

Shelters for abused women in Canada, 2014

by Sara Beattie and Hope Hutchins



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- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
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Women experiencing violent victimization often rely on social services that exist outside of the formal criminal justice system (Sinha 2013). In Canada, referrals to residential services and emergency shelters are among the most common referrals made by victim service providers (Allen 2014, Munch 2012). Using data from the 2014 Transition Home Survey, this *Juristat* bulletin presents the most up-to-date information on shelters for abused women in Canada.

The Transition Home Survey (THS) was developed under the federal government's Family Violence Initiative in consultation with provincial and territorial governments and transition home associations.¹ The objective of the THS is to collect data that will provide a profile of residential services for abused women and their children during the previous 12 months, as well as provide information on the clientele being served.

The information presented in this article refers to two distinct time periods. First, data pertaining to the characteristics of facilities, the number of annual admissions, and the types of services offered were collected in 2014 and are based upon a 12-month period that preceded the survey.² Second, information on the women being served in shelters was collected on a specific "snapshot date" (April 16, 2014).

While the THS is designed to collect information pertaining to residential services for abused women, shelters responding to the survey may admit women for reasons other than abuse, such as protecting their children and housing issues. Additionally, although a minority of the facilities responding to the survey offer services to men as well as to women,³ the focus of this report is on the women seeking shelter for reasons of abuse.

Transition homes and emergency shelters are the primary providers of shelter

The THS identified 627 shelters for abused women that were operating across Canada on April 16, 2014 (Table 1). These facilities were asked to indicate the area(s) they served, including population centres, rural populations, and reserves. Of these facilities, 357 (57%) indicated that they solely serve a population centre, defined for the purposes of the THS as an area with a population of 1,000 or more people. A further 28 shelters (4%) reported that they provide services specifically to rural populations. In addition, 72 facilities (11%) provided services to population centres and rural populations only.

Although the THS does not collect information on the Aboriginal identity of women staying at shelters, it does ask facilities to indicate whether or not the facility serves an on-reserve population as well as whether or not it is located on a reserve. In 2013/2014, 17 facilities (3%) exclusively served an on-reserve population. However, approximately one quarter of all shelters (27%), including those who also serve population centres and/or rural populations, indicated that they provide services to an on-reserve population. A total of 32 shelters were located on a reserve, some of which also serve population centres and rural populations.

There are various types of shelters available to women who have experienced abuse in Canada (Text box 1). Of the women admitted to shelter facilities in 2013/2014, half of admissions were to transition homes (50%) which offer short or moderate-term secure housing. An additional 41% of admissions were to emergency shelters and women's emergency centres which typically offer temporary short-term accommodations. A further 3% of admissions were to second-stage housing, which offer long-term secure housing. The remaining 6% of admissions were to other residential facilities including safe home networks, interim housing (Manitoba only), family resource centres (Ontario only), and all other residential facilities offering services to abused women (Table 2).

Text box 1

Types of residential shelters for abused women

For the purposes of the Transition Home Survey (THS), the term “shelter” is used broadly to refer to all residential facilities for abused women. In addition, the following generic categories were developed to further define the various types of shelters. Referring to these definitions, those responding to the THS were asked to select the facility type that best described their shelter.

Transition home: Facility offering short- or moderate-term (1 day to 11 weeks) secure housing for abused women with or without children. This type of shelter may also be referred to as first-stage emergency housing. In 2013/2014 there were 281 transition homes known to be in operation.

Second-stage housing: Facility offering long-term (3 to 12 months) secure housing with support and referral services designed to assist women while they search for permanent housing. In 2013/2014 there were 123 second stage housing facilities known to be in operation.

Women's emergency centres: Facility offering short-term (1 to 21 days) respite for women and their dependent children. In 2013/2014 there were 80 women's emergency centres known to be in operation.

