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To cite this article: Shalva Weil & Noam S. Keshet (2020): Female geronticide: the case of Israel, Journal of Gender Studies, DOI: [10.1080/09589236.2020.1809361](https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1809361)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1809361>



Published online: 31 Aug 2020.



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## Female geronticide: the case of Israel

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### ABSTRACT

This study of femicide involving elderly women, or female geronticide, aims to fill a gap in the research literature. The article is divided into three parts: a review of the literature on femicide, geronticide, and specifically female geronticide; a review of the literature utilizing Israel as a case-study and an empirical report on the findings of the first longitudinal study on female geronticide in Israel, which demonstrates that over a period of 10 years (2006–2015) female geronticide was perpetrated solely by intimate male partners. Findings of the study also show post hoc that while femicide is perpetrated in disproportionate numbers by, and towards, members of particular ethnic categories, such as Ethiopian immigrants and foreign migrants, there were no cases of female geronticide in these two groups. The likelihood of an elderly woman being murdered by her intimate partner or family member was higher among the following groups in the following order: immigrants from the former Soviet Union; Israeli-born Jews and; Israeli Arabs. The findings are important for policy-makers in Israel but have applications globally.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 November 2019  
Accepted 7 August 2020

### KEYWORDS

Femicide; geronticide; Israel; elderly women; violence against women

## Introduction

This article aims to synthesize and broaden knowledge of elderly femicide, or female geronticide, which has received little attention in studies of gender, elderly abuse, violence against women or gender-related killings of women and girls. The article is divided into three parts:

- a review of the literature on femicide, geronticide, and specifically female geronticide;
- a review of the literature on femicide and geronticide in Israel;
- an empirical report on the findings of the first longitudinal study on female geronticide in Israel.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first longitudinal study of female geronticide in Israel surveying a full decade (2006–2015); the first such study conducted elsewhere was in Canada (Sutton & Dawson, 2017). Israel is not a ‘typical’ country (is there such an entity?), since societal conflict is high, yet femicide rates are comparatively low. The deductive research conducted here extracted the number of elderly women from all the femicide cases in Israel, and post hoc examined the variables of age, the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, and the ethnicity of the murderer and the murdered woman. The rate of female geronticide for members of different ethnicities was then calculated in order to establish whether females of different ethnic groups are more likely to be murdered under or over the age of 60. The findings of the study have implications for policy-makers,

and the welfare of elderly women, and will be useful for cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons globally.

## On femicide, geronticide and female geronticide

### *Femicide*

Femicide, an extreme form of gendered violence, is the killing of women and/or girls because they are perceived as female. The definition of this heinous phenomenon has altered over time in line with changing political and social attitudes (Corradi, Marcuello-Servós, Boira, & Weil, 2016; Grzyb, Naudi, & Marcuello-Servós, 2018). Broader interrogations of the phenomenon have identified a variety of factors that affect femicide, such as belief in witchcraft, dowry marriages and so on. In November 2012, the Vienna Declaration on Femicide by the United Nations defined femicide as a wide-ranging phenomenon, comprising murder, as well as torture, honour killing, dowry-related killing and infanticide as well as gender-based pre-natal selection, genital mutilation and human trafficking (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013). According to Weil (2016a), femicide has been 'invisible' with studies and policies focusing on domestic abuse or violence against women, which did not necessarily end up in the death of a woman or girl. The situation is now changing in the media with daily reports on femicide throughout the coronavirus period (e.g. Weil, 2020), and articles reporting on the situation in the scientific literature in different countries (Weil & Kouta, 2017).

