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Juristat

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

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WEAPONS AND VIOLENT CRIME

by Tracey Leesti

Highlights

- In 1995, the majority of violent crime victims did not encounter a weapon (72%). Only 2% of violent crime victims encountered firearms.
- The use of knives or blunt objects during an assault was more likely to result in injury to the victim than when a firearm was present. In 1995, almost one-third (31%) of assault victims who encountered an assailant armed with a knife sustained major injuries, compared to 16% who encountered one armed with a firearm. This may be explained by the notion of compliance: when victims are faced with firearms they tend to be more compliant, resulting in fewer injuries.
- Firearm homicides represent only a small proportion of all annual firearm deaths in Canada. In 1995, there were approximately 1,100 deaths caused by firearms, of which 13% were homicides. Suicides, accounted for 81% of all firearm deaths, while accidents and undetermined firearm deaths comprised the remaining 6%.
- Between 1991 and 1995, the homicide rate decreased (26%). While each year approximately one-third of homicides involve a firearm, the type of firearms being used has changed. On average, between 1975 and 1990, 61% of firearm homicides involved shotguns and rifles, while 29% involved handguns. Since 1991, however, the use of handguns increased, accounting for one-half of all firearm homicides.
- The use of handguns in homicides is more common in large urban areas. Since 1991, handguns were responsible for three-quarters of all firearm homicides in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver - Canada's largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA). Conversely, in smaller non-CMA areas with a population under 100,000, rifles and shotguns were most prevalent in firearm homicides (62%).



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INTRODUCTION

The use of weapons in crimes is a concern for Canadians. Generally speaking, a weapon is anything that is used, or intended for use in causing or threatening death or injury, whether designed for such purposes or not. This *Juristat* examines the extent to which weapons, such as guns, knives and blunt objects, are used in violent crimes. In order to understand the prevalence of violent crime in general, the first section provides a brief explanation of the trends over time in Canada, while the second section of this *Juristat* provides a snapshot of the use of weapons in violent crime in 1995. The final section more specifically examines the national trends in weapon use in the crimes of homicide and robbery since 1975, with a particular focus upon the use of firearms.

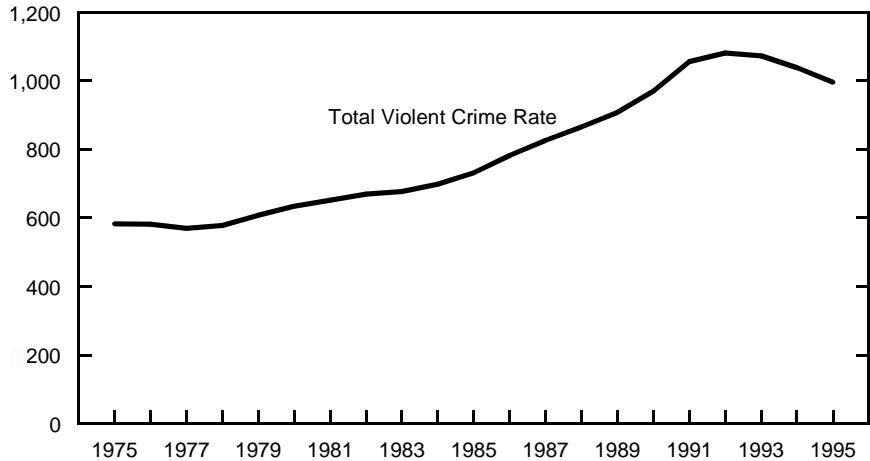
I. Violent crime decreasing

The violent crime category accounted for approximately one-tenth of all Criminal Code offences (11%) in 1995. And while many Canadians believe that violent crime is presently on the rise, police-reported data indicate otherwise. In fact, after years of increase, the level of violent crime has actually decreased since 1992 (Figure 1).

Figure 1



Rate per 100,000 population



Source: *Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*

The violent crime rate increased substantially between 1975 and 1992, almost doubling from 583 to 1,077 violent crimes per 100,000 population. This was primarily due to large increases in level 1 assaults, in which there was no harm or a relatively minor injury suffered by the victim. Various other factors may have also contributed to the increase in rates over the years, including: more and better statistical reporting systems; reduced societal tolerance, hence a greater willingness to report certain types of crime incidents, such as spousal assault cases, and; definitional changes in legislation, such as Bill C-127 which replaced rape with the offence of sexual assault, and encouraged more victims to report sexual attacks to the police by downplaying the sexual nature of the offence.

