



# Brief: Statistical profile of intimate partner violence in Canada

*Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee  
on the Status of Women - FEAO*

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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.

### KEY DATA SOURCES – INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

At Statistics Canada, there are two primary data sources and related methods for measuring intimate partner violence in Canada: administrative data collected from the police and survey data collected directly from Canadians. Many crimes are never reported to the authorities, and reasons for not reporting might vary by crime type. When it comes to intimate partner violence, research to date has found that this is a form of abuse that is chronically underreported. Victims could be reluctant to report to police due to reasons such as living arrangements, financial dependence and shared children. Victims might be unwilling or unable to seek out the police; hence this constitutes a key limitation to administrative data sources. Consequently, self-reported experiences of violence via surveys are an important complement to police-reported data. Further to that, police reported data capture only those forms of violence that meet the criminal threshold and, as such, do not monitor emotional, psychological or financial abuse which are common forms of intimate partner violence.

#### The General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety

Currently, Statistics Canada has two key surveys that capture self-reported data on intimate partner violence. These are instrumental to understanding overall trends and who is most at risk. First, the [General Social Survey - Canadians' Safety](#) (GSS on Victimization) collects self-reported victimization data every five years and has been doing so for more than two decades. These data are particularly important as they provide trend data on violence both in current and former spousal relationships (from 1999 to 2019). This data source is able to situate this violence relative to other violent crimes outside of spousal relationships that also meet the criminal threshold. The GSS on Victimization captures information on the overall prevalence of spousal violence (including physical and sexual assault, emotional and financial abuse) over the 12 months and five years that preceded the survey.

#### The Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces

In addition, the [Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces](#) (SPPSS), funded through Women and Gender Equality Canada (WaGE) as part of the Federal Strategy to End Gender-Based Violence, also collects information about self-reported intimate partner violence. However, it includes intimate partner violence perpetrated outside of a spousal relationship, both in the year preceding the

survey, and lifetime experiences (since the age of fifteen) of such violence. In addition to physically and sexually violent behaviours, the SSPPS captures abuse that occur in intimate relationships (27 forms of abuse are captured).

The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse

[Survey of Residential Facilities Serving Victims of Abuse](#) (SRFVA) is a census of Canadian residential facilities that are primarily mandated to provide residential services to victims of abuse. The SRFVA highlights the services offered. As well, it provides a one-day snapshot of the clientele being served on a specific date (mid-April of the survey year); including the reason why individuals are seeking shelter.

## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN CANADA

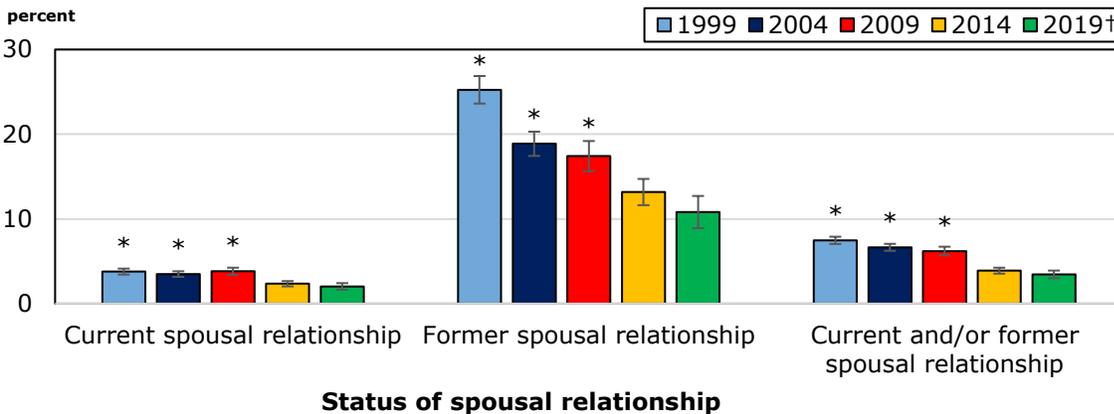
The Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics (CCJCSS) has released numerous *Juristat* reports over the past three years to highlight the nature and overall trends of intimate partner violence. The following summary of key results in this brief are based on these reports and a list of resources are included in the last section of this written submission.

