



Female Honor Killing: The Role of Age and Marital Status

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Abstract

Given that most studies on femicide were conducted in Western societies, there is still a need to study the phenomenon among diverse sociocultural contexts, particularly in traditional communities within non-Western contexts. This study focuses on identifying possible risk factors for female honor killing (FHK). A total of 102 cases involving the main Arab subgroups in Israel—Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs—were analyzed from an 11-year period. Study findings note intriguing diversity in femicide risk factors. Commonly considered risk factors previously noted in Western societies' studies, such as prior domestic violence and being in an intimate relationship, were not significant in FHK cases. Instead, being unmarried and older than 30 were found to be associated with increased risks of FHK. These findings suggest a need for further exploration of sociocultural diversity in femicide risk factors.

Keywords: Homicide risk factors; femicide; female honor killing; crime and culture.

Introduction

Given that most studies on femicide (the killing of women) were conducted in Western societies (e.g., Dayan, 2021a; Forciniti & Zavarrone, 2024; Lewis et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2011; Sutton & Beech, 2023), there is still a need to study femicide risk factors among diverse sociocultural contexts, particularly in non-Western societies. The need to contextualize femicide risk factors is further highlighted by growing concerns regarding the generalizability of current knowledge on homicide risk factors and their associated risk assessment tools (Guy et al., 2005; Leistico et al., 2008; Schwalbe, 2008; Singh et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, there is a need to further understand femicide risk factors using a heterogeneous, socioculturally sensitive, and contextualized framework of analysis.

Much knowledge on intimate partner homicide (IPH) emanated from research on factors that contribute to this greatest risk of intimate partner violence, such as characteristics of victimization (e.g., Aldridge & Browne, 2003; Campbell et al., 2007; Garcia et al., 2007) and risk factors for increased lethality (e.g., Campbell, 2004). Female honor killing (FHK), IPH, and femicide are interconnected forms of gender-based violence rooted in patriarchal systems that seek to control and punish women for perceived transgressions (Abu-Odeh, 2010; Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2003; Dayan, 2021a, 2023; Sheehan et al., 2015; Weismann-Henelius et al., 2012). While honor killings are often framed as culturally specific acts meant to restore



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family reputation following a woman's alleged moral or sexual impropriety (Ne'emann-Haviv, 2021), they share key characteristics with other forms of femicide, particularly IPH. In both FHK and IPH, the motive is frequently tied to male control, jealousy, or a sense of ownership over the woman (Campbell et al., 2010). These forms of violence reflect broader patterns in which women are killed for asserting autonomy, ending relationships, or defying gender norms (Christianson & Eriksson, 2014; Christianson et al., 2021). Thus, rather than being entirely distinct categories, FHK and IPH exist along a continuum of violence that targets women who challenge patriarchal authority.

During the past four decades, a surge in researching risks of lethal and fatal intimate partner violence in the form of IPH has been noted (Singh et al., 2011). Since most IPH victims are women (e.g., Stöckl et al., 2013; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019), knowledge on IPH risk factors seems to be almost equated with femicide (Sheehan et al., 2015). Understanding the dynamics of IPH risk is essential for developing effective crime prevention strategies (Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020). However, as we shall note, since most studies and corresponding risk assessment tools have been developed in Western societies, there remains a need to examine femicide risk factors within diverse sociocultural contexts, such as FHK in non-Western societies.

IPH and FHK risk factors can be broadly categorized into two distinct dimensions: individual and situational. Individual risk factors encompass inherent traits and behaviors of individuals that render them more susceptible to victimization (Ferraro, 1995). In IPH, individual characteristics noted as risk factors are: an intimate male partner's (a) extreme jealousy/possessiveness (e.g., Campbell et al., 2003), (b) previous criminal or violent activity (Campbell et al., 2007), (c) substance abuse (e.g., Aldridge & Browne, 2003; Garcia et al., 2007; Oram et al., 2013), (d) mental health problems (Spencer & Stith, 2020), or (e) unemployment (e.g., Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 2007); or a female intimate partner having children from a previous intimate relationship (Campbell, 2012). Some of these risk factors (e.g., mental health problems and substance abuse) have been criticized due to their emphasis on the characteristics of victims as potential contributors to violence, thereby being associated with victim-blaming narratives (see Grubb & Turner, 2012). In FHK, individual characteristics identified as risk factors include young age (Chesler, 2010) and single marital status (i.e., never married, widowed, separated, or divorced; e.g., Al-Adili et al., 2008; Kressel et al., 1981; Kulczycki & Windle, 2011).

