

# **FEMICIDE REPORT**

## **NOVEMBER 2019 - NOVEMBER 2020**

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**A REPORT BY THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF  
INTERVAL & TRANSITION HOUSES**



**'We are heartbroken': Ex-husband wanted after woman found dead in Brampton, police say**

**'A beautiful person': Toronto trans activist Julie Berman identified as homicide victim**

**Brockville mourns 'a beautiful soul' lost to domestic violence**

**Mother fatally stabbed a victim of domestic violence: family**

**The court said it wasn't urgent. How a bitter custody battle ended with the death of a GTA kindergartener and her father**

**Husband cuffed in senior's slaying**

**North York woman killed in stabbing at spa was a 'loving mother' who had 'contagious' smile**

**Gunman kills four of his family members before taking his own life at Oshawa home: Police**

**81-year-old Mississauga woman dead, husband charged with 1st-degree murder: police**

**Man arrested in death of woman in Scarborough apartment fire**

**'The whole street is left in sadness': 54-year-old woman found dead in Oakwood-Vaughan home was victim of homicide, police say**

# BACKGROUND

Femicide is commonly defined as the intentional murder of women because they are women. Broader definitions can include any killings of women or girls. In 1995, OAITH began publishing an Annual Femicide List to bring attention to the violence women experience by men. The list includes women and sometimes children who were killed by men who were known to them, either a current or former intimate partner, a family member, friend or acquaintance, or an unknown relationship but a targeted incident where their gender put them at risk. Victim and offender relationships are categorized based on the following characteristics: intimate partner (current or former intimate partner), family (father, son, nephew), known (acquaintance, neighbour) or unknown (did not have any relationship but was a targeted attack or details may be unknown or unreleased regarding the nature of their relationship). To date (1990-2020), OAITH is aware of over 855 femicide victims who've been killed by men closely known to them.

## Report Purpose

The following report uses data collected from the 2019-2020 Annual Femicide Report to further analyze and examine ongoing femicide trends in Ontario. This report will further expand on the media analysis of femicide reporting in Ontario and the impacts of negative media framing on public awareness, understanding and conceptualization of gender based violence, and more specifically femicide. This report will also examine a number of indicators and measures related to femicide victims and to the victims' relationship with the perpetrator. These measures provide valuable insight to new and continuing femicide trends, as well as highlight potential risk factors and areas for future study.

It is important to note that the femicide lists are only partial. There are two common sources of information used to determine the number of femicides that occur in a given year that include either coroners data or media reports. OAITH utilizes local, regional and national media reports to track, analyze and produce an annual femicide list and media analysis. There have been a number of instances over the last several years where police have not released details pertaining to a femicide until several months or sometimes years later. Based on this analysis the following three categories with case examples have been included:

\* OAITH's Femicide Database contains names dating back to 1990. OAITH began officially publishing an Annual Femicide List in 1995.



## Murder/Foul Play Identified With No/Limited Reporting To Media

There have been a number of instances where police have delayed announcing a femicide until several months and sometimes years later, despite an ongoing investigation. In some circumstances police services have reported to the public this can be due to a lack of available information to conclude a femicide has occurred or to preserve the integrity of an ongoing police investigation. This delay in reporting can result in underreporting of femicide rates and can also distort public perception and understanding of gender-based violence by diminishing the prevalence of femicide within the community.

In November 2020, Brantford Police released details pertaining to a femicide that occurred in March 2020.<sup>1</sup> Although the victim's name has been released as Shannon Burnside and she has been included in the 2019-2020 Femicide List, there continues to be limited information regarding the nature of her death and a suspect.

Toronto Police have recently reported the death of a young woman named Danielle Stephanie Warriner, who died while at a Toronto Hospital. Danielle had sought medical help at Toronto General Hospital in May 2020, after testing positive for Covid-19, and was in medical distress when she was assaulted by two security officers, later resulting in her death. Toronto Police, however, did not release information regarding formal charges until December 2020.<sup>2</sup>

In May 2019, a family of five were found dead in a fatal fire in Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (K.I.) First Nation. Police released very little information at the beginning of the investigation. The fire killed 5 people, Geraldine Chapman, as well as her children and foster children, Angel McKay, Karl Cutfeet, Hailey Chapman and Shyra Chapman.<sup>3</sup> The OPP didn't lay charges until November 2020, more than a year and a half after the family was killed.<sup>4</sup> This case highlights the violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls, while also illustrating the lack of media and police attention that is often given to violence committed against Indigenous women. Furthermore, this case exemplifies the continued colonial oppression and discrimination through the lack of essential resources, services and infrastructure on the K.I. First Nation, and on many First Nations.

1 Woman's death in March labelled homicide by Brantford police. (2020, November 30). The Hamilton Spectator. Retrieved from <https://www.thespec.com/news/crime/2020/11/30/womans-death-in-march-now-being-labelled-homicide-by-brantford-police.html>

2 Two security guards charged with manslaughter in the death of a woman at Toronto General Hospital. (2020, December 8). Toronto Star. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/12/08/two-security-guards-charged-with-manslaughter-in-the-death-of-a-woman-at-toronto-general-hospital.html>

3 First Nation in Ontario name family killed in early morning house fire. (2019, May 6). APTN News. Retrieved from <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/first-nation-in-ontario-name-family-killed-in-early-morning-house-fire/>

4 First-degree murder charges laid in fatal K.I. fire that killed 5. (2020, December 9). CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/murder-charges-ki-fire-1.5834425>

## Missing Person Identified and Reported

**Many women are reported missing every year, with Indigenous women, girls and 2-Spirit Peoples being overrepresented on missing persons lists across Canada. In some circumstances there may be limited information by police, different information from family or friends, risk factors that suggest foul play, and other complexities that can lead to reporting biases.**

Alyssa Turnbull was reported missing in March 2020 from Nipigon Ontario. Very little information has been provided to the media and few media sources have reported on this disappearance. Some articles have suggested two of her former intimate partners are responsible for her disappearance and others have referenced the missing woman's past substance use and have alleged connections with local drug networks placing the blame on the victim.<sup>6</sup> Recently, the OPP announced a \$50,000 reward for assistance in finding the victim,<sup>7</sup> however, there has been little media coverage since then. When women are reported missing OAITH continues to monitor media reports, but rely on authorities to report if they've been found or murdered. OAITH's Femicide List doesn't capture women reported missing, however available online missing persons lists to analyze contextual elements for women who were missing and then deemed to be murdered.

## Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

It is important to note that there is often little to no media coverage regarding violence against Indigenous women and girls. Media representation, biases, racial stereotyping, victim blaming of missing and murdered Indigenous Women, are reflective of colonial structures and systemic racism that perpetuate harm and violence. It is important to highlight that the small percentage of Indigenous victims included in the 2019-2020 Femicide List may not be a true indication of the number of murdered Indigenous women and girls in Ontario. Violence against Indigenous women and girls continues to be a serious concern within Canada and requires immediate government and community actions to address the colonial and racist structures that continue to perpetuate oppression and violence.

6 Update Disappearance of Alyssa Turnbull. (2020, September 21). Lake Superior News. Retrieved from <https://lakesuperiornews.com/Public-Safety/Crime/update-disappearance-of-alyssa-turnbull>

7 OPP offer \$50K reward in Alyssa Turnbull investigation Social Sharing. (2020, October 30). CBC News. Retrieved from [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/opp-alyssa-turnbull-reward-1.5783592](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/opp-alyssa-turnbull-reward-1.5783592)

## MEDIA FRAMING ANALYSIS

Previous research has identified a number of issues in the way media reports gender-based violence and femicide. Media sources use various media frames which can be represented by specific language or words, tone, visuals and contexts to shape their messaging.<sup>8</sup> Often, the media reports on femicide as an isolated or episodic event that is sensationalized and often taken out of a gender-based violence context.<sup>9</sup> Due to the large dissemination of information from mainstream news sources, the media has a strong influence on public perception and understanding of gender-based violence.<sup>10</sup> Depending on the media framing used, the reports can either improve social awareness and understanding of femicide in a positive way or they can minimize the issue and/or reinforce myths about gender-based violence. Depending on how the frame shapes the messaging, it can be categorized as either a positive frame or a negative frame. In total, between November 2019 and November 2020, 100 media sources were examined from national, local and television media sources. Each article was analyzed based on the following media framing categories:

### Positive Frames:

**Victim Humanized:** Describing and remembering the woman positively and acknowledging how she impacted the lives of others.

**Labelled a Femicide:** Labelling the murder as a femicide or specifically as violence against women.

**Picture of Victim:** Existence of a positive or neutral picture of the woman in the new report.

**Gendered Social Problem:** Contextualizing femicide as a social and/or political problem room in gender inequality.

**Violence Against Women (VAW) Help Information:** Existence of information about women's shelters or other violence against women resources.

### Negative Frames:

**Victim Blaming:** Attributing blame to the victim directly by emphasizing her role in the femicide, or indirectly by excusing/justifying the perpetrator.

**Traditional Voice of Authority:** Relying on traditional voices of authority, such as law enforcement and government officials to be cited over the voices of friends, family or violence against women experts.

**Individualized:** Portraying the femicide as an individual aberration, isolated or seemingly random event.

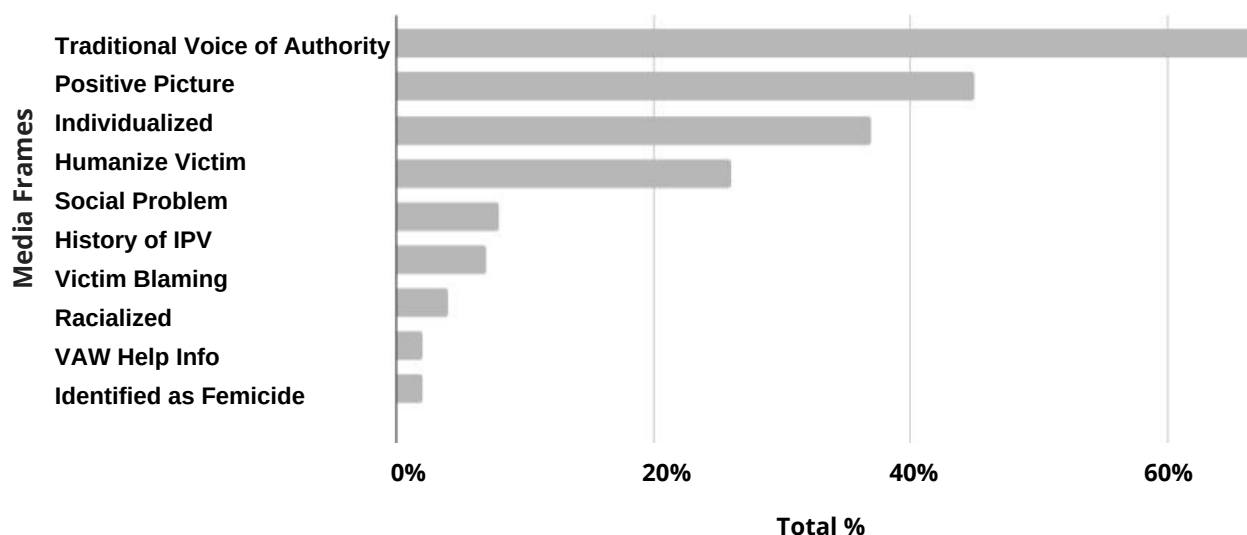
**Violence against women (VAW) History Undocumented:** Failing to address any history of power and control, abuse and/or violence by the perpetrator. This is particularly relevant, as research suggests that history of violence is the most significant risk-factor for femicide.

**Racialization:** Misrepresentation or stereotyping of people into groups by reference to their skin colour or physical features, or race/ethnicity.

- 8 Lee, C., & Wong, J. S. (2019). 99 Reasons and He Ain't One: A Content Analysis of Domestic Homicide News Coverage. *Violence Against Women*, 26(2), 213-232. doi:10.1177/1077801219832325
- 9 Easteal, P., Holland, K., & Judd, K. (2015). Enduring themes and silences in media portrayals of violence against women. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 48, 103-113. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2014.10.015
- 10 Gillespie, L. K., Richards, T. N., Givens, E. M., & Smith, M. D. (2013). Framing Deadly Domestic Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 19(2), 222-245. doi:10.1177/1077801213476457

The most common media frame used across all 100 media sources analyzed was a Traditional Voice of Authority, with 67% of articles using this frame. This media frame can be understood as an over reliance on police or government officials in media reporting. This can create many issues as it relates to reporting on femicide, as it excludes the voices of the victim's family community and/or Violence Against Women (VAW) experts. Through omitting the voices of the family and VAW experts, the media is not able to contextualize the incident or provide insight into the societal roots of oppression and violence against women. Additionally, this frame does not allow for the victims of femicide to be memorialized in any way. This discourse is necessary to bring a greater awareness and understanding of violence against women within the community so that greater steps may be taken to end further violence. Additionally, 37% of all media articles individualized the incident. Similarly to overreliance on traditional voices of authority, framing the femicide as an individual or isolated incident ignores the societal root causes of male power, control and violence. In order for these systems to be addressed they must first be recognized as the causes behind gender-based violence.

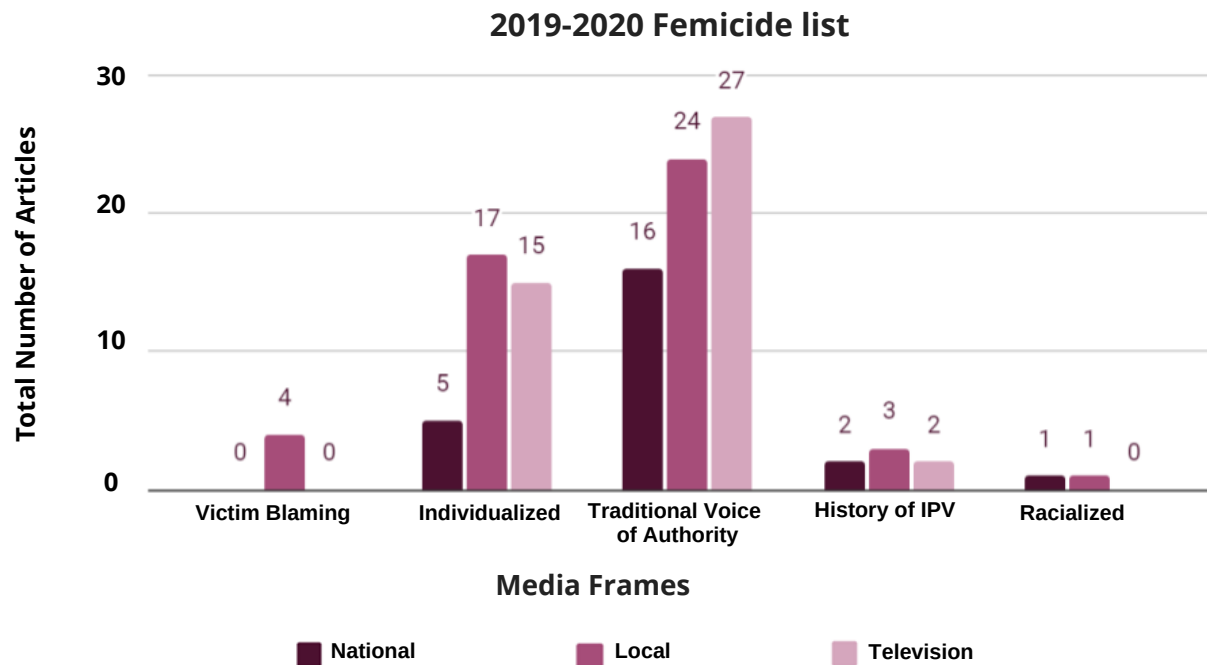
Media Frame	Yes	No
Humanize Victim	26%	74%
Positive Picture	45%	55%
Social Problem	8%	92%
Identified as Femicide	0%	100%
VAW Help Info	2%	98%
Victim Blaming	4%	96%
Individualized	37%	63%
Traditional Voice of Authority	67%	33%
History of IPV	7%	93%
Racialized	2%	98%

**Media Frame Counts Across 100 Media Sources**


What is also notable from the media analysis is that 0% of all sources identified the murder as a femicide, and only 2% of all sources provided information about VAW help or resources. It is imperative that there is a greater understanding of violence against women, and more specifically femicide, within society. In order to understand this issue, it needs to be identified as such. Media reporting continues to ignore and omit the gendered differences and power imbalances that exist in gender-based violence and femicide. It is necessary to distinguish femicide from other homicides and to define it as a femicide in order to expand community awareness, knowledge and response. The media also has the opportunity to disseminate critical help info for local VAW shelters or hotlines to a wide audience. In doing so, the media could further assist in bringing awareness to femicide as a societal gender-based issue, as opposed to sensationalizing it as an isolated incident.

When examining the media frames by each media source, local news sources were the most likely to use negative media frames, using a total of 49 negative frames. Television sources used a total of 44 negative frames while national sources used the least amount of negative media frames, with a total of 24 negative frames used. Traditional Voice of Authority was the most commonly used negative media frame across all sources. Notably, local sources were the only source to engage in victim blaming.

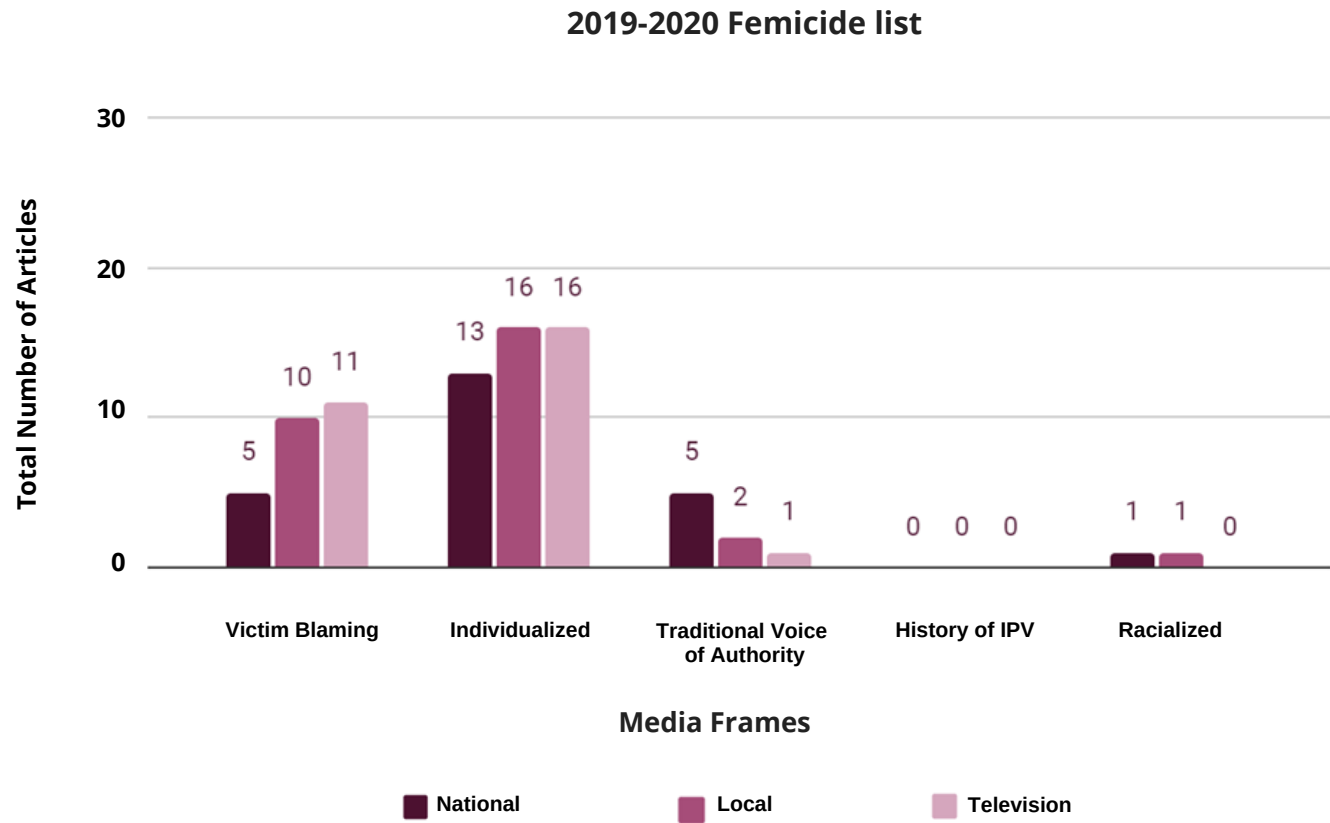
## Comparison of Negative Media Frames Across All Media Sources





Local news sources also used the most positive frames across all media reports, using a total of 29 positive frames. Television sources used a total of 28 positive frames and national sources used a total of 24 positive frames. The most common positive frame used across all media sources was the inclusion of a positive picture of the victim. Most notably, no media source identified any murder as a femicide. As mentioned previously, in order to address lethal violence against women it needs to be labelled a femicide and to be identified as a societal gender-based problem. This labelling needs to begin with both police and media reporting in order to improve public understanding of gender-based violence and femicide.

Comparison of Positive Media Frames Across All Media Sources



## Victim Offender Relationship

The femicide types were categorized based on the following characteristics:

**Intimate Partner:** husband, ex-husband, common law spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, date

**Family:** father, brother, son, uncle, nephew, step-father

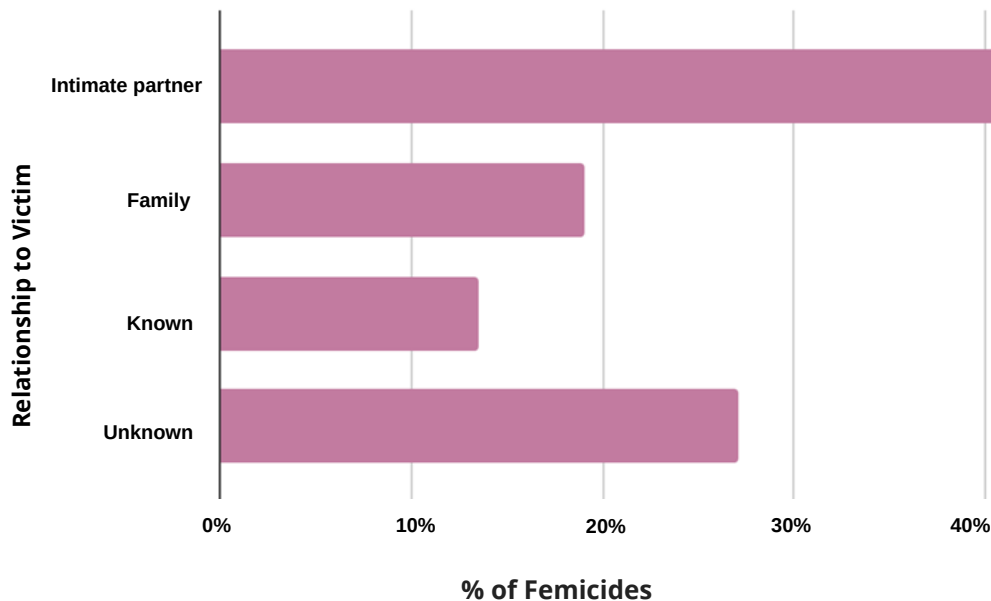
**Known:** neighbour, employer, co-worker, friend, roommate acquaintance

**Unknown:** Was a targeted attack/at-risk due to gender and details about the nature of the relationship are unknown or unreleased

The most common victim-offender relationship was an intimate partner relationship. Of the 37 femicides reported (15 women, or 40.5% of all victims), there was a current or former partner that has been charged or deemed responsible. As identified in media reporting, former partners were charged and/or deemed responsible in 33.3% of the cases we analyzed. Former partners can include separation or those who were in the process of separating. It is important to understand that a woman is not safe simply because she has left her former abusive partner, and this analysis points to that reality. In many cases a woman is at an increased risk for experiencing violence, including lethal violence, when they are leaving an abusive relationship due to a perceived loss of control over the woman. This danger is often overlooked and it is often assumed that if a woman ends her abusive relationship then she would be safe from violence, however, as this data has shown that is not the case. This highlights the need for increased supports, expert planning and safety measures for women who are leaving an abusive partner and transitioning into the community.

### Victim Offender Relationship

#### 2019-2020 Femicide list



When comparing the victim-offender relationships to the previous year's data, there are many similarities. The most notable similarity between the two years, is the percentage of victims who were killed by their current or former intimate partner. Intimate Partner Femicide (IPF) was the most common femicide type for both years and accounted for 50% of all femicide victims in 2018-2019 and 40.5% of all femicide victims in 2019-2020. What is also notable among this comparison, is the increase in the number of victims included in the unknown relationship category in 2019-2020. This increase can be attributed to lack of police disclosure, limited media information due to publication bans, or as a result of the victim's family requesting these details not be released.

A significant number of femicides from 2019-2020 have been categorized as relationship unknown. There are a number of instances where police have released very limited information pertaining to the nature of the victim offender relationship, however language often used when reporting does indicate a femicide has occurred. For example, when media reports state that the incident was isolated, not a random act of violence or there is no ongoing threat to public safety this is often indicative that the victim and the offender were known to one another.

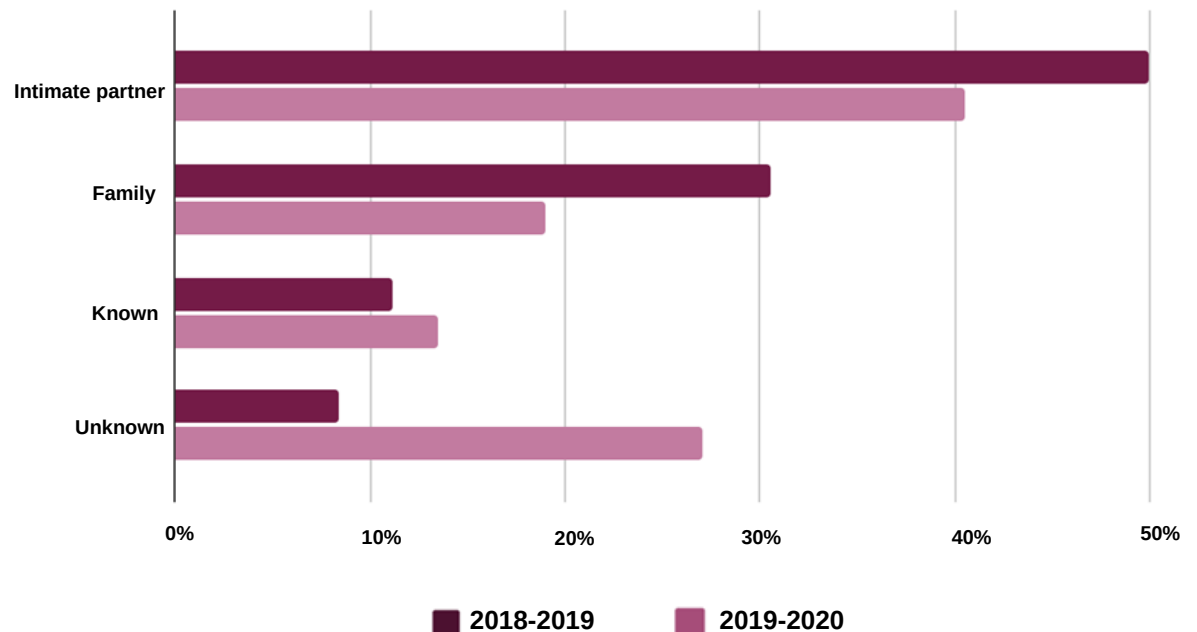
### IPF as the Most Common Femicide Type

#### 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Femicide List Comparison

Relationship to Victim	#of Femicides	%of Femicides
Intimate Partner	15	40.5%
Family	7	19.0%
Known	5	13.5%
Unknown	10	27.0%

### IPF as the Most Common Femicide Type

#### 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Femicide List Comparison



## Intersections Between Violent Extremism and Violence Against Women

The 2019-2020 Femicide List, includes two cases where violent extremism and violence against women have been connected to two femicides. Both of these victims were women of colour and both victims belonged to already vulnerable and marginalized populations. Over the last few years there have been reported violent extremism attacks that have lacked an immediate connection or acknowledgement of the perpetrators history of violently harming women known to them. This has decontextualized violent extremism as another use of male violence and ultimately as a form of violence against women.<sup>11</sup> What occurs is targeted attention on extremism, and more specifically on specific groups, that can and does target racialized communities not associated with acts of extremist violence. Creating anti-violent societies requires targeted focus on the inner connections between misogyny and patriarchal violence as root causes both within and outside of extremist violence ideological groups and organizations, so not to place blame or target specific cultural and/or racialized communities.

In the first case the victim and the perpetrator were unknown to each other, however, the case has been labelled as a targeted

terrorist attack. On February 21st, 2020 a 64 year old woman was targeted and killed by a man who used a hammer as a weapon. The initial murder charges have been upgraded to “murder-terrorist activity” following the discovery of a note that was left with the victim linking the perpetrator to the terrorist group, ISIS.<sup>12</sup> Although neither the perpetrator nor the victim had any known connection or relationship, this case provides an example of one of the various ways that violent extremism and violence against women were linked and intersecting.

The second case that highlights the intersections between violent extremism and femicide, involved a 17 year old man who entered a Toronto massage parlour and murdered one of the women working at the time. While the victim did not know the perpetrator, evidence has been discovered directly linking this attack to the Involuntarily Celibate, or Incel, movement. Police have since upgraded the man’s charges and for the first time in Canadian history, the Incel movement has been recognized as a form of domestic terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

The Incel movement or ideology is deeply rooted in misogyny, anti-feminism, gender objectification and oppression and has ultimately resulted in a number of instances of femicide.

- 11 Norris, S. (2017, August 15). Time and again, we find that terror suspects have a history of domestic violence. What will it take for us to listen to women? Prospect. Retrieved from <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/other/time-and-again-we-find-that-terror-suspects-have-a-history-of-domestic-violence-what-will-it-take-for-us-to-listen-to-women>
- 12 Suspect’s alleged statements about ISIS led to terrorism charge over Toronto hammer attack: Sources. (2020, March 16). Global News. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/6661038/toronto-hammer-attack-by-isis-supporter/>
- 13 What is the ‘incel’ movement that police allege inspired a terrorist attack at Toronto massage parlour? (2020, May 20). National Post. Retrieved from <https://nationalpost.com/news/explaining-the-incel-movement-that-police-allege-inspired-a-terrorist-attack-at-toronto-massage-parlour>



The first recorded targeted attack that can be attributed to misogyny and an anti-feminist ideology in Canada, occurred in 1989 at L'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec. This attack targeted women in the engineering program, ultimately killing fourteen women and injuring ten other women and four men.<sup>14</sup> At the time of this attack the Incel movement or ideology had not existed in online forums as it exists today. However, many of the same misogynistic, anti-feminist ideologies and beliefs that motivated the attack in Montreal, continue to exist within the Incel movement today and have been motivators for additional Incel related killings. Although there was no direct link between the attack at L'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal and an organized Incel movement, some research has suggested that this attack set the foundation for future Incel related attacks, with many members viewing the perpetrator as a forerunner of this movement.<sup>15</sup> In 2018, a man killed ten people in Toronto and injured an additional sixteen people by targeting them and running them over with a rented van. Out of the ten people murdered in this attack, 80% of the victims were women. Despite the perpetrator's submission of a "Not Criminally Responsible" (NCR) defence, he has since been convicted on 10 accounts of first degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder. As was highlighted through court testimony, the perpetrator supported the online Incel movement and was found to have deliberately targeted women in this attack.<sup>16</sup> Research has noted that the time between these targeted Incel attacks is decreasing and this source of violence remains to be a prevalent threat within Canada due to growing online support and networking.<sup>17</sup>

No previous Incel related attack or femicide has been prosecuted as a terroristic offence, however, the most recent charges laid could set a legal precedent and framework for future Incel attacks and Incel related femicides. Labelling femicides as terroristic offences, however, could also lead to increased surveillance and criminalization of marginalized communities and groups and further decontextualize violence against women. OAITH's work on Femicide has demonstrated for over 30 years that femicide is the extreme problem of violent men, misogyny and toxic masculinity requiring the application of existing laws, policies and investments in community-based resources and violence prevention programs.

14 Lanthier, S. (2012, January 5). École Polytechnique Tragedy (Montreal Massacre). In The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/polytechnique-tragedy>

15 CASIS Vancouver. (2019). The Anti-Women Movement. The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare, 2(2), 9. doi:10.21810/jicw.v2i2.1057

16 Humphreys, A. (2021, March 3). Alek Minassian found guilty for killing 10 people in Toronto van attack after judge rejects NCR plea. National Post. Retrieved from <https://nationalpost.com/news/toronto/alek-minassian-verdict-guilty-for-killing-10-people-in-toronto-van-attack>

17 CASIS Vancouver. (2019). The Anti-Women Movement. The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare, 2(2), 9. doi:10.21810/jicw.v2i2.1057

## Cause of Death

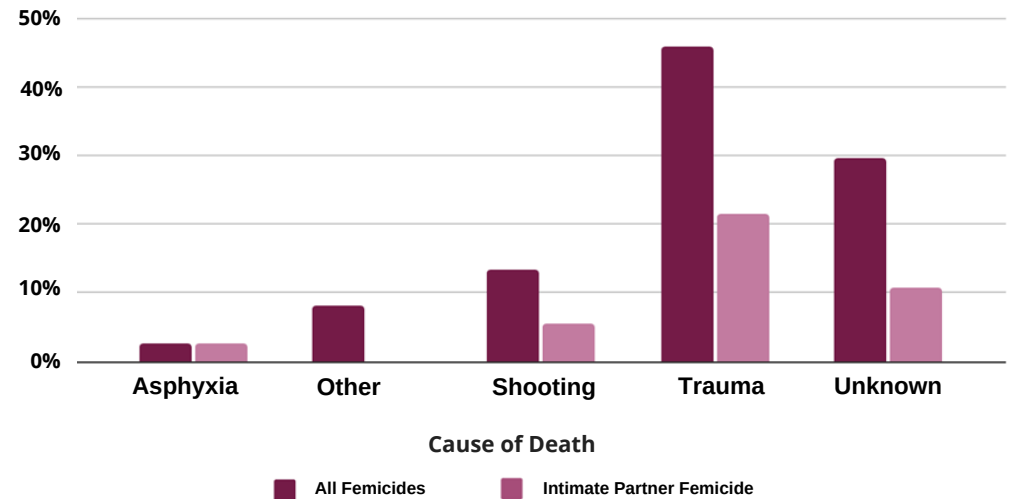
Cause of death is another indicator that was examined for the 2019-2020 Femicide List. Cause of death is categorized as follows: trauma (includes stabbing, assault or any other blunt force trauma), shooting, asphyxiation (includes strangling, choking or suffocation), other (includes any other intentional killing e.g. fire, drowning) and unknown (the cause of death has not been released or determined).

As depicted in the graph to the right (top), through a comparison of the cause of death of all femicide cases and intimate partner femicides, the most common cause of death for all femicide victims was determined as some form of trauma (45.9%), including stabbing and assaults. Trauma was also the most common cause of death among intimate partner femicides and almost half of all trauma deaths were intimate partner femicides (20.6%). The cause of death was not released or identified in the media in 29.7% of all femicide cases making it difficult to accurately measure the cause of death.

When comparing with data from the 2018-2019 cause of death indicator for all femicides, there are many similarities in the cause of death between the two years with two notable differences. In the previous list, no cause of death was classified as “other”. In the 2019-2020 list however, 8.11% of femicide victims had a cause of death that was classified as other, including two arsons and a fall by femicide-suicide. Additionally, the instances of shooting increased by approximately 5% in 2019-2020.

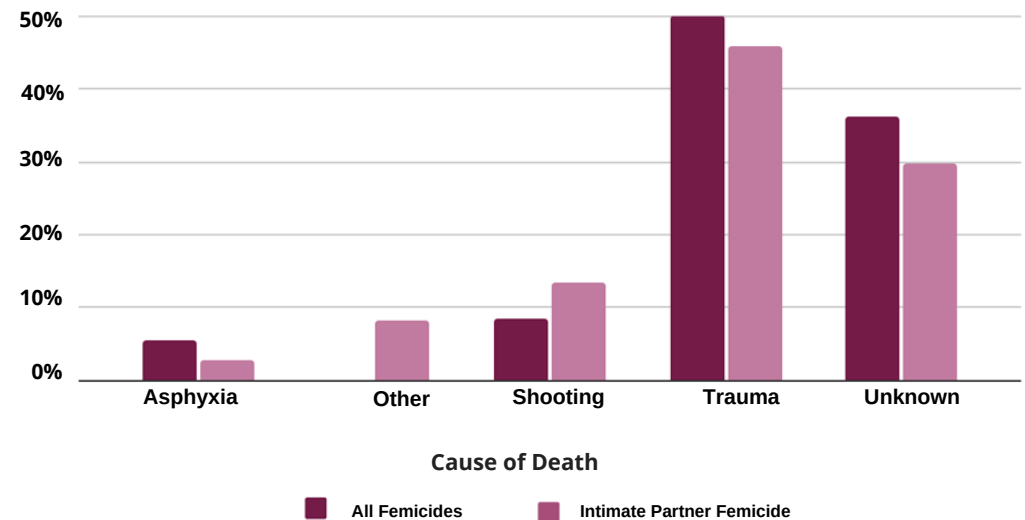
## Cause of Death 2019-2020 Femicide List

### Intimate Partner Femicide Comparison



## Cause of Death 2019-2020 Femicide List

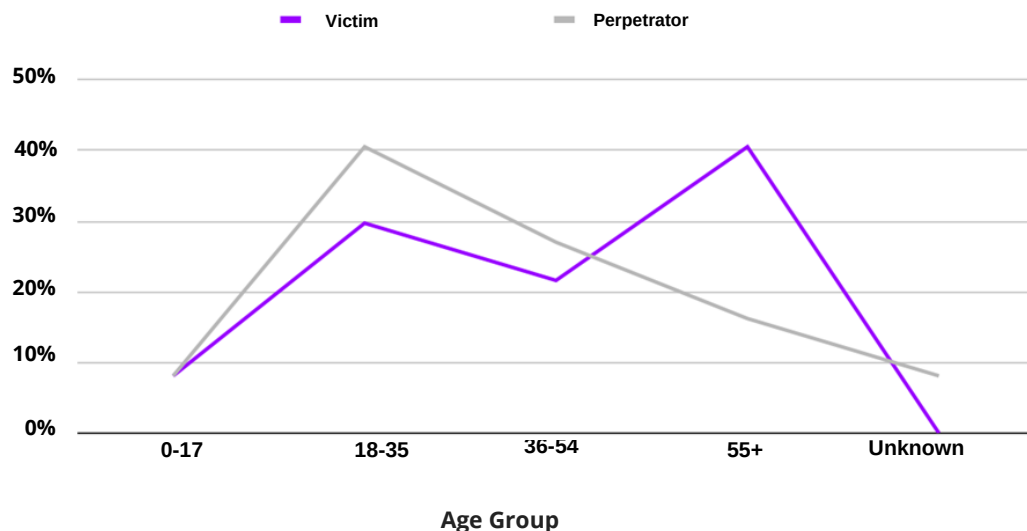
### 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Femicide List Comparison



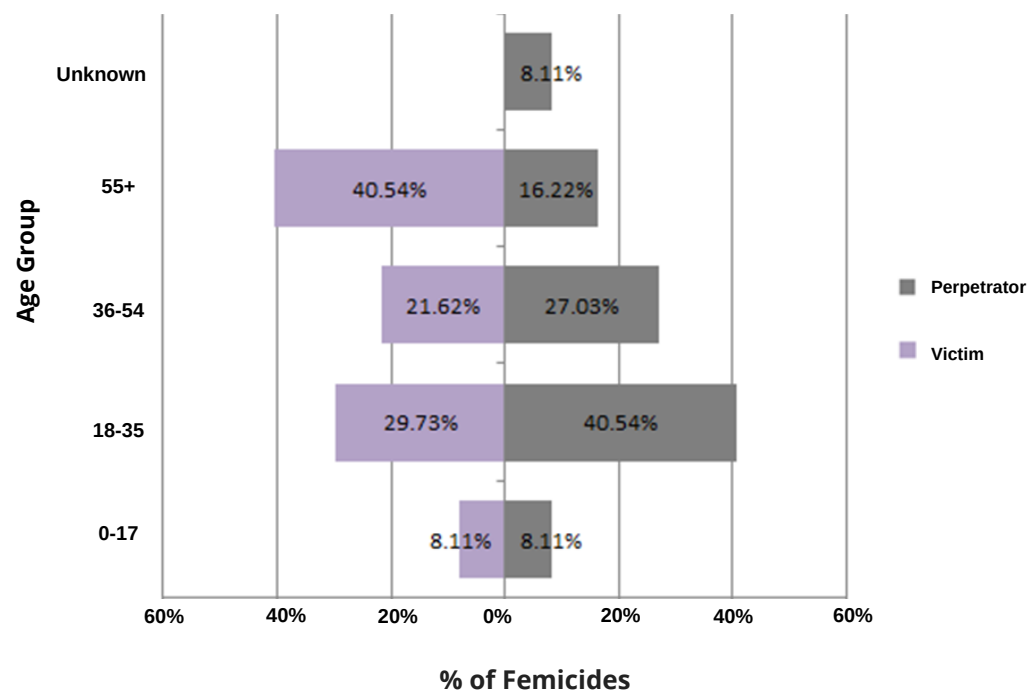
## Age

There are a few very distinct trends that are highlighted when examining and comparing the age of all femicide victims and the age of the perpetrators. As noted in previous years through OAITH's **Aging Without Violence** work, there has been an increase in the number femicide victims that are women aged 55 and older. The 2019-2020 Femicide List highlights this ongoing trend as women belonging to the age group 55 and older were most likely to be killed by someone known to them. Almost half, 40.5%, of all femicide victims included in the list were ages 55 and older. When examining the perpetrator's age, the most common age group for offenders is 18-35, with 40.5% of all offenders belonging to this age group.

### Victim And Perpetrator Age Comparison 2019-2020 Femicide List



### Victim Perpetrator Age Trend Analysis

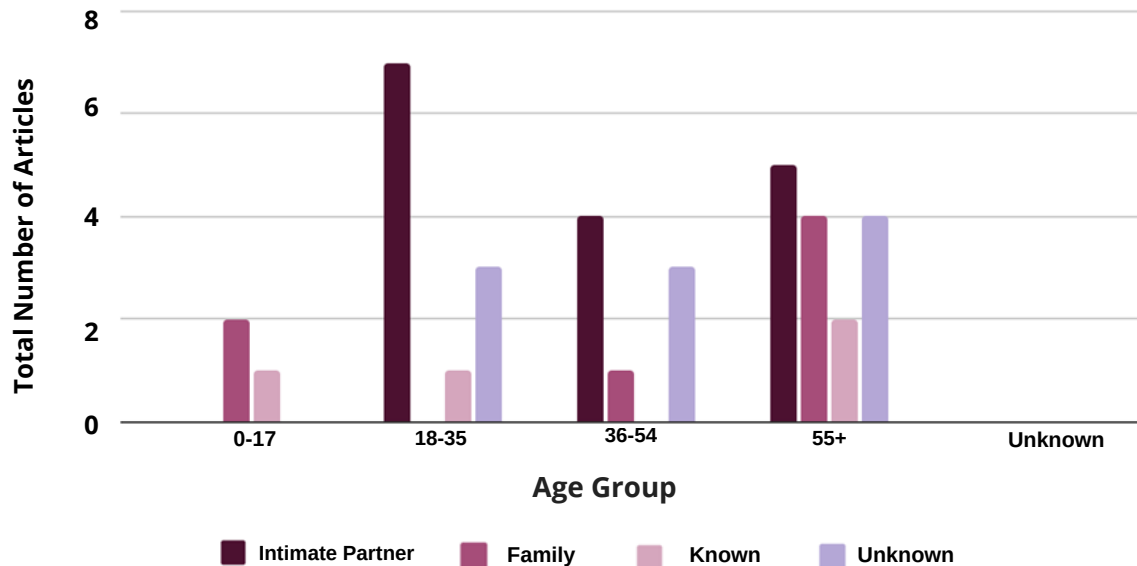


What is clear is that the majority of femicide victims belong to the aging population and the majority of perpetrators are young men. This highlights specific populations that can be targeted to improve supports, through providing tailored, specific and accessible services and resources to the aging population and providing health care workers or other care workers necessary tools and resources to identify potential violence and abuse before it escalates to fatality. Additionally, this demonstrates a need to address gender-based violence with young men aged 18-35 and to implement prevention programs before they reach adulthood.

It is also important to recognize that while the data pool for victims aged 0-17 is the smallest in comparison to others, 8.11% of all victims were children. Notably, one of these victims was murdered by her father during an unsupervised visitation. Both of these age groups represent vulnerable populations that require additional supports and protections, as systems intended to protect them are failing children and their mothers.

## Victim Age and Offender Relationship Comparison

### 2019-2020 Femicide List



When examining the femicide victim age groups in comparison with victim offender relationship type it is clear that different age groups are at greater risk for different types of femicide. Victims between the ages of 0 and 17 were most likely to be killed by a family member. Women between the ages of 18 and 35 were most commonly killed by an intimate partner, and this was the age group containing the most intimate partner femicides, with a total of seven. Notably, over half (57.1%) of those victims aged 18 to 35 were killed by former intimate partners. Women between the ages of 36-54 were also most likely to be killed by an intimate partner with a total of four victims killed by their intimate partner and one victim killed by a family member.

Women aged 55 and older made up the largest age cohort, making up 40.5% of all femicide victims reported in the 2019-2020 Femicide List. Unlike the other age groups, women aged 55 and older are at a relatively similar risk of being killed by an intimate partner, a family member or someone of an unknown or unspecified relationship. Most notably, this age group is the only age group that contains victims belonging to all four relationship categories, as well as the age group with the highest number of unknown relationships. This is important to identify as it has highlighted that older women continue to be at the greatest risk of femicide and are experiencing violence from a number of sources. Therefore, it will be imperative that preventative measures and initiatives addressing violence against older women understand the complexities of this type of violence and target the various sources of violence.

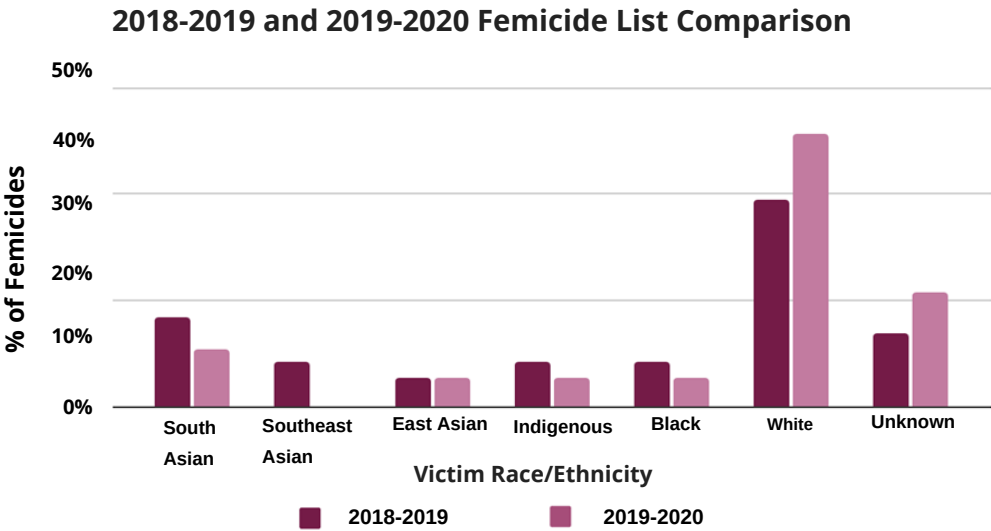


## Victim Race/Ethnicity

In order to better understand risk factors for femicide, one of the demographics examined was victim race and ethnicity. As highlighted in the graph to the right, the majority of femicide victims (51.4%) were coded as white or Caucasian. There were 10.8% of femicide victims who were South Asian. As well as, 5.4% of victims who were identified as being East Asian, 5.4% victims were Black and 5.4% of victims were Indigenous. It is worth noting that 21.6% of all femicide victims were coded as race/ethnicity unknown.

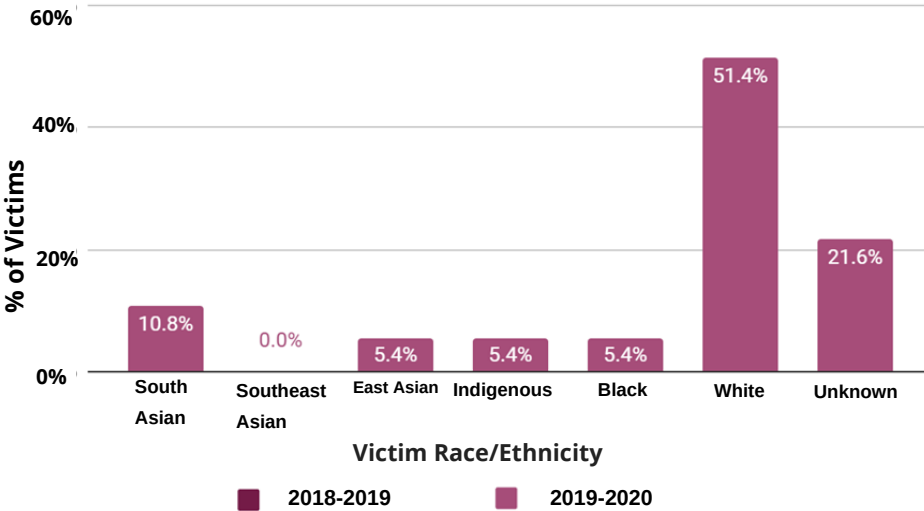
When comparing the 2019-2020 race/ethnicity data to the previous years data, many of the findings are quite similar, with the majority of victims being white. Notably, there was a decrease in the number of South Asian femicide victims, as well as a decrease in South East Asian femicide victims in 2019-2020. There were also small decreases in the percentage of Black femicide victims and Indigenous victims for the 2019-2020 year. It is important to note again that the decrease in the number of Indigenous victims does not

## Femicide Victim Race/Ethnicity



## Femicide Victim Race/Ethnicity

2019-2020 Femicide List



mean there is a decrease in violence against Indigenous women, as murdered Indigenous women are often underrepresented in media reporting.

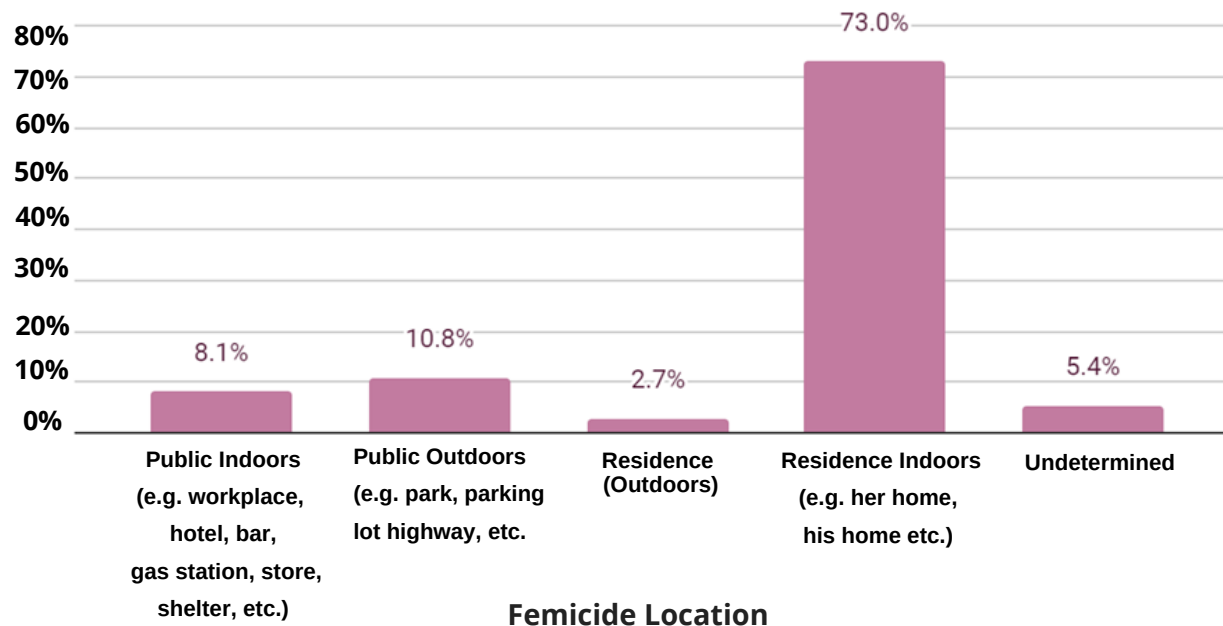
A limitation in using media reporting to track femicides is the inconsistencies on media reporting and lack of demographic information provided about the femicide victims. While it is beneficial to track demographics, such as race, to look for yearly trends and potential risk factors, it is also detrimental when the media overracializes a victim as this negatively frames the femicide and may detract from a victim’s perceived news-worthiness. Due to the lack of demographic information contained in media reports, indicators such as race are especially difficult to accurately measure and often victims can only be coded based on their appearance in the media photo. Not only does this create the potential for inaccuracies in reporting but it also fails to adequately describe the current situation as a large proportion of cases are ultimately coded as unknown.

## Femicide Location

In examining the place of death for all femicides throughout the 2019-2020 Femicide List, the majority (73%) of all femicides occurred inside a residence, often the victim's home or the perpetrator's home. Additionally, 2.7% of all femicides also occurred at a residence, but outside of the home. As a result of the pandemic thousands of people in Ontario have been forced to stay at home throughout the lockdown(s), and even after lockdown restrictions began to lift, as many people lost their jobs or had to leave their jobs due to lack of alternative childcare. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a number of impacts on the gender-based violence sector and the women and children experiencing violence. What is clear from the femicide list, is that home is simply not a safe place for those experiencing violence. This demonstrates a need to further study the implications of not only the pandemic but the health measures that have been put in place for women experiencing gender-based violence.

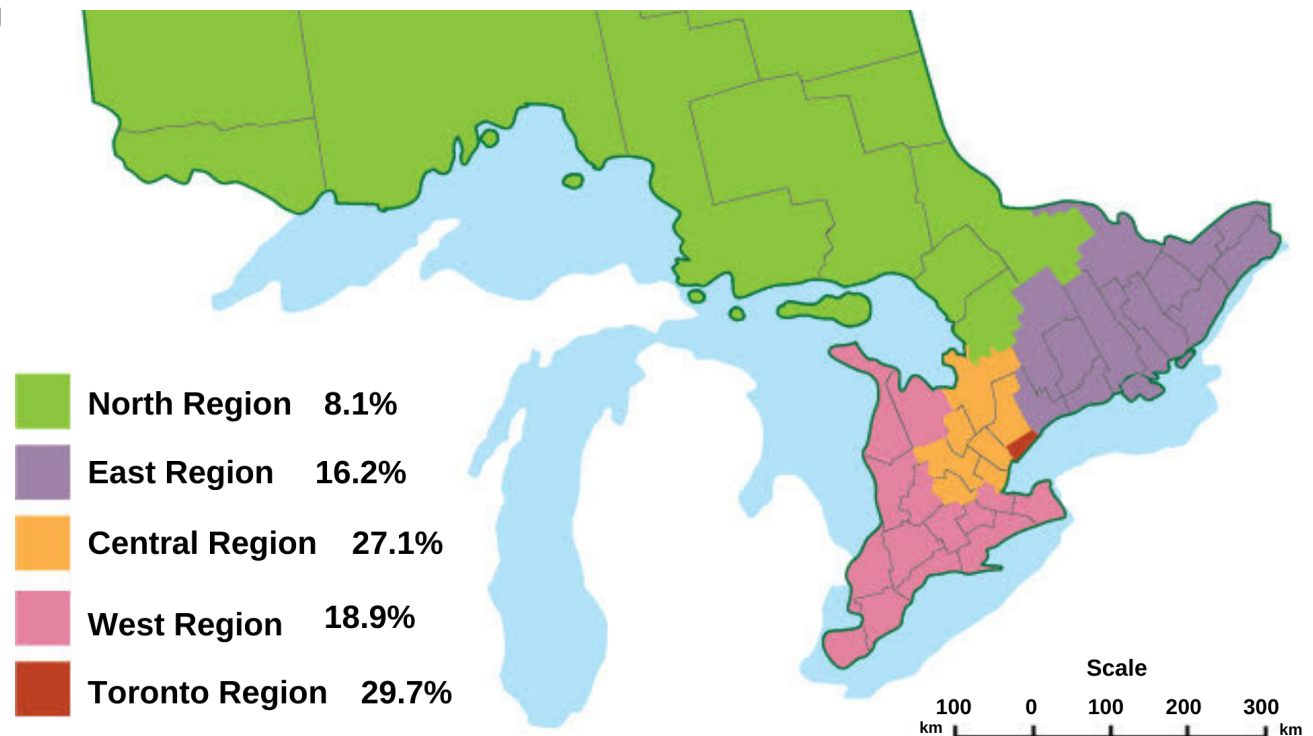
### Femicide Location

#### 2019-2020 Femicide List



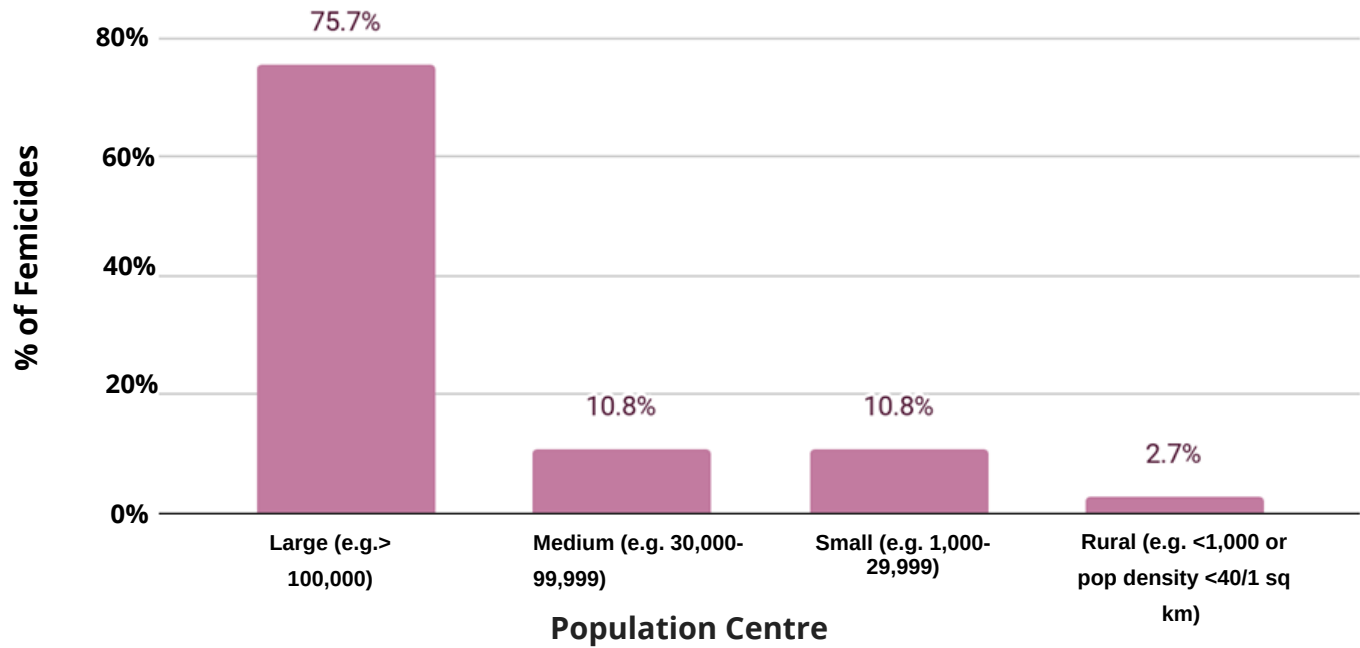
## Geographic Region & Population Classification

OAITH's Femicide geographic mapping is based on the Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services regional mapping. This allows us to easily identify the location of femicides with the location of available gender-based violence services that this government ministry funds. As highlighted in the MCCSS regional map - 29.7% of all femicides included in the 2019-2020 Femicide List occurred in the Toronto Region. A large percentage of femicides also occurred in the Central Region (27.1%). While both the Toronto Region and Central Region are the two smallest geographic regions in the MCCSS regional map, they are also the most densely populated regions.



The above map identifies which regions are experiencing the highest number of femicides and who may benefit from additional supports or services within the community. The Peel Region, located within the MCCSS Central Region, accounted for 18.9% of femicides or 7 out of 37 reported femicides. Similarly to the Toronto Region, the Region of Peel is a very small but densely populated geographic region. In addition, it is worth noting both regions have very long waitlists for supportive housing, in addition to both regions having expensive housing markets. This highlights the potential need for increased supports in these regions such as additional shelter capacity and increased local housing supports to mitigate the bottleneck crisis in these shelters.

Population Classification  
 2019-2020 Femicide List



The city the femicide occurred in was also categorized based on population center size. The categories are as follows:

- Large Population Center:** Population >100,000
- Medium Population Center:** Population: 30,000-99,999
- Small Population Center:** Population: 1,000-29,999
- Rural Population Center:** Population <1,000 or population density of 40/1 sq km

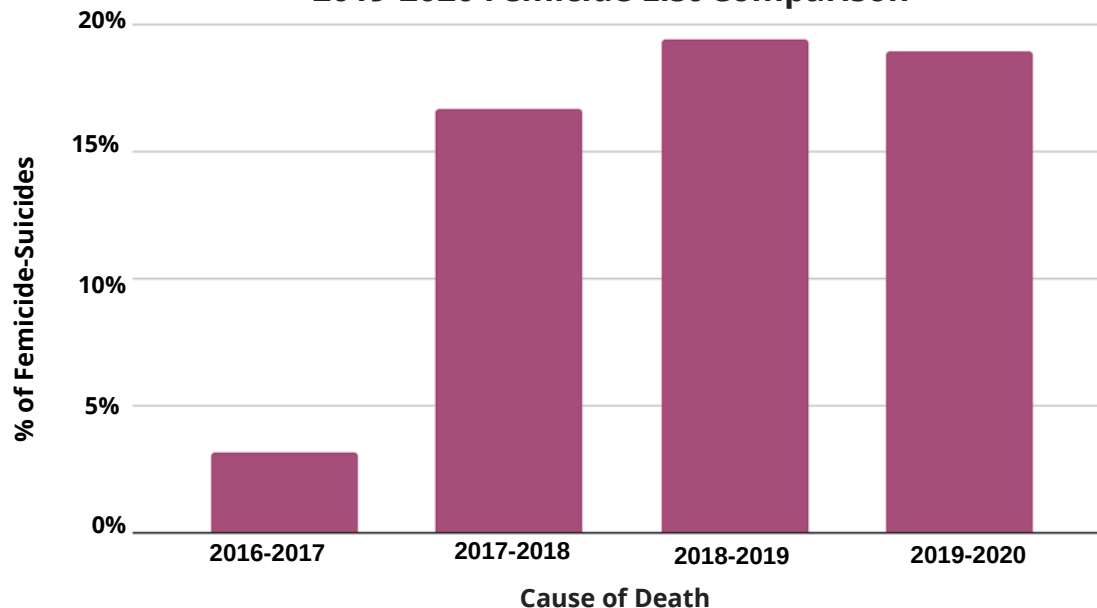
When examining all femicides, the vast majority of cases took place in large population centers in metropolitan areas, with the majority of those femicides located in Toronto. Additionally, 10.8% of all femicides occurred in both medium and small population centers. Rural settings accounted for only 2.7% of all reported femicides. It is important to note again that the femicide list is only partial; the low rate of femicide occurrence in rural settings may be attributed to limited media coverage in remote and rural settings.



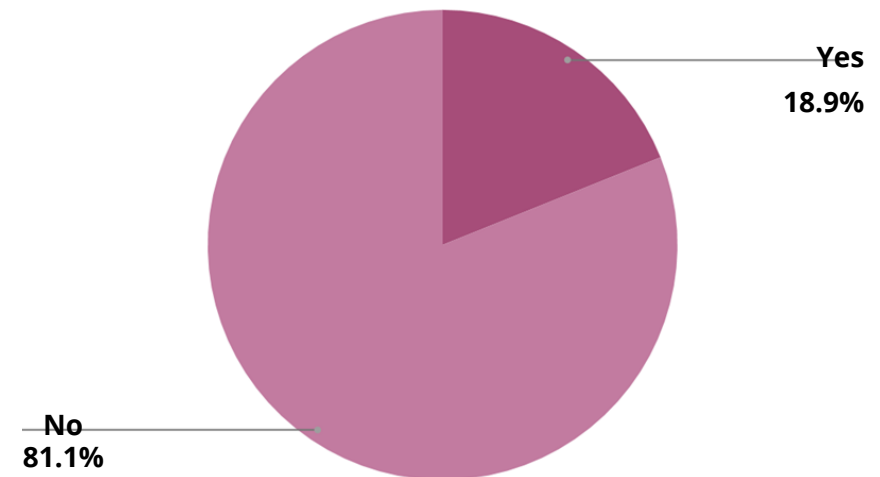
## Femicide-Suicide

Another notable statistic from the 2019-2020 Femicide List was the number of femicide-suicide occurrences. As highlighted in the pie chart to the right, 18.9% of all femicide cases involved a femicide-suicide, or a total of 7 femicide cases. Of the cases involving a femicide-suicide 57.1% involved an current or former intimate partner and 42.9% of the cases involved a family member, including a son, father and uncle. As noted in the media analysis, it is important that femicides be accurately conceptualized and reported on in the media as a gendered social problem and not as isolated events. This is especially true for femicide-suicides as there is often little to no extended media coverage due to the lack of trial, murder charges or perceived threat to safety and as a result can often be framed as an isolated event. In actuality, however, gender-based violence and ultimately femicide, continues to be pervasive within society and exists on a broad societal level. Therefore, it is imperative that femicide-suicides be contextualized as gender-based violence that is rooted in societal systems, institutions and gender oppression, in order to properly address the continued threat gender-based violence poses to women and their children.

**Femicide-Suicide Rates**  
2019-2020 Femicide List Comparison



**Femicide-Suicide Rate**  
2019-2020 Femicide List



Femicide-Suicide Rates	Yes	No
2016-2017	3.1%	96.9%
2017-2018	16.7%	83.3%
2018-2019	19.4%	80.6%
2019-2020	18.9%	81.1%

When examining this occurrence rate with previous years, there has been an increase in the number cases involving a femicide/suicide over the last several years. When examining the femicide data from 2016-2017, 3.1% of all cases involved a femicide/suicide and there has been a notable increase in the following years. This has highlighted the need to continue to track rates of femicide/suicides to determine if there is in fact an increase in the number of cases involving femicide/suicides and to then identify potential risk factors for this type of femicide.

There are significant, lasting impacts that result from femicide and femicide-suicides that extend far beyond the intended femicide victim. Communities, family and friends, while often overlooked, also experience significant disturbances as a result of the femicide. While there remains to be limited research examining effects of femicide and femicide-suicide on children, it is known that children who have lost a parent to femicide experience “a range of psychological, academic, social and physical outcomes”.<sup>18</sup> These effects can be amplified when a child loses both parents, whether due to femicide-suicide or due to the incarceration of the offender, and when a child is present to witness the femicide. In addition to the trauma resulting from the femicide or femicide-suicide, there is often compounded trauma resulting from violence and abuse the child has experienced and/or witnessed prior to the femicide.<sup>19</sup> This highlights the need for a holistic framework when working with children who have lost parents due to femicide and femicide-suicide, in order to address the compounded and complex trauma the child has experienced. Family, friends and co-workers may also feel the effects of femicide and may have difficulties engaging at work or school, potentially resulting in job loss, as well as mental and physical health problems.<sup>20</sup>

18 Dawson, M., Sutton, D., Carrigan, M., & Grand'Maison, V. (2018). #callitfemicide: Understanding gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada 2018. Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 49-50.

19 Alisic, E., Groot, A., Snetselaar, H., Stroeken, T., & Van de Putte, E. (2017). Children bereaved by fatal intimate partner violence: A population-based study into demographics, family characteristics and homicide exposure. PLoS ONE (12)10. doi:https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0183466

20 Learning Network Team. (n.d.). Issue 14: FEMICIDE. Retrieved from [http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased\\_newsletters/issue-14/index.html](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-14/index.html)

## Femicide Month

Another indicator that was examined for the 2019-2020 Femicide List was the total number of femicides per month. A large number of femicides occurred in the winter months of 2019-2020, starting in December 2019. December had the highest number of femicides, with 6 femicides or 16.2% of all femicides occurring in that month alone. The number of monthly femicide cases decreased slightly in January to 3 or 8.1% and slightly increased in February to 4 cases or 10.8%. The number of femicide cases then began to decrease beginning in March. The months of May and June had the lowest number of femicide cases with one femicide occurring each month (2.7%). Femicide cases began to increase beginning in July (10.8%) and remained generally consistent until a small drop in cases occurred in November 2020.

When comparing the 2019-2020 data to the previous years' data some very clear differences have emerged between the two years. While rates of femicides for the 2019-2020 list began decreasing in the month of March, the 2018-2019 list had an increase in the number of femicides beginning in March continuing throughout the summer, with the exception of no femicides reported in the month of June, and beginning to decrease in the fall.

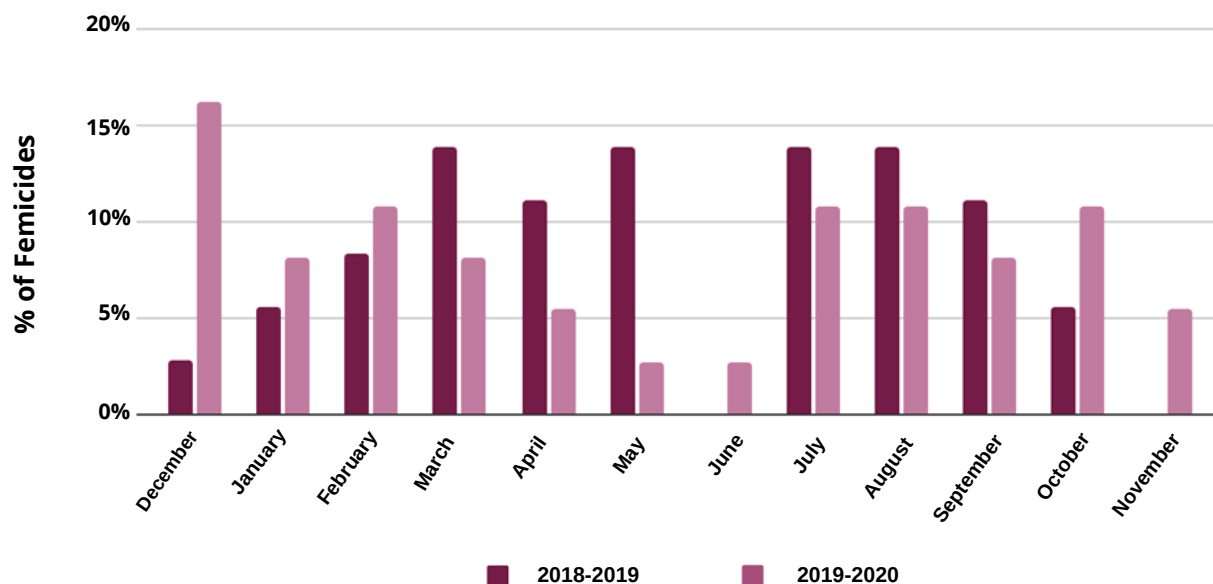
## Femicide Month

2019-2020 Femicide List



## Femicide Month

### 2019-2020 Femicide List & 2019-2020 Femicide List Comparison



Throughout the pandemic, OAITH has been closely analyzing femicides for any comparisons with previous years. Throughout the early months of the first lockdown, less femicides were reported than in the previous years. Initial assumptions of the pandemic and lockdown measures on survivors included concerns of increased femicides. However, when the lockdown began there were fewer femicides compared to last year, and a stark increase in monthly femicides when lockdown measures were lifted. As the province of Ontario goes through a second province-wide lockdown, OAITH will continue to analyze trends to determine if a pattern emerges comparable to the first province-wide lockdown. This has highlighted an area for future study in order to understand the impact Covid-19 has had on women experiencing gender-based violence and on femicide rates.

Although VAW shelters and other gender-based violence services remained open throughout the pandemic, there were many barriers for women trying to access these services due to the pandemic and the implementation of stay at home orders. It will therefore be imperative to understand the relationship between lockdown measures and intimate partner femicide, and to explore how the lockdown impacted women who were living with their partners throughout the pandemic. Additionally, it will be necessary to identify and address the cause of the increase in femicides beginning in July and understand the connection between lifting lockdown measures and an increase in intimate partner femicides.



It would be beneficial to examine official coroner reports to ensure that the number of femicide victims was accurately captured for the 2019-2020 year. A current limitation to the femicide list is that it relies on media reporting to track femicides, and as a result may only be partial. Due to the pandemic, a great deal of media coverage was focused on the virus and the accompanying health measures and restrictions, therefore it would be beneficial to verify the number of femicides from the months of March through June. As mentioned at the beginning of this report, there are two instances of limited police information pertaining to two femicides from March and April. There continues to be an ongoing investigation into the disappearance of Alyssa Turnbull who went missing in April. Additionally, the Brantford Police Department announced in December 2020 the femicide of Shannon Burnside, whose death occurred in March 2020. Therefore, in order to properly examine the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on femicide rates, it will be imperative to continue tracking missing persons cases, police announcements and other sources of information to identify any additional femicide cases that have occurred since the start of the pandemic.

## Conclusion

As was highlighted in this report, femicide continues to be a pressing issue in Ontario as well as throughout the country and requires immediate attention to address the societal root causes of oppression and violence against women. There are a number of emerging trends that have been highlighted throughout this report that must be addressed. As has been noted through OAITH's previous [Aging Without Violence](#) work there has been an increase in the number of femicide victims aged 55 and older in the last few years. This trend has continued to be prominent in the 2019-2020 Femicide List as the majority of femicide victims included in the list were aged 55 and older. This has identified a specific population that is not only vulnerable to gender-based violence but may also be experiencing barriers in escaping violence due to age related concerns. Also consistent with findings from previous years, the majority of the femicide victims contained in the 2019-2020 Femicide List were killed by an intimate partner and many of those victims were killed by an ex-partner that they had previously separated from or were in the process of separating. Despite leaving the relationship, women are often at an increased risk for violence, specifically lethal violence, when leaving an abusive relationship, as was highlighted in this report. This has identified the need for additional safety measures and supports for women who are leaving abusive relationships, as leaving the relationship does not always mean the woman can escape the violence.

Violence against women and femicide existed as a global pandemic prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated systemic barriers and inequalities for many women.<sup>21</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic itself has intensified violence for many women and the lack of income support and lack of available affordable housing have only intensified barriers for women looking to escape violence.<sup>22</sup> There is a need for further study in the upcoming years to understand the long-term impacts the Covid-19 pandemic will have for women experiencing gender-based violence. There will also be a need for government commitment to address the ongoing femicide trends that existed previous to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as increasing rates of femicide among aging populations and the ongoing rates of femicide among intimate partners. In addition, it will also be necessary to ensure there is a proactive approach to addressing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on gender-based violence in order to prevent further escalations and increases in violence against women and more specifically femicide.

## Acknowledgements:

Our work on Femicide Reporting is done in partnership with Dr. Mavis Morton and the University of Guelph. Remembering the lives of these women wouldn't be possible without the support of the students taking SOC\*4030.01 F20 Advanced Topics in Criminology. OAITH greatly appreciates their commitment and care in ensuring these tragedies and acts of horrific violence are not forgotten: Vanessa Arman, Meghan Bradley, Eden Capitano, Anthony Cassano, Meghan Catto, Olivia D'Andrade, Megan Devine, Angelo Dimita, Liam Forbes, Emily Gadjimousiev, Rachel Jestratijevic, Georgia Kerley, Julia Killworth, Mikaylee Klaver, Sara Leon, Tara Mauchel, Karen Paquette, Lukas Quo Vadis, Avery Rodrigues, Alec Simons, Francesca-Jane Stevenson, Han Truong, Yodit Tsegai, Emily Wright and Xieling Zhang.

- 21 Urgent action needed to END pandemic Of femicide and violence against Women, says UN expert. (2020, November 25). Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26533&LangID=E>.
- 22 United Nations Development Programme. (2020, May 11). Gender-based violence and covid-19. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19.html>