

Annual Victims' Survey 2023

August 2024



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr Tara Young (Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Kent) for reviewing an earlier version of this report. We would also like to thank Katrin Hohl at City University, Louise Holden from Inclusion London and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) for their input and feedback on the recommendations that are made in this report.

Most of all, we would like to express our thanks to the victims who took the time to respond to our survey and share their experiences of the criminal justice system with us.

Summary

This report, produced by the Victims' Commissioner, presents the findings from the Victim Survey 2023. This survey provides key insights into victims' experiences with the criminal justice system, including the police, victims' services, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the courts and the Victims' Code.

In November 2023, YouGov, on behalf of the Victims' Commissioner, launched The Victim Survey 2023, an online survey that asked victims of crime in England and Wales about their experiences. This survey is both one of the largest surveys ever undertaken with victims of crime as well being the largest survey undertaken by the Victims' Commissioner to date. This research gathered 3,048 responses from individuals who had been a victim of crime or had reported a crime since January 2020. The data has been weighted and is representative of all crime victims aged over 16 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 2022, 2021 and 2020 Victim Survey results, but they should be interpreted with caution, as the 2023 survey methodology and sample are considerably different to previous years (see Appendix A for the detailed methodology).

Key Findings

Victims' experiences of police are mixed but could be improved by more thorough and timely investigations and better communication.

- 40% of respondents were dissatisfied with the police response to the crime.
- 46% of respondents disagreed that they were kept regularly informed by police about the investigation.
- Only 30% of respondents agreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly.
- 71% of respondents said they would report a crime to the police again.

Victims' services can be invaluable, but more victims need to be referred and timely and tailored support should be available to all victims.

- 15% of respondents told us they recalled being referred or self-referring themselves to victims' services.
- 21% of those referred agreed that they had to wait a long time to receive help from victims' services.
- 15% of those referred disagreed that the support they received from victims' services was tailored to their needs.

Victims' experiences of the courts and Crown Prosecution Service vary but could be improved with fewer delays and better provision of support and information.

- 83% of those who had attended court, said they would attend again.
- 33% of respondents agreed that they had to wait too long for the case to come to trial.
- 25% of the respondents disagreed that victims are given enough support during the court process.
- 30% of respondents disagreed that they were kept well informed about the progress of the case.

Victims lack confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

- 38% of respondents were confident the criminal justice system was fair.
- 27% of respondents were confident the criminal justice system was effective.
- 23% of respondents were confident that they could receive justice by reporting a crime.

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

- 19% of respondents had heard of the Victims' Code of Practice.
- 8% of respondents were aware of the Victims' Right to Review (VRR).

Key recommendations

This report contains 15 recommendations that are grouped into three overarching aims and are designed to improve victims' experiences after they have suffered from a crime. These recommendations seek to:

- Improve the delivery of Victims' Code rights.
 - By implementing a robust monitoring mechanism.
 - By ensuring relevant agencies have suitable training to meet their Code obligations.
 - By updating the Victims' Code to include victims of persistent anti-social behaviour.
- Improve victims' experiences of support services.
 - By ensuring commissioners provide a range of specialist services meeting all victims' needs.
 - By evaluating commissioning practices and the Victims Funding strategy.
- Improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system.
 - By undertaking work to identify the impact of the court backlog on victims.
 - By undertaking work to understand the barriers to some victims engaging with the criminal justice system.
 - By collecting consistent data on victims and their personal characteristics.

Please turn to page 34 for a full list of our 15 recommendations.

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Foreword

All victims are affected by crime. Whether it's a violent assault, a life-altering injury, the loss of a loved one, or a deeply personal violation, victims carry the weight of their experience throughout the criminal justice process and beyond. This is a truth I sadly know all too well.

It is also a truth that our justice system too often fails to prioritise victim needs. That's why this landmark survey, the largest survey undertaken by a Victims' Commissioner, is so important. Encompassing over 3,000 victims across all crime types and all stages of the justice system, it allows us to explore and amplify the true victim experience.

This survey could not be more timely. The justice system is grappling with record Crown Court backlogs, lengthy waits for justice, and strained resources. While the Victims and Prisoners Act promises significant reforms, the findings in this survey underscore the challenges facing our justice system and the need for change.

Key among the findings was victim dissatisfaction with how police handled their case. This cut across all victim groups, with a common feeling that police weren't actively pursuing leads or taking their case seriously. This, coupled with a lack of communication and engagement throughout the investigation, left victims feeling unsupported and frustrated during a difficult time.

But there are also troubling disparities across minoritised groups. Disabled victims, for example, report lower overall satisfaction with the police, are less likely to report in future, and receive disproportionately poor treatment within the justice system. This is especially concerning given the higher rates of victimisation faced by disabled people and the potential for a cycle of under-reporting.

Endemic delays throughout the criminal justice system, from police investigations to court proceedings also negatively impact victim confidence. This can fuel a concerning rate of victim withdrawal from the process. Many investigations are closed prematurely due to victim withdrawal, highlighting a systemic issue within the justice system.

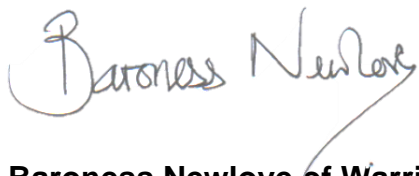
This survey also shines a light on the need for increased referrals to victim support services, particularly for victims of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Access to these services shouldn't be determined by your postcode; support should be available to everyone, regardless of where you are in the country.

Perhaps the most concerning finding is the knock-on impact of the justice system's challenges on reporting behaviour. Victims' awareness of low prosecution rates and resource limitations, for example, discourages, or even silences, victims from coming forward in the first place.

Further compounding the issue is a troubling lack of awareness regarding key rights under the Victims' Code, such as the right to information about their case or the right to support services. Without this knowledge, victims are less likely to advocate for themselves effectively, leading to a cycle of frustration and unmet needs.

Let's be clear: victims deserve better. They deserve a justice system that treats them fairly; a system where their needs and rights are considered alongside those of the offenders. At its core, it is about decent treatment, procedural justice, and a thorough investigation. It's about being seen and heard, and receiving the support they need to secure justice and to heal.

As the Victims and Prisoners Act nears its final legislative stages, this report is a timely reminder of why it is needed. The report outlines concrete recommendations to ensure victims' rights are no longer an afterthought but woven into the very fabric of how we deliver justice. I hope they will be given due consideration. A criminal justice system that actively supports victims and fosters their participation is the only system that can deliver true justice for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Baroness Newlove". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Baroness Newlove of Warrington

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

Victims' experiences with the police

For most of our respondents (1,991, 65%) the police were aware of the crime committed. As engagement with the police is the first stage of the criminal justice process, it is vitally important victims have a positive experience to encourage their continued engagement with the process both in the present and the future.

We heard from some victims who had incredibly positive experiences with the police and these two quotes highlight how victims' experiences of the police can be excellent.

The police were amazing and I'm very thankful for all their help. (Female, 16-24, Yorkshire and the Humber)

Everything they did as far as my experience went, they were perfect. (Female, 45-54, West Midlands)

Positive elements of victims' experiences with the police included officers who were kind, supportive and treated victims respectfully. Sixty-one percent of respondents agreed that they felt comfortable speaking to investigating officers (figure 1) with many victims describing how officers were kind, considerate and supportive and the positive effect this had on them.

Police were extremely supportive and helped in whatever way they could. I knew I was in capable, well trained hands and felt safe once they arrived. (Female, 45-54, South West)

I was given a dedicated female detective, who would text me before speaking or meeting to make sure I was ok. I was invited to have a friend with me for support. (Female, 35-44, London)

Very kind and helpful. Put my mind at rest and informed me of my rights. (Female, 55-64, South West)

They came back to check on me and give me security devices to manage my anxiety which was lovely of them, they made me feel like my concerns mattered and it was OK to be upset even though they couldn't investigate it, that made me feel better. (Female, 35-44, West Midlands)

When victims had a supportive police officer who was designated as their single point-of contact throughout their criminal justice journey this further enhanced the victim experience. This sense of continuity is important for victims navigating an unfamiliar system. It also fosters inter-agency collaboration, as the same individual is responsible for updating the victim on behalf of different agencies throughout the process.

I was looked after throughout the process by the same female officer which was wonderful. She kept in regular contact and updated me. (Female, 35-44, Wales)

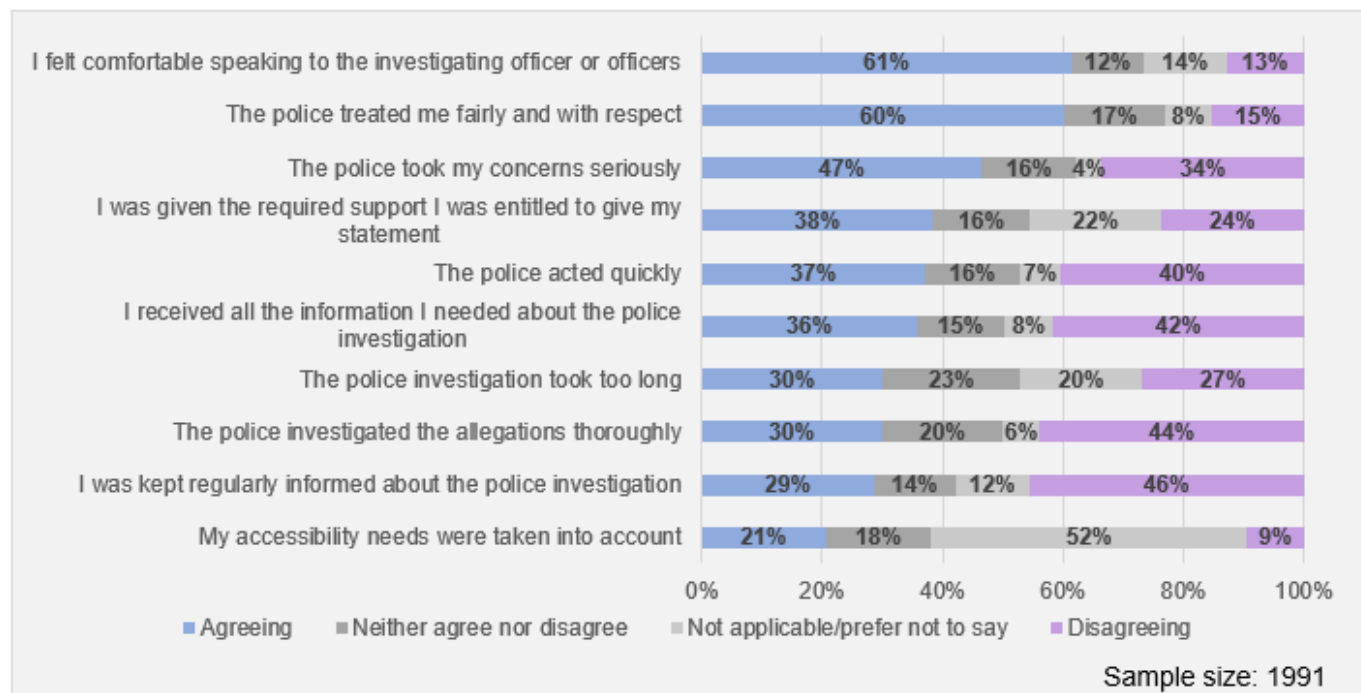
The officer who attended was absolutely brilliant, he took control of the whole situation and supported me entirely, all the way to trial. (Female 45-54, South East)

In addition to this, 60% of respondents agreed that the police treated them fairly and with respect (figure 1), with respondents identifying this as a positive element of their reporting experience.

