

Canadian Domestic Homicide
Prevention Initiative



FAMILICIDE IN CANADA: 2010-2019

Domestic Homicide
Brief 9

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The Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations presents its ninth Homicide Brief, *Familicide in Canada: 2010-2019*. This brief offers a summary of data collected through the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations focusing on familicide – the killing of multiple family members. Families living in rural, remote and northern populations appear to be particularly vulnerable offering implications for risk assessment, risk management and safety planning.

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FAMILICIDE

Familicide is a type of mass killing that involves family members as victims (Malmquist, 1980). Definitions of familicide vary, often based on the perpetrators' relationship with their victims. Some scholars define familicide broadly, such as one family member killing multiple other family members (Liem & Koenraadt, 2008). For the purpose of this brief we are using the following definition: an individual killing his/her current or former spouse and at least one biological or step-child (Wilson, Daly & Daniele, 1995).

Familicide: an individual killing his/her current or former spouse and at least one biological or stepchild (Wilson, Daly & Daniele, 1995).

PREVALENCE OF FAMILICIDE

Familicide occurs very rarely in Canada and elsewhere around the world but certainly has devastating effects when it does happen. Between 1974 and 1990, 61 incidents of familicide, involving 161 victims, occurred in Canada (Wilson et al, 1995). When the focus is on homicides that occurred between 1961 and 2003, there were 127 incidents of familicide involving 279 victims (Statistics Canada, 2005). Beyond these figures, there is little existing documentation of the prevalence of familicide in Canada despite it being the most common type of mass killing, a finding true for both Canada and elsewhere (Duwe, 2004). Based on historical data, familicide-suicide, defined as the killing of family members followed by the perpetrator's suicide, occurred on average once a year in the Netherlands between 1992 and 2005 (Liem & Koenraadt, 2007). In England and Wales, one out of every 72 homicide victims was a victim of familicide and in Canada between 1974 and 1990, one in 69 was a victim of familicide (Wilson et al, 1995). Of the solved homicide-suicides that occurred in Canada between 1961 and 2003, 14 in 100 victims was a victim of familicide-suicide (Statistics Canada, 2005).

FAMILICIDE IN CANADA

The Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPVP), a national research project on domestic homicide, has created a database that documents domestic homicides in Canada between 2010 and 2020. The data sources are court and media records, and data collection is currently ongoing. Data for this brief come from the CDHPVP database which contains information on 667 domestic homicide cases, involving 756 victims, that occurred in Canada from 2010 to 2019. Of the 667 cases, 25 cases involving 69 victims and 25 accused met the criteria for familicide, according to our definition above. The CDHPVP data supports the assertion that familicide, or the killing of a current or estranged intimate partner along with at least one child, continues to be rare as a total proportion of all homicides. Among all domestic homicide cases identified nationwide between and including 2010 and 2019, less than four percent (N=25) can be classified as a familicide, comprising nine percent of all domestic homicide victims.

During the 10-year time frame, there was on average 66.7 domestic homicide cases per year and 2.5 familicide cases per year. Therefore, the information about familicides presented in this brief is based on a small number of cases, but focusing on them can help to provide context for these types of killings and contribute to more nuanced risk assessment, risk management and safety planning.

Familicides in Canada 2010 – 2019

25 cases involving 69 victims

Just over two-thirds (68%) of all familicide cases (N=17; 55 victims) involved the killing of a primary victim who belonged to one or more of the four vulnerable groups focused on by the CDHPVP. Specifically, of the 69 victims, 31 children (less than 18 years old) were killed alongside the primary victim in 21 cases. Among the 31 child victims, 14 lived in an RRN region of the country,

five were Indigenous, and two were second-generation immigrants, highlighting intersecting vulnerabilities of victims in these cases. Another 17 adult victims, comprising 12 cases, were killed in an RRN area of the country, three of which were Indigenous. Four cases involved the killing of immigrants/refugees with seven adult victims total.¹ Finally, eight Indigenous victims were killed in three familicide cases, all of which occurred in an RRN area of the country, which, again highlights intersecting vulnerabilities. Not only do Indigenous peoples experience increased risk of violence because of the effects of colonization but that risk is compounded by living in rural areas (e.g., due to factors such as social isolation, service barriers, presence of firearms, etc.) (Doherty & Hornosty, 2008; Holmes & Hunt, 2017; Jeffrey et al, 2019; Peters et al, 2018)

