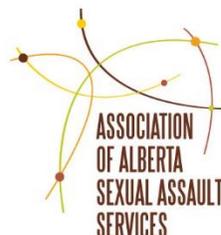


**SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS  
PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND  
CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE  
IN ALBERTA**

**Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services**  
January 29, 2020



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## Background and Rationale

In many jurisdictions around the world, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse is a public health issue that requires urgent and immediate attention.

In support of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services' (AASAS) strategy to advance research excellence in the area of sexual violence and to inform policy makers and service providers in evidence-based decision making, a survey was conducted to determine a statistically reliable estimate of Albertan's experiences of sexual abuse throughout their lifetime.

The last Canadian prevalence study on child sexual abuse, chaired by Robin Badgley (1984), found that at some time during their lives one in two females and one in three males had been victims of unwanted sexual acts and approximately four in five of these incidents occurred when they were children or youths. The current study looks to build on the work of Robin Badgley to determine whether the extent of childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault has changed over the past 36 years. This report contains a comparison between the current study and that of Badgely, as well as a Statistics Canada report on sexual harassment behaviours in Canada conducted in 2018.

AASAS is a provincial umbrella organization dedicated to creating awareness of issues involving sexual abuse and sexual assault, and striving to ensure that all Albertans have access to healing and recovery programs, services and supports. Part of AASAS' role is to work with the Government of Alberta to develop effective policies and sustainable program funding for sexual assault services across Alberta. The organization supports 14 front-line sexual assault service organizations in 11 communities across Alberta. AASAS' mission is to provide leadership, coordination, collaboration and a unified voice on issues of sexual abuse and sexual assault.

AASAS is working to further understand issues of sexual assault and abuse, and values open and informed dialogue on these important issues. Recent and accurate knowledge about the scope and nature of Albertan's experiences of sexual assault and child sexual abuse in Alberta will help to develop and promote the quality and availability of sexual assault services, education and prevention initiatives.

## Methodology

The current study was designed to produce a statistically reliable estimate of Albertan’s experiences of sexual abuse while also identifying the nature, extent and type of sexual abuse experienced.

Albertan’s opinions of sexual assault services were also measured.

The steps followed to complete the study included:

- Survey instrument design;
- Ethics submission;
- Pilot testing of the survey instrument (phase 1 and phase 2); and
- Final ethics approval and full survey administration.

To administer the survey, the research team procured a general population sample which included landlines, cell phones and random digit dialing.

Surveyors were trained by AASAS and sexual assault centre staff before administering the survey, and respondents who wanted support were connected directly to Alberta’s One Line for Sexual Violence 1-866-403-8000.

The research team received a very positive response from those who completed the survey interviews. In total, 1,512 survey completions were obtained.

The number of survey completions by Alberta Health Zone is presented in Table 1.0.

**Table 1.0: Total Completions by AHS Health Zone**

Zone	Population (2019)	Percent of Population	Number of Completions
North	482,635	11%	300
Edmonton	1,404,498	32%	305
Central	479,453	11%	303
Calgary	1,669,272	38%	300
South	306,577	7%	304
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,342,435</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,512</b>

Note: Population data for AHS Health Zones was obtained from the 2018-19 AHS Annual Report.

Survey findings presented in this report are based on weighted data across two variables: age and gender. The weighting technique utilized aligns the sample distributions with population distributions, determined through the Statistics Canada census data.

Less than 1% of the sample identified as transgender or non-binary. Due to the low number of completions for this subset of the sample, these results have been excluded from any analysis involving gender. In addition, respondents who did not report the gender they identified with were also removed from the analysis. As a result, findings related to gender are based on a total of 1,496 survey completions.

## Limitations

Limitations to the current study include:

- The survey was administered to Alberta residents over the age of 18 only. As a result, respondents retrospectively reported on their experiences of sexual abuse.
- Regional analysis relates to the location where the survey was completed and not the location of where incidents of sexual abuse occurred.
- Survey quotas were based on region and no other demographic variables. As a result, inferences on specific sub groups (e.g. Indigenous identity, sexual orientation etc.) should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.
- The study assumed no difference in experience in the different regions (note that there is not statistically significant difference in our results, but that does not necessarily prove that there is not regional difference given modest sample sizes)
- Less than 1% of the sample identified their gender as transgender or non-binary. Due to the low number of completions for this subset of the sample, those results have been excluded from any analysis.
- When exploring the specific details of respondents' childhood sexual abuse experiences, the interview survey collected data on, at most, three types of experiences (the most severe type of abuse and two other types of abuse at random). As a result, findings for some types of abuse were based on a sub-sample of respondents and not all respondents who reported those types of abuse.

