

## **Violent victimization and discrimination, by religious affiliation in Canada, 2014**

by Dyna Ibrahim  
Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

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## Violent victimization and discrimination, by religious affiliation in Canada, 2014: Highlights

- According to the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), individuals who reported no religious affiliation experienced a higher rate of violent victimization (113 incidents per 1,000 population) than Christians (67 per 1,000 population). This difference was in large part attributed to age as individuals with no religious affiliation tended to be younger. People who reported a religion other than Christianity (72<sup>E</sup> per 1,000 population) experienced violent victimization at a rate similar to Christians.
- People affiliated with a non-Christian religion were significantly more likely to report experiencing discrimination on the basis of their religion in the previous five years than Christians (11% compared to 1%).

# Violent victimization and discrimination, by religious affiliation in Canada, 2014

by Dyna Ibrahim

Canada has become increasingly more diverse ethno-culturally and also in terms of religious affiliation. There has been a rise in the proportion of people who report religious affiliation other than Christianity—the religion of the majority of Canadians. In 2011, Statistics Canada estimated that about one in ten (9%) Canadians was affiliated with a religion other than Christianity, a significantly larger proportion compared to decades prior.<sup>1</sup> It was projected that by 2036, this proportion could almost double to between 13% and 16% of the population (Morency et al. 2017).

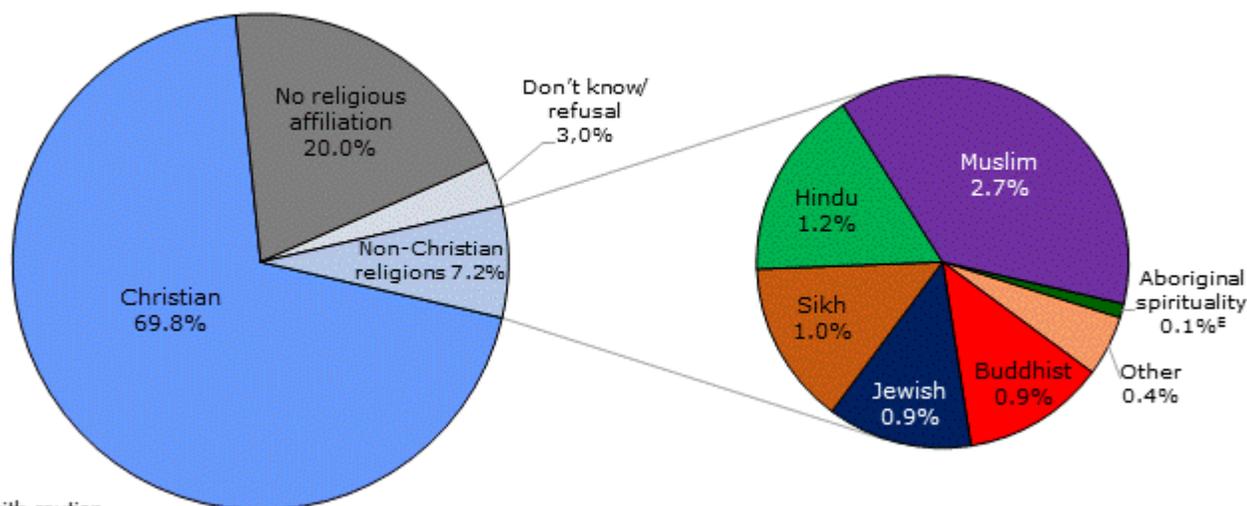
Every five years Statistics Canada conducts the General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), which collects self-reported information on the experiences of victimization among Canadians 15 years of age and older, as well as their religious affiliation. In order to better inform discussions related to diversity and security, this *Juristat* article examines the victimization and discrimination experiences of Canadians with diverse religious affiliations as well as their perceptions of safety and the police.

## Text box 1 Religious affiliation of Canadians, 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization

In this report, religious affiliation refers to the person's self-identification as having a connection or association with any religious denomination, group, body, sect, cult or other religiously defined community or system of belief. Religious affiliation is not limited to formal membership in a religious organization or group. Moreover, religious affiliation differs from religious practices such as participation in ceremonies or prayers and religiosity (devotion, importance of religion in an individual's life, etc.).