In contrast, situational risk factors focus on the external conditions and immediate circumstances surrounding potential victims (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson & Steadman, 1983). Situational risk factors include: (a) a woman being previously battered by a male partner, particularly being abused while pregnant (Campbell et al., 2003; Spencer & Stith, 2020); (b) a male partner's direct access to a gun (Matias et al., 2019; Spencer & Stith, 2020); (c) a male partner's previous threats with a weapon or nonfatal strangulation of the woman (Campbell et al., 2007); (d) a previous male partner's stalking of the woman (Aldridge & Browne, 2003; Campbell et al., 2007); and (e) a woman's desire for estrangement (e.g., Matias et al., 2019). In FHK, situational characteristics noted as risk factors include domestic violence inflicted by both nuclear and extended family members (Payton, 2014), low economic status, and rapid modernization (Dayan, 2021a). Additional situational risk factors, such as pervasive cultural or legal norms tolerating or condoning violence against women, may reinforce potential offenders' beliefs and behaviors, thereby exacerbating the risk factors associated with FHK (Dayan, 2023; Hasan, 2002).

The extensive research on IPH culminated in the development of risk assessment tools. Utilized in police forces, legal procedures, prison facilities, treatment services, and other relevant agencies, these tools are considered crucially relevant for decision support systems and for effective prevention and interventions for women at risk (Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2011). However, we argue that since most studies and corresponding risk assessment tools have been developed in Western societies, there remains a need to examine femicide risk factors within diverse sociocultural contexts, such as FHK in non-Western societies.

Using Israel as a non-Western society, this study endeavored to identify possible risk factors for FHK within traditional communities in non-Western contexts, specifically among the Arab population in Israel. Building a risk management tool requires sizable quantitative resources that are currently lacking regarding FHK (Payton, 2014). Nonetheless, this study is important to the mapping and understanding of diversity in risk factors for femicide in general and FHK in particular.

Contextualizing Female Honor Killing

FHK appears to occur in multiple contexts. While some cases are linked to "honor"-related motives (Dayan, 2021a; 2023; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021), the majority—both globally and in Israel—stem from intimate partner violence and systemic gender-based power imbalances (e.g., Abdo, 2006; Abu-Rabia, 2011; Hassan, 2006; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999, 2002). Key FHK characteristics relate to its agnatic, familial, collective, and honor-related nature (e.g., Abdo, 2006; Abu-Odeh, 2010; Chesler, 2010; Hasan, 2002; Kulwicky, 2002). The concept of honor is intricately linked to the female body, virginity, and sexuality,

especially in non-Western patriarchal societies, where a woman's sexual purity is often seen as a direct reflection of her family's and community's honor (Barmaki, 2021; Bordo, 2020; Loza, 2022; Parla, 2001). In these contexts, female virginity is not only a personal attribute but a social commodity and a marker of family status, with the preservation of an unbroken hymen until marriage being heavily emphasized and policed (see Schlegel, 1991). The loss or suspected loss of virginity—whether through premarital sex, rape, or unfounded rumors—can result in severe social consequences, including ostracism, violence, or even honor killings, as the woman is perceived to have brought shame upon her entire family (Bordo, 2020; Brown et al., 2018; Christianson & Eriksson, 2014; Loza, 2022). These honor codes function as mechanisms of informal social control, restricting women's autonomy, dictating their behavior, and reinforcing patriarchal structures by making female sexuality a matter of collective, rather than individual, concern (Loza, 2021; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021). Thus, the female body becomes a symbolic site where notions of purity, family reputation, and social order are negotiated and enforced, often to the detriment of women's rights and freedoms (Loza, 2021).

FHK is also deeply intertwined with patriarchal control over women's marital status, where marriage is often viewed as a contractual agreement between families rather than a personal choice for the woman (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Hasan, 2002; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021). When women refuse arranged marriages, seek divorce, or are perceived as failing to fulfill marital expectations—such as remaining faithful or producing heirs—they are seen as violating family honor and may be targeted for FHK (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; Barmaki, 2021; Peristiany, 1965; van Baak et al., 2024). In many cultures, a woman's marital status directly impacts her perceived worth and the family's social standing; thus, any deviation from accepted marital norms, including separation or divorce, can provoke extreme family reactions, including honor killings (Kayaoglu, 2022; Lamichhane et al., 2011; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021).

