



Brief: Statistical landscape of senior abuse in Canada

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and Human Rights*

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Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics
Statistics Canada

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics (CCJCSS) a division of Statistics Canada, is responsible for providing information to the justice community and the public on the nature and extent of crime and victimization and the administration of criminal and civil justice in Canada. Governance for the production of this information, through national data collection and reporting is provided through the National Justice Statistics Initiative (NJSI). The NJSI is a collaboration between Federal, Provincial and Territorial Deputy Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety in Canada and the Chief Statistician of Canada.

Senior abuse is an area of victimization where data are collected through several data collection mechanisms, outlined briefly below.

Data Collection relevant to senior abuse

The CCJCSS administers the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), which collects police-reported data on criminal incidents and victims. The UCR captures police-reported criminal incidents that align with *Criminal Code* provisions.¹ The CCJCSS also collects data on criminal courts through the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). Information on senior abuse is not available directly through the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). Reporting to the ICCS data is based on Criminal Code sections. Because, there is no specific crime of “elder abuse” identified in the *Criminal Code*, crimes committed against older people must be prosecuted under other criminal provisions. Further, the ICCS does not collect information on victims related to cases brought to court.

For the most recent police reported statistics pertaining to violence against seniors please refer to the following publication “*Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2019*”, *publically available here*: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/85-002-X202100100001>

To address gaps in the police-reported statistics, the General Social Survey on Canadians’ Safety collects self-reported victimization data every five years. These data are particularly important for certain victimization experiences like sexual assault and intimate partner violence, which are chronically underreported to police.

SELF-REPORTED VICTIMIZATION

¹ The Criminal Code provides a broad range of offences that are commonly charged in senior abuse cases, including assault (section 266), fraud (section 380), and failing without lawful excuse to perform the duty of persons to provide necessities of life (section 215). It also contains specific dispositions to address senior abuse in the sentencing context. For example, section 380.1 directs courts to find an aggravating circumstance if an act of fraud had a significant impact on a victim given their age. Section 718.2 makes it an aggravating circumstance if the offender abused a position of trust or authority, or if the offence had a significant impact on the victim given their age. Section 718.04 further directs the court to give primary consideration to the objectives of denunciation and deterrence if the offence involved the abuse of a person who is vulnerable because of personal circumstances.

The General Social Survey on Victimization measures eight types of crime, including three types that are violent—sexual assault, robbery and physical assault. These data are critical to our understanding as they capture victimization whether it was reported to the police or not. According to the 2019 GSS just under one in ten seniors—about 589,000 people— self-reported being a victim of household or violence crime in the previous 12 months, 84,000 seniors were victims of a violent crime.

Of note due to a change in mode of collection for the GSS, trend data on violent victimization of seniors is not feasible.²

Through the GSS we are also able to capture experiences of emotional and financial abuse of older adults by a family member or caregiver. Results found that approximately 2% (1.7%) of seniors reported experiencing financial or emotional abuse at the hands of a family member or caregiver over the past five years prior.

Finally the GSS also noted that 14% of seniors experienced fraud over the previous five years. Older women and men were at equal risk of being a victim of fraud.

CUSTOM TABULATIONS:

For the purposes of supporting Committee members study of senior abuse, the CCJCSS produced custom tabulations, each of which are presented below with key findings.

1. Senior victims of police-reported violence, by gender of victim and province or territory, 2019

² As Statistics Canada continues to modernize, the General Social Survey (GSS) Cycle 34 allowed respondents to complete their questionnaires online, in addition to traditional collection by telephone. This change of data collection for the GSS Cycle 34 was done to address several challenges, namely to reduce respondent burden and to respond to increasing collection costs however this created a mode effect and 2019 GSS victimization results should not be compared to past cycles.

Senior victims of police-reported violence, by gender of victim and province or territory, 2019

Province or territory	Female victims		Male victims		Total victims	
	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate
Newfoundland and Labrador	110	195	139	267	249	230
Prince Edward Island	23	145	41	296	64	215
Nova Scotia	138	134	189	210	327	169
New Brunswick ¹	169	221	233	339	402	277
Quebec	1,389	169	1,903	261	3,292	212
Ontario	2,617	205	2,514	230	5,131	216
Manitoba	232	223	309	339	541	277
Saskatchewan	156	172	257	317	413	240
Alberta	556	190	734	280	1,290	233
British Columbia	948	200	1,306	305	2,254	250
Yukon	19	789	23	866	42	829
Northwest Territories	44	2,558	62	3,239	106	2,917
Nunavut	26	3,667	19	2,334	45	2,955
Canada	6,427	194	7,729	265	14,156	227

1. Excludes data from the Saint John Police Service due to data quality concerns.

Note: Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population aged 65 to 89 years. Populations based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims refer to those aged 65 to 89 years. Victims aged 90 years and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown. Given that small counts of victims and accused persons identified as “gender diverse” may exist, the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “male” or “female,” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons identified as gender diverse have been assigned to either male or female based on the regional distribution of victims’ or accused persons’ gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

In 2019, the overall rate of police-reported violence for seniors aged 65 to 89 was 227 senior victims per 100,000 population. Rates for this type of violence were highest in the territories, with Nunavut (2,955), the Northwest Territories (2,917) and Yukon (829) reporting rates that were notably higher than the provinces. The lowest rates were reported in Nova Scotia (169), Quebec (212) and Prince Edward Island (215).