## Key Findings

Respondents were asked about their experiences of sexual abuse over their lifetime, their age when they experienced the abuse (under 18; over 18; both under and over 18), the type of abuse they experienced and about Albertan's awareness of and perceptions of sexual abuse.

The following findings are based on the survey interview responses of 1,496 adult Albertans from June to September 2019.

Findings are presented in the following 8 sections:

1. Prevalence of sexual abuse across the lifespan

2. Types of sexual abuse across the lifespan

3. At risk groups

4. Survivor age at time of incident

5. Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse

6. Prevalence of sexual assault in adulthood

7. Comparison to other research

8. Awareness and perceptions of sexual abuse

## 1. Prevalence of sexual abuse across the lifespan

**Forty-five percent of adult Albertans have experienced some type of sexual abuse in their lifetime.**

**That's almost one in every two.**

Almost one in every two (45%) adult Albertans has experienced some type of sexual abuse in their lifetime. It is important to note that all respondents were over the age of 18 at the time of surveying.

Participants were asked about their age when they experienced sexual abuse (under the age of 18; or over the age of 18; and both under and over the age of 18).

**34% of Albertans were sexually abused under the age of 18 and 28% of Albertans were sexually assaulted as adults.**

It is important to note that these survey findings are not a measure of how many incidents of sexual assault occur in Alberta. These findings are a measure of how many individuals currently living in Alberta have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime.

Approximately two in three females and one in three males experienced sexual abuse.

These results demonstrate that females are two times more likely than males to experience sexual abuse (60% of females compared to 31% of males).

Applying the prevalence rate to the adult population of Alberta (3,284,102), it is estimated that a total of 1.48 million Albertans over the age of 18 have experienced some type of sexual abuse in their lifetime.

**Two in three females and one in three males in Alberta experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime.**

**Figure 1.0: Estimated Prevalence of Sexual Abuse – Alberta**



As seen above, the number of individuals surveyed (adults over the age of 18) who experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lifetime, is estimated to be 1.48 million Albertans.

This does not include however, children currently living in Alberta.

Therefore, if we consider the current population of children in Alberta (955,799) and use the 34% prevalence rate, as noted above, we can estimate that the number of children who are experiencing childhood sexual abuse in Alberta is approximately 325,000.

Therefore, the total number of Alberta residents who have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime is estimated at 1.8 million (1.48 million + 325,000).

Based on these results, the estimated prevalence rate of sexual abuse in Alberta is approximately 43%, when including the adult and child (under 18) prevalence rates. When combining the estimated number of adult and child survivors of sexual abuse, the prevalence rate for Alberta is estimated at 56% for females and 29% for males.

**1.8 Million Albertans have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime.**

## 2. Types of sexual abuse across the lifespan

Respondents were surveyed about eight types of sexual abuse they may have experienced. The types of abuse were categorized as those involving physical contact and those involving no physical contact. It is important to acknowledge the seriousness of all types of sexual abuse and the potential for traumatic impact regardless of whether or not there was physical contact.

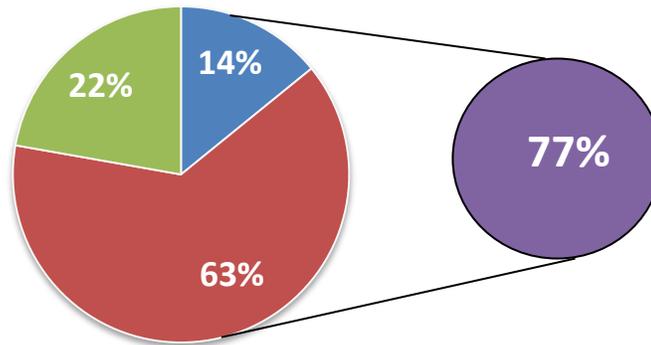
**Table 2.0: Types of Sexual Abuse: No Physical Contact versus Physical Contact**

