

Femicide in Canada: Accountability and Punishment

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Introduction

There has been growing attention to social and state responses to femicide in the past decade (Laurent et al., 2013; Nowak, 2012). As a result, the lack of systematic, evidence-based information on state accountability and/or the punishment of femicide perpetrators has become glaringly obvious in most countries. Evidence-based data are sparse, in part, because simply documenting the number of women and girls killed, by whom, what relationship they shared with the perpetrators, and which cases can be classified as femicide has been a challenge in most world regions.

Therefore, recording how states subsequently respond to this type of violence and the punishments that result has not been the primary focus of research and data collection efforts. However, understanding state accountability in responding to femicide, including the punishment of perpetrators, is crucial when determining the impact of (a) increased efforts to implement legislation and policy, and (b) the rise in specialized police and prosecution units in some countries to target what many argue is the impunity for such perpetrators.

It is recognized that those who are tasked with imposing the law must recognize the seriousness of violence against women if they are to respond effectively. However, the dearth of reliable data that documents how states are actually responding on the ground is hindering the ability to move beyond legislative and policy initiatives. Moreover, understanding how some femicide victims and their deaths may be discounted by the state because of who they were and where, how and by whom they were killed is of paramount concern.

All women and girls – no matter their social locations or identities – should have equitable access to justice in life and in death. To understand whether this is currently the case, better information is required

about whether and how femicide perpetrators are made accountable by states, including those states that may be contributing to this ongoing violence by inadequately responding, if at all, to the killing of women and girls.

Highlighting key findings from a long-term, ongoing research project that examines criminal justice responses to femicide¹ (Dawson, 2016), this article traces the early beginnings of this feminist-inspired research to the recent establishment of the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA). The ongoing research focus is on the role of intimacy in legal responses to violence. More recent research has begun to interrogate how other characteristics of victims, their killers, or the context surrounding the femicide can lead to varying social and state responses.

A key concern is the treatment of Indigenous women and girls in Canada because inadequate state responses and historical and current impacts of colonization have contributed to their high femicide risk (NWC, 2010). In fact, a 2013 investigation by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concluded that a national action plan was required to address the roots of the problem (IACHR, 2014). A national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls has been ongoing for the past two years, the effectiveness of which remains to be seen.

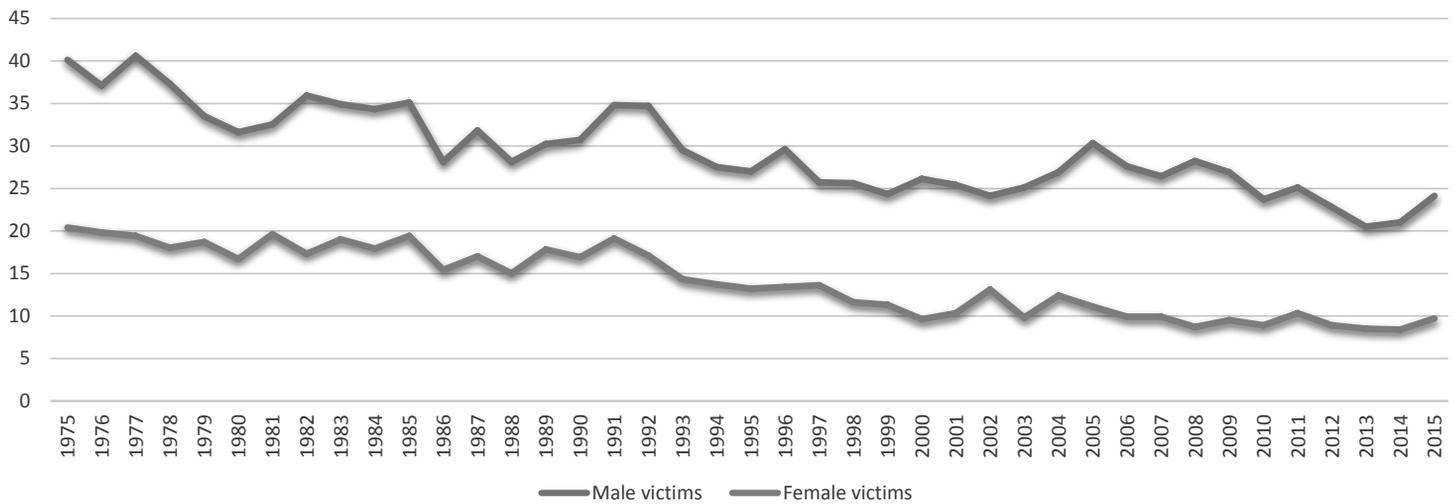
Why examine the role of intimacy in state responses to femicide?

