Ni Una Más, Ni Una Menos

Analysing Media Framing of Femicide in Pandemic-Era Spain

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Table of Contents

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Intentional Homicides of Females in Western European EU Member States

Figure 2.4: Visual Representation of the Cascade Theory

Table 3.2: Distribution of Case Coverage per Year

Table 3.4: Categories of Content Analysis

Figure 4.1.1: Percentage of Videos per Source

Table 4.1.1: Range of Video Length per Source

Table 4.1.2: Description of Videos Covering the Same Cases

Figure 4.1.2: Most Common Themes in Videos

Figure 4.1.3: Main Themes in Visual Images

Figure 4.2.1: Main Descriptions of Victims

Figure 4.2.2: Main Descriptions of Perpetrators

Figure 4.2.3: Main Descriptions of Crimes

Figure 4.3: Pandemic Mention per Source

Table 4.3: Pandemic Mention per Source per Year

Table 4.4.1: Number of Articles Mentioning Helplines and Support per Source per Year

Figure 4.4.1: Types of Helplines and Support

Table 4.4.2: Mention of Statistics per Source per Year

Figure 4.4.2: Types of Statistics

Abstract

In the first two years of the coronavirus pandemic, there were 161 femicides recorded in Spain. While women were locked inside their houses to keep themselves safe from one pandemic, they were in danger of being killed by another, a silent pandemic: femicide. This research focuses on the framing of femicides by Spanish media in terms of the victims, perpetrators, crimes and mention of the COVID-19 pandemic to see if such cases are framed as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem in Spain. This aim is undertaken through content analysis of 121 articles covering a total of 19 cases from March to May 2020 and the same timeframe in 2021. The articles come from seven leading online Spanish-language Spanish newspapers: *ABC, El Diario, El Español, El Mundo, El País, OKDiario* and *La Vanguardia.* The findings indicate that Spanish media does not play into negative stereotypes of victims, full blame is placed on the shoulders of perpetrators, the pandemic was not mentioned to the extent expected and such crimes are portrayed as part of a larger societal problem in Spain: gender-based violence and femicide.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Six victims in seven days. A child of seven. His three months pregnant mother. Four other women. All in different regions of Spain. All with different hopes, dreams and lives. All with one thing in common: they were murdered by current or former intimate partners, and in the case of the child, his father. All victims of femicide in Spain. Unfortunately, this is nothing new. In 2021 alone, there were 78 femicide cases in Spain ('Listado de feminicidios', 2021). The six mentioned took place over the course of one week after the nationwide 'state of alarm' lockdown restrictions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted on the 9th of May. Women and their children may have been safe in their homes from one pandemic, but not the silent pandemic within it: femicide.

Femicide refers to the killing of females for being female and is an endemic issue rampant across all corners of the world, not only in Spain. For example, in 2020, 47,000 women and girls were killed by an intimate partner, ex-intimate partner, or family member, equating to one femicide every 11 minutes (UNODC, 2021). According to the same report, this number has increased in Western Europe by 11% since 2019, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, which saw victims stuck at home with their abusers and unable to seek help discretely (Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom, 2021; McClay, 2021).

This study aims to contribute to existing literature about media portrayals of femicide cases in a Spanish, and mid-pandemic, context in order to see which aspects of the crimes were deemed as more important and newsworthy by news sources, and

subsequently how the public sector may view and react to these news items. To achieve these aims, the research will examine Spanish media narratives of these crimes. Specifically, this thesis will use textual analysis of media publications of 19 recent femicide cases from across Spain to determine how the victims and perpetrators of such crimes are framed for a domestic Spanish audience, and whether news sources give importance to the coronavirus pandemic's potential role in these crimes. This research is significant because it addresses a gap in current literature, considering the effect of the COVID-19 lockdowns on femicides in Spain.

COVID-19 was first recorded in Spain on 31 January 2020 (Linde, 2020), and by 14 March, there were reported cases in all 50 provinces (Orea and Álvarez, 2020), which prompted the government to issue a nationwide 'state of alarm' lockdown which was lifted on 21 June after 98 days (González and de Arc, 2020). During this time, autonomous regions announced their own emergency measures, such as Murcia, which announced the confinement of 500,000 people in coastal municipalities (Navarro and Buitrago, 2020). Movement between the provinces was forbidden, and Spanish borders were closed to all except Spanish citizens and people in need. The 'state of alarm' restrictions were reimposed from 1 October 2020 to 9 May 2021 (Mouzo, 2021). Organisations concerned with women's health and wellbeing warned that there could be an increase in male violence towards females who were confined at home with their abusers. This turned out to be true, as between 14 and 29 March 2020, calls to the 016 Gender-Based Violence helpline increased 12.43% and online consultations 269.57% compared to the same timeframe in 2019 (Castellanos-Torres, Mateos and Chilet-Rosell, 2021). This timeframe (March of 2020) forms part of the timeframe used in this thesis, which also

encompasses April and May of 2020, and the same three months of 2021 – months and years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and 'state of alarm' lockdowns in Spain.

The distribution of responsibilities in terms of gender-based violence in Spain is based on principles of interconnected public policies and shared between the three levels of administration in the country: the state, autonomous communities and local bodies (Murillo de la Vega and Palomo Díaz, 2019). For example, the state develops nation-wide public policies, courts dealing with violence against women and the provision of special support services for victims such as the 016 gender-based violence helpline. Autonomous communities are responsible for developing public policies by territory, Comprehensive Forensic Assessment Units and autonomic police forces (like the Ertzaintza in the Basque Country or Mossos d'Escuadra in Catalonia). Finally, local bodies handle support services (drop in and residential) and measures to raise awareness for the detection and prevention of gender-based violence. On a national level, the Government Delegation for Gender-Based Violence is the body in charge of coordinating and collaborating with autonomous communities and local bodies with actions and measures against violence against women. Autonomous communities, as well as respecting Spain's 2004 Organic Law for Integral Protection against Gender-Based Violence (Law 1/2004), also follow their own laws relating to gender-based violence, including Law 5/2005 of 20 December, against Gender Violence in the Community of Madrid and Law 13/2007 of 26 November, on integral protective and preventive measures against gender violence in Andalusia (Murillo de la Vega and Palomo Díaz, 2019). At a national government level, the fight against gender-based violence has traditionally had cross-party support, as the government unanimously approved Law

1/2004 and the state pact against gender-based violence in 2017 (Álvarez and Murillo, 2019). However, in 2019, Vox, a far-right party in Spain, refused to sign an all-party declaration condemning violence against women, making it the first time local authorities in Madrid were unable to issue an all-party joint statement. In this case, a joint statement refers to an agreement reached by all parties in the government, that only acts as an agreement (not a law to be sighed and enforced). Vox also blocked the passing of measures in other regions such as Murcia, Valencia and Castille and León. In the November 2019 election, Vox gained 51 seats, making it the third largest party in the Spanish parliament (Reuters, 2019), which may lead future blockages of the government passing laws against gender-based violence and the prevention of femicide.

The media sources considered in this research are the following seven popular mainstream online Spanish newspapers, each of which presents a different political ideology: *ABC, El Diario, El Español, El Mundo, El País, OKDiario,* and *La Vanguardia*. Examining the political leanings of each source and their impact on the media's portrayal of femicide is beyond the scope of this research, with this thesis focusing on mainstream Spanish media as a whole. Each source used in this research reported on most, if not all, of the 19 total femicide cases in Spain spanning from March to May of 2020 and the same timeframe of 2021. In particular, there were seven cases between March and May 2020 and 12 in 2021. The analysis investigates the way in which these sources have framed the events under consideration in terms of their descriptions of the victim, perpetrator and crimes themselves, and the degree to which the current COVID-19 pandemic played a role in these crimes. As femicide is a serious and ongoing issue in Spain, each case is argued to have a strong emotional impact on its community and

contributes to the importance of International Women's Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – both of which are actively celebrated in Spain.

1.1 Research Question

This research presented here has systematically analysed Spanish news articles from seven different newspapers pertaining to Spanish femicide cases, in order to examine how the crimes themselves, the victims, and perpetrators are portrayed in the Spanish media. This was done in order to understand the potential impact of the media in shaping public perceptions of the crimes that may be part of a larger societal problem.

The principal research question guiding this thesis is:

How did mainstream Spanish media (Spanish language editions) portray and frame femicide cases in Spain in the months of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns from 2020 to 2021?

This thesis hypothesises that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent 2.5 month 'state of alarm' lockdown in Spain will be mentioned as a factor in these crimes, and that female victims (and their children in some cases) and male perpetrators of femicides will be portrayed a certain way, based on stereotypical variables such as ethnicity, occupation and whether or not there were previous reports of intimate partner violence (IPV). The terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are used to denote each actor's role in the

crimes and to keep everything anonymous. The term 'intimate partner violence' shall be used instead of 'domestic violence' to highlight the specific role of the partner. Here, IPV is defined as the physical, emotional, sexual or psychological violence against a woman by a former or current male partner (Devries *et al.*, 2013). IPV is a leading cause of femicide (Devries *et al.*, 2013; Stöckl *et al.*, 2013). Femicide is defined as the killing of females because they are females by males (Russell, 2008). This research also assumes that these crimes will be portrayed as part of a larger societal problem in Spain as opposed to being treated as isolated cases.

This research focuses specifically on the media framing of male perpetrators of femicides and the female victims (and their children in some cases) murdered by their current or former intimate partners from March to May 2020 and 2021. It considers the potential impacts of the pandemic and subsequent strict lockdown and restrictions imposed on Spanish people in these cases, as women were forced to stay at home with their abusers and thus could not always call friends or authorities for assistance (Slakoff, Aujla and PenzeyMoog 2020; Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom, 2021; McClay, 2021). This analysis only uses seven mainstream online news sources in Spain and has a limited focus of six months (March to May 2020 and the same timeframe of 2021), thereby covering 19 different reported femicide cases. It is important to keep these limitations in mind, as sources of different languages, types (social media, print, or broadcast), other political affiliations (centre, extreme left or right), or periods of time (before the pandemic or in other selected months of these two years) may paint a different picture to the articles being analysed here. Thus, further research may consider an intra-regional or cross-regional comparative study within this timeframe; a

comparison to other Spanish news sources be they other newspapers, televised news reports, or social media posts; or historical comparative research in a Spanish context.

1.2 Sub-Questions

This research aims to answer the following four sub-questions, each of which is pivotal to the analysis of the framing of the Spanish media in femicide cases in Spain:

1. How are the victims and perpetrators of femicides portrayed in the media?

2. How were the crimes under consideration portrayed in the media?

3. To what extent has the pandemic played a role in these crimes?

4. Are femicide cases framed as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem?

1.3 Background

Femicide continues to be a prevalent societal issue in Spain. In the first half of 2021 alone, there were 58 femicides (Davidson, 2021), 12 of which occurred from May to June (Álvarez, 2021) after the country's coronavirus state of alarm was lifted on 31 May. Experts suggest this increase in femicide cases is due to women trying to escape abusive relationships after the lockdown was lifted (Jones, 2021). Over half of the cases of female homicides are femicides due to gender-based violence (Sarto *et al.*, 2018). In this

research, femicide shall be defined as the killing of females for being females by males. The number of femicides in Spain in 2021 was 78 ('Listado de feminicidios', 2021), and general homicides 206 (EPData, 2021). This gap should not come as a surprise, as in general, men and boys are the victims of 80 per cent of homicides (UNODC, 2021), but women and girls make up the majority of victims of homicides in a domestic setting. Spain currently has a population of 47.35 million people. According to the UNODC (2022), the most recent data for femicides in Western European countries was recorded in 2018, which compared the 'intentional homicides of females' per 100,000 women in Spain to those of other Western European EU Member States as presented in Table 1 below. There was no data for Europe or the EU27 as a whole, but the global average was 2.17 victims per 100,000 women.

EU Member State	2018 Victim Figure per 100,000 Women
Austria	0.97
Finland	0.96
Germany	0.87
France	0.73
Denmark	0.69
Sweden	0.66
Spain	0.49
Italy	0.43
Netherlands	0.42

Table 1: Intentional Homicides of Females in Western European EU Member States

(UNODC, 2022)

Spain was among the three countries with femicide rates lower than 0.5 victims per 100,000 women, alongside Italy and the Netherlands – whose rates were lower than Spain's. Austria and Finland had the highest rates, at over 0.9 each. All of these countries had lower rates than the global average of 2.17. However, these statistics were from 2018, and thus do not consider the potential impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on such crimes. Because this thesis focuses on 2020 and 2021 – years affected by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, this rate is expected to change.

Valiente (1999) argues that in Spain, the issue of violence against women was not a priority for activists and the government before the 1970s and 1980s, when feminists 'discovered' the problem. Thus, femicide too was not prioritised by activists in the women's movement and the government until much later. Spanish legislation does not specifically stipulate femicide as a separate crime, as it is still included in homicide datasets (Sarto *et al.*, 2018), even though murders of women started to be recorded separately in 2003.

This should not come as a surprise, as according to the European Institute of Gender Equality (2021), none of the EU27 countries or UK have a definition of femicide in their respective national criminal laws. In 2004, the Organic Law for Integral Protection against Gender-Based Violence (Law 1/2004) was established, which was one of the first national laws in the EU to frame domestic abused suffered by women and gender-based violence (Grzyb, 2019). In the 2008 Catalan Act, gender-based violence is now called 'male-based violence' in order to show that the root of the problem is males abusing females (Comas-d'Argemir, 2015), which is in line with descriptors in Russell's definition

of femicide. In 2014, the term *feminicido* was added to the Real Academia Española Spanish Language Dictionary, defined as 'the murder of a woman due to her sex.' However, femicide is only utilised by certain academic and social institutions including NGOs (Sarto *et al.,* 2018). The only Spanish public institution to use this term is the Observatory on Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence, which was created in 2002 and produces an annual report on fatal injuries resulting from domestic violence. (Sarto *et al.,* 2018).

The turning point for the portrayal of femicide in the media and subsequent social awareness in Spain was in 1997, when Ana Orantes was beaten and then burned to death by her ex-husband shortly after appearing on television and testifying to the domestic abuse she had suffered for years (Abreu, 2009; Gryzb, 2019). In this case, the media focused not only on the brutality of the case, but also on the inadequacy of the legal system to protect her (Wheeler, 2008).

In Spain, femicide cases are not always framed by the media as isolated events, but instead as a broad social problem caused by the structural dominance of men over women (Comas-d'Argemir, 2015). The majority of Spanish people (69.7% because of television and 37.3% because of the written press) are aware of femicide thanks to the media's focus on it (Martínez, 2010). Comas-d'Argemir (2015) found that very few, if any, news items reporting on femicide blamed the victim (be that directly or indirectly) or used implicit justifications of the murders (such as because the perpetrator had a pathology). Thus, research to date has concluded that news about femicide seems to be framed in a way to raise awareness that it is a public problem, not a problem faced by

women on an individual case basis. This thesis will investigate if this finding was mirrored in the coverage during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

1.4 Importance, Novelty and Key Concepts

Although there is a significant amount of existing literature on femicide and its portrayal in the media, the majority of this research centres around the United States or other English-speaking countries. Many such papers were written before the pandemic. Thus, this research is significant because it focuses only on Spain and Spanish-language publications with the pandemic as its backdrop. Femicide continues to be a serious issue in Spain, and thus this research is important in terms of its extremely contemporary and relevant nature. My research is unique as I am not Spanish – I am viewing these cases, their media portrayal, and impact on Spanish society as an outsider 'looking in', thus my findings may offer a perspective different to that of a Spanish person.

It will be useful for the academic community as it contributes to existing academia about how femicide cases are framed in the media within a Spanish and mid-pandemic context. It could also be used in an intra-regional or cross-regional comparative study within this timeframe; a comparison to other Spanish news sources be they other newspapers, televised news reports, or social media posts; or in historical comparative research in a Spanish context.

In terms of methodology, this research utilises a content analysis of seven mainstream Spanish-language Spanish newspapers with various political ideologies working with

data related to the coverage of 19 different cases of femicide from March to May 2020 and the same timeframe of 2021. The method of data analysis is novel in that it considers the potential influence of the pandemic and subsequent 'state of alarm' lockdown and restrictions in Spain and the way Spanish newsmakers frame these crimes within the context of the pandemic. Only fatal crimes committed by a man against his current or former partner were considered and analysed, as femicide is highly gendered, being the murder of a female by a male for being female (Russell, 2008).

