Media Representations of Femicide. A Systematic Review of Literature in English and Spanish

Mariana Aldrete [a]*, Nermin Taşkale[b], and Eloísa Rivera Ramirez[c] and Víctor Daniel Gil Vera[d]

[a]*Department of Communication and Journalism, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain;* [b]*Department of Psychology, Division of Applied Psychology, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Türkiye;* [c]*Independent Researcher, Mexico City, Mexico;* [d]*Faculty of Engineering and Systems, Catholic University Luis Amigó, Medellín, Colombia.*

*Correspondence address: San Antonio, Texas. United States of America.

Email: mgutierrezald@uoc.edu

ORCID: 0000-0002-2409-5337

Twitter: @MarianaAldrete5

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Abstract

Research on media representations of gender-based violence GBV murders from multiple social contexts is available, but no literature review study. This work assesses this gap by examining 213 studies that analysed empirical evidence from 45 countries. Our mixed methodology provides a mapping of the literature in a scientific and transparent process. Our results show that the representation depends on the media type and not the country. The most analysed are news, finding victim-blaming, perpetrator-justification, and otherization narratives, but these were also found in other media. Social media, literature, and artistic materials help increase the visibility of activists and victims, can convey the context of GBV help to social awareness, or reproduce stereotypes that minimize, naturalize, and legitimize GBV.

Keywords: femicide, feminicide, honour killing, dowry death, intimate partner murder, family murder, media representation.

Introduction

Statistics from UN Women show that during the past decade, most of the intentional killings of women and girls in the world were gender-motivated and 56% of these were committed by intimate partners or other family members (Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito, 2022).

In 1992, Diana Rusell proposed the term femicide to name gender-based violence murders (GBV), highlighting its special nature as the product of discriminatory ideologies embedded in culture and social practices. Later, Marcela Lagarde (2006) translated the term to the Spanish *feminicidio* (feminicide), including into the concept the institutional discrimination experienced by the victims and their families during the criminal investigations by government officials in Mexico. GBV murders are a complex

category; they represent the result of persistent actions of violence of a wide variety (Radford & Russell, 1992). The term femicide aims to encompass all misogynist murders in public and private contexts (Segato, 2014). Femicides can be committed by (1) partners or ex-partners; (2) relatives (including dowry-related (Weil et al., 2016) and honour-related (Jiwani, 2014)); (3) friends or acquaintances taking advantage of the personal relationship; (4) community members to enforce codes and practices as in honour-related violence (Hellgren & Hobson, 2008); (5) strangers and organized crime groups involving crimes that especially target women such as rape, trafficking, exploitation, hatred of women with stigmatized occupations (sex workers, escorts, dancers, waitresses), associated with torture, and public exhibition of the corpses (Berlanga Gayón, 2017; Monárrez Fragoso, 2009). Scholars have discussed whether the word to define these murders should be femicide (*femicidio)* or feminicide (*feminicidio)* (Boira et al., 2015; Lagarde, 2006; Saccomano, 2017)*;* we decided to use inclusive criteria as Lagarde (2006) explains that femicide and feminicide are both concepts that highlight the specific discrimination that affects women in a patriarchal system. For practical reasons and to adjust to the most common use of the term in the English language literature, from now on we will use femicide to refer to GBV murders.

Femicides are intersectional and political regardless of the victim-perpetrator relationship because the perpetrator holds political power supported by a hierarchical system in which many GBV acts are normalized (Segato, 2014). In the public sphere, elite actors such as the legal system, policymakers, and the media produce discourses that legitimize GBV on an institutional and systemic level (Gutierrez Aldrete, 2022; Lazar, 2005; Wright, 2011). On the other hand, the vertiginous increase in media consumption and diversity has opened opportunities for other political actors to place their discourses in the public debate (Aldrete, 2023a; Belotti et al., 2021). Consequently,

the body of literature analysing the media discourses of femicide has grown exponentially and can be considered a scientific field itself. Nevertheless, to our knowledge, no systematic literature review study is available. We aim to assess this gap by exhaustively examining 213 journal articles and book chapters that deal with media empirical evidence on femicide. We used a methodology that incorporates qualitative content analysis and the software Bibliometrix on R.

The main objective is to provide an analysis of available research in a replicable, scientific, and transparent process, allowing us to map the main advances in the field and minimize the bias that can result from author-centric reviews (Linnenluecke et al., 2020). The relevance of mapping this extensive body of literature lies in the need to outline the problem of discriminatory practices in public discourses at a macro level. Femicide has become an international indicator of gender inequalities (*Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide)*, 2022); nonetheless, GBV is nuanced by intersectional and cultural relations that difficult a global approach to generate reliable data and build strategies to fight the problem (Walby, 2023). Studies have consistently proved that discriminatory discourses influence justification of the violence and victim-blaming in individuals and societies (see Colagrossi et al., 2023; Hunnicutt, 2009). Therefore, the present work aims to provide a tool to identify common patterns of representations and serve as a foundation for global analyses.

Our study provides a general view of the research in the field, illustrating the aspects that have been analysed and aspects that could open avenues for new research, by identifying how the media represent, inform, and explain femicide by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the main bibliometric indicators of the literature on media representations of femicide?

RQ2: What are the main trends in literature that analysed empirical evidence about media representations of femicide?

RQ3: What are the differences and similarities between the representation of femicide among different types of media?

Methods

We followed the guidelines proposed by Wolfswinkel and others (2013) with five stages: (1) criteria selection; (2) literature search; (3) selection and refinement; (4) analysis; and (5) presentation.

To define the criteria selection (1), two reviewers made an exploratory search on EBSCOhost to establish the keywords for the search of papers. Femicide is a relatively new concept and can be theoretically linked to certain geographies and conditions. We considered that some studies could use different words to define GBV murders. Besides, we analysed the relevance of the languages to include and the possibility of having more languages. The results of the exploratory search were discussed by two reviewers to create a list of keywords that allowed us to find all the studies that dealt with the topic. Insofar as the languages, we chose the two with the most volume of papers.

