





Consequences of Femicide on Orphaned Children: An Integrative Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Femicide persists as a global health issue. The death of the maternal figure represents an impact on everyone in her social environment, including her children. Therefore, this integrative review study aims to analyze what national and international scientific literature presents regarding the consequences of femicide on orphaned children. An integrative literature review was conducted on studies related to the mentioned topic. The search strategy resulted in 28 articles for final qualitative analysis. The results point to various groups of consequences for orphans, mainly divided into individual, familial, and social consequences. Thus, it is concluded that there is an urgent need to implement reception and protection policies aimed at supporting these individuals in vulnerable conditions.

Keywords

orphans, gender violence, femicide

RESUMO

O feminicídio persiste como uma questão global de saúde pública. A morte da figura materna representa um impacto significativo em todos ao seu redor, especialmente em seus filhos. Assim, este estudo de revisão integrativa tem como objetivo analisar o que a literatura científica nacional e internacional apresenta sobre as consequências do feminicídio em crianças órfãs. Foi realizada uma revisão integrativa da literatura com foco em estudos relacionados ao tema mencionado. A estratégia de busca resultou em 28 artigos para a análise qualitativa final. Os resultados apontam para diferentes grupos de consequências para os órfãos, principalmente divididos em consequências individuais, familiares e sociais. Conclui-se, portanto, que há uma necessidade urgente de implementar políticas de acolhimento e proteção voltadas para o apoio a esses indivíduos em condições de vulnerabilidade.

Palavras Chave

órfãos, violência de gênero, feminicídio

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Consequências do feminicídio em crianças órfãs: uma revisão integrativa da literatura

Introduction

Violence is a historical-cultural manifestation present in the contemporary world, regardless of its form or complexity. Thus, the theoretical and practical integration of this reality required the conceptualization and classification of violence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is categorized into three main types: self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, and collective violence. Interpersonal violence is subdivided into two categories: violence against family and intimate partners and violence against individuals without close personal relationships (Habitzreuter 2019).

In this context, gender violence is a form of interpersonal violence, especially domestic violence committed by intimate partners or ex-partners, which is the most common scenario for cases of femicide and violence against women. Femicide, therefore, represents a double violation of rights. Besides transgressing the right to life, the aggressor also violates women's right to respect and equality, exposing them to institutionalized and structural violence of patriarchy, understood as a system of male domination that determines the social functions of men and women.

Thus, femicide persists as a global public health problem. Data presented by the United Nations (UN) in 2022 revealed that 89,000 women and girls were intentionally killed that year, of which 48,000 were victims of their intimate partners or other family members, resulting in more than 133 women being killed daily by a member of their own family nucleus (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023).

However, it is recognized that the number of victims is likely higher than reported due to difficulties in accurately capturing and documenting these cases, as well as underreporting of femicides involving specific groups, such as transgender and lesbian women who are particularly affected. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze the direct and indirect consequences of femicide not only on immediate victims but also on their families and communities. The violent death of a mother directly impacts the family nucleus, triggering a series of secondary effects that reverberate for generations. When examining the repercussions of the growing global crisis of gender violence, the situation of orphaned children of women victims of femicide, who are often neglected in such a tragic context, stands out (Moraes et al. 2023).

Thus, to contribute to the field of research on issues involving indirect victims of femicide, this integrative review study aims to analyze what national and international

scientific literature presents regarding the consequences of femicide on orphaned children, as well as to provide an overview of the publications on the content and systematically describe the presented consequences.

Method

This is an integrative review. This methodology enables the synthesis and analysis of multiple studies, facilitating the drawing of conclusions about a specific area of study according to the prerogatives of Mendes et al. (2008).

Therefore, to respond to the research objectives, the following steps were adopted: 1) establishment of the theme and guiding question; 2) identification of inclusion/exclusion criteria; 3) categorization of studies; 4) evaluation of studies; 5) interpretation of the results found; and 6) synthesis of studies.

