

Press release Sexual Assault Review

A recently completed review of sexual assault occurrences in Stratford from 2010 to 2014 has highlighted the need for some changes in the way those occurrences are processed by the Stratford Police Service.

The multi-phase review, which began in February, involved close collaboration with several community partners and agencies, including Optimism Place, The Emily Murphy Centre, Peel Regional Police, a sexual assault working group, and Stratford Police civilian and sworn staff.

The initial internal review, and an external one conducted by the Peel Regional Police, both underscored an issue with the way the Stratford Police Service had coded sexual assault cases under the Unified Crime Reporting (UCR) survey.

After reviewing the 114 sexual assault occurrences reported in Stratford from 2010 to 2014, a total of 21 (or 18.4%) of those were determined to be unfounded. That's slightly below the national average of 19%.

"The investigations of sexual assaults are conducted by detectives assigned to the Criminal Investigations Division, and are done with integrity, professionalism and a focus on justice and victim care," said Stratford Police Chief Mike Bellai. "There is always room for improvement as we constantly look for ways to better serve our community."

The Stratford Police Service will continue its important partnerships with community agencies to ensure victims of all crimes receive the best care possible, and is particularly looking forward to working with Optimism Place on the implementation in Stratford of the highly regarded Philadelphia Model of advocate care review of sexual assault cases. The goal is to ensure greater transparency with investigations and victim care.

The Emily Murphy Centre has also offered to help with training on trauma-informed care for all sworn police officers.

A series of recommendations from the Police Chief are aimed at improving and enhancing victim care and investigations around sexual assault occurrences in Stratford.

Those recommendations are as follows:

Unified Crime Reporting (UCR) coding

- Ensure accurate reporting, clearing and coding of sexual assaults to Statistics Canada
- Niche Coordinator trained in proper coding of offences and reporting to Statistics Canada, with this coding reviewed by a supervisor
- Review of UCR-coded unfounded sexual assault cases from 2000-2017

Investigations

- Continued evidence-based approach to sexual assault investigations and continued partnerships with the Crown Attorney's office to ensure successful prosecutions
- To ensure consistent investigations, victim assistance and care, as well as accurate UCR coding, the Police Service will begin case conferences at the conclusion of every sexual assault investigation with a direct supervisor and the Inspector in charge of Investigative Support
- Patrol officers will receive additional training in receiving initial disclosure of sexual assault investigations through Investigative Support Services

General Orders

- A review of the Stratford Police Services' General Orders in relation to investigating sexual assaults, criminal investigation management plan and victim assistance

Victimology

- Implementation of the Philadelphia Model of sexual assault review
- Continued partnerships with the sexual assault working group, Optimism Place, Emily Murphy Centre, Victim/Witness Assistance Program and Victim Services
- Participate in trauma informed care training provided by the Emily Murphy Centre
- Advocate for evidentiary "sexual assault kits" to be provided locally, instead of requiring victims to travel to hospitals in Kitchener or London

For more information, contact:

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