

# Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative



## ONE IS TOO MANY: TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN DOMESTIC HOMICIDES IN CANADA 2010-2015

Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with  
Vulnerable Populations

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# HIGHLIGHTS

This study documents the number of domestic homicides in Canada between 2010 and 2015 based on court and media reports. This research has been done as part of a five-year, SSHRC-funded project entitled *The Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations* (CDHPiVP). The project has academic and community partners across Canada who are focused on promoting collaborative, cross-sectoral research to identify unique individual and community-level risk factors that may increase exposure to domestic violence and domestic homicide for specific populations.

**This report** is a painful reminder that domestic violence is a major public health, social, and criminal issue that affects thousands of Canadians. We highlight several cases to remind the reader of the lives lost to domestic violence and the family and friends left behind. This report is limited by the information available from court decisions and media reports. In the next phase of our grant we will be working with provincial and territorial coroners and medical examiners to ensure that we have captured reliable information on all Canadian domestic homicides. We will be working with domestic violence death review committees to examine emerging trends and recommendations across the country.

**This report** has a focus on four vulnerable populations who appear to be at greater risk of domestic homicide due to historical oppression and/or lack of access to resources because of isolation through factors such as geography, language, culture, age and poverty. We prioritized four populations as a first step: (1) Indigenous populations; (2) immigrant and refugee populations; (3) rural, remote, and northern populations; and (4) children killed in the context of domestic violence. Each of these populations experience factors that enhance their vulnerability to domestic violence and domestic homicide and exacerbate the negative mental and physical health consequences of this violence. These groups face significant challenges in finding services and safety.

**Future reports** will help identify and inform priorities for future practice, policy, and research. The overall mission is to develop and implement more nuanced and appropriate population-specific, culturally-informed practices and policies. Our growing knowledge base needs to be translated into action in the field to support victims and service providers to assess and manage risk as well as to promote safety planning. The challenge across the country is realizing these goals for vulnerable populations in a manner that addresses existing inequities and increases access to resources and services.

- ❖ From 2010-2015 in Canada, there were 418 cases of domestic homicide involving 476 victims. There were 427 adult victims (90%) and 49 victims aged 17 and younger (10%).
- ❖ Females comprised 79 percent of the adult victims and males were 21 percent of adult victims. Among victims aged 17 and younger, females represented 53 percent of the victims and males were 47 percent of victims.
- ❖ The majority of adult victims were 25 to 34 years of age (28%). The average age was 39 years. Among child victims, ages ranged from less than one year to 13 years old, with an average age of six years.
- ❖ There were 443 accused identified in the 418 cases of domestic homicide. The majority of accused were male (86%). Of the 443 accused, 21 percent committed suicide and another seven percent attempted suicide following the homicide.
- ❖ The majority of the accused were aged 25 to 34 years (25%) with an average age of 40 years.
- ❖ The majority of victims were in a current intimate relationship with the accused (61%) and 26 percent were separated or estranged.
- ❖ Among 61 percent of cases in which the victim and accused were in a current relationship, 21 percent had evidence that separation was imminent or pending. Of those, the majority involved female victims and male accused (91%).
- ❖ Thirty-seven children were killed within the context of the domestic homicide; 70 percent were biological children of the victim and/or accused and 24 percent involved stepchildren.



## HIGHLIGHTS (cont'd)

- ❖ In the 418 cases, 13 percent involved the homicide of third parties, such as family members, neighbours, new partners, or other bystanders.
- ❖ When information was known, most victims died as a result of stabbing (38%), following by shooting (24%), strangulation (11%) or beating (11%).
- ❖ Most victims were killed in the home that they shared with the accused (44%), in their own home (19%), or the home of the accused (10%).
- ❖ Second-degree murder was the most common initial charge laid (50%) followed by first degree murder charges (37%), manslaughter charges (7%), and other charges related to the homicide (2%; e.g., criminal negligence causing death, accessory after the fact, failure to provide the necessities of life).
- ❖ There were 253 domestic homicide victims (53%) that were identified as belonging to one or more of the four populations being focused on in the CDHPVP, including Indigenous, immigrant/refugee, and rural, remote and northern populations as well as children killed in the context of domestic violence.

***Section Highlights for the four populations are included in separate sections below.***



# INTRODUCTION

The *Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations* (CDHPVP) is a five-year project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The initiative has the following key objectives: (1) to conduct research on domestic homicides in Canada; (2) to identify protocols and strategies that will reduce risk of domestic homicide as well as the violence that leads to domestic homicide; and (3) to share knowledge with and learn from the wider community. In doing so, the CDHPVP is working to create partnerships that will facilitate collaborative, cross-sectoral research of which the primary aim is to identify unique individual and community-level risk factors that may increase exposure to domestic violence and homicide for specific populations.

The CDHPVP focuses on four populations that experience increased vulnerability to domestic homicide and/or face unique challenges as shown below:

## ❖ Indigenous populations

The rate of domestic homicide is eight times higher for Indigenous women compared to non-Indigenous women in Canada. Research suggests that colonization, poor socio-economic status, systemic and interpersonal racism, and intergenerational violence largely contribute to the heightened risk faced by Indigenous populations.

## ❖ Rural, remote and northern populations

The rate of domestic homicide in rural, remote and northern regions of Canada is often significantly higher than in urban areas. Research identifies potential contributing factors such as precarious employment, unemployment, and/or role of firearms as well as barriers to leaving abusive relationships such as a lack of transportation and/or privacy and confidentiality.

## ❖ Immigrant and refugee populations

Immigrant and refugee populations experience language, cultural and legal barriers that make it more difficult to report domestic violence and to access services. Additional barriers that increase their risk are discrimination/racism and economic vulnerability.

## ❖ Children exposed to domestic violence

Children and youth aged 17 and younger who were victims of family-related violence represent 29 percent of all children and youth victims of violent crime. Research has identified child abuse, separation, custody and access issues as common risk factors.

The CDHPVP recognizes that there are other marginalized and/or vulnerable populations who also face higher risk of domestic homicide and/or unique challenges when experiencing domestic violence (e.g. people living with disabilities, seniors, LGBTQ+ communities, etc.). It is the hope that subsequent research will focus on these groups. For more information on the initiatives of the CDHPVP as well as helping resources, please visit our website: [www.cdhipi.ca](http://www.cdhipi.ca).

## ***Documenting domestic homicides in Canada***

One major activity of the CDHPVP is the development of a national domestic homicide database that can better capture the context of all domestic homicides and, specifically, those that occur for the above groups. While various mechanisms are already in place to document domestic homicides, these official records often underestimate the extent of domestic homicide because of the definitional parameters that are used and/or because they lack the detailed, but important information about the events leading up to the domestic homicide as well as the characteristics of those involved.

Responding to the definitional issue, to ensure that all domestic violence-related homicides are captured, the CDHPVP has developed the following definition of domestic homicide:

*Domestic homicide is defined as the killing of a current or former intimate partner, their child(ren), and/or other third parties. An intimate partner can include people who are in a current or former married, common-law, or dating relationship (the term dating is used in its broadest sense). Other third parties can include new partners, other family members, neighbours, friends, co-workers, helping professions, bystanders, and others killed as a result of the incident.*

While this definition still poses some challenges in a variety of contexts (Fairbairn et al. 2017), its scope is more comprehensive than most official data sources such as the Statistics Canada Homicide Survey. More importantly, while





the Homicide Survey does collect police-reported data on all homicides, including domestic homicide, the data are often limited with respect to the events leading up to the killing as well as the previous and current experiences of those involved.

As such, the CDHPVIP seeks to capture more comprehensive and detailed information concentrating on domestic homicide victims exclusively and emphasizing the marginalization and/or vulnerability of various population subgroups, beginning with the four identified above. For example, the CDHPVIP collects information on factors that are more common in, or unique to, domestic homicides including, but not limited to, more nuanced information on victim-accused relationship such as relationship length; if separated when homicide occurred and for how long; history of previous separations if more than one; whether there was a new partner in the victim's life; presence of stepchildren; detailed history of domestic violence; and prior agency contact. These and other well-documented risk factors are not systematically captured in the Homicide Survey despite the significant role they often play in domestic homicides (Campbell et al., 2003; Liem & Reichelmann 2014).

While the rise of domestic violence death reviews in Canada and internationally has improved knowledge with respect to trends, patterns and risk factors for domestic violence related killings (for review, see Bugeja et al., 2015; Dawson, 2017), such initiatives do not exist in all jurisdictions in Canada. As such, information on domestic homicides is often dependent upon where it occurs in the country. It is the goal of the CDHPVIP to make this information more consistent nationally, both for comparative purposes and to better understand regional variations that may be important for intervention and prevention.

### *Developing the databases*

The CDHPVIP is developing two databases to document domestic homicides in Canada. This was necessary for privacy and confidentiality purposes to help facilitate research agreements with coroners/medical examiners. The first database is compiling information from coroner and medical examiner records in each of the jurisdictions to ensure that the total population of domestic homicides are captured in all provinces/territories. To do so, individual research agreements are being established in each jurisdiction. Agreements are

currently in place for New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan.

While the above process is ongoing, a second database has been developed that draws information available in the public domain including media and court documents. With the growth of information technology, these sources are now easier to access and retrieve, either for free or for a small, monthly subscription fee. Given increasing reliance on media sources, the quality of information documented in the media has been compared to information contained in official sources. While this work is in its infancy, some research conducted in the United States has shown that these data sources are often as accurate as official sources when documenting the gender, age, and race/ethnicity of the victim and the accused (Heide & Boots, 2007; Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017). Moreover, media are often found to be more informative when determining victim-accused relationship, whether they had children together (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017) and for situational context, providing a more complete picture of the crime (Genovesi et al., 2010; Shon & Lee, 2016).

Because information for the second database is public, data collection using these sources began first focusing on the period 2010-2015. Using detailed media and court document search strategies, lists of victims were constructed and numbers compared to those provided in annual reports published by the Statistics Canada Homicide Survey. Despite the broader definition adopted by the CDHPVIP, this allows for an assessment of how complete our lists are while awaiting total population counts that will be achieved through coroner and medical examiner records. For all identified cases, a data collection instrument developed specifically for the CDHPVIP project was used to code information on a variety of variables, some of which are reported on below.

### *Structure of Report*

This first report of the CDHPVIP draws from the media and court document database documenting domestic homicides for the six-year period 2010 to 2015.

**Section I** of this report focuses on general trends for all domestic homicides that have occurred nationwide between and including 2010 and 2015.



**Section II** of this report focuses on trends and patterns documented across each of the four populations being focused upon: Indigenous; immigrant/refugee; rural, remote, and northern; and children killed within the context of domestic violence.

It is important to emphasize that these data capture a **minimum** estimate of the number of domestic homicides that have occurred during this period as well as the characteristics of the killings and those involved. Given information is drawn from publicly-available sources (e.g., media files and court documents), what is reported is restricted to the information available at the time of this report since some investigations and court cases may still be ongoing. In short, while the information is as reliable as official statistics in many respects as discussed above, media coverage and/or court documents more often report affirmative characteristics (e.g. whether the victim/perpetrator *had* a specific characteristic, such as a prior criminal record, children, etc.) rather than those characteristics that are absent. This is also typically the case with official statistics, but it is a limitation that should be kept in mind when reviewing the trends and patterns below.

Similarly, numbers for each population of focus are also minimum estimates because some investigations for some cases are still ongoing, or information has been limited to date. Therefore, it was not always possible to determine whether a case was associated with the specific population being examined.

The CDHPVP further acknowledges that some victims' deaths remain unsolved and, therefore, are not captured in this report while other victims may currently be classified as missing. Cases are being monitored and data will continually be updated.

In summary, trends and patterns are based on available information and this is indicated where possible when describing results. In reviewing the data in the following sections, it is important to be reminded of the meaning of absolute numbers and per capita figures. For example, the number of total domestic homicides in Ontario may be high in absolute terms; however, it may be smaller when calculated on a per capita basis since about 40% of the Canadian population lives in Ontario. On the other hand, a small number of domestic homicides in the Northwest Territories may seem less significant until one considers the population is only about .1% of the Canadian population. As well, there are variations by year that may not represent a significant pattern, but rather are indicative of random fluctuations only. For example, a homicide-suicide involving multiple deaths may skew the statistics for that year but do not represent a pattern over time. Finally, please note that due to rounding, some percentage totals may not equal 100 percent.





# SECTION 1: Results for all domestic homicides, 2010-2015

From 2010-2015 in Canada, there were 418 cases of domestic homicide involving 476 victims. There were 427 adult victims (90%) and 49 victims aged 17 and younger (10%). During the six years examined, there were a total of 443 accused. There were 353 homicide victims (74%) and another 123 victims killed as a result of homicide-suicides (26%).

## Patterns over time and by geography

**Temporal distribution:** The number of victims killed each year ranged from 60 to 96. Specifically, Figure 1 shows the distribution of victims during this period with the highest number killed in 2010 and the lowest number killed in 2013. These figures are reflective of broader homicide trends nationwide as recorded by Statistics Canada (Hotton Mahony 2011).

**Geographic distribution:** Table 1 shows the number and percentage of victims killed as well as the rate of victims killed in domestic homicide in each province and territory which adjusts for population size. For example, as shown below, Ontario had the highest number (N=157) and largest proportion of victims (33%) in the country during the period examined. However, adjusting for its population size, which is the highest in Canada, its rate of domestic homicide was among the lowest (1.17) and below the national average. Over a 10-year period (2006-2015), the national homicide rate has remained relatively stable with an average national rate of 1.68 victims per 100,000 of the population (David 2017). Largely consistent with historical patterns, Table 1 also shows that the highest domestic homicide rates were largely in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, followed by Manitoba. The lowest rates were found in Quebec and British Columbia.

Figure 1. Annual distribution of domestic homicides in Canada



Table 1. Distribution of domestic homicide victims by jurisdiction, 2010-2015 (N=476)

Jurisdiction	Total number of victims	Percent of total victims/Canada population	Percent of total Canada population	Rate of domestic homicide <sup>1</sup>
Ontario	157	33%	38%	1.17
Alberta	73	15%	12%	1.79
Quebec	67	14%	23%	0.82
British Columbia	51	11%	13%	1.10
Manitoba	43	9%	3.6%	3.36
Saskatchewan	25	5%	3.1%	2.28
New Brunswick	17	4%	2.1%	2.28
Nova Scotia	15	3%	2.6%	1.62
Nunavut	10	2%	0.1%	27.82
Newfoundland and Labrador	8	2%	1.5%	1.54
Northwest Territories	7	2%	0.12%	16.75
Prince Edward Island	3	<1%	0.4%	2.10
Yukon	0	0%	0.1%	N/A

<sup>1</sup> The number of domestic homicide victims killed in each jurisdiction per 100,000 of the total population. Rates were calculated based on 2016 census population data.