Descriptors and Search Strategy

Based on the guiding question: “What does the scientific literature present about the consequences of femicide on orphaned children?” specific descriptors were extracted from DeCS – Health Sciences Descriptors (BVS) – to enable an adequate search strategy.

A systematic search was conducted in the PubMed and BVS databases to identify studies that analyzed the consequences of femicide on orphaned children. There were no restrictions regarding the language or date of publication.

The combination of the descriptors used with their synonyms and the results found for each platform on the search day is detailed on OSF through the link <https://osf.io/a7kqm/> and DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/A7KQM. Furthermore, searches were conducted in gray literature databases to complement and increase the scope of analysis from the objectives of this research.

Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria were defined as studies published in scientific publications without a publication date limit. Studies that associate maternal death and femicide with impacts on their orphaned children without addressing it as a central theme were excluded, along with editorials, opinion articles/scientific dissemination texts, and interviews. Additionally, undergraduate theses, dissertations, and theses were also excluded. Only primary studies and scientific articles published in indexed journals were

included, without language restrictions. Articles published in non-indexed journals and those not addressing maternal death and femicide with impacts on their orphaned children were excluded.

Study selection was performed in duplicate by two independent reviewers (GSJSJS, CABO). Any discrepancies were resolved by consensus, with the involvement of a third evaluator (BVCG).

Data Extraction and Analysis

The data from the selected articles were organized into Microsoft Excel 2023 spreadsheets. Additionally, the extraction of the main data was performed, such as: title, author/year, journal, objective. The data were analyzed qualitatively, mainly considering the type of consequence reported in orphaned children due to femicide.

The results were categorized and analyzed descriptively, with tables used to synthesize the study data based on the PRISMA-ScR flowchart model. In this framework, data analysis and the drafting of the review were conducted using a 27-item checklist organized into seven main domains, in accordance with the criteria proposed by Tricco et al. (2018).

Results

The initial selection resulted in 979 studies found, from which 30 duplicates were identified and removed. From there, a title and abstract reading was conducted, of which 184 samples fit the eligibility criteria. Finally, the full reading of the studies resulted in 28 articles for the final database, as shown in Figure 1.

Tables 1 and 2 present the main characteristics and the synthesis of the studies raised, highlighting title, year of publication, journal published, study objective, methodology used, location of the studies/nationality of the author, main issues evidenced in the study related to the research question, main issues identified in the study related to the research objective, and the type of consequence presented by the article directly or indirectly to maternal or femicide orphans, sectioned into individual, familial, and social consequences.

