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Gender differences in impacts of violence on economic opportunities and outcomes in Canada

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by Adam Cotter and Jasmin Thomas

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Introduction

The right to safety and security, including freedom from violence, is both a human right and a prerequisite for equitable access to education, employment, and economic opportunity. Beyond the direct and immediate harm to individuals, families, and communities, experiences of violence can have lasting impacts on educational pathways, employment, financial well-being, and participation in economic and social life. Victims are more likely to experience interruptions to their studies, absenteeism, employment instability, and other barriers that can limit their participation in education, entrepreneurship, and leadership (Blom & Lamarre, 2025; Herschcovis & Barling, 2010). Violence can also increase demands on public services, including health care, social services, housing supports, and the criminal justice system (Hoddenbagh et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2012).

Certain forms of violence, like gender-based violence,¹ are more prevalent and more often lead to negative consequences among women compared with men. As a result, the impacts of violence can accumulate differently, contributing to gender disparities in other areas.

Text box 1

About this analytical brief

The Gender Results Framework is a whole-of-government tool that measures progress toward gender equality across six key areas, called pillars. Under each pillar is a gender equality goal, its objectives, and indicators for measuring progress towards the goal.

To complement Gender Results Framework indicators available through Statistics Canada's Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics (GDIS) Hub, Statistics Canada and Finance Canada collaborated to produce analytical briefs to provide deeper insights into these indicators. This analytical brief examines some of the impacts of gender-based violence in Canada.

The GDIS Hub is Statistics Canada's primary platform for data, analyses, and reference materials relevant to Gender-based Analysis Plus, including those that support the Gender Results Framework, such as interactive dashboards for data and insights related to women and gender equality in Canada.

This brief provides an overview of certain forms of violence, with a high-level focus on gender differences. Many other factors impact not only the prevalence of violence, but also how it is experienced. For more information on victimization and crime in Canada, including disaggregated data, regional analysis, and trends over time, see Cotter & Burczycka (2026), the Police-reported Information Hub, and the *Juristat* publication.

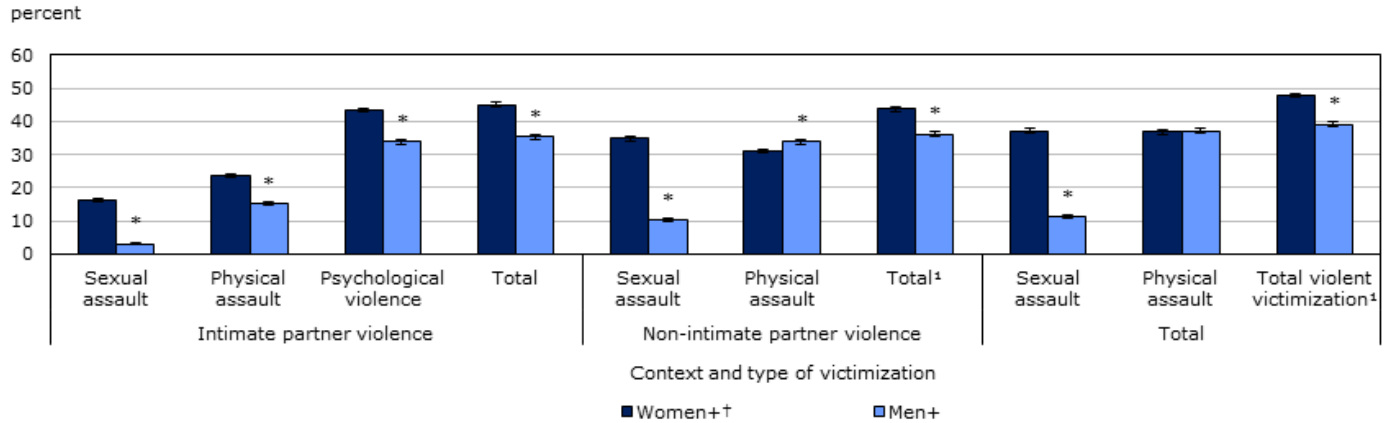
Women and other population groups more at risk of experiencing violence

