

Topic: Child Abuse and Neglect

Title: Police-reported family violence against children and youth in Canada, 2019

APA7 Citation:

Article Summary

Statistics Canada reports on police-reported family violence against children and youth in Canada (2019). Family violence refers to violence committed by parents (biological, step, adoptive and foster), siblings (biological, step, half, adopted and foster), extended family members (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and in-laws) and spouses (legally married, separated, divorced and common-law). Victims refer to those aged 17 years and younger

There can be many impacts of family violence against children (child maltreatment) including physical injury, delayed growth and development, emotional and mental health issues, alcohol and drug use, and other risky behaviour. Also, research shows an association between child maltreatment and violence victimization in adulthood (including intimate partner violence)

An important note is that child maltreatment is difficult to detect, and police-reported data is likely an underestimation of the true extent of the issue. One reason for this is because children may not realize they are being maltreated. And during the COVID 19 pandemic, children had less access or exposure to friends, teachers, doctors and counsellors, so violence they may be facing may have been more hidden.

In 2019, there were 69,691 child and youth victims of police-reported violence in Canada, and victims were more commonly girls (57%). Perpetrators of violence against children and youth were most commonly a casual acquaintance (32%), a parent (19%) or a stranger (16%).

The rate of police-reported family violence against children and youth was 14% higher in 2019 compared with the previous year, and increases were similar for girls and boys. Since 2016, there has been a year-over-year increase in the rate of family violence against children and youth, marking a 33% increase.

The most common type of family violence perpetrated against children and youth was physical assault

Bullet Points:

- Family violence refers to violence committed by parents (biological, step, adoptive and foster), siblings (biological, step, half, adopted and foster), extended family members (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and in-laws) and spouses (legally married, separated, divorced and common-law). Victims refer to those aged 17 years and younger
- Impacts of family violence against children (child maltreatment) include physical injury, delayed growth and development, emotional and mental health issues, alcohol and drug use, and other risky behaviour.
- Research shows an association between child maltreatment and violence victimization in adulthood (including intimate partner violence)
- In 2019, there were 69,691 child and youth victims of police-reported violence in Canada, and victims were more commonly girls (57%). Perpetrators of violence against children and youth were most commonly a casual acquaintance (32%), a parent (19%) or a stranger (16%).
- The rate of police-reported family violence against children and youth was 14% higher in 2019 compared with the previous year, and increases were similar for girls and boys.
- Since 2016, there has been a year-over-year increase in the rate of family violence against children and youth, marking a 33% increase.

- The most common type of family violence perpetrated against children and youth was physical assault



Section 2: Police-reported family violence against children and youth in Canada, 2019

Family violence against children and youth—also referred to as child maltreatment—can lead to a range of impacts on young victims, including physical injury, delayed growth and development, emotional and mental health issues, alcohol and drug use, and other risky behaviour (Public Health Agency of Canada 2014; United Nations 2006). In addition, research has shown an association between childhood maltreatment and violent victimization in adulthood—including intimate partner violence—and increased mental or psychological limitations and poor physical health (Burczycka 2017).

It is important to note that the victimization of children and youth is often difficult to detect—particularly in the context of family violence—and police-reported data are likely an underestimation of the true extent of the issue. For instance, younger victims are unique in that they may be unaware that they are being victimized, may not know how to seek help, may be unable to report their victimization and may be dependent on the perpetrator. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many children and youth have had minimal exposure to people outside the home—such as friends, teachers, doctors and counsellors—and thus violence against young victims has become more hidden. Further, as children and youth have spent more time online, the nature of their victimization might have changed.

In this section, family violence refers to violence committed by parents (biological, step, adoptive and foster), siblings (biological, step, half, adopted and foster), extended family members (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and in-laws) and spouses (legally married, separated, divorced and common-law). Victims refer to those aged 17 years and younger.¹

One in three child and youth victims of police-reported violence victimized by a family member

