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Canadian Centre for Justice
Statistics Profile Series

Seniors in Canada



This paper is one in a series of ten profiles funded through the federal Policy Research Initiative. The objective of these profiles is to provide data analysis on the experience of various groups as victims and offenders* in the criminal justice system.

The profiles are based on Statistics Canada sources and include a mix of demographic, economic and justice data as well as information specific to each group.

Other profiles in this series include:

- Aboriginal People in Canada
- Canadians with Disabilities
- Canadians with Literacy Problems**
- Canadians with Low Incomes
- Children and Youth in Canada
- Immigrants in Canada
- Religious groups in Canada
- Visible Minorities in Canada
- Women in Canada

* Data on offenders is only available for the following: Aboriginal People, Children and Youth, Seniors, and Women.

** The literacy profile does not include a criminal justice component.

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Seniors in Canada

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Seniors¹

A rapidly growing population²

Seniors constitute one of the fastest growing population groups in Canada. In 2000, there were an estimated 3.8 million Canadians aged 65 and over (see Tables 1, 2), up 62% from 2.4 million in 1981. As a result, the share of the overall Canadian population accounted for by seniors has risen in the last several decades. In 2000, seniors made up 13% of the total population, up from 10% in 1981 and 8% in 1971. The current figure is also more than twice that in 1921, when only 5% of people living in Canada were aged 65 and over.

The senior population is expected to grow even more rapidly during the next several decades, particularly once people born during the Baby Boom years from 1946 to 1965 begin turning age 65 early in the second decade of the new century. Statistics Canada has projected, for example, that by 2016, 17% of all Canadians will be aged 65 and over, and that by 2041, 23% of the population will be seniors.

More older seniors

The fastest growth in the number of seniors is occurring among those in older age ranges. In 2000, there were an estimated 416,000 people aged 85 and over in Canada, more than double the number in 1981 and close to 20 times more than in 1921. As a result, over one in ten Canadian seniors is now aged 85 and over, compared with about one in 20 earlier in the century. The number of people aged 85 and over is also expected to increase rapidly in the approaching decades. Overall, people aged 85 and over are projected to make up 4% of the total population in 2041, compared with a little over 1% in 2000.

Senior women in the majority

The senior population in Canada is predominantly female. In 2000, women represented 57% of Canadians aged 65 and over, whereas they made up just over half (51%) of those aged 55-64 and 50% or less of those in age groups under age 55. The fact that women currently represent a substantial majority of seniors, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Women have only made up more than half of the population aged 65 and over since the 1950s.

Women account for particularly large shares of the older segments of the senior population. In 2000, women made up 70% of all persons aged 85 and older and 60% of those aged 75-84, compared with 53% of people aged 65-74.

Seniors across the country

As a percentage of the population, seniors account for the largest shares of the provincial populations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, although people aged 65 and over make up a relatively large share of the population in all provinces. In 2000, 14% of all residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba were aged 65 and over, while the figure was 13% in British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec; 12% in Newfoundland; and 10% in Alberta.

In contrast, seniors generally make up a relatively small share of the population in the territories. In 2000, only 4% of all residents of the territories were aged 65 or over. That year, 4% of those living in the Northwest Territories were seniors, as were 5% of those in the Yukon and 3% in Nunavut.

There is also considerable variation in the share of the population accounted for by seniors in different urban areas across the country. For example, 17% of all residents

in Victoria and St. Catharines-Niagara in 2000 were aged 65 and over, while the figure was 15% in Thunder Bay and Trois-Rivières; 14% in Hamilton; and 13% in Winnipeg, London, Montreal, and Windsor. In contrast, seniors made up only 10% of people in Edmonton, Halifax and Oshawa, and just 9% of those in Calgary.

Most seniors live with family

The large majority of seniors living in private households live with their families, either as a family head or spouse, or with their extended family, such as the family of a daughter or son. In 1996, 69% of

¹ This profile provides descriptive socio-demographic and criminal justice characteristics associated with the senior population. It does not however, account for the possibility that some additional factors, such as sex, disability, visible minority status and low income status may also be correlated with age. For more information on these additional factors, please refer to the other profiles in this series.

² Data for the socio-demographic section of the seniors' profile are drawn from: Statistics Canada's Census of Canada; Demography Division; Health Statistics Division; Income Statistics Division; International Adult Literacy Survey; Labour Force Survey; National Population Health Survey; and National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

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From the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics: Jodi-Anne Massicotte, David Gullickson, Tina Hotton, Stacie Ogg and Eileen Cook.

all people aged 65 and over lived with family members.

There are, however, considerable differences in the proportion of Canadian seniors living with their families depending on their age and sex. Senior women, for example, especially those in older age ranges, are far less likely than their male counterparts to be living with family members. In 1996, only 40% of women aged 85 and over and 49% of those aged 75-84 lived with members of their family. These figures were both around 30 percentage points below those for men in the same age range. Women aged 65-74 were also less likely than their male counterparts to be living with members of their family, although this difference was only about half that for women in older ranges: 69% versus 84%.

Smaller percentages of senior women in older age ranges currently live with members of their family in large part because the percentage of senior women living with their spouse declines sharply with age. In fact, most senior women in older age ranges are widowed. In 1996, almost 80% of women aged 85 and over were widowed, as were 58% of those aged 75-84, whereas this was the case for only 32% of women aged 65-74.

The proportion of senior men living with their spouse also decreases with age, although the majority of senior men in all age ranges live with their spouse. As well, at all ages, senior men are far more likely than their female counterparts to be living with their spouse.

Almost a quarter of a million (240,000) seniors, 7% of the total population aged 65 and over, lived with members of their extended family in 1996. The proportion of seniors who live with their extended family, though, is currently only about half what it was in 1971, when the figure was 16%. As well, women make up the large majority of seniors living with members of their extended family. In 1996, 10% of all women aged 65 and

over lived with their extended family, compared with just 3% of men in this age range.

