

Unfounded criminal incidents in Canada, 2017

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In 2017, 7% of criminal incidents in Canada were classified as unfounded and the proportion of sexual assaults classified as unfounded declined from 2016. One in seven sexual assaults reported to police in 2017 was classified as unfounded, meaning that police determined that no crime had taken place, compared with one in five sexual assaults in 2016. At the same time, the number of founded sexual assaults reported by police rose in 2017.

Ongoing public discussions around sexual misconduct and sexual violence in both the news media and on social media in 2017 likely had an impact on the number of sexual assaults reported to police in late 2017. Additionally, several police agencies across Canada announced in 2017 that they would review their unfounded sexual assault cases to determine whether further investigation was required. At the same time, Statistics Canada has worked with the policing community to address data quality issues and ensure standardized reporting among police services.

The *Juristat* article "[Unfounded criminal incidents in Canada, 2017](#)" and the accompanying infographic "[Unfounded Sexual Assaults in Canada, 2017](#)," released today, present an overview of rates of all unfounded criminal incidents, with a particular focus on sexual assaults. The article is the first release of information on unfounded criminal incidents since Statistics Canada resumed collection and release of these data through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey. Substantive work undertaken by Statistics Canada with police and other partners is documented in the article "[Revising the classification of founded and unfounded criminal incidents in the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey](#)" and the accompanying infographic "[Unfounded criminal incidents: Statistics Canada's path to new data collection](#)."

Crime indicators for the provinces, territories and police services are available in the new interactive product, "[Canadian Community Crime Tracker](#)." This tracker includes rates of sexual assault and the proportion that were reported as unfounded.

Proportion of sexual assaults deemed unfounded down in 2017

In 2017, 14% of sexual assaults (levels 1, 2, and 3) reported to police were classified as unfounded, down from 19% in 2016. In all, about 3,900 incidents of sexual assault reported to police in 2017 were deemed to be unfounded.

In the *Criminal Code*, sexual assaults are classified into three separate categories depending on the nature and severity of the incident, with level 2 representing sexual assaults that involve weapons, bodily harm or threats of bodily harm, and level 3 representing those that wound, maim, disfigure, or endanger the life of the victim. More severe sexual assaults (levels 2 and 3) were less likely to be deemed unfounded (7% and 9%, respectively) than were level 1 sexual assaults (14%), that is, violations of a sexual nature that did not involve weapons or evidence of bodily harm, such as unwanted touching or other non-consensual sexual contact.

In comparison, the proportion of physical assaults classified as unfounded also decreased over this period, though to a lesser extent, from 11% to 9%. As with sexual assaults, a higher proportion of level 1 physical assaults (common assault) were classified as unfounded (11%) when compared with level 2 (involving a weapon or bodily harm) (3%) and level 3 (aggravated assault) (1%).

Overall reporting of sexual assaults to police up in 2017

Sexual assault is one of the crimes least likely to be reported to police, yet the number of reported incidents rose in 2017, particularly following the height of social media campaigns that raised awareness of the issue.

