

Just Facts

April 2019

Research and Statistics Division

Sexual Assault

This fact sheet is primarily based on self-reported data from the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization,¹ on police-reported data from the 2018 Uniform Crime Reporting Survey,² and on court data from the 2016/2017 Adult Criminal Court Survey.³

Self-reported rates of sexual assault have been stable in Canada over the past 15 years

The rate of self-reported sexual assault has remained relatively stable over the past 15 years from 1999 (21 incidents per 1,000 population) to 2014 (22 incidents per 1,000 population).

Victims are often young women who know their assailant

Sexual assault is a gendered crime; women are victimized at a higher rate (37 incidents per 1,000 women) than men (5^E per 1,000 men). As with other violent victimization, according to the 2014 GSS, young people aged 15-24 years have the highest rate of sexual assault (71 incidents per 1,000 population). This is more than double the next highest rate of 32^E per 1,000 population for 25-34 year olds. Self-reported incidents of sexual assault were more likely than robberies and physical assaults to involve an offender who was known to the victim. In over half (52%) of sexual assault incidents, the perpetrator was a friend, acquaintance, or neighbour of the victim. Sexual assault accounted for 10% of all violent self-reported incidents in the 2014 GSS.

Majority of sexual assaults are not reported to police

According to the 2014 GSS, in that year, the majority (83%) of sexual assaults were not reported to police. In fact, only five percent of sexual assaults were reported.⁴ In three studies completed by Justice Canada with survivors of sexual assault,⁵ over two-thirds of those in the male sample (68%), and in the northern sample (67%), and 64% in the female sample did not report child sexual abuse/assaults to the police, nor did another individual report the abuse. The findings were similar for survivors of adult sexual abuse/assault. In the male sample, 70% stated that they did not report adult sexual abuse/assault, while 59% of those in the female sample and 56% of those in the northern sample did not report it. In the Justice Canada studies, the most frequently reported reasons for not reporting child sexual abuse and/or adult

¹ Perreault, S. 2015. *Criminal victimization in Canada, 2014*. Juristat Statistics Canada Catalogue 85-002-X.

² Allen, M. 2018. *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2017*. Juristat Statistics Canada Catalogue 85-002-X.

³ Miladinovic, Zoran. 2019. "Adult criminal and youth court statistics in Canada, 2016/2017." Juristat Statistics Canada Catalogue 85-002-X. Accessed at https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00002-eng.pdf?st=ul_wYC3p

⁴ For the remaining incidents, it is unknown whether they were reported to the police or not.

⁵ Northcott, Melissa. 2013. A Survey of Sexual Assault Survivors. *Victims of Crime Research Digest*, 6: 12-19. Accessed at <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd6-rr6/p3.html#ftn1>



sexual abuse were: the participants thought that they would not be believed, they felt ashamed or embarrassed, they did not know they could report the abuse, and they had no family support.

All of the participants in the Justice Canada studies, regardless of whether their cases did or did not go to trial, were asked to rate their level of confidence in the police, the court process, and the criminal justice system in general. Few participants stated that they were very confident. Indeed, approximately two-thirds of the participants stated that they were not confident in the police, the court process, or the criminal justice system in general. A higher percentage of participants in the male and female samples from the provinces stated that they were confident in the police in comparison to participants in the Northern sample.

Police-reported sexual assaults fluctuate, clearance rates are stable

In 2017, there were 24,672 incidents of sexual assault (levels 1, 2 and 3) reported by police and 98% of them were categorized as level 1. This represents an increase from 22,246 incidents in 2006. From 2006-2016, the quantity of incidents reported by police fluctuated slightly. However, from 2016 to 2017, the number of police-reported level 1 sexual assaults increased 14% (from 21,072 to 24,094), the number of level 2 sexual assaults increased 6% (from 395 to 417), and the number of level 3 sexual assaults increased 44% (from 112 to 161).

The proportion of the total number of all sexual assaults reported to police that were cleared by charge was mostly constant from 1998 to 2015, varying from 41% to 46%. In the past two years, the cleared-by-charge rate dropped considerably to 37% in 2016 and 34% in 2017. In 2017, a higher proportion of sexual assault incidents, level 2 (55%) and level 3 (64%), were cleared by charge than level 1 incidents (34%).⁶

Fewer than half of sexual assault cases in adult criminal court result in guilty verdict ⁷

For the 2016/2017 fiscal year, 42% of all sexual assault case decisions (levels 1, 2, and 3) in adult criminal court resulted in a finding of guilt. The percentage of sexual assault cases that resulted in a guilty decision has remained stable over the past 10 years. For the 2016/2017 fiscal year, 59% of accused found guilty of sexual assault (levels 1, 2, and 3) in adult court were ordered a custodial sentence and 19% were ordered probation as the most serious sentence.

^E Use with caution

⁶ Statistics Canada. *Table 35-10-0177-01 - Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations*, CANSIM (database).

⁷ Statistics Canada. *Table 35-10-0031-01- Adult criminal courts, guilty cases by most serious sentence, annual*, CANSIM (database); Statistics Canada. *Table 35-10-0027-01 - Adult criminal courts, number of cases and charges by type of decision*, CANSIM (database).