Since peaking in 1992, the overall violent crime rate has decreased by 8%, to 995 violent crimes per 100,000 population in 1995. Between 1994 and 1995, every type of violent crime decreased, with the exception of robbery, which was up slightly (3%) from the previous year.

What is violent crime?

In this report, the violent crime categories include:

Homicide - first and second degree murder, manslaughter and infanticide. Deaths caused by criminal negligence, suicide, accident or justifiable homicide are not included;

Attempted murder - attempted murder and conspiracy to commit murder;

Assault - Level 1 - common assault (level 1);

Other assaults - aggravated assault (level 3), assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2), unlawfully causing bodily harm, discharge firearm with intent, assault against peace officer, criminal negligence causing bodily harm and other assaults;

Sexual assault - Level 1 - includes, for example, unwanted touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling.

Other sexual assaults - aggravated sexual assault (level 3) and sexual assault with a weapon or threats to a third party (level 2);

Robbery - theft offences where one uses violence or threats of violence to overcome resistance, assaults any person with intent to steal from him/her, or steals while armed with an offensive weapon or imitation thereof;

“Other” violent offences - all other violent offences not stated above, such as criminal negligence causing death, kidnapping, abduction, extortion and non-assault sexual offences.

What is a weapon?

The definition of a weapon can be quite expansive, ranging from guns and knives, to the use of fire or motor vehicles. In this *Juristat*, weapons categories include:

Firearms - prohibited weapons, such as fully automatic firearms, sawed-off rifles, restricted weapons, such as handguns, non-restricted firearms, such as hunting rifles and shotguns, and “other” firearms, such as, starters pistols and BB guns;

Knives and other sharp objects - knives (e.g., kitchen knives, pocket knives, switchblades) and any object other than a knife whose action would cut or pierce flesh (e.g., hatchet, razor blade, bow and arrow, sword, crossbow);

Blunt objects - any tool or article that is used to cause physical injury or death by hitting or bludgeoning (e.g., baseball bat, brick);

“Other” weapons - any other object used as a weapon, such as, poison, fire, motor vehicle, and unknown types of weapons. Caution must be taken when examining the “other” weapons category for Revised UCR data. The figures are somewhat inflated, as the Toronto police include a number of methods in this category that would normally be coded as physical force.

No weapon/physical force - situations where no weapon was involved or where there may have been injury sustained by the victim, yet it was not as a result of the weapon present. This category also includes a large majority of cases where physical force was used against the victim (e.g., beating with fists, kicking, choking, etc.).

II. Characteristics of Weapons Used in Violent Crimes in 1995

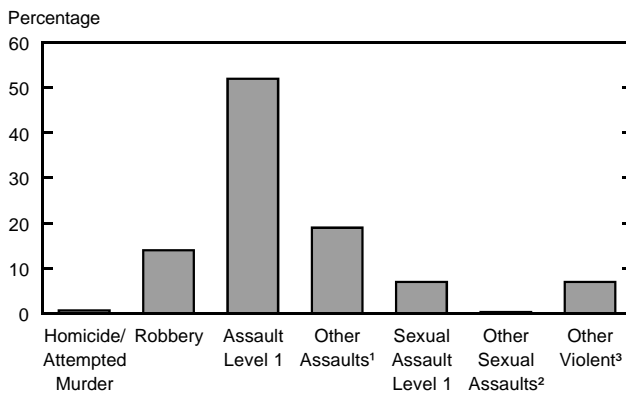
Data from the Revised Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey provide details of violent crimes against victims, including the use of weapons and the level of injury sustained by the victim. As of 1995, the Revised UCR data represented approximately 44% of violent incidents reported to the police in Canada and, as a result, are not representative of Canada, or of any particular region within Canada¹. These data do, however, provide useful information on the characteristics of offences involving weapons in 1995.