FHK is a type of group-on-individual, or collective, violence, whereby the group inflicting violence on women is not the community at large but the social unit on which the community is based—in this case, the family (Cooney, 2014). Such honor-related femicides have been a long-standing phenomenon in both Muslim Arab and Christian Arab societies in the Middle East such as Israel (Abdo, 2006; Dayan et al., 2024) and Turkey (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025). It is also a growing phenomenon among Middle Eastern diasporic communities in Western societies, increasingly identified in Europe and in the Anglophone world (Lewis et al., 2024; McLachlan & Ferguson, 2024; Payton, 2014; Soares et al., 2024).

Although FHK is increasingly recognized as a form of violence against women and girls, it is neither fully conceptualized nor integrated into risk management strategies increasingly used to address femicide in Western societies (Payton, 2014). A corollary of this theoretical gap is that evidence-based risk assessment tools and policy cannot be sufficiently developed. This study aimed to enhance our comprehension of femicide risk factors by delving into a specific non-Western sociocultural context, potentially characterized by diversity ingrained within Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs in Israel.

To identify related FHK risk factors, the research focused on three previously postulated FHK risk factors: women's young age (e.g., Chesler, 2010; Kulwicky, 2002; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2002), single marital status (i.e., never married, widowed, separated, or divorced; e.g., Al-Adili et al., 2008; Kressel et al., 1981; Kulczycki & Windle, 2011), and prior domestic violence (e.g., Payton, 2014; Touma-Sliman, 2005). Therefore, based on previous studies on FHK (e.g., Chesler, 2010; Kulczycki & Windle, 2011) and literature on FHK risk factors (Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 2007; Chesler, 2010; Sorrentino et al., 2020), we hypothesized that:

- H1: Women younger than 30 are at higher risk of being the victim of FHK compared to women 30 and older. For the purpose of this analysis, we defined a young woman as younger than 30 because this age group is often referred to as young adults in the literature (Arnett & Tanner, 2016).
- H2: Unmarried women (never married, estranged, divorced, or widowed) are at higher risk of being the victims of FHK compared to married women.
- H3: Women who have suffered domestic violence in the past (intimate partner violence or extended family violence) are at higher risk of being the victim of FHK.

Research Population

Israel is often characterized as a hybrid society, with a self-image and international reputation that is largely Western, yet it differs in significant ways from typical Western democracies (Ben-Porat et al., 2023; Smootha, 2002). Scholarly analyses highlight that, despite being inspired by Western democratic ideals and enjoying economic integration with the West, Israel's social fabric is marked by deep cleavages. These exist not only between Jews and Arabs but also among Jewish subgroups divided along religious, ethnic, and political lines (Dayan, 2021b; Dayan et al., 2024). These divisions are reflected in public

policy debates over religion and state, and the lack of a unified civic identity challenges the notion of Israel as a Western society (Ben-Porat et al., 2023).

About 2.08 million people in Israel (excluding Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem) are of Arab descent (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The Arab population in Israel is diverse, consisting of two main subgroups, Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs, who differ in terms of religion, social structures, culture, and geographical locations (Amara & Schnell, 2004; Haj-Yahia, 2000). Several cultural characteristics are common to Arab social groups: the family and clan (*hamula*) as the central units of society, a collective identity, a patriarchal and patrilineal social structure, and notions of family honor and female-related honor (Abdo, 2006; Dayan, 2023; Dayan et al., 2024; Landau, 2016). According to Al-Haj (2012), the Arab society in Israel has undergone significant changes in different areas, of which the level of education is probably the most salient. The illiteracy rate among Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs has decreased rapidly, along with a steady increase in tertiary education (Al-Haj, 2012). However, the patriarchal culture and the familial clan social structure have remained despite economic, educational, political, and social changes in the Israeli Arab society in recent decades (Abdo, 2006; Landau, 2016).