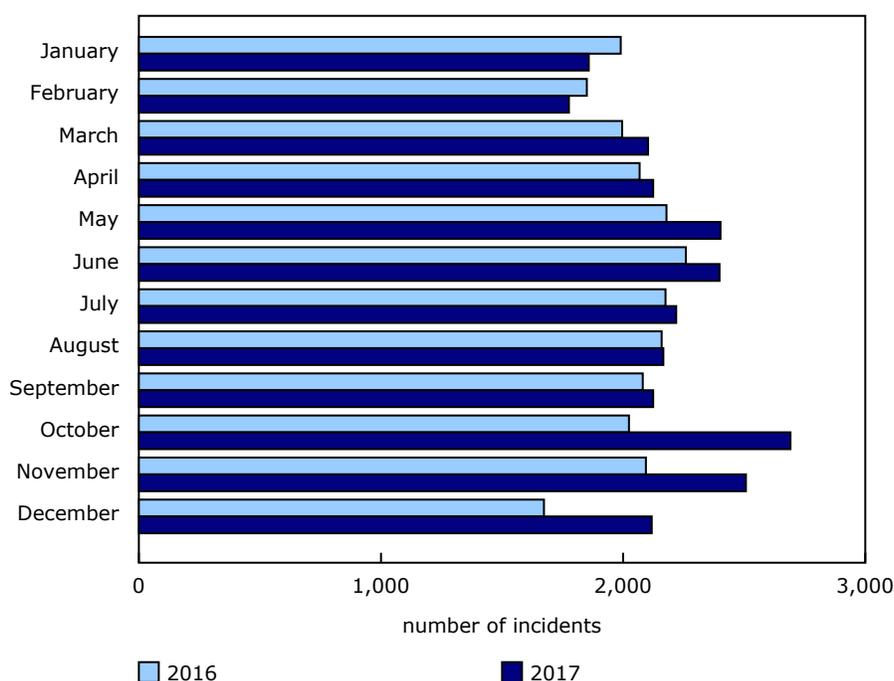
According to the most recent General Social Survey on Victimization, 5% of sexual assault incidents in 2014 were brought to the attention of police. Since these incidents typically go unreported, any changes in reporting behaviour are likely to have a measureable impact on the number of police-reported incidents.



While the number and proportion of unfounded incidents decreased from 2016 to 2017, overall reporting of sexual assaults to police increased. In 2017, there were 28,551 incidents of sexual assault reported to the police, of which 24,672 were deemed founded; that is, police determined that a crime had taken place. The rate of founded sexual assault increased 13% from 2016, to 67 incidents per 100,000 population in 2017.

Compared with 2016, the largest increases in the number of reported sexual assaults (including founded and unfounded) were in October, November and December 2017. Many social media campaigns surrounding awareness of sexual misconduct and sexual violence, such as #MeToo, went viral in October 2017 and continue to garner public attention.

Chart 1
Police-reported incidents of founded and unfounded sexual assault, by month reported to police, 2016 and 2017

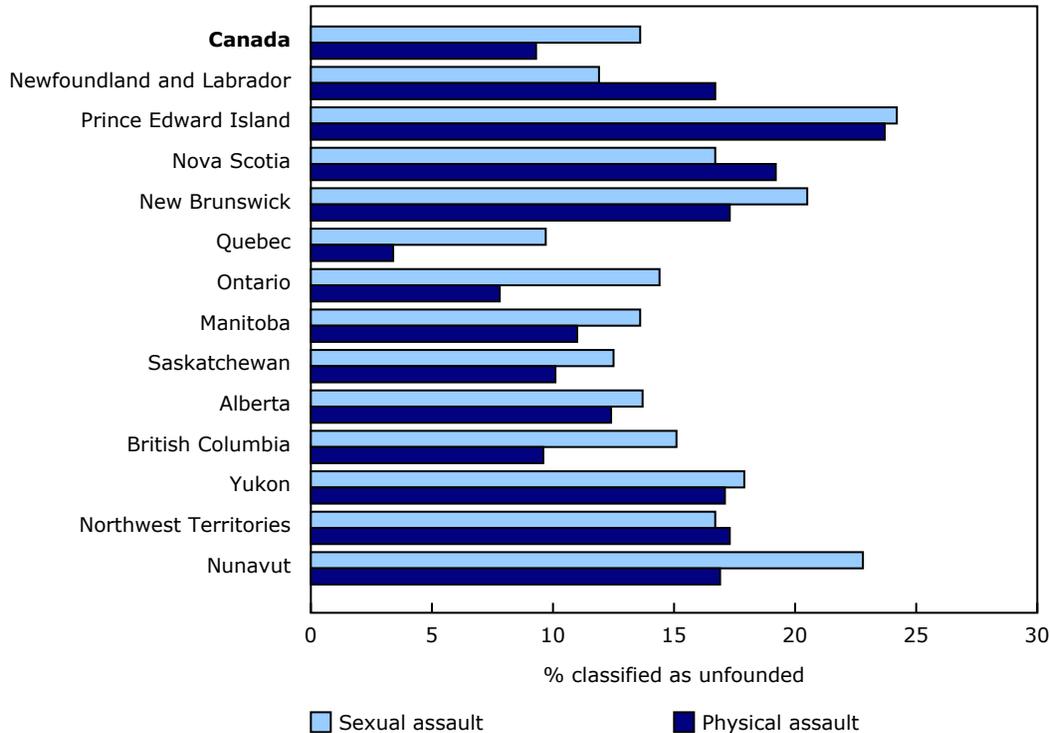


Note(s): #MeToo went viral in October 2017. Includes levels 1, 2, and 3 sexual assault. Includes both founded and unfounded incidents. Data for unfounded incidents are available even though inconsistencies in reporting may still exist.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

Proportion of sexual assaults classified as unfounded lowest in Quebec

The proportion of sexual assaults classified as unfounded varied across the provinces and territories in 2017, ranging from 10% of all reported sexual assaults in Quebec, to 24% in Prince Edward Island. In terms of physical assault, Quebec (3%) and Prince Edward Island (24%) also reported the lowest and highest proportions of unfounded incidents, respectively.

Chart 2
Police-reported incidents of sexual assault and physical assault classified as unfounded, by province and territory, 2017



Note(s): Includes levels 1, 2, and 3 sexual assault and levels 1, 2, and 3 physical assault. Data for unfounded incidents are available for 2017 even though inconsistencies in reporting may still exist.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

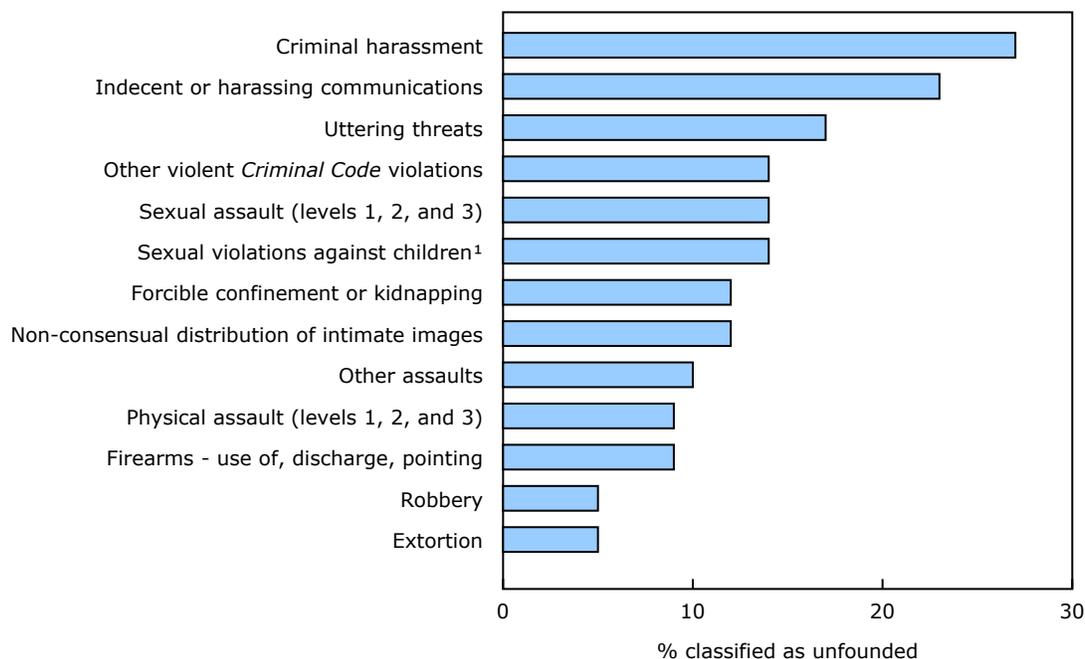
More than 1 in 10 violent incidents reported to police classified as unfounded

In 2017, there were just over 2.1 million criminal incidents reported to police, of which about 152,000, or 7%, were classified as unfounded.

