

SEXUAL ASSAULT
HAPPENS
AND IS DEEPLY DAMAGING

Ask for help

Québec 

WHAT IS A SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Whether you are a victim, the loved one of a victim, or a resource person, understanding the issue of sexual assault is essential. Below is important information to help you.

A definition

“Sexual assault is an act that is sexual in nature, with or without physical contact, committed by an individual without the consent of the victim or in some cases through emotional manipulation or blackmail, especially when children are involved. It is an act that subjects another person to the perpetrator’s desires through an abuse of power and/or the use of force or coercion, accompanied by implied or explicit threats. Sexual assault is an attack on one’s basic rights, including the right to physical integrity and physical and psychological safety.”¹

THIS DEFINITION APPLIES REGARDLESS OF...

- ♦ The age, sex, culture, origin, civil status, religion, or sexual orientation of the victim or sexual perpetrator
- ♦ The nature of the sexual act
- ♦ The location or environment in which the sexual act takes place
- ♦ The relationship between the victim and sexual perpetrator

SEXUAL ASSAULT ALSO ENCOMPASSES TERMS SUCH AS

- ♦ Sexual abuse, sexual offense, sexual touching without consent, incest, juvenile prostitution and pornography, and rape

**IT IS
TOTALLY
UNACCEPTABLE
AND CRIMINAL!**

**SEXUAL ASSAULT IS
UNACCEPTABLE
REGARDLESS OF THE TYPE
OF ASSAULT, THE ACT,
THE SITUATION, THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUALS,
OR THE CIRCUMSTANCES.
ALL ACTS AND TYPES OF
SEXUAL ASSAULT
ARE CRIMINAL.
AND ALL SEXUAL ACTS
AGAINST INDIVIDUALS UNDER 16
ARE CONSIDERED TO BE
“WITHOUT CONSENT”
AND THEREFORE CRIMINAL.***

Sexual assault is a **CRIMINAL ACT** because the victim is not consenting or is not old enough to consent. In almost all cases, sexual assault has devastating consequences for the victim.

¹ *Les orientations gouvernementales en matière d'agression sexuelle*, Government of Québec, 2001.

*The Criminal Code of Canada provides an exception, whereby fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds can consent to sex provided that their partner is less than five years older than they are, is not in a position of authority or trust over them, is not someone upon whom they are dependent, and is not abusing them. Twelve- and thirteen-year-olds may consent if their partner is less than two years older than they are and the preceding conditions are met.



MAIN TYPES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault can take many forms. Acts and the degree of violence used can vary.

SEXUAL KISSING

TOUCHING

breasts, thighs, buttocks, penis, vulva, anus

MASTURBATION

of the person by the offender or of the offender by the person

ORAL AND GENITAL CONTACT

FELLATIO: intromission of the offender's penis into the victim's mouth or the victim's penis into the offender's mouth

CUNNILINGUS: mouth contact with the genital organs of a girl or woman

PENETRATION

vaginal or anal penetration by the penis, fingers, or objects

EXHIBITIONISM

the act of showing one's genitals in public

FROTTEURISM

the practice of achieving physical contact with non-consenting individuals in public places (e.g., trying to rub the sexual organs of strangers on the bus)

VOYEURISM

the practice of observing the sexual acts or naked bodies of others

SIGNIFICANT STATISTICS²

In Québec **5,341 SEXUAL OFFENSES** were registered by police in 2008. Many fall under the Criminal Code of Canada, notably sexual assault, sexual touching or invitation to sexual touching with children under 16, sexual abuse of a teen 14 to 18 years old, and incest. Since March 1, 2008, they have also included corrupting children, luring a child via computer, and voyeurism.

The sexual offenses were mainly sexual assaults, numbering **4,283**. Other sexual offenses totaled **1,058**.

34% of sexual offenses registered in 2008 were reported to police the same day they were committed, while 20% were reported over a year after being committed.

83% of victims were female
53% young girls under 18
30% adult women
15% young boys under 18
2% adult men

68% of victims were under 18
10% 5 or under
21% 6 to 12
21% 12 to 14
16% 15 to 17
13% 18 to 24
19% 25 or older

39% Nearly seven out of ten victims (69%) were assaulted in a private residence. Of this number, were assaulted in the residence where they lived with the perpetrator
22% were assaulted in the residence where they lived
26% were assaulted in the perpetrator's residence

8 Just over out of ten victims (81%) knew the perpetrator:
 For:
27% of victims, the perpetrator was a mere acquaintance
13% a parent or step-parent
12% a brother or sister
8% a spouse, ex-spouse, intimate friend, or ex-intimate friend
6% a distant relative
6% a friend
5% a symbol of authority
4% a business associate

C hildren, compared to adults, were more often assaulted by
 ♦ An immediate family member (parent, step-parent, brother, or sister) (33% compared to 9%)
 ♦ A member of the extended family (7% compared to 3%)
 ♦ A person in a position of authority (6% compared to 2%)

N early three out of ten victims (29%) were physically injured when assaulted.

