

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act done by one person to another, and statistics show that most abusers are men and most people who experience sexual assault are women. Sexual assault can be anything from unwanted touching of a sexual nature to rape.

Many types of sexual assault are addressed in Canadian criminal law. They deal with different kinds of abuse (e.g. using a weapon, causing bodily harm, and making threats) as well as different types of relationships where sexual contact can be a criminal offence (e.g. where one person is in a position of authority over the other or where there is a relationship of dependency by one person towards the other). Legal penalties for different types of sexual offences vary.

General Sexual Assault Statistics

51% of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of sexual or physical violence. Close to 60% of these women have survived more than one incident of violence. (Statistics Canada, 1993, "Violence Against Women Survey", The Daily, 18 November, p. 1, 3)

6 out of 10 victims who reported being sexually assaulted were under 17. (Statistics Canada, 2005, "Children and Youth as Victims of Crime", The Daily, 20 April)

In 2000, women made up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault (86%) and other types of sexual offences (78%). (Statistics Canada, 2001, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2001)

80% of sexual assaults occur at home; 49% in broad daylight. (Sexual Assault Care Centre, Women's Care Centre, Sunnybrook & Womens, 1999, Myths and Facts About Sexual Assault, http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/facts/quick_show_d.cfm?number=65)

In cases reported to police, 80% of sexual assault survivors knew their abusers. About 10% were assaulted by a friend and 41% were assaulted by an acquaintance. 28% were assaulted by a family member, while the remaining 20% were assaulted by a stranger. (Statistics Canada, 2003, The Daily, 25 July)

Reporting Sexual Assault

Victimization surveys show that less than 10% of women who are sexually assaulted report the assault to the police. (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 2002, Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile, p.19)

It is estimated that over 80% of women who are sexually assaulted do not report due to humiliation or fear of re-victimization in the legal process. For women of colour, that fear is worsened by the experience of racism. (Ontario Women's Directorate, 2002, Sexual Assault: Reporting Issues, <http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/owd/english/publications/sexual-assault/reporting.htm>)

Sexual Assaults: Girls and Young Women

In 2002, children and youth accounted for 61% of sexual assault cases reported to a subset of 94 police departments. Girls represented 79% of those cases. (Statistics Canada, 2004, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, p.1)

54% of girls under the age of 16 have experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention. 24% of these have experienced sexual assault, and 17% have experienced incest. (J. Holmes and E. Silverman, 1992, We're Here, Listen to Us: A Survey of Young Women in Canada)

In a Toronto survey, young women identified that their highest safety concern was about assault. Since women are most vulnerable to sexual assault, harassment, and other forms of gendered abuse, their concern is consistent with their experiences. (City of Toronto, 2002, Speak Up: Toronto Youth Talk about Safety in Their Community, p. 12)

In a Canadian study, 25% of all female post-secondary students in 1993 had been physically and/or sexually assaulted by a male date or boyfriend. 1 in 5 male students surveyed said that forced intercourse was all right "if he spends money on her", "if he is stoned or drunk", or "if they had been dating for a long time". (H. Johnson, 1996, Dangerous Domains: Violence Against Women in Canada, p. 115, 120)

Women Living with Disabilities

83% of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime. (L. Stimpson and M. Best, 1991, Courage Above All: Sexual Assault against Women with Disabilities)

The rate of sexual abuse of girls with disabilities is four times that of the national average. (S. Razack, 1994, From Consent to Responsibility, from Pity to Respect: Subtexts in Cases of Sexual Violence involving Girls and Women with Developmental Disabilities, Law and Social Inquiry, Vol.19, No. 4, p. 891-922)

Aboriginal Women

Frontline organizations confirmed that racist and sexist attitudes toward Aboriginal women continue to make them vulnerable to sexual assaults in Canadian cities. (Amnesty International, 2004, Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada, www.amnesty.ca/resource_centre/reports/view.php?load=arcview&article=1895&c=Resource+Centre+Reports)

Up to 75% of survivors of sexual assaults in Aboriginal communities are young women under 18 years old. 50% of those are under 14 years old, and almost 25% are younger than 7 years old. (S. D. McIvor and T. Nahanee, 1998, "Aboriginal Women: Invisible Victims of Violence", in K. Bonnycastle and G. S. Rigakos, eds., Unsettling Truths: Battered Women, Policy, Politics and Contemporary Research in Canada, p.65).

Women of Colour

Women of colour may be more vulnerable to sexual assault because of racist sexual stereotypes, and these stereotypes on the part of the police and the courts mean they may have less access to justice. (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2002, Factsheet: Women's Experience of Racism: How Race and Gender Interact, http://www.criawicref.ca/factSheets/racegender_e.htm)

Sexual assault and abuse are rarely discussed in low-income Toronto communities where women of colour live, and most resources are concentrated on preventing young men from committing crimes. (P. Kholsa, 2003, If Low Income Women of Colour Counted in Toronto, p. 59)

Women Living in Poverty

Combined with stigmatization, stereotyping, state scrutiny, and inadequate social support, poverty and unemployment are significant predictors of being vulnerable to violence. (Y. Jiwani, 2002, Mapping Violence: A Work in Progress, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/fvpi.htm>)

Women with low household incomes, low levels of education and/or who are unemployed are at higher risk of being sexually assaulted than women in general. (H. Johnson, 1996, Dangerous Domains: Violence Against Women in Canada, p.108-109)

Women and War

Women are sexually abused during times of war - they are raped, abducted, humiliated and made to undergo forced pregnancy, sexual abuse, and slavery. (Unifem, Facts and Figures: Crimes Against Women in War and Armed Conflict, http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/november25/facts_figures_7.php)

Sexual violation of women can destroy a community in a way that few weapons can. The damage can be devastating because entire families will take on the violation and pain of sexual assault. (Unicef, 1996, "Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War", Unicef, Marking 50 Years for Children, Launches Anti-War Agenda, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc96pk/sexviol.htm>)