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VIOLENCE COMMITTED BY STRANGERS

by Derek E. Janhevich

HIGHLIGHTS

- Recent victimization surveys indicate that the levels of fear among Canadians have increased slightly, despite downward trends in police-reported crime, and despite low levels of violence perpetrated by strangers.
- In 1996, approximately one-third (34%) of all victims of police-reported violent crime were victimized by a stranger. Most violent crimes (60%) involved a perpetrator known to the victim.
- Robbery is the only violent offence that is typically committed by strangers. In 1996, over eight in ten robberies (83%) were committed by strangers.
- Overall, violence committed by strangers is less likely than other types of violence to result in physical injury (41% for strangers compared to 52% for non-strangers).
- Cases of stranger violence are more likely to involve the presence of a weapon. In 1996, weapons were present in 39% of violent crimes where a stranger was involved and 28% of cases where the accused knew the victim. In addition, 12% of all cases involving strangers had a firearm present compared with only 1% for other types of violent crime.
- Police-reported data indicate that males aged 15 to 24 (24%) made up the largest proportion of those victimized by strangers. Men between the ages of 25 and 34 presented the next largest group (17%), followed by young women between the ages of 15 and 24 (11%).
- Male against female violence was the most common type of overall violence, but the least likely to involve strangers. In the large majority of these cases (87%), assailants knew their victim(s), and almost one-half (46%) were spouses. The type of incident most likely to involve strangers was male on male violence. Approximately four in ten (39%) of these cases involved strangers.
- Like most violent crimes, homicides are more likely to be committed by someone known to the victim than by a stranger. In 1996, only 14% of homicide victims were killed by a stranger.



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INTRODUCTION

Police-reported statistics indicate that crime rates in Canada decreased for the fifth consecutive year in 1996. Similar trends have been noted in England/Wales and the United States. Results from victimization surveys confirm this recent trend, yet despite this decrease in crime, many Canadians remain fearful of being victimized.

What is the source of this fear; who is more likely to be a victim of violent crime; who is the typical perpetrator; and where is the victimization likely to take place? Generally speaking, questions like these are designed to assess concerns about threats of violence by strangers. But what is the nature of violent incidents involving strangers and what are the characteristics of those strangers? The answers to these questions are examined below. The purpose of this *Juristat* is to examine the profile of perpetrators and victims of violent crime by comparing characteristics of crimes committed by strangers to those involving offenders known to the victim. This will contribute to discussions about the nature of violent crime and about related concerns that are at the centre of current debates.

Box 1 – Definitions and concepts

What is an accused / victim?

Accused – An accused is a person who has been identified as an offender in an incident and against whom a charge has been laid or could be laid in connection with that incident.

Victim – A victim is a person who is the target of a violent/aggressive action or threat.

What relationships exist between victims and accused?

Stranger – The accused is not known to the victim in any way.

Non-Stranger – The accused is known to the victim in one of the ways described below:

Acquaintance – The accused is a casual or business acquaintance of the victim. This encompasses a social relationship which is neither long term nor close, and includes persons known by sight only. Examples could include neighbours, classmates, fellow workers, business partners, employee-employer, as well as non-commercial relationships (e.g. student-teacher, physician-patient).

Close Friend – The accused is a long-term and/or close (or intimate) friend to the victim. For example, boyfriends, girlfriends, ex-friends, or any intimate or ex-intimate partners are classified as close friends.

Spouse/Ex-spouse – The accused is the husband or wife of the victim through marriage or common-law, or the accused is the former husband or wife (through marriage or common-law) of the victim and at the time of the incident they are separated or divorced.

Other Family – The accused and victim are related, but not through marriage or common law agreement. Other family members include parents, children, other immediate family members (e.g. siblings) or extended family members (e.g. uncles/aunts, cousins, etc.).

Unknown – The identity of the accused is not known or the relationship could not be established. For example, if there is a homicide, the identity of the accused may not be known.

N.B. For the purposes of this *Juristat*, the terms **stranger** and **non-stranger** are used *only* to describe the relationship of the accused to the victim. The discussion does not refer in a general way to all strangers and non-strangers.

What is a violent crime?

In this *Juristat*, the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) violent crime categories include: homicide, attempted murder, sexual assault (levels 1 to 3), assault (levels 1 to 3), abduction/kidnapping, robbery, and other violent offences (e.g. assault against public/peace officer and criminal harassment).

The analysis in this report will focus mainly on information gathered from the Revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR II). In 1996, 154 police agencies responded to the UCR II, representing 47% of the national volume of reported crime. These 154 departments represent a non-random sample and as a result are not nationally representative. In addition, information will be presented from the Aggregate UCR

Survey, the 1993 General Social Survey (GSS), the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS), the 1996 International Crime Victimization Survey, and the Homicide Survey. Please refer to the Methodology section for a more detailed discussion on these data sources.

PEOPLE FEARFUL DESPITE DECREASES IN VIOLENT CRIME

Violent crime continues to account for a small proportion of *Criminal Code* offences – 11% of all incidents in 1996. The violent crime rate per 100,000 population declined by 2% in 1996, marking the fourth consecutive annual decrease. Prior to this downward trend, the violent crime rate increased for 15 consecutive years. This increase was due primarily to large increases in common (level 1) assaults, the least serious of all assaults. Level 1 assaults accounted for approximately 60% of all violent crimes in 1996. The violent crime rate per 100,000 population was 24% higher than a decade ago, however the increase for all other violent crimes excluding common assaults, was only 7%.¹

that the chances of a break-in within the coming year were “likely” or “very likely,” down slightly from the 1992 survey (34%).

A 1997 Angus Reid poll entitled “Crime and the Justice System” found that most Canadians believe crime is increasing, and this concern was especially high in western Canada. When asked whether they thought crime in their community had increased, decreased or remained stable over the past five years, 59% of adult Canadians thought that crime had increased. This proportion was down from 68% in 1994, but was consistent with 1990 perceptions (57%). When asked to what extent they feared being a victim of crime in their community, 21% of the population expressed “a great deal” (5%) or “a fair amount of fear” (16%). This proportion is consistent with the 19% which gave the same response in 1990.³

The same Angus Reid poll indicated that persons aged 55 and over were more likely than persons in younger age groups to feel that crime levels had increased.