Figure 1

Flowchart of Study Collection and Selection

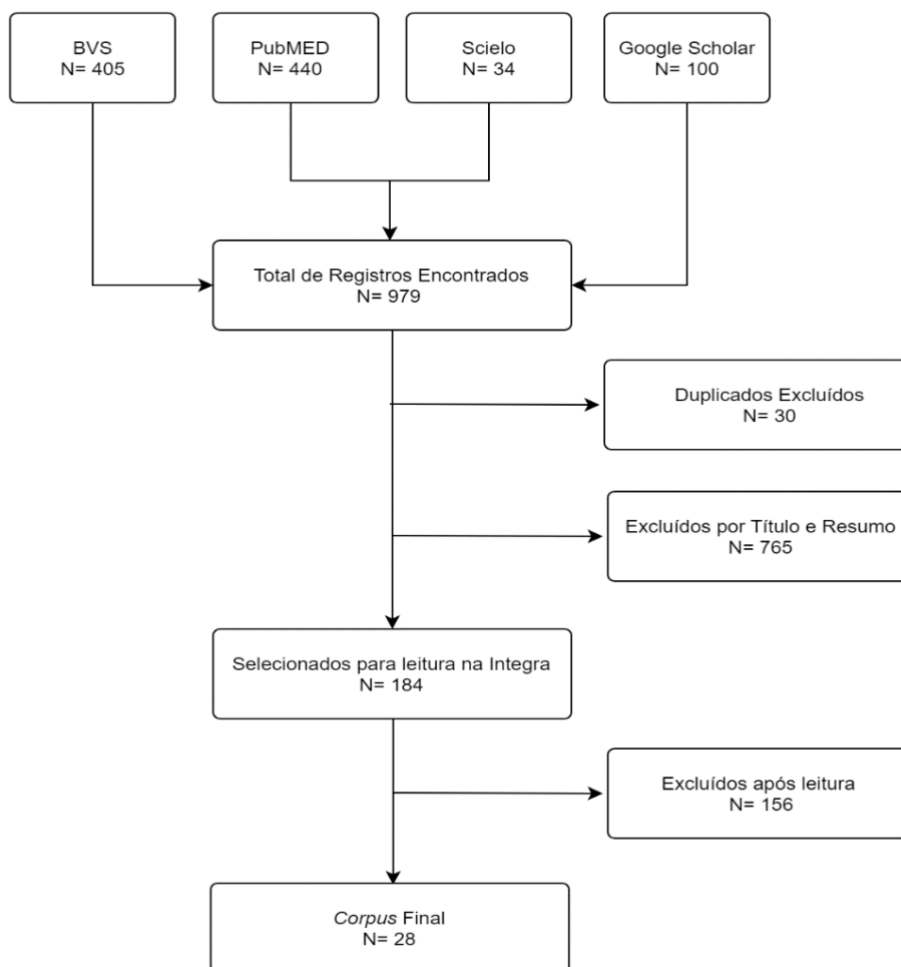


Table 1

Main Characteristics of the Study

Title	Author/Year	Journal	Objective
Adolescentes y jóvenes en orfandad por desaparición, homicidio y feminicidio: revisión narrativa	Villanueva-Coronado et al. (2022)	Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud	To describe the emerging themes related to adolescents and young people in orphanhood due to femicide.
Continuing with “...a heavy heart” - consequences of maternal death in rural Kenya	Pande et al. (2015)	BioMed Central	To analyze the consequences of maternal death on households in western Kenya, specifically regarding neonatal and child survival, childcare, and schooling.
Consequências na alimentação de crianças órfãs após a morte materna: uma investigação por meio de softwares de mineração de texto.	Salazar-López et al. (2020)	Cadernos de Saúde Pública	To analyze the consequences and effects that maternal death has on orphaned children.

Title	Author/Year	Journal	Objective
Orfandade por aids ou por homicídio apresenta efeitos sobre o estado nutricional das crianças?	Bronhara et al. (2012)	Revista Brasileira de Epidemiologia	To evaluate the nutritional status of orphans due to AIDS or homicides living in São Paulo and estimate the association of nutritional indices with variables related to orphanhood.
Impacts of maternal mortality on living children and families: A qualitative study from Butajira, Ethiopia.	Molla et al. (2015)	Reproductive Health	To investigate the impact of maternal mortality on children and families in Ethiopia.
“Without a mother”: caregivers and community members’ views about the impacts of maternal mortality on families in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.	Knight et al. (2015)	Reproductive Health	To investigate the impacts of maternal mortality on families and children in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
Costs of Inaction on Maternal Mortality: Qualitative Evidence of the Impacts of Maternal Deaths on Living Children in Tanzania.	Yamin et al. (2013)	Plos One	To provide qualitative data on how maternal mortality affects the well-being of children and families.
Implicaciones familiares y sociales de la muerte materna.	Lozano-Avendaño et al. (2016)	Universidad y Salud sección de artículos de revisión de tema	To analyze the emotional, economic, and health consequences generated by the unexpected loss of the mother on all household members.
The Effects of Maternal Mortality on Infant and Child Survival in Rural Tanzania: A Cohort Study.	Finlay et al. (2015)	Maternal and Child Health Journal	To analyze the impact of maternal mortality on the survival of infants and children in rural Tanzania.
Femicide and murdered women’s children: which future for these children orphans of a living parent?	Ferrara et al. (2015)	Italian Journal of Pediatrics	To evaluate the prevalence of femicide in Italy in the last three years and the potential long-term effects of these traumatic events.
Survival, family conditions and nutritional status of motherless orphans in the West Bank, Palestine.	Al-Adili et al. (2008)	Journal of Tropical Pediatrics	To describe the survival, family conditions, and nutritional status of orphans whose mothers died in the West Bank, Palestine, in 2000 and 2001.
Tracing shadows: How gendered power relations shape the impacts of maternal death on living children in sub-Saharan Africa.	Yamin et al. (2015)	Social Science & Medicine	To identify how gendered power relations influence the impacts of maternal death on living children in low- and middle-income countries, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa.
Rates and risks for prolonged grief disorder in a sample of orphaned and widowed genocide survivors.	Schaal et al. (2010)	BMC Psychiatry	To determine the rates and risks of Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) in genocide survivors in Rwanda who lost a parent and/or spouse.
Gender-Based Disparities in Infant and Child Mortality Based on Maternal Exposure to Spousal Violence.	Silverman et al. (2011)	Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine	To examine the associations between intimate partner violence against Indian women and the risk of death among their sons and daughters, as well as related gender disparities.
Os Órfãos do Femicídio: Consequências Psicológicas	Silva et al. (2022)	Periódicos UFAM	- To analyze the psychological consequences of femicide on orphaned children.

