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Perceptions of Social Capital Before and After the Perpetration of Femicide, Homicide, and Other Serious Crimes: Evidence from Argentina

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, femicide—the gender-based killing of women or girls—has become an issue of international concern. Yet relatively little data on perpetrators exist. Current research primarily focuses on individual risk factors with less attention on community and societal factors. We use a social capital approach to examine femicide by analyzing the extent to which crime perpetrators experience and perceive social punishment (exclusion) from their social networks. Using a quota sampling strategy, we administered a cross-sectional questionnaire to perpetrators of femicide ($N = 71$), male–male homicide ($N = 73$), and other serious crimes ($N = 64$) across four prisons in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Other crime perpetrators served as a control to the two lethal crime groups. Perceived social capital scores were assigned based on responses to two scales adapted from the World Bank's "Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital." Before committing murder, femicide and homicide perpetrators' scores were not statistically different. Yet after the crime, femicide perpetrators retained significantly greater scores than homicide perpetrators. The perceived

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social capital scores of other crime perpetrators did not change after the commission of their crimes. As a secondary objective, we examined the individual and social contexts of femicide perpetrators. Most (85%) of the femicide perpetrators could name at least one other person in their social network whom they knew to be physically violent during disagreements with their partner, while 11% stated that "everyone" they knew used violence during disagreements. Although the penalty for committing femicide and homicide is ostensibly equivalent—a life sentence of 50 years—we found that the informal social punishment femicide perpetrators perceived is less severe than that experienced by homicide perpetrators. These data indicate a lack of social punishment for femicide, compared to other crimes, showing social legitimization of the crime. These findings support the development of community-level interventions to prevent femicide.

Keywords
homicide, homicide (and domestic violence), violent offenders, perceptions of domestic violence (domestic violence), batterers (domestic violence)

Introduction

Femicide, the killing of women or girls because of their gender, is an extreme manifestation of rigid and patriarchal gender norms (Messerschmidt, 2017; Segato, 2013).[1] Despite increasing attention to the phenomenon—including the enactment of anti-femicide laws in many countries (Pasinato & de Ávila, 2023)—femicide trends have remained relatively unchanged over the last decade (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021; United Nations Women, 2018). Every hour, more than five women or girls are intentionally killed by a family member or intimate partner (UNODC, 2022).

Over the past two decades, understanding of femicide has increased with a focus on victimization risk factors. Justifiably, most literature on femicide is centered on victims (Dobash & Dobash, 2015; 2017, p. 135) with intimate partner violence (IPV) being a primary risk factor for femicide (Garcia-Vergara et al., 2022). However, victim-centered research may implicitly place the burden for femicide prevention on victims (Oddone, 2020). Translating research into prevention introduces a variety of challenges as it can be difficult and dangerous for potential victims to extricate themselves from abusive and violent relationships. As perpetrators are the drivers of femicide, primary prevention begins with them. Research capturing the perpetrator's perspective is critical. However, in contrast to data on victims, the information on offenders, their life courses, or biographical contexts is scarce (Di Marco & Evans, 2021; Dobash & Dobash, 2017, p. 135; Johnson et al., 2019). A recent

systematic literature review of first-hand accounts from femicide perpetrators found only 14 papers; quantitative data on perpetrators are confined to demographics, psychological, and criminological profiles (Evans et al., 2023).

In addition to perpetrators' individual and interpersonal characteristics, social and community norms are also worthy of consideration. Podreka (2019, p. 16) argues that femicide reflects broader patriarchal power relations between men and women. In her sample, femicide perpetrators utilized violence when they felt they were losing power and control in their relationship and/or as a means to reposition themselves and their own authority in their relationship and their community. Podreka's findings are in keeping with masculinities research on lethal and non-lethal IPV (Gottzén, 2019; Kimmel, 2019; Messerschmidt, 2017). Monckton Smith (2020, p. 1278) identified a "discursive link between losing control and losing status." By killing their partners, these men seek to re-establish the roles they believe they should hold and hope for some "confirmation of their manliness" (Podreka, 2019, p. 22). While evidence on the rationale behind violence perpetration has been growing, fewer studies have been conducted about the immediate social surroundings of these men. Furthermore, the current evidence base lacks sufficient information to back policy-making that would identify and implement upstream approaches to femicide prevention among potential perpetrators (Brookman, 2015; Oddone, 2017; 2020).

Social Capital, Social Sanctions, and Crime

Formative literature stresses that community norms and social networks play an important role in violence victimization and perpetration (Messner et al., 2004; Rosenfeld et al., 2001; Voith et al., 2021). We draw upon social capital theory as a framework for the methodology of this study and as a means to orient the findings. Social capital is made up of the "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Everyday interactions between neighbors and friends build social networks, the societal structural units via which bonds are created, norms are set, and information is disseminated. Within a social network, individuals trust one another not to violate these norms; otherwise, offenders can expect consequences and social isolation (Lederman et al., 2002; Putnam, 2000). Yet crime and violence persist even within tight social networks. In the literature, there are two primary social-capital-related explanations for the incidence of crime: a deficit of social capital and the perversion of social capital.