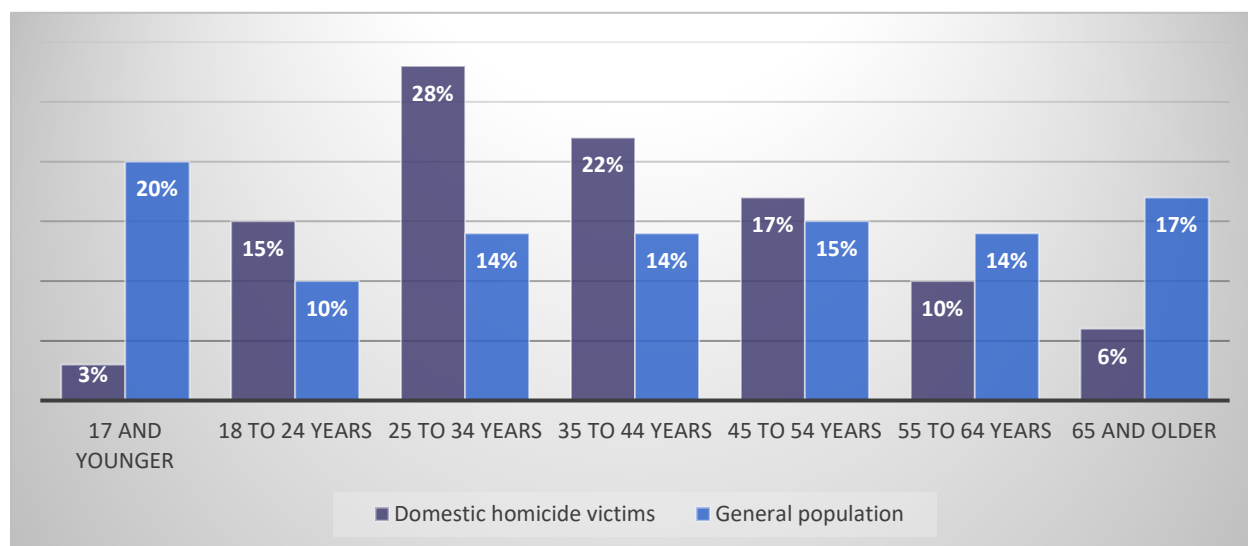
## Demographic characteristics of victims and accused

**Gender of the victim:** Examining both adult victims and victims aged 17 and younger, results showed that the majority of victims were female (76%) and one quarter were male (24%). Examining adult victims only, females comprised 79 percent and males were at 21 percent. Among child victims, females represented 53 percent of the victims and males were 47 percent of victims. This is consistent with other domestic homicide research (Campbell et al. 2007; Dawson et al., 2009) and national trends more broadly (Miladinovic & Mulligan 2015).

**Age of the victim:** Victims ranged in age from less than one year to 91 years old with an average age of 36 years. When children killed in the context of domestic homicide were excluded, the age of the adult victims ranged from 14 to 91 years old with an average age of 39 years. Among children killed within the context of domestic violence, victim ages ranged from less than one year to 13 years old, with an average age of six years.

Chart 1 shows the age distribution of domestic homicide victims, excluding children. The majority of victims were in the 25-to-34-year age category (28%), followed by 35 to 44 years (22%), 45-54 (17%), 18-24 (15%), 55-64 (10%), 65 years and older (6%) with those 17 and younger representing the smallest group (3%). When comparing these figures with the proportion of individuals falling into those age categories in the general population, we can see how some age groups are overrepresented while others are underrepresented. For example, domestic homicide victims aged 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 years were overrepresented compared to the general population (Statistics Canada, 2018). Whereas victims 17 years old and younger as well as those aged 55 and older were underrepresented when compared to age demographics in the general population (Statistics Canada, 2018).

**Chart 1.** Age distribution of domestic homicide victims compared to general population (N=433)<sup>2</sup>



\*Not including children killed in context of domestic homicide.

<sup>2</sup> The victim age was unknown in six cases.

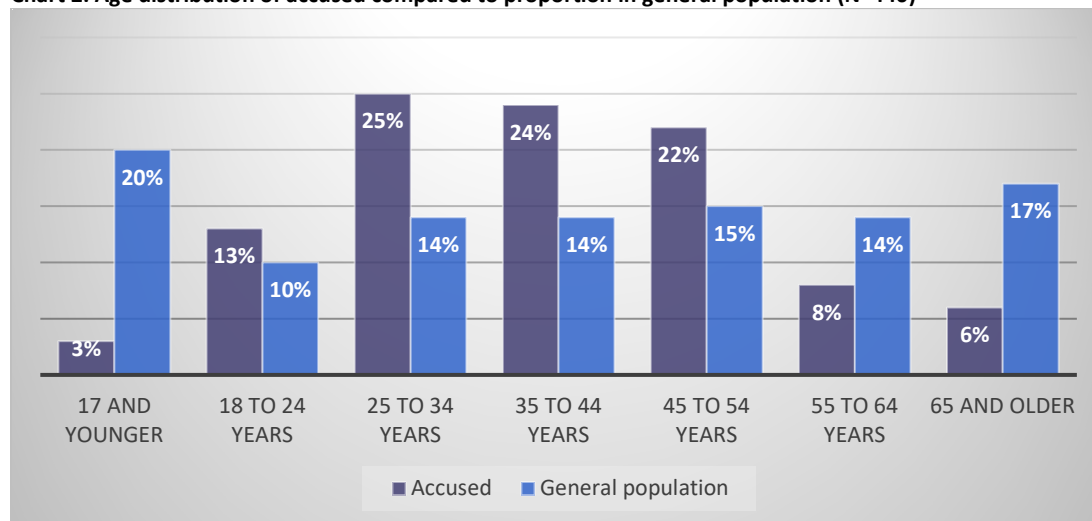


**Marital status of the victim:** The marital status of the victim was known in 84 percent of cases. Where information was known, victims were almost equally likely to be legally married (27%) or living common law (28%). About one in five of the victims (20%) were in an estranged marital relationship, including legal (12%), common-law (7%), and divorced (1%) victims. One-quarter of the victims (25%) had never married and three of the victims (<1%) were widowed.

**Gender of the accused:** There were 443 accused identified in the 418 cases of domestic homicide. The majority of accused were male (86%) and remaining accused were female (14%) or transgender (<1%).<sup>3</sup>

**Age of the accused:** The ages of the accused ranged from 13 to 88 years old with an average age of 40 years.<sup>4</sup> As shown in Chart 2, the largest proportion of accused were between the ages of 25 and 34 years old (25%), followed by those aged 35 to 44 years (24%), 45 to 54 years (22%), 18 to 24 years (13%), 55 to 64 (8%), and those aged 65 and older (6%). There were 11 accused that were younger than 17 years (3%). Similar to domestic homicide victims, those aged 18 to 54 years were overrepresented compared to the demographic composition of the general population, and those aged 17 and younger and those 55 and older were underrepresented.

**Chart 2. Age distribution of accused compared to proportion in general population (N=440)<sup>5</sup>**



**Marital status of the accused:** Where the marital status of the accused was known (82%), similar to the victims, the majority of accused were in a current legal (31%) or common-law relationship (29%). Approximately 25 percent were in an estranged legal (15%) or common-law (10%) relationship, with the remaining accused (15%) having never been married.

<sup>3</sup> There were two cases involving transgender accused.

<sup>4</sup> The 13-year-old perpetrator, known as H, because he cannot be identified under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, shot his father and was later acquitted of all charges due to the severe abuse the father perpetrated against his wife, the mother of the perpetrator, and the children, including the 13-year-old boy. For more information, see: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/alberta-judge-acquits-boy-of-murder-who-shot-abusive-dad-to-protect-mom/article26759032/>

<sup>5</sup> The age of the accused was unknown in three cases.



## Victim-accused relationship

As displayed in Figure 2<sup>6</sup>, the majority of victims were in a current intimate relationship with the accused (61%) and 26 percent were separated or estranged. Although not shown in Figure 4, among current relationships, almost an equal proportion of cases involved legally-married and common-law relationships. The remaining cases involved dating relationships. Among estranged relationships, most involved a marital separation, including legally-married and common-law relationships, followed by estranged dating partners.<sup>7</sup> The remaining 13 percent of the cases involved 'other' relationships, often collateral victims as discussed in more detail below.

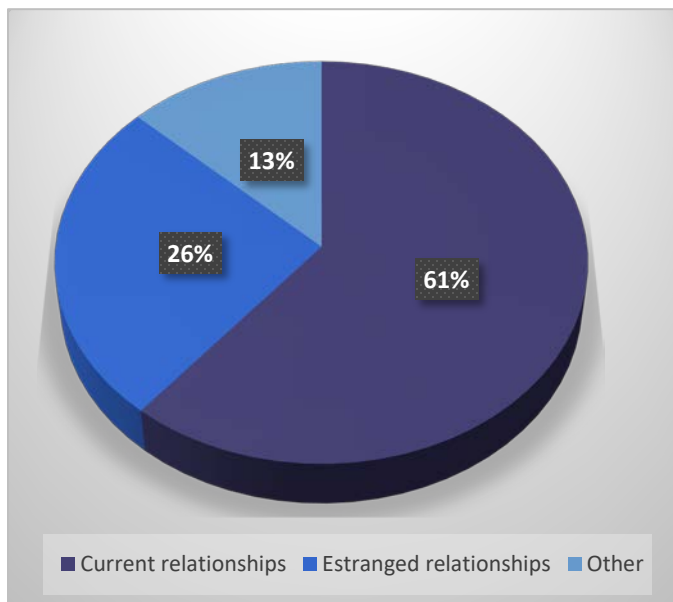
**Separation:** Research recognizes that separation/estrangement may be a precursor to lethal violence even if physical separation has yet to occur (Hyden & Hyden, 1999; Bruton & Tyson, 2017). That is, the decision to leave a relationship, or to tell a partner that the relationship is ending, can often end in a domestic homicide. Among 61 percent of cases in which the victim and accused were in a current relationship, 21 percent had evidence that separation was imminent or pending. Of those, the majority involved female victims and male accused (91%), also supporting research that shows separation/estrangement is a risk factor for women being killed by male partners. Some indicators of pending separation were the victim sharing with family or friends her desire to leave, evidence of suspected/actual infidelity, searching for an alternative residence, and changing the locks.

**Children:** The victim and accused had children together in 29 percent of cases. Among those cases, the number of children ranged from one to five. When the victim and accused were separated, the victim typically had custody of the children at the time of the homicide; however, where information was known, when a custody agreement was in effect, it appears that joint custody was most common.

Thirty-seven children were killed within the context of domestic homicide, 70 percent of which involved biological children of the victim and/or accused, 24 percent involved stepchildren, and five percent of victims shared an "other" type of relationship to the victim and/or accused (e.g., one adopted child and one niece of the accused).<sup>8</sup> Seven percent of the domestic homicides involved familicides in which multiple members of the family, including children, were killed (N=31 victims). All familicides were committed by a male accused (N=8).

**Collateral victims:** Recent research has begun to examine victims killed in the context of domestic violence, but who were not the intended or primary victim, often referred to as collateral victims (Meyer & Post, 2013). Other research identifies them as corollary victims; for example, one study found that as many as 20 percent of the victims of domestic homicides involved corollary victims. These victims are killed at the same time as the target or primary victim, and often include other family members, new intimate partners, friends, acquaintances, police officers, and strangers (Smith et al., 2014). The CDHPVIP database demonstrates that an

Figure 1. Distribution of victim-accused relationship (N=439)\*



\*Not including children killed in context of domestic homicide.

<sup>6</sup> Excludes children killed in the context of domestic homicide.

<sup>7</sup> This included two same-sex domestic homicides.

<sup>8</sup> Total will not equal 100% due to rounding.

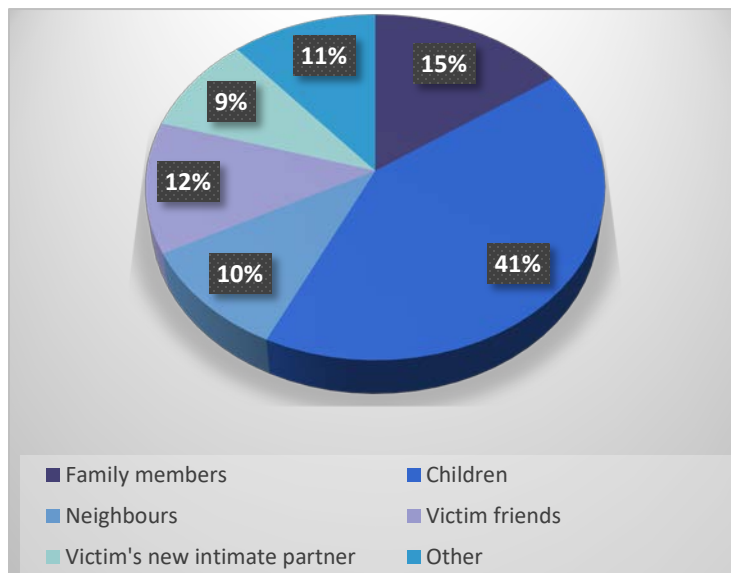
additional 13 percent of cases involved the homicide of third parties, such as family members, neighbours, new partners, or other bystanders (e.g. police). More detail on collateral victims is provided in the next section.

### *Characteristics of the homicide incident*

**Number of victims killed:** As with homicides generally, most of the domestic homicide cases involved a single victim (80%); however, one in five cases (or 20%) involved multiple homicide victims (up to eight victims in one case). This is one characteristic – multiple victims – that is more common in domestic homicide than other types of homicide. In these cases, the primary or target victim was most often a current or estranged intimate partner (78%), the accused and/or victim's biological child (17%), or an "other" type of relationship (5%).<sup>9</sup> In one third of all cases involving multiple victims (33%), the accused committed familicide, killing three or more family members in quick succession.

