

Respect Project: Community Conversations about Sexual Assault
Online Community Survey Findings

In July 2014, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre received funding from Status of Women Canada to carry out a project designed to increase their ability to prevent/respond to sexual violence against women and girls on PEI. To help guide the project work, an online survey was conducted with female and male community members over the age of 16 years to collect information on the following:

- Awareness of the types of services and supports available to women and girls on PEI who have been victims of sexual assault
- Experience of females with sexual assault and how it was dealt with
- The types of services and supports that should be in place to support female victims of sexual assault
- Barriers/challenges that make it difficult for female victims of sexual assault to access support
- The best ways to protect women and girls and prevent sexual assault

The survey link was posted on the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre website, and word-of-mouth, email invitations, CBC radio interview and social media (i.e. Facebook, newsletters, Twitter, etc.) were used to promote the project and encourage community members to complete it. The survey was anonymous and voluntary.

Altogether, 592 people started the survey and 471 completed it to the extent that their input was usable. Of the 471 respondents who completed the survey, 92% (433/471) identified as female, 7% (34/471) male and <1% (2/471) gender neutral. Information on <1% (2/471) was not available. Seventy-two percent (340/471) of respondents reside in Queens County, with only 18% (83/471) residing in Prince County and 10% (48/471) in Kings County. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 55 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Age of Respondents in Years

Category (n=471)	Percentage	Count
Under 18	1%	4
19-25	12%	59
26-35	32%	152

36-45	21%	101
46-55	18%	83
56-65	12%	56
66 or older	3%	15
Prefer Not To Say	<1%	1

Overall, 64% (282/471) of respondents stated that they are aware of supports and services available to women on PEI who experienced sexual assault. The following table shows the types of services/supports they are aware of, with the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre being the most commonly identified.

Table 2: Services and Supports Available to Women

Category (n=282)	Percentage	Count
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre	82%	230
Police	70%	197
Family Doctor	60%	170
Canadian Mental Health Association	58%	164
Victim Services	58%	163
Private counselor	56%	159
Catholic Family Services	52%	147
Psychologist	51%	143
Family Services PEI	47%	132
Family Violence Prevention Services	46%	130
Community Mental Health	42%	118
School counselor	38%	106
Addiction Services	34%	97
Faith/Clergy	27%	75
Aboriginal Service Providers	21%	60
Hotline support service	20%	57
Group therapist	12%	35
Anderson House	21%	6
Women's Network PEI	1%	2

Other services and supports noted by one respondent each were SAGE, the emergency room at hospitals, Student Services at UPEI, the UPEI Women’s Centre, Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women’s Shelter, SANE, and the Employee Assistance Program.

In addition, 42% (184/471) of respondents noted that they are aware of supports and services available to girls on PEI who experienced sexual assault. Table 3 outlines the services/supports they are aware of, with the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre and school counselors being the most commonly identified.

Table 3: Services and Supports Available to Girls

Category (n=184)	Percentage	Count
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre	70%	130
School counselor	69%	129
Police	63%	118
Family doctor	62%	115
Victim Services	54%	101
Psychologist	50%	92
Family Services PEI	49%	91
Private counselor	47%	85
Catholic Family Services	46%	85
Family Violence Prevention Services	38%	71
Canadian Mental Health Association	36%	67
Community Mental Health	36%	67
Faith/Clergy	24%	44
Hotline support service	22%	41
Aboriginal Service Providers	21%	39
Addiction Services	21%	39
Group therapist	13%	25

Other services and supports noted by one respondent each were the emergency room at hospitals, Child and Family Services, Girls Circle and Anderson House.

Overall, only 11% (53/471) of respondents think women who experienced sexual assault have access to adequate services and supports; 38% (179/471) think there are not enough services and supports available and 44% (208/471) are unsure. In the case of girls who experienced

sexual assault, only 8% (38/471) think they have access to adequate services and supports. The other 44% (210/471) think they do not and 41% (193/471) are unsure. In both cases, 7% (34/471) of respondents did not answer these questions.