Social Capital Deficit. Social capital deficit research has found an association between increases in social capital and decreases in crime; likewise, the

opposite is also observed (Lederman et al., 2002). Neighborhoods characterized by high crime also tend to rank lower in social capital as lower levels of social capital are often found in economically depressed areas (Akçomak & ter Weel, 2012; Kirst et al., 2015; Lederman et al., 2002; Rubio, 1997). However, the direction of causation is unclear largely because of historical and contemporary wealth-based inequities and systems of oppression. As Miles-Doan & Kelly (1997) identified, "compared to other neighborhoods, those with a concentration of people living in poverty are. . .likely to have fewer formal (police protection) or informal (community crime prevention strategies) social controls available" (p. 134).

Further supporting the theory of social capital deficit is the evidence of an inverse relationship between social capital and crime. A 2006 study with a sample of 1,435 American mothers, found a one-point increase in a social capital score was associated with a 30% reduction in domestic violence (Zolotor & Runyun, 2006). Lederman et al. (2002) included 39 countries in a study examining the effect of social capital—measured by voluntary participation in civil, community, and religious organizations—on the homicide incidence in each country and found that increased social capital was associated with a reduced risk of violent crime.

Perverse Social Capital. The theory of perverse social capital posits the presence of social capital may not always help to prevent crime; instead, it can facilitate it (Cuesta et al., 2007; Rubio, 1997). Rather than risk losing relationships, in some communities, committing a crime can strengthen relationships. While researching juvenile gangs in Colombia, Rubio (1997) distinguished between productive and perverse social capital, arguing that criminality is not always evidence of a social capital deficit, but rather a different type of social capital is present. The trust and bonding relationship established between members of a gang is a prime example; to be accepted as a member of the in-group, one must commit crime and/or violence. Whereas social capital might usually serve as a deterrent, perverse social capital motivates and normalizes crime and violence by providing the same benefits one might usually expect by acting in a way that is beneficial to the community, but instead by performing acts that are harmful to society and may only serve to benefit the in-group. Murder can be understood as a consequence of the pervasive norms of a social group (see Segato, 2013) or as an individual action to achieve an interactional, emotional, and moral positioning (Fahs, 2023).

Thus, perverse social capital and masculinity theory are complementary in this context. This understanding of social capital dovetails with Podreka's (2019) analysis of what motivates men to commit femicide, ". . .mainly as a

means of repositioning themselves and their own authority, both in relation to their partner, among their friends and in the wider society from which they want to get confirmation of their manliness" (p. 22). In communities where violence is used to prove one's masculinity, perverse social capital may incentivize violent crime to establish and maintain social connections.

Within some communities, violence against a woman, and in particular violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, is discursively constructed as legitimate, normalized, and even inevitable (Di Marco & Sandberg, 2024; Segato, 2013). An individual's risk of experiencing IPV increases when there are higher levels of IPV within their neighborhood and social network (Baeza et al., 2022; McQuestion, 2003; Raghavan et al., 2006, 2009; Uthman et al., 2011). Sá et al. (2021, p. 7) as well as Agoff et al. (2007) warn against the assumption that women with strong social ties are protected against IPV as individuals around the victim can serve to perpetuate the belief that abuse is tolerable.

Social Sanctions. A common thread between these two branches of social capital theory is the understanding that social networks exert control over individuals' actions and decision-making via the implementation of social sanctions. Communities enact informal social sanctions by withdrawing social capital as punishment. Following a study of 142 Dutch municipalities wherein researchers observed social capital levels increase as crime rates decreased, Akçomak & ter Weel (2012) argued when "deviant" behavior (i.e., criminality) is punished, others in the community are more likely to refrain from that same behavior.

Much of the literature on social capital among incarcerated individuals is focused on re-entry and recidivism. The prevailing theory is that those who can maintain strong social ties while in prison are less likely to be incarcerated again following release. But social capital is difficult to maintain in prison, since not only are there logistical barriers, but "friends and relatives might not want to keep contact with someone who has committed a crime" (Liem, 2013). This deficit of social capital makes it even more difficult to successfully re-integrate following imprisonment (Lafferty et al., 2015; Liem, 2013; Liu et al., 2016). Perpetrators of crime, particularly sex offenders, suffer significant social sanctions upon returning to their communities, unable to gain employment, housing, join organizations, or maintain relationships with old friends (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Liu et al., 2016; Tolson & Klein, 2015). Using a rational choice theory framework, Nagin and Paternoster (1994) found that offenders not only consider the formal and legal consequences of a crime but also the informal sanctions they may face such as the "cost of damage to social bonds." The risk of losing ties with

family, friends, and neighbors increases the cost of committing a crime and, therefore, serves as a further deterrent.

