



2021 Report on GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE in Belize

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.....	2
2.1 REPORTED CASES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE; 2017-2020	2
2.2 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19	3
2.3 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY DISTRICT	3
2.4 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY SEX.....	5
2.5 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY AGE GROUP	5
2.6 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY FACTOR.....	6
2.7 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES BY PLACE OF OCCURRENCE	7
2.8 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES BY RELATIONSHIP TO OFFENDER.....	8
2.9 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES BY OFFENSE.....	9
3. SEXUAL VIOLENCE.....	10
3.1 SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES, 2018 -2020	10
3.2 SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES BY MONTH.....	10
3.3 SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES BY AGE GROUP.....	11
3.4 SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES BY RELATIONSHIP TO OFFENDER	12
3.5 SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY DISTRICT.....	13
3.6 OTHER SEX CRIMES.....	14
4. FEMALE MURDER	15
4.1 FEMALE MURDER RATES (2009-2020)	15
4.2 FEMALE MURDER INCIDENTS.....	16
.....	16
4.3 FEMALE MURDER COUNTS BY DISTRICT	16
4.4 FEMALE MURDER COUNTS BY MONTH	17
4.5 FEMALE MURDER COUNTS BY AGE GROUP	17
4.6 FEMALE MURDER COUNTS BY WEAPON.....	18

1. INTRODUCTION

Although both males and females can be victims of **Gender-based Violence**¹, this type of violence disproportionately affects women and girls. Given the role that power-dynamics play in the perpetration of gender-based violence (GBV), the term is usually used to describe violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking and femicide. Gender-based violence—which includes physical, mental, emotional or economic harm, coercion, restriction of liberty and threats of violence, either in public or in private²—is rooted in power inequalities and may be worsened by elements of culture or social norms that exacerbate the abuse of male power and authority. Gender-based violence is a human-rights violation. It is one of the most serious and widespread societal problems today.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Across their lifetime, 1 in 3 women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner – a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade.”³

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the risk of gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence and violence perpetrated in the home. Lockdown measures and restrictions, as well as the economic hardships brought on by the pandemic were key factors for risk escalation. In Belize, the threat was mitigated with increased access to services, including the opening of an additional mobile police hotline – 0-800-A-WAY-OUT⁴ or 501-672-9628. Social media campaigns were also launched as a means of proactively reducing the risks through increased awareness.

This report presents some salient statistics on domestic violence, sexual violence, and murder⁵. Of note is that Belize saw a consistent increase in the number of domestic violence complaints made to the Police Department after the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in late March 2020. Restrictions in movement, ranging from curfews to a total lockdown, were

¹ Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence directed at a person because of their gender, or violence that is perpetrated against someone because of unequal power relations. Women and girls are most frequently the victims of GBV, and in most cases where males are victims, they largely tend to be minors.

² The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, better known as the Belém do Pará Convention.

³ <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

⁴ A Gender-based Violence Hotline | [Channel5Belize.com](https://www.channel5belize.com)

⁵ In Belize, there is no legal classification of femicide, and so data on the murder of female victims are not generally captured and reported using this categorization.

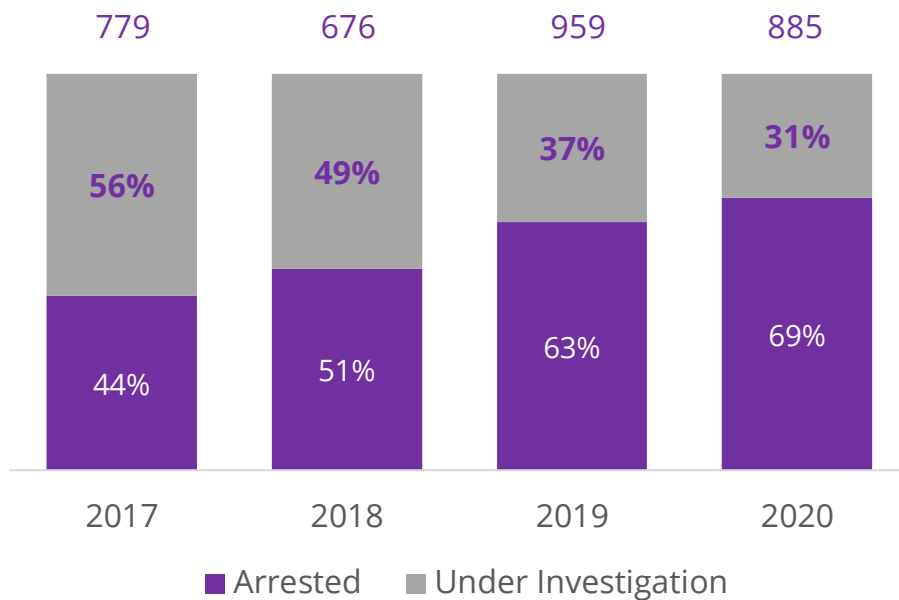
implemented through State of Emergency measures enforced during April to June 2020. Many of the restrictions that were lifted at the end of June, after cases plateaued, began to be reintroduced in late July and August, due to a resurgence of COVID-19 cases. With increased restrictions came renewed concerns over the risk of violence in homes. Until the COVID-19 pandemic is over, these heightened concerns will remain.

2. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

2.1 Reported Cases of Domestic Violence; 2017-2020

During 2020, there were 885 domestic violence cases registered by the Belize Police Department, which represented an 8% decline from the 959 cases registered for the previous year. Approximately seven in every ten cases resulted in arrests, while the remaining portion were under investigation at the close of the year. Notably, the proportion of domestic violence cases that resulted in an arrest continued to improve, as in 2020 there was a 25 percentage-point increase when compared to 2017.

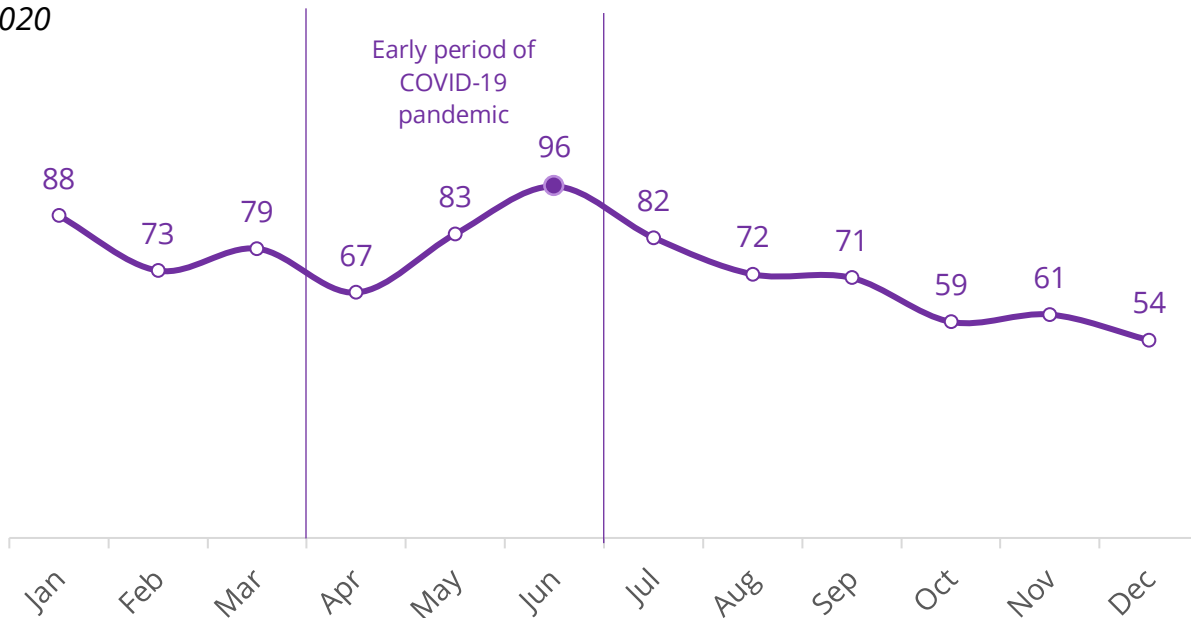
Figure 1
Domestic violence cases by status
2017-2020



2.2 Domestic Violence in the Context of COVID-19

It is notable that the peak in reported cases occurred during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which government-imposed State of Emergency measures restricted movement for non-essential purposes, which meant that people were spending more time at home, where many share living spaces with their aggressors. Reports were on an upward trend between April to June but declined thereafter with the relaxation of measures. Whereas June 2020 recorded the highest case count (94) during the State of Emergency period, December registered the lowest case count for the year, at 54.

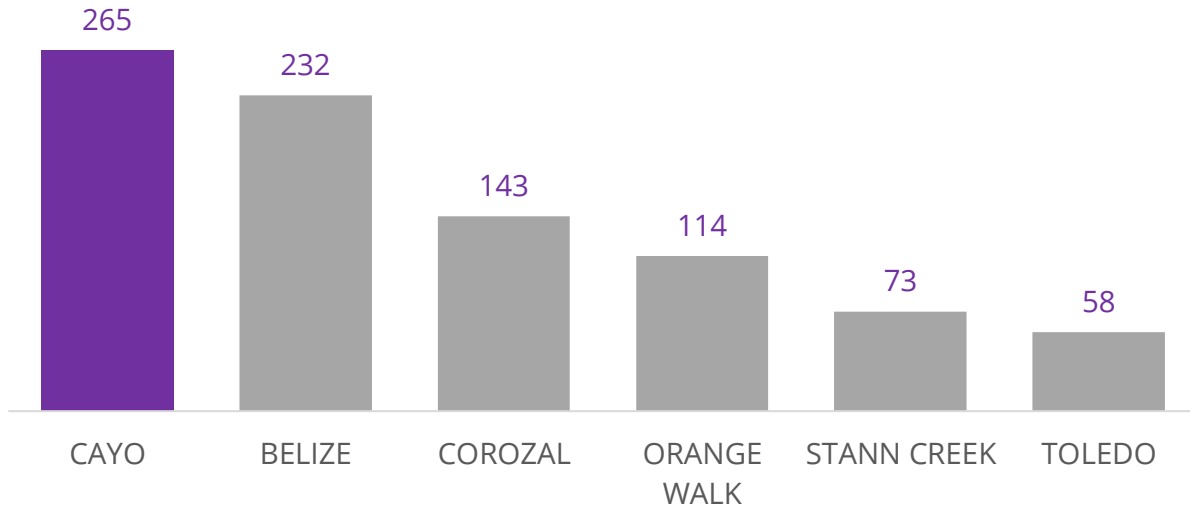
Figure 2
Domestic violence cases by month
2020



2.3 Domestic Violence by District

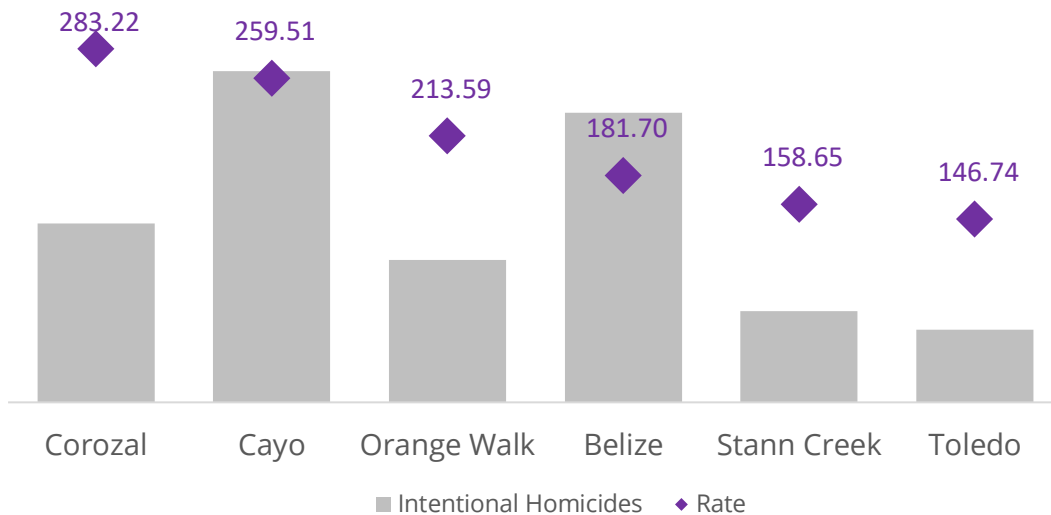
During 2020, the Cayo District registered the highest count of domestic violence cases (see Figure 3). Although the Belize District has a larger population than the Cayo District, it registered the second highest count. Together, these districts accounted for 55.6% of all cases in the country. The Toledo District, the district with the smallest population, recorded the lowest number of reported cases, with 58, and Stann Creek the second lowest, with 71.

Figure 3
Domestic violence cases by district
2020



Although the larger districts accounted for the most domestic violence cases, the number of cases registered in the Corozal District, where domestic violence services are relatively more accessible than some of the other districts, was high relative to its small population. As a result, that district reported the highest rate of domestic violence cases, at 283.2 per 100,000 inhabitants. This was followed by the Cayo and Belize Districts, with rates of 259.5 and 213.6, respectively. The lowest rate countrywide was registered for Toledo, at 146.74 per 100,000 inhabitants.

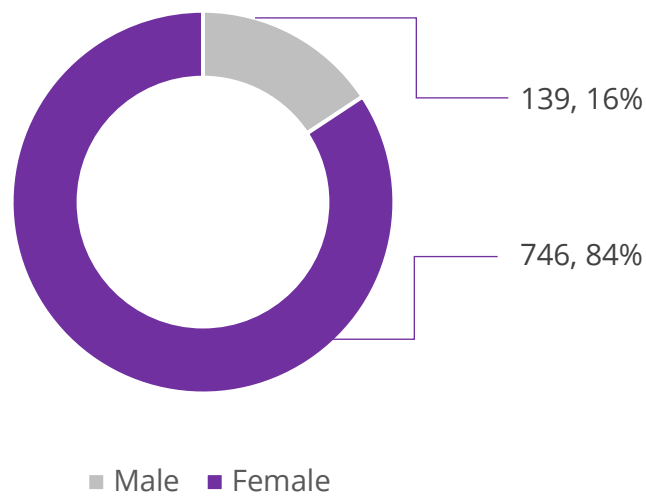
Figure 4
Domestic violence case rate per 100,000 inhabitants by district
2020



2.4 Domestic Violence by Sex

During 2020, eighty-four percent of domestic violence victims were females. As seen in Figure 5 below, 746 female victims of domestic violence lodged cases with the Belize Police Department during 2020. Male victims lodged 139 cases or 16% of the total 885 cases registered by Police.

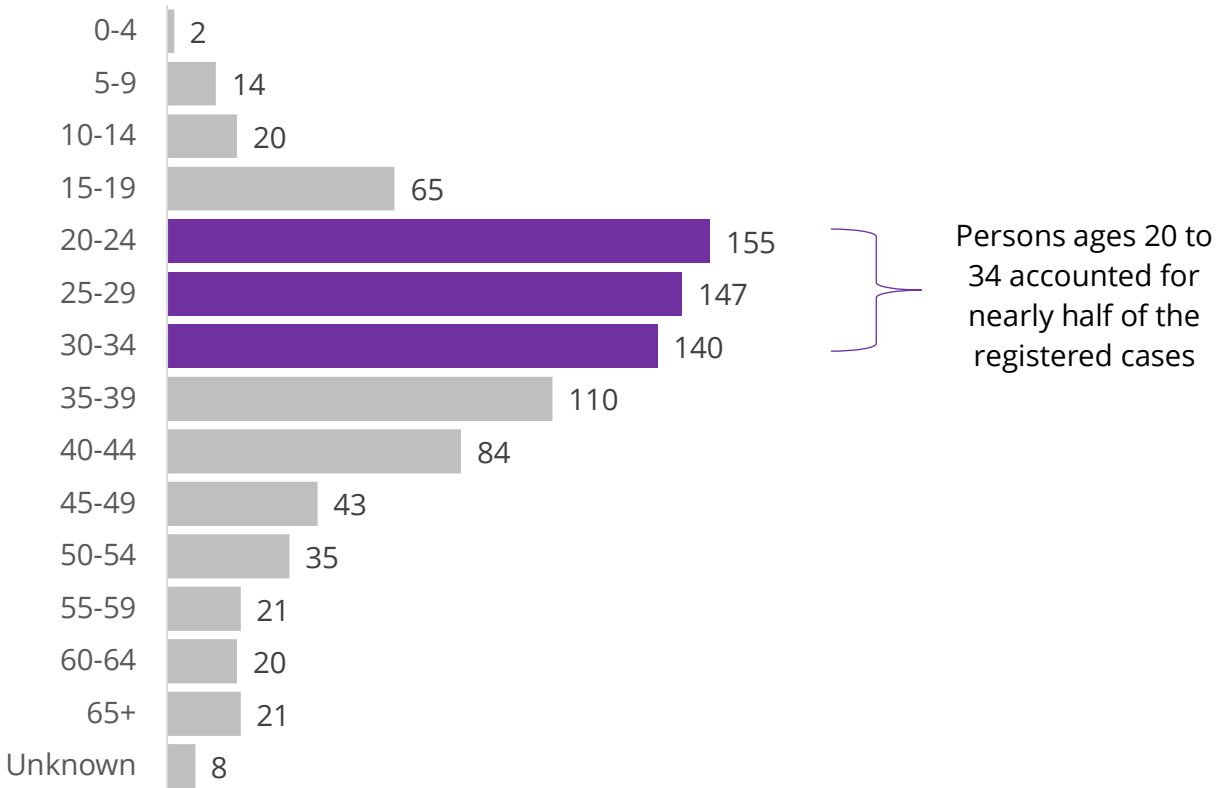
Figure 5
Domestic violence cases by sex
2020



2.5 Domestic Violence by Age Group

Persons between the ages of 20 and 34 represented the largest percentage of domestic violence victims, accounting for almost half (49.9%) of all cases, or a total of 442. The number of cases steadily decreased with age, thereafter. Notably, the under-ten age group accounted for 1.8% of the cases, and the over-sixty-five age group accounted for 2.4%. These age groups accounted for the smallest percentage of cases.

Figure 6
Domestic violence cases by age group
2020

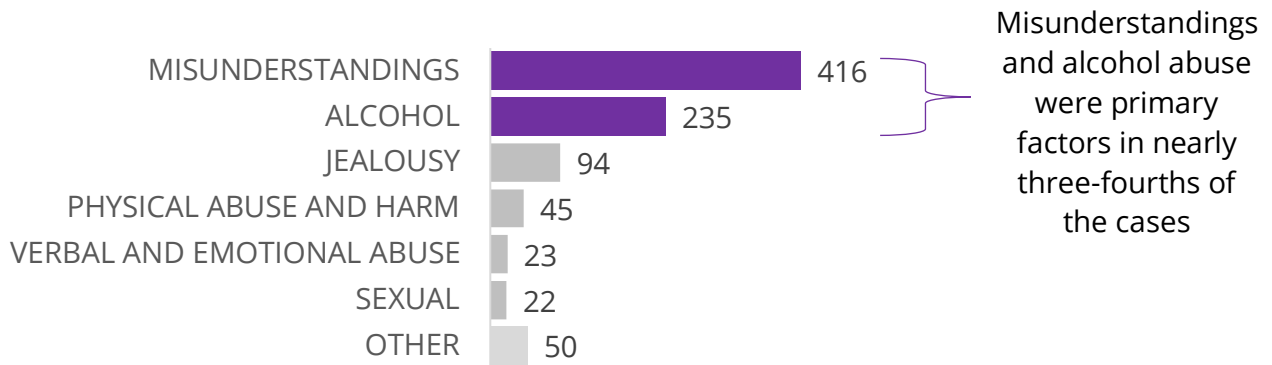


2.6 Domestic Violence by Factor

The two most prominent primary factors associated with domestic violence cases were 'misunderstanding' and 'alcohol' abuse. Nearly three-fourths, or a total of 641 cases, were attributable to these factors.

'Jealousy' was the third most common factor identified, accounting for 94 (10.6%) of the reported cases. Several other cases were associated with various forms of abuse: sexual (22), verbal and emotional (23), or physical (45).

Figure 7
Domestic violence victims by factor
2020



2.7 Domestic Violence Cases by Place of Occurrence

Domestic violence incidents almost always occurred inside a residence, and most often at the home of either the victim or the perpetrator. Cases linked to incidents that occurred at a residence accounted for 93% of all cases registered, as seen in the chart below.

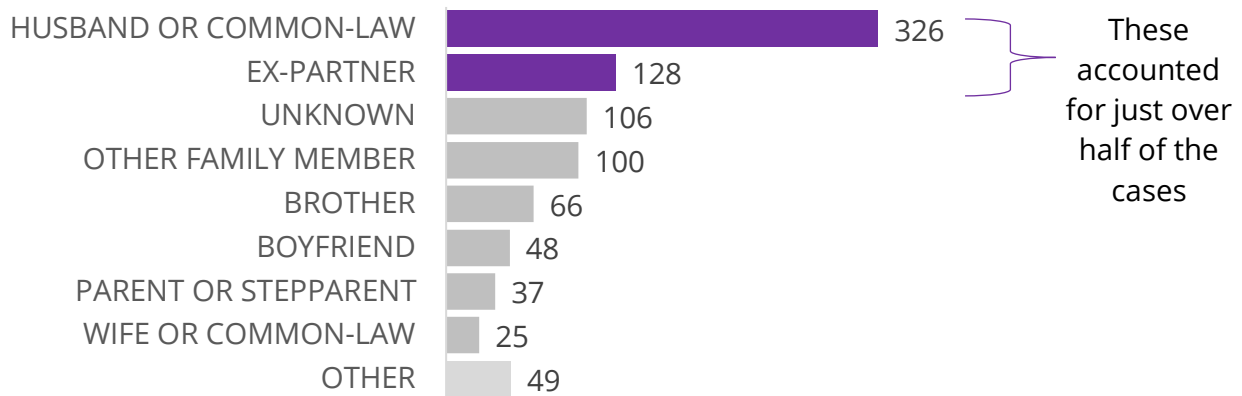
Figure 8
Domestic violence cases, according to place of occurrence
2020



2.8 Domestic Violence Cases by Relationship to Offender

At least 60% of domestic violence cases registered during 2020 were the result of intimate partner violence. Husbands and common-law husbands were most often identified as the perpetrators of domestic violence, for the cases registered. These categories of perpetrators comprised 37% of all registered cases, or a total of 326. Ex-partner was the second most common category, accounting for 128 cases (or 14.5%). Together, these accounted for just over half of the registered cases of domestic violence during 2020. Other common relationships of offender to victim were 'Boyfriend' and 'Brother', 5.4% and 7.5%, respectively.

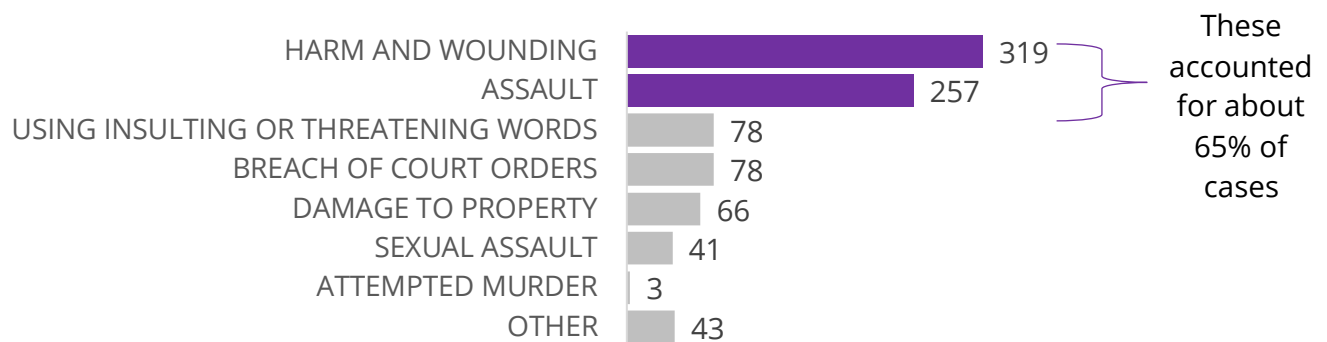
Figure 9
Domestic violence cases, according to relationship to offender
2020



2.9 Domestic Violence Cases by Offense

Most cases of domestic violence involved incidents of ‘harm and wounding’ and ‘assault’. Together, these two categories comprised 65% of all offenses associated with cases lodged during 2020. ‘Breach of court orders’ and ‘damage to property’ were the next most frequently reported offenses, accounting for 78 (9%) and 66 (7.5%) cases, respectively.

Figure 10
Domestic violence cases according to offense
2020



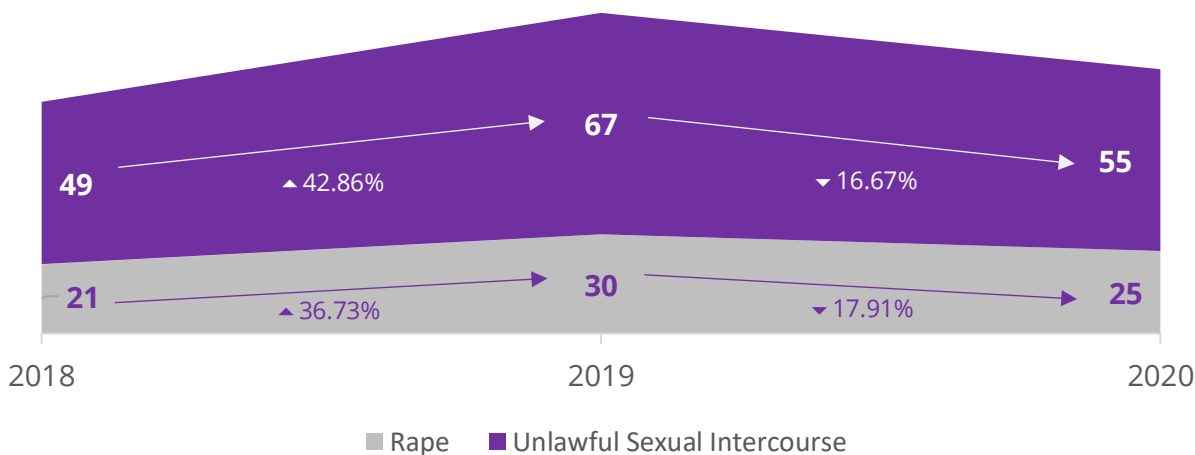
Note that during 2020, Police also recorded a total of 55 sexual assault cases, mostly perpetrated against female victims (see page 14 of this report).

3. Sexual Violence

3.1 Sexual Violence Cases, 2018 -2020

During 2020, there were 80 reported cases of sexual violence in the major crimes category. Of these, 25 were cases of rape and 55 were cases of unlawful sexual intercourse (USI). Whereas these forms of sexual violence were the only major crimes that had registered an increase during 2019, there was a notable downturn during 2020. The number of reported cases of rape (25) decreased by 16.7%, while reported cases of unlawful sexual intercourse (55) dropped by 17.9%. This decline notwithstanding, the number of sexual violence cases in the major crimes category was still 14% higher in 2020 than it was in 2018.

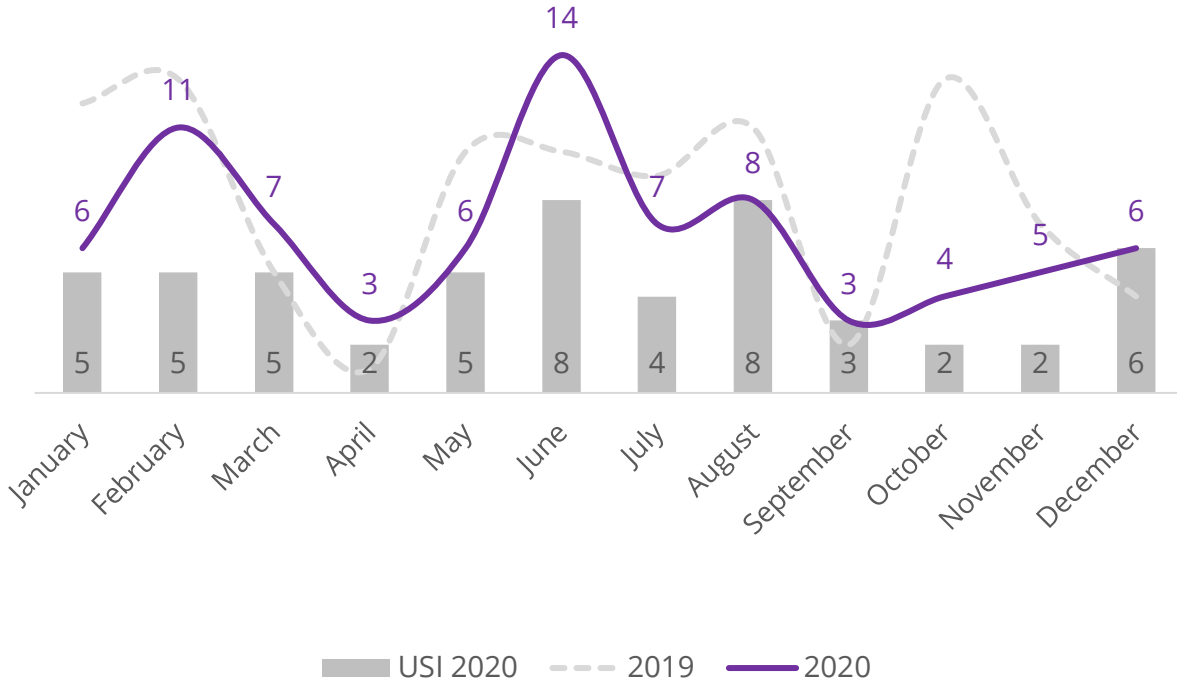
Figure 11
Sexual Violence cases according to type
2019 – 2020



3.2 Sexual Violence Cases by Month

The number of sexual violence cases fluctuated over the course of 2020. However, notable peaks were recorded in June (14 cases), February (11 cases) and August (8 cases). There was a dip in cases during April and September, which each registered 3 cases, the lowest monthly count during that year.

Figure 12
Sexual Violence cases by month
2020 and 2019



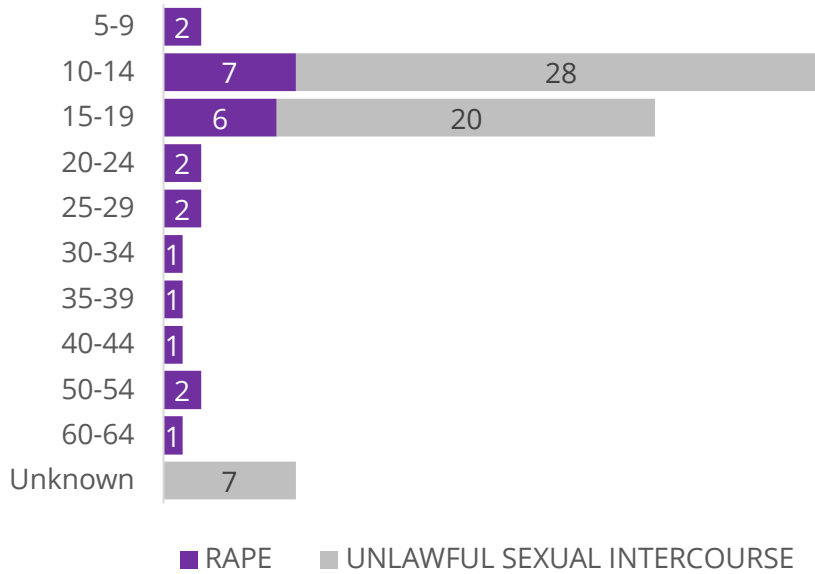
(Note: The ratio of USI to rape cases for the year has been about 2 to 1, based on the past three years of data.)

3.3 Sexual Violence Cases by Age Group

The victims in the vast majority of sexual violence cases in the major crimes category were young persons between the ages of 10 and 19. These young persons accounted for 61 out of the 80 reported cases, or 76.3%, with ‘unlawful sexual intercourse’⁶ being the most common offense.

⁶ Unlawful Sexual Intercourse refers to the criminal offence perpetrated against a minor under the age of 16, who cannot legally consent to sexual intercourse.

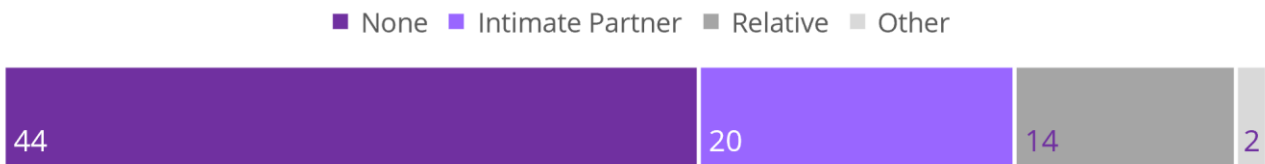
Figure 13
Sexual Violence cases by type and age group
2020



3.4 Sexual Violence Cases by Relationship to Offender

In at least 43% of reported sexual violence cases in the major crimes category, the victim had a close relationship to the offender. In those cases, the perpetrators were identified as either a present or past intimate partner or a relative. Most frequently (in one-fourth of the cases), the alleged perpetrator was a present or past intimate partner, usually from a common-law union. In 18% of the cases, the complainant identified a relative as the perpetrator. Notably, though, no relationship between the victim and perpetrator was reported for 55% of cases. For 1 in every 3 cases of unlawful sexual intercourse lodged, a boyfriend or girlfriend was said to be the alleged perpetrator.

Figure 14
Sexual Violence cases according to relationship to offender⁷
2020



⁷ Intimate partner may include a present or past intimate partner.

3.5 Sexual Violence by District

During 2020, Stann Creek had the largest number of reported sexual violence cases in the major crimes category, and also the highest number of rape cases registered for the period. In fact, that district reported twice the number of rape cases documented in either the Belize or Cayo Districts, which have much larger populations. On the other hand, the Cayo District recorded the highest number of unlawful sexual intercourse cases, followed by the Stann Creek and Belize Districts. Together, the Stann Creek and Cayo Districts accounted for just over half (51%) of the 80 reported cases of sexual violence in the country during 2020.

Figure 15
Sexual Violence cases by district
2020

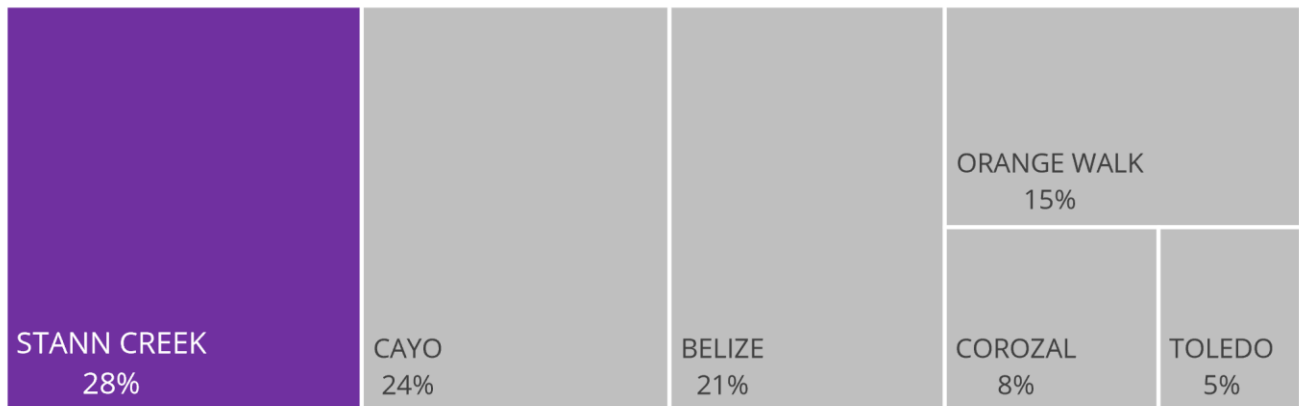
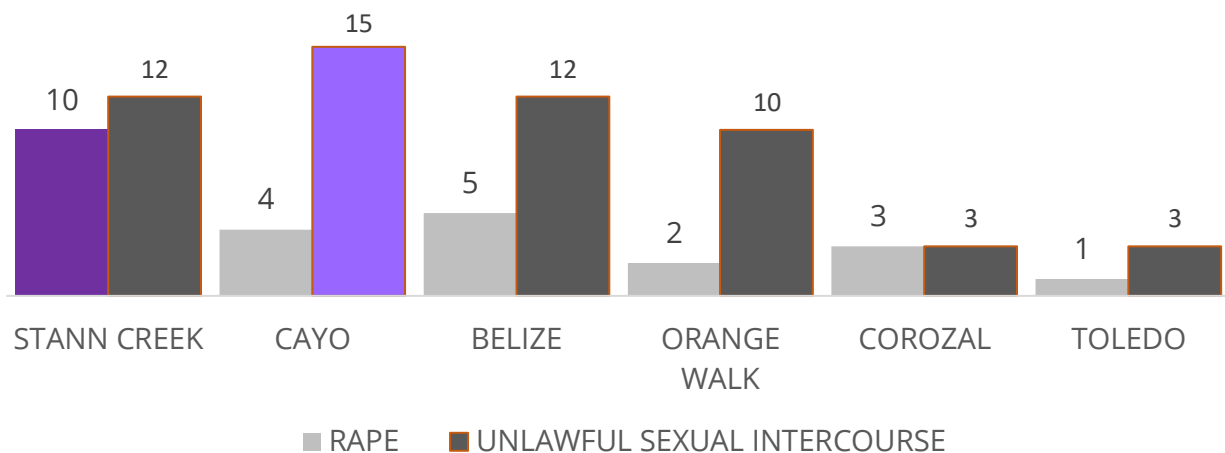


Figure 16
Types of Sexual Violence cases by district
2020

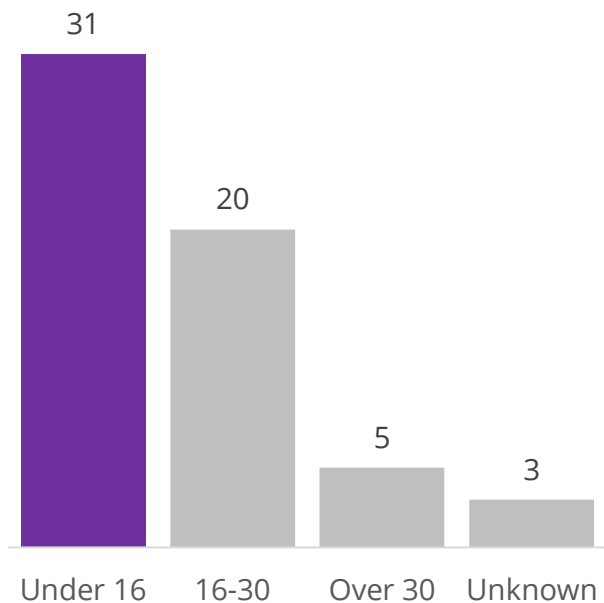


3.6 Other Sex Crimes

During 2020, a total of 55 sexual assault cases were registered, equal to the number of cases of unlawful sexual intercourse registered during the same year. Just over half (51%) of the victims were minors under the age of 16. All these minors, except for 1, were females. (During 2020, 41 domestic violence cases were associated with a sexual assault offence, as noted on page 9 of this report, section 2.9).

Additionally, there were 3 cases of incest and 1 case of indecent assault registered by Police. Within these three categories of sex crimes, 97% of the victims were females. The two male victims recorded were ages 5 and 17.

Figure 16
Victims of Sex Crimes by age category
2020

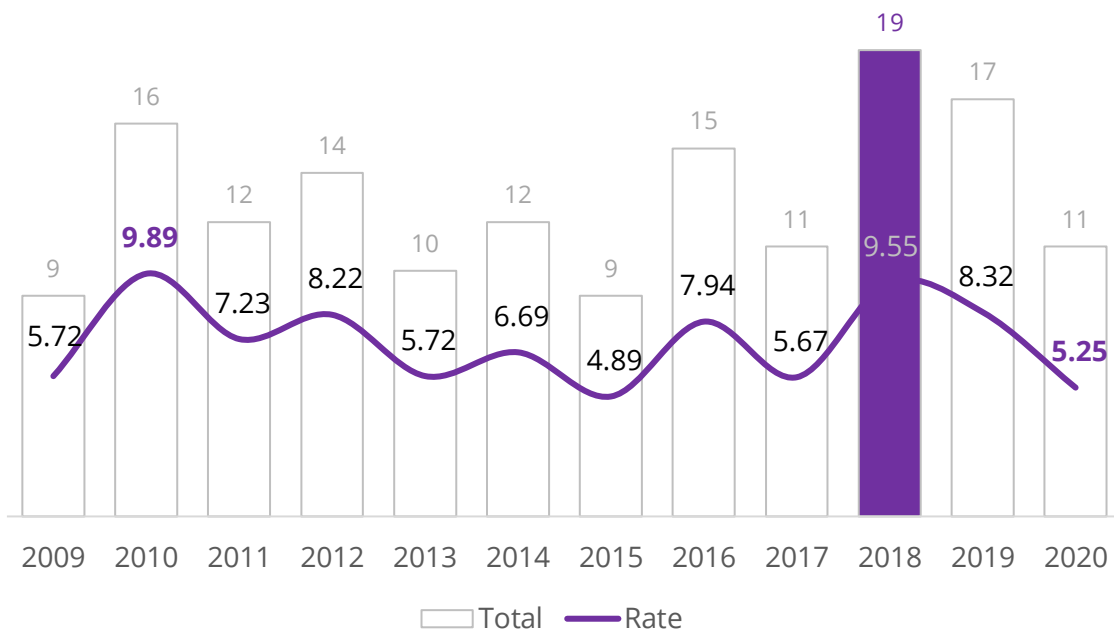


4. Female Murder

4.1 Female Murder Rates (2009-2020)

The female murder rate has fluctuated over the period 2009-2020, ranging mostly between 5 and 10 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, but the rate declined for the second consecutive year during 2020, when it registered its lowest figure since 2015. During 2018, there was a spike in the murder of females, driven by multiple murder-suicides and other incidents of femicide⁸.

Figure 17
Murder rates per 100,000 inhabitants
2009 – 2020



⁸ There is no provision on Belize’s law books for the classification of femicides. Therefore, the killing of females appears in the official statistics as murder, with no subclassification to reflect cases of gender-based killings.

4.2 Female Murder Incidents

There were 102 murders in 2020, and 11 of the victims were female. This accounts for roughly 11% of all murders recorded in Belize during that year. The percentage of female murder victims relative to the annual total has averaged around 10% over the past decade. The years 2018 and 2019 were above-average years. Whereas nationally, the murder count declined by 24% during 2020 relative to 2019, for females it declined 35% over that period.

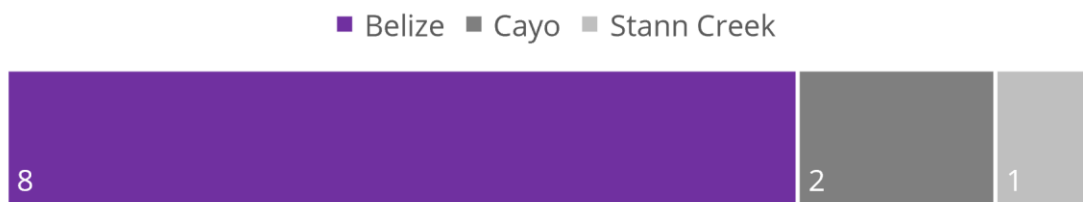
Figure 18
Murder count by sex
2018-2020



4.3 Female Murder Counts by District

The Belize District registered the most female murders (8), followed by Cayo (2) and Stann Creek (1). No other district reported cases during 2020.

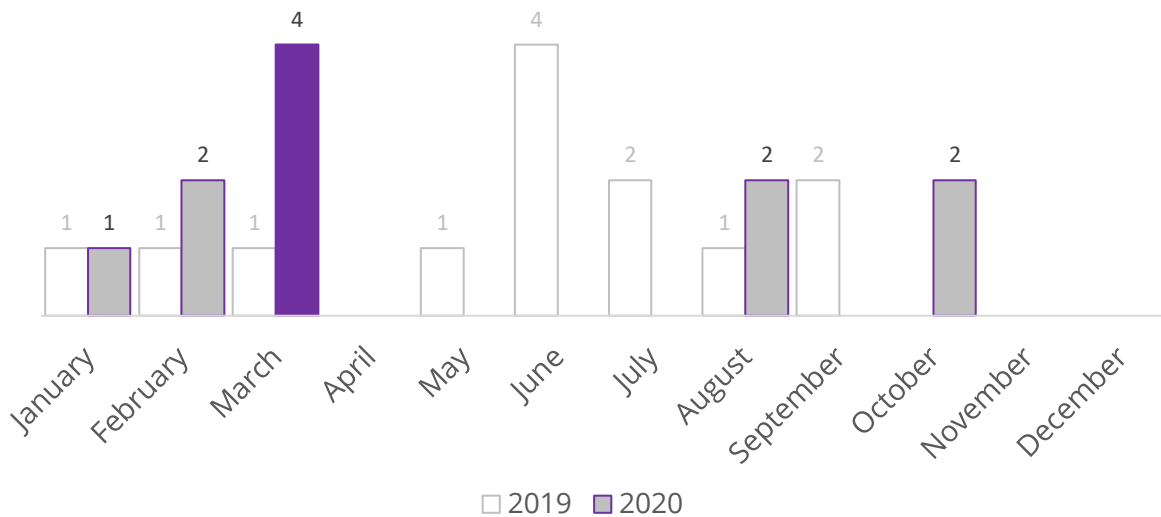
Figure 19
Female murder counts by district
2020



4.4 Female Murder Counts by Month

March 2020 saw a spike in the killing of females, partly attributable to gang violence in Belize City. This spike in violence which resulted in the murders of women and children triggered a gang-related state of emergency in Belize City, where the murders were occurring most frequently. Most of the female murder victims were killed during the first three months of the year (January to March 2020), before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the declaration of states of emergency measures. There was a subsequent 4-month period (April to July 2020), during which no females were murdered. No females were murdered for seven of the twelve months during 2020.

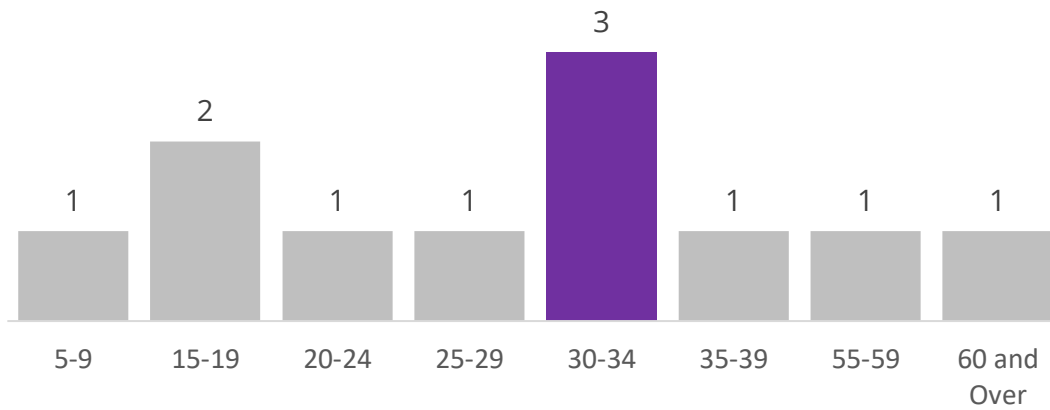
Figure 20
*Female murder counts by month
 2019 and 2020*



4.5 Female Murder Counts by Age Group

Most of the female victims were in the 30-34 age range. The average age of the victims was 31, although the youngest was only 5 years old. The eldest was age 65.

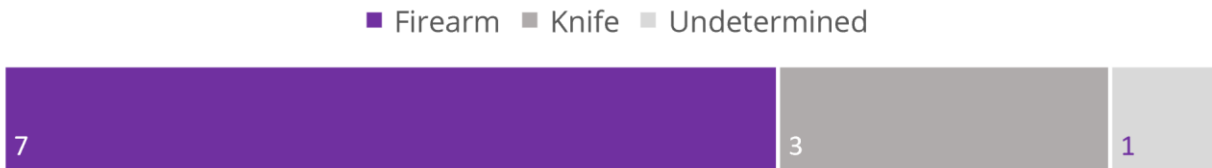
Figure 21
Female murder counts by age group, 2020



4.6 Female Murder Counts by Weapon

Most female murder victims (7 of the 11, or 64%) were killed with a firearm. Three of the four other female murder victims were stabbed to death. In one case, the weapon used was listed as ‘undetermined’.

Figure 22
Female murder counts by weapon
2020



Credits:

Data Source: The Belize Police Department

Cover Image: Identity vector created by freepik (www.freepik.com)