital mutilation and coercive abortion or sterilization (World Health Organisation, 2014). Unwanted touching as a part of sexual harassment and incest as a form of family-related sexual violence have been added to the list by the United Nations (2015), in addition to femicide, including honour and dowry killings (World Health Organisation, 2012). Indeed, violence against women can also be psychologically perpetrated. It

consists of causing emotional harm using verbal violence or any act that aims at belittling women's self-worth and confidence, as well as constant criticism and name-calling.

The statistics on VAW are very alarming. At an international level, about 35% of women have been physically and/ or sexually abused by an intimate partner or a stranger at least once in their life. Other national statistics reveal that 70% of women have experienced physical or/and sexual violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. Moreover, according to some studies conducted in 24 countries from 4 continents, between 20% to 50% of women have been subjected to physical violence by their intimate partners (World Health Organisation, 2013). About 200 million women and girls in 30 countries have undergone genital mutilation before the age of five (UNICEF, 2016). More than 700 million women are alive around the world report having been forced to marry before the age of eighteen. Among these women, 250 million were married before fifteen. An estimated number of 120 million girls worldwide have endured rape or other sexual assaults once in their life, either by an intimate partner or husband (UNICEF, 2014).

The UN's "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons" findings on gender being a risk factor in International human trafficking are disturbing. Based on the 2014 report, 49 % of human trafficking victims are women, and 21% are girls (UNDOC). In 2016, statistics demonstrated that 71% of worldwide human trafficking victims are women and girls, 51% of which are adults and 20% minors (UNDOC). Among 10 victims detected worldwide in 2018, 5 are women, and 2 are girls. This makes 7 out of 10 victims of trafficking in people women. Indeed, about one third of the victims are children, of which girls constitute 19 % (UNDOC, 2020). The UN's latest report shows a decrease in the percentage of human trafficking female victims, with 42 % of women and 18% of girls. In the 166 countries covered by the study, 60 % of the total victims are females (UNDOC, 2022). These statistics indicate that gender has always been a risk factor in this type of VAW. They justify women and girls' exposure to such a phenomenon, showing the extent to which it still threatens female integrity universally. The United Nations and the World Health Organisation's field research have evinced that VAW is a globalized social plight that affects both developing and industrialized countries. It is among the main causes of women's health problems, as it may inflict serious body injuries, lead to physical disablement, or even affect the victims' psychological stability.

2. Methodology

This article is concerned with the study of violence against women as a global phenomenon that endangers the lives and well-being of female victims worldwide. It falls under the scope of feminist theory and uses qualitative and socio-cultural analysis to look at the core essence of various manifestations of gendered violence. A feminist analysis imposes itself while dealing with such an issue, which is typical of the male-female power relations in global societies, due to many reasons. Firstly, the defense of women's cause is of paramount relevance in the field of feminism. Secondly, feminists argue that gendered crimes against women are nurtured by gender inequality that still characterizes today's societies. So, preventing crimes against women cannot be achieved without combating its major contributing factor, which is socially structured gender discrimination.

Qualitative research on the topic is carried out through the exploration and analysis of global statistics by the United Nations and the World Health Organization. At this level, a numerical description of VAW around the world is adopted to investigate the scope and rapid expansion of the phenomenon. Indeed, this article is an attempt to historicise the origin of VAW and define it as a subcategory of hate crimes. Moreover, tracing the historical etymology of hate crimes as a legal concept is used as a major argument for the relabeling of VAW as gendered hate crimes, especially rape and femicide.

This research paper demonstrates that violence against women is not exclusive to a particular culture and does not target a specific group of women over the other. It argues for the inclusion of gendered violence against women, more specifically, femicide and rape, within the legal framework of hate crimes. Since the collected data are based on a globalized overview of the statistics provided by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, the findings can serve as an introduction to future quantitative studies in the field of women's rights and its relationship with gendered violence.