This research contributes to the literature on femicide prevention by taking perpetration as its central focus. We bridge sociological theory (with a focus on social relationships) and the public health framework (which centers on populations and community-based prevention) by drawing from the social–ecological model to widen the scope of perpetration analysis beyond the individual to consider how community and society interact with the perpetrator in the context of their crimes. This approach aligns with the belief that transdisciplinary and multi-level research is necessary to build effective strategies against femicides (Pizarro et al., 2023). Our work is oriented toward ultimately preventing femicide. We test whether a sample of incarcerated men—perpetrators of femicide, male–male homicide, and other crimes—report the same degree of informal social punishment from their social networks following the commission of their crimes. For each type of offender, we consider social capital scores, operationalized as social network size and social support given and received. As a secondary objective, we examine the individual and social contexts of homicide perpetrators.

Materials and Methods

Study Setting

In 2012, Argentina added femicide to the penal code defining the crime as, "the violent death of women for reasons of gender, whether it takes place within the family, domestic unit or in any other interpersonal relationship; in the community, by any person, or that is perpetrated or tolerated by the State and its agents, by action or omission" (Oficina de la Mujer, 2020). Prior to 2012, femicide was considered an "aggravating factor for homicide"; however, now it is an autonomous criminal act under which the convicted receives a sentence of no more than 50 years (Contini, 2013). Argentina has a history of leadership in combating femicide through both formal mechanisms and social movements (Hanssmann, 2020; see Ni Una Menos, 2017). Since 2015, Argentina's Supreme Court has tracked cases of femicide and prepared an annual report, the Registro Nacional de Femicidios de la Justicia Argentina (RNFJA). The existence of the registry allows for detailed data collection on the individual and sociodemographic characteristics of victims and perpetrators of femicide in the country. Despite mitigation attempts, a woman is murdered every 30 hours and, in the last 7 years, the national femicide rate in Argentina has remained constant, while the homicide rate has steadily declined (Ministerio de Seguridad de la Nación, 2021; Observatorio de Seguridad Ciudadana, 2017; Oficina de la Mujer, 2020; UNODC, 2020).

Design and Ethics

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional design among an incarcerated population in Metropolitan Buenos Aires, Argentina. The study falls under a larger body of research, Narratives of Life and Death (PRI DAR 2938/20) in collaboration with the Social Sciences Faculty at the University of Buenos Aires. This project was approved by Comité de Bioética Hospitalario "Vicente Federico de Giúdice," an Argentinian authority on research ethics.

Instrument

We administered a structured questionnaire to a sample of three types of offenders (perpetrators of femicide, homicide, and other serious crimes). The questionnaire had several scales, including the Pre-Imprisonment Social Capital Scale and the Post-Imprisonment Social Capital Scale.

These scales were adapted from the World Bank's "Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital (SC-IQ)" (Grootaert et al., 2004). The SC-IQ was originally designed to serve as a household survey in low-resource areas. The questionnaire includes 27 core questions covering 6 main topic areas—Groups and Networks, Trust and Solidarity, Collective Action and Cooperation, Information and Communication, Social Cohesion and Inclusion, Empowerment, and Political Action. From these areas, our scale included questions from four segments (Groups and Networks, Trust and Solidarity, Information and Communication, and Social Cohesion and Inclusion). We selected the most appropriate items to develop the scales for our study.

We adapted the wording to ask about the individuals' perceptions of their experiences before and after imprisonment. Respondents were asked to reflect on their relationships with friends and family before and after they were imprisoned. These questions sought to collect data on *perceived* social capital. We did not triangulate findings with the friends and family members of perpetrators. The social capital scale used in this study asked: (1) About how many close friends did (do) you have? These are people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters, or call on for help. When you had a problem in your life, you could turn to them for emotional or financial support. (2) Before (After) being imprisoned most recently, who in your family or who among your friends did you speak to at least once every 2 weeks? (3) In the 12 months before you were imprisoned (In the past 12 months), how many people with a personal problem have turned to you for assistance? Albeit a short scale, these questions explore perceived social support both given and received.

Within the context of each question, respondents were asked to name any number of individuals they had regular contact with (friend, sibling, parent, co-worker, etc.). These responses were grouped and coded for analysis with 0 meaning no one filled that role in the respondent's life, 1 for one or two people, 2 for three or four, and 3 for five or more. The possible range of pre- and post-social capital scores were 0 to 9 with 0 indicating no social capital or network; this individual could not name a friend, family member, co-worker, etc. with whom they were amicable and 9 meaning they could name five or more individuals in response to each question. Both scales have high internal consistency; the pre-scale has a coefficient alpha of .88 and the post-scale has an alpha of .85.

Pre- and post-social capital scales and the relative change of these scores for each respondent were the key dependent variables. Homicide perpetrators were included in the sample as a group comparable to femicide perpetrators as their crimes both involved a lethal act. The group of other crime perpetrators served as the control group to the femicide and homicide groups. This approach is supported by criminological studies indicating differences in the criminal social identity between murderers and other types of offenders, including studies comparing femicide perpetrators with other groups (Caman et al., 2022; Erikson et al., 2019; Sherretts et al., 2017). The offenders in the other serious crimes group included individuals who committed robbery and/or assault, excluding rape or sexual assault. We hypothesized that femicide perpetrators' social capital scores following imprisonment would not differ significantly from those of homicide perpetrators. This design did not require a non-incarcerated control group to be tested.

