



Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability

Observatoire canadien du fémicide pour la justice et la responsabilisation

# #CallItFemicide

Understanding sex/gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada, 2020


 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada


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- Ontario Native Women's Association
- Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women
- Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women Newfoundland and Labrador
- Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan
- Silent Witness New Brunswick
- Silent Witness Nova Scotia
- Status of Women Council of the Northwest Territories



**It is our work together that will make a difference and ensure these women and girls are not forgotten, and that fewer women and girls need to be remembered in the future.**



## Foreword

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On July 28, 2020, Diana E. H. Russell, a world-renowned feminist activist, scholar and author died. We lost a powerful voice in our local, national, and global efforts to address male violence against women and girls.

Professor Russell's legacy will live on, however, in the work many of us do to prevent male violence against women and girls and, specifically, in our global efforts to prevent femicide.

Professor Russell devoted her life to fight crimes against women, was a grassroots organizer, and wrote many books and articles on marital rape, femicide, incest, misogynist murders of women, and pornography. However, her most significant theoretical contribution to the field of women's studies may have been with a single word – *femicide*. As stated in her obituary:

“In 1976, Russell redefined 'femicide' as “the killing of females by males because they are female.” Russell's intention was to politicize the term. She wanted to bring attention to the misogyny driving lethal crimes against women, which she said gender-neutral terms like murder failed to do. In order to deal with these extreme crimes against women, Diana insisted, it was necessary to recognize that, like race-based hate crimes, “femicides are [also] lethal hate crimes.”

Feminist movements in many countries have since adopted the use of Russell's politicized 'femicide' and have successfully used it socially, politically, and legally to address lethal violence against women in their respective countries.

In 1994, during the last year of my Bachelors' degree, I read the co-edited anthology, *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, by Jill Radford and Diana Russell. For me, this was the most influential book of my undergraduate degree and likely beyond because it served to focus the next two-plus decades of my research, advocacy and activism, culminating in the establishment of the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice & Accountability in 2017.

In this Foreword, I want to acknowledge the contributions made by Diana E.H. Russell during her lifetime and her legacy which can be seen in every page of this report and in the work of the Observatory. While there remains much work to be done, if not for her early and ongoing efforts to draw attention to femicide, we would not be discussing femicide as a hate crime motivated by misogyny that exists at all levels of society, locally and globally.

Change takes time. Diana E.H. Russell began the journey. It is now up to us to pick up where she left off in this journey and continue to take it forward.

Thank you, Diana.

In solidarity,  
Myrna Dawson  
Director, Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice & Accountability



# Dedication

During 2020, the CFOJA documented that 160 women and girls were killed by violence. This report is dedicated to their memory, to the memory of all those women and girls who died due to violence perpetrated against them, and to the family and friends left behind both to mourn and to celebrate their lives.

Every year, beginning on November 25 - the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women - and continuing throughout the 16 Days of Activism, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability remembers each woman and girl who was killed by violence in Canada each year using #RememberMe. The image below represents all women and girls remembered in 2020.

While not all deaths will fall within the definitional parameters of femicide, they all represent a significant loss to society and must be remembered.

We have included a single flame when no photo was available, a silhouette when the woman or girl's name was not released, or the 'You Are Not Forgotten' image for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls when their names were not released and/or no photo was available.





## Executive Summary

The *Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability* (CFOJA) is the sole Canadian initiative responding to the United Nations call to establish femicide watches/observatories to more comprehensively and accurately document sex/gender-related killings of women and girls, referred to as ‘femicide’ or ‘feminicide’ (ACUNS, 2017).

Launched on Dec. 6, 2017, the CFOJA mandate is to establish a visible and national focus on femicide in Canada by:

1. documenting femicides as they occur in Canada; and,
2. monitoring state, legal and social responses to these killings.

This is the CFOJA’s third annual *#CallItFemicide* report, focusing on women and girls killed by violence in Canada from January 1 to December 31, 2020.

In **Section I**, we provide some national context for our work and discuss why it is important to name, recognize and document femicide in Canada and globally. We also briefly discuss the impact on our work of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is occurring alongside the much longer-standing and ongoing pandemic of male violence against women and girls. We conclude this section by describing the structure of the report.

Drawing from media reports, **Section II** provides some basic trends for all women and girls killed by violence in Canada in 2020 before turning to a more in-depth focus on women and girls killed in incidents that involved male accused only in 2020. Below, we provide some highlights.

- In 2020, a total of 160 women and girls were killed by violence in Canada. When accused identified (N=143), the deaths of 128 women and girls involved a male accused (90%).
- The highest rates of women and girls killed by male accused were in the Northwest Territories (13.68), Nunavut (5.21) and Nova Scotia (3.00).
- A greater proportion of women and girls was killed in non-urban regions of the country (54%) compared to urban centres (46%), despite the greater representation of urban dwellers in Canada.
- Women aged 55-64 years comprised the largest proportion of victims (19%), followed closely by those aged 25-34 (17%) and those aged 35-44 (16%). When

compared to their representation in the population, women aged 25 to 64 were overrepresented as victims. The largest proportion of male accused were aged 25-34 (25%).

- While information on race/ethnicity was not available in many cases, 30 of the 128 women and girls killed by male accused were Indigenous (23%), meaning that more than one in five female victims killed by male accused was an Indigenous woman or girl.
- Information continues to emerge for victim-accused relationship. The relationship shared between primary victims and accused was reported in the media for two-thirds of the cases (64%). Of these, one-half involved male accused who were current or former partners (50%) and just over one-quarter (26%) involved male accused who were family members of the primary victim.

Information on other victim, accused and incident characteristics are provided in the body of the report as well as more focused information on three subtypes of femicide – intimate partner femicide, familial femicide, and non-intimate femicide.

In **Section III**, we compare the killing of women and girls to homicides of men and boys to underscore why a sex/gender-specific term – femicide – is used to capture the distinct contexts in which women and girls are killed. Both female and male victims are killed primarily by males; however, significant differences were identified as highlighted below:

- Female victims were older than male victims, by an average of four years; differences varied across age groups, however.
- Those accused of killing females were older, on average, than those accused of killing males.
- Female victims were more likely to be killed by a single accused than male victims.
- Collateral homicide victims – sometimes referred to as secondary victims – were more common in the killings of women and girls compared to the killings of men and boys.
- Females were more often killed in private locations whereas males were more commonly killed in public locations.



- Female victims were more often killed in non-urban areas (e.g. rural regions or small towns) than male victims.
- Women and girls were more likely to be beaten, strangled, or suffocated. Males were more likely to be killed by firearms, although this pattern is more commonly found in urban homicides. When examining non-urban homicides, an equal proportion of female and male victims was killed by firearms.
- Females were more likely to be killed by an intimate male partner or family member. Males were more likely to be killed by male friends or acquaintances.
- Excessive force – often referred to as ‘overkill’ – was more common in the killings of females, compared to males.
- Individuals accused of killing women and girls were more likely to attempt or die by suicide compared to those accused of killing men and boys.
- Older women;
- Collateral victims;
- Urban and non-urban femicide;
- Firearms-related femicide, particularly in non-urban communities;
- Suicide and mental health;
- Police use of deadly force;
- Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; and,
- Non-intimate femicide.

Building on the above section, **Section VI** discusses data gaps and priorities which need to be addressed if any meaningful progress is to be made in the prevention of femicide and other forms of male violence against women and girls. Overall, a key message is that we need to ‘make visible the invisible victims’ who continue to be largely ignored.

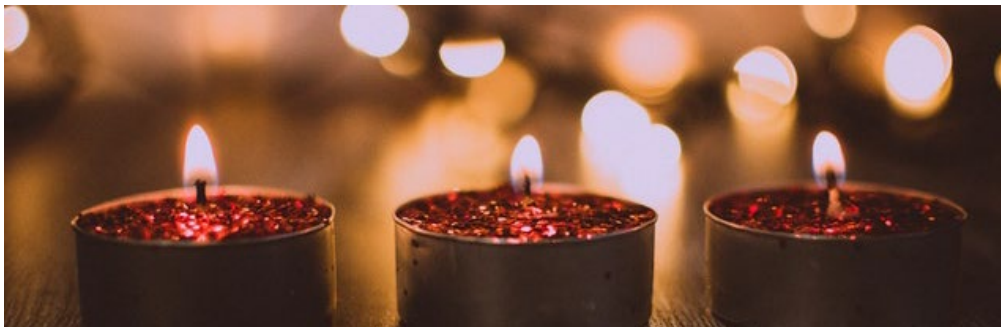
Finally, **Section VII** remembers all women and girls killed by violence in Canada in 2020 whose deaths are the most recent evidence of our inability to effectively respond to violence in our society.

Throughout the report, we include quotes from family members and friends impacted by the deaths of their loved ones as one way of showing their lost potential and the ongoing impacts on those they leave behind. Their deaths remind us also of the lives of over 10,000 women and girls who have been killed, primarily by men, since official record keeping began in 1961. Their deaths are the tip of the iceberg representing male violence against women and girls more broadly in our country, a pandemic that many have recognized for some time, but has only really come to light for broader society during the past year as we struggle with the second pandemic – COVID-19.

Continuing to provide evidence of the need for a sex/gender-specific term to capture the killing of women and girls, **Section IV** describes some additional sex/gender-related motives and indicators that have been identified globally, using illustrative case examples from cases that occurred in Canada in 2020. We do so to increase education and awareness about the circumstances leading up to and surrounding these deaths and to underscore the need for better data to reliably document the presence of these factors in the killings of women and girls.

**Section V** briefly describes current and emerging research priorities for informing the prevention of femicide and male violence against women and girls more broadly. We focus on priorities related to:

- Intimacy, including coercive-controlling behaviours;





## SECTION I: Introduction

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Just over three decades separate two of Canada's worst mass killings that resulted in the deaths of 14 and 13 women respectively.

- On Dec. 6, 1989, a lone, white male, armed with a gun, entered École Polytechnique at the Université of Montréal and carried out his mission – to kill women *because* they were women and, in his view, feminists for whom he expressed his hatred. He left 14 women dead and another 14 women and men injured before killing himself. It took 30 years before the 'Montreal Massacre' was finally recognized for what it was – an anti-feminist attack and a mass femicide.
- Fast forward to April 18-19, 2020, another lone, white male, also armed with guns, terrorized residents of Portapique, Nova Scotia, and surrounding communities, leaving 13 women and nine men dead in his wake. The killer, wearing a police uniform and driving a replica police car, was subsequently killed by police.

But guns are not the only arsenal used by misogynists.

- On April 23, 2018, a man who self-identified as an Incel (Involuntary Celibate) killed eight women and two men and injured 16 others in what is referred to as the 'Toronto Van Attack.' Another killing motivated by the hatred of women.

However, it is not always immediately clear that misogyny was part of the motivation for violence.

- Later in 2018, an 18-year-old woman and a 10-year-old girl were killed and another 13 injured in the Danforth (Toronto) shootings – an attempted mass homicide – or femicide? This event at first appeared far removed from misogynistic motivations; however, police later found evidence of the perpetrator's preoccupation with killing fantasies and the misogynistic Incel group.

These events capture only mass killings – multiple deaths in a single event or series of events in a short period of time. Understandably, these events get much publicity and outrage. However, this outrage does not seem to be matched when men kill multiple family members, with the primary target being their female partner. These are also often mass killings motivated by misogyny.

Nor does this outrage seem to be matched when men kill individual women and girls as they are so consistently and unwaveringly doing throughout our country and have been for the past four decades at least. These acts are also often motivated by misogyny.

Despite the passage of time, then, the role of misogyny – and white male entitlement – continues to play a role in women's deaths, up to and including the Nova Scotia mass killings and beyond. Yet, still today, we continue to witness resistance to acknowledging the role of misogyny in violence against women and girls, particularly if men and boys are also killed alongside female victims. This, in turn, prevents our ability to address the role of misogyny in facilitating and maintaining the persistently stable rates of violence against women and girls in Canada and globally which also impacts men and boys as well as broader communities and society.

Part of the reason for this resistance to recognize misogyny is because it is not just an individual characteristic. It is also a characteristic of our patriarchal social structures and systems such as the police, courts, corrections, our governments, our education systems, our health care systems, and our media. It is part of the fabric of the everyday life of women and girls. The almost invisible (to some) role of



misogyny inherent in these structures has minimized and/or normalized the killing of women and girls in our society as well as the various forms of non-lethal violence they experience in significantly greater numbers.

It is this misogyny at all levels of our society that the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability wishes to expose and highlight.



First and foremost, we do so by using the term ‘femicide’ to underscore that women and girls are often killed *because* they are women and girls – because of their sex or gender, because of a hatred towards women and girls. This is not a new term. This term has existed for more than four decades and is recognized globally. Femicide is a universal phenomenon. In some countries, it is recognized in legislation, as a criminal offence, or an aggravating factor at sentencing – in short, it is named and recognized. Marches, protests, and other social movements are occurring with greater frequency and intensity in many countries wishing to expose the ‘how and why’ women are being killed as well as the need to use the term ‘femicide’ (or ‘feminicide’ in some world regions) to name and address the problem (see *The Growing Global Fem[in]icide Movement* in Dawson et al. 2019).

In contrast, the recognition of femicide as a social problem has been slow to come to Canada, despite its lengthy history in our country.

In Canada and other countries, it has also been starkly underscored that misogyny works closely together with racism, discrimination, prejudice, bigotry – whatever the preferred term – to differentially impact women and girls. This is not only individual racism and discrimination, but systemic racism and discrimination which is inherent in our social structures alongside misogyny. In part, this means that even less attention is paid to the violent deaths – femicide – of marginalized women and girls who face greater risks of being violently victimized or killed. This includes, but is not limited to, Indigenous and other racialized women and girls, women and girls living with disabilities, elderly women, women and girls living in rural and remote regions of our country, LGBTQ+ and others who experience overlapping layers of oppression. So, while femicide is a universal phenomenon, it disproportionately impacts some groups of women and girls more than others.

No clearer example of this can be found than the ongoing disproportionate risks faced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada which, despite data gaps, has been well documented for decades. This ongoing situation has most recently been documented by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls but was previously highlighted by the Native Women’s Association of Canada, and countless others. It is likely that other racialized women and girls are disproportionately impacted, but there is currently no reliable data being collected to systematically examine their risk.

These overlapping and intersecting identities and oppressions also often lead to impunity for crimes perpetrated against women and girls. This impunity sets in motion a vicious cycle in which the police and the courts symbolically discount many victims, sending a message to society that their deaths do not matter. And, so, their deaths continue. Therefore, while we use the term ‘femicide’ in our work, we recognize the utility of ‘feminicide’ which underscores state complicity in the ongoing phenomenon, particularly for Indigenous and other racialized women and girls.

The CFOJA was launched in 2017 to bring a visible and national focus to femicide – the killings of women and girls *because* they are women and girls. A key goal is to demonstrate what this means by underscoring the role played by internationally recognized sex/gender-related motives and indicators. In doing so, we focus on all women and girls killed by violence and work to differentiate those deaths that most clearly fall within the definitional parameters of femicide.



During the past five years (2016-2020), the CFOJA has documented the deaths of over 761 women and girls in our country, killed mostly by men who were close to them.<sup>1</sup> This means that, on average, 152 women and girls are killed each year – one woman or girl every 2.5 days. And men are the majority of those accused and, sometimes, convicted for these killings.

We do not yet know whether all these women and girls were targeted *because* they were women or girls, or the role played by misogyny more generally. It is often difficult to know at first if a woman or girl was killed *because* of their sex or gender. In many cases, we may never know depending on the information that becomes available. However, as part of our education and awareness efforts, we continue to monitor the killings of women and girls to differentiate, where possible, those killings that did involve sex- or gender-related motives and/or indicators. This focus is vital because official narratives about the killings of women and girls – whether one female, multiple females, or both female and male victims – may often obscure that at least some of these killings are femicides or occur as a result of femicide in the case of many collateral victims killed, who are often children.

These debates occurred most recently in response to the Nova Scotia mass killings in which both women and men were killed which means, for some, that misogyny did not play a role or that none of these deaths could be femicides. That is why the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has been calling on all countries to establish femicide observatories since 2015; in part, to increase education and awareness, often through these types of discussions, and to collect data that can better inform effective femicide prevention.

And at no time is such a focus more crucial than in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic underscored for many the ‘other pandemic’ which has existed for much longer and will continue long after – the pandemic of male violence against women and girls. It is unlikely that we will ever discover a vaccine to eradicate male violence against women and girls. However, during the past year, as individuals and communities struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased recognition about its impact on the lives of women and girls, many of whom were already living with violence, but whose situations are now exacerbated and highlighted by lockdowns and restrictions which are becoming a regular part of our lives.

On the positive side, COVID-19 resulted in increased attention by governments and members of the public, which led to emergency funding to address increasing levels of violence against women and girls during, and because of, the pandemic. This helped to support the extraordinary and herculean efforts by frontline workers, anti-violence against women organizations, advocates and activists responding to these increases while also being subject to limitations and restrictions on their everyday work to prevent violence. During this period, as increases in domestic violence have been documented, a common question has been whether the killings of women and girls has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. This question is difficult, if not impossible, to answer in Canada for several reasons and, arguably, is not the question we should be asking as a country.

### **Why is it a difficult question to answer?**

There will always be random fluctuations in rates of violence and homicide from year to year so, if numbers are higher in 2020, we cannot know for sure if this is due to COVID-19 or to random fluctuations. Longer-term trends are needed before the impact of COVID-19 can be accurately examined. On the other hand, if the numbers have not increased, that does not necessarily mean that more violence and death did not occur. One reason for this is that the number of women and girls killed by violence in 2020 is based on available information and may increase following the publication of this report. For example, in 2018, we reported 148 women and girls killed by violence, a number that now sits at 164 for that year. This increase is because new deaths were discovered, some investigations are now completed, and deaths that were suspicious have been reclassified as homicides. As such, we do not make claims in this report about the impact of the pandemic on femicide because it is not yet possible to do.

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<sup>1</sup> The CFOJA also collects data retrospectively on women and girls killed by violence in Canada. To date, data collection has been completed for the years 2016 through to 2020, a five-year period.




Table 1.1: Number of women and girls killed during five-year period in Canada, 2016-2020

Year	Total number of victims	No accused identified	Number of male accused	Number of intimate partner femicides
2016	131	11	104	40
2017	160	13	129	51
2018	164	11	136	58
2019	146	15	116	49
2020	160	17	128	36

Table 1.1 demonstrates that numbers across the five years are similar in range for total number of women and girls killed as well as for those cases involving male accused. It also shows that the number of intimate partner femicides – those in which a woman was killed by her male partner – is lower in 2020 than in the previous four years. This is due, in part, because information on the relationships between victims and accused are increasingly being withheld from the public by police and/or not becoming available until cases go to trial (and possibly never in cases of intimate femicide-suicide). As a result, this number will increase in the coming months which is, again, why it is too early to assess the impact of COVID-19 on femicide.

Another reason why we do not make such claims is because many have documented increases in non-fatal violence, and intimate partner and domestic violence specifically. However, given additional emergency government funding, it may be that some deaths were prevented with more adequate resources and support for those working directly with women, children, and families experiencing violence. We cannot capture those numbers – those deaths that were prevented.

What we should be asking, then, is not whether deaths have increased, but rather whether the emergency funding can be turned into much needed, more consistent, and sustained funding in a future non-pandemic environment? This would allow those working with women, children and families experiencing violence to more effectively respond because they have adequate resources to do so.



“A bright light with the biggest of hearts.”

“It was the happiest I’ve ever seen her, being away from him.”

“We’re so thankful that she had that time away from him, to realize what life could be like and to see her that happy. She was the most beautiful person you would ever meet. So full of life.”

## Structure of Report

Our inaugural #CallItFemicide report discussed the evolution of the term ‘femicide’ internationally and in the Canadian context (Dawson et al. 2019). Despite being introduced by the late Diana Russell in 1975, the term remains a relatively new concept with limited visibility and recognition, although this is changing. There is also an increasing recognition of the role of misogyny in these deaths and in all forms of violence against women and girls from sexual harassment to femicide. The history of the term femicide, discussed in our inaugural report, can be found in Appendix A.

Following this introductory **Section I**, we provide basic patterns in the killing of all women and girls by violence in Canada in 2020 in **Section II**. This includes temporal and geographic distributions, gender of accused, victim-accused relationship, and method of killing.



Appendix B provides detail on the methodology and data sources. Next, given that incidents involving women and girls killed by men most closely align with common understandings of femicide, we focus in more detail on these femicides in the remainder of Section II. We begin by describing victim, accused, and incident characteristics as well as case outcomes where available. Then, focusing on three femicide subtypes, we examine select characteristics for intimate partner femicide, familial femicide and non-intimate femicide (i.e., those that occur between friends, acquaintances, strangers, and other non-intimate relationships).

One way to explain the importance, and meaning, of the term ‘femicide’ is to identify how the killing of women and girls differs from the killing of men and boys. Therefore, focusing on the years 2016 and 2017, **Section III** compares male-victim homicide with female-victim homicide to begin to identify those differences. However, while all femicides are homicides in Canada, not all homicides will be femicides even if a male accused is involved. In other words, for a case to be classified as a femicide, at least one sex/gender-related motive or indicator (SGRMI) needs to be identified.

**Section IV** builds on previous reports by continuing to increase education and awareness about SGRMIs, illustrating further what is meant by ‘women/girls killed because they were women/girls.’ To do so, we describe various SGRMIs evident in the 2020 cases. Our research is ongoing in these efforts to identify the presence or absence of SGRMIs across all cases; so, it may not always be possible to make such determinations and it will often depend on when and what information becomes available. For example, we have only now begun to revisit 2018 cases because perpetrators have been processed through the criminal justice system and, thus, court documents with additional information may now be available (*see also 2018 and 2019 reports for more information on SGRMIs*).

Similar to previous reports, **Sections V and VI** identify current and emerging research priorities and data gaps and priorities, some of which remain unchanged from previous reports and are similar to those identified by research internationally. Among the many priorities, we focus on those that most closely align with the analyses and findings of the 2020 report.

Finally, **Section VII** remembers all women and girls killed by violence in Canada in 2020. On page six, we continue to dedicate this report to these women and girls as well as the thousands who have been killed before them in our country. In this section, we list the names of the 2020 victims that we were able to gather with the hope that readers will, by now, have a better understanding of their lives and their deaths. For some victims listed, it was not possible to remember them by name because they have not been identified and/or their names have not been released to the media. We also note that, at the point of publication of this report, several 2020 cases, like previous years, could not be included because investigations are ongoing, and a determination of homicide not yet made. In addition to remembering women and girls killed in this section, we include quotes throughout the report from family members and friends impacted by their deaths as one way of showing their lost potential and the ongoing impacts on those they leave behind. All quotes have been taken from media reports, and names and identifiers have been removed. Their words reflect all the potential that has been lost to Canadian society due to these deaths and the ongoing impacts for those left behind. It is our hope that these words will also celebrate the lives of those women and girls.



“[She] was very kind, very selfless, very thoughtful of others. I really have never met a more gentle soul in my entire life.”

“Beautiful smile – she always had a beautiful smile on her face, welcoming and warm.”



## SECTION II: Patterns In Women & Girls Killed By Violence In Canada

Below, we begin by documenting basic information about the killing of all 160 women and girls whose deaths have been ‘officially’ classified as a homicide. The deaths of an additional 16 women and girls have been classified as suspicious. Following this, we focus on a subset of these killings, which most closely align with the phenomenon of femicide – the killing of women and girls by men. We examine general patterns as well as patterns specific across three subtypes – intimate partner femicide, familial femicide, and non-intimate femicide. [All percentages reported below may not equal 100% due to rounding.]

### All Women and Girls Killed by Violence in Canada

**Temporal distributions:** As shown in Table 2.1, the number of women and girls killed each month ranged from a low of eight in August to a high of 26 in April, with an average of 13 women or girls killed each month.<sup>2</sup> July was the second deadliest month with 23 women and girls killed by violence.

**Geographic distributions:** Table 2.2 shows the number and percentage of women and girls killed in 2020 in each province and territory. The table also shows the percentage of total female population living in each province and territory as well as the calculated rate of killing to adjust for population size. The largest group of women and girls was killed in Ontario (31%), which is attributable, in part, to Ontario being Canada’s most populous province.

When adjusting for Ontario’s female representation of the Canadian population (39%), the rate at which women and girls were killed in Ontario (0.66) in 2020 is below the national average for female victims of homicide (0.84 per 100,000 women and girls).<sup>3</sup> The rate at which women and girls were killed by violence in Quebec and British Columbia was below the national rate. In all other jurisdictions, however, the rate of killing exceeded the national average for female victims of homicide. The highest rates were observed in the Northwest Territories (13.68), followed by Nunavut (5.21), and Nova Scotia (3.00).

**Sex of the accused:** Excluding 17 cases in which no accused was identified in public documents, there was a total of 127 cases involving 141 accused of which 86 percent were male (N=121) and 14 percent were female (N=20). Focusing on the primary accused,<sup>4</sup> 88 percent were male (N=112) and 12 percent were female (N=15).

Table 2.1: Monthly distribution of women and girls killed by violence in Canada, 2020 (N=160)

Month	Women/girls killed	
	N	%
January	10	6
February	10	6
March	17	11
April	26	16
May	12	8
June	11	7
July	23	14
August	8	5
September	10	6
October	12	8
November	9	6
December	12	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>2</sup> In April, 13 of the 22 victims of the Nova Scotia mass killing were female victims.

<sup>3</sup> National homicide rate based on the population of female residents in Canada in 2020 (160 victims/19,119,977 females x 100,000 = 0.84).

<sup>4</sup> The primary accused designation is used when there were multiple perpetrators, but one was more dominant in the killing and/or shared the closest relationship to the victim.




Table 2.2: Geographic distribution of women and girls killed by violence in Canada, 2020 (N=160)\*

Province/Territory	Number	% of female victims	% of female population	Rate of killing per 100,000
Ontario	49	31	39	0.66
Quebec	23	14	22	0.54
British Columbia	20	13	14	0.77
Alberta	20	13	11	0.91
Nova Scotia	15	9	2.6	3.00
Saskatchewan	13	8	3.1	2.22
Manitoba	11	7	3.6	1.59
New Brunswick	4	3	2.1	1.01
Northwest Territories	3	2	<1	13.68
Nunavut	1	1	<1	5.21
Prince Edward Island	1	1	<1	1.23

\*There were no documented killings in Yukon or Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the 15 incidents in which the primary accused was female, the relationship was not specified for one third of cases (N=5; 33%). Where this information was known, the victims were children of the accused (N=5), friends/acquaintances (N=2), a sibling, a stranger, and a patient who was at a hospital where they died from a brain injury following restraint techniques used by hospital guards.

Below, we focus the remaining analyses on women and girls killed by male accused which are those cases that most closely align with the phenomenon of femicide.



“A person that you could always count on, she was always there to make you smile and laugh.”

"She was always there, no matter what. Even if she didn't know you, she was there all the time, for anybody, for anything."

## Women and Girls Killed by Violence Involving Male Accused

Similar to the previous section, we begin by describing patterns for the total sample of incidents that involved the killing of a woman or girl in which a male accused has been identified. Next, focusing on select characteristics, we examine the most common type of femicide intimate partner femicide – followed by familial femicide before reviewing femicides that occur outside the context of intimacy, including primarily friends, acquaintances, or strangers.

As noted above, in 2020, there were 144 homicide cases involving the killing of 160 women or girls. No accused was identified from public documents in 17 of these cases, and 15 cases involved female accused. With these exclusions, 128 women and girls were killed by violence involving male accused in Canada. These 128 female victims stemmed from 112 cases, involving 121 male accused.

*Temporal distributions:* In 2020, as shown in Table 2.3, the number of women and girls killed by violence involving male accused ranged from four victims in August to 23 victims in April, with an average of 11 women or girls killed each month. The deadliest months were April with 23 women and girls killed, which included 13 females killed in the mass homicide in Nova Scotia, followed by July during which



18 women and girls were killed. Table 2.4 shows that the largest group of female victims was killed on Saturday, with one in four killings occurring that day. Over 40 percent of the women and girls were killed on the weekend (18% on Sunday and 25% on Saturday).

Table 2.3: Monthly distribution of women and girls killed by violence involving male accused in Canada, 2020 (N=128)

Month	Women/girls killed by male accused	
	N	%
January	9	7
February	9	7
March	12	9
April	23	18
May	10	8
June	8	6
July	18	14
August	4	3
September	7	6
October	11	9
November	7	6
December	10	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2.4: Distribution of women and girls killed by violence involving male accused in Canada by day, 2020 (N=124)\*

Day of week	Women/girls killed by male accused	
	N	%
Sunday	22	18
Monday	14	11
Tuesday	10	8
Wednesday	17	14
Thursday	15	12
Friday	15	12
Saturday	31	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100</b>

\*The exact homicide date was unknown for four victims.

**Geographic distributions:** Similar to findings reported in the previous section, Table 2.5 shows that Ontario saw the largest proportion of women and girls killed by violence involving a male accused (30%), followed by Quebec (16%). After adjusting for population size, however, the rate at which women and girls were killed by a male accused in these jurisdictions was, again, among the lowest in the country, along with British Columbia, with rates below the national rate of female killings involving male accused (0.67 per 100,000 females). Aligned with findings reported above, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Nova Scotia had the highest rate of females killed by violence.