3. Literature Review

3.1 History and Definition of Hate Crimes

It is important to understand the concept of hate crimes and their relationship with the practice of violence against women before justifying the relabeling of such horrendous sexist acts as hate crimes. The expression 'hate crime' was coined in the United States during the 1980s. It was used to denote crimes motivated by hatred and racial discrimination perpetrated against ethnic and religious minorities in the USA, such as Jews, African Americans and homosexuals (Perry, 2003). The first law against hate crimes was enacted in 1981 in Oregon and Washington (FBI, 2007). The United Kingdom was the first European country to pass a law against hate crimes after the racist homicide of Steven Lawrence, a Black British man, in 1993. Consequently, the British Crime and

Disorder Act was passed in 1998 to condemn crimes motivated by race or ethnicity that developed later on to include crimes motivated by religion, sexual orientation and gender (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998).

Laws against hate crimes have been enacted in various countries of the European Union. Although European countries differ in terms of the legal definition of hate crimes and the form of punishment inflicted on perpetrators, bigotry and prejudices are commonly defined as the major motivations for such types of crimes. Hate crimes can be defined as bias-motivated offences in which the victim is targeted because of her/his religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or belonging to a particular social group or community (Streissguth, 2009). This definition implies that any crime motivated by cultural or social prejudices against the victim is viewed as a hate crime. Hatred is one of the primordial aspects of such crimes since the perpetrator's acts are nurtured by an extreme degree of hatred and discrimination towards the victim. Hate crimes range from minor offences, such as verbal assaults, to major crimes as homicides (Turpin-Petrosino, 2015).

What makes a violent act a hate crime is not the act itself but the social and cultural contexts in which it is committed and also the power relationship between the victim and the culprit. This leads us to the phenomenon of violence against women, which is considered one of the types of hate crimes in many countries because of three reasons. Firstly, violence against women consists of gendered crimes, as the victims are targeted because they are women. Secondly, VAW is the result of unequal power relations between men and women, where the latter is dominated by the former. Thirdly, in some forms of VAW, the offender is driven by extreme loathing towards women. This can be the case of femicidal serial killers or sadist rapists whose acts manifest extreme hostility towards the female victim, so such crimes may simply be the expression of misogyny. Therefore, the only risk factor and the main motivation for acts of violence against women is the fact of being a female. That is why feminists and activists in the United States, as well as in many European countries, are calling for the legal recognition of VAW as a hate crime. Mark Walters, co-director of the International Network for Hate Studies and lecturer in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice at the University of Sussex, is one of the activists that lobby for the legal recognition of crimes against women as a form of hate crimes for many reasons. Firstly, all forms of sexual violence against women are sustained by prejudices used to subjugate women and control them. Secondly, either in hate crimes or in VAW, victims are subjected to the same severe emotional trauma whose effects are much more dangerous and deeper than any other physical violence. Indeed, both hate crimes, and VAW are very symbolic acts through which the assailants address the victim and other people belonging to the same social group. Such acts then aim at expressing hatred and contempt for the victims' social and sexual identity and subvert their role in society. Thirdly, one of the main purposes of hate crime laws is to protect those people who have experienced various forms of abuse throughout history (Walters & Tumath, 2014).

3.2 Rape as a Hate Crime

The characteristics of hate crimes victims mentioned in the above definition fit perfectly the case of women who have been exposed to many forms of violent acts. There are many examples throughout history. We may cite; widow burning and slavery in ancient times, rape and wife beating in the Middle Ages, witch-hunts during and after the Renaissance, and other multiple forms of VAW in current modern societies. In "Gender 'Hostility', Rape, and the Hate Crime Paradigm", Martin Walters and Jessica Tumath claim that rape should be the first form of VAW to be addressed as a hate crime by the law. This is because rape is an explicit manifestation of misogyny and the most abhorrent form of gendered-motivated violence against women that fits the paradigm of a hate crime perfectly. Feminists argue that rape is men's means to subjugate women and deny them the right to have control over their own bodies. Liberal feminists see it as an infringement of women's self-determination and emphasize the psychological and physical damage it causes to the victim. For radical feminists, rape is an expression of male-female power relations based on patriarchal notions of sexuality and gender difference (Whisnant, 2017). Rape is also an expression of men's fear of women's transgression.

