

FEMICIDE IN OTTAWA AND BEYOND

A Call for Coordinated Policy
and Systemic Change



CANADIAN CENTER
FOR WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT

CENTRE CANADIEN
POUR L'AUTONOMISATION
DES FEMMES



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**Content Warning**

This brief discusses the topics of domestic violence, economic abuse and femicide. We encourage readers to care for their well-being while engaging with this content.

To survivors and advocates, rest and taking time for healing are valid responses and are needed to dismantle the systems that perpetuate these harms. Knowing and honouring your emotional limits is part of the work and essential for your humanity. The fight to end systemic harms is collective. Take breaks, step away if needed, and return only when you have the capacity to do so. When you need to pause, others will carry it for you.

This brief is dedicated to the memory of all women whose lives have been taken too soon by gender-based violence, and to the friends, families, and communities forever changed by their loss.

We hold in our hearts the recent tragedies in Ottawa and the four women whose lives were stolen. Out of deep respect, we have chosen not to include their names. As a survivor-led organization, we believe every woman deserves to share her story on her own terms. These women were denied that chance, and it is in their memory, and in solidarity with all those affected by femicide, that we continue this work toward safety, justice, and change.



INTRODUCTION

In the first half of 2025 alone, four women in Ottawa have been killed in acts police have identified as femicides. This surpasses the total number of police-identified femicides in all of 2024 in the city. However, the true rate may be even higher. While Ottawa is the first police department in Canada to track femicides formally, most jurisdictions do not consistently collect this data. Because there is no national system for identifying or recording femicide separately from other forms of homicide, many cases across the country may go unrecognized or misclassified. The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA) fills this gap and identified 187 femicides across Canada in 2024 (CFOJA, 2024).

This is a grim reminder of the ongoing national crisis of gender-based violence in Canada. As the national capital, Ottawa sets the tone for the rest of the country and is where federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal policy responses intersect. These deaths must result in an urgent, coordinated policy response across all levels of the government.

This brief focuses on the systemic structures that support and perpetuate femicide and calls for enhanced and holistic survivor support. While individual prevention, such as stopping men from committing acts of violence, is critical, our area of expertise is dismantling systemic structures that deny survivors freedom and safety. For survivors of domestic violence, alternative supports that do not rely on carceral systems are crucial, as these systems often cause more harm to survivors than support, let alone justice. At the same time, efforts to reeducate and support perpetrators are vital, emphasizing the need to decolonize and unlearn patriarchal thinking and behaviours. Both system change and individual transformation are necessary to create a society free from gender-based violence.

WHAT IS FEMICIDE?

Femicide is generally defined as the killing of women and girls because of their gender. It is the most extreme form of gender-based violence, rooted in inequality, misogyny, power imbalances, and discrimination. Globally, up to 55% of all homicides of women are committed by intimate partners (this includes same-sex and heterosexual relationships) (Koureta et al., 2025). Women who date men are disproportionately affected, with approximately 60% of female homicide victims killed by a male intimate partner (Koureta et al., 2025).

The term femicide is not officially recognized nationally in Canada, as it is absent from the Criminal Code. This means that policing and court systems largely do not acknowledge femicide. This also means that any documented rates of femicides are expected to be much lower than the reality, as there is no official channel documenting them. The primary focus within the criminal justice system is on homicide, which is typically male-on-male violence (Ajula et al., 2023).

While there have been calls to add femicide to the Criminal Code, which would help in knowing the real extent of this issue, a carceral response is not sufficient (Dawson, 2016). Building on the decades-long calls from Indigenous and anti-carceral advocates, we must take a decolonial approach that does not rely on policing, courts, or prisons. These systems have repeatedly failed to protect women and instead revictimize them, particularly those who are Indigenous, racialized, disabled, rural, or low-income (Battle & Powell, 2024; Demkiw, 2023). True justice and safety must be rooted in prevention, survivor-led responses, culturally safe supports, and community-based solutions (Dusenbery et al., 2024).

When talking about femicide, it is essential to acknowledge that Indigenous women and girls are significantly more likely to go missing or be murdered than non-Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Despite these tragedies being felt disproportionately within First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities, these cases often face even greater under-reporting, receive less media attention, and get fewer law enforcement resources (Villalobos, 2025). This reality reflects deep-rooted, systemic injustices that stem from the historic and ongoing colonialism, racism, and marginalization of Indigenous communities (García-Del Moral, 2018).

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) was launched in recognition of these truths, with a broad mandate to uncover the social, economic, cultural, institutional, and historical causes of this violence. This includes addressing femicide and the disappearances of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, as well as the wider spectrum of violence, such as sexual violence, domestic abuse, and systemic neglect that they may face. Recognizing these patterns is critical for any effort to end femicide in Canada. Without centering the leadership, experiences, and solutions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and Two-Spirit people, any response to gender-based violence will be incomplete and unjust.



HOW DOES FEMICIDE INTERSECT WITH ECONOMIC ABUSE?

Economic Abuse incorporates a range of behaviours that a perpetrator uses to control someone else's economic resources or freedoms. It refers to various tactics that limit an individual's financial autonomy, including but not limited to denying them access to their money, exerting control over their resources, sabotaging their employment or educational opportunities, or leveraging intimidation and threats to constrain their economic freedom.

Femicide and economic abuse are closely linked, both stemming from structural inequality, patriarchy, and colonialism. 95% of domestic violence cases in Canada involve economic abuse (CCFWE, 2023). While we do not know if economic abuse was present in the recent femicides in Ottawa, we do know that economic abuse traps survivors in violent relationships by restricting their access to money, employment, safe housing, and other resources that make leaving an option. This makes addressing economic abuse a critical element in stopping femicide.

Women who are Indigenous, racialized, or single mothers face additional layers of vulnerability due to systemic discrimination and a lack of adequate social supports. In Canada, 77 percent of one-parent households are led by women, and one in six single mothers lives in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2022). Without access to safe housing, childcare, and income security, many survivors are forced to remain in abusive environments to remain housed or employed (Kulkarni & Notario, 2024). These barriers not only increase the risk of homelessness, but in the most extreme cases, can lead to femicide as they force women to remain in dangerous situations.

As Canada grapples with a growing affordability and housing crisis, these risks are even more severe, as discussed in depth in CCFWE's policy brief, ["Urgent Action Needed: Ensuring Safe and Secure Housing for Survivors of Economic Abuse."](#) Addressing femicide requires not only confronting economic abuse but also recognizing the larger systemic factors, such as inequitable housing policies, income disparities, and inadequate social supports, that create and perpetuate these harms. This is not just about individual actions; it is about dismantling the structures that enable femicide while prioritizing prevention to ensure long-term safety and equity.



CENTRING SURVIVORS IN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

As Canada navigates economic challenges amid shifting political landscapes globally, particularly in the U.S., the federal government has prioritized economic recovery and affordability. This is reflected in legislation such as the One Canadian Economy Act and the Making Life More Affordable for Canadians Act. However, while economic recovery and affordability are critical for social well-being, addressing these issues effectively requires a deeper consideration of economic abuse and economic empowerment as integral to achieving equity and safety for all people in Canada. We acknowledge that the federal government is new and still introducing policies, but the work presented thus far lacks intersectional and gender-based analysis. Key gaps include:

- No basic income or income security measures for survivors seeking to flee abuse
- Housing policy focused primarily on home ownership, with little attention to deeply affordable rental housing
- No targeted support for those most vulnerable to homelessness and gender-based violence, especially Indigenous and racialized women
- Overreliance on criminal justice systems that survivors consistently report as discriminatory, neglectful, or actively harmful.

These gaps must be addressed to truly have economic resiliency across the country that supports a healthy economy by enabling all those who wish to participate in it to access it. That includes preventing unnecessary and violent deaths of women.

WHY FOCUS BEYOND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

Despite decades of investment in the criminal justice system (CJS) to address gender-based violence, survivors continue to report that it frequently fails to protect them or understand what they demand as justice (Hester et al., 2025). In fact, in many cases, the CJS causes additional harm. Many perpetrators of femicide, including the 2015 Renfrew County and recent Ottawa femicides, were known to police and involved in the criminal justice system (Koureta et al., 2025). Between 2009 and 2021, 48 percent of perpetrators of femicide in Canada were known to police and involved in the CJS (Sutton & Cotter, 2023). Further, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability found that 90% of femicides included prior abuse by the perpetrator (CFOJA, 2024). This highlights how police and CJS responses fail to address the root causes of gender-based violence, often reinforcing the conditions for future violence, including femicide.

Furthermore, the act of engaging with the CJS can be harmful in itself. Survivors often encounter police and CJS responses marked by disbelief, inaction, or blame, especially when they belong to marginalized communities (Belisle et al., 2024). For many, the police are not a source of safety but a barrier to seeking help. A growing body of research calls attention to these systemic failures. It underscores the urgent need to shift away from carceral models toward prevention, community-led responses, and survivor-centered care. Findings include:

- Revictimization and negligence were recurring themes across diverse survivor populations (Belisle et al., 2024)
- Failures in policing responses to protect survivors, such as the misuse of mandatory charging practice to criminalize survivors as the primary aggressor, and failures to investigate and enforce violations related to no-contact orders and firearm use (Grace, 2019; Cross, 2024; NAWL, 2024)
- Discrimination and cultural incompetence by police continue to affect racialized, immigrant, rural, and LGBTQ+ survivors (Sharma and Winterdyk, 2024)
- Indigenous women in particular describe deep systemic harm at the hands of legal and child welfare systems, calling instead for decolonial, non-carceral approaches that affirm sovereignty and collective care (Kaye and Glecia, 2025)

While this brief focuses on taking a decolonial approach and investing in alternatives, we also acknowledge that the CJS is sometimes the only support available to survivors. We stand in solidarity with organizations working to reduce harm within these systems and to push for systemic change, while ensuring survivors have access to safety in the absence of more just and accessible options.