Seniors living alone

While most Canadian seniors live with their family, a substantial number live alone. In 1996, over 900,000 people aged 65 and over, 29% of all seniors, were living on their own. This compared with just 9% of people between the ages of 15 and 64. As well, the proportion of seniors living alone is rising. In 1996, 29% of seniors lived by themselves, up from 27% in 1981 and 20% in 1971. Senior women are far more likely than senior men to live alone. In 1996, 38% of all women aged 65 and older lived on their own, compared with 16% of men in this age range.

Seniors living in an institution

While most seniors live in private households, a substantial number live in an institution. In 1996, just over 250,000 people aged 65 and over, 7% of all seniors in Canada, lived in an institution. In fact, seniors were considerably more likely to live in an institution than those under the age of 65, among whom the figure was less than 1%. As a result, people aged 65 and over represented nearly 75% of all people in Canada living in an institution that year. The proportion of the senior population living in an institution, however, has fallen in recent decades. In 1996, 7% of seniors were in an institution, down from 10% in 1971.

Most seniors in institutions reside in special care homes for the elderly and chronically ill. In 1996, 6% of all people aged 65 and over lived in one of these institutions, while about a half a per cent resided in each of hospitals and religious institutions.

There is some variation in the proportion of seniors in different provinces in institutional care, although in no province do more than one out of ten seniors live in an institution. In 1996, the proportion of seniors living in an institution ranged from 5% in British Columbia to 10% in Quebec. The compara-

tively large percentage of Quebec seniors living in an institution results partly from the fact that many seniors in that province reside in a religious institution. In 1996, around 15% of all institutionalized people aged 65 and over in Quebec lived in this type of facility, whereas the figure in the other provinces ranged from 7% in Prince Edward Island to less than 1% in British Columbia.

In all provinces, however, the large majority of institutionalized seniors reside in special care homes for the elderly. In 1996, around 90% of institutionalized seniors in all provinces outside Quebec were in these types of facilities, while the figure was 75% in Quebec.

Increasing life expectancy among seniors

The remaining life expectancy of Canadian seniors has risen substantially over the course of this century. As of 1997, a 65-year-old person had an estimated remaining life expectancy of 18.3 years, roughly a half a year more than in 1991, three years more than in 1971, and five years more than in the 1921. As in other age groups, senior women have a longer remaining life expectancy than senior men. A woman aged 65 in 1997, for instance, could expect to live, on average, another 20.0 years, almost four years longer than the figure for a man aged 65 (16.2).

Gains in life expectancy among Canadian seniors reflect long-term declines in death rates among people in this age group. Between 1980 and 1996, the age-standardized death rate among people aged 65 and over fell 12%.

Among seniors, death rates are considerably higher among men than among women. In 1996, there were over 5,600 deaths for every 100,000 men aged 65 and over, compared with just over 3,600 per 100,000 senior women. Between 1980 and 1996, however, declines in the age-standardized death rates among senior men and women were about equal.

Heart disease and cancer main causes of death among seniors

Heart disease and cancer account for over half the deaths of Canadian seniors. In 1996, 30% of all deaths of people aged 65 and over were attributed to heart disease and 26% were from cancer. Of the remaining deaths of seniors, 11% were from respiratory diseases, 9% were from strokes, while 24% were attributed to all other diseases and conditions combined. The age-standardized death rate due to heart disease among seniors, however, has fallen sharply since the early 1980s, whereas the figure for cancer rose in the same period.

The perceived health of seniors

While most seniors report their overall health is relatively good, many seniors have a chronic health condition as diagnosed by a health professional. In 1996-7, 82% of all people aged 65 and over living at home reported they had been diagnosed with at least one chronic health condition.

Arthritis and rheumatism are the most common chronic health problems reported by seniors. In 1996-7, 42% of people aged 65 and over living at home had been diagnosed by a health professional with one of these problems. At the same time, a substantial proportion of seniors report some level of restriction in their activities because of a long-term health problem. In 1996-7, this was the case for 28% of all people aged 65 and over living in a private household. Among seniors, those in older age ranges are more likely than their younger counterparts to report some level of activity restriction because of a health problem. In 1996-7, 50% of people aged 85 and over were so limited, while the figure was 34% among those aged 75-84 and 22% among those aged 65-74.

Seniors with disabilities

One in four Canadian seniors has a long-term disability or handicap. In 1996-7, 25% of all people aged 65 and over living at home had such a condition, compared with

20% of people aged 55-64 and less than 10% of those between the ages of 25 and 54.

Not surprisingly, the proportion of seniors with a long-term disability rises sharply with age. In 1996-7, 45% of those aged 85 and over had a disability or handicap, versus 28% of those aged 75-84 and 21% of those aged 65-74.

Educational attainment of seniors

Seniors have relatively low levels of formal education. As of 1996, only 8% of all Canadians aged 65 and over had a university degree, compared with 13% of those aged 55-64 and over 20% of those between the ages of 25 and 54. The majority of today's seniors, over six out of ten, never completed high school. Of these, 25% had attended, but had not graduated from high school, while 37% had less than a Grade 9 education.

Partly as a result of their relative lack of formal educational experience, many seniors have difficulty reading. In 1994, over half of all Canadians aged 66 and over performed at the lowest level on the prose scale in the International Adult Literacy Survey. That year, 53% were not able to perform more than simple reading tasks, such as locating one piece of information in a text.

Few seniors employed

The majority of Canadian seniors are retired, but a small number are still part of the paid workforce. In 1999, close to 220,000 people aged 65 and over, 6% of the total senior population, had jobs. The proportion of seniors currently with jobs, though, is lower than it was in the mid-1970s.

Of those seniors that are still part of the paid work force, a substantial share - 40% in 1999 - work part-time. At the same time, almost two out of three employed seniors are either self-employed or unpaid family workers.

A relatively large share of employed seniors work in agriculture. As a result, seniors represent a

substantial share of the agricultural workforce in Canada. In 1999, 15% of all agriculture workers were aged 65 and over, whereas seniors made up less than 2% of the overall workforce. Seniors also make up a large share of those employed in religious professions. In 1999, 14% of all people employed in these professions were aged 65 and over.

While relatively few seniors are still in the paid workforce, many more stay active in their communities through participation in formal volunteer activities. In 1997, 23% of the total senior population, participated in these kinds of activities. That year, senior volunteers averaged 3.9 hours per week on these activities, compared with 3 hours or less for volunteers in age groups under age 65. Even greater numbers of seniors - 58% that year - participate in informal volunteer activities outside their homes.

Average incomes rising

The incomes of Canadian seniors have risen faster than those of younger people in the past two decades. Between 1981 and 1998, for example, the average income of seniors rose 22%, once the effects of inflation have been accounted for. In contrast, during that period, the average income of people under age 65 remained almost stagnant. Seniors, however, still have lower incomes, on average, than people in most age groups under age 65.

Income of seniors in the provinces

As with people in younger age ranges, seniors in Ontario and the Western provinces have higher incomes, on average, than those in Quebec and some of the Atlantic provinces. In 1998, seniors in both Ontario and British Columbia had an average income of over \$22,000, while the figures were close to \$22,000 in Alberta, and over \$20,000 in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In contrast, seniors in Quebec had an average income of \$18,600 that year, while in the Atlantic provinces

the figure ranged from \$19,300 in Prince Edward Island to slightly more than \$15,000 in Newfoundland.

Sources of the income of seniors

The largest share of the income of seniors comes from private retirement pensions. In 1998, 29% of all the income of seniors came from this program, while 28% came from the Old Age Security (OAS) program, 21% came in the form of Canada and Quebec Pension Plan (C/QPP) benefits, 13% came from investments including RRSPs, and 5% was income from employment. Most of the gains in the overall average incomes of seniors have come from work-related pensions; indeed, the share of the income of seniors coming from both C/QPP and private employment pensions more than doubled between 1981 and 1998.

On the other hand, there has been little change in average Old Age Security payments received by seniors in the past decade and a half. Old Age Security benefits make up a particularly large share of the incomes of senior women. In 1998, 36% of all income of women aged 65 and over came from this program, compared with 21% of that of their male counterparts.

Low income among seniors³

One in five seniors in Canada lives in a low-income situation. In 1998, almost three-quarters of a million people aged 65 and over, 20% of all seniors, had incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs. The proportion of seniors with low incomes has fallen sharply over the past decade and a half, dropping from 34% in 1980 to 20% in 1998.

There is wide variation in the proportion of seniors with low incomes in different provinces. In 1998, the share of seniors with low incomes ranged from 30% in Quebec to 14% in Ontario. In the remaining provinces, the figure was 25% in Manitoba, 19% in British Columbia, 18% in Saskatchewan, 17% in Alberta, and 15% in New Brunswick.

Unattached senior women are particularly likely to have low incomes. In 1998, 48% of these women were considered to have low incomes, compared with 35% of unattached senior men and 7-9% of senior men and women that lived with their spouse or other family members.

Seniors and the Criminal Justice System

Seniors less likely to be victims of crime than younger age groups

According to the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) (see Box 1), 8% of the senior population aged 65 and older reported having been the victim of at least one crime⁴ in the 12 months preceding the survey. This proportion was much lower than for other age groups:

Box 1: The General Social Survey

Statistics Canada, as part of the General Social Survey Program, conducts a survey on criminal victimization every 5 years. The most recent survey was conducted in 1999, and involved telephone interviews with approximately 26,000 people, aged 15 and older, living in the 10 Canadian provinces. Similar to previous surveys, all respondents were asked about their experiences with criminal victimization, and their opinions on a variety of justice related topics including their fear of crime, and their perceptions about the performance of the police, criminal courts, and prison and parole systems.

It is important to note that the GSS data are estimates. They are based on information collected from a sample of the population and are therefore subject to sampling error. The GSS analysis uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. Any estimate with a CV of more than 33.3% is considered unreliable and is not published. When the CV of the estimate is between 16.6% and 33.3%, the symbol '†' is used. These estimates should be used with caution.

40% of those aged 15-24, 31% of those aged 25-44 and 20% of those aged 45-64.

Rates of personal victimization (see Box 2) also decreased significantly with age. Seniors were 15 times less likely to be victimized than those aged 15-24 (27 versus 405 incidents per 1,000 population), 8 times less likely than those aged 25-44 (212 incidents per 1,000 population) and nearly 4 times less likely than those aged 45-64 (103 incidents per 1,000 population)(see Figure 1).

These findings were similar for all personal crime categories, particularly in the case of violent offences. People 65 years of age and over were 21 times less likely to be victims of violent crime (sexual assault, assault, robbery) and 9 times less likely to be victims of personal property theft than were people in the 15-to-24 age group.

Seniors reported very little violence by children, caregivers and spouses⁵

The 1999 GSS also asked Canadians 65 years of age and older a series of detailed questions

³ Families or individuals fall below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs if they spend, on average, at least 20 percentage points more of their pre-tax income than the Canadian average on food, shelter, and clothing. Using 1992 as the base year, families and individuals with incomes below the Low Income Cut-offs usually spend more than 55% of their income on these items and are considered to be in straitened circumstances. The number of people in the family and the size of the urban or rural area where the family resides are also taken into consideration. Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs, however, are not official poverty lines. They have no officially recognised status as such, nor does Statistics Canada promote their use as poverty lines.

⁴ This section includes personal and household victimization as well as incidents of spousal violence that occurred in the 12 months preceding the survey.

⁵ See Pottie-Bunge and Locke (2000)

Box 2: Offence types

The 1999 GSS measured the incidence of personal and household victimization looking at eight offence types, based on the *Criminal Code* definitions for these crimes. Detailed analysis of the senior population only takes into account the four personal offences since for personal crimes, it is an individual who is victimized. For household crimes, it is all members of the household who are victimized. Rates of personal offences are calculated per 1,000 persons aged 15 and older.

Crime category	Offence	Description
Personal crimes	Violent crimes	
	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.
	Assault	An attack (victim hit, slapped, grabbed, knocked down, or beaten), a face-to-face threat of physical harm, or an incident with a weapon present.
	Theft of personal property	Theft or attempted theft of personal property such as money, credit cards, clothing, jewellery, a purse or a wallet. (Unlike robbery, the perpetrator does not confront the victim.)

about emotional and financial abuse by children, caregivers⁶ and spouses⁷ as well as questions about physical and sexual assaults by children⁸, caregivers and spouses.

Older Canadians who were residing in private dwellings reported very little physical and sexual violence. In fact, only 1% of this population of seniors indicated that they had been physically or sexually assaulted by a spouse, adult child or caregiver in the five years prior to the survey.

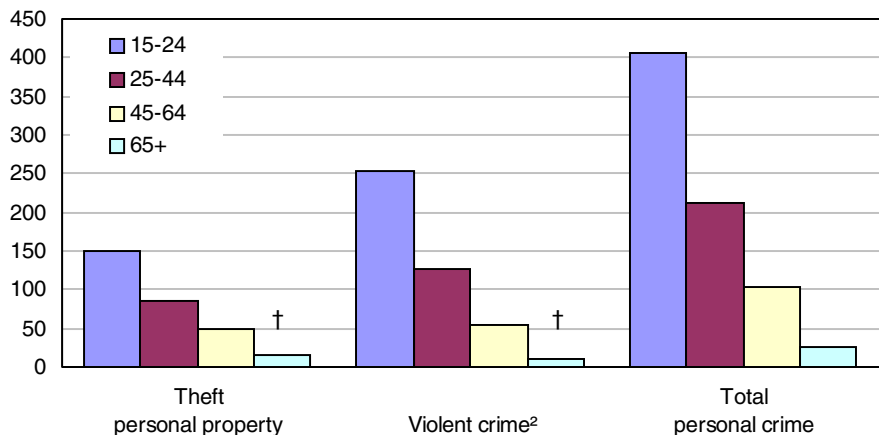
Emotional and financial abuse infrequent

Overall, 7% of older adults experienced some form of emotional or financial abuse by an adult child, caregiver, spouse or common-law spouse with whom they had contact in the five years prior to the survey (see Box 3). The vast majority of emotional and financial abuse was committed by spouses. Senior men (9%) were more likely than senior women (6%) to report being victims of emotional or financial abuse. Emotional abuse (7%) was reported more frequently

Figure 1

Seniors less likely to be victims of personal crime than younger age groups¹

Rate per 1,000 population



¹ Includes incidents of spousal physical and sexual assault

² Includes sexual assault, assault and robbery

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

than financial abuse (1%). The most common form of emotional abuse reported by seniors was being put down or called names (3%), followed by limiting contact with family or friends (2%).

⁶ A caregiver is defined as anyone, either paid or unpaid, who provides assistance or healthcare in the respondent's home. This includes meal preparation, personal care or medical assistance.

⁷ Spouses include current and former partners as well as common-law partners.

⁸ Respondents were not asked about sexual assaults by children.

Box 3:
Measuring emotional and financial abuse of older adults

Emotional and financial abuse of older adults is measured on the 1999 GSS by a module of questions regarding abuse by spouses, children and caregivers. Due to the distinct nature of these relationships, variations of the emotional and financial abuse questions were asked depending on the relationship between the respondent and the perpetrator. Respondents aged 65 and over were read the following:

I'm going to read a list of statements that some people have used to describe their spouse/partner (children) (caregiver). I'd like you to tell me whether or not each statement describes any of them.

1. They try to limit your contact with family or friends (not asked of caregivers)
2. They put you down or call you names to make you feel bad
3. He/she is jealous and doesn't want you to talk to other men/women (asked only of spouses).
4. They harm, or threaten to harm, someone close to you.
5. He/she demands to know who you are with and where you are at all times (asked only of spouses).
6. They damage or destroy your possessions or property.
7. They prevent you from knowing about or having access to the family (your) income, even if you ask (not asked of caregivers).
8. They try to force you to relinquish control over your finances when you don't want to (not asked of spouses).
9. They try to force you to give up something of value when you don't want to.
10. They try to force you to change your Last Will and Testament or try to obtain Power of Attorney over your finances when you don't want them to.

Police-reported victimization rates among seniors are also lower⁹

Police-reported data also show that seniors are less likely to be victims of crime than younger age groups. For example, the percentage of senior victims of violent crime is significantly smaller than their 12% proportion of the Canadian population. In 1999, of all victims of violent crime with a known age in the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR2) sample, fewer than 2% were 65 years of age and older.

The police-reported violent crime victimization rate among those

⁹ These data are based on reports of violent crime reported by 164 police departments in 1999. Gender, relationship to accused, types of weapons encountered and the level of physical injury sustained by victims are examined for selected violent offences – robbery, assault and “other” violent offences (including sexual assault, homicide, attempted murder and all other violent offences not mentioned above). These data are intended to provide an indication of the characteristics of victims of violent crime. However, the reader is cautioned that these data are not nationally representative.

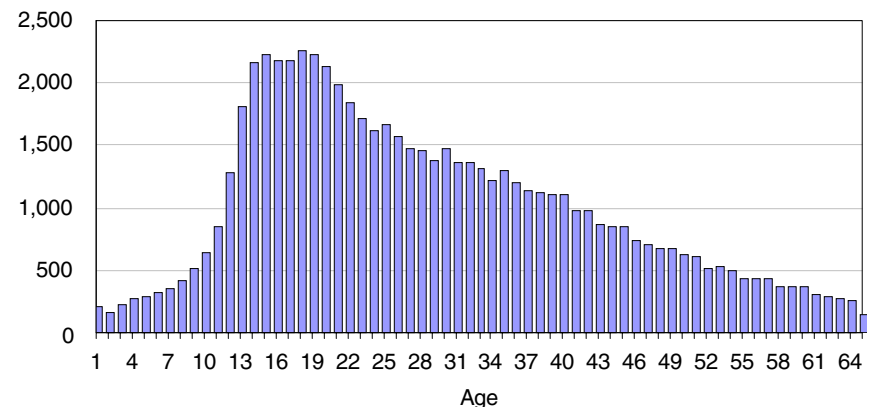
aged 65 and over in 1999 was 149 victimizations per 100,000 population. This was less than one-quarter of the rate among those 50 years of age (626 victimizations per 100,000 population), one-tenth of the rate among those 30 years of age (1,469), and about one-fifteenth of the rate among the most at-risk age group, those 18 years of age (2,252) (see Figure 2).

One-half of senior violent crime victims are victims of assault

Although the majority of all violent crime victims in 1999 were victims of assault, this was true to a lesser extent for senior victims. As a proportion of all violent crimes, 47% of senior victims were victims of assault compared to 60% of younger victims (see Figure 3). While seniors constituted 4% of

Figure 2
Police-reported victimization rates among seniors are lower than other age groups¹

Rate per 100,000 population



¹ Based on a non-representative sample of 164 police services, representing 46% of the national volume of crime.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999 Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

robbery victims, a larger proportion of elderly victims of violent crime was robbed: 24% of elderly victims were victims of robbery, compared to 14% of younger victims.

Risk of violent victimization higher for female seniors than male seniors

In 1999, the overall rate of police-reported violent victimization among seniors was higher for females (188 per 100,000 population) than for males (126 per 100,000 population) (see Table 3). For all violent offence types excluding offences causing death, women aged 65 and over experienced higher rates of victimization than their male counterparts. This pattern however, differed for men and women under 65, who experienced varying rates of victimization by violent crime type. For instance, male victims under 65 had higher rates of assault, robbery and offences causing death than their female counterparts.

Senior victims less likely to know their perpetrator than younger victims

While senior victims were much less likely than younger victims to know the accused as a spouse or ex-spouse (8% versus 18%), they were more likely to be victimized by strangers (39% versus 31%) and by other immediate family members (e.g., child, sibling) (17% versus 8%) (see Figure 4).

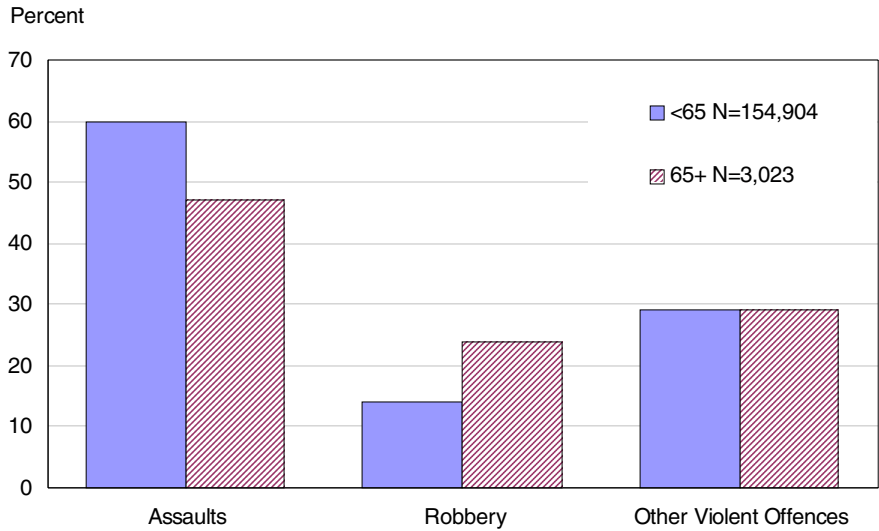
In cases of assault, both senior and younger victims knew the accused the majority of the time. For robberies, however, the accused was a stranger to 93% of senior victims and 89% of younger victims.

Injury levels among senior and younger victims do not substantially differ

The level of injury refers to the extent of the victim's physical injury at the time of the incident or determined later through police investigation. Overall, senior victims did not substantially differ from younger victims in the level of injury they sustained. In 1999,

Figure 3

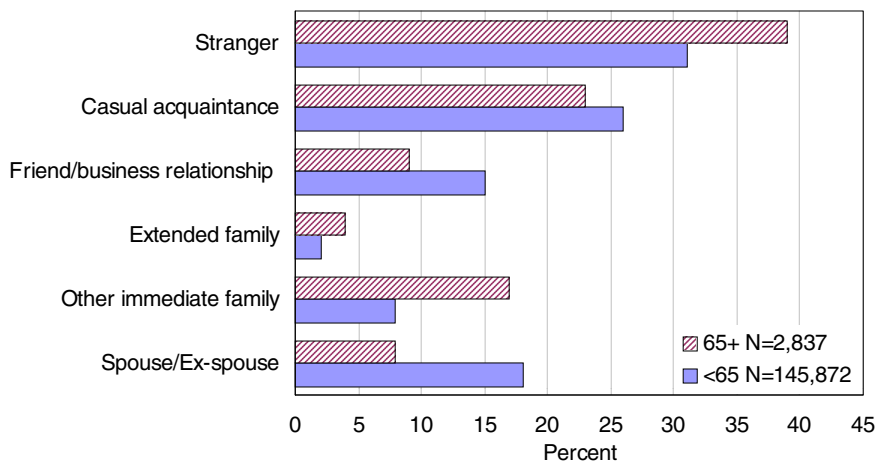
Larger proportion of elderly victims of robbery



Source: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999 Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Figure 4

Senior victims less likely to know their perpetrator than younger victims¹



¹ Excludes unknown age and relationship

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999 Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

40% of senior victims of violent offences experienced some form of injury. When an incident resulted in an injury, 85% of senior victims and 90% of younger victims reported sustaining only a minor injury.

For robbery, 46% of elderly victims reported receiving some form of physical injury compared to 29% of younger victims. In the case of assault, senior victims experienced some type of injury slightly less often than younger victims did (55% versus 57%).

Seniors less likely to be homicide victims than younger age groups¹⁰

Seniors are generally less likely than younger people to be victims of homicides. In 1999, the homicide rate for seniors was 13 per million population aged 65 and over, compared with 23 among 15- to 24-year-olds, 26 among those aged 25 to 44, and 14 among those aged 45 to 64. From 1980 to 1999, the average annual rate of homicides against adults aged 65 and over was 15 per million.

Senior men more likely to be homicide victims than senior women

The rate of homicides against senior male victims has been consistently higher than the rate among senior female victims, ranging from 23% to 72% higher between 1980 and 1999. The 1999 rate for senior male victims was 18 per million as compared to 9 per million for female victims.