Table 2.5: Geographic distribution for women and girls killed by violence involving male accused in Canada, 2020 (N=128)

Province/Territory	Number killed	% total victims	% female population	Rate of killing per 100,000
Ontario	38	30	39	0.51
Quebec	21	16	22	0.49
Nova Scotia	15	12	2.6	3.00
Alberta	15	12	11	0.68
British Columbia	12	9	14	0.46
Manitoba	11	9	3.6	1.59
Saskatchewan	9	7	3.1	1.54
Northwest Territories	3	2	<1	13.68
New Brunswick	3	2	2.1	0.76
Nunavut	1	1	<1	5.21

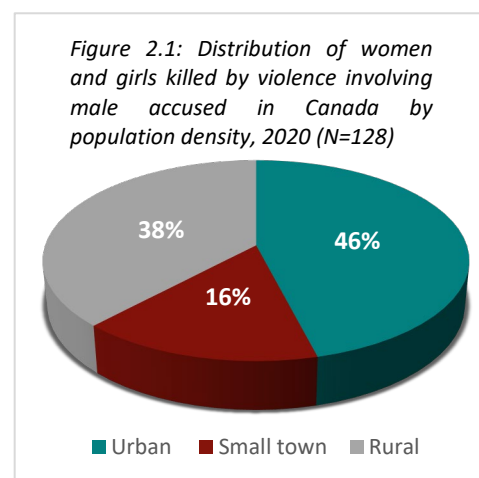
\*There were no documented killings of women or girls by male accused in Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland and Labrador

“[She] was always smiling. She had such a warm heart. She had a beautiful, beautiful soul.”

**Urban/rural distributions:** Similar to previous years, results show that women and girls continue to be more at risk of femicide in non-urban regions of Canada compared to urban areas. Specifically, Figure 2.1 shows that 38 percent of women and girls were killed by a male accused in rural, remote, or northern regions; however, only about 16 percent of the population in Canada lives in non-urban areas of the country (Beattie et al., 2018). When including small towns in the non-urban category, results demonstrated that, overall, more than half of all women and girls were killed in non-urban areas (54%), compared to 46 percent in urban areas, the latter of which comprises over 80 percent of the Canadian population.

The Nova Scotia mass killing occurred in a rural area of the province, which can explain, in part, the greater proportion of victims killed in rural areas compared to earlier reports. However, even with this case excluded, over half (51%) of all women and girls killed by a male accused were killed in an urban location and about 48 percent were killed in non-urban areas. Therefore, results still show that women and girls continue to be at a greater risk of femicide in rural regions of the country compared to urban areas.

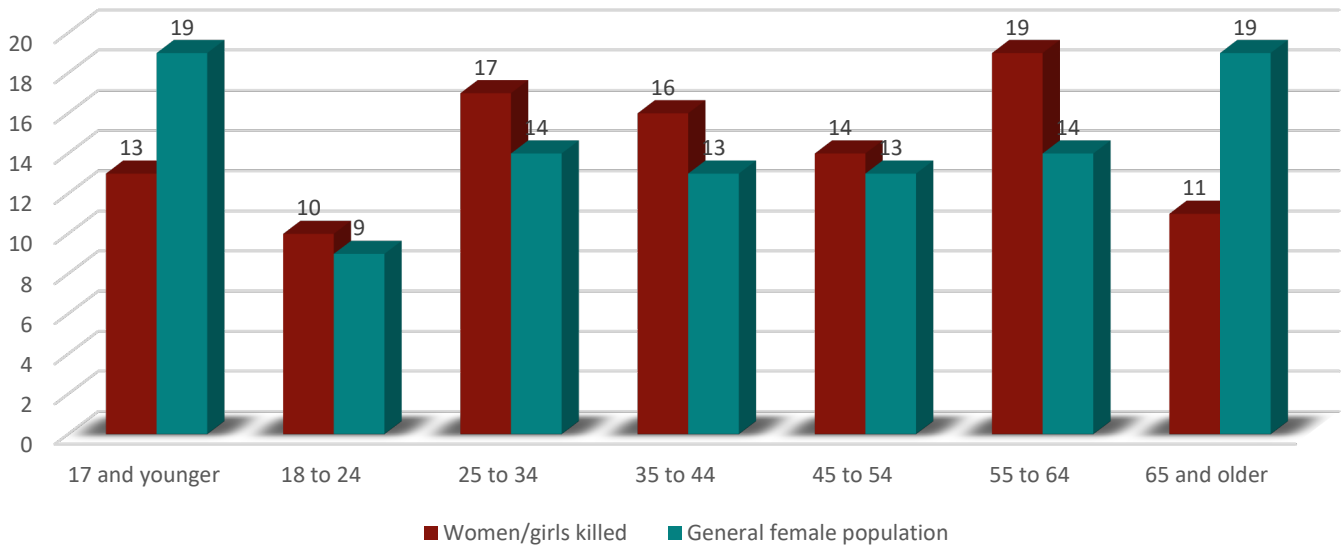
**Age of victims:** In 2020, women and girls killed by a male accused ranged in age from less than one year to 95 years old, with an average age of 41 years. Chart 2.1 shows that the largest proportion of women was between the ages of 55 to 64 years (19%), followed by those aged 25 to 34 (17%), 35 to 44 (16%), and almost equal proportions of victims were 45 to 54 (14%), and 17 and younger (13%). The smallest proportion of victims was between the ages of 18 to 24 (10%), and 65 years and older (11%). These trends differ from what was observed in 2019, where the largest group of women killed were 65 years and older and the smallest group was aged 17 years or younger.





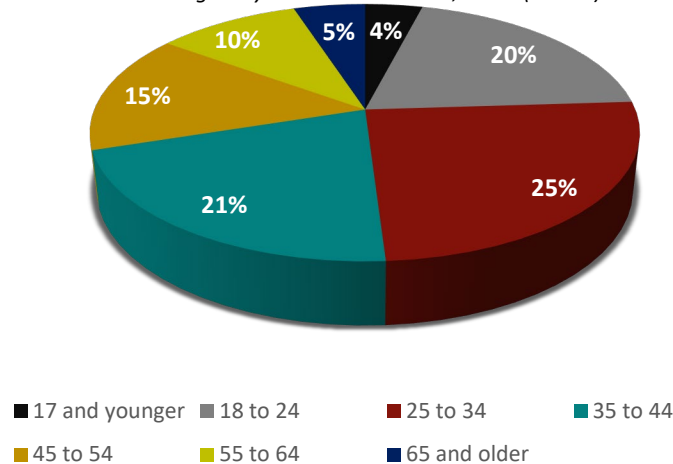
When comparing these distributions to the age distributions in the general population (also shown in Chart 2.1), various age groups are overrepresented, underscoring their greater vulnerability to femicide than women and girls in other age groups. For example, women aged 25 to 64 were at greater risk of femicide, relative to their proportion in the general population. In contrast to the 2019 CFOJA, report which found victims aged 65 years and older were over-represented as victims of femicide, results for 2020 show this is not true of the current year. Because homicide numbers can fluctuate randomly, our research will continue to monitor these trends over time.

Chart 2.1: Age distribution of women and girls killed by violence involving male accused in Canada, compared with general female population, 2020 (N=124)\*



\*Age was unknown for four women.

Figure 2.2: Age distribution of males accused of killing women and girls by violence in Canada, 2020 (N=117)\*



\*Age was unknown for four accused



**Age of the accused:** Focusing on age of the accused when known (N=117), male accused ranged in age from 14 to 94 years old, with an average age of 38. As shown in Figure 2.2, the largest proportion of male accused was aged 25 to 34 (25%), followed by those aged 35 to 44 (21%), 18 to 24 (20%), 45 to 54 (15%), and 55 to 64 (10%). The smallest accused age groups were those aged 17 and younger (4%) and 65 and older (5%).

**Race/ethnicity of victims and their accused:** Information is missing on the victims' race/ethnicity in almost two-thirds of the cases (65%; N=83), so few conclusions can be drawn. Similarly, in cases where a male accused was identified (N=121), information on race/ethnicity was missing for 90 percent of the accused. Therefore, the reliability of this information is not adequate to reach conclusions because distributions may change significantly when additional information becomes available and given that media may be more likely to report race/ethnicity in some incidents over others (e.g., Indigenous versus White victims). Keeping the above in mind, of the 128 women and girls killed by a male accused, 30 were Indigenous (23%). This means that, at minimum, one in five female victims killed by male accused was an Indigenous woman or girl.

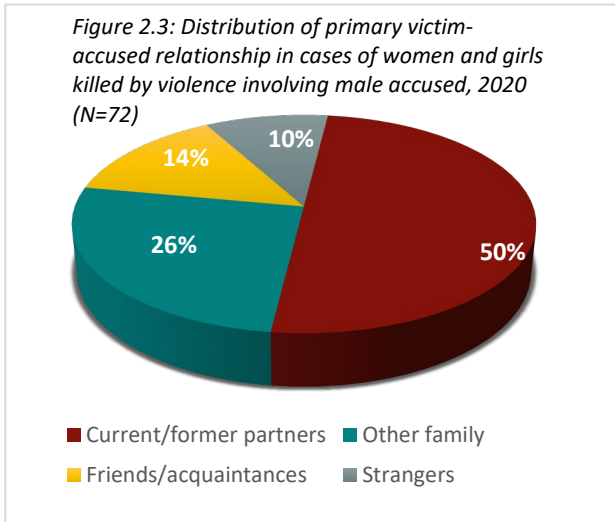
**Victim-accused relationship:** In 2020, results showed that the relationship between the primary victim and accused was known in almost two-thirds of the cases (64%; N=72). Focusing on cases where this information was known, Figure 2.3 shows that half of all women killed were in a current or former intimate partner relationship with the accused (50%; N=36). The next largest group of women and girls was killed by other family members (26%; N=19), followed by friends or acquaintances (14%; N=10) and strangers (10%; N=7).<sup>5</sup> In total then, when the relationship shared between the primary victim and accused was known, over 75 percent were killed by an intimate partner or family member.

An additional 16 women and girls were killed by a male accused alongside the primary victim. Acquaintances of the accused (N=8) made up the largest proportion of victims, followed by strangers (N=4), daughters (N=2), and other family members (N=2).

**Children left behind:** Whether the victims had children was known for 67 percent of women killed by a male accused (N=82).<sup>6</sup> Of those, 83 percent (N=68) had a least one child. Focusing on victims with children, 19 percent had one child (N=13), 32 percent had two (N=22), 21 percent had three (N=14), and 15 percent had four or more children (N=10). An additional 13 percent had at least one child (N=9), but the exact number of children was not specified. This means that at least 157 children were left without their mother following her killing.

**Method of killing:** Information on the method of killing was known for 41 percent of victims (N=53). When this information was known, most victims were shot to death (42%; N=22), followed by stabbings (32%; N=17), beatings (13%; N=7), and other methods (13%; N=7).<sup>7</sup> The method of killing remains unknown from public document in the majority of cases. It appears this information is increasingly being held until the trial or guilty plea. It is unclear why this is occurring and contrasts with the greater detail that used to be provided in earlier years. We will return to this issue in the *Data Gaps and Priorities* section.

**Location:** Almost three-quarters of the women and girls killed by a male accused died in a private location (73%; N=94), including their own homes, the home of the accused, or the home they shared with the accused. Other private locations included hotel rooms or an




<sup>5</sup> The stranger category includes two police-perpetrated shootings.  
<sup>6</sup> This percentage excludes girls killed who were 11 years and younger (N=6).  
<sup>7</sup> Other methods include arson, strangulation, being pushed, being hit by a car, and child abuse.



unspecified residence. Thirteen percent were killed in a public location such as parks, residential streets, businesses, or inside vehicles (N=17). The remaining 13 percent of women and girls were killed and/or discovered in unknown locations (N=17).

**Suicide:** In 2020, results showed that 14 percent (N=17) of the accused died by suicide following the killing. In almost two-thirds of these cases (65%; N=11), their victims were current or former female partners. In the remaining cases, the accused killed his child (12%; N=2), another family member (12%; N=2) or shared an unspecified relationship with his victim (12%; N=2).

**Case status:** In cases that did not end with the suicide of the accused (N=104), second degree murder was the most frequent charge laid (52%; N=54), followed by first degree murder (34%; N=35), and manslaughter (10%; N=10). One accused was charged with criminal negligence causing death (1%) and one accused was charged as an accessory after the fact (1%). Whether charges will be laid was unknown for two accused (2%), and one accused was killed by police (1%).<sup>8</sup>



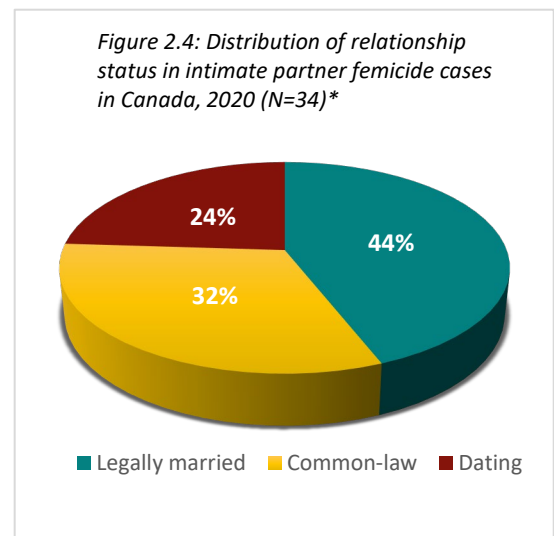
“We will all miss [her] spunk, smile, the phone calls that would last forever, her unwavering friendship, and more than anything, her big infectious laugh.”

## Intimate Partner Femicide

Of the 128 women and girls who were killed by male accused in 2020, the type of relationship they shared was known for 88 victims of which 36 (41%) involved a current or former intimate partner relationship.

**Intimate partner relationship:** Variations across a wide range of intimate partner relationships can be captured by focusing on relationship status and relationship state (Dawson & Gartner, 1998). Relationship status refers to whether the victim and accused were/had been legally married, common-law partners, or dating. Relationship state refers to whether the victim and accused were currently in a relationship or separated at the time of the killing. Relationship status and relationship state were not known for two of the cases involving intimate partners.

Focusing on relationship status, among 34 intimate partner femicides for which status was known, Figure 2.4 shows that 44 percent involved victims and accused who were currently or previously legally married (N=15), 32 percent were/had been common-law partners (N=11), with the remaining 24 percent being a current or estranged dating partner of the accused (N=8). When relationship state was known (N=34), 79 percent of all women killed were in a current relationship with their accused (N=27) and 21 percent were estranged from their accused (N=7).



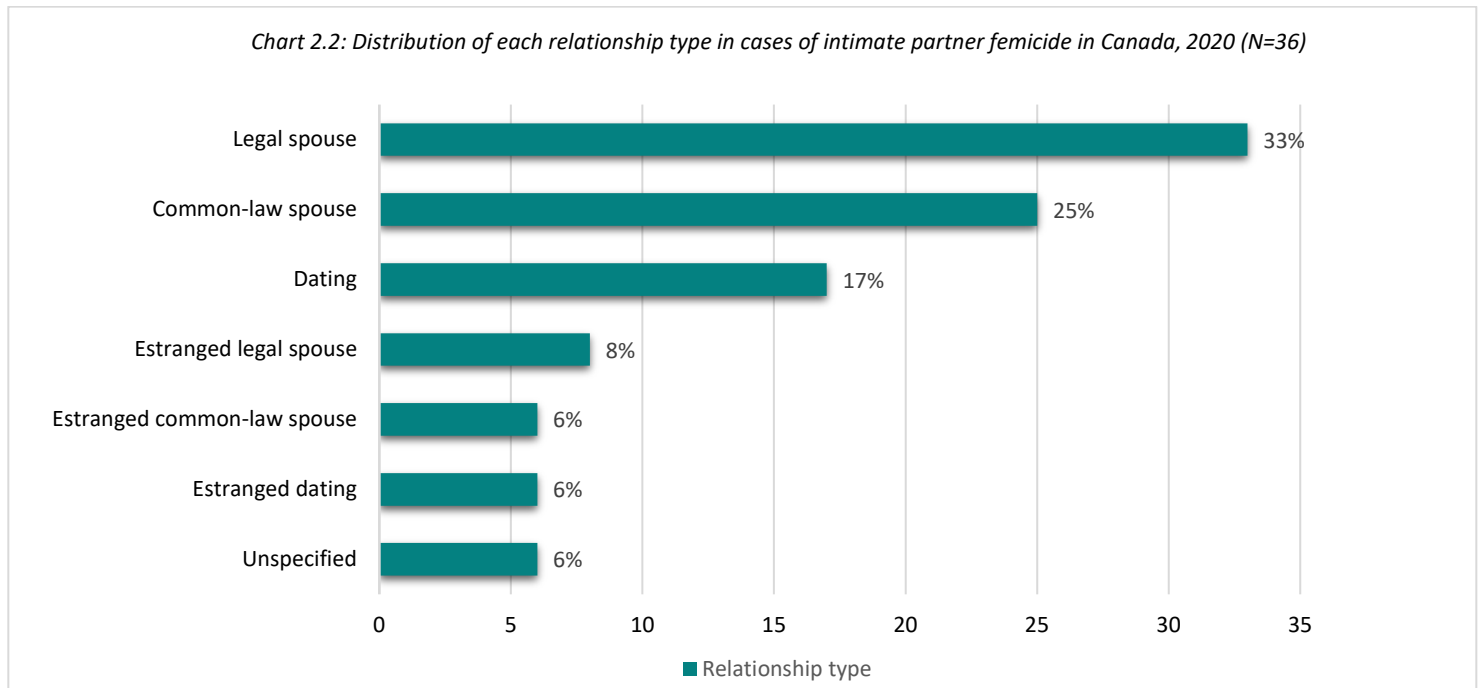
*\*The relationship status was unknown for two intimate partner femicides*

Chart 2.2 shows that intimate partner femicide comprises a broad spectrum of relationships. The largest proportion of victims was killed by a current legal spouse (33%; N=12), followed by a current common-law spouse (25%; N=9), a current dating partner (17%; N=6), and an estranged legal spouse (8%; N=3). Equal proportions of women were killed by an estranged common-law partner (6%; N=2) or an

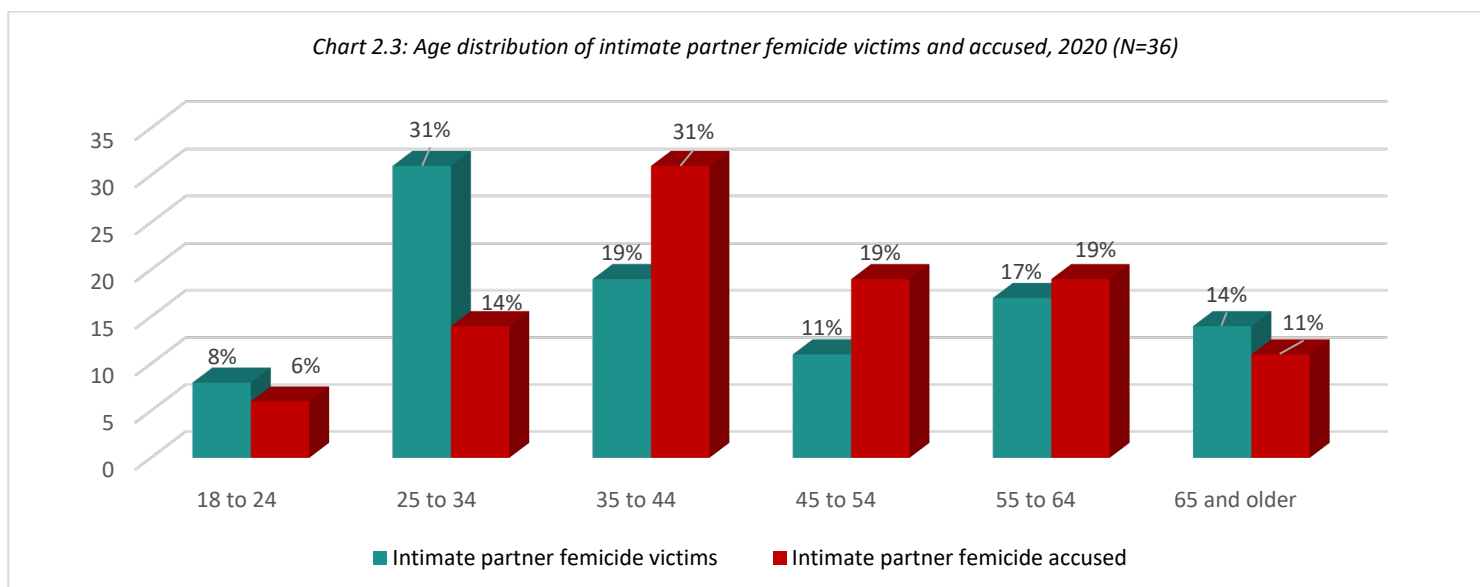
<sup>8</sup> This accused was the perpetrator in the Nova Scotia mass homicide.



estranged dating partner (6%; N=2). Two victims shared an intimate relationship with the accused, but the exact status and state were not disclosed in public documents (6%).



**Age of victims and their accused:** The victims ranged in age from 20 years to 89 years old, with an average age of 45 years. The largest proportion of victims was aged 25 to 34 (N=11; 31%) and the smallest proportion was aged 18 to 24 (N=3; 8%). Like the victims, the accused ranged in age from 21 to 94 years, with an average age of 47 years. The largest proportion of accused was between the ages of 35 to 44 (N=11; 31%) and the smallest proportion was aged 18 to 24 (6%; N=2). Chart 2.3 provides a breakdown of the percentage of victims and accused who belonged to each age category.



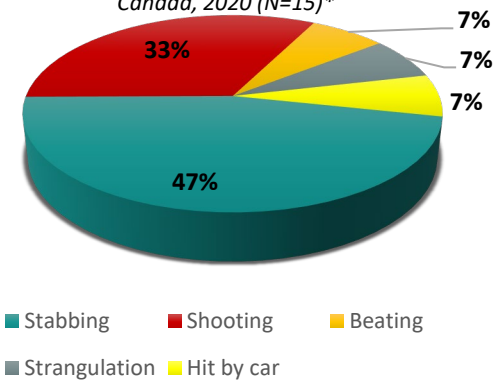


**Method of killing:** The method of killing in cases of intimate femicide was not reported in the media for 58 percent of victims (N=21). Focusing only on victims where information was known (N=15), and differing from patterns for all women and girls killed by a male accused, Figure 2.5 shows that stabbing was the most common cause of death for intimate femicide victims (47%; N=7), followed by shooting (33%; N=5). Equal proportions of women and girls were strangled, beaten, or hit by a car (7% each; N=1). Although limited based on the information reported, these findings align with those found during a six-year period in which stabbing was the most common method used to kill an intimate partner, including both male and female victims, followed by shooting, strangulation, and beating (Dawson et al., 2018).

**Location:** The exact location of the killing was unknown for 11 percent of women killed (N=4). However, the majority of intimate partner femicides occurred in a private location (83%; N=30). Of those cases, most occurred in a residence she shared with the accused (63%), followed by her own home (20%), the home of the accused (13%), or an unspecified residence (4%). These figures underscore the home as a “dangerous domain” for women (Johnson, 1996; UNODC, 2018).

**Accused suicide and case status:** Compared to the total sample of male accused in which 14 percent died by suicide, a higher proportion of the accused died by suicide following intimate partner femicide (31%; N=11). This is consistent with earlier intimate femicide research in Ontario that found 28 percent of the perpetrators died by suicide following the femicide (Dawson, 2005: 80). Examining those cases in which the accused did not die by suicide, the largest proportion of accused was charged with murder, either second degree (72%; N=18) or first degree (16%; N=4). Two accused were charged with manslaughter (8%) and one with criminal negligence causing death (4%).

Figure 2.5: Distribution of method of killing in cases of intimate partner femicide in Canada, 2020 (N=15)\*



\*The method of killing was not reported for 21 intimate partner femicide victims.



“When people were in trouble, she would go out of her way to help them. If somebody down the street had no food, she would go get food for them, that’s the way she was.”

“She took care of people. She saw the good in people. She was so selfless and at the end of the day, she just wanted to make sure people were okay.”

## Familial Femicide

This section focuses on those women and girls killed by male accused who were family members, not including intimate partners – most often referred to as familial femicide. There were 19 cases involving 23 victims and 19 accused in 2020 that can be categorized as familial femicide. To be consistent with the above sections, percentages will be reported, but we caution that they are based on small numbers – also provided – and should be interpreted accordingly.

**Age of victims and their accused:** The victims ranged in age from less than one year to 95 years old, with an average age of 41. The age of one victim was not specified. While numbers are small for most age groups, a clear pattern emerged whereby familial femicides were more likely to involve girls aged 17 and younger (32%; N=7) or older women (e.g., those aged 55 years and older, 45%; N=10).



The accused ranged in age from 17 to 66 years old, with an average age of 35 years. This age demographic is aligned with the total sample of male accused, who had an average age of 37 years, but the demographic is younger, on average, compared to accused who committed intimate partner femicide whose ages averaged 47 years.



**Victim-accused relationship:** Familial femicides cover a wide range of relationship types. Of the 23 victims, 43 percent were mothers of the male accused (N=10), and equal proportions were daughters, sisters, or other kin of the male accused (17%; N=4 each). The exact familial relationship was unspecified for one victim and accused, but she was likely the accused's stepdaughter considering he lived with the victim's mother (4%).

**Method of killing:** Information on the method of killing was known in 43 percent of familial femicides (N=10). Based on the information available and aligned with findings from the total sample of killings that involve male accused, shooting was the most common method of killing used (40%; N=4). Equal proportions of familial femicide victims died by stabbing (20%; N=2), or beatings (20%, N=2). One victim was pushed from a height (10%) and another died from child abuse (10%).

**Location:** Most of the familial femicides occurred in private locations (74%; N=17), three were killed in an outdoor public location (13%), and the exact homicide location was unknown for three victims (13%). Among the women and girls who were killed in private spaces, the vast majority died in the home she shared with the accused (53%; N=9), her own home (35%; N=6), or an unspecified residence (12%; N=2).

**Accused suicide and case status:** Four of the accused in cases of familial femicide died by suicide following the killing (21%). For the remaining accused, nine were charged with second degree murder (60%), five were charged with first degree murder (33%), and the remaining accused was charged with manslaughter (7%).

## Non-Intimate Femicide

This section focuses on cases of non-intimate femicide in which the woman or girl did not share an intimate or familial relationship with the male accused, capturing primarily acquaintance and stranger femicide. There were 17 such cases in 2020 involving 29 victims and 18 accused.<sup>9</sup> This section is driven largely by the 13 women and girls who lost their lives in the Nova Scotia mass killing. To be consistent with above sections, percentages will be reported, but again we caution that they are based on small numbers – also provided – and should be interpreted accordingly.

**Age of the victims and their accused:** The victims ranged in age from seven to 75 years old, with an average age of 45 years. The victims ages were dispersed evenly across most of the age groups, but the highest proportion of victims was between the ages of 45 to 54 (21%; N=6), and the smallest group was between the ages of 18 to 24 (3%; N=1).<sup>10</sup> The youngest accused in the non-intimate femicide cases was 24 years old and the oldest was 69, with an average age of 39 years.

**Victim-accused relationship:** Non-intimate femicide comprises a range of relationships; specifically, most victims were acquainted with their accused (59%; N=17), followed closely by strangers (38%; N=11), and one victim was friends with her accused (3%). Within the acquaintance category, relationships ranged from neighbours to housemates, legal or illegal business relationships, or staff-client

<sup>9</sup> Excluded are 40 victims whose relationship with the male accused was not specified.

<sup>10</sup> The age of one victim was unknown.



relationships. Within the stranger category, victims and accused had no prior interaction, including one police officer who was killed on the job and two women who were killed by the police. Of the 13 women and girls who were killed in the Nova Scotia mass murder, 10 victims either knew the accused or were neighbours with him, and another three were strangers, including the officer who was killed on duty.

**Method of killing:** The method of killing was known in just over half of all non-intimate femicides (52%; N=15). Based on the information that is known, most were shot to death (47%; N=7), four of whom were shot in the Nova Scotia mass killing.<sup>11</sup> Equal proportions of women and girls were stabbed (20%; N=3) or beaten to death (20%; N=3). The remaining two victims where this information was known were either hit by a car (7%) or pushed, not from a height (7%).

**Location:** Similar to the previous sections, most non-intimate femicides occurred in a private location (66%; N=19), such as the victim’s home (N=11), an unspecified residence (N=3), the home they shared with the accused (N=2), or a hotel room (N=1). Differing from the previous sections, a larger proportion of women and girls was killed in a public location (28%; N=8), such as in a park, on a residential street, or in a car. The exact location of homicide was unknown for two victims (7%).

**Accused suicide and case status:** None of the accused in non-intimate femicide cases died by suicide; however, the man responsible for the Nova Scotia mass homicide was killed by police before charges were laid. It has not yet been made public whether charges will be laid in the two police shootings. Focusing on the remaining 15 accused, and aligned with patterns reported in previous sections, most were charged with murder, either second degree (53%; N=8), or first degree (40%; N=6). One accused was charged with manslaughter (7%).



She was a gentle and loving mother, friend, daughter and sister to everyone who knew her. She was everything that was good about people.”

