

# Study: Women in Canada: Women and the Criminal Justice System

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Tuesday, June 6, 2017

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Violence against women has been recognized at both national and international levels as an important issue and one that affects individuals, families and society as a whole. Violence against women also acts as a barrier to the advancement of gender equality in Canada and around the world. Women experience different types of violence than men, making gender-based analysis important for the development of crime prevention measures.

There are two primary sources of data that can be used to measure violence against women in Canada: self-reported victimization data and police-reported crime data. Not all incidents of violence come to the attention of police. Studies of violence against women, therefore, benefit from including both self-reported and police-reported data.

Women account for over half of all victims of violent crime in Canada, according to results of both self-reported and police-reported data. In contrast, data from police, court and correctional surveys show that females account for about one-quarter of all offenders. For this reason, it is important to examine offences perpetrated by females separately from those of male offenders to better understand distinctive crime trends involving female offenders.

Today, Statistics Canada releases "[Women and the Criminal Justice System](#)," a new chapter of *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. This chapter provides a broad overview of criminal victimization and offending among the female population, as well as information on the increase of women in justice-related occupations.

## **Self-reported rates of physical assault are down since 2004, while self-reported rates of sexual assault are unchanged**

Since 2004, self-reported victimization rates have declined among women for physical assault, while self-reported rates of sexual assault have not changed.

According to the 2014 victimization cycle of the General Social Survey, women reported being the victim of 1.2 million incidents of physical assault, sexual assault or robbery in the previous year. Self-reported violent victimization rates were higher among women (85 per 1,000 population) than men (67 per 1,000 population). This difference was largely attributable to higher rates of sexual assault among women.

## **About one-quarter of people accused of committing a *Criminal Code* offence are female**

Females aged 12 and older accounted for about one-quarter of people accused of committing a *Criminal Code* offence in 2015, according to police-reported data. Although there was an overall decline in police-reported crime in Canada among adults aged 18 and older from 1998 to 2015, the decrease was more pronounced for crimes involving a male accused.

From 1998 to 2015, the rate of females charged with property crimes declined by almost 21% (from 286.8 per 100,000 females to 226.1), while the rate for males decreased by 45% (from 1,085.1 per 100,000 males to 592.9).

Violent crime charge rates against males have declined by 17% since 1998 (from 995.3 per 100,000 males to 823.2), while charges against females rose by 27% from 1998 to 2001 (from 148.9 per 100,000 females to 189.7) and have remained fairly stable since then.

Women accounted for 1 in 5 accused people in cases disposed of in criminal courts in 2014/2015. In terms of correctional supervision, women represented fewer than 1 in 5 under community correctional supervision and about 1 in 10 admitted to provincial/territorial (13%) or federal (7%) custody in 2014/2015.



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## Aboriginal women have higher rates of victimization and offending

Previous studies have consistently shown that Aboriginal women are overrepresented as victims of violent crime and as offenders.

In 2014, Aboriginal women were 2.7 times more likely to have reported experiencing violent victimization than non-Aboriginal women.

The number of Aboriginal female victims of homicide has increased over the past several decades, while the number of non-Aboriginal female victims has declined. As a result, Aboriginal females account for an increasing proportion of female homicide victims, rising from one-tenth (9%) of all female homicide victims in 1980 to one-quarter (24%) in 2015.

Females accounted for approximately 1 in 10 people accused of homicide from 2001 to 2015. However, the proportion of Aboriginal females accused of homicide (4.33 per 100,000 population) was higher in 2015 than for non-Aboriginal females (0.14 per 100,000 population). Meanwhile, the rate at which Aboriginal males (16.09 per 100,000 population) were accused of homicide was 3.7 times higher than the rate at which Aboriginal females were accused.

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in the justice system extends to admissions to correctional supervision. Aboriginal women represented less than 5% of the total female population in Canada in 2015, while they accounted for over one-third of female admissions to federal (39%) and provincial/territorial (38%) custody in 2014/2015.

### Note to readers

Data are taken from many Statistics Canada surveys including the "[General Social Survey \(GSS\) on Canadians' Safety \(Victimization\)](#)" (2004, 2009, and 2014), the "[Uniform Crime Reporting Survey](#)" (1998 to 2015), the "[Homicide Survey](#)" (1961 to 2015), the "[Integrated Criminal Court Survey](#)" (2000/2001 to 2014/2015), the "[Youth Custody and Community Services Survey](#)" (2014/2015), the "[Adult Correctional Services Survey](#)" (2000/2001 to 2014/2015), and the "[Transition Home Survey](#)" (2013/2014). This information is supplemented with data from the "[Police Administration Survey](#)" (1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011), the "[Canadian Census](#)" (1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006), and the "[National Household Survey](#)" (2011).

Self-reported surveys have the advantage of collecting information directly from respondents, including information on crimes that were not reported to police. Police-reported data, however, provide broader and more detailed information on offences and include information on criminal incidents coming to the attention of the justice system.

Findings presented in *The Daily* and in the chapter use the term "accused" generically to refer to a person who has been identified as an accused person in an incident and against whom a charge may be laid in connection with that incident.

Findings presented in *The Daily* focus on broad trends in the criminal victimization and offending of women in Canada. These findings are taken from the chapter "[Women and the Criminal Justice System](#)," from the publication *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. This chapter explores a broad range of topics related to the criminal victimization of women and girls as well as their involvement in the criminal justice system as offenders. It covers the types of criminal victimization experienced by females over time; where possible, highlighting important differences in violent crime by Aboriginal identity, immigrant status, visible minority status and age.

The use of formal and informal support services is also explored, including changes over time in the use of police services. This chapter also reports trends in the number and types of crimes committed by females, along with their involvement in the criminal courts and correctional systems. Some results, such as overall rates of violent victimization and spousal violence among Aboriginal women, should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.

Data in this report are presented and analyzed by sex, as per international guidelines for producing gender statistics. For more information, see United Nations Statistics Division, [Gender Statistics Manual](#).

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**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3301](#), [3302](#), [3306](#), [3312](#), [3315](#), [3323](#), [3328](#), [3901](#), [4504](#) and [5178](#).**

This release is based on the chapter "[Women and the Criminal Justice System](#)," that is part of *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, seventh edition ([89-503-X](#)), which is now available.

The publication *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report* is a collaborative effort of Status of Women Canada and Statistics Canada.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).