### Overall trends in self-reported and police-reported intimate partner violence

Findings from the GSS on Victimization show that spousal violence (physical and sexual assault and or the threat of violence) in the provinces was significantly lower in 2019 than in 1999 (3.5% versus 7.5%, marking a 54% decrease). Spousal violence decreased for both women and men: in 1999, 8.3% of women and 6.6% of men were victims of spousal violence in the preceding five years, proportions that dropped to 4.2% and 2.7%, respectively, in 2019. This marked a 49% decrease in spousal violence for women and a 60% decrease for men.

Between 2009 and 2019, spousal violence remained unchanged in the territories (10.2% versus 9.8%).

**Victims of spousal violence (physical or sexual assault or threat of violence) in the past five years, by status of spousal relationship and year, provinces, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019†**



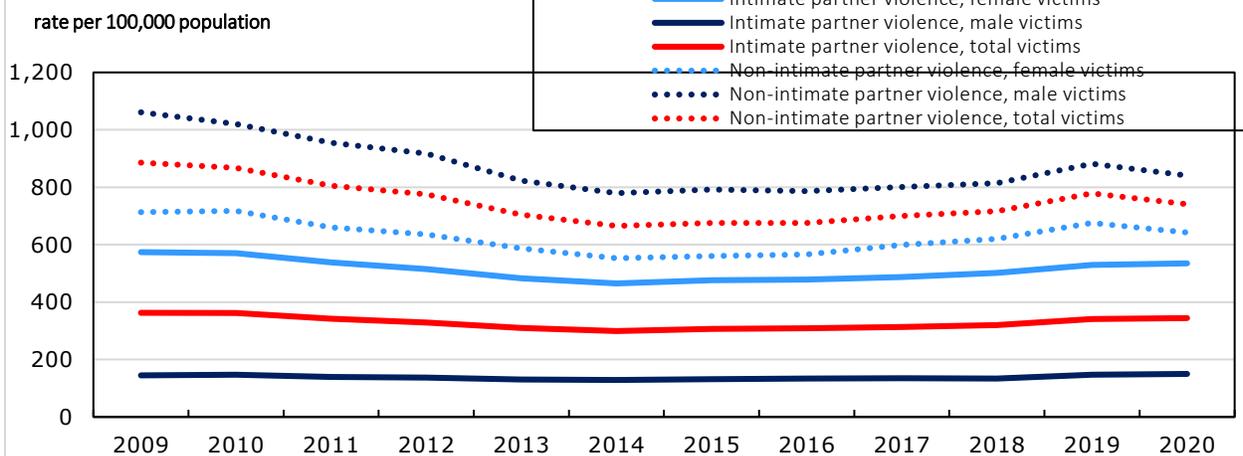
\* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )  
 † reference category

**Note:** Spousal violence includes physical and sexual violence. Includes those who are legally married or living common law, and those who are separated or divorced from a legal marriage or common-law union and have had contact with their former partner in the past five years. Spousal relationships include same-gender relationships. As information about gender was collected as of 2019, data from earlier cycles are based on sex (i.e., sex at birth) instead of gender (i.e., gender identity or gender expression). Missing responses are included in percent calculations. For comparability over time, trend analysis is limited to the provinces. Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals and should be interpreted as follows: if the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the interval would cover the true population value.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization).

Overall trends from police-reported data show declines in intimate partner violence since 2009 through to 2015. However, more recently, there have been incremental year-over-year increases. Specifically, the rate of police-reported intimate partner violence against women increased 10% in 2020 from what was recorded in 2017 – similar increases over the same time period were noted for men (11%).

**Victims of police-reported intimate partner and non-intimate partner violence, by gender of victim and year, Canada, 2009 to 2020**



**Note:** Intimate partner violence rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population aged 15 and older. Non-intimate partner violence rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations based on July 1, 2020 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims aged 111 and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Intimate partner violence refers to violence committed by current and former legally married spouses, common-law partners, dating partners and other intimate partners. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown or where the accused-victim relationship was unknown. Records where the victim and accused were originally coded as boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend who lived together have been recoded to spouses/ex-spouses. Records where the victim was under age 18 and the accused was originally coded as the victim's child, and records where the victim was over age 65 and the accused was originally coded as the victim's parent have been recoded to other family. Based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data for 99% of the population in Canada.

