



Brief: Victimization and Perceptions of Safety in Remote Communities

Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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Submitted by: The Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics

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.

The present brief is submitted to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to their study on resource development and violence against Indigenous women and girls, which responds to Call to Justice 13.4 and 13.5 of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry Report.

The information presented in this brief relies on self-reported data collected through two household surveys, namely the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS), and the General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), with analysis of the Remoteness Index. Currently, police services do not report Indigenous identity of victims and accused in the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, which is the survey used to generate police-reported crime statistics. Recognizing the critical need for this data, Statistics Canada is collaborating with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to collect these data through the UCR, though collection has not yet started. As a result, statistics related to the police-reported victimization of Indigenous Women are not available.

Furthermore, due to limitations posed by sample sizes, mapping self-reported data from the SSPPS and GSS to low levels of geography, including resource extraction sites is not possible. For this reason, the brief focuses more broadly on victimization of women and girls in remote communities, as well as perceptions of crime and safety in remote areas, including analysis specific to Indigenous women.

The Remoteness Index

Canada is a vast country, and its population is not evenly dispersed. Historically, the classifications “urban” and “rural” have been applied to Canadian communities, in an effort to understand how the experiences of their residents may differ from one another. These concepts are based on measurements of population density or commuting flows between communities ([Statistics Canada 2016a](#); [Statistics Canada 2016b](#)).

The development of Statistics Canada's Remoteness Index (RI) sought to bridge this gap. Development involved the use of well-established information sources such as the Census of Population, together with data available from newer platforms such as Google Maps ([Alasia et al. 2017](#)). Starting with an area's proximity to centres of economic activity and population agglomerations, key concepts related to accessibility were added. For instance, to find a true measure of accessibility of a service, the costs associated with travelling to it were considered. This is especially meaningful when one considers that some communities in Canada are only accessible by air, or by road on a seasonal basis. The resulting index assigns a numeric value to each census subdivision (CSD) in Canada, representing the relative remoteness of that CSD—and reflecting the relative ease with which residents of that CSD can access services. These remoteness values can then be grouped into five categories (easily accessible, accessible, less accessible, remote, very remote), representing a continuum which captures the accessibility of services in that type of area (Subedi et al. 2020).

The analysis presented in this brief integrates the Remoteness Index with self-reported victimization data including the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) and the General Social Survey on Safety (Victimization)(GSS) in order to portray the experiences of violence and perceptions of safety of women living in remote regions of Canada. Because the populations of remote areas of Canada are small, the sample of their residents who were surveyed by the SSPPS is small as well. For this reason, the smallest categories (remote and very remote) are combined, as are the categories accessible and easily accessible. Throughout this analysis, the term “remote” includes both remote areas, and the term “accessible” includes both accessible areas. For the purposes of the Committee’s study, understanding remoteness is relevant given that regions where resources are extracted are located, for the most part, in remote areas of the country including the Territories and Northern regions of the Provinces.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of women in remote communities and associated risk factors for victimization

Since the development of the Canadian Index of Remoteness in 2017, it has been used by several studies to look at various aspects of life in remote areas. According to data from the 2016 Census of Population, 4.6% of women and girls in Canada were residents of remote areas (Leclerc 2021). Additional data from Census provide more information on the sociodemographic profiles of women in these areas: for instance, the median age of women in remote areas (44.7 years) is higher than the median age for Canada as a whole (41.6), but in very remote areas, their median age is considerably lower (31.0). Other studies have shown that women’s family composition, educational attainment, physical activity levels and mortality vary according to the relative remoteness of their place of residence (Leclerc 2022; Leclerc 2021; Mardare Amini 2022).

Census data also show how the profile of women in remote areas differs from those in accessible areas in terms of Indigenous identity, visible minority identity, and immigrant status (Leclerc 2021). Data from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) show the ways in which some sociodemographic characteristics may relate to how women in remote areas experience violence.

Indigenous women as likely to experience violence in remote areas as in accessible areas

Compared to other areas, remote communities were home to larger proportions of Indigenous women. Data from the 2016 Census show that the majority of Indigenous women and girls (58.2%) live in accessible or easily accessible areas, while 26.7% live in remote or very remote areas (Leclerc 2021). However, as the remoteness of communities increases, the proportion of Indigenous women and girls rises considerably: Indigenous women and girls account for 4.9% of women and girls across Canada, and 72.5% of those in very remote areas (Leclerc 2021). Overall, as of the 2016 Census, just over 230,000 Indigenous women and girls lived in remote and very remote areas of Canada (Leclerc 2021).

