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In 2021, in contrast to media reports and statements by politicians, there was a decrease in the cases of femicide in Israel, including among Israeli Arabs, and an increase in the murder of mothers (matricide).

The Israel Observatory on Femicide (IOF) www.israelfemicide.org aims to be Israel's official body providing qualitative and quantitative data on femicide. The IOF has just released a report for 2021 written by Dr. Shalva Weil, of the Seymour Fox School of Education at the Hebrew University, summarizing the main characteristics of femicides in Israel in 2021 from the beginning of the year until the end. The report points to cautious optimism as to the murder of women in Israel by their partners and family members, but is horrified by the rise in the killing of mothers by their own sons, which constituted one quarter of all femicide cases in Israel in 2021. The number of femicide cases in Israel is 24% lower than it was in 2020 at the height of the lockdowns during the covid-19 pandemic.

Femicide is defined as the intentional killing of women because they are female. Accordingly, the numbers of women murdered for other reasons, such as accidental murder or involvement in crime, were omitted. This year, some cases which at first appeared to be femicide, turned out to be suicide, and the suspects were released, whereas some murders which at first appeared to be random killings turned out to be femicides. Some femicide cases are under investigation and others have a restraining order in effect.

Data Collection: The data gathered by the IOF comes from local and national media and internet reports, Google alerts and reports from women's organisations. It is crosschecked with other data bases from different organizations, parliamentary reports, and the police. It should be pointed out that the collection of femicide data is restricted to age 18 and above in order to comply with international guidelines for purposes of comparison. Therefore, the case of a girl aged 17, who was murdered in 2021 and had a relationship with an adult partner, has not been included in our statistics.

Number of femicides-2021: Sixteen femicides were perpetrated in Israel during 2021; by contrast, there were 21 femicides in 2020. Six were perpetrated by a partner, four by a son (matricide) and two by brothers; in four cases the identity of the murderer is still unknown.

Ethnicity: One femicide case occurred in the Hebrew Israelite community. 44% of all femicide victims were Jewish, and 50% were Israeli Arabs, including Druze (31% Arabs, 19% Druze). However, it is important to note that Israeli Arabs, including Druze, constitute 21.1% of the total population in Israel. In all cases, the ethnic identity of the perpetrator and the victim appears to have been the same.

Femicide among Israeli Arabs: In 2021, there was a sharp increase in violence in the Arab sector: 125 homicides took place, 11% of which were murders of females. Eight of these 14 cases were femicides in that a woman was murdered because of her gender, and all were connected in some way to so-called "honour killings". The other six murders of women took place against a background of crime and violence.

Age: The average age of the victim was 45.6, higher than last year due to the rise in the murder of mothers by their sons. The youngest victim was 27 years old and the oldest was 76.

Weapon: Of the 16 murders, one quarter of the women were stabbed, one third were shot to death, and one third were strangled. 13% were killed by other means.

Recourse to authorities: Authorities had received previous complaints about domestic violence in one third of all the case, in which the identity of the murderer is known. Of these, two murderers with psychiatric histories were known to the authorities.

Indictments: To date, eight indictments (66%) have been filed for the femicides in which the murderer's identity is known. In three cases, the murderer was unfit to stand for trial. During 2021, several milestone verdicts, including life sentences, were meted out by judges femicides perpetrated this year and in previous years.

Reasons for the decrease: According to Dr. Shalva Weil, "There can be multiple explanations for the decrease in the femicide rate in Israel in 2021. One of them is undoubtedly the end of the strict lockdowns during the covid-19 pandemic. Another is the unprecedented media coverage on the subject of femicide, and the significant activities of various feminist organisations. In parallel, it should be pointed out that this year saw several harsh verdicts for perpetrators, which may have acted as deterrents."

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