

**Young intimate femicide in Romania. Incidence and risk factors****DOI:** <http://doi.org/10.26758/8.1.2>

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**Abstract**

**Objectives.** This paper presents the results of the first research made in Romania on young intimate femicide cases committed between 2011 and 2015. The study aims to identify the incidence, risk factors and the particularities of the young intimate femicide from a South-East European country.

**Material and methods.** In the definition area for ‘*young intimate femicide*’, there are included all cases of intentional murder of a woman aged between 15-25 years, both the victim and the offender being actual or former intimate partners. Information about the cases of young intimate femicide was extracted from the online media. The registration file for the young intimate femicide cases includes: data regarding the victim, the offender, and the murder.

**Results.** A number of 184 cases of intimate femicide were committed in Romania between 2011-2015, out of which 32 cases (17.4%) were committed against young women aged between 15 and 25 years old. On average, 6 young intimate femicide cases were committed per year. The number of women murdered in urban areas (59.4%) was higher than the number of young intimate femicide committed in rural areas (40.6%).

**Conclusions.** This study confirms the results of other studies regarding young intimate femicide. The results of data analysis show that the young intimate femicide is the result of a relationship marked by violence against women. For most of the cases, jealousy associated with the suspicion of infidelity represented the main reasons for young intimate femicide.

**Keywords:** young intimate femicide; risk factors; victims; perpetrators; Romania.

**Introduction**

The number of women killed by their partner is still high at the moment, despite the fact that in some regions of the world important steps in fighting violence against women, including intimate femicide, were taken. In the category of ‘intimate femicide’, all the homicides intentionally committed by the current or former partner (husbands, lovers, concubines) on women were included. A study which analyzed the data regarding intimate partner homicide in 66 countries pointed out that “*one in seven homicides (13.5%) is committed by an intimate partner*” (Stockl et al., 2013, p.859). On average, 38.6% of the total number of femicide cases was committed by the intimate partner. The highest values of intimate femicide were recorded in Southeast Asia (58.8%), the Americas (40.5%), and Africa (40.1%) (Ibidem). The studies focused on the identification of risk factors showed that among risk factors there are: Intimate Partner Violence (Campbell, 1992, 2003;

Dobash et al., 2004), history of violence, forced sex and threats to harm children (McFarlane et al., 1999), the victim separation from offender (Dobash et al., 2004; Brennan, 2016) associated with “stalking, abuse during pregnancy, forced sex, and previous threat with a weapon” (Campbell et al., 2003b:1089). Other studies pointed out the role of socio-demographical factors (such as the age of aggressor and victim, the poverty, the ethnicity, the type of relationship – Dobash et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 2003b; Wilson et al., 1995).

Some authors drew attention to the fact that offenders who commit femicide are “specialized” in “violence against women” (Dobash et al., 2004). Other authors showed the fact that the offenders were themselves victims of the abuse during their childhood (Aldrige and Browne 2003), they were poor and unemployed (Campbell, 2003, Dobash et al., 2004), have mental health issues (Dobash et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 2001; Belfrage and Rying, 2004), have substance use problems (Dobash et al 2004), a personal criminal history (Belfrage and Rying 2004) and also they have the desire to control women (Dobash et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 2003; Wilson and Daly, 1992). In most of the cases the victims are women who are members of the ethnic groups (Corradi and Piacenti, 2016; Cases et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2003), have substance use problems (Sharps et al., 2003), and previous experience of Intimate Partner Violence victimization (Abrahams et al., 2000).

The majority of these studies do not differentiate between adult intimate femicide and young or adolescent intimate femicide. So far, few studies have been carried out regarding young intimate femicide and even less were focused on identifying the risk factors that are specific for this type of violence. Nevertheless, some studies highlighted the fact that young femicide cases were committed to a higher extent by intimate partners and family members (Coyne-Beasley et al., 1999), while adolescent femicide cases (11-14 years) were mostly committed by family members (Coyne-Beasley et al., 2003).

Other studies provided information regarding the incidence of femicide for some age groups. Studies carried out in countries from Latin America highlighted the fact that the number of femicide adolescent victims was quite high. In Argentina, the number of female adolescents murdered was of 124 victims aged between 13 and 18 years old within the timeframe 2008-2013 (Zambrano, 2017). On average, 21 female adolescents per year lost their lives in this country. In Mexico, 315 girls and teenagers were killed in 2013 only (Frayssinet, 2015).

In England and Wales, within the timeframe 2009-2015, 3.5% of the victims of femicide were aged between 14 and 17 years old and 14.8% were aged between 18 and 25 years old (Brennan, 2016:16). Among the factors which determinate the Intimate Partner Violence evolution towards young femicide there were highlighted the fact that young women tend to consider the partner’s violence a sign of love (Roscoe and Callahan, 1983; Roscoe and Kelsey, 1986; Seimer, 2004) and do not evaluate correctly the consequences of violence (Seimer, 2004). Other studies showed that, in general, young intimate femicide is determined by the same risk factors identified among adult intimate femicide. However, the influence of some factors like: jealousy and the partner’s desire to control the victim, unemployment and the separation of the victim from the perpetrator are more strongly manifested among cases of young intimate femicide (Glass et al., 2008).

## Material and methods

In this paper, the term ‘femicide’ was used as it was defined in the *Vienna Declaration* as “the killing of women and girls because of their gender” (\*\*\*2013, p.2). In the definition area for „*young intimate femicide*” there were included all cases of murder intentionally committed on a

woman aged between 15 and 25 years old, with the victim and the aggressor being actual or former intimate partners (husband, ex-husband, partner, ex-partner, lover, ex-lover). Here there are included all cases committed between Romanians, either in Romania or abroad, regardless of the aggressor's age.

The study presents the results of the analysis of young intimate femicide cases committed between 2011 and 2015. The corpus of the analysis was formed by all the young intimate femicide cases which were identified in the online media (N=32). In order to obtain information regarding these cases, articles from Romanian media regarding cases of young intimate femicide within the timeframe 2010-2015 (N=569 articles) were analyzed. These articles were identified using keywords typed in Google Chrome: *"murdered his wife/ex-wife"*, *"murdered his girlfriend/ex-girlfriend"*, *"murdered his concubine/ ex-concubine"*. In order to identify as many articles as possible, new keywords extracted from the articles found in the first phase were used to find other articles related to the case of young intimate femicide. These keywords were: the name of the aggressor, the weapon used to commit the murder and the place where the murder occurred. The resulting articles were analyzed using a scale divided into four sections: data regarding young intimate femicide, data regarding the victim, data regarding the offender and data regarding media coverage of the case. In order to identify young intimate femicide, all the cases involving victims under the age of 25 and who were either current or former intimate partners when the murder occurred were selected. In the end, N=32 of intimate femicide cases committed by intimate partners on women who were under the age of 25 were identified.

## Results

In the timeframe 2011-2015, in Romania, there were committed 184 intimate femicides. On average, 25.3 women were murdered by their partners per year. In the same timeframe, 54 young femicides took place, 32 cases being committed on young women aged between 15-25 years old. The weight of young intimate femicide in the total amount of intimate femicide cases was 17.4%. , On average, 6 young intimate femicide cases were committed per year. In 2013 values two times higher than the annual average (12 cases) were recorded. The fewest cases were committed in 2015 (2 cases). Approximately two-thirds of the cases were committed in the urban area (19 cases) and the rest of them in the rural area (13) (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Intimate femicide cases and young intimate femicide cases committed in Romania**

Year	Intimate femicide cases	Young intimate femicide cases
2011	18	5
2012	41	6
2013	48	12
2014	44	7
2015	34	2
Total	184	32

## Perpetrators' characteristics

The average age of the perpetrators was 24.7 years old (16-56 years old). More than half of the perpetrators were young people under the age of 25 (16-17 years old – 3 perpetrators; 18-25

years old – 14 perpetrators). A quarter of the perpetrators were young people aged between 26-35 years old, while 5 perpetrators were aged between 36-45 years old. A single perpetrator was above the age of 56. Information about the educational level and profession was rarely mentioned in the articles. Only the professions of one-third of the perpetrators (11) were identified, the majority having a low professional level (9): skilled and low-skilled workers, day laborers, unemployed. Two of the perpetrators were found to have a high professional status: one of them was a well-known businessman and the other was the secretary-general of a county party organization. The great majority of the perpetrators worked in Romania and only four of them abroad (2 in Italy, one in the UK and one in Spain).

