

# FIVE YEARS OF FEMICIDE REPORTING IN ONTARIO: **MEDIA FRAMES** and **TRENDS IN ONTARIO**

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## BACKGROUND

Based on the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses' (OAITH) annual media analysis research, from 2018 to 2023, femicide in Ontario increased by 72%, rising from 36 to 62 cases<sup>1</sup>. This five-year review by OAITH examines 628 media reports covering 245 femicides. Femicide is defined by OAITH as the killing of a woman, child, or gender-diverse person by a cisgender man who is charged or deemed responsible. These killings are connected to gender-based violence (GBV) and shaped by systemic and structural factors such as patriarchy, misogyny, racism, and colonialism.

## PURPOSE

The report addresses two key questions:

- 1) How do local, national newspapers and television outlets frame and report femicide in Ontario?
- 2) What demographic and situational details about victims and perpetrators are made visible—or invisible—through media coverage?

## METHODOLOGY

OAITH conducted a systematic media content analysis using three media sources: national newspapers (*The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*), local outlets near incident locations, and television news (CBC, CTV, Global).

Media reports were coded using ten framing categories—five negative (e.g., omission of the perpetrator's violence history, reliance on “voices of authority”, individualization, victim blaming, racialization) and five positive (e.g., victim humanized, positive picture of the victim, framed as a gendered social problem, labelled as femicide, inclusion of violence against women (VAW) help info). Demographic and situational data included age, race/ethnicity, relationship, cause of death, and location.

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- 1 This increase can be explained by numerous factors including increases in the actual prevalence of femicides which includes the impact of COVID-19, increases in the attention femicides have received from mainstream media and therefore the increased ability to find femicides using mainstream news sources and finally changes to the definition of femicide and the impact this has on what cases are assessed as relevant.
  - 2 How femicide is defined is important and contentious. See Grzyb, Naudi & Marcuello-Servós (2018) for a review and analysis of the history and ongoing debates about necessary and appropriate language and definitions.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Rising femicide rates:** 72% increase over five years, with the sharpest rise during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023.

**Victim and perpetrator profiles:** Victims averaged 44.9 years of age, perpetrators 39 years of age; 95.6% of perpetrators were male. Intimate partners were responsible in 38.8% of cases, family members in 24.4% of cases

**Racial disparities:** White victims comprised 44% of reported cases—below their population share—while Indigenous and other racialized women were overrepresented. Race was unknown for 25% of the victims and for 86% of the perpetrators.

**Cause and location of death:** Trauma was the leading cause of death (42.2%), followed by shootings (15.3%). Nearly three-quarters of femicides occurred in residences; 16.4% in public outdoor settings.

**Media Coverage gaps:** National outlets reported only 60% of Ontario femicides, compared to 98% by local outlets and 97.6% by television. National coverage more often featured young, white, middle-class victims.

**Negative Framing patterns:** The most common negative frames include the omission of the perpetrator's violence history (76%), reliance on official "voices of authority" (65-70%), and individualization (16%).

**Positive Framing patterns:** The most common positive frames include a picture of the victim (37.4%), victim humanized (23.1%), gendered social problem (8.3%) and labelled as a femicide (6.2%)

**Prevention gap:** Only 2.5% of reports included VAW helpline or resource information.

## ANALYSIS & IMPLICATIONS

Media narratives do not merely describe femicide—they actively shape public understanding and political will. Selective coverage and episodic framing detach femicide from its systemic causes, obscuring patterns of risk and reinforcing harmful myths. Omission of perpetrator history removes critical prevention signals from the public record. Unequal humanization of victims, racialized underrepresentation, and overreliance on police/government sources narrow the discourse and perpetuate structural invisibility. The near absence of resource information reflects a missed opportunity for the media to act as a primary prevention tool (Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2024).

## OAITH'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consistent use of the term femicide and framing as gender-based violence (GBV) rooted in inequality.
- Greater thematic/contextual reporting linking cases to systemic causes.
- Routine inclusion of perpetrator violence history.
- Diversification of sources to include GBV experts, survivors, and families.
- Coverage of racialized victims proportional to their level of victimization
- Standard inclusion of GBV resources in all reporting.
- Ongoing journalist training on ethical and prevention focused GBV reporting.

## CONCLUSION

Femicide in Ontario is rising, with racialized women disproportionately affected. The media's role is pivotal: coverage can either obscure systemic causes or illuminate them, fostering prevention and accountability. Without structural, contextual, and relevant reporting, femicide will remain framed as an isolated crime rather than a gendered social and political crisis. This report underscores the need for a sustained shift in journalistic practice to make media a partner in prevention, not just a chronicler of loss.

Since 1990, OAITH has tracked over 1,080 media-reported femicides across Ontario to raise awareness about gender-based violence and killings (OAITH 2024a). The definition of femicide has evolved over time as OAITH continues to examine the complexities of gender, including non-binary and gender continuum perspectives, as well as the diverse relationships between victims and perpetrators (OAITH 2024b).

OAITH currently defines femicide as the killing of a woman, child, or gender-diverse individual in which a cisgender man has been charged or deemed responsible (OAITH 2022). Perpetrators may include intimate partners, family members, acquaintances, or others across different relational contexts.

In some cases, the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator may be unknown, though prior violent acts, including sexual violence, may have occurred before the murder. There are also instances where the perpetrator and victim have no known relationship, yet the victim is targeted specifically because of their gender (OAITH 2022).

When available through media sources, OAITH tracks a range of demographic and situational indicators, including race and/or ethnicity, age, cause of death, geographic location, relationship to the perpetrator, and known histories of prior violence (OAITH, 2022). These indicators form the basis for identifying broader patterns in how femicide occurs and is reported across the province. Their intersection with systemic patterns of gender-based violence is further analyzed throughout this report.

**PURPOSE**

- 1) How does local, national newspapers and television outlets frame and report femicide in Ontario?
- 2) What demographic and situational details about victims and perpetrators are made visible—or invisible—through media coverage?

This analysis is based on data from OAITH’s Annual Femicide Lists (2018–2023) (OAITH, 2024b), which documents a total of 245 femicides during this five-year period (see Figure 1).

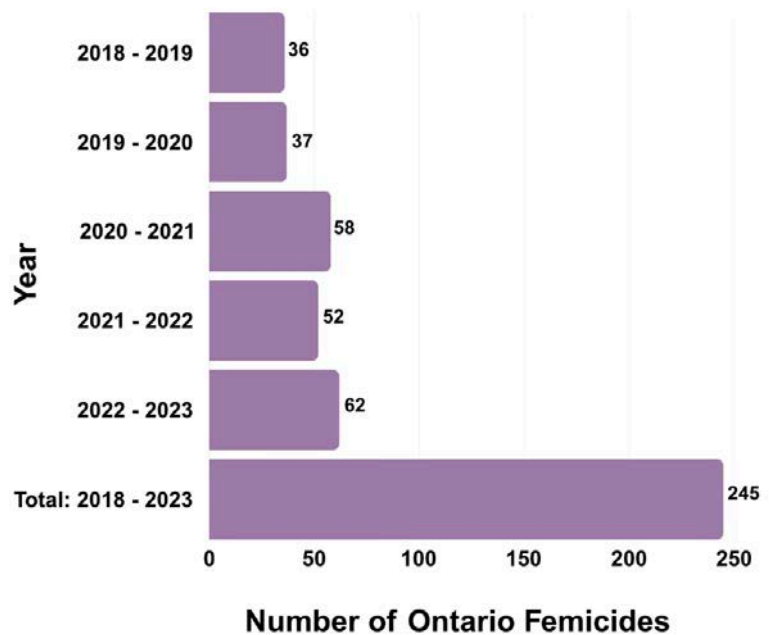


Figure 1: Number of Ontario Femicides over Five Years

## CRITICAL MEDIA FRAMING METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

There is consensus in the literature that media representation matters and that it plays a critical role in shaping public awareness, perceptions of societal issues, politically significant consequences and responses to social issues including gender-based violence (Aldretea & Fernández-Ardèvol 2024; Eastel et al. 2021; 2022; Fairbairn et al., 2023; Freezel et al. 2021; Lloyd and Ramon 2016). The media uses narrative templates (Fairbairn et al., 2023), which offer a unique opportunity to enhance public understanding of these serious social and political issues. Consequently, the way issues are framed influences how audiences interpret the events, perceive those involved, and determine what responses are deemed necessary. This is done through processes including agenda setting which helps to propel specific issues for audiences to take note of and priming which facilitates the media's ability to shape the considerations that people use when making judgements about an issue (Antolak-Saper 2023).

Previous research has examined how mainstream media outlets frame stories about femicide, identifying various ways these incidents are portrayed, both positively and negatively. Framing facilitates an understanding of an event or issue, and their strength of framing depends on many factors including who the individual is, the topic, the context and the socio-political context (Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol 2024; Antolak-Saper 2023). Antolak-Saper (2023) reminds us that journalists and media outlets do not necessarily frame stories to put a spin on the story but instead framing can help reduce the complexity of an issue and this is often a goal of media outlets.

The way an issue is portrayed is influenced by factors such as the source of the information, the content of the story, and the language and visuals used to describe the events and construct a narrative (Carlyle et al. 2014; Eastel et al. 2021; Freezel et al. 2021; Lee and Wong 2019). This is the definition of media “framing”, and the deliberate emphasis and/or omission of information can either amplify or diminish certain viewpoints or perspectives (Taccini & Mannarini, 2024). Frames have been defined as “‘horizons of meaning’ that emphasize certain information and perspectives while dismissing others” (Pröll & Magin 2022, 120). The framing of femicide in media can either foster public awareness and empathy, or conversely, reinforce harmful myths and stereotypes that blame victims and obscure systemic causes (Eastel et al., 2022). Historically, mainstream media reports have often depicted femicide as an isolated or sensationalized event, disconnected from the broader context of gender-based violence, and this can undermine efforts to adequately address and prevent femicides. Journalistic practices can either dehumanize or depersonalize female victims of violence while positive personal information about victims can increase readers’ empathy and reduce victim blaming (Eastel et al. 2022).

The data collection and analysis methodology used to produce the annual OAITH Femicide Media Analysis aligns with decades of other media representation femicide research (Gillespie & Richards, 2018) which involves searching for femicides from a large sample of mainstream news sources (Papa, Kouros & Lambe, 2025). For OAITH this involves gathering and examining local and national media from newspaper and television outlet regarding cases of femicide. National sources used are newspapers with the largest circulation and in our analysis, this includes *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The National Post*. Local media outlets are selected based on their proximity to the location where the femicide took place and cover a large range of sources. Television coverage is drawn from reports aired or published by major outlets including CBC News, CTV News, and Global News.

When OAITH began collaborating with the University of Guelph to conduct media analysis research in 2015, we reviewed existing studies of media representation research and found that content analysis was a common method of analysis (Gillespie & Richards, 2018). Our coding scheme (frames) was also chosen to align with most of the research examining how femicide and domestic violence was being portrayed in the news (Gillespie & Richards, 2018). The frames we chose then, in 2015 and still examine today, continue to be the most common content to examine 10 years later (see Figure 2 below for a list of frames and how each frame is defined).

The combined OAITH media analysis from 2018-2023 totals 628 news articles/ media sources that were reviewed, coded, and analyzed annually according to the media frames and criteria outlined below in Figure 2.

As summarized in Figure 2, the framing categories reveal a persistent divide in how femicide is portrayed—either through humanizing and contextualized narratives that situate the violence within broader gender-based dynamics, or through decontextualized, individualized framings that obscure systemic patterns.

Positive Frames	Negative Frames
<p><b>Victim Humanized:</b> Recounting and honouring the woman in a positive light while recognizing her influence on the lives of those around her.</p>	<p><b>Victim Blaming:</b> Assigning responsibility to the victim, either explicitly or implicitly, by highlighting her actions concerning the femicide, or indirectly by rationalizing or excusing the perpetrator’s behaviour.</p>
<p><b>Picture of Victim:</b> A favourable or neutral portrayal of the woman in the news article.</p>	<p><b>Individualized:</b> Depicting the femicide as a singular incident, disconnected from boarder social patterns, and presenting it as an isolated or random occurrence.</p>
<p><b>Gendered Social Problem:</b> Framing femicide as a societal and/or political issue stemming from gender-based disparities.</p>	<p><b>Voice of Authority:</b> Prioritizing statements from traditional authoritative sources like law enforcement and government officials, while marginalizing or excluding perspectives from friends, family members, or violence against women experts.</p>
<p><b>Labelled a Femicide:</b> Identifying the killing as a targeted act of gender-based violence or explicitly categorizing it as a femicide.</p>	<p><b>Violence Against Women (VAW) History Undocumented:</b> Omitting or neglecting to mention any prior patterns of domination, abuse, or violent behaviour by the perpetrator.</p>
<p><b>Violence Against Women (VAW) Help Information:</b> Details regarding women’s shelters and other resources and support services for victims of violence against women.</p>	<p><b>Racialization:</b> Inaccurate portrayal or use of stereotypes to categorize individuals based on their skin colour, physical characteristics, or racial/ethnic background.</p>

Figure 2: Positive and Negative Media Methodology and Analysis (OAITH 2022)

### FIVE YEAR MEDIA ANALYSIS 2018-2023

Over the five-year period from 2018 to 2023, there were 245 femicides recorded in Ontario. It is important to note, however, that this number does not reflect the total number of media reports reviewed in the analysis. Not every femicide was reported on by all three media formats—national, local, and television—each year. Figure 3 displays the annual breakdown of sources available across these platforms.