We used three international online databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and EBSCOhost. The strategy for the literature search (2) used two separate search queries: the first included the keywords "femicide" OR "*femicidio*" OR "feminicide" OR "*feminicidio*" in the titles, keywords, and abstracts. The second query included the keywords "homicide of women" OR "*homicidio de mujeres*" OR "murder of women" OR "*asesinato de mujeres*" OR "slain women" (*asesinato de mujeres*) OR "wife murder" or "*asesinato de esposa*" OR "gender based murder" OR "*asesinato por género*" OR "intimate partner violence murder" or "*asesinato y violencia íntima de*

pareja" OR "domestic violence murder" OR "*asesinato y violencia doméstica*" OR "intrafamily murder" OR "*asesinato intrafamiliar*" OR "honor killing" OR "honour killing" OR "*asesinato por honor*" OR "dowry death" or "*muerte por dote*" NOT "femicide" NOT "*femicidio*" NOT "feminicide" NOT "*feminicidio*" in the titles, keywords and abstracts. Restrictions were applied to include just peer-reviewed publications, journal papers, book chapters, Spanish and English languages, and the time frame from the earliest possible to October 2022.

From the results, the first reviewer (bilingual) read the titles and abstracts to manually select and refine the search (3) to papers that dealt with media representations of femicide guided by the use of the words "media" (*medios de comunicación*), "representation" (*representación*), "discourse" (*discurso*), "coverage" (*cobertura*), "reporting" (*reportaje*), "debate" (*debate*), and/or the mention of the use of empirical evidence of any type of media such as "broadcast" (*transmisión*), "television" (*televisión*), "newspapers" (*periódicos*), "digital news" (*noticias digitales*), "books" (*libros*), "e-books" (*libros digitales*), "social media" (*redes sociales*), "facebook", "twitter", "tiktok", "instagram", "web pages" (*páginas web*), "music" (*música*), "fiction movies" (*películas de ficción*), "documentaries" (*documentales*), "legends" (*leyendas*), "paintings" (*pínturas*), "art exhibitions" (*exhibición de arte*), and "performances". We discarded papers that focused on sociological, legal, or philosophical discussion of the concepts, essays, and those that did not refer to any empirical evidence. An email request was sent to all authors whose papers we were unable to locate. The articles from the authors who did not respond to this request or the authors who stated they did not have the paper available to send, were not included in this review.

The first reviewer extracted data from the qualifying studies into a pre-developed Excel spreadsheet containing the data fields mostly present in Appendix 1.

Scopus and WoS provided the complete bibliographic information to download, but EBSCOHost did not. Papers only found at EBSCOHost were added to Appendix 1 manually by looking directly at the source's web pages, and the number of citations was consulted in Google Scholar. We removed duplicates. The information was verified and examined by three reviewers to assess their fit with the inclusion criteria, in some cases, it was necessary to read the entire paper to be sure that it complies with the inclusion criteria. Disagreements were resolved through consensus; nonetheless, we just found disagreement with three articles that are included in this review.

In analysis (4), we used the tool Bibliometrix, free software developed in R to generate bibliometric indicators with data extracted from Scopus and WoS (Aria & Cuccurrullo, 2020). In addition, we manually registered the citation score from Google Scholar for the most cited papers, and counted the scientific production of journals not indexed in Scopus or WoS, to compare with the results from Bibliometrix. For the qualitative analysis, we applied the content analysis technique, used to examine messages through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of topics (Krippendorff, 2004). Full-text records were examined; we divided the corpus into three groups based on the communicative material analysed and each group was examined by one reviewer whose expertise relied on the analysis of the communicative materials studied in the papers. Our coding scheme was designed to illustrate descriptive information and the main results. We registered the type of media analysed, the use of the word femicide as the denomination for the murders, the country of data, and the type of methodology. To register the main results, we followed an inductive approach but took into consideration the papers´ objectives to define the main results related to them. To reach intercoder reliability, 20% of the articles were coded by two reviewers, in cases of initial

disagreement, a consensus was reached through discussion between the three reviewers.

We did not read the quotes from the communicative materials to avoid analysing them ourselves with our knowledge of the topic. Instead, we registered the authors' results and conclusions. We did not evaluate the quality of the research or make any additions to it. In a second coding, we classified the papers' results registered in the descriptive dataset into topics that we used to create groups; for example, phrases such as 'lack of relating the crime with gender-based violence or femicide', 'there is no mention of how the violence embraced by men derives from the Italian patriarchal structure, which normalizes male power', 'a minority of articles contextualized the problem as domestic violence', 'relating the crimes with poverty, crime, and drugs, is not presented as violence against women (VAW)', 'domestic violence were often placed with individual victims and abusers, rather than offering systemic solutions', we registered in the topic 'lack of context of VAW'. The topics registered in the second coding were counted and we report their frequency in the results chapter.

Some papers mentioned the frequency of some features such as victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification, we did not register the percentages or numbers, but the authors' conclusion of the counting with words such as 'majority', 'some', or 'rarely' (i.e., the majority of articles contain victim-blaming narratives, some articles describe previous IPV events, narratives that justify the perpetrator were rarely found). Figure 1. shows the selection process:

Figure 1. About here

Results

The corpus of analysis consists of 213 documents, 135 written in English and 78 in Spanish, analysing media evidence from 45 countries. We grouped the papers by the material analysed in them, Table 1 shows the main descriptive characteristics per group.

Table 1. About here

Bibliometric Analysis

To generate the bibliometric analysis, we used the tool Bibliometrix in the program R, which processes data available in Scopus and WoS. Thirty-five documents in our corpus are not in these databases and could not be included in the analysis carried out using Bibliometrix. This tool allows an analysis of scientific production, citations, impact, metrics, the changes over time, and facilitates the visualization of the results, but all inside of the frame of the databases Scopus and WoS. We compared the results from Bibliometrix (178 documents) with a manual count of relevant sources of the entire corpus (213 documents) presented in Table 2. In addition, aiming to better grasp the scope of the most relevant literature, we compared the results of citation scores from Bibliometrix with the data provided by Google Scholar in Table 3.

Table 2. About here

Table 3. About here

We consider that Bibliometrix is a powerful tool that helps to map relevant indicators, in the following section we show the analysis for relevant affiliations, keywords, themes, and co-citation of the 178 documents that are possible to analyse with Bibliometrix.

Based on citations, the United States is the most relevant country of authors' affiliation, followed by Canada and Spain. Figure 2. shows how the definition of the problem tends to be diverse in these countries, the use of the concepts of gender, violence against women, or intimate and domestic violence makes clear that the murders are gender-based but are not always called femicide, especially in Canadian studies.

