

**An Exploration of the Relationship Between Economic Factors, Economic Recessions, and  
Spousal Violence**

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## **Abstract**

The focus of the study is centred on the relationship between economic recessions, economic factors such as unemployment rates, low income, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and spousal violence. The research is focused on scholarship and statistics within a Canadian context, as well as specific to Calgary and Alberta where appropriate. The study covers the economic recessions and related statistics on low income and unemployment rates in Canada from 2008 to 2020 in an attempt to illustrate a connection with spousal violence. The statistics on spousal violence cover the period from 2009 to 2014, given these are the most recently available publicly accessible statistics from the General Social Survey and the Uniform Crime Report through Statistics Canada. Exploring economic factors such as low income and unemployment is important because it can lead to a better understanding of how these factors intersect and contribute to and/or perpetuate spousal violence. It is also significant because exploring economic recessions can contribute to a more in-depth understanding of how the economy impacts spousal violence and the corresponding statistics on spousal violence. The methods utilized to research the topic include an integrative literature review, a descriptive research design, and a meta-analysis to collate, extract, and synthesize the literature and statistics. Findings include increased unemployment rates during periods of economic recessions and increased spousal violence-related calls to police agencies and other services during such periods. Lastly, women are the victims of spousal violence and their victimization is exacerbated by low income, their male partner's unemployment, and periods of economic recession.

## **Dedication and Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge my parents for their continued support and encouragement throughout my academic career. Thank you, for your wisdom and advice that has helped me through the most exciting and difficult years of my life. You have raised me to be determined, resilient, persistent, and successful. I believe these qualities are reflected in my academic career, professional development, and my Honours thesis.

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## **An Exploration of the Relationship Between Economic Factors, Economic Recessions, and Spousal Violence**

In this thesis, the relationship between economic factors, economic recessions, and spousal violence will be explored. It has been suggested there is a correlation between economic factors including low income (Benson et al., 2003; Buzawa & Buzawa, 2013; Fox et al., 2002; Lupri et al., 1994; Renzetti, 2009); and unemployment (Benson et al., 2003; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002; Golden et al., 2013; Macmillan & Gartner, 1999; Peterson, 2011; Renzetti, 2009; Schneider et al., 2016); and spousal violence. There is also a suggested relationship between economic recessions and spousal violence. Specifically, when there is a period of economic recession, there is an increase in spousal violence incidents and increased spousal violence-related calls to service providers. The consensus amongst the literature is that women are the primary victims of spousal violence and men are the primary perpetrators.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on incidents of spousal violence will also be explored. At this time, there is not an abundance of prior research on spousal violence and the COVID-19 pandemic, however, studies such as Peterman et al. (2020) and Moffitt et al. (2020) emphasized the negative effect COVID-19 has had on spousal violence in Canada, particularly on female victimization. Previous scholarship has concluded periods of economic recession in Canada in 2008, 2009, 2014, 2015, and 2016, contributed to increases in spousal violence (Boutilier et al., 2017; Renzetti, 2009; Schneider et al., 2016). Existing literature also concludes unemployment contributes to increases in spousal violence (Benson et al., 2003; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002; Golden et al., 2013; Macmillan & Gartner, 1999; Peterson, 2011; Renzetti, 2009; Schneider et al., 2016). Government reports indicate Canada underwent an economic recession from 2020 to 2021, associated with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic

(Government of Canada, 2020). Moreover, Canadian statistics depict a significant increase in Canada's unemployment rate in 2020 (Statista Research Department, 2021); and it is suggested this increase is also attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020).

The relationship between economic recessions and spousal violence is important to study because research such as the Riggs et al. (2000) study illustrates a relationship between the economy, low income, and spousal violence (p. 1293). The focus of this thesis is on heterosexual spousal partnerships because they are the most often studied and presented in statistics and the literature. Moreover, there is a wider range of research available on heterosexual spousal partnerships to utilize. By exploring economic recessions, a more in-depth understanding of how the lows of the economy impact incidents of spousal violence will be gained. Exploring the relationship between economic factors such as unemployment rates, low-income after-tax cut-offs (LICO-AT), and the COVID-19 pandemic is important to develop a better understanding of how these factors contribute to and exacerbate incidents of spousal violence. The aims of this exploration are to demonstrate that periods of economic recession are linked to increases in spousal violence incidents which is evident in Calgary, as well as Alberta, and to demonstrate that increases in unemployment rates contribute to increases in spousal violence incidents. By reviewing statistics on spousal violence and unemployment rates, low income, the COVID-19 pandemic, and periods of economic recession, these aims will be achieved.

## **Research Question**

My research question is: “how do low income, unemployment, and economic recession contribute to incidents of spousal violence?” The relationship between economic recessions and spousal violence is important to study because research such as the Riggs et al. (2000) study illustrates a relationship between the economy, low income, and spousal violence (p. 1293). Exploring economic factors such as low income and unemployment leads to a better understanding of how these factors intersect and contribute to spousal violence. Exploring economic recessions will contribute to a more in-depth understanding of if and how the economy impacts spousal violence.

## **Methodology**

I conducted an integrative literature review. My literature review falls under the scope of an integrative literature review because it is not systematic and it looks at research articles and other published sources (Snyder, 2019, p. 334). It is an integrative literature review because it aims to synthesize the information, patterns, and themes found in the literature (Snyder, 2019, p. 334). An integrative literature review also aims to merge various perspectives and knowledge from different fields of study (Snyder, 2019, p. 336); which is applicable because I explored economic recessions, economic factors, and spousal violence.

My research design is a descriptive design. This type of design best fits my research question, how to obtain data, and how to analyze data. A descriptive research design aids in providing answers to who, what, when, where, and how questions related to a research topic or issue (“Descriptive Design,” n.d., para. 1). A descriptive research design is not able to conclusively determine answers to “why” questions such as hypothesis testing might; however, descriptive research is used to gather information that describes the relationship among the

current variables being studied (Lappe, 2000, p. 81). Descriptive research designs also try to minimize bias in the relationship being studied (Palys, 1997, p. 84); which is integral to ensure an objective approach is taken to select and include the literature and data.

Key features of descriptive research design include the subject is observed in a natural and undisturbed setting, or it is used as a stepping stone towards research with a more quantitative design by providing some valuable information on what variables to test (“Descriptive Design,” paras. 2-3). Descriptive design tells us if the limitations of the descriptive research design are understood, then they are useful for the development of a study with a more refined focus, or yielding of data that contributes to significant recommendations to be implemented in practice (“Descriptive Design,” paras. 4-6). It is the latter feature that best fits my honours thesis project.

I also conducted a meta-analysis because I looked at the primary and secondary analysis conducted by researchers and agencies as I extracted information from journal articles and statistics (Snyder, 2019, p. 335). In conducting a meta-analysis, I combined the results of various studies to look for patterns and any relationships that have a similar context and the same topic (Snyder, 2019, p. 335). By using a meta-analysis, I also extracted disagreements within the literature that have similar contexts and are pertaining to the same topic (Snyder, 2019, p. 335).

### **Conceptualization**

The concepts used in this thesis are defined in the Definitions section where they are defined and utilized within the context of this thesis.

### **Operationalization**

I extracted information about economic factors from various journal articles and research databases. Information about spousal violence was extracted from various journal articles and

research databases to determine relationships between economic factors and spousal violence. I incorporated economic statistics such as the rate of unemployment from Statistics Canada and victimization survey data found in service providers' annual reports and the GSS (General Social Survey). Comparing these statistics revealed a relationship between economic factors and spousal violence. I also looked at journal articles and statistics about economic patterns over time to describe a link between periods of economic recession and incidents of spousal violence.

### **Data Collection Methods and Sources**

I collated publicly accessible statistics from agencies such as Statistics Canada and the GSS on rates of unemployment and compared them to victimization survey data about police-reported spousal violence during the same period. By comparing publicly available statistics on rates of unemployment with victimization survey data, I was able to consider if there is a relationship between unemployment and higher rates of incidents of spousal violence or if there is a linkage between unemployment and lower rates of spousal violence. The focus was on Canada to examine national data while I also remained open to searching if one or more provinces or territories have a meaningful relationship between unemployment data and spousal violence data.

I accessed information from scholarly literature from various disciplines such as justice studies, economics, social work, sociology, and criminology, in the form of journal articles, notably, from the Mount Royal University Library databases. These databases included JSTOR, Cambridge University Press, Criminal Justice Database, Proquest Ebook Central, Google Scholar, Oxford Journals, Sage Books, Elsevier Science Direct, SpringerLink Journals, Statista, and Taylor & Francis Library. The keywords used to search these databases included: spousal violence, domestic violence, recession, unemployment rates, Low-Income-Cut-Offs, COVID-19,

coronavirus, low income, General Social Survey, economy, Canada. This information helped me understand how other academics have studied or theorized how low income, unemployment, and economic patterns of recession contribute to incidents of spousal violence.

I extracted information and reports from sources such as Statistics Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Government of Canada, and annual reports from spousal violence service providers. The information and reports contributed to an understanding of how the victims and service providers view the relationship between economic factors, economic recessions, and incidents of spousal violence that may not be included in the academic literature.

I analyzed the data by cross-referencing it with patterns and themes found in the literature to determine if there was a relationship between economic factors, economic recessions, and spousal violence. For example, if the data illustrated Canada's national level of unemployment increased in 2020 from the previous year. The number of spousal violence incidents across Canada increased in 2020 from the previous year, and various studies identified unemployment can trigger incidents of spousal violence; I postulated that there is a relationship between economic factors, economic recessions, and incidents of spousal violence.