1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter Two provides a review of the existing literature of key facets related to the research, which are: intimate partner violence, the 'definition chaos' of femicide, and finally, media portrayals of femicide. This chapter will also introduce and discuss the two leading theories guiding this study: Robert Entman's Cascade Theory and the Agenda-Setting Theory of media framing. Chapter Three illustrates the data and methodological framework used to undertake this content analysis of the media framing of femicide cases in Spain and to answer the research questions posed earlier in Chapter One. Chapter Four presents the findings of the empirical analysis in the forms of article length; visual image; the framing of victims, perpetrators and crimes themselves; the degree of mention of the pandemic, helplines and expert interviews; and the use of statistics to determine whether the media portrays these crimes as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem in Spain. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and theories employed. Finally, Chapter Seven offers a conclusion,

summarising the research as a whole, discussing limitations of this study and providing

suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

In recent years, there has been a surge in research of intimate partner violence and femicide around the world and how the media portrays crimes against women (Weil, 2016; Sela-Shayovitz, 2018; Smith, Bond and Jeffries, 2019; Standish and Weil, 2021). However, there has been little focus on individual nation states outside the USA (see Devries *et al.,* 2013; Margo and Farrell*,* 2020; Gosangi *et al.,* 2021; Boserup, McKenney and Elkbuli, 2020; Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom, 2021). There is a handful of studies such as these in the context of Spain (see for example Martínez, 2010; Sarto *et al*., 2018), and so this thesis draws on existing literature to examine the sociological background and media portrayal of femicide in Spain. Existing literature also does not consider the coronavirus lockdown and its potential impact on the increase in cases of femicide in Spain. Therefore, the research aims to bridge this gap pertaining to femicide cases and their media portrayal during the current worldwide pandemic in a Spanish context.

The current coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented event in human history, the likes of which have not been seen on such a scale since the influenza pandemic (or 'Spanish flu') of 1918. It has been especially bad in Spain, as everyone to self-isolate in their homes between March and May 2020. Spain's lockdown was comparatively more restrictive than other countries like the UK or Germany, as people could not even go outside to exercise. This left vulnerable women trapped inside their homes with their potential abusers and unable to seek help discreetly (Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom, 2021; McClay, 2021), as described in the previous chapter.

This thesis utilises two theoretical approaches to explain how Spanish media frames these crimes for a local Spanish audience: 1. Robert Entman's Cascade Theory and 2. Agenda-Setting Theory. Although these two approaches can be used separately, this thesis shall use them in tandem, as complements to each other and the research itself. These theories are both concerned with issue salience and which messages the media wishes to send to their audience through the strategic use of specific words and images in order to elicit a certain emotional response. This thesis will use these theories to show how Spanish media considers and covers the issue of femicide for a domestic audience by examining the choices made by each outlet in terms of visual images used and the way in which the victims, perpetrators and crimes themselves are framed.

Central to this research, Entman's Cascade Theory is used to describe the main ideas that Spanish newsmakers wish to project in their communication towards Spanish society in terms of the words and images used to invoke a certain emotional response. The idea of counter framing present within this theory will be used to analyse how different sources of different political standpoints may alter the narrative to fit their ideologies. Coinciding with this, Agenda-Setting Theory is used in order to explain how the media considers, covers and emphasises certain issues, thus raising their importance for the public. It also examines the potential use of stereotypes, which may appear in this research, as sources may portray the victim or perpetrator in a certain light that best fits their political ideology and audience.

This chapter presents an overview of the existing literature in the following sub-sections: Firstly, an overview of research on intimate partner violence globally, in order to understand the root causes of femicides. This shall be followed by a short background into the debate on how to define femicide, its history in literature, and statistics about its role in Europe to understand why it is a big issue in the EU. Secondly, how femicide is portrayed by the media in a global then narrower European context to provide a glimpse into what conclusions academics are making from the exposure of femicide in the news. Next, the two academic theories utilised in this research will be discussed, followed by a brief conclusion.

2.1 Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (or IPV) is a leading cause of femicide (Devries *et al*., 2013; Stöckl *et al.,* 2013) and the most common form of violence against women globally. IPV occurs in every country (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002), with 30 per cent of women globally having experienced some form of IPV (Fulu *et al.,* 2013). Furthermore, up to 600 million women live in countries where IPV is not a crime (Turquet, 2011). Devries *et al.* (2013) defines IPV as physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence that occurs between former or current intimate partners – most of whom are female victims of male perpetrators. Many countries and international institutions have signed and ratified numerous treaties to address violence against women including IPV, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979, the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Women in 1995, the UN Commission on the

Status of Women in 2013, the Istanbul Convention in 2014, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals of 2016-2030 (with SDG 5 being focused solely on gender equality). In the same vein, many national governments (including Spain's) have laws explicitly criminalising IPV and femicide.

Many women who experience IPV do not reach out and ask for help as there are barriers to reporting IPV, especially during a pandemic (Evans, Lindauer and Farrell, 2020). According to Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom (2021), one such barrier is the perpetrator at home who is "vigilantly watching" the victim so she is unable to call for help. Liang *et al.* (2005) suggest that there are three steps in the help-seeking process: problem recognition and definition, the decision to seek help, and selecting a help provider – steps which are severely limited when the victim is in lockdown with her perpetrator. Vives-Cases *et al.* (2021) state that the current COVID-19 pandemic has influenced and generated social inequalities, including IPV and femicide. Other studies (see Boserup, McKenney and Elkbuli, 2020; McLay, 2021; Gosangi *et al.,* 2021) have shown an increase in IPV cases during the pandemic, up to 1.8 times higher than in previous years (Gosangi *et al.,* 2021). Gosangi's findings also suggest that the overall number of women who reported IPV decreased during the pandemic, which backs up Evans, Lindauer and Farrell's (2020) statement presented earlier in the paragraph that there are added obstacles preventing women from seeking help in this context. Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom (2021) found that victims are encouraged to leave the situation; contact friends, family, law enforcement and professionals; and seek services that are available during the pandemic, while Evans, Lindauer and Farrell (2020) recommend medical professionals to utilise telehealth to video call victims and have

them do silent hand gestures (such as raising a fist) to show they need help and that IPV is happening to them at the moment of the call. This is a Western (American) approach, as Evans, Lindauer and Farrell's 2020 study was conducted in the United States and centred around American services, while Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom's 2021 study was also conducted in the United States, but focused on the Latino community.

There are limitations in the current literature about IPV in general, and especially in times of a pandemic. Many of the aforementioned studies took place in the United States (Devries *et al.,* 2013; Margo and Farrell*,* 2020; Gosangi *et al.,* 2021; Boserup, McKenney and Elkbuli, 2020; Alvarez-Hernandez, Cardenas and Bloom, 2021) or other areas of the world such as Asia and the Pacific (Fulu *et al.,* 2013), and thus are not 100% relevant to this research as they do not consider special conditions in Spain. They are useful for IPV data and statistics in a global context (as they cover different areas of the world), as well as for providing recommendations for governments and healthcare systems to improve on access and responses to IPV for vulnerable women under lockdown circumstances.

The comparative study by Gosangi *et al.* (2013) was also limited in scope, having only 26 samples from 2020 and 42 from the previous three years (said samples were victims of IPV, and the study used their demographics, clinical presentation, injuries, and radiologic findings). It is difficult to create clear conclusions in a broader sense from such a small study, but it can be used as a supplementary study in a United States context as it was published in an academic journal. None of these studies looked at the media's

response to, and portrayal of, IPV, so they are only useful for this thesis as they provide background into IPV, its definition, its prevalence during the pandemic, and recommendations by scholars in how governments can better handle IPV during lockdown. The media's response to IPV (in the form of femicide) will be discussed in chapters four and five of this research when the findings of the reports by Spanish newspapers in the content analysis are presented.

Maquibar *et al.* (2017) found that nationwide mass media campaigns in Spain about IPV do not realistically reflect the specific characteristics of IPV among young people, and are thus ineffective at raising awareness and fitting young people's needs. Slakoff, Aujla, and PenzeyMoog (2020) suggest that the media should offer a platform to social service providers (organisations that help victims) and not mistakenly imply that the current global COVID-19 pandemic is the cause of abuse. Based on existing literature regarding IPV and the pandemic, it can be concluded that enforced lockdowns and subsequent close geographical and physical proximity to potential abusers raises the risk of IPV and femicide for women around the world, but do *not* cause it per se. This issue is a silent pandemic within an already existing global pandemic (COVID-19).

2.2 The 'Definition Chaos' of Femicide

Femicide can be defined as the intentional murder of women because they are women (Standish and Weil, 2021). However, there is still a debate among academics as to what definition best fits femicide from a historical, sociological, cultural or feminist lens. Some analysts refer to femicide as all killings of women (Taylor and Jasinski, 2011; Campbell

and Runyan, 1998), and others as the murder of women by intimate partners (Dawson and Gartner, 1998; Richards, Kirkland Gillespie and Smith, 2011). According to Walklate *et al*. (2019, n.p.), defining femicide as intimate partner homicide 'highlights the context of the killing but not its gendered nature,' and thus there is no term or phrase adequate enough to capture the violent nature of the woman's murder and responsibility of the male perpetrator. Russell (2008) argues that children and babies are also victims of femicide, and thus extends the definition to 'the killing of females because they are females by males,' thereby replacing the terms 'women' and 'men' to include victims and perpetrators of all ages. Spinelli (2008) summarises the problem as "definition chaos" in terms of how femicide is presented in academic literature.

The term 'femicide' was first introduced into the mainstream in 1976 by Diana Russell in her testimony at the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, which brought attention to violence and discrimination against women by men. She went on to further define femicide in her 1992 anthology *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, co-authored by Jill Radford, stating that "we have long needed such a term as an alternative to the gender-neutral (term) homicide" (pp. xiv). Thus, Corradi *et al.* (2016) argue that this neologism has a political purpose, and that it is intended to produce changes in the social order which tolerated the violent death of women (which has subsequently been) successful in transforming conventional perception, public awareness, scientific research and policy making. The use of the term is to 'give women a voice,' but Weil (2016) argues that with regards to femicide, the women killed have no voice, and that femicide in general has not received the same attention in academia as gender and other women's issues like domestic abuse.

Other academics do not even use the term femicide in their works (see Liem and Pridemore, 2013; Pritchard, 2011), but instead refer to it as 'female homicide,' 'intimate partner homicide,' 'intimate partner violence female homicide' or 'the violent deaths of women.' This exposes the problem of mainstream criminology – it tends to lean towards the conservative side on this issue (Weil, 2016), and thus downplays the seriousness and scope of the crime and the fact that such crimes have been committed against women for being women. This thesis will therefore analyse the words used to describe these cases in a Spanish context, to see if the crimes are portrayed and presented in a way similar to those in existing literature.

Femicide, like IPV, is a global issue, affecting all continents and countries. In 2017, women killed by intimate partners accounted for 58 per cent of all female homicide victims, 3000 of which occurred in Europe (UNODC, 2018). Some EU Member States (including Spain) have national databases with detailed information about femicide cases, however, these have not been collated or integrated at a European level. Not all EU countries even have the availability of data including the victim's sex and relationship with the perpetrator in their police and judiciary statistics (Corradi *et al.,* 2018). However, Spain does, which makes it the perfect candidate for a study of media portrayals of femicide in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The framing of IPV and femicide cases can influence readers' perceptions of victims and perpetrators, as "most people use the media to learn about social problems" (Berns, 2009 p. 7). This research shall use Russell's (2008) definition of femicide: the killing of females because they are females

by males in order to erase any ambiguity or confusion in relation to the defining of femicide in other studies.

2.3 Media Portrayals of Femicide

For those nation states and national databases that have no traceable statistics on femicide, there is an alternate method of study that many scholars have used: newspaper archives and media reports. Weil (2016) argues that this method has its limitations – it reflects the public and media's views of the lethal killings of women, and therefore may leave out important points or not be completely factual. Coleman and Wu (2010) utilise the Agenda Setting Theory to state that the media emphasises certain issues, thus raising their importance for the public. Therefore, with this theory, if we can understand what the media is reporting on, we can ascertain what is deemed 'important' for public knowledge and concern. Drawing on this, this thesis will employ the Agenda Setting Theory to discuss how the chosen media outlets frame cases of femicide for a domestic Spanish audience in order to see which aspects of said cases are 'more important' for the public to consider.

According to Surette (2007), the power of the media is both the problem of and solution to public opinions towards crimes due to the influence it has on the criminal justice system. In the past, the language pertaining to femicide victims has been highly sexualised and has promoted traditional representations of gender stereotypes (Benedict, 1993), similar to rape cases where the victim is often blamed. Weil (2016) and Bullock and Cubert (2002) agree that the words used by journalists influence the framing

of domestic violence and femicide in the eyes of the general public, distorting the understanding of an event and the participants involved. This research will examine if this is indeed the case in domestic Spanish media or not, by analysing the ways in which victims are described by the chosen media outlets.

Meyers (1997) argues that the representation of the assailant as a monster or psychopath allows men to distance themselves from the perpetrators of these crimes. This research, as well as analysing how female victims are portrayed, will also examine how the male perpetrators of these crimes are portrayed, to see if such descriptions are utilised in a Spanish context. Building on the portrayal of male perpetrators involved in these crimes, Sela-Shayovitz (2018) observes that those who are presumed to be upper-middle class (and white) are perceived as 'good partners' who have 'failed' due to mental health issues, while those from lower class and immigrant communities are marginalised through an 'othering' process of being painted as unemployed, incapable and alcoholics, reinforcing social perceptions of immigrants as a burden on society.

At the same time, victims are often portrayed as 'bad girls' who do 'bad things,' thus shifting the blame from the perpetrator (Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2018). Taylor (2009) argues that victims are often blamed either directly or indirectly for their own deaths. They are also painted as 'femme fatales' (Balica, Marinescu and Balica, 2020; Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2018), which, coupled with being blamed for their own deaths, thus presents the image of an equally distributed responsibility of victim and perpetrator (Balica, Marinescu and Balica, 2020; Gius and Lalli, 2014).

The increased influence of and easy access to social media also skews public opinion in media report of femicide, as victims' posted photos can be used to further portray a certain image (Balica, Marinescu and Balica, 2020), which serves to reinforce existing traditional narratives of femicide in a way which normalises the criminal behaviour of men towards women, while also diminishing their guilt (Smith, Bond and Jeffries, 2019). Hence, journalists miss an opportunity to use their influence to create a dialogue, raise awareness and impact policy development about femicide (Gillespie *et al.,* 2013). The presence or absence of femicide statistics (whether they be for a given year, since the beginning of the pandemic, or since Spain started such crimes in 2003), helplines and mention of the pandemic's potential role in these crimes will also help to ascertain if such cases are considered by the media to be isolated events or part of a larger societal problem in Spain.

Simons and Morgan (2018) argue that journalists rely on the police as 'expert voices' in femicide cases (thus excluding advocates, survivors and researchers), which is a problem as police generally do not frame intimate partner violence and femicide as a social issue that needs to be discussed and addressed by society as a whole. This study was based in Australia. Meyers (1997) and Sela-Shayovitz (2018) argue that intimate partner violence leading to murder is so common that unless dramatic coverage is 'newsworthy' or can serve as a warning to other women, it is often not significant enough to merit media and subsequent public attention.

Balica (2017) argues that journalists care less about the victims, aggressors and the history of their relationship than the act of violence itself, which supports Sela-

Shayovitz's (2018) observation that the preference for dramatic coverage and 'newsworthiness' of femicide cases is advantageous for newspaper sales. This thesis will examine such aspects in a Spanish context by analysing the portrayal of the victim, perpetrator, and crime itself to see what words are being used to describe each actor and the action itself to see in media outlets in Spain use the same tactics as presented in the literature. This seems to be the case in this thesis, as only four of the seven chosen newspapers (*ABC, El Diario, El País and La Vanguardia*) covered all 19 cases, while one (*OKDiario*) only covered 11. This shall be discussed further in the coming chapters.

There are limitations with existing literature regarding the media portrayal of femicide. For example, several of these studies (Meyers, 1997; Benedict, 1993; Bullock and Cubert, 2002) were done before the rise of the internet, so they were only gathering information from television news reports and newspaper archives. Nowadays, the majority of people have access to digital and social media, and thus are exposed to and consuming more news content in various forms (for example: videos, online newspapers, online articles) than ever before.

Further, many of these previous studies took place in the United States (see Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Gillespie *et al*., 2013; Taylor, 2009) or Australia (see Simons and Morgan, 2018), thus representing femicide and its news coverage in North America and other areas of the world, which would be potentially relevant for a global study, but not in the context of Spain, specifically at this time. As they are older studies, they do not consider the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns as a potential influence for these crimes. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Spain's 'state of alarm' lockdown and

restrictions were comparatively stricter than those of other countries. What's more, these studies took place in English-speaking countries using English-language sources, whereas in the case of Spain, Spanish-language sources will provide a richer understanding of the news domestic audiences are consuming. Therefore, this research will present and discuss media coverage of femicide cases in Spain through the use of content analysis of seven different Spanish newspapers between March and May of 2020 and 2021 in order to see what Spanish audiences are being exposed to when they are consuming news about these cases, and whether the media mentions the current COVID-19 pandemic as a potential influencing factor in these crimes.

2.4 The Cascade Theory

Entman's Cascade Theory is utilised in this research in order to understand the key messages Spanish news outlets wish to give their audience. Cascade Theory sees the press acting as the mediator between elite and public opinion (Ruddy, 2015), with media framing the central process by which government officials and journalists exercise political influence over each other and the public (Riker, 1986). In his 2003 analysis of American media framing of 9/11 (utilising several different daily and weekly newspapers, and nightly news broadcasts), Entman describes framing as the selection and highlighting of some facets of events and making connections to promote a particular interpretation or evaluation. This theory uses the following figure (Entman, 2003:419) as a visual representation of the 'cascading flow of influence' connecting every level of society, from the administration to the media and news frames down to the public sector and back up again like a cascading, spraying waterfall. Just as the administration

can affect other elites, which in turn affect the media which affects news frames which affects the public sector, the public sector can in turn affect the media, and news frames can affect other elites which can then affect the administration. In this way, there is a splashing effect, as the public sector sitting at the bottom of the hierarchy as the dependant variable can affect those above it. Despite being a top-down model, the Cascade Theory thereby allows members of the public sector to construct their own frames as a weapon to pressure mainstream news organisations, especially nowadays with the rise and accessibility of the internet and other modern factors (Çeçen, 2015).

Administration
White House
State
Defense

Other Elites
Congress members
& staffers
Ex-officials
Experts

Media
Journalists
News organizations

News frames
Framing words
Framing images

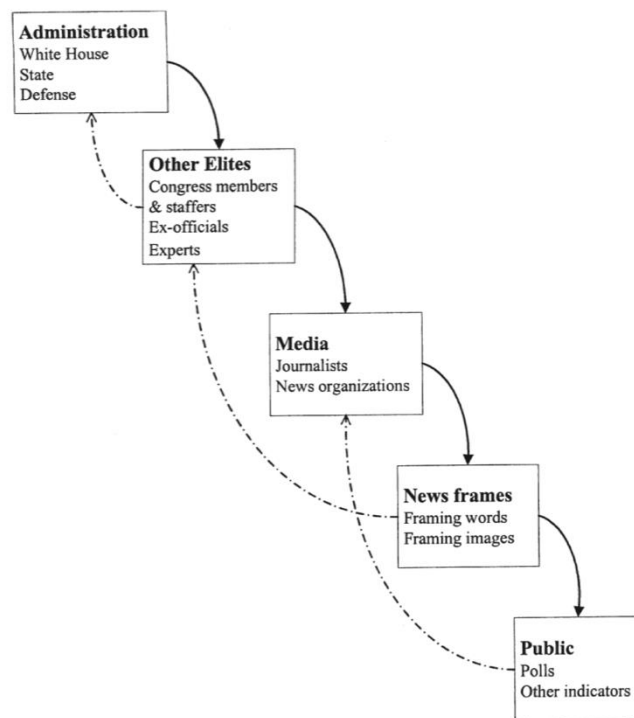**Public**
Polls
Other indicators

Figure 2.4: Visual Representation of the Cascade Theory (Entman, 2003:419)

Piasecki (2017) adds that media framing can be coupled with the concept of *counter framing*, which can be observed when competing media outlets change the narrative

(for example, one newspaper labeling an individual as a terrorist while others do not) in order to gain traction with their ideological values. In this vein, journalists seek to produce 'good stories' that protect and advance their careers and accord with their self-images who must provide balance to stories as opposed to having the goal of exerting power over outcomes (Althaus et al., 1996; Althaus, 2003; and Entman, 2003).

Unlike journalistic communication, successful political communication requires events, issues, and actors to be framed in a way that encourage perceptions and interpretations that clearly benefit one side while hindering the other (Entman, 2003:417). Thus, where political crises are concerned, this theory distinguishes words and visual images from the rest of the news based on their capacity to stimulate support or opposition for either side. Entman (2003) describes this capacity in two ways: as 'cultural resonance' (see Miller and Riechert, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1988) and 'magnitude.'

Magnitude refers to the prominence and repetition of words and images, whereas culturally resonant words and images are highly salient, memorable, noticeable, and understandable in the context of the culture, and thus provoke an emotional response and have the greatest potential for influence. Hence, Entman (2003) argues that the greater the resonance and magnitude of a word or image, the more likely the framing is to invoke similar thoughts or feelings in a significant amount of the audience. Lodge and Stroh (1993) add that this process of bringing thoughts and feelings to mind works through 'spreading activation.' This research shall utilise these ideas of magnitude and resonance by measuring the frequency of words used to describe the victims and

perpetrators of femicide cases in Spain, and analysing the types of visual images used to enhance the articles.

As this study is also a domestic study (in the context of Spain however, not the United States like Entman's), it shall benefit from the addition of the Cascade Theory to describe how Spanish newsmakers frame these cases for domestic Spanish audiences. This study, like Entman's, utilises different news outlets to examine media framing and textually analyse news articles pertaining to one central theme (in this case, the coverage of different femicide cases across a given timeframe as opposed to one singular event like 9/11 in Entman's original study). Like Entman's, this research focuses on media interpretations of events after they happened, however it does not focus on foreign policy news. The use of Spanish-language media limits the exposure of these articles to a Spanish-speaking audience, so this study does not go beyond Entman's to encompass and invoke a global awareness and response. With the Cascade Theory, this research will be able to identify key messages that Spanish newsmakers are sending to a local audience about femicide crimes, their victims and perpetrators. It will be able to pinpoint uses of counter framing as each news source has a different political ideology and therefore may alter the narrative to invoke a specific emotional response from the audience. The types of images used to support the articles and frequency and repetition of words will also be analysed in this thesis to see the potential cultural resonance and magnitude of the framing and subsequent emotional response.

2.5 The Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory is also used as a theoretical framework for this study because, like the Cascade Theory, it too is concerned with issue salience and the messages the media wishes to send to its audience through the use of specific words and images. This theory also considers stereotypes, which could potentially exist in this research in terms of how the victims and perpetrators of femicides are framed. The Agenda Setting Theory is seen as the transfer of issue salience from the news media to the public agenda, with the issue agendas of the news media and public as the most prominent operational definitions (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver 2014). In this case, issue salience refers to how the media emphasises certain issues and how this raises their importance for the public (Coleman and Wu, 2010). According to Evatt and Ghanem (2001), salience is the product of both personal and social forces that direct our attention. In this theory, framing considers not only the issue of interest but also how the media covers and packages it (Zoch and Molleda, 2006).

McCombs (2005) argues that this theory has also incorporated some established communication concepts such as stereotyping and image-building – two concepts relevant to this research as victims and perpetrators may been portrayed a certain way to reflect a newspaper's political ideology. In addition, the media has increasingly begun to influence political agenda through explicitly telling people what topics they should be thinking about (Watts, 2010). Watts (2010) also argues that this theory's aim is to explain "the extent to which the amount of media coverage of an issue has an impact upon the public's attention to, and interest in, that issue" (p. 7), thus giving the media

power to influence their audience through the stories they deem to be the most prominent – stories which the audience will in turn view as the most important.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) add that editors, broadcasters, and journalists play a significant part in shaping political reality in the way they choose and display news, as consumers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to it based on the amount of information accompanying it. Thus, the media 'sets the agenda' of a news item. However, Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue that framing goes 'well beyond' the traditional model within this theory, which "tends to take issues as givens" (p.113).

Scholars have divided the Agenda-Setting Theory into three central levels: basic, attribute, and network agenda setting (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver 2014). The first level, basic agenda setting, refers to the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda in terms of the salience of issues, political figures, and other objects of attention. Such objects can be public issues, political candidates, countries, companies and so on. This level focuses on the amount of coverage an issue receives, which, according to Coleman and Wu (2010), suggests that the media decide upon the issues the public will be aware of. The second level, attribute agenda setting, refers to the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda regarding the salience of the attributes of the aforementioned objects.

These attributes can be divided into two further dimensions: substantive and affective (Coleman and Wu, 2010). The substantive dimension focuses on things like personality,

ideology, or fitness for candidacy where a politician is concerned; or inflation versus unemployment where the economy is concerned. The affective dimension then shifts focus to the emotional qualities of the substantive attributes – whether they are positive, negative, or neutral. The final level, network agenda setting, describes the impact of the networked media agenda of objects or attributes on the networked public agenda of said object or attribute.

The Agenda-Setting Theory claims that the media influences the degree to which issues gain public attention. Therefore, when people rate crime as a popular topic, they thus set an agenda for themselves and also for the media as to which to cover most (Alitavoli and Kaveh, 2018). This theory places emphasis on certain issues and their subsequent level of importance to the public. Thus, the Agenda-Setting Theory will be useful in my research when considering how much importance each source gives these cases; for example: the length of the article and number of articles per source (some articles cover two cases while some sources do not have an article for every case). It will also be useful when analysing the words used to see if Spanish media has resorted to stereotypes when building specific images of the victims, perpetrators, and crimes themselves. These crimes can be seen as objects of attention, and thus divided into substantive and attribute dimensions. These second-level agenda-setting dimensions are used in this research to analyse each article in terms of the personalities of the victims and perpetrators (if mentioned) on the substantive level, and then determine the tone of said personality attributes (positive, negative, or neutral) on the attribute level. The same shall be done for the framing of the crimes themselves.

2.6 Conclusions

The purpose of this review was to examine existing academic works regarding the definition and history of femicide, femicide and its portrayal in the media in Spain to see how commentary on the aforementioned themes has changed over time and continues to change today. It is clear that there are gaps in the academic literature about femicide and its portrayal in the media throughout the EU, as well as any form of post-pandemic and lockdown femicides in Spain.

Academics agree that media plays an important role into attitudes towards femicide, its perpetrators and its victims (Meyers, 1997; Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Surette, 2007; Taylor, 2009), so there needs to be more research into how femicide in portrayed in the news in the EU, and likewise for Spain itself. The definition of femicide is still being debated among academics, which leads to doubt and confusion, for if we cannot come to an agreement on how to define the problem, how can we begin to describe it, study it and suggest ways to overcome it? There needs to be an open dialogue regarding this, and I would suggest using Russell's revised definition of "the killing of females because they are females by males," as this eliminates all ambiguity and clearly states the victims, perpetrators, and motives for murder.

This field of inquiry is very important and relevant in the modern world, as femicide continues to be an issue affecting women not only in Spain and the EU, but also all around the world as a whole. With the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent worldwide lockdowns, women are facing an unspoken, silent pandemic as cases of IPV

and femicide are growing exponentially. This is not a problem that will disappear with the lifting of lockdowns, which has been evident thus far in 2021 in Spain. Discussing the problem of femicide and assessing its portrayal in the media is also very important in modern society, as the media influences how people interpret the crime, victim, and perpetrator.

This chapter has also defined and outlined the two theoretical models central to this research. These models shall help towards describing framing trends and understanding the way Spanish news outlets make decisions about how to frame these events. The following chapter shall introduce the methodologies used for data collection and analysis while explaining the appropriateness and details of the research design.

Bearing in mind the limitations in the aforementioned existing literature presented in this chapter, this thesis aims to focus primarily on the during and post-pandemic femicide cases in Spain, how the media frames these crimes, public perceptions of this framing, and make recommendations based on existing information as to how Spain could improve its coverage of such crimes.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As stated previously, this research aims to examine how the selected Spanish media outlets presented 19 domestic cases of femicide to a local Spanish audience, in order to uncover how femicide victims, perpetrators, and the crimes themselves were portrayed to Spanish society during six months of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1 Methodological Design

This study utilises a qualitative research approach, as it was decided that this approach would be more appropriate for the research design of a case-study analysis. Qualitative research can be defined as the interpretation and summary of organised empirical data – data which generally comes in the form of words rather than numbers (Materud, 2012; Punch, 2013). Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall and Rossman, 2014), and is especially useful when there is little knowledge of a research area asking questions of a subjective experience, as it provides a 'better opportunity for conveying sensitivity' (Davies *et al.*, 2009:6). This research utilises this approach by anonymously discussing the victims and perpetrators of femicides in Spain in order to convey sensitivity. Interviews with neighbours featured in the articles will also be discussed and again kept anonymous for this reason. According to Weil (2017), a qualitative approach can be of great use to femicide studies, as qualitative studies are usually small-scale studies which are discovery-oriented and typically yield detailed descriptions and reveal experiential data. Thus, this study

employs a qualitative approach to analyse how different aspects of Spanish domestic femicide cases are framed by the Spanish media, such as the portrayal of the victims and perpetrators.

The use of qualitative methods is few and far between in analyses of femicide cases, restricted to small numbers of studies (Weil, 2017). Past femicide studies which have utilised this method are Macdougall (2000), Nicolaidis *et al.* (2003), and Masciave (2019). Macdougall's 2000 study conducted 30 interviews with survivors of 'failed femicides' in the USA in order to examine the would-be victims' lives and identify patterns to aid clinicians in their ability to predict and prevent femicides from taking place. Nicolaidis *et al.* (2003) also used interviews, but in a South African context, focusing on five perpetrators of femicides to gain insight into why they committed these crimes, and if they showed any remorse after doing so. Masciave's 2019 study comprised of a critical discourse analysis of three leading Italian newspapers and their portrayals of perpetrators of domestic femicide cases. This study builds on these existing studies by undertaking a qualitative content analysis of femicide cases in Spain and their portrayal in the Spanish-language media for a domestic Spanish audience. Like Masciave's (2019) study, this research provides a portrayal of femicide perpetrators, but it also provides a portrayal of femicide victims and the crimes themselves. Unlike Macdougall (2000) and Nicolaidis *et al.* (2003), it does not involve the use of interviews, only critical analysis of femicide reports in seven different online Spanish newspapers.

Though many employ quantitative methods when investigating this issue, quantitative studies often fail to understand the victim-perpetrator relationship, and specifically the

history between intimate partners (Weil, 2017). The most difficult part about using this method is the fact that the victims of femicide are not here to tell their story, and thus, 'life-histories' of victims, as told by the victims themselves, are out of the question entirely (Weil and Kouta, 2017). The benefit of using qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, methods for such studies is that the former allows for the in-depth investigation of aspects of the crime that would perhaps be ignored if the victim or perpetrator were merely reduced to statistics, such as socio-economic factors or a perpetrator's prior history of abuse. Thus, this research utilises a qualitative approach to include such factors which will be useful in answering the sub-questions related to the portrayal of the victims, perpetrators, and crimes themselves.

3.1.1 The Multiple Case Studies Method

Case studies allow for the exploration and understanding of complex issues when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required (Zainal, 2007). This research uses the multiple case studies method as opposed to a single case-study or experimental research. Through case study methods, a researcher is able to closely examine the data within a specific context, often focusing on a limited number of individuals as the subjects of studies (Zainal, 2007). Yin (2009) adds that the case study method is preferred when the research focuses on modern-day phenomena in a 'real life' setting. This research thus prefers to use the multiple case study method as the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, and the cases undergoing investigation happened very recently – the oldest was only two years ago and the latest one year ago. Femicides continue to take place regularly in

Spain, and their effects are felt throughout Spanish society, thus on-going media portrayals and their impact on readers is pertinent.

Stake (2013) describes multiple case studies as starting with the recognition of what concept or idea binds the cases together. This thesis examines 19 domestic cases of femicide in Spain across a given six months. Concepts that bind these cases together include them taking place in Spain, featuring the death of a woman at the hands of her current or former intimate partner, and being covered by the selected news sources. Such terms used to find articles included: *asesinato* (murder), the region and date (where applicable), *feminicidio* (femicide) and the victim's name (where applicable).

Multiple case studies are useful as they allow researchers to understand the differences and similarities between cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995), and can thus be used to augur contrasting results for expected reasons or similar results within the studies (Yin, 2003). This research uses this method to compare and contrast 19 different femicide cases in Spain throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Baxter and Jack (2008) say that any evidence generated from a multiple case study is strong and reliable. Gustaffson (2017) adds that multiple case studies are more intensely grounded in several empirical evidence and therefore create a more convincing theory. The research presented in this thesis aims to present similarities and differences in how femicide cases are portrayed in Spanish media by different online newspapers. Each case can be inspected closely and then compared and contrasted against both the same case's framing in other sources and the other 18 cases in order to draw conclusions about how certain sources frame these cases, and how femicides are framed overall in a domestic

Spanish context. Dubbing this idea as 'pattern matching,' Zainal (2007: 2) states that the

multiple case design enhances and supports the previous results. Stake (2013) adds that

by using multiple cases (say between 15 and 30), the research can provide more

uniqueness than the researcher or reader can come to understand.

A total of 19 case studies were selected for this research under the criteria of having

taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic from March to May 2020 and 2021. All case

studies pertain to events of femicide in Spain, in which a woman was murdered by her

current or former intimate partner. These cases were reported by seven mainstream

Spanish online newspapers: *ABC, El Diario, El Español, El Mundo, El País, OKDiario*, and

La Vanguardia – each with a different political ideology. This research is using only these

sources, but acknowledges that social media also plays a huge role in how the public

receives and perceives news. However, the addition of social media analysis is outside

the realm of this thesis.

3.1.2 The Inductive Approach

This research takes an inductive approach, as opposed to a deductive approach, which

would be useful if the research were based on prior assumptions, theories, or

hypotheses (Thomas, 2006). The inductive approach, on the other hand, pre-empts the

possibility of a forced predetermined result (Azungah, 2018; Bradley, Curry and Devers,

2007; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Glaser, 1992), as it is built up from observation through

systemic empirical data (Ezzy, 2013). There are no clear preconceptions in data

collection or analysis in this study, so it is well suited to the inductive approach. Thomas

(2006) adds that this approach is a 'systematic procedure' for analysing qualitative data in which the analysis is guided by specific evaluation objectives. This process involves going through data line by line and coding segments (words, paragraphs) accordingly as concepts unfold (Bradley, Curry and Deves, 2007; Curry, Nembhard and Bradley, 2009). This approach is appropriate for this research, as its specific evaluation objectives are themed by the actors in and nature of the crimes (the media's framing of the victims, perpetrators, and crimes themselves) in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we will see in the procedure of data collection section of this chapter, the sources were read line by line and data coded accordingly, in order to gather key words and ideas for analysis.

Thomas (2006) provides five steps in an inductive analysis: The preparation of raw data files, a close reading of the texts, the creation of categories, overlapping coding and uncoded text, and continuing revision and refinement of the category system. He adds that the purposes of using this approach are to condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; to establish clear links between the research objectives and summary findings drawn from the raw data; and to develop a framework of the underlying structure of processes evident in the raw data (2006: 237). This research uses a similar approach, as first, raw data was gathered, then read and coded according to categories useful for the research questions. These steps will be expanded in Section 3.3: Data Collection. The inductive approach helps this research to achieve its objectives, as by examining key repeating themes in the data, the analysis can uncover key messages the Spanish media is sending to its domestic Spanish audience about the issue of femicide in Spain.

3.1.3 Media Framing Analysis

Media Framing Analysis (MFA) is a formal procedure for conducting analyses of news media texts, developed primarily with media material in mind (Giles and Shaw, 2009), and can be defined as the examination of news discourse primary focus on conceptualizing news texts into empirically operationalisable dimensions so that evidence of the news media's framing of issues in news texts may be gathered (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Entman (1991; 1993) identified five stages to MFA: agency (who is the actor and who is being acted upon), identification (who the audience is invited to identify with in the article), categorisation (the use of certain words, for example), and generalisation (to other articles, a broader theme etc.). Giles and Shaw (2009) added initial data collection, screening, narrative form, and analysis of language categories to this list. This research utilises each of the aforementioned steps to identify patterns in the data and examine which aspects of femicide cases are framed as more prominent and important by Spanish media sources, with the portrayal of the victims and perpetrators as especially intriguing.

Entman (2003:417) suggests that those frames with more 'culturally resonant' terms have the 'greatest potential' for influence, and that such frames use words and images that are both emotionally charged and highly salient in the culture. Alongside resonance, Entman (2003:417) also describes magnitude, referring to the prominence and repetition of the framing words. The framing is more likely to evoke similar thoughts and feelings on the audience if there more resonance and magnitude within the framing. With MFA concentrating on emotionally charged events, and as femicide is a strongly

emotive topic, it is expected that articles describing these cases will have emotionally charged words and depictions of the crimes. In each article, words and phrases with significant magnitude will be analysed in detail to uncover key messages that Spanish news outlets are sending to their domestic Spanish audience about femicide in Spain.

3.2 Framing Femicide: The Newspapers Under Investigation

The rationale behind investigating mainstream Spanish media coverage of femicide cases was discussed in the introductory chapter. Each of the following online newspapers were chosen for different reasons, namely: popularity, political standpoint, location, and reputation. The four most popular newspapers in Spain are *El País, El Mundo, ABC,* and *La Vanguardia* ('La Vanguardia digital newspaper', n.d.). *La Vanguardia* is also the only Catalonian newspaper in this list – the rest are based in Madrid. As outlined below, *OKDiario* was chosen for its political ideology and reputation as Spain's 'worst-rated' newspaper (Villadiego, 2017). *El Diario*, on the other hand, was chosen for its lack of political association, and dedication to making journalism 'honest.' Finally, *El Español* was chosen for its political ideology and the fact that its founder had worked for *El Mundo* in the past – something which could lead to clear similarities (or differences) between the two and the seven as a whole. With such a wide scope of sources, this research will offer a broader look at how the Spanish media presents such cases to a domestic audience.

ABC: Founded in Madrid in 1903 initially as a weekly newspaper until becoming a daily in 1905, *ABC* is one of Spain's leading newspapers ('ABC Spanish Newspaper,' 2020), and

the oldest living newspaper in Madrid (Vocento *et al*., n.d.). A Seville edition was launched in 1929, which was supportive of the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War, while the original Madrid edition has been monarchist in orientation since its inception, and was overtaken by Republicans in 1936. At this time, *ABC* supported Franco and his regime, but remained critical of government excesses (Vocento *et al*., n.d.). Between 2010 and 2011, it circulated 243,154 copies (OJD, 2011). *ABC* generally supports conservative political views (Dobek-Ostrowska *et al.,* 2010) and has a right-wing stance (Beeton, 2013).

El Diario: Founded in 2012 as a Spanish-language only, online only newspaper, *El Diario* has had considerable success with the public from the beginning, as it is generally oriented towards a younger audience with academic backgrounds and criticizes the PP (People's Party – a conservative Christian-democratic political party in Spain) (López García and Valera Ordaz, 2013). According to founder and CEO Ignacio Escolar, *El Diario* is different from other newspapers in that it has no connection to a political party nor does it support one (Breiner, 2016). Although it is free, by December 2016, *El Diario* had 20,000 voluntary paying members (Negredo, Vara and Amoedo, 2017). According to Jordán (2014: 493), *El Diario* is presented as a defender of major democratic ideals; freedom of the press; and human rights, and is characterised by making a firm commitment to rigorous and independent journalism that is honest at the same time. *El Diario* translates to 'the daily' in English.

El Español: Like the previous publication, *El Español* was founded in Madrid within the last decade (in 2015) and is online only. Its founding took place following a successful

crowdfunding campaign which saw the newspaper gain 5,500 shareholders and 10,000 subscribers before its launch, breaking the world record for crowdfunding journalism with 1.3 million euros (del Arco Bravo, 2016). Its creator, Pedro J Ramírez, founded *El Español* with his daughter after being dismissed from his role as director of *El Mundo* – another newspaper analysed in this study. According to Ramírez, *El Español* "contributes to the strengthening of the Spanish society" (del Arco Bravo, 2016). Its political orientation is centre-right and supports social liberalism, but "smells like interpretive journalism rather than fact-based journalism" (del Arco Bravo, 2016). *El Español* translates to 'the Spaniard' in English.

El Mundo: Founded in 1989 and controlled by Italian publishing company RCS MediaGroup, El Mundo is a Madrid-based daily newspaper with a target audience of 35-54-year-old adults of the middle and upper classes and was the third largest printed newspaper in Spain in 2020, circulating over 53,000 copies ('Leading daily newspapers', 2021). One of the most influential newspapers in Spanish society, El Mundo's website has seven million readers ('El Mundo', 2016). Since the beginning, *El Mundo* has aspired to be a 'progressive' newspaper, committing to "defending the current democratic system, public freedoms, and human rights" ('Principios Ideológicos', n.d.). Its political orientation is liberal and secular centre-right (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Widlak and Sorribes, 2016), often critical of the left and peripheral nationalisms. *El Mundo* translates to 'the world' in English.

El País: Founded in 1976 and owned by Spanish media conglomerate *Prisa*, *El País* is the top-ranking Spanish-language media outlet in the world, with 94 million readers across

all editions and 100,000 digital subscribers ('El País', n.d.). There are five online versions: Spain (Spanish), Mexico (Spanish), Brazil (Portuguese), Catalonia (Catalan), and America (English). Its headquarters are in Madrid. Having always presented a centre-left political orientation, El País was the first pro-democracy newspaper at the time of its founding in post-Franco society during Spain's transition to democracy (Almiron and Segovia, 2012; Barrera del Barrio and Zugasti, 2006). In 1978, far-right terrorists attacked the headquarters due to the political upheaval at the time, leaving four injured and one dead. Today, *El País* remain centre-left, with more specific ideologies of Europeanism, progressivism, and social liberalism (Antonovica, 2012). *El País* translates to 'the country' in English.

OKDiario: *OKDiario* is a digital newspaper based in Madrid and founded in 2015 by Eduardo Inda, the former deputy editor of *El Mundo*. In May 2021, the website got 12 million visits, making it the eighth most viewed digital outlet in Spain at that time ('OKDiario is el único medio del top 10', 2021). *OKDiario* has a far-right political orientation, promoting neoliberalism; support of the free market; and Spanish nationalism, while rejecting totalitarian populism ('Eduardo Inda ultima el lanzamiento del digital OKDiario', 2015). According to Peinado and Muela (2018), *OKDiario* is infamous for "promoting falsehoods" and being a distributor of 'fake news.' A 2017 study by the University of Valencia found *OKDiario* to be Spain's worst-rated media outlet (Villadiego, 2017). *OKDiario* translates to 'OK daily' in English.

La Vanguardia: The only Catalonian newspaper under investigation in this study, *La Vanguardia* was founded in Barcelona by Carlos Godó in 1881, making it one of Spain's

oldest newspapers. A daily newspaper that is both printed and online, *La Vanguardia's* digital articles are all in Spanish as well as Catalan (since 2011). Only articles in Spanish will be analysed in this study. Although *La Vanguardia* is Catalonia's highest selling newspaper, it is the fourth top-selling newspaper in Spain, behind *El País, El Mundo*, and *ABC* respectively ('La Vanguardia digital newspaper', n.d.), with a daily circulation of 84,000 printed copies in 2020 ('La Vanguardia', n.d.). During the Spanish Civil War, it was the mouthpiece of the Republic and thus suffered the most under censorship of Franco's dictatorship ('La Vanguardia', n.d.). *La Vanguardia's* political orientation is liberal-conservative ('La Vanguardia', n.d.), supporting Catalanism, centrism, and the monarchy ('La Vanguardia Española', n.d.). *La Vanguardia* translates to 'the vanguard' in English.

The coverage and framing of femicide cases, as portrayed by each newspaper, allows for the comparison of the seven sources in terms of their potential similarities and differences in how these crimes are presented to a wider domestic Spanish audience.

	2020 (7 Total)	2021 (12 Total)	Total (19)
ABC	7	12	19
El Diario	7	12	19
El Español	6	10	16
El Mundo	7	11	18
El País	7	12	19
OKDiario	5	6	11
La Vanguardia	7	12	19

Table 3.2: Distribution of Case Coverage per Year

3.3 Procedure of Data Collection

To collect the sample data, the following steps were taken:

First, a search was carried out to determine the number of femicide cases in Spain in both 2020 and 2021. These years were chosen for analysis because the COVID-19 pandemic hit Spain in early 2020, and the 'state of alarm' restrictions of October 2020 were lifted in May 2021. According to feminicidio.net ('listado de feminicidios', 2020; 2021), there were 83 femicide cases in Spain in 2020 and 78 in 2021. This source was favoured over mainstream media reports and statistics for providing the data used in this research because it provides annual reports of femicides and other murders of women while mainstream media reports only contain those reported, confirmed femicide cases, which are far fewer. Feminicidio.net also offers information about each case such as the location, the victim's name (if available), age, and how she was known to the perpetrator. There is also a section specifically covering cases during the COVID-19 lockdown. From there, the months under consideration were finalised to March, April, and May of both years. March was chosen as a starting point because by that time in 2020, there were over 500 coronavirus cases in Spain ('Timeline', 2020). May was chosen as the end point because in 2021, Spain's 'State of Alarm' restrictions ended on 9 May. Between these months in 2020, there were seven femicide cases ('listado de feminicidios', 2020) and 12 in 2021 ('listado de feminicidios', 2021), making 19 in total. This gave a maximum data range of 133 articles (if each case was covered by each source).

Next, the digital news sources under investigation were chosen based on their popularity, political ideologies, and reputations, as outlined in greater detail in the previous section. Articles (one per source per case) were selected through a Google search of each source and the cases' key words, for example *asesinato* (murder) followed by the location, date, or victim's name where applicable. If such a search yielded no results, archival search from the newspaper's website was used. To do this, all articles published in the month needed (March, April, or May) were found, and the femicide case article was found by looking at the date and headline. At the end, there were 121 articles across the different sources for the 19 cases. As depicted in the table above, there were 12 articles missing: two from *El Español,* one from *El Mundo*, and eight from *OKDiario*. Although these sources did not cover every case, they covered the majority of cases and it will still be interesting to analyse what they say about the cases they do cover. As mentioned previously, these sources were chosen for their political ideologies (or lack thereof), popularity and reputation. Between these sources and the other four which do cover every case, there is enough data and information to draw preliminary conclusions about how each source (and therefore the Spanish media as a whole) frames these femicide cases to a domestic Spanish audience.

3.4 Procedure of Data Analysis

3.4.1 Analytical Tools

This research uses content analysis to present and discuss how Spanish media frames

cases of femicide for a domestic Spanish audience. The analysis was carried out based on the following categories as described in Table 3.4 below.

Reference information	Reference number
	Heading
	Sub-heading
	Date of case
	Article length
	Author
Reportage of femicide	Description of victim
	Description of perpetrator
	Framing of crime
	Visual image
	Mention/Description of pandemic
	Mention/Description of helplines
	Mention/Description of femicide statistics

Table 3.4: Categories of Content Analysis

Under reference information, article length shall be examined in order to see what the average word count is overall, and per source. This is so preliminary conclusions can be drawn regarding which sources (of which political ideologies) tend to write longer or shorter articles about this topic. Article length will also be used to determine which important is deemed important or worthy of inclusion per source compared to what is

not. This will lead into the reportage of the femicide cases themselves, which will be analysed first based on the visual images used, then the description of the victims and perpetrators, and the framing of the crimes. From here, the degree of mention and description of the pandemic, helplines and femicide statistics will be examined in order to answer the research questions and see how each source reported on this topic. It is important to note that each category was recorded in the original Spanish and English translation. Only the English versions will be used in this study.

3.4.2 Validity

To increase this study's validity, only online print articles were used for analysis – not videos, social media posts, or any other type of media. To mitigate the potential political biases in these articles given their sources' ideological stances, seven sources were chosen, each with a different political leaning, ranging from conservative, to liberal, to neutral. Furthermore, this research only used Spanish-language articles to examine the framing of femicides to a domestic Spanish audience. In order to do this successfully in an English-language thesis, each article was translated with the help of a local translator with a Cambridge-certified C2 native level of English, as the author's level of Spanish is poor. English-language editions of the sources (if applicable) might produce different results as these would be catered to an international audience and either written in or translated into English by the journalists themselves.

This research utilised content analysis as its approach as this was the most effective way to study the framing of femicide cases as portrayed by the Spanish media, especially

given the pandemic restrictions everywhere and the fact that this research was conducted entirely by distance. Therefore, interviews with Spanish academics, government officials and other elites or members of the public sector were impossible due to financial and COVID-19 constraints. This study was only focused on the media, so perhaps future studies could incorporate interviews with different members of Spanish society to draw more specific conclusions about how audiences perceive the news they are presented with in relation to these crimes.

3.4.3 Limitations

Like all research, this study has its limitations. First, as touched upon earlier in the chapter, not every source covered and provided an article for every femicide case. Since data is missing, it is only possible to draw preliminary conclusions about each of the sources and their portrayals of femicide cases, and shows which cases the media deemed as 'more important'. Furthermore, only seven sources were used – this is not reflective of all of Spanish online media sources, let alone other types of media such as print, television, and social media. Thus, further studies could utilise other sources and media types to get a clearer image of this phenomenon in Spain. Additionally, only six months and 19 cases were covered in total. Further studies that consider the full range of months in which the COVID-19 pandemic affects Spain could provide broader conclusions about the pandemic's potential role in these crimes, and by including data from before the pandemic (such as 2018 or 2019), could offer a comparison of femicides in 'normal' times versus in times of an international health crisis. Finally, Entman's Cascade Theory introduces the idea that high-level officials and elites of society play a

part in the framing and distribution process, however, these articles only reflect what some journalists and editors working for these sources think. Thus, this study is not reflective of all Spanish people. Many of the sources analysed follow a political ideology to some extent, potentially leading to political bias in how cases are framed.

The following chapter will present the research findings, thus building upon the methodologies and showing how they were applied in order to answer the research questions.

Chapter Four: Findings

Following Chapter Three's outline of the methodological design of this research and the methods used to carry it out, this chapter will introduce the findings of the qualitative content analysis consisting of 121 articles, covering 19 domestic cases of femicide in Spain, over a period of six months during the coronavirus pandemic. In order to answer the principal research question guiding the thesis, this chapter focuses on the media framing of these crimes. The chapter is broken down into the following sections: Visual images; descriptions of the victims, perpetrators and crimes themselves; as well as the degree of mention of the pandemic and helplines and statistics. Media items were not referenced due to ethical concerns and not wanting to retraumatise victims' loved ones upon reading this thesis.

4.1 Visual Images

The first variable measured in this study was the use of visual images, be they videos or photographs, in the collected data. Videos were analysed in terms of length and content, while photographs were analysed in terms of the total number of images in the 121 articles and per source, then coded by theme. The results of both are presented below.

4.1.1 Videos

Of the 121 articles collected, 18 had videos. Details of these videos are presented in the

following figures 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 and tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 below. Only five of the seven sources provided included at least one video. In a 2016 study about the future of online news videos, Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini and Newman found that video was present in 6.5% of articles. In this study, video was present in 15% of articles – more than double of their findings. The distribution of videos per source in this research is outlined in Figure 4.1.1 below, and was calculated to analyse how this 15% was distributed across sources and to see which sources had a larger proportion of videos in their articles.
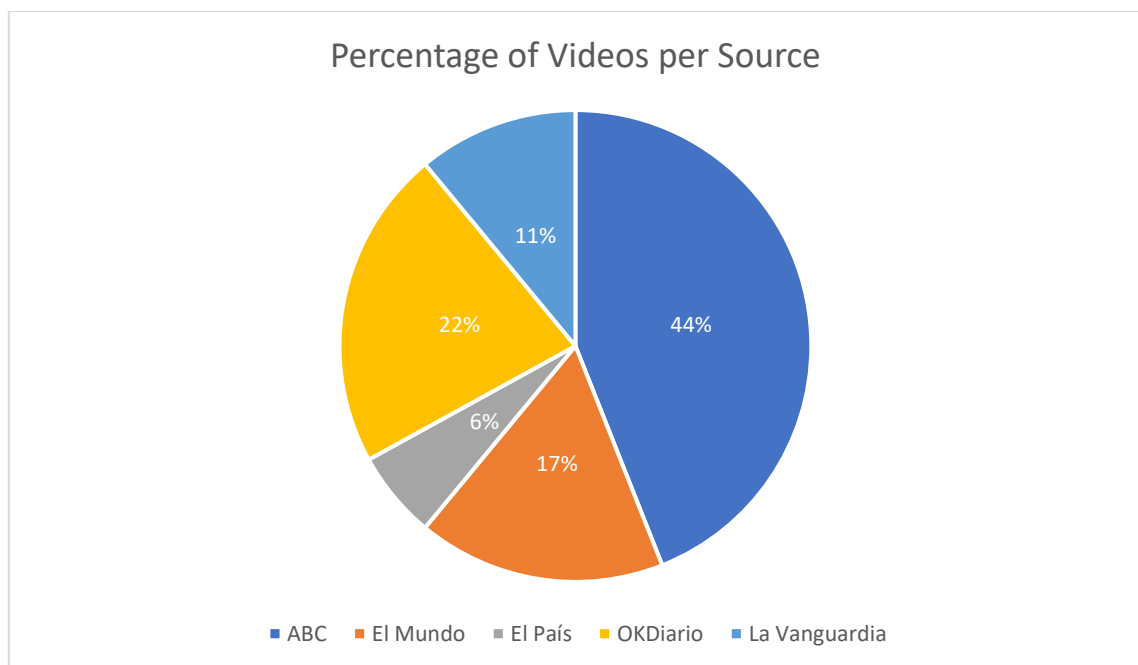
Figure 4.1.1: Percentage of Videos per Source

ABC had the highest number of articles with videos, with eight (44% of total news items); followed by *OKDiario* with four (22%), *El Mundo* with three (17%), *La Vanguardia* with two (11%) and *El País* with one (6%). *El Diario* and *El Español* each had none. As discussed earlier in the chapter, *ABC, La Vanguardia* and *El País* each covered 19 cases, while *El*

Mundo covered 18 and *OKDiario* covered 11. 42% of *ABC*'s articles contained videos, as did 36% of *OKDiario*'s and 17% of *El Mundo*'s. The only sources whose percentage of video features close to the 6.5% found by Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini and Newman (2016) were *La Vanguardia* at 10% and *El País* at 5%. From this, it can be deduced that *ABC* and *OKDiario* are most likely to use videos to supplement their articles, while *La Vanguardia* and *El País* are least likely to do so.

Each video varied in length, with the shortest being 34 seconds (*El Mundo*) and longest 93 (*ABC*). The overall average length was 67 seconds, which is shorter than Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini and Newman's (2016) average length of 75 seconds. They also found that 8% of news videos were longer than 120 seconds and 56% shorter than a minute. In this study, 6% of videos present were longer than 120 seconds, but 50% longer than a minute. 50% were shorter than a minute, so Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini and Newman's (2016) findings are almost echoed here. Table 4.1.1 presents the shortest, longest and average video length per source. It is important to note that El País (77 seconds) was excluded as there was only one video, and that each length was recorded in the format of minutes, seconds.

Source	Minimum	Average	Maximum
ABC	00.48	01.08	01.38
El Mundo	00.34	00.54	01.08
OKDiario	00.49	00.59	01.09
La Vanguardia	00.43	00.51	00.59

Table 4.1.1: Range of Video Length per Source

The shortest video was by *El Mundo*, at 34 seconds. This video only showed the victim's body being taken away. The shortest video for each source was under 50 seconds, while the averages ranged from 51 to 68 seconds long, with the highest average being *ABC* and the lowest *La Vanguardia*. The longest videos were all above a minute, except *La Vanguardia*, which was 59 seconds long. The longest video was by *ABC* at 93 seconds long. This video showed the neighbours outside, the house where the crime took place, the perpetrator being arrested and led to a police car and an interview with government delegation members.

In six instances, the same case was covered by different sources, and because the video lengths varied, different information was showcased in each video. A comparison is present in Table 4.1.2 below. Note that * denotes that the same video was used in both cases.

| Date of Case	Source One	Source Two
19/03/20	*El Mundo* (00.34) Body taken away	*El País* (01.17) Interview with mayor
04/04/20	*ABC* (00.48) The crime scene	*OKDiario* (00.49)*
14/04/21	*ABC* (00.57) Body taken away, police at the scene, interview with neighbour	*La Vanguardia* (00.59)*
17/05/21-18/05/21	*ABC* (01.18)	*ABC* (01.18)*

	Neighbours outside, the crime scene, interviews with neighbours	(There were two cases in the same region over 24 hours, so they were both covered in one video)
20/05/21	*ABC* (00.55) Police station, crime scene, interviews with neighbours	*OKDiario* (01.02)*
29/05/21	*ABC* (01.38) Neighbours outside, the crime scene, perpetrator arrested, interview with government delegation members	*El Mundo* (00.59) The crime scene, minute of silence in the neighbourhood

Table 4.1.2: Description of Videos Covering the Same Cases

67% of the time, the same video was used by two different sources. In the two instances where the same case was covered by different sources with different videos, the information provided was quite different, with the longer videos offering more details and clarity than shorter ones. In both of these cases, *El Mundo* presented the shorter video, with few details including the victim's body being taken away and the crime scene and neighbours holding a minute of silence. On the other hand, *El País* and *ABC* offered more details, as they were longer, such as interviews with experts and the perpetrator's arrest. Video duration was measured to see which sources had longer or shorter videos

and why that might be, to compare the average length per source and see if that reflected the findings of Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini and Newman (2016), and to explain why some videos had more details and covered more themes than others. The aforementioned themes were common across all videos, as presented in Figure 4.1.2 below.
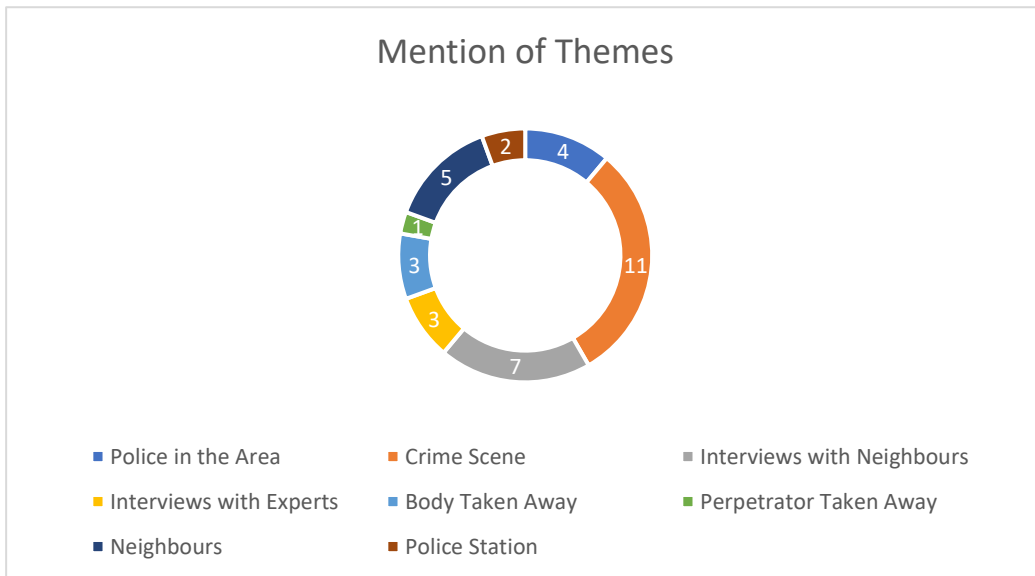
Figure 4.1.2: Most Common Themes in Videos

The most common theme to appear in the videos was the crime scene, which appeared in 11 of the 18 videos. The exact depiction of the crime scene depended on the case, however, these 11 videos showed either the street in which the crime took place, or the victim's house. In one video, the victim's burned car was shown, as well as the house where she was murdered. The media does this to show audiences where (and how) crimes took place, reminding them that this can happen anywhere – even in their neighbourhood. This is done to make audiences more attentive. The next most frequent theme was interviews with neighbours, which seven videos featured. These interviews

were often short (mere seconds long), and gave information about the victim, her relationship with the perpetrator and how scarred and shaken the neighbourhoods were following these crimes. Media sources use this tactic to humanise the victim through emotionally-charged anecdotes and make audiences feel more involved (Bandes and Salerno, 2014). In five videos, neighbours were shown either near the crime scene as police investigated or having a minute of silence for the victim. However, as they were not interviewed, they were grouped separately from the previous point. Aspects of law enforcement were shown in six articles: police officers in the area or investigating the crime scene in four, and shots of the police station itself in two. The media uses footage of law enforcement to demonstrate that the situation (femicide) is under control and that the police are here to restore order and justice following crimes of this nature.

Three videos featured expert interviews. Such experts included police officers, medics, government delegates and mayors. This was done to show Spanish audiences that femicide is a wider societal issue that needs to be treated as such, and that authorities are working hard to get to the root of these crimes and prevent them from happening again in the future. Finally, three videos showed the body of the victim being taken away, and one the perpetrator being arrested and led to a police car. There was no significant difference in the type of outlet in terms of video content as many videos featured the same themes, and often, the exact same video was used by different sources.

4.1.2 Photographs

Images such as photographs are important parts of a news article because they indicate to readers the importance of the story itself (Carter, 2013) and encourage readers to identify with and become emotionally invested in the events being described (Gilchrist, 2010: 382). Only nine of the 121 articles (7%) had no visual support. Five of these were from *La Vanguardia*, three from *El Diario*, and one from *El Mundo*. In comparison, 12 articles (10%) had more than one, and two (2%) had more than two. In total there were 124 visual images across the 121 articles. Each was coded according to the main theme it represented. The findings are presented below in Figure 4.1.3.
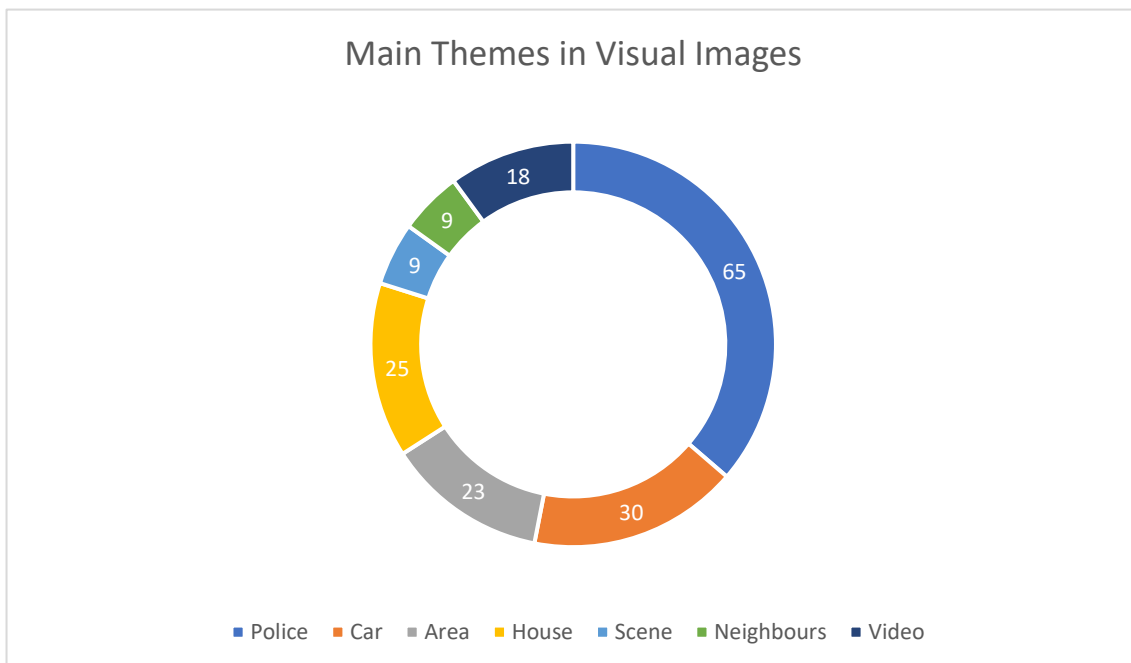

Main Themes in Visual Images

- Police: 65
- Car: 30
- Area: 23
- House: 25
- Scene: 9
- Neighbours: 9
- Video: 18

Figure 4.1.3: Main Themes in Visual Images

The most common theme present throughout the visual images was 'police,' which featured in 65 articles. This included things like patrols, police officers at the scene of the crime, officers investigating or helping with the transferring of corpses from the scene, police stations, the perpetrator's arrest or police uniform. Spanish media may use such imagery (like in videos as mentioned above) to show domestic audiences that law enforcement has the situation of femicide under control. The next most common theme of 'car' (present in 30 articles) supports this claim. However, 'car' does not only refer to police cars per se, but also victims' cars in cases where they were burned and destroyed by perpetrators. The themes of 'area' (in 23 articles), 'house' (in 25 articles) and 'scene' (in nine articles) were also prominent, as they refer to the crime scene (which was often the victim's house) and police and neighbours in the area the crime took place in. Spanish media may choose to use these themes to remind audiences that crimes like this can take place anywhere, even if their own neighbourhoods, and thus, femicide does not only affect the victim/perpetrator and their families, but also everyone nearby. In the same vein, 'neighbours' (which featured in nine articles) was also a prominent theme in the images. Neighbours were shown in interviews, standing outside the scene of the crime, holding memorials or minutes of silence for the victims and being visibly upset. And finally, some visual support came in the form of videos as opposed to photographs (presented above).

4.2 Descriptions of Victims, Perpetrators and Crimes

The following section presents the main descriptions of the victims, perpetrators and crimes themselves, presented in Figures 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 in the form of word clouds.

The analysis of the frequency of prominent words in this section was done in order to see how Spanish media frames these aspects of the crimes for their domestic Spanish audience, if they played on stereotypes about victims and perpetrators as discussed in Chapter Two, and the degree of humanisation of both. First is the word cloud summarising the victims' descriptions, then those of the perpetrators and finally those of the crimes themselves. Word clouds were used here to highlight the importance and prominence of a word based on its frequency in the articles, which is useful for this section because this section deals with the most used descriptions of victims, perpetrators and the crimes themselves across the 121 articles gathered.

4.2.1 Descriptions of Victims

The main descriptions of the female victims were described in the 121 articles in the form of a word cloud in Figure 4.2.1 below.
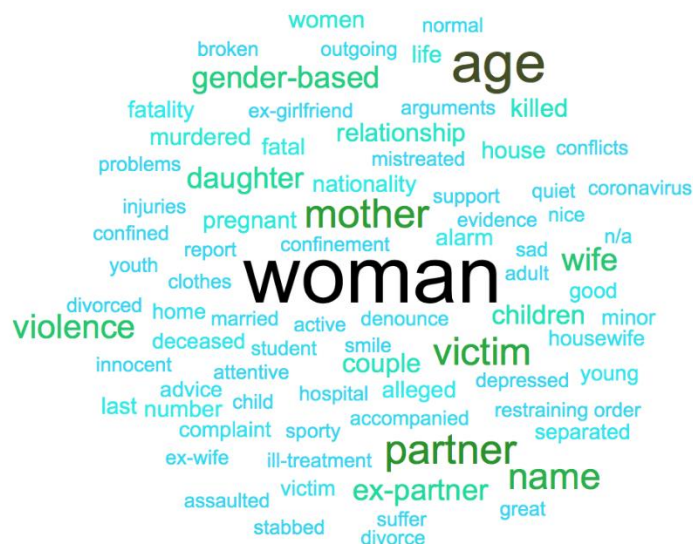

Figure 4.2.1: Main Descriptions of Victims

The most prominent descriptors used to portray the victims were 'woman' and 'age', with 'age' referring to the woman's age. The words 'age', 'name' and 'nationality' were coded as such instead of the actual numbers, names of the victims and countries they were from in order to give all parties anonymity. With 'woman' being the most noticeable descriptor, the difference in gender roles and the masculinity of perpetrators is highlighted. It also emphasises that these were indeed *femicides,* not just homicides.

This finding is further supported by the prominence of 'gender-based' and 'violence', referring to the crimes. After 'age', the next most common descriptors are the victims' roles in the crime, family or relationship with perpetrators: 'mother', 'partner', 'victim', 'wife', 'daughter' and 'ex-partner'. The familial terms 'mother', 'wife' and 'daughter' play to the audience's emotions, as journalists may want to highlight the familiarity everybody associates with these words, and thus offer the audience a connection to the victims. The terms 'victim' and 'ex-partner' show that the women were not at fault – they were not even in a relationship with the perpetrator anymore. This furthers the stressing of these cases as femicides because there was (or used to be) a relationship between these women and the men who killed them. The victims' names were mentioned heavily, which, coupled with their ages, shows that Spanish media wants to highlight basic facts about these women in order to humanise them and show that they are not statistics.

Duara (2014) argues that it is harder to tell victims' stories if their names are withheld. By naming victims, the media offers its audiences another sense of familiarity with the deceased, as she is not merely 'another woman', but someone who had a name, a life.

Even if articles did not mention much else about her, they at least mentioned her name. The pandemic was mentioned three times in the form of the following words: 'confinement', 'alarm' (referring to the 'state of alarm' lockdowns in Spain at the time) and most obviously, 'coronavirus', showing that the pandemic may have played a role in these crimes. The victims were described as 'normal', 'outgoing', 'innocent', 'nice', 'quiet' and 'active', which journalists used to emphasise the familiarity and respectability of the victims. They also may be employed to offer positive connotations of the victims in the minds of readers, thus also potentially emphasising the injustice of the crimes and negative connotations towards perpetrators. Finally, the details of their relationships with the perpetrators were described: 'mistreated', 'complaint', 'ill-treatment', 'separated', 'restraining order', 'problems' and 'broken'. These highly emotive words are used to show the toxicity and unhealthiness of the relationships, and how the victims tried to escape from them through filing complaints or getting restraining orders to protect themselves. Again, this portrays a vulnerability of victims, which adds to the anger readers may feel towards perpetrators.

4.2.2 Descriptions of Perpetrators

Figure 4.2.2 shows the main descriptions of the male perpetrators, also in the form of a word cloud.

Figure 4.2.2: Main Descriptions of Perpetrators

The words with the highest frequencies used to describe perpetrators were 'alleged', 'man', 'perpetrator' and (his) 'age'. Journalists may have opted for 'alleged' as the crimes had just been committed and at such an early stage, nothing had been confirmed in a court of law. They want to protect their reputations as unbiased news sources, which means sticking to the adage 'innocent until proven guilty'. The prominence of 'man' adds to the classification of these crimes as femicides (which are defined as the killings of women by men), which is proven further by the prominence of 'perpetrator' and 'ex-partner', which shows the role of these men in these crimes.

As with the victims, offering the perpetrators' ages (and names) humanise them and show that they are people, not just statistics. With the perpetrators, the coding was either 'Spanish' (Spanish-born or citizens) or 'nationality' (non-Spanish). This was done in order to see how journalists framed the men, as, often, there is a sense of 'othering' with foreigners being seen as a scapegoat in these crimes (see for example Sela-

Shayovitz, 2018 or Wakefield, 2019). However, in this study, Spanish men committed more femicides than foreign men. Here, journalists are not furthering the stereotype that foreigners are 'monstrous' and the 'enemies within' (Sela-Shayovitz, 2018). The familial terms of 'father', 'partner' and 'husband' are used to show their role in the family and relationship, thus playing to audience's emotions and humanising them further. In this way, they too (like the victims) are being portrayed as people with families and lives like any other. This is further confirmed by the use of the perpetrators' names. However, naming them can also shame them and show that they themselves are the ones to blame for these crimes. The use of the terms 'assailant' and 'murderer' add to the men's roles in these crimes, and such emotive language may trigger the audience and make them feel more sympathetic towards the women and less so towards the men. Finally, this potential perceived lack of sympathy is furthered by how the perpetrators are described in terms of their character. Unlike the victims, who received positively-charged descriptions, the perpetrators were described as: 'forcible', 'depressed', 'unsociable', 'sullen', 'threat', 'evil', 'manic', 'violent episodes', 'crazy', 'toxic', 'obsessive' and 'controlling'. Such descriptions paint a very negative picture of the men, which may have been the intention of journalists. Framing perpetrators in such a way suggests that Spanish media aims to create a narrative about the types of men that commit these crimes, while also further highlighting the innocence and vulnerability of their female victims.

4.2.3 Descriptions of Crimes

The final word cloud represents the most frequent descriptions of the crimes committed in Figure 4.2.3 below.
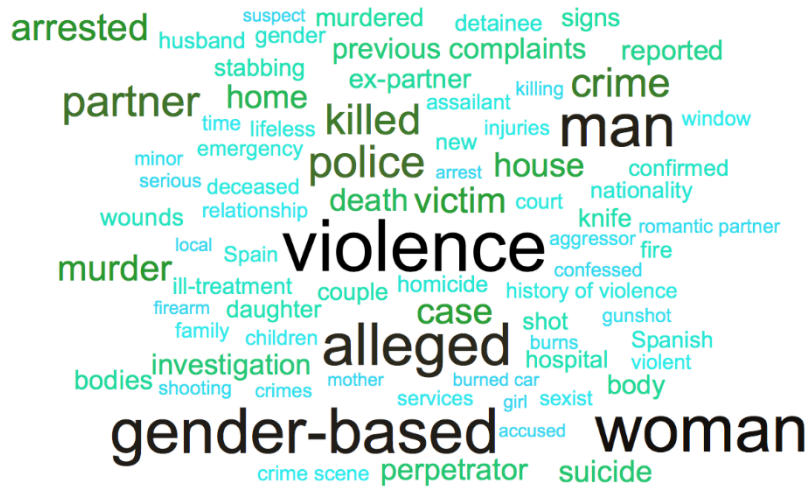

Figure 4.2.3: Main Descriptions of Crimes

According to the analysis, the main aspects of the crimes were described as 'violence', 'gender-based', 'woman', 'man' and 'alleged'. 'Violence' was used to describe and emphasise the viciousness of the crimes, as often the victims were stabbed, shot or burned alive. This sentiment is furthered by other prominent words like 'murder', 'death' and 'killed'. Journalists may also use 'violence' to not only describe the perpetrators' actions, but also their mindsets before committing the crimes. Next, 'gender-based', 'man' and 'woman' were used to highlight the roles of those involved (male perpetrators and female victims) and stress that these crimes were indeed *femicides*, having a gender-based nature. This is emphasised by 'new' which, in many articles, referred to: 'new (another) case of femicide in Spain', thus showing that these crimes are treated by

the media as a wider societal problem as opposed to isolated events. 'Partner' was used to show the relationship the victim had to the perpetrator and vice versa – that the perpetrator was known to the victim, which fits the traditional mindset and definition of femicide: the killing of a woman by her current or former intimate partner. Again, like with descriptions of the perpetrators, journalists used 'alleged' to protect themselves and remain neutral at such an early stage before confirmation by authorities. The frequency of words relating to law enforcement ('arrested', 'police', 'crime' and 'investigation') may have been used to reassure audiences that everything is under controlled and being handled by police so that justice can be served and an accurate depiction of facts can be provided. Journalists may want their audiences to know that the authorities are in charge of the situation and actively restoring order after these crimes are committed. 'House' refers to the crime scene, which was often the victim's home. 'Suicide' was a clear theme because in ten of the 19 cases, the perpetrator either successfully committed suicide or attempted to commit suicide after committing the femicide. Finally, 'previous complaints' and 'reported' show that the victim had tried to seek help, to escape the relationship and man, but the system failed her. This may make audiences feel angry at the injustice of the system and more sympathetic towards the victims, as they did try to get out, but their pleas were ignored. This is backed up by 'signs', meaning that the perpetrator had either acted in such a violent manner before, or had the potential to. This research is only concerned with overall portrayals of femicide victims, perpetrators and crimes by the Spanish media in general, not per source. Hence, only a general analysis was carried out, combining results from all 121 articles across the seven sources. Further research could break this down per source.

4.3 Degree of Mention of Pandemic

The degree of mention of the COVID-19 pandemic's potential role in these crimes is a vital factor in this research because each case took place during this pandemic and/or subsequent strict 'state of alarm' lockdown in Spain, when women were trapped indoors with their potential abusers. As discussed in Chapter Three, previous studies demonstrate that the media shifts blame from the perpetrators when it can (see Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2018 and Taylor, 2009). Since victims were not blamed in the findings presented here, perhaps the pandemic/lockdown situation was. Only 18 articles of 121 (15%) mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic in their descriptions of the crimes. The number of articles per source are presented in Figure 4.3 and Table 4.3 below.
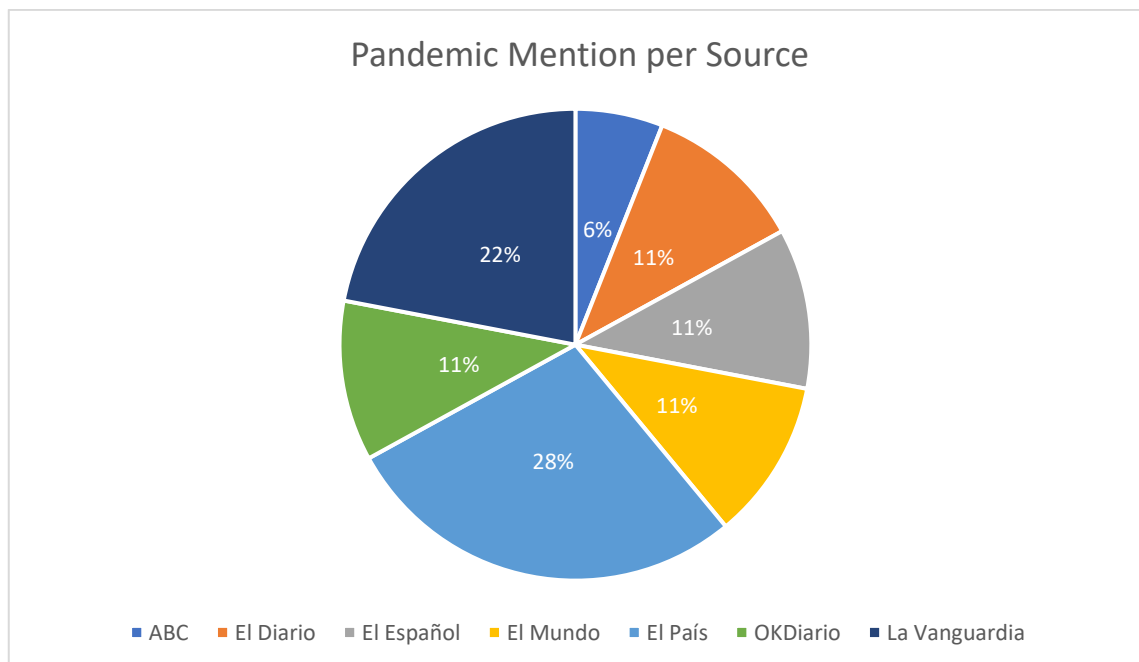

Figure 4.3: Pandemic Mention per Source

Of the 18 articles that mentioned the pandemic, 28% were written by *El País* and 22% by *La Vanguardia*. The sources *El Diario, El Español, El Mundo* and *OKDiario* all had the same number of articles with mention of the pandemic, and *ABC* mentioned the pandemic the least, in 6% of articles that mentioned it. The exact amount per year per source is presented below in Table 4.3.1.

Source	Pandemic Mention 2020	2020 Article Total (7 Total)	Pandemic Mention 2021	2021 Article Total (12 Total)	Overall Pandemic Mention Total
ABC	1	7	0	12	1
El Diario	2	7	0	12	2
El Español	2	6	0	10	2
El Mundo	1	7	1	11	2
El País	4	7	1	12	5
OKDiario	2	5	0	6	2
La Vanguardia	4	7	1	12	5

Table 4.3: Pandemic Mention per Source per Year

In 2020, all seven sources mentioned the pandemic at least once, with *El País* and *La Vanguardia* mentioning it in 57% of articles, and *OKDiario* in 40%. *El Mundo* and *ABC* both only mentioned it once, while *El Diario* and *El Español* mentioned it twice. In 2021, only *El Mundo, El País* and *La Vanguardia* mentioned it at all (once each). Overall, *El País*

and *La Vanguardia* mentioned the pandemic more than any other source, at 5 articles each, while the majority mentioned it twice and *ABC* only once. The pandemic was mentioned in articles in six different cases: four in 2020, and two in 2021.

Specifically, the first case of femicide in Spain since the nationwide 'state of alarm' lockdown was imposed on 14 March took place only five days later, on 19 March. To summarise, articles said that it was the first gender-based murder since the declaration of the 'state of alarm', the situation of confinement increases the risk of violence as women have to live permanently with their possible aggressors, the Ministry of Equality announced they would present new measures to accompany the existing helplines and services available to victims during the lockdown, and that a neighbour heard screams but thought it was a celebration or tribute that people made at the time from their balconies. The next case took place on 4 April, with articles saying it was the second fatality due to gender-based violence since the lockdown began, that all services for victims of gender violence are still active, despite the confinement situation, experts warning of the risk posed to victims by being forced to live with their aggressors (despite the lockdown having drastically reduced the number of general crimes not exclusive to femicide), and the Ministry of Equality guaranteeing attention to victims of gender violence and other forms of violence against women, as part of the Contingency Plan due to the COVID-19 crisis by providing safe housing alternatives for victims and their children. On 27 May, the third fatality due to gender-based violence since the 'state of alarm' was decreed occurred, with experts saying the abuse has multiplied with the confinement as complaints of gender-based violence increased significantly. Finally, on 30 May, the pandemic was mentioned in two articles, regarding a minute of silence for

the victim in the community, with neighbours recommended to stay in their own homes to maintain the safety distances in place at the time, thus respecting the 'state of alarm'.

The cases in 2021 had one mention of the pandemic each, with the first being on 2 March, described as: one of the most dangerous moments for victims is when they decide to leave. Six days later, on 8 March, neighbours described the perpetrator of that case as 'obsessive', and that his obsessive nature worsened after the pandemic began, as he refused to let his wife and daughter go outside.

As only 15% of articles mentioned the pandemic even once, it was not treated as a significant factor in these crimes. This comes as a surprise because the media tends to shift blame from male perpetrators in femicide cases wherever it can (see for example Balica, Marinescu and Balica, 2020 or Sela-Shayovitz, 2018), but in this study, the biggest external factor in these crimes (the pandemic/lockdown) was scarcely mentioned at all.

4.4 Degree of Mention of Helplines and Statistics

According to the United Nations, journalists should provide practical and useful information including helplines, the police phone number and any other service where it is possible for female victims of abuse of those threatened by their partners to file a complaint or contact for help (Impe, 2019: 100). Similarly, journalists must ensure that they provide keys to understanding and assessing the extent of the phenomenon of violence against women through statistics to put events into perspective and explain its systemic nature (Impe, 2019: 111). However, it is not clear if such duty of care guidelines

exist on a national Spanish level in terms of articles needing to provide information such as statistics and helplines about sensitive topics like gender-based violence and femicide. To see if Spanish media perceives femicide cases as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem, helplines and statistics were analysed in terms of how many articles featured them and what kinds of helplines and statistics were mentioned. The findings are presented in points 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 below.
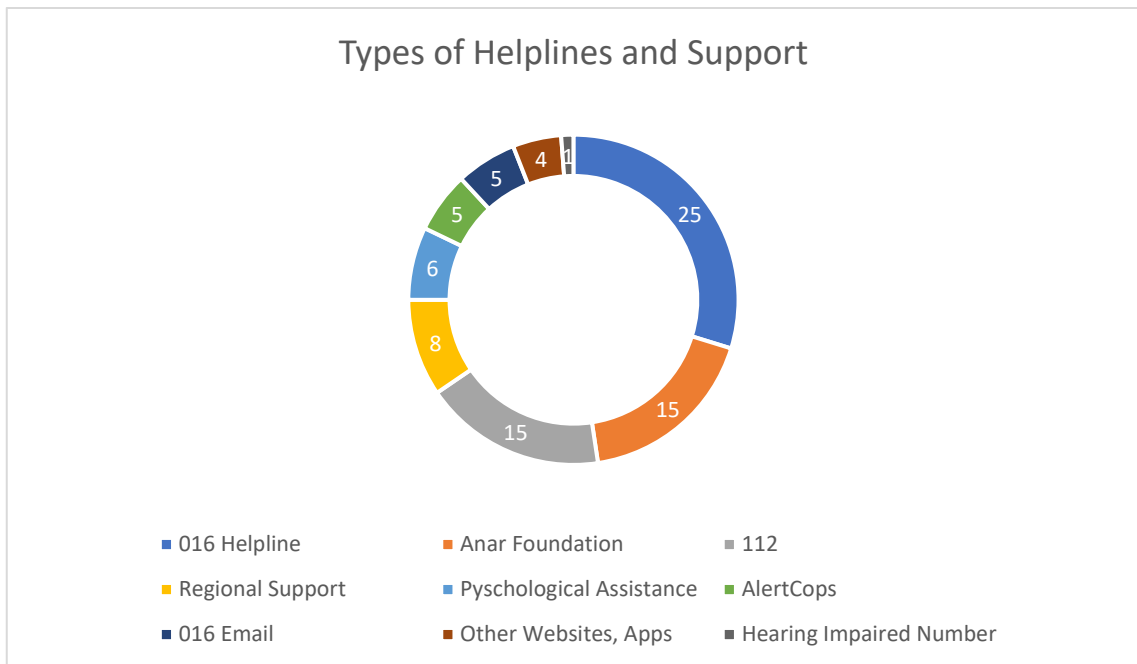
4.4.1 Helplines

The first variable in this section is the degree of mention of helplines and other forms of support. This was measured by comparing each article per source per year in this regard, and then analysing the types of helplines or other forms of support mentioned overall as presented in Table 4.4.1 and Figure 4.4.1 below.

Source	Helpline Mention 2020	2020 Article Total (7 Total)	Helpline Mention 2021	2021 Article Total (12 Total)	Overall Helpline Mention Total
ABC	0	7	1	12	1
El Diario	3	7	1	12	4
El Español	0	6	1	10	1
El Mundo	1	7	0	11	1
El País	4	7	11	12	15

| OKDiario | 1 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 1 |
| La Vanguardia | 3 | 7 | 0 | 12 | 3 |

Table 4.4.1: Number of Articles Mentioning Helplines and Support per Source per

Year

In total, 26 of the 121 articles (or 21%) featured helplines or other forms of support. In

particular, there were 12 articles with this information in 2020 and 14 in 2021. Overall,

the source with the most articles featuring helplines and support was *El País* at 79%, and

the source with the least was *ABC* at 5%. Every other source ranged between 6% and

21% - shockingly low compared to *El País*. The researcher was unable find if there is a

law in Spain or media guideline by which articles mentioning gender-based violence

and/or femicide must provide helplines or other methods of support for potentially

suffering readers. However, a 2011 study by the Ministry of Equality found that 55% of

people want newspapers to highlight the need to promote information about and

processes involved in escaping abusive situations. If such a law does not yet exist, it is

certainly wanted by the people. The types of helplines and support are presented in

Figure 4.7.2 below.

Figure 4.4.1: Types of Helplines and Support

Of the 26 articles that mentioned helplines or other forms of support for victims, 25 mentioned the 016 helpline, which is the helpline in Spain for victims of gender-based violence, which is available 24/7 in 51 languages and leaves no trace on the phone bill but must be deleted from the call log on some phones. 15 articles mentioned the 112 number and Anar Foundation website. 112 is the standard emergency number in Spain for police, and can be used for witnesses of assaults to report what they have seen. The Anar Foundation provides a number that minors can call or a website in which they can chat with professionals. The chat service is secure as it erases victims' messages. 8 articles mentioned regional support, which included things like regional helplines, for example the number for Women's Information (Andalusia) or the Balearic Institute for Women (Balearic Islands). Also included in this group were initiatives such as 'mask19' in the Canary Islands, where victims of gender-based violence could subtly report their abuse at a pharmacy with the password: mask19. Six articles mentioned psychological

assistance, which is in the form of Whatsapp numbers victims can message or call. AlertCops and the 016 email address were mentioned five times each. AlertCops is a free application that activates a geolocation for the police to receive. Its 'SOS button' allows one to send an immediate notice to one's contacts with one's location and a 10-second long audio. There is also an option for the hearing impaired. Four articles mentioned other websites and applications, which included ATENPRO and COMETA. ATENPRO (Telephone Service for Attention and Protection of Victims of Gender-Based Violence), by the Government Delegation Against Gender-Based Violence, offers victims of gender-based violence immediate attention by trained professionals 24/7. COMETA (Telematic Control of Measures and Penalties of Removal), by the Ministry of Equality, makes the victim's right to safety effective and contributes to her recovery. It consists of GPS tracking of both the victim and convicted, with the convicted also receiving a radio frequency transmitting bracelet that has sensors which detect the device's manipulation of breakage, as well as absence of skin contact. Finally, a helpline number for the hearing impaired was mentioned once.

4.4.2 Statistics

75 total articles (or 62%) of articles mentioned statistics, linking each case to other femicides that happened in the region, that year or since 2003 when official records started being kept. Such statistics were measured in order to see if the media perceives these crimes as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem. Table 4.4.2 below presents this information in more detail (per source per year and the total number of articles which mention statistics per source).

Source	Statistics Mention 2020	Statistics Mention 2021	Statistics Mention Total	Article Total
ABC	4	8	12	19
El Diario	5	8	13	19
El Español	5	7	12	16
El Mundo	5	4	9	18
El País	4	10	14	19
OKDiario	2	1	3	11
La Vanguardia	7	5	12	19

Table 4.4.2 Mention of Statistics per Source per Year

El Español and *El País* had the highest number of articles mentioning statistics based on the number of articles they had in general, at 12 (75%) and 14 (74%) respectively. *El Diario, ABC* and *La Vanguardia* each had statistics in over 60% of articles, with 13 (68%), 12 (63%) and 12 (63%). Nine (50%) of articles by El Mundo featured statistics, and only three (27%) by *OKDiario*. As the majority of sources had statistics in over 50% of their articles, it can be concluded that leading Spanish media sources see each femicide case as part of a larger societal problem as opposed to individual isolated events. The exact statistics featured are presented in Figure 4.4.2 below.
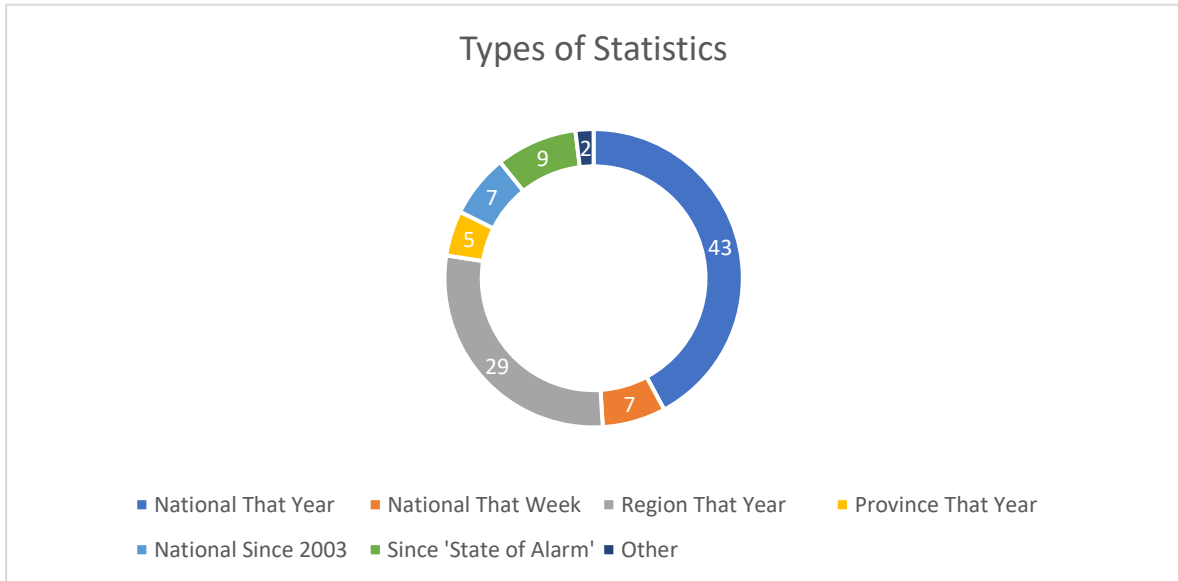
Figure 4.4.2: Types of Statistics

43 articles (or 57%) mentioned the number of femicides so far that year on a national Spanish level, which shows that these crimes are viewed by the media as a collective problem and thus all relevant to each other as femicides. The next most common statistic was the number of femicides so far that year on a regional level, being mentioned in 29 (39%) of articles. Five articles (7%) also mentioned such numbers but on a provincial level. Spain is made up of 17 autonomous regions with 52 provinces within them. By breaking these crimes down into regional and provincial statistics, the media is reminding its audience that these crimes can and do happen everywhere, and that it is a problem at these levels of society, not just the national one. Seven articles (9%) mentioned the number of femicides that week at a national level. In the middle of May 2021, there were six victims of femicide in Spain including a child. By adding this statistic, the media's goal may have been to highlight the frequency of these crimes to emphasise how endemic the issue is in Spain. Nine articles (12%) mentioned the number

of femicides since the 'state of alarm' restrictions were put in place to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This was done to underline the effect the pandemic and its lockdowns have had on victims being confined in their homes with their potential abusers. Finally, seven articles (9%) mentioned the number of femicide deaths in Spain since official records started being kept in 2003, and two articles (3%) shared another statistic: that 70% of gender-based violence victims do not report their aggressors according to official data (De Vega, 2020; 'Detenido un hombre', 2020).

4.5 Conclusions

To conclude, this chapter has offered the key findings of the content analysis of 121 Spanish news articles from seven Spanish media sources covering 19 domestic cases of femicide in Spain. This was done through the analysis of visual images in the forms of videos and photographs; descriptions of the victims, perpetrators and crimes themselves in the form of word clouds; the degree of mention of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the degree of mention of helplines and statistics. In general, the victims were described in terms of their relationships with the perpetrators, their ages and names were given to humanise them, and their personalities were described positively. In contrast, the perpetrators (although 'alleged') were given synonyms for 'murderer' such as 'perpetrator' or 'assailant', their ages and nationalities were mentioned, and their personalities were described negatively. The crimes were described as 'violent' and of a gender-based nature, with the actors (victim and perpetrator) highlighted. Only 15% of articles mentioned the pandemic and 21% helplines, but 62% mentioned femicide statistics at different levels (e.g. national, regional, provincial, since 2003 etc.). The

following chapter will discuss the findings in terms of research sub-questions and link the content analysis to the theoretical models employed by this research. It will also examine broader implications and media contexts of the findings. The seven online Spanish news sources employed by this research were chosen due to their widespread readership in Spain and wide range of political ideologies. Findings represent a broader view of how Spanish media (not left-wing Spanish media or right-wing Spanish media) collectively frames femicide cases in Spain.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Final Conclusions

This chapter will further discuss the findings introduced in Chapter Four. To do so, it will link the theoretical models of the Cascade Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory employed by this research (see Chapter Two) with the empirical evidence, and answer the sub-questions framing the research project. Finally, this chapter offers an overall conclusion to summarise the thesis and pose questions for further research.

5.1 Linking Theoretical Models with Empirical Evidence

5.1.1 The Cascade Theory

According to the Cascade Theory, framing is described as the selection and highlighting of some facets of events and making connections, in order to promote a particular interpretation or evaluation (Entman, 2003). Within this theory, the prominence and repetition of certain words and images are utilised to provoke a certain emotional response, thus raising their magnitude and cultural resonance. These words and images are highly salient, memorable and understandable in the culture, having the greatest potential for influence. The findings presented in Chapter Four show that many prominent images and words were repeated over the six-month timeframe, thus fitting the theory's description of being highly salient and emotive. Videos and images of police (be it police uniforms, police in the area, police outside the crime scene, police cars or interviews with police) potentially invokes a sense of safety and security in audiences,

as Spanish media is highlighting the presence of law enforcement in the aftermath of these crimes. Although it is impossible to know the motives behind the presence of these policing images, their presence may serve to reassure audiences that Spanish law enforcement is taking these crimes seriously, and is working to enforce justice for the perpetrators. The prominence of interviewed neighbours in videos and images points to a sense of comradery and togetherness in these crimes – that the crimes affect everyone and could happen to anyone. With such videos and images, Spanish media is perhaps bringing community (through the repeated images of neighbours) and public safety (through the repeated images of law enforcement) to the forefront, highlighting that femicide affects everyone and the police are there to restore order and justice after the fact.

