

2.2 INTERPERSONAL HOMICIDE

Straddling the divide between the private and public spheres, much of this type of lethal violence is attributed to the very nature of coexisting with others. Central to its definition is the fact that interpersonal homicide is not instrumental to the accomplishment of a secondary goal, but is rather a means of resolving a conflict and/or punishing the victim through violence when relationships come under strain (including from friction due to social and cultural norms).

Its two main sub-types, intimate partner/family-related homicide and homicide related to other interpersonal conflicts are distinguished from each other by the nature of the relationship between perpetrator and victim. This means that in homicides related to intimate partners or family members, the relationship between victim and perpetrator is characterized by an emotional attachment, as well as other links, often of an economic or legal nature, whereas the perpetrator and victim in other interpersonal-related homicide may or may not know each other.

In contrast to the rates of other forms of homicide, which can vary significantly from year to year, the average rate of homicide by intimate partners or family members is relatively stable at the global level, though regional trends can differ remarkably. Although this type of homicide affects people in all regions, it disproportionately affects women to the extent that, in some countries, most female victims of homicide are killed by their intimate partners or family members. Indeed, at the global level, almost half of female homicide victims are killed by their family members or intimate partners, whereas the figure for men is just over 1 in 20 homicide victims. With bitter irony, women run the highest risk of being killed by those who are expected to care for and even protect them.

As clear and consistent data on other types of interpersonal homicide, including property- or revenge-related killings, are less readily available, such a broad category of lethal violence is difficult to examine. A snapshot of mass murder, which spans both types of interpersonal homicide is, however, provided.

Intimate partner/family-related homicide

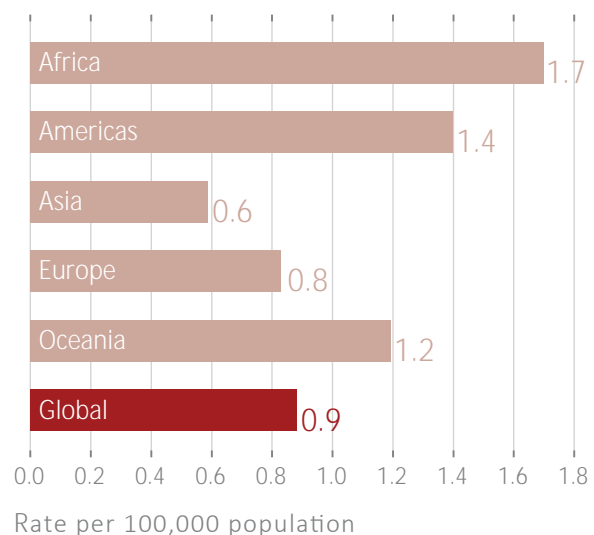
Conflicts and violence within families and couples contribute significantly to shaping patterns of

homicide.¹³ Given the intimate nature of such relationships, and the daily interaction, stresses and intricacies of emotional, financial and cultural ties, it is not surprising that a large share of known-context homicides are of this type. Based on available data, rates of intimate partner/family-related homicide at the regional level range from 0.6 to 1.7 per 100,000 population, with some significant variations (see figure 2.2.1).

Although the rate of intimate partner/family-related homicide is higher in Africa and the Americas than in other regions, it accounts for a larger share of total homicide victims in Asia, Europe and Oceania than in Africa and the Americas (see figure 2.2.2). This is due to the fact that in regions with high homicide rates, other types of homicide (such as that related to other criminal activities) are more prevalent.

Unlike the rates of other forms of homicide, which can vary significantly from year to year, intimate partner/family-related homicide is, on average, remarkably stable at the global level, though more significant differences are visible at the regional level. In the 32 countries with available trend data, the average rate of intimate partner/family-related homicide remained constant from 2006 to 2011, whereas the total homicide rate in the same group of countries decreased by 15 per cent (see figure 2.2.3).

Fig. 2.2.1: Intimate partner/family-related homicide rate, by region (2012 or latest year)



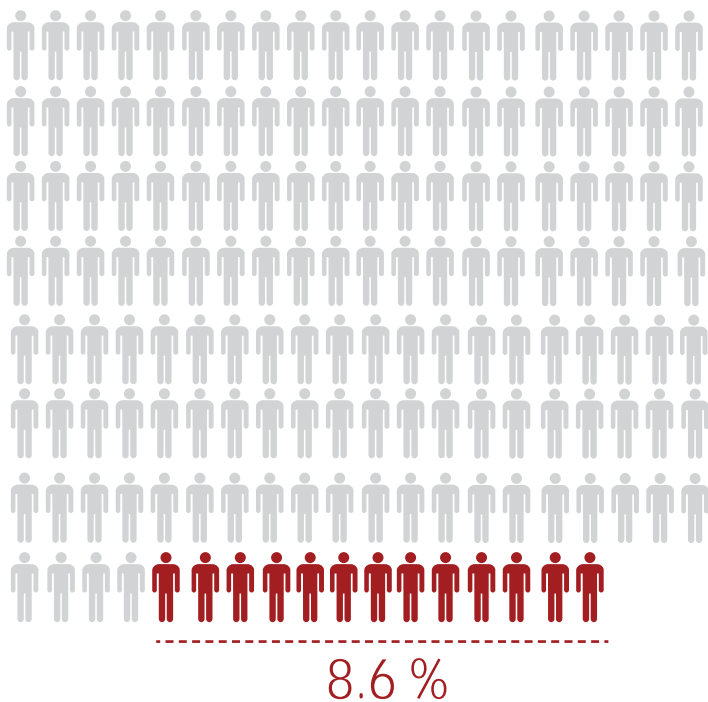
Note: Rate estimates based on data for 4 countries in Africa, 14 countries in the Americas; 9 countries in Asia; 21 countries in Europe; and 3 countries in Oceania.