Year	Number of Ontario Femicides	Number of National Sources	Number of Local Sources	Number of TV Sources
2018 - 2019	36	31	35	34
2019 - 2020	37	29	35	37
2020 - 2021	58	40	57	57
2021 - 2022	52	19	52	52
2022 - 2023	62	28	62	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>1497</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>% of Total Femicides</b>		<b>60%</b>	<b>98.4%</b>	<b>97.6%</b>

*Figure 3: Number of Ontario femicides compared to the number of national, local and TV sources that reported on femicides*

### Lack of Ontario Femicide Reporting by National Sources

One trend over the five-year period (2018-2023) was that national news sources only reported 60% of the Ontario femicides that OAITH found from media reports. As Figure 3 below demonstrates, local news sources and television sources almost always reported on the femicides (98.4% and 97.6% respectively). See Figure 3 above for the number of missing sources. This underreporting suggests that some femicides were considered less newsworthy, a finding that aligns with previous research (Coy, 2024; Lee & Wong, 2019). Newsworthiness refers to the "... value judgments journalists and editors make about the public appeal of a story as well as whether it is in the public interest" (Jewkes & Linnemann, 2018, 43). Victims deemed more 'worthy' of media attention are often White, young, middle-class women (Gekoski et al., 2012; Lee & Wong, 2016). In general media have stereotyped racialized more negatively than White women (Slakoff, Brennan & Epinger, 2023). The value assigned to factors such as age, gender, and race indicates that national news outlets often deemed racialized femicide victims as less newsworthy. The lack of national news coverage of femicides and the over representation of white women in national reporting aligns with the newsworthy research referred to above.

The following section provides a comparative analysis across news sources (i.e. national, local and television) and between positive and negative framing.

### National Sources Do Less Negative Framing

Over the five-year period, when national news outlets (i.e., *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The National Post*) did report on Ontario femicides, they employed fewer negative frames compared to local and TV sources. See Figure 4 below for an overview of the use of negative frames across all media sources.

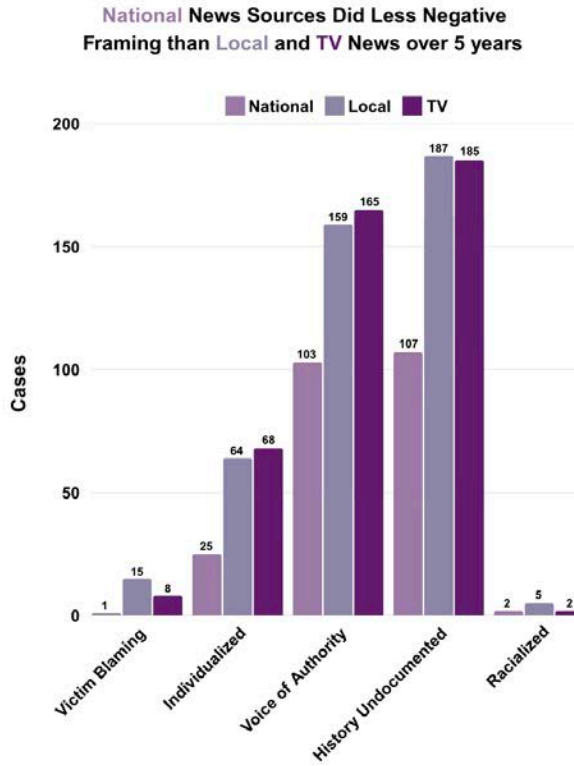


Figure 4: Comparison of Negative Media Frames Among all Media Sources

**Most to Least Negative Framing in Ontario Media Reporting**

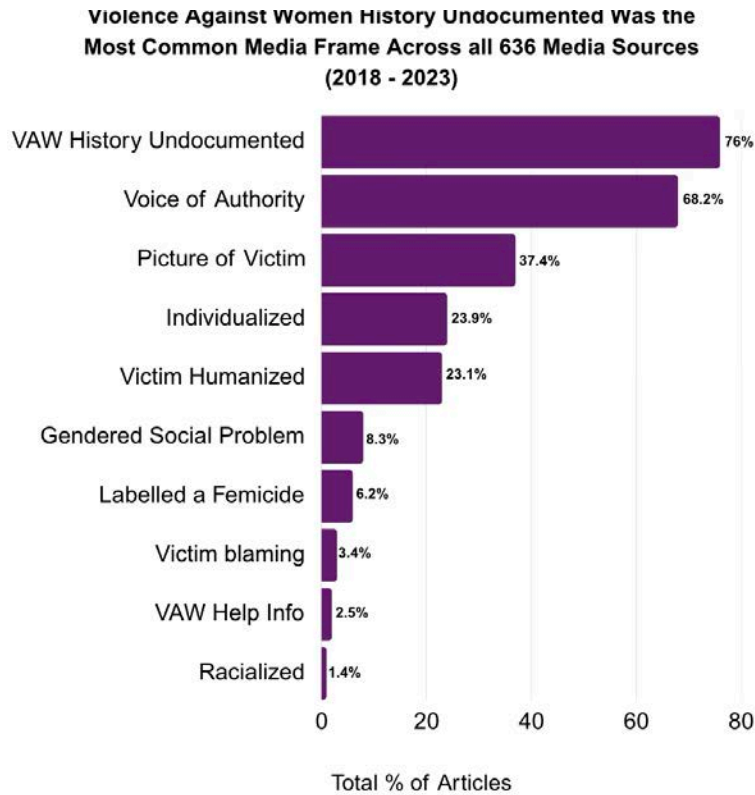


Figure 5: Distribution of Negative Media Frames in Ontario Femicide Reporting Across All Media Sources (2018–2023)

### Lack of Information about Perpetrators’ History of Violence

The “VAW History Undocumented” frame refers to failing to provide information about the perpetrators’ history of violence.

**“VAW History Undocumented” is the Most Common Negative Frame used in Local, National, and TV Media (2018 - 2023)**

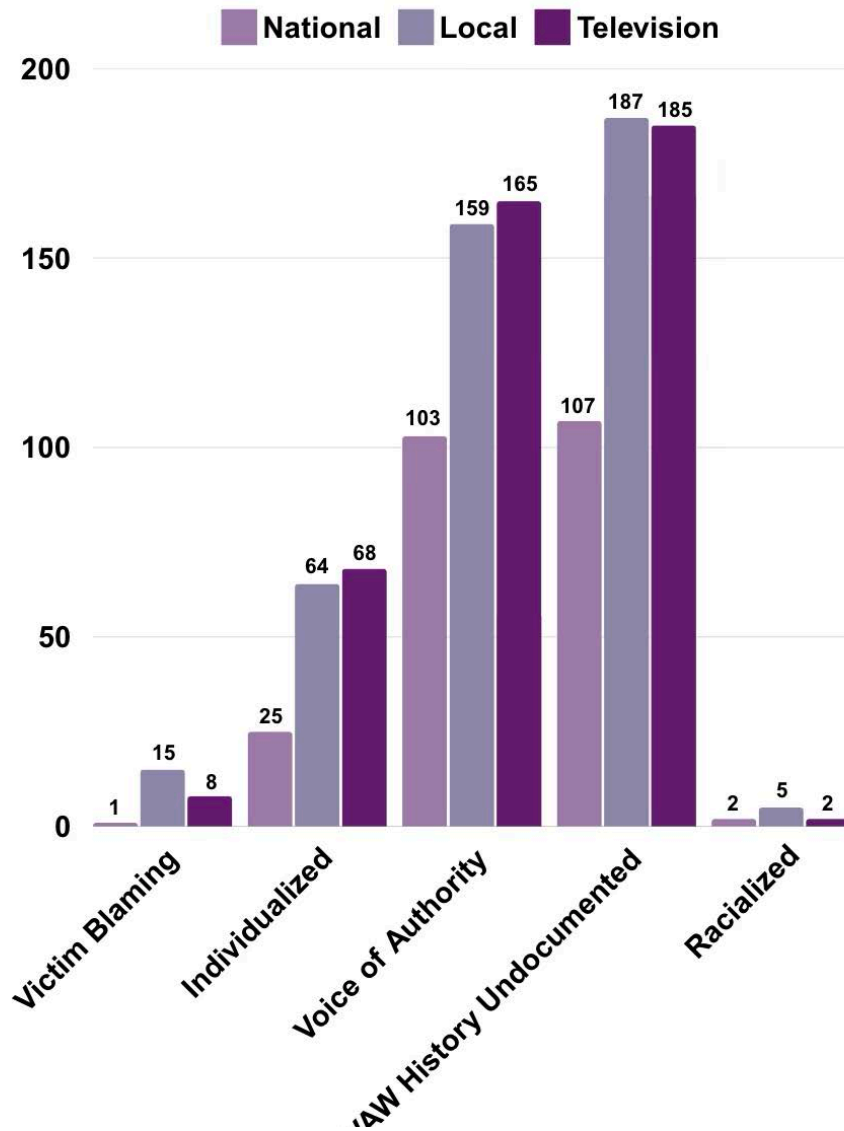


Figure 6. “VAW History Undocumented” as the Most Common Negative Frame in Local, National, and Television Media (2018–2023)

A counter example of this otherwise common frame shows up in the 2023 national news report below since the headline of the report identified the fact that the perpetrator had been investigated for previous violence against his intimate partner.

## Shooter in Sault Ste. Marie involved in intimate partner investigations in past

“VAW History Undocumented” was both the most common negative frame used by all sources (see Figure 7 below) and as shown in Figure 5, the most prevalent media frame among the ten coded categories. Across all three sources, information about the perpetrators’ violence was not included in the media reports 76% of the time. This finding is significant because research on intimate partner femicide reveals that in most cases, there is a documented history of violence between the victim and the perpetrator (Domestic Violence Death Review Committee [D VDRC], 2019). For example, a documented history of domestic violence was present in 68% of domestic homicides reviewed by Ontario’s Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (2021), making it one of the most significant risk factors associated with intimate partner femicide.

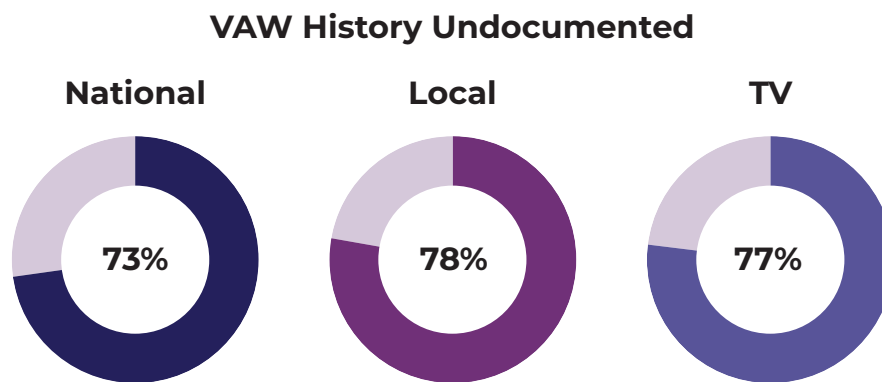


Figure 8: Prevalence of Media Frames in OAITH Media Analysis, Highlighting “VAW History Undocumented” as the Most Common Frame

Despite the significance of documenting a history of VAW, as noted above it is often missing from media coverage. Since it highlights a significant risk factor and is a predictor of fatal violence, it is an important piece of information to include. If such details are not provided in police press releases, journalists are encouraged to actively seek out this information from law enforcement, to verify whether there was a prior history of abuse, either towards the victim or women in general (OAITH 2021a). Given the media’s broad ability to disseminate information, this presents a critical opportunity to raise public awareness about femicide and its warning signs, potentially helping to prevent future violence. As Fairbairn et al. (2023) argue, media representations of femicide can serve as a “primary prevention tool” (p. 554), as “primary prevention aims to prevent violence before it occurs” (p. 554).

## Privileging Traditional Voices of Authority

The next most common negative frame was what we refer to as “Voice of Authority”. Traditional voices of authority refer to who is quoted in the news report and whose perspective and voice provides information about either the femicide, the victim, or the perpetrator. These traditional voices of authority are often referred to in the literature as “state managers” who include public officials such as government bureaucrats, political leaders, as well as criminal justice agents like police, crown attorneys, and correctional administrators (Crichlow & Fulcher 2017, 173; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2009). This can be problematic as it can incorporate harmful beliefs from patriarchal systems rather than emphasize the broader issue of gender discrimination and violence against women (Easteal et al. 2014). This is significant as 34% of the articles across the three types of media sources utilized the voices of government officials or law enforcement to provide information about the femicide, rather than relying on voices from people who are more educated on the issue of gender-based violence, or more connected to the victims, such as experts in the field or the victim’s family and friends.

The way OAITH codes “Voice of Authority” also considers “coverage” or how much of the story is taken up by traditional voices of authority versus other voices. Reliance on these traditional voices often results in fewer quotes from gender-based violence experts, advocates such as researchers, violence against women shelter leaders, and other gender-based violence sector experts, and/or the victims’ family and friends. An example of the use of non-traditional voices of authority comes from this 2021 national news source in which the interim executive director of a violence against women’s shelter was interviewed and offered some research-based advice,

Nicole Regehr, Interim Executive Director of Gillian’s Place, said isolation and possessive behaviours are early warning signs of a scary situation.

“If you feel like something’s not right, it probably isn’t,” said Regehr. “If your partner makes you feel uncomfortable or afraid, checks up on where you are, makes you feel afraid to disagree. Some of these things are innate feelings that you have.

An example of the use of traditional voices of authority comes from a national news report on a 2023 femicide. In this short story the only voices that were included in the report were from the staff reporter and the police:

“Toronto police said they were called to the Markham Road and Progress Avenue area on June 13 at around 11 a.m.

Police said that the victim, who has been identified as 29-year-old (name of victim), allegedly was “violently assaulted” in an apartment.”

In another example, this one from a 2022 local newspaper, the entire story comes from the perspective of the police, and the only picture is a picture of a police car:



The newspaper report is as follows:

“Following new information from the community, York Regional Police have made a new arrest and withdrawn murder charges laid against the husband of a Vaughan woman found stabbed in a burning house last week.

Investigators uncovered additional evidence that led to the arrest of (perpetrator) 43, on Sept. 29 for the homicide of (victim), 64, police said. He is charged with first degree murder and arson endangering life.

