

Data activism against feminicide

Co-designing digital tools to monitor gender-related violence across the Americas

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Each year tens of thousands of cis and transgender women and girls are killed in violence related to their gender. This problem, known as feminicide, is vastly underreported. Researchers, civil society groups and activists have joined forces to co-design new digital tools that can help record missing data.

Project affiliation: Data Against Feminicide

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Femicide: a global problem that is not being addressed

Gender-related violence against women and its lethal outcome, femicide, has a devastating impact on individuals and societies around the world.

Although governments have passed legislation recognising femicide as a specific crime, official data is often missing, incomplete or inaccurate.

This evidence gap means that we do not understand the full scale of the problem or how to target efforts to prevent it. In response, grassroots activists and civil society organisations are finding ways to collect data themselves.

Research overview

This brief draws on qualitative and participatory action research designed to understand activists' data practices around femicide monitoring and to co-design practical digital tools that support activists in their work.

- Mapping **180+ initiatives globally** that produce data about gender-related violence.
- Interviews with **41 activists and civil society groups** that monitor femicide across 18 countries, particularly in Latin America.
- **Three years of participatory research with data activists**, including collaborative data annotation for machine learning, co-design and testing of digital tools.



Insights from our research can facilitate the workflow and data practices of grassroots activists and civil society organisations who monitor femicide, as well as help policymakers, journalists and academics better understand and address problems of missing data on gender-related violence.

Recommendations

1

Policymakers should recognise and support grassroots data production. Activists leading these initiatives have valuable expert knowledge on femicide in their local areas. Policymakers can collaborate with these organisations, where appropriate, to produce more robust data and develop better policies to prevent femicide.

2

Journalists should work with activists to improve media coverage of femicide. Activists typically rely on media sources to identify femicide cases, but find that media coverage is plagued by missing information and biased narratives that often blame victims. Activists understand these biases and how to confront them, which could be valuable to journalists reporting on these cases.

3

Funding bodies and governments should fund continuous grassroots femicide monitoring. Grassroots activists play a vital role in producing femicide data and holding states and media accountable. However, this work is often undervalued and voluntary, despite being labour-intensive and emotionally draining. Greater access to funding can help activists sustain their work over time.

4

Governments, academia, and civil society should work together for a social justice-oriented and participatory data science. Big data and AI raise questions about how data is produced and who it overlooks. The digital tools we have co-developed — a data highlighter and tailored email alert system — show it is possible to build digital technologies through participatory processes that engage communities, value their lived experiences and confront structural inequalities.

Femicide: a structural and intersectional problem

Gender-related violence happens inside the home and outside in the public spaces of cities, towns, villages and rural areas around the world. It is part of a pattern of violence against women driven by misogynistic, racist and transphobic attitudes in society, discrimination and unequal power. As such, **some people are disproportionately targeted with violence and neglected in efforts to address it, including women from racialised, trans, indigenous and low-income groups.** While the crimes are committed by individuals, the problem is structural, enabled by state inaction and media coverage that downplays the issue or blames victims. **By addressing these structural causes, we can help stop the violence and create a safer world for all women and girls.**

Key findings and resources

States and the media contribute to producing incomplete data

States:

- frame legislation in ways that may exclude and thus under-report certain types of femicide like trans-femicides or femicides that occur in public spaces
- make official data hard to access
- fail to carry out proper investigations into murders
- misclassify deaths caused by gender violence, particularly in relation to transgender identity, race and indigenous peoples.

The media coverage of deaths, a key resource for activists, often:

- lacks information on victims
- focuses on high-profile cases, paying less attention to murders in poorer communities
- perpetuates harmful attitudes towards women and minoritised groups, blaming victims for violence.

‘Counterdata’ that values people, memory and justice

Activists confront the issue of missing data on femicide by producing ‘counterdata’ that values the lives of marginalised people who are victims of violence. We identified three common stages to this work: research, careful record keeping, and remembering the human stories of the people recorded in data.



The sharing of experiences and the digital tools that were developed have helped to expand the horizon for our monitoring and political advocacy, as well as to optimise the time we invest in deepening and consolidating the work we do.

Dr Silvana Mariano, director of the Laboratório de Estudos de Femicídios (LESFEM) and co-founder of Néias - Observatório de Femicídios Londrina, Brazil

New AI-powered tools to support data activism

We have co-designed and developed two digital tools to support grassroots activists and civil society groups with the informatic tasks of producing counterdata about femicide:

- **‘Data Highlighter’**: a browser extension that helps activists pinpoint relevant information about femicide cases when reading a webpage
- **‘Data Against Femicide Email Alert’**: an AI-powered platform that identifies news articles that are highly likely to concern a femicide.

The tools aim to reduce, not replace, the manual and emotional labour of monitoring femicide by reducing exposure to violent content. Both tools are free to download and can be used by anyone interested in collecting femicide data.



Access the tools in English, Spanish and Portuguese:
www.datoscontrafemicidio.net

Underpinning research

D'Ignazio et al., (2022). 'Femicide and counterdata production: Activist efforts to monitor and challenge gender-related violence', *Patterns*, Vol. 3, Issue 7.

Suresh et al., (2022). 'Towards Intersectional Feminist and Participatory ML: A Case Study in Supporting Femicide Counterdata Collection', *FACCT '22: Proceedings of the 2022 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*.



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