In 1999, in incidents where the accused was identified, senior males were most likely to be killed by an acquaintance (52%) followed by a son (14%), spouse (10%) and other family member (10%). Senior females were most likely to be killed by a spouse (36%), and equally likely to be killed by an acquaintance (21%) and a stranger (21%).

Fear levels are similar at all ages

While the 1999 General Social Survey measured incidents of victimization, it also examined fear and safety levels as well as perceptions of the justice system. Some research suggests that fear of crime increases with age. In 1999, the 65+ age group reported the lowest level of overall safety, with 87% stating that they felt somewhat or very satisfied with their personal safety from crime as compared to 93% for the youngest age group (see Table 4).

However, when respondents were asked about fear while engaging in certain activities, it was found that fear of crime was similar for all age groups. For example, among

seniors who walked alone in their area after dark, 10% felt somewhat or very unsafe, compared with 13% for 15- to 24-year-olds, 10% for 25- to 44-year-olds and 11% for 45- to 64-year olds.

When 1999 GSS respondents were asked if they would walk alone/walk alone more often at night if they felt safer from crime, 26% of people aged 65 or older indicated that they would. This was much lower than the figures for other age groups (36% for those aged 45 to 64, 41% for those aged 25 to 44, and 44% for those aged 15 to 24).

Seniors are satisfied with the police, less satisfied with courts, prison and parole systems

Overall, satisfaction with the police appears to increase with age¹¹. In 1999, for example, 7 in 10 Canadians over 65 years of age rated the police positively on enforcing the laws, compared with 63% of those aged 45 to 64, 57% for those aged 25 to 44 and 56% of those 15 to 24 years of age (see Table 5). This could be related to the fact that people aged 65 and over reported the lowest rate of personal victimization in 1999.

Seniors were not as satisfied with the criminal courts, the prison system and the parole system as they were with the police. For example, 36% of seniors felt that the courts were doing a good job of ensuring a fair trial for the accused, 18% felt that the prison system was doing a good job of supervising and controlling prisoners while in prison, and only 9% felt that the parole system was doing a good job at supervising offenders on parole. These proportions were lower than those aged under 65, however, seniors were more likely to report higher proportions of "don't know" responses than their younger counterparts.

Seniors represent a very small minority of offenders

Seniors are much less likely than younger age groups to be involved in criminal activity as offenders.

Overall, seniors accounted for less than 1% of all persons accused of a *Criminal Code* offence in 1999. They represented 1.3% of those accused of violent offences, 0.8% of those accused of property offences, and 0.7% of those accused of other *Criminal Code* offences (see Table 6).

Seniors are accused of crimes at a fraction of the rate among younger age groups. In 1999, those 65 years of age and over were accused of crimes at a rate of 171 accused per 100,000 population. This is 16% of the rate among 50-year-olds (1,090), 5% of the rate among 30-year-olds, and just 2% of the rate among those 18 years of age, the age cohort with the highest age-specific offending rate (9,298 accused per 100,000 population) (see Figure 5).

Overall, 40% of seniors accused of a *Criminal Code* offence in 1999 were accused of a violent crime, 42% were accused of a property offence, and 17% of another *Criminal Code* offence (e.g., offences against the administration of justice, disturbing the peace).

Senior women are less criminally active than senior men, accounting for 23% of seniors accused of a *Criminal Code* offence in 1999. Women accounted for 12% of seniors accused of a violent offence, 39% of those accused of a property offence, and 10% of those accused of other *Criminal Code* offences.

Forty-four percent of seniors accused of a violent offence in 1999 were accused of assault level 1 and 12% were accused of assault level II (assault causing bodily harm/assault with a weapon). A further 13% were accused of sexual assault and 3% with other sexual offences.

Seniors accounted for 4% of those accused of sexual assault in 1999, and 7% of those accused of other

¹⁰ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Homicide Survey, 1980-1999*.

¹¹ See Tufts (2000)

sexual offences (e.g., sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching). The relatively high incidence of sexual offences among seniors appears to be due in part to a growing willingness of adult victims to report incidents which allegedly occurred years earlier. Overall, 79% of seniors charged with a *Criminal Code* property offence in 1999 were accused of theft under \$5,000, while a further 8% were accused of fraud and 7% of mischief, respectively.

Seniors account for a very small minority of those appearing in court

As a result of few seniors being charged with a *Criminal Code* offence, they account for a very small minority of those who appear in adult criminal court – 1.3% in 1998-99. The 25-to-34 age group accounted for the highest percentage of cases heard in adult criminal courts (32%), followed closely by the 18-to-24 age group (30%) and the 35-to-44 age group (24%), while those 45 to 64 accounted for 13% of the cases heard in adult court¹².

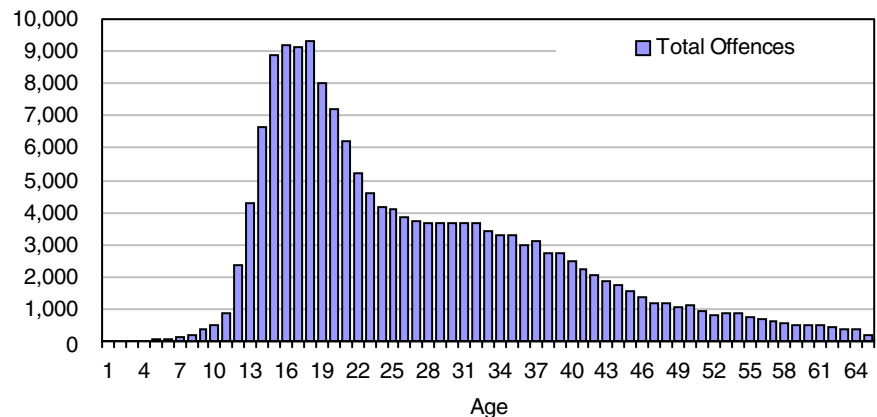
In 1998-99, the most frequently occurring offences among seniors were impaired driving (24% of cases) and theft (15% of cases). The category of common assault accounted for 11% of cases, while other *Criminal Code* offences (e.g., uttering threats and failure to comply with a probation order) accounted for 10% of cases.

In 1998-99, just over half (56%) of the cases against seniors resulted in a conviction. The most common most serious sentence imposed on seniors was a fine, imposed in 50% of all cases with a conviction. Probation was imposed as the most serious sentence in 27% of all cases, while a prison term was imposed in 14% of cases. A further 8% of cases received other sentences (e.g., absolute discharges, conditional discharges, and suspended sentences).

Compared to all cases with a conviction, seniors are more likely

Figure 5
Seniors accused of crimes at a lower rate than younger counterparts, 1999¹

Rate per 100,000 population



¹ Based on a non-representative sample of 164 police services representing 46% of the national volume of crime.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

to receive a fine (50% versus 33%), less likely to receive a prison term (14% versus 35%), and equally likely to receive a term of probation (27%).

Seniors a very small minority of those in prison

Data from a 1996 One-Day Snapshot of inmates in Canadian correctional facilities¹³ suggest that the number of seniors among those in prison are few. As of October 1996, people 65 years of age and over accounted for 1.4% of those in provincial and territorial custody, and .6% of those in federal custody.

The majority of older offenders in federal institutions were incarcerated for sexual assault (57%) and homicide/manslaughter (20%). In provincial and territorial institutions, most seniors were incarcerated for sexual assault (36%), property (9.5%), and other criminal code offences (13%).

¹² This analysis excludes cases against companies and cases where the age of the accused is unknown.

¹³ It should be noted that these data are based on inmates who were in a facility on one particular day. As such, generalizations should be made with caution.

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Table 1

Selected characteristics of seniors, by age, Canada

	People aged			
	65-74	75-84	85 and over	Total 65 and over
Total senior population, 2000 (000s)	2,135.2	1,298.8	416.0	3,849.9
As % of the total population, 2000	6.9	4.2	1.4	12.5
Women as % of the total senior population, 2000	53.1	60.1	69.6	57.3
% living in institutions, 1996	2.1	8.9	33.8	7.3
Percentage living with spouse, 1996				
Men	79.7	73.1	55.8	76.5
Women	54.9	31.0	11.0	43.5
Total	66.3	48.0	26.0	57.8
Percentage living with extended family, 1996¹				
Men	2.7	4.6	10.3	3.7
Women	7.6	12.4	21.9	10.3
Total	5.4	9.3	18.0	7.4
Percentage living alone, 1996				
Men	13.8	18.6	28.6	16.0
Women	29.8	49.2	57.8	38.4
Total	22.4	36.9	48.0	28.7
Percentage with disabilities, 1998-1999	21.6	28.1	35.2	24.9
% with less than grade 9, 1996	34.4	39.3	47.8	36.8
Average income, 1998				
Men	28,307	25,119	21,128	26,833
Women	17,149	16,904	15,280	16,898
Total	22,271	20,251	17,446	21,219
% with low income, 1998²				
In families	7.7	6.8	13.3	7.8
Unattached individuals				
Men	39.6	30.6	..	35.1
Women	42.6	49.4	61.7	47.9
Total	41.7	44.7	53.2	44.4
% of income from government transfers, 1998				
Men	42.2	48.2	49.2	44.3
Women	57.2	61.7	67.3	59.5
Total	48.5	54.8	59.2	51.2

¹ Refers to people living with members of their extended family.² Based on Statistics Canada's 1992 Low-income Cut-offs.

.. Figures not available

Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 75-202-RPE; Census of Canada; Income Statistics Division; and Demography Division.

Table 2

Selected characteristics of seniors, by province

	Canada	Nfld.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Qc.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
Total senior population, 2000 (000s)	3,849.9	62.8	18.2	124.1	97.6	944.4	1,466.7	155.1	148.1	301.2	527.6
As % of the total population, 2000	12.5	11.6	13.1	13.2	12.9	12.8	12.6	13.5	14.4	10.1	13.0
Women as % of the total senior population, 2000	57.3	55.7	57.6	58.2	57.8	58.8	57.1	57.5	56.5	55.7	55.8
% living in institutions, 1996	7.3	6.7	8.4	6.0	6.7	9.7	6.4	6.6	7.2	7.8	5.4
Percentage living with spouse, 1996											
Men	78.3	79.4	77.0	75.8	76.8	77.0	80.0	76.4	75.9	78.6	78.0
Women	49.4	54.2	48.1	47.0	48.9	48.1	50.1	46.8	49.3	50.7	50.4
Total	61.9	65.4	60.2	59.1	61.0	60.3	63.0	59.3	61.2	63.2	62.8
Percentage living with extended family, 1996¹											
Men	3.7	6.8	4.9	5.2	4.7	3.9	3.7	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.0
Women	10.3	15.9	11.1	11.9	11.4	10.2	11.4	7.0	4.6	9.0	9.7
Total	7.4	11.8	8.4	9.1	8.5	7.6	8.0	5.3	3.8	6.3	6.7
Percentage living alone, 1996											
Men	16.0	12.0	15.8	16.7	16.1	16.4	14.6	19.3	19.4	16.4	16.9
Women	38.4	28.5	38.2	38.6	37.2	39.4	37.0	45.0	44.8	38.6	38.0
Total	28.7	21.1	28.8	29.4	28.1	29.7	27.3	34.1	33.5	28.6	28.6
Life expectancy at age 65, 1997 (years)											
Men	16.2	14.8	16.3	15.4	16.0	15.5	16.3	16.5	16.9	16.9	17.1
Women	20.0	18.3	21.4	19.3	19.8	19.8	20.0	20.0	20.9	20.3	20.6
Total	18.3	16.6	18.9	17.5	18.0	17.8	18.3	18.4	18.9	18.7	19.0
Percentage with disabilities, 1998-1999	24.9	18.7	29.6	35.8	26.6	20.8	26.8	27.4	23.4	25.9	23.5
% with less than grade 9, 1996	36.8	53.1	34.7	28.3	47.4	52.6	31.9	37.4	40.8	29.3	23.7
Average income, 1998											
Men	26,833	18,755	..	26,315	28,540	24,311	29,216	24,632	24,896	27,062	26,634
Women	16,898	11,919	..	16,466	15,123	14,387	18,073	16,858	16,934	17,572	19,011
Total	21,219	15,014	19,314	20,602	20,861	18,553	22,946	20,200	20,441	21,811	22,456
% with low income, 1998²											
In families	7.8	..	..	5.6	4.6	14.6	4.7	10.5	4.9	5.4	8.1
Unattached individuals											
Men	35.1	..	..	..	..	44.3	32.3	..	30.1	28.3	36.5
Women	47.9	66.5	38.0	50.4	49.4	63.0	38.4	51.6	41.0	46.2	42.8
Total	44.4	56.6	40.1	40.6	42.6	58.0	36.8	48.2	37.4	40.7	40.9
% of income from government transfers, 1998											
Men	44.3	65.3	..	46.8	41.4	47.0	41.7	48.9	46.1	46.8	42.7
Women	59.5	83.2	..	60.5	67.0	66.3	57.2	62.6	59.0	60.5	51.6
Total	51.2	73.1	55.8	53.2	52.0	55.7	48.6	55.4	52.1	52.9	46.8

¹ Refers to people living with members of their extended family.² Based on Statistics Canada's 1992 Low-income Cut-offs.

.. Figures not available

Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 75-202-RPE; Census of Canada; Income Statistics Division; and Demography Division.

Table 3

Rates of violent victimization for seniors and non-seniors, 1999

Violation	Rate per 100,000 population						
	Under 65			65+			
	Female	Males	Total	Female	Male	Total	
Causing Death	3	7	5	2	3	2	
Sexual Assault	123	22	73	7	1	3	
Assault	590	661	626	77	65	70	
Kidnapping/Abduction	16	9	12	3	2	2	
Robbery	88	142	115	54	24	36	
Other Violent	236	194	215	38	33	35	
Total	1,056	1,036	1,046	181	126	149	

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Revised Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Table 4

Feelings of safety from crime by age group¹, 1999

	% of population			
	15-24	25-44	45-64	65+
While waiting for/using public transportation alone after dark, how do you feel about your safety from crime?				
Not at all worried	55	52	51	60
Somewhat worried	39	40	38	30
Very worried	5	7	10	7 [†]
Don't know/Not stated	--	--	1 [†]	--
How safe do you feel from crime when walking alone in your area after dark?				
Very safe	40	43	46	44
Reasonably safe	47	46	43	45
Somewhat or very unsafe	13	10	11	10
Don't know/Not stated	--	--	--	1 [†]
While alone in your home in the evening or at night, how do you feel about your safety from crime?				
Not at all worried	81	78	80	82
Somewhat worried	18	20	17	15
Very worried	1	2	2	3
Don't know/Not stated	--	--	--	--
In general, how do you feel about your safety from crime?				
Very satisfied	49	44	43	41
Somewhat satisfied	45	47	47	46
Somewhat dissatisfied	3	5	4	3
Very dissatisfied	1	2	2	2
Don't know/Not stated	2	3	3	8

¹ Includes only respondents who engaged in these activities.

-- Amount too small to be expressed.

Note: [†] Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3%.

Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 5

Perceptions of the justice system among the senior population aged 65+, 1999

	Senior population 65+									
	Total	Good job	Average job	Poor job	Don't know/ Not stated	Total	Good job	Average job	Poor job	Don't know/ Not stated
	(000s)					%				
What kind of job are your local police doing at ...										
Being approachable?	3,558	2,486	326	80	665	100	70	9	2	19
Ensuring the safety of citizens?	3,558	2,458	597	84	419	100	69	17	2	12
Enforcing the laws?	3,558	2,474	647	119	317	100	70	18	3	9
Supplying information on reducing crime?	3,558	2,154	579	163	661	100	61	16	5	19
Responding promptly to calls?	3,558	1,975	388	148	1,046	100	56	11	4	29
What kind of job are criminal courts doing at ...										
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused?	3,558	1,272	875	414	997	100	36	25	12	28
Determining the guilt of the accused?	3,558	598	1,055	719	1,186	100	17	30	20	33
Helping the victim?	3,558	494	756	1,276	1,032	100	14	21	36	29
Providing justice quickly?	3,558	430	854	1,476	797	100	12	24	41	22
What kind of job is the prison system doing at ...										
Supervising/controlling prisoners?	3,558	648	728	834	1,348	100	18	20	23	38
Helping prisoners become law-abiding?	3,558	483	825	724	1,526	100	14	23	20	43
What kind of job is the parole system doing at ...										
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend?	3,558	320	777	1,310	1,151	100	9	22	37	32
Supervising offenders on parole?	3,558	306	641	1,156	1,455	100	9	18	32	41

Note: Figures may not add to total due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 6

Persons accused of federal statute offences by age group, 1999

	Age		Total
	<65	65+	
Violent Offences			
homicide/attempted murder	99.5	0.5	610
sexual assaults	96.3	3.7	4,657
other sexual offences	93.5	6.5	708
assaults	98.9	1.1	70,175
kidnapping/abduction	99.3	0.7	1,393
robbery	100	0	8,436
other violent offences	98.4	1.6	20,774
Violent crime total	98.7	1.3	106,723
Property Offences			
arson	99.2	0.8	1,342
break and enter	99.1	0.1	29,399
theft over \$5,000	99.9	0.1	8,182
theft under \$5,000	98.5	1.5	73,984
have stolen goods	99.7	0.3	16,530
fraud	99.6	0.4	25,585
mischief	99.5	0.5	19,389
Property crime total	99.2	0.8	174,411
Other Criminal Code			
prostitution	98.7	1.3	4,524
other criminal code	99.3	0.7	28,166
bail violations	99.5	0.5	51,602
Other Criminal Code total	99.3	0.7	84,292
Total Criminal Code	99.1	0.9	100
Other Federal Statutes			
drug offences	99.8	0.2	31,229
other	99.3	0.7	3,775
Total All Offences	99.1	0.9	400,430

Note: Data are a non-representative sample of 164 police departments, representing 46% of the national volume of crime.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.