

Sexual violence in our community – The City of Hamilton

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Some facts:

- 1 in 3 women experience sexual assault in their lifetime.
- 1 in 6 men experience sexual assault in their lifetime.
- Trans-individuals (trans women and trans men) are at higher risk of sexual violence¹. Existing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize and minimize sexual violence against women, girls², as well as trans and non-binary persons³.
- Sexual crimes are by far the most common offence against girls⁴. For boys, being under 12 years old heightens their vulnerability to being targeted for sexual offences⁵.
- Indigenous and people of color in Canada are at increased risk of violence: for example, a Canadian national inquiry found that Indigenous women and girls are 16 times more likely to be killed or to disappear than white women⁶.

Crime statistics, however, only reflect a small minority of the GBV that occurs. Most sexual violence cases do not engage the criminal justice system⁷. This means that the prevalence of sexual violence in Ontario is in fact much higher than the numbers shown here.

History of our services and increasing resource challenge

- SACHA has been operating in the region since 1975.
- Since that time, we have provided many years of prevention education, advocacy and support for survivors in the region.
- During this time, the number of survivors wanting to access the crisis counselling and long term counselling programs has increased:
 - In 2019, SACHA's waitlist for counselling reached an all time high of 11 months for counselling services
 - Currently (November 2022) SACHA's waitlist for counselling sits at 5 months
 - As we return to in person services, the demand counselling services will grow
- Budget pressures have meant the number of FTE staff providing crisis and counselling support at our centre has shrunk, instead of increasing to meet rising needs.
- Our centre supports survivors of recent sexual violence, as well as survivors of historical sexual violence: for example, child sexual abuse, or adult sexual assault that occurred many weeks, months or years before.
- In the gender based violence sector, under resourced agencies like ours must compete for project-based funding, spending scarce resources to repeatedly write grants, rather than having basic costs of operation increases to our base budgets.

¹ Factor & Rothblum, (2007).

² World Health Organization. *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Online: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf

³ TransPulse Ontario

⁴ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Released on February 25, 2013. *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends*. p. 15

⁵ Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006, Statistics Canada

⁶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Report released June 2019. Online: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>

⁷ Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html

- Training and recruiting staff is difficult in our sector, with highly specialized skills and low wages and benefits relative to other mental health funded positions.

No increased funding from provincial government again this year despite increased service demand from pandemic

- Awareness of sexual violence is increasing—a significant and positive achievement. More and more, survivors of violence are reaching out for support. Since 2014, sexual assault centres across Ontario have seen a significant influx of new referrals, crisis line calls and intake for counselling services.
- Most existing Ontario sexual assault centres have been operating in Ontario since the 1990s. During this time, the number of survivors accessing crisis counselling and long term counselling or therapy programs has multiplied—in some regions by up to 4 times⁸; yet funding has simply not kept pace.
- Instead, Ontario sexual assault centres have seen cuts, (5% 1995) nominal increases (2004-2005, an annualized 5% increase to re-instate the previous government’s cutback; 3% 2007-2008) and some small increases connected to provincial action plans (2011, 2015) that were not always continued.
- In 2018, the then-Ontario government announced an approximately 30% increase to the sexual violence sector in Ontario. The 2018 announcement would have realized a significant increase for Ontario’s community-based sexual assault centres. Despite this commitment, under the current provincial government, the [funding increase never became reality](#).
- In its 2021 budget, Ontario allocated some positive investments to address gender-based violence. The budget also saw some investment in victim services – 2.1 million over 3 years to improve victim and new sexual assault services in three underserved Ontario locations
- Of these dollars, however, none find their way directly to Ontario’s existing sexual assault centres such as SACHA.

Legal barriers to sexual assault are not getting better

- In September 2019, Statistics Canada released its findings of *Incident-based crime statistics*⁹ in Canada. These statistics – aligning with our experiences – reveal that sexual assault in Ontario rose from 7,434 police-reported incidences in 2016 and 8,782 in 2017 to 10,634 in 2018 — a year over year increase of almost 19%. The *Incident-based crime statistics* draws on data¹⁰ on police reported crimes.
- As many sexual violence survivors choose not to engage the criminal justice system¹¹, this means that the prevalence of sexual violence in Ontario is in fact far higher.
- The majority of all reported sexual assault cases are simply not resolved through the criminal justice system. According to Canadian research¹², 33 out of every 1,000 sexual assault cases are reported to the police, and just 29 are actually recorded as a crime. These numbers speak volumes about how many are not held accountable, as well as why survivors may be afraid to report.

⁸ Provided by Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services in December 2021.

⁹ Statistics Canada. *Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, Canada, provinces, territories and Census Metropolitan Areas*. Data release - July 22, 2019. Online:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510017701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.16&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.16>

¹⁰ The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), in co-operation with the policing community, collects police-reported crime statistics through the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR). The UCR Survey was designed to measure the incidence of crime in Canadian society and its characteristics. See [this link](#) for more information on the data collected in the survey.

¹¹ Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html

¹² Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html

- At present, police services in our region receive reports from a minority of survivors we work with, year over year. We know that nationally only 6% or less report sexual violence to police.
- Our centre has always provided support to survivors of sexual violence who are reporting to the police, as well as those who choose *not to report* (or who do not see their case proceed through the system). In this, our centre is seeing far many more sexual violence cases than is apparent to the local criminal justice system in our region, or apparent to the public.
- We encourage municipalities to consult with gender based violence agencies regarding community wellness and safety planning, not simply with police, for these reasons.

Impact of the pandemic

- The economic fallout from business closures, job loss and other impacts can also lead to increased risk for intimate partner violence, risky coping strategies including survival sex, and increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse¹³.
- Crisis events such as pandemics tend to worsen pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities. Racialized communities, those living in poverty “and other groups that have traditionally been marginalized, tend to be harmed by a disaster more” than others¹⁴.
- The Learning Network on Violence Against Women notes that “recommended public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 such as social/physical distancing and the closure of non-essential services may increase exposure to violence (e.g. intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child maltreatment), in addition to changing the landscape of support-seeking”¹⁵.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for SACHA’s Crisis Support Program. At the onset of the pandemic the telephone support line saw a dramatic increase in calls from April 2020 to September 2020. As the pandemic has continued, so have the calls for support, along with an increased frequency of calls and the length of calls for support. We have seen a 29% increase in calls.
- SACHA expanded our support services to include a WebChat & Text Service. Which has meant greater accessibility and an increase to the ways through which survivors of sexual violence and their allies can receive support and information from SACHA. This expansion of services has come without increased funding.

Further information and reading

Ontario Sexual Assault Centres and funding:

- For past work of efforts to ensure financial stability of the sector see: <https://sexualassaultsupport.ca/tag/survivorscantwait/>
- <https://sexualassaultsupport.ca/ontario-budget-2021-and-gender-based-violence-spending-ontario-coalition-of-rape-crisis-centres-ocrcc-responds/>

Gender-based violence and sexual violence in Canada:

- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510017701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.16&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.16> (Ontario)
- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.htm>

¹³ Global Protection Cluster GBV Protection and Response and Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Last updated: 6 April 2020. *Identifying & Mitigating Gender-based Violence Risks within the COVID-19 Response*. Online: <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Interagency-GBV-risk-mitigation-and-Covid-tipsheet.pdf>: 10.

¹⁴ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2015. Unseen, unheard: Gender-based violence in disasters. Online: https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201511/1297700_GBV_in_Disasters_EN_LR2.pdf: 16

¹⁵ The Learning Network on Violence Against Women. *Resources on Gender-Based Violence and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Online: <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/Resources%20on%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20and%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic.html>