The questionnaire for femicide perpetrators also included 20 items focused on the index relationship. Perpetrators were asked about their relationship and history with the victim, how they knew each other, how often they disagreed or argued, and what specific acts of violence may have preceded the murder (punch, kick, abusive language, gun violence, sexual assault, etc.). An open-ended question was also posed to perpetrators; "What do you think would have needed to be different for the woman (the victim of the femicide) to be alive today?" This counterfactual question was asked to gauge how perpetrators understood the murder following imprisonment and to inform femicide prevention strategies.

Participants and Sample

The sample size for the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and regression analyses was calculated to power the study at 80% seeking a medium effect size of 0.6 at a $<.5$ p-value would require a sample size of 30 individuals per group

(Cohen, 1988). Our sample size of 208 total with ~70 men per group exceeds the minimum requirement for the necessary sample size. Eligible participants were cisgender males who were serving a prison sentence for "aggravated homicide due to femicide" (femicide), intentional homicide (homicide), or robbery with a weapon, robbery without a weapon, or drug crimes (other crimes). The men who committed non-lethal crimes were categorized as "other crime perpetrators."

Due to access permission and safety measures, the questionnaire was administered in prison educational facilities with inmates who were attending classes to complete secondary and/or university-level education. Those with existing secondary or college qualifications were invited to participate in interviews in the same setting. Education was included as a control variable. Each of the four prisons provided a list of individuals divided by crime type; equal quotas for 75 individuals were randomly selected from each crime type. The sample of 75 from each group was deemed logistically possible to survey given the time frame for conducting questionnaires and the team size. Contacts were made over a period of 67 days between June and November 2021 until COVID-19 restrictions were implemented terminating the fieldwork.

Data collection took place in four prisons across Metropolitan Buenos Aires. These facilities were selected because of prior institutional agreements. Fieldwork was conducted by a team of four assistants (two psychologists and two sociologists) under the supervision of the second author. This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and visitation rules were variable. Of the 208 interviews, 94 were conducted in person and the remainder over the phone. All interviews were conducted in Spanish; data were entered into an Excel database in both English and Spanish. The average response rate was 84.8% (91% "aggravated homicide due to femicide," 89% intentional homicide, 82% robbery with a weapon, 83% robbery without a weapon, and 79% drug crimes/dealing).

Analysis

Before analysis, composite scores were created for each scale. An initial one-way ANOVA test was completed to assess the score difference between femicide, homicide, and other crime perpetrators. We sought to control for any covariates in this study including, age, socioeconomic status (maximum education level), carceral institution, and years since the crime. We provide the adjusted least squares means produced from regression modeling and used the Šidák method to complete pairwise comparisons between the three groups. Additionally, responses to one open-ended question were coded inductively and subsequently quantified to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Results

Among respondents ($N=208$), 71 were femicide perpetrators, 73 were homicide perpetrators, and 64 committed a non-lethal crime (other crime) (Table 1). Most (85%, $n=176$) of the participants were classified as having a low socioeconomic background based on their maximum education level prior to incarceration. The three groups in the sample were fairly homogenous in age, nationality, and socioeconomic status. Nearly all of the men were born in Argentina, with 4.8% ($n=10$) born in neighboring countries. More than a third (38.5%, $n=80$) previously committed some other crime. At the time of their conviction, most (84%, $n=174$) received only a primary or secondary level of education. For the whole sample, the average amount of time that elapsed between the interview and the crime was ~4 years. This random sample lacks diversity but is similar to the incarcerated population of Argentina (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). Moreover, for the purposes of this study, the reduced variability aided cross-group comparison.

Social Capital

To determine a baseline understanding of the difference between the three offender groups, we performed a one-way ANOVA (Table 2). This test found a significant difference between the three groups on all social capital measures: pre-social capital (F [2, 205] = 11.77, $p < .000$), post-social capital (F [2, 205] = 17.48, $p < .000$), and relative change (F [2, 205] = 9.88, $p < .000$). For the last score, we calculated the relative change of each respondent in each group and present the mean. Following imprisonment, both homicide and femicide perpetrators experienced a significant decrease in their social capital scores, but other crime perpetrators who started with the lowest scores did not experience this same drop. We adjusted for age and socioeconomic covariates and still saw differences between the groups.

