



COMMISSIONER  
**FOR VICTIMS  
OF CRIME**

# **2024 Victim Survey**

## **Key Findings**

September 2024

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# Foreword

It is with pride and responsibility that I present this ground-breaking report on victims' experience within the Northern Ireland justice system. This survey marks a significant milestone as the first comprehensive online study to encompass the experiences of victims across all crime types, including domestic violence, sexual violence, hate crimes and homicide. The inclusion of these diverse experiences was paramount to me, as victims of these crimes are most frequently in contact with our office and not usually included in wider victim satisfaction surveys.

First and foremost, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all the victims who took the time to respond to this survey. Your courage in sharing your experiences is invaluable and will undoubtedly contribute to improving the system for others. I would also like to extend a special thanks to the victims and key stakeholders who acted as critical friends in reviewing the survey and promoting it. Your input was crucial, especially given that this was our first attempt at such a comprehensive online survey, and your feedback and advice was vital as we encountered some technical challenges along the way.

The findings of this report make it abundantly clear that we have a significant journey ahead if we are to ensure that victims receive the treatment they are entitled to and most rightly deserve. Whilst not surprising, it remains particularly concerning to note the low levels of awareness regarding the Victim Charter. The responses to key questions also unequivocally demonstrate that victims are not consistently receiving their entitlements as outlined in our statutory Victim Charter.

There is no doubt in my mind that this failure in the care and support of victims has contributed to the poor confidence levels that victims have in the system and its ability to deliver justice. This feedback is an SOS from victims of crime.

As we move forward, the report will act as a crucial baseline for measuring our progress in improving victims' experiences within the justice system. It highlights areas where immediate action is needed and provides valuable insights that will shape our strategies and policies in the coming years.

Our commitment to victims of crime remains unwavering. This report is not just a collection of statistics, it represents the experiences of those who have been impacted by crime and their interactions with our justice system. It is our responsibility to listen, learn and act upon these findings to create a system that truly serves and supports victims at every step of their journey.

Thank you once again to all who contributed to this vital piece of work. Your experiences and insights will be the catalyst for positive change in our justice system.

## Geraldine Hanna

*Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime*



The Victim Survey is an online survey that was created to capture the experiences of victims of all types of crime in Northern Ireland of its criminal justice system.

This is the first victim survey open to victims of all crime types in Northern Ireland.

Responses provide an insight into the real experiences of victims of crime and help to inform the priorities of the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime in championing victims' rights and perspectives.

Surveys of this nature are conducted in England and Wales every year and the evidence gathered is used by the Victims Commissioner there to advocate for changes and improvements to the criminal justice system.

It is hoped that this can happen here in Northern Ireland also.

The survey was conducted online with respondents completing the survey independently. The survey was open to individuals who were victims of crime from 2018 and those who reported a historical crime from 2018. The survey was promoted widely, utilising the networks of the Commissioner Designates office as well as inviting victims that had engaged directly with the office. Posters and promotional material regarding the survey were also disseminated across the court estate in Northern Ireland.

The survey was launched and went live on 1st September 2023 and was due to close on 28th February 2024 but was extended to 31st March 2024. A portal called Citizen Space was used to administer the survey, gather and analyse responses. The survey used a mix of open-ended (free text) and closed (tick box) questions.

The survey findings have certain limitations. Based on the approach used, the sample used in this research was a self-selecting group and cannot be viewed as representative of all victims. There may be underrepresentation of respondents with limited internet access, who do not use social media or that do not engage with support organisations within and beyond the criminal justice system.

We received a total of 166 responses to the survey in this first year, which represents a small but not insignificant sample size. Of these, one respondent was provided with telephone support to complete the form online and another requested a hard copy of the questions which were completed and returned to the office by post.

It was also the first time that the office used the Citizen Space portal to undertake a survey. This resulted in some issues and some learning for future surveys. For example we were made aware while the survey was live that some victims were required to respond to questions that were not relevant to their experience. While this was subsequently addressed, it did result in frustrations for some victims while completing the survey for which we are sorry.

# Summary

## Background of victims and types of crime

Of the 166 respondents to this survey, 67% (n=111) were female and 29% (n=48) were male. The remaining 7 respondents preferred not to say or did not wish to answer. The age profile of respondents was as follows: 16-24 (7/4%); 25-34 (18/11%); 35-44 (49/30%); 45-54 (48/29%); 55-64 (33/20%); 65-74 (6/4%); 75+ (0) and 4 respondents preferred not to say. 83% of respondents reported being straight/homosexual, 8% reported as gay/lesbian/bisexual with another 8% who preferred not to say.

The geographic spread of responses came from across Northern Ireland as detailed in the table below:

Table 1: Geographic spread of respondents

Location	No. of Respondents
Belfast	42
Co. Antrim (excl Belfast)	30
Derry / L'Derry	19
Down	38
Armagh	10
Fermanagh	3
Tyrone	10
Prefer not to say	13
Not answered	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>

The ethnic make-up of respondents was predominantly white and is detailed in the table below:

Table 2: Ethnic make-up of respondents

Option	Total
Asian/Asian British	1
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	6
White	150
Prefer not to say	6
Other (Please specify):	1
Not Answered	1

## Physical Health

57% (n=95) of respondents reported living with physical conditions or illness lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more. 36% (n=59) of respondents reported that their physical condition or illness reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a lot with a further 16% (n=26) reporting that it reduces their ability a little. 39% (n=65) of respondents stated that this condition was related to their experience as a victim of crime with 48% (n=80) stating that it was unrelated.



## Mental Health

43% (n=72) of respondents have been diagnosed with a mental health condition in the last 12 months and another 13% (n=22) preferred not to say whether they had or not. The predominant conditions diagnosed were PTSD (complex & non-complex), anxiety and depression. 40% (n=67) of respondents stated that their mental health condition significantly reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Respondents were victims of a broad range of crimes. A number of respondents were victims of more than one crime type, hence the total in the table below is more than the total number of respondents. Only 3 of the 166 victims chose not to answer or preferred not to state the type of crime which they experienced. Respondents were asked to indicate what crime they had experienced. It should be noted that individuals were able to select more than one crime type – overall 350 crimes were indicated. 39% (n=65) of respondents were a victim of rape or sexual offences and 18% (n=31) were a victim of stalking.

Table 3: Crime type and volume

Crime Type	No. of Respondents
Murder / manslaughter	1
Robbery / burglary	16
Violence (with injury)	43
Violence (without injury)	41
Rape	23
Sexual Offences	42
Stalking	31
Cyber-crime	9
Criminal damage	39
<b>Other crime types</b>	<b>54</b>

Respondents were asked whether the crime of which they were victims was domestically motivated. 44% (n=73) of crimes had a domestic motivation with 17% (n=28) motivated by hate crime (motivated by prejudice against religion, sexual orientation, race or disability),

## Reporting the crime

73% (n=122) of respondents stated that they reported the crime to the PSNI. Another 14% (n=23) stated the police came to know about the crime in another way. Around 13% (n=21) stated that they did not think that the crime was reported to the PSNI.

## Experience with PSNI

63% (n=91) of those whose crimes were investigated felt that the crime was not thoroughly investigated by the PSNI, while only 31% of respondents (n=45) felt that they were treated fairly and with respect. Overall, 65% (n=93) of the 144 respondents that answered this were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their treatment by the PSNI and 43% stated that they would not report a crime to the police again based on their experience.

## Experience with PPS

50% of victims reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated by the PPS. Victims were asked whether they would report a crime again based on their experience with the PPS. Of the 34 responses provided, 53% (n=18) reported that they would with another 15% stating that they didn't know whether they would report or not. 32% said they would not report a crime again following their experience.

## Court Experience

### Timeframes

Respondents were asked about the timeframe regarding their experience and approximately how long it took from reporting the crime to the PSNI to their case getting a hearing in court. 29% of respondents waited over 3 years for their case to be heard, a further 10% waited between 2-3 years and another 29% waited between 1-2 years. 29% of respondents had their case heard within 12 months of reporting to police with the final 1% awaiting a trial date.

### Support

Victims were asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding their court experience. Around 77% (n=17) of those that responded reported not being given enough support during the court process. Just 9% of respondents agreed that they had been given enough support during the process.

### Case Outcome

Respondents were also asked whether the defendant pleaded guilty or was found guilty of a lesser charge than the one with which they were initially charged. Of the 22 victims that responded, 11 reported a lesser charge with a further 4 unsure.

### Special measures

50% of respondents said that special measures and the benefits they have were not explained to them by someone.

### Victim Personal Statements (VPS)

When asked about their victim personal statement (VPS) 55% (n= 12) of victims who had provided a statement informed us that it was not referred to by the Judge at sentencing.

7 victims (32%) stated that they would attend court again and 8 (36%) stated they would not attend again based on their experience. A further 7 (32%) victims expressed uncertainty about whether they would attend court again or not.

## Experience with Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) & Victim Information Scheme (VIS)

Respondents were asked if they had been made aware of PBNI's victim information scheme. Of the 22 that answered this question, only 4 reported being registered. Another 3 respondents said this was not applicable to them leaving 15 (68%) who stated that they were not aware of this service until responding to this survey.

## Victim Support Services

Victims were asked if they were referred or self-referred to formal support services like Victim Support NI or the NSPCC. 57% (n=67) of victims reported being referred or self-referring to one of the available support services. 36% (n=42) reported not being aware of support services available to help them. Only 7% (n=8) of victims declined a referral to formal support services.

Victims were asked about the referral timeframes and how long they had to wait to get support from the time they were referred. Of the 68 responses, 37% (n=25) reported waiting under 2 weeks to get support, 25% (n=17) waited between 2 and 6 weeks for support and 16% (n=11) waited between 6-12 weeks. 22% of respondents (n=15) stated that they had to wait over 3 months from the initial referral before getting support.

## Restorative Justice (RJ)

A significant proportion of respondents (45%) had heard of restorative justice prior to completing this survey. Of those that did respond 52% (n=60) reported that they did not wish to pursue this option. Around 30% stated that they would have liked to explore this option with a further 17% being unsure about it. Only 1 of the 116 victims that responded to this question reported taking part in a restorative justice process.

## Victim Charter

73% (n=120) of respondents reported that they were not aware of the Charter prior to completing this survey. A further 8% were unsure whether they had heard of it or not. 19% or 31 victims had heard of the Charter and reported hearing about it primarily via the organisations from whom they received support or through their work / studies.

## Overall experience of the Criminal Justice System

Survey respondents were asked to share their views on the overall experience of the criminal justice system (CJS) in Northern Ireland. The first question looked at victim confidence in the effectiveness of the CJS.

Of the 165 victims that responded to this question, none were very confident, while 7% (n=11) were fairly confident in its effectiveness. 65% (n=107) of victims were not at all confident with another 26% (n=43) not very confident in the effectiveness of the CJS.

Victims were subsequently asked about their confidence that reporting a crime will result in justice. Again, the sentiment was overwhelmingly weighted towards a lack of confidence in the system delivering justice on the back of reporting a crime. 88% of victims had little confidence in receiving justice, while 12% demonstrated some level of confidence.



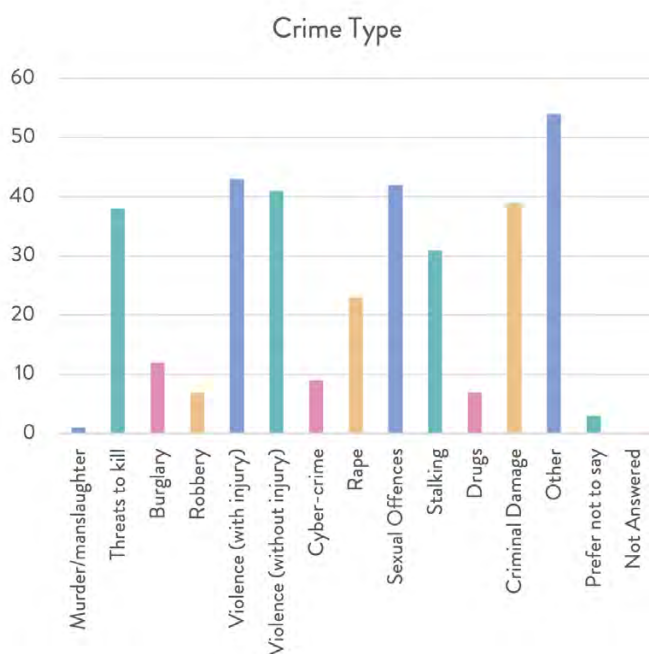


# Survey Findings

## 1. Nature of Crime

A broad spectrum of victims (n=166) responded to this survey and the table below shows the range of crime types they were victims of:

Figure 1: Range of Crime Types

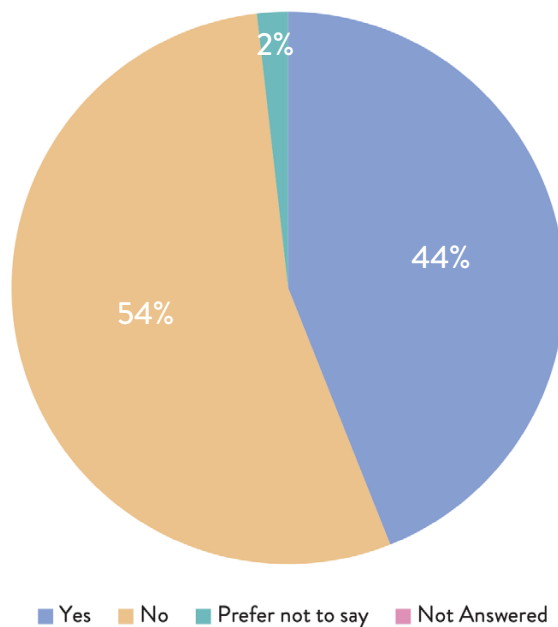


The largest category chosen was 'other' with a text box option to provide further details. Among the other crime types listed were: intimidation, harassment, domestic violence & abuse, coercive control, fraud, non-fatal strangulation, hate crime and child abuse.

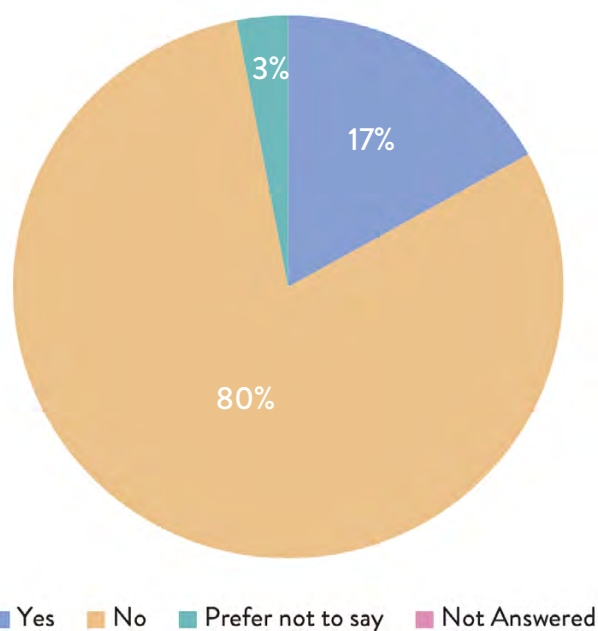
Respondents were asked whether the crime of which they were victims was domestically motivated. As the charts show, around 44% (n=73) of crime had a domestic motivation with 17% (n=28) motivated by hate crime (motivated by prejudice against your religion, sexual orientation, race or disability):

Figure 2: Domestic & Hate motivated crime

Was the crime domestically motivated?



Was the crime a hate crime? (motivated by prejudice against your religion, sexual orientation, race or disability?)



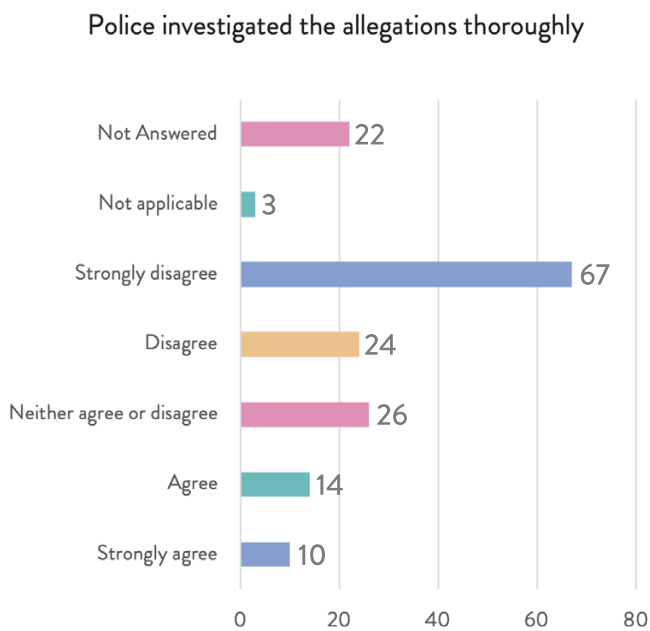
## 2. Reporting the Crime

73% (n=122) of respondents stated that they reported the crime to the PSNI. Another 14% (n=23) stated the police came to know about the crime in another way. Around 13% (n=21) stated that they did not think that the crime was reported to the PSNI.

Respondents were then asked whether they reported the crime to anyone else other than the PSNI. 144 responses were received to this question with 97 (67%) stating that they did and 47 (33%) stating that they did not report it to anyone else.

## 3. Experience with PSNI

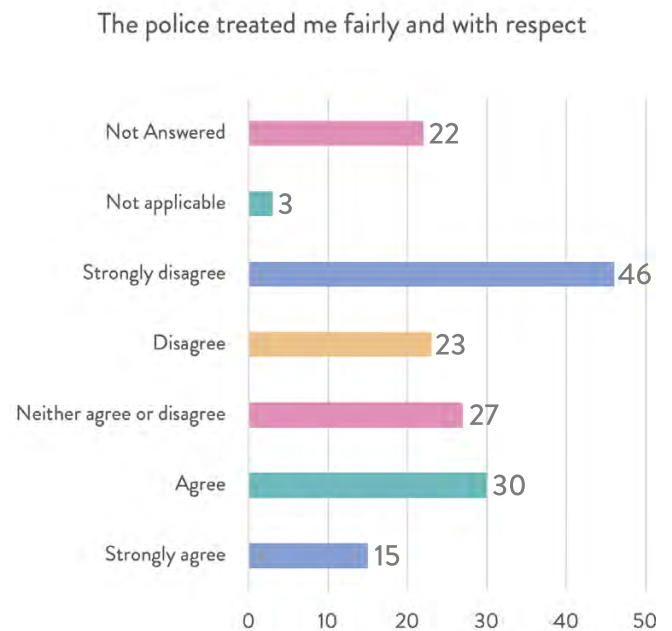
Figure 3.1: Satisfaction with police investigation



Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements regarding their experience with the PSNI – i.e. the first stage of their interaction with the criminal justice system.

The first statement related to the police investigation into their case. While 14% (n=24) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 55% (n=91) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

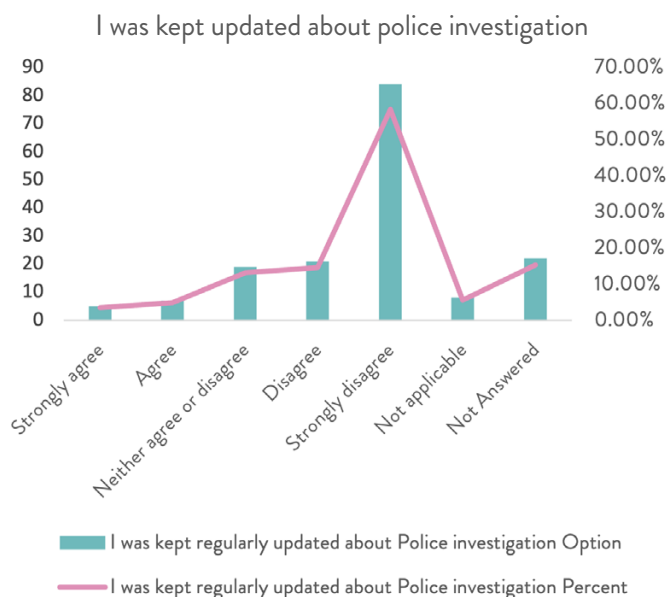
Figure 3.2: Treatment by PSNI



They were then asked whether they felt they were treated fairly and with respect. 27% of respondents (n=45) agreed or strongly agreed with this whereas around 42% (n=70) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Respondents were asked if they were kept regularly informed about the police investigation, a key entitlement in the Victim Charter. Of the 144 respondents to this statement, 73% disagreed or strongly disagreed with only 6% agreeing or strongly agreeing. See chart below with a more detailed breakdown:

Figure 3.3: Updates on police investigation



On the same theme of being kept up to date, there was a more encouraging response to the statement: *I was kept updated when someone was arrested and charged*. 18% of victims agreed or disagreed with this statement and when you remove the 50 respondents that specified this statement was not applicable to them, this percentage rises to 28%.

Figure 3.4: Updates on arrest & charge

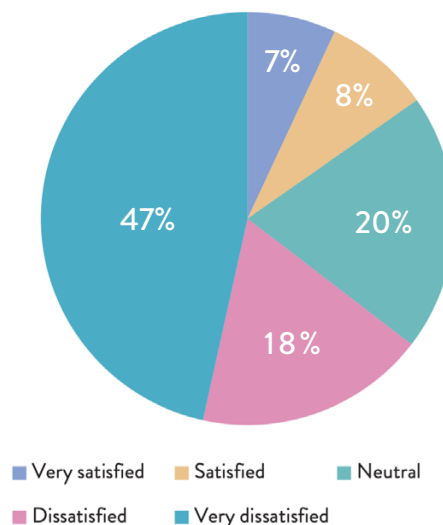


Survey respondents were then asked to comment on their satisfaction levels in terms of how they were treated by the police. 65% (n=93) of the 144

respondents that answered this were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their treatment.

Figure 3.5: Satisfaction with treatment by police

How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how you were treated by the police?



Respondents were also asked to provide reasons for their response. For those that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated, the most frequent reasons provided for their dissatisfaction are listed below:

- Communication was poor and had to chase up for updates;
- Was not taken seriously and incidents belittled (particularly domestic abuse cases involving both male & female victims)
- Officers not trained in how to deal with sexual assault; and
- Failure to thoroughly investigate

*“The whole event was a shambles from lack of communication from the police. Until I had the final officer involved as there were a number of officers during the case. The outcome was disappointing and that I feel us as victims were treated like the guilty party. We never had any communication of what happened until I contacted police.”*

“I had a mixed experience with the police, I had some officers who were very good and patient and understanding and some that were very dismissive and said things like ‘what do you want to happen out of this report’ which in the mouth of trauma was a very confusing question to ask. I wanted help and protection from domestic and sexual abuse and wanted them to tell me how they could help me. One officer in particular was very impatient and dismissive and did not seem to understand the strength it had taken for me to be brave enough to report to the police and the fear I was living in. I have also been made aware by a support service recently that I should have been offered an interview called an ABE which I was not offered and could have greatly helped my case but I was not made aware of this nor given the opportunity to have this take place.”

A common complaint was that police did not investigate, showed little interest in investigating further, or tried to dissuade victims from taking further action/making a statement. Victims described measures they themselves had to take in absence of a thorough police investigation:

“I had to investigate myself and find out who the driver was and where the car was. The police did nothing. Absolutely nothing. The perpetrator, a known criminal wasn’t even interviewed.”

“To date, no one has been arrested or charged. The case is still ongoing almost 4 and a half years since the accident occurred.”

Those that expressed satisfaction with their treatment by police referenced how:

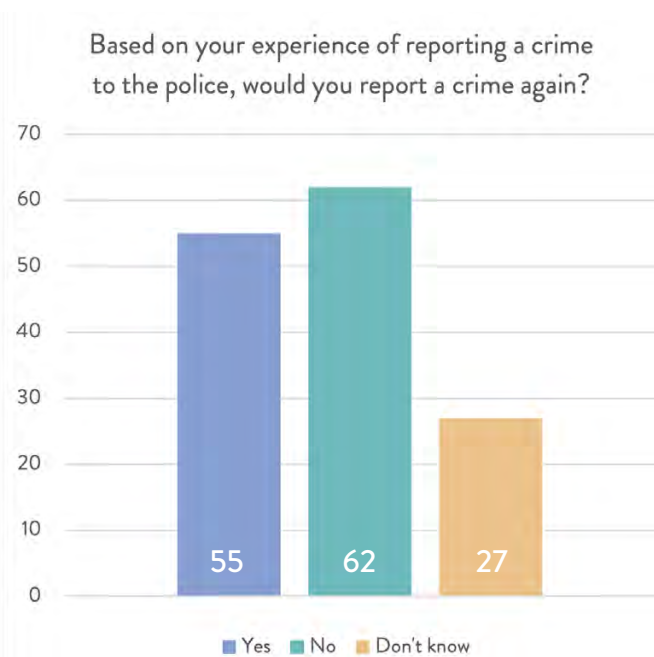
- The police were understanding, professional and compassionate;
- The police were respectful; and
- The officers were polite, considerate and helpful.

*“The police were understanding, professional and compassionate. They were very thorough and supportive. They went above and beyond to put the case together.”*

*“The investigating officer was clearly experienced and did a good job at establishing safety in our communication. However, this was not a consistent approach across officers I had to deal with.”*

Victims were later asked whether they would report a crime to the police again based on their experience. 144 people responded to this question and 43% stated that they would not with another 18% saying they did not know whether they would. This compares to 34% (n=145) of respondents to an equivalent survey in England / Wales who said they would not report a crime again to the police there.

Figure 4: Confidence in police



A few comments provided give an insight into why some victims would choose not to report a crime if they were to become repeat victims:

“It’s Russian roulette when you report a crime. You get someone who cares or you don’t. I do not trust the police at all due to this.”

A number of victims also gave positive feedback about their experience with the PSNI:

“There was one officer who called he was a lovely man. Had a nice way about him and helped keep me calm and assured me it was okay & it wasn’t my fault. He restored my faith in the police after the raid. What a good person he was.”

“I know a lot of good work is done by fantastic officers.”

#### 4. Experience with Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

The number of responses to the survey dropped off significantly at this section, decreasing from an average of 144 to 34 responses. In terms of the reasons behind this, we know from an earlier question that somebody was charged with a crime in 34 (20%) of the cases that responded to this survey and that 77 respondents (46%) stated that nobody was charged. 33 respondents (20%) stated they were not aware whether somebody was charged or not and another 22 (13%) respondents did not answer the question.

Effectively, this demonstrates that a significant number (~80%) of the crimes reported to and investigated by the police were potentially ‘no prosecution’ decisions and did not make it to court/trial. This could also be influenced by the high proportion of crimes with a domestic (n=73 / 44%) or hate crime (n=28 / 17%) motivation as highlighted earlier in this report.

Respondents were provided with a number of statements regarding their experience with PPS and

“I would avoid if possible as I don’t have any faith in the police and after how I was treated I would not like to be treated like that again if I had to report a crime.”

“I am still getting terrorised in my home and someone keeps throwing dog s\*\*t at my door. I haven’t reported this to the police as I know they won’t do anything.”

“I felt that by reporting the crime I made the situation worse. Even though they said they could not take it any further I discovered later that he had been told by someone within PSNI that I had complained. Further damage was then carried out to my car and personal property.”

“I no longer trust the police to protect me.”

given a range of options to select on an agree/disagree continuum. These charts indicate their satisfaction levels across two key metrics.

Figure 5: Needs assessment

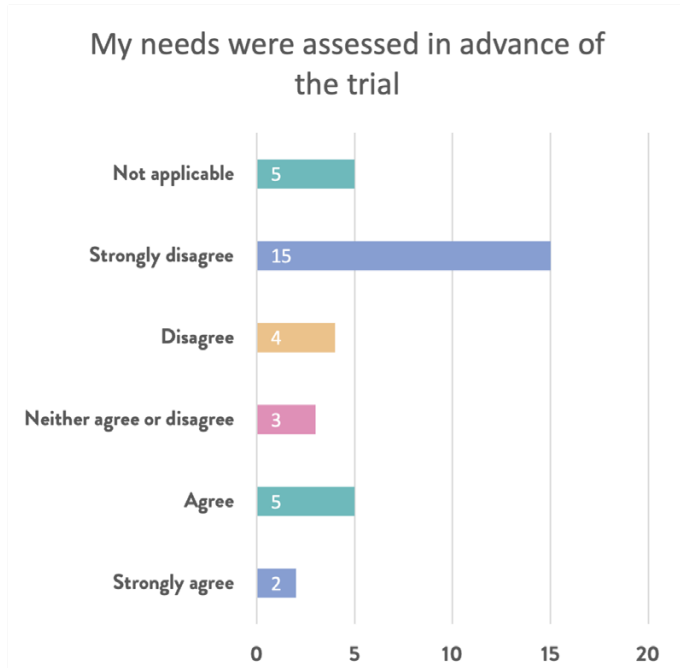
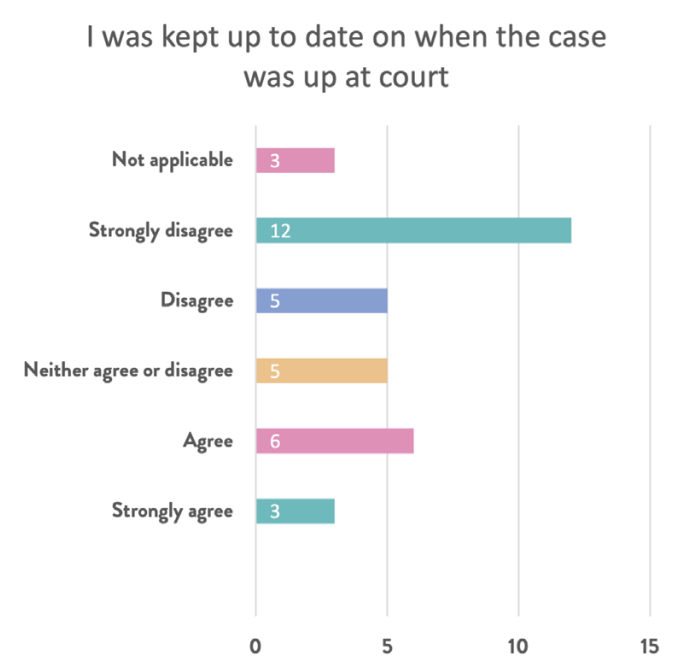


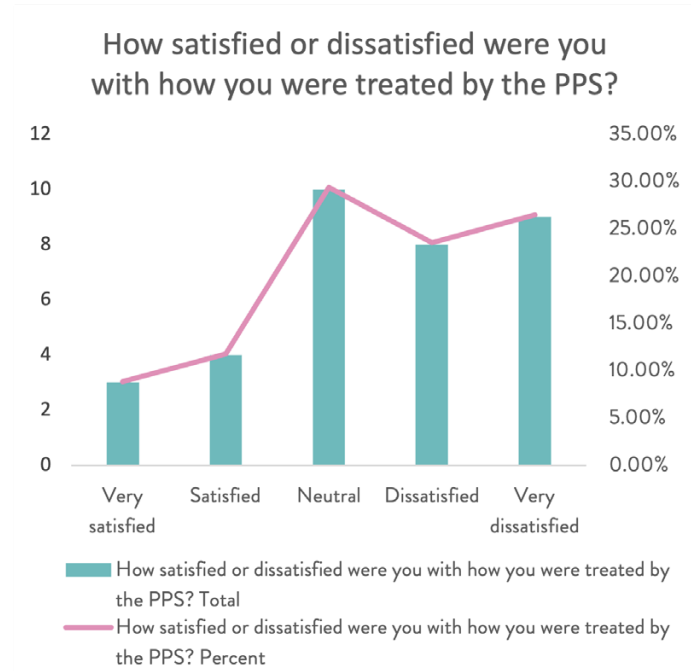
Figure 6: Updates about court case



Victims were then asked about their overall satisfaction in terms of their experience with the Public Prosecution Service. 50% (n=17) of victims

reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated by the PPS.

Figure 7: Satisfaction with PPS treatment



When asked to provide reasons for their dissatisfaction, victims cited a lack of communication and a failure to recognise/accommodate the needs of victims. Below are a sample of the comments provided:

“I was glad to be informed of the outcome by post but I didn’t even know the case was being progressed or that he was due to appear at court. There was over a year between arrest and sentence, with no communication from the PPS.”

“The generic letters that were sent out from VWCU (Victim and Witness Care Unit) were inaccurate. They outlined that we could check the progress of the case via an online portal. We later learned that such a portal was never established by the PPS.”

“Lack of communication and having to chase them all the time and the fact they had not told me that it had gone to court a second time.”

Victims were also asked if there was anything they would like to tell us about their experience as a victim with the prosecution - anything that was done well or anywhere they felt things could be improved. 23 victims provided feedback to this question and below is a sample of experiences that identify areas for improvement:

“A decision to prosecute was made in March but the letter from the PPS was not received until Sept the same year. The VWCU contact had to be chased and I usually ended up having to speak with another member of the team to have questions answered. I sent emails, followed by text messages and gave up trying to contact my contact as I never heard from her. I set up a meeting with the prosecutor to ask questions before the trial but this just made me feel worse as I came away thinking, why bother, he obviously doesn't care and to save himself from being accused of coaching me, would not discuss the case. He said I was no longer a victim but a witness for the PPS. The only advice he did give was not to be crying as the jury may struggle to hear what I'm saying. I felt the prosecutor was condescending and gave the impression he did not care. I left that meeting with the words 'these cases are very difficult to prosecute' resounding in my head. Why was I even bothering putting myself through this.”

“I did not have much interaction with the PPS. But the legal team was very effective in getting a conviction. I felt that they could have kept me better informed. Decisions were made without consulting me. In the event those decisions were right, but I would have liked more involvement in them.”

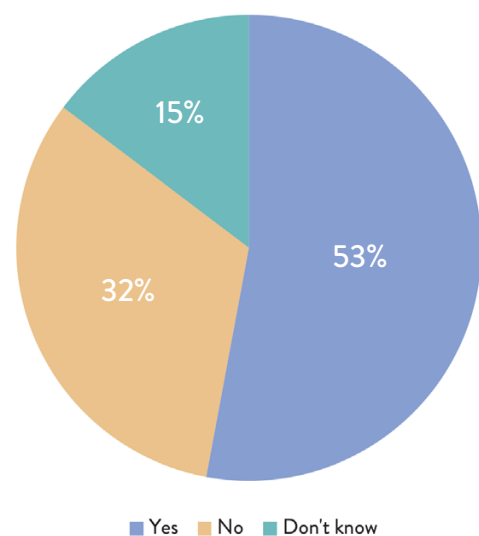
“Sat all day waiting for the case. In a small room on my own. This was a domestic violence case. My offender sat outside the room on a chair beside the door. You couldn't write the script. I was frozen. Terrified. No support. Prosecution Lawyer, she popped her head through the door minutes before the case was called. Didn't even come into the room. Don't forget I sat in that tiny room for hours. I shall quote. 'Innocent until proven guilty. Oh. By the way, the police aren't coming, something else has turned up'. And off her head disappeared through the door again. Brief, shocking, and no opportunity to have a conversation. I was left sitting there with my mouth open.”

“Also meeting barristers earlier and not on the morning of the court date.”

Finally, we asked victims whether they would report a crime again based on this experience with the PPS. Of the 34 responses provided, 53% (n=18) reported that they would with another 15% stating that they didn't know whether they would report or not. 32% said they would not report a crime again following their experience.

Figure 8: Satisfaction with PPS experience

Based on your experience of engaging with the PPS, would you report a crime again?



## 5. Experience in Court

Response levels remained the same or similar for this section of the survey as they were for the previous section, with approximately 34 or so responses to the key questions. Of the 34 victims that responded, the majority (68%) attended court.

Figure 9: Court attendance

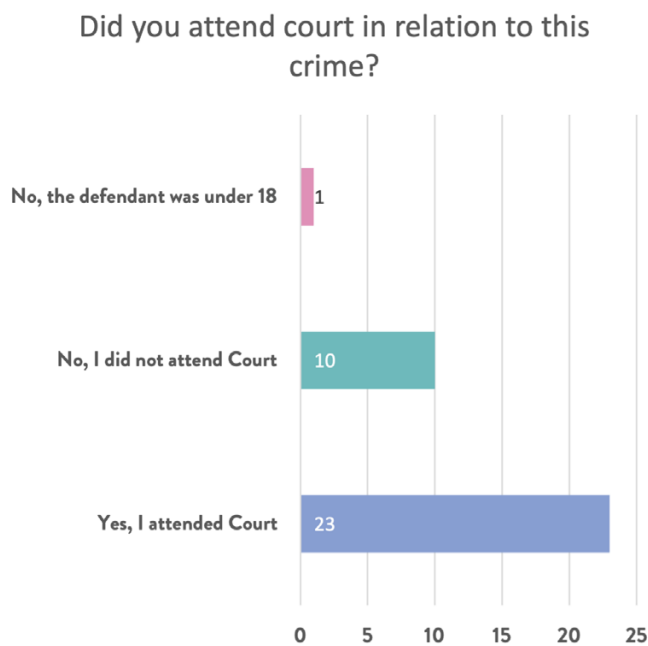
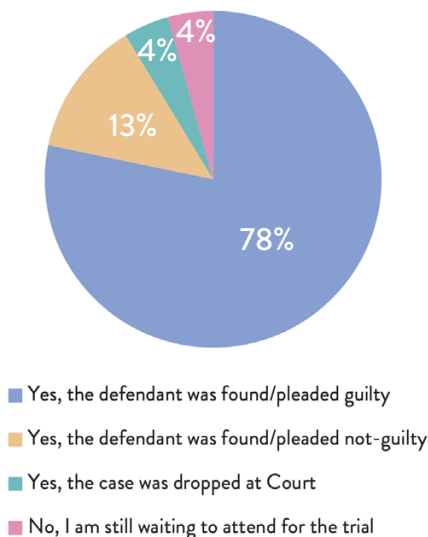


Figure 10: Case status

Has the court proceedings about this crime now finished?

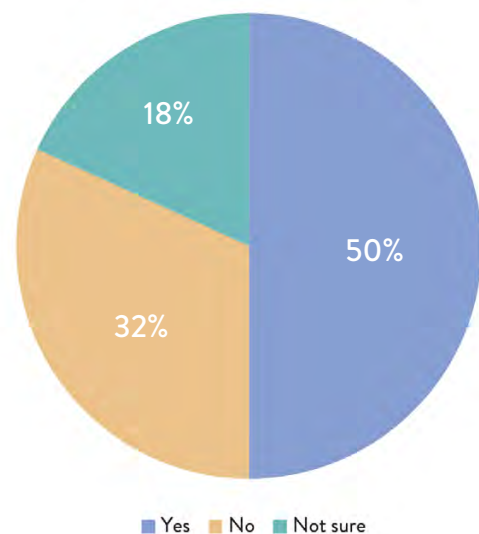


It was primarily those victims that attended court that gave responses to the next series of questions relating to what happened in the court setting regarding their case. The first of these questions was to establish whether the trial has ended and what the outcome was. All but one case has completed and the vast majority - 78% (n=18) - had a guilty plea / verdict.

Respondents were also asked whether the defendant pleaded guilty or was found guilty of a lesser charge than the one with which they were initially charged. Of the 22 victims that responded, 11 reported a lesser charge with a further 4 unsure. 7 victims stated that this was not the case.

Figure 11: Case outcome

Did the defendant plead guilty or were they found guilty of a lesser charge?



A few examples of the changes to the charges and how the victim felt are provided below:

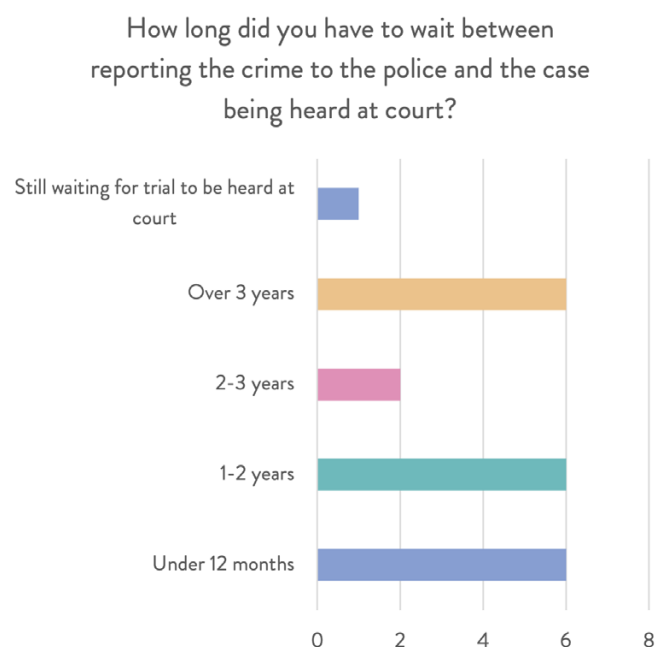
“The lesser charge related to another victim of the offender. A deal was reached whereby rape was reduced to a serious indecent assault.”



“GBH with intent, threats to kill. Pleaded not guilty. Convicted of common assault. Absolute joke. I’m still receiving hospital treatment for the injuries. He also has a history of violence which came out in court.”

“2 x sexual assault and coercive control had to be dropped to ensure a conviction.”

Figure 12: Reporting crime - court case timeframe

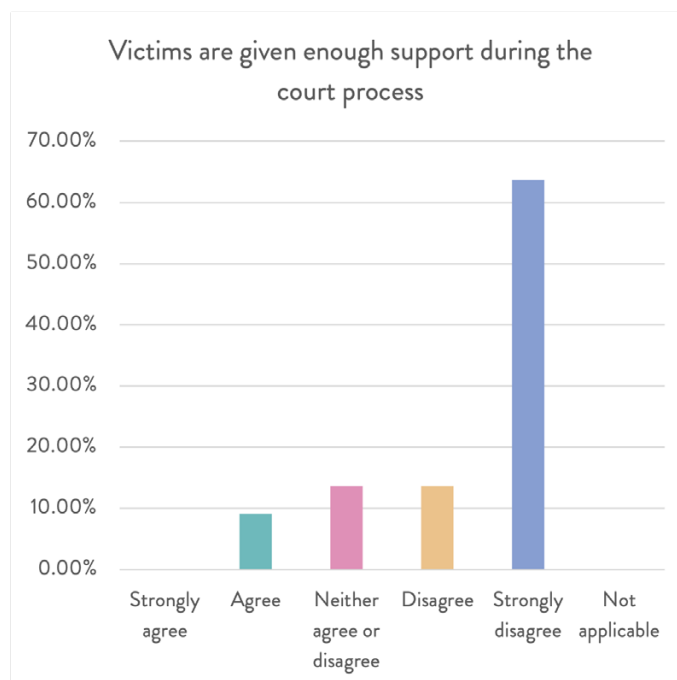


Respondents were asked about the timeframe regarding their experience and approximately how long it took from reporting the crime to the PSNI to their case getting a hearing in court. 29% (6) of respondents waited over 3 years for their case to be heard, a further 10% (2) waited between 2-3 years and another 29% (6) waited between 1-2 years. 29% (6) of respondents had their case heard within 12 months of reporting to police with the final 1% (1) awaiting a trial date.

Victims were asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding their court experience. Around 77% (n=17) of those that responded reported not being given enough support during the court process. Just

9% of respondents agreed that they had been given enough support during the process.

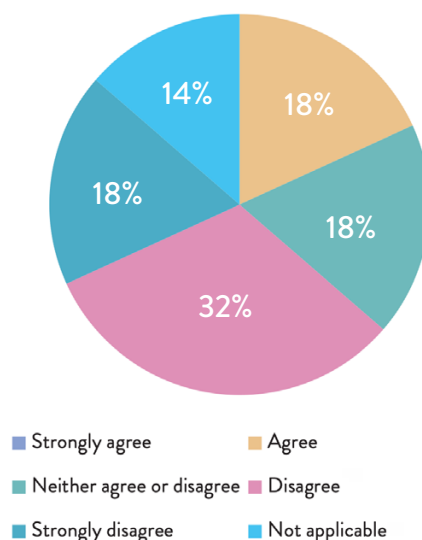
Figure 13.1: Support during court process



50% of those that responded (n=11) reported that, following conviction in court, the sentence was not clearly explained to them with around 18% agreeing that it was.

Figure 13.2: Explanation of sentencing

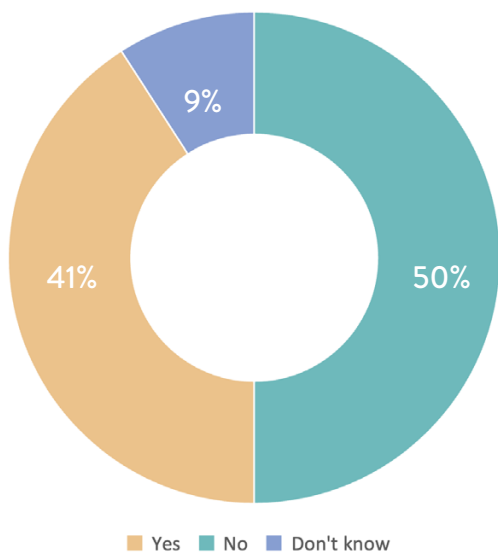
When the defendant was convicted, the sentence was clearly explained to me



When asked about their victim personal statement (VPS) 55% (n=12) of victims informed us that their statement was not referred to by the Judge at sentencing. The VPS is a statement written by the victim that documents the impact the crime has had on them – physically, financially, emotionally, on their education/employment and socially. 23% (n=5) indicated that their VPS was referred to in court.

Figure 15.1: Special Measures

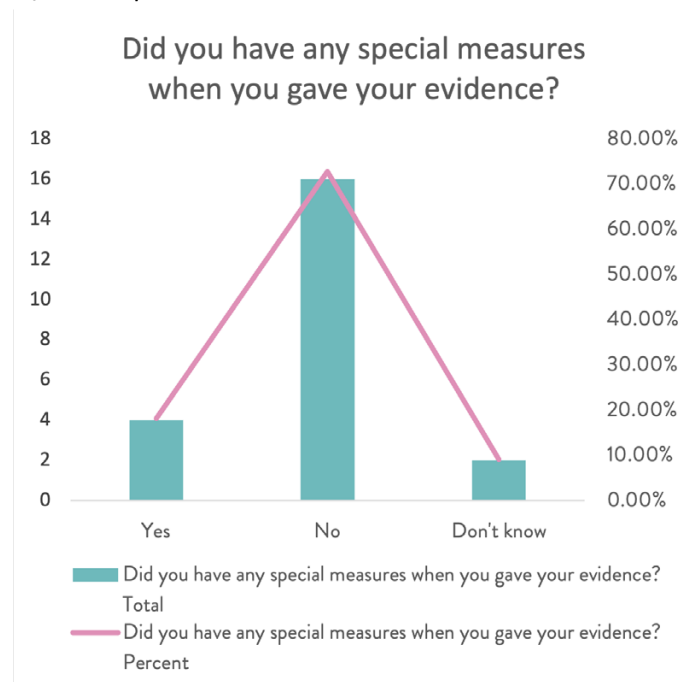
Did someone explain what special measures are and how they may benefit you?



Survey respondents were then asked whether special measures were explained to them and how they might benefit from this. Special measures are measures that the Courts can put in place to support vulnerable victims / witnesses to ensure they feel comfortable and safe giving evidence at court. 50% (n=11) of respondents said that this was not explained to them with 41% (n=9) stating that the benefits of special measures were explained.

Following on from this, the survey then asked respondents if they had any special measures in place when they gave their evidence – e.g. did they give evidence over a video link, from behind a screen in court etc.?

Figure 15.2: Special Measures



Just 4 of the 22 respondents to this question reported special measures being in place when they gave their evidence.

A number of those that responded to this question also provided some feedback on their experience with special measures. A few of these responses are provided below:

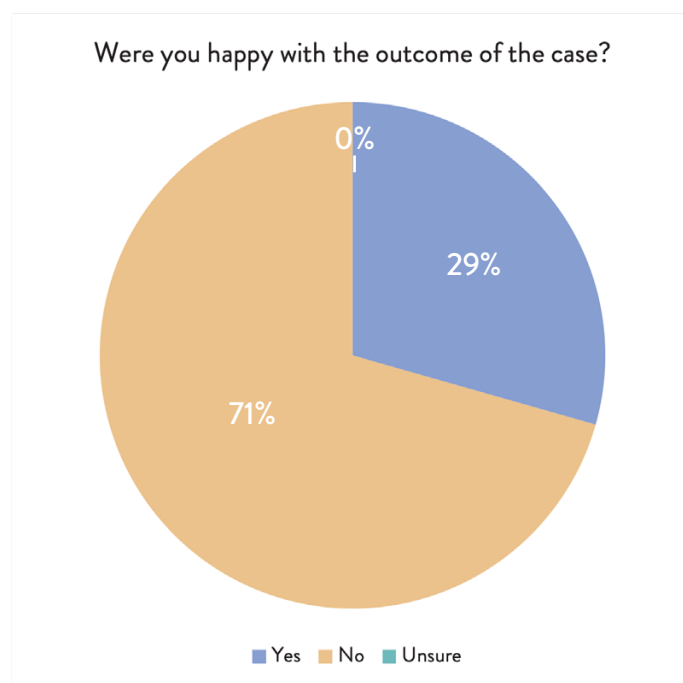
“Video Link was used as the special measure even though I said I didn’t want special measures. When I advised the PPS that I did not request it, I was told make up your mind (quite sternly by the QC) PPS barrister turned to the QC and said the judge won’t be happy given that he had granted the special measures. Felt that it was taken out of my hands and agreed to use the measures.”

“So the farcical proceedings continued. Prosecution Lawyer told the judge while I was sitting in court that I had requested to be screened off from offender. We were sitting opposite each other at this stage. So why was the screen not set up before I came into court. Having to sit opposite the person who wanted and tried to kill me. We were last case of the day, that I’m only guessing as I’m waiting on my PSNI officers of the case to come. But they never did. The judge was furious and stormed out of court into his chambers. Still can see his robes flying behind him. It was at this point that I definitely understood that I had lost my case. The wooden screen was then assembled. My offender was still loudly laughing. Even when the judge returned.”

“I was allowed to give evidence via video link.”

“Asked for them and was denied which added to my trauma.”

Figure 16: Satisfaction with Case Outcome



Victims were asked if they were satisfied with the outcome of their case in court. Only 17 victims responded to this question with ~71% (n=12) reporting that they were not satisfied and ~29% (5) stating they were content with the case outcome.

Victims were subsequently asked an open ended question about their court experience: *Is there anything you would like to tell us about your experience as a victim with the courts? Please tell us anything that was done well or anywhere you feel things could be improved.*

“It is very daunting. I was there alone. Telling me what it would be like or what to expect would have helped.”

“As someone who had no experience of the justice system, I would have appreciated a visit to the court before the trial began. Also the Judge made certain insensitive remarks in open court about my victim impact statement without understanding the full nature of the abuse I was subject to as a thirteen year old boy. His remarks, I feel, have set me back.”

“No protection or segregation in the court house. No protection once outside. As a victim of dv and subsequent stalking, I was intimidated inside and outside the court. I was extremely scared.”

“Having the same standard of counsel that the defendant has.”

“My abuser got off very lightly considering I had 22 years of abuse and had to drop charges to ensure a conviction. He is still engaging in coercive control during our divorce process as there was no deterrent for him not to due to court process.”

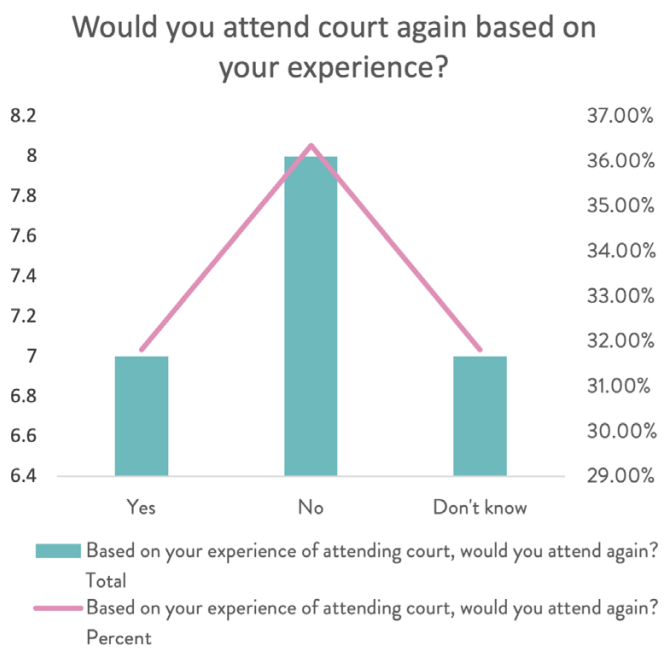
that reported not wishing to attend court again that provided reasons for their response. A few of the reasons provided are given below:

“My experience was so damaging, I felt like a small fish in a tank full of sharks who were always circling. I would not want anyone else to be treated the way I was.”

“Unless I have to, never again, it’s a horrific experience. Too hard on victims.”

“It was a long day, we arrived early morning and were one of last to leave. I would never put myself through that again.”

Figure 17: Willingness to attend court again



The last question in this section asked victims if they would attend court again based on their experience and to provide reasons for their response. Responses were fairly evenly split with 7 (32%) saying they would and 8 (36%) stating they would not attend again. A further 7 (32%) victims expressed uncertainty about whether they would attend or not. It was mainly those

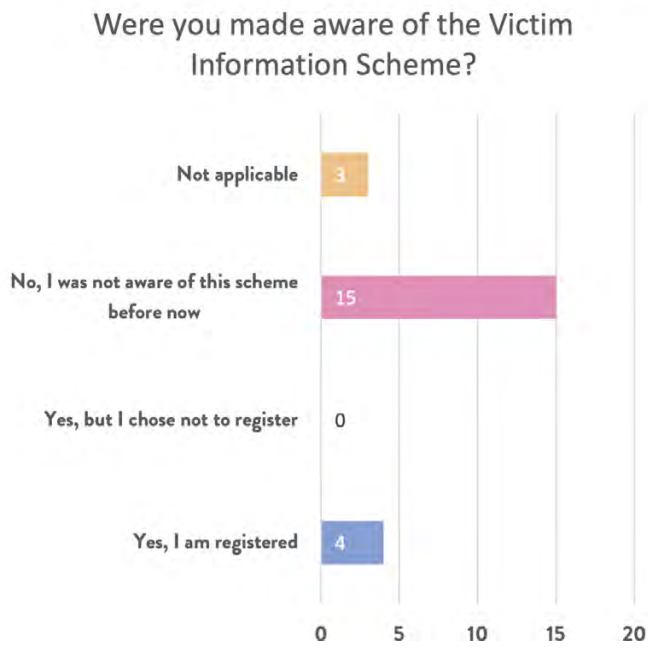
## 6. After Court Experience

### Victim Information Scheme (VIS)

This is a service delivered by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and managed by their Victim Information Unit whose purpose is to give victims information about the criminal justice system and key stages of the sentence of the person who has offended in a manner which is accessible, understandable and supportive. They have three Victim Information Schemes, which deliver services depending on the nature of the respective case.

They strive to provide regular communication to victims which contains relevant, timely, and accurate information about their case. They provide information about the criminal justice system and key stages of the sentence of the person who has offended, in a manner which is accessible, understandable, and supportive.

Figure 18: VIS Awareness levels



As part of this survey, respondents were asked to provide feedback on their experience with the victim information scheme. They were first asked if they had been made aware of the scheme. Of the 22 that answered this question, only 4 reported being registered. Another 3 respondents said this was not applicable to them leaving 15 (68%) who stated that they were not aware of this service until responding to this survey.

The next question looked to delve into this a bit more and asked respondents to tell us about anything that went well or that could be improved. Only two victims provided feedback to this element and the responses provided are given below:

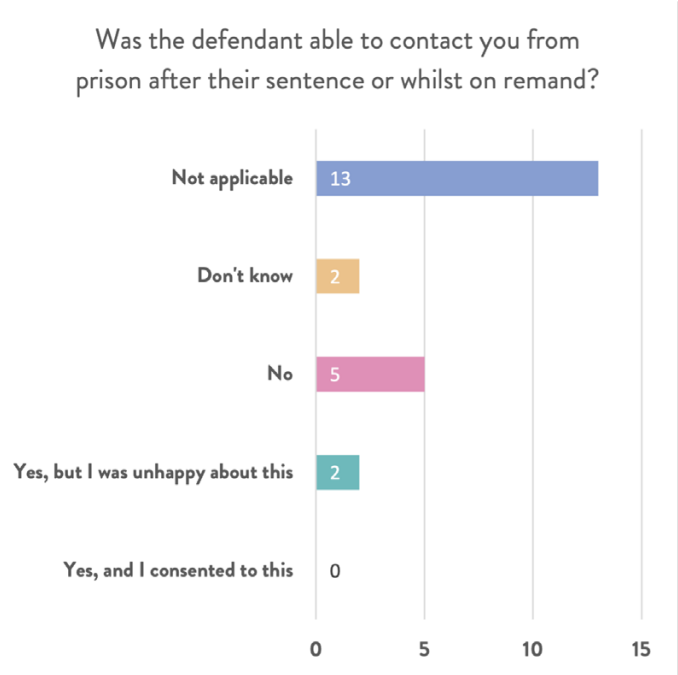
“I have no feedback or information from this scheme except for 1 initial phone call. Makes me wonder who is being protected here, the victim or the perpetrator. Certainly seems like odds are stacked against the victim right now as I’m still having to avoid areas due to his probation being so lax.”

“They never tell you anything.”

### Prisons

Victims were asked whether the defendant was able to contact them from prison after their sentence or whilst on remand. Of the 22 respondents, 13 reported this question as not being applicable so it is quite a small sample. 2 victims reported that the defendant was able to contact them and being unhappy about this. Another 2 were unsure with 5 victims stating that the defendant was unable to contact them.

Figure 19: Contact with defendant



### Restorative Justice

A significant proportion of respondents (45%) had heard of restorative justice prior to completing this survey. Of those that did respond 52% (n=60) reported that they did not wish to pursue this option. Around 30% stated that they would have liked to explore this option with a further 17% being unsure about it. Only 1 of the 116 victims that responded to this question reported taking part in a restorative justice process.

Figure 20: RJ awareness

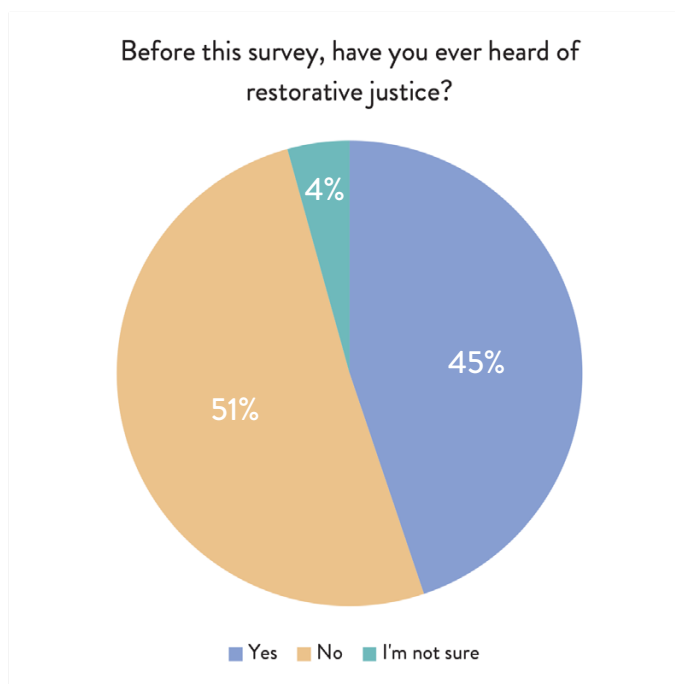
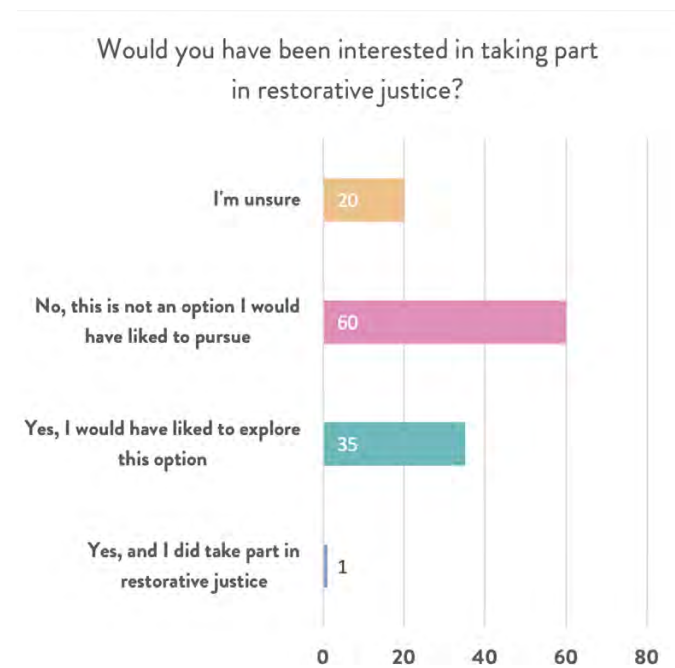


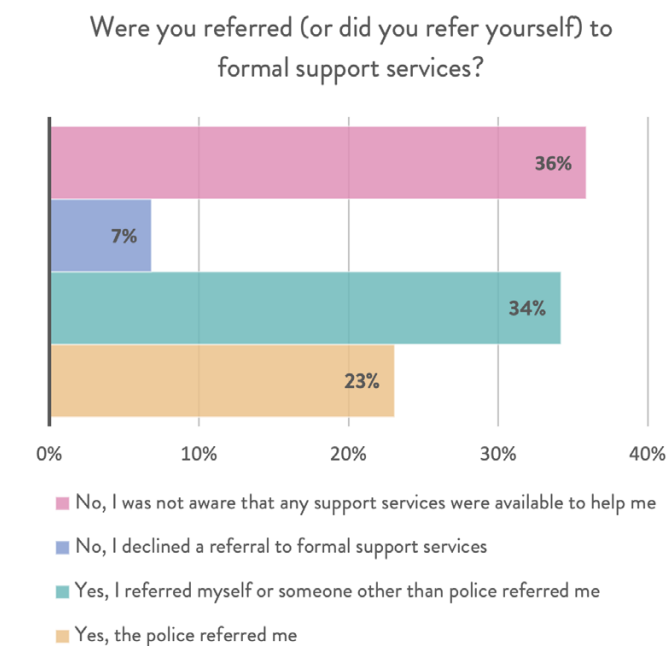
Figure 21: RJ appetite



### Support services

Survey respondents were asked about their experience regarding support services linked to the criminal justice system. They were first asked if they were referred or self-referred to formal support services like Victim Support NI or the NSPCC. While 57% (n=67) of victims were referred or self-referred to one of the available support services, 36% (n=42) reported not being aware of support services available to help them. Only 7% (n=8) of victims declined a referral to formal support services.

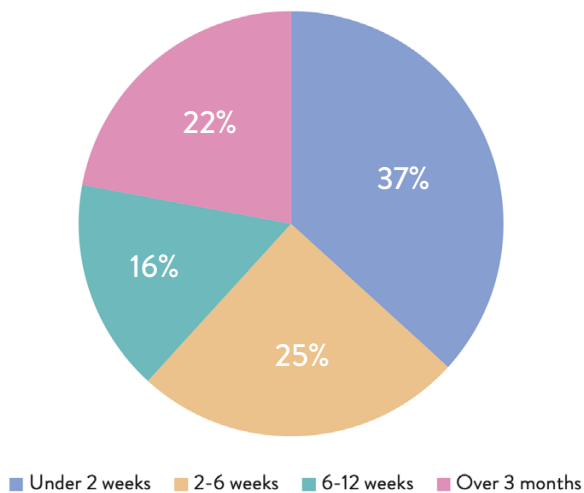
Figure 22.2: Support service referrals



Victims were asked about the referral timeframes and how long they had to wait to get support from the time they were referred. Of the 68 responses, 37% (n=25) reported waiting under 2 weeks to get support, 25% (n=17) waited between 2 and 6 weeks for support and 16% (n=11) waited between 6-12 weeks. 22% (n=15) of respondents stated that they had to wait over 3 months from the initial referral before getting support.

Figure 22.2: Support service referrals

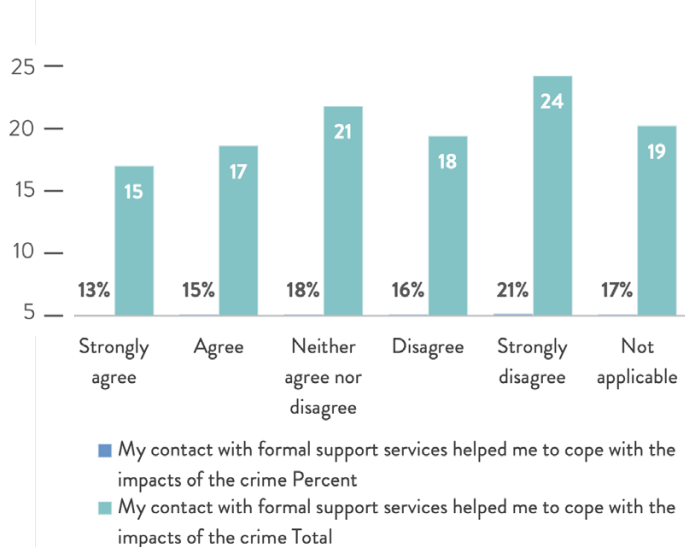
How long did you have to wait between being referred to a support service and receiving support?



Victims were then asked to agree or disagree with a statement about whether the support they received helped them to deal with the impact of the crime. 114 responses were received to this question with 28% (n=32) agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement below. 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement with a further 18% (n=21) stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 23: Benefits of support services

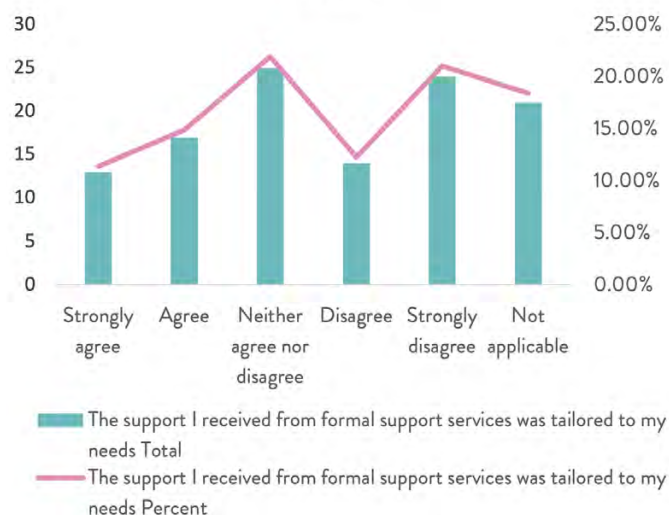
My contact with formal support services helped me to cope with the impacts of the crime



Victims were additionally asked to agree/disagree with a further statement on whether the support they received was tailored to their needs. 26% (n=30) of those that responded agreed or strongly agreed with this, whereas 33% (n=38) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Around 22% (n=25) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 24: Suitability of support services

The support I received from formal support services was tailored to my needs



Victims were finally given an opportunity to provide some narrative feedback on their experience with support services. They were asked if there was anything else they would like to tell us about their experience with victim support services - anything that was done well or anywhere they feel things could be improved. 69 people provided a response to this question and there was an even mix of positive and negative comments. A sample of both the complimentary and critical comments are shared overleaf:

“I was told about Victim Support and Men’s Advisory I got a text from Victim Support. Men’s Advisory phoned me and then arranged to see me. They helped. They got it. I was with them in one way or another for about 18 mths. Very good. Would recommend.”

“I would like to thank and recommend NEXUS for their excellent support.”

“ASSIST NI has been fantastic.”

“There’s not enough availability of the services to cater for the amount of victims. Nexus were very good support and helped me work through my feelings and coming to terms and I never had any issues getting in contact with them it just took so long to finally receive the counselling.”

“We have never been offered support and now to know there is support out there i am frustrated – I’ve had to go through this on my own not knowing what to do or where to turn, now i find out there’s a support service available who could have guided us and helped”

“I received a text message from victim support letting me know they were there if I needed them. That was it. I actually needed someone to speak to the police and advocate on my behalf. I was terrified.”

“The biggest problem is that nobody seems to be expecting disabled people, let alone people like me with multiple complex disabilities across multiple domains (physical health, mental health, neurodevelopmental disability) to need their services. Yet the statistics show that it’s very common for disabled people to be targeted for domestic abuse, hate crimes, and mate crime (a form of exploitation that commonly targets autistic people and people with intellectual disabilities). Not understanding autistic communication needs is a big one. But so is the fact that there’s so little physical infrastructure, e.g. if you’ve got physical disabilities and need to go to a domestic abuse shelter. I wonder how many of us never even show up in the victim statistics because the first thing we do isn’t report to police: it’s check if there is even accessible support for us. Often, there isn’t. Bottom line: the problem is a multi-agency one, so solutions need to be multi-agency too.”

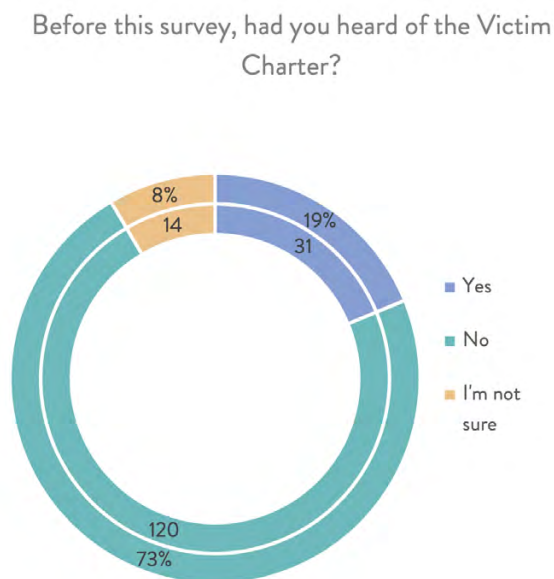
“My father, was offered telephone counselling by victim support following my mother’s death. He found this difficult and so declined over the phone counselling. There was no follow up for him.”

### Victim Charter

Respondents were asked about their awareness of the Victim Charter, a charter that sets out the rights and entitlements of victims across the criminal justice system. There were 165 responses to this with the vast majority - 73% - reporting that they were not aware of the Charter prior to completing this survey. A further 8% were unsure whether they had heard of it or not. 19% or 31 victims had heard of the Charter and reported hearing about it primarily via the organisations from whom they received support or through their work / studies.



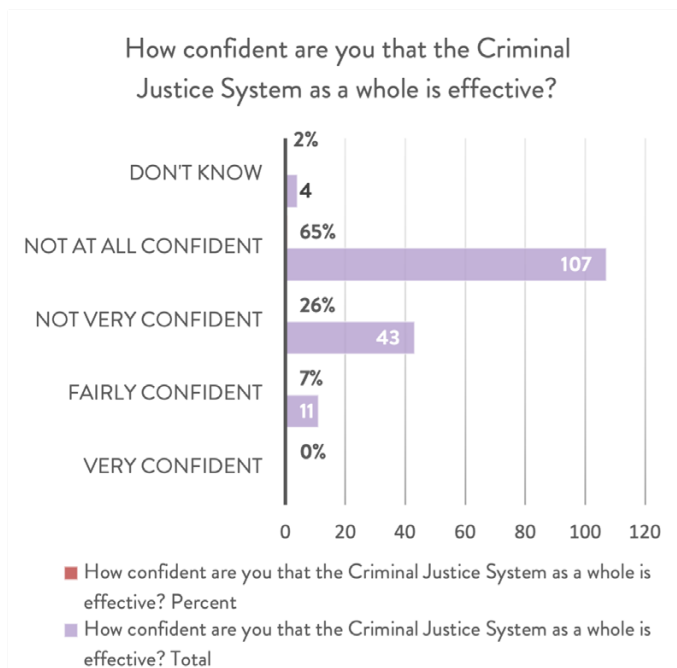
Figure 25: Victim Charter awareness



## 7. Overall Experience of the Criminal Justice System

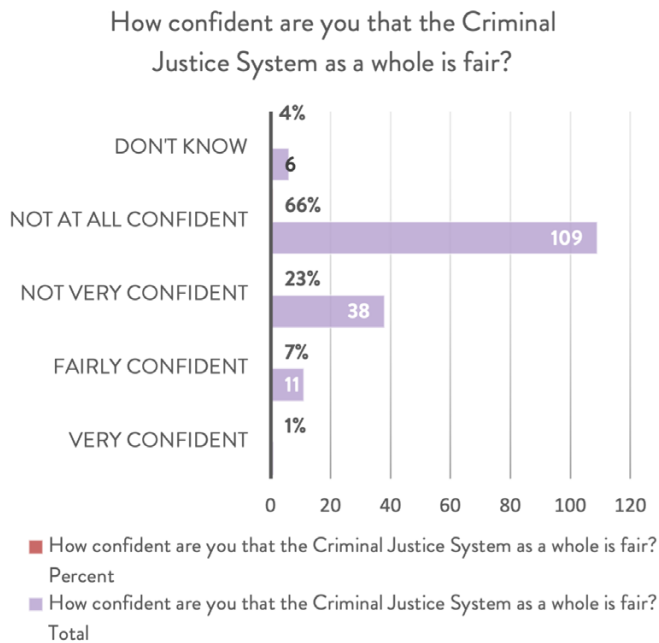
Survey respondents were asked to share their views on the overall experience of the criminal justice system (CJS) in Northern Ireland. The first question looked at victim confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Of the 165 victims that responded to this question, none were very confident, while 7% (n=11) were fairly confident in its effectiveness. 65% (n=107) of victims were not at all confident with another 26% (n=43) not very confident in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Figure 26: Effectiveness of CJS



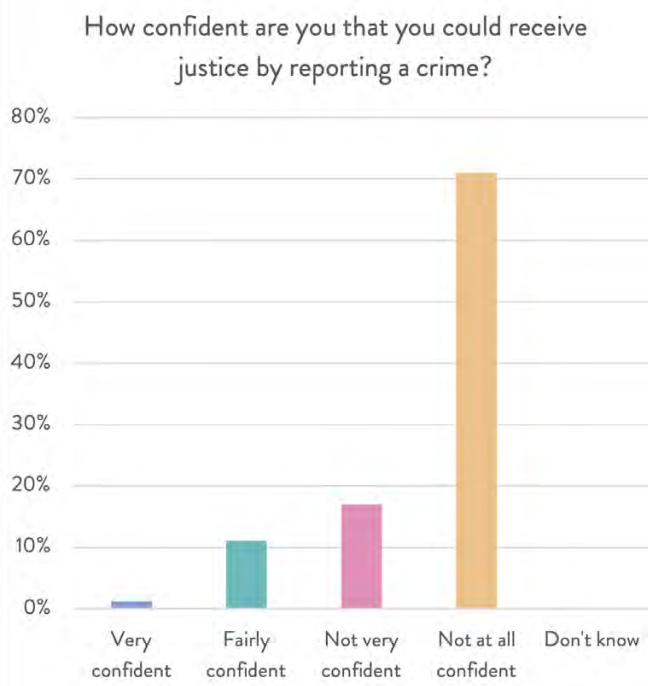
The next question looked at perceptions of / confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system. A similar response rate was received to this and as highlighted in the chart below, levels of confidence in the fairness of the system almost mirror levels of confidence in its effectiveness. 89% (n=147) of victims are 'not very' or 'not at all' confident that the criminal justice system as a whole is fair. 8% (n=12) reported confidence that the system is fair, though only one respondent is very confident of this.

Figure 27: Fairness of CJS



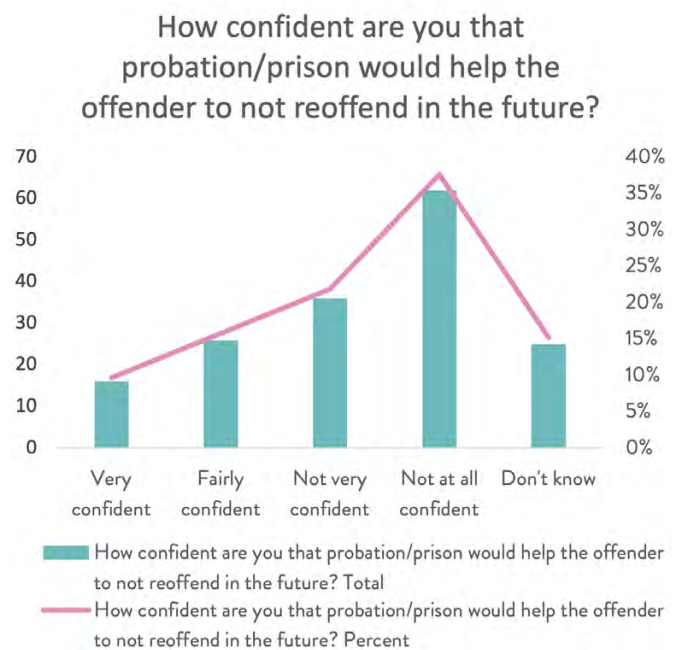
Victims were subsequently asked about their confidence that reporting a crime will result in justice. Again, the sentiment was overwhelmingly weighted towards a lack of confidence in the system delivering justice on the back of reporting a crime. 88% of victims had little confidence in receiving justice, while 12% demonstrated some level of confidence.

Figure 28: Confidence in receiving justice



Finally, victims were asked their views on whether probation / prison helps the offender not to reoffend. 10% (n=16) were very confident and a further 16% (n=26) were fairly confident that probation / prison would help the offender not to reoffend in the future. Conversely, 22% (n=36) were not very confident while 38% (n=62) were not at all confident that probation / prison would help offenders not to reoffend.

Figure 29: Confidence in probation/prison to address offending



Some victims that completed this survey provided general comments and feedback on their overall experience of the criminal justice system while not all victims that did the survey experienced each stage of the criminal justice system, below is a flavour of the views shared:

“My experience of the criminal justice system following on from the police, was so horrendous that I would be very hesitant to go through that process again.”

“The process was extremely long, extremely invasive and extremely traumatising aside from the trauma I endured as a result of the rape. I felt like I was the person who was under investigation when I did not choose this and did not do anything wrong. The justice system as a whole let me down dreadfully. It continues to let victims down, and continues to treat them as though they are the ones under investigation which is not okay.”

“Speaking out has made me a victim of not being believed and having to fight a system that does not assist sexual abuse victims. The lack of justice has made the healing process more difficult. False hope in thinking society and laws protect its citizens.”

“My issue was genuine, the man has repeatedly stalked and threatened me. It felt as if I was not believed, as my abuser just denied everything. It was not investigated fully, he was not prosecuted (again), and carries on with his behaviours. Him and his family intimidated me outside of the courthouse. What is the point of reporting when it does nothing only place the victim in a more vulnerable position and provides the defendant with a piece of paper that says they have done nothing essentially, and that the victim is then viewed as a liar.”

## 8. Overall benchmarking against England / Wales

As outlined in the introduction to this report, The Victims Commissioner for England / Wales conducts an equivalent survey of victims' experiences there.

While the two surveys are independent of each other and ask some different questions, there is some overlap. Therefore it is a useful comparator and reference point given they have been undertaking this type of survey since around 2015.

Below are a sample of overlapping questions and findings from the different jurisdictions. The most recent survey for England / Wales relates to a survey carried out in November 2023 of crime victims from January 2020 and published in August 2024.

	England & Wales	N. Ireland
Experience with Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40% of respondents were dissatisfied with the police response to the crime.</li> <li>70% of respondents report not being confident that police thoroughly investigate the crimes reported to them.</li> <li>29% of respondents said they would not report a crime to the police again.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>65% respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their treatment by the PSNI.</li> <li>63% of those whose crimes were investigated felt that the crime was not thoroughly investigated by the PSNI.</li> <li>43% stated that they would not report a crime to the police again based on their experience.</li> </ul>
Experience with Prosecution Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 6% agreed that victims are fully supported by the Crown Prosecution Service.</li> <li>Respondents were also asked how confident they were that the CPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime and 13% were confident, 8% didn't know how confident they were, and 79% were not confident.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50% (n=17) of victims reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated by the PPS.</li> <li>53% reported that they would report a crime again based on their experience with the PPS while another 32% said they would not report a crime again following their experience. 15% stated that they didn't know whether they would report or not.</li> </ul>
Experience with Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>83% of respondents said they would attend court again.</li> <li>33% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I had to wait for too long before the case came to court'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>36% of respondents said they would not attend court again, 32% were unsure.</li> <li>71% of respondents reported waiting more than 12 months, 38% waited more than 24 months and 29% waited more than 36 months for their case to be heard in court.</li> </ul>

Experience with Support Orgs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 33% of victims disagreed with the statement that it was easy to get access to victims' services.</li> <li>• 21% stated that they had to wait a long time to receive help from victims' services.</li> <li>• 15% of those referred disagreed that the support they received from victims' services was tailored to their needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28% of victims disagreed with the statement that it was easy to get access to formal support services.</li> <li>• 19% stated that they had to wait a long time to receive help from victims' services.</li> <li>• 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the support they received was tailored to their needs.</li> </ul>
Victims' Code / Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less than a fifth (19%) of respondents were aware of the Victims' Code of Practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19% of victims had heard of the Victim Charter.</li> </ul>
Overall CJ experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27% of respondents were confident the criminal justice system was effective.</li> <li>• 38% were confident the criminal justice system was fair.</li> <li>• 73% of victims were not confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7% of respondents were fairly confident in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.</li> <li>• 8% reported confidence that the CJS as a whole is fair.</li> <li>• 88% of victims stated they were not confident that they could receive justice by reporting a crime.</li> </ul>

This is the first time a survey of this nature, which includes all victims of crime, has been undertaken in Northern Ireland and we are grateful to all who took the time to respond. The sample size was modest in this first year of the survey and we look forward to building on this and growing the survey year on year. This will become an annual survey conducted in the autumn each year which we hope will provide a strong evidence base that this office will use to advocate for changes and improvements to our criminal justice system.

Our survey findings are disappointing but not surprising as they reflect the concerns that we continue to hear from victims, both directly from those engaging with our office and indirectly through partner organisations and stakeholders working across the criminal justice system. It is clear from our engagement with victims and from the responses to this survey, that significant work is required for victims to believe they are at the centre of the system here.

This survey will be one of a number of mechanisms at the disposal of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime Office to ensure our criminal justice agencies strive to deliver against the promises that we make to those most impacted by crime in our society.

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FOR VICTIMS  
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