Title	Author/Year	Journal	Objective
Órfãos do feminicídio	Araújo et al. (2022)	Anais do 19º Encontro de Iniciação Científica (ENIC)	To clarify the serious social problem related to femicide and the situation of orphans resulting from this crime.
Murdered women's children: A social emergency and gloomy reality.	Ferrara et al. (2018)	Signa Vitae	To evaluate the prevalence of femicides in Italy and their consequences for orphaned children.
Los niños huérfanos de feminicidio y sus repercusiones en la familia en Colombia.	Díaz et al. (2021)	Pensamiento Jurídico	To analyze the repercussions of femicide on orphaned children and their families in Colombia.
Impactos psicossociais do feminicídio na vida dos filhos.	de Sousa et al. (2024)	Revista Foco	To analyze the fatal violence against women from the perspective of femicide and the consequent grief of their children.
From the eyes to the heart through the collection of art images: A preliminary study on the traumatic symptoms and psychological well-being of orphans of femicide.	Di Gesto et al. (2023)	Arts & Communication	To investigate the associations between the use of art images, the perception of traumatic symptoms, and the psychological well-being of orphans of femicide.
Feminicídio no brasil: os reflexos na vida dos filhos e da família.	Silva et al. (2022)	Diálogos em direito	To show the impact of femicide on the lives of the victims' children and the State's response in these cases.
Feminicídio e seus filhos: uma pesquisa bibliográfica sobre os órfãos do feminicídio.	Zambotti (2022)	Universidade Estadual de Campinas	To identify the consequences of femicide on the lives of the orphaned children of the victims.
Do visível ao invisível: a realidade dos órfãos do Feminicídio.	Fonseca (2023)	Repositório Institucional da Unipampa	To discuss the consequences of femicide on orphaned children.
“Em busca de um mar calmo” - a dimensão emocional da orfandade por feminicídio narrada por uma sobrevivente.	da Silva et al. (2023)	Contribuciones a Las Ciencias Sociales	To investigate the experience narrated by a survivor of maternal femicide, analyzing the emotional dimension in her life trajectory.
Como poderei viver sem a tua companhia? A criança órfã do feminicídio e o Sistema de Garantia dos Direitos.	Paplowski (2022)	Revista Húmus	To analyze how the Judiciary and the child and adolescent protection network can reduce the suffering of children orphaned by femicide.
A Qualitative Study of Intimate Partner Femicide and Orphans in Cyprus.	Kapardis et al. (2017)	Qualitative Sociology Review	To analyze the consequences of femicide on orphaned children.
A study on domestic gender crimes and the protection of orphans: the experience of social services in Italy.	Malizia (2022)	Sociology and Social Work Review	To identify the real needs and requirements of orphans of domestic crimes.
Pefil de los niños, niñas y adolescentes sin cuidado parental em Colombia	Strauch et al. (2009)	Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud	To analyze the profile of children and adolescents without parental care in Colombia.

Table 2

Summary of Studies

Autor	Type of Consequence
Villanueva-Coronado et al.	Individual (physical, psychological, and emotional health) Familial (changes in family bonds)
Pande et al.	Individual (physical, mental, and emotional health, grief, post-traumatic stress) Familial (changes in family relationships and bonds) Social (lack of support and community resources can aggravate the previous situations)
Salazar-López et al.	Individual (physical health)
Bronhara et al.	Individual (physical health)
Molla et al.	Individual (physical health, education, and migration) Familial (family fragmentation and additional economic care)
Knight et al.	Individual (physical, psychological, and emotional health, schooling, and identity building) Familial (additional economic needs) Social (impact on social and community networks, isolation)
Yamin et al.	Individual (physical, psychological, schooling, socialization, identity building)
Lozano-Avendaño et al.	Individual (physical, psychological, and emotional health, schooling, socialization, peer relationships, and identity building) Familial level (relationships, bonds, and economic care needs)
Finlay et al.	Individual (higher risk of mortality) Familial (economic challenges, family relationships, and family bonds)
Ferrara et al.	Individual (physical, psychological, and mental health, schooling) Familial (changes in family bonds) Social and community (social withdrawal and problems with social identity building)
Al-Adili et al.	Individual (survival and nutrition) Familial (changes in care arrangements)
Yamin et al.	Individual (physical and psychological health) Familial (changes in relationships and family bonds) Social (changes in social support networks due to the loss of the mother)
Schaal et al.	Individual consequences: Orphans face emotional and psychological challenges, such as prolonged grief and possible symptoms of post-traumatic stress.
Silverman et al.	Individual consequences (physical, psychological, and emotional health, including grief, post-traumatic stress).
Silva et al.	Individual (psychological and emotional).
Araújo et al.	Consequences at the individual, familial, and social/community levels, such as mental health problems, economic and care needs, and impacts on relationships and identity.
Ferrara et al.	Orphans of femicide face individual, familial, and social/community-level consequences.
Díaz et al.	Familial-level consequences.

Autor	Type of Consequence
de Sousa et al.	Consequences at the individual, familial, and social/community levels, such as complicated grief, identity changes, economic and care needs, and impacts on social relationships.
Di Gesto et al.	Individual-level consequences (mental health).
Silva et al.	Consequences at the individual and familial levels.
Zambotti	Individual impacts (psychological and emotional).
Fonseca	Individual-level impacts (physical, psychological, and emotional health).
da Silva et al.	Impacts at the individual, familial, and social/community levels.
Paplowski	Individual-level consequences.
Kapardis et al.	Individual and social/community-level consequences, including impacts on mental health and financial issues.
Malizia	Social/community-level consequences.
Strauch et al.	Individual: Mental, emotional, and psychological health.

Discussion

The results indicated a diverse group of distinct consequences for children orphaned by femicide, highlighting the complexity and severity of the impacts these individuals face after the traumatic loss of their mothers. The analysis of results in national and international contexts allowed the evaluation of consequences in different sociocultural environments. The consequences were classified into three categories: individual, familial, and social impacts. Among these categories, individual impacts proved to be the most recurrent, while familial and social impacts were addressed less directly in the analyzed articles.