Category	Types of Sexual Abuse Included in the Category
Physical contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Feeling pressured to have sex when the survivor didn't want to or being made to feel like there would be a consequence if the survivor did not have sex.</li> <li>b. Trying to make the survivor touch the perpetrator's body in a sexual way when the survivor didn't want this.</li> <li>c. Touching the private parts of the survivor's body when the survivor didn't want this.</li> <li>d. Trying to have or having sex with the survivor when the survivor didn't want this, or making aggressive sexual advances.</li> </ul>
No physical contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. Showing or persuading the survivor to look at pornographic material (for example, magazines, videos, internet, etc.) in a way that made the survivor feel uncomfortable.</li> <li>f. Exposing their sexual organs to the survivor when this was unwanted.</li> <li>g. Touching themselves in front of the survivor while being exposed when the survivor did not want this.</li> <li>h. Making or persuading the survivor to take off their clothes, or pose in a sexually suggestive way to be photographed/videoed, when they didn't want this.</li> </ul>

**Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) reported experiencing at least one incident which involved physical contact.**

Among all respondents who identified as a survivor of sexual abuse, over three-quarters (77%) reported experiencing at least one incident which involved physical contact. Figure 2.0 presents the distribution of the categories of sexual abuse reported by survivors.

**Figure 2.0: Type of Contact Experienced – All Survivors**



■ Physical contact only ■ Both no physical contact and physical contact ■ No physical contact only

QB1ai-QB1hi. Total does not add due to rounding.

**Of all types of sexual abuse surveyed, 92% reached the threshold of a crime when perpetrated against adults. 100% reached the threshold of a crime when perpetrated against children.**

Across all survivors, 92% experienced chargeable acts of sexual abuse. The remaining 8% of survivors experienced acts of sexual abuse, which under certain circumstances may not be considered a criminal offence.

All acts considered in the survey instrument would be criminal if they occurred to someone who was under the age of 18. While some acts considered in the survey may not be a criminal act under specific circumstances, this does not mean that they are any less wrong or traumatic for survivors.

The most common type of sexual abuse involving physical contact experienced by respondents was the perpetrator touching the private parts of the survivor’s body when the survivor did not want this (28%). The most common type of sexual abuse involving no physical contact experienced by respondents was the assailant exposing their sexual organs to the survivor when the survivor did not want this (27%).

**Females reported higher rates across all types of sexual abuse.**

Across gender, females reported higher rates across all types of sexual abuse. The differences in prevalence rates across genders were found to be statistically significant, with the exception of showing or persuading the survivor to look at pornographic material (e.g. magazines, videos, internet, etc.) in a way that made the survivor feel

uncomfortable; for this type of abuse, there was no difference in prevalence between males and females.

Sexual abuse experienced by males was also more likely to involve no physical contact (36% of males compared to 16% of females), while females were more likely to have experienced sexual abuse involving both physical and no physical contact (69% of females compared to 53% of males).

### 3. At Risk Groups

Research literature demonstrates that Indigenous people, gender and sexually diverse people, people with disabilities and racialized people experience higher rates of sexual abuse.

Respondents were asked to self-identify their ethnicity in order to understand the prevalence of sexual abuse among racialized people. Note that, ethnicity was coded and categorized as “Visible Minority” as per Statistics Canada guidelines.

The methodology underpinning this survey utilized a general population sample which implies that survey respondents were randomly selected across Alberta to take part in the survey. Survey completions were evenly distributed across regions; however, other demographic characteristics, such as Indigeneity, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation, were not controlled for.

As a result, analysis on these specific groups must be interpreted with caution, as the number of survey completions for some groups was relatively small due to the fact they comprise a relatively small proportion of the Alberta population. Table 3.0 presents the Alberta proportion of specific groups, as well as the proportion of each group that completed the survey.

**Table 3.0: Population and Sample Proportions of Specific Groups\***

	Indigenous	Sexual Orientation	Visible Minority	Disability
Alberta Population	7%	3%	23%	22%
Survey Sample	3%	2%	6%	22%

\* Who self-identified

As shown in Table 3.0, the proportion of some at risk groups in Alberta is relatively small. However, aside from visible minorities, who self-identified; the survey does reflect the proportions of these groups within Alberta.

Survey results found that the following demographic groups had higher prevalence rates of sexual abuse compared to the overall rate for Alberta:

- People who are Indigenous (66%)<sup>1</sup>;
- People with diverse sexual orientations (77%)<sup>2</sup>; and
- People living with a disability (49%)<sup>3</sup>.

People who identify as a visible minority were found to have a lower rate of sexual abuse (41%).

