

Femicide in Portugal during the COVID-19 pandemic

Observatory of
Murdered Women

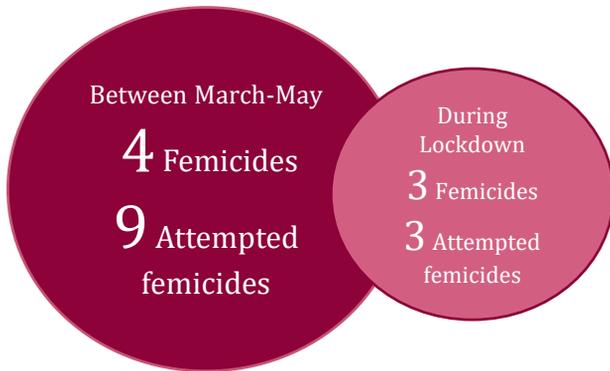
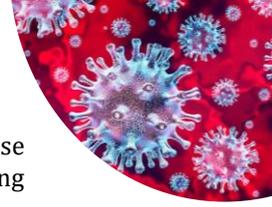
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INTRODUCTION

The Observatory of Murdered Women (OMA) of Women's Association Alternative and Response (UMAR), a Portuguese NGO, publishes every year data about murdered women, including femicides and attempted femicides reported by the press.

The COVID-19 pandemic has marked the year 2020, and it is extremely important to analyse how the governmental lockdown measures have impacted the reality of people who experience violence in their homes. During March, April, and May, Portugal underwent extreme measures imposing restrictions of movement and social isolation. Between the 18th of March and the 3rd of May, the National State of Emergency was in place, imposing mandatory lockdown. This report highlights data collected by OMA relating to femicides, attempted femicides, and death threats reported by the Portuguese press between the 1st of March and the 31st of May of 2020. These three months were selected because, in Portugal, a sizeable part of the population went into voluntary isolation even before the State of Emergency was declared. After the mandatory lockdown was over, the restrictions were lifted gradually, and most of the population kept in isolation during the whole month of May. In this report, lockdown will refer to the period in which the State of Emergency was in place, and people were under mandatory confinement.

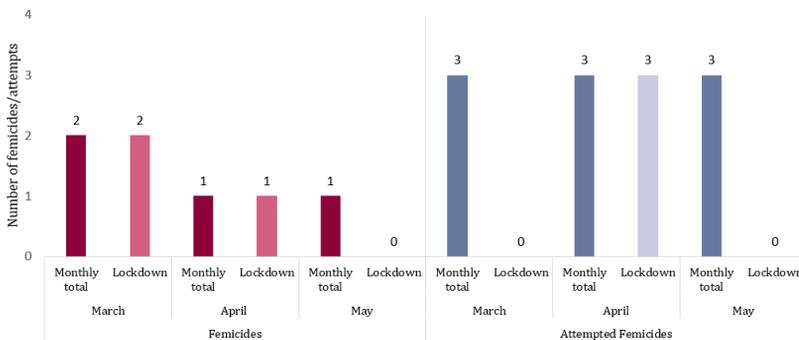


	Femicides March-May	Femicides Lockdown
Intimate relationship	4	3
Perpetrated at home	4	3
Indication of previous domestic violence	2	1

In the four femicides reported the victim and perpetrator had been in an intimate relationship, and the crime was committed at home. Three of these femicides were during lockdown. Nine femicide attempts were reported between March and May, three of them during lockdown.

FEMICIDES AND ATTEMPTED FEMICIDES: MONTH BY MONTH

Number of femicides and femicide attempts between March and May 2020 (monthly total vs during lockdown)



Two femicides were committed in March, both during lockdown. In April, one femicide was counted, also during lockdown. In May, no femicides were reported during lockdown, however, after the State of Emergency was lifted there was one femicide.

Regarding attempted femicides, before the State of Emergency was declared there were three attempted femicides in March. In April, all three attempted femicides were during lockdown, whilst in May there were three attempted femicides after the mandatory confinement was lifted.

DEATH THREATS

A high number of death threats in a context of domestic violence were reported in the Portuguese press in these months. Between March and May, 33 death threats were reported, 18 of them during lockdown. Considering that death threats and attempted femicides are significant risk factors for femicide, these data are of extreme importance for the prevention of these crimes.



FEMICIDES AND ATTEMPTED FEMICIDES BETWEEN MARCH-MAY: RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS 2004-2020



The pandemic situation highlighted an increased concern with victim protection and gender-based violence prevention in Portugal. Several measures targeting domestic violence victim support and protection were implemented early at the beginning of the pandemic period.

Although the number of attempted femicides does not differ considerably from those reported in previous years, the number of femicides has decreased. However, these data need to be analysed carefully given that during this period news coverage of the pandemic may have hindered femicides reports in the media.

Period:	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
March -	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
May	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Femicides	9	9	10	7	14	6	7	5	11	13	12	9	4	7	8	6	4
Attempted Femicides	2	10	3	15	16	9	13	15	8	13	15	7	9	11	3	8	9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Data presented in this report highlight the importance of maintaining the measures to prevent gender-based violence in Portugal, especially domestic violence. The fear experienced by many women during the period of mandatory lockdown may have caused some of them to adopt a more complacent attitude towards the abuser's demands while being forced to stay at home. This might have been used as a survival strategy by victims to try to protect themselves and their children from the violence and, also, from the danger of COVID-19 infection if they attempted to leave the violent relationship. This strategy might have contributed to reducing the number of separations and, therefore, the risk associated with those separations. On the other hand, several measures aiming to protect and assist domestic violence victims were implemented in Portugal in this period. This might have been a factor contributing to protect and avoid a higher number of murdered women. Thus, it is recommended that these measures are extended and that a long-term plan for preventing femicide is created, having in consideration the pandemic situation. It will be fundamental to keep the focus on the post-lockdown period as women will have more space and opportunity to separate from the abusive partner and will get back to an active social life. These two factors might increase women's risk when considering the lockdown period. Additionally, the pandemic situation might have caused stress and familiar disruptions, the consequences of which might be felt in the long-term. A specialised and in-depth analysis of femicide and attempted femicide is crucial to identify effective policies for its prevention.

METHOD

The Observatory of Murdered Women collects data about murdered women, including femicide, from the press coverage in Portuguese newspapers, such as the newspapers *Público*, *Diário de Notícias*, *Correio da Manhã* and *Jornal de Notícias*. **Femicides** are considered to be all intentional murders of women motivated by gender issues (e.g. due to jealousy in an intimate relationship). **Attempted femicides** are all attempted intentional murders of women motivated by gender issues. Attempted femicides cases collected by OMA were those in which the news coverage mentions an attempt to kill or an injury caused with the intention to kill. For the first time, and considering its importance in the recent pandemic period, OMA also analysed death threats. The data presented in this report represents only a part of murdered women during the year 2020. OMA collects information about all murdered women, including those that are not in a context of femicide (e.g. as a result of a robbery).

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