



# SEXUAL VIOLENCE FACT SHEET

## What is Sexual Violence?

**Sexual violence** is a broad term that describes any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. Any act that undermines an individual's sexual or gender integrity can be considered sexual violence.<sup>1</sup>

This can include unwanted sexual touching, sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, sexual assault, rape, online sexual harassment, ritual abuse, incest, childhood sexual abuse, indecent/sexualized exposure, exhibitionism, sharing sexual photographs or videos without permission, unwanted comments or jokes, forced marriage or cohabitation, or trafficking and sexual exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

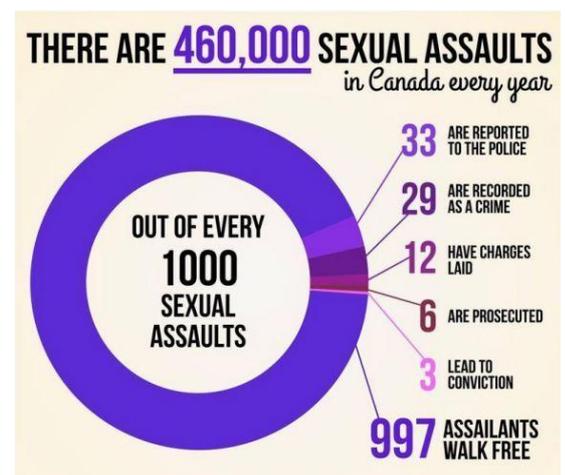
## What is Human Trafficking?

**Human trafficking** involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/ or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour. It is often described as a modern form of slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Sex trafficking can occur via escort services, massage parlours, bars and strip clubs, phone sex lines, internet chat rooms, and forced prostitution, among others. People being trafficked are often lured and groomed by people posing as a potential romantic partner.<sup>3</sup> Violence and/or threats of violence are often used as a means to control or force people being trafficked into performing sexual services.<sup>3</sup>

## Prevalence of Sexual Violence

- Sexual assault is the only violent crime that is **not** declining in Canada<sup>4</sup>
- Women account for **92% of victims** of police-reported sexual assaults<sup>4</sup>
- **Over 70%** of people being trafficked are **females under the age of 25**<sup>5</sup>
- **1 in 3 women** will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>6</sup>
- **39% of adult women** in Canada reported having at least one experience of sexual assault since age 16<sup>6</sup>
- **1 in 6 men** will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>6</sup>



Source: Johnson, "Limits of a Criminal Justice Response: Trends in Police and Court Processing of Sexual Assault," in Sheehy, *Sexual Assault in Canada: Law, Legal Practice and Women's Activism*, 2012.

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Image 1. Sexual Assault in Canada<sup>6</sup>

## Certain people face a higher risk of sexual assault:

- Rates of sexual assault for young people ages 15-24 is 18 times higher than people ages 55+<sup>4</sup>
- Women who are Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, institutionalized, single, unemployed, and/or have low-incomes experience heightened risk for sexual assault<sup>4</sup>

## Myths & Facts about Sexual Violence

### MYTH: Sexual assault is usually committed by strangers.

In about 80% of sexual assault cases, the person causing harm is known to the survivor, most commonly this person is an acquaintance, a family member, or an intimate partner.<sup>4</sup>

### FACT: The only person that is responsible for sexual violence is the perpetrator.

Suggesting a survivor is responsible for the sexual violence against them is called victim-blaming and sends the message that abuse and violence are acceptable.<sup>4</sup>

### MYTH: All survivors should respond in the same way.

There is no correct way to react or respond to sexual violence. Some people may minimize or deny it happened because they love the abuser or don't want to be seen as a victim, some will stay in touch with an abuser, and some will immediately cut off ties. A survivor's response should not be used to argue that violence didn't happen.<sup>4</sup>

### FACT: Sexual violence costs Canadians approximately \$4.8 billion per year.

Sexual violence costs us all. Criminal justice, medical, and social service costs, as well as lost productivity, pain and suffering, and employer losses as a result of sexual violence costs us more per year than gun violence.<sup>6</sup>



Image 2. Sexual Violence Costs in Canada<sup>6</sup>

## The Roots of Sexual Violence

- **GENDER INEQUALITY** is a major cause of gender-based and sexual violence. All genders receive messages through the media, religion, politics, and cultural norms that normalize men having more power than other genders.<sup>4</sup>
- **HYPER-MASCULINITY** is the idea that masculinity is displayed through strength and power (aggression and control) which promotes violence and entitlement and devalues feelings and emotions. Hyper-masculinity is damaging for everyone, including men.<sup>4</sup>
- A **lack of understanding about CONSENT** can lead to sexual violence. A 2015 study by the Canadian Women's Foundation found that 96% of Canadians believe all sexual activity should be consensual but only 1 in 3 knew what it means to give consent.<sup>4</sup>
- **RAPE CULTURE** includes jokes, TV, music, advertising, legal jargon, laws, words and imagery that normalize sexual violence against women to the point that sexual violence is seen as "just the way it is".<sup>7</sup>

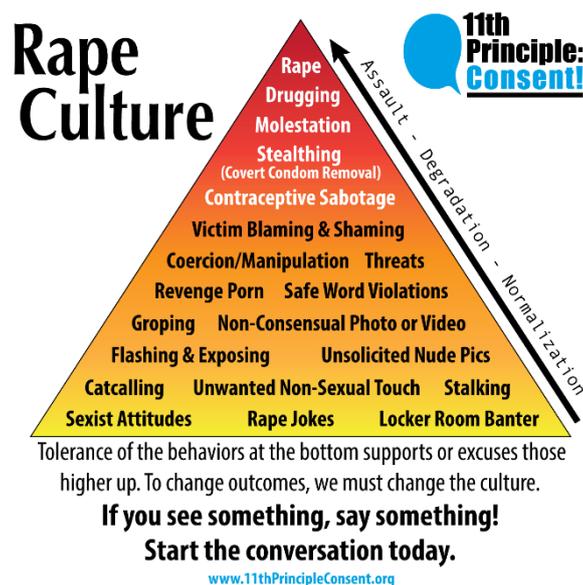


Image 3. Rape Culture<sup>8</sup>

## The Effects of Sexual Violence

Any type of sexual violence can have long-term impacts on survivors.<sup>9</sup> People who have experienced sexual violence may experience<sup>9</sup>:

- Flashbacks (memories of trauma feel as if they are currently taking place)
- Dissociation (detachment from reality, “out of body” experiences)
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Sleep disorders
- Suicidal behaviours
- Self-harm
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse issues
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Gynaecological or other health complications
- Sexually transmitted infections

## Why Are Police Reported Incidents of Sexual Violence So Low?

### Trauma Responses are Complicated!

- You may have heard of the “fight or flight” response, but “freezing” is another common reaction to fear and stress that can paralyze the person experiencing the violence and they become physically incapable of resisting or speaking up.<sup>4</sup>
- Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the survivor knows. Survivors often struggle to comprehend how someone they know could hurt them, and they may worry about getting that person in trouble. They may also feel shame or embarrassment.<sup>4</sup>
- This person might be in a position of authority over the survivor and the survivor may be afraid they won't be believed. In a workplace setting, survivors may fear that they will jeopardize their career or reputation if they speak up.<sup>4</sup>

### Criminal Justice System Barriers to Reporting Sexual Violence

- A person can be re-traumatized or re-victimized when reporting a sexual assault when they are not believed, blamed or made to feel responsible for the violence, or subjected to callous or insensitive treatment, when police fail to take evidence, or when their cases are dropped arbitrarily.<sup>4</sup>
- Studies show that when women of colour report violence, particularly rape, their experiences are often taken less seriously within the criminal justice system.<sup>4</sup>
- 53% of survivors in a survey said they did not report their sexual assault because they weren't confident in the police and 2/3 stated they were not confident in the criminal justice and court system in general.<sup>4</sup>

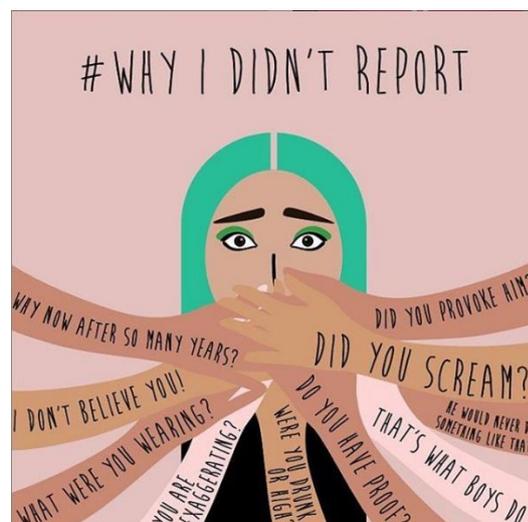


Image 4. #WhyIDidn'tReport Graphic<sup>10</sup>

## Combating Sexual Violence

Ending and preventing sexual violence requires a number of different interventions that address individual, community, and systemic factors<sup>11</sup>:

- ✓ Raise awareness about the importance of consent and what consent means and looks like
- ✓ Teach young people how to develop healthy relationships
- ✓ Challenge victim-blaming. Let survivors know you believe them and it is not their fault.
- ✓ Hold people causing harm accountable for their actions – otherwise we send the message that violence and abuse are acceptable
- ✓ Address the systemic barriers in the criminal justice system
- ✓ Challenge gender inequality and rape culture – if you hear or see something, say something!

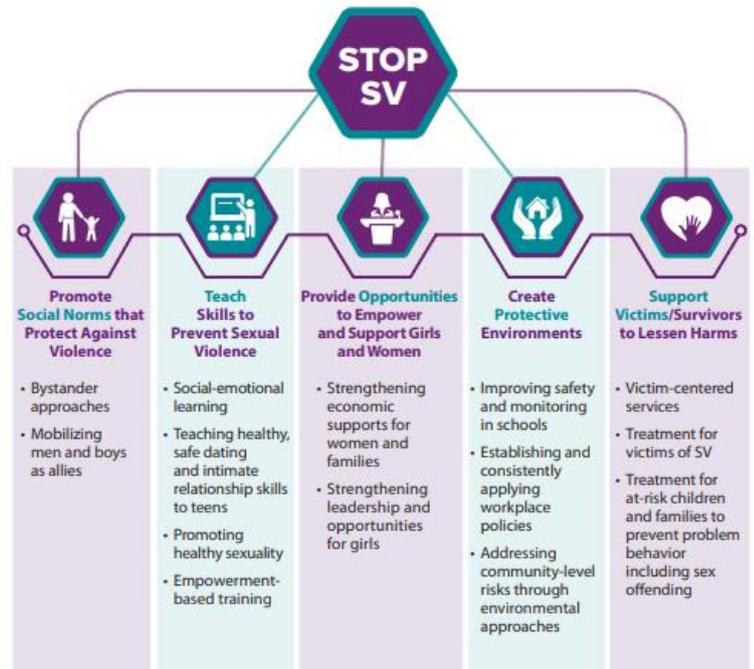


Image 5. Strategies to End & Prevent Sexual Violence<sup>11</sup>

## Learn more about Sexual Violence

Women's Support Network of York Region: <https://womenssupportnetwork.ca/>

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres: <https://sexualassaultsupport.ca/>

Canadian Women's Foundation: <https://www.canadianwomen.org/>

Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline: <https://www.canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca/>

## References

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