Among seniors, the rate of violence was higher for senior men than senior women in every province and territory, with the exception of Nunavut (3,667 female victims versus 2,334 male victims). In Prince Edward Island and Manitoba, the rate of victimization was about twice as high for men than women (296 versus 145 and 339 versus 223, respectively).

2. Victims of police-reported violence, by age group and gender of victim, and year, Canada, 2009 to 2019

**Victims of police-reported violence, by age group and gender of victim, and year,
Canada, 2009 to 2019**

Year	Children and youth (aged 0-17)					
	Female victims		Male victims		Total victims	
	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate
2009	37,370	1,118	38,347	1,090	75,717	1,103
2010	37,374	1,119	36,430	1,035	73,804	1,076
2011	34,856	1,044	34,433	978	69,289	1,010
2012	33,492	1,002	31,975	908	65,467	954
2013	30,950	924	27,301	775	58,251	848
2014	28,628	852	24,728	701	53,356	775
2015	28,669	847	24,631	695	53,300	770
2016	29,894	873	24,741	692	54,635	781
2017	32,909	956	26,077	725	58,986	838
2018	34,699	1,001	25,996	718	60,695	857
2019	39,103	1,120	29,721	815	68,824	964
	percent change in rate					
2019 vs 2018	...	12	...	13	...	13
2019 vs 2014	...	31	...	16	...	24
2019 vs 2009	...	0	...	-25	...	-13

... not applicable

Note: Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims aged 90 years and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown. Excludes a small number of victims in Quebec whose age was unknown but was miscoded as 0. Based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data for 99% of the population in Canada. As a result, numbers may not match those presented elsewhere. Given that small counts of victims and accused persons identified as "gender diverse" may exist, the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either "male" or "female," in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons identified as gender diverse have been assigned to either male or female based on the regional distribution of victims' or accused persons' gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.

**Victims of police-reported violence, by age group and gender of victim, and year,
Canada, 2009 to 2019**

Year	Adults (aged 18-64)					
	Female victims		Male victims		Total victims	
	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate
2009	160,220	1,473	152,320	1,391	312,540	1,432
2010	162,676	1,478	149,929	1,355	312,605	1,417
2011	152,796	1,377	141,475	1,269	294,271	1,323
2012	148,249	1,326	139,209	1,238	287,458	1,282
2013	139,509	1,240	128,718	1,136	268,227	1,188
2014	134,700	1,190	124,800	1,094	259,500	1,142
2015	138,597	1,222	128,372	1,123	266,969	1,172
2016	140,571	1,232	129,057	1,123	269,628	1,177
2017	146,548	1,275	131,902	1,138	278,450	1,207
2018	153,251	1,321	136,434	1,164	289,685	1,242
2019	164,556	1,405	147,919	1,248	312,475	1,326
	percent change in rate					
2019 vs 2018	...	6	...	7	...	7
2019 vs 2014	...	18	...	14	...	16
2019 vs 2009	...	-5	...	-10	...	-7

... not applicable

Note: Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims aged 90 years and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown. Excludes a small number of victims in Quebec whose age was unknown but was miscoded as 0. Based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data for 99% of the population in Canada. As a result, numbers may not match those presented elsewhere. Given that small counts of victims and accused persons identified as "gender diverse" may exist, the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either "male" or "female," in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons identified as gender diverse have been assigned to either male or female based on the regional distribution of victims' or accused persons' gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.

Victims of police-reported violence, by age group and gender of victim, and year, Canada, 2009 to 2019

Year	Seniors (aged 65 to 89)					
	Female victims		Male victims		Total victims	
	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate
2009	3,633	148	4,285	215	7,918	178
2010	3,966	158	4,493	219	8,459	186
2011	3,886	151	4,548	214	8,434	180
2012	4,084	154	4,686	211	8,770	180
2013	4,089	149	4,824	208	8,913	176
2014	4,126	146	5,024	208	9,150	175
2015	4,553	157	5,365	214	9,918	183
2016	4,646	155	5,687	219	10,333	185
2017	5,172	167	6,215	230	11,387	197
2018	5,492	172	6,684	239	12,176	203
2019	6,386	193	7,681	264	14,067	226
	percent change in rate					
2019 vs 2018	...	12	...	11	...	11
2019 vs 2014	...	32	...	27	...	29
2019 vs 2009	...	30	...	23	...	27

... not applicable

Note: Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims aged 90 years and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown. Excludes a small number of victims in Quebec whose age was unknown but was miscoded as 0. Based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data for 99% of the population in Canada. As a result, numbers may not match those presented elsewhere. Given that small counts of victims and accused persons identified as "gender diverse" may exist, the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either "male" or "female," in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons identified as

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.