Intergenerational violence and trauma are pervasive in Indigenous communities, and systemic discrimination and racism have made Indigenous people vulnerable to victimization outside of their communities as well (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people have been shown to experience violence at disproportionately high levels (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

2019). In remote areas, considerable proportions of Indigenous women experienced violence (Table 1). For instance, just under one in ten (9%) Indigenous women had been victimized by an intimate partner or someone else in the past 12 months (Table 1). One in ten Métis women experienced violence (10%), as did 6% of First Nations women. Inuit women experienced an especially high prevalence of violence (20%)—echoing findings from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019), which showed how colonization has engendered particularly high rates of violence among Inuk women. Overall, the prevalence of violence among Indigenous women in remote areas was comparable to those living in accessible communities (8%, a difference not found to be statistically significant) (Table 1).

The prevalence of violence was not found to be statistically different between Indigenous women in remote areas and their non-Indigenous counterparts (9% and 6%), including among women who experienced violence outside of intimate partner relationships (5% and 4%; Table 2) as well as IPV (14% and 11% (data not shown)). The prevalence of specific kinds of violence were also shown to be similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in these areas, as was the frequency of instances of IPV that women experienced. However, the small sample size on which these findings are based may mask differences in the experiences of these groups: other Canadian studies using both police-reported and self-reported data have consistently found higher rates of victimization among Indigenous women (Allen 2020; Boyce 2016; Heidinger 2022). Moreover, qualitative research has suggested the normalization of gender-based violence against women in many remote Indigenous communities as a pervasive consequence of colonization (Brassard et al. 2015), pointing to potential under-acknowledgement of violence among women in these areas.

Under a quarter of Indigenous women in remote communities who had experienced IPV in the previous year said that they had reached out to a victims' service for support (23%; data not shown). This proportion was not statistically different from that reported by non-Indigenous women in these areas. While sample size does not allow for further analysis of Indigenous women's experiences with victims' services in remote areas, a 2018 study on residential facilities for Indigenous victims and survivors of abuse does. According to data from the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse, in April 2018 there were 47 short-term shelters serving primarily Indigenous populations in rural areas, with a total of 517 beds; on the day on which data were collected, 68% of the beds available at these shelters were occupied, and 23% of shelters were full (Maxwell 2020). Notably, occupancy rates were highest in the territories (118%) and in rural parts of Alberta (104%) and Manitoba (80%); as noted, the remote areas of these provinces and the territories also recorded high rates of police-reported violence against women.

Table 1

Self-reported intimate partner violence and non-intimate partner violence against women in the past 12 months, by relative remoteness of area of residence and selected characteristics of victim, Canada, 2018

Selected characteristics	Remote area			Less accessible area			Accessible area		
	percent	95% confidence interval		percent	95% confidence interval		percent	95% confidence interval	
		from	to		from	to		from	to
First Nations, Métis, or Inuit identity									
Indigenous person [†]	9	5.5	15.6	8	3.4	17.9	8	5.2	12.9
First Nations person	6	2.7	14.7	11	3.5	29.4	12	6.3	21.6
Métis person	10	3.1	29.7	F	F	F	4	2.3	8.2
Inuit person	20	11.1	33.2	F	F	F	F	F	F
Non-Indigenous person	6	3.7	8.3	5**	3.4	6.3	6	5.7	7.1
LGBTQ2 person									
Yes ^{††}	12	3.6	33.9	12	5.5	24.8	17	12.7	21.8
No	6	4.6	9.0	5	3.3	6.2	6*	5.3	6.7
Ethnocultural group									
Designated as visible minority	F	F	F	F	F	F	6	4.3	7.3
Not designated as visible minority ^{2†}	7	4.9	9.2	5**	3.7	6.6	7	5.8	7.4
Immigrant status									
Immigrant [†]	F	F	F	3	1.1	6.2	4	3.1	5.6
Non-immigrant	7	4.8	9.3	5**	3.7	6.7	7*	6.3	8.0
Disability									
Person with disability [†]	9	6.2	14.0	8	5.3	11.5	10	8.3	11.0
Person without disability	5	2.9	8.1	3***	1.8	4.0	4*	3.5	5.0

F too unreliable to be published

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

** significantly different from estimate for accessible or very accessible area residents only ($p < 0.05$)

*** significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$) and estimate for accessible or very accessible area residents ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

1. Includes those whose sexual orientation was lesbian, gay, bisexual, or another sexual orientation that was not heterosexual. Also includes respondents whose sex assigned at birth did not align with their gender (i.e. transgender, gender diverse) and who identified as women at the time of the survey.