The majority of violent crime victims did not encounter weapons

In 1995, for the 120,100 violent incidents recorded in the Revised UCR Survey, there was a total of 126,668 victims. The type of weapon victims encountered varied depending on the nature of the violent incident. For example, homicide and attempted murder victims were most likely to have weapons used against them, however, they accounted for less than 1% of all violent crime victims. In fact, the majority of violent crime victims did not encounter a weapon. As indicated in Figure 2, more people were victims of common assaults, level 1, than of any other type of violent crime (52%). In addition, while sexual assaults accounted for 7% of all violent crimes, almost all of these were level 1 sexual assaults (96%). In both of these cases, weapons were not typically used (Table 1), and there was no physical harm or relatively minor injury suffered by the victim² (Table 2).

Figure 2

Victims of Violent Crime by Violent Crime Category, 1995



¹ Includes aggravated assault, assault with a weapon, assault against police/peace officer, unlawfully causing bodily harm, etc.
² Includes aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon.
³ Includes criminal negligence causing death, kidnapping, abduction, etc.
 Source: Revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

¹ In 1995, the Revised UCR had a coverage which included reporting from most major metropolitan areas. As a result, the data indicate a urban bias. This should be noted when examining revised UCR weapons data.
² This does not give any indication of the emotional injury suffered by victims, which is an important aspect of violent crime.

Of the remaining violent offences, the most common were "other" types of assaults, such as aggravated assault or assault causing bodily harm (19%). In these incidents, almost one-third of victims had a knife or blunt object used against them (31%), while a very small proportion encountered an assailant armed with a firearm (2%) (Table 1). Robberies were more likely than assaults to involve a firearm, however, the use of knives and blunt objects was much less prevalent (Table 1).

The same proportion of males and females were victims of violent crimes (50%). Two-thirds of females and three-quarters of males encountered assaults as the most serious violation. A slightly higher proportion of males were victims of robberies (17% versus 11%), while more females were victims of sexual assault (12% versus 2%). Overall, while males and females were both likely to encounter the same types of weapons during a violent incident, slightly more males encountered assailants armed with firearms, knives and blunt objects (14% and 6% respectively), while a slightly higher proportion of females faced unarmed assailants (74% versus 69%).

More injuries were caused by the use of knives or blunt objects than firearms

The use of a knife or blunt object during a *non-lethal* violent incident was more likely to result in injury to the victim than when the perpetrator was armed with a gun. For example, nearly one-third (31%) of "other" assault victims who had a knife used against them sustained major injuries, compared to 16% who encountered a firearm. In fact, victims who had physical force used against them were more likely to be injured than those who encountered assailants armed with firearms (Table 2). This may be explained by the notion of compliance: when victims are faced with firearms they tend to be more compliant, resulting in fewer injuries (Gabor, 1994). It is also important to note however, as research has shown, firearms tend to be the most lethal of weapons. For example, a slightly higher proportion of all violent crime victims died as a result of an incident involving a firearm (4%) compared to those involving knives (1%) or blunt objects (less than 1%) (Table 2).

Fewer robbery victims sustained injuries than victims of "other" assaults. This is not unexpected though, given the nature of

robberies; to gain compliance from the victim, avoid confrontations and leave with the valuables as quickly as possible (Gabor, 1994). Similar to assaults, however, the use of a knife or blunt object during a robbery increased the likelihood of injury to the victim. For example, a much larger proportion of robbery victims who encountered an assailant armed with either a blunt object (76%) or a knife (42%) sustained some form of physical injury compared to those who faced an assailant armed with a gun (24%) or no weapons at all (21%).

Type of weapons similar whether adults or youths accused³

The types of weapons present during violent incidents were similar whether adults or youths were accused. For example, both adults and youths accused of violent crimes were most likely to be involved in incidents where physical force or no weapons were present (65% each). In cases where a weapon was identified, 15% of adults and 17% of youths were involved in incidents where knives or blunt instruments were present. Firearms were the weapon least likely to be present in incidents where either adults or youths were accused (4% and 5%, respectively)⁴.

III. Trends in Weapons Use in Homicides and Robberies

Homicides generally account for a very small proportion of all violent crime; less than 1% in 1995. Though the number of homicides may be low relative to other types of violent crimes, the previous section demonstrated that it is this crime that most frequently involves the use of weapons⁵. Drawing on data from the Homicide Survey and the aggregate Uniform Crime

³ In cases of multiple accused it is not possible to ascertain the exact weapon used by each accused. For this reason, examination of accused focuses upon the characteristics of all the accused involved in the incident and the presence of weapons.

⁴ The remaining adults and youths accused of a violent crime were involved in incidents where either threats or other weapons were present.

⁵ Homicide is classified as first degree murder, second degree murder, manslaughter or infanticide. Homicide characteristics reported on the Homicide Survey may not match those reported to the Revised UCR survey. For detailed analysis of homicides in Canada, please refer to "Homicide in Canada-1995" Juristat, Vol. 16 no. 11, 1996.

Table 1

Weapon Used	Homicide/ Attempted murder	Robbery	Assault		Sexual Assault		Other Violent	Total
			Level 1	Other	Level 1	Other		
Total Number	860	17,923	65,637	24,678	8,743	393	8,434	126,668
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Firearm	29	7	-	2	-	3	2	2
Knife or sharp object	30	7	-	16	-	22	2	5
Blunt object	5	3	-	15	-	3	1	3
No weapon/physical force	20	69	80	51	79	59	72	72
Other weapons ¹	8	6	16	11	19	9	14	14
Unknown	8	8	4	5	2	4	10	5

¹ Caution must be taken when examining the "other" weapons category. The figures are somewhat inflated, as the Toronto police include a number of methods in this category that would normally be coded as physical force.

- nil or zero.

Source: Revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 1995.

Table 2

Level of Injury Sustained by Violent Crime Victims by Type of Weapon Used, 1995

Violent Offence by Type of Weapon	Level of Physical Injury					
	Total	Unknown	None	Minor	Major	Fatal
Total Violent						
Firearm	100%	8	54	22	12	4
Knife or sharp object	100%	4	31	36	28	1
Blunt object	100%	4	13	56	27	--
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	5	50	41	3	--
Attempted Murder						
Firearm	100%	4	28	14	55	-
Knife or sharp object	100%	2	5	14	78	-
Blunt object	100%	-	-	21	79	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	2	62	15	21	-
Robbery						
Firearm	100%	11	66	18	6	-
Knife or sharp object	100%	9	50	28	14	-
Blunt object	100%	7	17	49	27	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	3	76	19	2	-
Level 1 Assaults						
Firearm	100%	-	-	-	-	-
Knife or sharp object	100%	-	-	-	-	-
Blunt object	100%	-	-	-	-	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	6	40	54	-	-
Other Assaults						
Firearm	100%	6	41	38	16	-
Knife or sharp object	100%	3	26	40	31	-
Blunt object	100%	4	12	57	27	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	3	36	42	18	-
Level 1 Sexual Assaults						
Firearm	100%	-	-	-	-	-
Knife or sharp object	100%	-	-	-	-	-
Blunt object	100%	-	-	-	-	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	11	75	13	-	-
Other Sexual Assaults						
Firearm	100%	17	33	33	17	-
Knife or sharp object	100%	11	35	43	10	-
Blunt object	100%	-	8	62	31	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	11	31	39	18	-
Other Violent						
Firearm	100%	9	66	15	8	2
Knife or sharp object	100%	8	49	30	12	1
Blunt object	100%	13	33	40	15	-
No Weapon/Physical Force	100%	4	89	6	1	--

-- amount too small to be expressed.
 - nil or zero.

Source: Revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 1995

Reporting Survey, this final section of the *Juristat* provides a more detailed examination of the national trends in weapons use in the crimes of homicide and robbery. In recent years, high profile firearm incidents have caused the Canadian public much concern, and for this reason, the final section will have a particular focus on the use of firearms.

Only a small proportion of firearm deaths were homicides

Much of the media and public interest surrounding firearms has been directed towards the use of firearms in violent crimes, in particular, homicide. In 1995, Canada's rate of firearm homicide was 0.6 per 100,000 population. This is considerably lower than

some countries, such as the United States (5.8) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996), yet still higher than others, such as Britain (0.13) (United Nations Report, 1997).

Firearm homicides, however, represent only a small proportion of all annual firearm deaths in Canada. In 1995, there were approximately 1,100 deaths caused by firearms, of which only 13% were homicides. Suicides, on the other hand, accounted for 81% of all firearm deaths, while accidents and undetermined firearm deaths⁶ comprised the remaining 6%. (Causes of Death Survey, 1997).