### **Ethical Approvals**

I did not need to secure ethical approval from MRU'S Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) because I conducted a literature review and a meta-analysis and did not interview people.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of the research design is that I could not make any causal conclusions, and thus, I was limited to making inferences from the literature and police-reported data. The police-reported data constitutes a secondary source of data, meaning that it is data that has

previously been analyzed (Jupp, 1989, p. 33). According to Jupp (1989), secondary data can be found in the form of official statistics collected by departments of the government, such as police agencies, as a tool to aid future policies and decision-making (p. 33). A limitation of police-reported data is it does not include spousal violence incidents that go unreported and thus, may not be completely accurate or representative.

Another limitation is that the literature and data used are not specific to any one culture and, therefore, could be considered quite broad. Much of the literature and police-reported data pertains to spousal violence against women in heterosexual relationships. Thus, another limitation of the research design is it does not focus enough on male victims or homosexual relationships and spousal violence.

The General Social Survey is conducted every five years, however, not all of the data collected is published at once. Therefore, this is a limitation because not all of the data available are current and may lack relevancy as a result. The funding for statistical collection and analysis was cut by the previous Conservative government, and as a result, the current government is backlogged with the data collected from the previous GSS. Hence, there are delays in the publication of and access to the data.

## **Definitions**

### **Spousal Violence**

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (n.d.) defines spousal violence as violence that:

Occurs in relationships that are romantic in nature and where one partner seeks to dominate and exert power over the other. In doing so, the relationship often deteriorates and may become violent. Emotional, verbal, psychological, financial, physical, and sexual abuse are common types of violence in such relationships. Spousal abuse can occur in husband-wife relationships, dating relationships between boyfriends and girlfriends and same-sex dating partners . . . with common-law partners. (p. 1)

### **Domestic Violence**

In the academic literature, domestic violence differs from spousal violence because it is defined as one individual attempting to gain control over or harm the other individuals in a family or relationship (Czerkowski, 2018, para. 9). In contrast, spousal violence relates to two people in a romantic relationship. Domestic violence can include romantic partners but is not exclusively so. Domestic violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, financial, spiritual, and/or psychological forms of abuse (Czerkowski, 2018, para. 9). Victims of domestic violence include spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, children, as well as other family members (Czerkowski, 2018, para. 9). Spousal violence may be referred to as domestic violence; they are used interchangeably (“A Focus on Family Violence in Canada,” 2016, p. 5). The key difference is that spousal violence involves married and/or common-law spouses and dating relationships that are intimate or romantic in nature.

### **Common-law Partner**

Canada Revenue Agency defines a common-law partner as someone you are not legally

married to but share a conjugal relationship (“Marital Status,” n.d., para. 3). A minimum of one of the following conditions applies in this definition:

The individual has been residing with you in a conjugal relationship for a minimum of twelve consecutive months, the individual is the biological or adoptive parent of your child(ren), and the individual has custody of your child(ren) in which the child(ren) is/are fully dependent on this figure for support. (“Marital Status,” n.d., para. 3)

### **Low-income Status**

Low-income status is defined as “the income situation of the statistical unit in relation to a specific low-income line in a reference year. Statistical units with income that is below the low-income line are considered to be in low income” (Statistics Canada, modified on March 25, 2021). Low Income Cut-offs (LICOs) were developed in Canada in the 1960s and first implemented in 1967 (Giles, 2004, p. 6) and are used to determine low-income status (“Part B-Detailed definition,” para. 1). The LICO measures are used to determine the income of families after taxes and utilize the size of families, the amount spent on basic necessities of living, and their neighbourhoods as contributing factors to their income status (“Part B-Detailed definition,” para. 5). LICO is also an income threshold that reflects a family’s higher likelihood of spending a substantially greater amount of its income on shelter, food, and clothing, compared to the average Canadian family (Giles, 2004, p. 6).

### **Economic Recession**

An economic recession is defined as a substantial decrease in economic activity throughout all aspects of the economy and this decrease spans a duration of longer than a few months (Lee & Shields, 2011, p. 44). Economic recessions characterize events such as the 2008 Recession in the United States (Lee & Shields, 2011, p. 43). Lee and Shields (2011) note that an economic recession is

accompanied by a reduction in overall activity and economic adversity and strain felt by a substantial number of individuals (p. 45). Moreover, those impacted by the economic recession typically see a decrease in their household income and may experience unemployment or a decrease in their wages (Lee & Shields, 2011, p. 45). It is important to understand that while financial hardship and strain are typically universal, an economic recession impacts sectors of the economy and households in different ways (Lee & Shields, 2011, p. 45). Economic recessions have a substantial impact on the decision-making process as companies and households try to navigate their way through the recession (Lee & Shields, 2011, p. 45).

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment is defined as the labour supply in the labour force that goes unused (Yarhi, 2009). Unemployment rates are considered to be indicators of the health of the economy (Yarhi, 2009). The unemployment rate is stated as a percentage of the total labour force which in Canada is the total number of people 15 years old and over who are employed or unemployed (Yarhi, 2009). An unemployment rate is determined by dividing the number of unemployed individuals by the total number of people in the labour force (Yarhi, 2009).

### **Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) “is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus” (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.). WHO also states COVID-19 “spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes” (WHO, n.d.). According to the National Library of Medicine (NIH), the World Health Organization declared Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to be a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (National Library of Medicine [NIH], 2020).

## **Statistics**

Publicly gathered statistics from various journal articles and agencies such as Statistics Canada provide valuable information to illustrate the prevalence of spousal violence incidents. Such statistics also provide information on unemployment rates and household income in Canada. Numerous statistics provided from Statistics Canada are included as they are empirical and valid and help to determine if there is a relationship between unemployment, low income, and spousal violence within a Canadian context. Lastly, these statistics will be utilized to explore the relationship between economic factors, economic recessions, and spousal violence.

### **Spousal Violence in Canada**

The included statistics indicate common themes found in spousal violence. Such themes include women are more likely to experience being victims of spousal violence, women are more likely to experience spousal violence in the form of physical and sexual abuse compared to men, female spousal partners are more likely to experience severe forms of spousal violence, and a lack of reporting incidents of spousal violence to police agencies. These themes are crucial as they indicate the risks associated with victimization and the perpetration of spousal violence. Moreover, although an economic analysis will be provided in the Economic Factors section instead of the Statistics section, it is significant to acknowledge these themes also illustrate a connection between economic factors and spousal violence, such as low income in particular.

In Canada, statistics collected for 2018 reflect that spousal violence constituted approximately 30 percent of all violent crimes reported to a police agency (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). In 2018, of the 99,452 individuals who endured spousal violence, women accounted for 78,852 (79 percent) of the incidents (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020); thus, indicating women are the primary victims of spousal

violence. Women between the ages of 25 to 34 years had the highest number of police-reported incidents of spousal violence in 2018 at approximately 1,104 per 100,000 in the population (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). Moreover, data collected from the General Social Survey convey Indigenous females have a higher likelihood of being victims of spousal violence at a rate that is approximately three times higher than that of non-Indigenous females (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). Data indicate that in 2018 spousal violence was occurring in a private residence in 84 percent of the incidents reported and ten percent experienced it in a public area such as a parking lot (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). For those who experienced spousal violence, statistics indicate 50 percent experienced it in the residence they shared with the perpetrator and about 30 percent experienced it in a residence not shared with their perpetrator (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). Women most commonly experienced spousal violence in the form of physical assault in 2018, at a rate of 373 incidents per 100,000 in the Canadian population (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). Moreover, women experienced sexual assault at the hands of their partners approximately 30 times more compared to their male counterparts (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). In all things considered, these statistics reflect the disproportionate impact of spousal violence on women in Canadian society in particular.

In a study conducted by Romans et al. (2007), the researchers found female spousal partners were more likely to report being physically and sexually abused compared to their male counterparts (p. 1504). This finding is consistent with the patterns in the collection of 2018 statistics collected and interpreted by Statistics Canada. The consistency between the 2007 and 2018 data sets of women being more likely to report physical and sexual violence committed by

their partners, could suggest that physical and sexual violence are prevalent forms of spousal violence utilized against a female partner. Such a pattern is also consistent with the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization results mentioned below. Romans et al. (2007) also assert female partners were more susceptible to experiencing more severe forms of spousal violence (pp. 1504-1505). According to these researchers, more severe types of spousal violence determined in the study were in the form of physical and sexual violence (Romans et al., 2007, p. 1503). The female partners in the study with low-income status were found to have been physically and/or sexually abused by their spousal partners (Romans et al., 2007, p. 1510). Romans et al. (2007) assert the relationship between low income and spousal violence is of concern because of the impact exposure to spousal violence could have on the financial stability of the partners (p. 1510). As reflected in the 2018 set of statistics from Statistics Canada and the 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization, the results from Romans et al. (2007) study remain relatively unchanged regarding the prevalence of physical and sexual violence in spousal relationships. This pattern suggests female partners continuing to experience physical and sexual forms of spousal violence is common.

