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# RCMP seeks to expand third-party reporting for sexual assault cases

By Joanna Smith The Canadian Press

**A new Global News/Ipsos Reid poll shows that our justice system isn't doing enough to protect victims of sexual assault. The poll shows that as many as 30 per cent of Canadian women have been forced into sexual encounter, but very few ever go to the the police. Those who do report generally do not feel the police are on their side. Jennifer Tryon looks at where the breakdown is happening and what's being done to fix it.**

OTTAWA – The RCMP is exploring ways to expand a program that allows victims to report allegations of sexual assault – and get the help they need – without actually having to go to the police and face their fear of not being believed.

“The RCMP is in the preliminary stages of looking into how third party reporting could be implemented in the wide variety of RCMP-policed environments, where it doesn't currently exist,” Staff Sgt. Tania Vaughan, a spokeswoman for the federal police force, told The Canadian Press in an email.

“The RCMP is committed to working with interested jurisdictions and communities to explore expanding third party reporting,” she added, repeating a message that Kevin Brosseau, the deputy commissioner of the RCMP, told a gathering of ministers responsible for that status of women last week.

The program, which already exists in British Columbia and Yukon, allows victims of sexual assault to report the details to a community-based organization, which then shares the information anonymously with police.

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“It was part of the conversation around more responsive legal and justice systems for survivors of sexual assault,” Status of Women Minister Maryam Monsef said in an interview.

“The purpose of the conversation ultimately was to address the stigma, but also address the barriers that prevent survivors from coming forward, from reporting and from seeking support,” said Monsef, who met with her provincial and territorial colleagues in Toronto last week.

“One of the solutions that the RCMP presented was this idea of third-party reporting.”

The program is aimed at improving the long-standing and concerning trend that sexual assaults remain vastly under-reported.

According to the latest data from Statistics Canada, there were approximately 636,000 self-reported incidents of sexual assault in 2014, or 22 incidents for every 1,000 Canadians age 15 and older – unchanged since 2004, despite a decline for all other crimes over the same period.

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Nonetheless, Statistics Canada said less than five per cent of all sexual assault incidents perpetrated by someone other than a spouse was reported to police, whereas about one-third of other crimes do get reported.

“Most sexual assault survivors don’t want to report to the police, for a myriad of very valid reasons and the more marginalized someone is by society, the less likely they are interested in reporting,” said Tracy Porteous, the executive director of Ending Violence Association of B.C.

**VIDEO: Improving the overall system for sexual assault victims**

Porteous, who was involved in the push for province-wide, third-party reporting of sexual assault in B.C., said the program helps both survivors and police.

Since the reporting is done through a community-based organization such as a victim-assistance program or a sexual assault centre, survivors can be set up to receive the emotional, psychological and practical support they need to process and recover from the traumatic experience.

As for the police, Porteous said they enter the details into a database that helps identify trends and patterns and alerts other police forces in B.C. to any possible similarities between cases, which is especially important given research suggesting most sexual predators are repeat, and escalating, offenders.

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Porteous said there is also the option for a police officer who wants to investigate a tip to return to the community organization that reported the sexual assault and ask to speak to the victim, who might be more willing to participate knowing the police are already taking it seriously.

“Most survivors don’t report to the police because they think they are not going to be believed,” Porteous said. “They think somebody is going to blame them or judge them for what happened.”

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One of the challenges, Porteous said, is that the type of community-based organizations that could implement third-party reporting are stretched thin and completely absent from large swaths of the country, particularly in remote, rural and northern areas.

That could be problematic, as Vaughan stressed the RCMP cannot do this alone.

“Community support must be in place for this type of initiative to be successful,” said Vaughan.

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Rochelle Squires, the Manitoba environment minister who is also responsible for the status of women portfolio, said her province would be in favour.

“It would give them an opportunity to reach out and tell their story and know that they’re going to be believed,” said Squires.

“If they’re not comfortable right away stepping out and walking into that police station or making that call to the RCMP, perhaps there is a gentler way that we can get these survivors to access the system and to start to get some of the support they need to find the healing that they need,” she said.

**VIDEO: #MeToo campaign prompts victims of sexual assault, harassment to come forward**

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