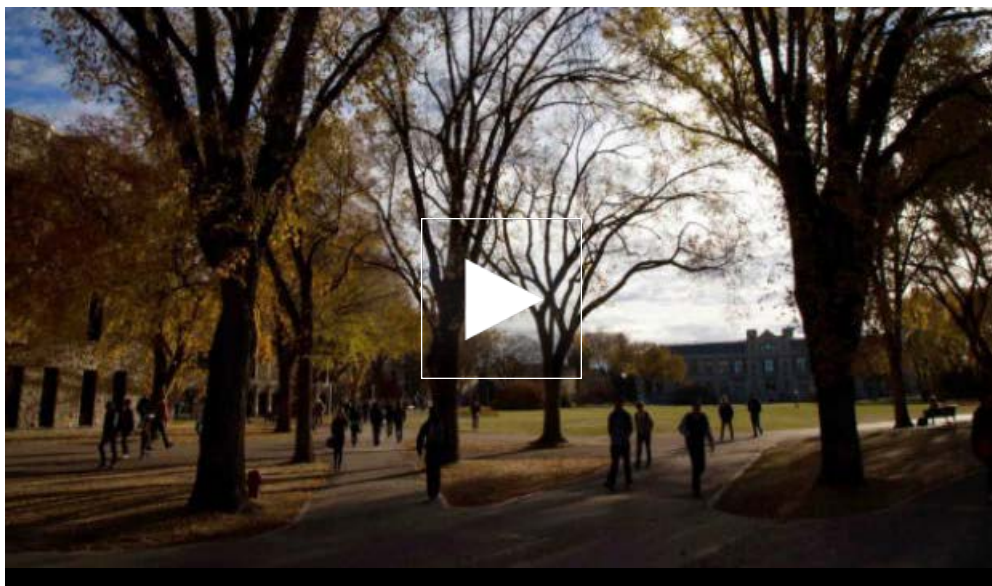


EXCLUSIVE | Sex assault reporting on Canadian campuses worryingly low, say experts

CBC News contacted 87 university and major colleges across Canada to request data

By Timothy Sawa and Lori Ward, CBC News | Posted: Feb 06, 2015 8:29 PM ET | Last Updated: Feb 09, 2015 10:58 PM ET



Sexual assault on campus 4:46

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Sex assault reports on Canadian campuses too low: experts 2:38

An exclusive CBC News investigation has revealed that more than 700 sexual assaults were reported to Canadian universities and colleges over the past five years. The investigation also discovered that the numbers vary widely from school to school, even when adjusted for population.

Overall, experts say the number of sexual assaults reported to Canadian post-secondary schools is surprisingly low, and an indication that they are doing a poor job of encouraging students to come forward.

"I find [the numbers] laughingly low," says Lee Lakeman with



Acadia University in Wolfville, N.S., has the most reports of sexual assault when the data is adjusted for population.

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the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter and a leading voice on the issue of violence against women.

"It's just not that possible that they're that low. I can get more reports of sexual assault by walking across the street on a campus [and asking students directly]."

Over the course of six months, CBC News contacted 87 university and major colleges across Canada to request the number of sexual assaults reported on each campus to the institution between 2009 and 2013.

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Over that five-year period, more sexual assaults were reported to Ryerson University in Toronto than any other university or college in Canada, according to the survey conducted by CBC News. When the data is adjusted for population, Nova Scotia's Acadia University has the highest number of reports.

Seventy-seven schools provided a complete set of data broken down by calendar year, but 10 did not.

At Ryerson University, which is situated in downtown Toronto, 57 assaults were reported to the university between 2009 and 2013. In 2013, Ryerson had a full-time student population of almost 24,000.

"Regarding the data, unfortunately, there is little consistency in how Canadian post-secondary institutions collect and report sexual assault data," the university told CBC News in a statement. "[At Ryerson] we also collect data that includes non-community members reporting incidents that have happened within our precinct, which extends over a large area of downtown Toronto. In light of these inconsistencies in data collection and reporting across Ontario, universities are working together to developing common definition and data. We believe it's important to have clear, consistent, comparable information to better address this very important issue."

Acadia University in Wolfville, N.S. saw 22 reports of sexual assault over five years. When adjusted for population, it has the highest rate of reporting in the country.

"Inter-institutional comparisons have little meaning since each individual campus has its own unique set of circumstances including the size of the community in which it is located and the variances inherent in reporting requirements," adds Acadia University, in a statement.

"The CBC has chosen to ignore the flaws inherent in its research in an effort to present comparative data with no relevance to many of the universities in its survey sample. Presenting comparative data on a per 10,000 student basis has no relevance for a university campus with only 3,500 full time students unless it is a deliberate effort by reporters to sensationalize an otherwise extraordinarily important and complex issue."

Stats can have dual meaning

Experts say the figures can have more than one meaning, and for that reason caution against coming to conclusions based on the raw data or



Click on the graphic to see school-by-school data from the CBC News survey. (CBC)



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the per-capita comparisons.

While schools with higher numbers could have a higher rate of sexual assault compared to other campuses, it could also mean the school is doing a better job of encouraging students to come forward and report incidents.

And it could mean a university has a good system for keeping track of what is reported to them.

While the data can be interpreted in different ways, experts agree that this is the first time in Canada that a snapshot like this has been available.

In fact, it could help prospective students when choosing a school.

"As a parent or a prospective student I might want to say, 'What are you doing about sexual assault? What are you doing about prevention? What is your policy?'" says Charlene Senn, a professor at the University of Windsor who studies violence against women on university campuses.

"[A higher number of reported assaults] may well be because they have more supportive services, so I would want to know that. But if there is an absence of those services, then likely that relatively higher rate is something to be concerned about."

Sexual assault reports low overall

Overall, experts say the number of students reporting sexual assault to universities and colleges is well below national averages.

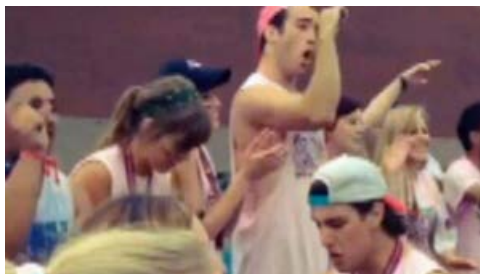
"At a certain point, we noticed there was something strange, which was that the rates of sexual assaults on the campuses were considerably lower than the rates of assaults for the surrounding cities," says Jeffrey Rosenthal, a statistics professor at the University of Toronto who analyzed the data collected by CBC News.

A recent student survey at the University of Ottawa shed some light on the actual rates of sexual assault at a major Canadian university.

It shows as many as 44 percent of female students experienced some form of sexual violence or unwanted sexual touching while attending the university.

Yet the CBC News survey shows that over the course of five years, only 10 students reported an assault to the U of O.

"[The CBC survey] found such a variation across the country, I think that it can open up an important conversation. It could also open a conversation up about are we recording them all and how are we responding?" asks



The release of a video in which students at St. Mary's University in Halifax sing a pro-rape chant helped start a national conversation about sexual assault on Canadian campuses. (Instagram)



Dalhousie University, which declined to provide data for the CBC survey, was recently rocked by a scandal involving misogynistic comments on Facebook.

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Holly Johnson, a criminology professor at the University of Ottawa and the architect behind the groundbreaking student survey at her university.

While the CBC News survey shows reports of sexual assaults to university campuses are very low, the numbers also demonstrate that reports are on the rise.

In 2013, 179 assaults were reported, a 21 per cent rise over 2012 and a 66 per cent rise over the number of sexual assaults reported in 2009.

More than 700 assaults were reported over the five-year period reviewed by CBC News.

Several universities declined to participate

A total of six schools either declined or said they weren't able to provide numbers when asked by CBC News. An additional six schools weren't able to provide data going back the full five years.

Three of those schools could only provide data by academic year -- rather than calendar year -- meaning their data could not be included in this analysis.

Dalhousie University declined to provide any data at all. The school's dentistry college was recently rocked by a scandal involving misogynistic comments on Facebook.

"We won't be able to provide the numbers you have requested," the university told CBC News in an email. "The reason being it is very difficult to comment on numbers of sexual assaults on campus."

CBC News nonetheless obtained the numbers (38 reports over five years) by filing an access to information request.

Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. "respectfully declined" to provide its numbers as well. Again, CBC News was able to obtain those numbers (14 reports over five years) by filing an access to information request.

The University of Manitoba couldn't provide numbers for the year 2009, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology said it only started tracking sexual assault in 2011 and Mount Royal University in Calgary couldn't provide numbers prior to 2012.

McGill University could only provide numbers broken down by academic year, meaning they could not be included in the CBC News analysis, which tracked reports by calendar year.

Experts say schools ultimately need to do a better job of encouraging students to come forward to report a sexual assault, and they need to be more transparent.

"I think there is an ethical imperative, I think there is a political responsibility and I think in the long run it would pay off," adds Lee Lakeman.

"I think we are getting a loud message from students that they want change."

We want to hear your stories. If you have any information you wish to share on this topic, contact timothy.sawa@cbc.ca.

Corrections

- The information used in the original version of this story to calculate the total number of reports of sexual assaults on campuses across Canada has since been updated. The numbers now cited in the story reflect the changes.

Feb 09, 2015 2:05 PM ET



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