



Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

# 1990–2015 25 Years of Femicide

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Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses and University of Guelph Violence and Society Sociology Students have partnered over the last 3 years. Through this work a Community of Learning has emerged to create a Discussion Paper on Femicide, 25 Year Review of Femicide in Ontario and our Annual List to Remember the Lives Lost to Femicide. This work would not be possible without the commitment of the following people:

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# BACKGROUND

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) is a coalition of women shelters, second stage housing programs and Violence Against Women community-based organizations. Originally formed in 1977, they have and continue to advocate on issues related to violence against women through government relations, the development of training and resources, and public awareness campaigns.

In 1995, OAITH began to formally document Intimate Partner Femicide (IPF), as it was reported on in the media. Overall, OAITH has the names of women and children who've lost their lives to violence since 1990, culminating into 25 years of data on IPF. In 2014, OAITH identified Femicide as a priority as we still continue to see women and children losing their lives. The aims of the project include:

1. Increasing our understanding of media reporting trends in the last 25 years
2. Identify the gaps and limitations of how Femicide is documented in the media
3. Create resources to bring increased attention to the systemic issues
4. Translate to the broader community that women and children losing their lives to targeted violence, is preventable.

Through the analysis of a data set from 1990-1995, we examine victim characteristics including age, gender, relationship status, cause of death and geography. From 1995-2015 further analysis and recommendations on media representation are provided. Intimate partner femicide (IPF) can be defined as a homicide that occurs between individuals who have previously been, or currently are involved in some form of an intimate relationship.<sup>1</sup> Statistics in Canada demonstrate that overwhelmingly women are victims of IPF while men are found to be the perpetrators. Specifically in 2013, 82% of IPF victims in Canada were women.<sup>2</sup>

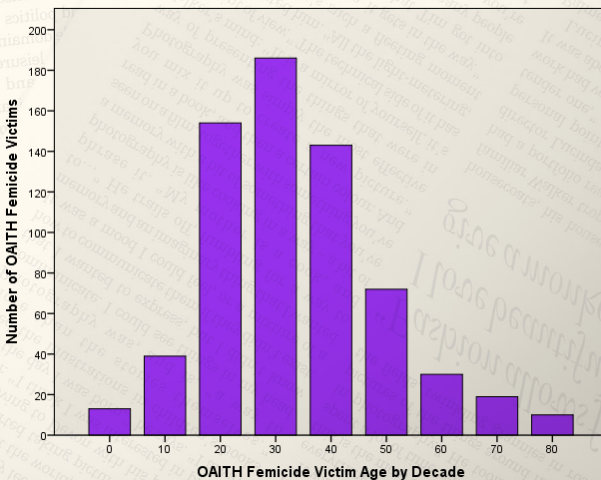
The following information summarizes and discusses various aspects of IPF in Ontario from 1990 to 2015. This information was collected through newspaper media articles, and therefore must be understood within the context of what is and is not shared with the media and the limitations that exist as a result. These limitations are discussed further in depth toward the end of this report.

# VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

This data collection focused exclusively on women who were killed in Ontario between the years of 1990 and 2015, that OAITH has documented from media reports. As a result, there are likely women missing who were not reported on in the media. Overall 689 women were victims of IPF from OAITH's data set. This number includes women who were killed by their intimate partners and those who were killed as a result of intimate partner violence. For example, it includes women who have been killed by their family member's partner, such as a son-in-law. Furthermore, this data includes children who were killed as a result of intimate partner violence involving either one or both of their parents. As seen in the graph below, approximately 52 of these victims are 19 years of age and younger. Out of those 52 children, 13 of them are under the age of 10.