Box 2 – Fear of crime

The term “fear” usually denotes an emotional response to some immediate threat. However in social science research, access to measure this immediate threat in a fear-provoking situation is not possible. As a result, in victimization surveys that address the notion of fear, it is understood as a perception or an attitude rather than an emotional reaction. Survey respondents are asked about anticipated fear they have faced or could hypothetically face (Sacco, 1995).

In recent years, both the overall crime rate and the violent crime rate have been declining. However, fear of crime (as measured by victimization surveys) remains unchanged or, according to some surveys, (such as the International Crime Victimization Survey) it has increased. Why have the levels of fear remained the same or even increased when police-reported crime rates have been decreasing in recent years? This is a complex question. In part, public fear of crime is a misnomer (Sacco, 1995). Victimization surveys reveal that most Canadians generally feel safe, however for certain segments of the population, fear is a significant issue.

Two main socio-demographic characteristics which have been linked to fear are gender and age. Most research notes that fear is higher for women and the elderly, compared to men and younger segments of the population (Fattah and Sacco, 1989). These heightened levels of fear are arguably rooted in numerous factors such as women’s concern about sexual violence, a lower sense of physical strength in comparison to the average offender, gender socialization during childhood rearing, the elderly’s lack of physical vigour, as well as their lack of social and family support (Sacco, 1995).

Anxieties and fears about crime may also be more pronounced for those who have been victims of crime or for those who live in areas which they perceive to have high crime rates (Sacco, 1995). According to American

criminologist Wesley Skogan (1990), fear of crime can be fostered by disorder or signs of incivility in local communities that can cause people to feel uneasy, even as crime rates stabilize or decline. Residents who witness the continuing presence of such problems as public drunkenness, prostitution, graffiti, vandalism, loitering, sexual harassment, or abandoned or ill-kept buildings, may feel that they and the police have lost control over the neighbourhood. Some groups, such as inner-city dwellers, are more likely to be exposed to these signs of disorder which results in heightened levels of anxiety and fear.

Findings from the 1993 GSS support some of the above hypotheses on fear of crime. Women, victims of particular types of crime, and those who perceive their neighbourhoods as being conducive for criminal activity to flourish, all appear to be more anxious about the threat of crime. The data did not support the notion that higher levels of fear exist among the elderly. It is possible that some of the questions that relate to fear were not pertinent for older persons. For instance, one way that the GSS measures fear is by asking how safe one feels when walking alone at night. Research indicates that this type of activity is not one that most elderly people would engage in. However, when seniors were asked questions that were more pertinent to their daily activities (i.e. being home alone in the evening or assessing their general safety over crime), there is no strong evidence to support that aging leads to greater fear of crime (Sacco, 1995). In fact, in the 1993 VAWS, which allowed women who never engage in an activity to be excluded from the analysis, the percentage who felt worried about their safety declined with age. What’s more, elderly women were more likely to opt out of certain activities, but no more likely to say the reason was fear.

In general, fear of crime appears to be the result of gender, direct experiences, social circumstances, and the environment to which one is exposed.

Despite the recent decreases in reported violent crime, a consistent proportion of Canadians remain fearful. Findings from the 1996 International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) indicate that 26% of Canadians reported feeling “a bit unsafe” or “very unsafe” when walking alone in their area after dark. This proportion was up from 1992, when 20% expressed the same feelings.² However, three in ten (30%) Canadians felt

¹ For more information regarding violent crime refer to Johnson, Holly, “Violent Crime in Canada”, Juristat (Catalogue 85-002 XPE vol. 16, no.6), or Kong, Rebecca, “Canadian Crime Statistics, 1996”, Juristat (Catalogue 85-002XPE, Vol. 17, no. 8).

² For a more detailed examination of the ICVS and criminal victimization, refer to Besserer, Sandra, “Criminal Victimization: An International Perspective”, Juristat (Catalogue 85-002-XPE, Vol. 18, no. 6).

³ Results are from the survey conducted between May 28 and June 2, 1997, in which 1,516 Canadian adults were surveyed. The margin of error is $\pm 2.5\%$ points, with 95% confidence. The data are representative of the population’s age, sex, and regional characteristics according to 1996 census.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VIOLENT CRIME BY STRANGERS

Two basic sources of statistical information are available to examine the characteristics of violent incidents, violent offenders and their victims: data reported to police and data captured on crime victimization surveys. Both have strengths and weaknesses (Box 3).

Most violent crimes not committed by strangers

Victims of violent crime usually know the offenders. In 1996, 60% of violent crime victims knew the perpetrator while for 34% of victims, the accused was a stranger (Table 1). In 6% of cases, the identity of the accused or the relationship of the

accused to the victim was unknown. The picture for most individual offences was similar. Robbery was an exception.

Most robberies committed by strangers

In contrast to other violent offences, robbery stands out as one offence in which a majority of offenders are strangers. In fact, if robberies are excluded from the violent crime total, the proportion of persons victimized by a stranger drops from 34% to 26%. In 1996, over eight in ten robbery victims (83%) did not know the perpetrator.

Findings from victimization surveys demonstrate similar results. According to the 1993 GSS, the majority of robberies (67%) were committed by strangers.

Table 1

Offence	Total Victims		Relationship of Accused to Victim			Non-Stranger			
	Total Number	Percent ¹	Stranger	Total Non-Stranger	Unknown ²	Acquaintance	Close Friend	Spouse / Ex-spouse	Other Family
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total³	130,051	100	34	60	6	28	6	17	9
Total (excl. robbery)	109,948	100	26	69	5	31	7	20	11
Homicide ⁴	314
Attempted Murder	580	100	28	57	15	33	4	13	7
Sexual Assault - level 3	139	100	23	71	6	38	6	12	14
Sexual Assault - level 2	291	100	41	53	6	30	9	9	5
Sexual Assault - level 1	9,037	100	19	76	6	40	9	4	22
Assault - level 3	1,526	100	33	55	12	30	7	11	7
Assault - level 2	18,168	100	32	62	6	31	6	16	9
Assault - level 1	65,743	100	22	74	4	32	7	25	10
Abduction/Kidnapping	1,876	100	39	53	7	17	8	14	15
Robbery	20,103	100	83	9	9	8	-	-	-
Other Violent ⁵	12,274	100	38	54	8	27	7	14	6

¹ Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

² The identity of the accused is not known or the relationship cannot be established.