“Just being friends with [her], when you met her, right away you were friends. She’d give everyone the time of day to talk.”

“[She] is so loved and was such an outgoing, positive, kind, loving and genuinely good young woman.”

<sup>11</sup> The method of killing used for the remaining nine victims of the Nova Scotia mass killings was not specified. The accused set many victims’ homes on fire, but it is unclear whether they were shot prior to the fire or died in the fire.





## SECTION III:

### Comparing the Killing of Female & Male Victims in Canada, 2016-2017

It is commonly assumed that the term ‘femicide’ is used to indicate that women and girls are killed more frequently than men and boys; however, that is not the case. Globally and over time, research has shown that males are killed at much greater rates than females, although both female and male victims are killed primarily by males. In fact, the term ‘femicide’ captures how and why women and girls are killed which is distinct from how and why men and boys are killed. These distinctions underscore the necessity of prevention initiatives that consider and account for the specific sex/gendered circumstances and contexts leading up to, or surrounding, the deaths of women and girls.

In the CFOJA inaugural report (Dawson et al. 2018), we indicated that, as part of a larger project entitled the *Canadian Geography of Justice Initiative*,<sup>12</sup> information was also being collected on male-victim homicides and that these data would be used for comparative purposes in a later CFOJA report. Data collection on male victim homicides for a two-year period are analyzed and reported here. We compare the killings of females and males for this two-year period to demonstrate why a specific focus on ‘femicide’ is necessary.

#### Number of Female and Male Victims

In the 2016-2017 period, we documented 1,115 homicide cases in Canada involving 1,198 victims and 1,216 accused.<sup>13</sup> Of the 1,198 victims, about one quarter of those killed (24%) were female victims, one victim was transgender,<sup>14</sup> and the remaining victims were male (see Table 3.1 for a breakdown by sex of the victim for each year).

The proportion of female and male victims is similar to the data reported by Statistics Canada for the same years, although there are variations in actual numbers reported. In 2016, Statistics Canada reported 616 homicides, of which 25 percent of the victims were female (Statistics Canada, 2021). In 2017, there were 667 recorded homicides of which 26 percent of the victims were female (Statistics Canada, 2021). The two-year total for Statistics Canada, then, is 1,283 victims,<sup>15</sup> meaning that CFOJA numbers undercount victims by a total of 70 victims in 2016 and 15 victims in 2017. Given that our research relies on data collected from media reports, one explanation for these discrepancies is that some deaths do not get reported in the media. This explanation is supported by U.S. research (Parkin & Gruenewald 2015) but has yet to be systematically examined in Canada.

Table 3.1: Annual breakdown of victims killed by violence in Canada, 2016-2017 (N=1,192)\*

Year	Female victims		Male victims		Total killed	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
2016	130	24	415	76	545	100
2017	158	24	489	76	647	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>1192</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Six of the 1,198 victims are not included in this table. This includes five victims for whom sex was unknown, four of whom were newborns; one victim referred to only as a ‘person’; and one transgender victim. Five of these victims were killed in 2017 and the sixth was killed in 2016.

<sup>12</sup> For further information, see: <https://violenceresearch.ca/who/location-location-location-canadian-geography-justice-initiative>.

<sup>13</sup> The number of homicide victims and accused reported for 2016 and 2017 are current as of December 15, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Little data exists for transgender homicide victims in Canada. Therefore, the CFOJA seeks to document the number of victims of transphobic homicides, including both transwomen (males at birth who identify as women) and transmen (females at birth who identify as men) to assess risk over time and to better understand the contexts in which these killings occur. The current analysis focuses on female victims (see Textbox 1 on page 27 for summary of the transphobic homicides for 2016-2020).

<sup>15</sup> It does not appear that Statistics Canada records or discusses transgender victims of homicide in their homicide reports. For the first time, however, Statistics Canada has released estimates of the proportion of transgender Canadians (0.24% of the population; Statistics Canada 2020).



In Table 3.2, examining the geographic distributions, the largest proportion of victims, regardless of sex, was killed in Ontario, Canada’s most populous province. The next largest group of victims was killed in Alberta followed by British Columbia. The lowest number of victims was recorded in Atlantic Canada<sup>16</sup> and the Northwest Territories. In Newfoundland and Labrador, more females than males were killed.

Table 3.2: Geographic distribution of victims killed by violence in Canada, 2016-2017 (N=1,192)\*

Jurisdiction	Females killed			Males killed			Total
	N (%)	% pop.	Rate	N (%)	% pop.	Rate	
Ontario	89 (31)	39	1.25	300 (33)	38	4.32	389 (32)
Alberta	48 (17)	11	2.28	176 (20)	12	8.24	224 (19)
British Columbia	47 (16)	13	1.89	142 (16)	13	5.82	189 (16)
Quebec	35 (12)	23	0.84	104 (12)	23	2.51	139 (12)
Saskatchewan	20 (7)	3	3.50	62 (7)	3	10.70	82 (7)
Manitoba	18 (6)	4	2.70	63 (7)	4	9.45	81 (7)
Nova Scotia	15 (5)	3	3.10	20 (2)	3	4.31	35 (3)
Newfoundland & Labrador	6 (2)	1	2.25	5 (1)	1	1.91	11 (1)
New Brunswick	4 (1)	2	1.03	12 (1)	2	3.16	16 (1)
Nunavut	3 (1)	<1	16.45	6 (1)	<1	31.07	9 (1)
Yukon	2 (1)	<1	10.26	10 (1)	<1	49.56	12 (1)
Northwest Territories	1 (<1)	<1	4.59	4 (<1)	<1	17.32	5 (<1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>288 (100)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1.56</b>	<b>904 (100)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4.98</b>	<b>1,192 (100)</b>

Six of the 1,198 victims are not included in this table because their sex was unknown or identified as transgender. Five victims were killed in Quebec, including the transwoman, and one victim was killed in British Columbia. No killings were reported for Prince Edward Island. Percent of population and rate of killing determined is based on 2017 population data (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501>).

For some jurisdictions, the geographic breakdown of homicide victims depicted in Table 2 is the same as data reported by Statistics Canada, but for other jurisdictions, CFOJA data are different. For example, our figures for Yukon and Northwest Territories align with data reported by Statistics Canada; however, our data documented additional homicide victims in Nunavut (by 2 male victims), Nova Scotia (by 2 male victims), Ontario (by 1 male victim), and Newfoundland and Labrador (by 1 female victim).<sup>17</sup>

Our data undercounted the number of victims reported by Statistics Canada in several jurisdictions as follows: Quebec (by 21 victims: 10 females, 9 males, and 2 victims where sex was unknown), British Columbia (by 20 victims: 5 females and 15 males), Ontario (by 16 female victims), Alberta (by 11 victims: 5 females and 6 males), Saskatchewan (by 12 victims: 3 females and 9 males), Manitoba (by 8 male victims), New Brunswick (by 5 victims: 1 female and 4 males), Prince Edward Island (by 2 male victims), Newfoundland and Labrador (by 1 male victim) and Nova Scotia (by 1 female victim).

## Rates of Female and Male Victims

Table 3.2 also shows the rates of homicide by sex per 100,000 based on the proportions of females and males living in each jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup> This table provides a more accurate representation of risk when adjusting for the size of the population of Canadians, disaggregated by sex, living in each province or territory. The highest rates of killing for both male and female victims were found in the Territories,

<sup>16</sup> Prince Edward Island was the only Atlantic province for which no victims were recorded in 2016-2017.

<sup>17</sup> After each annual Homicide Survey is released, Statistics Canada continues to update their homicide figures as information becomes available so their numbers may be different since date of publication.

<sup>18</sup> The rate of homicide reported will differ from what is reported by Statistics Canada because our rates were calculated using two years of homicide data, whereas Statistics Canada calculates their rates according to annual data. The rate of killing was based on the population data for female and male residents living in each jurisdiction (e.g., in Ontario there were 89 female victims/7,133,566 x 100,000 = 1.25).



consistent with findings from Statistics Canada. A high rate of killing of males was also observed in Saskatchewan. Ontario had one of the lowest homicide rates per 100,000 population, with only Quebec and New Brunswick having comparatively lower homicide rates.

When comparing rates by sex of the victim, as expected, the rate of male homicide victims exceeds that of female homicide victims, except in Newfoundland and Labrador. Male-to-female ratios are relatively consistent across the country, ranging from 3:1 to 3.5:1, with higher ratios in the Yukon (4.8:1) and the Northwest Territories (3.8:1) and lower ratios in Nunavut (1.89:1) and Nova Scotia (1.4:1). Put another way, the male-female gender gap in homicide is highest in the Yukon and Northwest Territories and lowest in Nunavut and Nova Scotia.

## Textbox 1: Transphobic Homicide

*Only recently have discussions about gender-based violence begun to focus on the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming populations (Wirtz et al., 2020). However, according to some data, trans people are reportedly frequently victims of violence, from both strangers and their partners (Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide [TVT], 2020; Wirtz et al., 2020; Prunas et al., 2015; Stotzer, 2009). Although data are limited, some sources indicate that transwomen are at particular risk of violence (TVT, 2020). It may also be the case that some victims are misgendered by police and, therefore, accurate numbers remain unknown.*

*Perpetrators of violence against trans populations often target gender expression and gender nonconformity, meaning this violence is inherently gendered (Wirtz et al., 2020; James et al., 2016). Transphobia, the animosity expressed towards people who do not conform to gendered expectations, can materialize in serious hate crimes, such as assaults and murders (Miller et al., 2020). Some studies show that violence against trans people may be attributed to hate motives with 75% of trans victims of violence indicating the crime was driven by transphobia or homophobia (Prunas et al., 2015; Xavier, 2000).*

*There were two killings of transgender women reported in Canada between 2016 and 2020. Both cases shared similarities, providing examples of violence against trans and gender-diverse people. In the first case, residents of an apartment building heard screaming and contacted police. Upon arrival, a conscious victim was found who died roughly an hour later due to brutal stab wounds. The victim was a transwoman. The offender was reportedly a male who was visiting her apartment to obtain sexual services when an argument broke out. Violence is reported to be amplified for transwomen that engage in sex work or prostitution with some studies demonstrating that they frequently experience violence and abuse from clients and/or men posing as clients (Miller et al., 2020; Deering et al., 2014; TVT, 2020; Stotzer, 2009; Valera et al., 2000; Cohan et al., 2006). For example, globally, 62% of trans murder victims in 2020 worked in the sex industry (TVT, 2020). In this 2017 case, the offender fled to another province but was apprehended and formally charged with second-degree murder. He pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of manslaughter and is awaiting sentencing.*

*In the second case, a transwoman was found with serious injuries after police were called to a residence. The victim succumbed to her injuries after being taken to the hospital. At the scene, a male accused was charged with second-degree murder; however, based on public documents, it is unclear what events led to the attack. It was reported that the victim was an advocate for transgender rights.*

*The most obvious shared characteristics of the two killings is that the perpetrator was male. Furthermore, both cases involved the use of a weapon by the accused to stab or bludgeon the victims. In the first case, the offender admitted to stabbing the victim with a katana, a long Japanese sword, following the altercation they had in her apartment. The second victim died of blunt-force trauma to the head caused by an unknown weapon. These cases reflect the findings that transgender victims of crime are less often killed by firearms than by other weapons (Prunas et al., 2015; Gruenewald, 2012).*

*Overkill, defined as the excessive use of violence, multiple methods of violence, and mutilation during or after the killing, are also often observed. There was some evidence of overkill in the first case, with the victim suffering from a deep wound to the clavicle, internal bleeding, sores on her fingers, and non-fatal wounds to her neck and navel. Details relating to the nature of the second victim's injuries are limited. Similar to female victims, research suggests that overkill is common in violence against gender minorities and the LGBTQ community and is deeply rooted in transphobia and/or homophobia (Prunas et al., 2015; Stotzer, 2009). Violence may serve as a warning that deviations in gender conformity are not tolerated (Prunas et al., 2015). Research on transphobic homicide is limited and, as such, there have been calls for research on victimization of this population (Wirtz et al., 2020).*

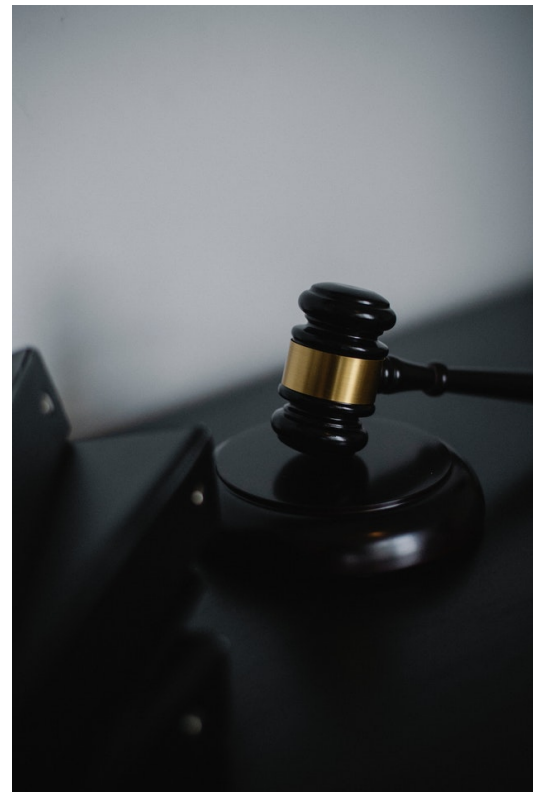


## Cases with no identified accused

Of the 1,192 victims killed in 2016-2017 for whom sex was known, there were 253 cases involving the killings of 265 victims for which no accused was identified (22%), at least as reported in the media. Examining these cases by sex of the victim, results showed that no accused was identified in the killings of 24 female victims (9%) and 241 male victims (91%).

The following sections describe the victim, accused, and incident characteristics for the entire sample and then compare these characteristics disaggregated by sex (see Tables 3-5). The first column in Tables 3 through 5 list the characteristics being examined with each table organized to focus separately on victim/incident characteristics (Table 3), accused characteristics (Table 4), and the victim-accused relationship (Table 5). The next column of each table provides the total number and percentage for which the characteristic was relevant for all victims/cases and then disaggregated by female victims and male victims to determine differences by sex of the victim.<sup>19</sup>

Any characteristic that differed significantly by the sex of the victim is marked with an asterisk.<sup>20</sup> When information is missing for some characteristics in a high proportion of cases, we report on any significant associations found between victim sex and the identified data gaps to determine whether information is more likely to be missing for female victims compared to male victims.



## Victim and Incident Characteristics by Victim Sex

This section focuses on the 1,110 homicide cases involving 1,192 victims, including unsolved cases or those for which no accused had been identified. In Table 3.3, we report figures for the total sample as well as data disaggregated by sex of the victim to identify any differences across victim and incident characteristics. Specifically, we focus on age and race of the victims, number of victims in each case, method and location of killing, as well as population density where the homicides occurred.

**Age of victims:** Victim ages ranged from less than one year old (i.e. newborns) to 98 years, with an average age of 37 years.<sup>21</sup> The largest proportion of victims was 25-34 years old (N=313; 27%), followed by those aged 18-24 (N=233; 20%), 35-44 (N=197; 17%), and 45-54 years old (N=158; 13%). Victims aged 17 years or younger represented the smallest age group of victims (N=83; 7%), followed closely by those aged 65 and older (N=91; 8%) and those aged 55 to 64 years old (N=97; 8%). Chart 3.1 provides a visual representation of the percentage of victims in each age category, where percentages are provided for all victims and then for each victim sex.

Overall, female victims, with an average age of 40 years, were significantly older than male victims, whose average age was four years younger. However, Chart 3.1 indicates that victim age by sex varies across the life span with the most similarity for females and males in the 35-44 age group and greatest difference in the 18-24 age group.

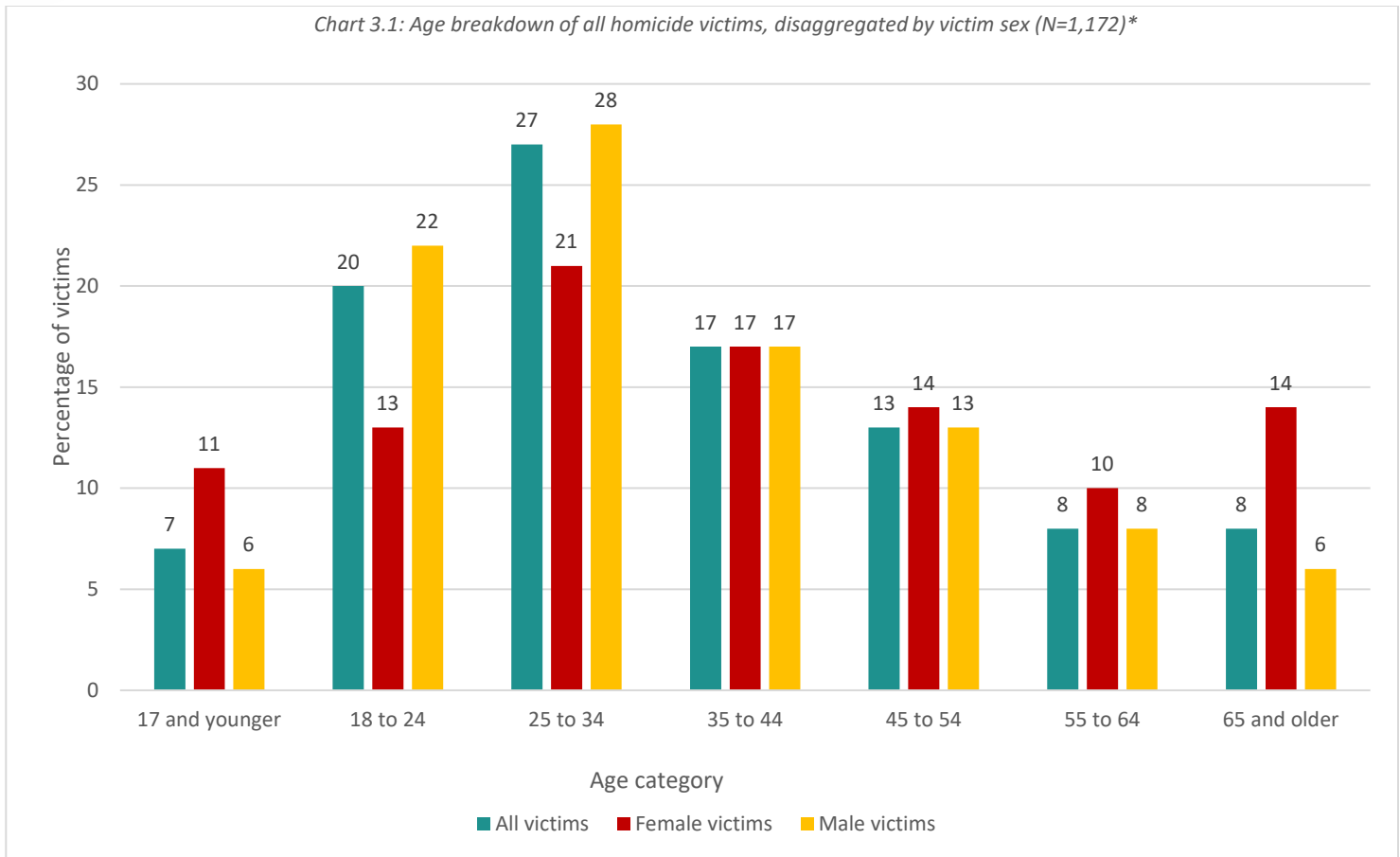
<sup>19</sup> The percentages reported in these tables may not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>20</sup> One asterisk means that we are 95% confident that the difference was not due to chance alone; two asterisks signal that we are 99% confident; and three asterisks that we are 99.9% confident that the difference was not due to chance alone.

<sup>21</sup> The age of 20 victims (2%) was not specified in public documents. The percentages reported focus on victims whose ages were known (N=1,172; 98%).



Chart 3.1: Age breakdown of all homicide victims, disaggregated by victim sex (N=1,172)\*



\*The age of 20 victims was unknown



“I always admired her, how no matter what she was going through she had the ability to carry an extremely contagious smile. She was selfless and loyal. Anyone who has ever spoken with her

**Race of the victims:** Information was missing on race of the victim for almost two-thirds of all female victims (62%) and for three quarters of the male victims (75%). Therefore, few conclusions can be drawn regarding the victims’ race/ethnicity. Of the 343 victims for whom the racial background was known, 40 percent were Indigenous (N=137); 33 percent of whom were female (N=45), and 67 percent were male victims (N=92).<sup>22</sup> This issue will be revisited in the *Data Gaps and Challenges* section of the report.

<sup>22</sup> For three additional male victims, there was some indication that victims were Indigenous, although this information was not confirmed in public documents.



Table 3.3: A gendered comparison of characteristics for all homicide victims and incidents, 2016-2017 (N=1,192)

Characteristics	Total		Female victims		Male victims		$\chi^2$
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
<b>Total sample</b>	1,192	100	288	24	904	76	
<b>Victim age (years)</b>	--	37	--	40**	--	36	
<b>Victim race unknown</b>	852	72	178	62***	674	75	17.421
<b>Two or more victims</b>	149	13	57	20***	92	10	18.460
<b>Number of accused</b>							
<b>One accused</b>	629	73	225	92***	404	66	57.685
<b>Two or more accused</b>	215	25	21	9***	194	32	50.293
<b>Unknown # of accused</b>	13	2	0	0*	13	2	5.315
<b>Method of killing</b>							
<b>Shooting</b>	471	40	68	24***	403	45	40.181
<b>Stabbing</b>	281	24	70	24	211	23	.113
<b>Beating</b>	131	11	44	15**	87	10	7.137
<b>Other</b>	91	8	46	16***	45	5	37.441
<b>Unknown</b>	218	18	60	21	158	18	1.646
<b>Use of excessive force</b>							
<b>No evidence</b>	286	24	80	28	206	23	2.982
<b>Excessive force</b>	224	19	76	26***	148	16	14.362
<b>Unknown</b>	682	57	132	46***	550	61	20.095
<b>Location</b>							
<b>Private location</b>	634	53	221	77***	413	46	84.575
<b>Public location</b>	437	37	49	17***	388	43	63.128
<b>Unknown</b>	121	10	18	6*	103	11	6.336
<b>Population density</b>							
<b>Urban</b>	801	67	169	59***	632	70	12.499
<b>Small town</b>	118	10	43	15**	75	8	10.777
<b>Rural</b>	262	22	76	26*	186	21	4.305

$\chi^2$  significance \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Number of victims:** In the two years examined, a single victim was killed in 94 percent of the cases (N=1,043) and multiple victims were killed in the remaining six percent of the cases (N=67). Of the multiple victim incidents, two victims were killed in five percent of cases (N=57 cases, 114 victims total), and the remaining one percent of cases ranged from three to eight victims being killed (N=10 cases, 35 victims total).<sup>23</sup>

Female victims were significantly more likely to be killed in multiple victim incidents compared to male victims (20% versus 10% respectively).

<sup>23</sup> Five of the eight victims were killed prior to 2016 although the accused was charged and convicted of all eight homicides during a single trial.



**Number of accused:** In almost three quarters of all cases where an accused has been identified, the homicide involved a single accused (73%; N=629) and 25 percent of cases involved multiple accused (N=215). In cases with multiple accused, 14 percent involved two accused (N=116), six percent involved three accused (N=53), and six percent of cases ranged from four to eight accused (N=46). The exact number of accused was unknown in the remaining two percent of the cases (N=13), of which 92 percent were police-perpetrated killings (N=12) in which the exact number of officers involved was unknown.

The number of accused involved in a single homicide case differed significantly by sex of the victim. Cases involving male victims were more likely to involve multiple accused (32%) compared to cases involving female victims (9%). As a result, female victims were more likely to be killed by a single accused (92%) than were male victims (66%). Cases involving male victims were more likely to have an unspecified number of accused involved (2%) whereas this information was known for all cases involving a female victim as the primary target.<sup>24</sup>

**Method of killing:** Among all victims of homicide, shooting was the most common cause of death (N=471; 40%), followed by stabbing (N=281; 24%), beating (N=131; 11%), and other methods (N=91; 8%).<sup>25</sup> However, the method of killing was unknown or not reported in public documents for 18 percent of victims (N=218).

Significant differences emerged when examining the method of killing between female and male victims. Overall, males were more likely to be killed by firearms (45%) compared to females (24%). Females, in comparison, were more likely to be beaten to death (15%) than male victims (10%). Females were also more likely to be killed by other means (16%) than were males (5%). For example, a sizable proportion of females were strangled or smothered (10%) compared to males (2%).

The above findings, however, were largely for urban homicides, which accounted for 67 percent of all victims killed (N=801). A different pattern emerged when the method of killing was examined in rural locations (i.e., areas with a population of less than 1,000 residents) where 22 percent of victims were killed (N=262). Equal proportions of females and males were shot to death in rural areas (36% each). We return to urban/rural distinctions below.

**Use of excessive force:** Whether excessive force was used in the homicide (i.e. 'overkill' i.e. multiple methods or the repeated use of single method) was reported in the media for 43 percent of victims (N=510), significantly more often for female victims (54%) compared to male victims (39%). Based on this information, over one quarter of all women and girls suffered "overkill" (26%) compared to victims who were men and boys (16%).

**Location:** The largest group of victims was killed in a private location (N=634; 53%), including their own residence, the accused's home, or a shared residence. Other private locations included hotel rooms, institutions (e.g., long-term care facilities, prisons), and unspecified residences. Another 37 percent (N=437) were killed in a public location (e.g., businesses, parks, or other outdoor locations), and the exact location of the homicide was unknown for the remaining ten percent of victims (N=121).

Female victims were significantly more likely to be killed in private locations (77%) compared to their male counterparts (46%). Specifically, the largest group of female victims was killed in a residence that they shared with their accused (30%), followed by those killed in their own home (27%), the home of the accused (7%), or an unspecified residence (8%). In contrast, males were significantly more likely to be killed in public locations (43%) than were female victims (17%). For example, 29 percent of male victims were killed outside, either on a residential street or in a park, compared to 10 percent of female victims. The exact location where males were killed was significantly less likely to be specified in media documents than was the case for female victims (11% versus 6% respectively).

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<sup>24</sup> When police-perpetrated killings are excluded, the unspecified number of accused is no longer significantly associated with sex of the victim because most of the police-perpetrated killings involve male victims.

<sup>25</sup> Other methods include strangulation, smothering, arson, vehicular homicides, drownings, axed to death, child abuse, neglect, being pushed from height, and other.



**Urban/rural:** More than two-thirds of all homicide victims, regardless of sex, were killed in an urban area (N=801; 67%). This is expected given that urban areas have greater populations. Another 22 percent were killed in a rural area defined as an area with less than 1,000 residents (N=262). The remaining 10 percent were killed in a small town with a population between 1,000 and 49,999 inhabitants (N=118). The exact location of 11 homicide victims could not be determined. Despite fewer numbers, risk of homicide is greater in non-urban Canada than in urban centres of our county, consistent with findings from Statistics Canada.

Results show that men and boys were most likely to be killed in larger urban centres (>50,000 residents), where 70 percent were killed, compared to 59 percent of women and girls. Females, on the other hand, were at greater risk of homicide in rural areas and small towns, compared to males. Specifically, 41 percent of female victims were killed in rural areas or small towns compared to 29 percent of male victims. Delving deeper into this finding, female victims were more likely to be killed in both rural areas (26%) and small-town locations (15%) compared to male victims (21% and 8% respectively). There is, however, great variation in definitions of rurality used in reporting, a discussion beyond the scope of this report. This issue will be examined in future research.



“You were a wonderful and magnificent young woman. We are privileged to have been able to live such beautiful moments with you.”

## Accused and Relationship Characteristics by Victim Sex

This section focuses on the 857 homicide cases involving 927 victims for which an accused had been identified (N=1,215). In Table 3.4, we report figures for the total sample of accused and then disaggregated by sex of the victim to identify any differences across characteristics. Specifically, we focus on sex, age and race of the accused, as well as whether the accused died by suicide and, if not, whether and what formal charges were laid.

**Sex of accused:** Of the 1,215 accused, where sex was reported, 87 percent were male accused (N=1,018) and 13 percent were female accused (N=153).<sup>26</sup> Focusing on the primary accused only,<sup>27</sup> where this information was known, 91 percent were male (N=745) and nine percent were female (N=71). Of all secondary accused where the sex was reported, 77 percent were male (N=275).



When comparing the sex of the primary accused for male and female victims, males were significantly more likely to be killed by other males. Specifically, among male victims, 93 percent of accused were male whereas, among female victims, 87 percent of all accused were male. The same finding was observed for secondary accused, where male victims were significantly more likely to be killed by a male accused. These findings are consistent with research that has documented that, over time and globally, regardless of the sex of the victim, the majority of killers are male.

<sup>26</sup> The sex was unknown for four percent of all accused (N=44).

<sup>27</sup> The primary accused designation is used in cases where multiple accused were identified in a single case, but one was portrayed as the primary accused and/or who shared the closest relationship to his/her victim. The sex was unknown for five percent of primary accused (N=41) and one percent of secondary accused (N=3).





