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SPOUSAL VIOLENCE AFTER MARITAL SEPARATION

by Tina Hotton*

Highlights

- According to the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization, 28% of women and 22% of men who had been in contact with a previous spouse in the five years prior to the survey had experienced some type of violence by that partner, either while living together or after separation.
- Marital separation does not necessarily mark the end of a violent relationship. Forty percent of women and 32% of men with a former violent marriage or common-law relationship reported that violence occurred after the couple separated.
- Most of those who reported violence after separation stated that the assaults became more severe or began after separation. In 37% of cases the assaults did not increase in severity, in 24% the violence became more serious, and in 39% of cases the violence first began after the separation.
- Both women and men were more likely to have contact with the police when violence occurred after separation as compared with other cases of spousal violence, but men were only about half as likely as women to report these incidents to the police (55% of women compared with 30% of men).
- Children are frequently the unintended observers of violence between spouses. Among those cases where violence occurred after separation, children were witnesses to at least one violent occurrence in 50% of cases.
- Women made up 77% of criminal harassment victims reported to police in 1999. Current or former husbands and boyfriends were offenders in about half of these incidents.
- Women have a heightened risk of homicide after marital separation. Between 1991 and 1999, separated women were killed by estranged partners at a rate of 39 per million couples. In comparison, an average of 26 women per million couples were killed by current common-law partners, and 5 women per million couples were killed by current husbands. Risk of spousal homicide was lower on average for men, and men were at greater risk of homicide by a current common-law spouse than an ex-spouse. An average of 12 men per million couples were killed by a current common-law partner, 2 men per million couples were killed by an ex-partner, and 1 man per million couples was killed by a current marital partner.
- Men who killed an ex-partner were most often motivated by jealousy (44%), while arguments or quarrels (41%) most frequently motivated women.
- Estranged husbands were twice as likely as current husbands to have multiple victims. When marital relationships were still intact at the time of spousal homicides, children were the most likely victims other than the spouse. In estranged marriages, the victim's new partner was the most frequent third party victim.

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Introduction

During the 1990s, advances in methods of measuring violence in the home revealed the frequency of violent marital relationships and the devastating impact that violence can have on the well being of families. The most recent figures from the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization estimate that 1.2 million Canadians, or 7% of the married and common-law population, experienced at least one incident of violence by a current or former marital partner during the previous five years.

Research has identified certain factors that increase the risk of spousal assault, including the young age of victims and perpetrators, living in a common-law union, and chronic unemployment and alcohol abuse on the part of perpetrators. Studies have also found a connection between violence and controlling and emotionally abusive behaviour, exposure to violence in childhood, pregnancy, and separation (Smith, 1990; Wilson and Daly, 1993; Wilson, Johnson and Daly, 1995; Johnson, 1996).

Using data from the 1999 General Social Survey, the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS), the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey and the Homicide Survey, this *Juristat* investigates the prevalence, nature and severity of violence that occurs following the breakdown of a marital union.

The prevalence of violence after marital separation

According to the 1999 GSS, 2.8 million Canadians had some form of contact¹ with an ex-marital or common-law partner² in the five-year period prior to being surveyed. Within this population, approximately 437,000 women (28%) and 259,000 men (22%) reported some type of violence perpetrated by a former partner, either while living together or after separation.³

The focus of this *Juristat* is to examine the frequency and nature of continued abuse after the termination of intimate relationships.⁴ While in the majority of cases (63%) the violence ends at separation, assaults occurred after separation in slightly more than one-third of previous violent relationships (see Table 1). Of those who had previous violent relationships, women (39%) were more likely than men (32%) to report that they were assaulted after the relationship ended.

Respondents who reported violence by ex-partners after separation were asked if they thought the frequency or severity of violence increased at that point. Approximately 61,000 (24%) reported that the violence continued and became more serious, and 95,000 (37%) reported that while the violence continued it did not increase in severity. A further 98,000 (39%) indicated that the violence first started after separation (Figure 1).

¹ Only those people who had contact with their ex-partners over the previous five years were asked if they experienced violence. Therefore, it does not capture those individuals who have purposely not had contact with ex-partners in order to escape violence.

² Unless specified otherwise, this analysis includes both legal marriages and common-law unions.

³ For further information about spousal violence and other forms of family violence see Pottie Bunge and Locke, 2000.

⁴ A small number of same sex couples are included in the figures presented in this report, but the number of these cases is too small to release separately.

Measuring post-separation spousal violence

Violence by a previous spouse is measured on the 1999 GSS and the 1993 VAWS by a module of 10 questions. This approach consists of asking respondents about specific actions instead of simply asking about "violence" or "assaults" in order to minimize differing interpretations about what constitutes violent behaviour. Respondents who had contact with a previous spouse in the five years prior to the interview were asked the following questions.⁵

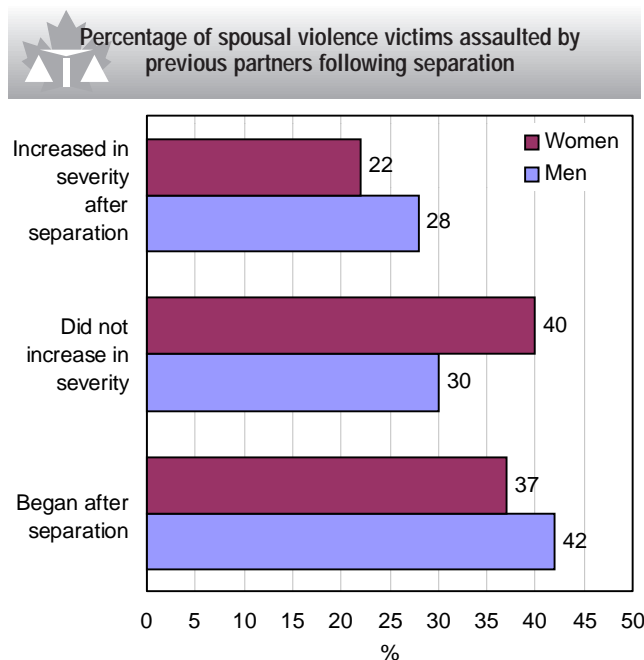
During the past five years, did your previous partner:

1. Threaten to hit you with his/her fist or anything else that could have hurt you?
2. Throw anything at you that could have hurt you?
3. Push, grab or shove you in a way that could have hurt you?
4. Slap you?
5. Kick you, bite you, or hit you with his/her fist?
6. Hit you with something that could have hurt you?
7. Beat you?
8. Choke you?
9. Use or threaten to use a gun or knife on you?
10. Force you into any unwanted sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way?