The 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization) found that close to four out of five (77%) Canadians 15 years of age and older identified with some form of religion, most commonly Christianity (70%) (Text box 1 chart).<sup>2</sup> The proportion of the population affiliated with a religion other than Christianity grew from 5% in 2004 to 7% in 2014, while about one in five (20%) people did not have a religious affiliation.<sup>3,4</sup> It is important to note, however, that no religious affiliation does not necessarily indicate absence of spiritual beliefs. Persons without a religious affiliation may self-identify as atheist, agnostic or humanist.<sup>5</sup>

**Text box 1 chart**  
**Religious affiliation of Canadians aged 15 years and older, 2014**



† use with caution  
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

## Violent victimization and religious affiliation

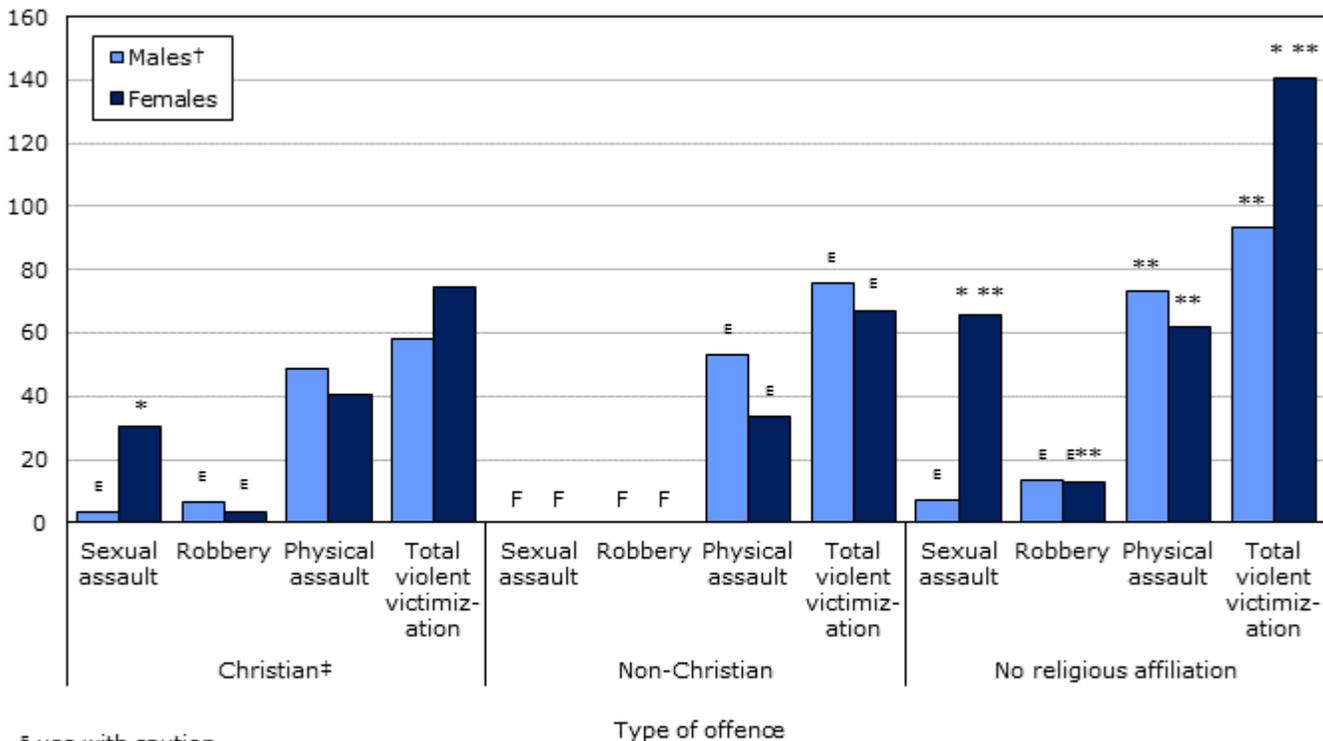
### Rate of violent victimization higher among individuals with no religious affiliation

