



# Just Facts

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Research and Statistics Division

## Data Sources on Indigenous Victimization

### Five national sources of administrative data within the justice system on Indigenous people

There are five national sources of administrative data from within the justice system that report on Indigenous people's contact with police and the corrections system: three are corrections-level surveys and two are police-level surveys.<sup>1</sup>

### Heavy reliance on the General Social Survey on Criminal Victimization

Partly as a consequence of the data gaps that exist within the justice system, research into the victimization of Indigenous people in Canada has relied heavily on the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization as a source of statistical data. The GSS on Victimization, which is carried out by Statistics Canada every five years, was most recently carried out in 2014. The GSS allows an analysis of self-reported rates of specific forms of victimization, such as robbery or family violence, with other social and demographic factors such as age, gender and the relationship between the victim and the accused.

### Evolution of the GSS on Victimization

The 1999 GSS on Victimization was the first cycle to conduct telephone interviews in the North, but the findings were not released due to representativeness issues. The results of the 2004 cycle were released, however, the report urged extreme caution in interpreting the data due to several limitations and challenges. Many have noted that relying on telephone surveys inadequately represented the experiences of many marginalized people, particularly women, who either could not be reached by phone or did not speak French or English, or refused to participate.<sup>2</sup> The 2009 cycle added in-person interviews in the three territories to supplement the telephone surveys. However, comparison between provincial and territorial data were to be made with caution due to the underrepresentation of the Inuit population in Nunavut. With improvements to the survey and an increase in the number of in-person interviews, the 2014 GSS on Criminal Victimization was the first to present combined provincial and territorial data on Indigenous people.

### 2014 Homicide Survey first cycle to have complete information on Indigenous identity

Between 2003 and 2013, the Indigenous identity<sup>3</sup> of about half of victims and accused persons in a



homicide case was reported as unknown. The 2014 Homicide Survey was the first cycle to have more complete information on the Indigenous identity of victims and accused persons in a homicide case and only 3% were reported as unknown.<sup>4</sup>

### **2015 Homicide Survey presents special analysis on casual acquaintances**

The 2015 homicide survey presented a special analysis of homicides of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women committed by casual acquaintances.<sup>5</sup> This special analysis examined cases between 1980 and 2015, where police reported that 18% of Indigenous female victims and 11% of non-Indigenous female victims were killed by a ‘casual acquaintance’. The results showed that of the total number of female homicide victims killed by a casual acquaintance, 24% were of Indigenous identity. The analysis found that 38% of Indigenous female victims killed by a casual acquaintance were “co-substance users” with the perpetrator.<sup>6</sup>

### **Gaps in disaggregated data on Indigenous people and the Canadian justice system**

An examination of the way in which data is collected on Indigenous involvement in the criminal justice system was undertaken by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS).<sup>7</sup> The authors of the resulting report note that Canadian commissions and inquiries have repeatedly highlighted the gaps in disaggregated data on Indigenous people and the Canadian justice system. An example of one issue noted was the need for the consistent definition of terms such as “Aboriginal” across surveys and reporting agencies. Collecting information on Indigenous origin and identity was also a challenge in the recent RCMP research initiative on missing and murdered Indigenous women. First Nations people are registered status Indians, whose Indigenous identity can be ascertained regardless of whether the victim is incapacitated. Other than that group, Indigenous identity is only determined through self-identification rather than being ascribed by police and other front-line responders, which causes additional challenges, for example, when the victim is incapacitated, missing or murdered. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) also identified the lack of definitions and comparable datasets among agencies and jurisdictions across Canada.

Earlier reports questioned the quality and quantity of reliable data dealing with Indigenous victimization.<sup>8</sup> Though this remains a gap, information has improved over the years.<sup>9</sup>

### **GSS a tool that continues to improve**

Though there has been a positive evolution of data collection methods for the GSS, the survey remains limited as a research tool for examining Indigenous victimization.<sup>10</sup> A lack of available statistical information may lead to the underestimation of the full extent of violent victimization of Indigenous people in Canada while also threatening to distort Canada’s understanding of the causes and contexts of this violence. A significant gap is that the GSS does not document victims’ experiences in the justice system itself.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note, however, that Statistics Canada continues to work with partners to improve the quality of its many surveys.

<sup>1</sup> Correctional level surveys: Adult Correctional Services Survey, Youth Custody and Community Services Survey and Integrated Correctional Services Survey. Police level surveys: Uniform Crime Report and Homicide Survey

<sup>2</sup> Kong, R., and Beattie, K. *Collecting Data on Aboriginal People in the Criminal Justice System: Methods and Challenges*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2005; Perreault, S. *Criminal victimization in Canada, 2014*. Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X, 2015; Perreault, S. and Simpson, L. *Criminal victimization in the Territories, 2014*. Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Indigenous identity, when reported by police is determined through status cards, information from the victim or accused persons’ families, information supplied by the victim or accused persons themselves, community members, band records, or forensic evidence. Miladinovic, Z. and Mulligan, L. *Homicide in Canada, 2014*. *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. 2015.



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<sup>4</sup> According to the 2015 Homicide Survey, there were seven times more Indigenous homicide victims than non-Indigenous homicide victims that year (rates of 8.77 and 1.31 per 100,000, respectively). The survey also found that there were ten times more Indigenous persons accused in homicide cases than non-Indigenous persons accused (rates of 10.13 and 1.01 per 100,000, respectively). Mulligan, L., et al. Homicide in Canada, 2015. *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. 2016.

<sup>5</sup> The Homicide Survey describes 'casual acquaintances' as: "A person known to the victim and with whom the victim did not have a romantic, sexual, or close friendship and whose relationship cannot be better described by another 'acquaintance' relationship type collected on the survey (i.e., close friend, neighbor, authority figure, business relationship or criminal relationship). Roommates and fellow inmates with no close personal friendship are included in the definition of casual acquaintance." (Mulligan et al. 2016, 7)

<sup>6</sup> The Homicide Survey describes the co-substance user relationship as "based solely on the consumption of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicating substances immediately prior to the homicide" (Mulligan et al. 2016, 7).

<sup>7</sup> Kong, R., and Beattie, K. 2005.

<sup>8</sup> For example: Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada. *Exposure to Violence in the Home: Effects on Aboriginal Children Discussion Paper*. Ottawa, ON, 2001; Hylton, J. *Aboriginal Sex Offending in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2002; Van der Put, D. *Literature Review on Aboriginal Victims of Crime*. Unpublished manuscript, Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People Inquiry, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> For example, a study conducted by Paletta (2008) looked at family violence and sexual assault in the territories using Crown Prosecutor files. Paletta examined the relationship between the offender and the offender's history of violent victimization. Paletta, A. *Understanding Family Violence and Sexual Assault in the Territories, First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples*. Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the 2014 GSS on Criminal Victimization included questions on participants' experience of maltreatment during childhood and analysed results for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. However despite this addition to the GSS, there is a general lack of Indigenous-specific data on child victimization.

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International. *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*. N.a., 2004; Kong, R., and Beattie, K. 2005.

