

Trends in reporting criminal victimization to police, 1999 to 2009

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- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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Trends in reporting criminal victimization to police, 1999 to 2009: highlights

- According to the 2009 General Social Survey (GSS), about one-third of self-reported victimization incidents were reported to police. Break and enter, along with theft of motor vehicle or parts had the highest rate of reporting to police. Spousal violence and sexual assaults were the most likely to go unreported.
- Trends in reporting to police generally vary by offence type. Reporting of non-violent victimization and spousal violence to police have decreased between 1999 and 2009, while reporting of violence committed by someone other than a spouse remained stable over this same time period.
- Based on the GSS, the heightened seriousness of an offence generally increases reporting to police. For non-violent forms of victimization, large dollar losses were linked to higher levels of reporting. In 2009, about 7 in 10 household incidents with a dollar loss of at least \$1,000 came to the attention of police. This compares to 27% of losses with less than \$500.
- Between 1999 and 2009, the likelihood of reporting household crime incidents with large financial losses dropped from 84% to 68%, while actual incidents resulting in losses of \$1,000 or more also decreased in prevalence (from 22% to 16%).
- In 2009, more than half of victims who experienced the most severe forms of spousal violence indicated that the police were contacted, including 49% of victims who were sexually assaulted and 55% who were beaten, choked, or had a weapon used against them. This compares to 13% of spousal violence victims who experienced less severe forms of violence, namely being pushed, shoved or slapped.
- The most severe forms of spousal violence, such as being beaten or sexually assaulted, have decreased in prevalence between 1999 and 2009, dropping from 19% of spousal violence victims in 1999 to 15% in 2009. Injury levels, however, have remained unchanged over this period.
- Three measures of offence seriousness were associated with reporting non-spousal violence to police - injury, weapon use and multiple perpetrators. All three have remained unchanged between 1999 and 2009.
- Reasons for reporting to police remained relatively constant over time. Topping the list of reasons for reporting violent victimization was the desire to stop the incident or receive protection from police, though this was more commonly cited by spousal violence victims. For non-violent victimization, a sense of duty and a desire to catch and punish the offender were leading reasons for reporting to police.

Trends in reporting criminal victimization to police, 1999 to 2009

by Maire Sinha

Monitoring changes in the willingness of victims and witnesses to report crime to police is important to understanding and contextualizing police-reported crime data, as well as providing an indirect indicator of Canadians' confidence in the criminal justice system. Internationally, there has been a growing interest in rates of reporting to police (Tarling and Morris 2010). It has been noted that the costs of unreported crime can have many repercussions on both victims and society as a whole (Tarling and Morris 2010). Not reporting can mean that victims are unable to access the services they need, particularly police or court-based services and at the societal level, the accused may reoffend and the criminal justice system may not deter others from committing crime (Bosick et al. 2012; Tarling and Morris 2010).

Population-based victimization surveys collect information on self-reported experiences of victimization, regardless of whether the incident reaches the attention of police. Consequently, they are able to provide an indicator of levels of reporting to police. In Canada, the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, conducted every five years, is the key data source for measuring self-reported criminal victimization experiences and reporting behaviours (See Textbox 1). Improvements to this survey over the years have enhanced its ability to track changes in reporting patterns for highly under-reported crimes, such as spousal violence and sexual assault.

Using data from the 1999, 2004 and 2009 cycles of the GSS on Victimization, the first part of this Juristat explores trends in reporting to police over time, noting differences across offences and provinces. The second part presents descriptive statistics on the factors influencing the decision to report to police and any shifts in these factors. In particular, five key indicators previously shown to affect reporting to police are examined: 1) victim characteristics, 2) relationship between the victim and offender, 3) severity of criminal victimization incidents, 4) victims' motivations for reporting or not reporting to police, and 5) victims' contact with and confidence in the police.

Information on non-spousal criminal victimization is based on incidents occurring in the 12 months preceding the survey. Information pertaining to spousal violence, however, refers to violent victimization that was experienced over the previous five-year period, in order to facilitate reliable estimates at lower levels of disaggregation.

Text box 1

The General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization

The GSS on Victimization is a sample survey of Canadians aged 15 years and older. It excludes individuals living in institutions (e.g., long-term care facilities, prisons), individuals unable to speak English or French, and households without landline telephones or only cell phones.

One component of the survey interviews Canadians on their experiences of victimization over the previous 12-month period. Captured are eight offence types, three of which are violent offences (physical assault, sexual assault and robbery) and five of which are non-violent offences (break and enter, theft of motor vehicle or parts, theft of household property, vandalism and theft of personal property). For each incident, respondents are asked whether the incident was reported to police.

Text box Table

Type of victimization	Description
Violent Victimization	
Sexual assault	Forced sexual activity, an attempt at forced sexual activity, or unwanted sexual touching, grabbing, kissing, or fondling.
Robbery	Theft or attempted theft in which the perpetrator had a weapon or there was violence or the threat of violence against the victim.
Physical assault	An attack (victim hit, slapped, grabbed, knocked down, or beaten), a face-to-face threat of physical harm, or an incident with a weapon present.
Non-Violent Victimization	
Household victimization	
Break and enter	Illegal entry or attempted entry into a residence or other building on the victim's property.
Motor vehicle/parts theft	Theft or attempted theft of a car, truck, van, motorcycle, moped or other vehicle or part of a motor vehicle.
Theft of household property	Theft or attempted theft of household property such as liquor, bicycles, electronic equipment, tools or appliances.
Vandalism	Wilful damage of personal or household property.
Theft of personal property	Theft or attempted theft of personal property such as money, credit cards, clothing, jewellery, a purse or a wallet (unlike robbery, the perpetrator does not confront the victim).

In addition to these eight offences, the GSS on victimization contains a special module on spousal violence, which captures detailed information on the dynamics of violence within spousal and common-law relationships. Canadians who had contact with a spouse in the five years prior to the interview are asked a series of questions on violence by their current and/or previous spouse and common-law partners. Questions ask about victims' overall experiences of spousal victimization and reporting to police, rather than about specific incidents of violence.

The GSS collects information on spousal violence differently from non-spousal violence. For spousal violence, many questions are asked about victims' overall experiences of spousal victimization, rather than specific incidents of violence. As a result, the unit of count is the victim. In contrast, for non-spousal victimization, the survey can capture multiple separate incidents of victimization experienced by a single victim. The unit of count for non-spousal victimization is generally the criminal incident, rather than the victim.

Levels of reporting to police

One-third of victimization incidents were reported to police

Known as the 'dark figure of crime', a certain proportion of criminal incidents never come to the attention of the criminal justice system. According to the 2009 GSS, about one-third of self-reported victimization incidents were reported to police, though significant variations existed by type of victimization (Table 1). Break and enter, along with theft of motor vehicle or parts had the highest rate of reporting to police.¹ More than half of these incidents came to the attention of police (54% of break and enters and 50% of thefts of motor vehicle/parts). The rate of reporting was even higher for completed motor vehicle thefts (excluding thefts of motor vehicle parts), at 90%.

