Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series

Criminal Victimization in the Workplace

2004

by Sylvain de Léséleuc

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics
19th floor, R.H. Coats Building, Ottawa, K1A 0T6

Telephone: 613-951-9023 Toll-free: 1-800-387-2231

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Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

Criminal Victimization in the Workplace

2004

By Sylvain de Léséleuc,

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada

Preface

This series of profiles provides analysis on a variety of topics and issues concerning victimization, offending and public perceptions of crime and the justice system. The profiles primarily draw on results from the General Social Survey on victimization. Where applicable, they also incorporate information from other data sources, such as the Census of the Population and the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Examples of the topics explored through this series include: Victimization and offending in Canada's territories, Canadians' use of crime prevention measures and victimization of older Canadians. This is a unique periodical, of great interest to those who have to plan, establish, administer and evaluate justice programs and projects, or anyone who has an interest in Canada's justice system.

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Highlights

- According to the 2004 GSS, 17% of all self-reported incidents of violent victimization, including sexual assault, robbery and physical assault, occurred at the respondent's place of work. This represents over 356,000 violent workplace incidents in Canada's ten provinces.

- Workplace violence incidents were much more common in certain employment sectors. For example, 33% of workplace violence incidents involved a victim who worked in social assistance or health care services, 14% of incidents involved victims working in accommodation or food services and 11% of incidents were committed against those working in educational services.

- Physical assaults made up a higher proportion of all violent incidents in the workplace, representing 71% of all incidents of workplace violence. This compares to 57% of violent non-workplace incidents.

- Workplace violence was much more likely to come to the attention of police than violence outside the workplace, with 37% of workplace incidents being reported to the police compared to 17% of non-workplace incidents.

- Violent workplace incidents involving male victims were more likely than those involving female victims to come to the attention of the police (57% versus 20%).

Introduction

In recent years, violence in the workplace has been the subject of increasing public attention. In response to the growing concerns over workplace victimizations, such as assaults and incidents of criminal harassment, both public and private sector workplaces have developed policies to deal with workplace violence and harassment.

Given the lack of national data on workplace violence, the nature, severity and prevalence of the problem has been difficult to quantify. The General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization[1] captures information on the nature and extent of criminal victimization, including whether an incident occurred at the victim's place of work.[2] This *Profile* examines these data, provides a detailed look at violent workplace incidents and identifies the risk factors that are related to these incidents. The report also examines the aftermath and consequences of violence in the workplace.

The extent and nature of workplace victimization in Canada

According to the 2004 GSS, 17% of all self-reported incidents of violent victimization, including sexual assault, robbery and physical assault, occurred at the respondent's place of work. This represents over 356,000 violent workplace incidents in Canada's ten provinces.

There were some variations among the provinces. For example, 40% of all violent incidents in Newfoundland and Labrador occurred at the victim's workplace. This proportion was at least double that of each of the other provinces, which ranged from 11% in Nova Scotia to 20% in both Saskatchewan and Alberta.[3]

Research has shown that certain sectors pose greater risks for violent workplace victimization. For example, employees that frequently come into contact with the public or clients are more likely to report being the victim of a violent incident (Macdonald and Sirotich 2005; Runyan et al. 2005; Hesketh et al. 2003).[4] Newfoundland and Labrador's higher proportion of violent workplace incidents may be partly explained by the fact that a greater proportion of residents in Newfoundland and Labrador work in higher risk sectors.

Text box 1
How this study measures workplace violence

The GSS examines the prevalence of violence for three offences: sexual assault, robbery and physical assault.

Sexual assault: Forced sexual activity, an attempt at forced sexual activity, or unwanted sexual touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling.

Robbery: Theft or attempted theft in which the perpetrator had a weapon or there was violence or the threat of violence against the victim.

Physical assault: An attack (victim was hit, slapped, grabbed, knocked down, or beaten), a face-to-face threat of physical harm, or an incident with a weapon present.