As displayed in Figure 3, when multiple victims were killed, excluding the primary victim, the largest group of collateral victims were biological children of the accused and/or the primary victim (41%), either the accused's biological child (24%) or the primary victim's biological child (17%). Other collateral victims included family members of the victim or accused (15%), friends of the victim (12%), neighbours (10%), and new partners of the victim (9%). A smaller proportion of cases, forming the "other" category in Figure 3, involved the death of strangers (5%), previous/estranged intimate partners of the accused (3%)<sup>10</sup>, and other relationship types (3%).<sup>11</sup>

Figure 3. Distribution of collateral victims killed (N=58)



**Number of accused:** The majority of domestic homicides involved one accused (89%); however, multiple accused were involved in some cases: seven percent of cases involved two accused; in three percent of cases, there were three accused; and, in less than one percent of the cases, there were four accused.

**Method:** Information on the method of killing was not made public in 17 percent of the cases. When this information was known, most victims died as a result of stabbing (38%), following by shooting (24%), strangulation (11%) or beating (11%). In the remaining 16 percent of cases, victims died by other means including death by arson (5%), hit by a car (3%), smothering or suffocation (2%), pushed from height (1%), drowning (1%), or a drug overdose (<1%). In three percent of the cases, the method of killing was listed as 'other'. Approximately 11 percent of the cases involved killings that incorporated more than one method (e.g. beating and stabbing).

**Weapon used:** The use of a weapon was unknown in just over one-fifth of all cases (21%). However, when this information was known, 79 percent of victims were killed with a weapon. When a weapon was used, a knife was the most common type (45%), followed by firearms (22%), bars/bats/sticks (4%), vehicles (4%), or an "other" type of weapon (8%). Approximately 17 percent of cases involved a

<sup>9</sup> The two cases involving "other" relationships were unique in their context compared to domestic homicides more generally. The first involved an accused who attempted to murder his ex-girlfriend, but she survived while her sister and mother were killed as collateral victims. The second involved an accused who started a fire at a rooming house where the intended victims, who were family members of the boyfriend of the accused, escaped unharmed, but five individuals, with no apparent relation to the accused, did not and died as a result.

<sup>10</sup> One case involved the accused killing three estranged intimate partners in the same day.

<sup>11</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.





weapon, but the type was unknown. The unknown category captures cases in which it was known that a weapon was used (e.g. shooting), but no additional details were provided on the specific type of weapon used (e.g. a handgun or a long gun).

**Sexual assault:** In 58 percent of cases, there was no mention of sexual assault. In 39 percent of the cases, it was determined that sexual assault was not present. In the remaining three percent of cases, there was evidence of a sexual assault (2%) or circumstantial evidence of a sexual assault occurring (1%).

**Witnesses:** As is often the case with domestic violence/homicide (Carman et al., 2017; Hayes, 2018), there were no witnesses present in 63 percent of cases, according to the information available, or there was no information on the presence of witnesses (13%). When witnesses were present (24%), however, it was most commonly children of the victim and/or perpetrator (31%), third parties such as coworkers, police, or strangers (23%), family members of the victim and/or perpetrator (18%), friends of the victim (15%), neighbours (13%), or the victim's new intimate partner (<1%).

**Location of crime:** Most victims were killed in the home that they shared with the accused (44%), in their own home (19%), or the home of the accused (10%). The remaining 27 percent of the victims were killed in various other locations, including slightly more than 13 percent who were killed in a more public location such as on the street, in a park, or at a place of business. About seven percent of the victims were killed in a private or semi-private, location such as an institution, hotel, or rooming house. The remaining six percent were killed in an "other" or unknown location.

## *Outcome of case*

**Suicide:** Of the 443 accused, 21 percent committed suicide and another seven percent attempted suicide following the homicide. Accused who committed suicide were predominantly male (98%) and most often died by shooting (44%) followed by stabbing (8%), hanging (8%) or arson (5%). The remaining suicide methods included jumping from height (4%), being hit by a car (4%),<sup>12</sup> poison (2%), or drowning (2%). The exact method used to commit suicide was unknown in the remaining 23 percent of the cases.



Accused who attempted suicide, but were not successful, were also predominantly male (88%) and most often attempted suicide by stabbing (39%) followed by drug overdose (13%), and shooting (10%). The remaining methods varied including being hit by a car (7%), poisoning (3%), hanging (3%), jumping from height (3%), or "other" (16%). The exact method used to attempt suicide was unknown in the remaining six percent of the cases.

**Criminal justice response:** Second-degree murder was the most common initial charge laid (50%) followed by first degree murder charges (37%), manslaughter charges (7%), and other charges related to the homicide (2%; e.g., criminal negligence causing death, accessory after the fact, failure to provide the necessities of life). This information was unknown in the remaining three percent of cases and not applicable in one case due to the death of the accused after the charge was laid.

## *Risk factors*

One of the key objectives of the CDHPVP is to better understand the role of risk and protective factors in cases of domestic homicide, particularly for the four groups being examined. Prior research has shown that there are a variety of risk factors which have been well-documented in domestic homicide (Dawson & Piscitelli, 2017; Jaffe et al., 2017; Sheehan et al., 2015). Further, some US studies suggest

<sup>12</sup> Three cases involved the accused deliberately driving his vehicle into the path of oncoming traffic and another case involved the accused jumping from an overpass onto a busy highway.



that a larger number of risk factors occurring together would be associated with domestic homicides such as separation, stalking, prior threats to kill and the presence of guns (Campbell et al., 2009). How distinct they are from risk factors for domestic violence that does not end in death remains unclear, however, as well as the particular combination of risk factors that may be the most lethal (Dawson & Piscitelli, 2017).

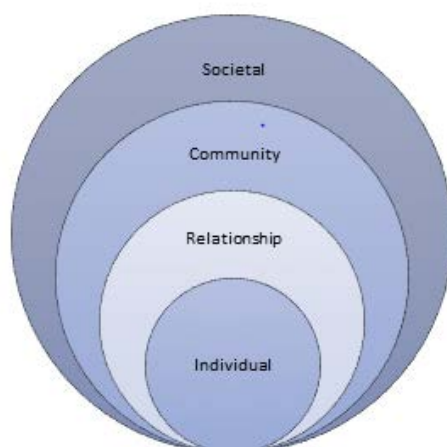
Furthermore, the presence of and/or role played by other risk factors is less well known, particularly for the four populations examined because their risk may be attributable to factors that are not easily captured (e.g. impacts of colonization, poverty, discrimination), or even possible to measure in what are, most commonly, individual-level studies. As a result, despite the proliferation of international research on risk and protective factors for domestic violence and homicide, our knowledge, and consequently the potential for prevention, remains limited for various reasons, but two are particularly important:

- (1) There is increasing recognition that domestic violence and domestic homicide are multifaceted phenomenon that arise out of the interplay of individual, family, community and socio-cultural factors (Heise 1998). In other words, such acts as well as the relative risk of victimization and perpetration cannot be explained by a single factor (e.g. mental illness, substance abuse, childhood maltreatment or poverty) or multiple factors at a single level (e.g. individual age, race/ethnicity, employment, etc.). As such, more attention needs to be paid to risk and safety at the community and societal levels given that the greatest attention has traditionally focused on individual-level factors, including the findings discussed below. This is also primarily the case for domestic violence death review initiatives.
- (2) It is also increasingly being recognized that victims, perpetrators and families experiencing violence cannot be viewed through a one-dimensional lens which focuses on single identities (e.g. as a woman, as an immigrant/refugee, or as someone who lives in a rural area) when determining how best to respond to their experiences of violence. Rather these and other identities need to be considered simultaneously (e.g. as a poor, immigrant woman who lives in a rural area) to comprehensively assess risk and safety and to understand how these identities might work together, not just separately, in compounding their level of risk or safety needs. As such, more attention needs to be paid to how various social and other identities intersect and work together to compound risk and safety. To capture these dynamics of domestic violence and domestic homicide requires adopting both an ecological framework (point #1; Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; WHO, 2002) as well as an intersectional framework (point #2; Crenshaw, 1989) because both are important when examining the four groups above. These two frameworks allow one to simultaneously consider and apply the intersecting identities/factors that lead to experiences of victimization and perpetration at multiple levels simultaneously, moving beyond the emphasis on individual and relational factors. The latter are also important, but often need to be considered in combination with factors at other levels. As such, these frameworks are critical in our research and understanding of domestic homicide, but existing community responses such as the police must often focus on the immediate individual factors such as threats made, prior history and separation in addressing risk. For example, some population sub-groups often have multiple social identities/oppressions (e.g. indigeneity, race/ethnicity, geography, age, etc.) at the individual level, but their risk at the community (e.g. lack of access to services, language barriers) and/or the socio-cultural level (e.g. colonization, discrimination) may be equally, if not more, important. Further, intersectionality is about more than vulnerability; it is about recognizing the multiple and overlapping axes of oppression faced by individuals (Crenshaw, 1989) and how the resulting marginalization works to increase vulnerabilities to violence.



Incorporating these frameworks in research and practice has so far been a challenge, but it remains a crucial goal to determine how best to do so if we are to move the knowledge base forward in terms of violence prevention. While still limited, the CDHPVP focus on specific populations with increased marginalization, vulnerability or unique barriers when experiencing violence is a necessary first step.

Figure 4. Ecological model for violence prevention



Source: World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010, pg. 18.

Keeping the above in mind, what we capture below in this first report are primarily individual-level risk factors given that they represent only those risk factors that were documented by the public information accessed and, as a result, our knowledge remains limited. We discuss them here as a starting point in understanding risk as we move forward. In designing our data collection tool, we drew from the risk factor list devised by the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC) (see [DVDRC Annual Report, 2017](#)).

The distributions below overlap with information already presented as risk factors and characteristics of victims, accused and incidents may sometimes be similar.

- ❖ There was at least some indication of an actual or pending separation in almost one-half of the cases (47%).
- ❖ Approximately 24 percent of domestic homicide cases involved victims and accused who were in a current common-law relationship.
- ❖ The presence of stepchildren was noted in 13 percent of cases.<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ There was an age disparity of nine or more years between the victim and accused in 21 percent of cases.
- ❖ The youth of the couple was documented in 10 percent of the cases.

In the next section, we begin to unpack how characteristics of victims, accused, and the incidents may vary, or not, across the four subgroups examined.

<sup>13</sup> This risk factor captures presence of step-children in the home, but it does not mean they were killed as well.



## SECTION II: Domestic homicides by population, 2010-2015

### Introduction

As shown in Figure 5, there were 253 domestic homicide victims (53% of the total sample of victims) that were identified as belonging to one or more of the four populations being focused on in the CDHPVP. As already discussed, this will be a minimum estimate given that it was not always possible to determine at this point if the deaths were associated with these four groups from the information available. However, some domestic homicides will not fall within the parameters of these four groups.

Further, as already noted, it is important to recognize intersecting identities among vulnerable populations as shown in Figure 6. For example, there was a substantial overlap between Indigenous victims and those who lived in rural, remote, or northern regions of Canada. Specifically, almost two-thirds of all Indigenous victims (59%) resided in a rural, remote, or northern region of the country. Additionally, more than half of all those accused of killing an Indigenous victim also lived in a rural, remote, or region of the country (56%). Therefore, the risks faced by rural, remote and/or northern populations have further implications for the vulnerabilities faced by Indigenous victims living in these regions, whose unique risk factors (e.g. colonization, discrimination) are compounded, or work in combination with, contributors to higher risks in rural, remote or northern communities such as timeliness and quality of medical care, availability of safe housing, and availability of social supports and programming (Assembly of First Nations, 2013; Moffitt, Fikowski, Mauricio & Mackenzie, 2013).

In contrast, as also shown in Figure 6, there was less overlap among immigrant/refugee victims and accused with the other three vulnerable populations being examined. For example, based on information currently available, only two immigrant/refugee victims lived in a rural, remote, or northern region (3%) and none involved the homicide of children.

Figure 5. Distribution of domestic homicide victims

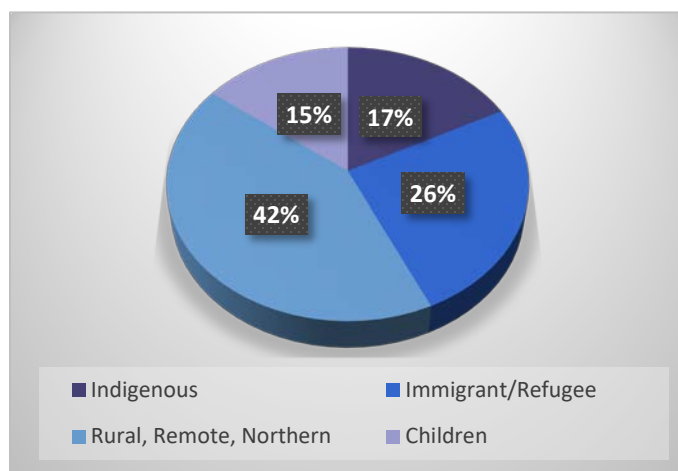
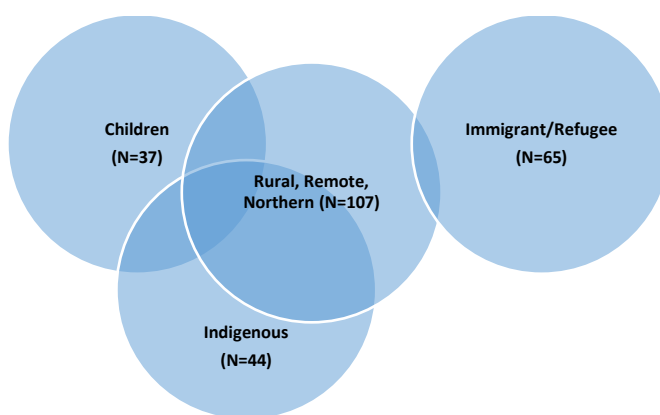


Figure 6. Intersecting vulnerabilities in domestic homicides in Canada



## INDIGENOUS DOMESTIC HOMICIDES

According to the CDHPVP, Indigenous is an inclusive term to encompass all Indigenous peoples and identities, including status, non-status, Indian, Aboriginal, Native, First Nation, Métis and Inuit who live on or off reserve and in settlement lands per the Land Claims Settlement Agreements in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Indigenous peoples are the youngest and fastest growing populations in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017; Peters et al., 2018). Specifically, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations have grown by 42.5 percent since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Although Indigenous populations make up approximately five percent of Canada's population, they are overrepresented in statistics on domestic violence and domestic homicide perpetration and victimization (Arriagada, 2016; Miladinovic & Mulligan, 2015; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017). Specifically, Indigenous populations experience more than double the rate of violent victimization than non-Indigenous people (163 per 1,000 versus 64 per 1,000) (Boyce 2016). Moreover, they are seven times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous populations (Miladinovic & Mulligan 2015). The most recent report from Statistics Canada on homicide rates shows that Indigenous females have a homicide rate that is six times higher than the non-Indigenous population (Beattie et al., 2018).

Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is a societal issue, gaining increased national and international attention since the launch of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in September 2016. In 2015, Indigenous women accounted for 25 percent of all homicide victims (Mahony, Jacob & Hobson, 2017). In some cases, these homicides occurred within the context of a domestic relationship; however, it must be noted that Indigenous women and girls are also at significant risk from acquaintances and strangers, significantly exceeding their non-Indigenous counterparts. As such, although this report focuses on domestic homicide because of the project parameters, this is not to take away from the importance of MMIWG nor to ignore the racist and sexist norms and attitudes that have resulted in senseless violence perpetrated by strangers and/or non-Indigenous people.

As discussed above, vulnerability is further complicated by the intersectionality of Indigenous identity, for example, an Indigenous child who lives in a remote community. Many Indigenous peoples live on reserves in rural, remote, or on settlement lands and in other northern areas. This provides a different set of unique risks and needs (*as discussed above and later in this report*). Further, although historical experiences of colonization and the subsequent trauma, discrimination, and marginalization are largely experienced across Canada's wider Indigenous populations, specific risks, needs, and responses are likely to differ among Indigenous communities. Therefore, it is imperative that we acknowledge the diversity between and within Indigenous communities (Peters et al., 2018). More background on these issues is found in the CDHPVP literature review (Jeffrey et al.,

## LOOKING BEYOND THE STATISTICS

An Indigenous woman was stabbed to death by her common-law partner in an Ontario city. She had moved to the city from another region of the province where she was a member of a First Nations' community. She was described as a loving mother, aunt and daughter. The couple had been together for nine years. Paramedics attended their home the day before and took the perpetrator to hospital regarding mental health concerns and drug consumption. He was not seen to be a danger to himself or others at the time. The next day, the victim called 911, fearful of her partner's erratic behaviour as his drug abuse continued. When paramedics arrived on scene, the perpetrator tried to smash the emergency vehicle's windows with a knife. The victim tried to intervene and he began stabbing her repeatedly. After his arrest, he told a homicide detective he stabbed his partner but could not provide the reason why. He later claimed to have no recollection of the killing. A psychiatrist had diagnosed him as suffering from a "cocaine induced psychotic episode." The perpetrator's lawyers requested a Gladue report to weigh societal factors for an offender of Indigenous heritage. The judge accepted his claim to Métis status, but indicated that there was no evidence of hardships, such as poverty, alcoholism, lack of education or employment, or any bias against him as an Indigenous person, all of which are to be considered in Gladue reports. He was reported to have a normal childhood. The victim came from a home that strictly forbade the use of drugs and she was trying to help her partner deal with his addiction when he killed her. In October 2018, he was sentenced to eight years for manslaughter.





2018) and summarized in our recent domestic homicide brief (Peters et al., 2018; <http://cdhpi.ca/domestic-violence-risk-assessment-risk-management-and-safety-planning-indigenous-populations>).

## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ There were 44 Indigenous domestic homicide victims identified in the period from 2010 – 2015, representing nine percent of the domestic homicide cases. Our preliminary analysis of Indigenous domestic homicides suggests that the rate over the period from 2010 to 2015 is twice the rate of domestic homicide in the non-Indigenous population. As mentioned above, the focus on domestic homicide needs to be placed in a broader context of the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people that was described as tantamount to “cultural genocide” with an intentional violation of basic rights and destruction of Indigenous culture, language and spiritual belief (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). Our study captures only a small part of the human suffering within the Indigenous population and needs to be understood in a broader framework and the ongoing study of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. Much work is needed to address the underlying issues related to domestic violence and to identify culturally-appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.
- ❖ The majority of adult Indigenous domestic homicide victims were female (70%) and about two thirds of Indigenous child and youth victims (age 17 years and younger) were female (67%).
- ❖ The majority of individuals accused of domestic homicide (n=45) were male (76%) and the remainder were female (24%).
- ❖ The age of the accused ranged from 18 to 60 years, with an average age of 33. The largest proportion of individuals fell within the 25-to-34-year age category (34%), followed by an equal proportion of those aged 18 to 24 and 45 to 54 years (both at 25%), 35 to 44 years (14%), with one accused falling in the older age category of 55 to 64 years (2%). This aligns with the relative age of the Indigenous population in general which is generally younger, on average, than the general population.
- ❖ The majority of Indigenous cases involved current intimate relationships (75%). Specifically, in 51 percent of cases, the victim and accused were in a current common-law relationship, 19 percent were dating, and five percent were legally married. Of those in an estranged relationship (19%), most were estranged from a marital union (14%) and five percent were in an estranged dating relationship.
- ❖ It is important to recognize intersecting identities of many Indigenous domestic homicide victims. For example, almost two-thirds of Indigenous victims (59%) resided in a rural, remote, or northern region of the country. Two percent of the Indigenous victims were children. The majority of Indigenous homicide victims belonged to a First Nations band or First Nations Government (77%) and 14 percent identified as Inuit. The victim’s Indigenous group was unknown in the remaining nine percent of cases.



## RESULTS FOR INDIGENOUS DOMESTIC HOMICIDES

### Patterns over time and by geography

**Temporal distribution:** Figure 7 indicates that the largest proportion of Indigenous victims were killed in 2015 with 16 victims (36%). This compares with 10 victims in 2010 (23%), three in 2011 (7%), eight in 2012 (18%), five in 2013 (11%), and two in 2014 (5%). Random fluctuations in homicide numbers are expected from year to year.

Figure 7. Annual distribution of Indigenous domestic



**Geographic distribution:** Table 2 shows the distribution of Indigenous victims across the country.

Table 2: Distribution of Indigenous domestic homicide victims by Jurisdiction, 2010-2015 (N=44)\*

Jurisdiction	Total number Indigenous victims	Percent of total Indigenous victims
Manitoba	12	27%
Ontario	9	21%
British Columbia	6	14%
Alberta	4	9%
Northwest Territories	4	9%
Nunavut	3	7%
Saskatchewan	2	5%
New Brunswick	2	5%
Quebec	1	2%
Newfoundland-Labrador	1	2%
PEI	0	0%
Nova Scotia	0	0%
Yukon	0	0%

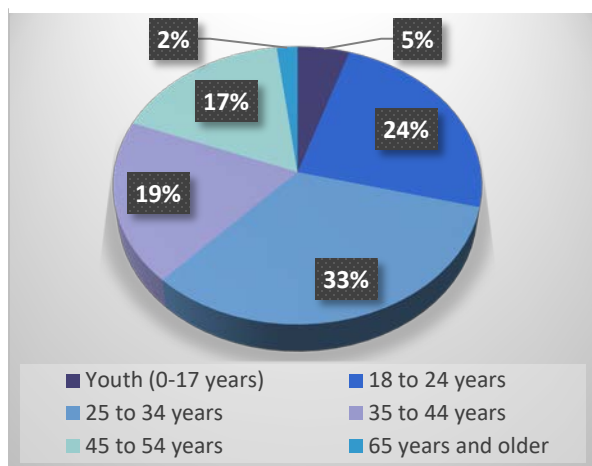
\*Total may not equal 100 percent due to rounding



## Demographic characteristics of Indigenous victims and accused

**Gender of the victim:** Most of the adult Indigenous domestic homicide victims who were 18 and older were female (70%). About two thirds of Indigenous victims 17 years and younger were also female (67%). Research shows that Indigenous women are at a higher risk of victimization compared to non-Indigenous women and Indigenous men (Arriagada, 2016; Miladinovic & Mulligan, 2015). Indigenous women are especially vulnerable as they are 2.7 times more likely to have reported experiencing violent victimization and three times more likely to report being a victim of spousal violence compared to non-Indigenous women (Boyce, 2016). This victimization is largely due to underlying systemic sexism and the devaluing of Indigenous females stemming from Canada's history of colonization (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety, 2016).

Figure 8. Age distribution of Indigenous victims (N=41)<sup>15</sup>



**Age of the victim:** The age of Indigenous domestic homicide victims ranged from two to 67 years old, with an average 32 years, similar to their average age in the general population in 2017. When excluding children killed within the context of domestic violence, the ages ranged from 15 to 67 years, with an average age of 33 years.

Figure 8 shows the age distribution of Indigenous adult victims with the largest proportion aged 25 to 34 (33%), followed by 18 to 24 (24%), 35 to 44 (19%), 45 to 54 (17%), 17 and younger (5%), with the smallest proportion aged 65 years and older (2%). There were no victims in the 55-64 age group.

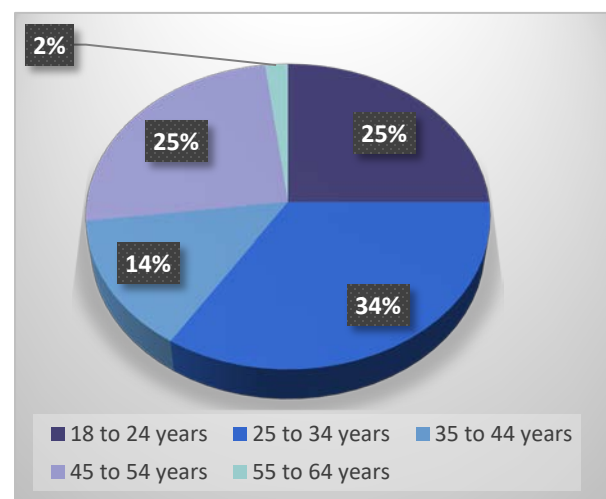
**Identification of the victim:** The majority of Indigenous homicide victims belonged to a First Nations band or First Nations Government (77%) and 14 percent identified as Inuit. The

victim's Indigenous group was unknown in the remaining nine percent of cases. With the introduction of Bill C-31, the number of First Nations people registered as status Indian increased by approximately 31 percent from 2006 to 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017).<sup>14</sup>

**Gender of the accused:** There were 45 accused in the 42 cases of domestic homicide involving an Indigenous victim. The majority of individuals accused of domestic homicide were male (76%) and the remainder were female (24%). This is distinct from the distribution of male-to-female accused for domestic homicides in Canada generally (86% and 14% respectively), but consistent with trends in other research (see Regoecki, 2001).

**Age of the accused:** Figure 9 presents the age distribution of Indigenous accused. The age of the accused ranged from 18 to 60 years, with an

Figure 9. Age distribution of accused in Indigenous cases (N=44)



<sup>14</sup> Prior to the Bill C-31 amendments to the Indian Act in 1985, an Indigenous woman who married a non-Indigenous man was stripped of her status and could not pass on Indian status to her descendants.

<sup>15</sup> The victim age was unknown in one case and the one child killed in context of domestic violence was excluded. There were no victims in the 55-64 age group.

<sup>16</sup> The accused age was unknown in one case.

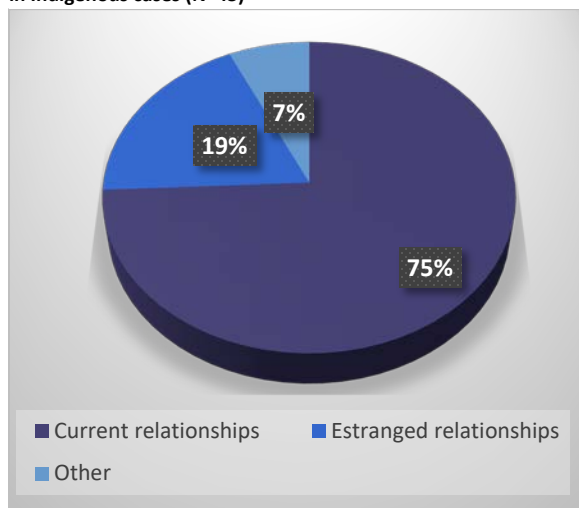
average age of 33. The largest proportion of individuals fell within the 25-to-34-year age category (34%), followed by an equal proportion of those aged 18 to 24 and 45 to 54 years old (both at 25%), 35 to 44 years old (14%), with one accused falling in the older age category of 64 years old (2%). Again, this aligns with the relative age of the Indigenous population which is generally younger, on average, than the general population.

**Identification of the accused:** Information on whether the accused identified as Indigenous was not available in over one third of the cases (38%). When information was provided, the majority of accused were Indigenous (93%), 82 percent of which identified as First Nations, seven percent Inuit, and four percent Métis. The remaining seven percent did not identify as Indigenous. Further, identification is in line with census statistics in which there is a larger population of First Nations people followed by Métis and Inuit (see Kelly-Scott & Smith, 2015).

### *Victim-accused relationship*

As displayed in Figure 10, the majority of Indigenous domestic homicides involved current intimate relationships (75%). Specifically, in 51 percent of cases, the victim and accused were in a current common-law relationship, 19 percent were dating, and five percent were legally married. As previously indicated, common-law is the most common type of relationship among Indigenous females and males (Arriagada, 2016).

**Figure 10. Distribution of relationship between victim and accused in Indigenous cases (N=43)<sup>18</sup>**



As previously indicated, common-law is the most common type of relationship among Indigenous females and males (Arriagada, 2016).

Of those in an estranged relationship (19%), most were estranged from a marital union (14%), including both legal and common-law relationships, and five percent were in an estranged dating relationship. Little is known about the occurrence of estranged partner homicide and Indigenous populations as research typically compares acquaintance-perpetrated homicides with family member-perpetrated (including current and ex-partners) or compares family-perpetrated homicides with current and former partners combined (see Miladinovic & Mulligan, 2015). Despite this, homicides within a current or former intimate relationship are found to be more common among Indigenous female victims than non-Indigenous female victims (Miladinovic & Mulligan, 2015).

Three victims shared an “other” relationship with the accused (7%), such as relatives of the accused’s intimate partner or other collateral victims.<sup>17</sup>

Among those currently with their intimate partner at the time of the killing, there was evidence that separation was imminent in one case. However, this information was unknown in 50 percent of cases.

**Children:** The victim and accused had children in common in 22 percent of cases; there was no mention of children in common in 53 percent of cases, this information was unknown in the remaining cases (25%). When they did have children in common, the number ranged from one to four.

One Indigenous child was killed in the context of domestic homicide. In this case, two victims were killed—the girlfriend of the accused along with their biological child. There were no documented familicides among Indigenous victims.

<sup>17</sup> The one child killed within the context of domestic violence was excluded.

<sup>18</sup> Total will not equal 100% due to rounding.