In contrast, police were rarely made aware of sexual assaults committed by someone other than a spouse, making it the offence with the highest level of underreporting. About nine in ten sexual assaults (88%) by a non-spousal perpetrator were

never reported to police. Underreporting was most pronounced for sexual touching, where 93% of incidents were not reported to police. In comparison, 64% of sexual attacks perpetrated by someone other than a spouse never came to the attention of police.

Not captured by the GSS are other types of criminal offences that may have differing levels of reporting. For instance, internationally, it has been recognized that homicide incidents are more often reported, with a much higher proportion coming to the attention of police (Nivette 2011).

No change in reporting of non-spousal violence to police, while decrease in reporting of non-violent victimization

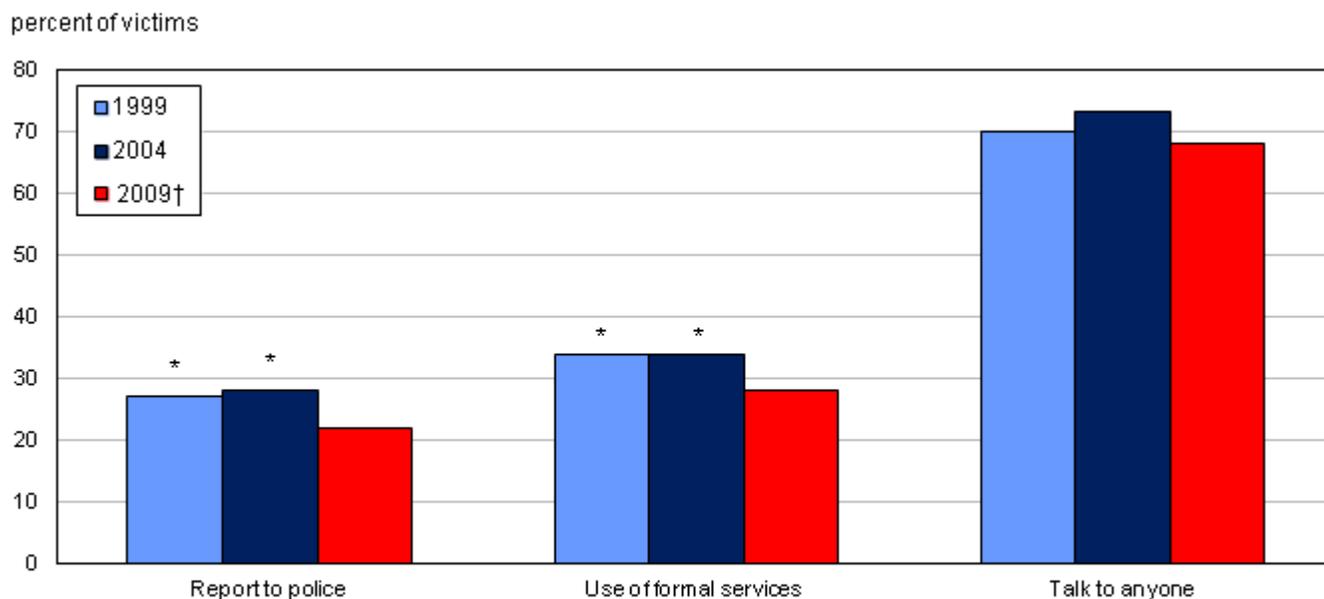
Non-spousal forms of violent victimization were as likely to come to the attention of police in 2009, as they were a decade earlier (Table 1).² In contrast, fewer incidents of non-violent forms of victimization were reported to police in 2009 compared to previous years. Between 1999 and 2009, the rate of reporting household crimes³ dropped from 44% to 36% (Table 1).

Break and enters and thefts of motor vehicle/parts, the two types of victimization with the highest level of reporting, recorded some of the greatest declines, dropping 8 and 10 percentage points, respectively. Reports of thefts of household property and personal property also fell. Only vandalism maintained a steady rate of reporting to police over the ten-year period, though the level of reporting increased in 2009, after decreasing in 2004.

Decrease in reporting spousal violence to police

Spousal violence had one of the lowest levels of reporting, with less than a quarter (22%) of spousal violence victims in 2009 indicating that the incidents came to the attention of police.⁴ Furthermore, in 2009, victims of spousal violence were less likely to say that their victimization was reported to police than they were five and ten years earlier. More specifically, reporting of spousal violence dropped from 27% in 2004 to 22% in 2009, after a period of stability between 1999 and 2004 (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Self-reported spousal violence victims less likely to turn to police or formal sources of support in 2009



† reference category

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

Note: Refers to victims who experienced violence in the previous five years. Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded. Response of 'don't know' and not stated are included in the total but are not shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999, 2004 and 2009.

Besides turning to police, spousal violence victims can also turn to other formal sources of support, such as a crisis centre, counsellor, shelter or other victims' service. As with reporting to police, spousal violence victims were less likely to use formal

services in 2009 compared to previous years. Nevertheless, spousal violence victims were just as likely to talk about their experience of spousal victimization with family, friends, and neighbours in 2009, as they were in previous years.

Rates of reporting to police similar across provinces

Rates of reporting of violent forms of victimization vary little from one region to another, with the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairie provinces, and British Columbia all recording similar rates. This was the case for both non-spousal victimization and spousal violence (Table 2). In addition, no region experienced a statistically significant change in levels of reporting of non-spousal violence between 1999 and 2009.

For spousal violence, the decrease in reporting at the national level was largely driven by Ontario. In this province, the proportion of spousal violence victims indicating that their victimization was reported to police dropped 11 percentage points over this ten-year period.

Reporting of household victimization to police was similar across Canada. Quebec's rate of reporting was higher (41%) while reporting of theft of personal property (22%) was significantly lower than the national average of 28%. Decreases in the reporting of household crime and theft of personal property were recorded in nearly all regions. The only exceptions were Quebec for household crime, and the Atlantic provinces and British Columbia for theft of personal property, where there were no statistically significant changes in reporting rates.

