

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Client: CVOCNI

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Foreword

This independent research was commissioned in response to concerns raised with my office by both domestic abuse victims and voluntary sector organisations about the effectiveness of protection orders in enhancing victim safety. Women's Aid Federation NI in particular expressed concern about a decrease in the numbers of Non-Molestation Orders (NMOs) being applied for across Northern Ireland as well as a decline in the perceived effectiveness of such orders amongst the women using their services.

This study aimed to examine the utilisation and efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders (NMOs) and Occupation Orders (OOs) across Northern Ireland from 2016 to 2024. Resources available in year to undertake this study restricted the focus primarily to a quantitative analysis of the data available; however, I greatly appreciate the additional effort by Fiona Boyle Associates to conduct a low-level qualitative review as part of this research piece.

This study is undoubtedly enhanced by the qualitative feedback from support organisations working with victims to whom these Orders apply. The case studies in particular, provided in Section 5, reinforce the reason why government introduced such protections for victims of crime and the importance of ensuring that such Orders provide a meaningful response to identified risk and need. I thank the agencies and individuals involved for their time and commitment to this report.

Key Findings

The overarching findings validate the concerns which led to the commissioning of this report. The headline figures are stark. **In a society which has seen a 42% increase in reported domestic abuse crimes since 2015-16, there has been a 28% decrease in people applying for NMOs, and a 39% decrease in *ex parte* NMOs** which are typically used as a temporary measure in emergency situations. **There are significant regional disparities and granting rates across court areas with an overall regional decrease of 8% in NMOs granted and 9% of *ex parte* NMOs granted.**

Victims and support organisations report inconsistent and, at times, inadequate police responses to alleged breaches of NMOs, and there is a perception of police reluctance to take action. Whilst the associated numbers of cases being sent to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) are therefore also reducing, the percentage of cases being prosecuted remains broadly similar. It is concerning to note, however, that despite the falling numbers of cases being prosecuted over the time period, the proportion of acquittals has increased from 15% in 2016 to 20% in 2024. This may counter any potential assumption that the reduction in numbers of applications and prosecutions for breaches is due to only the most serious or 'strongest' cases being progressed.

Our understanding of the quantitative picture has unfortunately been impacted by our inability to retrieve the necessary granular data from justice agencies. Such gaps make it difficult to monitor and evaluate performance on a local or regional basis and, consequently,

limit our ability to hold agencies accountable for their role in protecting victims and helping ensure transparency and confidence in the system.

Impact

The combined effect of reduced applications and inconsistencies in both granting and enforcement across the region will inevitably lead to a reduction in victim confidence in the system and victims' perception of the usefulness of such Orders. It is essential therefore that we progress the recommendations to better understand the contextual background to this changing landscape.

Robust data collection combined with a clear understanding of both the actual and perceived effectiveness of current protective orders are foundational to the successful introduction of new Orders such as Domestic Abuse and Protection Orders currently being considered in Northern Ireland. Without this, there is a risk that any new measures will replicate existing failings, leaving victims inadequately protected and further undermining confidence in the justice system.

List of Abbreviations

CVOCNI	Commissioner for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland
DA/DV	Domestic abuse/domestic violence
DOJ	Department of Justice
ICOS	Integrated Court Operations System
JR	Judicial Review
NICTS	Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service
NIHRC	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
NMO	Non-Molestation Order
OO	Occupation Order
PPS	Public Prosecution Service
PSNI	Police Service Northern Ireland

Section 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This research was commissioned by the office of the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime (CVOCNI)¹. The Commissioner Designate, Geraldine Hanna, was appointed in March 2022.
- 1.2 The overarching purpose of the role of Commissioner Designate is to represent the needs and interests of all victims of crime and help drive systemic improvements across the criminal justice system. To enable this work the Commissioner must capture the experience of victims of crime and use this evidence to influence change in policy and practice. The role has a special interest in issues affecting victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and hate crime.

The role of the Commissioner Designate is noted² as follows:

- The Commissioner Designate will use victims' experiences of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland to improve services for victims.
- The Commissioner will work closely with victims, their families and support agencies to record their experiences. This will be used as evidence to provide advice to government on changes that are needed for a better victim centred criminal justice system.
- The Commissioner wants to hear from all victims about their experience of crime and how they were treated by the agencies they came into contact with.

- 1.3 The Commissioner Designate has commissioned this research because of feedback received from victims and victim support organisations, in relation to perceived inconsistencies across Northern Ireland in the application and granting of Non-molestation Orders (NMOs) and Occupation Orders (OOs). In addition, feedback has been received on concerns about the criminal justice system response when such Orders are breached. The background to NMOs and OOs is outlined in further detail in Section 3, and then discussed in the findings in Sections 4 and 5.
- 1.4 This research project has been undertaken by Fiona Boyle (Fiona Boyle Associates) in January – March 2025. The research methods included desk-based quantitative data analysis of anonymised³ records provided by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS)⁴. This data is outlined at Appendix 1. Data analysis included

¹ The Commissioner Designate, Geraldine Hanna, was appointed by the Minister of Justice in March 2022 to be an independent voice for victims of crime. It was not possible in the NI Assembly mandate of 2017 – 2022 to legislate in order to put the Victims of Crime Commissioner for Northern Ireland on a statutory footing. Therefore a non-statutory Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate was initially appointed. It is the intention that legislation will be introduced in the current mandate.

² See: <https://www.cvocni.org/>

³ Data was anonymised at source by the data provider.

⁴ Note: This data is not currently 'publicly' available but was made available to CVOCNI for the purposes of this research.

reviewing variations by court, police district (where available) and year, and other factors including variation during the Covid-19 pandemic period. This desk-based review also included analysis of data relating to the incidence and recording of crimes of domestic abuse/violence. Data analysis is outlined in Sections 3 and 4.

Other research methods included the following:

1. **Production of research context and summarised background literature review** – this included information relating to NMOs and OOs in Northern Ireland. This element also included references to the relevant legislation and the process of applying for Orders. In addition, this area examined the incidence and nature of domestic abuse/violence, and recorded figures over the same time period being examined for Orders. This element is provided at Section 3.
2. **Small-scale qualitative review of context** – the Research consultant conducted small-scale qualitative semi-structured interviews with organisations supporting victims of domestic abuse, to ensure clear inclusion of relevant issues and data in the project. This element is outlined at Section 5.
3. **Examination of other jurisdictions** – the Research consultant conducted a low-level review of Protective Orders in other jurisdictions including trends in numbers of applications, Orders issued and how any breaches are dealt with. This element is outlined in Section 6.

Section 2 Research Rationale and Methods

Research Rationale

- 2.1 This research was commissioned by the office of the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime (CVOONI)⁵. The Commissioner Designate, Geraldine Hanna, was appointed in March 2022.
- 2.2 As noted in the introduction this research was commissioned because of concerns highlighted by victims and victim support organisations about possible inconsistencies in terms of the application for and granting of NMOs and OOs. In addition, the research rationale connected to perceived concerns about the criminal justice system response when such Orders are breached. The Commissioner Designate convenes Advisory Panels and two focus specifically on domestic abuse and sexual abuse. The granting of NMOs and OOs is an issue that has been raised by their members as an area of concern.

Specific concerns raised by CVOONI from these various sources are as follows:

- There are inconsistencies across the region in the level of applications for Orders, with initial analysis indicating a downward trend and significant variations across court areas. In addition, potential concerns were raised by solicitors as to the merits of applying;
- There are inconsistencies across the region in the level of granting of Protective Orders, with initial analysis indicating a downward trend and significant variations across court areas;
- There are concerns about the level and nature of the criminal justice system response when such Orders are breached. This includes feedback from victims of potential resistance from police officers in taking action on alleged breaches of Orders.

The Office of the Commissioner Designate noted that these perceived or actual issues are causing victims of domestic abuse to question the usefulness of Protective Orders; this has the potential to undermine their confidence in the system's ability to keep them safe. Feedback provided to the Commissioner Designate at this point is largely anecdotal. The Commissioner Designate is therefore seeking greater understanding of how these Orders are being used across Northern Ireland and the criminal justice system response to enforcement, by way of an external and independent research study.

⁵ The Commissioner Designate, Geraldine Hanna, was appointed by the Minister of Justice in March 2022 to be an independent voice for victims of crime. It was not possible in the NI Assembly mandate of 2017 – 2022 to legislate in order to put the Victims of Crime Commissioner for Northern Ireland on a statutory footing. Therefore a non-statutory Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate was initially appointed. It is the intention that legislation will be introduced in the current mandate.

- 2.3 In addition, a number of Judicial Reviews⁶ (JR) pointed to changes in how victims can access the protection offered by NMOs and OOs.

A recent (2023) JR (JR231⁷) explored the legal test relating to whether to grant an *ex parte*⁸ NMO under the *Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998*. This case was brought by a victim of domestic abuse who claimed that the Court Service had acted unlawfully by refusing to grant an emergency NMO for her protection. In this case, the High Court found that the District Judge had equated ‘significant’ to mean ‘really serious harm’, when considering the non-exhaustive list of factors to be considered in considering an emergency *ex parte* application. The High Court determined that this was setting the bar too high and that whilst “‘significant’ must mean more than trivial or unimportant harm it was not as high as ‘really serious harm’”. The court determined that the District Judge had erred in law by effectively setting the bar for the granting of an *ex parte* non-molestation Order at a level higher than that decreed by the legislature.

The High Court allowed the third ground of the JR finding that as a matter of procedural fairness, the District Judge should have raised his concerns about granting the *ex parte* Order with the applicant’s representative and allowed an opportunity to make further submissions and if necessary receive oral evidence. The High Court concluded that the District Court should afford this opportunity to the applicant’s legal representatives given “the gravity of applications for non-molestation orders”.

- 2.4 From the other end of the spectrum – how NMOs and OOs are enforced – again a preliminary assessment of the available literature on this matter points to the need to ensure that breaches of NMOs are being responded to appropriately and in a timely way by the PSNI. This was highlighted in a response by the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)⁹ to the Department of Justice (DoJ) consultation on enhancing legal protections for victims of domestic abuse. The response made key recommendations for the roll-out of new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Notices. It also noted, that through engagement with civil society organisations supporting victims of domestic abuse, the NIHRC learnt that when reporting breaches of existing protective Orders such as NMOs, OOs and *ex parte* NMOs to the PSNI victims felt that not enough was being done and arrests were not being made,

⁶ Four JRs since the Covid-19 pandemic dealing with the granting of *ex parte* non-molestation orders to victims of domestic violence, suggesting that clarity is needed in the application of the law and the procedure to be adopted by the district judge’s court with reference to NMOs.

⁷ <https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/2023-nikb-18>

⁸ An *ex parte* Order is an Order which is granted where one of the parties is not present in court. In the case of NMOs, the applications are heard without the alleged perpetrator being present. *Ex parte* Orders are made in the interests of justice to provide temporary, urgent emergency protection to vulnerable victims

⁹

https://nihrc.org/assets/uploads/publications/NIHRC_Domestic_Abuse_Protection_Orders_and_Notices_Response.pdf

which hindered their confidence in reporting to the police. This is explored in more detail in Section 5.

Research Aims and Objectives

2.5 The overarching aim of this research study is as follows:

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the application for, and granting of, NMOs and OOs across Northern Ireland between 2016 and 2024.

2.6 The agreed research objectives are:

1. Analyse application rates and granting patterns for NMOs and OOs across different court areas;
2. Identify any regional (by court area) and annual variances in the application and granting of these Orders;
3. Analyse reporting rates of breaches of NMOs / OOs, including any repeated breaches where known;
4. Identify any regional and annual variances in the rate of prosecution, conviction and what outcomes resulted.

2.7 The research project sought to answer the following questions:

1. How many NMOs and OOs have been applied for and issued over the last 8 years?
2. What regional and annual variations exist in the application and granting of these Orders?
3. What is the total number of recorded breaches of NMOs and OOs between 2016 and 2024 by police district?
4. What proportion of NMO/OO breaches resulted in prosecution between 2016 and 2024 by police district?
5. What regional variations exist in the response to and enforcement of these Orders?
6. How many NMO/OO breaches were before the court between 2016 and 2024 by court area?
7. How many breaches of NMO/OO's before the court between 2016 - 2024 led to a conviction, and what were the typical sentences by court area?

Section 3 Research Background and Context

Protective Orders - Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders

- 3.1 NMOs and OOs are legal mechanisms introduced via the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998¹⁰. Both types of Order were introduced, by way of legislation, in order to provide immediate and enforceable protection, thus protecting individuals from domestic abuse, reducing the risk of further harm and to ensure safe living arrangements.
- 3.2 Paragraph 20 of the 1998 Order outlines that NMOs prohibit a person (the respondent) from using or threatening violence, harassment or intimidation against a victim or their children, and these Orders can be put in place for a specified period and/or until further notice and can be applicable to a range of relationships including spouses, cohabitants and family members. The wording notes: *provision prohibiting a person (the respondent) from molesting another person who is associated with the respondent....and a relevant child*. The Order is made by the court in response to an application by the individual or in any family proceedings¹¹ to which the individual is a party¹². Paragraph 20 notes the following in relation to how the court should decide whether to issue an Order. It states: *In deciding whether to exercise its powers under this Article and, if so, in what manner, the court shall have regard to all the circumstances including the need to secure the health, safety and well-being— (a)of the applicant or, in a case falling within paragraph (2)(b), the person for whose benefit the order would be made; and (b)of any relevant child*.

Furthermore paragraph 20 indicates that a NMO may exclude the respondent from a defined area in which a dwelling-house is included, any other defined area and any premises specified in the Order.

- 3.3 OOs stipulate who can reside in the family home, potentially excluding the alleged abuser (respondent) from the property in order to protect the victim's safety. Paragraph 11 of the 1998 Order notes: *An Order under this Article may— (a) enforce the applicant's entitlement to remain in occupation as against the other person ("the respondent")....(d) regulate the occupation of the dwelling-house by either or both parties;and (i) exclude the respondent from a defined area in which the dwelling-house is included, any other defined area and any premises*.

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/1071/contents>

¹¹ A non-molestation Order which is made in other family proceedings ceases to have effect if those proceedings are withdrawn or dismissed.

¹² This may include an emergency protection order under Article 63 of the [1995 NI 2.] Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 which includes an exclusion requirement (as defined in Article 63A(3) of that Order).

- 3.4 Both NMOs and OOs are matters for the civil courts (see Appendix 2 for a list of the courts in Northern Ireland). The individual/victim applies for an Order, usually with support from a Family Law solicitor.
- 3.5 Breach of a NMO is a criminal offence and the alleged perpetrator can be arrested and prosecuted if sufficient evidence is available. This is dealt with via the criminal courts. However, a breach of an OO is not a criminal offence unless a power of arrest has been attached to the Order.
- 3.6 In emergency situations an *ex parte* injunction can be granted by the court without the alleged perpetrator being brought to court but with a full hearing up to six weeks later. In addition, a criminal court may issue a restraining order but this can only be granted at the conclusion of criminal proceedings, albeit this is not dependent on a judgement of guilt and/or a conviction. Paragraph 23 of the 1998 Order states that: *The court may, in any case where it considers that it is just and convenient to do so, make an occupation order or a non-molestation order even though the respondent has not been given such notice of the proceedings as would otherwise be required by rules of court. In determining whether to exercise its powers...the court shall have regard to all the circumstances including—*
- (a) any risk of significant harm to the applicant or a relevant child, attributable to conduct of the respondent, if the order is not made immediately,*
 - (b) whether it is likely that the applicant will be deterred or prevented from pursuing the application if an order is not made immediately, and*
 - (c) whether there is reason to believe that the respondent is aware of the proceedings but is deliberately evading service and that the applicant or a relevant child will be seriously prejudiced by the delay involved.*

If the court makes an *ex parte* Order, it also specifies a date for a full hearing.

- 3.7 Legal Aid is available to victims of domestic abuse for the legal costs relating to applying for all types of Orders¹³. Legal Aid may cover the full legal costs, or an applicant may have to pay some of this depending on their income, savings and any property they own¹⁴. In this regard it is also important to note the Domestic Abuse Waiver¹⁵ in Legal Aid applications. This relates to Section 28 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021. This states that the financial

¹³ See: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/legal-aid-victims-domestic-abuse>

¹⁴ The current limits: to qualify for advice and assistance under Legal Aid disposable income must be less than £234.00 per week.

¹⁵ See: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/guidance%20on%20the%20domestic%20abuse%20waiver%20for%20access%20to%20legal%20aid.pdf>

eligibility test that would usually apply to an application for Legal Aid for representation may be subject to a discretionary waiver in certain specific circumstances. These circumstances include:

- Where the person applying for legal aid is, or appears to be, a victim of domestic abuse;
- Where the person applying for legal aid is seeking to be represented as a respondent in proceedings relating to an Order under Article 8 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995; and
- Where the domestic abuse committed against the person applying for legal aid was committed by the person now bringing the legal proceedings against them.

3.8 In its 2024 Review of Civil Legal Aid¹⁶ DoJ gathered evidence from a range of interested stakeholders including those who have needed legal aid in the past, those who provide legal services or assist others to access legal services. DoJ noted that civil cases account for 50.3% of the total legal aid expenditure.

The consequent 'Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan' published for consultation in early 2025¹⁷ proposed a way forward for legal aid reform, referencing the need to improve access to justice including *enhancing eligibility for legal aid to ensure a greater range of citizens are protected and for introducing simpler, fairer eligibility rules that focus resource on greatest need and greatest risk of harm*.

A further review and rapid priority setting exercise of Civil Legal Aid for cases of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland was also undertaken: 'A Steep Learning Curve'¹⁸. This was jointly commissioned by the DoJ and the CVOCNI.

Those representing victims of domestic abuse/violence have noted concern that potential cuts to legal aid and a move towards mediation and early resolution models in order to make significant savings to the legal aid budget would negatively impact victims¹⁹. These concerns have been factored into the above consultations and reviews.

¹⁶ www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/justice/Call%20for%20Evidence%20-%20Civil%20Society.pdf

¹⁷ [Consultation on Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan | Department of Justice](#)

¹⁸ https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/216941969/FINAL_DoJ_CLA_Report_2.12.24.pdf

¹⁹ Women's Aid: Consultation Response 2024.

Covid-19 pandemic and the Courts

- 3.9 CVOCNI highlighted the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on crime levels, with particular reference to domestic abuse. This was noted in the CVOCNI Strategy for 2022 – 2025²⁰ as follows:

The Covid-19 pandemic created a perfect storm for families and individuals who were already struggling. The prolonged lockdown periods meant victims of domestic abuse were unable to escape the violence at home and children who received additional support at school had that lifeline removed. The PSNI reported that in the 12 months from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022 there was a 6.5% increase in domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland from the previous 12 months. In addition, the number of domestic abuse crimes rose by 12.8% on the previous 12 months and was the highest 12-month period recorded since the data series began in 2004/05²¹.

- 3.10 A report by the University of Ulster (December 2020)²² noted that the lockdown and continued public health measures necessitated by Covid-19 affected the ability of the NICTS to operate courts at their normal capacity. The research examined the impact of Covid-19 on family courts in Northern Ireland where there has been limited capacity for face-to-face court hearings and a move to remote (telephone or video-enabled) hearings as an alternative. They noted that the heavy reliance on paper-based systems used in the court offices and the requirement for staff to work from home meant the courts were not able to maintain their normal operating capacity. Four court hubs remained open throughout lockdown²³, but criminal and custody cases, along with urgent Non-Molestation Orders and Care and Protection Orders, were prioritised. With the exception of three courts where the room capacity was too small to adhere to social distancing requirements, all courts were open again by September 2020²⁴.
- 3.11 At the outset of the pandemic instructions were issued from the Office of the Lord Chief Justice on 25 March 2020, which advised that where an urgent matter was to be adjudicated on, or the parties have agreed the way forward in a family matter before the court at any tier or business type, the legal representatives should complete FORM FCI1 as directed. Where a party is unrepresented, they should complete FORM LIPCI1 as directed and in line with guidance for Unrepresented

²⁰ www.cvocni.org/files/cvocni/2023-02/CVOC-Strategy-22-25.pdf

²¹ The PSNI caveat these figures by noting that the Covid-19 lockdown measures first introduced on 23rd March 2020 which had an impact on the lower crime levels seen from that date through to February 2021.

²² The Impact of Covid-19 on Family Courts in Northern Ireland G. McKeever, J. McCord, L. Royal-Dawson and P. Yarnell December 2020

www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/799039/Impact-of-CV19-on-family-courts-NI-201217.pdf

²³ Out of an estate of 21 courthouses. These were in Derry/Londonderry, Laganside in Belfast, Dungannon and Craigavon (for Lisburn).

