



Victim Survey Report

2026

COMMISSIONER
FOR VICTIMS
OF CRIME

Foreword

This is the third survey I have conducted since taking up this position in 2022. I am hopeful that the annual nature of this survey is playing some small part in normalising the inclusion of victims' voices in our public conversations about our justice system.

I look ahead to next year, when we will all embark upon a serious public conversation, one of the great milestones in any democratic society, the Assembly election to choose our legislators for the next five years.

It is my hope that in the coming months and over the course of the election, the issues important to victims of crime will be seen, rightly, as important to all of us. The criminal justice system is not something that happens in old buildings behind closed doors, it is a crucial cornerstone of our state, equal in importance to the health and education systems and a well-functioning economy.

The issues highlighted in this and other surveys are not just statistics pulled together, but a representation of the challenges faced by real people, residents of constituencies across all of Northern Ireland.

Most importantly, of course, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to every victim who took the time to respond to this survey. By sharing their experiences, they have made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of how victims experience the criminal justice system and where improvements are needed. I am particularly encouraged by the significant increase in participation, with a 124% rise in responses compared with last year's survey and a 246% increase compared with our inaugural survey in 2023/24. I hope this reflects growing confidence among victims that their voices matter and that their experiences can help shape meaningful change. It is my sincere hope that even more victims will engage with future surveys, ensuring that their perspectives continue to inform and influence improvements across the system.

The findings of this report leave little doubt that significant challenges remain in ensuring that victims consistently receive the treatment they are entitled to and deserve. Although I acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of those working across the criminal justice system, I am

troubled by accounts from victims whose experiences bear little resemblance to the standards and protections that the system is intended to provide.

I take some encouragement from the improvements observed in several key indicators outlined in the summary findings, particularly in comparison with last year's survey results. Nonetheless, it is important to view these findings with appropriate caution. The positive changes reflected in the data may not be attributable solely to improvements in victims' experiences; the larger sample size achieved this year may also have had an impact on the overall results.

I am grateful to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for its support in extending the reach of this year's survey. By helping to disseminate the survey directly to victims, the PPS played an important role in increasing participation and enhancing the evidence base from which we can better understand victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. Such collaboration is vital in ensuring that victims' voices are heard, and I hope this support will continue in future years.

I also want to thank you the reader for your interest in learning more about the experience of victims of crime and hope you can lend your support to our work to create a society where victims of crime have increased rights to protection, participation, support and redress.

I am indebted to all those who have found the courage to come forward and tell the story of their experience in our criminal justice system. I am as committed as ever to making sure that the experiences and insights shared can be used as a catalyst for positive change to make things better for victims in the future.

Geraldine Hanna
**Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime
Northern Ireland**



Introduction

This briefing, produced by the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime, presents the findings from the Victim Survey conducted in Autumn 2025. The survey provides key insights into victims' experiences with the criminal justice system, including the police, victim support services, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), the courts as well as important insights into victims' awareness and understanding of the Victims Charter.

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

It is the only Victim Survey open to victims of all crime types in Northern Ireland and this is the third year it has been carried out.

The responses provide a unique insight into the real experiences of victims of crime and help to inform the priorities of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime Office in championing victims' rights and perspectives.

The survey was conducted online with respondents completing the survey independently. The survey was open to any victim of crime who reported their experience to the police since 2020 as well as those who chose not to report. 575 people responded to this year's survey, of which 81% (n=463) chose to directly report the crime they experienced to the police. The survey was promoted widely, utilising the networks of the Commissioner Designate's office as well as inviting victims that had engaged directly with the office to respond. Posters and promotional material regarding the survey were also disseminated across the court estate in Northern Ireland.

The survey was launched and went live on 22nd September 2025 and closed on 22nd December 2025. A portal called Citizen Space was used to administer the survey, gather and analyse responses. The survey used a mix of open-ended (free text) and closed (tick box) questions.

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

We received a total of 575 responses to the survey this year, which represents a reasonably significant sample size. This was an increase of 124% on last year's Victim Survey. CVOCO worked with the Public Prosecution Service this year for the first time to promote awareness of the survey and to encourage victims to respond. This was done through sharing a link as well as some information about the survey with victims from the PPS database that had engaged with the service in the previous 18 months.



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VICTIMS' CRIMINAL JUSTICE EXPERIENCE

Survey findings at a glance · 2025 compared with 2024 and 2023

Victims' overall Criminal Justice experience

n= 575

- 77% of respondents are not confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime (vs 81% in 2024 & 88% in 2023).
- 49% of victims do not have confidence that the crime they reported will be fairly investigated (vs 57% in 2024 & 66% in 2023).
- 34% of respondents stated that they would not report a crime if they were a victim in the future (vs 42%/41% in 2024/2023 respectively).
- 80% (vs 80%/73% in 2024/2023 respectively) of respondents had not heard about the Victim Charter before completing this survey.

Experience with PSNI

Avg # of respondents for Q's in this section: 550

- 56% believed they were treated fairly and with respect (vs 43% / 27% in 2024 / 2023 respectively).
- 44% of respondents stated that they were dissatisfied with how they were treated by the police (vs 51% / 65% in 2024 / 2023).
- 27% of those that responded would not report a crime again based on their experience with the PSNI (vs 34% / 43% in 2024 / 2023).

PPS experience

Avg # of respondents for Q's in this section: 230

- 32% of respondents were dissatisfied with how they were treated by PPS (vs 40% / 50% in 2024 / 2023).
- 34% of victims that responded stated that their needs were not assessed in advance of the trial (vs 32% / 21% in 2024 / 2023).
- 31% of those that responded said they were not kept up to date on when the case was up at court (vs 38% / 50% in 2024 / 2023).

Victims' experience with support services

Avg # of respondents for Q's in this section: 325

- 57% of respondents were referred or self-referred to formal support services (vs 55 / 57% in 2024 / 2023).
- A further 30% of respondents stated that they were not aware that any support services were available to help them (vs 33% in 2024).
- 17% of victims reported waiting over 3 months from referral to receiving support (vs 18% / 22% in 2024 / 2023).
- 41% of victims stated that their contact with formal support services helped them to cope with the impacts of the crime (vs 41% / 28% in 2024 / 2023)

Other stats / findings of note:

- 52% of victims that responded stated that they were not offered, or could not recall if they were offered, the opportunity to make a victim personal statement.
- 71% of victims that responded stated that they would wish to read out their VPS in open court.
- 58% of victims stated that they were not aware of the Victim Information scheme before completing this survey.
- 57% of respondents had never heard of restorative justice prior to completing this survey.

READING THE COLOUR

- Improvement on previous year's statistics
- No significant change from previous years (within 5%)
- Regression on previous years



Annual Survey Report

Background of victims and types of crime experienced

We received 575 responses to our 2025 Victim Survey, which was open to victims of all crime types. As with our previous Victim Surveys in 2023 & 2024, this was an online, self-selecting survey. We will therefore compare responses across previous years to help identify any trends or patterns.

Of the 575 individuals that completed this survey, 63% (n=364) were female and 35% (n=201) were male. The remaining 10 respondents preferred not to say or did not wish to answer.

Figure 1: Sex at birth

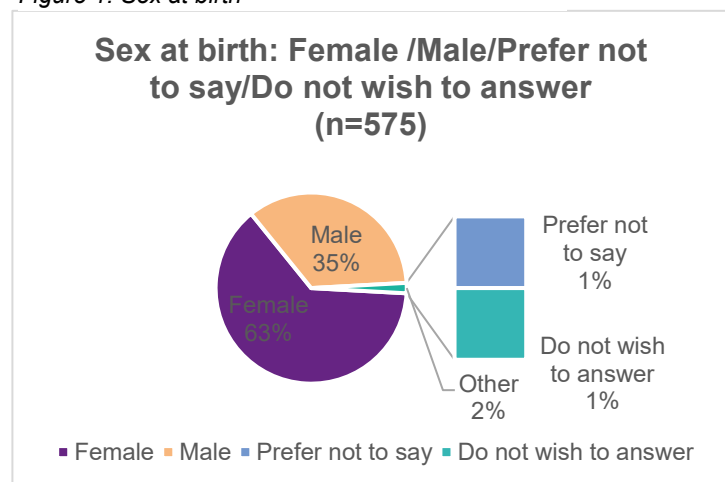
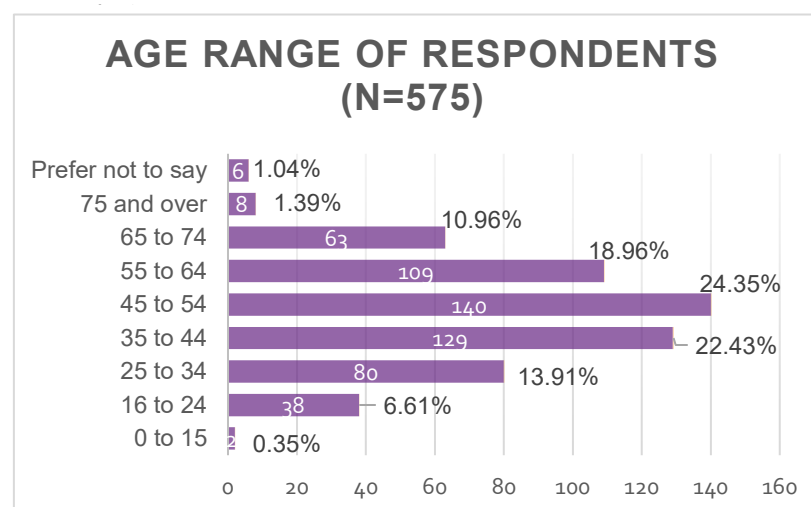


Figure 2: Age profile of survey

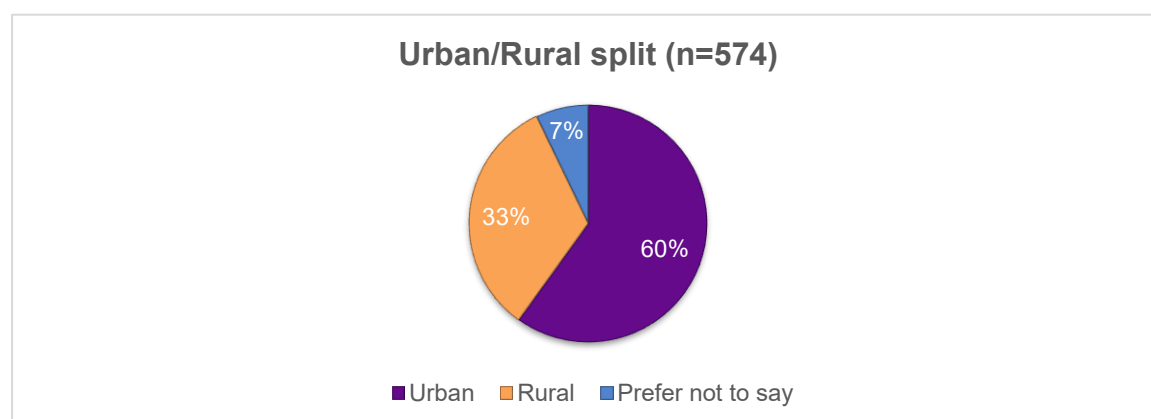


The age profile of respondents is represented in Figure 2.

89% (n=510) of respondents reported being straight/heterosexual, with 8% (n=45) stating they were gay, bisexual or of other sexual orientation. 3.5% (n=20) of respondents preferred not to say.

The geographic spread of responses came from across Northern Ireland and Figure 2 below outlines the urban / rural split of respondents:

Figure 3: Urban/Rural makeup of respondents



Of the 574 responses to this question, 60% (n=344) reported living in an urban setting with 33% (n=189) stating they reside outside of urban areas. A further 41 (7%) preferred not to say where they reside.