In order to capture the extent of workplace violence, the GSS asked respondents about the location of their criminal victimization incident. Possible locations included: the respondent's home and surrounding area, other private residences or farms, commercial or institutional establishments, streets or other public spaces, or "other" locations.

Only those who reported that the incident occurred in a commercial or institutional establishment were asked if this location was also their place of work. The types of commercial or institutional establishments listed in the survey include: restaurants, bars, schools or school grounds, commercial or office buildings, factories, stores, shopping malls, hospitals, prisons and rehabilitation centres.

Since those respondents who experienced violence in locations other than commercial or institutional establishments were not asked whether the location was also their place of work, the extent of workplace violence in this study may be underestimated. For example, those working in high-risk professions such as police officers, paramedics, bus drivers and taxi drivers who may have been victimized in streets, public places or other locations would not be included in this analysis. In addition, incidents involving those who work in primarily residential settings, such as house cleaners, home care workers, or child care workers would also be excluded from the analysis.

Almost half (48%) of respondents in Newfoundland and Labrador reported working in higher risk employment sectors such as health care, social assistance, accommodation and food services.[5] This proportion was much higher than the proportion of workers in these same sectors from the other Canadian provinces which ranged from 13% to 29%.

Profile of violent workplace victimization incidents[7]

The GSS allows us to examine various characteristics of violent workplace victimization incidents such as the type of incident, the location and the relationship between the accused and the victim. When comparing workplace and non-workplace incidents in the following section, only violent incidents involving respondents who were asked whether their incident occurred at their place of work were included in the analysis.[8]

According to the GSS, women and men were equally likely to have reported experiencing workplace violence (53% versus 47%). This was also the case for non-workplace incidents.

Physical assault most common type of violent workplace victimization

Physical assaults are the most common type of violent incident regardless of location of the incident. However, there were some differences in the distribution of offence types when considering violent workplace and non-workplace incidents. For example, 71% of all incidents of workplace violence were physical assaults, compared to 57% of violent non-workplace incidents. Sexual assaults were less common in the workplace (24%) than in non-workplace environments (34%). Robberies were the least frequent violent offence, regardless of the location.

One-third of workplace violent incidents involved a victim working in social assistance or health care services

According to the GSS, workplace violence was much more common in certain employment sectors. For example, 33% of

> **Text box 2**
> **Certain occupations carry higher risks of homicide[6]**
>
> **The Homicide Survey collects information on homicides that are related to a victim's occupation (legal or illegal). Because of the inherent dangers associated with some occupations, certain people are at greater risk of both lethal and non-lethal violence at their place of work. It is important to note that the following analysis includes only those victims whose deaths directly resulted from their profession, either partly or entirely. For example, if a police officer were killed because of a domestic dispute that was not related to his/her work, this homicide would not be counted as an occupation-related homicide.**
>
> **According to the Homicide Survey, in Canada it is relatively rare for a victim to be killed during the course of legal employment. Between 2001 and 2005, there were 69 homicides that occurred as a result of the victim's legal employment, representing an average of 14 victims killed each year while "on-the-job".**
>
> **Among the most common occupations of homicide victims between 2001 and 2005, 11 were taxi drivers, 10 were police officers, 8 were bar or restaurant employees, 8 were retail employees, 4 were labourers, 3 were health or social service workers, 3 worked in inspection or enforcement occupations, and 3 worked as security guards. The remaining homicide victims worked in 19 various other occupations.**
>
> **Many victims involved in prostitution or illegal "occupations"**
>
> **Data from the Homicide Survey have also shown that homicides are often associated with a victim's involvement in prostitution or illegal activities, such as gang activities, drug dealing or trafficking. In 2005, police reported a total of 9 prostitutes killed. Police were able to establish that 3 of the prostitutes were killed as a direct result of their "occupation". The police were unable to make this determination for the 6 remaining victims.**
>
> **There were 139 homicides committed against persons working in illegal "occupations" such as drug dealers, members of an organized crime group or a gang. This represents 37 more victims than in 2004. Police were able to establish that 104 of these homicides occurred as a direct result of the victim's "occupation", 14 where police determined that the homicide was not related to the victim's "occupation". Police were unable to make this determination for 21 victims.**