## Rural and urban rates of intimate partner violence against women

Rural rates of intimate partner violence against women are significantly higher than urban areas in all areas of Canada. The rural areas of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta show the highest rates within the provinces and the largest rates in the Territories were found in the rural areas of the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

### Police-reported intimate partner violence against women, by urban or rural location of incident and province or territory, Canada, 2020

Province or territory	Urban	Rural
	rate per 100,000 population	
Newfoundland and Labrador	512	871
Prince Edward Island	433	477
Nova Scotia	540	636
New Brunswick <sup>1</sup>	722	823
Quebec	484	526
Ontario	378	598
Manitoba	664	1,913
Saskatchewan	727	2,282
Alberta	535	1,245
British Columbia	469	785
Yukon	1,582	4,982
Northwest Territories	2,971	10,340
Nunavut	...	10,044
<b>Canada</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>985</b>

... not applicable

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 15 and older. Populations based on July 1, 2020 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims aged 11 and older are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Intimate partner violence refers to violence committed by current and former legally married spouses, common-law partners, dating partners and other intimate partners. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown or where the accused-victim relationship was unknown. Records where the victim and accused were originally coded as boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend who lived together have been recoded to spouses/ex-spouses. Records where the victim was under age 18 and the accused was originally coded as the victim's child, and records where the victim was over age 65 and the accused was originally coded as the victim's parent have been recoded to other family.

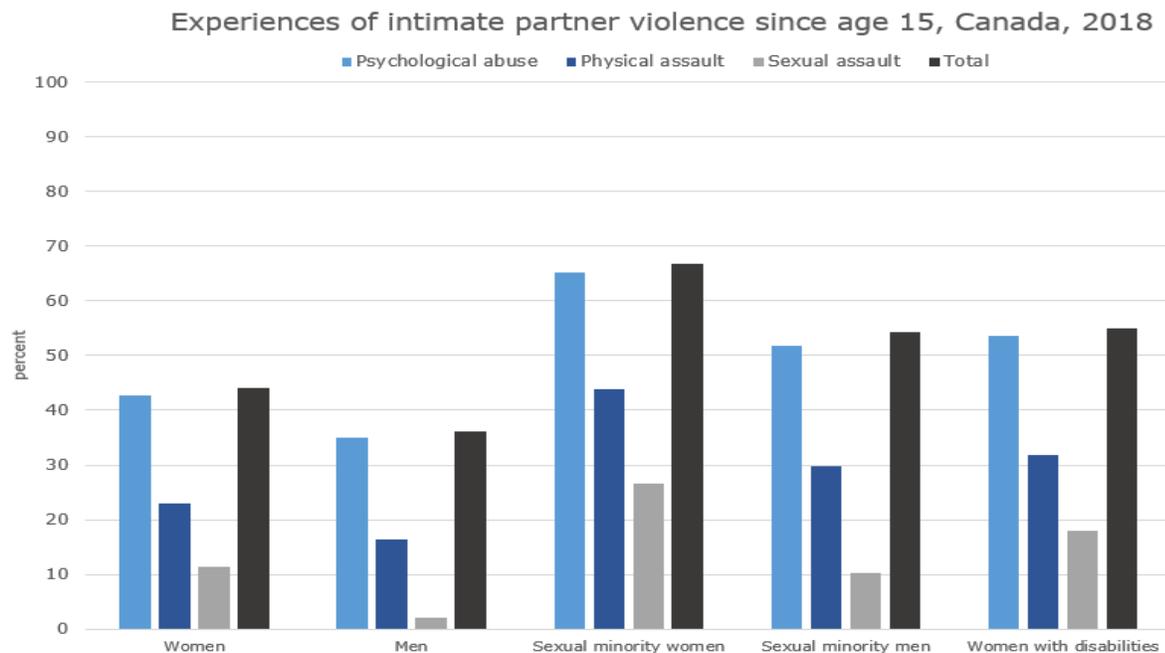
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

## Lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence

While physical and sexual assault are the most overt forms of intimate partner violence, they are not the only forms of violence that exist in intimate partner relationships. Intimate partner violence also includes a variety of other behaviours that may not rise to the current level of criminality in Canada, but nonetheless cause victims to feel afraid, anxious, controlled or cause other negative consequences for victims, their friends, and their families.