The ethnic make-up of respondents was predominantly white and is broken down in more detail in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Ethnic make-up of respondents

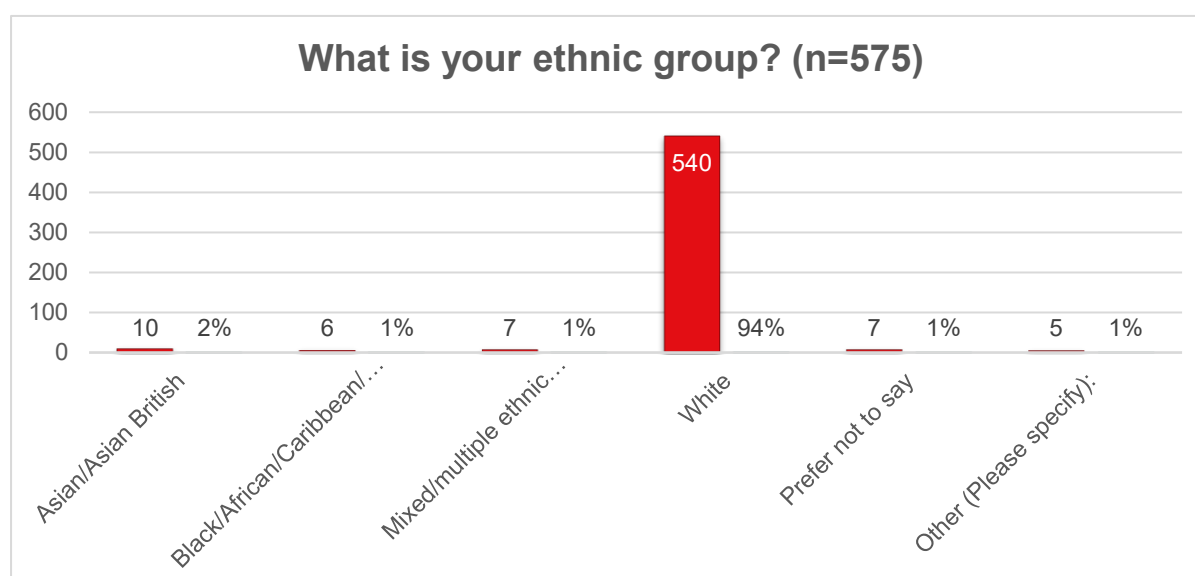
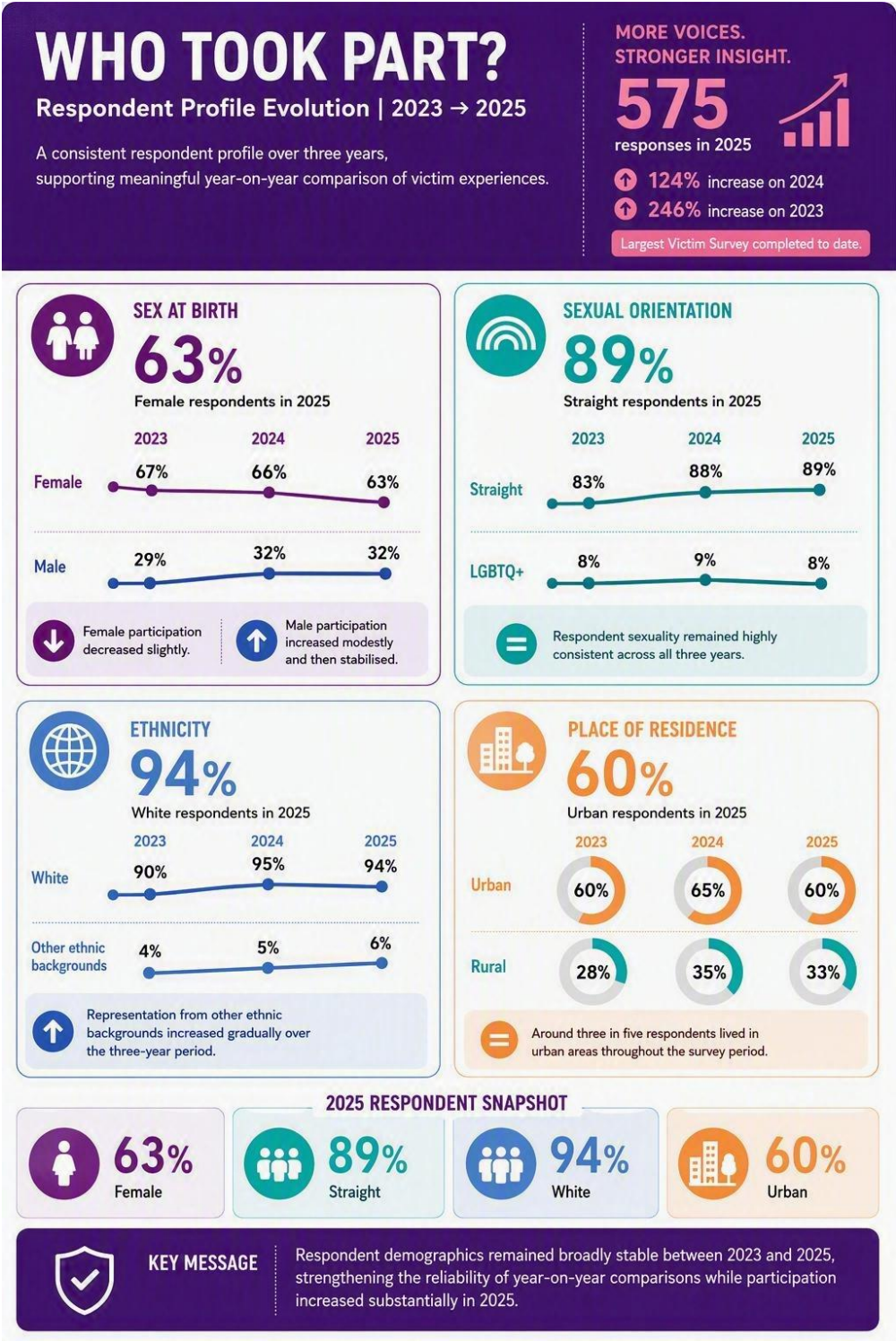


Table 1 shows a comparison between the profiles of victims that responded this year compared with the previous years in these areas:

Table 1: 2023-2025 victim profile



Physical Health

56% (n=320) of survey respondents reported living with physical conditions or illness that reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. 195 of those who indicated such physical conditions (34%) stated that this physical condition was related to their experience as a victim of crime.

Table 2 below shows the comparison between responses in 2024 compared with 2025, which indicates around an 8% decrease in victims with a physical condition / illness.

Table 2: Victims with Physical Conditions

Any physical conditions or illnesses that reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?				
Option	2025 #	2025 %	2024 #	2024%
Yes	320	55.6%	165	64.2%
No	206	37.3%	73	28.4%
Prefer not to say	29	5.25%	15	5.83%
Not Answered	20		4	
Totals	575		257	

Mental Health

43% (n=249) of respondents have been diagnosed with a mental health condition at any point in the last 12 months. The predominant conditions diagnosed were PTSD (complex & non-complex), anxiety and depression. 178 respondents or 71% of those diagnosed with a condition stated that their mental health condition significantly reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Table 3 below shows a comparison between 2025 and 2024 data:

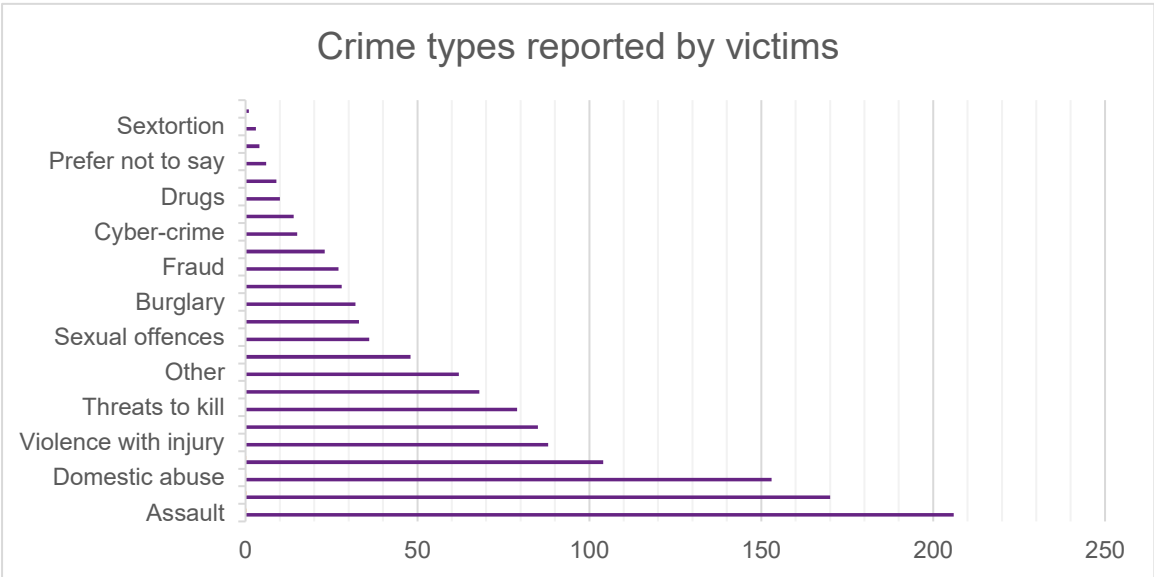
Table 3: Victims with Mental Health Conditions

Have you been diagnosed with a mental health condition at any point in the last 12 months?				
Option	2025 #	2025 %	2024 #	2024 %
Yes	249	43.3%	123	48.6%
No	279	48.52%	106	41.9%
Prefer not to say	47	8.17%	24	9.5%
Not Answered	0		4	
Total	575		257	

Crime Types

Assault was the most prevalent crime type (reported by 36% of respondents), closely followed by intimidation/harassment (30%) and then domestic abuse (27%). Coercive control was reported by an additional 18% of respondents. Rape, sexual abuse and sextortion combined was reported by 13% of respondents.

Figure 5: Crime Types

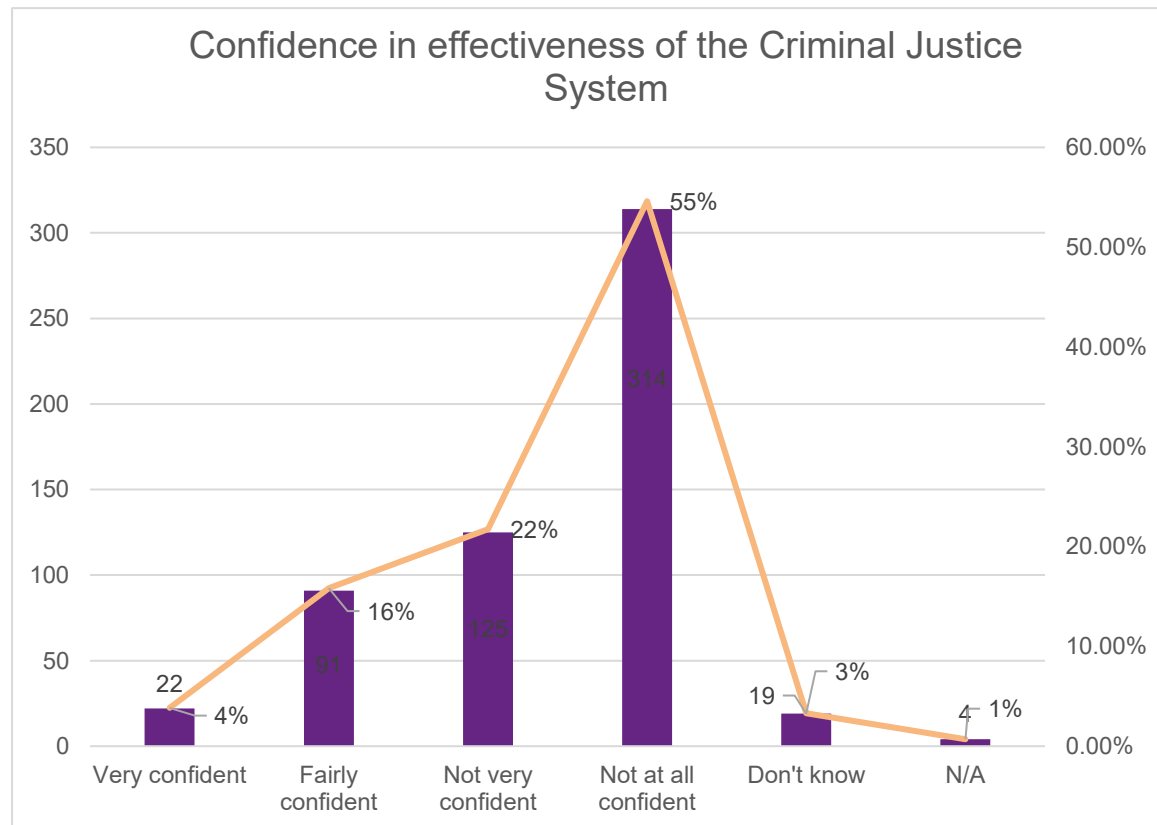


Overall, 36% of crime reported was domestically motivated (vs 47% in 2024 & 44% in 2023), while 13% of respondents informed us, they were victims of hate crime (vs 19% in 2024 & 17% in 2023). A range of the other crime types listed may also have a domestic motivation though have not been recorded as such.

Victim confidence in the Criminal Justice System

Overall CJS perceptions

Figure 6: Confidence in effectiveness of criminal justice system

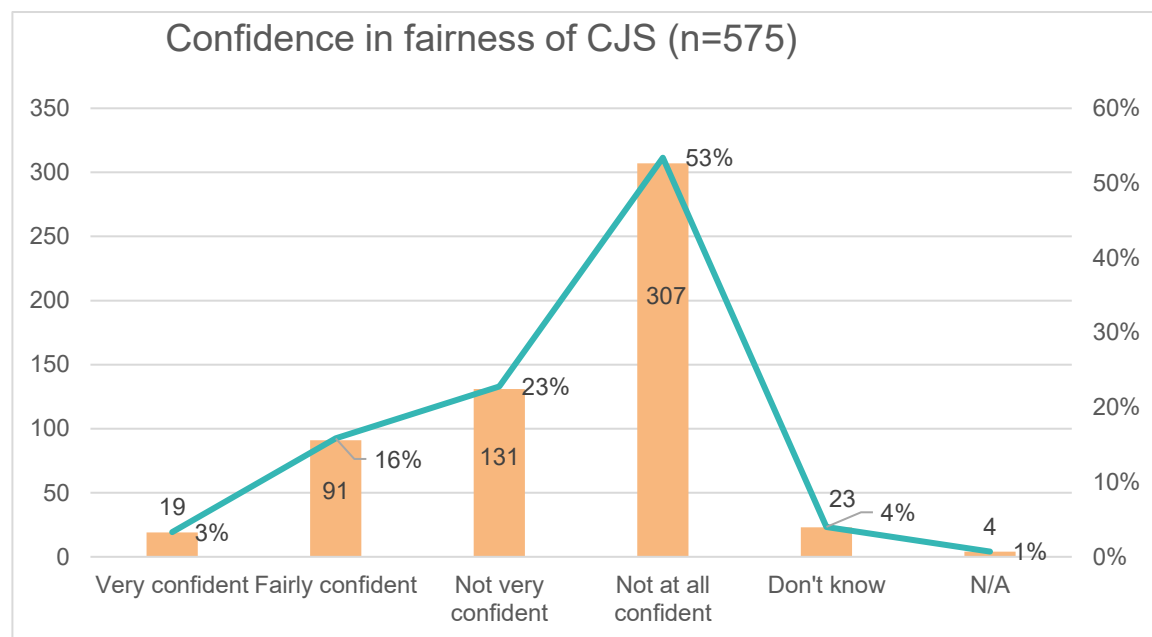


Respondents were asked about their overall confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. As highlighted in Figure 6, 20% stated they were very confident or fairly confident in its effectiveness, with 77% stating they were not very or not at all confident. This compares with 2024 survey data where the figures were 11% and 70% respectively.

This highlights the consistently low levels of confidence in our system with only one in five victims expressing some degree of confidence.

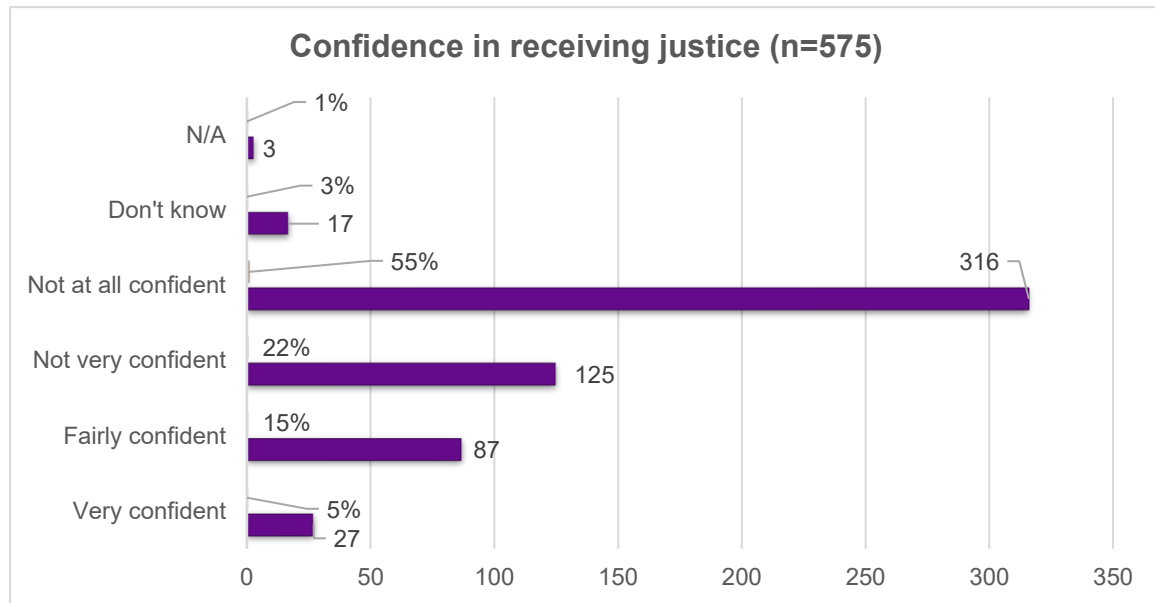
Respondents were also asked whether they thought the criminal justice system is fair. 19% were very confident or fairly confident while 76% of respondents were not at all confident or not very confident in the fairness of the system. This compares with 2024 survey data where the figures were 13% and 79% respectively.

Figure 7: Confidence in fairness of CJS



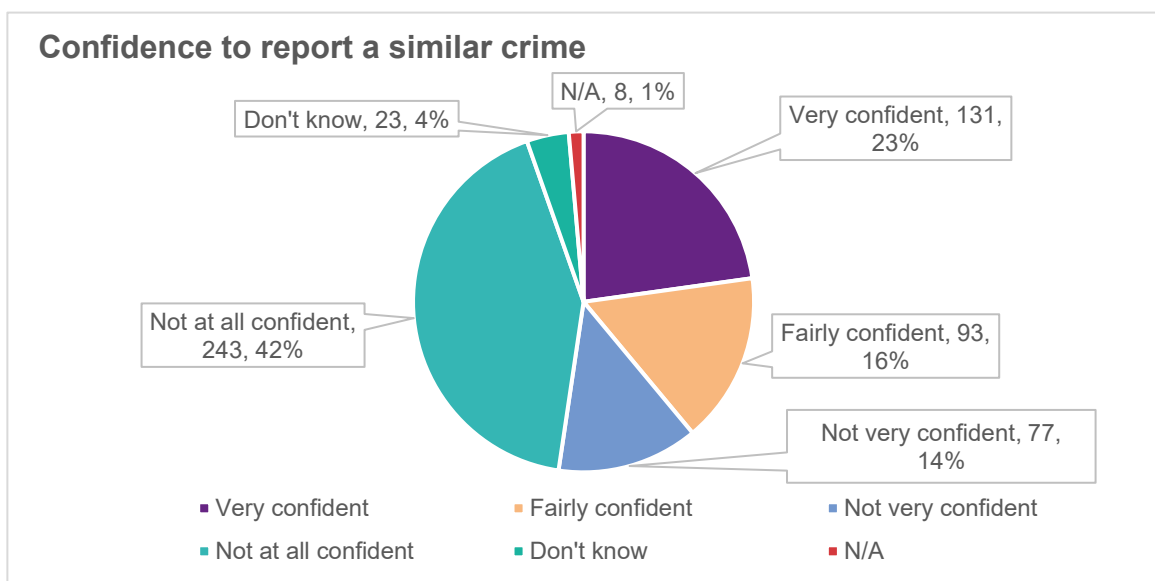
Victims were asked about their confidence in receiving justice by reporting a crime. As Figure 8 illustrates, a significant proportion of those that responded were either not very confident (22%/n=125) or not at all confident (55%/n=316). 15% (n=87) stated they were fairly confident they would receive justice by reporting a crime with just 5% (n=27) being very confident.

Figure 8: Confidence you can receive justice by reporting a crime



Respondents were asked about their confidence to report a similar crime in the future. 39% (n=224) of respondents stated they were very confident or fairly confident they would report a similar crime in the future. 56% (n=320) stated they were not very or not at all confident they would report such a crime in future.

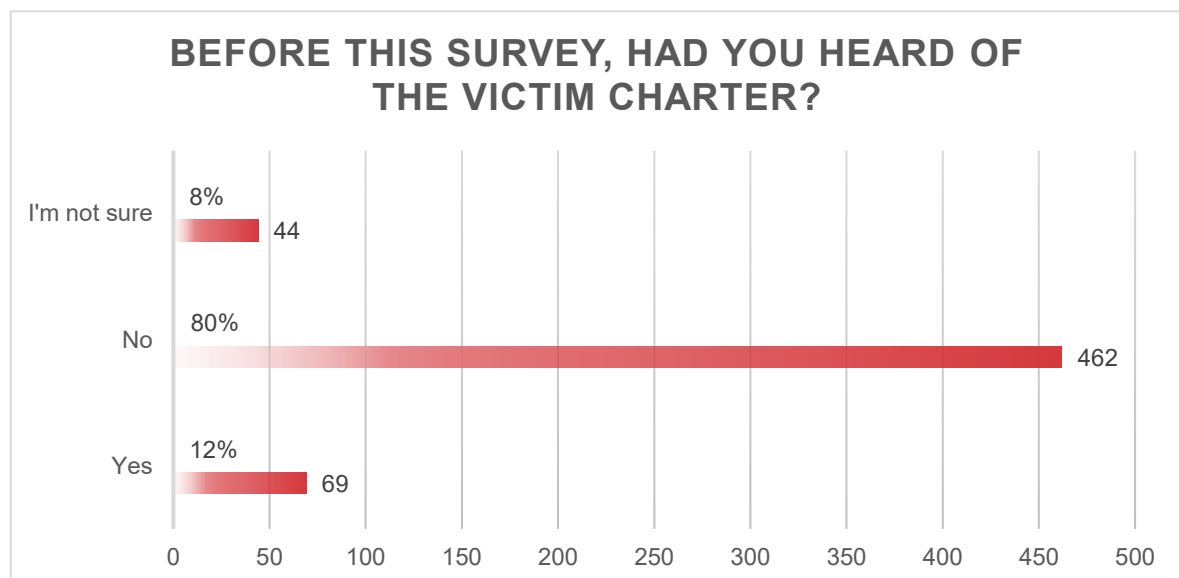
Figure 9: Confidence in reporting a similar crime in the future



Respondents were asked about their awareness of the Northern Ireland Victim Charter, prior to completing this survey. 80% (n=462) of respondents said they were not aware of the Charter. 12% (n=69) stated they were aware of the Charter with a further 8% (n=44) unsure whether or not they had heard about it.

This is fairly consistent with previous years of the survey, albeit with a slight drop in the percentage of victims that were aware of the Charter prior to the survey.

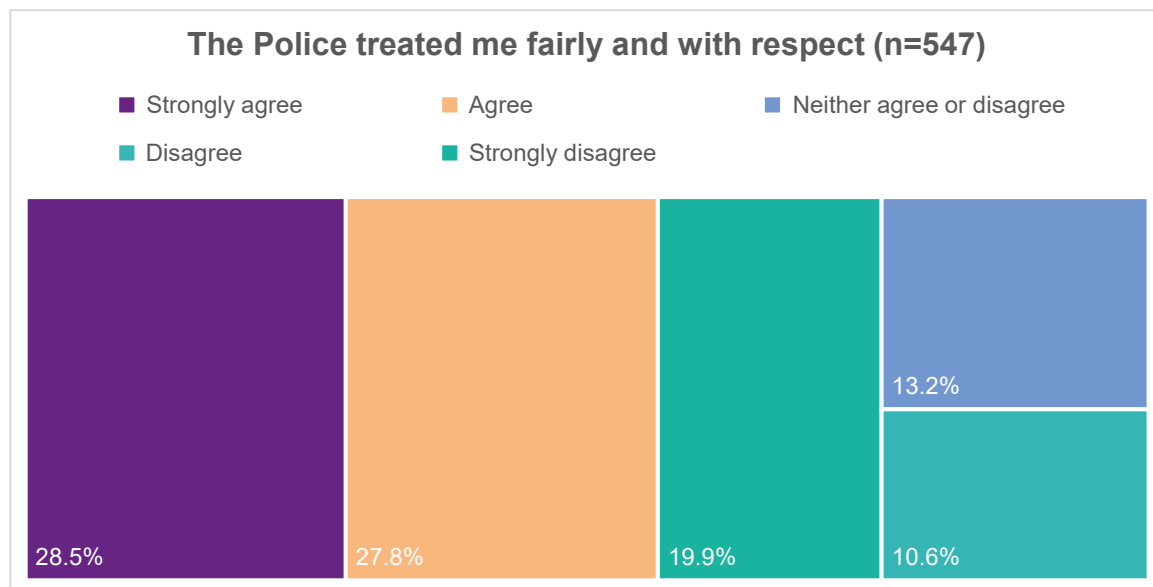
Figure 10: Victim Charter awareness levels



Victims' experience with PSNI

The survey asked victims for their overall experience and sense of the criminal justice system as well as asking for their specific views and experiences of each stage of the system. The first contact with the system will typically be with the PSNI. As detailed below, all indicators point to positive progress in terms of perceptions of how the PSNI performed assessed against the previous years of this survey.

Figure 11: Treated fairly and with respect

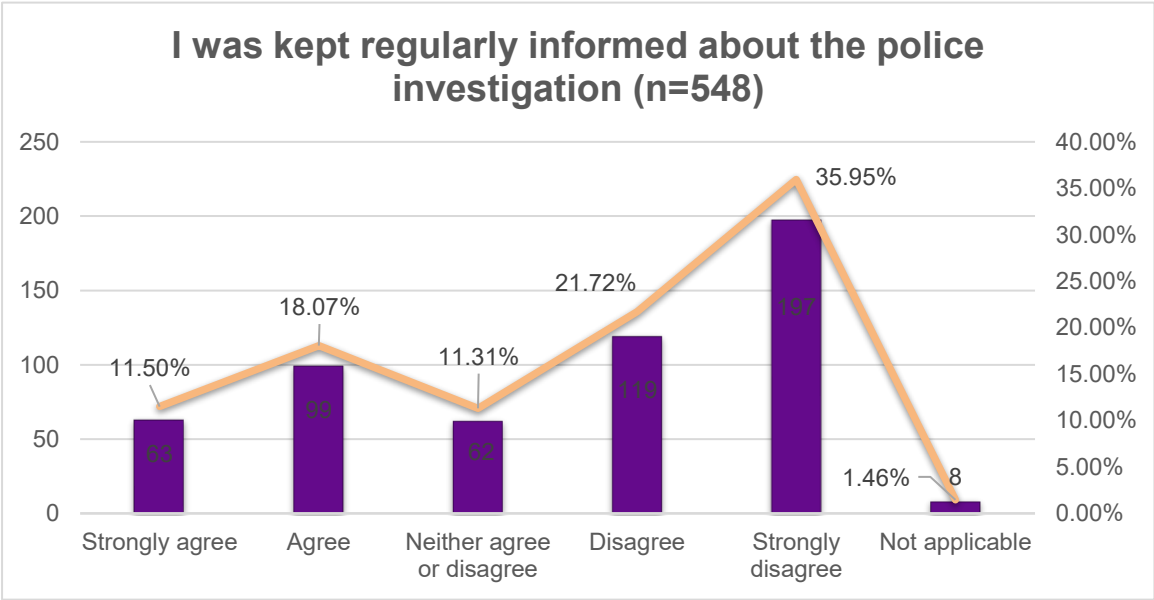


56% (n=308) of those that responded to this question stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the police treated them fairly and with respect. As outlined in the summary findings, this is up from 43% on findings from the previous year's survey. 33% (n=167) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were treated fairly and with respect (vs 42% in 2024). A further 11% (n=72) neither agreed nor disagreed. This shows a fairly even split between victims who felt they were treated fairly / respectfully and those that didn't.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the police investigation took too long. 42% (n=228) of respondents did think the investigation took too long while 29% (n=161) did not. A further 25% (n=134) of those that responded neither agreed nor disagreed.

Survey respondents were asked whether they were kept regularly informed about the police investigation, a key entitlement under the Victim Charter. 30% (n=162) stated that they were kept regularly informed, 57% (n=316) stated they were not. Another 11% (n=62) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

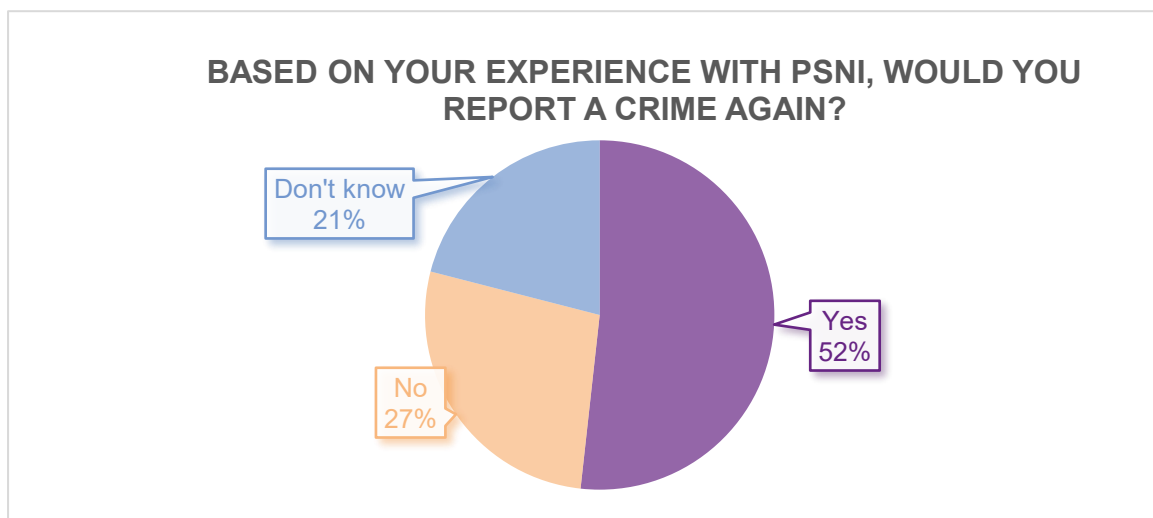
Figure 12: Kept regularly informed about police investigation



Victims were also asked what was important for them when it came to their experience with the PSNI. ‘Having the matter dealt with efficiently’ and ‘having the crime fully investigated’ were ranked as the top two issues on a list of priorities. These were closely followed by being treated fairly and with respect.

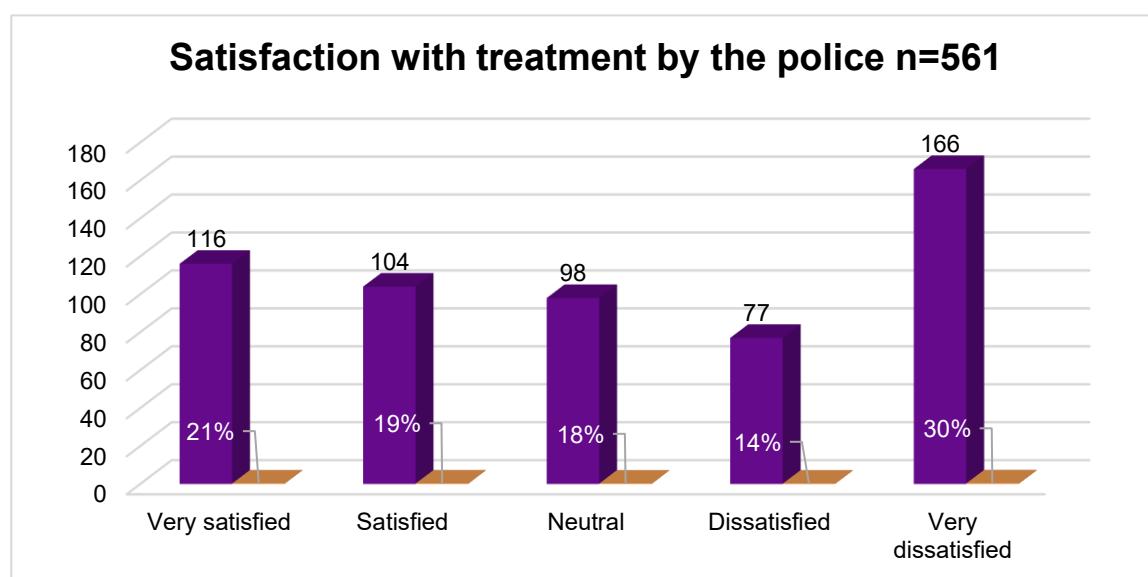
When asked whether they would report a crime again based on their experience of reporting a crime to the PSNI, 27% (n=148) of respondents stated they would not report a crime again (vs 35% in 2024) while 52% (n=281) stated that they would (vs 34% in 2024). A further 21% (n=114) were unsure whether they would report a crime again or not.

Figure 13: Would you report a crime again to PSNI?



40% (n=220) of victims that responded stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with how they were treated by the police. While 11% (n=98) were neutral on this question, 44% (n=283) stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated. This is down 7% on 2024 levels of dissatisfaction expressed by victims through this survey.

Figure 14: Satisfaction levels with treatment by the police



Victims were given a free text option and asked to provide reasons for their response. A few key threads stood out in the array of comments provided:

- Police are doing their best under difficult circumstances – they were compassionate and caring
- Lack of updates and correspondence from investigating officer – particular issues around notifying victims about bail conditions
- Inconsistency of response and follow up – varying from excellent to useless. It is individual officers that are making the difference in either direction
- Many described a really good initial response but then the updates and support tapered off with victims having to chase up to seek information and updates
- Failure to understand or accommodate special needs – e.g. autism
- Lack of awareness and understanding of how to deal with domestic abuse and coercive control
- Repeated claims of failure to take claims of intimate partner violence on a male partner seriously
- Lack of thoroughness or slow nature of investigation, which in turn led to a poor outcome for the victim
- Victims were not always believed

Many respondents provided positive words and feedback about their experience with the PSNI and a few examples of what victims said are provided below:

'I cannot speak highly enough of the officers involved and the timeliness of response in resolving the crime and bringing those responsible to justice.'

'Police gave regular updates and explained things easily. The officer believed me from the start.'

'When my case was taken out of the hands of the local police and given to the domestic violence unit PPU my experience changed entirely. They did a very professional job and treated me very well in all aspects. They listened, supported, took action, helped me stay safe. I could not commend them enough.'

'The officer was so sympathetic. He told me to stop worrying and to hand the worry over to him. I have always remembered that.'

The police who came out to me made me feel like I mattered and were very reassuring and took me very seriously.'

'The constable I dealt with was clearly trained to deal with domestic abuse and was determined to ensure I was supported throughout. They worked hard to be empathetic, were communicative, and went above and beyond to provide the best experience possible.'

Other victims who did not have such a positive experience used less complimentary language to express how they felt:

'My experience as a victim could have been improved through better communication. Following the motor accident, I was not kept updated on the progress of the incident or the final outcome. This lack of information left me feeling frustrated and unsupported during an already stressful time. While the officers at the scene were professional, clearer and more regular updates would have helped me feel more informed and reassured.'

'There were aspects of the crime that weren't thoroughly investigated which meant there hadn't been enough evidence collated to ensure a conviction for all crimes committed.'

'My experience as a victim showed me that while individual officers were sometimes polite and understanding, the overall handling of my case revealed serious gaps. Communication was inconsistent, and I did not receive regular updates on the investigation. Important information such as the status of bail conditions, the progression of the case, or next steps was often unclear or not provided unless I asked repeatedly.'

'When 2 policemen came to interview me on the evening of the crime which was committed in the afternoon, one was calm, and seemed compassionate, the other one was on edge, talking down to me, argumentative, and giving me incorrect information. I was too exhausted to correct him.'

‘Once they understood my disabilities I was allocated a more understanding police lady and then an impartial support liaison... it was quite distressing that initially the policeman was not as well equipped to handle my personal issues.’

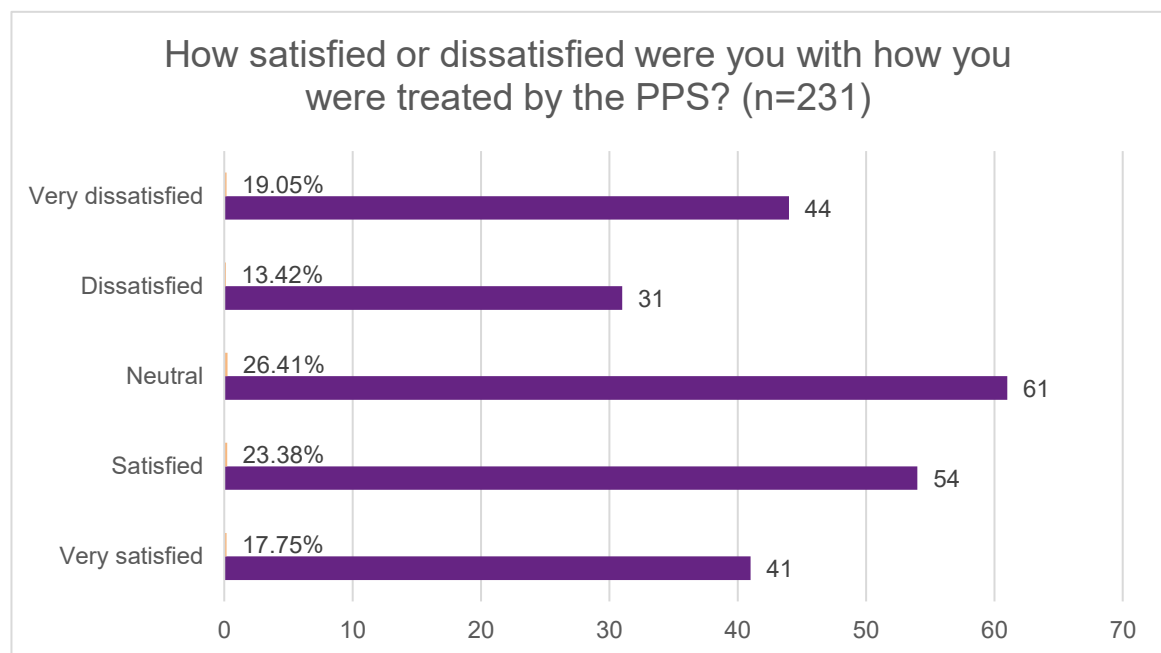
‘All the police officers were empathetic to me. However, they had to record twice due to tech error and this put me in two states: (1) re traumatized, (2) I couldn’t recall everything I told in the first interview - I was overwhelmed by the never-ever expected experience.’

‘Police took a long time to investigate & I felt like I wasn’t believed as a male victim of domestic abuse.’

Victims' experience with Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

The response rate for this section of the survey dropped off significantly compared to the earlier section on PSNI. An average of around 232 of the overall 575 respondents answered questions in this section, which equates to around 40%. This reflects the fact that many cases reported to the PSNI do not progress to prosecution.

Figure 15: Satisfaction with treatment by PPS



When asked about their satisfaction levels with how they were treated by the PPS, 41% (n=95) stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with how they were treated. One respondent stated:

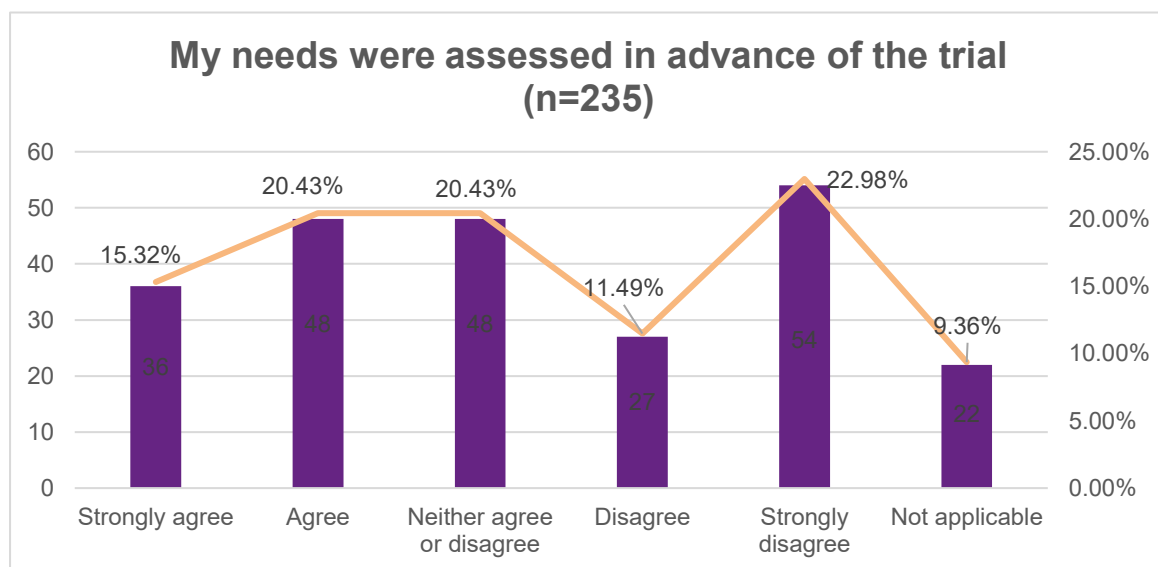
'I felt at ease because of the actions of them. Throughout the case and appeal everything was explained very well and they were very kind in their approach.'

Conversely, 32% (n=75) said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated by the PPS. One respondent stated:

“Educate and train all your professionals within your department on working with victims of domestic abuse with invisible disabilities, autism, sensory disorders as well as alienation, as so much was missed in my case and to this day me and my children are still suffering.”

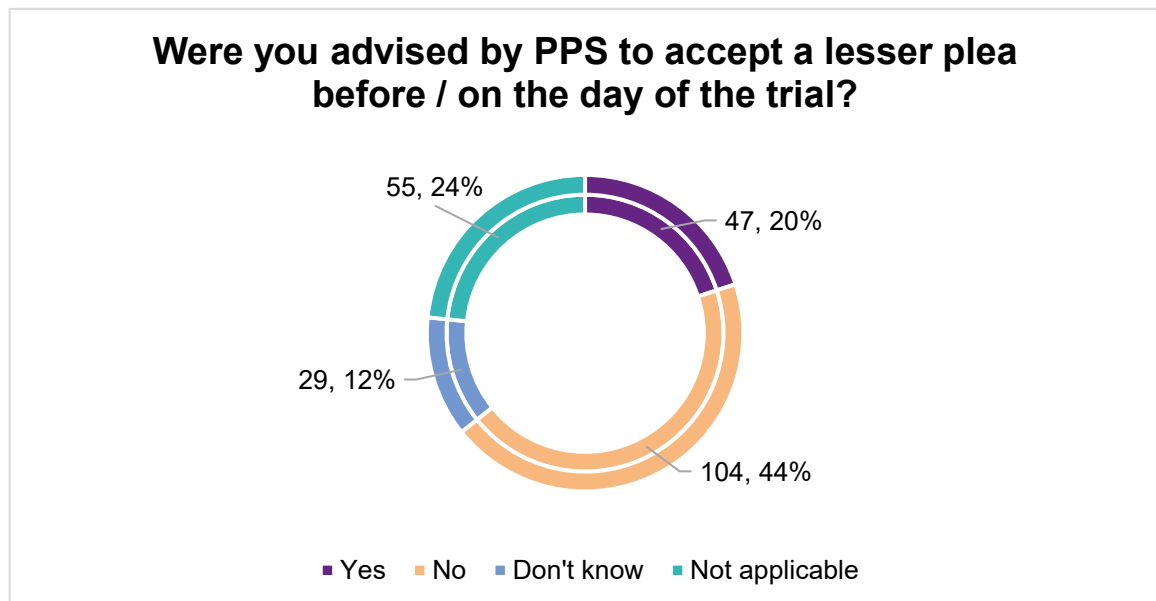
Another 26% (n=61) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 16: Victim needs assessed before trial



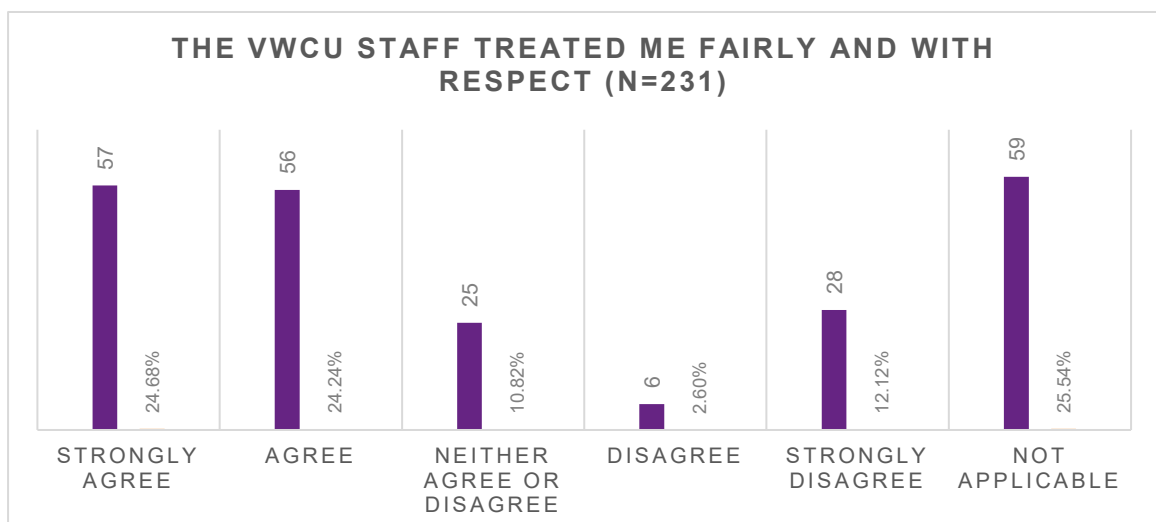
36% (n=84) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their needs were assessed in advance of the court trial while 34% (n=81) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 20% neither agreed nor disagreed and a further 9% said it was not applicable to them.

Figure 17: Victim advised to accept lesser charge pre-trial



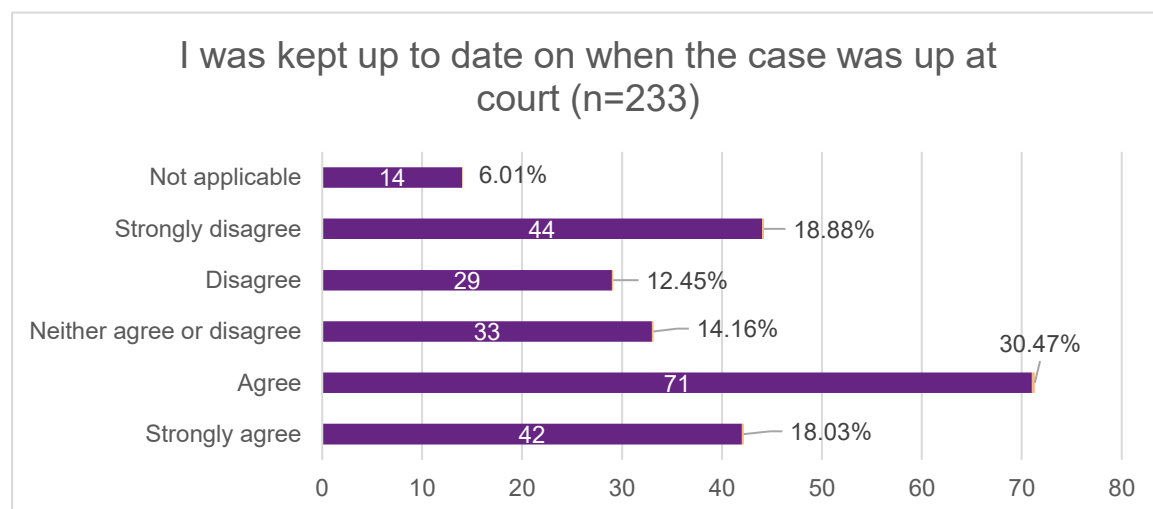
Respondents were asked whether they were advised by PPS to accept a plea to a lesser charge before or on the day of trial. As detailed in the chart above 20% (n=47) stated that they were advised to do this with a further 12% (n=29) not knowing. 44% (n=104) stated that they were not advised to accept a lesser plea and another 24% (n=55) said that this was not applicable in their case.

Figure 18: Treated fairly by VWCU



When asked whether they felt they were treated fairly and with respect by the PPS Victim & Witness Care Unit (VWCU), respondents again had mixed views with a majority feeling they were. 49% (n=113) (vs 40% in 2024) agreed or strongly agreed that they were treated fairly and with respect. 15% (n=34) (vs 12% in 2024) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. A further 11% (n=25) neither agreed nor disagreed with another 26% (n=59) stating this was not applicable to them.

Figure 19: Victim was kept up to date when case up at court



31% (n=73) (vs 38% in 2024) of respondents felt they were not kept up to date on when their case would be up in court, while 49% (n=113) (vs 41% in 2024) stated that they were kept up to date.

One victim stated:

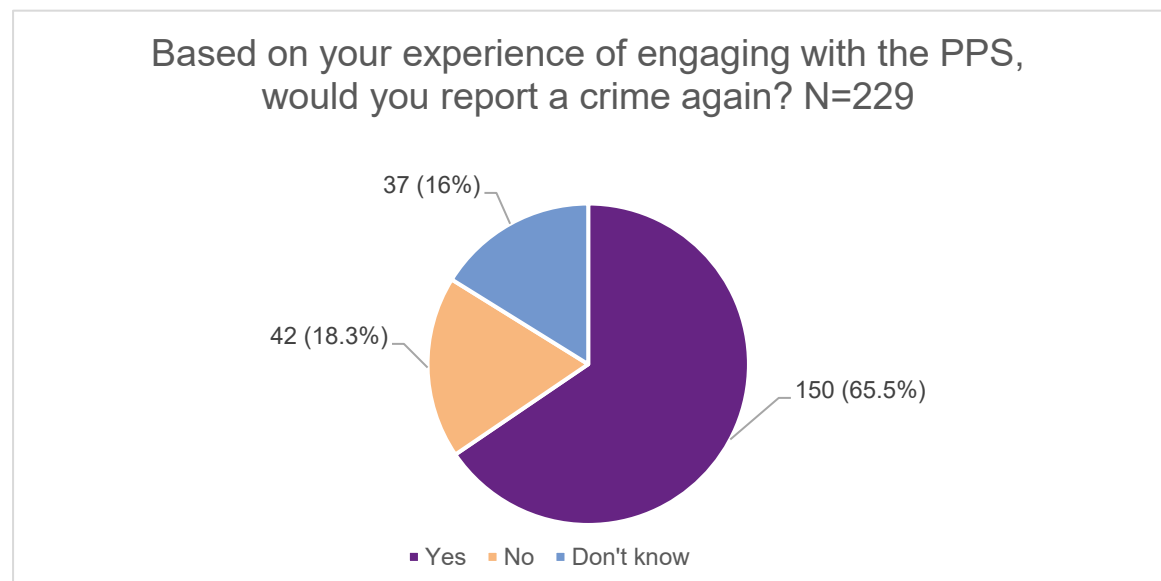
'The VWCU failed to inform me of the court date changes and therefore I was unable to attend court and wasted 4 hours sitting in a room for absolutely no reason. This was just another inconvenience'

while another said:

'I found VWCU to be very professional. I was always kept informed of what loop about court appearance and applications that were being made and contacted very promptly after court appearance and updated on what was happening.'

Finally, respondents were asked if they would report a crime again based on their experience with the PPS. 66% (n=150) (vs 48% in 2024) stated they would report a crime based on the PPS experience and 18% (vs 25% in 2024) said they would not. A further 16% (n=37) stated they did not know whether they would report a crime again or not.

Figure 20: Would you report a crime again based on PPS experience?



Below are some of the comments provided, both from a positive and negative perspective:

'The prosecutor was very kind and understanding. She explained that the defence wanted me to accept a caution for the perpetrator and when I declined, she immediately accepted this and recognised that the outcome of the trial was important to me and didn't expect me to accept at all. She spoke to me afterwards about what may come as a result of the hearing and was very sympathetic to a less-than-ideal outcome.'

'Everyone I've spoke with in VWCU are very nice compassionate people. They treat victims with respect and kindness.'

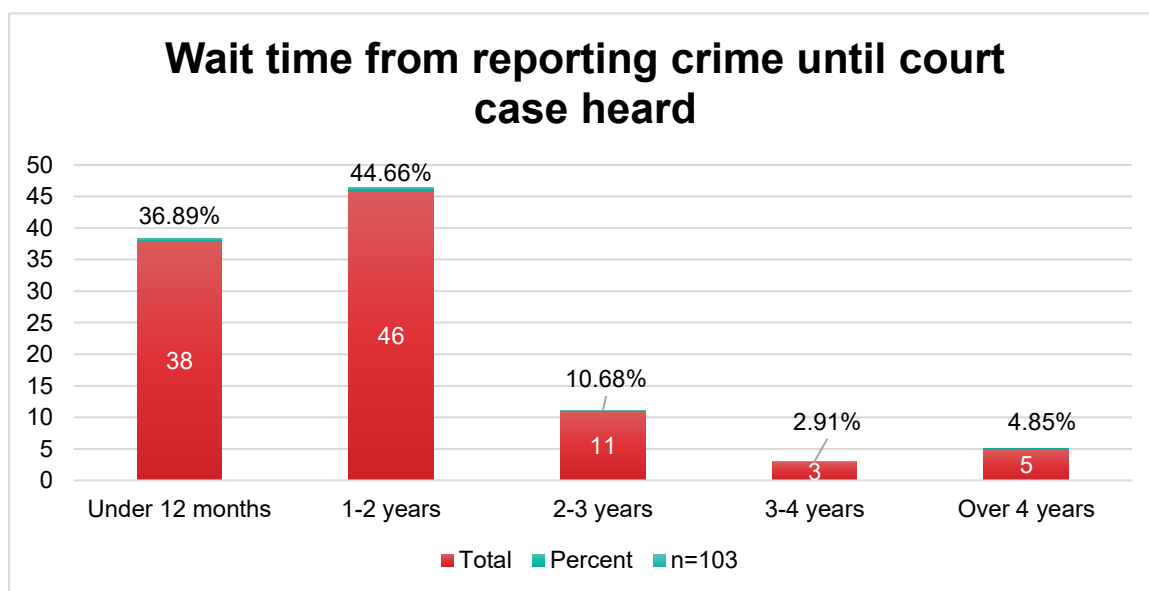
'I want to express my profound dissatisfaction, disappointment, and complete loss of faith in the Public Prosecution Service following my experience as the victim in an attempted murder case. The treatment I received throughout the prosecution process was not merely inadequate, it was fundamentally disrespectful, unprofessional, and represented a wholesale failure to provide victims with the representation, dignity, and voice that should be considered fundamental to any justice system worthy of the name. For a case of such severity, the lack of seriousness, preparation, and victim consideration displayed by the PPS was nothing short of shocking.'

