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Online child sexual exploitation and abuse: Criminal justice pathways of police-reported incidents in Canada, 2014 to 2020

by Dyna Ibrahim

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Online child sexual exploitation and abuse: Criminal justice pathways of police-reported incidents in Canada, 2014 to 2020

by Dyna Ibrahim

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse encompasses a broad range of behaviours, including those related to child sexual abuse material, sexting materials (often distributed without consent),¹ sextortion,² grooming and luring, live child sexual abuse streaming and made-to-order content (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Research has documented the short- and long-term negative outcomes of childhood sexual victimization (Beitchman et al., 1991; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Hailes et al., 2019; Heidinger, 2022; Olafson, 2011). Similarly, studies have demonstrated the negative long-term effects and potential re-victimization that victims of online child sexual exploitation and abuse experience (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2017; Carnes, 2001; Hanson, 2017; Martin, 2015; Ospina et al., 2010; Say et al., 2015; Whittle et al., 2013).

Self-reported victimization data have shown that, overall, the majority of sexual offences never come to the attention of police (Burczycka & Conroy, 2017). Further, when a sexual offence involves a child victim, the incident is even more likely to be underreported for a number of reasons. For example, some children—especially younger children—may be unable to report or seek help, may fear reporting, or may not know how to report or seek help (Finkelhor et al., 2001; Taylor & Gassner, 2010). Additionally, as technology becomes more advanced, so too do the tactics used by offenders to lure and groom children for sexual exploitation and abuse, and with improved anonymity capabilities they can better hide their activities (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2019). This creates challenges for law enforcement to keep up with investigating incidents related to this crime, to identify victims for protection and to bring offenders to justice.

Sexual offences involving children—coupled with the proliferation of smart devices and advancements in technology—make online child sexual exploitation a highly underreported offence in official crime statistics. Still, since national data first became available in 2014, the number of police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse has increased, with the rate nearly tripling by 2020 (Ibrahim, 2022). Even though this crime is underreported and underestimated in police-reported data, this upward trend and the continuing advancements in technology underscore the importance of continued research in this area to help facilitate informed decision making and prevention efforts.

National-level statistics on police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse were presented in a preceding publication (Ibrahim, 2022). In addition to the previously published information on prevalence, trends, and characteristics of incidents, victims, accused persons, and court cases and charges, there are other questions about this type of crime that can be addressed using data collected from police and court records. These questions include, among others:

- What happens after an incident is reported to police?
- How do online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that were reported to police progress through the criminal justice system?
- What happens to accused persons who have been identified in relation to these incidents in terms of the types of charges laid and the outcomes of these charges?
- More broadly, how do the pathways of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents in the criminal justice system compare with other types of crime?

This article aims to answer these important questions.

Using data from the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey, the current article examines criminal justice outcomes of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that were reported to police between 2014 and 2020, and the pathways of these incidents through the justice system, including court case outcomes. Understanding the pathways of these cases through the criminal justice system will shed light on the similarities between online child sexual exploitation and abuse compared with other forms of crime, and on the potential challenges and constraints related to the prosecution of those accused of the former that may be unique to or exacerbated by the online nature of these crimes.

It should be noted that, while the current article makes many references to the preceding Statistics Canada article on online child sexual exploitation and abuse (Ibrahim, 2022), the analyses presented herein aim to answer a different set of questions—specifically, those listed above. Additionally, while the preceding article used the same data sources individually, the current article is based on a record linkage between the two files. Therefore, any comparisons between the two articles should be made with caution.

When examining underreporting, attrition, and justice outcomes of sexual crimes, studies have often used physical assault as a benchmark for comparison (Felson & Paré, 2005; Rotenberg, 2017; Thompson et al., 2007). Additionally, while certain violations defined within the *Criminal Code* fall under the scope of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (Text box 1), the absence of a standard or specific *Criminal Code* offence for online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and a reliance on survey-specific fields to define it, presents challenges in comparing court outcomes of these incidents to different types of sexual offences—which are explicitly defined in the *Criminal Code*. Further, due to data constraints, comparisons to in-person incidents that take place in offline spaces (i.e., non-cybercrime incidents, also referred to in this article as ‘contact offences’) would be limited to data beginning in 2018—reducing the number of incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse that could be analyzed for court outcomes.³ For these reasons, in the current article, physical assault is used as a benchmark for comparisons throughout.⁴

It should be noted that, while comparisons throughout this article are to total physical assaults, the findings and any differences to online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents remained even when the analyses were limited to physical assaults involving child victims below the age of 18 years. Therefore, comparisons of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents to child physical assaults specifically are not discussed. However, data for child physical assaults, which represented approximately 13% of the reported physical assault incidents, are presented in the charts for reference. Additionally, using sexual assaults as proxy for contact sexual offences against children, further comparisons of online child sexual exploitation and abuse outcomes are explored in Text box 3.

This article was produced with funding support from Public Safety Canada.

Text box 1

Defining and measuring online child sexual exploitation and abuse using police-reported data

Beginning in 2014,⁵ the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey has collected information related to online crime through the use of a cybercrime flag. An incident is flagged as a cybercrime when the crime targets information and communication technology (ICT), or when ICT was used to commit the offence.

ICT includes, but is not limited to, the Internet, computers, servers, digital technology, digital telecommunications devices, phones and networks. Crimes committed over text and through messages using social media platforms are also considered cybercrime activity.

Police services can report up to four violations for each incident reported in the UCR. The UCR classifies incidents according to the most serious violation occurring in the incident (generally the offence which carries the longest maximum sentence under the *Criminal Code*), with violations against the persons always classified as more serious than other violations. In order to maintain consistency in measuring the cyber aspect of crime, analyses of cybercrime data are based on the most serious violation in the incident that was most likely to have involved ICT, referred to as the cybercrime violation.

Incidents involving child pornography where an actual child victim was not identified are reported to the UCR with the most serious violation being “child pornography.” When an actual child victim is identified, the incident is reported to the UCR with the most serious violation as sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or other sexual violations against children, and child pornography may be reported as a secondary violation. Because of this difference, and to account for the complexities associated with investigating incidents of child pornography, analyses in this article are presented in terms of two categories of offences: **online sexual offences against children** and **online child pornography**.

Online sexual offences against children include:

- **Sexual violations against children** involve the following *Criminal Code* offences: sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, parent or guardian procuring sexual activity, householder permitting prohibited sexual activity, luring a child, agreement or arrangement (sexual offences against a child) and bestiality (in presence of, or incites, a child),⁶ and
- **Other sexual offences** are *Criminal Code* sexual offences that are not specific to children but where a victim was identified as being younger than 18. These include: non-consensual distribution of intimate images, sexual assault (levels 1, 2 and 3), sexual exploitation of person with disability, bestiality (commits, compels another person), voyeurism, incest and other sexual crimes.

Online child pornography includes incidents excluded from the category of sexual offences against children and includes offences under section 163.1 of the *Criminal Code* which makes it illegal to make, distribute, possess or access child pornography.

Keeping with the above noted definitions and structure of the UCR, the current article defines **online child sexual exploitation and abuse** as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18.

This definition is used for identifying police-reported incidents. Subsequent analyses on court outcomes and pathways are based on court records that were successfully linked to these police incidents. For additional information, see Text box 2.

In this article, the terms “online” and “cyber” are used interchangeably and, in the context of police-reported incidents, they all refer to situations where ICT was flagged. Further, “children and youth” refer to people aged 17 and younger.⁷

When a police-reported incident has been flagged as *cybercrime*, any of the violations in the incident may have involved the use of technology. For analytical purposes, a specific violation within each cybercrime incident is identified as the cyber-related violation. This violation is the most serious in the incident which was most likely to have involved ICT.

Retention or attrition of online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases in the criminal justice system

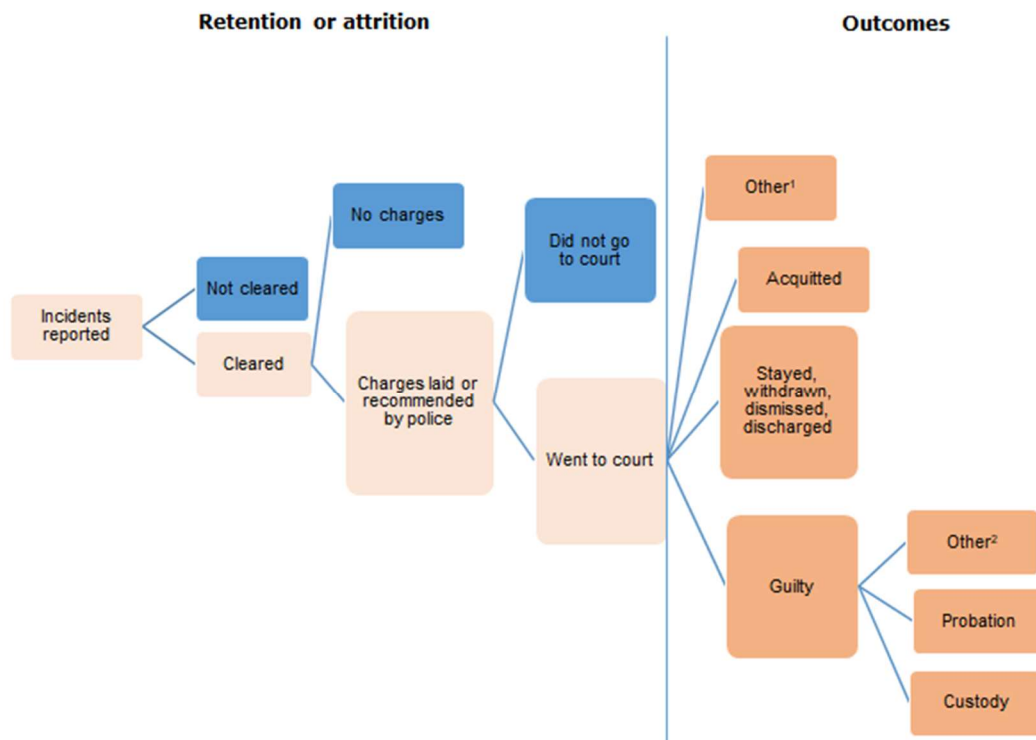
It has been well established that sexual offences involving child victims do not often come to the attention of police for numerous reasons such as children not knowing that they are being victimized, being afraid to report or knowing how to report or seek help (Finkelhor et al., 2001; Taylor & Gassner, 2010). Further, when such crimes are perpetrated or facilitated online, this presents additional barriers for police to identify and investigate, and for victims to be located or perpetrators to be identified and prosecuted. For example, with better technology comes advanced anonymity capabilities which may allow offenders to better hide their criminal activities (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2019). Thus, online child sexual exploitation and abuse, which encompasses a wide range of actions and behaviours, is highly susceptible to underreporting and underestimation.