The Arab population in Israel maintains social harmony through social interdependence and mutual responsibility of individuals, culturally preserving family ties and placing community interests ahead of those of individuals (Dayan et al., 2024; Meler & Marnin-Distelfeld, 2023; Shdema & Martin, 2022). Traditional marriage patterns are preserved (with women required to obtain the family's blessing and consent) and early-age marriage is common (Dayan, 2021a, 2021b; Sabbah-Karkabi, 2024; Shiri et al., 2024). Family problems are generally addressed and guided by older family members, who provide concrete and immediate solutions. Regarding gender, a woman's social status in the Arab society has always been considered inferior to that of a man, with women's lives constrained and dependent on men financially, socially, and culturally (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Dayan et al., 2024; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021; Sabbah-Karkabi, 2024; Shehadeh & Alayan, 2025).

Method

To test the hypotheses, we collected and analyzed data on relevant microlevel factors in all FHK cases in Israel from January 2010 to December 2020 (11 years, $N = 102$). A case was included if the woman was at least 15 years old (Corradi et al., 2017) and the killing was confirmed either by the police or criminal procedures as a homicide offense and was not related to a terror attack, medical negligence, or non-related criminal activity such as robbery. Cases that occurred in the Gaza Strip or West Bank were excluded for want of relevant information. Due to the unavailability of official data on femicide in Israel, data on FHK cases and their various relevant factors were collected using a media surveillance methodology (Adinkrah, 2014; Warren-Gordon et al., 2010). Media surveillance is recognized as a valid methodology for studying FHK, particularly in contexts where official datasets are scarce or unavailable (Adinkrah, 2014, p. 372; Warren-Gordon et al., 2010, p. 1594). This method involved structured media searches using relevant keywords (e.g., "honor killing," "female murder," "family honor"), followed by the application of a coding framework adapted from Dayan (2021a) and Dayan et al. (2024). Sampling was conducted through media surveillance, encompassing prominent Israeli online news platforms such as Walla and Ynet, from 2021 to 2022. This exploratory study focused on microlevel factors related to FHK because, given the nature of the secondary data, this was the main information that could be collected and coded systematically.

All FHK cases from 2010 to 2020 were extracted from the media and reviewed and coded by a trained research assistant (RA) with substantial experience in coding femicide cases. In cases of missing data in the available media ($n = 20$), the RA corroborated the media-based data using official government publications such as police records, court files, and information from nongovernmental organizations, when obtainable. Where the RA was in doubt, the authors were consulted and resolved coding. Overall, the data collected constitute a census of all known femicide cases in the Arab society in Israel (excluding Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem) between 2010 and 2020. One hundred and two eligible cases were identified, comprising the research sample. The unit of analysis was the case file. Each case was coded for variables such as the victim's age, marital status, and prior known domestic violence. Descriptive statistics about cases with more than 10% missing data were excluded (Schlomer et al., 2010). We endeavored to collect additional information on the victims' education, employment, and chronic diseases. However, missing data associated with these variables caused a substantial number of cases to exceed the 10% threshold, so these variables were excluded from the statistical analysis to preserve sample size (Schlomer et al., 2010). Based on the literature on FHK risk factors (Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 2007; Chesler, 2010; Sorrentino et al., 2020), we hypothesized that:

- H1: Women younger than 30 are at higher risk of being the victim of FHK compared to women 30 and older. For this analysis, we defined a young woman as younger than 30 because this age group is often referred to as young adults in the literature (Arnett & Tanner, 2016).

- H2: Unmarried women (never married, estranged, divorced, or widowed) are at higher risk of being the victims of FHK compared to married women.
- H3: There is a positive correlation between the number of reported domestic violence incidents (including intimate partner violence or extended family violence) and an increased risk of becoming a victim of FHK.

Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis and to map different risk factors. Following descriptive analysis, comparisons of FHK incidence and social factors were conducted, comparing rates in the group of FHK cases to rates in the Arab population, using Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2024) data and conducting exact binomial tests.

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, most victims had children (58.8%, $n = 60$), did not engage in drugs or alcohol (69.6%, $n = 71$), and were not pregnant (91.2%, $n = 93$).

Table 1

Descriptive Table of FHK Risk Factors

	n	%
Victim has children		
Yes	60	58.8
No	42	41.2
Victim's substance abuse (drugs/alcohol)		
Yes	31	30.3
No	71	69.6
Victim's pregnancy*		
Yes	9	8.8
No	93	91.2

*At the time of being killed.

