

CANADA

We are the dead

A months'-long Maclean's investigation into intimate-partner violence reveals how systems, politicians and people have failed women and girls

by [Anne Kingston](#) Sep 17, 2019



The women and girls pictured represent a tiny sample of those killed recently in Canada in confirmed or suspected incidents of domestic violence by men. Some of these cases are still before the courts. Their names are included at the end of this article.

On Dec. 3, 2016, Dr. Angela Mailis awoke to a shocking barrage of text messages. “Did you hear about Mo?” was the theme, a reference to Mohammed Shamji, a Toronto-based neurosurgeon just arrested for first-degree murder. The victim was his wife, Elana Fric, a family physician and mother of their three children.

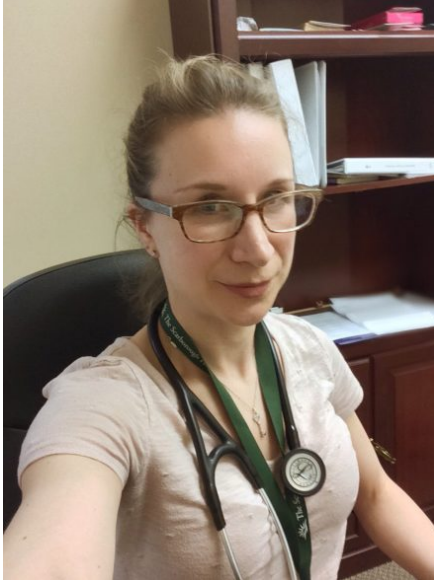
Mailis cried out in disbelief. She and Shamji had worked closely at Toronto’s Western Hospital, where she founded the Krembil Neuroscience Centre’s pain program. Her horror intensified with details of the verbal, emotional and physical abuse Fric experienced during her 12-year marriage. Fric was killed two days after she handed Shamji divorce papers: he beat her, broke her neck and ribs and choked her to death, stuffed her body in a suitcase and threw it in a river. (Shamji pleaded guilty to second-degree murder this year.) Mailis also learned that Fric was a member of a private Facebook group of female physicians abused by their partners.

Mailis, who emigrated to Canada from Greece, knew that successful, financially independent women could be abused in the home; she once was. In person, she’s articulate and engaging, no shrinking violet. Colleagues at Western dubbed her “The Bulldozer.” For 27 years, however, Mailis endured constant, erosive abuse—verbal and emotional—from her husband, the father of her two sons. She divorced him in 1995, an acrimonious, debt-inducing process. Later, when she disclosed her abuse to other accomplished women—women who sat on boards, women married to well-known men, doctors—many confided they were in similar situations. Some were physically abused, but more experienced coercive, controlling domination meted out in insults,

intimidation, sexual assault, financial abuse and stalking, both physical and technological.

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Mailis, who went on to found the Pain & Wellness Centre in Vaughan, Ont., began collecting stories. Patterns emerged—many women didn't identify coercive behaviour as abuse or justified it. She examined biological and cultural factors—and conducted a small survey of women aged 18 to 36. Half said they'd experienced abuse in a relationship, a stat that squares with a 2017 Statistics Canada report.



Dr. Elana Fric
(@ElanaFricShamji/Twitter)

Fric's murder prompted Mailis to write *Smart, Successful and Abused: The Unspoken Problem of Domestic Violence and High-Achieving Women*, published in September. It puts the spotlight on a population often overlooked in studies of intimate-partner violence, despite a parade of high-profile cases—Nicole Brown Simpson, Reeva Steenkamp, Nigella Lawson—that reveal domestic abuse knows no boundaries, class or otherwise. Focus, understandably, has been on the most vulnerable: immigrants and refugees, disabled women and women in rural and northern communities, while the spotlight has shifted only recently to Indigenous women as well.

Mailis defies the entrenched image of the “battered woman” that veered into public consciousness almost 50 years ago in another way. She was never subjected to physical violence. Rather, she experienced coercive, controlling behaviour, which can be just as or even more traumatic. She was constantly demoralized, lacking

autonomy, always “walking on eggshells”—all within her own home.