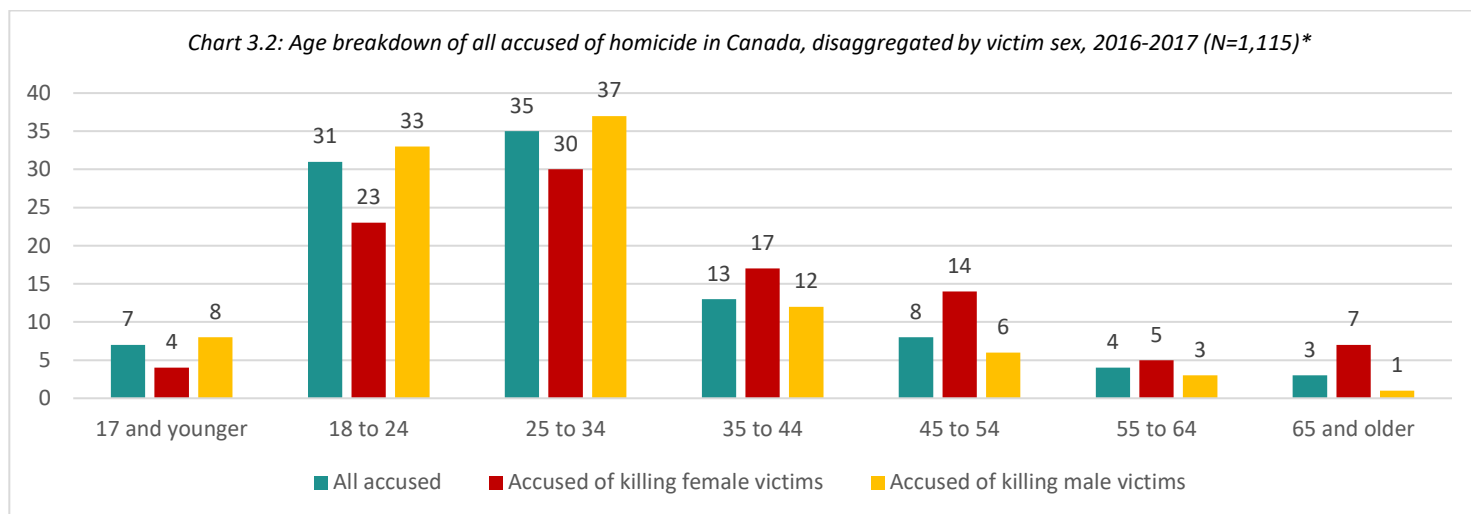
Table 3.4: A gendered comparison of characteristics for all accused of homicide in Canada, 2016-2017 (N=1,215)

Characteristics	Total		Women/girls killed		Men/boys killed		χ <sup>2</sup>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
<b>Total sample</b>	1215	100	284	23	931	77	
<b>Primary male accused</b>	745	91	214	87**	531	93	8.224
<b>Secondary male accused</b>	275	77	25	64*	250	79	4.136
<b>Accused age (years)</b>		31		36***		29	
<b>Accused race unknown</b>	970	80	215	76*	755	81	3.929
<b>Accused suicide</b>							
<b>Accused died by suicide</b>	35	3	26	9***	9	1	52.152
<b>Accused attempted suicide</b>	18	2	16	6***	2	<1	43.784
<b>Unknown</b>	15	1	4	1	11	1	.092
<b>Charge laid</b>							
<b>First degree murder</b>	366	31	82	32	284	31	.091
<b>Second degree murder</b>	471	40	117	45*	354	38	4.065
<b>Manslaughter</b>	159	14	36	14	123	13	.065
<b>Other</b>	94	8	18	7	76	8	.441
<b>Unspecified/no charges laid</b>	90	8	5	2***	85	9	15.169

χ<sup>2</sup> significance \*p<.05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

**Age of accused:** Focusing on accused for which ages were known (N=1,115; 92%), accused ranged in age from 12 years to 85 years old, with an average age of 31 years. The largest proportion of accused were between the ages of 25 to 34 years old (N=392; 35%), followed by those aged 18 to 24 (N=345; 31%), and 35 to 44 (N=149; 13%). Those aged 65 years and older were the smallest group of accused (N=29; 3%).

Chart 3.2: Age breakdown of all accused of homicide in Canada, disaggregated by victim sex, 2016-2017 (N=1,115)\*



\*The age of 100 accused was unknown.



Comparing cases involving female and male victims, results show that accused who killed female victims were significantly older compared to accused who killed male victims. Specifically, the average age of those accused of killing female victims was 36 years while the average age of those accused of killing male victims was 29 years. Chart 3.2 provides a visual representation of the percentage of accused within each age category, first reporting on all accused and then disaggregating by the victim's sex.

**Race of the accused:** Information was missing on the race/ethnicity of the accused in 76 percent of cases involving female victims and significantly more so in cases involving male victims (81%). Due to the large amount of missing information, no comparative analyses were conducted. This limitation will be discussed in the *Data Gaps and Challenges* section of the report.

**Suicide:** Most accused did not die by, or attempt, suicide following the homicide (N=1,144; 94%). Three percent of individuals died by suicide (N=35), two percent attempted suicide (N=18), and this information was not available for the remaining one percent of accused (N=15).<sup>28</sup> Of those who attempted or died by suicide (N=53), the largest group of accused did so by firearms (N=21; 40%), stabbing (N=8; 15%), drug overdose (N=5; 9%), another method, such as drowning, hanging, arson, jumping from height, jumping in front of a moving car (N=7; 13%), or an unknown method (N=12; 23%).

Compared to individuals accused of killing men or boys (1%), those who killed women or girls were significantly more likely to die by suicide following the homicide (9%). Likewise, accused who killed women or girls were significantly more likely to attempt suicide (6%) compared to accused who killed men or boys (<1%).

**Charge laid:** When examining accused who did not commit suicide following the homicide (N=1,180), charges were laid against 92 percent of the accused (N=1,090).<sup>29</sup> Focusing on those accused for whom this information was available (N=1,090), 43 percent of accused were charged with second-degree murder (N=471), 34 percent were charged with first-degree murder (N=366), 15 percent were charged with manslaughter (N=159), and the remaining nine percent of accused faced other charges related to the homicide (N=94).<sup>30</sup>

Those accused of killing females were significantly more likely to be charged with second-degree murder (45%) compared to those accused of killing males (38%). Information on the charge laid against those accused of killing male victims was significantly less likely to be reported in public documents or these accused were less likely to be charged (9%) compared to those accused of killing females (2%). This finding, however, was driven by male victims of police-perpetrated homicide. When such cases were excluded, there was no significant association between victim sex and the lack of charges laid.

**Victim-accused relationship:** In 2016 and 2017, the relationship shared by victims and the accused was specified in media reports for three quarters of all victims (75%; N=698).<sup>31</sup> Focusing on the killings of victims where this information was known, the largest group of victims was friends or acquaintances with their accused (31%; N=217), followed by 'other' relationship types (23%; N=158), family members (18%; N=126), and intimate partners (15%; N=103). The smallest group of victims was strangers to their accused (14%; N=94). These findings, however, were driven largely by the inclusion of male victims. Below, it becomes clear why data disaggregation by sex of victim is crucial to understand patterns and to inform violence prevention.

One of the most fundamental differences between the killings of females and males is demonstrated when examining the victim-accused relationship. As such, we first examine the relationship shared between the primary victim and accused before exploring the relationship shared between secondary, or what is sometimes referred to as 'collateral', victims and their accused.

<sup>28</sup> These individuals were injured, but it was not clear from public documents whether that injury was self-inflicted. Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>29</sup> The reasons for not laying charges vary. Charges were not laid for: police shootings deemed justified, when the accused was killed before charges were laid, cases involving accused who acted in self-defence or were cognitively impaired (e.g., Alzheimer's), or the accused was identified but not yet apprehended and/or charged. Finally, some cases may have resulted in charges being laid, but this information was not made public in media files by the time of this report's release.

<sup>30</sup> The most common charges laid, aside from those listed above, were accessory after the fact, criminal negligence causing death, indignity to human remains, assault related charges, and conspiracy to commit murder.

<sup>31</sup> An accused was identified for the remaining 25 percent of victims (N=229), but the exact relationship they shared with the accused was unspecified. These victims were still included in the analysis to determine whether the relationship type was more likely to be unspecified in cases involving accused who killed male or female victims.



Table 3.5: A gendered comparison of the relationship shared between victims and accused, 2016-2017 (N=927)

	Total		Women/girls killed		Men/boys killed		$\chi^2$
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
<b>Total sample</b>	927	100	246	29	611	71	
<b>Primary victim-accused relationship</b>							
<b>Intimate relationship</b>	101	16	90	42***	11	3	164.372
<b>Current</b>	70	71	61	68	9	100	
<b>Estranged</b>	28	29	28	32*	0	0	3.964
<b>Familial relationship</b>	106	17	57	26***	49	12	22.781
<b>Friends/Acquaintances</b>	198	31	29	13***	169	40	46.794
<b>Stranger</b>	81	13	18	8*	63	15	5.512
<b>Other</b>	154	24	22	10***	132	31	34.362
<b>Secondary victim-accused relationship</b>							
<b>Intimate relationship</b>	2	3	1	6	1	2	.428
<b>Familial relationship</b>	20	35	10	59*	10	24	6.307
<b>Friends/Acquaintances</b>	19	33	5	29	14	34	.122
<b>Stranger</b>	13	22	1	6	12	29	3.779
<b>Other</b>	4	7	0	0	4	10	1.781

$\chi^2$  significance \* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

The relationship shared between the primary victim and accused was not specified in 25 percent of all cases analyzed (N=217). This information was significantly less likely to be specified in public documents reporting on the killing of male victims compared to female victims (31% and 12% respectively). To capture the gendered differences in relationships shared between primary victims and their accused, the figures reported in Table 3.5 exclude those that were unspecified, leaving a total of 640 primary victims.

As shown, females were significantly more likely to be killed by an intimate partner (42%) or a family member (26%) than were males (3% and 12% respectively). Overall, when the victim-accused relationship was known, female victims were killed by an intimate partner or family member in 68 percent of the cases. In comparison, males were significantly more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance (40%), by an individual with whom they shared an ‘other’ type of relationship (31%), or by a stranger (15%).

Focusing only on killings within intimate relationships, female victims were significantly more likely to be estranged from their accused (32%) compared to male victims, who were all in a current relationship with their accused at the time of the homicide.

There were an additional 70 victims killed along with the primary victim. Of these secondary victims, the victim-accused relationship was not specified for 17 percent of the victims (N=12) with no significant difference in reporting by victim sex. Focusing on the 58 victims where the relationship was reported, one significant difference was observed based on sex: secondary female victims were significantly more likely to be killed by a family member (59%) compared to secondary male victims (24%).

## Section Summary

When comparing victim, accused, and incident characteristics for the females and males killed across Canada in 2016 and 2017, several significant differences are evident. Because these analyses were reliant on information reported in the media coverage of homicides, it is possible that there are other unreported differences in the killings of women and girls compared to the killings of men and boys. This



highlights the necessity of conducting future femicide research with varying data sources. The differences observed, however, underscore the importance of researching femicide as a unique phenomenon using multiple data sources.

Prevention initiatives must account for the specific sex/gendered circumstances leading up to or surrounding the killings of women and girls, which differ in many ways from the killing of men and boys, despite involving mostly male accused. The findings below only begin to scratch the surface of the differences that may be crucial for improving femicide prevention efforts.

Specifically,

- Female victims were older than male victims, by an average of four years; differences varied across age groups, however.
- Those accused of killing females were older, on average, than those accused of killing males.
- Females were more likely to be killed by a single accused than male victims.
- Secondary homicide victims – sometimes referred to as collateral victims – were more common in the killings of women and girls compared to the killings of men and boys.
- Females were most often killed in private locations whereas males were more commonly killed in public locations.
- Female victims were more often killed in non-urban areas (e.g. rural regions or small towns) than male victims.
- Women and girls were more likely to be beaten, strangled, or suffocated. Males were more likely to be killed by firearms, although this pattern is more commonly found in urban homicides. When examining non-urban homicides, equal proportions of female and male victims were killed by firearms.
- Females were more likely to be killed by an intimate male partner or family member. Males were more likely to be killed by male friends or acquaintances.
- Excessive force – often referred to as ‘overkill’ – was more common in the killings of females, compared to males.
- Individuals accused of killing women and girls were more likely to attempt or die by suicide compared to those accused of killing men and boys.



"She never hesitated to help a friend in need... she stood by every decision I made, wiped every tear and cheered at every accomplishment...she was always there in my corner for anything that I needed."





## SECTION IV: SGRMIs and Femicide

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Discussions continue globally as to how femicide/feminicide should be defined, how it is distinct from homicide, and how these differences can be measured to better identify sex/gender-related killings of women and girls. Answers to these questions are crucial for at least three reasons:

- To effectively produce and understand femicide statistics within and across countries;
- To determine more appropriate prevention and intervention initiatives, including punishments for offenders; and,
- To raise public awareness, increase education, and enhance training about sex/gender-related violence against and killings of women and girls, primarily by men.

Below, similar to previous reports, we discuss the importance of enhancing our understanding of sex/gender related motives and indicators in femicide. We follow this with examples from 2020 cases that best illustrate what we mean by each of the motives or indicators discussed.

While many responding states, including Canada, collect data on the killing of all women and girls, there is increasing recognition that understanding these deaths from a human rights perspective requires that we better understand what is meant by sex/gender-related killings or the ‘killing of women and girls *because* they are women and girls’. Historically and still often today, the killings of women and girls, particularly in the context of intimate partner or familial femicide, are typically seen as isolated, sporadic events that occur between individuals rather than as extreme manifestations of broader cultural and societal norms surrounding male violence against women and girls.

When femicides occur outside intimate relationships, victims are often blamed for their ‘risky lifestyles’ (especially if their lifestyles do not align with dominant norms for women’s roles in society) and perpetrators are portrayed – or excused – as mentally ill, substance abusers, or simply ‘evil’. Seldom are their acts linked to broader and more frequent incidents of non-lethal violence against women and girls, perpetuated and maintained by community, societal and cultural norms that support the use of violence in the subordination and oppression of women and girls. Still more rare is to have such killings identified as violations of the human rights of women and girls – violations that work against the principles of sex/gender equality and non-discrimination, and are supported by misogyny, hatred, and/or contempt of women and girls.

One way to draw attention to how broader societal and cultural norms lead to femicide is by clearly showing how motives are often linked to discrimination and hatred of women and girls and/or by identifying related sex/gender-related indicators that are evident before, during or after the femicide. Indicators that are seldom present in the killing of men, regardless of the sex of the perpetrator. To date, one of the most comprehensive efforts to do so is *The Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-Related Killings of Women (Femicide/Feminicide)* (hereafter referred to as ‘the protocol’; Sarmiento et al., 2014). The protocol documents how femicide might be identified by reviewing sex/gender-related signs, motives, or indicators that capture the contexts surrounding femicide and its various subtypes (e.g. intimate partner femicide, familial femicide). While the protocol specifically targets criminal justice investigations, it also serves as a crucial starting point for researchers aimed at measuring femicide, documenting trends within and across countries, and better informing prevention efforts.

The protocol states that, in most countries, all femicides can be classified as homicides; however, not all homicides of women or girls are eligible to be classified as femicide (p. 51). In other words, while the death of a woman or girl may be violent, the act may not have been motivated by the fact that she was female (e.g. traffic accident), or indicators that it was sex/gender-related may not be present in the context surrounding her death. For example, the woman may have been the unintended target of a shooting (e.g. killed because she was a bystander) or she was killed along with a male victim and he was the primary target (e.g. a drug- or gang-related killing). However, is it always possible to eliminate sex/gender-related motives or indicators even in these latter cases? For example, a woman may be killed



because she is the female partner of a man who is in a dispute with someone over drugs or money and she is killed to send a message to her male partner. In this situation, she is clearly seen as the ‘property’ of a man by those who killed her, using her to send a message to that man. Further, a woman may be killed by police, or while in detention or incarcerated, which can involve varying contexts which may or may not involve sex/gender-related motives or indicators. Therefore, only with careful review and analysis can such conclusions be made.

It is important, then, to clearly establish the killings that have some “motivation or context based in a culture of sex/gender-based violence and discrimination” (p. 51), particularly for enhanced awareness, education, and training. To further clarify, the protocol authors write:

*The factors that differentiate the crime of femicide from the homicide of a man, and even from the common homicide of a woman, reveal that aim of the killing is to entrench and perpetuate the patterns that have been culturally assigned regarding what it means to be a woman: subordination, weakness, sentimentality, delicateness, femininity, etc. This means that the femicidal agent and his actions draw on cultural patterns rooted in the misogynist ideas of male superiority, discrimination against women, and disrespect toward her and her life. These cultural elements and systems of beliefs make the perpetrator believe that he has sufficient determinative power over the lives and bodies of women to punish them, and ultimately, to preserve social orders of inferiority and oppression. These same cultural elements allow the perpetrator to feel reinforced in his manhood through this conduct (p. 52).*

The key objectives, then, of identifying the sex/gender-related motives and indicators for femicide is to link these acts to the continuum of violence against women and girls more broadly and to locate all forms of violence against women within broader cultural and societal norms and environments that tolerate, accept, condone and/or encourage the use of violence in the ongoing subordination of women and girls.

## What is a sex/gender-related motive or indicator for femicide?

Broadly speaking, sex/gender-related motives/indicators (SGRMIs) for femicide are characteristics that signify whether and how the killings were/are rooted in the perpetrators’ misogynist attitudes or community- and societal-level acceptance of, or support for, violence against women and girls. The protocol explains that motives centre around ‘women/girls as possessions’ (i.e. belongs to a man) and ‘women/girls as objects’ (i.e. can be used by a man) who can, at any time, be disposed of in whatever way that is deemed opportune or appropriate.

Intimate partner or familial femicides arguably most clearly align with the view that ‘women/girls are possessions’ and sexual femicide is a common example of the idea of ‘women/girls as objects.’ These categories are not mutually exclusive, however; for instance, a sexual femicide can also be an intimate partner femicide or a familial femicide. Furthermore, sex/gender-related motives or indicators for femicide often overlap and one case may present many similar or overlapping indicators. It may not always be easy to categorize femicide as being motivated by the perception of women/girls as possessions or as objects, however.

For example, the relevance of the term femicide in the Canadian context was driven home on December 6, 1989, when a lone male entered École Polytechnique at the Université de Montréal with the intent to kill women, blaming them for his failure to gain entrance to the engineering program (Eglin & Hester 1999; see Appendix A). The male separated students by sex and yelled, “You’re all a bunch of feminists, and I hate feminists!” before firing at the women. Following this targeted act of lethal violence against women, 14 women were dead and another 14 women and men were injured before the male turned the gun on himself. It is not clear whether his motive focused on these women as ‘objects’ or ‘possessions’, but it is clear that these were sex/gender-related killings – the lone gunman’s hatred of women was stated specifically and directly at the women before he shot and killed them. Despite this, in the aftermath of the killing, many people including the media described his actions as the work of a madman, disconnecting the violence from clear evidence of his hateful and misogynist attitudes toward women. In short, it was not acknowledged until 30 years later that he targeted his victims *because* they were women, consistent with the definition of femicide, despite the direct evidence that it was a sex/gender-motivated killing.



Further, in contrast to the above case, SGRMIs may not always be directly identifiable; rather, they may be indirectly evident or more subtle, only becoming clear after a careful investigation of the context surrounding the killing, the specific victim or perpetrator characteristics or actions, and/or manifestations of violence. For example, in 2018, a male armed with a handgun opened fire, seemingly at random, on a crowded street where restaurants were filled with customers relaxing on a summer evening, ending in the death of a young woman and a girl. At first appearing far removed from any misogynistic motivations, and attributed to mental health issues, later reports revealed that a search of his home found evidence of his preoccupation with killing fantasies, including the misogynistic Incel (Involuntary Celibate) ideology that blames women for the sexual failings of men. It was also reported that, just prior to the event, he had been told by his family that he should find a wife. Despite this, his actions continue to be linked primarily to substance abuse and mental health issues thereby overlooking sex/gender-related motivations (see Dawson et al., 2019: 59). As such, with respect to context, a woman or girl may be killed in a generalized situation of violence against women influenced by a culture of discrimination that is not immediately or clearly sex/gender-related (Sarmiento et al., 2014: 47), but ultimately is so.

Furthermore, specific types of victims may share particular characteristics that increase their vulnerability such as being young or elderly, poor, or having multiple and intersecting identities/oppressions (e.g. a poor, elderly, immigrant woman) or their deaths involved initial disappearances and/or the victims were disposed of or abandoned after death. Femicide victims may also be subject to excessive violence, often referred to as 'overkill', mutilation and/or torture. Finally, their perpetrators may share cultural beliefs or attitudes that their actions were justified because they were humiliated or disrespected by the victims (e.g. who spurned their advances, who left or were leaving the relationship, who were involved in suspected/actual infidelity, and/or shamed the family).

In short, femicide reinforces in both direct and indirect ways how societal and cultural norms define what it means to be a female, woman or girl, including their ongoing subordination as possessions or objects, and whose future – and, in fact, whose lives – depend on the actions of the men with whom they come into contact as intimates or otherwise (Sarmiento et al., 2014). To understand femicide, then, it is important to assess whether and how perpetrators might use or draw upon such norms when committing femicide, including ideas of male dominance, bias and disregard for a woman or girl's life. These ideas facilitate the perpetrators' beliefs that they have authoritative control over victims' lives or bodies, including the right to punish or kill to maintain social order (Sarmiento et al., 2014).

Although frequency may vary, many SGRMIs are similar across countries, including Canada, because sex equality or gender equality has not been achieved in any country despite some countries making more progress than others. Some may argue, as a result, that all killings of women and girls by violence can be considered femicide given that patriarchal social structures that perpetuate and maintain gender and other inequalities exist globally to varying degrees. It might also be argued that all women killed by current or former male partners can be considered femicide, more commonly referred to as intimate partner femicide (UNODC, 2019). This is largely because most of these cases involve some stage of separation and/or a prior history of one or more forms of violence or abuse, which are common SGRMIs as discussed below.


Our goal is to more clearly delineate what we mean by sex/gender-related motives and indicators for femicide to increase public awareness and education about femicide and, in turn, contribute to the global movement to reduce such killings. Below, drawing from the ground-breaking work of the Latin American model protocol and building on previous CFOJA reports (Dawson et al., 2018, 2019), we begin by briefly summarizing the presence of select SGRMIs in 2020. Next, we provide more in-depth case examples from 2020 to further illustrate the role of select sex/gender-related motives and indicators where possible based on available information. While the protocol states that understanding whether a killing is sex/gender-related does not depend on the existence of more or fewer indicators, as will become evident, multiple SGRMIs are often present in each case.

It is acknowledged that information is based on narratives provided by third parties; however, reported characteristics of the femicides and those involved can still be used to illustrate the role played by sex/gender-related motives and indicators. However, because of the difficulties gathering information about the circumstances that led up to the femicide, it is not always possible to make a firm conclusion either way. While the SGRMIs described below are not exhaustive, they are evident in the cases examined during the period focused upon in this report. As new information becomes available, it is anticipated that the presence of SGRMIs will increase.



Table 4.1: Number of 2020 femicide cases that involved sex/gender-related motive/indicators

Number of cases	Sex/gender related motive or indicator
23	Number of cases with 1 SGRMI
17	Number of cases with 2 or more SGRMIs present
4	Number of cases with 3 or more SGRMIs present
40	Total number of cases with at least one SGRMI
12	Accused committed prior physical, psychological, and/or sexual violence
10	Enforced disappearance of woman or girl
10	Disposal or abandonment of woman or girl
9	Actual or pending separation
7	Accused used excessive violence; 'overkill'
5	Accused used coercive controlling behaviours with the victim
3	Femicide connected to human trafficking, group or cultural practices
2	Evidence of misogyny
2	Victim was pregnant
2	Victim was mutilated
1	Accused made prior threats to hurt or kill the woman or girl
1	Forcible confinement
1	Sexual violence
1	Victim killed after declining to establish/re-establish relationship



“She was an angel. She was beautiful. She never had hate in her heart, even when someone wronged her.”

“I can honestly say anyone who had the pleasure to know her benefited from her gentle soul.”

### SGRMI: Prior violence by perpetrator

As shown in Table 4.1, the existence of prior violence by the perpetrator, regardless of whether the violence was reported to police or other formal agencies, is one of the most common SGRMIs in Canada and globally. When killings of women and girls are preceded by a history of violence by the perpetrator against the victim, repeated expressions of violence, or an incident of violence, this is seen as a clear manifestation of the man’s perception of the woman or girl as a possession or object to do with as he wishes. Violence by perpetrators against previous female partners, or women generally, may also be considered an SGRMI because it demonstrates hatred and/or disrespect for women and/or misogynist attitudes and beliefs.





## Textbox 2: Accused previous homicide convictions or involvement in investigations

Three of the accused in separate cases of femicide in 2020 were involved in investigations, or convicted, of previous killings of women or girls.

- ✓ In the first case from 2020, a man is accused of killing a teenage girl who was reportedly not previously known to him and leaving her body in a wooded area (Prairie, 2020). Six years prior, the accused was charged with second-degree murder and indignity to a body stemming from the death of his former female partner. The previous murder charges in this case were stayed. It was reported that the perpetrator had a lengthy history of both violent and non-violent crimes, such as pointing a firearm, sexual assault, unlawful confinement, and evading an officer (Parsons, 2020).
- ✓ In the second 2020 case, a man is accused of killing a woman who police believe was unknown to him and leaving her body in a rooming house (Brohman, 2020). The perpetrator had previously pleaded guilty to manslaughter for violently beating his girlfriend to death 17 years prior and spent 13 years in prison (Izri & Rosen, 2020).
- ✓ In the third case, a man was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison for killing a female who worked at an erotic massage parlour (Bergeron, 2020). According to media reports, after several meetings with the victim, the perpetrator had developed an obsession with the victim, or what he described as a “certain attachment.” Prior to the killing, he began to feel that his relationship with the victim was deteriorating; he lured her to a hotel room and stabbed her more than 30 times (Bergeron, 2020). The perpetrator had a lengthy history of domestic violence involving previous victims and was out on day parole at the time of the killing. He had previously served a life sentence for the murder of his wife 16 years earlier. After murdering his wife, the Parole Board of Canada had classified him as a high risk for future partner violence, but later reduced this classification to moderate risk. As a result, his parole officer developed a “strategy” that allowed him to meet with women solely to satisfy his “sexual needs” and it was during one of these visits that this 2020 femicide occurred (Lowrie & Banerjee, 2020).

Findings from prior research and our analyses emphasize the role that prior histories of violence, both lethal and non-lethal and often involving female victims, play in cases of femicide. It is well documented that a history of domestic violence is one of the most common risk factors for femicide and, particularly, intimate partner femicide (Block, 2000; Campbell, Glass, Sharps, Laughlon & Bloom, 2007; Garcia, Soria, & Hurwitz, 2007). However, histories of violence against women, including sexual violence, stalking and domestic violence, are also significant risk factors for femicides that do not involve female intimate partners such as friends, acquaintances, and strangers. For example, recent research exploring mass killings (i.e., the killing of three or more, or four or more, victims killed in a single incident) found that many perpetrators have histories of violence against women, regardless of whether they target domestic or non-domestic victims (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2019; Marganski, 2019). When focusing on intimate femicide specifically, Johnson et al. (2019) found that just over two-thirds of perpetrators had previously been violent towards non-intimate partners and about one-half had been violent towards both intimate partners and non-intimate partners. These findings demonstrate that histories of violence against women do not always manifest themselves as domestic violence in cases of femicide. To illustrate further, the perpetrator of the Nova Scotia mass killings that occurred last year, which started out as an act of domestic violence, was reported to have had a history of being abusive towards not only his intimate partner, but also friends and acquaintances.

The three cases mentioned above as well as prior research highlight the need to develop more effective criminal justice responses when perpetrators commit violence against women, including prior lethal violence. In two of the three cases, for example, the perpetrators had spent considerable time incarcerated for committing previous femicides, yet still went on to perpetrate a similar crime when they were released.

In 2020, many cases of femicide involved chronic abuse and violence toward victims who were ultimately killed by their abusers. Some of these cases involved repeated formal system contacts, and specifically contact with the criminal justice system (see also Textbox 2, *Perpetrators’ previous homicide convictions or involvement in investigations*)

For example:

- One perpetrator was taken into custody three times, some following breaches of court orders, but was released on house arrest after which he killed the victim.
- In another case, at the time of the killing, the accused was under judicial release stemming from a previous domestic assault against the femicide victim and had been arrested four times for violating an order that barred contact with the victim.



- In yet another case, the accused was well-known to police for a history of domestic violence and had a longstanding no-contact order with the victim and, prior to her death, police had to intervene in multiple violent events between the victim and the accused.
- In another case, the couple were known to police and there was a history of violence. According to police, there were many records for calls that would be considered “minor” events of domestic violence.
- In another case, a year prior, the accused pleaded guilty to assaulting the femicide victim. Just a week before her death, she was spotted by a friend with bruised ribs, a black eye, and in a significant amount of pain.
- In one case, the accused had been charged with assault causing bodily harm for two previous domestic incidents. In one instance, the accused was reported to have broken the victim’s nose.
- In another case, the accused had a recorded history of violence against the victim. Earlier that year, he was charged and sentenced to prison for assaulting the victim. At one point, the accused faced counts of uttering death threats to the victim and breaching a condition to keep peace with her, however, those counts were withdrawn. Three months before the victim’s death, the no-contact order between the accused and the victim was removed at a hearing.

