The Sexual Assault Review Committee has completed their review of over 100 sexual assault investigations conducted between 2014 and 2017. This review outlines the purpose, scope, method and data collected in the review. The review also provides recommendations in general terms to improve the organization’s future response to these types of allegations and investigations.
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INTRODUCTION

On February 3rd, 2017, the Globe and Mail released a report titled: Unfounded, Will the Police Believe You? The article was based on a 20 month investigation by the Globe and Mail which revealed that sexual assault victims were more likely to be believed in some areas of the country than others. The report was a comprehensive look at sexual assault reports in Canada, which focused on police investigations that were classified as unfounded. According to the report 19% of sexual assault investigations in Canada conducted from 2010 to 2014 were classified as unfounded.

**Unfounded:** “An incident that has been determined through police investigation that the offence reported did not occur, nor was it attempted and therefore no violations of the Criminal Code or other federal statute took place at the time or location.”

The Globe and Mail report provided a wide range of statistics obtained from Statistics Canada and from freedom of information requests to 178 police services. The report provided nationwide, provincial and regional statistics along with unfounded statistics specific to police jurisdictions. The statistics concerning the municipal jurisdiction of Camrose, Alberta, indicated:

- The 5-year unfounded sexual-assault rate is 46% (2010 – 2014).
- The 46% unfounded rate was among the highest in Canada.

The release of the Globe and Mail report increased the attention placed on sexual assault reports and investigations in Canada and initiated stakeholders to review the manner in which these occurrences were classified.

On February 14th, 2017, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, released a new national standard for the classification of crime reports. The new standard allowed for a new classification titled “unsubstantiated”, which allowed police services an alternative option to the “unfounded” classification, which more accurately scored the reported incident.

In March of 2017, the Camrose Police Service conducted a preliminary review of all of their sexual-assault reports from 2010 – 2017, which reviewed the manner in which the reports were classified. The results of the initial review determined that:
- Had alternative Uniformed Crime Reporting (UCR) classifications been available at the time of the reporting, many occurrences would not have been scored as Unfounded.

On July 24th, 2017, Mark Neufeld was hired as the new Chief of Police for Camrose Police Service. Recognizing the political, media, and public interest in sexual assault reports and the high unfounded rate in Camrose, he directed the creation of an internal review committee to conduct a comprehensive review of all sexual assaults reported from 2014 to 2017.

NEW UCR INCIDENT CLEARANCE STATUSES

On April 4-5th, 2017, the Police Information and Statistics Committee (POLIS) of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) developed recommendations addressing the feasibility of reinstating collection and the need for consistent and standardized reporting of all founded and unfounded incidents, including sexual assault. The CACP Board of Directors endorsed these recommendations from the POLIS committee on April 10th, 2017.

As a result of these recommendations, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) and POLIS have worked with other partners and independent experts and implemented changes to the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey and to developed material to help train police on the new changes. The definitions for both founded and unfounded have been updated as per the recommendations from POLIS. The improvement to these definitions has helped police services across Canada report incidents to Statistics Canada in a consistent fashion.

New definition of “Unfounded”

“An incident is unfounded if it has been determined through police investigation that the offence reported did not occur, nor was it attempted.”

UCR Clearance status options were expanded and revised, providing police with more options then previously available.
New Clearance Statuses

- Insufficient evidence to proceed
- Victim / Complainant declines to proceed (no CSC identified)
- Victim / Complainant requests that no further action is taken (CSC Identified)
- Charges recommended but declined by Crown

PURPOSE

The act of sexual violence is a complex and multi-faceted issue that requires a significant commitment from social stakeholders and law enforcement to mitigate the lasting consequences for victims, families and communities. The purpose of the Sexual Assault Review Committee was to evaluate the police service’s response and commitment towards the reported sexual assault occurrences within scope.

The goals of the review were to:

- Obtain a better understanding of reported sexual assaults at a local level.
- Ensure proper reporting and classifications of sexual assault cases.
- Ensure the investigations were thorough and complete.
- Review the level of professionalism and evidence of any bias.
- Ensure the investigations adhered to current policies and procedures.
- Inform in generating recommendations where changes in policy, practice and training are required.
- Ensure supports for victims are closely aligned across agencies: police, Victim Services and community support groups.

SCOPE

As a result of the Globe and Mail report, many police services across Canada have chosen to review the reported sexual assaults that were previously classified as “unfounded”. In order to fully address the purpose of this review, the Sexual Assault Review Committee reviewed **ALL occurrences related to sexual violence** from 2014 to 2017, regardless of their classification.
METHOD

Sexual Assault Review Committee developed a standardized evaluation form which was used to evaluate the occurrences. This form consisted of a comprehensive breakdown of victimology, occurrence scoring, and investigative methods. Each member of the Sexual Assault Review Committee was assigned a number of cases to review, and each member conducted their own independent review of the occurrences. Once the reviews were completed, and the problem files were identified, a joint review was completed. To confirm there is no conflict of interest while reviewing the files, two guidelines were followed by committee members:

- The reviewing committee member could not have had any involvement in the investigation, as an investigator or as a supervisor.
- All occurrences within scope could be subjected to a joint review by the committee.