Textbox 2

International rates of reporting to police for specific offence types

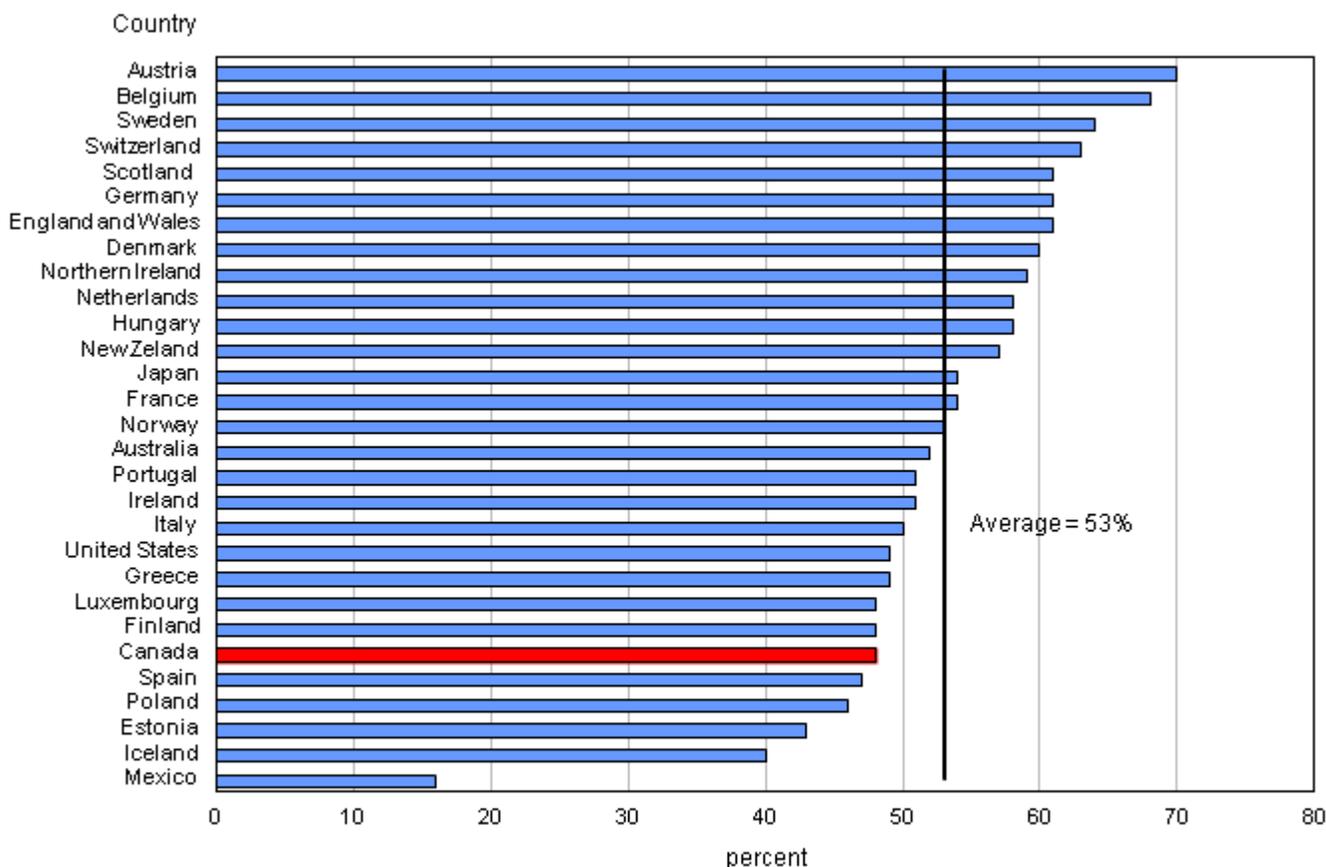
In addition to conducting the GSS on victimization, Canada has participated in the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS). The most recent cycle of the survey was conducted in 2004/2005 with 30 countries. The survey collected self-reported information from residents of 30 countries on their experiences of criminal victimization and reporting to police. Through the use of a standard questionnaire, survey procedures and techniques for producing the results, the ICVS has been able to address the challenges in comparing victimization data from various countries (Sauvé and Hung 2008).

Based on a combined reporting rate for five specific offence types (theft from a car, theft of a bicycle, burglary, attempted burglary and theft of personal property), Canada ranked slightly lower than the international average (Sauvé and Hung 2008). More precisely, 48% of Canadian victims reported these incidents to police, compared to the average of 53% among the 30 participating countries (Textbox chart). The highest reporting rates among participating countries were found in Austria and Belgium, at 70% and 68% respectively.

The survey also asked victims of break and enter about reasons for not reporting the incident. The most often cited reason was that the incident was not serious enough (34%), followed by the belief that the police could not do anything (21%) or that the police would not do anything (20%) (Van Dijk et al. 2007).

Textbox 2, continued
International rates of reporting to police for specific offence types

Text box 2 chart
Victimization incidents reported to police, by participating countries, 2004/2005



Note: Based on responses from victims of at least one out of the five types of offences (theft from a car, theft of a bicycle, burglary, attempted burglary and theft of personal property) in the year preceding the survey. In general, a difference of less than four percentage points between two countries is not statistically significant.

Source: Sauv , J. and K. Hung. 2008 (December). "An international perspective on criminal victimisation." Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X and Van Dijk, J., J. Van Kesteren and P. Smit. 2007. Criminal Victimization in International Perspective: Key Findings from the 2004-2005 ICVS and EU ICS. Tilburg University, UNICRI and UNODC.

Understanding trends in reporting to police

Criminal victimization incidents can come to the attention of police in a variety of ways. Victims may report the crime themselves; witnesses, family or friends may contact police; or the police may directly detect the criminal act. By and large, when incidents are reported, it is the victims who are most likely to report the criminal victimization incidents to police. In 2009, 65% of non-spousal violent incidents reported to police were initiated by the victim. The same was true for 69% of spousal violence victims, 73% of household victimization incidents, and 67% of thefts of personal property.

Consequently, trends over time in reporting crime to police have been driven primarily by the victims' desire to report to police, rather than the behaviours of others. For instance, between 1999 and 2009, victims' reporting of spousal violence fell from 19% to 15%, household victimization from 34% to 27% and theft of personal property from 26% to 19%. Over this same time period, there was no change in reporting in some other way (i.e., witnesses, police detection).

Reporting criminal victimization to police involves the consideration of a range of factors, with both the costs and benefits being weighed. The characteristics of victims and their relationship to the perpetrator, as well as the severity and circumstances of the crime can factor into the likelihood of crimes being reported. Closely related are the victims' personal motivations for either reporting the incident to police or dealing with the incident in another way. Any decision may also be influenced by the victims' previous contact with police and confidence in police.

Socio-demographic characteristics of victims⁵

Reporting non-spousal violence to police higher among older victims

The sex and age of the victim may impact reporting to police. However, in the case of non-spousal violence, police were as likely to learn about incidents involving female victims, as they were for incidents involving male victims. This was true in 2009, as well as a decade earlier.

While the sex of the victim had no bearing on reporting non-spousal violence to police, the age of the victim has played a role in reporting non-spousal violent victimization. In keeping with previous research on reporting patterns throughout the life course,⁶ non-spousal violent incidents involving young victims were reported less frequently than those involving older victims. In 2009, about one-quarter (24%) of violent incidents involving victims aged 15 to 34 were reported to the police, compared to about 39% of incidents for victims aged 35 years and older. While the size of the age disparity has varied over time, incidents involving younger victims have been consistently less likely to be reported to police, despite the fact that rates of non-spousal violence are higher among this group.

Over time, the reporting rates for non-spousal violence have remained stable for both women and men, and among victims of all ages. The profile of non-spousal violence victims has also remained unchanged. Non-spousal violent incidents have continued to be slightly more likely to involve male victims (54%) and much more likely to involve a victim under the age of 35 (over 60%).

Drop in reporting of spousal violence driven by female victims

In contrast to non-spousal violent victimization, significant differences exist between women and men in reporting spousal victimization incidents to police. In 2009, the rate of reporting for female victims was more than double the rate for male victims (30% versus 13%). Reporting rates by age followed a similar pattern as non-spousal violence, with younger victims of spousal violence having lower rates of reporting to police.

Because of the much higher rate of reporting among women, the decrease in the reporting of spousal violence overall was primarily driven by a drop in the reporting rates of spousal violence against women. In 2009, 30% of female victims indicated that their spousal victimization was reported to police, down from 36% in 2004 and 1999. This drop was evident for women of all ages.

The same decrease in reporting to police was not evident for male victims of spousal violence, which has held relatively constant over the same ten-year period. This lack of change reflects trends in reporting to police among men under 35, as the rate of reporting increased for male victims aged 35 years and older, from 21% to 30% between 2004 and 2009.

Other than sex and age, previous research based on the GSS has found mixed results for the connection between other socio-demographic characteristics and reporting to police (Sinha 2013). For instance, lower levels of educational attainment and lower incomes have been found to be related to higher rates of reporting non-spousal violence, but not spousal violence.

Crime severity

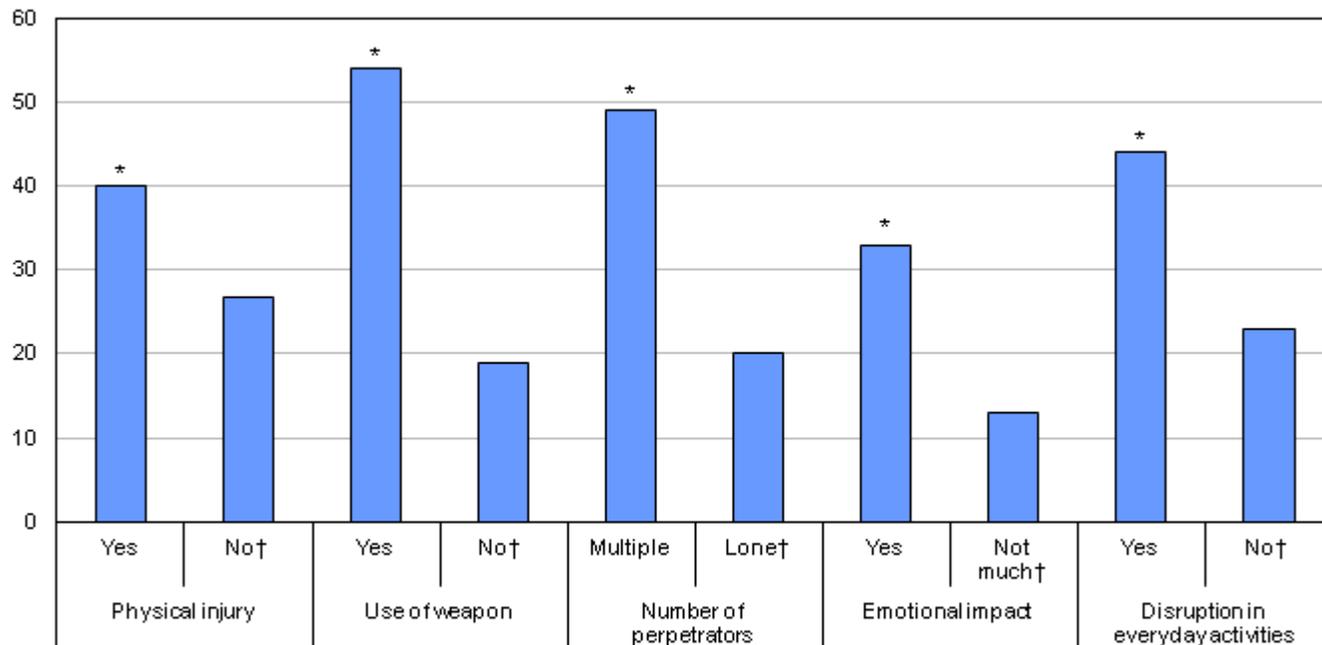
Rates of reporting non-spousal violence increase with offence severity

Previous research has found that the heightened severity of an offence increases the involvement of police (Tarling & Morris 2010; Goudriaan et. al 2006; Skogan 1994). This is also the case with the GSS, regardless of the type of victimization.

For non-spousal violence, traditional indicators of severity include the level of injury sustained by the victim, the use of a weapon, and the involvement of multiple perpetrators. Based on the 2009 GSS, the reporting rate to police for non-spousal incidents of violence involving bodily harm stood at 40% in 2009, about 1.5 times higher than for those incidents involving no physical injury (27%) (Chart 2). An even greater difference in rates of reporting was noted when a weapon was involved. Over half (54%) of incidents involving a weapon, whether it was a knife, firearm, or other weapon, came to the attention of police in 2009. This was almost three times higher than the reporting rate of violent incidents where no weapon was used (19%).

Chart 2
Rates of reporting increase with severity of non-spousal violence, 2009

Level of reporting to police (percent)



† reference category

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

Note: Refers to incidents occurring in the previous 12 months. Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded. Responses of 'don't know' and 'not stated' are included in the total but not shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2009.

Incidents with multiple perpetrators were also more likely to be reported to the police. When more than one offender was involved, the rate of reporting was almost 2.5 times higher than for those incidents carried out by a lone perpetrator (49% versus 20%).⁷

The relationship between reporting to police and crime severity mirror what was observed ten years earlier, and confirms that the heightened severity of non-spousal violent victimization is related to a higher level of reporting to police. Correspondingly, any shifts in crime severity may impact reporting rates.

Indeed, the three measures of offence seriousness associated with reporting to police- injury, weapon use and multiple perpetrators - have remained unchanged over time, coinciding with the lack of change in rates of reporting to police. Between 1999 and 2009, there was no significant change in the likelihood of physical injury, with about one in five victims indicating that they were physically harmed as a result of the non-spousal violence. Similarly, the use of weapons in violent victimization has held steady, at around one-quarter of all non-spousal violent incidents. Furthermore, violent offences continued to be primarily committed by a lone offender, at around three-quarters of all non-spousal violent incidents.

Disruption in everyday activities increases reporting to police

Another important factor in reporting to police can be the victims' emotional response to their victimization. In general, heightened emotional impacts, such as feelings of anger, depression, and fear, were linked to a higher likelihood of reporting. Among non-spousal violence victims who expressed some type of emotional impact, 33% said the incident was reported to police in 2009. This compares to the 13% who reported the incident, despite saying that the impact was negligible.

Also closely related to reporting was a disruption in everyday activities. In 2009, victims who found it difficult or impossible to carry out their everyday activities were twice as likely to say the incident was reported to police (44% versus 23%).

There was no change in the proportion of non-spousal violence victims reporting an emotional impact or disruption in their daily routines between 1999 and 2009.

Decreased severity of spousal violence mirrors decrease in reporting to police

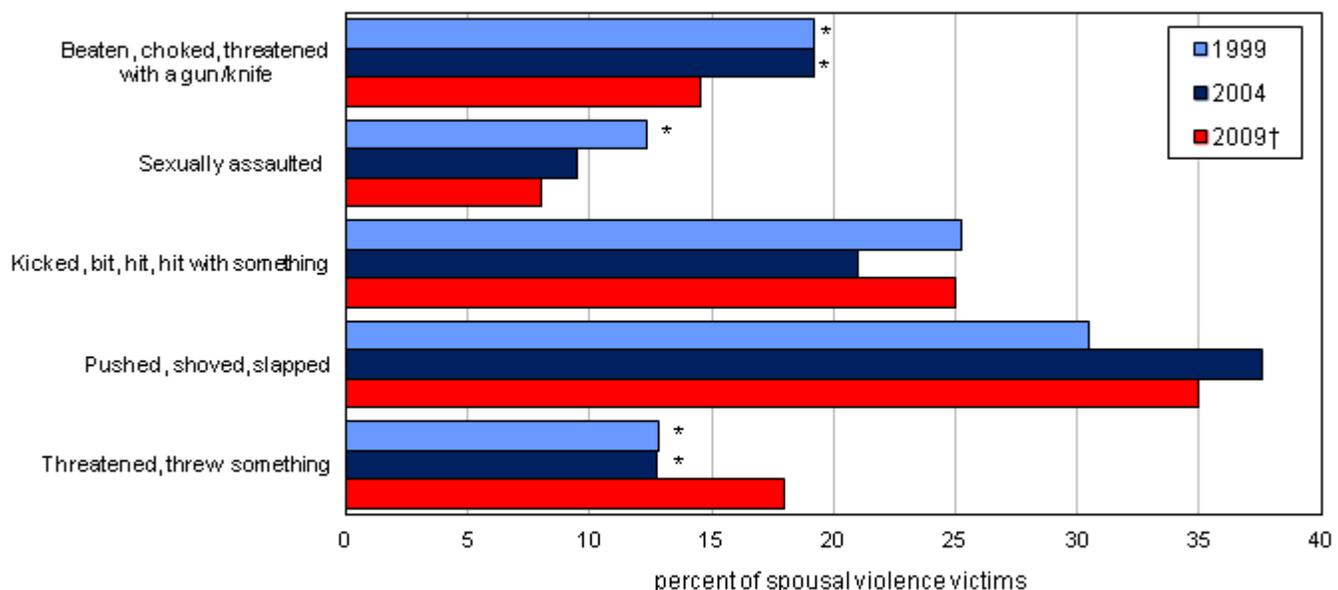
Offence severity also features prominently in reporting spousal violence to police. In 2009, more than half of victims who experienced the most severe forms of spousal violence indicated that the police were contacted, including 49% of victims who were sexually assaulted and 55% who were beaten, choked, or had a weapon used against them. This compares to 13% of spousal violence victims who experienced less severe forms of violence, namely being pushed, shoved or slapped. These patterns in reporting mirror those observed in 1999 and 2004.

Physical injury also heightened the possibility of police involvement, particularly if the injury required medical attention. In 2009, 65% of spousal violence victims who sustained an injury requiring medical attention said that the police were contacted, compared to 38% of victims with an injury not needing medical attention and 13% with no injury. Similarly, reporting to police was higher for spousal violence victims who said that the incident affected them emotionally and who feared for their lives.

There is some evidence to suggest that the severity of spousal violence has decreased, mirroring the decline in rates of reporting spousal violence to police. The proportion of victims experiencing the most severe forms of violence has dropped, with fewer victims being beaten, choked, or threatened with a weapon in 2009 (15%) than a decade earlier (19%) (Chart 3). Meanwhile, the least severe forms of spousal violence became more common, with threats increasing from 13% to 18% of all spousal violence victims. These patterns were primarily driven by victimization patterns against female spousal violence victims.

Chart 3

Self-reported spousal violence victims less likely to be beaten, choked, threatened with a weapon in 2009, compared to earlier years



† reference category

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Note: Refers to victims who experienced violence in the previous five years. Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded. Response of 'don't know' and not stated are included in the total but are not shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999, 2004 and 2009.

Furthermore, spousal violence victims were also less likely in 2009 to say that the violence did not have an emotional impact on them (12% versus 19% in 1999) and less likely to say they feared for their lives (19% versus 24%). There was, however, no change in the level of injury in 2009, compared to 2004 and 1999.

Household crimes with greater dollar loss more often reported

The seriousness of non-violent victimization⁸ can be measured by examining both the tangible and intangible costs associated with these types of victimizations. Property loss represents a measure of the tangible costs of household crime, and can be quantified by examining the dollar value of property stolen and/or damaged. In general, the greater the dollar loss, the more likely the property crime was reported to police. In 2009, about 7 in 10 household incidents with a dollar loss of at least \$1,000 came to the attention of police. This increased to 90% when the loss totalled \$5,000 or more. In comparison, 27% of incidents with a loss of less than \$500 were reported to police.

The dollar loss, an indicator of severity, is also closely tied to pragmatic reasons for reporting. A police report is often required to obtain insurance compensation to cover the cost of the property loss, and may only be filed when the value of the stolen/damaged property is greater than the insurance deductible amount.⁹ Based on the 2009 GSS, reporting to police was higher when the victim had insurance (39% versus 24% without insurance), with the likelihood of reporting increasing when an insurance claim was filed. In particular, an estimated 84% of household incidents that lead to an insurance claim were reported to police. This was nearly three times higher than the reporting rate when no insurance claim was filed (29%).

In addition, self-reported incidents of break and enter were generally more likely to be reported to police than incidents of attempted break and enter. In 2009, 58% of completed break and enters were reported to police, compared to 43% of attempted ones. Completion of the crime, however, had no impact on reporting motor vehicle thefts or thefts of household property to police.

Decrease in reporting crimes with larger financial losses

After adjusting for inflation, the likelihood of reporting household incidents with a dollar loss of \$1,000 or more dropped from 84% to 68% between 1999 and 2009.¹⁰ Research has suggested that an increase in standard of living reduces the actual worth of stolen items over time (Tarling & Morris 2013), which may decrease victims' tendencies to report this sort of victimization to police.

The value of property stolen or damaged also fell over the ten-year period. Fewer household crimes had a dollar loss of \$1,000 or more in 2009, compared to ten years earlier: 16% versus 22% in 1999. This drop in overall dollar loss was not uniformly observed for property stolen versus property damaged, or for all types of household crimes. For example, the decrease in dollar loss was seen for stolen property but not for damaged property. Also, the dollar loss of break and enter and vandalism did not change, while the proportion of incidents resulting in a loss of at least \$1,000 dropped for thefts of motor vehicle/parts and theft of household property.

Similar to household crimes, the decrease in reporting thefts of personal property to police follows the same trend in severity. The proportion of thefts resulting in a loss of \$1,000 or more dropped. However, unlike household crimes, a decrease was seen in the reporting of both personal property stolen and personal property damaged.

Consistent with violent victimization, when victims indicated that the incident had impacted them emotionally, reporting levels to police were higher compared to incidents resulting in very little emotional impact (40% versus 23%, respectively). Similarly, the reporting rate was higher when incidents required the victim to take time off work to replace or repair property or to visit insurance agents. At 59%, the 2009 rate of reporting for household victimization incidents that had disrupted the everyday activities of victims was nearly double the rate for incidents without any disruption (31%).

A somewhat higher proportion of victims in 2009 reported that the incident did not have an emotional impact compared to 1999 (19% versus 16%). However, the percentage of household incidents that brought a disruption in everyday activities remained unchanged over the same period of time, at 18% of all household incidents.

Relationship between the victim and perpetrator

Non-spousal violence committed by family most often reported

In addition to the offence severity, the likelihood that police will be contacted can depend on other circumstances surrounding the violent incident, notably the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Family violence incidents committed by someone other than a spouse, such as a parent or sibling, were most likely to be reported to police. Such incidents had a reporting rate of 39% in 2009. This was followed by stranger-perpetrated violence, at 33%.

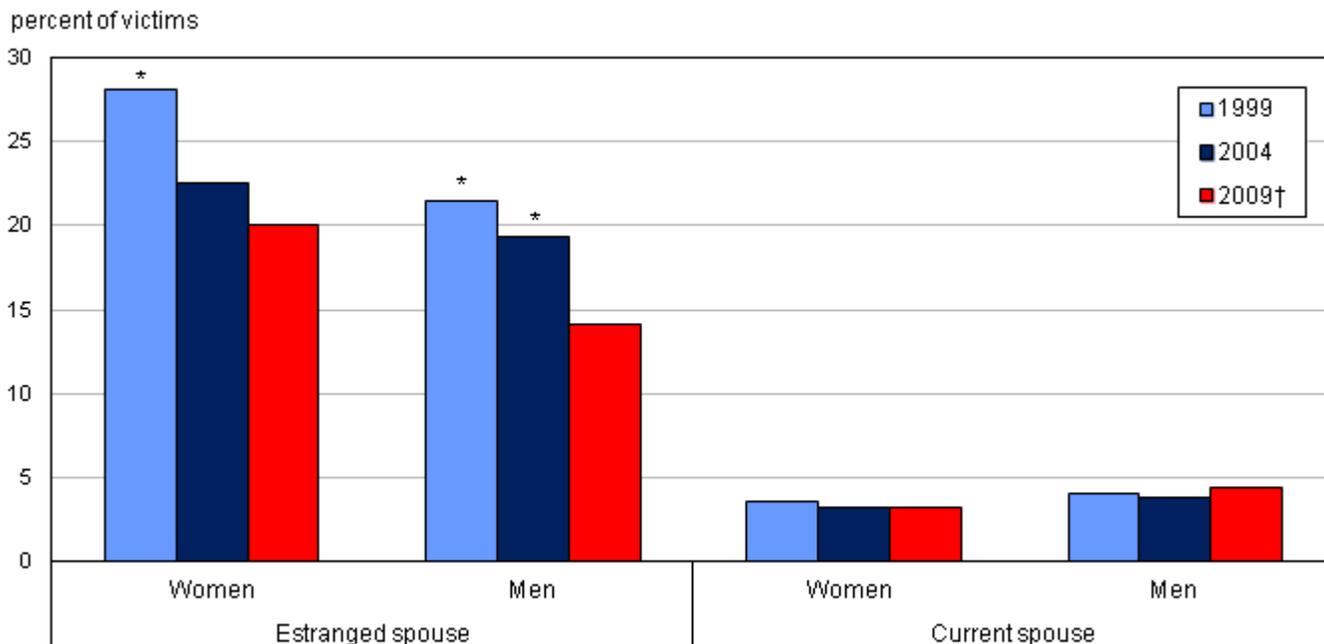
In contrast, acts of violence committed by an acquaintance, neighbour or friend were the least likely to be reported to the police, with less than one in five (18%) being reported. Rates of reporting for all three groups have remained constant over time.

Reporting rates higher for spousal violence involving estranged partner

Reporting rates varied greatly depending on the status of the spousal relationship. More than one-third (36%) of victims threatened or attacked by an estranged partner indicated that the police were contacted. This was more than three times higher than reporting for spousal violence involving a current partner (10%). A similar difference in reporting by marital status existed in 1999: 37% for violence by a previous spouse and 15% for violence by a current spouse.

While reporting rates involving estranged partners has held steady between 1999 and 2009, there has been a decrease in spousal violence against ex-spouses, the form of violence most often associated with reporting to police (Chart 4). This was true for both women and men.

Chart 4
Decrease in prevalence of spousal violence against ex-partners, 1999, 2004 and 2009



† reference category

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

Note: Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded.

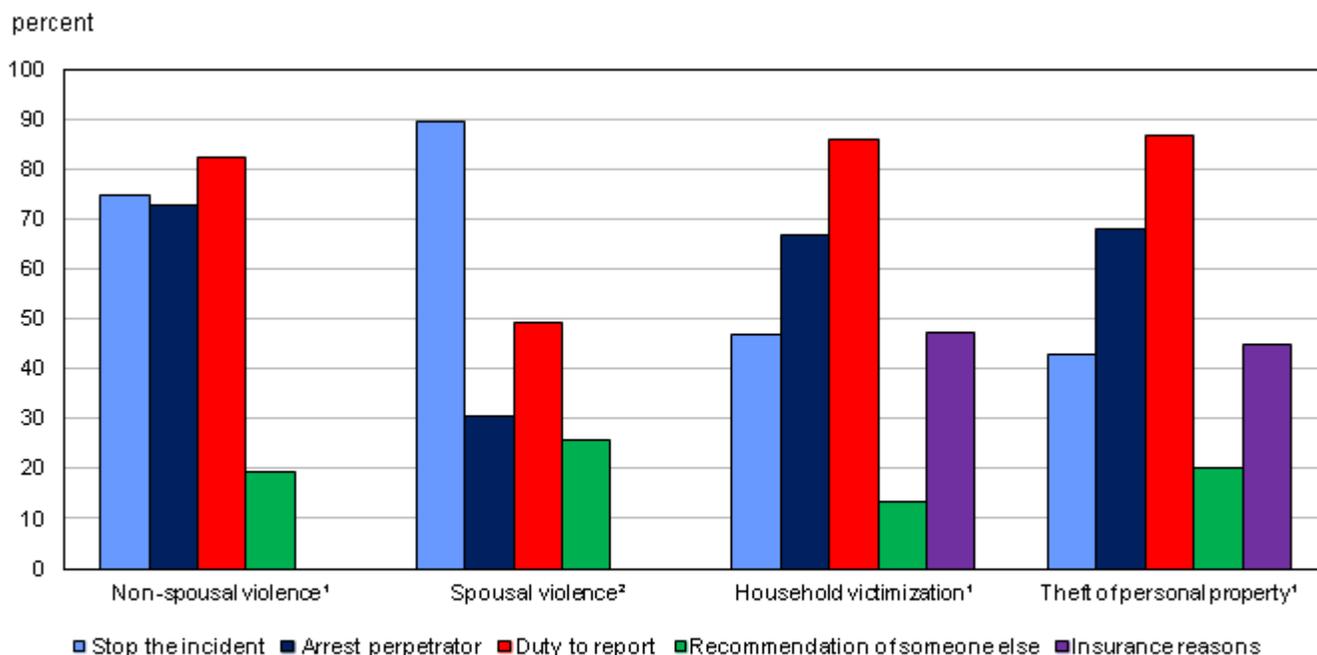
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999, 2004 and 2009.

Reasons for reporting and not reporting crime to police

Understanding the motivations underlying the decision to involve police provides some insight into trends in reporting to police. It can also generate a greater understanding of the possible ways to increase victims' participation in the administration of justice, namely reporting to police.

Reasons for reporting to police remained relatively constant over time. Topping the list of reasons for reporting violent victimization was the desire to stop the incident or receive protection from police, though this was more commonly cited by spousal violence victims.¹¹ In 2009, 89% of spousal violence victims who reported to police mentioned this as a reason for doing so (Chart 5). The same was said by 75% of victims of non-spousal violence who reported to police.

Chart 5
Reasons for reporting to police vary by victimization type, 2009



1. Refers to incidents occurring in the previous 12 months.

2. Refers to victims who experienced violence in the previous 5 years.

Note: Multiple responses are possible and therefore, the totals will not sum to 100%. Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded. Responses of 'don't know' and 'not stated' are included in the total but not shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2009.

A sense of duty and a desire to catch and punish the offender were leading reasons for reporting both non-spousal violence and non-violent victimization. These reasons, particularly a desire to arrest the perpetrator, were less prominent among spousal violence victims. In 2009, less than one-third (31%) of spousal violence victims cited arresting the perpetrator as a reason for contacting police. This represented a significant decrease from 1999, when 45% of spousal violence victims identified this as a reason for involving police.

At the same time, feeling a sense of duty has increased in proportion as a reason for reporting non-spousal violence and household crimes. In 2009, a sense of duty was mentioned in 82% of reported non-spousal violent incidents, up from 72% in 1999. For household victimization, the proportion citing a sense of duty increased from 80% to 86% over this time period. According to previous research, this same social conscience mindset may deter people from reporting victimization to police, as they feel a duty to avoid wasting police time and resources (Tarling & Morris 2010).

A desire to stop the incident also became a more common reason behind the reporting of household victimization (38% in 1999 and 47% in 2009), as did the reason that reporting was recommended by someone else (9% in 1999 versus 13% in 2009). At the same time, the desire to catch the perpetrator dropped in prevalence, from 75% in 1999 to 67% in 2009. Also dropping was insurance as a motivation for reporting (57% in 1999 to 47% in 2009), which may be explained by a decrease in those victims with an insurance policy.

'Not important enough' grows as a reason for not reporting spousal violence

Victims' motivations and rationale underlying the decision not to report to police can be critical in understanding trends in reporting, particularly when looking at drops in the reporting of spousal violence. Compared to previous years, a higher proportion of spousal violence victims in 2009 said that they did not report their experience to police because it was 'not important enough'. More specifically, 34% of victims of spousal violence did not regard the crime as serious enough in 2009 to report, compared to 25% in 1999. The growth in this main reason, which is also the leading reasons for not reporting spousal violence, mirrors the decrease in the severity in the types of spousal violence offences and the drop in the self-reported emotional consequences of spousal violence incidents.

The main reasons for not reporting household crime to police have remained relatively constant over time, with no significant changes overall. Victims' feeling that the incident was not important enough and that the police could not do anything remained the leading reasons for not reporting crime to police, at 26% and 40% respectively.

There were, however, a few changes over the decade in reasons given for not reporting particular types of non-violent offences to police. For instance, the reason that police could not do anything was less commonly reported for motor vehicle thefts in 2009 than in 1999 (18% versus 28%). Also, victims of theft of personal property were less likely to say they dealt with the offence in another way over the same ten-year period, from 16% to 12%.

Victims of non-spousal violence were less likely to say in 2009 that they did not report their victimization because they did not want to get the police involved (5% in 2009 compared to 10% in 1999). All other reasons stayed about the same over the ten-year period.

Contact with police and confidence in police

The perceived benefits of involving police can vary depending on victims' previous personal experiences with police and levels of confidence in police (Baumer 2002; Bosick et al. 2012). With the GSS, it is possible to examine victims' type of contact with police and their likelihood of reporting victimization to police. That said, it is not possible to determine if this contact occurred before or after their experiences of victimization. Perception of police is measured by looking at victims' assessments of police performance on a number of areas, as well as their overall levels of confidence in police.

A connection between reporting crime and victims' contact with police exists for non-spousal violence. In 2009, victims of non-spousal violence who attended a police information or crime prevention session in the previous 12 months were about 1.5 times more likely to turn to the police for help than those who did not attend such a session (35% versus 27%). Similarly, those who witnessed a crime were more likely to report their own victimization to police than those who had not (40% versus 25%).

On the other hand, victims who had previous contact with police because of a traffic violation had lower rates of reporting non-spousal violence. Among victims of non-spousal violence, 24% of those who had contact with police because of a traffic violation reported the incident of violence, compared to 30% of those without contact for a traffic violation. With the exception of attending an information session, these same patterns in reporting by nature of contact with police were evident in previous years.

No connection existed between reporting and previous contact with police for all other forms of victimization, including spousal violence, household victimization and theft of personal property.

Confidence in police not consistently linked to reporting to police

Previous research has suggested that levels of trust in police may be closely associated with the desire or reluctance to report experiences of victimization to police (Baumer 2002). Victims who have higher levels of confidence in police effectiveness have been found to be more apt to see the benefits of involving the criminal justice system, while the opposite has been noted for those with lower levels of confidence (Baumer 2002).

Certain measures of positive attitudes toward local police have been linked to higher levels of reporting crime to police, though this relationship has varied depending on the type of victimization, as well as the survey period being analyzed. For example, a positive perception of police in supplying crime prevention information was related to reporting non-spousal violence in 2009, but not in previous years or for other types of victimizations.

For spousal violence, only the global assessment of police was associated with higher reporting rates. In 2009, spousal violence victims who said that they had great confidence in police were nearly twice as likely to report their victimization to police as those who did not (22% versus 13%). It is not possible to examine this link in other time periods, since this question was first introduced in 2009.

Because of the mixed results in linking confidence in police and reporting crime to police, it is difficult to determine if any changes in victims' perception of police would have an impact on trends in reporting. Nevertheless, there were some notable changes in victims' assessment of police over the ten-year period. Victims' beliefs that police were doing a good job at being approachable decreased for both victims of non-spousal violence and non-violent crime between 1999 and 2009. Decreases were also evident in the role of police in supplying information on reducing crime and ensuring the safety of citizens. There was no change in spousal violence victims' assessments of police performance over time.

Summary

Based on the GSS, only about one-third of self-reported criminal victimization incidents in Canada are reported to police, though much variation exists across offence types. In the same vein, trends in reporting vary by offence type. Levels of reporting have held steady for non-spousal forms of violence, but have dropped for spousal violence victimization and non-violent forms of victimization.

The decrease in reporting spousal violence - driven primarily by drops in reporting among young female victims in Ontario - coincides with a decrease in certain indicators of crime severity and the reduction in rates of spousal violence by an estranged partner. The decrease in severity is reflected in the higher proportion of spousal violence victims in 2009 that said they did not report their experience to police because it was 'not important enough'.

The lack of change in reporting to police over the past decade for non-spousal violence mirrors the lack of change in the severity of these forms of victimization. There was also no change in the motivations for not reporting crime to police, though a sense of duty to report has grown as a reason for reporting.

For non-violent victimization, the decline in reporting to police accompanied a decrease in the tendency to report incidents with a large dollar loss and an overall decline in the actual financial loss of these types of victimizations.

With the forthcoming release of the 2014 GSS on Victimization, efforts should be made to determine if changes in reporting rates, or lack thereof, represent a long-term trend in reporting behaviour. Future research should also expand upon the factors influencing reporting to police, such as community indicators of social cohesion, and its impact on different segments of the victim population, particularly those with the lowest levels of reporting, such as young adults. Finally, as some relationships can change when other factors are held constant, multivariate analysis may shed further light on the strongest predictors of reporting to police.

Data source

This report is based on data from the 1999, 2004 and 2009 General Social Survey on Victimization. For this report, the target population consisted of persons aged 15 and older living in Canada's 10 provinces, excluding people living full-time in institutions.

For more information on the data sources, please consult the following documents:

2009

<http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=51198&Instald=49195&SDDS=4504>

2004

<http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=1715&Instald=7705&SDDS=4504>

1999

<http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=1715&Instald=5267&SDDS=4504>

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Notes

1. Includes both attempted and completed incidents.
2. All differences presented are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), unless otherwise noted.
3. Includes break and enter, theft of motor vehicle/parts, household property theft and vandalism.
4. Spousal violence incidents refer to the previous 5 years.
5. For household crimes, it would not be accurate to examine reporting of the incident in relation to the sex and age of the victim. The victim who reported the incident to the GSS was just one of the members in the household that was victimized.
6. See Bosick et al. 2012.
7. Incidents involving multiple perpetrators were still more likely to be reported than those involved a lone perpetrator, even when controlling for physical injury and weapon use.
8. Includes household crime (break and enter, theft of motor vehicle/parts, and theft of household property) and theft of personal property.
9. When the dollar value was at least \$1,000, 42% resulted in a request for insurance compensation. This figure decreased to 6% when the dollar value was under \$1,000.
10. All trend comparisons on dollar loss are based on 2009 constant dollars.
11. Includes victims who reported the victimization to police themselves.

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Victimization incidents reported to police, by type of offence, 1999, 2004 and 2009

Type of offence	1999		2004		2009 [†]	
	number ('000)	percent reported	number ('000)	percent reported	number ('000)	percent reported
Total non-spousal victimization	2,417	37[*]	2,613	34[*]	2,770	31
Non-spousal violent victimization	603	31	687	33	777	29
Sexual assault	F	F	42 ^E	8 ^E	F	F
Robbery	105	46	127	46	158	43
Physical assault	460	37	519	39	572	34
Household victimization	1,181	44[*]	1,188	37	1,160	36
Break and enter	365	62 [*]	275	54	337	54
Motor vehicle/parts theft	303	60 [*]	281	49	227	50
Household property theft	240	32 [*]	330	29 [*]	250	23
Vandalism	273	34	303	31 [*]	346	35
Theft of personal property	633	35[*]	738	31	833	28

^E Use with caution

F Too unreliable to be published

[†] reference category

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

Note: Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded. Responses of 'don't know' and 'not stated' are included in the total but not shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999, 2004, 2009.

Table 2
Victimization reported to police, by region, 1999 and 2009

	Non-spousal violence ¹		Spousal violence ²		Household victimization ¹		Theft of personal property ¹	
	1999	2009 [†]	1999	2009 [†]	1999	2009 [†]	1999	2009 [†]
	percent reported to police							
Canada	31	29	28[*]	22	44[*]	36	35[*]	28
Atlantic provinces	35	35	27	28	42 [*]	35	23	25
Quebec	36	28	20	20	46	41 ^{**}	30 [*]	22 ^{**}
Ontario	30	27	31 [*]	20	43 [*]	33	34 [*]	29
Prairies	33	34	29	26	44 [*]	36	41 [*]	29
British Columbia	22	25	29	21	46 [*]	37	39	35

[†] reference category

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

** significantly different from reference category, Canada, 2009 (p < 0.05)

1. Refers to incidents occurring in the previous 12 months.

2. Refers to victims who experienced violence in the previous 5 years.

Note: Data from the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut were collected using a different methodology and are therefore excluded. Responses of 'don't know' and 'not stated' are included in the total but not shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999 and 2009.