

### **America Do Better: Femicides Are A Problem Here Too**

“Juan Castillo on the run for murdering his common-law wife, Monica Leija,” read the news banner. As an eight-year-old, I couldn't fathom that Monica was gone, and Juan had fled to El Salvador. Just the prior week she made her kids, LaLa, BoyBoy, and I a *sopa maruchan*, as we finished playing with the sprinklers. Monica, a dear family friend, was shot by her husband in February 2010 in Houston, Tx. This was just another case where domestic violence led to the killing of a woman. Just another victim for the United States to treat as an Intimate Partner Homicide (IPH) case, and just another reason for Americans to buy into the narrative that immigrants are “bringing crime,” as former president Donald Trump once said. Because the US is failing to acknowledge female homicide cases as femicide, it allows the IPH cases to be viewed as a race and immigration problem. This is in contrast to Mexico, which identifies these numerous female killings as a femicide and gender issue. The US prides itself in being one of the most progressive countries in the world, but how “progressive” is it really when it's not even willing to identify femicides as a topic of discussion within its borders. America, do better.

Femicide is defined as the killing of a woman by a man because of her gender. The US Department of Justice (DOJ), does not track instances of femicide, only accounts for tracking Intimate Partner Homicides, therefore this gendered issue is grossly understudied. IPH reports do however show women are disproportionately affected by violence as “intimate partners carried out more than 40 percent of homicides of women and about 7 percent of homicides in men” according to the DOJ (Cooper and Smith). In addition, the CDC has stated that “nearly half of all

homicides are perpetrated by a current or former male intimate partner” (Petrosky et al.). Women are being killed at an alarmingly high rate. Yet, the US has failed to establish a federal femicide tracking initiative, despite annual reports that prove femicide is a domestic crisis. Instead, a woman by the name of Dawn Wilcox has done what the US has not been able to do and established a femicide database called “Women Count USA” (Wilcox). Admittedly, there are only so many cases one woman can keep track of. Governmental support is needed. The US is dawdling when compared to Mexico, as they are one of the leading nations on femicide data collecting, beginning in 2012 (Sandin). America, do better.

The American government is oblivious; its failure to acknowledge femicides has allowed for these cases to become an “immigrants vs. women ” issue rather than a “men vs women” case. Despite, “undocumented immigrants have substantially lower crime rates than native-born citizens and legal immigrants” (Light et al.), the US has allowed minorities to become a scapegoat for a broader institutional issue. The US has neglected to acknowledge that the root issue of female homicide cases are men. Blaming a group of people for crimes due to their immigration status does not occur in Mexico; division of legal status for this crime is nonexistent. In Mexico, femicides are accurately viewed as a gender and class issue. America, do better.

Women who have died at the hands of their male partners deserve a federal system that honors their lives. Monica deserves to have her death be used to inform girls and women about the dangers of femicides, and the inequalities against them. A federal femicide tracking system would shift the focus from “What is the criminal's immigration status?” to “What is the criminal's gender?”. Identifying the root of the issue is imperative to solving the crisis, and yet the US has failed to do what Mexico has done, and correctly identify the issue as femicide. Rice

students, Houston, a city where femicides have and will continue to occur, is now your home.

Let us be the generation that switches the narrative and approaches femicides from a gender and social standpoint. Be wary of the dangers that your female peers, faculty, and staff face because of their gender. Use your voice for the women who could not and lost their lives, for the creation of a safer America for its women.

Works Cited

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