



Canadian Centre for Justice  
Statistics Profile Series



# Women 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
- Children and Youth in Canada
- Canadians with Disabilities
- Immigrants in Canada
- Canadians with Low Incomes
- Canadians with Literacy Problems\*\*
- Religious Groups in Canada
- Seniors in Canada
- Visible Minorities 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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## Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Women<sup>1,2</sup>

### **The majority population**

Currently, slightly more than half of all people living in Canada are women or female children. In 2000, there were a total of 15.5 million females in Canada, representing 50.4% of the overall Canadian population (see Table 1). In fact, women make up more than half the population in every province except Alberta; they also represent less than half the population in the territories.

### **Age distribution**

Women born during the baby boom years from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s make up the largest group of women in Canada. In 2000, almost one out of three Canadian women was between the ages of 35 and 54. At the same time, a substantial proportion of the female population, 31% in 2000, was under the age of 25, while 23% was aged 55 or over. That year, 9% of all women were aged 55-64 and 14% were seniors aged 65 and over.

Women constitute a particularly large segment of the senior population. In 2000, women made up 57% of all Canadians aged 65 and over, whereas they represented 51% of those aged 55-64 and 50% or less of people in all other age ranges. Women account for even larger 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.

### **Most women live with their families**

The vast majority of women in Canada live with members of their family. In 1996, 84% of women aged 15 and over, about the same figure as for men, were living with either their immediate or extended

family. That year, exactly half of all Canadian women aged 15 and over were living with their husband, while 8% were living in a common-law relationship, another 8% were lone parents, 14% were children still living at home with their parents, and 4% were living with members of their extended family, such as the family of a daughter or son.

While the large majority of Canadian women live with their family, a growing proportion are living alone. In 1996, almost one and a half million women, 13% of the total female population aged 15 and over, were living alone. Indeed, the share of adult women living alone has almost doubled since 1971, when the figure was 7%. Among women, seniors are, by far, the most likely to live alone. In 1996, 38% of all women aged 65 and over were living on their own, compared with just 12% of women aged 45-64, 7% of those aged 25-44, and 3% of 15-24-year-olds.

### **More female-headed lone-parent families**

There have been changes in the family characteristics of women over the course of the past several decades. Most notably, there has been a dramatic growth in the number of women who are lone parents. In 1996, there were 945,000 female-headed lone-parent families in Canada, representing 19% of all families with children. In fact, the latter figure is almost double that in 1971, when 10% of families with children were headed by female lone parents. Women continue to make up the large majority of lone parents. In 1996, 83% of all one-parent families were headed by women, a figure that has remained relatively constant since the mid-1970s.

Female-headed lone-parent families account for a relatively large share of families in all provinces. In 1996, 20% of all families with children in both Nova Scotia and Quebec were lone-parent families headed by

women, while the figure in the remaining provinces ranged from 19% in British Columbia to 16% in each of Alberta and Newfoundland.

### **Falling birth rates**

There has also been a dramatic decline in the birth rate among Canadian women. In 1997, there were just 44 births for every 1,000 women in Canada aged 15-49, less than half the figure in 1959, when there were 116 births per 1,000 women in this age range.

As with most other family-related variables, birth rates vary considerably across Canada. In 1997,

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

<sup>2</sup> Data for the socio-demographic component of this profile are drawn from: Statistics Canada's Census of Canada; Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics; Demography Division; General Social Survey; Health Statistics Division; Income Statistics Division; Labour Force Survey; and Labour Statistics Division.

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there were 51 births for every 1,000 women in each of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, while Alberta with 48, and Ontario and Prince Edward Island, both with 45, were also above the national rate. In the remaining provinces the figure ranged from 42 in each of British Columbia and Quebec to a low of 35 in Newfoundland.

### ***Rising educational attainment***

Canadian women have made tremendous strides in terms of their educational attainment in the past several decades. In 1996, for example, 12% of all women aged 15 and over had a university degree, double the figure in 1981 (6%) and four times that in 1971 (3%).

Women, however, are still somewhat less likely than men to have a university degree. In 1996, 12% of women aged 15 and over, versus 14% of their male counterparts, had a university degree. This, however, is a smaller difference than in the early 1970s, when women were only about half as likely as men to be university graduates. This gap will likely close even further in the future, since women currently make up the majority of full-time students in Canadian universities. In the 1997-98 academic year, 55% of all full-time university students were female, up from 52% in 1992-93 and 37% in 1972-73.

Women in Ontario are more likely to have a university degree than their counterparts in other provinces. In 1996, 14% of the female population aged 15 and over in Ontario had a degree, while the figure in the remaining provinces ranged from 12% in British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia to just 8% in Newfoundland. As well, in all provinces except Prince Edward Island, women were less likely than men to have a university degree that year.

### ***More women employed***

The past several decades have witnessed dramatic growth in the share of women who are part of the paid workforce. In 1999, 55%

of all women aged 15 and over had jobs, up from 42% in 1976. In contrast, the proportion of men who were employed fell during this period from 73% to 67%. As a result, women accounted for 46% of the employed workforce in 1999, up from 37% in 1976.

Women in Ontario and the Western provinces are more likely than those in Quebec and most of the Atlantic provinces to be employed. In 1999, 62% of women in Alberta had jobs, as did 57% of those in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, and 55% of those in British Columbia. The majority of women in Prince Edward Island (53%) were also part of the employed workforce, while the figure was 50% in Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick and just 43% in Newfoundland. In all provinces, however, women were considerably less likely than their male counterparts to be employed.

### ***Employment and presence of children***

There has been particularly sharp growth in the employment rate of women with children in the past two decades. In 1999, 69% of all women with children less than age 16 living at home were part of the employed workforce, up from 39% in 1976. Women with children, though, are still less likely to be employed than women without children. In 1999, for example, 76% of women under age 55 without children living at home were part of the paid workforce.