all violent workplace incidents involved a victim who was working in social assistance or health care services such as hospitals, nursing or residential care facilities. A further 14% of incidents involved victims working in accommodation or food services, such as hotels, bars or restaurants, and 11% of

incidents were committed against those working in educational services. These findings support research that has identified some of the highest-risk professions for workplace violence within these sectors (Macdonald and Sirotich, 2005; Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2005).

Workplace victimization incidents more likely to occur in offices, factories and stores

Incidents of workplace violence are much more likely to occur in certain locations. Similar to what was found in previous research (Macdonald and Sirotich 2005; Runyan et al 2005; Hesketh et al 2003), almost half (49%) of all violent workplace incidents occurred in locations such as office buildings, factories, stores or shopping malls. Other common locations for violent workplace incidents were hospitals, prisons or rehabilitation centres (31% of incidents), restaurants or bars (10%), and inside schools or on school grounds (10%) (Figure 1).
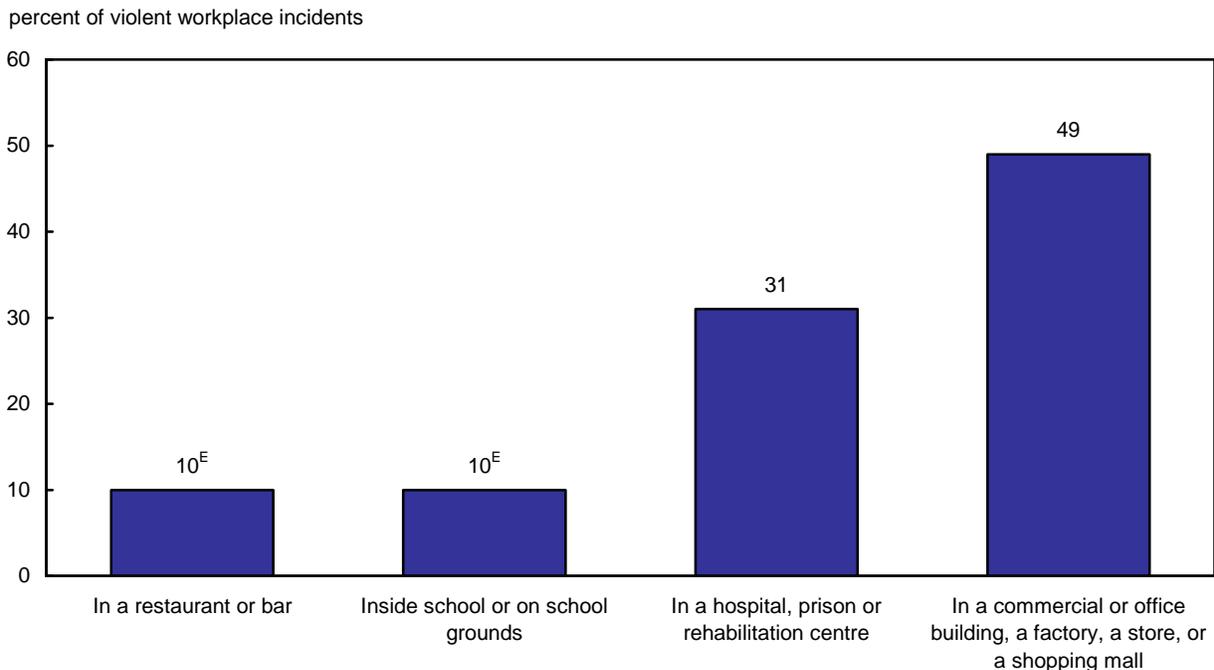
> **Text box 3**
> **Factors that increase the risk of violence in the workplace**
>
> **According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, there are certain work factors, processes, and interactions that can put people at increased risk of workplace violence.**
>
> **Examples include: working with the public; handling money, valuables or prescription drugs (e.g. cashiers, pharmacists); carrying out inspection or enforcement duties (e.g. government employees); providing service, care, advice or education (e.g. health care staff, teachers); working with unstable or volatile persons (e.g. social services, or criminal justice system employees); working in premises where alcohol is served (e.g. food and beverage staff); working alone, in small numbers (e.g. store clerks, real estate agents), or in isolated or low traffic areas (e.g. washrooms, storage areas, utility rooms); working in community-based settings (e.g. nurses, social workers and other home visitors); having a mobile workplace (e.g. taxicab); working during periods of intense organizational change (e.g. strikes, downsizing).**
>
> **Furthermore, the risk of violence may increase depending on the geographic location of the workplace; for example, near buildings or businesses that are at risk of violent crime (e.g. bars, banks) or in areas isolated from other buildings or structures.**

Figure 1
Violent workplace incidents most likely to occur in offices, factories and stores, 2004

percent of violent workplace incidents

Location	Percent
In a restaurant or bar	10[E]
Inside school or on school grounds	10[E]
In a hospital, prison or rehabilitation centre	31
In a commercial or office building, a factory, a store, or a shopping mall	49

[E] use with caution
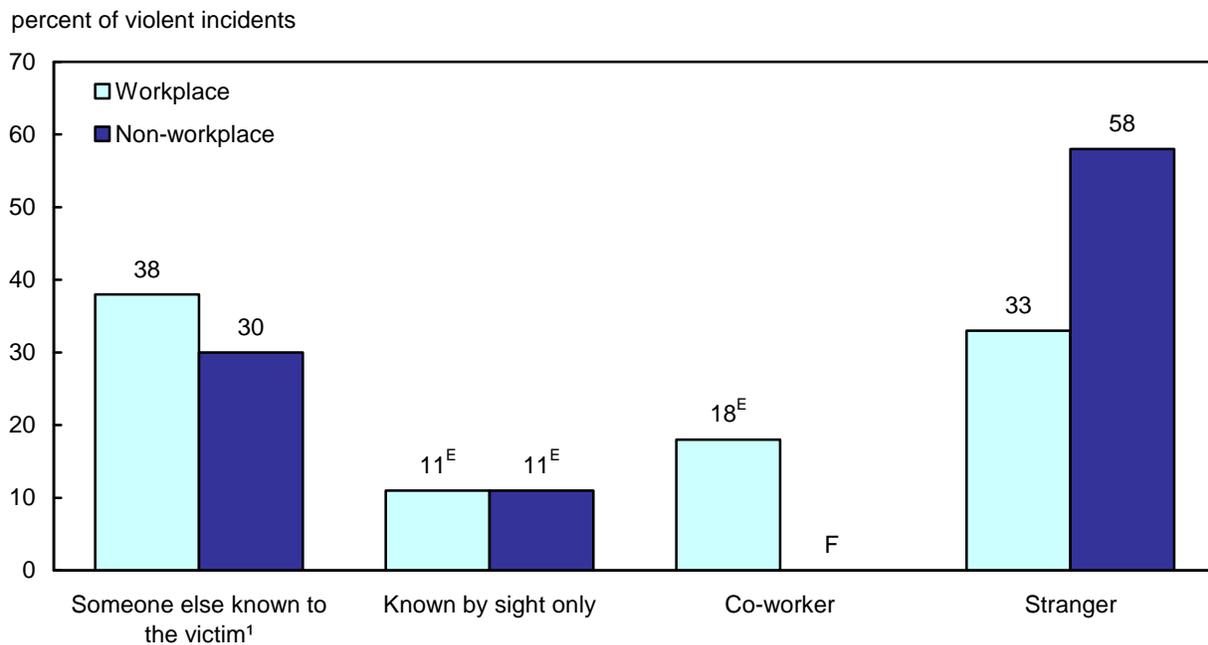**Note:**   Only includes violent incidents that occurred at the victim's place of work.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

Perpetrators of workplace violence often known to victims[9]

According to the GSS, 66% of violent workplace incidents were committed by someone known to the victim while one-third of incidents were committed by a stranger. According to research, the majority of workplace victimization incidents are not committed by co-workers or members of the same organization. They are more likely to be committed by a member of the public or a client that comes into contact with the victim (LeBlanc and Barling, 2004).

When looking at violent workplace incidents where the accused was known to the victim, the perpetrator was a co-worker in 18% of incidents and was known by sight in 11% of incidents. The accused was either someone else known by the victim or had an 'other' relationship with the victim in 38% of incidents. Examples of these other relationships may include: a patient, a client, a customer or a former co-worker (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Violent workplace incidents more likely to be committed by someone known to the victim, 2004

percent of violent incidents

E use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
1. Someone else known to the victim includes relatives, ex-boyfriends, ex-girlfriends, friends, neighbours, acquaintances and other relationships.
Notes: Includes only violent incidents committed by a single perpetrator.
            Excludes incidents of spousal sexual and physical assault.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

When considering violent non-workplace incidents, 42% were committed by someone known to the victim. The most common relationships were friends, neighbours or acquaintances (27%) and people known by sight only (11%).

Almost one-half of violent workplace incidents linked to alcohol or drug use

Studies on workplace victimization have shown that alcohol or drug consumption can increase the risk of workplace victimization (Dupré and Barling, 2003). According to the GSS, in 46% of incidents of violent victimization in the workplace, the victim believed the incident was related to the perpetrator's alcohol or drug use. This proportion was lower than for incidents that occurred outside the workplace (54%).

Most incidents of workplace violence committed by a male acting alone

The vast majority of reported workplace violent incidents (93%) were committed by a single offender. This is higher than the three-quarters of violent incidents that occurred in a non-workplace location. Among those violent workplace incidents with a single perpetrator, males were identified as the accused in 93% of incidents. This proportion is significantly higher than the 83% of violent non-workplace incidents that involved a male offender. Victims also reported that single accused were relatively young, with over half (54%) of incidents involving an accused who was under the age of 35.

Aftermath and consequences of violent workplace victimization incidents

Weapon use not common in violent workplace incidents

Weapons were not often used in violent incidents, regardless of the location. About 19% of workplace incidents involved the use of a weapon, such as a gun, a knife, a bottle, a stick or a bat. This proportion was not statistically different from the 16% of violent non-workplace incidents involving the use of a weapon.

One out of five violent workplace incidents resulted in injuries to the victim

The victim reported suffering injuries in about 21% of violent workplace incidents, similar to the 23% for violent non-workplace incidents. Violent workplace incidents involving male victims (27%) were more likely to result in injuries compared to those involving female victims (17%).

For some victims, the consequence of the workplace victimization was emotional. The most commonly reported emotional impacts on victims of workplace violence were being angry (21% of incidents), being upset, confused or frustrated (20% of incidents) and feeling fearful (15% of incidents). In over one-quarter of incidents, the victim stated that the incident had little emotional effect on them (27%). The emotional impacts were similar for victims of violent non-workplace incidents.

Victims of violent workplace incidents were more likely than victims of non-workplace incidents to report finding it difficult to carry out everyday activities as a result of their incident (25% versus 14%), even though workplace incidents and non-workplace incidents were equally likely to result in injuries to the victim.

