

Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada before and after #MeToo, 2016 and 2017

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Following the widespread #MeToo social media movement in October 2017, police-reported sexual assaults in Canada increased sharply. There were 25% more victims of police-reported sexual assault in the three months after #MeToo first went viral (October to December 2017) compared with an average three-month period leading up to #MeToo (January 2016 to September 2017). The average number of police-reported sexual assault victims went from 59 per day before #MeToo to 74 per day after #MeToo.

In this study, police-reported sexual assaults refer to incidents that were reported to police and then classified by police as a founded criminal offence.

This sharp increase in police-reported sexual assaults following the #MeToo movement does not necessarily reflect a rise in the prevalence of sexual assaults in Canada, but is likely attributable to a combination of factors, including an increased willingness of victims to report to police. Other factors include a heightened awareness among Canadians of what constitutes a sexual assault and public announcements by police services to encourage victims to report. Further, changes in policing practices for classifying sexual assaults following national media coverage on unfounded cases in Canada may have affected the number of police-reported sexual assaults.

This *Daily* article is based on the *Juristat* article released today, entitled "[Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada before and after #MeToo, 2016 and 2017](#)," which examines the shifts in volume and characteristics of police-reported sexual assaults in the wake of #MeToo. The article uses 2016 and 2017 data provided by police and groups sexual assault incidents into two key time periods: those reported to police during the pre-#MeToo period (January 1, 2016, to September 30, 2017) and those reported post-#MeToo (October 1 to December 31, 2017—the most recent data available).

Number of victims of police-reported sexual assault increases sharply after #MeToo

Data provided by police services in Canada show a marked increase in the number of victims of founded sexual assaults during October 2017—the same month that #MeToo went viral—with nearly 2,500 victims of sexual assault. The number of sexual assaults reported by police in October and November 2017 was higher than in any other calendar month since comparable data became available in 2009.

As a result of the increase in the last three months of the year, the number of police-reported sexual assaults in 2017 reached its highest level since 1998.

See the chart "[Victims of police-reported sexual assault, by month reported to police, Canada, 2016 and 2017](#)."

In October 2017, after #MeToo went viral on social media, there were 29% more reported victims of sexual assault than in September 2017, and 46% more victims than in October 2016. Overall, the number of reported victims was up 38%, from 4,912 in the fourth quarter of 2016 to 6,766 in the fourth quarter of 2017—the three months after #MeToo went viral.

Quebec records largest increase in rate of reported sexual assaults after #MeToo

As is the case for most violent crimes, police-reported sexual assault rates were highest in the three territories, both before and after #MeToo. Quebec had the largest increase in rate post-#MeToo, rising 61%, from 12.4 to 20.0 victims per 100,000 population. Newfoundland and Labrador (+36%) recorded the second largest increase, followed by Manitoba (+27%). In contrast, parts of the territories saw a decrease.

Nationally, the rate of police-reported sexual assaults rose 24% after #MeToo, from 15.0 to 18.6 victims per 100,000 population.



See the map ["Percent change in rate of police-reported sexual assaults after #MeToo, by province or territory, Canada, 2016 and 2017."](#)

Increases in police-reported sexual assaults after #MeToo were more common in major cities and urban areas. For instance, the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Québec (+78%), Sherbrooke (+76%), Brantford (+76%), Saguenay (+69%) and Montréal (+67%) had the highest increases among CMAs. While rural Canada had consistently higher rates of sexual assault compared with urban areas both before and after #MeToo, the rate increase after #MeToo in urban areas (+27%) was more than double the rise in rural areas (+12%).

New initiatives were also introduced by some police services to encourage reporting of sexual assaults. For example, in October 2017, the Montréal Police Service implemented and advertised a dedicated hotline for reporting sexual assaults. Other police services in Quebec also urged victims to come forward around this time, and this may have driven the large increase in the number of victims reported in Quebec.

After #MeToo: Three in four police-reported sexual assaults had taken place in the previous month

One possible explanation for the increase in police-reported sexual assaults after #MeToo was that victims who had been assaulted in the past were now coming forward. Data show that most sexual assaults that came to the attention of police—whether before or after #MeToo—had occurred somewhat recently. About half of sexual assaults were reported to police the same day they occurred (51% pre- and 47% post-#MeToo), and overall, about three-quarters were reported within one month after they took place (77% pre- and 73% post-#MeToo).

Overall, police did not receive a notable influx of reports for sexual assaults that took place more than one month prior to #MeToo. That said, the number of reported cases more than a decade old rose sharply (+92%), from an average of 284 per quarter pre-#MeToo, to 544 per quarter post-#MeToo. These incidents, however, were generally infrequent and represented 8% of reported assaults.

Rate of police-reported sexual assaults highest among teenage girls before and after #MeToo

As has been the case historically, about 9 in 10 victims of police-reported sexual assaults were female, both pre- and post-#MeToo. Young women and girls under the age of 25 continued to be overrepresented among victims, accounting for over half of victims before (55%) and after (56%) #MeToo.

Average quarterly rates of police-reported sexual assaults were highest among girls aged 15 to 17, both before and after #MeToo. Their rate of reported sexual assaults rose 32%, from an average of 145.3 per 100,000 in the pre-#MeToo period to 191.5 per 100,000 following #MeToo.

More sexual assaults reported after #MeToo where the victims knew their assailant

Four in five (80%) victims of police-reported sexual assaults in 2016 and 2017 knew the person accused of victimizing them. After #MeToo, the number of such victims rose 30%, five times the increase seen for victims who were sexually assaulted by a stranger (+6%).

Specifically, after #MeToo there were notable increases in police-reported sexual assaults involving a casual acquaintance (+28%), a friend or roommate (+35%), or a business relationship (+65%). This last group, however, represented a small proportion of reported sexual assaults (6% post-#MeToo). A business relationship refers to, for example, co-workers, service providers, or patrons and clients of public services.

Increase in reported sexual assaults on school grounds after #MeToo

Although sexual assaults occurring on school property (5%) accounted for a minority of sexual assaults reported by police in 2016 and 2017, they had one of the largest volume increases following #MeToo, up 59% from the fourth quarter of 2016 to the fourth quarter of 2017. Reported sexual assaults occurring on school property mostly occurred in non-postsecondary institutions, such as high schools, rather than in universities and colleges.

Note to readers

This article uses two years of police-reported data (2016 and 2017) from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, and includes incidents where a sexual assault (level 1, 2, or 3) was the most serious violation in the incident. Because there can be more than one criminal offence in a single incident, the most serious of these offences is used to represent the incident. This means that sexual assault was the most serious (or the only) offence in the sexual assault incidents analyzed.

Average quarterly sexual assault rates per 100,000 population are used in this report in order to make comparisons between pre- and post-#MeToo. Consequently, the rates provided herein are not directly comparable to other Statistics Canada publications which typically use annual rates.

Police-reported crimes capture only those incidents that were reported to police and classified as a founded criminal offence, namely, where it was determined through police investigation that a crime took place. This excludes incidents reported to police that were deemed 'unfounded'. Overall, in 2016 and 2017, 17% of police-reported sexual assault incidents were classified as unfounded. The proportion of unfounded sexual assaults began declining in February 2017, and continued to decrease after #MeToo to 12%. More information on unfounded sexual assaults is available in "Unfounded criminal incidents in Canada, 2017" and "Revising the classification of founded and unfounded criminal incidents in the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey."

For information on sexual assaults beyond those reported by police, please refer to the following report: "[Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014](#)."

As has historically been the case, the vast majority of sexual assaults that were reported by police in 2016 and 2017 were level 1 offences (98%), which typically involve some or no physical injury to the victim. The remaining 2% were level 2 or 3 sexual assaults, which are more violent and involve bodily harm or endangering the life of the victim. There was no change in these proportions after #MeToo.

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

The article "[Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada before and after #MeToo, 2016 and 2017](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat* ([85-002-X](#)). The infographic "[Before and after #MeToo: A look at police-reported sexual assaults in Canada](#)" ([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).