According to SSPPS, psychological abuse was the most common type of intimate partner violence, reported by about four in ten ever-partnered women (43%) and men (35%). This was followed by physical violence (23% of women versus 17% of men) and sexual violence (12% of women versus 2% of men). Notably, nearly six in ten (58%) women and almost half (47%) of men who experienced psychological abuse also experienced at least one form of physical or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner in their lifetime.

However, when looking at specific forms of intimate partner violence, the SSPPS noted that women were more likely to have reported experiencing more severe forms of intimate partner violence, specifically physical violence (23% versus 17%) and sexual violence (12% versus 2%) during their lifetime. When looking at the more specific forms of violence, women were much more likely than men to have been confined or locked in a room (3% versus 0.5%), beaten (6% versus 2%), been forced to have sex (10% versus 2%) or have been choked (7% versus 1%) by an intimate partner during their lifetime.



Source: Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces

Intimate partner violence tends to happen repeatedly for some victims. About three in ten women victims of intimate partner violence reported experiencing at least one type of violence (physical, sexual or psychological) repeatedly: either on a monthly basis or more often in the previous 12 months. Overall, one in five (20%) women who experienced sexual violence committed by an intimate partner in the past 12 months said that it happened monthly or more in the past 12 months. The frequency with which women experience this kind of intimate partner violence is notable, as this type of violence is often also considered to be the most severe.

Intimate partner violence, since age 15 and in the past 12 months, Canada, 2018				
Intimate partner violence <sup>1</sup>	Women <sup>†</sup>		Men	
	number (000s)	percent	number (000s)	percent
<b>Since age 15</b>				
Emotional, financial, or psychological	6,043	42.7	4,705	34.9 *
Physical	3,250	23.0	2,232	16.5 *
Sexual	1,630	11.5	268	2.0 *
Total, physical or sexual	3,636	25.7	2,295	17.0 *
<b>Total, any type</b>	<b>6,242</b>	<b>44.1</b>	<b>4,874</b>	<b>36.1 *</b>
<b>Past 12 months</b>				
Emotional, financial, or psychological	1,453	11.9	1,434	11.2
Physical	295	2.4	356	2.8
Sexual	141	1.2	57	0.4 *
Total, physical or sexual	378	3.1	383	3.0
<b>Total, any type</b>	<b>1,477</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>1,468</b>	<b>11.4</b>
* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)				
† reference category				
1. Includes violence committed by a current or former spouse, common-law partner, dating partner, or someone with whom the victim was in another type of intimate relationship. Percent calculation excludes respondents who reported that they have never been in an intimate partner relationship.				
<b>Source:</b> Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.				

## Who is most at risk of intimate partner violence

Certain segments of the population are at greater risk of experiencing intimate partner violence. In addition to gender, other individual and socioeconomic characteristics intersect to impact the likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence. According to the SSPPS, the prevalence of intimate partner violence (over the past 12 months and over the lifetime) was notably higher among Indigenous women, LGBTQ2S+ women and men, and women with disabilities. The following groups of people were more likely than their respective counterparts to have experienced intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime: women living with disabilities (55%), LGB+ women (67%), and Indigenous women (61%).

### *Indigenous women were more likely to experience each form of intimate partner violence and multiple times*

About six in ten First Nations (59%) and Métis (64%) women stated that they had experienced some form of psychological, physical or sexual abuse committed by an intimate partner in their lifetime, as did 44% of Inuit women. Taken together, this represented 61% of all Indigenous women. Furthermore, Indigenous women were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous women to have experienced each of the 27 different behaviours (captured by the SSPPS) by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

Among Indigenous women who were victims of intimate partner violence in their lifetime, approximately 9 in 10 experienced two or more related behaviours and 4 in 5 experienced three or more related behaviours by an intimate partner.

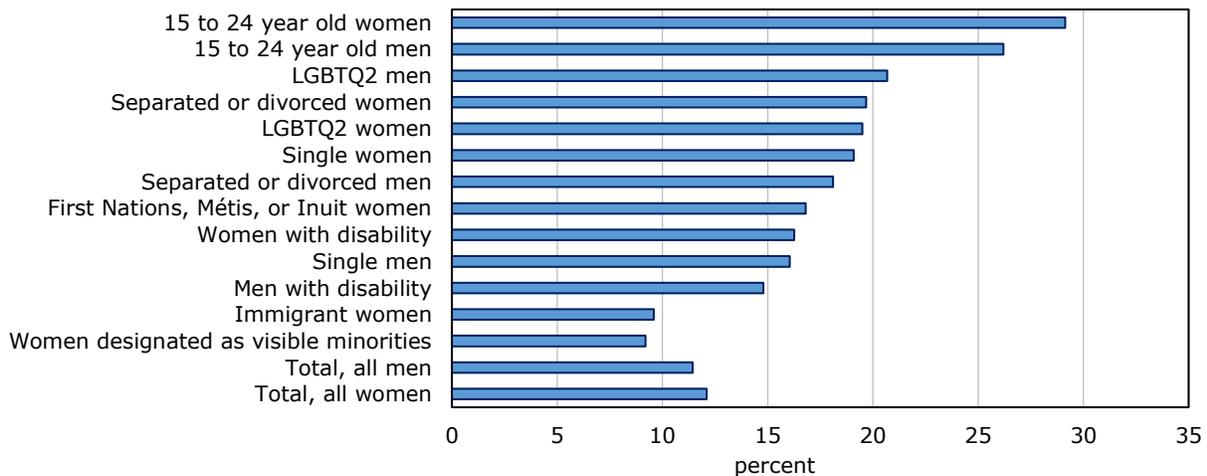
In addition, Indigenous women were more likely than non-Indigenous women to indicate having had two or more different abusive partners (40% versus 29%). More specifically, 18% of Indigenous women had three or more abusive partners in their lifetime, more than double the proportion among non-Indigenous women (7%).

*Intersection of Indigenous Identity with other characteristics influences the likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence*

According to the SSPPS, LGBTQ2S+ Indigenous women (86%) were more likely to experience lifetime intimate partner violence compared with non-LGBTQ2S+ Indigenous women (59%). Similarly, a significantly larger proportion of Indigenous women with a disability (74%) experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime compared with Indigenous women without a disability (46%).

**Intimate partner violence in the past 12 months, by selected victim characteristics, 2018**

Selected victim characteristic



**Note:** Includes psychological, physical, or sexual violence committed by a current or former intimate partner. Only differences that are statistically different from their respective reference category are shown on the chart; for a more fulsome listing of characteristics, see Table 3. Confidence intervals for each estimate are also available on Table 3. Totals for women and men are displayed for the purposes of comparison.  
**Source:** Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.

*Few victims of intimate partner violence report their victimization to police*

According to the GSS on Victimization, in 2019 only one in five (19%) spousal violence victims reported their victimization to the police, a lower proportion than what was observed 20 years prior (28% in 1999). Women who were victims of spousal violence did not report to the police because they considered the incident to be a private or personal matter, that the crime was minor not worth taking the time to report and because they felt that no one was harmed. In 2019, the vast majority (90%<sup>E</sup>) of

victims who reported the violence they experienced to police themselves said they did so to stop the violence and receive protection.

### *Child maltreatment and links to intimate partner violence*

Victimization surveys and research consistently show that adverse childhood experiences are associated with a higher risk of being a victim of violence during adulthood. This is particularly the case with intimate partner violence; women with a history of physical or sexual abuse before the age of 15 were about twice as likely as women with no such history to have experienced intimate partner violence either since age 15 (67% versus 35%) or in the past 12 months (18% versus 10%). Emotional abuse during childhood has also been shown to be associated with an increased risk of intimate partner victimization in adulthood. This was also the case when it came to harsh parenting—that is, having been slapped, spanked, made to feel unwanted or unloved, or been neglected or having basic needs go unmet by parents or caregivers. Such experiences were reported by 65% of women and 62% of men, who subsequently were more likely to report intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

Research has shown that childhood experiences of violence in the home are associated with an increased risk of violent victimization. Findings from the SSPPS support this: nearly two-thirds (64%) of women who were exposed to violence between their parents or other adults during childhood experienced violence in their own relationship at some point in their adult lives, compared with 41% of women not exposed to such violence as a child.

### *Impacts of intimate partner violence*

According to the GSS on Victimization, experiencing an injury as a result of the spousal violence was more common among women than men (39% versus 23%). Furthermore 47%<sup>E1</sup> of women who reported physical injuries as a result of spousal violence had to take time off from daily activities.