There have been particularly dramatic increases in the employment levels of women with very young children. Indeed, by 1999, 61% of women with children less than age 3 were employed, more than double the figure in 1976. Similarly, 66% of women whose youngest child was aged 3-5 worked for pay or profit in 1999, up from 37% in 1976. Women with pre-school-aged children, though, are still less likely than those with school-aged children to be employed.

Among women with children, female lone parents are considerably less likely than those in two-parent families to be employed. In 1999, 61% of female lone parents with children less than age 16 living at home were employed, compared with 70% of their counterparts in two-parent families. Female lone parents are also less likely to be employed than mothers in two-parent families whatever the age of their youngest child. Indeed, among mothers with a child under age 3, female lone parents were only about half as likely as women with a spouse to be employed in 1999: 38% versus 63%.

### ***Part-time employment***

A substantial share of women with jobs work part-time. In 1999, 28% of all employed women worked less than 30 hours per week, compared with just 10% of employed men. In fact, since the mid-1970s, women have consistently accounted for about seven in ten part-time employees.

While most women work part-time voluntarily, a substantial proportion, 21% in 1999, do so because of personal or family responsibilities. In contrast, virtually no men work part-time because of these reasons. Women are also considerably more likely than men to be absent from work because of family responsibilities.

### ***Still in traditional female occupations***

The majority of employed women continue to work in occupations in which women have traditionally been concentrated. In 1999, 70% of all employed women were working in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, and sales and service occupations. This compared with just 29% of employed men. The proportion of women currently in these jobs, however, has declined somewhat from 74% in 1987.

At the same time, though, women have increased their representation in several professional fields in

recent years. For example, in 1999, women made up 49% of business and financial professionals, up from 41% in 1987. There has also been substantial growth in the number of women employed in diagnostic and treating positions in medicine and related health professions. In fact, women made up almost half (47%) of all doctors and dentists in 1999, up from 44% in 1987. Similarly, 58% of professionals employed in social sciences or religion in 1999 were women, compared with 48% in 1987.

Women have also increased their share of total employment in managerial positions. In 1999, 35% of all those employed in managerial positions were women, up from 29% in 1987. Among managers, however, women tend to be better represented among lower-level managers, as opposed to those at more senior levels. In 1999, women made up only 27% of senior managers, compared with 36% of managers at other levels.

Women also continue to remain very much a minority among professionals employed in the natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics. In 1999, just 20% of professionals in these occupations were women, a figure which has changed little since 1987 (17%). In addition, it is unlikely that female representation in these occupations will increase in the near future, because women continue to account for relatively small shares of total university enrolments in these fields.

#### **Unemployment rates lower**

Unemployment<sup>3</sup> rates are currently slightly lower among women than men. In 1999, 522,000 women, 7.3% of all female labour force participants, were unemployed, compared with 7.8% of male labour force participants. In fact, the unemployment rate has been lower among women than men throughout the 1990s, whereas the reverse was the case for much of the period from 1976 to 1989.

Young women are considerably more likely than other women to be

unemployed. In 1999, 12.6% of female labour force participants aged 15-24 were unemployed, compared with just 6.6% of those aged 25-44 and 5.4% of those aged 45-64. Young women, however, are still considerably less likely than their male counterparts to be unemployed.

Women in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec have higher unemployment rates than those in Ontario and the Western provinces. In 1999, 15.5% of female labour force participants in Newfoundland were unemployed, while the figure was 13.9% in Prince Edward Island, 9.4% in New Brunswick, and 8.8% in both Nova Scotia and Quebec. In contrast, less than 8% of female labour force participants in each of Ontario and the Western provinces were unemployed.

#### **Employment and unpaid work responsibilities**

Even when employed, women are still largely responsible for looking after their homes and families. In 1998, women employed full time with a spouse and at least one child under age 19 at home spent 4.9 hours per day on unpaid work activities. This was an hour and a half more per day than their male counterparts, who averaged 3.3 hours per day on these activities.

#### **Average earnings still lower**

The average earnings of employed women are still substantially lower than those of men. In 1998, employed women had average earnings of just over \$22,000, a figure that was only 63% that of all men with jobs. Even when employed on a full-time, full-year basis, the earnings of women remain well below those of their male counterparts. In 1998, women working full-time, full-year had average earnings which were just 72% of those of men employed full-time, full-year that year.

The gap between the earnings of women and men, however, is considerably smaller than it was two decades ago. Women's full-time, full-year earnings in 1998 were 72% those of men, up from

68% in 1990 and around 64% in the early 1980s.

Women's earnings are also lower than those of their male counterparts, whatever their educational attainment. Even female university graduates employed full-time, full-year earned only 70% as much as their male colleagues in 1998, the same figure as among women with a non-university post secondary certificate. In addition, that figure ranged from 74% among high school graduates, to 66% for those who had attended, but had not graduated from high school, and just 57% among those with less than Grade 9. Women's earnings are also well below those of men in all occupational categories.

#### **Women's incomes lower**

One result of the fact that the earnings of women are well below those of men is that the overall incomes of women remain well below those of men. In 1998, the average annual pre-tax income of women aged 15 and over from all sources was \$20,800, just 61% the figure for men, who had an average income of \$33,900 that year. The average incomes of women, however, have risen somewhat faster than those of men in recent years. In fact, the average income of women in 1998 was 18% higher than the figure in 1993, once the effects of inflation have been factored out, whereas the real average income of men rose only 11% in the same period.

As with men, women in Ontario and the Western provinces generally have the highest average incomes while those in the Atlantic provinces have the lowest. In 1998, women living in Ontario had an average income of \$22,800, while the figure was \$21,600 in British Columbia, \$20,600 in Alberta, and \$19,100 in Saskatchewan. At the same time, women in both Manitoba and Quebec had average incomes of around \$19,000, whereas in the Atlantic provinces the figure ranged

<sup>3</sup> The unemployed include those who are not working for pay or profit, but who are looking for employment.

from \$17,700 in Prince Edward Island to just \$14,600 in Newfoundland. The average incomes of women, though, are well below those of men in all provinces.