As shown in Table 2, the victims' mean age was 34.19 ($SD = 14.58$). Therefore, being 30 or older was an FHK risk factor, with women older than 30 being significantly overrepresented among FHK cases. Although women 30 or older comprise 38% of the total Arab women population in Israel (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024), they comprised 57.8% ($n = 59$) of the FHK cases. An exact binomial sign test indicated that the proportion of women 30 or older among FHK cases was significantly higher than their share in the general Arab population in Israel ($p < .001$).

Being unmarried was also an FHK risk factor, because unmarried Arab women (never married, estranged, divorced, or widowed) were at higher risk of being femicide victims compared to married Arab women. An exact binomial sign test indicated that the share of unmarried women in the FHK group was significantly higher (56.8%, $n = 54$) than their share in the general Arab population in Israel (41.3%, $p < .01$). When combining the age and marital status variables and their share in the general Arab population in Israel, we found that unmarried Arab women 30 or older had a significantly higher risk of being a femicide victim. An exact binomial sign test indicated that the share of these women in the FHK group (24.2%, $n = 23$) was significantly higher than their share in the total population of Arab women in Israel (14.5%, $p < .01$). Thus, being unmarried in general, and being unmarried and older than 30 specifically, was associated with an increased risk of FHK.

Prior domestic violence was reported in 30.4% ($n = 31$) of these FHK cases. Because we did not have data about the share of women with prior known domestic violence in the general Arab population, we could only compare the percentage of women in the FHK group who had prior known domestic violence (30.4%, $n = 31$) to those who had no such prior known domestic violence (16.7%, $n = 17$). A chi-square analysis indicated that the difference was not significant ($\chi^2 = 3.419$, $df = 1$, $p = .064$); hence, prior domestic violence was not found to be an FHK risk factor.

Table 2*Nonparametric Tests*

	Current research		General population/ expected	
	n	%	%	p-value
Age (M=34.19 SD=14.58)				
Under 29	43	42.2	62.0	0.000
30 and above	59	57.8	38.0	
Marital status				
Non-married	54	56.8	41.3	0.002
Married	41	43.2	58.7	
Age*marital status				
Over 30 & non-married	72	70.6	14.5	0.008
Other	27	26.5	85.5	
Prior domestic violence				
Yes	75	58.1	50.0	0.064
No	54	41.8	50.0	

Discussion

Our findings suggest that women Aged 30 and over face an increased risk of FHK. This observation is intriguing because most FHK studies, both among Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs in Israel and in other places in the world, found a higher frequency of FHK among young women. The characteristic of younger women having a greater FHK risk was observed in Arab diasporic communities in Western societies (Chesler, 2010), Arab countries (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Kulwicky, 2002; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2002), and Israel (Abdo, 2006; Kressel et al., 1981; Sela-Shayovitz, 2010). This finding is intriguing, particularly against the backdrop of the tendency in Arab communities to marry off women at an early age, believing that the status of a married woman shields her from allegations of a family honor violation (Al-Adili et al., 2008; Hliheli, 2008).

The changing pattern of FHK victims' age seems to converge with femicide risk factors based on research in Western societies. Campbell et al. (2003) reported the mean age of high femicide risk was older than 30 ($M = 31.4$) and Sorrentino et al. (2020) noted a peak high-risk age from 30 to 49 years old. However, despite similarities regarding age, contrary to current knowledge on femicide risk factors based on Western studies, we found that older unmarried women face the highest risk of FHK. A somewhat similar pattern was observed by Al-Adili et al. (2008), who found that the likelihood of an Arab woman in the West Bank dying (from sickness, injury, accident, or crime) was much higher among unmarried women than married women.

When analyzed based on general victimological approaches to crime, our finding is not peculiar because being an unmarried adult (unmarried or widowed), particularly an unmarried adult woman, was noted as a precipitating victimological factor as early as the 1970s (von Hentig, 1979). This general risk factor may be more prominent in patriarchal cultures that portray their disapproval and condemnation of unmarried women, believing a woman's social status should be conferred through fulfilling her role as a wedded wife (e.g., Al-Adili et al., 2008, p. 113; Hliheli, 2008, pp. 283, 305; Trivedi et al., 2009). For example, Al-Adili et al. (2008) argued that if an Arab woman in the West Bank passes her late 20s without marrying, she is labelled *A'nes*. This means she is usually considered to be beyond marriageable age and viewed as having less worth in the eyes of the community, especially in Arab conservative and rural communities. Such older unmarried women, constrained in their daily

activities, social interactions, and relationships (Al-Adili et al., 2008), might consequently lack social support networks (Gähler, 2006) that play a protective role against FHK.