³ Represents all victim records.

⁴ The number of homicides is included in the total; however, figures for relationship are excluded, because the Homicide Survey provides more accurate information. For a more detailed examination of stranger homicide, refer to Table 7.

⁵ Includes the following categories: Criminal Harassment, Other Sexual Crimes, Unlawfully Causing Bodily Harm, Discharge Firearm with Intent, Assault Against Peace-Public Officer, Criminal Negligence Causing Bodily Harm, Other Assaults, and Other Violent Violations.

... Figures not appropriate or applicable.

- Amount less than one percent.

Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Box 3 – Differences between police-reported surveys and victimization surveys

Two main sources of data are available to describe/analyze patterns in crime and victimization. The first is police-reported statistics provided by the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey. The second, is information gathered by victimization surveys such as the one included in the General Social Survey (GSS), or the Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS). Both measure crime differently and may consequently produce different results. The results from both sources should be seen as complementary, as they measure crime from different perspectives. For the purposes of this *Juristat*, the results from the GSS and VAWS were used to contextualize information from the UCR surveys.

Uniform Crime Reporting data consist of only those incidents that become known to the police and are recorded by them as crimes. In order for this to happen, an incident must pass through a set of victim and police decisions. For instance, a crime must first be recognized by the victim, the police notified, and the offence entered into official police records. Uniform Crime Reporting data are thus subject to a degree of underestimation. This underestimate is commonly referred to as the "dark figure" of crime.

Victimization surveys were originally designed to measure this "dark figure," and also serve to examine crimes and perceptions (e.g. fear) about crime from the victim's perspective. By their very nature however, victimization surveys do not measure all types of crimes. Information on homicides or crimes

committed against children and establishments are not collected, and furthermore, information on "victimless" crimes (e.g. drug use, prostitution, gambling) and corporate or white-collar crime, is typically not collected.

Whereas the UCR (and revised UCR) is a **census** of all criminal offences reported to the police, victimization surveys collect information from a **sample** of individuals about their victimization experiences for certain types of crime.

Both surveys provide reliable and valid information about crime; however it is important to recognize that any type of survey is subject to limitations. Victimization surveys are subject to sampling errors as well as non-sampling errors related to the following: coverage, respondent error (e.g., recall error), non-response, coding, edit and imputation, and estimation. On the other hand, a principle advantage of victimization surveys is that the information gathered comes directly from those affected by crime. Personal experiences, associated socio-economic risk factors, and subsequent after-effects of crime are all variables that can be measured.

Police-reported data are subject to limitations and factors which could include: changes and biases in victim and police reporting behaviour, legislative changes, processing errors, as well as non-responding police departments. However, they have an advantage with respect to wider coverage, volume, and the ability to track trends over time.

Sources: Ogrodnik and Trainor, 1997; Gartner and Doob, 1997.

Box 4 – Multiple Offenders

Violent crimes can occur in a variety of ways. There can be a single perpetrator and a single victim; the incident can involve a single perpetrator and several victims; several offenders can attack a single person; or the crime can involve multiple perpetrators and multiple victims. In 1996, of those violent incidents where an accused was identified, eight in ten (81%) involved a single perpetrator.

In 1996, almost three-quarters (73%) of single accused cases involved an offender who was known to the victim. This compares to 60% for all

violent crimes. This difference implies that stranger violence is more common in instances where more than one accused is involved.

Robberies, more than any other violent crime, tend to be committed by multiple accused persons. One-half of all robberies were committed by multiple offenders in 1996.

Victimization surveys reveal similar patterns. Findings from the 1993 GSS indicate that 81% of all sexual assaults and assaults were committed by a single offender, whereas more than half (56%) of all robberies involved one accused person.

Two in ten sexual assaults are committed by strangers

Two in ten sexual assault (level 1) victims (19%) were assaulted by strangers. Aggravated (level 2) sexual assaults had a much higher proportion of stranger involvement (41%) (Table 1).

Results from victimization surveys confirm this. According to the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS) 23% of Canadian women have been sexually or physically assaulted and nearly two in ten (19%) have been sexually assaulted by a stranger in their adult lifetime (Box 5).

Most violence by strangers does not occur in the home

According to the 1993 General Social Survey (GSS), one in four Canadians indicated that they were very or somewhat worried when alone in their homes in the evening or at night.

Why is it that people are afraid when alone at home? The answer is not a simple one and depends on a number of factors such as age, gender, lifestyle, geographic location of residence, personal experiences, previous victimization, and other variables.

The 1993 GSS found that women were much more fearful than men of being alone in their homes in the evening or at night. Overall, 37% of women were very or somewhat worried. This was three times higher than the figure for men (12%). The proportion was highest among women between the ages of 15 to 24 (42%). A consistent finding in this area of research is that women report higher levels of fear and concern for personal safety regardless of age, place of residence, victimization experience or other personal characteristics.

The GSS results also indicate that worry about safety when at home alone is most marked by those recently victimized by sexual assault, robbery, or break and enter (Sacco, 1995). Although previous victimization is one influential factor that induces fear, other sources of fear could stem from the media, personal observation and conversation (Wachs, 1988 as cited in Sacco, 1995).

Should people fear being attacked by strangers when in their homes? Police-reported crime statistics indicate that the most common location for a violent crime to occur is in the home (Figure 1). However, only a small number of incidents at home involve strangers (9%) (Table 2). Strangers are more likely to be implicated in incidents that take place at commercial/corporate places or outdoors.

Box 5 – Women’s experience of violence by strangers

Statistics Canada’s 1993 Violence Against Women Survey was a special focus survey undertaken to assess the nature and the extent of violence experienced by women in this country and their perceptions of their personal safety. A random sample of 12,300 women 18 years of age and over were questioned in detail about acts of physical and sexual assault that had occurred against them since the age of 16, including acts involving spouses, dates and boyfriends, other men known to them, and strangers.