'I know barristers are expensive, but this chap came in late, left early and didn't seem to care as hadn't read all the information maybe just a summary. New evidence had been submitted but he had failed to realise that and was told when I was in the room.'

'Will me commenting on this really make a difference??'

Victims' experience with NI Courts & Tribunal Service (NICTS)

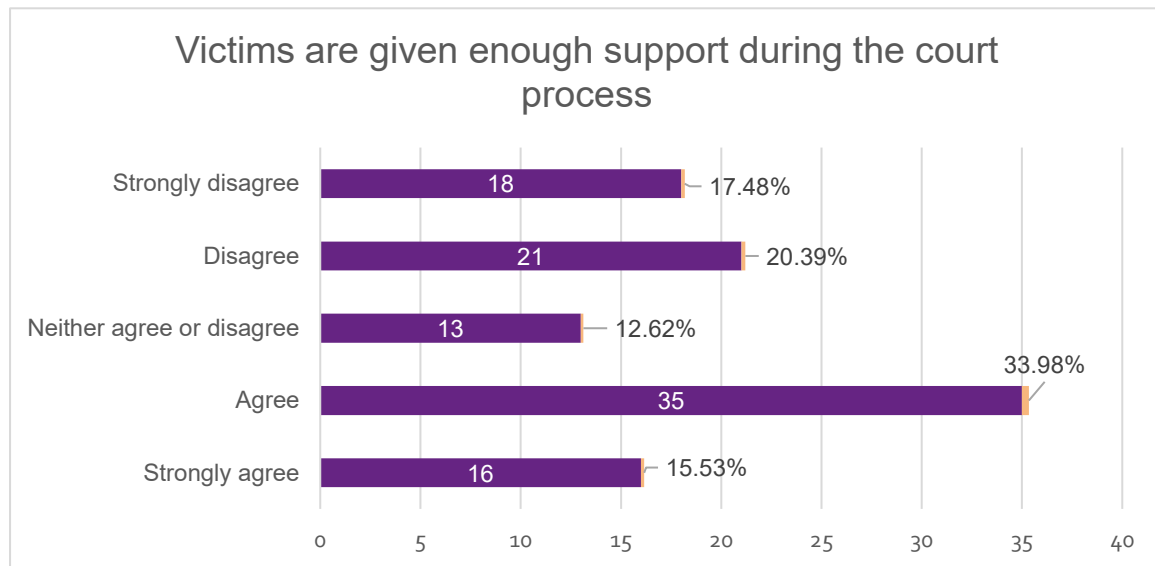
Figure 21: Length of time from reporting a crime to the case getting to court



The number of victims that responded to this section tailed off again with just over 100 responses on average. This could reflect the low number of victims whose cases made it as far as the courts.

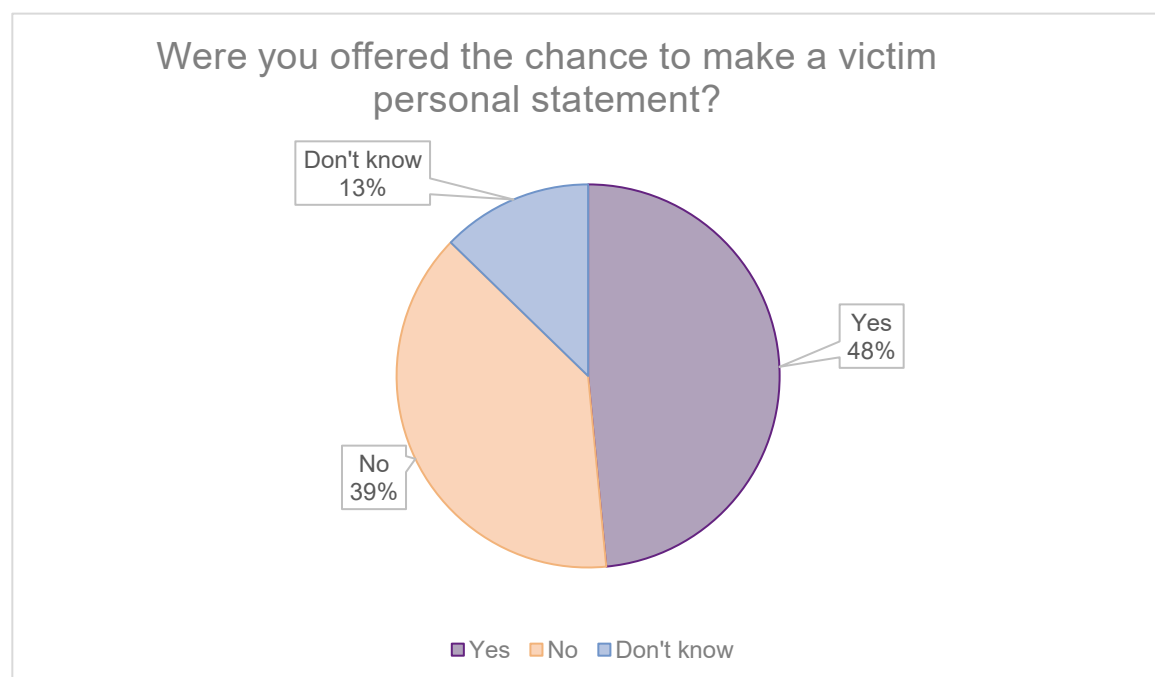
Survey respondents were asked how long they had to wait from when they first reported the crime to the police to when the case was heard at court. As Figure 21 outlines, 37% (n=38) (vs 43% in 2024) of those that responded waited under 12 months, 56% (n=57) (vs 40% in 2024) waited 1-3 years and a further 8% (n=8) waited more than 3 years (vs 17% in 2024).

Figure 22: Victims are given enough support through court process



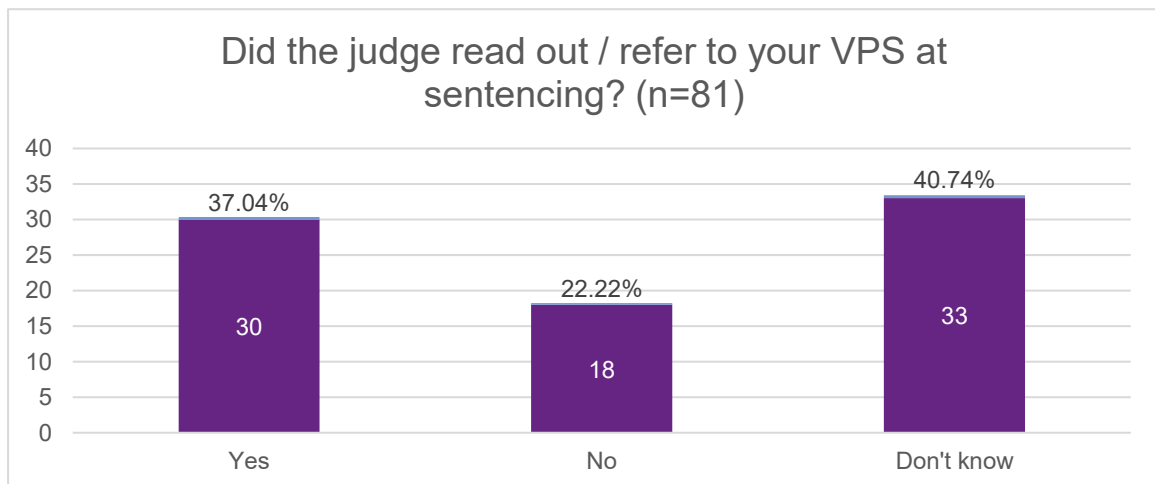
Victims were asked whether they felt they were given enough support during the court process. Again, the picture was mixed with 49% (n=51) (vs 42% in 2024) stating they agreed or strongly agreed with this, while 38% (n=39) (vs 48% in 2024) stated they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The remainder (13%, n=13) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 23: Were victims offered a chance to make a VPS?



Respondents were asked whether they were given the opportunity to make a victim personal statement (VPS). Of the 165 victims that responded, 48% (n=80) (vs 62% in 2024) said that they were offered the chance with 39% (n=64) (vs 33% in 2024) stating they were not offered the chance to make a VPS. 13% (n=21) said they did not know whether they were given the opportunity or not.

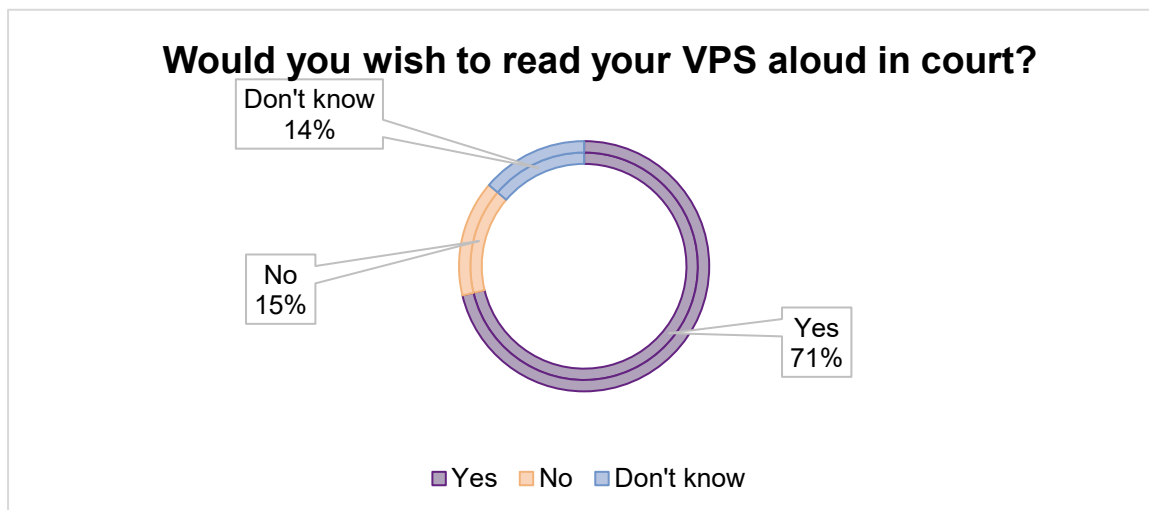
Figure 24: Did the Judge read or refer to your VPS?



The survey asked victims whether the Judge read out or referred to their victim personal statement (VPS) at sentencing. While 37% of respondents stated that the Judge either read or referred to their statement, 63% (n=49) stated that the Judge did not do this or that they did not know if the judge did this or not.

Victims were also asked whether they would wish to read their VPS aloud in court or have it read out. 71% (n=57) responded yes to this with only 15% (n=12) stating that they would not wish to do this.

Figure 25: Would you wish to read your VPS in court?



Below are some views that victims provided regarding victim personal statements and how they were / should be treated in our criminal justice system:

'This is very important as it shows the trauma I experienced during and after the crime'

'It made me feel good getting to write about how it affected me and to get my say'

'Even that I thoroughly expressed how I felt, it wasn't taken into consideration at all'

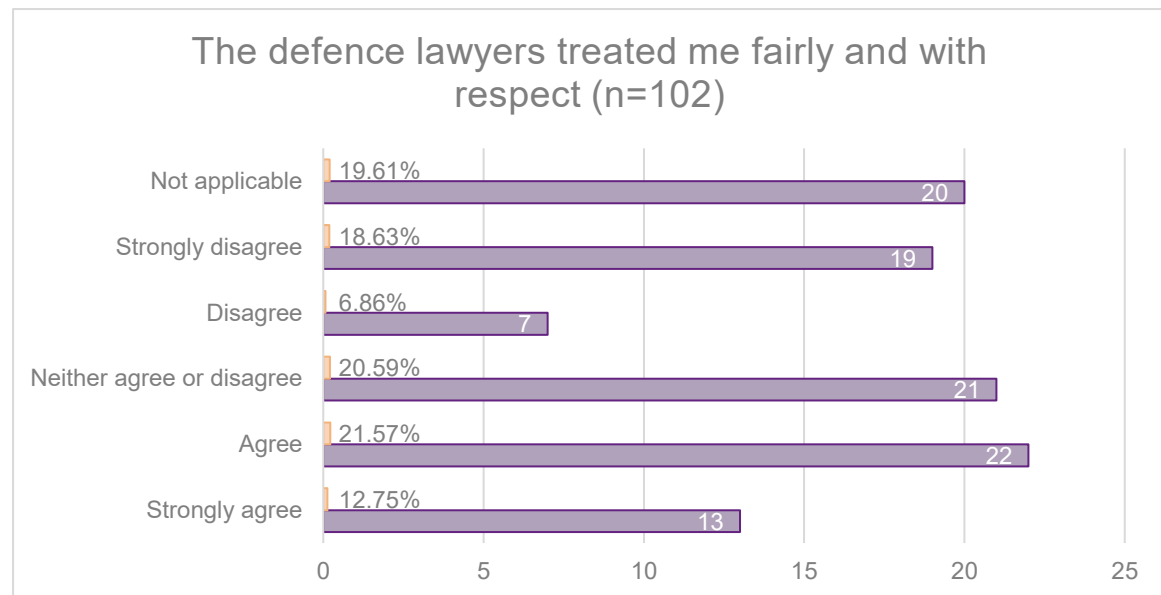
'But I didn't get to send it in, in time as the case went to trial- which I was not given the date for, and then within 3 weeks it had been to trial, and it was all over'

'There was no reference to it at the proceedings'

'It gives victims a chance to be heard and to feel seen. It gives us a chance to process our feelings too'

'It was good to write everything down that had happened and to start to process the impact the events had had on me.'

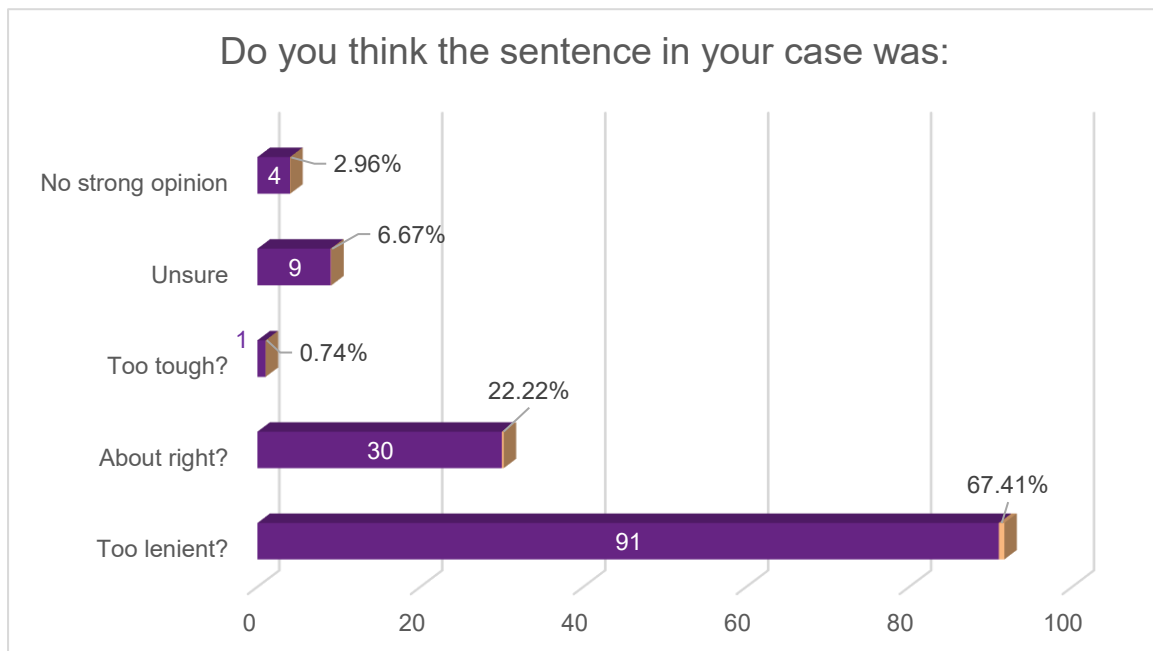
Figure 26: Defence lawyers treated victims fairly and with respect?



Victims were asked about their experience in court with defence lawyers and whether they felt they were treated fairly and with respect. 25% (vs 39% in 2024) of respondents felt they were not treated fairly and with respect by defence lawyers, while 34% (n=35) (vs 26% in 2024) felt that they were. 21% (n=21) neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

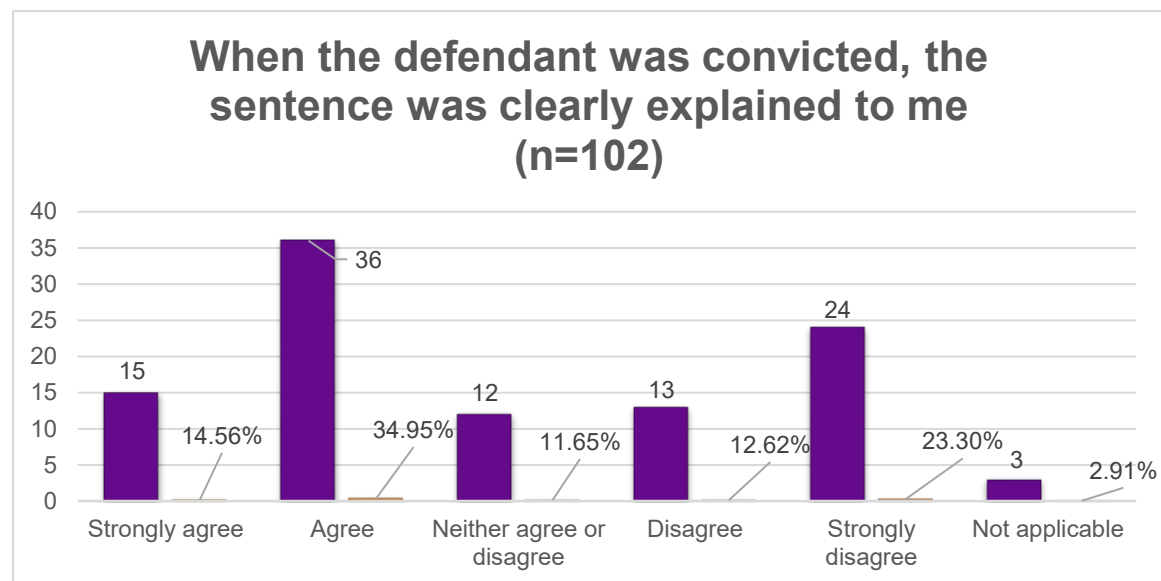
Sentencing

Figure 27: Views on sentencing



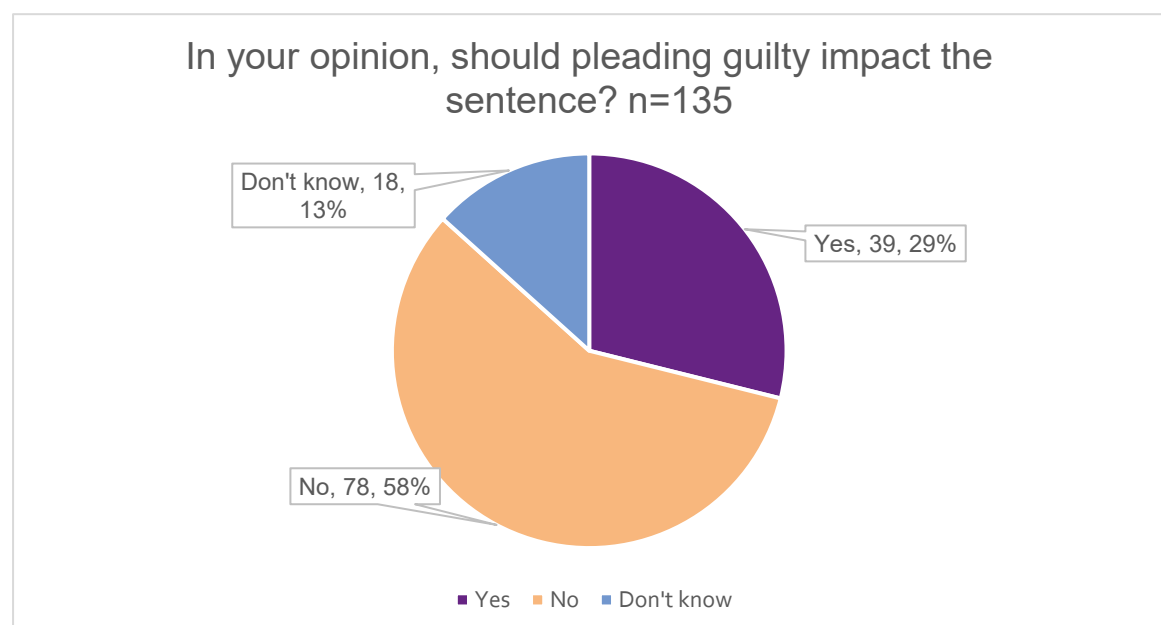
Victims were asked a range of questions about their experience of sentencing in our courts system. On average, around 135 people responded to questions in this section. When asked what they thought about the sentence handed down in their case, 67% (n=91) of victims believed it was too lenient with less than 1% (1) believing it was too tough. 22% (n=30) of victims believed the sentence given to the perpetrator was about right.

Figure 28: Was the sentence explained to you?



Survey respondents were asked for their views on whether the sentence was explained to them following conviction. Figure 28 shows that while 50% (n=51) (vs 32% in 2024) of respondents stated that they did have the sentence clearly explained to them, 36% (n=37) (vs 45% in 2024) stated that this wasn't the case.

Figure 29: Guilty plea impact on sentencing



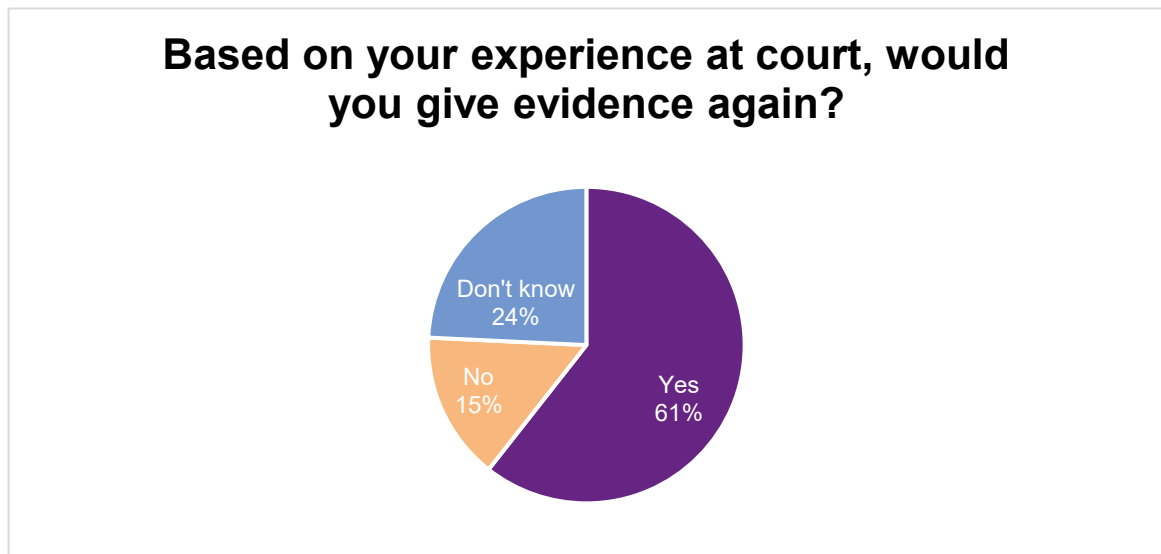
Victims were asked for their views on guilty pleas and whether these should have an impact on sentencing. 29% (n=39) of respondents believe that pleading guilty should impact the sentence. 58% (n=78) believe that it should not impact sentencing with 13% (n=18) not sure whether it should or not.

Some respondents provided reasons for their response and a sample of these are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Victim views on guilty pleas and impact on sentencing

Pleading guilty should impact the sentence	Pleading guilty should not impact the sentence
<i>I think a genuine guilty plea with some form of acknowledgement of the crime and the impact on the victim should be taken account of in sentencing. In my case the defendant initially pleaded not guilty and only changed their plea when the evidence against them was overwhelming. They have not demonstrated any real regret or acceptance of wrongdoing and I find this unacceptable.</i> <i>Yes but only if they plead guilty at the first opportunity - ie when they're being interviewed by police</i> <i>Pleading guilty indicates acceptance that the perpetrator acknowledges the crime. It would have saved a lot of time and discomfort (the cross examination as a witness was particularly grizzly in my case) and these should be acknowledged by a reduction in sentence.</i> <i>Yes, if you plead guilty at the earliest opportunity. Not on the day of the hearings with all the expenses involved and the wasting of police time as they were also in attendance at court.</i>	<i>They're either guilty or not guilty of whatever offence & should receive an appropriate sentence.</i> <i>They're guilty and that's that. Whether they plead not guilty or guilty, they're still found guilty. Letting people plead guilty for a lesser charge/less time - makes them feel like they're still in charge. I've had my ex plead guilty to one case then breached it and plead not guilty to the breach because they still felt like they could get away with stuff because that first guilty plea made them get away with it.</i> <i>Pleading guilty should not count as time off a sentence. Criminals plead guilty or not guilty on the advice of their legal teams not because they are remorseful or have a conscience.</i> <i>In my case the defendant pleaded not guilty for over a year, he was told I was in court to give evidence and still didn't change his plea- he didn't believe I was strong enough to actually go through with it. He waited until the last second where he knew I was going to give my evidence then decided to change to guilty. I do not think he should have been rewarded for this.</i>

Figure 30: Would you give evidence in court again?



Survey respondents were asked, based on their experience of giving evidence at court whether they would give evidence again. 61% (n=60) (vs 58% in 2024) of those that responded stated that they would attend again with 15% (n=9) (vs 29% in 2024) stating they would not attend again. 24% (n=24) of respondents did not know whether they would attend court again or not.

Victims were also asked to provide reasons why they answered in a certain way. Below are some of the comments they provided:

"I found this to be a harrowing experience and one which I wouldn't like to revisit."

"Too harrowing and I still have nightmares that I'm in court."