Until recently, the role of intimacy in law's response to violence was arguably one of the most ignored relationships while, at the same time, widely contested among social science and legal researchers.

¹ Femicide is defined in this study as the killings of all women and girls, by both male and female perpetrators, for ease of discussion and because there continue to be ongoing debates about the appropriate definitional parameters for classifying the killing of a female as a femicide.

Chart 1: Homicide rates by sex of victim, 1975 to 2015, Canada

Rate per million population



Rates are calculated per 1,000,000 population using revised population estimates from Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Source data originates from Chart 8 of *Women and the Criminal Justice System*, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14785/c-g/c-g11-eng.htm>

Notes: There may be a small number of homicides in a given year's total that occurred in previous years. Homicides are counted according to the year in which they are reported to Statistics Canada. Excludes 7 homicide victims whose sex was reported as unknown.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Homicide Survey, 1975 to 2015*.

Today, the role of intimacy in law remains unclear because of the lack of available data and because intimacy is often conflated with gender – or what it means to be a woman – when the law responds to violence perpetrated by men against women. Regardless, it is largely recognized that, historically, intimacy has served to mitigate the seriousness of men's violence against women. Simply put, if a man victimizes a woman with whom he was, or had been, in a relationship, the law's response is typically more lenient than if there had been no prior relationship (Dawson 2004a, 2004b; Rapaport, 1994).

Arguably, policymakers in Canada have recognized this fact because, in 1996, the federal government passed Bill C-41 which included a statutory statement stipulating that an offender who abuses a spouse or child may be subject to harsher penalties. As such, judges are now to consider the existence of a spousal relationship between an offender and his/her victim as an aggravating factor at sentencing.²

² Early in 2018, the Canadian government introduced Bill C-75 which is meant to provide significant reforms to Canada's criminal justice system. The Bill received its first reading on March 29, 2018 and includes various reforms targeting responses to domestic violence and, once again, identifies intimacy as an aggravating factor at sentencing [<http://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-75/first-reading>].

This was a significant change in Canada given that, previously, penal laws made no mention of the relationship between a victim and an accused or what that relationship should mean in criminal law (Grant et al., 1998).

This situation is not unique, however, with few countries clarifying the role of intimacy in law, even though intimacy most often poses the greatest danger to women and girls.

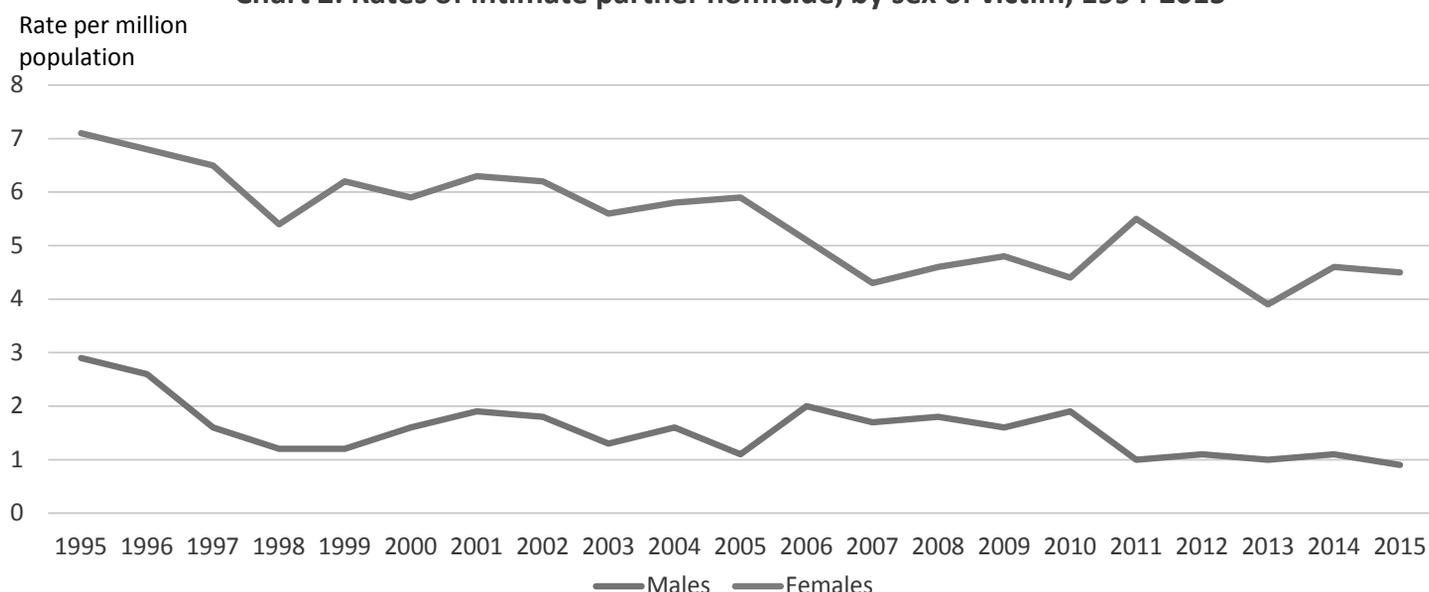
Following a brief description of femicide in the Canadian context, research findings from one jurisdiction are highlighted, and the path traced from the beginnings of this research to the subsequent launch of the CFOJA which focuses specifically on femicide, accountability and punishment.

Femicide in Canada

There are no official national data on femicide³ in Canada; however, in 2015, police reported 604 homicide victims (1.68 per 100,000 population) of which about 29 percent or 173 were female homicide victims (David, 2017). The highest rate of femicide was reported for females aged 18 to 24, followed closely by females aged 25 to 34 (David, 2017).

³ The term 'female homicide victims' is adopted by Statistics Canada's Homicide Survey from which these data were drawn.

Chart 2: Rates of intimate partner homicide, by sex of victim, 1994-2015



Rates are calculated per 1,000,000 population aged 15 years and over using revised population estimates from Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Original source data is based on Chart 9 of *Women and the Criminal Justice System*, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14785/c-g/c-g11-eng.htm>

Notes: There may be a small number of homicides in a given year's total that occurred in previous years. Homicides are counted according to the year in which they are reported to Statistics Canada. Excludes homicide victims whose sex was reported as unknown. Intimate partners include current and former same-sex and opposite-sex spouses, common-law partners, dating partners, and other intimate relationships.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Homicide Survey, 1994 to 2015*.

Canada's rate of femicide is significantly lower than other countries; however, in 2013, Canada had the fifth highest homicide rate (1.44 per 100,000) among 17 similarly-situated countries (Cotter, 2014: 3)⁴.

The ratio of female-to-male victims has remained relatively stable from 1975 to 2015 (see Chart 1), ranging from a high of 38 percent in 1981 to a low of 24 percent in 2008. Although homicide rates are generally higher for males than females, females remain at a much higher risk of homicide by male intimate partners, similar to many other countries (Stöckl et al., 2013). In 2015, in Canada, the rate at which women were killed by an intimate partner was more than five times the rate for men (see Chart 2). There has been a downward trend in rates of intimate partner homicide from 1975-2015, decreasing about 37 percent for female victims, but more than 69 percent for male victims.

The greater decline for males is perceived as a paradox of sorts given that most legislative and policy changes in recent decades were targeted at intimate partner violence by men against women. The more significant