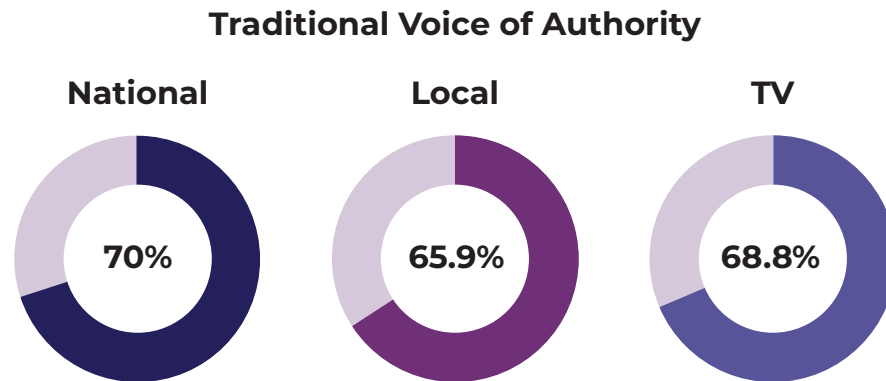
Charges against the victim’s husband, (husband’s name) (husband’s age), have been withdrawn.

On Friday, Sept. 23 at approximately 7:45 p.m., police was called to assist Vaughan Fire and Rescue Services for a structure fire in the area of Parktree Drive and Lucena Crescent.

When officers arrived on scene, they located an unresponsive female victim inside the residence. She was pronounced deceased at the hospital.”

Global research has shown that overreliance on police and criminal justice sources can lead to portraying femicide as an isolated event (Fairbairn et al., 2023). Fairbairn goes on to suggest that “[c]hanging sourcing practices is key to capturing trends across femicide cases and contexts and to encourage social and political responses to femicide” (Fairbairn et al. 2023, 556).

Below in Figure 8, approximately 65–70% of all three sources relied on traditional voices of authority to report on Ontario femicides.



*Figure 8: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Traditional Voices of authority to report on Ontario Femicides*

### Individualised

The next most common negative frame was the individualisation of femicide. The “individualized” frame appeared in 103 cases, representing 16% of coverage across the three media sources. As defined in Figure 2 above, individualizing refers to misrepresenting femicide as an isolated and/or random event. An individualised frame isolates single incidents and fails to situate them within a broader structural context (Meltzer, 2024). Bouzerdan, Cameila and Whitten-Woodring (2018) argue that news media “typically cover the killing of women as separate incidents rather than as parts of a broader context” (p. 213).

Fairbairn et al. (2023) explain that the consequence of representing femicide as an isolated event “render[s] social structures such as patriarchy, racism, and colonisation invisible” and instead presents it as the result of “individually driven circumstances” (p. 554). Framing femicides as an individual or isolated incident is also known in the literature as episodic framing (Coy, 2024). Episodic framing involves highlighting “event-centered” information and presenting issues through “concrete instances” (Feezell, 2021, p. 347). Episodic frames focus on the details of specific events or cases to represent a larger societal issue (Iyengar, 1991; Zukas & Liapis, 2024, p. 205).

In Figure 9 below, femicides are individualised between 17% of the time from national sources to close to 1/3 of the time from local (26.5%) and TV sources (28.3%).

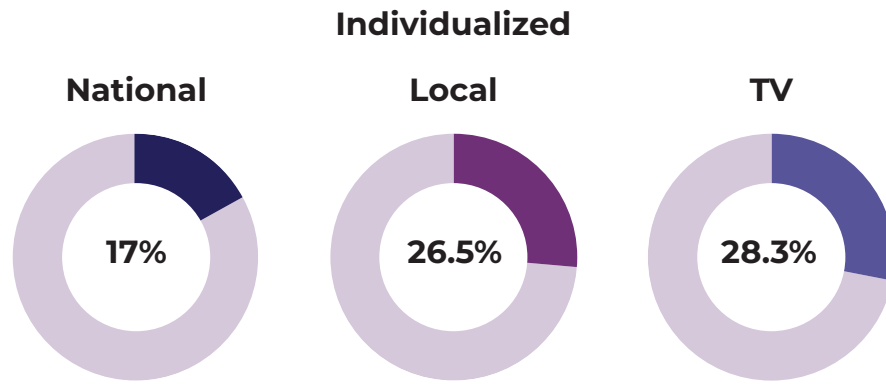


Figure 9: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as Individualised

An example of how media can individualize a femicide is shown in the following 2022 TV report. The headline read:

### **Woman lit on fire aboard Toronto transit bus dies of injuries: police**

As part of the TV coverage, it was reported that "speaking at a press conference after the incident, Const. Li said investigators believe it was an "isolated incident" and a "random attack." Both terms "isolated incident" and "random" are commonly used when coding a report as "individualising".

Another form of individualizing appears in the Ontario context when news reports simultaneously describe the incident as an "isolated incident" and as involving "domestic violence." In a 2022 TV news example, a murder-suicide case was reported by police as: "Investigators are treating this as an isolated incident and a case of domestic violence between two individuals that were in a relationship," ..."

Given the widespread prevalence of domestic violence and the strong body of evidence showing that domestic violence and femicides are part of a broader gendered social problem (Dawson & Vega 2023) this contradictory framing reflects a lack of awareness and education among mainstream journalists and editors.

## Victim Blaming

One of the least common negative frames used in media reporting was victim blaming. As defined in Figure 2 above, victim blaming refers to attributing blame to the victim, holding her responsible for her own victimization or death, or suggesting that blame should be equally shared between her and the perpetrator. Previous research has shown that many news articles imply that the victim provoked the attack, or they minimize the perpetrator's responsibility (e.g., Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Gillespie, Richards, Givens, & Smith, 2013; Taylor, 2009).

Direct and indirect forms of victim blaming can distort the public's understanding of the root causes of gender-based violence and erroneously shift responsibility onto the victim. Such framing also reinforces harmful stereotypes and misogynistic ideologies (Fairbairn et al. 2023, 556). As highlighted in Aldrete and Fernández-Ardèvol's (2024) article on framing femicide in the news, studies have shown that the way femicide is reported can reinforce harmful misconceptions, particularly through the focus on single incidents and victim blaming (p. 232). When the blame is placed on the victim, it risks distancing the killing from being recognized as a form of gender-based violence and could even serve to justify the act (Lloyd and Ramon 2016).

Attributing responsibility is a common feature of the framing process which is referred to in the research as the "attribution of cause" or who is seen as responsible (Siefkes-Andrew & Alexopoulos, 2019). Lee and Wong (2020, p. 216) found that patterns of victim blaming are common in media studies on domestic violence. Many media reports suggest that the victim provoked the attack, or they present the incident in ways that minimize the perpetrator's responsibility (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Gillespie, Richards, Givens, & Smith, 2013; Taylor, 2009).

Victim blaming also frequently relies on stereotypes and myths about women and victims. Pröll and Magin (2022) highlight earlier research showing that victims of femicide are often blamed, either directly or indirectly.

Direct blaming dominates ... including negative language use (e.g., adjectives such as "greedy", "threatening", or "sexually promiscuous") and statements that the victim had not reported previous acts of violence or had met other men. Forms of indirect blaming, which is less common, include mentioning the physical, mental, or emotional health of the perpetrator or victim and his or her financial problems, as well as describing domestic violence in a way that makes the victim and perpetrator appear jointly responsible for the feminicide (Pröll & Magin, 2022, p. 120).

An example of direct victim blaming in a local paper in 2022 reported: “She had a relationship with the wrong man and, despite being estranged, allegedly could not escape him” (Warmington, 2023).

An example of indirect victim blaming can be found in a TV example also from 2022, reporting that: “It has been hard for the family to cope in the wake of her death ... in part because they were all frustrated with (victim’s name) for not leaving” (CBC News, 2023)

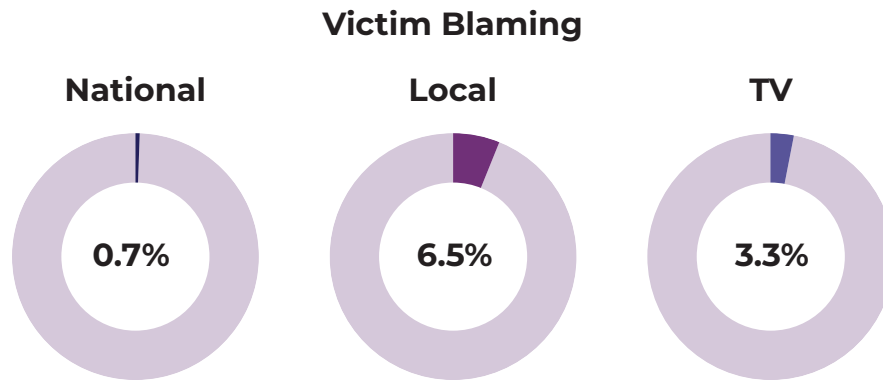


Figure 10: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as Victim Blaming

### Racialized

Racialization refers to how the media construct or emphasize racial meanings by associating certain behaviours or issues with specific racial or ethnic groups, reinforcing stereotypes, misrepresenting individuals based on race, or erasing race when it may be relevant in stories involving discrimination or inequality (Neely, 2015; Duxbury et al., 2016). At times, highlighting race in reporting can also serve to distract from the core issue of gender-based violence.

Racialized was the least common frame to appear in reporting on Ontario femicides with 4% of articles across the three types of news media demonstrating racialization. One of the reasons that might explain the lack of racialization in news coverage is that racialized victims of femicide may not make the news at all.

Decades of research show that mainstream media tend to prioritize stories of “violence, disappearances, or killings” when the victims are “... white, affluent, and conventionally attractive” overlooking women from “non-white backgrounds and low-income groups” (Stillman, 2007; Muratoğlu Pehlivan & Atalay, 2024, p. 2). As discussed above; in doing so, media effectively categorize victims as either valuable and thus newsworthy, or worthless and therefore invisible.

Muratoğlu Pehlivan and Atalay (2024) draw attention to the phenomenon known as “Missing White Woman Syndrome (MWWS),” which highlights how women who do not meet specific racial and socioeconomic ideals are more likely to be symbolically erased compared to others. This reveals the media’s tendency to create implicit hierarchies among women.

Research on media coverage of women of colour has consistently found that they “are at the bottom of the list when it comes to news coverage—even regarding homicides” (Neely, 2015, p. 9).

A look at OAITH’s five-year data on victims’ race (see Figure 23) demonstrates that approximately 50% of the femicides that made the news were White, 25% had an unknown race/ethnicity, and just over 25% were non-White. As discussed in the section on Victim Race below, this does suggest that racialized femicide victims are unrepresented in media reporting given the overrepresentation of the risk racialized women face regarding lethal violence (Slakoff, Brennan & Epinger, 2023)

An example in the 5-year analysis comes from a 2018-2019 local media source in which the femicide victim was Indigenous. *“(victim’s name), whose work had once graced the Nunavut government’s holiday card, struggled with alcoholism. They loved one another but fought over her drinking more and more while eating less and less”*. Another example comes from both a national and local source in 2020 that provide almost identical coverage *“A woman who died after being shot inside the garage of her Brampton home was the wife of the head priest of a prominent Hindu temple, a member of the temple confirmed Sunday.”*

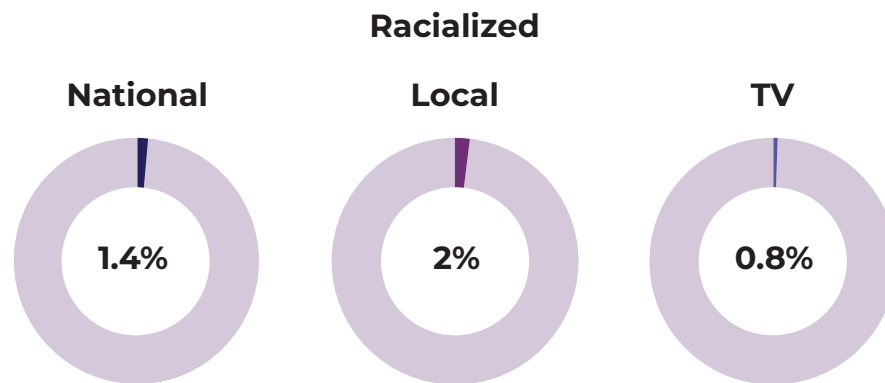


Figure 11: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as Victim Racialized

## NATIONAL SOURCES DO MORE POSITIVE FRAMING

A five-year analysis of the data demonstrates that overall local news outlets offer more positive framing than national and TV sources. See Figure 12 below for an overview of the use of positive frames across all media sources.

### Most to Least Positive Framing in Ontario Media Reporting

The most common positive frame across local, national, and TV media/news is “Picture of the Victim,” followed by “Victim Humanized.” Like OAITH’s 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 reports, “picture of victim” was also the most common positive frame (Hancock 2022; Hancock 2023). The local news sources did the best job of providing a positive picture of the femicide victim 42% of cases.

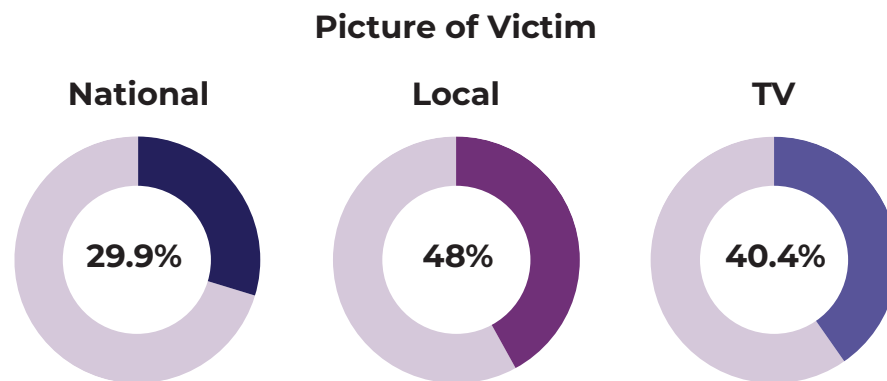


Figure 12: Comparison of national, local, and TV femicide coverage framed as “Picture of the Victim”

Photographs in news stories are prominent story elements and “convey rich meaning, and most readers recall story imagery but not story text” (Slackoff, Brennan, & Epinger, 2023, p. 21). Research suggests that smiling in photographs contributes to a positive image, and women are more likely to be perceived as attractive when wearing make-up (Slackoff, Brennan, & Epinger, 2023, p. 21).