To examine the effect that imprisonment had on perceived social capital for the different offender types, we performed a regression analysis with each social capital score: pre-social capital, post-social capital, and relative change. Table 3 displays the least squares means adjusted for socioeconomic status, carceral institution, and the number of years since the crime was committed. We sought to control for these variables as they are all likely to covariate with social capital. Informed by the initial ANOVA test and the difference it determined between the three groups, we used the Šidák method to complete a pairwise comparison of the three groups following adjustment (Table 4). Prior to imprisonment, perpetrators of femicide and homicide reported statistically similar adjusted mean social capital scores of 5.11 and 4.72 ($p=.627$), while perpetrators of other crimes reported the lowest at 3.43 (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 1. Demographics of 208 Men Convicted of Femicide, Homicide, or Other Crimes in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

	Femicide ($n = 71$)	Homicide ($n = 73$)	Other Crime ($n = 64$)	All ($n = 208$)
Variable	*M* (*SD*) or % (*n*)	*M* (*SD*) or % (*n*)	*M* (*SD*) or % (*n*)	*M* (*SD*) or % (*n*)
Age	27.84 (11.21)	29.36 (10.92)	30.70 (11.81)	29.25 (11.30)
Low socioeconomic status	89 (63)	89 (63)	84 (54)	85 (176)
Unemployed at time of crime	37 (26)	37 (27)	44 (28)	39 (81)
Highest education				
Primary	45 (32)	51 (37)	55 (35)	50 (104)
Secondary	38 (27)	32 (23)	31 (20)	34 (70)
Tertiary	10 (7)	8 (6)	8 (5)	9 (18)
University/graduate	7 (5)	10 (7)	6 (4)	8 (16)
Years since crime	2.94 (2.44)	5.03 (3.63)	4.15 (2.13)	4.03 (2.95)

Table 2. Summary of the Center and Spread of the Social Capital Score Distribution for Each Offender Group and Results from One-Way Analysis of Variance.

Pre- and Post-Incarceration scales and relative change between each	Femicide ($n=71$)				Homicide ($n=73$)				Other Crimes ($n=64$)					
	Mean	Med	Range	SD	Mean	Med	Range	SD	Mean	Med	Range	SD	*F*-statistic	*p*-Value ANOVA
Pre-social capital	5.10	6	1 to 9	2.10	4.90	6	1 to 9	2.20	3.55	3	1 to 6	1.66	11.77	<.000***
Post-social capital	3.17	3	0 to 9	1.84	2.01	2	0 to 4	1.26	3.55	3	0 to 6	1.66	17.48	<.000***
Relative change	−0.04	−0.4	−1 to +5	1.23	−0.45	−0.67	−1 to +2	0.60	0.33	0	−1 to +5	1.16	9.88	<.000***

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance.
***$p < .000$.

Table 3. Least Squares Means.

Pre- and Post-Incarceration scales and relative change between each	Femicide ($n=71$)			Homicide ($n=73$)			Other Crimes ($n=64$)		
	Mean	95% CI	SE	Mean	95% CI	SE	Mean	95% CI	SE
Pre-social capital	5.11	[4.07, 6.14]	0.43	4.72	[3.74, 5.69]	0.40	3.43	[2.41, 4.46]	0.43
Post-social capital	3.10	[2.28, 3.92]	0.34	2.08	[1.32, 2.85]	0.32	3.49	[2.68, 4.30]	0.34
Relative change	0.03	[−0.50, 0.57]	0.22	−0.39	[−0.89, 0.11]	0.21	0.34	[−0.14, 0.92]	0.22

Note. Adjusted for age, socioeconomic status, carceral institution, and years since the crime was committed. CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.

Table 4. *p*-Values Produced by Pairwise Comparisons Using the Sidak Method.

Pre- and Post-Incarceration scales and relative change between each	Crime Type 1	Crime Type 2	*p*-Value
Pre-social capital	Femicide (5.11)	Homicide (4.72)	.627
	Femicide (5.11)	Other crime (3.43)	<.000***
	Homicide (4.72)	Other crime (3.43)	<.000***
Post-social capital	Femicide (3.10)	Homicide (2.08)	.001*
	Femicide (3.10)	Other crime (3.49)	.430
	Homicide (2.08)	Other crime (3.49)	<.000***
Relative change	Femicide (0.03)	Homicide (−0.39)	.001*
	Femicide (0.03)	Other crime (0.34)	.430
	Homicide (−0.39)	Other crime (0.34)	<.000***

Note. Means included from Table 2 for convenience.
*$p < .05$. ***$p < .000$.

Following imprisonment, the average social capital scores of the other crime perpetrators remained relatively unchanged, but both femicide and homicide perpetrators' scores decreased. However, homicide perpetrators' scores diminished by more than half, while femicide perpetrators retained more than half of their score. The relative change between the two groups was significant at the $p < .05$ level. Although scores dropped for femicide perpetrators, their perception of their social capital experience post-imprisonment was not significantly different from that of the perpetrators of other crimes.

Social and Individual Contexts of Femicide Perpetrators

To further contextualize the crime and expand our understanding of femicide perpetration, we explored variables related to the perpetrators' relationship with the victim, experiences with prior violence, and perceptions of their social networks.