Between 2014 and 2019, police-reported violence against seniors aged 65 to 89 increased by 29% in Canada, to a rate of 229 victims per 100,000 in 2019. Over the same time period, the rate of violence increased more for senior women than senior men (+32% versus +27%). While police-reported violence against seniors has increased, the same applies to other age groups. For instance, violence against adults aged 18 to 64 increased 16% between 2014 and 2019, while violence against children and youth aged 17 and younger increased 24%. Again, increases were higher for girls and women than boys and men (+31% for girls versus +16% for boys, and +18% for women and +14% for men). Another high priority subject, intimate partner violence, increased 14% overall for those aged 15 to 89 during the same period.

3. Senior victims of police-reported violence by gender of victim, location of incident and year, Canada, 2017-2019

Senior victims of police-reported violence by gender of victim, location of incident and year, Canada, 2018-2019

Gender of victim and location of incident	2018		2019	
	number	percent	number	percent
Female victims				
Nursing or retirement home	646	12	1,010	16
Other location	4,846	88	5,376	84
Total	5,492	100	6,386	100
Male victims				
Nursing or retirement home	325	5	512	7
Location	6,359	95	7,169	93
Total	6,684	100	7,681	100
Total victims				
Nursing or retirement home	971	8	1,522	11
Other location	11,205	92	12,545	89
Total	12,176	100	14,067	100

Note: Victims refer to those aged 65 to 89 years. Victims aged 90 years and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown. Based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data for 99% of the population in Canada. As a result, numbers may not match those presented elsewhere. Given that small counts of victims and accused persons identified as “gender diverse” may exist, the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “male” or “female,” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons identified as gender diverse have been assigned to either male or female based on the regional distribution of victims’ or accused persons’ gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.

In 2017, nursing and retirement homes were added as incident locations to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey. Between 2017 and 2019, the proportion of seniors aged 65 to 89 who experienced police-reported violence in such locations has grown; however, this is likely influenced by a larger proportion of police services making use of the new location codes in the survey.

4. Emotional or financial abuse of Canadians 65 years of age and older by a relative, friend, or caregiver in the past five years, by gender, 2014 and 2019

Emotional or financial abuse of Canadians 65 years of age and older by a relative, friend, or caregiver in the past 5 years, by gender, 2014 and 2019

Year and gender	Emotional abuse ¹		Financial abuse ²		Emotional and/or financial abuse	
	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent
2014						
Women	51	1.8	17	0.6	63	2.2
Men	26	1.1 *	13	0.5	32	1.3 *
Total	78	1.5	30	0.6	95	1.8
2019						
Women	58	1.7	22	0.6	65	1.9
Men	40	1.4	22	0.7	48	1.6
Total	98	1.5	43	0.7	112	1.7

* significantly different from estimate for women (p < 0.05)

1. Includes having a relative, friend, or caregiver (excluding current or former legally married spouse, common-law partner, or dating partner) try to limit contact with family or friends, call you names to make you feel bad, or threaten to harm you or someone close to you.

2. Includes having a relative, friend, or caregiver (excluding current or former legally married spouse, common-law partner, or dating partner) try to prevent you from knowing about or having access to your income, force you to relinquish control over your finances, or give up something of value.

Note: Total gender includes those who reported their gender as non-binary as well as those who did not state their gender. Percent calculation includes missing or not stated responses. In 2014, these questions were only asked of respondents who were 65 years of age and older; in 2019, they were expanded to be asked of all respondents.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2014 and 2019.

In 2019, 1.7%, or approximately 12,000 seniors, indicated that they had been emotionally or financially abused by a friend, relative, or caregiver in the past five years. Emotional abuse (1.5%) was more common than financial abuse (0.7%). The proportion of senior women (1.9%) and senior men (1.6%) who experienced emotional or financial abuse was not statistically different.