The community police took a thorough statement over the phone and assured me they would send someone immediately. Two days later, the group was gone, and neighbours told me they had been immediately and that others had also complained. I was pleased with the respect I was shown and the way the episode was dealt with. (Female, 65+, South West)

I was taken seriously, treated with respect, and reassured of support and immediate response should there be a recurrence. (Female, 65+, South West)

Figure 1. Respondent levels of agreement and disagreement with various statements about their experience with the police.¹

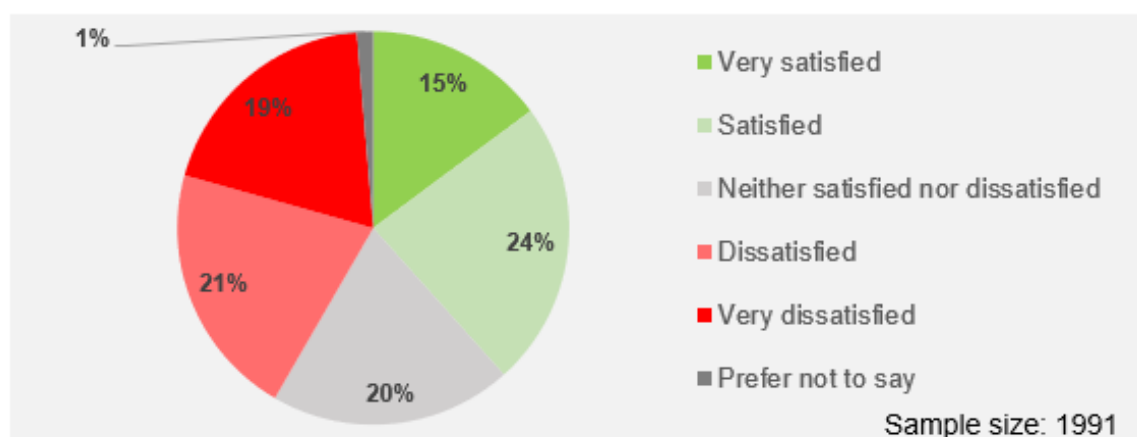


However, we found that 40% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the police response to the crime (figure 2)². In line with the findings from our previous victim surveys, this research identified several common issues that contribute to poor victim experiences with the police. These include a lack of police investigation into reported crimes, delayed police attendance and investigation into reported crimes and a lack of communication from the police.

¹ Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

² This compares to 71% [in our 2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 2. Respondent satisfaction levels with the response they received from police.



Victims have told us repeatedly, in both this survey and others, that after reporting a crime to the police, one of the most important things to them is for the crime to be fully investigated.³ Therefore, it is very concerning that only 30% of respondents agreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly (figure 1). Many respondents described a complete lack of interest from the police in carrying out the investigation and in some cases, victims had to initiate the investigations themselves to receive the justice they deserved.

They made it clear they were not interested in prosecuting the individuals even though they knew who they were and that they had a long history of committing the same crime. (Male, 35-44, East Midlands)

I was fobbed off by the police, they didn't even bother to investigate. They told me it wasn't a crime. It was. I then had to complain. Then they realised a crime had taken place, but they then said too much time had gone by and they didn't attend... (Female, 35-44, East of England)

I had to do all the investigating. My car and my son's car were both keyed. We reported it to the police and gave them the information of someone who had CCTV so they could see who had done the damage. They didn't bother so I had to ask for the footage from my neighbour. I identified the boys were from a local school and sent the footage to them. They contacted the police with the names of the boys. I had to keep phoning for updates and push the police to investigate this matter. They eventually spoke to the boys who admitted the criminal damage and their parents paid for the repairs. If I hadn't done the majority of the work, I'm sure I would still be waiting! (Female, 45-54, South East)

Another recurring issue our respondents have described is delays in the police attending and investigating the reported incident. This is reflected in the 30% of respondents who agreed that the police investigation took too long⁴ and the 40% of respondents who disagreed that the police acted quickly⁵ (figure 1). Multiple victims described how delays in police action impeded them from receiving justice.

³ See [Appendix D](#) for further detail on the most important factors for victims when reporting a crime to the police.

⁴ This compares to 45% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁵ This compares to the 60% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Everything took too long. The initial incident was attended – eventually – but took so long, the perpetrator was able to get away from the city where it took place, having left the scene almost immediately... Because it had taken so long to find him, they were not able to test for drunk/drug driving. (Female, 55-64, West Midlands)

[Police] investigated too late so CPS could not charge him with a crime as time had lapsed. (Female, 35-44, Yorkshire and the Humber)

For many victims, reporting a crime will be their first experience of the criminal justice system and if victims perceive the police are disinterested in investigating their reports or find that the police investigations are too delayed for them to get justice, this is likely to discourage them from engaging with the criminal justice process in the future.

A further issue victims continue to encounter is a lack of communication and a lack of provision of information and updates from the police. Forty-six percent of respondents disagreed that they were kept regularly informed by police about the investigation⁶ and 42% disagreed that they received all the information they needed about the police investigation⁷ (figure 1). Many respondents cited a lack of information or follow up from police, with some victims left with no idea what happened as a result of them reporting the crime, undermining victim confidence that it is worthwhile reporting crimes to the police.

I have no idea what happened after I reported the crime. There was no contact from the police beyond the e-reply, so I answered “neither/nor” to the survey questions as I have no notion of what they did – hope they did something! (Female, 45-54, North West)

The police could have updated me about the outcome of the incident. They were great on the day and did not update me despite me regularly requesting updates (Female, 35-44, Wales)

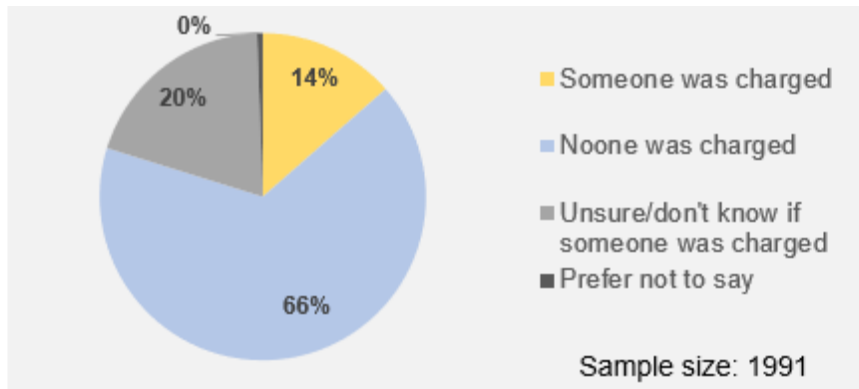
The police officer who came to take a statement was friendly enough, and seemed to be thorough enough, but there was much that I was not informed about. I would like to see faster response times, better explanation of process, better explanation around redress (or lack of) and better communication. (Female, 55-64, West Midlands)

In line with this, when we asked respondents if anyone was charged following the report to the police as many as a fifth of respondents (20%) were unsure or did not know (figure 3).

⁶ This compares to 65% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁷ This compares to 62% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 3. Proportion of respondents reporting whether someone was charged following a report to the police.



Victims continue to tell us that one of the most important things they need from the police after reporting a crime is to have that crime investigated fully. Yet too many victims do not feel this is happening and that their claims have not been taken seriously, leaving some victims to initiate investigations themselves. On top of this, when police do investigate, this is often hampered by delays which can prevent victims from getting justice. Victims also struggle to get information or updates about their case, which can leave them feeling very unsupported and excluded from the process. Current victim attrition is high, with 27% of police investigations closed because the victim does not support police action.⁸ While there are many reasons why victims withdraw from the criminal justice process, if they perceive a sense of inaction from the criminal justice system this is unlikely to encourage their sustained participation or any future engagement with the system.

In this research we also found that dissatisfaction with the police response was higher for certain victim groups. Disabled respondents reported significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction, 45% of disabled respondents⁹ told us they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the police response to the crime, with victims mentioning problems with the police exhibiting behaviour that did not take into account their needs.

Some disabled victims felt that they were infantilised by police. This quote from a disabled victim shows how they felt that they were patronised and treated differently due to their disability.

If anything, I felt like the police made things significantly worse for me throughout this, especially because of my disability. They told me at one point that because of my disability I should have someone looking after me to help stop crimes happening to me. I am an adult and they didn't treat me as such. I don't need a caretaker just because I am in a wheelchair. (Female, 25-34, East of England)

Other victims described how they struggled to get the police to make basic reasonable adjustments for their disability. This is despite the Equality Act 2010 setting out that public bodies should ensure they deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, accessible to all, and which meet different people's needs.¹⁰

⁸ [Crime recorded to police decision - CJS Dashboard \(justice.gov.uk\)](https://www.justice.gov.uk/cjs-dashboard)

⁹ This is statistically significantly higher than for non-disabled respondents (39%).

¹⁰ [Equality Act 2010: specific duties to support the equality duty. What do I need to know? A quick start guide for public sector organisations \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-specific-duties-to-support-the-equality-duty-what-do-i-need-to-know-a-quick-start-guide-for-public-sector-organisations)

Took time for them to listen to and then make adjustments for my disabilities – I am partially hearing and partially sighted and often people would stand too far away to speak to me or cover their mouth when speaking so I couldn't keep up with what was being said. (Female, 45-54, East of England)

Police found it difficult to make reasonable adjustments to my disabilities and kept forgetting and having to be told again/asked to repeat things. (Female, 45-54, East of England)

This finding supports previous research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which found the criminal justice system does not always treat disabled people fairly. They found the system does not always meet the needs and abilities of disabled people and that reasonable adjustments are not always made.¹¹ This is particularly concerning when you consider disabled people are 57% more likely than non-disabled people to be a victim of headline crime.¹² If reporting to the police is not accessible, disabled people are excluded from, and disadvantaged by the system. This can result in disengagement with the system and a reluctance for them to report the crimes they experience.

Disabled victims were not the only group of respondents who were notably more dissatisfied with their experiences with the police. Dissatisfaction was even higher for respondents from the mixed/multiple ethnic group, with 58% of respondents¹³ telling us they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the police response to the crime. Some victims described the police as disrespectful and felt that their cases were not treated seriously due to their ethnicity. This quote from a victim expands on this issue.