Figure 2. About here

The analysis of word frequency provides an overview of the most studied perspective of the problem. Figure 3. demonstrates that femicide is more common than feminicide in keywords, and together Figures 3. and 4. reveal that intimate partner violence (IPV) or domestic violence is the most analysed type of femicide.

Figure 3. About here

Figure 4. About here

Figure 5 shows a map of relevant themes divided into four categories: motor, basic, emerging or declining, and niche themes. These are the results from multiple variables, the tool Bibliometrix evaluates which are the main topics of every document based on word counting and word association. Motor themes are the topics of highly cited papers, basic themes are topics found in patterns over time, emerging or declining themes are topics that experienced a significant increase or decreased over time, and niche themes illustrate topics that are mostly found together (Aria & Cuccurrullo, 2020).

Figure 5. About here

Figure 6. shows the co-citation web there are three main groups of co-citations. The most influential authors in the field who tend to work together are marked in blue. In green, on one side authors of critical discourse analysis methods, and the other side authors related to the sociological concept of femicide. In red, are authors that studied the social context of GBV.

Figure 6. About here

Qualitative Content Analysis

We examined a total of 213 papers and discovered similarities in their findings that we grouped first by material analysed and then by topics of findings. We decided to not cite any authors in this chapter, the reason is that due to the size of our unit of analysis, in

some topics that are the most studied, it would be impossible to cite all the authors. We could choose some that represent a finding, but there are no logical reasons to choose some authors over others and many even use the same words. Instead, we present trends of findings, highlighting how many papers found the same, and each paper can be counted in more than one category. We coded each paper in Appendix 1 with our 'code keywords', in this chapter in bold; transforming the present work and Appendix 1 into a tool to easily identify the papers counted in each category.

News

Papers that analysed news (108) focused on five main topics: **victims, perpetrators, sensationalism, otherization, and contextualization**, mainly finding discriminatory structures that naturalize, minimize, or justify GBV. Nonetheless, some sort of progress was also found in producing less discriminatory stories that we called the **good news**.

Victims' portrayals are mentioned in 60 papers' main findings, 54 found **victim-blaming** structures, five papers looked for it and did not find it, and one found just neutral evaluations. The papers that identified victim-blaming structures found a dichotomy of good valuable women and bad disposable women based on gender stereotypes, racism, colonialism, classism, and the portrayal of the patriarchal family as a core value of the society which helps to legitimize male privilege.

The ideal victims tend to be young (or old in the case of South Africa), white, middle or upper-class, physically attractive, sexually inactive, or related to the stereotypes of being a wife and a mother. Ideal victims tend to attract more media attention, even more, when young children are involved in a family-centric discourse. The abusers of ideal victims tend to receive harsher treatment in the media. Women whose characteristics set them apart from ideal are portrayed as having contributed to

their ‘expected’ fates. Race, ethnicity, low income, and lack of education are used as explanations for the victims’ ‘bad’ choices, naturalizing the violence, and suggesting their disposability. The most common victim-blaming structure found in 32 papers is **sexual morality**, including having an extramarital relationship, suggesting promiscuity, revealing clothing, sexual work, and being sexually provocative. The narrative of unfaithfulness naturalizes jealousy as an uncontrollable force that drives the ‘in love’ man to murder. Other victim-blaming structures include negative representation, mentions of alcohol and drug abuse, staying in a relationship with the perpetrator, not reporting to the police, lack of self-care by being in dangerous places or personal involvement with dangerous people, mutual violence, being nagging, too old, and a source of stress for the man. Papers that also analysed social media found that articles that contain victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification structures tend to attract more comments from the readers, and male users tend to use more victim-blaming discourses.

Perpetrators’ representations are mentioned in 66 papers’ findings, 49 papers found structures that **justify or blur** the perpetrators’ responsibility, 11 found the immigrant status or country of origin as the explanation of being a perpetrator, four found that the perpetrator was held accountable, and two found neutral descriptions. The justification is based on constructing an empathic explanation and conveying masculinity around acceptable patriarchal roles. By mentioning love, unfaithfulness from her, or jealousy, the perpetrators are presented as victims in pursuit of love and the woman who abused it. Often, the murder is described as a one-time incident, an argument that went out of hand due to causes out of his control such as mental health, physical, emotional, and financial problems, alcohol or drugs, and describing domestic violence in terms that assign equal blame to both partners. These explanations take away the social roots of the crime and justify GBV masked by a sentiment of love and natural impulses. The blurring of

responsibility occurs when the news story lacks reference to the perpetrator, machismo, and sexism, or uses ambiguous or passive language for his actions.

Sensationalism or spectacularization was found in 33 papers, consisting of the description of morbid details of the murders in the news articles, the use of a dramatic or alarming narrative, and sexualization. The dramatic narrative can be created by focusing on the victim as an object of pity and the suffering of the family. The alarming narrative was identified with the discourse of danger describing the crimes as especially aberrant, unexpected, uncommon, and perpetrated by an unknown 'other'. The sexualization of victims is created with pictures, sexual headlines, over-explanation of sexual details, mentioning rape, especially with racialized women that also tend to be hyper-sexualized, and misgendering transgender women.

The construction of **otherness** was found in 36 papers, consisting of the explanation of the problem as a product of external ideologies and/or typical to marginalized individuals. These narratives reinforce the misperception that not all populations are at risk of IPV, producing dehumanization of the victims, and discrimination of an entire group by ethnicity, race, religion, immigration status, and economic situation. Discourses that relate the crimes with a different **country of origin** of the people involved were found in 22 papers. The so-called honour killings attract more media attention in the West, these are framed in the news as something that occurs to alien people, emphasizing the supremacy of Western culture and contributing to a distorted image of immigrants. In contrast, family murders committed by Western men highlight the perpetrators' mental disorders, implying they do not represent Western culture. In general, when the victim and perpetrator are both aliens, the cause is explained as the product of an external ideology, reinforcing the idea that the fight against GBV is 'us' vs 'them'. When just the perpetrator is an alien, the news stories

relate the causes to his heritage, obsolete values, failure to integrate, and inadequate masculinity, portraying foreign men as a threat to women. When just the victim is an alien, she is related to poverty, being a manipulative gold-digger, exotic, and sexualized, representing alien women as an object of desire and fear.