2. The non-visible minority population includes single origin White, single origin Indigenous persons, and multiple origin White/Latin American and White/Arab-West Asian, as per Census definition.

Note: Intimate partner violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, financial and psychological violence committed by a current or former legally married spouse, common-law partner, boyfriend or girlfriend. Non-intimate partner violence includes physical and sexual violence committed by someone other than an intimate partner. Remote areas include remote and very remote areas, and accessible areas include accessible and easily accessible areas, as defined by the manual classification approach to the Remoteness Index.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces and Remoteness Index.

Table 2

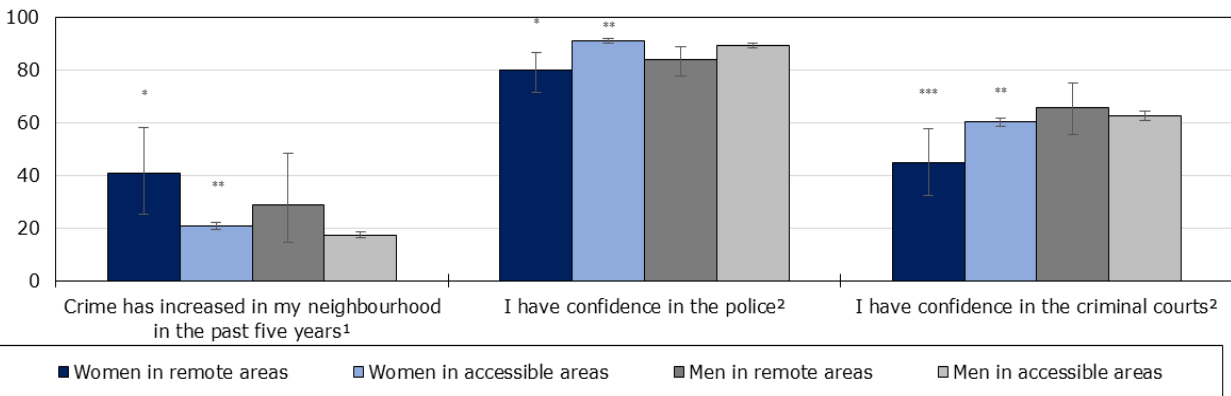
Self-reported non-intimate partner violence against women in the past 12 months, by relative remoteness of area of residence and selected characteristics of victim, Canada, 2018										
Selected characteristics	Remote area			Less accessible area			Accessible area			
	percent	95% confidence interval		percent	95% confidence interval		percent	95% confidence interval		
		from	to		from	to		from	to	
First Nations, Métis, or Inuit identity										
Indigenous person [†]	5	2.7	10.6	7	2.6	17.1	7	3.8	11.3	
First Nations person	2	0.8	6.0	9	2.6	28.8	9	4.1	19.2	
Métis person	F	F	F	F	F	F	4	1.7	7.5	
Inuit person	14	5.7	29.7	F	F	F	F	F	F	
Non-Indigenous person	4	2.2	6.3	3	2.1	4.8	4	3.9	5.1	
LGBTQ2 person										
Yes ^{††}	10	2.5	33.9	8	3.1	20.3	12	8.7	16.8	
No	4	2.6	6.3	3	2.1	4.9	4 [*]	3.6	4.9	
Ethnocultural group										
Designated as visible minority	F	F	F	F	F	F	4	2.7	5.4	
Not designated as visible minority ^{2†}	4	2.7	6.3	3	2.4	5.1	5	4.0	5.4	
Immigrant status										
Immigrant [†]	F	F	F	F	F	F	3	1.8	3.9	
Non-immigrant	4	2.8	6.5	4 ^{**}	2.4	5.2	5 [*]	4.4	6.0	
Disability										
Person with disability [†]	6	3.4	10.5	6	3.4	9.4	7	5.7	8.2	
Person without disability	3	1.5	5.5	2 ^{***}	1.1	3.0	3 [*]	2.3	3.6	
F too unreliable to be published										
* significantly different from reference category only (p < 0.05)										
** significantly different from estimate for residents of accessible areas (p < 0.05)										
*** significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05) and estimate for residents of accessible areas (p < 0.05)										
† reference category										
1. Includes those whose sexual orientation was lesbian, gay, bisexual, or another sexual orientation that was not heterosexual. Also includes respondents whose sex assigned at birth did not align with their gender (i.e. transgender, gender diverse) and who identified as women at the time of the survey.										
2. The non-visible minority population includes single origin White, single origin Indigenous persons, and multiple origin White/Latin American and White/Arab-West Asian, as per Census definition.										
Note: Non-intimate partner violence includes physical and sexual violence committed by someone other than an intimate partner. Remote areas include remote and very remote areas, and accessible areas include accessible and easily accessible areas, as defined by the manual classification approach to the Remoteness Index.										
Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces and Remoteness Index.										

