Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Flying under and through the radar: tactics used by intimate partner femicide perpetrators to evade interventions

Di Marco, M.H.; Evans, D.P.

Citation
Di Marco, M. H., & Evans, D. P. (2025). Flying under and through the radar: tactics used by intimate partner femicide perpetrators to evade interventions. *International Journal Of Law, Crime And Justice*, *82*. doi:10.1016/j.ijlcj.2025.100767

Version:	Publisher's Version
License:	Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4285682

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice 82 (2025) 100767

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijlcj

Position Paper

Flying under and through the radar: Tactics used by intimate partner femicide perpetrators to evade interventions

Martín Hernán Di Marco [a,*], Dabney P. Evans [b]

[a] Leiden University, Institute of Security and Global Affairs, P.O. Box 13228 2501 EE, The Hague, Netherlands
[b] Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, Grace Crum Rollins Building 1518 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA, 30322, USA

1. Introduction

Intimate partner femicide (IPF) is a pressing global issue, garnering increased attention since the 1990s. In response to feminist activism and grassroots movements worldwide, international organizations and governments have enacted various institutional measures to define, recognize, measure, and prevent these killings. These efforts include anti-femicide legislation (Pasinato and de Ávila, 2022), the development of risk assessment tools (J. Campbell et al., 2003), protocols for statistical definitions and measurement (Dawson et al., 2024), guidelines for police investigations (ONU Mujeres and Únete, 2014), and prevention recommendations (Saxton et al., 2024). Additionally, upstream policies such as media campaigns and initiatives to transform gender norms (Kouta et al., 2018) have been introduced to address the broad social drivers of IPF.

Despite these extensive efforts, 2023 recorded the highest global rate of femicide on record, with femicide rates in the Americas remaining stagnant despite efforts to address the issue (UNODC and UN Women, 2024). The persistence of high femicide rates despite prevention efforts highlights the need for further innovation in intervention and prevention strategies to effectively tackle the complexities of IPF.

One thing is certain about IPF: most cases occur after a prolonged history of abuse in an intimate or former intimate relationship (Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020; UNODC, 2023). Furthermore, a significant proportion of victims do not report intimate partner violence (IPV) to formal authorities prior to the homicide (Caman, 2017; R. Dobash et al., 2007; R. E. Dobash and Dobash, 2015; Enander et al., 2021). This raises critical questions: How, despite prior abuse and increasing social awareness, do femicides still occur without early detection of IPV? Were there missed opportunities for prevention in interactions between social networks (friends, peers, neighbors), institutions (hospitals, workplaces) and perpetrators? Most importantly, how did these men manage to evade intervention by social systems?

The literature on femicide perpetrators has expanded over the years, fueled by a growing recognition that understanding aggressors is essential to grasping the subjective motivations behind femicide and crafting effective prevention policies (Evans et al., 2023; Pizarro et al., 2023). From narrative studies (Di Marco and Evans, 2020; Fahs et al., 2023; Regis-Moura et al., 2021a) to biographical approaches (R. E. Dobash and Dobash, 2015; Mathews et al., 2011) and phenomenological analyses (Di Marco and Sandberg, 2024; Goussinsky and Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012), research focusing on offenders has provided insight into their rationalizations and pathways leading to homicide, based on the assumption that understanding their lives serves as an "asset" for prevention (Whynacht, 2019). However, this body of literature remains relatively limited (Evans et al., 2023; Molnar and Aebi, 2024; Narvey et al., 2024) and its nascent nature has thus far limited its ability to directly inform prevention strategies.

Coercive control has become a critical framework for understanding patterns of IPF and, more broadly, IPV. Research by Johnson

* Corresponding author. Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Leiden University, Netherlands.
E-mail addresses: m.h.di.marco@fgga.leidenuniv.nl (M.H. Di Marco), devan01@emory.edu (D.P. Evans).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2025.100767
Received 22 January 2025; Received in revised form 28 May 2025; Accepted 26 June 2025
Available online 3 July 2025
1756-0616/© 2025 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

(2008) and Campbell et al. (2003) demonstrated that identifying and analyzing the behavioral patterns through which one individual seeks to dominate and manipulate another using specific tactics not only enhances our understanding of IPV but also supports case assessment and intervention strategy design. This focus has driven recent interest in projects exploring pathways to homicide, as seen in studies from Australia (Boxall et al., 2022) and Finland (Hakkarainen, 2024), advancing the methodological strategies that have been called for to generate evidence on femicide perpetration (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2024; Molnar and Aebi, 2024).

Recent work by Monckton Smith in the UK has focused on identifying points of potential intervention by developing a temporal sequence of IPF progression (Monckton Smith, 2019; Monckton Smith et al., 2022). These studies emphasize coercive control strategies, outlining a micro-pattern of control-challenge-consequence. In this cycle of abuse, perpetrators enforce relationship rules—often tied to gender norms—and punish their partners when these rules are challenged, sometimes with physical violence. While Monckton Smith's model is valuable, it was developed using data from the UK and has not been extensively tested in other contexts.

In this paper we examine the coercive control strategies employed by perpetrators to analyze our sample of 97 interviews with 68 perpetrators from nine Latin American countries. Our analysis takes a cross-cultural, inductive perspective to explore how these men maneuvered to avoid detection and intervention before committing femicide, identifying recurring patterns in their behaviors. We compare our findings to Monckton Smith's eight stage progression to homicide, focusing specifically on Stage 3, the relationship and the use of coercive control.

2. Coercive control, femicide timeline and avoidance

Extensive analyses of court cases, domestic violence death reviews, and other secondary sources indicate that most IPFs are both foreseeable and preventable with timely interventions that address commonly linked risk factors (Kouta et al., 2018; Webdale, 1999). Research on IPV and IPF has comprehensively examined risk factors at different levels, following the socio-ecological model (Fulu et al., 2023). However, there is a near total overlap between risk factors for IPV and IPF, complicating scholarly understanding of the escalation process and casting doubt on the reliability of current risk assessment tools to effectively prevent and intervene in femicide cases.

One of the strongest predictors of future IPF is a history of male-perpetrated IPV within the relationship (Matias et al., 2020). Recognizing this, risk assessment tools have been developed to evaluate the presence of violence, controlling behaviors, and other key risk factors, becoming essential for identifying and addressing these risks within criminal justice, healthcare, and social services systems. Among the most widely used tools are the Danger Assessment (DA), Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA), Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA), Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI and DVSI-R) and the H-index (Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020; J. Campbell et al., 2008; Messing and Thaller, 2013); these tools vary with regards to the specific outcomes they measure with some assessing lethality risk (Danger Assessment) and others measuring IPV recidivism (ODARA) (Garcia-Vergara et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2004).

Meanwhile, the concept of coercive control (Stark, 2007) has been pivotal in understanding both lethal and non-lethal forms of IPV. Coercive controlling violence represents a distinct type of violence—which in some specific cases can be seen also as intimate terrorism (Cares et al., 2023; M. Johnson, 2008). Coercive control involves systematic patterns of dominance, using intimidation, isolation, and sometimes terror-inducing violence or threats, which restrict victims' freedom, isolate them from support networks, and entrap them financially, socially, and/or emotionally (H. Johnson et al., 2019). This form of abuse involves three primary components: the abuser's intentional and goal-directed behavior, the victim's negative perception of the control, and the abuser's capacity to reinforce their dominance through credible threats (Hamberger et al., 2017). The widespread adoption of the term among academics and practitioners has spurred new interpretations, including that of Dutton and Goodman (2005), who highlight how perpetrators' economic contexts can shape different abusive dynamics and outcomes.

Feminist research has been essential in linking IPF to coercive and controlling behaviors. It has also deepened the understanding of how social networks can reinforce these tactics (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2013), highlighting the critical role of institutional engagement in effectively addressing and preventing coercive control (Monckton Smith, 2019). In particular, the Homicide Timeline (Monckton Smith, 2021) has delineated the progression of abusive relationships through eight stages, theorizing how coercive control and other forms of abuse can escalate to murder. It begins with a history of violent or abusive behaviors, followed by an intense early commitment in the relationship, and the establishment of dominance by one partner. A triggering event that threatens the abuser's control then leads to an escalation of controlling behaviors or violence. This progression ultimately shifts the perpetrator's mindset toward contemplating homicide, culminating in planning and executing the murder. Each stage reflects an increasingly overt and systematic exertion of power and control over the victim. While the Homicide Timeline provides a useful structure to consider progression towards femicide, it has limitations. Most notably, this framework was developing in a single high-income country context using a relatively small number of cases. Most relevant to this work, while Monckton Smith draws heavily on existing knowledge about the cycle of abuse and coercive control they do not account for the role or influence of other actors—information critical to disrupting progression towards IPF.

