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# Innovation in measuring victimization of women and children: The Canadian experience

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# Overview of the presentation

- 1) The evolution of Canadian household surveys to measure violence against women
  - 1993 Violence Against Women Survey
  - General Social Survey on Victimization
  
- 2) Innovation in measuring childhood victimization
  - Challenges and approaches



# 1993 Canadian Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS)

One-time sample survey, designed to fill data gaps

First-ever national indicators of:

- Spousal violence
- Other forms of violence against women
  - Dating violence
  - Threats and violence by strangers
  - Sexual harassment

Interviewed women aged 18 years and older



# Building from the VAWS experience: General Social Survey on Victimization

- Statistics Canada considered ways to integrate the survey content within an existing population-based survey.
- It was decided to develop a special module on spousal violence within the General Social Survey (GSS). The questions contained in this module were modelled off the VAWS.
- Target population for the GSS: women and men aged 15 years and older in Canada



# Enhancements to GSS with each victimization cycle

- 1988: First general victim survey
- 1993: Collect distinct measures of physical and sexual assault
- 1999: Special modules to measure spousal violence, now repeated with every victimization cycle
- 2004: Criminal harassment/stalking
- 2009: Cybercrime, including cyberbullying

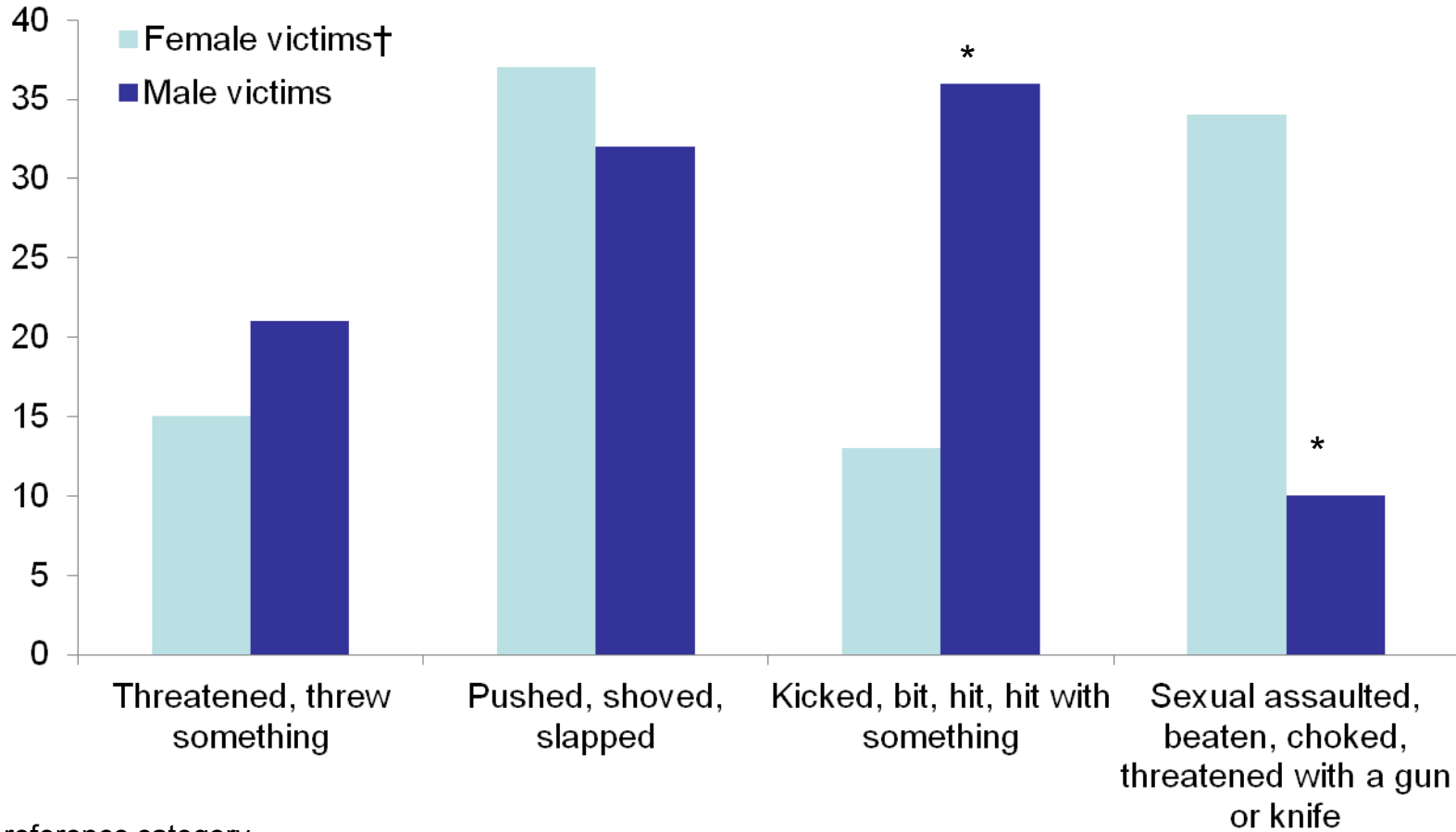


# Benefits of integrating modules into the General Social Survey

- 1) Preserved ability to measure prevalence and compare results against the VAWS
  - 2) Improved gender-based analysis to better inform policies and programs
- Gender is relational - women cannot be viewed in isolation, but their experiences must be contextualized and understood in relation to men.



# Women more likely to experience severe forms of spousal violence, 2009



† reference category

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

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Victimization.



# Further advancements with the GSS on Victimization

The 2014 GSS on Victimization:

- Distinct measure of dating violence
- Expanded questions on children witnessing spousal violence
- New question on sexual violence in those cases where the person was not able to consent to sexual activity because they were drugged, intoxicated, manipulated, or forced in other ways than physically.
- Expanded set of questions on childhood victimization





# Measuring victimization experiences occurring in childhood

- Measuring the prevalence and extent of violent victimization among child and youth under 15 primarily relies on administrative police records.
- Many challenges of population-based surveys for children beyond survey design, such as:
  - Issues of parental permissions (who may also be the perpetrator)
  - Legal responsibility to report abuse to police or child protection authorities (compromising confidentiality)



# Measuring childhood victimization, using a population-based survey

## 2009 GSS on Victimization: Questions first introduced

- Respondents aged 15 years and older were asked retrospective questions on experiences of sexual and physical violence before the age of 15

## 2014 GSS on Victimization: Expanded questions

- Capture information based on specific violent acts (e.g., push, grab), rather than direct questions on physical or sexual assault
- Limit acts perpetrated by adults aged 18 years and older
- Introduce questions on frequency of violent acts
- Introduce questions on whether the violent incidents were ever reported to the police or child protection services.



## **New opportunities for understanding childhood victimization**

- Generational differences in the prevalence of childhood victimization
- Childhood victimization as a risk factor for future victimization
- Repeat childhood victimization
- Levels of reporting to police and inter-generational differences



# Questions/Comments?