

# Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in New Brunswick

*A Framework for Action*

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## *What is Sexual Violence?*

Sexual violence is about power and control. It violates the fundamental rights of a human being, in particular, their personal integrity, security and safety.

Sexual violence is any harmful behaviour perceived by the victim to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted and takes place without consent or understanding of the victim. There is recognition that sexual violence encompasses a continuum of behaviour which may or may not be criminal in nature and may or may not include physical contact.

Sexual violence is not about sex – it is about the exertion of power and dominance, and a result of gender inequality. Myths that blame survivors for what they did, what they wore, or who they are thrive and further perpetuate the power imbalance. Sometimes, this is referred to as rape culture, which is a term used to express the pervasiveness of the issue. It refers to “a culture in which dominant ideas, social practices, media images and societal institutions implicitly or explicitly condone sexual assault by normalizing or trivializing

male sexual violence and by blaming survivors for their own abuse”. (It’s Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment- Government of Ontario, 2015, p. 9)

Some acts of sexual violence, such as sexual assault, are crimes. The Criminal Code of Canada sets out the range of penalties for sexual offences. Some acts are not criminal, for example, sexual harassment, coercion and street harassment. Whether criminal or not, there is still an emotional and psychological impact on the person.

Individuals who have been subjected to and /or impacted by sexual violence may be referred to as victims, survivors or persons who have experienced sexual violence. It is important that each person have the right to name their experience in their own way. Secondary victims are those individuals not directly involved, but still affected by sexual violence that has occurred in their family or community. Secondary victims can experience a similar sense of shame, guilt and fear as the primary victim.

## **Sexual assault:**

Any form of non-consensual sexual contact

## **Sex trafficking:**

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring, or transfer of person through the use of force, threats, coercion, fraud, or abuse of power. These acts are for the purpose of exploitation and cause the victim to fear for their safety or wellbeing, or the safety of others if they refuse to perform the sexual acts demanded of them by their traffickers. (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2014;people's Law school:UN, 2000).

## **Sexual harassment:**

Any unwelcome behaviour, action, or words which:

- Are sexual in nature;
- Are likely to offend or humiliate;
- Relate to a person's sex, sexuality or body parts;
- The harasser knows or ought to know are inappropriate;
- Are repeated after the person has been told to stop.

## **Cyber sexual violence:**

Using social media and communication technologies for the following:

- Any unwanted sexual act;
- An attempt to obtain a sexual act;
- Sexual comments or advances; or
- Sexual coercion (Munn-Rivard, 2014).

## **Intimate partner sexual violence:**

Any form of non-consensual sexual violence that takes place within an intimate relationship, i.e. current or former marital, common-law or dating relationships.

It is both sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

## Why address this issue?

Sexual violence affects all genders, orientations, ages, economic statuses, cultures, and abilities. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Men are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence, though men and boys are also impacted by sexual violence as victims and bystanders.

Sexual violence is under-reported to the police or not named as sexual violence.

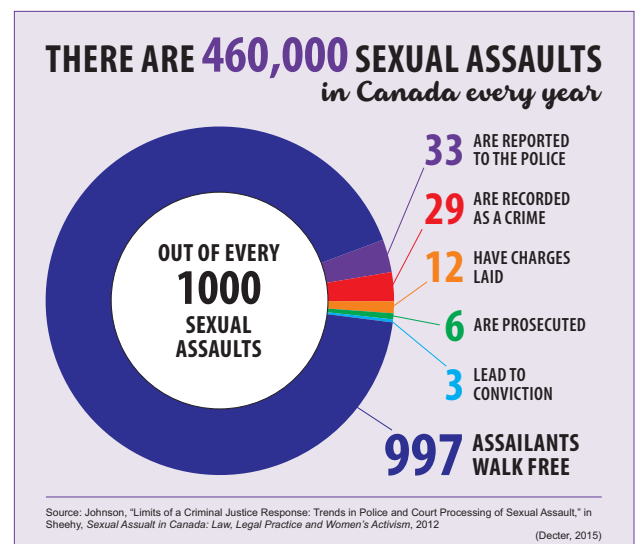
**Less than 5% of sexual assaults are reported to police** (Perreault, 2015)

Less than one in twenty incidents of sexual assault are reported to the police in Canada (Perreault, 2015). There are likely many reasons that sexual violence is not reported but one of the most pervasive reasons is victims' fear of not being believed. This fear is valid as rape myths and rape culture normalize such violence and blame victims.

**In 2014, women made up 87% of the victims of self-reported sexual assault in Canadian provinces** (Perreault, 2015)

Victims of sexual violence require specialized care and support, while perpetrators of sexual violence must be held accountable for their behaviour.

As sexual violence is underreported to police and victims may not come forward, support is often inaccessible or inadequate for those who have experienced sexual violence.



Children and youth are at particular risk of being sexually assaulted and require specialized care and support.

**Children and youth under 18 accounted for 66% of all victims of sexual violations reported to police in New Brunswick in 2013 and 2014** (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2016)

In both 2013 and 2014, children under 18 accounted for 66% of all victims of sexual violations reported to police in New Brunswick. Girls represented the victims in 74% of these cases (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2016). Girls are even more vulnerable within families as the rate of sexual assault against children and youth committed by family members was 4 times higher for girls than for boys (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2011).

Aboriginal women and girls recorded a sexual assault rate of 115 incidents per 1,000 population, much higher than the rate of 35 per 1,000 population recorded by their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Perreault, 2015). Of the Aboriginal women who experienced violence by a current or former partner, close to half (48%) reported the most severe forms of violence, such as being sexually assaulted,

beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or a knife (Brennan S., 2011).

***Girls under 18 represent almost half of all victims of reported sexual offences in***

***New Brunswick***

*(Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2016)*

Victims of sexual violence face numerous barriers and challenges throughout the process of dealing with the sexual violence they have experienced starting with making the difficult decision to disclose. Societal attitudes which blame the victim and systems that are insensitive to the trauma of sexual violence contribute to these challenges. Victims require a wide range of services starting with their immediate needs in a crisis followed by an effective response from those involved in investigation (if the victims reports) and then supportive care to assist in reframing their lives and experience after the violence. When individuals from vulnerable or marginalized populations are victims of sexual violence, not only are they coping with the effects of violence but their unique needs must be addressed at all levels from initial disclosure, through the criminal justice process and finally in regaining their sense of hope and safety.

The perpetrators of sexual violence also require intervention, both for accountability and ultimately for rehabilitation and prevention of further sexual violence. In Canada in 2014, 94% of the offenders in sexual assault incidents were male (Perreault, 2015). Engaging men and boys must therefore be part of a strategy in ending sexual violence.

In addition to being a societal problem, sexual violence also presents an economic problem. The cost of sexual crimes was estimated at \$4.8 billion in 2009 (Hoddenbagh, 2014). Minimizing further social and economic cost to our society is both socially and fiscally responsible. This framework is meant to encourage action from government and community to address sexual violence.

## **Addressing Sexual Violence in New Brunswick: Partners Working Together**

More than 10 years ago, the Women's Equality Branch and the Fredericton Sexual Assault Centre initiated the development and implementation of a provincial strategy on sexual assault services. Known as the Provincial Strategy on Sexual Assault Services, it recognizes and utilizes the expertise of established service providers, supporters and survivors in creating a network of individuals and organizations to provide survivor centered solutions. It works through established regional violence prevention networks across New Brunswick to enhance community-based services for those experiencing sexual assault.

As the Provincial Strategy on Sexual Assault Services began rolling out across the province, it became apparent that victims of sexual violence require a wide range of services from the time of their initial disclosure through to reframing their lives and experience after the crisis. Intervention is also required for perpetrators of sexual violence, both for accountability and rehabilitation.

The Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in New Brunswick - A Framework for Action informs government and community partners on future directions and sets the areas for strategic focus that government and community will partner on. Building on the sharing of information on programs and services, better practices and lessons learned, the Framework considers the needs, experiences and supports required for victims and impacted bystanders or community members who are children, women or men, including those who may be trafficked. The Framework also takes into account that these individuals may be facing intersecting challenges relating to the experiences of poverty, of being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit, immigrant, racialized, of ethno-cultural and/or refugee groups, living with physical and intellectual disabilities and/or Aboriginal.

# Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in New Brunswick: *A Framework for Action*

## *Vision:*

The elimination of sexual violence through the development and implementation of a comprehensive response for all those affected, thereby contributing to healthy individuals, families and communities.

## *Mission:*

Prevent and respond to sexual violence in New Brunswick.

## *Guiding Principles*

These following principles guide the decisions and actions to prevent and respond to sexual violence in New Brunswick.

