

# Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative



## **Press Release**

*For release September 25<sup>th</sup> [See accompanying 5 infographics – one total sample, one for each group]*

### **662 domestic homicides during 2010-2018**

#### **Canadian researchers, community collaborators launch study to learn from survivors and those left behind to enhance domestic homicide prevention**

There have been at least 662 victims of domestic homicide in Canada since 2010 and the numbers continue to rise. On average, that's well over 70 victims per year, according to a five-year, national initiative being led by researchers at Western University and the University of Guelph.

Consistent with Statistics Canada figures and global estimates, these data also show that domestic homicide remains a deeply gendered crime with 80% of adult victims and 59% of child victims in Canada being female.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, citing the most recent official figures, Statistics Canada reported that the rate of intimate partner homicide was 5 times greater for females than for males, a consistent pattern over time.

[See link to Statistics Canada's *Homicide in Canada, 2017* for access to the most recent full report: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181121/dq181121a-eng.htm>.]

[See link to United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime *Global Study on Homicide, 2019* for global estimates on gender-related killings of women and girls at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet\\_5.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf)]

However, those involved in the *Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative for Vulnerable Populations* (CDHPIVP) recognize the threat is even greater for Indigenous women (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), those living in rural, remote or northern areas, and children exposed to domestic violence. Further, there are specific challenges faced by immigrant and refugee women. While sharing risk factors with other victims, these groups experience additional barriers that make it more difficult for them to report their experiences of violence and to access the necessary services.

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<sup>1</sup> Family violence accounts for 26 per cent of all violent crimes in Canada (Burczycka & Conroy, 2018). One of the most common forms of family violence is domestic violence which is a gendered crime in Canada. Women account for about 80% of victims of domestic violence and domestic homicide. In 2017, 84% of domestic homicide victims were female. The rate of domestic homicide was 5 times greater for females than for males (Beattie, David & Roy, 2018).

The overarching goal of the CDHPV is to reduce these deaths through research, broader public awareness, and professional training, focusing more closely on the above four populations. The national research team is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Partnership Development Grant and led by Guelph sociology professor Myrna Dawson and Western education professor Peter Jaffe.

Underscoring the enhanced vulnerabilities of some populations, the study's recent numbers show that well over half (52%) of the victims of domestic homicide during this nine-year period fell into at least one of the four groups being examined. And these are minimum estimates only, given that information is drawn from media and court data which is the most readily accessible to researchers focused on prevention.

[Link to story about data gaps citing Jaffe & Dawson: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-in-counting-domestic-violence-deaths-canadas-jumble-of-rules-and/>]

Further emphasizing the role of intersecting vulnerabilities which see various identities work together to compound risk (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, geography), almost one in four of these victims belonged in two or more of the vulnerable groups (23%). The fact that the highest rates of domestic homicide during this period were found in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Manitoba point to the potential impacts of intersecting vulnerabilities, given the higher proportions of both Indigenous and rural/remote/northern populations in these regions of the country, Dawson says.

In fact, among domestic homicide victims, those living in rural/remote/northern areas of the country represented the largest vulnerable population examined (29%). This is perhaps not surprising, Dawson says, given that the most recent figures from Statistics Canada showed a greater increase in general homicide rates in rural compared to urban areas in 2017. Further, the rate of firearm-related homicide was higher in rural than urban areas.

Along with the availability of firearms in rural areas, it's also recognized that it remains a challenge to provide consistent and accessible services in such regions with transportation barriers and confidentiality concerns serving as only some of the deterrents to seeking help, says Dawson.

[Link to the recent 2017 Statistics Canada figures related to firearms-related homicide: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181121/dq181121a-eng.htm>]

During this period, 55 children were killed in domestic-violence related homicides. While their deaths often occur alongside their mothers, Jaffe says, often the risks to children are overlooked. "In fact, prior studies suggest that when the mothers are at risk for lethal violence, the children may be equally at risk as well and need the benefit of safety planning and risk management strategies," he added.

Domestic homicides involving Indigenous victims represented 12% of sample, despite the fact that they comprise only 5% of the Canadian population. While under-represented compared to their representation in the population, Dawson says, immigrant and refugee victims face specific challenges when accessing services, often due to social isolation and language barriers.

Jaffe highlights that many domestic homicides appear preventable and predictable with hindsight because the vast majority are preceded by warning signs seen by friends, family, co-workers and community professionals such as police and social service providers. While this is also true for the four vulnerable groups being examined, Jaffe says, the contexts surrounding domestic violence and homicide may not

appear obvious or familiar to those responding. This underscores the need for more nuanced risk assessment, risk management and safety planning approaches than what may currently be available along with appropriate education and awareness efforts.

And the best way to understand how to improve on current approaches is to listen to the voices of those who have experienced such violence, Dawson says. Focusing specifically on these four groups, the research team will interview about 200 survivors of severe domestic violence as well as family and friends who lost someone to domestic homicide between 2006 and 2016, including only those cases with no pending court or coroner investigations.

This research “is crucial because it can save lives through enhanced policies and services in community responses to domestic violence,” says Dawson, who is also director of the Centre for the Study of Social and Legal Responses to Violence at the University of Guelph.

“Nationwide, collaborative efforts will allow us to identify unique, individual and community-level risk factors for violence for particular vulnerable populations,” says Jaffe, who is also director of Western’s Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. “Assessing and managing risk for these and other groups is crucial to preventing deaths that occur in the context of domestic violence.”

These efforts, as well as earlier studies conducted as part of this research initiative, have been supported by research-community partnerships involving experts from more than 60 community service organizations, government departments and universities. Since the CDHPIVP’s inception in 2015, there has been tremendous efforts working with provincial and territorial coroners and medical examiners to develop a national database, Dawson says.

Jaffe adds that more than 300 interviews have been conducted with service providers in different justice and community agencies across the country to identify the barriers to effective risk assessment, safety planning and risk management in domestic violence cases.

Participants for the study must identify as a survivor of severe domestic violence or a family member, friend, or community professional who lost someone to domestic homicide from one of the four vulnerable groups between 2006 and 2016. The domestic violence or domestic homicide case must be closed, meaning that there are no pending court or coroner investigations. Participants must be safe, at least 18 years of age, and willing to have their interview audio-recorded. People can share their story with the CDHPIVP research team by phone, video conference, or in-person. If needed, translation services are available, and travel and/or childcare costs will be covered. Participants will receive a \$50 honorarium for sharing their story.

For more information, or to participate in this project, please contact:

CDHPIVP Project Manager Anna-Lee Straatman at [astraat2@uwo.ca](mailto:astraat2@uwo.ca)

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**Further media contacts to family of victims of domestic homicide:**

**Indigenous:**

Terri Brown, sister of Ada Elaine Brown [[kukdookaa@gmail.com](mailto:kukdookaa@gmail.com) 604-787-6621]

<https://www.cbc.ca/missingandmurdered/mmiw/profiles/ada-elaine-brown>

**Rural/Remote/Northern:**

Mariann Rich, sister of Shirley Parkinson [[mariannrich@gmail.com](mailto:mariannrich@gmail.com)]

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/secret-murder-rcmp-said-shirley-parkinson-homicide-a-private-matter-1.2798395>

**Immigrant/refugee:**

Maha El-Birani, daughter of Sonia El-Birani [[mahl77@gmail.com](mailto:mahl77@gmail.com)]

<https://london.ctvnews.ca/guilty-plea-life-sentence-in-2012-south-london-murder-1.1786828>