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NEWS MEDIA'S REPRESENTATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT ON CASES OF

INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

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INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE**

Submitted by

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The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who has experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner, the law enforcement officers who respond to these calls with courage and compassion, and all who are committed to raising awareness of and preventing intimate partner violence.

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I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Lynn Corcoran and Dr. Jeff Chang, for their ongoing flexibility and guidance as this research project evolved. This thesis represents only a small fraction of what I've learned about gender-based violence and the qualitative research process under your patient mentorship.

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Abstract

Despite policy advances and changing public attitudes toward intimate partner violence (IPV), approximately 743 women were murdered by their current or previous intimate partner in Canada between 2011 and 2021 (Sutton, 2023). News media can play a significant role in shaping public opinions about IPV, including how it ought to be formally and informally responded to (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Gillespie et al., 2013; Kajeepeta et al., 2017). Research has also demonstrated that media representation of law enforcement can impact officer's understandings of their own occupation (Rantatalo, 2016). Previous studies have investigated news media's representation of IPV and news media's representation of law enforcement; however, no research has looked specifically at news media's representation of law enforcement officers on cases of intimate partner femicide. Given that inaccurate and/or problematic narratives may be a barrier to effective law enforcement responses and reporting, further research is warranted. Using a blended method of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the purpose of this study was to answer the following research question: *How was law enforcement represented in cases of intimate partner femicide in Albertan newspapers in 2020?*

Keywords: Intimate Partner Femicide, Law Enforcement, News Media, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Chapter 1. Significance of the Problem

Gender-based violence impacts one in three women worldwide (UN Women, n.d.) and accounts for one quarter of the violent crimes reported to police in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015). Unlike the violence experienced by men, the violence that women experience is most likely to be perpetrated by someone with whom they have a close and personal relationship, such as an intimate partner or family member (David & Jaffray, 2022; Dawson et al., 2021; Sutton, 2023). In 2020, the lockdowns and quarantines intended to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the corresponding economic consequences aggravated risk factors for gender-based violence (e.g., increased perceived social isolation, increased proximity to perpetrators, loss of employment, etc.) while simultaneously increasing barriers to essential support services and, predictably, violence against women increased on a global scale (UN Women, n.d.). Research also indicated that the documented rate of femicide, the most extreme manifestation of violence against women and girls, increased in Canada and numerous other countries (Gadermann et al., 2021; Piquero et al., 2021).

Although it is widely accepted that news media can play a vital role in shaping society's perceptions and raising awareness of social issues, gender equality organizations have raised concerns about the media's representation of domestic violence and femicide (Gillespie et al., 2013; Kajeepeta et al., 2017). While some research has indicated that news media are increasingly reporting important contextual details, such as a previous history of intimate partner violence (IPV) and are less likely to excuse or justify the perpetrator's actions (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013), journalists frequently frame femicide as a shocking and isolated incident rather than positioning stories within the broader context of violence against women (Gillespie et al., 2013). Further, the level of coverage of domestic homicides tends to be lower than that of non-

domestic homicides and only a small fraction of articles include IPV advocates or experts as sources (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Kajeepeta et al., 2017).

Although law enforcement can be a literal lifeline for women in imminent danger of IPV, reporting rates to police are low and most IPV survivors indicate that the majority of the violence they experience goes unreported (Conroy, 2021). The reasons for the underreporting of IPV are undoubtedly complex; however, it is plausible that IPV survivors' perceptions of law enforcement are a contributing factor. Further, research has indicated that law enforcement officers' personal beliefs about and attitudes toward IPV can vary drastically (Harper et al., 2020; Lila et al., 2013; McPhedran et al., 2017; Segrave et al., 2016; Sun, 2007). Additional research is necessary to better understand the role that news media plays in shaping individual and collective narratives about law enforcement responses to IPV and femicide. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how law enforcement is represented in the news media in cases of intimate partner femicide. Specifically, I sought to answer the following question: *How was law enforcement represented in cases of intimate partner femicide in Albertan newspapers in 2020?*

Definition of Terms

The following terms are key concepts in my study. They are defined as follows:

Femicide

The term femicide will be operationally defined as the intentional killing of women and girls because of their gender and/or sex (Russell, 2012; UN Women, 2023). Gender- or sex-related motives include, but are not limited to, discrimination against women and girls, misogynist ideas of male superiority, and/or harmful societal norms (UN Women, 2023).

Intimate Partner Femicide

Intimate partner femicide is a sub-type of femicide committed by current or former intimate partners. This includes partners in marriage, common-law, and dating relationships. Intimate partner femicide is the most common form of femicide (UN Women, 2023).

Intimate Partner Violence

The term IPV will be operationally defined as physical, sexual, or psychological harm caused by a current or former intimate partner (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2021). Although the terms 'domestic violence' and 'family violence' often include IPV, these terms also encompass harm that occurs between other parties in the same household, such as child abuse or elder abuse. This study focuses specifically on the violence that occurs between intimate partners and, therefore, I will not be using these terms interchangeably.

Survivor

Although the criminal justice system and a significant portion of the professional literature utilizes the term 'victim' to describe an individual who has experienced IPV, I will be using the term 'survivor' to refer to these individuals. This term has been intentionally chosen for its empowering and hopeful connotation; however, I recognize that not all individuals who have experienced IPV may identify with this term and suggest that practitioners inquire about and honour individuals' preferences.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I review the literature that informs this study. Specifically, I reflect on the distinctive characteristics of IPV and femicide, risk factors for IPV and femicide, how law enforcement officers perceive and respond to incidents of IPV, how IPV survivors perceive those interventions, and the mediating role of news media in Canada. Research directly examining IPV survivors' perceptions of police responses to incidents of violence is limited and the mediating role of news media in shaping these interactions has not yet been explored; however, such links are plausible. Additional research is necessary to better understand the role news media plays in shaping individual and collective narratives about law enforcement responses to IPV and femicide.

What is Intimate Partner Violence?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) defined IPV as "physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse" (para. 1). Physical violence includes "forms of abuse that involve physical assault or the threat of physical assault…[such as] being threatened with a weapon, being slapped, being beaten, and being choked" (Cotter, 2021, p. 4). Sexual violence includes "sexual assault or threats of sexual assault…[such as] being made to perform sex acts that the [person] did not want to perform" (Cotter, 2021, p. 4). Psychological harm includes "forms of abuse that target a person's emotional, mental, or financial well-being, or impede their personal freedom or sense of safety" (Cotter, 2021, p. 4). Examples of psychological harm include, but are not limited to, put-downs, manipulation, confinement, or property damage (Cotter, 2021). Psychological abuse is the most common type of IPV, reported by 43% of women and 35% of men (Cotter, 2021).

According to the 2019 GSS on Victimization, approximately 28% of survivors experience the most severe types of IPV, including choking, threatening to use or using a gun or knife, sexual assault, or beating (Conroy, 2021). Women disproportionately experience the more severe types of IPV. For instance, 17% of female IPV survivors report being sexually assaulted (versus 7.4% of male survivors) and 14% report being choked (versus 3.4%) (Conroy, 2021). Conversely, it is more common for men to report that their partner threw something that could hurt them (60% of male survivors versus 39% of female survivors) or slapped them (37% versus 17%) (Conroy, 2021).

In addition, coercive control co-occurs with physical violence in an estimated 60-80% of cases (Stark, 2009). Coercive control is described as a distinct pattern of coercion and control that includes intimidation, stalking, isolation from friends or family, and fostering dependence (Kadel, 2019). This type of psychological abuse is intended to diminish the survivors' sense of autonomy and is both multidimensional and continuous in nature (Stark, 2007; Stark, 2009). In 2021, Bill C-202 sought to amend the Criminal Code to create an offence of engaging in coercive control and controlling conduct; however, the bill did not pass. A new bill seeking to criminalize coercive control, Bill C-332, reached its second reading in the House of Commons in November 2023 but has not yet been passed (Aziz, 2023).

What is Femicide?

While all cases of femicide are homicides, not all homicides of females can be classified as femicides. In order to be considered a femicide, there must be indicators that her death was "an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation" (UN Women, 2023). While it can be difficult to determine definitively that a woman or girl was killed because of her sex and/or gender, the victim and/or perpetrator characteristics, the specific actions before, during or after

the murder, and the context of the killing can all be reviewed for sex/gender-related

motives/indicators (SGRMIs). For instance, women are significantly more likely to be killed by

an intimate partner or family member while men are significantly more likely to be killed by a

friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger (David & Jaffray, 2022; Dawson et al., 2021; Sutton,

2023). Research has documented that intimate partner femicide is typically motivated in whole

or in part by sexist or misogynist attitudes, specific to the perception that women/girls are

'property' over whom men/boys have entitlement (Dawson et al., 2021). Therefore, the murder

of women by an intimate partner is broadly considered to be a SGRMI (Dawson et al., 2021). In

fact, this is only criterion used by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to identify

femicides (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

Based on the information reported to police, 66% of the 1,125 femicide victims in

Canada between 2011 and 2021 were currently in or had previously had an intimate partner

relationship with the perpetrator (Sutton, 2023). When the sex of the primary accused was

reported, 91% were male (Dawson et al., 2021). Although femicides are primarily perpetrated by

men, Russell (2012) notes that female perpetrators can also commit femicide when acting as the

agents of men.

Dawson et al. (2021) asserted that prior IPV, including coercive controlling behaviours,

in the relationship is one of the most common SGRMIs in Canada and globally. Dawson et al.

(2021) maintains that a history of violence against the victim can be seen as a tangible expression

of misogynist attitudes and beliefs, in which the perpetrator perceives "the woman or girl as a

possession or object to do with as he wishes" (p. 40). Although male perpetrators are responsible

for the overwhelming majority of murders of both women and men, this SGRMI is seldom

present in the killings of men or boys. Additional SGRMIs include pregnancy, connection to

human trafficking, sexual violence, forcible confinement, actual or pending separation, and mutilation of the victim (Dawson et al., 2021).