When considering all violent incidents reported to the police in 2017, more than 1 in 10 was classified as unfounded (12%). In comparison, 6% of property crimes and 7% of other *Criminal Code*-related incidents were deemed unfounded. That said, some property offences, like arson (14%) and motor vehicle theft (10%), were more commonly classified as unfounded relative to other property crimes.

Overall, certain violent offences were more likely to be classified as unfounded by police, such as criminal harassment (27%), indecent or harassing communications (23%) and uttering threats (17%). In contrast, a lower proportion of incidents of robbery (5%) and extortion (5%) were deemed unfounded.

Chart 3
Proportion of police-reported incidents classified as unfounded, selected violent offences, Canada, 2017



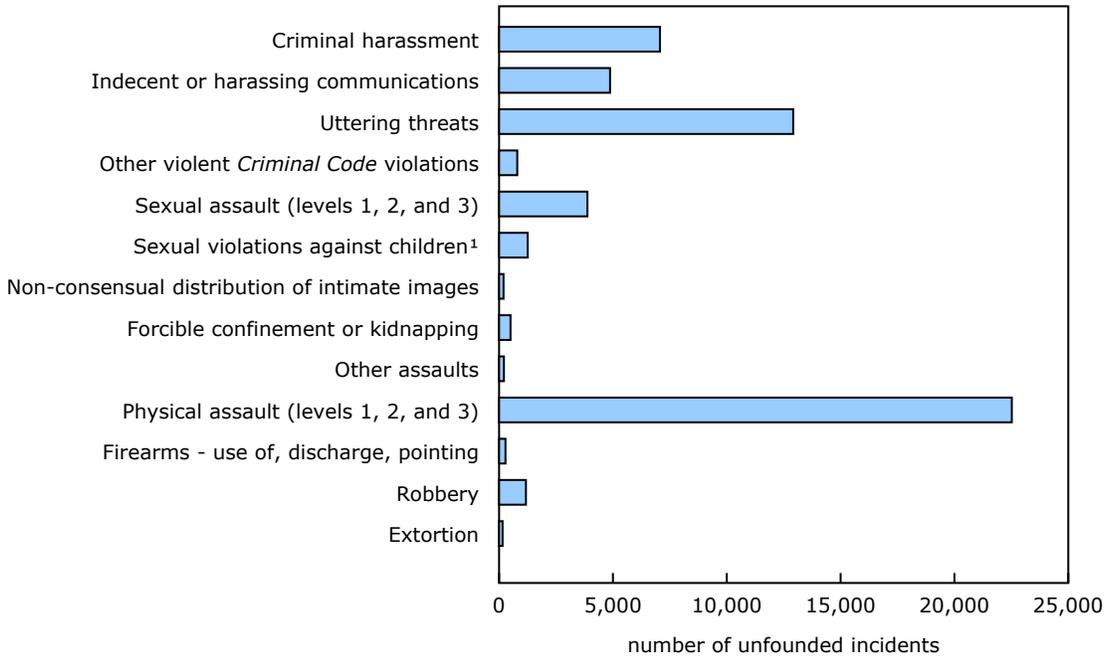
1. Excludes sexual assaults against children and youth, which are reported as level 1, 2 or 3 sexual assault.

Note(s): This chart presents selected violent violations where there were at least 100 incidents classified as unfounded by police in 2017. Data for unfounded incidents are available for 2017 even though inconsistencies in reporting may still exist.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

Unfounded criminal incidents followed the same trend as crime in general, with the highest-volume offences representing the largest number of unfounded incidents. For example, level 1 physical assault, the most common type of violent crime, also accounted for the highest volume of unfounded criminal incidents in 2017 among violent crimes. In 2017, sexual assault (levels 1, 2, and 3) represented 7% of all unfounded violent criminal incidents and 6% of all founded incidents of violent crime reported to police.

Chart 4
Number of police-reported incidents classified as unfounded, selected violent offences, Canada, 2017



1. Excludes sexual assaults against children and youth, which are reported as level 1, 2 or 3 sexual assault.

Note(s): This chart presents selected violent violations where there were at least 100 incidents classified as unfounded by police in 2017. Data for unfounded incidents are available for 2017 even though inconsistencies in reporting may still exist.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

Note to readers

When the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey was launched in 1962 to measure police-reported crime in Canada, counts of unfounded criminal incidents were collected in order to produce statistics on these types of incidents. Over time, however, inconsistent reporting of unfounded incidents led to poor data quality. Prior to this release, the last time rates of unfounded sexual assault were published was in July 2003.

Prior to 2018, an incident was defined as unfounded if it was "determined through police investigation that the offence reported did not occur, nor was it attempted."

The definition was updated in January 2018 to read: "An incident is founded if, after police investigation, it has been determined that the reported offence did occur or was attempted (even if the charged/suspect chargeable is unknown) or there is no credible evidence to confirm that the reported incident did not take place. This includes third party reports that fit these criteria."

It is important to note that the data for 2016 and 2017 do not follow the new standards for founded and unfounded criminal incidents, as they have not yet been fully adopted. Though work was done by police services to review their unfounded cases, 2017 data may still be subject to inconsistent reporting and may therefore be incomparable across police services.

In addition, UCR data cannot determine what impact, if any, police service reviews may have had. However, in light of police services conducting reviews and in order to establish a baseline for data collection and analysis moving forward, the 2017 data on unfounded criminal incidents are now available. It is expected that the data quality will improve over time as police services implement the new standards and receive training. This will occur throughout 2018 and it is anticipated that 2019 will be the first year of complete data.

Statistics Canada has added 2017 counts of unfounded criminal incidents to its suite of crime statistics tables. These data are available on the Statistics Canada website. See the following data tables for information at the designated level of geography:

Canada, provinces, territories and census metropolitan areas – Table 35100177

Data for police services in the Atlantic provinces – Table 35100178

Data for police services in Quebec – Table 35100179

Data for police services in Ontario – Table 35100180

Data for police services in Manitoba – Table 35100181

Data for police services in Saskatchewan – Table 35100182

Data for police services in Alberta – Table 35100183

Data for police services in British Columbia – Table 35100184

Data for police services in the territories – Table 35100185

For information on all types of police-reported crime in 2017, see "[Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2017](#)."

Table 1
Police-reported crime for selected offences, Canada, 2017

	Reported	Unfounded		Founded	
	number	number	%	number	rate
Total Criminal Code (excluding traffic) – "Crime rate"	2,110,658	152,635	7.2	1,958,023	5,334.0
Total violent crime	459,223	56,022	12.2	403,201	1,098.4
Homicide	660	0	0.0	660	1.8
Other violations causing death	96	18	18.8	78	0.2
Attempted murder	836	9	1.1	827	2.3
Sexual assault - level 3 - aggravated	176	15	8.5	161	0.4
Sexual assault - level 2 - weapon or bodily harm	446	29	6.5	417	1.1
Sexual assault - level 1	27,929	3,835	13.7	24,094	65.6
Sexual violations against children	9,302	1,256	13.5	8,046	21.9
Assault - level 3 - aggravated	3,585	44	1.2	3,541	9.6
Assault - level 2 - weapon or bodily harm	53,498	1,645	3.1	51,853	141.3
Assault - level 1	183,864	20,830	11.3	163,034	444.1
Assault of police officer	10,903	56	0.5	10,847	29.5
Other assaults	2,164	212	9.8	1,952	5.3
Firearms - use of, discharge, pointing	3,015	281	9.3	2,734	7.4
Robbery	23,918	1,179	4.9	22,739	61.9
Forcible confinement or kidnapping	4,280	502	11.7	3,778	10.3
Trafficking in persons	317	46	14.5	271	0.7
Extortion	3,287	154	4.7	3,133	8.5
Criminal harassment	26,502	7,064	26.7	19,438	53.0
Uttering threats	74,992	12,918	17.2	62,074	169.1
Indecent or harassing communications	21,073	4,874	23.1	16,199	44.1
Non-consensual distribution of intimate images	1,664	195	11.7	1,469	4.0
Commodification of sexual activity	1,168	62	5.3	1,106	3.0
Other violent <i>Criminal Code</i> violations	5,548	798	14.4	4,750	12.9
Total property crime	1,261,594	70,505	5.6	1,191,089	3,244.8
Breaking and entering	170,727	11,391	6.7	159,336	434.1
Possess stolen property	25,305	1,436	5.7	23,869	65.0
Theft of motor vehicle	94,317	9,297	9.9	85,020	231.6
Theft over \$5,000 (non-motor vehicle)	18,682	1,427	7.6	17,255	47.0
Theft under \$5,000 (non-motor vehicle)	527,895	23,338	4.4	504,557	1,374.5
Fraud (excluding identity theft and fraud)	119,739	6,876	5.7	112,863	307.5
Identity theft	3,411	144	4.2	3,267	8.9
Identity fraud	14,740	465	3.2	14,275	38.9
Mischief	276,895	14,779	5.3	262,116	714.1
Arson	9,883	1,352	13.7	8,531	23.2
Total other Criminal Code offences	389,841	26,108	6.7	363,733	990.9
Weapons violations	18,137	2,352	13.0	15,785	43.0
Child pornography	7,629	1,108	14.5	6,521	17.8
Prostitution	151	17	11.3	134	0.4
Disturb the peace	103,006	6,625	6.4	96,381	262.6
Administration of justice violations	228,755	11,919	5.2	216,836	590.7
Other violations	32,163	4,087	12.7	28,076	76.5
Total Criminal Code traffic violations	129,285	3,907	3.0	125,378	341.6
Alcohol impaired driving	68,910	3,352	4.9	65,558	178.6
Drug impaired driving	3,828	339	8.9	3,489	9.5
Other <i>Criminal Code</i> traffic violations	56,547	216	0.4	56,331	153.5
Total drug offences	94,077	3,452	3.7	90,625	246.9
Possession - cannabis	39,848	1,350	3.4	38,498	104.9
Possession - cocaine	7,387	279	3.8	7,108	19.4
Possession - methamphetamines and ecstasy (MDA)	9,382	113	1.2	9,269	25.3
Possession - heroin	2,279	60	2.6	2,219	6.0
Possession - other drugs	8,434	444	5.3	7,990	21.8
Trafficking, production or distribution - cannabis	10,172	678	6.7	9,494	25.9
Trafficking, production or distribution - cocaine	6,972	169	2.4	6,803	18.5
Trafficking, production or distribution - methamphetamines and ecstasy (MDA)	2,749	83	3.0	2,666	7.3
Trafficking, production or distribution - heroin	1,024	9	0.9	1,015	2.8
Trafficking, production or distribution - other drugs	5,830	267	4.6	5,563	15.2
Total other federal statute violations	32,333	1,547	4.8	30,786	83.9
Human trafficking under the <i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i>	124	20	16.1	104	0.3
<i>Youth Criminal Justice Act</i>	5,522	70	1.3	5,452	14.9
Other federal statutes	26,687	1,457	5.5	25,230	68.7
Total - all violations	2,366,353	161,541	6.8	2,204,812	6,006.3

Note(s): Data for unfounded incidents are available for 2017 even though inconsistencies in reporting may still exist. Police-reported statistics may be affected by differences in the way police services deal with offences. In some instances, police or municipalities might choose to deal with some offences using municipal by-laws or provincial provisions rather than *Criminal Code* provisions. Counts are based on the most serious violation in the incident. One incident may involve multiple violations. Data for specific types of crime are available, in most cases, from 1977. Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations are based upon July 1 estimates.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3302.

The article "[Unfounded criminal incidents in Canada, 2017](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat* (85-002-X). The infographic "[Unfounded Sexual Assaults in Canada, 2017](#)" (11-627-M) is also released today.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).