

**Brief for the House of Commons Standing Committee on the  
Status of Women for its Study on  
Gender-Based Violence and Femicides in Canada**

**Submitted by the Canadian Federation of University Women  
– La Fédération canadienne des femmes diplômées des  
universités**

November 8, 2024

## About CFUW

Founded in 1919, CFUW is a self-funded, non-partisan organization of over 6,600 women and 94 Clubs across Canada. We work to improve the status of women by promoting public education, human rights, social justice, and peace in Canada and abroad. CFUW Clubs grant over \$1 million a year in scholarships, and work actively in their communities to advance our mission of achieving equality and social justice through continuous learning. Since the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre, CFUW has joined women's organizations across the country in advocating for stronger gun control.

## Gun Control Measures as a Critical Way to Prevent Femicide

CFUW was pleased to have the opportunity to submit a brief to the House Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) for its study on intimate partner and domestic violence in 2022. In that brief, we outlined how gun violence is a major threat to the safety of women, girls, and gender-diverse people, and a common tool used to both intimidate and kill intimate partners. This reality was regrettably excluded from FEWO's subsequent report, *Towards a Violence-Free Canada: Addressing and Eliminating Intimate Partner and Family Violence*, in which guns and gun control were not mentioned.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an epidemic with complex causes and intersectional impacts. As FEWO's 2022 report recognized, "power, control, gender inequality and patriarchal values, as well as racism, ableism and colonialism, intersect to create the root of GBV and IPV."<sup>1</sup> There is so much cultural and systemic change needed to bring this epidemic to an end, and legal actions are only one part of the solution. Still, we believe that strict gun control is a necessary measure to prevent fatal incidents of GBV—in other words, femicides.

As the Canadian Women's Foundation states: "A lot of factors can turn a violent situation into a lethal one, but the single greatest risk factor for domestic violence becoming fatal isn't a history of violence, or even prior death threats. It's gun ownership."<sup>2</sup> The link between femicide and access to guns has been documented in several Canadian studies and reports, including the Renfrew County Coroner's Inquest and the Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission. In the latter, the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic shared how the presence of a gun is among their highest risk indicators for intimate partner-related deaths, due to its permanent presence in the home and immediate, lethal effect.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, firearms-related IPV is five times more likely to be lethal than types of IPV not involving a firearm.<sup>4</sup>

The incidence of femicide by firearm is particularly high in rural areas, where both the risk of gender-based violence and access to guns are higher. 42% of women and girls killed by violence involving a "male accused" were killed in non-urban areas in 2022, while only about 18% of Canadians live in non-

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<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee on the Status of Women, *Towards a Violence-Free Canada: Addressing and Eliminating Intimate Partner and Family Violence* (2022): 16, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/FEWO/report-4/>.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation, *Gun Violence Against Women and Girls is Preventable*, September 19, 2019, <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/gun-violence-against-women-and-girls-is-preventable/>.

<sup>3</sup> Mass Casualty Commission, *Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission* (vol. 3, 2023): 324, <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/files/documents/Turning-the-Tide-Together-Volume-3-Violence.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Public Safety Canada, *Parliamentary Committee Notes: Gender-based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/trnsprnc/brfng-mtrls/prlmntry-bndrs/20220914/55-en.aspx#wb-cont>.

urban areas.<sup>5</sup> Guns are often the weapon of choice in these murders: firearms are the most common method used to kill an intimate partner or child in rural areas.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, there is an established connection between gender-based violence, femicides, and mass shootings, a finding also addressed by the Mass Casualty Commission (*see: Mass Casualty Incidents as an Escalation of Gender-Based Violence*, Vol. 3, pages 246–254). A United States study found that more than two-thirds of mass shootings are domestic violence incidents or are perpetrated by individuals with a history of domestic violence.<sup>7</sup> This has been the case in many mass shootings in Canada, often with red flags not being taken seriously enough in the lead-up to the killings, such as in the Portapique massacre, the Desmond family shooting, and the Sault Ste. Marie mass shooting.

Critically, guns are also used as tools to intimidate, control, and coerce. In addition to inflicting severe psychological harm, the threatened use of guns can make it too dangerous for women to leave abusive situations, with the danger extending to their children and pets as well. Again, this is particularly true for women in rural areas, where the presence of a gun combined with the greater isolation and distance from support services can make leaving the situation especially difficult. The barriers to accessing services are even higher for rural women with other intersecting identities, namely Indigenous, disabled, racialized, and migrant women.

The lethality of guns and their use in gender-based violence justifies swift government action to reduce the presence of firearms in Canada. CFUW applauds the gun control measures the federal government has introduced in recent years, including the prohibition of 1,500 models of assault-style firearms and the national handgun freeze. We were also pleased to see Bill C-21, *An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms)*, become law, particularly given its provisions related to intimate partner violence.

But more needs to be done to prevent further femicides committed by men with access to a gun.

**CFUW recommends the following actions:**

- Operationalize the assault-style firearm buyback program without further delay.
- Prohibit *all* models of assault-style firearms, including any future models that may be developed.
- Introduce the regulations needed to implement the intimate partner violence-related provisions in Bill C-21, and provide training on the new provisions to Chief Firearms Officers. Please see the brief published by the National Association of Women and the Law and PolySeSouvient for detailed recommendations on the regulatory steps needed.
- Develop education campaigns for the police, judges, and the public on the importance of removing firearms from individuals who engage in IPV, and legal options available to do so.
- Fund accessible safety planning resources and crisis services for those most at risk of gun violence, particularly in rural and remote communities.

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<sup>5</sup> Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, *#CallItFemicide: Understanding Sex/Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls in Canada, 2018-2022* (2023): 26, <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide2018-2022.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, *Gender-Related Homicide of Women and Girls in Canada*, April 5, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2023001/article/00003-eng.htm#n24-refa>.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Geller, Marisa Booty, and Cassandra Crifasi, *The Role of Domestic Violence in Fatal Mass Shootings in the United States, 2014-2019*, *Inj. Epidemiol* 8, 38 (2021), <https://injepjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>.