Approximately one-half of all women reported experiencing at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16 (table). The rate of violence by male strangers was equal to the rate of violence by known men who were not intimate partners. Overall, 45% of all women had been victims of violence by men known to them,¹ about twice the percentage who had been assaulted by strangers.

Relationship	Number (in millions)	Percent Adult lifetime	Percent past 12 months
Total victimized women	5.38	51 ²	10
Stranger	2.46	23	4
Spouse/ex-spouse ³	2.65	29	3
Date/boyfriend	1.72	16	2
Other known man	2.46	23	4

Responses have been weighted to represent the total population of Canadian women.

With these responses weighted to represent all Canadian women, the number of women who reported an assault by a stranger was estimated to be 2.46 million. Assaults by known men, especially family members, have received a great deal of attention due to the violation of trust and devastating consequences these incidents produce. However, assaults by strangers can also have serious physical and emotional consequences. These attacks can be sudden and brutal, leaving the victim physically and psychologically traumatized, and leaving her feeling vulnerable, frightened and unable to protect herself from further danger.

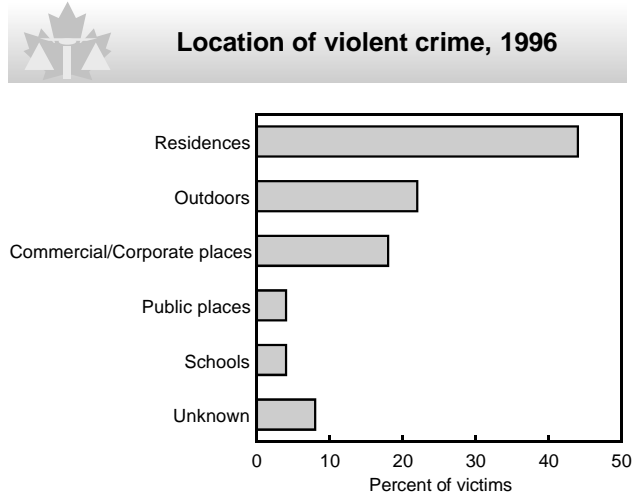
For a more in-depth examination of stranger violence against women and a general discussion of victimization against women, refer to Johnson, Holly. *Dangerous Domains: Violence Against Women in Canada* (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1996), and Strike, Carol. “Women Assaulted by Strangers,” *Canadian Social Trends* no. 36, Spring 1995 (catalogue no. 11-008-E). Statistics Canada: Ottawa.

¹ This figure was derived by combining responses of women who had been assaulted by a spouse or date or other known man. Many women may have been assaulted more than once; therefore, total is less than the sum of the categories.

² Figure was derived by combining responses of women who had been assaulted by a stranger or spouse or date or other known man. Many women may have been assaulted more than once; therefore, the total is less than the sum of the categories.

³ Rate is based on the number of women who have ever been married or lived with a man in a common-law relationship.

Figure 1



Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Some people may also fear break and enters when home alone at night or in the evening. Home invasions (break and enters when someone is occupying a residence) make up a small proportion of all break and enters; however they may be a source of fear (Box 6).

Injuries less common with strangers

One way to assess whether stranger violence is more serious than other types of violence is to examine the nature of the offence including physical injury⁴ and the presence of a weapon. The majority of violent crimes result in no apparent injury or in minor injuries (Figure 2) and strangers are less likely than known offenders to inflict physical injury on victims. In 1996, the proportion of incidents that resulted in injuries was 41% for incidents involving strangers and 52% for those

Box 6 – Violent break and enter and home invasions

Although residences are the most common location for violent incidents to occur, this is not usually the result of stranger attacks. Violent incidents at home are most frequently the result of domestic and family disputes. One type of crime that has spawned some level of fear amongst persons while at home is residential break and enter (B&E). By their very nature, break-ins are typically not violent, and usually occur when residences are vacant. The immediate concern of a burglar is whether a place is occupied or not, since most do not wish to confront anyone while at home (Greenberg, 1996; Waller and Okihiro, 1978). Furthermore, police-reported data suggest that B&Es involving violence are rare. In 1996, approximately 1% of total B&Es recorded by the revised UCR survey involved a violent offence of which the vast majority were assaults (72%).

Residential B&Es that involve violence and robberies that occur at a place of residence are broadly categorized as “home invasions.” While no official definition exists, they are characterized by forced entry into a private residence while someone is at home and involve violence against the occupants. Although such events are relatively rare, they have recently been reported in some Canadian cities. In 1996, 2,471 home invasions were reported by the police. About half of these involved the robbery of those present in the home. Data from a sample of 61 police agencies that have been reporting consistently to the revised UCR survey since 1993 indicate that home invasions increased slightly between 1993 and 1994, but have been decreasing since.

Whether the incident is a home invasion or a B&E of an unoccupied residence, heightened levels of fear are an inevitable outcome since a violation of one’s personal and private space has occurred.

For a more elaborate discussion of B&Es and home invasions, refer to Kong, Rebecca. “Breaking and Entering in Canada,” *Juristat*. (Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE, vol. 18, no.5).

involving non-strangers (Table 3). Small proportions of incidents involving both strangers and non-strangers (6% and 5% respectively) resulted in major physical injury.

The only violent crimes where strangers were much more likely to inflict some type of injury on the victim were for “other violent” violations (most of which were assaults against peace officers).

⁴ This refers to apparent physical injuries at the scene of the incident and excludes emotional or psychological trauma that often results from violent victimization.

Table 2

Location	Total Victims		Relationship of Accused to Victim			Non-Stranger			
	Number	Percent ¹	Stranger	Total Non-Stranger	Unknown ²	Acquaintance	Close Friend	Spouse / Ex-spouse	Other Family
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total³	130,051	100	34	60	6	28	6	17	9
Residence	56,040	100	9	87	4	23	11	34	18
Commercial/Corporate Places	24,286	100	56	35	8	28	2	3	2
Outdoors	29,547	100	54	38	8	29	4	4	2
Public Places	4,898	100	41	53	6	46	2	2	3
Schools	5,233	100	18	78	4	73	3	1	1
Unknown	10,047	100	69	25	5	17	1	4	3

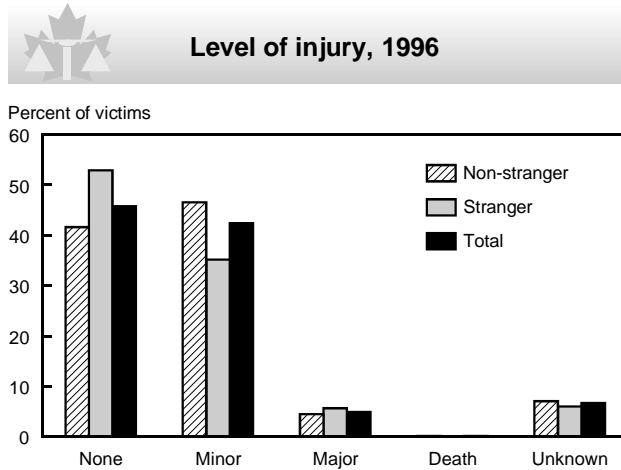
¹ Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

² The identity of the accused was unknown or the relationship could not be established.

³ Represents all victim records.

Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Figure 2



Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

When comparing the overall use of weapons by strangers and non-strangers, some differences can be noted. Weapons were present in 39% of violent crimes where a stranger was involved, compared with 28% of cases where the accused knew the victim. Only 1% of all non-stranger violence involved a firearm; compared to 12% for strangers (Figure 3). Knives and sharp objects were also more likely to be found in incidents that involved strangers (12% compared to 7%).

The greater level of firearm involvement in stranger violence is related to the number of strangers involved in robbery offences. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of all offences where a firearm was present were robberies, and 86% of these involved strangers.

Males twice as likely to be victims of stranger violence

Like other criminal offences, violent crimes are most often committed by males. In 1996, nearly nine in ten (86%) persons accused of violent crimes were males. A profile of victims reveals that males and females were equally likely to be victimized; however, they tended to be victimized by different types of people.

Table 3

Offence	Total Stranger						Total Non-Stranger					
	Number	Percent ²	Level of Injury				Number	Percent ²	Level of Injury			
			None ¹	Minor	Major	Unknown			None ¹	Minor	Major	Unknown
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Total³	44,710	100	53	35	6	6	77,729	100	42	47	5	7
Homicide ⁴	51	100	-	-	100	-	146	100	-	-	100	-
Attempted Murder	161	100	26	20	53	1	332	100	17	22	59	1
Sexual Assault 3	32	100	-	38	44	16	98	100	-	39	38	18
Sexual Assault 2	119	100	-	45	8	8	155	100	-	37	16	13
Sexual Assault 1	1,684	100	-	16	-	12	6,844	100	-	12	-	17
Assault 3	505	100	-	26	71	2	837	100	-	24	73	1
Assault 2	5,763	100	-	47	25	2	11,283	100	-	55	21	3
Assault 1	14,365	100	-	53	-	6	48,625	100	-	56	-	7
Abduction	739	100	74	19	3	4	1,003	100	49	34	8	9
Robbery	16,615	100	68	21	3	7	1,738	100	44	38	9	10
Other Violent	4,676	100	67	26	1	6	6,668	100	84	9	1	5

¹ No visible injuries were noted at the time of the incident or the violation did not involve the use of weapons nor physical force against the victim.

² Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

³ Represents all victim records, excluding where relationship was unknown.

⁴ Injuries for homicide refer to deaths.

- Nil or zero.

Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Stranger violence more likely to involve weapons

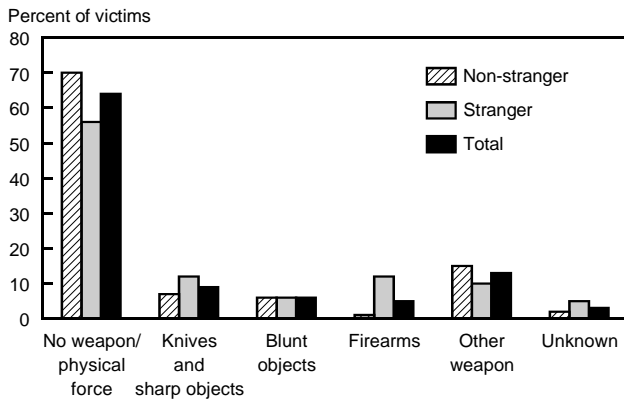
In 1996, weapons⁵ were present in over one-third (36%) of all violent crimes. Weapons are used in some instances more to threaten the victim than to inflict injury. For example, over one-half (55%) of all robberies involved the presence of a weapon; however only 26% of victims were injured. Although the weapon may not have been used to cause injury, the risk and potential for injury were present.

Males were twice as likely as females to be victimized by a stranger. Strangers were involved in 22% of violent incidents against females, compared to 46% of incidents involving male victims (Figure 4). Males were also more likely than females to be victimized by acquaintances. Female victims were more likely to be attacked by someone known to them, especially by a spouse or ex-spouse (30% compared to 4% of males).

⁵ Weapons include the following: knives and sharp objects, blunt objects, firearms, and other weapons such as fire and explosives.

Figure 3

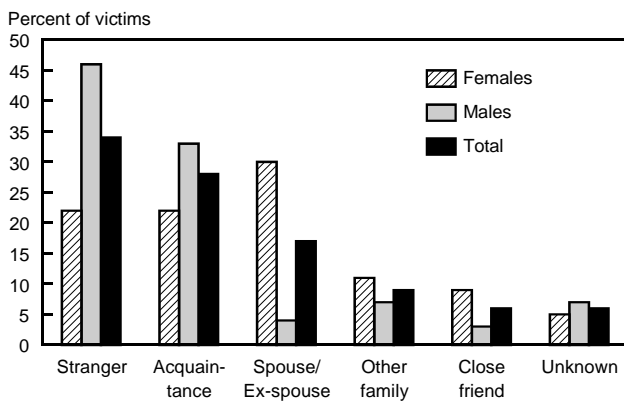
Most serious weapon present, 1996



Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Figure 4

Sex of victims by relationship to accused, 1996



Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Young adults most likely to be victims of stranger violence