According to some psychoanalytical studies conducted on convicted offenders, rapists manifest a feeling of hostility and hatred towards their victims, so their crimes are an attempt to overpower women (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979). In *Men Who Rape Women: The Psychology of The Offender*, Nicholas Groth and Jean Birnbaum identify two leading factors of rape. The first factor is power, which means that rape is motivated by the offender's desire to dominate the victim. Therefore, the sexual act symbolizes the conquest of the woman's body. In this case, rape is a pseudo-sexual act, not a crime of passion driven by a sexual impulse, but rather a non-sexually motivated desire for dominance and fear of women's empowerment. The second factor is anger, by which the rapist is driven by feelings of anger, hatred and disdain towards the victim. That is why, in anger rape, the woman is subjected to both sexual and physical violence. Through such acts, the aggressor seeks to prove that women's sexuality must be contained and that men are both physically and sexually more powerful than women (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979).

In her essay "Sexual Terrorism", Carole Sheffield argues that rape is a form of sexual terrorism manifested through explicit and implicit violence, which all women are irrespectively exposed to (1997). The fear of being raped haunts all women. Even those who have not experienced it live under the constant threat of being targeted by human predators. This feeling of being under the mercy

of rapists contributes to the perpetuation of rape myths and the reinforcement of the masculine ideology of dominance. Women are maintained in a state of fear, kept in their limited space, the same way as other hate crimes' victims (as ethnic or religious groups) are secluded and shut away into their closed communities (Walters & Tumath).

The pervasiveness of rape crimes against women and girls across the world means that the female gender has always been a risk factor in VAW. Consequently, exactly as in hate crimes where the risk factor may be the victim's religion, race and sexual orientation, women's gender is what makes them vulnerable to sexual aggression. The pervasive and recurrent nature of rape crimes is related to women's downgraded status in societies compared to that of men. As a result, women and girls represent easy prey for rapists. Indeed, the repetitive aspect of sexual violence against women is similar to that of hate crimes. In rape as well as other hate crimes, the chances for the incident's reoccurrence are very high. This means that the rapist is likely to commit the same crime again against the same victim or that the latter may be targeted again by another criminal. Thus, exactly as any type of hate crime is meant to spread fear and terror among members of a religious community or a social group, rape leads to all women's victimization and instills fear into the victims.

Rape's damaging impact on the victim is another factor that justifies relabeling it as a hate crime. Its traumatic consequences on women's bodies and minds have an everlasting impact. At the physical level, the victims suffer from general injuries, such as fractures and bruises, or genital injuries that may provoke serious complications. The risk of contracting HIV, syphilis or other STDs is likely higher for rape victims. Rape incidents can be fatal in many instances, especially for girls, and death may be the immediate result of sexual violence or after the incident due to an STD, gynaecological complications or suicide. At the psychological level, rape has a much more harmful impact on the woman's emotional and mental stability. The victims are likely to experience post-traumatic depression, rape trauma syndrome, anxiety, stress, and other behavioral troubles.

Addressing rape as a hate crime represents a major step towards fighting back rape myths and misconceptions surrounding the victims. It would answer back societies' stereotypes that view women as the major ones responsible for sexual crimes being those who seduce and tempt men to rape them. Bringing out the prejudices behind the crime's motives would call to attention that the female gender is a risk factor for rape and other sexual assaults against women. This would help subvert the victims' situation and unveil other unreported rape cases. Women who have gone through the traumatic experience of sexual violence would be given a voice to speak out and sue their offenders. As a result, many criminals who raped women and got away with it would be persecuted and punished for their crimes. This would definitely help to fight back and prevent rape and other forms of sexual abuse perpetrated against women and girls. It would also restore integrity and dignity to the victims leading to their empowerment.