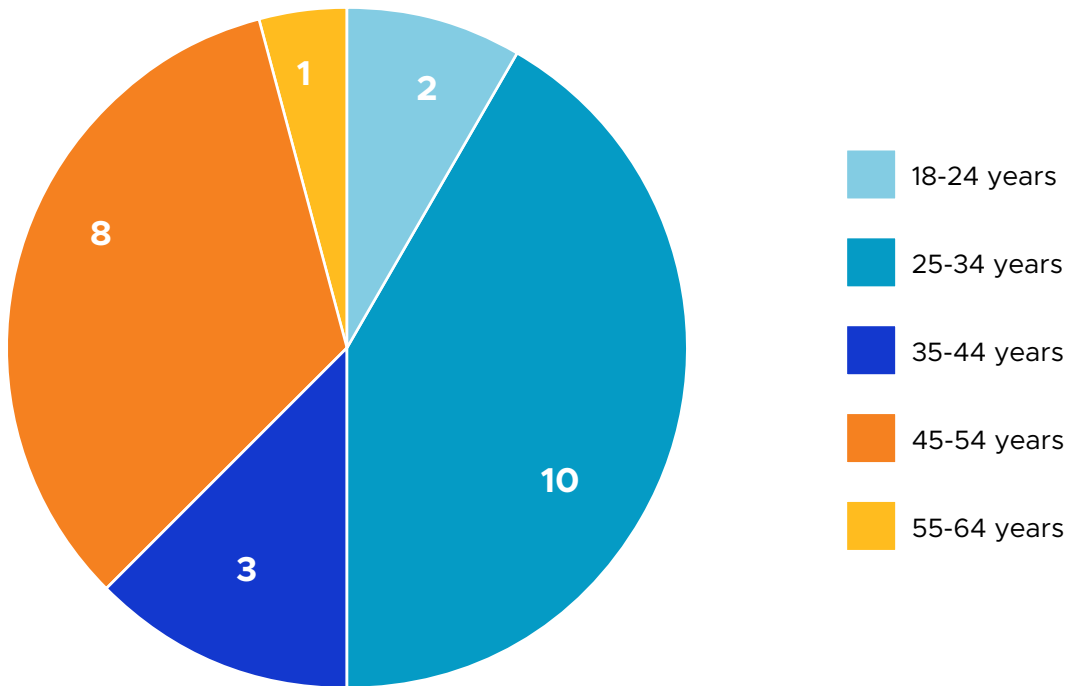
CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILICIDE PERPETRATORS

Previous research regarding familicide perpetrators has focused on demographic information and found that familicide is almost exclusively perpetrated by men (Mailloux, 2014), aged 30 to 40 years (Liem & Koenraadt, 2008). The CDHPVIP data is consistent with this research. All but one of the accused in the familicide cases were male (N=24) with an average age of 39 years.

Common Characteristics of Familicide Accused

- Primarily male
- 30 to 40 years of age
- History of domestic violence
- Accused more likely to commit suicide

FIGURE 1: AGE OF ACCUSED (N)



¹One case involved the killing of seven family members, two of which were children, and an unintended victim (for a total of 8). The primary victim and accused were immigrants but the children were born in Canada. The immigration status of the unintended victim was not reported in public documents.

Figure 1 shows the number of accused in age categories. The majority of accused fell within the 25-to-34- year age category (N=10), followed closely by 45-to-54 years (N=8). The age of one accused was unknown.

History of domestic violence: There is often a history of domestic violence by familicide perpetrators including physical violence, intimidation and threatening behavior (Johnson & Sachman, 2014). Although a history of domestic violence is not always reported by police, this information is often reported by family, friends and neighbours to media after the familicide occurs. The CDHPVP data indicates that among those accused of committing familicide, there was a documented history of violence against the primary victim in just over half of all cases (N=13). Among those with a documented history of domestic violence, physical violence was most commonly experienced (N=8), followed by emotional/psychological (N=5), coercive control (N=3), and an equal proportion of victims reported sexual, economic, or another type of violence (N=1 each).² Victims were most likely to report the violence to police (N=4), family members (N=4), or both (N=1), with the remaining confiding in friends (N=2), coworkers (N=1), or neighbours (N=1). It is expected that these numbers are still an underestimation of the history of domestic violence in these cases.

1 in 2 cases of familicide reported a history of domestic violence.

Financial and/or employment status: Research examining perpetrator employment and/or financial status at the time of the familicide has produced mixed results. Some literature suggests that men who commit familicide are financially stable and are likely to be employed at the time of the crime (Dobash & Dobash, 2015; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008) while other literature suggests that men who commit familicide are

likely to be unemployed or struggling financially (Mailloux, 2014). In the CDHPVP data, when this information was available (60% of the cases), just over one-third (N=9) of accused held full- or part-time employment at the time of the familicide.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILICIDE VICTIMS

While multiple victims are killed in familicide cases, it is typically the case that a primary victim can be identified as the main target of the perpetrator. Other victims are often biological or stepchildren (Lefevre et al, 2011; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008), but they may also be parents, relatives, or those unrelated to the perpetrator but related to the victim (e.g., new partner) or bystanders. Prior research documents that the primary victims are mostly adult women, usually in a legal marital relationship with the perpetrator (Mailloux, 2014). Of the familicides committed in Canada between 2010 and 2019, consistent with other studies, all but one of the primary victims was an adult female (N=24) who was either the current or estranged legal or common-law partner of the accused. More than half (64%) of the victims were in a current relationship with the accused as shown in Figure 2.

Although the average age of primary victims within the CDHPVP dataset was 36 years, almost half of the victims were between 25 and 34 years of age. Figure 3 shows the distribution of victims by age group. When primary victims were killed in an RRN area of the country (N=12), they tended to be older, on average, than any other vulnerable group of familicide victims. Specifically, their ages ranged from 23 to 56 with an average age of 39 years.

² Five cases involved multiple types of reported violence, which explains the values exceeding 13. The “other” type of violence involved the accused locking his spouse inside their home when he left the residence.

FIGURE 2: RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRIMARY VICTIM TO PERPETRATOR



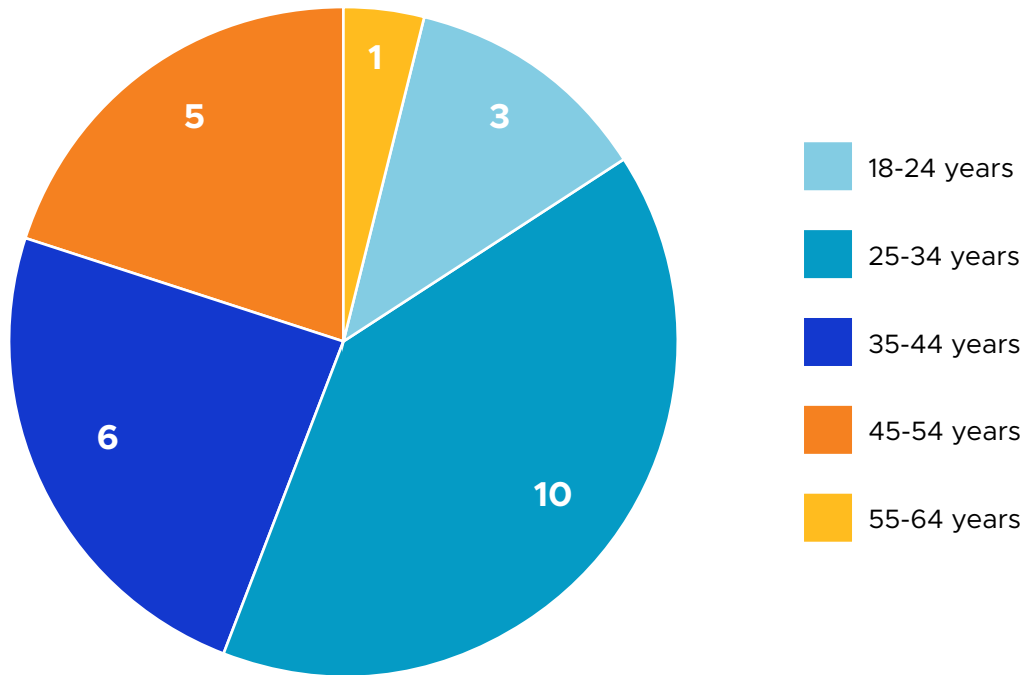
Actual or pending separation has been identified as one of the greatest risk factors for familicide and domestic homicide. This usually involves a woman leaving, or attempting to leave, an intimate relationship (Mailloux, 2014; Office of the Chief Coroner, Ontario, 2019). When a woman leaves a relationship, the perpetrator may feel as though his control over his family has been threatened, thereby increasing the risk for familicide. In the CDHPVP data, just over one-third (N=9; 36%) of primary victims were estranged and in another 20 percent of cases there was evidence that separation was imminent (N=5). In comparison, drawing from our 2018 report on domestic homicides in Canada (2010-2015), 26 percent of all victims were estranged from their partners with an additional 21 percent had evidence of an upcoming separation (Dawson et al, 2018). Separation and estrangement appear to increase the risk of a domestic homicide occurring and is also significant among familicides.

Characteristics of Primary Victims

- Usually female adult
- Often common-law or legal spouse
- Recent/pending separation
- More likely to live in a RRN area

Actual or pending separation a factor in 47% of all domestic homicides and 56% of all familicides.

FIGURE 3: AGE OF PRIMARY VICTIMS



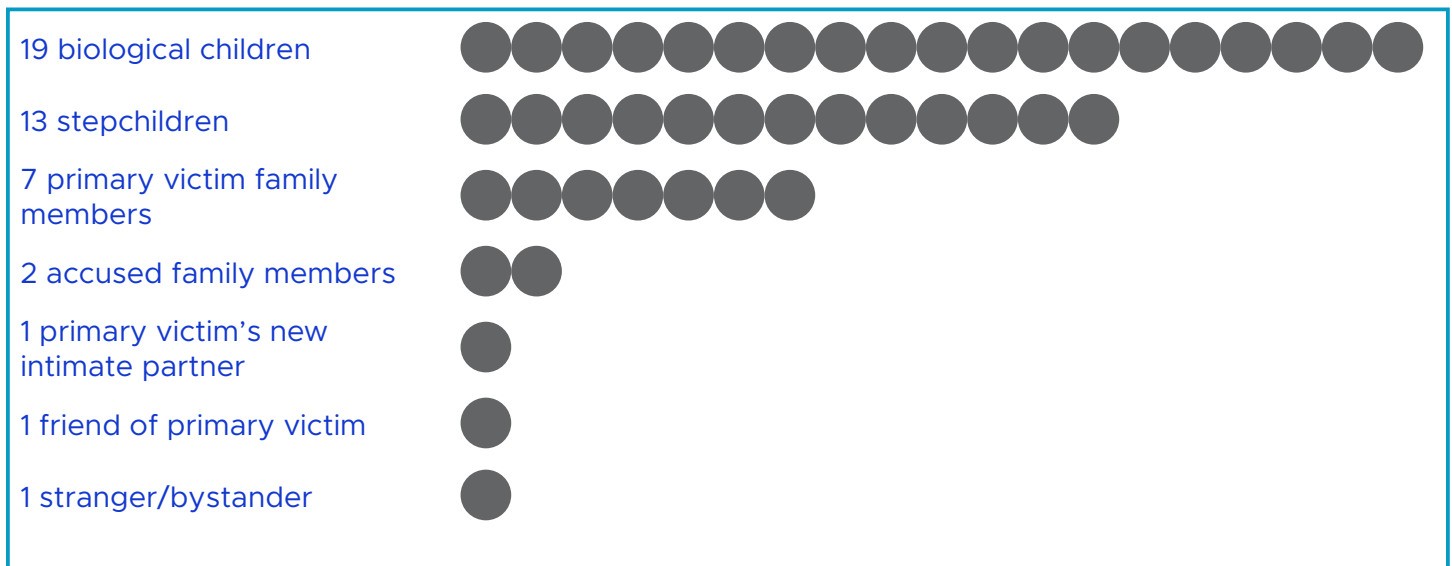
OTHER VICTIMS

Beyond the primary victim, other victims in these familicide cases included 26 female victims and 18 male victims. Focusing on collateral victims only (N=44), the average age was 18 years. Most victims were the biological child of the accused (and the primary victim) or the stepchild of the accused (73%). Figure 4 provides information about the relationship of the other victims to the accused. When focusing on children killed within familicide (N=31), the gender was split almost evenly with 17 female children (55%) and 14 male children (45%). Their ages ranged from less than one year to 15 years old, with an average age of eight years. Among the 31 children, 14 lived in an RRN area of the country and five were Indigenous, highlighting the intersecting vulnerabilities many of these children faced.

HOMICIDE AFTER SEPARATION

In 2011, the accused repeatedly stabbed and cut the throats of his ex-wife and her daughter. The victim and the accused were separated and involved in a custody battle at the time. One week before the murders, the victim had sent her ex-husband separation papers to finalize their divorce. The killings occurred four days before the couple was scheduled to go to court to decide on the custody of their children. During interrogation, the accused stated that on the evening of the murders he engaged in a verbal argument with his ex-wife about photos of her with another man on a recent vacation with her friends. The accused killed his stepdaughter prior to killing her mother in front of their two children. At trial, the Crown asserted that the accused was a jealous, controlling, and angry man who could not handle the marital separation and potential loss of custody of his children. The jury found him guilty of two counts of second-degree murder. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for 15 years.

FIGURE 4: RELATIONSHIP OF OTHER FAMILICIDE VICTIMS TO THE ACCUSED

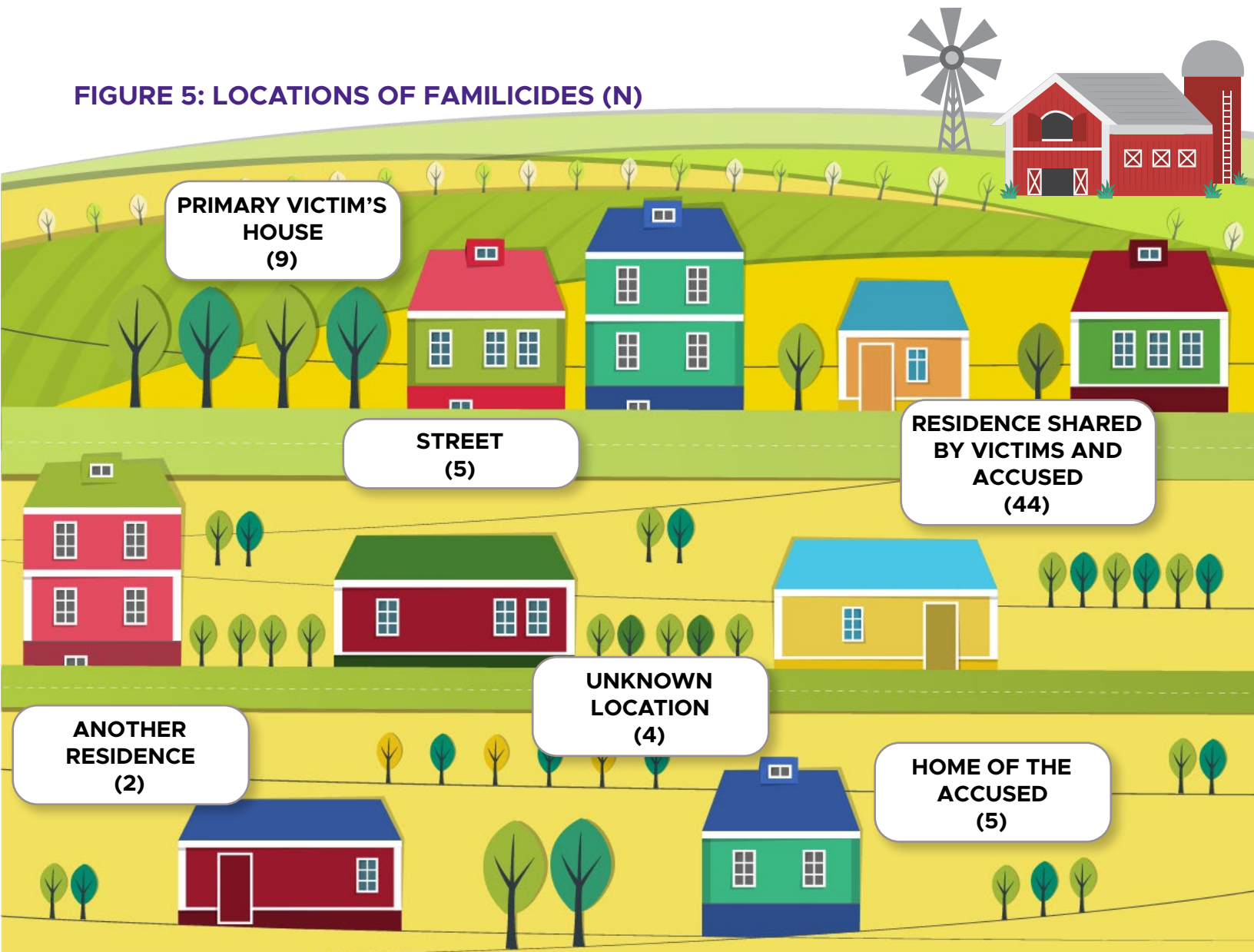


COMMON INCIDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN FAMILICIDE

Familicides tend to occur in the family home or a location known to the perpetrator (Capellan & Gomez, 2017) and the perpetrator often commits suicide following the killing of his victims (Taylor, 2018; Fegadel & Heide, 2017). Most familicide victims identified in the CDHPVIP data were killed in a residence they shared with the accused (N=44; 64%). The next largest group of victims were killed in their own residence (N=9; 13%), the accused's home (N=5; 7%), or a public street (N=5; 7%). The remaining victims were killed in another residence (N=2; 3%) or other/unknown location (N=4; 6%).³ Figure 5 offers a depiction of where the familicide victims were killed.

³ The exact location of homicide was unknown for two familicide victims because their bodies were found in a wooded area. The remaining two victims were killed in a vacation residence/chalet that one victim owned but was not her primary residence.

FIGURE 5: LOCATIONS OF FAMILICIDES (N)



CAUSE OF DEATH AND WEAPON USE

Although firearms are the most common weapon in cases of familicide, perpetrators may also use a diverse range of weapons (Capellan & Gomez, 2017). Following shooting deaths, other common causes of death include stabbings, beatings, and arson where the frequent weapon choices are knives or cutting instruments, and blunt objects (Fegadel & Heide, 2017). The cause of death was not always reported in public records (information was missing for 25% of victims), but when it was, the CDHPIVP data reveals that shooting (41%) was the most common cause of death followed by

stabbing, strangulation, beating, vehicular deaths, and arson. Table 1 provides the breakdown for cause of death where information was known.

TABLE 1: CAUSE OF FAMILICIDE DEATHS

METHOD USED TO KILL	NUMBER	%
Shooting (handgun or long gun)	28	41
Stabbing	9	13
Strangulation	5	7
Beating	5	7
Vehicular death	3	4
Arson	2	3
Unreported	17	25
TOTAL	69	100

FAMILICIDE - SUICIDE

Previous familicide research found that the majority of familicide perpetrators either commit suicide or attempt suicide following the attack (Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). This is particularly true when children are killed. The perpetrator is significantly more likely to commit suicide after killing children (Wilson et al., 1995; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Straatman et al, 2020). According to several researchers (Johnson, 2006; Liem et al., 2013; Aho et al., 2017), familicide perpetrators who commit suicide have been found to have the following characteristics:

- sought help for a variety of mental health problems including depression, personality disorders, self-destructiveness, and/or substance abuse;
- have unstable social relationships including recent separations;
- a history of violence towards children, intimate partners and other people;
- a documented criminal history.

13 of the 25 accused died by suicide after the familicide and 1 accused attempted suicide.

Some research suggests that perpetrators who are motivated by the desire to commit suicide and kill their family are not actually representative of a man trying to protect his family, but rather a result of his own suicidal tendencies and an inability to see his partner or family as separate from himself (Dawson, 2005). Over half of all familicide accused (N=13) in the CDHPVP data committed suicide following the familicide, and one individual attempted suicide. Among the accused who committed suicide, the largest group of accused shot themselves (N=7; 54%), followed by accused who jumped from height (N=2; 15%), and one accused intentionally drove his vehicle into oncoming traffic (8%). The remaining three accused killed themselves with unknown methods. In sum, our CDHPVP data supports prior literature in that individuals accused of familicide are likely to attempt or die by suicide following the killings.

FAMILICIDE AND RURAL, REMOTE & NORTHERN (RRN) POPULATIONS

Isolation is considered a risk factor for domestic homicide, particularly in RRN areas (Grama, 2000; Logan et al., 2003; Jeffrey et al, 2018). The same trend can be seen of familicides. Despite that less than 20 percent of Canada's population resides in rural areas (Statistics Canada, 2012), almost half of the familicides occurred in RRN regions of Canada involving 12 primary victims and 21 other victims. Eight of these familicides occurred in a residence shared by the primary victim and accused, one in the victim's home, and the rest were divided between a public street, other home, or the victim's vacation home (N=1 each). Most RRN victims were shot to death (N=17; 74%), three were hit by a car (13%), two were beaten (9%), and one was strangled (4%). Among those who were shot to death, long guns were used more often (N=7) than handguns (N=2). The cause of death was unknown for 8 RRN victims. Accused were more likely to commit suicide in an RRN area than in urban settings. Among all familicide accused who committed suicide (N=13), a greater proportion of accused committed suicide in RRN areas (N=8; 62%) than those in urban areas (N=5; 38%).

Two out of three accused who lived in RRN locations died by suicide following the familicide.

RRN – HOMICIDES WITH FIREARMS

- A. In 2010, a man murdered his estranged common-law wife and her adult daughter in their mobile home located in a rural area. On the morning of the murders, the accused entered the mobile home armed with a pistol and a loaded rifle and argued with his ex-partner. Both victims died of multiple gunshot wounds. There was evidence of premeditation in the murder of his ex-partner, as he used her Facebook account to locate her, however there was no evidence suggesting he knew her daughter would be present. The accused did not have a criminal record however he was banned from going near both victims at the time due to a restraining order. The accused was found guilty of first-degree murder of his ex and second-degree murder of the primary victim's daughter.
- B. In 2014, police discovered the bodies of a woman and her new partner outside a home in a rural area. Approximately 70km away, police later discovered the bodies of the woman's two young children and her estranged partner inside his home. According to police, the accused killed his recently estranged wife, and her new partner prior to returning home and killing his two children and himself. The ex-wife died of strangulation and the others were killed with firearms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RISK ASSESSMENT, RISK MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING

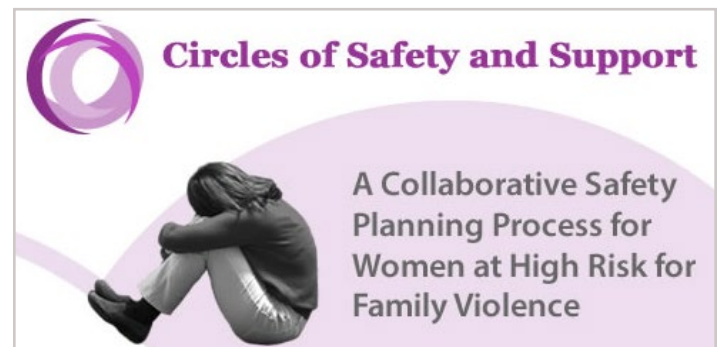
Familicide is a rare event but does happen, on average, more than twice each year in Canada. While risk factors are similar for familicide and domestic homicides, there are some noteworthy differences that may help inform prevention:

- Almost half of all familicides occur in RRN areas of Canada. This is significant considering that less than 20% of Canada's population lives in RRN areas (Statistics Canada, 2012).
- Accused in RRN areas are more likely to commit suicide than are accused in urban areas.
- Familicides in RRN regions are more commonly committed using firearms than other weapons.
- Domestic violence was a known precursor to familicide in over half of these cases.

When there is a known history of domestic violence and a perpetrator appears to have suicidal thoughts, assessment for homicidal thoughts should be considered – not just towards an intimate partner but towards other family members and individuals as well, and appropriate strategies for management be considered. People living in isolated areas require specialized safety plans – not just for the primary victim, but for the entire family. The information provided in this brief speaks to the importance of engaging in safety planning with children as well.

supports such as Victim Services and Shelter supports like Outreach. A number of facilitated meetings are held to strategize solutions to high-risk situations and to identify other supporters and services that may be included and how. The circle is maintained as long as needed to monitor and ensure the safety plan is working. Women who have participated in circles have found them to be empowering and helpful in problem-solving and decision-making. Although previously limited to Prince Edward Island, the model is being expanded to rural communities in Canada including Peace River, AB, La Ronge, SK, and Watson Lake, YK (CBC News, March 6, 2020).

Women experience significant risk to safety due to isolation in rural, remote and northern regions of Canada. Involving both personal and professional people to provide safety and support may have a significant impact on reducing risk and preventing domestic homicides.



CIRCLES OF SAFETY AND SUPPORT

[Circles of Safety and Support](#), originally developed in Prince Edward Island, by Justice Options for Women, address the needs of women worried about their physical or emotional safety due to high risk domestic violence. Circles are facilitated using an Interest-based process. A Circle evolves around the voluntary participation of a woman experiencing domestic violence. The woman helps to identify people to include in her circle and is an active decision-maker in the safety planning process. This important distinction that empowers women to make these key decisions makes it different than other models. Anyone can be included in a circle including neighbors, friends, family, employers, co-workers, child protection, police, and victim

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CDHPIVP PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

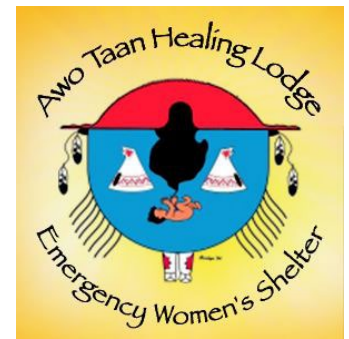
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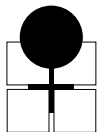
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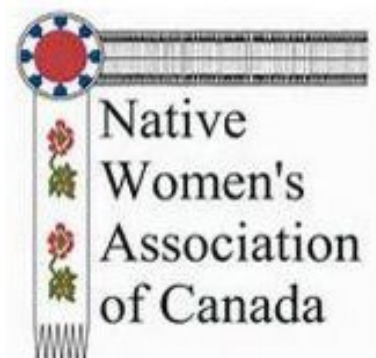
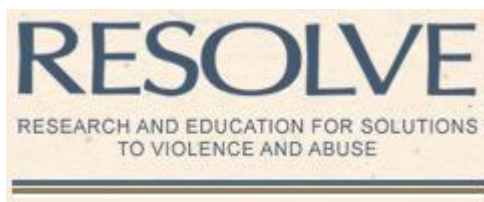


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