

Police-reported online child sexual exploitation in Canada, 2022

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There were 15,630 incidents of online sexual offences against children and 45,816 incidents of online child pornography reported by police in Canada from 2014 to 2022.

Advancements in technology and increased Internet accessibility have provided Canadians with a wide range of opportunities for enhancing daily life. However, these advancements come with increased concerns over the online safety of individuals—particularly children and youth. Specifically, online child sexual exploitation, including the transmission of material related to child sexual abuse, sexting, sextortion, grooming and luring, and live child sexual abuse streaming has been on the rise. For the purposes of this article, children are aged 0 to 11 years and youth are aged 12 to 17 years.

A *Juristat* article released today, "[Online child sexual exploitation: A statistical profile of police-reported incidents in Canada, 2014 to 2022](#)," presents overall trends and characteristics of online sexual offences against children and online child pornography offences, based on data from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

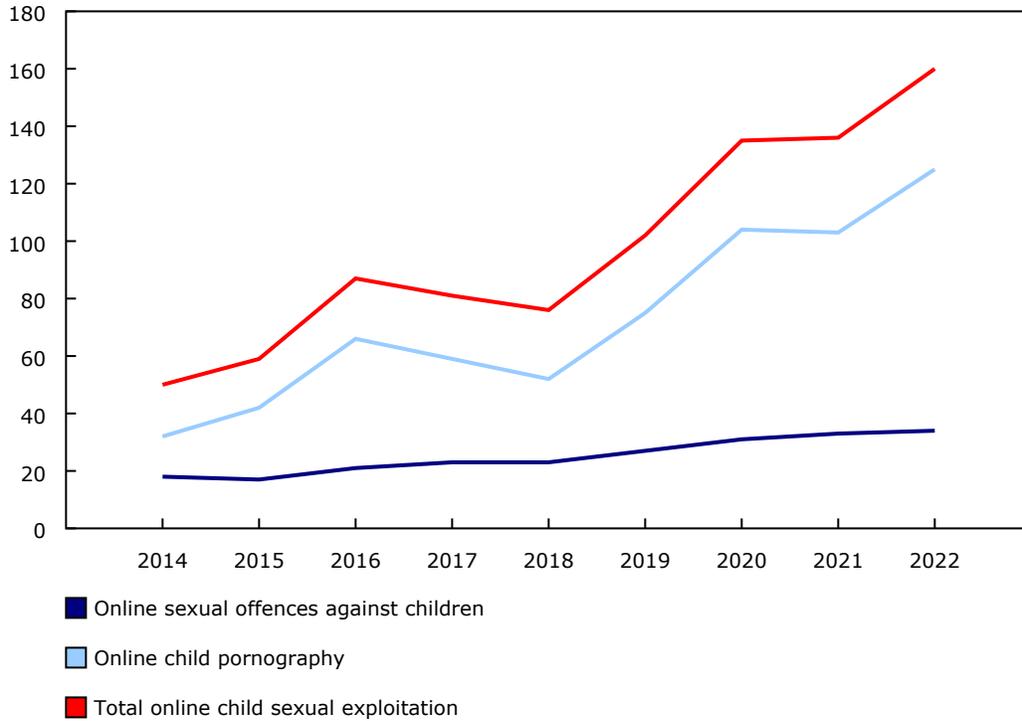
Rate of police-reported online child pornography has almost quadrupled since 2014

The overall rate of police-reported online child sexual exploitation incidents—which includes both online sexual offences against children and online child pornography—has risen since 2014, from 50 incidents per 100,000 children and youth in 2014 to 160 incidents in 2022. More specifically, this increase was driven by online child pornography reported to police, which accounted for three-quarters (75%) of all online child sexual exploitation offences. The rate of online child pornography reported to police nearly quadrupled from 2014 (32 incidents per 100,000 children and youth) to 2022 (125).



Chart 1
Police-reported incidents of online child exploitation, Canada, 2014 to 2022

rate per 100,000 children and youth



Note(s): Prior to 2020, the number of cybercrimes is an undercount, as some police services were unable to report the cybercrime indicator for all years. The data exclude the Québec City Police in 2014 and 2015, the municipal police service of Calgary from 2014 to 2016, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) from 2014 to 2017 and both the Saint John Police Force and the Canadian Forces Military Police from 2014 to 2019. For 2022, the data exclude Dryden, a detachment of the OPP. Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 children and youth aged younger than 18 years. Populations are based upon July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.
Source(s): Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

These significant increases could reflect an actual rise in this type of crime, increased awareness and reporting among the general population or more resources and training for police to better detect online child sexual exploitation—or a combination of these factors.

The survey disaggregates child pornography offences into the specific offences of "accessing or possessing child pornography" and "making or distributing child pornography." Making or distributing child pornography offences accounted for most (72%) child pornography incidents from 2014 to 2022.

Boys and men account for the vast majority of accused

Like trends in violent crime overall, especially sexual offences, boys and men accounted for the vast majority of accused persons in incidents of online sexual offences against children from 2014 to 2022. Notably, most incidents of invitation to sexual touching (97%), luring a child (96%) and possessing or accessing child pornography (90%) involved a male accused.

Non-consensual distribution of intimate images often involves a youth victim being victimized by a peer

From 2015 (when non-consensual distribution of intimate images became an offence) to 2022, there were more than 1,700 incidents of non-consensual distribution of intimate images of children and youth reported to police. Youth aged 12 to 17 years accounted for almost all (97%) victims, with the large majority (86%) of victims being girls.

Most persons accused of this offence were similar in age to the victim. Specifically, from 2015 to 2022, the median age of victims was 15 years for girls and 14 years for boys, while the median age of accused persons for this offence was 15 years for boys and 14 years for girls.

Furthermore, most victims of this offence knew their perpetrator. The most common accused-victim relationships from 2015 to 2022 were casual acquaintances (33%), current or former dating partners (28%) and friends (21%). Victims were far less likely to have been victimized by a stranger (14%).

From 2015 to 2022, girls and women represented one-quarter (25%) of persons accused in incidents of non-consensual distribution of intimate images, with almost all (95%) being aged 12 to 17 years.

Police solve two in five online sexual offences against children

From 2014 to 2022, 41% of incidents of police-reported online sexual offences against children were cleared (that is, solved) by police. Incidents were more likely to be cleared if they involved multiple violations. Of cleared incidents, three-quarters (74%) resulted in a charge being laid or recommended against an accused.

From 2018 (when more detailed clearance information became available) to 2022, clearance rates were higher for online sexual offences against children (37%) compared with child pornography offences (22%). An incident may remain uncleared (that is, unsolved) for various reasons: it could still be under investigation or there may be insufficient evidence to proceed with a charge.

One-third of online child sexual exploitation charges result in a guilty finding

From April 2014 to March 2021, criminal courts in Canada processed more than 30,000 charges related to sexual offences against children likely committed or facilitated online. In adult criminal court, around one-third (34%) of charges laid for sexual offences against children likely committed online resulted in a guilty finding, while just over 6 in 10 charges (63%) were stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged. More than three-quarters (78%) of guilty cases in adult court led to a custodial sentence.

In contrast, from April 2014 to March 2021, 44% of charges in youth court led to a guilty finding. Youth found guilty of committing an online sexual offence against children were most likely to be sentenced to probation (62%).

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Note to readers

The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), which collects data on activities that meet criminal thresholds as stipulated within the Criminal Code, is used to measure crime in Canada. While the Criminal Code does not have a specific definition for the broad crime of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, tools available in the UCR can be used in conjunction with the Criminal Code definitions to identify criminal incidents that fall within the scope of this crime. Beginning in 2014, a cybercrime indicator was introduced in the UCR to allow police services across Canada to report information relating to crime that is committed or facilitated online.

In the UCR, an incident is flagged as a cybercrime when the crime targets information and communications technology (ICT), or when ICT is used to commit the offence. To maintain consistency in measuring the cyber aspect of crime, analysis of cybercrime data is based on the most serious violation in the incident which was most likely to involve ICT.

ICT includes, but is not limited to, the Internet, computers, servers, digital technology, digital telecommunications devices, phones and networks. Crimes committed over text and through messages using social media platforms are also considered cybercrime activity.

Incidents involving child pornography where an actual child victim was not identified are reported to the UCR with the most serious violation being "child pornography." When an actual child victim is identified, the incident is reported to the UCR with the most serious violation being sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or other sexual violations against children, and child pornography may be reported as a secondary violation.

The category "other sexual offences against children" is an aggregate category that encompasses all sexual violations against children (excluding child pornography), such as sexual interference, sexual exploitation or sexual assault, which were facilitated by or involved the use of technology.

There are limitations to police-reported data. Self-reported victimization surveys show that only a small fraction of sexual offences is reported to the police. Sexual offences involving children and youth are even more likely to be underreported due to young victims not recognizing online sexual exploitation and having to rely on an adult to report the incident. As such, police-reported data likely underestimate the true extent of this form of abuse in Canada. However, the data presented in this article provide a national reference point for informing policies and programs aimed at combatting this crime.

With respect to court statistics, a completed charge refers to a formal accusation against an accused person or company involving a federal statute offence that was processed by the courts and received a final decision.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3302](#).

The article "[Online child sexual exploitation: A statistical profile of police-reported incidents in Canada, 2014 to 2022](#)," 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).