Stabbing was the most common cause of death for intimate partner femicide victims followed by shooting (Dawson et al., 2021). Excessive force or 'overkill' is also more common in the killings of females compared to males (Dawson et al., 2021). Further, research has consistently confirmed across countries and cultures that homicide-suicide is almost exclusively perpetrated by males who kill female partners (Dawson et al., 2021; Flynn et al., 2016).

Who is at Risk for Intimate Partner Violence and/or Femicide in Canada?

Obtaining accurate statistics can be challenging. Although most homicides are reported to the police in Canada (Dawson et al., 2021), it is not always clear whether there were gender- or sex-related contributing factors. Because IPV and femicide generally occur in private settings, these phenomena cannot be directly observed (Dawson et al., 2021; Ruiz-Pérez et al., 2007). Researchers studying IPV must rely heavily on self-report data, which has limitations and can be susceptible to biases. Additionally, there is a lack of consensus on the operational definitions of IPV (Ruiz-Pérez et al., 2007) and femicide (Dawson et al., 2021; Russell, 2012). Consequently, making comparisons between studies is a complex task. The literature I review here provides a general sense of the magnitude of these issues.

Although people from all backgrounds can experience IPV, victimization reports consistently confirm that women experience IPV and are killed by their intimate partners at higher rates than men (Beaupre, 2015; Burczucka & Conroy, 2018; Conroy, 2021; Dawson et al., 2021). In 2019, approximately 432,000 or 4.2% of women experienced IPV compared with 279,000 or 2.7% of men in Canada (Conroy, 2021). Of the 1,847 police-reported female homicide victims in Canada between 2011 and 2021, 1,125 were classified as gender- or sex-

related (Sutton, 2023). Although femicide rates have generally decreased over time, there was a 14% increase in Canada between 2020 and 2021 (Gadermann et al., 2021; Piquero et al., 2021).

Age is a second major risk factor for IPV with IPV being more prevalent among younger age groups (Burczucka & Conroy, 2018; Conroy, 2021). Women between the ages of 15 to 24 years report rates of IPV that are more than double those reported by women aged 25 years or older (Conroy, 2021). Although younger women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner, the largest portion of femicide victims in Canada in 2020 was women aged 55 to 64 years, with an average age of 41 years (Dawson et al., 2021). When motivations are documented, romantic jealousy was found to be the most reported motive for the femicide of younger women (Sutton & Dawson, 2017). In contrast, women 55 years and older are more likely to be killed by another family member, friend, or care provider (Sutton & Dawson, 2017). Regardless of the motive for the femicide, research indicates that excessive force was used against younger and older women equally (Sutton & Dawson, 2017).

Indigenous populations (First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit) experience IPV at rates that are more than double the non-Indigenous population in Canada (Conroy, 2021); however, within group differences are noteworthy. For instance, approximately 15% of Inuit people experience IPV compared with approximately 9% of Métis people (Conroy, 2021). While IPV rates in the provinces decreased from 7.5% in 2009 to 3.5% in 2019, rates remained highest in the territories (Conroy, 2021). Conroy (2021) reported that 9.8% of Canadians in the Northwest Territories and 16% of Canadians in Nunavut experienced IPV in the five years preceding 2019. Conversely, Canadians in Newfoundland and Labrador reported IPV at a rate well below the national average at 1.4% (Conroy, 2021). Indigenous women are also at disproportionately high risk for intimate partner femicide in Canada (Sutton, 2023). Indigenous women make up

approximately 16% of femicide victims, despite making up less than 5% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2016).

IPV and femicide rates in rural areas tend to be higher than in urban areas (Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, 2022; Sutton, 2023). Specifically, the rural areas of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have the highest rates of IPV within the provinces (Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, 2022). Further, approximately three-quarters of femicide victims are killed in private locations, such as their own homes or the home of the accused (Dawson et al., 2021). Comparatively, less than half of male homicide victims die in private locations (Dawson et al., 2021).

Situational factors can also increase the risk of IPV and/or femicide. Separations or breakups can be a significant risk factor (Burczycka, 2016). Sixteen percent of IPV survivors reported that they were only subjected to violence once their relationship had ended and 49% of survivors reported that the severity of the violence had increased following separation (Burczycka, 2016). Further, a woman's risk of being murdered by a legally separated spouse is nearly six times higher than her risk of being murdered by a legally married spouse (Government of Canada, 2018). Police report that approximately 32% of femicides are motivated primarily by the accused's feelings of anger, despair, or frustration, compared with approximately 12% of non-gender-related homicides (Sutton, 2023).

A history of violence in the childhood home of adult IPV survivors is another noteworthy individual risk factor (Burczycka, 2016). Approximately 21% of IPV survivors report having witnessed violence committed by a parent or guardian as a child (Burczycka, 2016). Additionally, low level of formal education is a consistent risk factor associated both with a women's risk of experiencing IPV as well as a man's risk of committing violence against his

partner (World Health Organization, 2012). In Canada, individuals who report an annual household income of less than $20,000 report higher rates of IPV over their lifetime than any other income group (Cotter, 2021). Economic stress is a well-established risk factor for IPV (World Health Organization, 2012).

Based on self-report data, people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual experience higher rates of IPV than people in heterosexual relationships (Statistics Canada, 2021). Given that most of the existing research uses measurement methodologies based on the traditional gender binary, official statistics and data on the experiences of transgender and non-binary survivors of IPV may be misrepresented or, in some cases, excluded entirely. While I was unable to locate statistics on IPV rates in transgender populations specifically, research suggests that transgender people generally experience violence at higher rates than cisgender people (Jaffray, 2020). Although intersectional-based statistics continue to be quite limited, reflecting on the interaction between an individual's multiple identities can help us better understand their unique risk profile. For example, an alarming 71% of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2) women with disabilities report having experienced some form of IPV since the age of 15 years (Statistics Canada, 2021). Further intersectional-based research will support a more accurate analysis of the contributory social issues. While evidence-based risk factors can help to identify those at risk for IPV and/or femicide, it is important to recognize that no static or dynamic factor is singularly casual. IPV can occur to anyone in an intimate partner relationship.

How Have Police Responded to Incidents of Intimate Partner Violence Historically?

Until the 1970s, the Canadian court systems regarded IPV primarily as a private family matter and police responses were limited. There were no official law enforcement protocols for

IPV calls and officers were likely to receive little to no official training (McPhedran et al., 2016). When officers were called to an IPV incident, they primarily concentrated their response on keeping the abuse from become public knowledge (Corcoran & Allen, 2005; Tutty et al., 2008). However, mounting societal pressure in the 1970s and 1980s pushed both the courts and police services to take this violence more seriously.

In May 1982, the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Health, Welfare, and Social Affairs reported that the police training at that time generally instructed against the arrest of a perpetrator "unless he was actually found hitting the victim or unless the victim had suffered injuries that were serious enough to require a certain number of stitches" (Department of Justice Canada, 2001, p. 9). In July 1982, the House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion that "Parliament encourage all Canadian police forces to establish a practice of having the police regularly lay charges in instances of wife beating" (Department of Justice Canada, 2001, p. 9). Between 1983 and 1986, federal and provincial Attorneys General and Solicitors General adopted policy directives that required police and Crown prosecutors to "charge and prosecute all incidents of spousal abuse where there were reasonable and probable grounds to believe that an offence had been committed" (Department of Justice Canada, 2001, p. 1). However, it is important to note that these 'new' policies were no more than the criminal justice system's application standard for all other criminal conduct.

How do Police Respond to Intimate Partner Violence Today?

While the Criminal Code is under federal jurisdiction, the administration of these policies is a provincial/territorial responsibility (Saxton et al., 2021; Tutty et al., 2008). Accordingly, specific practice guidelines are location dependent. In Alberta, the Ministry of Justice and

Solicitor General (2020) recommended that a trauma and violence-informed police response to
IPV includes:

- Being responsive to the individual's needs;

- Addressing the individual's needs in a way that is empowering and non-judgmental;

- Providing the individual with options for further support and services when the
  individual is ready;

- If possible, modifying the physical environment to minimize the victim's perceived
  level of fear or risk;

- Supporting the individual in understanding the connections between their experiences
  of trauma and their current coping mechanisms; and

- Avoiding re-traumatizing or replicating previous trauma dynamics (para. 2).

The objective of a trauma and violence-informed approach is to "minimize the potential for harm
and re-traumatization," not to treat trauma (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018, para. 2).

Current policies have been criticized for failing to address the coercive control common
in abusive relationships. While select abusive behaviours, such as stalking or assault, are illegal
in the Criminal Code of Canada, most non-violent coercive control tactics, such as degradation,
shaming, and intimidation, are not criminal offences (Stark, 2012). Consequently, police tend
respond to IPV calls as episodic and discrete violent incidents. However, Stark (2012) observes
that the "hallmarks of violence in abuse cases are its frequency and duration, not its severity" (p.
201).

Despite the various policies and practice guidelines, research suggests that responses
depend heavily on the discretion of the individual law enforcement officer and can vary
considerably. Sun (2007) outlined that officer responses to IPV can range from control actions,

such as issuing verbal commands or making arrests, to supportive actions, such as offering information about relevant services or expressing concern for survivors. Previous research has focused primarily on the efficacy of control actions (Dawson & Holton, 2014; Hamilton & Worthen, 2011; Lee et al., 2013; Srinivas & DePrince, 2015). Research on the prevalence and/or nature of supportive police interventions is limited (Sun, 2007).

Research suggests that attitudes and personal beliefs about IPV play a significant role in determining an officer's response. Based on a study of 404 male police officers in Valencia, Spain, Lila et al. (2013) concluded that sexist attitudes tend to have a particularly deleterious effect on officer responses. Importantly, this study distinguished between hostile sexism, defined as "an antagonistic attitude towards women, who are often viewed as inferior and trying to control men", and benevolent sexism, defined as "a chivalrous attitude towards women that feels favourable but is actually sexist because women are seen as weak creatures in need of men's protection" (p. 911). Lila et al. concluded that both forms of sexism can prove problematic. As can be reasonably predicted, several studies have confirmed that hostile sexist beliefs are routinely used to justify acts of violence against women (Herrera et al., 2012) and result in decreased feelings of empathy for female survivors (Lila et al., 2013). However, officers with higher levels of benevolent sexist beliefs *also* tended to have a higher tolerance for IPV against women when compared with officers with non-sexist attitudes (Lila et al., 2013). They speculated that officers who hold benevolent sexist beliefs tend to favour stereotypical ideas about women and may be more inclined to endorse the view that IPV is a legitimate response to women who do not fulfill their traditional social roles.

In addition to sexist attitudes, Lila et al. (2013) also measured officer empathy levels. Although empathy is commonly considered a prosocial response, the surprising results of this

study established that this is not necessarily so. While officers with non-sexist beliefs and high levels of empathy demonstrated a greater awareness of the obstacles IPV survivors face, officers with high levels of empathy and high levels of hostile sexist beliefs were actually more likely to direct their empathetic response towards the perpetrator (Lila et al., 2013). It is important to note that authors controlled for social desirability bias by way of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale and, therefore, the internal validity of this research is considered strong. Given that law enforcement is a largely male-dominated profession, many scholars argue that the masculine 'police subculture' may promote patriarchal attitudes among officers (Harper et al., 2020; Lila et al., 2013; McPhedran et al., 2016).

Sexist attitudes aside, research suggests that police attitudes towards incidents of IPV tend to be markedly negative. McPhedran et al. (2017) reported that over nine out of every ten officers in their American and Australian samples indicated that responding to multiple IPV calls from the same address was a significant problem and led to feelings of frustration and futility (Harper et al., 2020; Segrave et al., 2016). Research participants from both countries also agreed that too many resources are utilized for verbal family disagreements (Harper et al., 2020; McPhedran et al., 2017) and that they were more likely to sustain an injury on an IPV call than on any other type of call (McPhedran et al., 2017).

Additionally, survivors of IPV may not fit well with officers' notion of a 'true' victim as they may be somewhat uncooperative at times or may appear to have a certain degree of control over their victimization (Segrave et al., 2016). Sun (2007) found that survivors who aligned more closely to the traditional conceptualization of a 'victim,' including female, young or elderly, wealthy, or injured survivors, were more likely to be offered support. Research also indicates that extralegal variables, such as gender or relationship status, may influence police charging

decisions (Dawson & Hotton, 2014). The findings of research examining the impact of race on charging decisions are inconsistent (Hamilton & Worthen, 2011; Lee et al., 2013).

Based on 204 semi-structured interviews with police officers in Victoria, Australia, Segrave et al. (2016) concluded that, despite overall feelings of cynicism and frustration due to the repetitive and time-consuming nature of IPV calls, most officers reported complying with their organizational policies regarding IPV. In this study there was no control for social desirability bias and, thus, these results must be interpreted cautiously. Segrave et al. (2016) acknowledged that a significant theme in the data was avoiding managerial scrutiny, rather than a sincere belief in the benefits of these policies. Towns and Adams (2015) warned that this sort of noncommittal attitude can lead to problematic "linguistic ambiguity" (p. 497) on the part of responding officers. Towns and Adams (2015) indicated that when officers make ambiguous or seemingly insignificant comments that could potentially be construed as blaming the survivor for the harm they have experienced, both survivors and perpetrators may interpret it as confirmation from a powerful authority figure that this interpretation of the events is legitimate. Given that survivors are frequently isolated from their social support networks (Towns & Adams, 2015) and access to alternative narratives is limited, officers' clear condemnation of violence is of the utmost importance. Further, Stover et al. (2010) suggested that an officer's feelings of annoyance or frustration may negatively impact the IPV survivor's perception of the responding officer as well as the criminal justice system as a whole, even if the officer diligently adheres to their organizational policies.

Who Reports Intimate Partner Violence to Police?

Although IPV accounts for one quarter of the violent crimes reported to police in Canada, only 19% of IPV survivors contacted the police themselves to report the violence they were

experiencing (Burczycka, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2015). Research consistently indicates that

IPV is more likely to be reported to police when the violence is severe or the degree of threat is

serious, such as when a weapon is present (Bonomi et al., 2006; Felson et al. 2002; Tutty et al.,

2008). According to the 2019 GSS on Victimization, 90% of survivors who self-reported IPV to

the police did so to stop the violence and receive immediate, short-term protection (Conroy,

2021; Neill & Peterson, 2014).

Although 17% of Indigenous women report having low or no confidence in the police

(compared to 8.2% of non-Indigenous women), IPV reporting rates by Indigenous and non-

Indigenous survivors are similar (Conroy, 2021; Heidinger, 2022). Specifically, 20% of

Indigenous survivors and 19% of non-Indigenous survivors indicated that the violence they

experienced was reported to the police (Conroy, 2021).

How are Interactions With Officers Perceived by Survivors?

In a survey of 2,831 Canadians who reported IPV, Saxton et al. (2021) found that 26.2%

of survivors had found the police to be "very helpful", 42.6% had found them "somewhat

helpful", 29.7% had found them "not helpful at all", and 1.4% were "not sure." These results are

consistent with the information collected in the 2019 GSS on Victimization (Conroy, 2021).

Additionally, Saxton et al. (2021) provided study participants with a text box to elaborate on

their experiences with police and the researchers identified several themes in the responses.

Specifically, respondents indicated that they felt the police had been helpful when the officer was

sympathetic, provided resources, and handled their situation appropriately (Saxton et al., 2021).

Conversely, respondents indicated that they had found their experience with the police unhelpful

when the officer was perceived as insensitive, blameful, or not following up appropriately

(Saxton et al., 2021). Further, respondents consistently emphasized the role of "luck" in

encountering supportive service providers, leaving Saxton et al. (2021) to conclude that "mandated high-level policies…do not always translate to more effective service from individual actors in the system" (p. 2044).

Survivors who express satisfaction with police responses are more likely to report future incidents of IPV, including incidents of non-physical abuse (Stover et al., 2010). Increased and earlier reporting is advantageous because it enables the criminal justice system to take a more proactive and preventative approach. Conversely, reported dissatisfaction with police response is significantly associated with a reduction in the reporting of future violence (Miller & Segal, 2018) as well as detrimental psychological outcomes for survivors (Srinivas & DePrince, 2015). Specifically, Srinivas and DePrince (2015) found that police responses that failed to meet survivors' expectations were significantly associated with greater posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom severity.

What is the Role of News Media?

News media is a primary means for distributing information in democratic societies. Data from the 2020 General Social Survey on Social Identity indicated that more than half of Canadians follow the news on a daily basis. In 2020, circulation sales for print newspapers were $522.0 million and circulations sales for digital newspapers were $74.8 in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022). In general, older Canadians and people with a higher level of education are more likely to follow the news and current affairs (Statistics Canada, 2016). The internet is the most popular news source for Canadians between the ages of 15 to 34 years, while television is more popular for those 55 years and older (Statistics Canada, 2022). Younger generations tend to have less confidence in the media than older Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed under section two of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; however, the Court may order a publication ban in some cases. A publication ban can restrict news media from publishing or broadcasting any identifying information. Publication bans are implemented to protect the identity of witnesses, victims, accused persons, or other justice system participants (Criminal Code, 1985). Publication bans may be ordered for some femicide cases to ensure the accused has a fair hearing and/or to protect vulnerable witnesses, such as surviving children.

For those cases covered by news media, the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) ethics guidelines apply. The general ethical principles promoted by the CAJ include a commitment to accuracy, fairness, independence, transparency, and accountability. The CAJ ethics guidelines further state that Canadian journalists and broadcasters serve the public interest by "promoting the free flow of information, exposing crime or wrongdoing, protecting public health and safety, and preventing the public from being misled" (CAJ Ethics Advisory Committee, 2023, p. 4). Canadian journalists reserve the right to report on the activities of any publicly elected or special interest group "as fair and impartial observers" (CAJ Ethics Advisory Committee, 2023, p. 5).

The CAJ also endorses a commitment to diversity, encouraging journalists to "include views from all segments of the population…[including] minorities and majorities, those with power and those without it, holders of disparate and conflicting views" (CAJ Ethics Advisory Committee, 2023, p. 7). Despite this, some research suggests that femicides may receive less media coverage generally. For instance, non-domestic mass killings consistently receive more media coverage than domestic mass killings (Gerard et al., 2015). Research also suggests that there is some variance in the coverage of victims (Gilchrist, 2010). A quantitative and qualitative

content analysis found that Indigenous femicide victims received approximately three and a half times less press coverage than White femicide victims in Canada (Gilchrist, 2010).

As public attitudes toward IPV began to shift in the 1970s, news outlets coverage of IPV and femicide incidents increased substantially (Gillespie et al., 2013; Kajeepeta et al., 2017). Research comparing news coverage of intimate partner femicides in Toronto, Canada between 1975-1979 and 1998-2002 found that more recent news coverage is more likely to report a previous history of IPV and less likely to excuse or justify the perpetrator's actions (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013). However, news media continues to portray intimate partner femicides as an individual event and frequently neglects the perspectives of IPV researchers and services providers (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013).

How do News Media Depictions Impact Officers?

Media portrayals impact public opinion of law enforcement as well as officer well-being. Through a systematic search of numerous academic databases and Google Scholar, Graziano (2018) located a total of 42 media and policing-related studies. This meta-analysis confirmed that exposure to negative coverage and high-profile incidents is highly related to negative public perceptions of the police. Specifically, exposure to negative news coverage may contribute to the erosion of public trust and confidence in law enforcement (Graziano, 2018; Rantatalo, 2016). As public opinion becomes more negative, law enforcement officers tend to feel more distrustful of the public (Nix & Pickett, 2017). Several studies have also found that negative news media coverage of police is positively correlated with feelings of demoralization, increased stress levels, and increased anxiety for law enforcement officers (Edwards et al., 2020; Newiss, 2022). Accordingly, law enforcement institutions routinely devote considerable resources to ensuring the media presents policing favourably (Graziano, 2018).

Research has also confirmed that media portrayals of police work impact law enforcement "officer's day-to-day understandings of [their] occupational identity" (Rantatalo, 2016, p. 98). For example, positively biased representations of police work as heroic have been found to have self-enhancing effects on officers' professional identifications (Rantatalo, 2016). However, because news coverage tends to be limited to serious crimes, a substantial portion of police work is invisible. Huey and Broll (2015) found that some individuals want to become police officers as a consequence of the exciting portrayal in the media but begin to lose enthusiasm for the profession as they gain a more accurate understanding of the occupational realities. Regrettably, it was quite challenging to locate research exploring IPV survivors' perceptions of IPV in the media.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In this chapter, I reviewed literature on the distinctive characteristics of IPV and femicide, the general risk factors for IPV and femicide, how law enforcement officers typically perceive and respond to incidents of IPV, how IPV survivors perceive those interventions, and the role of news media in Canada. It is evident that police can be an invaluable lifeline for IPV survivors. An effective law enforcement response can help to ensure survivors' safety both in the moment as well as in the long-term. However, news media coverage may produce or reinforce specific narratives about femicide, IPV, and law enforcement's responsibilities. Specifically, it is probable that news media's representation of law enforcement may influence the way in which law enforcement officers perceive IPV calls and their corresponding duties. The purpose of this study is to understand how law enforcement is represented on cases of intimate partner femicide in news media.

Chapter 3. Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the theoretical orientation guiding this study, outline the rationale for using this method, summarize the research operations I undertook to address this research question, and detail how I interpreted the results of that data. Specifically, I utilized a blended approach of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Reflexive thematic analysis and IPA have several common features that made these approaches compatible. Both RTA and IPA employ an inductive research approach, in which codes and themes are developed based on what is observed in the data rather than predefined theoretical categories. Researcher subjectivity is presumed in both RTA and IPA. The knowledge produced is accepted as inherently subjective and situated). Additionally, RTA and IPA methods are both iterative processes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Smith & Nizza, 2022). In the following sections, I will discuss each of these approaches and my use of these methods in greater detail.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a flexible method used to develop, analyse, and interpret patterns in various types of datasets, including textual documents (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Although different approaches to TA have been documented across disciplines as far back as the early twentieth century (Byrne, 2021), Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) are often credited with delineating this method in their publication on the use of RTA in the field of psychology. The procedure Braun and Clarke (2022) outlined consists of six phases: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) coding the data (3) initial theme development, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) production of the report. Familiarisation with the data set requires reading and re-reading the data corpus to become fully

immersed in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Generating codes involves reducing the data into "small chunks of meaning" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3355). Sematic codes are identified based on what has been explicitly said or written in the dataset (Byrne, 2021). Conversely, latent codes are developed to "identify hidden meanings or underlying assumptions, ideas, or ideologies that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data" (Byrne, 2021, p. 1397). Latent coding, therefore, requires the researcher to engage more actively with the data. Both sematic and latent coding may be utilized, and some items may be double-coded (Bryne, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022). For this study, I engaged in line-by-line coding for every line that mentioned law enforcement officers. I used an inductive coding approach in which I derived all the codes from the data rather than assigning the data pre-determined codes.

The next step, initial theme development, required the codes to be organized into higher-level categories. The criteria for a theme to be considered significant is whether the theme is meaningful to the analysis rather than simple frequency. Accordingly, Braun and Clarke (2006) do not offer a firm guideline as to "what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 10). Themes are considered "analytic outputs…[that are] actively produced by the researcher through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8) and, therefore, cannot be identified in advance of the analytic process. Further, the researcher's active role in knowledge production means that codes and themes are unlikely to be reproduced by other researchers. Thus, pursing consensus between multiple researchers is unnecessary and can be considered antithetical to RTA (Byrne, 2022).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is an experiential qualitative research methodology that was first introduced to the field of health psychology by Jonathan Smith (1996) in the mid-1990s. Interpretative phenomenological analysis has gained considerable traction since that time and is now widely used in clinical, counselling, and social psychology research (Cohen et al., 2022; Smith, 2011; Smith & Nizza, 2022). The primary objective of IPA research is to systematically explore peoples' subjective experiences of phenomena (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Because this research project did not seek to understand the subjective lived experiences of the research participants, a purely IPA methodology would not have been appropriate or possible. However, I was able to develop a more nuanced interpretation of the data by 'borrowing' certain processes and elements from IPA methodology. The three primary theoretical underpinnings of the IPA method are phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. In the following sections, I will discuss each of these tenets in greater detail.

Phenomenology

Phenomenologists hold the view that people extract meaning from the world through their personal experiences (Husserl, 1927; Smith & Nizza, 2022). These scholars, therefore, seek to understand the outside world as it is interpreted through human consciousness (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Specifically, IPA is grounded in theoretical principles from transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutical phenomenology, and philosophies of perception.

Originally articulated by Edmund Husserl (1997), transcendental phenomenology proposes that every experience may be subject to reflection, and, upon reflection, conscious meaning-making processes occur. In this sense, meaning-making is a distinct process from the experience itself. Accordingly, IPA seeks to understand individuals' subjective interpretations of

their lived experiences and the sense they make of those experiences, rather than examining the structure of actual phenomena (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Further, Husserl (1997) encouraged phenomenologists to suspend their knowledge of predefined theoretical categories and/or personal judgements through a process called "bracketing." Husserl (1997) alleged that effective bracketing would enable researchers to examine experiences on their own terms. Ergo, IPA is an inductive methodology in which conclusions are drawn based on what is observed in the data (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Hermeneutical phenomenology, proposed by Martin Heidegger (1962), contributes the notion that individuals exist within a pre-established world that is "socially and historically contingent and contextually bound" (Cohen et al., 2022, p. 924). Furthermore, Heidegger (1962) recognized that the processes of interpretation and mean-making will be influenced by an individual's prior experiences and personal context (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, IPA employs an ontological framework that maintains that an individual's experiences and perceptions can only be understood within their social and historical contexts (Cohen et al., 2022). In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger alleged that the complete bracketing of potential biases is not possible, and most IPA researchers tend to agree with this assumption (Smith et al., 2009).

Finally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) work on perception is pertinent to understanding phenomenology from an IPA perspective. Merleau-Ponty (1962) reasoned that there is no separation between the body and the mind; rather, our physical bodies are our means to experience and communicate with the world. Accordingly, IPA researchers maintain that "an individual's experience can be observed and understood through the researcher's perspective" (Cohen et al., 2022, p.924).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is described as "the theory of interpretation" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 7). Further building on the philosophies proposed by Husserl and Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1993) offers that experiences occur within a given context that give the experience meaning and it is through language that our perspectives and meaning are derived from our experiences. In other words, all knowledge is interpretation, and these interpretations are constructed through language (Chang, 2010). Thus, hermeneutics is grounded in the underlying epistemological assumption of intersubjectivity (Cohen et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2009). Specifically, interpretative phenomenological researchers posit that knowledge develops through the exchanges between the participant and the researcher. In IPA research, the researcher engages in a two-step interpretation process in which the participant attempts to make sense of their experience and the researcher endeavors to make sense of the participants' personal understanding. Smith and Osborn (2003), therefore, described this methodology as a "double hermeneutic" (p. 51). Chang (2010) noted that the resulting interpretations are "a unique confluence of the social, cultural, and historical moment" and, therefore, ought to be considered "a bounded interpretation" (pp. 21-22). Although my interpretations were not developed through direct exchanges with my participants, this research study was double hermeneutic in the sense that journalists interpreted the function of law enforcement officers in responding to femicide and I endeavored to make sense of their understanding.

Idiography

Finally, IPA is firmly rooted in idiography. Idiography is described as "a focus on the particular and is often discussed in contrast to a *nomothetic* approach, which is concerned with establishing laws or generalizations that can be valid for a population of people" (Smith & Nizza,

2022, p. 8). Namely, IPA researchers seek to understand the unique experiences of specific

people within their individual circumstances (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

In accordance with idiographic philosophy, each case in an IPA study is fully analyzed before

cross-case analyses occur. Further, the researcher seeks to discover "connections, similarities,

and differences" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 53) between the participants' experiences, rather than

attempting to produce a single unified summary. Indeed, Smith (2011) stated "convergence and

divergence are the hallmark of good IPA work" (p. 24). By obtaining detailed, in-depth

knowledge of multiple participants' experiences, IPA researchers can gradually and meticulously

construct a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the shared experience (Smith et al.,

2009).

Rationale for Blending RTA and IPA

Combining RTA and IPA enabled me to address this research question in a

comprehensive and ethical manner. Reflexive thematic analysis was a strong fit for this research

project because of its versatility. Reflexive thematic analysis can be used with a variety of data

types, including written data sources. I was able to apply both semantic and latent codes using

the RTA process, which allowed me to produce a more nuanced interpretation of the dataset.

Incorporating select IPA processes enabled me to develop a more in-depth understanding of how

law enforcement representation differed between cases as I conducted participant-level analyses

prior to the cross-case analyse. This was a valuable addition as the coverage of victims can be

inconsistent (Gilchrist, 2010).

In practice, I blended RTA and IPA approaches by first developing themes at the

individual-level. I organized these themes with a table for each femicide victim. I then reviewed

the potential themes to ensure that each theme was cohesive and that there was sufficient data to

support the theme. Overlapping themes or themes with too much variation were revised. The next phase involved developing names for the themes. The names for these themes were predominately descriptive. I then compared and contrasted the themes across cases to develop overarching group themes. The final step involved producing a report that connected the themes to the research question and situated my findings within the existing literature.

Sampling and Inclusion Criteria

Sampling

Given the intensive analysis required, the sample had to be realistic given the time and resources allocated for this master's level research study, yet sizable enough to allow for the development of group themes. For this study, I reviewed newspaper articles written about six victims of intimate partner femicide. The inclusion criteria for this study included victims in reported cases of intimate partner femicide that occurred in the province of Alberta in 2020.