When asked if they are aware of any efforts taking place on PEI to help protect women from sexual assault, 10% (45/471) noted that they are. Some of the efforts noted include the following:

- Education, programming and advocacy by such organizations as Women's Network PEI, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, Anderson House, East Prince Women's Information Centre, the Premiers Action Committee, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Family Violence Prevention Services, etc. (12 comments)
- The Purple Ribbon Campaign (7 comments)
- Incorporating bullying, violence and abuse into school curriculum (2 comments)
- UPEI campus renovation to improve lighting (2 comments)
- Take Back the Night campaign (1 comment)
- Articles, newsletters, and social media by Becka Viau advocating for women's rights in regards to sexual assault (1 comment)
- Beyond Jian, Community Conversations and Projects (1 comment)
- Lighting on the Confederation Trail (1 comment)
- Bystander intervention through UPEI (1 comment)

In addition, 8% (40/471) of respondents noted that they are aware of efforts taking place to help protect girls. These include the following:

- School curriculum on bullying, violence, abuse and healthy relationships (11 comments)
- Education, programming and advocacy by such organizations as Women's Network PEI, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, Anderson House, East Prince Women's Information Centre, the Premiers Action Committee, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Family Violence Prevention Services, etc. (11 comments)
- Girls Circles (5 comments)
- Boys Councils (4 comments)
- Police supporting schools (2 comments)
- Websites on bullying and violence prevention (2 comments)
- The Purple Ribbon Campaign (2 comments)

Of the 433 female respondents who completed the survey, 68% (294/433) indicated that they experienced sexual assault, and of that 68%, 65% (192/294) noted that they told someone about their experience. The most commonly told individuals were a friend or family member.

Police, private counselors and family doctors were the most common service providers told. See Table 4 for details.

Table 4: Individuals Told About Sexual Assault Experience

Category	Percent	Count
N=192		
Friend	77%	147
Family member	57%	109
Police	15%	28
Private counselor	12%	23
Family doctor	10%	20
Psychologist	9%	17
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre	9%	17
Victim Services	9%	17
Specialist Physician (psychiatrist)	8%	15
School counselor	8%	15
Catholic Family Services	4%	8
Faith/Clergy	4%	8
Community Mental Health	3%	4
Canadian Mental Health Association	2%	4
Family Services PEI	2%	4
School teacher	2%	3
Employer	2%	3
Employee Assistance Program	1%	2
Addiction Services	1%	2
Hotline support service	1%	2
Group therapist	1%	2
Family Violence Prevention Services	1%	1
Emergency Room doctor	1%	1
Media/Public	1%	2
Babysitter	1%	1
Aboriginal Service Providers	0%	0

Sadly, 32% (93/294) of female respondents that experienced sexual assault did not share their experience with anyone; the other 1% (3/294) preferred not to say if they did or not. When asked why they didn't tell anyone about their experience, the most common reasons were feelings of embarrassment (62% - 58/93) and shame (58% - 58/93). See Table 5 for a complete list of reasons why respondents did not tell anyone about their experience.

Table 5: Reasons for not Telling Anyone about their Sexual Assault Experience

Category N=93	Percent	Count
Feelings of embarrassment	62%	58
Feelings of shame	58%	54
Fear	50%	47
Fear of being blamed	41%	38
Not sure if the assault was serious enough to report	37%	35
Stigma	33%	31
Didn't think anyone would believe me	30%	28
Not sure if what happened to me was sexual assault	29%	27
Didn't feel I needed professional help	27%	25
Power imbalance between me and the offender	18%	17
Lack of opportunities to do so	15%	14
Mistrust of the justice system	15%	14
I was a child when it happened	5%	5
Family member was involved	3%	3
Didn't know who to tell	2%	2
Fear of repercussions if told anyone	2%	2

Of the 294 respondents who experienced sexual assault, only 21% (63/294) sought out professional services or support to help deal with their experience. The most commonly sought

out services, as shown in Table 6, were a psychologist, a private counselor and the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre.

Table 6: Types of Services/Supports Sought Out

Category N=63	Percent	Count
Psychologist	32%	20
Private counselor	27%	17
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre	25%	16
Police	22%	14
Victim Services	21%	13
School counselor	16%	10
Catholic Family Services	11%	7
Family doctor	11%	7
Faith/Clergy	10%	6
Canadian Mental Health Association	8%	5
Community Mental Health	7%	5
Employee Assistance Program	3%	2
Group therapist	3%	2
Family Violence Prevention Services	3%	2
Hotline support service	3%	2
Family Services PEI	2%	1
Aboriginal Service Providers	2%	1
Addiction Services	2%	1
Psychiatrist	2%	1
Clinic Doctor	2%	1

As outlined in Table 7, the most common types of services/supports these victims received were general counseling, emotional support and mental health counseling.