Through several initiatives, Canada continues in its efforts to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse. This includes work under Canada’s *National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation on the Internet*. For example, with support from Public Safety Canada, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) manages Project Arachnid, an automated web crawler that detects and processes tens of thousands of images per second and sends take-down notices to online service providers to remove child sexual abuse material globally. Additionally, C3P is also responsible for Cybertip.ca, an online platform that facilitates the reporting of suspected online child sexual exploitation by Canadians. Additionally, Public Safety Canada, in collaboration with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, is participating in collaborative working groups with international partners to minimize barriers for law enforcement to better tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Since 2014, when nationally representative cybercrime data first became available, the number of incidents constituting police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse has generally been on an upward trend (Ibrahim, 2022). Understanding where retention or attrition occurs for these incidents, decisions and outcomes related to incidents that are retained, and at what point the gap widens relative to other crimes will help in identifying areas of focus for law practitioners, and program and policy makers. It will also aid in making programming and services, and the justice system as a whole, more responsive to incidents involving online child sexual exploitation and abuse and the unique needs of those who experience it.

In the context of this article, case retention is defined as the proportion of police-reported incidents that continue through the justice system, from an incident reported to police, to a court case with a reportable outcome. Conversely, attrition refers to points in the criminal justice pathways at which a case may “drop out” of the system. Here, it is the opposite of retention. In linked police and court data, there are several points at which case retention or attrition could be measured (Figure 1). First, examining clearance (where at least one accused had been identified in connection with the incident) and charge rates will indicate the proportion of incidents where the incident was considered solved, and subsequently whether charges were laid or recommended.⁸ Then, of those incidents where an accused person was identified and charged (or charges were recommended), the proportion that went to court is another case retention indicator.⁹

Figure 1
From police report to sentencing: Criminal justice pathways, and case retention or attrition



1. Other decisions include final decisions of found not criminally responsible and waived out of province or territory. This category also includes any order where a guilty decision was not recorded, the court's acceptance of a special plea, cases which raise *Charter* arguments and cases where the accused was found unfit to stand trial.

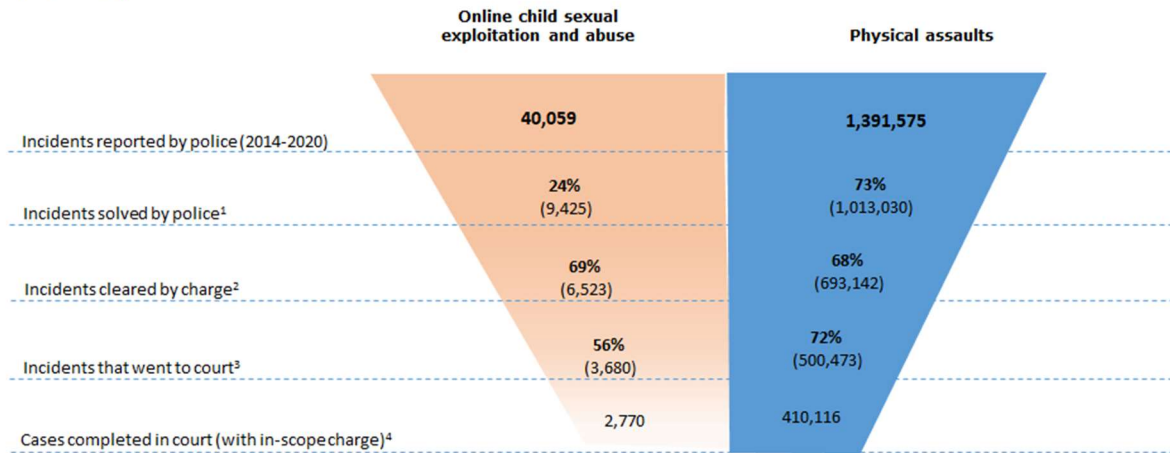
2. Includes conditional sentences, fines, community service, and other sentencing decisions.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Attrition in police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents highest at the clearance stage

As mentioned, incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse are likely highly underreported, meaning, they don't even enter the formal justice system. Further, incidents that do come to the attention of police continue to gradually drop out of the justice system. Figure 2 below illustrates the decline in the number of incidents that are retained within the system.

Figure 2
Attrition of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents from the criminal justice system versus physical assaults, by stage, 2014 to 2020



1. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents that have been cleared (where an accused had been identified in relation to the incident).
 2. Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where charges against an accused were laid or recommended by police.
 3. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended. An incident was considered to have gone to court if it linked to a court case.
 4. Number of court cases linked to police-reported incidents. For online child sexual exploitation and abuse, this number includes cases with at least one sexual offence charge. For physical assaults, this number includes cases with at least one physical assault charge. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents.
Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Physical assaults include common assault (level 1), and major assaults (levels 2 and 3), where it was the most serious violation in the incident. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

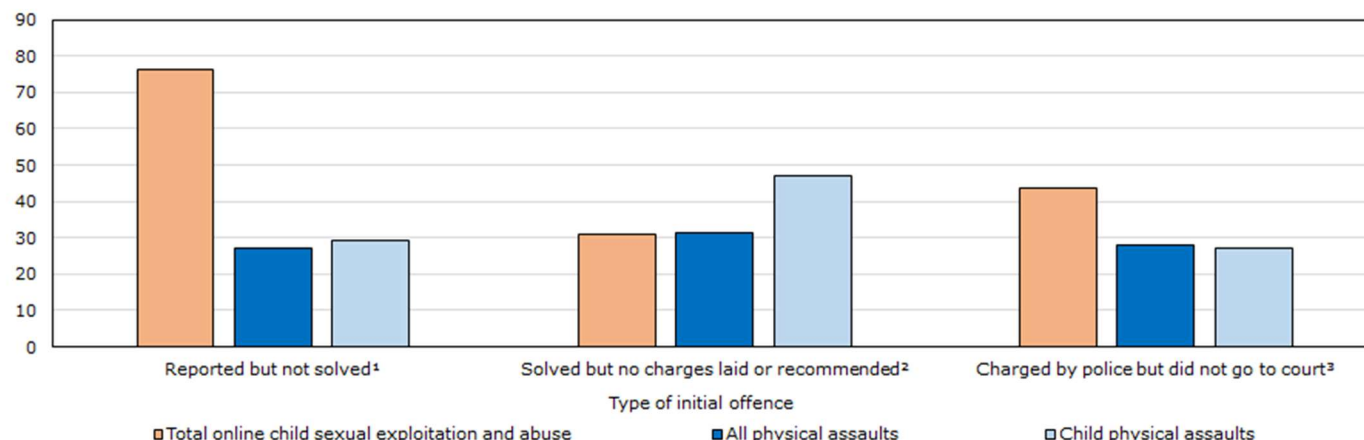
Police-reported data indicate that from the time national level cybercrime data first became available in 2014, until 2020, there were 40,059 incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁰ This number represents both online child sexual offences against children where the victim was identified by police, and child pornography incidents, where the child victim had not been identified. As previously reported, incidents involving an identified victim were much more likely to be cleared compared with child pornography incidents (Ibrahim, 2022). An incident is considered to be cleared, or solved, if police were able to identify an accused person in relation to the incident and had enough information to lay or recommend a charge against them.

Among the stages included in the current article (clearance, charge, court), attrition for online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents was highest at the clearance stage, with 24% of incidents being solved by police services (Figure 2). This means, for 76% of incidents, an accused person was not identified and therefore no charges could be laid or brought to court (Chart 1). This was also the stage where the biggest difference in attrition rates between online child sexual exploitation and abuse and physical assaults was observed (27% for physical assaults). This large drop-off is likely due to significant challenges police encounter in trying to solve a crime that was perpetrated online where accused persons can more easily evade detection. The next highest level of attrition for reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse is at the court stage: in more than four in ten (44%) incidents where there was an accused identified and charges were laid or recommended, the case did not proceed to court.¹¹

Chart 1

Attrition of police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse through the criminal justice system versus physical assaults, 2014 to 2020

percent



1. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where an accused person had not been identified in relation to the incident.
 2. Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where there were no charges laid or recommended by police. This includes incidents that were cleared by other means such as extrajudicial measures.
 3. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended, but where the incident did not link to a court case. This includes cases that may not have been linked due to false negatives in the linkage methodology or that may not have been processed by the courts within the time frame of the study.
Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Physical assaults include common assault (level 1), and major assaults (levels 2 and 3), where it was the most serious violation in the incident. Child physical assaults include physical assault incidents where the victim was a person younger than 18. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Making or distributing child pornography incidents most likely to drop out before going to court

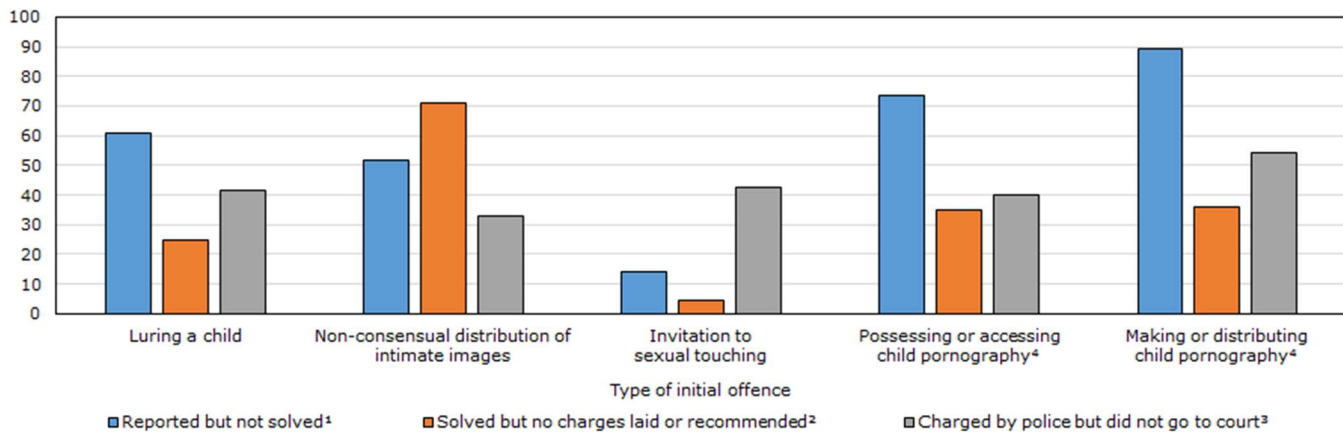
Examining linked data from an attrition standpoint reveals some notable differences among the different types of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse.¹²

Compared with other forms of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, a much lower share of making or distributing child pornography incidents went to court. Over half (54%) of police-reported incidents of making or distributing child pornography did not go to court, resulting in this offence having the highest attrition rate at this stage (Chart 2).