Previous research has demonstrated that women who are victims of IPF are on average younger than male perpetrators.<sup>3</sup> In this given data set, the age of 666 out of the 689 total victims were determined with the average age being 37.8 years old. The youngest victim found was 2 years old, and the eldest victim was 86 years old. When grouped by decade, most victims were between 20 and 40 years of age. This coincides with previous research that states that younger women are at a greater risk of being victims of IPF than older women.<sup>4</sup>

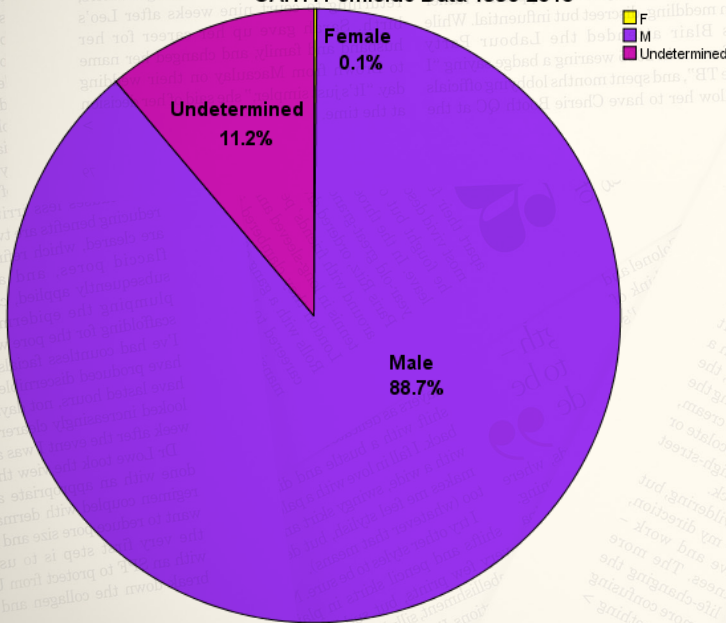
OAITH Femicide Data 1990-2015



# OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

As stated previously, men have been found to overwhelmingly represent perpetrators of IPF. This data found similar results with 611 of the offenders identifying as male. Furthermore, male perpetrators are typically older than their victims. Previous academic research has demonstrated that male offenders of IPF are typically between 30 to 50 years of age.<sup>5</sup> This is reflected in this data collection, with the average age of offenders being 41.3 years. The youngest offender was a male of 17 years, and the eldest was a male of 87 years.

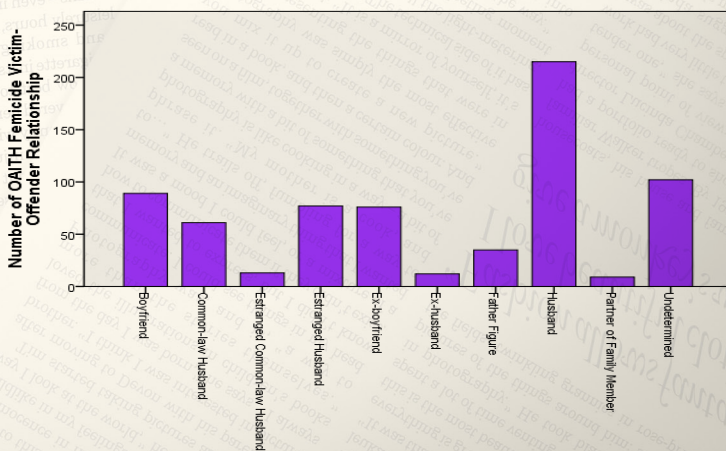
OAITH Femicide Data 1990-2015



# VICTIM-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP

The most common relationship status among all cases of femicide are intimate partners.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, married couples, common-law partners and (ex) boyfriends make up the majority of IPF in Canada.<sup>7</sup> This data collection found similar results, with married couples (marked as husband in the graph below) comprising the largest group of relationships. Current and ex-boyfriends of the victim also comprised a significant amount of relationships with a combined representation of 165 cases. This is also true for current and previous common-law partners of the victim, which together makes up 74 cases. When combining these three relationship typologies it is evident that they represent a large majority of the IPF cases found in Ontario between the years of 1990-2015.