Papers that analysed how the problem of femicide or a case was contextualized in the news found that the blame and solutions were placed on individual victims and perpetrators, rather than social causes. Fifty-five papers highlighted the **lack of personal and social context of GBV** by framing IPV murders as isolated incidents without previous violence, and the women attacked by strangers are framed as events linked to a context of general violence and employing victim-blaming structures. The authors of the papers noted that there is minimal coverage in comparison to the number of murders, the news stories lack important aspects such as the denomination as femicide, the adequate terms of GBV, the resources available to help IPV victims, and GBV experts and women's voices.

The **good news** was observed in 26 papers, which besides discriminatory structures, also encountered some kind of improvement such as the decrease of the harmful discourses, being rarely found, or not found, the existence of counter-discourses, and the explanation of the personal and social context of violence. In addition, 15 papers did not find any of the discriminatory structures explained before. These studies highlighted the contextualization of the crimes as a social problem, the use of GBV experts as sources, the commitment of journalists to campaign against GBV, the self-representation of the victims' families, and the relevance of social media and hashtags campaigns to influence the frame of public discourses. These papers generally emphasized that the reporting is getting better, but there is still improvement to make to abolish discriminatory discourses in the news.

Social media

Of the 19 studies that analysed social media, 14 focused on **activism** and/or campaigns against femicide, and five referred to **specific discourses** without mentioning activism.

The studies noticed the use of hashtags to add meaning to a phrase or slogan by politicizing it. Hashtags were used online and offline in posters in demonstrations, t-shirts, sticky notes, graffiti, and other paraphernalia, marking both social media and public spaces and forcing society to confront the reality of femicide. Activists framed femicide as a social matter of justice, violence, and gender. The movements' main strategies were using statistics to reveal the scale of the problem and connect specific cases, using the victims' names, highlighting the personal context of IPV, denouncing victim-blaming, and representing the victims in a dignified way. The studies demonstrated the movement's success at making the discourse accessible, popularizing and politicizing key GBV concepts, reaching international attention, changing beliefs at a societal level, and transforming passive observers into subjects of action by identifying interactions, such as comments and sharing. One study detected that clarity in the message is a key characteristic of producing more **interactions**. Four studies highlighted that **feelings** have a crucial role in mobilizing participation by creating a collective identity based on shared experiences of GBV and facilitating the creation of affective connections among women. The climate of awareness provides a supportive environment for victims and their families to take control of their own representation and their political agendas.

The movements were successful in influencing laws and policies by using the human rights discourse as a master frame and pointing out the responsibility of the state. The activists used hashtags and trending topics to pressure politicians to create new laws, harden penalties, require compulsory training for public servants, expose

discriminatory sentencing, and hold law enforcement officials accountable. Papers that analysed **specific discourses** found structures that help to perpetuate discrimination based on gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status.

Novels

In the 42 studies that analysed novels, we found five main topics: **societal values, women's representation, victim-blaming**, **otherness,** and being part of future **solutions**. In addition, we found that the novel '**2666**' by the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño is the most analysed, being the focus of 11 papers, followed by ***'Chicas Muertas'*** by the Argentinian Selva Almada in four papers.

The discussion of **societal values** was found in 26 papers. Twenty-three of them argued the problematic dominance of patriarchal values as a normative order, the gender inequalities, and the exertion of power and control over women's bodies and desires. Three papers focused on how societies get desensitized to femicides and GBV due to their frequency.

An inquiry into **women's representation** was found in 22 studies. Fifteen of them highlighted that women are portrayed as powerless victims, they were nameless, disposable, and without control over their lives. In comparison, only six studies found women represented as survivors and showing agency in the fight against GBV. One study found women represented both as powerless victims and survivors depending on their sociopolitical background.

Six studies discussed **victim-blaming** narratives, they found that women characters in the novels were represented as promiscuous and worthless, being unappreciative of men's love and not being supportive, these reasons were suggested as the causes behind the crime. However, one of them discussed how a passive and

submissive representation of women can be made in a way that conveys a social context of helplessness against GBV**.**

Ten studies focused on **otherness**, they found that novels tend to otherize the individuals involved in femicides, relating the crimes with specific backgrounds such as having a non-western culture, lack of academic education, poverty, Muslim religion, or living in the Mexican northern border cities. Three studies discussed how Muslim societies were prone to GBV; however, one of them argues that the effects of culture outweigh the effects of religious background. Similarly, four studies underlined that the scale of the problem is global, and a human rights issue that cannot be related to any specific cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, or economic group.

Five studies focused on the novels' being part of future **solutions** or on suggesting solutions. These highlighted that telling the story of these women makes them visible, supports the efforts to bring justice, and promotes distancing from the patriarchal values that legitimize the control dynamics of women in society.

The papers that analysed the novel **'2666'** focused solely on one chapter 'The part of the crimes'', which takes place in a fictional Mexican northern border city and describes the femicides committed in the 1990s in the city Juarez, which remain unpunished. These papers discussed the forensic review of the crimes by Roberto Bolaño, presented as a product of structural issues and the use of the narrative to effectively convey the horror suffered by women.

The book **'Chicas muertas'** focuses on three femicides that occurred in Argentina in the 1980s. The papers that analyse this book highlighted the author's stylistic mix between chronicle and biography, which created new, personal, and intimate forms of memory of femicide. The papers emphasized the exhaustive research

made by Selva Almada, about the crimes, but also on the lives of the victims, and the effects on their close circles.

Documentary Film

Of the 13 articles that analysed documentary films, nine analysed films about femicides in the city Juarez, especially "*Señorita extraviada*" by Lourdes Portillo (five), three analysed films on honour killings, and one analysed fragments of Latin American productions.

Although the approaches differ, the articles coincide in highlighting the testimonial value of the documentary, since it manages to give voice to the victims and contributes to the preservation of their memory, a central element in the demand for justice. Documentaries, particularly those made by women, are considered an effective tool for raising awareness about femicides and creating links between the victims of violence, referring to cinema as a counter-pedagogy of cruelty.

Fiction Cinema

The six papers found the role of cinema as a reproducer of violence and/or as a tool for **raising awareness** about VAW. Some studies identified the **stereotypical representation** of women as powerless victims, victim-blaming narratives, sensationalist use of brutal violence, and relating the violence to poverty or a specific social context. Nonetheless, some film industries are gradually changing their approach becoming critical and sensitive.

Entertainment

The ten papers discussed how **patriarchal values** were represented. Five papers also attempted to provide possible **solutions**. Three of them mentioned the role of music and

art as a tool for activism in the fight against GBV whereas the other two underlined the importance of making victims visible.

The studies found the representation of the perpetrator as a mentally disturbed man and therefore made invisible the cultural misogyny, the creation of a dichotomy of good and bad women, and victim-blaming structures based on sexual morality and being unpleasant for men. Two papers analysed visual arts, one regarding the pictorial representation of honour crimes found the reproduction of the stereotype of fragile and vulnerable victims; the other paper discussed how art can contribute to preserving the memory of the victims and draw attention to the problem.

Two papers highlighted the normalization of violence through the dissemination of narco-culture in music, books, and TV series, portraying drug cartel members as ideals of power and masculinity. One paper found the normalization of the 'sacrificial murder' of women in ballads, portraying the murders as beneficial for the community to gain water and protection from unknown dangers.

Performance

The 12 papers deal with performances created in Latin America by local artists, mainly intending to raise **awareness** about the social context of VAW. The studies highlighted how a more corporal and sensorial activity such as performance could be a pedagogical tool to allow greater societal involvement. When the piece is performed by "non-artists", for example, male adolescent students, it can serve them to question how they exercise masculinity and their relationship with women, and when it is performed by women, it can serve to recognize in themselves the internalization of violence. Two papers argued that the **victims' families' involvement** in activism and performances connects the public, the private, the intimate, the political, and the affective.

The performance '*Un violador en tu camino*', by the Chilean collective '*Las tesis*' is the most analysed (3 papers). This performance is a paradigmatic example, due to its wide dissemination via social networks, its reproduction, and adaptation in different latitudes, evidencing global structural violence and the creation of solidarity networks.

Some papers also took a **c**ritical approach and noted that art is not always equivalent to social activism. Artistic proposals and non-hegemonic mass media can reproduce symbolic violence when they are focused on the execution of the performance, instead of the factors that cause femicides.

Other communicative materials

This category includes the articles that did not fit into the above categories. All articles dealt with the issue of possible **solutions**. One focused on cartography discussed how the collective elaboration of maps recording the crimes' location helps preserve memory. One studied prosopopoeia (the personification of an object) as a tool in a campaign against femicide triggering empathetic reactions and affective responses. One analysed literature courses proposing materials and techniques to help students to be aware of ethical issues when studying literature about femicide.

Discussion and Conclusions

The size of our unit of analysis and the numerous countries these papers analysed demonstrate an increasing interest in the content of the public discourses about femicide. This paper contributes to the field in several ways: (1) our inclusive criteria to define media serve to equalize the findings from different disciplines and can serve as a base for future interdisciplinary studies. The social construction of meaning through public discourses is more diverse than ever and recent research has proven a strong

interaction between different types of media (Belotti et al., 2021; Gutierrez Aldrete, 2022; Trilling et al., 2017). We consider that there is a mutual nourishment of information, similar processes, and models about how social representations are constructed. (2) Femicide intersects with other discriminations and is closely related to social, historical, and political conditions, our study helps readers and researchers to identify relevant literature that fits better with their objectives and contexts. (3) We contribute to strengthening the dialogue between researchers who write in Spanish and English. We consider the difficulty of keeping track of new developments due to the rapid increase in published work and due to the interest in femicide among Latin American researchers, the advances made by studies published in Spanish cannot be overlooked. (4) Many of the papers included in this literature review remark on the need to eradicate sexist, colonizing, racist, classist, and other explicit or subtle discriminatory discourses and practices in the media. We aim to contribute to eradicating these practices in academia as well, by highlighting the relevance of the research made in the global south.

Insofar RQ1, most of our corpus can be analyse using Bibliometrix; nevertheless, we discovered that two of the journals that publish the most about femicide in the media 'Question' and '*Cuadernos del CILHA*' are overlooked using Bibliometrix (Table 2), these journals publish articles written in Spanish. Table 3 shows that using Bibliometrix the ten most cited studies are all written in English and the data analysed belongs to global north countries. Using Google Scholar which counts a larger range of documents, just one study in Spanish from Argentina is in the ten most cited. We concluded that bibliometric indicators reveal some disregard for research made in the global south. The reasons could be several, first, the year of publication as some of the most cited papers were published 10 or 14 years ago giving time to accumulate

citations. The second reason can be the language as English is a popular choice for a second language, and researchers could be assembling their literature reviews using their native language and English. The third reason could be the academic rule to cite ground research, which is usually the most cited, making less cited works invisible. A fourth reason could be the word limit for academic journals, which could force researchers to choose to cite highly cited papers over not-so-famous ones. Nonetheless, these practices could be contributing to the perpetuation of the dominant global north view in science due to technical issues. Supporting what Nechama Brodie (2021) noted, even though femicide is a global problem, the media studies published in English are dominated by the reading of media coverage from the United States, and their findings could not apply to countries with different sociopolitical contexts.

About RQ2, we found that most of the papers (148) use femicide or feminicide to denominate GBV murders of women and girls. We considered the year of publication could be a factor as femicide is a relatively new concept, but we found the year is not relevant. Twenty-six papers that use different denominations were published in the last 5 years, denominating the crimes: ‘honor killings’ (Snir, 2020) or ‘honour killings’ to highlight these murders are not honorable (Hertzog, 2019), intimate partner violence homicide (Bagai & Faimau, 2021; Kelly & Payton, 2019), domestic violence homicide (Perras et al., 2021), homicide (Wattis, 2022), and murder-suicide (Quinn et al., 2019). Instead, the country of the data is the main factor, the papers that use femicide or feminicide analysed data from Latin America 106, Europe 18 (mainly from Spain and Italy 13), USA-Canada 8, the Middle East 7, Africa 6, Asia 1, Oceania 1, and mixed zones 1. The 65 studies that use different denominations analysed data from Europe 19, USA and Canada 17, Asia 10, the Middle East 7, Oceania 4, Latin America 4, Africa 2, and mixed zones 2. This finding illustrates the preference of researchers that analyse

Latin American media for the use of the term femicide (*feminicidio*), which might have several causes and implications.

Since the start of the use of the term *feminicidio* in Mexico, feminist activists, politicians, and academics used it to demand action from the government, helping to their visibility at an international level (García-Del Moral, 2016). The social movement against femicide in Mexico has remained active for 30 years and recently a study that measured its representation in mainstream media demonstrated that de movement is evaluated more positively than the authorities (Aldrete, 2023a). At an international level in Latin America, the movement has proven its technopolitical power to mobilize an enormous amount of people and produce changes in policies and political discourses (Belotti et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, the use of the term in scientific research and news coverage can also be related to a myth of the marginality of GBV. Intersectional discriminations such as racism, classism, and coloniality contribute to worsening conditions in specific geographic locations, which might be influencing the perception that femicides are typical of underdeveloped communities. The above can affect the media resonance of emblematic cases like the femicides in the city Juarez and honour killings in Western countries making them common objects of scientific studies. From the 106 research pieces that analysed media from Latin America and denominate the problem as femicide/feminicide, 49 pieces were written by researchers affiliated to universities in the global north. This proves the visibility and the international resonance of the problem of femicide that occurs in Latin America, which may influence researchers from the global north to focus on Latin America instead of other regions.

According to the United Nations, Asia was the region with the highest number of murders of women committed by partners or family members in the year 2020 with

18,600, followed by Africa with 18,100, America with 7,300, Europe with 2,600, and Oceania with 300. The rates per 100,000 persons show that the highest is Africa at 2.7, Oceania at 1.6, America at 1.4, Asia at 0.8, and Europe at 0.7 (Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito, 2022, p. 4). This data reveals that the regions with the highest numbers and rates of femicides are not the most analysed. Media from Latin America are the most analysed and the authors of these papers are the most likely to define the problem as femicide. This could be the result of years of activism and political struggle to drive attention to the social problem of GBV, given its unprecedented visibility in the region (Belotti et al., 2021), and changing the perception of the problem in scientific research as it was one of the objectives in naming GBV murders as femicides (Corradi et al., 2016; Lagarde, 2006; Radford & Russell, 1992).

There is a more specific trend in preference of geographic location, we found that 45 papers focused on the interrelation of femicide and the social context of the Mexican northern border. Figure 4. reveals that 'Ciudad Juárez' is in the third level of most frequent words in abstracts just after 'domestic violence' and 'intimate partner'. Novels such as '2666' or documentaries like '*Señorita extraviada*' occurred in a Mexican northern border city having specific implications such as the capitalist policies of production between Mexico, the USA, and Canada, the drug cartels' power, the narco-culture, and the failure of the state to solve and prevent the femicides (Fragoso, 2019; Segato, 2014). In this context, the criminal organizations and the authorities act under hypermasculine logic, reinforcing misogynist ideologies and reestablishing patriarchy through the bodies of the dead (Berlanga Gayón, 2017; Wright, 2011). Nonetheless, the over-representation of the Mexican northern border context related to femicide in the media and scientific research could give the misguided idea that

femicides just occur in these specific conditions, and camouflage the severity of the problem in different contexts.

The idea that femicides are somehow different and/or more severe than other GBV murders of women was identified by studies in our corpus, not just related to the Mexican northern border context. In South Africa, Amanda Spies (2020) found that the news media tend to denominate GBV murders as femicides just when the victim and the perpetrator were both black, and Floretta Boonzaier (2022) discovered that the use of a narrative of pandemic/wave of violence is used with a colonial lens in which is relevant just to black and poor people. The same occurs in Western countries with the denomination of honor killings, which is automatically used by journalists when the victim and the perpetrator are Muslim (Ehrkamp, 2010; Shier & Shor, 2016).

We demonstrated that the differential coverage due to race, ethnicity, age, economic status, religion, and country of origin, is a transnational trend. These characteristics are mentioned in the media relying on stereotypes and discriminative representations (BardWigdor & Bonavitta, 2017; Brodie, 2021; Fuentes, 2020), serving to the otherization and stigmatization of a group (Aldrete, 2023b; Giomi & Tonello, 2013; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2013). Figure 5. illustrates how the studies from Germany are entirely related to Islamism and the immigrant population. Surprisingly, stories that otherize the individuals involved in femicides were found in media of all regions, depending on the specific context, but the result is a narrative that blames the 'other' instead of questioning the values of the society in which the crime happened. This strategy is more clear when the media of two countries report the same case (see Balica et al., 2022).

We found that the differences and similarities in media representations of femicide (RQ3) depend more on the media analysed than the geographic zone. Studies

on news found victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification narratives the most; studies on social media and performance found the visibility of activists' and victims' discourses; studies on novels, documentaries, and fiction cinema, highlighted how the authors use the narrative to convey the context of VAW or reproduce stereotypes. The results demonstrated that victim-blaming, perpetrator-justification, and otherization structures are transversal to different types of media, which suggests common processes and mutual nourishment. A broad base of sources exposes and disseminates stories with embedded discriminatory discourses. Even when the stories are presented as fictional like in artistic media, or an exceptional real case in the news, and these are not aimed at presenting the causes of extreme GBV as universal, the constant repetition of the same patterns produces social representations that might be influencing discriminatory practices against the victims.

We conclude that telling the femicide stories can increase their visibility, promote awareness at a societal level, and serve the pursuit of justice, but the key factor is in the explanation of the context. Discourses that rely on sexist and other discriminatory stereotypes serve to minimize, normalize, naturalize, and even legitimize the violence suffered by the victims before the murder and other women at risk (Brodie, 2021; Gutierrez Aldrete, 2022; Lazar, 2005; N. Saroca, 2006; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). Instead, discourses can highlight intersectional conditions and connect the femicides to a larger socio-political context of VAW (Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2023). These can include explanations of how elite political actors, the justice system, and the community are failing to offer opportunities to the victims to ask and obtain help and serve as a pedagogical tool to disseminate truthful information and produce positive reactions towards the victims (Abramsky et al., 2011; Hunnicutt, 2009).

Our objective insofar methodology was to differentiate qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies, as our main objective was to focus on the papers' findings. Most of them used a qualitative methodology but we noticed changes over time. The content analysis and discourse analysis techniques are common, but the main differences lie in the incorporation of the socio-historical context and intersectional conditions as analytical dimensions. Table 3 illustrates the most cited papers, all examining news as empirical evidence. From these, the studies of media from the Netherlands, Germany, Britain, and Sweden are focused on honour killings. These papers were published between 2008 and 2014 and analysed the social context because the cases' resonance was based on the otherization of the persons involved (i.e. Hellgren & Hobson, 2008; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2013). Instead, the studies made in Canada and the USA about the coverage of IPV murders did not take into account intersectional conditions (i.e. Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Gillespie et al., 2013; Taylor, 2009).