The femicide of elderly women is usually included in the figures for femicide, and the study of this phenomenon has widely neglected older women. As life-span increases, with women living longer than men, the salience of this kind of femicide may be increasing; future research into female geronticide may prove this hypothesis. However, as in the case of femicide, studies and policies have largely focussed upon abuse of the elderly rather than their murder *per se*. The World Health Organization provided a definition of elderly abuse in 2002: 'a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person' (World Health Organization, 2002, p. 3). Sociological studies of violence against the elderly have tended to concentrate on abuse meted out by care-givers, often in residential settings (Meddaugh, 1993; Saveman, Åström, Bucht, & Norberg, 1999). The risk factors entailed by employing carers, who might abuse or neglect their elderly dependents, have also been studied (Campbell Reay & Browne, 2002). Occasionally, research has included the case of older women beyond employed carers. For example, Zink et al. discuss persisting intimate violence against women over a lifetime (2006). Nevertheless, research into the most extreme form of abuse, namely, homicide of the elderly, and its gender-related components, is rare. A notable exception is a Special Issue on 'Elderly Homicide' in the 2013 journal *Homicide Studies* (Riedel, 2013).

### *Geronticide*

Geronticide has been defined as '... the deliberate and systematic killing of the elderly solely because they are elderly' (Brogden, 2001, p. 22). Geronticide has variously been called 'eldercide' (Krienert & Walsh, 2013), 'lethal intimate partner violence in later life' (Salari & Maxwell, 2016), or 'senicide' (Chatterjee, 2017).

Geronticide is a universal phenomenon, but in some cultures, it occurs in higher number than in others. The reverence of old age varies between societies and attitudes to the killing of the elderly and/or infirm also differ. It is commonly believed that the Inuits/Eskimos placed their elderly and infirm on ice floes and abandoned them to die (Leighton & Hughes, 1955), but apparently, these cases were rare. The Japanese are reported to have taken their elderly family members to a mountain top to die to ensure the survival of the rest of the community, a practice which was known as *obasute* (Kawai, Kubo, & Kubo-Kawai, 2014, p. 254).

Geronticide has been identified in contemporary times in many parts of the world. In Tamil Nadu, India, a special oil bath is given to some elderly, called *thalaikoothal*, the elderly person is then forced to drink glasses of green coconut water, which results in kidney failure, high fever and death (Chatterjee, 2017). In the West, geronticide of the elderly is sometimes termed 'euthanasia', but these phenomena are not interchangeable, since geronticide pays no concern to the needs of the victim and euthanasia also occurs in younger persons for other reasons. Euthanasia is the intentional termination of life by another at the explicit request of the person who wishes to die (Van der Maas et al., 1996) in the absence of coercion; geronticide is the murder of another without their consent.

As Krienert and Walsh have shown in their analysis of a large sample of reported homicides between the years 2000–2005 in the United States (2013), the majority of victims of 'eldercide' are White males, but the majority of intimate partner homicides, or homicides by family members of the elderly, are against women.

### **Female geronticide**

When elderly women are killed, this may be because they are elderly or because they are women, or for both reasons. Matricide, or the killing of a mother by her biological children, features prominently in mythology and ancient history, as well as in Freudian psychoanalysis (Jacobs, 2008). In Japan, female geronticide may be tantamount to 'granny dumping' (Kawai et al., 2014). In the United States, matricide is still unusual and female geronticide comprises less than 2% of all homicides (Heide & Frei, 2010).

A scholarly examination of the femicide of elderly women (as opposed to domestic or other abuse) is rare. There are several reasons for the dearth of scientific literature on female geronticide. One reason is that what constitutes femicide of elderly women is not clear-cut. If a woman, elderly or otherwise, is killed in an accident or by a hit- and- run driver, that death may not be considered femicide. However, if an elderly woman is specifically targeted in a gender-related killing, or if she is murdered by an intimate partner, who may have abused her all her life, then that murder could constitute a female geronticide.