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Her book arrives alongside two new important examinations of the personal and societal ravages of intimate-partner violence: *No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us* by American academic Rachel Louise Snyder and *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control and Domestic Abuse* by Australian investigative journalist Jess Hill. Both books dismantle entrenched biases and stereotypes: that victims can always just leave; that violence in the home is of a lesser order; that a non-violent person cannot become violent; and that shelters are an adequate response. We're asking the wrong questions, Snyder writes: instead of “Why does she stay?,” we need to ask “Why does he abuse?” and “How do we keep a family safe?” Women don't “stay,” she explains. They constantly calculate how and if they can leave so they and their children escape harm. Hill is blunt as to why intimate-partner violence persists: “Men abuse women because society tells them they can be in control.” It's a society, she writes, that can be cruel to men too.

The complex topic of intimate-partner violence is one of renewed urgency in Canada. National rates of homicide, domestic violence and dating violence have decreased since 2009, but recent spikes in domestic homicide have experts concerned. “Epidemic level” is how Staff Sgt. Paul Wozney of the Calgary Police Service described domestic abuse in his city earlier this year. Six of 12 confirmed homicides in the first half of 2019 were believed to be “domestic,” nearly equal to totals from both 2017 and 2018: a 40 per cent increase in the five-year average. In May, 25-year-old Jasmine Lovett and her 22-month-old daughter, Aliyah Sanderson, were found murdered. A May house explosion killed 22-year-old Dorsa Dehdari and her 15-year-old sister, Dorna; it was set by their father, who also died. (The girls' mother had just filed for divorce.) They join the

growing list of women or girls killed every 2.5 days, on average, in Canada, most often at the hands of someone they trusted, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability at the University of Guelph.

It's impossible to calculate the number of women and girls experiencing violence at the hands of an intimate partner, spouse or relative. The majority—more than 80 per cent, according to one StatsCan estimate—go unreported. Most of the 1,300 new callers at the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter every year never contact hospitals, doctors or police, says Sophia Hladik, its spokesperson. She notes an alarming rise in the severity of violence reported, including more accounts of strangulation. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) reports a rise in the number of women it assesses as facing "extreme danger"—from 54 per cent in 2011/12 to 64.8 per cent in 2017/18. Alberta shelters received more than 58,000 crisis calls in 2018, up 10 per cent over 2017. Demand at the country's 550 shelters exceeds beds, Kaitlin Bardswich, a spokesperson for Women's Shelters Canada tells *Maclean's*. The 2018 average turn-away rate was 78 per cent, up 2 per cent from 2017.

READ: Let's retire the 'abortion debate'

A *Maclean's* investigation into intimate-partner violence, which included dozens of interviews with front-line workers, lawyers, police, government officials and academics, found a response mechanism structured to fail—a lack of data, inconsistent record-keeping, systemic disconnects, lack of accountability and failure of political will. Yes, we've seen the creation of specialized domestic violence units on police forces, specialized courts, provincial death review committees and classes teaching children respectful relationships. But an examination of provincial and international systems, as well as anecdotal reports and new literature, reveal an underlying lack of concern for the human rights and safety of women and children. The courts remain shadowed by "coverture"—the archaic legal status that saw a wife subsumed in her husband's identity. Public perceptions reflect entrenched cultural stereotypes about marriage and relationships, including the notion that controlling and violent behaviour is part of the romantic "fairy tale."

We're at a stall, says Elizabeth Sheehy, professor emeritus at the University of Ottawa's school of law and a leading scholar on the law's response to violence against women. "There's resistance at all institutional levels to recognizing men's use of control and force against women," she tells *Maclean's*. She sees a lack of political will: "We've never had a government that has centred men's violence against women and developed a massive policy." Yet if ever the "personal is political" had meaning, particularly on the cusp of an important federal election, it's in addressing intimate-partner violence.

The term "epidemic" is apt when describing intimate-partner violence given the social contagion it can wreak. Children are the first collateral victims, directly and indirectly. Rates of children and youth implicated in police-reported intimate-partner violence have declined since 2009, though a 2017 Statistics Canada survey noted a rise in recent years. In February, 11-year-old Riya Rajkumar of Brampton, Ont., was murdered by her father, who died of a self-inflicted gun wound. There was more **outrage over the late-night Amber Alert** Rajkumar's abduction triggered than her murder. In May, Trent Butt of Carbonear, Nfld., was found guilty of first-degree murder of his five-year-old daughter, Quinn, who was found in a fire he set as an act of vengeance against his estranged wife, Quinn's mother.