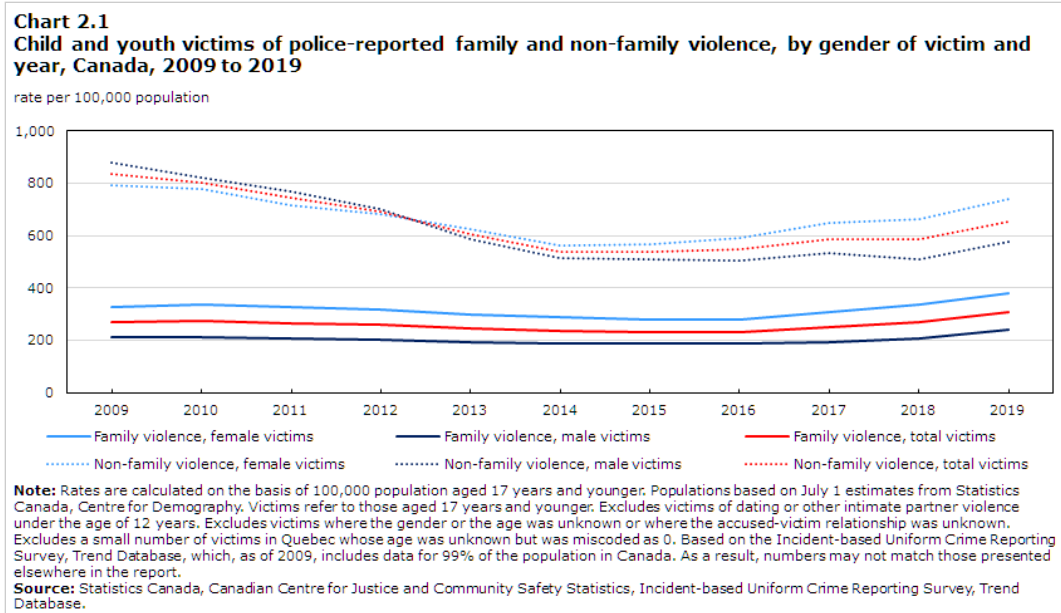
In 2019, there were 69,691 child and youth victims of police-reported violence in Canada, and victims were more commonly girls (57%) (Table 2.1). Perpetrators of violence against children and youth were most commonly a casual acquaintance (32%), a parent (19%) or a stranger (16%).

One-third (32%) of children and youth who were victims of violence that came to the attention of police were victimized by a family member. This represented 22,299 child and youth victims of family violence and, again, a larger proportion of victims were girls (60%). Within the family, child and youth victims were most often victimized by a parent (60%) while a sibling (15%) was less common.

Younger children had the highest proportion of family violence, and this decreased with age. More than two-thirds (71%) of victims aged 5 and younger were victimized by a family member. Meanwhile, less than one-fifth (18%) of victims of violence aged 15 to 17 were victimized by a family member.

Family violence against children and youth increases for the third consecutive year

The rate of police-reported family violence against children and youth was 14% higher in 2019 compared with the previous year, and increases were similar for girls and boys (Chart 2.1).² Since 2016, there has been a year-over-year increase in the rate of family violence against children and youth, marking a 33% increase. Between 2009 and 2019, the rate increased 15% while the rate of non-family violence against children and youth decreased 22%.



Physical assault most common form of family violence against children and youth

In 2019, the rate of police-reported family violence against children and youth was 311 victims per 100,000 population (Table 2.2). The most common type of family violence perpetrated against children and youth was physical assault³ (accounting for 54% of victims, a rate of 169 per 100,000 population). While the rate of physical assault was similar for girls and boys (167 versus 171), the rate of sexual offences⁴ was 4.6 times higher for girls than boys (170 versus 37).

Among child and youth victims of family violence, rates of physical assault generally increased with age. Meanwhile, rates of sexual offences peaked among girls aged 12 to 14 and boys aged 6 to 11 (275 and 50 per 100,000 population, respectively).

Three-quarters (74%) of child and youth victims of family violence were assaulted using physical force (Table 2.3).⁵ A further 15% of young victims of family violence were assaulted with a weapon present, such as a knife, club or firearm. More than one-third (36%) of child and youth victims of family

violence suffered a physical injury.⁶ Among those who were physically injured, nearly all (96%) had minor injuries. Physical injury resulting from family violence was more common for boys than girls (43% versus 31%).

Text box 2**Self-reported childhood experiences of physical and sexual abuse**

As mentioned, measuring violence against children and youth is challenging. Gathering information from a range of sources is critical for monitoring this issue (Public Health Agency of Canada 2019). Police-reported data are likely an underestimation of the true extent of violence against children and youth, particularly in the family context. For this reason, self-reported data offer additional insight into the nature and extent of violence against young victims and complement police-reported data.