<sup>1</sup> Statistically significant difference between overall prevalence rate (45%)

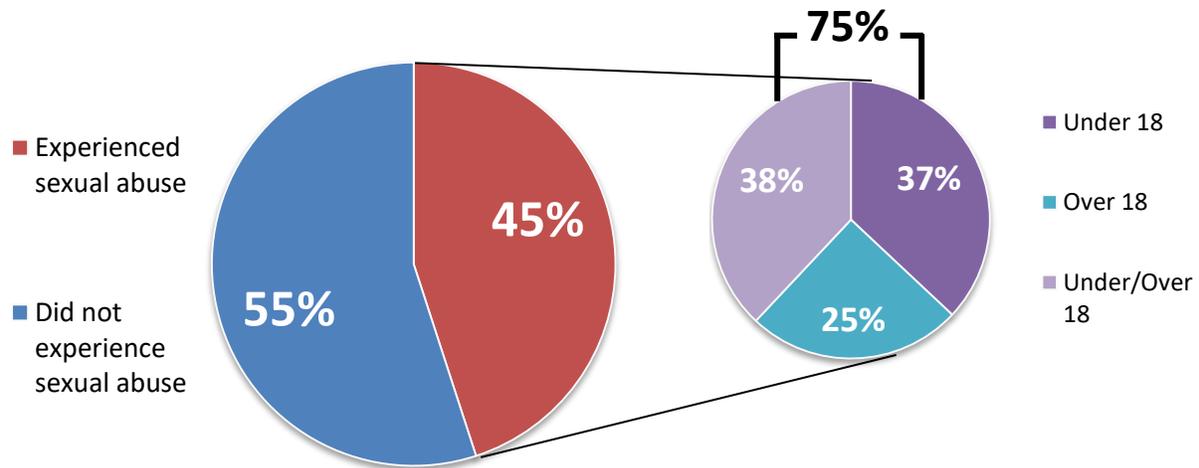
<sup>2</sup> Statistically significant difference between overall prevalence rate (45%)

<sup>3</sup> Difference between overall prevalence rate (45%) was not statistically significant

## 4. Survivor Age at Time of Incident

Among respondents who identified as survivors of sexual abuse (45% of overall sample), it was most commonly reported that they experienced abuse both under and over the age of 18 years (38%).

Figure 3.0: Survivor Age at Time of Incident



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**Three out every four (75%) survivors of sexual abuse were under the age of 18 during at least one incident of sexual abuse. Moreover, half of the survivors who experienced sexual abuse as a child also experienced sexual assault as an adult.**

Survey results demonstrate that approximately three out every four (75%) survivors of sexual abuse were under the age of 18 during at least one incident of sexual abuse (i.e. experienced sexual abuse U18 and U/O18).

Moreover, half of the survivors who experienced sexual abuse as a child also experienced sexual assault as an adult. As such, survivors who experienced sexual abuse as a child were more likely to experience sexual assault again as an adult.

**Survivors who experienced sexual abuse as a child were more likely to experience sexual assault again as an adult.**

## 5. Prevalence of Childhood Sexual Abuse among Albertans

**One in three Albertans (34%) experienced sexual abuse when they were under the age of 18.**

One in three Albertans (34%) experienced sexual abuse while they were under the age of 18. Thus, it is estimated that 325,000 Albertans under the age of 18 have experienced some type of sexual abuse.

**Table 5.0: Estimated Number of Child Survivors by Region**

Health Zone	Child Population (2019)	Estimated Number of Child Survivors*
North	115,861	39,393
Edmonton	298,626	101,533
Central	110,549	37,587
Calgary	358,010	121,723
South	72,753	24,736
<b>Alberta</b>	<b>955,799</b>	<b>324,972</b>

\*Region totals do not sum to the provincial total due to the impact of rounding.

Table 5.1 presents the estimated number of survivors by gender. Population data for gender was obtained from the 2019 Statistics Canada Census.

**Table 5.1: Estimated Number of Child Survivors by Gender**

Gender	Population (2019)	Prevalence Rate	Estimated Number of Child Survivors*
Female	464,941	44%	204,574
Male	490,859	24%	117,806

\*Gender totals do not sum to the provincial total due to the impact of rounding.