Throughout abusive relationships, evading detection and intervention by authorities is often critical for the eventual commission of femicide. Detection avoidance following the femicide—defined as "any behavior an offender employs to hide, destroy, or manipulate evidence to avoid detection or apprehension by police" (McLachlan and Ferguson, 2024, p. 1)—provides valuable insights into post-crime strategies. These strategies often mirror the patterns of coercive control observed within the relationship itself (Ferguson and McLachlan, 2023).

While post-homicide avoidance strategies have received increasing attention, research into pre-IPF detection avoidance remains comparatively limited—particularly in relation to cases that culminate in femicide. That said, there is a substantial body of work

addressing how perpetrators of non-lethal IPV evade detection, including manipulation of legal systems, custody proceedings, and courts (see e.g., Araji, 2012; Bonomi and Martin, 2023; E. Campbell, 2017; Fathiyah and Santiago, 2024). Because it remains unclear the extent to which these patterns differ—if at all—from those of perpetrators who commit femicide, we believe drawing on this broader IPV literature is essential. At the same time, first-hand qualitative accounts from IPF perpetrators themselves are especially rare, which hopefully makes our study a meaningful contribution.

Recent efforts to identify 'leaking'—offense-related statements, behaviors, or actions that reveal the perpetrator's thoughts, intentions, plans, or prior similar offenses—have emerged as promising strategies for detecting early warning signs and missed intervention opportunities (Rumpf et al., 2024). Despite the importance of understanding 'covering up' tactics and their frequency (Ferguson, 2023; Monckton Smith, 2021), research in this area remains scarce, likely due to significant methodological challenges and a focus on retrospective rather than prospective or 'real time' approaches.

The growing trend of using biographical reconstructions of perpetrators or relationships—primarily through court files and other secondary sources—reflects an increasing interest in understanding the sequence of coercive control leading up to femicide. Effective policy and prevention efforts require a solid foundation in how lethally violent relationships develop (Molnar and Aebi, 2024). Additionally, advancing our understanding of coercive control requires examining the complex dynamics between violent men and their victims. If explored accurately, coercive control could significantly contribute to theoretical and empirical research, with scholars also advocating for qualitative data to refine the concept and improve assessments of these violent patterns (Evans et al., 2023; Oddone, 2020; Weil, 2017).

2.1. The logic behind coercive control: trajectory and narrative

Research examining IPF from the perspective of perpetrators has provided critical insights into individual, situational, and contextual factors contributing to violence perpetration. Although there has long been a gap in femicide literature on how perpetrators make sense of their aggression (Evans et al., 2023), this field has significantly expanded over the past decade.

One line of research has focused on perpetrators' rationales. Hearn's (1998) seminal work on IPV laid the foundation for understanding subjective narratives in a non-pathologizing way, including perpetrators' denials, justifications, and rationalizations. These strand of studies explore various aspects, including the emotional repertoire of perpetrators (Di Marco and Sandberg, 2024), the perception of violence as legitimate payback for perceived emotional harm (Fahs et al., 2023), and the ways these rationalities are reinforced by discourses of masculinity (Elisha et al., 2010; Mathews et al., 2015). Similarly, consistent patterns of deflection—such as low remorse and denial of responsibility—highlight that these individuals may continue to pose a risk to future partners, even after imprisonment (R. E. Dobash and Dobash, 2011; Regis-Moura et al., 2021b). Studies that collect data directly from perpetrators reinforce the notion that violence can be seen as a 'remedial' action (Kimmel, 2019), driven by a logic of entitlement.

Biographical factors of femicide perpetrators have also proven relevant, though they remain largely underexplored in relation to coercive control in regions like Latin America. Notably, most perpetrators had documented ongoing disputes within their relationships, with a history of serious and recurrent violence against their partners, including controlling behaviors and jealousy (R. E. Dobash et al., 2009; R. E. Dobash and Dobash, 2011, 2015; Spencer et al., 2024). Additionally, a portion of IPV and IPF scholarship has examined physical, sexual, and emotional abuse among perpetrators during their childhoods (Adams, 2009; Mathews et al., 2011). While research documents a strong link between childhood maltreatment and negative outcomes such as IPV perpetration and victimization, less is known about these patterns among IPF perpetrators including any potential protective actors which may remediate future risk.

These studies consistently reveal that perpetrators rationalize femicide, deflect responsibility, cast themselves as victims while vilifying the actual victim, and uphold rigid gender norms. Scholars argue that understanding qualitative, emic perspectives is crucial for designing effective violence prevention programs and policies, as it provides insights into the rationalities behind both non-lethal and lethal violence (Jewkes et al., 2015; Kouta et al., 2018; Weil, 2017). However, despite substantial research using secondary sources, firsthand studies directly engaging perpetrators remain scarce. Although such studies may face methodological challenges, such as desirability bias, perpetrators' willingness to discuss their actions can still yield valuable insights. Qualitative biographical data, particularly from Latin America—where femicide rates remain stagnant despite specific laws and robust social activism—may enrich existing models and potentially inspire new approaches.

Within the context of research on coercive control and femicide perpetration, the purpose of this study was to identify the tactics of coercive control used prior to IPF, situate them within a relationship timeline, and analyze the specific strategies employed by perpetrators.[1] Additionally, we aim to expand current research on coercive control and femicide—recognizing that much of the existing literature has primarily focused on non-lethal IPV and has been conducted in regions outside Latin America. Through this research, we seek to uncover overlooked opportunities for intervention in both the prevention and response to IPV and IPF.

In this paper, we use the term 'tactics' to emphasize the harmful intent of these actions, which help illuminate the rationales behind events leading to femicide. We do not see these strategies as fully conscious or deliberately planned in a rational or Machiavellian way. Instead, we use this framework to understand how these behaviors work in practice. Our focus is not on the perpetrators' intentions, but on how these actions function as part of coercive control and, ultimately, contribute to femicide. Many of these strategies are complex, shaped by social learning and the contexts in which they occur, including relationships and institutions. While they often

[1] An earlier draft of this version was presented and discussed at the World Conference of the International Sociological Association (Melbourne, 2023) and at a convening of the Community of Practice for the Study of Homicide, organized by John Devaney, James Rowlands, and Stephanie Holt (2024). We are grateful to these networks for their thoughtful feedback and insights.

reflect power and dominance, they also affect other areas such as peer relations, family life, and household economies. We also clarify that although these tactics can be seen as ways of asserting dominance or reinforcing gender roles, our specific concern is their role as tools of coercive control. Whether they are intentional or learned, what matters here is the effect they produce.

3. Methods

3.1. Design

This paper is based on a pooled data derived from a multi-country study of femicide perpetrators. The parent study applies a biographical framework to understand the intersection between life-course trajectories and narratives of IPF perpetrators in Latin America. In this paper we focus on the tactics of coercive control used by perpetrators within the femicidal relationship while the victim was alive.

3.2. Participants

All participants (n = 68) were cisgender men convicted of femicide or feminicide under local legislation. Although there are subtle distinctions between the two terms, both refer to the intentional killing of women based on their gender. The interviewees represented a diverse range of nationalities: Argentina (n = 29), Bolivia (n = 13), Brazil (n = 2), Chile (n = 6), Colombia (n = 1), Honduras (n = 1), Paraguay (n = 11), Mexico (n = 3), and Venezuela (n = 2) (Table 1).

Before conviction, 29 % of offenders had completed primary school, 50 % had finished secondary school, and 21 % had college degrees. Ages ranges from 18 to 67 with an average age of 38 at the time of the interview. These educational backgrounds and age groups largely reflect the distribution of femicide perpetrators in Latin America, yet with a slightly higher average age (UNODC, 2023). Regarding their relationship status with the victim, the sample was split in half evenly between current and former partners. Most men (74 %) were fathers to at least one child. The average time served in prison by offenders was approximately 6 years.