In psychoanalytic and psychological studies, specific conceptions of suffering and grief can be identified. For Freud, (1974), the concept of “grief work” involves profound mental pain, loss of interest, and inhibition of activity, while Lindemann (1944) defines a set of adaptive grief reactions to explain it as a psychic crisis. The theory of grief (Bowlby, 1961) and the psychosocial transition theory (Parkes, 2009) have contributed to grief studies, both working from the perspective of object relations, attachment bonds, and social roles to understand the process of adaptation when the experience is one of suffering. From a cognitive perspective, Stroebe and Schut (1999) proposed the “Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement,” which explains the bereaved person’s

oscillation between emotional confrontation with the loss and the confrontation of stressors related to identity changes.

According to Worden (2013), there are special types of loss that may be considered when the context is grief, in which traumatic loss may be included: trauma and grief with emotional and psychological impact resulting from the loss; and abnormal grief reactions (situations in which grief manifests in unexpected ways). Each individual will confront the reality of death in their own way (Kovács, 2003). However, when a child loses a figure with whom they had a significant attachment, intense reactions of pain and denial of the loss often emerge in the grieving process (Bowlby, 1993).

There may be an intensification of grief reactions in the context of violent death (Parkes, 1998; Worden, 1998). In cases of femicide, when the victim had children and the perpetrator was imprisoned, the orphans often experience simultaneous griefs: one resulting from the mother's death and another from the symbolic loss of the parent who committed the act. It is important to emphasize that trauma, as a consequence of the real and symbolic losses experienced by the children, may result in anxiety and depressive states.

When one parent kills the other, children are confronted with multiple losses involving their attachment figures and their immediate living environment. In such complex situations, potentially delicate decisions must be made, for example, regarding new living arrangements and contact with the father (Alisic et al., 2015). It is estimated that more than 55,000 children worldwide are bereaved each year due to intimate partner homicide, typically femicide, and that these children suffer severe consequences. Thus, it is important to highlight that the traumatic aspects of loss through homicide tend to be exacerbated when the perpetrator is a family member of the survivor, especially when it is one of the parents (Stöckl et al., 2013).

At the individual level, the impacts related to orphanhood by femicide encompass psychological, emotional, and physical consequences faced by individuals after losing the maternal figure. Initially, highlighting the psychological and emotional aspects, studies such as those by Silva Ávila and Moura (2022) and Araújo et al. (2022) reveal that children who witness violence against their mothers in the family environment develop a

variety of short-term psychological problems. These problems include depression, aggression, irritability, suicidal thoughts, compulsions for food, drink, or drugs, feelings of persecution, anxiety, outbursts of anger, emotional dysregulation, and mood swings, in addition to a greater propensity for developing panic disorder. Ferrara et al. (2015) corroborate these findings, adding other afflictions such as enuresis, encopresis, sleep disorders, flashbacks, dissociation, passive-aggressive behavior, and psychosomatic disorders.

Furthermore, studies by Schaal et al. (2010) indicate that death under violent circumstances is a significant risk factor for the development of Prolonged Grief Disorder, making individuals who lose their mother to femicide particularly vulnerable to this disorder. The psychological and emotional impacts arising from these circumstances are therefore long-lasting and significant, potentially persisting throughout the affected individuals' lives. In this sense, the importance of multidisciplinary follow-up for orphaned children due to femicide is identified. On the other hand, several studies also address the physical consequences for these individuals. Salazar-López et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of the mother in nutrition, highlighting that maternal death increases the risk of infant mortality due to lack of breastfeeding, malnutrition, and greater susceptibility to infections resulting from poor nutrition.

However, Bronhara et al. (2012) observed that orphans in São Paulo did not show nutritional risks associated with orphanhood because the study focused on children who became orphans after the age of two, a period when complementary feeding is developed, and the child is not so dependent on breastfeeding. Thus, nutritional impacts are more relevant during the breastfeeding period, not being as significant for orphans in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. Finlay et al. (2015) studied the relationship between the survival of babies and children and maternal death in rural Tanzania, revealing that about 50% of children who became orphans during childhood died. Moreover, children who lost their mothers during or shortly after childbirth had a significantly elevated mortality rate before their first year of life compared to those whose mothers survived.