Table 7: Types of Supports/Treatment Received

Category N=63	Percent	Count
General counseling	65%	41
Emotional support	48%	30
Mental health counseling	30%	19
Medical treatment	14%	9
Specialized therapy - i.e. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Trauma Therapy, etc.	13%	8
Help navigating the justice system	13%	8
Group therapy	11%	7
Psychologist services	10%	6
Psychiatric care	8%	5
None	3%	2
Phone counseling	2%	1

Overall, 43% (27/63) of respondents felt the services/supports they received were helpful and 44% (28/63) felt they were sort of helpful. The other 13% (8/63) did not feel they were helpful. When asked about ways to improve the services/supports they received, the following suggestions were put forth:

- Increase awareness of the types of services available and how to navigate them (3 comments)
- Put more focus on the long-term emotional and mental issues that occur as a result of sexual assault and how to manage them (3 comments)
- Have service providers believe victims and understand that victims seldom lie about sexual assault (3 comments)
- Train police to better support sexual assault victims (3 comments)
- Provide more counselors through the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre (2 comments)
- Train counselors so they can better support victims of sexual assault (2 comments)
- Reduce wait times to access services (1 comment)
- Make it easier to access services (1 comment)
- Provide more follow up care (1 comment)
- Provide more services for adult survivors of childhood sexual assault (1 comment)

When asked if there are any other types of services/supports they would like to have access to on PEI outside of those they accessed, 57 out of 63 respondents noted the following:

Table 8: Other Services and Supports Suggested to Support Victims of Sexual Assault

Category N=57	Percent	Count
Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner at the hospital	61%	35
Peer support group	60%	34
Specialized therapy - i.e. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Trauma Therapy, etc.	54%	31
Emotional support	49%	28
Help navigating the justice system	49%	28
Mental health counseling	47%	27
Group therapy	46%	26
Psychologist services	44%	25
General counseling	42%	24
Psychiatric care	39%	22
Medical treatment	30%	17
Residential treatment programs	26%	15
Reading or print materials	25%	14
Mental health support group	2%	1
Professionals that specialize in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	2%	1

Of the 433 female respondents who completed the survey, 28% (122/433) noted that they never experienced sexual assault and 4% (17/433) preferred not share this information. When asked who they would contact/approach if they were to experience sexual assault, Table 9 shows that the vast majority would go to either a friend or family member.

Table 9: Who Female Respondents would Contact/Approach for Support

Category N=139	Percent	Count
Friend	71%	99
Family member	63%	88
Police	55%	77
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre	47%	66
Family Doctor	40%	56
Victim Services	27%	37
Private counselor	22%	31
Employee Assistance Program	14%	19
Specialist physician (psychiatrist)	12%	17
Psychologist	11%	15
Catholic Family Services	9%	13
Faith/Clergy	6%	9
Family Services PEI	5%	7
Hotline support service	5%	7
Family Violence Prevention Services	5%	7
Community Mental Health	4%	6
No one	4%	5
Canadian Mental Health Association	3%	4
Aboriginal Service Providers	1%	2
Hospital	1%	2
Women's Shelter	1%	2
School counselor	1%	1
Group therapist	1%	1

The 139 female survey respondents who indicated that they never experienced sexual assault, the 34 male respondents, and the two respondents who noted they were gender neutral were asked who they would encourage a female family member/friend/colleague to contact for support if they experienced sexual assault. Table 10 shows that the most common responses were police, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre and family doctor.

Table 10: Who You Would Encourage a Female Family Member/Friend/Colleague to Approach for Support

Category N=175	Percent	Count
Police	74%	130
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre	73%	128
Family Doctor	50%	88
Victim Services	40%	70
Family member	29%	51
Private counselor	28%	50
Friend	26%	46
Psychologist	23%	40
Employee Assistance Program	15%	27
Hotline support service	15%	26
Family Violence Prevention Services	14%	25
Specialist physician (psychiatrist)	14%	24
Family Services PEI	14%	24
Catholic Family Services	13%	23
Community Mental Health	11%	20
Canadian Mental Health Association	11%	19
Faith/Clergy	9%	16
School counselor	8%	15
Group therapist	4%	8
Addiction Services	3%	5
Aboriginal Service Providers	2%	4
Hospital	1%	2
Women's shelter	1%	1
No one	0%	0

Three percent (5/175) of respondents noted that the types of services/supports they would recommend would depend on the person and the circumstances.