3.3. Sampling and recruitment

Data collection took place between 2021 and 2023 in Metropolitan Buenos Aires (Argentina), La Paz (Bolivia), Recife (Brazil), Santiago de Chile (Chile), Bogotá (Colombia), Tegucigalpa (Honduras), Asunción (Paraguay), Mexico City (Mexico), and Caracas (Venezuela). Interviews were conducted in carceral facilities within each city, primarily in medium and maximum-security level prisons. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, Portuguese (Brazil), and Guaraní (Paraguay) based on participant preference. The first author conducted all the interviews that took place in Argentina (including those from the pilot study, explaining the over-representation of this country), along with one in Santiago de Chile, while the rest of the interviews, except for those that took place in Venezuela, were conducted by local researchers. These interviews were conducted in the context of the CRIMLA Project (funded by The Research Council of Norway; grant number 324299) and the project Narratives of lives and deaths (funded by Buenos Aires University, Argentina, grant number PRI R20-24). Interviews from Venezuela stem from a similar project (Meanings and situational properties of youth interpersonal violence) led by Prof. Luis Gerardo Gabaldón, from the Andrés Bello Catholic University.

We conducted a two-stage convenience sample. Prison selection in each country was based on prior arrangements with each facility and penitentiary authorizations. Within each institution, men convicted of IPF were contacted with the assistance of prison authorities. Additionally, to mitigate potential biases inherent in relying solely on authorities, we also conducted snowball sampling starting from the initial contacts.

Interviews took place in secluded spaces within the facilities, such as empty classrooms, visitor areas, multipurpose rooms, and patios. As a general principle, interviews were not conducted in the presence of other inmates, or prison staff. In most prisons, there were no specific rehabilitation or treatment programs. Individual psychological sessions were available for interested individuals, but group therapy was not offered.

3.4. Procedure

Interviews were open-ended and consisted of three 1.5 hour long sessions with each respondent, in total an average of 4.5 hours of recordings and more than one hundred pages of transcribed text per individual. Arguably, such repeat interviews increase trust and make it easier to study the nuances of trajectories (Di Marco and Sandberg, 2023). An interview guide with a life-course approach was used as a framework for the conversations; we also employed a free-flowing approach to allow participants to expand on topics and change the subject as they wished.[2]

3.5. Analysis

Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the interviews were

[2] To view the interview guide, please visit the webpage of the associated research project: https://www.crimeinlatinamerica.com/.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of participants.

Variable	N (Percentage)
Country of origin	
Argentina	29 (42.6 %)
Bolivia	13 (19.1 %)
Brazil	2 (2.9 %)
Chile	6 (8.8 %)
Colombia	1 (1.5 %)
Honduras	1 (1.5 %)
Paraguay	11 (16.2 %)
Mexico	3 (4.4 %)
Venezuela	2 (2.9 %)
Educational background	
Primary school	20 (29 %)
Secondary school	34 (50 %)
College degree	14 (21 %)
Age distribution	
18–25 years	9 (13 %)
26–35 years	14 (21 %)
36–45 years	24 (35 %)
46–55 years	16 (24 %)
56 years or older	5 (7 %)
Age range in years	18–67
Average age in years	38
Relationship status with victim	
Current wife	14 (21 %)
Current girlfriend	20 (29 %)
Former wife	9 (13 %)
Former girlfriend	25 (37 %)
Number of children	
0	18 (26.5 %)
1	23 (33.8 %)
2	15 (22.1 %)
3	3 (4.4 %)
4	3 (4.4 %)
5 or more	6 (8.8 %)
Time since imprisonment	
2 years	8 (11 %)
3–5 years	14 (21 %)
6–10 years	17 (25 %)
11–20 years	17 (25 %)
21 years or more	12 (18 %)
Total	**68 (100 %)**
Average time served in prison	6 years

processed in NVivo 12, where they were coded using a codebook containing over 100 life course-related codes. Second, in line with the research question, selected codes (e.g., relationship with the partner, description of the victim) were used for inductive and open thematic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For each transcript, reflective notes were written using analytical tools, such as memos.

To identify the tactics used by perpetrators to control their female partners, avoid detection and contact with formal institutions, we included both explicit examples (e.g., "I wouldn't let her leave the house to meet her family") and implicit references to such practices (e.g., "during that month, my friend helped me to deal with her lawyer"). In addition, we identified the strategies—defined as the behaviors, methods or actions—undertaken by perpetrators while using each specific tactic.

Given the importance of the timeline and the relationship's progression leading up to the IPF, all strategies were organized chronologically, based on participants' framing of the relationship. We considered the elements used to describe stages (e.g., references to months, years, or specific periods). The stages were defined as follows: 1) initial courtship, 2) relationship, 3) conflict/breakup, and 4) dissolution/separation (Table 2). The first two stages were present in all cases, while the third and fourth stages were only applicable in cases with explicit conflict or post-breakup dynamics (i.e., IPF of a former partner).

3.6. Reliability

All interviews were coded by two coders: a research assistant with experience using the same codebook for a broader dataset and the first author of the paper. To minimize cultural biases and promote thoughtful analysis, the first author collaborated with local researchers to discuss interpretations. This collaboration enabled the authors to explore unexpected findings, challenge assumptions, and critically assess their contributions to developing analytical categories based on the data. Additionally, the results were presented and discussed with a panel of three IPV experts from Argentina, Chile, and Mexico to gain insights and ensure the robustness of the

Table 2
Relationship stages.

Relationship stage	Main defining element
1. Initial courtship	Getting to know each other
2. Relationship	A well-established relationship with familiarity with each other's daily lives and networks
3. Conflict/break-up	References to conflict within the relationship as well as the potential or actual dissolution of the relationship
4. Dissolution/separation	References to events or dynamics following relationship separation

interpretation.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The study was reviewed by the Bioethical Committees of each respective country (Gino Germani Research Institute, Argentina; Center for Research and Teaching in Economics, Mexico; Social Sciences Faculty, Chile; Federal Institute of Paraná, Brazil; Bolivian Criminological Sciences Academy, Bolivia; National Autonomous University of Honduras, Honduras). Each research team adhered to the ethical guidelines set out in the Helsinki Ethical Principles. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with both oral and written informed consent, and the nature of the interviews and the overarching purpose of the project were thoroughly explained. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, although only one participant chose to do so (Di Marco and Sandberg, 2023).

To protect privacy, all names of individuals, locations, and institutions were de-identified in the transcripts. Additionally, any potentially identifiable details, particularly cases that received media attention, were omitted from the transcripts. Recordings were securely stored on an online platform provided by the University of Oslo. Finally, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to further ensure confidentiality.

4. Results

We identified seven overarching tactics, each encompassing several specific coercive control strategies used by perpetrators to avoid the detection of IPV and to evade system interventions throughout the relationship. The order in which these tactics are presented reflects the frequency with which they were mentioned across the life history (Table 3).

4.1. Social isolation from existing social networks

At the onset of their relationships, participants most frequently reported fostering social isolation of their partners. This involved a range of strategies aimed at severing or weakening the female partner's social bonds, thereby shrinking their networks and instilling doubts about the reliability of these connections. Typical tactics included criticizing the victim's relationships, distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' friends and relatives, and erecting barriers between her and certain individuals, particularly those viewed as potential threats to the relationship. Ultimately, the intended outcome was the victim's isolation, reinforcing the participant's control.

Participants referred to three overarching practices, spanning from direct interventions in the victim's social network to more discursive tactics: a) instigating conflicts within the victim's social circle (e.g., close friends, relatives, and coworkers), b) persuasion

Table 3
Tactics and strategies used by IPF perpetrators to evade system interventions by relationship stage.

Overarching tactics	Specific strategies	Relationship stage			
		1	2	3	4
Social isolation from existing social networks	- Instigating conflict - Persuasion strategies - Replacing friends	X	X	X	
Gaslighting	- Denying harm - Reversing the direction of harm - Discouraging actions	X	X	X	X
Limiting outside employment	- Persuading or imposing sexist views against women in the workforce - Creating tensions between intimate life and work life - Issuing direct threats	X	X	X	X
Vilifying perceived external/new enemies	- Erosion of potential social support networks - Discrediting institutional actors and resources		X	X	X
Relying on alliances with male peers	- Mutual validation and approval of IPV - Seeking strategic support from friends to conceal IPV		X	X	X
Body territorializing	- Direct control over the partner's body - Confinement or 'locking in'		X	X	X
Disrupting healthcare access	- Discouraging standard caregiving behaviors - Deterring access to support programs - Explicitly blocking access to support resources			X	X

strategies, aimed at convincing her of the harmful influence of her friends and family, and c) replacing the victim's friends with the man's own acquaintances.