According to the United Nations, for every three supplemental months of lockdown during the perpetuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are an estimated 15 million cases of gender-based violence that will occur on a global scale (Moffitt et al., 2020). Thus, it is estimated spousal violence will occur in mass numbers across the world as the pandemic continues. In Canada, one in ten women fears the chance of violence occurring in their home during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Moffitt et al., 2020). It would be incorrect to infer or assume spousal violence is not part of such fear for women given previous economic recessions and times of economic instability and adversity have resulted in increased rates of spousal violence

(Schneider et al., 2016, p. 473). This fear has become the exacerbated reality for many Indigenous women in Canada as a survey of approximately 250 Indigenous women carried out by the Native Women's Association of Canada, found that one in five Indigenous women had been the victim of physical or psychological spousal violence throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Moffitt et al., 2020). For their study, Moffitt et al. (2020) defined Indigenous as those identifying as First Nations, Inuit, or Metis. The risk of spousal violence being perpetrated towards Indigenous women is further heightened as they report worry over the impact of social distancing and lockdown periods on relationship and family stress, at a higher rate compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Moffitt et al., 2020). In addition, Indigenous women are two times more likely to report feeling worried about spousal violence occurring in their living spaces throughout the presence of COVID-19, compared to non-Indigenous females (Moffitt et al., 2020).

### ***Calgary, Alberta***

In a study conducted of over 6,407 cases between 1998 and 2008, the Calgary Domestic Violence (DV) Court has identified 3,092 (67.1)% of the accused in all domestic violence cases were employed, while 1,221 (36.5%) of the accused in all domestic violence cases were unemployed, or on welfare or disability (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 740). This data does not pertain solely to spousal violence cases, however, given the percentage of spousal violence cases in this study was higher than the number of other types under the umbrella term of domestic violence, this data is likely to be representative of spousal violence cases in Calgary, Alberta (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 740).

Tutty and Koshan (2013) analyzed 6,218 cases of the 6,407 total cases to determine the occurrence rates of spousal violence versus non-spousal violence in accused-victim relationships

in Calgary, Alberta (p. 739). As noted in Appendix A, the researchers labelled “current partners” as a category that includes married heterosexual couples, common-law husband or wife relationships, boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, and homosexual relationships (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739). Although the study by Tutty and Koshan (2013) did not define what they meant by a common-law partner, because the study falls within Canadian jurisdiction, the definition of common-law partner provided by the Canada Revenue Agency will be utilized. Spousal violence incidents occurred in current partnerships in 3,826 of the 6,218 cases, accounting for 61.5 percent (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739). In contrast, the category “ex-partners” consists of ex-spouses, ex-common-law partners, ex-boyfriend/girlfriend, legally separated/divorced (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739). The “ex-partners” category accounted for 1,098 (17.7 percent) of the total (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739). The “family members” category includes parents, children, siblings, elders, and any other family members, and made up 1,009 (16.2 percent) of the incidents (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739). Lastly, the “non-family members” category includes caregivers and friends and consisted of 285 (4.6 percent) of the incidents (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739). The findings of the study by Tutty and Koshan (2013) indicate incidents of spousal violence are more prevalent in Calgary than incidents of non-spousal violence.

### ***Children as a Factor in Spousal Violence***

Children can impact the incidence of spousal violence in relationships due to the stress and expenses created by having children. Having children can be overwhelming to the financial stability of the relationship and can create additional stress as there is uncertainty on how necessities will be provided. For low-income spousal relationships, in particular, there is likely stress associated with how the children will be taken care of when little funds are available. This may perpetuate arguments over finances that could erupt into spousal violence amongst partners.

This is not to suggest that children are solely responsible for spousal violence occurring, rather, children may play a role in the occurrence of spousal violence for these reasons. In contrast, children may act as a buffer against spousal violence as illustrated by the statistics provided by Tutty and Koshan (2013).

Tutty and Koshan (2013) note the role of dependants in the dynamics and prevalence of spousal abuse in Calgary, Alberta (p. 741). The researchers were able to collate the data on 4,100 accused and victims of spousal violence to determine if children are a factor in the occurrence of spousal violence (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). They found that 1,693 (41.3 percent) of individuals analyzed had no children (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). On the other hand, 96 individuals (2.3 percent) of the 4,100 had no children under the age of 18 (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). Moreover, 1,075 individuals (26.2 percent) had one child under the age of 18 and 1,076 (26.3 percent) had two or three children who were minors (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). Lastly, 160 individuals (3.9 percent) had four or more underaged children (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). These statistics suggest those with no children are more likely to be victims or perpetrators of spousal violence (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). Those with one child under the age of 18 are less likely to be the victim or perpetrator of spousal violence than those with two or three children under 18 (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). The risk of being a perpetrator or victim decreases if there are four or more children under the age of 18 in the spousal relationship (Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 741). The data referenced pertains to domestic violence as a whole, however, given the aforementioned percentage of spousal violence cases involved in the study, the figures are likely to be accurate for spousal violence as well.

Perhaps one of the explanations for the increased likelihood of spousal violence in intimate partnerships without children is because children may act as a buffer between the two

partners and as a result, this deters the perpetration of spousal violence. In addition, the raising of children may provide the intimate partners with a bonding experience and strengthen their relationship, thus also deterring the likelihood of spousal violence from occurring. Furthermore, a lack of children, especially within the same space being occupied by the intimate partners, means there are very few, if any, witnesses and so this increases the likelihood of spousal violence occurring because there is no one to end, intervene, or report the incident. This is an interesting finding considering children can create financial difficulty and strain within an intimate partnership, and there is a correlation between financial hardship and the occurrence of spousal violence (Renzetti, 2009, p. 1).

Fox et al. (2002) note that spousal relationships with more children are at an increased risk of spousal violence occurring, particularly towards the female partner (p. 806). This could be explained in part because women are typically the caregivers of children and tend to stay at home with them, at least for some time after they are born. Therefore, a spousal couple's female partner and children become financially dependent on the male. The increase in necessities created by large numbers of children, and decrease or unsustainable income causes a financial imbalance. Such a financial imbalance exacerbates the risk of spousal violence due to the financial strain and stress felt as monetary resources to fund the expenses associated with raising children are drained. This is especially true if the male has a low-income job or is unemployed, and if the female partner is also experiencing similar financial circumstances (Fox et al., p. 795). Moreover, if the female partner is employed while the male is not, and the relationship and children are sustained from her income, this may heighten the risk of spousal violence as the female partner's role in financially providing for her partner and children go against the typical

patriarchal society in which men are the breadwinners and are financially accountable (Fox et al., 2002, p. 805).

### **General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization**

The General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization collects and analyzes data on matters of a sensitive nature, such as spousal violence (Statistics Canada, 2019). Statistics are collected through the GSS every five years and data collection is conducted through independently completed questionnaires, and interviews conducted over the telephone (Statistics Canada, 2019). Specifically, the purpose of the GSS on Victimization is to ask various individuals across Canada about victimization which has been reported, as well as unreported, to gain an understanding of experiences such as crime, violence, and spousal abuse by former or current intimate partners (Statistics Canada, 2019). The GSS on Victimization is important as it becomes aware of and analyzes data that is not brought forward to police agencies and thus, is not counted in Canada's official crime rates (Statistics Canada, 2019).

### ***2009 Statistics***

According to the 2009 GSS on Victimization, females reported experiencing more severe forms of spousal violence compared to their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015). In particular, women reported spousal violence at a rate of 34 percent compared to males who reported at a rate of 10 percent (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015). In 2009, individuals in the age group of 25 to 34 were approximately three times more likely to report being a victim of spousal violence compared to those in the age category of 45 years and older (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015). The 2009 iteration of the GSS on Victimization depicts those in common-law relationships are approximately three times more likely to report experiencing at least one episode of spousal

violence compared to married couples, in the past 12 months (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015).

The rate at which spousal violence incidents were reported to a police agency continued to decline and in 2009, the rate of reporting was 22 percent, and this decline was most prominently attributed to females experiencing victimization (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015). The 2009 iteration reports the main reason for spousal violence victims to report to police was because of their desire to end the violence and to be protected (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015). Conversely, one of the most common reasons why victims did not report to the police was based on their belief the incident consisted of a personal issue that was not the concern of the police (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015). Similar to previous iterations of the GSS on Victimization, the 2009 iteration indicates approximately 63 percent of spousal violence victims had experienced more than one incident before reporting to the police (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015).

The 2009 GSS on Victimization cycle notes approximately slightly less than 30 percent of female victims experienced financial abuse in the form of having their possessions or property damaged or destroyed at the hands of their spousal partner (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015, Chart 1.5). On the other hand, approximately slightly over ten percent of males had reported having their possessions or property damaged or destroyed by their spousal partner (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015, Chart 1.5). Moreover, slightly over 20 percent of females had experienced financial abuse as they were barred from access to or knowledge of the household income, even if they had asked about it, compared to slightly over ten percent of males (Statistics Canada, modified on November 27, 2015, Chart 1.5).

### ***2014 Statistics***

According to the GSS on Victimization, in 2014, four percent of Canadians (excluding Canadians residing in the territories), reported being physically or sexually abused by a current or previous common-law partner or spouse during the previous five-year period (Burczycka, 2016). In 2014, 418,000 males and 342,000 females across the provinces reported being victimized by spousal violence during the previous five-year period (Burczycka, 2016). The results of the 2014 GSS indicate the previous pattern of women experiencing more severe forms of spousal violence at a rate more frequent than that of men, continues to persist (Burczycka, 2016). For 70 percent of spousal violence incidents in 2014, the police were never informed (Burczycka, 2016); thus, highlighting the lack of awareness and response to spousal violence in Canada.

In addition, a finding from the 2014 iteration of the GSS on Victimization indicates 14 percent of Canadians in the provinces reported being victims of emotional or financial abuse by a current or past spouse or common-law partner during their life (Burczycka, 2016). Specifically, males were more likely to report experiencing emotional or financial abuse at a rate of 15 percent in comparison to their female counterparts at 13 percent (Burczycka, 2016). The difference between males and females in reporting their financial or emotional victimization can be attributed to females' reluctance to report incidents due to fear of retaliation from their partner or the associated shame and embarrassment, as well as the belief that the criminal justice system will not adequately respond (Barrett, St. Pierre, & Vaillancourt, 2011, p. 39).

### **Canadian Economy**

This section includes key statistics on economic recessions, as well as economic factors such as unemployment rates and low income from 2008 onwards. There is an existing

relationship found in the literature between spousal violence and economic stress in particular (Renzetti, 2009, p. 1). The inclusion of such statistics is significant to explore the relationship between economic factors, economic recessions, and spousal violence. Moreover, the use of statistics can help strengthen or negate the existence of this relationship within a Canadian context.

### ***Oil and Gas Industry***

According to Boutilier et al. (2017), the Calgary Police Service noticed a trend in increasing spousal violence rates, with 2016 having the largest increase of 36 percent more spousal violence-related calls, accounting for the highest rate of spousal violence-related calls since 2004 (p. 2). Calgary, Alberta is home to numerous head corporate offices related to the oil and gas industry which is proven to be an industry that is sensitive to economic disruption (Boutilier et al., 2017, p. 2). Boutilier et al. (2017) assert decreases in oil prices create challenges for spousal relationships in the form of economic hardship as unemployment rates often increase when oil prices drop (p. 3). The findings of the Boutilier et al. (2017) study provide evidence that the fluctuations in oil prices create periods of economic instability and hardship that have a negative impact on spousal violence rates. This is especially true in Calgary where oil and gas play a large role in the economy (Boutilier et al., 2017). It is also likely given the nature of Alberta's oil and gas-dependent economy, the fluctuations in oil and gas prices in other parts of Alberta result in increased spousal violence incidents as well.

### ***Unemployment Rate in Canada From 2008-2020***

As one would anticipate, the unemployment rate in Canada has fluctuated between 2008 and 2020. Appendix B contains the unemployment rates expressed as a percentage for each year from 2008 to 2020. Appendix B indicates an increase in unemployment from 6.1 percent in 2008

to 8.3 percent in 2009, and 8.1 percent in 2010 (Statista Research Department, 2021). This period overlaps with the 2008-2009 recession Canada experienced and the economic shock in 2010 after the recession began to end (Bourbeau, 2019). Cross and Bergevin (2012) note the last recession Canada experienced was in 2008-2009 (p. 22). The 2008-2009 recession was, of course, the most recent recession up until 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

As noted in Appendix B, the most significant difference between unemployment rates between this period was between 2019 and 2020 (Statista Research Department, 2021). In 2019, the unemployment rate was 5.7 percent and in 2020, the rate jumped to 9.5 percent, constituting the highest increase within the time frame examined (Statista Research Department, 2021). One explanation for this sharp increase was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 across the globe on an unprecedented scale (Government of Canada, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic harmed the Canadian economy as Canada as a whole was forced to quickly implement public health measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, including various measures which essentially shut down the economy (Government of Canada, 2020).

### ***COVID-19***

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak in Canada, between February and April 2020, 5.5 million workers, or approximately 30 percent of the total workforce were negatively impacted (Government of Canada, 2020). This period overlaps with Canada's first lockdown (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10); and the accompanying economic recession Canada began to experience (Government of Canada, 2020). Although the statistics from February through April 2020 reflect only a portion of the year, given COVID-19 persisted for all of 2020, it is very likely a significant portion of the workforce remained negatively impacted.

Moffitt et al. (2020) noted the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the Canadian economy and the availability of spousal violence-related services and shelters. Due to the economic recession created by COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2020), the budgets used to fund spousal violence shelters and programs have been decreased (Moffitt et al., 2020); this means that during an unprecedented time whereby many women need these services most, they are not available. Thus, women remain increasingly susceptible to spousal violence during the COVID-19 pandemic as they cannot access the necessary supports and protection. Moreover, the economic impact of COVID-19 has trickled down into spousal violence-related non-profit organizations that are reliant on donations to sustain their services (Moffitt et al., 2020); due to the diminished spending of Canadians as the economic recession and pandemic persist.

If Canadians are not donating to spousal-violence-related organizations, the availability of services for women is reduced, leaving them vulnerable to their abusive partners. As a result of the economic recession fueled budget cuts and COVID-19 physical distancing requirements, spousal violence shelters are not able to accommodate as many women and potentially their families (Moffitt et al., 2020). Some spousal violence shelters are forced to pay the expenses of housing victimized women in hotel rooms when space is not available in the shelters or in the event they need to self-isolate due to exposure to COVID-19 (Moffitt et al., 2020). Moffitt et al. (2020) argued the aggravating factors fostered by COVID-19 have made it financially difficult for spousal violence shelters to continue operating and supporting victims of spousal violence. In all things considered, such financial difficulty is further exacerbated by Canada's existing economic recession as funding becomes limited and consumers are spending less money as some experience financial insecurity.

### *Low-Income Cut-offs After Tax From 2008-2010*

Low-income after-tax cut-offs (LICO-AT) indicate Canadian families considered to be low-income after taxes have been deducted from their total annual income (“Part B-Detailed definition,” para. 5). Low-income after-tax cut-offs (LICO-AT) provided by Statistics Canada (modified on April 13, 2021, Table 11-10-0241-01); are useful in illustrating how household income correlates with periods of economic recession, particularly in the 2008 and 2009 recession (see Appendix C). There are no publicly available LICO-AT measures for 2020, however, it is very likely given previous patterns of household income during recessions, the LICO-AT measure for 2020 would reflect the recession Canada underwent. Appendix C contains the LICO-AT measures after taxes in dollars, from 2008 to 2010, for families ranging in size from one person to five people, both in populations of 100,000 to 499,999 and populations of 500,000 and up. The reason for the inclusion of LICO-AT measures only from 2008 to 2010 is because Bourbeau (2019) notes this was a recession period for Canada and the aftermath of the economic shock experienced.

It is important to note that the LICO-AT measure is higher in a community with a population of 500,000 or more compared to a community with a population of under 500,000 (Statistics Canada, modified on April 13, 2021, Table 11-10-0241-01). One possible reason for this is because living expenses may be higher in larger communities such as cities and urban centres. It is also beneficial to understand that the LICO-AT measure also increases as there are more family members in the same household, and this is the case for both communities with populations over and under 500,000 (Statistics Canada, modified on April 13, 2021, Table 11-10-0241-01).

## **Economic Factors**

Previous scholars have found personal levels of economic vulnerability, lack of job security, views of economic strain, the male partner's unemployment, low income, and negative economic conditions are all contributing factors to spouse violence (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 474). This relationship is significant to study because such factors can create financial strain and hardship, which create stress in the spousal relationship, thereby increasing the risk of spousal violence (Renzetti, 2009, p. 1). Exploring and understanding the relationship between economic factors and spousal violence is also important because the replication of various studies has shown that the likelihood of spousal violence occurring decreases as the rate of a spousal relationship's economic status and well-being increases (Renzetti, 2009, p. 2). Moreover, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impact on the Canadian economy, it has become more crucial to understand the adverse impact a poor economy has on spousal violence and to have resources in place to prevent, as well as support those enduring it.

### **Low Income**

Low income is a crucial economic factor to explore as it is one of the more common factors associated with spousal violence (Fox et al., 2002, p. 795). Fox et al. (2002) articulated the family stress theory has an impact on spousal violence perpetrated by men towards their female partners as a result of mounting stressors associated with a perceived surplus of demands and a lack of resources to deal with such demands, especially in relationships with lower income and unemployment (p. 794). The family stress theory also applies to spousal relationships and is beneficial in explaining the connection between low income and spousal violence because when partners in the relationship are characterized as low-income, according to the LICO-AT measures, these partners spend the majority of their income on basic living expenses such as

shelter, food, and clothing (“Part B-Detailed definition,” para. 5); and face stress when they are not earning enough income to support these needs. In low-income relationships, the demands for basic living necessities are outweighed by the income to support such necessities, and so financial stress and strain result. To further compound the crisis created by low income, the spousal partners are unable to afford resources and other coping mechanisms (Fox et al., 2002, p. 794); and so spousal violence may result due to the compounding effects of low income.

Buzawa and Buzawa (2013) also articulated spousal violence disproportionately impacts spousal relationships where low income or other financial disadvantages are present (p. 131). This is because low income results in a deprivation of resources which can foster conditions of stress and strain in spousal relationships (p. 131). In addition, female victims of spousal violence with more financial resources available are better equipped to navigate their abusive spousal relationships and accompanying circumstances than their female counterparts with less financial resources (Renzetti, 2009, p. 2). Taken together, these perspectives indicate the particular disadvantage low-income women in spousal partnerships are subjected to because they can hardly afford necessities for survival and other crucial living expenses such as rent, let alone be able to financially support themselves and leave their abusive partner whom they may be dependent on for support. Therefore, these women remain trapped in violent relationships and are exposed to spousal violence because they are unable to financially provide for themselves, given their low-income status.

Buzawa and Buzawa (2013) further noted economic factors such as unemployment, low income, decreased financial access to resources, and economic recessions, have a relatively weak linkage to spousal violence (p. 132). They argue that while such economic factors and recessions are contributing factors to spousal violence, they tend to exacerbate pre-existing conditions such

as substance abuse or mental health-related issues (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2013, p. 132). In this respect, spousal violence is triggered by the presence of existing substance abuse, mental health issues, and economic factors, all of which create stress and strain in the spousal relationship (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2013, p. 132).

According to Benson et al. (2003), spousal violence can occur when parties of a spousal relationship are enduring financial difficulties because there are more altercations or an increased likelihood of altercations occurring over financial issues (p. 212). Due to the stress and strain stemming from the financial difficulties, both can be expressed through violence towards one's spousal partner (Benson et al., 2003, p. 212). Benson et al. (2003) asserted spousal violence tends to affect those associated with the lower social class due to higher rates of unemployment and decreased earnings (p. 213). Both of these economic factors would contribute to low-income status in spousal relationships, thereby resulting in or exacerbating existing financial stress and strain amongst partners as funds are unstable or depleting. For these reasons, the financial stressors associated with low income perpetuate incidents of spousal violence.

Fox et al. (2002) stated the effect long working hours have on spousal relationships (p. 794). The male partners often work long hours which may deter them from utilizing violence in the home, but on the other hand, longer working hours can increase the levels of stress felt by the male and the spousal relationship, therefore, the likelihood of spousal violence is heightened (Fox et al., 2002, p. 794). These male partners may be working longer hours to generate extra income in spousal relationships that are already plagued by low-income status. While working long hours, and if the nature of the job predisposes the males to exhaustion and irritability (Fox et al., 2002, p. 795); this creates further strain in the relationship as the men feel compelled to perform exhausting and frustrating labour to financially sustain themselves and their partners. In

all things considered, the negative impacts of longer working hours and the additional stress to bring in more income or to keep the income stream from depleting could result in males perpetrating spousal violence against their female partners (Fox et al., 2002, p. 795).

Spousal violence is rooted in patriarchy whereby men assert economic and political dominance and power over women (Kaukinen & Powers, 2015, p. 232; Lupri et al., 1994, p. 49; Renzetti, 2009, p. 4). Spousal violence remains in society because of the continued existence of the historical formation of a patriarchal social structure that continues to disadvantage women and leave them in a place of social inequality and inferiority (Lupri et al., 1994, p. 49). The patriarchal subculture thesis asserts male partners who are characterized as low-income and lower in socioeconomic status ranking, are significantly more susceptible to adhering to patriarchal structures and beliefs (Lupri et al., 1994, p. 50). Male partners are more likely to perpetrate spousal violence if they firmly believe in and follow the patriarchal structure in the relationship and home (Lupri et al., 1994, pp. 49-50). In addition, to support their findings, Lupri et al. (1994) utilized Wolfgang and Ferracuti's 1967 articulation that violence is more likely to occur in the lower socioeconomic class because there is more emphasis placed on violence compared to classes of higher socioeconomic status (p. 50). This suggests that men feel additional pressure to be the breadwinners, thereby adhering to patriarchy, and are more likely to inflict spousal violence on their partners due to the financial strain and stresses they feel associated with low income.

While low income is a contributing factor to spousal violence, unemployment is an additional factor that has been extensively studied by scholars concerning incidents of spousal violence. Unemployment and low income are mutual in the sense they exacerbate the likelihood

of spousal violence occurring, particularly against women, as illustrated by the statistics provided.

### **Unemployment**

There is a plethora of research available that asserts a relationship exists between unemployment, unemployment rates, and incidents of spousal violence (Benson et al., 2003; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002; Golden et al., 2013; Macmillan & Gartner, 1999; Peterson, 2011; Renzetti, 2009; Schneider et al., 2016). Unemployment has been argued by scholars to be one of the stronger correlates of spousal violence occurring and Benson et al. (2003) argued unemployment plays a significant role in the perpetration of spousal violence against female partners specifically because unemployment is a challenging and stressful transition (p. 212).

According to Andresen (2015), individuals who are unemployed or face adverse economic circumstances have more motivation to commit criminal activity (p. 39). This is likely because unemployment creates financial stress and strain that impacts all aspects of an individual's life. The argument proposed by Andresen (2015) is similar to Robert Merton's Anomie and Social Structure Theory. Merton's main hypothesis is that although a society should place equal emphasis on attaining goals such as personal success and financial wealth, and on the methods employed to achieve these goals, the reality is that society tends to place unequal emphasis on one of these two components (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 117). This unequal emphasis creates unequal access to opportunities to attain conventional goals and success, thus frustration and strain are created and individuals find alternative ways to achieve these goals, deviance and/or crime being one of them (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 117). An individual may be motivated to commit spousal violence due to the frustration they face as their financial stress and strain stemming from their unemployment spill over into the spousal relationship, or to regain a sense

of control in the relationship since their economic control and stability have been hindered. Enacting spousal violence towards one's partner to regain control may be especially motivated if the female partner is financially dependent on their male partner (Golden et al., 2013, p. 2136). Thus, this opportunity motivates the perpetrator to regain control over their partner and relationship, thereby adhering to the socially ascribed conventional goals of attaining partnership and financial success (Tibbetts, 2019, p. 117).

According to Peterson (2011), three hypotheses explore how the employment of the male partner, female partner, and of both partners, affects spousal violence incidents (p. 173). The resource deprivation hypothesis emphasizes unemployment of one or both of the partners in the relationship results in an increased feeling of financial stress which strains the spousal relationship and the likelihood of spousal violence occurring is increased (Peterson, 2011, p. 173). The dependency hypothesis states unemployed women are more vulnerable to spousal violence because they do not have the personal or financial resources to flee the abusive relationship or they do not have the credibility to threaten to leave the relationship should the abuse continue, due to a lack of resources (Peterson, 2011, p. 173). The female partner's unemployment and resulting deficiency of resources indicate many in such circumstances are forced to remain in their abusive spousal partnership as they cannot afford to support themselves and their children. This reality enables the perpetuation of spousal violence, especially against female partners.

The third hypothesis articulated by Peterson (2011), claims when a woman is employed, their risk of becoming a victim of spousal violence can increase (p. 173). This is known as the backlash hypothesis, whereby, the male partner will inflict violence on the female partner in an attempt to reinsert gender roles in the form of male dominance (Peterson, 2011, p. 173). This

occurs as the male partner's unemployment contributes to a loss of power and control over the female partner, and the male seeks to regain these elements through violent means (Peterson, 2011, p. 173). The methods in which unemployed males under the backlash hypothesis inflict abuse include increasing the severity and frequency in which the violence is perpetrated and participating in financial forms of spousal violence such as controlling monetary aspects of the relationship (Peterson, 2011, p. 174). The backlash hypothesis indicates that male unemployment deteriorates the patriarchal structure of the relationship and diminishes the perceived power and control felt by the male over their partner. As a result, spousal violence can occur to correct the male partner's losses and to remain adherent to traditional gender expectations in which the male provides for the relationship.

Peterson (2011) further stated a study conducted by Macmillan and Gartner in 1999, revealed the resource deprivation hypothesis was weakly supported by the findings of the study, but also found men who were unemployed were at an increased risk of perpetrating spousal violence (p. 174). There are mixed results on the resource deprivation hypothesis upon replication of the Macmillan and Gartner (1999) study; however, the findings of the study conducted by Schneider et al. (2016) are consistent with the resource deprivation hypothesis. The objective and subjective types of economic distress articulated by Benson et al. (2003) are also consistent with the resource deprivation hypothesis.

Moreover, the study completed by Macmillan and Gartner (1999) found consistent support for the backlash hypothesis in which female partners who maintained employment were more vulnerable to experiencing spousal violence when the male experienced unemployment (Peterson, 2011, p. 174). To add to this, the 1999 study mentioned by Peterson (2011), found support for the dependency hypothesis whereby when the female partner is experiencing

unemployment but the male partner is employed, the rate at which the female is vulnerable to spousal violence increases because of her dependency on the male partner (Peterson, 2011, p. 174). Overall, Peterson (2011) also articulates the significance of unemployment as a strong correlate of spousal violence (p. 174).

In the research study conducted by Peterson (2011), he noted the study conducted by Farmer and Tiefenthaler in 2003 explored the rate of spousal violence against women in the United States, using data sets from the 1990s (p. 175). Peterson (2011) stated Farmer and Tiefenthaler excluded household income from their study and found when females were employed, they had a decreased likelihood of being victims of spousal violence (p. 175). This indicates employment attained by female partners was a key factor in the decline of incidents of spousal violence in the United States during the 1990s (Peterson, 2011, p. 175). Despite the study mentioned by Peterson (2011) being American based, the conclusion drawn applies to Canada as well because the two countries are similar in terms of capitalism and gross domestic product (GDP). Moreover, the stressful and straining effects of unemployment are not solely characteristic of the United States as Canada has also endured its share of unemployment amongst its population, and to reiterate, the economies are similar.

A study conducted by Schneider et al. (2016) examined the correlation between poor labour market circumstances and abusive behaviour endured by mothers during the period between 2001 and 2010 (p. 471). It is important to acknowledge that the time frame utilized by the Schneider et al. (2016) study overlaps with the 2008 economic recession in the United States (p. 472). This study asks the question of “whether economic distress and exposure to high unemployment rates increase the likelihood that a mother will be in a violent or controlling relationship” (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 480). The researchers further defined a romantic

relationship as one in which the parties involved in the relationship are dating, married, or cohabitating (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 480). The definition of a romantic relationship provided by Schneider et al. (2016) is compatible with the definition of spousal partner provided by the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (n.d.). The researchers discuss the family stress model in which unemployment and circumstances of economic adversity contribute to economic stress within the spousal relationship and can lead to conflict between the spousal partners that may culminate into spousal violence (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 472). Schneider et al. (2016) referred to the 2008 economic recession in the United States as the Great Recession, and their findings reflect swift increases in rates of unemployment during the Great Recession were connected to the increase of abusive behaviour committed by male partners in the spousal relationship (p. 472). To reiterate, the content and findings of the study conducted by Schneider et al. (2016) are reflective of spousal violence rates in the United States during the 2008 recession. However, Canada also underwent an economic recession during 2008, and therefore, it is very likely that Canada's spousal violence rates increased during this time as well given the societal, economic, and cultural similarities between the two Western civilizations.

### ***Types of Economic Distress***

There are two types of economic distress individuals face: objective and subjective (Benson et al., 2003, p. 212). Objective economic distress is found in the form of unemployment and insufficient funds to cover one's needs (Benson et al., 2003, p. 212). Subjective economic distress takes the form of anxiety and worry over lack of income, or worrying over job loss and instability (Benson et al., 2003, p. 212). Benson et al. (2003) articulated the economic strain and instability associated with objective and subjective economic distress, contribute to stress and frustration that are exerted in the form of violence towards one's spousal partner (p. 212). One

commonality between objective and subjective economic distress is not having a job and therefore, not having funds to support oneself and their spousal relationship. This relates to unemployment because if an individual does not have a job, they likely lack a stable income, and so the associated financial stressors contribute to the likelihood of spousal violence occurring.

Consistent with previous research conducted by Macmillan and Gartner in 1999, Benson et al. (2003) postulated that when males are unemployed or have unstable employment, the likelihood of spousal violence being perpetrated against their female partners is higher because such unemployment or unstable employment creates a drain on the male's self-worth and threatens their masculinity (p. 230). Moreover, if men experience numerous releases from employment or are fired numerous times, this could exacerbate their anger which is then directed towards their partners in the form of spousal violence (Benson et al., 2003, p. 230). Based on this postulation, it is evident unemployment challenges the status quo for men and they feel the pressures of masculinity weighing down on them as they are no longer financially stable, nor are they the breadwinners of the relationship. Therefore, the risk of spousal violence occurring is exacerbated in an effort for the male to remain the dominant figure of the relationship. In summary, in this way, Benson et al. (2003) explained men who are unemployed are affected more by the symbolism of employment as it relates to masculinity than they are affected by the actual economic nature of their unemployment (p. 230); and this is an interesting and less common conclusion to consider.

### ***Symbolic Significance of Employment***

Providing foundational concepts and findings for many similar studies in the future including DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2002), Fox et al. (2002), Benson et al. (2003), and Renzetti (2009); Macmillan and Gartner (1999) articulated the symbolic significance of employment

status amongst partners in a spousal relationship whereby employment is regarded as symbolic of traditional notions of masculinity and duties in the household are prescribed to females (p. 949). As follows, the likelihood of spousal violence inflicted on the female partner is heightened when the female partner holds employment and the male partner does not (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999, p. 949). The increased likelihood of spousal violence can be explained as the female partner's employment represents a breakdown of masculinity in the relationship and is deemed as threatening to the male partner (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999, p. 949). To gain back the authority and dominance in the relationship from the female partner, the male may utilize violence over his spousal partner (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999, p. 949). The researchers also found when both the male and female partners are employed, the likelihood of spousal violence occurring is reduced (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999, p. 957). This finding can be interpreted as employment being a factor that may safeguard women against spousal violence because there is no loss of masculinity or the loss of the symbolic importance of employment as the male partner is also employed. Lastly, Macmillan and Gartner (1999) argued the most important aspect of employment in the occurrence of spousal violence is its measure of status amongst the partners that serve to reinforce traditional gender roles whereby women are the homemakers and are dependent upon men for their survival, and the men are the breadwinners as well as the figurehead of authority in the relationship (p. 957).

Renzetti (2009) also declares employment can be a protective factor for women because employment provides them with financial security and resources which in turn contributes to their psychological ability to cope with or to terminate an abusive spousal relationship (p. 2). However, women who report being victims of spousal violence are more likely to arrive late to their jobs, are absent from their work, have reduced productivity from mental and physical health

problems related to their victimization, and have a reduced capacity to maintain long-term employment (Renzetti, 2009, p. 2). This means that female partners experiencing the symptoms and consequences of previous or existing spousal violence victimization are disadvantaged because if they are less likely to maintain employment in the long term, they face a higher likelihood of unemployment. Furthermore, feelings of depression and anxiety in the abused female partner can prevent them from maintaining employment or finding future employment to support themselves (Renzetti, 2009, p. 6). To reiterate, female partners who have experienced spousal violence are disadvantaged as they endure the depression, anxiety, and even trauma associated with the violence. Such feelings prevent the female partner from employment, thereby leaving many unemployed, and if they are unemployed, they are subjected to further incidents of spousal violence.

Renzetti (2009) also stated men who are unemployed and live in neighbourhoods characterized by financial disadvantage, are at risk of experiencing financial stress because they are hindered from achieving a highly valued status in a patriarchal society, which is financial success (p. 4). These men might carry out violence towards the other person in the spousal relationship because they view themselves as failing to be breadwinners and violence is a tool used to assert their masculinity and dominance (Renzetti, 2009, p. 4). This finding affirms unemployment fosters stress and strain that negatively impact the spousal relationship and increase the risk of spousal violence occurring.

DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2002) articulated that many individuals who are unemployed live in public housing programs (p. 35); likely due to their affordable nature, especially for individuals with low income. Living in public housing programs could be exacerbated during periods of economic recession in which spousal partners may resort to living in more affordable

public housing. According to these researchers, male and female spousal partners living in public housing, enforce the belief that men should be the breadwinners of the relationship, thereby enforcing the patriarchal structure of the relationship and even the household (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002, pp. 35-36). As a result, for men who cannot adhere to the breadwinner role and who experience economic hardship and inability to financially control their partner due to the male partner's unemployment and subsequent lack of income, stress and strain are outcomes (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2002, p. 36). In conclusion, this stress and strain can increase the likelihood of spousal violence occurring amongst spousal partners living in public housing.

### ***Economic Abuse***

In particular, economic abuse is frequently used by the perpetrator to obtain and maintain control over their spousal partner (Renzetti, 2009, p. 3). Economic abuse is engaged when the perpetrators of spousal violence intentionally attempt to destroy their partner's ability to receive and maintain paid positions of employment (Renzetti, 2009, p. 3). When the male partner sabotages or attempts to sabotage their female partner's employment, this could result in the female losing their job and leaving them unemployed. The female partner's unemployment now becomes a substantially high risk of facing further violence. Various other forms of economic abuse used by the perpetrators include: ruining the female's work attire, inflicting cuts and bruises to the face to prevent them from attending work, saying they will care for the couples' children but then not following through at the last minute and leaving the female partner unable to go to work, and even stalking or harassing the female on the job (Renzetti, 2009, p. 3). Each of these methods could negatively affect the female partner's employment and increase her risk of being unemployed.

Females who hold positions of employment are at risk of losing or leaving their jobs when experiencing economic abuse, especially in the form of being stalked at work (Renzetti, 2009, p. 3). Thus, the female's financial stability is reduced and in turn, her capacity to leave or terminate the abusive spousal relationship is also diminished because of a lack of financial resources available to support herself (Renzetti, 2009, p. 3). In addition, female victims of spousal violence have revealed seeking employment has often led to incidents of spousal violence because their partners become aggravated to gain more control and power over them (Renzetti, 2009; Peterson, 2011; Macmillan & Gartner, 1999). This is especially true for male perpetrators of spousal violence who are unemployed (Renzetti, 2009, p. 3); as feelings of inferiority, loss of masculinity, and loss of power stemming from their unemployment create aggravation towards their female partner's employment, therefore, increasing their risk of perpetrating spousal violence. The outcome of such actions and feelings is the unemployment of the female partner who is now at a greater risk of experiencing further victimization.

The impact of unemployment on incidents of spousal violence is profound. Such unemployment has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in increasing unemployment rates at various points since its outbreak. The unemployment rates in Canada continue to fluctuate as the COVID-19 pandemic persists (Government of Canada, 2020).

### **COVID-19**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) "is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus" (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.). WHO asserts COVID-19 "spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes" (WHO, n.d.). According to the National

Library of Medicine (NIH), the World Health Organization declared Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to be a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (National Library of Medicine [NIH], 2020). After the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, there was a global shut down, leading to many hardships and barriers faced on an international level.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been profound on an unprecedented global scale, and the pandemic has not discriminated against impacting the relationship between spousal violence and economic factors in Canada. In May 2020, Canada's unemployment rate increased to a high of 13.7 percent from 5.5 percent in January 2020, before it slowly decreased in the following months (Government of Canada, 2020). Furthermore, the economic hardship associated with the heightened unemployment rates during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted millions of Canadians (Government of Canada, 2020). The unemployment rate in Canada has decreased from an overall 9.5 percent in 2020 (Statista Research Department, 2021); to 7.5 percent in March 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021); approximately a year after the pandemic hit Canada. Despite this decrease, the pandemic's impact on unemployment and economic recession remains dynamic as the conditions of the pandemic continuously change.

On February 2, 2021, as part of a webinar hosted by the Alberta Criminal Justice Association (ACJA), Meghan Costello and Joy Steppacher, both practitioners with domestic violence service providers in Calgary, presented spousal violence-related trends throughout 2020. When Alberta went under its first lockdown on March 17, 2020, in response to the outbreak of COVID-19, experts and advocates in the field of spousal violence had forewarned significant increases in spousal violence as well as other types of domestic violence (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10). During this lockdown period beginning on March 17, 2020, and lasting until approximately May 2020 when Alberta began its phases of re-opening, there was an

increase in the number of incidents and severity of the spousal violence reported (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10). Trends in spousal violence included more frequent episodes of violence occurring for many days or even weeks in duration prior to being reported to the police (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10). Such an increase can be attributed to reduced opportunities for victims to leave their houses and to seek community supports that they can engage with as many services were temporarily shut down to slow the spread of COVID-19 (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10).

This increase can also be explained in part by the limited opportunity for victims to speak with their support networks when the perpetrator resides and is isolating in the same home as the victim, and more reluctance to report incidents of spousal violence which could result in either the victim or the perpetrator having to reside in places they might consider put them at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or an outbreak, such as in a shelter or remand center (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10). For these reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic has created tense environments in the homes of many spousal partnerships where strain, stress, and economic hardship have exacerbated the risk of spousal violence occurring. Meanwhile, many are unable to flee the violence and seek help as society was encouraged to stay home and limit social contact with others, and many businesses and programs were shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The case studies in Calgary, Alberta mentioned by Costello and Steppacher (2021), highlight the role unemployment and COVID-19 have on spousal violence. In one case study, a young woman was forced to work from home due to the initial lockdown and her partner had been laid off and was in the same living space during the lockdown (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 11). Her partner became physically violent towards her not long after the

lockdown restrictions had been implemented and he began to destroy the technology she used for work and communication purposes (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 11). This woman was unable to reach out to her support network and seek help because she was constantly trapped in the same living space as him and had no access to technology (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 11). Eventually, this woman received help as her colleagues acknowledged her absence from work meetings and calls and were concerned for her safety, thus, they called the police who pressed charges against her spousal partner and referred her to domestic violence service providers (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 11). This case study illustrates how quickly the stressors created by unemployment had erupted into spousal violence.

In another case study articulated by Costello and Steppacher (2021), another woman was affected by the lockdown restrictions and began working from home while her husband had been laid off from his job and was back in the household on a full-time basis, thereby changing the environment of the home in a negative way (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 14). Her partner became emotionally violent and began to monitor and control her time spent on her phone and laptop, thereby cutting her off from her support network (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 14). It is evident this young woman's partner was impacted negatively by his job loss and had turned his stress and frustration towards his partner, culminating in spousal violence. In both case studies, the impact of COVID-19 was severe as it had created stress, financial difficulties, and isolation that significantly increased the likelihood of spousal violence occurring. Given the existing relationship between unemployment and an increased risk of spousal violence occurring, it is highly likely these circumstances created by COVID-19 and the accompanying financial stress were experienced across Canada.

Peterman et al. (2020) asserted the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in continuous financial uncertainty with those who are economically vulnerable predicted to experience the hardest effects of this uncertainty (p. 9). Such economic uncertainty may take the form of increasing unemployment rates, reduced capacity to work because of caregiving responsibilities, and lack of adequate workspace in one's home, as well as a reduction in income (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 9). Females are more likely to be disproportionately impacted by the financial uncertainty created by COVID-19 as they often take the role of caregiver which decreases their capacity to fulfill paid employment (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 9). This is because childcare programs had shut down repeatedly since the onset of the pandemic, thereby creating additional challenges for working mothers to balance their employment and caretaker responsibilities. Peterman et al. (2020) also stated disruptions in the economy can contribute to changes in the economic balance of power between spousal partners whereby female partners may experience increases or decreases of spousal violence incidents with the attainment of supplementary economic power in the relationship (p. 9). However, the researchers highlighted that this supplementary economic power is contingent upon the male partner's reaction to this shift in the economic power balance of the relationship (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 9).

Peterman et al. (2020) noted the impact previous pandemics have had on lost revenue and unemployment rates, such as the Ebola outbreak in Africa which had an estimated GDP loss of \$2.8 billion to \$32.6 billion (p. 9). While the researchers further assert the lost revenue caused by COVID-19 is unknown at this time (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 9); it is apparent given Canada's overall unemployment rate of 9.5 percent in 2020 (Statista, 2021); that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted Canada's revenue and has resulted in heavy economic losses. Moreover, pandemics including COVID-19 can create food insecurity (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 9); as many

people experience reduced wages, unemployment, and other sources of financial insecurity. These feelings of financial insecurity result in increased levels of stress that can lead to an increased number of incidents and heightened severity of incidents of spousal violence (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 9).

Quarantine periods are also a factor that heightens the risk of spousal abuse for many female partners as women are exposed to their male partners on a more frequent and prolonged basis (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 10). In the study conducted by Peterman et al. (2020), quarantines were juxtaposed with refugee camps and other humanitarian camps whereby the spousal partners are forced to be in the same space under stress-flourishing circumstances, and so the risk of spousal violence occurring increases (p. 10). The researchers argued quarantine periods could also lead to food insecurity as partners are unable to leave their living spaces and therefore, can increase the risk of spousal violence occurring as such feelings of financial insecurity overshadow the spousal relationship (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 10). Episodes of spousal violence may occur as perpetrators utilize violence as a method of coping with the loss of power and control felt by quarantine measures (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 10). Furthermore, quarantine periods help foster a sense of isolation that can be weaponized by abusive partners to strengthen the social disconnect between the victimized partner and their friends, colleagues, and loved ones (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 10). Thus, the perpetrator perceives a complete sense of control and dominance over their spousal partner (Peterman et al., 2020, p. 10); as there are no social resources the abused partner can utilize to seek help.

It is evident the COVID-19 pandemic has created widespread, unprecedented challenges for Canadians and the economy in 2020 and continuing through 2021. Despite the slow economic recovery Canada has begun to make since the outbreak of the pandemic (Government

of Canada, 2020); it is clear there has been considerable suffering in Canadian society in the spousal relationship sphere. Moreover, various government reports and statistics indicate that Canada is indeed experiencing a recessional period provoked by COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2020); and the linkage between economic recessions and incidents of spousal violence will be explored.

### **Economic Recessions**

The circumstances created by economic recessions can contribute to increases in spousal violence. Specifically, economic recessions lead to unemployment and increased unemployment rates and exacerbate financial instability for low-income individuals and spousal relationships. Canada is currently experiencing an economic recession associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020); and spousal violence rates are increasing as a result (M. Costello & J. Steppacher, 2021, slide 10).

Research existing from the Great Depression to the present illustrates economic recessions have a significantly negative impact on spousal relationships (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 494). This historic pattern can be explained as the diminished control or perceived control in one area, such as the economy, contributes to an increased assertion of control in another area which is the spousal relationship (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 494); thereby increasing the likelihood of spousal violence occurring. Unlike previous studies, the study conducted by Schneider et al. (2016) is inclusive of spousal violence in relationships where economic prosperity exists (p. 494). One of the related key findings is the uncertainty and anxiety accompanied by economic recessions can affect spousal relationships, exacerbating the likelihood of spousal violence occurring as the male partner's control or perceived control over finances is greatly reduced (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 494). This crucial finding illustrates that

even spousal relationships with a stable income before an economic recession, are affected by a recessionary period because they perceive their financial situation to be jeopardized. To summarize, the perceived threat to one's financial situation triggers stress and strain that contribute to an increased likelihood of spousal violence occurring.

Schneider et al. (2016) described two different ways in which economic recessions contribute to increases in spousal violence (p. 473). The first way describes the loss of employment and consequent material hardship, directly increase violent behaviour towards the other partner because the one spousal partner collapses under the challenges and strain associated with negative economic conditions, and abusive behaviour that was repressed now arises (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 473). The second way states the worsening economic circumstances provoke the rise in abusive behaviour because the circumstances create exacerbated feelings of uncertainty and fear (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 473). These exacerbated feelings affect spousal violence because the loss of control over finances and economic conditions can result in a partner's heightened need to regain control in another area, and spousal violence is utilized to regain such control in another domain (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 474; Benson et al., 2003; Renzetti, 2009).

Spousal violence-related calls to services, programs, and shelters increase significantly during periods of economic recession (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2013, p. 132). According to the Mary Kay Foundation (2011) "75 percent of the nation's domestic violence shelters reported an increase in women seeking help since December 2008" (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2013, p. 132). This could be attributed to the fact that many people experience unemployment during economic recessions due to layoffs or inability to attain a position of paid employment, and unemployed partners may be at a heightened risk of committing spousal violence because they are in the same

space as the victim more often and therefore, have increased opportunities to commit spousal violence compared to partners who are employed (Benson et al., 2003, p. 212). Benson et al. (2003) noted this is especially true if the male partner is unemployed (p. 212); and this is likely because men are more likely to be perpetrators of spousal violence (Status of Women Canada, modified on October 28, 2020). This increase in calls to spousal violence-related programs and services can also be attributed to economic recessions which further hinder a victimized woman's ability to end or leave their abusive spousal relationship because they lack the financial resources to do so and cannot afford other means of housing (Renzetti, 2009, p. 5).

Economic recessions also block women from leaving abusive spousal partners because their social support networks themselves also lack the financial resources to help (Renzetti, 2009, p. 4). It is important to acknowledge that male spousal partners are not excluded from these conditions, however, women are more likely to experience them. Therefore, women, in particular, are deterred from leaving or terminating their abusive spousal relationships because they lack or perceive they lack alternative shelter or refuge due to the economic hardship created by the economic recession. Furthermore, women remain confined in the same living space as their abuser, and the opportunity for spousal violence to occur increases.

There is a myriad of existing literature on the economic recession of 2008 including research completed by Renzetti (2009), Peterson (2011), Cross and Bergevin (2012), and Schneider et al. (2016). According to Renzetti (2009), the 2008 economic recession saw unemployment rates reach their peak since the 1980s, placing many relationships and families in a position of economic adversity (p. 1). During this time, the number of calls received by spousal violence agencies for women seeking support and refuge increased (Renzetti, 2009, p. 1). This was due to the financial hardship created by the recession that left many without the necessary

resources to mitigate or leave their violent spousal partners (Renzetti, 2009, p. 1). Such circumstances rendered them dependent upon their partners out of necessity, even if it meant enduring spousal violence.