T he alleged perpetrators of these sexual assaults were mainly male (98%) and mainly adults in terms of age (77%):
21% were age 12 to 17
12% were age 18 to 24
17% were age 25 to 34
21% were age 35 to 44
15% were age 45 to 54
12% were 55 or older

² 2008 *Statistics on Sexual Assault in Québec*,
 Ministère de la Sécurité publique, December 2009.

A DIFFICULT SITUATION THAT HAS TO BE REPORTED

Certain studies paint an even bleaker picture. They maintain that sexual assaults are the offenses least reported to police. Why? Because of the shame or **FEAR** felt by victims as well as the taboos, myths, and **PREJUDICES** surrounding these crimes that keep them from being reported.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?

In light of the 2008 police statistics, we can assert that

- ♦ The victims were mainly women and children
- ♦ Over **EIGHT OUT OF TEN** (81%) knew their perpetrator
- ♦ The majority (69%) were assaulted in a private residence
- ♦ Nearly three out of ten (29%) were physically **INJURED**

WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES

of sexual assault, victims are **not responsible!** The reality is that it can happen to anyone—a child, a teen, or an adult of any age. But victims are never responsible, no matter how they're dressed, the state they're in, or how they behave.

HOW CAN SEXUAL PERPETRATORS BE CHARACTERIZED?

EVERYDAY CITIZENS

Perpetrators are generally people of sound mind who know their victims and take advantage of their trust relationships or positions of authority with them to sexually assault them. A perpetrator could be a relative, a sports coach, teacher, employer, colleague, client, spouse, family member, friend, consulted professional, or mere acquaintance.

Taking into account the **5,341** sexual assaults registered in Québec in 2008, here's what we can say about the perpetrators:

- ♦ In over eight out of ten cases, the victims **KNEW** their perpetrator
- ♦ In **98%** of cases, the perpetrators were male
- ♦ In **77%** of cases, the perpetrators were adults
- ♦ In **70%** of cases, the perpetrators committed their crime in a private residence (generally their own or that of their victims)

Remember that only perpetrators can be held accountable for their sexual assaults.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO STOP SEXUAL ASSAULT

The key words are vigilance, information, and awareness. To stop sexual assault, we need to help both children and adults to better *understand* it. We also need to work on achieving *equality* between men and women and boys and girls in society, as this lowers the risk of sexual assault. Let's be vigilant and remember that...

- ♦ Among **YOUNG GIRLS**, sexual assault is most often committed in the family environment by an uncle, a cousin, a brother, a friend, the father, the mother's spouse, etc.
- ♦ Among **YOUNG BOYS**, sexual assault occurs more often outside the family environment and is committed by a sports coach, teacher, camp leader, etc.
- ♦ Generally speaking, perpetrators are almost exclusively male and mainly adults of sound mind, such as a spouse, friend, acquaintance, consulted professional, colleague, employer, classmate, neighbor, or family member.
- ♦ Certain groups of women are more at risk of sexual assault, notably young women, aboriginal women, prostitutes, and homeless women, while other groups are more vulnerable, including disabled women, women in cultural communities, and elderly women.

THE ROLE OF LOVED ONES

Following a sexual assault, victims may react differently. Their **REACTIONS** may be affected by various factors, including their age, their personality, the type of sexual assault they endured, their relationship with their perpetrator, the degree of violence used, and the frequency of the assault.

The initial reactions of victims in a state of shock may include the following:

**ANGER AND
AGGRESSIVENESS
TOWARD THOSE AROUND
THEM OVER TRIVIAL MATTERS**

INTENSE FEAR

DEPRESSION, SADNESS

**FREQUENT
MOOD SWING**

SLEEP DISORDERS

EATING DISORDERS

**LOWER TOLERANCE
THRESHOLD IN
SITUATIONS PERCEIVED
AS A THREAT TO
THEIR SAFETY**

DISORGANIZATION, ANXIETY

ISOLATION

The **SUPPORT** of family and friends plays an important role in the healing process of sexual assault victims. Below is the recommended approach to dealing with people who have been sexually assaulted.³

Listen

Listen to what victims have to say without passing judgment. Let them express themselves in their own words, in their own way, at their own pace.

Believe

Believe what victims tell you. It's what they perceive happened to them. You should focus on what they say and experience.

Acknowledge

Acknowledge what victims say without minimizing or exaggerating the facts, emotions, or consequences.

Encourage their strength

Back up victims' positive steps forward by focusing on their strength and courage to talk about it.

Alleviate the guilt

Make victims understand that the sexual assault was in no way their fault. The perpetrators are entirely responsible for their actions. The victims' responsibility is taking care of themselves.

Help them reclaim their autonomy

Help victims take back control of their life while you remain in the picture. Give them space to breathe and get back to their usual routine.

Validate their emotions

Help victims express what they feel by reassuring them that their reactions, emotions, and feelings of anger, resentment, guilt, and low self-esteem are normal. Everyone is entitled to respect for their integrity; sexual assault is unacceptable and criminal.

Aid and guide them

Let victims know you are available to talk to or guide them. It is important to tell them that there are also resources available to help them. Refer them to these resources, or get assistance yourself from these resources.

³ *Information Guide for Sexual Assault Victims*, Table de concertation sur les agressions sexuelles de Montréal (a Montréal coordinating group on sexual assault), 2008.

OBLIGATION TO REPORT

Protecting children is a collective responsibility. Under the Youth Protection Act, everyone is required to file a report with the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) if they have reasonable cause to believe that a child under 18 is a victim of sexual abuse or is at serious risk of becoming a victim.

All sexual abuse situations, with or without physical contact, must be reported to the DYP immediately, regardless of who the perpetrator is and the means used by the parents to correct the situation.

Contact the Director of Youth Protection on your area.

SPEAKING OUT IS ESSENTIAL!

To talk about your sexual assault is not always an easy decision, but sexual assault is a crime that happens and can happen again, in part, because of the code of silence. If you seek help as quickly as possible, the consequences of your assault will be minimized and you won't have to bear the burden alone anymore.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CAN LEAD TO OVERWHELMING PAIN. IT'S IMPORTANT TO ACT QUICKLY!

Generally speaking, victims may experience...

PHYSICAL problems, such as headaches, fatigue, sleep disorders, nightmares, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, injuries, or pain

PSYCHOLOGICAL problems, such as sadness, depression, feelings of guilt, anger, rage, fear, low self-esteem, shame, and discouragement, thoughts of suicide, or self-mutilation

EATING disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia

ADDICTION to alcohol, drugs, gambling, or medication

RELATIONSHIP difficulties with family, friends, or their spouse

Frustration or **ANXIETY** over legal proceedings or court testimony

FINANCIAL, social, or family problems, such as loss of income, problems at work, or rejection by friends

These various reactions may occur over a relatively long period of time, starting immediately following the sexual assault or several years later. Getting help as quickly as possible helps minimize the consequences and put an end to isolation.

HELP, INFORMATION, AND REFERRALS

Whatever your age, condition, or gender and whether you are a victim of sexual assault, a loved one, or a resource person, you can obtain help and information at any time. A number of professionals in public, parapublic, and community networks are specially trained to provide you with support.

HELP, INFORMATION, REFERRALS

Referrals to all assistance and protection resources.
Toll free, available 24 hours a day,
seven days a week, anywhere in Quebec.

1-888-933-9007 or **514-933-9007**

POLICE for immediate assistance

911

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES CENTER (CSSS)

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca

A CSSS consists of one or more CLSCs, residential and long term care centers (CHSLDs) and, in most cases, a hospital center. For contact information for the CSSS in your area, visit the website.

QUÉBEC GROUP OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT CENTERS (RQCALACS)

1-877-717-5252

www.rqcalacs.qc.ca

RQCALACS is a coalition of CALACS that rallies individuals and groups to end sexual assault and fosters social and political change.

CRIME VICTIMS ASSISTANCE CENTER (CAVAC)

1-866-LE CAVAC (1-866-532-2822)

www.cavac.qc.ca

CAVAC provides free and confidential assistance and guidance services to anyone who has been the victim of a crime committed in Québec, their loved ones, and witnesses of a criminal act.

WEBSITE

www.SexualAssaults.gov.qc.ca

MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca

www.scf.gouv.qc.ca

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