

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children

FACT SHEET

2008 Safe School Social Responsibility Survey for Secondary Students

8% of students said they had been forced or threatened into unwanted sexual activity. 52% were female, 48% were male

Of these 8%:
Grade 10 students had the highest incidence rate (25%), while grade 8 students had the lowest (16%)

43% were Caucasian, followed by Mixed Ethnicity (13%) and Asian (12%)

29% felt they did not have an adult in their family to talk to compared to 12% of the general student population

21% did not feel safe in their community compared to only 5% among the general population of students

Sexual abuse of a child happens when children are used for the sexual gratification of an adult, older adolescent, or someone else in a position of authority over the child. Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that occurs when a child engages in sexual activity, usually through manipulation or coercion, in exchange for items, such as money, drugs, food, or shelter.

Children who are sexually exploited are not prostitutes or criminals, but victims of abuse. Sexual exploitation may lead to life-long illness and disability. Most individuals affected by sexual abuse and exploitation require professional intervention from physicians and mental health professionals to aid in their recovery.

What does the law say about child sexual abuse and exploitation?

The Canadian Criminal Code has different sections designed to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Sections 151 to 153 state that behavior becomes sexually abusive or exploitive when any sort of sexual touching, directly or indirectly, occurs to any part of a young persons' body. The punishment for an indictable offense includes a maximum prison sentence of 10 years to a minimum of 45 days. The punishment for a summary conviction is a maximum prison sentence of 18 months to a minimum of 14 days. The [Criminal Code](#) can be viewed on-line.

An important global instrument for guiding the protection of children's rights against sexual abuse and exploitation is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Specific reference to sexual exploitation can be found in articles 19 and 34. The [UNCRC](#) can be viewed on-line.

What is the age of consent?

As of May 1, 2008 through the *Tackling Violent Crime Act*, the legal age of sexual consent in Canada was raised from 14 to 16 years. However, the act also specifies that the legal age of sexual consent is even higher (18 years) when a younger individual is in a relationship that is potentially exploitative in nature. If the exploitative relationship includes factors like prostitution, pornography, or if it occurs with an adult with whom the child is reliant on (e.g. authority figures like teachers and coaches) than the age of consent is 18 years. Each individual case needs to be considered according to its own merit; therefore, it is in the best interests of young people, parents, and professionals to fully understand the implications of these variations. For questions and guidance concerning a specific situation, community members can contact their local police service.

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Help Lines and Referral Information

Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Services

1.800.663.1441
604.660.9382

BC Crisis Line (24 hr)

www.crisiscentre.bc.ca
1.866.661.3311
604.872.3311

Children's Helpline

604.310.5225

Identifying Child Exploitation

604.859.5225

National Centre for Mission and Exploited Children

www.missingkids.com
1.800.THE-LOST (843.5678)

National Runaway Hotline

1.800.680.4264

Rape Relief Line

www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca
1.604.872.8212

Youth Against Violence Line

1.800.680.4268

Cybertip

www.cybertip.ca

Centre for Public Safety and Criminal Justice Research

33844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC
V2S 7M8
604 854-4553
<http://cjr.ufv.ca>

How many children are sexually abused and exploited?

In 2003, 3% of the child maltreatment cases in Canada (excluding Quebec) were sexual in nature. In actual numbers, this refers to about 3,000 confirmed, rather than suspected, cases. Sexual assault is a crime that is largely committed against children and youth given that 61% of all sexual assaults reported to police have a child or youth as the victim. It is difficult to determine the actual extent of the problem in Canada as many instances are left unreported since victims may be fearful, confused, or unwilling to talk about their experience.

Who is at-risk for abuse?

There are three main areas that increase the likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation. Environmental factors stem from societal attitudes, poverty, and socio-economics. Children and youth have little control over environmental factors. There are also situations or events arising from family dysfunction, school experiences, and sexual behaviors that have a more direct effect on children. In these cases, children may have some degree of control over their circumstance. Finally, internal forces, both cognitive and psychological, may influence low self-esteem or depression in children, creating further vulnerability to risk for sexual exploitation and abuse.

What types of prevention and intervention methods are useful?

Education is an important way to prevent harm. Various programs are designed to empower young people, and to teach community members about how to recognize individuals and situations in order to protect children from abuse. Those working with children and youth should familiarize themselves with specific strategies and initiatives. [UNICEF](http://www.unicef.org) has identified a variety of resources to protect children from this form of violence and abuse. In addition, [Expect Respect](http://www.expectrespect.ca) is a school-based program to promote safe and healthy relationships.

The *BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect and Responding to Child Welfare Concerns* is available free of charge by contacting www.mcf.gov.bc.ca.

Learning how to safely navigate the internet and electronic devices, along with internet tip-lines, such as Cybertip, are emerging as a best practice in combating the on-line sexual exploitation of children. An important goal of a prevention plan is to keep the issue of the sexual abuse and exploitation at the forefront of peoples' minds so that the idea of exploitation for individual or commercial gain becomes socially, economically, and politically unacceptable.