The 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization measured self-reported violent victimization which includes three types of offences: sexual assault, robbery and physical assault. Individuals who reported no religious affiliation experienced higher rates of violent victimization (113 incidents per 1,000 population) than Christians (67 per 1,000 population).<sup>6</sup> This difference was mainly attributable to age; people with no religious affiliation were typically younger, with more than one-third of them being between the ages of 15 and 29 years, the age group most at risk of violent victimization (Perreault 2015).<sup>7, 8</sup> The rate of violent victimization among individuals who reported a religion other than Christianity (72<sup>E</sup> per 1,000 population) was not significantly different when compared to Christians.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to age, one's sex has generally been linked to the risk of violent victimization. According to the 2014 GSS on Victimization, women in general were at a higher risk of violent victimization than men (Perreault 2015). At a rate of 141 incidents per 1,000 population, women with no religious affiliation were significantly more likely to have reported experiencing violence than men with no religious affiliation (93 per 1,000 population) (Chart 1; Table 1). Among Christians and non-Christians, however, women and men experienced violent victimization at similar overall rates.

**Chart 1**  
**Violent victimization by sex, religious affiliation and type of offence, 2014**

rate per 1,000 population



<sup>E</sup> use with caution

<sup>F</sup> too unreliable to be published

\* significantly different from reference category (†) (p < 0.05)

\*\* significantly different from reference category (‡) (p < 0.05)

† reference category

‡ reference category

**Note:** Responses of "Don't know/refusal" are included in the calculation.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

## Characteristics of violent incidents and reporting to police

Results from the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization indicate that generally, the nature of the violent incidents reported by Canadians did not vary by religious affiliation. Overall, most individuals experienced a single incident and did not believe the incident was a hate crime. Additionally, most incidents involved a male offender—although this proportion was slightly lower among individuals with no religious affiliation (80%) than Christians (88%).

Most violent incidents experienced by individuals affiliated with a Christian religion (68%) or those with no religious affiliation (71%) did not come to the attention of police.<sup>10</sup> Among victims who indicated that they were affiliated with a religion other than Christianity, nearly half (46%<sup>E</sup>) of the incidents did not come to the attention of police.

Among Christians and individuals with no religious affiliation, the most common reasons for not reporting the violent incident to police were that victims felt that the incident was minor and not worth taking the time to report and that victims considered the incident to be a private or personal matter to be handled informally.<sup>11, 12</sup> Victims who were affiliated with a religion other than Christianity and who did not report the incident to the police most often indicated that it was because they did not want the hassle of dealing with the police (62%<sup>E</sup>).

## Experiences of discrimination and religious affiliation

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* prohibits discrimination based on religion (*Canadian Human Rights Act*). The 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization asked respondents about their experiences, if any, with discrimination in the previous five years.<sup>13</sup> This included the perceived reasons for the discrimination that they experienced and the situation in which it happened.

### People affiliated with a religion other than Christianity more likely to report discrimination based on religion

The 2014 GSS on Victimization found that, overall, 2% of the population aged 15 years and older (about 600,000 people) reported experiencing discrimination on the basis of their religion in the preceding five years. Individuals who were affiliated with a non-Christian religion were significantly more likely to report that they experienced discrimination because of their religion. About one in ten (11%) individuals with a non-Christian religion indicated that they faced discrimination based on their religion in the previous five years compared to 1% of people with a Christian religion. Regardless of religious affiliation, similar proportions of men and women reported experiencing discrimination on the basis of religion in the previous five years.

Overall, the proportion of Christians and non-Christians who reported experiencing discrimination based on religion remained unchanged from what was reported 10 years prior.<sup>14</sup>