Findings from the GSS on Victimization, indicate that victims of spousal violence often reported suffering emotional consequences as a result of the abuse they experienced. The most common emotional impacts cited by victims were feeling upset (52%), hurt or disappointed (48%) and angry (44%). More than one-quarter of victims reported feeling isolated (27%) or experienced depression or anxiety (29%). About one in six (14%) victims said that they were afraid for their children and one in ten (10%) said they had suicidal thoughts.

### *Women who were victims of intimate partner violence were more likely to experience fear, anxiety and feelings of being controlled or trapped by a partner*

Measures of intimate partner violence often take into account the levels of fear victims' experience. Being afraid of a partner can be indicative of a pattern of behaviour in the relationship that is more coercive and relatively more severe, and more likely to reflect a pattern of behaviour by an abusive partner. Fear is considerably more common among women who experience intimate partner violence; according to the SSPPS, nearly four in ten (37%) women who were victims of this type of violence said that they were afraid of a partner at some point in their life because of their experiences this is well above the proportion of men (9%). The type of intimate partner violence experienced is associated with the likelihood of experiencing fear. Over half (55%) of women who experienced physical or sexual

intimate partner violence feared a partner at some point, as did 14% of men. Additionally, more than half (57%) of women and over one-third (36%) of men reported feeling anxious or on edge due to the violence, while 43% of women and 24% of men reported feeling controlled or trapped by an intimate partner.

### *Women victims seek out support from counselors, psychologists and social workers*

According to the GSS on Victimization, more than one in three (37%) victims of spousal violence in the preceding five years used formal support services, and, aligned with research on help-seeking behaviours, this was more common among women than men (44% versus 26%). This is likely impacted by several factors, including women experiencing more negative emotional impacts following violence and an increased availability of services for women. Women victims reached out to a counsellor, psychologist or social worker (42%) for help, as well as contacting a crisis centre or crisis line (15%), a victim support group or centre (9.8%), a shelter or transition house (8.4%). Between 1999 and 2019, the use of formal support services did not change significantly among women victims in the provinces (48% and 44%).

Through the SRFVA, the number and characteristics of persons who rely on shelters can be measured. From this survey, it was found that on snapshot day (April 18, 2018) one in five residents who were leaving the shelter were returning to where their abuser lived. While 36% of women leaving it was uncertain as to where they were going, 18% were leaving to live with family or friends while 11% were leaving to reside in another shelter.

On snapshot day (April 18, 2018) 669 women and 236 accompanying children and 6 men were turned away from shelters – and the most common reason for being turned away was that the facility was full (82%).

### *Women are over-represented as victims of spousal homicide*

Women are overrepresented among victims of spousal violence in its most extreme form, homicide. According to police-reported data from the Homicide Survey, there were 576 victims of intimate partner homicide between 2014 and 2020. Eight in ten (80%) victims were women, almost three-quarters (74%) were killed by a current or former spouse or common-law partner (as opposed 26% who were killed by a non-spousal intimate partner—such as a current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, or an extra-marital lover). During the same period, among the victims of intimate partner homicide who were men, nearly two-thirds (64%) were killed by a spouse (while 36% were killed by a non-spousal partner).

## **Future research**

- Statistics Canada is currently planning a second cycle of the SSPPS (2024 data collection), which will help continue to monitor gender-based violence trends over time. Furthermore, Statistics Canada, with funding from WaGE, will be enhancing our understanding of gender-based killings or femicides in Canada. This research project will include supplementing homicide narratives to better understand the context of femicides and data record linkage studies to look at court case outcomes for these types of violent crimes.

## Links to research reports on intimate partner violence

[Police reported family violence in Canada, 2020](#)

[Spousal Violence in Canada, 2019](#)

[Family Violence in Canada, 2019](#)

[Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: Overview, 2018](#)

[Intimate partner violence: Experiences of First Nations, Metis and Inuit Women in Canada, 2018](#)

[Intimate partner violence: Experiences of young women in Canada, 2018](#)

[Intimate partner violence: Experiences of women with disabilities, 2018](#)

[Intimate Partner Violence: Experiences of visible minority women in Canada, 2018](#)

[Intimate partner violence: Experiences of sexual minority men in Canada, 2018](#)

[Intimate partner violence: Experiences of sexual minority women in Canada, 2018](#)

[Canadian residential facilities for victims of abuse, 2017/2018](#)

[Shelters for victims of abuse with ties to Indigenous Communities, 2017/2018](#)

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<sup>i</sup> E Use with caution.