The 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces included retrospective questions about experiences of childhood physical and sexual abuse.⁷ Just over one-quarter (27%) of Canadians experienced abuse before age 15.⁸ A slightly lower proportion of women than men had experienced physical abuse early in life (22% versus 25%) while the proportion that experienced sexual abuse was three times higher for women than men (12% versus 4%).

When it came to violence during childhood, 78% of victims of physical abuse and 45% of victims of sexual abuse said the most serious incident they experienced was perpetrated by a family member. Victimization by a family member was more common for female victims of physical abuse (83% versus 74% of male victims) and sexual abuse (49% versus 32% of male victims).

Of those victimized within the family context during childhood, 6% of victims said the violence they experienced came to the attention of police while another 6% said they spoke with someone from child protective services.

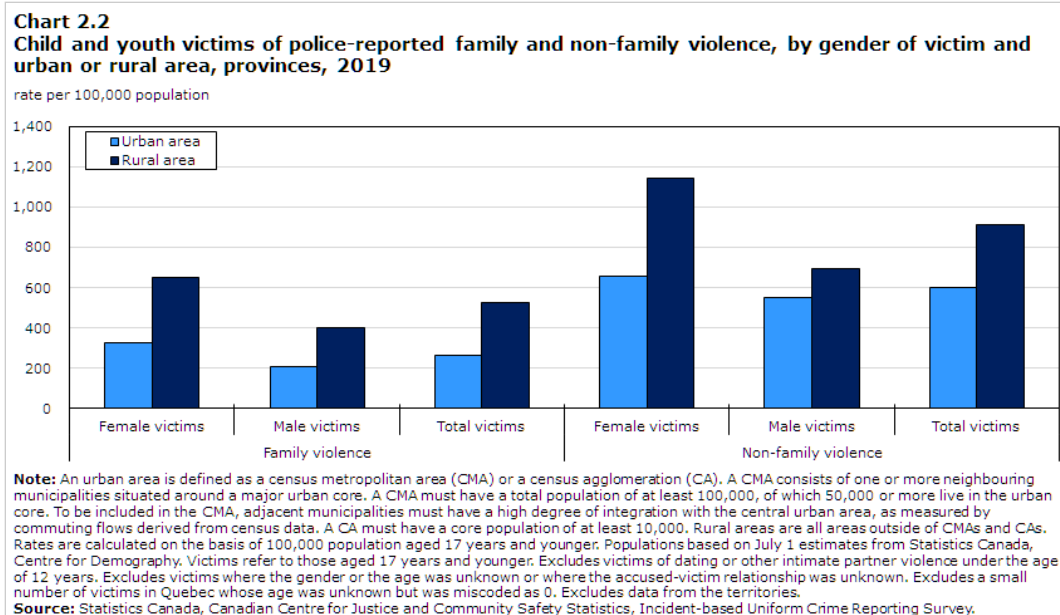
Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Manitoba have highest provincial rates of family violence against children and youth

Among the provinces, the rate of police-reported family violence against children and youth was highest in Saskatchewan (540 per 100,000 population), Newfoundland and Labrador (433) and Manitoba (414) (Table 2.4).⁹ Meanwhile, it was lowest in Ontario (211), Alberta (286) and British Columbia (291). Compared with the provinces, rates were notably higher in the territories, with Nunavut reporting the highest rate (1,913) followed by the Northwest Territories (1,349) and Yukon (764).

Girls experienced a higher rate of family violence than boys in every province and territory. The largest differences in the rate for girls and boys were noted in the Northwest Territories (1,953 versus 748, 2.6 times higher for girls), Yukon (999 versus 546, 1.8 times higher) and British Columbia (374 versus 213, 1.8 times higher).

In every province and territory in 2019, the rate of family violence against children and youth increased from the previous year, with the exception of Prince Edward Island (-1%).¹⁰ The largest provincial increases were noted in Newfoundland and Labrador (+46%) and British Columbia (+41%).

The rate of family violence against children and youth in the provinces was 2.0 times higher in rural areas than urban areas (522 versus 265 per 100,000 population), and this pattern was similar for girls and boys (Chart 2.2).¹¹ In rural areas, girls had a rate of family violence that was 1.6 times higher than boys (652 versus 398). Of note, when it came to child and youth victims, the difference between rural and urban rates was larger for family violence than non-family violence (2.0 versus 1.5 times higher in rural areas).