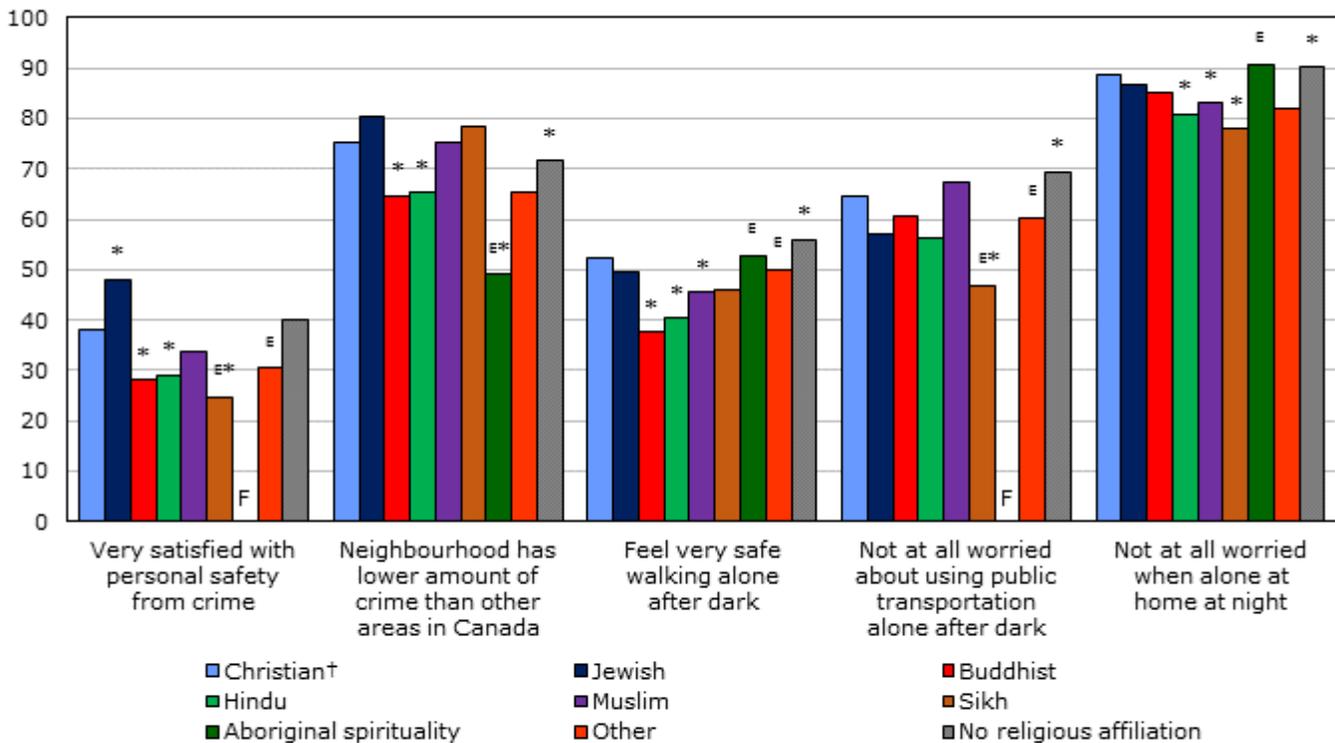
## Religious affiliation and perceptions of safety

### Non-Christians least likely to report feeling 'very satisfied' with personal safety from crime

Results from the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization showed that the vast majority of Canadians were satisfied with their personal safety from crime.<sup>15</sup> However, people who identified with a religion other than Christianity were less likely to report that they were "very satisfied" with their personal safety from crime (32%) compared to Christians and individuals with no religious affiliation (38% and 40%, respectively). Specifically, Sikhs (25%<sup>E</sup>), Hindus (29%) and Buddhists (28%) were the least likely to report that they were "very satisfied" (Chart 2). Jewish individuals were more likely than Christians to have expressed that they were "very satisfied" with their safety from crime (48% versus 38%).

**Chart 2**  
**Feelings of personal safety from crime, by religious affiliation, 2014**

percent



‡ use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

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

† reference category

**Note:** Responses of "Don't know/refusal" are included in the calculation.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

Although most Canadians felt that they lived in a neighbourhood with less crime than other areas of the country (74%), individuals with a non-Christian religion (6%) and those with no religious affiliation (5%) were more likely to feel that their neighbourhoods had a higher amount of crime (when compared to 3% of Christian individuals).

Other measures of personal safety show similar patterns. For example, less than half (45%) of individuals with a non-Christian religion felt "very safe" from crime when walking alone in their area at night compared to 52% of Christians and 56% of individuals with no religious affiliation. Buddhists (38%), Hindus (40%) and Muslims (45%) were less likely than Christians to say they felt "very safe" from crime while walking alone in their area at night. Similarly, among those who sometimes spent time alone at home at night, a lower proportion of individuals affiliated with a non-Christian religion (83%)—especially Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims—were "not at all worried" about their safety from crime when compared to Christians (89%) and non-religious individuals (90%).

