

# Sexual violence widespread at Quebec universities, study finds

 [cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/sexual-assault-campus-quebec-victimization-1.3937527](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/sexual-assault-campus-quebec-victimization-1.3937527)

Quebec's francophone universities are sites of widespread sexual violence where many are victimized repeatedly, according to results of an online survey released today.

The violence ranged from verbal sexual harassment to sexual assault.

A research team based at the Université du Québec à Montréal surveyed 9,284 people who work or study at six of the province's French-speaking universities.

- **How recent campus controversies forced a debate about rape culture in Quebec**

They found that more than 3,400 respondents — or 36.9 per cent — reported being a victim of some form of sexual violence by someone linked to their university.

Among those who reported being victims, almost 42 per cent said they experienced two or three forms of sexual victimization.

The lead author of the study, Manon Bergeron of the department of sexology at UQAM, said the prevalence of sexual victimization on campus wasn't surprising to her researcher team.

- **Thousands gather across Quebec to denounce rape culture**

"For the general population, yes it's shocking. For us it's not," Bergeron told Radio-Canada.

Sandrine Ricci, a PhD student in sociology who also worked on the study, said its results correspond to similar studies in other areas of Canada and the U.S.

"Sexual violence hits all areas of public life," Ricci said. "I don't know why universities would dodge it."



Lead author Manon Bergeron said researchers were not surprised by the results of the study. (Radio-Canada)

## Repeat victimization

What Bergeron said was shocking for the research team was that in so many cases victims are being abused

repeatedly.

It's often new students who are being targeted at parties and during activities related to student life, she added.

Bergeron said more education is needed because there's still a tendency to blame the victim, which discourages them from reporting what happened.

Her colleague in UQAM's sexology department, Martine Hébert, said many victims don't even tell those close to them. Those who do, often don't get the support they are looking for.

- **Schools reporting zero sexual assaults on campus not reflecting reality, critics, students say**

"People will minimize what was experienced, and encourage the victim to remain silent," Hébert said. "They also could face blame, like they were responsible for the situation and could have prevented it."

According to the study, only 9.2 per cent of women who've been sexually victimized reported it to police.

"Rape culture is also a culture of impunity," Ricci said.

"It's a culture that blames the victim and absolves the aggressor."

The study says that along with new students being susceptible to sexual victimization, women, minorities, people who claim to have a handicap or health problem and international students are also especially vulnerable.



Researchers say their findings reflect similar studies conducted in Canada and the U.S., where sex assault has become a major issue on many campuses. (Gabrielle Lurie/AFP/Getty Images)

## **Government consultations, university action**

Following a string of break-ins and alleged sexual crimes at a [Laval University student residence](#) in October, Higher Education Minister H el ene David announced a series of consultations into sexual violence on campuses.

David promised to [hold meetings](#) to establish common practices on campuses, which will then be framed in a policy or law.



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"The person must have the reflex to immediately confide in someone they trust at their school. Often it's a friend, but the friend must also know about the resources available – a clearly identified resource, with signage around the school," David said. "I think this is the reflex that we need...because it is vulnerable people who come forward and often just to have someone listen to you can help so much, and then we need to intervene."

McGill and Concordia have already taken steps to update how they handle sexual assault cases.

After years of debate, [McGill new sexual assault policy](#) was unveiled in December. It covers how assaults are reported and establishes measures to prevent, educate and support students.

Concordia adopted a new sexual assault policy last spring. It seeks to increase the number of assaults that are reported by streamlining the reporting process.

Jennifer Drummond, co-ordinator of Concordia's Sexual Assault Resources Center, said at the time that the changes reduce "the burden and the stress on the survivor to get the support they need."

- [Are Concordia and McGill doing enough to deal with sexual assault allegations?](#)