The Met police treated me with disrespect, as a black woman I was disappointed. I did everything they asked me to, but my case was rudely dismissed. My neighbour, another black woman, was threatened in her own home with a gun, the perpetrator a white man was let off with a warning, disgraceful and concerning. (Female, 55-64, London)

Some respondents felt marginalised by the police and explained how they felt the police did not take them, or the crimes they experienced, seriously.

No-one took the claims that the crimes were hate crimes against me and my husband seriously. Also, the frequency and proximity of how these crimes were being committed did not seem to be taken into account. (Female, 55-64, East of England)

Recent research has highlighted the challenges that minoritised women in particular face when engaging with the criminal justice system and has shown that experiences with the police put these women off from going through the criminal justice system, even when they are being supported by specialist women's services.¹⁴ This group of victims often report that their claims are minimised and

¹¹ [Inclusive justice: a system designed for all | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://equalityhumanrights.com/)

¹² [Crime in England and Wales, victim characteristics: year ending March 2023 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk). Headline crime includes theft, robbery, criminal damage, fraud, computer misuse and violence with or without injury.

¹³ This is statistically significantly higher than for white respondents (40%) and black respondents (36%)

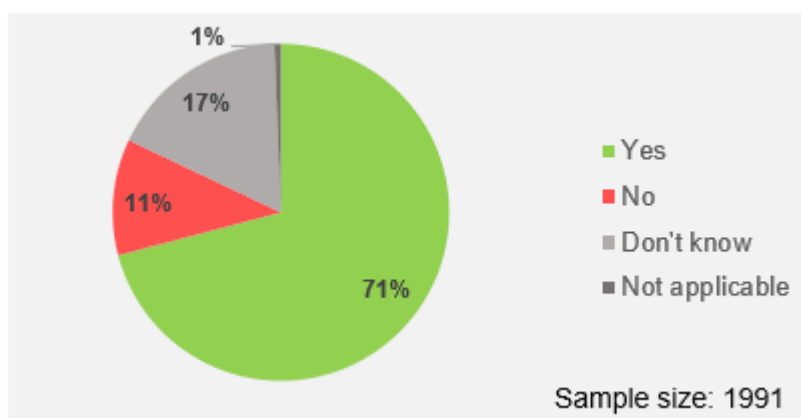
¹⁴ [Imkaan and University of Warwick \(2020\). Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence – Key Findings](#)

dismissed by the police and this response to the reporting of the crimes they have experienced, can engender a lack of trust in the police.

Willingness to report to the police again

Despite the negative experiences of some of our respondents, overall, there was a willingness for people to continue to engage with the justice system. Seventy-one percent of our sample said they would report a crime to the police again (figure 4).¹⁵ 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 the police to build a better picture of what is happening in the local area and inform their local policing priorities.¹⁶ We found that when victims were satisfied with the police response to the crime, 94% of them would report a crime to the police again, compared to only 47% when victims were dissatisfied with the police response to the crime. This highlights the impact of a positive victim experience with the police and how important victim satisfaction is in ensuring a functioning criminal justice system.

Figure 4. Proportion of respondents who would or wouldn't report a crime to the police again.



Eleven percent of victims would not report a crime to the police again in the future. Often victims felt there was no point in reporting crimes owing to the lack of response and disregard from the police. Whereas others felt frustrated by the lack of communication they received during the process.

I have been met with indifference in the past and even a refusal to investigate as crimes were passed on to other private security firms who did nothing. When we had a theft last year, we didn't report it as felt nothing would happen. (Female, 35-44, North West)

I felt like I was being an irritant. I have had zero communication with what has happened and frankly would not bother with the Police again. (Female, 55-64, North West)

The police are appalling at dealing with domestic abuse and criminal damage. They didn't take my case any further even though my ex partner made threats to kill me because "it had been too long to take the case further" because they

¹⁵ This compares to 44% in our [2022](#) survey, 43% in our [2021](#) survey and 42% in our [2020](#) survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

¹⁶ <https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/news/2023/10/importance-of-reporting-crime/>

took too long!!! Will never report anything to the police ever again. (Female, 25-34, East Midlands)

However, this unwillingness to report was not universal across all groups of victims. There were notable differences in the proportion of respondents who would not report a crime to the police again across demographic characteristics. Overall, only 11% of victims told us that they would not report a crime again but for disabled victims this rose to 14%.¹⁷ As disabled victims are more likely to become a victim of crime¹⁸ it is concerning that they have an increased propensity to not engage with the police again. Disabled victims deserve justice. If disabled victims do not engage with the police due to past negative experiences, the police will lose proficiency in interacting with and adequately supporting disabled victims.

We found that Asian respondents and younger respondents were even less likely to report a crime to the police again, with 17% of Asian respondents¹⁹ and 23% of respondents aged 16-24²⁰ having said they would not report a crime to the police again citing a lack of confidence that the police would pursue the matter and a general sense of frustration at a dearth of communication.

Any kind of interest at all from the police would be a bonus. (Male, 16-24, South West)

I have very little confidence that most 'minor' crime will ever be solved. (Male, 16-24, West Midlands)

The police told me they would investigate and contact me again in two weeks. Half a year has now passed and I haven't heard a thing from them, not even to close the case. (Female, 16-24, East Midlands)

Whilst many victims do have positive experiences with the police and a large proportion remain willing to report crimes to the police in future, almost half of respondents (48%) disagreed that victims can get justice by reporting incidents to the police and the same proportion (48%) disagreed that victims can have confidence that the incident they reported will be fairly investigated (figure 5). On top of this, some victims' experiences with the police do leave them unsure or unwilling to report future crimes and this risks the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Ensuring thorough and timely police investigations, effective police communication, and an accessible and inclusive police experience for all victims is essential to improve victim satisfaction and continued engagement with the criminal justice system.

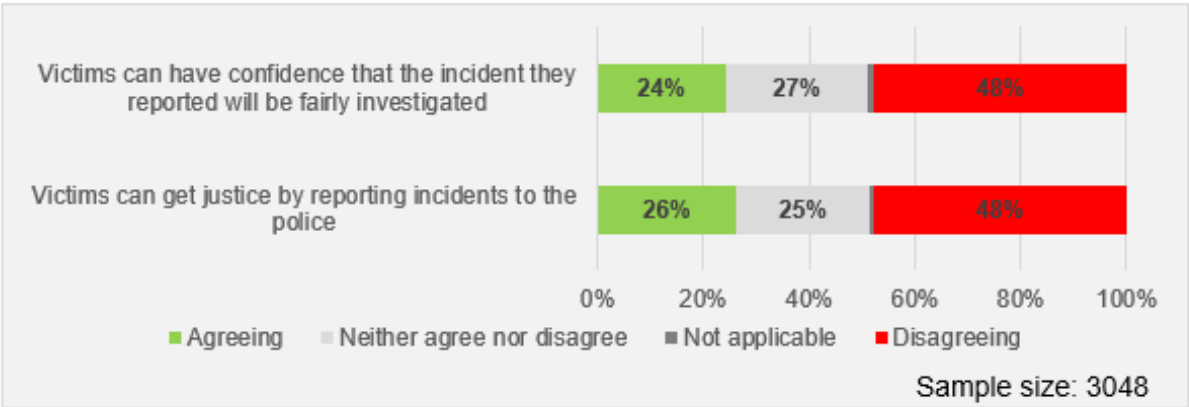
¹⁷ This is statistically significantly higher than for non-disabled respondents (10%).

¹⁸ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/crime)

¹⁹ This is statistically significantly higher than for white respondents (11%).

²⁰ This is statistically significantly higher than all other age categories: 25-34 (11%), 35-44 (14%), 45-54 (12%), 55-64 (11%) 65+ (8%).

Figure 5. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about the fairness of police investigations and the ability to get justice through reporting.²¹



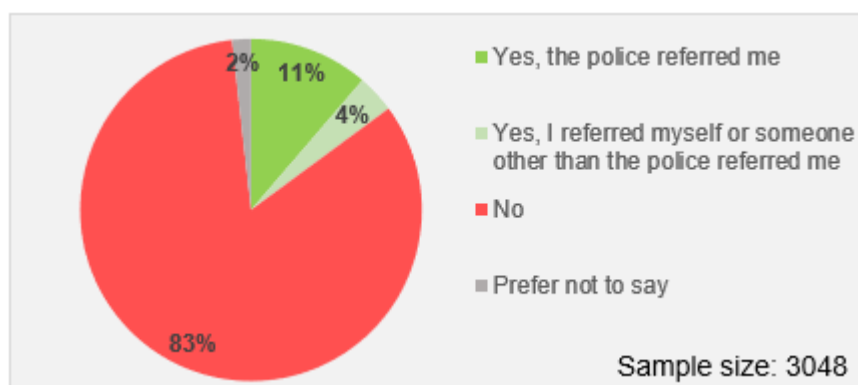
²¹ Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Victims' experiences of victims' services

Less than a sixth of our respondents (15%) told us they recalled being referred or had self-referred to victims' services²² (figure 6). Again, these numbers varied by the nature of victim characteristics and crime types. For victims who were aged over 65 only 12% of respondents reported that they had been referred, or self-referred to victims' services.²³ Similarly, for people who had been a victim of anti-social behaviour only 8% of those respondents were referred or self-referred to victims' services.²⁴

In this research we found the proportion of victims referred to victims' services increased as they progressed through the criminal justice process, with 39% of respondents being referred when the police arrested someone, 42% being referred when someone was charged and 45% being referred when the offence went to court. However, the Victims Code²⁵ 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.

Figure 6. Proportion of respondents referred to victims' services.



The Victims Code gives victims the right to access support services, whether they choose to report the crime or not. Nevertheless, some victims reported receiving initial valuable support that was later retracted following the CPS's decision not to continue with the case. In these cases, victims experienced feelings of abandonment and isolation in addition to the emotions they are already experiencing as a victim of crime.

In the acute stages, the speed at which things happened (arrest, securing the house, involving support services, appointing an IDVA) happened very quickly and was very reassuring. The speed at which all the support was removed once CPS decided not to proceed was also incredibly quick and made me feel abandoned, scared and alone. (Female, 35-44, North East)

²² This compares to 46% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

²³ This is statistically significantly less than 16-24 years olds (19%) and 25-34-year-olds (21%).

²⁴ This is statistically significantly less than victims of Assault (28%), Burglary (17%), Domestic Abuse (35%), Fraud and Theft (13%), Hate Crime (17%), Stalking and Harassment (24%), Street Violence (23%), Rape and Sexual Assault (34%).

²⁵ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

This withdrawal of support, combined with the fact that only 4% of respondents were referred or self-referred to victims' services when police were not aware of the incident²⁶, highlights the importance of ensuring support is available to victims regardless of whether they are involved with criminal justice agencies or have reported the crime. In addition to this, work is needed to ensure that victims are aware that the crime does not need to be reported for them to be able to access support services.

Of those respondents who were referred to victims' services, we found they had mixed experiences of the service provided. Whilst only around a third of respondents agreed that their contact with victims' services helped them to cope with the impacts of the crime (34%)²⁷ and recover from the impacts of the crime (33%, figure 7)²⁸, many victims did describe the profound positive impact victims' services had on their lives.

