



November 23, 2020

Response to the Femicide Watch call 2020 from United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences for femicide-related data and information.

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This submission responds to the call from the Special Rapporteur for information on gender-related killings of women and girls. In response to the above request, the following information is provided from the *Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability* (CFOJA; see www.femicideincanada.ca). The inaugural 2018 and 2019 *#CallItFemicide* reports are also available in French and English. The links are provided at the end of this document. The third *#CallItFemicide* report is in progress and pending January 2020.

Background of the CFOJA:

This CFOJA was launched on December 6, 2017 which is Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Its establishment was, in part, the response to the UN Special Rapporteur call for such watches or observatories. It also built on the culmination of two decades of research on femicide in Ontario, Canada, by Professor Myrna Dawson, University of Guelph, which was being rolled out nationally to examine regional similarities and differences in sex/gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada. The international call and the national roll out of the long-standing research project made it timely and crucial to launch the CFOJA for which the core mandate is to "establish a visible and national focus on social and state responses to femicide in Canada" including documenting femicides as they occur.

The CFOJA defines femicide as the killing of all women and girls primarily by, but not exclusively, men. We do so for two reasons.

- (1) Given that the CFOJA focuses on femicide using a national lens in Canada, this definition enhances the ability to make provincial/territorial comparisons. This same reasoning is used to

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support the adoption of a broad definition at the international level.

- (2) This definition allows for the possibility that femicide may involve female perpetrators in various social and cultural contexts.

As investigations into cases proceed, however, we are developing more specific parameters to capture the ‘*killed because they were women*’ elements of narrower definitions of femicide and to identify various subtypes of femicide. These more specific parameters can contribute to education and awareness about femicide. They are discussed in more detail in the CFOJA 2019 report as well as in peer-reviewed research on the identification and collection of sex/gender related motives and indicators (Dawson and Carrigan 2020).

The ultimate goal is to create a sustainable foundation for the Observatory which is currently driven and supported by research funds awarded to Professor Dawson, Director of the Centre for the Study of Social and Legal Responses (www.violenceresearch.ca), University of Guelph, and Director of the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability.

In addition to documenting femicides as they occur, there are **three core activities** of the CFOJA:

- 1) *Documenting social responses to these deaths.* Social responses are captured by focusing on media coverage of these killings to identify stereotypes and biases that may exist and, in particular, how they may be linked to varying social identities of the women and girls killed. The goal is to identify ways in which media coverage of these killings can be improved as one mechanism for improving education and awareness about gender-related killings of women and girls (e.g. see *Tips for Media* on CFOJA homepage). The goal is to better understand the presence of societal messages and norms about femicide given that it is recognized that entrenched attitudes, beliefs, and resulting stereotypes about violence against women perpetuate and maintain practices that are harmful to women and girls.
- 2) *Documenting state responses to these deaths:* State responses are captured by focusing on existing federal/provincial/territorial legislation as well as criminal justice responses in terms of charges, convictions and sentences that result. First, identifying current/existing legislation and how it varies nationwide as well as in-depth analysis of various legislative content and prevention initiatives is ongoing. Second, court outcomes in cases of femicide are also being tracked and monitored to determine if variations exist depending on specific characteristics of the crimes (e.g. level of intimacy, indigeneity, age, etc.). In-depth analysis of sentencing comments is ongoing to determine how stereotypes and biases may present themselves in this context. Internationally, a key concern is the impunity of many perpetrators, often resulting from the lack of action or inadequate responses by state actors. Worldwide, there are discussions about the impunity of those who perpetrate these crimes but there is currently little information on exactly what happens to perpetrators following a femicide.



- 3) *Sex/gender-related motives and indicators of femicide*: The third key activity of the CFOJA is to identify key indicators of gender-related killings of women and girls. To date, including that of the CFOJA, the majority of femicide research has been inclusive when defining such acts, incorporating one of two approaches: (1) a focus on all killings of women and girls or ‘female homicide victims’; or (2) a focus on what is commonly perceived as the most obvious gender-motivated type of femicide – ‘intimate femicide.’ The CFOJA is using longitudinal data on femicides for a period of four decades as well as current data to assess the availability, accessibility, and utility of various indicators to more clearly identify femicides in the Canadian context. The long-term goal is to define a set of key parameters to capture the sex/gendered elements of these killings.

How does the work of the CFOJA differ from existing initiatives in Canada?

- While the killing of all women is included as a core focus of data collection for Statistic Canada’s Homicide Survey, data is limited, not easily accessible, and has little focus on justice and accountability following the femicide beyond initial charge laid and no focus on the media (for fuller discussion, see Dawson & Carrigan 2020).
- While several provinces currently have domestic violence death review committees, not all have such an initiative in place. Further, where they do exist, the goal is primarily to examine a subtype of femicide referred to as intimate femicide defined as the killing of a female by a current or former male partner. Some do include children killed in the context of domestic violence and third-party collateral victims as well. However, this largely excludes in-depth examinations of women killed by non-intimates (e.g. strangers, friends, acquaintances) or in other contexts (e.g. gang involvement, sex trade workers, human trafficking, organized crime).

