

## Canada

# Drop in spousal killings — but not in Toronto

**Dramatic decline nationally: StatsCan**  
Many abuse victims still stay silent

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The number of men and women killing their spouses across Canada has dropped dramatically over the last 30 years even though the number of domestic homicides in Toronto this year has already surpassed last year's total, the national statistics agency said yesterday.

The Statistics Canada report also measured, for the first time, the criminal history of persons charged with spousal abuse over a 10-year time frame and found victims of domestic violence often suffer in silence — only telling police about an incident once when victimization surveys have shown spousal violence frequently involves multiple incidents.

The findings are in step with the agency's 2004 general social survey on victimization that found that only 28 per cent of victims of spousal violence turned to police for help. Incidents that are reported tend to depend on the severity and frequency of the violence, and on whether children were witnesses.

Other factors include whether the victim was female, young, Aboriginal, or turned to others for support, the agency said.

The new findings, based on police reports collected between 1995 and 2004, concluded that eight out of 10 offenders, or 81 per cent, were reported to authorities just a single time.

Repeat spousal offenders, those with two to four incidents reported to police, accounted for 18 per cent and chronic abusers, with five or more reported incidents, accounted for

the remaining 1 per cent of offenders.

Younger people, those aged 15 to 24, were most likely to report spousal violence to the police, while those aged 35 and older were least likely to report, the study said.

Most people, 52 per cent, who reported incidents to the police later said that violence decreased after the intervention. Thirty per cent said there was no change in the abuse, and 11 per cent said things worsened.

Det. Const. Kevin Neill, who

**Many victims of abuse still don't report to police because of threats, financial distress**

works in York Regional Police's domestic violence unit, said there are many reasons women spousal abuse victims don't call police, including embarrassment, threats, financial considerations, fear of reprisals and a feeling of "who's going to believe them?"

"A lot of these guys present very well to friends, neighbours, family outside the home... If I was to tell them he does this behind closed doors, they're going to go, 'What, Bob, you kidding me? No way.'"

And there are other reasons — the social and economic inequalities — that explain why women don't report on why they stay or return to abusive relationships, said Wendy Komofis, executive director of Metrac, Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children.

For many women, especially

with two or three children, who are financially dependent on their abusive partner, when they look at the choices they have or options, they're not very good."

Immigrant women will also not choose to report because of language barriers. They may not be aware there are multilingual services available, Komofis said.

Neill, however, took issue with part of the report that said police lay charges in 84 per cent of spousal violence incidents — and that only 10 per cent of victims requested police not press charges.

He said that flies in the face of everything he knows. "How would they come up with that? I was in uniform for 11 years going to these calls. It seemed to me that probably more

than half the times the victims say, 'No, I don't want him charged, I just want him to stop.'"

Yet he understands why so few will see it through and credits his extensive domestic abuse training with York.

"No matter what we do as police, we can't change the psyche that is common in the phenomenon of abused women or anybody."

He was also quick to note that a large chunk of time measured by the report came before police services across the province revamped procedures and practices relating to domestic violence in the wake of several high profile coroner's inquest recommendations on domestic abuse.

Overall, there have been positive changes in the area of family violence, notes the report, including the downward trend

that has seen spousal homicide rates drop 57 per cent for female victims and 68 per cent for male victims from 1974 to 2004.

That despite the fact there have already been eight domestic homicide charges in Toronto so far this year — the same number as occurred in all of 2005. The spousal homicide rate fluctuates, the agency stated.

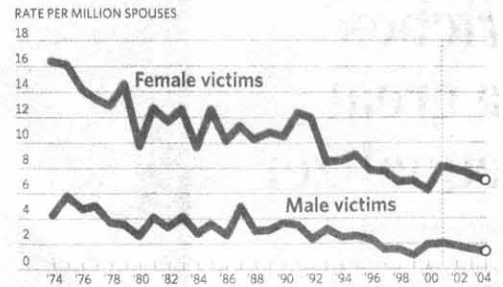
Spousal homicides involve persons in legal marriages, those separated or divorced in such unions, and those in common-law relationships, including same-sex spouses.

Across Canada in 2004, there were 74 spousal homicides, down four from the previous year and slightly lower than the 10-year average of 79 (from 1994 to 2003).

This figure represents an overall rate of 4.3 spousal homicides

## Declining spousal homicides

Although the rate has fluctuated, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of men and women killing their spouses over the past 30 years.



SOURCE: STATSCAN

TORONTO STAR GRAPHIC

per 1 million spouses in 2004, the third consecutive annual decline in the spousal homicide rate.

"Possible explanations for this decrease... include increased gender equality, changes in police and court policies towards spousal violence and an increase in services for persons experiencing family violence, such as specialized domestic vi-

olence courts and emergency shelters for abused women," said the report called Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile.

"In addition, public awareness and policy responses to spousal violence have intensified over the years including the implementation of criminal procedures and protocols to better respond to this type of violence."

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