Chart 2

Attrition of police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse through the criminal justice system, by type of offence, 2014 to 2020

percent



1. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where an accused person had not been identified in relation to the incident.

2. Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where there were no charges laid or recommended by police. This includes incidents that were cleared by other means such as extrajudicial measures.

3. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended, but where the incident did not link to a court case. This includes cases that may not have been linked due to false negatives in the linkage methodology or that may not have been processed by the courts within the time frame of the study.

4. Includes offences under section 163.1 of the *Criminal Code* which makes it illegal to make, distribute, possess or access child pornography.

Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records.

These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

While, overall, attrition in online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents was highest at the clearance stage, this was not the case for non-consensual distribution of intimate images, where attrition was in fact highest at the charge level, with a large majority (71%) of incidents not resulting in charges after an accused was identified. This is likely in large part attributable to the fact that this type of offence typically involved a youth accused (between the ages of 12 and 17 years) (Ibrahim, 2022). The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* dictates that youth accused should be dealt with through extrajudicial measures that divert them from the formal court system.

Another notable difference was for the offence of invitation to sexual touching which had the lowest attrition rate at the charge stage, with a 5% dropout rate. Relative to the other offence categories, this offence type also had the highest clearance rate (Ibrahim, 2022), yielding the lowest attrition rate at the clearance stage (14%) among all offence categories of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.¹³ These findings may be related to this type of offence being likely to involve multiple violations in the incident which, as previously reported, often results in a higher clearance rate and charges (Ibrahim, 2022).

Text box 2

Pathway of charges from police-reported incident to court

There is no definition for the offence of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in the *Criminal Code*. To examine justice outcomes of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Canada, police-reported incidents from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey are defined based on a cybercrime flag (Text box 1). Then, these data are linked to court records from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) to explore their outcomes within the courts system. It is important to note that, in this article, proportions of cases or charges going to court are limited by the ability to successfully link a record from police-reported incidents to administrative court data. Therefore, some records may be missing from the linked file. This, however, is a limitation for all offences included in the study, and comparative offence groups.¹⁴

It is also worth noting that there are many differences between the UCR Survey and the ICCS. One notable difference between the two is in how records are counted. For example, multiple police incidents can lead to a single court case, and one accused person in police records can be involved in multiple court cases. Similarly, charges laid or recommended by police may change once in court, and additional charges may be added once a court case has begun. Therefore, the relationship between the two data sources is not one-to-one. Given that there is no specific definition for the crime of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in

the *Criminal Code*, this text box presents a brief analysis of the charges in police incidents and how court cases related to the online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents are identified.

Of note, to simplify the analysis of charge information as they progress from police to court using the UCR Survey and ICCS, calculations in this text box are limited to single-accused incidents which represent 93% of all cleared online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents.

About two-thirds (65%) of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that were cleared by charge had information about the types of charges laid or recommended by police.^{15 16} Multiple charges were laid or recommended by police in the majority of these incidents: 28% involved two charges, 24% involved three charges, and 25% involved four or more charges. Single charge incidents represented 24% of incidents.

Overall, the large majority (89%) of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents with available police charge information included a charge for a sexual offence that matched the initial violation identified as the online child sexual exploitation and abuse offence (Text box 1).^{17 18} The remaining 410 incidents did not include a charge that matched the initial cybercrime violation. In these incidents, charges were most often laid or recommended for a different type of sexual offence.

Cases processed in court can involve multiple charges. Linked court data indicate that there were 31,557 charges processed in court in relation to the single-accused online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents reported by police.¹⁹ Seven out of ten (70%) of the charges processed in court matched one of the charges laid or recommended by police.²⁰ Another 23% of charges were for a sexual offence different than those laid or recommended by police. These charges could be for secondary violations which were not reported in the survey.²¹ Similarly, the vast majority (91%) of charges processed in court for incidents that started off as physical assaults—and where such charges were laid or recommended by police-- were the same as those seen in court.

As stated earlier, online child sexual exploitation and abuse is not explicitly defined in the *Criminal Code* and, as demonstrated above, court charges related to online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents often remained the same as the charge laid or recommended by police, or changed to a charge for a different sexual offence. Moreover, sexual offences are generally slightly less likely to lead to a conviction, compared with physical assaults (Rotenberg, 2017). For these reasons, and due to a relatively small sample size, analysis of court outcomes in this article are based on all cases with at least one charge for a sexual offence violation. This represents 84% of all court cases linked to the online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents reported by police. Additionally, throughout the article, conviction rates are presented for cases where there is a finding of guilt for any sexual offence charge in the case.

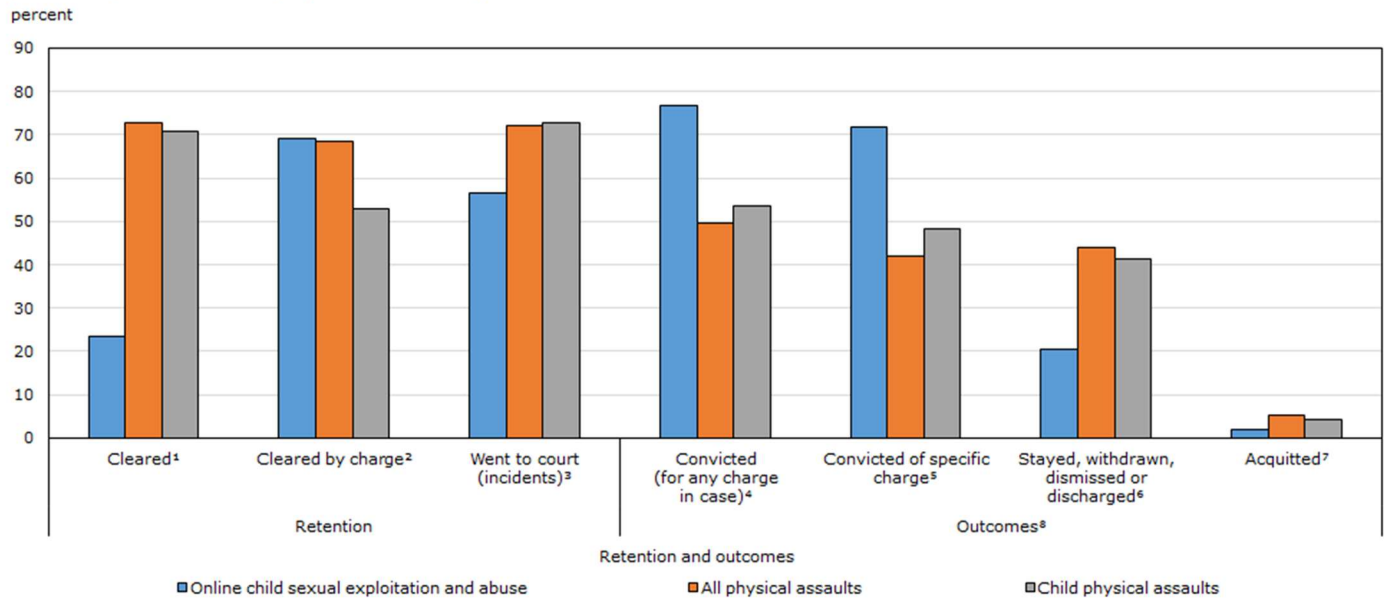
Pathways and outcomes of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that are retained in the criminal justice system

Relatively few online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents compared with physical assaults are solved or make it to court, but conviction rates are much higher

Previous research found that sexual assaults involving child victims went to court less often than adult sexual assaults, and sexual assaults in general were more prone to dropping out of the justice system between police and court than physical assaults (Rotenberg, 2017). Consistent with this finding, and as shown above, the retention of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents from police to court was generally lower compared with physical assaults. Nevertheless, as demonstrated below, linked online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases that ended up in court had a much higher conviction rate for any charge in the case, compared with linked physical assault cases.²²

As indicated, of the 40,059 police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse reported between 2014 and 2020, about one-quarter (24%) were cleared, meaning an accused person was identified in relation to the incident (Table 1).²³ In comparison, a much larger proportion of physical assaults reported over the same time were cleared (73%) (Chart 3). This may be expected as a physical assault, by its very nature, can generally be pinpointed to a specific location, making it easier to locate an accused person, which is in direct contrast to trying to locate an accused person who committed an online offence.

Chart 3
Retention and outcomes of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents in the criminal justice system versus physical assaults, 2014 to 2020



- Calculations are based on police-reported incidents that have been cleared (where an accused had been identified in relation to the incident).
 - Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where charges against an accused were laid or recommended by police.
 - Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended. An incident was considered to have gone to court if it linked to a court case.
 - For online child sexual exploitation and abuse, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any charge in the case. For physical assaults, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for physical assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any charge in the case.
 - For online child sexual exploitation and abuse, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for a sexual offence charge in the case. For physical assaults, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for physical assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for a physical assault charge in the case.
 - Includes stays as well as court referrals to alternative or extrajudicial measures and restorative justice programs, withdrawals, dismissals and discharges at preliminary inquiry. These decisions refer to the court either putting the charges against the accused on hold or stopping criminal proceedings against the accused.
 - An acquittal requires that a trial took place and a verdict of not guilty was reached for all the charges presented before the court.
 - In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents. This chart excludes figures for other decisions including final decisions of found not criminally responsible and waived out of province or territory, any order where a conviction was not recorded, the court's acceptance of a special plea, cases that raise *Charter* arguments, and cases where the accused was found unfit to stand trial. However, percentages for other categories are presented with other decision counts factored into the denominator.
- Note:** Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Physical assaults include common assault (level 1), and major assaults (levels 2 and 3), where it was the most serious violation in the incident. Child physical assaults include physical assault incidents where the victim was a person younger than 18. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Overall, once an accused person was identified in connection with an online child sexual exploitation and abuse incident, it was very likely for the incident to result in charges being laid or recommended. There were charges laid or recommended in nearly seven in ten (69%) incidents that were cleared. This charge rate was similar to physical assaults where 68% of cleared incidents resulted in charges being laid or recommended. Charges were more common for online sexual offences against children than for online child pornography.