- Every human being is entitled to respect for their personal integrity, and to be safe and protected in all settings, private and public.
- Sexual violence impacts individuals, families and communities.
- Sexual violence is an unacceptable social problem that impacts all New Brunswickers and must be acknowledged and eliminated.
- There is a dedicated response to sexual violence against youth and children.
- Aboriginal New Brunswickers are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence as a result of colonization and systemic oppression.
- Sexual violence occurs in a wider context of violence against women and gender inequality.
- Victims of sexual violence are believed and entitled to a sense of empowerment, compassion, empathy and respect, taking into consideration the unique needs of the individual and recognizing intersecting oppressions they may be experiencing.
- Perpetrators are held accountable for their behaviour and have the opportunity for treatment and rehabilitation.
- Strategies, services, and programs are trauma-informed and meet the needs of all marginalized and vulnerable populations.

## KEY RESULT AREA:

### *Prevention and Awareness*

Prevention and awareness, including promoting healthy relationships, is crucial to long-term change in attitudes that perpetuate sexual violence. When we have a better understanding of the issue, we are better able to respond to those who have experienced sexual violence.

To enhance prevention and awareness of sexual violence, government and community will work together to:

- Deliver prevention and awareness initiatives in communities throughout the province.
- Partner with post-secondary institutions on awareness and prevention initiatives focused on reducing the incidence of sexual violence in post-secondary institutions.
- Educate on gender roles, consent and coercion, myths and stereotypes, and privilege and oppression, emphasizing marginalized groups (e.g. Aboriginal women and girls, LGBTQ, immigrants, people with disabilities).
- Deliver age appropriate education about sexual violence in collaboration with schools and agencies that work with children and youth.

## KEY RESULT AREA:

### *Professional Education and Training*

Considering the complex nature of the trauma of sexual violence, there is a need for comprehensive, ongoing, accessible, and specialized training and education for all service providers and others who work with the justice system. This is fundamental to the delivery of a safe and compassionate response to those affected by sexual violence.

To increase education and training opportunities, government and community will work together to explore the:

- Development and enhancement of specialized and customized training for volunteer, community, and government service providers who work with victims and perpetrators of sexual violence.
- Development and provision of training and resources in prevention education and sexual violence response to those who work with children and youth, including post-secondary institutions
- Development and delivery of trauma-informed training to law enforcement, police, and others in the criminal justice system aimed at compassionate, appropriate, and timely responses.



## KEY RESULT AREA:

### *Intervention*

Of crimes reported to law enforcement, sexual violence has one of the lowest reporting rates. Victims often feel frustrated, blamed, and shamed by society and therefore do not report.

Depending on the nature of the sexual violence, and the age of the survivor, many types of interventions may be required. A survivor may need emergency and ongoing health care, police services, crisis intervention, child protective services, counselling, community programs, as well as victim and court support services.

Greater attention should be given to the needs of survivors within the various systems they encounter.

Services for survivors should be timely and accessible throughout New Brunswick and informed by better practices and interventions. Service providers need to be supported in the work they do.

To better respond to the unique and complex needs of survivors, while striving for better outcomes, government and community will work together to:

- Provide accessible, sustained, timely specialized sexual trauma counselling and crisis support services throughout the province.
- Provide and support Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Programs (SANE) in hospitals throughout the province, and inform communities of the SANE's role and services available.
- Provide services to victims by offering trained support people who will provide information on the criminal justice process, and provide support and advocacy through any court processes.
- Establish coordinated and collaborative response teams which include health care, community agencies/services, victim services and law enforcement. Post-secondary institutions should have representation in communities where they are located.
- Develop regional directories of services available to victims of sexual assault and distribute to all service providers.
- Provide support, resources and guidance to service providers working with those affected by sexual violence.
- Examine opportunities for improvement on how sexual crimes are investigated based on the 2017 Sexual Crimes review and develop recommendations.
- Work in partnership with post-secondary institutions to improve supports and responses to sexual violence within their institutions.

## KEY RESULT AREA:

### *Policy, Research, and Evaluation*

Research is an important step in fully understanding the complexities and impacts of sexual violence on survivors and communities. Research is the foundation of building innovative and effective responses, policies and prevention initiatives to ultimately end sexual violence.

We must monitor and evaluate our progress implementing this framework for action to determine if we are achieving our mission of preventing and responding to sexual violence in New Brunswick.

To better inform our work, government and community will work together to:

- Explore models which contribute to improvements in reporting of sexual violence, which is a critical step to accessing assistance, support, and legal recourse.
- Research and explore models to address the barriers victims face and improve the supports along the entirety of the criminal justice system.
- Coordinate research on sexual violence issues, policies, and programs to inform the work of this framework and share findings and information with relevant community, government and institutional stakeholders.
- Collaborate to create institutional policies that address sexual violence from a prevention and intervention perspective.
- Identify appropriate evaluation methods to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of this framework, and use the results to inform future actions.

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