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Trends in Sexual Assault in Switzerland

Findings from the Zurich and Vaud Youth Surveys 1999-2022

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Aims

- To introduce a little-known set of repeated studies on long-term trends in victimization, delinquency, and substance use among juveniles in Switzerland.
- To raise awareness about the increase in sexual victimization among youths in Switzerland



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Study Profiles



Zurich Youth Surveys 1999-2021 (ZYS)

Profile

- Four methodologically largely identical surveys (1999, 2007, 2014, 2021)
 - With regard to questionnaire, survey population, sample structure & size, survey timing
- Large, representative samples (approx. 2,500 9th graders per survey, ~15.5 years)
 - 2014 & 2021 additional sample of approx. 900 11th graders (~18 years)
 - 2021 additional sample of approx. 1'000 7th graders (~13.5 years)
- Survey from victim and offender perspective alike, on offences relevant to criminal law
- Consideration of different manifestations of violence and problem behavior
 - School bullying & cyberbullying
 - Dating violence
 - General juvenile delinquency & substance use
- Excellent participation rate (around 90% in each survey)
- Anonymous, written surveys in controlled class settings ensure high data quality
- Unique survey series that allows methodologically unbiased statements on the long-term development of the dark figure of youth violence and delinquency in Switzerland



Zurich Youth Survey 2021

Sampling, Data Collection and Analytical Approach

Stratified Sampling (School District x School Type x Grade)

- 90 sample clusters (e.g. «Dielsdorf District, Secondary A, Grade 9», «Vocational School Zurich, Hairdresser class, Grade 11»)
- Class-level data provided by the Departement of Education of the Canton of Zurich

Fieldwork

- May-July 2021
- Tablet-based questionnaire (125 Tablets)
- Team of 12 fieldwork collaborators to implement and supervise surveys in classrooms
- 266 classes surveyed

Data Analysis

- Data weighting relative to cluster sizes
- Trend analyses & group comparisons using CSGLM in SPSS – adjusts for clustering at the class-level



Vaud Youth Surveys 2004-2021 (VDYS)

Profile

- Methodologically largely identical surveys
 - With regard to questionnaire, survey population, sample structure & size, survey timing
 - From 2014 digital questionnaire (CASI) instead of paper questionnaire (PAPI)
- Large, representative samples (approx. 2,500 9th graders per survey, ~14.5 years)
 - 2004 only Lausanne (546 9th graders); thereafter entire Canton of Vaud
 - 2017 & 2022 additional sample of ~1,500 11th graders (~17.8 years)
- Largely identical thematic focus & questionnaire like ZYS
- Excellent participation rate (around 90% in each survey)
- Anonymous, written survey in controlled class settings like in ZYS
- Complementary survey series to ZYS allows for enlarging the geographical scope:
 - German & French part of Switzerland
 - Inclusion of urban and rural zones
 - VD & ZH = 27% of the Swiss population

	2004	2014	2017	2022
Grade 9	546	2,665	-	2,651
Grade 11	-	-	1,570	1,340



Vaud Youth Survey 2022

Sampling, Data Collection and Analytical Approach

Stratified Sampling (School District x School Type x Grade)

- 61 sample clusters
- Class-level data provided by the Departement of Education of the Canton of Vaud

Fieldwork

- August - December 2022
- Computer-based questionnaire
- Team of 20 fieldwork collaborators
- 264 classes surveyed

Data Analysis

- Data weighting relative to cluster sizes
- Trend analyses & group comparisons using CSGLM in SPSS – adjusts for clustering at the class-level



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Trends in Sexual Victimization



Sexual Assault in the Context of ZYS/VDYS

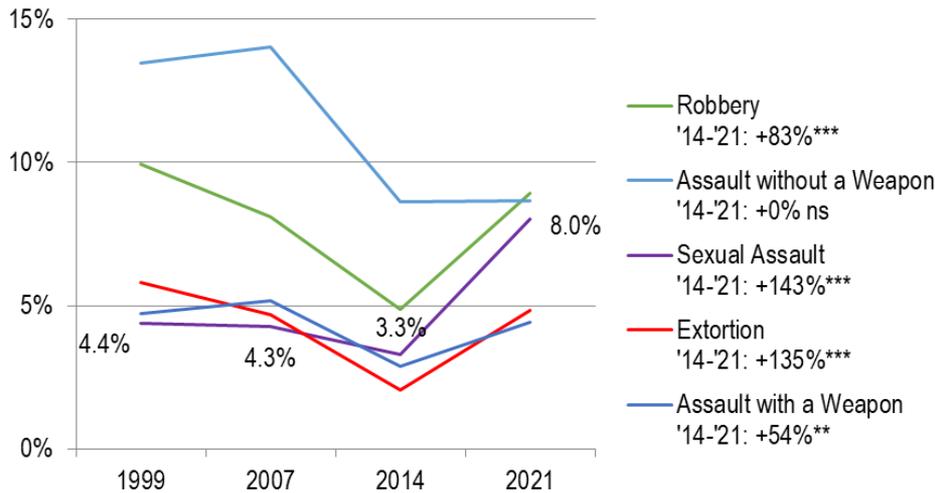
Someone compels you by force or by serious threat of force to perform sexual acts or to tolerate sexual acts that you did not want (e.g., a rape, or being grabbed between your legs against your will).



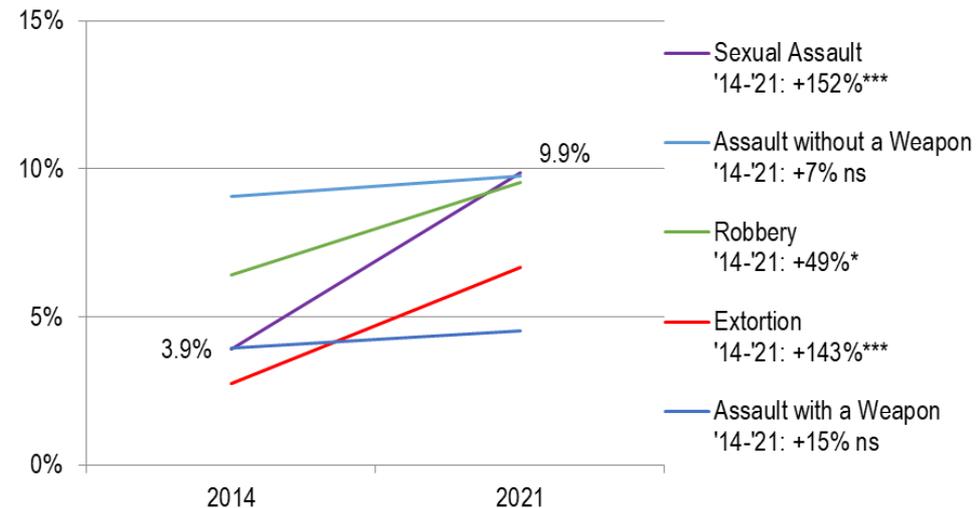
Trends in Self-Reported Violent Victimization ZH

Prevalence Rates (% Victims) 30 Months, Grades 9/11

Zurich Grade 9 (15.5y)



Zurich Grade 11 (18.0y)