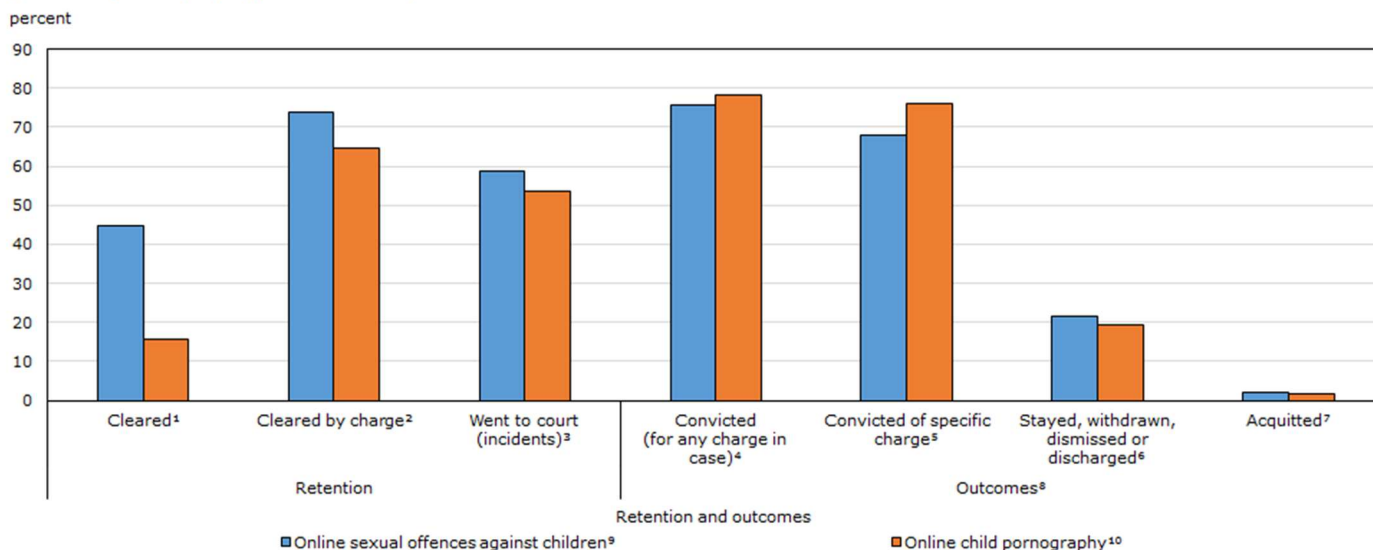
Just over half (56%) of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that led to charges proceeded to court; these consisted of slightly more online sexual offences against children than online child pornography (59% and 53%, respectively).^{24 25} The overall proportion was much lower than the 72% of charged physical assault incidents that went to court.

While the trends seen in this article thus far yielded a lower overall retention rate for online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents, relative to physical assaults, court outcomes reveal a different trajectory for these crimes. More specifically, of the linked online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases in court where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence, 77% led to a conviction (for any offence in the case).²⁶ Overall, 72% of cases resulted in a guilty finding for a sexual offence charge. The remaining 5% of the linked cases led to a guilty finding for a non-sexual offence. Moreover, 20% of linked cases resulted in a stay, withdrawal, dismissal or discharge as the most serious decision in the case.²⁷ This finding

could also be considered a form of attrition, as these decisions all refer to the court stopping criminal proceedings against the accused. An acquittal was rare in linked online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases (2%).

Of note, overall conviction rates when considering all charges in the case were similar for police-reported incidents of online sexual offences against children (where a child victim had been identified) and online child pornography (where the child victim had not been identified) (Chart 4). However, linked online child pornography cases more often led to a conviction for a sexual offence charge specifically (76%), compared with online sexual offences against children (68%).

Chart 4
Retention and outcomes of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents in the criminal justice system, by type of offence, 2014 to 2020



1. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents that have been cleared (where an accused had been identified in relation to the incident).
 2. Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where charges against an accused were laid or recommended by police.
 3. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended. An incident was considered to have gone to court if it linked to a court case.
 4. For online child sexual exploitation and abuse, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any charge in the case. For physical assaults, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for physical assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any charge in the case.
 5. For online child sexual exploitation and abuse, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for a sexual offence charge in the case. For physical assaults, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for physical assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for a physical assault charge in the case.
 6. Includes stays as well as court referrals to alternative or extrajudicial measures and restorative justice programs, withdrawals, dismissals and discharges at preliminary inquiry. These decisions refer to the court either putting the charges against the accused on hold or stopping criminal proceedings against the accused.
 7. An acquittal requires that a trial took place and a verdict of not guilty was reached for all the charges presented before the court. This chart excludes figures for other decisions including final decisions of found not criminally responsible and waived out of province or territory, any order where a conviction was not recorded, the court's acceptance of a special plea, cases that raise *Charter* arguments, and cases where the accused was found unfit to stand trial. However, percentages for other categories are presented with other decision counts factored into the denominator.
 8. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents.
 9. Includes sexual violations against children and other sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18.
 10. Includes offences under section 163.1 of the *Criminal Code* which makes it illegal to make, distribute, possess or access child pornography.
Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

In contrast, while a larger share of physical assault incidents proceeded to court, 50% of cases with at least one assault charge processed in court ended in a finding of guilt for a charge in the case, regardless of the type of charge. The proportion that resulted in a guilty finding for at least one assault charge (42%) was almost half of the proportion of online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases that resulted in a guilty finding for a sexual offence charge.²⁸ Instead, a finding of stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged was the most serious decision for any charge in the case in more than four in ten (44%) linked physical assault cases. In other words, although online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents less often went to court, compared with physical assaults, when they did, they more often led to a conviction.

Of online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases with a guilty finding, almost nine in ten led to a custodial sentence

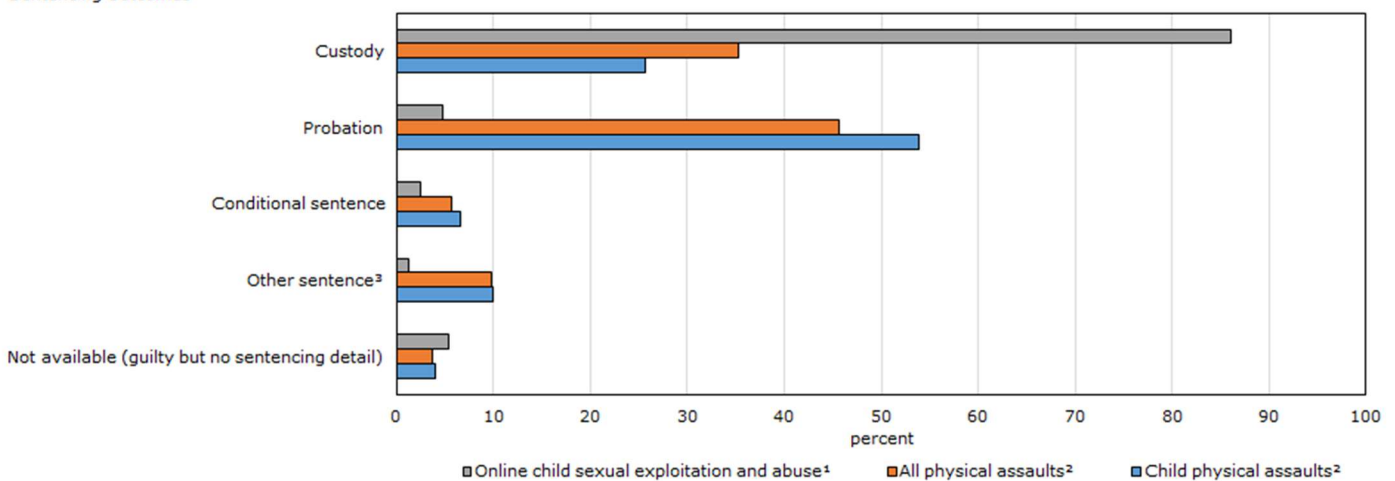
In total, there were 2,770 court cases linked to an online child sexual exploitation and abuse incident, where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence. The large majority (84%) were processed in adult courts, while cases completed in youth courts accounted for the remaining 16%.²⁹

In adult courts, linked online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases with a guilty finding for any charge in the case most often led to custody (86%) (Chart 5).³⁰ In comparison, a much lower proportion of linked cases of physical assaults with a guilty finding in adult courts resulted in a custody sentence (35%).

An adult custody sentence was slightly more common for linked online child pornography than online sexual offences against children (90% compared with 83%, respectively).

Chart 5
Sentencing outcomes of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse versus physical assaults, adult criminal court, 2014 to 2020

Sentencing Outcomes



1. Calculations are based on linked adult court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any offence in the case.

2. Calculations are based on linked adult court cases where there was at least one charge for physical assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any offence in the case.

3. Includes fines and other sentencing decisions (including restitution, absolute and conditional discharge, suspended sentence, community service order and prohibition orders, among others).

Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Physical assaults include common assault (level 1), and major assaults (levels 2 and 3), where it was the most serious violation in the incident. Child physical assaults include physical assault incidents where the victim was a person younger than 18. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Some of these differences in custodial sentences for guilty cases may be partly attributable to mandatory minimum penalties which are imposed for the most serious offences under the *Criminal Code*. In 2005, mandatory minimum penalties were introduced for sexual violations against children and child pornography. There was a large increase in custody sentences for sexual violations against children and child pornography cases with guilty decisions following the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences in 2005 (Allen 2017).³¹

Text box 3**Sexual offences against children: Online versus a proxy for contact offences**

Prior to 2018, all cybercrime data collected through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey were kept in a separate database from other data collected through the UCR. Due to differences in the data processing methodologies between these databases, analysis identifying cybercrime incidents within all incidents was not feasible. As this change in methodology is related to data processing (particularly, when the different data sets were created), the cybercrime and all crime data sets are incomparable. However, this change does not impact the way data are collected. Therefore, while comparisons between cybercrime and non-cybercrime incidents cannot be made prior to 2018 due to these processing differences, the changes do not impact total year-to-year counts for cybercrime data alone. As such, the current article pools UCR data from 2014 to 2020. Beginning in 2018, cybercrime data were merged with all other UCR incident data to allow for comparisons between cybercrime data and non-cyber crime. This type of comparison can only be done using data beginning in 2018 (see Text box 3 in Ibrahim, 2022).