Sampling Selection

The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA) released a list of the names of the women and girls killed by violence in Canada in 2020. In Alberta, the names of a total of 17 victims were released. The names of an additional four victims were not released. In order of death date, the names of the identified femicide victims are as follows:

Melissa Rae Blommaert, 33-years-old, of Calgary, AB

Sheri Lynn Gauthier, 33-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Sarah Nicole Natasha Rabik, 24-years-old, of Cochrane, AB

Brittney (Brittany) Ann Meszaros, 24-years-old, of Calgary, AB

Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner, 55-years-old, of Strathcona County, AB

Sarah Gartner, 13-years-old, of Strathcona County, AB

Bella Rose Desrosiers, 7-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Lisa Dawn Arsenault, 48-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Roderica Ribbonleg, 15-years-old, of John D'Or Praire, AB

Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles, 39-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Audrey Corcoran, 33-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Vida Smith, 69-years-old, of Calgary, AB

Sierra Chalifoux-Thompson, 13-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Chantelle Renee Firingstoney, 26-years-old, of Ponoka, AB

Corrine Lisa Saddleback, 51-years-old, of Maskwacis, AB

Billie Wynell Johnson, 30-years-old, of Edmonton, AB

Louanne Martha Cardinal, 29-years-old, of Frog Lake First Nation, AB

The next step was to identify which of these victims had had an intimate relationship with the accused. To do this, I searched for news articles written about each of the named victims in the archives of the two provincial newspapers with the greatest readership, the Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald. Based on Audit Reports from the Alliance for Audited Media (2020), the Edmonton Journal had an average daily circulation rate of print and digital of 54,187 and the Calgary Herald had a total average daily circulation rate of print and digital of 58,419 in 2020.

Each victim's name was used as a search term in the Calgary Herald and Edmonton Journal online archives. The victims who had a second given name released were searched for by applying both their first and last name as well as their first name, second given name, and last name. For example, I searched for news articles written about Melissa Rae Blommaert by using the search terms "Melissa Blommaert" and "Melissa Rae Blommaert." This did not have an

impact on the search results for any of the victims. Any articles written about a case were reviewed.

There were sufficient details released in the news articles to determine that six of the femicide victims listed above were killed by a current or former intimate partner. News articles in the Calgary Herald and/or Edmonton Journal explicitly indicated that the following victims had been in an intimate relationship with the accused at some point prior to or at the time of their death:

Melissa Rae Blommaert

Brittney (Brittany) Ann Meszaros

Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner

Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles

Audrey Corcoran

Billie Wynell Johnson

Accordingly, these six women are the deceased 'participants' in this study. This is consistent with the recommended sample size for a master's level IPA research project (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

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Ethical Considerations

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According to Canada's Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS), research that uses data from the public domain does not require research ethics board approval (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018, p. 15). The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board reviewed this study on November 9, 2023 and confirmed that this project is exempt under Article 2.2 of the TCPS2.

Ethical Considerations in Researching Deceased People

Although the TCPS does not offer clear guidelines for conducting research with deceased 'participants', I did feel that there were ethical issues to consider with this research project. Specifically, I felt strongly that it was imperative to conduct my research and disseminate the findings in such a manner that the individual victims' memories were honoured as much as possible.

One of the key choices that I made on this issue was to identify each of the femicide victims by name. This is in direct contrast to the way in which living participants identities would be protected through the use of pseudonyms and the anonymization of their data. I sought guidance from key stakeholders to reinforce my decision-making on this potentially contentious issue. Specifically, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA) and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) have expressed the position that releasing the names of femicide victims is key to paying respect to the victim's individual stories and increasing public attention to the social issue of gender-based violence (Dawson et al., 2021; Johnston, 2019). Further, identifying the victims by name is a direct challenge to the historical attitude that IPV should be treated as a private family matter.

Data Collection

The raw data for this study is comprised of the news articles published in the Calgary Herald and/or Edmonton Journal containing information about the identified victims of intimate partner femicide (i.e., deceased participants). Obituaries were excluded. Articles from the time of femicide to present (February 2024) were included to capture law enforcement representation at all stages in the criminal justice process. This yielded a total of 42 articles, 19 articles in the Edmonton Journal and 23 articles in the Calgary Herald, for detailed review. One of the articles,

2020 among Edmonton's Top 5 Deadliest Years for Homicides (Junker, 2020), mentioned two of

the deceased participants -- Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles and Audrey Corcoran. Only those

sections of this article that were relevant to the respective case were analyzed during the

participant-level analysis. In Table 1, this article is represented as a .5 for each of these

participants. See Table 1 for a summary.

Table 1. Breakdown of analyzed articles based on participant and newspaper

Participant	Edmonton Journal Articles	Calgary Herald Articles
Melissa Rae Blommaert		16
Brittney (Brittany) Ann Meszaros		7
Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner	5	
Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles	5.5	
Audrey Corcoran	2.5	
Billie Wynell Johnson	6	
Total	19	23

Several of these articles (N=7) contained information about other homicide cases so only those

portions of the article that were relevant to the participant were analyzed. The remaining articles

were analyzed in their entirety.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

I will describe the process for data analysis and interpretation here as a series of

sequential steps; however, the process was far more dynamic in practice. I wove back and forth

through these steps several times as I developed new insights that enabled me to see the data

with fresh eyes (Larkin et al., 2006). This cyclical approach is typical of both RTA and IPA

research methods (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Cohen et al., 2022; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Participant-Level Analysis

Owing to IPA's idiographic underpinning, the articles or portions of articles written about each participant were fully analyzed before the cross-case analyse occurred. As per the RTA procedure, I began by reading and re-reading all the articles written about the first participant to familiarize myself with her story as much as possible.

Because this study focused specifically on how law enforcement is represented in the media in cases of intimate partner femicide, any statements directly referencing law enforcement were then extracted for further analyse. A variety of terms were used to refer to law enforcement including "Mounties," "RCMP"," "police," "authorities," and the "force" among others. Individual officers were also referred to by name or professional title. I created a master list of all these statements, printed them, and cut each statement out. I lay the statements out on a large surface so that they could easily be repositioned. I then physically grouped together statements that appeared to be similar or connected. (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Some statements supported two concurrent themes. The clusters were then converted into a table, and I gave each grouping an informative name based on the dominant feature or theme of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Potential themes were frequently collapsed or expanded upon during this process.

Once the first case was analyzed to this point, I began the process again with the second case. In line with idiographic tradition, the aim of the analysis was to understand the representation of law enforcement on the second case of intimate partner femicide, not to compare and/or contrast the representation of law enforcement in the second case with the

representation of law enforcement in the first case (Smith & Nizza, 2022). I completed this process for each deceased participant in my study.

Cross-Case Analysis

After the single case analyses were complete, I began my cross-case analysis. I carefully reviewed each table to "identify connections, similarities, and differences" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 53) in how law enforcement was represented on each of these cases. Because I employed a combined method, the intention of the group experiential themes was to highlight the convergence and divergence of law enforcement representation on the various cases (Smith & Nizza, 2022) as well as identify overarching patterns across the full dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Rigor

Mohanan and Parameswaran (2022) stressed the importance of developing a strong qualitative research question as all other aspects of research design are dependent of the focus and clarity of the question guiding the study. For this reason, my research question was developed after a comprehensive review of literature and in collaboration with my supervisors. After developing a thorough understanding of intimate partner violence, intimate partner femicide, and law enforcement responses to domestic violence in Canada, it became apparent to me that survivors' experiences and expectations and law enforcement officers' experiences and expectations of these interactions often conflict. The role that news media plays in shaping the expectations of these interactions had not yet been studied. Ergo, we developed the following research question: *How was law enforcement represented in cases of intimate partner femicide in Albertan newspapers in 2020?* This research question was determined to be novel, ethical,

relevant, and feasible within the resources and time constraints of a masters-level study (Mohanan & Parameswaran, 2022).

All themes are firmly rooted in the data and clearly supported by extracts from the participants in high-quality IPA papers (Smith, 2011). Smith (2011) stated that researchers must provide sufficient details to "successfully illustrate…the complexity, ambiguity and nuance in participants' accounts" (p. 20) if they are to do justice to a theme. The inclusion of direct quotes also helps to ensure transparency, which is a prominent characteristic of high-quality qualitative research (Levitt et al., 2018). Accordingly, I included a minimum of three statements from the data to support each theme that I identified.

Limitations

A primary limitation of this study is that I exclusively reviewed newspaper articles. Other news media sources, such as television or radio, were not investigated. It is possible that law enforcement is represented differently in broadcast news versus print journalism. It is also possible that the additional visual and/or auditory information in broadcast news impacts audiences dissimilarly.

A second limitation is that I reviewed articles from only two newspapers. The Edmonton Journal and the Calgary Herald were selected because these newspapers had the greatest readership rates; however, there are numerous smaller regional newspapers published in the province of Alberta and these newspapers may report on intimate partner femicide and/or law enforcement differently. These limitations were required to ensure that my research question was answerable within the timeframe and resources available for a master's level study.

Finally, I am a novice researcher at the beginning of gaining research experience. This is a limitation. Ongoing supervision was used to mitigate this limitation. I regularly engaged in

open communication with my supervisors throughout the research process to ensure that I

conducted rigorous research.

Chapter 4. Results

The following section presents the findings from the analysis of 42 newspaper articles

written about six women who were murdered by their intimate partner in Alberta in 2020. Any

articles published from the time of the participant's death to the present (January 2024) were

included for analysis. Some of the articles, such as *2020 among Edmonton's Top 5 Deadliest*

Years for Homicides (Junker, 2020), mentioned two or more of the deceased participants. Law

enforcement was explicitly mentioned in 76% (N=32) of these articles. This section will provide

a brief overview of the details of each case followed by the individual themes identified in the

articles written about the victims. Following the participant-level analysis, the group themes

identified in the cross-case analysis will be presented.

Participant-Level Analyses

Melissa Rae Blommaert

Melissa Rae Blommaert was killed by her husband, Ronald Candaele, on February 11,

2020 in the city of Calgary, AB. According to a statement of agreed facts, Blommaert, 33-years-

old, and Candaele, 36-years-old, had rented a U-Haul cube van to remove their personal

possessions from their Calgary Housing unit after being evicted. Based on the testimony of four

witnesses and closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage from a nearby gas station and two homes

in the area, it is believed that the couple then got into a verbal altercation while driving in the

neighbourhood of Bowness, Calgary. Blommaert, who had been driving the vehicle at the time,

stopped the vehicle, exited, and began walking and then running down the centre of a residential

street. Candaele got into the driver's seat and struck Blommaert with the vehicle. Candaele then

turned the vehicle around and bypassed Blommaert as he fled the scene. A passerby found

Blommaert lying on the street approximately two hours later. She was taken to hospital where

she was pronounced dead. Her cause of death was multiple blunt-force injuries. Candaele was convicted of second-degree murder. The reported SGRMIs for this case include an intimate relationship between the victim and the perpetrator as well as a history of violent assaults committed by Candaele against Blommaert, including a physical attack while she was pregnant. Candaele was in breach of a no-contact order when he killed Blommaert.

A total of 16 articles were published in the Calgary Herald between February 11, 2020 and August 31, 2022 on this case. Law enforcement was explicitly mentioned in 50% (N=8) of these articles in a total of 37 statements. The statements about law enforcement from this dataset were used to identify five themes. The most prominent theme was *law enforcement actions,* which included details about law enforcement activities. This theme was found in a total of 11 statements. The second major theme identified was *investigation details*, which included any information about the case that law enforcement provided to the public. This theme was supported by eight statements. The next theme identified was *relevant statistics*. This refers specifically to statistics on law enforcement responses to domestic violence and was identified in a total of five statements. Finally, *requesting public assistance,* which refers to law enforcement officers asking for information from the public to assist with their investigation, and *stressing resources,* which refers to encouraging members of the public to seek out professional support, were each identified in a total of four statements.

Table 2. Themes and Statements from the Data on the Case of Melissa Rae Blommaert

Theme	Statements from the Data
Law enforcement actions (N=11)	"Police have laid a murder charge against the partner of a woman found dead in Bowness on Monday."
	"Police are investigating the scene in Bowness where a woman was found in distress and later died on Monday, Feb. 10, 2020."

"Calgary police analyst Mark Ruggieri presented a PowerPoint presentation from the witness stand to Justice Blair Nixon using CCTV clips from two Bowness homes and a nearby gas station."

Investigation details (N=8)	"A passerby found Blommaert and called emergency services, police say."
	"Police believe she got out of the vehicle after a verbal altercation with the driver, who then struck her with the vehicle."
	"Police believe Candaele and Blommaert were married and living together in a Bowness residence."
Relevant statistics (N=5)	"Of the 20 confirmed homicides in 2019, about one-third were deemed domestic in nature and the Calgary Police Service responded to more than 25,000 domestic-related calls, which is a continuing trend, according to Staff Sgt. Paul Wozney."
	"In 2019, police laid about 5,400 domestic-related charges, which is approximately one out of every five calls attended, according to Wozney."
	"In terms of their numbers, we know that the Calgary Police Service received 30,000 calls for domestic violence support last year, and that year-over-year the number of calls are going up."
Requesting public assistance (N=4)	"Police are encouraging witnesses to come forward as they continue to investigate what they are calling a domestic homicide in Bowness on Feb. 10."
	"Police are asking anyone with information to call the non-emergency line at 403-266-1234."
	"Anyone with information about the incident is asked to call the police non-emergency number at 403-266-1234, or the Homicide Unit Tip Line at 403-428-8877."
Stressing resources (N=4)	"Police stresses that resources are available for Calgarians experiencing domestic violence."
	"We would like to remind Calgarians experiencing abuse or violence in an intimate or family relationship that they are always encouraged to

reach for help, as these conflict behaviours often become worse over time," said Staff Sgt. Colin Chisholm of the Calgary Police Service homicide unit."

"Anyone experiencing domestic abuse can contact police any time and are asked to call 911 if they are in immediate danger."

Brittany/Brittney Anne Meszaros

Brittany/Brittney Anne Meszaros was shot and killed by her common-law partner, Alexander Moskaluk, in their basement apartment in the city of Calgary, AB on April 24, 2020. Moskaluk confessed to detectives that he had been consuming alcohol and playing with an unlawfully possessed shotgun when he accidentally shot Meszaros in the chest. According to a statement of agreed facts, Moskaluk then attempted to bandage Meszaro's wound and revive her. When his efforts proved unsuccessful, Moskaluk left her body on the floor of their living room. On the evening of April 27, 2020, Meszaro's father, her two sisters, and their boyfriends entered the home to do a welfare check and discovered Meszaro's body in the living room and Moskaluk experiencing a drug overdose in the bedroom. Emergency medical services (EMS) were able to revive Moskaluk and he was charged with manslaughter with a firearm. The SGRMI for this case is the abandonment of the victim's body.

A total of seven articles were published in the Calgary Herald between April 28, 2020 and January 19, 2022 on this case. Law enforcement was explicitly mentioned in 85.7% (N=6) of these articles in a total of 28 statements. The statements about law enforcement from this dataset were used to identify four themes. The primary theme, *investigation details*, was supported by a total of nine statements. The secondary theme, *law enforcement observations of domestic violence,* included information about general observations law enforcement had made about the phenomenon of domestic violence rather than specific details about this case. This theme was

identified in seven statements. The third theme, *attestation of law enforcement's commitment to address domestic violence,* refers to both statements that generally declare a commitment to address domestic violence as well as specific details on the steps that law enforcement takes to address domestic violence. This theme was supported by a total of six statements. Finally, the theme of *law enforcement actions* was identified in a total of four statements.

Table 3. Themes and Statements from the Data on the Case of Brittany/Brittney Anne Meszaros

Theme	Statements from the Data
Investigation details (N=9)	"Police say they believe Meszaros was killed sometime between Friday and Monday at 8:30 p.m."
	"According to police, Moskaluk and Meszaros were living together in a common-law relationship and they believe the death to be domestic in nature, but the couple has no known history of domestic violence."
	"A 23-year-old man, who police said was in a common-law relationship with Meszaros, has been charged with manslaughter."
Law enforcement observations of domestic violence (N=7)	"Calgary police have recorded an increase in domestic conflict calls but are reporting a decrease in domestic violence by about 30 per cent."
	"Supt. Steve Barlow said previously that most calls are related to "verbal disputes and concerns about conflict between individuals" but not physical violence."
	"The force did see a significant drop in domestic homicides, with only two of 33 cases last year designated as such."
Attestation of law enforcement's commitment to address domestic violence (N=6)	"Notwithstanding the pandemic, we are absolutely committed to addressing domestic violence issues in the community," he said."
	"These community agencies are well-resources, well-trained and certainly have a very good idea of what's going on in the community when it comes to domestic violence, so I view that as a positive," said Wozney, adding they partner with more than 80 social agencies in the community."

	"He said the service has plans to address domestic violence should it increase exponentially, as experts have warned."
Law enforcement actions (N=4)	"Police hold the scene of a suspicious death in a home in the 600 block of Marian Crescent N.E. in Calgary on Tuesday, April 28, 2020."
	"Calgary police and EMS attended the residence in the 600 block of Marian Crescent N.E. and also found a man in serious condition."
	"No motive has been established and police are reviewing CCTV footage and speaking with potential witnesses."

Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner

Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner, 55-years-old, was killed by her husband, Greg Gartner, on May 4, 2020 in Strathcona County, AB. Mounties were called to the home at approximately 6:15 a.m. on May 4, 2020 for reports of a man with a firearm. Upon entering, officers found Paterson-Gartner along with the couples' 13-year-old daughter, Sarah, and the family dog had been shot and killed before Gartner, 53-years-old, used the firearm to kill himself. The Strathcona County RCMP confirmed that the weapon used was legally owned and no criminal charges were laid. The RCMP also stated that they had no record of prior domestic or family violence in the home.

A total of five articles were published in the Edmonton Journal between May 6, 2020 and April 21, 2021 on this case. Law enforcement was explicitly mentioned in 80% (N=4) of these articles in a total of 24 statements. Investigation details and law enforcement actions were the two primary themes identified. *Law enforcement actions* were referenced in a total of 11 statements and *investigation details* were referenced in a total of nine statements. The theme *identification of the victims and/or perpetrator* references the RCMP decision not to release the

names of the victims and/or perpetrators in this case. This proved to be a controversial decision and was mentioned in a total of six statements.

Table 4. Themes and Statements from the Data on the Case of Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner

Theme	Statements from the Data
Law enforcement actions (N=11)	"Our members responded immediately, ensured the safety of the public, accessed the residence and located three deceased people," Kalist said Tuesday afternoon. "To protect the public, the area was contained, traffic was diverted and nearby residences were evacuated." "When Strathcona RCMP, including the Emergency Response Team, made entry onto the subject's property, three people and one dog were located, deceased."
Investigation details (N=9)	"RCMP, for their part, had no record of violence in the home." "Strathcona County RCMP detachment commander Supt. Dave Kalist said the 55-year-old mother and teenage daughter were victims of homicide and the 53-year-old man died of a self-inflicted injury." "The weapon used was "legally owned," said Kalist and RCMP had not been called to the home before."
Identification of the victims and/or perpetrator (N=6)	"Kalist cited the Federal Privacy Act, noting that names of the victims will not be provided by RCMP." "But ultimately we believe police services should be releasing the names of those who have been killed due to domestic violence." "Alberta Council of Women's Shelters executive director Jan Reimer took issue with the RCMP decision not to identify the victims and apparent perpetrator in the case, saying it obscures the reality of domestic violence."

Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles

Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles was stabbed to death by her husband, Luis Antonio Candela-Gonzales, on July 11, 2020. Esquivel-Robles, 39-years-old, was found dead in her condo in Edmonton, AB. Candela-Gonzales, 39-years-old, was later found dead near his vehicle on the Trans-Canada Highway near Sicamous, B.C. Police confirmed that Candela-Gonzales had died from self-inflicted wounds and no criminal charges were laid.

