

## News

# Sex abuse usually targets children

60% of the time victims under 18, StatsCan reports

In child homicides, infants under age 1 most likely to die

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STAFF REPORTER

Three out of every five reported sexual assaults involves a child or youth under 18, even though they make up just a fifth of Canada's population, says a new report.

Children and teens were victims of 21 per cent of all physical assaults and 17 per cent of all other crimes involving violence or the threat of violence reported to police in 2003, according to the study released yesterday by Statistics Canada.

The report used data from 122 police services, including Toronto, York Region and Peel Region, which represent 61 per cent of crimes committed in Canada.

It examined violent crimes, including sexual and physical assaults, robbery, uttering threats, extortion, abduction and homicide.

Among the most disturbing findings: For those under 18, infants younger than one year face the highest risk of homicide.

The perpetrators are most likely to be known to their victims.

Between 1998 and 2003, two-thirds of the 350 solved homicides of children and youth were committed by a member of their family.

More than half of these were committed by the victim's father, followed by the mother (32 per cent) and other family members (9 per cent).

Police data showed that the youngest victims, those younger than six, were usually the victims of physical force such as strangulation, suffocation, beatings or forceful shaking.

Frustration was most often reported as the motive in homicides of young children.

Those aged 14 to 17 were most often killed as a result of an argument.

Karen Bach, director of the Yonge Street Mission's Evergreen Centre for Street Youth, was neither shocked nor surprised by the statistics.

"Unfortunately, the increasing stress in families coupled with the inherent violence to which people are exposed on a daily basis, both children and adults, leads inevitably to violent re-

**Pre-natal classes should have sessions on non-violent parenting, expert says**

sponses against those who are most vulnerable and least able to defend themselves — namely children and youth," she said.

Among kids living on the street, the rates of violence are even higher, she added.

"It is our observation that family violence can and does lead youth to run to the street to escape ... however, once there, they find their lives filled with even greater violence," Bach said.

The majority of physical and sexual assaults against children younger than six were committed by a family member, most often a parent, the report said.

In contrast, older youth aged 14 to 17 were more likely to be assaulted by a peer or a stranger.

The report also found the most dangerous times of the day for different age groups.

During the 2003 school year, it found that children aged six to 13 were at the greatest risk of physical assault from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

More than 40 per cent of physical assaults occurred during those four hours.

In 2003, nearly 28,000 physical assaults and more than 9,000 sexual assaults against people under 18 were reported to the 122 police services in the study.

The majority of cases were classified as common assault, which means no weapon was used and there were no serious injuries.

Det. Const. Scott Purches of the Toronto police sex crimes unit, child exploitation section, said the statistics reflect reality in Toronto.

According to Toronto Police Service figures for 2003, there were 473 reported sexual assaults on children, from newborns to 11 years old — 129 males and 344 females.

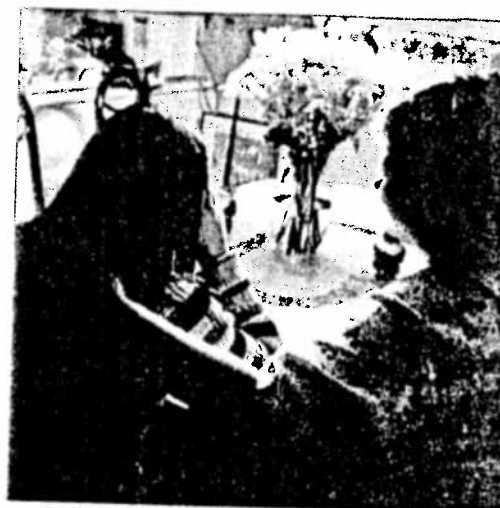
In the 12- to 17-year-old age group, there were 882 sexual assaults — 81 on males and 801 on females, the Toronto figures show.

Looking at trends over six years, the study found rates of violent crime among children and youth were mostly unchanged, with some decrease in older children.

The best way to reduce violence against children is education, said Bach.

"There is an enormous need to begin to address the issue of non-violent parenting," she said.

"It would be my hope that pre-natal classes would begin to include a number of sessions on how to parent without violence."



PETER MARTIN/MONTREAL GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

The risk of violent attacks on girls peaks at about age 15.

**For some kids, home is not a refuge**

The study 'Children and Youth as Victims of Violent Crime' used 2003 data from 122 police services, including the Toronto, York Region and Peel Region forces, which represent 61 per cent of crimes committed in Canada.

Children and youths under 18 were the victims in three out of five sexual assaults reported to police — although they make up just 21 per cent of the population.

The vast majority of sexual assault victims younger than 18 (80 per cent) were female.

Strangers were accused in only 5 per cent of sexual assaults against children and youth. Half of all sexual assault victims aged 6 or younger were attacked by a family member.

When family members were accused of sexually assaulting a child or youth, the accused were male in 98 per cent of cases.

The risk of a child or youth being a victim of violent crime (including assault, sexual assault, abduction and murder) peaks among girls at age 15, then declines. The peak age

for boys is 17.

The four hours after school are the most dangerous time of the day for children aged 13. On school days, more than 40 per cent of physical assaults against children that age happened between 3 and 7 p.m. Among youth aged 14 to 17, the most dangerous hour: were noon to 4 p.m., suggesting a link with truancy.

Male children and youth were more likely than female to be physically assaulted by someone from outside the family.

In cases of family-related physical assault, 44 per cent of the accused were fathers.

Among physical assaults perpetrated by a mother, most of the victims (63 per cent) were daughters. Fathers were more likely to assault their sons.

Rates for all types of violent offences were relatively stable over the previous five years for children younger than 11. Rates of crimes against older children and youths declined slightly.

Source: Children and Youth as Victims of Violent Crime, Statistics Canada