The current article presents analyses of online child sexual exploitation and abuse based on incidents where a specific sexual offence was identified in police-reported data as the cybercrime violation (Text box 1). Given that the UCR Survey defines the cybercrime violation based on the most serious violation that is likely to be a cybercrime, there were no sexual assault incidents that were identified as the cybercrime violation. As such, in this text box, sexual assaults are used as proxy for 'contact' (or in-person) sexual offences against children, allowing for comparisons of data collected over the same period of 2014 to 2020.³² Since there are some differences between online sexual offences against children, and online child pornography, comparisons to online child sexual exploitation and abuse will be limited to incidents where a victim was identified (or sexual offences against children—hereafter referred to in this text box as "online offences").

Police services can report up to four violations for each incident. Further, in a small minority of incidents, the cybercrime violation is not the most serious violation in the incident (Ibrahim 2022). Therefore, it is possible that a small share of incidents overlaps between the online and contact incidents included in this analysis.

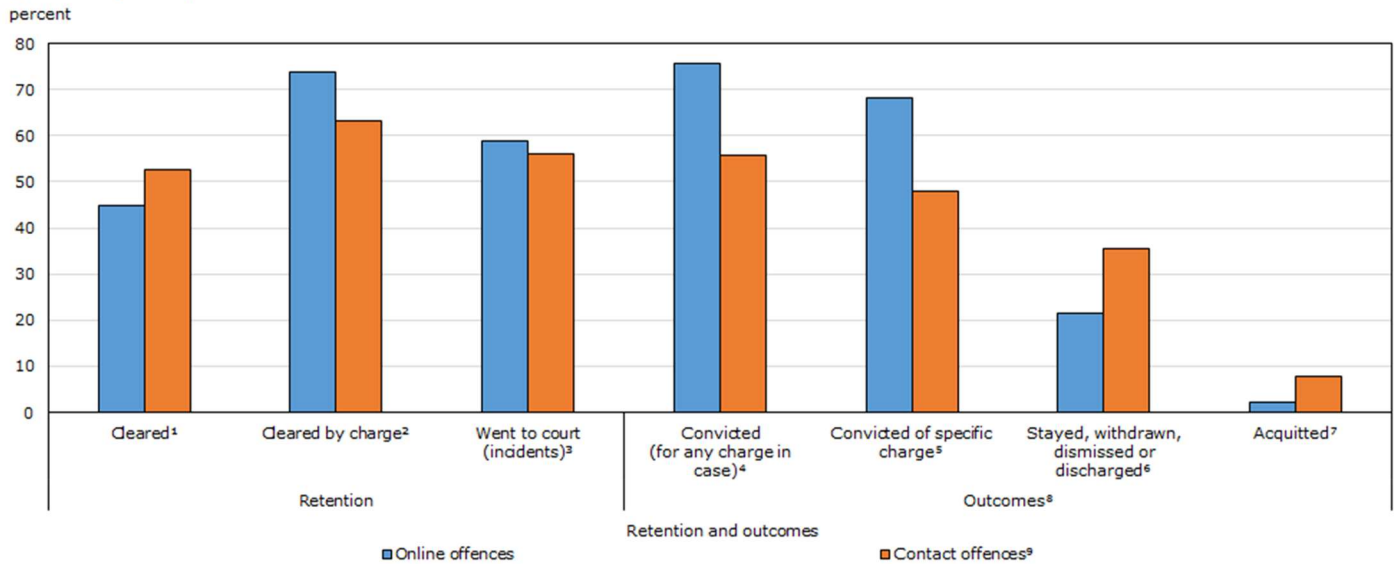
Online offences less commonly solved, but when they are, more often lead to charges, a conviction and adult custody

Between 2014 and 2020, police reported 61,537 incidents of sexual assaults against children (referred to hereafter in this text box as "contact offences"). More than half (53%) of the reported contact offences were solved compared to 45% of online offences, while fewer contact incidents resulted in charges being laid or recommended (63% compared with 74%).

Retention rates from police to court were almost the same for online and contact incidents (59% and 56%, respectively). Like the differences seen with physical assaults, online incidents more often led to a finding of guilt once in court, compared with cases linked to contact offences (76% versus 56%). A conviction for a sexual offence was also higher for cases linked to online (68%) than contact offences (48%) (Text box 3 Chart 1). The presence of online footprints or records that present as physical evidence that may aid in proving guilt may contribute to these differences, whereas physical evidence for contact sexual assaults may be more difficult to produce.

Text box 3 Chart 1

Retention and outcomes of police-reported online versus contact sexual offences against a child in the criminal justice system, 2014 to 2020



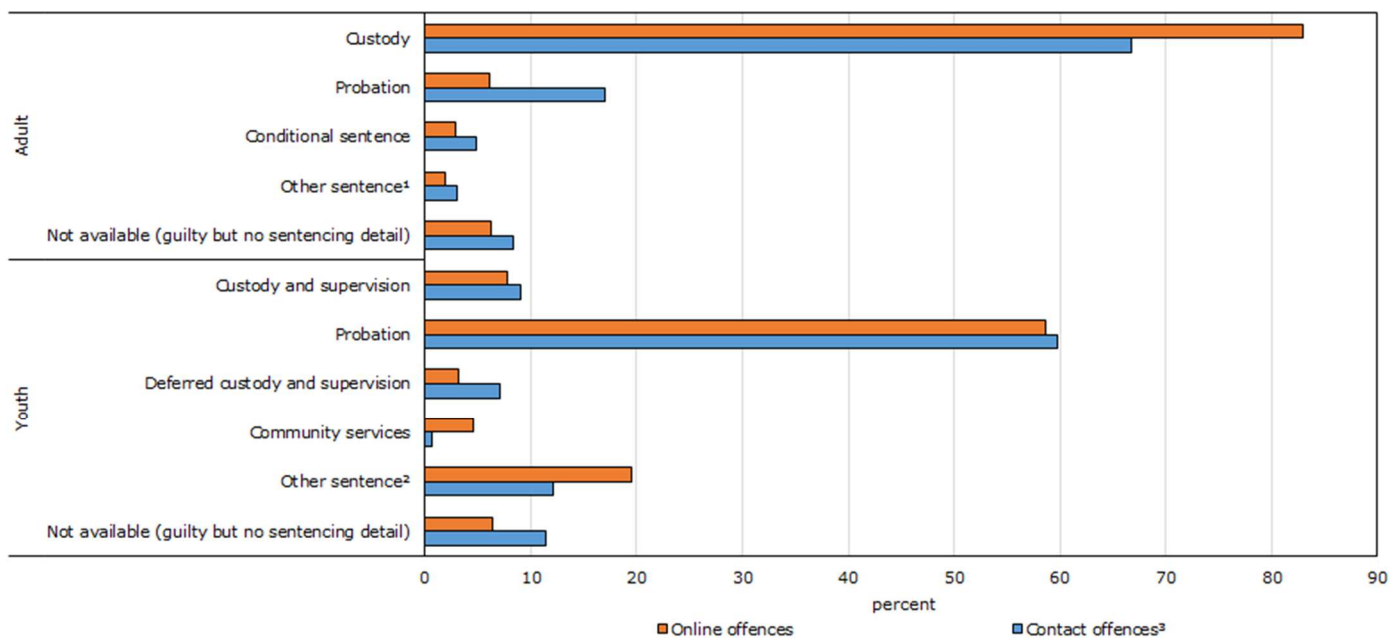
1. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents that have been cleared (where an accused had been identified in relation to the incident).
 2. Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where charges against an accused were laid or recommended by police.
 3. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended. An incident was considered to have gone to court if it linked to a court case.
 4. For online offences, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any charge in the case. For offline offences, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for sexual assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for any charge in the case.
 5. For online offences, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for a sexual offence in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for a sexual offence charge in the case. For offline offences, calculations are based on linked court cases where there was at least one charge for sexual assault in the case, and where there was a finding of guilt for a sexual offence charge in the case.
 6. Includes stays as well as court referrals to alternative or extrajudicial measures and restorative justice programs, withdrawals, dismissals and discharges at preliminary inquiry. These decisions refer to the court either putting the charges against the accused on hold or stopping criminal proceedings against the accused.
 7. An acquittal requires that a trial took place and a verdict of not guilty was reached for all the charges presented before the court.
 8. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents. This chart excludes figures for other decisions including final decisions of found not criminally responsible and waived out of province or territory, any order where a conviction was not recorded, the court's acceptance of a special plea, cases that raise *Charter* arguments, and cases where the accused was found unfit to stand trial. However, percentages for other categories are presented with other decision counts factored into the denominator.
 9. Includes sexual assaults (level 1, 2 and 3) where it was the most serious decision in the incident, and where a victim was identified as someone below the age of 18.
Note: In this text box, sexual assaults where a victim was identified as someone below the age of 18 are used as proxy for 'contact' sexual offences against children, allowing for comparisons of data collected over the same period of 2014 to 2020. Given there are some differences between online sexual offences against children, and online child pornography, comparisons to online child sexual exploitation and abuse are limited to online sexual offences against children only. Online sexual offences against children includes sexual violations against children and other sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

In all, 59% of cases involving contact sexual offences against children were processed in adult courts, and 41% in youth courts. Like physical assaults, a custodial sentence in adult courts was less common for cases linked to contact offences than online offences (67% versus 83%) (Text box 3 Chart 2). Probation, instead, was more common for contact offences (17% compared with 6% for online offences). Outcomes for contact offence cases processed in youth courts were generally more in line with online offences, specifically, where probation was the most likely outcome.