Change 2014/17-2021/22

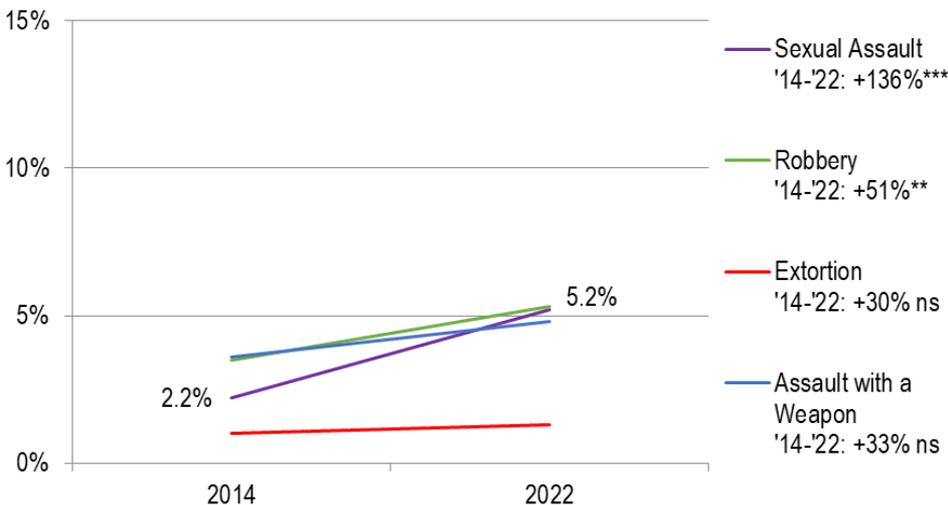
*** highly sig. (p<.001)
 ** sig. (p<.01)
 * narrowly sig. (p<.05)
 ns non-sig. (p>.10)



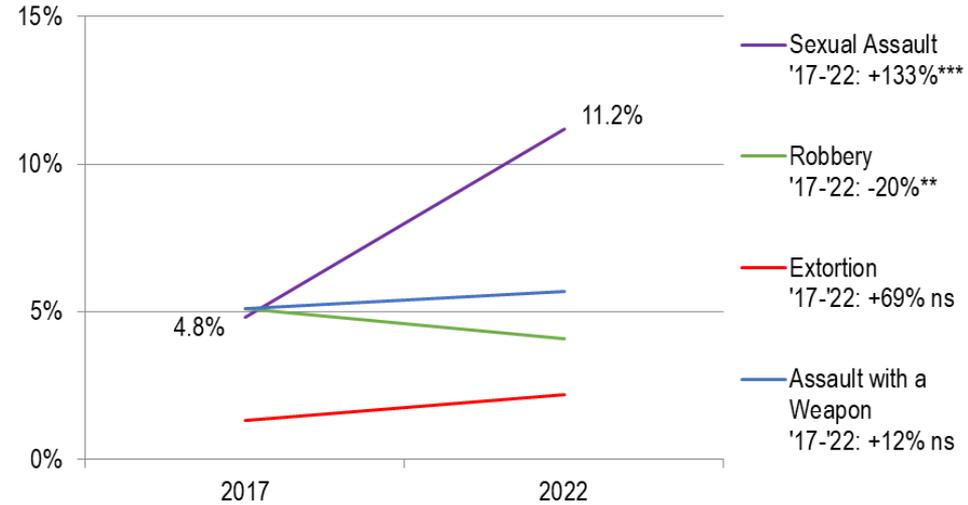
Trends in Self-Reported Violent Victimization VD

Prevalence Rates (% Victims) 30 Months, Grades 9/11

Vaud Grade 9 (14.5y)



Vaud Grade 11 (18.0y)



Change 2014/17-2021/22

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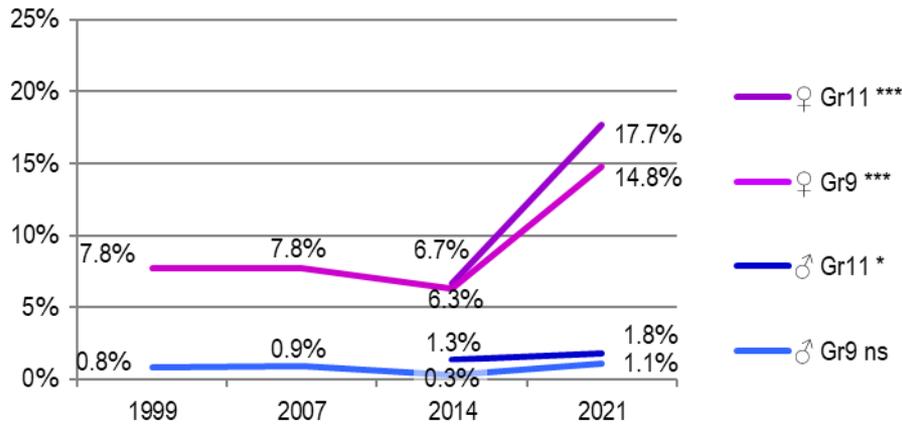
ns non-sig. (p>.10)