Although 38% of articles across all media sources featured positive images and humanized victims, there remains room for improvement in how Ontario media humanize femicide victims.

**Victim Humanized**

Humanizing victims refers to providing information about the femicide victim that highlights them in a positive light, honours them and acknowledges the influence and/or contribution they had on others and their community. Research shows that adding personal information about a murder victim adds a layer of empathy and therefore “... causes readers to feel greater compassion for the victim and the victim’s family and friends” (Neely, 2015, p.18).

As discussed above in the Racialization frame section in which research on the Missing White Woman Syndrome was used to help explain the invisibility of racialized femicide victims, there is also research from Slackoff (2013) and Liebler (2010) that demonstrates that women from specific social classes and/or with specific characteristics receive more media coverage when they go missing, experience violence, or are killed (Pehlivan & Atalay 2024, p. 2). Liebler (2010) reported over 15 years ago that if “missing or murdered women belong to the middle or upper classes, are white, pretty, and young, the media coverage of their cases is much higher” (Muratoğlu Pehlivan& Atalay 2024, p. 2).

The mainstream media gives more importance to reporting incidents of violence, disappearances, or killings when the victims are white, affluent, and conventionally attractive women but minimize coverage, downplay and victimize individuals from non-white backgrounds and low-income groups (Stillman, 2007). This way, women are classified as either valuable or worthless victims. This classification has been associated with the extent to which women victims are considered innocent, and this impacts their worthiness and newsworthiness (Jewkes 2018).

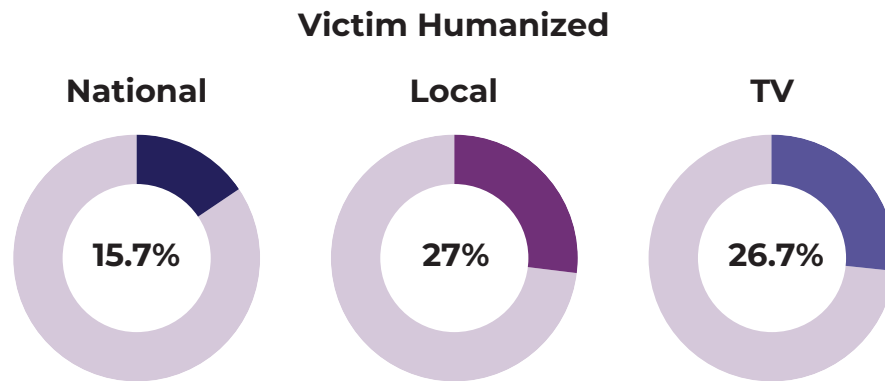


Figure 13: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as Victim Humanized

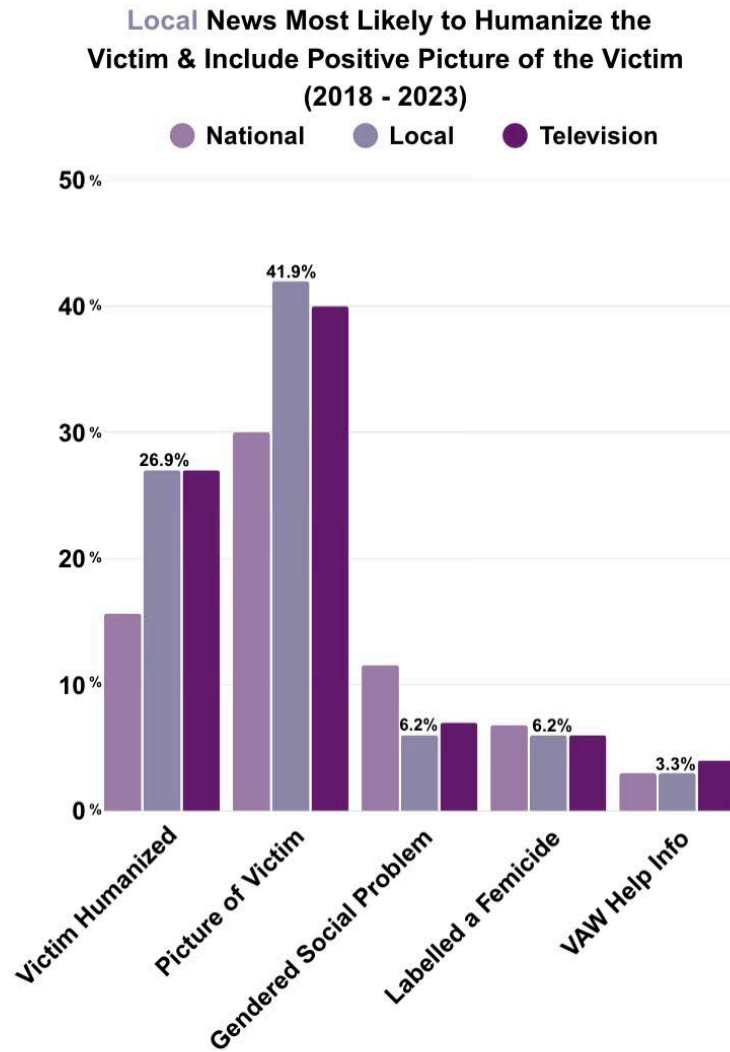


Figure 14: Local News Trends in Humanizing Femicide Victims and Using Positive Imagery.

An example of humanizing comes from a local newspaper in 2023 that provided reflections from colleagues and friends about a femicide victim who had received a compassion award for her service and dedication in attempting to help immigrant women in Canada find a career. The news report provided this reflection offered by one of her colleagues:

*“You know sometimes how people walk into a room and they don’t need to say anything and you want to talk to them? So this is [femicide victim’s name]. [She] is true joy. Someone’s presence who would lighten the room. (You’d say) ‘ [femicide victim’s name] can you help?’ (She’d say), ‘Yes, I can help.’ And you can forget about the person (needing help). You’d know that she’ll be employed or that she’ll be guided or she’ll be mentored. [Femicide victim’s name] made such a difference in so many people’s lives. It’s unbelievable.”*

In a television report about the same victim, she was remembered as a “leader in the community,” who “inspired” and mentored others.

In another 2023 local news source a different femicide victim was remembered by a friend for her “... *smile and a laugh that could light up a room. Such a beautiful person*”.

The next two least common positive frames over the last five years include femicides being framed as a “gendered social problem” followed by being “labelled a femicide.”

### Gendered Social Problem

One of the most important frames in reporting on femicides is whether the femicide was identified and understood, not as an individual phenomenon, (see Individualized frame above) but as the result of a larger social and political context in which individual experiences and interactions with others are shaped by various personal and individual level influences, as well as societal and institutional level forces (DeWard, 2024).

Referring to femicide as “gender-based violence” or as a “gendered social problem” means that gender as a social phenomenon plays a central role in explaining the “why” of the perpetration and experience of that violence (Boyle, 2019; Buiten, 2022, p. 44). It means to understand the killing of women as both a product and a driver of systemic gender inequality. It means understanding gender-based violence and femicide as the result of cultural norms and, structural and institutionalized gendered power relations that reproduce unequal gendered hierarchies in which women’s experiences of violence are normalized and enabled (DeWard, 2024; Zhang & Peterson, 2023).

Media framing literature distinguishes between episodic and thematic framing. As discussed above, in media reporting on femicides, episodic framing often results in individualising femicides, whereas thematic framing reports on femicides as a social or public issue within a wider context (Mattis, 2025; Zukas & Liapis, 2024).

The example below is from a local newspaper in 2020. The femicide was reported on as one of several women killed in the GTA in cases an intimate partner was charged with their deaths.

*“[Femicide victim’s name’s] death is the third homicide in Peel Region this year in which a current or former partner, or a family member, has been charged. There were 13 such homicides in the area last year. ... at least 14 women were killed last year in the GTA where current or former intimate partners were charged.”*

This same report went further to contextualize the femicide as an example of a domestic violence death and referenced the research conducted by Ontario’s Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC, 2019).

“Research by Ontario’s Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and other domestic violence researchers has established that women are most at risk of being killed when they are leaving an abusive relationship. Of 329 cases reviewed by the committee between 2003 and 2018, two-thirds involved an actual or pending separation. In half the cases, the perpetrator was depressed. About one-third of the cases reviewed were homicide-suicides (DVDRC, 2019)”

In 2019, a television report connected the femicide to the larger issue of transgender rights. In the news report, a friend of the femicide victim said

*“she, ... got to know the femicide victim through community events such as the Trans Day of Remembrance, which celebrates and honours ‘the lives of trans-identified people who have passed away due to transphobia, hate crimes, illness, substance use, suicide, or murder.’ The friend went on to say that the ‘... [femicide victim’s name’s] death reminds her there is much work to do on strengthening transgender rights.”*

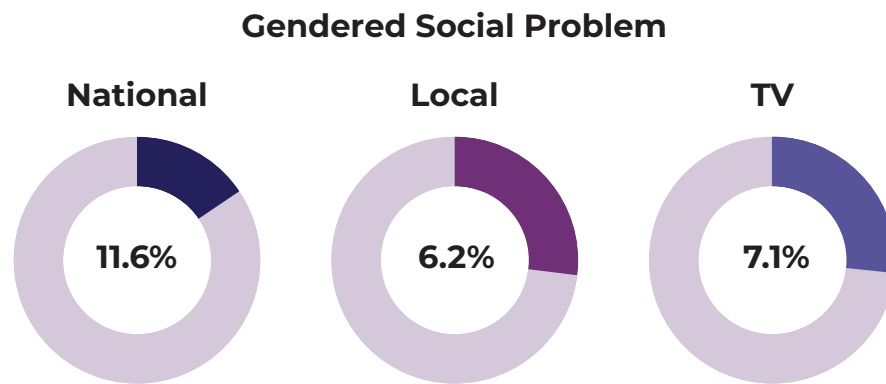


Figure 15: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as Gendered Social Problem

When information is not provided to frame these deaths within the broader social and political context, they risk being perceived as random, isolated incidents. This perception reduces the sense of collective responsibility in addressing the ongoing issues of GBV and femicide (Gillespie et al., 2013).

### Labelled A Femicide

This frame has been coded to include news reports that refer to the femicide as a targeted act of gender-based violence as well as explicitly referring to it as a femicide.

While the national news reports do a slightly better job compared to local and TV, there are not significant differences.

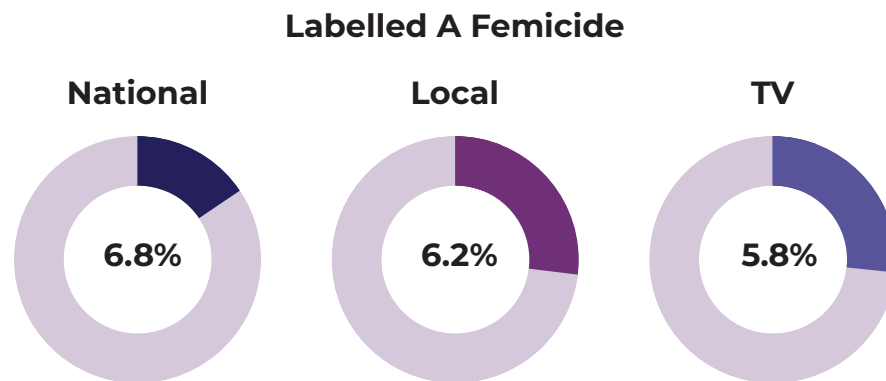


Figure 16: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as Labelled a Femicide

Despite the historically limited use of this frame in Ontario news reports (see Figure 16), the five-year review indicates that there has been some increase in either the specific use of the term “femicide” or reference to the killing as an example of targeted gender-based violence. For example, in 2018-2019 only two reports out of 37 cases (5%) were coded as labelling the murders as femicides and even in these cases the word “femicide” was not used in either case. In the 2022 Global News TV example, they referred to the femicide as an “alleged domestic homicide” in the headline of the report, “81-year-old man charged after woman found dead in alleged domestic homicide at Brampton home”. In the national news report the headline explained her death because of being “allegedly killed by her boyfriend”.

By 2023-2024, two notable changes emerged. First more reports (39%) explicitly referred to the killing as an example of intimate partner violence such as in this TV example below.

Toronto | News

## Police believe woman killed in Whitby was victim of intimate partner violence

The second change is that on occasion, although still not often, the word femicide is specifically used. In the 2023 case below the subheading of a local newspaper report says, “Most recent case of alleged femicide a stark reminder of work to be done, says group”. In another local newspaper report the headline refers to the homicide as a femicide.

## Group calls homicide of Waterford woman 'femicide'

Labelling these fatalities as femicides highlights a gendered form of violence rooted in sexism, patriarchal ideology, and systems of power and control.

It also draws attention to the commonalities that link seemingly isolated and random killings (Coradi et al., 2016). At the same time, the example above reflects the Voice of Authority frame, as the headline was based on a press release issued by a local Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee (VAWCC). In this way, femicide is legitimized in public discourse not only as a gendered issue but also through the authoritative framing of community-based organizations.

### VAW Help Information

Overall, the least commonly depicted frame is “VAW help info.” This frame refers to the news report providing information about gender-based violence shelters as well as other supports and resources for survivors experiencing gender-based violence.

In this 2021 local source example there was significant news report coverage given to the local VAW shelter executive director informing readers about the range of support and resources available.

*“We provide support regardless of your choices and where you are in the relationship. If somebody feels that their relationship is abusive, but they don’t want to leave, that’s OK too. I don’t ever want there to be this misconception we only help people when they’re ready to leave their relationship or they need to admit to the shelter because that’s not the case”.*

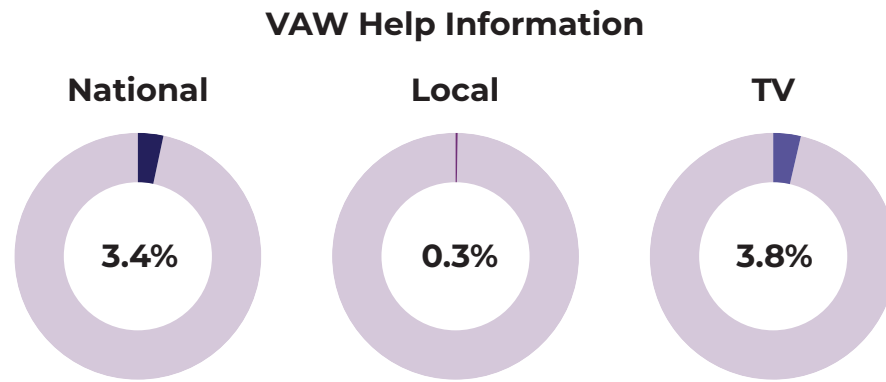


Figure 17: Shows the comparison of National, Local and TV Femicides framed as VAW Help Information

As the least used positive frame, this means that local, national, and TV media/news reports typically did not include violence against women help information, with only 3% of media sources providing helplines or information about community programs available to women experiencing violence against women. Providing VAW Help Info may help save lives of women experiencing violence and abuse by providing support, and it serves as an example of thematic framing by contextualizing these cases into the broader issue of gender-based violence.

Therefore, it is important that more effort is put into highlighting the broader context of gender-based violence and violence against women when discussing femicides. The following are examples from all three media sources about how this VAW Help Info can show up. In a local newspaper example in 2020, the report provided this, “There are several services available to help victims of domestic violence. The Assaulted Women’s Helpline can be reached 24 hours a day at 1-866-863-0511.” In TV coverage in 2023, the following was provided:

*“Of the 17,000 to 20,000 calls received annually by Victims Services Toronto, which offers confidential support for anyone who has experienced crime or sudden tragedy, 70 per cent of those are about intimate partner violence ....”*

Finally, a national newspaper in 2021 ended their report with this. *“If you recognize red flags in your own relationship or in the relationship of a loved one, Gillian’s Place’s support line is available 24/7, by call or by text 905-684-8331”*

As emphasized in **OAITH’s Femicide Reporting Recommendations**, incorporating local gender-based violence resources into media reports on femicide is vital for connecting survivors, especially those at risk of lethal violence, with the support services they need.

Given the extensive reach of the media across various platforms, there is a significant opportunity to broadcast vital resources and support information for survivors of gender-based violence and can play a key role in raising awareness and providing crucial assistance to those in need.



## FIVE-YEAR RESULTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC & SITUATIONAL FACTORS OF FEMICIDE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

### DEMOGRAPHIC & SITUATIONAL FACTORS OF FEMICIDE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Since this research is based on media-reported femicides, the analysis must be understood within the epistemological limits of media narratives. As Walby et al. (2017) remind us, gender-based violence requires multidimensional inquiry—attending to the gender of the victim, the gender of the perpetrator, the nature of their relationship, gendered motivations, and the broader structural impact. Yet, media sources rarely capture all these dimensions in a consistent or complete manner. This analytical gap complicates interpretation and requires a reflective approach to how femicide is framed and understood. Before presenting the demographic and situational data below, it is essential to acknowledge the partiality and constructed nature of the media reports that serve as our data source.

Consistent with the framing analysis above, the demographic and situational data for Ontario femicide victims and perpetrators is drawn from the same annual OAITH media data from 2018-2023. Over this five-year period, OAITH identified 250<sup>3</sup> femicide victims and 236 femicide perpetrators.

### ONTARIO FEMICIDES INCREASED OVER 5-YEARS

A five-year review of femicide reporting in Ontario reveals some interesting and important findings. The first is that the number of all types of femicides reported in Ontario mainstream news outlets rose by approximately 72% from 36 in 2018-2019 to 62 in 2023-2024 (over the last five years). This represents an average annual increase of about 17% per year<sup>4</sup>. This increase is likely a function of four factors: 1) increases in the actual prevalence of femicides which includes the impact of COVID-19, 2) increases in the attention femicides have received from mainstream media and therefore 3) the increased ability to find femicides using mainstream news sources and finally 4) the changes to the definition of femicide and the impact this has on what cases are assessed as relevant.

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3 The reason there is a difference in the number of femicides analyzed in the media analysis and this analysis is that in the earlier years, OAITH did not provide a frame analysis for children however, they are included in this demographic and situational analysis.

4 Calculation to get the percent increase per year:  $\text{average} = \frac{42.78 + 56.76 - 10.34 + 19.23}{4} = 468.43 \approx 17.11\%$

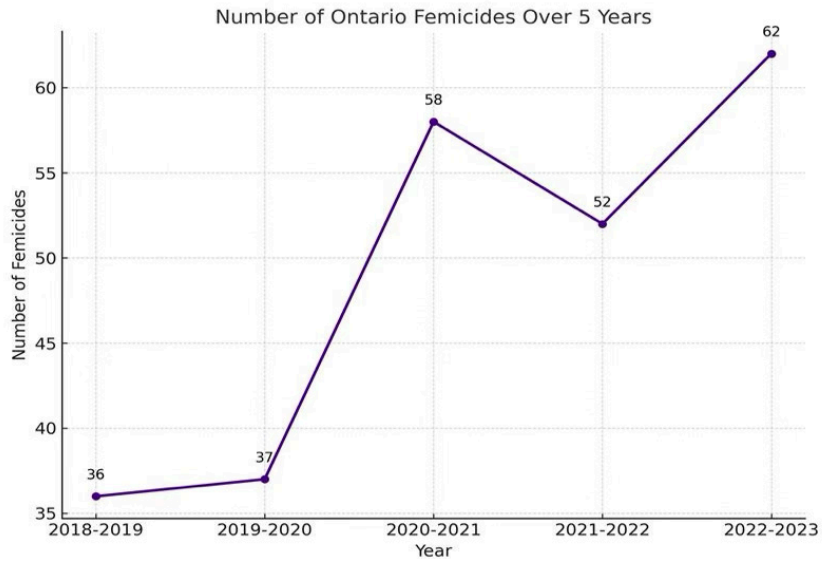


Figure 18. Number of Ontario Femicides Reported in Mainstream Media (2018–2023)

As illustrated in Figure 18 above, the biggest increase in Ontario femicides occurred during the pandemic. The percentage increase from year two (2019-2020) to year five (2022-2023) was 67.5% and the increase from pre-Covid (2019-2020) to the start of Covid (2020-2021) was 56%. While the increases in the number of femicides in Ontario are greater than the reported Canadian femicide increases, there is evidence that femicides have increased since the pandemic. For example, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability report 2018-2022 reported that “... the killing of women and girls involving male accused in Canada increased by 27 percent in 2022 compared to the pre-COVID year, 2019” (Dawson, Zecha & Angu, 2022). Statistics Canada reports that “... while the rate of gender-related homicide of women and girls has generally declined since 2001, there was a 14% increase between 2020 and 2021 (from 0.48 to 0.54 victims per 100,000 women and girls), marking the highest rate recorded since 2017” (Sutton, 2023,p. 3). The United Nations also provided data suggesting domestic violence has intensified globally since the COVID-19 outbreak (U.N. Women, 2020).

In addition to examining the changes in the number of femicides, our analysis aligns with other research such as Fairbairn and Dawson (2013), and nine demographic and situational variables were analyzed and coded using the following categories:

**1. VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Victim Age Distribution:**

- 0-17
- 18-35
- 36-54
- 55+
- Unknown

**Perpetrator Age Distribution:**

- 0-17
- 18-35
- 36-54
- 55+
- Unknown

**Victim/Perpetrator Relationship:**

- Intimate partner
- Family
- Known acquaintance
- Relationship not reported
- No prior relationship

**2. CAUSES OF DEATH**

**Breakdown:**

- Asphyxiation
- Shooting
- Trauma
- Vehicular
- Other
- Unknown

**3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**Race of Victims:**

- Black
- East Asian
- Indigenous
- Latino
- Middle Eastern
- South Asian
- Southeast Asian
- White
- Other
- Unknown

**Femicide/Suicide Link:**

- Yes
- No
- Yes - suicide by cop

**4. LOCATION AND POPULATION CONTEXT**

**Location of Femicide:**

- Public indoors
- Public outdoors
- Residence indoors
- Residence outdoors
- Unknown

**Population Size of Area:**

- Rural (<1,000 or density <40/sq km)
- Small (1,000–29,999)
- Medium (30,000–99,999)
- Large (>100,000)

**Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) Femicide Region:**

- East
- West
- Toronto
- Central
- North

Annual data for each of the five years (2018-2023) was compiled into a single Excel worksheet. All the data originated from one or more of three types of sources: local and national news reports and/or television broadcasts. During analysis, each variable of interest was highlighted as a category in Excel, and a pivot table was created for this highlighted data<sup>5</sup>. The frequencies for each category within the variable were calculated and expressed as percentages. Once the data were generated as percentages, the pivot table was highlighted, and a customized visual chart was created to display the results. This process was repeated for all subsequent variables.

## VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR AGE COMPARISON

### Victim Age

A total of 250 women and girls were included as victims in the five-year Excel database. Femicide victims killed in (2018-2023) ranged in age from two to 94 years old and the average age among femicide victims was 44.91 years old.

As shown in Figure 22 (see below), 32% of all femicide victims from (2018-2023) were 55 years of age and older. Thirty percent of femicide victims were between the ages of 36-54 and 25.6% of all victims were between the ages of 18-35. Young girls between the ages of 0-17 accounted for 8% of all femicides. A small portion of femicide victims were included in the unknown age category, where 4.4% of femicide cases did not include the victims' ages in media reports. This missing data can result from court ordered publication bans and at times, at the request of the family to protect the privacy of surviving loved ones, such as children. This represents a limitation inherent in sourcing femicide data from media reports, as it limits the ability to determine femicide rates across socio-demographic groups with full accuracy.

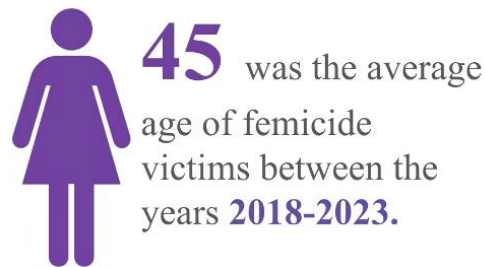


Figure 19: Average Age of Femicide Victims (2018-2023)

<sup>5</sup> A pivot table in Excel is a tool that summarizes and reorganizes data in a spreadsheet for analysis.

This average age is consistent with Statistics Canada data indicating that “Between 2011 and 2021 and aligned with the high proportions of women killed by their spouse or child, nearly six in ten (59%) victims of gender-related homicide were aged 35 and older” (Sutton 2024, p. 6). Based on our data approximately 62% of Ontario femicides were aged 36 and older. Sutton goes on to explain that the proportion (i.e. 6 in 10 victims were aged 35 and older) “... is also representative of their makeup in the general population; in 2021, 60% of the female population in Canada was aged 35 and older (Statistics Canada, 2022).

This also aligns with our research (see Figure 22 below) that the majority of Ontario femicide victims (32%) were in the 55+ age category compared to any other age category. Given the aging senior population in Canada, these findings point to an increased need for additional supports and resources for identifying and preventing gender-based violence among senior women (Sutton 2023).

### Perpetrator Age

There was a total of 239 different femicide perpetrators identified between (2018-2023). The reason there is a difference between the number of victims, and the number of perpetrators is that in some cases, one perpetrator killed more than one victim and in other cases more than one perpetrator killed the same victim. To analyze perpetrator ages, we analyzed 251 perpetrator age records, and this includes 12 perpetrators for whom no age information was available. The perpetrator was identified as male in 95.6% of femicide cases within the five-year period. In some cases, multiple individuals have been charged, and, in some cases, the suspected perpetrator was deemed responsible for more than one femicide. Women accounted for 2% of perpetrators charged in relation to the victim’s death and the perpetrator’s identity has not been specified within 2.4% of cases. Perpetrator ages ranged from 12 to 94 years, with the average age of perpetrators being 39 years old (see Figure 20) and more than 1/3 of the perpetrators were between the ages of 35-54 (35.9%). Almost half, or 41.8% of all perpetrators were between the ages of 18-35. The least common age categories for femicide perpetrators were ages 17 and under (3.6%) and men ages 55 and older (13.9%). A total of 4.8% of cases, at the time of publication, have not yet disclosed information regarding the suspected perpetrator’s age.

From **2018-2023**  
femicide perpetrators  
were an average age of  
**39.**

*Figure 20: Average age of Femicide perpetrators (2018-2023)*

Given the above results and research over the last 25 years, we have important information about ways to reduce gender-based violence via effective universal prevention strategies in elementary, secondary, postsecondary and university settings (e.g. Fourth R, Safe Dates, and Shifting Boundaries) (Crooks et al. 2019). The Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario also recommends using and building on “existing age-appropriate education programs for primary and secondary schools, and universities and colleges” (Office of the Chief Coroner, 2022, p.25).

**VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR AGE COMPARISON**

As indicated above, perpetrators were younger on average than the victims they killed. Just over 40% of perpetrators were between the ages of 18-35. A Canadian study similarly found that perpetrators in femicides involving older women had an average age of approximately 48 years, whereas in femicides involving younger women perpetrators averaged about 36 years. This highlights that perpetrator age is a meaningful variable across victim age groups in Ontario (Dawson, 2021).

Age Range	Victim Age	Prep. Age
0 - 17	8%	3.6%
18 - 35	25.6%	41.8%
36-54	30%	35.9%
55+	32%	13.9%
Unknown	4.4%	4.8%

*Figure 21: Table Comparison of Victim and Perpetrator Age Percentage*

The Majority of Femicide Victims Were 55+ Years of Age Whereas Majority of the Femicide Perpetrators Were Between 18-54 Years of Age (Dec 2018 - Nov 2023)

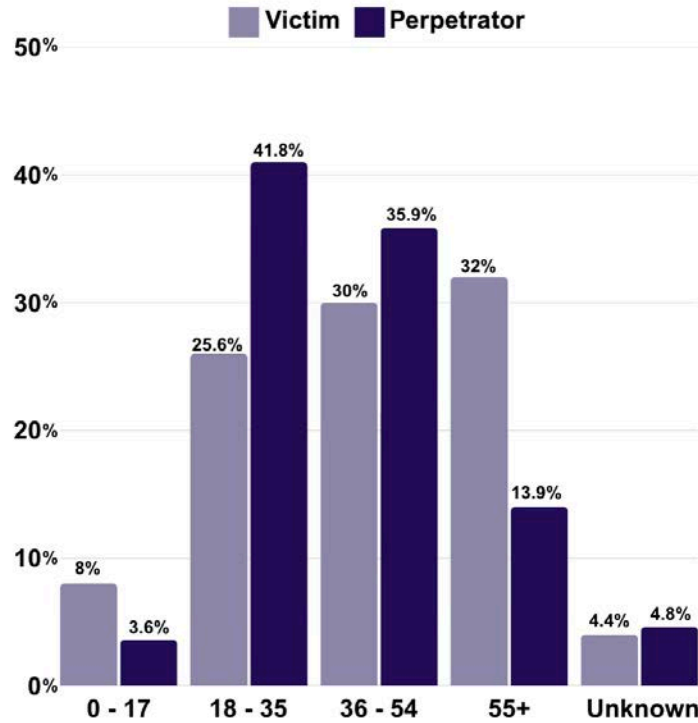


Figure 22: Age Distribution of Femicide Victims (2018-2023)

The differential age gap between victims and perpetrators is mainly explained by the next variable which is relationship status (Dawson, 2021).

**VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR RELATIONSHIP COMPARISON**

When OAITH began coding provincial femicide data from media reports four femicide relationship categories were used:

1. intimate partner
2. family member
3. another man known to them
4. unknown

The unknown category included cases where relationship details had not been disclosed in the media reports and in cases where it was indicated there was no prior relationship. To better clarify this data, OAITH has removed the unknown category and included two new categories (see legend below) that better describe the types of femicides they are categorizing: Relationship Not Reported, in which relationship details are not provided and/or are protected by court publication bans and No Prior Relationship, in which police and media reports explicitly state that the victim and perpetrator were not previously known to each other. This new categorization provides more information about how often relationship details are not released.

**Intimate Partner:** Current or Former Intimate Partner  
**Family:** Father, Son, Nephew  
**Known:** Acquaintance, Neighbour  
**Unknown:** Was a Targeted Attack/ At-Risk Due to Gender and Details About the Nature of the Relationship Are Unknown or Unreleased

As shown in Figure 23, while femicides continue to be most often perpetrated by current or former intimate partners (38.8%), women and girls continue to experience violence from other relationships as well. In one quarter of the cases (24.4%), a male family member, including a father, son, grandson, nephew, and brother, has been deemed culpable in the victim's death. This pattern is consistent with national data, as Statistics Canada has reported that more than half of gender-related homicides of women and girls in Canada are committed by current or former intimate partners, while a substantial proportion also involve male family members or acquaintances (Sutton, 2023). These findings align with criminological research showing that most femicides in Canada are perpetrated by intimate partners, though family members and acquaintances also represent significant perpetrator categories (Dawson & Piscitelli, 2021).

A man who had a known relationship to the victim, such as an acquaintance or roommate, has been charged or deemed responsible in 19.2% of femicide cases. No relationship details have been released in 12.4% of cases and there was no prior relationship existing between the victim and the perpetrator in 5.2% of cases.

**From 2018 - 2023, Most Femicide Victims in Ontario Were Killed by Their Intimate Partners**

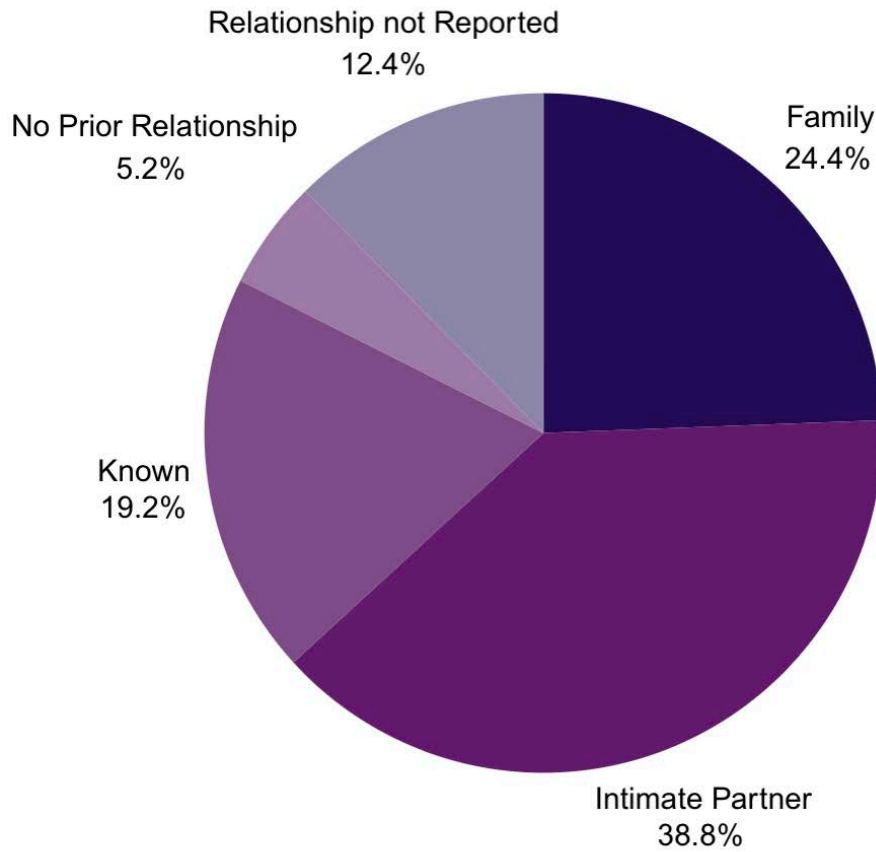


Figure 23: Examination of Victim Relationship to Perpetrator (2018-2023)

Due to the lack of relationship details in many cases, the current rates of femicides by intimate partners, family members, or others in known relationships may be underreported. In Ontario, there is no mechanism to review femicides committed by family members unless they involve intimate partner violence, such as a father killing a child. OAITH’s femicide data highlights high rates of killings by other family members, including sons, grandsons, nephews, and brothers. For instance, OAITH’s most recent monthly femicide factsheet (May 2025) reported that of 16 femicides in Ontario since November 2024, 6 were perpetrated by intimate partners and 5 by family members, underscoring the significant role of male relatives in femicide cases (OAITH, 2025).

A more thorough provincial review of these cases could help identify gaps in services and lead to recommendations that improve system collaboration and safety for victims of this type of violence.

### CAUSE OF DEATH

Since 2018 OAITH has been capturing the cause of the victim’s death using the following categories in Figure 24 below.

#### In Ontario, Trauma was the Most Commonly Reported Cause of Death Among Femicide Victims (2018 - 2023)

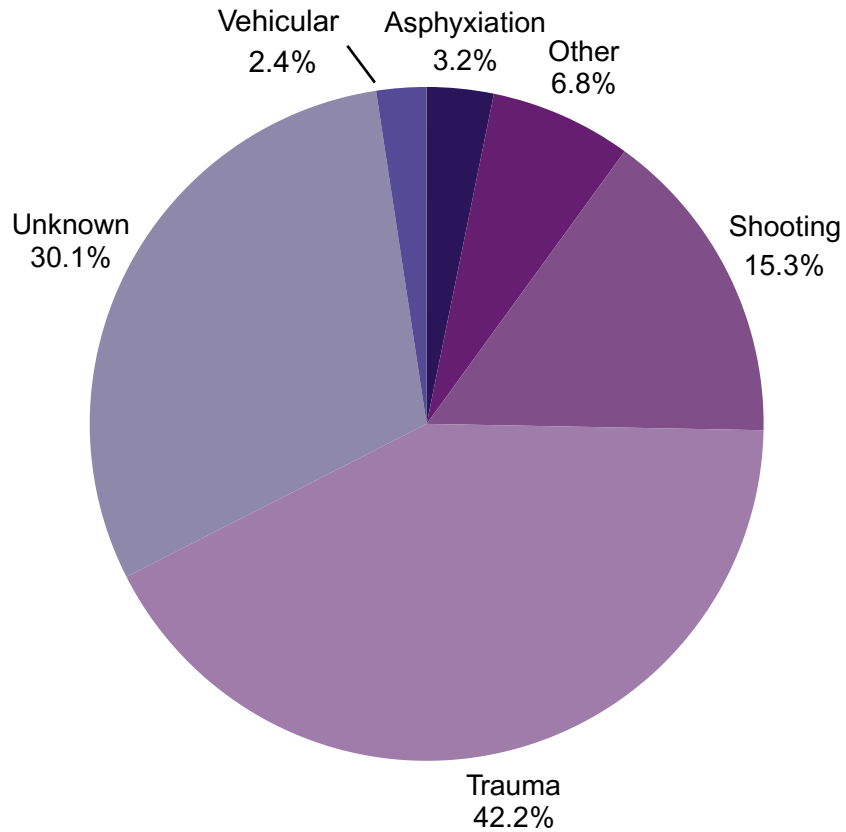


Figure 24: Examination of Femicide Victims’ Cause of Death

Between 2018-2023, trauma was identified as the leading cause of death among femicide victims, accounting for 42.2% of cases. The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC) also reports trauma<sup>6</sup> as the most common cause of death in the cases they review (DVDRC 2019). Similarly, Statistics Canada reports that of “... all gender-related homicides of women and girls that occurred between 2011 and 2021, most victims died by stabbing, although when focusing on rural areas specifically, a larger proportion died by shooting” (Sutton 2023, p.16). Research confirms that “... perpetrators of domestic homicide in rural areas in Ontario were more likely to have access to a firearm than in urban Ontario and to use it to kill their partner (Banman 2015)” (Moffitt et al. 2022). In our analysis, shooting is responsible for 15.3% of femicide deaths, while asphyxiation/strangulation accounts for 3.2% and vehicular deaths account for 2.4%. This statistic underscores the lethal role of guns in violence against women and suggests that stricter firearm regulations could be a crucial step in mitigating this form of violence.

In 6.8% of cases, the cause of death was categorized as “other,” which includes arson or poisoning as well as other unclassified causes. Approximately one-third of femicide cases (30.1%) had an unknown cause of death, which highlights a limitation of using media-reported data instead of coroner data. This information may not have been available at the time of police press releases or may be withheld due to court publication bans. Expanding data collection on cases with unknown causes in OAITH’s femicide records could help clarify death trends in other types of femicides, such as those committed by family members, acquaintances, or strangers.

## VICTIM RACE

As with all the socio-demographic data in this analysis, OAITH relies on media-reported and publicly available information to collect race-based data on femicide victims and perpetrators. Due to a lack of available data, Figure 8 shows that a substantial proportion (25.2%) of cases remain coded as “unknown”, which may include errors or omissions. Due to the substantial number of cases in which no race-based information has been collected the following data is likely to be an underestimate of the true rates of violence that racialized communities are experiencing.

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6 includes assault from being punched, hit, stabbed as well as from falls, burns etc.