Source: Elaboration based on UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

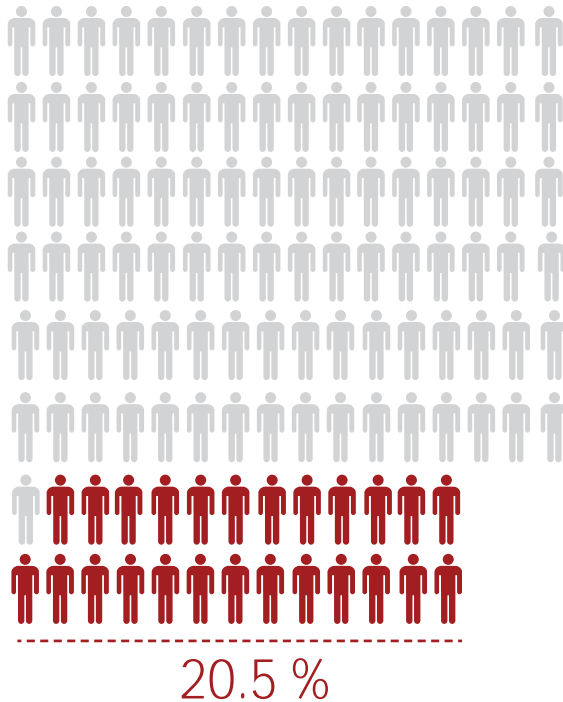
¹³ For more, see Campbell, J.C. (2007), in *Trauma, Violence and Abuse* 8(3); and Weizman-Henelius, G. (2012), in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27(8).

Fig. 2.2.2: Number and share of victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide out of total homicide victims, by region (2012 or latest year)

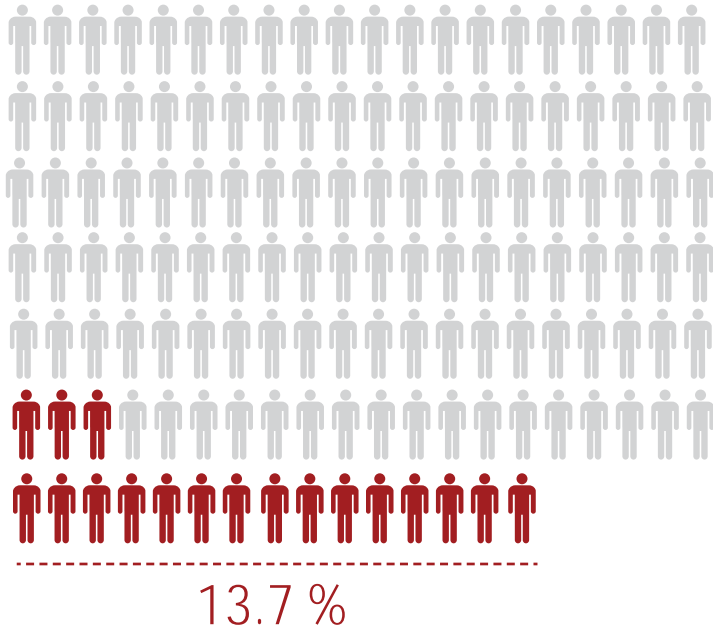
Americas



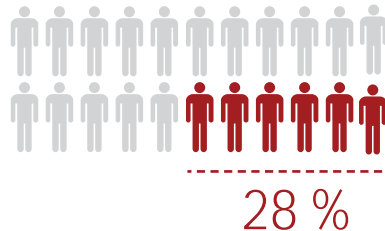
Asia



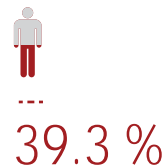
Africa






Europe



Oceania



 Victim of homicide
  Victim of intimate partner/family-related homicide
  = 1,000

Note: estimates based on data for 4 countries in Africa, 14 countries in the Americas; 9 countries in Asia; 21 countries in Europe; and 3 countries in Oceania.

Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

The enduring risk factors for intimate partner/family-related homicide may explain some of the stability of its prevalence. When not addressed through non-violent mechanisms of reconciliation, conflicts and disputes between individuals living in family contexts or as couples can have violent outcomes, especially when certain concomitant factors or enablers are at play, such as power relations based on gender, or patterns of alcohol use (see chapter 3). Factors of that nature tend not to change in the short term.

Fig. 2.2.3: Total homicide rate and intimate partner/family-related homicide rate, selected countries (2006-2011)



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

However, while intimate partner/family-related homicide appears to be very stable at the global level, this disguises nuances across regions (the Americas, Asia and Oceania, and Europe 2006-2011) (see figure 2.2.4). For example, female victim rates of intimate partner/family-related homicide are consistently higher than male rates for this type of homicide, and there is more fluctuation than can be seen at the global level. In promising trends, levels of intimate partner/family-related homicide for both sexes are decreasing in selected countries in Asia and Oceania for which data are available.