CALL TO ACTION

The crisis of femicide in Canada is urgent and growing. Naming femicide is not enough. Government responses must move beyond the limitations of the Criminal Code and the failures of carceral systems. Survivors need access to economic independence, stable income and housing, safety, and dignity, all without fear of being retraumatized by the very institutions meant to protect them.

While governments have made commitments through the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and invested in programs like the Housing Accelerator Fund, these actions must be implemented with survivor-informed accountability and urgency. Promises are not protection. Only real, coordinated investments in safety, housing, and economic freedom will prevent further loss of life.

The Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment urges policymakers at all levels to adopt a decolonial, feminist, and intersectional approach to preventing femicide. Safety is not optional, and justice cannot wait. All work should center the leadership of people with lived experience and from an intersectional lens.

To effectively address femicide and protect the lives of women and gender-diverse people in Canada, we call on all levels of government to take the following actions:

All Levels of Government

- All government leaders must consider gender and the intersections of identity in all economic legislation and programs, including, when relevant, the voices of survivors.
- Relevant government leaders meet with the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment to address the intersectional gaps highlighted in this brief.

Federal Government

- Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure, Ministry of Women and Gender Equity work together to ensure that the National Housing Plan considers the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based violence and includes consideration around Economic Abuse. This work should explore existing best practices that have already proven effective.
- Ministry of Finance and National Revenue invests in basic income pilots that include survivors of gender-based violence as a priority group. This should include mandatory economic abuse training for program staff, secure payment routing options, legal protection for coerced debt, trauma-informed financial coaching and multi-sector partnerships.
- Ministry of Crown-Indigenous Relations must uphold the Calls for Justice from the MMIWG2S National Inquiry by funding community-based, non-carceral prevention and response services, including culturally specific supports, for survivors and perpetrators of violence.
- WAGE to declare November 26th as International Economic Abuse Awareness Day.
- Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance and National Revenue include strings-attached funding within the Canada Health Transfer to support the physical and mental health of people experiencing gender-based violence.

Provincial and Territorial Governments

- Increase and guarantee funding for emergency shelters, second-stage housing, legal aid, and wrap-around services for survivors to support them in rebuilding financial independence, including career support.
- Mandate and fund trauma-informed service delivery in all gender-based violence programs, including supports for survivors and their families navigating the criminal justice system.
- Develop and fund community-led safety plans in urban, rural, and Indigenous communities.
- Premiers declare Intimate-Partner Violence an epidemic across all provinces and territories.
- Develop and fund an Independent Intimate Partner Violence Commission focused on ending gender-based violence and representing survivors' experiences of violence.
- Develop emergency funds and grant programs for survivors of intimate partner violence for relocation that do not impact social assistance incomes.

Municipal Governments

- Amend residential tenancy laws to better protect survivors from being evicted while facing gender-based violence. This should include measures to ensure their safety, financial security, and housing access while streamlining lease modifications and termination processes.
- Fund and support community organizations, including shelters, to increase targeted programs that meet the unique needs of higher-risk populations, Black, indigenous, documented, and undocumented refugees, newcomers, and gender diverse women.
- To declare Intimate-Partner Violence an epidemic across all municipalities.
- Include Gender-based violence, specifically intimate partner violence, in municipalities' community safety and well-being plans.

CONCLUSION

The Governments across Canada need to act now to address gender-based violence to prevent future femicides. This response needs to go beyond adding femicide to the federal Criminal Code. Governments must fund survivor-centred and trauma-informed programming and supports for survivors of economic abuse and gender-based violence. It is clear that the CJS does not prevent harm and often causes further harm to survivors. Canada needs to prioritize decolonial and alternative approaches to addressing gender-based violence and provide holistic supports that address the intersections of survivors' experiences.

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ABOUT CCFWE

The Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE) is Canada's only national non-profit organization dedicated to addressing Economic Abuse and economic injustice in the context of domestic violence through education, research, financial empowerment, policy and system change. CCFWE works collaboratively with organizations and individuals to develop a comprehensive approach that enables domestic violence survivors to recover from Economic Abuse. It also addresses critical policy gaps preventing survivors from recovering and becoming economically secure and independent.

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