Unmarried status as a femicide risk factor may not be unique to FHK. Similar stigmatic social attributions have been reported with respect to divorcees in general, owing to their sociodemographic singlehood status and the possible correlated social stigma associated with not having “fulfilled” gendered expectations regarding their social roles as wives. Indeed, empirical studies have repeatedly shown that marital dissolution is associated with several social problems. Studies indicated that, in addition to the lack of a partner, women divorcees generally have smaller social networks (i.e., fewer potential providers of social support) than women living with a partner (Gähler, 2006; Trivedi et al., 2009). The low economic status of divorced and unmarried women is a social risk factor for femicide because women’s economic disadvantage (the poverty gap between men and women in the same society) increases their risk of being killed (Brewer & Smith, 1995, p. 184). However, given that Arab societies still regard the phenomenon of divorce as a sensitive taboo (Buchbinder & Barakat, 2014; Haj-Yahia, 2000), the social stigma and economic hardships Arab divorcees and unmarried women face may be relatively worse than their Western counterparts (Hliheli, 2008; Trivedi et al., 2009).

The overrepresentation of unmarried women generally, and older unmarried women specifically, in FHK cases runs counter to what is commonly recognised as key femicide risk factor according to studies conducted in Western societies (see Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020). The FHK phenomenon does not seem to correlate with what is considered the primary femicide risk factor in current knowledge: being in an intimate (often cohabiting) relationship. This characteristic of FHK, i.e., being killed irrespective of intimate relationship status, implies that risk factors pertaining to perpetrators and victims, so far acknowledged as femicide risk factors, may be irrelevant to FHK.

This central diverging characteristic of FHK implies that it should not be equated with female IPH, although there are possible close affinities between IPH and femicide in Western societies. Whereas female IPH is estimated to account for more than 30% of femicide cases across the globe (Stöckl et al., 2013), a substantial proportion of all femicide cases are perpetrated by individuals who are not intimate partners. An estimated 66% of femicide cases are committed by either family members or perpetrators outside the family (24% and 42% of all femicide cases, respectively; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). Because non-IPH femicide is considered more common in Arab societies (Chesler, 2010; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999; Touma-Sliman, 2005), special care and attention toward advancing knowledge on non-IPH femicide’s possible diversity and its risk factors is imperative in this context.

Viewed through a broader theoretical lens, our findings on FHK risk factors appear to align with current theoretical discourse on homicide risk factors. In this discourse, there is uncertainty over the generalizability and predictive power of IPH risk factors in non-Western sociocultural settings (Guy et al., 2005; Leistico et al., 2008; Schwalbe, 2008; Singh et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009). The findings of this research seem to corroborate this raised uncertainty and support arguments regarding current knowledge on IPH risk factors having greater predictive power among Caucasian victims than non-Caucasian victims (Långström, 2004; Leistico et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2011).

An additional finding appears to contradict current knowledge that prior domestic violence toward femicide victims is an IPH risk factor (e.g., Brewer & Smith, 1995; Campbell et al., 2003). Compared to empirically reported figures of prior domestic violence in femicide cases, indicating about 70% of femicide cases were preceded by domestic violence (Campbell et al., 2007), our data showed prior domestic violence in only about 31% of the FHK cases. It is possible that prior domestic violence is a significant risk factor yet it goes underreported in FHK cases in Israel. The underreporting pattern may be further heightened in this study, given empirical evidence indicating an extremely low level of trust in the police among the Arab population in Israel (e.g., Hasisi, 2008; Hasisi & Weitzer, 2007) and the general tendency not to report crimes to the police in the absence of trust (e.g., Mentovich et al., 2016).

Moreover, older unmarried women who are abused or battered by their extended families may be even less willing or able to report such violence due to the agnatic and collective nature of FHK and the higher homicide risk these women face. This possible explanation resonates with Payton’s (2014) observation on the understanding of gender-based violence. Payton (2014) noted that this understanding is grounded mainly in Western familial patterns of dyadic interpersonal relationships and nuclear families, whereas comprehensive knowledge of how it manifests in extended family relationships and collective societies is lacking.

Alternatively, this finding may be situated within a larger debate regarding the fact that many femicide risk factors seem to be similar to, if not the same as, those for intimate partner violence (Spencer & Stith, 2020). Such similarity, or overlap, makes homicide predictions more complex (Sheehan et al., 2015). Thus, this research finding corroborates the need to further identify

key risk factors for femicide, beyond prior intimate partner violence (Caman et al., 2017; Campbell, 2012; Campbell et al., 2003; Garcia et al., 2007; Matias et al., 2019; Nicolaidis et al., 2003; Sebire, 2013; Sheehan et al., 2015; Vives-Cases et al., 2016).

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged in this study. First, the relatively small sample size limits the ability to generalize the findings. Second, given that the research is based on secondary data from media sources, there may be inherent biases in the data collected. Third, while FHK should be examined as a heterogeneous phenomenon (Dayan, 2021a; Dayan et al., 2024), the small sample size in this study hindered a comprehensive analysis. Lastly, because this research focused specifically on the Arab population in Israel, its applicability to FHK in other regions remains unclear. Future studies should aim to include larger samples from diverse Arab communities to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusions

Despite the above limitations, our findings emphasize the need to reorient scholarly research to the notion of diversity in crime in general and homicide in particular. Femicide should not be viewed as a homogenous phenomenon; thus, a sensitive contextual framework is needed to better comprehend the phenomenon. Implications for addressing femicide include the need to broaden scientific knowledge on femicide; explore crime phenomena in diverse sociocultural contexts and diverse forms, such as non-IPH femicide; and design risk assessment tools with higher predictive power for non-Caucasian women victims. By definition, the call to contextualize knowledge on femicide risk factors extends beyond non-Western cultures, given femicide commonly encompasses diverse social contexts that may themselves be risk factors. For example, the predictive power of IPH risk assessment tools might differ based on migratory processes (Matias et al., 2019), unemployment, and alcohol abuse (Weismann-Henelius et al., 2012).

In this study, we examined the current paradigm of risk factors for female homicide victims and shed light on crucial differences regarding risk factors. This research demonstrates the scientific importance of studying criminal phenomena amid their various possible sociocultural contexts. Analyzing one such context with a non-Western sample of femicide cases, this research seems to corroborate arguments that to develop an accurate and comprehensive scientific understanding of social phenomena, empirical analysis of non-Western manifestations is crucial (e.g., Adams et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2020). Highlighting once again Payton's (2014) observation on the nature of domestic violence perpetrated by extended family members, our findings suggest that our understanding of domestic violence patterns in Arab societies is still lacking. The myriad ways in which domestic violence toward women can be perpetrated not by their intimate partners but rather by their extended family await further comprehensive studies.

Future research on FHK risk factors should adopt a multifaceted approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon. Comparative analyses across different cultural contexts can help identify common risk factors while acknowledging the unique contextual elements at play. Future studies should explore FHK diversity across Arab sociocultural groups (i.e., Christians, Muslims, and Bedouins) in Western and non-Western societies. Due to the sociocultural differences in the Arab society, it is essential to explore the role of family dynamics, cultural norms, and legal frameworks to develop a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to honor killings.

Implications

Addressing the complex issue of FHK risk factors requires an interdisciplinary approach involving helping professions and policymakers. This study highlights the need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to femicide research and prevention. It underscores that risk factors for femicide can vary significantly across different cultural and social contexts. As such, interventions and policies aimed at reducing FHK and similar forms of violence must be tailored to the specific characteristics and dynamics of each community. In addition, the findings challenge preconceived notions about femicide risk factors and emphasize the importance of continuous reassessment and refinement of our understanding of potential homicide risk factors. Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners should remain open to evolving insights and adapt strategies accordingly. Lastly, the study underscores the significance of considering sociocultural diversity in the design of prevention programs and support services for vulnerable individuals.

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Data Availability

The data supporting this study's findings are not publicly available. However, they can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical considerations.

Ethics Statement

All procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and later amendments. Approval was obtained from University of Haifa Human Research Ethics Committee.

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