Victim-Offender Relationship	Number of Each Relationship
Boyfriend	89
Common-law Husband	61
Estranged Common-law Husband	13
Estranged Husband	77
Ex-boyfriend	76
Ex-husband	12
Father Figure	35
Husband	215
Partner of Family Member	9
Undetermined	102



# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

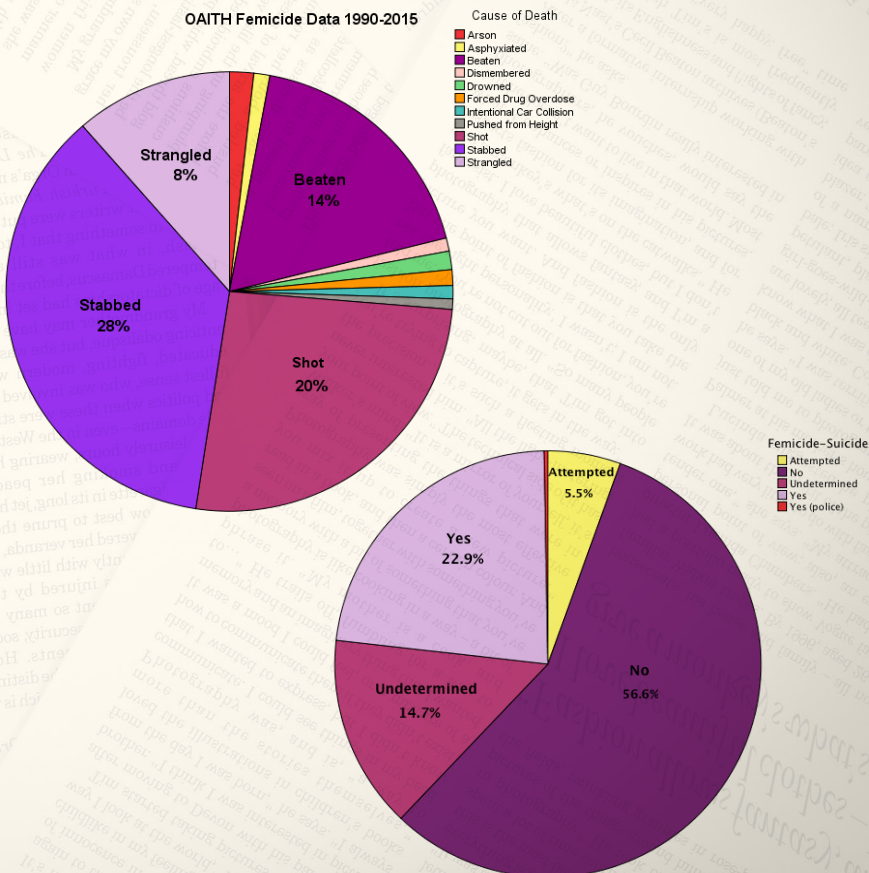
Previous research has found that up to 48% of femicide involve some type of weapon.<sup>8</sup> In this data collected for Ontario, this is seen in the charts below under the Cause of Death category. Together the two methods of stabbing and gun shots of IPF comprise 327 cases (approximately 48%) found. However, the category of beaten involves women who were beaten to death either with or without a weapon. Moreover, there are still 161 cases that have yet to be determined the exact cause of death. With this in mind a conclusion can likely be drawn that in Ontario over the past 25 years, weapons were used in over 48% of the cases found.

Cause of Death	Number of Each Cause of Death
Arson	10
Asphyxiated	8
Beaten	97
Dismembered	5
Drowned	7
Forced Drug Overdose	6
Intentional Car Collision	5
Pushed from Height	4
Shot	136
Stabbed	191
Strangled	59
Undetermined	161

Another aspect of these IPF cases that was analyzed was whether or not the perpetrator committed suicide after killing their intimate partner. This concept is defined as a femicide-suicide. As seen below, the majority of perpetrators did not kill themselves after killing their intimate partners. Only 157 cases involved the perpetrator killing themselves, two of which were killed by police in commission of the IPF. This coincides with existing research, which states that most people who kill others do not kill themselves, and that approximately 25% of intimate partner femicides in the United States, Canada, Australia and Sweden are followed by suicide.<sup>9</sup>

Femicide-Suicide	Number of Each Type of Femicide-Suicide
Attempted	38
No	390
Yes	158
Yes (police)	2
Undetermined	101

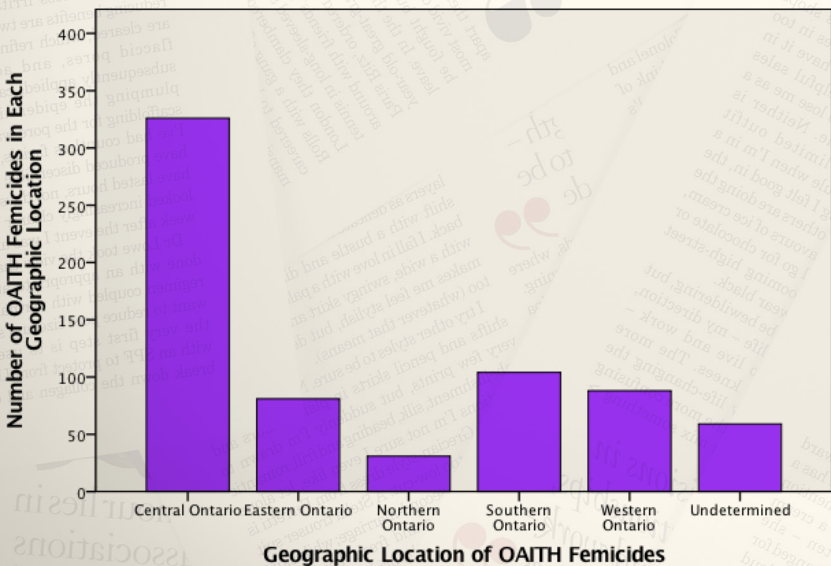
OAITH Femicide Data 1990-2015



# GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

This data set categorized Ontario into five geographic locations. When considering the graph below it is important to note that every category includes at least one large urban city, with Central Ontario including the Greater Toronto Area. As a result, this region encompassed the most IPF cases with 326 found. For Western Ontario, a large majority of the 88 cases found in this region can be attributed to the Peel region and in part to the Wellington and Simcoe regions. The cities of Hamilton and London are in large part representative of Southern Ontario's 104 cases, and the same can be said for Ottawa's inclusion in Eastern Ontario. Lastly, despite the fact that Northern Ontario encompasses the largest amount of space in the province, it only accounts for 31 IPF cases in this data set thus far. This could be due to several factors, however one main factor that must be considered is the lack of media representation for rural areas such as those typically found in Northern Ontario.

**OAITH Femicide Data 1990–2015**



# IS FEMICIDE PREVENTABLE?

Of particular concern when relying on media reports, is the lack of understanding on the root causes and contextual framework for femicide. As we understand the full scope of gender-based violence against women and how we can change this tragic outcome for so many, it's important to note that there are predictors of lethality developed through the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. The most common are noted below:

- history of domestic violence  
(69% of cases reviewed from 2003-2014)
- actual or pending separation  
(72% of cases reviewed from 2003-2014)
- obsessive behaviour
- depressed perpetrator
- prior threats or attempts to commit suicide
- escalation of violence
- prior threats to kill the victim
- prior attempts to isolate the victim
- victims who had an intuitive sense of fear
- a perpetrator who was unemployed.

In 80% of the Domestic Violence cases reviewed from 2003-2014, there were seven or more risk factors identified. In 12% of the cases there were 4-6 risk factors identified and in 13% of the cases there were 1-3 risk factors identified. Only one percent of cases had no risk factors identified. Given that predictors of lethality exist, utilizing tools such as safety planning, risk assessment and on-going risk management can be life-saving and prioritize women's safety.

# ONTAIRH FEMICIDE DATA & MEDIA ANALYSIS

Figure 1 displays that of the 432 femicide cases in Ontario between 1995-2015, positive media representation displays a significant uptrend with 29 cases in '95-'99, 36 cases in '00-'04, 35 cases in '05-'09 and 68 cases between '10-'14. Meanwhile, negative media representation of femicide victims is on the decline with 10 cases between '95-'99, 12 cases in '00-'04, 11 cases in '05-'09 and 3 cases recorded between '10-'14. As society continues to develop, femicide victims appear to receive more heartfelt coverage that aims to sympathize for the victim rather than blaming them for the occurrence. For instance, positive reports of victims tended to emphasize the remarkable personal characteristics of the woman and express how they will be deeply missed.

## Femicide In the Media Trends

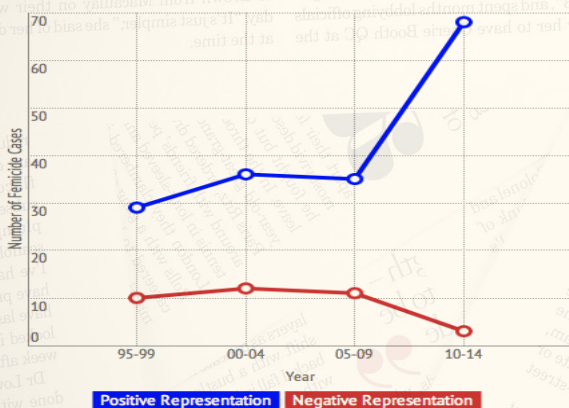


Figure 1

According to the literature, the media has great influence on the public's opinions and the ways in which they perceive incidences of femicide<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the public's opinions are based mainly off of what they hear or learn from the media. It is evident how powerful the media is as a source of information. Since, the media is a source of information, many look to the media when trying to understand domestic violence and this has the ability to directly affect responses by the criminal justice system, the community and the government with regard to policy and prevention.<sup>11</sup> Authors in these literatures, suggest that it is important to regulate the way media portrays information relating to sensitive issues such as femicide. In order to develop policies and programs to control for

violence against women, the media must be weary of presenting biased and stereotypical information.

Moreover, existing literature reveals that, mass media's portrayal of women reflects the overall treatment of women in society, such that women are subjugated by men through social structure<sup>12</sup>. Aforementioned, the media is a powerful tool in shaping peoples' opinions and perceptions therefore; the literature states that the media is primarily responsible for perpetuating harmful myths and stereotypes about victims of violence against women<sup>13</sup>. In an era where women are trying to fight for equality, it makes it difficult when the media treats women unequally and reinforces men to impose power, control and other patriarchal tendencies in their relationships with women<sup>14</sup>. Due to the fact that the media plays a vital role in shaping the public's opinions and perceptions regarding femicide, the overall treatment of women in society is dependent upon the media. What this means is that, if the media continues to portray victimized women as responsible for their victimization then they will continue to be subjugated by men through social structure<sup>15</sup>.

Likewise, there is agreement between the literature that media sources rely largely on police as a source of information, rarely interviewing those who knew the victim or perpetrator or domestic violence experts<sup>16</sup>. The major problem with using an authority figure as the source of information instead of those close to the victim is that the police tend to be biased in their opinions on femicide cases and have a tendency to hold patriarchal views<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, they also tend to put blame on the victims in cases pertaining to intimate partner violence. Hence, this further influences the public's opinions of women involved in femicide cases. Theorizing about crime reporting largely ignores instances in which there was a female victim and news coverage tends to attribute violent female victimization to individual and family pathology rather than to social structures and gendered patterns of dominance and control<sup>18</sup>. Finally, another common theme among the articles is that, in the studies that were conducted by the authors, they found that the media tended to demonstrate that in some instances, the perpetrator's culpability was mitigated based on pathological conditions such as drug or alcohol use<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, the perpetrator's actions were excused based on various pathological conditions. Thus, there is much consensus among the literature, on the effects of media in portraying violence against women and in particular femicide.

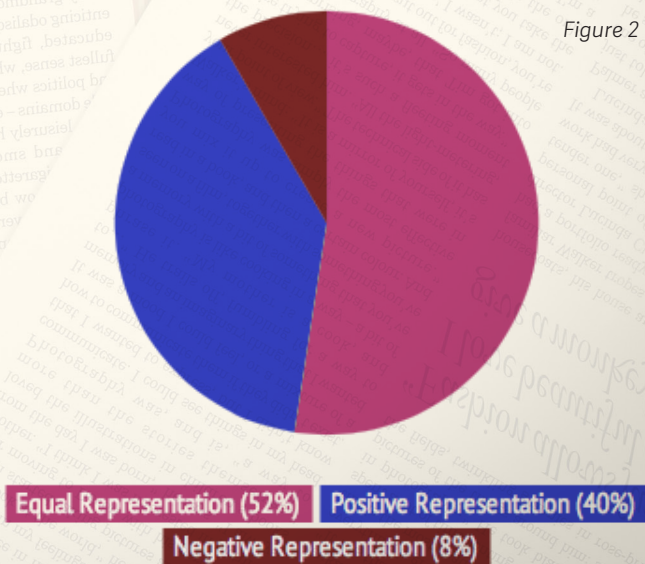
# VICTIM REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

Although there is research indicating that femicide cases receive more media attention than in the 1970's, the literature reveals that when the media reports on femicide cases, it does not represent the issue adequately<sup>20</sup>. For instance, the media continues to portray domestic violence as an individualized problem rather than explaining it as a widespread social problem<sup>21</sup>. Individualizing the problem rather than portraying it as a widespread issue was a theme that was discovered while analyzing OAITH's Femicide List from 1995-2015. A prevalent way to individualize violence against women is to blame victims for their own victimization<sup>22</sup>. The media will often state that the victim failed to take appropriate measures to protect herself from her abusive partner, such as not pressing charges or failing to leave the abusive situation (Richards et al. 2011; Taylor, 2009). In addition, these findings support literature from feminist theorists who contend that the tendency of the media to cast blame on victims of femicide for their own deaths present a significant barrier to social change concerning femicide<sup>23</sup>. This can easily be seen in the language used in the titles of the media and by using specific quotes in the media that further emphasizes victims for being responsible and portraying perpetrators as blameless for their actions<sup>24</sup>.

# MEDIA ANALYSIS OF BLAMEWORTHY OATH FEMICIDE VICTIMS

Figure 2 provides each femicide case with a variable of positive, negative or equal representation. Victims were considered as having equal media representation if the news reported on the case with a non-bias perspective and strictly focused on the facts of the incident. Victims were provided with a positive representation variable if the news focused on sympathizing with the victim and how they positively impacted the lives of others. Meanwhile, victims were given a negative representation variable if the media placed blame on the woman for the occurrence and how they should have left the perpetrator sooner. Within the 432 cases of femicide since 1995 in Ontario, Figure 2 indicates that 36 cases (8%) were instances where the media blamed the victim. Though the data does correlate with the literature in the sense that there are cases where victims are blamed, Figure 2 suggests that it is much less common than the literature suggests. One could argue that the media should display more sympathy for victims during their reports since a vast majority of cases are based on facts with limited emotion involved. If this can be accomplished, then the media may develop more social change and raise awareness of this phenomenon.

Figure 2



# REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN THE MEDIA

Mainstream news is predominantly represented through a western, Caucasian, middle-class, male-dominated lens<sup>25</sup>. One result is that Caucasian victims of femicide are much more likely to appear in the media compared to racial minorities. Minority groups not only receive less coverage in femicide reports, but they receive a less sympathetic tone as well <sup>26</sup>. For instance, First Nation, Metis and Inuit Women (FNMI) in particular suffer from media discrimination due to myths and stereotypes that are deeply embedded within Canadian institutions<sup>27</sup>. Cultural proximity has been argued to impact instances of minority cases of femicide because the story does not resonate with the dominant viewers' values, beliefs or concerns and therefore, it provides a less emotional reporting. For example, studies were conducted on at least 60 missing and murdered Aboriginal sex workers within Vancouver's downtown eastside. The media labeled the victims as "high risk", implying that their victimization was due to their poor choices and putting themselves at risk, ultimately blaming them for the violence they experience<sup>28</sup>. Portraying them as "high risk" implies that FNMI women are viewed as disposable and mistreatment against them is justified as a result of their stigmatization.

