Provincial police in Norfolk County have charged a 28-year-old woman with public mischief after she allegedly reported a sexual assault that investigators deemed unfounded. (Andrew Lupton/CBC)

A Norfolk County woman who reported a sexual assault has been charged with public mischief after police say she provided investigators with false information about the incident.

Provincial police launched an investigation after the woman reported the alleged assault around on Dec. 17.
Const. Ed Sanchuk said through the course of an investigation police determined the report was based on false information.

"Any time you enter into an investigation and information is provided that is false in nature ... you've had officers conducting an intensive investigation for a long period of time, you've got the resources tied up in the investigation," he said, explaining why the woman was charged.

**False allegations are rare**

Amber Wardell, justice for women coordinator at Haldimand and Norfolk Women's Services, said someone making a false report of sexual assault is exceedingly rare. The charges laid by police this week are the first she can recall in 11 years of working in the area.

"It's a really small amount of cases. The research is saying it's less than two to eight per cent that are false reports."

Those few cases are often the subject of "disproportionate" media coverage compared to the vast majority of sexual assaults that still go reported, Wardell said.

"Sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes in Canada, so we're always worried about anything that is going to increase that number of assaults that aren't being reported."

*When people come forward with allegations they have to be truthful.* - Const. Ed Sanchuk, Norfolk County OPP

On Jan. 7 police charged the woman with public mischief under the criminal code.

"We want people to come forward with regards to their allegations. We want to make sure they have the confidence in the OPP and its ability to investigate crimes and bring those responsible to justice," said Sanchuk. "But what it comes down to is when people come forward with allegations they have to be truthful."

The woman is scheduled to appear before the Ontario Court of Justice in Simcoe at a later date.

**Here’s where you can find support**

Both Wardell and Sanchuk said they're hopeful people who have been sexually assaulted continue to seek out to police and community services for support.

"We don't want to discourage any victims from coming forward," said Sanchuk. "I want to stress the importance of the fact that the OPP takes reports of sexual assault and violence very seriously and uses all resources necessary to conduct complete, thorough and professional investigations."
The crisis and support line for Haldimand and Norfolk Women's Services can be reached by calling 1-800-265-8076. For those outside the area, the Assaulted Women's Helpline can be contacted at 1-866-863-051.

Here's where you can find a sexual assault centre near you.