More than four in 10 people living in Canada have experienced physical or sexual assault in their lifetime, with a higher prevalence among women (48%) than men (39%) (Chart 1, Table 1). In particular, more women (37%) than men (11%) have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime. In addition, intimate partner violence (IPV)—which includes psychological and economic forms of abuse in addition to physical and sexual violence—is a prevalent form of violence in Canada. As with

violence overall, lifetime experiences of IPV are more common among women (45%) than men (35%). The prevalence of physical assault, sexual assault, and IPV is also higher among youth and young adults, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQ+ people, and people living with a disability (Cotter & Burczycka, 2026; Sutton-Preddie & Rauh, 2026).

Chart 1

Experiences of physical and sexual assault since the age of 15, by context and type of victimization, Canada, 2025



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

1. Psychological violence was only measured in the context of intimate partner violence and is not included in this total.

Note: The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary respondents and some respondents who did not state their gender, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons and some respondents who did not state their gender. Percent calculations for intimate partner violence exclude respondents who have never been in an intimate partner relationship.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.

The prevalence of physical and sexual assault in 2025 was broadly similar to what was found in 2018. This is largely true for women and men, as well as for many groups at higher risk of violence, such as Indigenous people, youth and young adults, and the LGB+ population (Cotter, forthcoming 2026; Cotter & Burczycka, 2026).

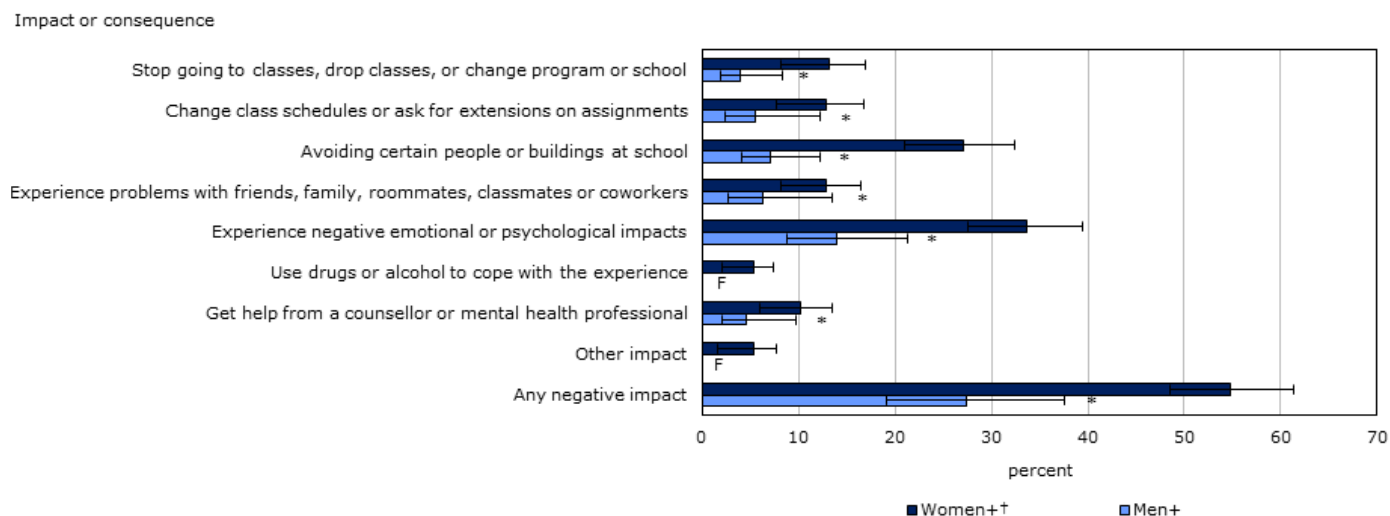
Violence disrupts learning and educational pathways

Experiences of violence can act as barriers to education. Victims of family violence and IPV, for example, are more likely to face interruptions in their studies, which may contribute to lower academic performance and potentially lower educational attainment (Klencakova et al., 2023). In other cases, violence may occur in the school setting, sometimes directly in places of learning. One such form of violence is sexual harassment, including inappropriate sexual jokes, unwanted sexual attention, unwanted physical contact, and indecent exposure.²

Women and girls are more likely to face sexual harassment in educational settings,³ a pattern that is apparent among high school students as well as those pursuing post-secondary education.⁴ In 2025, 25% of girls who had attended high school in the past 12 months experienced some form of sexual harassment at school or by someone associated with their school, compared to 14% of boys. Among those who had attended a post-secondary institution⁵ in the past 12 months, the overall prevalence of sexual harassment was lower, yet it remained twice as high among women (12%) relative to men (6%).