The rate of family violence against children and youth was 2.1 times lower in Canada's largest cities—referred to as census metropolitan areas¹² or C.M.A.s—than it was in non-C.M.A.s (239 versus 492) (Table 2.5).¹³ Among the C.M.A.s, rates were highest in Saguenay (488), Trois-Rivières (417) and Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (389). Meanwhile, rates were lowest in Guelph (106), Ottawa¹⁴ (121) and Barrie (163).

Among the C.M.A.s, the largest differences in the rate of family violence between girls and boys were noted in Thunder Bay (389 versus 111, 3.5 times higher for girls) and Kingston (274 versus 93, 2.9 times higher).

Detailed data tables

Table 2.1 Child and youth victims of police-reported family and non-family violence, by gender and age group of victim, and relationship of accused to victim, Canada, 2019

Table 2.2 Child and youth victims of police-reported family and non-family violence, by gender and age group of victim, and type of violation, Canada, 2019

Table 2.3 Child and youth victims of police-reported family and non-family violence, by gender of victim, type of weapon present and level of injury, Canada, 2019

Table 2.4 Child and youth victims of police-reported family and non-family violence, by gender of victim and province or territory, 2018 to 2019

Table 2.5 Child and youth victims of police-reported family and non-family violence, by gender of victim and census metropolitan area, 2019

References

Burczycka, M. 2017. "Profile of Canadian adults who experienced childhood maltreatment" in *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2015*. *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Public Health Agency of Canada. 2019. "A pathfinding country: Canada's road map to end violence against children."

Public Health Agency of Canada. 2014. *Family Violence Initiative*.

United Nations. 2006. "World report on violence against children." Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Publishing Services.

Notes

- 1 Excludes victims where the gender or the age was unknown. Counts represent the number of victims involved in incidents of violence. It is possible that individual victims may have experienced more than one incident, and would therefore be counted more than once here. For type of relationship, percentages have been calculated excluding unknown relationships.
- 2 Trend numbers are based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data from 99% of the population in Canada. As a result, trend numbers may not match those presented elsewhere in the report.
- 3 Includes assault level 1, assault level 2 (with a weapon or causing bodily harm) and assault level 3 (aggravated assault).
- 4 Includes sexual assault level 1, sexual assault level 2 (with a weapon or causing bodily harm) and sexual assault level 3 (aggravated sexual assault). Also includes sexual violations against children, which refer to a set of *Criminal Code* offences that specifically concern offences involving child and youth victims. These include offences such as sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching and sexual exploitation, but exclude sexual assault (levels 1, 2 and 3) and other sexual offences not specific to children.
- 5 Data on type of weapon present exclude the province of Quebec due to data quality concerns. Percentages have been calculated excluding unknown type of weapon present.
- 6 Data on level of injury exclude the province of Quebec due to data quality concerns. Percentages have been calculated excluding unknown level of injury.

- 7 For physical abuse, the following questions were asked: “Before age 15 [...] did any adult do any of the following to you? Slap you on the face, head or ears, or hit you with something hard to hurt you? Push, grab, shove or throw something at you to hurt you? Kick, bite, punch, choke or burn you, or physically attack you in some way?” For sexual abuse, the following questions were asked: “Before age 15 [...] did any adult do any of the following to you? Force you or attempt to force you into any unwanted sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way? Touch you against your will in any sexual way, meaning anything from unwanted touching or grabbing, to kissing or fondling?”
- 8 Totals include female, male and gender diverse respondents, and respondents who did not state their gender.
- 9 Trend numbers are based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data from 99% of the population in Canada. As a result, trend numbers may not match those presented elsewhere in the report.
- 10 Part of the overall increase in police-reported crime may be attributed to the implementation of new reporting standards. For more information, see Survey description.

¹¹Excludes data from the territories. An urban area is defined as a census metropolitan area (CMA) or a census agglomeration (CA). A CMA consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. To be included in the CMA, adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows derived from census data. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000. Rural areas are all areas outside of CMAs and CAs. The populations for urban and rural areas have been adjusted to reflect the actual policing boundaries within the urban and rural geographies and do not reflect the official Statistics Canada population for these geographies. Excludes data from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children as it responds to incidents nationally. The incidents themselves and the offenders are not limited to one specific province or territory.

¹²For a definition of a census metropolitan area, see endnote 11.

¹³Data for the census metropolitan area of Saint John are excluded due to data quality concerns associated with the Saint John Police Service.

¹⁴Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau census metropolitan area.

[← Previous](#)

[Next →](#)

Date modified:

2021-03-02