A total of six articles referencing this case were published in the Edmonton Journal between July 15, 2020 and December 31, 2020. All six articles explicitly mentioned law enforcement in reference to this case but also included information about other homicides that had occurred throughout the year, including homicides that were not domestic in nature. Only those sections of the articles that were relevant to this case were analyzed. Law enforcement was mentioned in a total of 12 statements pertaining to this case. The primary theme identified in these sections was *investigation details* which was mentioned in a total of five statements. The secondary theme was *law enforcement observations of domestic violence* which was mentioned in a total of three statements. Due to the relatively limited coverage of this case, these were the only two themes identified.

Table 5. Themes and Statements from the Data on the Case of Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles

Theme	Statements from the Data
Investigation details (N=5)	"Police believe he died from self-inflicted wounds."
	"Meanwhile, police confirmed Wednesday a death last weekend was confirmed as a homicide."
	"Police do not believe it is criminal in nature."
Law enforcement observations of	"McFee said the level of violence such as shootings and domestic violence has gone up in 2020."

domestic violence (N=3)	"McFee said as of Monday, there had been 7,816 domestic violence violations compared to 6,737 at the same time last year, for a 16 per cent increase."
	"McFee said three of the killings have been "spousal related.""

Audrey Corcoran

Audrey Corcoran died on July 19, 2020 as a result of serious injuries inflicted by her girlfriend, Ashley Courterielle, in Edmonton, AB. Police initially responded to a weapons complaint at approximately 2 a.m. on July 13, 2020. When they arrived, the officers discovered Corcoran, 33-years-old, on the ground with what appeared to be a stab wound. EMS were called and transported Corcoran to hospital; however, her condition continued to deteriorate, and she died on July 19, 2020 as a result of her injuries. Courterielle, 38-years-old, admitted that she had become "very angry" with Corcoran and stabbed her once in the chest with a kitchen knife. Courterielle and Corcoran had been consuming alcohol and socializing with neighbours at the time of the incident. Courterielle was charged of second-degree murder as well as assault with a weapon for a physical altercation that occurred with a bystander who had attempted to intervene in the assault on Corcoran. This is the only case of female-perpetrated femicide analyzed in this study.

Police did not disclose Corcoran's death to the public until August 5, 2020. A total of three articles were published in the Edmonton Journal on this case between August 5, 2020 and September 21, 2022. Law enforcement was explicitly mentioned in all these articles in a total of ten statements. One of the articles also included information about other homicides. Only the section of this article that pertained to this case was analyzed. One theme was identified. The

theme identified in these articles was *law enforcement actions* which was mentioned in a total of four statements.

Table 6. Themes and Statements from the Data on the Case of Audrey Corcoran

Theme	Statements from the Data
Law enforcement actions (N=4)	"Police responded to a weapons complaint at a Kensington-area home at approximately 2:15 a.m. on July 13, a Wednesday police news release said."
	"Police had initially charged Ashley Courterielle, 38, with aggravated assault, assault with a weapon and possession of a weapon, but following the autopsy updated the charges against Courterielle to second-degree murder."
	"Police did not reveal her death until Aug. 5."

Billie Wynell Johnson

Billie Wynell Johnson, 30-years-old, went missing from downtown Edmonton, AB on December 24, 2020. Kenneth Courtorielle, 35-years-old, was arrested in February 2021 in relation to her death. Johnson and Courtorielle were in an "on-again, off-again" relationship and Courtorielle was with Johnson at the time of her death according to a statement of agreed facts. Courtorielle maintained that Johnson died of an accidental drug overdose; however, based on the forensic evidence and expert witness testimony, the judge found that Johnson had died as a result of one or more blows to her face. Courtorielle was convicted of manslaughter and indignity to a body. Courtorielle was on parole for a previous sex offence at the time of Johnson's death.

A total of six articles were published in the Edmonton Journal on this case between January 7, 2021 and September 25, 2023. Law enforcement was explicitly mentioned in 83% (N=5) of these articles in a total of 25 statements. *Requesting public assistance* was referenced in a total of seven statements and *law enforcement actions* were referenced in a total of five

statements. The theme *perjury* references the act of making a false statement to a law enforcement officer while knowing that the statement is false. This theme was mentioned in a total of five statements.

Table 7. Themes and Statements from the Data on the Case of Billie Wynell Johnson

Theme	Statements from the Data
Requesting public assistance (N=7)	"On Thursday, police asked for the public's help in finding a black Dodge Ram that was seen leaving the downtown area headed west out of the city between 9:30 p.m. on Dec. 24 and 1:14 a.m. on Dec. 25." "The Edmonton Police Service have released photos of a man and a truck they are looking for in relation to her disappearance." "The homicide section continues to search for Johnson's body and are asking rural landowners in the areas surrounding Edmonton to check their properties and contact police if they notice anything suspicious."
Law enforcement actions (N=5)	"Edmonton police have charged a man with second-degree murder in connection to the disappearance of Billie Wynell Johnson, 30, who was last seen in the area of 113 Street and 107 Avenue on the evening of Dec. 24, 2020." "Kenneth Courtorielle, 35, was arrested on Tuesday in St. Albert with help from the RCMP and has been charged with second-degree murder in relation to the death of Johnson." "Courtorielle then dumped her body in a field north of Edmonton, where homicide detectives found the skeletal remains four months later."
Perjury (N=5)	"Teskey admitted Courtorielle lied repeatedly to police." "He said the court should not believe Courtorielle, given the "torrent" of lies he told to police – including an interview in which Courtorielle cried and wondered aloud where Johnson might be." "He repeatedly lied to investigators, engaging in what Hillier called "manipulative antics.""

Cross-Case Analysis

Most of the themes from the individual analyses can be grouped into two broad group

themes: *law enforcement's role* and *contextualizing femicide as domestic violence.* The group

theme *law enforcement's role* is comprised of the individual themes of *law enforcement actions,*

investigation details, and *requesting public assistance.* This theme offers a framework of the

functions of law enforcement officers in response to IPV and/or femicide.

The second group theme, *contextualizing femicide as domestic violence*, includes the

individual themes of *relevant statistics, stressing resources, law enforcement observations of*

domestic violence, attestation of law enforcements commitment to address domestic violence,

and *identification of the victims and/or perpetrator.* This theme involves situating individual

cases of femicide within the broader context of domestic violence. The themes of *law*

enforcement's role and *contextualizing femicide as domestic violence* will be explored in greater

detail in Chapter 5 Discussion. The theme of *perjury* was not connecting to either of the

aforementioned themes.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how law enforcement is represented in the news media in cases of intimate partner femicide. This chapter discusses the results of this study within the context of the existing literature on law enforcement officer's attitudes toward IPV, IPV survivors' experiences with law enforcement, and the representation of law enforcement and femicide in news media. Potential implications will be explored.

The representation of law enforcement was relatively consistent across the reviewed cases, despite the overall coverage of the cases ranging dramatically. While some cases were covered extensively from the time of the incident until the sentencing of the perpetrator with numerous articles fully dedicated to the case, other femicide cases received minimal attention. For example, there were a total of 16 articles dedicated to Melissa Rae Blommaert's case while Teresa Dejesus Esquivel-Robles' case was pithily mentioned in six articles written on the subject of homicides generally. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine what made some of these cases more 'newsworthy' than others; however, a cursory interpretation suggests that the race and/or ethnicity of the victims and perpetrators may have been relevant factors. In focusing narrowly on the representation of law enforcement on these cases, two group themes were developed in direct response to the research question: *How was law enforcement represented in cases of intimate partner femicide in Albertan newspapers in 2020?*

Law Enforcement's Role

Overall, law enforcement's role in responding to femicide cases was reported on in a neutral and fact-based manner. Specific law enforcement actions reported in the dataset included, but were not limited to, responding to calls, securing a crime scene, making arrests, investigating, requesting assistance from the public with an investigation, laying charges, and

reviewing and presenting evidence. The heavy emphasis on factual information, such as the specific activities that officers performed or facts about the investigation, aligns with the CAJ ethics guidelines requiring journalists to report the news in an objective and unbiased fashion.

Although law enforcement's role on these cases was not necessarily sensationalized, any mention of supportive actions that an officer may engage in when responding to an incident of IPV, such as providing resources, was notably absent. Ergo, the role of law enforcement in averting potential IPV incidents was consistently overlooked. This finding generally aligns with the existing literature which suggests that news media tends to highlight those actions related to responding to serious violent crimes (Huey & Broll, 2015). From the perspective of IPV survivors, this may reinforce the idea that the primary reason to contact the police is to receive immediate, short-term protection rather than preventative support (Conroy, 2021; Neill & Peterson, 2014).

Rantatalo (2016) confirmed that media portrayals of police work also inform officer's understandings of their occupational duties. It is plausible that the effect of this selective reporting on officers may be to fortify the belief that emotionally supporting and/or resourcing victims is outside of the scope of their role and/or a less important job duty. Conversely, the existing research on IPV survivors' perceptions of law enforcement interventions suggests that survivors find officer empathy and the provision of resources to be helpful (Saxton et al., 2021). Therefore, this omission may contribute to a disconnect between officers' expectations and survivors' lived experiences. Finally, it is plausible that a more accurate portrayal of law enforcement responsibilities in responding to IPV incidents may attract prospective officers with skills and interests better suited for the occupational realities.

Contextualizing Femicide as a Domestic Violence

Law enforcement officers helped to contextualize femicide within the broader context of domestic violence through the use of statistics on domestic violence and stressing the availability of domestic violence resources; however, the gendered nature of IPV was not explicitly acknowledged by the officers quoted nor the journalists. Despite the fact that officers frequently confirmed that the homicides were "spousal related" or "domestic in nature," the term 'femicide' was never utilized in any quotes by law enforcement officers and, therefore, the directionality of the violence was obscured. Further, none of the articles reviewed for this study positioned the femicides within the broader social issues of gender-based violence or gender inequality, even though the murder of women by an intimate partner is broadly recognized as a SGRMI (Dawson et al., 2021). Shrouding the misogynistic nature of these crimes is highly problematic because sexist attitudes and patriarchal power structures cannot be challenged effectively when they are not accurately identified.

