

## UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women Inquiry into Femicide 2018

### Evidence Submission from Dr Hannah Bows, Durham Law School, Durham University

The findings will be published in the *British Journal of Social Work* in December 2018.

### New Data on Homicides of Women Aged 60+ in the UK

#### 1. Executive Summary

Durham University collected data from all 45 police forces across in the UK on all recorded homicides (murder and manslaughters) recorded by each force involving a victim aged 60 or over between 2010 and 2015. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to collect data on the demographics of victims and offenders and characteristics of the offences. A total of 514 homicides involving an older victim were recorded during this period; 221 (43%) were 'domestic homicides', defined as homicides where the perpetrator was either a spouse, adult son/daughter or other family member. This submission will focus on the findings from those 221 cases.

#### 1.1 Key Findings:

Overall, there were 221 domestic homicides involving a victim aged 60 and over recorded by the police between 2010 and 2015. This equates to roughly 44 per year, which means that approximately 1 in 4 domestic homicides in the UK involves an older victim.

#### What do we know about victims?

**1.1.1 Gender of victims:** The majority (67%) of victims were female, consistent with the broader national data on domestic homicides involving younger people (ONS, 2018).

**1.1.2 Age of victims:** Most victims were aged 60-69 (42%) and there was a steady decline in homicides as victim age increased. However, this decrease was less prominent for women;

**1.1.3 Gender of perpetrators:** Overall, 81% of the offenders were male, with the remaining 19% female.

**1.1.4 Age of perpetrators:** Most perpetrators were younger than victims; overall, 58% were aged under 60.

**1.1.5 Relationship to victim:** Of the 221 cases, 102 (46%) were committed by a spouse/partner whilst 97 (44%) were committed by a son/daughter (89) or grandson/granddaughter (8). Consequently, older people are almost as likely to be killed by their partner as their child/grandchild, a significant age-related difference compared with younger victims. Female victims were generally killed

by spouse/partners (53%) followed by sons/daughters (13%) whereas male victims were more likely to be killed by son/daughter (53%) than a spouse/partner (31%). However, it is important to note that the overall risk of parricide for older people is much higher for women. Fifty women were killed by a son/daughter compared with 39 men.

## **Characteristics of domestic homicides of women (n=148)**

**1.1.6 Relationship to offender:** Most of the female victims (n=148) were killed by a partner/spouse (n=79) (53%) whilst 57 were killed by a son/daughter or grandson/daughter (38%).

**1.1.7 Gender of offender:** Most offenders were male (n=134) (90%)

**1.1.8 Location of homicide:** Most older women were killed in their own home (n=132) (89%).

**1.1.9 Method of killing:** Most women were stabbed (n=60, 40%), strangled (n=18, 12%) or assaulted with a weapon (n=17, 11%).

## **1.2 Recommendations**

**1.2.1 Life-course analyses of violence against women is needed:** this research has identified that the dynamics of domestic homicide in later life are gendered; women remain at a higher risk of domestic homicide compared with men, however the almost equal numbers of spouse/partner homicides and adult son/grandson homicides (often term parricide) brings into sharp relief the need to recognize that age is also critical in understanding violence against older women.

**1.2.2 Awareness raising of the extent and nature of violence against older women:** the longstanding assumptions that older people are low risk for violence has been challenged by an emerging pool of research over the last decade. The present study expands the current knowledge on violence against older women and highlights the need to raise awareness of the extent and nature of violence against older women.

**1.2.3 Training for age-related organisations and frontline health professionals:** it is critical that services that are likely to be in contact with older people (including age-related organisations, health and social care services and adult safeguarding social workers) are aware of the signs and risk factors for domestic homicide. This must incorporate violence by (adult) children, grandchildren and other family members.

**1.2.4 Comprehensive risk assessments that take into consideration all age groups:** risk assessments for domestic violence usually focus on young victims and offenders; for example, many of the questions in the risk assessment tool in England and Wales (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment – DASH) focuses on pregnancy and/or young children, issues less likely to affect older adults. Older women's risk may be missed/overlooked by these risk assessments. Risk assessments must be adaptable for all age groups and ensure risk is assessed in totality, incorporating various dynamics such as child-to-parent violence and abuse.

**1.2.5 National and international databases:** methodologies must extend to incorporate age as well as gender (and other identities). The current dichotomies and disjoints that exist between the different disciplines (e.g. elder abuse, eldercide, domestic violence, domestic homicide, adolescent-to-parent violence and parricide) and different forms of violence result in a limited picture of interpersonal violence and homicide, complicating research and hindering the development of a comprehensive evidence base. National and international data on homicide (and domestic violence) must include older victims and allow for disaggregation by age and other demographics.

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Hannah Bows currently holds the position of [Assistant Professor in Criminal Law at Durham University](#). She has researched in the broad area of violence against women for the last five years. Key projects include: [the first national study to examine rape and sexual assault of older people in the UK](#); the first analysis of homicides of older people in the UK; and a project [exploring risk assessment of older sex offenders](#). This work has fed into Home Office briefings on crimes against older people and an HMIC scoping report on police responses to crime involving older victims. She has extensive experience of using [Freedom of Information requests as a research method](#), alongside more conventional quantitative and [qualitative methods](#). [Hannah.Bows@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Hannah.Bows@durham.ac.uk)

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ONS (2018) *Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2017* [online]. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/homicideinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017#which-groups-of-people-are-most-likely-to-be-victims-of-homicide>