5. Emotional or financial abuse by a relative, friend, or caregiver in the past five years, by age group and gender, 2019

Emotional or financial abuse by a relative, friend, or caregiver in the past 5 years, by age group and gender, 2019

Age group and gender	Emotional abuse ¹		Financial abuse ²		Emotional and/or financial abuse	
	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent
Under 55 years of age						
Women	423	4.4 *	144	1.5 *	438	4.5 *
Men	286	2.9 ***	63	0.6 **	300	3.0 ***
Total	718	3.6 *	212	1.1 *	747	3.8 *
55 to 64 years of age						
Women	75	2.8 *	24	0.9	76	2.9
Men	38	1.5 **	9	0.4 **	41	1.6 **
Total	113	2.2	33	0.6	118	2.3
65 years of age and older†						
Women	58	1.7	22	0.6	65	1.9
Men	40	1.4	22	0.7	48	1.6
Total	98	1.5	43	0.7	112	1.7

* significantly different from reference category only (p < 0.05)

** significantly different from estimate for women only (p < 0.05)

*** significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05) and estimate for women (p < 0.05)

† reference category

1. Includes having a relative, friend, or caregiver (excluding current or former legally married spouse, common-law partner, or dating partner) try to limit contact with family or friends, call you names to make you feel bad, or threaten to harm you or someone close to you.

2. Includes having a relative, friend, or caregiver (excluding current or former legally married spouse, common-law partner, or dating partner) try to prevent you from knowing about or having access to your income, force you to relinquish control over your finances, or give up something of value.

Note: Total gender includes those who reported their gender as non-binary as well as those who did not state their gender.

Percent calculation includes missing or not stated responses.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2019.

In 2019, 1.7% of seniors reported that they experienced emotional or financial abuse committed by a friend, relative, or caregiver in the past five years. This was similar to what was reported among those 55 to 64 years of age (2.3%), and lower than the proportion of those under 55 who were emotionally or financially abused (3.8%). Notably, while women were more likely than men to report emotional abuse or financial abuse among those under 55 or 55 to 64, similar proportions of senior women and men reported emotional or financial abuse.

6. Victims of fraud in the past five years, by age group and gender, Canada, 2019

Victims of fraud in the past 5 years, by age group and gender, Canada, 2019

Gender	Under 55 years of age		55 to 64 years of age		65 years of age or older†	
	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent
Women	1,847	19.0 *	387	14.7	455	13.1
Men	1,601	16.2 **	468	18.2 ***	442	14.8
Total	3,480	17.7 *	861	16.5 *	906	14.0

* significantly different from reference category only ($p < 0.05$)

** significantly different from estimate for women only ($p < 0.05$)

*** significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$) and estimate for women ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

Note: Fraud includes having someone successfully use personal information or account details to obtain money or buy goods and services, use personal information or account details to create or access an account, or apply for benefits, services, or documents, being tricked or deceived out of money or goods in person, over the telephone, or online, or any other type of fraud. Total gender includes those who reported their gender as non-binary as well as those who did not state their gender. Percent calculation includes missing or not stated responses.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2019.

According to the 2019 General Social Survey, just over 900,000 seniors (14%) were victims of fraud in the past five years. There was not significant difference between senior women (15%) and senior men (13%). The proportion of seniors who were victims of fraud was lower than that observed among 55 to 64-year-olds (17%) and those under 55 years of age (18%).

DATA GAPS AND CHALLENGES

While the data collected by Statistics Canada is very high-quality, and captures both police-reported and self-reported victimization, senior abuse presents unique challenges for data collection. These challenges are outlined below.

Lack of standardized definition

“Senior abuse” is a term commonly used to refer to the victimization of older individuals³. Seniors are at risk of being victimized through abuse (physical, psychological/emotional, sexual and financial) and neglect. Some provinces and territories have responded to the abuse and neglect of seniors through adult protection, guardianship, and family violence laws. While none of these laws broadly defines senior abuse and neglect, some define “abuse” in the context of a system intended to protect vulnerable adults.

Though no national definition has been agreed upon, various non-governmental organizations and police services have developed operational/policy definitions of senior abuse or have adopted existing definitions (e.g., National Initiative for the Care of the Elder). The World Health Organization for example defines senior abuse as:

“a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person. This type of violence constitutes a violation of human rights and includes physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse; financial and material abuse; abandonment; neglect; and serious loss of dignity and respect.” (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/elder-abuse>)

Collecting senior abuse data in institutional settings

Each province and territory has different reporting requirements (i.e., reporting to the police and to the government authority responsible) for incidents of abuse that occur in long term care residences. Research also shows that senior abuse may not be reported when it occurs in private settings. This for many of the same reasons that family violence is not often reported: embarrassment and shame, a desire to protect the perpetrator, fear that no one will believe the allegations and the need for the perpetrator’s continued presence for economic, emotional, or other support, etc. In addition to the challenge of reporting requirements, there are many considerations on how to measure senior abuse among seniors who may suffer from cognitive impairment, as well as abuse resulting from neglect within the institutional setting itself.⁴

³ There is no universal consensus nor consistency in the age demarcations that are used to define senior/older adult.

⁴ Institutions, including hospitals, nursing homes and penitentiaries are excluded from all sample survey collection.