Respondents who stated that they had experienced any of these ten types of violence were asked, "did any of the violence happen after you split up?" Those who responded affirmatively were asked, "do you think it increased after you split up?" This *Juristat* compares the seriousness and outcomes of violence that continued after separation with cases where the violence ceased.⁶ Wherever possible, 1999 GSS figures are compared with 1993 VAWS data to track changes over time.

For the purpose of the GSS and the VAWS, when the coefficient of variation (CV) of an estimate is higher than 33.3%, this is considered too unreliable an estimate to be published and the symbol -- is printed in the corresponding cell of the data table. This symbol is also used to indicate that publication of the data in that cell would violate confidentiality rules. When the CV of the estimate is between 16.6% and 33.3%, the corresponding estimate is accompanied by the symbol "†". Readers using estimates with high CV's to support conclusions should be aware that they are based on relatively small sample counts.

Figure 1



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Severity and frequency of post-separation violence

Women and men who were assaulted after separation more frequently described severe forms of violence compared with those assaulted during a current relationship (Table 2). Among those assaulted following separation, 40% of women and 20% of men reported being beaten, 34% of women reported being

choked,⁷ and 27% of women and 19% of men had (or threatened to have) a gun or knife used against them. And, for the crime of sexual assault, 35% of women reported this occurrence on at least one occasion.⁸

When there was violence in a previous marriage, multiple occurrences were common, particularly in cases where violence occurred after separation. Approximately 85% of women and 76% of men assaulted by an estranged partner experienced more than one incident of violence (Table 3). About 50% of women and 40% of men who suffered assaults after separation experienced 10 or more incidents of violence.

Just as women experienced more severe types of violence, female victims were more likely to be physically injured during violent encounters. Nearly 60% of women assaulted after separation reported injury, 25% received medical attention for their

⁵ The first two questions were given in sequence to all respondents. The remaining eight questions were asked randomly.
⁶ The design of the 1999 GSS does not lend itself very well to a detailed analysis of the risk factors associated with the ending or continuation of abuse after separation. Information on demographic characteristics of spouses, such as marital status, age of the victim and offender, unemployment, household income and alcohol abuse is limited to current spouses and is not available for ex-spouses. The data provide no detail on the influence that divorce proceedings or custody and access issues have on post-separation conflict. In addition, the spousal violence modules do not detail the chronology of violent incidents and do not provide details on each incident. Therefore, it is not possible to ascertain when the most serious incident of violence occurred in the sequence of events (i.e., before or after separation). Instead, it is necessary to rely on the victim's perception of whether the violence increased, decreased or stayed the same after separation.
⁷ The number of men is too small to produce a statistically reliable estimate.
⁸ One limitation of this survey is that it cannot be determined whether these incidents by ex-partners occurred prior to or following the separation, except for those incidents that began after separation.

Violence that began after separation

The assumption that the breakdown of a marital union ends the risk of spousal violence is not confirmed by the data. Not only can violence sometimes continue after separation, in many cases the first assault occurs after the couple is separated. According to the 1999 GSS, approximately 63,000 women and 35,000 men were assaulted for the first time after marriage breakdown. Among women who experienced violence after separation, 37% were victimized for the first time after one of the parties had left the shared residence. For men, the proportion was 42%.

The types of violence first experienced after separation can be quite severe, particularly for women. The majority of women (57%) who first experienced violence after separation were beaten, choked, threatened with a gun or knife, or sexually assaulted. Men more frequently reported being kicked, bit, or hit (58%) (Table 4). Approximately 41% of women who first experienced violence after separation feared for their lives as a result of the violence. Multiple victimization incidents were also common with 60% of women and 49% of men in this group being assaulted more than once.

The vast majority of these women and men (96%) also experienced some form of emotional abuse either prior to or following the separation. The most frequent forms of emotional abuse include being put down or called derogatory names (80%), having a spouse who demanded to know their whereabouts at all times (64%) and having a jealous partner (62%) (Figure 2).

injuries, and 59% reported fearing for their lives because of the violence. In comparison, 20% of male victims of post-separation violence were injured and 17% feared for their lives.⁹

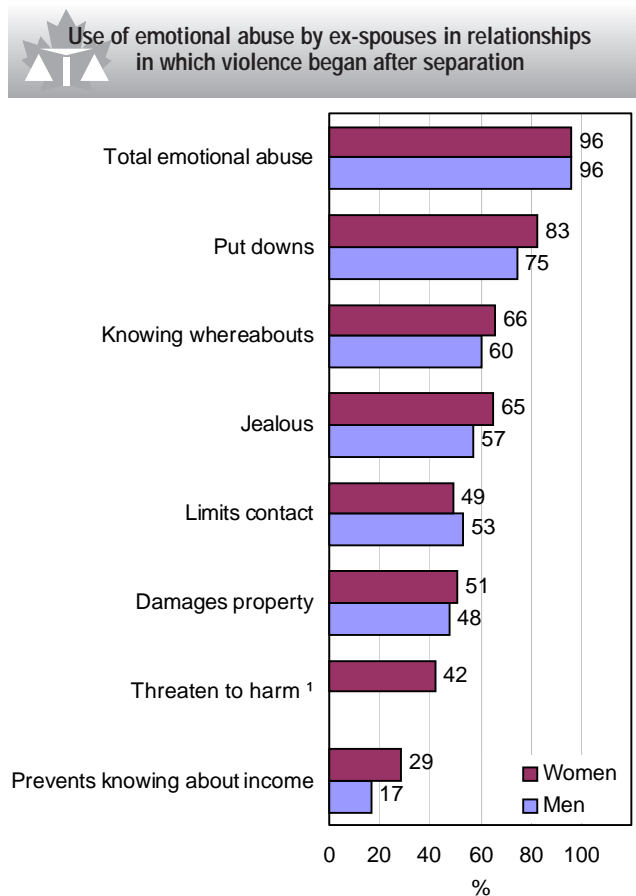
Child witnesses of violence

Children were often the unintended observers of violence between spouses. Approximately 218,000 women (50%) and 79,000 men (31%) assaulted by an ex-partner reported that a child had either heard or seen the violence (Table 5). Children were more likely to witness violence against a parent if some incidents occurred following separation compared to those where it stopped at separation (56% compared to 46% in the case of mothers; 40% compared to 27% in the case of fathers).

In many cases, children witness severe forms of spousal violence. In 62% of cases in which children witnessed their mother being assaulted, and in 16% of cases of children witnessing an assault against their fathers, their parent reported fearing his/her life was in danger at some point in the relationship.