> **Text box 4**
> **Initiatives designed to prevent and address workplace violence**
>
> In 1993, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) conducted a survey which revealed that over 60% of respondents had been victims of an aggressive act in the previous two years.
>
> With the increase in attention to issues around violent victimization in the workplace, unions, agencies and corporations have made the issue of workplace violence a health and safety priority and have undertaken active measures to protect employees from internal and external forms of workplace violence. Examples of such efforts include training, legislation, modification of work environments, and implementation of security protocols and procedures (Pizzino, 2002).
>
> Federal and provincial governments have also addressed workplace violence through the creation or modification of legislation containing violence prevention provisions. For example, in 2000, the Canada Labour Code was amended to include a specific article pertaining to workplace violence, stating that employers are required to take the prescribed steps to prevent and protect against workplace violence. These regulations require: identification of violence potential situations or environments; assessment of violence potential situations or environments; development of control procedures; training and education programs; and, audit and review protocols.
>
> It has been recognized that in order to effectively address violence in the workplace, employees should be active participants in violence prevention and employers should have a strong commitment to the process (Pizzino, 2002.)
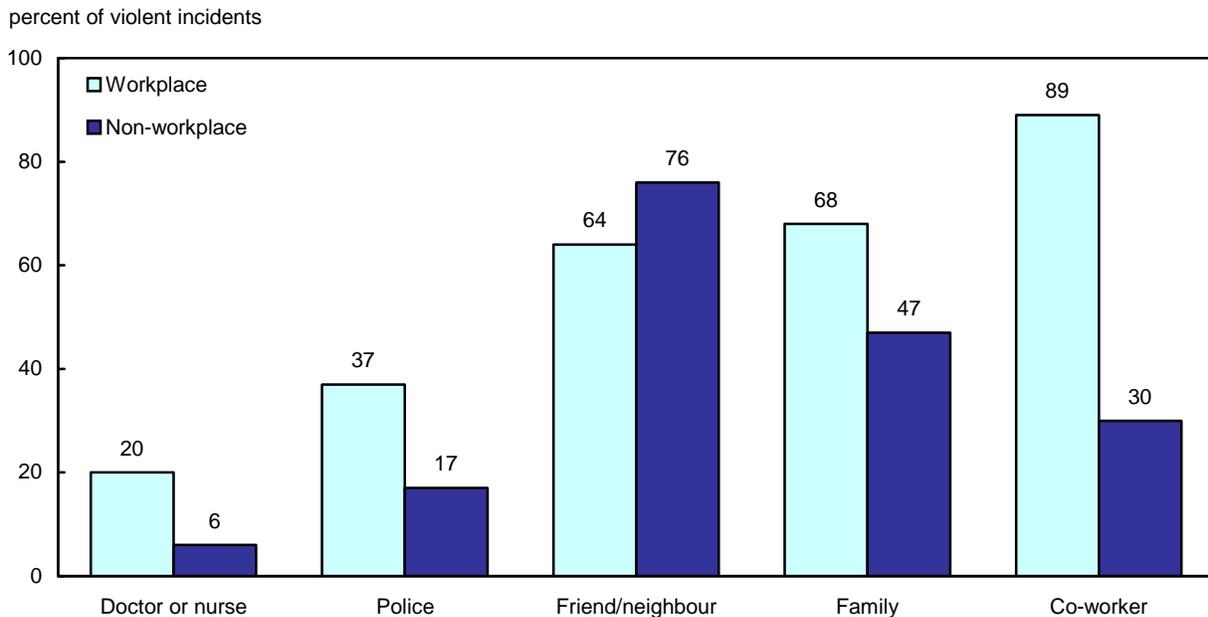
Victims of violent workplace incidents more likely to report to police than victims of non-workplace incidents

Violent workplace incidents were much more likely to come to the attention to police than were violent incidents that occurred elsewhere (37% versus 17%) (Figure 3). This may be due in part to the public nature of workplace violence or the presence of witnesses.