#### **Women with low incomes<sup>4</sup>**

Women make up a disproportionate share of the population in Canada with low incomes. In 1998, 2.8 million women, 18% of the total female population, were living in low-income situations, compared with 15% of the male population. That year, females accounted for 55% of all Canadians classified as having low incomes.

Unattached senior women and female lone-parents are particularly likely to have low incomes. In fact, in 1998, 48% of unattached senior women and 53% of all families headed by lone-parent mothers had incomes which fell below the Low Income Cut-offs.

#### **More dependent on government transfer payments**

In general, women receive a larger portion of their total income than men from government transfer payments. In 1998, 18% of the total income of women came from transfer payments, almost double the figure of men, who received only about 10% of their total income from these sources.

Not surprisingly, there are considerable differences in the impact of these government transfer programs on women depending on their age and family status. For example, 60% of all the income of senior women in 1998 came from government transfers, compared with only 11% of that of women under age 65. At the same time, 29% of all income of female-headed lone-parent families, versus 13% of that of male-headed lone-parent families and just 6% of that for two-parent families with children, came from transfer payments.

Women also receive a larger share of their income from other sources, including alimony and child support payments from a former spouse. In 1998, 3% of all income of women came from these sources, more than twice the figure for men, who got only a little more than 1% of their income from other sources. Again, female-headed lone-parent families receive a relatively large proportion of their income from these other sources. In 1997, other money income accounted for 7% of the income of lone-parent families headed by women, compared with about 2% of the income of male-headed lone-parent families and just 1% of that of two-parent families with children.

## **Women and the Criminal Justice System**

#### **Women and men have similar overall risks of victimization<sup>5</sup>**

According to the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) (see Box 1), approximately 25% of the female population reported having been the victim of at least one crime in the 12 months preceding the survey. This proportion was slightly lower than the proportion of men (27%) who were victimized in the same time period.

#### **Women more likely to be victims of sexual assault<sup>6</sup>**

There was very little difference in the overall risk of personal victimization (see Box 2) for women and men. In 1999, the rate of personal victimization was 189 per 1,000 women and 183 per 1,000 men. There were, however, greater variations among the individual offence types. For example, sexual assaults were more likely to be perpetrated against women (rates of 33 per 1,000 women and 8 per 1,000 men). Men, in contrast, reported higher rates of robbery (rates of 7<sup>†</sup>

#### **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, 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> This section includes personal and household victimization as well as incidents of spousal violence that occurred in the 12 months preceding the survey.

<sup>6</sup> See Besserer and Trainor (2000).

<sup>†</sup> Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3%

for women and 12 for men) and assault (rates of 70 for women and 92 for men) than did women (see Figure 1). Rates of theft of personal property were not significantly different for the two sexes.

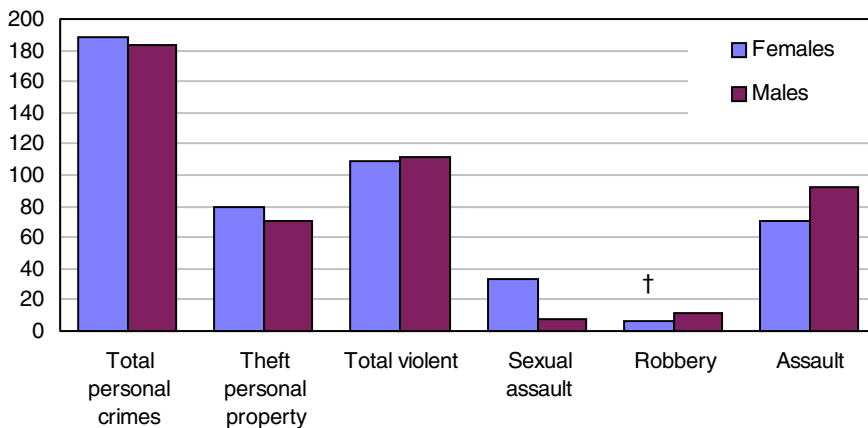
**Women and men unlikely to report personal victimization incidents to the police<sup>7</sup>**

According to the GSS, over 60% of personal victimization incidents committed against both females

and males were not reported to the police. The most common reason for not reporting, cited by both women and men, was that the incident was “not important enough” (29% and 34% of incidents).

Figure 1  
**Sexual assaults and thefts of personal property more likely to be perpetrated against women<sup>1</sup>, 1999**

Rate per 1,000 population



† Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3%

<sup>1</sup> Includes incidents of spousal physical and sexual assault

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

**Women more likely to report being fearful**

Being the victim of a crime may cause a number of emotional consequences. When asked how the experience affected them, the most commonly cited reaction for both women and men was that they felt angry (41% and 40% of incidents). It appears, however, that the effect of being victimized may be more distressing for females. For example, women were more likely than men to report feeling fearful (18% versus 8%).

<sup>7</sup> The following three sections exclude incidents of spousal sexual and physical assault because information on each incident is not available.

**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 female 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.)

### **Women more likely to have difficulty carrying out their main activity**

Respondents were asked specific details about the violent crime incidents in which they were a victim such as: whether they were injured, if they found it difficult to carry out their main activity as a result of the incident, and if they spoke to anyone about the incident. In 1999, victims were injured in 18% of violent incidents, a figure that was similar for both men and women. While women were as likely as men to be injured, they were nearly twice as likely to indicate that as a result of the incident, it was difficult or impossible to carry out their main activity for all or most of the day (33% versus 17%).

Female and male victims of violent crime often turn to friends/neighbours, family members or co-workers to talk about what happened. The most commonly cited resource for both women and men was a friend or neighbour (74% and 70% of incidents). While women were more likely than men to discuss the incident with family (66% versus 58%), they were less likely to indicate discussing the situation with a co-worker (38% versus 51%).