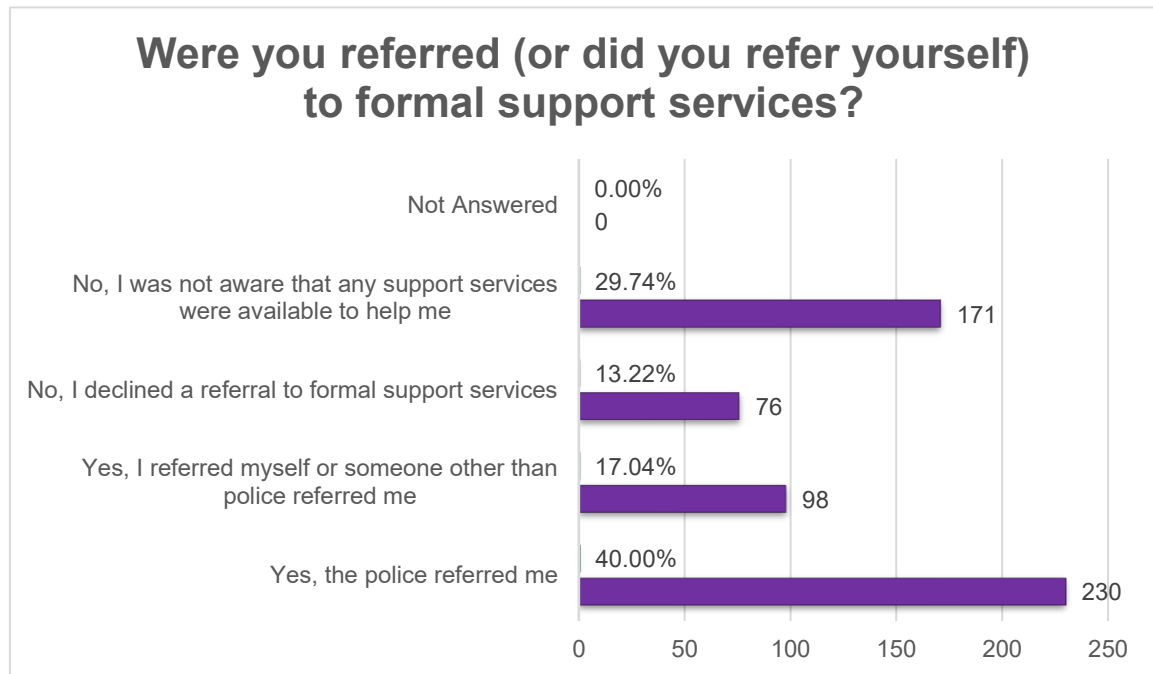
"If I had the correct and proper opportunity to do so. My participation in giving evidence at court consisted of answering two yes or no questions. Two. After surviving an attempted murder, after enduring the trauma of the attack and the lengthy process leading to trial, after being asked to complete a victim impact statement that was never used, my voice in the courtroom amounted to two binary responses. I was not given the opportunity to describe what happened"

to me. I was not given the opportunity to convey the terror, the pain, or the lasting impact. I was not treated as a person with a story that mattered. I was reduced to a procedural formality, present in body but utterly marginalised in voice and significance. This is not representation. This is not justice. This is institutional indifference dressed up as prosecution.”

“I was treated very badly by defending barrister who repeatedly called me a liar and I wasn’t aware that I should have been standing up to him I felt humiliated and belittled”

Victims' experiences with Support Organisations

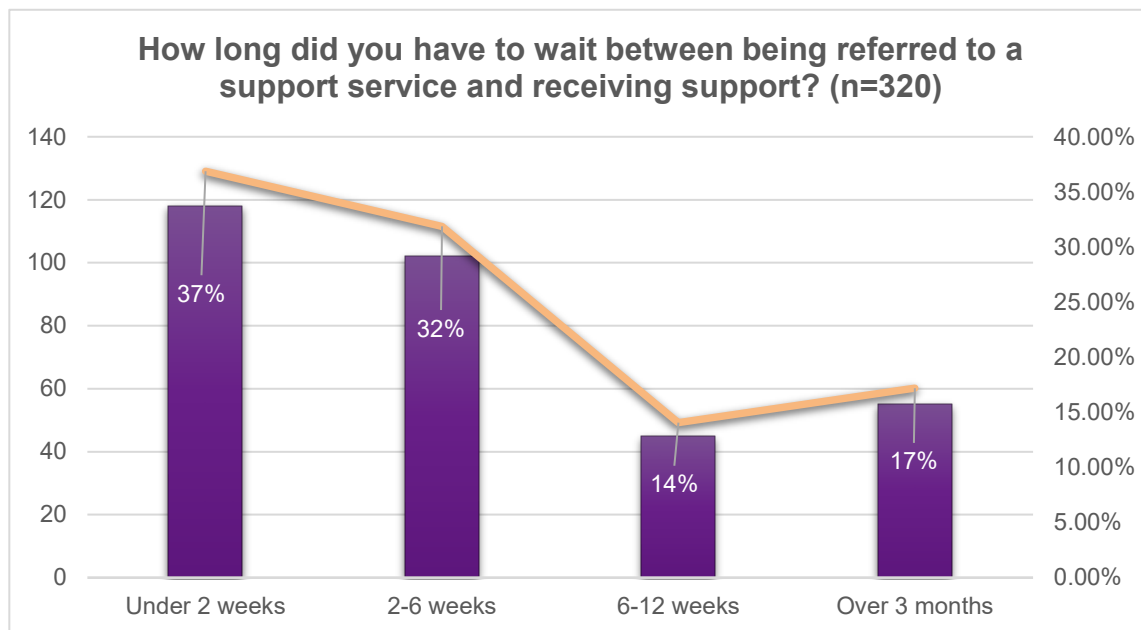
Figure 31: Victim referrals to formal support services



Survey respondents were asked about their experience regarding support services linked to the criminal justice system. They were firstly asked if they were referred or self-referred to formal support services like Victim Support NI or the NSPCC.

While 57% (n=328) of victims were referred or self-referred to one of the available support services, 30% (n=171) (vs 33% in 2024) reported not being aware of support services available to help them. 13% (n=76) of victims declined a referral to formal support services.

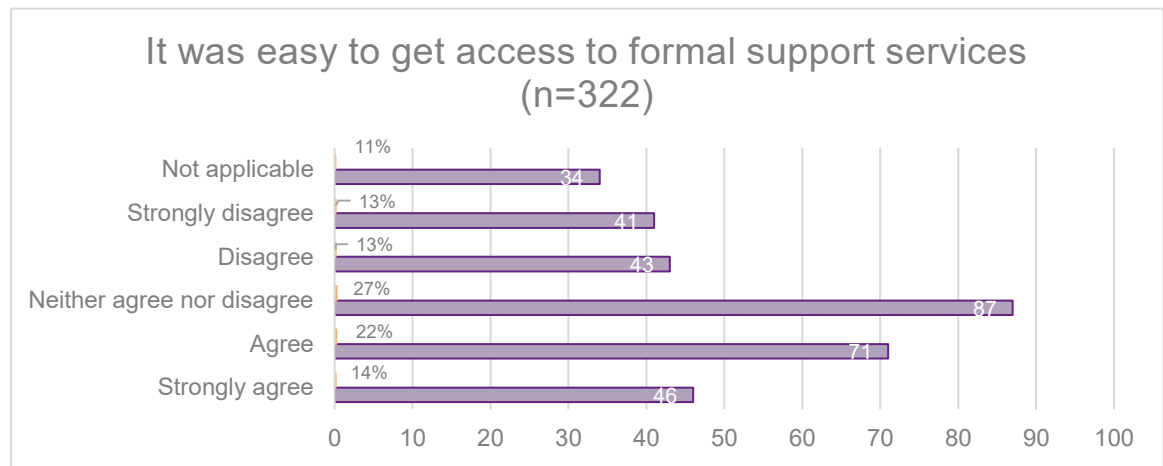
Figure 32: Wait time between referral and receiving support?



Victims were asked about the referral timeframes and how long they had to wait to get support from the time they were referred. Of the 320 responses, 37% (n=118) (vs 31% in 2024) reported waiting under 2 weeks to get support, 32% (n=102) (vs 36% in 2024) waited between 2 and 6 weeks for support and 14% (n=45) waited between 6-12 weeks. 17% (n=55) (vs 18% in 2024) of respondents stated that they had to wait over 3 months from the initial referral before getting support.

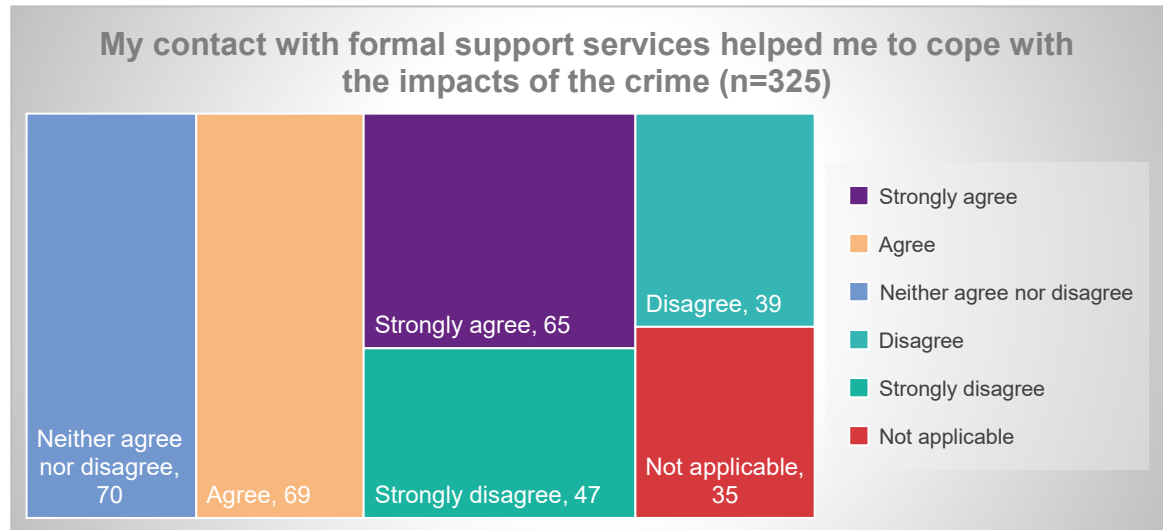
A further question was asked of respondents regarding the ease of access to support services. 26% (n=84) (vs 33% in 2024) of victims did not think it was easy to get access to formal support services, while a further 27% (n=87) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. 36% (n=57) (vs 42% in 2024) agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to access formal support services.

Figure 33: Ease of accessing formal support services



When asked whether formal support services helped them to cope with the impacts of the crime, victims were quite positive in their response. As the chart demonstrates 41% (n=134) of victims agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. 26% (n=48) (vs 35% in 2024) disagreed or strongly disagreed that it helped them cope with a further 22% (n=70) neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Figure 34: Support services helped me to cope



Victims provided feedback on their experience and below are a few different perspectives on that experience:

“The support services saved my life! Nexus, Relate NI and Women’s Aid have all been fantastic.”

“Victim Support were very comforting during the trial. I think they are vital to have especially during and after the court case.”

“I don’t think I would have been able to deal with my abuse if it wasn’t for Women’s Aid- they were the ONLY help I felt I had throughout the entire process. They came to court with me, explained everything I needed and helped me to rebuild my life, mental health and self-esteem after what I had been through.”

“Women’s Aid saved my life. It’s hard to put into words how appreciative I am for this service. I honestly think I would have been manipulated back into a relationship with my abuser without them. They strongly supported me the whole way right up to court.”

“Victim Support informed me of information relating to my case without hearing from police i.e. hearing dates and charges against the accused. They kept me more in the loop than anyone else involved with the case.”

“I was able to receive counselling support which I have found very beneficial. I did have to wait a considerable time for this however, but I appreciate there is a significant demand on the service.”

“Without the help of Women's Aid and Victim Support I would not be handling this very well.”

They do what they can with their resources, they deserve more support to help people

Others who did not have such a positive experience, while in the minority, provided some insightful feedback:

“My children were victims too, support for them was missing throughout all the services from start to finish everyone was interested in the adults. Who is there for all the innocent children, who is representing them?”

“Victim Support rang me and they were there for me to sit with during the trial but other than that they don’t help me in anyway.”

“I did not receive meaningful support from victim services for many months. After the police became involved in April, I had no practical or emotional support during the most difficult part of the process. Despite being in a high-risk domestic abuse case with three children under Child Protection, I was left to cope completely on my own.”

“I feel victim support services need to respond much faster in high-risk domestic abuse cases, ensure victims are not left alone during critical periods, and improve coordination with police and social services so that vulnerable families do not fall through the cracks.”

Conclusion

This is the third year this annual survey has been conducted, which includes all victims of crime, in Northern Ireland and we are grateful to all who took the time to respond. The sample size (575 respondents) was the largest so far and this year saw a 124% increase on the number of respondents in 2024. We look forward to building on this and growing the survey year on year.

Significant progress has been made with all criminal justice agencies on developing a model to gather victim feedback on their criminal justice experience. It is hoped that this can be finalised and rolled out in the coming year. We still anticipate that this office will publish a report annually on the victim experience which will be used to advocate for changes and improvements to our criminal justice system.

While our 2025 survey findings show improvements in a number of areas as compared with the findings in our 2024 survey, there is still a long way to go to ensure victims are consistently treated fairly and with dignity by all parts of the criminal justice system. The findings in this report reflect the concerns that we continue to hear from victims, both directly from those engaging with our office and indirectly through partner organisations and stakeholders working across the criminal justice system. It is clear from our engagement with victims and from the responses to this survey, that significant work is required to ensure that victims and witnesses are central to the criminal justice system and that our criminal justice agencies move beyond the rhetoric of victim-centred, trauma-informed etc and deliver services that recognise victims and allow their voices to be heard.

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



www.cvocni.org
office@cvocni.org
028 9052 6607