Conflicts with the victim's social circle were mentioned throughout the entire dataset. These conflicts involved a range of behaviors, often escalating to direct confrontations with the victim's network or peer group. The more established the intimate relationship, the more explicit these confrontations. The common thread was the creation of tension in the intimate relationship and with others, which in turn made the women more vulnerable to increasing coercive control. Below, we present two contrasting cases that illustrate this pattern, varying in terms of country, age, and socio-economic status:

> I told her, like, deep down, she had to pick: her cousins or me. Not that I wanted her to just cut ties with her family or anything, but honestly, there was no way, no way (voice rises), for us to be together if she kept seeing them. (Argentina, 36)

> Her cousin was so wrapped up in that political party, totally obsessed with her work, all politics, all the time. There was nothing outside of that little bubble. I just didn't see it as a healthy relationship, so yeah, I was against it. (Chile, 52)

In contrast to the direct creation of tension, most strategies involved convincing the victim of the problematic nature of her relationships with others with whom she had previously been close. We coded these discursive strategies as central to the exercise of coercive control, equally necessary to the aggression itself. These tactics primarily targeted two objectives: convincing the woman of the negative influence of her social network (e.g., "She's really not your friend") and presenting the man as a victim of the situation: "I'm jealous, I know that, but I admit it. Just the thought of her being with one of her male friends drives me crazy" (Argentina, 29); "I was always afraid of being abandoned, like my mom left me, and I think that's why I acted the way I did. I felt like I was going to die if it happened again" (Chile, 47).

Though less frequent, 'replacing friends' was still significant when mentioned. This involved integrating the man's friends into the victim's inner circle, complementing other actions linked to gaining compliance, silencing violence, gaslighting, and ultimately aiding in the cover-up of both non-lethal and lethal aggression: "I've known my friend since I was five years old, and he's a good guy. Of course, I wanted him to be part of our circle. Not like her friends, who were all fake" (Chile, 27).

Disrupting pre-existing social bonds was a frequently reported tactic used by perpetrators. Although participants described this strategy in various ways, the consistent result was the weakening of their partner's social fabric. While these actions were not always framed as deliberate objectives, they often led to social isolation. Given that lack of social support are well-documented risk factors for IPV (Voith et al., 2021), this pervasive pattern in our sample reveals the implicit logic behind this tactic. By isolating their partners, perpetrators reduce the victims' access to external support, rendering them more vulnerable to abuse and control. Social isolation was reportedly used throughout relationships although the associated strategies were not mentioned with regards to relationship dissolution.

4.2. Gaslighting

Following the initial courtship phase, participants reported using manipulation tactics aimed at making their partners or former partners question their reality, memory, or perceptions. These strategies, indirectly framed by participants as tools to maintain control, served two main purposes: to assert dominance in relational or everyday matters (e.g., control over household finances) and to undermine the partner's psychological confidence (e.g., questioning her intelligence). The latent impact of such strategies was to reduce women's willingness to seek help or, more broadly, to discuss their intimate lives with their social networks.

Gaslighting typically involved three key strategies: a) denying harm, b) reversing the direction of harm (emotional vs. physical), and c) discouraging help-seeking. The most common approach was harm denial, where perpetrators downplayed or refuted the idea that certain behaviors were abusive, often using neutralization tactics or justifications to obscure the boundaries of violence:

> Violence is something else. After some months of living together, she would complain that I was violent, aggressive, or whatever, but her idea of 'violent' was simply me expressing my opinion firmly. That's just being decisive, I told her. She was mixing things up until she would back down and understand. (Bolivia, 37)

The counterpart to harm denial was a specific type of self-victimization: reversing the direction of harm. This tactic frequently involved reframing a perceived emotional provocation (e.g., being "provoked" to jealousy) as a justification for physical aggression. "If you drive me crazy by provoking me or making me jealous, of course I'd get physical. I always explained that to her. (…) She got it after some time" (Argentina, 38).

Finally, these strategies often discouraged the victim from seeking help by convincing her that the aggression was justified or that her perception of harm was inaccurate. A range of covert threats and manipulations were used to reinforce this objective. "If you go to the police or talk to your sister, it's because you don't trust me" (Mexico, 37). Such statements worked to undermine the victim's confidence in her own judgment, framing her attempts to reach out for help as a betrayal or a sign of distrust, further isolating her and reinforcing the perpetrator's control.

Ultimately, gaslighting tactics demonstrate how coercive control can operate through both individual manipulation and the targeting of institutional engagement. Perpetrators use gaslighting not only to dominate their partners but also to obstruct their access to external support, thereby maintaining or extending isolation and control. Gaslighting was reported in all relationship phases.

4.3. Limiting outside employment

Most participants often viewed employment as a competing environment that conflicted with women's (gendered) roles as intimate partners. This perception varied in intensity and was justified differently across cases and countries, but a common thread was the early restriction and reorganization of women's employment opportunities. The severity of this tactic tended to increase with the age of the participant, with older individuals describing harsher strategies.

Strategies to undermine women's inclusion in the workforce varied widely: a) persuading or imposing sexist views against women in the workforce, b) creating tensions between intimate life and work life, and c) issuing direct threats. These tactics generally escalated in this order as the intimate relationship progressed.

Enforcing sexist views on women's roles in the workforce involved a range of actions aimed at preventing women's independent entry into the labor market. Naturally, these actions were shaped by context-specific factors, such as labor market conditions and dominant cultural narratives. The overarching tactic was the promotion of the idea that women did not belong in the workplace, at least to some extent. This often drew on dominant discourses around women's supposed poor job performance, their responsibilities as mothers and romantic partners, and their emotionality. For instance, one participant stated, "In a relationship, responsibilities are divided and agreed upon. She didn't take care of her part because she was greedy" (Chile, 52). Another remarked, "I didn't think it was necessary for her to work. She had a small child. She needed to stay home and avoid the chaos of work. I was against it, yes" (Mexico, 31).

The creation of fictional tensions between intimate life and work life often emerged later in the relationship. Participants who referred to this tactic described how, once the relationship had been "established," work began to be framed as a problem. This often involved manipulating women into quitting their jobs and staying at home. The most common justification was that women's work life posed a threat to the intimate relationship, whether by disrupting family routines, sexual dynamics, or general family arrangements. This was often characterized as a "conflict of interest:"

> They (women) start working, and then they stop caring about you. They end up destroying themselves in the process. Our family was never the same after she started teaching. I kept telling her it was too much for her to handle; she just couldn't manage everything. We struggled for a while until she finally came to her senses and quit her job. (Argentina, 29)

Finally, two participants mentioned the use of direct threats. These strategies typically emerged in the later stages of the relationship and were primarily recounted by participants with more candid narratives, in which they acknowledged their use of violence. The threats included warning their partners against starting or continuing work, blackmailing them with the possibility of losing custody of their children, or resorting to physical abuse. One participant shared: "I told her, 'If you go back to your office, I'm gone. And you won't see our kids again!' I said that" (Venezuela, 52).

Overall, this strategy complemented social isolation by severely restricting women's economic freedom and, consequently, their social networks, particularly with work colleagues; it also limited their physical time outside of the home environment. The direct threats not only curtailed their financial independence but also intensified the emotional and psychological control within the relationship, effectively limiting the women's geographic mobility and ability to access external support systems and maintain professional connections. Limiting outside employment was reported across all relationship phases.

4.4. Vilifying perceived external/new enemies

While creating social isolation was identified as a tactic from the early stages of the relationship, a later, more intense strategy broadened its scope by targeting potential sources of help and IPV detection. The distinctive feature of vilifying perceived external enemies is that it focused on potential networks rather than pre-existing ones, reflecting a deeper intent to control women. Often, the 'outside world' was portrayed as a hostile and threatening environment, demonized to undermine the victim's trust in external support. This behavior ultimately weakened and eroded the social spaces where women could forge connections.

This strategy involved two main tactics: a) the erosion of potential social support networks and b) the discrediting of institutional actors and resources. The first tactic aimed to weaken the victim's ability to form new social connections, targeting any networks that might offer support. Participants mentioned sports clubs, neighborhood organizations, and religious groups as examples. The vilification often portrayed these external networks as conflicting with the dynamics of the intimate relationship. One participant explained: "You can say whatever you want, but at the beginning of a relationship, you want to be with your partner all the time. Getting involved in the neighborhood board was a death sentence for us" (Venezuela, 52).