3.3 Femicide is an Extreme Form of Gendered Hate Crimes.

Rape is not the only form of VAW that should be addressed as a hate crime. Many feminists and advocates of women's rights call for the inclusion of domestic violence, intimate partner violence (both sexual and physical), and femicide within hate crimes' legislation. Femicide is another form of violence against women that should acquire the legal status of a hate crime. It represents the end of VAW's continuum and claims many victims in both developed and developing countries. The origin of the word goes back to the nineteenth century. In 1801, femicide appeared in John Corry's satirical review as a reference to the killing of women (by either men or women) (1801). Then it acquired a legal status when published in Wharton's Law Lexicon in 1848 (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). It was not until the 1970s that the term started to gain prominence among feminists who, since then, have adopted it to call attention to men's oppression of women and raise people's consciousness about women's suffering.

In 1976, the South African feminist writer and activist Diana Russell redefined the term to refer to specific cases of women's killing by men. Femicide is then defined as the "systematic killing of women because they are women". It comprises all types of murders motivated by gendered discrimination. According to *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, femicide is defined as:

The murder of women by husbands, lovers, fathers, acquaintances and strangers.....
the most extreme form of sexist terrorism motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure or
a sense of ownership of women (Radford & Russell, 1992)

This implies that women and girls are vulnerable to femicidal crimes anywhere and anytime: within the domestic sphere in closed family circles, as well as in public, at work, or in the street. Like rape, a femicide is a form of sexist terrorism nurtured by hatred towards women and men's desire to reify and dehumanize them. It is then a lethal threat that all women are exposed to in many ways. It involves many types of killings, such as:

Mutilation murder, rape murder, a battery that escalates into murder, the immolation
of witches in Western Europe and of brides and widows in India and crimes of honor in
some Latin American and Middle Eastern countries (Radford & Russell, 1992)

This list is not exhaustive, as other types of women's killings have been added. For instance, women killed in wars and conflict zones, female infanticide, female foeticide, serial femicide, sexual femicide, femicide through HIV transmission, death by harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and murder by torture, starvation or ill treatment. The Italian feminist attorney Barbara Spinelli argues that uxoricide is the most pervasive form of femicide in Europe. This is because all European women, with no exception, are exposed to the risk of being murdered by a husband, partner, or relative. Unfortunately, uxoricide and family-related femicides are still dealt with by the European legal systems as gender 'neutral crimes'. It is only very recently, within the last two decades, that such femicides have been recognized as a violation of human rights by the UN and EU. Still, femicides in Europe have not acquired the legal status of gendered crimes yet due to many reasons. On a theoretical level, European legislation is meant to protect women's rights and ensure equality between men and women. All European countries have established NAPs (National Action Plans) to fight VAW, yet, the reality is completely different. There are many factors that impede the government's commitment to fighting femicide. The absence of a standard legal definition of gender violence, domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV), as each country of the EU has its own legal status for gendered motivated crimes against women. Indeed, the lack of data, as many cases of VAW and femicide, is still underreported. There is also the absence of long-term strategies to fight gender-biased crimes. Added to this is the persistence of patriarchal values and gender discrimination, whose effect is deeply entrenched in many European societies (Spinelli, 2011).

According to Kersti Yllo and Michele Bograd in *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, marriage and family circles are social institutions that contribute to the indoctrination of patriarchal values and the promotion of male violence against women and gender inequality (1988). Femicide, like any other violent act, is a representation of men's attempt to command women and restrain their freedom by all possible coercive means. That is why, in violent male-dominated contexts, femicide is a devastating tool to ensure male superiority since women's passivity and submissiveness have become essential means for survival. Thus, femicide, as the most extreme form of violence against women, has always been part of human history and can be found in many cultures. It is a systematic form of male domination that aims at keeping women in a state of subordination. When a woman is killed by her husband, intimate partner or a relative, her death will serve as a reminder for any woman who dares to transgress her relegating position and challenge the gender norms. Femicide is then a product of gendered stereotypes as the victims' vulnerability to this lethal form of violence is due to the fact that they are women. Therefore, the marital household and the family circle, which are supposed to be the safest places for a woman, have become the environments where she is at a greater risk of being killed.

Most studies on intimate partner homicides have concluded that even though men can also be killed by their female partners or wives, such a type of homicide is different and less frequent. Russell Dobash, Emerson Dobash (1992), Margo Wilson and Martin Daly (1998) argue that "men often kill wives after lengthy periods of prolonged physical violence accompanied by other forms of abuse and coercion; the roles in such cases are seldom if ever reversed" (1992). Cases, when a wife kills her husband or intimate partner are very rare. Even when she kills, she does it out of defense and as a reaction to male violence. When a man commits femicide, it is not to defend himself or react against an abusive wife or intimate partner. Men kill women when they feel they are estranged from their female partners or when they feel they are rejected or their authority is being challenged. That is why; femicide among intimate partners can be regarded as the end of a continuum of abuses, be they physical, sexual, emotional or all at once perpetuated against women. (Russell Dobash, Emerson Dobash, Margo Wilson and Martin Daly, 1992/1998).

We may say that most men who are violent towards their female intimate partners or relatives can be viewed as susceptible to committing femicide. This is another evidence of the gendered nature of femicide. In "Femicide and The Feminist Perspective", Rae Taylor and Jana Jasinski state that femicide is related to gender inequality and unbalanced male-female relationship where men hold superior positions and are granted rights denied to women. Proponents of such a feminist perspective to femicide contend that gender equity between the opposite sexes is the best way to answer back and, at least, decrease the rate of femicidal crimes. Some feminists believe that gender equity depends mainly on enabling women to subvert male dominance. This is possible through education and employment so as for women to acquire social status and be men's equals in the domestic and public spheres (2011). Other feminists claim that even when women have access to higher education and enjoy the same economic situation as that of men, they may not escape femicidal crimes. Sometimes women's educational and professional attainment can represent a threat to the patriarchal order. Such a situation may make them more vulnerable to all forms of violence, including femicide, as many men see women's empowerment as an attempt to disrupt male authority. It is for such reasons that men have recourse to all coercive means, even the most noxious ones as femicide, to overpower women. As a result, whether they are financially independent or not, whether they have lower, higher, or equal educational and social backgrounds as men, women are still exposed to the risk of femicide.

Femicidal crimes are more frequent in couples where the woman has a higher educational level than the man. Indeed, DeaAnn Gauthier and William Bankston have shown that in couples where men have lower income than their wives or/and female partners, men are more likely to use violence and commit femicide. This may push many men to use all sorts of abuse and even kill to maintain their privileged situation both in the household in particular and society in general. Femicide may be viewed as one of those tactics used by some men to answer back the threat of being overthrown by women's empowerment. In patriarchal systems,

femicide is regarded as the most efficient measure to compensate for the loss of power and supremacy over women. In patriarchal cultures, men feel that the privileged position they hold in society does not depend on them having a higher socioeconomic status compared to that of women but rather on their belonging to the superior gender. As a result, male violence that may lead to femicide is a manifestation of maleness and an affirmation of women's inferior status.

While Carole Sheffield calls rape sexual terrorism, Jane Caputi and Diana Russell define femicide as a misogynous killing, a sort of sexist terrorism placing it at the end of a long continuum of violence exerted against women. They argue that femicide is one of the aspects of the entitlement concept (1992), referred to also as 'sexual proprietariness' by Margo Wilson and Martin Daly. The expression (entitlement) denotes the fact that, either in marriages or intimate relationships, most men view their wives as mere commodities. Women are thus perceived as men's sexual and reproductive property (1998). This belief has been deeply rooted in almost all the world's cultures since the dawn of history. Due to such attitudes towards women, men are able to do anything to preserve such a privilege, even to kill. Such right is used as a pretext for husbands who kill their wives out of jealousy or when a violent partner kills his girlfriend because he thinks that he possesses her and that she does not have the right to abandon him. Therefore, intimate partner femicide is strictly related to men's sexual proprietariness, a right that men defend at any price.