## Characteristics of the homicide incident in Indigenous cases

**Number of victims killed:** Most Indigenous domestic homicide incidents also involved a single victim (89%) with the remaining 11 percent of cases involving two victims killed in a single incident. In the three cases that involved multiple homicide victims, the primary victim was either the estranged partner of the accused (66%) or his girlfriend (33%). In the two cases involving the homicide of the accused's estranged partner, the accused also killed the victims' new intimate partner. The final case involved the death of the accused's girlfriend and their biological child.

**Number of accused:** Most cases of domestic homicide involved a single accused (89%) with the remaining 11 percent involving the participation of two (4%) or three accused (7%).

**Method:** Over one half of Indigenous victims were stabbed to death (53%), representing the most common method of homicide. Almost a quarter were beaten (20%), followed by strangulation (9%), arson (9%), gunshot wounds (6%), with the remaining three percent being killed by smothering or suffocation. Sixteen percent of cases documented the use of multiple methods.

**Weapon used:** Information on weapon use was unknown in almost a third of all cases (30%). However, when this information was known, over three quarters of all victims were killed with a weapon (77%). When a weapon was used, the most common weapon type was a knife (58%), followed by an "other" type of weapon (13%), and then a bar/stick (8%). The remaining 21 percent of cases involved the use of a weapon, but the exact type was not specified.

**Witnesses:** Information on the presence of witnesses was unavailable in over a third of all cases (36%). However, when this information was available, there were no witnesses in the majority of Indigenous domestic homicides (50%). When witnesses were present, they were often the child(ren) of the victim and/or accused (14%), a family member of the victim and/or accused (7%), or neighbours (7%). Other witnesses included third parties including friends, strangers, or "other" relationship types (21%).<sup>19</sup>

**Location of crime:** Most Indigenous victims were killed in the home they shared with the accused (31%), their own home (14%), another residence (17%), or the accused's residence (10%). Approximately 17 percent were killed in a public location, and the remaining 12 percent were killed in an "other" (2%) or unknown location (10%).<sup>20</sup> There is a paucity of research regarding the location of domestic homicides involving Indigenous victims, however, domestic homicides tend to occur more in private residences compared to public locations (Mulligan, Axford, & Solecki, 2015).

## Outcome of cases in Indigenous Domestic Homicides

**Suicide:** Of the 45 individuals accused of committing domestic homicide of an Indigenous victim, 11 percent committed suicide and another two percent attempted suicide. Among those who committed suicide, all were male (100%). The exact method was unknown



<sup>19</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

<sup>20</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



in most cases (60%); however, when information was known, both accused committed suicide by firearm (40%). One male accused attempted suicide after committing the domestic homicide (2%); however, the method used was not reported in the media.

**Criminal justice response:** The majority accused of killing an Indigenous victim were charged with second degree murder (64%), followed by manslaughter (18%), and first-degree murder (15%). This information was unknown in one case.

### ***Risk factors***

As noted above, given this is the first report and it is based on media and court information primarily, many of the risk factors that may be relevant for the four groups are not yet captured adequately. With respect to the Indigenous group, for example, we do not have data on the role played by colonization, discrimination, access to services, poverty and so on. Rather, as is common in the prior and international literature on domestic homicide, the emphasis remains on individual and relationship factors.



The most common risk factor facing Indigenous victims was living common-law, present in one-half of the cases (50%). Age disparity was also a risk factor as there was an age difference of nine or more years in almost one quarter of the cases (23%). There was at least some evidence of an actual or pending separation in 21 percent of cases. The youth of the couple was also common with one quarter of the cases (25%) involving victims and accused between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Finally, stepchildren were present in the home in eight percent of cases; however, this information was unknown in almost half of the cases (42%).

These risk factors are further supported by trends in risk assessment and risk management literature. Namely, that Indigenous people are more likely to be living common-law (Frideres, 1993; Regoeczi, 2001; Arriagada, 2016), are a younger population (Statistics Canada, 2017), that separation increases risk of violence for Indigenous populations, in particular (Spiwak, 2004), and that the presence of an age disparity increases the risk of violence (Regoeczi, 2001).

Since 2000, the increased vulnerability faced by Indigenous peoples has been given more attention in research, policy, and practice; specifically moving from identifying risk factors to placing them within a historical context. It is now commonly recognized that the aforementioned risk factors experienced by Indigenous populations are related to Canada's history of colonization; resulting in many complex and concurrent issues (Peters et al., 2018). Past and ongoing experiences of abuse and intergenerational violence make up the predominant and most significant framework for understanding the above risk factors.



## IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE DOMESTIC HOMICIDES

According to the CDHPVP, immigrants and refugees are a heterogeneous group, coming from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Rossiter et al., 2018). The terms 'immigrant' and 'refugee', in research, are often used along with the terms foreign-born, undocumented, documented, legal, illegal, non-citizen, non-status, minority or visible minority groups, and people of immigrant descent. For this reason, these terms were taken into consideration as part of the working definition of immigrant and refugee populations. Specifically:

- ❖ Immigrants are individuals who have voluntarily chosen to move to a new country to settle forever. Immigrants come from all around the globe and live in countries other than their countries of origin. Immigrants come into the host countries through diverse immigration categories with the intention to settle in the host country. For individuals to be recognized as immigrants, they have to live in the host country for a minimum stay of one year (UNESCO, 2017).
- ❖ Refugees are individuals who migrate involuntarily or by force for a variety of reasons, including war, political or religious persecution, or natural disasters.

One of the challenges in our preliminary analysis is grouping all immigrant and refugees together given it is acknowledged that there are many diverse experiences and vulnerabilities across different populations who settle in Canada. Some newcomers arrive from war-torn countries with experiences of trauma together with the stress of migration. Some newcomers face many barriers to integration including racism and inequitable access to education and employment. As such, it is not possible to generalize across these diverse groups and experiences. There are some common trends in existing research that suggest that immigrants and refugees are no more likely to be involved in violence and domestic violence (e.g. Ibrahim, 2018), but when they are, they may face greater language and cultural barriers in getting support. These issues have been covered more comprehensively in the CDHPVP literature review (Jeffrey et al., 2018) as well as our Domestic Homicide Brief (Rossiter et al., 2018 - <http://cdhpi.ca/domestic-homicide-immigrant-and-refugee-populations>).

## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ The majority of immigrant/refugee domestic homicide victims were female (86%). The age of the victim ranged from 19 to 88 years, with an average age of 40 years.
- ❖ The majority of accused were male (93%). Similar to the age of immigrant and refugee victims, the average age of the accused was 43 years old with a range of 19 to 88 years.

## LOOKING BEYOND THE STATISTICS

In 2011, a man walked into a business in British Columbia where his estranged wife was employed. He arrived armed with a hatchet and knives. The victim attempted to flee, yelling for help. The perpetrator attacked his estranged wife and she died on the scene of multiple stab wounds. Two co-workers attempted to intervene. One was stabbed. The fatal victim was described by friends as quiet and well-liked. She had family in India, a mother, father, and brother who loved and cared for her very much. They supported her decision to move to Canada, thinking she would have a better life and achieve her dreams. She taught free dance classes and volunteered helping new immigrants adjust to life in Canada. She had married the perpetrator, shortly before arriving in Canada from India, but had separated from him several months before the homicide. There was evidence of repeated harassment in the weeks after separation. The Crown Attorney argued the perpetrator felt entitled to take revenge against his estranged spouse for leaving him. According to media reports, the defense lawyer blamed a "misogynistic culture" in which women are considered property of their husbands. The defense also raised issues about his client's mental/physical health which was diagnosed following childhood injuries. Following the separation, he stopped taking his medication and became preoccupied with reconciliation. He was considered fit to stand trial and pled guilty to second-degree murder. He was sentenced to life with no possibility of parole for 16 years.



## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS (CONT'D)

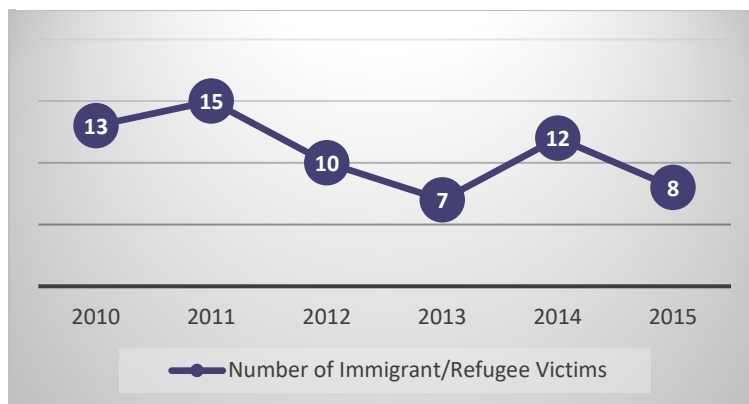
- ❖ The majority of individuals accused of killing an immigrant/refugee victim were also immigrants/refugees themselves (71%).
- ❖ Three quarters of immigrant/refugee domestic homicide victims were killed in the context of a current or estranged marital relationship. Specifically, almost half of all victims were legally married to the accused (49%) and almost one quarter were in an estranged marital relationship (21%), including both legal and common-law unions. Five percent were in a common-law relationship, eight percent were former dating partners and six percent were currently dating at the time of the homicide. Approximately 11 percent involved an “other” type of relationship to the accused, such as family members of the primary victim.
- ❖ Among victims who were in a current relationship, there was evidence that separation was imminent in just over a quarter of the cases (28%), all of which involved female victims and male accused (100%).
- ❖ The victim and accused had children in common in almost half of all cases (52%), with the number ranging from a single child to five children in common.
- ❖ Most immigrant/refugee domestic homicides involved a single accused (92%), with the remaining eight percent involving the reported participation of two individuals.

## RESULTS

### *Patterns over time and by geography*

**Temporal distribution:** Figure 11 displays the number of domestic homicide victims who were a documented immigrant or refugee. Specifically, it shows that there were 13 victims in 2010 (20%), 15 in 2011 (23%), 10 in 2012 (15%), seven in 2013 (11%), 12 in 2014 (19%), and eight in 2015 (12%).

Figure 11. Annual distribution of immigrant/refugee



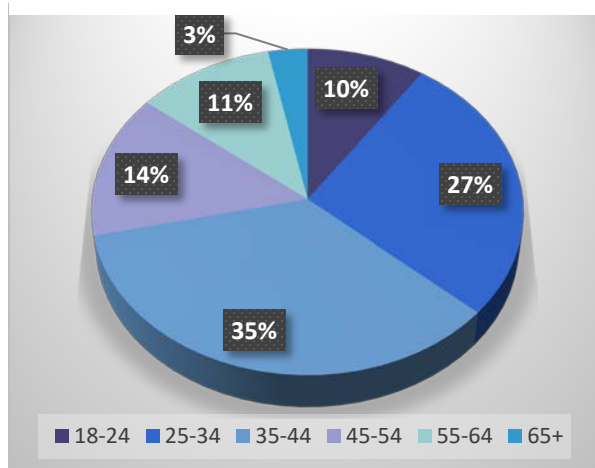
**Geographic distribution:** Statistics Canada does not calculate homicide rates for immigrant/refugee populations, but it has been reported that they are at a lower risk of violent victimization in general than Canadian born citizens (Ibrahim, 2018). Table 3 shows their distribution by number and proportion of victims by province and territory.

Table 3. Distribution of immigrant/refugee (IR) domestic homicide victims

Jurisdiction	Total number of IR victims	Percent of total IR victims
Ontario	30	46%
Alberta	11	17%
British Columbia	9	14%
Quebec	6	9%
Manitoba	6	9%
Nova Scotia	2	3%
Saskatchewan	1	2%
PEI	0	0%
New Brunswick	0	0%
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0%
Northwest Territories	0	0%
Nunavut	0	0%
Yukon	0	0%

### Demographic characteristics of immigrant/refugee victims and accused

Figure 12. Age distribution of immigrant/refugee victims (N=63)<sup>21</sup>



**Gender of victim:** The majority of immigrant/refugee domestic homicide victims were female (86%). There were no recorded cases involving children killed in the context of domestic violence.

**Age of victim:** The age of the victim ranged from 19 to 88 years, with an average age of 40 years. Figure 12 shows that the largest proportion of immigrant/refugee victims were in the 35-to-44-year age category (35%), followed by 25 to 34 years (27%), 45 to 54 years (14%), 55 to 64 (11%), 18 to 24 (10%). The smallest proportion of victims was 65 years and older (3%).

**Gender of accused:** There were 62 accused identified in the 60 cases of domestic homicide involving an immigrant/refugee victim. The majority of accused were male (93%). Females were accused in five percent of cases and one accused was transgender (2%).

**Age of accused:** Similar to the age of immigrant/refugee victims, the average age of the accused was 43 years old with a range of 19 to 88 years. Figure 13

<sup>21</sup> The victim age was unknown in two cases.

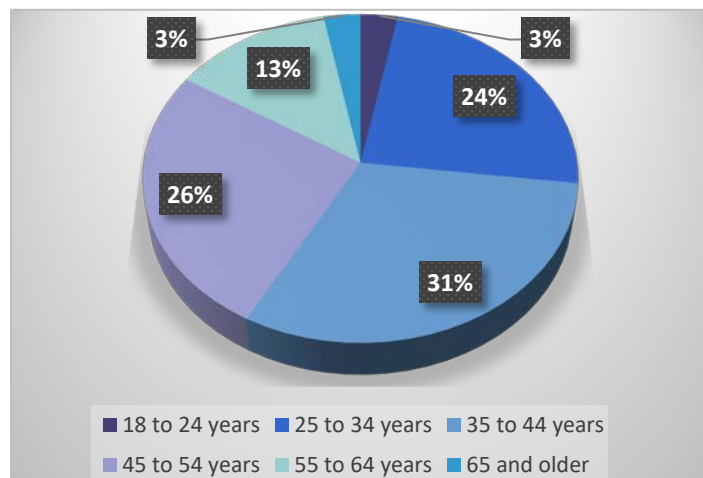
shows that the largest proportion of accused were between the ages of 35 and 44 (31%), 45 to 54 years (26%), 25 to 34 (24%), 55 to 64 (13%). The smallest proportion were 18 to 24 years (3%) or 65 years and older (3%).

### ***Victim-accused relationship***

As shown in Figure 14, three quarters of immigrant/refugee domestic homicide victims were killed in the context of a current or former marital relationship. Specifically, almost half of all victims were legally married to the accused (49%) and almost one quarter were in an estranged marital relationship (21%), including both legal and common-law unions. Five percent were in a common-law relationship, eight percent were former dating partners and six percent were currently dating at the time of the homicide. Approximately 11 percent involved an “other” type of relationship to the accused, such as family members of the primary victim.