An allied difficulty is deciding who qualifies as an 'elderly woman' (cf. Addington, 2012). There is no set age for seniority, and the definition of the 'elderly' can vary from one society to another and within different sub-sections of the same society. In some cultures, such as Ethiopia, a woman is old after menopause (Weil, 2004); in other countries, a woman is considered an elderly woman ready for retirement as early as 50 as in China (Xue, Head, & McMunn, 2017), or as late as 75 years in a flexible retirement scheme in Norway.<sup>1</sup> In line with increasingly older populations and a worldwide decrease in families willing to care for their elderly, countries are in the process of reviewing the statutory age of retirement in line with increasing gender equality, increased life expectancy, and concomitant scarcity of pension funds over long retirement periods. Whereas female longevity is greater than male longevity, females are often forced to retire at an earlier age than men (OECD, 2017). In order to give an indication of the vast variation in attitudes towards elderly women, concomitant with data on longevity, it is useful to point out that in 2017, the retirement age of women was 50 in China (Xue et al., 2017), and 66 in the Netherlands and in the United States (OECD, 2017). An article entitled 'Who you calling Old? Measuring "Elderly" and what it means for Homicide Research' (Addington, 2012) shows that the over 65 population is treated heterogeneously in the United States. Whereas homicide studies usually count 65 and over as 'elderly', Addington suggests a multiple-category definition of elderly in homicide research, which identifies similarities and differences among elderly and non-elderly populations. For example, the oldest victims in the elderly category, who are 80 and over, are female, killed by someone they know (such as a child or family member) by means of a weapon or personal contact, may have more similarities with victims of non-fatal elder abuse, or even with other younger femicide victims.

The lacuna in research on femicides of elderly women is also related to reporting. Documentation on the killing of elderly women may remain 'hidden', and may not even be reported to the police,

especially if the murder is perpetrated by a family member. In patriarchal, and even in matriarchal societies (such as in south India), elderly females may be devalued and their deaths under-reported, or not even reported at all.

Not all countries demand a coroner's certificate for a family member found dead in the domestic arena. In the face of lack of information, statistics can be skewed and the full extent of femicide of elderly women remains undocumented. In a pioneering study, Fileborn (2017) demonstrated that existing research underestimates the extent of sexual assault against older women since they make up a small proportion of the victims or survivors of this type of violence. She points out how elderly women face particular barriers to disclosure and accessing the justice system, resulting in their reports of violence remaining hidden. Elderly women's experiences may be ignored, dismissed, or downplayed by others. In a certain percentage of cases, abuse may end in death. In other words, female geronticide may simply be the tail-end of the continuum of violence that a woman faces her entire life.

More recently, a pioneering volume on abuse and femicide among elderly women was published (Hemblade, 2017), with reports on several countries including Canada (Dawson, 2017) and Ghana (Sossou & Yogtiba, 2017). Articles also linked the victimization and femicide of elderly women with disenfranchisement and 'witchcraft' (Joseph, 2017; Platzer, 2018). Another hypothesis is that women may be devalued once they have passed menopause. Once they have finished raising their families, and can no longer produce children, or are perceived as being unable to contribute economically or physically to the family, they may become dispensable.<sup>2</sup> Against the background of the literary survey presented here, this article now presents the findings of the first longitudinal study on female geronticide utilizing Israel as a case study.

## On the elderly, elderly abuse and femicide in Israel

### *Demography, life expectancy and retirement in Israel*

According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (henceforth CBS), the total population of Israel in 2015 was estimated to be 8.46 million people, of whom nearly 75% are Jewish (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016a, p. 21). The Arab population is composed of 1.76 million people, the vast majority of whom are Muslim, who constitute approximately 20% of the Israeli population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016a, p. 22). Israeli Arabs are sometimes referred to as 'Palestinians' (cf. Shalhoub-Kervorkian & Daher-Nashif, 2013), but, while honouring the right to self-definition, this designation gets confusing when the data analysed by researchers refer to people living within the borders of the State of Israel, who are not residing in the Palestinian Authority. Approximately 5% of the total population in Israel belong to other religions. These include 117,000 Israeli Arabs and 35,000 non-Arabs who belong to the Christian faith, 150,000 members of the Druze religion, and nearly 100,000 foreign residents, foreigner workers and asylum seekers, who may be Hindu, Buddhist or members of other religions.

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Jewish population living in Palestine almost doubled in 18 months, with Jews flocking to Israel after the Holocaust and fleeing persecution in Arab lands (Reich, 1991). Additional waves of immigrants reached Israel in the 1950s and 1960s (Hacohen, 2001; Reich, 1991). At the end of the 1970s, Jews started immigrating to Israel from Ethiopia. According to the CBS, at the end of 2015, a total of 141,200 Jews of Ethiopian origin were residing in Israel, including Ethiopian Jews born in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016d, p. 1). After the break-up of the former Soviet Union (FSU), about one million former Soviet immigrants entered Israel between the years 1990 and 2000. At the end of 2015, there were 1.2 million immigrants from the FSU living in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016d, p. 23). In recent years, Israel has also taken in non-Jewish and non-indigenous 'foreigners': migrants with legal work permits, and illegal immigrants, such as migrant workers with expired work permits or asylums seekers. In 2015, there were 183,000 legal migrant workers in Israel and 43,000 illegal migrants (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016b, p. 1).