Women in remote areas more likely to say crime is rising, less likely to have high confidence in the police or criminal courts

Alongside measures of police-reported crime rates, and of reporting of crime to police—all of which are higher in remote areas—are measures of women’s own feelings about safety and crime in their communities. According to self-reported data from the General Social Survey on Victimization, many women in remote areas said that they believed that crime in their community had increased during the previous five years (41%); this opinion was considerably more common than it was among women in accessible areas (21%; Chart 1). Additionally, women in remote areas were less likely than those in accessible areas to have high confidence in the police (80% versus 91%) or the criminal courts (45% versus 60%). No differences in these perceptions was noted between men in remote areas and men in accessible areas.

Chart 1

Perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system, by relative remoteness of area of residence and gender, Canada, 2019



* significantly different from estimates for accessible areas only ($p < 0.05$)

** significantly different from estimates for men only ($p < 0.05$)

*** significantly different from estimates for accessible areas and from estimates for men ($p < 0.05$)

1. Excludes respondents who had not lived in their neighbourhood long enough to form an opinion.

2. Includes respondents who said that they had some or a great deal of confidence. Calculations include answers of "don't know", which ranged from 12% of men in remote areas to 32% of women in remote areas.

Note: Remote areas include remote and very remote areas, and accessible areas include accessible and easily accessible areas, as defined by the manual classification approach to the Remoteness Index.

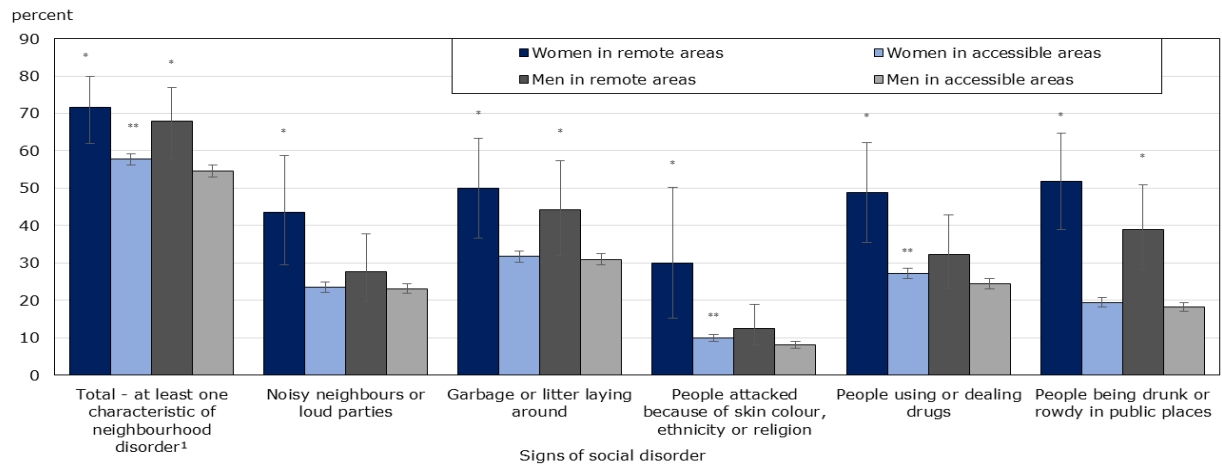
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization) and Remoteness Index.

