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OPINION

# Gender-based violence claimed 58 lives in Ontario this year. It's an indictment of our collective failure to keep women and girls safe

By **Heather McGregor** Contributor

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The list is 22 pages long this year, each one lined with pictures of women and girls who died between this November and last. I cannot help but get emotional scrolling through each page, scanning every face, reading each small blurb about who they were before their lives were cut short by violence.

For the past two years, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transitional Houses (OAITH) has released [a list of women and girls who were killed in the preceding 365 days](#) because of their gender, a crime known as femicide. Since November 2020, 58 women and girls ranging in age from two to 84 were murdered in Ontario.

These are names that do not always get released in short media reports, often laden with code like “there is no danger to the public” or “the victim was known to the accused.” Some of them are merely listed as “Jane Doe,” a white rose accompanying few details about their deaths.

As we mark Dec. 6 this year — [The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women](#) — it will be our second time doing so in the midst of a global pandemic. It will also be the second year we see a statistical rise in gender-based violence that is costing lives: The OAITH list is 21 names longer this year [than last](#). The rise of gender-based violence, dubbed the Shadow Pandemic, points to the perfect storm of stress, isolation and aggression that has harmed so many lives.

It is also an indictment of the collective failure to keep women and girls safe.

Urgent action is needed to prevent gender-based violence, and yet this Shadow Pandemic is not being treated — by either policy-makers or Canadian society — as the serious public health risk that it is. This is true even as the pandemic has exacerbated poverty and worsened conditions for women living in violent situations.

We need serious investment in digging up the roots of this violence, in the form of billions earmarked to enact a [National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence](#). We need the findings of the [Domestic Violence Death Review Committees](#) acted upon. Housing, child care, income security supports — investment in all of these

things will make such a difference in ending this gender-based violence. It will save lives.

At least one of the women on OAITH's list this year used our shelter services at YWCA Toronto. Our staff are shattered by the loss. This experience has only deepened our commitment to advocate for the women, girls and gender-diverse people we serve. We are proud to help survivors rebuild their lives in safety through our [December 6th Fund](#), which provides interest-free loans.

On Dec. 6, we will mourn the woman we lost in our community along with all others who died by gender-based violence in our city, our province and our nation. We do this while also remembering the [14 women murdered at École Polytechnique](#) 32 years ago — and the more than 3,000 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

In short, we need further government investment in community supports for survivors. Recently, we [launched a YWCA Toronto campaign](#) to draw attention to the frightening fact we will lose more women over the holiday season, a time known for increased rates of violence. It is why our association offers emergency shelters and healing programs — because we know such services are desperately needed in our city.

I read and reread this year's femicide list with a heavy heart. But I also have hope that the list will get shorter with each passing year through our collective efforts. It will take not only hope, but hard work and a deep resolve to do right by these 58 women. We owe them at least that.

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*Heather McGregor is the CEO of [YWCA Toronto](#).*

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