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Matter of Fact

Celebrating 20 years

No. 1

Canada's General Social Survey has been gathering information for 20 years on key social issues in Canadian society.

The *Matter of Fact* series highlights important insights into changes in Canadian society over the past two decades, following the theme, "Without the General Social Survey, we would still be wondering . . ."

By Robyn Brazeau and Jodi-Anne Brzozowski

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Violent victimization in Canada

Introduction¹

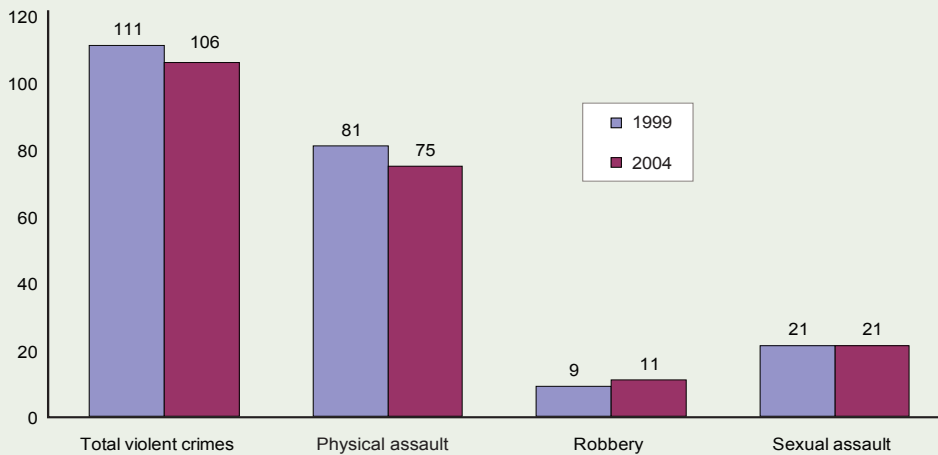
In 2004, as part of its General Social Survey program, Statistics Canada conducted a survey on victimization. This survey collected information on the extent and nature of self-reported criminal victimization, the impact and consequences of crime to the victim, reporting to the police and the use of informal and formal services. Similar surveys on victimization were conducted in 1999, 1993 and 1988^{2,3}. For the 2004 survey, interviews were conducted by telephone with about 24,000 people, aged 15 years and older living in the 10 provinces⁴.

Violent victimization rates remain stable

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), overall rates of violent victimization, including sexual assault, robbery and physical assault, remained stable between 1999 and 2004. For every 1,000 Canadians aged 15 years and over, there were 106 incidents of violent victimization in 2004, similar to the rate recorded in 1999 (111 incidents).

Chart 1 Rates of violent victimization remain unchanged

Rate per 1,000 population
15 years and over



Note: Includes incidents of spousal sexual and physical assault.

The differences between 1999 and 2004 figures are not statistically significant.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999 and 2004.

The survey also found that between the two survey periods, there was no significant change in rates for the individual violent offences.

Certain groups experience higher rates of violent victimization

A number of factors were found to be related to higher rates of violent victimization in both 1999 and 2004. For example, being young, being single, going to school, being unemployed, earning a low income, living in an urban area and engaging in 30 or more evening activities a month tended to contribute to a person's increased risk of being the target of a violent crime.

Similar to what was found in 1999, women and men continued to experience similar overall rates of violent victimization in 2004.

- Adapted from: Gannon, M. and Mihorean, K. 2005 "Criminal victimization in Canada, 2005" Juristat. Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE, Vol. 25, no. 7. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- The next victimization survey will be conducted in 2009.
- Due to methodological and conceptual changes between the victimization survey periods, comparisons of violent victimization can only be made between the two similar victimization cycles of the GSS. For additional information, see Gannon and Mihorean, 2005.
- Data collected in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Nunavut as part of a pilot test are not included in this analysis.

Men’s rates of physical assault and robbery were higher than women’s rates, while women’s rates of sexual assault were higher than men’s for both survey periods.

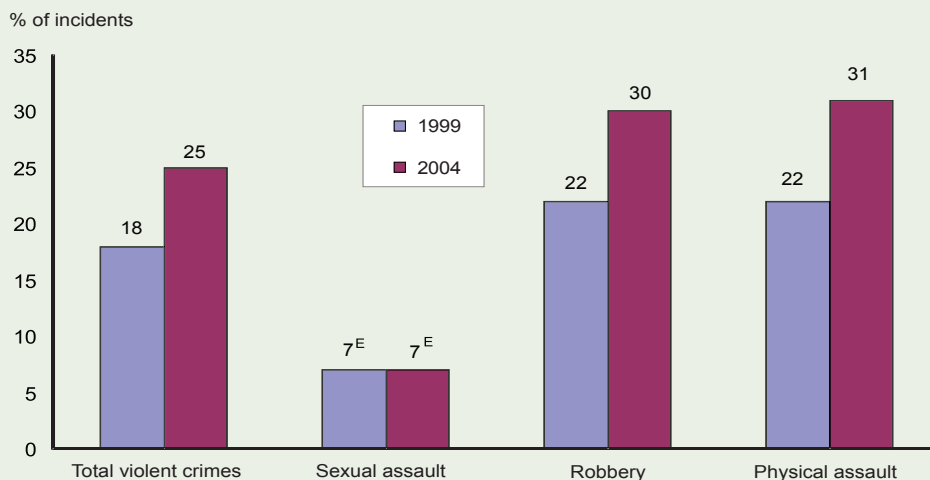
Rates of victimization were higher among various sub-groups. For example, according to GSS data from both survey periods, Aboriginal people experienced rates of violent victimization that were three times higher than the non-Aboriginal population.

In 2004, for the first time, the GSS asked Canadians to identify their sexual orientation. Compared to heterosexuals, the odds of experiencing a violent victimization were nearly 2 times greater for gays and lesbians and 4.5 times greater for bisexuals. This remained true even when controlling for other factors such as age, sex, and income.

Most violent incidents do not involve a weapon

When examining the rates of violent victimization, it is also important to assess the nature and characteristics of these offences.

Chart 2 More violent incidents resulting in injury in 2004



In 2004, nearly 7 in 10 violent incidents did not involve a weapon. Among different types of violent offences, robberies were most likely to involve the use or presence of a weapon (45%). In the case of sexual assaults, the vast majority (91%) did not involve a weapon.

There was no significant change in the overall presence or use of a weapon in violent incidents between the two survey periods, however, a higher percentage of violent incidents resulted in a physical injury to the victim. In 2004, in one-quarter of violent incidents, the victim was injured, compared to 18% of incidents in 1999.

^E use with caution

Note: Excludes incidents of spousal sexual and physical assault.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004

Police reporting rates remain stable

Rates of reporting violent incidents to the police remained stable between 1999 and 2004. In 1999, 31% of violent incidents were reported to the police, compared with 33% of incidents in 2004. This difference was not statistically significant.

The seriousness of the offence, whether the victim was injured, whether a weapon was present and whether the victim had to take time off from their main activity were factors that tended to increase rates of reporting a violent incident to the police. For example, in 2004, rates of reporting to the police were 1.5 times higher when the victim was injured (47% versus 28%), and more than double for incidents involving weapons compared to those where no weapon was involved (53% versus 25%).

Similar to results from the 1999 survey, the 2004 survey found that violent incidents were most likely to occur in a commercial place or public institution (38%), followed by a street or other public place (26%), the victim’s home (19%) or other private residence (10%).

Violent incidents often linked to the offender's alcohol or drug use

According to the 2004 GSS, in just over half (52%) of violent incidents, the victim believed that the incident was related to the perpetrator's alcohol or drug use. This represented an increase from 43% of violent incidents reported to the 1999 GSS. Alcohol or drug use by the perpetrator was similar for all three violent offence types, ranging from 48% of sexual assault incidents to 55% of physical assaults.

Victims of violent incidents most likely to turn to friends or neighbours for support

The 2004 GSS found that victims sought assistance from a formal help agency such as a counsellor, a community or family centre, victim services and crisis centres or help lines in 9% of violent victimizations.

Most victims turned to informal supports to help them cope with their victimization experience (90%). Victims were most likely to turn to a friend or neighbour (74%) or a family member (60%). These findings were similar to those of the 1999 survey.

References:

Beauchamp, D. 2008. "Sexual Orientation and Victimization, 2004" *Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series*. 85F0033M — No. 016. Ottawa.

Besserer, S. and Trainor C. 2000. "Criminal victimization in Canada, 1999." *Juristat*. Vol. 20, no. 10, Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE. Ottawa.

Gannon, M. and Mihorean, K. 2005. "Criminal victimization in Canada, 2004." *Juristat*. Vol. 25, no. 7. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE. Ottawa.

How to obtain more information

Specific inquiries about this product and related statistics or services should be directed to: Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0T6 by telephone: 613-951-5979) or by e-mail at sasd-dssea@statcan.ca.

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