

Canadians Cautiously Optimistic that Outcry around Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Will Lead to Culture Shift

Four in ten Canadians foresee a long-term change in societal attitudes and behaviour.

Vancouver, Canada – (December 19, 2017) – Sexual harassment and sexual violence are hot topics in the news lately with new allegations daily about celebrities, politicians, and other public figures. The list of those publically accused of inappropriate sexual behaviour includes marquee names such as Matt Lauer, Harvey Weinstein, Roy Moore, Kevin Spacey, Al Franken, and even US President Donald Trump. In response to these serious accusations, the #MeToo social media campaign quickly gained ground to raise awareness about the types of sexual harassment and sexual violence women face on a day-to-day basis, a movement so important that it has been named the *Time* Person of the Year for 2017.

But do Canadians believe that this outcry around sexual harassment and sexual violence, paired with the momentum of the #MeToo campaign, will have a lasting impact on our culture?

A new poll from NRG Research Group reveals that Canadians are cautiously optimistic that real changes will begin to emerge in workplaces as a result of these revelations. More than one-half (56%) of Canadians believe that the recent high-profile allegations and the #MeToo campaign will have a large impact on changing attitudes towards sexual harassment in the workplace; nearly the same proportion (51%) believe that this conversation will have a large impact on reducing the occurrences of sexual harassment in the workplace.

One-half (50%) of all Canadians reported being somewhat or very aware of the #MeToo campaign. Notably, younger adults under the age of 35 (63%) are more likely than their older counterparts to be aware of this campaign. While overall levels of awareness were similar across gender lines, women are notably more likely than men to rate themselves as “very aware.”

A vast majority (84%) of those aware of #MeToo say that the campaign has effectively raised awareness of sexual harassment and sexual violence, with women (89%) more likely than men (80%) to share this view. However, when asked about the long-term effects of the #MeToo campaign and the current wave of high-profile allegations, men were more optimistic than women. Canadians tend to be divided about whether the #MeToo campaign and high-profile allegations will have a lasting impact in changing societal attitudes and behaviours regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence (40%) or whether the current focus will fade away over time and not have a lasting impact on attitudes and behaviours

towards sexual harassment and sexual violence (35%), with one-quarter (26%) unsure of the long-term fallout of the current conversation. Men are much more likely to lean toward the view that things will get better as opposed to remain the same (43% versus 30%). Women, on the other hand, are slightly more pessimistic and likely to believe things will remain the same as they were before than to believe that there will be a long-term improvement (39% versus 37%).

When it comes to defining the behaviours that cross the line from acceptable into inappropriate, there is a wide range of opinion about what constitutes sexual harassment or sexual violence.

Most Canadians agree that threats of rape (92%), attempting sexual activity with someone who is incapacitated or intoxicated (91%), sharing intimate photos or videos without consent (88%), making comments about someone's genitals, buttocks, or breasts (83%), and stalking or cyber stalking (82%) are good examples of sexual harassment or sexual violence.

However, there appears to be less consensus on areas that might be more contextually-driven, such as commenting on someone's sex life (56%), asking someone out on a date more than once after being told no (47%), and commenting on someone's appearance upon greeting them (5%). "This really demonstrates a key difficulty in sexual harassment and sexual violence awareness," said Kim Scott, NRG Vice President. "The lines between what is perceived as normal behaviour and what is inappropriate can be fuzzy or can differ very much based on the specific circumstances. What's important in each scenario is the imbalance of power that is used by the perpetrator."

Interestingly, when Canadians are asked to consider how high-profile sexual misconduct allegations might affect their decision to engage with a celebrity's work (e.g., watch a movie or a TV show featuring the celebrity, or attend a concert the celebrity), one-half (49%) of Canadians said they would be less likely to watch or attend. Meanwhile three in ten (31%) said their likelihood to watch or attend a performance would not change, and 7% say they actually would be more likely to watch or attend a performance.

Methodology

These results are from a provincially-representative Canada-wide study of 1,001 online respondents conducted by NRG Research Group from November 27 to 29, 2017. NRG purchased online panel sample from Research Now, a long-established, reputable research panel provider with an extensive panel list numbering over half a million panelists in Canada. The poll was conducted in English and French. Results were weighted to reflect the actual age and gender distribution in each region.

