SOCIAL
Policy Trends

NOVEMBER 2026

BEFORE THE FIRST CHARGE

From 2020 to 2023, more than half of convicted offenders had police interactions prior to a domestic violence charge.

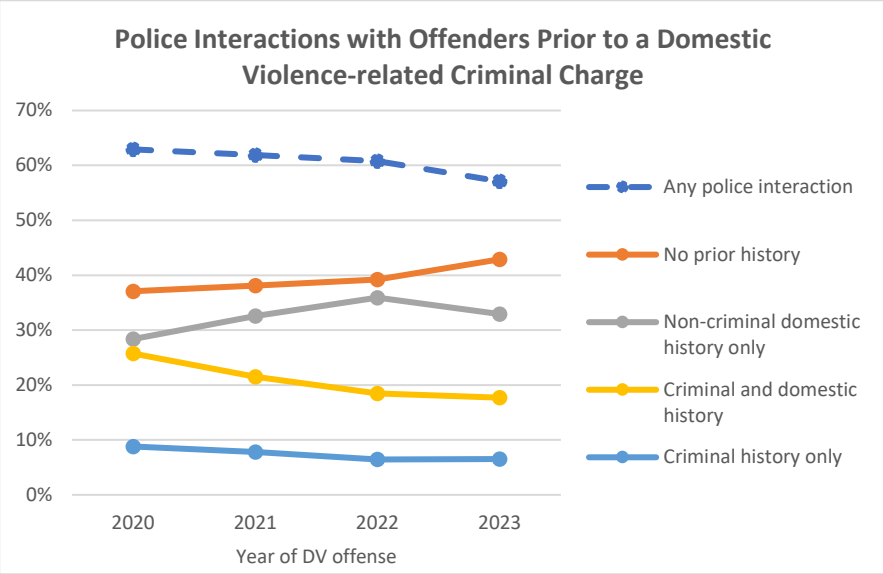
The perpetration of domestic violence (DV) remains a persistent challenge in Canada, with the number of male perpetrators per capita remaining relatively stable over the past two decades. Public policy responses have traditionally focused on supporting victims and holding perpetrators accountable *after* violence occurs. While essential, these approaches do little to prevent violence from happening in the first place.

A prevention-oriented approach requires identifying opportunities to intervene before violence escalates to the point of criminal charges. One promising avenue is to examine patterns of interactions with police in the years leading up to a DV charge. If consistent patterns can be identified, they may signal opportunities for early intervention and inform the development of prevention strategies.

Many domestic violence offenders have repeated interactions with police before being charged. This provides opportunities to identify escalating risks and to intervene earlier.

A recent report published by the School of Public Policy examined patterns of police interactions among male DV offenders in the years leading to a criminal conviction. The study tracked police contacts with four cohorts of men convicted of a DV offence between 2020 and 2023. Cohorts were defined by the year in which they were charged for a crime involving domestic violence. Data provided the opportunity to observe up to seven years of police interactions with each man prior to the offence that resulted in their conviction. A total of 3,846 offenders were studied. In the chart we report results drawn from that study.

Across all four cohorts, approximately 60% of offenders had at least one police interaction prior to the DV offence that led to their conviction while 40% had no prior police contact.



Approximately one-third of offenders had previous encounters with police that involved a domestic incident but did not result in a criminal charge. Approximately 20% had histories with police involving both non-DV criminal charges and domestic incidents that did not lead to a criminal charge. Finally, less than 10% of men had histories with police that involved only non-DV related criminal charges.

The proportion of offenders with prior police interactions remained remarkably constant across all four cohorts. This suggests that the pathways leading up to DV convictions have changed little over time and that police interactions may provide valuable opportunities for early intervention.

In sum, the findings suggest that prior police interactions represent a significant opportunity for early intervention and that stable patterns over time support the use of standardized prevention approaches.

School of Public Policy | University of Calgary

Editorial Practices Statement: This manuscript is a rapid contribution to the policy conversation that has been open-reviewed by at least one University of Calgary faculty member prior to publication.

Authors: Ron Kneebone and Ken Fyie

Interested in having *Social Policy Trends* delivered to your in-box?
Contact Margarita Wilkins at mgres@ucalgary.ca

www.policyschool.ca