Children not physically harmed growing up in an abusive home cannot escape trauma known to register later in life in the forms of chronic illnesses, higher suicide risks and likelihood of being victims or perpetrators of intimate-partner violence. Anyone an abused person cares about is a potential target. In July, Alexis Ames of Rocky Mountain House, Alta., was shot by her long-term partner; her 26-year-old sister, Ashley Smith-Ames, was killed in the attack. Animals are casualties too. In one Australian study of women abused by their partners cited in *See What You Made Me Do*, half said their abuser abused or killed their pet.

There have been efforts to estimate the total cost of domestic violence to the economy—lost productivity, health care, police costs and so on. A Justice Department of Canada report determined “spousal violence” cost \$7.4 billion in 2009.

Men who abuse their partners pose another societal threat. What mass shooters share—far more than religion or ideology—is a history of domestic abuse. Increasingly, intimate-partner violence is being likened to terrorism: in 2017, Shane Patterson, acting police commissioner in Victoria, Australia, announced the force would address domestic violence with the same urgency as terrorism in resources allocated and focus, given their similar outcomes: “We have death, serious trauma, serious injury and people impacted for the rest of their lives.”

READ: Maryam Monsef on the violence against women and girls crisis

If any country should understand, it’s Canada, where Dec. 6 is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, marking the targeted massacre of “feminists” at the Université de Montréal’s École Polytechnique in 1989; 14 women died, and 14 were injured, including men. Yet an April 2018 report by a United Nations Special Rapporteur found violence against women in Canada remains a “serious pervasive and systematic problem” and “unfinished business that requires urgent actions.” Canadian women’s human rights are “protected in an incomplete and patchwork way,” Dubravka Šimonović wrote after touring the country, citing disparities in provincial and territorial laws and unequal access to services, particularly for women in rural and northern communities. She also noted a “dire shortage” of shelters and a general lack of affordable public housing forced women to return to their homes, where they’d face further violence.

Šimonović’s recommendations echo demands made for decades by academics, legal experts and front-line workers—even a 1991 all-party subcommittee report, *The War on Women*, written after the Montreal massacre. The UN Special Rapporteur called for implementing a coordinated national plan between the feds, provinces and territories, a federal law on violence against women and domestic violence, uniform access to and enforcement of protection orders in domestic violence cases across the country, and specialized sexual assault training for police officers and prosecutors.

The Liberals’ *Strategy to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence*, introduced in 2017, is insufficient, Šimonović writes, lacking a “holistic legal framework with a clear elaboration of prevention measures, integrated services delivery and prosecution of perpetrators in a coordinated manner and guaranteed in all jurisdictions.”

Maryam Monsef, minister of international development and minister for women and gender equality, defends the strategy, heralded in some quarters for its \$100-million funding of women’s groups across the country. She outlined plans for increased shelter beds and affordable housing in an interview with *Maclean’s*. She admitted unequal access to services nationally. The federal strategy is “meant to fill in existing gaps across the country,” she said. “Some provinces were way ahead of us [in initiatives], and our job wasn’t to step on their toes.”

Offering supports via employment and housing is crucial, says Kathryn Smithen, a Toronto lawyer who represents victims of domestic abuse; she once was one. “If you don’t give women the tools to take care of themselves and their children, of course they will go back. When I split, I had no idea how hard it would be to survive financially.”

It is impossible to fix what you can’t see. In 2017, the Canadian Femicide Observatory was established at the University of Guelph to track femicide, defined as “the killing of one or more females by one or more males because they are female.” More men are killed than women annually. But the killing of women is vastly different in a way not captured in StatsCan’s annual homicide stats, the observatory’s director, Myrna Dawson, says. “Women are most often killed by male partners, and prior sexual violence and abuse is often a factor.” Tracking dead women in

Canada, viewed as minimal estimates, is laborious. Because there is no domestic violence, family violence or even “femicide” criminal offence of the sort that exists in South America that would centralize statistics, the observatory relies on media reports, regarded as accurate as official sources, Dawson says; the alternative is submitting hundreds of access to information requests.

