

Sexual minority people almost three times more likely to experience violent victimization than heterosexual people

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, September 9, 2020

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people in Canada were almost three times more likely than heterosexual Canadians to report that they had been physically or sexually assaulted in the previous 12 months in 2018 and more than twice as likely to report having been violently victimized since the age of 15. Sexual minority Canadians were also more than twice as likely as heterosexual Canadians to experience inappropriate sexual behaviours in public, online or at work in the previous 12 months, according to a new study.

A new *Juristat* article, "[Experiences of violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours among gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people, and the transgender population, in Canada, 2018](#)," sheds light on the experiences of violent victimization and other unwanted sexual experiences while in public, online or at work among sexual minority and transgender Canadians. Some key findings on the experiences of sexual minority Canadians are also presented in an accompanying infographic "[Gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority Canadians' experiences of violence and inappropriate sexual behaviours, 2018](#)." This new study is the next in a series of work connected to Statistics Canada's [Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics](#), which was created to support the development of evidence-based policies and programs by monitoring changes and reporting on gender, diversity and inclusion issues.

While the data presented predate the COVID-19 pandemic, they provide valuable insights into the experiences of sexual minority and transgender people in Canada, especially during this time of physical distancing measures, economic disruption and fears of contracting the virus. A recent crowdsourcing survey on Canadians' perceptions of safety during COVID-19 found that almost one-third (31%) of non-binary people who responded to the survey felt either somewhat or very unsafe walking alone after dark since the start of the pandemic, while the same was reported by 23% of women and 12% of men.

For the first time, national estimates of transgender—including non-binary—Canadians are now available

According to the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, an estimated one million, or 4%, of Canadians aged 15 and older said that they were part of a sexual minority population (gay, lesbian, bisexual or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual) in 2018. In addition, an estimated 75,000, or 0.24%, of Canadians aged 15 and older said that they were transgender, which includes anyone whose reported sex assigned at birth differs from their current gender, including those who are non-binary (those whose current gender was not reported exclusively as male or female).

This survey is the first large-scale, nationally representative survey in Canada to use statistical standards on sex at birth and gender to collect information that facilitates the identification and estimation of the transgender population in Canada. This fills an important data gap surrounding the experiences of gender-based violence among transgender Canadians.

Research on the context and types of gender-based violence experienced by sexual minority and transgender Canadians can contribute to the development of additional community programs for intervention and increased physical and mental health support among these populations.

Sexual minority Canadians almost three times more likely to experience violent victimization in the previous 12 months than heterosexual Canadians

Excluding experiences of violence within intimate relationships (see note to readers), sexual minority Canadians were much more likely than heterosexual Canadians to have been physically or sexually assaulted both in the 12 months preceding the survey and since the age of 15.

Just over 1 in 10 (11%) sexual minority Canadians reported that they had been physically or sexually assaulted within the past 12 months in 2018—almost three times higher than the proportion of heterosexual Canadians (4%).

Since the age of 15, sexual minority Canadians (59%) were also much more likely than heterosexual Canadians (37%) to have been physically or sexually assaulted by someone who was not an intimate partner.

Sexual minority Canadians are more likely to experience inappropriate behaviours in all environments than heterosexual Canadians

When compared with the experiences of heterosexual Canadians, sexual minority Canadians disproportionately experience greater rates of inappropriate sexual behaviours in their day-to-day lives—in public, online and while at work. Regardless of environment, sexual minority Canadians were at least two times more likely to experience inappropriate behaviours than their heterosexual peers.

For example, over half of sexual minority Canadians (57%) reported that they had experienced an inappropriate sexual behaviour in public in the previous 12 months—more than twice what was reported by heterosexual Canadians (22%). Looking at the specific behaviours experienced in public, sexual minority Canadians most commonly reported having received unwanted sexual attention, such as comments, gestures, body language, whistles or calls (36% versus 15% for heterosexual Canadians).

Like inappropriate behaviours in public, sexual minority Canadians (37%) were more than twice as likely to report experiencing inappropriate sexual behaviours online as heterosexual Canadians (15%), and twice as likely to report experiencing inappropriate behaviours while at work (44% versus 22% for heterosexual Canadians).

The most common behaviour experienced by sexual minority Canadians while online was being sent unwanted sexually suggestive or explicit images or messages (24%), while for heterosexual Canadians, the most common behaviour experienced was receiving threatening or aggressive messages directed at them personally (8%).

At work, the most common unwanted behaviours experienced by both sexual minority and heterosexual Canadians were inappropriate sexual jokes, and unwanted sexual attention. However, sexual minority Canadians were almost two times more likely to experience inappropriate sexual jokes (27%) than heterosexual Canadians (14%) and more than twice as likely to experience unwanted sexual attention (23% versus 9%).

Sexual minority victims of abuse are more likely to use drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism

Alcohol and drug use is often associated with experiences of abuse or violence, and is sometimes used as a method of coping with the psychological trauma caused by these experiences.

In 2018, almost 3 in 10 (29%) sexual minority victims reported that they had used drugs or alcohol in the previous 12 months to cope with their lifetime experiences of abuse or violence, almost triple the proportion of heterosexual victims (10%). In general, other health-risk behaviours such as binge drinking, non-medicinal cannabis use and non-prescribed drug use were also more prevalent among sexual minority than heterosexual Canadians.

One-third of sexual minority Canadians consider their mental health poor or fair

Although the survey data cannot be used to establish causality between experiences of victimization and mental health, reports of poor or fair mental health were almost three times higher among sexual minority Canadians (32%) than heterosexual Canadians (11%) in 2018. Sexual minority Canadians (40%) were also almost three times more likely to report having seriously contemplated suicide at some point in their lives than heterosexual Canadians (15%).

Transgender Canadians are more likely than non-transgender Canadians to experience violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours

Similar to the experiences of sexual minority Canadians when compared with their heterosexual peers, transgender Canadians were more likely than non-transgender (cisgender) Canadians to report experiencing violent victimization since the age of 15. They were also more likely to report experiencing inappropriate sexual behaviours in all settings covered by the survey—in public, online and at work—than their non-transgender peers.

While transgender and non-transgender Canadians were equally likely to have engaged in binge drinking, transgender victims were more likely than non-transgender victims to report using drugs or alcohol to cope with their lifetime experiences of abuse or violence. Transgender Canadians were also more likely to report poor or fair mental health and suicidal thoughts than non-transgender Canadians.

Note to readers

This release is based on results from the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS), which asked Canadians about their experiences of violent victimization and other unwanted sexual experiences while in public, online or at work.

In 2018, the SSPPS was developed as part of It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence. The survey measured five possible dimensions of gender-based violence: unwanted sexual behaviour in public, unwanted sexual behaviour online, unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace, and sexual assault and physical assault—collectively referred to in this release as violent victimization.

Gender-based violence is defined as violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender, and encompasses a wide range of behaviours, not all of which meet the threshold of criminal behaviour. While not all inappropriate sexual behaviours are criminal by law, they can make people feel unsafe, uncomfortable and unwelcome in a variety of environments and can affect their physical and mental well-being.

It is impossible to have reliable information on gender, diversity and inclusion in Canada without strong statistical standards that clearly define the concepts being measured. Statistics Canada, as the national statistical agency, plays a leading role in ensuring that strong statistical standards are developed and adopted as part of the national statistical system.

The survey used new statistical standards on sex at birth and gender. These questions allowed, for the first time, the identification and analysis of the experiences of the transgender population in Canada.

Transgender: *refers to persons whose reported sex assigned at birth differs from their current gender, including those who are non-binary, that is, those whose current gender was not reported exclusively as male or female*

Whether a person is transgender or not is unrelated to their sexual orientation. Transgender people, like non-transgender people, can be heterosexual or a sexual minority (gay, lesbian, bisexual or any other sexual orientation that is not heterosexual).

Sexual minority: *refers to both transgender and non-transgender (cisgender) persons whose sexual orientation is gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual or any sexual orientation that is not heterosexual.*

Due to small sample size, precise estimates for the transgender population and their experiences are not presented in this release or the accompanying Juristat article. Please refer to the confidence intervals provided in the tables to better understand the experiences of transgender Canadians. For the quality of estimates, the lower and upper bounds of the confidence intervals are presented. Confidence intervals should be interpreted as follows: If the survey were repeated many times, then 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20), the confidence interval would cover the true population value.

This release excludes physical and sexual assault committed in an intimate partner relationship, which will be reported at a later date.

For information on the methodology of the survey, see: [Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5256](#).

The article "[Experiences of violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours among gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people, and the transgender population, in Canada, 2018](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat* ([85-002-X](#)).

The infographic "[Gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority Canadians' experiences of violence and inappropriate sexual behaviours, 2018](#)" is also now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada — Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)).

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).