Emergency shelters: Facility offering short-term (1 to 3 days) respite for a wide population range, not exclusively abused women. Some facilities may provide accommodation for men as well as women. This type of facility may accommodate residents who are not associated with family abuse but are without a home due to an emergency situation (e.g., eviction for non-payment of rent). In 2013/2014 there were 84 emergency shelters known to be in operation.

Safe home networks: A network of private homes in rural or remote areas where there is no full-fledged operating shelter. It offers subsidiary short-term (1 to 3 days) emergency housing for women. In 2013/2014 there were 17 safe home networks known to be in operation.

Other: Includes all other residential facilities offering services to abused women with or without children, not otherwise classified. In 2013/2014 there were 42 other residential facilities known to be in operation.

The availability of space within shelters can be measured through the concept of bed space.⁴ The total number of funded or licensed beds in residential shelters as of April 16, 2014 was 12,058, amounting to an average of 19 licensed beds per shelter.

The majority of these beds were occupied on the snapshot date: among facilities that admit women, men⁵ and children, approximately 66% of funded and licensed beds were occupied. Among facilities that admit only women and children, approximately 70% of funded and licensed beds were occupied.⁶

Most shelters in Canada offer a standard range of services for women. In 2013/2014, most shelter facilities provided the following services: safety and protection planning (90% of shelters), transportation services (87%), advocacy on behalf of women (86%), housing referrals (85%), and individual short-term counselling (85%).

Many shelters in Canada offer culturally sensitive services that accommodate the diverse needs of Aboriginal women and children. For example, these services may recognize traditional healing methods and Aboriginal cultural norms and beliefs. In 2013/2014, 63% of shelters responding to the THS reported offering culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal women, while 46% reported offering culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal children. Further, 21% of shelters in Canada offered services in at least one of the following Aboriginal languages: Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut.

In 2013/2014, shelters across Canada reported 60,341 admissions of women, representing a rate of 403 admissions per 100,000 women 15 and older.⁷ The rate of admissions tended to be higher in the Territories and the western provinces. Saskatchewan had the highest rate of admissions among the provinces (717 admissions per 100,000 women) while Prince Edward Island reported the lowest (138 admissions per 100,000 women).⁸

The rate of funded and/or licensed beds available to women tended to be higher in the Territories. Among the provinces, Manitoba had the highest rate (178 beds per 100,000 women) while Quebec reported the lowest rate (55 beds per 100,000 women). Across all three territories the rates exceeded 400 per 100,000 women.⁹

One in four women residents had sought shelter at the facility before

On the April 16, 2014 survey snapshot date, there were 7,969 women and children staying in shelters across Canada for reasons of abuse and otherwise. Of these residents, 4,476 were women (56%) and 3,493 (44%) were their dependent children. Among these women and children, 78% were there primarily because of abuse and the remaining 22% of residents were there primarily for other reasons.

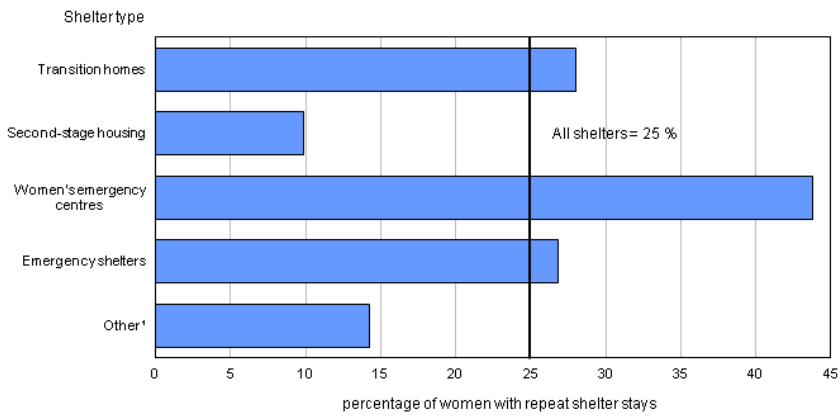
The largest proportions of women and children residing in shelter facilities on the snapshot date were staying at transition homes (37%), second-stage housing (23%), emergency shelters (21%) and women's emergency centres (13%). The remaining 6% were staying at other types of facilities such as family resource centres.