Analyst: Kelsey Stratichuk

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF UNFOUNDED

In 2014, the Camrose Police Service saw a total of 26 occurrences related to sexual violence. Of those 26 occurrences, 14 were scored and treated as unfounded, totaling 53.9%. In 2015, the number of reported occurrences increases to 39, 56.4% of which were scored as unfounded. We see these numbers start to change significantly in 2016. The reported number is 26 (equal to 2014), but the unfounded rate drops to 34.6%. The numbers continue to drop in 2017 with 15 total reported incidents and only 1 occurrence scored as unfounded.

UNFOUNDED SEXUAL ASSAULTS PER YEAR

- 2014: 53.9%
- 2015: 56.4%
- 2016: 34.6%
- 2017: 6.7%
SEXUAL ASSAULT REVIEW

Attempting to understand the reasons behind the unfounded rate, the Committee gathered data on reporting, investigative methods, and victimology. The numbers show 76% of all unfounded complaints were reported by a third party, either a family member, friend, hospital staff or other.

When asked to participate in the investigation process, 38% of victims provided details about the incident, and only 24% wanted Police to continue with a formal investigation. There was also a 10% Victim attrition rate, where a Victim was initially onboard with a police investigation and later declined. These statistics are compelling given the fact that 76% of all unfounded occurrences were reported by a third party.
It is interesting to note the demographics of the victims of the unfounded complaints are typically children 12 years old and younger.
While there does seem to have been room for improvement with the unfounded scoring, specifically in 2014 and 2015, only 28% of the 106 files reviewed required reclassification. Statistics Canada addressed the problem of unfounded scoring by stating: “it was determined that the lack of specificity in reasons for not clearing an incident may have contributed to varying rates of unfounded” (Statistics Canada, 2018, p.6). Before the evolution of founded and unfounded definitions within CCJS and POLIS, unfounded was routinely used when the limited other clearance statuses were not applicable.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON ALL OCCURRENCES**

Looking further into the larger descriptors of sexual violence in Camrose, the review painted a picture of the locations these types of occurrences are most likely to happen, who is involved and the nature of the allegations. Like the unfounded statistics, the typical victim for reported sexual violence incidents is a Caucasian female, 12 years old and younger. The suspect is likely to be a Caucasian male, 25 years and older.
Further to this, we have seen that the victim is 74% likely to know the suspect, helping to understand that 30% of these reported assaults happen in the victim’s residence.

Looking into the incidents themselves, 84% of the sexual offences committed were a sexual assault and the police service investigated very few incidents that caused bodily harm, were aggravated or involved a weapon. The offences listed as: Sexual Exploitation, Interference and Invitation to Sexual Touching are unique to occurrences involving children.
Camrose Police Service Major Crimes Unit (MCU) has had involvement with 13% of sexual assault cases in this four year period.

MCU’s involvement dropped to 8% of the unfounded cases, as many of these cases did not require as much investigative follow-up.

The final captured statistic reflects whether Police followed the policies and procedures regarding sexual assault files. Upon review it was determined that 93% of the 106 files under review followed policy, with 7% needing further investigation. Of the total unfounded occurrences, 10% required further investigation and 90% adhered to the policies and procedures in place at the time.
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Since the development and release of the new clearance statuses, we have seen a large decrease in the use of unfounded. 2015 was the highest year for the total number of reported sexual assaults, as well as unfounded complaints. A search of the 2018 sexual violence files found 42% resulted in charges, an increase of 223% from 2015. The unfounded rate has held steady at 6% since 2017, which is an 89% decrease from 2015.

2018 Totals

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<tr>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cleared by Charge</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsolved/Insufficient</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic Declines - CSC Identified</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic Declines - No CSC</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsubstantiated</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfounded</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleared Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
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RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the information gathered in the review of over 100 sexual assault investigations, the following recommendations are being put forward for consideration. The recommendations are based on investigative best practice and in striving to a more victim-centered approach:

1. **Update the current Camrose Police Service Policies and Procedures related to sexual assault investigations.**
   In 2018, the Province of Alberta released a Best Practice Guide for Law Enforcement Investigations into Sexual Violence. This guide was drafted by a
provincial subcommittee, which consisted of representation from various police and social agencies including the Camrose Police Service. The Camrose Police Service should rely on the best practice guide to amend its current policies.

2. **The Camrose Police Service looks into the viability of a “Third Option”**.
   The “Third Option” allows survivors who are unsure about reporting a sexual assault to police to have forensic evidence collected and stored for a defined period of time. This option should be discussed with Alberta Health Services and local Sexual Assault Centers to determine how it can be applied in Camrose.

3. **The Camrose Police Service implements a file review process based upon the “Philadelphia Model”**.
   In the development of new policies and procedures related to sexual assault investigations, consideration should be given to developing a file review process that includes community partner collaboration. This collaborative process will bring confidence in the investigative process and improve victim support.

4. **Increase the involvement of the Major Crimes Unit (MCU) in sexual assault investigations**.
   According to data within the review, MCU was involved in 13% of the sexual assault investigations. It is recognized that not ALL sexual assault investigations need to be conducted by MCU, however, having more experienced and specialized investigators involved in these types of investigations leads to better outcomes.

**Work Cited**