Further, the focus of review initiatives is on the events leading up to the killing with no attention to social and legal responses to the intimate femicide after it has occurred. While their prevention focus is crucial, it does not address justice and accountability in the same way that the CFOJA does, arguing that such responses serve as a social barometer for the perceived severity of such killings and, as a result, contribute to prevention at various levels as well (for fuller discussion of these initiatives, see Dawson 2017).

To date, as noted by the Special Rapporteur, there is virtually no data on the investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of perpetrators. Given the public nature of media and court decisions, the CFOJA will focus on charge, conviction, and sentence outcomes for femicide perpetrators to determine justice and accountability in the courts. To focus more broadly on social justice and accountability, the media’s role in contributing to our understanding of femicide will be examined.

See below for administrative data from 2018-2020 inclusive.



Administrative Data on femicide/homicide or gender-related killings of women and girls for the past three years (2018-2020)

*See Table 1 for figures from CFOJA and Statistics Canada Homicide Survey where available and Table 2 for COVID-related numbers.

Some highlights and clarifications:

- As shown in Table 1 below, CFOJA reports that the total number of women and girls killed were 161, 142 and 141 respectively for 2018, 2019, and 2020 (until Nov. 22, 2020), representing approximately 22% to 24% of all homicides in Canada.
- Total figures for women collected by CFOJA were almost identical to those recorded by the Statistics Canada Homicide Survey in 2018 and 2019. Figures are not yet available from Statistics Canada for 2020.
- Total figures for male victims are slightly higher for CFOJA, but data collection has just begun for comparative research so these figures may change slightly.
- When examining disaggregated data by relationship type (e.g. intimate partner, family), CFOJA figures are lower than those recorded by Statistics Canada. This is due, in part, to the fact that early data collected by the CFOJA relies heavily on media reports which has a higher proportion of missing information on relationship type compared to Statistics Canada whose data is police-reported. As court reports become available for cases that are processed through the criminal justice system, this information will be collected, reducing the proportion of missing information over time.
- We currently do not have clear numbers on the proportion of sex/gender-related killings of women and girls because our mandate is to identify clear parameters for designating killings as ‘femicide’ beyond the traditional focus on intimate partner and familial femicide. Our case collection began in 2018 so many cases are continuing to work their way through the criminal justice system and determinations cannot always be made prior to its conclusion and often may not be made at all. Future research will examine these indicators more comprehensively.



Table 1: The number and percentage of female and male victims by type of homicide for 2018-2020*

	2018				2019				2020			
	Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total homicides												
CFOJA	161	24	497	76	142	22	504	78	141	23	475	77
Statistics Canada*	166	25	492	75	144	23	486	77	-	-	-	-
Total Intimate Partner Homicide												
CFOJA	56	37	-	-	48	38	-	-	29	23	-	-
Statistics Canada	67	47	20	7	-	47	-	6	-	-	-	-
Total Family Homicide												
CFOJA	24	16	-	-	29	23	-	-	26	21	-	-
Statistics Canada	31	22	45	15	-	26	-	15	-	-	-	-
Total Non-intimate Homicide												
CFOJA	43	29	-	-	14	11	-	-	29	23	-	-
Statistics Canada	45	31	209	72	-	20	-	68	-	-	-	-

*Data up to November 22, 2020. The following victims could not be included for figures on disaggregated relationships in each of the following years because relationship remained unknown or were police shootings: in 2018, the relationship of 26 victims was unknown and there were 3 police shootings (-11 unsolved, N=150); in 2019, the relationship of 32 victims was unknown and there were 4 police shootings (-15 unsolved, N=127); and in 2020 the relationship of 40 victims is unknown and there were 2 police shootings (-15 unsolved, N=126). Numbers are not currently available for 2020 from Statistics Canada.

Table 2: Number of women killed by men in Canada between March 18 and November 21 in each of the 3 years which represents the period of COVID-19 impact in 2020*

Year	Total N (% of total for year)	Total N (% of intimate femicide)	Total N (% of familial femicide)
2018	92 (70%)**	39 (30% of all women killed)	8 (6% of all women killed)
2019	72 (65%)	26 (23%)	21 (19%)
2020	85 (76%)***	20 (18%)	19 (17%)

*Percent based on all women and girls killed by men for the full year (or until Nov. 22 for 2020).

**This includes eight women and girls killed in April 2018, along with two men, as part of a mass femicide/homicide referred to as the 'Toronto Van Attack'.

***This includes 13 women and girls killed in a mass femicide/homicide in Nova Scotia in which 9 men were killed.



If further information is required, please do not hesitate to touch base by emailing cfoja@uoguelph.ca. For access to the 2018 and 2019 reports, see:

Our 2018 inaugural report can be accessed at:

English: <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide.pdf>

French: <https://femicideincanada.ca/Cestunf%C3%A9micide.pdf>

Our 2019 report can be accessed at:

English: <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide2019.pdf>

French: <https://femicideincanada.ca/cestunf%C3%A9micide2019.pdf>

Thank you for the opportunity to submit information on the work of the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. Please visit us at: www.femicideincanada.ca.

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