Although the majority of the articles in the dataset contextualized the femicides as domestic violence, some of the articles written on Lois Antonia Paterson-Gartner's case were a noteworthy exception in this theme. Specifically, the RCMP on Paterson-Gartner's case released a statement noting that there was no history of previous violence reported in the home and did not provide any further information that could have implied that the femicide was a potential incident of domestic violence. One journalist further portrayed the femicide as an isolated incident by suggesting that the perpetrator, Paterson-Gartner's husband and a prominent tax attorney, "enjoyed rough and tumble pursuits, including barefoot water skiing, rodeo, ski-biking and motocross" and raising the possibility that he "may have suffered from some form of traumatic brain injury that affected his decision-making" (Wakefield, 2020). Portraying femicide

as a sudden and episodic event contradicts the well-established fact that IPV is a usually a series of abusive events that increase in frequency and duration. Framing femicide as an isolated incident also means that this violence it is not recognized as gender-based and the contributory societal conditions are not examined. Further, using circumstantial evidence to justify and/or excuse the violence spares perpetrators from responsibility for their actions and may act as a potential reporting barrier for IPV survivors as they are likely to question whether they would be believed and supported if they were to report abuse.

Officers also declined to release the names of the victims in this case. This decision was openly criticized by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters on the grounds that "failing to identify victims contributes to an ongoing silencing of the issue [of domestic violence] at the individual, community and societal levels" (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2019).

<div align="center">**Implications for Practice**</div>

Implications for Journalists

Although this research study focused narrowly on the representation of law enforcement officers, the findings of this study leads me to generally endorse the following recommendations for reporting on femicide and provide some additional suggestions. There are several tip sheets available for editors and journalists on best practices for reporting on IPV and/or femicide. The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) (2021) makes the following recommendations:

- Use the term femicide;
- Attend to language (e.g., avoid sensationalist language and/or graphic details of the violence, reinforce perpetrator accountability, do not reinforce gender stereotypes/myths, etc.)

- Include contact information for victim support services;

- Contextualize femicide and violence against women as a social problem;

- Include statistics and other contextual information;

- Use appropriate imagery;

- Include expert sources;

- Do not assign responsibility for violence to women;

- Report on non-physical manifestations of coercive control (p. 3-9).

Based on the findings of this research study, I would like to add additional support for these recommendations as well as expand upon this list.

Based on the results of this study specifically, I strongly endorse the recommendation to report on non-physical forms of abuse. Because coercive control has not yet been criminalized in Canada, law enforcement officers often respond to each IPV call as a distinct incident of violence (Stark, 2012). When abuse is not identified accurately, it cannot be responded to effectively. I propose including information about early warning signs for individuals who believe they may be experiencing abuse, such as becoming isolated from their family and friends, as well as early warning signs to assist perpetrators in identifying their own abusive behaviours, such as having constant unrealistic expectations of their partner. Including information about the signs and symptoms of non-physical abuse helps the public recognize the complexity of abusive relationships and conceptualized IPV as a systematic pattern of abusive behaviour. Further, law enforcement officers reported believing that too many resources are utilized for verbal domestic disputes (Harper et al., 2020; McPhedran et al., 2017). Highlighting the damaging effects of non-physical abuse may help officers recognize the value of responding

to calls earlier in the continuum of abuse and become less reliant on the physical evidence of trauma.

Although nine of the articles I reviewed quoted professionals at domestic violence organizations, none of the articles included any quotes from a survivor with lived experience with IPV. Granted IPV survivors are a hidden population and there are justifiable privacy concerns with interviewing these individuals; however, the CAJ ethics guidelines explicitly state that journalists are encouraged to "include views from all segments of the population…[including] minorities and majorities, those with power and those without it" (CAJ Ethics Advisory Committee, 2011, p. 7). Further, IPV survivors' perspectives have been neglected historically. Including quotes from survivors would give survivors an opportunity to describe, in their own words, how IPV has impacted them. It is conceivable that this could be empowering and validating experience for survivors as well as increase the general public's feelings of empathy and compassion for survivors. Thus, journalists must be mindful of ongoing inclusion and exclusion patterns.

In addition to providing contact information for support services for individuals experiencing IPV, I strongly encourage journalists to provide resources for perpetrators. Providing resources exclusively for persons experiencing abuse creates a narrow focus on the behaviour and choices of these individuals. This aligns with problematic narratives that inappropriately assign responsibility to victims and may cause survivors of abuse to feel culpable for a situation that they have relatively little control over. Whiting et al. (2019) confirmed that over 70% of IPV survivors have been blamed by their abusers for their own abuse and often feel "deep shame and may blame themselves for staying or for allegedly causing the abuse" (p. 80). Conversely, including information about intervention services for perpetrators of violence

implies that perpetrators are accountable for their behaviour, and it is their responsibility to stop the abuse. Of the 42 articles reviewed for this study, four articles provided contact information for essential services for IPV survivors, such as helplines and/or domestic violence shelters, and none of the articles provided resources for perpetrators.

I advocate for including information about the significant barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. In addition to potentially bolstering the public's and officer's empathy for survivors, this may help validate survivor's lived experiences. This information can enable survivors, officers, and members of the public accurately attribute the barriers that survivors face in leaving abusive situations to external situational factors rather than faults in their personal character. Whiting et al. (2019) found that over 60% of people assumed that IPV survivors could leave the abusive relationship if they wanted to and did not recognize the significant practical barriers, including financial constraints and an increased risk of violence, in doing so. Additionally, Lila et al. (2013) noted that officers with chivalrous attitudes and benevolent sexist beliefs are inclined to view women as weak and in need of male protection. Highlighting the barriers individuals face in leaving abusive relationships helps to illuminate the complex reality of IPV and denotes that the women in these situations are generally resilient and capable rather than incompetent. Ergo, stressing the situational barriers that IPV survivors encounter directly challenges these problematic attitudes and beliefs.

Further, I recommend providing the public with general prevention strategies and guidelines for responding to instances of IPV. Assigning some responsibility to the public suggests that we all have a role to play in ending violence against women. For this study, only one of the article reviewed offered an IPV prevention strategy:

Checking in regularly with people who may be experiencing intimate partner violence and developing a plan or signal to signify they are in danger, such as a certain message or blinds closed, is one way to look out for friends (Smith, 2020).

These recommendations were particularly valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, one of the articles provided specific tips for responding to IPV disclosures:

The most important part of being receptive to a friend or family member's call for help is listening and believing their story, then moving forward by finding them appropriate resources and community supports (Babych, 2020, para. 13).

Given that high quality perceived social support has been linked to a reduction in PTSD symptoms (Simon et al., 2019), information on how to respond to abuse in a supportive fashion could be have immediate and long-term physical and psychological benefits for IPV survivors.

Implications for Counsellors

Awareness of abuse dynamics, including the seriousness and potency of non-physical forms of abuse, is the foundation of effective IPV recognition and treatment. Coercive control and emotional abuse must be acknowledged as legitimate forms of abuse by treatment professionals so that they can help IPV survivors learn to recognize the patterns of manipulation and subtle abuse tactics used by their perpetrators and appropriately validate their experiences. Covert abuse tactics, such as gaslighting, blame shifting, and insults disguised as humour, must be named so that IPV survivors can begin to make sense of their complex lived experiences.

Incidents of IPV should be framed as a part of a larger social issue and systemic barriers should be brought to light whenever possible. Given the majority of IPV survivors have been blamed for their own abuse by their abusers, counsellors must actively and sensitively contradict

this narrative. Like law enforcement officers, counsellors are in a position of authority and have a responsibility to be trauma-informed and self-reflective.

Counsellors should apply an intersectional lens when conceptualizing the cases of their IPV survivor clients. Some cultural groups experience IPV disproportionately and counsellors should be able to recognize how multiple modes of marginalization can compound their clients' risk for and experiences of IPV. Counsellors should recognize when individuals require support from multiple services and make referrals as appropriate.

Recommendations for Future Research

Much of the research cited in my literature review was conducted in other countries. Additional Canadian research is required, particularly on IPV survivors' experiences with law enforcement and on law enforcement officers attitudes toward IPV. Within Canada, region specific research would be particularly advantageous as IPV rates range considerably between provinces/territories and the specific law enforcement practice guidelines for responding to these incidents vary.

The perspectives of IPV survivors have been under researched historically. While there are many barriers to accessing this hidden population, additional qualitative research on IPV survivors' perspectives on law enforcement's responses to IPV would be highly beneficial. Research on IPV survivors' perspectives on the overall representation of IPV in news media is also needed.

As was mentioned in chapter two, intersectional-based statistics and research continues to be limited. Intersectional-based research is necessary to develop a more accurate understanding of the contributory social issues. Research on news media's representation of IPV survivors from

marginalized communities, ethnic/racial minority women, women in same-sex relationships, and transgender populations represent areas for further research.

Conclusion

News media is a central platform that shapes public opinion and indirectly influences policy making. Specifically, news media can establish and influence narratives surrounding violence against women and policing. While previous research has explored the representation of law enforcement in news media generally, I was unable to locate studies specifically examining the representation of officers in cases of intimate partner femicide. The overall findings of this study suggest that Canadian publication standards prohibiting the sensationalizing of these incidents have been effective. Law enforcement was generally portrayed in a neutral and fact-based manner. Consistent with the previous literature, job duties pertaining to responding to violent crime were highlighted and preventative and/or supportive actions were overlooked. Thus, the portrayal of officers was somewhat stereotypical and simplified and did not fully capture the activities necessary to respond to these incidents effectively. The implications of the discrepancy between news media's portrayal of law enforcement's role in responding to IPV and the social reality of what is required to respond effectively may have implications for officers' understanding of their responsibilities as well as survivors' help-seeking behaviours.

Law enforcement officers also helped to contextualize femicide within the broader social issue of domestic violence. However, the violence was not recognized as gender-based. Additional recommendations for journalists are included above. Similar to coercive control, misinformation gains potency through repetition. Journalists have an invaluable opportunity to provide the public with credible information about and increase awareness of the complex dynamics of IPV. Journalists must be mindful of their ability to produce and perpetuate

narratives as well as influence the expectations of both law enforcement officers and IPV survivors. Journalists can support IPV awareness and prevention efforts by using their platform to actively address public misconceptions about IPV, femicide, and law enforcement.

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