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Many victims remain unnamed since many police forces don’t report names of some homicide victims or victims of murder-suicides, which are frequently “domestic” in nature. One-third of the 445 homicides reviewed by the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee between 2003 and 2017 were murder-suicides. Police justify withholding names by claiming there’s no investigative reason to make them public, and out of respect for grief-stricken families that want to keep them private.

There are signs of change. Edmonton Police Services reversed its position on withholding names of homicide victims this year; it will do so on a selective basis.

Not naming victims in murder-suicides creates secrecy and stigma around domestic violence, says Jan Reimer, executive director of the ACWS: “Women shouldn’t be murdered in secret. Family, friends, schools and the workplace all know. It’s important the public know.” The family of Nadia El-Dib, a 22-year-old Calgary woman murdered in 2018, thought so. They asked police to release the horrific details of Nadia’s final minutes: her ex-boyfriend stabbed her 40 times, slit her throat and shot her.

Not naming or withholding details can sanitize and blur. No cause of death was initially provided in the 2016 murder-suicide of Darby Maurice and Calvin Dunn in Delisle, Sask., which led to this *Star-Phoenix* headline: “Foul play is not suspected in the deaths of two 26-year-old parents in Delisle, according to RCMP,” sending the message that murdering one’s spouse isn’t “foul play.”

“Saying ‘no foul play’ is intended to put the community at ease—to say that it’s an isolated incident,” Cpl. Rob King, media relations officer with the Saskatchewan RCMP, tells *Maclean’s*. The RCMP releases information on a case-by-case basis, balancing what the public needs to know and being compassionate to the family. King says, “We have to ask: ‘Would releasing cause of death hurt or attach stigma to the family?’”—a question never asked in a stranger murder.

A disconnect between understanding how the private informs the public underlines the way we see and talk about intimate-partner violence. This extends to terminology. “Domestic violence,” by definition, fails to capture its impact; it implies a household concern, a lesser matter. “Intimate-partner violence” is seen as an improvement in that it recognizes abuse outside matrimony. Orla Hegarty, a statistician in rural Newfoundland who tracked domestic homicides in her *Counting Dead Women* blog before the Femicide Observatory was founded, views even the intimate-partner label as restricted: “One of the most disturbing things I saw was how many sons and grandsons kill their mothers or grandmothers.”

Front-line workers, among them Sophia Hladik, reject “spousal assault” and “domestic violence,” saying they veil the fact that, in almost all cases, it’s men’s violence against women. Hladik uses “men’s violence against women and girls.” The issue is complex: stats also show that women who identify as lesbian report higher incidence of intimate-partner violence than women in heterosexual relationships.

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“Clarity in language is crucial to good policy-making,” says Sheehy, who was invited by the federal government to speak at its initial gender-based violence strategy planning committee. Her first recommendation: rename the strategy “men’s violence against women and girls.”

“‘Gender-based violence’ is so vague it’s meaningless,” Sheehy says. “It could include any form of violence—women’s violence against men, women’s violence against women, homophobic and transphobic violence. It can also be commandeered by men’s rights activists who say women are at least as violent as men, if not more violent.” Language can obscure, and minimize, she says: “The more we use these euphemisms as opposed to ‘women-killing’ or ‘femicide,’ the easier it is to ignore and silence what is actually happening.”

Intimate-partner violence, and the society that ignores it, hurts boys and men as well. Direct male victims of domestic homicide do exist but are rare, says Deirdre Bainbridge, a nurse who chairs the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee: “In most cases, there’s a record of him being a perpetrator.” Ontario is one of six provinces, along with British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick, with such a committee (Quebec is setting one up). Again, protocols vary provincially. Generally these committees summarize annual domestic homicides, without names or identifying details, and identify risk factors, some of which are blaring sirens, including a history of domestic violence and/or recent or future separation. Other known risks include escalating violence, threat of suicide, depression, unemployment, obsessive behaviour, stalking, the presence of a gun in the home or the presence of an actual or perceived new partner. A major red flag, says Bainbridge, is strangulation, in which an abuser literally has the victim’s life in his hands: “Someone strangled to unconsciousness but left alive is seven times more likely to be killed than if never strangled.”

Death review committees make recommendations to a host of agencies. Yet no mechanism exists that requires these recommendations be read, let alone implemented. Bainbridge has seen five responses to dozens of recommendations in two years. “We log responses,” she says. “But we don’t collate it as data.”

Inability to demand a response is a problem, says Dawson, who sits on the Ontario committee. Some countries have laws in place, she says: Australia’s Coroners Act mandates that there be a report back on recommendations—and that it’s made public. Sheehy cites New Zealand’s Family Violence Death Review Committee as a model: its mandate is full systemic change. One improvement: police manuals on how domestic violence must be handled at every level are publicly available. Dawson agrees that drilling down on risk factors on an individual or relationship level fails to challenge the society in which a couple lives—“whether it’s poverty, or discrimination if an immigrant family, or colonization if it’s an Indigenous family.”

Death committee reviews can lay bare an utter lack of communication between agencies supposed to keep families safe. A 2016 review of a 2013 murder-suicide of a separated couple with a history of domestic violence in Alberta found that the person with “the clearest picture of the severity of risk to the victim” was a shelter worker. But she had no mechanism, nor perceived authority, to bring together needed service providers that could defuse the situation and help the woman and her children. “No change will come without including front-line workers in law reform projects,” says Sheehy. “They’re the real experts.”



Lori Dupont, a nurse, was stalked and stabbed to death in Windsor, Ont., by her ex-boyfriend (Windsor Star/CP)

What does change systems, if slowly, are inquests into headline-making tragedies that should not have happened. In 2005, nurse Lori Dupont was stabbed to death at Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare in Windsor, Ont., by a staff doctor she'd broken up with and who was known to threaten and stalk her. In 2010, the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act was amended to include the threat of domestic violence from someone in the workplace; other provinces followed suit. An inquest into one of this country's most heinous cases of intimate-partner violence was announced in late April: Basil Borutski's Sept. 22, 2015, rampage in Wilno, Ont. Borutski had a decades-long record of domestic abuse and stalking; he strangled Carol Culleton, then shot Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam.

One possible outcome of that inquest is the requirement that police and courts notify victims

when their abusers are released from prison, something not done when Borutski was released. But, typically, a long history of violence already exists before an alleged offender is identified by police, or jailed. And it's not unusual for that record to be hidden, not only from authorities, but from family members, friends and co-workers. Again, it's a question of what is "private" and "public." In 2018, Saskatchewan was the first, and to date only, province to introduce legislation that allows police to warn someone of a new partner's violent or abusive past. Based on the U.K.'s 2014 Clare's Law, it's intended to be a preventative early measure before violence escalates.

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Cultural attitudes toward love and relationships also figure into how we see, or don't see, intimate-partner violence. Here, red flags for domestic homicide are sometimes upheld as part of a romantic "fairy tale." One woman told of "being swept off her feet," says Bainbridge. Abusers often rush the first stage of intimacy—known as "love-bombing," she says. Likewise, sexual jealousy, constant texting and continual checking in on someone are seen as signs of love.

And it's precisely that perceived connection and trust of a partner that makes coercive control such an insidious facet of intimate-partner violence, Hill writes in *See What You Made Me Do*: "the perpetrator takes advantage of their partner's love and trust and uses that person's most intimate details—their deepest desires, shames and secrets—as a blueprint for their abuse." What evolves is "a terrifying language"—a sideways look, sarcastic tone or stony silence, understood only by the people involved. Reimer recalls a lawyer telling the story of a client, a victim of domestic abuse, unexpectedly conceding to terms in a settlement hearing attended by both parties. The woman told him later she folded after seeing her spouse twirl his wedding ring—something he did before he beat her. Cultural conditioning also shapes how victims react. They want the abuse to end, not the relationship, Snyder writes. Mailis notes many high-functioning women believe they can fix the situation, or are in denial (thinking "That's not really him" or "It's partially my fault"). Many fear that no one will believe that a "pillar of the community" could be

abusive. In some cases, the women are being financially controlled and have no place to go.

Media coverage often downplays violence to uphold the fairy tale myth. Stories of Elana Fric's brutal killing were routinely illustrated with images from social media of her and the man who killed her kissing and laughing; Shamji's patients were quoted expressing denial that the man they knew could do that. In August, Kenneth Soederhuysen of Burlington, Ont., was charged with the first-degree murder of his wife, Laura Grant, shot dead in their backyard. Even then, an unnamed neighbour called Soederhuysen "a stand-up guy," adding: "He doesn't seem like that type of person."

Domestic abuse is different from other crimes, like robbery or stranger assault, because it's ongoing, never a one-time event. But people don't want to accept that, says Bainbridge: "We want to believe that this is normally a good person who lost it one time. We don't see how it's insidious, it's deliberate, it's conscious. He knows exactly who to pick to get away with the abuse. It's not as if he's never been upset with his boss. But if you punch your boss, there are huge repercussions."

The biggest stumbling blocks to addressing intimate crimes, says Dawson, are entrenched stereotypes. "The most common phrase when a man kills a woman is that it's a 'crime of passion.' But it's not. It's a crime of control." And this is where the public becomes the private. Social messaging tells men they're entitled to that control, Hill writes, that women belong to them, owe them, or must be punished for failing to love or obey them: "The unifying ingredient among abusers is a radioactive sense of entitlement. The animating force behind their violence is the belief that their feelings are more important than those of their partners and children." In a CBC interview, Nadia El-Dib's sister Racha made this point about the man who killed her sister: he "believed he had the right to murder her because she exercised her right of taking ownership of her life, body and soul."

The shadows of coverture, a husband's legal domination over a wife, persist in the Canadian justice system. In a 2015 study, Dawson coined "intimacy discount" to describe how men charged with killing intimate partners receive more lenient sentences than those who kill strangers or non-intimate partners. A 2017 StatsCan report found dating violence was more likely to result in a criminal charge than violence by a spouse: 91 per cent of alleged dating violence victims saw charges; 78 per cent of those reporting spousal violence did. A "master of the house" mindset prevails, says lawyer Kathryn Smithen.

Convictions on charges related to intimate-partner abuse are rare, she says, noting she's seen only one in hundreds of cases she's taken before the courts in eight years. Most cases don't even make it to trial, she says. A high percentage of complainants are pressured to recant or not appear. Typically, the Crown withdraws the charges and the defendant enters into a peace bond after completion of a partner-assault response program; that means no trial, no sentencing, no criminal record. Decades ago, when her husband was charged with 17 criminal offences, including strangulation and sexual assault, the Crown was adamant that he would be tried, Smithen says. He was convicted of assault and assault with a weapon in 1996. She doesn't see the same vigour today. (How many peace bonds are issued for charges related to domestic assault is unknown; the numbers aren't kept.)

A disconnect between the criminal law system and the family system is another problem, Smithen says. "After entering into a peace bond, offenders carry on in family court as though the offence never officially happened in the justice system and then return to the cycle of terror against their victims." There's a sense having a father on premises is "best for the family," Smithen says. The wives and mothers in these family law cases are expected to separate "their" issues with their former partners from their children's right to have both parents in their lives. Some judges get it, others don't, she says, recalling a female judge who said all couples have "tussles" when they break up, when Smithen was arguing for a restraining order. Special domestic-violence courts with specially trained judges and Crown attorneys exist across the

country, but a 2011 study by University of Ottawa criminologist Holly Johnson found complainants experienced the same problems of being shut out and unheard that Smithen enumerates: “Women lack choice and control over critical decisions during court proceedings,” Johnson concluded.

Bill C-75, passed in June, included changes to laws governing domestic abuse, including imposition of a reverse onus at bail for those charged with related offences if they are repeat offenders, and added sentencing provisions aimed at making intimate-partner violence an aggravating factor that applies to former as well as current partners. Strangulation became an elevated form of assault, and a higher maximum penalty for repeat offenders was imposed. Given what’s known about intimate-partner violence, there were big holes: the law didn’t extend to include the equally dangerous men who stalk women who’ve refused them access to a dating relationship, or recognize that perpetrators also target anyone close to the victim.