In other cases, family reported that:

- The victim’s death was a result of a pattern of domestic abuse by her killer.
- The victim had tried to check into an emergency domestic violence shelter but there were too many barriers.
- They urged the victim to call the police, but she never did because she was afraid child services may become involved.
- The victim had been trying to stand up for herself and leave an environment that was rife with violence.
- They saw signs that the accused was abusing the victim but did not realize the extent of the abuse.

## SGRMI: Coercive controlling behaviours

Second, as discussed in previous reports, and much prior research, one type of violence – coercive-controlling behaviour – is almost exclusively used by men against women in the context of their intimate relationships (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Myhill, 2015). Thus, it is a highly gendered – male – behaviour that encompasses an interplay of physical and sexual violence and/or psychological, emotional and financial abuse, that leads to women suffering injuries, intimidation, and/or daily fears (Johnson et al. 2019). In fact, men who use such tactics often do not need to resort to physical violence to achieve control of their partners; rather they accomplish this through fear of potential consequences if women do not comply (Stark, 2007). There are four common measures of coercive control: controlling/proprietary behavior (specific to the perception of ‘women/girls as property’), psychological abuse, sexual jealousy; and stalking.

For example, in 2020, there were several reports:

- of “a clear history of controlling and verbally abusive behaviour by [the victim’s] husband”;
- that “the accused was violent and controlling towards the victim”;
- the accused had been “controlling, undermining, and manipulative to the victim.”

However, many coercive controlling behaviours often go unnoticed as red flags for the femicide that ultimately occurs and, therefore, are significantly underestimated.

## SGRMI: Enforced disappearance and/or disposal or abandonment of woman or girl

A femicide can involve the initial disappearance of a woman or girl and/or her disposal or abandonment, often in largely public locations. In 2020, enforced disappearance and/or disposal or abandonment was present in multiple cases. For example, it was reported that:

- A young girl’s human remains were found in forested area, separate from her clothing which was also found nearby.
- The victim’s body was found disposed of next to a busy highway.



- The victim's body was uncovered in the isolated location.
- The remains of a woman were discovered in a burned-out vehicle.
- Officials were not sure how long her body was abandoned in the woods before someone found it.
- The victim's remains were found disposed of in a rural area.
- A dogwalker found the victim's body disposed of in a wooded area.
- The accused disposed of her lifeless and partially unclothed body alongside a secluded road.

To illustrate further the role of select SGRMIs present in 2020 cases, we expand on the summary above by providing 12 illustrative case examples listing the SGRMIs present based on information available from media at the time of this report's publication.

### Case #1

SGRMIs: Committed previous violence; coercive controlling behaviours; separation.

A woman was found stabbed to death in her apartment and, a short distance away, her husband – the perpetrator – was found dead near his truck. Police ruled the deaths a murder-suicide. There was a history of domestic violence in the relationship, where the victim reported multiple incidents of physical violence. In the six months prior to the killing, the perpetrator was taken into custody and released on three separate occasions. First, he was charged with assaulting the victim by way of choking, strangling or suffocation, using a belt as a weapon, and he reportedly damaged her cellphone. When released from custody, he was ordered by the court to stay away from his wife and the couple separated. The order was rescinded by the court a month later, but it was unclear if the couple reconciled. Four months after being released on the initial assault charge, the perpetrator was charged with assaulting and unlawfully confining their teenaged son. He was granted bail a second time, with the court ordering him to not contact his wife or son. Three days later, he was taken into custody, charged with failing to comply with the order, but later released on 24-hour house arrest, with the no-contact order upheld. Less than two weeks later, both the victim and the accused were dead. That week, the perpetrator was scheduled to appear in court in relation to the set of charges involving his son.

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### Case #2

SGRMIs: Enforced disappearance; disposal or abandonment.

A young Indigenous girl, who resided in an Indigenous community, was reported missing by her family. After she vanished, the community began to look for her and extensive ground searches were conducted. The girl's clothing was discovered in a forested area not far from where she was last seen which became the targeted search area. A week after she disappeared, human remains were discovered in the wooded area close to where her clothing was found. The body was later identified as the missing high school student. A man was charged with first-degree murder in connection with the victim's disappearance and death. The accused is a convicted sex offender who was previously charged with second-degree murder in connection with his common-law wife's death. Six years ago, his wife, who was also Indigenous, went missing in the middle of the night. Her remains were discovered eight days later in a wooded area. The charges against the accused were stayed because there was no reasonable likelihood of conviction. The accused was released into the community, where he has resided until his recent arrest. The case is currently pending trial.

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### Case #3:

SGRMIs: Committed previous violence; separation; coercive controlling behaviours.

A woman had recently left an 18-year marriage that had reportedly involved ongoing verbal abuse and controlling behaviours by her husband, the perpetrator. Her family states that the relationship problems were exacerbated further by the COVID-19 pandemic. After two weeks of staying with family, the victim returned to the matrimonial home to retrieve some of her belongings and to care for her horse. There was a pre-arrangement that her estranged husband would not be on the property during that timeframe. The victim had spoken to police about having an escort to the property but later felt her estranged husband would not be a threat. She was reassured by the fact that her ex-husband's guns had been confiscated and his truck was not in the driveway. However, her husband moved his



truck, was armed, and hiding in the woods on their property, waiting for her to arrive. He ambushed her, shot her twice with his firearm, and then turned the gun on himself. He was found dead on the property and the victim succumbed to her injuries en route to the hospital. Police confirmed a firearm was involved but declined to elaborate further. A family member stated that, “he couldn’t stand to see her be happy and he couldn’t be happy, neither could she.”

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**Case #4:**

SGRMIs: Victim declined to establish a relationship; use of excessive violence.

A man went to a police station to confess to killing a young woman in a hotel room. Police went to the hotel and found the victim’s body, which bore signs of significant violence. The man was arrested and charged with first-degree murder. He had been released on day parole shortly before the stabbing, after completing a 15-year prison sentence for murdering his wife. The parole board classified him as being at high risk of intimate partner violence, but the risk was revised to moderate upon his release. Despite this documented risk, his case management team allowed him to buy sexual services to meet his sexual needs once a month. The victim was a young woman who worked in a massage parlour. The man was a client of hers, but he had previously been expelled from the parlour due to violence directed towards the other masseuses. He asked to meet her at the hotel, where he stabbed her more than 30 times with a knife. He confessed to the crime and stated how he had fallen in love with the victim and developed an unhealthy obsession with her. At the time of the killing, the perpetrator felt spurned and was under the impression that their “relationship” was deteriorating. He claimed the murder was driven by jealousy after having felt rejection. After pleading guilty to first-degree murder, the perpetrator was sentenced to life imprisonment without possibility of parole for 25 years.

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**Case #5:**

SGRMIs: Committed previous violence; coercive controlling behaviours.

A woman was visiting her boyfriend’s house when she was assaulted and suffered a significant laceration. The victim was taken to hospital in critical condition, where she later succumbed to her injuries. Her boyfriend was charged with second-degree murder and his trial is pending. Their relationship was reportedly marked with physical violence. A year prior, the accused pled guilty to assaulting her and another woman. He was ordered by a judge not to contact the victim, an order he violated less than a week later. The no-contact order was still in place at the time of the victim’s death. A week before her death, the victim visited a friend who noted the victim had bruised ribs, a black eye, and was in a significant amount of pain. The friend claims the victim would often come by her apartment with bruises. Her friend described the accused as controlling, and claimed the victim feared having her face slapped, hair pulled, or clothes torn if she were to “dress up nice.” During her last visit, the victim promised her friend that she would seek help from a domestic violence shelter as she had attempted to do so in the past. However, the victim, for whatever reason, was often unsuccessful in attaining help and would often return to the accused. She did so shortly before her death, despite the restraining order being in place.

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**Case #6**

SGRMI: Committed previous violence.

One morning, a young child ran to his mother’s bedroom to wake her, but she was unresponsive, having suffered a traumatic brain injury following a domestic assault. She was rushed to hospital where she spent two weeks in a coma before the decision was made to remove her from life support. The victim’s on-and-off again boyfriend was with her the night before she was discovered unresponsive. He was charged with aggravated assault and criminal negligence causing bodily harm, which was upgraded to criminal negligence causing death following her passing. The relationship had been on and off for several years and was reportedly marked by physical violence. In one instance, the accused allegedly broke the victim’s nose. Friends said there were signs that the relationship was unhealthy and described a pattern of abuse, separation, and reconciliation. The victim sent friends and family photos of her injuries, texts describing her physical abuse, and screenshots of conversations where she begged the accused to stop hurting her. Her family urged the victim to call the police,



but she never did because she was afraid child services may become involved. However, as a result of her documenting evidence of abuse, the accused is also facing two historic charges of assaulting the victim and two additional assault charges related to violence inflicted on previous girlfriends.

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#### **Case #7**

SGRMI: Pregnancy

After receiving a call to perform a welfare check, police arrived at a home to find the bodies of a man and a woman. The deaths were deemed a domestic murder-suicide by police. The victim was allegedly shot and killed by her boyfriend, who posted a suicide note on social media, before turning the weapon on himself. In the social media post, he claimed that the shooting death was an accident and accused his partner of cheating on him. The victim was expecting her third child with the accused. Her family is mourning the loss of her and the child she was expecting.

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#### **Case #8**

SGRMI: Misogyny

One afternoon, a young man entered a massage parlour with a machete. The owner of the parlour heard screams coming from the back of the building and went to investigate. The machete-wielding man allegedly attacked the woman who sustained severe lacerations. Despite her wounds, the woman fought back, disarmed her attacker, and the two ended up in the parking lot of the building, where they were found by police. The man was taken to hospital in life-threatening condition and the woman was treated for non-life-threatening injuries. Prior to the woman's intervention, the man had attacked another female employee of the spa, who succumbed to stab wounds at the scene. After being treated at hospital, the man was charged in connection with one count of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder, which were later upgraded to include terrorism charges. The accused allegedly wanted to kill everyone in the massage parlour. Police determined the attack was inspired by the Incel (involuntary celibate) ideology. Participants in this movement are fueled by misogyny and blame women for their own lack of sexual success, and sometimes threaten and/or commit violence against them. Police are not providing details on what evidence they have that is indicative of terrorist activity, but this is the first time that terrorism-related charges have been laid for a crime motivated by misogyny and carries an automatic life sentence if convicted.

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#### **Case #9**

SGRMIs: Committed previous violence; coercive controlling behaviours; separation; disposal or abandonment.

A woman was reported missing to police after failing to return home from work. Police set up a command post to search for her. A day later, a dogwalker found her body in a wooded area. Police believe she died from strangulation and her body was then concealed. Her ex-husband became a primary suspect and a first-degree murder warrant was issued for his arrest. The couple had wed in an arranged marriage before arriving to Canada seven years ago. A co-worker of the victim alleged that the victim's ex-husband was controlling, although she had never met him. Family members of the victim also claimed that a relative of the accused had threatened to kill her. Two months before her murder, the couple began the process of divorce and the victim moved away from the accused. Once the victim and accused separated and she left his apartment, friends and coworkers said she seemed happier. Shortly after the warrant was issued for the accused, he was found deceased in a park.

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#### **Case #10**

SGRMIs: Committed previous violence; separation.

After a three-year long, on-again-off-again relationship, a woman decided to end her relationship permanently. After years of violence, she was ready to leave, and the accused reportedly knew that. One afternoon, she visited her boyfriend's home, where he had been on



house arrest after being charged with possession of a handgun and for breaching a no-contact order with the victim. Soon after, police were called to the home on reports of a shooting. Upon arrival, the woman was deceased, and the accused had sustained self-inflicted gunshot wounds. The accused allegedly shot the victim with an illegal firearm. Police and the victim's family struggled to keep her safe from the accused and both blamed the courts for their role in the young woman's death. Specifically, the accused was known to possess illegal firearms and had a history of perpetrating domestic violence against the victim while flaunting no-contact orders. At the time of the killing, the accused was on bail arising from domestic assault and firearm possession charges. He had been arrested four times for violating the no-contact order yet was released into the community with a GPS monitoring device. Police officers were angered by the court's decision to grant bail based on his history of unwillingness to abide by conditions. They stated he was released despite "clear concerns regarding his risk to the victim, the community, and the potential to re-offend." Friends and family saw warning signs between the couple that suggested a history of physical violence, where the victim sought refuge from the relationship on at least one occasion. The accused now faces charges of second-degree murder, possession of a loaded firearm, and two counts of failure to comply with a release order.

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### Case #11

GRMI: Forcible confinement.

Police responded to reports of gunfire and, upon arrival, found a vehicle with the body of a young woman. The victim had succumbed to a fatal gunshot wound. Nearby, another victim was found with a gunshot injury, but was taken to hospital and survived. The shooters fled the area in a vehicle and were arrested nearly a month later. There was evidence that the victims were held against their will. Four men were charged with first-degree murder, attempted murder, two counts of forcible confinement, and two counts of assault by choking, suffocating or strangling.

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### Case #12

SGRMIs: Sexual violence; enforced disappearance; disposal or abandonment.

One morning, a young girl left her home to go to school. She never made it and her parents soon reported her missing. On her way to school, the victim had crossed paths with the accused, and he allegedly took her to his home, drugged, and beat her with a blunt object. The accused reportedly disposed of her lifeless body alongside a secluded road, before visiting a car wash and cleaning the weapon used in the killing. A passerby discovered the lifeless body of the victim, which was partially unclothed and showed signs of violence and circumstantial evidence of a sexual assault. A day later, the accused was arrested and charged with first-degree murder. It was later revealed that the accused was a family friend, nearly 40 years her senior, and had allegedly maintained an inappropriate relationship with the victim during the months leading up to her killing.

## Summary

Keeping in mind that information is still pending in many 2020 cases, those discussed above provide an illustration of the presence of select individual and combined SGRMIs in cases of femicide. It is important to understand the role of these SGRMIs because they are seldom present in the killings of men or boys, regardless of whether the perpetrator is female or male. Given there were 160 cases in 2020, a review of Table 1 shows that there are many cases not covered in this section which, at this time, have no reported SGRMIs. This does not mean they are absent. The main commonality across the cases without an identified SGRMI was lack of information. Specifically, some did not have enough media coverage (i.e. one or two short media reports) or, despite much coverage, the information was limited. With respect to the latter, there were many statements from police declining to comment on various details such as the relationship between the victim and accused or the cause of death. These trends highlight potential questions for future inquiry. First, why is there so little media coverage of some cases? What do they have in common? Second, are there changes in the reporting of these cases by law enforcement and, if so, why? These issues are returned to in subsequent sections of the report.



## SECTION V: Current and Emerging Research Priorities

Section V identifies and discusses current and emerging research priorities. The objective is to identify what research can contribute to the development of more effective femicide prevention and intervention initiatives specifically and male violence against women and girls more generally. Underpinning such initiatives there must be reliable and valid data that can capture the nuances and contexts surrounding the killing of women and girls. We do not currently have such data for femicide, and these challenges and gaps are exacerbated for some groups of women and girls specifically. We introduce some of these data gaps and challenges in this section, and further build on them in more detail in Section VI.

This section begins by recapping key differences in the killings of women and girls compared to homicides involving men and boys that were described in Section III. While only scratching the surface due to data gaps, these differences begin to underscore why there is an increasing global use of the term ‘femicide’ to recognize and acknowledge the distinct ways in which, and reasons why, women and girls are killed compared to men and boys. The recognition and acknowledgement of these differences is necessary for effective prevention. Following this, we provide an overview of some current and emerging research priorities, some of which have been identified in previous reports and by research internationally. Priorities are many so we focus on those most clearly supported by the findings in this report.



"She was so outgoing. So comical. She would make you happy if you were sad in a moment.... She may have looked like an adult but deep down inside she wasn't. She was still a baby. My baby. And I'll never see her again."

"This little girl believed she could change the world, and she will."

### Why we need to #CallItFemicide

In Section III of this report, where data allowed, we compared the killings of women and girls to the killings of men and boys for a two-year period. Like global patterns over time (UNODC, 2019), the greatest similarity in the killings of females and males is that most involved a male accused/perpetrator. Beyond this, there are more differences than similarities, underscoring the relevance and, indeed, the



necessity of using the term ‘femicide’ (or ‘feminicide’ which is used in some countries or world regions). These differences are recapped briefly below and expanded upon later in this section (see also Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Differences between the killing of female victims and male victims

Characteristic	Finding
<b>Victim-accused relationship</b>	Females were more likely to be killed by an intimate male partner or family member. Males were more likely to be killed by male friends or acquaintances.
<b>Age of victim</b>	Female victims were older than male victims, by an average of four years; differences varied across age groups, however.
<b>Age of accused</b>	Those accused of killing females were older, on average, than those accused of killing males.
<b>Multiple accused per case</b>	Females were more likely to be killed by a single accused than male victims.
<b>Multiple victims per case</b>	Collateral or secondary homicide victims were more common in the killings of women and girls compared to the killings of men and boys.
<b>Location of killing</b>	Females were more often killed in private locations whereas males were more commonly killed in public locations.
<b>Geographic region</b>	Female victims were more often killed in non-urban areas (e.g., rural regions or small towns) than male victims.
<b>Method of killing</b>	Women and girls were more likely to be beaten, strangled, or suffocated. Males were more likely to be killed by firearms, although this pattern is more pronounced in urban homicides. When examining non-urban homicides, an equal proportion of female and male victims were killed by firearms.
<b>Excessive violence</b>	Excessive force – often referred to as ‘overkill’ – was more common in the killings of females, compared to males.
<b>Suicide of accused</b>	Individuals accused of killing women and girls were more likely to attempt or die by suicide compared to those accused of killing men and boys.

**Intimacy:** Supported by global, historical, and current research, the most significant difference between female-victim and male-victim homicide can be found when examining the relationship between victims and their killers. The global homicide rate for male victims is roughly four times that observed for women and girls (UNODC, 2019). However, within the context of intimacy, often irrespective of era or geography, females carry the greatest risk of victimization and are roughly three to four times more likely than males to be killed by an intimate partner (Caman et al., 2017; Fox & Zawtitz, 2007; Stockl et al., 2013; UNODC, 2018; UNODC, 2019). The current research supports the ongoing gendered nature of intimate partner homicide or what many refer to as intimate partner femicide. Specifically, as reported in Section III, females were more likely to be killed by an intimate male partner or family member whereas males were more likely to be killed by male friends or acquaintances. [See ‘Intimacy as a risk factor for femicide’ below].

**Age:** The analyses in Section III also documented significant differences in the ages of those involved across female-victim and male-victim homicides. Victims and accused in the killings of women and girls are older, on average, than victims and accused in male victim homicides. This finding may be due to females having an increased risk of being killed by an intimate partner: research has documented that such killings often involve an older demographic, compared to other homicide victims (DeJong, Pizzaro, and McGarrell, 2011) [See ‘Older women and femicide’ below].

**Number of those involved:** There were significant differences in the numbers of victims and accused involved in femicide and homicide cases. While the largest proportion of homicides, regardless of victim sex, involved a single accused, multiple accused were involved in close to one-third of the male-victim homicides (32%) compared to only nine percent of female-victim homicide cases. However, while females were more likely to be killed by a single accused, multiple victims were more common in these cases (20%) compared to male-victim homicides (10%). [See ‘Collateral victims of femicide’ below].





*Location and geography of killing:* Focusing on location and geographic region by sex of the victim, Section III also demonstrated that females were more likely to be killed in private locations and in non-urban regions than male victims. In contrast, males were more likely to be killed in public locations and in urban centres. These differences continue to underscore rural locations generally (Roy & Marcellus, 2019), and the home specifically (Caman et al., 2016), as being particularly dangerous for women and girls (UNODC, 2019). [See ‘Urban versus non-urban femicide and homicide’ below.]

*Method of killing and excessive violence:* Overall, females were more likely to be killed using proximate methods (i.e. beating, strangulation or suffocation) whereas males were more likely to be killed by firearms. When focusing on non-urban cases exclusively, however, these differences disappear – both females and males were equally likely to be killed by firearms. Statistics Canada data reveal that the largest group of homicides involve firearms, and this finding has remained true over time (Roy and Marcellus, 2019). These data do not disaggregate the method of killing by victim sex, however. Focusing on intimate partner and domestic homicide data, research shows that most female victims are killed using proximate methods (Caman et al., 2016; Dawson et al., 2019). However, research has also documented a heightened risk of firearms-related domestic and intimate partner homicides in rural areas (Beyer et al., 2013; Dawson et al., 2019). [See ‘Firearms, non-urban areas, and femicide’ below.]

The level of violence also distinguished female and male killings: females were subject to excessive violence or ‘overkill’ more often than male victims. Overkill means multiple methods or excessive use of one method beyond which was required to accomplish the killing.

*Suicide:* Consistent with international research (Liem et al., 2011), accused in cases of female victim homicide more often died by suicide than in cases of male-victim homicide. This finding may also be explained, in part, by the relationship shared between victims and accused. Canadian data has revealed that although homicide-suicides are rare, they often involve a male killing a spouse or family member(s) (Brennan & Boyce, 2013). [See ‘Suicide, mental health and femicide’ below.]

The significant differences across female and male killings highlight important research and practice priorities given that each can separately, and sometimes together, inform the development of more nuanced and appropriate interventions. As such we discuss some of these issues and other priorities in more detail below. However, beyond these characteristics, there are other important sex/gender related motives and indicators (SGRMI) that distinguish femicide from other types of homicide as discussed in Section IV. While current official and unofficial data sources do not currently capture the presence of many of these factors (Dawson & Carrigan, 2020), prior and current research has shown that they are significantly more likely to occur in the killings of women and girls compared to the killings of men and boys. This warrants further examination and better data collection going forward.

For example, as noted in the 2020 cases specifically, appearing in four or more cases, these were:

- Prior violence by the perpetrator/accused against the female victim or others in the past;
- Enforced disappearances and/or disposal/abandonment of the female victim;
- Actual or pending separation;
- Use of excessive violence; and,
- Coercive controlling-behaviours by the perpetrator/accused against his female partner.

We also expand on select SGRMIs below and discuss related data issues in Section VI.

## Intimacy as a risk factor for femicide

In Canada, and internationally, it is well-documented that intimacy is a risk factor for women and girls; that is, women and girls are most at risk of experiencing violence, and death, at the hands of those they know – and know well – primarily male partners and male family members (Burczycka, 2019; UNODC, 2019). The data presented in this report show that intimacy continues to be a risk factor for women and girls: when relationship was known for cases involving male accused, 50% involved a current or former partner. In addition, 26% of the male accused were a family member of the victim. In total, then, more than two-thirds (67%) of the women and girls were killed by



males whom they arguably shared the closest of relationships. This reflects patterns documented in the 2018 and 2019 CFOJA reports. This figure is also consistent with, but slightly higher than, recent global findings that showed 58 percent of the women and girls were killed by male intimate partners or family members (UNODC, 2018: 10).<sup>32</sup> Globally, then, intimacy continues to be one of the greatest risk factors for women and girls. This differs from risk for male victims of homicide as noted above, and is supported by the most recent figures from Statistics Canada's Homicide Survey that found the proportion of female victims killed by a spouse or intimate partner was over eight times greater than the proportion of male victims killed by a spouse or intimate partner (Statistics Canada, 2020).<sup>33</sup>

Efforts to address the role of intimacy in female experiences of violence have shown little progress globally (UNODC, 2018) and, given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it feels like progress has stalled and may even be diminishing in many ways. This is largely due to an inability to address negative and damaging attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes about violence in intimate relationships. Evidence of the potential negative outcomes arising from such attitudes can be seen in 2020 cases in which violence against women in the context of intimacy continues to be minimized and normalized. For example, for various cases, it was reported in the media that police had been called to respond to arguments between couples which were labelled by police as 'minor' or family members claimed that the victim was involved in a 'toxic' relationship. However, it is often, and perhaps almost exclusively, that it is the female who ends up dead following such 'minor' incidents or from being in a 'toxic' relationship. Arguably, then, the power imbalances in these relationships are not captured when such descriptors are used and demonstrates how formal and informal responses continue to normalize what is not normal – violence against women by their male partners.

The law and those who impose it must recognize the seriousness of this type of violence before society can combat it effectively. And, assuming professionals responding to violence have some relevant training, if the law and its representatives still cannot recognize the seriousness of violence against women and girls in the context of their intimate relationships with men, how can we expect members of the public to do so? The treatment and perception of intimate partner and domestic violence has changed in Canada, but progress is slow and lacking altogether in some sectors. As such, the ongoing legacy of these entrenched stereotypes creates an environment in which intimacy continues to be a risk factor for women and girls and an 'intimacy discount' continues to dominate in public and professional responses to violence. The role of primary prevention remains crucial in challenging and exposing these beliefs and their impacts on the lives of women and girls. In particular, the common question 'why didn't she leave?' is the legacy of such attitudes as is the perception that violence must be physical to be real, precluding the recognition of separation and coercive controlling behaviours by the perpetrator as key risk factors for lethality.

## Older women and femicide

As noted above, the age of victims and accused in female-victim homicides are older, on average, than male victim homicides. An encouraging finding in this report, however, is that the previously emerging risk for women aged 65 and older was not evident in 2020. Specifically, in 2019, the largest victim age group was women aged 65 and older (20% of victims); however, in 2020, they were among the smallest victim age group (11%). Random fluctuations in numbers are expected from year to year so age as a risk factor for femicide will continue to be examined given that risk can also vary depending on the age threshold used. For example, various studies, depending on world region, use 50, 55 and 60 years of age as lower-age thresholds for older women. If the middle-ground of 55 years and older is selected, 30% of the victims in the CFOJA 2020 data would be considered older women compared to 32% in the 2019 data. In both years, then, older women represented almost one-third of the victims. As such, given the aging population, and specifically women who live longer than men, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on elderly populations, this should be an ongoing research priority, particularly in the context of increasing pressures on long-term care facilities and caring for the elderly in community settings. Further, prior research has revealed that the killing of older women differs in some respects from the killing of women younger than 55 (Sutton & Dawson, 2017), although prevention efforts cannot be isolated from the broader context in which violence against women and girls persists.

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<sup>32</sup> This figure may change as more information becomes available for cases in which the relationship between the victim and accused have not yet been identified.

<sup>33</sup> See Statistics Canada Homicide in Canada, 2019 infographic at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/11-627-M2020055>.



### Textbox 3: Nova Scotia Mass Killings

*In April 2020, a man posing as a member of the RCMP went on a murderous rampage across 16 locations in Nova Scotia, beginning in the rural community of Portapique (MacDonald, 2020). Killing 13 females and nine males, his rampage began as an act of domestic violence when the perpetrator got into an argument with his female partner, resulting in him forcibly confining her in their home (Quan & McKinley, 2020). The killer then made his way through Nova Scotia, killing his victims using a combination of firearms and arson before being shot and killed by police (MacDonald, 2020).*

*With many mass homicides, the media frequently depict mass killers as 'lone wolf terrorists,' often also highlighting mental health issues, but failing to report on the histories of violence against women often common among these typically white, male perpetrators (McCulloch & Maher, 2020; Bourgeois, 2020). In the wake of this case, the RCMP were tight-lipped about what had occurred, confirming the number of victims but failing to disclose that the killings began with domestic violence against a surviving victim. In fact, the superintendent of the RCMP noted that misogyny could not be linked to this case because the perpetrator did not target solely female victims (Haiven, 2020). Surviving family members were outraged about the lack of information. Local and national community activists and advocates spoke out about the role of misogyny, violence against women, and domestic violence that was central to this attack (McCulloch & Maher, 2020). Others criticized the RCMP for ignoring the misogynistic and gendered nature of this mass homicide as well as attacks on women and children more generally (D'Entremont, 2020). A group of Nova Scotia feminists asserted that, although not all of the victims were female, domestic violence and misogyny were at the root of the killings as it started as an attack against his intimate partner (Bensadoun, 2020). Human rights activists also argue that there is a lack of attention paid to violence against women in mass killings and females are frequently ignored in such events, despite many starting out as acts of gender-based violence (Bensadoun, 2020).*

*Specifically, in this case, individuals known to the perpetrator recalled his history of being jealous, controlling, and abusive, primarily towards his intimate partner, but also abusive toward males and females alike (MacDonald, 2020). Acquaintances recalled both physical and verbal abuse, describing situations such as beating and strangling his intimate partner, threatening her, and removing tires from her car to prevent her from leaving after an argument (Quan & McKinley, 2020). They also described feeling as though he did not view himself and his intimate partner as equals (MacDonald, 2020). Neighbours discussed how they were afraid of the perpetrator and mentioned how he spoke unnervingly about his collection of weapons, was obsessed with RCMP paraphernalia, and terrorized one of them to the extent that she moved out of the province (Sarson & MacDonald, 2020). Individuals reported making complaints to police for years about his history of domestic violence and large collection of weapons, all of which were ignored (MacDonald, 2020). As a result, activists and researchers, including the CFOJA, continue to argue for the need to recognize domestic violence as a predictor of future violence and emphasize the need to shift the narrative of mass killings being described as 'senseless' or 'crazy' and, instead, acknowledge them for what they often are: acts of sex or gender-based violence (Bourgeois, 2020).*

*Many, including the CFOJA, insisted on the need for a public inquiry to provide a feminist analysis of the killings which would aid in the recognition of its femicidal nature and its roots in misogyny by the killer and by the RCMP (Sarson & MacDonald, 2020). Initially announcing an independent review instead, a peaceful protest resulted in the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness announcing that a public inquiry would be held (Sarson & MacDonald, 2020). The inquiry is expected to release an interim report in May 2022 and a final report in November 2022 (Cooke, 2021). For more information on what has been called the Mass Casualty Commission, see: <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/>.*



"[She] was just very kind, very loving. She was a very outgoing person. She had many friends and she loved to laugh, she liked to joke around. She was just a pleasure to be around always."



## Collateral victims of femicide

Collateral victims of femicide are individuals killed in addition to, or instead of, the primary female victim, either intentionally or by accident. In some cases, the primary victim survives the killing and the collateral victims do not (Campbell et al., 2009). Collateral victims are often those with some connection to the victim and/or the accused, such as children, parents, or friends. It may also be the victim's new intimate partner if the victim and accused were separated (Meyer & Post, 2013). Some research differentiates collateral victims from secondary victims with the former typically being killed because they were present at the time of the killing (Dobash & Dobash, 2012) and the latter being killed because they were associated with the primary victim (Levin & Fox, 1996). The CFOJA includes both types of victims as collateral victims; regardless of whether they were present or associated with the primary victim, they were not the intended or primary target, but were killed because of efforts to harm a woman or girl.

Our analyses showed that there were more likely to be collateral victims when females were killed compared to male victim homicides in 2016 and 2017. Specifically, 20 percent of female victims were killed alongside other victims compared to 10 percent of male victims who were killed alongside other victims. These findings highlight a heightened public safety concern in femicide cases.

Femicides that involve collateral victims are sometimes defined as familicide, which refers to the killing of two or more family members in a single incident, most often by a male perpetrator (Wilson, Daly, & Daniele, 1995). In 2016 and 2017, there were 67 homicides that involved two or more victims killed in a single incident, 34 of which involved female primary targets.<sup>34</sup> In these 67 cases, 82 victims were identified as collateral victims, 23 of whom were female and 59 of whom were male. Of these 82 collateral victims, the most common relationship was acquaintances of the victim and/or the perpetrator, followed by other family members, strangers, and children. In these cases, males comprised a larger proportion of collateral victims than females. Therefore, despite femicide being a gendered crime that largely affects females, it often involves male victims, including male children, as collateral victims.

The variation in relationships to the accused among collateral victims was illustrated by media reports covering homicides that occurred in 2016 and 2017. For example, in one case in 2016, a male was suspected of killing his girlfriend, his brother, and his mother prior to killing himself. In another case that year, the victim's child, and her girlfriend were killed as well. In 2017, a male was accused of murdering his former spouse and their teenage daughter. In all three cases, the female intimate (or former) partner was the primary target and the other victims were killed because they were present at the time of the killing.

While children may also be killed in cases of femicide, they are often the 'living victims of femicide'. For example, focusing on femicides that occurred in Ontario between 1974 and 2012, at least three-quarters of the women killed had children (Dawson, 2019). These numbers were similar to cases that occurred between 2016 and 2018 across Canada in which 83 percent of victims had at least one child (Dawson, 2019). Of these latter cases, at least 20 percent of the children were home during the femicide, and at least eight percent witnessed the femicide either directly or indirectly (Dawson, 2019). These findings indicate, then, that collateral victims of femicide can also involve individuals who are not killed, but who witness the homicide(s), such as children. They can also involve individuals who are connected to the victim(s) and left behind, such as friends and/or family, who were not involved in the attack, but are left dealing with the trauma of losing someone close to them.

In summary, the damage caused by femicide can be extensive. The minimal research in this area shows that children of femicide victims typically endure long-lasting social, physical, and psychological effects (Alisic, Krishna, Groot, & Frederick, 2015). They may also experience stigma regarding the femicide and be forced to grieve their loss(es) in the public eye due to heavy media coverage and police attention (Kapardis, Costanza Baldry, & Konstantinou, 2017). In fact, research shows that femicides that involve child witnesses garner more attention from the media than femicides that do not involve children (Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson, & Ackerly, 2004). Furthermore, in some cases of intimate partner femicide, children often witness their father die by suicide after the femicide or lose him to incarceration, thus, resulting in the loss of both parents (Dawson, 2019). Therefore, the detrimental effects of femicide do not end when the attack is over but, rather, continue to be endured every day by those left behind.

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<sup>34</sup> These figures are based on cases as the unit of analysis and not victims.



## Urban versus non-urban femicide and homicide

As discussed in previous reports, women and girls living in rural, remote, and northern areas – non-urban regions – have a heightened risk of femicide than women and girls living in other more urban areas across Canada. This is true for cases of familicide as well (Duwe, 2004; Gallup-Black, 2005) which typically include female partners as the primary target (Boyd et al. 2020). Drawing from prior literature, several factors may explain why sex/gender-based violence and femicide is more common in non-urban areas.



First, the geography of non-urban regions, and specifically remote areas, leads to increased physical and social isolation, which is conducive to intimate partner and/or domestic violence (Gallup-Black, 2005; Jeffrey et al., 2019). Second, interpersonal relationships differ in rural areas as opposed to urban centres or cities, with individuals being more likely to know one another, which may preclude anonymity. This may prevent women and girls from seeking help due to the fear of reaching out to individuals known to the perpetrator (Gallup-Black, 2005). Finally, rural areas often have more traditional, and conservative perceptions of gender roles, including that males are/should be the breadwinners and females are/should be the homemakers, thus, increasing their risk for victimization (Gallup-Black, 2005; Hornosty & Doherty, 2003). While not exhaustive, these factors highlight several considerations to explore when identifying prevention initiatives that can more effectively respond to female victimization in non-urban communities.

For example, to decrease the number of femicides that occur in non-urban locations, it is essential that resources such as anti-violence against women agencies and outreach, shelters and mental health services are more accessible in these areas to allow women experiencing domestic violence, and perpetrators, to seek help without travelling to urban cities, particularly if they are unable to do so (Macy et al., 2010). Moreover, the integration of material into non-urban (and urban) school curriculums that educates children and adolescents on the issue of violence against women and gender inequalities could help combat the legacy of conservative, negative attitudes towards women and tolerance of violence in some situations. Furthermore, it is essential that we focus on how certain factors can work together to increase risk, such as histories of domestic violence, access to firearms, and rurality, an issue we turn to below.

## Firearms, non-urban areas, and femicide

Three key findings were highlighted in this report when comparing female and male victims of homicide with respect to the role of firearms.


1. Overall, among the total number of homicide victims in 2016 and 2017, shooting was the most common cause of death (40%), followed by stabbing (24%) where information was known (for 82% of the victims).
2. Males were more likely to be killed by firearms (45%) compared to females (24%) who were more likely to be beaten to death (15%) than male victims (10%).
3. A different pattern emerged, though, when the method of killing was examined in non-urban locations (i.e., areas with a population of less than 1,000 residents): equal proportions of females and males were shot to death in rural areas (36% each).

And, in 2020, this finding remains true. Specifically, most women and girls were shot to death (42%) or stabbed (32%), although this information remains unknown from public documents in the majority of cases and it appears this information is increasingly being withheld until the trial or guilty plea. However, the role of firearms in homicide is supported by the most recent figures from Statistics Canada's Homicide Survey: 40 percent of homicides were committed with a firearm – 60 percent of which were handguns (Statistics



Canada, 2020). In their infographic depicting these findings, directly beside a graph illustrating patterns in firearms-related homicide, Statistics Canada reported that almost one in four homicides in Canada was gang-related. The proximate placing of these two figures in the infographic – use of firearms-related homicides and gang-related homicides – leaves the impression that firearms-related homicides are most often committed in the context of gang activity. While it may be true that the largest group of killings with firearms are gang-involved (although the definition of which remains vague and likely varies across jurisdictions), it draws attention away from the proportion of killings by firearms that do not take place in the context of gang-related activity and, specifically, the killings of women and girls in non-urban areas. This is also a prevention priority with respect to research and evidence-based policy.

The risk of femicide using firearms in non-urban regions has been consistently documented in the CFOJA reports as well as by other studies nationally and internationally (e.g. Beattie et al., 2018; Doherty, 2006; Doherty & Hornosty, 2008; Jennings & Piquero, 2008; Mancik et al., 2020; Reckdenwald et al., 2019; Sinauer et al., 1999). While this information is not reported in Statistics Canada’s 2019 infographic, earlier national data documented an increase in homicides in rural areas that was 45 percent higher than the rate reported in urban areas (Beattie et al., 2018). Except in Ontario, this increase was due, in part, to an increase in firearms-related homicide. For example, in rural areas of Saskatchewan, the rate of homicide was 126 percent higher than the rate in urban areas due to higher rates of firearms violence (Beattie et al. 2018). No information was available on the sex/gendered contexts of these firearms-related homicides nor on whether firearms were registered/licensed. Until such data are available, the risk of firearms for women and girls, particularly in non-urban regions, as well as the role of licensed firearms in their deaths, remains largely unknown.



“She was strong and brave, knew how to stand up for herself and often stood up for people she believed needed the help.”

“She was amazing, she was beautiful, she was funny, she was loud, she was proud, she was high-energy. Not a mean bone in her body. She was definitely one-of-a-kind.”

## Suicide, mental health and femicide

Accused in cases of female-victim homicides more often died by suicide than in male-victim homicides. In fact, homicide-suicide is almost exclusively perpetrated by males who kill female partners (Bossarte, Simon, & Barker, 2006; Bourget, Gagné, & Whitehurst, 2010; Dawson, 2005; Flynn, Gask, Appleby, & Shaw, 2016; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Liem et al., 2011; Reckdenwald and Simone, 2017; Roma et al., 2012; Salari and Sillito, 2016) which is why it is often referred to as intimate femicide-suicide. This finding, consistent across many countries and over time, can result in a conflation of male-perpetrated intimate femicide-suicide with mental health issues. There are several problems with this assumption.

First, suicide is not restricted to individuals with mental health issues exclusively; there are myriad of reasons why someone may decide to end their life (Sanati, 2009). Similarly, this assumption ignores the fact that most males (and females) who suffer mental health issues do not perpetrate violence, let alone homicide. Conflating violence and mental illness result in the unsubstantiated belief that most individuals with mental health issues are violent or have the propensity to commit violence. In fact, those who are mentally ill are more often victims of violence, not the perpetrators (Corrigan et al. 2015; Nordt et al., 2006). As such, while mental illness may be a factor for some perpetrators, it cannot be the only factor.

Relatedly, the third problem with this assumption is that it detracts attention away from other contributing factors thereby reducing the likelihood of effective femicide prevention. This issue is difficult to challenge, however, given the paucity of reliable and valid data that



can accurately capture the role of mental health in these cases. For example, definitions of mental illness tend to vary across studies, with some defining it as depression (Hamilton, Jaffe, & Campbell, 2013) and others defining it as psychotic, mood, or personality disorders (Liem & Koenraadt, 2008). The way researchers measure mental illness also differs, with some relying on psychiatric and/or psychological reports (Vinas-Racionero et al., 2017) and others relying on statements from friends, family, and/or law enforcement personnel (Taylor, 2018). Therefore, the inconsistencies in prior literature on mental illness underscore this as a research priority.

## Femicide and police use of deadly force

The overrepresentation of racialized victims of police violence, and Indigenous peoples in particular, has garnered increased public attention and scrutiny in the past several years. Following the killing of Chantel Moore in New Brunswick in June 2020, Prime Minister Trudeau recognized the existence and persistence of systemic racism against Indigenous and other racialized populations perpetrated by police (Britneff, 2020; Kirkup, 2020). In this incident, Chantel's boyfriend requested police conduct a wellness check, fearing she was being harassed. A lone officer was dispatched to Chantel's home. He alleges she came at him with a knife before he shot her five times (Magee, 2020; Rabson, 2020). Her killing sparked outrage and confusion as to how someone dies during a wellness check and prompted calls for reform in how police interact with Indigenous peoples (Magee, 2020; Rabson, 2020). Quebec's watchdog agency has submitted its investigative report to New Brunswick's prosecution office to determine whether charges will be laid (Magee, 2020).

In 2016 and 2017, according to CFOJA data, 66 individuals were reported to have been killed by the police: 32 in 2016 and 34 in 2017. Of these victims, 63 were male and three were female. Aligned with this pattern, research has consistently shown that most victims of police use of deadly force are males (Hays, 2011; Kesic, Thomas, & Ogloff, 2010; Klinger et al., 2016). Below, including the additional nine women and girls who died by police violence between and including 2018 to 2020, we compare police-perpetrated killings of female and male victims, and flag it as a future research priority.

Recent Canadian data has documented the overrepresentation of racialized groups as victims of police use of deadly force (Graham, 2020b; Marcoux & Nicholson, 2018; Singh, 2020). Specifically, in the past 20 years, 16 percent of all police killings involved Indigenous victims and nine percent involved Black victims; both figures overrepresent each group's proportion in the general population (5% and 3% respectively; Singh, 2020). Although information on the racial background of victims is often unreported in public documents (63%), the CFOJA data provides partial support for the above assertion. Of the 12 female victims, five were Indigenous (42%), one was White (8%), and the racial background of the remaining six women killed by police was not identified in public documents (50%). Among male victims of police violence, nine were Indigenous (14%) and five were Black (8%). Collectively, the CFOJA data supports research on the overrepresentation of both Indigenous (19%) and Black (8%) female and male victims of police violence compared to their proportion in the general population.

Recent data also indicates that individuals exhibiting signs of mental illness are overrepresented as victims of police violence (Marcoux & Nicholson, 2018; Singh, 2020). Although the mental health status of victims is often missing from public documents, two women exhibited signs of mental illness, but their treatment history was not reported publicly, and one had sought treatment for substance abuse. The mental health status of the remaining nine victims was not disclosed (75%). For male victims, 11 percent (N=9) had received inpatient and/or outpatient treatment prior to their death. An additional 18 percent (N=11) exhibited signs of mental illness, but their treatment history was not reported. In total then, based on the limited data available, 29 percent of victims who exhibited some evidence of mental illness which provides preliminary support for their overrepresentation in incidents of police use of deadly force, relative to their proportion in the general population (Chappell, 2010; 2013; Marcoux & Nicholson, 2018; Worden, 2007)

Most victims were shot to death (95%; N=71), two were beaten (3%), one died after being pepper-sprayed and restrained by multiple officers (1%), and one victim died from cardiac arrest related to a drug overdose (1%). Among the 12 female victims, 11 were shot to death (92%) and one died from cardiac arrest (8%), the details of which were discussed in last year's CFOJA report (Dawson et al. 2019). In this incident, the arresting officer falsely claimed the victim had been medically assessed. He was later charged and convicted of criminal negligence causing death and failure to provide the necessities of life. While the judge did not discuss whether the victim's Indigenous heritage played a role in police actions, or lack thereof, she ruled the officer had been influenced by stereotypes about drug users and did



not ensure the victim received the medical attention necessary to reduce an overdose (Graham, 2020a). The presence of multiple stigmatizing stereotypes related to substance use, poverty, and homelessness often intersect to increase the risk experienced by marginalized groups, including Indigenous populations (Goodman et al., 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The inequalities surrounding accessibility and delivery of healthcare to Indigenous peoples in general, and addiction services specifically, has been well documented (Adelson, 2005; Goodman et al., 2017). Indigenous peoples have reported negative experiences with the healthcare sector stemming from racial stereotypes that influence clinical practice and quality of care provided (Goodman et al., 2017). These interlocking identities – a substance user *and* Indigenous - along with stereotypes that accompany both, can influence how officers and other healthcare workers respond to those in need of help, with potentially life-threatening consequences. To ensure officers act with due diligence, it is essential for police services to implement culturally responsive practices for handling calls involving individuals whose interlocking identities increase their risk of experiencing harm.

The CFOJA data show that the largest proportion of police use of deadly force cases was ruled justified and no charges were laid (60%; N=45). The external investigations are pending for 36 percent of deadly force incidents (N=27), and charges have been laid in the remaining four percent of cases (N=3). For those three incidents in which charges were laid, one involved the death of an Indigenous woman, discussed previously. The other two involved the killing of Black men, in which the officers involved were charged with manslaughter. The first incident involved an officer beating the victim with reinforced gloves; the officer was found not guilty late last year. The second officer who was charged shot the victim with a rubber bullet, and the victim then fell out a window. This officer was acquitted.

## Femicide of Indigenous Women and Girls and the MMIWG Inquiry

Indigenous women and girls disproportionately experience all forms of sex- and gender-based violence. For example, they are more likely to be killed by a stranger, to be sexually assaulted, and to be victims of intimate partner violence than non-Indigenous women and girls (Allen, 2020; Brennan, 2011; Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2010). The victimization of Indigenous women and girls is deeply rooted in historical, cultural, economic, and political practices and policies that stem from the ongoing impacts of colonization, systemic

discrimination, and poverty. This includes their experiences of over-policing and under-protection despite their greater risk of violence (Baigent, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2017) as well as their experiences of violence at the hands of police (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2017; Lafontaine, 2020).



These patterns have been documented for decades by Statistics Canada as well as various other national and international inquiry reports, commissions, and research studies – too numerous to list here. Most recently, they include a report by the UN Committee Against Torture and by the *UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women* in Canada’s most recent country report (United Nations, 2018; United Nations, 2019). However, the historical and ongoing overrepresentation of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls has been documented most

comprehensively in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

On June 3, 2019, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* was released, comprising over 1,000 pages, and concluding with 231 recommendations – or Calls for Justice – on health, security, justice, and culture (MMIWG Final Report, 2019). The report highlighted the historical and ongoing genocide of Indigenous women and girls. Colonization was recognized as a root cause in the violent victimization of First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls. The Calls for Justice target federal and provincial governments, institutions, social service providers, industries, and all Canadians (MMIWG Final Report, 2019).





In the month prior to the one-year anniversary of the report's release, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations announced that the federal government would not be able to deliver a national action plan by the one-year anniversary of the report's release due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the anniversary of the report's release, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) released a report card on the government's response and concluded that "in the absence of any National Action Plan, it is challenging to award any score other than a resounding 'fail' to the Canadian government" (NWAC, 2020: 3). NWAC condemned the government's lack of response to the Calls for Justice and the paucity of publicly available information regarding the formation of a National Action Plan. They argued that the global pandemic, rather than delaying action, should signal a greater need for a response to the Calls for Justice as many Indigenous women and girls face an increased risk of violence due to isolation measures (NWAC, 2020).

The federal government's lack of progress and transparency regarding the Calls for Justice also prompted more than 1,500 academics and allies from across the country to sign and send a letter to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations in September of 2020. The letter outlined deep disappointment regarding the Canadian government's failure to address the recommendations or to work towards reconciliation and the building of new relationships with Indigenous peoples. It called on the Canadian government to outline how and when they intend to respond to each Call for Justice, to work with Indigenous organizations and families of MMIWG2S to develop their response, and to call on provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to develop responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

On December 6, 2020, a statement was issued on behalf of the MMIWG National Action Plan Core Working Group stating that a National Family and Survivors Circle is working with a Core Working Group and eight sub-working groups to develop a National Action Plan to address and implement the Calls for Justice and the systemic racism and violence faced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2020). The statement did not outline a timeline for the completion of the National Action Plan, but indicated that there would be updates in the near future (for full statement, see: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1607207513882/1607207535679>).

Despite increasing attention in recent years, the CFOJA continues to highlight that there has been no identifiable reduction in the numbers of Indigenous women and girls killed by violence. During the five-year period from 2016 to 2020, the CFOJA documented that 149 Indigenous women and girls were killed, and an additional five victims were believed to be Indigenous, but official confirmation was not available. This represents about 20% of all women and girls killed by violence during the five years (N=758), which is four times their representation in the population (5%). In 2020, the focus of this report, of the 160 women and girls killed by violence, 39 were Indigenous which is 24% of female victims – a minimum estimate given ongoing gaps and poor quality of data for race/ethnicity in data sources. Of those victims in which the accused was male, 30 of the 128 victims were Indigenous women or girls, or 23% of the total female victims. Thus, even with minimum estimates, the proportion of victims in this most recent year has increased not decreased and is now approaching five times their representation in the population. While fluctuations in femicide and homicide are expected from year to year, this could also be an increasing trend. This number does not include those women and girls who have gone missing during this period.

While Indigenous communities and their allies await a national action plan from the Canadian government, significant efforts are taking place in provinces and territories to engage with Indigenous groups and collaborate on responses to the final report of the National Inquiry. In parallel with the work on the national action plan, several provinces and territories have initiated their own responses. For example, based on publicly available information:

- The Yukon was the first jurisdiction to announce its MMIWG strategy as a response to the National Inquiry (see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-mmiwg2s-strategy-national-inquiry-1.5835588>).
- The Alberta Joint Working Group on MMIWG has been appointed to provide advice, direction and input into the Alberta government's proposed action plan to address the calls for justice (see: <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-joint-working-group-on-mmiwg.aspx>). In addition, on Dec. 4, 2020, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women released a Final Evaluation Report, entitled Engagement on a National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered and Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in



Alberta (see: <https://iaaw.ca/engagement-on-a-national-action-plan-on-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and-girls-in-alberta/>).

- On June 21, 2020, Prince Edward Island provided a status report on their progress on the 231 calls for justice (see: <https://docs.assembly.pe.ca/download/dms?objectId=620ce46b-68e1-4282-8eef-2d07e2c8ae53&fileName=Premier.King.06192020.Missing%20and%20murdered%20indigenous%20women%20and%20girls%20status%20report.pdf>).
- In July 2020, the Northwest Territories announced that they would develop their own action plan on MMIWG (see: <https://cabinradio.ca/41932/news/premier-announces-cabinet-shuffle-development-of-mmiwg-action-plan/>).
- On the one-year anniversary of the release of the Final Report, Saskatchewan’s Minister Responsible for First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs announced a \$300,000 investment for locally-developed projects related to issues raised in the final report (see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-mmiwg-awareness-one-year-anniversary-reportx-1.5600369>).

However, without a valid, reliable, and sustainable mechanism that can immediately begin to document missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls going forward, the ability to assess the impact of the above efforts – and a national action plan when it is implemented – will be difficult. This is just one data gap – albeit a major one – among the many data challenges and gaps faced when documenting femicide which we discuss further in Section VI.

## Non-intimate femicide

A final research priority relates to the global emphasis on femicide in the context of women’s intimate relationships with men, whether they are intimate partners or family members. It is largely recognized that this is the most common form of femicide in most – but not all – world regions (UNODC, 2019). However, this focus often precludes the equally important examination of femicides of women killed by those they did not share an intimate relationship with whose deaths are often less visible. This is due, in part, to the fact that they are also often marginalized and vulnerable populations, already ignored by society in many ways including, but not limited to, poor women, women and girls killed in the context of sex work, prostitution or human trafficking, women and girls with disabilities, racialized women, and rural women. These deaths are equally preventable but require systematic examination of their lives and deaths to identify initiatives that will address their experiences and circumstances. Some of the challenges in doing so are expanded on in the next section.



“Your shining soul, your contagious laughter and your eloquence will keep your memories strong in my heart.”



## SECTION VI: Data Gaps & Priorities

Data on femicide remain difficult to access and collect, particularly in some world regions or for some groups of women and girls (Cullen et al., 2020; Dawson & Carrigan, 2020; Fuentes & Cookson, 2020; Walby et al., 2017; Walklate et al., 2020). It is also a growing challenge to get even basic information beyond sex and age of the victim, date, location, and cause of death; and, if an accused is identified, sometimes the relationship that they shared with their victim. In many countries, basic data collection is the best-case scenario, but these data are usually collected by official agencies and not easily accessible by researchers, advocates, service providers, or violence prevention organizations – those who could actually use the data to inform prevention. As noted in Section V, underpinning any prevention or intervention initiatives there must be reliable and valid data that can systematically and consistently capture the nuances and contexts surrounding the killing of women and girls. There is currently limited data that can do so in Canada and globally and these gaps are exacerbated for some groups of women and girls specifically. We introduce some of these data gaps and related priorities for data collection efforts in this section.



As we have highlighted in previous reports, Statistics Canada collects relatively comprehensive information on all homicides that occur; however, these data are limited in scope for determining whether the case was a sex/gender-related killing, or femicide (*for full discussion, see Dawson et al. 2019*). Given the lack of variables and measures in our official data collection instruments that can assist with informing better femicide prevention initiatives, the lives of women and girls are at risk because we are not collecting, or making available, the right information to support prevention efforts.

This situation is getting worse despite growing awareness and education about sex/gender-related elements in male violence against women and girls alongside advances in technology and digital data. Violence prevention researchers, advocates and activists are working hard to collect evidence-based data and are becoming increasingly reliant on publicly accessible information (e.g. media and court documents) in place of official data that are hard to access or are administrative in focus with little to offer by way of informing prevention (Cullen et al., 2020; Dawson & Carrigan, 2020). More recently, publicly available data, limited as they are, are also becoming harder to access because those who record and report this information are increasingly withholding basic facts – sex, gender, relationship, method of killing and so on (Dawson et al., 2019). Like other countries, then, Canada faces similar challenges in documenting femicide accurately. And, a crucial question we have asked in previous reports is, if we cannot document femicide in a reliable and valid manner, how can we document, consistently and accurately, the significantly greater incidence of male violence against women and girls?

Below, we introduce some of the key data gaps and priorities moving forward when documenting and preventing femicide. Specifically, we discuss how the risks for diverse groups of women and girls remain difficult to document because of a lack of reliable and valid data. This difficulty is due, in part, to an increasing lack of transparency from those who record/report these incidents, not only when relying on media and/or court documents, but also across official data sources. This decline in availability of essential data is occurring in the face of international calls for more in-depth and accurate data on femicide and other forms of violence against women and girls (ACUNS, 2017).

### Making visible the invisible victims

Homicide is frequently used in research as a barometer of sorts for trends and patterns in violence (Gabor et al., 2002). A key reason for this is that official homicide statistics are generally viewed as a reasonably reliable indicator of the actual number of killings that have



taken place and of the characteristics of those involved. This assumption seems reasonable since most homicides are reported to the police and, therefore, potential problems created by reporting bias are minimal, at least compared to other types of violent crime. Moreover, compared to other reported crimes, homicides are arguably investigated with more thoroughness due to the severity of the offence, making the available information more accurate and detailed. Finally, because of societal consensus about the gravity of homicide, many perpetrators are prosecuted and punished to some degree, contributing further information about the homicide and those involved.

Despite the validity of the above arguments, it is increasingly being recognized that homicide data poses its own challenges which impact some groups of victims more than others and that these challenges will vary depending on the data sources used. We discuss some of these challenges in the context of documenting femicide, identifying data gaps, and highlighting ongoing questions that remain unanswered due to these challenges.

## Not all femicides are reported equally or at all

Paralleling increasing digital and publicly accessible data, researchers have begun to rely on media coverage and/or court documents for information on femicides and homicides. In fact, recent international work has found that data extracted from media coverage of femicide is seen as the most feasible mechanism for collecting data on the killings of women and girls (Vives-Cases et al., 2016). It was also recognized that the establishment of national databases to document the prevalence and characteristics of femicide would be the most desirable and appropriate approach, but it would require the political will to do so (Vives-Cases et al., 2016) which is oftentimes lacking. In the 2019 CFOJA report, we discussed some of the drawbacks of relying on media coverage, including the increasing tendency by police to withhold details on the victim-accused relationship and/or method of killing, despite the fact that this information can contribute to primary prevention (Dawson et al., 2019: 68).

Furthermore, when focusing on mass killings (i.e., the killing of three or more victims killed in a single incident), the media tend to focus primarily on those that involve strangers and/or acquaintances as victims (i.e., non-domestic mass killings). In contrast, less focus is dedicated to those that involve family members as victims (i.e., domestic mass killings), which are often not labeled as mass homicide (Gerard, Whitfield, Porter, & Browne, 2016; Capellan & Gomez, 2017). This overrepresentation obscures the fact that many mass killings that occur worldwide involve white, male perpetrators who kill current or former intimate partners, children, and others (Boyd 2021). This is just one example of how the media can skew the representation of violence in general, but specifically as it relates to femicide.

On the other hand, research has also shown that media coverage can be as reliable and sometimes more reliable than official data sources (see *Appendix B for more information*). However, this assumes that all femicides and homicides are reported and, if so, reported on equally. This is not the case. U.S. research has discussed the differential coverage of victims (Parkin & Gruenewald 2015), and some Canadian studies have drawn similar conclusions (e.g., Bouchard, 2020; Gilchrist, 2010), but this has yet to be examined systematically in Canada and likely varies by province and territory.

For example, CFOJA research relies on data collected from media reports and, in 2016-2017, we found that our numbers undercounted victims compared to figures reported by Statistics Canada for those years.<sup>35</sup> In 2016-2017, our figures undercounted female-victim and male-victim homicide in:

- Quebec (by 21 victims: 10 females, 9 males, and 2 victims where sex was unknown)
- British Columbia (by 20 victims: 5 females and 15 males)
- Ontario (by 16 female victims)
- Alberta (by 11 victims: 5 females and 6 males)
- Saskatchewan (by 12 victims: 3 females and 9 males)
- Manitoba (by 8 male victims)

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<sup>35</sup> We could not compare 2020 figures because Statistics Canada has not released those numbers and will not do so until late 2021.