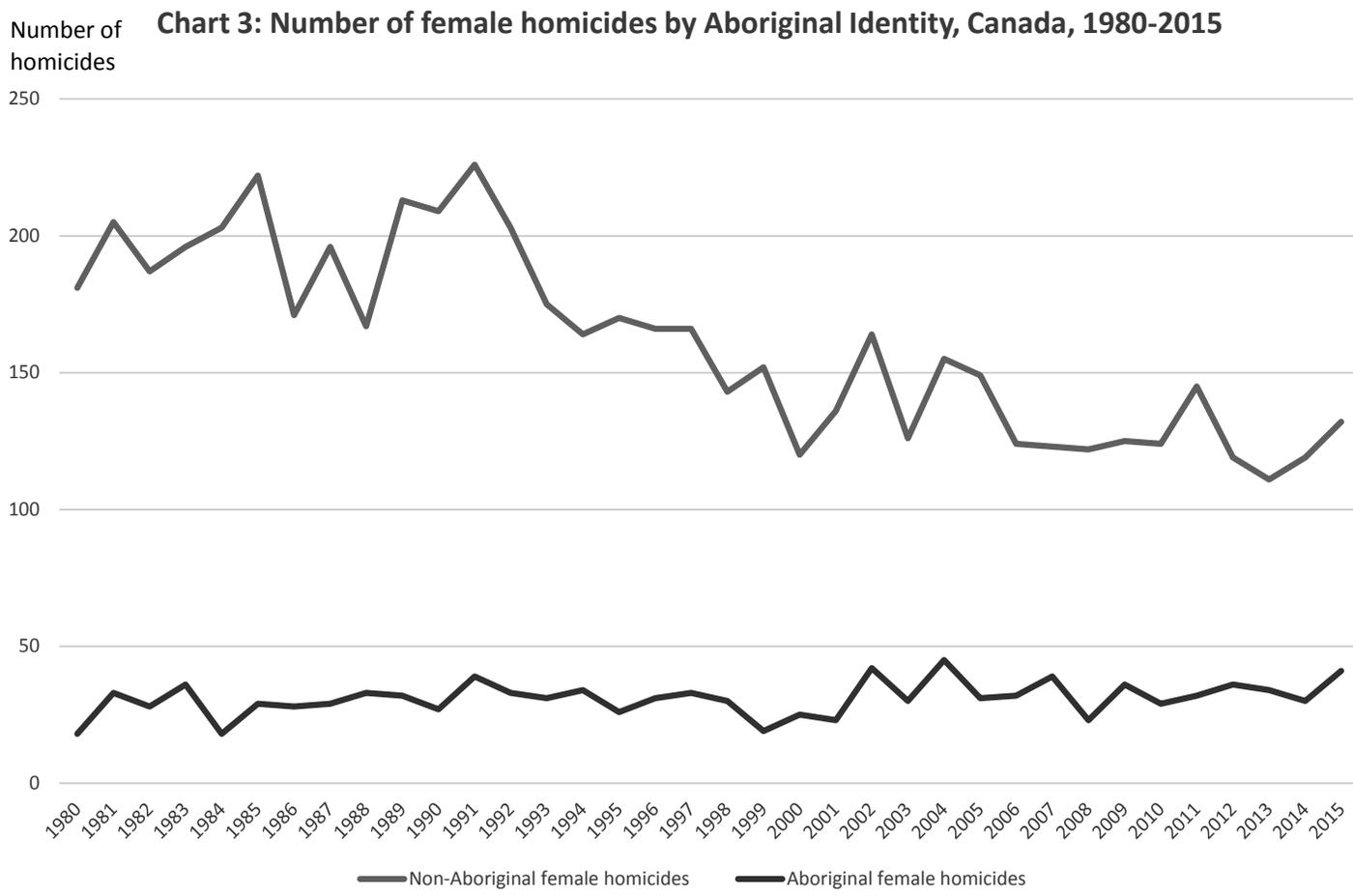
⁴ The Conference Board of Canada identified similar countries by selecting those identified as 'high income' by the World Bank with a total population of more than one million, larger than 10,000 square kilometres, and a higher-than-the-mean average real income per capita.

decline for men suggests that resources may provide women with alternatives to lethal violence when living with abuse (Browne & Williams, 1993; Dawson et al., 2009; Dugan et al., 1999, 2003).

In 2015, close to one half (48%) of all solved femicides were committed by an intimate partner. Family members (except parents) were perpetrators in 22 percent of cases, followed by casual acquaintances (14%), parents (6%), strangers (6%), and criminal acquaintances (3%). In contrast, males were most often killed by casual acquaintances (45%), criminal acquaintances (16%), or strangers (16%).

A smaller percentage of incidents involving male victims were committed by family members (14%), parents (5%), or intimate partners (4%). Both female and male victims are killed primarily by male perpetrators; however, the motivations and circumstances in which women and men are killed differ significantly, underscoring the relevance of the term 'femicide'.

In 2015, approximately 16 percent of femicides remained unsolved compared to 29 percent of male homicides, representing a significant increase since



Note: Source data originates from Chart 11 of *Women and the Criminal Justice System*, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14785/c-g/c-g11-eng.htm>
 Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey, 1980 to 2015.

data collection began in 1961 when about five percent of femicides and six percent of male homicides were unsolved. On average, killings involving intimate partners or family members are solved more quickly than those involving perpetrators and victims sharing more distant relationships (see also Trussler, 2010).

Internationally, the risk of femicide is unevenly distributed across groups. In Canada, Indigenous women are at elevated risk of femicide.⁵

Based on 15 years of homicide survey data (2001-2015), femicide rates for Indigenous females were approximately six times higher (48.2 per million population) than rates for non-Indigenous females (8.2 per million population).

Other research suggests that Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than

any other women in Canada and 16 times more likely than White women (Peters, 2017).

This over-representation has been observed across the country, although to varying degrees. In contrast to overall declining trends, the number of femicides involving Indigenous females has remained stable or increased in the 36-year period from 1980 to 2015, but their proportion of total femicide victims has changed (see Chart 3).

In 1980, Indigenous females accounted for nine percent of all femicides, rising to 24 percent in 2015. In addition, in 2015, about 17 percent of Indigenous femicide victims and 18 percent of non-Indigenous femicide victims were recorded as missing at the time the femicide became known to police. In a national overview, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) (2013) estimated that, between 1980 and 2012, about 1,200 Indigenous women and girls were missing or

⁵ 'Aboriginal' is used in the tables because this is the term currently used by Statistics Canada Homicide Survey.

murdered – a situation that is, as noted above, the subject of an ongoing national inquiry.

Intimacy and punishment: Femicide in Ontario, 1974-2013

Like global patterns, femicide is most often perpetrated in Canada by current or former male partners – a phenomenon referred to as intimate femicide or intimate partner femicide.⁶

In response to a series of such killings in Ontario, Canada's most populous province, a group of eight women who worked in shelters for abused women and had worked with or been friends of women who were killed by male partners met in 1989 to share their experiences and emotional support (Gartner, Dawson, & Crawford, 1999).

Naming themselves, the Women We Honour Action Committee, they set out to learn more about intimate femicide by documenting the incidences and describing the characteristics and circumstances of their deaths. Occurring in two stages, the study covered the period 1974-1994 and documented the femicides of 1,206 women aged 15 and older from official records (e.g. coroner's files, police and Crown attorney records) (Gartner et al., 1999). Of the 1,120 cases in which the killers were identified, 705 or 63 percent were current or former male partners.

Today, ongoing data collection has been completed up to 2013. During this period, 2,700 femicides have been documented in Ontario with research ongoing (Dawson, 2017a, 2017b, 2016a, 2016b, 2012, 2006, 2005, 2004a, 2004b, 2003; Dawson & Sutton 2017; Dawson & Carrigan 2017).

The scope of research questions being examined is growing; however, femicide and punishment has remained a core focus. Two key questions have been central: does intimacy matter and, if so, why?

Overall, findings largely underscore that men who kill their female partners - wives, girlfriends, lovers – benefit from an intimacy discount compared to men who kill women who were not their intimate partners. Simply put, this means that their punishments appear to be less severe than men who kill women with whom they have not shared a relationship. The intimacy discount appears to also benefit, to some extent,

⁶ The term intimate femicide is used here because it is most commonly used in the Canadian context given that this was the term adopted by the first study to focus on this phenomenon in Canada.

men who kill their mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts and so on. The evolution of these findings to date are discussed in more detail.⁷

Intimacy as a continuum

Conceptualizing intimacy as a continuum, one study compared criminal justice outcomes for five victim-defendant relationships – intimate partners, family members (not spouses), friends, acquaintances and strangers (see Dawson, 2004a, 2004b).

The main hypothesis was that cases involving intimate partners – those seen as having the highest degree of intimacy – would be treated more leniently by the courts.

The study focused on 1,003 homicides that were handled through the adult criminal justice system in Toronto, Ontario during a 23-year period (1974-1996). Results showed that intimacy affected criminal justice responses to violence, but its impact depended on the decision-making stage and the relationship type. Controlling for various legal and extra-legal factors, compared to defendants who killed strangers:

- *Initial charge:* Defendants closest to their victims – intimate partners – were less likely to be charged with first-degree murder.⁸
- *Mode of conviction:* Intimate partner killers were less likely to have their cases resolved at trial and more likely to enter guilty pleas.
- *Length of sentence:* Defendants who shared the closest relationships with victims – intimate partners, family members – received shorter sentences.

The above findings – providing partial support for criminal justice leniency for those who shared the closest relationships – appeared to diminish over time, a point returned to below.

The cost of 'lost' intimacy

Recognizing that the degree of intimacy between intimate partners can also vary along with the characteristics of violence (Dawson & Gartner, 1998), a subsequent study examined whether the state of an intimate partner relationship played a role in

⁷ It is not possible to do justice to the full spectrum of theoretical and empirical findings from the series of publications focusing on the role of intimacy in law in this one article; therefore, readers are encouraged to review the full results in the sources as noted throughout.

⁸ In Canada, Section 222(4) of the Criminal Code of Canada includes three types of culpable homicide: murder (first- and second-degree), manslaughter and infanticide.

Table 1: Bivariate Associations for Type of Homicide and Criminal Justice Outcomes for Three Time Periods, Toronto, 1974-2002

	Year case entered court					
	1974-1983		1984-1996		1997-2002	
	(N=402)		(N=533)		(N=108)	
	Intimate	Non-intimate	Intimate	Non-intimate	Intimate	Non-intimate
Criminal Justice Outcome						
1 st -degree murder charge	26%	35%	40%	50%	50%	36%
Case sent to trial	61%	65%	46%	53%	55%	55%
Guilty at trial	48%	53%	78%	66%	82%	62%
Convicted	68%	69%	90%*	80%	90%*	74%
Murder conviction	21%**	39%	50%*	38%	67%	45%
Sentence length	6 years*	8 years	10 years	9 years	12 years	10 years

Note: *p<.05 **p<.01

determining law's response to violence (see Dawson 2003).

Specifically, the question was, were male defendants who killed female partners who were attempting to leave the relationship or had already left treated more severely than male defendants who killed current female partners? This analysis focused on intimate femicide cases dealt with by the courts in Toronto from 1974-1996 (N=144). Consistent with work by Rapaport (1994), results showed that relationship state was associated with punishment severity at sentencing: male offenders who killed female partners from whom they were, or about to be, separated, received sentences that were about two years longer than defendants who killed current partners.

Introducing intimacy as an aggravating factor

More recent research examines the introduction of intimacy as an aggravating factor in the 1996 legislation (see Dawson 2012). Focusing on an expanded study period (1974-2002) in Toronto, this study compared criminal justice outcomes for cases involving both female- and male-perpetrated intimate partner homicides with all other relationships.

Table 1 shows that those who killed intimate partners were still more likely to have their cases resolved by plea compared to other killers, although less so than previously documented⁹.

When cases went to trial, however, defendants who killed intimate partners were now more likely to be found guilty than those who killed other victims – a difference that was not evident in earlier years.

When examining conviction severity, intimate partner homicides resolved in the early period were less likely to result in murder convictions than non-intimate partner homicides – a difference that was no longer evident in the latter period. Finally, intimacy no longer appeared to lead to differential sentences as it had during the shorter study period (1974-1996). These new findings might be explained by the effects of time and the introduction of intimacy as an aggravating factor, but concrete conclusions require further study.

A specific focus on femicide

In the most recent analysis (Dawson 2016a), expanding the focus to the province of Ontario and examining femicide cases only, the intimacy discount remains evident as follows: (1) intimate and familial femicide were less likely to result in first-degree murder charges; (2) familial, but not intimate, femicide were less likely to result in murder convictions compared to stranger femicide; and (3) intimate and familial femicide were more likely to result in shorter sentences compared to stranger femicide (see Table 2). However, similar to findings above, the study documented changes over time in how the courts responded to femicide overall. For example, overall, first-degree murder charges and murder convictions were less likely to occur in femicide cases in the early period compared to the most recent period, suggesting increasing levels of punishment over time.

Femicide cases disposed in the early and middle periods resulted in significantly shorter sentences than cases

⁹ Bivariate associations shown here for illustrative and descriptive purposes. Multivariate results available in Dawson 2012.

Table 2: Descriptive patterns for court outcomes by femicide subtype, Ontario, 1974-2013 (N=1,381)

Variables	Intimate Partner		Other Family		Other Known		Stranger		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	(58%; 801)		(15%; 206)		(18%; 242)		(10%; 132)		(N=1,381)	
First-degree charge	48	382	43	89	55	134	65	86	50	691
Likelihood of conviction	96	681	94	174	93	199	86	113	94	1167
Murder conviction	57	387	44	76	66	132	66	74	57	669
Sentence (in years)	14		13		15		17.5		13.5	

disposed in the more recent period, again suggesting increasing accountability¹⁰.

Why might intimacy matter?

Referred to above as the ‘intimacy discount’, defendants who killed women with whom they shared closer relationships continue to be subject to lighter punishments than those who shared more distant relationships despite legislative and policy changes meant to improve social and legal responses. While some progress is evident, the question remains, why does intimacy continue to matter?

I argue elsewhere that intimacy matters in law because of entrenched stereotypes that continue to resonate in the legal and public domain (e.g. ‘crimes of passion’, victim provocation) (Dawson, 2006, 2016b). Just as Hagan and O’Donnell (1987) argued about gender over three decades ago, stereotypes about intimacy are so common in our everyday world and in everyday court interactions that they are part of conventional and sociological wisdom. However, there is no solid base of empirical evidence that supports the validity of such stereotypes or contributes to an understanding of their role in law.

These stereotypes, typically negative and generated by problematic attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and acceptable types of violence, also unfairly disadvantage some groups of women, depending upon their varying social locations and/or identities (e.g. Indigeneity, race/ethnicity, class, sexualities, age, disabilities, and so on).

¹⁰ It could be argued that what appears to be increasingly punitive sanctions for femicide may simply be a product of increasing punitiveness overall. Focusing on the middle and recent period, a similar analysis was conducted determining sentence length for male victims (not shown here). There was also an increase in sentence severity for male victims although the relationship was not as strong.

Challenges and priorities to understanding femicide, accountability and punishment

The above research on the role of intimacy in legal responses to femicide and homicide helps to illustrate the value in systematically collecting reliable and detailed information on the criminal justice processing of violence against women. Such efforts are not meant to prioritize criminal justice mechanisms as the primary mode of femicide prevention, but rather to underscore that understanding patterns in punishments can help to identify and challenge problematic attitudes and stereotypes held by those who investigate and respond to femicides and other forms of violence against women. Arguably, it is such attitudes that can act to prevent real societal changes from legislative and policy initiatives. There are two key challenges to moving forward, discussed next, framed as priorities for research and prevention.

The first challenge/priority to understanding state responses to femicide is the need to develop more innovative ways to identify and collect systematic, detailed and reliable data. Traditional data sources (e.g. coroner, police and court data) often come with limited information and the mandate for collecting data is not research.

More importantly, these data are also often inaccessible to researchers. Criminal justice actors are the gatekeepers to such data and are frequently reluctant to partner with researchers despite the potential value of such collaborations for improving social and legal responses to violence.

As a result, researchers are increasingly seeking alternate or complementary data sources, particularly more public forms of information such as media coverage and court records given their increased accessibility in the digital age.

However, these data also come with limitations (e.g. not all cases are reported, what is reported may not capture all relevant information) and, therefore, partnerships and collaborations between state and research institutions will be necessary to move forward. The second challenge/priority is the need to better identify and define reliable and valid indicators of law's response to femicide; for example, when assessing stereotypes about intimacy and violence, how does one measure premeditation or victim provocation? When broadening the scope of possible stereotypes, how one measures Indigeneity, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and so on also becomes more important. Assuming this information is available – which it is often not – reliable and consistent measures will need to be identified. At the very least, understanding what we mean by femicide and what acts are captured by this term is crucial, but continues to be debated (Dawson & Carrigan 2017; Mujica & Tuesta 2014).

Researchers' and court actors' goals are not the same and may even be at odds. Addressing these and other challenges requires increased collaborations among feminists, social scientists, legal scholars, court and state actors. Community mobilization and grassroots efforts can also play a valuable role, particularly if resources are available to help facilitate their efforts. Regardless of how achieved, understanding how the law's symbolic – and real – response might be contributing to femicide risk, particularly for vulnerable and/or marginalized groups of women and girls is paramount and requires more innovative and collaborative efforts. The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA), launched in December 2017, provides one example of how this might occur.

The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability

In early 2017, as the above Ontario-based research on femicide was being rolled out nationally, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences called for submissions that documented promising practices, already in existence, on data collection and prevention of femicides or gender-related killings of women.

I responded to this call given that, for the past two decades in my work on femicide in Ontario, I had developed a process for data collection, expanded and enhanced the tools used to collect data, continued to respond to the challenges of accessing official data sources and the issue of missing information, and

identified other types of data that could fill the gap or complement official data when available.

Throughout, the specific focus had been on punishment and accountability and the resulting Ontario femicide/homicide database has grown to include about 7,000 homicide cases, 2,700 of which are femicides. Prior to this call, in 2015, the Special Rapporteur had also begun to call on countries to establish a femicide watch or observatory to collect, analyze and review data on femicide.

These ongoing efforts paralleled the national roll-out of my research as well as the increasing frustration by many with the inadequate social and state responses to femicide in our country, particularly for some women and girls. Indeed, growing attention to the situation of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada underscored that no country is free from this type of violence and that not all women and girls have equitable access to justice in life or in death. The CFOJA and its website were officially launched on December 6, 2017, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, representing new, collective efforts to address social and state accountability for femicide¹¹.

The goals of the feminist-led CFOJA are multi-faceted but focus specifically on documenting social and state responses to femicide in Canada to bring visible and national attention to the issue.

A key prevention goal is to highlight how negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes towards women and girls helps to perpetuate and maintain violence against women in its varying forms, including femicide.

The CFOJA recognizes the importance of varying social identities, beyond gender, that impact the treatment of female victims by society. As such, its growing expert advisory panel brings multiple expertise that captures feminist, and more importantly, intersectional perspectives to highlight social and state responses to femicide. It adopts the ecological perspective that recognizes that no single factor can explain femicide, but that factors at varying levels of society work in combination to decrease or increase femicide risk.

The subsequent belief, of course, is that prevention must also occur at multiple levels and the CFOJA focuses on identifying and challenging how societal

¹¹ For more information, visit www.femicideincanada.ca, email cfoja@uoguelph.ca, or follow on Twitter at @CAN_Femicide or on Facebook CAN. Femicide.

and community attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes work to perpetuate and maintain all forms of violence against women.

The CFOJA is undertaking several initial activities focusing on responses to femicide after it occurs to recognize how broader societal contexts facilitate femicide. First, to capture the larger context, it will identify legislation, policies and practices in social and state responses to femicide with two goals in mind: (1) to examine whether different parts of the country have more or fewer resources to respond to violence against women; and (2) to assess how these resources may still perpetuate and maintain social structures and gender inequalities conducive to the perpetration of femicide. The CFOJA will also examine how legislations, policies and programs address (or fail to address) vulnerable and marginalized groups of women and girls including, but not exclusively, Indigenous women, immigrant and refugee women, older women, disabled women and so on.

Second, the CFOJA will identify stereotypes and biases that underpin social and state responses. Focusing on the media as one type of social response and the courts as representative of the legal response, the CFOJA will examine and challenge how varying social identities, including those of intimate partners, are constructed by social and state actors when responding to femicides. In addition, recognizing that justice often varies by geography, it will also examine how social and state responses vary across the country (e.g. by region, urban/rural location).

Finally, the CFOJA will facilitate the exchange of information, reliable data, and current knowledge to advance legislative, policy and program change to enhance the prevention of femicide in Canada.

To do so, it will: (1) monitor emerging issues and trends related to femicide specifically and violence against women more generally; (2) provide user-friendly, reliable information, resources and research on femicide; and (3) act as a knowledge broker for researchers, professionals, policy-makers, the media and the public. In short, it will serve as a web-based research and information centre which aims to conduct, mobilize, exchange and promote research and knowledge to prevent femicide and other forms of gender-based killings in Canada. This is the first time there has been a single location to mobilize knowledge and action for femicide victims in Canada.

Many remain skeptical about the willingness of criminal justice or state actors to seriously address the problem

of violence against women, including femicide. Others recognize that 'law in practice' is often much different than what is, or has been, legislated. Traditional ideologies or stereotypes may continue to downplay the seriousness of some violence for some groups of victims.

Documented improvements in the court's response to femicide may be explained, in part, by increasing punitiveness in Canadian sentencing overall rather than due to the impact of specific legislative and policy responses. Alternatively, some of this improvement may be due to increased legislative and policy attention to femicide, particularly intimate femicide, and other forms of violence against women more generally. However, much more nuanced and systematic research is required before we can answer the above questions adequately.

Collecting information is a challenge and missing information is a common problem, not unique to Canada. Regardless, understanding how state and social responses might contribute to risk for femicide overall, and for certain groups of women and girls, is paramount and requires more innovative and collaborative efforts. Increased collaboration and prioritization of community mobilization are core goals of the CFOJA in its effort to better understand responses to femicide. Legislation and policy represent symbolic efforts to address perceived problems, but it is law and policy in practice that requires research attention if we are to ensure equitable access to justice for all women and girls.

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