⁶ Unable to determine if the death by firearm was purposely or accidentally inflicted.

Firearms, How Common Are They?

In 1991, the Angus Reid Group conducted a survey for the Department of Justice on firearm ownership in Canada. The survey was based on a representative, random sample of 10,000 households from across Canada. The results indicate that in 1990, at least one firearm was owned in approximately 23%, or 2.2 million Canadian households, with rifles and shotguns, by far, the most common type. Within private households, there were 3.1 million rifles and 2.3 million shotguns. Hunting was given as the main reason for owning rifles (68%) or shotguns (78%). Data

from the Firearms Registration and Administration Section of the RCMP indicate that there are approximately 1 million handguns in Canada. Target shooting (41%) and collecting (32%) were given as the main reason for owning handguns. Researchers, however, have pointed out the difficulties in measuring the number of firearms. For example, surveys of the number of households possessing a firearm may not capture the actual number of firearms in circulation in the country, and should therefore be used as a crude estimation (Gabor, 1994).

Canadian Firearms Legislation

In 1976, Parliament put forward proposals to introduce stricter gun control provisions. In 1977, Bill C-51 was passed, and over the following year its provisions were implemented, including: new firearms offences, changes to police search and seizure powers, increases in penalties for gun-related offences, mandatory and discretionary prohibitions from possessing firearms, and additions to the categories of prohibited and restricted weapons. Two final changes in this Bill came into effect in 1979: the introduction of the Firearm Acquisition Certificate (FAC), a screening procedure for those wishing to acquire a firearm; and, the Firearms and Ammunition Business Permit systems.

In 1989, government officials began working on legislation to make changes that would strengthen the enforcement of the gun control provisions in the *Criminal Code*. In 1991, Bill C-17 was

passed. This set of amendments extended those made in the late 1970s. The 1991 legislation served to control access to firearms (including, among other things, the enhancement of the FAC screening process, strengthening of prohibition order provisions and regulation of safe storage, handling, display and transportation of firearms), control the availability and accessibility of specific firearms and deter offenders from using firearms in crimes.

Most recently, in December 1995, Parliament passed Bill C-68 which created a new *Firearms Act* and amended the *Criminal Code*. As part of the new legislation, firearm owners will be required to become licensed and to register all their firearms over the next few years. In addition, the legislation has created new offences for gun smuggling and trafficking, as well as prohibiting a number of different types of handguns, and introduced new mandatory penalties for those who use firearms during the commission of a crime (Department of Justice Canada, 1996).

Firearm homicides gradually decreasing

National homicide statistics were first collected in 1961, at which time the homicide rate was 1.28 per 100,000 population. The homicide rate in Canada increased steadily from this point, reaching an all-time high in 1975, of 3.02 homicides per 100,000 population. At this time, shootings were the most frequent method of committing a homicide (42%), followed by beatings (23%) and stabbings (18%). In 1977, Bill C-51 was passed, introducing stricter gun control provisions.

As can be seen from Figure 3, despite an overall drop in the homicide rate from 3.02 per 100,000 population in 1975 to 2.37 in 1990, the late 1980's saw an upward trend in both the homicide and firearm homicide rates. Between 1991 and 1995, however, both rates decreased (26% for homicide and 39% for firearm homicide), and as a result, have reached their lowest levels since 1969.

Recent UCR data from the United States have indicated similar, but less distinct trends in the overall homicide rate, as well as in firearm homicide rates. For example, while the characteristics of homicide victims and the weapons used have remained relatively stable since 1992, the proportion of firearm homicides has decreased slightly (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997).

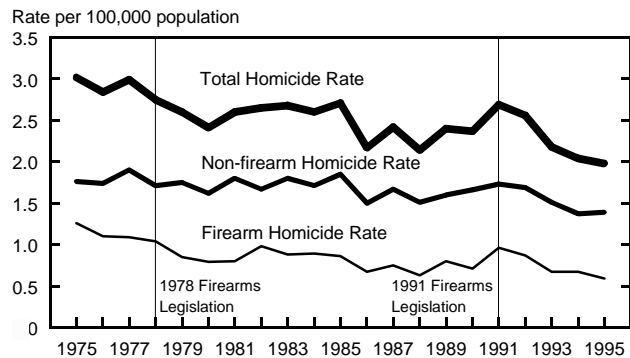
The use of handguns in homicides has increased

While the Canadian homicide rate has decreased slightly over the years, the proportion of firearm homicides to all homicides has remained fairly constant, as indicated in Table 3. Since 1979, firearms have been used in approximately one-third of all homicides each year.

