

## MEASURING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: STATISTICAL TRENDS – KEY FINDINGS

This fact sheet provides an overview of key statistical data included in *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends* (2013). The full report can be accessed at [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf).

### Intimate Partner and Spousal Violence

#### Key Facts

- **Intimate partner violence and spousal violence<sup>1</sup> have been consistently identified as the most common forms of violence against women in Canada.**
- **In 2011, eight in 10 victims of police-reported intimate partner violence were women. Women's increased risk was evident in both police-reported spousal and dating violence, with women almost four times more likely than men to be victims of these forms of violence.**
- **The costs of spousal violence against women in Canada have been estimated at close to \$5 billion annually.**

#### *Prevalence and severity*

- Self-reported victimization data show 6% of Canadian women experienced spousal violence in the previous five years, which is similar to the rate for men.
- However, self-reported victimization data also show that women experienced more severe forms of spousal violence. In 2009, female victims of spousal violence were over three times more likely to be sexually assaulted, beaten, choked or threatened

with a weapon, and much more likely to experience chronic forms of spousal violence. More than half of female victims reported multiple victimizations, compared to just over a third of male victims.

- Intimate partner violence can take a variety of forms. Based on police-reported data, 73% of women victimized by their intimate partners experienced physical assault. Although the percentage was similar for male victims, 11% of female victims experienced aggravated assault or assault with a weapon. Both men and women were more at risk of violence from dating partners than from spouses. In 2011, at least 631 women per 100,000 of the unmarried population were victims of police-reported dating violence, 60% more than the spousal violence rate.
- The most serious form of intimate partner violence is intimate partner homicide. According to police-reported data, in 2011 there were 81 female victims of intimate partner homicide in Canada, versus 13 male victims.
- Trends in intimate partner homicide can be an indicator of change in the prevalence of intimate partner violence. Despite an increase in 2010-2011, there has been an overall decline in intimate partner homicides of women. This refers to both spousal and dating homicides, with the rate being 15% lower than 10 years ago.

- Decreases are also evident in attempted murder and physical assault rates of female intimate partners, according to police-reported data for 2009-2011.
- In contrast, other forms of police-reported intimate partner violence, such as sexual assault, have increased. In 2011, women were 11% more likely to be the victim of sexual assault by an intimate partner than they were in 2009.
- Given that a large share of violence against women is committed by intimate partners, regional variations follow the overall pattern of police-reported violence against women. Provincially, Manitoba and Saskatchewan recorded the highest rates of intimate partner violence, while Ontario and Quebec had the lowest. Rates in the territories were also consistent with the overall violence rate, with Nunavut recording the highest (7,772 victims per 100,000 population).
- One indicator of the severity of spousal violence is its recurrent and ongoing nature. According to the 2011 Homicide Survey, between 2001 and 2011, about six in 10 spousal homicides of women had a history of family violence involving the victim and accused.
- Children are significantly impacted by this form of violence against women. Besides the risk of direct harm, children can also witness spousal violence. Almost six in 10 female spousal victims with children reported that their children heard or saw the violent episode.
- Younger women were more vulnerable to dating violence than older women. Women aged 25-34 were most at risk, as indicated by police-reported data. By contrast, dating homicide was highest for women aged 35 to 44. Notably, girls and women aged 15-24 were most vulnerable to one particular form of dating violence, namely sexual violation.
- As with police-reported data, being young also emerged as a significant risk factor for women's self-reported spousal victimization. According to the 2009 General Social Survey (GSS), women aged 15 to 34 with a current or former spouse were about two to three times more likely than their older counterparts to report experiencing spousal victimization in the last 12 months.
- Similarly, females aged 15 to 24 were most at risk for spousal homicide (18.8 spousal homicides per million females in this age group). Data from the Homicide Survey indicate that spousal homicide was highest among legally separated women; over the previous five years, women were six times more likely to be killed by an ex-spouse than by a current spouse.
- Aboriginal women, following the general pattern of increased vulnerability to violent victimization, are disproportionately represented in homicide statistics. For example, they account for at least 11% of dating homicide victims.
- Women who self-identified as lesbian or bisexual were among the most vulnerable groups, reporting violence by a current or previous spouse at three times the rate of heterosexual women.
- Women with an activity limitation, such as a physical or mental condition, reported nearly double the rate of spousal violence.

### ***Risk factors***

- According to police-reported data, in general, women are more at risk of violence from an intimate partner than any other type of perpetrator, although not all women experience the same level of risk.



## *Impacts*

- Four in 10 women victimized by their spouse in the previous 12 months reported being physically injured, more than twice the proportion of male victims. Overall, female victims were three times more likely than their male counterparts to experience disruptions to their daily lives and almost seven times more likely to fear for their lives.
- In terms of emotional well-being and mental health, female victims of spousal violence were seven times more likely than male victims to be fearful, three times more likely to be depressed or anxious, and twice as likely to be angry.
- In addition to these kinds of impacts, spousal violence is also associated with broader financial and economic costs to society. In general, costs were higher for women than for men in all categories (including tangible costs and intangible costs such as the impact on work productivity). One study estimated the economic impact of spousal violence against women at \$4.8 billion over a one-year period (2009).<sup>ii</sup>

## *Responses*

- Self-reported data show less than one-third (30%) of female spousal violence victims indicated the incident came to the attention of police (down from 36% in 2004). Certain types of spousal violence were more likely to be reported to police, such as victims being beaten, choked or having a weapon used against them (60%).
- Sixty-nine percent of female victims of violence who stated the incident did not come to the attention of police stated they dealt with the situation in another way or that it was a personal matter. Although

similar to male victims' responses, women were six times more likely than men to say the incident was not reported out of fear of their spouse, and almost twice as likely as men to say they did not want anyone to find out about the incident.

- In 2009, 15% of female victims of spousal violence obtained a restraining or protection order against their spouse; one-third of these women said that the terms of the order were breached.
- Women also turned to other sources of support beyond police. One-quarter of female victims of spousal violence used formal social services, such as counselors or psychologists, as well as crisis centres/lines and community/family centres and shelters. According to the Transition Home Survey, there were 4,645 women residing in shelters across Canada on the snapshot day (April 15, 2010), most of whom were escaping abuse.

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<sup>i</sup> Intimate partner violence is defined as violence committed by legally married, separated, divorced, opposite- and same-sex, common-law, dating and other intimate partners. In *Measuring Violence against Women: Statistical Trends*, this terminology is used in the context of police-reported data. Self-reported victimization data, however, is limited to spousal violence, as the GSS contains a special module on this form of violence, and only captures incidents of dating violence within the general victimization component of the survey. Spousal violence is defined here as violence committed by current and former spouses and common-law partners.

<sup>ii</sup> See Zhang et al. (2013). *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada, 2009*. Department of Justice Canada