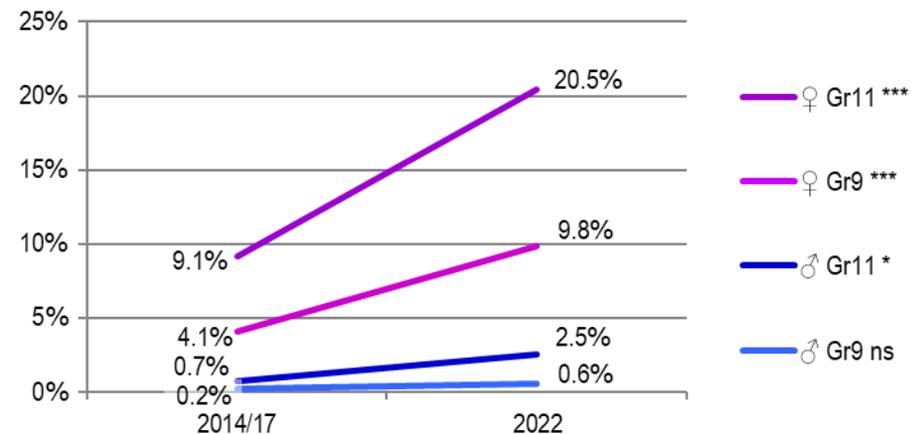
Trends in Sexual Assault by Sex

% Victims by Sex (Prevalence), Last 30 Months

Zurich



Vaud



Change 2014/17-2021/22

*** highly sig. (p<.001)

** sig. (p<.01)

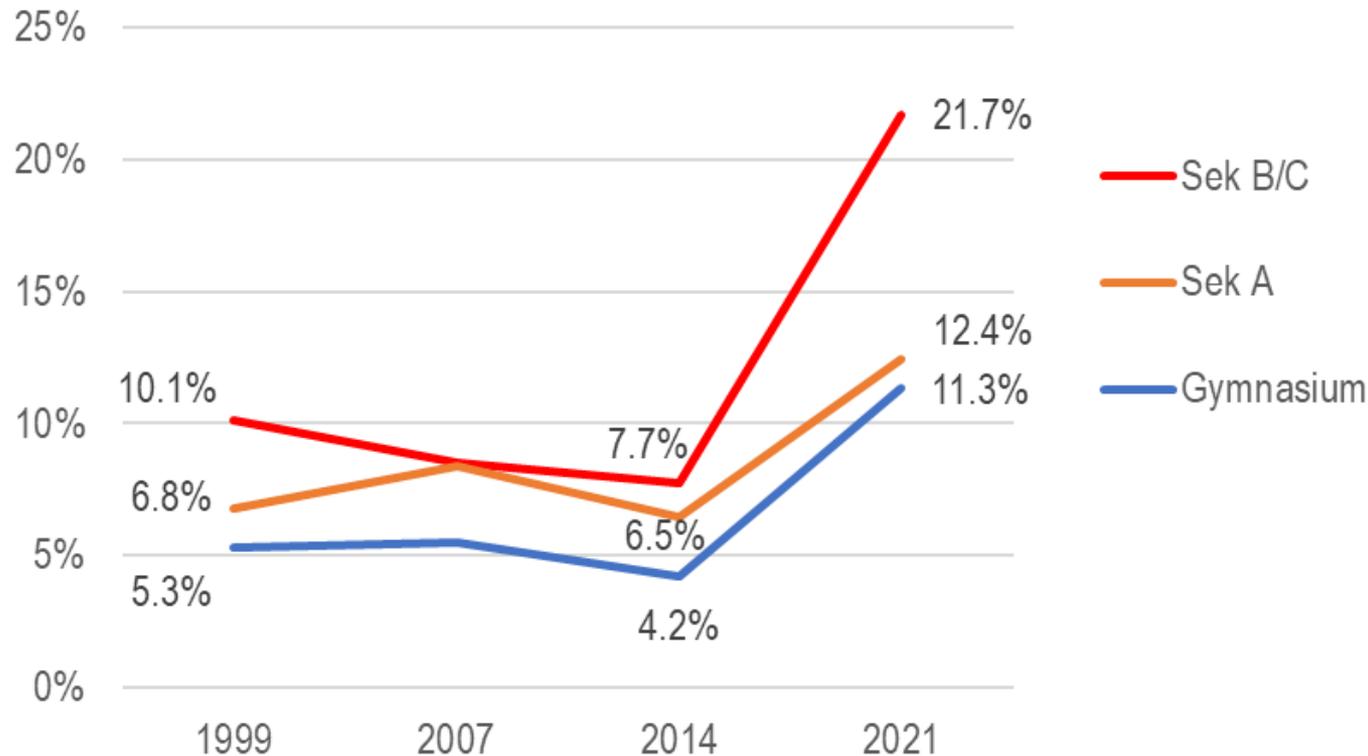
* narrowly sig. (p<.05)

ns non-sig. (p>.10)



Trends in Sexual Assault by School Type

% Female Victims (Prevalence), Last 30 Months, Grade 9 - ZH



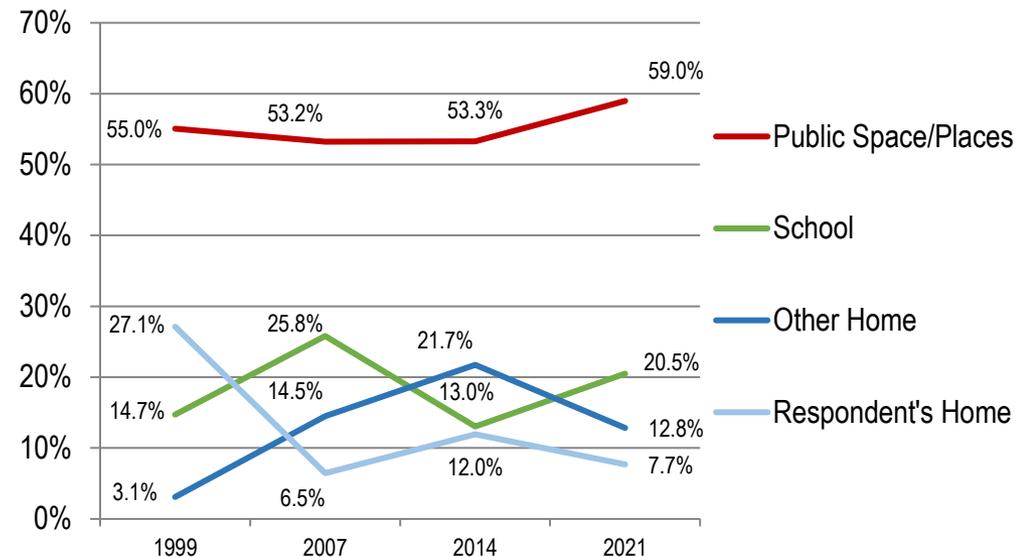
- *No comparable data for Vaud due to change in school system*
- *Highly sig. 2014-21 increase in all groups*



Contextual Characteristics of Sexual Assault (ZH, Gr 9)

Trends 2014-2021

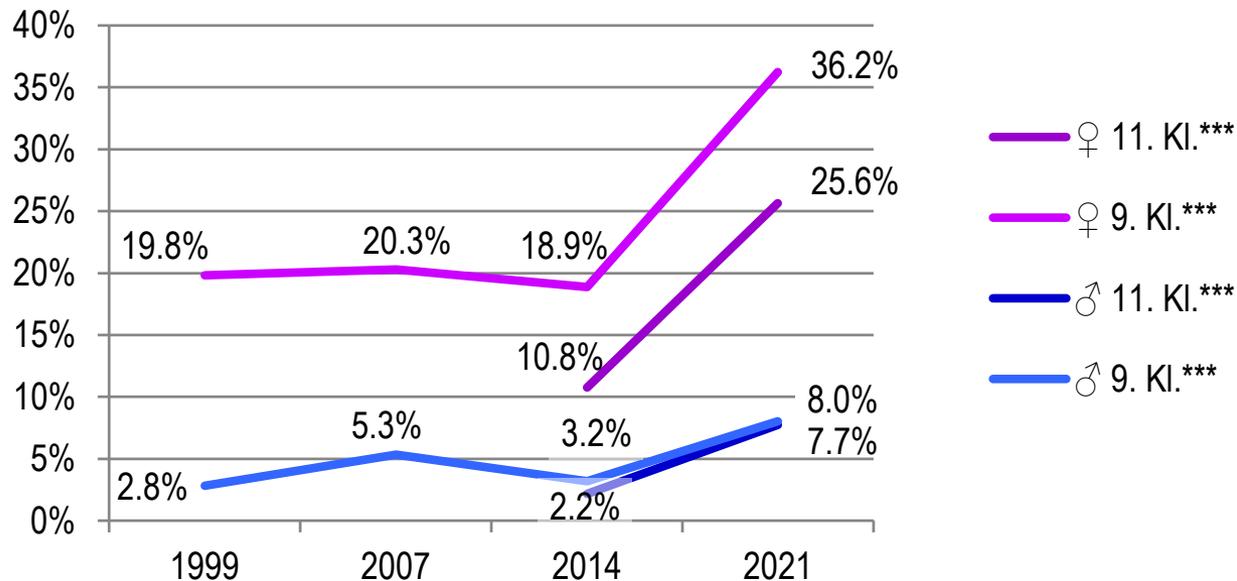
- Shift toward the public space and school settings (66%→80%) →
- Increasing proportion of unknown perpetrators (35%→43%); *not shown*
- Increasing proportion of group perpetration (4.7%→7.2%); *not shown*
- Increasing proportion of same age perpetrators (34%→45%); *not shown*
- Decreased reporting to the police (12.3%→6.7%; -46%); *not shown*
 - Increasing rates in police statistics (not shown) likely underestimate the actual increase



Trends in Sexual Harassment at School

% Victims by Gender (Prevalence), Last 12 Months - ZH

You were sexually harassed [at school, on the way to school] (hit on, groped).