Research has shown that witnessing the abuse of a parent can have numerous negative consequences on the health and well-being of children. The immediate effects of witnessing family violence on children can include depression, worry, stress-related disorders and lower levels of empathy (Fantuzzo, et al., 1991; Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998; Moore & Pepier, 1998; Edleson, 1999). The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) data show that controlling for other influences, children who witnessed violence were at greater risk of physical aggression, indirect aggression and delinquent acts against property compared with other children (Dauvergne & Johnson, 2001). Research on the generational cycle of violence has also found that over the long term children who witness family violence are more likely to use violence to resolve marital conflicts in adulthood (Rodgers, 1994).

Figure 2



¹ The number of men who reported threats is too small to produce a statistically reliable estimate.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Emotional consequences of violence by ex-partners

Women and men reported a number of emotional consequences resulting from being in a violent relationship. The most common consequences include anger (37% for women and 25% for men), being upset and confused (35% for both women and men) and feeling hurt or disappointed (27% and 25% respectively).

Consistent with the fact that women experienced more severe forms of violence by ex-partners, women assaulted by previous spouses also tended to suffer more negative emotional consequences than did men. Women were much more likely to report being fearful for their personal safety (39% versus 6%[†]) and the safety of their children (17% versus 5%[†]). In addition, women were more likely than men to report having lower self-esteem as a result of the abusive relationship (29% compared with 7%[†]), greater incidence of depression or anxiety (27% versus 16%[†]), shame or guilt (19% versus 8%), and sleeping problems (18% versus 6%[†]).

⁹ The number of men who received medical attention for their injuries is too small to produce a statistically reliable estimate.

Some emotional consequences were more prevalent when the violence occurred after separation and overall women reported more emotional consequences from post-separation violence. Women were more likely to report being fearful for themselves and fearful for their children (46% and 23%) than were men in the same situation (34% and 13%). Women were also more likely than men to report depression and anxiety (33% compared with 22%), and having problems relating to others of the opposite sex (16% compared with 8%) when post-separation violence occurred. No statistically significant differences in emotional consequences were found between men who experienced continued violence compared with men who experienced cessation of violence after separation.

Police intervention

Police not aware of the majority of violent relationships

The majority of spousal assault victims do not contact the police for assistance. Incidents of spousal violence in current relationships were brought to the attention of the police in only 26% of cases involving female victims and 6%[†] of cases with male victims over the five-year period. Although seeking police assistance was more common among women and men assaulted by a previous partner (44% and 25% respectively), those who contacted the police remain a minority.

The police were more likely to become aware of violent incidents when women experienced abuse after separation, which may be linked to the severity and persistence of violence experienced. In relationships with violence that continued or first occurred after separation, 55% of women reported having contact with the police compared with 37% if the violence ceased prior to separation. For men, the proportions with police contact were 30% and 23%, respectively (Table 6).

Respondents who had police contact were asked if they thought the violence had increased in severity, decreased/stopped or stayed the same after police intervention. Both women and men were likely to report that the violence stopped after police contact (44% and 50%, respectively). Approximately 33% of women and 39% of men reported no change, and a minority (19% of women and 11% of men) reported an increase in violence. However, without accurate information about the outcome of police intervention (i.e. whether or not formal charges were laid, if the case was taken to court and prosecuted), it is difficult to assess whether it was simply police presence or a combination of factors that had an impact on subsequent violence.

Victim satisfaction with police intervention

Among those who had police contact following violence in previous relationships, the majority of both women and men (67% and 56%) were satisfied with the actions taken by police. When victims who were assaulted by an ex-partner were asked what else the police could have done, the majority (60%) indicated that no additional police action was necessary. Among female victims,¹⁰ the most common suggestion for improvement was for police to be more supportive and sympathetic (reported by 16%[†]). Another 15%[†] of women

suggested that the police should have charged or arrested their ex-partners, 9%[†] felt they should have taken their ex-partner from the home, 6%[†] thought they should have responded more quickly, and 5%[†] stated the police should have referred or taken them to a support service.

Reasons for not reporting to police

The reasons¹¹ given by women and men for not reporting the incident(s) to the police were that it was a personal matter (54% and 75%, respectively), it was dealt with another way (61% and 67%, respectively), and the victim did not want to involve the police (47% and 50%, respectively). Many women also indicated that they did not contact the police for fear of the abuser (34%)¹². Further, women were more likely to report that fear of reprisal was taken into consideration when deciding whether or not to involve police when violence continued than when violence ended at separation (45% and 28%, respectively).

Emotional Abuse

Emotionally abusive behaviour can take many forms including verbal insults, jealousy, and regular attempts to control and limit the activities and social relationships of one's partner. Case-study interviews with abused women have found that for many women, the cumulative impact of emotional abuse over a long period of time can be equally or more damaging than physical violence (Follingstad et al., 1990; MacLeod, 1987; Walker, 1984).

Comparison with the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey

Comparisons can be made between the 1993 VAWS and the 1999 GSS in order to assess changes in post-separation violence against women¹³ over time.

Overall rates of spousal violence in the five-year period prior to being surveyed declined from 12% to 8% between these two time points; however, the percentage of women who were assaulted after separation increased from 22% of all cases of violence by past partners in 1993 to 39% in 1999.

The severity of violent acts has generally declined over this time period. Among women who experienced violence after separation, the percentage who were sexually assaulted declined from 46% in 1993 to 35% in 1999. In 1993, approximately 75% of women who were assaulted after separation were beaten, choked, had or threatened to have a gun or knife used against them or were sexually assaulted, down to 66% in 1999.

Approximately 60% of women assaulted after separation reported fearing for their lives both in 1993 and 1999.

In relationships with continued violence, 55% of women in 1999 reported having contact with the police compared with 65% of women in 1993. Many women reported that the violence stopped after police contact (44%). Approximately 33% of women reported no change, and 19% reported an increase in violence. Similar assessments of violence after police intervention were given in 1993.

¹⁰ The number of men is too small to produce a statistically reliable estimate.

¹¹ Figures do not add to 100% due to multiple responses.

¹² The number of men is too small to produce a statistically reliable estimate.

¹³ No comparable data are available for men in 1993. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn about changes over time in the experiences of men.

Nearly all women (95%) and the vast majority of men (93%) assaulted by previous partners also experienced some form of emotional abuse. Women were more likely than men to report certain forms of emotional abuse including having their contacts with others limited, being threatened, verbally put down and insulted, prevented from knowing about household income, and having their property damaged (Table 7).

Although emotional abuse is common in most violent relationships, certain forms of emotional harm were more prevalent in relationships with post-separation violence, including threats of violence directed at someone close to the victim, and having their property damaged or destroyed.

Criminal Harassment

Criminal harassment, which includes “stalking,” has been a criminal offence in Canada since the passing of Bill C-126 in 1993. Although criminal harassment law is not gender specific, this legislation was mainly introduced as a response to violence against women, and in particular, to domestic violence against women (Department of Justice, 1999). Several highly publicized cases of women being stalked and killed by estranged partners in the early 1990s were the impetus for legislation that would better protect people from criminally harassing behaviour before it escalates to physical violence.

Prior to 1993, persons engaging in criminal harassment might have been charged with offences such as uttering threats, mischief, harassing phone calls or trespassing at night. But existing laws did not adequately address all of the types of behaviour associated with “stalking” including repeatedly following someone or continually watching someone’s home or workplace. Section 264 of the *Criminal Code* created a new offence of “criminal harassment” to better respond to all of these behaviours and to provide for a more serious penalty.¹⁴

According to the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey,¹⁵ women were the victims in 77% of criminal

Criminal Harassment
Criminal Code of Canada, s. 264

(1) No person shall, without lawful authority and knowing that another person is harassed or recklessly as to whether the other person is harassed, engage in conduct referred to in subsection (2) that causes that other person reasonably, in all the circumstances, to fear for their safety or the safety of anyone known to them.

(2) The conduct mentioned in subsection (1) consists of:

- a) Repeatedly following from place to place the other person or anyone known to them;
- b) Repeatedly communicating with, either directly or indirectly, the other person or anyone known to them;
- c) Besetting or watching the dwelling-house, or place where the other person, or anyone known to them, resides, works, carries on business or happens to be; or
- d) Engaging in threatening conduct directed at the other person or any member of their family.

(3) Every person who contravenes this section is guilty of

- a) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years; or
- b) an offence punishable on summary conviction.

harassment incidents reported to police in 1999. Current or former husbands and boyfriends were the offenders in 55% of incidents reported by women and current or former wives and girlfriends were the perpetrators in 16% of criminal harassment incidents reported by men. Men were more likely to report being stalked by casual acquaintances.

While most incidents of criminal harassment do not culminate in homicide, between 1997 and 1999, stalking behaviour precipitated 12% (6 cases) of all homicides committed by male ex-marital partners.

Findings from the 1996 U.S. National Violence Against Women Survey

Data on the extent of criminal harassment in the general population are currently not available in Canada. Results of the 1996 National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) conducted in the U.S. found that eight percent of women and two percent of men have been stalked at some point in their life, and four percent of women and less than one percent of men reported being stalked by a current or former marital partner sometime in the past year (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). Of those women who reported being stalked by a former partner, 21% said that the stalking occurred before the relationship had ended, and 36% said it occurred both before and after. The remaining 43% of stalking cases occurred only after the relationship had ended. Stalking behaviour by current or ex-marital partners continued for 2.2 years on average.

When asked to describe the most common forms of harassment, victims of both sexes reported being followed, spied on, watched from outside their homes, receiving unwanted phone calls and letters and having property vandalized. This finding showed that stalkers do not always threaten their victim verbally or in writing, but they more often engage in a course of conduct that, taken in context, causes a reasonable person to be fearful.

The Killing of Ex-Spouses

Women have a heightened risk of spousal homicide¹⁶ after marital separation

Marital separation is a factor that elevates the rate of spousal homicide for women. Ex-marital partners were responsible for 38% of all homicides perpetrated against women, but only 2% of homicides committed against men. Although spousal killings that occur after separation are fewer in number than those that occur in intact unions (Table 8), when calculated as a rate per million couples, the rates for separated women are higher. Between 1991 and 1999, women were killed by

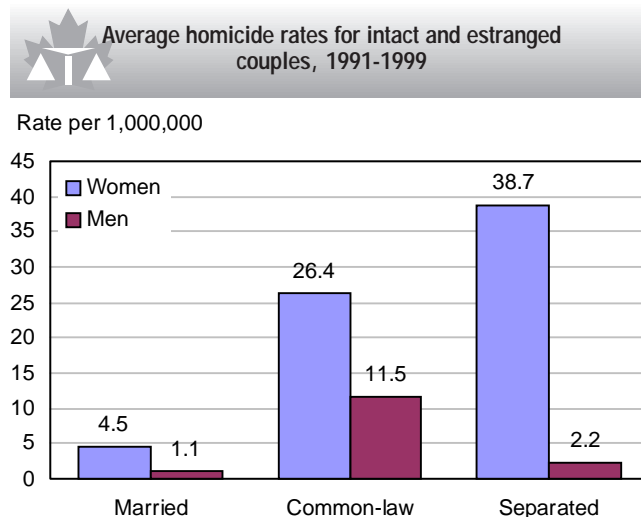
¹⁴ Refer to Hackett (2000) for more information about criminal harassment in Canada.

¹⁵ The UCR2 Survey is a micro-data survey completed by a sample of police forces across the country. The UCR2 Survey has advantages over the original UCR Survey for this analysis as it isolates criminal harassment from other criminal offences and provides a detailed breakdown of the victim-offender relationship. However, police forces reporting to the UCR2 Survey are mainly urban forces, and as a result, the data are not nationally representative. For the purposes of this report, a subset of 106 police forces that have been consistently reporting to the UCR2 from 1995 to 1999, (representing 41% of the national volume of crime), will be examined.

¹⁶ In Canada, criminal homicide is classified as first degree murder, second degree murder, manslaughter or infanticide. Deaths caused by criminal negligence, suicide, accidental or justifiable homicide are not included in this classification.

estranged partners at a rate of 38.7 per million. In comparison, an average of 26.4 per million women were killed by current common-law partners, and 4.5 women per million were killed by current husbands (Figure 3).

Figure 3



The 1991 and 1996 Census was used to estimate the number of women and men aged 15 and older who were married, in a common-law union, and separated from legal marital partners during the reference period. Spousal homicide rates were not calculated for those separated from common-law partners, as there are no reliable estimates for this sub-population available from the Census. All known cases of homicide perpetrated by an ex-common law partner (as identified from police narratives) have been omitted from the separated rates. The denominators used for inter-censal years were estimated by averaging the difference from the known population figures in 1991 and 1996. Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey, 1991-1999.

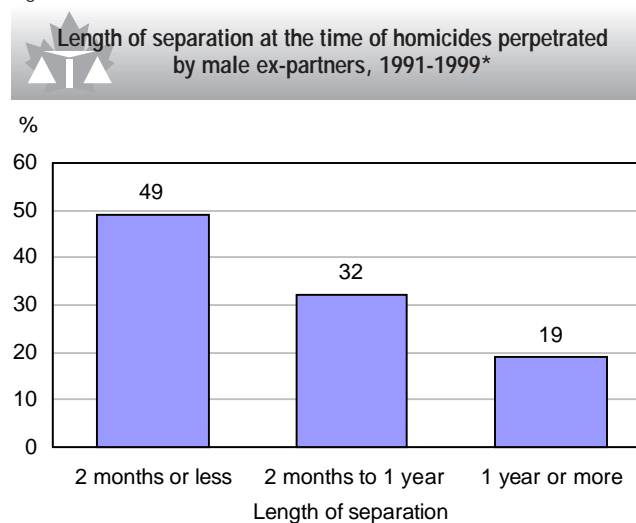
This heightened risk of homicide victimization following separation was not found for men. Instead, men are at greater risk of homicide by a current common-law spouse than an ex-spouse. An average of 11.5 men per million were killed by a current common-law partner between 1991 and 1999, five times the rate for separated men.

Length of separation

Studies that have examined this aspect of homicide have shown that women are most at risk of homicide within the first several months after separation. Wilson and Daly (1993) reported that among women killed by their estranged husbands in Chicago, USA and New South Wales, Australia approximately 50% were killed within two months and a total of 87% were killed within one year of leaving the relationship.

The Canadian Homicide Survey does not systematically record the length of separation for women and men killed by estranged partners. However, this information is often available in the narrative completed by police about each homicide incident. Of all (169) of the narratives of female killings by ex-partners reviewed,¹⁷ 73 reports specified the length of separation. This sub-set of 73 cases point to the early months of separation as the highest risk time. Approximately one-half of these homicides (49%) occurred within two months of separation, another 32% occurred after two to twelve months of separation, and 19% of homicides were committed more than one year after the dissolution of the relationship (Figure 4).¹⁸

Figure 4



* Percentages are based on a subset of 73 cases
Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey, 1991-1999.

Estranged male partners most often motivated by jealousy

Researchers have attempted to explain why women are more likely than men to be the victim of spousal homicides by estranged partners. Wilson et al. (1995) have argued that wife killings by estranged husbands are best interpreted as an attempt to maintain control over their wives.

In the written descriptions of ex-partner homicides completed by investigating police officers, fear of infidelity stood as a central theme for male perpetrators. As determined by police, the most common motive among men for killing an ex-partner was jealousy (41%). In contrast, men who killed current partners were more often identified as being motivated by the escalation of an argument or quarrel (56%). Similarly, the most common motive among women who killed either previous or current marital partners was an argument or quarrel (41% and 79% respectively) (Table 9).

Younger women at greater risk of post-separation spousal homicide

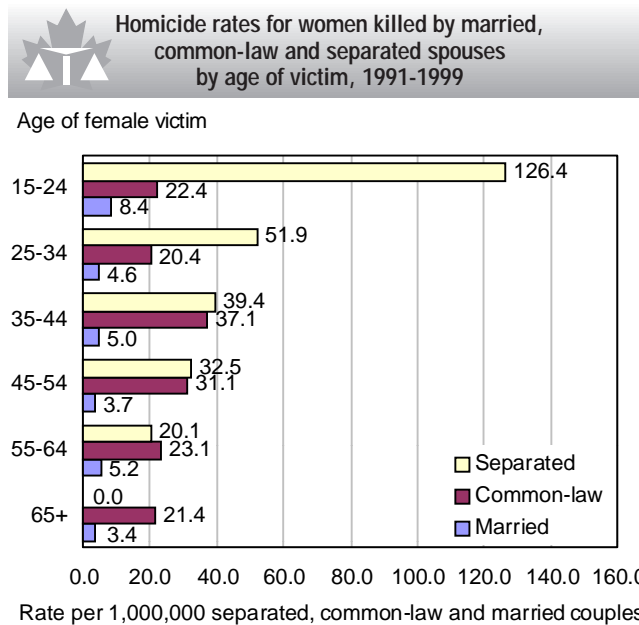
The young age of both the victim and offender is commonly cited as a risk factor for lethal and non-lethal violence by spouses. However, this risk of spousal homicide among the young varies by the victim's sex and type of marital union. Women killed by estranged spouses are at greatest risk when they are young (aged 15-24), and risk clearly declines with age for separated women. The same cannot be said for women currently living with legal spouses or common-law partners. Rates of homicide were relatively comparable for married women across age groups, and for women in common-law relationships spousal homicide rates were highest for those

¹⁷ Incomplete information and small numbers prohibited the analysis of separation length for men killed by ex-marital partners.

¹⁸ These proportions should be interpreted with caution because of the high rate of missing information.

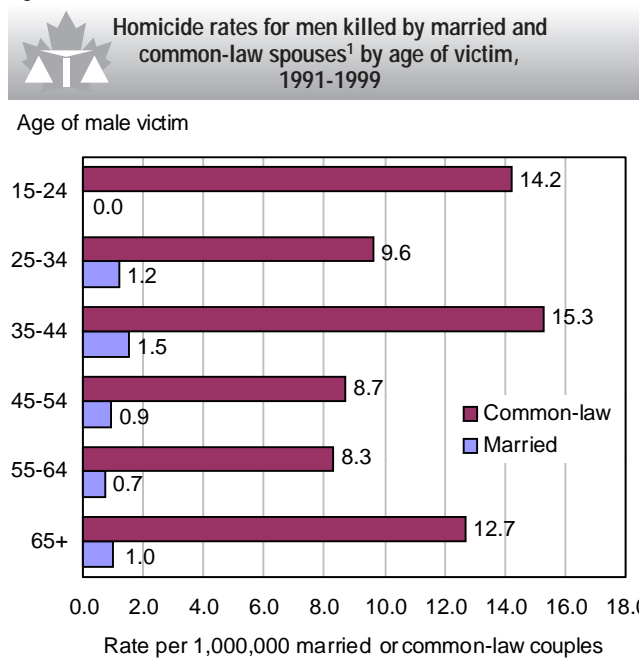
35 to 44 years of age. Although homicide rates were highest for men living in common-law relationships, there was no clear age-related pattern for men.¹⁹

Figure 5



Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey, 1991-1999.

Figure 6



¹ The number of men killed by ex-marital partners were too small to analyse by age of victims.

Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey, 1991-1999.

Multiple victims more common in ex-partner homicides

When women killed their current or ex-marital partners, it was very rare for harm to come to others during the incident.²⁰ Men, on the other hand, were much more likely to kill others in addition to their spouses during these incidents, and estranged husbands were twice as likely as current husbands to do so. There were multiple victims in approximately 12%²¹ of homicides committed by male ex-spouses and 6% of homicides committed by current male spouses.

Among marital relationships still intact at the time of homicide, children were the most likely third party victims of multiple homicides (79%). In estranged marriages, however, the female victim's new partner was the most frequent third party killed (38%), followed by other family members of the victim (24%), the couple's children (24%), and friends (14%) (Table 10). Wilson and Daly (1993) argue that often violence against female partners is used to control and deter partners from pursuing other romantic involvements. When this control is unsuccessful, new partners may also become victims of jealous ex-partners.

There were similar trends in non-lethal cases of spousal violence. According to the 1999 GSS, third parties were threatened or harmed in 25% of cases in which women were assaulted by ex-partners and 14% of cases with male victims. Third parties were two to three times more likely (for female and male victims respectively) to be harmed in relationships with continued violence after separation than those who experienced violence only while residing with their ex-partner. Similar to multiple homicides, children under age 15 made up a lesser share of third party victims when violence continued after separation than when it ceased.

The presence of children

The Homicide Survey does not routinely record whether children of the victim or accused witnessed spousal homicide incidents. However, among the 169 narratives of ex-partner homicide reviewed, 29 (17%) noted that one or more children witnessed the killing of a parent. In 22 cases (13%) a child was present but unharmed, in 5 cases (3%) a child was also killed, and in 2 cases (1%) an attempt was made on a child's life.

Again, it is important to note that the number of child witnesses could be underestimated, as not all narratives provided the detail required for an accurate assessment. Also, as children were more likely to become third party victims in current partner homicides, it is likely that child witnesses were more prevalent in these incidents.

¹⁹ Numbers were too small to calculate age-specific rates of homicide perpetrated by estranged spouses for men.

²⁰ Between 1991 and 1999, less than one percent of husband killings (representing one incident) involved multiple victims.

²¹ This proportion is an underestimation of the number of third parties victimized, as it does not take into account the attempted murder of third parties. In addition, if following the homicide the perpetrator kills a third party in a different location, it is most often classified as an incident distinct from the spousal homicide.

Homicide followed by suicide

Research suggests that the likelihood of suicide following a homicide increases with the closeness of ties between the offender and the victim and is highest after the offender kills a child or a spouse (Stack, 1997). Homicide data in Canada show that men, and especially estranged male partners, were more likely than women to take their own lives following the killing of a spouse. Among male ex-partners, 39% committed suicide following the homicide,²² as compared with 29% that killed current spouses. No incidents of murder-suicide were found among women who killed their male ex-partners, and a small percentage of women who killed current partners (3%) also committed suicide.

Most ex-partner homicides occur in a private residence

The majority of homicides perpetrated by ex-marital partners occurred in a private residence (75% and 71% of homicides involving female and male victims respectively). Most of these took place in the home of the women involved, whether they were the victim or the killer. Female victims were most often killed in their own homes (53%); only 17% were killed in the home of the male accused. The pattern was different for men killed by ex-partners: men were most often killed in the home of the female accused (41%), and in only 24% of cases in their own homes.

Use of firearms

Consistent with homicides in general, men who killed their spouses, particularly men who killed estranged partners, were more likely than women to use firearms. From 1991-1999 the most common cause of death for women killed by current and estranged partners was being shot (33% and 44%, respectively) followed by being stabbed with a knife (29% and 31%, respectively). The opposite is true for male victims. Men killed by a current or ex-spouse most often had common household knives used against them (66% and 59%, respectively), while a smaller proportion (19% and 24%, respectively) were killed with firearms.

The proportion of current and estranged spousal killings involving firearms fluctuated during the 1991 to 1999 period, revealing no clear increase or decrease in the use of firearms.

Previous history of domestic violence common in spousal homicides

Between 1991 and 1999, police were aware of previous domestic violence in 74% of homicides perpetrated by ex-husbands, 57% of homicides perpetrated by common-law husbands and 41% perpetrated by husbands in legal marriages. Women under the age of 30 killed by ex-spouses had the highest homicide rates and were most likely to have a history of domestic violence: 80% of these cases had known histories of domestic violence. In contrast, police were more likely to be aware of previous violence when men were killed by their common-law wives (66%) than those killed by ex-partners (59%) or legal spouses (56%). However, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as it is not clear from police statistics who was responsible for the domestic assaults, the victim or the perpetrator of the homicide. Some homicide offenders are

acting in self-defence when the homicides occur and it is the victims who are responsible for a history of domestic assaults (Browne, 1986).

Of the police narratives reviewed, at least 8% of male ex-partners accused of killing their former partners had a non-association or restraining order against them at the time of the homicide.²³ In 1999, 65% (13) of men who killed their former spouses had a previous criminal record, of which 45% (9) had a record for violent offences.²⁴ However, it is not known how many of these convictions involved domestic violence.

Methodology

THE 1999 GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY (GSS) ON VICTIMIZATION

The victimization cycle of the Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS) was conducted for the third time in 1999. Previous cycles were conducted in 1988 and 1993. As in the past, individuals 15 years and older were asked about their experiences with crime and their opinions concerning the justice system. One of the enhancements made to the GSS in 1999 was the addition of a spousal violence module. Following the structure of the Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS), the 1999 GSS asked respondents who had ever been married or lived in a common-law relationship a series of questions to measure the extent of sexual and physical assault and emotional abuse by a current or former spouse/partner during the previous five years. This was a major improvement over the previous survey that included only general physical and sexual assault questions and simply reminded respondents to include acts by family and non-family members. Research has shown that for sensitive and complex issues such as spousal violence, respondents are more likely to disclose violence if they are asked a series of questions about specific acts that their spouse/partner might have done to them.

Sampling and data collection

Households in the 10 provinces were selected using random digit dialing techniques. Once a household was chosen, an individual 15 years or older was randomly selected to respond to the survey. Households without telephones were excluded from the survey. Also excluded were individuals living in institutions. In all, approximately 2% of the population was excluded. This figure is not large enough to significantly change the estimates.

In 1999, as in previous cycles of the GSS, the response rate was quite high with 81% of selected respondents answering the survey. Types of non-response included respondents who refused to participate, could not be reached, or could not speak English or French.

²² Incident narratives reveal that another 6% attempted to commit suicide.

²³ There was no mention in incident narratives of restraining orders against women who killed ex-partners.

²⁴ The proportion of perpetrators with a criminal record was higher for men who killed current common-law partners (94%), and lower for perpetrators in legal marriages (20%). There were too few cases of husband killings in 1999 to analyze the criminal history of the accused.

It is important to note that the GSS data are estimates. They are based on information collected from a sample of the population and are therefore subject to sampling error. This Juristat uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. Any estimate that has a high CV (over 33.3%) has not been published because the estimate is too unreliable.

The Homicide Survey

The Homicide Survey has collected police-reported data on all homicide incidents, victims and accused persons (including murder, manslaughter and infanticide) since 1974. For every homicide that comes to the attention of police, the investigating police department completes a survey questionnaire. This questionnaire remained virtually unchanged up to 1990. In 1991 and later in 1997, in an effort to respond to changing information needs, the survey was revised and expanded.

The homicide count for each year reflects the number of homicides reported to police in that year, regardless of the date that the homicide actually occurred. Socio-demographic and other information (e.g., history of domestic violence, alcohol/drug consumption) about persons accused of homicide are only available for solved incidents (i.e., where at least one accused has been identified).

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey was developed by Statistics Canada with the Co-operation and assistance of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. The aggregate UCR Survey, which became operational in 1962, collects crime and traffic statistics reported by all police agencies in Canada. UCR survey data reflect reported crime that has been substantiated through police investigation.

The UCR2 Survey is a micro-data survey that provides detailed information about the characteristics of the crime incident, the victim and the accused. The UCR2 Survey has an advantage over the original UCR Survey as it does not aggregate criminal harassment with other offences and can isolate these occurrences.

The number of police forces reporting to the UCR2 Survey has been increasing from year to year. The UCR2 Trend database used for this report is based on a subset of 106 police forces that consistently reported to the UCR2 from 1995 to 1999. These 106 police forces included Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Regina and represented 41% of the national volume of crime. The police forces that reported to the UCR2 Survey were mainly municipal forces, and the majority of reported incidents came from the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. As a result, the data are not geographically representative at the national level.

The 1993 Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS)

In 1993 Statistics Canada conducted a national survey (excluding the Yukon and the Northwest Territories), on behalf of Health Canada, on male violence against women. Approximately 12,300 women 18 years of age and older were interviewed in depth by telephone about their experiences of physical and sexual violence since the age of 16 and about their perceptions of their personal safety.

The VAWS was the first national survey to ask a random sample of women about their experiences of violence. The survey was conducted by telephone using the random digit dialing in the selection of households. Every household in the ten provinces stood a chance of being selected, allowing statistically reliable estimates to be made of the general population. Women without telephones, those residing in institutions and those who did not speak English or French were excluded from the sample.

Responses were weighted to represent the population of Canadian women 18 years of age and older. Estimates of proportions of the total female population produced from this survey are expected to be within 1.2% of the true proportion 19 times out of 20. Estimates of proportions of subpopulations will have wider confidence intervals.

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Table 1

	Total		Female victim		Male victim	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Violence by any spouse	1,239	7	690	8	549	7
No violence in the past 5 years	14,505	87	7,234	87	7,271	87
Refused	959	6	433	5	526	6
Total with current or previous spouse	16,702	100	8,356	100	8,346	100
Total violence by current spouse	562	4	259	4	303	4
No violence in the past 5 years	13,501	91	6,678	91	6,823	90
Refused	806	5	373	5	433	6
Total with current spouse	14,869	100	7,310	100	7,558	100
Violence by previous spouse	697	25	437	28	259	22
No violence in the past 5 years	2,022	73	1,100	71	922	76
Refused	41	2†	17	1†	24	2†
Total with previous spouse	2,759	100	1,554	100	1,205	100
Total violence by previous spouse	697	100	437	100	259	100
Violence ceased at separation	437	63	264	60	173	67
Violence after separation	255	37	172	39	83	32
Don't know/refused	--	--	--	--	--	--
Violence after separation	255	100	172	100	83	100
Increased in severity	61	24	39	22	23	28
Did not increase in severity	95	37	69	40	25	30
Began after separation	98	39	63	37	35	42

† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).

-- amount too small to be expressed

Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 2


Types of violence in previous and current marital unions by sex of victim

Type of violence	Violence by previous spouse						Violence by current spouse	
	Total		Violence ended at separation		Violence occurred after separation		Total	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence female victims	437	100	264	100	172	100	259	100
Threatened to hit	307	70	168	64	137	80	145	56
Threw something	211	48	122	46	88	51	90	35
Pushed, grabbed	378	87	228	87	150	87	187	72
Slapped	203	46	113	43	89	52	77	30
Kicked, bit or hit	177	41	102	39	75	44	50	19
Hit with something	127	29	65	25	61	35	28†	11†
Beat	139	32	71	27	68	40	33†	13†
Choked	114	26	56	21	58	34	26†	10†
Used or threatened to use gun or knife	86	20	40	15	46	27	--	--
Sexual assault	117	27	57	22	60	35	21†	8†
Total violence male victims	259	100	173	100	83	100	303	100
Threatened to hit	173	67	107	62	66	79	162	53
Threw something	147	57	99	57	46	55	163	54
Pushed, grabbed	135	52	84	48	51	61	103	34
Slapped	162	63	109	63	53	64	153	51
Kicked, bit or hit	161	62	102	59	59	71	124	41
Hit with something	93	36	60	35	33	40	53	17
Beat	41	16	25†	14†	16†	20†	13†	4†
Choked	18†	7†	--	--	--	--	--	--
Used or threatened to use gun or knife	35†	14†	20	12	15	19	--	--
Sexual assault	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).

-- amount too small to be expressed

Figures do not add to totals due to multiple responses.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 3


Severity of ex-partner violence, past five years

	Violence by previous spouse						Violence by current spouse	
	Total		Violence ended at separation		Violence occurred after separation		Total	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence female victim	437	100	264	100	172	100	259	100
Occurred once	104	24	79	30	25	15	126	49
2-9 times	163	38	105	40	58	34	81	31
10 or more times	163	37	76	29	87	51	42	16
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Physical injury	213	49	112	42	101	59	67	26
No physical injury	217	50	146	55	70	41	186	72
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Received medical attention	80	19	37	14	43	25	25	10
Did not receive medical attention	133	31	75	29	59	34	42	16
No physical injury	217	50	146	55	70	41	186	72
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Feared for her life	208	48	106	40	102	59	53	20
Did not fear for her life	220	50	153	58	68	39	201	77
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total violence male victim	259	100	173	100	83	100	303	100
Occurred once	76	29	57	33	18†	21†	163	54
2-9 times	107	41	74	43	32	38	113	37
10 or more times	66	26	35	20	31	38	20†	7†
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Physical injury	54	21	38	22	16†	20†	18†	6†
No physical injury	199	77	134	77	65	78	279	92
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Received medical attention	13†	5†	--	--	--	--	--	--
Did not receive medical attention	41†	16†	30	17	11†	14†	--	--
No physical injury	199	77	134	77	65	78	279	92
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Feared for his life	34	13†	19	11	15†	17†	--	--
Did not fear for his life	219	84	152	88	66	80	--	--
Not stated/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--


† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).

-- amount too small to be expressed

Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 4



Types of violence in relationships where the first incident occurred after separation by sex of victim

Type of violence	Female victim		Male victim	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence	63	100	35	100
Threatened to hit	42	67	26	75
Threw something	22†	35†	12†	34†
Pushed, grabbed	46	73	17†	48†
Slapped	15†	24†	17†	48†
Kicked, bit or hit	14†	21†	20†	58†
Hit with something	--	--	--	--
Beat	13†	21†	--	--
Choked	11†	17†	--	--
Used or threatened to use gun or knife	12†	19†	--	--
Sexual assault	14†	22†	--	--


† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).

-- amount too small to be expressed

Figures do not add to totals due to multiple responses.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 5



Severity of violence by an ex-partner witnessed or heard by children, past 5 years

	Total		Violence ended at separation		Violence occurred after separation	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence experienced by female victims	437	100	264	100	172	100
Children saw or heard violence	218	50	122	46	97	56
Children did not see or hear violence	102	23	65	25	36†	21†
No children at the time	109	25	71	27	38†	22†
Not stated/Don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total with children who saw or heard violence	218	100	122	100	97	100
Parent feared for his/her life	135	62	67	70	68	56
Parent did not fear for his/her life	82	38	29†	30†	53	44
Not stated/Don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total violence experienced by male victims	259	100	173	100	83	100
Children saw or heard violence	79	31	46	27	33	40
Children did not see or hear violence	79	30	56	32	22†	27†
No children at the time	91	35	65	38	25†	31†
Not stated/Don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total with children who saw or heard violence	79	100	46	100	33	100
Parent feared for his/her life	13†	16†	--	--	--	--
Parent did not fear for his/her life	67	84	--	--	--	--
Not stated/Don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--

† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).

-- amount too small to be expressed

Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 6


Number and percentage of spousal violence incidents reported to police, past five years

	Violence by previous spouse						Violence by current spouse	
	Total		Violence ended at separation		Violence occurred after separation		Total	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence experienced by female victims	437	100	264	100	172	100	259	100
Reported to the police								
Yes	191	44	100	37	94	55	66	26
No	237	54	161	61	75	44	185	71
Refused/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Satisfaction with police response	191	100	100	100	94	100	66	100
Satisfied	128	67	68	70	60	63	49	74
Dissatisfied	63	33	28†	29†	35	37	14†	22†
Refused/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total violence experienced by male victims	259	100	173	100	83	100	303	100
Reported to the police								
Yes	65	25	40	23	25†	30†	19†	6†
No	186	72	130	75	55	66	276	91
Refused/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Satisfaction with police response	65	100	40	100	25†	100†	19†	100†
Satisfied	36	56	19†	48†	17	69	--	--
Dissatisfied	28	43	21†	52†	--	--	--	--
Refused/don't know	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).

-- amount too small to be expressed

Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 7

Type of emotional abuse	Prevalence of emotional abuse among those who experienced violence by previous spouse						No violence by previous spouse	
	Total		Violence ended at separation		Violence continued after separation		Total	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Total violence female victims	437	100	264	100	172	100	1,110	100
Tried to limit contact with family and friends	269	61	154	58	114	67	450	29
Put you down or called you names to make you feel bad	365	84	212	80	152	88	717	46
Jealous and did not want you to talk to other men/women	319	73	182	69	135	79	588	38
Harmed, or threatened to harm, someone close to you	186	43	85	32	100	58	274	18
Demanded to know who you were with and where you were at all times	290	66	162	61	128	74	484	31
Damaged or destroyed your possessions or property	260	59	140	53	119	69	399	26
Prevented you from knowing about or having access to the family income	137	31	74	28	63	37	252	16
Total emotional or financial abuse	416	95	248	94	167	97	900	58
Total violence male victims	259	100	173	100	83	100	922	100
Tried to limit contact with family and friends	121	47	71	41	49	59	255	21
Put you down or called you names to make you feel bad	165	64	101	59	64	76	335	28
Jealous and did not want you to talk to other men/women	181	70	121	70	59	71	407	34
Harmed, or threatened to harm, someone close to you	45	17	19†	11†	26†	32†	74	6
Demanded to know who you were with and where you were at all times	158	61	98	57	59	70	311	26
Damaged or destroyed your possessions or property	107	41	60	35	45	55	164	14
Prevented you from knowing about or having access to the family income	55	21	32†	19†	23†	27†	86	7
Total emotional or financial abuse	240	93	157	91	81	97	610	51

† Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% and 33.3%).
 Figures do not add to totals due to multiple responses.
 Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 8

	Homicides perpetrated by previous and current spouses by sex of victim, 1991-1999			
	Female victim		Male victim	
	No.	%	No.	%
Current spouse	447	72	148	90
Ex-spouse	170	28	17	10
Total	617	100	165	100

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
 Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey.

Table 9

	Police recorded principle motive for killing ex-partners and current partners by sex of victim, 1991-1999							
	Perpetrated by ex-marital partners				Perpetrated by current marital partners			
	Female victims		Male victims		Female victims		Male victims	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Revenge	20	12	2	12	6	1	8	5
Jealousy	69	41	2	12	84	19	10	7
Argument, quarrel, frustration	57	34	7	41	249	56	117	79
Finances	3	2	2	12	19	4	1	1
Other	16	9	4	24	47	11	8	5
No known motive	5	3	0	0	42	9	4	3
Total	170	100	17	100	447	100	148	100

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
 Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey.

Table 10

	Number and percentage of multiple victim homicides committed by male spouses, 1991-1999			
	Victim-offender relationship			
	Estranged husband		Current husband	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total homicides	170	100	447	100
Single victim homicides	149	88	419	94
Multiple victim homicides	21	12	28	6
Relationship to primary victim	21	100	28	100
Child of victim	5	24	22	79
New love interest of victim	8	38	0	0
Family member of victim	5	24	3	11
Friend, acquaintance of victim	3	14	3	11

Source: Statistics Canada, Homicide Survey, 1991-1999.

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

For further information, please contact the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 19th floor, R.H. Coats Building, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T6 at (613) 951-9023 or call toll-free 1 800 387-2231. To order a publication, you may telephone (613) 951-7277 or fax (613) 951-1584 or internet: order@statcan.ca. You may also call 1 800 267-6677 (Canada and United States) toll-free. If you order by telephone, written confirmation is not required.

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