

Domestic Homicide, Gender-Related Homicide, and Femicide: Making Sense of the Terms

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This Backgrounder explores the terms domestic homicide, gender-related homicide, and femicide to strengthen understanding and promote prevention of these killings. Rather than competing, these terms are valuable for different reasons and serve to capture diverse phenomenon. They also share a common goal:

To call attention to gender-based violence (GBV) and advocate for action to end GBV.

Each term has a different meaning and even within each term there may be different understandings and applications of the term. This Backgrounder offers general guidance on these commonly utilized terms in Canada, but it does not cover every way they may be used or additional terms that may be used.

What is the connection between GBV and killings?

GBV involves violence directed against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived gender, gender identity, or gender expression. It includes sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and family violence. GBV is rooted in [rigid gender norms](#), [gender inequity](#), and power imbalances.

GBV disproportionately impacts women, girls, and gender-diverse peoples.¹

The terms domestic homicide, gender-related homicide, and femicide all capture the distinct ways that GBV and gender norms relate to killings. For instance, women are more likely to be killed in the context of intimate relationships.²



What is Domestic Homicide?

Domestic homicide refers “to homicides that happen in the context of an intimate relationship and [are] perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner.”³ It is a gendered crime as it overwhelmingly involves the death of women and is primarily committed by men.⁴ However, domestic homicide can occur against men as well and be committed by women. Definitions of domestic homicide vary depending on their inclusion criteria:



Killing of a current or former spousal or common-law partner. This includes people who are separated or divorced. Sometimes this is referred to as intimate partner homicide. Most definitions of domestic homicide include dating partners. Some definitions include relationships that are non-reciprocal, such as the killing of a woman by a partner that she rejected after a brief interaction (e.g., a single date, a short period of reciprocal online engagement). For example:

- Imani was killed by a man she met off Tinder and had a couple dates with.
- Jada was killed by her husband of 40 years.

Inclusion of secondary victims. In addition to the criteria above, some definitions of domestic homicide include secondary victims like children, family, co-workers, service providers, and bystanders who are killed as an extension of the domestic violence. For example:

- Carlos, a young boy, was killed as a secondary victim to the violence experienced by his mother.
- Lowen, the partner of Astrid, was killed by Astrid’s former partner.

The range of intimate partners included and the choice to include or not include secondary victims in the definition of domestic homicide reflects complexities in defining intimate partner relationships and determining secondary victims.

Domestic homicide is often used in the context of Domestic Violence Death Review Committees (DVDRCs). DVDRCs are multi-disciplinary advisory committees of experts that review domestic violence related deaths with the goal of preventing them in the future. Several provinces and territories in Canada have established DVDRCs, fatality reviews, and/or inquests into deaths related to domestic violence. Some DVDRCs are governed through legislation which dictates which homicides are included in the review.

Learn more: [Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative \(CDHPI\)](#)

CDHPI is a knowledge hub that helps to inform promising practices in domestic homicide prevention. In particular, the CDHPI focuses on emerging risk assessment, management, and safety planning strategies.

What is Gender-Related Homicide?

Specific to the Canadian context, this Backgrounder focuses on the use of gender-related homicide by Statistics Canada. Exploring this term is useful as many individuals refer to Statistics Canada for tracking GBV. Statistics Canada defines gender-related homicides as:

A solved homicide of a woman or girl perpetrated by a male accused who:



The qualifier of 'was an intimate partner or family member' puts gender-related homicide in partial alignment with domestic homicide against women and girls who are killed by an intimate partner. However, with gender-related homicide, there is additionally an extension to include 'killed by a family member who was not an intimate partner', 'inflicted sexual violence as part of killing' and 'killed women or girls identified as a sex worker.' Statistics Canada notes that they include these additional qualifiers as they are "factors known to disproportionately affect women and girls and can be seen as evidence of how attitudes of male dominance may be relevant in some homicide cases."⁵ Attitudes of male dominance include possessiveness and male superiority.⁶ These attitudes are reflected and compounded by broader criminalization and stigmatization that harms sex workers.

Statistics Canada notes that all the indicators used to capture gender-related homicide and/or femicide in other contexts, such as the United Nations, are not currently captured in their data although further analysis may be possible in future work.⁷

Learn more: [*Gender-related homicide of women and girls in Canada* by Statistics Canada](#)
This Juristat draws on data from Statistics Canada's Homicide Survey to explore trends and characteristics of gender-related homicides of women and girls over time and across location to enhance public understanding of gender-related killings.

What is Femicide?

Femicide is the killing of women and girls because of their sex and gender. This term explicitly highlights the ways that women and girls are targeted due to gender oppression and marginalization.

One way to discern femicide is using sex and gender-related motives and indicators (SGRMIs). SGRMIs are not motives but contextual factors that capture gender bias to differentiate femicide from homicide. According to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, SGRMIs include:⁸

- Killing by a current or former intimate partner including spouses and dating partners
- Killing by a family member such as children, siblings, and relatives by blood, marriage, or adoption
 - *For example: Hae was killed by another family member after separating from her husband*
- Previous record of harassment or violence by the perpetrator
 - *For example: Aafia was killed by a stalker after taking out a protective order against them*
- Illegal deprivation of liberty by perpetrator including detainment and kidnapping
- Use of force or mutilation as part of the killing
- Body disposed of in a public place including the victim being exposed or partially clothed in areas like streets, workplaces, and schools
- Sexual violence committed before and/or after the killing
- Victim working in the sex industry
- Hate crime motivated by bias against women/girls including attacks on feminist activists, a perpetrator who shared messages of hatred against sexual orientation or gender identity, or an attack by someone in a hate group targeting women
- Victim of forms of illegal exploitation including forced labour, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation

Femicide can be committed by a woman, but it is primarily committed by men. Femicide may additionally include secondary or 'collateral' victims where further individuals of any gender are killed in addition to or instead of the women or girl. For instance, a son, new partner, or service provider.

Learn more: [Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability \(CFOJA\)](#)

CFOJA is a web-based research and information centre which aims to conduct, mobilize, exchange, and promote research and knowledge to prevent femicide and other forms of gender-based killings in Canada.



In what ways do these terms relate and differ?

All three terms capture the killing of a woman or girl by her intimate partner. Likewise, each term is a gendered phenomenon as it disproportionately impacts women and girls.

There also exists some differences between the terms. Domestic homicide, for instance, can include men who are killed by their spouse or common-law partner. Below we share a snapshot of each definition:

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE

Killing of a current or former spouse or common-law partner - may also include dating partners and non-reciprocal relationships

Perpetrators may be any gender but are primarily men

Victims may be any gender but are overwhelmingly women and girls

Secondary victims may be included and may be any gender

GENDER-RELATED HOMICIDE

Killing of an intimate partner or family member, a woman or girl identified as a sex worker, or where there was sexual violence inflicted

Perpetrated by men

Victims are women and girls

Secondary victims are not included

FEMICIDE

Killing of women and girls because of sex and gender-related motives and indicators

Perpetrators may be any gender but are primarily men

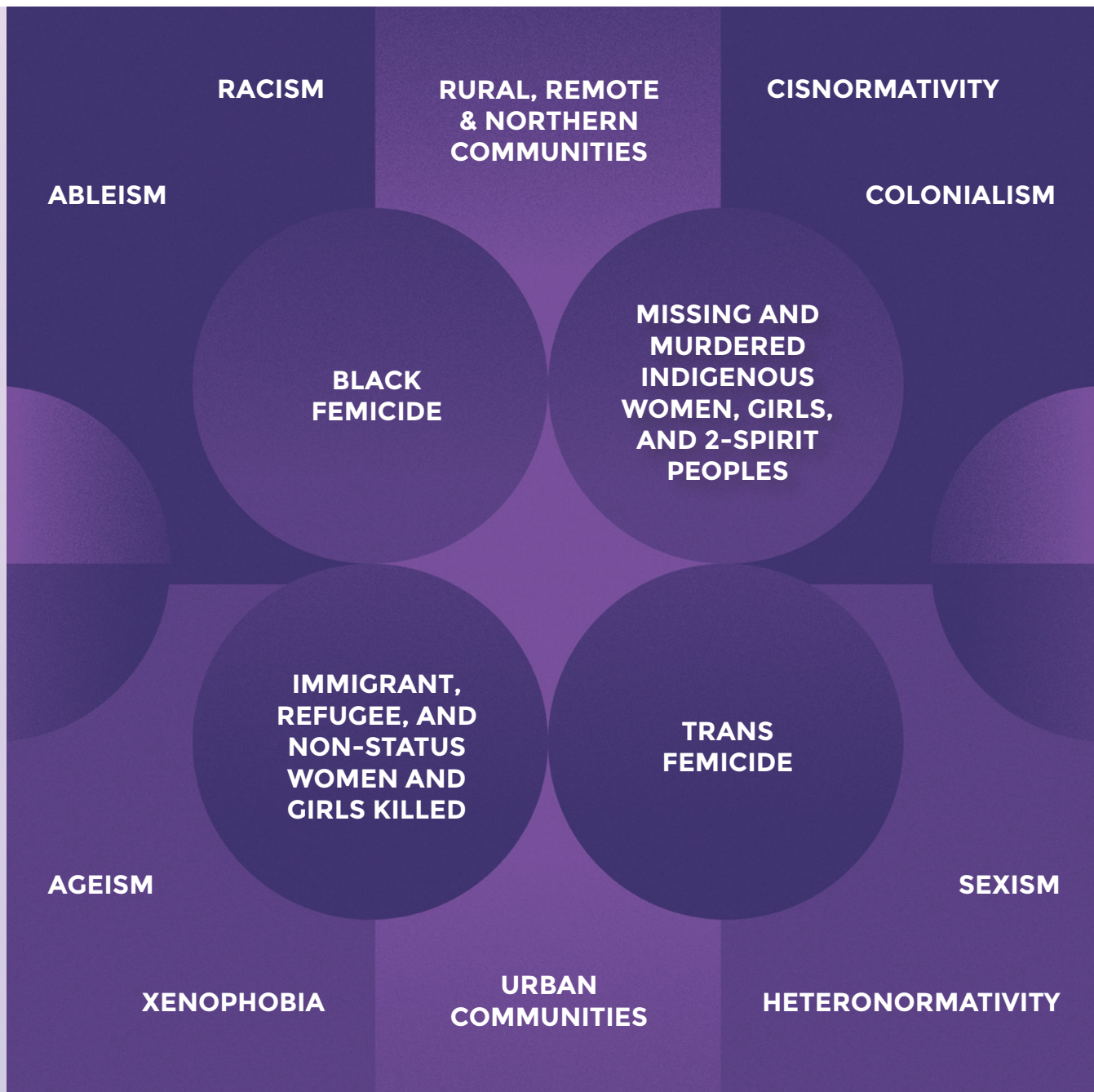
Victims are women and girls

Secondary victims are included and may be any gender

How do gender-related killings impact diverse groups?

Domestic homicide, gender-related homicide, and femicide must be understood through an intersectional lens. This requires recognizing:

- **how killings occur against diverse groups of women** including Black femicide; Trans femicide; missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2-Spirit people; and immigrant, refugee, and non-status women and girls killed
- **how killings occur in specific contexts** including rural, remote, and northern communities or urban communities
- **how killings occur within systems of marginalization** including racism, ableism, sexism, and colonialism



How does identifying these terms help with ending violence?

A specific focus on GBV, including its disproportionate impacts on women, girls, and gender-diverse people, allows the specific ways that these deaths occur to be explored and prevented. GBV has at times been construed as a 'private' issue – something that happens behind closed doors that people either do not know about or should not intervene in.

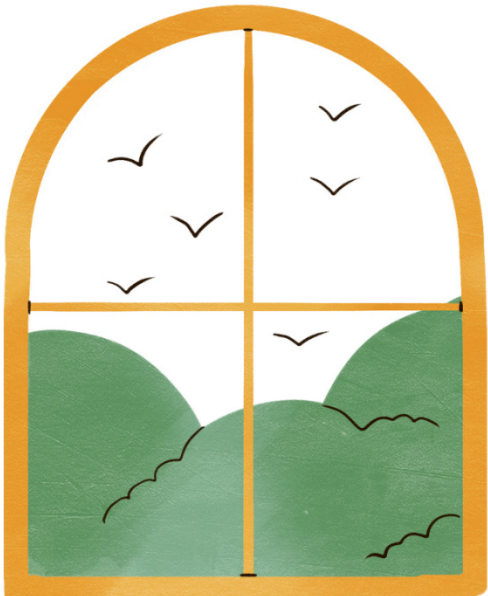
Domestic homicide, gender-related homicide, and femicide challenge that narrative by acknowledging how killings are public – they occur often; have impacts on people around the victim and perpetrator including children, family, service providers, and communities; and they can be prevented through public action and education.

GBV is not a private matter; it is a human rights and justice issue.

Preventing GBV helps to make a safer society for all people and contributes to ending these killings and further connected forms of violence like mass casualties.

“We need to accept that those who perpetrate mass casualties often have un-addressed histories of gender-based, intimate partner, or family violence – which means that tackling those forms of violence must be an urgent priority.”⁹

Action is needed to end all forms of gender-based violence including domestic homicide, gender-related homicide, and femicide. Utilize existing recommendations to promote safer communities for all:



- [Mapping a Decade of Recommendations to Address Violence Against Women](#)
- [Culleton, Kuzyk, and Warmerdam Inquest Jury Recommendations](#)
- [Mass Casualty Commission Final Report](#)
- [Femicide Reporting Recommendations](#)
- [Recommendations for Action Against Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls](#)
- [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
- [MMIWG2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan: Final Report](#)
- [Dismantling a Culture of Violence: Understanding Violence Against Transgender and Non-Binary People and Ending the Crisis](#)

References

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- ⁷ Sutton, D. (2023). *Gender-related homicide of women and girls in Canada*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2023001/article/00003-eng.htm>
- ⁸ Dawson, M., Zecha, A. & Angus, H. in collaboration with members of the research team at the Centre for the Study of Social and Legal Responses to Violence, University of Guelph: Boyd, C., Graham, E., Hendren, T., Mitchell, A., & Rohn, E. (2023). *#CallItFemicide: Understanding sex/gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada, 2018-2022*. <https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide2018-2022.pdf>
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