- **No increase found in Vaud**
- **Very high level in 2014/17 already (~ZH in 2021)**

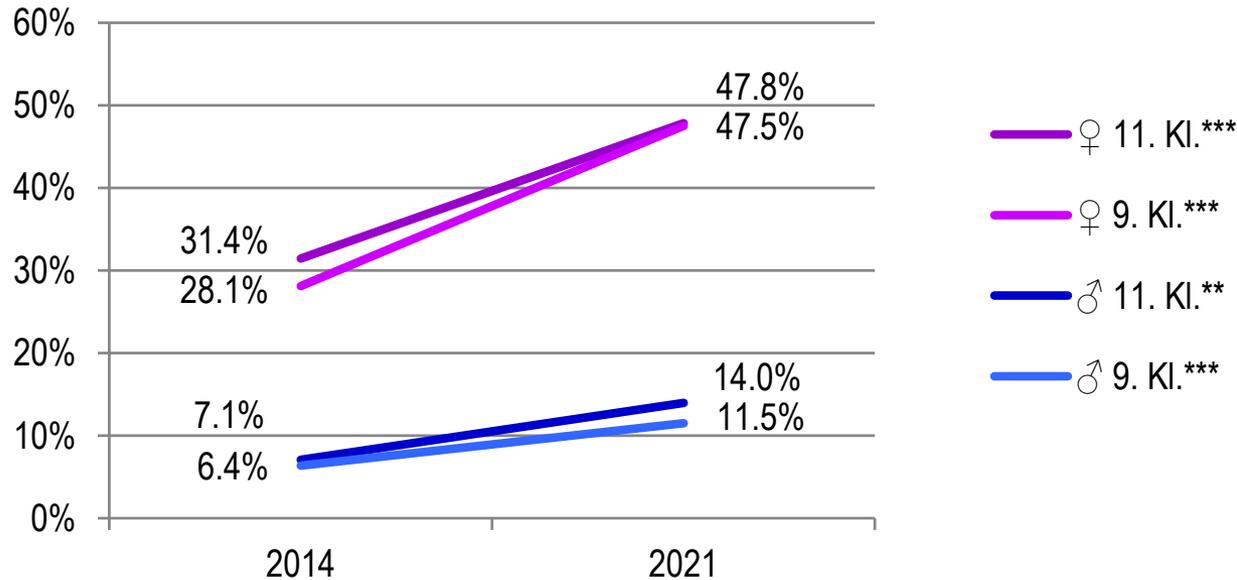
Change 2014-21

*** highly sig. (p<.001)
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 * narrowly sig. (p<.05)
 ns non-sig. (p>.10)

Trends in Sexual Cyber-Harassment

% Victims by Gender (Prevalence), Last 12 Months - ZH

Someone has clearly sexually harassed you while chatting on social media or in another form of internet communication (e.g. via Facebook, WhatsApp etc.)



Similar trends in Vaud

Change 2014-21

*** highly sig. (p<.001)
 ** sig. (p<.01)
 * narrowly sig. (p<.05)
 ns non-sig. (p>.10)



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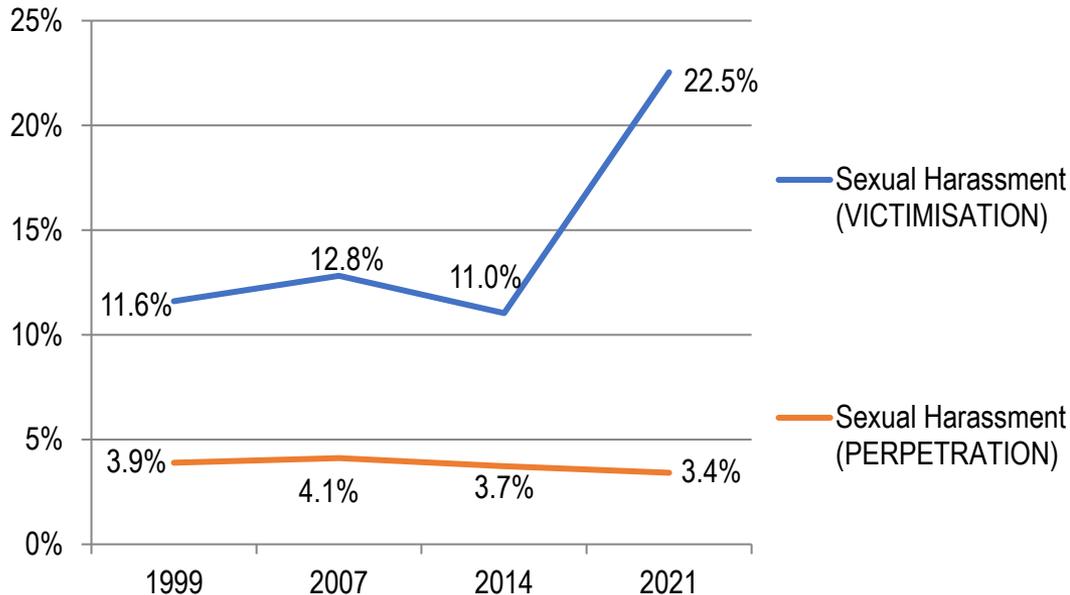
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The issue with the perpetrator perspective



Comparing Victim and Perpetrator Perspectives *Sexual Harassment at School, Grade 9 - ZH*



- Strongly diverging levels and trends in sexual harassment when comparing the victim and perpetrator perspective
- No sex differences in perpetration levels (not shown) → unplausible, indicating lacking validity
- Substantial underreporting of sexual offending among boys appears very likely
- Technically, this prevents risk factor analyses
- For prevention, this indicates that there is a considerable need to raise awareness about sexualized wrongdoing among young males



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Summary & Conclusions



Summary & Conclusions

- Since 2014, consistent increase in all forms of sexual victimization at both study sites (VD/ZH) and in both sexes, with young women massively more affected
 - Exception: sexual harassment at school in Vaud, with high levels in 2014 already
- Increase particularly marked among students in classes with low requirements (Sek B/C)
- Analysis of contextual characteristics reveals ...
 - a shift of sexual assaults toward the public space and school contexts
 - more unknown perpetrators, more group perpetrators, more same-age perpetrators
 - decreasing reporting rates suggest that the increase in the PKS tends to underestimate the actual increase
- *However:* Rates of perpetrators of sexual harassment are unaltered and at much lower level than victimization rates
 - Likely reflects perpetrators' lack of insight into the wrongfulness of their sexually harassing behavior
→ *in contrast other forms of violent/delinquent behavior are being reported at considerable rates*
 - Raising awareness about inappropriate sexualized behaviors is key to prevention efforts
- Study reports can be accessed here:
<https://www.jacobscenter.uzh.ch/de/research/zproso/jugendgewalt/publikationen.html>



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**Thank you for your
attention!**