Seven in ten women in remote areas say neighbourhoods have signs of social disorder

In addition to these opinions about crime and the justice system, many women in remote areas talked about some troubled aspects of their communities. More than seven in ten (72%) stated that their neighbourhood was characterized by signs of social disorder—a considerably higher proportion than among women in accessible areas (58%; Chart 2). For example, 52% of women in remote areas stated that people being drunk and rowdy in public was a problem in their neighbourhood, compared to 19% of women in accessible areas. Similarly, women in remote areas more often said that their neighbourhoods had problems with garbage and litter lying around (50%, versus 32% of women in accessible areas), people using or dealing drugs (49% versus 27%), noisy neighbours or loud parties (44% versus 24%), and people being attacked or harassed because of their skin colour, ethnicity or religion (30% versus 10%).

Chart 2

Perceptions of social disorder in the neighbourhood, by relative remoteness of area of residence and gender, Canada, 2019



* significantly different from estimates for accessible areas only ($p < 0.05$)
 ** significantly different from estimates for men only ($p < 0.05$)
 1. Includes people hanging around in the streets and vandalism, graffiti and damage to property, in addition to the signs of social disorder presented on this chart.
Note: Includes respondents who stated that the particular issue was a big, moderate or small problem in their neighbourhood. Remote areas include remote and very remote areas, and accessible areas include accessible and easily accessible areas, as defined by the manual classification approach to the Remoteness Index.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization) and Remoteness Index.

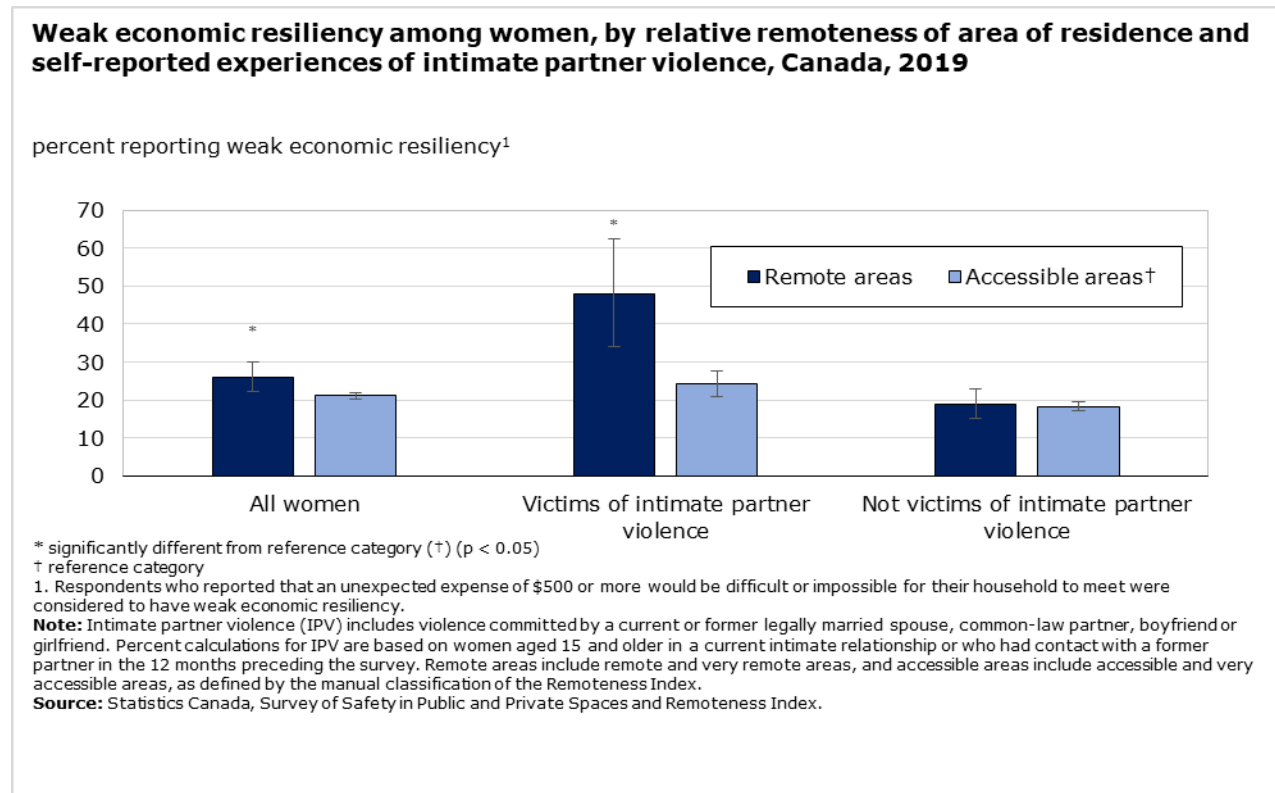
Weak economic resiliency more common for women in remote areas