### Religious affiliation and perceptions of police

Perceptions about police varied among Canadians with different religious backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> For example, Jewish, Buddhists, those affiliated with Aboriginal spirituality and Sikhs were generally less likely than Christians to give their local police a good rating. Meanwhile, Muslims were more likely to indicate that the police do a good job when it comes to enforcing the laws, promptly responding to calls and ensuring the safety of citizens. Across the six elements of police performance measured by the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, individuals with no religious affiliation were generally less likely to give the police a good rating.

When asked about their confidence in the police, Christians and non-Christians generally had a similar level of confidence, and both groups had higher confidence than did individuals with no religious affiliation. However, Buddhists (31%) and individuals affiliated with Aboriginal spirituality (23%<sup>‡</sup>) were less likely to have a "great deal" of confidence compared to Christian individuals (48%). In contrast, more than half (53%) of Muslim individuals indicated they had a "great deal" of confidence in the police, a higher proportion than among Christians.

## Summary

Findings from the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians' Safety (Victimization) indicate that most Canadians report being affiliated with a religion. Christianity was the religion of the majority of Canadians, while people who were affiliated with non-Christian religions represented 7% of the total population. One in five Canadians did not have a religious affiliation.

When the experiences of violent victimization of Canadians were examined in the context of religious affiliation, age—a factor known to be linked to violent victimization—played a significant role. People who did not report a religious affiliation were typically younger than those affiliated with a Christian religion. The individuals who had no religious affiliation, and therefore were generally younger, were over 1.5 times more likely to have reported experiencing violent victimization than Christians. Canadians affiliated with a religion other than Christianity experienced violent victimization at a rate not significantly different from Christian individuals.

Individuals affiliated with non-Christian religions were more likely to report experiencing discrimination on the basis of religion.

## Survey description

### General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization)

In 2014, Statistics Canada conducted the victimization cycle of the General Social Survey (GSS) for the sixth time. Previous cycles were conducted in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004 and 2009. The purpose of the survey is to provide data on Canadians' personal experiences with eight offences, examine the risk factors associated with victimization, examine rates of reporting to the police, assess the nature and extent of spousal violence, measure fear of crime, and examine public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system.

The 2014 GSS on Victimization was also conducted in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut using a different sampling design. The GSS on Victimization was also conducted in the Territories in 2009 and was preceded by test collections in 1999 and 2004.

In 2009, comparisons between the data from the territories and the provinces were to be made with caution primarily because the Inuit population was underrepresented in the territories. In 2014, as a result of advancements made to the frame and higher response rates, data in the territories can be compared, or combined, with data for the provinces. It is noteworthy, however, to keep in mind differences in survey methods and weighting strategies for the provinces and territories when analyzing GSS 2014 data at the Canada level. This report combined 2014 GSS on Victimization data from both the provinces and territories.

The target population for the GSS on Victimization is the Canadian population aged 15 and over, living in the provinces and territories. Canadians residing in institutions are not included. Once a household was contacted an individual 15 years or older was randomly selected to respond to the survey. With funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Public Safety Canada, an oversample of immigrants and youth was added to the 2014 GSS on Victimization for a more detailed analysis of these groups.

In 2014, the sample size for the 10 provinces was 33,127 respondents. Of that number, 2,787 were from the oversample. In 2014, the sample size for the three territories was 2,040 respondents, about twice the number of respondents in 2009 (1,094).

### Data collection

#### Provinces

Data collection took place from January to December 2014 inclusively. Responses were obtained by computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). Respondents were able to respond in the official language of their choice.

#### Territories

Data collection took place from August 2014 to January 2015 inclusively. The method of collection was a mixture of computer-assisted telephone (CATI) and personal interviews (CAPI). Most cases started as CATI at the regional office and could be transferred to a CAPI-interviewer depending on the community and collection constraints. Respondents were interviewed in the official language of their choice.

