

Annual Victims' Survey 2024

October 2025



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Acknowledgements

We would firstly like to express our gratitude to the people who took the time to respond to our survey and share their experiences of the criminal justice system with us.

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Glossary

Adjournment – a court trial or hearing being postponed to another date.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) - prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales.

His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) - is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice responsible for the administration of criminal, civil and family courts in England and Wales.

Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) - an independent advisor who works with people who have experienced rape and/or sexual assault by providing them with support, advice and help.

Judiciary – the judiciary is made up of judges, magistrates, tribunal members, and coroners, they uphold the rule of law

RASSO – Rape and Serious Sexual Assault.

Special measures – The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced a range of measures to facilitate the gathering and giving of evidence by vulnerable and intimidated witnesses by alleviating some of that stress. The measures are collectively known as "special measures" and include screens to prevent the victim and defendant from seeing each other when the victim is giving evidence or being cross-examined and the giving of evidence via live video link.

Victims' Code¹ – The Victims Code sets out the minimum standards of service (victims' rights) that agencies in the criminal justice system must meet when dealing with victims of crime.

Victim Liaison Officers (VLOs) – Victim Liaison Officers are professionals within the criminal justice system who act as a single point of contact for victims and witnesses of crime, providing support and communication to them throughout the legal process.

Victim Personal Statement (VPS)² – A statement which gives victims an opportunity to explain how the crime has impacted them, physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially or in any other way. This statement is given to the police, or any agency or organisation assigned by the police to take the VPS on their behalf.

Victims' Right to Review (VRR) – A process that allows victims to exercise the right to review certain decisions made by the police or CPS if they are unhappy with the decision not to prosecute the suspect. There are separate processes for a police decision or a CPS decision.

Witness Care Unit (WCU) – These units have the role of managing the care of victims and witnesses who are due to attend court and guide them through the criminal justice process. They are staffed by people from the police.

¹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime-in-england-and-wales) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² This is now referred to as the Victim Impact Statement.

Foreword by the Victims' Commissioner



This is my final report as Victims' Commissioner. When I was first appointed in 2013, I was determined all my work would be shaped by listening to victims' lived experiences of the criminal justice system. Having been through the system myself, I knew only too well that, all too often, the reality for victims does not match the rhetoric.

Over the years, my team and I have undertaken many victim surveys and have used the feedback to make the case for positive change. This year's Victim Survey is the largest ever, with over 6,500 voices sharing their experiences. For me, these voices matter. They are telling us not only what is working, but crucially where the system is failing victims, the very people it is meant to protect.

One of the most striking and most worrying findings is the lack of confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. This concern is even more pronounced among groups who are disproportionately victimised - women, LGBT+ people, and disabled people. Most concerning of all, many victims told us they doubt they would receive justice if they reported a crime. That should trouble us all. If victims lose faith in the system, they may stop coming forward. Justice cannot be delivered if victims are silent.

There are also positives. Many victims felt treated with fairness and respect by the police. But these experiences were overshadowed by reports of poor communication and inadequate investigations. I want every victim to feel they have been taken seriously, kept informed, and confident that action will follow their report. Too often, this is not the case.

Once again, the findings show that communication is key. At critical points, charging decisions, court outcomes, being kept informed transformed victims' experiences, helping them feel included rather than disempowered. Conversely, silence left them feeling abandoned.

Court delays remain a major source of harm, particularly for victims of rape, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment. These delays prolong trauma and damage mental health. Yet, amidst these challenges, victims spoke warmly of the support they received from judges, magistrates, ushers, security staff, and witness service volunteers. This feedback re-enforces what I have always said: empathy and compassion cost nothing but make a real difference.

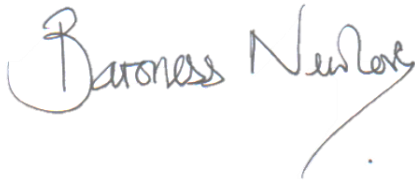
Access to support services is another area of real concern for me. Only around a quarter of victims recalled being referred to help, and even when their case reached court this only increased to around half. Where referrals did happen, victims often faced long waits for

under-resourced services. Properly funded victim support services are vital; support can be the difference between a victim staying engaged or walking away from the justice process.

Finally, too many victims remain unaware of their rights under the Victims' Code. Rights that give them a voice, such as making a Victim Personal Statement or requesting a review of decisions. These rights exist for a reason - to ensure victims are heard. But rights mean little if victims are not being told they have them. How can victims hold agencies to account if they do not know what they are entitled to expect?

I believe all victims deserve to be treated with decency and respect. This means good communication, tailored support, and a clear understanding of their rights and entitlements. Sadly, this report sends a very clear message that we have a great deal of work to do to rebuild victim confidence in the justice system.

For this reason, I am calling on the government to listen to what victims are telling us and to act.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Baroness Newlove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Baroness Newlove of Warrington

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

Summary

This report, produced by the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, presents the findings from her Victims' Survey 2024. The survey provides key insights into victims' experiences with the criminal justice system, including the police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the courts, victims' services and the delivery of victim entitlements under the Victims' Code.

Between 25th November and 31st December 2024, TONIC³, a social research organisation commissioned by the Victims' Commissioner, launched the Victims' Survey 2024. This is an online survey that asked victims of crime in England and Wales about their experiences of the criminal justice system. The survey is one of the largest surveys ever undertaken with victims of crime as well as being the largest survey undertaken by the Victims' Commissioner to date. This research gathered 6,581 responses from individuals who had been a victim of crime or had reported a crime since January 2021. The data has been weighted and is representative of all crime victims aged 16 and over in England and Wales by age, gender, region, ethnicity, and disability (see Appendix C for the demographic breakdown of respondents).

In the report, several comparisons are made to the 2023 and 2022 Victims' Survey results. However, these should be interpreted with caution, as the 2024 survey methodology and sample are considerably different to previous years (see Appendix A for the detailed methodology).

Key findings

Victims lacked confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Factors which undermined their confidence included a lack of resources, poor communication between criminal justice agencies and systemic biases. They also reported feeling like they were not believed or taken seriously.

- Around half (51%) of respondents were confident the criminal justice system was fair.
- Less than half (46%) of respondents were confident the criminal justice system was effective.
- Less than half (42%) of respondents were confident you could receive justice by reporting a crime.

Many victims do not report the crimes they have experienced to the police. When they do, victims have mixed experiences. Some victims reported negative experiences which involved poor treatment, poor support and insufficient communication and action in response to their reports.

- Positively, almost three quarters (71%) of respondents agreed that the police treated them fairly and with respect. However, this was lower for disabled victims, some of whom felt the police did not take them seriously.

³ [TONIC](#)

- Less than half (40%) of respondents agreed that they were kept regularly informed about the police investigation. Victims described feeling left in limbo and abandoned when they did not receive updates on their case.
- Less than half (43%) of respondents agreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly and many described feeling there was a lack of police effort to respond to and investigate the reported crime.
- Despite the negative experiences of some of our respondents, over two thirds (68%) of respondents said they would report a crime to the police again. When victims were satisfied with the police response to the crime, their willingness to report a crime to the police again increased.

Victims' experiences following a charging decision varied greatly. Victim confidence in the effectiveness of the CPS and satisfaction with the quality of communications about charging decisions, the court process and court outcomes was mixed.

- Less than half (48%) of respondents were confident that the CPS are effective at prosecuting people accused of committing crime.
- Many respondents praised the communications they received about their case and the legal processes. However, when communication was lacking, victims felt excluded, disempowered and stressed.

Victims' experiences of the courts varied considerably. Positive experiences involved good victim treatment and support, but lengthy delays contributed to more negative experiences.

- Over two thirds (68%) of respondents agreed they were provided with enough support throughout the court process. Victims told us how well supported they were by judges, magistrates, ushers, security staff and witness service volunteers.
- A fifth (20%) of respondents were dissatisfied with the length of time taken for the case to progress through the court. This dissatisfaction was higher for victims of rape and sexual assault and stalking and harassment, many of whom experienced multiple adjournments and waited several years from reporting the incident to the trial taking place.

Victims' services can be invaluable, but too few victims are referred to these services. The availability of timely, tailored, and effective support for all victims was also lacking.

- Only around a quarter (27%) of respondents told us they recalled being referred or had self-referred to victims' services. For victims whose case reached court, this only increased to 56%.
- Nearly two thirds (61%) of respondents agreed that the support they received was tailored to their needs though some victims emphasised the need for more individualised support to be available.
- Just over half (53%) of respondents agreed that their contact with victims' services helped them to recover from the impacts of the crime. This was lower for victims of stalking and harassment.

Too few victims are aware of or are receiving their Victims' Code rights.

- Less than a fifth (17%) of respondents had heard of the Victims' Code.
- Less than two thirds (60%) of victims recalled being offered the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement⁴ when cases had progressed to court.
- When no one was charged following a report to the police, only 14% of respondents had heard of the Victims' Right to Review.

⁴ This is now referred to as a Victim Impact Statement.

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Victim confidence in the criminal justice system

For the criminal justice system to function successfully, it needs victims to engage with it. To facilitate this, victims need to have confidence in the ability of the system to deliver justice. However, we found victim confidence in the effectiveness and fairness of the criminal justice system was low. Whilst some victims described having confidence in one part of the criminal justice system, they reported this being undermined by a lack of confidence in another part of the system.

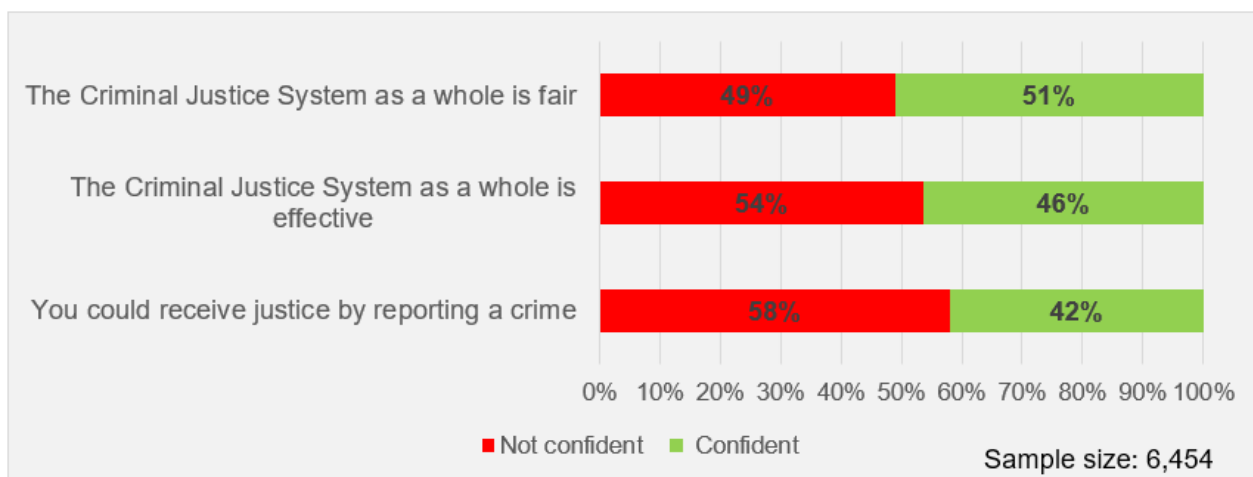
Certain victim groups also reported lower confidence in the justice system than others. For example, only a third of bisexual and gay/lesbian victims were confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime. Additionally, less than half of disabled victims and female victims said they were confident in the fairness of the justice system.

Victims reported a range of factors which undermined their confidence in the criminal justice system. These included insufficient resources to effectively deliver justice, poor interagency communication and a lack of trust from victims that they would be supported or believed.

Effectiveness and fairness of the criminal justice system

Overall, we found victim confidence in the criminal justice was low. Only 51% of respondents were confident the criminal justice system was fair, 46% were confident the criminal justice system was effective and 42% were confident you could receive justice by reporting a crime (figure 1).⁵

Figure 1. Proportion of respondents who were confident or not confident with various aspects of the criminal justice system.⁶



We also found that where victims had confidence in the effectiveness of one part of the criminal justice system, this was undermined by a lack of confidence in another part of the system. For some victims, they had a fantastic experience with police but felt let down by the CPS, whereas others had poor experiences with the police but then had better experiences with the later stages of the process. To maintain victim engagement with the justice system, victims need to have confidence in the whole process.

⁵ This compares to 38%, 27% and 23% respectively in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁶ Confident includes respondents who were fairly confident and very confident and not confident includes respondents who were not very confident and not at all confident.

The police were fantastic with me, the CPS decision not so. The threshold is far too high and not all evidence can be considered. From a safeguarding [perspective] of not just me but the wider public, when you know there are multiple allegations of rape and controlling and coercive behaviour, more should be done to protect people and to stop it from continuing and happening to other people. (Victim of post-separation abuse, Female, 45-54)

They [CPS] are completely useless and make the police's hard work pointless. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Male, 35-44)

I think courts are handled fairly well but the police are not. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

We also found that victims with certain characteristics had even lower confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. This was particularly notable for bisexual, gay or lesbian respondents. Only 38% of bisexual respondents and 39% of gay/lesbian respondents were confident the criminal justice system was effective⁷ and only 33% of bisexual and gay/lesbian respondents were confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime.⁸ Additionally, less than half of disabled victims (47%)⁹ were confident in the fairness of the criminal justice system. This replicates findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, which found that disabled people reported lower confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of justice system than non-disabled people.¹⁰ We also found less than half of female victims (47%)¹¹ were confident in the fairness of the criminal justice system. This is concerning when those who are female, LGBT+ or disabled are more likely to be a victim of crime.¹² Those who are more likely to experience a crime should not be less confident that the incident will be effectively or fairly addressed by the criminal justice system. Victims detailed how they felt sex, disability and ethnicity impacted how they were treated. Systemic biases like these must be addressed for all victims to feel confident that the criminal justice system will treat them fairly if they choose to engage with it.

I feel like race and sex is always a factor when you report a crime or are seeking justice. You won't always be treated fairly. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Less discrimination towards disabled people. To be treated more fairly and compassionately. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 35-44)

Our research identified several reasons why victims lacked confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to effectively deliver justice. These included insufficient resources in

⁷ These are statistically significantly lower than for heterosexual respondents (47%).

⁸ These are statistically significantly lower than for heterosexual respondents (43%).

⁹ This is statistically significantly higher than for non-disabled victims (53%)

¹⁰ [Perception and experience of police and criminal justice system, England and Wales, year ending March 2025 - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹¹ This is statistically significantly higher than for male victims (56%).

¹² [Crime in England and Wales: Annual Trend and Demographic Tables - Office for National Statistics](#)

the criminal justice system, a lack of inclusion and support for victims in the process and poor communication between criminal justice agencies.

Victims were aware of some of the difficulties facing the criminal justice system, describing it as having insufficient resources to be effective in delivering justice. This damaged victims' confidence in the system being able to successfully deal with all reports of crime.

It is clearly over stretched and unable to support victims adequately which is why so many crimes (including very serious crimes) go unreported. (Victim of fraud and theft, Male, 55-64)

The criminal justice system needs more funding to be able to deal with the vast amounts of crimes that they have to manage. (Victim of burglary, Male, 45-54)

We also heard from victims who lacked confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to include them, support them and do the right thing by them as a victim. Without trust that the criminal justice system would support and include them, victims were not confident the system would effectively deliver justice.

[Need] more confidence that [the criminal justice system will] do the right thing and stand up for the victim. Nobody was on my side. (Victim of online harm, Female, 16-24)

I felt entirely detached from the whole process - although I was the victim of the crime, I might as well have been receiving a very occasional update on an administrative process that had absolutely nothing to do with me. I understand the crime was an accident and it wasn't the crime of the century, but the experience gave me very little confidence in the criminal justice process. (Victim of road traffic accident due to careless and drunk driving, Male, 25-34)

Other reasons for why some victims lacked confidence in the criminal justice system included not feeling they were believed by criminal justice agencies. Respondents emphasised the importance of being listened to and believed as a victim, instead of feeling distrusted and blamed. Some victims felt that believing victims would motivate criminal justice agencies to act effectively on the reported crime and bring the perpetrator to justice.

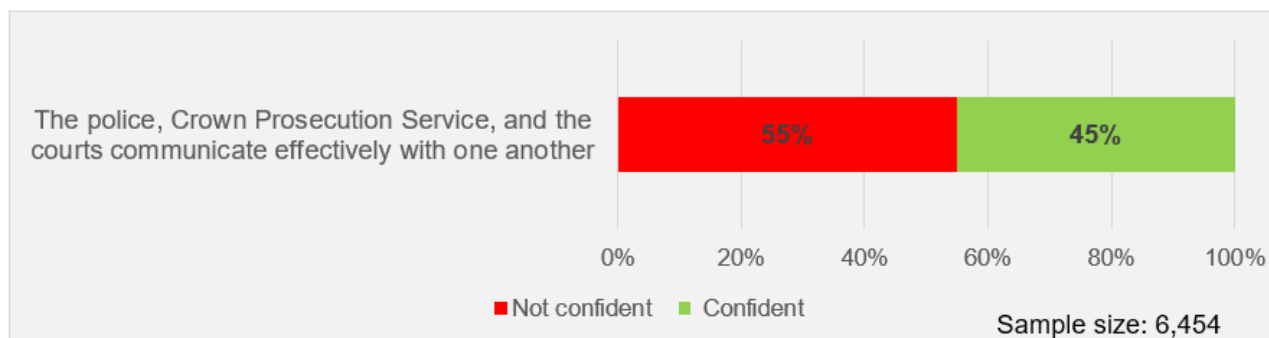
To believe victims and treat them with more dignity and respect, to not interrogate them too heavily, especially women who have experienced assault etc and add to culture of blame. (Victim of anti-social behaviour, Female)

Actually believing the victims and making sure the criminal is never able to repeat their actions. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

Listening to victims and acting on the crime reported regardless how small the crime is. (Victim of burglary, Male, 65-74)

Victims reported that their confidence in the criminal justice system was also undermined by poor communication between criminal justice agencies. We found that confidence in communication between agencies was lacking, with over half (55%) of respondents stating they were not confident that the police, Crown Prosecution Service, and the courts communicate effectively with one another (figure 2).

Figure 2. The proportion of respondents who were confident or not confident that the police, Crown Prosecution Service and the courts communicate effectively with one another.⁶



Several victims described how inter-agency communication between criminal justice agencies was insufficient. Victims detailed how this led to poor handling and hampering of their cases and created additional and unnecessary stress for victims. This ultimately undermined their confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

The police [and] CPS witness care teams etc all need to be in sync and up to date with correct information too. They were all on different pages and planets...The crime was treated like a petty theft! (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

Chinese whispers from us via police to CPS also hampered case. (Victim of Assault, Female, 55-64)

I wish the police had more insight or a closer working partnership with the CPS. If both the police and CPS were in alignment, it would ultimately serve victims better. I imagine there would be less "back and forth" with the CPS, the CPS not asking more questions than what the police have thoroughly covered in their investigations. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

This is concerning as effective communication between criminal justice agencies is vital to enable victims to navigate a system which is unfamiliar to them and alleviate unnecessary stress.

A successfully functioning criminal justice system is dependent on victim engagement. This requires victims to feel empowered to engage with the system when they need to and feel confident in its ability to deliver fair and effective justice. It is clear from these findings that confidence in the criminal justice system is low amongst victims. It is also concerning that this confidence is particularly low for victim groups that are more likely to be victimised. To improve this, communication between criminal justice agencies needs to improve and

victims need to feel listened to and believed. To allow all victims to have confidence in the criminal justice system, systemic biases within the justice system must be addressed. In the following chapters, we further explore victims' experiences at each specific stage of the criminal justice system. These chapters seek to identify areas for improvement and examples of good practice which ultimately impact victim confidence and engagement with the justice process.

Victims' engagement and experiences with the police

Engagement with the police is the first stage of the criminal justice process. A quarter of victims told us they chose not to report the crime to the police or withdrew from the police investigation. Some victims cited feeling discouraged from reporting due to a lack of confidence that the police would respond effectively and fear that police involvement may worsen the criminal behaviour.

Those who did report to the police and remained engaged with the process described mixed experiences. Positively, nearly three quarters of victims felt that the police treated them fairly and with respect. Victims of rape and sexual assault in particular described having a more positive experience where they perceived police officers to have specialist knowledge and training. However, we found improvements needed to be made to communication and procedure. Over a third of victims disagreed that the police investigated allegations thoroughly and that they were kept regularly informed about the investigation. Victims described a lack of effort to investigate in a timely manner and a lack of support and safeguarding provided by police.

While overall, victims reported a willingness to report to police again in the future, victims of certain crimes such as rape and sexual assault, were less willing. Where victims reported higher satisfaction with the police response, they were more likely to report again which demonstrates the importance of a positive experience with police.

Non-reporting to the police

Over a fifth of respondents (22%) stated that the crime was not reported to the police. However, for certain demographic characteristics and crime types there was a much higher prevalence of non-reporting. Thirty-two percent of Asian and Black victims¹³ said the incident was not reported to police. Some respondents highlighted the lack of trust they had in the police to take appropriate action.

*Because the world has turned it to a normal thing and no one cares about minorities, the case would not be taken seriously or be dismissed.
(Victim of hate crime, Female, 25-34)*

Additionally, 38% of victims aged 16-24¹⁴ said the incident was not reported to police. They often attributed this to their young age and lack of knowledge about the action that could be taken by police.

*I was very young and didn't know any better, I thought if anything I would get in trouble as well, because I knew what was happening was wrong.
(Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

Because it was online theft and I was young so I thought no one could do anything about it. (Victim of fraud and theft, Male, 16-24)

¹³ These are statistically significantly higher than for white victims (21%).

¹⁴ This is statistically significantly higher than for victims aged 25-34 (24%), 35-44 (20%), 45-54 (18%), 55-64 (19%), 65-74 (20%), 75+ (18%).

More than a third (36%) of hate crime victims, 41% of rape and sexual assault victims and 48% of online harm victims said the incident was not reported to the police.¹⁵

The main reasons victims gave for not reporting were thinking the incident was not serious enough to involve police, a fear of repercussions arising from their report and a lack of trust and confidence in the police. Victims also reported a desire to move on and a lack of understanding that a crime had taken place.

Many victims explained how they felt the crime was not serious enough to warrant using the limited amount of police time and resources available. Some victims felt as though there were more important crimes that the police should allocate their time to instead. The latest data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that one of the most common reasons for not reporting crime to the police was that the incident was deemed too trivial or not worth reporting.¹⁶

The police have more important things to deal with. (Victim of online harm, Female, 55-64)

I thought it wasn't major, and the police have only finite time and resources, so I thought in the grand scheme of things, they should be allocating their time better. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

We also heard from multiple victims who did not report their experiences to the police because they feared that rather than improve the situation, police involvement would worsen and escalate the behaviour. This was particularly the case for victims of domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and anti-social behaviour.

No firm indication of what help they could provide - if I reported it and did not get the right kind of help, I would be worse off and more at risk. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)

I was worried the situation would escalate and things [would] become worse than they are. (Victim of antisocial behaviour, Female, 55-64)

I was both convinced the police would not be effective in stopping the harassment and I felt that reporting it would increase the level of harassment. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Male, 25-34)

Victims also suggested they were less inclined to report where they anticipated that no meaningful action would be taken by the police in response. This was a particularly prominent reason given by victims of online harm and victims of hate crime. The Crime Survey for England and Wales found that over a quarter of people who did not report the crime attributed this to thinking the police could not do anything.¹⁷ Similarly, research looking at barriers to reporting hate crime found that where there is a low perception of a positive and successful police response, victims are less likely to report.¹⁸

¹⁶ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹⁷ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹⁸ [Barriers to reporting hate crime: A Welsh perspective - Gareth J Cuerden, Brian Blakemore, 2020](#)

I was convinced that the police wouldn't be able to do anything, so reporting it to them was pointless. The police don't necessarily have the best track record when it comes to dealing with hate crime effectively. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 25-34)

Because it was online, I did not think the police would do anything but just take the report. (Victim of online harm, Female, 35-44)

Many victims of rape and sexual assault told us that they did not report the crime due to a fear of not being believed or taken seriously by the police. This feeling was often compounded by apprehension about the criminal justice process and a fear of victim-blaming. The recent report published on Operation Soteria^{19 20} highlighted that one of the most common reasons for not reporting was that rape and sexual assault survivors did not think they would be believed by police.

I was worried about not being believed. It was by someone I knew, and I was drunk at the time. I also knew people who reported sexual assault and had a horrible time reporting it and going through the courts. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Because even if they believed me, the process is too long and would rip me and my character and credibility apart. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Shame that I would be blamed, and that people wouldn't believe me as the person was popular and well liked and I was not. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Male, 16-24)

Some victims identified that instead of reporting the incident to the police, they preferred to try and move on with their life. In some cases, this was due to the trauma they thought they would encounter if they engaged with the criminal justice system. Previous research conducted by the Victims Commissioner heard from many victims who felt they could not move on with their lives whilst engaged in the criminal justice process and others who described how the process can be retraumatising.²¹ In this research we heard from several victims, particularly victims of rape and sexual assault, who did not report to the police to avoid these negative consequences.

I didn't want to go through the legal system and all the additional trauma that involves. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

¹⁹ [City Research Online - Operation Soteria Rape and sexual assault survivors' experience of the police in England and Wales Survey Report II: July 2023 – June 2024](#)

²⁰ [Operation Soteria](#) was developed and launched in June 2021, in response to national concern around the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault offences, with the aim to increase the number of adult rape and serious sexual assault cases reaching charge and improve criminal justice whole system response. This has led to the development of the first National Operating Model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences.

²¹ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

[It] took me a while to acknowledge it and [I] wanted to move on. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

Other victims described how they did not know that what had happened to them was a crime. This was sometimes the case for incidents of domestic abuse, sexual assault or antisocial behaviour. This meant they were unaware that they could report these incidents to the police.

At the time, I didn't realise it was a crime. (Victim of anti-social behaviour, Female, 45-54)

I did not think it was assault until I left the relationship. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

At the time, I didn't know I could [report]. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 65-74)

Research by the Victims' Commissioner on anti-social behaviour²² found that this lack of clarity and awareness that a crime had taken place was often replicated by police. In some cases, this led police to dismiss the offence.

Some victims will choose not to report a crime to the police, and they should feel empowered to make the decision that is right for them. However, it is concerning that some victims are discouraged from reporting due to a lack of trust or confidence that the police will respond effectively, and fear that their involvement will worsen the criminal behaviour. For the criminal justice system to deliver effective justice, victims must feel confident about reporting crimes and engaging with police in the first instance.

Victim withdrawal from the police investigation

Despite engaging with the police initially, some victims told us they decided to withdraw from the police investigation. Victims not supporting or withdrawing support for a police investigation is not uncommon, with the latest police statistics showing that 26% of assigned police outcomes for all offences were for evidential difficulties due to the victim not supporting action.²³ For some crimes, such as rape offences, this outcome is assigned to over half (55%) of cases. Victims gave several reasons for withdrawing from the police process. These were to protect themselves from the negative impact of the process, poor police handling of the case and not wanting the perpetrator prosecuted.

Being a victim of crime can have devastating impacts on the victim, which can be further exacerbated by the criminal justice process. Many victims highlighted the negative impact the process was having on them. They also told us how withdrawing from the criminal justice process was a way of protecting themselves.

²² [Still living a nightmare: Understanding the experiences of victims of anti-social behaviour - Victims Commissioner](#). Anti-social behaviour is not a specific criminal offence but many of the behaviours, such as criminal damage or harassment, are criminal. This report explores this further.

²³ [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables - GOV.UK](#)

Too stressful, [it] took too long. It ruined my life and I thought I'd lose my family if I carried on with the case. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

The process affected [my] mental health, so it was easier to drop it, even though there was a clear crime. (Victim of assault, Male, 35-44)

Other victims attributed their withdrawal from the police investigation to the poor handling of the case. This included the length of time it was taking, poor record keeping and poor communication from the police about the progress of the case.

I chose to withdraw from the investigation process because I felt it was taking too long... Additionally, I perceived that there was little significant progress being made in the case, which led me to lose confidence in achieving a satisfactory resolution. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

[Because] there was a delay in the investigation and the police were not saying certain things. (Victim of fraud and theft, Female, 25-34)

One of the crimes I reported was rape. They have made such a mess of everything, ping-pong crimes back and forth between forces, losing files, and evidence. I have zero faith most officers would be able to solve a crime if it happened in front of them. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

Despite being the victim in the event, some victims withdrew from the process due to concern for the perpetrator and what might happen to them. We heard from victims who did not want to see the individual responsible for the incident prosecuted or wanted them to receive mental health support instead.

Because I didn't want the person prosecuted. (Victim of assault, Female, 45-54)

[The] person responsible needed mental health intervention. (Victim of criminal damage, Female, 45-54)

Reporting to the police

For most of our respondents (74%), the police were aware of the crime committed. This was either through the victim reporting the incident themselves or the police finding out via other means. The initial response from police is the first stage of the criminal justice process, and it sets the tone for victim engagement with the criminal justice system. It is vitally important victims have a positive experience to encourage their sustained engagement with the process both in the present and the future.

We heard about a range of victims' experiences with the police. Key factors contributing to victims' experiences included how police officers treated and supported victims, the communication victims received and the action the police took in response to their reports.

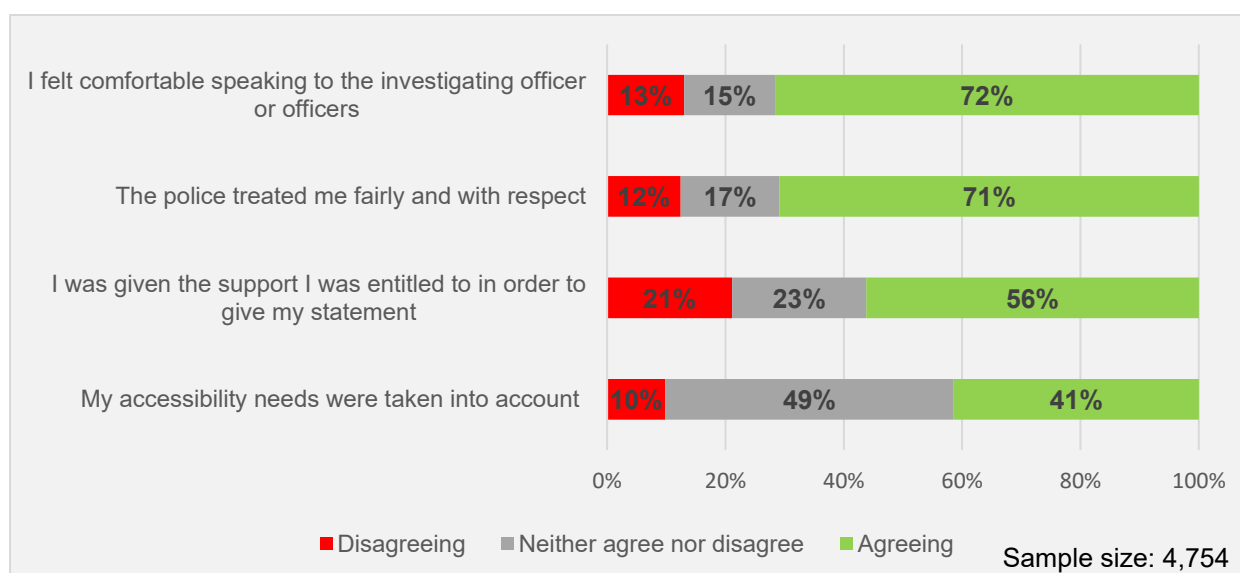
The majority of respondents (72%) agreed that they felt comfortable speaking to the investigating officer/s (figure 3).²⁴ However, this was much lower for victims of rape and sexual assault (60%) and domestic abuse (59%).²⁵ Victims told us how the police lacked empathy and were unsupportive. They also described feeling victim blamed and as though they should not be reporting the crimes.

There was a severe lack of compassion and empathy, I felt like I shouldn't have been there and should have avoided reporting. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

There was a lot of victim blaming, they did not see the seriousness in what I reported or how it would impact me. No emotional support was offered. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

The police officer that phoned me seemed annoyed/not compassionate at all. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Figure 3. Respondent levels of agreement and disagreement with various statements about their experience with the police.²⁶



Victims of rape and sexual assault reported a very different experience when they received support from officers they perceived had specialist training or knowledge of dealing with victims of these specific crimes. Increased specialist training and knowledge in the police includes the work of Operation Soteria, which was launched in 2021 and rolled out across all 43 police forces in England and Wales in 2023.²⁷ This was designed to improve how police handle rape and serious sexual offences and has led to the development of the first

²⁴ This compares to 61% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

²⁵ These are statistically significantly lower than for victims of antisocial behaviour (73%), assault (70%), burglary (81%), criminal damage (74%), fraud and theft (72%) and online harm (75%).

²⁶ Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

²⁷ [Op Soteria rolled out across England and Wales](#)

National Operating Model for the investigation of these offences.²⁸ Our research reinforces how vital it is that learning from Operation Soteria is effectively embedded across England and Wales. We heard from victims of rape and sexual assault who reported positive experiences with police officers who had specialist experience and training. Victims described the officers' compassion, empathy and how they made them feel safe.

They appeared to be well trained to deal with victims of sexual assault who [are] presenting with trauma. They were professional and compassionate, yet unbiased. I understand they are part of a reasonably new initiative across [police force area] – [operation] Soteria. Perhaps that is why it was largely a positive experience engaging with the police. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

The officers I spoke to initially were empathetic and kind. They clearly had a lot of experience dealing with victims and knew how to conduct the situation. They made me feel safe. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

When looking at the treatment victims of all crime received from the police, 71% of respondents agreed that police treated them fairly and with respect (figure 3).²⁹ This included police taking the time to explain unfamiliar processes clearly to victims, listening to them, addressing and supporting their needs and giving them the space to decide how they wanted to proceed. This is empowering to victims in a process that can feel isolating.

The last police [officer] was nice. Kept me updated. Did a welfare check on me when he had not heard from me. Was very patient with me. Explained things in simple English. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

They took time to talk me through the whole process and didn't force me to press charges. (Victim of assault, Female, 45-54)

The police were very knowledgeable around the impact of mental health and saw it as a vulnerability rather than a reason to doubt my account. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Everyone was kind, understanding and took things at my pace, I zoned out a lot and needed a lot of details repeated to me. I was worried I'd be annoying, but they were very sweet. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

In comparison, only 67%³⁰ of disabled respondents agreed that they were treated fairly and with respect by the police. Respondents told us they did not feel that the police took them

²⁸ [Operation Soteria – Transforming the Investigation of Rape](#)

²⁹ This compares to 60% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

³⁰ This is statistically significantly lower than for non-disabled respondents (73%).

seriously and that officers made few or no adjustments to accommodate their disability. One victim emphasised the need for better police training to enable disabled victims to express themselves.

Stop prejudicing against disabled people. [I] feel like the police don't investigate or take things seriously when a disabled person reports a crime, in fact they often make the victim feel like they are on trial. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 35-44)

Police to treat disabled victims in a less prejudiced, discriminatory, and fairer and more compassionate way, and with respect and dignity. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 35-44)

Make adjustments for disabled autistic people. Listen [and] don't contradict as autistic people have difficulty expressing themselves. GET TRAINED! (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)

This replicates previous findings from the Victims' Commissioner's annual victims' survey,³¹ which highlighted police failings to make reasonable adjustments for disabled victims and that some disabled victims felt infantilised. The Victims' Commissioner's recently published review into disabled victims' experiences of the criminal justice system identified a lack of knowledge and training about working with and supporting disabled victims and instances of police dismissing and minimising crime against disabled people.³² Research on disabled victims' experiences of police has suggested that police may be less likely to take the reported incident seriously due to their perception of the way disabled victims may present during the investigation.³³ This can lead to police discrediting their account,³⁴ leaving victims feeling disbelieved and with little support from police to pursue justice.

Police response and communication

Thirty-two percent of respondents told us they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the police response to the crime (figure 4).³⁵ Many victims highlighted dissatisfaction with the communication they received following their report to the police and the lack of action taken by the police following their report.

³¹ [Annual Victims' Survey 2023 - Victims Commissioner](#)

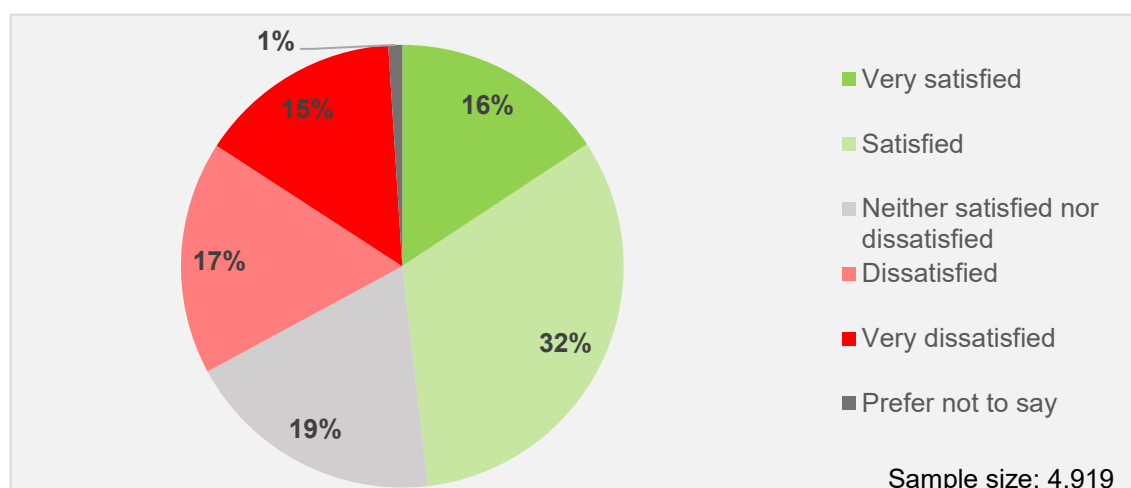
³² [Disabled victims' experiences of criminal justice systems: A systematic literature review - Victims Commissioner](#)

³³ ['I may be left with no choice but to end my torment': disability and intersectionalities of hate crime: Disability & Society: Vol 38, No 1](#)

³⁴ [City Research Online - Operation Soteria Rape and sexual assault survivors' experience of the police in England and Wales Survey Report II: July 2023 – June 2024](#)

³⁵ This compares to 40% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 4. Respondent satisfaction levels with the response they received from police.



For 42% of respondents, they disagreed that they were kept regularly informed about the police investigation (figure 5).³⁶ When we asked respondents if someone was charged following their report to the police, 16% did not know.³⁷

Victims stated how receiving more regular updates and better communication from police, without having to chase them, would have improved their experience of the criminal justice process. This is because better communication reduced uncertainty and stress and allowed victims to feel more supported. One victim described how the lack of updates left them feeling abandoned by the police who should be protecting them.

Communication from the police overall is less than poor. They need to do better at communicating quickly but also, they need to give people an idea of time frames in terms of when they will next be communicated with or how long investigations often take. Being left in limbo for anyone, be that [a] victim or someone being accused of a crime, is just not good enough. It impacts people on a daily basis and often for extended periods of time. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

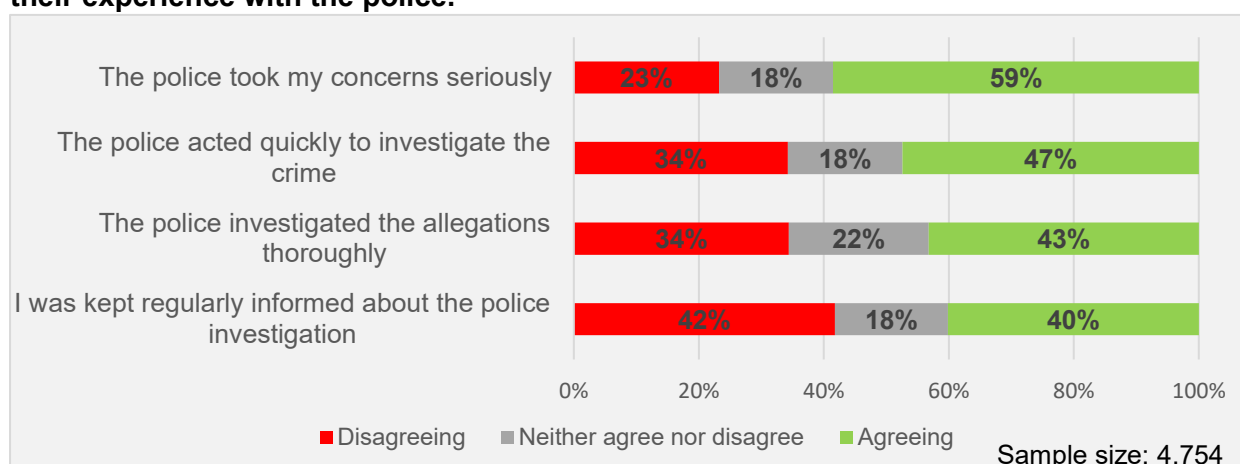
I frequently went for long periods without hearing from the officers dealing with the case despite chasing them via email, text, and phone. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)

I think the follow ups should be improved so that I know everything about what has been happening about the investigation, I would rather not feel abandoned by people that are supposed to protect me. (Victim of assault, Male, 25-34)

³⁶ This compares to 46% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

³⁷ Please note this may include victims who recently reported a crime and are yet to be notified of the charging decision. 21% said someone was charged, 61% said no one was charged and 1% preferred not to say.

Figure 5. Respondent levels of agreement and disagreement with various statements about their experience with the police.³⁸



Whilst 43% of victims agreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly (figure 5)³⁹, many other victims expressed concern that there was a lack of meaningful action taken by police when they reported a crime. Over a third (34%) of victims disagreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly which is particularly concerning as our research consistently shows that having the crime fully investigated is one of the most important things to victims.⁴⁰ Victims described how they felt there was a lack of effort by police to investigate the crime and dissatisfaction with the time taken for police to respond to victims' reports. We heard from victims where the lack of police action meant more offences took place or the time limit to prosecute had passed.

I think the police could have acted quicker to investigate my case/claim - in the time it took, the offender managed to offend again. (Victim of assault, Male, 25-34)

If they had listened to me at the time, the statutory time limit to prosecute would not have lapsed and the suspect could have been charged. However, it took me standing up in a [Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner] meeting and an article in the local press before they took action. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

[The police] investigating alleged crimes would be a start, despite sexual assault, stalking, harassment and spyware on my phone, they've never been interviewed, spoken to or arrested. I've tried to get 3 restraining orders and have tried to end my own life several times, all this because the police cannot be bothered. My abuser will kill me, I've no doubt about that and I'll be another headline instead of the police

³⁸ Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

³⁹ This compares to 30% in our 2023 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁴⁰ See Appendix D for further detail on the most important factors for victims when reporting a crime to the police.

actually doing what they're supposed to and investigate. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

Some victims stated they were aware of the limitations and difficulties facing the police. Several victims felt the police were doing the best they could to investigate reports with the limited resources and staff that they had available.

It was obvious that the police were trying their best but were short staffed. (Victim of assault, Male, 55-64)

I don't think they were able to investigate fully because they are under resourced. I don't feel that I was deliberately rebuffed - they just cannot investigate everything thoroughly and have to prioritise. (Victim of fraud and theft, Female, 45-54)

With 6.6 million crimes recorded by police between April 2024 and March 2025⁴¹, criminal justice agencies must be appropriately resourced to effectively prosecute perpetrators of crime and effectively support and communicate with victims during the criminal justice process.

Support from the police

Overall, 38% of respondents agreed with the statement that victims are well supported by the police (figure 6).⁴² Victims cited examples of good practice where supportive police officers built their trust and allowed them to feel safe throughout the process.

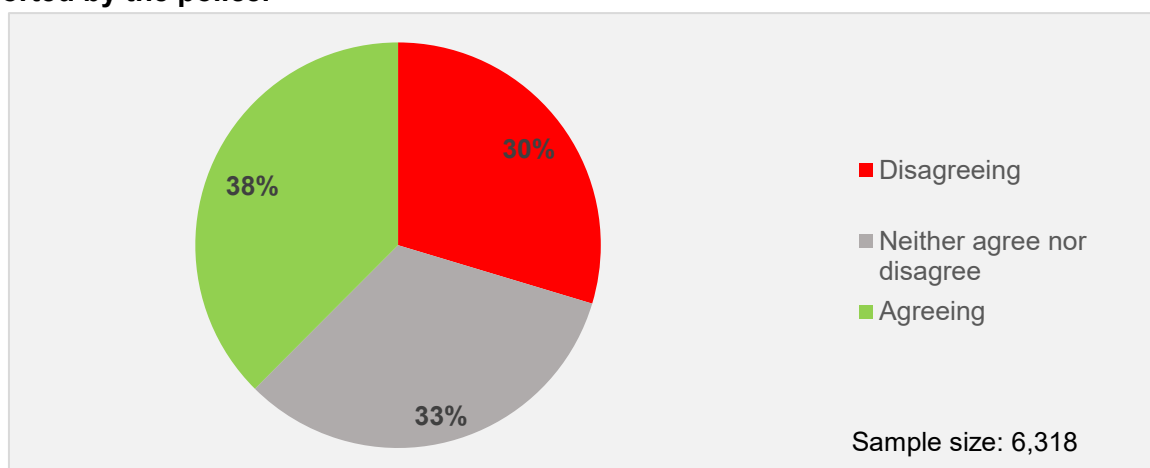
I had an amazing officer in charge. She was exactly who I needed to support me through the process. She saved my life and my daughter's life. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Although the assailants were never found, the police were fully supportive, kind and understanding. I could not have been treated better. (Victim of street violence, Female, 55-64)

⁴¹ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁴² This compares to 23% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 6. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing that victims are well supported by the police.



However, not all victims felt this way about their interactions with the police, with some victims reporting poorer experiences. Thirty percent of survey respondents disagreed with the statement that victims are well supported by the police (figure 6).⁴³ Victims detailed experiences where they were not offered sufficient support during the police investigation, particularly support to understand the process.

[I] needed more support to get through the investigation - [I] didn't understand the process or how long it would take. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

When I was first interviewed and given the opportunity to make a statement, I was not given the support I needed to give the statement in the best way. I only realised this when I was in court and giving evidence. The whole case was based on my first statement, which took 16 hours to complete over 2 days. I did not understand exactly what I was doing and how it would be used in court. I believe [domestic violence] victims, who are in shock at the time, could be given better support to understand what they are doing when they give the statement and how their words/account will exactly be used. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Victims also described a lack of victim safeguarding provided by police officers to support them and keep them safe. We heard from victims where their physical safety was not prioritised by police following reporting.

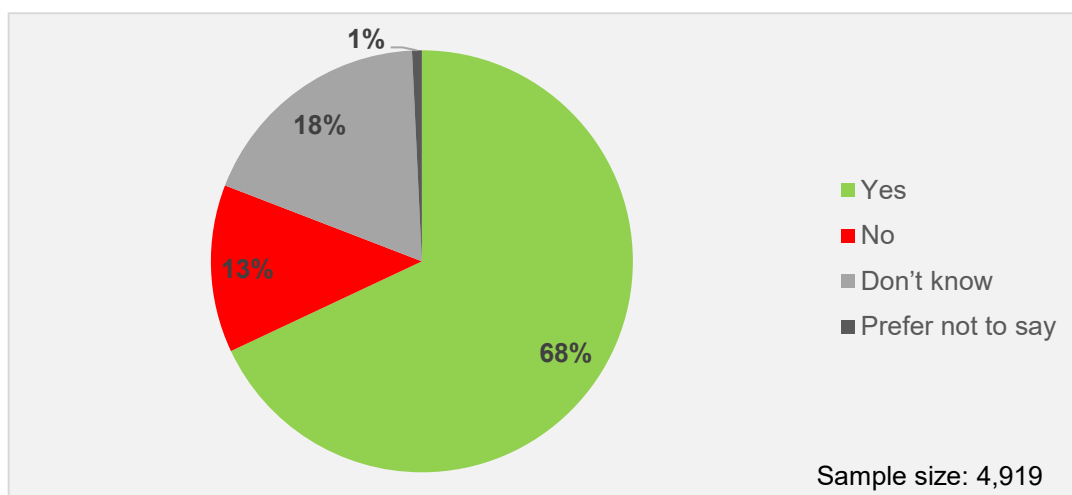
Ex partner held knife to my throat. Police brought him back in [the] early hours of the morning and demanded I let him back in. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

⁴³ This compares to 44% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Willingness to report to the police again

Despite the negative experiences of some of our respondents, overall, people reported a willingness to engage with the justice system again. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said they would report a crime to the police again (Figure 7)⁴⁴. This is positive, as a functioning justice system requires the engagement of the public in reporting crimes. Despite some victims feeling that nothing will happen as a result of their report, all reports made to the police help them to build a better picture of what is happening in the local area and inform their local policing priorities.⁴⁵ In both this survey and last year's survey⁴⁶, we found that when victims were satisfied with the police response to the crime, the willingness of victims to report a crime to the police again increased. The same was true for the reverse, that when victims were dissatisfied with the police response to the crime, their willingness to report a crime decreased. This highlights the impact of a positive victim experience with the police and how important victim satisfaction is for ensuring a functioning criminal justice system.

Figure 7. Proportion of respondents who would or wouldn't report a crime to the police again.



Willingness to report a crime to the police again varied across crime types. This willingness fell to 54% for victims of rape and sexual assault⁴⁷. This is particularly concerning as the latest Office for National Statistics data shows that fewer than 1 in 6 victims of rape or assault by penetration reported the crime to the police.⁴⁸

Victims of rape and sexual assault described how they were discouraged from future engagement with the police by their experience and the way they were treated when reporting the incident and during the investigation. Victims described the process as being traumatising, having to keep re-explaining what happened and not feeling heard, believed, or supported.

⁴⁴ This compares to 71% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁴⁵ <https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/news/2023/10/importance-of-reporting-crime/>

⁴⁶ [Annual Victims' Survey 2023 - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁴⁷ This is statistically significantly lower than for victims of antisocial behaviour (68%), assault (67%), burglary (78%), criminal damage (66%), fraud and theft (70%) and online harm (70%).

⁴⁸ [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

Honestly, it was really hard to report, and I feel like not much was done, and I had to keep re-explaining the story which was very traumatic for me. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

Police stations are intimidating places. I thought - that happened to me! Why wouldn't they believe me? - as a victim of crime, you have to prove what happened and I felt the police couldn't be bothered with me. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

One victim described how due to a lack of feeling understood or supported by officers, they would actively discourage a friend from reporting to the police. This can have negative implications for victims' trust and confidence in the justice system, with recent research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner finding that victim trust and confidence is shaped by hearing about others' negative experiences.⁴⁹

Process was re-traumatising, I had to take a significant time off work to deal with how the case was managed. I didn't feel heard, understood, or supported by officers. If the same thing happened to a friend, I would actively encourage them not to report the crime. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

Whilst many victims choose not to report crimes to the police for a range of reasons, those that do deserve a positive experience. Although we found that many victims did have positive experiences with police, too many victims felt they were not supported or taken seriously. They also reported receiving insufficient communication from police and experiencing a lack of police action. These negative experiences left some victims unwilling to report future crimes, which risks the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. As the police response is often the first interaction that victims will have with the criminal justice system, it is crucial they are reassured they have been taken seriously and that police will take effective action to investigate the incident. To ensure this, thorough police investigations and effective communication and support from police must be provided. This is essential to improve victim satisfaction and continued victim engagement with the criminal justice system.

⁴⁹ [Domestic Abuse Commissioner's report on transforming the criminal justice response to domestic abuse](#)

Victims' experience of the Crown Prosecution Service and case progression

Of the 4,901 victims for whom a report was made to the police, 21% saw the perpetrator charged.⁵⁰ Victims told us about their experiences of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the progression of their case after the police investigation.

Many victims (52%) lacked confidence in the ability of the CPS to effectively prosecute people accused of committing crime. Concerns highlighted by victims were the lack of CPS knowledge and understanding of certain crimes, including stalking and harassment and domestic abuse. They suggested better training to understand patterns of criminal behaviour would enable the CPS to prosecute more effectively. Additionally, the negative impact delays in the criminal justice system had on decisions to charge suspects led to victim frustration.

Where victims reported receiving good communication about case progression, charging decisions and court outcomes, their experiences were much improved.⁵¹ This is because transparent communication gave them agency in the process and allowed them to feel supported. This was often the case where they had positive engagement with a CPS Victim Liaison Officer. However, almost a fifth of respondents reported that the conviction and sentence was not properly explained to them which left them with unanswered questions.

Several victims identified that more timely and frequent updates were needed to reduce stress and uncertainty. Some victims described feeling like they were treated as a statistic rather than a person, which left them feeling isolated and unheard.

Effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service

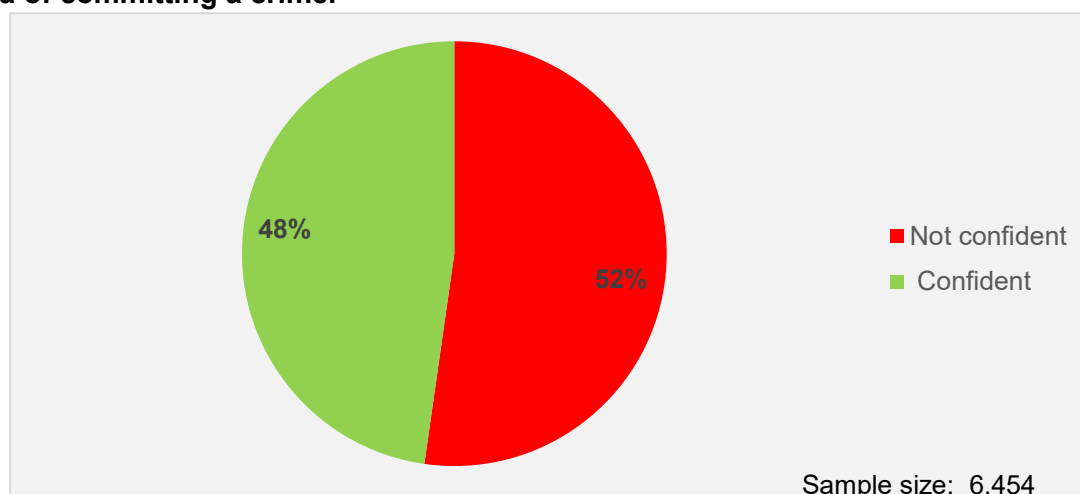
Of all the victims we surveyed, 52% were not confident that the CPS are effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime (figure 8).⁵² Many victims expressed concern that the CPS had insufficient knowledge of certain crimes to be able to effectively charge suspects. They also described instances where they felt the CPS had substantial evidence and yet decided not to charge suspects. Victims also highlighted how in certain cases, delays in the criminal justice system prevented charges being authorised by the CPS.

⁵⁰ These figures will not include those still progressing through the system or those selecting 'prefer not to say'

⁵¹ After the police investigation has been concluded, most of the communication with victims is the responsibility of the Witness Care Unit. [In some specific circumstances, it is the responsibility of the CPS.](#)

⁵² This compares to 63% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 8. Proportion of respondents confident that the CPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime.



In cases where victims referenced a lack of CPS knowledge and understanding of certain crimes, they suggested CPS staff required training to enable them to understand patterns of criminal behaviour and be more effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime. This was specifically reflected by victims of domestic abuse and stalking and harassment.

Please could the CPS educate themselves more thoroughly on domestic abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)

Take stalking seriously. Look at patterns over years. Don't dismiss anything. Listen. Believe victims. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)

Other victims described the thorough evidence they had provided in the belief this was sufficient for a prosecution. When the decision was taken not to charge a suspect, victims felt this was not in keeping with the evidence provided. This led to them feeling dismissed, particularly when the suspect went on to commit further offences.

I provided clear evidence of the traffic incident taking place i.e., pictures, CCTV, witness statements, proof of injury, and the case was disregarded due to 'lack of evidence'. (Victim of traffic accident, Male, 25-34)

I was fobbed off and dismissed at every opportunity. Perpetrator received NFA [No Further Action]. He has since gone on to offend again. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

Other victims expressed their frustration with delays in the criminal justice system affecting charging decisions. This had implications which included too much time passing for the

suspect to be able to be charged.⁵³ Another victim expressed frustration at being told the CPS were not authorising a charge due to the backlog in the courts system.

The CPS unnecessary delays meant that the perpetrator was unable to be charged with assault because they let six months go past through no fault of my own. (Victim of assault, Female, 35-44)

The police told me that the CPS were unlikely to prosecute an assault - I was hit multiple times by a moving van on purpose, the incident was recorded as I was on the phone to the police at the time, and the perpetrator admitted he had done it - because of the court backlog. I am really disappointed that an assault that left me with psychological trauma doesn't merit the person who assaulted me being arrested, any driving offences to be considered, or a court case. (Victim of assault, Male. 45-54)

This issue was similarly highlighted in the Victims' Commissioner's research on Crown Court delays, where a Witness Care Officer described how delays contributed to the CPS determining the prosecution as being no longer in the public interest.⁵⁴

Victim treatment and support

Some victims did not feel they were treated well by the CPS, which left them feeling disrespected, unsupported, and unheard. Some victims felt like they were treated like a statistic instead of a person. Others felt the CPS lacked accuracy and attention to important details in their communications.

CPS are [the] same as the police. People are just statistics nothing else. (Victim of assault, Female, 25-34)

[CPS could be improved by] being respectful, they kept getting my name and the gender of the perpetrator incorrect on letters. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Some victims had a more positive experience with the CPS and felt supported and well-treated. This was often the case where they had good engagement with a CPS Victim Liaison Officer.⁵⁵ Victims described how having a direct point of contact provided the practical and emotional support they needed whilst navigating the criminal justice process. This included guidance to help them understand what to expect from proceedings.

The CPS provided me with a dedicated Victim Liaison Officer who offered emotional support and guidance throughout the process. They

⁵³ Summary only offences have a limitation period within which the accused must be charged. This period is 6 months from when the offence took place.

⁵⁴ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁵⁵ Victim Liaison Officers are professionals within the criminal justice system who act as a single point of contact for victims and witnesses of crime, providing support and communication to them throughout the legal process.

ensured I understood the proceedings and what to expect. (Victim of fraud and theft, Female, 35-44)

The ladies on the Victim Liaison Unit were fabulous and supportive for me mentally. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

In 2022, the CPS launched their Victims Programme⁵⁶, to improve the service they provide to victims of crime. This includes a service for victims of all crime, currently running as a pilot scheme in two CPS areas. The pilot involves direct contact with victims to inform them of charging decisions through their preferred means of contact and the opportunity for victims to ask questions, hear more about next steps and their rights under the Victims' Code. It also includes comprehensive training including trauma awareness for all CPS staff who work directly with victims. Our research reinforces the importance of positive victim engagement with the CPS, so if the pilot is found to improve victim experiences, it should be rolled out across England and Wales.

Communication with victims

Good communication is key to victims having a positive experience of the criminal justice system. Where victims were provided with good communication about the legal process and case progression, including charging decisions and court outcomes, this made them feel supported and included. The responsibility for communicating this information to victims lies with the Witness Care Unit. However, in some specific circumstances depending on the nature of the communication, it is a CPS responsibility. Witness Care Units are staffed by representatives from the police to manage the care of victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process.

Communication about charging decisions

Some victims highlighted positive communication regarding charging decisions, particularly when the decision had been made to take no further action. The importance of clear and honest communication to victims was apparent, with victims appreciating the transparency they received. This improved the outcome of their experience, even if the decision was not what they hoped for.

They were honest [with] me on the reasons the case won't go to court. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

I did appreciate the letter from [the] CPS explaining why the case wouldn't be going forward. (Victim of criminal damage, Female, 65-74)

Unfortunately, this was not the case for all victims. Many reported insufficient explanations regarding the CPS decision not to charge a suspect, excluding victims and leaving them with unanswered questions. When victims feel excluded from and disempowered by the criminal justice process, this impacts on their whole experience and can lead to them feeling disillusioned about the whole system.

⁵⁶ [Victims Programme | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

Need more conversation/explanation about why no further action is taken when the police agree a crime has taken place. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)

The charging process sometimes results in the CPS charging suspects with an alternative charge to what the victim was expecting. This can come as a surprise to the victim as they are often unaware this could happen. We found that where a suspect was charged by the CPS, 14% of victims told us this charge was not in line with their expectations.⁵⁷ One victim described the poor communication they received regarding the CPS authorisation of a lesser charge. This left them feeling vulnerable and misrepresented.

I wasn't informed of how the person was to be charged [or received] any liaison regarding the crime...In fact the charge wasn't at all as severe as what was done to me... Makes one feel vulnerable and totally misrepresented as a victim. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 75+)

Research that has informed the CPS Victims Programme⁵⁶ highlighted key victim needs, which included having charging decisions explained directly in a way that allows two-way conversation. This is important as it involves victims in the process and allows them to feel heard and validated. It also provides victims with closure, even if the charging outcome is not what the victim desires.⁵⁸

Communication about case progression

Many respondents praised the clarity of communications about their case and the legal processes. This enabled them to easily follow and engage with the criminal justice process and feel in control during a very uncertain time.

I appreciated the professionalism and clarity with which certain aspects of the case were communicated to me...staff were respectful, and I felt heard throughout the process. Additionally, the language used was clear and easy to understand, which helped me follow the progress of the case without difficulty. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

They kept me informed about the progress of the case, explained the steps involved, and provided guidance on what to expect. Their professionalism and empathy helped me feel supported and reassured as I navigated the legal proceedings. (Victim of burglary, Female, 16-24)

However, this was not a universal experience. Several respondents identified that more timely and frequent updates were needed about case progression, to reduce stress and uncertainty for victims.

I think communication could be more frequent and detailed. There were times when I felt insufficiently informed about the progress of the case or the decisions made. Additionally, it would be helpful if the process

⁵⁷ 83% said the charge was in line with their expectations and 3% preferred not to say.

⁵⁸ [A victims' strategic needs assessment for the Crown Prosecution Service](#)

and timelines were explained more clearly from the outset to reduce uncertainty. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

One area that could be improved is the timeliness of case updates. There were times when I felt left in the dark, waiting for important information. More frequent communication would have been reassuring. (Victim of Assault, Male, 35-44)

I would like to have a clearer explanation of the progress of the case and the legal proceedings to ease my anxiety. (Victim of burglary, Male, 45-54)

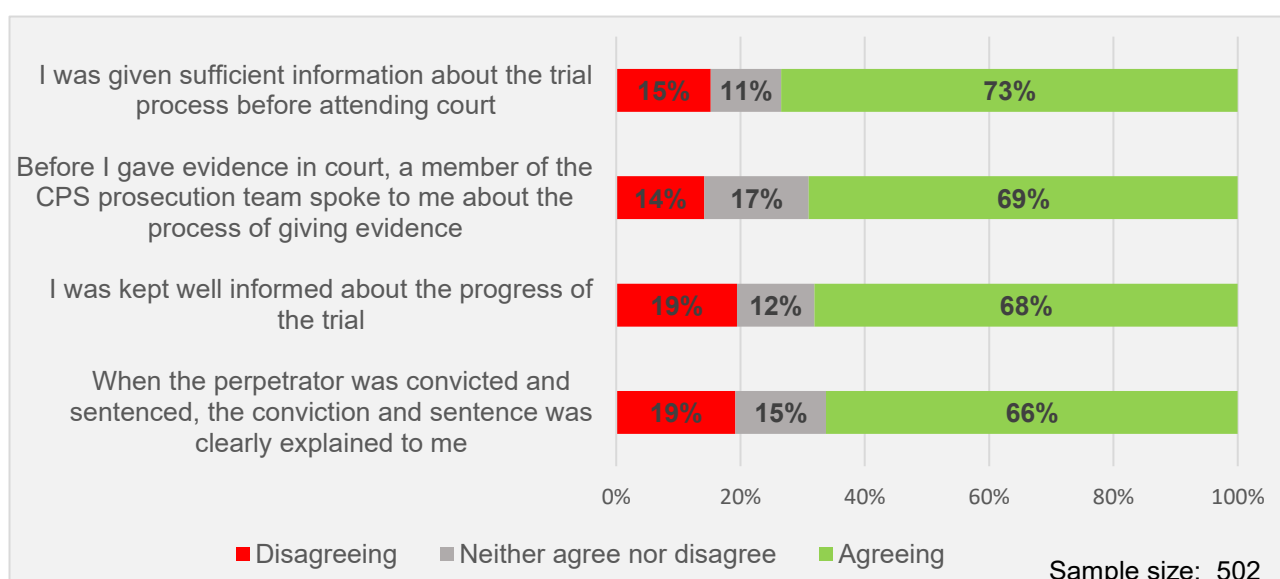
Communication regarding court processes and outcomes

The importance of feeling involved in the criminal justice process continued through to the court stage of the process. Where victims described being provided with clear communication, they were able to feel included and informed. Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents agreed that they were given sufficient information about the trial process before attending court (figure 9). For many victims, excellent communication revolved around what to expect from the courts process.

The CPS were fabulous - kind, thoughtful and explained everything and what would happen in court. They kept me well informed. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

Good amount of contact from the CPS and other bodies, everything well communicated and I knew what was expected of me with regards [to] going to court. (Victim of antisocial behaviour, Male, 45-54)

Figure 9. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about the CPS.



Where this was not provided, victims noted feeling increased anxiety or stress leading up to attending court. Attending court is a very stressful and daunting experience and as seen in

the Victims' Commissioner's research on court delays, a lack of communication with victims ahead of a court appearance worsens their distress.⁵⁹

I think communication could be improved, particularly in explaining the judicial process. There were times when I felt lost or unsure about what was happening, as clear updates were not provided. Additionally, the waiting time between hearings was long, which increased my anxiety. More guidance on what to expect at each stage of the process would have been really helpful. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

Maybe spoke to me more about what to expect in court as [I] was very nervous. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

Some victims highlighted the lack of contact they had with CPS lawyers in advance of the trial, often only getting the opportunity to speak to them about the case on the day of the trial.⁶⁰ Victims also expressed concern that CPS lawyers often only had little time to familiarise themselves with the case, subsequently missing key information during the trial. Some victims felt that this impacted the outcome of the trial, leaving them feeling that they had not received justice.

The fact the victim does not meet the CPS barrister until the day the victim gives evidence. The fact that the barrister only had the weekend to review over 110 exhibits before going to court. I felt I knew my case better than the barrister and it is my belief that the first charge was found not guilty because the barrister did not make use of the limited evidence we had for that time period. The evidence we had was third party - medical and health visitor records and a phone call recording. I'm not sure that the barrister was even aware we had this evidence as it did not seem to be produced. I found this frustrating and disappointing, and it still bothers me now. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Because the case was passed down from 3 CPS lawyers to an advocate who had been quickly versed and missed out important information in part of the crime which led to a problem with consent. The mistakes and so much disjointedness failed me. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

Positively, we found that where a suspect was charged, the case progressed to court and the defendant was convicted, the majority (66%) of respondents agreed that the perpetrators conviction and sentence were clearly explained to them (figure 9). However, almost a fifth (19%) of respondents felt the conviction and sentence was not properly explained to them.⁶¹ The Victims' Code outlines that victims should be given information

⁵⁹ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁶⁰ As part of the CPS Victims Programme, all CPS areas now offer victims of rape and serious sexual offences a [pre-trial](#) meeting with members of the prosecution team.

⁶¹ This compares to 21% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

about the outcome of the case. This includes the right to be told the sentence the defendant received and a short explanation about the meaning and effect of the sentence.^{62 63} We heard from victims how this lack of explanation and clarity worsened their experience. This is because it caused additional anxiety and left them feeling unimportant, without closure.

Sentencing took place on the same day as the plea hearing and a suspended sentence was the outcome - no one ever explained the reasons as to why this was the outcome. I felt it being a historic case it was less important - and that they just wanted to rush it through. I had no closure following this, I did not feel empowered by the process and I did not feel I got justice - I instead felt like a dismissed statistic. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Victims want to be treated as an active participant in the criminal justice system,⁶⁴ therefore it is vital that they are provided with a clear explanation around conviction and sentencing.⁶⁵ As our findings suggest, where victims receive transparent communication around case progression and legal processes, they feel supported and heard. In addition to empowering victims, this also makes them more likely to stay engaged with the criminal justice process, as well as engage with it in the future.

Overall, we found that victims had mixed experiences of the CPS and case progression beyond the police stage. Where they felt valued, supported and communicated with, they tended to report a more positive experience but in too many cases, they felt frustrated by and excluded from the process. In addition, too many victims lacked confidence in the ability of the CPS to effectively prosecute. Changes need to be made to ensure all victims have a positive experience of these vital points in their criminal justice journey. This is particularly crucial at a time where there are increasing delays in charging decisions⁶⁶ and delays in the court system,⁶⁷ which means victims' ongoing engagement with the system is necessary for justice to be delivered.

⁶² [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

⁶³ The Witness Care Unit have the responsibility to communicate the outcome of the case to the victim. Witness Care Units are staffed by police staff to manage the care of victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process.

⁶⁴ [A victims' strategic needs assessment for the Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁶⁵ The Victims' Commissioner [has previously called for](#) victims to be provided with a free written transcript of Judges sentencing remarks in the Crown Court and a written summary of the sentence in the Magistrates Court. She has also argued that in cases where a victim continues to struggle to understand how the sentence has been calculated, the CPS should have a duty to speak to the victim and explain the factors the court has considered as part of the sentencing exercise.

⁶⁶ [Police referral to prosecution by the Crown Prosecution Service \(CPS\) - CJS Dashboard](#)

⁶⁷ [Charge to case completion at court - CJS Dashboard](#)

Victims' experience of the Courts

In this research, we heard from over 700 victims whose case went to court. The number of cases that reach the court stage of the criminal justice system are relatively low in comparison to the number of crimes reported to the police. Many victims who do reach this stage are likely to have already endured a long journey through the justice process. Therefore, having a positive experience with the courts is crucial.

Positively, we found that over two thirds of victims felt they were provided with enough support throughout the court process. They particularly highlighted how court staff and volunteers helped them to feel supported through an intimidating process. However, where victims were entitled to special measures, designed to help victims give their best evidence, victims cited barriers to the provision and implementation of these measures. This included a lack of communication about their availability and being advised against using them.

Replicating findings from the Victims' Commissioner's recent report on delays in the Crown Court,⁶⁸ victims expressed concerns about court timeliness. Over a third of rape and sexual assault and stalking and harassment victims expressed dissatisfaction with the time it took for the case to progress to court. This was of particular worry to these groups of victims as they felt the delays compromised their safety and damaged their mental health.

Another notable concern identified by victims was the lacking provision of court-awarded compensation. Many described issues with the fulfilment of the compensation which left them in financial hardship and questioning the point of being awarded it by the courts. Overall, victims reported a willingness to engage with the courts again, however, we found that this figure was lower for female victims, victims of rape and sexual assault and victims of domestic abuse.

Treatment and support at court

Attending court can be a very daunting and stressful experience for victims. However, with support, respect and fair treatment, victims can feel empowered and have agency in this process.

We heard from victims who described how court staff and the judiciary⁶⁹ treated them with respect and created a comfortable and safe environment for them. This is vital as it allows victims to feel heard and supported to be an active participant in an unfamiliar and intimidating process.

I appreciate how my testimony was handled in court. The staff were respectful and made sure I understood the process at all times. Additionally, they provided a safe environment, which allowed me to feel calmer during my statement. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

The judge listened to my statement very patiently during the trial, making me feel respected. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 25-34)

⁶⁸ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁶⁹ The judiciary includes judges and magistrates.

Due to our adversarial justice system, during a trial, victims are cross-examined by a defence lawyer. This is the only direct interaction victims will have with the defence lawyer, who is tasked to test the victims' evidence and put the defendant's version of events to the victim. Whilst 66% of respondents agreed that the defence lawyers treated them fairly and with respect in direct interactions, 13% of respondents disagreed with this (figure 10).⁷⁰ Some victims told us how treatment by the defence made them feel as though they were on trial themselves. Experiences included upsetting cross-examinations⁷¹ and third-party material⁷² being referenced during the trial with the victim receiving no warning.⁷³ The Crown Prosecution Service via the Witness Care Unit should prepare the victim by ensuring they understand what will happen during the trial and the roles of the judiciary, prosecution and defence lawyers. They also have a responsibility to prepare victims if private material has been disclosed to the defence who may ask questions about it during the trial. Victim treatment in court can be damaging and traumatising and is exacerbated by inadequate preparation. Poor experiences in court could prevent any future engagement with the criminal justice system.

I was treated as if I was on trial for something. (Victim of street violence, Female, 55-64)

[I was] very shocked, as my private counselling notes were read out and had no warning. (Victim of street violence, Female, 45-54)

The defence barristers are far too brutal. I was accused of "being a jealous ex-girlfriend who had turned an 'accidental' injury into something more for my own gain." The way they portray us victims is horrific. I was on the stand for 4 days. It was mentally and emotionally exhausting...There needs to be more consideration when speaking to victims about crimes of such nature. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

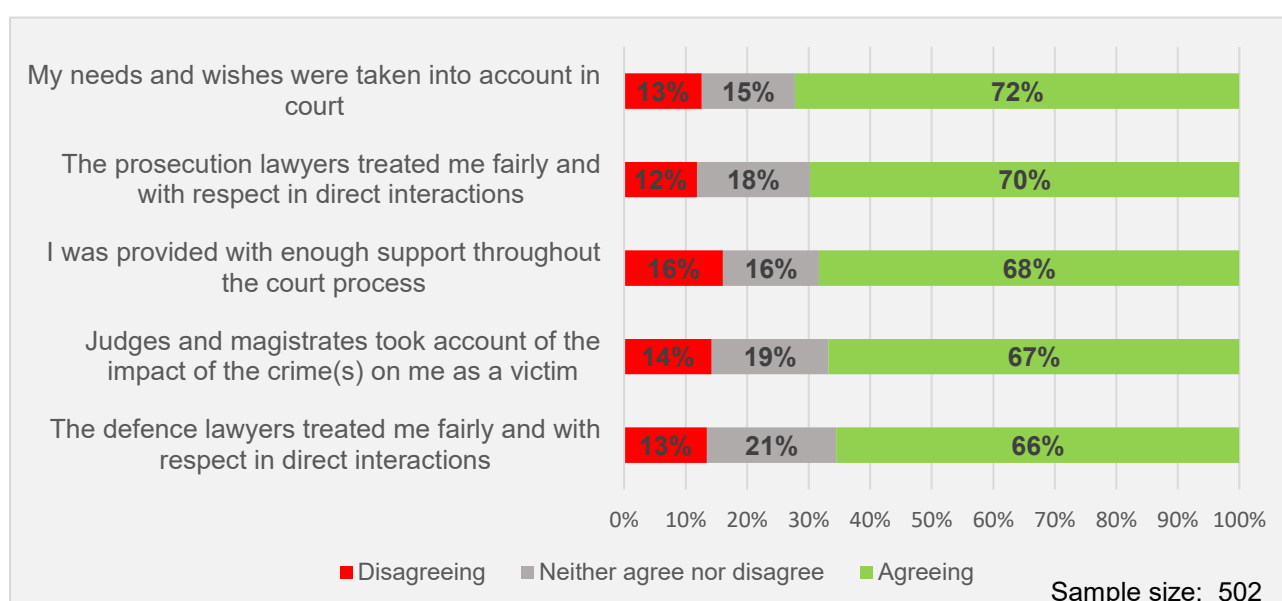
⁷⁰ This compares to 7% disagreement in the [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁷¹ During a trial, the judge or magistrates have a duty to ensure lawyers conduct the trial professionally and in accordance with strict rules.

⁷² Material about the victim in the hands of other people (third parties), including medical, social services, school and therapy records.

⁷³ [The use of third-party material in criminal proceedings is an area the Victims' Commissioner has previously campaigned on](#), including through amendments to legislation such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.

Figure 10. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about court.



Over two thirds (68%) of respondents agreed they were provided with enough support throughout the court process (figure 10). Many victims told us how well supported they were by the courts and the court staff when they attended court. This included judges, magistrates, ushers, security staff and witness service volunteers. They described how this support from the courts, from being offered water and tissues, to having a pre-trial visit, helped them feel supported, comfortable, and made the experience less daunting. This is important because for many victims, it will be their first time attending court, therefore, being supported in this unfamiliar environment can improve this experience.

The ushers were attending, i.e., offered me water, tissues etc. My detective in charge of the case was there and offered support. I had an [sexual violence organisation] support worker. There was a volunteer who sat with us and answered any questions. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

The witness service also helped with explaining the process and [were] very helpful and patient. The magistrates were reassuring during the process. The security officers were compassionate and helpful. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

All the court staff were absolutely brilliant and supportive. Before the trial I was able to be shown a court room and talked through the procedures, so on the day I appeared in court, it was not as daunting as it could have been. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)

We can see from these quotes the importance to victims of being supported during this process. Again, this positive experience was not universal. Some respondents highlighted that the support available during the court process needed improvement. Victims identified

that more support should be available to victims to allow them to feel safe enough to attend court and alleviate the nervousness and intimidation they felt during the trial process.

I didn't feel supported by the courts, I told them I was vulnerable and felt intimidated. I did not get support from the police and felt very alone. Because of this I was not able to attend court as I was frightened and my partner, who committed the assault, was able to persuade/coerce me not to go. (Victim of assault, Female, 45-54)

In court, I feel that there is not enough psychological care for victims. There is not enough support provided to help me deal with the nervousness during the trial process. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 25-34)

The judge said it was the worst burglary he had ever seen but I felt the balance of support went to the criminal, not the victim. (Victim of burglary, Female, 56-74)

We found that 72% of respondents agreed that their needs and wishes were taken into account in court (figure 10)⁷⁴. To help victims give their best evidence, support victim needs and alleviate stress, some victims are entitled to special measures⁷⁵ when attending court. These measures are important as they facilitate the gathering and giving of quality evidence by vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses.⁷⁶ Examples of special measures include screens to prevent the victim and defendant from seeing each other when the victim is giving evidence and the giving of evidence via live video link. Victims detailed how these measures made them feel safer and more comfortable whilst giving their evidence.

I requested special measures to protect my identity and provide testimony without directly facing the defendant. These included the use of screens in the courtroom and the option to give my evidence via video link, which made me feel safer and more comfortable during the process. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

I requested a screen to be placed between me and the defendant, and this was implemented. It made me feel more comfortable during the trial. (Victim of hate crime, Female, 25-34)

However, of the victims we heard from who reported being entitled to special measures, only 59% had their options for special measures explained to them. Recent research by Victim Support similarly found victims received partial information about the special measures available to them. For example, only being told the special measure they could have rather than being given agency to choose for themselves.⁷⁷ Insufficient offering of appropriate special measures to victims has also been noted in previous research by the

⁷⁴ This compares to 39% in our [2023 survey](#) and 48% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁷⁵ [Special Measures | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁷⁶ [Next steps for special measures: A review of the provision of special measures to vulnerable and intimidated witnesses - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁷⁷ [Suffering for justice report - Victim Support](#)

Victims' Commissioner.⁷⁸ In this research, issues with poor communication around special measures were again highlighted. One victim described how she only found out she was eligible for special measures through her own internet search.

Victims are not made aware that they are eligible to apply for a screen. Because I happened to google it, I became aware and applied for one which was granted. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

Victim Support⁷⁹ also found some victims of sexual violence were advised that giving evidence through pre-recorded cross examination⁸⁰ or via video link was less effective than giving evidence in the court room. In our research, we similarly heard from victims who were advised against certain special measures, to be more 'convincing' and connect better with the judge and jury.

It was suggested that it would be more convincing if I wasn't behind a screen. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

I requested a video link, but the CPS barrister said he thought a screen would be better so the jury and judge could connect with me. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Victims also described the impact that not having their request for special measures granted or implemented had on their anxiety when attending court.⁸¹ For one victim, their agreed special measures were only implemented in court when the prosecution barrister raised the issue.

Although I requested to give evidence via video link due to my nervousness and concerns about facing the defendant, this option was not provided. Instead, I had to be physically present in court, which increased my anxiety and discomfort. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

Court didn't put them in place until my barrister raised it. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Court efficiency

Of those victims we spoke to whose cases had come to court, over two thirds (68%) said they were satisfied with the time it had taken to progress through the court system (figure 11). However, a fifth (20%) reported they were dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction with court timeliness was even higher for victims of rape and sexual assault (37%) and stalking and

⁷⁸ [Next steps for special measures: A review of the provision of special measures to vulnerable and intimidated witnesses - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁷⁹ [Suffering for justice report - Victim Support](#)

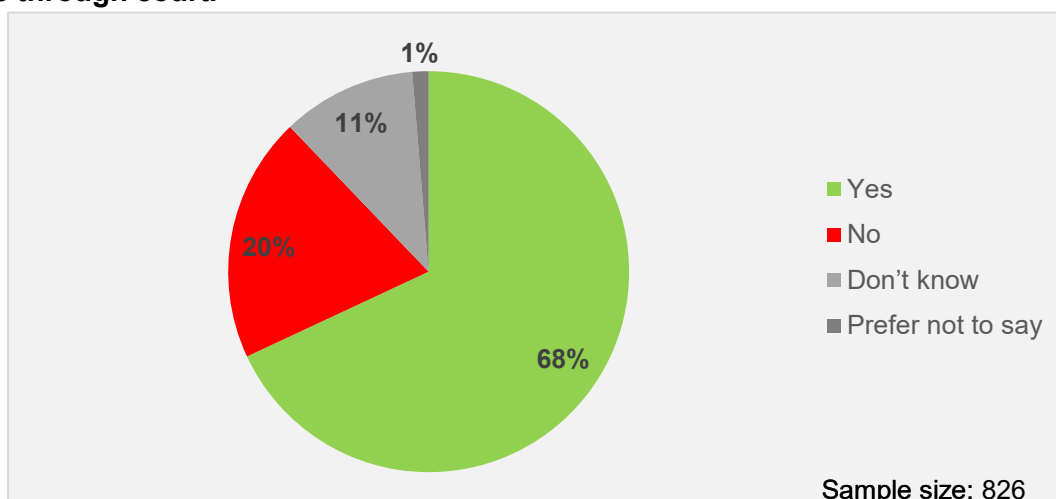
⁸⁰ [The cross-examination of a victim is pre-recorded and later played during the trial. This is also known as "Section 28".](#)

⁸¹ For special measures to be successfully implemented, the CPS must submit the special measures application on the victims' behalf, the judge needs to grant the request and then court staff must arrange the measures in the court.

harassment (39%)⁸² which is a concern when these victims will have already endured a great deal to reach this point.

As identified in our research on the Crown Court backlog, victims of rape and sexual assault are disproportionately affected by delays in the process.⁸³ They are also burdened by long police investigations⁸⁴ and report lower satisfaction with and confidence in the criminal justice system.⁸⁵

Figure 11. Proportion of respondents satisfied with the length of time taken for the case to progress through court.



We heard from several victims of rape and sexual assault who detailed their long journeys through the court system. Often, these featured multiple adjournments and spanned several years from reporting the incident to the trial taking place.

I reported it in 2021. It wasn't in court until February 2024. It took 3 years, lots of push backs. This crime happened to me when I was 18/19...I am now 24 and court has only just been concluded this year. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

5 years from arrest to court, 5 months (at the moment) for sentencing, this may still be extended, yet to hear as communication [is] poor. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Male, 45-54)

I feel totally let down by the system...my case was supposed to be heard in court in November 2024 (I reported in early 2023). I found out around a week before my court date that it had been postponed to November 2025... I now have to live with the fear of seeing the accused man around my homeplace and painstakingly wait another year. This is unacceptable and I was given no reason for this massive delay or

⁸² These are both statistically significantly higher than for victims of anti-social behaviour (12%), burglary (11%), criminal damage (5%), fraud and theft (12%) and street violence (8%).

⁸³ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁸⁴ [Criminal Justice System - All metrics - CJS Dashboard](#)

⁸⁵ In our research, only 41% of victims of rape and sexual assault were confident that the criminal justice system is effective⁸⁵ and only 35% were confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime.

reassurance that it could be moved earlier. I am strong, but a rapist is walking free for at least 2 years after being reported to the police, so not only have I been let down but also the community. I fear that other victims may be deterred from reporting if they knew this could be their wait and also the risk to their mental health, such as suicide increases. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female)

Rape Crisis England and Wales reported that the proportion of rape trials concluding without any delay has been decreasing since 2015.⁸⁶ Recent research by the Victims' Commissioner⁸⁷ highlighted the detrimental impact the Crown Court delays have on victims' recovery, mental health and the quality of justice they receive. Similarly, reports published by Victim Support⁸⁸ and Rape Crisis England and Wales⁸⁹ identified that the re-traumatising court process and unacceptably long waits lead to these victims considering withdrawing from the system.

We also heard from several stalking and harassment victims who described the terror they experienced during the year-long waits for the case to get to trial. For offences like rape and sexual assault and stalking and harassment, perpetrators are less likely to be remanded in custody.⁹⁰ Due to custody time limits,⁹¹ cases where defendants are serving time on remand are prioritised in the courts. Because of this, and the current court delays, cases where a defendant is not on remand, are more likely to experience long delays. This leads to victims in cases where the defendant is not on remand waiting for longer periods. Recent data shows the average number of days between charge and completion at the Crown Court was 336 days where the defendant was not remanded in custody, compared to 187 days where the defendant was on remand.⁹² In some cases, victims highlighted how they felt the delays compromised their safety, due to the perpetrator's continuous breaches of bail conditions while awaiting trial.

They need to speed things up, it's terrifying being a victim and especially with this crime, to be told I need to wait over 12 months for a trial but not have any reassurance that he isn't free to move around is ridiculous. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

It has been 2 years by the time this comes to the rearranged trial date of October 2025. That's 3 years of terror for me to live through ... I am so upset with how long everything takes and how he just gets away with breaching bail constantly. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

⁸⁶ [Breaking Point | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)

⁸⁷ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁸⁸ [Sufferingforjusticereport.pdf](#)

⁸⁹ [RCEW - Breaking Point report - March 2023 E4uqKBL.pdf](#)

⁹⁰ If a perpetrator is remanded in custody, they will be detained in prison until their trial. [Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

⁹¹ [Custody Time Limits | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁹² [Charge to case completion at court - CJS Dashboard](#)

Victims also told us how the long court delays were worsened by the poor communication they received about the delays. Many victims described arriving at the court or waiting all day at court before being informed of the delay or adjournment, which echoed experiences described by victims in our research on the Crown Court backlog.⁹³ The last-minute communication of delays and adjournments made an already stressful experience even more traumatic.

[Victims' court experience could be improved by] informing me that there was a fail to attend before [the] end of [the] court day so I was not sat waiting. (Victim of criminal damage, Female, 55-64)

Keeping victims of crime properly informed is vital...I arrived at court at the given time only to be told to come back in 5 hours as the trial had been delayed. I was a nervous wreck. Dreadful. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 65-74)

As our report on the Crown Courts backlog highlighted, receiving minimal, or no explanation for an adjournment exacerbated the impact the adjournments had on victims' wellbeing and daily functioning. Victims described feeling like the system disregarded the impact the trial and subsequent adjournment had on their lives.⁹⁴

Willingness to attend court again

Despite the negative experiences of some of our respondents, overall, there was a willingness for victims to engage with the courts again. Seventy-two percent of respondents said they would attend court again⁹⁵ (figure 12). However, this was much lower for female victims (64%)⁹⁶, victims of rape and sexual assault (57%)⁹⁷ and victims of domestic abuse (55%)⁹⁸. This is concerning, given that rates of rape and sexual assault continue to increase⁹⁹ and approximately one in five people experience domestic abuse.¹⁰⁰ Considering only a small proportion of these offences are charged and proceed to court,¹⁰¹¹⁰² it is vital that victims' experiences of the court system do not deter any future engagement with the courts.

⁹³ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁹⁴ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁹⁵ In our [2023 survey](#), 83% said they would and in our [2022 survey](#) 61% said they would. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁹⁶ This is statistically significantly lower than for male victims (83%).

⁹⁷ This is statistically significantly lower than for fraud and theft victims (90%) and online harm victims (97%).

⁹⁸ This is statistically significantly lower than for burglary victims (82%), fraud and theft victims (90%) and online harm victims (97%).

⁹⁹

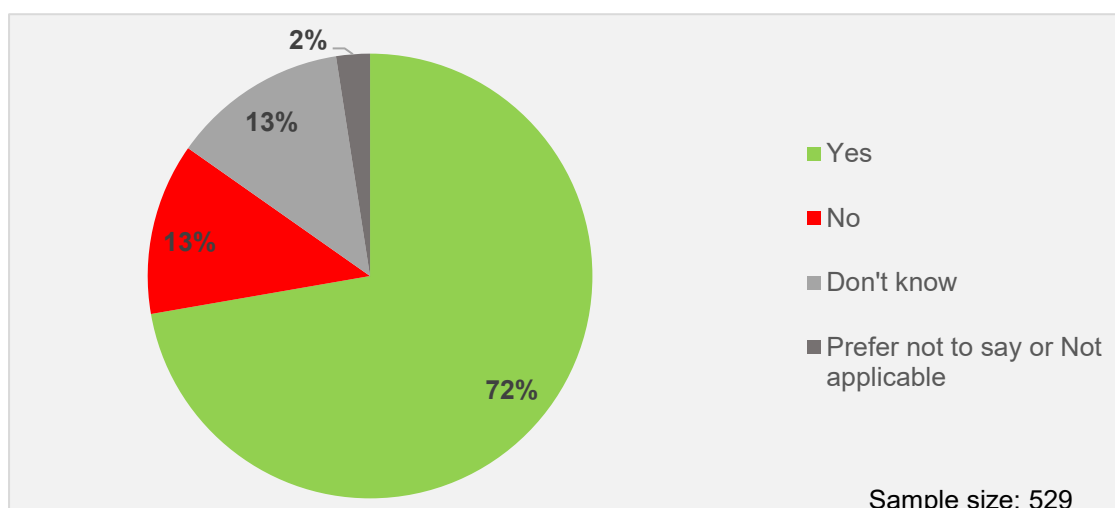
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingsseptember2024>

¹⁰⁰ [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹⁰¹ [Rape review - progress against aims - CJS Dashboard](#)

¹⁰² [dac_cjs-report_main_FINAL-DIGITAL.pdf](#)

Figure 12. Proportion of respondents who would or wouldn't attend court again.



The main reasons victims told us they would not attend court again were based on their negative experiences of the court system. Some found the process too stressful and anxiety-inducing to endure again, while others felt failed by the court system. Victims described how difficult it was to be a victim in a court trial, especially when the defendant was found not guilty.

Too much anxiety to be basically called a liar anyway. (Victim of assault, Female, 25-34)

It was a very stressful experience. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female 45-54)

What is the point? I was nearly killed, and he was found not guilty. The attack was caught on camera. He attacked emergency staff, and it was caught on camera. My rape kit came back positive, and I had injuries. How was he found not guilty? (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

Court-awarded compensation

A particular issue victims highlighted regarding court outcomes was relating to the poor provision of court awarded compensation.

In some circumstances, when defendants are found guilty of the offence, they are ordered by the courts to make financial reparation to the victim for any injury, loss or damage resulting from the offence. Whilst we heard from some victims who were satisfied with the process surrounding these criminal compensation orders, we also heard from many victims who found it to be lacking. Many described never receiving the compensation they had been awarded in court, with some questioning the point of the court granting victims compensation in the first place.

Nobody actually follows up to see that they do. On 2 occasions I have been awarded compensation through the justice system and have not received a penny. (Victim of criminal damage, Female, 65-74)

The person convicted was ordered to pay compensation to myself. This did not cover the expense I had to pay out myself for the damage caused to my property. It did not even compensate me for the distress and inconvenience. The CPS did not enforce payment and there was no follow up on this. I only received a tiny proportion of the compensation which is all wrong and is not justice. (Victim of criminal damage, Female, 45-54)

As a victim I have been granted compensation. I will never get that compensation... No point granting compensation when the victim will never see it. (Victim of antisocial behaviour, theft, assault, Male, 16-24)

Other victims described how the compensation was paid to them in small amounts over 18 months, which meant they had to face the initial financial hardship, such as replacing their car, before being fully reimbursed. One respondent suggested victims should receive the full compensation award upfront to prevent them from facing further hardship.

I was awarded compensation, however this has taken a long time to be settled due to other fines that had to be paid, and it was a low payment over 18 months. There could perhaps be a way of the whole amount being reimbursed, with the person then paying the point of who paid in full. The victim then has reduced hardship, at having to perhaps repair or replace a car. (Victim of car accident, Female, 55-64)

A small proportion of cases progress to the court stage of the criminal justice process. When victims have remained engaged with the criminal justice process this far, it is important that they have a positive and empowering experience at court. In this research, we found that when victims were treated well and supported by judges, barristers, and court staff, this made a positive difference to their experiences at court. However, many victims reported experiencing delays in the courts, which negatively impacted them and left them feeling let down. Victims of rape and sexual assault and stalking and harassment were notably more dissatisfied with court timeliness. For those victims who had reached the conclusion of the court process, many expressed concerns about the poor provision of court-awarded compensation. Despite this, the majority of respondents said they would be willing to attend court again in the future. It therefore remains vitally important that all victims have positive experiences of the courts, where they are appropriately supported, and swift outcomes are delivered.

Victims' experiences of victims' services

Victims' support services exist to help victims cope, and as far as possible, recover after a crime, regardless of whether the crime has been reported to the police. There is a variety of support that victims may receive, including counselling, therapy, confidential helplines, and advocacy.

In line with previous research, we found that victims' services can be invaluable to victims' recovery. However, less than a third of respondents recalled being referred to victims' services. This figure was lower for male victims, older victims and victims of criminal damage and anti-social behaviour.

A positive finding was that almost two thirds of respondents found it easy to access victims' services. However, disabled victims cited the inaccessibility and inflexibility of available support services.

Additionally, nearly two thirds of victims were satisfied with the time taken to receive support. However, some victims, particularly victims of rape and sexual assault, described facing lengthy waits to access crucial support. Although some victims were aware of the resource challenges facing victims' services, they suggested that support needs to be available all the way through an increasingly long criminal justice process.

We also found only half of respondents agreed that their contact with victims' services helped them to recover. Many highlighted the need for more individualised support that was tailored to victims' specific needs. Our findings highlight the importance of having accessible, timely and appropriately tailored support available to all victims.

The value of victims' services

In our research we heard from many victims, across crime types, who emphasised how crucial victim support services were following the crime and during their journey through the criminal justice system. Victims told us how this support allowed them to feel heard and supported and aided their recovery from the traumatic event.

The support services who helped me were invaluable and I can't fault them. They got me through some truly awful situations. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 65-74)

I would like to highlight the emotional support I received from the victim support services. The staff were understanding and provided a safe space where I could express my feelings without fear of being judged. Additionally, they provided useful resources for dealing with trauma and guided me on how to access other support services, which truly made a difference in my recovery process. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

My Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) saved my life. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

As these quotes detail, having an effective support system whilst navigating the criminal justice process is crucial to victims and in some cases, provides lifesaving care. Previous

research conducted by the Victims' Commissioner has highlighted the benefit of victim support services, specifically victim advocacy, in keeping victims engaged with the criminal justice system.¹⁰³ Victim attrition remains high,¹⁰⁴ at a time where the number of outstanding cases at court are at a continually increasing all-time high¹⁰⁵ and the wait for justice is long. Support from victims' services can therefore be transformative in preventing victims from withdrawing from the process. A functioning criminal justice system needs victims to remain engaged with the process and provision of effective victims' services is an important way to support this.

Accessibility of victims' services

To access support from victims' services, victims rely on referrals by criminal justice agencies, or they can self-refer themselves if they are aware the services exist. Our research found that certain victim groups experienced barriers to accessing appropriate support for their needs. There were also lengthy waits for access, due to reduced resource and capacity for victims' services to provide high-quality support.

Less than a third of respondents (27%) told us they recalled being referred or had self-referred to victims' services¹⁰⁶ ¹⁰⁷(figure 13). Again, these figures varied by victim characteristics and crime types. Male victims¹⁰⁸, older victims¹⁰⁹ and victims of criminal damage and antisocial behaviour¹¹⁰ were all less likely to have been referred or self-referred to victims' services.

We found that the proportion of victims referred to victims' services increased as they progressed through the criminal justice process, with 49% being referred when the police arrested someone, 55% being referred when someone was charged and 56% being referred when the offence went to court. However, the Victims Code¹¹¹ clearly states that when victims report a crime to the police, they have the right to be referred to services that support victims and our findings show this is not routinely the case.

¹⁰³ [Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner](#)

¹⁰⁴ [Increasing victim engagement - CJS Dashboard](#)

¹⁰⁵ [Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰⁶ This compares to 15% in our [2023 survey](#) and 46% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

¹⁰⁷ Some victims may not want or feel they need support from victims' services.

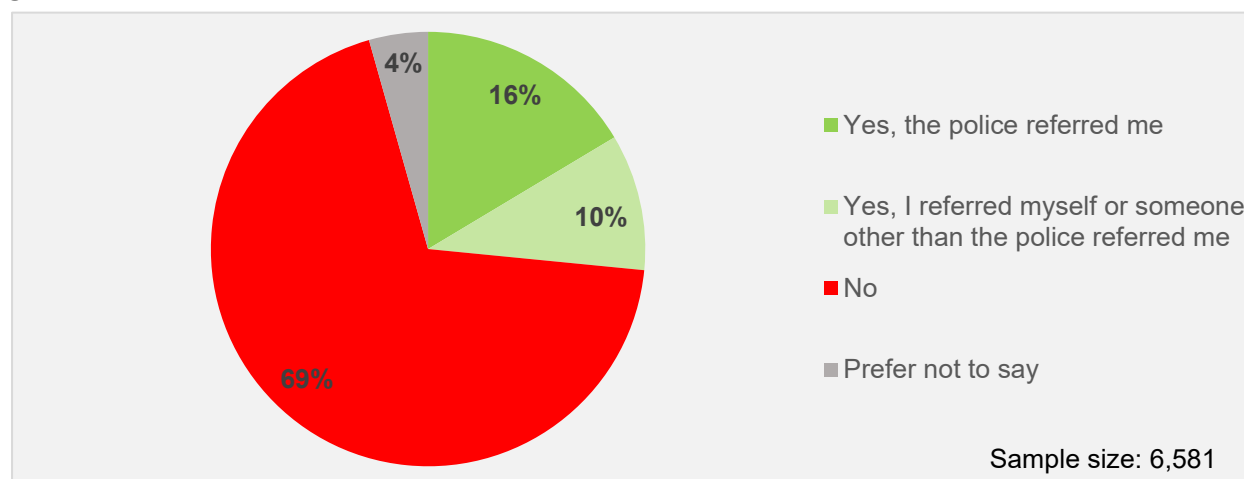
¹⁰⁸ 23% of male victims were referred or self-referred to victims' services, which is statistically significantly lower than for female victims (30%).

¹⁰⁹ 15% of 65-74 year olds and 18% of those over 75 were referred or self-referred to victims' services. These are both statistically significantly lower than for 16-24 year olds (32%), 25-34 year olds (36%), and 35-44 year olds (28%).

¹¹⁰ 13% of victims of criminal damage and 16% of victims of antisocial behaviour were referred or self-referred to victims' services. These are both statistically significantly lower than for victims of assault (34%), domestic abuse (54%), fraud and theft (22%), hate crime (40%), online harm (38%), stalking and harassment (39%), street violence (34%), and rape and sexual assault (45%).

¹¹¹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 13. Proportion of respondents referred to victims' services.



Older victims highlighted the difficulties they faced accessing support due to the lack of clear information available to them and the lack of referrals to support they received. This replicates findings from our 2023 Victims' Survey which also found that older victims were less likely to be referred to and supported by victims' services.¹¹² Research has acknowledged the difficulties these victim groups in particular face in accessing support, with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales identifying that older people are often poorly served in the provision of specialist support services.¹¹³ These barriers to information about support and referrals to support are concerning as they lead to delays in victims receiving valuable support. In some cases, this can lead to a decline in their mental health.

Access to the support I needed was by referral from the police. Because the police initially failed me, I became increasingly desperate and at one point considered taking my own life to escape the hell I was in. My mental health went into free fall but eventually I was given that support alongside an apology from the police for failing me. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 65-74)

If you don't know something exists, how can you access it? So it needs a process that offers this support. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 65-74)

Whilst the majority of victims were satisfied with the time taken to receive help from victims' services (63%, figure 14), this was not the case for all victims. We heard from many victims, particularly victims of rape and sexual assault, who faced lengthy waits before being able to access vital support services.¹¹⁴ Though many victims described how amazing the support they received was, they felt the waits to access it were too long.

¹¹² [Annual Victims' Survey 2023 - Victims Commissioner](#)

¹¹³ [Older People's Access to Criminal Justice: A Literature Review - Older People's Commissioner for Wales](#)

¹¹⁴ In their [recent funding crisis report](#), Rape Crisis England and Wales reported that three of their Rape Crisis centres had closed in the last 12 months and others were at risk of closure. They also reported losing staff and expecting a reduction in counselling services because of funding uncertainty.

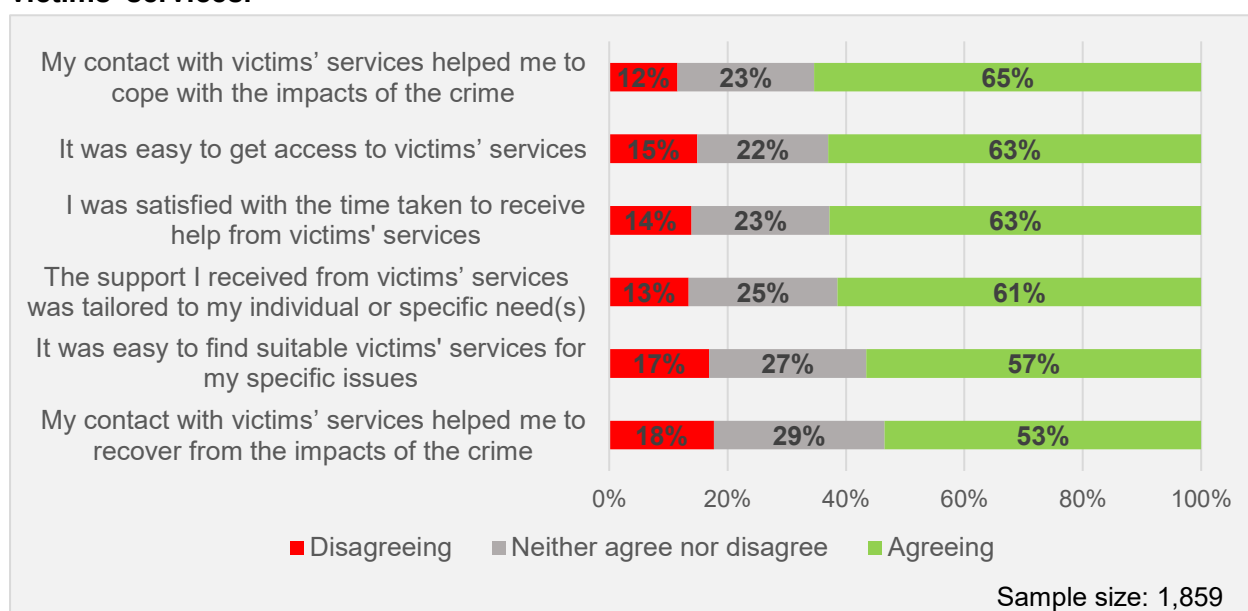
It took 11 months to be offered a single counselling session. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

The support services are amazing, but they are very busy so waiting times can be lengthy. (Victim of assault, Male, 45-54)

The waiting lists for these support services are just too long, I'm on a two year long waiting list for psychiatric support. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

The wait lists were all months/years long, so I didn't get any immediate support from a specialist [Sexual Abuse] provider. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female)

Figure 14. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about victims' services.¹¹⁵



Some respondents attributed poor victims' services accessibility and availability to the lack of funding and resources they had. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner identified how the delays in the Crown Court have increased demand for victims' services. This is because victims need support for longer amidst the Crown court delays, however, new support referrals continue to come in at the same rate. This leads to increasing caseloads and reduced capacity to provide the high-quality support victims need.¹¹⁶ This has been compounded by the recent core funding cuts to victims' services.¹¹⁷ In this research, many victims described a lack of victims' services staff resource and capacity which left victims without support at a very vulnerable time.

¹¹⁵ Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

¹¹⁶ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

¹¹⁷ In the last financial year, core funding has been reduced by 4.2%.

The individual ISVA was incredible, but I only spoke to her twice as she was too busy. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

The service initial helplines are so overwhelmed, nine times out of ten you cannot get through or speak to anyone. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

There is a 6-month waiting list to receive counselling from the charity that offers it for victims of SA [Sexual Abuse] in my catchment area. Their counsellors are trained to work with SA. They used to offer 50-minute weekly counselling sessions over a period of 30 weeks. This was a very reasonable time frame for engagement given SA victims have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD. Owing to cutback in funding, they now offer 50-minute sessions over a period of 12 to 15 weeks. Many counsellors have left the service now. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

Victims have agonising wait for support at most frightening and stressful time in their life. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

One victim described how victims' services were not equipped to support victims through the increasingly long criminal justice process. They stated that consistent support should be available to victims for the full duration of their criminal justice journey. This is especially relevant when victims are experiencing unprecedented delays in the justice system.

If the justice system allows such a length of time to get from the initial crime to sentencing, why is there no service to support you for this full length of time? Not one person has been on this full journey with me and for the past 12 months, I've had virtually no contact...They just need to be with you for the duration, if the duration is too long, then this is something that needs to be looked into and cut down to ensure victims get the full support. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

Although 63% of respondents found it easy to access victims' services (figure 14), this was lower for disabled victims (58%)¹¹⁸. This was often related to the accessibility and flexibility of support services to support victims' individual needs. Recent research by the Ministry of Justice has highlighted the difficulties disabled victims face in accessing support services, identifying attitudinal, communication and physical barriers.¹¹⁹ In this research, we heard from disabled victims who received no support due to the inaccessibility of victims' services.

I was not able to have any help, all I got was a phone call which did not meet my needs. I find making calls hard and therefore received no help, not accessible support at all...They are not accessible. Calling

¹¹⁸ This is statistically significantly lower than for non-disabled victims (67%).

¹¹⁹ [Formal support needs of disabled adult victim-survivors of sexual violence](#)

someone when they are traumatised and are unable to respond and thinking that is helpful is not. (Victim of anti-social behaviour)

[Victim service] declined to help on the basis I had complex needs, Complex PTSD, due to a previous crime. All the more [reason] to need help. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)

This is concerning as research shows that disabled people across England and Wales are disproportionately victimised.¹²⁰ It is therefore important that these victims are able to access the support they need.

Effectiveness of victims' services

Victim support services should help victims cope and where possible, recover, after a crime.¹²¹ We found that whilst 65% agreed that their contact with victims' services helped them to cope with the impacts of the crime¹²², only 53% agreed that their contact with victims' services helped them to recover from the impacts of the crime (figure 14).¹²³

These figures were lower for victims of stalking and harassment, where only 58%¹²⁴ agreed that their contact with victims' services helped them cope with the crime and only 43%¹²⁵ agreed that it helped them recover from the impacts of the crime. Victims of stalking and harassment described a lack of stalking specific support services and support workers having a lack of specific training in stalking behaviour. Data published by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust raised concerns around a lack of sufficient specialist services for stalking victims being commissioned in England and Wales.¹²⁶ In our research, victims described how this could be damaging and had a negative impact on their mental health.

I've been referred by the police, victim support, citizens advice and my GP to victim support services. It was only after three months that I finally started receiving support from an [Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker]. All other services acted as a referral organisation or had long waiting lists or stopped their services due to funding cuts. I think I called and emailed every support service possible. Very disheartening and it had a severe impact (and continues to have) on my mental health. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

More training in stalking. They were not trained. It was more damaging for me. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)

¹²⁰ [Crime in England and Wales: Annual Trend and Demographic Tables - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹²¹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

¹²² This compares to 34% agreement in the 2023 Victims' Survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

¹²³ This compares to 33% in the 2022 Victims' Survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Our findings also highlighted that the effectiveness of victims' services was limited by a lack of follow up communication and a lack of services tailored to specific crimes and individual victim needs. For those victims who were referred to victims' services and received initial contact, they suggested there was a need for follow-up communication to ensure that victims were receiving ongoing support to effectively aid their recovery.

After the initial contact, I heard nothing from anyone from the support services to inquire about how I was. Initial contact is good, but they should know that it takes a while for the real impact on a victim to set in and therefore follow up contact could make all the difference in the victim being able to recover better. (Victim of assault, Male, 55-64)

I also think that more regular follow-up from the support services would have been helpful to ensure I received the ongoing assistance I needed throughout the process. (Victim of street violence, Male, 16-24)

Additionally, we found that only 57% of victims agreed that it was easy to find suitable victims' services for their specific issues and only 61% agreed that the support they received was tailored to their needs (figure 14).¹²⁷ Many respondents highlighted that it would be beneficial to their recovery if there was more individualised support available, that was tailored to victims' specific needs.

The services are very inflexible. If your situation does not fit in their 'box' then you are on your own. Personal circumstances can and do dictate how you respond to domestic situations ... The services highlighted great work in their brochures/websites. The reality is something very different. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

Everyone who suffers from some form of abuse has different experiences, even if the crime committed was similar. The help should be more individualistic. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)

The main area for improvement is the connection between services and the specific needs of victims. More personalised support would have made a significant difference in my recovery. (Victim of assault, Male, 16-24)

It would have helped to have clearer guidance on all the available services to address specific emotional or psychological needs. (Victim of fraud and theft, Male, 16-24)

As highlighted in our 2023 Victims' Survey,¹²⁸ there is demand from victims for support that is less generic and better tailored to their individual needs. This includes the need for specialised 'by and for' services.¹²⁹ Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has

¹²⁷ This compares to 36% agreement in the [2023 Survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

¹²⁸ [Annual Victims' Survey 2023 - Victims Commissioner](#)

¹²⁹ 'By and for' services are specialist services that are led, designed, and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve.

highlighted how crucial these organisations can be in offering victims support from staff with minoritised identities and life experiences that match their own.¹³⁰ It was apparent that where victims received effectively tailored support, this benefited them and their recovery. As victims will have differing needs and vulnerabilities, they need more than a 'one size fits all' approach. It is therefore necessary to ensure that a range of support is available. One respondent described feeling empowered by the sense of choice given to them about which support service was most appropriate to their needs.

I was given resources and allowed to decide for myself who I felt most comfortable reaching out to for support; I liked that sense of choice. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

Being treated as an individual was appreciated. (Victim of street violence, Female, 35-44)

They called me every single day. I have awful anxiety and hate talking on the phone... At times I'd watch it ring, scared to answer. They always understood and didn't take it personally and would text me to let me know they [would] try again at a specific time. They helped me get through the days and listened to my struggles, which in itself was a huge help. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

We know from our research, along with previous literature, that positive experiences with victims' services can be invaluable to victims' recovery following a crime. All victims should be able to access and receive effective, timely and tailored support when they need it. However, this research highlights that this is not the reality for all victims. Too many victims are not referred or are unable to access victims' services. Others face long waits to access support and experience under resourced and oversubscribed support services, or services that are not effective or tailored to their needs. Effective victims' services support and encourage victims to remain engaged with the criminal justice process. This is increasingly important with the ongoing delays in the criminal justice system and ultimately enables the system to function. More accessible, timely, effective, and tailored support and well-resourced victims' services are needed to provide all victims with the vital support they need and deserve.

¹³⁰ [Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner](#)

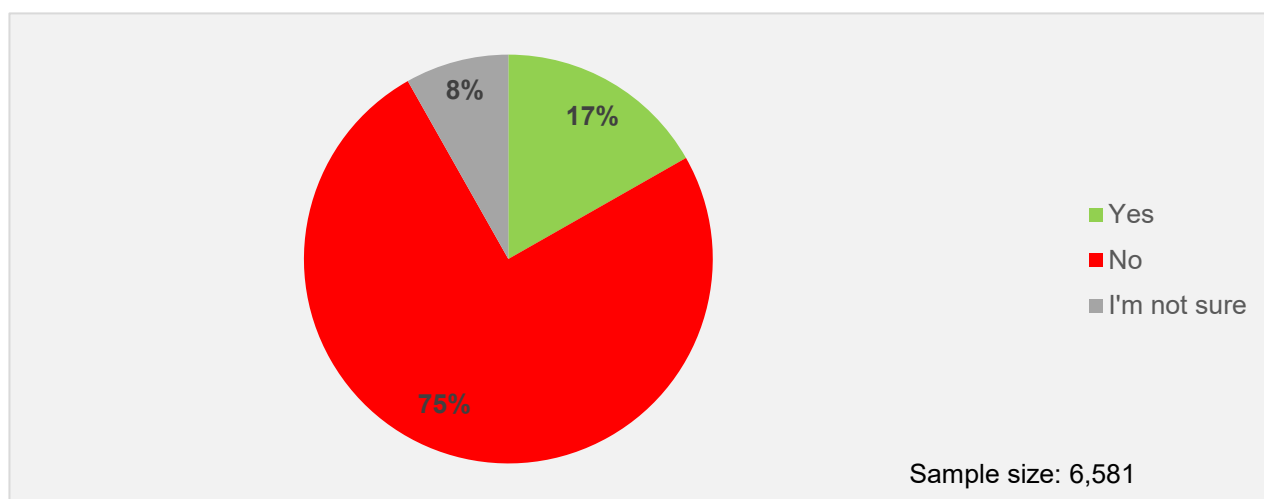
Victims' experiences of the Victims' Code

The Victims Code¹³¹ sets out the minimum standards of service agencies in the criminal justice system must meet when dealing with victims of crime. Currently there is minimal reliable data collected on criminal justice agencies' compliance with the Victims' Code. However, every year, our survey findings show a worrying lack of awareness of the Victims Code amongst victims and a concerning lack of Victims' Code rights being implemented by criminal justice agencies. This includes a low proportion of victims being offered the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) and being made aware of their right to ask for a review of a decision made by the police or CPS not to prosecute a suspect.

Awareness of the Victims' Code

In this year's survey, we found that only 17% of respondents had heard of the Victims' Code (figure 15)¹³². Even when the crime had been reported to police, only 19% of victims had heard of it. This lack of awareness amongst victims, is particularly concerning as without knowledge of their Victims' Code rights, victims will be unable to ask for these rights to be met.

Figure 15. Proportion of respondents who had heard of the Victims' Code.

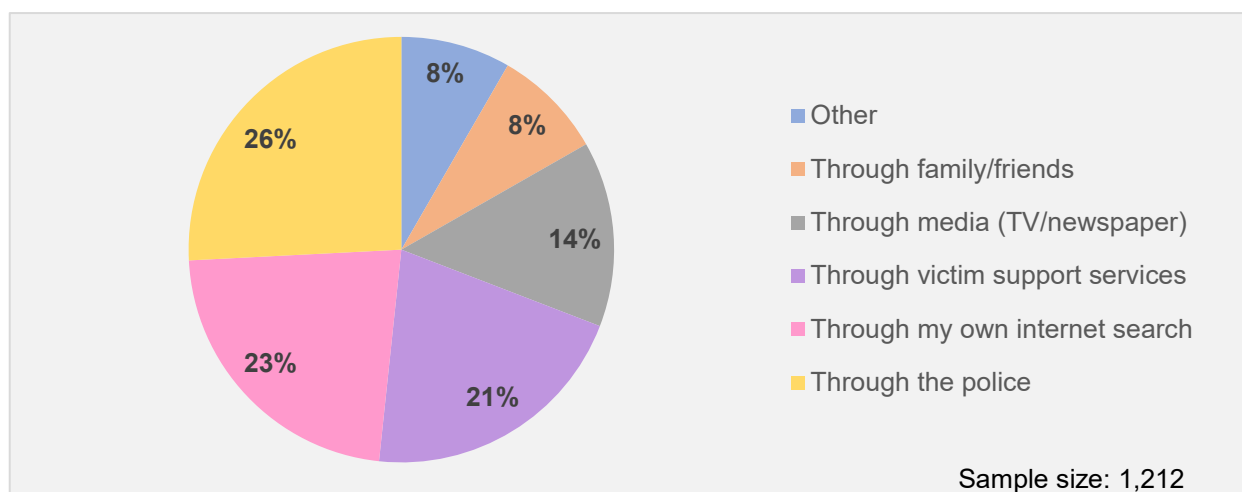


We asked respondents who had heard of the Victims' Code, how they came to know about it. The largest proportion of respondents (26%) were aware of the Victims' Code through the police, followed by 23% who were aware of it through their own internet search (figure 16). Criminal justice agencies are responsible for ensuring that victims are aware of their Code rights, so it should not be left to victims to undertake their own research to find out what they are.

Figure 16. Proportion of respondents hearing about the Victims Code through various sources.

¹³¹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61221/code_of_practice_for_victims_of_crime_in_england_and_wales_victims_code.pdf)

¹³² This compares to 19% in the [2023 survey](#) and 29% in the [2022 survey](#).



Victim Personal Statement¹³³

One of the key rights in the Victims' Code is the ability for victims to be able to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS).¹³⁴ This gives victims a powerful opportunity to voice the impact that the crime had on them. The VPS is used when a defendant is sentenced, and victims are entitled to make the statement at any stage before the defendant is convicted. Government guidance suggests that victims make a VPS at the same time as they make a witness statement with the police.¹³⁵ We found that less than a third (30%) of victims were offered the chance to make a VPS when the police were aware of the crime (Figure 17). As cases progressed through the system, more victims recalled being offered the opportunity to make a VPS, but even when cases had progressed to court only 60% recalled being offered the opportunity to make one.

For some victims, the VPS and the VPS process was clearly explained to them, so they understood what it was and what they needed to do. For others, this was not the case, with victims left unclear when the VPS is taken and how it is different from the witness statement.

*The procedure given for the VPS was well understood and emphasised.
(Victim of street violence, Male, 25-34)*

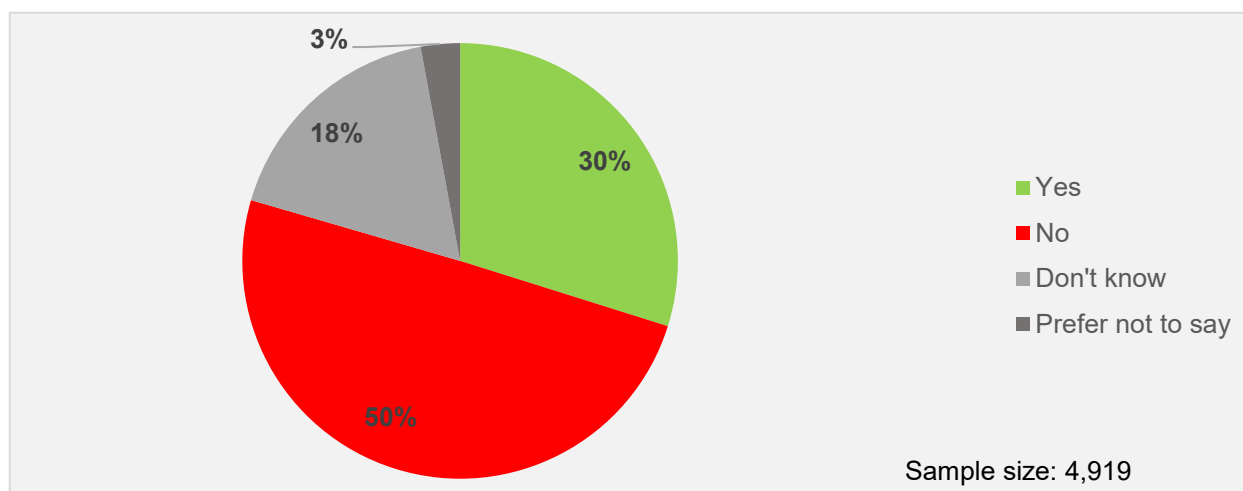
*Provide more information upfront regarding what constitutes the VPS,
when is it taken and how [it] is distinct from the witness statement.
(Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

¹³³ This is now referred to as the Victim Impact Statement.

¹³⁴ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

¹³⁵ [Making a Victim Personal Statement: You have a voice in the criminal justice system and have a right to explain how the crime has affected you \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 17. Proportion of respondents who recalled being offered the chance to make a Victim Personal Statement.



In advance of their VPS being read in court, victims should be asked by police what their preference is for the VPS being read by them or someone else on their behalf.¹³⁶ It is then at the discretion of the judge or magistrate whether this preference is granted. We heard from multiple victims who had requested to read out their VPS themselves but did not have this granted in court. This left victims feeling dismissed and undermined their sense of closure.

Read out victim personal statement after explicitly requesting to read it out myself for closure... I felt dismissed and unheard. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

I was never allowed to speak in court as victim...never allowed any voice...never allowed to read my 3 different VPS ever during 3 cases, 9 hearings in all & 2 sentence hearings. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)

Victims' Right to Review

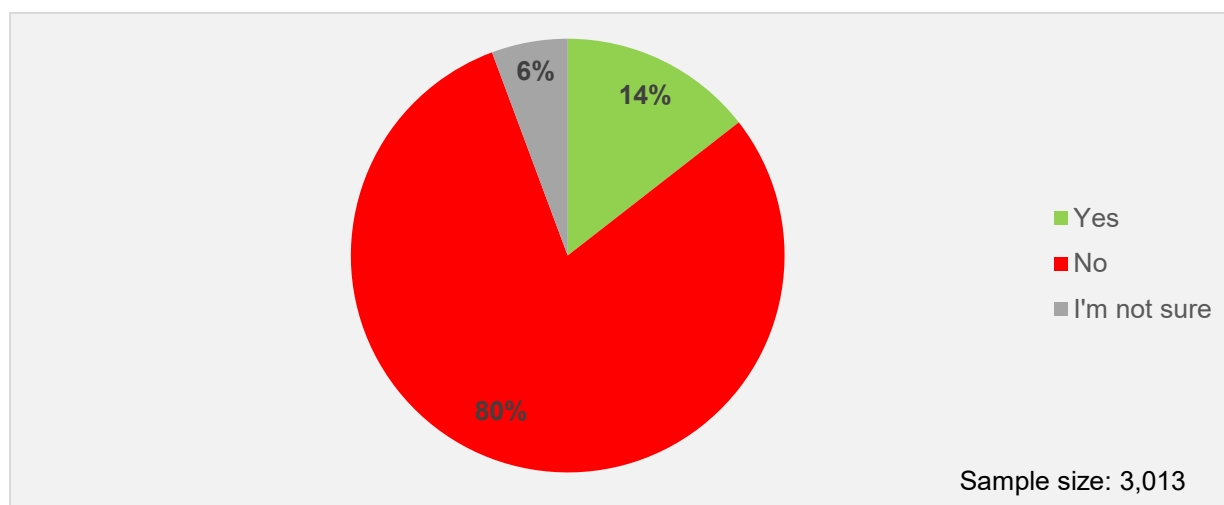
Another key right in the Victims' Code is the Victims' Right to Review (VRR). This gives victims the right to ask for a review of a decision made by the police or CPS to take no further action in an investigation or to discontinue a prosecution. The police, or the CPS via the Witness Care Unit, should advise a victim of their right to review at the same time as communicating a decision not to progress the case. We found that when no one was charged following a report to the police, only 14% of respondents had heard of the VRR (figure 18)¹³⁷. Victims are only able to request a review of a police or CPS decision within a short timeframe¹³⁸, so victim awareness of this right is crucial.

¹³⁶ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

¹³⁷ This compares to 8% in our [2023 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

¹³⁸ [A police VRR request must be made within 3 months of the decision](#) and a [CPS VRR request must be made within 10 working days of the decision](#).

Figure 18. Proportion of respondents who had heard of the Victims' Right to Review (VRR) scheme when no one was charged following a report to the police.



We heard from victims who were informed of the VRR and exercised this right. Following this, some victims experienced an improvement in how their case was investigated.

The initial investigation was incredibly poor, but the investigation after the Right to Review scheme was better. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Other victims acknowledged that their VRR was handled well. However, they suggested the criminal justice system should function well enough that victims do not need to pursue a review, as some victims may not be able to.

When I applied for a VRR... I was shown respect and felt listened to and that it wasn't my fault. I felt believed. However, victims should not have to go this far and if it was not for the fact I work with victims now, I am not sure I would have pursued it to this stage. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

Year after year, our research shows that too few victims are being informed of their Victims' Code rights and too few victims are receiving their Victims' Code rights. Many victims only find out about the Victims' Code through their own internet search. Criminal justice agencies have a responsibility to inform victims of their rights and ensure these vital rights are implemented. This must be improved, and criminal justice agencies must improve how they monitor their compliance with the Victims' Code to ensure victims receive the service they are entitled to.

Key research findings

Victim confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system is low.

Our research highlighted that victim confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system is low and is particularly low for victim groups that are more likely to be victimised such as females, LGBT+ and disabled people. There was also an inconsistency in the confidence victims reported in the effectiveness of different stages of the justice system. For some victims, the good experience they had with the police was let down by their experience with the CPS, whereas others reported poor experiences initially which improved as they reached later stages of the criminal justice process. Victims reported a lack of confidence in criminal justice agencies communicating effectively with each other and described the need for the criminal justice system to listen to victims and address systemic biases within the system.

Victim experiences with the police were mixed and often impacted by the thoroughness of investigations in response to their reports and the support and communication they received.

When victims choose to report a crime to the police, it is vital they have a positive experience to encourage their sustained engagement with the criminal justice process. Whilst some victims do have a positive experience with the police, we found this was not routinely the case. Around a third of respondents were dissatisfied with the police response to the crime, disagreed that victims are well supported by the police and disagreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly. The main issues victims identified were not being taken seriously, not being kept informed, and a lack of effective action being taken by police in response to their reports. Victims described how regular communication and having their needs addressed and being supported by police was important for building trust and improving their experience. Despite the negative experiences of some of our respondents, over two thirds said they would report a crime to the police again. When victims were satisfied with the police response to the crime, their willingness to report a crime to the police again increased.

Victims lacked confidence in the CPS. Their experiences of case progression after the police investigation were impacted by how they were treated and the quality of communication.

We found that over half of victims lacked confidence in the ability of the CPS to effectively prosecute people accused of committing crime. Some victims highlighted a lack of CPS knowledge of domestic abuse and stalking and harassment. Others were frustrated with CPS charging decisions being negatively impacted by delays in the criminal justice system.

As with our previous research, our findings highlighted that the way victims are treated and communicated with as cases progress through the criminal justice system was of utmost importance. There are lots of vital communication points during a victim's criminal justice journey, including communication regarding charging decisions, court processes and court outcomes. Victims described how effective communication from criminal justice agencies transformed their experience from feeling disempowered to feeling included and supported in the process.

Victim experiences of the court system were influenced by the treatment, support and delays they experienced.

Victims' experiences of the courts varied. Some victims described receiving excellent support from the courts and court staff when they attended court, particularly when special measures were provided to help them give evidence. However, others described a lack of support whilst attending court as well as feeling retraumatised by the cross-examination. Delays in the court system also impacted victims' experiences. A fifth of respondents were dissatisfied with the length of time taken for their case to progress through the court system. This dissatisfaction with court timeliness was even higher for victims of rape and sexual assault and stalking and harassment. Victims voiced the negative impact these long waits for trial had on their recovery and mental health.

Victims' services can be vital to victims, but support must be accessible, timely, tailored, and effective.

Support can be invaluable to victims' recovery after a crime, and we heard about some instances of lifesaving care. However, our research also found that too few victims are referred to these vital services. Less than a third of respondents told us they recalled being referred or had self-referred to victims' services and this only increased to just over half when the offence went to court. Our findings also showed that too many victims experienced long waits to access under resourced and oversubscribed support services. In some cases, the support they ultimately received was not tailored to their needs or effective.

Too few victims are informed of or receive their Victims' Code rights.

We found too few victims are being informed of their Victims' Code rights and too few victims are receiving these rights. Less than a fifth of victims where the crime had been reported to police had heard of the Victims' Code. In addition, too many victims reported finding out about the code through their own research as they had not been informed of it by criminal justice agencies. It was also concerning that key Victims' Code rights, such as the right for victims to be able to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS)¹³⁹, are not being routinely implemented by criminal justice agencies.

¹³⁹ This is now referred to as the Victim Impact Statement.

Conclusion

This report provides insights into the victim experience throughout the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Our findings show that whilst some victims are satisfied with their experience of the criminal justice system, many victims are not confident it can deliver justice for them. Victims suggested that this confidence was undermined by a lack of thorough and fair police investigations, poor communication about case progression, poor treatment and delays in the system. Our report also demonstrates how experience, perception, and willingness to engage again with the criminal justice system varies widely across different demographic groups and different types of crime.

Improvements to the criminal justice system need to be made so all victims, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, ability, and crime type, feel confident that they can receive justice by reporting a crime and be provided with the appropriate support throughout the criminal justice system.

Compounding these issues, too few victims are being referred to victims' services and receiving effective support and too few victims are aware of or are receiving their Victims' Code rights. This means they are unaware of the minimum standards of service that agencies in the criminal justice system must meet when dealing with victims of crime and many are therefore unable to advocate for themselves when needed.

Our findings also show how positive experiences of the criminal justice system can be transformative for victims. At a time when the courts backlog and the time taken for cases to progress through the criminal justice system remains incredibly high¹⁴⁰, this is even more important.

¹⁴⁰ [Criminal Justice System - All metrics - CJS Dashboard](#)

Appendix

Appendix A – Methodology

On behalf of the Victims' Commissioner, TONIC Consultants ran an online survey between 25th November and 31st December 2024. Telephone-assisted survey completion was also available. The survey, designed by the Office of the Victims' Commissioner, took approximately fifteen minutes to complete. For 2024, the survey design was reviewed and updated from previous years following stakeholder engagement and cognitive testing with a small sample of victims. The survey included a combination of closed questions (tick box/multiple choice) and open-ended questions (free text response box). This mixed-methods approach ensured both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, providing a comprehensive understanding of victims' experiences.

Survey participants were recruited in two ways:

- **Open Promotion:** The survey was disseminated through the communications channels of key partners, including national charities, police services, Police and Crime Commissioners, local authorities, and NHS services across England and Wales.
- **Specialist Panel Recruitment:** The specialist panel company, Norstat, identified participants from their panel members who had previously been a victim of crime. Screening questions were used to identify individuals who had been victims of crime or had reported a crime since January 2021. Eligible participants were then randomly selected from this pool to complete the survey.

Additional screening questions were used to route respondents through the survey based on their experiences, for example, if a victim indicated they had attended court, they were directed to questions about their experiences of attending court. This ensured that the survey captured relevant and detailed data tailored to each participant's circumstances.

The total sample size was 6,581 participants aged 16 and over who had been a victim of a crime or reported a crime to the police between January 2021 and December 2024. The data has been weighted to ensure the sample was representative of adults aged 16+ in England and Wales who have experienced a crime. Weighting was based on age, gender, region, ethnicity, and disability, using the most recent figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.¹⁴¹

All reported group differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (alpha value of 0.05), established using t-tests (and non-parametric equivalents). Bessel's correction and false discovery rate were also applied.

This report makes some comparisons to our previous Victims' Surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023. However, our previous methodology was different, either utilising a small sample of self-selecting victims who were not representative of victims of crime in England and Wales (2022 survey) or You Gov panel members only (2023 survey) so caution must be taken when comparing previous findings to our Victims' Survey 2024 findings.

¹⁴¹ [Crime in England and Wales: Annual Trend and Demographic Tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

Due to the use of rounding in our analysis, not all the percentages presented will add up to 100%.

Appendix B – Limitations

The survey findings have some limitations. The methodology relied on online survey tools and partner organisations for participant recruitment, which may introduce biases, such as underrepresentation of individuals with limited access to digital platforms. To mitigate this, a telephone assisted survey was also offered on request.

The survey was also only available in English and Welsh so our survey will have been more difficult for those with English as an additional language to complete. The survey was only available in a standard format that was screen reader accessible but our sample will not include victims of crime who need alternative formats to participate, such as an easy-read version or braille version.

Our survey was only available to victims aged 16 and over so experiences of younger victims will be excluded from our findings.

Whilst the survey findings were weighted to enhance the representativeness of victims of crime across England and Wales, the sample used were self-selecting. The survey methodology literature on self-selection bias indicates that respondents with strong feelings may be more likely to respond to surveys.¹⁴²

¹⁴² See: 'Self-selection bias' in: Lavrakas, P.J., (2008). *Encyclopaedia of Survey Research Methods*. 2nd Edition. Sage Publications. Also see: Bethlehem, J. (2010). Selection bias in web surveys. *International Statistical Review*, 78(2), pp.161-188

Appendix C - Weighted demographic breakdown

Sex at birth: Female (53%), Male (46%), Intersex (0.3%)

Gender identity: Gender identity the same as sex registered at birth: Yes (98%), No (1%), Prefer not to say (2%).

Age (years): 16 to 24 (14%), 25 to 34 (19%), 35 to 44 (17%), 45 to 54 (17%), 55 to 64 (16%), 65 to 74 (10%), 75 and over (6%).

Ethnicity: White (83%), Asian/Asian British (7%), Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (4%), Mixed/multiple ethnic group (2%), Other ethnic group (3%)

Sexuality: Heterosexual (93%), Bisexual (2%), Gay/Lesbian (2%), Other (1%).

Disability: Non-disabled (74%), Disabled (24%)¹⁴³

Region: East Midlands (8%), East of England (10%), London (14%), North East (4%), North West (12%), South East (19%), South West (12%), Wales (4%), West Midlands (8%), Yorkshire and the Humber (9%).

¹⁴³ Disability was defined using [The Equality Act disability definition](#) (EADD).

Appendix D

Figure 19. Percentage of respondents selecting each factor as the most or second most important factor for victims when reporting a crime to the police.