Sexual harassment in places of learning can disrupt studies and thereby influence educational attainment or field of study. In 2025, 55% of women and 27% of men who reported sexual harassment in a post-secondary school-related setting reported some form of negative consequence as a result (Chart 2). The most common impacts, for both women (34%) and men (14%), were negative emotional and psychological consequences. More than one in ten (13%) women stopped going to class, dropped a class, or changed schools or programs entirely, compared with 4% of men. Changing class schedules or asking for extensions on assignments (13% of women and 6% of men) and avoiding certain people or buildings at school (27% of women and 7% of men) were also relatively common impacts. Taken together, the compounding effects—of women being more likely than men to experience sexual harassment as well as more likely to experience negative impacts as a result—reinforce the gendered impact of sexual harassment. For example, of all women who attended a Canadian post-secondary institution in 2025, 1.5% stopped going to or dropped classes or changed schools or programs due to sexual harassment, compared with 0.2% among men.

Chart 2
Negative impacts and consequences of school-related sexual harassment, by gender, Canada, 2025



F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

Note: Percent calculations are based on those who experienced a form of sexual harassment (inappropriate sexual jokes, unwanted sexual attention, unwanted physical contact, and indecent exposure) related to school while attending a post-secondary institution (e.g., college, university, trade school) in Canada. Experiences are considered school-related if they took place at school or on campus, off-campus but school-related (e.g., at an internship, at a social event involving fellow students), online or during remote learning, or on public transit when travelling to and from school. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary respondents and some respondents who did not state their gender, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons and some respondents who did not state their gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.

Experiences of sexual harassment were more common among women who stated that the other students in their program or field of study were all or mostly men (20%), when compared with those who said fellow students were all or mostly women (13%) or that they were about evenly divided between men and women (11%). Differences in the prevalence of sexual harassment could, in turn, be associated with the likelihood of enrolling or continuing in a particular field of study and contribute to gender disparity in some fields (Clancy et al., 2014). Among men, there were no significant differences in the prevalence of sexual harassment based on the perceived gender composition of their program.

Workplace violence can affect careers and gender equality in the labour market

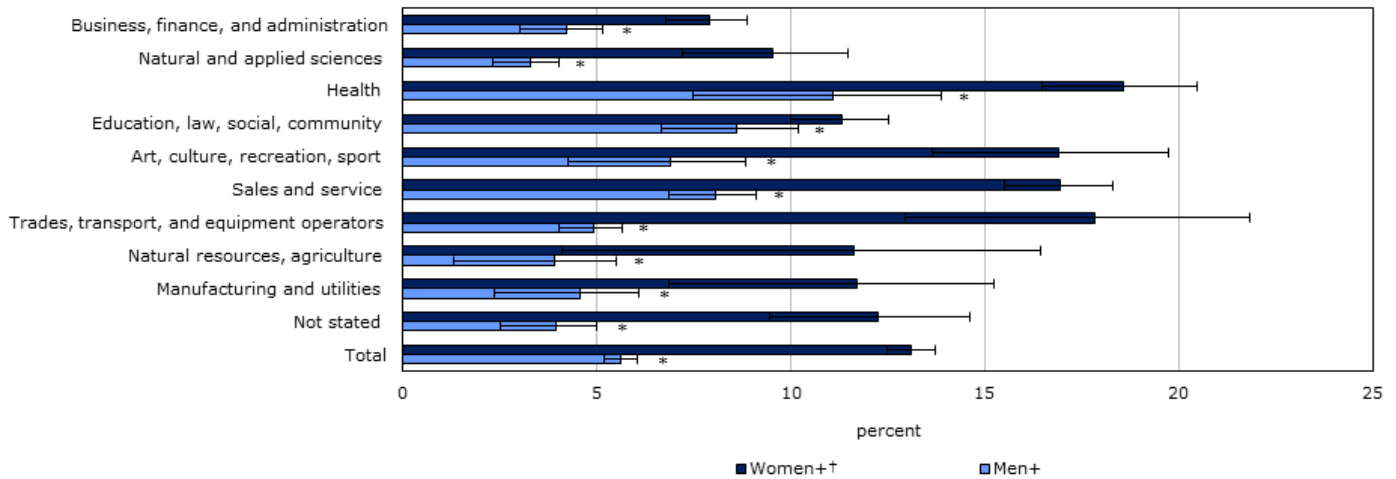
Experiences of violence may also occur in the workplace, with potential consequences for workers' well-being, labour market participation, career progression, and gender equality in the labour market. In 2025, 9% of the population who were employed at some point in the past 12 months experienced some form of sexual harassment while at work or participating in a work-related event.⁶ Women (13%) were more likely to experience these behaviours than men (6%).

