

# FACT SHEET: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault

## What is Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault?

### Definitions (Department of Justice Canada)

#### **Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation**

Using a child for sexual purposes. Examples of child sexual abuse include:

- Fondling
- Inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually
- Sexual intercourse
- Rape
- Incest
- Sodomy
- Exhibitionism
- Masturbation
- Speaking or compelling a child to speak in a sexual manner
- Involving a child in prostitution or pornography
- Luring Children on the Internet

#### **Sexual Assault**

Any form of sexual activity performed without a person's consent. This may include:

- Kissing
- Fondling or touching
- Oral sex
- Anal sex
- Sexual intercourse
- Not stopping sexual contact when asked
- Forcing someone to engage in sexual intercourse or any other sexual act

Sexual assault may not leave obvious physical injuries. A perpetrator may use coercive actions, such as threats or the presence of weapons that do not leave obvious marks.<sup>1</sup> Lack of physical injury does not mean an individual was not sexually assaulted.<sup>2</sup>

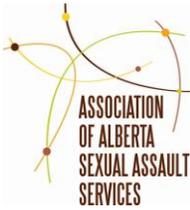
#### **Stalking**

Includes being followed or spied on, receiving threatening and/or unwanted phone calls, e-mails, letters and unwanted gifts. This is repeated on numerous occasions and in general serves no legitimate purpose but to cause the recipient to fear for their own safety.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sexual Assault Centre London. Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved on October 28, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.sacl.ca/resources/frequently-asked-questions/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Dispelling The Myths About Sexual Assault. Retrieved on October 28, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/Default.aspx?pageId=535956>.



### **Sexual Harassment** (Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission)

Any unwelcome behaviour, that is sexual in nature, that adversely affects, or threatens to affect, directly or indirectly, a person's job security, working conditions or prospects for promotion or earnings; or prevents a person from getting a job, living accommodations or any kind of public service. This includes:

- Suggestive remarks, sexual jokes or compromising invitations
- Verbal abuse
- Visual display of suggestive images
- Leering or whistling
- Patting, rubbing or other unwanted physical contact
- Outright demands for sexual favours
- Physical assault

### **Who is at risk of sexual abuse/sexual assault?**

There are no boundaries in today's society that the trauma of sexual abuse and sexual assault hasn't crossed. Geographic, gender, racial, social, economic, educational, and cultural -- every demographic category generates a long list of survivors. There is no stereotypical victim who can be identified as a potential target for sexual abuse or sexual assault.

- Women make up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault (86%) and other types of sexual offences (78%).<sup>3</sup>
- 91% of sexual offences against women are level 1 sexual assaults. 75% of these are characterized by the absence of physical injury, while 25% involve the infliction of minor physical injuries.<sup>4</sup>
- More than one-third of Canadian women (39%),<sup>5</sup> and 12% of men<sup>6</sup> have experienced at least one incident of sexual assault since the age of 16.
- Statistics suggest that girls are more frequently abused than boys (as high as 1 out of 3 girls versus 1 in 6 boys),<sup>7</sup> but this may only reflect the reality that sexual abuse involving males of any age is reported far less frequently than sexual abuse involving females.
- In an extensive 1988 Canadian study, a shocking 53% of women and 31% of men indicated they had experienced some form of child sexual abuse.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2001). Canadian Crime Statistics 2000 (Catalogue 85 - 205).

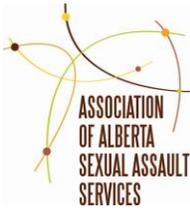
<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada (2013). Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends. (Catalogue number 85-002-X). Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. (2006). *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>6</sup> Brennan, S. 2012. Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2011. Statistics Canada: Ottawa retrieved June 20 2014 at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11692-eng.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Badgley, R. (1984). Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children in Canada.

<sup>8</sup> Badgley, R. (1988). Child Sexual Abuse in Canada: Further Analysis of the 1983 National Survey. Ottawa, Ontario: Health and Welfare Canada.