Economic resiliency—the ability to easily withstand unexpected expenses or make ends meet—is intrinsically linked to a woman’s experience of IPV. Preventing a partner from having access to a job, money or financial resources is itself a form of gender-based violence which occurs in intimate partnerships. In other situations, a family for whom expenses are met with difficulty may experience greater levels of stress, which can contribute to violence, while a woman who has less access to financial resources may find it more difficult to secure safe housing away from an abusive partner (Annan 2008). Additionally, women who leave a home shared with an abusive partner may experience financial hardship as they attempt to secure housing and perhaps adjust to life as a single parent.

While the economic aspects of violence against women are already an element of many victims’ service programs, addressing the issue from the perspective of remote communities is important. The inadequate availability of housing in remote areas has received much attention in Canada, and moving to a different community in order to find a place to live can be especially difficult. Other issues, such as access to employment and the generally higher cost of common household goods can also pose particular difficulties for women in remote areas (Daley et al. 2015; Leclerc 2021).

According to the SSPPS, weaker economic resiliency was more common for women in remote communities, compared to women in accessible areas. Overall, 26% of women in remote areas stated that an unexpected expense of \$500 or more would be difficult or impossible for their household to meet; this was slightly higher than among women in accessible areas (21%; Chart 3). Among men, as well, weaker economic resiliency was reported by a larger proportion of those in remote areas (20%, versus 16% of men in accessible areas; data not shown). In both types of communities, it was more common for women to report weak economic resiliency, compared to men: 26% versus 20% among residents of remote areas, and 21% versus 16% in accessible areas (Chart 3).

Chart 3



Police-reported violence against girls under age 15 considerably higher in remote areas

Childhood physical and sexual abuse often goes unreported to the police. For instance, a small proportion (5%) of women in remote areas who experienced child abuse stated that the situation had been brought to the attention of the police. In accessible areas, this proportion was 7% (a difference not found to be statistically significant; data not shown). Nevertheless, police-reported data on child abuse provide important information on when and where sexual and physical violence against children occurs.

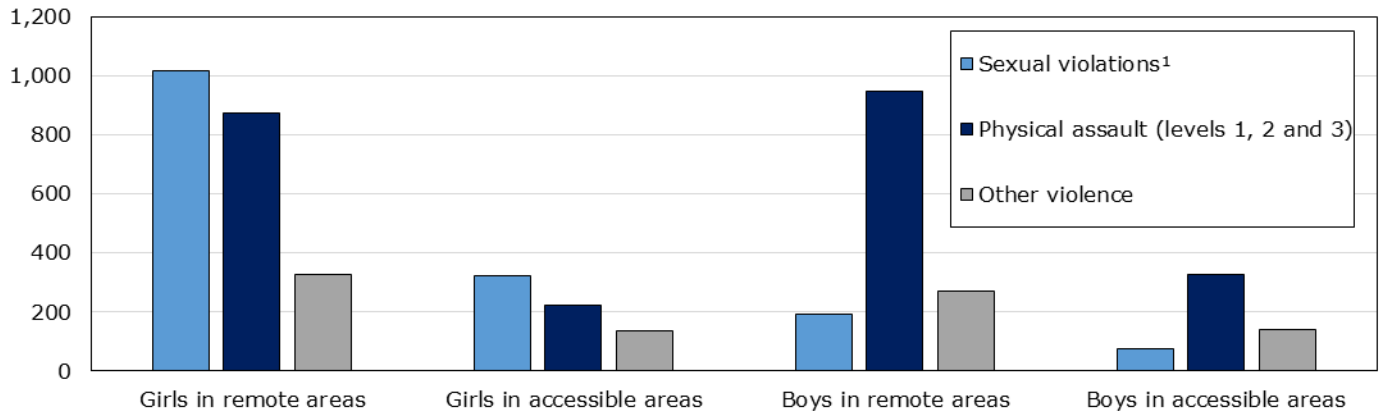
In 2019, police in remote areas reported rates of violence against children aged under 15 that were considerably higher than rates reported by police in accessible areas. In remote areas, police-reported rates of sexual assault and sexual violations against girls were especially high: these offences occurred at a rate of 1,014 victims per 100,000 girls under age 15, a rate over three times higher than in accessible areas (322 per 100,000; Chart 4). The rate of physical assault was four times higher for girls aged 15 and younger in remote areas (874 per 100,000 girls, versus 223 per 100,000 in accessible areas).