In addition, the female survey respondents who indicated that they never experienced sexual assault, the male respondents, and the respondents who noted that they were gender neutral were asked why they think victims of sexual assault do not report or tell anyone about their experience. As shown in Table 11, the most common reasons they suspect are fear, feelings of shame and fear of being blamed.

Table 11: Reasons why Victims of Sexual Assault do not Tell Anyone about their Experience or Seek Support

Category N=175	Percent	Count
Fear	86%	150
Feelings of shame	84%	147
Fear of being blamed	81%	142
Feelings of embarrassment	81%	141
Stigma	76%	133
Don't think anyone will believe them	71%	124
Power imbalances between offender and victim	69%	121
Not sure the assault was serious enough to report	69%	121
Mistrust of the justice system	68%	119
Not sure if what happened to them is sexual assault	62%	108
Don't feel they need professional help	36%	63
Lack of opportunities to do so	24%	42
Not worth the trauma of telling anyone because sexual assault isn't taken seriously in our society	3%	5
Don't know who to tell	2%	4
Fear of not being believed	2%	3
Small province/community where everyone knows everyone else	2%	3
Long wait times for professional help/services	1%	2

All survey respondents, excluding those who indicated that they were victims of sexual assault and who received services and supports to help deal with their experience, were asked what type of services and supports they feel should be available to women and girls who experience sexual assault (408/471). Seven of the 408 respondents did not answer this question, so the findings outlined in Table 12 are based on the 401 who did.

Table 12: Types of Services and Supports that should be Available

Category N=401	Percent	Count
Emotional support	89%	357
Police officers specially trained to investigate sexual assault	85%	341
Mental health counseling	80%	321
Medical treatment	80%	321
Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner at the hospital	80%	321
Female only clinic	78%	313
Help navigating the justice system	77%	309
General counseling	75%	301
Specialized therapy - i.e. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Trauma Therapy, etc.	69%	277
Peer support group	66%	265
Psychologist services	60%	241
Group therapy	59%	240
Reading or print materials	54%	216
Psychiatric care	49%	196
Residential treatment programs	39%	156
Confidential helpline	1%	4
Specialized retreats	<1%	1
Better triage support in hospitals	<1%	1
Access to a specialized lawyer who can help navigate the system	<1%	1
Access to more rape crisis counselors	<1%	1

All survey respondents were asked about potential barriers/challenges that might make it difficult for sexual assault victims to access services and supports on PEI. Overall, 469 of the 471 respondents answered this question. The most common responses, as noted in Table 13, are embarrassment/shame/fear/stigma, lack of awareness of what services and supports are available, and feelings they will not be believed or taken seriously.

Table 13: Barriers/Challenges to Accessing Services and Supports

Category N=469	Percent	Count
Embarrassment/shame/fear/stigma	88%	414
Lack of awareness of what services and supports are available	83%	389
Feeling they will not be believed or taken seriously	74%	347
Mistrust of the justice system	63%	294
Fear of reporting to police	62%	293
Confidentiality issues	61%	286
Distance/lack of transportation	56%	261
Long wait times	52%	244
No services available in the region	44%	208
Gender of the service provider	39%	184
Cost of treatment	37%	172
Confidentiality issues/fear of members of the community finding out	1%	5
Not sure if what was experienced was sexual assault/lack of understanding of what happened	1%	4
Don't feel deserve services or support	<1%	2
Fear of being blamed	<1%	1

In addition, all survey respondents were asked what needs to be in place to help increase awareness of sexual assault against women and girls and to help prevent it. Altogether, 470 respondents completed the question specifically for women – see Table 14 for findings.

Table 14: Ways to Increase Awareness of Sexual Assault against Women and to Help Project Them

Category N=470	Percent	Count
Public awareness campaigns about sexual assault myths and realities	86%	402
Public awareness campaigns about the meaning and laws about consent	83%	389
Training for police about victim realities, responses and misconceptions	83%	388
Education for front-line workers about the realities of a victim's experiences and popular misconceptions	80%	377
Campaigns aimed specifically at men and boys around healthy masculinity	79%	371
Public awareness campaigns that help bystanders to respond to remarks that perpetuate sexual assault myths	73%	342
Better education in schools	1%	4
Public education on what bystanders can do to help if they witness a sexual assault	<1%	3
Public education on where to go for help if sexually assaulted	<1%	2
Public campaigns to encourage victims to seek help	<1%	1

As for the question specific to girls, 469 respondents completed it. Table 15 shows an overview of the findings.