## Response rates

### Provinces

The overall response rate in 2014 was 52.9%, down from 61.6% in 2009. Non-respondents included people who refused to participate, could not be reached, or could not speak English or French. Respondents in the sample were weighted so that their responses represent the non-institutionalized Canadian population aged 15 and older.

### Territories

The overall response rate was 58.7%, up from 50.7% in 2009. Non-respondents included people who refused to participate, could not be reached, or could not speak English or French. Respondents in the sample were weighted so that their responses represent the non-institutionalized territories population aged 15 and older.

### Data limitations

As with any household survey, there are some data limitations. The results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to sampling errors. Somewhat different results might have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed. This article uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. Estimates with a high CV (over 33.3%) were not published because they were too unreliable. In these cases, the symbol "F" is used in place of an estimate in the figures and data tables. Estimates with a CV between 16.6 and 33.3 should be used with caution and the symbol "E" is used. Where descriptive statistics and cross-tabular analyses were used, statistically significant differences were determined using 95% confidence intervals.

## References

*Canadian Human Rights Act, R.S.C. 1985. c. H-6.*

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Morency, Jean-Dominique, Éric Caron Malenfant and Samuel Maclsaac. 2017. *Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91-551-X.

Perreault, Samuel. 2015. "Criminal victimization in Canada, 2014." *Juristat*. Statistics Canada catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Statistics Canada. 2013. *National Household Survey: Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity*. 2011. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-010-X.

## Notes

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

1. The most recent religious affiliation information available for the Canadian population are from the 2011 National Household Survey. The question on religion was not included in the 2016 Census as it has only been asked every 10 years, since 1871.
2. Estimates of religious affiliation from the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization were in line with those from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS)—the most recent population estimates available on religious affiliation. According to the 2011 NHS, 67% of the population reported an affiliation with a Christian religion, 9% reported a religious affiliation other than Christianity and 24% had no religious affiliation (Morency et al. 2017; Statistics Canada 2013).
3. Unless otherwise specified, all differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).
4. The diversity of religions in Canada is in large part due to its growing immigrant population, especially in recent years (see Statistics Canada 2013; Ibrahim 2018).
5. Individuals with no religious affiliation may also provide another applicable response.
6. Unless otherwise specified, all differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).
7. According to the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization, 38% of individuals aged 15 years and older who reported no religious affiliation were between 15 and 29 years of age, compared to 19% of Christians.
8. The age-standardized rate of violent victimization of individuals with no religious affiliation was not statistically significant when compared to Christian individuals (79 incidents per 1,000 population versus 67 per 1,000 population).

9. Victimization rates by detailed type of religion were too unreliable to be published.

10. The answers "Don't know" and "Refusal" are included in the calculation of the percentages.

11. Among victims who did not report the incident to police, 66% of victims affiliated with a Christian religion and 75% of victims who did not have a religious affiliation felt that the incident was minor and not worth taking the time to report. This reason was cited by 44%<sup>E</sup> of victims affiliated with a non-Christian religion who did not report the incident to police.

12. Among victims who did not report the incident to police, two-thirds (66%) of victims affiliated with a Christian religion and 60% of victims who reported no religious affiliation considered the incident to be a private or personal matter to be handled informally. Less than half (43%<sup>E</sup>) of victims affiliated with a non-Christian religion and who did not report the incident to police felt the same way.

13. In this report, discrimination refers to an individual's perception of discrimination. The General Social Survey on Victimization asked respondents whether or not they had experienced discrimination or had been treated unfairly by others in the past 5 years (because of their sex, ethnicity or culture, race or skin colour, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, language or any other reason).

14. Due to differences in methodology, data from the territories are not included in the trend analysis.

15. Respondents were asked to describe their satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. About 88% of Canadians 15 years of age and older were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their personal safety from crime.

16. The General Social Survey on Victimization asked respondents whether their local police force does a good job, an average job or a poor job in terms of six specific measures: enforcing the laws; promptly responding to calls; being approachable and easy to talk to; supplying information to the public on ways to prevent crime; ensuring the safety of citizens in the area; and treating people fairly.

## Detailed data tables

**Table 1**  
**Violent victimization incidents reported by Christians, non-Christians and individuals with no religious affiliation, by selected victim characteristics, Canada, 2014**

Selected victim characteristics	Christian <sup>‡</sup>		Non-Christian		No religious affiliation	
	number (000's)	rate	number (000's)	rate	number (000's)	rate
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,376</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>153<sup>E</sup></b>	<b>72<sup>E</sup></b>	<b>670</b>	<b>113<sup>**</sup></b>
<b>Sex</b>						
Male <sup>†</sup>	560	58	85 <sup>E</sup>	76 <sup>E</sup>	315	93 <sup>**</sup>
Female	816	74	67 <sup>E</sup>	67 <sup>E</sup>	355	141 <sup>**</sup>
<b>Age group (years)</b>						
15 to 24 <sup>†</sup>	414	160	54 <sup>E</sup>	133 <sup>E</sup>	253	183
25 to 34	280	103 <sup>*</sup>	F	F	237	145 <sup>*</sup>
35 to 44	210	69 <sup>*</sup>	F	F	85 <sup>E</sup>	80 <sup>E*</sup>
45 to 54	268	68 <sup>*</sup>	F	F	59 <sup>E</sup>	73 <sup>E*</sup>
55 to 64	142	38 <sup>*</sup>	F	F	F	F
65 and older	62 <sup>E</sup>	13 <sup>E*</sup>	F	F	F	F
<b>Marital status</b>						
Married or common-law	568	44 <sup>*</sup>	70 <sup>E</sup>	51 <sup>E*</sup>	233	76 <sup>**</sup>
Separated, widowed or divorced	156 <sup>E</sup>	58 <sup>E*</sup>	F	F	58 <sup>E</sup>	142 <sup>E**</sup>
Single, never married <sup>†</sup>	652	135	70 <sup>E</sup>	112 <sup>E</sup>	379	156
<b>Aboriginal identity</b>						
Non-Aboriginal people <sup>†</sup>	1,279	64	133 <sup>E</sup>	63 <sup>E</sup>	624	111 <sup>**</sup>
Aboriginal people <sup>1</sup>	94 <sup>E</sup>	145 <sup>E*</sup>	F	F	45 <sup>E</sup>	165 <sup>E**</sup>
<b>Immigrant status</b>						
Non-immigrant <sup>†</sup>	1,204	72	89 <sup>E</sup>	146 <sup>E**</sup>	614	128 <sup>**</sup>
Immigrant	131 <sup>E</sup>	37 <sup>E*</sup>	54 <sup>E</sup>	39 <sup>E*</sup>	44 <sup>E</sup>	47 <sup>E*</sup>
Immigrated between 2005 and 2014	F	F	F	F	F	F
Immigrated before 2005	105 <sup>E</sup>	39 <sup>E</sup>	24 <sup>E</sup>	28 <sup>E</sup>	35 <sup>E</sup>	51 <sup>E</sup>
<b>Visible minority status</b>						
Non-visible minority <sup>†</sup>	1,232	68	70 <sup>E</sup>	133 <sup>E**</sup>	614	54 <sup>E*</sup>
Visible minority <sup>2</sup>	137 <sup>E</sup>	58 <sup>E</sup>	82 <sup>E</sup>	52 <sup>E*</sup>	48 <sup>E</sup>	124 <sup>E**</sup>
<b>Sexual orientation<sup>3</sup></b>						
Heterosexual <sup>†</sup>	1,188	62	119 <sup>E</sup>	62 <sup>E</sup>	514	98 <sup>**</sup>
Homosexual or bisexual	54 <sup>E</sup>	137 <sup>E*</sup>	F	F	88 <sup>E</sup>	323 <sup>E***</sup>
Don't know/refusal	135 <sup>E</sup>	123 <sup>E</sup>	F	F	68 <sup>E</sup>	171 <sup>E</sup>

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

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

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

† reference category

‡ reference category

1. Includes those who self-identified as First Nation, Métis or Inuit.

2. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour".

3. Includes persons aged 18 years and older only.

**Note:** Rates are calculated per 1,000 population aged 15 years and older. The answers "Don't know" and "Refusal" are included in the calculation, but may not appear in the table. Because of the inclusion of the answers "Don't know" and "Refusal" and of rounding, counts may not add up to totals.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.