

Section 3: Police-reported intimate partner violence

 statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14698/03-eng.htm

Language selection

- [Français](#)

Search

You are here:

by **Marta Burczycka**

► On this page

Start of text box

The impacts of intimate partner violence on victims, witnesses and society as a whole have been well-documented in research and have gained attention from those responsible for justice and public health policy ([Golding 1999](#); [Campbell 2002](#)). In Canada, self-reported data have shown that violence in spousal and dating relationships affects hundreds of thousands of people and results in both physical and psychological injuries ([Burczycka 2016](#)). In his 2016 Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer identified addressing intimate partner violence as being part of a strategy towards improving multigenerational health, social and economic outcomes of Canadians ([Public Health Agency of Canada 2016](#)).

Intimate partner violence includes violence against spouses and dating partners in current and former relationships. Spouses are defined as current or former legally married, separated, divorced, and common-law partners, while dating relationships include current or former boyfriends and girlfriends as well as "other" intimate relationships (sexual relationships or situations involving mutual sexual attraction which were not considered to be boyfriend/girlfriend relationships). While spousal violence has been a focus of researchers and policymakers for some time, interest in violence within intimate relationships outside marriage and common-law unions is growing. This section presents data and analysis of violence within this broader spectrum of intimate relationships.

In this section, intimate partner violence includes police-reported violent *Criminal Code* offences committed against victims aged 15 years and over within an intimate relationship. Using data from the 2015 Uniform Crime Reporting and Homicide surveys, information provided in this section includes analysis of the sex and age of victims, the relationship between victims and accused, the types of violence committed, weapons present during the violent act, as well as some comparisons between victims of spousal violence and victims of other forms of intimate partner violence. A geographic breakdown of intimate partner violence is also presented, as well as trend analysis of select offences against intimate partners, including homicides.

This section covers all types of violent *Criminal Code* offences that came to the attention of police, ranging from uttering threats and physical and sexual violence to homicide. Non-violent crimes such as theft and fraud, all types of abuse which were not substantiated by police, as well as conduct which is not covered by the *Criminal Code* are not included in this section. Additionally, analysis based on Homicide Survey data excludes homicides which have not been solved by police.

While this section provides important contextual information on incidents of family violence which come to the attention of police, it may underestimate the true extent of intimate partner violence in Canada. For example, results from the 2014 General Social Survey showed that when it came to spousal violence, seven in ten victims indicated

that the police had never been made aware of the violence. Most often, victims of spousal violence indicated that they did not report the violence to police because they saw the abuse as a private matter. For those victims who did report spousal violence to the police, the majority did so because they wanted to stop the violence and receive protection ([Burczycka 2016](#)).

Unless otherwise specified, all rates shown in this section are per 100,000 population. Definitions and information on data sources and survey methodology can be found in the '[Survey description](#)' section at the end of this publication.

Highlights

Intimate partners accused in one-third of police-reported violent crime

- In 2015, almost 92,000 people in Canada were victims of intimate partner violence, representing just over a quarter (28%) of all victims of police-reported violent crime. Four out of five victims of police-reported intimate partner violence were women (79%)—representing about 72,000 female victims ([Table 3.1](#)).
- Victimization by an intimate partner was the most common form of police-reported violent crime committed against females (42% of female victims, compared to 12% of male victims). In contrast, more males relative to females were victimized by a friend or an acquaintance (40% versus 28%) or by a stranger (36% versus 15%) ([Table 3.1](#)).
- In 2015, violence within dating relationships was more common than violence within spousal relationships, according to police reported data. A current or former dating partner was the perpetrator against 54% of intimate partner violence victims, compared to a current or former legally married or common-law spouse (44% of victims). These proportions were similar among male and female victims ([Table 3.1](#)).
- Police-reported intimate partner violence was more prevalent in current relationships than in relationships that had ended: a current dating partner (34%) or current spouse (32%) was implicated more often than a former dating partner (20%) or former spouse (12%). These proportions were similar among male and female victims ([Table 3.1](#)).