Text box 3 Chart 2

Sentencing outcomes of police-reported online versus contact sexual offences against a child, adult criminal and youth court, 2014 to 2020

Sentencing outcomes



1. Includes fines and other sentencing decisions (including restitution, absolute and conditional discharge, suspended sentence, community service order and prohibition orders, among others).
 2. Includes conditional sentence, intensive support and supervision, order to attend a non-residential program (attendance order), reprimand, and other sentencing decisions (including compensation, pay purchaser, compensation in kind, restitution, prohibition, seizure, forfeiture, conditional discharge, absolute discharge, essays, apologies and other counselling programs).
 3. Includes sexual assaults (level 1, 2 and 3) where it was the most serious decision in the incident, and where a victim was identified as someone below the age of 18.
Note: In this text box, sexual assaults where a victim was identified as someone below the age of 18 are used as proxy for 'contact' sexual offences against children, allowing for comparisons of data collected over the same period of 2014 to 2020. Given there are some differences between online sexual offences against children, and online child pornography, comparisons to online child sexual exploitation and abuse are limited to online sexual offences against children only. Online sexual offences against children includes sexual violations against children and other sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Retention and outcomes of online child sexual exploitation and abuse by incident characteristics³³

Studies have shown that the nature and characteristics of crimes that are reported to police often influence how these incidents are treated in, and their progression through, the criminal justice system. For example, sexual assault cases with delays in reporting to police, incomplete or unknown incident information, involving female perpetrators or child victims often have lower retention rates compared with physical assaults (Rotenberg, 2017).

Having multiple violations in an incident did not have much influence on advancement to court

A larger majority (85%) of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents with a secondary violation resulted in charges, compared with incidents with no secondary violations (56%).³⁴ However, similar proportions of both types of incidents proceeded to court (Table 1). In court, similar shares of single-violation and multiple-violation incidents resulted in a finding of guilt for a sexual offence charge (72% and 71%, respectively, Table 2).

Men and boys more often are charged, appear in court and convicted

Aligned with the aim of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* to divert youth from the criminal justice system through the use of extrajudicial measures, significantly fewer incidents involving a youth accused (aged 12 to 17 years) resulted in charges, compared with incidents where the accused was an adult. The vast majority of people accused in online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents were men and boys, varying in ages, while women and girls represented a smaller

proportion, and most were youth (Ibrahim, 2022). Three quarters (76%) of cleared incidents involving men and boys as the accused resulted in charges being laid or recommended, compared with just over one-quarter (28%) of cleared incidents involving women and girls as the accused (Table 1).³⁵ After charges were laid or recommended in an incident, a smaller but notable difference was observed in the proportions of incidents with the accused being men and boys (57%), and women and girls (52%) that proceeded to court.

Once in court, incidents involving men and boys as the accused much more often ended in a conviction in general (78%) and, in all, 73% resulted in a guilty finding for a sexual offence charge. In comparison, of the 51 cases that went to court involving a woman or girl charged in an online child sexual exploitation and abuse offence, about half (53% or 27 cases) concluded with a conviction for at least one charge in the case, and over four in ten cases (45% or 23 cases) ended in a conviction specifically for a sexual offence charge.

Vast majority of incidents have a single victim, but charges more common in multiple-victim incidents

Victim information was provided for 7,880 incidents, representing 20% of all online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents reported to police between 2014 and 2020.³⁶ The vast majority (91%) of these incidents involved one victim, while multiple victims were identified in the remaining 9% of the incidents. Incidents with multiple victims had a higher clearance rate than single-victim incidents, and they also more often led to charges. More specifically, half (49%) of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents with a single victim were cleared compared with about two-thirds (64%) of incidents with more than one victim. Moreover, incidents with a single victim had a lower charge rate, with 71% of cleared incidents leading to charges against the accused, compared with 85% of cleared multiple-victim incidents.

Some differences between single-victim and multiple-victim incidents in court were noted. While similar proportions of incidents went to court (60% of cleared by charge single-victim and 61% of cleared by charge multiple-victim incidents), there were notable differences in the court outcomes. For example, 77% of cases linked to single-victim incidents compared to 69% of multiple-victim cases resulted in a conviction for any offence in the case. A finding of guilt for a sexual offence charge was also different (72% of single-victim cases versus 63% of multiple-victim cases).

Once solved, incidents with younger victims more often lead to sexual offence convictions

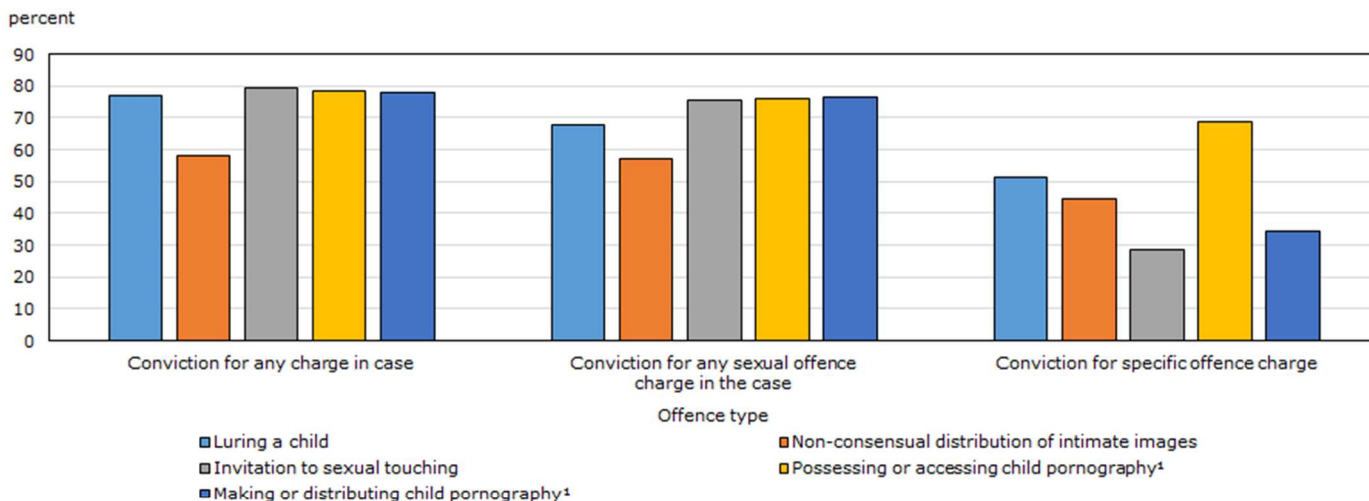
Unlike the generally consistent differences seen by accused gender, differences by victim gender were generally less prominent across the various stages of the criminal justice process examined. Additionally, some differences were noted based on the age group of the victim. For example, fewer incidents involving child victims under the age of 12 years are solved. But, once solved, these incidents more often led to charges (76%) and resulted in a conviction for any charge in a court case (83%), compared with incidents involving youth victims aged 12 to 17 (70% led to charges and 76% resulted in conviction for any charge in the case).³⁷ Incidents involving child victims also more often resulted in a conviction in court for a sexual offence specifically (81% versus 71% for linked cases involving youth victims).

In addition, clearance and charge rates differed based on accused to victim relationship. For example, while incidents involving a stranger were least likely to be cleared (29%), once an accused was identified, 75% of these incidents resulted in charges being laid or recommended. Incidents involving an authority figure had the highest charge rate, with 94% of incidents that had been cleared leading to charges. The proportion of incidents going to court (where the relationship was known) were somewhat similar across relationship types, ranging between 54% and 67%. Once in court, a conviction for any charge in the case was most common for incidents involving strangers (82%), while incidents involving a friend (78%) or a family member had the highest proportions leading to a conviction for a sexual offence (76%).

Making or distributing child pornography convictions least common

It was shown earlier that there are differences in how the various categories of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents progress through the justice system. For example, as noted, making or distributing child pornography incidents were most likely to drop out before proceeding to court. In court, further differences are observed among the various categories. For example, making or distributing child pornography cases had a relatively high conviction rate for any charge in the case (78%) and for any sexual offence in the case (77%) (Chart 6).^{38 39} Yet, a conviction for the specific charge (making or distributing child pornography) was less common, with 35% of linked making or distributing child pornography cases resulting in a conviction for this specific charge. Similarly, despite having high conviction rates for any offence in the case, linked invitation to sexual touching cases less often resulted in a conviction for those specific charges (29%). In these cases, guilty findings were often for other sexual offence charges such as child luring.

Chart 6
Conviction rate of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents, by offence type, 2014 to 2020



1. Includes offences under section 163.1 of the *Criminal Code* which makes it illegal to make, distribute, possess or access child pornography.
Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

At the sentencing stage, across all offence categories of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, relatively smaller proportions of adult cases ended in non-custodial sentences —meaning, custody was often the most likely outcome.⁴⁰ Proportions of cases resulting in non-custodial sentences generally ranged from 5% for making or distributing child pornography, to 11% for child luring —where, of the cases processed in adult courts, a different sentencing outcome than custody was observed, usually probation. As an exception to these findings, of the 14 linked cases for non-consensual distribution of intimate images processed in adult courts, a non-custodial sentence was likely (71%, or 10 cases).

Text box 4
Sextortion trends in Canada

Like online child sexual exploitation and abuse, there are various definitions for sextortion. In general terms, sextortion involves a person threatening to disseminate sexually explicit or intimate images of someone without their consent for the purposes of obtaining additional images, sexual acts or money (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2022b; Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Wolak et al., 2018). Within the scope of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, sextortion is defined as the use of coercion and threats to extort child sexual exploitation images or videos from youth (either by other youth or adult offenders) (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Sextortion on its own is not a criminal offence in the *Criminal Code*. However, there are circumstances where sextortion could meet the criminal threshold, for example in situations where it involves child pornography, criminal harassment or non-consensual distribution of intimate images. Because of this potential for overlap, the current article uses other sources of data to examine recent trends in sextortion in Canada.

According to Cybertip.ca, Canada’s national tipline for the reporting of online child sexual exploitation, there has been an increase in the reporting of sextortion cases in Canada. Specifically, between December 2021 and May 2022, the national tipline saw a 150% increase in reporting of youths being victims of sextortion online. According to Cybertip.ca, young men and boys are most susceptible to being victims of sextortion, and they are often contacted via social media where they are tricked into sharing sexually explicit images or are unknowingly recorded while exposing themselves over livestream (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2022a; Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2022b).

One in twenty young men and boys report someone sharing or posting embarrassing photos of them online

The 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) on Canadians' Safety (Victimization) collected information on experiences of online victimization, such as cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying taking place in the preceding five years. While the survey did not collect information on sextortion specifically, the survey collected related information including incidents where someone shared or posted photos that were embarrassing or threatening to the respondent (may not be sexual in nature).

According to the GSS on Victimization, about 1 in 20 (4.2%) young males between the ages of 15 and 24 experienced someone sending out or posting pictures that embarrassed them or made them feel threatened within the preceding five years, in comparison to about 1 in 50 females in the same age group (2.2%). This finding is inline with the sextortion trends observed by *Cybertip.ca* where young men and boys are overrepresented.

For information on the victimization of men and boys in Canada, see Sutton, 2023.

Summary

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse encompasses a broad range of behaviours, including those related to child sexual abuse material, sexting materials, sextortion, grooming and luring, live child sexual abuse streaming and made-to-order content. The current article identifies various stages within the justice system to measure retention and attrition of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse; namely, at the clearance, charge and police-to-court stages.

In all, 24% of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents were cleared, meaning an accused person was identified by police in relation to the incident. Once an accused was identified, there were charges laid or recommended in nearly seven in ten (69%) incidents. More than half (56%) of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that led to charges proceeded to court.

In comparison, 73% of physical assaults reported during the same time were cleared and 68% of those cleared resulted in charges. More than seven in ten (72%) physical assault incidents that were cleared by charge went to court. While physical assault had much higher clearance and police-to-court progression rates, relative to online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents, the story changes once in court. Almost eight in every ten (77%) cases related to an online child sexual exploitation and abuse incident resulted in a conviction for any offence in the case, compared with 50% of linked physical assault cases. Further, after a guilty finding was rendered, 86% of adult cases linked to online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents resulted in a custody sentence, much higher than the 35% observed for physical assault cases.

Beyond comparisons to physical assaults, differences in justice outcomes for online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents were also observed among select incident, accused, and victim characteristics. For example, court cases linked to police-reported incidents with men and boys accused more often had charges laid or recommended by police, proceeded to court, and resulted in a finding of guilt. Additionally, once solved, incidents with younger victims, and accused friends or family members more often ended in a guilty finding for a sexual offence.

Understanding the progression of online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents from police to court, the characteristics of those incidents and outcomes of linked court cases, and how these indicators compare with other types of crime is an important step in measuring the response of the criminal justice system to these incidents, and in gauging some of the challenges and limitations at different stages of the justice system. This information can be used to make informed policy and program decisions in responding to this serious, evolving, and underreported crime.

Survey description

Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

The Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey collects detailed information on criminal incidents that have come to the attention of police services in Canada. Information includes characteristics of victims, accused persons and incidents. In 2020, data from police services covered 99% of the population of Canada. The count for a particular year represents incidents reported during that year, regardless of when the incident actually occurred.

For the years 2014 and 2015, the municipal police services of Saint John, Québec and Calgary, the Ontario Provincial Police and Canadian Forces Military Police were excluded from the UCR cybercrime data. For the year 2016, the police services of

Saint John and Calgary, the Ontario Provincial Police and Canadian Forces Military Police were excluded. For the year 2017, the municipal police service of Saint John and the Ontario Provincial Police were excluded. For the years 2018 and 2019, the municipal police service of Saint John and Canadian Forces Military Police were excluded.

Integrated Criminal Court Survey

The Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) collects statistical information on adult and youth court cases involving *Criminal Code* and other federal statute offences. All adult courts have reported to the adult component of the survey since the 2005/2006 fiscal year. Information from superior courts in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well as municipal courts in Quebec was not available for extraction from their electronic reporting systems and was therefore not reported to the survey. Superior court information for Prince Edward Island was unavailable until 2018/2019.

A completed charge refers to a formal accusation against an accused person or company involving a federal statute offence that was processed by the courts and received a final decision. A case is defined as one or more charges against an accused person or company that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. A case combines all charges against the same person having one or more key overlapping dates (date of offence, date of initiation, date of first appearance, date of decision, or date of sentencing) into a single case.

Record linkage (Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey)

To infer criminal justice outcomes for police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, an initial Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey file was created from production files, which contained available personal and incident information to be used for linkage to the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). While this methodology section focuses on the linkage process for online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents, the same steps were also applied to link physical assault incidents and other comparison offences from police to courts.

The initial UCR file contained all police-reported incidents reported between 2014 and 2020 where a cybercrime violation was identified as one of the violations included in the definition of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, as outlined in Text box 1. The file was then subset to only include accused persons that were charged. While analysis in this article were rolled up to the incident level, linkage to ICCS is performed at the charged person level, as the ICCS information linked to the accused is at the charge level. Therefore, multiple ICCS rows is common if a link was possible.

For the linkage, first, a series of record joins between UCR and ICCS were performed based on personal identifiers. Personal identifiers included province, accused person's date of birth, gender/sex, and Soundex, which is an algorithm that encrypts accused person's names for confidentiality purposes. Joining online child sexual exploitation and abuse records based on personal identifiers yielded a 62.5% linkage rate, where there was at least one linkage match on some pre-set criteria.

Next, records with at least one match were put through a date matching process to ensure charge dates in ICCS match charge information from UCR. In all, this process resulted in an overall linkage rate of 41.2% for online child sexual exploitation and abuse records. Of note, this linkage rate is based on all counts of accused persons involved in the incidents, and as such does not match the police-to-court retention rate presented in the article, which is based on incident counts only.

Since multiple matches can exist for a single case, as a final step, matched cases underwent a series of violation matching processes to ensure the best court case was selected for each UCR record. Consistencies or similarities in the types of violations seen on the match court case and the UCR violations reported determines the quality of the match. In some instances, even after having personal identifier and date matching, cases would not be considered a good match due to having significantly different violations or unrelated violations. For this reason, the analytical approach taken for analyzing court data was to only consider cases with at least one sexual offence charge in the case to be a good match and is referred to as "going to court".

Given that sexual offences generally take longer to be processed in court, it is possible that the linkage rate may be biased for online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases that were in court towards the end of the linkage period if they take longer to complete than physical assaults. However, Rotenberg, 2017 showcases that the gap in linkage rates between sexual assaults, more generally, and physical assaults remained consistent toward the end of the study period. Therefore, unless otherwise specified, to maintain the maximum number of linked cases, the current analysis retained all data from 2014 to 2020 for UCR, and 2013/2014 to 2020/2021 for ICCS. However, at the time of the current study, ICCS data was only available up to March 31, 2021.

As with any record linkage undertaking, linkage results are subject to false negative linkage issues where incidents may not have linked due to data quality issues in administrative data (e.g., incorrect birth dates or inconsistent personal identifiers used for the same accused). Consequently, in combination with other methodological considerations explained above, the retention rate from police to court may be an underestimation, and in turn, the attrition rate may be an overestimation.

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Notes

1. Sexting refers to the process by which someone intentionally shares sexually explicit messages, images or self-generated sexualised images of themselves (ECPAT, 2016).
2. Defined as use of coercion and threats to extort child sexual exploitation images or videos from youth (either by other youth or adult offenders).
3. For additional details, see Text box 3.
4. In this article, physical assaults include common assault (level 1), and major assaults (levels 2 and 3), where it was the most serious violation in the incident.
5. The cybercrime flag was introduced prior to 2014 as a pilot project involving select police services. The flag was rolled out to most police services beginning in 2014.
6. In this article, sexual violations against children (where a child victim had been identified) excludes the offence of making sexually explicit material available to children.
7. In the *Criminal Code*, some sexual violations against children are specific to certain age groups. For example, the offence of sexual interference applies to children younger than 16, and the offence of sexual exploitation applies to victims aged 16 and 17.
8. In this article, information on charge rates refers to the police laying or recommending charges against an accused person. Depending on jurisdiction, police can either lay charges against an accused or recommend that the Crown lay charges. Police lay charges in all provinces with the exception of British Columbia and Quebec, where the decision to lay charges is made by the Crown. In New Brunswick, the decision to lay charges is made by police after receiving advice from the Crown (Department of Justice Canada, 2012; New Brunswick-Office of Attorney General, 2017).
9. The term “went to court” or “proceeded to court” is a simplified way of indicating that an incident is linked to a court case. Incidents reported to police between 2014 and 2020 are linked to court records from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey for the fiscal years 2013/2014 to 2020/2021 (see the Survey description section for details on how the linkage was conducted).
10. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published article which preceded this article (Ibrahim, 2022) for two reasons: First, data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. Second, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore, data for the 2020 reference period have been revised since the previous article was released.
11. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents.

12. Comparisons exclude cases that started off as “other online child sexual offences against children”.
13. Comparisons exclude the category “other sexual offences against children”.
14. Information about the linkage process can be found in the Survey description section.
15. There were 6,253 single-accused online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents where charges were laid or recommended against the accused.
16. Analyses in this text box are based on incidents where at least some charge information was reported. In the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, police services can report information about the specific charges laid or recommended for up to four charges. However, the reporting of charge information is not mandatory. Therefore, information in this text box should be used with caution.
17. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse are limited to the offence types of luring a child, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, invitation to sexual touching, and child pornography.
18. Excludes 6% of incidents where the initial cybercrime violation was another type of online sexual offence against children than those included in footnote 17.
19. Excludes 2,729 charges (8%) that were linked to another type of online sexual offence against children than those included in footnote 17.
20. Excludes 39% of the linked court charges where police charge information was not known.
21. Police services can report up to four violations for each incident in the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.
22. In this article, the terms “conviction” and “guilty findings” are used interchangeably to refer to decisions of guilt that are imposed by the court, as well as guilty pleas, and cases where an absolute or conditional discharge has been imposed.
23. To allow for a larger pool of data to analyze, unless otherwise specified, throughout this article analyses are typically based on the combined total for all online child sexual exploitation and abuse offences as defined in Text box 1, or broken down into the two larger categories of online sexual offences against children, and online child pornography. Brief analyses focusing on the different offence types that make up online child sexual exploitation and abuse are presented, where possible.
24. It is important to note that, in this article, the proportions of cases going to court are limited by successfully linking a record from police to court. Therefore, retention and attrition rates for this stage are confined to this limitation, and do not account for the actual records that may have proceeded to court but did not successfully link in the current study. This, however, is a consistent limitation for all offences included in the study, and comparative offence groups.
25. See footnote 9.
26. While the analysis of the progression of police-reported incidents from clearance to court has used police incidents as the unit of measure, analysis of court case outcomes are based on court cases. Calculations for conviction rates are based on cases with at least one charge for a sexual offence. For more information, see Text box 2.
27. Includes decisions made at preliminary inquiries as well as court referrals to alternative or extrajudicial measures and restorative justice programs.
28. Of note, 93% of assault cases had at least one assault charge in the case. Calculations are based on these cases.
29. For more information on court outcomes of incidents involving youth, see the section under the heading “Men and boys more often are charged, appear in court and convicted”.
30. Sentencing information is based on the most serious offence in the case (which may not necessarily be the sexual offence charge), and calculations include 54% of cases where there was a guilty finding but no sentencing information. The remaining cases resulted in other types of sentencing outcomes such as probation or a conditional sentence.
31. For more information on the impact of the introduction of mandatory minimum penalties and subsequent amendments on court outcomes, see Allen, 2017.
32. Includes incidents where sexual assault (level 1, 2 or 3) was the most serious violation in the incident, and where a victim was identified as someone below the age of 18.
33. Due to small data counts, a comparison of sentencing outcomes by incident characteristic was not feasible for online child sexual exploitation and abuse.
34. Police services can report up to four violations for each incident in the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey. Reporting of secondary violations in an incident is not mandatory, and therefore, may be underreported, and thus, likely underestimating the true number of violations per incident.