- New Brunswick (by 5 victims: 1 female and 4 males)
- Prince Edward Island (by 2 male victims)
- Newfoundland and Labrador (by 1 male victim)
- Nova Scotia (by 1 female victim)

The number of undercounted victims is related, in part, to the overall number of homicides with the highest undercounts occurring in the provinces with more homicides (e.g., Quebec, British Columbia, and Ontario). Furthermore, it is likely that Quebec has the largest number of undercounted victims due to the greater number of French-language newspapers, although we include articles that are digitized and translatable. The key point, however, is that some victims are not counted, at least by the media, and unless identified through other avenues (such as court documents which we discuss below), they are also not counted by the CFOJA, despite our efforts to be as comprehensive as possible. In addition, male victims tend to be undercounted more often, except in Ontario and Nova Scotia where only female victims were undercounted (16 victims and 1 victim respectively).

While we have yet to examine the overall representation of victims in court documents because it takes, on average, two years for cases to be processed by the criminal justice system, it is possible that more comprehensive information will be contained in these reports. However, verdicts and sentencing transcripts will only be publicly available for select victims and the amount of information will vary by type of conviction. For example, there is no judicial discretion in sentencing for first-degree murder convictions which come with a mandatory life sentence and no parole eligibility for 25 years. Therefore, there are often few sentencing remarks delivered by judges or sufficient summary of case information. More concerning, however, is that those accused that die by suicide will not be processed through the criminal justice system at all; therefore, victims of intimate femicide-suicide are likely to be one of the most invisible groups of victims in these data sources, similar to media sources.

## Official versus unofficial designation of homicide

Typically, members of society recognize that a homicide occurs if the state/government or its representatives (i.e., police, courts) identify a killing as such, and this is representative of official counts as well (i.e., Statistics Canada Homicide Survey). But what happens to killings that are perpetrated by the state or its representatives (i.e., police use of deadly force, deaths in custody) which are not ultimately determined to be homicide? What happens to victims whose deaths remain suspicious, but are not designated as a homicide, despite family, friends and others indicating it was a homicide? In short, whose voices count the most when determining whether a homicide occurs? And do killings have to be 'officially' identified to be counted?

As discussed above, police use of deadly force has been a key focus of many protests and movements in Canada, the United States, and other countries, particularly in 2020, and the core focus of Black Lives Matter movements and related campaigns such as #SayHerName for Black women killed by police. For example, anti-police and anti-racism protests occurred last year in Toronto and in other parts of Canada, following the death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, 29, who fell to her death from her balcony in police presence. A young black and Indigenous woman, Korchinski-Paquet's family believe the police failed in their 'duty of care' and were, in part, responsible for her death. However, Ontario's Special Investigation Unit found "no reasonable grounds to believe that any of the officers committed a criminal offence in connection" with her death or any evidence of "overt racism" on the part of the officers.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the case involving Chantal Moore in New Brunswick, shot by police during a wellness check, is awaiting its official determination. It is not disputed that a police officer shot Chantal Moore. If not designated a homicide, is it a femicide?

And what of the case involving a four-year-old girl found dead with her biological father in an Ontario conservation area? Her mother and stepfather believe it was a homicide-suicide, but there has never been an official designation of the girl's death as homicide. It was reported that there had been a lengthy custody dispute that resulted in her biological father losing custody at trial and had his access

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<sup>36</sup> For SIU report, see: [https://www.siu.on.ca/en/directors\\_report\\_details.php?drid=908](https://www.siu.on.ca/en/directors_report_details.php?drid=908).



reduced in the summer preceding her death early in 2020. Both the child and her father were found at the base of an escarpment with injuries consistent with a fall, which occurred when she had been visiting her father for the weekend.

The victim's mother had previously raised concerns about the girl's safety and tried to have his custody reduced, three years prior, but was unsuccessful. The judge noted the accused's "aggressive and somewhat bullying" behaviour to his ex-wife but ruled against limiting the young girl's overnight visits with her father (Moon & Kennedy, 2020). The judge was not concerned with the girl's safety but did award her mother sole decision-making authority about the child's upbringing, which the accused appealed. The judge wrote: "I am of the view that there is no risk to [the victim]" (Moon & Kennedy, 2020). The victim's mother had asked the court for an emergency hearing to limit the accused's access or give him only supervised access, shortly before the fateful hike. The judge said the motion was "serious" but not urgent, because a children's aid society was currently investigating the case (Casey, 2020). This was the young victim's last weekend with the accused before the court appearance where the prospect of having his custody being reduced would be reviewed.

And what happens when victims are missing and presumed dead – what many have begun to refer to as 'no-body' homicides (Ferguson & Pooley, 2019), which is again particularly relevant in the case of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, as documented by the Inquiry report. While research is limited in Canada, research in the United States has found that 'no-body' homicides most commonly involve female victims and male perpetrators (DiBiase, 2014). For example, in one 2020 case in Canada, a woman disappeared after travelling for an appointment out of town. After failing to attend the appointment and not returning home, her family reported her missing to police. After ten days, police charged a man with manslaughter in connection with her disappearance. The victim and the accused were seen arguing before she went missing. The relationship between the victim and the accused had spanned many years and they were reportedly both friends and business partners. The victim's car had been recovered, but police were still searching for her body. After announcing the victim is presumed to be dead, they upgraded the accused's charges to first-degree murder. In another 2020 case, a woman's disappearance sparked an intensive and long police search. After failing to return home, her family contacted police and a missing person case was opened. After almost two months of searching, police charged her husband with second-degree murder in connection with her disappearance. Although the details of her killing remain unknown, the victim is presumed dead, and police continue to work to recover her body. Not all missing persons cases lead to a charge of homicide when the victim has yet to be found, however. What determines which cases do result in a homicide classification and those that do not? This is another dimension to understanding official and unofficial homicide counts which may be more relevant to marginalized and vulnerable groups of women and girls.

The above cases, and many others in previous years, underscore the fine line between what are official homicides and those which are not designated as such. While legal and other formal systems are restricted to making such designations only when 'evidence-based', when does the lived experiences and 'expertise' of those who know the victim, and arguably the perpetrator, become evidence? If not officially designated a homicide, where do these victims get counted? Do they get counted? The invisibility of some women and girls in life – and death – has been underscored by the focus on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada and the United States. It has also been highlighted an issue for Black women in the United States, a situation which is likely similar in this country if reliable data were available, an issue we turn to next.



"She always laughed, laughed always. Her laughter was infectious. She made a joke out of everything. She was just a very giving person ... She was never adversarial. She didn't like conflict – but a strong woman at the same time, very strong, very strong-willed."

## Race-based data

Like previous reports, we continue to draw attention to the data challenges and gaps in documenting the risk of violent victimization experienced by Indigenous and other racialized women. These gaps are as glaring in official data sources as they are in media coverage




of these crimes, albeit arguably more concerning in the former than the latter because of the legitimacy with which official figures are viewed by the public. With respect to media reports, in 2016-2017, the CFOJA found that information was missing on race for about two-thirds of female victims (62%) and three quarters of the male victims (75%). Similarly, information was missing on the race/ethnicity of the accused in 75 percent of female-victim cases and significantly more so in male-victim homicides (81%).

Although investigations are early and ongoing, patterns were similar for 2020: race was not documented for 65% of victims and 90% of the accused. However, even with these gaps, minimum estimates can be provided. Specifically, the CFOJA documented the continued overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls – at least four times their population. This means that, at minimum, more than one in four female victims killed by male accused was an Indigenous woman or girl. The most recent figures provided by Statistics Canada’s Homicide Survey show similar proportions in which Indigenous peoples, both female and male, accounted for 27% of all homicide victims (Statistics Canada, 2020). They further note that Indigenous women and girls are killed at a rate of 4.01 per 100,000 compared to non-Indigenous women (0.55 per 100,000) in 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2020).

As noted, conclusions could not be drawn for other racialized female victims using CFOJA data, but the most recent figures from Statistics Canada reported that one-third of homicide victims – including both female and male victims – were identified as visible minorities<sup>37</sup>, 44 percent of whom were identified as Black (Statistics Canada, 2020). These figures were not disaggregated by sex of the victim nor was the proportion of missing information reported. This is particularly concerning given that it is anticipated that Black females are at an increased risk of lethal violence, but this is not currently possible to document.

Given increasing criticisms of how law enforcement agencies – and other institutions such as health care organizations – respond to marginalized communities, Statistics Canada reported last year that it would begin to collect race-based data, in partnership with the Canadian Association of the Chiefs of Police.<sup>38</sup> It is clear that these types of data have the potential to shed light on key issues of systemic discrimination and racism within institutions; however, who should be collecting such data, what partners and stakeholders should be involved, and how these data will ultimately be used and by whom remain key questions in moving forward.



"Her gentle and kind soul, her laughter, her smile, her big brown eyes and beauty are irreplaceable."

## Sex, gender, or gender identity? Why is that even a question?

There have been growing discussions and debates in recent years surrounding the use of sex, gender, and/or gender identity in various legislative and policy initiatives, which has impacted current and emerging efforts to collect crucial data. Specifically, the response of some public agencies to these ongoing discussions will make it much more difficult to gather data and track crimes of male violence against women, including femicide, as well as to document transphobic violence and femicide.

For example, as of January 2019, Statistics Canada’s Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) switched from gathering data based on the category of ‘sex’ to a category of ‘gender’, in which the gender ‘female’ includes anyone who identifies as female (including cisgender and trans women) and the ‘male’ gender category which includes anyone who identifies as male (including cisgender and trans men).<sup>39</sup> There

<sup>37</sup> Used by Statistics Canada and defined by the Employment Equity Act, the term “visible minority” refers to “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” and consist mainly of the following groups: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese, and Korean (see <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=469273&CVD=469273&CLV=0&MLV=1&D=1>). This term is not recognized in many other countries.

<sup>38</sup> See: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/statistics-canada-race-data-police-1.5650273>.

<sup>39</sup> For classification of sex, see: <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=467245&CVD=467245&CLV=0&MLV=1&D=1>. For classification of gender, see: <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=467245&CVD=467245&CLV=0&MLV=1&D=1>.



is also a category for people who identify as gender diverse. This is, in contrast, to earlier surveys that captured whether a victim or an accused was ‘male’ or ‘female.’ It is not clear if these are the same definitions used in the most recent Homicide Survey infographic given that female victim and male victim are not defined and a full *Juristat* has not been released. The 2018 publication was still using the term ‘sex’ of the victim and accused where there was a focus on this characteristic, albeit such a focus was limited (Roy & Marcellus, 2019).

Given the increasing recognition by some groups of non-binary gender<sup>40</sup> and transgender identity<sup>41</sup>, some changes to the collection of data were arguably warranted. However, while there is still confusion as to what exactly will happen going forward, the approach that seems to have been adopted above – the removal of sex-based categories – will make it increasingly difficult to accurately track male violence against women and, specifically, femicide. It will also prevent the tracking of violence against transgender persons; data that were already difficult to collect given that previous survey instruments did not provide the space to capture gender identity. If this information is not reported consistently, it will be impossible to accurately count the number of women killed, the sex of the perpetrator, and the nature of the relationship or context in which the femicide took place. If we cannot identify and track the scope of the problem, we cannot begin to address it. Without sex-specific data, the work of the Observatory and other anti-violence initiatives will be profoundly limited and, in turn, efforts at public education, awareness and prevention will be hindered. Further, given these changes, and the complexities involved, both the recording and reporting of these data will require all those responsible, and primarily the police, to have an understanding of trans/gender diversity for subsequent data to be reliable and valid.

In addition, over time and across cultures, one consistent social fact is that certain crimes, and specifically violent crimes, are clearly sex-specific with males overwhelmingly the perpetrators, regardless of the sex of the victim. As a result, the collection of sex-disaggregated data is, and has been, an international norm. In 2018, UN Women called for the collection of sex-disaggregated data to ensure that women and girls and their needs were visible (UN Women, 2018: 46). The implications of the changes that are occurring with respect to the collection of these data in Canada will have far-reaching and potentially negative future impacts on our ability to understand and prevent crime, particularly for those already vulnerable to specific types of violent crime, including women, girls, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Recently, it appears that there is a recognition that consultation is needed before further changes are made. A recent call from Statistics Canada for experts, stakeholders, and others invites feedback on “gender and sexual diversity statistical metadata standards.”<sup>42</sup> In thinking about how we proceed, the question that needs to be asked is why it must be a choice between sex, gender, or gender identity? Good research and data collection protocols begin with more categories and collapses later as needed, depending on one’s purpose, not collapsing categories before the collection of data begins.

## Sexual femicide

The CFOJA defines sexual femicide as killings in which sexual violations and sexual violence are part of, or result in, the death of a woman or girl. The sexual violence involved in sexual femicide may range from leaving the victim unclothed, often displayed publicly, to rape, sexual assault, and sexual mutilation. For women and girls killed in 2020, there was evidence of sexual violence documented in one case; however, little information was provided given the recency of the investigation. In that case, the perpetrator was a family friend of the 13-year-old victim. There were allegations that the accused had an “inappropriate relationship” (as reported in the media) with the young girl and, when she was killed, the accused had left her body unclothed. In the five-year period, 2016-2020, there were 11 female victims for whom there was evidence to determine they had been sexually assaulted prior to their death, one of which involved sexual mutilation, and another case in which there was latent evidence of a sexual assault.

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<sup>40</sup> Gender non-binary is a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine or identities that are outside the gender binary.

<sup>41</sup> A general term used to describe someone whose gender expression or gender identity is different than their sex at birth.

<sup>42</sup> For more information on content of this call, see: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/concepts/consult-variables/gender?fbclid=IwAR2K9bQL5G1HzSmusMFdDPvNJ0lGtKgyRhenjqGpjqn72kYx8p23lSnKMMN>





It is contended by the CFOJA, however, that sexual femicides are vastly undercounted; in part, due to a gap in research, data collection and reporting around sexual femicide, but also because of minimization of this form of violence as a significant factor in the killing of women and girls. There may also be a lack of effort on the part of police to document and disclose the types of sexual violence that are present in the killings of women and girls. For example, research has shown that sexual violence is often present in femicides, but this information is rarely reflected in official documents (Dawson & Carrigan, 2020). This Canadian study showed that, when this information was included in documents examined, one in five women or girls was subject to some type of sexual violation or violence (Dawson & Carrigan, 2020). However, despite research documenting the higher likelihood of sexual violence in the killing of women and girls, data on sexual violence was more often missing in documents related to the deaths of women (28%) compared to other types of homicide involving men (ranging from 18% to 25%) (Dawson & Carrigan 2020).

Sexual violence against women and girls and femicide are closely linked forms of violence that are both rooted in oppressive structures including, but not limited to, gender inequality, racism, colonialism, and ableism. The minimization and underreporting of sexual violence in femicide are likely exacerbated in cases that involve women killed by male partners, as well as for sexual femicide against marginalized groups of women and girls, including but not limited to, Indigenous women and girls, Black women and girls, and women and girls living with a disability. Sexual femicide remains difficult to understand because of the lack of research, knowledge, and data around the interaction of sexual violence and femicide globally, an issue which requires urgent attention.

## Separation and femicide

One of the ongoing legacies of naïve and negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes exists in the most common question asked when a woman is killed by her male partner – why didn't she leave? Not only does this question remove responsibility from the perpetrator for his actions, it also ignores two other important realities: that separation poses an increased risk for intimate partner femicide and, relatedly, that she may have been trying to leave when she was killed.



Despite the recognized role that actual or pending separation plays as a risk factor in cases of intimate partner femicide, our CFOJA 2020 data showed that female victims separated from their accused did not appear to be overrepresented. In part, this is likely due to using media as a primary data source given that details are still emerging on many of these cases. It may also be due to the impact of COVID-19 in which women's ability to leave has been severely restricted. However, it is also likely due to the way in which actual or pending separation is captured, or whether it can always be captured, from the data accessed as discussed next.

Although its conceptualization is changing, separation was historically only noted by researchers if it was a physical separation. However, it is often the case that couples are separating, but have yet to move apart. Alternatively, they may have been separated, but could not afford to live in two separate residences or maintained the same residence for the children. These latter situations are often seen as more lethal situations than the physical separation itself. Beyond this, and likely more often, is the situation in which the female victim has announced that she is leaving her male partner, which prompts a reaction from the perpetrator. Separation is a key factor in the intimate partner femicide, then, even when physical separation has not occurred. As such, data collection efforts in the future need to begin to tease out separation as a process during which a woman often ends up being killed even if she has not yet had the chance to physically leave. The need to do so has been underscored in the work of domestic violence death review committees who commonly find that a woman has been killed while in the process of trying to separate from a male partner.



## Textbox 4: Separation as an SGRMI for femicide

*Actual or pending separation is recognized as a sex/gender related motive or indicator for femicide, and particularly intimate partner femicide, as it is a motive present almost exclusively in the killing of women by their male partners. Typically, 'if I can't have you, no one can' is the most commonly recognized attitude of males toward females as property over whom they have entitlement, including whether they, and often the children, are able to live or die, if not remaining in the relationship.*

*Intimate partner femicide involving couples who were separated or estranged are fewer in absolute numbers than those who were currently in a relationship when the killing occurred (i.e. relationship state, Dawson and Gartner, 1998). Despite this, in most countries with available data to report disaggregated rates, femicide rates are typically higher for women who are legally separated from their male partner compared to women in current relationships (Dawson and Gartner, 1998; Johnson and Hotton, 2003; Hotton, 2001; Wilson and Daly, 1993). Put another way, despite their lower absolute numbers, women are at greatest risk of intimate femicide when they are separating, or separated from, their male partner. Official data confirms that from the period of 2007 to 2011, women who were legally separated from their spouse had a risk of spousal homicide that was six times higher than women who were married to their spouse (Sinha, 2013). This risk is generally compounded when there are children involved that lead to custody and access disputes and/or if the woman begins a relationship with a new partner (Jaffe et al., 2014).*

*For example, using published Canadian data available from the period of 2007 to 2011, when calculated as a rate per 100,000, 1.80 women per 100,000 were killed by a male spouse from whom they were separated (Lindsay, 2014). In comparison, 1.29 women per 100,000 were killed by a current common-law partner and 0.31 women per 100,000 were killed by a legally married partner (Lindsay, 2014). Over the same period, no males were killed by a legally separated or divorced female partner and 1.00 males per million married men were killed by their current spouse (Lindsay, 2014; Sinha 2013).*

*Statistics Canada has not published data on crude divorce rates since the year 2008, where there were 21.1 divorces reported per 10,000 population, leaving a decade-long gap on divorce trends in Canada (Milan, 2013; Margolis et al., 2019). However, separation may be considered an increasingly common life transition, which is concerning if it is also a high-risk time for women based on the context of victimization. Roughly four in 10 marriages will end by their 30th year of marriage (Kelly, 2012; Milan, 2013), which suggests the population of separated women may grow in Canada. Therefore, separated women experience higher femicide rates and are at a heightened risk of homicide victimization by their former spouses compared to their married counterparts.*

*In 2020, according to CFOJA data, when relationship state was known (N=34), 79 percent of all women killed were in a current relationship with their accused (N=27) and 21 percent were separated from the accused (N=7). This reflects the proportion of women who were married and separated in the national data, given that about 22 percent of women living in Canada were separated or divorced compared to 78 percent who were married (Statistics Canada, 2020). Because media was the primary data source, it is contended that separation/estrangement is currently undercounted as a risk factor for 2020 data and more generally for data over time as discussed in Section V, Current and Emerging Research and Data Priorities.*

## Summary

In summary, despite the focus on violence against women and girls, including femicide, in recent decades, we continue to face significant gaps in our knowledge, largely because data collection efforts are either administrative rather than preventative in focus or because the killing of women and girls is not seen as a prevention priority. There is no doubt that governments globally are highlighting that femicide and violence against women is a priority; however, are these symbolic and often performative gestures being followed with concrete actions by way of investment of resources, the establishment of long-term, sustainable initiatives, and an emphasis on the vital, quality training of those working in responding sectors that needs to accompany such changes?

The lives of women and girls are at risk because we are not collecting, or making available, the right information. The list of research priorities in Section V and the data gaps and challenges identified in this section, if not addressed, will continue to stunt progress in prevention efforts. The priorities discussed in this report are not exhaustive; rather, they were most closely aligned with the findings of previous analyses and results in this report. Given this, and the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of women and girls, and specifically their experiences of violence, the priorities and challenges identified are basic, minimum steps that must be taken if we are to reverse the pendulum that has begun to swing backwards in our efforts to address male violence against women and girls.

In the next and final Section VII, the list of women and girls killed by violence in Canada in 2020 offer the most recent evidence of our inability to effectively respond to violence in our society.



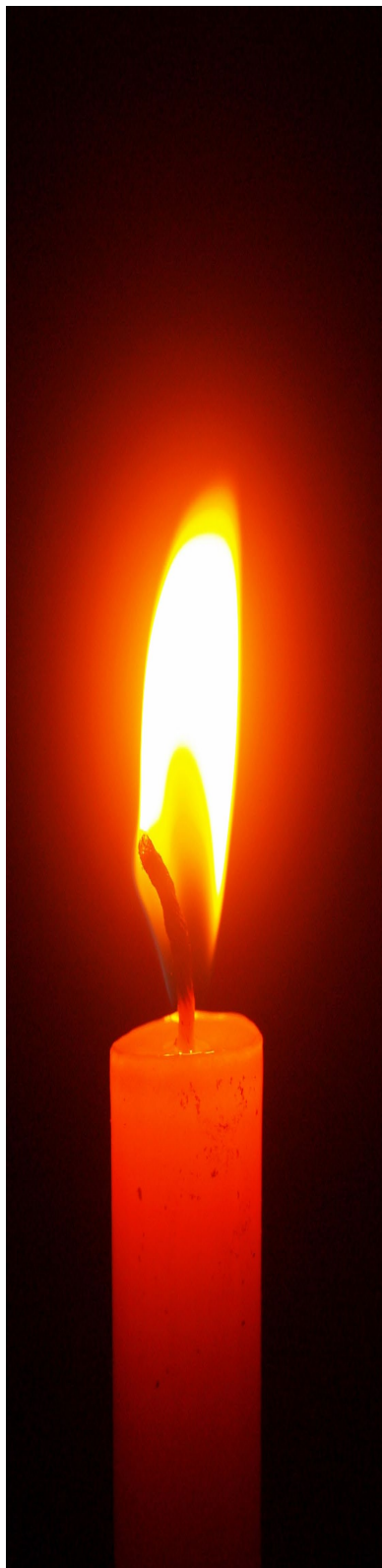
## SECTION VII:

# Remembering Women and Girls Killed by Violence in 2020

If you know the name of a woman or girl below who is currently not named, please contact us at [cfoja@uoguelph.ca](mailto:cfoja@uoguelph.ca).

Keesha Cree Alexandra Bitternose, 29, Indigenous, Regina, SK (Jan 5)  
Reagan Danielle Gross, 49, Winnipeg, MB (Jan 10)  
Maryna Kudzianiuk, 49, Scarborough, ON (Jan 13)  
Heeral Patel, 28, Brampton, ON (Jan 13)  
Jaël Cantin, 33, Mascouche, QC (Jan 16)  
Annie Koneak, 39, Indigenous, Kuujjuaq, QC (~Jan 18)  
Tonya-Lee Nina Hyer, 45, Vancouver, BC (Jan 19)  
Giulia Matthews, 54, Toronto, ON (before Jan 20)  
Marylène Lévesque, 22, Quebec City, QC (Jan 22)  
Name not released, 55, Gatineau, QC (Jan 25)  
Céline Labelle, 54, Val-des-Monts, QC (Feb 2)  
Name not released, 43, Indigenous, Iqaluit, NU (Feb 6)  
Brittney Newman, 25, Mississauga, ON (Feb 9)  
Keira Kagan, 4, Milton, ON (Feb 9)  
Melissa Rae Blommaert, 33, Calgary, AB (Feb 11)  
Sheri Lynn Gauthier, 33, Indigenous, Edmonton, AB (Feb 12)  
Hang-Kam Annie Chiu, 64, Scarborough, ON (Feb 21)  
Ashley Noell Arzaga, 24, North York, ON (Feb 24)  
Océane Boyer, 13, Brownsburg-Chatham, QC (Feb 26)  
Sarah Nicole Natasha Rabik, 24, Cochrane, AB (Feb 26)  
Rae Charlotte Towegishig, 25, Indigenous, Thunder Bay, ON (Mar 3)  
Allison Moosehunter (Ally Witchekan), 28, Indigenous, Saskatoon, SK (Mar 4)  
Angela "Angie" Suzanne Dalman, 40, Langford, BC (Mar 6)  
Pen Yun Ivy Chen, 36, Coquitlam, BC (~Mar 6)  
Rhonda Homsombath, 25, Hamilton, ON (Mar 8)  
Erika Ann Vautour, 39, Saint-Ignace, NB (Mar 8)  
Sequin Mooswa, 22, Indigenous, North Battleford, SK (Mar 8)  
Joy Morris, 62, Vanderhoof, BC (Mar 9)  
Shannon MacDougall, 37, Brantford, ON (Mar 11)  
Theepa Seevaratnam, 38, Scarborough, ON (Mar 13)  
Sarah Marie Thwaites, 29, Sarnia, ON (Mar 13)  
Dorothy Brown, 72, Dryden, ON (Mar 25)  
Name not released, 35, Indigenous, Lake Manitoba First Nation, MB (Mar 26)  
Name not released, 41, Sundre, AB (Mar 29)  
Sandra Henry, 56, Indigenous, Prince Albert, SK (Mar 29)  
Barbara Waite, 64, Squamish, BC (Mar 31)  
Audrey Hopkinson, 33, Brockville, ON (Mar 31)  
Name not released, 20, Windsor, ON (Apr 1)  
Tracey (Tracy) Jean MacKenzie, Hammond Plains, NS (Apr 2)  
Tali Nolan, 20, Peterborough, ON (Apr 3)  
Marguerite Lamonde, 69, Montmagny, QC (~Apr 8)  
Eishia Hudson, 16, Indigenous, Winnipeg, MB (Apr 8)





Emily McCallum-Daniels, 3, Indigenous, Prince Albert, SK (Apr 8)  
Tina Seminara, 61, Osoyoos, BC (Apr 8)  
Raquel Callum, 15, Indigenous, Waywayseecappo First Nation, MB (Apr 11)  
Julie Racette, 34, Indigenous, Winnipeg, MB (Apr 11)  
Tanya Alcrow, 19, Indigenous, Saskatoon, SK (Apr 13)  
Jamie Blair, 40, Portapique, NS (Apr 18)  
Joy Bond, 70, Portapique, NS (Apr 18)  
Dawn Madsen (Gulenchyn), NS (Apr 18)  
Elizabeth Joanne Thomas, 58, Portapique, NS (Apr 18)  
Kristen Beaton, 33, Debert, NS (Apr 19)  
Gina Goulet, 54, Shubenacadie, NS (Apr 19)  
Lillian Hyslop, 65, Wentworth, NS (Apr 19)  
Alanna Jenkins, 36, Wentworth, NS (Apr 19)  
Lisa McCully, 49, Portapique, NS (Apr 19)  
Heather O'Brien, 55, Debert, NS (Apr 19)  
Jolene Oliver, 39, Portapique, NS (Apr 19)  
Heidi Stevenson, 48, Shubenacadie, NS (Apr 19)  
Emily Tuck, 17, Portapique, NS (Apr 19)  
Brittney (Brittany) Ann Meszaros, 24, Calgary, AB (~Apr 24)  
Jolie-Anne De Sève, 11, Montreal, QC (Apr 25)  
Kayleigh (Kayliegh) Ivall, 14, Thunder Bay, ON (Apr 27)  
Tina Tingley-McAleer, 43, Hillsborough, NB (May 2)  
Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner, 55, Strathcona County, AB (May 4)  
Sarah Gartner, 13, Strathcona County, AB  
Breanna Menacho, 22, Indigenous, Yellowknife, NT (~May 5)  
Marie Morin, 46, Indigenous, Winnipeg, MB (May 15)  
Gladys Little, 79, Hamilton, ON (May 16)  
Bella Rose Desrosiers, 7, Edmonton, AB (May 18)  
Johanne Corriveau, 53, Montreal, QC (May 23)  
Lisa Dawn Arsenaault, 48, Indigenous, Edmonton, AB (May 24)  
Danielle "Stephanie" Warriner, 43, Toronto, ON (May 27)  
Name not released, 60, St. Catharines, ON (May 29)  
Jennifer "Jen" Quesnel, 41, Salt Spring Island, BC (June 1)  
Karlee May Dixon, 40, Surrey, BC (June 2)  
Chantel Moore, 26, Indigenous, Edmundston, NB (June 4)  
Tessa Marie Bryant, 7, North Battleford, SK (June 4)  
Francine Brière, 74, Ormstown, QC (June 11)  
Tatiana Bazyar, 50, Langley, BC (June 13)  
Medea "Befrin" Ebrahimian, 23, Langley, BC (June 13)  
Bo Fan, 41, South Surrey, BC (June 17)  
Lydia Rose Jacob, 47, Indigenous, Thunder Bay, ON (June 19)  
Cara Cochrane, 37, Kingston, ON (June 21)  
Name not released, 22, Indigenous, Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, MB (June 26)  
Danielle Dawn Cote, 27, Indigenous, Winnipeg, MB (Jul 1)  
Samandeep Jhinger, 23, Warman, SK (~Jul 2)  
Name not released, 26, Prince George, BC (Jul 3)  
Roderica Ribbonleg, 15, Indigenous, John D'Or Prairie, AB (~Jul 5)  
Norah Carpentier, 11, Saint-Apollinaire, QC (~Jul 11)  
Romy Carpentier, 6, Saint-Apollinaire, QC (~Jul 11)



Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles, 39, Edmonton, AB (Jul 11)  
Hailey Belanger-Weeseekase, 19, Indigenous, Saskatoon, SK (Jul 11)  
Eleanor Noreen Harding, 85, Dartmouth, NS (Jul 11)  
Arlene Wapoose, 26, Indigenous, Fort Hope, ON (Jul 12)  
Danielle Harper, 35, Indigenous, Winnipeg, MB (~Jul 12)  
Myah Larmond, 17, Hamilton, ON (Jul 15)  
Name not released, 9, Charlottetown, PEI (Jul 17)  
Linda Dutchak, 59, Canora, SK (Jul 17)  
Audrey Corcoran, 33, Edmonton, AB (Jul 19)  
Vida Smith, 69, Calgary, AB (~Jul 21)  
Name not released, 6, Montreal, QC (Jul 23)  
Karen Gottschalk-Millar, 63, Kemptville, ON (Jul 24)  
Sarah Foord, 38, Fort St. John, BC (~Jul 24)  
Suzanne Desjardins, 57, Drummondville, QC (Jul 26)  
Darian Hailey Henderson-Bellman, 25, Brampton, ON (Jul 28)  
Kayla Renee Aubichon, 33, Indigenous, Prince Albert, SK (Jul 28)  
Helen Sedo, 61, Aurora, ON (~Jul 29)  
Teresa Santos, 75, Toronto, ON (~Aug 8)  
Name not released, 23, Grand Prairie, AB (Aug 11)  
Sangita Sharma, 56, Brampton, ON (Aug 13)  
Genesis Young, 17, Sauble Beach, ON (Aug 15)  
Marion Wallace, 81, Mississauga, ON (Aug 18)  
Name not released, Indigenous, Cold Lake First Nation, AB (Aug 18)  
Name not released, 45, Belleville, ON (Aug 22)  
Tara Morton, 41, Toronto, ON (Aug 26)  
Tamara Lee Benoit (Norman), 35, Portage la Prairie, MB (Sep 3)  
Adelaide Traynor, 15, Oshawa, ON (Sep 4)  
Shao Jing Lu, 57, Nuns' Island (Montreal), QC (Sep 7)  
Huiping Ding, 52, Brossard, QC (Sep 8)  
Name not released, 18, Hay River, NWT (Sep 9)  
Kayla Duff, 22, Cambridge, ON (Sep 11)  
Iva Barcelos, 59, Toronto, ON (Sep 12)  
Erin Chelsea Borgford, 27, Vernon, BC (Sep 20)  
Megan Gallagher, 30, Saskatoon, SK (~Sep 20)  
Amy Hager, 20, Hamilton, ON (Sep 21)  
Name not released, 35, Indigenous, St. Theresa Point First Nation, MB (Sep 24)  
Sierra Chalifoux-Thompson, 13, Indigenous, Edmonton, AB (Oct 2)  
Diane Leblanc, 61, Mercier, Montreal, QC (Oct 3)  
Sylvie Leblanc, 56, Mercier, Montreal, QC (Oct 3)  
Belynda Kerelchuk, 53, Mississauga, ON (Oct 6)  
Name not released, 1, Regina, SK (Oct 9)  
Sylvie Favron, 61, Ahuntsic-Cartierville, QC (Oct 10)  
Judy Neddo, 75, Temiskaming Shores, ON (Oct 11)  
Baljit Kaur, 20s, Surrey, BC (Oct 20)  
Margaret Nishikawara, 95, North York, ON (Oct 20)  
Name not released, 69, Sarnia, ON (Oct 25)  
Suzanne Clermont, 61, Quebec City, QC (Oct 31)  
Name not released, 29, Yellowknife, NT (Oct 31)  
Mary Saviadjuk, 37, Indigenous, Salluit, QC (Nov 1)





Shanda Wilson (Atkinson), 38, Whiskey Creek, BC (Nov 1)  
Chantelle Renee Firingstone, 26, Indigenous, Ponoka, AB (Nov 5)  
Kerri Ann Weber, 55, Langford, BC (Nov 5)  
Corrine Lisa Saddleback, 51, Indigenous, Maskwacis, AB (Nov 7)  
Catherine Ambrose, 63, Hamilton, ON (Nov 13)  
Tigist "Tiggy" Takle, 31, Toronto, ON (Nov 18)  
Maryanne Blandizzi, 41, Toronto, ON (Nov 22)  
Name not released, 18, Burnaby, BC (Nov 29)  
Lisa Ellie Marie Baines, 29, Surrey, BC (Dec 3)  
Madiha Malik, Milton, ON (Dec 4)  
Maria Manuela-Correia, 61, Brampton, ON (Dec 4)  
Françoise Côté, 74, Laval, QC (Dec 4)  
Name not released, 47, Ermineskin Cree Nation, AB (Dec 9)  
Name not released, 39, Kingston, ON (Dec 12)  
Mindy Godin, 32, Grand Falls, NB (Dec 21)  
Billie Wynn Johnson, 30, Edmonton, AB (~Dec 24)  
Nicole Lauzon, 64, Ste-Marthe-sur-le-Lac, QC (Dec 26)  
Name not released, 89, Wallaceburg, ON (Dec 26)  
Louanne Martha Cardinal, 29, Indigenous, Frog Lake First Nation, AB (Dec 26)  
Moirin Gladys Webster, Gibson, BC (Dec 27)  
Cheryl VanHuizen, 51, Corunna, ON (Dec 31)



# APPENDIX A:

## The History of the Term ‘Femicide’

### International context

The term “femicide” was introduced publicly in the modern age<sup>43</sup> by violence against women feminist pioneer, expert and activist, Diana Russell, at the *International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women* to bring attention to violence and discrimination against women (Russell & Van de Ven, 1976). Its definitional parameters have changed somewhat over time, however. For example, in its earlier iterations, femicide was defined as “the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women” (Caputi & Russell, 1990) and “the misogynistic killings of women by men” (Radford & Russell, 1992). More recently, this definition evolved to “the killing of one or more females by one or more males because they are female” as stated by Russell in her introductory speech to the *United Nations Symposium on Femicide* in November 2012 (Russell, 2012). At this event, the Vienna Declaration on Femicide was signed by 150 individuals, including various ambassadors and 10 Member States.<sup>44</sup>

Emphasizing that femicide comprises the killing of women and girls because of their gender, the following forms were identified specifically at this 2012 symposium:<sup>45</sup>

- 1) murder of women as a result of intimate partner violence;
- 2) torture and misogynist slaying of women
- 3) killing of women and girls in the name of "honour";
- 4) targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict;
- 5) dowry-related killings of women;
- 6) killing of women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity;
- 7) killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender;
- 8) female infanticide and gender-based sex selection foeticide;
- 9) genital mutilation related deaths;
- 10) accusations of witchcraft and
- 11) other gender-based murders connected with gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms (Acuns, 2013: 4).

However, the term as well as its accepted meaning continues to vary, depending upon whose perspective and from where it is being examined. As such, the phenomenon of femicide and its definitional parameters continue to be discussed and debated internationally in academia, policy and grassroots activists’ arenas as well as regional, national and other legislative processes (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Laurent et al., 2013; Mujica & Tuesta, 2014). For example, in some world regions, such as Latin America, the term *feminicidio* (or feminicide in English) is preferred because it captures the way in which states or governments are often unresponsive to the killings of women (Lagarde De Los Rios, 1990).

It has been argued that this term may also be more appropriate in the Canadian context of ongoing settler colonialism. Indigenous women and girls, in particular, face disproportionate violent victimization in the context of ongoing settler colonial relations and a long history of



<sup>43</sup> The first documented use of the term ‘femicide’ was in a book by John Corry (1801) called *A Satirical View of London at the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century* where it was used to refer to the killing of a woman.

<sup>44</sup> See: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ngos/DCN5-Symposium-on-femicide-a-global-issue-that-demands-action.html>.

<sup>45</sup> This list is not exhaustive and has been expanded by others. For example, while killing because of race or racism is not captured directly above, others including the CFOJA include ‘racist femicide’ which refers to killings that occur because of hate or rejection of a woman’s ethnic or racial origins, real or perceived, or her genetic features (see also <https://www.femicideinCanada.ca/about/types>).



targeted colonial violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada. This includes state violence, such as the targeted apprehension of Indigenous children into residential schools, as well as a general failure of police and others in the criminal justice system to adequately respond to, or provide for, the needs of Indigenous women and girls (e.g. CEDAW, 2015; Garcia-Del Moral, 2018). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (2015) indicates that perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women “may count on the insufficient response of the police and justice system and continue to operate in an environment conducive to impunity in which aboriginal women continue to suffer high levels of violence with insufficient criminal liability and without adequate access to justice.”

Internationally, a broader definition of femicide is sometimes used that includes all killings of women and girls (UNODC 2018; Corradi et al., 2016). This is often done for ease of international comparisons. In more recent international work, however, the focus has been on intimate partner/family-related femicide *committed by males*, while also acknowledging that, in some cases, the violence may be perpetrated by female family members in various social and cultural contexts (Glass et al., 2004; Muftic & Bauman, 2012). It is also recognized that women may be the accused in other contexts categorized as femicide (e.g. female-perpetrated acquaintance femicide, Muftic & Bauman, 2012). It continues to be recognized, however, that men are the primary perpetrators of femicide and, as stated by the United Nations Secretary-General, in a report on the progress towards Sustainable Development goals, this violence is perpetuated and maintained through broader patriarchal systems of oppression and ongoing gender inequality (Grzyb, 2016; Taylor & Jasinski, 2011; Russell & Harmes, 2001).

The former UN SRVAW, Rashida Manjoo, was instrumental in developing a knowledge base around the topic of femicide and identifying various types of femicide. The current UN SRVAW, Dubravka Šimonović, has continued with this focus, identifying femicide prevention as an immediate priority and emphasizing the pressing need to collect comparable data on femicide that can be disaggregated by victim-perpetrator relationship, age and race/ethnicity of victims, as well as prosecution and punishment outcomes for perpetrators. To this end, the current UN SRVAW called upon all countries to establish femicide watches/observatories as a key mechanism for the systematic and detailed collection of data on femicide to inform the development of more effective prevention initiatives and to guide knowledge-based policymaking.<sup>46</sup>

Such watches or initiatives existed in some countries before this call (e.g. the United Kingdom,<sup>47</sup> Australia,<sup>48</sup> and Mexico<sup>49</sup>) and, most recently, on a regional basis (European Observatory on Femicide<sup>50</sup>).

## Canadian context

The relevance of the term femicide in the Canadian context emerged following December 6, 1989, when Mark Lépine entered École Polytechnique at the Université De Montréal with the intent to kill women, blaming them for his failure to gain entrance to the engineering program. Lépine separated students by gender and yelled, “You’re all a bunch of feminists, and I hate feminists!” before firing at the women (Elgin & Hester, 1999: 225; Rosenberg, 2003: 20). Following this gendered act of lethal violence, 14 women were dead and another 10 were injured before Lépine turned the gun on himself.

The gendered nature of this attack was largely overlooked by the media, however. In the aftermath of the killing, many people described Lépine’s actions as the work of a madman, disconnecting the violence from his hateful and misogynistic attitudes toward women. In short, it was not acknowledged that he targeted his victims *because they were women* thereby largely ignoring the context of his actions. Regardless, these killings serve as a clear example of what femicide means or, in this case, mass femicide and the role of misogyny in such

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<sup>46</sup> See: <https://www.femicideincanada.ca/library/international>.

<sup>47</sup> See: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigning-and-influencing/femicide-census/> and <https://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/>.

<sup>48</sup> See: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/counting-dead-women-the-project-keeping-toll-of-australia-s-hidden-epidemic> and Cullen et al. (2019).

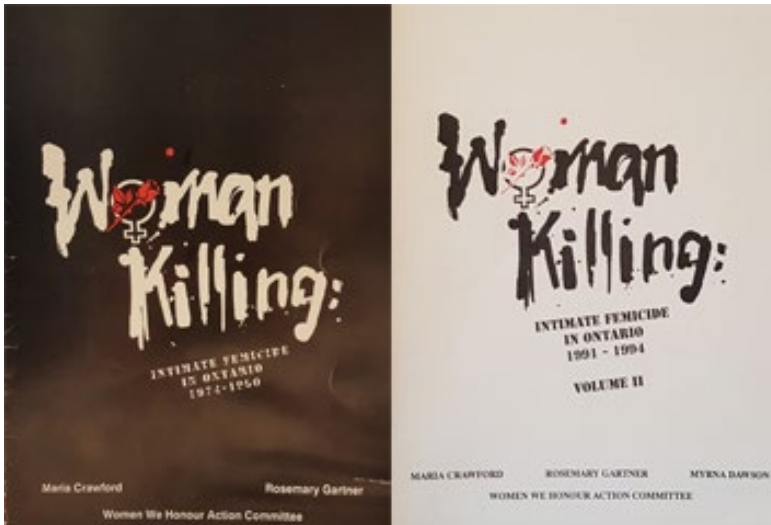
<sup>49</sup> See: <http://femicide-watch.org/players/national-observatory-femicide-mexico> and <https://justiceinmexico.org/femicidesinmexico/>.

<sup>50</sup> See: <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-03-20/education/The-European-Observatory-on-Femicide-launched-in-Malta-6736186593> and Weil et al. (2018).





deaths. Since then, every year on December 6, Canadians come together to honour the victims of this mass femicide as well as other femicide victims in a *National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women*.<sup>51</sup>




That same year – 1989 – in response to a series of killings in Ontario, a group of eight women working in shelters for abused women in that province came together to share experiences and to provide each other with emotional support. They had worked with, or had been friends of, women who were killed by male partners (Gartner et al., 1999). Naming themselves the *Women We Honour Action Committee*, the group set themselves the task of learning more about women killed by male partners. Launching a study, they had three goals: (1) to document the incidence of these killings; (2) to describe the characteristics of those involved as well as the circumstances; and (3) to present the stories of some of the women who had been killed by current or former legal spouses, common-law partners or boyfriends.

Occurring in two stages and focusing on the period 1974-1994, the study documented 1,206 killings of women aged 15 and older from official records (e.g. coroner’s files, police and court records) (Crawford & Gartner 1992; Crawford et al., 1997). Of the 1,120 cases with identified killers, 705 or 63 percent of the killers were current or former male partners (Gartner et al., 1999). Described in two reports (see above images), the study’s findings demonstrated that, like global patterns, femicide was most often perpetrated by current or former male partners.

Since then, this early ground-breaking, feminist-inspired research has been cited frequently in publications internationally. It also served as the impetus for the ongoing research project, *Femicide in Ontario*, which, in turn, is the core foundation of research being conducted by the CFOJA (Dawson, 2018). Where possible, data from this research will be used to provide some historical context to the 2018 trends and patterns discussed in this report.<sup>52</sup>

Contributing significantly to knowledge about femicide and intimate femicide, the authors of the early study acknowledged that many questions remained. Of note was why did some groups of women face disproportionately higher risks of intimate femicide compared to other groups of women (Dawson & Gartner, 1998; Gartner et al., 1999)? This question continues to be asked today about femicide more broadly (see Chart A1 next page), particularly with respect to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls who face higher risks of femicide both in and outside their intimate relationships as discussed next.



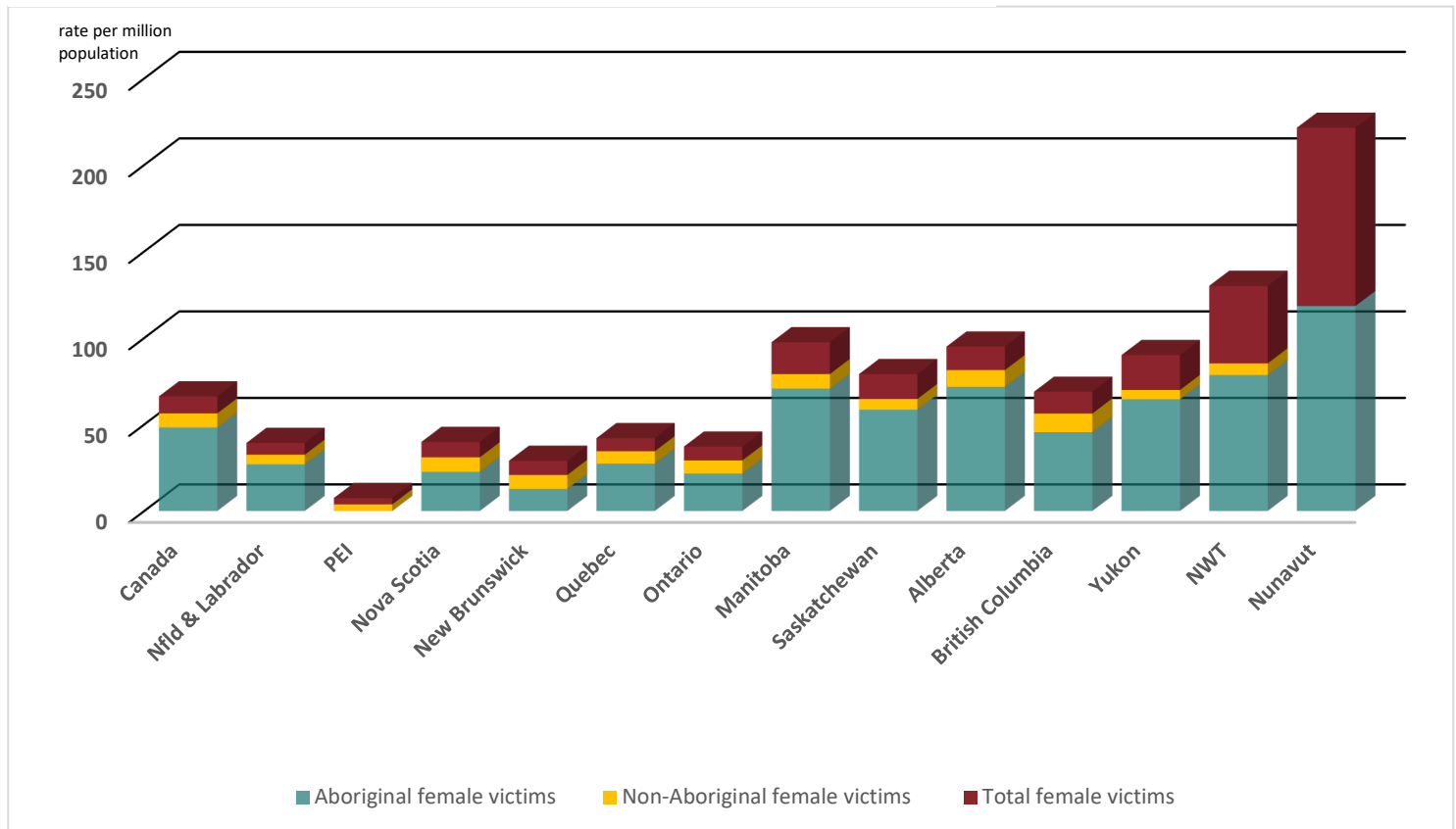
"Just know that (she) was a very kind and loving young woman. Very family-oriented and never wanted harm to come to anyone."

<sup>51</sup> For more information, see: <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/commemoration/vaw-vff/remembrance-commemoration-en.html>.

<sup>52</sup> While the *Femicide in Ontario* research focuses on one province in Canada, Ontario is the country’s most populated province and, as such, typically represents close to one-third of the homicides that are documented annually. Therefore, while patterns are not generalizable to the country, they may reflect some of the dominant patterns over time.



Chart A1: Rates of female homicide by Aboriginal identity and province or territory, 2001-2015



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey, 2001 to 2015

In Canada, official statistics have consistently documented that Indigenous women are significantly more likely to be killed by male partners than non-Indigenous women. However, Indigenous women and girls are overrepresented as victims of femicide more generally. For example, about five percent of the Canadian population is Indigenous and female yet they represented 24 percent of victims in 2015 (Statistics Canada, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2015). Despite their higher risk of intimate femicide, some research shows that Indigenous women and girls are also often killed by male acquaintances and strangers and more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women (Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence Against Indigenous Women 2015).

This fact was initially brought to light by Amnesty International and the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC). The Amnesty International reports – *Stolen Sisters* (2004) and *No More Stolen Sisters* (2009) – demonstrated that “widespread and entrenched racism, poverty and marginalization” heightened Indigenous women and girls’ vulnerability to violence while “denying them adequate protection by police and government services” (p. 2). Similarly, NWAC’s *Sisters in Spirit* grassroots initiative launched in 2005 demonstrated that Indigenous women and girls were as likely to be killed by male acquaintances or strangers as they were by male partners. This finding is even more significant given that official statistics indicate that they also are eight times more likely to be killed by male partners than non-Indigenous women (NWAC 2010; Statistics Canada 2006).



The Sisters in Spirit initiative also highlighted various systemic issues including the impunity<sup>53</sup> of many of the perpetrators, similar to that being documented in other world regions like Latin America and South Africa. Other key contributing factors identified are the violence that has been experienced for decades by Indigenous women and girls in Canada along with their families and communities due to “the intergenerational impact and resulting vulnerabilities of colonization and state policies” (e.g. residential schools, child welfare system) which is both historical and ongoing (NWAC 2010: i).



More recently, the Legal Strategy Coalition (LSC) on Violence Against Indigenous Women (2015) examined over two decades of reports – a total of 58 reports containing 700 recommendations – focused on stopping violence against Indigenous women and girls. The report revealed that, despite general consensus about the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls, only a handful of the 700 recommendations have been fully implemented and there has been a complete failure to plan or implement the needed responses detailed in the recommendations. The LSC analysis suggested a national inquiry examine the resistance to implementation of known and recommended measures to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, including the systemic barriers that must be addressed to bring about needed changes.

After repeated national and international calls for an inquiry into the treatment of Indigenous women and girls, the Canadian government launched the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2016.<sup>54</sup> The Inquiry’s interim report documented the continued high risk of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls, which stems, in large part, from a failure of police and others in the criminal justice system to adequately respond to, or provide for, the needs of

Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG, 2017). Serious concerns have been raised about the ability of the national inquiry to address systemic causes when its mandate includes no explicit reference to review police policies and practices or the criminal justice system more generally (LSC 2018; Also see FAFIA and NWAC 2016). The final report of the MMIWG Inquiry was released on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019.

In summary, the phenomenon of femicide in Canada and its evolution as an increasingly-recognized social, legal, public health and human rights problem underscores that women do have the most to fear from current or former male partners, as demonstrated by the early work of the *Women We Honour Action Committee* as well as by subsequent research which continues to build on this study in the Canadian context (e.g. for most recent research, see Dawson, 2018, 2017, 2016).

However, Canada’s National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women underscores that women and girls also continue to be targeted outside their intimate relationships ‘*because they are women and girls*’ due to misogynistic attitudes, male entitlement, and other social structural impacts (e.g. access to, and quality of, education, employment opportunities, services and resources), in part, the result of ongoing gender inequality. In addition, the experiences of Indigenous women and girls in Canada highlights that some groups of women and girls are at greater risk, due in part to gender, but also to other intersecting identities and inequalities that increase their marginalization in society and, in turn, their vulnerability to violent victimization.

<sup>53</sup> Impunity is defined as the exemption from punishment, or freedom from any consequences, for perpetrating injurious actions and, in this context, describes the inadequate, and often non-existent, actions by police, prosecution and the courts when responding to violence against women and femicide, particularly when victims are Indigenous women and girls (ACUNS, 2018; MMIWG 2017).

<sup>54</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1448633299414/1534526479029> where the Inquiry’s interim report is also available for download.



## Defining the CFOJA research parameters

Because the CFOJA is a new initiative, to be consistent with some international efforts, we begin by defining femicide as the killing of all women and girls primarily, but not exclusively, by men (see <http://www.femicideinCanada.ca/home/what>).<sup>55</sup> We do so for three reasons:

- 1) Given that the CFOJA adopts a national lens, this definition enhances the ability to make provincial/territorial comparisons. This same reasoning has been used to support the adoption of a broad definition at the international level (Sarmiento et al., 2014).
- 2) This definition allows for the possibility that femicide may involve female perpetrators in various social and cultural contexts (UNODC, 2018: 24) and to examine what those circumstances may look like in Canada.
- 3) It is not always, or even usually, immediately clear that there were gender-related elements present in the killing of a woman or girl; therefore, this definition allows us to capture all killings which can then be monitored and examined over the long-term to identify gender-based motives/indicators.

It is a long-term goal of the CFOJA, as will be discussed in Section III, to develop more specific and nuanced definitional parameters that better capture the *'killed because they were women or girls'* aspect of the definition of femicide and to identify various subtypes of femicide. This parallels similar efforts internationally (Sarmiento et al., 2014).



“(She) had the most beautiful smile. When she smiled the entire world smiled. Her daughter... has that same one.”



<sup>55</sup> This definition excludes deaths by car accident unless identified as intentional. We also exclude the deaths of women and girls who reside in Canada but were killed abroad unless both victim and accused were residents of Canada. For more information, see: <https://www.femicideinCanada.ca/about/types>.



## APPENDIX B

### Data Sources

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To track and describe femicide in Canada, this report relies primarily on media sources to document the initial incident, subsequent investigation and court processing of an accused if arrested. Additional information will be drawn from public court records when they become available upon the resolution of the criminal case.

With the growth of information technology, these sources are now easier to access and retrieve, either for free or for a small, monthly subscription fee. Given increasing reliance on media sources, the quality of information documented in the media has been compared to information contained in official sources. Although this research has largely been conducted in the US, similarities to the Canadian situation are likely. This research has shown that:

- Demographic information, such as the gender and age of the victim and perpetrator, is often reported accurately in newspapers, aligning with national database statistics (Heide & Boots, 2007; Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017).
- Race/ethnicity can be more difficult to determine based on newspaper articles alone due to editorial restrictions on how and when race/ethnicity can be reported. However, when comparing information extracted from newspapers to official US statistics, one study showed that it was possible to correctly identify the race/ethnicity of the victim in 90 per cent of cases based on newspapers alone (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017). They argued that one reason for this may be that official statistics do not record race/ethnicity if it is not easily available.
- Information can also be found on education, employment, prior criminal record, and whether the victim and/or perpetrator had children (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017), but information may not be consistently reported. In fact, most news coverage only reports affirmative characteristics (e.g. whether the victim/perpetrator had a particular characteristic, such as a prior criminal record, children, etc.). However, this is also typically the case with official statistics.
- Newspapers were found to be more informative than official data for determining the victim-perpetrator relationship. The relationship was specified in 80 percent of cases reported in the media compared to only 55 percent of cases included in official data (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017).
- Newspapers were also found to be useful for providing information about the situational context. For example, information extracted exclusively from police files may not provide the bigger picture because information is not recorded for research purposes, but rather to fulfill organizational requirements (Shon & Lee, 2016). In addition, a more complete picture of events may not be known at the time the official report was generated. For example, the circumstances of the homicide may not be known early in the investigation, especially if a suspect has not been identified, and the initial report may not be updated when the investigation has concluded. This might be particularly problematic if the accused committed suicide following the killing and no trial follows.
- Newspapers, on the other hand, are more likely to report the social and contextual details of the homicide as the investigation unfolds to construct an interesting story for their audiences (Shon & Lee, 2016). Another study by Genovesi et al. (2010) found that newspaper articles provided more context on the homicide circumstances than what was noted in medical examiner files
- The exact location (e.g. address) and the type of location (e.g., residence, outdoors) is often reported consistently across news sources (Heide & Boots, 2007; Huff-Corzine et al., 2014; Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017). This is an advantage compared to official data in which exact location is rarely specified and is reported at the census level.



In summary, there is general agreement in the literature that newspapers identify just as much, or more, information about the circumstances surrounding a homicide than what is included in official data sources (Genovesi et al., 2010; Huff-Corzine et al., 2014; Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017; Shon & Lee, 2016). In addition, there were similarities between the two data sources in terms of the information and circumstances listed, highlighting a high level of agreement and legitimacy to media/newspaper accounts.

Some limitations were also noted, however, again drawing primarily from US research:

- 1) Certain homicides may not receive coverage while others are sensationalized (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017; Salari & Sillito, 2016).
- 2) Related to the first point, minority homicide victims and victims residing in low socio-economic communities are less likely to receive media coverage (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017). However, it is important to recognize that these limitations are drawn from US-based literature. It is possible that Canadian news outlets report on most homicides given their relative infrequency compared to US homicide rates; however, the level of detail will likely vary by the characteristics of the victim and accused and the region of the country.
- 3) Journalists typically rely on police sources, may not interview those who knew the victim/perpetrator well, or may not contact violence against women agencies who may have been working with the victim, accused and/or the family (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Richards et al., 2011; Taylor, 2009). Therefore, the information shared by police may not be an accurate reflection of the interpersonal history of those involved, especially when there was a limited amount of police contact prior to the homicide (Taylor, 2009).



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