Intimate partner/family-related homicide as a component of violence against women

Violence against women is a very broad concept that encompasses forms of physical, sexual and

Intimate partner/family-related homicide: progress in prevention

In the United States of America, various programmes termed “high-risk team networks”^a or “lethality assessment programmes”^b have emerged at State-level to coordinate the sharing of information among law enforcement, social and health services about those experiencing intimate partner or family-related violence (mainly women) who are at risk of being killed at the hands of intimate partners or family members.^c These programmes are based on the concept that there are several predictors of intimate partner and family-related homicide; among them, previous physical abuse, attempted strangulation, threats with weapons, stalking, sexual assault, and obsessive jealous and controlling behaviour.^d When people experiencing such violence seek help from various services such as law enforcement or health care, those services screen them and, through a risk assessment tool, identify cases with a high likelihood of reoccurrence or of lethal assault. Individual intervention plans may involve everything from monitoring offenders to sharing information across the many disciplines of law, justice, health and social services, to working preventatively to protect those experiencing violence and their families. Such measures seem to show a good degree of effectiveness; for example, over the eight years this model has been in place in the State of Massachusetts, 92 per cent of the 106 high-risk individuals identified have reported no subsequent assault and there have been no homicides.^e

^a See, for example, Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center. *Domestic violence high risk team network*.

^b Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence. *Lethality Assessment Program – Maryland Model*.

^c Hanson, B. (2013). *Preventing and Reducing Domestic Violence Homicides*. United States Department of Justice.

^d Campbell, J.C., et al. (2003), in *American Journal of Public Health* 93(7).

^e Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center. *Op.Cit.*

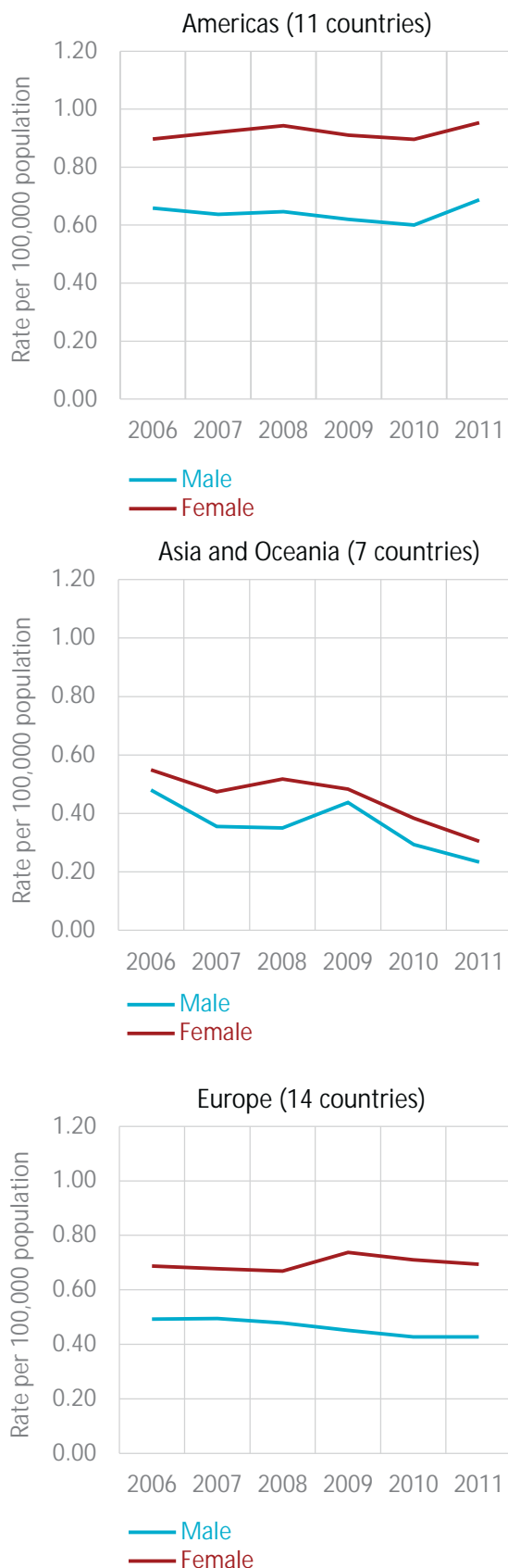
psychological violence.¹⁴ According to the Beijing Declaration, violence against women “is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement.”¹⁵ There are multiple challenges to measuring all forms of violence against women because of its complexity, the high “dark figure” that affects data based on victim reports to authorities (law enforcement and public health), the different means and criteria for collecting data on victimization which may not be comparable, and the difficulty of accurately measuring certain types of violence against women (such as psychological violence).¹⁶

14 Violence against women means 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 such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. United Nations General Assembly (1994). A/RES/48/104.

15 United Nations (1996). *The Beijing Declaration*. Para. 73f.

16 For more information on those challenges, see Jansen, H.A.F.M. (2012). *Prevalence surveys on violence against women: Challenges around indicators, data collection and use*. UNWOMEN.

Fig. 2.2.4: Intimate partner/family-related homicide rate, by sex, Americas, Asia and Oceania, and Europe (2006-2011)



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

The killing of women on the basis of their gender represents the ultimate form of violence against women. In some countries, legislation recognizes the vulnerability of women to violence and makes a link between homicide and violence against women.¹⁷ Terms such as “femicide” or “feminicide” have been used to define the gender-related killing of women, which itself can take many forms. For example, “honour”-related killings, dowry-related killings, as well as witchcraft or sorcery-related killings, are direct forms of gender-related homicide that almost exclusively target women, whereas more indirect forms include other types of killings that may not be counted as homicides.¹⁸ Such homicides are poorly captured by official statistics, which rarely provide information on homicide motives. But what does emerge from available statistical evidence relating to the relationship between victims and offenders is that a significant portion of lethal violence against women takes place in a domestic environment.

Given the aforementioned challenges of measuring gender-related violence in a comprehensive manner, exploring intimate partner/family-related homicide is one way of gaining a clearer understanding of the killing of women due to gender motives.¹⁹ In contrast to other types of homicide in which the victims are predominantly men, the percentage of female homicide victims resulting from intimate partner/family-related homicide is much higher than the corresponding percentage of male victims in all regions. Homicide of this type is the ultimate consequence of unequal power relationships between men and women in the private sphere, which it serves to reinforce and sustain.²⁰ Intimate

17 For example, in Mexico, the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence (2007) defines femicide violence as “the most extreme form of gender violence against women, produced by the violation of their human rights in public and private spheres and formed by the set of misogynist actions that can lead to the impunity of society and the State and culminate in the homicide and other forms of violent death of women.” (article 21).

18 United Nations General Assembly (2012). A/HRC/20/16. Para. 15-16.

19 There are two main theoretical approaches in intimate partner homicide research, notably the “gender perspective” that sees intimate partner violence, particularly against women, as an instrument used by men to maintain their dominance in a patriarchal society, where gender roles and relationships are often crystallized in certain practices and where violence may be a tool to enforce them. The other perspective, the “violence perspective” suggests that the motivation for homicide against intimate partners is no different from the motivation for other types of violence, such as individual defiance or social disadvantage. For more, see Kivivuori, J. and M. Lehti (2012), in *Homicide Studies* 16 (1): 60.

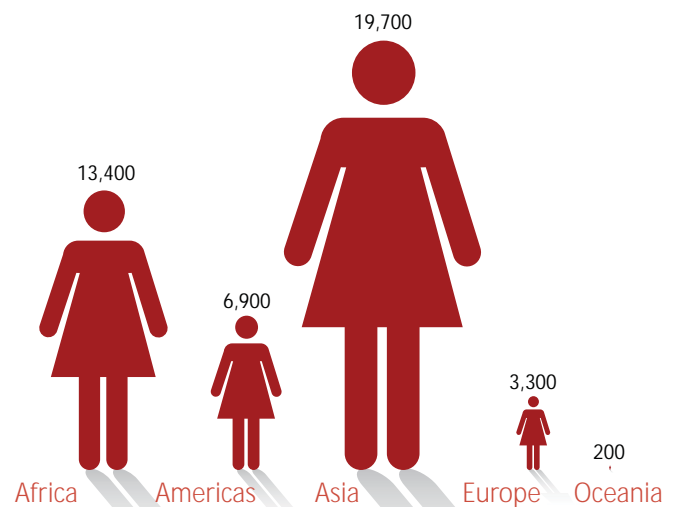
20 Fulu, E. et al. (2013). *Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it?* UNDP, UNFPA, UN

partner/family-related homicide represents a small share of total acts of violence against women, but its very nature, as well as the fact that data on intimate partner/family-related homicide are increasingly available and comparable, make such indicators extremely valuable for understanding and monitoring patterns of violence against women.

It is estimated that of all the women killed in 2012 (93,000 women), 43,600 (47 per cent) were killed by their family members or intimate partners, whereas 20,000 of all male homicide victims (6 per cent) were killed by such perpetrators. Thus, at the global level, more than twice as many women as men are killed by their intimate partners or family members. In absolute terms, the highest numbers of such killings of women take place in Asia and Africa (see figure 2.2.5), but their relative share in the total number of female homicides in each region tells a slightly different story.

Of particular note is the fact that most (over 50 per cent) female victims of homicide in Asia, Europe and Oceania (see figure 2.2.6) are killed by their intimate partners or family members. As such, the killing of women in those regions is effectively a function of intimate partner/family-related violence and, in some countries in those regions, the elimination of intimate partner/family member homicides would substantially reduce the total number of female homicides.

Fig. 2.2.5: Number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide, by region (2012 or latest year)



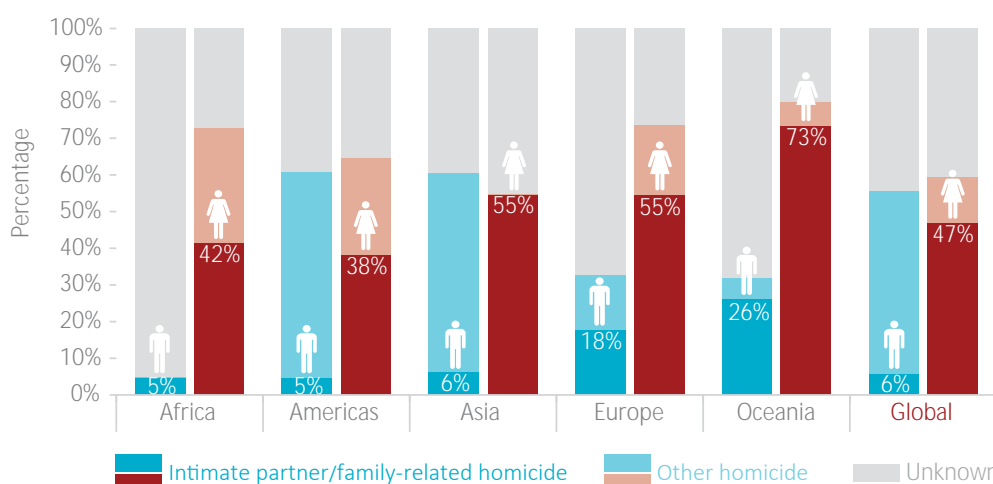
Note: Estimates based on data for 4 countries in Africa, 14 countries in the Americas; 9 countries in Asia; 21 countries in Europe; and 3 countries in Oceania.

Source: Elaboration based on UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

Intimate partner versus family-related homicide

A clearer picture of the burden of lethal violence borne by women can be drawn when sex-disaggregated homicide data are available that can distinguish homicides committed by intimate partners from those perpetrated by other family members. In 18 countries (mostly in Europe),²¹ almost equal shares of victims are killed by intimate partners (53

Fig. 2.2.6: Male and female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide as a percentage of total male and total female homicide victims, by region (latest year)



Note: Estimates based on data for 4 countries in Africa, 14 countries in the Americas; 9 countries in Asia; 21 countries in Europe; and 3 countries in Oceania.

Source: Elaboration based on UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

South Africa: the enduring nature of intimate partner homicide

An example of the enduring nature of intimate partner homicide can be seen in the recent experience of South Africa, a country with a high homicide rate (31 per 100,000 population in 2012). The South African Medical Research Council conducted a study of female homicide for two points in time, 1999 and 2009, and found a substantial (50 per cent) decrease in the overall rate of female homicide over the 10-year period, but less of a decrease in the rate of females killed by their intimate partners.^a The rate of female homicide was 12.9 per 100,000 females in 2009, a little over half of the 24.7 in 1999, while the rate of women killed by their intimate partners decreased 36 per cent over the decade (8.8 to 5.6 per 100,000 females). The decrease is encouraging but South Africa's female homicide rate is still five times the global rate (2.6 per 100,000 women) and intimate partner homicide now accounts for 57 per cent of total female homicides in the country.

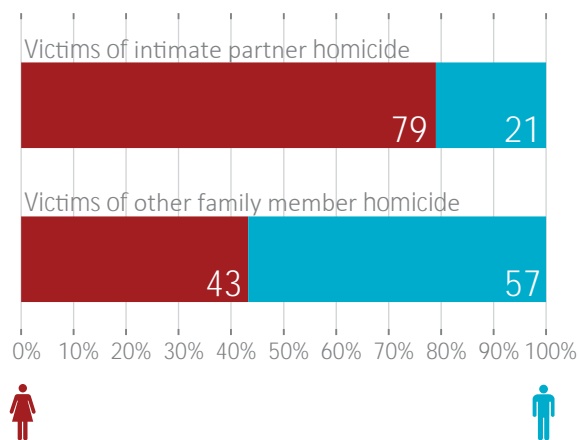
^aAbrahams, N. et al. (2012), in South African Medical Research Council Research Brief.

per cent) and by other family members (47 per cent). There is, however, far greater disparity in the sex distribution of victims killed by these perpetrators, with 79 per cent of victims killed by their intimate partners being women (see figure 2.2.7).

Homicide and gender parity

Available data suggest that in countries with very low (and decreasing) homicide rates (less than 1

Fig. 2.2.7: Average percentage of male and female victims of types of intimate partner/family-related homicide, selected countries (latest year)



Source: UNECE Statistical Division Database.

per 100,000 population), female victims constitute an increasing share of total victims and, in some of those countries, the share of male and female victims appears to be reaching parity. For example, in Japan and Hong Kong, China, which have some of the lowest homicide rates in the world (0.3 and 0.4 per 100,000 population in 2011-2012, respectively), females account for just over half of all victims of homicide (see figure 2.2.8).

“Honour killings”: there is no honour in homicide

“In the name of preserving family ‘honour’, women and girls are shot, stoned, burned alive, strangled, smothered and knifed to death with horrifying regularity.” — Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 8 March 2010.^a

“Honour”-related homicides are the killings of (mostly) women or girls by a member of their family for an actual or presumed act of sexual or behavioural transgression (such as adultery, sexual intercourse or pregnancy outside marriage, refusal to enter an arranged marriage, wearing certain clothing or engaging in activities deemed unsuitable) that is perceived to bring shame upon their family. Such killings are the ultimate manifestation of discrimination against women and girls; the ultimate act of gender-based violence.

It is a challenge to differentiate statistics on “honour killings” from the broader field of statistics on female homicide, as data on this particular motive for homicide are not generated by most police forces. Qualitative studies and interviews on the dynamics and acceptance

of “honour killings” have been produced, but little reliable quantitative data is available.^b For example, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, media coverage and the Crown Prosecution Service documented an average of 12 “honour killings”, which were investigated by the police, each year between 1998 and 2007.^c

“Honour” crimes may not be specific categories within legal systems, but in some countries they may be treated distinctly from non-“honour”-based violence against women.^d In the last few years, several countries have repealed aspects of their criminal and penal codes that provided for mitigated sentences for perpetrators of “honour killings”, and the practice is increasingly criminalized.^e

^a UN OHCHR (2010).

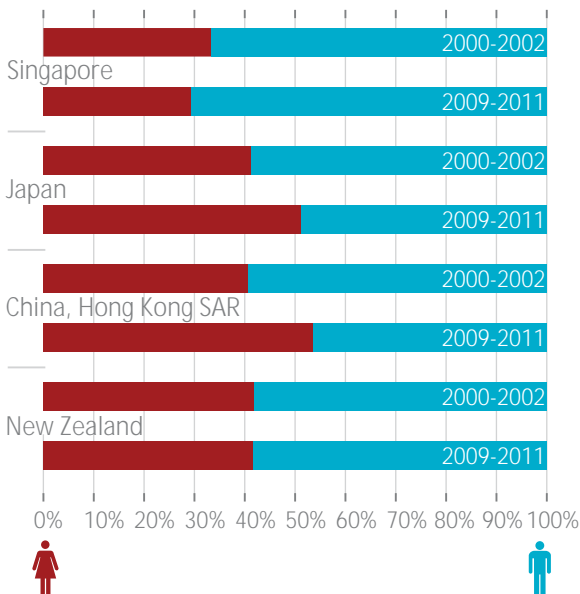
^b See, for example, UNDP and UNFPA (2007); Oberwittler, D. and Kassel, J. (2011); Eisner, M. and L. Ghuneim (2013), in *Aggressive Behaviour* 39(5).

^c Crown Prosecution Service (2007); Crown Prosecution Service (2007), in United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

^d United Nations General Assembly (2002). A/57/169.

^e United Nations General Assembly (2012). A/HRC/20/16.

Fig. 2.2.8: Percentage of total homicide victims, by sex, selected countries with homicide rates below 1.0 per 100,000 population in 2009-2011, Eastern Asia and Oceania (2000-2002 and 2009-2011)



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

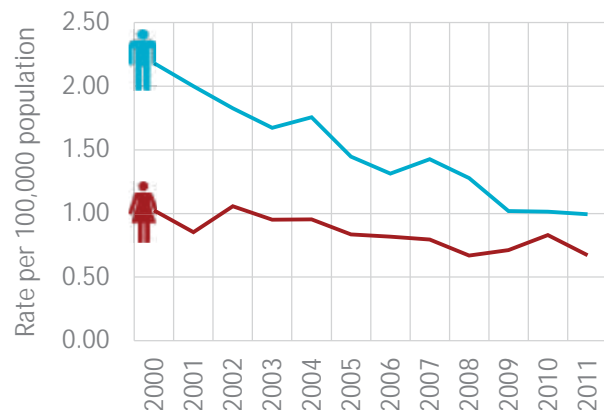
In another group of countries with low homicide rates, made up entirely of European countries, the pattern is the same. The homicide trend is also a downward one, but the pace of the decrease is noticeably faster for rates of male homicide than for rates of female homicide, and the historical gender gap is closing (see figure 2.2.9). If such trends continue, in years to come, there could be more female homicide victims than male victims in a number of countries.

Yet while some countries with very low homicide rates are approaching gender parity in terms of homicide victimization, the same cannot be said for homicide offenders. There remains an imbalance from a perpetrator perspective, with the vast majority of formal suspects²² of intentional homicide being men (for more, see chapter 5). The overwhelming pattern is still that men kill both men and women (see figure 2.2.10), irrespective of the increasing gender parity of the victims in some countries.

Even in some of the world's safest and most developed countries, it appears that homicide is very much the tip of the iceberg when it comes to violence against women. Although the decrease in

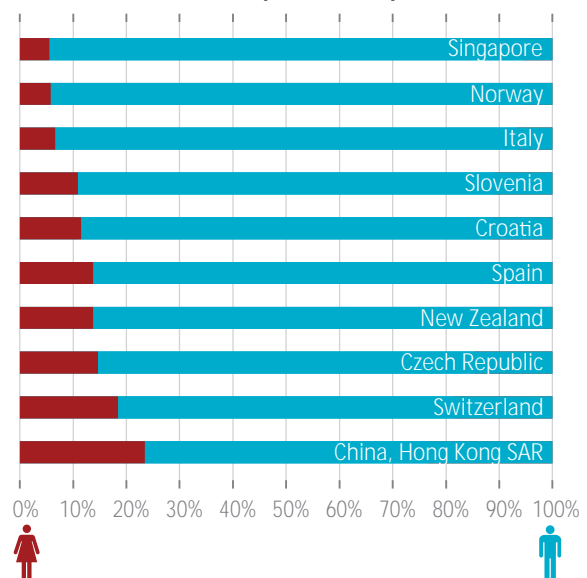
²² Suspects brought into formal contact with the police may include persons suspected of, or arrested and cautioned for, a criminal offence by the police, at the national level.

Fig. 2.2.9: Average homicide rate, by sex, six European countries with homicide rates below 1.0 per 100,000 population in 2011 (2000-2011)



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

Fig. 2.2.10: Percentage distribution of suspects brought into formal contact with police for completed intentional homicide, by sex, selected low-homicide countries (2009-2011)



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

female homicide victims (see figure 2.2.9) is a positive trend in itself, its slow pace highlights the difficulty of eradicating practices and behaviours that are all too often ingrained in cultural and societal norms around the world. Available data show that even in countries with very low homicide rates, a significant share of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. For example, at some point in their lifetime, roughly a quarter to a third of women in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partner.²³

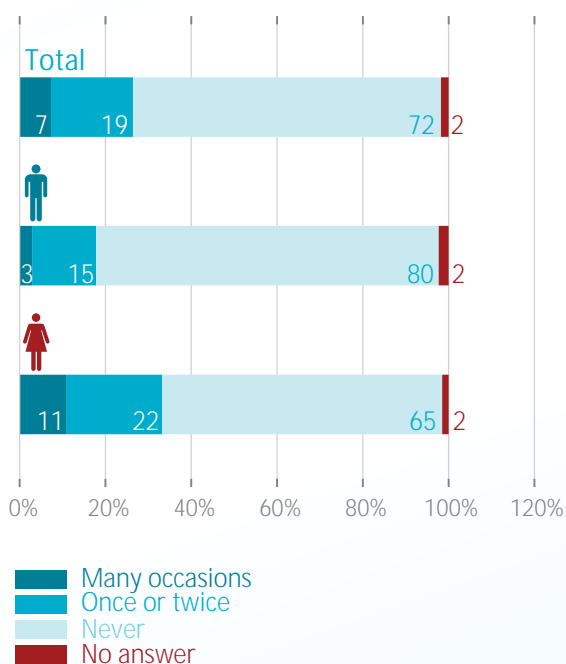
²³ See UNWOMEN (2011).

Intimate partner violence in Japan

The experience of Japan indicates that in a context of very low levels of homicidal violence, additional efforts may still be required to address intimate partner and family-related violence. Every three years, the Japanese Cabinet Office conducts a “Survey on Violence between Men and Women.” In the 2002 survey, 4.4 per cent of female respondents reported that the spousal violence they experienced was severe enough to make them fear for their life.^a In subsequent surveys in 2005 and 2008, over 10 per cent of married women and approximately 3 per cent of married men reported that they experienced either “physical assault”, “mental harassment or frightening threats”, or “sexual coercion” by their spouse on many occasions.^b More than one in five married women and approximately 15 per cent of married men reported having experienced spousal abuse on one or two occasions (see figure 2.2.11).

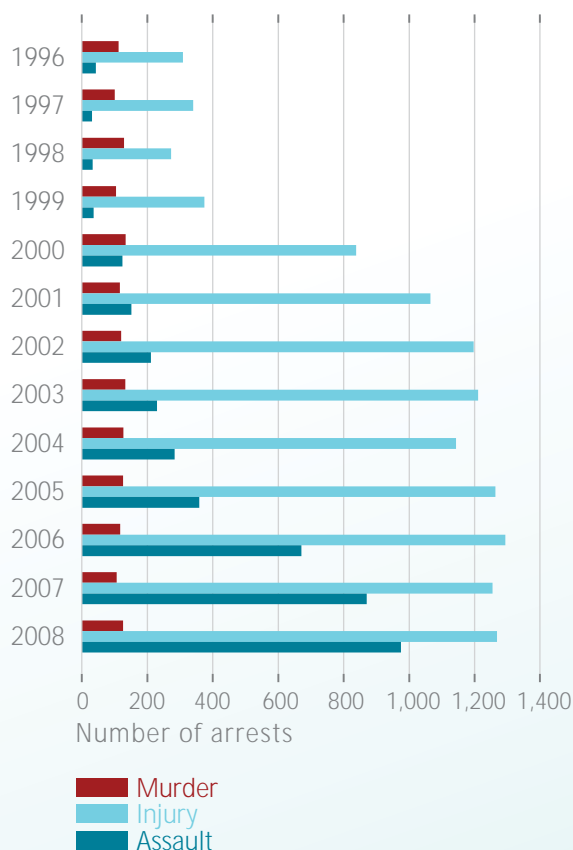
In response to these new findings about the particular vulnerability of women, in the same period, Japan enacted several laws designed to protect women and prevent domestic violence.^c Since the enactment of those laws, more arrests for intimate partner violence have occurred. This could indicate that women who survive such violence feel more empowered by the protection provided by the laws, and, as a result, an increase in the number of arrests for non-lethal spousal violence has occurred (see figure 2.2.12). It is noteworthy that the homicide rate of women killed by their husbands and the corresponding number of husbands arrested for this crime was very stable over the time period, reaffirming the global trend in the stability of intimate partner homicide.

Fig. 2.2.11: Percentage distribution of victimization experience of spousal abuse, by sex, Japan (2008)



Source: Cabinet Office, Japan (2009). P. 34.

Fig. 2.2.12: Arrests for cases of spousal violence against wives by husbands, Japan (1996-2008)



Source: Cabinet Office, Japan (2009). P. 35.

^a Cabinet Office, Japan (2004). P. 31.

^b “Spouse” includes common-law partners, spouses living separately, and also ex-spouses. In the 2008 survey, this term was also expanded to include current partners (boyfriend/girlfriend).

^c For example, the Law on Proscribing Stalking Behaviour and Assisting Victims (enacted 2000), and the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and Protection of Victims (enacted 2001).

Other interpersonal homicide

The previous section deals with homicide in the private or family sphere, but many forms of lethal violence, which are not connected to other criminal activities or socio-political violence, also exist outside domestic relationships. This type of lethal violence can be attributed to the very nature of coexisting with others and the concomitant frictions and differences that exist in some relationships. It may, for example, be rooted in disputes between neighbours, revenge-related killings or may result from random and seemingly unprovoked acts in which the victim is simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some types of interpersonal homicide particularly affect women, especially when linked with forms of sexual violence, and they should be considered a component of violence against women in general.

The division between what can be considered “other interpersonal” homicide or socio-political homicide (as discussed in the last section of this chapter) is not always clear, but the former is the case when killing is not instrumental to the achievement of a further goal, and when the personal dimension drives the homicidal act. Such acts can happen outside in the street, or inside public spaces or establishments, and even at the home of the perpetrator or victim. But the motives that lead to homicides in the public sphere are not often recorded, which is why specific data relating to much “other interpersonal” homicide are difficult to come by.

Mass murder

No other type of homicide generates such public fear or stupefaction at its meaninglessness as that involving multiple victims. Due to its often shocking and sensational nature, particularly of so-called “rampage killings”, mass murder also captures the attention of the public, the media and policymakers the world over, which no doubt colours perceptions of the prevalence and patterns of such events. Also affecting the view of mass murder is the fact that some such incidents bridge the divide between the “other interpersonal” and socio-political homicide typologies, since, depending on the number of victims, deaths due to acts of terror can also be considered mass murder.

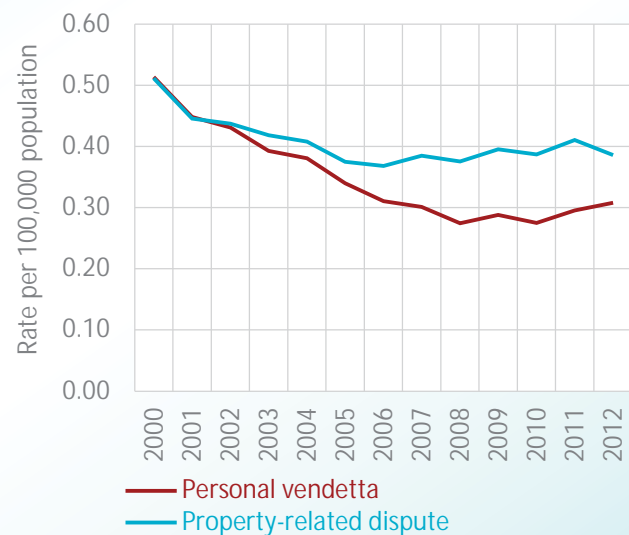
Mass homicides may have a high profile, but they are actually low-frequency events, accounting, for example, for less than 1 per cent of all homicide cases in the United States and less than 3 per cent

in Finland and Sweden.²⁴ Despite the notoriety of this type of killings, there is no universal definition for what actually constitutes “mass murder”, but for most purposes the term denotes the wilful homicide of at least four persons. A common form of mass murder is familicide,²⁵ which, due to its relationship-driven nature, actually spans both components of interpersonal homicide. In available data for both Finland and the United Kingdom, for example, most murders of four or more people have been familicides.²⁶ Other, more public, acts of mass murder, often called rampage or “spree” killings, have occurred in schools and workplaces around the world.

Other interpersonal homicide in India

As denoted in figure 2.2 in the introduction to chapter 2, roughly one in every five homicides (21 per cent) in India is linked to selected forms of other interpersonal-type homicides. From 2000 to 2012, over half of all such homicides were the result of property-related disputes (54 per cent) and the remainder were associated with personal vendettas (46 per cent). Homicides motivated by personal vendetta have decreased by 40 per cent since 2000, while property-related disputes have decreased by 25 per cent.

Fig. 2.2.13: Rate of homicide motivated by personal vendetta or property-related disputes, India (2000-2012)



Source: National Crime Records Bureau, India. (2012).

24 Bureau of Justice Statistics, United States (2013); and European Homicide Monitor.

25 “Familicide” refers to the killing of multiple family members. In its most common form, it is the killing of an intimate partner and child(ren), but may also include the killing of parents and/or siblings. While typically considered a form of intimate partner homicide, given the number of victims in such events, this type of homicide is often “mass murder”.

26 Government of the United Kingdom (2012); and National Research Institute of Legal Policy, Finnish Homicide Monitoring System (2011).