A possible proposed change to the Divorce Act would make a record of intimate-partner violence a criterion when determining the best interest of the child, Smithen says. “There’s an attitude in some legal circles that domestic violence is isolated, that if a parent is violent with a spouse it has nothing to do with their relationship with their children. I don’t agree.”

In 2015, England and Wales became the first countries to make it a crime to engage in “coercive control” with an intimate partner. This year, Scotland made it a crime punishable up to 15 years in jail. Experts express concern that proper police and legal training is required to enforce the law properly and safely. Legislation is only as good as the people who implement it, says Dawson. “If we don’t train individuals—police, judges, lawyers—on the legislation and what we mean by coercive, controlling behaviour, what we mean by femicide, whatever the concept, then the legislation will miss its mark.”



A candlelight vigil in in Wilno, Ont., for Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam (Justin Tang/CP)

Given systemic failures to address intimate-partner violence, it’s not surprising that the upcoming Wilno inquest is being met with hope and skepticism. Holly Campbell, founder of the Because Wilno advocacy group, says it will put a spotlight on stalking as a serious criminal offence and the lack of services for rural women, but expresses mixed feelings: “It’s important that we draw attention to all of the systemic failures that led to the killing of these three women, but I also feel frustration because we continue to see women dying in such a predictable way,” she told the *Ottawa Citizen*. “For me, the question is, Why can’t we have leadership on this issue? Why can’t we react to what we already know is broken?”

Calgary’s Staff Sgt. Paul Wozney calls domestic violence a “community problem” that requires community engagement to address. In September, the force introduced an app to connect

victims of domestic abuse with services. Bainbridge speaks of the need for bystander awareness campaigns focused on neighbours, family, friends and employers. We need to shift attention, Bainbridge says. “We focus on the person being victimized and put all the responsibility on her. But nothing will change without focus on the perpetrator. Even if we get her out, he’ll follow her until he gets a new girlfriend and then he becomes her problem. He’s the constant. And he’s not going to change unless he wants to change.”

Social stigma can change behaviour, as seen with changing attitudes to drunk driving. Bainbridge recalls an account of the friends of an abused woman moving in with her and her husband. “It made him very, very uncomfortable. He left.” She asks: “Why should the woman always be the one to leave?”

As a federal election nears, there’s no indication that violence against women and girls will be a campaign issue. *Maclean’s* contacted the major parties to ask for their platforms. The Green Party of Canada outlined “comprehensive solutions” to the problem of violence against women, girls and gender-diverse people that included working with women’s groups and Indigenous organizations, implementing recommendations of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and establishing a guaranteed livable income. The NDP’s “New Deal for People” commits “to end violence against women,” a party spokesperson wrote in an email, with “a comprehensive plan to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ12S+ people,” which includes supporting community policing and “advancing gender equality.” The Liberals hadn’t released their platform days before the writ was to drop. The Conservative party did not return *Maclean’s* calls.

As Sheehy sees it, mainstream lack of concern about violence against women is itself a dire societal indictment: “Only in a misogynist society could you have this many femicides and not react,” she says. “I don’t think we value the lives of women and I don’t think we value the lives of children. Otherwise, we would be standing up in complete alarm.”

These are the women pictured in the photo at the beginning of this article.

Left to right,

Top row: Abigail Ootoova, Holly Marie Hamilton (large photo), Amber Cobean, Ashley Smith-Ames, Brenda Lautaoja, Dorna Dehdari, Dorsa Dehdari (large photo), Alberta (Beth) McGaghey

Second row: Elaine Bellevue, Edresilda (Edra) Haan, Jasmine Lovett and Aliyah Sanderson, Kathryn Niedoba, Jennyfer Lachapelle, Hanh (Hana) Nguyen

Third row: Liisa Nukkala, Lise Danais, Lorraine Kerubo Ogoti (large photo), Maryhelen Johnston, Merna Fiddler, Quinn Butt, Noémie Lavoie

Fourth row: Riya Rajkumar (large photo), Nadia El-Dib, Tammy Brown (large photo), Laurie-Anne Grenier, Wendy Allan

Fifth row: Laura Grant, Sandra Anne Finn, Shawn Boshuck, Marie-Ève Naud, Yvonne Mooney

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