- In 1997, Health Canada found that 57% of Aboriginal women had been sexually abused.<sup>9</sup> Rates of reported sexual assault are more than three times higher for Indigenous women than non-Indigenous women in the United States. Studies have suggested that assaults against Aboriginal women are not only more frequent, they are also often particularly brutal.<sup>10</sup>
- The risk of sexual abuse among persons with disabilities is at least 150% of individuals of the same sex and similar age without disabilities.<sup>11</sup> One study states that 83% of women and 32% of males with an intellectual disability have been sexually assaulted.<sup>12</sup> It is estimated that only 20% of sexual abuse cases involving disabled people are ever reported to the police.<sup>13</sup>
- A Canadian study found that 40 to 70% of female children with developmental disabilities and 15 to 30% of male children with developmental disabilities experience sexual abuse.<sup>14</sup>
- A study found that on average 30% of gay and bisexual men reported having experienced at least one form of sexual assault in their lifetime.<sup>15</sup>
- A 2010 prevalence study based in the United States found that the lifetime occurrence of sexual assault by any perpetrator was 13.1% for lesbian women and 46.1% for bisexual women.<sup>16</sup>
- 100% of trans-identified people have experienced sexual harassment.<sup>17</sup>
- 49% of homeless women are survivors of childhood sexual abuse.<sup>18</sup>
- Sexual abuse is the second highest police-reported violence crime committed against children and youth. Over half (59%) of all reported victims of sexual assault were children and youth under the age of 18. Despite the fact that both boys and girls are vulnerable to sexual violence, females had higher rates of reported sexual offences (82%).<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women:

[http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Strategic\\_Framework\\_Aboriginal\\_Women.pdf](http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Strategic_Framework_Aboriginal_Women.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Jodi-Anne Brzozowski, Andrea Taylor-Butts and Sara Johnson, "Victimization and offending among the Aboriginal population in Canada", *Juristat*. Vol. 26, no. 3, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> DAWN, Ontario, Disabled Women's Network Ontario, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, I., Sigler, R. 2000. "Forced Sexual Intercourse Among Intimates," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 15 (1.)

<sup>13</sup> DAWN, Ontario, Disabled Women's Network Ontario, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Roheher Institute. (1992). Violence and people with disabilities: A review of the literature. *Health Canada*.

<sup>15</sup> Rothman, E. Exner, D., Baughman, A. (2011). The prevalence of sexual assault against people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual in the United States: A systemic review in trauma violence abuse. *Journal of Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, (12), 55-56.

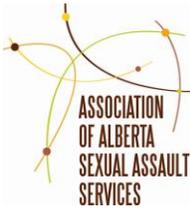
<sup>16</sup> Walters, M., Chen, J., & Breiding, M. (2010). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings Based on Sexual Orientation, *National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.

<sup>17</sup> 16 Canada's progress report: No Action No Progress FAFIA, (2010).

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT\\_CEDAW\\_NGS\\_13431\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGS_13431_E.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Statistics Canada (2008). Child and Youth Victims of Police-Reported Crimes. (Catalogue number 85F0033M). Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/85f0033m2010023-eng.pdf>



### Who commits sexual abuse/sexual assault?

- In reported sexual assaults, 97% of sex offenders are men. <sup>20</sup> (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2003).
- In 2007 Police reported that in 82% of all sexual assaults the victim knew their perpetrator. In just 18% of incidents the accused was a stranger or recent acquaintance to the victim. <sup>21</sup>
  - 31% of accused are family members.
  - 28% are casual acquaintances.
  - 8% were identified as friends.
  - 6% were identified as authority figures.
  - 5% were current or former boyfriends/girlfriends.
  - 4% were business acquaintances.
- Most of the time children are also sexual abused by someone they know and trust. In 2012, of the 14,000 police reported cases of child/youth sexual assaults: <sup>22</sup>
  - 12% of the accused were stranger – Older children/youth between the ages of 12 and 17 were more likely to be assaulted by a stranger than younger children (80% of stranger assaults were perpetrated against this older age group).
  - 88% of the accused were known to the child/youth.
  - Of those known, 38% were family members, 44% were acquaintances of the child/youth and 6% were intimate partners of the child/youth.

### Impacts of sexual abuse and sexual assault

Anyone who has been sexually abused or assaulted, female or male, straight or gay, experiences lasting effects and suffers emotional pain. Each person handles the effects of sexual assault differently which may occur immediately after the assault, or many years later. <sup>23</sup> Physical health consequences of sexual assault include physical injury, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy.<sup>24</sup>

Society is also impacted in many ways by sexual assault. Loss of productivity, and costs to the health care system resulting from long-term physical and mental health issues faced by victims. The direct costs of sexual assault are estimated to be more than \$546 million a year. <sup>25</sup> If pain and suffering are calculated at the rates given for sexual assault in the Justice Canada report, the number rises to \$1.9

---

<sup>20</sup> Statistics Canada (2010). The nature of sexual offenses. Retrieved From:  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/2008019/findings-resultats/nature-eng.htm>

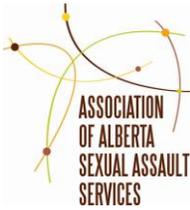
<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada (2010). The nature of sexual offenses. Retrieved From:  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/2008019/findings-resultats/nature-eng.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada (2012). Police-reported sexual offences against children and youth in Canada. Statistics Canada. (Catalogue number 85-002-X). Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14008-eng.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Dispelling The Myths About Sexual Assault. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/Default.aspx?pageId=535956>.