### **Most female victims of violent crime know their perpetrator<sup>8</sup>**

According to the GSS, female victims of violent crime were much more likely to be victimized by someone they know than by a stranger. In 1999, women knew their perpetrator in 82% of incidents: 41% of incidents were committed by a family member, and 41% were committed by a friend/acquaintance/other. Only 18% of incidents committed against women involved a stranger. Men, in contrast, were most likely to be victimized by a stranger (36%), followed by a family member (33%) and a friend/acquaintance/other (30%).

### **Spousal violence rates are similar for women and men, but women are more likely to experience more severe forms of violence<sup>10</sup>**

Results show that 7% of people who were married or living in a

### **Box 3: Measuring spousal violence<sup>9</sup>**

For the first time, the 1999 General Social Survey included detailed measures on the incidence and prevalence of spousal violence using a module of ten questions. This approach describes specific actions rather than asking a single question about “violence” or “assaults”. The module of questions was introduced by the following statement:

It is important to hear from people themselves if we are to understand the serious problem of violence in the home. I’m going to ask you ten short questions and I’d like you to tell me whether, in the past 5 years, your spouse/partner has done any of the following to you. Your responses are important whether or not you have had any of these experiences. Remember that all information provided is strictly confidential. During the past 5 years, has your partner:

1. Threatened to hit you with his/her fist or anything else that could have hurt you.
2. Thrown anything at you that could have hurt you.
3. Pushed, grabbed or shoved you in a way that could have hurt you.
4. Slapped you.
5. Kicked, bit, or hit you with his/her fist.
6. Hit you with something that could have hurt you.
7. Beaten you.
8. Choked you.
9. Used or threatened to use a gun or knife on you.
10. Forced you into any unwanted sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way.

commonlaw relationship experienced some type of violence by a partner during the previous 5 years. The 5-year rate of violence was similar for women (8%) and men (7%). Overall, this amounts to approximately 690,000 women and 549,000 men who had a current or former partner in the past five years and reported experiencing at least one incident of violence.

Women were more likely than men to report what could be considered more severe forms of violence. Women were more than twice as likely as men to report being beaten (25% versus 10%), five times more likely to report being choked (20% versus 4%<sup>†</sup>), and almost twice as likely to report being threatened by or having a gun or knife being used against them (13% versus 7%<sup>†</sup>). Men were more likely than women to report being slapped (57% versus 40%), having something thrown at

them (56% versus 44%), and being kicked, bit or hit (51% versus 33%) (see Table 2).

### **Female victims of spousal violence more likely to report repeated victimizations, injuries and fearing for their lives**

Women were more likely than men to report repeated victimizations. Sixty-five percent of women who were assaulted by a partner were victimized on more than one occasion, 26% more than 10 times. By comparison, 54% of men who experienced marital violence were the targets in more than one incident and 13% said it happened more than 10 times.

<sup>†</sup> Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3%.

<sup>8</sup> Based on incidents with a single accused. Includes all incidents of spousal physical and sexual assault.

<sup>9</sup> See Pottie Bunge and Locke (2000).

<sup>10</sup> See Pottie Bunge and Locke (2000).



Insofar as women were more likely to experience more severe and repeated violence, they were more likely than men to be injured by spousal violence. Women were three times more likely than men to be injured by spousal violence (40% versus 13%) and five times more likely to require medical attention (15% versus 3%).

Furthermore, during the 5-year period, almost one-quarter (24%) of spousal violence victims feared their lives were in danger. This fear was much more prevalent among women than men: 38% of women compared to 7% of men feared for their lives because of the violence.

***Risk factors of spousal violence include age, type of union and income***<sup>11</sup>

Generally speaking, younger people are at greater risk of experiencing spousal violence than are older people. Young women under 25 years of age reported the highest rates of violence (5%) in the previous year compared to 1% of women 45 and over. Similarly, the estimated risk of being a victim of spousal violence is higher for women living in common-law unions. Four percent of those living in common-law unions reported spousal violence in the previous 12 months compared to only 1% of those who were married.

Women and men from all income levels and educational backgrounds reported experiencing spousal violence. One year rates of spousal violence ranged from a high of 3% for those with a household income of less than \$30,000 to a low of 1% for those households with an income of \$60,000 or more, while rates of violence were similar for people from varying educational backgrounds.

***Half of women abused by their partners in the previous five years used support services***

Various types of social services are available to women and men who are abused by their partners, including counsellors, crisis lines,

community centres, women's centres, men's centres, and support groups. A total of 48% of women and 17% of men abused by a marital partner in the previous 5 years used a social service. Overall, women were more likely than men to report using all types of social services.

The most frequently used social service for both women and men was a counsellor or psychologist (28%), followed by a crisis centre or crisis line (10%) and community centre or family centre (10%). Transition homes were used by 11% of female victims of violence.<sup>12</sup>

***Police more likely to find out about spousal violence against women***

The GSS found that the police were more likely to find out about spousal violence against women than spousal violence against men. During the 5-year period, 37% of cases of spousal violence involving female victims compared to 15% of spousal violence involving male victims was reported to the police. This may be due in part to the fact that women experience more severe, injurious and more frequent violence than men.

The majority of women (93%) and men (79%) who reported an incident to the police said they did so to stop the violence or to receive protection from the abuser. Women and men were also likely to notify the police because they felt it was their duty (55% and 58% respectively). As well, women were likely to report the incident to the police so the abuser would be arrested and punished (48% of abused women versus 34% of abused men).

***Women more likely to be murdered by someone they know***<sup>13</sup>

In 1999, there were 536 homicide victims in Canada, of whom 32% were female and 68% were male. As with other types of victimization, women are more likely to be murdered by someone they know than by a stranger: 35%

of women who were murdered in 1999 were murdered by a spouse or ex-spouse, whereas this was the case for only 3% of men murdered that year.