Highly salient words included 'gender-based', 'violent/violence', 'alleged' and the victim-perpetrator relationship ('partner', 'ex', 'husband/wife' etc.). With the media acting as a mediator between elite and public opinion (Ruddy, 2015), audiences will presumably know and understand that these crimes were indeed femicides as opposed to homicides, with the victims being current or former intimate partners of the perpetrators, and the crimes being of a gender-based nature. However, in order to maintain a sense of unbiasedness, they also highlight the male's status as the 'alleged' perpetrator -- nothing had been proven at the time of reporting. These concepts may elicit a certain emotional response to these cases, as femicide can, and does, happen to anyone, and continues to happen, regardless of the pandemic. On the other hand, these concepts serve further highlight that femicide is a public, endemic problem within Spain, which may lead to discussion among all levels of the cascade (elites, media and public)

regarding how to better raise awareness about these crimes and possibly prevent them in the future.

5.1.2 The Agenda-Setting Theory

Both the Cascade and Agenda-Setting Theories are concerned with issue salience and the messages the media sends to its audience through the use of specific words and images. As the media links elite and public opinion, journalists influence the degree to which issues gain public attention. While the Cascade Theory describes the magnitude and cultural resonance of such salient words and images, the Agenda-Setting Theory focuses on substantive and attributive dimensions, like the positively/negatively/neutrally described personality traits of victims and perpetrators. According to this theory, issue salience refers to the media's emphasis on certain issues and how this raises their importance for the public (Coleman and Wu, 2010). This transfer of issue salience from the news media to the public agenda reveals the thinking and motivation behind particular framing decisions. Only four of the seven sources (*ABC, El Diario, El País and La Vanguardia*) included coverage all 19 cases, thus judging them to be of equal importance and worthy of media coverage, while the rest did not. *OKDiario* only covered 11 cases. It can potentially be concluded that sources covering all cases give more importance to femicide as a public issue that readers should be aware of than those that did not cover all of them.

McCombs (2005) introduces the idea of potential stereotypes used by the media within Agenda-Setting Theory in order to paint a certain picture of the actors involved. This

concept can be used to explain the negative attribute characteristics of male perpetrators variously described as: 'evil', 'obsessive', 'crazy', 'toxic' *etc*. Such stereotypes are problematic, as this representation of the assailant as abnormal allows men to distance themselves from perpetrators (Meyers, 1997). The negative descriptors might also show audiences that a certain type of man commits these crimes, which is not 'wrong' *per se* as these men did display those characteristics, but, in reality, it can be anyone. Anyone can be a perpetrator and anyone can be a victim.

However, the expected stereotypes for female victims were not present in this study. As discussed in Chapter Two, previous literature has found victims to be 'bad girls' or 'femme fatales' (Balica, Marinescu and Balica, 2020; Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2018) that are blamed either directly or indirectly for their own deaths (Gius and Lalli, 2014). In this study, victims were described positively as 'normal', 'nice' and 'outgoing'. These positive descriptors, and the negative ones for male perpetrators, indicates that attribute salience is present in the media's coverage of these crimes. This concept of attribute salience takes place in the second level of the Agenda-Setting Theory and broken down into substantive and affective dimensions (Coleman and Wu, 2010), with the affective dimension focusing on the emotional qualities of the substantive elements (in this case, the victims and perpetrators), which have been seen in the media's positive framing of victims and negative framing of perpetrators. Through the use of stereotypes and attribute salience, this theory is pivotal to the analysis of how Spanish media frames victims and perpetrators of femicides.

5.2 Answering Sub-Question One: How are the victims and perpetrators of femicides portrayed in the media?

Femicide victims were portrayed in a positive and sympathetic light by Spanish media, through the use of familial terms, positive salient characteristics and an emphasis on the state of their relationship with the perpetrators. In particular, the familial terms of 'mother', 'daughter' and 'wife' highlight the femininity of the victims, which in turn could also emphasise the masculinity of perpetrators.

These terms also invoke a sense of sympathy and relatability with readers, as they may think about their own mothers, daughters or wives when reading these articles. Victims were not blamed either directly or indirectly by the media, as the prominence of the words 'ex-partner', 'complaint' and 'restraining order' show. The media presumably wants readers to know that many of these women were no longer in a relationship with their abusers, and that they did everything they could to distance themselves from him (be it file a complaint or get a restraining order against him).

The victims were not framed as 'bad girls', but given positive attribute characteristics including 'normal', 'outgoing', 'innocent' and 'nice', which shows that any woman can be a victim of femicide, even if she is 'good' and no longer in a relationship with her abuser. To further emphasise the innocence of victims, the state of their relationships with their abusers were made clear in the forms of the following terms: 'mistreated', 'ill-treatment', 'problems' and 'broken'. These terms show how victims were already suffering before their deaths, which adds to the sense of vulnerability of and sympathy

for them, and potential anger towards their abusers on behalf of readers. Visual images also added to this positive portrayal of victims, as some articles had a photograph of her or of a memorial by neighbours who knew and loved her. Such images add to the media's trend of humanising the victim, which is also done through using her name, age and positive salient characteristics as discussed earlier. From this study, it can potentially be concluded that Spanish media wants readers to know that these victims are not mere statistics, but people – people with hopes, dreams and lives just like anyone else – whose lives were robbed prematurely by forces out of their control.

Just like victims, perpetrators were portrayed in familial terms with an emphasis on their relationship status. However, unlike the victims, the media framed them in a negative and unsympathetic light through the use of negative salient characteristics. The familial terms of 'partner', 'father' and 'husband' highlight the masculinity of perpetrators and invoke a sense of familiarity and relatability with readers, who might liken them to their own partners, fathers or husbands. This might also leave readers feeling shocked and betrayed, since any partner, father or husband could commit such a crime in theory.

The use of their nationality also adds to the sense of familiarity, as the majority of perpetrators were Spanish – a fact highlighted by the media. This was unexpected, as in previous studies (see Chapter Four), there was always an emphasis on the *foreignness* of perpetrators, which potentially tells readers that such crimes are a consequence of immigration and not an internal problem or crimes committed by 'locals'. Here, through the emphasis of the 'Spanishness' of perpetrators, readers will likely see femicide as a domestic problem that *does* affect everyone and can be committed by or against anyone.

This sense of familiarity is further enhanced by the use of the perpetrators' names and ages, as they too (like victims) are painted as people, not statistics. However, some articles focused only on the female victims, as there was no information at all about the perpetrator aside from the fact that he was a man.

Despite being framed as 'perpetrators', 'assailants' and 'killers', the most salient description of the role of men in these crimes was 'alleged', which is the one instance in which Spanish media was the most unbiased since nothing was proven at the time of writing the articles under consideration. However, personality traits given to these men were negative and emotive, painting a very specific picture about the type of man that commits such a crime. 'Toxic', 'obsessive' and 'controlling' show the unhealthiness of their relationships with victims, which is further enhanced by 'restraining order' and 'complaints'. The use of the terms 'depressed', 'sullen' and 'unsociable' perpetuate stereotypes of criminals as noticeably sad or quiet outcasts who can display angry and scary tendencies.

This stereotype is further maintained through other emotive terms such as: 'forcible', 'crazy', 'manic', 'evil', 'violent episodes' and 'threat'. Such terms serve to demonise perpetrators, distance them from 'normal' men (which is problematic as discussed in point 6.1.2 above) and further highlight the innocence and vulnerability of victims. In ten cases, perpetrators either attempted to or succeeded in ending their own lives after the fact, which can be seen through the ideas of 'suicide' and 'self-inflicted injuries'. Here, the media highlights their sense of remorse, guilt and shame, thus humanising

them. Those who did survive were sometimes depicted in visual images being arrested by police.

5.3 Answering Sub-Question Two: How were the crimes under consideration portrayed in the media?

Spanish media framed the crimes under consideration predominantly as 'gender-based' and 'violent'. The salience of 'gender-based' enforces that these crimes were indeed *femicides* as opposed to regular homicides. This is supported by the salience of 'man', 'woman', 'victim' and 'perpetrator', which show each actor's role in the crimes: a female victim murdered by a male perpetrator. The prominence of 'violent' shows the intense nature of the crimes, which is further expanded by the details of the crimes: 'stabbing', 'shooting' and 'fire'. 'Violence' can also refer to the perpetrators' behaviours before committing these crimes, as they were described negatively and there were 'signs' that something like this could happen.

Again, Spanish media seems to be placing blame entirely on the perpetrators' shoulders, which goes against the expected stereotype of victim-blaming or using other things (like the pandemic) as excuses to shift the blame from perpetrators alone. Visual images included the crime scene, neighbours, the area where the victim lived, and the house where her body was found. Such scenes add to the sense of familiarity, as the media's goal here is possibly to show the public that crimes like this can happen to anyone anywhere, perhaps in their neighbourhood or even within their family. Law enforcement also featured heavily in the visual support, showing that the police are there to restore

order and deliver justice in the aftermath of these crimes. However, this could reflect negatively on the legal system. Readers might acknowledge that justice can be served *after* a femicide, but not *before*: many women sought restraining orders and filed complaints against their abusers but still became victims of femicide all the same. Perhaps gender-based violence laws and protections in Spain need to be revised.

5.4 Answering Sub-Question Three: To what extent has the pandemic played a role in these crimes?

The vast majority of articles neglected to mention the pandemic at all, as only 15% of total articles mentioned COVID-19 and Spain's subsequent lockdowns. This is surprising because blame is often shifted from the male perpetrator to any external factor in other studies on this topic (see for example Sela-Shayovitz, 2018 or Wakefield, 2019), so the pandemic was expected to feature more prominently here. The majority of articles that *did* mention the pandemic were in 2020, when the first 'state of alarm' was decreed and Spain went into strict lockdown for the first time. Every source mentioned the pandemic at least once in 2020, while only three mentioned it once each in 2021. The pandemic was not mentioned at all in descriptions of perpetrators or crimes, but it was mentioned in descriptions of victims in the form of the words: 'coronavirus' and 'confinement'.

Women were locked inside with their abusers and killed during the 'state of alarm' lockdowns, with articles describing victims as the first, second etc. since lockdowns began. Spanish media also acknowledged and reported that confinement increases the risk of femicide and multiplies abuse. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Ministry

of Equality planned to introduce new measures to try and combat gender-based violence. In one case, there was a noticeable change in the perpetrator's attitude since the beginning of the pandemic (he grew more controlling and paranoid, not allowing his wife or daughter to leave the house). Aside from this, the pandemic was not mentioned at all as an excuse for the rise in femicides or blamed for the crimes, which came as a surprise given the tendency for media to shift the blame from the perpetrator to anything else such as his mental state, foreign nationality, the victim's personality or other circumstances (see for example Balica, Marinescu and Balica, 2020; Sela-Shayovitz, 2018). The lack of mention of the pandemic (and victim blaming in any form) potentially serves to demonstrate that Spanish media places full responsibility for femicide on the shoulders of perpetrators and does not give them the benefit of the doubt y by shifting blame to other factors present in the timeframe including the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

5.5 Answering Sub-Question Four: Are femicide cases framed as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem?

The research demonstrates that Spanish media frames femicide cases as part of a larger societal problem within Spain, as opposed to treating each case as isolated events. In this study, this was achieved through the use of helplines and statistics, connecting each case to each other and the issue of femicide in Spain as a whole. Only 21% of articles mentioned helplines, compared to 62% mentioning statistics. This number (21%) is shockingly low, which could be due to a lack of media law in Spain stating that helplines must be provided when a sensitive topic like femicide or gender-based violence is

reported. Further research is required to see if such a law does indeed exist. 79% of the articles that did mention helplines were from *El País.* Overall, such helplines included the 016 gender-based violence helpline (in all articles but one), the 112 national police number, the ANAR Foundation, regional support, apps and the 016-email address. In short, there are many different options available to those seeking help and support. By providing so many different options, the media wanted to emphasise this fact, and show readers that these crimes are connected and that they all fall under the issue of gender-based violence and femicide in Spain.

Statistics were also used by journalists to link cases together, with 62% of articles mentioning some form of statistics. Such statistics included the number of femicide cases that given year on a national, regional or provincial level; on a national level since the 'state of alarm' lockdowns began; and on a national level since 2003 when official records were first recorded. By differentiating between that year and since the 'state of alarm' lockdowns began, the media highlights the increased risk of femicide when a victim is confined at home with her abuser and unable to leave, showing that the pandemic plays a role in the factors that could influence the frequency of femicides, which was proven in May 2021, when there were six different cases in a single week. With provincial and regional statistics, the media reminds its readers that such crimes happen everywhere in the country and are not restricted to one area or social class. Finally, as the crimes were predominantly described as 'gender-based' and 'new' (as in 'new case of gender-based murder in Spain', for example), these cases are all linked by the media as cases of femicide.

5.6 Conclusions

To conclude, the Cascade and Agenda-Setting theoretical models utilised in this research provided useful insights into the areas of femicide and media framing of crime, proven by the linking of these theoretical models with empirical evidence. In terms of the sub-questions, victims and perpetrators were framed quite differently. Although the media used familial terms for both, victims were portrayed in a positive and sympathetic light, not blamed in any way for their deaths, and humanised through positive salient characteristics and visual images such as photographs and memorials by neighbours. Conversely, perpetrators were portrayed in a negative and unsympathetic light, with an emphasis on their Spanish nationality. They were given all the blame and were perpetuated by negative stereotypes of criminals. Visual image support showed them being arrested, and many (ten of the 19) tried to commit suicide after committing the femicide. Victims were given more emphasis than perpetrators across the board. In terms of the crimes themselves, they were highlighted as having a gender-based nature, which emphasises that they were femicides, with each actor's role clearly defined (male perpetrator and female victim). The nature of the crimes was violent, with blame placed squarely on the shoulders of perpetrators, who displayed negative characteristics and previous signs of violence. Visual images offered a sense of familiarity, as these crimes can happen to anyone anywhere. The pandemic was scarcely mentioned as a factor in these crimes, only appearing in victim descriptions and statistics. Spanish media places full blame on perpetrators, not external factors like the pandemic and lockdown. Finally, femicide cases are framed as part of a larger societal problem in Spain, through the use

of helplines and statistics provided by media, linking each case to each other and the overarching issue of gender-based violence and femicide on a national level.

5.7 Final Conclusions

This thesis has investigated the issue of femicide in Spain during the COVID-19 pandemic through conducting a content analysis of framing trends by seven leading online Spanish news sources. There were 19 cases analysed across six months of 2020 and 2021 (March to May both years), all taking place during the 'state of alarm' lockdowns imposed by the Spanish government to combat the rise in COVID-19 cases in Spain. The thesis aimed to contribute to the field of the media's framing of femicide cases by analysing how victims and perpetrators were portrayed, if the pandemic played a substantial role in these crimes, and if Spanish media connects such crimes and links them to a broader societal issue on a national level.

The principal research question guiding this thesis was: *How did mainstream Spanish media (Spanish language editions) portray and frame femicide cases in Spain in the months of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns from 2020 to 2021?* The sub-questions were: 1. How are victims and perpetrators of femicides portrayed in the media? 2. How were the crimes under consideration portrayed in the media? 3. To what extent has the pandemic played a role in these crimes? 4. Are femicide cases framed as isolated events or part of a larger societal problem? The principal research objectives were achieved through the employment of the Cascade and Agenda-Setting Theories and the

multiple case studies method, inductive approach and media framing analysis. Through the categories of visual images; victim, perpetrator and crime descriptions; and the degree of mention of the pandemic, helplines and statistics presented in Chapter Four, victims were framed positively, perpetrators were framed negatively and fully blamed for the crimes, the crimes were predominantly described as gender-based, the pandemic was not as big of a factor as expected, and Spanish media frames these crimes as part of a larger societal event on a national level than as isolated events.

Further research could include this study to undertake a comparative analysis between European countries or other Spanish-speaking countries such as Mexico or Argentina to measure the potential variation in media framing of femicide cases, their actors and the pandemic. Such a study would provide a deeper understanding of how different countries of different political standpoints report and frame femicide crimes. This research could also be used as part of a historical comparative analysis within Spain, using different months of the pandemic, or even cases from before the pandemic to see if Spanish media framing of such events has changed over time. Different Spanish news sources covering the 19 cases here might even frame them differently, so a comparative analysis to other sources would also be interesting.

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