Younger victims of intimate partner violence more often victimized by current, former dating partners

- A current dating partner was most often the perpetrator against young victims of intimate partner violence: 51% of victims aged 15 to 19 years and 46% of victims aged 20 to 24 years were victimized by a current dating partner. These age groups were also more often victimized by former dating partners. According to the 2011 Census of Population, individuals in these age groups are less likely to be married or divorced ([Milan 2013](#)), thereby making their risk of spousal violence lower in proportion to dating violence ([Table 3.2](#)).
- Those aged 65 years and older had the highest proportion of victimization by a current spouse, with 7 out of 10 (68%) intimate partner victims in this age group having been victimized by their current husband, wife or common-law partner. Census data for 2011 show that individuals aged 65 and older were married or in common-law relationships more often than in other kinds of relationships ([Milan 2013](#)), making their relative risk for spousal violence higher than for other types of intimate partner violence ([Table 3.2](#)).

Physical assault most common type of victimization among intimate partner violence victims

- Physical assault (77%) was the most common offence experienced by victims of police-reported intimate partner violence in 2015. While almost 9 in 10 male victims of intimate partner violence experienced physical assault (86%), the overall majority of intimate partner physical assault victims were women (76% of all victims) ([Table 3.3](#)).

- Sexual assault by an intimate partner was ten times more common among female victims of intimate partner violence (4%) than male victims (0.4%). Female victims were also more likely than males to have experienced uttering threats (8% versus 6%) or criminal harassment (7% versus 4%) (Table 3.3).
- The type of violence most often experienced by police-reported intimate partner violence victims was physical force, such as pushing, hitting or choking (71%). Weapons such as knives, firearms, and others were less common (14%). Threats without physical force or a weapon present were reported in 15% of incidents. These proportions were similar for both spousal and intimate partner violence (Table 3.4).
- In 2015, most police-reported intimate partner violence was cleared^{Note 1} by police through the laying or recommendation of a charge (72%). An additional 14% of victims of intimate partner violence were involved in incidents which were cleared by means other than the laying of a charge, such as in cases where the victim requested that charges not be laid (6%). The remaining 14% of victims were involved in incidents which were not cleared (Table 3.5).

Lowest rates of intimate partner violence reported in Prince Edward Island and Ontario

- In 2015, Canada's rate of police-reported intimate partner violence was 309 per 100,000 population. Among the provinces, the highest rates were reported in Saskatchewan (666 per 100,000) and Manitoba (554), while Prince Edward Island (197) and Ontario (226) recorded the lowest (Table 3.6).
- As with police-reported crime in general (Allen 2016), rates of intimate partner violence were highest in the territories. Nunavut had the highest rate of police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada (3,575 per 100,000 population), more than five times that of the highest provincial rate (Saskatchewan, 666) (Table 3.6).
- Although women across Canada were generally at a higher risk of intimate partner violence than men, the difference was greatest in Nunavut (where rates against women were almost 7 times greater than those against men) and Prince Edward Island (where they were over 5 times greater). Rates of intimate partner violence involving male victims were lowest in Prince Edward Island (61 per 100,000) and highest in the Northwest Territories (969) (Table 3.6).

Rate of intimate partner sexual assaults up 15% since 2010

- The rate of intimate partner physical assault (the most common type of police-reported intimate partner violence) increased slightly between 2014 and 2015 (+2%), from 231 victims per 100,000 population to 235. Since 2010, however, the rate of this kind of intimate partner violence has declined by 8% (Table 3.7).
- In 2015, the rate of police-reported intimate partner sexual assaults was 7% higher than in 2014 and 15% higher than in 2010, reaching a rate of 9 victims per 100,000 population. Sexual assault was the only type of police-reported intimate partner physical and sexual assault to see a rate increase between 2010 and 2015 (Table 3.7).
- The rate of intimate partner sexual assault was 36 times higher among women than men (18 victims per 100,000 versus 0.5), according to police-reported data for 2015 (Table 3.7).