The studies published in the last four years analysed media from 34 countries and different types of communicative materials. This divergence served the researchers to investigate how contextual factors affect media representations depending on historical racism (Boonzaier, 2022; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019), cultural gender stereotypes (Brodie, 2021), activism resonance (Belotti et al., 2021), political elite discourses (Gutierrez Aldrete, 2022), and economic interests (Holling, 2019). These studies supplied a richer view of the mechanisms that affect and produce extreme GBV by including the analysis of a specific socio-historical context, which implies the explicit mention of the geographic location. This is evidenced by Figures 3 and 4, showing that Ciudad Juarez, South Africa, Latin America, and the UK are commonly used in the abstracts and keywords.

For future research, we consider quantitative and mixed methods studies including interviews with public discourse-makers are areas of opportunity to understand better the conditions in which these discourses are created. In addition, interdisciplinary studies using experimental methods focusing on how media framing shapes individual perceptions and attitudes may be a fruitful field for communication and psychology researchers. These studies may be able to describe the processes that produce victimization and reactions from the community and institutions.

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Table 1. Overview of the corpus. Own elaboration.

Table 1. Overview of the corpus

Communicative material	Papers	Call it femicide	Countries of data	Regions*	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed method
News	97	58	29	Af, Eu, La, Me, Oc, Sa, UsC	74	10	13
News and other	11	8	10	Af, Eu, La, Oc, Sa	7	2	2
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, comments, websites)	19	14	13	Af, As, Eu, La, Me, Sa, UsC	13	3	3

Novel	42	35	14	Eu, La, Me, Sa, UsC	42	0	0
Documentary film	13	10	8	La, Me, Sa, Oc, UsC	12	0	1
Fiction cinema	6	2	7	La, Me, Sa, UsC	6	0	0
Entertainment (TV series, music, visual arts)	10	6	7	La, Me, Sa, UsC	10	0	0
Performance	12	12	7	La, Oc, UsC	11	0	1
Other (maps, educational material)	3	3	3	Eu, La	3	0	0
Total	213	148	45		178	15	20

*Countries by region to roughly address political contexts. Africa-Af, Asia-As, Europe-Eu, Latin America-La, Middle East-Me, Oceania-Oc, South Asia-Sa, and USA-Canada-UsC.

Table 2. Most relevant sources comparison. Own elaboration.

Table. 2 Most relevant sources comparison

Bibliometrix n=178		**Appendix 1 N=213**	
Source	**Documents**	**Source**	**Documents**

Violence Against Women	6	Question	7
Estudios Sobre el Mensaje Periodístico	5	Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico	6
Feminist Media Studies	5	Violence Against Women	6
Anclajes	3	Cuadernos del CILHA	5
African Journalism Studies	2	Feminist Media Studies	5
Bulletin of Hispanic Studies	2	Anclajes	3
Comunicación y Sociedad (Mexico)	2	African Journalism Studies	2
Comunicar	2	Andamios	2
Crime, Media, Culture	2	Bulletin of Hispanic Studies	2
Critique – Studies in Contemporary Fiction	2	Comunicación y Sociedad (Mexico)	2

*There are 16 sources with two papers in Appendix 1 and 13 sources with two papers in the subgroup analysed with Bibliometrix.

Table 3. Most cited documents comparison. Own elaboration.

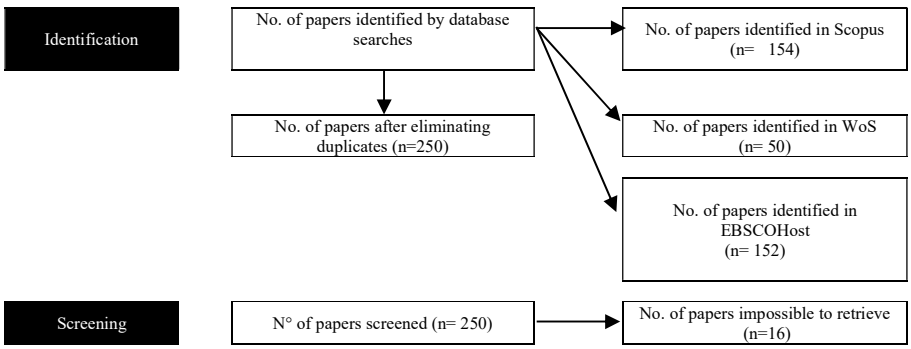
Table. 3 Most cited documents comparison

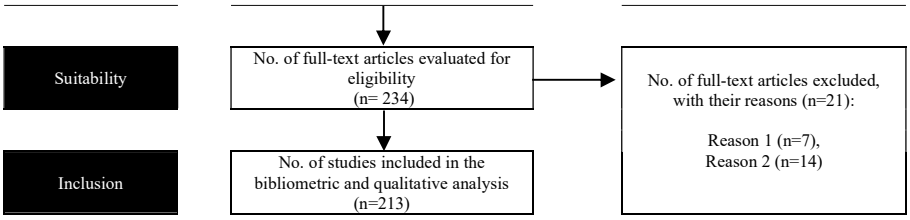
Bibliometrix n=178				**Google Scholar N=213**			
Paper	**Citations***	**Country affiliation**	**Country of Data**	**Paper**	**Citations***	**Country affiliation**	**Country of Data**
Korteweg A, 2009 Ethnic and Racial Studies	128	Canada	Netherlands Germany	Korteweg A, 2009 Ethnic and Racial Studies	300	Canada	Netherlands Germany
Taylor R, 2009 Homicide Studies	88	USA	USA	Taylor R, 2009 Homicide Stud	236	USA	USA

Gillespie LK, 2013 Violence Against Women	81	USA	USA	Gillespie LK, 2013 Violence Against Women	229	USA	USA
Gill AK, 2014 Eur J Women's Stud	45	UK	UK	Yurdakul G, 2013 Women's Stud Int Forum	103	Germany	Netherlands, Germany, Britain
Fairbairn J, 2013 Feminist Criminology	45	Canada	Canada	Maxwell KA, 2000 Journal Mass Commun Q	99	USA	USA
Yurdakul G, 2013 Women's Stud Int Forum	45	Germany	Netherlands, Germany, Britain	Hellgren Z, 2008 Ethnicities	95	Sweden	Sweden
Maxwell KA, 2000 Journal Mass Commun Q	37	USA	USA	Mason, P, 2008 Journalism	66	UK	UK
Liem MCA, 2007 J Forensic Psychiatry Psychol	36	Netherlands	Netherlands	Angélico, R, 2014 Universitas Humanística	58	Argentina	Argentina
Hellgren Z, 2008 Ethnicities	35	Sweden	Sweden	Dog˘an, R, 2011 J of Muslim Minority Affairs	53	Sweden	UK
Ehrkamp P, 2010 Space Polity	34	USA	Germany	Comas-D'argemir, D, 2015 Eur J of Communication	49	Spain	Spain

*Updated data in April 2023

Figure 1. Selection process. Own elaboration.