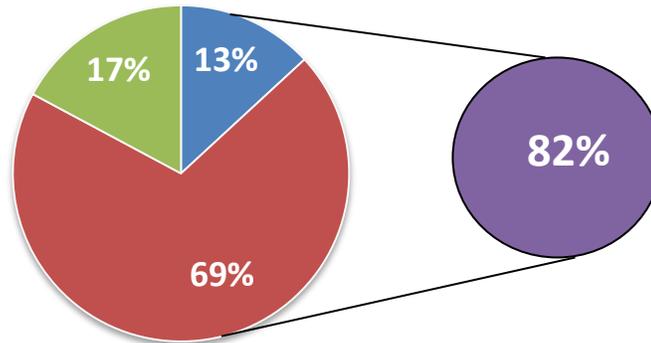
**Just under one in two girls (44%) and one in four boys (24%) in Alberta have experienced child sexual abuse.**

Among respondents who were under the age of 18 during their first incident of sexual abuse, the most common type of sexual abuse involving physical contact was the perpetrator touching the victim's body without consent (20%). The most common type of abuse which involved no physical contact was the perpetrator exposing themselves (20%).

**Among respondents who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the majority experienced sexual abuse which included physical contact (82%).**

Among all respondents who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the majority experienced sexual abuse which included physical contact (82%).

**Figure 4.0: Amount of Contact Experienced – All Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse**



■ Physical contact only ■ Both no physical contact and physical contact ■ No physical contact only

QB1ai-QB1hi. Total does not add due to rounding.

In most experiences of child sexual abuse reported in this survey:

- First incident occurred between the ages of 6 and 11 years or 12 and 17 years depending on the type of abuse
- Abuse was committed by one male individual
- Survivor knew the abuser (e.g. the abuser was a friend, relative, acquaintance)
- The abuser resided outside the survivor's home

Strangers were less likely to commit child sexual abuse, but when they did, the types of abuse they most often committed were exposing their sexual organs and touching themselves in front of the child.

Most respondents reported that the abuse did not occur over a prolonged period of time (years). When the abuse did occur over a longer period of time, the types of abuse experienced were among the most aggressive in terms of physical contact.

**When the abuse did occur over a longer period of time, the types of abuse experienced were among the most aggressive.**

## 6. Prevalence of Sexual Assault in Adulthood

**One in four Albertans experienced sexual assault when they were over the age of 18.**

Over one quarter (28%) of the individuals surveyed had experienced sexual assault when they were over the age of 18. Of the 28% of Albertans who experienced sexual assault in adulthood, 11% indicated they experienced sexual assault when they were over the age of 18; 17% indicated they experienced sexual abuse both when they were both under and over the age of 18.

Therefore, 61% percent of people who experienced sexual assault as an adult had also experienced sexual abuse as a child.

Extrapolating to the general population this means that 919,549 individuals in Alberta have experienced sexual assault over the age of 18. Table 6.0 presents the estimated number of survivors who experienced sexual assault while over 18 across AHS Health Zones.

**Table 6.0: Estimated Number of Survivors Sexually Assaulted in Adulthood by AHS Health Zones**

Health Zone	Adult Population (2019)	Estimated Number of Survivors*
North	343,314	96,128
Edmonton	1,077,247	301,629
Central	372,643	104,340
Calgary	1,258,637	352,418
South	232,261	65,033
<b>Alberta</b>	<b>3,284,102</b>	<b>919,549</b>

\*Region totals do not sum to the provincial total due to the impact of rounding.

Females are significantly more likely than males to experience sexual assault when they are over the age of 18: 41% of females had experienced sexual assault over the age of 18 compared to 17% of males.

**Females are significantly more likely than males to experience sexual assault when they are over the age of 18.**

**Table 6.1: Estimated Number of Adult Survivors by Gender - Alberta**

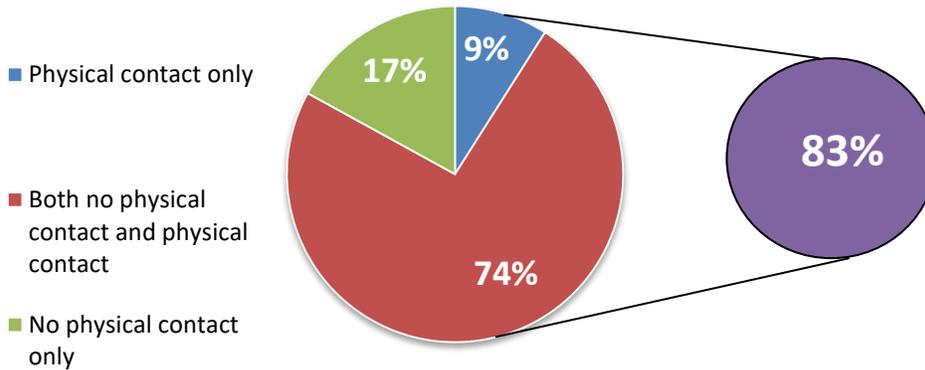
Gender	Adult Population (2019)	Prevalence Rate	Estimated Number of Survivors*
Female	1,655,365	41%	678,700
Male	1,628,736	17%	276,885

\*Gender totals do not sum to the provincial total due to the impact of rounding.

Overall, across females and males, sexual assault that occurs when an individual is over the age of 18 more commonly includes physical touch. Among all survivors of sexual assault in adulthood, the majority of survivors experienced sexual assault which included physical contact (83%).

**The majority of survivors experienced sexual assault which included physical contact (83%).**

**Figure 5.0: Type of Contact Experienced –Adult Sexual Assault**

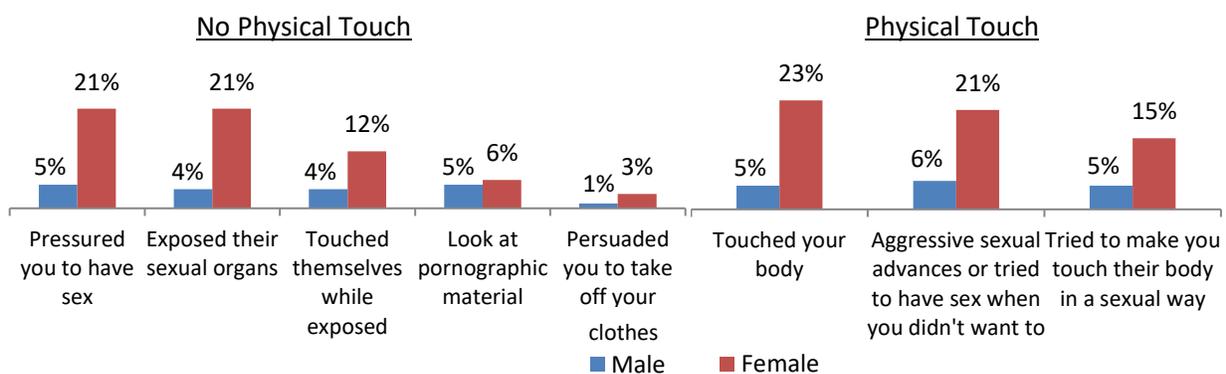


QB1ai-QB1hi. Total does not add due to rounding.

Across males and females that have experienced sexual assault when they were over the age of 18, it often included being touched when they did not want to be (14%), being pressured to have sex (13%), or aggressive sexual advances (13%).

As adults, females are commonly touched when they do not want to be (23%), experience aggressive sexual advances (21%), pressured to have sex (21%), or have someone expose their sexual organs when it is unwanted (21%).

**Figure 6.0: Adult Prevalence Rates by Type of Sexual Abuse by Gender – Alberta**



QB1ai-QB1hi. Differences in prevalence rates between genders were statistically significant for all types of sexual abuse, excluding 'look at pornographic material'.

## 7. Comparison to Other Research

### **Badgely Report (1984)**

This section includes a comparison of findings between the 1984 Badgely Report and the current study. In order to ensure comparability, the current study findings related to the prevalence of sexual abuse among Albertans over the age of 18 who experienced sexual abuse at any point in their lifetime are considered.

Findings from the Badgely report are consistent with the current Alberta study. The prevalence rate across the two studies is similar: the 1984 Badgely report found a prevalence rate of 42% among the general public nationally and 45% in Alberta/British Columbia; the current study identified a prevalence rate of 45%.

**Findings from the current report are consistent with the 1984 Badgely report.**

As in the Badgely report, females continue to report significantly higher rates of sexual assault. Moreover, the rate of sexual assault amongst females has grown slightly. Badgely’s 1984 study found that 54% of females were survivors of sexual assault; the current 2019 study found a 4% increase in prevalence, with an overall prevalence rate of 60% among females. Sexual assault among males, while still far too high, has remained steady at 31% between 1984 and 2019.

It is important to note, however, that while the prevalence rates are similar, the number of people impacted by sexual assault has grown significantly. In 1984, a prevalence rate of 42% would result in an estimated 721,000 people in Alberta being impacted by sexual assault; by 2019, the prevalence rate of 45% has resulted in this number expanding to 1.48 million.