Figure 3
Victims more likely to turn to a co-worker following a violent workplace incident, 2004

percent of violent incidents

Notes: Figures may not add to 100% due to multiple responses.
Excludes incidents of spousal sexual and physical assault.
Only includes violent incidents.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

A number of additional factors can influence a victim's decision to report their violent incident to police including: to stop the incident or receive protection, to arrest and punish the offender or because the victim felt it was his or her duty to notify police. When looking at incidents that were reported to the police, in a substantial majority of workplace incidents, the reason that victims gave for reporting to police was that they felt a duty to report the incident (97%), perhaps to prevent other co-workers from becoming victims. This same reason for reporting to the police was given in 88% of violent incidents that did not occur in the workplace.[10]

Research has shown that several other factors come into play when a victim decides to report their violent incident. These can include the degree of severity and the seriousness of the offence, whether the victim was injured, whether a weapon was present during the incident or whether a victim had to take time off from their main activity because of the violence. This was also true for violent workplace incidents, for example, incidents in which a weapon was present were more than 1.5 times more likely to come to the attention of police (58% versus 32%) than those that did not involve the use of a weapon.

Male victims much more likely to report violent workplace incidents to police

Male victims of violent workplace incidents were almost three times more likely than their female counterparts to bring their incident to the attention of police (57% versus 20% of incidents). This might be partly explained by the fact that males were more likely to suffer injuries as a result of workplace violence

compared to their female counterparts. In addition, women are more often victims of sexual assault, which has the lowest reporting rate to police.

When looking at non-workplace incidents, 21% of incidents involving male victims were reported to police while the proportion of non-workplace violent incidents reported to the police by females was not releasable.

Police action more likely in workplace incidents than in non-workplace incidents

Among all violent workplace incidents that were brought to the attention of police, police visited the scene in 89% of incidents and conducted an investigation in 80% of incidents. This compares to 76% and 58% of incidents that occurred outside of the workplace. Police were also more likely to take the following actions in workplace incidents compared to those occurring in non-workplace locations: take the offender away (49% versus 24%) and arrest or lay charges against the offender (39% versus 29%). In about half of workplace and non-workplace incidents, police gave the offender a warning (51% and 49% respectively).

Victims who reported their violent incident to the police were asked about their satisfaction with the actions the police took. Victims of violent workplace incidents were more likely than victims of violent non-workplace incidents to say they were either somewhat or very satisfied with the actions police took (88% versus 54%). This can be partly explained by the fact that actions were taken against the offender in a higher proportion of violent workplace incidents compared to non-workplace incidents.

"Incident dealt with another way" most common reason for not reporting to police

Respondents who did not report their victimization to the police were asked to state their reasons for not reporting. The most commonly reported reason was that the incident was dealt with another way (74%). This could include reporting to another official or a manager.[11] Other common reasons for not reporting to police included: the incident was not important enough (44%), the incident was a personal matter and did not concern police (31%) and victim did not want to get involved with police (30%). These findings were comparable to the reasons reported by victims of non-workplace incidents.

Victims of violent workplace incidents most likely to turn to co-workers

The majority of violent workplace incidents (96%) resulted in victims turning to an informal source of support to help deal or cope with the victimization. In almost nine out of ten incidents, victims said they told another co-worker about the incident. This may be due to the fact that co-workers are more likely to be a readily available source of help for victims. In similar proportions of incidents, victims said they either told family (68%), or friends or neighbours (64%). In a much smaller proportion of incidents (20%), victims told a doctor or a nurse (Figure 3).

Among non-workplace incidents, the most common informal source of help was a friend or a neighbour (76% of incidents). In almost half of incidents (47%) the victim told family, in 30% of incidents the victim told a co-worker and the victim turned to a doctor or a nurse in 6% of incidents.

Methodology

General Social Survey on Victimization

In 2004, Statistics Canada conducted the victimization cycle of the General Social Survey for the fourth time. Previous cycles were conducted in 1988, 1993 and 1999. The objectives of the survey are to provide estimates of the extent to which people experience incidences of eight offence types, examining risk factors associated with victimization, reporting rates to police, and measures fear of crime and public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system.

Sampling

Households in the 10 provinces were selected using Random Digit Dialing (RDD). Once a household was chosen, an individual 15 years or older was selected randomly to respond to the survey. Households without telephones, households with only cellular phone service, and individuals living in institutions were excluded. These groups combined represented 4% of the target population. This figure is not large enough to significantly change the estimates.