Another participant described the subtle control over their partner's social participation:

> It's natural that you do things differently when you're in a relationship. I didn't play football three times a week like I used to. She wasn't attending every meeting at the council (a Christian relief center). So, I supported her when she had second thoughts about participating so often. It was a strain on our relationship, especially the time we spent together. (Honduras, 41)

A specific form of vilification was aimed at institutional actors, where perpetrators would speak negatively about, discourage, and in some cases covertly block engagement with institutions. This included local government officials, community leaders, and political representatives. As with the previous strategies, the approach varied depending on the context but always sought to undermine the victim's trust in institutions that might provide help or protection.

Both strategies aimed at limiting interaction with the 'outside,' going beyond social isolation to undermine potential future connections. They complemented gaslighting by portraying the outside world as dangerous, discouraging the victim from seeking support

and reinforcing dependence on the abuser. Ultimately, these tactics kept the victim isolated both socially and psychologically by limiting the development of new social ties. The vilification of enemies tactic was observed only after the initial courtship phase.

4.5. Relying on alliances with male peers

Male friends and relatives played a critical role in both supporting abusive relationships and in helping perpetrators avoid legal consequences. In most cases, participants reported that their friends encouraged the relationship, justified their' actions, and provided emotional support during moments of distress related to their partners. In a few instances (n = 4), friends actively concealed, justified, and reinforced physical violence. In one extreme case, friends even attempted to cover up a femicide.

Alliances with male peers were particularly influential, offering social support that allowed perpetrators to rationalize their harmful behaviors or recast them as non-violent. These alliances sometimes facilitated unsuccessful attempts to conceal IPV. The strategies were expressed in two key ways: a) mutual validation and approval of IPV, where peers reinforced the idea that violent actions were acceptable, and b) strategic support from friends to help conceal IPV or related crimes.

The first tactic involved the mutual legitimization of IPV among male peers. Participants referred to male friends and colleagues as "allies," who offered emotional support and helped avoid both informal IPV detection and formal systems. This often included preventing external intervention, such as discouraging others from calling the police or trying to "calm the women down." Violence was downplayed or redefined in these conversations. One participant explained that while discussing and acknowledging his aggression against his partner some of his friends supported him instead of being critical or confronting him in any way: "I tell you, without them, I would have gone mad. They were a touchstone, like escaping a storm and realizing everything had gone terribly wrong" (Argentina, 29). Another added:

> Since my wife was an only child, my mother-in-law was very intrusive. When [name] was born via cesarean, she told me, 'For five years, she can't get pregnant, so you need to be careful, blah blah blah.' And I said, 'You know what? We already talked to the doctor.' (…). Later, I shared this with my friends, and one of them said, 'You have to set boundaries with her, or she'll keep interfering.' That advice helped me realize I needed to stand up more for our relationship. (Argentina, 41).

Justification of violence and control varied over the course of the relationship, with group dynamics among male friends or relatives playing a key role. For example, one participant said, "[Friend's name] knew that if she made a formal claim, both of us would lose. So, he ended up helping me" (Argentina, 40).

A distinct strategy involved seeking emotional support from friends after particularly violent events, including the femicide itself. Some men sought validation, such as, "My friends told me they (the judges) used my case to increase the number of femicides in the country" (Argentina, 29). In extreme cases, this support extended to literally covering up the crime, such as staging a suicide.

While these actions do not constitute coercive control strategies *per se*, they demonstrate how peer support contributes to violence and concealment. In extreme cases, offenders directly or indirectly asked friends to assist in covering up their crimes. One participant described:

> At first, I called him. He would know what to do because I was in shock. I mean, it was an accident, and he … he was a lawyer. So, I called him, and we tried to figure out how to handle the situation.[…] But things took a turn for the worse (Chile, 47).

Reliance on male alliances reportedly occurred during the relationship, conflict/breakup, and dissolution/separation phases. In contrast to the role of male peers, we found marginal evidence about female peer support of male perpetrators' aggression and/or control: only one participant alluded to this in a tangential way.

4.6. Body territorializing

As conceptualized by Gago (2020) body territorializing is a set of practices aimed at controlling women specifically targeted their bodies. In our sample, this control involved restrictions, physical constraint, and various forms of emotional abuse that undermined the partner's bodily autonomy. These behaviors typically emerged during the later stages of the relationship phase, although they were not consistently referenced in any one stage or stages across our sample. Two primary strategies were identified: a) direct control over the partner's body, and b) confinement or 'locking in.'

Strategies of direct control spanned various methods to restrict the partner's presence in the home, her commuting, physical movement/geographic mobility, and reproductive autonomy. These included, for example, forced medication, insults, and criticisms regarding her body and attire. One participant remarked: "You tell her that, well, since she'd just had our baby, she was a bit chubby, you know. So, don't go out. And then she complained!" (Argentina, 33, college degree).

Reproductive coercion, which includes actions aimed at undermining women's autonomy over their pregnancies, contraceptive use, family planning, or decisions regarding abortion, emerged as a significant form of control. In some instances, controlling a woman's ability to have—or not have—a child was used as an indirect means of asserting dominance over her.

An extreme form of body territorialization involved confining women. This was explicitly mentioned by two participants and indirectly alluded to by another two. 'Locking women in' was described as an extreme control tactic that, despite the direct justifications given by perpetrators, effectively created a severe barrier between the victim and potential sources of help, such as law enforcement or family members.

Use of the body territorializing tactic was observed during the relationship, conflict/breakup, and dissolution/separation phases. The narratives surrounding these practices varied significantly. While reproductive coercion often emerged during the relationship

stage, confinement or 'locking in' was mentioned only in cases involving breakups or periods of heightened tension and fragility in the relationship. Bodily territorialization could be indirectly associated with efforts to prevent a separation. Moreover, this group of strategies signaled a shift from psychological and social control—more common in earlier stages of the relationship—to physical violence.

4.7. Disrupting healthcare access

A final tactic identified was disrupting access to healthcare, encompassing strategies that extended beyond reproductive coercion and sought to isolate women from institutions capable of identifying violence. This involved three main strategies: a) discouraging standard caregiving behaviors, b) deterring access to support programs, and c) explicitly blocking access to support resources. While some cases reported the first strategy during the early and relationship stages, these tactics were predominantly mentioned as being used in later stages.

The first strategy involved creating obstacles to accessing healthcare services, including general practitioners, gynecological care, reproductive health programs, and other specialists. This tactic was increasingly employed as relationships progressed, particularly in cases where the couple was cohabiting or had children. One participant shared, "We lived 2 h away from the healthcare center. Going there was a big investment of time and money. If she went as much as she said she wanted, our income would have dwindled. […] It's not that I opposed her seeing a doctor, but it was excessive" (Paraguay, 35).

The second strategy involved deterring access to support programs, such as women's police stations and municipal gender-based violence programs. This approach was primarily reported by men who had been previously reported for battering before committing femicide. These men employed various rationales to discourage or dissuade their partners from seeking support or undergoing risk assessments. Their justifications included denying the violence, challenging its gendered nature, and issuing subtle threats. One man stated, "She did it just to hurt me (raises voice). She did it to manipulate me because she knew if she went [to the hospital], they'd think I was the bad guy" (Chile, 41). Another added, "The relationship wasn't actually violent at that stage. I spoke my mind: she was doing it to make me insecure, so she desisted" (Bolivia, 29). Considering the phenomenon of recantation—where victims retract violence allegations, often due to systemic or relational pressures (Bonomi and Martin, 2024)—this strategy may represent deliberate manipulative actions aimed at fostering such recantation.

The third strategy, explicitly blocking access to support resources, appeared in the final stages of these relationships and was mentioned by three participants. In some cases, the cycle of violence was described as cyclical, with moments of "reconnection" and peace following peaks of aggression. This stage involved direct threats and intensified efforts to discredit gender-based violence programs. One participant stated, "Why would she want to create more problems? We had enough, and no one—no one—would be able to help us but ourselves. So, I put my foot down" (Argentina, 45).

Access to healthcare and support is crucial for detecting IPV, and obstructing access was a direct strategy these men employed to avoid systemic interventions and their repercussions. This tactic is inclusive of reproductive and healthcare coercion and encompasses a broader range of actions that extended beyond reproductive control. These actions physically restricted access to healthcare facilities and aimed to prevent any external scrutiny of the violence occurring within the relationship. The disruption of healthcare access tactic was observed only after the initial courtship phase.