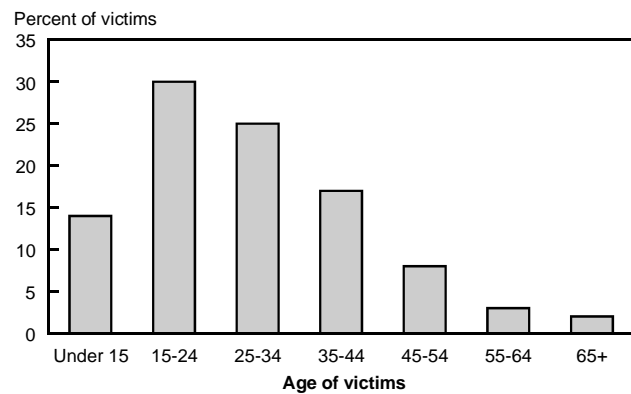
Information gathered from victimization surveys such as the 1993 GSS and the VAWS reveals that young adults under 24 years of age have the highest rates of violence. This is true for both males and females. The GSS indicates that in a one-year period, young adults aged 15 to 24 were five times more likely to face violent victimization than those aged 45 and over.

According to police statistics, nearly one-third (30%) of all victims of violent crime were between the ages of 15 and 24, and one-quarter (25%) were 25 to 34 years old (Figure 5). The proportion of victims aged 15 to 24 was nearly three times higher than the much larger age group of persons over 45 years old.⁶ Overall, young males (15 to 24) presented the largest group of persons victimized by a stranger. Approximately one-quarter (24%) of all incidents of stranger violence involved an attack on a man (or men) between the ages of 15 and 24 (Table 4). Men between the ages of 25 and 34 made up the next largest proportion (17%) followed by young women (aged 15 to 24) (11%), and men aged 35 to 44 (10%).

A number of factors largely related to lifestyle can help explain why younger age groups are at greater risk of violent victimization, especially by strangers. Unattached individuals have more available leisure time to pursue activities in public places, which increases their risk of attack by a stranger (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Findings from the 1993 GSS indicate that young, single people as well as students, reported the highest frequency of evenings spent outside the home. Single people (most of whom are young) reported rates of violent victimization that were twice the national average and four times greater than those of married persons (including common-law unions). In addition, numerous violent incidents involve the consumption of alcohol, both in public drinking establishments and in the home.

Figure 5

Victims of violent crime by age group, 1996



Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

⁶ Rates cannot be calculated with revised UCR survey data because the available police data are not consistent with Census population figures; however, general proportions can be established.

Table 4

Victim Age and Gender	Relationship of Accused to Victim				Non-Stranger			
	Total ¹	Stranger	Total Non-Stranger ²	Unknown ³	Acquaintance	Close Friend	Spouse / Ex-spouse	Other Family
Number	121,206	41,374	72,682	7,150	33,699	7,300	20,561	11,122
Percent⁴	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total Males/Females								
Under 15	14	10	17	13	21	9	–	38
15-24	30	35	27	34	30	38	20	23
25-34	25	24	26	23	21	28	41	12
35-44	17	16	18	16	15	18	27	12
45-54	8	9	8	9	8	6	8	8
55-64	3	4	3	3	3	1	2	4
65+	2	3	1	3	2	–	1	3
Females								
Under 15	6	3	8	6	9	6	–	23
15-24	15	11	17	13	13	33	19	15
25-34	13	7	17	9	8	22	37	7
35-44	9	5	12	6	5	13	24	8
45-54	4	3	4	4	3	4	7	5
55-64	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2
65+	1	2	1	1	1	–	1	2
Total Female	50	33	61	40	40	79	89	62
Males								
Under 15	8	7	8	7	12	3	–	15
15-24	15	24	10	21	17	6	1	8
25-34	12	17	9	14	13	6	4	5
35-44	8	10	7	10	10	4	4	4
45-54	4	6	3	5	5	2	1	3
55-64	2	2	1	2	2	–	–	2
65+	1	1	1	1	1	–	–	1
Total Male	50	67	39	60	60	21	11	38

¹ Represents all victim records. Excludes cases where age and sex is unknown.

² Excludes cases where relationship is unknown.

³ The identity of the accused was unknown or the relationship could not be established.

⁴ Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

– Amount less than one percent.

Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

AGE AND SEX OF OFFENDERS⁷

Male against female violence most common, but least likely to involve strangers

The most common type of violent incident involves a male accused and a female victim. In 1996, almost half (48%) of all violent crimes involved a male perpetrator against a female victim (Table 5). In an additional 39% of cases, males attacked males, while the remaining 13% were committed by female offenders against females (7%) and against males (6%).


Although it was the most common type of violence, male against female violence was least likely to involve strangers. In the large majority of these cases (87%), assailants knew the victim(s), and almost one-half (46%) were spouses. The type of incident most likely to involve strangers was male on male violence. Approximately four in ten (39%) of these cases involved strangers.

Strangers accused of violent crime slightly younger than non-strangers

When comparing ages of accused persons that were strangers and those that were non-strangers, some subtle differences emerge. Few differences are noted for most age categories, except for persons aged 15 to 24. Stranger violence tends to happen more frequently among young adult offenders (15 to 24) than violence perpetrated by somebody known to the victim(s) (Table 6). The median age for accused persons that were non-strangers to the victim was 31, slightly older than persons who were strangers (29). The same lifestyle factors that can help explain why younger adults are more prone to violent victimization can also be used in the context of the offender.

⁷ Because of certain methodological limitations, characteristics about the offender can only be gathered for incidents that involved only one accused person (see Methodology).

Table 5



Sex of Accused and Victim by Accused-Victim Relationship, 1996

Accused	Victim	Number	Percent	Relationship of Accused to Victim				Non-Stranger			
				Total % ¹	Stranger	Total Non-Stranger	Unknown ²	Acquaintance	Close Friend	Spouse / Ex-spouse	Other Family
			%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total³		76,398	100	100	23	73	4	30	7	25	11
Male	Male	29,591	39	100	39	56	6	43	3	1	9
Male	Female	36,849	48	100	11	87	3	18	12	46	11
Female	Male	4,479	6	100	23	71	5	21	7	33	10
Female	Female	5,479	7	100	17	78	4	53	4	2	19


¹ Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

² The identity of the accused was unknown or the relationship could not be established.