Table 15: Ways to Increase Awareness of Sexual Assault against Girls and to Help Project Them

Category	Percent	Count
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N=469		
School curriculum about healthy relationships for both boys and girls	92%	430
Public awareness campaigns about healthy relationships for both boys and girls	89%	419
School curriculum that addresses healthy sexuality for both boys and girls	87%	408
School curriculum about the meaning and laws about consent	85%	399
Public awareness campaigns about the meaning and laws about consent	81%	378
Public awareness campaigns that address healthy sexuality for both boys and girls	80%	375
Resources for parents about family sexuality and consent	80%	375
Training for teachers, school staff and other youth service providers on sexual assault	1%	3
Resources for girls and boys about sexuality and consent	1%	3
Anonymous online resources/helpline support	1%	3
Media watch campaigns that address eroticized violence	<1%	2
Public campaigns to encourage victims to report incidents and seek help	<1%	2
Public education on what bystanders can do to help if they witness a sexual assault	<1%	1

People were asked to make additional comments. 110 people responded.

18 people expressed pleasure that the survey was being done

16 persons recounted their personal experiences with sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse

2 people expressed hopelessness that sexual violence will be eliminated

Main themes of comments:

General Public Education: 18

Public education to better inform of realities and impacts of sexual assault, consent and healthy relationships: 13

The use of personal stories of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse and the impacts on lives of survivors to help inform public: 2

Shift focus of prevention education from victim to perpetrator: 2

Male hockey teams need training on consent and sexual assault: 1

“In order to support individuals who have went through sexual assault the general public needs to be educated rather than just being able to take sides on who they know best”

“I think there is a misconception that sexual assault only includes penetration and people are not clear on the fact that unwanted sexual touching of any kind is assault”

“Public awareness and discourse on healthy relationships is paramount to prevention”

“If the stigma was taken down a few notches then maybe people wouldn’t feel so terrible. It needs to be talked about more so it loses it’s power”

“I think the general conversation about sexual assault (regardless of gender) needs to shift away from focus on the victims and put more emphasis on the perpetrator”

Education Targeted to Youth: 19

Healthy relationship and consent education specifically for youth: 7

Improvement in sexual education in school programs to include sexual assault and consent: 5

Education directed at boys and young men: 5

Empowerment training for girls: 2

“From my own experience, I don’t believe PEI’s sex education programs in schools is very comprehensive and did not give an adequate definition of consent”

“More educational programs on this in high school”

“I think we especially need to remember to educate men and boys about respecting women and girls. It’s all fine to teach girls and women about safety, but if the male is just going to disregard it, what good is it?”

“Would LOVE to see some actual sexual education in school! What passes for that now is silly, absolutely silly”

Justice System: 15

Changes in police investigation and criminal justice system to respond with empathy and respect to those reporting: 8

Stiffer penalties for perpetrators: 4

Improvement in educating victims about justice system to make it less daunting: 3

“I told the police what happened to me, but they made the process so daunting I did not press charges against the man who assaulted me.”

“Sad how the judicial system lets offenders off with little or no penalty. Stiffer penalties may be a small deterrent but are needed”

“In working with persons who have been sexually assaulted the process of court can re-victimize people”

Services and Supports for Victims and survivors: 13

More resources to support survivors: 6

More education about resources for survivors: 3

Difficulties accessing services in rural areas: 2

Need for support groups for survivors: 2

“I think there needs to be more awareness about resources that are available”

“There are services, however, access is difficult”

“Educating the public, programs in school and providing those in positions of power/healing with the appropriate tools to help victims is essential, and on PEI being able to provide anonymous services is important”

“I really hope there will be a support group for survivors...Something that helped me the most was knowing I' not alone and hearing other peoples' stories”

“..hearing the personal experiences of survivors of sexual abuse and childhood sexual abuse will help victims who are suffering in silence”

“Wait times in the mental health sector are completely unacceptable”

Awareness raising about male victimization and more male centered services: 6

More awareness focused on male victims and services for men: 6

“Women already receive so much more help than men in these circumstances. The focus needs to be in prevention and appropriate action for EVERYONE that experiences sexual assault”

“I would love to see a similar survey in support of men/boys. I know this is a less common sexual assault, but I feel they are very overlooked and have even less resources available to them as well as more shame/embarrassment as far as reporting the assault”

Gender issues: 6

Gender inequality as a root cause of sexual violence needs to be addressed: 6

“Gender inequality is endemic and its going to need to be addressed.”

“PEI is probably close to 1970s level of gender equality”