

Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018

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Almost 3 in 10 Canadians are physically or sexually abused during childhood

Almost 3 in 10 Canadians aged 15 years and older (27%) experienced childhood victimization, which includes at least one instance of physical or sexual abuse at the hands of an adult—such as a parent, another family member, friend, neighbour or another adult—before age 15.

Childhood is an important time in life that is a critical part of physical, cognitive and emotional development. Experiences of physical or sexual abuse during this period of development can have serious detrimental and long-lasting consequences.

The *Juristat* article "[Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018](#)," released today, focuses on self-reported instances of physical or sexual abuse during childhood using data from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. The article provides an overview of childhood victimization in Canada, examines factors associated with an elevated likelihood of experiencing childhood victimization and identifies adult outcomes that are associated with a history of childhood victimization.

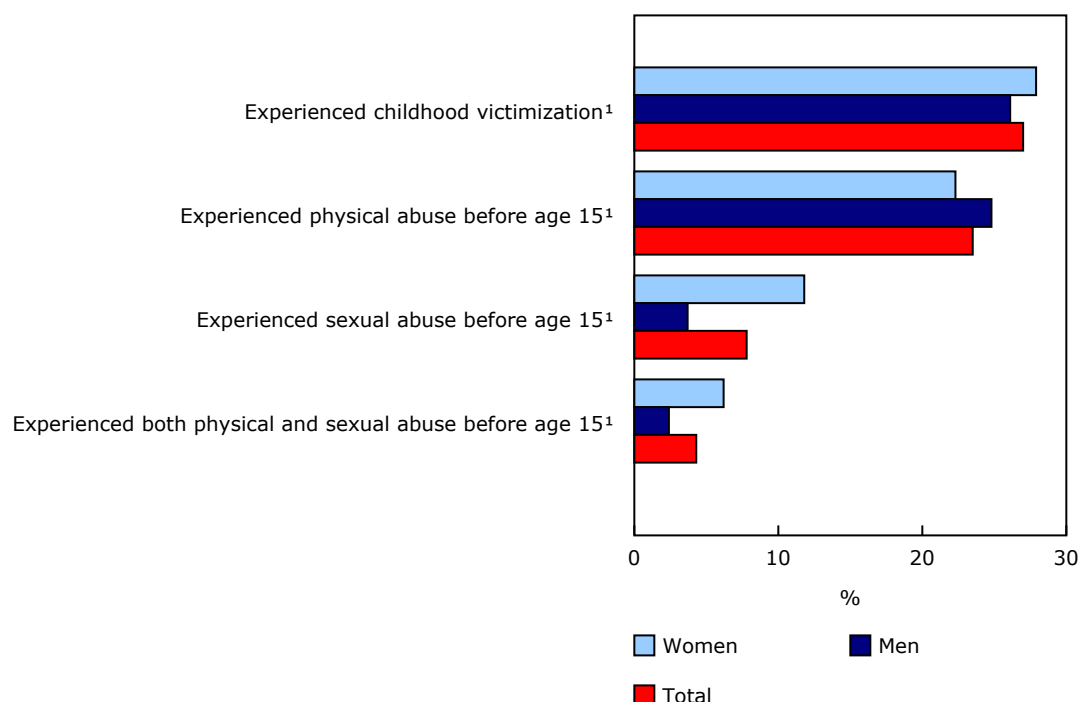
Physical abuse most common type of childhood victimization

Physical abuse was the most commonly experienced type of childhood victimization. Approximately one in four Canadians (24%) experienced at least one type of physical abuse during childhood. Men (25%) were slightly more likely to have been physically abused during childhood compared with women (22%).

Though sexual abuse during childhood was relatively less common than physical abuse, almost 1 in 10 Canadians (7.8%) experienced at least one type of sexual abuse before age 15. Women (12%) were about three times more likely than men (3.7%) to have been sexually abused by an adult during childhood.



Chart 1
Self-reported experiences of childhood victimization, by gender, Canada, 2018



1. The estimate for women is significantly different from the estimate for men ($p < 0.05$).

Note(s): Childhood victimization constitutes any instance of physical or sexual abuse by an adult—such as a parent, other family member, friend, neighbour or other adult—occurring before the age of 15.

Source(s): Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (5256).

The most serious incident of physical abuse during childhood most often committed by a parent or stepparent

The majority (69%) of Canadians who were physically abused as children reported that the most serious incident was perpetrated by a parent or stepparent. Women (73%) were more likely than men (66%) to report that a parent or stepparent was responsible for the most serious incident of physical abuse during childhood.

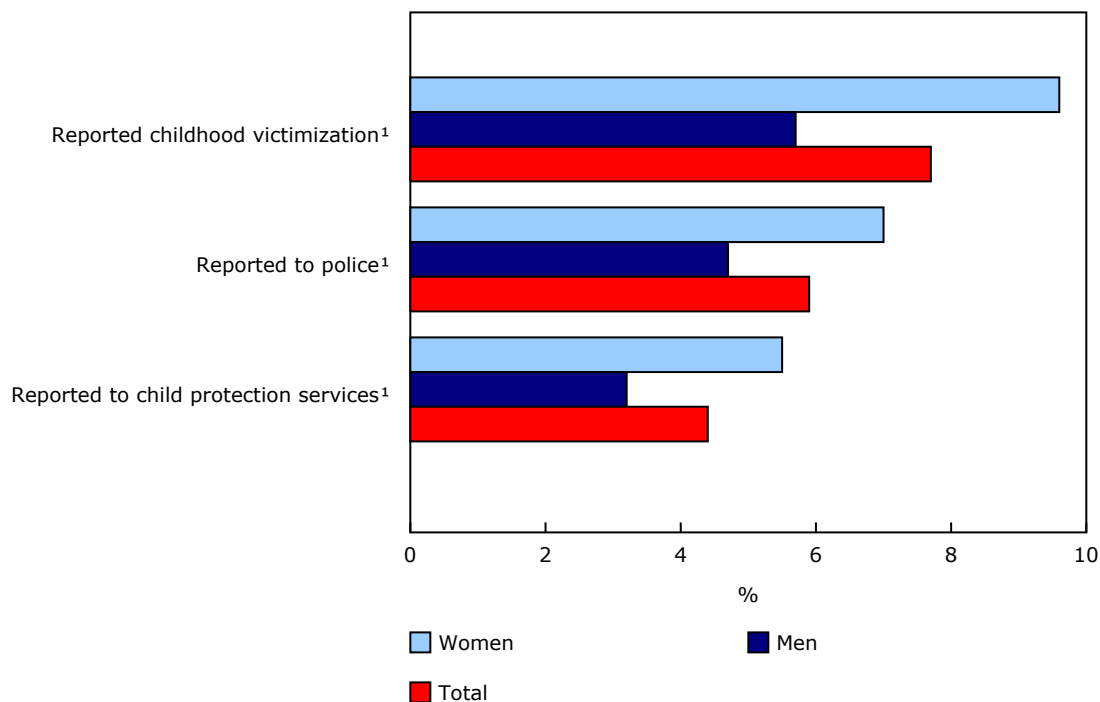
Similar proportions of Canadians who were sexually abused during childhood reported that the most serious incident was perpetrated by a family member other than a parent (30%) or by a neighbour, a friend, a classmate or an acquaintance (29%). Women (33%) were more likely than men (22%) to report that the most serious incident of sexual abuse during childhood was perpetrated by a family member other than a parent or stepparent.

Very few incidents of childhood victimization reported to authorities

The vast majority of Canadians who experienced childhood victimization did not report any instance to authorities or child protection services when they were children. Among those who experienced childhood victimization, fewer than 1 in 10 (7.7%) indicated that they had reported any of the abuse experienced to the police or child protection services before age 15. Overall, women who experienced childhood victimization (9.6%) were more likely than men (5.7%) to indicate that they had reported any abuse experienced before age 15.

Chart 2

Reporting childhood victimization to police or child protective services among those who experienced childhood victimization, by gender, Canada, 2018



1. The estimate for women is significantly different from the estimate for men ($p < 0.05$).

Source(s): Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (5256).

It is important to highlight that a higher proportion of people who experienced multiple types of abusive behaviours during childhood indicated that they reported the abuse to authorities before age 15. Of those who indicated that they experienced four types of abusive behaviours, about one in five (19%) indicated that they had reported the abuse to either police or child protection services during childhood. This proportion was even higher among individuals who experienced the five types of abusive behaviours, with one-quarter (25%) indicating that they reported at least one instance of the abuse experienced during childhood.

History of childhood victimization is linked to homelessness, poorer health and victimization in adulthood

Canadians who had experienced childhood victimization were more likely to experience a wide range of negative adult outcomes. For instance, those who had experienced childhood victimization had a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness or having to temporarily live with family or friends because they had nowhere to go (5.6%) compared with those who did not experience violence as a child (0.8%).

About 3 in 20 Canadians who had experienced childhood victimization (16%) rated their current general health as fair or poor. In comparison, 1 in 10 Canadians who had not experienced childhood victimization (9.5%) rated their current general health as such. Furthermore, those who had experienced childhood victimization (18%) were twice as likely to rate their current mental health as fair or poor compared with those who had not experienced childhood victimization (8.9%).

Lastly, about 7 in 10 Canadians who had experienced childhood victimization (69%) subsequently experienced violent victimization as an adult (since age 15). In comparison, about one-third (33%) of Canadians who had not experienced childhood victimization experienced violent victimization as an adult. Similarly, those who experienced childhood victimization (10%), were more than twice as likely as those who had not experienced childhood victimization (4.8%) to have experienced violent victimization in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Note to readers

This Juristat article is based on results from the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS). The SSPPS collected information on Canadians' self-reported experiences of childhood victimization, instances of physical or sexual abuse before age 15. The target population of the SSPPS was those aged 15 years and older living in the provinces and territories; therefore, information on childhood victimization is retrospective. The term "adult" refers to respondents of the SSPPS and includes any respondent aged 15 years and older.

Physical abuse includes having ever experienced any of the following physically abusive behaviours or indicators by an adult before age 15: an adult slapped you on the face, head or ears, or hit you with something hard to hurt you; an adult pushed, grabbed, shoved or threw something at you to hurt you; or an adult kicked, bit, punched, choked, burned, or physically attacked you in some way.

Sexual abuse includes having ever experienced any of the following sexually abusive behaviours or indicators by an adult before age 15: an adult forced or attempted to force you into any unwanted sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way; or an adult touched you against your will in any sexual way, meaning anything from unwanted touching or grabbing to kissing or fondling.

Childhood victimization is composed of the above abusive behaviours or indicators of either physical or sexual abuse. Details provided about the most serious incident may not be representative of all incidents of abuse, but rather only the incident deemed most serious to the respondent.

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

The article "[Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat* ([85-002-X](#)).

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).