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Supplementary Materials



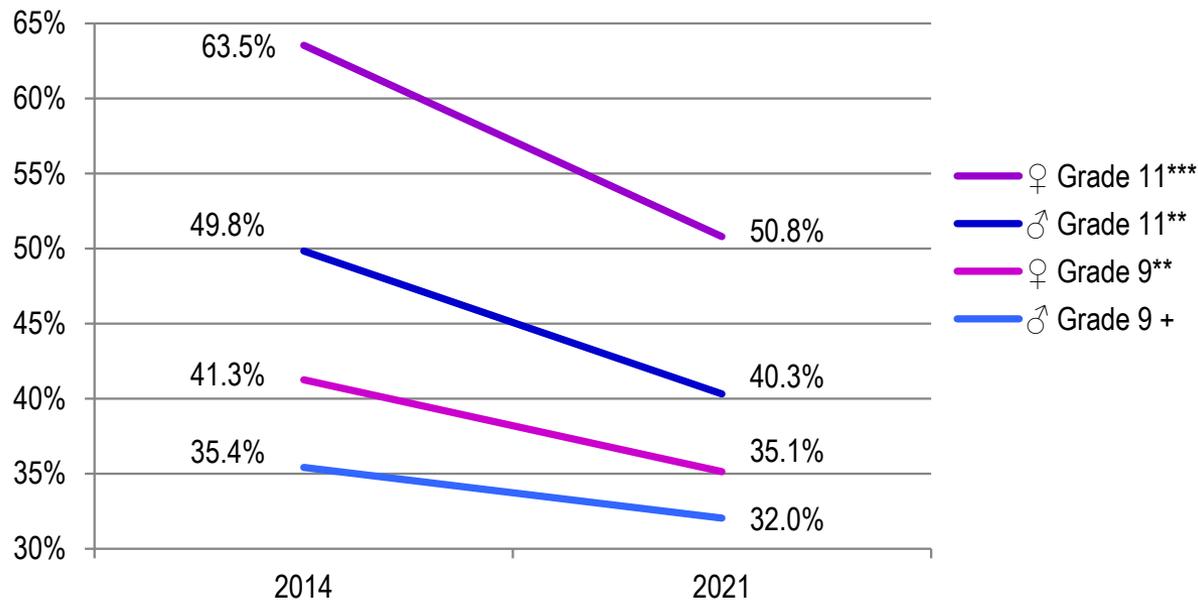
Summary & Conclusions LONG)

- Since 2014 consistent increase in all forms of sexual victimization in both study sites (VD/ZH) and sexes, with young women massively more affected
 - Exception: sexual harassment at school in Vaud, with high levels 2014 already
- Increase is particularly marked among students in classes with low requirements (Sek B/C)
- Analysis of contextual characteristics reveals
 - a shift of sexual assault incidents toward the public space and school contexts
 - more unknown perpetrators, more group perpetrators, more same age perpetrators
 - decreasing reporting rates suggest that the increase in the PKS tends to underestimate the actual increase
- However: Rates of perpetrators of sexual harassment largely unaltered and at much lower level than victimization rates
 - Likely reflects perpetrators' lack of insight into the wrongfulness of their sexually harassing behavior (in contrast other forms of violent/delinquent behavior are being reported at considerable rates)
 - Raising awareness for inappropriate sexualized behaviors seems key prevention efforts
- Overall, little evidence that the increase in sexual victimization is due to some sensitization effect ("Me-too-effect")
- Less youths in romantic relationships, less sexually experienced youths
- Generally positive development with regard to gender-related attitudes (increasing egalitarianism, decreasing "macho attitudes") yet massive increase in pornography consumption in males



Youths in Romantic Relationship

Last 12 Months, at least 1 Week



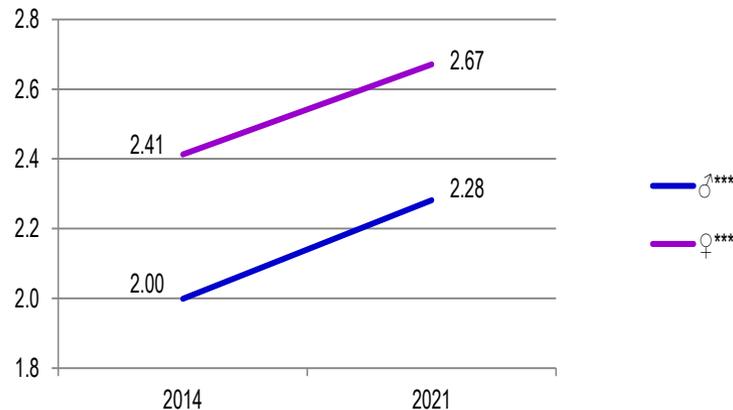
→ Similar decreasing pattern found for rates of sexually experienced youth

Trends in Gender-related Attitudes

Mean Scores, Grade 9

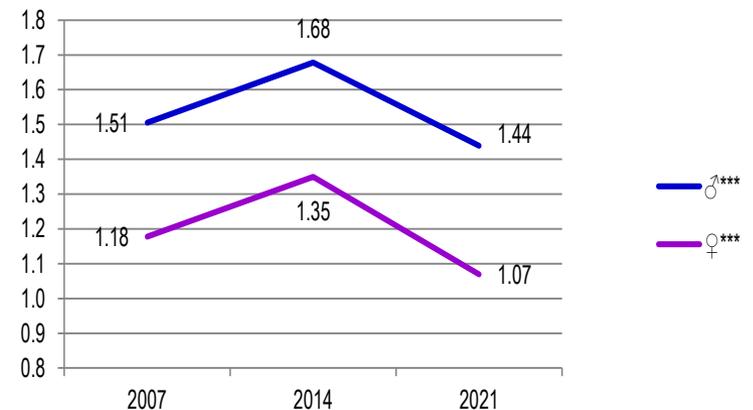
Egalitarian Attitudes

e.g. «In a couple relationship, the woman should have as much influence as the man.»



Violence-Legitimising Norms of Masculinity

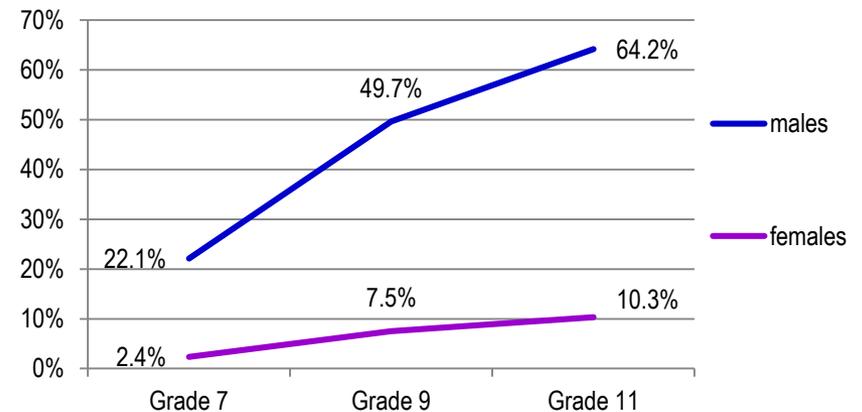
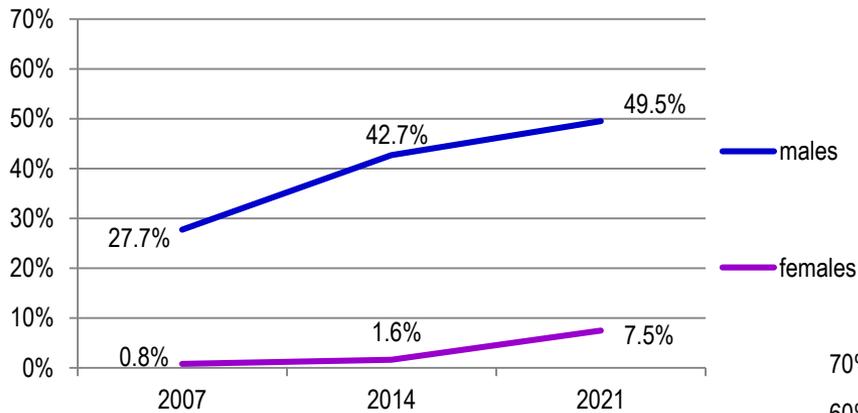
e.g. «A man who is not willing to defend himself against insults with violence is a weakling.»



Consumption of Pornography

% weekly or more frequent use

- «*Watched porn movies*»
- «*Searched for and viewed pornographic content on the internet*»





Summary & Conclusions

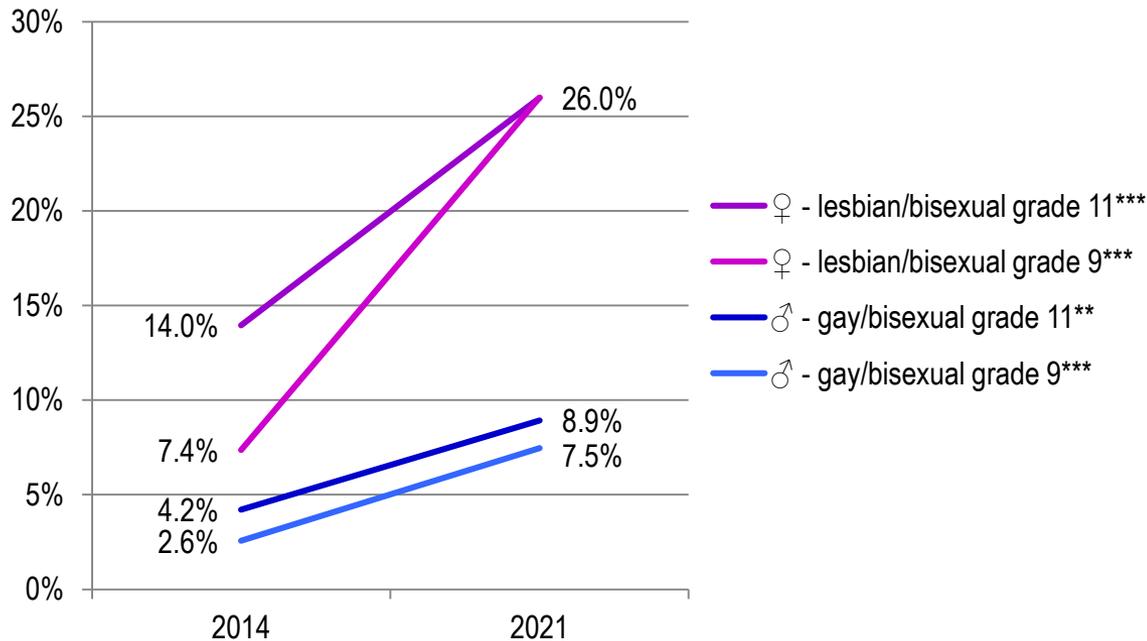
Contextual Factors & Risk Factors

- Shift of violence toward public space
 - Increased random/unmotivated (from the victim's point of view) violence
 - Increase of motives related to group affiliations
- Risk factor analysis reveals mixed picture
 - Tendency towards unfavorable trends in the domains of school (motivation) & family (conflict)
 - Individual factors with declining prevalence, but stronger association with violent behavior
 - Ditto for lifestyle indicators (violent media, going out, substance use)
 - Increase in violence concentrated in a small, highly risk-exposed and risk-sensitive minority



Sexual Orientation

- Increasing proportion of non-exclusively heterosexually oriented young people from 94% to 83%
- Large gender-specific differences:

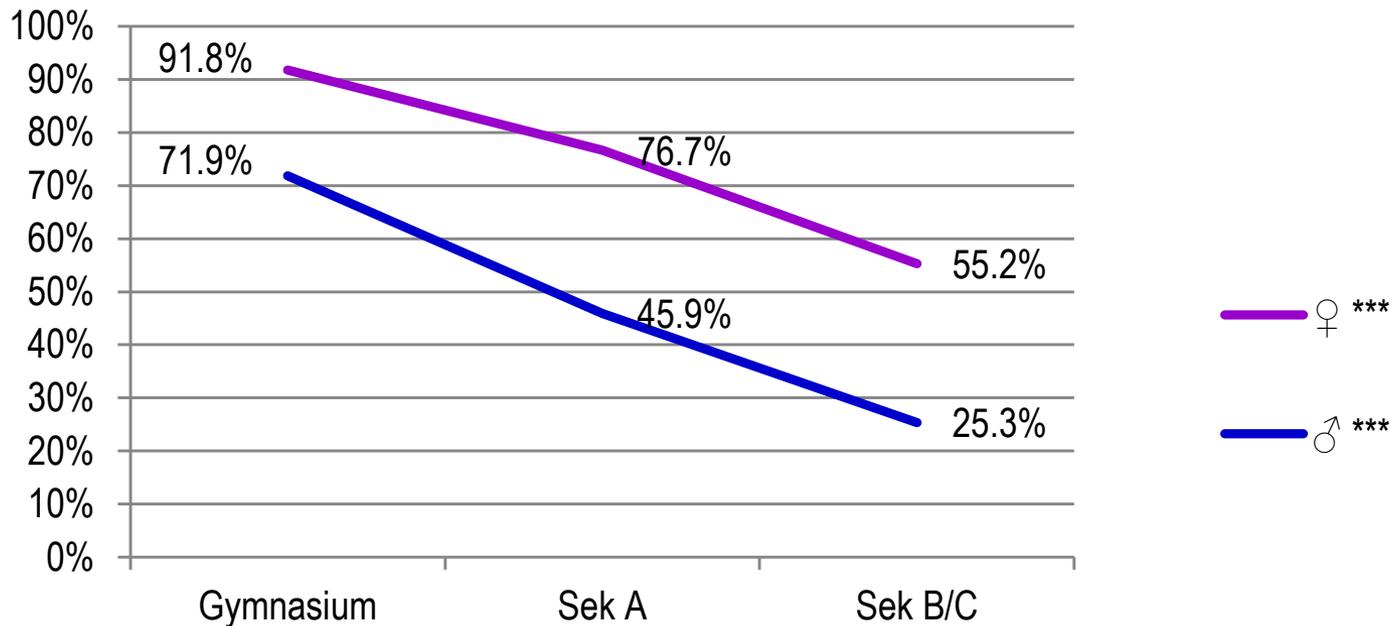




Acceptance of Homosexuality

% Full Acceptance, 2021

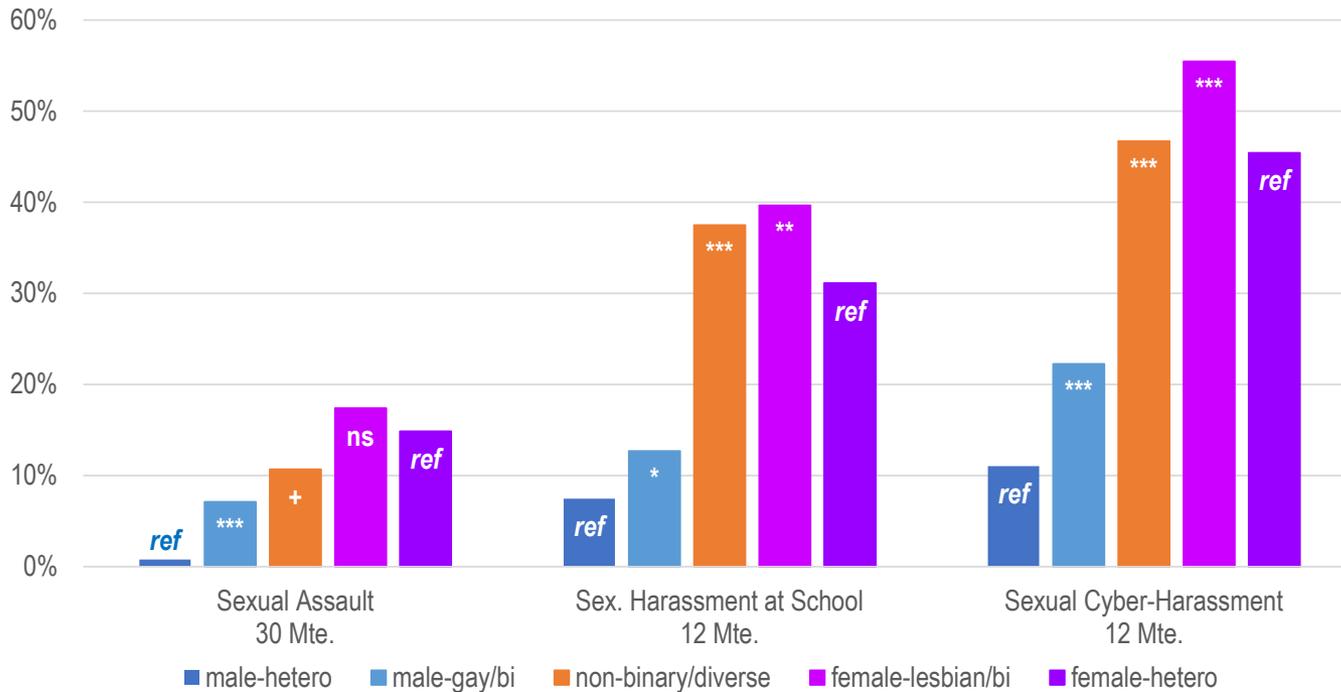
- 2 Items: «Lesbian/gay relationships are just as okay as relationships between women and men.» → % both «fully agree»





Sexual Violence Against Sexual Minorities

% Victims, Grades 9 & 11



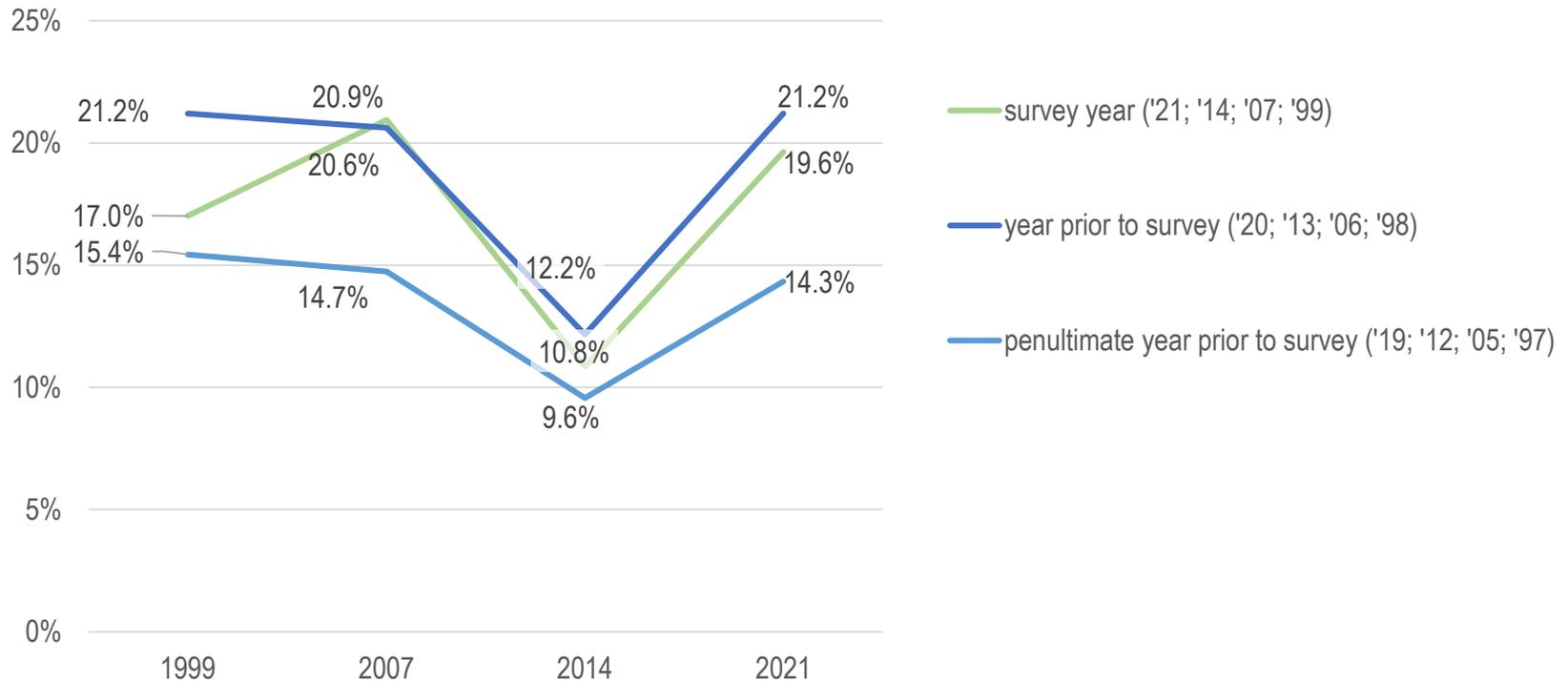
Comparison with Reference Category (ref)

- *** highly sig. (p < .001)
- ** sig. (p < .01)
- * narrowly sig. (p < .05)
- + near sig. (p < .10)
- ns non-sig. (p > .10)



Is the increase in violence related to the pandemics?