Since the research is conducted online using panel sample, it is considered to be a non-probability sample and therefore, margins of error are not applicable. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of a survey size of 1,000 cases with this sample plan would carry a margin of error of approximately +/- 3.2 percent, 19 times out of 20 for the total sample.

About NRG

NRG Research Group is a leading Canadian public affairs and market research company with offices in Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg. NRG's team of experts provide exceptional quality, made-to-measure research using qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

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Notes to editor:

One thousand one Canadians were asked the following questions...

Q1. Which of the following do you believe are examples of sexual harassment or sexual violence?

- 92 percent of respondents selected “Threatening to rape someone”
- 91 percent selected “Attempting sexual activity with someone who is incapacitated / intoxicated”
- 88 percent selected “Sharing intimate photos or videos of someone without their permission”
- 83 percent selected “Making comments about someone’s buttock, breast, or penis size”
- 82 percent selected “Stalking or cyber stalking”
- 56 percent selected “Commenting on sex life”
- 47 percent selected “Asking someone out on a date more than once after being told no”
- 5 percent selected “Greeting someone and telling them they look nice today”
- 1 percent selected “None of these”

Q2. There have been sexual harassment allegations made in recent weeks about several celebrities and public figures (e.g., Harvey Weinstein, Roy Moore, Kevin Spacey, Al Franken, among others). How much of an impact do you feel these allegations regarding high-profile public figures will actually have in:

A. Reducing the occurrences of sexual harassment in the workplace?

- 19 percent said “very large impact” and 32 percent said “somewhat large impact”
- 32 percent said “somewhat small impact” and 19 percent said “no impact at all”
- 8 percent were unsure or preferred not to answer

B. Changing attitudes towards sexual harassment in the workplace?

- 19 percent said “very large impact” and 37 percent said “somewhat large impact”
- 31 percent said “somewhat small impact” and 7 percent said “no impact at all”
- 6 percent were unsure or preferred not to answer
- Men (59%) were more likely to anticipate a large impact than women (53%)

Q3. #MeToo is a social media campaign aiming to raise awareness about sexual harassment and sexual violence women face on a day-to-day basis. Pictured above is European Parliament member Terry Keintke, centre, holding a sign with the hashtag #MeToo during a debate to discuss measures against sexual harassment and sexual violence in the EU. Prior to doing this survey, how aware were you of the #MeToo campaign?

- 21 percent said “very aware” and 29 percent said “somewhat aware”
- 11 percent said “somewhat unaware” and 36 percent said “not aware at all”
- 3 percent were unsure or preferred not to answer
- Those 18-34 (63%) were more likely to be aware than those 35-54 (48%) or 55+ (44%)

Q4. [IF AWARE AT Q3] In your opinion, how effective has the #MeToo campaign been to raise awareness of sexual harassment and sexual violence?

- 28 percent said “very effective” and 56 percent said “somewhat effective”
- 8 percent said “somewhat ineffective” and 3 percent said “very ineffective”
- 5 percent were unsure or preferred not to answer

- Women (89%) were more likely than men (80%) to believe the campaign has been effective (80%)

Q5. Which of the following viewpoints is closer to your own?

- 40 percent selected “The #MeToo campaign and high profile sexual misconduct allegations coming out will have a lasting impact in changing societal attitudes and behaviours regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence. Things are changing for the better.”
- 35 percent selected “The #MeToo campaign and high profile sexual misconduct allegations, while newsworthy now, will fade away over time and not have a lasting impact on attitudes and behaviours towards sexual harassment and sexual violence. Over time things will be the same as they were before.”
- 25 percent were unsure or preferred not to answer
- Men (43%) were more likely than women (37%) to indicate the response “Things are changing for the better. Women (39%) were more likely than men (30%) to select the response “Over time things will be the same as they were before.”

Q6. Several high profile entertainers, such as Kevin Spacey, Bill O’Reilly, Ben Affleck, and Louis C.K., to name a few, have been accused of sexual harassment and as a consequence, have suffered professionally. When this happens, how does it affect your decision to watch one of their movies, TV shows or attend one of their concerts? Are you...

- 7 percent selected “More likely to watch or attend”
- 49 percent selected “Less likely to watch or attend”
- 31 percent selected “It would have no impact on my decision to watch or attend”
- 13% were unsure or preferred not to answer
- Women (53%) are more likely than men (45%) to say they would be less likely to watch or attend following an allegation