²⁴ This report is December 2020 – so not sure if another set of closures after that date – 2nd wave of Covid.

parties/Litigants in Person. All parties were asked to consider the need for applications in line with the changing situation and Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance. Once lodged, the judge would then decide how to proceed on receipt of the appropriate form, having reviewed the application and any relevant papers, given the circumstances at that time. The court office would subsequently advise what steps should then be taken and issue any interim Orders or further directions to the parties involved.

- 3.12 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is referenced in this current report, in terms of any impact on domestic abuse/violence figures and in relation to figures relating to court statistics (applications for Protective Orders and breaches of Orders). It is important to note that the changes in how the courts and policing worked, and other factors such as restriction of movement and victims being forced to remain in their homes with abusers, means that the data for 2020 and 2021 can be deemed incongruous with the rest of the dataset.

Domestic Abuse/Violence

- 3.13 The starting point in thinking about the need for NMOs and OOs lies in an understanding of the level and nature of domestic abuse/violence in Northern Ireland.
- 3.14 For the purposes of this research we are adopting the term domestic abuse to cover both abuse and violence. Furthermore we are using the definition of domestic abuse and violence outlined in the NI Government Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024 - 2031²⁵ which is also used by the PSNI. This definition is:

‘threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member’.

The following will assist in the application of this definition:

- (a) ‘Incident’ means an incident anywhere and not confined to the home of one of the partners/family members;
- (b) ‘Family members’ include mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, in-laws or stepfamily.
- (c) ‘Intimate partners’ means there must have been a relationship with a degree of continuity and stability. The relationship must also have had (or reasonably supposed to have had) a sexual aspect, such as in the relationship between husband and wife or between others generally recognised as a couple including same sex couples.

²⁵ [Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024–2031](#)

A crime will be recorded as having a domestic abuse motivation where it meets the definition provided above. Not all domestic abuse incidents will result in the recording of a crime. Domestic abuse crimes are classified according to the Home Office Counting Rules and form a subset of the overall police recorded crime statistics.

- 3.15 Following recommendations made in the Policing Productivity Review²⁶, by the National Police Chiefs Council, the Home Office implemented changes to the Counting Rules – the mechanism used by police forces across England and Wales to record crime²⁷. Prior to the changes, which were implemented in June 2023, most police forces recorded a maximum of two crime incidents when a victim made a report to the police, regardless of whether more than two different crimes had taken place. Now, only one incident - what is deemed the most serious crime - is recorded by the police due to the implementation of the 'Principal Crime Rule'. This approach has been adopted by the PSNI²⁸. Domestic abuse crimes are included within the police recorded crime statistics for Northern Ireland and these crimes are recorded in compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules.
- 3.16 According to the PPS, domestic abuse is *an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, inflicted by a current or former partner or close family member. Domestic abuse can include:*
1. *Coercive control*
 2. *Psychological/emotional abuse*
 3. *Physical abuse*
 4. *Sexual abuse*
 5. *Economic and financial abuse*
 6. *Online and technological abuse.*²⁹

²⁶ Home Office (2023) The Policing Productivity Review:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/655784fa544aea000dfb2f9a/Policing_Productivity_Review.pdf

²⁷ See Home Office Counting Rules - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counting-rules-for-recorded-crime>

²⁸ [www.psnipolice.uk/system/files/2024-](http://www.psnipolice.uk/system/files/2024-08/987257139/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20June%202024.pdf)

[08/987257139/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20June%202024.pdf](http://www.psnipolice.uk/system/files/2024-08/987257139/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20June%202024.pdf)

This Bulletin (May 2023) states: The Home Office introduced a further change in respect of these 'behavioural crimes' by reversing the requirement to record the most serious additional victim-based offence. This latest change has had the greatest impact on malicious communications offences, with fewer such offences required to be recorded. In practice these changes meant that between 1st April 2018 and 30th April 2023 there was some 'double counting' of offences when an incident involved a conduct offence (Harassment, stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour) and another offence, which would have led to an increase in the number of crimes recorded. From 1st May 2023, this practice was reversed, and the current approach is more similar to the period prior to 1st April 2018, where a conduct/behaviour crime will only be recorded when it is deemed to be the most serious offence.

²⁹ [Domestic Violence and Abuse | Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland \(ppsni.gov.uk\)](https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse)

- 3.17 The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021³⁰, which came into effect in February 2022, created a new, specific offence of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. It offers greater protections to all victims who have suffered abuse, including those experiencing controlling or coercive behaviour in a domestic context. Recording of this offence started on 21st February 2022, and is included within the Stalking and Harassment classification.

The incidence and nature of domestic abuse/violence in Northern Ireland

- 3.18 Table 1 outlines the recorded statistics (PSNI) on the occurrence of domestic abuse incidents and domestic abuse crimes in Northern Ireland for the research period (2016 – 2024). For clarification, a domestic abuse crime is recorded when there is a domestic abuse motivation in any crime. Not all domestic abuse incidents (as recorded by the PSNI) will result in the recording of a crime, as what has occurred in the incident may not be of the level of severity that would result in a crime being recorded³¹ or may not fall into the classification of a specific offence.

Table 1: Occurrence of domestic abuse incidents and domestic abuse crimes in Northern Ireland by year

Year ³²	Number of domestic abuse incidents in NI	%age change from previous year	Number of domestic abuse crimes	%age change from previous year
2015 – 2016	28,392	0.36	14,061	5.27
2016 – 2017	29,166	2.72	13,930	-0.93
2017 – 2018	29,913	2.56	14,535	4.34
2018 – 2019	31,682	5.91	16,165	11.21
2019 – 2020	31,817	0.43	18,624	15.21
2020 – 2021	31,197	-1.95	19,022	2.13
2021 – 2022	33,188	6.38	21,665	13.89
2022 – 2023	32,876	-0.94	22,312	2.99
2023 – 2024	32,763	-0.34	19,954	-10.57 ³³

Source: PSNI³⁴

Table 1 indicates that the total number of domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland by year has increased in the period 2015-16 to 2023-24, with some small

³⁰ [Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/12/section/1)

³¹ Where crimes with a domestic abuse motivation are recorded, they are classified according to the Home Office Counting Rules and form a subset of the overall police recorded crime statistics.

³² Counting period is: 1st October to 30th September.

³³ The percentage change from 2022/23 to 2023/24 is linked to the Home Office changes in counting (referenced above at 3.15); for example, in the case where two crimes have occurred only one incident (the most serious crime under the 'Principal Crime Rule') is recorded.

³⁴ From - [Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2023/24](#)

decreases between years on three occasions. The overall percentage increase over the period is 15.4%.

In addition, Table 1 shows an increase in the number of domestic abuse crimes with an overall percentage increase over the period of 41.9%. There has been some fluctuation in these figures over the research period, with a number of decreases between years, and in some cases large increases. In addition, it is important to note the percentage change from 2022/23 to 2023/24. This is linked to the Home Office changes in counting (referenced above at 3.15); for example, in the case where two crimes have occurred only one incident (the most serious crime under the 'Principal Crime Rule') is recorded. This has resulted in a decline in numbers of crimes recorded.

The Covid-19 pandemic may have had some impact on figures. A review of PSNI figures over the last six plus years points to a massive increase in the incidence of domestic abuse.³⁵ The Covid-19 pandemic period showed higher levels of recorded domestic abuse. Following the introduction in March 2020 of restrictions relating to the pandemic, most classifications within overall police recorded crime fell resulting in lower crime levels in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20. However, crimes with a domestic abuse motivation showed higher levels in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20, with the exception of theft (including burglary) and criminal damage. An increase in domestic abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic was also reported more widely³⁶.

This backdrop – of domestic abuse incidents and domestic abuse crimes – is important when we then examine the numbers and trends relating to applications for Protective Orders.

- 3.19 Belfast City, whilst being only one policing district, accounts for a reasonable proportion of all domestic abuse motivated incidents/crimes recorded in Northern Ireland. It includes four local policing teams based in Strandtown (East), Tennent Street (North), Lisburn Road (South), and Woodbourne (West).

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of incidents with a domestic abuse motivation by Council area over the last nine years.

³⁵ Police Service of Northern Ireland, Domestic Abuse Statistics, Domestic Abuse Annual Trends 2004-05 to 2022-23, November 2023 available at www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics.

³⁶ [Domestic violence in NI is epidemic | ScopeNI \(nicva.org\)](https://www.nicva.org/)

Table 2: Domestic Abuse incidents, by local government district and by year

Year ³⁷	2015 – 2016	2016 – 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023	2023 – 2024
Antrim & Newtownabbey	1,893	1,902	2,126	2,323	2,193	2,205	2,380	2,428	2,306
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	3,001	2,915	2,871	3,131	3,248	3,442	3,756	3,541	3,664
Belfast	7,613	7,803	8,031	8,491	8,610	7,926	8,468	8,484	8,538
Causeway Coast & Glens	2,158	2,187	2,119	2,265	2,144	2,161	2,122	2,206	2,178
Derry City & Strabane	3,012	2,783	3,080	3,100	3,170	3,046	3,210	3,086	3,227
Fermanagh & Omagh	1,493	1,691	1,726	1,874	1,736	1,562	1,654	1,629	1,681
Lisburn & Castlereagh	1,497	1,627	1,613	1,789	1,771	1,981	1,870	1,811	1,883
Mid and East Antrim	2,161	2,267	2,191	2,199	2,283	2,176	2,325	2,291	2,188
Mid Ulster	1,476	1,500	1,673	1,912	2,063	2,110	2,490	2,321	2,154
Newry, Mourne & Down	2,020	2,142	2,268	2,351	2,438	2,560	2,660	2,820	2,703
Ards & North Down	2,068	2,349	2,215	2,247	2,161	2,028	2,253	2,259	2,241
Northern Ireland	28,392	29,166	29,913	31,682	31,817	31,197	33,188	32,876	32,763

Source: NISRA³⁸

- 3.20 In addition, it is clear that these figures are an under-reporting and under-counting of the incidence of domestic abuse incidents and crimes. The Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) 2010/11³⁹ found that *‘The police in Northern Ireland were only made aware of around one-third of all ‘worst’ cases of domestic partner abuse (31.1% in NICS 2010/11), meaning that they were unaware of the experiences of seven-in-ten victims (68.9%).’* The survey findings also estimated that *‘15.7% of people aged 16-64 have experienced at least one form of domestic violence, by a partner, since age 16, with women (19.3%) displaying a higher prevalence rate than men (11.5%).’*

³⁷ Counting period is: 1st October to 30th September.

³⁸ [DOMLGD - Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes](#).

Under crime and justice heading – and then under PSNI statistics and domestic abuse statistics.

³⁹ Experience of Crime: Findings from the 2010/11 Northern Ireland Crime Survey Research and Statistical Bulletin 3/2011 S Toner and R Freel December 2011

www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doi/nics-2010-11-experience-of-crime-version.pdf

More recently the NI telephone survey⁴⁰ estimated that only 43% of all NICTS crime is reported to the police. Various crime categories displayed higher reporting rates such as burglary (70%) and vehicle-related theft (55%). Reasons given for not reporting an incident or crime to the police included:

- 'Too trivial/no loss/police would not/could not do anything' (54%);
- 'Private matter/dealt with matter ourselves' (33%).

3.21 Other reference points for data on the incidence and nature of domestic abuse can be found in the CVOCNI Victims Survey (September 2024)⁴¹. With responses from 166 victims (representing 350 crimes), 39% (n=65) of survey respondents were a victim of rape or sexual offences and 18% (n=31) were a victim of stalking. In addition, 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).

A further point to note is the increasing focus on domestic abuse over the last decade and associated awareness campaigns from statutory services including the PSNI⁴² and voluntary sector providers. Given this backdrop, and associated increase in knowledge and awareness, there would be an expectation of increased numbers of victims coming forward to seek legal advice and a criminal justice response.

3.22 A further reference point is the data recorded in relation to the incidence of homicides with a domestic abuse motivation, as recorded by the PSNI (see table 3). Whilst this shows considerable fluctuation year by year, the numbers provide further context to the need for Protective Orders and the outworkings of protection for vulnerable individuals in the home. Further information is provided in DoJ publications.⁴³

⁴⁰ Experience of Crime and Perceptions of Crime and Policing and Justice: Findings from the 2021/22 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey K Ross and M Beggs March 2023 NISRA and DoJ. www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/2021-22%20ni%20safe%20community%20telephone%20survey.pdf

⁴¹ <https://www.cvocni.org/publications/2023-24-victim-survey-results>

⁴² For example, the PSNI Safe Place campaign: <https://www.psni.police.uk/safety-and-support/keeping-safe/domestic-abuse/safe-place-campaign#:~:text=Support%20the%20Safe%20Place%20Campaign,violence%20to%20confidentially%20access%20information.>

⁴³ www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/dhr-ruth.pdf

Table 3: Homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded by the PSNI

Year	Number of homicides with a domestic abuse motivation in NI
2015 – 2016	1
2016 – 2017	3
2017 – 2018	11
2018 – 2019	4
2019 – 2020	5
2020 – 2021	9
2021 – 2022	9
2022 – 2023	8
2023 – 2024	3

Source: PSNI

- 3.23 Taking into account the overall picture of increasing occurrence/incidence of abuse incidents and domestic abuse crimes, it would be reasonable to assume that this might have an impact on the number/level of applications for Protective Orders and/or the outcomes in relation to breaches of Orders. The incidence of homicides as a result of domestic abuse serves as a timely reminder on the need for consideration of this topic. Section 4 provides an analysis of the recorded statistics relating to Protective Orders.

Section 4 Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders – number of applications, outcomes and breaches

- 4.1 This section looks at the available quantitative data relating to Protective Orders provided by the NICTS via their Integrated Court Operations system (ICOS)⁴⁴ and from the PPS and PSNI, with a focus on highlighting the journey of a domestic abuse scenario where the individual applies for a Protective Order. It should be noted that some data is not available, or available in a format that provides sufficient granularity for analysis purposes. In addition, data from different sources is not always comparable in a given year, as the journey of a case from a victim applying for an NMO, reporting a breach, and a criminal case being concluded in court can span more than one calendar year.
- 4.2 This section seeks to answer the following research questions:
1. How many NMOs and OOs have been applied for and issued over the last nine years?
 2. What regional and annual variations exist in the application and granting of these Orders?
 3. What is the total number of recorded breaches of NMOs and OOs between 2016 and 2024 by police district?
 4. What proportion of NMO/OO breaches resulted in prosecution between 2016 and 2024 by police district?
 5. What regional variations exist in the response to and enforcement of these Orders?
 6. How many NMO/OO breaches were before the court between 2016 and 2024 by court area?
 7. How many breaches of NMO/OO's before the court between 2016-2024 led to a conviction, and what were the typical sentences by court area?

Number of NMO and OO applications and regional variations – 2016 - 2024

- 4.3 This sub-section now explores the number of applications for and numbers issued of NMOs and OOs over the last nine years. This is examined by Court (where the application was lodged). This sub-section links to Questions 1 and 2 (see italics for Q2):
1. How many NMOs and OOs have been applied for and issued over the last nine years?

2. What regional and annual variations exist in the *application* and granting of these Orders?

Tables 1 – 3 (See Appendix 3) record the total number of applications for three types of Order – NMOs, NMO *ex parte* and OOs. These tables demonstrate the following:

- The total number of applications for all three types of Protective Order decreased over the 9-year period (2016 – 2024). It is recognised that there is some variation year on year. One key factor impacting the number of NMO and *ex parte* NMO applications may have been a linkage to Covid. The figures demonstrate a downward trend in applications from 2017 onwards with a spike in 2020/2021 (Covid period), and then reductions again since 2021. This correlates with increases and decreases in incidents of domestic abuse, as outlined in Section 3.

NMOs

- The total number of NMO applications declined by 28% in the 9-year period (2016 – 2024) from a total of 2,006 in 2016 to 1,443 in 2024.
- The majority of courts (12 out of 19) showed a decline in the actual number of NMO applications (percentage decrease in brackets). This was most pronounced in the following ten courts; and has been arranged in descending order from the biggest to the smallest percentage decrease. A note of caution should be associated with the courts which dealt with lower levels of overall numbers of applications.
 - Magherafelt – 13 to 1 (92%)
 - Antrim – 53 to 14 (74%)
 - Armagh – 53 to 14 (74%)
 - Banbridge – 36 to 13 (64%)
 - Laganside – 712 to 290 (59%)
 - Office of Care & Protection – 24 to 11 (54%)
 - Newtownards – 215 to 156 (27%)
 - Ballymena – 130 to 98 (25%)
 - Craigavon – 104 to 81 (22%)
 - Londonderry – 221 to 175 (21%)
- The total number of NMO applications stayed relatively steady, albeit with some variation in the Covid years (2020/21) in a number of locations (e.g. Downpatrick, Omagh, Strabane, Coleraine, Limavady and Dungannon) and only three court locations showed an increase in NMO applications (Enniskillen with a relatively small increase and Lisburn and Newry with more significant increases. The number of applications to Lisburn Court were huge, increasing by 619% from 16 in 2016 to 115 in 2024).

NMOs ex parte

- The total number of *ex parte* NMO applications declined by 39% in the 9-year period (2016 – 2024) from a total of 2,145 in 2016 to 1,300 in 2024.
- The majority of courts (13 out of 19) showed a decline in the actual number of *ex parte* NMO applications (percentage decrease in brackets), and this pattern largely corresponded to the decline in NMO applications outlined above. This was most pronounced in the following ten courts; and has been arranged in descending order from the biggest to the smallest percentage decrease. A note of caution should be associated with the courts which dealt with lower levels of overall numbers of applications.
 - Limavady – 5 to 0 (100%)
 - Magherafelt – 20 to 0 (100%)
 - Antrim – 57 to 13 (77%)
 - Banbridge – 39 to 9 (77%)
 - Armagh – 42 to 14 (67%)
 - Laganside – 794 to 280 (65%)
 - Office of Care & Protection – 20 to 9 (55%)
 - Ballymena – 204 to 96 (53%)
 - Omagh – 39 to 20 (49%)
 - Lisburn – 149 to 105 (29%)
 - Newtownards – 190 to 153 (19%)
 - Craigavon – 77 to 59 (23%)
 - Londonderry – 165 to 138 (16%)
- The total number of *ex parte* NMO applications stayed relatively steady in a number of locations (e.g. Downpatrick, Coleraine and Dungannon with increase less than five) and only three court locations showed an increase in NMO applications (Strabane and Enniskillen with relatively small increases and Newry with a more significant increase).

Occupation Orders

- The total number of OO applications declined slightly over the 9-year period (2016 – 2024), from 48 applications in 2016 to 43 applications in 2024. There was slight variation within the timeframe, with the highest level of applications in year in 2017 (60).
- There is regional variation with some courts receiving no or minimal applications in any year

4.4 Based on the analysis of applications for NMOs, including *ex parte* NMOs, and OOs, and the regional variation within these, what can we say about the regional and annual variations in applications for Protective Orders? It is difficult to be conclusive on the basis of one-dimensional figures, without cross-referencing for example the application patterns to population numbers for the court areas/locations and/or

cross-referencing to the level of reported domestic abuse/violence incidents and crimes in those areas. However, we can draw a number of conclusions as follows:

- It is interesting to note that whilst the domestic abuse/violence figures show an increase in incidence across Northern Ireland (see Section 3), there is a contradictory and unexplained decrease in the number of applications for Protective Orders. This is particularly pronounced for the *ex parte* NMOs. It brings forward the question – why would fewer people apply for a Protective Order, when the need for Protective Orders is increasing? This theme is explored in more detail from a qualitative perspective in Section 5.
- It is also interesting to note that the decline in applications (for all three types of Orders but mainly the NMOs and *ex parte* NMOs) is at different rates with some courts showing significant reductions in the number of applications both in actual terms (numbers) and comparative terms (percentage). This raises the question – why would the number and proportion of applications for Protective Orders be declining at different rates in different areas? This theme is again explored in more detail in Section 5.

Outcomes of NMO and OO applications, including number granted and regional variations – 2016 - 2024

4.5 This sub-section now examines the outcomes for applications for the Protective Orders being reviewed – NMOs, NMO *ex parte* and OOs. This sub-section links to Question 2 (see italics):

2. What regional and annual variations exist in the application and *granting* of these Orders?

The possible outcomes are as follows:

Granted – this means that the application for a Protective Order was approved, and the Order is then in place.

Dismissed/refused – this means that the application for a Protective Order was not approved or granted, and consequently no Order is in place.

Withdrawn – this means that the application for a Protective Order is withdrawn from the court by the applicant or by agreement between the applicant and the court.

Varied/discharged – this means that there is an application to amend the terms and conditions of the original Order (vary) or the Order is ended (discharge). This variation or discharge is served on all relevant parties and the PSNI if required.

Other – this includes absolute or conditional discharges where an offender will not be sentenced for an offence unless a further offence is committed within a stated period, a binding over order which is essentially a bail order (with or without)

conditions to be of good behaviour and keep the peace for a specified period, a restraining order etc.

4.6 Tables 4 – 6 (See Appendix 3) record the outcomes of NMO, NMO *ex parte* and OO applications, including the number granted and other outcomes. These tables demonstrate the following:

- Overall there is a marked change during the 9-year period in the actual number of Protective Orders granted, and a reduction in the other outcomes in real terms, but an increase in the proportion of these other outcomes – that is the application is dismissed/refused, the application is withdrawn or the application is varied and discharged. This is now examined in detail for the separate types of Protective Orders.

NMOs

- As noted earlier the total annual number of applications for NMOs has declined over the last nine years, albeit that there are some regional variations in the level and rate of decline.
- Analysis of the outcomes for the total NMO applications shows a number of changes in the 9-year period. These are outlined in Table 4 which compares the outcomes for total applications for NMOs between 2016 and 2024.

Table 4: Outcomes for applications for NMOs: 2016 – 2024

Outcomes	2016		2024		Change in proportionate outcome
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
Granted	817	41	474	33	-8%
Dismissed/refused	299	15	255	18	+3%
Withdrawn	545	27	421	29	+2%
Varied/discharged	344	17	285	20	+3%
Other	1	<1	8	1	+1%
TOTAL	2006	100	1443	101⁴⁵	

Source: ICOS

- Table 4 shows that there has been an overall decline in the number of NMOs granted or issued across Northern Ireland over the 9-year timeframe. In absolute terms this indicates a reduction from 817 NMOs granted to 474. As a proportion of the possible outcomes, NMOs granted was 41% of all outcomes in 2016; by 2024 this had reduced to 33% - an 8% reduction in the proportion of granted NMOs within the overall outcomes.
- In contrast whilst the actual numbers of applications which were dismissed/refused, withdrawn or varied/discharged reduced, there was a proportionate/percentage increase in these outcomes overall. The biggest

⁴⁵ Totals in all tables – percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

increase proportionately was in the percentage dismissed/refused (3% increase) and the percentage varied/discharged (3% increase).

- There are also regional variations in this pattern as outlined in Tables 5 - 8 below. This shows the reduction in actual numbers of NMOs granted by regional court (although in some cases there was an increase in the proportion of this outcome overall) and the trends in terms of actual numbers of NMOs that were dismissed/refused, withdrawn and varied/discharged. The percentages indicated are the percentage of this outcome as part of the overall outcomes in that year. This suggests that there is significant regional variation in terms of the likelihood of particular outcomes of applications for Protective Orders across the range of court locations. Alongside this it is important to remember that no two cases are the same and that the merits of any application will be based on the individual circumstances of the case.

Table 5: NMOs granted by Court location: 2016 – 2024 – numbers and percentage granted by total applications

Court	NMOs granted				Percentage reduction in total numbers granted (%)
	2016		2024		
	Numbers	% granted	Numbers	% granted	
Laganside Courts	259	36	156	54	-40
Newtownards Court Office	91	42	50	32	-45
Downpatrick Court Office	26	44	11	18	-58
Craigavon Court Office	49	47	27	33	-45
Armagh Court Office	31	58	4	29	-87
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	14	39	6	46	-57
Omagh Court Office	10	34	8	27	-20
Strabane Court Office	14	47	11	35	-21
Antrim Court Office	23	43	5	36	-78
Londonderry Court Office	95	43	50	29	-47
Enniskillen Court Office	15	52	10	27	-33
Coleraine Court Office	38	46	17	23	-55
Newry Court Office	68	43	54	26	-21
Limavady Court Office	1	100	0	0	-100
Magherafelt Court Office	7	54	1	100	-86
Ballymena Court Office	49	38	32	33	-33
Lisburn Court Office	1	6	16	14	Increase
Dungannon Court Office	17	40	15	43	-12
Office of Care & Protection	9	38	1	9	-89
TOTALS	817	41	474	33	-42

Source: ICOS

- As noted earlier the total number of NMOs granted has reduced over the 9-year timeframe. This reduction in the actual number of NMOs granted was a trend

across all but one court location (Lisburn which showed an increase in the total numbers granted).

- This was most pronounced in a number of regional courts as follows (percentage reduction in real terms of 40% and above). Courts which had low numbers at the outset of the period and are therefore showing massive percentage reduction in numbers have been excluded (these are: Limavady, Magherafelt, Banbridge and Office of Care & Protection).
 - Armagh – 31 to 4 (87%)
 - Antrim – 23 to 5 (78%)
 - Downpatrick – 26 to 11 (58%)
 - Coleraine – 38 to 17 (55%)
 - Londonderry – 95 to 50 (47%)
 - Craigavon – 49 to 27 (45%)
 - Newtownards – 91 to 50 (45%)
 - Laganside – 259 to 156 (40%)

Table 6: NMOs dismissed/refused by Court location: 2016 – 2024

Court	NMOs dismissed/refused			
	2016		2024	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Laganside Courts	47	7	39	13
Newtownards Court Office	19	9	6	4
Downpatrick Court Office	14	24	1	2
Craigavon Court Office	23	22	8	10
Armagh Court Office	8	15	0	0
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	0	0	2	15
Omagh Court Office	7	24	9	30
Strabane Court Office	9	30	8	26
Antrim Court Office	20	38	8	57
Londonderry Court Office	34	15	16	9
Enniskillen Court Office	2	7	18	49
Coleraine Court Office	28	34	11	15
Newry Court Office	11	7	25	12
Limavady Court Office	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	1	8	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	62	48	53	54
Lisburn Court Office	4	25	38	33
Dungannon Court Office	8	19	10	29
Office of Care & Protection	2	8	3	27
TOTALS	299	15	255	18

Source: ICOS

- As noted earlier whilst the actual numbers of applications which had an outcome of dismissed/refused reduced in overall terms from 299 to 255 over the 9-year period, this outcome increased in real terms in a number of court locations

(Omagh, Enniskillen, Newry, Lisburn, Dungannon, Office of Care & Protection). In most cases the increases were small numbers (less than 10) but in three cases (Enniskillen – 2 to 18, Newry – 11 to 25 and Lisburn – 4 to 38) the increases were more significant.

- In addition, the relative proportion of this outcome within any one court's range of outcomes increased in a number of court locations. For example:
 - Laganside – 7% to 13%
 - Banbridge – 0% to 15%
 - Omagh – 24% to 30%
 - Antrim – 38% to 57%
 - Enniskillen – 7% to 49%
 - Newry – 7% to 12%
 - Ballymena – 48% to 54%
 - Lisburn – 25% to 33%
 - Dungannon – 19% to 29%
 - Office of Care & Protection – 8% to 27%

Table 7: NMOs withdrawn by Court location: 2016 – 2024

Court	NMOs withdrawn			
	2016		2024	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Laganside Courts	149	21	80	28
Newtownards Court Office	66	31	41	26
Downpatrick Court Office	18	31	20	33
Craigavon Court Office	24	23	31	38
Armagh Court Office	13	25	6	43
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	22	61	1	8
Omagh Court Office	12	41	10	33
Strabane Court Office	7	23	8	26
Antrim Court Office	9	17	1	7
Londonderry Court Office	91	41	86	49
Enniskillen Court Office	12	41	7	19
Coleraine Court Office	14	17	12	16
Newry Court Office	54	34	72	35
Limavady Court Office	0	0	1	100
Magherafelt Court Office	5	38	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	12	9	11	11
Lisburn Court Office	8	50	17	15
Dungannon Court Office	17	40	10	29
Office of Care & Protection	12	50	7	64
TOTALS	545	27	421	29

Source: ICOS

- As noted earlier whilst the actual numbers of applications which had an outcome of being withdrawn reduced in overall terms from 545 to 421 over the 9-year

period, this outcome increased in real terms in a number of court locations (Downpatrick, Craigavon, Strabane, Newry, Limavady and Lisburn). In most cases the increases were small numbers (less than 10) but in one case (Newry – 54 to 72) the increase was more significant.

- In addition, the relative proportion of this outcome (withdrawn) within any one court's range of outcomes increased in a number of court locations (Limavady has been excluded as numbers are so low). For example:
 - Liganside – 21% to 28%
 - Downpatrick – 31% to 33%
 - Craigavon – 23% to 38%
 - Armagh – 25% to 43%
 - Strabane – 23% to 26%
 - Londonderry – 41% to 49%
 - Newry – 34% to 35%
 - Ballymena – 9% to 11%
 - Office of Care & Protection – 50% to 64%

- In contrast a number of court locations showed a decrease in the relative proportionality of this outcome within the range of outcomes, as follows:
 - Newtownards – 31% to 26%
 - Banbridge - 61% to 8%
 - Omagh – 41% to 33%
 - Antrim – 17% to 7%
 - Enniskillen – 41% to 19%
 - Coleraine – 17% to 16%
 - Magherafelt – 38% to 0%
 - Lisburn – 50% to 15%
 - Dungannon – 40% to 29%

Table 8: NMOs varied/discharged by Court location: 2016 – 2024

Court	NMOs varied/discharged			
	2016		2024	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Laganside Courts	256	36	13	5
Newtownards Court Office	39	18	59	38
Downpatrick Court Office	1	2	27	45
Craigavon Court Office	8	8	12	15
Armagh Court Office	1	2	4	29
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	0	0	4	31
Omagh Court Office	0	0	2	7
Strabane Court Office	0	0	4	13
Antrim Court Office	1	2	0	0
Londonderry Court Office	1	<1	22	13
Enniskillen Court Office	0	0	2	5
Coleraine Court Office	2	2	34	46
Newry Court Office	24	15	56	27
Limavady Court Office	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	0	0	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	7	5	2	2
Lisburn Court Office	3	19	44	38
Dungannon Court Office	0	0	0	0
Office of Care & Protection	1	4	0	0
TOTALS	344	17	285	20

Source: ICOS

- As noted earlier whilst the actual numbers of applications which had an outcome of being varied/discharged reduced in overall terms from 344 to 285 over the 9-year period, this outcome increased in real terms in a number of court locations (Newtownards, Downpatrick, Craigavon, Armagh, Banbridge, Omagh, Strabane, Londonderry, Enniskillen, Coleraine, Newry, and Lisburn). In most cases the increases were small numbers (less than 10) but in six cases (Newtownards – 39 to 59, Downpatrick – 1 to 27, Londonderry – 1 to 22, Coleraine – 2 to 34, Newry – 24 to 56 and Lisburn – 3 to 44) the increase was more significant.
- The actual number of applications for NMOs that were varied or discharged fell in real terms between 2016 and 2024 in Laganside Courts from 256 to 13. This is a significant decline, and is worth exploring in more detail. The numbers were relatively steady for the period 2016 – 2019 (2016 – 256, 2017 – 291, 2018 – 264, 2019 – 260) and then fell dramatically (2020 – 20, 2021 – 26, 2022 – 41, 2023 – 37). It could be surmised that this change/departure in outcomes for NMO applications may have been linked to the change in circumstances and court proceedings relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

NMOs ex parte

- As noted earlier the total annual number of applications for *ex parte* NMOs has declined over the last nine years (from 2,145 to 1,300), albeit that there are some regional variations. It is worth noting that the number of applications for *ex parte* NMOs is higher than the number of applications for NMOs. This therefore forms an important part of the picture.
- Analysis of the outcomes for the total *ex parte* NMO applications shows a number of changes in the 9-year period. These are outlined in table 9 which compares the outcomes for total applications between 2016 and 2024.

Table 9: Outcomes for applications for *ex parte* NMOs: 2016 – 2024

Outcomes	2016		2024		Percentage change in proportionate outcome
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
Granted	1762	82	951	73	-9%
Dismissed/refused	312	15	307	24	+9%
Withdrawn	39	2	23	2	-
Varied/discharged	29	1	12	1	-
Other	3	<1	7	1	+1%
TOTAL	2145	100	1300	101⁴⁶	-

Source: ICOS

- Table 9 shows that there has been an overall decline in the number of *ex parte* NMOs granted or issued across Northern Ireland over the 9-year timeframe. In absolute terms this indicates a reduction from 1,762 *ex parte* NMOs granted to 951. As a proportion of the possible outcomes, *ex parte* NMOs granted was 82% of all outcomes in 2016; by 2024 this had reduced to 73% - a 9% reduction in the proportion of granted NMOs within the overall outcomes.
- The actual numbers of *ex parte* NMO applications which were dismissed/refused declined but only slightly from 312 in 2016 to 307 in 2024. However, this represented a 9% increase in terms of the relative proportionality of this outcome across all outcomes.
- The actual numbers of *ex parte* NMO applications that were withdrawn or varied/discharged decreased in numbers but maintained their relative proportionality within the range of outcomes.
- There are also regional variations in this pattern as outlined in Tables 10 and 11 below. This shows the reduction in actual numbers of *ex parte* NMOs granted by regional court (although in some cases there was an increase in the proportion of this outcome overall) and the trends in terms of actual numbers of *ex parte* NMOs that were dismissed/ refused. The percentages indicated are the percentage of this outcome as part of the overall outcomes in that year. This suggests that there is significant regional variation in terms of the likelihood of

⁴⁶ Totals in all tables – percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

particular outcomes of applications for Protective Orders across the range of court locations.

- The actual numbers of applications which were withdrawn or varied/discharged are minimal, both in terms of totals across Northern Ireland (total withdrawn 2024 – 23 and total varied/discharged 2024 - 12) and by court location. Analysis of these is not possible due to the low numbers.

Table 10: NMOs *ex parte* granted by Court location: 2016 – 2024

Court	Ex parte NMOs granted				Change in proportionate outcome (%)
	2016		2024		
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
Laganside Courts	724	91	165	59	-32
Newtownards Court Office	171	90	118	77	-13
Downpatrick Court Office	55	92	46	74	-18
Craigavon Court Office	50	65	45	76	-9
Armagh Court Office	40	95	9	100	+5
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	34	87	9	100	+13
Omagh Court Office	25	64	14	70	+6
Strabane Court Office	21	81	27	84	+3
Antrim Court Office	51	89	7	54	-35
Londonderry Court Office	148	90	112	81	-9
Enniskillen Court Office	26	74	36	88	+14
Coleraine Court Office	50	68	57	78	+10
Newry Court Office	87	80	118	78	-2
Limavady Court Office	5	100	0	0	-100
Magherafelt Court Office	17	85	0	0	-85
Ballymena Court Office	176	86	75	78	-8
Lisburn Court Office	60	40	84	80	+40
Dungannon Court Office	11	28	25	57	+29
Office of Care & Protection	11	55	1	11	-44
TOTALS	1762	82	951	73	-9

Source: ICOS

- As noted earlier the total number of *ex parte* NMOs granted has reduced over the 9-year timeframe. This reduction in the actual number of *ex parte* NMOs granted was a trend across the majority of court locations, with six courts showing an actual increase in the numbers of *ex parte* NMOs granted (Strabane, Enniskillen, Coleraine, Newry, Lisburn and Dungannon).
- Furthermore around half of the courts showed a decline in the proportionality of the outcome granted against the other outcomes. In contrast, eight courts showed an increase in the proportion of *ex parte* NMOs granted in comparison to the other outcomes (Armagh, Banbridge, Omagh, Strabane, Enniskillen, Coleraine, Lisburn and Dungannon)

- Similar to the outcomes of NMOs granted this regional variation indicates a potential differential in how applications are treated across the different court locations.

Table 11: NMOs *ex parte* dismissed/refused by Court location: 2016 – 2024

Court	NMOs dismissed/refused			
	2016		2024	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Laganside Courts	64	8	108	39
Newtownards Court Office	17	9	33	22
Downpatrick Court Office	3	5	8	13
Craigavon Court Office	19	25	8	14
Armagh Court Office	2	5	1	7
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	5	13	0	0
Omagh Court Office	13	33	5	25
Strabane Court Office	5	19	4	13
Antrim Court Office	4	7	6	46
Londonderry Court Office	9	5	25	18
Enniskillen Court Office	8	23	5	12
Coleraine Court Office	22	30	16	22
Newry Court Office	19	17	30	20
Limavady Court Office	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	2	10	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	25	12	19	20
Lisburn Court Office	64	43	20	19
Dungannon Court Office	29	73	18	41
Office of Care & Protection	2	10	1	11
TOTALS	312		307	

Source: ICOS

- As noted earlier whilst the actual numbers of applications for *ex parte* NMOs which had an outcome of dismissed/refused reduced marginally in overall terms from 312 to 307 over the 9-year period, this outcome increased in real terms in a number of court locations (Laganside, Newtownards, Downpatrick, Antrim, Londonderry and Newry). In most cases the increases were small numbers (less than 10) but in four cases (Laganside – 64 to 108, Newtownards – 17 to 33, Londonderry – 9 to 25 and Newry – 19 to 30) the increases were more significant.
- In addition, the relative proportion of this outcome within any one court's range of outcomes increased in a number of court locations. For example:
 - o Laganside – 8% to 39%
 - o Newtownards – 9% to 22%
 - o Downpatrick – 5% to 13%
 - o Armagh – 5% to 7%
 - o Antrim – 7% to 46%
 - o Londonderry – 5% to 18%

- Newry – 17% to 20%
- Ballymena – 12% to 20%
- Office of Care & Protection – 10% to 11%

Occupation Orders

- As noted earlier the total annual number of applications for OOs has remained relatively small and with low levels of annual variation.
- Table 12 shows the outcomes for OO applications; these have remained relatively stable in terms of overall numbers in each type of outcome and the proportionality between outcomes.

Table 12: Outcomes for applications for OOs: 2016 – 2024

Outcomes	2016		2024		Percentage change
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
Granted	11	23	11	26	-3%
Dismissed/refused	6	13	6	14	+1%
Withdrawn	26	54	22	51	-3%
Varied/discharged	4	8	4	9	+1%
Other	1	2	0	0	-2%
TOTAL	48	100	43	100	-

Source: ICOS

- The low numbers mean that there is limited opportunity for any regional analysis. However, it is important to note that most court locations received only minimal numbers of applications for OOs in year. When reviewing the 2024 data the following courts had received less than five applications in year: Downpatrick, Craigavon, Banbridge, Omagh, Enniskillen, Coleraine, Newry, Ballymena and Lisburn.
- Looking at 2024 figures the largest numbers of applications for OOs were received by Laganside (16) and Newtownards (9).
- A number of courts received no applications for OOs in 2024: Armagh, Strabane, Antrim, Londonderry, Limavady, Magherafelt, Dungannon and the Office of Care & Protection.

Recorded breaches of NMOs and OOs, by police district and prosecution outcomes – 2016 - 2024

- 4.7 This sub-section examines the number of recorded breaches of NMOs and OOs in the study period and reports on the number of breaches that resulted in prosecution. This data was provided by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and the PSNI. This sub-section links to research questions 3 and 4:
3. What is the total number of recorded breaches of NMOs and OOs between 2016 and 2024 by police district?
 4. What proportion of NMO/OO breaches resulted in prosecution between 2016 and 2024 by police district?

Data provided by the PSNI indicates a downward trend in terms of the total number of breaches of NMOs recorded. This is summarised in table 13.⁴⁷

Table 13: Breaches of NMOs recorded by the police, by year and by policing district

Year ⁴⁸	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Antrim & Newtownabbey	75	48	38	47	46	43	32	39	35
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	75	56	48	46	62	57	38	70	54
Belfast	238	253	216	238	191	179	173	164	111
Causeway Coast & Glens	49	37	30	58	49	34	57	40	55
Derry City & Strabane	71	58	40	64	72	82	65	65	58
Fermanagh & Omagh	35	26	20	26	31	24	42	25	24
Lisburn & Castlereagh	58	62	34	41	37	60	37	40	35
Mid and East Antrim	88	75	69	39	55	49	38	33	25
Mid Ulster	13	25	12	33	31	33	41	25	18
Newry, Mourne & Down	94	60	58	53	109	76	66	88	63
Ards & North Down	73	61	64	64	44	37	56	69	46
Total Northern Ireland	869	761	629	709	727	674	645	658	524

Source: PSNI⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Any differential in data relates to different recording systems, including counting periods. In addition, caution should be taken with Table 13, as not all cases in the last recorded year have been assigned an outcome, and therefore may not yet be included in the figures

⁴⁸ Counting period is: 1st April to 31st March. A breach of an Order is deemed to be an offence against the State and is therefore counted separately to offences which are regarded as offences against the person.

⁴⁹ www.psnipolice.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics

Table 13 indicates an overall downward trend in relation to the number of breaches of NMOs recorded by the PSNI, with just one region (Causeway Coast & Glens) recording a slight increase. Belfast and Mid and East Antrim show the biggest decrease in numbers of breaches of NMOs recorded.

- 4.8 It should be noted that the PSNI was unable to provide any data on victim reports of NMO breaches in order to compare victim reports against cases where police registered a breach and took action. This has resulted in a gap in the data, which is explored in more detail in Section 5. In reality this approach to record-keeping means there is a lack of visibility of what happens when a victim of domestic abuse reports that they have experienced further abuse which they feel amounts to a breach of a NMO or OO.

Breaches - NMOs

- 4.9 Table 14 provides details of the number of files received by the PPS in relation to a breach of a NMO over the 9-year period 2016 to 2024.

Table 14: Files received for breach of NMO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Year	Number of cases of NMO breach	Percentage variation in cases 2016 - 24
2016	727	-
2017	620	-15%
2018	573	-8%
2019	618	+8%
2020	550	-11%
2021	526	-4%
2022	535	+2%
2023	507	-5%
2024	425	-16%
TOTALS	5081	

Source: PPS

Table 14 shows a steady decline in the number of files received by the PPS in relation to a breach of a NMO. Whilst there is some level of variation over the period, the overall trend in numbers and as a percentage is downward.

Breaches of NMOs and OOs before the courts, and outcomes including convictions and typical sentences by court area – 2016 - 2024

- 4.10 This sub-section examines the level and nature of how breaches are dealt with by the courts and the level of convictions arising from prosecution, and the typical sentences by court area. This sub-section links to research questions 6 and 7:

6. How many NMO/OO breaches were before the court between 2016 and 2024 by court area?
7. How many breaches of NMO/OO's before the court between 2016-2024 led to a conviction, and what were the typical sentences by court area?

The possible outcomes, for prosecution in relation to a breach of a NMO are as follows:

Community sentence – Examples of community sentence include supervised activity orders, probation order, community service order etc. These are Orders that the defendant must complete in a community environment, outside of custody.

Discharge – This is where the Judge decides that an existing Order should no longer apply.

Imprisonment – This is where the defendant is committed to prison or detained in custody within the prison estate⁵⁰.

Monetary penalty – this is a fine to be paid within a specified time period.

Suspended custodial – this is a prison sentence that is suspended for a period of time and not put into operation immediately. If the defendant commits further offences during the set time period, the prison term imposed can be put into operation if the Judge so directs.

Not Guilty – this is where the defendant is found not guilty of the breach of the Order.

Other – this includes absolute or conditional discharges, whereby the defendant will not be sentenced for an offence unless a further offence is committed within a stated period, a binding order which is essentially a bail order (with or without) conditions to be of good behaviour and keep the peace for a specified period, or a restraining order.

Whilst this sub-section indicates the broad sentencing outcomes, we had hoped to look at more detailed information including typical court sentences for breaches of NMOs and OOs by court area, in order to answer Question 7. However, this more granular detail was not available⁵¹.

Table 15 shows the decisions relating to breach of NMO for the 9-year period.

⁵⁰ The NI Prison estate includes HMP Maghaberry, HMP Magilligan, Hydebank Wood College and the Juvenile Justice Centre at Woodlands.

⁵¹ PPS noted that it is not possible to provide a breakdown by court area as files are not categorised in that way when received by PPS. In addition, this is not possible as a suspect can appear at more than one court venue as a case progresses.

Table 15: Decisions issued for breach of NMO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Year	Prosecution or Diversion		No prosecution		Totals
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
2016	463	63%	270	37%	733
2017	376	61%	235	39%	611
2018	380	65%	204	35%	584
2019	406	67%	195	33%	601
2020	331	67%	161	33%	492
2021	371	70%	157	30%	528
2022	328	65%	180	35%	508
2023	353	69%	161	31%	514
2024	261	66%	135	34%	396
TOTALS	3269		1698		4967

Source: PPS

Table 15 indicates the total numbers in relation to the decisions arising from the breach of a NMO. This shows that in overall terms the number which proceed to prosecution or other type of diversion has steadily declined in the 9-year period from 463 in 2016 to 261 in 2024 (a decrease in numbers of 44%). In addition, the overall numbers where there is no prosecution has also fallen (from 270 to 135). These declines relate directly to the decrease in overall numbers of files received in relation to a breach of a NMO (see table 13 earlier).

The reason for no prosecution decisions related mainly to the case did not pass the evidential test; that is the evidence which can be presented in court is sufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction. The evidential test states that a reasonable prospect of conviction exists if, in relation to an identifiable suspect, there is credible evidence which the prosecution can present to a court upon which an impartial jury (or other tribunal), properly directed in accordance with the law, could reasonably be expected to find proved beyond reasonable doubt that that suspect had committed a criminal offence. If the evidential test is not met the case cannot proceed, no matter how serious or sensitive it may be⁵².

In contrast a small number of cases did not proceed because they did not pass the public interest test. This states that if a case passes the evidential test, the prosecutor must decide if a prosecution is required in the public interest. Broadly, the presumption is that the public interest requires prosecution where there has been a contravention of the criminal law. This presumption provides the starting point for consideration of each individual case. The prosecutor will weigh relevant

⁵² Wording from: <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/how-we-reach-decisions#:~:text=can%20be%20taken,-The%20Evidential%20Test,or%20sensitive%20it%20may%20be>.

public interest factors to determine whether prosecution is in the public interest. Where available, the views of the victim will also be taken into account⁵³.

Table 16 outlines the reasons for no prosecution decisions for breaches of NMOs in the 9-year time period 2016 to 2024. In the majority of cases this is due to not passing the evidential test rather than the public interest test.

Table 16: Reason for no prosecution decisions for breach of NMO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Year	Did not pass evidential test	Did not pass the public interest test	Totals
2016	263	7	270
2017	232	3	235
2018	200	4	204
2019	188	7	195
2020	159	2	161
2021	157	-	157
2022	172	8	180
2023	155	6	161
2024	132	3	135
TOTALS	1658	40	1698

Source: PPS

The majority of cases relating to breaches of NMOs were heard in the Magistrates' courts. Over the 9-year period only 10 cases were heard in the Crown Court. Table 17 shows the outcomes in the Magistrates' Courts.

Table 17: Magistrates' courts: outcomes for breach of NMO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Year	Convicted of at least one offence	Acquitted	Other	Totals
2016	333	67	53	453
2017	267	56	61	384
2018	266	72	33	371
2019	280	59	49	388
2020	186	27	30	243
2021	294	85	60	439
2022	266	61	35	362
2023	241	52	42	335
2024	200	60	33	293
TOTALS	2333	539	396	3268

Source: PPS

⁵³ Wording from: <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/how-we-reach-decisions#:~:text=can%20be%20taken.-,The%20Evidential%20Test,or%20sensitive%20it%20may%20be.>

Breaches - OOs

Table 18 provides details of the number of files received by the PPS in relation to a breach of an OO⁵⁴ over the 9-year period 2016 to 2024.

Table 18: Files received for breach of OO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Year	Number of cases	Number of suspects
2016	16	16
2017	11	11
2018	10	10
2019	6	6
2020	5	5
2021	6	6
2022	7	7
2023	7	7
2024	7	7
TOTALS	75	75

Source: PPS

Table 18 indicates relatively low levels of cases relating to breaches of OOs.

Table 19 shows the decisions relating to breach of an OO for the 9-year period.

Table 19: Decisions issued for breach of OO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Years ⁵⁵	Prosecution or Diversion		No prosecution		Totals
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
2016 - 2018	25	76%	8	24%	33
2019 – 2021	13	81%	3	19%	16
2022 - 2024	18	86%	3	14%	21
TOTALS	56	80%	14	20%	70

Source: PPS

Table 19 indicates the total numbers in relation to the decisions arising from the breach of an OO. This shows that in overall terms the number which proceed to prosecution or other type of diversion has declined in the 9-year period from 25 in 2016 - 2018 to 18 in 2022 – 2024. In addition, the overall numbers where there is no

⁵⁴ As noted in Section 3 whilst a breach of an OO is not a criminal offence, an Occupation Order breach counts as an offence, as per Clause 25 of the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 if it happens in conjunction with the breach of an NMO. As it is common for an NMO to be granted at the same time as an OO due to the extra protection that brings in cases of breach, the situation of a breach of an OO (associated with an NMO) can arise.

⁵⁵ Due to multiple small cell counts and to prevent the potential disclosure of personal information calendar year data has been combined.

prosecution has also fallen. However, the overall numbers are small and it is difficult to make a firm conclusion from this.

The reason for no prosecution decisions related mainly to the case did not pass the evidential test (11 of the 14 cases) and the case did not proceed because they did not pass the public interest test (3 of the 14 cases).

All cases relating to breaches of OOs were heard in the Magistrates' courts. Table 20 shows the outcomes for the prosecutions and diversions.

Table 20: Magistrates' outcomes for breach of OO: 2016 – 2024

Calendar Year	Convicted of at least one offence	Acquitted	Other	Totals
2016	7	1	3	11
2017	7	-	1	8
2018	3	-	2	5
2019	9	1	1	11
2020	1	-	1	2
2021	1	-	-	1
2022	7	1	2	10
2023	2	-	-	2
2024	7	-	3	10
TOTALS	44	3	13	60

Source: PPS

- 4.11 Table 7 in Appendix 3 provides data on defendants prosecuted for breach of NMOs by year and by court. This data shows a fluctuation over time in terms of the proportion of the type of outcomes through prosecution. Table 21 provides an overview of this for all courts and comparing the data from 2016 to 2024. There has been a reduction in the actual numbers of some outcomes and their proportionate use e.g. community sentence, discharge, monetary penalty and suspended custodial have all declined. In contrast whilst the actual numbers have not increased significantly, the relative proportionality in terms of outcomes has increased for the outcome of: not guilty.

Table 21: Magistrates' outcomes for breach of NMO: 2016 – 2024

Outcomes	2016		2024		Percentage change
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	
Community sentence	65	14	23	7	-7%
Discharge	53	12	27	8	-4%
Imprisonment	62	13	44	13	-
Monetary penalty	63	14	39	12	-2%
Suspended custodial	72	16	50	15	-1%
Not Guilty	141	31	148	44	+13%
Other	4	1	2	1	-3%
TOTAL	460	101% ⁵⁶	333	100	-

Source: ICOS

- 4.12 More in-depth analysis of Table 7 in Appendix 3 suggests there is regional variation in outcomes if we make a comparison to the proportions of outcomes for 2024 as a whole. A number of courts demonstrated a similar picture to the NI wide percentage distribution across the various outcomes, with just small variations (up to 5%) in percentages. These courts were in line with the overall NI picture. In contrast a number of courts showed wider diversity in the outcomes. However, given the small numbers involved it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. In addition, NICTS noted that it was not possible to draw out any greater detail on sentences arising from breaches of NMOs⁵⁷.
- 4.13 It is also important to note that as breaches of Protective Orders may not always be reported by the victim, or do not always result in arrest or prosecution, the proportion of NMOs breached may be higher than the number of cases prosecuted implies⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Totals in all tables – percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

⁵⁷ DoJ noted that the request to provide more detailed data would require disproportionate effort for the output. In addition, all of the sentences are detailed differently according to the splits between custody and licence and are very difficult to categorise. There are also significant issues with the community sentences with some being measured in hours, months and years, and with different types of sentence, e.g. Community Service, Probation etc. It is therefore difficult to provide a general summary of each.

⁵⁸ Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse – A public consultation, Department of Justice, December 2020.

https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/doj/enhancing-legal-protections/user_uploads/consultation-paper-on-dapns-and-dapos---04-12-20-v2.pdf

Section 5 Qualitative commentary on reasons for changing nature and usage of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders

Changing nature and usage of NMOs and OOs – possible reasons?

5.1 This section examines the possible reasons for the changing nature and usage of NMOs and OOs reported on in Section 4. In summary Section 4 noted the following:

- Applications for NMOs and *ex parte* NMOs have decreased by 29% and 39% respectively over the 9-year period, 2016 to 2024;
- Applications for OOs have remained steady, albeit at a very low level;
- The proportion of NMOs granted has declined from 41% to 33% in the period. In addition, the overall numbers granted has decreased in the same period. There is regional variation in this picture, with the proportion of applications granted ranging from 9% to 100%⁵⁹ (However, care should be taken in interpretation of this data, as 100% often relates to a court area where there have been small numbers of applications for NMOs). Furthermore, higher levels of applications are being withdrawn, and the proportion being dismissed/refused in court has increased from 15% to 18% in the timeframe;
- There is a similar picture in terms of outcomes for *ex parte* NMOs, with the proportion granted declining from 82% to 73% of applications in the period 2016 – 2024. In addition, the proportion dismissed/refused has increased from 15% to 24%;
- The proportion of OOs granted over the time period has remained relatively steady. Although the overall numbers are small, the proportion dismissed/refused has increased from 13% to 35% and the proportion withdrawn has decreased from 54% to 37%;
- The outcomes data in cases of breach of NMOs is interesting as it shows a decline in discharge over the period (12% to 9%) and increase in imprisonment (13% to 19%). Other outcomes (community sentence, monetary penalty, suspended custodial and not guilty) remain largely the same proportionately.

Qualitative feedback on changing nature and usage of NMOs and OOs

5.2 Whilst this project has largely had a quantitative focus, the Research Consultant also met with representatives of Women's Aid branches and the Women's Aid Federation in Northern Ireland and a representative of ASSIST NI⁶⁰ to explore reasons behind the above emerging picture in relation to the nature and usage of NMOs and OOs. Analysis of their qualitative feedback is provided below; it is noted that this is a small-scale initial examination of this area which would require further in-depth

⁵⁹ Care should be taken with low base numbers in some regions.

⁶⁰ ASSIST NI – Domestic and Sexual Abuse Advocacy Service - <https://assistni.org.uk/>

qualitative research across a broader range of Support agencies in order to produce more definitive and robust findings.

In addition, both organisations provided some background and case-study material in relation to cases where NMO/OO issues had arisen. These are provided in summary format at paragraph 5.3.

What do key support agencies say are the reasons for reductions in applications for NMOS and *ex parte* NMOs in Northern Ireland?

Support agencies suggested a number of reasons why victims may be less likely to apply for NMOs than in the past, and therefore why as a result the overall number of applications for NMOs and *ex parte* NMOs has declined, despite the fact that domestic abuse and domestic violence incidents and crimes have increased. Support agencies emphasised that it was a multi-faceted area, and there may be a combination of reasons behind any decline in applications.

The reasons noted were as follows:

- **Changing narrative and perceived value of Protective Orders:** Support agencies suggested that the perception of the victims (who may be in need of an NMO) is: *it's not worth the paper it's written on*. In other words that they are totally ineffective as preventing any reoccurrence (of abuse etc.) and/or of responding to any abuse or a breach of the NMO. Support agencies referenced a *tangible narrative* as a backdrop for those considering applying for Protective Orders, suggesting that potential applicants may feel or believe the following (both perceived and actual experience):
 - a. *Bit of a Lottery*
 - b. *Burdensome to apply for*
 - c. *Not awarded by the Courts*
 - d. *Unassured outcomes from Court*
 - e. *Inconsistencies of outcomes (by Court and by Region)*

Support agencies noted that this narrative has changed over the last 8 – 9 years, albeit that some variables have remained steady. They suggested that this was due to much more detailed information and exposure of cases via the media, social media and online, in particular in the last five years. One respondent said: *when you google (Protective Orders) this is what comes up – and people think – what's the point? I won't get it. And this has heightened and polarised people's views on PO's*. The fact an application can be hard to evidence was also deemed to be a further off-putting factor.

- **Dilution of the nature of Protective Orders:** The above was linked to another concern voiced by support agencies, namely that there has been a decline in the strength of Protective Orders, and this has led to a reduction in the number of applications. One respondent said: *that we've looked at examples and the wording of it (the Order) recently has been diluted...the police are going by the letter of the law. So the very specific offence has to happen – and be visible to them or evidence of it – before they will act. And word goes round very quickly amongst women and they say – what's the point?* One respondent noted that there is an inconsistent approach by the PSNI and that they had noted cases of police actively dissuading victims from applying.
- **Vulnerability of the potential applicant**
Support agencies interconnected the above factor (perceived value of Protective Orders) with a key underlying factor; that is the vulnerable nature/position of the potential applicant, and how it takes a significant step on their part to make an application. Furthermore, it was noted that if the application does not result in an Order and/or if a breach of an Order is not followed up this results in *devalidating the applicant's experience – this is 'enabling' to the (alleged) perpetrator...* Support agencies suggested that this can lead to a level of apathy on behalf of potential applicants.
- **Cost barriers and changes in Legal Aid:** Support agencies noted that the fact that victims have to pay to apply for Protective Orders, referencing costs in the region of £100. In addition, they noted that in many cases the individual is having to pay for other Orders and enforcement and this can add up to considerable amounts e.g. to get contact with children. Support agencies noted that there is a lack of the Legal Aid waiver being used (in order to get an Order). One respondent suggested that the changes in accessibility to Legal Aid over the period being examined (2016 – 2024) was the biggest factor in the change in numbers of applications for Protective Orders.
- **Lack of access to legal representation:** Support agencies noted that many solicitors are now not taking any Legal Aid cases and/or any family/civil law matters – *they only deal with private stuff*. As a result, it has become more difficult for an individual to seek application for a Protective Order, and there are regional difficulties because of the lack of access to legal firms who will undertake this type of work. One respondent noted: *so many practices only do private work. We have cases of people having to come to Belfast – example in Coleraine recently*, in order to get a solicitor who would assist in submitting an application for a NMO. Furthermore, they noted that this is difficult for the victim, costly and overbearing in terms of having confidence to travel out of their area etc. In

addition, a lack of childcare and family support were other reasons why it is difficult for women in particular to attend a solicitor, put in an application and attend court.

One respondent suggested that there is only a handful of solicitors (perhaps 6 – 7) across Northern Ireland who are the main ones supporting such applications. Reference was made to Francis Hanna & Co solicitors in Belfast as being involved in the highest number of cases. Reference was also made to changes in ‘family solicitors’ with fewer practices having the specialist knowledge in this area – *there is literally a handful of solicitors and really just one or two firms that do NMOs...this is because they are quite nuanced. The irony is that they are really straightforward – but they are not interested, it is not financially viable for them.* Support agencies noted that this lack of available solicitors/legal practices directly impacts on victims’ ability to get the right advice at the right time to enable making an NMO/OO application – *‘And what victims do is if they can’t get an appointment, they don’t go to another solicitor they walk away.’*

- **Lack of understanding by legal representatives:** Following on from the point about the small number of solicitors now doing this type of work, support agencies also noted that there is a lack of understanding amongst professionals in the legal sector about Protective Orders – including a lag in getting things done, knowing and responding to the *right time to apply for Orders*, understanding and knowledge of Legal Aid in this context. support agencies suggested that these are structural issues in terms of getting traction for an application to be made.
- **Regional variation:** Following on from the above point, support agencies noted that a lack of regional legal practices willing/able to undertake this work results in a very difficult situation if the individual wants to get an *ex parte* NMO where timing is critical. It was suggested that in the past Courts/ Judges would have been more lenient if over the time limit; now – *courts are very tight on the timing... before ex parte was taken as the truth* (what the victim said was accepted) – *but now they are being turned down and they have to go for the full Order. This is very daunting for women – being turned down and has a huge impact on women thinking about making a full application.*
- **Perceived changes in the Court system:** Support agencies made reference to *ex parte* NMO applications, noting: *years ago you could have got it more easily – they were more liberally awarded – but now there’s been a decline.*
- **Supremacy of other bail conditions:** Support agencies noted that the number of applications for NMOs has reduced because bail conditions are more prevalent in

a higher number of related cases; whereby the alleged perpetrator is covered by bail conditions. As a result they said: *Orders (for NMOs) are not being granted because there's bail conditions in place (for another offence).*

Overall support agencies noted an overarching barrier in the system is that the victim has to take the lead in the legal battle for protection. One respondent noted: *there are barriers and blocks everywhere...you have to seek it out yourself and pay for it.*

A further factor identified by one respondent was that during the time period under consideration there has been a reduction in the *broader confidence* (or lack of) *in statutory services and the Criminal Justice system...this is a drip drip....lack of trust in state/ government, authority and more anti-establishment and populist movements.* This respondent noted that potential applicants place consideration of applying for a Protective Order alongside their wider and general experience of the justice process (at present and historically). She noted: *this is often poor – and it affects their confidence in the judicial system – do they want to invest their emotions, their time and relive a traumatic situation by making an application?* This can therefore interconnect to an unwillingness to apply.

What do key support agencies say are the reasons for low levels of applications for OOs in Northern Ireland?

Support agencies noted that in addition to some of the factors noted above in relation to applications for NMOs and *ex parte* NMOs (including cost) three key factors result in low levels of applications for OOs. Firstly, many victims do not want to and have no intention of returning to the home they have left. One respondent noted: *women don't apply for them – their memories are in the house – and they don't want to go back.* A further factor, different to NMOs, is that there is no power of arrest if the OO is breached. Finally, the fact that the applicant has to suggest where the alleged perpetrator should go (out of the house) is a barrier. One respondent asked: *why is it the woman's responsibility to find the address for the man?* In addition, some Support agencies suggested that Judges are reluctant to put OOs in place, with reference to the 'human rights' of the alleged perpetrator. One respondent noted: *they (Judiciary) feel it is really draconian to remove someone from the house.*

What do key Support agencies say about outcomes from applications for Protective Orders?

Support agencies referenced the increased proportion of NMO applications being declined (not granted) and withdrawn, and at the same time the increased proportion being dismissed/refused in Court. Regional variation in this was noted. One respondent said: *Our experience would be what would appear to be very equal*

justification, complexity and warranted applications can have very different outcomes and time frames. If we talk about victim expectations their postcode should not play into someone's ability to access justice or a justice outcome but it is doing.

With reference to cases being withdrawn, support agencies asked whether this was because the applicant no longer wished to proceed or that a criminal charge has superseded the need for an Order? One respondent noted that she does not believe that an individual is withdrawing their application because they feel safer.

What do key Support agencies say about breaches of NMOs and OOs?

In a discussion on the data on levels of imprisonment as a result of a breach of an Order, one respondent suggested that the figure seems higher than the reality, and noted that this may mean only one night or 48-hour period in prison. The main issues raised under this discussion were as follows:

- There is a high level of incidence where a breach of a NMO occurs at the same time as the commission of a more serious offence, accounting for the higher level of imprisonment;
- There was a perception that the No File Decision pilot⁶¹ had had a knock-on effect on police practice with regard to NMO breaches. Whilst the number of NMO breaches recommended as No File Decisions was low, support agencies felt that the policy shift may have resulted in more cases not being counted as a breach in the first place. This was not able to be corroborated, as it was not possible to get data on the number of victim reports of breach that were deemed by the PSNI to not constitute a breach. This is a significant statistical gap as there is no data which represents the victim's view that their NMO, and consequently their safety, has been breached.
- Support agencies suggested that in many of these cases the decision is: *that's not a breach*. They suggested that there is both a lack of understanding of Protective

⁶¹ There is a 'No File Decision' (NFD) pilot currently running in Northern Ireland whereby police are making decisions instead of PPS on whether the evidential threshold has been met in a case. A NFD is made when, after a police investigation, the PSNI determines that the evidence gathered does not meet the "evidential test" (insufficient evidence to bring a successful prosecution) or the "public interest test" (even with sufficient evidence, it's not in the public interest to prosecute).

Data provided by PSNI indicated a total of 28 incidents related to Protective Orders in 2024 where there was a NFD. These were as follows:

- Breach of NMO – 12 and all were dealt with by NFD decision
- Breach of NMO, Breach of restraining Order – 1 dealt with by NFD decision
- Breach of restraining Order – 14 and all were dealt with by NFD decision
- Breach of restraining Order, Common assault – 1 dealt with by NFD decision

PSNI note that there may be further incidents which may have a link to NMOs or OOs which are not recorded under this data heading (HFD) because they are not the primary offence (Home Office Counting Rules).

Orders by PSNI officers and a lack of action when a breach is found. One respondent said: *the answer isn't to make Orders more specific, there needs to be a better understanding and broadening of the term molestation.*

- One respondent noted: *Unrecorded breaches – the Order loses traction. And where breaches are found the outcome is often less than the outcome expected.* This then in turn feeds into the narrative around the usefulness of making such applications;
- Support agencies suggested that the lack of action on breaches and what is deemed to be 'serious' points back to a lack of definition in the Order. There was acknowledgement that whilst this needs to be broad rather than specific as this could mean that certain behaviours are as a consequence left out, there does need to be a situation where action is taken in relation to a breach. Support agencies also noted that certain behaviours may not be seen as an emergency and not perceived as putting the victim at risk (or at risk of serious harm);
- Support agencies suggested that there was also a link between lack of recording and follow-up of breaches and police resources.

What other options exist to provide protection for individuals experiencing domestic abuse/violence?

Option 1

Support agencies suggested that there have been more positive moves (albeit still small-scale) to the use of the law relating to coercive control, since its introduction in 2022⁶². Support agencies noted: *the bail conditions attached to this are tighter – and then there is no need to do the NMO.* However, there was concern that this legal tool was not being used to its full breadth at this stage, and that despite a perceived tightening of bail conditions, the need for NMOs remains, in particular as bail conditions can be easily varied, pulled or indeed ignored, and a victim may not necessarily be informed of any variation. One respondent noted: *it's 'lazy' policing – there is still a lack of understanding of coercive control. The law has come in – but there is a lack of understanding.* Support agencies noted that the number of arrests and convictions relating to coercive control remains very low – *PSNI are noting that it's very hard to find evidence and many incidents are being treated as a one-off.*

⁶² The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 criminalizes coercive control in Northern Ireland. This legislation came into effect on February 21, 2022.

Option 2

Support agencies compared the current system (where the victim has to take the legal lead) to the system of DAPOs⁶³, which are not yet in place in Northern Ireland, whereby it will be the police's role to get the application and the Order in place.

Provision was made for the introduction of additional protective measures in the form of Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) under section 97 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. DVPNs/DVPOs are civil orders that would be available to the police and magistrates' courts respectively, allowing an alleged perpetrator of domestic violence to be immediately removed from the victim's home for up to 48 hours following an incident or threat of violence (through a DVPN) and to be prevented from returning to the home and having contact with the victim for up to 28 days (through a DVPO).

Similar protections have been in place across England and Wales since March 2014 but have not yet been implemented in Northern Ireland, in part as a result of the previous absence of a legislature to bring forward the necessary secondary provisions.

There were some recorded implementation problems with DVPNs and DVPOs in England and Wales, including underuse by some police forces and limited sanctions for breach⁶⁴, and a decision was taken to move to Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and DAPOs. The proposal for Northern Ireland is to introduce these latter measures rather than the original measures⁶⁵. Furthermore the DoJ consultation proposed that it would be a criminal offence to breach a DAPN or DAPO. A magistrates' court would be able to impose a sentence of up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine and the Crown Court up to five years and/or an unlimited fine for a breach of a DAPO. In this consultation DoJ noted: *we consider that it sends a strong message that non-compliance will be taken seriously*. It should be noted that arrangements for DAPNs and DAPOs in Northern Ireland, and how these sit alongside current protection orders including NMOs continue to be a matter of consideration for DoJ alongside PSNI and voluntary sector organisations.

⁶³ DAPO – Domestic Abuse Protection Order. This is a domestic abuse protection order; a civil court order aimed at enhancing the safety of victims of abuse.

⁶⁴ [Domestic abuse protection orders "absolutely pointless" say victims - BBC News](#)

⁶⁵ Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse – A public consultation, Department of Justice, December 2020.

https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/doj/enhancing-legal-protections/user_uploads/consultation-paper-on-dapns-and-dapos---04-12-20-v2.pdf

Option 3

Representatives from Women's Aid made reference to the Women's Aid worker who is co-located in Lisburn police station; this has been in existence for around 15 years. They noted that this was to be replicated in other police stations but lack of funding has been an issue. This staff member is able to provide *direct support to women* – to go to court, to submit an application and to follow-up if a breach of an Order.

Option 4

Support agencies pointed to the need to increase and deepen understanding of Protective Orders and how they could/should work. Reference was made to the need for an expert or champion: *there needs to be advice from within* (within the systems). In addition, the importance of advocacy services and advocates was highlighted, with the suggestion that the approach should be victim-centred, and that they should: *walk through this with the judiciary – the context*. It was suggested that this would help the Judiciary to be: *more alert and understand coercive offences*. Support agencies suggested that advocacy work would be useful to stress the importance of Protective Orders and putting them in place swiftly. *Just like you'd have a legal expert who'd walk you through a legal finance order etc. there is a place for advocates to walk through with judiciary – get them to consider context in which the application is being made – utilising the evidence-based understanding of our sector*. The same respondent noted that one barrier to this was that advocates in the voluntary sector are not seen in the same light as legal professionals. *We could have every letter after our name, but our advice would not be held in the same way advice is held from within the legal sector*.

- 5.3 Women's Aid provided the following anonymised case-studies relating to two of their clients. These real-life stories serve to highlight the difficult position women who have or are experiencing domestic abuse/violence from an alleged perpetrator are in. The case-studies also highlight the type and nature of serious assault they are subjected to, the ongoing and persistent fear that they live in and the potential weaknesses of the Protective Orders (namely NMOs, *ex parte* NMOs and OOs). The situation of breaches of Orders not being recognised or recorded, issues in relation to the nature and timing of PSNI responses and the importance of advocacy services for women are further highlighted.

Sarah's Story

Sarah had been in an abusive relationship for 15 years. She had one son aged 10.

Sarah had been subjected to physical and emotional abuse throughout the relationship often witnessed by her son.

They managed to flee the family home and secure a rental property in a rural area outside Lisburn. Sarah applied for and was granted a NMO which she believed would provide her with added security. As a result of the seriousness of the abuse, Sarah's ex-partner had limited supervised contact with their son.

Sarah attended an event at the local primary school where her son was performing in the end of year concert. Later that evening she received an anonymous text containing a photograph of her son on the stage with the back of her head also visible. Sarah was absolutely terrified and knew immediately that the photograph had been taken by her ex-partner. She called police who attended her address and took a statement. The Duty Sergeant felt that the incident may not 'technically' have met the threshold for a breach of the Order.

The Women's Aid/PSNI Support Worker was informed by Sarah of the ongoing debate and was immediately able to robustly challenge the Duty Sergeant, giving countless examples of the sinister and chilling behaviours displayed by the alleged perpetrator making it highly probable that he had entered the primary school and taken the photograph. This resulted in an arrest of the alleged perpetrator being secured.

Laura's Story

Laura was arrested by one of the Response Officers based in Lisburn station for shoplifting and conveyed to the Custody Suite. Following a conversation with the Women's Aid /PSNI Worker, the Officer was encouraged to look more closely as to the items involved in the theft.

All of the items were of male clothing and one chocolate bar. Following further discussion with Laura, she disclosed that she was forced to shoplift for her partner on a regular basis or be subjected to a physical or sexual assault. She told the Officer she had stolen the chocolate bar for herself and her son.

The Officer was able to pass Laura's details on to the Women's Aid/PSNI Worker who made contact with Laura on her release. Both Laura and her son are now residing in a Women's Aid refuge.

- 5.4 ASSIST NI undertook a dip sample (February 2024) of ten cases they had dealt with where NMO/OO issues had arisen. The anonymised data extracted from case notes is provided below in summary format for eight of these cases. Again these demonstrate similar factors relating to the nature and need for Protective Orders, the issues around applying, and the implementation of the Orders with particular reference to breaches and how these are dealt with.

Client 1

This client had a NMO in place since 2022, following a conviction against the alleged perpetrator for assault. A referral was received after reported repeated breaching of the NMO. The client wants to pursue a charge/prosecution but the incidents were disregarded by PSNI who repeatedly minimised breaches and in the end 'closed her file'.

The client has stated there have been evidenced breaches of NMO but she feels that PSNI have not been taking these seriously. She shared she does not feel policy and procedures are being followed in this jurisdiction compared to England- she particularly referenced not recording calls, and possible breaches of confidentiality regarding her disclosures.

The client has referenced institutionalised attitudinal problems within the PSNI including misogyny, and has said the way she has been treated is disgusting as politically there are already barriers to going through traditional justice in her area. The client was very emotionally heightened and has said she has lost all hope in the Criminal Justice System and is now engaged with the Ombudsman over inaction. Overall this client was very dissatisfied with the PSNI lack of action in relation to breaches of the NMO and that the case had been closed without agreement.

Client 2

This client was subjected to multiple offences; initially domestic related harassment, then assault with related breaches of police bail. Further disclosures were made by the client relating to sexual offences during the relationship including rape.

This case showed complexities owing to overlapping court processes. The client felt well supported by PSNI and the Advocate explaining differences between a NMO and breaches of bail. The PSNI strongly opposed bail and some of the conditions which the defence requested were reduced.

The alleged perpetrator repeatedly presented at the client's address, repeatedly letting himself in and being arrested from the address. The Court however continued to allow bail and refused to restrict his access to the area. Although 'non-contact' conditions were in place, they were repeatedly breached. The alleged perpetrator repeatedly breached post charge bail and was arrested but rereleased by the courts with the same conditions. A NMO was also obtained.

Client 3

In this case there were multiple offences relating to misuse of telecommunications, harassment and stalking. The case was described by the Advocate as the most worrying case she had ever seen as the alleged perpetrator has absolutely no regard for authority or restraint. The case was complicated by the fact that the alleged perpetrator resided in Scotland during some of the abuse but not exclusively.

The alleged perpetrator repeatedly disregarded all bail conditions, Orders and conditions with continual harassment via hundreds and hundreds of emails, messages, letters. The alleged perpetrator was not arrested. PSNI and Police Scotland did take statements but stated, no arrest will be made and at best 'it will be added to the existing breach file'.

In saying this the client was always really appreciative of PSNI engagement and claimed that the Local Policing Team (LPT) were brilliant with her. The case was passed to the Child Protection Team rather than the Public Protection Unit (PPU) which the Advocate believed had an impact on PSNI action. In other concerning aspects of the case, at one stage, the Investigating Officer phoned the client and asked them to decide between an overnight charge or 28-day charge, claiming that the overnight charge would hurt the alleged perpetrator more as he would have to stay remanded until Monday morning. Decisions which a highly traumatised victim should clearly not be making. The matter has now been before the Court; the respondent was charged with 7 x breaches of restraining order and 1 x harassment. At sentencing he was given 2 x suspended sentences but breached immediately, including a further breach of restraining order and was then remanded into custody.

Client 4

This was a long-term client; first supported following a domestic assault and thereafter, for multiple referrals as the alleged perpetrator repeatedly breached the NMO. The client was desolate at the consistent inaction by police and case now sits with The Ombudsman. The client described repeated breaches of NMO but police inaction citing the proximity to which the alleged perpetrator lives to the client being an excusable reason for behaviours, e.g. walking past house, cycling past house etc.

The client stated she contacted 101 and would repeatedly be asked 'why is that a problem?', 'what do you expect to be done' etc. PSNI would take statements and 'try to get' the alleged perpetrator but that they frequently evade arrest and the client feels that arresting him is not a priority.

At one stage five breaches were outstanding and no arrest made. The client suffered significantly with her nerves, physical and mental well-being and still needs someone to stay with her at night-time. The alleged perpetrator was eventually charged, pleaded guilty and received a 5-month custodial sentence.

Client 5

This case was a repeat referral after a possible breach of Order. The original case supported by ASSIST related to the original harassment. After charges brought in relation to harassment, the alleged perpetrator repeatedly makes attempts to engage the client over their children. This constituted an evidencable breach of Restraining Order. PSNI advised they would not take any further action.

The client was very concerned that the PSNI are not taking the complaint further and advised they have 'talked' to the alleged perpetrator who stated he 'just wanted to see his kids' despite not having initiated contact with them in two years. The attending police officer reportedly shared with the client that he 'felt quite bad' for the alleged perpetrator.

The PSNI demonstrated a total lack of understanding around context of abuse. The client made the PSNI aware that she was granted a restraining order as an outcome of trial. The PSNI stated that it was not on the system, and the client proceeded to evidence paper copy. The attending police officer still refused to arrest the alleged perpetrator stating initiation of contact on social media did not constitute harassment (incorrect). The client shared that she is unsure of how this is possible and was told restraining order has arrest powers irrespective of how the alleged perpetrator tries to communicate. No action was taken by PSNI.

Client 6

In this case the client feels let down by the PSNI. There were no updates regarding bail release on two occasions:

- The alleged perpetrator assaulted the client. He was arrested and held on overnight charge. The client was not updated when the alleged perpetrator was released on bail. He immediately breached conditions.
- The alleged perpetrator breached bail conditions and the NMO. He was arrested and held on remand. The client was not updated again when the alleged perpetrator was released on bail and found out this information through a friend.

The client was feeling unsafe and frustrated with the PSNI. The client advised that the investigating police officer had laughed when she mentioned an incident whereby, she was hit by the alleged perpetrator with a spoon. The client feels impacted by the officer's behaviour and understandably reluctant to report incidents mentioned above to him directly.

The client wants to report everything to the PSNI as soon as possible but as mentioned earlier previous dealings with the investigating officer have stopped her doing so.

Client 7

This case highlighted Initial complexities as the PSNI had stated they wanted to make an arrest but did not have clearance to go into the area within which the alleged perpetrator resided (2nd breach). The alleged perpetrator made repeated attempts to contact the client via other parties, particularly relating to the children. The PSNI told the client that contact relating to the children would not constitute a breach (incorrect). The alleged perpetrator was in court on an unrelated matter, was abusive to the client, with a witness and the barrister in court and yet still no additional action was taken.

The PSNI did not arrest him despite outstanding matters and repeated contact with PSNI. Although the NMO was granted and extended for four months. The alleged perpetrator presented at the children's school; initially the PSNI did not attend and when they did, he had obviously left. The alleged perpetrator was in hospital; the PSNI were advised but again did not attend and he was missed again.

The client was repeatedly notified of the alleged perpetrator's location by friends and family, and notified the PSNI repeatedly of same but still not arrested. The investigating police officer began ignoring all calls. The Advocate made dozens of attempts themselves to obtain an update from the investigating police officer over the next 4-month period, but there was no update from the investigating police officer or police Sergeants and no arrest was made.

The case was then raised to Inspector level. The client was then notified that the alleged perpetrator was himself assaulted and despite PSNI engagement again, was not arrested. Threats towards the client continued and there were breaches of family court processes such as supervised contact with children etc.

Eventually the alleged perpetrator attended by appointment with his solicitor. He continued to contact children and attend at the client's home despite the NMO. This was reported repeatedly to the PSNI and no action was taken. The alleged perpetrator repeatedly made threats and reminded the client of the date of the expiry of the NMO and engaged with police around the end date deliberately to frustrate the client and the Court.

At NMO renewal the client was advised by the court that 'she had to wait for him to do something before getting another one'. The client was distraught; in their opinion the alleged perpetrator played the system and it worked. Other matters remain on going with PPS also.

Client 8

The client in this case faced repeated harassment from the alleged perpetrator's family. Despite bail conditions in place not to contact directly or indirectly, the client continued to receive repeated messages and calls from the alleged perpetrator's family regarding the pending court process. They were advised by the Investigating Officer to report all incidents yet on reporting them via 101 and to Officers, repeatedly told 'We can't do anything' and/or advised it does not constitute a breach and/or for the client to change her number etc.

Section 6 Comparative figures and commentary – England and Wales

The incidence and nature of domestic abuse/violence in England and Wales

6.1 The Crime Survey for England and Wales⁶⁶ estimated that 2.3 million people aged 16 years and over (1.6 million women and 712,000 men) experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024. There was no statistically significant change in the prevalence of domestic abuse experienced in the last year, compared with the previous year.

Statistics provided by Safe Lives⁶⁷ indicate that each year more than 75,000 people in the UK are at high and imminent risk of being murdered or seriously injured as a result of domestic abuse.

6.2 The police recorded 851,062 domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales in the year ended March 2024; a decrease compared with the previous year (911,248), which, in part, reflects recent changes in police recording practices. There were 51,183 domestic abuse-related prosecutions in England and Wales in the year ending March 2024, compared with 51,288 to year end March 2023⁶⁸.

Applications for NMOs and OOs

6.3 Despite some fluctuation year on year, the national picture for England and Wales has seen a consistent overall rise in Orders made (referred to as domestic violence remedy applications and Orders) as illustrated by the Chart below. The number of domestic violence remedy order applications decreased slightly by 1% in 2024 compared to the equivalent quarter in 2023, while the number of Orders made increased by 8% over the same period⁶⁹.

In April to June 2024, there were 7,720 domestic violence remedy applications, down by 1% on the same quarter in 2023 requesting a total of 8,864 orders (multiple orders can be applied for in a single application). Most of the orders applied for were non-molestation orders (84%) compared to occupation orders (16%); these proportions have remained relatively consistent in recent years as illustrated by the chart overleaf.

⁶⁶

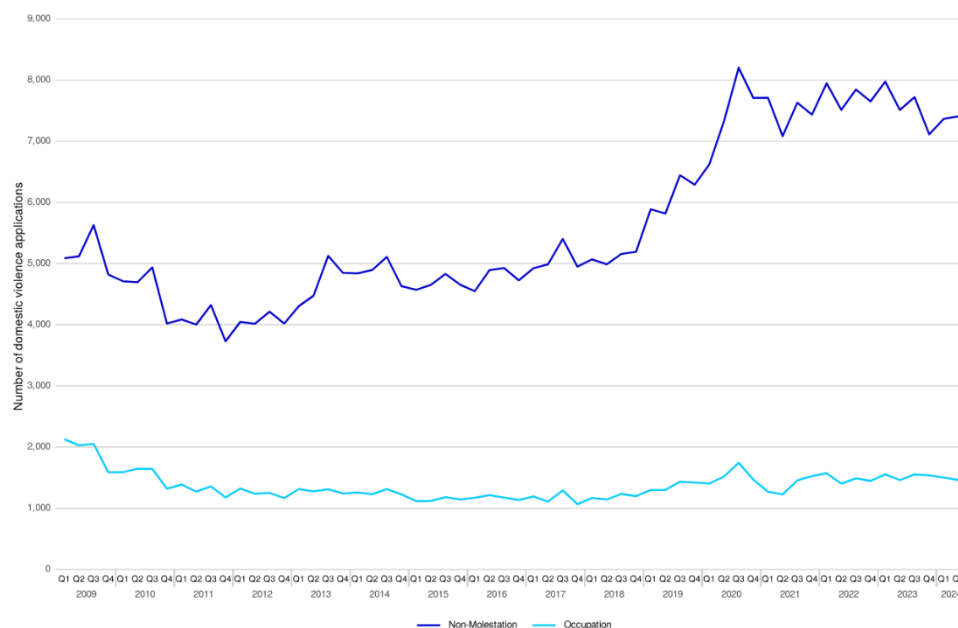
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2024#latest-domestic-abuse-data>

⁶⁷ <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/marac-quarterly-datasets-2023/>

⁶⁸ Data from ONS – see footnote 50.

⁶⁹ Data and information from: Ministry of Justice: Family Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2024 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-court-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024/family-court-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024#domestic-violence-remedy-orders

Applications for domestic violence remedy orders, January to March 2009 to April to June 2024



It is interesting to compare the picture in England and Wales to Northern Ireland. As noted earlier the number and level of applications for NMOs and OOs in Northern Ireland has been steadily decreasing. Whilst the England/Wales figures show some signs of decline since an overall peak in Quarters 2 and 3 of 2020, the overall picture has been one of increasing numbers of applications.

Reasons for this pattern?

- 6.4 The National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV)⁷⁰ commented on this pattern – of an overall increase in applications for domestic violence remedy orders. They noted the following:

In our opinion, more joined up safeguarding arrangements and/or hubs means more families are identified and offered support. Schools, nurseries and further education institutions are doing a good job of training staff and supporting parents/children. Public education and raising awareness continues to remove stigma and increase opportunities for disclosure. MARAC meetings continue to engage local agencies and services, keeping domestic abuse high on their agenda. DARDR arrangements have created a culture of organisational accountability with many reviewing and improving their approach to victim/survivors.

⁷⁰ Email communication with Sharon Bryan, Head of Partnerships and Development, NCDV.

Are there other relevant developments in England and Wales?

6.5 NCDV provided the following commentary on recent developments in England and Wales in relation to domestic violence remedy orders:

The DAPO pilot and potential roll out across England and Wales is likely to be the biggest change to domestic abuse protective orders in recent years. Despite questions remaining, it appears likely that the new orders will benefit victim/survivors in the following ways:

- *Should the DAPO become the 'Go to' Order, as the Government intends, it should simplify the system and make it easier for professionals and victim/survivors to understand and apply for a DAPO because it will replace a range of fairly complex orders in both the criminal and civil courts;*
- *The DAPO falls under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, rather than the Family Law Act, so the threshold for an Order should be easier to reach. Under Family Law, there are thresholds such as time since the last incident, association to the perpetrator, and length of relationship, which blocks many victim/survivors from obtaining legal protection.*
- *The Judge can attach conditions which orders the perpetrator to be tagged or attend programmes.*

There are also questions and concerns about the DAPO, such as:

- *How will the additional conditions, such as ordered uptake of services or tagging, be resourced locally by the time the DAPO ends?*
- *How will breaches be dealt with? Will they be enforced more robustly than at present?*
- *As the DAPO can only be sought in the area in which the perpetrator resides, victim/survivors may need to travel long distances to attend court and be in areas that heighten their risk with no support professionals.*

NCDV noted that they will be taking an active interest in the roll out and progress of the pilot as new court areas join.

Section 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

- 7.1 This research was commissioned by the office of the CVOCNI following concerns highlighted by victims and victim support organisations about possible inconsistencies in terms of the application for and granting of NMOs and OOs. Specific concerns included perceived inconsistencies across the region in the level of applications for Orders, potential concerns raised by solicitors as to the merits of applying, perceived inconsistencies across the region in the level of granting of Protective Orders, and reported concerns about the level and nature of the criminal justice system response when such Orders are breached.
- 7.2 The overarching aim of this research study was as follows:
To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the application for, and granting of, NMOs and OOs across Northern Ireland between 2016 and 2024.

The agreed research objectives were to:

1. Analyse application rates and granting patterns for NMOs and OOs across different court areas;
2. Identify any regional (by court area) and annual variances in the application and granting of these Orders;
3. Analyse reporting rates of breaches of NMOs / OOs, including any repeated breaches where known;
4. Identify any regional and annual variances in the rate of prosecution, conviction and what outcomes resulted.

Context and background

- 7.3 This research took into account the wider context and background in relation to domestic violence, including legislation⁷¹, recent Judicial Reviews, the position in terms of Legal Aid and relevant policy documentation and reviews⁷². In addition, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on factors such as crime levels, and in particular crime/incidents relating to domestic abuse, and the impact of the pandemic on the operation of the courts and sentencing was also taken into account.

⁷¹ Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998
Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021

⁷² DOJ 2024 Review of Civil Legal Aid www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/justice/Call%20for%20Evidence%20-%20Civil%20Society.pdf
https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/216941969/FINAL_DoJ_CLA_Report_2.12.24.pdf

- 7.4 A key starting point for the research study was the underlying level and nature of domestic abuse/violence in Northern Ireland, as a precursor for the need for NMOs and OOs.

Analysis of available PSNI data indicated that the total number of domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland by year increased in the research study period (2015-16 to 2023-24) by 15.4%, albeit that there was some fluctuation during that time period, including small decreases between years on three occasions.

At the same time the number of domestic abuse crimes showed an overall percentage increase over the period of 41.9%⁷³.

The research concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic may have had some impact on figures, including a massive increase in the incidence of domestic abuse during the Covid-19 timeframe, together with the levels of recorded domestic abuse.

The research highlighted the incidence of homicides with a domestic abuse motivation, as recorded by the PSNI, providing a timely reminder on the need for consideration of this topic.

- 7.5 A further important area of context related to the changes in Counting Rules implemented by the Home Office, and then adopted by the PSNI. These changes meant that only one incident is recorded by the police – namely what is deemed to be the most serious crime, via the ‘Principal Crime Rule’, rather than the prior system whereby two crime incidents could be recorded when a victim made a report to the police.

The research also noted that not all domestic abuse incidents (as recorded by the PSNI) will result in the recording of a crime, as what has occurred in the incident may not be of the level of severity that would result in a crime being recorded⁷⁴ or may not fall into the classification of a specific offence.

- 7.6 Overall taking into account the overall picture of increasing occurrence/incidence of abuse incidents and domestic abuse crimes, the research study noted that it would be reasonable to assume that this might have an impact on the number/level of applications for Protective Orders and/or the outcomes in relation to breaches of Orders.

⁷³ A 10% decrease in the period 2022/24 to 2023/24 is linked to the changes in Home Office counting rules.

⁷⁴ Where crimes with a domestic abuse motivation are recorded, they are classified according to the Home Office Counting Rules and form a subset of the overall police recorded crime statistics.

Conclusions – Quantitative Data Analysis

7.7 Through analysis of quantitative data this research study found that there has been a 28% decrease in people applying for NMOs (2,006 to 1,443 in the time period 2016 to 2024), and a 39% decrease in *ex parte* NMO applications (2,145 to 1,300), in the same period when there has been a 42% increase in reported domestic abuse crimes (since 2015 – 2016). The total number of OO applications was very small and remained relative stable for the period 2016 to 2024, ranging from 43 to 48 applications per year. Analysis of the figures also pointed to considerable variation across the nineteen courts in terms of the rate of decline in applications.

7.8 The study noted that it is difficult to be conclusive on the basis of one-dimensional figures, without cross-referencing for example the application patterns to population numbers for the court areas/locations and/or cross-referencing to the level of reported domestic abuse/violence incidents and crimes in those areas. This was not possible within the parameters of this study and/or with the data available.

However, a number of conclusions were noted as follows:

- It is interesting to note that whilst the domestic abuse/violence figures show an increase in incidence across Northern Ireland, there is a contradictory and unexplained decrease in the number of applications for Protective Orders. This is particularly pronounced for the *ex parte* NMOs. It brings forward the question – why would fewer people apply for a Protective Order, when the need for Protective Orders is increasing?
- It is also interesting to note that the decline in applications (for all three types of Orders but mainly the NMOs and *ex parte* NMOs) is at different rates with some courts showing significant reductions in the number of applications both in actual terms (numbers) and comparative terms (percentage). This raises the question – why would the number and proportion of applications for Protective Orders be declining at different rates in different areas/Courts?

7.9 The quantitative analysis found that there are significant regional disparities and granting rates across court areas with an overall regional decrease of 8% in NMOs granted and 9% of *ex parte* NMOs granted. In addition, there was an increase in the proportion of applications that were dismissed/refused or where the application was withdrawn. In summary, the proportion of NMOs granted was 41% of all outcomes in 2016; by 2024 this had reduced to 33%. In a similar pattern, as a proportion of the possible outcomes, *ex parte* NMOs granted was 82% of all outcomes in 2016; by 2024 this had reduced to 73%.

7.10 Analysis of PPS data indicated a steady decline in the number of files received by the PPS in relation to a breach of an NMO. In addition, data analysis showed that in overall terms the number which proceed to prosecution or other type of diversion

has steadily declined in the 9-year period from 463 in 2016 to 261 in 2024 (a decrease in numbers of 44%). In addition, the overall numbers where there is no prosecution has also fallen (from 270 to 135). It can be assumed that these declines relate directly to the decrease in overall numbers of files received in relation to a breach of an NMO. In the majority of cases the reason for no prosecution related to the case not passing the evidential test, with much smaller numbers related to the case not passing the public interest test.

It should be noted that we had hoped to look at more detailed information including typical court sentences for breaches of NMOs and OOs by court area. However, this more granular detail was not available⁷⁵.

- 7.11 Data relating to outcomes for breaches of NMOs indicated a reduction in the total number of cases being prosecuted over the time period (460 to 333), and that there has been a reduction in the actual numbers of some outcomes and their proportionate use e.g. community sentence, discharge, monetary penalty and suspended custodial have all declined. In contrast whilst the actual numbers have not increased significantly, the relative proportionality in terms of outcomes has increased for the outcome of: not guilty/acquittal (from 15% in 2016 to 20% in 2024) and there was an increase in the level of imprisonment (13% to 19% in the same time period).

Conclusions – Qualitative Data Analysis

- 7.12 Through analysis of qualitative data this research study explored the quantitative trends outlined above. The reasons for reductions in applications for NMOs and *ex parte* NMOs, despite the fact that domestic abuse and domestic violence incidents and crimes have increased are multi-faceted and complex. A number of structural, system-wide and societal barriers were identified through respondent engagement including:
- The changing narrative and perceived value of Protective Orders, with victims potentially viewing them as ineffective in preventing any reoccurrence (of abuse etc.) and/or of responding to any abuse or a breach of the NMO. It was suggested that this narrative has changed over the last 8 – 9 years, albeit that some variables have remained steady. They suggested that this was due to much more detailed information and exposure of cases via the media, social media and online, in particular in the last five years;
 - That victims and victim support organisations believe that the nature of Protective Orders have been diluted in strength and this has led directly to a reduction in the number of applications;

⁷⁵ PPS noted that it is not possible to provide a breakdown by court area as files are not categorised in that way when received by PPS. In addition, this is not possible as a suspect can appear at more than one court venue as a case progresses.

- That there may be an inconsistent approach by the PSNI with reference to cases of police actively dissuading victims from applying;
- That the vulnerability of the potential applicant is an interconnected factor; that is the vulnerable nature/position of the potential applicant, and how it takes a significant step on their part to make an application. Furthermore, it was noted that if the application does not result in an Order and/or if a breach of an Order is not followed up this results in further reducing the perceived value of Protective Orders;
- That changes in the Legal Aid system including cost and accessibility is a key issue in the change in numbers of applications for Protective Orders;
- That there is a lack of access to legal representation, with a reduced number and availability of solicitors taking Legal Aid cases and/or any family/civil law cases, and with limited regional coverage. All of this results in a situation which may be difficult for the victim, costly and overbearing in terms of having confidence to travel out of their area etc. In addition, a lack of childcare and family support were other reasons why it is difficult for women in particular to attend a solicitor, put in an application and attend court;
- That there is a lack of understanding amongst professionals in the legal sector about Protective Orders – including a lag in getting things done, knowing and responding to the *right time to apply for Orders*, understanding and knowledge of Legal Aid in this context;
- That there are perceived changes in the Court system and how Protective Orders are awarded;
- That bail conditions are more prevalent, whereby the alleged perpetrator is covered by bail conditions (for another offence), therefore having a downward push on the number of applications for NMOs.

7.13 The reasons for low levels of applications for OOs included the factors noted above; in addition three further factors were identified. These related to the victim having no intention of returning to the home, that there is no power of arrest if the OO is breached, and the fact that the applicant has to suggest where the alleged perpetrator should go, if they (the victim) get access to return to the home under the Order.

7.14 Based on feedback from Support agencies, the study noted the increased proportion of NMO applications being declined (not granted) and withdrawn, and at the same time the increased proportion being dismissed/refused in Court. Regional variation in this was also noted.

7.15 Feedback on the outcomes from breaches of NMOs and OOs highlighted that a large proportion of breaches fall into 'No file decisions'. In these cases, the incident is

recorded as a breach but the outcome is not to prosecute, with the decision being made by the PSNI. These cases are not taken forward to the PPS. Support agencies suggested that in many of these cases the decision is: *that's not a breach*. They suggested that there is both a lack of understanding of Protective Orders by PSNI officers and a lack of action when a breach is found. Qualitative feedback on this lack of action indicated that this in part results in Protective Orders losing traction, and has a cumulative impact on victims and whether they see any merit in applying for Orders. Support agencies also suggested that there was a link between lack of recording and follow-up of breaches and police resources.

- 7.16 Case-studies provided by both Assist NI and Women's Aid highlighted many of the points and factors outlined in this study, from the perspective of the victim, and served to illustrate the inter-connections and cumulative effect of victims seeking legal redress in order to protect themselves and their families.
- 7.17 In addition a number of other existing options were noted which could be further utilised or expanded. These included the use of the law relating to coercive control, the need for the introduction of the system of DAPOs which exists in England and Wales and is due for introduction in Northern Ireland, the positive interconnection between personnel from victims support organisation directly working alongside the PSNI and opportunities to increase and deepen understanding of Protective Orders amongst the Judiciary and the potential for a champion or advocates.

Recommendations

- 7.18 This research study has highlighted the incidence and use of Protective Orders in Northern Ireland over the last nine years (2016 – 2024), looking firstly at the numbers of applications, outcomes and breaches, and then secondly from more qualitative perspective thinking about victims' experience of Protective Orders.
- 7.19 The study highlights some further questions which urgently require further examination if victims of domestic abuse/violence are to be protected from their perpetrator. These are outlined below as recommendations arising from this research.

Recommendation 1

The DoJ, PSNI, PPS and NICTS should review existing data collection practice regarding Protective Orders to ensure the statistics accurately capture the prevalence of applications for and granting/refusing of NMOs, instances of breach and detailed mapping of justice outcomes. Gaps in data, including instances of victim allegations of breach vs breaches recorded by PSNI, and typical sentences for those convicted of breach, should be resolved. Agencies should work together to create datasets which

are complementary and measure the effectiveness of NMOs and victim confidence in NMOs as a safety and justice tool.

Recommendation 2

Further research should be carried out to ascertain why numbers of applications, numbers of recorded breaches, and numbers of convictions for breaches of NMOs have decreased in spite of reports of domestic abuse incidents and crimes to police having risen over the same time period. This research should establish the wider context in which domestic abuse victims in NI seek support and the interplay between NMOs and the usage of other Protective Orders, the availability of legal aid, the accessibility of appropriate expert legal services, and the provision of advocacy and support for victims. The aim of a further qualitative study should include to seek viable solutions to ensure NMOs are an effective tool in safeguarding victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

Appendix 1 Available Data for purposes of project

The following data was requested and provided for the purposes of this research project.

Data from NICTS/ICOS

- The number of applications made (for NMOs and OOs)
- The number of Orders granted
- The timescale for Orders granted (in weeks)
- The number of *ex parte* applications made (for NMOs) and number granted
- The number of applications to extend/discharge/vary occupation for NMOs

This data was provided by calendar year (2016 – 2024) and by Court/Region.

Data from PSNI

- The number of reported breaches of NMOs and OOs
- The subsequent actions (if any) for breaches of NMOs. These will be recorded in full, and then categorised
- The number of breaches that lead to the actions and sentences noted in the questions above.

This data was provided by calendar year (2016 – 2024) and by PSNI District.

Appendix 2 List of courts Northern Ireland

Civil & Criminal Courts – only civil matters marked with *

Laganside Court, Belfast
Newtownards Court Office
Downpatrick Court Office
Craigavon Court Office
Armagh Court Office
Banbridge at Newry Court Office
Omagh Court Office
Strabane Court Office
Antrim Court Office
Londonderry Court Office
Enniskillen Court Office
Coleraine Court Office
Newry Court Office
Limavady Court Office
Magherafelt Court Office
Ballymena Court Office
Bangor Court Office⁷⁶
Larne Court Office⁷⁷
Lisburn Court Office
Dungannon Court Office
Office of Care & Protection *⁷⁸

⁷⁶ The work of Bangor Court Office was subsumed into Newtownards Court Office during the data period.

⁷⁷ The work of Larne Court Office was subsumed into Ballymena/Antrim Court Offices during the data period.

⁷⁸ The Office of Care and Protection is a civil office in the High Court which looks after the interests of patients who, through mental disorder, are deemed incapable of managing their financial affairs. Orders can be made in this court in order to protect the interests of the vulnerable person. However, it would not be the appropriate forum if an Order was breached as it then becomes a criminal matter prosecuted in the criminal court.

[Information about the Office of Care and Protection](#)

Appendix 3 Detailed tables for analysis

Table 1: Total applications for non-molestation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024⁷⁹

Court	Years								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 P ⁸⁰
Laganside Courts	712	697	726	713	409	643	407	387	290
Newtownards Court Office	215	256	211	194	158	269	222	195	156
Downpatrick Court Office	59	79	49	51	31	79	49	59	60
Craigavon Court Office	104	69	70	43	53	101	75	76	81
Armagh Court Office	53	47	38	34	12	21	12	7	14
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	36	31	23	15	11	25	7	8	13
Omagh Court Office	29	41	31	18	23	61	43	18	30
Strabane Court Office	30	37	28	47	23	23	26	21	31
Antrim Court Office	53	44	47	32	42	40	27	41	14
Londonderry Court Office	221	152	118	133	174	232	137	153	175
Enniskillen Court Office	29	36	39	29	13	32	26	18	37
Coleraine Court Office	82	67	51	61	83	97	74	82	74
Newry Court Office	157	170	152	122	95	176	203	209	207
Limavady Court Office	1	4	12	7	3	5	0	1	1
Magherafelt Court Office	13	25	9	7	1	1	3	2	1
Ballymena Court Office	130	155	85	89	92	134	131	112	98
Lisburn Court Office	16	77	142	118	131	159	120	126	115
Dungannon Court Office	42	61	31	35	87	101	91	81	35
Office of Care & Protection	24	24	9	17	8	11	10	5	11
TOTAL⁸¹	2006	2072	1871	1765	1449	2210	1663	1601	1443

Source: ICOS

⁷⁹ Note: Type of application based on first Order sought and recorded on ICOS.

⁸⁰ 2024 figures are provisional – marked as P*

⁸¹ Totals in all tables in Appendix 3 – percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2: Total applications for *ex parte* non-molestation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024⁸²

Court	Years								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 P*
Laganside Courts	794	882	824	659	487	498	403	307	280
Newtownards Court Office	190	207	159	176	181	221	220	168	153
Downpatrick Court Office	60	81	65	43	53	61	56	85	62
Craigavon Court Office	77	82	70	29	63	84	54	52	59
Armagh Court Office	42	55	31	31	19	25	10	9	14
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	39	29	20	24	17	31	15	18	9
Omagh Court Office	39	38	33	14	33	56	40	17	20
Strabane Court Office	26	40	39	51	20	20	35	30	32
Antrim Court Office	57	35	56	42	37	37	45	33	13
Londonderry Court Office	165	125	128	145	163	164	122	151	138
Enniskillen Court Office	35	50	43	31	28	31	25	29	41
Coleraine Court Office	74	81	58	67	126	112	99	94	73
Newry Court Office	109	106	109	86	101	112	168	212	152
Limavady Court Office	5	16	10	8	4	2	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	20	14	11	10	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	204	176	93	91	102	141	120	117	96
Lisburn Court Office	149	204	151	121	225	148	126	116	105
Dungannon Court Office	40	33	24	35	123	107	96	82	44
Office of Care & Protection	20	14	8	13	9	23	21	21	9
TOTAL	2145	2268	1932	1676	1791	1873	1655	1541	1300

Source: ICOS

⁸² Note: Type of application based on first Order sought and recorded on ICOS.

Table 3: Total applications for Occupation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024⁸³

Court	Years								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 P*
Laganside Courts	10	14	15	21	12	6	12	13	16
Newtownards Court Office	8	11	6	10	1	9	3	10	9
Downpatrick Court Office	1	2	0	1	2	5	1	0	0
Craigavon Court Office	3	1	3	3	5	1	5	3	4
Armagh Court Office	1	0	4	3	0	0	1	0	0
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Omagh Court Office	0	5	4	2	1	4	0	0	1
Strabane Court Office	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Antrim Court Office	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Londonderry Court Office	3	2	1	1	2	3	3	5	0
Enniskillen Court Office	3	0	2	0	1	0	2	2	3
Coleraine Court Office	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	4	1
Newry Court Office	3	6	5	3	2	3	2	3	4
Limavady Court Office	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	3	2	0	3	1	5	0	0	1
Lisburn Court Office	4	7	2	0	7	4	7	2	3
Dungannon Court Office	6	3	2	0	2	5	1	1	0
Office of Care & Protection	0	4	1	3	2	0	0	2	0
TOTAL	48	60	47	50	40	45	40	46	43

Source: ICOS

⁸³ Note: Type of application based on first Order sought and recorded on ICOS.

Table 4: Total outcomes for applications for non-molestation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Laganside Courts	Granted	259	36	232	33	257	35	238	33	147	36	239	37	187	46	177	46	156	54
	Dismissed/refused	47	7	47	7	44	6	53	7	58	14	62	10	27	7	37	10	39	13
	Withdrawn	149	21	119	17	148	20	158	22	171	42	282	44	150	37	134	35	80	28
	Varied/discharged	256	36	291	42	264	36	260	36	20	5	26	4	41	10	37	9	13	5
	Other	1	<1	8	1	13	2	4	1	13	3	34	5	2	<1	2	1	2	1
	TOTAL	712	100	697	100	726	99	713	99	409	100	643	100	407	100	387	101	290	101
Newtownards Court Office	Granted	91	42	87	34	91	43	77	40	56	35	83	31	82	37	69	35	50	32
	Dismissed/refused	19	9	15	6	11	5	6	4	8	5	13	5	5	2	12	6	6	4
	Withdrawn	66	31	78	30	43	20	52	27	45	28	68	25	57	26	46	24	41	26
	Varied/discharged	39	18	74	29	66	31	59	30	49	31	105	39	78	35	68	35	59	38
	Other	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	215	100	256	100	211	99	194	101	158	99	269	100	222	100	195	100	156	100
Downpatrick Court Office	Granted	26	44	21	27	6	12	10	20	7	23	16	20	6	12	19	32	11	18
	Dismissed/refused	14	24	5	6	3	6	2	4	0	0	6	8	2	4	2	3	1	2
	Withdrawn	18	30	27	34	25	51	10	20	9	29	27	34	15	31	7	12	20	33
	Varied/discharged	1	2	26	33	15	31	29	57	15	48	30	38	26	53	31	53	27	45
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
	TOTAL	59	100	79	100	49	100	51	101	31	100	79	100	49	100	59	100	60	100
Craigavon Court Office	Granted	49	47	22	32	28	40	12	28	17	32	43	43	23	31	20	26	27	33
	Dismissed/refused	23	22	16	23	15	21	7	16	4	7	7	7	14	19	24	32	8	10
	Withdrawn	24	23	29	42	23	33	21	49	20	38	31	31	32	43	30	39	31	38
	Varied/discharged	8	8	2	3	4	6	3	7	11	21	19	19	4	5	2	3	12	15
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	2	3	0	0	3	4
	TOTAL	104	100	69	100	70	100	43	100	53	100	101	101	75	101	76	100	81	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Armagh Court Office	Granted	31	58	11	23	13	34	14	41	3	25	4	19	5	42	2	29	4	29
	Dismissed/refused	8	15	5	11	3	8	2	6	0	0	1	5	0	0	1	14	0	0
	Withdrawn	13	25	19	40	20	53	14	41	4	33	7	33	6	50	2	29	6	43
	Varied/discharged	1	2	12	26	2	5	4	12	5	42	9	43	1	8	2	29	4	29
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	53	100	47	100	38	100	34	100	12	100	21	100	12	100	7	101	14	101
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	Granted	14	39	17	55	7	30	8	53	5	45	1	4	2	29	2	25	6	46
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	6	19	0	0	1	7	0	0	3	12	1	14	0	0	2	15
	Withdrawn	22	61	7	23	11	48	4	27	1	9	9	36	3	43	6	75	1	8
	Varied/discharged	0	0	1	3	5	22	2	13	5	45	12	48	1	14	0	0	4	31
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	36	100	31	100	23	100	15	100	11	99	25	100	7	100	8	100	13	100
Omagh Court Office	Granted	10	34	12	29	7	22	5	28	9	39	15	25	13	30	4	22	8	27
	Dismissed/refused	7	24	14	34	8	26	2	11	3	13	11	18	8	19	5	28	9	30
	Withdrawn	12	41	15	37	16	52	11	61	11	48	32	52	16	37	9	50	10	33
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	6	14	0	0	2	7
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
	TOTAL	29	99	41	100	31	100	18	100	23	100	61	100	43	100	18	100	30	100
Strabane Court Office	Granted	14	47	7	19	13	46	24	51	4	17	7	30	10	38	4	19	11	35
	Dismissed/refused	9	30	11	30	4	14	12	26	6	26	8	35	8	31	2	10	8	26
	Withdrawn	7	23	18	49	11	39	10	21	13	57	8	35	6	23	14	67	8	26
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	4	13
	Other	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0
	TOTAL	30	100	37	101	28	99	47	100	23	100	23	100	26	100	21	101	31	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Antrim Court Office	Granted	23	43	11	25	16	34	14	44	14	33	14	35	7	26	12	29	5	36
	Dismissed/refused	20	38	17	39	9	19	6	19	16	38	19	48	11	41	23	56	8	57
	Withdrawn	9	17	16	36	19	40	12	38	9	21	6	15	8	30	5	12	1	7
	Varied/discharged	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	1	3	1	4	1	2	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	3	6	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	53	100	44	100	47	99	32	101	42	99	40	101	27	101	41	99	14	100
Londonderry Court Office	Granted	95	43	56	37	35	30	49	37	55	32	83	36	47	34	44	29	50	29
	Dismissed/refused	34	15	38	25	29	25	21	16	29	17	39	17	31	23	31	20	16	9
	Withdrawn	91	41	55	36	50	42	63	47	79	45	69	30	45	33	70	46	86	49
	Varied/discharged	1	<1	2	1	3	3	0	0	10	6	40	17	12	9	8	5	22	13
	Other	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	<1	2	1	0	0	1	1
	TOTAL	221	99	152	100	118	101	133	100	174	101	232	100	137	100	153	100	175	101
Enniskillen Court Office	Granted	15	52	9	25	11	28	9	31	4	31	13	41	7	27	6	33	10	27
	Dismissed/refused	2	7	4	11	1	3	8	28	4	31	6	19	10	38	8	44	18	49
	Withdrawn	12	41	22	61	26	67	12	41	5	38	11	34	5	19	2	11	7	19
	Varied/discharged	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	6	3	12	1	6	2	5
	Other	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	6	0	0
	TOTAL	29	100	36	100	39	101	29	100	13	100	32	100	26	100	18	100	37	100
Coleraine Court Office	Granted	38	46	22	33	20	39	20	33	22	27	18	19	12	16	31	38	17	23
	Dismissed/refused	28	34	16	24	13	25	28	46	32	39	15	15	11	15	27	33	11	15
	Withdrawn	14	17	26	39	11	22	12	20	7	8	24	25	26	35	7	9	12	16
	Varied/discharged	2	2	0	0	2	4	1	2	22	27	40	41	25	34	17	21	34	46
	Other	0	0	3	4	5	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	82	99	67	100	51	100	61	101	83	101	97	100	74	100	82	101	74	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Newry Court Office	Granted	68	43	55	32	50	33	44	36	21	22	43	24	59	29	68	33	54	26
	Dismissed/refused	11	7	20	12	12	8	10	8	8	8	14	8	14	7	21	10	25	12
	Withdrawn	54	34	51	30	47	31	28	23	28	29	61	35	78	38	80	38	72	35
	Varied/discharged	24	15	44	26	43	28	40	33	38	40	58	33	52	26	40	19	56	27
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	157	99	170	100	152	100	122	100	95	99	176	100	203	100	209	100	207	100
Limavady Court Office	Granted	1	100	2	50	4	33	3	43	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	2	17	2	29	1	33	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	2	50	3	25	2	29	0	0	1	20	0	0	1	100	1	100
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33	3	60	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	3	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	1	100	4	100	12	100	7	101	3	99	5	100	0	0	1	100	1	100
Magherafelt Court Office	Granted	7	54	10	40	4	44	3	43	0	0	0	0	2	67	0	0	1	100
	Dismissed/refused	1	8	3	12	3	33	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	5	38	12	48	2	22	3	43	1	100	1	100	1	33	2	100	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	13	100	25	100	9	99	7	100	1	100	1	100	3	100	2	100	1	100
Ballymena Court Office	Granted	49	38	49	32	29	34	23	26	26	28	38	28	33	25	38	34	32	33
	Dismissed/refused	62	48	72	46	27	32	32	36	44	48	57	43	36	27	56	50	53	54
	Withdrawn	12	9	32	21	24	28	31	35	20	22	21	16	47	36	13	12	11	11
	Varied/discharged	7	5	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	18	13	14	11	5	4	2	2
	Other	0	0	1	1	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	130	100	155	101	85	100	89	100	92	100	134	100	131	100	112	100	98	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Lisburn Court Office	Granted	1	6	30	39	34	24	15	13	25	19	26	16	11	9	19	15	16	14
	Dismissed/refused	4	25	33	43	48	34	34	29	14	11	33	21	31	26	39	31	38	33
	Withdrawn	8	50	7	10	14	10	12	10	15	11	21	13	12	10	15	12	17	15
	Varied/discharged	3	19	6	8	46	32	57	48	77	59	79	50	66	55	53	42	44	38
	Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	16	100	77	101	142	100	118	100	131	100	159	100	120	100	126	100	115	100
Dungannon Court Office	Granted	17	40	25	41	8	26	14	40	29	33	28	28	14	15	30	37	15	43
	Dismissed/refused	8	19	11	18	10	32	6	17	28	32	32	32	29	32	32	40	10	29
	Withdrawn	17	40	24	39	12	39	15	43	29	33	37	37	39	43	17	21	10	29
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	6	7	2	2	0	0
	Other	0	0	1	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	42	99	61	100	31	100	35	100	87	99	101	101	91	100	81	100	35	101
Office of Care & Protection	Granted	9	38	8	33	2	22	6	35	2	25	5	45	4	40	3	60	1	9
	Dismissed/refused	2	8	0	0	2	22	1	6	2	25	0	0	0	0	1	20	3	27
	Withdrawn	12	50	15	63	4	44	10	59	4	50	5	45	6	60	1	20	7	64
	Varied/discharged	1	4	1	4	1	11	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	24	100	24	100	9	99	17	100	8	100	11	99	10	100	5	100	11	100
TOTAL	Granted	817	41	686	33	635	34	588	33	447	31	676	31	524	32	548	34	474	33
	Dismissed/refused	299	15	333	16	244	13	234	13	257	18	327	15	238	14	321	20	255	18
	Withdrawn	545	27	574	28	509	27	480	27	471	27	721	33	552	33	461	29	421	29
	Varied/discharged	344	17	461	22	453	24	458	26	258	26	449	20	338	20	267	17	285	20
	Other	1	<1	18	1	30	2	5	<1	16	1	37	2	11	1	4	<1	8	1
	TOTAL	2006	100	2072	100	1871	100	1765	99	1449	101	2210	101	1663	100	1601	100	1443	101

Source: ICOS

Table 5: Total outcomes for applications for *ex parte* non-molestation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Laganside Courts	Granted	724	91	774	88	759	92	558	85	249	51	368	74	186	46	160	52	165	59
	Dismissed/refused	64	8	95	11	56	7	94	14	229	47	129	26	212	53	141	46	108	39
	Withdrawn	4	1	5	1	2	<1	4	1	3	1	1	<1	2	<1	5	2	2	1
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	1	<1	1	<1	4	1	0	0	2	<1	1	<1	2	1
	Other	2	<1	8	1	6	1	2	<1	2	<1	0	0	1	<1	0	0	3	1
	TOTAL	794	100	882	101	824	100	659	100	487	100	498	100	403	99	307	100	280	101
Newtownards Court Office	Granted	171	90	173	84	139	87	150	85	141	78	173	78	180	82	122	73	118	77
	Dismissed/refused	17	9	33	16	20	13	25	14	35	19	47	21	40	18	44	26	33	22
	Withdrawn	2	1	1	<1	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	<1	0	0	1	1	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	190	100	207	100	159	100	176	100	181	100	221	99	220	100	168	101	153	100
Downpatrick Court Office	Granted	55	92	71	88	52	80	35	81	37	70	44	72	43	77	65	76	46	74
	Dismissed/refused	3	5	9	11	11	17	4	9	14	26	17	28	7	13	10	12	8	13
	Withdrawn	2	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	4	0	0	2	4	3	4	3	5
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	7	0	0	0	0	4	7	7	8	5	8
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	60	100	81	100	65	101	43	99	53	100	61	100	56	101	85	100	62	100
Craigavon Court Office	Granted	50	65	53	65	34	49	19	66	44	70	61	73	33	61	27	52	45	76
	Dismissed/refused	19	25	21	26	33	47	10	34	14	22	22	26	20	37	19	37	8	14
	Withdrawn	4	5	8	10	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	6	2	3
	Varied/discharged	3	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	5	8	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
	Other	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	4	7
	TOTAL	77	100	82	101	70	100	29	100	63	100	84	100	54	100	52	101	59	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Armagh Court Office	Granted	40	95	49	89	28	90	25	81	13	68	18	72	9	90	9	100	12	86
	Dismissed/refused	2	5	3	5	3	10	4	13	6	32	7	28	1	10	0	0	1	7
	Withdrawn	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	2	4	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	42	100	55	100	31	100	31	100	19	100	25	100	10	100	9	100	14	100
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	Granted	34	87	27	93	19	95	22	92	13	76	19	61	12	80	15	83	9	100
	Dismissed/refused	5	13	2	7	1	5	2	8	4	24	12	39	1	7	3	17	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	13	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	39	100	29	100	20	100	24	100	17	100	31	100	15	100	18	100	9	100
Omagh Court Office	Granted	25	64	28	74	17	52	7	50	29	88	41	73	23	58	10	59	14	70
	Dismissed/refused	13	33	9	24	14	42	7	50	4	12	13	23	16	40	7	41	5	25
	Withdrawn	1	3	1	3	2	6	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	3	0	0	1	5
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	39	100	38	101	33	100	14	100	33	100	56	100	40	100	17	100	20	100
Strabane Court Office	Granted	21	81	35	88	34	87	48	94	12	60	16	80	23	66	23	77	27	84
	Dismissed/refused	5	19	5	13	4	10	1	2	8	40	4	20	12	34	7	23	4	13
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	26	100	40	101	39	100	51	100	20	100	20	100	35	100	30	100	32	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Antrim Court Office	Granted	51	89	31	89	43	77	37	88	35	95	29	78	31	69	23	70	7	54
	Dismissed/refused	4	7	4	11	13	23	5	12	2	5	8	22	14	31	10	30	6	46
	Withdrawn	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	57	100	35	100	56	100	42	100	37	100	37	100	45	100	33	100	13	100
Londonderry Court Office	Granted	148	90	111	89	114	89	138	95	131	80	119	73	97	80	133	88	112	81
	Dismissed/refused	9	5	8	6	9	7	5	3	30	18	42	26	23	19	18	12	25	18
	Withdrawn	5	3	6	5	5	4	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	2	0	0	1	1
	Varied/discharged	3	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	165	100	125	100	128	100	145	100	163	99	164	101	122	101	151	100	138	100
Enniskillen Court Office	Granted	26	74	45	90	37	86	30	97	22	79	25	81	21	84	20	69	36	88
	Dismissed/refused	8	23	5	10	6	14	1	3	6	21	6	19	3	12	9	31	5	12
	Withdrawn	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	35	100	50	100	43	100	31	100	28	100	31	100	25	100	29	100	41	100
Coleraine Court Office	Granted	50	68	47	58	46	79	49	73	106	84	81	72	65	66	75	80	57	78
	Dismissed/refused	22	30	28	35	12	21	16	24	19	15	31	28	33	33	19	20	16	22
	Withdrawn	2	3	5	6	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	74	101	81	100	58	100	67	99	126	100	112	100	99	100	94	100	73	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Newry Court Office	Granted	87	80	87	82	88	81	74	86	77	76	74	66	132	79	184	87	118	78
	Dismissed/refused	19	17	17	16	19	17	11	13	20	20	37	33	33	20	23	11	30	20
	Withdrawn	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	2	1
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	1	1	3	2	0	0	2	1
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	109	100	106	100	109	100	86	100	101	100	112	100	168	100	212	100	152	100
Limavady Court Office	Granted	5	100	7	44	7	70	7	88	3	75	1	50	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	5	31	3	30	1	13	1	25	1	50	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	4	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	5	100	16	100	10	100	8	101	4	100	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	Granted	17	85	12	86	8	73	6	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	2	10	2	14	2	18	4	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	20	100	14	100	11	100	10	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	Granted	176	86	161	91	65	70	75	82	78	76	97	69	82	68	95	81	75	78
	Dismissed/refused	25	12	11	6	27	29	16	18	23	23	42	30	36	30	19	16	19	20
	Withdrawn	3	1	3	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2
	Varied/discharged	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	204	99	176	100	93	100	91	100	102	100	141	100	120	100	117	100	96	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Lisburn Court Office	Granted	60	40	137	67	127	84	95	79	165	73	111	75	96	76	91	78	84	80
	Dismissed/refused	64	43	46	23	17	11	20	17	41	18	31	21	24	19	23	20	20	19
	Withdrawn	4	3	13	6	4	3	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	21	14	8	4	2	1	4	3	19	8	5	3	5	4	2	2	1	1
	Other	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	149	100	204	100	151	100	121	101	225	99	148	100	126	100	116	100	105	100
Dungannon Court Office	Granted	11	28	9	27	4	17	22	63	84	68	73	68	60	63	61	74	25	57
	Dismissed/refused	29	73	24	73	20	83	12	34	39	32	33	31	34	35	21	26	18	41
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	1	2
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	40	101	33	100	24	100	35	100	123	100	107	100	96	100	82	100	44	100
Office of Care & Protection	Granted	11	55	8	57	2	25	7	54	4	44	10	43	9	43	10	48	1	11
	Dismissed/refused	2	10	1	7	2	25	1	8	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	5	1	11
	Withdrawn	7	35	5	36	4	50	5	38	5	56	12	52	11	52	9	43	6	67
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	5	1	11
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	20	100	14	100	8	100	13	100	9	100	23	99	21	100	21	101	9	100
TOTAL	Granted	1762	82	1865	82	1623	84	1404	84	1243	69	1360	73	1102	67	1123	73	951	73
	Dismissed/refused	312	15	328	14	272	14	239	14	495	28	483	26	509	31	374	24	307	24
	Withdrawn	39	2	55	2	25	1	19	1	18	1	22	1	28	2	29	2	23	2
	Varied/discharged	29	1	11	<1	5	<1	11	1	33	2	8	<1	15	1	13	1	12	1
	Other	3	<1	9	<1	7	<1	3	<1	2	<1	0	0	1	<1	2	<1	7	1
	TOTAL	2145	100	2268	98	1932	99	1676	100	1791	100	1873	100	1655	101	1541	100	1300	101

Source: ICOS

Table 6: Total outcomes for applications for Occupation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Laganside Courts	Granted	2	20	3	21	5	33	6	29	1	8	1	17	1	8	3	23	1	6
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	1	7	6	40	2	10	2	17	2	33	2	17	4	31	5	31
	Withdrawn	4	40	7	50	1	7	12	57	7	58	3	50	9	75	5	38	8	50
	Varied/discharged	3	30	3	21	2	13	1	5	2	17	0	0	0	0	1	8	2	12
	Other	1	10	0	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	10	100	14	99	15	100	21	101	12	100	6	100	12	100	13	100	16	99
Newtownards Court Office	Granted	1	13	3	27	0	0	3	30	0	0	1	11	1	33	1	10	1	11
	Dismissed/refused	1	13	0	0	2	33	1	10	0	0	1	11	1	33	5	50	0	0
	Withdrawn	6	75	7	64	4	67	4	40	1	100	1	11	1	33	3	30	7	78
	Varied/discharged	0	0	1	9	0	0	2	20	0	0	6	67	0	0	1	10	1	11
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	8	101	11	100	6	100	10	100	1	100	9	100	3	99	10	100	9	100
Downpatrick Court Office	Granted	1	100	1	50	0	0	1	100	0	0	3	60	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	2	40	1	100	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	1	100	2	100	0	0	1	100	2	100	5	100	1	100	0	0	0	0
Craigavon Court Office	Granted	2	67	0	0	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	50
	Dismissed/refused	1	33	0	0	1	33	1	33	1	20	1	100	2	40	1	33	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	1	100	1	33	2	67	3	60	0	0	2	40	2	67	2	50
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	100	1	100	3	99	3	100	5	100	1	100	5	100	3	100	4	100

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Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Armagh Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	1	25	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	1	100	0	0	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	2	50	2	67	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	1	100	0	0	4	100	3	100	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	1	100	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
Omagh Court Office	Granted	0	0	4	80	2	50	0	0	0	0	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	1	20	1	25	2	100	1	100	3	75	0	0	0	0	1	100
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	5	100	4	100	2	100	1	100	4	100	0	0	0	0	1	100
Strabane Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	100	1	100	0	0

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Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Antrim Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Londonderry Court Office	Granted	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	50	1	33	1	33	3	60	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	1	33	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	2	67	1	50	0	0	1	100	1	50	2	67	1	33	2	40	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	100	2	100	1	100	1	100	2	100	3	100	3	99	5	100	0	0
Enniskillen Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	2	100	1	50	1	33
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	1	33
	Withdrawn	3	100	0	0	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	100	0	0	2	100	0	0	1	100	0	0	2	100	2	100	3	99
Coleraine Court Office	Granted	2	67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	25	1	100
	Dismissed/refused	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	25	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	2	50	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	100	1	100	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	1	100	4	100	1	100

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Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Newry Court Office	Granted	0	0	2	33	3	60	0	0	0	0	2	67	0	0	2	67	1	25
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	2	67	2	33	2	40	2	67	2	100	0	0	1	50	1	33	3	75
	Varied/discharged	1	33	2	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33	1	50	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	100	6	99	5	100	3	100	2	100	3	100	2	100	3	100	4	100
Limavady Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena Court Office	Granted	1	33	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	1	50	0	0	2	67	0	0	3	60	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	2	67	0	0	0	0	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	100	2	100	0	0	3	100	1	100	5	100	0	0	0	0	1	100

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Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Lisburn Court Office	Granted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14	0	0	3	43	0	0	3	100
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	1	14	0	0	0	0	1	14	1	25	0	0	2	100	0	0
	Withdrawn	4	100	5	71	0	0	0	0	1	14	1	25	2	29	0	0	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	2	100	0	0	4	57	2	50	2	29	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	4	100	7	99	2	100	0	0	7	99	4	100	7	101	2	100	3	100
Dungannon Court Office	Granted	2	33	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	1	17	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	1	100	0	0	0	0
	Withdrawn	3	50	1	33	2	100	0	0	2	100	3	60	0	0	1	100	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	6	100	3	99	2	100	0	0	2	100	5	100	1	100	1	100	0	0
Office of Care & Protection	Granted	0	0	1	25	0	0	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dismissed/refused	0	0	1	25	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0
	Withdrawn	0	0	2	50	1	100	2	67	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0
	Varied/discharged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	4	100	1	100	3	100	2	100	0	0	0	0	2	100	0	0
TOTAL	Granted	11	23	17	28	14	30	12	24	5	16	10	22	7	17	11	24	11	26
	Dismissed/refused	6	13	6	10	12	26	7	14	3	9	9	20	8	20	16	35	6	14
	Withdrawn	26	54	29	48	16	34	28	56	19	59	15	33	22	54	17	37	22	51
	Varied/discharged	4	8	7	12	4	9	3	6	5	16	11	24	4	10	2	4	4	9
	Other	1	2	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	48	100	60	100	47	101	50	100	32	100	45	99	41	101	46	100	43	100

Source: ICOS

Table 7: Defendants prosecuted for breach of non-molestation Orders by year and by Court, 2016 – 2024

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Laganside Courts	Community sentence	32	21	19	13	14	10	18	13	6	7	18	12	12	11	9	9	9	10
	Discharge	7	5	10	7	4	3	16	12	4	5	13	8	11	10	5	5	7	8
	Imprisonment	10	7	14	10	11	8	12	9	18	21	26	17	21	19	25	26	14	15
	Monetary penalty	22	15	22	15	20	15	25	18	13	15	15	10	15	13	14	15	6	7
	Suspended custodial	21	14	20	14	36	26	26	19	21	24	27	18	17	15	11	11	17	19
	Not Guilty	59	39	57	40	52	38	42	30	25	29	55	36	36	32	32	33	37	41
	Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	TOTAL	151	101	143	100	137	100	139	101	87	101	154	101	112	100	96	99	91	101
Newtownards Court Office	Community sentence	8	18	2	7	6	13	2	5	0	0	4	10	0	0	2	6	2	7
	Discharge	10	22	8	27	13	29	8	20	1	8	9	21	7	32	11	33	5	17
	Imprisonment	8	18	2	7	2	4	11	28	2	17	0	0	3	14	2	6	3	10
	Monetary penalty	6	13	2	7	6	13	2	5	3	25	3	7	1	5	3	9	3	10
	Suspended custodial	2	4	7	23	10	22	7	18	3	25	5	12	1	5	5	15	5	17
	Not Guilty	11	24	9	30	8	18	10	25	3	25	21	50	10	45	10	30	12	40
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	45	99	30	101	45	99	40	101	12	100	42	100	22	101	33	99	30	101
Downpatrick Court Office	Community sentence	1	5	2	20	1	10	1	7	0	0	1	3	1	4	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	5	26	1	10	1	10	7	50	0	0	1	3	4	15	2	22	4	25
	Imprisonment	3	16	0	0	0	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	22	2	13
	Monetary penalty	0	0	0	0	5	50	1	7	1	20	6	19	3	12	0	0	3	19
	Suspended custodial	4	21	5	50	1	10	3	21	2	40	7	22	4	15	2	22	2	13
	Not Guilty	5	26	2	20	2	20	1	7	2	40	17	53	13	50	3	33	5	31
	Other	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	19	99	10	100	10	100	14	99	5	100	32	100	26	100	9	99	16	101

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Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Craigavon Court Office	Community sentence	2	6	2	8	1	8	1	6	0	0	3	20	3	30	2	13	1	9
	Discharge	2	6	0	0	2	15	1	6	2	29	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
	Imprisonment	14	39	3	13	3	23	5	31	2	29	0	0	3	30	4	27	0	0
	Monetary penalty	5	14	6	25	1	8	0	0	3	43	4	27	1	10	2	13	0	0
	Suspended custodial	4	11	6	25	2	15	4	25	0	0	3	20	1	10	3	20	0	0
	Not Guilty	9	25	7	29	4	31	5	31	0	0	5	33	2	20	4	27	9	82
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	36	101	24	100	13	100	16	99	7	101	15	100	10	100	15	100	11	100
Armagh Court Office	Community sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14	0	0	1	9	1	17	1	17	2	20
	Discharge	3	60	0	0	3	43	0	0	1	25	1	9	0	0	1	17	0	0
	Imprisonment	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	20
	Monetary penalty	0	0	5	45	1	14	2	29	0	0	2	18	4	67	0	0	1	10
	Suspended custodial	1	20	1	9	0	0	1	14	0	0	3	27	1	17	0	0	0	0
	Not Guilty	1	20	5	45	3	43	1	14	3	75	4	36	0	0	4	67	5	50
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	5	100	11	99	7	100	7	100	4	100	11	99	6	101	6	101	10	100
Banbridge at Newry Court Office	Community sentence	0	0	1	33	0	0	1	13	0	0	2	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	0	0	2	67	1	17	0	0	0	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Imprisonment	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	67	3	43
	Monetary penalty	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	25	0	0	2	20	3	75	1	33	2	29
	Suspended custodial	1	33	0	0	3	50	0	0	0	0	2	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Not Guilty	1	33	0	0	2	33	4	50	0	0	3	30	1	25	0	0	2	29
	Other	1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	99	3	100	6	100	8	101	0	0	10	100	4	100	3	100	7	101

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Omagh Court Office	Community sentence	2	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	2	33	0	0	1	17	0	0
	Discharge	0	0	2	67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Imprisonment	1	13	1	33	1	25	1	33	0	0	1	17	4	36	2	33	0	0
	Monetary penalty	1	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	38	0	0	1	9	0	0	0	0
	Suspended custodial	2	25	0	0	1	25	1	33	0	0	3	50	4	36	1	17	1	50
	Not Guilty	2	25	0	0	2	50	1	33	4	50	0	0	2	18	2	33	1	50
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	8	101	3	100	4	100	3	99	8	101	6	100	11	99	6	100	2	100
Strabane Court Office	Community sentence	1	33	0	0	0	0	3	38	1	17	0	0	0	0	2	29	1	20
	Discharge	0	0	1	17	2	67	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	18	0	0	0	0
	Imprisonment	1	33	1	17	0	0	1	13	1	17	0	0	1	6	1	14	0	0
	Monetary penalty	0	0	0	0	1	33	1	13	0	0	1	25	3	18	1	14	0	0
	Suspended custodial	0	0	1	17	0	0	0	0	2	33	0	0	8	47	2	29	0	0
	Not Guilty	1	33	3	50	0	0	3	38	2	33	3	75	2	12	1	14	4	80
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	3	99	6	101	3	100	8	102	6	100	4	100	17	101	7	100	5	100
Antrim Court Office	Community sentence	4	24	0	0	2	15	1	11	2	22	2	15	1	13	1	9	2	17
	Discharge	3	18	0	0	2	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	25	1	9	1	8
	Imprisonment	0	0	1	20	0	0	1	11	1	11	5	38	1	13	3	27	1	8
	Monetary penalty	2	12	0	0	1	8	3	33	3	33	0	0	1	13	0	0	2	17
	Suspended custodial	4	24	1	20	2	15	0	0	0	0	2	15	3	38	1	9	2	17
	Not Guilty	4	24	3	60	6	46	4	44	3	33	4	31	0	0	5	45	4	33
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	17	102	5	100	13	99	9	99	9	99	13	99	8	102	11	99	12	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Londonderry Court Office	Community sentence	1	3	3	10	7	24	2	7	2	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
	Discharge	5	13	4	14	2	7	2	7	1	8	4	11	1	4	1	7	0	0
	Imprisonment	8	21	4	14	4	14	3	10	2	15	2	6	4	17	1	7	5	24
	Monetary penalty	12	32	5	17	4	14	11	38	3	23	5	14	2	8	2	13	5	24
	Suspended custodial	4	10	3	10	7	24	5	17	3	23	13	36	8	33	4	27	1	5
	Not Guilty	8	21	10	34	5	17	6	21	2	15	12	33	9	38	7	47	9	43
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	38	100	29	99	29	100	29	100	13	99	36	100	24	100	15	101	21	101
Enniskillen Court Office	Community sentence	2	17	0	0	1	8	1	14	0	0	2	25	0	0	4	29	1	11
	Discharge	0	0	4	31	1	8	1	14	0	0	1	13	1	6	0	0	1	11
	Imprisonment	1	8	0	0	1	8	0	0	1	25	2	25	0	0	4	29	1	11
	Monetary penalty	3	25	2	15	3	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	0	0
	Suspended custodial	1	8	0	0	1	8	1	14	1	25	0	0	8	50	2	14	1	11
	Not Guilty	5	42	7	54	6	46	4	57	2	50	3	38	7	44	3	21	5	55
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	12	100	13	100	13	101	7	99	4	100	8	101	16	100	14	100	9	99
Coleraine Court Office	Community sentence	1	5	1	6	0	0	1	8	7	41	1	5	0	0	1	5	0	0
	Discharge	1	5	3	17	3	16	1	8	0	0	3	16	0	0	2	11	1	5
	Imprisonment	4	19	0	0	5	26	3	23	1	6	4	21	2	15	5	26	3	17
	Monetary penalty	2	10	0	0	3	16	3	23	5	29	6	32	1	8	1	5	5	28
	Suspended custodial	5	24	9	50	2	11	1	8	1	6	1	5	5	38	7	37	4	22
	Not Guilty	8	38	5	28	6	32	4	31	3	18	4	21	5	38	3	16	5	28
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	21	101	18	101	19	101	13	101	17	100	19	100	13	99	19	100	18	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Newry Court Office	Community sentence	0	0	0	0	2	11	1	4	0	0	2	9	1	4	2	6	0	0
	Discharge	5	19	4	20	2	11	4	15	5	21	0	0	4	15	3	9	3	7
	Imprisonment	2	8	2	10	1	5	3	11	3	13	2	9	3	11	1	3	1	2
	Monetary penalty	6	23	6	30	8	42	8	30	6	25	5	23	8	30	9	28	8	20
	Suspended custodial	4	15	4	20	2	11	0	0	3	13	5	23	2	7	0	0	4	10
	Not Guilty	9	35	4	20	4	21	11	41	7	29	8	36	9	33	17	53	24	60
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	26	100	20	100	19	101	27	101	24	101	22	100	27	100	32	99	40	99
Limavady Court Office	Community sentence	1	50	0	0	0	0	1	25	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	25	0	0	1	20	1	20	1	13	0	0
	Imprisonment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	2	25
	Monetary penalty	0	0	0	0	1	33	0	0	0	0	1	20	2	40	2	25	3	38
	Suspended custodial	0	0	0	0	1	33	1	25	3	75	2	40	1	20	2	25	1	12
	Not Guilty	1	50	2	100	1	33	1	25	1	25	0	0	1	20	2	25	2	25
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	2	100	2	100	3	99	4	100	4	100	5	100	5	100	8	101	8	100
Magherafelt Court Office	Community sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0
	Imprisonment	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0	4	57	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Monetary penalty	1	20	1	33	0	0	1	20	0	0	2	29	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Suspended custodial	4	80	1	33	1	50	3	60	0	0	0	0	2	67	1	50	1	50
	Not Guilty	0	0	1	33	0	0	1	20	1	33	1	14	1	33	0	0	1	50
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	5	100	3	99	2	100	5	100	3	99	7	100	3	99	2	100	2	100

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Ballymena Court Office	Community sentence	5	14	1	3	2	8	3	11	5	25	2	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	9	24	3	9	0	0	1	4	1	5	4	24	5	17	3	17	0	0
	Imprisonment	3	8	5	16	7	29	2	7	1	5	3	18	4	13	4	22	2	17
	Monetary penalty	2	5	7	22	1	4	3	11	5	25	1	6	2	7	1	6	1	8
	Suspended custodial	5	14	8	25	7	29	5	18	5	25	3	18	3	10	6	33	5	42
	Not Guilty	11	30	8	25	7	29	14	50	3	15	4	24	16	53	4	22	3	35
	Other	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
	TOTAL	37	100	32	100	24	99	28	101	20	100	17	102	30	100	18	100	12	100
Bangor Court Office ⁸⁴	Community sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Imprisonment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Monetary penalty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Suspended custodial	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Not Guilty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	1	100
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	1	100
Larne Court Office ⁸⁵	Community sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Discharge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Imprisonment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Monetary penalty	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Suspended custodial	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Not Guilty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

⁸⁴ The work of Bangor Court Office was subsumed into Newtownards Court Office during the data period.

⁸⁵ The work of Larne Court Office was subsumed into Ballymena/Antrim Court Offices during the data period.

Examining the Utilisation and Efficacy of Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders across Northern Ireland

Court	Outcomes	Years																	
		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024 P*	
		Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%	Nrs	%
Lisburn Court Office	Community sentence	5	19	6	20	5	24	8	29	5	24	4	13	7	32	10	33	2	8
	Discharge	3	11	4	13	1	5	3	11	1	5	2	6	3	14	0	0	3	13
	Imprisonment	6	22	9	30	6	29	5	18	3	14	7	23	0	0	6	20	3	13
	Monetary penalty	0	0	3	10	1	5	2	7	1	5	2	6	3	14	2	6	0	0
	Suspended custodial	8	30	1	3	2	10	3	11	1	5	7	23	2	9	5	17	3	13
	Not Guilty	5	19	7	23	6	29	7	25	10	48	9	29	7	32	7	23	13	54
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	27	101	30	99	21	102	28	101	21	101	31	100	22	101	30	99	24	101
Dungannon Court Office	Community sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	5	33	2	14
	Discharge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	0	5	21	0	0	1	7
	Imprisonment	1	20	2	50	1	33	0	0	2	18	1	13	3	13	3	20	2	14
	Monetary penalty	1	20	0	0	1	33	1	25	0	0	2	25	2	8	2	13	0	0
	Suspended custodial	2	40	2	50	0	0	0	0	5	45	1	13	5	21	3	20	3	21
	Not Guilty	1	20	0	0	1	33	3	75	3	27	4	50	7	29	2	13	6	43
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	5	100	4	100	3	99	4	100	11	99	8	101	24	100	15	99	14	99
TOTAL	Community sentence	65	14	37	10	41	11	45	12	31	12	45	10	28	7	40	12	23	7
	Discharge	53	12	46	12	37	10	45	12	17	7	40	9	47	12	31	9	27	8
	Imprisonment	62	13	44	11	43	12	51	13	37	15	57	13	50	13	66	19	44	13
	Monetary penalty	63	14	60	16	57	15	65	17	46	18	57	13	52	14	41	12	39	12
	Suspended custodial	72	16	69	18	78	21	61	16	50	20	84	19	75	20	55	16	50	15
	Not Guilty	141	31	130	34	115	31	122	31	74	29	158	36	128	34	106	31	148	44
	Other	4	1	1	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
	TOTAL	460	101	387	101	371	100	389	101	255	101	441	100	380	100	339	99	333	100

Source: ICOS