## SPECIFIC FRAMING TECHNIQUES USED IN THE MEDIA

**Headlines** Mainstream news reports on Caucasian femicides are more descriptive, heartfelt and personal in comparison to the reporting of ethnic minorities<sup>29</sup>. Women from minority groups are rarely identified by name in the media:

Victim	Source	Headline	Literature Connection
Ethnic Minority No name provided	Welland Tribune	"Inquest Date Set For Wellander Accused Of Murdering Wife"	Victim failed to be identified by name, no heartfelt headline
Caucasian Name Provided	Brantford Expositor	"It Hurts Every Day, Mom Tells Court; (name) Killer Gets Life Sentence"	Victim was identified by name, while also containing a compassionate headline

**Tone** In addition to some common findings within research on media's representation of violence against women, there are also incompatible findings. Some Researchers agree that there is a similarity in tone for the coverage between Caucasian and other minority groups as they both convey a sense of desperation in trying to find the missing women. However there isn't full agreement on this, as some argue that the media displays a more urgent and compassionate tone when reporting on Caucasian women, while stories of minority groups were much less sympathetic and more factual based<sup>30</sup>.

**Media Sources** There is a definite consensus in the research regarding media's inability to include relevant sources in their news report, regardless of race. The research states that the media typically interviews police or neighbours that are not close to the family involved in femicide, as opposed to interviewing close friends or family<sup>31</sup>. As shown in *Figure 2*, the literature demonstrates a correlation with the 1995-2015 Ontario femicide chart due to the fact that the majority of femicide cases signified an equal media representation. This was typically due to unbiased and strictly factual based opinions provided by police or neighbours that were unfamiliar with the couple.

**Photographs** Visual images located alongside text are intended to make the information presented more memorable, while ensuring that readers become more emotionally invested in the events. Representation of Caucasian women often includes a photograph that is large and placed in the center, while minority groups are visually represented in considerably smaller and non-centrally placed photos<sup>32</sup>.

# FROM THE LITERATURE: FUTURE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Future research should focus on femicide news coverage in various geographical locations as this is important to ensure accurate information on femicide cases is found
2. Research should attempt to survey the journalists who have written stories covering femicide cases and ask them how they choose the sources to include the language to describe victims and perpetrators and whether or not to contextualize a femicide as domestic violence
3. Research must expand to include other types of news sources such as television. With the 24-hr TV news cycle and "news bites" that run continuously on news channels, the presentation of IPV on television may have an even greater impact on public perceptions than newspaper coverage
4. At the social level, recognizing femicide as IPV may initiate better public policy responses to IPV
5. We need to continue educating journalists about their power to help facilitate accurate information on violence against women as a practical and attainable goal for this line of research
6. The academic community must continue this line of research to develop a comprehensive strategy for reporting violence against women generally, and femicide specifically, in both print and television news.
7. Additional analysis regarding how race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation intersect in the news construction of intimate partner homicide is needed, both in terms of current representations as well as within the context of undertaking participatory efforts to reframe news coverage of intimate partner homicide.

# CONCLUSION

When comparing the data collected in Ontario from 1990-2015 on characteristics and 1995-2015 on media representation, many of the variables examined are reflected in previous research on femicide in Canada. First and foremost, men are overwhelmingly responsible for the killing of women in an intimate partner context. These men are on average older than their female counterparts, and overall younger females are more at risk for becoming victims of intimate partner homicide. The most common relationship found between the victim and the offender were that of married couples, with current or ex-boyfriends and/or common-law partners comprising the second most common type of relationships. The use of a weapon in the commission of the femicide was common and the majority of the cases found did not include the perpetrator committing suicide after killing their intimate partner.

We hope to move forward with understanding who is missing and how we can transform our understanding of Femicide because gender-based violence, has also moved beyond our homes and is now present within our communities, our streets, our schools and workplaces. Further, violence against women is interconnected to women's experiences of gender identity, classism, racism, heterosexism, ableism and ageism, making this a human rights issue. These experiences cannot be ignored, but they have overwhelmingly been lacking. Calling for an intersectional analysis of the systemic issues involved as well as the forms of violence women experience, will allow for all women to be included as we look at gender-based homicides in Ontario.

1 Campbell, Jacquelyn, Daniel Webster, Jane Koziol-McLain, Carolyn Block, Doris Campbell, Mary Ann Curry, and Faye Gary. 2003. "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study." *American Journal of Public Health* 93:1089-1097; Adinkrah, M. 2014. "Intimate Partner Femicide – Studies in Ghana: Victims, Offenders, and Incident Characteristics." *Violence Against Women*, 20(9): 1078-1096; Crawford, Maria, Myrna Dawson, and Rosemary Gartner. 1998. "Women Killing Intimate Femicide in Ontario." *Resources for Feminist Research* 26:151-173.

2 Statistics Canada. 2013. Homicide in Canada 2013. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/141201/dq141201a-eng.htm>

3 Juodis, Marcus, Andrew Starzomski, Stephen Porter and Michael Woodworth. 2014. "A Comparison of Domestic and Non-Domestic Homicides: Further Evidence for Distinct Dynamics and Heterogeneity of Domestic Homicide Perpetrators." *Journal of Family Violence* 29:299-313; Elisha, Ety., Yael Idisis, Uri Timor, and Moshe Addad. 2010. "Typology of Intimate Partner Homicide: Personal, interpersonal, and environmental characteristics of men who murdered their female intimate partner." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*; Koziol-McLain, Jane et al. 2006. "Risk Factors for Femicide-Suicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study." *American Journal of Public Health* 21:3–21; Adinkrah, M. 2014. "Intimate Partner Femicide – Studies in Ghana: Victims, Offenders, and Incident Characteristics." *Violence Against Women*, 20(9):1078-1096; Crawford, Maria, Myrna Dawson, and Rosemary Gartner. 1998. "Women Killing Intimate Femicide in Ontario." *Resources for Feminist Research* 26:151-173.

4 Azziz-Baumgartner E., McKeown L., Melvin, P., Dang, Q., & Reed, J. 2011. "Rates of Femicide in Women of Different Races, Ethnicities, and Places of Birth: Massachusetts, 1993-2007." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(5), 1077-1090; Campbell, Jacquelyn, Daniel Webster, Jane Koziol-McLain, Carolyn Block, Doris Campbell, Mary Ann Curry, and Faye Gary. 2003. "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study." *American Journal of Public Health* 93:1089-1097; Folkes, Stephanie, Zoe Hilton and Grant Harris. 2013. "Weapon Use Increases the Severity of Domestic Violence but Neither Weapon Use nor Firearm Access Increases the Risk or Severity of Recidivism." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 28(6): 1143-1156; Glass, N., Laughon, K., RuBo, C., & Campbell, J. 2008. "Young Adult Intimate Partner Femicide." *Homicide Studies* 12(2) 177-187; Muftic, Lisa and Miranda Baumann. 2012. "Female Versus Male Perpetrated Femicide: An Exploratory Analysis of Whether Offender Gender Matters." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27(14): 2842-2844; Romans, S., Forte, T., Cohen. M., Du Mont, J., & Hyman, I. (2007). Who is Most at Risk for Intimate Partner Violence? : A Canadian Population-Based Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 22 (12): 1495-1514; Shackelford, T., & Mouzos, J. 2005. "Partner killing by men in cohabiting and marital relationships." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(10), 1310-1324

5 Juodis, Marcus, Andrew Starzomski, Stephen Porter and Michael Woodworth. 2014. "A Comparison of Domestic and Non-Domestic Homicides: Further Evidence for Distinct Dynamics and Heterogeneity of Domestic Homicide Perpetrators." *Journal of Family Violence* 29:299-313; Elisha, Ety., Yael Idisis, Uri Timor, and Moshe Addad. 2010. "Typology of Intimate Partner Homicide: Personal, interpersonal, and environmental characteristics of men who murdered their female intimate partner." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*; Koziol-McLain, Jane et al. 2006. "Risk Factors for Femicide-Suicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study." *American Journal of Public Health* 21:3–21; Adinkrah, M. 2014. "Intimate Partner Femicide – Studies in Ghana: Victims, Offenders, and Incident Characteristics." *Violence Against Women*, 20(9):1078-1096; Crawford, Maria, Myrna Dawson, and Rosemary Gartner. 1998. "Women Killing Intimate Femicide in Ontario." *Resources for Feminist Research* 26:151-173.

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