Children orphaned by deceased mothers have a significantly higher chance of mortality compared to those with living mothers or a maternal figure in the family

nucleus. On the other hand, high survival rates were attributed to the success of complementary feeding after early weaning and the presence of maternal figures such as new wives of fathers or grandmothers. Although these studies are not directly linked to femicide, they demonstrate that the individual impacts arising from the loss of a mother to femicide are almost always present and vary according to the orphan's age, with nutritional issues predominating in the early years of life and psychological and emotional issues emerging over time (Al-Adili et al. 2008).

On the other hand, the family-level consequences, according to Pande et al. (2015), of the death of the maternal figure often result in the dissolution of the family nucleus. In their research, the family nucleus is defined as the place where family members decide to have their meals. Before the mother's death, about 61% of members ate at the victim's house; after her death, this number dropped to 28%, highlighting the rupture of the family nucleus. This rupture directly affects orphans, who are commonly adopted by other family members, requiring a reorganization of family dynamics and functions to accommodate the new member.

Lozano-Avendaño et al. (2016) add that family disintegration causes a redistribution of functions among family members because the responsibilities exercised by the victim need to be assumed by others. Generally, daughters assume these responsibilities, often leaving school and studies to become substitute mothers. Moreover, the authors highlight the financial difficulties arising from maternal death, as many women are responsible for the family's economic support. The death of these women results in a lack of basic resources for the children and a severe economic crisis for the family. Furthermore, Molla et al. (2015) described in their research conducted in Ethiopia situations where maternal orphans opted to leave their schools and families to migrate to Middle Eastern countries in search of job opportunities.

Most of the boys found occupations in the food service sector, while the girls took on roles as domestic workers. The study highlights that the motivations for this migration are not exclusively related to financial issues but also to the quality of the relationship between the orphans and their new guardians. For girls specifically, early marriage becomes an alternative to escape financial problems and family instability. Thus, the

vulnerability position of orphans after maternal death is clear. Although these studies do not specifically address cases of femicide, they provide insights into the importance of the maternal figure in the family context and the impacts on orphaned children.

The loss of the mother not only disrupts the family but also triggers changes in family responsibilities and dynamics. The studies highlight an increase in financial difficulties and the burden on remaining caregivers, as well as new responsibilities imposed on orphans, directly affecting their studies. These additional challenges intensify the traumatic impacts on children, creating a family environment marked by stress and emotional instability.

The social-level consequences, according to Lozano-Avendaño et al. (2016), of maternal death affect both the family and the community. In the context of femicide, the lack of public protection policies for orphaned children stands out, making it difficult to access basic needs such as breastfeeding, staying in the public health system, and mental health support. Moreover, they point out that maternal death can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and marginalization, especially when mothers are lost in conditions of poverty. These orphans tend to face difficulties becoming productive members of society, perpetuating poverty and marginalization of the affected families.

The article also emphasizes that maternal death is a social and public health problem since the maternal figure is crucial for building an individual's citizenship and maintaining their physical and mental health. Studies conducted in Italy by Malizia (2022) corroborate these observations by highlighting the importance of state support for orphans and their new caregivers. The support system is described as flawed and fragile, requiring a comprehensive and well-structured strategy to meet the necessary demands. Malizia points out the absence of support network protocols for femicide orphans, leaving orphans and their new families without psychological support, which can lead to adaptation problems to the new family nucleus.

Fonseca (2023) argues that femicide cases are most often the final act of a continuous cycle of domestic violence suffered by women. Consequently, children exposed to this violence are more likely to reproduce violent acts in their adult lives, believing that this is the appropriate way to resolve conflicts. Thus, some orphaned

individuals may be emotionally unbalanced and violent, which therefore requires the State's due attention to take care of their emotional issues in a timely manner, preventing the development of disorders that could lead them to repetitive cycles of violence. These studies highlight the importance of public policies and adequate psychological support to mitigate the negative effects of maternal death and prevent the perpetuation of cycles of violence and marginalization.

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