³ Represents a sample of single accused records. Excludes cases where sex is unknown.

Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Table 6



Sex and Age of Accused by Accused-Victim Relationship, 1996

Accused Age and Gender	Total ¹	Stranger	Total Non-Stranger	Unknown ²	Non-Stranger			
					Acquaintance	Close Friend	Spouse / Ex-spouse	Other Family
Number	76,378	17,346	55,854	3,178	22,910	5,618	19,005	8,321
Percent³	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total Males/Females								
Under 15	5	3	6	4	12	2	–	6
15-24	26	32	24	30	30	32	13	26
25-34	32	33	31	33	25	35	41	25
35-44	23	20	24	22	19	21	31	26
45-54	9	7	10	8	9	6	11	12
55-64	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3
65+	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Females								
Under 15	1	1	1	1	3	1	–	2
15-24	4	3	4	4	5	3	1	5
25-34	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
35-44	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	4
45-54	1	1	1	1	1	–	1	1
55-64	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
65+	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total Female	13	12	13	13	17	10	8	18
Males								
Under 15	4	2	5	3	9	2	–	5
15-24	22	29	20	27	25	29	12	20
25-34	28	29	27	28	21	32	37	20
35-44	20	18	21	19	16	20	28	22
45-54	8	7	9	7	8	6	10	10
55-64	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3
65+	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Total Male	87	88	87	87	83	90	92	82

¹ Represents a sample of single accused records. Excludes cases where age is unknown.

² The identity of the accused was unknown or the relationship could not be established.

³ Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

– Amount less than one percent.

Source: UCR II: Non-random sample of 154 police agencies accounting for 47% of the national volume of crime. The data are not nationally representative.

Among male strangers, the proportion of those between the ages of 15 and 24 was the same as those aged 25 to 34. These two age groups accounted for nearly 6 in 10 (58%) attacks by strangers.

Offenders somewhat older than victims

Police-reported data indicate that overall, the age profile of total accused persons tends to be somewhat older than that of victims. Whereas 44% of all victims of violent crime in 1996 were under 25 years old, the figure for accused persons was 31%. This may be because there is a greater proportion of victims under 15 years old, whereas offenders under 12 are not subject to criminal justice processing. This pattern is noted in all relationship categories.

As previously noted, persons aged 15 to 24 made up a significant proportion of all victims. Although this age group made up a notable proportion of all offenders (26%), the largest age group of those accused of a violent crime fell in the 25 to 34 age category (32%). The median age for all victims of violence committed by a stranger was 26, whereas the median age of offenders was 29.

Box 7 – Perceptions and characteristics of incidents where accused is a stranger

According to the 1993 GSS, in violent crime incidents involving strangers, victims had lower levels of fear than those incidents where the victim knew the offender. When the offender was known to the victim, approximately one-half (48%) of victims were very or somewhat worried when alone in their homes in the evening or at night. In contrast, when the offender was a stranger, 40% of victims felt the same sentiment. Similarly, in 35% of violent incidents where the offender was a stranger victims felt somewhat or very unsafe when walking alone after dark. The proportion increases to 45% in incidents where the offender knew the victim.

The GSS reported that a majority (66%) of violent crime incidents occurred during the night; however, incidents where the victim was attacked by a stranger were more likely to occur at night (73%). Lifestyle and demographic characteristics of both the accused and victim help explain this. For example, young single persons and students are more likely to engage in night time activities than their older counterparts. As a result, such persons are exposed to more situations that may involve contact with strangers.

STRANGERS IN HOMICIDES

What image does the public envision when considering the “typical” homicide involving a stranger? Most recently, pop-culture in both film and television has been inundated with the notion of socio- and psychopathic serial killers, thus possibly having an effect on how the public shapes its image of homicides involving strangers. But this does not paint an accurate picture of the typical homicide, nor homicides involving strangers.

Strangers commit a minority of homicides

In 1996, the homicide rate in Canada was 2.1 per 100,000 population. Following four straight annual declines, the national rate increased by 6% from 1995 to 1996. Although there were 45 more homicides in 1996 than in the previous year, there were still fewer total homicides than the average for the previous ten years.⁸

In 1996, of all the homicides where an accused was identified, 49% of the victims (241) were killed by an acquaintance, 37% (183) by a family member, and 14% (67) by a stranger (Table 7).

In order to obtain accurate characteristics of homicides based on the relationship of the accused to the victim, a sub-sample of those incidents which involved only one victim and one accused will be examined for the remainder of this section. Of all homicides between 1991 and 1996 where a single accused and a single victim were identified, 49% of the victims were killed by an acquaintance, 38% by a family member, and 12% by a stranger. This is not unlike the 1996 results based on the total number of solved homicides described above.

Stranger homicides more likely to involve males

Historically, approximately two-thirds of homicide victims are males and about nine in ten offenders are males (Fedorowycz,

⁸ These figures refer to total homicides in Canada reported by the Homicide Survey.

Table 7

Relationship	1996 ¹		1996 ²		Total 1991-1996 ²	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total³	491	100	362	100	2,400	100
Acquaintance ⁴	241	49	180	50	1,172	49
Family	183	37	133	37	911	38
Stranger	67	14	49	14	297	12
Unknown	-	-	-	-	20	1

¹ Includes homicide incidents in which there were known suspects; if there was more than one suspect, only the closest relationship to the victim was recorded.
² Includes only those cases involving a single accused and a single victim.
³ Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.
⁴ Category includes close friends, and other casual acquaintances.
 - Nil or zero.

Source: Homicide Survey, 1991-1996.

1997). The proportion for stranger homicides is even greater: over eight in ten (83%) victims are males and virtually all accused persons (98%) are males.

Most stranger homicides occur outside the home

Police-reported data and victimization surveys indicate that approximately nine in ten incidents of stranger-related violence occurred outside the home. The figures for homicide were lower, but the majority of stranger homicides do occur outside the home. Since 1991 (when information on stranger homicide characteristics was first gathered), about one-quarter (27%) of stranger homicides occurred in a residential setting. By contrast, most non-stranger homicides take place at home. Between 1991 and 1996, for example, nine out of ten (87%) family homicides occurred in the home, as did 66% of acquaintance homicides.