One-third of the perpetrators were under the influence of alcohol (9) or drugs (1). Health issues were mentioned for only two perpetrators: one of them suffered from depression and the other from a borderline personality disorder. One-third of the perpetrators (11) had criminal records: theft (2), assault and battery (3), rape (1), procuring (2), drug trafficking (1), public order offense (1), and trespassing (1). Three perpetrators were sanctioned for violence acts against the victims that were killed. In one case, the perpetrator had a restraining order and was not allowed to approach the victim.

More than a half of the perpetrators were residents in the urban area (17) and the rest in the rural area (14) (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Characteristics of victims and perpetrators**

	Victims	Perpetrators
Age		
<17 years	9	3
18-25 years	23	14
26-35 years	-	9
36-45 years	-	5
56 years	-	1
Level of education		
Low	-	-
Medium	5	1
High	3	1
Unknown	24	29
Occupation level		
Low	7	8
Medium	1	1
High	-	2
Unknown	24	21
Residence		
Urban	16	17
Rural	14	14
Alcohol/drug consumption	1	9/1
Health/mental problems	-	2
Criminal records	-	11

### **Characteristics of the victims**

The victims' average age was 19.9 years old (15-25 years old). Approximately two-thirds were aged between 18 and 25 years old (23 victims), and one third were minors, under the age of 18 (9). It was noticed that the victims' age was younger than the perpetrators'.

The level of education was mentioned for only eight victims. Five of them were high school pupils and three were university students (see Table 2).

More than half of the victims came from the urban area (16) and the rest from the rural area (14). For three of them, the residence was not mentioned. Only one was under the drug influence. The great majority of the victims (23) were clinically healthy people.

### **Relationship background**

The great majority of the perpetrators were the victims' current partners when the murder occurred (19 were boyfriends and 4 were husbands). Approximately one-third of them were former partners (9 former boyfriends). Three of the perpetrators had been separated for maximum 2 weeks and two couples had been separated for 6 months. One victim had just announced the perpetrator that she wanted to break up with him. Most of the actors involved in young intimate femicide cases had been together for maximum 2 years (10). Approximately one third (8) had had a relationship lasting 2-4 years, two couples a relationship longer than 5 years, and one couple a 10-year relationship.

More than a third of the perpetrators (11) were described as jealous (7) or violent (11) individuals. We notice the fact that violence was mentioned for all the 11 perpetrators, while jealousy was indicated only for seven perpetrators. Among them, some perpetrators were both violent and jealous (4) or both jealous and possessive (2). One perpetrator was well known for the jealousy and the threatening towards the victim. For another perpetrator, there were mentioned the jealousy and the fact that he continued to stalk the victim even after they had broken up.

For two-thirds of the relationships (21) frequent verbal conflicts were indicated. One-third of the victims were physically aggressed. Three victims lodged a complaint to the police and seven told the relatives about the violence acts they were undergone to by their partners. A single victim had obtained a restraining order against her perpetrator. One victim was beaten by her former partner even after they had separated. For two victims, there was information that the perpetrators had threatened them to death.

### **Data regarding young intimate femicide**

The great majority of young intimate femicide (29 cases) were acts of violence involving a single victim. Only three cases involved more victims, one of them being the aggressor's intimate partner (one case had 2 victims, the second 3, and the third 6 victims). Most of the young intimate femicide cases (23) were committed in the evening and at night in the timeframe 6.00 pm - 6.00 am. The rest of them were committed during the day, between 6.00 am and 6.00 pm. One-third of the young intimate femicide cases were committed at the victim's place (3 in the house and 8 in the yard) and only five young intimate femicide cases were committed at the aggressor's place (4 in the house and 1 in the yard). One-third of the murders (11) were committed in the place shared by the victim and the aggressor. Other seven young intimate femicide acts were committed in public places

(the center of the town, the hospital) or in spaces located at the periphery of the city (abandoned building, parks, a river's shore).

Half of the murders were committed by using a knife and five young intimate femicide acts were committed by hitting the victims with other objects (2 with an axe, 2 with a stake/pipe, one with scissors). Approximately one-third of the victims (8) were murdered by hitting them with fists and legs. Eight victims were murdered by strangulation and three were burnt alive. One-third of the young intimate femicide cases (10) were committed in the presence of some witnesses. In four of the cases, the witnesses were members of the family, in other four cases the family's children were present, and in two cases members of the aggressor's family. In almost half of the cases (14) multiple hits on the victims' bodies were identified. In eight cases, the victims were killed by a single hit, in four by 2-5 hits, and in three cases they were killed with 9-14 hits.

**Table 3. Motivation of young intimate femicide**

Motivation	Number of cases
The aggressor was jealous and thought the victim was cheating on him	9
The aggressor was jealous	4
The aggressor did not stand the idea of breaking up with the victim	1
The victim wanted to end the relationship with the aggressor	4
Between the aggressor and the victim conflicts often occurred and following some contradictions, the situation degenerated	2
The aggressor was jealous and the victim was often threatened because of jealousy	1
The victim ended the relationship with the aggressor. The latter tried to convince the victim to get back together when she came to his place, but she refused and the perpetrator became aggressive	1
The victim refused to get back with the partner	2
The victim refused to have sexual intercourse with the aggressor and wanted to go to her parents	1
The aggressor tried to have sexual intercourse with the victim and she refused	1
The victim refused to go to France together with the aggressor. He did not have a permanent job and had gone abroad for 8 months. At his return, he found the victim pregnant, which led to the idea he had been cheated on	1
The victims wanted to separate from the partners	5
The victim wanted to end the relationship with the aggressor and to abort the pregnancy	1
The victim and her relatives wanted to throw the aggressor out of the house	1
The victim wanted to return to Romania to visit her relatives. The aggressor did not agree with this - jealous of what the victim could do while she was at home	1
Between the aggressor and the victim took place conflicts based on alcohol/drugs consumption	2
The aggressor found out that the victim cheated on him	1

One-third of the murders were based on jealousy and suspicion of infidelity (9). Other six young intimate femicide cases were committed because of the perpetrators' jealousy. Four of the murderers were generated by conflicts between aggressors and victims and two of them occurred in

the context of alcohol and drugs consumption. The victims' refusal to get back together with the perpetrators led to killing three young women. A young intimate femicide case was committed because the victim refused to go to France together with the perpetrator, and two cases were committed because the victims refused to have sexual intercourse with the perpetrators. Seven young intimate femicide cases were committed because the victims wanted to separate from the perpetrators (one victim wanted to separate from him and to have an abortion and another victim wanted to throw the aggressor out of the house). For a single young intimate femicide case, there was information that the perpetrator killed his partner because she cheated on him.

## Discussions

The data analysis regarding the young intimate femicide cases in Romania has highlighted the fact that this type of violence seems to align to the patterns of young intimate femicide cases that were analyzed in some European countries (England and Wales). The weight of young intimate femicide cases among the total of intimate femicide cases in Romania was similar to the one recorded in approximately the same timeframe (2009-2015) in England and Wales (Romania – 17.4%; England and Wales – 18.3%) (Brenan, 2016, p.16).

The number of young intimate femicide cases recorded in Romania was significantly smaller than in countries from Latin America. In Argentina 124 young intimate femicide acts were committed in the timeframe 2008-2013 (Zabrano, 2017) and in Mexico 315 cases were recorded in a single year (Frayssinet, 2015). The average number of young intimate femicide cases per year in Romania was also smaller (6 cases per year) than in countries where this average was calculated (for example Argentina 21 cases per year) (Zabrano, 2017). The small number of young intimate femicide cases identified in Romanian media may be far from being real. Previous studies focused on the analysis of some types of homicide (Balica, 2016a) showed the fact that Romanian media presented approximately half of the homicide - suicides cases committed in the timeframe 2003-2013. Other studies showed an increase journalists' interest in media coverage of lethal violence in the recent years (Balica, 2016a, Balica, 2016b). Under these circumstances, shown in other papers (Balica, 2018, in press), as the official statistics (of police and justice) do not contain information regarding the victims' gender, the real number of young intimate femicide cases cannot be evaluated.