The prevalence of sexual harassment varies by industry and occupation. Overall, those working in health were most likely to have experienced sexual harassment (17%), followed by those in sales and service (13%) and art, culture, recreation, and sport (12%).⁷ Sexual harassment was more prevalent among women than men regardless of specific occupation (Chart 3). The gap between women and men was largest among those working in the trades, where the proportion who experienced sexual harassment was more than three times higher among women than men (18% versus 5%).

Chart 3

Experiences of sexual harassment in a work-related setting in the past 12 months, by type of occupation, Canada, 2025

Occupation



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

Note: Occupation is based on the 10-category classification of National Occupational Classification. Estimates for the category "Legislative and senior management" occupations are too unreliable to be published and are not displayed. The category "Not stated" includes those who worked in the past 12 months but for whom there was insufficient detail to classify their occupation. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary respondents and some respondents who did not state their gender, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons and some respondents who did not state their gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.

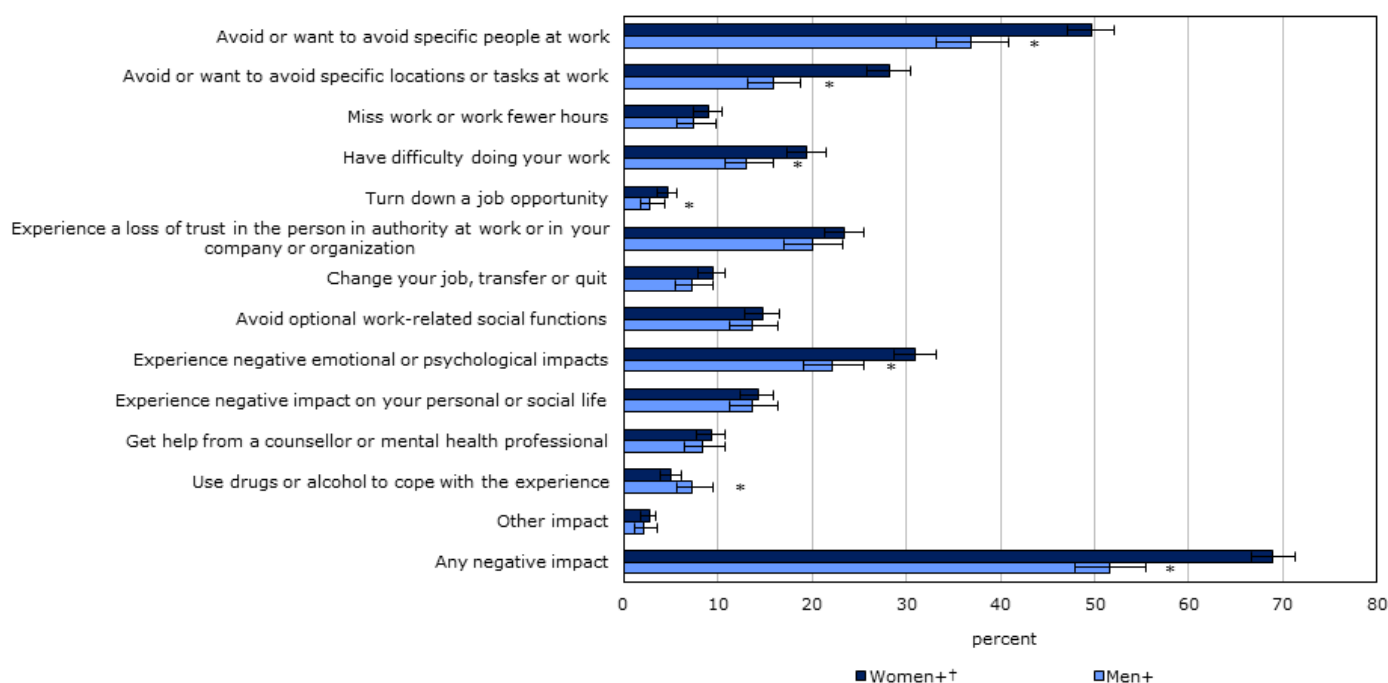
Other analysis of unwanted behaviours in the workplace (e.g., Burczycka, 2021)⁸ has similarly found a higher prevalence among women than men across occupations or industries. This data shows that occupations where men have historically outnumbered women—such as trades, transport, and equipment operators—and those where there is a higher degree of interaction with clients, patients, and customers—such as healthcare or sales and service—are associated with a higher prevalence of sexualized and discriminatory behaviours in the workplace (Burczycka, 2021).

Experiences of unwanted behaviours in the workplace can affect labour force attachment, career prospects and earnings, as those who are victims may leave their firms or their fields to avoid further experiences of violence or seek safety. Since women are disproportionately affected, this can contribute to gender differences in labour market outcomes, including earnings and the representation of women and men across occupations (Folke & Rickne, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025).

These experiences can have broader impacts in the workplace. Victims of sexual harassment may feel stress, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, lower job satisfaction, and reduced engagement at work. In 2025, 69% of women and 52% of men who experienced sexual harassment in a work-related setting reported negative impacts. The most common reported impacts were increased avoidance and absenteeism, negative impacts on mental health and personal life, and a loss of trust in their employer (Chart 4). A smaller proportion quit or changed jobs (9% of women and 7% of men), sought professional help from a counsellor or psychologist (9% of women and 8% of men), or used drugs or alcohol to cope with the experience (5% of women and 7% of men).

Chart 4
Negative impacts and consequences of work-related sexual harassment, by gender, Canada, 2025

Impact or consequence



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

Note: Percent calculations are based on those who experienced a form of sexual harassment (inappropriate sexual jokes, unwanted sexual attention, unwanted physical contact, and indecent exposure) related to their work in Canada. Experiences are considered work-related if they took place at the respondents' workplace, during a work-related event (e.g., training, retirement party), involved colleagues, bosses, or subordinates (including online behaviours), or on public transit when travelling to and from work. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary respondents and some respondents who did not state their gender, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons and some respondents who did not state their gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.

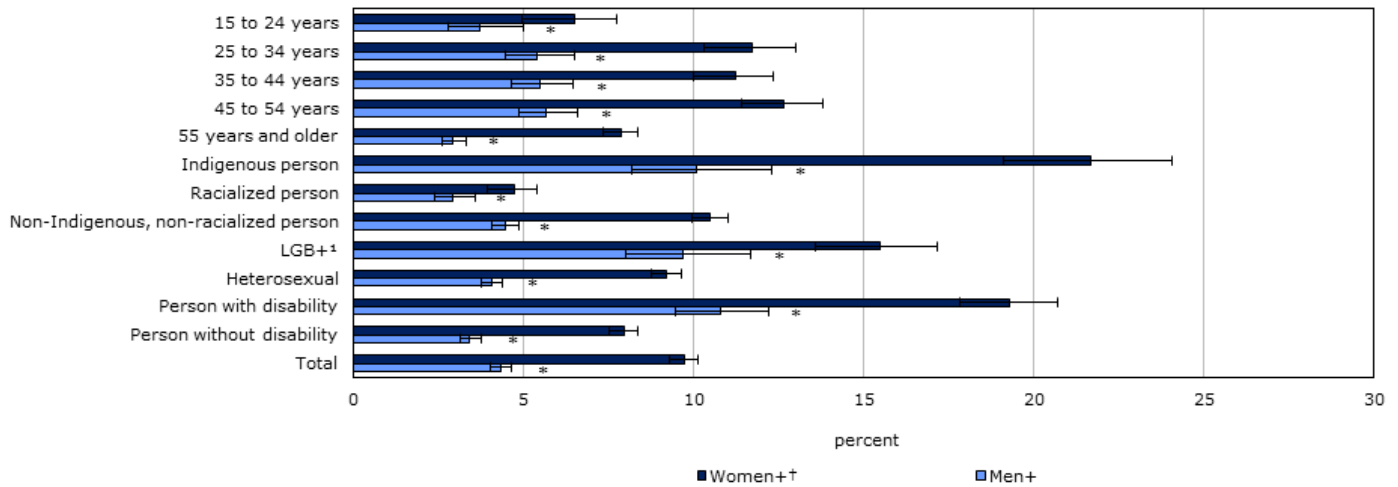
Intimate partner violence can directly target employment and finances

As with violence in school and work-related settings, experiences of violence at home or in the context of intimate partner relationships can also negatively impact labour force participation and financial well-being. Victims may miss work, reduce their hours, leave employment, or have difficulty securing and maintaining jobs because of injuries, trauma, stress, safety concerns, or disruptions caused by abusive partners (Blom & Lamarre, 2025). Violence at home can further affect concentration, job performance, and opportunities for career advancement, while increasing financial insecurity and dependence. These impacts can accumulate over time, contributing to lower earnings and weaker attachment to the labour market.

In some cases, intimate partner violence may specifically target employment and financial resources. This type of violence, referred to as economic IPV, occurs when perpetrators control or attempt to control employment, income, or assets, restricting independence and deepening financial vulnerability. Based on 2025 data, 7% of people living in Canada have experienced economic violence by an intimate partner.⁹ Like many other forms of IPV, more women (10%) than men (4%) have experienced economic IPV in their lifetime, and the prevalence is not uniform across the population (Chart 5).

Chart 5
Experiences of economic intimate partner violence since age 15, by selected demographic characteristics, Canada, 2025

Selected characteristic



* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

† reference category

1. LGB+ refers to those whose sexual orientation is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or any sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

Note: Economic intimate partner violence includes being forced to give money or possessions to a partner, and a partner preventing access to a job, money, or financial resources. Differences between groups are not necessarily statistically significant. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary respondents and some respondents who did not state their gender, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons and some respondents who did not state their gender. Excludes respondents who stated they have never been in an intimate partner relationship.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.

Survey description

In 2024-2025, Statistics Canada conducted the second cycle of the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS). The SSPPS was collected for the first time in 2018. The purpose of the survey is to collect information on Canadians' experiences of violence in public, at work, online, and in their intimate partner relationships. For additional information, see Cotter & Burczyk (2026) or Surveys and statistical programs - Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS).

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Notes

1. Gender-based violence includes a wide range of behaviours from non-criminal acts such as unwelcome comments or gestures to criminal behaviours such as sexual assault or homicide. While not all forms of gender-based violence meet the criminal threshold, they all generally refer to acts committed against someone based on their actual or perceived gender, gender identity, or gender expression (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2025).
2. In the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, respondents were asked about eight behaviours they may have faced in school- or work-related settings, including inappropriate sexual jokes, unwanted sexual attention, unwanted physical contact, suggestions that someone does not act like someone of that gender is supposed to act, being insulted, mistreated, ignored, or excluded due to (actual or assumed) gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and indecent exposure.
3. The Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces defined experiences as school-related if they took place at school or on campus, off-campus but school-related (e.g., at an internship, at a social event involving fellow students), online or during remote learning, or on public transit when travelling to and from school.
4. The information here is a very brief overview of selected experiences related to the school and work environment for those living in Canada. Detailed analysis of these experiences based on data from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces are forthcoming in *Juristat* articles. For information from other sources, see Burczycka (2020; 2021).
5. Includes, for example, a college, university, or trade school located in Canada.
6. The Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces defined behaviours as work-related if they took place at the respondents' workplace, during a work-related event (e.g., training, retirement party), involved colleagues, bosses, or subordinates (including online behaviours), or on public transit when travelling to and from work.
7. While not limited to sexual harassment, analysis of data from the 2016 General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home also found that workers in health-related occupations had higher levels of workplace harassment than other occupations (Hango & Moyser, 2018).
8. The analysis in Burczycka (2021) was not limited to sexual harassment. It included 18 specific sexualized or discriminatory behaviours, broadly classified into five categories: inappropriate verbal or non-verbal communication, sexually explicit materials, physical contact or suggested sexual relations, discrimination on the basis of gender, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.
9. Based on two items in the Survey of Safety in Public Spaces: being forced to give money or possessions to a partner, and a partner preventing access to a job, money, or financial resources. See Cotter (forthcoming 2026) for additional information.

Detailed data table

Table 1
Experiences of violence since age 15, by type of violence and selected demographic characteristics, Canada, 2025

Type of violence and selected characteristic	Women+†			Men+		
	percent	95% confidence interval		percent	95% confidence interval	
		from	to		from	to
Sexual assault						
15 to 24 years	32	30	34	10 *	9	12
25 to 34 years	49	47	51	17 *	15	18
35 to 44 years	44	42	45	14 *	13	16
45 to 54 years	41	39	43	11 *	10	13
55 years and older	30	29	31	7 *	7	8
Indigenous person	52	49	55	16 *	14	19
Racialized person	23	21	24	8 *	7	9
Non-Indigenous, non-racialized person	41	41	42	12 *	11	13
LGB+ ¹	61	58	63	38 *	35	41
Heterosexual	35	35	36	10 *	9	10
Person with disability	52	50	54	20 *	18	21
Person without disability	34	34	35	10 *	10	10
Physical assault						
15 to 24 years	28	26	30	28	26	30
25 to 34 years	44	42	45	44	42	46
35 to 44 years	42	41	44	46 *	44	47
45 to 54 years	43	41	45	44	42	45
55 years and older	32	31	33	30 *	30	31
Indigenous person	57	54	60	52 *	49	56
Racialized person	23	22	25	26 *	25	28
Non-Indigenous, non-racialized person	40	39	41	40	39	41
LGB+ ¹	58	56	60	54 *	51	57
Heterosexual	35	34	36	36 *	36	37
Person with disability	55	53	56	49 *	47	51
Person without disability	33	33	34	35 *	35	36

See notes at the end of the table.

Table 1
Experiences of violence since age 15, by type of violence and selected demographic characteristics, Canada, 2025

Type of violence and selected characteristic	Women+†			Men+		
	95% confidence interval			95% confidence interval		
	percent	from	to	percent	from	to
Intimate partner violence²						
15 to 24 years	58	56	61	48 *	45	51
25 to 34 years	55	53	57	46 *	44	48
35 to 44 years	50	48	51	41 *	39	43
45 to 54 years	48	47	50	37 *	35	38
55 years and older	35	34	36	25 *	24	26
Indigenous person	65	62	68	51 *	48	55
Racialized person	29	28	31	26 *	25	28
Non-Indigenous, non-racialized person	49	48	50	37 *	36	38
LGB+ ¹	69	67	72	57 *	54	60
Heterosexual	43	43	44	34 *	34	35
Person with disability	60	59	62	47 *	45	49
Person without disability	42	42	43	34 *	33	35

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

† reference category

1. LGB+ refers to those whose sexual orientation is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or any sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

2. Includes psychological violence, physical assault, and sexual assault. Excludes respondents who stated they have never been in an intimate partner relationship.

Intimate partner violence refers to violence committed by a current or former spouse, common-law partner, dating partner, or other intimate partner.

Note: Differences between groups and between types of violence are not necessarily statistically significant. See Cotter & Burczycka (2026) for additional information. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary respondents and some respondents who did not state their gender, while the category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons and some respondents who did not state their gender.

Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces.