

Case: **7/2018-VP**



EARHVD

Equipa de Análise Retrospectiva de
Homicídio em Violência Doméstica

FINAL REPORT

Domestic Homicide Review

Report Authors

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The review aims, in accordance with article 4-A of the Domestic Violence Law (Law no. 112/2009, of 16th September, in the wording of Law no. 129/2015, of 3rd January), to try to understand the reasons, circumstances and context in which the homicide occurred, in order to draw conclusions to improve intervention methodologies, correct errors and overcome insufficiencies regarding the action of public and private entities in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

In respect for the personal rights of the people involved, the reports of the Domestic Homicide Review Team (EARHVD) omit their identification and the geographic location of each case reviewed, as results from the articles 6/paragraph f) and article 12/no. 3 of Ministerial Order no. 280/2016, of 26th October.

For this review, the team was composed of its permanent members and a representative of the Public Security Police (PSP), as a non-permanent member.



Domestic Homicide Review

01.

**The case under
review and the
steps taken**



CHAPTER

01.

The case under review and the steps taken

This report refers to the homicide of a woman (A) by a man (B) who then committed suicide, in the context of the separation of two people who, having been married, continued to live together for more than 8 years after the divorce.

The Domestic Homicide Review Team (EARHVD) used the criminal investigation and the respective corresponding dismissing order (resulting from the death of the perpetrator of the homicide), as its primary source of information, although limited because the criminal investigation was not pursued further. The research carried out with the sectors represented within the Team did not provide much more information about the victim and the perpetrator/suicide, beyond the relevant information in the police file regarding his temporary disappearance a few years earlier. Nor was any trace found of any contact or support provided by a social sector entity. It was also not possible to complement the information with the testimony of people close to one and to the other, although steps were taken in that direction.

In this context, the EARHVD considered pertinent to further consult the information conveyed by the media on the date of the occurrence of the facts, through a Google search, having been consulted 21 pieces of news overall (18 of which published the same day).



Domestic Homicide Review

02.

**The three strands of
the review**



CHAPTER

02.

The three strands of the review

The review focused on: **(2.1.)** the context in which the murder occurred; **(2.2.)** the connection between **A's** murder and **B's** suicidal ideation; and **(2.3.)** the media reporting of the case.

2.1. The context in which the homicide occurred

This homicide was immediately followed by the suicide of **B**, who used the same firearm to kill his ex-wife (**A**), from whom he was divorced but living in the same house, and commit suicide. These facts occurred at the workplace and during **A's** working hours, where **B** showed up with a revolver. Both were in their 40s.

It was not possible to ascertain relevant facts for this review about their life story prior to the divorce.

Regarding the following years, the information gathered indicates that their relationship was conflictual, with **B** continuing to live in the same house as **A** against her will, as she had started a new relationship.

About eight years before the murder, when they were already divorced, **B** had temporarily disappeared having then sent messages to his closer connections interpreted as a "farewell"; at the time, it was feared that he could "attempt against his own life". However, twelve days after the report of his disappearance, the search for him was cancelled, because **B** "had already given news", and there was no other information about this event.

In situations similar to this one, in which a couple cohabits for a long time after the breakdown of the dyadic relationship, there tends to be a gradual tension, even if of low intensity, which, however, can dramatically worsen at the moment when, for example,



one of them wants to establish a new intimate relationship.

This homicide followed by suicide occurred after a long period of time, more than 8 years, in which **A** and **B** were already divorced but living in the same house against **A**'s will, with signs of persistent tension, discomfort and psychological suffering, in which the risk of physical violence is always present, and without any knowledge of an intervention to help them overcome the situation being on record.

It is also important to emphasize that **B** chose **A**'s workplace to commit the crime and then commit suicide, and that the manager of the company was aware that **B** had called **A** a few days before with death threat. When there is information about the risk of violence, especially the existence of death threats, employers must take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of those who work for them, while they work there; often these people are in a particularly vulnerable situation, not only because the aggressor knows the place and the victim's schedule, but also, in some cases, due to the characteristics of the activity the victim carries out there.

2.2. The relationship between A's homicide and B's suicidal ideation

The mention of **B**'s risk of suicide in the police report of his disappearance a few years before should not be considered of lesser importance in view of the facts that motivated this review.

The present case must be reviewed in the context of murder-suicide as an object of study in the field of violence in intimate relationships. Three other cases have already been the subject of review by the EARHVD (cases no. 1/2018-AC, 2/2018-JP and 8/2018-AC).

Suicidal ideation is a risk factor for homicide, which is expressed in the "risk assessment form for domestic violence situations" used in police and judiciary action (point 12. of RVD1L and RVD2L).

The most recent statistical data confirms this and highlights the relevance of homicide followed by suicide in intimate relationships in Portugal. In the years from 2014 to 2019, in 41 of 128 cases investigated by the Judiciary Police (PJ) (32%) the perpetrator (male in all cases) committed suicide afterwards, and it should be noted that in the year 2015



the percentage of perpetrators who committed suicide was 54%¹.

The probability that the person who commits the homicide in this context commits suicide (usually male) is much higher than in other homicide situations. A recent meta-analysis on the risk factors associated with intimate partner homicide identifies this probability as eight times higher².

Males predominantly show this behaviour, and it happens mostly in the context of intimate relationships, often in the context of conflict, recent separation or divorce, with close physical proximity being an increased risk factor for its occurrence.

The information collected about **B**'s persistence in continuing to live in the same house as **A** and the news that **A** might have started a new relationship indicate the presence of factors that are often referred to in these situations, such as "pathological" jealousy and the conviction about "infidelity", which may give rise to the idea of an unbreakable and definitive fusion with the victim, incorporating the victim's homicide in the suicide decision.

From a gender perspective, the homicide-suicide has been understood as an extreme manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, as a borderline form of control practiced by a man over his partner (or ex-partner) when the woman inevitably breaks up the relationship on her own initiative. The perpetrator aims to avoid being replaced by a third party and that they remain inseparable.

Suicidal ideation seemed to be already present in **B** at the time when he previously went missing. However, the unit that provided for his health care did not mention any mental health follow-up or referral, and there is no record of any reference to this event.

As this case shows, the recognition of the intention to commit suicide related to a conflict situation in intimate relationships requires mental health intervention, with a view to prevent the act and treat its causes, but also from the perspective that it can be an effective way to prevent homicide, particularly femicide.

¹ *Homicides in Intimate Relationships. Study of Enquiries investigated by the Judiciary Police (2014 to 2019 (2020)*, Judiciary Police.

² Cf *Intimate Partner Homicide: A meta-analysis of risk factors (2020)* Andreia Matias, Mariana Gonçalves, Cristina Soeiro e Marlene Matos, *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 50, 101358 (Available @ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178919300874>)



2.3. The media's reporting of the case

The information about this homicide followed by suicide was reported by the media on the same day and on the day after the event, with only one newspaper (regional scope) coming back to the subject two days later. In other words, all the news given about the case took place "on the verge of the event".

The research of the produced information did not bring anything sufficiently relevant for better understanding the situation.

From the analysis of the journalistic pieces, three notes stand out:

- a. Almost all the pieces mention the Lusa Agency and police forces as sources and deliver similar information and focus on the spectacular nature of the event and on the mobilisation of operational means of the police forces and health professionals to the scene. Some news in the local and regional press explore and speculate about aspects of the personal and family life of the people involved;
- b. To illustrate the news, are used images that explore the scene of the crime or the display of portraits of **A** and **B**;
- c. Only three pieces frame the news by referring to known data on the occurrence of situations of domestic violence and homicides in this context, made available by the State and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Therefore, it is possible to see that in almost all the news pieces, this violent crime was only the source of a "story", without any concern to inform about the problematic of homicide and suicide, as well as about the resources that the victims of domestic violence can access to. The spectacular nature of the act, the sensationalism, the (abusive) use of the victims' image, their identity and some irrelevant aspects of their private life are exploited, giving the focus of the news to the "private conflict", and the information does not fulfil the objective of denouncing, alerting and promoting the prevention and combat of this violation of human rights.

The law criminally protects these victims from public intrusion, which is, above all, the violation of an ethical duty, by stating that "the media, whenever discloses situations concerning the commission of crimes involving children or young people or other especially vulnerable people [as in the case of domestic violence victims], cannot identify or transmit elements, sounds or images that allow their identification, under penalty of



their agents incurring the crime of disobedience" (article 27 of the Statute of the Victim in Criminal Proceedings).

The information about domestic violence and homicides committed in familiar and intimate relationships, while respecting the personal rights of the victims, namely the right to image and to privacy, shall serve to unmask this reality, combat social and cultural tolerance, mobilise society to eradicate the violence, and inform the victims about the resources they can access.

We emphasise the importance of applying the good practice already defined in our country, namely by the Regulatory Authority for the Media (ERC)³ and the Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality, in partnership with media organisations, the ERC and the Union of Portuguese Journalists⁴.

³ Cf. Representation of Domestic Violence in Prime-Time Television News (2018), ERC.

⁴ Cf. Good practices standards for media in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (2019).



Domestic Homicide Review

03.

Conclusions



CHAPTER

03.

Conclusions

From the established facts and their analysis, it is possible to conclude:

- This homicide followed by suicide occurred in a context of separation of two people who, having been married, continued to live together for more than 8 years after their divorce.
- The gathered information indicates that the relationship between **A** and **B** was conflictual, showing signs of persistent tension, discomfort and psychological suffering, in which the risk of physical violence was always present. There is no record of any intervention taking place or having been sought to help them overcome this situation.
- **B** went to **A**'s workplace, killed her, and then committed suicide. Whenever there is information about the risk of violence, especially the existence of a death threat, employers should take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of those who work for them and are present at the workplace, often in a particularly vulnerable situation. Not only because the aggressor knows the place and the victim's schedule, but also, in some cases, as a consequence of the nature of the activity the victim carries out there.
- The reference to **B**'s suicidal ideation had already been made when he disappeared a few years earlier, but there is no knowledge of any referral of this situation, and the unit that provided him healthcare did not mention any follow-up or mental health referral.
- The detection of a person's intention to commit suicide related to a conflict situation in an intimate relationship requires mental health intervention, for his/her benefit, in view to preventing the act and treating its causes, but also from the perspective that it can be an effective way to prevent homicide, particularly femicide.
- This case was reported by the media on the same day it occurred and being the tone almost exclusively one of lack of concern about the problem of homicide



and suicide or about the resources the victims of domestic violence can access. It was centred in the exploitation of the spectacular nature of the act, the sensationalism, the abusive use of the victims' image, their identity and some irrelevant aspects of their private lives.

3rd February 2021

Representative of the Ministry of Health

Dr.^a Odete Mendes (Permanent Member)

Representative of the Ministry of Justice

Dr.^a Maria Cristina Mendonça (Permanent Member)

Representative of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security

Dr.^a Aida Marques (Permanent Member)

Representative of the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Dr. António Castanho (Permanent Member)

Representative of the Public Administration body responsible for the area of citizenship and gender equality

Dr.^a Marta Silva (Permanent Member)

Representative of the Public Security Police (PSP)

Commissioner Mariana Cristina Duro Morgado (Non-Permanent Member)

Approval of the Case Report No. 7/2018-VP

(Article no.6, d), e) and f) of the Ministerial Order no. 280/2016, of 26th October)

1. I attest to the concurrence with the contents of the foregoing report of all members of the EARHVD who subscribe to the review of this case.
2. The management of this dossier was from the beginning the responsibility of Dr. Vasco Prazeres, who served as the representative of the Ministry of Health in the EARHVD until 30th September 2020, having, to ensure the continuity of the process that on this date was already in its final stage, with the scheduled review meeting, participated in the preparation, discussion and approval of the report.



3. The objective of the review of homicides in a domestic violence context is to contribute to improving the performance of the entities that participate in the different aspects and levels of intervention in the phenomenon of domestic violence, including the implementation of new preventive methodologies.
4. In this particular case, was analysed a situation of homicide followed by suicide, focusing mainly in two issues that had not been addressed in previous reports: the suicidal ideation of the perpetrator of the homicide and the importance of suicide prevention also from the perspective of femicide prevention; and the media's treatment of the facts -, upon which relevant lines of analysis were developed that, given the limited factuality, have not yet allowed the formulation of recommendations.
5. The review procedure defined in the norms that regulate the activity of the EARHVD was respected.
6. The conclusions are based on the facts. The report is objective, reasoned and clearly written.

For all the above reasons, **I approve the Report.**

Communicate and publish it.

8th February 2021

Rui do Carmo
Coordinator of EARHVD