<sup>24</sup> United Kingdom, HM Government. (2007). Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse.

<sup>25</sup> McInturff, K. (2013). The Gap in the Gender Gap. *Canadian centre for Policy Alternatives*. Ottawa, ON.



billion. By working towards preventing sexual violence before it occurs, we as a nation can help prevent these systemic impacts.

The traumatic disruption of the body and spirit profoundly affects survivors in many painful ways, and no two people will suffer -- or recover -- in exactly the same manner, intensity or period of time. This is why you cannot tell if someone has been sexually assaulted by their behaviour.<sup>26</sup> A person who has been sexually assaulted may be crying, calm, silent, or very angry and articulate.<sup>27</sup> Others may try to minimize or forget about the assault as a way of coping with the trauma.<sup>28</sup>

Many of the impacts of sexual abuse and sexual assault are longer-term problems that affect virtually all aspects of a survivor's life. This can include anxiety and panic attacks, eating disorders, substance abuse, depression and other mental health problems.<sup>29</sup> A large number of these issues arise out of the survivor's best efforts to cope with an extremely stressful experience.

- A survivor's customary feeling of personal safety and security crumbles in the aftermath of sexual violence. The ability to trust, both in oneself and in others, is greatly reduced.
- Survivors of child sexual abuse sometimes create coping mechanisms as children that are carried forward into adulthood, where they no longer work well and can even cause new problems to develop.
- Young women who experience sexual assault may also be strongly affected by the reactions of others, including parents, siblings and peers. In today's hyperactive social media world, rumours and gossip can spread in a matter of seconds. Peers can be especially insensitive about a situation they have few facts about and don't understand.
- Family and friends of survivors will become "secondary victims" of the experience. Spouses and partners are often the ones most affected in this way, and may find themselves struggling with relationship challenges even as they try to be the survivor's primary source of emotional support.
- Parents of survivors face extremely difficult circumstances. Emotional turmoil is coupled with frustration at the inability to heal a child's pain, and confusion about emerging changes in behaviour. Supporting a child survivor's recovery process is a constant drain on physical energies and emotional resources, and the parents' own relationship may experience stress.
- Depending on circumstances, families can come together or be pulled apart by their reactions to sexual violence. At any age, brothers and sisters can be supportive of their abused sibling or feel resentful about the added attention they receive. If the offender was a trusted relative, feelings of disbelief or denial can emerge to cause internal family conflict.

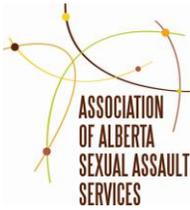
---

<sup>26</sup> Guelph-Wellington Action Committee on Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence. The Facts About Sexual Assault. Retrieved from: <http://theactioncommittee.ca/the-facts/sexual-assault/>.

<sup>27</sup> Guelph-Wellington Action Committee on Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence. The Facts About Sexual Assault. Retrieved from: <http://theactioncommittee.ca/the-facts/sexual-assault/>.

<sup>28</sup> (2013). Developing a Response to Sexual Violence: A Resource Guide for Ontario's Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from: [http://www.women.gov.on.ca/owd/docs/campus\\_guide.pdf](http://www.women.gov.on.ca/owd/docs/campus_guide.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> United Kingdom, HM Government. (2007). Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse.



- Women from "marginalized" communities, including immigrant or refugee women, elderly women, native women, women with disabilities, lesbians, homeless women, women in prison and women from low-income households can face additional obstacles when attempting to recover from -- or even report -- sexual abuse or sexual assault.

Our culture diminishes sexual abuse and sexual assault. Its survivors are constantly being accused of lying or told that the crime is in some way their own fault. People will tend to fault a victim instead of a perpetrator. If they choose to report the crime and press charges, survivors can discover they lack support from family and friends for doing so.

AASAS welcomes your suggestions and recommendations about other relevant research references that could be included on this website. Please e-mail us at [mailbox@asas.ca](mailto:mailbox@asas.ca).