As a result of relatively high fertility rates among all populations relative to other countries, Israel has one of the highest population growth rates of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018). Life expectancy in Israel is among the highest in the world (OECD, 2016, p. 203). The average life expectancy for men is 80.1 years and for women, it is 84.1 years. At the end of 2015, there were 938,900 elderly (of whom 59% were women) people in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016c). Despite the fact that women live longer than men, as in many other Western countries, women are considered 'elderly' and ready for retirement at a younger age than men. According to the Retirement Law passed in Israel's Knesset (Parliament) in 2004, the retirement age for males was fixed at 67 and for women, it was raised from 60 to 62 (National Insurance Institute, 2018). From 2009 to 2017, the retirement age of women was 62.66; in 2017, it rose officially to 63. Upon retirement, pensioners are entitled to 'old age' benefits. The National Insurance Institute of Israel clearly states that a male is eligible to receive these benefits at 67 upon retirement, but women's retirement age is based on date of birth; for women born between 1947 and 1952, it is 62 (Mizrachi-Simon, 2015a, p. 1–2). The National Insurance Institute of Israel point out on their website that the retirement age for women born after 1955 is under discussion by the Knesset's Finance Committee (National Insurance Institute, 2018). In September 2016, the Committee for Examining Women's Pension Age recommended an increase in the retirement age for women to age 65 over a 12-year period (Heruti-Sover, 2016). The committee's recommendations met opposition, primarily among feminists in Israel, and the retirement age of women meanwhile remains 62 (Mizrachi-Simon, 2015a; Sapiro, 2007).

At the end of 2015, 3% of 65 years old, and 11% of 85 years old and above, lived in nursing homes (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016c, p. 5). Different countries adopt different policies regarding long-term care systems. A comparison of three countries – Germany, Sweden and Italy – revealed three different models of care. In Germany, household and social services are expanding; in Sweden, a new government committee is examining the effects of welfare state marketization on long-term care and; in Italy, there are austerity policies in place, which leave many families reliant on an unregulated private care (Theobald & Luppi, 2018). In Israel, the low percentage of senior citizens residing in nursing homes relative to the Western world (Joint Distribution Committee Israel, 2016, p. 6) reflects Israel's emphasis on family and communal values. It is significant that Israel is one of the few countries in the world with a Ministry of Senior Citizens. Some researchers have assumed that Arabs would rate their culture as more tolerant and respectful towards the elderly. The studies on this are mixed, for example, in a 2013 study of 154 Israelis, 86 Jewish and 68 Muslim Arabs, in which measures of ageism, ageing anxieties and cultural views of older populations were recorded, the Arabs sampled were less worried about growing old. However, Arab women reported more ageing anxieties in comparison to Arab men, while no such differences were found among the Jewish samples (Bergman, Bodner, & Cohen-Fridel, 2013).

### *Elderly abuse in Israel*

While geronticide has not been researched in Israel, elderly abuse has been studied (see, Lowenstein, 1995; Lowenstein & Israel, 2008; Neikrug & Ronen, 1993). Programmes to combat neglect of the elderly are implemented by several different ministries. According to Schecter (2017), the diversity in Israeli legislation on the subject and the involvement of the Ministry of Health in combating elder abuse have not only created an additional safety net for the elderly but have given rise to several major achievements. Elderly abuse is a recognized phenomenon and part of the daily professional dialogue; there are increased rates of reporting abuse and neglect; multidisciplinary settings are the required and practised method of dealing with abuse; and facilities conduct in-house abuse prevention and intervention training sessions (Schecter, 2017).

An early study carried out in Israel with 452 subjects examined attitudes to elderly neglect and abuse (Neikrug & Ronen, 1993). It showed that violence against the elderly was ranked by respondents as most severe in old-age institutions, and intra-familial abuse was rated less severely; the

study did not deal with extreme violence resulting in death. Women perceived abuse of the elderly more harshly than men did. Subjects who defined themselves as Orthodox or secular Jews judged psychological abuse less severely than those who considered themselves 'traditional' Jews. Younger adults condemned elder abuse more harshly than older subjects. The findings showed a relative tolerance of intra-familial violence, if it occurred in the context of a caring relationship.

A national survey conducted in Israel demonstrated that 18.4% of the elderly population, Jews and Arabs alike, were exposed to at least one abuse type in the 12 months prior to the data collection period (Lowenstein, Eisikovits, Band-Winterstein, & Enosh, 2009). The most common type of reported abuse was verbal abuse (14.2%), followed by reports of financial exploitation (6.4%). Other forms of severe abuse, such as physical and sexual abuse, were reported by around 2% of respondents (Lowenstein et al., 2009). However, while this percentage seems low, it must be recognized that it represents a few tens of thousand citizens at risk (Alon & Berg-Warman, 2014).

As Israel's population is getting older and there is a higher number of older people in the general population, more attention is being placed on detecting and preventing elderly abuse. Lowenstein et al. (2009) examined the risk factors leading to abuse and neglect and found that living arrangements and family relations, lack of income and education, health restrictions, alongside subjective perceptions of loneliness and feelings of being neglected, were all indicators of the vulnerability of elderly persons to abuse and neglect. Moreover, elderly women were found to be at more at risk than men and were especially vulnerable to acts of physical abuse. Ten per cent of Arab women respondents and 2.1% of Jewish women respondents reported physical and/or sexual abuse, whereas only 0.8% of Jewish men respondents and no Arab men reported acts of physical violence (Lowenstein et al., 2009).

### *Femicide or the murder of Israeli women*

The term 'femicide' is not used in Hebrew, the national language of Israel; instead, the terms 'the murder of women' or 'women's murder' are used. In recent years, the murder of women by male intimate partners or family members is evident in public discourse and has featured prominently in the Israeli media (such as Chazan, 2018; iNews, 2018; Weil, 2020).

The criminal code assigns no specific clause to femicide, and femicidal murderers are charged with the general offence of homicide. Highly prevalent is the expression 'family honour killing' used to indicate murder by a partner or a family member, when a woman or girl is believed to have disrespected her family or to have brought shame (Cooney, 2014; Kulczycki & Windle, 2011).

Until 2012, apart from sporadic media-initiated projects, there had been no data collection available for femicide in Israel. In 2012 the Parliamentary Committee on Women's Rights determined that the murder of women should be reported annually (Mizrachi-Simon, 2015b). Despite being accessible to the public, only meagre efforts are made to disseminate this report outside the Israeli Parliament. Since 2015, there have been no systematic formal data on femicide in Israel – only a statement issued by the Israel Parliament, collating statistics they claim are sourced from the Israeli Police (Mizrachi-Simon, 2013).

In addition, in its annual report on violence, the Israeli Ministry for Internal Security, currently features a specific and distinct section on female victims of murder. However, no attempt is made to understand the motives underlying the murder of women and girls. In the Israeli Police's official Report on Violence for 2014, there are no less than nine different categories of murder, none of which relates specifically to the murder of women (Bitton & Weil, 2018).

Academic articles on femicide in Israel have identified killings among particular ethnic groups, such as Ethiopian immigrants and the particular narratives of survivors of 'failed femicides' (Weil, 2016b); Russian immigrants under the influence of alcohol (Sela-Shayovitz, 2010a), and; Arab/Palestinian populations (Shalhoub-Kervorkian & Daher-Nashif, 2013). Sela-Shayovitz has shown that femicides, often committed with a firearm, significantly increased during periods of war-like



conflict and specifically among immigrants holding firearms during the Second Intifada (Sela-Shayovitz, 2010b).

### *Femicide of elderly women*

A systematic literature review of 12 leading gender and gerontology journals,<sup>3</sup> and seven English-speaking databases<sup>4</sup> revealed that no articles exist on the femicide of elderly women in Israel. This article represents the first empirical study of the total population of elderly women who were killed in a decade.

### **A study of female geronticide in Israel, 2006–2015: methods**

All cases of femicide in heterosexual relationships of a woman over the age of 18 in Israel were examined from 2006 to 2015.<sup>5</sup> In line with the advice of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women; its causes and consequences, at the 27th Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 14–18 May 2018 (Simonovic, 2018, p. 8), data on intentional homicides were collected and out of that data, gender-related killings of women or femicide data were extracted. Since Israel does not officially disaggregate for femicides, the data were not gathered from one exclusive source but were gleaned one by one from police statistics, media reports, parliamentary reports and internet accounts. Every case was recorded according to name of victim and murderer, relationship between perpetrator and victim, type of weapon used, place of murder and other variables, and double-checked and sometimes triple-checked to ensure no double-counting.<sup>6</sup> The ages of the femicide victims were aggregated in tens such that statistics for the elderly were available for ages 60 and over. The cut-off age of 60 selected for this study is in accordance with a global review of 50 studies on the prevalence of abuse among the elderly, which chose to examine data among women aged 60 and beyond (Yon, Mikton, Gassoumis, & Wilber, 2017). Clearly, the number of femicides of 'elderly women' would have been fewer if we had concentrated on a higher age bracket such as 65 and over. However, it should be noted that in a rare comparable study of the killings of older women in Ontario, Canada, the cases of women over the age of 55 years were examined between the years 1974 and 2012 (Sutton & Dawson, 2017). The complete sample of femicide cases which were perpetrated in Israel between 2006 and 2015 for those over the age of 60 was extracted to determine the number of female geronticides in Israel over a decade.

Despite the fact that femicides and suicides are often connected (cf. Balica & Stöckl, 2016), our data neither included the suicide of elderly women nor suicide pacts between partners in old age. Nor did it include matricide, since there were no reported matricides of elderly women during the decade under study.<sup>7</sup> There was also no case of male geronticide at the hands of a female partner during the decade.

In order to understand the attributes of the victims of female geronticide in Israel, the study examined the variables of age, the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, and ethnicity. The rate of female geronticide for members of different ethnicities, relative to their percentage in the general population and relative to the percentage of cases within their ethnic group, was then calculated in order to establish whether females of different ethnic groups are more likely to be murdered under the age of 60 or over that age. As expected from such a small number of cases, the rates are much less than a hundredth of a per cent, but there are still definite findings.

## **Results**

### *Homicides vs. femicides*

From 2006 to 2015, 1,256 adult homicides were perpetrated in Israel (Israeli Police, 2016, p. 27; Sapiro, 2007, p. 11). Of these, 145 cases of femicide were extracted, constituting 12% of all homicides in a decade.



### *Femicide victims' age*

**Table 1** shows the number of femicides perpetrated in Israel in a decade, and the number of women over the age of 60 killed during that period.

The mean number of femicides over a decade was 14.5. The average age of the femicide victim was 34.5 and the standard deviation was 18.9.

Of the 145 femicide cases, 15 (c.10%) were murders of women over the age of 60. Although there are only one or two cases of female geronticide per year, the fact that just over 10% of all femicides in Israel are committed against elderly women is notable. The highest number of femicides of elderly women in 1 year was four in 2013. It is interesting to note that in the years of the highest numbers of femicide cases (2010, 2011, and 2015), there was not more than one case of femicide of an elderly woman, and in 2006, 2011, and 2012 there was not even a single case.

### *Relationship between the victim and the perpetrator*

In Israel, the media has proven to be an important source of information in reconstructing and documenting femicide. Sela-Shayovitz (2018) has shown the differing newspaper representations of intimate partner femicide when committed by members of different ethnic groups, and the key role that the media plays in the perpetuation of the structure of dominance, gender and class in Israel. In this study, an examination from media and internet sources of every single murder of an elderly woman committed between 2006 and 2015 revealed that all the cases of female geronticide in Israel were exclusively intimate partner femicides, and perpetrated in the domestic arena.

While intimate partner femicides constitute 38.6% of all femicides sampled in 66 countries (Stöckl et al., 2013), in this research, 100% of all female geronticides were carried out by intimate partners. It could be that the likelihood of a woman being murdered by her partner rises with age, particularly if she is the object of ongoing domestic abuse at his hands.

### *Femicide and female geronticide victims' age and ethnicity*

**Table 2** provides data on femicide and female geronticide among five distinct groups: veteran Israeli Jews; immigrants from the FSU; Israeli Arabs; Ethiopian immigrants and foreign migrants from Eritrea, Sudan, the Philippines, and other countries. This category includes illegal migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and legal foreign workers. **Table 2** summarizes the numbers of femicides and female geronticides, under the age of 60 and over 60 years old, for these groups, explaining the percentage of cases in relation to the group's relative proportion in the general population, as well as the percentage of cases within the ethnic group.

As can be seen from **Table 2**, with regard to femicide, Israeli Jews make up 16.6% of all femicide victims in Israel, but they constitute 61.18% of the total population. Immigrants from the FSU, who

**Table 1.** Femicide in Israel by age group, 2006–2015.

Year	Age		Total
	–60	60+	
2006	13	0	13
2007	10	3	13
2008	8	2	10
2009	7	1	8
2010	18	1	19
2011	18	0	18
2012	15	0	15
2013	13	4	17
2014	9	3	12
2015	19	1	20
Years: 2006–2015	130	15	145

**Table 2.** Age and ethnicity of femicides in Israel according to their percentage within the general population, 2006–2015.

Age	Ethnicity	Israeli (veteran) Jews	FSU immigrants	Israeli Arabs	Ethiopian immigrants	Foreign migrants	Years: 2006–2015
– 60	N of cases (%)	24 (16.6%)	29 (20.0%)	35 (24.1%)	23 (15.9%)	19 (13.1%)	130 (90%)
	% within ethnicity	0.00046%	0.00242%	0.00199%	0.01629%	0.01038%	0.03154%
	% in general pop.	0.00028%	0.00034%	0.00041%	0.00027%	0.00022%	0.00154%
60+	N of cases (%)	8 (5.5%)	5 (3.4%)	2 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (10%)
	% within ethnicity	0.00015%	0.00042%	0.00011%	0%	0%	0.00068%
	% in general pop.	0.00009%	0.00006%	0.00002%	0%	0%	0.00018%
Total	Total cases (%)	32 (22.1%)	34 (23.4%)	37 (25.5%)	23 (15.9%)	19 (13.1%)	145 (100%)
	Population	5,175,413	1,200,000	1,760,387	141,200	183,000	8,460,000
	Pop. Rate	61.18%	14.25%	20.81%	1.67%	2.16%	100%

Note: pop. = population.

are 14.25% of the general population, account for 20% of all femicide victims. Israeli Arabs (20.81% of the total population) represent 24.1% of the femicide victims. Many of these were what are called 'honour femicides' whereby a woman is murdered by a family member in order to protect the family's name, and are clearly identifiable by the name of the victim and the circumstances of the murder, as publicized in the media. Ethiopian immigrants and foreign migrants are disproportionately represented in the femicide statistics. Ethiopian immigrants make up 15.9% of the total cases of femicide in a decade, whilst they constitute 1.67% of the total population. Foreign migrants constitute 13.1% of the total femicide cases, but they are only 2.16% of total population.

The amount of femicide victims of under 60-years-old relative to their percentage in the general population, and relative to the percentage of cases within their ethnic group, is highest among Ethiopian Jews (0.01629%), followed by foreign migrants (0.01038%), FSU immigrants (0.00242%), Israeli Arabs (0.00199%), and Israeli Jews (0.00028%). In other words, the Ethiopian immigrant population is the most at-risk population of femicide in Israel.

However, the picture of the killing elderly women (over the age of 60) is quite different. Of the total cases of female geronticide, 54% of the cases were Israeli Jews, 33% of the cases were FSU immigrants, and 13% of the cases were Israeli Arabs. There were no cases of female geronticide among Ethiopian immigrants or foreign migrants. Thus, while femicide in general is high among particular ethnic groups, such as Ethiopian immigrants and foreign migrants, geronticide of women has been perpetrated in three distinct groups only in Israel: immigrants from FSU, Israeli-born Jews, and Israeli Arabs.

The rate of female geronticide cases is highest among FSU immigrants (0.0042%) relative to their population, and relative to the percentage of cases within their ethnic group. Israeli veteran Jews (0.00015%) constitute the next group that is at-risk as potential female geronticide victims, followed by Israeli Arabs (0.00011%). In other words, the odds of an older FSU immigrant woman being murdered is 1:240,000; it is 1:646,927 for an older Israeli Jewish woman; and 1:880,194 for an older Israeli Arab woman. Ethiopian immigrants or foreign migrants are unlikely to be at risk of being murdered by intimate partners when they reach seniority.

## Discussion

Much of the scientific literature on gender and violence against women had not, until recently, recognized femicide as a legitimate object of study. Much of the field of ageing and the aged has focussed on the abuse and neglect of the elderly, without paying sufficient attention to female geronticide, which is the ultimate outcome of violence against elderly women.

While Israel is, in no way, considered a representative country either for the study of femicide or for the study of geronticide, a review of the literature revealed that there has not been a single research study of female geronticide in Israel over time. The same is true of most countries, although,

as mentioned, recently a volume on the abuse and femicide of the older woman was published with reports from a few countries (Hemblade, 2017).

The study presented here is the first on female geronticide in Israel, documenting the numbers of femicides in Israel during the years 2006–2015, and extracting all femicides of women over the age of 60. Although the numbers are small indeed, the study analysed the total population of female geronticides over a decade. It transpired that all the cases in Israel during this period were perpetrated by intimate partners.

The findings revealed that, while femicide is perpetrated in disproportionate percentages for members of particular ethnic groups or categories, such as Ethiopian immigrants and foreign migrants, there were no cases of female geronticide in these two groups. By contrast, the likelihood of an elderly woman being murdered by her partner or family member was high among immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and then salient among Israeli-born Jews and Israeli Arabs. The findings of this research have implications for policy-makers, who have ignored the care and well-being of elderly women. In particular, as a result of this research, a profile of the next potential murderer of an elderly woman could be constructed at least as an investigative tool, as is done with serial killers in the United States (Van Aken, 2015). The findings of the study could be compared with similar (future) studies in other countries in order to monitor the killings of elderly women. It is worrying that female geronticide has been ignored globally, and, as women live longer, the phenomenon may well increase.

## Notes

1. The retirement scheme is outlined here: <https://tradingeconomics.com/norway/retirement-age-women>
2. I thank the anonymous reviewer of JGS for this insight.
3. These were: Violence against Women; Gender and Society; Gender, Place and Culture; Journal of Gender Studies; Journal of Women and Ageing; Journal of Middle East Women's Studies; Journal of Ageing Studies; Age and Ageing; Journal of Women's Health; Ageing and Society; Trauma, Violence, and Abuse; Journal of Gender-Based Violence. Keywords included murder of women, honour killings, intimate partner murder, femicide, violence against women, elderly abuse, and elderly women in Israel.
4. These were: Google; Google Scholar; Scopus; Springer; Taylor and Francis Online; Social Work Abstracts; Academic Research Complete.
5. To the best of my knowledge, there were no cases of the murder of a woman by a female intimate partner during that period.
6. Other Israeli researchers relied on one source only. For example, Sela-Shayowitz used a list of 174 victims from 2005–2014 (19 more cases than the number we included in this research for the decade 2006–2015) provided by the Israeli organization 'No to Violence against Women'.
7. A few high-profile cases of matricide have been reported in Israel over the years. One of these took place in 2015. A Bedouin Arab living in the north of Israel killed his own mother and was convicted of matricide. He had suffered continuous violence throughout his life at the hands of his mother and apparently could not bear it any more. In a plea bargain, the perpetrator received a reduced 25 year sentence. However, since the perpetrator was 30 years old and his mother was 50 years old, the case was not included in our sample of femicides of elderly women in Israel 2006–2015.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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