5. Discussion

In this study, we adopted a life course approach focused on a Latin American, multi-country sample of male perpetrators of IPF to identify coercive control tactics aimed not only at exerting power over victims, but also at evading both IPV detection and formal intervention. This approach yielded detailed data that encompassed reported actions—either directly or indirectly referenced by participants—and an explicit articulation of the underlying rationale behind these actions. We focus on four key findings.

First, the coercive control strategies identified showed striking similarities across our sample of men from different Latin American countries. While our aim was not to explore differences based on socioeconomic sectors or age groups—factors we hypothesize may have an impact—the tactics used to evade detection were notably consistent. Moreover, the timing of when these tactics began to be employed—or at least when they were first referenced in interviews—also showed similarities. However, the specific ways these strategies were enacted varied significantly depending on the local context, aligning with research that suggests similar rationality structures but differing cultural nuances (Di Marco and Sandberg, 2024; Segato, 2003). For instance, discussions around restricting women's employment opportunities differed sharply between Chile and Bolivia with markedly different labor markets, initially complicating efforts to identify commonalities. Ultimately, we chose to set aside a context-specific lens in analyzing these actions, opting instead for an approach that captures the shared dynamics between these tactics and their outcomes.

Secondly, while these coercive control tactics align with findings from previous scholarship (Caicedo-Roa et al., 2020; J. Campbell et al., 2008; Cares et al., 2023; M. Johnson, 2008; Viñas-Racionero et al., 2023), the role of social capital emerged more prominently than anticipated, as it has been less addressed in the literature and was not central to our initial hypotheses. As we have recently argued (FarrHenderson et al., 2024), the social capital of femicide perpetrators may serve as a significant indicator of social impunity and implicit support for these crimes, particularly when compared to other serious offenses. The events and actions recounted in the life histories indicate that men frequently reported receiving various forms of support from other men. This support appears critical in normalizing their aggression, legitimizing their actions, and facilitating evasion of detection or intervention.

Identifying coercive tactics involving social networks broadens the understanding of IPV/IPF beyond individual (perpetrator-focused) or dyadic (victim-perpetrator) frameworks, shifting to a broader perspective in which social networks play a pivotal role. This

approach aligns with research on male peer support theory (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2013) as well as male complicity and homosociality (Flood, 2007), which argue that understanding violence against women requires exploring men's relationships. Examining men's interactions within patriarchal systems reveals the norms they conform to and the motivations behind their violence (Hearn and Whitehead, 2006). Additionally, as Berggren et al. (2021) note, friends and family can provide emotional support by validating a man's sense of entitlement to control, or by reframing violent acts—such as presenting physical conflicts as mutual, rape as consensual, or shifting blame to the woman. Social networks may also offer material support, including financial assistance or encouragement to engage in activities that reinforce patriarchal norms and abusive behavior.

The frequent mention of male support from earlier stages also offers insight into potential silencing mechanisms within these networks that normalize or obscure IPV. One interpretation of this draws from the construction of silence in discourses. Tacit support for violence against women can range from "looking the other way" to "silent institutional de-securitizations," including state inaction (Khan, 2024). Unspoken narratives (Presser, 2023), taken-for-granted assumptions (Zerubavel, 2006) and "himpathy" (Manne, 2020) can be damaging when domestic conflict is seen as private and beyond intervention. Although these accounts are narrated from perpetrators' perspectives and may be strategically framed, they suggest that silences and social support can contribute to 'misrecognitions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) of intimate relationships and the violence within them. This process, where power relations are perceived 'not for what they objectively are,' highlights the need for collective efforts to recognize and address the violence that has become normalized.

A third aspect concerns the timing of when these tactics are employed. Monckton Smith developed an eight-stage homicide timeline that includes: perpetrator history, early relationship, relationship, trigger, escalation, homicidal ideation, planning, and homicide (Monckton Smith, 2019, 2021). Stage one of the homicide timeline on perpetrator history is in keeping with prior research on IPV and IPF risk factors. Stages 2–4 align with prior evidence relating to the cycle of violence and coercive control in abusive relationships. It is these stages that are most closely related to our work. While our findings broadly correspond to stages two through four of Monckton Smith's homicide timeline, they differ methodologically: our phases were derived from perpetrators' *emic* descriptions of their relationships, rather than from external sources, as in Monckton Smith's approach (Monckton Smith, 2019, 2021).

In our sample, we observed that male peer support often manifested early in the relationship (stage 2 of our classification), rather than primarily during the escalation phase as observed by Monckton Smith. In most of our cases, the involvement of the perpetrators' male friends and relatives began at the outset of the relationship, facilitating control and violence from the beginning, for instance in shifting social circles. According to the perpetrators' reconstructions, these networks were key to "flying under and through the radar." Additionally, peer support largely came from the perpetrators' social circles rather than those of victims, underscoring the potential importance of understanding more about these dynamics and their potential role in facilitating or preventing femicide.

Regardless of the timing of peer involvement, their role in supporting coercive control and helping perpetrators evade intervention remains underexplored. In this study, peer networks function as mobilized social capital, facilitating acts of violence and, in some cases, playing a crucial role in detention avoidance (Ferguson, 2023). Thus, peer support could be a fruitful avenue for expanding pathway research in IPF, as it has been in IPV.

Finally, the life history approach has uncovered strategies beyond the monolithic concept of coercive control, highlighting specific actions that help perpetrators evade detection and intervention. While this approach has its limitations, it provides valuable insights into the 'leaking' of IPV—offense-related statements, behaviors, or actions that reveal the perpetrator's thoughts, fantasies, intentions, or emotions (Rumpf et al., 2024)—as well as the trajectories of these relationships and the strategies employed by men.

The growing interest in life course and trajectories (Boxall et al., 2022; Kivivuori, 2024; Molnar and Aebi, 2024) is crucial for a deeper understanding of femicides and complements the existing body of research, particularly that based on secondary sources. Furthermore, with increasing attention to data production and usage, it is essential to find innovative ways to explore overlooked facets of this phenomenon, calling for a reexamination of how we record, measure, and, more importantly, perceive the surveillance of such violence.

Focusing on perpetrators can result in the underrepresentation of victims' voices, reinforcing the hermeneutic injustice surrounding femicide and exacerbating harm to their families and friends. However, we view this approach as necessary, as understanding perpetrators' perspectives and actions is essential for developing effective intervention policies.

6. Limitations

This study relies on emic data provided by the perpetrators, which introduces the potential for bias in the analysis. The data are based on open-ended life history interviews, which, while offering detailed insights, are heavily influenced by carceral and other contextual settings. Additionally, we acknowledge that participants are not 'cultural automatons,' and their narratives are strategically framed to some extent. We did not triangulate the data with official records or other sources, but, as discussed above, we believe the insights from these data outweigh the method's limitations, both empirically and theoretically.

Time and memory also introduce bias. We recognize that these are not merely memory biases (such as mistakes or omissions), but also reflect the nature of biographical reconstructions. As discourse changes over time, so do people's stories. Triangulation with judicial records and interviews with other individuals who knew the relationship could address this issue in a multimethod project.

We focused on cross-country similarities and chronological patterns, which means context-specific nuances were not explored in depth. This could have provided a more nuanced analysis. Additionally, the fact that not all men referenced all the strategies suggests the existence of different clusters of men with varying patterns of coercive control.

Finally, we also acknowledge that more discrete detection avoidance behaviors—such as preventing access to phones, manipulating responders, etc.—may have been present but not addressed. If the study aims to identify how perpetrators evade detection,

omitting these more obvious strategies constitutes a notable limitation.

7. Conclusion

This study highlights key coercive control tactics and specific strategies employed by Latin American men to evade system interventions of IPV before femicide occurs. A pattern of seven tactics, escalating in aggression throughout the intimate relationships, was common. These findings align with feminist coercive control literature and the Homicide Timeline, as well as with previous research on detection avoidance. However, in this sample, the role of male peer groups in supporting, normalizing, and aiding in the evasion of IPV detection appeared early on, offering a broader perspective on femicide beyond the victim-perpetrator dyad.

This study suggests that prevention efforts could be more effectively developed by considering the specific strategies men use to evade detection. The prominence of peer support in normalizing violence, legitimizing chauvinistic views, and covering up femicides highlights the potential for third party and bystander intervention programs and upstream policies that do not solely focus on direct perpetration. Additionally, the undetected navigation through key social institutions, such as healthcare facilities and police, underscores the need to strengthen coordination with these entities.