The sample size in 2004 was about 24,000 households, similar to the sample size in 1999 (26,000) and considerably higher than the sample in 1993 and 1988 (10,000 each).

Data collection

Data collection took place from January to December 2004 inclusively. The sample was evenly distributed over the 12 months to represent seasonal variation in the information. A standard questionnaire was conducted by phone using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). A typical interview lasted 30 minutes.

Response rates

Of the 31,895 households that were selected for the GSS Cycle 18 sample, 23,766 usable responses were obtained. This represents a response rate of 75%. Types of non-responses included respondents who refused to participate, could not be reached, or could not speak English or French.

Respondents in the sample were weighted so that their responses represent the non-institutionalized Canadian population aged 15 years or over. Each person who responded to the 2004 GSS represented roughly 1,000 people in the Canadian population aged 15 years and over.

Data limitations

As with any household survey, there are some data limitations. The results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to sampling error. Somewhat different results might have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed. The difference between the estimate obtained from the sample and the one resulting from a complete count is called the sampling error of the estimate. This *Profile* uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. Any estimate that has a high CV (over 33.3%) has not been published because the estimate is too unreliable. In these cases, the symbol 'F' is used in the figures and data tables. An estimate that has a CV between 16.6 and 33.3 should be used with caution and the symbol 'E' is used.

When comparing estimates for significant differences, the hypothesis that the difference between two estimates is zero is tested. A 95% confidence interval is constructed around this difference and if this interval contains zero, then it is concluded that the difference is not significant. If, however, this confidence interval does not contain zero, it is concluded that there is a significant difference between the two estimates.

Using the 2004 GSS sample design and sample size, an estimate of a given proportion of the total population, expressed as a percentage is expected to be within 0.8 percentage points of the true proportion 19 times out of 20.

Homicide Survey

The Homicide Survey began collecting police-reported data on homicide incidents, victims and accused persons in Canada in 1961. Whenever a homicide becomes known to police, the investigating police department completes a survey questionnaire, which is then sent to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. This questionnaire remained virtually unmodified from 1961 to 1990. In 1991 and later in 1997, in an effort to respond to changing information needs, the survey was revised and expanded.

The total count of homicides recorded each year equals the total number of homicides *known* by police departments and *reported* to the Homicide Survey during that year. Therefore, given that some homicides only become known to police long after they occur, some incidents that actually occurred in previous years are counted in the year they are reported by police to the Homicide Survey.

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Endnotes

1. The GSS provides data on incidents that are both reported and not reported to the police.
2. For the first time in 2004, the GSS on victimization asked victims of incidents occurring in commercial or institutional establishments if this location was also their place of work.
3. Estimates for Prince Edard Island and New Brunswick were too unreliable to be published.
4. According to the 2004 GSS, 58% of all violent workplace victimization incidents occurred against victims who worked in educational services, health care, social assistance, accommodation and food services.
5. Sectors were derived using the 1997 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).
6. Adapted from Dauvergne, M. and G. Li, 2006 "Homicide in Canada, 2005", *Juristat*. Catalogue n° 85-002-XPE, Vol. 26, n° 6. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
7. This section excludes incidents of spousal physical and sexual assault because detailed information on each spousal incident is not available.
8. Since those respondents who experienced violence in locations other than commercial or institutional establishments were not asked whether the location was also their place of work, the extent of workplace violence in this study may be underestimated. For example, those working in high-risk professions such as police officers, paramedics, bus drivers and taxi drivers who may have been victimized in streets, public places or other locations would not be included in this analysis.
9. Includes only violent incidents committed by a single perpetrator.
10. Respondents were able to cite multiple reasons for contacting the police.
11. Respondents were able to cite multiple reasons for not reporting incidents to police. Therefore, percentages do not total 100%.

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Following is a cumulative index of Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series published to date:

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