3.4 Femicidal Rape: Another Form of Femicide

Perhaps the most appalling crime against a woman is sexual femicide or femicidal rape. As its name denotes, this form of VAW is a combination of rape, physical violence and torture intended to kill the female victim. It is defined as the torture, killing and mutilation of a series of women by a man. Since the killing spree of five English prostitutes by an unidentified sadistic serial killer nicknamed Jack the Ripper, femicidal rape has emerged as a new extreme manifestation of women's hatred. These sexual femicides that shook Victorian English society served as a 'modal' for subsequent criminals who followed Jack's footsteps and spread fear among women and girls worldwide. For instance, each of the following rapists killed six women: Ted Bundy, the "Lipstick Killer", the "Boston Strangler", "Son of Sam", "Hillside Strangler" and the "Yorkshire Ripper" in addition to the 25 year-old Marc Lépine, who, in a femicidal craze, shot fourteen women. These misogynist murders marked the rise of a sex crime age against women (Karmae & Spender, 2000). In reference to the femicidal rape epidemic, Jane Caputi, in *The Age of Sex Crime*, states that many subcategories of sexual femicide have emerged during the last decades, like lust murder, rape murder, serial murder and ritual murder. These "varieties" of femicides are reminiscent of the rapid increase of femicidal rape around the world. These crimes do not only have sexual motives but also fall under the scope of gender politics and the masculine ideology of dominance. Nevertheless, there have been many attempts to deny the gendered-political dimensions of such crimes. Instead, the offenders are most of the time dealt with as sexual psychopaths driven by sexual perversions and mental disability to commit femicidal rape. Thus, overlooking the fact that many perpetrators can be psychologically fit, socioeconomically successful, and have a normal sex life, yet, they commit such abhorring crimes against women.

In 1989, Christopher Wilder raped, tortured and killed several women whose precise number is still unidentified. Wilder's personality and social status do not provide any clues about the crimes' motives. Wilder's death leaves behind a mystery as to the motives behind the rampage of death and terror. With plenty of money, soft-spoken charm, a background in photography, and a part-time career on the glamorous sports car racing circuit, Wilder, 39, would have had no trouble attracting beautiful women (Caputi, 1987: 2). The way he raped his victims, stabbed, and tortured them by means of electrocution is denotative of his extreme hostility and hatred towards women. Caputi argues that such a sadistic form of femicidal rape is 'phallic terrorism', evidence for the politicized nature of sexual femicidal crimes against women. In the same way, as many feminists consider rape as an institutionalization of misogyny, a form of terrorism meant to maintain and promote patriarchy, sexual femicide is not the manifestation of some supernatural evil entities or psychopathological deviance. It is rather a major step towards the establishment of patriarchy as the only socio-culturally acceptable order. (1987: 3).

3.5 Ritual Femicide

Another form of femicide that deserves much more attention is the ritual one. This type of women killing bears all the aspects of sexual femicide to which are added some ritualistic signatures left by the offender at the crime scene. Some murderers can perform post-mortem mutilation of the victim's body, leaving it in a specific position through which they convey a message or perform a kind of religious sacrifice. Ritual femicide may also include animal sacrifice, setting fire to the victim's body, and /or the ablation of genitals or other organs. We may cite the Black Dahlia murder as an example of ritual femicide through which the victim's body was hideously mutilated. "The woman's arms were raised over her head at 45-degree angles. Her lower half was positioned a foot over from her torso; the straight legs spread wide open. The body appeared to have been washed clean of blood, and the intestines were tucked neatly under the buttocks".(Ryan White, 2014: 92).

In her analysis of ritual femicide, Jane Caputi argues that such a form of woman killing has various cultural and social connotations. The sexual abuse and the ritualistic mutilation of the victim's body are very symbolic. They stand for women's defeat and conquest by their male counterparts. They symbolise women's degradation and annihilation by the male sex. They also serve to promote

patriarchal 'myths' on male aggressiveness towards women. It is also viewed as the best means to establish the archetype of male heroes present in ancient mythology, which is full of accounts of the Amazon's defeat by male epic heroes or the ritual rape and slaying of goddesses and deities by gods. As a result, through ritualistic femicidal crimes, the perpetrators, either consciously or unconsciously, contribute to an everlasting war between the sexes, through which men have sought to use all possible means to overpower women and impose hegemonic masculinity.