*Victimization Rates by Detailed Reference Period
(All Types of Violence, Grade 9)*

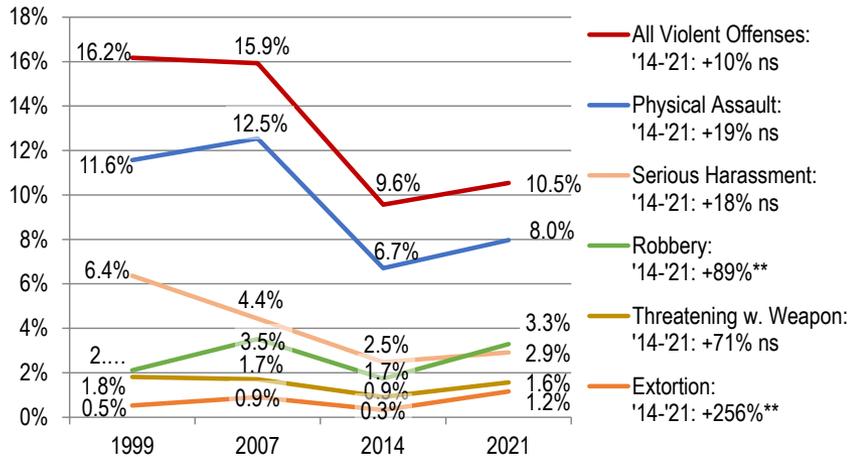




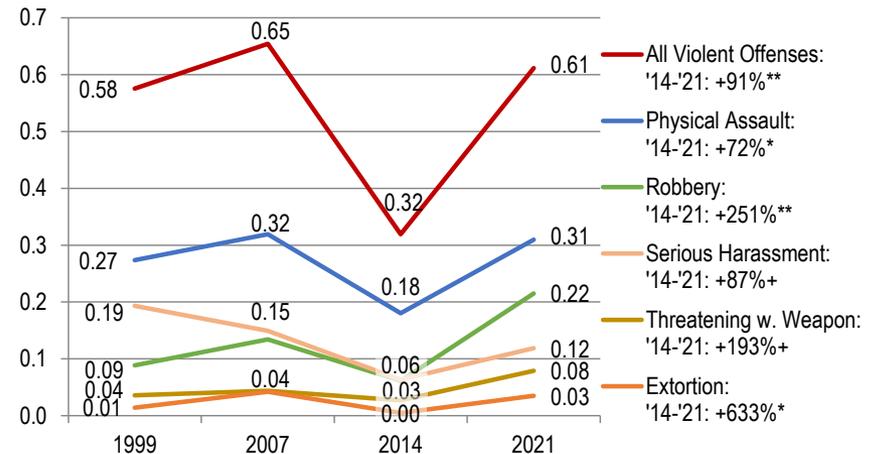
Trends in Self-Reported Violent Offending

Prevalence and Incidence Rates, 12 Months, Grade 9

Prevalence



Incidence

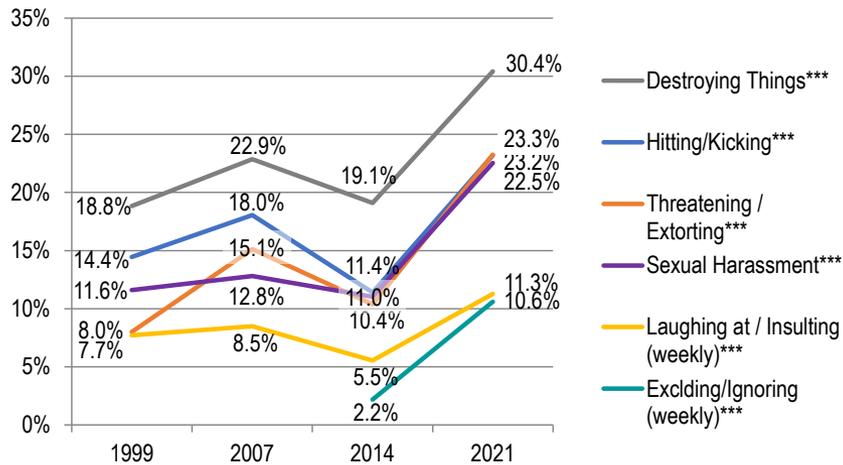




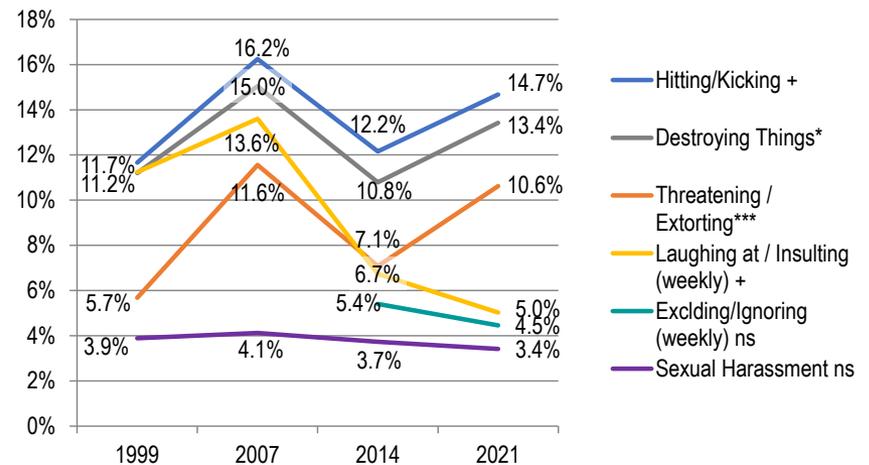
Trends in School Bullying; Victim & Perpetrator Rates

12 Months Prevalence Rates, Grade 9

Victims



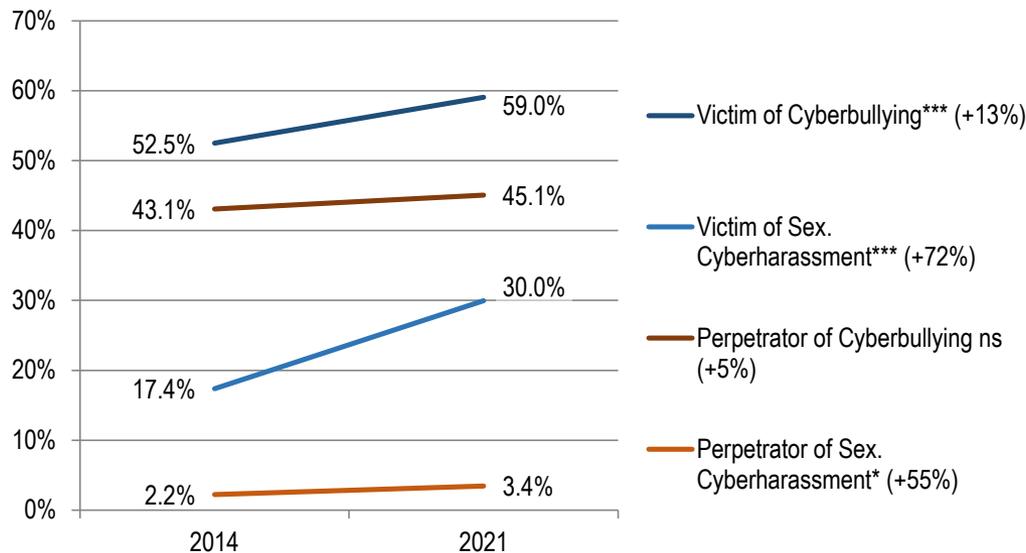
Perpetrators





Trends in Cyberbullying; Victim and Perpetrator Rates

12 Months Prevalence Rates, Grade 9



Sexual Cyberharassment

- Someone has clearly sexually harassed you while chatting on social media or in another form of internet communication

Cyberbullying

- Someone has sent you a mean or threatening message.
- Someone has sent you mean or threatening pictures or videos.
- Other young people have sent mean or embarrassing messages or rumours about you to their peers.
- Other young people have sent mean or embarrassing pictures or videos of you to their peers.
- Other young people have posted mean or embarrassing messages or rumours about you on the internet.
- Other young people have posted mean or embarrassing pictures or videos of you on the internet.



Rates of Reports to the Police – the Link to Police Statistics

30 Months Reporting Rates, Grade 9