**In Ontario, White Women Are The Most Common Race of All Femicide Victims (2018 - 2023)**

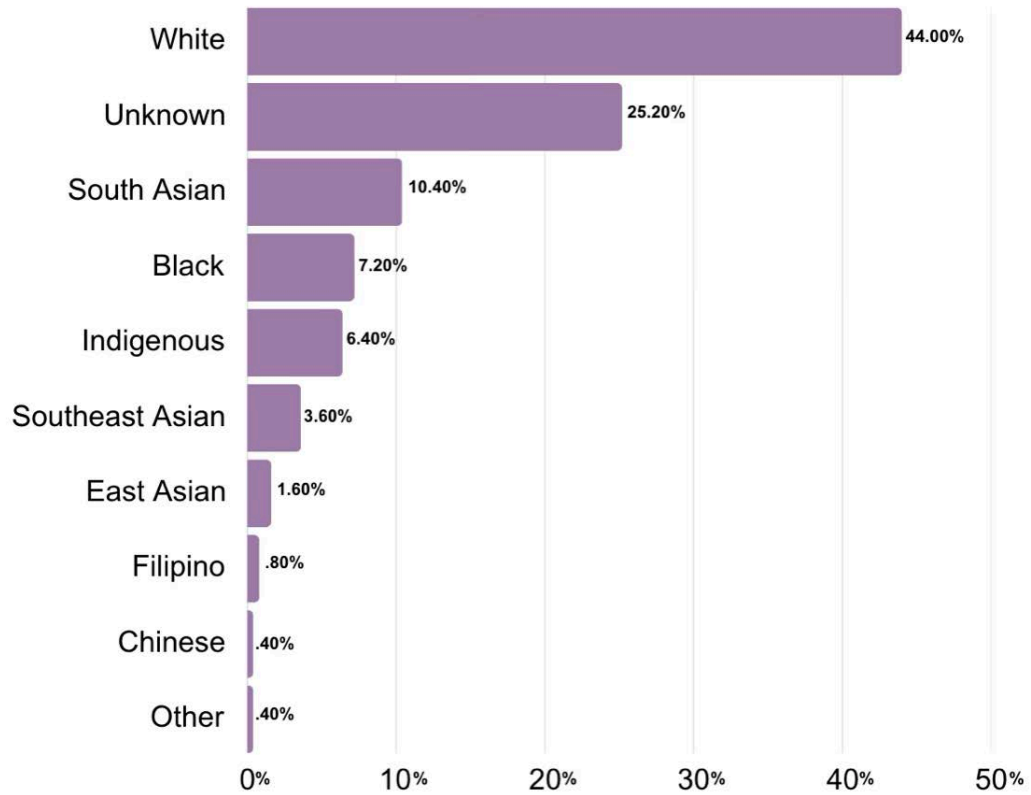


Figure 25: Examination of Race of Femicide Victims in Ontario (2018-2023)

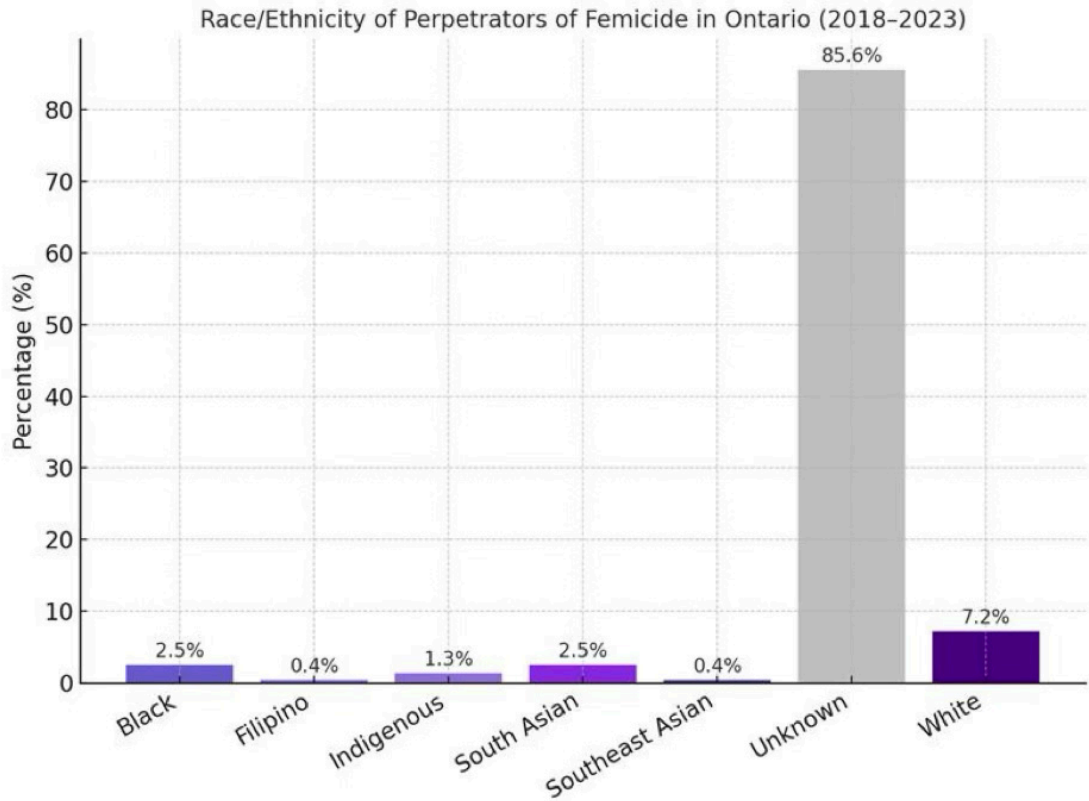
Within the available data, femicide victims were most identified as White, accounting for 44% of all femicide victims during the five-year period. However, this data must be interpreted cautiously. First, one quarter (n=63) of femicide victims’ race is unknown. Second, research consistently shows that Indigenous and other racialized women are overrepresented as victims of violence and femicide compared to their population. As Sutton (2023) reports, drawing on Klingspohn (2018) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG, 2019), in addition to “factors related to colonialism and intergenerational trauma, Indigenous women and girls may experience higher rates of homicide due to systemic and structural barriers which hinder the ability to seek culturally safe supports and help” (p.11).

White women in Ontario make up approximately 50% of the population and given that approximately 44% of femicide victims in Ontario over five years were White, they appear to be killed at rates lower than expected based on their population share. By contrast, Indigenous femicide victims make up approximately 6.4% of those killed whereas they represent only about 2.8% of the Ontario population. Statistics Canada report that “[W]hile only 5% of the female population in Canada identified as Indigenous in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022), over the 11-year period of analysis (i.e., 2011 to 2021), police reported that 21% of all gender-related homicides involved Indigenous women and girls, amounting to 233 victims....” (Sutton, 2023, p.11). Similarly, other racialized women including Black, South Asian, Southeast Asian women overrepresented as victims of femicide relative to their proportion in Ontario’s population.

The overrepresentation of racialized femicide victims, including Black, Indigenous, Southeast Asian, and Guyanese women, suggests significant service gaps and unique barriers faced by these communities. The Inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk, and Nathalie Warmerdam emphasized the need for tailored risk assessments and interventions for perpetrators of violence, as a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient (**The Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario 2022**). This principle applies equally to survivor services, which must be both accessible and culturally relevant to the diverse needs of Ontarians. OAITH’s recommendations for better access to culturally appropriate and safe services, outlined in the **National Action Plan to End GBV (2022)**, would support improved service access and safety outcomes for survivors from racialized communities disproportionately affected by GBV and femicide.

### PERPETRATOR RACE

The lack of race/ethnicity information reported about femicide perpetrators in Ontario news is notable and is likely the least reliable data category. Out of 251 total perpetrators and 239 unique perpetrators, race/ethnicity data was reviewed for 236. However, for the vast majority—202 perpetrators (85.6%)—this information was not reported.



Where race/ethnicity was available (34 perpetrators, 14.4%), White perpetrators were the most frequently identified group (17 perpetrators, 7.2%). Other reported racial/ethnic categories included Black (6 perpetrators, 2.5%), South Asian (6 perpetrators, 2.5%), Indigenous (3 perpetrators, 1.3%), Filipino (1 perpetrator, 0.4%), and Southeast Asian (1 perpetrator, 0.4%). This significant absence of data limits the ability to identify patterns of violence that may be shaped by systemic or structural factors. The lack of race/ethnicity reporting may reflect limitations in investigative processes, the unavailability of detailed police reports, and/or societal and institutional biases that influence data collection and media coverage. Addressing this gap is critical for informing equitable policy development, prevention strategies, and culturally appropriate support services.

### FEMICIDE/SUICIDE

The OAITH femicide database tracks femicide-suicides incidents, which include cases where both the victim and perpetrator are found dead, with evidence indicating the perpetrator killed the victim before taking their own life (Dayan & Bitton, 2022). This category also includes incidents, often termed “death-by-cop,” where the perpetrator provokes a law enforcement officer to kill them (Fairbairn et al., 2019). Figure 9 demonstrates that, while most perpetrators do not commit suicide after committing femicide (82%), femicide-suicides accounted for 18% of all femicide cases, 16.4% of those being true suicides (committed by the perpetrator on themselves), and 1.6% of those being suicide by cop.

### Over One Eighth of Femicide Cases Were Femicide/Suicides (2018 - 2023)

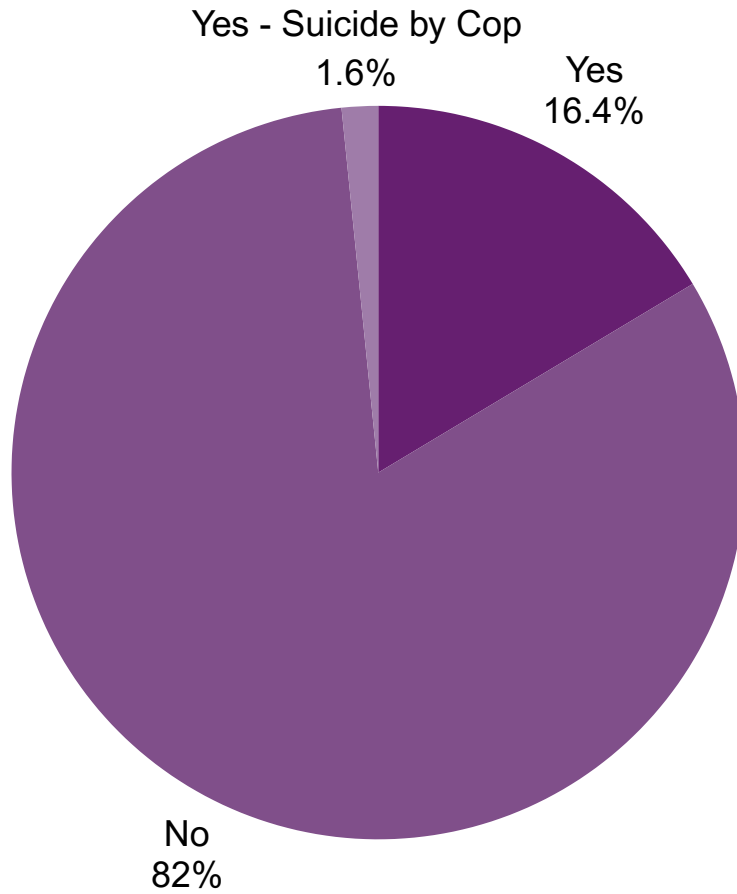


Figure 26: Rates of Femicide/Suicide Among Ontario Femicides (2018-2023)

Femicide/suicide cases often receive limited media attention due to factors such as the lack of police disclosure and the absence of perceived threats to public safety or ongoing investigations. This results in challenges in identifying key victim-perpetrator demographics and can lead to underreporting or omissions in femicide data. It will be important for future research to continue to monitor the presence of femicide/suicides in femicide cases and conduct further research on potential risk factors for both the victim and perpetrator. It is also crucial that media sources continue to report on these cases and within the context of gender-based violence. While many police reports and news articles often note there is “no threat to public safety” due to the death of the suspected perpetrator, it is important to understand that women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals continue to experience lethal gender-based violence throughout the province.

### FEMICIDE LOCATION

When examining the location of femicides, location is coded based on where media reports indicate the victim was found. In instances where the victim died later in hospital, the location is categorized based on where the incident occurred. As shown in Figure 27, femicide victims are most often killed inside a residence (71.6%). This residence may belong to the victim, the perpetrator, or both. Femicide victims were least likely to be killed inside a public location, such as a workplace (4%). The femicide location for 16.4% of all femicide victims was reported to be a public outdoor space, including parks, lakes, and parking lots. The femicide location for 6% of all femicide victims was reported to be outside of a residence, either belonging to the victim, the perpetrator, both, or residence owned by someone else. The femicide location has been categorized as unknown in a total of 2% of femicide cases over the five-year period.

#### Femicide Location

**Residence Indoors:** Victim/Perpetrator’s Residence  
**Residence Outdoors:** Driveway, Backyard, etc.  
**Public Indoors:** Workplace, Bar, Hotel, etc.  
**Public Outdoors:** Park, Parking Lot, etc.  
**Undetermined:** No Details Have Been Provided Regarding the Location of Death

Figure 27: Examination of Femicide Victims’ Place of Death

The high rate of femicide victims killed inside their residence, or a residence shared with the perpetrator, can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, where public health measures, including restrictions on movement and work, resulted in many survivors of GBV being at home, in lockdown, with an abusive partner and/or family member (OAITH, 2021b). The prevalence of killings in indoor residences illustrates the potentially fatal consequences due to extended confinement, unemployment, school closures, social isolation, and financial strain (Sutton & Beech, 2024). This underscores the urgent need for ongoing research into the effects of previous lockdown measures and the closure of community services for gender-based survivors, to better understand and mitigate future risks in any future pandemics.

**In Ontario, Femicide Victims Were Most Commonly Killed Inside A Residence (2018 - 2023)**

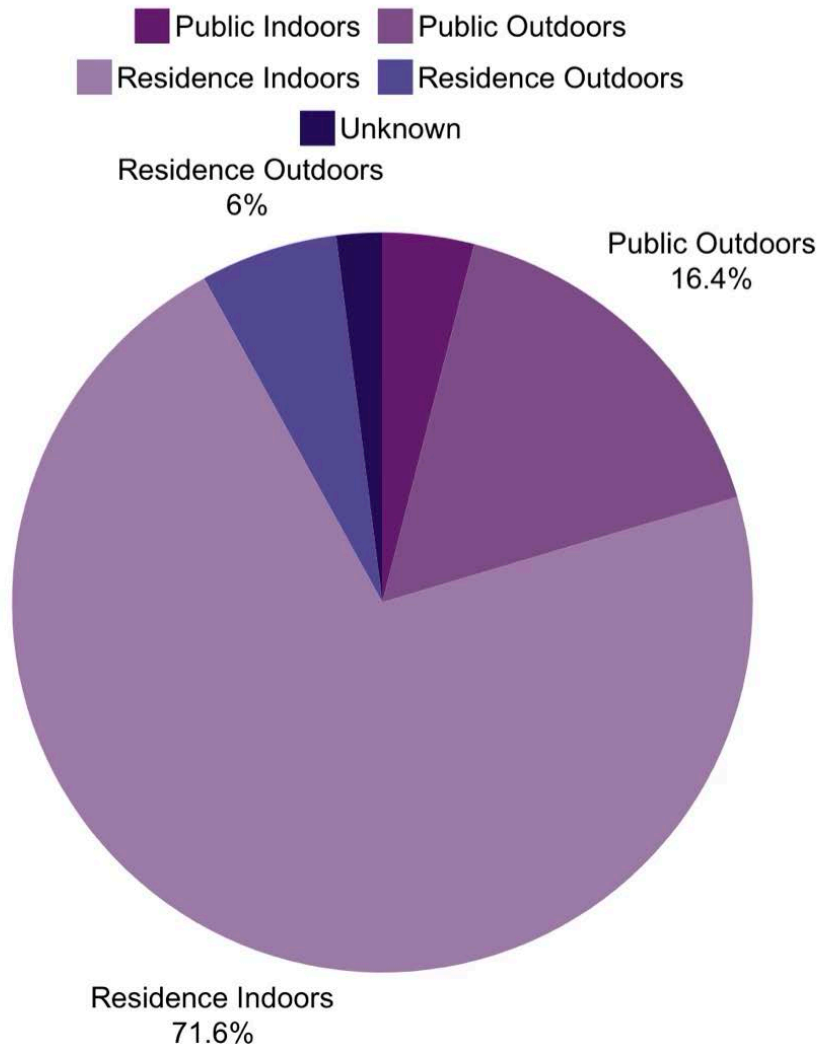


Figure 28: Residential Locations as the Most Common Site of Femicide in Ontario

## FEMICIDE GEOGRAPHY

OAITH uses the population size classifications (see Figure 29 below) based on Statistics Canada definitions (Statistics Canada, 2021).