While risk factors are important, they are insufficient on their own for understanding the root causes of lethal IPV. Understanding perpetrators as the primary drivers of harm is crucial, and the strategies men use to "fly under and through the radar" are key to identifying missed opportunities for prevention. This paper argues that the social trajectories, attitudes, and actions of IPF perpetrators' peer groups should be rigorously studied. This could provide more nuanced insights into culturally or region-specific patterns, homicide timelines and opportunities for femicide prevention.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Martín Hernán Di Marco: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Dabney P. Evans:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Funding

The study was supported by the CRIMLA-project (https://www.crimeinlatinamerica.com) at the University of Oslo, funded by The Research Council of Norway (grant number 324299), and the project Narratives of lives and deaths, funded by Buenos Aires University, Argentina (grant number PRI R20-24).

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

Adams, D., 2009. Predisposing childhood factors for men who kill their intimate partners. Vict. Offenders 4 (3), 215–229.
Araji, S.K., 2012. Domestic violence, contested custody, and the courts: a review of findings from five studies with accompanying documentary. Sociol. Perspect. 55 (1), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1525/SOP.2012.55.1.3.
Berggren, K., Gottzén, L., Bornäs, H., 2021. Theorising masculinity and intimate partner violence. In: Gottzén, L., Bjørnholt, M., Boonzaier, F. (Eds.), Men, Mascunities and Intimate Partner Violence. Routledge, pp. 34–51.
Bonomi, A., Martin, D., 2023. Recantation and Domestic Violence the Untold Story. Routledge.
Bonomi, A., Martin, D., 2024. Recantation and Domestic Violence: the Untold Story. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Recantation-and-Domestic-Violence-The-Untold-Story/Bonomi-Martin/p/book/9781032391670.
Bourdieu, P., Wacquant, L., 1992. An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology. University of Chicago Press.
Boxall, H., Doherty, L., Lawler, S., Franks, C., Bricknell, S., 2022. The "Pathways to intimate partner homicide" project: key stages and events in male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide in Australia. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide-project.pdf.
Braun, V., Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qual. Res. Psychol. 3 (2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
Caicedo-Roa, M., Da Veiga Pereira, T., Carlos Cordeiro, R., 2020. PROTOCOL: risk factors for femicide. Campbell Sys. Rev. 16 (4). https://doi.org/10.1002/CL2.1123.
Caman, S., 2017. Intimate partner homicide rates and characteristics. Karolinska Institutet.
Campbell, E., 2017. How domestic violence batterers use custody proceedings in family courts to abuse victims, and how courts can put a stop to it. UCLA Women's Law J. 24 (1). https://doi.org/10.5070/L3241036415.
Campbell, J., Webster, D.W., Glass, N., 2008. The danger assessment: validation of a lethality risk assessment instrument for intimate partner femicide. J. Interpers Violence 24 (4), 653. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260508317180.
Campbell, J., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M.A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S.A., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., Laughon, K., 2003. Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control Study. Am. J. Publ. Health 93 (7), 1089–1097. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.93.7.1089.
Cares, A., Khallouq, B.A.B., Mukazhanova-Powell, K., 2023. The reach of Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence: a scoping review of empirical research, 1996–2020. J. Fam. Violence 39 (1), 9–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/S10896-023-00602-X/TABLES/5.
Dawson, M., Angus, H., Zecha, A., 2024. Identifying femicide using the United Nations statistical framework: exploring the feasibility of sex/gender-related motives and indicators to inform prevention. Int. Sociol. 39 (3), 309–331. https://doi.org/10.1177/02685809241237440/ASSET/IMAGES/LARGE/10.1177_02685809241237440-FIG2.JPEG.
DeKeseredy, W., Schwartz, M., 2013. Male Peer Support and Violence Against Women: the History and Verification of a Theory. University Press of New England.
Di Marco, M.H., Evans, D.P., 2020. Society, her or me? An explanatory model of intimate femicide among male perpetrators in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Fem. Criminol. 15 (5).
Di Marco, M.H., Sandberg, S., 2023. "This is my story": why people in prison participate in qualitative research. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231171102.