Despite a very slight increase in 1999, spousal homicides have been decreasing since 1991, accounting for one out of every six solved homicides. They include persons in registered marriages, in common-law relationships and persons separated or divorced from such unions. These types of homicides have remained relatively stable over the last three years, after having declined since the early 1990s (see Figure 2).

In 1999, 38 women were killed by a current male spouse (legal or common-law) and 20 were killed by a separated or divorced male spouse. Another 2 women were killed by same sex spouses. Regardless of gender, six in 10 incidents of spousal homicides involved a history of domestic violence between the victim and the accused that was known to police.

***Women and men believe crime levels are stable***

While the 1999 General Social Survey measured incidents of victimization and spousal abuse, it also examined public perceptions of crime and the justice system. When they were asked about crime levels in their neighbourhood, the majority of women and men felt that crime in their neighbourhood had remained stable over the past 5 years (53% and 56%) and that crime in their neighbourhood was lower compared to other Canadian areas (60% and 57%).

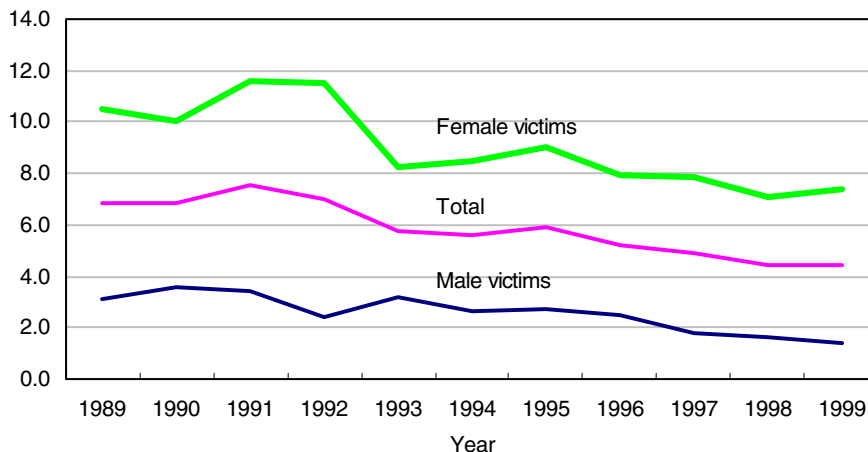
<sup>11</sup> Risk factors are based on one-year rates of violence.

<sup>12</sup> This question was only asked of female victims as there are no transition homes for men in Canada.

<sup>13</sup> See Fedorowycz (2000).

Figure 2  
**Spousal homicide rate, Canada, 1989-1999<sup>1</sup>**

Rate per 1,000,000 couples



<sup>1</sup> Based on Census population estimates for men and women legally married, in common-law relationships, separated or divorced.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey, 1999.

**Women more fearful than men in certain situations<sup>14</sup>**

The GSS also asked respondents about their levels of fear while engaging in certain activities. The analysis, therefore, is based only on the responses of those people who indicated that they did engage in these activities.

According to the GSS, nearly two-thirds (65%) of women who used public transportation alone after dark felt somewhat or very worried doing so (see Table 3). This proportion was more than double the figure of 29% for men. When they were home alone in the evening, 29% of women and 12% of men reported being somewhat or very worried. Finally, nearly one-in-five women (18%) felt somewhat or very unsafe when walking alone in their area after dark compared with 6% of men. These differences are quite large, considering that women and men have similar rates of personal victimization. It is interesting to note that when women and men were asked about their general level of personal safety, the results were alike: 88% of women and 93% of men reported being somewhat or very satisfied, although fewer women than men reported being very satisfied.

**Women more likely to have positive attitudes toward the police<sup>15</sup>**

While women were generally more likely than men to have positive attitudes toward the police, men were slightly more likely to have positive attitudes toward other sectors of the criminal justice system. In 1999, women were somewhat more likely than men to rate the police positively at enforcing the laws (62% versus 59% respectively), supplying information on reducing crime (56% versus 52%), and responding promptly to calls (50% versus 48%) (see Table 4). Women and men gave similar ratings for each of the other aspects of police performance.

In contrast, men were generally more likely than women to hold positive attitudes toward the criminal courts. In 1999, with the exception of helping the victim, slightly higher proportions of men than women gave a positive rating.

Men also rated the prison and parole systems somewhat higher than did women. In 1999, with the exception of rating the prison system at helping prisoners become law-abiding citizens, slightly higher proportions of men than women gave positive ratings for each of

the other aspects of both prison and parole system performance.

**Women a minority of offenders**

Women are much less likely than men to be perpetrators of crime. In 1999, adult women aged 18 and over made up only 17% of all adults charged with a criminal offence, up from 14% two decades earlier.<sup>16</sup>

As with adults, young women are much less criminally active than are young men; however, their involvement in crime is growing. In 1999, young women aged 12 to 17 accounted for 22% of all youths charged, up considerably from 12% in 1979. Since 1989, young women have accounted for a greater proportion of youth crime than women have of adult crime.

**Women more likely to commit property offences**

Women account for a higher proportion of adults charged with property offences than they do for violent offences. In 1999, adult women made up 22% of those charged with property crimes, whereas they represented 14% of those charged with violent offences (see Table 5).

By contrast, young women account for a higher proportion of youths charged with violent offences than they do for property offences. In 1999, 25% of youths charged with violent offences were young women, whereas young females made up 22% of youths charged with offences against property. Between 1989 and 1999, the rate of female youths charged with violent crimes increased much more (+81%) than for male youths (+30%). For adults, between 1989 and 1999, the violent crime rate for women increased by 41% compared to a 7% decrease for men.

Nevertheless, the rate for female youths charged with violent crime (445 per 100,000 youths) was still

<sup>14</sup> See Besserer and Trainor (2000).

<sup>15</sup> See Tufts (2000).