Strangers less likely to use firearms in homicides

Firearm use in homicides is greatest in instances where the accused was an acquaintance of the victim (30%). Just over one-quarter (26%) of family homicides involved the use of a firearm, while firearms were present in 23% of stranger homicides.

Assault and robbery most common precipitating crime

Some differences are noted when comparing the precipitating crime of homicides involving strangers and those involving non-strangers. Almost half (48%) of all stranger homicides involved another offence, whereas the proportion drops to 25% for homicides involving non-strangers. Of homicides involving strangers the most common precipitating crimes were robberies (12%) and assaults (11%), followed by sexual assaults (8%). Break and enters were involved in 4% of stranger homicides. The most common precipitating crime for non-stranger homicides was assault (9%).

CONCLUSION

The International Crime Victimization Survey indicates that levels of fear have increased in recent years. While the majority of Canadians do not express fear for their safety, fear continues to be a problem for certain segments of the population. Women, victims of certain types of crimes, and those who perceive their neighbourhoods as being conducive for criminal activity to flourish, all demonstrate levels of fear that are greater than for men and for younger segments of the population. In addition, despite decreases in police reported-crime rates, the majority of Canadians believe that crime in their neighbourhoods has increased. Explaining why this belief contradicts statistical evidence is beyond the scope of this report. A multitude of variables such as media influence, regional factors, and demographic characteristics may contribute to perceptions of safety.

Approximately one-third of all victims of police-reported crimes were victimized by a stranger. Victimization surveys and police-reported data indicate that most crimes occur in the

home, and in most of these situations, the victim and the accused know each other. Stranger attacks in the home are uncommon; nonetheless, stranger violence is still an area which raises much public concern.

The risk associated with stranger violence is largely based on lifestyle factors, and young males between the ages of 15 and 24 present the largest group of persons victimized by a stranger.

Police-reported data indicate that a larger proportion of stranger violence involves the use of firearms. This is largely due to the significant proportion of robberies that are committed by strangers and the prevalence of weapons in the commission of these crimes. Despite higher levels of weapon use, strangers were less likely than other offenders to inflict physical injury on victims.

Quantifying the nature and extent of stranger violence may help Canadians better understand this issue which seems to affect public perceptions and concerns over crime.

METHODOLOGY

● AGGREGATE UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING SURVEY (UCR) –

The UCR Survey has been collecting summary information on crime from police agencies across Canada since 1962. This survey records the number of criminal incidents that come to the attention of the police. It includes the number of reported offences and the number of actual offences (excluding those that are unfounded), the number of offences cleared by charge, the number of persons charged by sex and by adult/youth breakdown.

● REVISED UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING SURVEY (UCR II) –

Introduced in 1988, the UCR II captures detailed information on individual criminal incidents reported to police, including characteristics of victims, accused persons and the incidents. In 1996, 154 police departments in six provinces reported to the UCR II. The data represent 47% of the national volume of crime, and the reader is cautioned that these data are not nationally representative. Coverage of the survey will continue to grow as more police agencies convert to the UCR II.

The relationship of the accused to the victim

As previously indicated, the principle data source utilized in the preparation of this *Juristat* was the 1996 UCR II. The main unit of count is the violation against the victim (130,051 records). Using cases captured through the UCR II, this report focuses primarily on the relationship between the accused and the victim. Two separate analyses are made. The first describes crime based on victim records, because the relationship information is located in the victim file. The second focuses on characteristics of the accused.

In order to establish relationship characteristics of the accused, all incidents with no accused or more than one accused were excluded from the analysis. This was necessary because where there are multiple accused records, it is not possible to determine which accused represents the relationship to the victim(s). As a result, the second analysis focuses only on those incidents where a single accused was identified (76,643 records). These include cases where there was more than one victim. In cases where there were two or more victims present, analyses of incidents and accused persons by relationship will result in multiple counting. For example, a man may assault two persons in an incident, one he knows and one he doesn't. As a result, two relationships will be analyzed – the accused as a stranger and the accused as an acquaintance. Most of those incidents where a single accused was identified involved a single victim (87%).

● **HOMICIDE SURVEY –**

The Homicide Survey provides police-reported data on the characteristics of homicide victims, accused persons, as well as the incident. The survey has collected detailed information from the police on all homicides across Canada since 1961. It was revised in 1991, thus adding new data elements as well as improving existing ones.

● **GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY (GSS) –**

The GSS is a multi-cycle survey designed to measure the social conditions of Canadians. The topics covered include time use, the family, work and leisure, and crime and accidents. Each cycle runs once every five years.

The 1993 GSS was the second running of the crime and accident cycle. Telephone interviews were conducted with approximately 10,000 Canadians aged 15 and older. The sample covered the non-institutionalized population of the ten provinces and was selected using random digit dialing techniques. Respondents were asked about their experiences with crime and the criminal justice system over the previous 12 month period. On the basis of these interviews, estimates were made of the incidence of eight specific crimes (three violent and five property crimes) in the general population of 15 years of age and over.

● **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SURVEY (VAWS) –**

In 1993, Statistics Canada conducted the VAWS on behalf of Health Canada. It was conducted by telephone using random digit dialing techniques. A total of 12,300 women aged 18 years and older were interviewed about their experiences of physical and sexual violence since the age of 16, their responses to these experiences, and their perceptions of their personal safety. Responses were weighted to represent the 10.5 million women in the Canadian population. Estimates were made of both twelve-month and adult lifetime rates of violence.

● **INTERNATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY (ICVS) –**

In 1996, the ICVS was conducted for the third time, and Canada was one of 34 participating countries. The survey was coordinated by the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, and was conducted to provide comparable information on the incidence of victimization around the world. A random sample of persons aged 16 years and older were asked for detailed information on 11 offences, including when, where, and how often offences occurred over the previous five years; whether offences were reported to the police; and whether victimization experiences were considered serious. Participants were also asked for opinions on public safety, policing, as well as sentencing. In Canada, 2,134 respondents were interviewed by telephone.

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