Females 25 to 29 years old at the highest risk of intimate partner homicide

- The rate of intimate partner homicide decreased by 6% between 2014 and 2015, continuing a decades-long trend of decline. The rate of 2.7 intimate partner homicides per 1 million people recorded in 2015 represented a 46% drop since 1995 and a 23% drop since 2005 (Table 3.8).
- The decrease in intimate partner homicides has been especially pronounced among male victims. The rate recorded in 2015 (0.9 male victims per 1 million population) represented a 70% decrease since 1995 and a 24% decrease since 2005. Women continued to be at a higher risk of intimate partner homicide, with a rate about five times higher than that of men in 2015 (4.5 versus 0.9 victims per 1 million) (Table 3.8).

- Of the 964 intimate partner homicides between 2005 and 2015, most were committed by a current or former legally married or common-law spouse (74%). Since 2005, the proportion of intimate partner homicides committed by a current or former legally married spouse versus the proportion committed by a current or former common-law partner has fluctuated at times but remained generally stable, despite the general decrease of people with current or former legal marriages ([Milan 2013](#)) ([Table 3.9](#)).
- According to police-reported data on homicides occurring between 2005 and 2015, females aged 25 to 29 years were at the highest risk of intimate partner homicide (8.2 per 1 million population). Men in this age group were also at the highest risk among males (2.5 per 1 million), though their rates of intimate partner homicide remained considerably lower than those of women ([Table 3.10](#)).
- For women, the lowest risk of intimate partner homicide was among those aged 65 and over (2.0 per 1 million), while men aged 15 to 19 were at the lowest risk (0.2). Female victims in the latter age group were 14 times more likely to be victims of intimate partner homicide than their male counterparts (2.9 female victims per 1 million population) ([Table 3.10](#)).
- The gap in risk between females and males was smallest among those aged 55 to 59, among whom females were still twice as likely to be victims of intimate partner homicide (2.9 per million, compared to 1.6 per million among men) ([Table 3.10](#)).

End of text box

Detailed data tables

[Table 3.1 Victims of police-reported violent crime, by sex of victim and relationship of accused to victim, Canada, 2015](#)

[Table 3.2 Victims of police-reported intimate partner violence, by type of intimate partner relationship and age group of victim, Canada, 2015](#)

[Table 3.3 Victims of police-reported intimate partner violence, by sex of victim and type of offence, Canada, 2015](#)

[Table 3.4 Victims of police-reported intimate partner violence, by type of intimate partner relationship and type of weapon present, Canada, 2015](#)

[Table 3.5 Victims of police-reported intimate partner violence, by type of intimate partner relationship and type of clearance status, Canada, 2015](#)

[Table 3.6 Victims of police-reported intimate partner violence, by sex of victim and province or territory, 2015](#)

[Table 3.7 Victims of police-reported intimate partner violence for selected violent offences, by sex of victim and type of offence, Canada, 2009 to 2015](#)

[Table 3.8 Victims of intimate partner homicide, by sex of victim, Canada, 1995 to 2015](#)

[Table 3.9 Victims of intimate partner homicide, by type of intimate partner relationship, Canada, 2005 to 2015](#)

[Table 3.10 Victims of intimate partner homicide, by sex of victim and age group of victim, Canada, 2005 to 2015](#)

References

Allen, M. 2016. "Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2015." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Burczycka, M. 2016. "Trends in self-reported spousal violence in Canada, 2014." In *Family violence in Canada: A*

statistical profile, 2014. *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Campbell, J. 2002. "Health consequences of intimate partner violence." *The Lancet*. Vol. 359, no. 9314. p. 1331-1336.

Golding, J. 1999. "Intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders: A meta-analysis." *Journal of Family Violence*. Vol. 14, no. 2, p. 99-132.

Milan, A. 2013. "Marital status: Overview, 2011." *Report on the Demographic Situation in Canada*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-209-X.

Public Health Agency of Canada. 2016. *A Focus on Family Violence in Canada: The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2016*. Public Health Agency of Canada Catalogue no. HP2-1DE-PDF.

Notes

Footnote 1.

Police can respond to a family violence incident in one of three ways: police may charge the accused, clear the incident in another way, (i.e. through departmental discretion, reasons beyond the control of police department, or request by complainant for charges not be laid), or not clear the incident because of insufficient evidence to lay a charge in connection with the incident.

[Return to note 1 referrer](#)

[Report a problem or mistake on this page](#)

Date modified:
2017-02-21

[Share this page](#)