4. Findings

We cannot deny the fact that all forms of violence against women are very damaging and dehumanizing. They affect women's integrity and constrain their freedom; however, I think that rape and femicide (including their subcategories analysed earlier) are the most appalling types of VAW. They are destructively harmful to the victims and deserve to be given priority among other crimes committed against women and girls. Both rape and femicide are acts of gendered violence through which the perpetrators promote women's subordination and perpetuate male chauvinism.

When it comes to rape, it is the most mortifying assault that a man can inflict on a woman. Sometimes, killing a woman is a much more merciful act than sexually abusing her. Sexual violence is used to deny women authority over their own bodies marking them with shame and disgrace until the end of their life. Indeed, rape can be viewed as the sexual victimization of women whose aim transcends coercive sexual intercourse itself to much deeper socio-cultural and ideological connotations. It is a warning reminder for any woman who dares to challenge the patriarchal status quo and act as a fully independent individual with the same rights as those of men.

As to femicide, things can be worse. Such a deadly form of violence denies women even the most basic right, the right to life. I think that femicide is mainly related to the ubiquity of the male culture of entitlement. It is linked to men's tendency to consider women as mere "parasites" that can be easily destroyed the moment they start to impede the systematic mechanism of the patriarchal order. Behind femicide reside a multitude of encoded messages. Firstly, women can by no means be men's equals; they are considered second-class citizens. They belong to the weakest gender, which is why they should submit to male authority. Secondly, despite all women's attempts to subvert their subordination and challenge male dominance, men can at any time reverse the situation by means of annihilation.

VAW can have a drastic impact on women's existence and their social roles. The victims can no longer contribute to the development of their societies, as many of them are left with physical or psychological disabilities. They may lose their ability to work and take care of their children. In cases of rape, the victims feel that they are denied the right to have control over their bodies. Some may be exposed to the risk of contracting STDs; others may end up with depression, rape trauma syndrome or post-traumatic disorders. Another category plunges into drug or alcohol addiction, while there are some who may even commit suicide. For all these reasons, VAW should be considered a type of hate crime motivated by misogyny and male dominance, the main causes that make women worldwide vulnerable to violence perpetrated by men.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, I would rather say that in any type of violence against women, be it sexual, psychological or psychological, gender is a risk factor that exposes women more than any social group to such gruesome crimes. The latter are symbolic acts used as means to subdue women and maintain them under constant control. Therefore, all forms of violence against women (especially rape and femicide, which are situated at the end of the continuum of gendered violence) must be typified as hate crimes. They stand for an implicit instance of misogynistic beliefs about male supremacy and contribute to the promotion of the masculine power myth.

The victims are targeted because of their belonging to the female sex since men and women relationships are governed by a rigid system of gendered inequality that predetermines their roles in society. This creates a mechanism of gender socialization responsible for assigning men an authoritative position and women a relegating one. For women, gendered hate crimes emerge as a restrictive power that aims at annihilating any female attempt to transgress the role pre-assigned to them by the gendered biased social systems. Men's resort to violence against the opposite sex is a manifestation of their struggle to mark their male territory by repressing females striving for their social emancipation.

This paper sets the scene for further investigations of VAW through more specified contexts. It may serve as a cornerstone for more focused quantitative studies as the following:

- Quantitative case studies by country would be useful to understand the specificities of a given socio-cultural context in terms of gendered violence against women.
- Investigating the victims' socio-economic status through interviewing women from different social classes.

- A comparative quantitative study analysing violence against women in peace and wartime can be used to illustrate the phenomenon's prevalence in time and zones of conflicts.

-Mixed method approach where qualitative and quantitative studies are intertwined can be used to analyse in depth the scope and various dimensions of VAW.

Finally, as previously stated, this paper is built on a qualitative approach that relies on statistical data provided by international organizations. As a result, the data sources and study approach imply that this research is standardized. It does not examine VAW in a specific setting but rather as a universal social plight. That is to say, the following study provides a generalizable collection of findings that pave the way for more in-depth research on the subject. It sets the scene for future quantitative studies to highlight the various dimensions of this issue in more specific scenarios.

Statements and Declarations

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

Acknowledgements: I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Hassan Zrizi for his guidance and assistance in the field of academic research

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