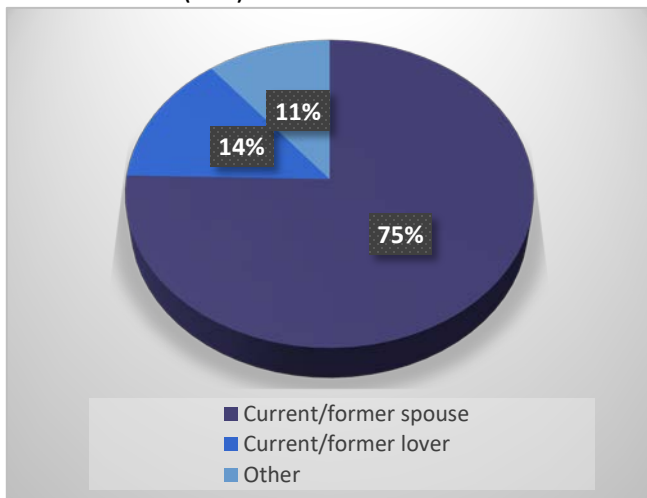
Among victims who were in a current relationship, there was evidence that separation was imminent in just over one quarter of the cases (28%), all of which involved female victims and male accused (100%).

Figure 13. Age distribution of accused for immigrant/ refugee cases (N=62)



**Children:** When information was known, the victim and accused had children in common in almost half of all cases (52%), with the number ranging from a single child to five children in common. When there was information that the victim and accused were separated, the victim often had legal and physical custody of the child(ren) at the time of his/her homicide.

Figure 14. Distribution of relationship between immigrant/ refugee victims and accused (N=65)



### ***Characteristics of the immigrant/refugee homicide incident***

**Number of victims killed:** The majority of immigrant/refugee domestic homicide cases involved a single victim (86%), four cases involved two victims, one case involved three victims, and another case involved eight victims. Of those cases that involved multiple victims, the primary victims killed were all female and were either the spouse of the accused (50%), his estranged spouse (25%), or his ex-girlfriend (25%). Excluding the primary victim, the collateral victims were either the victim’s family members (60%) or a friend (40%). The accused committed familicide<sup>22</sup> in one half of the cases involving multiple victims (50%). This proportion is higher than what was documented for all domestic homicides in Section I and is due to the case involving eight victims.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Familicide is a type of homicide or homicide-suicide in which the accused kills multiple close family members in quick succession, most often children or spouses.

<sup>23</sup> The case involving eight victims also involved the death of two children, however, the immigration status of the children was unknown, so they were not captured in the victim-accused relationship section.





**Number of accused:** Most immigrant/refugee domestic homicides involved a single accused (92%), with the remaining eight percent involving the reported participation of two individuals.

**Method:** Information on the method of killing was not made public in 15 percent of cases. When this information was known, most victims died of stab wounds (47%), followed by gunshot injuries (20%), beatings (13%), or strangulation (7%). The remaining methods varied: smothering/suffocation (6%), arson, drowning, being pushed, or pushed from height (each at 2%).<sup>24</sup> There was evidence that multiple methods were used in 19 percent of cases.

**Weapon used:** Information on weapon use was not available in 14 percent of cases. When this information was known, a weapon was used in 80 percent of all homicides involving immigrants and refugees. The most common weapon type was a knife (47%). When a firearm was used, most were handguns (16%) with a smaller proportion involving long guns (4%). Bats were used in three percent of cases, unknown/unidentified weapons in 13 percent of cases, and other types of weapons in the remaining 18 percent of cases.<sup>25</sup>

**Witnesses:** Whether witnesses were present at the time of the homicide was unknown in nine percent of cases. When this information was available, there were no witnesses present in almost two thirds of the cases involving an immigrant/refugee victim (65%). When witnesses were present, the majority were the children of both the victim and accused (20%), followed by neighbours or third parties (both 5%), a friend of the victim (3%), or a co-worker (2%).

**Location of crime:** Unsurprisingly, over half of all domestic homicides occurred in the shared residence of the victim and perpetrator (58%). Twenty percent of all victims were killed in their residence, and less than 10 percent at the accused's home (9%). The remaining 13 percent of cases appeared to have occurred in a (semi) public location: a business (3%), other home (2%), institution (2%), rooming house (2%), or an "other"/unknown location (4%).

### *Outcomes of domestic homicide cases for immigrant and refugee populations*

**Suicide:** Approximately 19 percent of accused in immigrant/refugee cases committed suicide and another 10 percent attempted suicide but were not successful. Of those accused who committed suicide, all were male and most died from stab wounds, gunshot injuries, or hanging (each 25%). Two accused committed suicide by jumping from height (17%) and one died of an unknown method (8%).

Of those accused who attempted suicide, most were also male (83%) and one accused was transgender (17%). The most common method used to attempt suicide involved being hit by a car (33%), with the remaining inflicting stab wounds, overdosing, or using an alternate method (each at 17%). The method used to attempt suicide was unknown in one case (16%).

**Criminal justice response:** Most accused in immigrant/refugee domestic homicides were charged with second degree murder (50%). Over one third were charged with first degree murder (39%) and two percent were charged with manslaughter. One accused was charged with accessory after the fact (2%) and another died after the initial charge was laid (2%). The charge was unknown in the remaining five percent of cases.

<sup>24</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

<sup>25</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



### *Risk factors for domestic homicide among the immigrant and refugee population*



Many of the risk factors discussed previously were not applicable to the immigrant/refugee population, due to the large proportion of those involved who were living in a marital relationship, had children in common, and were in an older age demographic. There was, however, evidence of an actual or impending separation between the victim and accused in over a third of cases (34%).

In our sample, approximately one in seven domestic homicides were associated with the victim and/or the perpetrator representing the immigrant/refugee population. No conclusions can be drawn from this figure since a large number of Canadians would be immigrants and our data did not capture the length of time in the country or the struggles they faced in their country of origin. We will be addressing these issues in subsequent studies with the use of more official records available from coroners and medical examiners. Nonetheless, the cases we reviewed raised several issues about immigrants to the country being unaware of their rights

or reluctant to report domestic violence to the police. Even when they disclosed domestic violence, it was difficult to access culturally-sensitive resources. Many immigrant victims were isolated within their families or communities and faced many barriers in accessing services. Our future work will address these issues as well as better informed risk assessment, risk management and safety planning strategies for this population (Jeffrey et al., 2018).



## RURAL, REMOTE, & NORTHERN DOMESTIC HOMICIDES

According to the CDHPVP, rural, remote, or northern (RRN) refers to a community or geographic location with a small and widely dispersed population distribution (rural as less than 10,000) and/or that is not accessible by road all year round (remote), and/or designated by the provincial government as being the Northern part of the province (northern; e.g. for Ontario, see <http://nohfc.ca/en/about-us/northern-ontario-districts>). All the territories are considered Northern.

The rate of domestic homicide in rural, remote and northern areas of Canada is notably higher than in urban areas (Beattie et al., 2018; Northcott, 2011). Further, females in rural, remote, and northern areas are at a higher risk of experiencing intimate violence than are similarly-situated urban and suburban females (Rennison, Dekeseredy, & Dragiewicz, 2013) and are significantly more likely to be younger in age, as outlined below.

This section focuses on trends documented across rural, remote and northern populations within the context of domestic homicide. For this analysis, all victims living in the northern territories are considered to belong to the RRN population.

### SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Nearly one quarter of the domestic homicides in Canada from 2010 to 2015 involved RRN populations (N=107 or 22% of the total number of victims).
- ❖ Similar to trends among other populations, the majority of RRN victims were female (78%). Distinguishing between adult victims and those aged 17 and younger, the majority of adult victims killed in a RRN location were female (80%), however, just over two thirds (67%) of all victims 17 years and younger were female. The victims ranged in age from two to 83 years with an average age of 36 years.
- ❖ There were 97 individuals accused of a domestic homicide in a RRN location. Most accused were male (86%). The age of accused ranged from 13 to 82 years with an average age of 41 years. The largest proportion of accused fell into the 45 to 54-year age category (29%), then 35 to 44 years (23%), 25 to 34 (21%), 18 to 24 (12%), 55 to 64 (7%), 65 and older (6%), and the smallest proportion were 17 years of age and under (2%).
- ❖ The majority of victims and accused were in a current intimate relationship (69%). Broken down further, nearly one third of the victims were in a common-law relationship with the accused (36%), almost one quarter were legally married (24%), and a fraction were in a dating relationship (9%).

## LOOKING BEYOND THE STATISTICS

In 2015, a woman was paying bills in her rural home in Saskatchewan when her husband approached her from behind, shooting her twice with a revolver. She was the primary breadwinner, but she lived frugally and found herself dealing with financial stress reportedly created by her husband. She was described by friends and coworkers as a mentor, a confidant, and a kind soul. The Crown Attorney highlighted how she had recently lost a significant amount of weight and was possibility planning a future without her husband. Their lengthy marriage (over 20 years) showed warning signs early on before they were married and accepted his demand that she not go anywhere without him. According to her parents, the victim's actions were controlled by her husband who restricted her visits to family members to once a month. He was an avid gun collector and suffered from depression and suicidal thoughts. In 2017, he pled guilty to second-degree murder and uttering threats to which he was sentenced to 17 years without the possibility of parole. Her parents submitted a victim impact statement, indicating they felt they had lost her years before to the perpetrator and reported that they no longer found meaning in their lives. The Crown requested that the perpetrator forfeit his firearm collection, a request that was denied by the trial judge on the grounds that the guns were not involved in the commission of the offence.



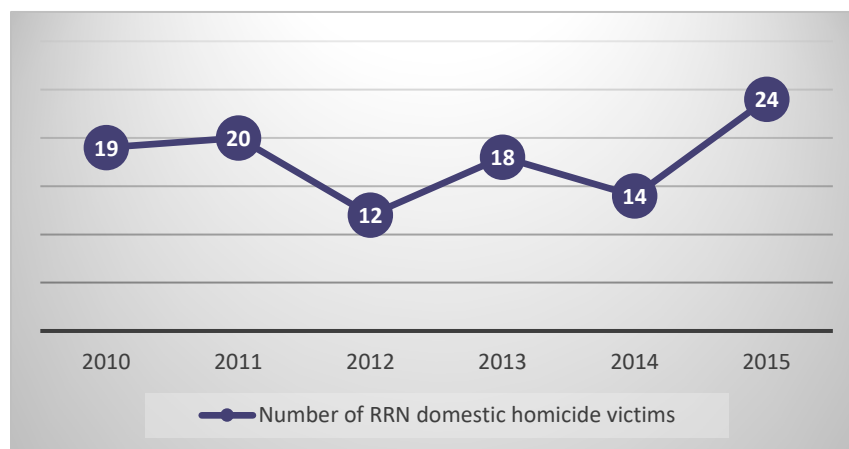
- ❖ An intersectional analysis of the RRN homicide victims found that almost one quarter identified as Indigenous (24%), 11 percent were children, and approximately two percent were immigrant/refugee. Approximately 28 percent of individuals accused of a RRN domestic homicide identified as Indigenous, four percent were immigrant/refugee, and one case involved a child accused of domestic homicide.
- ❖ Most RRN domestic homicides involved a single victim (79%). When multiple victims were killed, the primary victim was often a current intimate partner (56%), followed by the biological child of the accused (22%), or an estranged partner of the accused (22%). The most common collateral victims in multiple homicides involved children, either the accused's biological child (39%) or stepchild (31%). The accused committed familicide in almost half of all cases involving multiple victims (41%). The vast majority of RRN domestic homicides were committed by a single accused (96%) and four cases involved the participation of two individuals (4%).
- ❖ In contrast with the findings for the general population, the two most common methods of killing were by firearm (36%), followed by stabbing (28%).

## RESULTS

### *Patterns over time and by geography*

**Temporal distribution:** As shown in Figure 15, 19 victims residing in a RRN location were killed in 2010 (18%), 20 in 2011 (19%), 12 in 2012 (11%), 18 in 2013 (17%), 14 in 2014 (13%), with the highest number of 24 killed in 2015 (22%).

Figure 15. Annual distribution of domestic homicide victims killed in a RRN location (N=107)



**Geographic distribution:**<sup>26</sup> Examining proportions, Table 4 (see next page) the majority of domestic homicide victims killed in a RRN location resided in Ontario (25%), followed by Saskatchewan (12%) or British Columbia (12%), Manitoba (11%), Nunavut (9%), Alberta (7%) or Northwest Territories (7%), Quebec (6%), Nova Scotia (5%), New Brunswick (3%) or Newfoundland-Labrador (3%), and Prince Edward Island (1%). Yukon had no domestic homicide (0%).

<sup>26</sup> Census data available for RRN regions was based on 2011 data in the report titled "Number of persons in the total population and the farm population, for rural areas and population centres, classified by sex and age": <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3210019701>.



Table 4. Distribution of RRN domestic homicide victims by jurisdiction, 2010-2015 (N=107)

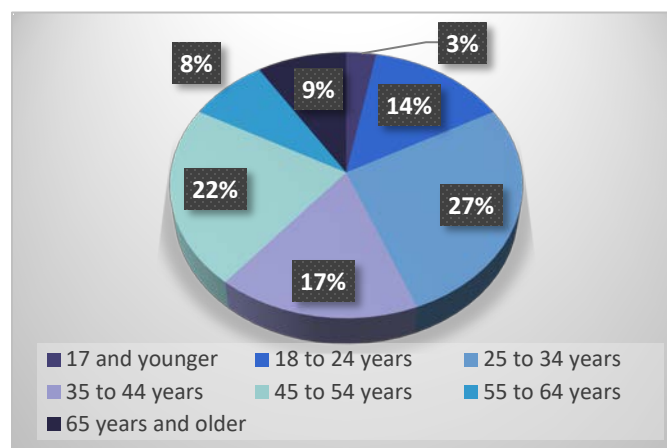
Jurisdiction	Total number of RRN victims	Total percent of RRN victims
Ontario	27	25%
Saskatchewan	13	12%
British Columbia	13	12%
Manitoba	12	11%
Nunavut	10	9%
Alberta	7	7%
Northwest Territories	7	7%
Quebec	6	6%
Nova Scotia	5	5%
New Brunswick	3	3%
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	3%
PEI	1	1%
Yukon	0	0%

### Demographic characteristics of RRN victims and accused

**Gender of the victim:** Similar to other RRN trends (Beaupré, 2015; Caman et al., 2017), the majority of RRN victims were female (78%). Distinguishing between adult and child victims, the majority of adult victims killed in a RRN location were female (80%), however, with victims 17 and younger, just over one third of all victims were female (67%).