What has changed over the years are the types of firearms used in homicides (Figure 4). Between 1975 and 1990, the rate of

Figure 3

Firearm and Non-Firearm Homicide Rates, Canada, 1975 to 1995



Source: *Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*

handgun use remained relatively stable, accounting for, on average, 29% of all firearm homicides. During this time, the use of rifles and shotguns was more common, accounting for 61% of all firearm homicides. In 1991, however, the number of handgun homicides almost doubled; from 69 in 1990 to 135 in 1991. Since 1991, handguns have been used in half of all firearm homicides, while the proportion of rifles and shotguns have dropped to 37%. Other firearms, such as sawed-off rifles and shotguns, fully automatic firearms and other firearm-like weapons comprised the remaining 14% of firearm homicides since 1991.

Table 3



Homicides by Cause of Death, 1985 to 1995

Cause of Death	1995		1994		Average 1985-1994	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Shooting	176	30	196	33	208	32
Stabbing	183	31	154	26	191	29
Beating	120	21	106	18	129	20
Strangulation	68	12	83	14	71	11
Fire (burns)	20	3	17	3	20	3
Other Weapons ¹	19	3	40	6	33	5
Total	586	100%	596	100%	652	100%

¹ Includes unknown weapons.
Source: Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

Handguns more common in homicides in large urban areas

Information about urban centres can be determined by looking at Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) data⁷. A CMA is a large urban centre with a population of 100,000 or more, including surrounding urban and rural areas that have a high degree of social and economic integration. On average, between 1991 and 1995, approximately one-third of Canada's population lived in the three largest CMA's - Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver - all over 1 million population. Between 1991 and 1995, Canada's homicide rate averaged 2.3 homicides per 100,000 population.

While Montreal and Vancouver had slightly higher than average homicide rates during these years (2.9 and 3.5, respectively), Toronto was consistently below average (2.0). Firearms were the weapon most frequently involved in homicides in these areas (35%), with handguns accounting for three-quarters of all firearm homicides (Table 4).

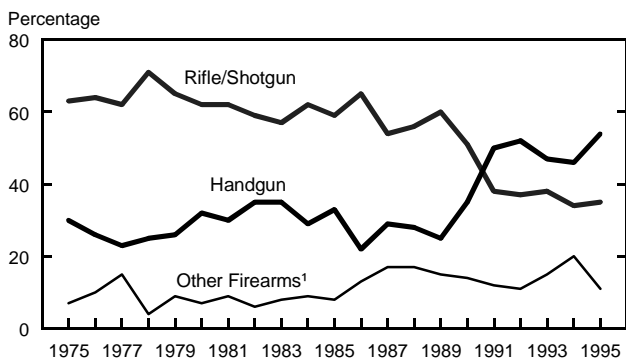
Between 1991 and 1995, a relatively large proportion of Canadians (39%) lived in non-CMAs, which are areas with a population of less than 100,000. With an average of 2.2 homicides per 100,000 population during this time, non-CMAs had a homicide rate comparable to the national average. Similar to the largest CMAs, firearms were the most common weapons used in the commission of a homicide (35%). While handguns were highly prevalent in firearm homicides in the largest CMAs, in non-CMAs, rifles or shotguns were the type of firearms most often used, accounting for almost two-thirds of firearm homicides (62%).

Use of firearms in spousal homicides declining

Spousal homicides include those involving people in registered marriages, common-law unions, as well as those separated or divorced from these unions. In 1995, almost one of every six solved homicide cases involved a victim killed by a spouse or ex-spouse. In 1995, as in previous years, three-quarters of spousal homicide victims were women. While these women were slightly more likely to be stabbed than shot in 1995, prior to this time, shooting was the most common cause of death (Table 5). In fact, between 1985 and 1995, the large majority of victims in spousal homicides involving a firearm were women (86%).

Figure 4

Firearm Homicides by Type of Firearm, Canada, 1975 to 1995



¹ Other firearms include sawed-off rifles/shotguns, fully automatic firearms (collected since 1991) and other firearm-like weapons.
Source: Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

The use of firearms in all spousal homicides has declined slightly, from 36% of victims between 1985 and 1994 to 28% by 1995. Patterns in the types of firearms used, however, have not changed. For example, between 1985 and 1995, by far the most common type of firearms used by both husbands and wives were rifles and shotguns (71%). A further 24% of spousal homicides involved handguns, while 4% involved sawed-off firearms and 1% involved other types of firearms.

Male homicide victims more likely to encounter firearms

While females were more commonly victims in cases of spousal homicides, when looking at homicide in general, consistently over the years, the majority of victims have been male. For example, in 1995, males comprised approximately two-thirds of homicide victims. Moreover, male and female homicide victims

⁷ Available from the Homicide Survey since 1991.

Table 4



Homicide by Type of Weapon and Census Metropolitan Area, 1991 to 1995

Census Metropolitan Area Size	Type of Weapon	Number homicides	Percent of all homicides	Percent of firearm homicides
1 million+ population <i>Includes: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver</i>	Total Homicides	1,190	100%	
	Firearm Homicides	422	35	100%
	Handgun	314		74
	Rifle/Shotgun	47		11
	Other ¹	61		14
500,000-999,999 population <i>Includes: Ottawa-Hull, Edmonton, Calgary, Québec, Winnipeg, Hamilton</i>	Total Homicides	512	100%	
	Firearm Homicides	152	30	100%
	Handgun	63		41
	Rifle/Shotgun	50		33
	Other ¹	39		26
250,000-499,999 population <i>Includes: London, Kitchener, St. Chatherine-Niagara, Halifax, Victoria, Windsor, Oshawa</i>	Total Homicides	216	100%	
	Firearm Homicides	53	25	100%
	Handgun	25		47
	Rifle/Shotgun	21		40
	Other ¹	7		13
100,000-249,999 population <i>Includes: Saskatoon, Regina, St. John's, Chicoutimi-Jonquière, Sudbury, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Saint John, Thunder Bay</i>	Total Homicides	151	100%	
	Firearm Homicides	28	19	100%
	Handgun	10		36
	Rifle/Shotgun	13		46
	Other ¹	5		18
Less than 100,000 population²	Total Homicides	1,231	100%	
	Firearm Homicides	427	35	100%
	Handgun	127		30
	Rifle/Shotgun	265		62
	Other ¹	35		8

¹ Includes fully-automatic firearms, sawed-off firearms and other types of firearms.

² Non-Census Metropolitan Areas

Source: Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

Table 5



Spousal Homicides by Cause of Death and Gender of Victim, 1985 to 1995

	1995			1994			Average 1985-1994		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Total Number	21	69	90	20	65	85	234	761	995
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Shooting	19	30	28	30	32	32	22	40	36
Stabbing	76	35	44	60	17	27	63	25	34
Beating	5	15	12	-	23	18	6	18	15
Other ¹	-	20	16	10	28	23	9	17	15

¹ Includes other methods such as strangulation, poisoning, fire (burns) and unknown methods.

Source: Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

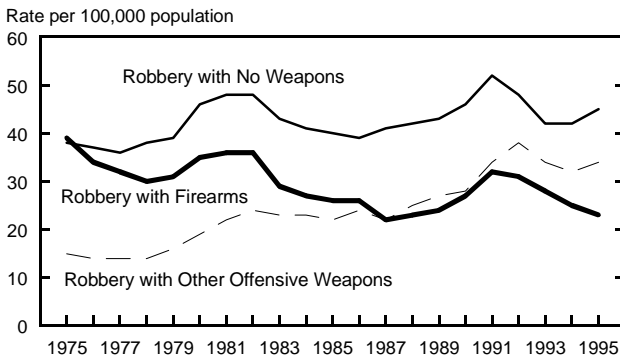
encountered different types of weapons. For example, on average between 1991 and 1995, males were more likely than females to face a firearm or sharp object. Females, on the other hand, were more likely than males to encounter blunt objects or physical force (Figure 5).

Firearm robberies also decreasing

In 1995, robberies accounted for 10% of all violent crimes. Contrary to homicides, both the number and rate of robberies have increased in Canada over the past two decades. In 1995, weapons were involved in 56% of all robberies. While the proportion of all weapons involved in robberies has remained relatively stable over the years, the involvement of firearms has decreased by 41% since 1975 (Figure 6). In contrast, the rates of robberies involving both other offensive weapons, such as knives, as well as those where no weapons were present have increased. This shift may indicate a displacement in the type of weapons used in robberies, from firearms to other types of weapons that are more readily available.

Figure 6

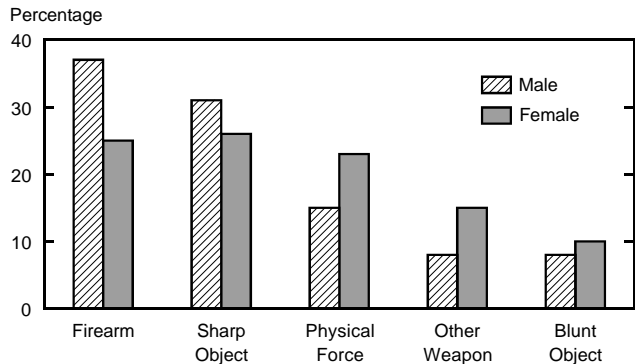
Trends in Robberies with a Weapon, Canada, 1975 to 1995



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

Figure 5

Homicides Victims by Type of Weapon and Gender, Canada, 1975 to 1995



Source: Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

Looking ahead

The use of weapons in violent crime is of concern for the Canadian public and policy makers alike. Recent changes to Canadian firearms legislation have drawn much attention; strong support from some areas, as well as harsh criticism from others. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other amendments, as well as to examine changes in the patterns of weapon use in violent crimes, reliable data must be made available. In years to come, the Revised UCR Survey is expected to increase coverage, which will allow for analysis of weapons use over time. In addition, work is ongoing to develop links between Revised UCR data and sentencing data, whereby sentencing patterns for violent offences involving weapons may be compared to those where no weapons were present.

Offensive and prohibited weapons violations declining

While not classified as violent offences, the *Criminal Code* contains offensive weapons categories which pertain to the possession or use of prohibited and restricted weapons, as well as possessing a weapon for the purpose of committing a crime, and the careless use of a firearm. Prohibited weapons offences include carrying, pointing or possessing prohibited weapons such as sawed-off or automatic firearms, silencers or spring knives. These types of weapons may only be possessed by police/peace officers or members of the military. Restricted weapons offences include carrying, pointing or possessing restricted weapons, such

as handguns, without permits. Other weapons offences include the carrying or pointing of non-restricted firearms, such as shotguns, rifles and knives. While it is legal to own many types of non-restricted firearms, such as rifles and shotguns, certain types may be prohibited or restricted.

The rate of offensive weapons offences has shown moderate changes. In 1975, the rate of total offensive weapons offences was 54 per 100,000 population. This rate peaked in 1981 at 71 per 100,000 population, but has since gradually decreased to 59 in 1995.

Data Sources

Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR and Revised UCR):

Since 1961, the UCR has provided basic police-reported information on violent, property and other crime, by age and gender. Only the most serious offence in an incident is recorded. This means that crimes, particularly those that are considered less serious, are under-reported. Virtually all police forces in Canada provide these data.

The Revised UCR, introduced in 1988, collects detailed information for up to four violations committed during an incident, including characteristics of the accused, the victims and the offences committed. Coverage, which has been increasing each year, was about 46% of the volume of all reported crime in 1995.

Although survey respondents do not provide a nationally representative sample of criminal incidents, there is good coverage of urban crime.

Homicide Survey: This survey provides police-reported data on the characteristics of homicide victims, as well as those accused of homicide. The count for a particular year represents all homicides reported that year, regardless of whether the death actually occurred in that year or not. The survey began collecting information in 1961, from which time information on cause of death, such as death by shooting, stabbing, beatings and other methods, as well as detailed firearms data have been available. Extensive revisions were made to the survey in 1991. Since this time, more detailed data on all types of weapons have been available.

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