**Large Population Center: Population >100,000**  
**Medium Population Center: Population: 30,000-99,999**  
**Small Population Center: Population: 1,000-29,999**  
**Rural Area: Population <1,000 or population density of 400/ sq. km**

*Figure 29: Population Classifications of Femicide Locations*

As illustrated in Figure 30 below, the majority of femicide cases (68.4%) included in the five-year analysis occurred in a city with a large population, of over 100,000 residents. This is not surprising given that most of the Ontario's population (approximately 90%) lives in urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2022). Approximately one-eighth of femicides (12.4%) occurred in medium sized cities. In 10% of cases, the femicide occurred in small cities and towns. Additionally, 9.2% of femicide cases occurred in a rural area. Research has shown that women, children, and gender-diverse individuals in northern and rural communities continue to face high rates of gender-based violence and femicide (OAITH, 2021b). Moffit et al. (2022) explain that geographic distance can be a "barrier to safety for victims experiencing IPV" (p.780) for survivors in rural, remote, and northern Canada, due both to challenges in reporting danger and in receiving assistance (e.g., police response time).

### The Majority of Femicides in Ontario Occurred in Cities with Large Populations (2018 - 2023)

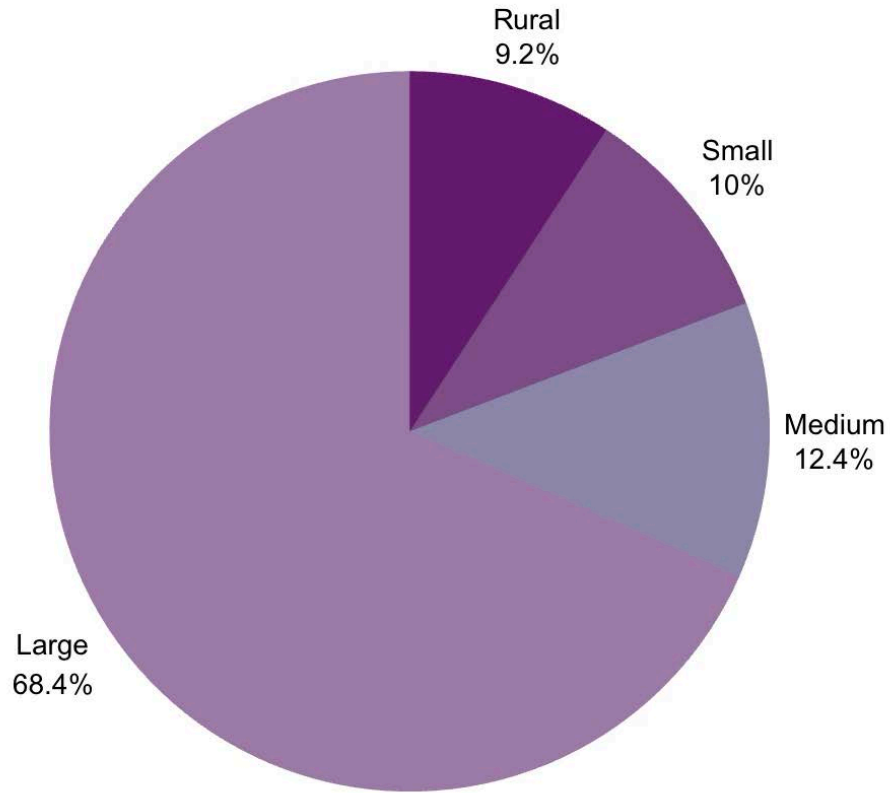


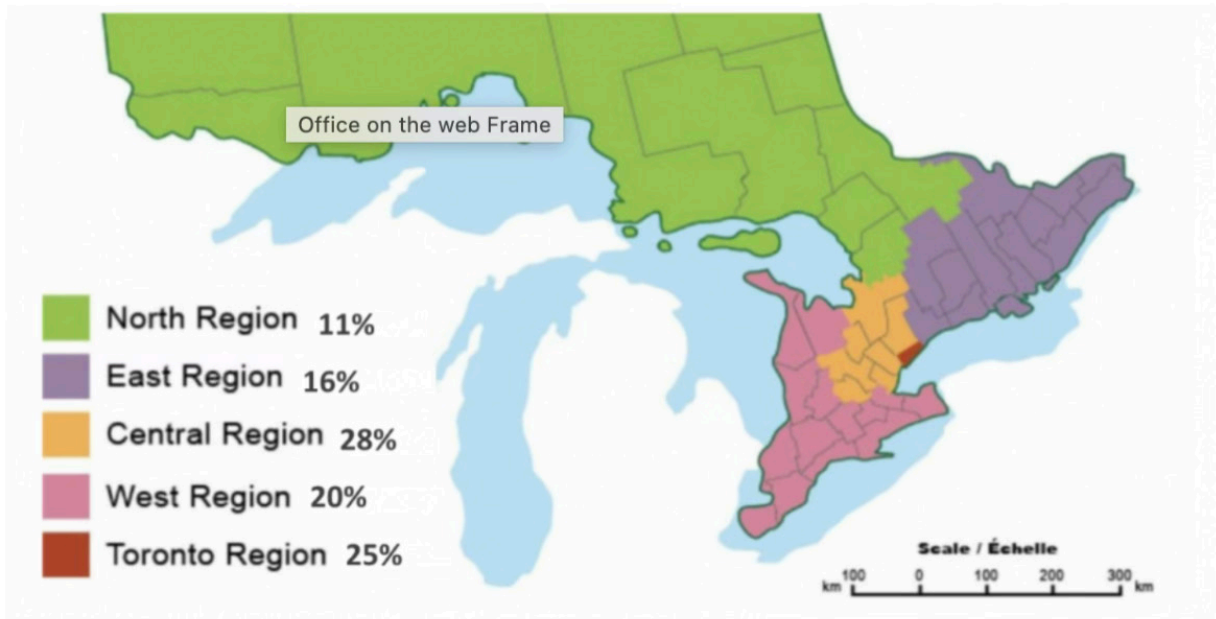
Figure 30: Majority of Femicides in Ontario Occurred in High-Population Cities (2018-2023)

This underscores the need for increased investment in violence against women shelters and other gender-based violence organizations to better support survivors in rural and remote areas, addressing challenges like transportation and privacy that are specific to their community and geographic context. Understanding the disparities between smaller and larger communities, is crucial to preventing further violence and ensuring survivors can access essential services and support, regardless of their location.

### Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Femicide Region

Violence against women shelters are partially funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and OAITH collects femicide data to illustrate the MCCSS regions of Ontario where femicides occurred. Figure 31 below highlights the distribution of femicide cases in relation to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) regions. The data shows that the Central and Toronto regions accounted for 28% and 25% of femicides across the five-year period, respectively. The West region had the third-largest share at 20%, followed by the East region with 16%, and the North region at 11%. Further research into regional disparities in services for survivors—such as housing, shelters, mental health support, childcare, and access to courts—could reveal factors contributing to higher rates of gender based and femicide in these areas. As Wathen et al. (2015) note, the social and geographic contexts in which shelters operate and the lack of available or accessible social services in rural and/or remote areas, all significantly impact the extent and way gender-based violence victims and their children are served.

**Femicide Rates Across Ontario Regions Over 5 Years  
(2018 - 2023)**



## ONTARIO FEMICIDES & THEIR REPORTING INCREASED OVER 5-YEARS

Research from Italy (Colagrossi et al., 2023) found that when femicides receive news coverage, help-seeking by survivors of intimate partner violence temporarily increases. This underscores the importance of consistent reporting, well-designed public information campaigns, and sustained community dialogue on gender-based violence. Crucially, these awareness efforts must be paired with accessible, adequately funded local supports and services so that survivors are not only encouraged to seek help but also able to receive it. Ultimately, reducing femicide requires more than media attention—it calls for coordinated action across media, policy, and service sectors to challenge systemic drivers of violence, ensure survivors' safety, and foster a culture that does not tolerate gender-based violence in any form.

## ELEVATING AWARENESS & ACCOUNTABILITY: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF MEDIA IN REPORTING ON THE CAUSES AND REALITIES OF FEMICIDE

This five-year analysis illustrates that national news outlets engage in slightly less negative reporting—for example, less omitting the history of perpetrator violence, avoiding victim-blaming, and resisting the individualisation of incidents—and are more likely to categorize femicide as a gendered social problem than TV or local sources. However, even national news reports identified femicide cases as a gendered social problem 11% of the time and labelled the killing as a femicide in only 7% of the reports. It is essential to label these deaths as femicides or extreme forms of gender-based violence to raise public and political awareness and recognize the gendered nature of the violence, rooted in misogyny, patriarchal ideologies, and power dynamics, which helps connect these incidents rather than treating them as isolated events (Coradi et al., 2016).

Local sources on the other hand, were the most likely to humanize the femicide victim and provide details about her/their life. Television sources were most likely to include some form of violence against women helpline or information about available support services.

While national sources did less negative reporting according to our framing categories, they report on femicides less overall than local or TV sources. To hit the national news, “newsworthiness” is key, and the lack of national news coverage of Ontario femicides could indicate that these cases often do not meet established newsworthiness criteria.

In addition to the work and advocacy that is required to prevent and end gender-based violence, we must continue to inform and educate the public about the prevalence and seriousness of gender-based violence and specifically, about femicide (the killing of women and girls). Research and policy pathways (Fairbairn et al. 2023, p. 560)

connect research to policy change through critical community engaged research, where researchers engage journalists, survivors and/or community organizations through the news construction process. It is equally important to continue to communicate and collaborate with journalists and media outlets to ensure that they report on these events in ways that challenge—rather than reinforce—myths, stereotypes, assumptions, and inaccuracies. These inaccuracies only serve to support the very systems and structures that have a critical role in explaining why femicides occur.

Ongoing training and education for journalists (Easteal et al., 2022) is essential to encourage them to report in ways that:

- Provide information about the perpetrators' history of violence. Include personal information about the victim, accompanied by a positive image, to ensure femicide victims are remembered as valuable members of society.
- Offer more thematic framing that helps audiences understand femicide as a gendered social problem, rather than an individualised “isolated incident” or one explained by mental health issues, or by victim-blaming narratives that hold the victim responsible.
- Present more socio-demographic information—including race/ethnicity and cause of death—while avoiding myths and stereotypes that reinforce negative assumptions and fuel racism, sexism, and homophobia. Draw on a greater range of experts, including non-traditional voices such as academics, practitioners, and family or friends of the victim. Use the term “femicide” more frequently to educate audiences about its prevalence and severe consequences. Provide information about available violence-against-women resources in local communities.

## FEMICIDE VICTIMS & PERPETRATORS

Based on the information available, of the 250 femicide victims and 236 perpetrators identified in news reports over 5 years, victims are older than their perpetrators (see Figure 22). The average age of victims was 45, compared to 39 for perpetrators. The majority of femicide victims are over 55 years of age, whereas 41.8% of perpetrators were between 18 and 35 years old. As shown in Figure 23, the majority of femicide victims were killed by an intimate partner (38.8%), but one quarter of them were killed by a family member. Trauma was the cause of death for nearly half of the victims (40%), although no cause of death was reported in about one-third of cases (30%). In most cases, perpetrators did not take their own lives; however, this occurred in about 16% of cases, and in fewer than 2% of cases, the perpetrator was killed by police. Almost three-quarters of femicide victims were killed in their own residences or in another private residence, while about 16% were killed outdoors, such as in parks or parking lots. Two-thirds of femicides occurred in cities or large population centres, with 8% taking place in rural communities. Nearly one-third of victims lived in Ontario's central region.

White victims are under-represented compared to their population in Ontario (44%) while Indigenous and other racialized victims are over-represented. In one quarter of the femicides cases, news reports did not provide information about the victim's race or ethnicity. Regarding perpetrators, the vast majority of news reports provided no information about their race or ethnicity.



## LIMITATIONS

This five-year analysis is constrained by the scope and quality of OAITH’s previous annual media analyses, which draw exclusively on media-reported sources (local, national, and television). Such reliance inevitably omits certain incidents, misrepresents details, or reflects biases inherent in journalistic practice. Moreover, the process of coding frames—particularly abstract categories such as “individualised”—is interpretive by nature. In these cases, meaning is not conveyed by a single word or omission but emerges from the cumulative effect of multiple journalistic choices, including language, structure, headline framing, image selection, placement, and the privileging of certain voices. These interpretive layers, while analytically valuable, introduce subjectivity and require critical awareness of how media conventions shape the narratives captured in the data (van Dijk, 1988).

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