<sup>16</sup> Refers to all federal statute offences.

only one-third the rate for male youths (1254 per 100,000 youths) in 1999. For adults, this gap was wider. The violent crime rate for women was one-sixth that of men.

The most common crime among women is theft. In 1999, 25% of charges against adult women and 32% of charges against young women involved this offence. In most instances, the theft was in the form of shoplifting and the stolen property was worth \$5,000 or less. The next most common offence is assault, which accounted for 16% of charges laid against adult women and 29% of charges against female youths. The majority of the assault charges involved common assault (level 1), the least serious form of assault.

### **Women less likely to receive jail sentences<sup>17</sup>**

In 1998-99, 15% of the cases completed in adult criminal courts involved women. Women who appear in court are somewhat less likely than their male counterparts to be found guilty. In 1998-99, just over half (53%) of the cases against women resulted in a conviction, compared with a figure of 63% for men.<sup>18</sup>

Reflective of the types of crimes that women commit (i.e., theft), those found guilty in court are more likely than men to be sentenced to probation. In 1998-99, 37% of women convicted of an offence were given probation as their most serious sentence; this compared with 26% of males. In contrast, women were less likely than their male counterparts to be sentenced to prison: 25% versus 37%.

### **Young female offenders account for one in five cases heard in youth court<sup>19</sup>**

Female youths account for a minority of all cases heard in youth courts across Canada. In 1997-98, there were over 23,000 cases in youth court involving females, representing 21% of the youth court caseload. As with older women, female youths dealt with by the

courts are somewhat less likely than young males to be found guilty — 62% compared to 69% of cases involving young men.

As with adult female offenders, young women are more likely than young men to be sentenced to probation, and less likely to be incarcerated are. In 1997-98, 54% of female youths found guilty in youth court were given probation as compared with 47% of male youths. At the same time, 27% of female youths and 36% of male youths were sentenced to custody.

Similar to adult females, female youths sentenced to custody tend to receive shorter terms than male youths do. In 1997-98, the median length of custody for female young offenders was 30 days – 12 days shorter than for male young offenders.

Differences in sentencing for males and females, both adults and youths, can be influenced by a number of factors, including criminal history of the offenders and seriousness of the offences that were committed. The less severe sentencing of female youths may be due to the fact that their crimes are less serious and that they are less likely to be repeat offenders than male youths. In 1997-98, 33% of young women who were found guilty had one or more prior convictions, versus a figure of 45% among young male offenders. Young women were also less likely to be persistent offenders, defined as having three or more prior convictions. In 1997-98, 6% of cases involving young women involved persistent offenders, less than half the figure for cases involving young men (13%).

### **Young women more likely to participate in alternative measures<sup>20</sup>**

Alternative measures programs (e.g., apologizing to the victim, performing community service, taking part in educational sessions) are used instead of the court system to deal with people who

are accused of less serious crimes. They are used relatively more often for young women than young men. In 1998-99, young women represented 37% of participants in alternative measures cases, which is almost double the proportion of female cases heard in youth courts<sup>21</sup> (21%), and police-reported incidents by female youth<sup>22</sup> (23%).

### **Females account for a small proportion of inmates**

Though females still account for a much smaller proportion than males, the proportion of women being admitted to custody is increasing.<sup>23</sup> Twenty years ago, the proportion of women admitted to provincial/territorial custody was 5%. This proportion increased over the years to 9% in 1992-93 and has remained constant since. The proportion of female offenders admitted to federal custody remained fairly constant (around 3%) over the same period of time. In 1998-99, a slight increase in the proportion of female admissions at the federal level was experienced, with women accounting for 4% of admissions.

Young female offenders make up a somewhat greater share of youths sentenced to custodial care. In 1998-99,<sup>24</sup> 17% of reported sentenced custody admissions were female<sup>25</sup> with both secure and open custody admissions showing a similar breakdown by sex (see Table 6).

<sup>17</sup> *Adult Criminal Court Survey, 1998-1999*

<sup>18</sup> Excludes case where the sex of the accused was not known and cases where the final disposition in provincial court was "committed for trial in Superior Court".

<sup>19</sup> See Carrière (2000)

<sup>20</sup> See Engler and Crowe (2000).

<sup>21</sup> See Carrière (2000).

<sup>22</sup> See Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2000).

<sup>23</sup> See Thomas (2000).

<sup>24</sup> See Moldon and Kukec (2000).

<sup>25</sup> New Brunswick and Quebec were unable to report sentenced (both secure and open) custody admissions by sex and age.

### **Characteristics of female inmates**

According to the 1996 One-day Snapshot study<sup>26</sup> of inmates in adult correctional facilities in Canada,<sup>27</sup> there were 1,807 female inmates on-register in Canadian correction facilities on October 5, 1996, representing just 5% of all inmates.

Female inmates tend to be younger than women in the general public. They are also more likely to be Aboriginal, single, less educated and unemployed than women in the general population (see Table 7). Further, female inmates in provincial/territorial correctional facilities have less extensive criminal histories<sup>28</sup> than male inmates, and serve shorter sentences.

At the time of the Snapshot, women in federal facilities were most likely to be there for homicide or attempted murder (37%) or for drug-related offences (27%). At the same time, the largest proportions of female inmates in provincial/territorial facilities were incarcerated for drug-related offences (13%) or theft (12%). In both types of facilities, smaller proportions of women than men were incarcerated for violent offences.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> See Finn, Trevethan, Carrière and Kowalski (1999).

<sup>28</sup> Prior conviction data were not available through this survey for federal inmates. Of women in provincial/territorial institutions in 1996, half (50%) had either none or one previous adult conviction, compared with 36% of male inmates. Further, the percentage of women with five or more previous convictions was close to half the figure for men: 12% compared to 21%.

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Table 1

**Selected characteristics of women, by province and territory<sup>1</sup>, 1998**

	Canada	Nfld.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Qc	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta	B.C.	Yuk.	Terr.	Nun.
Total female population, 2000 (000s)	15,517.2	272.1	70.6	479.3	382.1	3,733.5	5,909.0	577.7	514.9	1,482.8	2,046.7	14.9	20.4	13.2
As % of the total population, 2000	50.4	50.4	50.8	50.9	50.5	50.6	50.6	50.3	50.3	49.4	50.4	48.7	48.4	47.6
Women aged 65 and over as % of the total female population, 2000	14.2	12.8	14.9	15.1	14.8	14.9	14.2	15.4	16.3	11.3	14.4	5.5	4.2	2.4
Percentage of women aged 65 and over living alone, 1996	38.4	28.5	38.2	38.6	37.2	39.4	37.0	45.0	44.8	38.6	38.0	39.8	23.2	6.5
Immigrant women as % of the female population, 1996	17.7	1.6	3.3	4.6	3.5	9.3	26.1	12.6	5.6	15.6	25.1	10.1	6.4	1.4
Aboriginal women as % of the female population, 1996	2.8	2.6	0.6	1.4	1.4	1.0	1.4	11.7	11.5	4.7	3.8	21.6	49.6	86.0
Women in a visible minority as % of the female population, 1996	11.3	0.6	1.2	3.4	1.0	6.1	15.9	7.0	2.7	10.2	18.2	3.3	4.1	0.6
Female lone-parent families as % of all families with children, 1996	18.5	15.5	17.7	20.4	17.9	19.6	18.3	18.2	17.9	16.3	18.8	20.7	17.1	16.3
Total fertility rate, 1997	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.4	1.8	2.6	..
Life expectancy at birth, 1997 (years)	81.4	79.8	82.7	80.4	81.2	81.1	81.5	80.5	81.5	81.5	82.1	79.4	75.8	..
% with university degree, 1999	13.8	8.4	11.4	12.4	11.4	12.9	15.4	12.3	10.5	13.4	14.2	..	..	..
% employed, 1999	54.6	42.5	52.5	50.1	49.8	50.2	56.5	57.5	56.7	62.2	54.8	..	..	..
% of employed women in managerial or professional occupations, 1999	34.4	32.9	32.3	33.0	31.0	35.3	35.0	32.9	31.7	33.1	34.8	..	..	..
% of employed women working part-time, 1999	28.0	23.6	23.4	28.4	25.0	25.7	27.2	30.4	31.6	31.0	31.6	..	..	..
% unemployed, 1999	7.3	15.5	13.9	8.8	9.4	8.8	6.4	5.0	5.4	5.5	7.5	..	..	..
Earnings of women employed full-time, full-year as % of those of men, 1998	72.2	72.3	73.5	72.7	69.5	71.9	72.3	73.9	75.4	68.9	74.9	..	..	..
% with low income, 1998 <sup>2</sup>	18.4	21.3	..	21.8	17.2	24.1	15.3	22.6	18.7	16.7	15.9	..	..	..

<sup>1</sup> Nunavut was established April 1, 1999. While population estimates for this territory are available prior to 1991, for all other indicators, Nunavut is included in the Northwest Territories.

<sup>2</sup> Includes both unattached people as well as those living in families.

.. Figures not available

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada; Income Statistics Division; Labour Force Survey; and Demography Division.

Table 2

**Number and percentage of women and men aged 15 years and over who reported violence by a current or previous spouse<sup>1,2</sup>, by type of violence, past 5 years**

Type of violence	Victims					
	Total		Female		Male	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
<b>Total violence by any spouse</b>	<b>1,239</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>100</b>
Threatened to hit	782	63	449	65	333	61
Threw something	606	49	301	44	305	56
Pushed, grabbed, shoved	797	64	561	81	237	43
Slapped	589	48	276	40	313	57
Kicked, bit or hit	507	41	227	33	279	51
Hit with something	298	24	155	23	143	26
Beat	226	18	172	25	54	10
Choked	163	13	139	20	24	4 <sup>†</sup>
Used or threatened to use a gun or knife	132	11	91	13	41	7 <sup>†</sup>
Sexual assault	152	12	138	20	14	3 <sup>†</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Includes common-law partners.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes people who refused to state their marital status.

**Note:** <sup>†</sup> Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3%.  
Figures do not add to 100% due to multiple responses.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 3

**Feelings of safety from crime by sex<sup>1</sup>, 1999**

	% of population	
	Female population	Male population
<b>While waiting for/using public transportation alone after dark, how do you feel about your safety from crime?</b>		
Not at all worried	35	70
Somewhat worried	53	26
Very worried	12	3
Don't know/Not stated	1 <sup>†</sup>	1 <sup>†</sup>
<b>How safe do you feel from crime when walking alone in your area after dark?</b>		
Very safe	28	55
Reasonably safe	53	39
Somewhat or very unsafe	18	6
Don't know/Not stated	--	--
<b>While alone in your home in the evening or at night, how do you feel about your safety from crime?</b>		
Not at all worried	71	88
Somewhat worried	25	11
Very worried	3	1
Don't know/Not stated	--	--
<b>In general, how do you feel about your safety from crime?</b>		
Very satisfied	37	51
Somewhat satisfied	51	42
Somewhat dissatisfied	5	3
Very dissatisfied	2	1
Don't know/Not stated	4	3

<sup>1</sup> Includes only respondents who engaged in these activities.

-- Amount too small to be expressed.

**Note:** <sup>†</sup> 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 4

**Perceptions of the justice system among females aged 15+, 1999**

	Female population 15+									
	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)					%				
<b>What kind of job are your local police doing at ...</b>										
Being approachable?	12,320	8,213	1,975	413	1,719	100	67	16	3	14
Ensuring the safety of citizens?	12,320	7,704	3,147	535	934	100	63	26	4	8
Enforcing the laws?	12,320	7,608	3,420	535	757	100	62	28	4	6
Supplying information on reducing crime?	12,320	6,944	2,953	1,042	1,382	100	56	24	8	11
Responding promptly to calls?	12,320	6,147	2,409	801	2,964	100	50	20	6	24
<b>What kind of job are criminal courts doing at ...</b>										
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused?	12,320	4,423	4,552	1,325	2,021	100	36	37	11	16
Determining the guilt of the accused?	12,320	2,252	5,244	2,399	2,426	100	18	43	19	20
Helping the victim?	12,320	1,952	4,221	3,943	2,205	100	16	34	32	18
Providing justice quickly?	12,320	1,507	4,374	4,828	1,612	100	12	36	39	13
<b>What kind of job is the prison system doing at ...</b>										
Supervising/controlling prisoners?	12,320	3,048	4,078	2,320	2,875	100	25	33	19	23
Helping prisoners become law-abiding?	12,320	1,733	3,998	3,229	3,361	100	14	32	26	27
<b>What kind of job is the parole system doing at ...</b>										
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend?	12,320	1,713	4,246	3,823	2,539	100	14	34	31	21
Supervising offenders on parole?	12,320	1,539	3,689	3,972	3,121	100	12	30	32	25

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

*Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.*

Table 5

**Adult and young women charged by type of crime, 1999**

	Adult Women <sup>1</sup>		Young Women <sup>2</sup>	
	No. of women charged	% of adults charged	No. of young women charged	% of youth charged
<b>Violent Offences</b>	<b>15,987</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5,294</b>	<b>25</b>
Homicide	35	9	9	20
Attempted Murder	69	13	8	14
Sexual Assault	154	2	50	4
Other Sexual Offences	29	3	7	4
Assault	15,045	16	4,700	29
Abduction	61	40	3	43
Robbery	594	9	517	16
<b>Property Offences</b>	<b>29,539</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10,873</b>	<b>22</b>
Breaking and Entering	1,416	6	1,341	10
Motor Vehicle Theft	598	7	798	14
Theft over \$5,000	448	22	59	16
Theft \$5,000 and under	17,712	30	7,043	32
Possession of Stolen Goods	2,233	14	976	19
Fraud	7,132	29	656	32
<b>Other Criminal Code</b>	<b>21,465</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6,437</b>	<b>22</b>
Prostitution	2,607	53	63	82
Bail Violations	7,683	17	2,522	28
Mischief	1,704	12	797	12
Other	9,471	11	3,055	22
<b>Total Criminal Code</b>	<b>66,991</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22,604</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Other Federal Statutes</b>	<b>7,307</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2,386</b>	<b>20</b>
Drug Offences	6,076	14	820	12
Other	1,231	18	1,566	30
<b>Total All Offences</b>	<b>74,298</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24,990</b>	<b>22</b>

<sup>1</sup> Refers to adults aged 18 and older.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to youths aged 12 to 17 years.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, 1999.



Table 6

**Youth admissions to secure and open custody by sex, percent distribution, 1998-99**

Jurisdiction	Sex	Secure Custody		Open Custody	
		Total	Percent	Total	Percent
<b>Total admissions</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>7,823</b>		<b>8,321</b>	
<b>Total reported</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>6,245</b>		<b>6,968</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>5,208</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>5,706</b>	<b>82</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>1,037</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1,262</b>	<b>18</b>
Newfoundland	Total	195		199	
	Male	171	88	173	87
	Female	24	12	26	13
Prince Edward Island	Total	31		19	
	Male	26	84	16	84
	Female	5	16	3	16
Nova Scotia	Total	62		362	
	Male	58	94	315	87
	Female	4	6	47	13
Ontario <sup>1</sup>	Total	3,564		3,839	
	Male	2,994	84	3,100	81
	Female	570	16	739	19
Ontario MCSS	Total	1,880		2,769	
	Male	1,495	80	2,137	77
	Female	385	20	632	23
Ontario MSGCS	Total	1,684		1,070	
	Male	1,499	89	963	90
	Female	185	11	107	10
Manitoba	Total	238		448	
	Male	207	87	367	82
	Female	31	13	81	18
Saskatchewan	Total	332		449	
	Male	298	90	375	84
	Female	34	10	74	16
Alberta	Total	999		703	
	Male	823	82	595	85
	Female	176	18	108	15
British Columbia	Total	660		824	
	Male	493	75	671	81
	Female	167	25	153	19
Yukon	Total	52		26	
	Male	43	83	19	73
	Female	9	17	7	27
Northwest Territories	Total	112		99	
	Male	95	85	75	76
	Female	17	15	24	24
<b>Total non-reported</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,578</b>		<b>1,353</b>	
New Brunswick	Total	279		193	
Quebec	Total	1,299		1,160	

<sup>1</sup> Ontario is represented by two jurisdictions: The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ontario MCSS) is responsible for young offenders between the ages of 12 and 15 and The Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Service is responsible for those between the ages of 16 and 17.

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

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Youth Custody and Community Services Survey, 1998-99.

Table 7

**Selected characteristics of female inmates, 1996**

	Female Inmates		Female Adult Population in Canada <sup>1</sup>
	Provincial/ Territorial	Federal	
		%	
<b>Age</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
18-24	18	17	12
25-34	43	40	20
35-44	27	30	22
45-54	8	10	17
55+	2	2	30
<b>Aboriginal Status</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Non-Aboriginal	77	80	98
Aboriginal	23	20	2
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Married	24	31	63
Single	56	52	20
Separated, divorced or widowed	20	17	17
<b>Education</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Grade 8 or less	22	29	12
Grade 9-10	34	32	11
Grade 11 or higher	43	38	76
<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Unemployed	64	80	9
Employed	36	20	91

<sup>1</sup> Refers to women aged 18 years and older for aboriginal and marital status and 15 years and older for education and employment status.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, 1996 Census of Population and Housing, and Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *A One Day Snapshot of Inmates in Canada's Adult Correctional Facilities Survey, 1996*.