In contrast to the article written by Renzetti (2009), Peterson (2011) suggested the 2008 economic recession in the United States was not a cause of increased rates of spousal partner violence (p. 172). Peterson (2011) stated despite the media's portrayal of increases in calls to police services and domestic violence hotlines, and the higher rates of domestic violence shelter usage, these measures are not a holistic explanation of spousal violence increases (p. 172). In addition, the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) did not contain any evidence there was an increase in spousal violence incidents during the period between 2007 and 2009, which encompassed the economic recession of 2008 (Peterson, 2011, p. 172). Furthermore, Peterson (2011) looked at data sets from the period between 2001 and 2003 in which an economic recession in the United States also occurred, and he found this recessionary period did not contribute to increased incidence of spousal violence (p. 187). Thus, the findings of Peterson (2011) contradict the argument that economic recessions result in increased rates of spousal violence (p. 187). It is evident from the study completed by Peterson (2011) that research on economic recessions and their impact on incidents of spousal violence can be quite ambiguous and more research is needed. However, there is more current research since the commencement of this study that suggests otherwise.

Similar to the findings of Renzetti (2009), the study conducted by Peterson (2011) offered an alternative explanation to the increased use of domestic violence shelters which can also be attributed to the fact that friends and family become unable to financially support the victim of spousal violence (p. 172). Therefore, the victim turns to domestic violence shelters for support,

not because there was an increase in the rate of spousal violence during this period (Peterson, 2011, p. 172). Taken together, the findings of Peterson (2011) and Renzetti (2009) pertaining to increased calls for spousal violence-related services, are mutual and it is evident that economic recessions are accountable in part for these increases.

### ***Oil and Gas Industry in Alberta***

Boutilier et al. (2017) explored the impact of decreases in oil prices and the accompanying impact on spousal violence. Their findings support the link between economic recession and spousal violence as decreases in oil prices trigger an economic recession in Alberta's oil and gas dominant economy, thus contributing to increases in spousal violence (Boutilier et al., 2017, pp. 2-3). The increase in spousal violence-related calls to the Calgary Police Service in 2016 can be in part, attributed to the economic recession in Alberta lasting from 2014 to 2016 (Boutilier et al., 2017, p. 2; Hussey et al., 2018, p. 2). In the latter half of 2014, the price of oil had dramatically lost its value, leading to a year of economic hardship in 2015 (Hussey et al., 2018, p. 2). The culmination of decreased oil prices and economic hardship was the loss of jobs at an unprecedented rate not experienced since 1982, whereby over 20,000 oil and gas industry-related jobs were lost across Canada (Hussey et al., 2018, p. 2). Despite differences in estimates of oil and gas-related job losses in Alberta in 2015 with such differences including the reporting of mass layoffs or jobs lost indirectly, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) estimated this economic recession resulted in approximately 35,000 oil and gas-related jobs lost in Alberta (Geddes, 2015). Of this approximately 35,000, 25,000 jobs were lost in the oil services field and the remaining 10,000 were lost in oil and gas-related exploration and production sectors (Geddes, 2015). During the same year in Alberta, employment in the oil and gas industry, as well as other related industries had steeply declined,

wages were slashed, and spending on oil and gas-related activities decreased in Canada, with the majority of expenditure reductions being in Alberta (Hussey et al., 2018, p. 3).

One can understand the consequences an oil and gas-dependent province would face as a result of substantially declining oil prices which triggered an economic recession that impacted the livelihoods and economic stability of numerous Canadians. The economic recession from 2014 to 2016 had a negative impact on spousal violence incidents given the strong existent relationship between the two. The recession resulted in economic hardship as a large number of individuals lost their jobs, had wage reductions, or were initially unemployed (Boutilier et al., 2017, p. 12). All of which fostered strain, stress, and financial instability in spousal relationships, or compounded the pre-existing stress and strain, that exacerbated the risk of spousal violence occurring. The risk of spousal violence is fueled in circumstances of economic recession and the accompanying economic hardship, especially, if the spousal relationship is adherent to the patriarchal structure and beliefs that view violence against one's partner as acceptable. This is because patriarchy reinforces the perception that to regain control of one's financial stability, they need to exercise control in another area, in which case would be through inflicting violence upon their spousal partner (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 494).

## Discussion

Through reviewing the literature, I have fulfilled my primary aims of this thesis which were to demonstrate that periods of economic recession are linked to increases in spousal violence calls for service and demonstrate that increases in unemployment rates contribute to increases in spousal violence incidents. Upon interpreting statistics on unemployment rates, spousal violence demographics, and spousal violence rates, as well as exploring low-income cut-offs after tax, and examining the literature, I have answered my research question by deducing that increases in unemployment rates can be associated with periods of economic recession, like the current recession and high unemployment rates Canada is currently experiencing. As a result, there is increased stress, strain, and financial insecurity, especially for low-income individuals, in spousal relationships that exacerbate the likelihood of incidents of spousal violence occurring.

In all things considered, the findings of this thesis were anticipated. The relationship between economic factors such as low income, unemployment, COVID-19, and economic recessions and spousal violence was evident in the scholarship, as expected. I was also not surprised to discover that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased unemployment rates, an economic recession, and contributed to significant increases in spousal violence incidents given numerous lockdowns and the resulting social isolation created by lockdowns. However, the study conducted by Peterson (2011) contained surprising results. This study contradicted the consensus amongst the other literature explored as Peterson (2011) depicted economic recessions may not always play a distinct, significant role in increasing rates of spousal violence, as is evident in his results upon examining the 2008 recession in the United States and spousal violence statistics for the same period. This is an unexpected finding as I

hypothesized that the financial stress, strain, and instability created by periods of economic recession would contribute to increased strain, stress, and tension in spousal relationships. Thereby, increasing the likelihood of spousal violence occurring and an associated increase in incidents of spousal violence. Although, it would be worthwhile to examine the police-reported and victim-reported statistics to cross-reference and see if there is in fact, an increase in spousal violence incidents. On the other hand, the findings of the study completed by Peterson (2011) also provide an area of further research in which the media's portrayal of spousal violence is examined. Such future research could help determine if the media's portrayal of spousal violence creates an unnecessary or perceived stress in spousal relationships, or an indirect acceptance of such violence, that contributes to an increase in spousal violence rates. Furthermore, this thesis provided awareness on how economic factors and periods of economic recession can contribute to spousal violence incidents, and perhaps policymakers and social programs can utilize such findings to shape their prevention strategies and reactions to spousal violence.

### **Conclusion**

It is crucial to understand how economic factors including low income, unemployment, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and economic recessions can increase occurrences of spousal violence because once a more in-depth understanding of this relationship is gained, there can be more preventative and proactive action taken to reduce the impact of such factors on spousal violence incidents. The exploration of economic recessions has provided a more in-depth understanding of how the lows of the economy impact incidents of spousal violence and create stress, strain, and instability that could be relatively new in spousal relationships or could compound pre-existing stressors. Exploring the relationship between unemployment rates, low income, and the COVID-19 pandemic served to develop a better understanding of how these

factors contribute to and exacerbate incidents of spousal violence, as well as how these factors can coincide. Examining the effects of COVID-19 on spousal violence has been particularly eye-opening and serves to shed awareness on increases in incidents of spousal violence, especially as at the time of writing this thesis, the pandemic persists, thereby negatively impacting spousal relationships. Evidently, periods of economic recession are linked to increases in spousal violence incidents. Moreover, increases in unemployment rates contribute to increases in spousal violence incidents. Such conclusions are supported by the findings of studies including Benson et al. (2003), Boutilier et al. (2017), DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2002), Golden et al. (2013), Macmillan and Gartner (1999), Peterson (2011), Renzetti (2009), and Schneider et al. (2016).

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## Appendix A

### Spousal Versus Non-spousal Violence Cases Studied-Calgary, AB

**Table A1**

	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Current Partners (includes: Married heterosexual couples, common-law husband or wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, homosexual relationship)	3826	61.5%
Ex-partners (includes: ex-spouses, ex-common-law partners, ex-boyfriend/girlfriend, legally separated/divorced)	1098	17.7%
Family members (includes: parents, children, siblings, elders, and any other family member)	1009	16.2%
Non-family members (includes: caregivers, friends)	285	4.6%
Total	6218	100.0%

(Tutty & Koshan, 2013, p. 739).

**Appendix B****Unemployment Rate in Canada from 2008 to 2020****Table B1**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Rate (as a percentage)</b>
2008	6.1%
2009	8.3%
2010	8.1%
2011	7.5%
2012	7.3%
2013	7.1%
2014	6.9%
2015	6.9%
2016	7.0%
2017	6.3%
2018	5.8%
2019	5.7%
2020	9.5%

(Statista Research Department, 2021).

## Appendix C

## Low Income Cut-offs After Tax from 2008-2010 (in dollars)

Table C1

Population Of Community	Family Size	2008	2009	2010
100,000-499,999	1 person	15,538	15,579	15,865
	2 persons	18,911	18,960	19,308
	3 persons	23,548	23,610	24,043
	4 persons	29,378	29,455	29,996
	5 persons	33,453	33,541	34,157
500,000 and over	1 person	18,373	18,421	18,759
	2 persons	22,361	22,420	22,831
	3 persons	27,844	27,918	28,430
	4 persons	34,738	34,829	35,469
	5 persons	39,556	39,660	40,388

(Statistics Canada, modified on April 13, 2021, Table 11-10-0241-01).