**While the prevalence rates of the two studies are similar, the number of people impacted by sexual abuse has grown significantly since 1984.**

The majority of survivors of sexual assault experienced incidents of sexual abuse while they were under the age of 18. This finding holds from 1984 (Badgely report) to 2019 (current study). In 1984, Badgely reported that one in five (20%) was an adult (18 years or older) at the time of their first sexual assault. The current study found that 25% of survivors were over the age of 18 at the time of first assault,

regardless of gender. In both studies, the majority of survivors were between the ages of 12 and 17 (current study) or 12 and 18 (Badgely report) at the time they were first abused. Further, the incident rate by offense type has increased since the Badgely report (Table 7.0).

**Table 7.0: Comparison of Badgely (1984) and AASAS (2019) Prevalence Studies**

Study	Type of Abuse							
	Exposed to		Threatened		Unwanted Touch		Attempted/Assaulted	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Badgely (1984)	20%	9%	11%	5%	24%	13%	22%	11%
Current (2019)	41%	13%	30%	11%	44%	13%	33%	11%

### **Statistics Canada (2018)**

In 2018, Statistics Canada conducted a study on gender based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada. The study looked at the prevalence and effect of unwanted sexual behaviours in public, such as unwanted physical contact, indecent exposure, unwanted sexual attention (such as catcalls, whistles) and comments about sex, gender or sexual orientation.

According to the study, one in three women and one in eight men, 15 years of age and over, felt unsafe or uncomfortable due to unwanted sexual behaviour they experienced. The current Alberta study found higher rates of comparable sexual behaviour (i.e. indecent exposure) for women.

The current report found that almost one in two women (42%) and one in eight males (13%) over the age of 18 experienced indecent exposure within their lifetime.

In addition, the Statistics Canada report found that the majority of perpetrators who committed unwanted sexual acts were males not known to the victim. This finding aligns with the Alberta study's finding that acts involving indecent exposure (i.e. someone exposing themselves or someone touching themselves while exposed) were most commonly perpetrated by male strangers.

## 8. Awareness and Perceptions of Sexual Abuse

**Two out of three Albertans (67%) personally know a survivor of sexual abuse.**

**One in two Albertans (53%) have personally supported a survivor.**

Survey findings show that across Alberta, two out of three Albertans (67%) personally know a survivor of sexual abuse, either as a child or an adult, and one in two Albertans (53%) had personally supported a survivor.

One in two respondents (57%) agree or strongly agree that the average Albertan resident believes that sexual abuse is an issue in their community. When looking at survey results by gender, females were more likely than males to agree or strongly agree that the average Albertan believes that sexual abuse is an issue in their community (63% compared to 50% of males).

**Over half of respondents agree that sexual abuse is an issue in their community.**

While many Albertans feel that sexual abuse is an issue, 40% believe there are not enough supports for survivors, while 29% believe that there are. One-third of Albertans (30%) neither agreed nor disagreed that there were sufficient supports.

Across genders, females were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that sufficient supports are available for survivors of childhood sexual abuse compared to males (46% of females compared to 35% of males). Moreover, females were more likely to say it is difficult or very difficult for someone to get help for sexual violence in their community (65% of females compared to 51% of males).

Across Alberta, the most common type of support that should be available to survivors of child sexual abuse, as identified by survey respondents, is access to counseling or mental health services (44%). When comparing survey results by gender, females were more likely to identify the need for supports that address the trauma or impact of sexual abuse on survivors, while males were more likely to identify the need for stronger penalties for abusers.

**40% of Albertans believe there are not enough supports for survivors.**

**When asked about what types of support were needed, respondents felt that counselling was most important.**

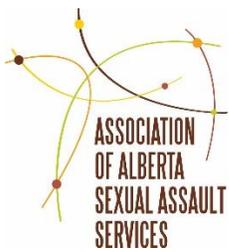
## Thank you

The Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services would like to thank every individual who took the time to respond to the survey. It wasn't easy to answer the questions and disclose their experiences of sexual abuse and assault.

Because Albertans were willing to share their experiences, we now know so much more about this important issue and this will help so many others.

Anyone in Alberta who has been impacted by sexual violence can reach out for support and resources through Alberta's One Line for Sexual Violence. Specially trained staff and volunteers are available seven days a week when you are ready to call, text or chat with us.





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