35. Based on single-accused incidents where the age and gender of the accused was known. Children under 12 years of age cannot be prosecuted for criminal activities and, as such, are excluded.

36. In addition to reported child pornography incidents where victim information is not available, in the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, the reporting of victim information is not mandatory for some sexual offences.

37. Based on single-victim incidents where victim information was provided, and the age and gender of the victim was known.

38. Analyses are based on the initial cybercrime violation identified in the incident.

39. See footnote 13.

40. See footnote 13.

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Retention of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents in the criminal justice system, by select incident characteristics, 2014 to 2020

Select characteristics	Total	Cleared ¹		Cleared by charge ²		Went to court ³	
	number	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total online child sexual exploitation and abuse	40,059	9,425	24	6,523	69	3,680	56
Total online sexual offences against children ⁴	10,808	4,850	45	3,573	74	2,102	59
Total online child pornography ⁵	29,251	4,575	16	2,950	64	1,578	53
Secondary violations							
No secondary violations	21,765	5,127	24	2,885	56	1,662	58
At least one secondary violation	18,294	4,298	23	3,638	85	2,018	55
Single or multi-accused incidents⁶							
Single accused	8,691	8,691	100	6,253	72	3,546	57
Multiple accused	627	627	100	192	31	134	70
Gender of accused^{7 8}							
Male	8,088	8,088	100	6,125	76	3,484	57
Female	400	400	100	113	28	59	52
Age group of accused^{7 8}							
12 to 17 years	1,845	1,845	100	674	37	438	65
18 to 24 years	1,748	1,748	100	1,362	78	758	56
25 to 44 years	3,257	3,257	100	2,794	86	1,594	57
45 years or older	1,638	1,638	100	1,408	86	753	53
Number of victims identified in incident⁹							
Single victim	7,159	3,517	49	2,505	71	1,511	60
Multiple victims	721	462	64	392	85	240	61
Gender of victim^{7 10}							
Male	974	420	43	301	72	171	57
Female	6,058	3,021	50	2,138	71	1,296	61
Age group of victim (years)^{7 10}							
0 to 11	1,003	352	35	269	76	153	57
12 to 17	6,029	3,089	51	2,170	70	1,314	61

See notes at the end of the table.

Table 1
Retention of police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents in the criminal justice system, by select incident characteristics, 2014 to 2020

Select characteristics	Total	Cleared ¹		Cleared by charge ²		Went to court ³	
	number	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Accused to victim relationship¹⁰							
Family (Parent, sibling, other family)	597	355	59	296	83	165	56
Dating or other intimate partner	608	389	64	243	62	136	56
Friend	558	357	64	195	55	130	67
Casual acquaintance	1,861	1,205	65	818	68	491	60
Authority figure	270	184	68	173	94	93	54
Stranger	2,579	755	29	569	75	347	61
Unknown	511	162	32	114	70	88	77

1. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents that have been cleared (where an accused had been identified in relation to the incident).

2. Calculations are based on cleared police-reported incidents where charges against an accused were laid or recommended by police.

3. Calculations are based on police-reported incidents where charges were laid or recommended. An incident was considered to have gone to court if it linked to a court case (for more information about the record linkage methodology, see the Survey description section of the article).

4. Includes sexual violations against children and other sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18.

5. Includes offences under section 163.1 of the *Criminal Code* which makes it illegal to make, distribute, possess or access child pornography.

6. Excludes cleared incidents where accused information was not reported to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

7. Gender and age breakdowns are based on the data source used. With the exception of incidents that went to court, gender and age are based on information from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, while for incidents that went to court, the data is based on information collected through the Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

8. Calculations are based on single-accused incidents where the age and gender of the accused was known. Children under 12 years of age cannot be prosecuted for criminal activities and, as such, are excluded.

9. Calculations are based on incidents where victim information was reported to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

10. Calculations are based on single-victim incidents where victim information was provided, and the age and gender of the victim was known.

Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Table 2
Court case decisions for police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that proceed to court, by select incident characteristics, 2014 to 2020

Select characteristics	Total ¹	Guilty of any charge in case ²		Guilty of a sexual offence charge ³		Stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged ⁴		Acquitted ⁵	
	number	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total online child sexual exploitation and abuse	2,770	2,125	77	1,985	72	567	20	51	2
Total online sexual offences against children ⁶	1,556	1,175	76	1,060	68	333	21	32	2
Total online child pornography ⁷	1,214	950	78	925	76	234	19	19	2
Secondary violations									
No secondary violations	1,223	925	76	886	72	256	21	28	2
At least one secondary violation	1,547	1,200	78	1,099	71	311	20	23	1
Single or multi-accused incidents⁸									
Single accused	2,602	2,016	77	1,891	73	510	20	49	2
Multiple accused	168	109	65	94	56	57	34	2	1
Gender of accused^{9 10}									
Male	2,548	1,988	78	1,867	73	485	19	49	2
Female	51	27	53	23	45	23	45	0	0
Age group of accused^{9 10}									
12 to 17 years	326	254	78	248	76	70	21	1	0
18 to 24 years	502	376	75	340	68	105	21	15	3
25 to 44 years	1,152	897	78	834	72	221	19	22	2
45 years or older	619	488	79	468	76	112	18	11	2
Number of victims identified in incident¹¹									
Single victim	1,091	835	77	787	72	220	20	24	2
Multiple victims	179	123	69	112	63	52	29	4	2
Gender of victim^{9 12}									
Male	118	87	74	83	70	24	20	4	3
Female	942	724	77	683	73	190	20	20	2
Age group of victim (years)^{9 12}									
0 to 11	99	82	83	80	81	13	13	4	4
12 to 17	961	729	76	686	71	201	21	20	2

See notes at the end of the table.

Table 2
Court case decisions for police-reported online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents that proceed to court, by select incident characteristics, 2014 to 2020

Select characteristics	Total ¹	Guilty of any charge in case ²		Guilty of a sexual offence charge ³		Stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged ⁴		Acquitted ⁵		
	number	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	
Accused to victim relationship¹²										
Family (Parent, sibling, other family)	125	98	78	95	76	22	18	2	2	
Dating or other intimate partner	104	70	67	65	63	34	33	0	0	
Friend	94	76	81	73	78	15	16	1	1	
Casual acquaintance	367	272	74	261	71	86	23	8	2	
Authority figure	72	53	74	51	71	15	21	3	4	
Stranger	222	183	82	166	75	32	14	3	1	
Unknown	63	50	79	47	75	6	10	7	11	

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

1. Number of court cases linked to police-reported incidents where there was at least one sexual offence charge. In this analysis, a case represents all charges against an accused person that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Given that one accused person may be involved in multiple in-scope police-reported incidents (for example, multiple online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents), if charges related to the various incidents were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision, these incidents would be represented by a single court case. Therefore, to follow police-reported incidents into the court system using linked data and to have more accurate counts of cases that linked to the initial in-scope police-reported incidents, in these instances, the counts of cases and their outcomes are duplicated to account for the various incidents.

2. Represents the percentage of linked cases completed in adult or youth court (that had at least one sexual offence charge in the case) that received a guilty decision for any offence in the case. Guilty findings include guilty of the offence, of an included offence, of an attempt of the offence, or of an attempt of an included offence. Also includes guilty pleas, and cases where an absolute or conditional discharge has been imposed.

3. Represents the percentage of linked cases completed in adult or youth court (that had at least one sexual offence charge in the case) that received a guilty decision for a sexual offence charge in the case. Guilty findings include guilty of the offence, of an included offence, of an attempt of the offence, or of an attempt of an included offence. Also includes guilty pleas, and cases where an absolute or conditional discharge has been imposed.

4. Includes stays as well as court referrals to alternative or extrajudicial measures and restorative justice programs, withdrawals, dismissals and discharges at preliminary inquiry. These decisions refer to the court either putting the charges against the accused on hold or stopping criminal proceedings against the accused.

5. An acquittal requires that a trial took place and a verdict of not guilty was reached for all the charges presented before the court.

6. Includes sexual violations against children and other sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18.

7. Includes offences under section 163.1 of the *Criminal Code* which makes it illegal to make, distribute, possess or access child pornography.

8. Excludes cleared incidents where accused information was not reported to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

9. Gender and age breakdowns are based on the data source used. In this table, gender and age are based on information from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

10. Calculations are based on single-accused police-reported incidents where the age and gender of the accused was known. Children under 12 years of age cannot be prosecuted for criminal activities and, as such, are excluded.

11. Calculations are based on incidents where victim information was reported to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

12. Calculations are based on single-victim incidents where victim information was provided, and the age and gender of the victim was known.

Note: Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is defined in the current analyses as police-reported cybercrime incidents involving *Criminal Code* child-specific sexual offences, including child pornography, and other *Criminal Code* sexual offences where a victim was identified as being a person younger than 18. This table excludes figures for other decisions including final decisions of found not criminally responsible and waived out of province or territory, any order where a conviction was not recorded, the court's acceptance of a special plea, cases that raise Charter arguments, and cases where the accused was found unfit to stand trial. However, percentages are presented with other decision counts factored into the denominator. Numbers presented in this article may be slightly different from the previously published report which preceded this article (Ibrahim 2022) for two reasons: 1. Data in the current article are extracted from pre-production data files that contain specific variables (including personal identifiers) that enable linkage to court records. These files differ from production files which are extracted on specific dates, and which were processed by removing all identifiers, created for the purposes of analysis by a wider audience. 2. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data are revised annually for the most recent year. Therefore data for 2020 have been revised since the previous article was released.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey.