



Brief for Study on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide

Prepared by the Ending Violence Association of Canada for submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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About EVA Canada

The [Ending Violence Association of Canada](#) is a national non-profit organization that works collaboratively with its member organizations and others to provide a unified, pan-Canadian voice on the issue of sexual violence. Through research, education, policy change, and advocacy, we identify and promote the solutions necessary to address the root causes of sexual violence.

Introduction

The [United Nations](#) recognizes femicide as the most extreme form of violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse people. In Canada, this is most evident in the disproportionately high rates of [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\)](#). Femicide in Canada continues to claim lives at alarming rates, highlighting the urgent need for societal and systemic changes to address and prevent these tragedies.ⁱ

Sexual violence (SV) significantly contributes to femicide at individual, interpersonal, societal, and structural levels. The intersection of SV with structural inequalities (e.g., poverty, colonialism) leaves certain groups including Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and women in sex work more vulnerable to such extreme forms of violence.

Addressing femicide effectively requires acknowledging patterns of SV and the broader structural factors that allow them to persist. This brief will emphasize the importance of considering SV in policy discussions of femicide and highlight the importance of community-based SV services in responding to gender-based violence.

Sexual Violence and Femicide are Inextricably linked

SV and femicide are deeply interconnected. In fact, SV is recognized as both an indicator, and a risk factor in both intimate and non-intimate femicides.ⁱⁱ For example, women who experience SV in intimate partner relationships report significantly more risk factors for femicide compared to those who face purely physical violence.ⁱⁱⁱ In cases involving a non-intimate perpetrator, SV is a key indicator of femicide identified by one or more countries.^{iv}

Despite the known role of SV in femicide, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability underscores a pressing challenge: a lack of comprehensive data on the prevalence and patterns of SV in femicides.^v This gap in data limits the ability to fully understand the role of SV in femicide and suggests a need for more robust information.^{vi}

Contributing Factors to Sexual Violence and Femicide

SV and femicide arise from broader societal patterns of misogyny and patriarchy, reinforced by intersecting forms of oppression (e.g., colonialism, transphobia, ableism) that permeate both public and private life. Addressing the structures that enable and perpetuate SV is key to preventing femicides.

Structural inequities—such as limited access to rights, financial insecurity, and unaffordable housing—render [certain groups disproportionately vulnerable](#) to SV and femicide. Indigenous women, sex workers, young women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, women with disabilities, and Black and racialized women face heightened risks of violence and /or greater barriers to accessing supports. Allowing individuals to live in precarious conditions enables violence to thrive.

Therefore, policy discussions and data collection must start with a broad, inclusive definition of femicide—one that encompasses not only the lethal act but also the power dynamics and

underlying conditions that enable it. It must also be reflective of those most at risk including gender-diverse individuals.

The Need for Strong Community-Based Responses to Sexual Violence and Femicide

Decades of carceral responses to GBV have shown that this approach is not working.^{vii} That only [6% of sexual assaults are reported](#) to the police means that most survivors of SV do not turn to the criminal justice system, while those who do, often feel re-victimized. Carceral responses also reinforce structural inequities by over-criminalizing marginalized groups.^{viii}

Echoing the [Mass Casualty Commission's](#) recommendations, investments should prioritize community-based responses that centre survivors' wellbeing and prevent violence. This includes strengthening social infrastructure to tackle root causes of violence and supporting sexual assault centres (SACs), that provide essential services and advocacy for survivors.

Although efforts have been made by the federal government to address SV as part of the National Action Plan to End GBV (NAP), [significant service gaps remain](#). NAP funding is not reaching SACs consistently or adequately across Canada.^{ix} When frontline organizations are chronically under-resourced, survivors' safety is compromised, increasing the risk of harm and femicide. Robust investment is essential to provide SV survivors with timely, quality services nationwide.

Meaningful progress towards addressing SV and femicide requires large-scale, sustained and coordinated efforts across jurisdictions, engagement with the sector and an accountability mechanism in the form of an independent GBV Commissioner to monitor and evaluate progress.^x

Recommendations

1. Establish a comprehensive data collection mechanism for femicides that specifically identifies and tracks sexual violence as a key risk factor and captures societal conditions that lead to sexual violence and femicide.
2. Urgently implement the 231 Calls for Justice for MMIWG and invest in initiatives that support communities that are structurally marginalized such as Indigenous communities, Black, racialized and trans individuals and women with disabilities, to reduce inequities that are conducive to violence.
3. Address key funding gaps in the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence by adequately funding community-based, survivor-serving organizations such as sexual assault centres to ensure timely services for survivors.
4. Establish an independent Gender-Based Violence Commissioner as a crucial step towards greater coordination of efforts and accountability.

Conclusion

Addressing femicide requires an approach that acknowledges the role of SV as a factor in both intimate and non-intimate partner femicides. Structural inequities create the conditions in which violence thrives, placing marginalized groups at greater risk. By investing in prevention, in survivor-serving organizations, and accountability, Canada can take meaningful steps to reduce femicide and create a supportive safety net for survivors.

ⁱ Sutton, D. (2023). Gender-related homicide of women and girls in Canada. *Juristat*, 2023(1). Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2023001/article/00003-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱ Dawson, M., & Carrigan, M. (2021). Identifying femicide locally and globally: Understanding the utility and accessibility of sex/gender-related motives and indicators. *Current Sociology*, 69(5), 682-704. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120946359>

ⁱⁱⁱ McFarlane, J., Malecha, A., Gist, J., Watson, K., Batten, E., Hall, I., & Smith, S. (2005). Intimate partner sexual assault against women and associated victim substance use, suicidality, and risk factors for femicide. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 26(9), 953-967.

^{iv} Dawson, M., & Carrigan, M. (2021).

^v Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. (2023). *Understanding sex/gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada, 2018-2022*. <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide2018-2022.pdf>

^{vi} Dawson, M., & Carrigan, M. (2021).

^{vii} Mass Casualty Commission. (2023). Final report: Turning the tide together. <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/final-report/>

^{viii} MacDougall, A., Walia, H. & Wise, M. (2022). Colour of violence: Race, gender & anti-violence services. Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS). <https://www.bwss.org/colour-of-violence/>

^{ix} Ending Violence Association of Canada. (2024). [The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence Must Address Service Gaps for Survivors of Sexual Violence](#)

^x Dale, A. (2024). What It Takes: Establishing a Gender-Based Violence Accountability Mechanism in Canada. <https://www.leaf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/What-It-Takes-Establishing-a-GBV-Accountability-Mechanism-in-Canada-Full-Report.pdf>