The most common referral sources for women in shelters on the snapshot date included other community agencies (14%), other transition homes (12%), and family or friends (8%). About one in three women (32%) reported not having been referred to the shelter.

Of the 4,476 women residing in a shelter on April 16, 2014, one-quarter (25%) had stayed at that same shelter before. Of these women, 412 (37%) had stayed at the same shelter one time in the previous 12 months, 188 (17%) had stayed there two to four times in the previous 12 months, and 116 (10%) had stayed at the same shelter five or more times in the prior 12 months. A further 335 women (30%) had stayed at the same shelter before but it had been more than a year since their last stay.

The highest rate of re-admissions was reported by women's emergency centres, where over 4 in 10, or 246, snapshot date residents had stayed at the shelter before. Conversely, 10% of the women residing in second-stage housing facilities on the snapshot date reported a previous stay at the shelter (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Women with repeat shelter stays, by shelter type, Canada,
April 16, 2014



1. Includes all other residential facilities offering services to abused women with or without children, not otherwise classified.
Note: Includes women's previous stays at the shelters at which they were residing on April 16, 2014. Previous stays at other facilities are not reported.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.

Most women seek shelter for reasons of abuse

The THS asked shelters to provide information on the various reasons women sought shelter on April 16, 2014 at their facility.

Emotional abuse (reported by 66% of women residents) and physical abuse (50%) were the most common reasons women sought shelter. This finding held true for most provinces and territories (Table 3).

Many women in shelters on the snapshot date also cited financial abuse (38%), threats (36%), harassment (27%), sexual abuse (21%), and other abuse (12%) among their reasons for seeking shelter. Further, on that snapshot date, 67 women (2%) indicated human trafficking as a reason for seeking refuge.

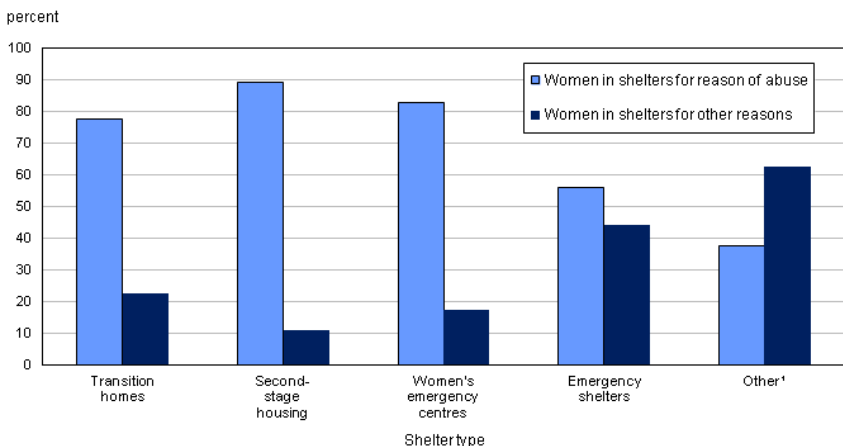
Protecting children from abuse or witnessing abuse was also a common reason women sought shelter: 26% of women identified wanting to protect their children from witnessing abuse, 18% of women identified wanting to protect their children from psychological abuse, and 10% of women identified wanting to protect their children from physical abuse as among their reasons for seeking shelter.

Housing issues were also a common reason for women seeking shelter: 30% of women identified being unable to find affordable housing as among their reasons for seeking shelter, while 17% of women cited short-term housing problems and 10% reported housing emergencies as reasons for their admission. The proportion of women residents with particular housing issues was higher in some provinces and territories. For example, the proportion unable to find affordable housing was higher in certain provinces such as Prince Edward Island (67%) and territories such as Nunavut (47%).

Other reasons for admission identified by women staying at shelters on the snapshot date included mental health issues (25%) and drug or alcohol addiction (19%). On snapshot day, the proportion of residents with mental health issues was highest in Newfoundland and Labrador (43%) followed by New Brunswick (39%).

The majority of women residing in transition homes, second-stage housing, and women's emergency centres cited abuse as their primary reason for seeking shelter. This was also true for emergency shelters, although in comparison to these shelter types, there was not as much of a difference in the proportion of women seeking shelter for reasons of abuse and those seeking shelter for other reasons. Most women staying at other types of shelters (such as safe home networks, family resource centres, and interim housing) reported reasons other than abuse as having motivated their stay (Chart 2).

Chart 2
Women staying at shelters, by type and whether for reasons of abuse,
Canada, April 16, 2014



1. Includes all other residential facilities offering services to abused women with or without children, not otherwise classified.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.

Abuse by current intimate partners prevalent among women in shelters

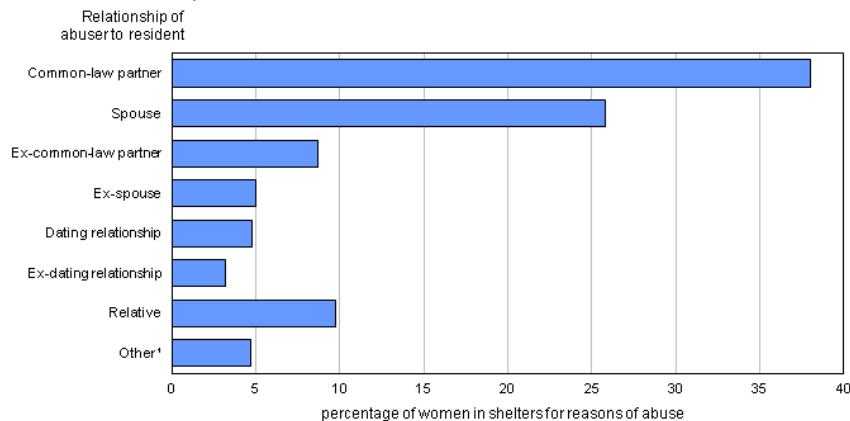
For the majority of women residing in shelters on the snapshot date, the abuser was an intimate partner. Intimate partners include individuals who are legally married, common-law (same and opposite sex), in a dating relationship, and other intimate partners. Of the 3,249 women reporting abuse as their primary reason for seeking shelter on April 16, 2014, 69% identified a current intimate partner as their abuser and 17% indicated their abuser was a former intimate partner.¹⁰

In particular, a total of 2,329, or 78% of women in shelters on April 16, 2014 identified their abuser as a current or former spouse or common-law partner, representing a rate of 23.6 women per 100,000 married, common-law and separated or divorced women (Table 4).

The largest proportion of women seeking shelter primarily because of abuse on the snapshot date identified their abuser as a current common-law partner (38%) (Chart 3). The rate of common-law women in shelters for reasons of abuse was over six times higher than the rate for married women. This finding is in line with self-reported victimization data showing that Canadians living in common-law relationships are approximately three times more likely than their married counterparts to report having experienced spousal violence (Brennan 2011).

Abusers were not limited to intimate partners. Other abusers reported by women residing in shelters on the snapshot date included family members (10%) and other types of relationships such as friends or acquaintances, authority figures, or caregivers (5%) (Chart 3).

Chart 3
Relationship of abuser to women residing in shelters primarily for reasons of abuse, Canada, April 16, 2014



1. Includes caregiver, friend/acquaintance, authority figure, and other unspecified relationships.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.

The majority (78%) of women residing in shelters for reasons of abuse were under the age of 45.

Among women residing in shelters for reasons of abuse, the highest rates were reported for women aged 25 to 34 years (45 per 100,000 women) followed by women aged 35 to 44 (31 per 100,000 women) and women aged 15 to 24 years (24 per 100,000 women). Women aged 65 years and over reported the lowest rates (2 per 100,000 women) of residing in shelters for reasons of abuse.

Of the women who sought shelter primarily because of abuse on April 16, 2014, just over half (51%) were admitted with their children. A further 31% of women in shelters did not have children or parenting responsibilities, while 17% came to the shelter facility without their children.

Shelters responding to the THS indicated that the abusive situations which cause women to seek shelter are often not reported to police. Considering the most recent abusive situation experienced by women residing in shelters on snapshot day, 49% of incidents were not brought to the attention of police. Conversely, about one in three (30%) incidents were brought to the attention of police, while for 21% of women it was not known if the incident was brought to the attention of police. Findings from the General Social Survey of Victimization also indicate that a minority of incidents of spousal violence come to the attention of police, with less than one-third of female victims of spousal violence stating that the police found out about the incident (Sinha 2013).

Full capacity most common reason for turning women and children away

The THS asked shelters to provide information regarding how many women and children departed their facility on the snapshot date and on how many women and children were turned away from shelters.

On April 16, 2014, 133 women and 90 accompanying children departed shelters in Canada. Of these 133 women, 7% reported that they were returning to their spouse or common-law partner. Approximately one in five women (21%) indicated they were departing to new accommodations without their spouse or common-law partner, while 17% specified they were departing to live with friends or relatives. A further 13% reported returning home without their spouse or common-law partner, 8% reported that they were departing to another shelter or residential service, and 4% reported going to a hospital upon departure. Other locations were identified for 6% of women departing shelters. For 32 of the 133 women (24%) it was unknown where they were going upon departure.¹¹

On the snapshot date, 338 women and 201 accompanying children were turned away from shelters in Canada. Alcohol and drug issues (8%), mental health issues (6%), and women being on a non-admit or caution list (4%) were among some of the reasons for turning away women and children. However, the shelter being full was cited as the most common reason, accounting for more than half (56%) of all reasons for turn-aways.

Survey Description

The scope of the Transition Home Survey (THS) is limited to those facilities that come to the attention of Statistics Canada through its consultations with provincial and territorial governments, transition home associations and other associations. See Text box 1 for a description of the shelter types surveyed. Of the 627 residential facilities providing services to abused women and their children in 2013/2014, 514 returned their questionnaire for a response rate of 82%. For those respondents who did not provide their information through the questionnaire, and for those respondents who did not answer some of the key questions on their survey forms, an imputation procedure was used to estimate the missing data. In rare cases, where appropriate, respondents could have data from their previous year's questionnaire carried forward. For the purposes of the THS, children are defined as being under 18 and accompanied by a parent or caregiver. A systematic respondent error in the reporting of annual admissions was detected during the processing of 2011-2012 data. As a result, trend analysis on admissions data is not possible.

References

Allen, Mary. 2014. "Victim services in Canada, 2011/2012." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada catalogue no. 85-002-X.

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Munch, Christopher. 2012. "Victim services in Canada, 2009/2010." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Sinha, Maire. 2013. "Measuring violence against women: Statistical Trends." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Notes

- ¹ The Family Violence Initiative is a horizontal collaboration of 15 federal departments, agencies and Crown corporations. For more information see www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fund-fina/cj-jp/fv-vf.html
- ² Shelters were asked to provide 12 months of data corresponding to a standard fiscal year (April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014), a calendar year, or a 12 month period of their own choosing. In 2013/2014, 92% of shelters responding to the survey reported their annual information based on a standard fiscal year.
- ³ Among the 627 shelters that offered services to abused women in 2013/2014, 36 or 6% have policy allowing the admission of adult men, including emergency shelters and transition homes.
- ⁴ Facilities responding to the Transition Home Survey provide a count of the funded and licensed beds (including each bed, child's bed, and crib) they have for clients (whether or not a bed is currently occupied). The purpose is to establish the "normal capacity" of facilities, therefore respondents are asked to exclude unfunded and unlicensed emergency beds, such as cots or sofas. The total number of beds available presented here may therefore undercount the total number of beds that shelters are prepared to provide to clients, if those shelters chose to offer unfunded or unlicensed beds.
- ⁵ See note 3.
- ⁶ In order to accurately present occupancy rates, child residents are included in these calculations.
- ⁷ Admissions refer to the official acceptance of a resident into the facility with the allocation of a bed, child's bed, crib, bedroom or bedroom unit, or apartment. The total number of admissions of women includes those who may have been admitted more than once. Each shelter visit is counted as a separate admission. For example, the same woman being admitted to a facility three times in a year would count as three admissions.

- 8 Admission rates vary according to shelter capacity. As a result, differences among the provinces may be influenced by the number of high capacity shelters in operation.
- 9 Among the Territories, rates were highest in the Northwest Territories (587 beds per 100,000 women), followed by Yukon (539 beds per 100,000 women) and Nunavut (408 beds per 100,000 women).
- 10 Current intimate partner includes individuals who are legally married or common-law (same and opposite sex), in a dating relationship, and other current intimate partners. Former intimate partner includes individuals who are separated (including legal and common-law, same and opposite sex), divorced, ex-dating relationship, and other former intimate partners. Dating partners were included in the definition of intimate partners as of 2011.
- 11 May include residents for whom the facility does not have information or residents who did not know their destination.
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Table 1
Number of shelters, beds, and women and children residents, provinces and territories, April 16, 2014

Province or territory	Shelters ¹	Beds	Women residents	Children residents
			number	
Newfoundland and Labrador	16	220	65	26
Prince Edward Island	6	65	15	11
Nova Scotia	17	264	94	84
New Brunswick	25	352	97	51
Quebec	135	1,926	846	566
Ontario	177	4,271	1,785	1,493
Manitoba	32	926	131	144
Saskatchewan	29	693	219	217
Alberta	60	1,437	482	416
British Columbia	113	1,677	683	429
Yukon	7	81	13	6
Northwest Territories	6	98	27	39
Nunavut	4	48	19	11
Canada	627	12,058	4,476	3,493

¹ For the purposes of the Transition Home Survey (THS), the term "shelter" is used broadly to refer to all residential facilities for abused women. The scope of the THS is limited to those facilities that come to the attention of Statistics Canada through its consultations with provincial and territorial governments, transition home associations and other associations.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.



Table 2
Annual number of admissions of women to shelters, by type of shelter, provinces and territories, 2013/2014

Province or territory	Transition home		Second stage housing		Emergency shelter		Women's emergency centre		Other ¹		Total	
	number	percent of admissions	number	percent of admissions	number	percent of admissions	number	percent of admissions	number	percent of admissions	number	percent of admissions
Newfoundland and Labrador	544	68	31	4	119	15	57	7	44	6	795	100
Prince Edward Island	0	...	21	24	66	76	0	...	0	...	87	100
Nova Scotia	641	57	30	3	389	34	0	...	72	6	1,132	100
New Brunswick	722	61	43	4	285	24	96	8	29	2	1,175	100
Quebec	13,110	85	180	1	126	1	528	3	1,467	10	15,411	100
Ontario	3,770	24	703	4	6,405	41	3,927	25	852	5	15,657	100
Manitoba	119	4	88	3	1,498	53	1,032	36	104	4	2,841	100
Saskatchewan	688	21	138	4	1,516	47	306	10	563	18	3,211	100
Alberta	771	12	295	5	2,520	39	2,828	43	100	2	6,514	100
British Columbia	8,910	74	191	2	2,112	18	451	4	332	3	11,996	100
Yukon	365	95	19	5	0	...	0	...	0	...	384	100
Northwest Territories	233	27	0	...	0	...	588	68	42	5	863	100
Nunavut	157	57	0	...	84	31	34	12	0	...	275	100
Canada	30,030	50	1,739	3	15,120	25	9,847	16	3,605	6	60,341	100

... not applicable

¹ Includes all other facilities not otherwise specified. For example, in 2013/2014, there were 746 admissions to Family Resource Centres (Ontario only) and 95 admissions to Interim Housing (Manitoba only).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.



Table 3
Women's reasons for seeking shelter, provinces and territories,
April 16, 2014

Type of reason	Canada		Newfoundland and Labrador	Prince Edward Island	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	Quebec	Ontario	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia	Yukon	Northwest territories	Nunavut
	Frequency reason cited	Percent of women residents ¹													
Abuse:															
Emotional abuse	2,933	66	77	67	56	80	68	65	67	60	67	65	85	89	89
Physical abuse	2,193	50	45	27	48	47	47	46	65	53	59	51	62	59	53
Financial abuse	1,671	38	32	27	36	42	36	37	42	20	44	43	23	41	42
Threats	1,593	36	40	33	40	51	35	33	37	34	33	43	31	44	68
Harassment	1,183	27	38	40	31	33	28	24	26	21	27	30	31	19	63
Sexual abuse	925	21	15	27	17	22	23	18	28	21	26	22	x	19	21
Human trafficking ²	67	2	x	x	x	5	2	1	x	4	2	2	x	x	x
Other abuse	523	12	x	x	x	x	19	13	x	3	18	4	x	19	x
Protecting children from:															
Witnessing abuse of mother	1,158	26	18	27	30	20	23	25	31	25	36	27	x	52	x
Psychological abuse	784	18	17	x	21	18	17	16	20	19	23	18	x	x	x
Physical abuse	428	10	11	x	10	10	11	8	19	11	11	12	x	x	x
Threats	348	8	5	x	6	8	9	7	7	5	6	10	x	x	x
Neglect	267	6	6	x	x	10	4	5	7	3	14	8	x	x	x
Sexual abuse	72	2	x	x	x	4	1	1	x	2	2	2	x	x	x
Housing:															
Unable to find affordable housing	1,311	30	25	67	23	21	23	31	19	25	35	35	x	37	47
Short-term housing problem	767	17	15	x	11	5	10	25	9	16	15	16	x	19	x
Housing emergency	428	10	11	x	14	x	6	12	4	10	9	9	x	15	37
Mental health	1,087	25	43	x	27	39	30	23	19	18	27	21	x	15	16
Drug/alcohol addiction	862	19	20	20	20	28	14	16	32	26	29	25	31	x	42
Other ³	482	11	x	x	4	12	7	12	3	7	10	18	x	x	x
Unknown	53	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Total reasons for admission	19,135	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

... not applicable

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

¹ Categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents may indicate multiple reasons for seeking shelter. Thus, percentages will not add up to 100%.

² The categories of "reasons for which women seek shelter" on snapshot date was expanded in the 2014 cycle of the Transition Home Survey to include human trafficking.

³ Other reasons for seeking shelter include destruction of property.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.

Table 4
Women in shelters because of abuse by a current or former spouse or common-law partner, provinces and territories, April 16, 2014

Province or territory	number ¹	percent ²	rate ³
Newfoundland and Labrador	32	76	20.6
Prince Edward Island	7	64	16.7
Nova Scotia	50	79	18.4
New Brunswick	52	81	23.6
Quebec	487	87	21.7
Ontario	909	73	23.7
Manitoba	81	79	24.0
Saskatchewan	103	77	35.3
Alberta	219	73	19.3
British Columbia	353	82	26.7
Yukon	7	58	71.9
Northwest Territories	16	70	152.7
Nunavut	13	76	190.4
Canada	2,329	78	23.6

¹ Represents the total number of women in shelters because of abuse by a current or former spouse or common-law partner.

² Percent of abused women in shelters who are there because of abuse by a current or former spouse or common-law partner. Percentages are based on totals excluding counts where the relationship to the abuser is unknown.

³ This rate is calculated using the total population of women who are married, living in common-law relationships, or are separated or divorced. Populations are based on July 1 estimates provided by Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Past reports may have used different populations to calculate this rate; thus, comparisons should be made with caution.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Transition Home Survey.