As it is also presented in the studies carried out in England and Wales (Brenan, 2016, p.16), most of the victims of young intimate femicide cases from Romania were aged between 18-25 years old (two-thirds of the victims). The fact that approximately two-thirds of the young femicide cases (N=32) were committed by intimate partners confirms the results of other studies which also have shown that young femicide acts with victims aged between 18-25 years old were committed by intimate partners (Coyne-Beasley et al., 1999). At the same time, the results of our study confirm the fact that the age difference between partners represents a risk factor for young intimate femicide. In Romania, the age difference between partners (4.8 years) was similar to the age difference identified within research in the USA (4.7 years) (Glass et al., 2008, p.181).

The results of the present study confirm the information highlighted by other studies in Romania and different European countries regarding femicide in general or young intimate femicide. They show the fact that acts of violence have mainly been based on jealousy and the suspicion of infidelity, these two motivations being also identified in young intimate femicide (Glass et al., 2008) and in intimate femicide (Balica, 2018, in press; Balica, 2016a). In this study, unlike intimate femicide, jealousy and suspicion of infidelity seem to be more obvious as main motivations

of young intimate femicide. The situation is not specific for Romania only, but also for cases committed in other countries (Glass et al., 2008). Taking into account the fact that there is an obvious background of violence between the two partners (although the majority of couples have had a relationship of maximum two years), frequent verbal conflicts, physical aggressions, death threatening and following the victim by the perpetrator were indicated in most of the cases. Information regarding the acts of violence they were undergone to and the lack of police reports can also be interpreted as a sign of tolerance from the victims towards the partners' violence. We can evaluate that there is a high level of interpreting the partner's violence as a sign of love by the young victims (Seimer, 2004; Roscoe and Callahan, 1983).

The way young intimate femicide acts were committed is specific for murderers committed against intimate partners. In most of the cases, the victims were killed using a knife either at their home or at the aggressor's. Using the knife as a murder weapon is a common fact in Romania (Balica, 2016; Balica, 2018, in press). In other European countries, the knife is one of the most frequently used (in Italy, for example, 29% of femicide acts were committed using a knife) together with the fire weapons (Italy – 31%) (Corradi and Piacenti, 2016). In the United Kingdom, most of the cases of femicide (45.5%) and intimate femicide (48.5%) were also committed with a sharp object (a knife) (Brenan, 2016, p.26). Strangulating the victim was mentioned in approximately one-third of the young intimate femicide cases in Romania, a fact which confirms the results of international studies regarding femicide (UK - strangulating is the second killing method within intimate femicide) (Brenan, 2016, p.26). On the other hand, the fact that more than half of the victims (17) were murdered by multiple stabs confirms the results of some studies regarding intimate femicide (Mathews et al., 2008; Chan, 2007). The presence of physical and verbal violence acts, but also of threatening and stalking (aggressor following the victim) made us think that the great number of stabs represents the expression of the perpetrator's hostility towards the victim, as it is also shown by Chan in his studies (2007).

## Conclusions

The research regarding young intimate femicide is one of the few studies that have been carried out on this topic at an international level and the first of this kind among countries from the South-East of Europe. Few studies regarding femicide and young femicide were carried out in the European area, although over the past few years the pressure of the European feminist organizations to initiate some measures that would prevent femicide has been felt. The paper brings into the discussion a type of lethal violence whose victims are young women in particular. The present study allows the identification of some risk factors that are specific for young intimate femicide committed in Romania.

The number of the cases analyzed was quite small and the information regarding young intimate femicide was taken from media, therefore the conclusions of this study should be considered with precaution. Nevertheless, the results of our study are similar to the results of international studies. The fact that young intimate femicide (adolescent femicide and young adult femicide) remains quite high in some regions of the world, determines us to suggest the expansion of the analysis of young intimate femicide cases to a greater period of time and the usage of some data regarding this type of femicide which are in the custody of the law system (criminal files from courts, data from police's statistics). The interviews with perpetrators who committed young intimate femicide or with young intimate femicide survivors could be used in order to identify the factors generating intimate partner violence within young short-term couples (as it results/ed from our research).

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