

Review of Sexual Assault Investigations



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January 2025

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Objectives of the Review

The purpose of this review is to ensure that the St. Thomas Police Service conducts comprehensive investigations into reported sexual assault cases, upholding the highest standards to protect victims' rights and ensure fair treatment throughout the process. Additionally, this review aims to confirm that the service's practices and policies consistently align with current legislation and established best practices. This in-depth assessment will specifically examine incidents of sexual assault, domestic sexual assault, and sexual offences against children reported to the St. Thomas Police Service in 2024. The key objectives of this review are as follows:

- **Review of Policies:**
Evaluate the existing policies governing the investigations of sexual assaults, domestic-related sexual assaults, and sexual offences against children.
- **Mechanisms For Tracking Offences:**
Recognize and assess the mechanisms employed to track incidents of sexual assault, particularly those related to domestic and child cases.
- **Incident Clearance Analysis:**
Identify and analyze incidents categorized as "unfounded," exploring the circumstances and factors contributing to this outcome.
- **Unfounded Investigations Review:**
Conduct an in-depth review of investigations labeled as "unfounded" to discern the specific factors that facilitated this particular outcome.

This report aims to provide insights into the current investigative procedures and policies, offering recommendations for potential improvements to further ensure the effectiveness and sensitivity of the St. Thomas Police Service's approach to handling sexual assault cases.

Method

This review of sexual assault investigations was conducted by the supervisor of Criminal Investigations was commenced in January of 2024.

A review of sexual assault investigations takes place daily, monthly and yearly.

A review of all sexual assaults, threshold and non-threshold offences, was conducted semi-monthly and those incidents that met the submission criteria were added to Provincial Approved Software (Powercase) by trained investigators.

These statistics are garnished from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) within the Niche Records Management System (RMS) and from tracking of ViCLAS (Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System) submissions.

- In 2024, the St. Thomas Police recorded 55 incidents that were investigated as sexual related offences. These incidents include all alleged reported incidents of a sexual nature. 52 of these complaints (sexual assaults, invitation sexual touching, sexual interference, luring and sexual exploitation) resulted in the submission to ViCLAS (Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System)
- There were 19 charges of adult sexual assault laid in 2024.
There were 0 charges of aggravated sexual assault.
There were 0 charges of sexual assault with a weapon.
There were 30 charges relating to sexual offences against children in 2024
 - 10 charges of sexual assault on a person under 16 years of age
 - 5 charges of Invitation to Sexual Touching
 - 1 charge of luring a child
 - 13 charges of sexual interference
 - 0 charges of sexual exploitation
 - 0 charges of indecent exposure to person under 16 years of age
 - 1 charge of makes, prints, publishes or possesses for the purpose of publication any child pornography
- PowerCase is a crucial tool for managing major case incidents, including sexual offences. The St. Thomas Police Service reviews all sexual offence allegations to determine if they meet the criteria for entry into this ministry-approved software. PowerCase streamlines case management, enhances data analysis, and simplifies evidence disclosure, ensuring thorough and efficient investigations. Its structured methodology supports all investigative stages, automatically linking entities and identifying patterns across cases. Built-in analysis tools provide clear visualizations of relationships, helping investigators quickly assess connections and advance their cases effectively.
- Of the 55 incidents that were investigated as sexual related offences, 52 of the investigations were entered onto PowerCase. The entries into PowerCase include all victims, all persons that are suspected/accused/charged, all offence locations, as well as all Officer reports relating to the incident. This ensures that the St. Thomas Police Service are doing their part to share important information to other police services.

Incident Clearance Analysis

A comprehensive review was conducted regarding the clearances of all sexual-related offenses, and the following was noted:

- Out of 55 investigations analyzed, 29 resulted in the laying of criminal charges, accounting for 52.73% of all sexual-related offense investigations.
- Additionally, 17 investigations concluded with the victim/complainant declining to proceed, constituting 30.90% of sexual-related offenses.
- Furthermore, in 8 investigations, insufficient evidence was found to support criminal charges, representing 14.55% of sexual-related offenses. For further confidential clarification on these cases, see Appendix 'A'
- Lastly, one investigation initially categorized as a sexual assault was reclassified as a regular assault following thorough examination, which also led to its exclusion from PowerCase as previously mentioned. This singular instance represents 1.82% of reported sexual-related offenses

Current Policies and Procedures Relating to Sexual Assault Investigations

The following policies and procedures have been implemented by the St. Thomas Police Service for reports of sexual assault, domestic sexual assaults and sexual offences against children.

- LE-034 Sexual Assault Investigations
- LE-046 Sexual Offender Registry
- LE-024 Domestic Violence Occurrences
- LE-027 Child Abuse and Neglect
- LE-006 Criminal Investigation Management Plan
- LE-020 Collection of Evidence
- LE-021 Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse
- LE-036 Child Pornography
- PR-11 DNA
- PR-48 Victim's Rights
- PR-49 ViCLAS
- PR – 80 Human Trafficking
- VA-001 Witness Assistance

Objective Findings and Recommendations

Objective

To review the related policies and procedures

Findings

The policies and procedures governing sexual assault investigations maintain their relevance and are consistently followed by all members of the Service. These policies underwent a thorough review by supervisors in the Criminal Investigations division in 2024. Additionally, members of the St. Thomas Police Service, including those in criminal investigations, underwent training on Intimate Partner Violence, Human Trafficking, and gender based occurrences.

The Service continues to work closely with community partners involved in victim's rights and resources.

Recommendations

- All members of Criminal Investigations attend two week intimate partner violence course provided by the Ontario Police College.

Objective Findings and Recommendations

Objective

Tracking Mechanisms

Findings

Reported Sexual Assaults are tracked through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) within the Niche Records Management System (RMS).

Recommendations

All reported incidents were analyzed and found to be categorized correctly. No recommendations required.

Objective Findings and Recommendations

Objective

Review all “unfounded” incidents.

Findings

- There were no unfounded incidents in 2024

Recommendations

There are no recommendations identified.

Training

Sexual assault investigation training is incorporated at the recruit level. Adequacy levels are tracked by coach officers and approved by the recruit's direct supervisor. A stand- alone component of a recruit's training is designated for sexual assault investigations.

All threshold offences are reassigned to the Criminal Investigations Unit as per the Criminal Investigations Management plan (LE-006). All members of Criminal Investigations have completed Sexual Assault Investigations as of December 2024. One new member is joining Criminal Investigations in 2025 and will require the Sexual Assault Investigations course.

These officers are members of the Sexual Assault Investigators Association of Ontario (SAIAO). All members of the unit are provided with additional training provided by local and regional Crown Attorneys who specialize in sexual violence prosecutions.

Designated members of the unit participate in "community partner" committees created and designed to address the sensitive nature and issues confronting victims and survivors of sexual assault.

As of February 2025 a new member will be joining the unit. This new member will require the ministry accredited training as per the Criminal Investigations Management plan (LE-006).

Recommendations As A Result of This Review

- Maintain and Monitor the St. Thomas Police Service's on-line reporting tool for sexual assaults, and make improvements and/or changes as required.
- Ensure those members (both front-line and investigators) involved in investigating Sexual Violence Offences receive continuous and ongoing training. (ie. SAIAO conferences, Crimes Against Women Conferences, etc). Training such as this helps keep members current and is an excellent opportunity to network for future development.
- Ensure members of the Criminal Investigations Branch receive training opportunities in the areas of motivational interviewing as well as trauma informed interviewing as they become available.
- Continuing to prioritize and support ongoing professional development initiatives is recommended to ensure that members of the Criminal Investigations Unit stay abreast of the latest investigative techniques and best practices. Additionally, periodic evaluations and feedback mechanisms can be implemented to gauge the direct impact of the training on the unit's investigative outcomes.

UPDATE :

2024

- In the year 2024, members of the Criminal Investigations Unit actively engaged in specialized training courses to augment their proficiency in key investigative areas. The diverse array of courses attended included:

Major Case Management: Equipping detectives with comprehensive skills and strategies essential for handling major and complex cases efficiently.

Sexual Assault Investigations: Specialized training to enhance understanding, sensitivity, and investigative techniques related to sexual assault cases.

Human Trafficking Investigations: Focused coursework addressing the nuances of human trafficking investigations, aiming to better combat this critical issue.

Domestic Violence Investigations: Training aimed at improving responses to domestic violence cases, with an emphasis on victim support and investigative procedures.

Powercase Investigations: Advanced coursework focusing on leveraging technology and data analysis in the investigative process.

The knowledge gained from these courses directly translates into improved investigative capabilities for the CIB detectives. Whether dealing with sensitive cases such as sexual assaults or addressing the complexities of major cases, the acquired expertise enhances the unit's ability to conduct thorough, efficient, and victim-centered investigations.

This report reflects the commitment of the St. Thomas Police for its continuous improvement and excellence in their investigative endeavors. The skills acquired through these specialized courses further position the unit to effectively navigate and address the evolving challenges of modern-day investigations, specifically in relation to sexual offences investigations.