Di Marco, M.H., Sandberg, S., 2024. Fear, helplessness, pain, anger: the narrated emotions of intimate femicide perpetrators in Latin America. Int. Sociol. 39 (2).
Dobash, R., Dobash, R.E., Cavanagh, K., Smith, D., Medina-Ariza, J., 2007. Onset of offending and life course among men convicted of murder. Homicide Stud. 11 (4), 243–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767907306850.
Dobash, R.E., Dobash, R., 2011. What were they thinking? Men who murder an intimate partner. Violence Against Women 17 (1), 111–134. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210391219.
Dobash, R.E., Dobash, R., 2015. When Men Murder Women. Oxford University Press.
Dobash, R.E., Dobash, R., Cavanagh, K., 2009. "Out of the Blue" men who murder an intimate partner. Fem. Criminol. 4 (3), 194–225. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085109332668.
Dutton, M.A., Goodman, L.A., 2005. Coercion in intimate partner violence: toward a new conceptualization. Sex. Roles 52 (11–12), 743–756. https://doi.org/10.1007/S11199-005-4196-6/METRICS.
Elisha, E., Idisis, Y., Timor, U., Addad, M., 2010. Typology of intimate partner homicide: personal, interpersonal, and environmental characteristics of men who murdered their female intimate partner. Int. J. Offender Ther. Comp. Criminol. 54 (4), 494–516. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X09338379.
Enander, V., Krantz, G., Lysell, H., Örmon, K., 2021. Before the killing: intimate partner homicides in a process perspective, part I. J. Gender-Based Violen. 5 (1), 59–74. https://doi.org/10.1332/239868020X15922355479497.
Evans, D.P., Di Marco, M.H., Narasimhan, S., Maino Vieytes, M., Curran, A., White, M., 2023. Male perpetrators' accounts of femicide: a global systematic review. In: Dawson, M., Mobayed, S. (Eds.), The Routledge International Handbook on Femicide and Feminicide. Routledge Handbooks, pp. 890–907.
Fahs, E., Marco, M. H. Di, Evans, D.P., 2023. "There Was No Other Option": femicide Perpetrators' sensemaking on gender and violence in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Gend. Soc. 10 (1), 29–37. https://doi.org/10.1089/VIO.2021.0093.
FarrHenderson, M., Di Marco, M.H., Evans, D.P., 2024. Perceptions of social capital before and after the perpetration of femicide, homicide, and other serious crimes: evidence from Argentina. J. Interpers Violence. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241265918.
Fathiyah, S., Santiago, F., 2024. Efforts to protect victims of domestic violence in divorce cases in court. J. Res. Soc. Sci. Econ. Manag. 3 (12), 2100–2107. https://doi.org/10.59141/JRSSEM.V3I12.675.
Ferguson, C., 2023. Detection Avoidance in Homicide : Debates, Explanations and Responses. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Detection-Avoidance-in-Homicide-Debates-Explanations-and-Responses/Ferguson/p/book/9780367521387.
Ferguson, C., McLachlan, F., 2023. Continuing coercive control after intimate partner femicide: the role of detection avoidance and concealment. Fem. Criminol. 18 (4), 353–375. https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851231189531.
Fitz-Gibbon, K., Walklate, S., McGowan, J., Maher, J., McCulloch, J., 2024. Securing Women's Lives: Examining System Interactions and Perpetrator Risk in Intimate Femicide Sentencing Judgments over a Decade in Australia. Monash University. https://doi.org/10.26180/25855543.V1.
Flood, M., 2007. Men, sex, and homosociality. Men Masculinities 10 (3), 339–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X06287761.
Fulu, E., Alondra, V., Warner, X., Brown, C., Leung, L., 2023. Understanding femicide using a global social ecological model. In: Dawson, M., Moyabed Vega, S. (Eds.), The Routledge International Handbook of Femicide and Feminicide. Routledge, pp. 40–49. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003202332-6.
Gago, V., 2020. Feminist International: How to Change Everything. Verso.
Garcia-Vergara, E., Almeda, N., Fernández-Navarro, F., Becerra-Alonso, D., 2022. Risk assessment instruments for intimate partner femicide: a systematic review. Front. Psychol. 13. https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2022.896901.
Goussinsky, R., Yassour-Borochowitz, D., 2012. "I killed her, but I never laid a finger on her" - a phenomenological difference between wife-killing and wife-battering. Aggress. Violent Behav. 17 (6), 553–564. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.07.009.
Graham, L.M., Sahay, K.M., Rizo, C.F., Messing, J.T., Macy, R.J., 2021. The validity and reliability of available intimate partner homicide and reassault risk assessment tools: a systematic review. Trauma Violence Abuse 22 (1), 18–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018821952.
Hakkarainen, P., 2024. Out of despair project. https://ulosepatoivosta.fi/en/.
Hamberger, L.K., Larsen, S.E., Lehrner, A., 2017. Coercive control in intimate partner violence. Aggress. Violent Behav. 37, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.AVB.2017.08.003.
Hearn, J., 1998. The Violences of Men: How Men Talk About and How Agencies Respond to Men's Violence to Women. SAGE Publications Ltd.
Hearn, J., Whitehead, A., 2006. Collateral damage: men's 'domestic' violence to women seen through men's relations with men. Probat. J. 53 (1), 38–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550506060864.
Hilton, N.Z., Harris, G.T., Rice, M.E., Lang, C., Cormier, C.A., Lines, K.J., 2004. A brief actuarial assessment for the prediction of wife assault recidivism: the Ontario domestic assault risk assessment. Psychol. Assess. 16 (3), 267–275. https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.16.3.267.
Jewkes, R., Flood, M., Lang, J., 2015. From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. Lancet 385, 1580–1589.
Johnson, H., Eriksson, L., Mazerolle, P., Wortley, R., 2019. Intimate femicide: the role of coercive control. Fem. Criminol. 14 (1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085117701574.
Johnson, M., 2008. A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence. Northeastern University Press.
Khan, F., 2024. The violent construction of silence(s): the case of targeted killings in North Waziristan, Pakistan. Violence Int. J. 5 (1), 76–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/26330024241242486.
Kimmel, M., 2019. Targeting women. In: Angry White Men. American Masculinity at the End of an Era, pp. 169–198. Bold Type Books.
Kivivuori, J., 2024. Out of despair. https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/projects/out-of-despair-providing-solutions-to-break-the-pathways-leading.
Kouta, C., Boira, S., Nudelman, A., Gill, A., 2018. Understanding and preventing femicide using a cultural and ecological approach. In: Weil, S., Corradi, C., Naudi, C. (Eds.), Femicide Across Europe: Theory, Research and Prevention. Bristol University Press, pp. 53–70.
Manne, K., 2020. Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women. Crown.
Mathews, S., Jewkes, R., Abrahams, N., 2011. "I had a hard life": exploring childhood adversity in the shaping of masculinities among men who killed an intimate partner in South Africa. Br. J. Criminol. 51 (6), 960–977. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azr051.
Mathews, S., Jewkes, R., Abrahams, N., 2015. "So now i'm the man": intimate partner femicide and its interconnections with expressions of masculinities in South Africa. Br. J. Criminol. 55 (1), 107–124. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azu076.
Matias, A., Gonçalves, M., Soeiro, C., Matos, M., 2020. Intimate partner homicide: a meta-analysis of risk factors. Aggress. Violent Behav. 50, 101358. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.AVB.2019.101358.
McLachlan, F., Ferguson, C., 2024. Rates and features of detection avoidance in intimate partner femicide in Australia. https://doi.org/10.1177/10887679241233980.
Messing, J.T., Thaller, J., 2013. The average predictive validity of intimate partner violence risk assessment instruments. J. Interpers Violence 28 (7), 1537–1558. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260512468250.
Molnar, L., Aebi, M.F., 2024. Theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and policy implications of research on femicide before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic: beyond a special issue introduction. J. Contemp. Crim. Justice 40 (2), 236–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/10439862241245820.
Monckton Smith, J., 2019. Intimate partner femicide: using foucauldian analysis to track an eight stage progression to homicide. Violence Against Women 26 (11), 1267–1285. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219863876.
Monckton Smith, J., 2021. In: In Control Dangerous Relationships and How They End in Murder. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
Monckton Smith, J., Siddiqui, H., Haile, S., Sandham, A., 2022. Building a temporal sequence for developing prevention strategies, risk assessment, and perpetrator interventions in domestic abuse related suicide, honour killing, and intimate partner homicide. https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/10579/.
Narvey, C.S., Kaukinen, C., Piquero, N.L., Piquero, A.R., 2024. A developmental and life-course approach to further understanding of the Nature and causes of intimate partner violence and femicide. J. Contemp. Crim. Justice 40 (2), 272–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/10439862241245880.
Oddone, C., 2020. Uomini normali. Maschilità E Violenza Nell'Intimità. Rosenberg & Sellier.

Onu Mujeres, OACNUDH, & Únete, 2014. Modelo de protocolo latinoamericano de investigación de las muertes violentas de mujeres por razones de género (femicidio/feminicidio). www.oacnudh.org.
Pasinato, W., de Ávila, T.P., 2022. Criminalization of femicide in Latin America: challenges of legal conceptualization. Curr. Sociol. 71 (1), 60–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221090252.
Pizarro, J.M., Messing, J.T., Abinader, M., Zeoli, A.M., Spearman, K., Campbell, J., 2023. Building a transdisciplinary team to prevent intimate partner homicide: a research note. Homicide Stud. 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/10887679231178786.
Presser, L., 2023. Unsaid: Analyzing Harmful Silences. University of California Press.
Regis-Moura, A., Ferreira, L.B., Bonfá-Araujo, B., Iglesias, F., 2021a. "If not mine, she won't belong to another": mechanisms of moral disengagement in a femicide perpetrator from Brazil. Violence Against Women 28 (12–13), 107780122110389. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211038969.
Regis-Moura, A., Ferreira, L.B., Bonfá-Araujo, B., Iglesias, F., 2021b. "If not mine, she won't belong to another": mechanisms of moral disengagement in a femicide perpetrator from Brazil. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211038969.
Rumpf, T., Horn, S., Vogt, C., Göbel, K., Görgen, T., Zibulski, K.M., Uttenweiler, V., Bondü, R., 2024. Leaking in intimate partner homicide: a systematic review. Trauma Violence Abuse 25 (4). https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241237213.
Saxton, M., Bukhari, S., Jaffe, P., Scott, K., Rajan, P., Reif, K., Zamfir, D., 2024. How to prevent domestic homicides: a qualitative study of recommendations from a Canadian domestic homicide review committee. J. Fam. Violence 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1007/S10896-024-00693-0/FIGURES/2.
Segato, R., 2003. Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos Sobe Género Entre La Antropología, El Psicoanálisis Y Los Derechos Humanos. Universidad Nacional de Quilmes.
Spencer, C.M., Keilholtz, B.M., Palmer, M., Vail, S.L., 2024. Mental and physical health correlates for emotional intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization: a meta-analysis. Trauma Violence Abuse 25 (1). https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221137686.
Stark, E., 2007. Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life. Oxford University Press.
UNODC, 2023. Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide): global estimates of female intimate partner/family-related homicides in 2022. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/gender-related-killings-of-women-and-girls-femicide-feminicide-global-estimates-2022-en.pdf.
UNODC and UN Women, 2024. Femicides in 2023: global estimates of intimate partner/family member femicides. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/femicides-in-2023-global-estimates-of-intimate-partner-family-member-femicides-en.pdf.
Viñas-Racionero, R., Raghavan, C., Soria-Verde, M.Á., Scalora, M.J., Santos-Hermoso, J., González-Álvarez, J.L., Garrido-Antón, M.J., 2023. Enhancing the assessment of coercive control in Spanish femicide cases: a nationally representative qualitative analysis. J. Fam. Violence 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1007/S10896-023-00628-1/TABLES/1.
Voith, L.A., Azen, R., Qin, W., 2021. Social capital effects on the relation between neighborhood characteristics and intimate partner violence victimization among women. J. Urban Health : Bull. N. Y. Acad. Med. 98 (1), 91. https://doi.org/10.1007/S11524-020-00475-1.
Webdale, N., 1999. Understanding Domestic Homicide. Northeastern University Press.
Weil, S., 2017. The advantages of qualitative research into femicide. Qual. Sociol. Rev. 8 (3), 118–125. www.qualitativesociologyreview.org.
Whynacht, A., 2019. Insurgent love. Abolition and Domestic Homicide. Fernwood Publishing.
Zerubavel, E., 2006. The Elephant in the Room. Silence and Denial in Everyday Life. Oxford University Press.