Among femicide perpetrators, the sample was evenly split. Almost half ($n = 36$) of the men lived with the victim at the time of the femicide, and half ($n = 35$) did not. Similarly, 34 of the men killed an intimate partner with whom they were involved at the time of the murder, and 34 killed a former partner. Ninety-six percent ($n = 68$) of the sampled perpetrators killed a former or current intimate partner. Three of the men killed a female family member; their victims were a sister-in-law, a sister, and a daughter; these murders are still considered femicide although they are not intimate partner homicide or intimate femicide.

Nearly three-quarters (73%, $n=52$) of the femicide perpetrators in our sample had daily or weekly "disagreements or fights" with the victim, while the remainder reported annual or monthly disagreements. During these disagreements, 86% ($n=61$) had previously threatened to kill their victim, 40% ($n=28$) used a weapon against the victim, 56% ($n=40$) had choked, strangled, or otherwise cut off her breathing, and 68% ($n=48$) admitted to "convincing or coercing" her to have sex when she did not want to during a disagreement. Over 80% (85%, $n=60$) of femicide perpetrators could name at least one other person in their social network who also used violence as a means to settle disagreements, and 11% ($n=8$) said "everyone" they knew used violence during disagreements.

Participants were posed an open-ended counterfactual question which asked them what conditions would have needed to be different for the femicide not to have occurred. Of 71 perpetrators, 25 refused to answer or stated some variety of "I don't know." Over one-third of respondents to the question (35%, $n=16$) said that education (including therapy or guidance/mentorship) on gender and healthy relationships would have changed the relationship and therefore the outcome. Four respondents directly blamed the woman they killed and one blamed the nature of the relationship but neither himself nor her. Most often, the men cited external factors. A quarter (26%, $n=12$) described lacking control, control over their own emotions (15%, $n=7$), abuse of drugs or alcohol (9%, $n=4$), or stress from working (2%, $n=1$). Some (15%, $n=7$) respondents blamed their family, their fathers, their upbringing, or the "macho" culture they were raised in. Three (7%) of the men described their social class, economic stress, and/or social and economic exclusion as a driving factor for their crime.

Discussion

This study revealed a statistical difference in self-reported social capital perception before and after imprisonment between femicide, male–male homicide, and other crime perpetrators. Despite similar social capital scores before committing murder, femicide perpetrators retained more than half of their social capital scores following the crime, while homicide perpetrators' scores diminished by more than half. Although scores dropped for femicide perpetrators (indicating some degree of social punishment), their perceptions of their social capital experience post-imprisonment were not significantly different from those of the perpetrators of other crimes.

Some decrease in social capital scores was expected for all groups because: (1) it is logistically difficult for imprisoned people to maintain prior relationships with the same frequency or intensity as those who are not incarcerated

(McCarthy & Adams, 2019), and (2) because the withdrawal of social capital is a primary means of enforcing social norms (Lafferty et al., 2015; Liem, 2013; Liu et al., 2016). Contextual and cultural aspects have, according to the literature (Condry, 2007; Liem, 2013), a key role in determining how acquaintances and relatives relate to the offender after the crime. A person's ability to create and maintain a social network is influenced by age, socioeconomic status, and, following imprisonment, influenced by the prison infrastructure and policy (i.e., visitation, distance from family, phone privileges, criminalization of relatives, etc.) (Liem, 2013).

How people relate to the offender is grounded in perceptions of the legitimacy and/or value of the crime (Kurtz & Zavala, 2017; Segato, 2013, p. 24). It is possible that the social network members of other crime perpetrators found it easier to maintain their relationships with the offender compared to the friends and relatives of individuals who were charged with a form of homicide. Using this same logic, we theorize why perpetrators of femicide might be able to retain social capital scores similar to those who have committed non-lethal crimes. Considering explanations for lethal violence within a social capital framework, the incidence of femicide perpetration might be characterized by both social capital deficit and perverse social capital.

The social capital deficit approach suggests the absence of key moral referees in the social environments where perpetrators reside (Rosenfeld et al., 2001). Within social networks, people are effectively taught what is and is not socially acceptable (Messner et al., 2004; Voith et al., 2021). However, when there is a lack of social capital, the informal systems that should serve to contain members of the network do not exist. A significant portion of femicide perpetrators who responded to our counterfactual question of what conditions would have needed to be different for their victim to still be alive responded with appeals for some form of education, both formal (in school or with a therapist) and informal (in the family or non-familial mentorship). These men were not necessarily taking responsibility for the murder, but they did acknowledge their role as perpetrators and believed that if they had received some education on or exposure to positive relationships between men and women the victim would still be alive. This finding supports the idea that the absence of social capital creates space for harmful and violent behaviors among group members.

Considering social capital deficit from the side of the victim, without a well-connected social network, a victim is more vulnerable to attack, and social consequences are reduced for the perpetrator (Kirst et al., 2015). Most (85%) of the femicide perpetrators in our sample could name at least one other person in their social network who they knew to be violent in disagreements with their partner and 11% said "everyone" they knew. However, this

widespread prevalence of IPV within one's immediate network also provides evidence of perverse social capital and violence normalization.

Following the perverse social capital framework, our findings suggest a certain level of social impunity among the social networks of femicide perpetrators underscoring the tacit acceptability of femicidal actions. IPV and femicide perpetrated by men may be constructured as understandable, such as a "crime of passion" motivated by love, as suggested by Duff et al. (2020) and Ruggiero (2001). Kimmel (2019) and Fahs et al. (2023) argue that men who commit femicide seek to reposition their authority within their relationship and in their community (see also Messerschmidt, 2017). The opportunity for this repositioning would only be possible in the presence of perverse social capital wherein violence against women is encouraged as a means to confirm one's masculinity.

As recent narrative studies have discussed (Birkbeck & Rodríguez, 2021; Di Marco, 2022; Rodríguez, 2021), depending on the social context, homicide can be experienced as a significant event, yet not necessarily as a turning point in the life of a perpetrator. There is little comparative research regarding the belief systems of homicide and femicide perpetrators (Di Marco, 2022). Violence borne of misogyny and cis-sexism serves to deny women and girls the same humanity afforded to men. When women's lives are devalued, violence against them might be more socially sanctioned than violence against men. Therefore, in a patriarchal belief system, a man who kills a woman has not committed the same social transgression as a man who kills another man (Gago, 2020; Rodríguez, 2012; Russell & Harmes, 2001). Furthermore, the perverse social capital interpretation of the results reinforces Segato's (2013) theory regarding femicide as a pedagogical strategy. Femicide can be viewed as a form of "expressive violence," serving as a mode of communication between the perpetrator and their social circle. This perspective suggests that the relatively minimal loss of social capital serves as an indication of societal support for IPV.

A perverse social capital interpretation of the perpetrators maintaining their networks also points to broader prevailing discourses about punishment. The underlying notion that violence against women constitutes a distinct crime and therefore its perpetrators are punished differently from those who commit violence against men is rooted in legal, cultural, and historical contexts that extend far beyond the individual social networks of femicide perpetrators. Keetley (2008) highlights the extended historical precedent for the legal legitimization of male-perpetrated femicide as a normative response to extreme anger and jealousy in the context of domestic relationships and marital love. Monckton Smith (2020) points to the construction of heterosexual love in popular discourse, highlighting that jealousy, possessiveness, and

violence are often viewed as powerful expressions of "love." Women are also constructed as untrustworthy, dishonest, and unfaithful (Monckton Smith, 2020, p. 1276). Rather than being viewed as autonomous individuals, throughout history women have been considered the possessions of men; a man who cannot acquire and control a woman is not a man. Men still internalize these messages. Similarly, Dobash and Dobash (2011, p. 112) found that while the perpetrators they interviewed often claimed a "loss of control," they also had "clear objectives" for their use of violence against their partners; they wished to silence her, punish her, frighten her, or teach her a lesson. Countering the "crime of passion" discourse, scholars have found evidence of premeditation among femicide perpetrators (Dobash & Dobash, 2015). The crime of passion defense has still been used consistently in different legal contexts internationally to lessen the sentence for those who commit murder in fits of anger or jealousy despite often protecting habitually violent, predominately male defendants (Dayan, 2023; Ramsey, 2010).

Moreover, expanding the theory focused on perverse social capital would also include the complicity of the state in shaping this scenario. Zara and Gino (2018) highlight the state's culpability in the incidence of femicide "many years of under prosecuted IPV incidents may have fostered an implicit license that it is somehow tolerable" to be violent toward an intimate partner. For instance, in 2010, Eduardo Vázquez—the drummer of a popular Argentine band—killed his wife, Wanda Taddei. He covered her in gasoline and lit her on fire. His crime and the proceedings of the following trial brought femicide to the forefront of national conversation in Argentina. The prosecutors in the case pushed for the maximum sentence under Argentine law, life imprisonment not to exceed 50 years. Despite Vázquez having a documented violent history with Taddei, his defense argued the crime was the result of "passion" and "violent emotion" thus deserving a lighter sentence; Vázquez was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment (Clarín, 2016; Peker, 2012). From 2010 to 2013 in what has been called the "Wanda Taddei effect," 132 women were burned by men in Argentina (half of whom died), compared to only 9 cases of burnings in the 2 years prior (El Tribuno, 2013). This spate of similar killings substantiated fears by feminist scholars that the reduced sentence might inspire a sense of impunity and legitimate the "crime of passion" excuse.

Femicide is a phenomenon that must be explored from a wider vantage than the individual and should be understood in the larger context of unequal gender power relations (see Pizarro et al., 2023; Podreka, 2019). Social capital and community support are indicators of how this extreme form of IPV is perceived not only by the perpetrator but also by those who surround them. Nagin and Paternoster (1994) argue that offenders not only consider the formal and legal consequences of crime, but also the informal social sanctions

they may face. The risk of losing ties with family, friends, and neighbors increases the cost of committing a crime and, therefore, serves as a deterrent. But if violence against women, particularly violence between intimate partners, is viewed as legitimate and normalized among the social networks of potential perpetrators (Di Marco & Evans, 2021; Kimmel, 2019; Segato, 2013), this social deterrent does not currently exist, as evidenced by the difference between post-crime social capital scores of femicide and homicide perpetrators.

Both social capital theories (deficiency and perversity) are useful in explaining why femicide perpetrators retain more social capital even after committing the crime and being imprisoned. Nonetheless, the latter provides more analytical tools to understand the apparent lack of informal social sanctions in the context of a patriarchal society, as femicides do not occur in social isolation. Ultimately, we agree with the directive offered by Zara et al. (2019), "if the aim is to tackle IPV at its bud, then attention should be devoted to the risk processes that foster a proviolence attitude, the exploitation of women, and interpersonal violence" (p. 1296). Before violence is committed, the community is a crucial point of entry for interventions aimed at changing norms.

Future research comparing the social capital scores of different types of offenders and non-offenders could provide further insight into the role of social capital on violent crime and help to distinguish between the two theories of deficit and perversion. Other future studies may consider not only the quantity of social connections in describing the social network of perpetrators but also the sources of these connections. For example, did the perpetrator consider their mother-in-law as part of their social network, and if so, did they lose contact with her following the commission of femicide?

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The scale measuring social capital was adapted from an instrument created for use in low-resource communities, but not in carceral settings. Not every topic area of the original questionnaire was used in our survey, and we may have missed some measures of social capital that were not directly linked to our aim. Because we used a subset of questions, this also means that respondents were assigned raw scores based on answers to fewer questions. However, the scoring system does not differ dramatically from the World Bank's SC-IQ as respondents were also assigned raw scores.

The decision to participate in the study might have some correlation with social capital and social network size. Men with few social connections might welcome the opportunity to talk with someone new or conversely wish not to

(Copes et al., 2013). However, we can assume that men's reasons for participating were universal and did not differ between offender types. Di Marco and Sandberg (2023) explain their findings on the reasons incarcerated people give for participating in qualitative research and found that while some individuals participate for practical reasons (access to snacks, break from tedious prison life), a majority revealed a desire to be heard, to have an emotional outlet, or to use the interview therapeutically to have an opportunity to reconceptualize their actions and change for the better. While incarcerated men might be viewed as unreliable narrators, thus biasing results of self-report, the existing literature has shown incarcerated populations to be reliable self-reports on a variety of objectively verifiable measures such as medical and incarceration records (see Loeffler et al., 2019; Schofield et al., 2011; Sutton et al., 2011).

It is also likely that incarcerated men differ from men who have perpetrated crimes but who have not been incarcerated. This may impact other aspects of the study that we cannot quantify; along similar lines, most men included in this sample are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Recall bias is also a potential concern as individuals may overestimate or underestimate their prior-conviction social capital. However, this study is primarily concerned with the perception of social capital; it is important to understand how perpetrators perceive their experiences before and after incarceration. The susceptibility to recall bias should not vary significantly by offender type, and time since the crime was committed was included in the regression analysis as a control. Data could not be adjusted to account for the amount of time an interviewee had been imprisoned. While we knew the year each respondent committed their crime, we did not know how much time they had spent in prison. Nonetheless, we did use the year they committed the crime as a proxy and controlled for this in our adjusted model.

The majority of the sampled femicide perpetrators killed an intimate partner although three killed a family member. The perceptions of this subset may have introduced some bias to the results, yet the social capital scores of these men did not stand as outliers when compared to the perpetrators who killed an intimate partner. While this study focused on male-perpetrated femicide and male–male homicide, we did not measure or control for sexual diversity in the sample. Future studies should make use of sexual and gender identity as a variable as it potentially adds an element of analysis not considered here.

Considering safety and logistics, only men who were attending educational programs or classes at their respective prisons were included in our sample. Because these men were self-selected into further education and likely met internal institutional requirements to participate, they differ from the greater prison population. This may have biased results and limited the generalizability of our findings.

Conclusions

Our findings identify a significant difference in the perceived social capital scores of femicide and homicide perpetrators after they have committed murder. The evidence that femicide perpetrators retain higher social capital scores than homicide perpetrators indicates a certain degree of social impunity for violence against women. In light of this observation, we argue factors further upstream than the individual may serve to legitimate and normalize IPV. Rather than relying on traditional forms of prevention for IPV that focus on the victim or individual, those seeking to prevent femicide can leverage informal systems of social control and sanctions that already exist within social networks. This framing can inform community-based interventions addressing interpersonal and IPV. In Argentina, where a registry of femicides is maintained and an active women's movement exists, there may be both infrastructure and popular support for deploying a community-based, educational intervention focused on behavior and gender norms change in support of femicide prevention.

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Note

1. Although we recognize the theoretical and political distinctions between femicide and feminicide (Carrigan & Dawson, 2012), we utilize the term femicide to maintain consistency with the legal definition under the Argentinean Penal Code.

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