I am still receiving support and it has been lifesaving during the most traumatic time of my life. (Female, 55-64, East Midlands)

Victim Support were perfect, and I would have been lost without them! (Female, 55-64, East of England)

I was assisted by a domestic abuse charity who understood what I had gone through before I did. They were a fantastic support and I will be forever grateful. (Female, 35-44, East of England)

Recent research conducted by the Victims' Commissioner has identified the benefits of victim support services, specifically victim advocacy, in keeping victims engaged with the criminal justice system.²⁹ This can be transformational in preventing victims withdrawing from the process at a time where the number of outstanding cases at court are at an all-time high³⁰ and the wait for justice is too long. A functioning criminal justice system needs victims to remain engaged with the process and provision of effective victims' services is one key way to support this.

²⁶ This is statistically significantly less than when police were aware of the incident (21%).

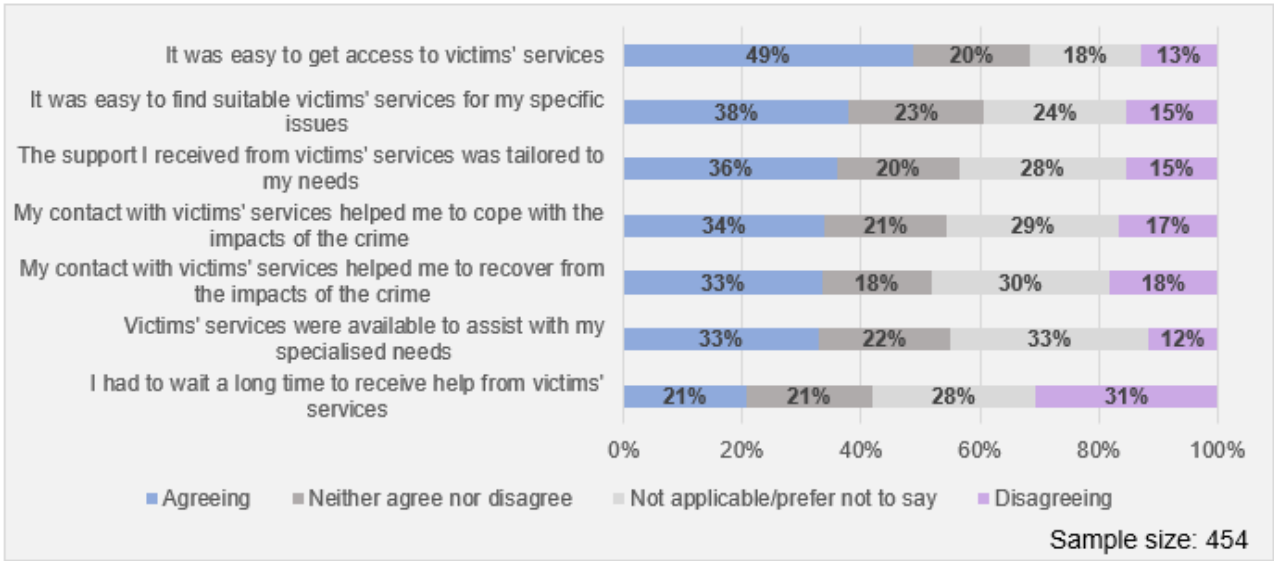
²⁷ This compares to 42% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

²⁸ This compares to 30% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

²⁹ [Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner](#)

³⁰ [Criminal court statistics quarterly: July to September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 7. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about victims' services.³¹



However, this research highlighted various limitations in services for victims. We found there was notable geographical variation in the referrals to victims' services and the perceived impact of victims' services, that there were long waits to access victims' services and that there was a lack of tailored services to meet all victims' needs.

We found that in some regions, victims were both more likely to be referred to victims' services and the services were more likely to be perceived as impactful in victims' recovery from the crime. In London, 22% of victims were referred to victims' services, which is significantly higher than the average across England (15%). Moreover, these victims were more likely to report a positive outcome from their interactions, with 56% agreeing that their contact with victims' services helped them to recover from the impacts of the crime. This was also significantly higher than the average across England (34%).

This geographical variation in service provision supports recent research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, which found that access to counselling support, mental healthcare and advocacy support for domestic abuse victims varied significantly across England and Wales.³² Effective victims' services should be available to all victims regardless of where they live, and it should not be a 'postcode lottery' as to whether victims can access such vital support.

Additionally, 21% of respondents agreed that they had to wait a long time to receive help from victims' services³³ (figure 7). Several victims detailed year-long waits for support or limited to no contact following a referral to support services.

I was told I was being referred and would be contacted because I was very distressed by what had happened, but I was never even contacted by victim support services. (Female, 55-64, South East)

³¹ Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.
³² [Domestic Abuse Commissioner: 'A Patchwork of Provision'](#)
³³ This compares to 29% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

The offence took a year to investigate and charge, then another year before I was contacted by victim support services (only a week before the scheduled trial). The trial did not go ahead yet and no update. Not good enough. (Female, 25-34, London)

I found victims' services relatively easy to access, however, my twin sister who has also reported control, coercion, and sexual abuse, from the age of 3, has still not been spoken to by the police 6 months later, not even one phone call. She has also tried repeatedly to access victim services to no avail... (Female, 35-44, North West)

On top of these issues, some victims described how they found it difficult to access specialist services that provided support suited to what they wanted and needed. Fifteen percent of respondents disagreed that the support they received from victims' services was tailored to their needs³⁴ (figure 7) and many described the available support services as too generic, highlighting a need for more specialised victim support services, including 'by and for' services.

It was not easy to make initial contact with the victim support, when I eventually made contact, it felt like a tick box exercise. I felt that the service did not meet my need as a black person. (Female, 55-64, North West)

Service too generic, felt like the justice system failed me. (Female, 45-54, Yorkshire and the Humber)

The victim support person seemed not to be capable. She was patronising and her "tailored support" was letting her know when I wanted to go for a coffee. (Female, 55-64, North East)

Research previously conducted by the Victims' Commissioner highlighted how crucial 'by and for' organisations can be in offering victims support from shared, minoritised identities and life experiences that match their own.³⁵ However, the limited funding available for these specialised services meant they were often disadvantaged in the crowded funding landscape due to their limited resource in comparison to larger organisations offering more generalised support.

All respondents, regardless of whether they had experience with victims' services, were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement 'Victims are fully supported by victims' services' and only 25% agreed or strongly agreed (figure 8). Agreement with this statement steadily declined with age, with only 19% agreement from respondents aged over 65.³⁶ The Older People's Commissioner for Wales has identified the need for equal access to criminal justice for older people. They have highlighted research that finds that older people are often poorly served in the provision of specialist support services.³⁷ Similarly, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Inspectorate (HMPCSI) have previously

³⁴ This compares to 35% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

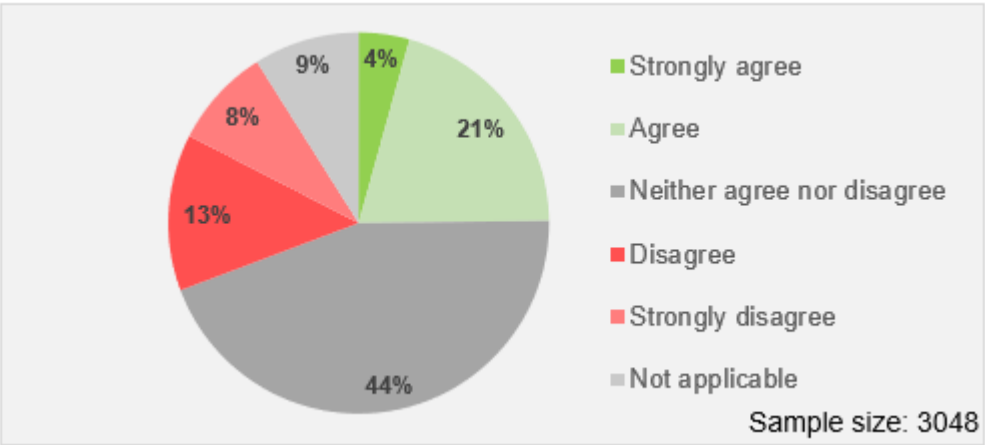
³⁵ [Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner](#)

³⁶ This is statistically significantly lower than the 44% agreement from respondents aged 16-24, 35% agreement from respondents aged 25-34, 27% agreement from respondents aged 35-44 and 25% agreement from respondents aged 45-54.

³⁷ [Older People's Access to Criminal Justice: A Literature Review - Older People's Commissioner for Wales](#)

found that referrals to victim support services for older people were too inconsistent.³⁸ This further highlights the need to ensure that tailored support is available for different victim groups who will have different needs and vulnerabilities.

Figure 8. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement ‘Victims are fully supported by victims’ services.’



This research, and other research done previously, has shown how a positive interaction with victims’ services provides invaluable support to victims of crime. The issues we have identified highlight that not all victims are getting the same benefits from these services and there is a range of experiences for victims of crime who engage with victims’ services. However, there is a lack of knowledge as to what makes a good victim experience. All victims should be able to receive effective, timely and tailored support when they need it. However, this research shows that only a quarter of the respondents felt that victims would be fully supported by victims’ services. A positive interaction with victims’ services encourages victims to continue to engage with the criminal justice system. This is increasingly important with the ongoing delays in the system, and ultimately enables the system to function. Most importantly, the right support can be transformative for victims and is vital for victims to recover from the impacts of the crime. More work is required to fully understand what makes a good experience for victims and to explore those areas of good practice so that this can be replicated across the country.

³⁸ [The poor relation: The police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to crimes against older people - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](#)

Victims' experience of the court and Crown Prosecution Service

Of the 1,991 respondents for whom a report was made to the police, 14% saw the perpetrator charged by the police, 8% had their case go to court and 6% had the perpetrator convicted of a crime.³⁹ A positive experience with the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is incredibly important as victims will have already navigated the initial stages of the criminal justice system and remained engaged to this point. It is vital victim needs are taken into account, and they are supported as they continue to navigate unfamiliar and complex CPS and court processes. Their experience will ultimately encourage both their present and future engagement with the system.

Some respondents reported positive experiences with the courts and CPS. Over half (58%) of respondents agreed that they were kept well informed about the progress of the case⁴⁰ and 39% agreed that their needs and wishes were taken into account in court⁴¹ (figure 9). In particular, when respondents' needs and wishes were taken into account and special measures were provided, victims reported how this supported their wellbeing, prevented additional traumatisation and empowered them.

The special measures implemented (being able to give evidence in advance of the trial and via video link) was very beneficial to me and it meant I didn't have the extra trauma of going through a full trial/having to attend. (Female, 25-34, North East)

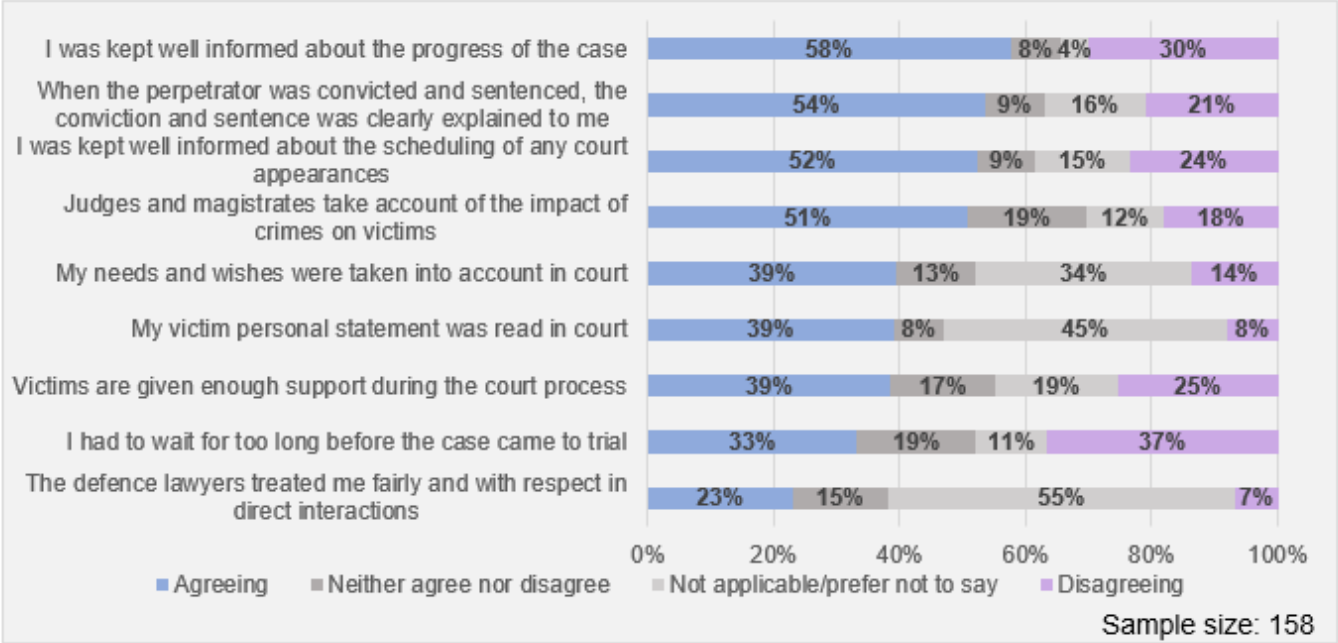
The alternatives of being able to do video link from the court or using a screen while in the same room gave me the chance to make that choice for myself and what I felt I needed to do to feel stronger and mentally move on whilst also providing the option of being ensconced away and not physically in the same room. (Female, 25-34, North East)

³⁹ These figures will not include those still progressing through the system or those selecting 'prefer not to say'.

⁴⁰ This compares to 58% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁴¹ This compares to 48% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 9. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about court and the CPS.⁴²



Thirty-nine percent of respondents agreed that victims are given enough support during the court process⁴³ with many victims highlighting the importance of victim and witness support services within the courts.

Witness support service are worth their weight in gold. The staff at Newcastle need to be cloned. (Female, 25-34, North East)

Everyone treated me with respect. The victim support workers deserve a lot of praise. (Male, 45-55, East Midlands)

However, in contrast to this, some respondents had a more negative experience of the courts and CPS. This was often due to a lack of support, having to wait too long for their case to get to trial and insufficient communication about their case.

A quarter of the respondents whose cases went to court disagreed that victims are given enough support during the court process⁴⁴ (figure 9). Several respondents reported not feeling respected or supported as a victim as well as not feeling part of the court process. This presented barriers for their attendance, engagement and recovery.

The court process was ok, although nobody was expecting me as had been promised initially by using the magistrates and judges staff entrance. For me it was hard being heckled in the court, and the layout did not make it easy to see some CCTV footage. The judges were good, the prosecutor was good, but the

⁴² Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.
⁴³ This compares to 39% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.
⁴⁴ This compares to 39% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

defence was very harsh and bordered on unprofessionally personal about my appearance. (Male, 45-54, Wales)

I received a letter informing me when the hearing would be. It was in another town, some way away. The offender did not attend. I felt like an afterthought. The offender was fined. The damage to my property remains, there was no redress for this, nor for the psychological damage to me; I still get flashbacks. The whole court business felt so distant, I didn't feel I was any part of it. (Female, 55-64, West Midlands)

Other victims reported that they felt that the criminal justice system did not prioritise the support of victims during the court process and were left feeling as though the system prioritised defendants or treated victims like they had done something wrong. For some victims, this presented additional barriers to engaging with the criminal justice system.

My perception is that criminals get more thought and help than victims of crime. (Female, 65+, South East)

When you're a victim, the courts treat you like YOU'VE done something wrong, and it makes prosecution too daunting for 99.9% of victims of crime. Add in factors like victims being from minority backgrounds (like me) and it makes it even less safe to report crimes. (Male, 16-24, West Midlands)

This is concerning as it risks victims being retraumatised by the court process and discouraging them from participating in the criminal justice system again if they feel side-lined and forgotten at one of the most crucial points in their criminal justice journey.

The delays in the court system are another key factor contributing to poor victim experiences. Thirty-three percent of respondents agreed that they had to wait too long before their case came to trial (figure 9). Currently the number of outstanding cases in the Crown Court is at a record high, with 67,573 cases outstanding at the end of December 2023.⁴⁵ This means the number of victims having to wait too long for justice and unable to move on with and rebuild their lives will continue to increase. These long waits for justice increase the risk of victims withdrawing from the criminal justice process altogether before justice has been served. One respondent detailed a particularly difficult court experience impeded by continuous court delays.

I was the last to know that sentencing hadn't occurred. In my unique case there were 14 separate sentencing dates and times agreed, and every one of them failed and I didn't know why or what was going on. In the end I wrote to the head of the CPS because it was a joke that this many dates could be arranged by judges in a crown court, and yet the sentencing does not occur. Every month I would be on tenterhooks awaiting an outcome that never occurred. Finally, six letters later and 18 months and 14 sentencing dates - it finally occurred. (Male, 45-54, London)

Communication was also an issue many victims felt could be improved, especially in relation to the lack of information they received about court dates and court outcomes. We found 30% of

⁴⁵[Criminal court statistics quarterly: October to December 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2023)

respondents disagreed that they were kept well informed about the progress of the case⁴⁶ (figure 9), with many respondents describing how they had to seek out information about court outcomes themselves, which again excludes them from the process.

The communication failed prior to his court appearance so I was unaware of it until after it happened...It would just have been more satisfactory to at least have been kept informed (Female, 65+. West Midlands)

I was not kept informed about the case at all until it went to court. After the trial, I did not hear about the result until I asked. (Male, 35-44, South East)

Victims have told us repeatedly, in both this survey and our 2022 survey, that when attending court, one of the most important things to them is the perpetrator being convicted of the crime.⁴⁷ However, some victims felt that there should be a greater focus on the outcome of cases and highlighted that the provision of support services was not an adequate substitute for a successful criminal justice outcome.

It seems like the police felt that referring me to victim support was an adequate alternative to actually punishing the assailant. (Female, 35-44, North West)

It [victim support services] is being used as a way of giving victims anything but justice. The criminals get to do as they wish while we get a chat and a friendly ear. This is patronising and not what is needed. I for one don't need a sympathetic ear, I want to know that the criminal has been punished and will be deterred from doing it again. (Female, 45-54, South West)

In addition, 63% of respondents were not confident that the CPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime (figure 10). Several victims described how they felt that despite there being sufficient evidence to prosecute, the CPS either decided not to pursue the case or reduced the charges that were to be prosecuted. Many respondents expressed anger at what they felt was a failure to acknowledge their victimisation and a disregarding of the crimes they had experienced.

CPS is out of touch and even with evidence they still refuse to prosecute which is a disgrace. (Male, 55-64, West Midlands)

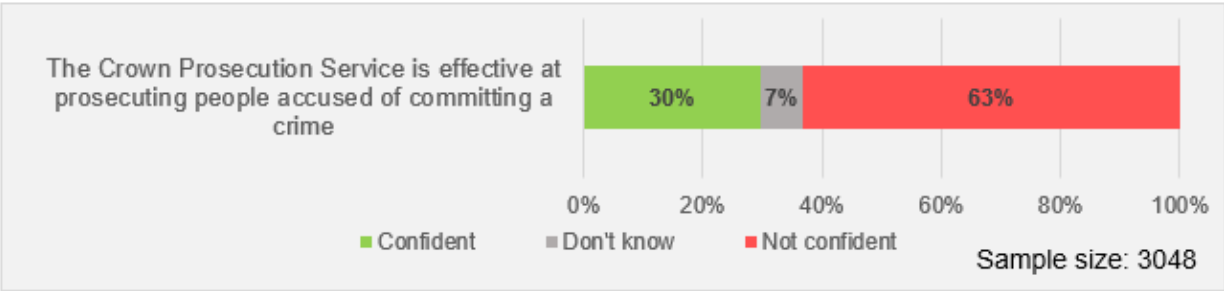
Originally arrested for threats to life and ABH. Reduced to Affray. It is disgusting that this lower charge was offered by the defence and even worse that the CPS accepted it. (Female, 35-44, South East)

Even when they have evidence or statements, the CPS may not bother prosecuting which is where the trust of victims is let down. (Female, 35-44, North East)

⁴⁶ This compares to 36% in our [2022 survey](#). Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁴⁷ See [Appendix D](#) for further detail on the most important factors for victims when attending court.

Figure 10. Proportion of respondents who were confident or not confident that the CPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime.⁴⁸

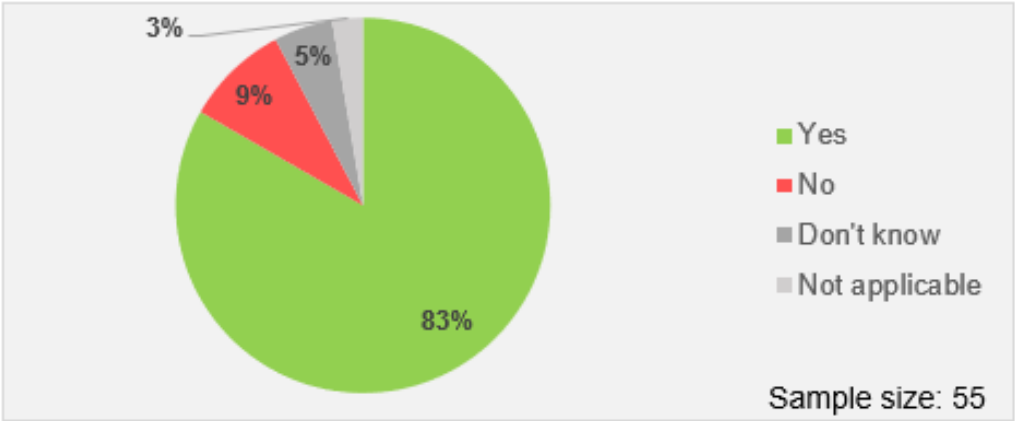


Victims told us about their experiences with the courts, of the slow progress of their cases through the court and the lack of communication, both from the courts and from the CPS. Many victims felt unsupported by the system overall and were frustrated by the lack of successful justice outcomes. These issues do not provide victims with a positive experience of the justice system and can discourage victims from maintaining their engagement with the criminal justice system. These factors may lead to victims withdrawing from the criminal justice process after a defendant has been charged. A negative experience with the CPS and the courts may also make victims reluctant to engage with any future investigation or case.

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. Of the 55 respondents who attended court in some capacity, 83% said they would attend court again⁴⁹ (figure 11).

Figure 11. Proportion of respondents who would or wouldn't attend court again.



The willingness of victims to engage with the criminal justice system in the future is a vital component of a successfully functioning court system. These findings highlight that even when victims court experiences are lacking, they maintain the motivation to engage with the system again if needed. However, it remains vitally important the system builds on examples of good practice to

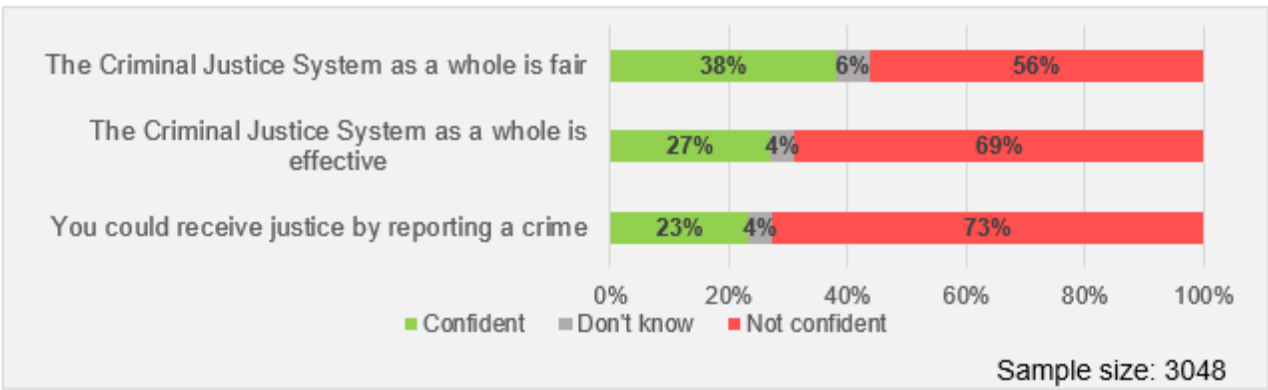
⁴⁸ Confident includes respondents who were fairly confident and very confident and not confident includes respondents who were not very confident and not at all confident.
⁴⁹ In our [2022 survey](#), 61% said they would, in [2021](#) 50% said they would and in [2020](#), 67% said they would. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

drive improvement. This will ensure victims are not retraumatised by the process and instead have positive experiences where they are kept informed, have their needs taken into account and are supported and included throughout.

Victim confidence in the criminal justice system

Overall, we found victim confidence in the criminal justice system was very low, with only 38% of respondents confident the criminal justice system was fair, 27% confident that the criminal justice system was effective, and 23% confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime (figure 12).

Figure 12. Proportion of respondents who were confident or not confident with various aspects of the criminal justice system.⁵⁰



As with the findings on victims’ experiences with police, respondent confidence in the criminal justice system was even lower amongst victims with certain characteristics. This was particularly notable for disabled victims who lacked confidence in the whole of the system. Only 30% of disabled respondents⁵¹ were confident in the fairness of the criminal justice system, only 20%⁵² were confident in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system and only 20%⁵³ were confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime. As was stated earlier, disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to be a victim of crime. Yet, throughout this research, we have found that they have less confidence overall in the criminal justice system. They are less likely to report a crime to the police and when they do report they are more likely to be dissatisfied with the police response. This paints a concerning picture. As disabled people are more likely to be a victim of crime, if they are less likely to engage with the criminal justice system, they are therefore accordingly less likely to receive the justice they deserve. For the criminal justice system to work successfully, it needs victims to have confidence in reporting and proceeding with their case, and this is even more important for those who are more likely to be victimised.

I am severely disabled. I was coerced and sexually assaulted. I did not report because there is no evidence. It becomes a ‘he said she said’ issue. Also I know when there is evidence there is rarely a conviction. Women are never believed as men’s reputation is always put first. So there’s no point. (Female, 25-34, West Midlands)

Our research identified several reasons why victims lacked confidence in the criminal justice systems’ ability to effectively deliver justice. These included low prosecution and conviction rates, a lack of interagency collaboration, insufficient resources, and extensive delays.

⁵⁰ 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.
⁵¹ This is statistically significantly lower than for non-disabled respondents (40%).
⁵² This is statistically significantly lower than for non-disabled respondents (29%).
⁵³ This is statistically significantly lower than for non-disabled respondents (24%).

We heard from victims who cited poor prosecution and conviction outcomes and poor victim experiences as key reasons for not trusting the justice system to deliver justice. These quotes show how, even without personal experience of the criminal justice system, the information people gather from wider society about other victims' experiences and the state of the justice system heavily influences their confidence and willingness to engage with the system themselves.

The discrimination against minorities, and the low prosecution rate for many crimes (especially sexual crimes and hate crimes) mean I would not report them to the police willingly...I do not trust the justice system to give me justice, so I would just want to try to heal in peace. (Female, 16-24, South East)

When the number of people who feel they received justice is about 0.6% I don't think that shows a system that works, having known several people who followed the legal route, police to court, they said they had a terrible time and many wish they hadn't bothered, this made me decide not to go down the legal route. (Male, 55-64, North West)

Other respondents described how their experiences varied widely as they progressed through the stages of the criminal justice system and how poor inter-agency collaboration and communication has negatively impacted their experience of the system.

I feel like the police do their utmost to help victims of crimes such as what I experienced but are let down if and when these issues get to court. (Female, 35-44, East of England)

The police on the ground were good it was the CPS which let things down. (Female, 65+, Yorkshire and the Humber)

The perpetrator was arrested for a crime in June 2023, but the case is still ongoing, and I have little faith that the courts will convict him of the crime. The police are great, but I feel that the system is let down in the handover from the police to the CPS. (Male, 25-34, South East)

Some victims lack confidence in the system because of the insufficient funding and resourcing of the criminal justice system. Victims explained how this lack of resources has led to the system failing victims by not being able to effectively investigate crime reports, prosecute defendants or support victims.

The entire justice system seems to be falling apart. Underfunded and low moral with little effort directed towards victims or justice. (Male, 45-54, London)

Stretched and underfunded services cannot effectively investigate, prosecute or support victims (Female, 45-54, North West)

One victim described their concerns that the criminal justice system is not appropriately resourced to deliver justice for victims. This view led them to feel it was not worth engaging with the system as it would result in victims risking re-traumatisation and damaging their mental health by engaging with the system.

I am not confident that the police have sufficient resources or care to deal with hate crime, and I would be worried about the time and energy that I had to put into reporting only to be traumatised again in the process. I just don't think it is worth the trouble and my mental health, since I do not trust that justice will be served. (Female, 35-44, Yorkshire and the Humber)

Another key factor, cited by victims, that resulted in the undermining of their confidence in the criminal justice system is the delays in the system. The time taken to progress through the criminal justice system is too long and has increased notably since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. At the end of December 2023, it took an average of 804 days between a sexual offence taking place and the completion of the case in court and for fraud offences the average was 1,322 days.⁵⁴ Victims cite these extensive delays as another reason why they lack confidence in the system. For some victims these delays prolong victim's trauma and with such a long time taken to progress any eventual outcome cannot be considered justice.

The delays in the court system have reached a stage where it is impossible to consider the system as justice. (Male, 55-64, Yorkshire and the Humber)

I think the court/trial process is ineffective – too slow from initial police investigation and lots of delays. This prolongs the trauma for victims. (Female, 25-34, North East).

It's obvious that the entire criminal justice system, police, courts, and prisons is hugely under resourced. The police in my case were as thorough as they could be but weren't at all confident that the thieves would be caught and even if they were, given the massive backlog in the courts it could take years before any effective action would occur. (Male, 55-64, West Midlands).

Our research shows that victims are incredibly aware of the challenges facing the criminal justice system. This includes the low levels of prosecution and conviction decisions, the lack of resources that prevent the system working effectively, and the backlogs in the system. For some victims, this results in an unwillingness to report crimes as they just do not believe it is possible to achieve justice. Moreover, for victims who do initially report a crime to the police the re-traumatisation they experience during the process can lead to premature withdrawal from the process. Victims who do persevere with the process, can experience a system that prolongs their trauma and delays their access to justice and ability to recover and move on with their lives.

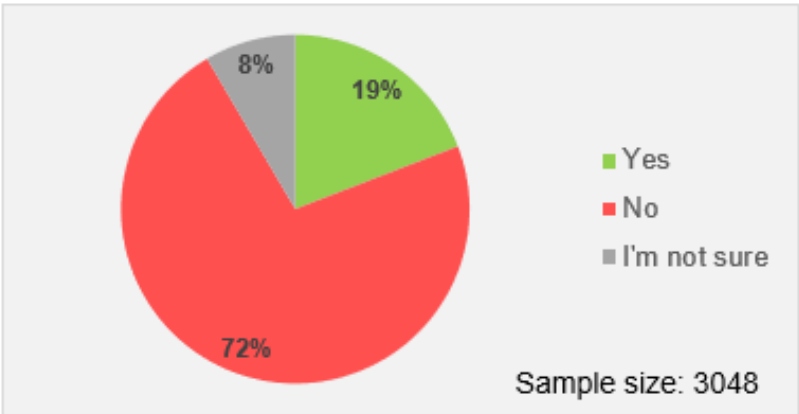
⁵⁴ [Criminal court statistics quarterly: October to December 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2023)

Victims’ experiences of the Victims’ Code

The Victims Code⁵⁵ sets out the minimum standards of service that 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.

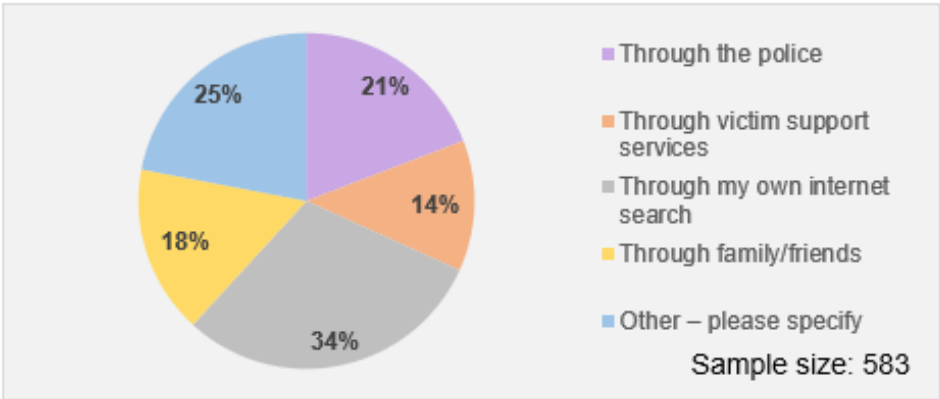
In this research we found less than a fifth (19%) of all respondents had heard of the Victims’ Code (figure 13)⁵⁶. Even when the crime had been reported to the police, only 21% of victims had heard of it. This lack of awareness amongst victims, is particularly concerning as without knowledge of their Victims’ Code rights, victims will be unable to ask for these rights to be met.

Figure 13. 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 (34%) were aware of the Victims’ Code through their own internet search (figure 14). A quarter (25%) of respondents learnt about the Victims’ Code through ‘other’ sources, for example through employment in the criminal justice system, through media sources such as newspapers and television or through their studies. Criminal justice agencies are responsible for ensuring that victims are aware of their Code rights. It should not be left to victims to undertake their own research to find out what it is.

Figure 14. Proportion of respondents hearing about the Victims Code through various sources.



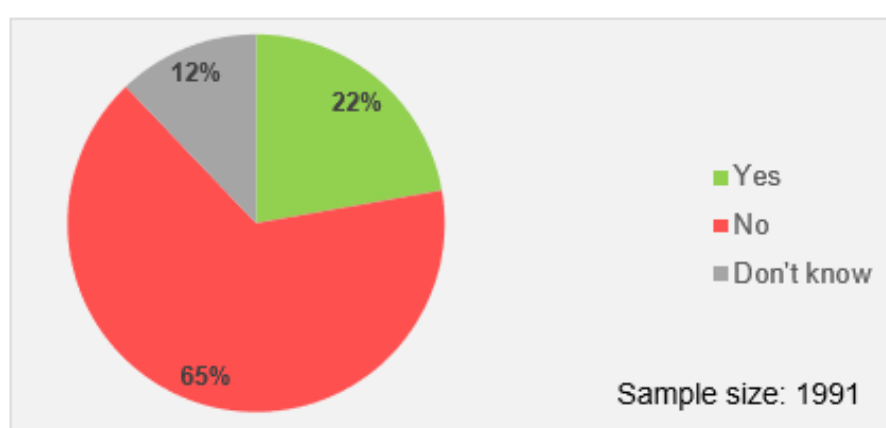
⁵⁵ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims’ Code\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/362222/code_of_practice_for_victims_of_crime_in_england_and_wales_victims_code.pdf)

⁵⁶ This compares to 29% in our [2022](#) and [2021](#) surveys. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Victim Personal Statement

One of the key rights in the Victims' Code is the ability for victims to be able to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS). This gives victims a powerful opportunity to voice the impact that the crime had on them, and government guidance outlines that victims are entitled to make a VPS at the same time as they make a witness statement with the police.⁵⁷ We found that less than a quarter (22%) of respondents said they were offered the opportunity to make a VPS when the police were aware of the crime (figure 15)⁵⁸. As cases progressed through the system, more victims were offered the opportunity to make a VPS, but even when cases had progressed to court, only 61% of victims were offered the opportunity to make a VPS.

Figure 15. Proportion of respondents who were offered the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement.



Victims' Right to Review

Another key right in the Victims' Code is the Victims' Right to Review (VRR). This gives victims' the ability to ask for a review of a decision made by the police or CPS if they are unhappy with the decision not to prosecute the suspect. In this research only 8% of respondents had heard of the VRR (figure 16). The younger respondents and Black respondents were more likely to be aware of the VRR, with 15% of respondents aged 16-24⁵⁹ and 20% of Black respondents⁶⁰ having heard of a VRR. However, these proportions are very low. Victims are only able to request a review of a police or CPS decision within a short timeframe⁶¹, so victim awareness of this right is crucial.

⁵⁷ [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 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614441/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.pdf)

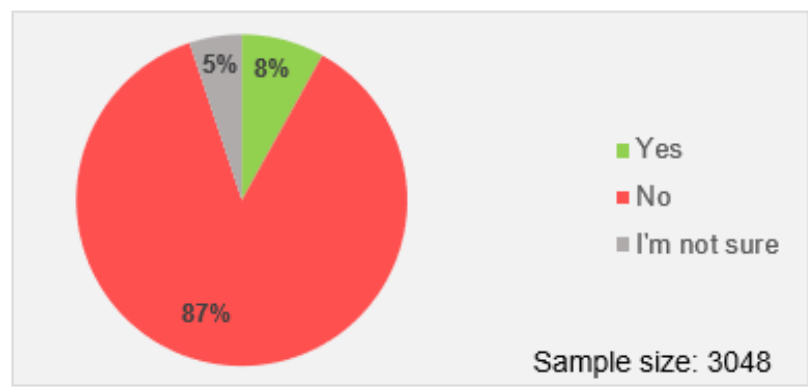
⁵⁸ This compares to 29% in our 2022 survey and 39% in our 2021 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

⁵⁹ This is statistically significantly higher than the proportion of respondents aged 35-44 (8%), 45-54 (9%), 55-64 (5%) and 65+ (6%).

⁶⁰ This is statistically significantly higher than the proportion of white respondents (8%) and Asian/Asian British respondents (9%).

⁶¹ [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 16. Proportion of respondents who had heard of the Victims’ Right to Review (VRR) scheme.



Year after year our research shows that too few victims are being informed of their Code rights and, as a consequence of this, too few victims are receiving their Victims’ Code rights. Criminal justice agencies have a responsibility to inform victims of these vital rights and must improve how they raise awareness of the Victims’ Code. Victims’ must be provided with their Victims’ Code rights, and the criminal justice agencies must improve how they monitor their compliance with the Victims’ Code to ensure that victims receive the service they are entitled to.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report provides numerous insights into the victim experience in England and Wales. Our findings show that whilst some victims are satisfied with their experience of the criminal justice system many victims lack confidence across all stages of the criminal justice system, from investigations not being conducted thoroughly and fairly, to not being kept informed about the progression of their cases, to delays in the courts. Our report also shows how experience and perception of the criminal justice system and willingness to engage again with the criminal justice system, varies widely across different demographic groups.

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

Compounding these issues, too few victims are being referred to victims' services 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 high⁶², this is even more important.

Recommendations

The following recommendations focus on three overarching aims to improve victims' experiences after they have been a victim of crime. These are to improve the delivery of the Victims' Code; to improve victims' experiences of victim support services; and to improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system overall.

Improving the delivery of Victims' Code rights

1. **Enforce the Victims' Code with compliance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.**

As part of the Victims' and Prisoners Act, the government are developing a Code compliance monitoring mechanism. As set out at the despatch box in April 2024⁶³, this will include issuance of non-compliance notifications when agencies with obligations under the Victims' Code are not delivering Code rights to victims. The accompanying statutory guidance will also contain details of non-compliance indicators and trigger points which will lead to non-compliance notifications being issued.

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice set out a timetable for immediate implementation of the compliance monitoring mechanism, including details of how the Victims' Commissioner will be consulted.**
- b. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice develop an accountability mechanism within the compliance mechanism which sets out the consequences for agencies of non-compliance.**

⁶² [Criminal Justice System - All metrics - CJS Dashboard](#)

⁶³ [Contribution by Lord Bellamy to Victims and Prisoners Bill Report Stage, debated on Tuesday 16 April 2024](#)

2. **Annual appraisal of criminal justice agencies' training on Victims' Code.**

The survey findings show that many victims are not receiving their Code rights, and that those with certain protected characteristics are being especially let down. Where respondents had a positive experience, this was related to delivery of individual Code rights such as regular communication with a single point of contact.

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice use the new Code compliance monitoring mechanism to monitor training on the contents and application of the Victims' Code for relevant staff of agencies with obligations under the Code. This should be done by including specific reference to the need for training on the Code within the statutory guidance which accompanies the compliance mechanism, and by including training as a metric within the annual report to be published on Code compliance. The assessment of this training should contain specific reference to meeting the needs of victims with protected characteristics.**

3. **Amend the Victims' Code to include victims of persistent anti-social behaviour.**

We found that victims of anti-social behaviour were the least likely to be referred to victims' services. Anti-social behaviour continues to be miscategorised by police as a neighbour dispute, meaning that incidents are not investigated properly, and victims are not given their Code rights. The previous government made a despatch box commitment⁶⁴ to consult on clarifying in the Victims' Code that its entitlements apply to victims of persistent anti-social behaviour where the criminal threshold is met, and to update statutory guidance around anti-social behaviour to reflect this.

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice update the Victims' Code as soon as possible to clarify these entitlements.**
- b. **The Home Office should update the statutory guidance dealing with anti-social behaviour to recommend that the police develop training to better understand course of conduct offending and to better identify when offending has reached the criminal threshold.**

4. **An inspection of communication practices to ensure compliance with the Victims' Code's accessibility requirements.**

It is a right under the Victims' Code to be provided with information about the criminal justice process. However, respondents to this survey told us their accessibility needs were often not met, acting as a barrier to this right.

- a. **We recommend that the criminal justice inspectorates (of constabulary, Crown Prosecution Service, prisons, and probation) incorporate the provision of communications to victims with accessibility needs into their thematic inspections of victims' services. This should be assessed against the benchmark set out in Right 1 of the Victims' Code: All service providers must communicate in simple and accessible language and all translation or interpretation services must be offered free of charge to the victim.**

⁶⁴ [Contribution by Lord Bellamy to Victims and Prisoners Bill Report Stage, debated on Tuesday 16 April 2024](#)

Improving victims' experiences of support services

5. **Mandate the commissioning of a diverse range of support services.**

Effective, timely and tailored support can help victims to cope and recover. When they have chosen to report the crime, support services can help them to navigate the justice system and encourage continued engagement. This support is increasingly important in the context of the ongoing delays in the system and the vital role that victims play in a functioning justice system. However, our survey found that too many victims are either not receiving any support or are receiving generic support which does not reflect their needs.

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice use the statutory guidance in respect of the Duty to Collaborate, in the Victims and Prisoners Act, to highlight the importance of service commissioners providing a range of services. As per our report on advocacy provision⁶⁵, this guidance should also require commissioners and service providers to use consistent reporting metrics to allow for effectively measuring the impact of these services.**

6. **Publish a dedicated older victims of crime strategy.**

Older respondents were more likely to report dissatisfaction with their experience of victim support services. These findings aligned with previous research carried out by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales and inspection reports by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSP).

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice publish a strategy for improving experiences of the criminal justice system amongst older victims of crime, with specific reference to improving support services for these victims.**
- b. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice use the statutory guidance in respect of the Duty to Collaborate to ensure commissioners of victims' services provide specialist services tailored for older victims.**

7. **Provision of specialist advocates for disabled victims.**

Disabled respondents reported disproportionately poorer experiences of the criminal justice system, particularly relating to reasonable adjustments and communication. Research published by this office earlier this year showed victim advocates can facilitate communication with statutory services and improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system.

We recommend the Ministry of Justice use the statutory guidance in respect of the Duty to Collaborate to encourage commissioners of victims' services to consider the needs of disabled victims as part of their strategic needs assessment. Guidance should highlight the benefit for this group of specialised and tailored advocacy and support.

8. **Publish an evaluation of the 2022 Victims Funding Strategy.**

In 2022, the government published their Victims Funding Strategy, which aims to fund the victim support sector more strategically, remove barriers to access and implement clear and consistent outcomes. However, many victims' services continue to face difficulties and limitations in providing support to victims. We note only 15% of respondents say they were referred/self-referred to victims' services.

⁶⁵ [Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner](#)

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice conduct and publish an evaluation of the Victims' Funding Strategy to date. This should include examination of the commissioning landscape to identify successes of the current strategy as well as any issues which any future iterations of the strategy, must tackle.**

9. Conduct a review of PCC commissioning practices.

This research identified several limitations with victims' services. There is notable geographical variation in the referrals to victims' services and the perceived impact of victims' services. Victims also face long waits to access victims' services and there was a lack of tailored services to meet all victims' needs.

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice conduct and publish a review of the quality of provision of victims' services commissioned by Police and Crime Commissioners. This review should consider the extent to which accurate local needs assessments inform the commissioning process, as well as the extent to which the current commissioning process provides value for money and measuring the impact of services on those victims who use them.**

Improving victims' experiences of the criminal justice system

10. Research court backlog impact on victims, witnesses and support services.

The backlog of cases in the Crown Courts has led to more victims waiting longer for their case to get to court, with a third of respondents to our survey agreeing that they had to wait too long before their case came to trial. Ministry of Justice's own statistics show that 27% of cases were rearranged on the day of trial at the end of December 2023. The backlog is placing unprecedented strain on both victim resilience and support providers' resources, the latter of which is crucial to helping reduce victim and witness attrition (see recommendation 5 for more on this).

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice undertake research to identify the impact of the court backlog on victims and witnesses and the services which support them.**

11. Ministry of Justice to research why some victims do not report the crime to authorities.

Whilst our survey focusses on victim experiences of the criminal justice system, we know large numbers of victims never engage with the system. We also know anecdotally that certain groups of victims, such as disabled people are less likely to engage with the criminal justice system and/ or are less likely to see a perpetrator prosecuted, even where they are statistically disproportionately more likely to be the victim of a crime.

- a. **We recommend that the Ministry of Justice commission research that explores why some victims of crime do not engage with the criminal justice system. This research should focus on the links between victims' personal characteristics and barriers to justice.**

12. Improve how agencies communicate with victims.

Survey respondents explicitly and implicitly told us communication from statutory services was often non-existent, poor, or infrequent. For example, we heard about police not communicating the outcome of investigations, legal decisions being poorly communicated by the CPS, or victims being given inadequate information about court listings.

- a. **We recommend: the College of Policing develop guidance and training for officers in effective and sensitive communication with victims; the CPS, seek to**

address this issue as part of its ‘Victim Transformation’ programme; and, HMCTS review their systems for communicating listing decisions to ensure they are operating in an effective and timely manner.

13. National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) to develop a clear investigation plan, taking into account victim needs.

This year’s survey results marked a deviation from previous years, with the thoroughness of the police investigation being more important to respondents than other elements of procedural justice. For example, the crime being fully investigated was viewed as more important than being kept informed.

- a. **We recommend the NPCC should develop a framework for ensuring all investigations are managed through a clear investigation plan, which takes victims’ needs into account and achieves suitable outcomes that consider the voice of victims. This should include recording evidence of compliance with the Victims’ Code.**

14. Enhanced data collection on victim demographics to identify and address disparities.

There is very little data collected on victims in England and Wales. As a result, we conduct our annual Victim Survey to provide insight into victims’ experiences with the Criminal Justice System. However, our internal resources and access to victims are limited and our survey findings are therefore limited in the insights they can provide, particularly with regard to accessing sufficient numbers of victims to draw conclusions about differences between victim groups (especially at the later stages of the criminal justice system such as the court stage).

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice use the guidance on Code awareness and reviewing compliance, as required by clause 11 of the Victims and Prisoners Act, to ensure criminal justice agencies collect a consistent set of data on victims and their personal characteristics. The guidance should contain specific reference to this data aiding understanding of who victims are. The data must be sufficient to allow agencies to be monitored as to the extent they are meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty, as well as identify if there are specific groups of victims who are withdrawing from the justice system in disproportionate numbers.**

15. Victim needs assessments and anti-discriminatory practice training.

We found that certain victim groups were significantly more dissatisfied with and less confident in the criminal justice system than others. Disabled respondents reported a more negative experience with the system, whilst also being more likely to be a victim of crime. Additionally, mixed-race respondents told us that they felt disrespected by agencies. We also know provision of interpreters and intermediaries is inconsistent.

- a. **We recommend the Ministry of Justice use statutory guidance in respect of Victims’ Code compliance to encourage criminal justice agencies to assess victims’ access, support and communication needs and to provide training for criminal justice agency staff on anti-discriminatory practice. This training should include specific reference to intersectional identities and how this can impact a victim’s experience with criminal justice agencies.**

Appendix

Appendix A – Methodology

On behalf of the Victims' Commissioner, YouGov ran an online survey between 10th and 20th November 2023. The survey was designed to take ten to fifteen minutes to complete. The survey used a mixture of closed questions (tick box) and open questions (free text response box).

Survey participants were identified in two ways. Firstly, a screening question was added to the end of other YouGov surveys to identify YouGov panel members who had been a victim of crime or had reported a crime of which they were a victim. Participants were then randomly selected from this pool to complete the full survey. Secondly, the full survey was sent to randomly selected YouGov panel members. Those who did not report being a victim of crime or having reported a crime of which they were a victim since January 2020 were screened out and did not answer any further questions.

Other screening questions were used to route respondents through the survey, for example, if a victim had attended court, they were asked about their experiences of attending court.

The total sample size was 3,048 adults who have been a victim of a crime or reported a crime to the police between January 2020 and November 2023. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in England and Wales who have experienced a crime (aged 16+) by age, gender, region, ethnicity and disability⁶⁶. The figures have been weighted using rim weighting.

All reported group differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (alpha value of 0.05), established using t-tests.

This report makes some comparisons to our previous Victim Surveys conducted in 2020, 2021 and 2022. However, our previous methodology utilised a small sample of self-selecting victims who were not representative of victims of crime in England and Wales so caution must be taken when comparing previous findings to our Victim Survey 2023 findings.

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

⁶⁶ [Crime in England and Wales: Annual Trend and Demographic Tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/crime-in-england-and-wales/annual-trend-and-demographic-tables)

Appendix B – Limitations

The survey findings have some limitations. The sample used in this research is limited to those who are registered members of the YouGov panel. The survey was also only conducted online, in English and in a standard format so our sample will not include victims of crime with limited/no access to the internet, or those who need an easy-read format to participate and the open-text responses may have been more difficult for those with English as an additional language to complete.

Our findings also rely on the willingness of respondents to provide details of their experiences and respondents may be less likely to do so on an online survey than they would via a telephone or face-to-face interview.

Over half of our respondents were victims of Fraud, Theft or Anti-Social Behaviour so the experiences of victims of other crimes may be less reflected in our findings.

Appendix C – Weighted demographic breakdown.

Sex at birth: Female (53%), Male (46%), Intersex (0.1%).

Gender identity: Female (52%), Male (46%), Another way (1%).

Age (years): 16-24 (5%), 25-34 (14%), 35-44 (16%), 45-54 (15%), 55-64 (17%), 65+ (33%).

Ethnicity: White (87%), Asian/Asian British (7%), Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (3%), Mixed/multiple ethnic group (2%), Other ethnic group (1%)

Sexuality: Heterosexual (84%), Bisexual (6%), Gay/Lesbian (5%), Other (2%).

Disability: Non-disabled (78%), Disabled (22%)⁶⁷.

Region: South East (14%), North West (12%), West Midlands (12%), East of England (11%), London (10%), East Midlands (10%), South West (10%), Wales (8%), Yorkshire and the Humber (8%), North East (5%).

⁶⁷ Disability was defined using [The Equality Act disability definition](#) (EADD).

Appendix D

Figure 17. Percentage of respondents selecting each factor as the most or second most important factor for victims when reporting a crime to the police.

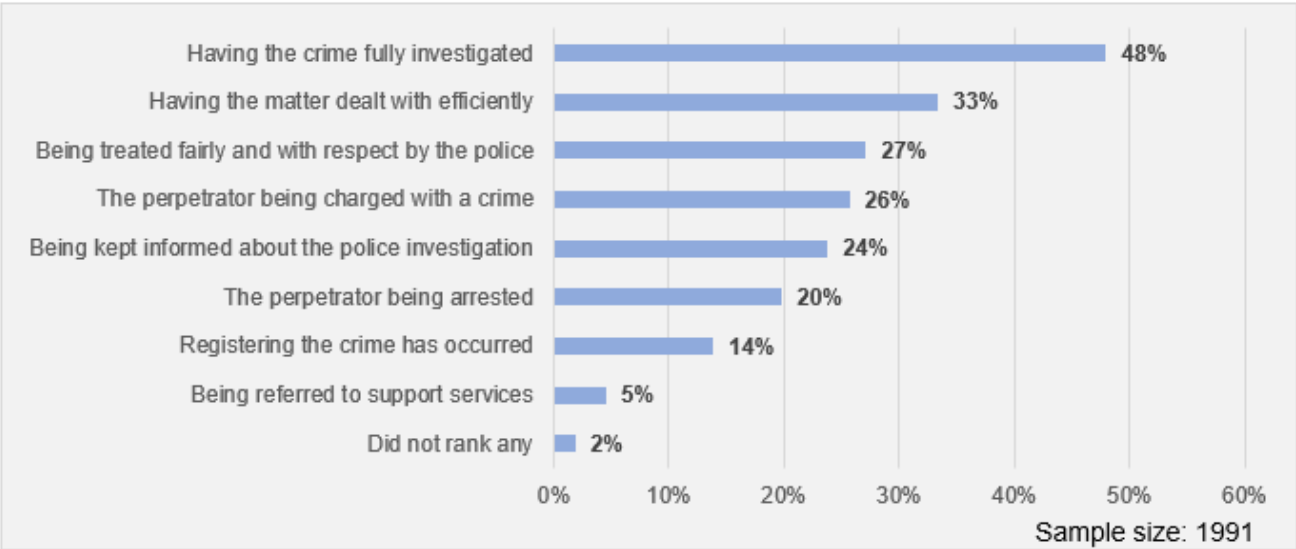


Figure 18. Proportion of respondents selecting each factor as the most or second most important factor for victims when attending court.