For both boys and girls, rates of sexual assault and sexual violations against children, physical assault, and other violence were higher among residents of remote communities.

Chart 4

Police-reported violence against girls and boys aged under 15 years, by offence type and relative remoteness of area of residence, Canada, 2019

rate per 100,000 population



1. Sexual violations include sexual assault (levels 1, 2 and 3) and sexual violations against children.

Note: Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population aged 0 to 14. Populations based on July 1st estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown or where the accused-victim relationship was unknown. Remote areas include remote and very remote areas, and accessible areas include accessible and easily accessible areas, as defined by the manual classification of the Remoteness Index. Data reflect the location where the incident occurred, not necessarily where the victim resided.

Source: Statistics Canada, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Remoteness Index.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are currently no statistics to inform the relationship between resource extraction and other development projects and violence against women overall, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, or to monitor the nature and extent of victimization in this context.

Statistics Canada collects police-reported data on violent crime occurring within each police services' boundary via the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey. All police services in Canada report to this Survey. The UCR collects information on the gender and age of victims of violent crimes, but it currently does not have information on the Indigenous identity or their identity in terms of being 2SLGBTQQIA for the victim or the perpetrator. The Indigenous identity may be attainable via linkage of UCR records to other sources such as the Census. However, not all police services provide the personal identifiers needed for these linkages. An additional consideration in the use of these data to measure and monitor this issue is that not all crimes are reported to the police and reporting by Indigenous populations is even lower than for non-Indigenous populations.

As context, historically it has been difficult to collect Indigenous data through the UCR. As the UCR is dependent on police services collecting data, and there have not been standard definitions or collection practises, the CCJCSS has not been able to collect any quality data on Indigenous identity. In response to these growing demands, Statistics Canada and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) proposed an initiative to collect data on the Indigenous and racialized identity of all victims and accused persons reported through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey. Accordingly, Statistics Canada embarked in an engagement process to seek feedback from diverse perspectives on this initiative, including the perspectives of Indigenous and racialized organizations and police services. As this data collection initiative requires notable efforts and consistent communication with several parties of interest, including Statistics Canada, the CACP, individual police services, Indigenous and racialized community communities, and record management system providers, a roadmap has been created to ensure an effective implementation of this data collection initiative. We are currently finalizing the report on recommendations, which will include modifications to the UCR, as well as other technical considerations. There will need to be further engagement and relationship building as we have the recommendations widely reviewed by police and communities and develop practical guidelines and training to implement collection.

Statistics Canada has also conducted a number of self-reported victimizations surveys to understand the nature, extent and risk and protective factors regarding gender-based violence, including violence against Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA populations. One of the challenges with self-report surveys is ensuring a large enough sample to provide reliable estimates for populations with certain characteristics. It is often not possible with sample surveys to provide reliable statistics estimates for specific and relatively small populations, particularly within small geographies. However, depending on what type of information is needed and at what geography, sample surveys could be one of various instruments to help inform and monitor this issue.

In conclusion, current sources of data held by Statistics Canada on their own are not sufficient. To produce statistics, work would need to be done to a) integrate data sources, b) amend existing sources, or c) develop new data sources d) pursue qualitative studies of this issue. The appropriate avenues would depend on articulated data needs and priorities.

Statistics Canada engages in discussions and collaborations with partners to identify data needs and potential solutions, which lie beyond police-reported data and national victimization surveys. Statistics Canada is committed to producing disaggregated data to inform issues facing diverse populations and is an active participant in federal responses to the recommendations from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Commission and National Strategy to address Gender-Based Violence in Canada.

REFERENCES

Findings and references cited throughout the brief are found in the following two analytical reports

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Heidinger, Loanna. 2022. "Violent Victimization and perceptions of safety: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women in Canada." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X