**Age of the victim:** The victims ranged in age from two to 83 years old, with an average of 36 years. When children killed in the context of domestic violence were excluded, the age of victims ranged from 15 to 83 years, with an average age of 40 years.

Figure 16. Age distribution of RRN victims (N=92)<sup>26</sup>



<sup>27</sup> The age of RRN victims was unknown in three cases and child victims excluded in this figure.

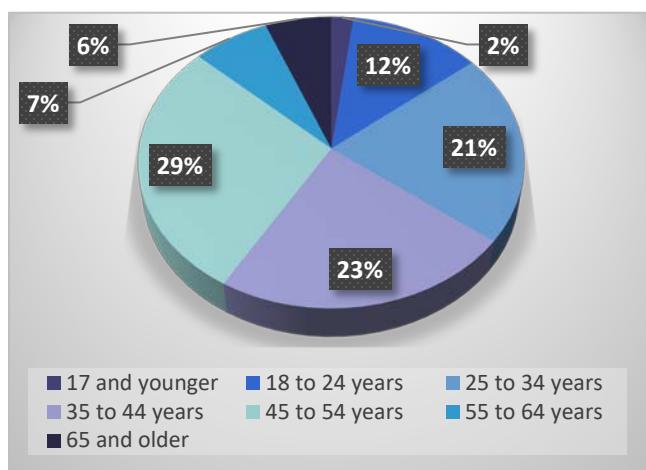




Excluding children, Figure 16 indicates that the largest proportion of victims were 25 to 34 years old (27%), followed by 45 to 54 years (22%), 35 to 44 (17%), 18 to 24 (14%), 65 years and older (9%), 55 to 64 years (8%) with the smallest proportion aged 17 and younger (3%).

**Gender of accused:** There were 97 individuals accused in 94 cases of domestic homicide in a RRN location. Most accused were male (86%).

Figure 17. Age distribution of RRN accused (N=95)<sup>27</sup>

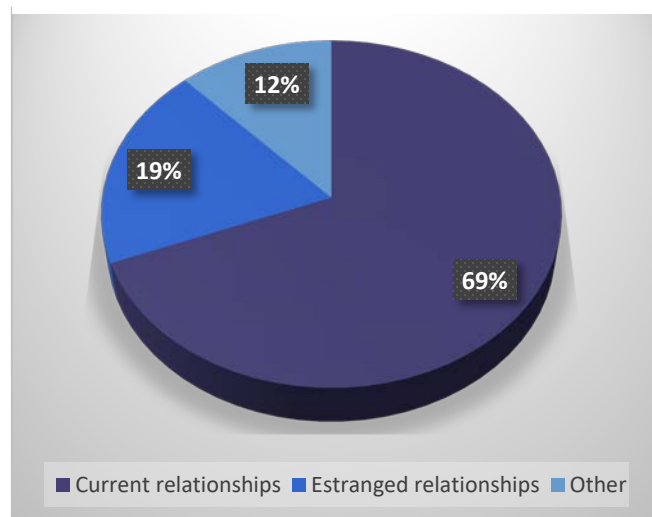


**Age of accused:** The age of accused ranged from 13 to 82 years old with an average age of 41 years. As shown in Figure 17, the largest proportion of accused fell into the 45-to-54-year age category (29%), then 35 to 44 years (23%), 25 to 34 (21%), 18 to 24 (12%), 55 to 64 (7%), 65 and older (6%), and the smallest proportion were 17 and younger (2%).

### Victim-accused relationship

As displayed in Figure 18, the majority of victims and accused were in a current intimate relationship (69%). Specifically, among current relationships, most victims were in a common-law relationship with the accused (36%), followed by those who were legally married (24%), and a smaller proportion who were dating (9%). This finding is highlighted in previous research on violence in intimate relationships between urban, suburban, and rural populations (Rennison et al., 2013). In this study, the scholars discovered that a greater percentage of rural females in particular were violently victimized by an intimate partner than by a stranger or a family member. Among estranged relationships, most involved marital estrangements, both legal marriages and common-law unions (11%) and the remaining were those in estranged dating relationships (8%). Finally, the “other” category included the homicide of one parent, other kin, as well as third parties (12%).

Figure 18. Distribution of relationship between victim and accused in RRN locations (N=95)<sup>28</sup>



When the victim and accused were in a current intimate relationship (62%), it was often unknown whether separation was imminent. However, there was evidence that separation was imminent in 12 percent of cases. Of those cases, all involved female victims and males made up the majority of accused (87.5%) with one female accused (12.5%).

**Children:** Whether the victim and accused had children in common was unknown in slightly more than one fifth of the cases (21%). However, when this information was available, most victims and accused did not have children in common (55%), but one-third (32%) did have children in common.<sup>30</sup>

When the victim and accused had children in common, the number ranged from a single child to four. In cases of separation, it was often unknown whether the victim or accused had legal custody at the time

<sup>28</sup> The age of the accused was unknown in two cases.

<sup>29</sup> Children killed in the context of domestic violence were excluded.

<sup>30</sup> This information was not applicable in 13 percent of the cases due to the “other” non-intimate relationship category.

of the homicide. There was only case where this information was known in which the victim had legal custody. Similarly, it was often unknown who had physical custody of children at the time of the homicide as this information was available in only two cases. Of those the victim had physical custody in one case and the accused did in the other case.

Twelve child victims residing in a RRN location were killed within the context of domestic violence. Most children killed were the biological child of the accused (58%) or a stepchild (33%). One victim was the adopted child of the accused (8%).

### ***Characteristics of the RRN domestic homicide incident***

**Number of victims:** Most RRN domestic homicides involved a single victim (79%), followed by cases involving two victims (9%), three (8%), and four victims (4%). When multiple victims were killed, the primary victim was often a current intimate partner (56%), followed by the biological child of the accused (22%), or an estranged partner (22%).

Excluding the primary victim, the most common collateral victims in multiple homicides involved children, either the accused's biological child (39%) or stepchild (31%). Two cases involved the death of other estranged partners of the accused (15%), the victim's new intimate partner (8%), or a third party (8%).<sup>31</sup> Aligned with these figures, the accused committed familicide in almost half of all cases involving multiple victims (41%).

**Number of accused:** The vast majority of RRN domestic homicides were committed by a single accused (96%) and four cases involved the participation of two individuals (4%).

**Method:** The exact method of homicide was unknown in one-fifth of all cases (20%), thus the figures below reflect the information available publicly. Aligned with literature on rural regions (Beyer, Layde, Hamberger & Laud, 2013), the most common method of killing was by firearm (36%), followed by stabbing (28%), beating (18%), strangulation (8%), and arson (6%). The remaining cases involved smothering/suffocation (2%), drowning (1%), and being hit by car (1%). The use of multiple methods was confirmed in 12 percent of cases.

Research highlights that the acceptance of firearms as part of rural, remote and northern culture may be common, but this is reason for concern. Specifically, research examining a variety of potential risk factors and the incidence of homicide in the home has concluded that firearm ownership is strongly linked to domestic homicides (Campbell et al., 2003; George & Harris, 2014; Johnson & Hotton, 2003), and firearms are often used to complete domestic homicide in rural regions in Canada (Dawson, 2001). Firearms in RRN locations are often used for hunting and target practice, and gun safety tends to be viewed more liberally in these communities as a result of strong community values around these practices (Doherty & Hornosty, 2008). While firearms might be purchased initially for such activities, previous research has shown that access to firearms by an abusive partner increases risk of homicide by 500% (Campbell et al., 2003). Moreover, in previous research on domestic homicides in rural locations, researchers have found that firearms were the most common weapons causing fatal injury (Beyer et al., 2013).

**Weapon use:** Information on weapon use was not available in 26 percent of cases. When this information was known, a weapon was used in 83 percent of RRN domestic homicides. When the type of weapon was identified, a knife was most common (32%), followed by a firearm (21% long gun; 8% handgun), an "other" weapon (11%), the use of a bar/bat (4%), or a vehicle (1%). The exact type of weapon used was unknown in 23 percent of cases often due to the type of firearm not being specified. These findings align with previous trends on the forms and levels of abuse among rural, remote and northern regions and urban regions in the United States (Websdale & Johnson, 1998). In their interviews with 510 sheltered women who live in RRN and urban communities, Websdale and

<sup>31</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



Johnson (1998) found that RRN perpetrators are significantly more likely than urban perpetrators to use a weapon during their domestic assaults.

**Witnesses:** Information on the presence of witnesses was known in 77 percent of domestic homicides. When this information was reported, there were often no witnesses present in most domestic homicides that occurred in a RRN location (68%). When witnesses were present, most involved the child(ren) of the victim and/or accused (11%), followed by family members of the victim or accused (9%), or friends of the victim (4%). The remaining eight percent of cases involved the homicide being witnessed by third parties (i.e., strangers, neighbours, police).

**Location of crime:** Most domestic homicides occurred in the victim and accused's shared residence (47%), followed by the victim's home (15%), and the accused's residence (9%). Another 13 percent of cases occurred at a public location (i.e., park, street, business, etc.), nine percent occurred in a private location (i.e., other residence), and the exact location was unknown in eight percent of cases.<sup>32</sup> Due to the conventional beliefs about privacy and the secrecy around domestic violence more generally in RRN regions (Doherty & Hornosty, 2008; Few, 2005), it makes sense that the majority of domestic homicides occurred in the victim's or accused's home or a shared residence between them. This trend is seen in similar research on domestic violence within rural areas whereby women reported experiencing greater abuse occurring inside the home, which is understandable as rural abuse tends to happen "behind closed doors" (Bhandari et al., 2015).

### *Outcomes of RRN domestic homicide cases*

**Suicide:** The accused did not attempt or commit suicide in most cases (65%). The accused committed suicide in just over a quarter of all cases (27%) and attempted suicide in the remaining nine percent. Of those who committed suicide, the majority were male (96%) and died by firearm (61%) and three accused died of either stab wounds, poison, or arson (each at 4%). The method was unknown in the remaining 27 percent of cases. Among those who attempted suicide, most were male (88%) and, again, the most common method was shooting (38%), followed by stab wounds (25%), an "other" method (25%), and the method was unknown in the final case (12%). Thus, the majority of suicides and attempted suicides involved the use of a firearm. Other researchers have found that lower levels of firearm ownership are consistent with lower levels of gunshot wound suicides, while higher firearm ownership, such as in rural, remote and northern regions, correlates with higher levels of suicide gunshot victims (Miller et al., 2006).

**Criminal justice response:** Where charges were laid, most accused were charged with second degree murder (51%), followed by first-degree (36%), and manslaughter (10%). The exact charge laid was unknown in the remaining three percent of cases.

### *Risk factors for RRN domestic homicides*

The most common risks facing RRN populations were living common-law (32%) and separation/estrangement for which there was evidence of an actual or pending separation in almost one third of the RRN cases (31%). Previous research has suggested that individuals in common-law partnerships are at a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence, which could be due to the fact that common-law couples tend to be younger in age and are likely to be of a lower socio-economic status (Johnson, 2006). Similarly, the risk of both lethal and nonlethal violence increases significantly when rural, remote or northern women are trying to leave, are in the process of leaving, or have already left a relationship (Rennison et al., 2013). Past research has concluded that at its most extreme, the risk of domestic homicide increases after separation for women; that is, a higher percentage of rural females separated from their partners are victims of intimate partner violence (Campbell et al., 2003; Johnson & Hotton, 2003; Rennison et al., 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



## CHILDREN KILLED IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Child exposure to domestic violence is one of the most frequent forms of maltreatment in Canada and accounts for more than one-third of substantiated abuse cases annually (Fallon et al., 2013). Infants and toddlers are most at-risk for exposure to domestic violence. While there is considerable research on the negative impact of the exposure to domestic violence on children's development (Jaffe et al., 2011; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, Macintyre-Smith & Jaffe, 2003), less is known about the risk of homicide faced by children living in these circumstances. When children are killed in the context of domestic violence, the context is most often a history of domestic violence and separation. In many cases, the motive appears to be an act of revenge to punish the adult victim for leaving the intimate relationship (Dawson, 2015; Jaffe et al., 2012).

According to the CDHPVP, child<sup>33</sup> domestic homicide is defined as: (see David et al., 2017)

1. Child(ren) killed as a result of intervening during a violent episode between parents<sup>34</sup>;
2. Child(ren) killed by a parent as revenge against the partner (e.g., partner ended relationship);
3. Child(ren) killed by a parent as part of a homicide-suicide in context of domestic violence;
4. Child(ren) killed by parent and there is a history of domestic violence<sup>35</sup> (e.g., perpetrator of child homicide was a victim and/or perpetrator of domestic violence);
5. Child(ren) killed by a third party (e.g., older sibling) at the direction of a parent.

### SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Slightly more than half of all children killed within the context of domestic violence were male (60%). The age of child victims ranged from less than one to 13 years with an average age of six years.
- ❖ The majority of accused were male (75%), 19 percent were female, and one accused identified as transgender (6%).

<sup>33</sup> Child includes a person who is 17 years and younger.

<sup>34</sup> A parent includes biological parent, step-parent, foster parent, and/or other caregivers (e.g., mother/father's new intimate partner, other family member acting in a caregiving role).

<sup>35</sup> History of domestic violence includes official records (e.g., police reports) or unofficial reports (by friends, family members) of violence occurring in the relationship. The key idea of this definition is that domestic violence is involved in the child death.

## LOOKING BEYOND THE STATISTICS

In 2014, a man rented a hotel room in an urban centre, accompanied by his two children. He had picked them up from school, took them to the hotel room and gave them sleeping pills and wine. At the time, he was suffering from depression and suicidal ideation. His marriage had collapsed, and he was experiencing significant financial strain because of it. After he drugged his children, he attempted suicide by overdose. By the time police found them, his daughter was dead, but he and his son survived. At trial, his son testified that his father stopped to at "the drink store" and a drugstore. The boy said his father told them the doctor said they needed to take the pills. The father took the stand in his own defense and maintained that he never intended to kill his children. He said he wanted them to take a nap while he used the sleeping pills to take his own life. The presence of his children would allow him to say goodbye and he felt their life would improve without him. His defense lawyer argued that giving children one sleeping pill with a light wine was not "objectively dangerous." The Crown Attorney disagreed and emphasized how the father gave his children the equivalent to double the adult dose. After three days of deliberations, the jury found him guilty of second-degree and attempted murder.



- ❖ The age of the accused ranged from 19 to 47 years, with an average age of 36. The largest proportion of accused were aged 35 to 44 (63%), followed by 25 to 34 years (19%), 45 to 54 (13%), 18 to 24 (6%).
- ❖ The marital status of the accused was somewhat equal across the different categories. However, the largest proportion were separated common-law (25%), followed by an equal distribution of those legally married and divorced (each 19%).
- ❖ The majority of children killed were the biological child of the accused (70%), followed by step-children (24%).
- ❖ The majority of child domestic homicides involved the death of two or more victims in a single incident (78%).
- ❖ Given that the majority of child domestic homicides involved multiple victims, it is not surprising that only 16 individuals were accused of perpetrating the homicides. The majority of cases involved a single accused (88%), and two cases involved the participation of two accused (12%).
- ❖ Most children were killed in the residence they shared with the accused (49%).
- ❖ Of the 16 individuals accused of killing a child within the context of domestic violence, over half committed suicide (56%) and almost one fifth attempted suicide (19%).
- ❖ When charges were laid, there was an even split between accused charged with first- and second-degree murder (each 43%) and one accused was charged with manslaughter (14%).



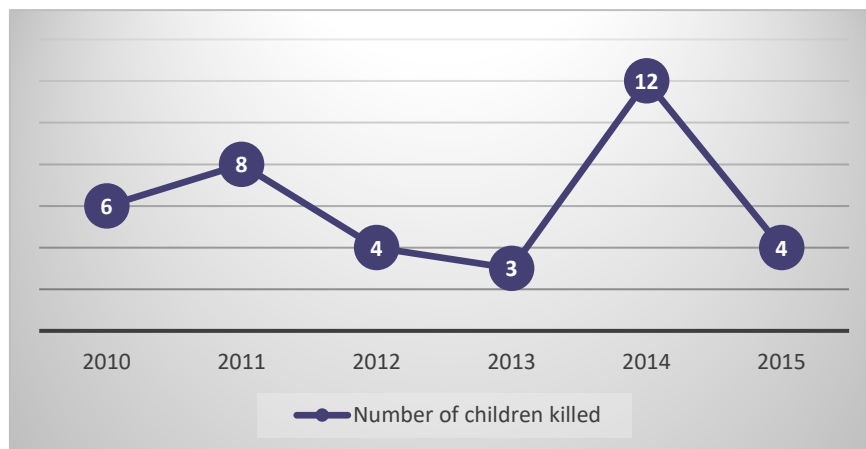


## RESULTS

### *Patterns over time and by geography*

**Temporal distribution:** As illustrated in Figure 19, there were six children killed in 2010, eight in 2011, four in 2012, three in 2013, 12 in 2014, and four in 2015.

Figure 19. Annual distribution of children killed in the context of domestic violence (N=37)



**Geographic distribution:** Contrary to previous findings, as shown in Table 5, most children killed within the context of domestic violence resided in Quebec (32%), followed by Ontario (27%), Alberta (19%), Saskatchewan (11%), Nunavut (8%), and PEI (3%).

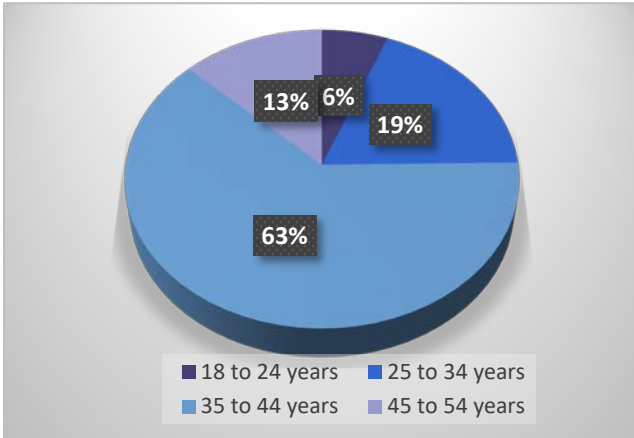
Table 5. Distribution of children killed in the context of domestic violence

Jurisdiction	Total number of victims	Total percent of victims
Quebec	12	32%
Ontario	10	27%
Alberta	7	19%
Saskatchewan	4	11%
Nunavut	3	8%
PEI	1	3%
British Columbia	0	0%
Manitoba	0	0%
New Brunswick	0	0%
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0%
Nova Scotia	0	0%
Northwest Territories	0	0%
Yukon	0	0%



## Demographic characteristics of victims and accused in child homicides

Figure 20. Age distribution of accused in child homicides



**Gender of victim:** Slightly more than half of all children killed within the context of domestic violence were male (60%).

**Age of victim:** The age of child victims ranged from less than one to 13 years with an average age of six years.

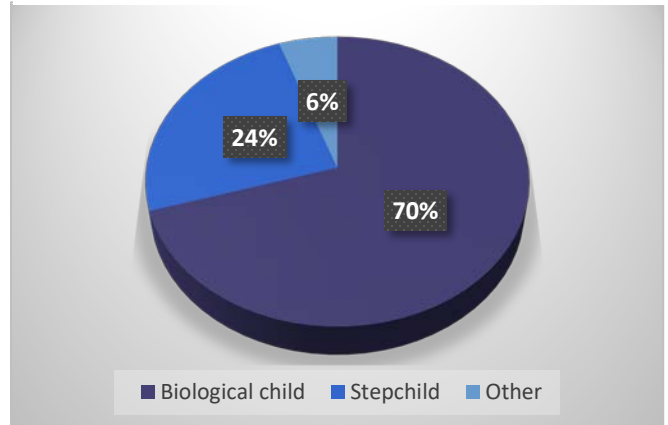
**Gender of accused:** There were 16 accused identified in the 14 cases of domestic homicide involving children. The majority of accused were male (75%), 19 percent were female, and one accused identified as transgender (6%).

**Age of accused:** As illustrated in Figure 20, the age of the accused ranged from 19 to 47 years, with an average age of 36. The largest proportion of accused were aged 35 to 44 (63%), followed by 25 to 34 years (19%), 45 to 54 (13%), 18 to 24 (6%).

## Victim-accused relationship

As displayed in Figure 21, the majority of children killed were the biological child of the accused (70%), followed by step-children (24%), and 'other' relationships (6%). The 'other' category included one child the accused had adopted and another child who was the niece of the accused.

Figure 21. Distribution of relationship between victim and accused in child homicides (N=37)



## Characteristics of the child homicide incident

**Number of victims:** The majority of child domestic homicides involved the death of two or more victims in a single incident (78%). Most cases involving multiple victims involved the death of two victims (52%), three victims (24%), four victims (17%), and the remaining case involved eight victims (7%), two of which were children (5%).

When multiple victims were killed, approximately two thirds of the cases involved the death of the accused's current or estranged intimate partner, who was identified as the primary victim (67%). It follows then, half of all cases were classified as a familicide (50%). Excluding the primary victim in cases of multiple victims, most children killed within the context of domestic violence were the biological child of the accused (41%), his/her stepchild or adopted child (28%), a family member of the primary victim (13%), strangers (9%), a friend of the primary victim (6%), or the primary victim's new intimate partner (3%).

**Number of accused:** Given that the majority of child domestic homicides involved multiple victims, it is not surprising that only 16 individuals were accused of perpetrating the homicides. The majority of cases involved a single accused (88%), and two cases involved the participation of two accused (12%).

**Method:** The exact method used was unknown in over one third of all child domestic homicides (35%). However, when this information was made public, most children were shot to death (29%), followed by arson (25%), hit by a car (13%), drowned, or strangled (each 8%). The remaining 17 percent of children died from stab wounds, a beating, drug overdose, or shaken baby syndrome (each slightly more than 4%). There were no cases involving multiple methods, however, this information was unknown in approximately 39 percent of cases.

**Weapon used:** Aligned with information missing on the method of killing, the use of a weapon was unknown in 35 percent of all child homicides. When this information was reported, a weapon was used in almost half of all domestic homicides (46%). Of those cases where a weapon was used, the most common type of weapon involved firearms (27% long guns, 18% handguns), or a vehicle (27%), with a smaller proportion involving the use of a knife (9%). The exact weapon used was unknown in the remaining 18 percent of cases.<sup>36</sup>

**Witnesses:** There were no witnesses present in the majority of cases involving children killed within the context of domestic violence (76%). When witnesses were present, most involved the accused's biological child (11%), a family member of both the victim and accused (5%), or a family member of the victim (3%). This information was unknown in the remaining five percent of all cases.

**Location of crime:** Given that most children are killed by a biological parent, it is not surprising that most died in the residence they shared with the accused (49%). Another 27 percent were killed in a public/semi-public location (i.e., street, car, park), 14 percent were killed in the accused's residence, five percent in the home they shared with another caregiver, and three percent killed at the accused's hotel room. This information was unknown in the remaining three percent of cases.

### *Outcomes of cases involving child domestic homicide*

**Suicide:** Of the 16 individuals accused of killing a child within the context of domestic violence, over half committed suicide (56%) and almost one fifth attempted suicide (19%). Among those who committed suicide, most were male (89%) and often died by fire (33%), followed by stab wounds (11%), or being hit by a car (11%). The exact method used to commit suicide was unknown in the remaining cases (44%). Among the accused who attempted suicide, just over one third were male (67%) and the methods used varied equally between stab wounds (33%), jumping from height (33%), and an attempted overdose (33%).<sup>37</sup>

**Criminal justice response:** No charges were laid in the majority of child homicide cases (56%) because the accused committed suicide following the homicide. When charges were laid, the accused was equally likely to be charged with first- or second-degree murder (43% each) and one accused was charged with manslaughter (14%).

### *Risk Factors for cases involving child domestic homicide*

The one risk factor not discussed previously because it is unique to child domestic homicide is whether there is a current custody/access dispute between the parents of the child killed. There was evidence of such a dispute in almost one third of all cases (30%). This finding is consistent with existing literature that suggests children are most at risk in the context of separation and prior history of domestic violence in their family. This trend underlines the importance of educating legal and mental health professionals working within the family court system to better assess the risk that adult victims and children may face (Jaffe et al., 2008; Léveillé et al., 2007). In the majority of cases, the perpetrator is the father and the mother and children are victims of the homicide. Although there are no specific tools addressing child homicide in the context of domestic violence, the existing research points to the fact that when adult victims are facing lethal danger, so are the children (Olszowy et al., 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Total will not equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>37</sup> Total will not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



# SUMMARY

Emotional Assault Defendant Marriage  
Women Pain Verbal Children  
Physical DOMESTIC VIOLENCE Abuse Court  
Argument Justice Grief Cohabitation Psychological Defense  
Partner Alcohol Sexual Rage  
Help Victim Rights Threats Anger  
Safe House Spousal Social  
Hotline Awareness Survivor

Domestic violence and domestic homicides are major social, criminal and public health issues that affect thousands of Canadians. Although both men and women are affected, the World Health Organization recognizes that women bear the greatest burden given they represent the majority of cases. This reinforces the fact that domestic violence and homicide is fundamentally a gender-based problem. There is also increasing evidence that thousands of children are exposed to domestic violence. From our review, children may also become homicide victims or witness horrific violence and a traumatic aftermath. One death is one too many. Four hundred and seventy-six Canadian lives lost to domestic homicides from 2010-15 is an overwhelming and staggering statistic.

At this stage in our grant, as we noted at the outset, we are still working with limited information, extracted from court decisions and media reports. This raises challenges in terms of consistency, thoroughness and accuracy of data for some of the cases. Many cases have missing information. Other cases have extensive information documented by the court's judicial findings of facts and reasons for sentencing. We continue to strive for more accurate and updated information and consistency in information across cases and to determine if the availability of information stems from the characteristics of the domestic homicides and those involved.

In the next phase of our grant we will be working with provincial and territorial coroners and medical examiners to ensure that we have captured reliable information on all Canadian domestic homicides. We will be working with domestic violence death review committees to examine emerging trends and recommendations across the country. When we began our research, only Ontario had such a committee. As of December 2018, there are domestic violence death review committees in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick. These initiatives allow for a deeper analysis of common and unique issues within and across jurisdictions ([see http://www.cdhipi.ca/dvdr-committees](http://www.cdhipi.ca/dvdr-committees)).

Our research has a focus on four vulnerable populations who appear to be at greater risk of domestic homicide due to historical oppression and/or lack of access to resources because of isolation through factors such as geography, language, culture, age and poverty. We prioritized four populations as a first step: (1) Indigenous populations; (2) immigrant and refugee populations; (3) rural, remote, and northern populations; and (4) children killed in the context of domestic violence. Each of these populations experience factors that enhance their vulnerability to domestic violence and homicide and exacerbate the negative mental and physical health consequences of violence. These groups face greater challenges in finding services and safety.

Our findings suggest that there are regions in Canada that reflect a higher rate of domestic homicides and vulnerable groups that are disproportionately affected. There are implications for increased awareness about the extent of the problem and needed solutions related to enhanced professional training and collaboration. In our other publications, we have discussed the importance of moving beyond a one-size fits all approach to understanding and addressing domestic violence and homicide (Jeffrey et al, 2018). The intervention and prevention strategies that are developed will need to recognize the combination of individual, relational, community, and societal factors that contribute to the risk for victims and their children.



The ultimate goal of the CDHPVP is to move from the findings above describing trends and patterns in domestic homicide to identify and inform priorities for future practice, policy, and research. The guiding question is how do we move from a one-size-fits-all approach, to develop and implement more nuanced and appropriate population-specific, culturally-informed practices and policies? Our growing knowledge base needs to be translated into action in the field to support victims and service providers to assess and manage risk as well as promote safety planning. The challenge across the country is realizing these goals for vulnerable populations in a manner that addresses existing inequities and increases access to resources and services.

Beginning in early 2019, we will be addressing these questions through the voices of survivors of life-threatening domestic violence as well as friends and family who lost loved ones to domestic homicide. The objective is to find out more about what worked and what did not work for victims of domestic violence seeking safety and support. The goal is to identify interested persons through surveys, advertisements, media contacts and community agencies with appropriate consents and confidentiality agreements in place. We will be looking at both formal and informal supports that may have saved lives so that we can share this information that can contribute to developing training, policy and practice in the field. Formal notices will go out as soon as we have approval from our universities' research ethics boards.





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