Reason 1: The paper did not deal with the topic of femicide.
Reason 2: The paper did not deal with media empirical evidence.

Figure 2. Correlation Authors' affiliation countries (AU_CO), authors (AU), and keywords (DE). Own elaboration.

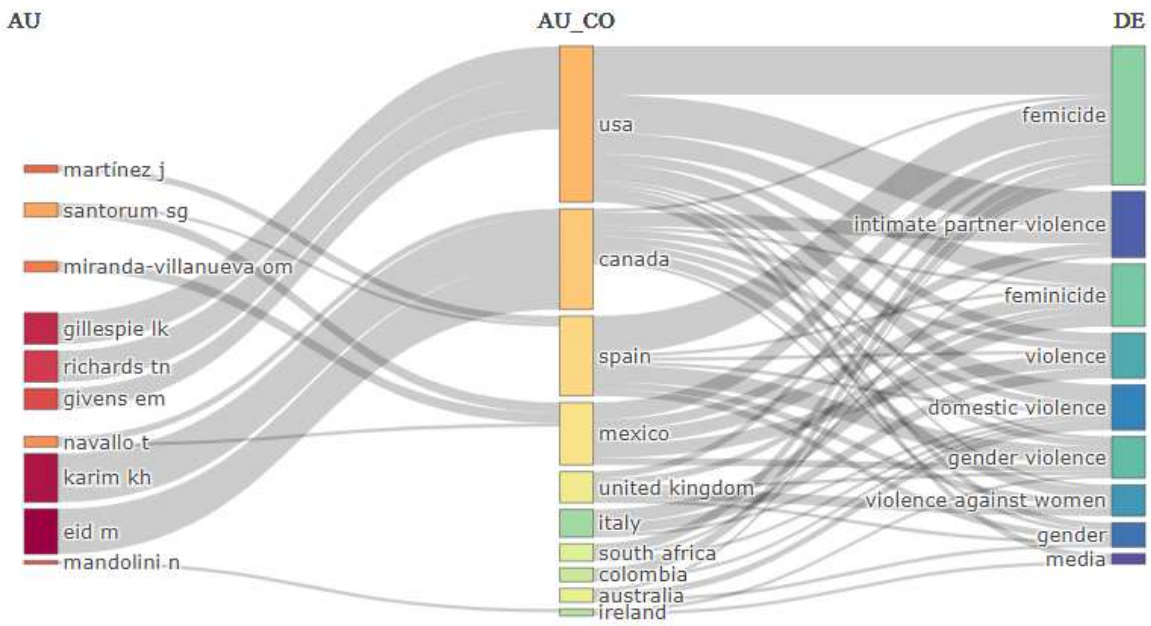


Figure 3. Word frequency in keywords



Figure 4. Word frequency in abstracts



Figure 5. Relevant themes

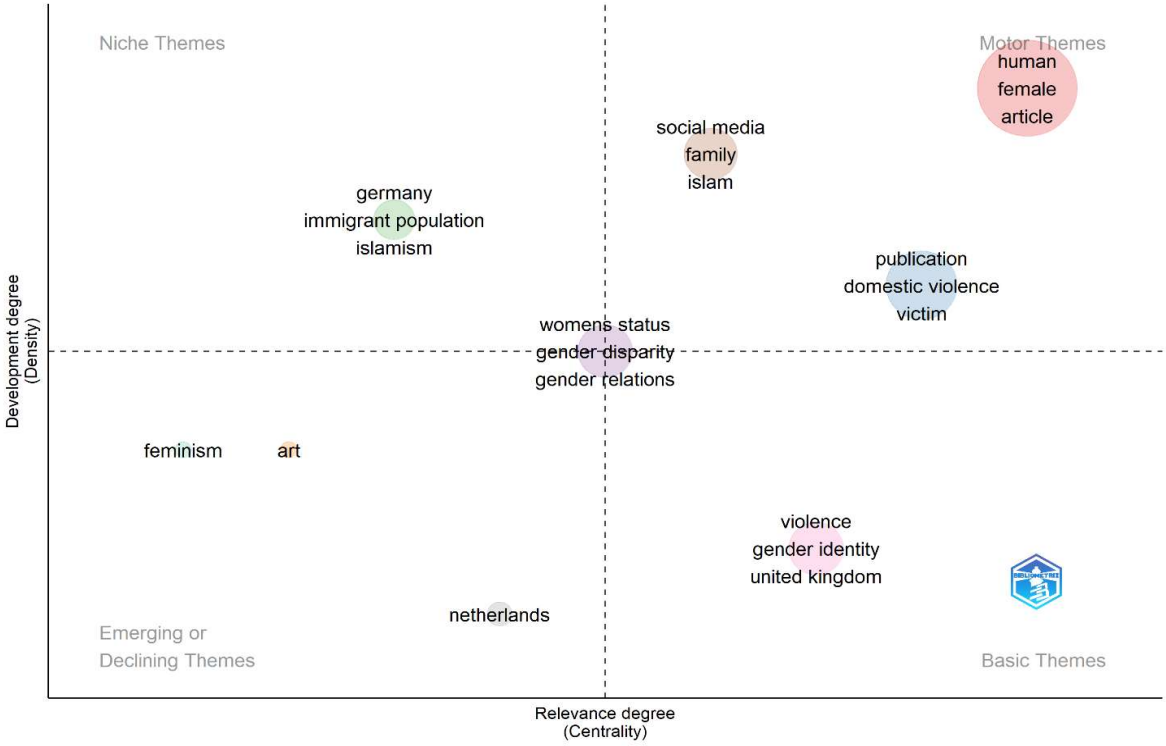


Figure 6. Co-citation

