Victims Commissioner

The Victim Survey 2026

November 2026

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Acknowledgements

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Most of all, we would like to express our thanks to the victims who took the time to respond to our survey. Without their bravery and willingness to share their experiences, this report would not be able to provide such valuable insights into the victim journey through the justice system.

Glossary

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

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

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) - an agency of the Ministry of Justice which pays compensation to victims of violent crime.

Enhanced Rights – additional entitlements under the Victims' Code given to victims who are considered vulnerable, intimidated, victims of the most serious crimes, or victims of persistently targeted offences. These enhanced entitlements include priority referral to support, eligibility for special measures, more regular information about the investigation and prosecution.

Family Liaison Officer (FLO) – a Family Liaison Officer is a trained police officer assigned to families following a fatality. The role of the FLO is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation whilst building trust with families, signposting them to support and providing timely information.

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

Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) and Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) - an independent adviser who works with people who have experienced domestic abuse (in the case of an IDVA) or rape and/or sexual assault (in the case of an ISVA) by providing them with support, advice and help.

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

Needs Assessment – a process to identify victim support needs, safeguarding concerns, communication requirements and eligibility for Enhanced Rights and special measures. When a crime is reported, police should carry out a needs assessment. This should be revisited and updated throughout the victims' journey through the criminal justice system.

Non-molestation order - a court injunction designed to protect an individual and their children from harassment, intimidation, or violence by a partner, ex-partner, or family member.

Officer in Charge (OIC) - a police officer in charge of an investigation.

Out of Court Disposal (OOCD) – where an offender is not formally prosecuted but the details of the investigation will remain on their record and they may be given a caution, community resolution or penalty notice.

Restorative Justice – an approach to justice which enables victims who wish to do so to communicate with the person responsible for the crime in a safe and controlled environment, with support from trained practitioners.

Special Measures - the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced a range of measures to help vulnerable and intimidated witnesses give their best evidence and reduce the stress associated with participating in criminal proceedings. These measures, known collectively as *special measures*, include screens to prevent the victim and defendant from seeing each other when evidence is given, as well as giving evidence via live video link.

Unduly Lenient Scheme (ULS) - where victims believe a sentence is too low, they may be able to ask the Attorney General to refer the sentence to the Court of Appeal under the ULS scheme.[1]

Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) – a scheme operated by HM Prison and Probation Service where eligible victims[2] are offered a Victim Liaison Officer (VLO), who can provide information about key stages of the offender's sentence, including release arrangements.

Victims' Code[3] - the Victims Code sets out the minimum standards of service (victims' rights) that agencies in the criminal justice system must meet when dealing with victims of crime.

Victim Impact Statement (VIS) - a statement which gives victims an opportunity to explain how the crime has impacted them, physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially or in any other way. This statement is given to the police, or any agency or organisation assigned by the police to take the VIS on their behalf and is considered when sentencing an offender.

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

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

Witness Care Unit (WCU) - these units have the role of managing the care of victims and witnesses who are due to attend court and guide them through the criminal justice process. They are staffed by people from the police, who are referred to as Witness Care Officers (WCOs).

Witness Service – provides free, independent support to witnesses and bereaved family members involved in criminal court proceedings in England and Wales.

[1] Eligibility for the Unduly Lenient Scheme is outlined in this guidance.
[2] Available to victims of serious sexual and violent offences where an offender receives a custodial sentence of 12 months or more.
[3] Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code)

Foreword by Victims' Commissioner



Every victim's journey through the criminal justice system is different. The crime itself, the impact it has, and the path a case takes can vary enormously. Yet despite these differences, the findings in this report reveal a striking consistency: victims tell us, time and again, what they need from the justice system, and too often it fails to provide it.

Victims want to be believed. They want to be kept informed. They want to be treated with dignity and compassion. They want to know their rights and receive the support they are entitled to. Above all, they want a justice system that recognises the impact crime has had on their lives, listens to their voices and experiences, and supports them in their recovery.

The Victim Survey 2026 gives voice to more than 6,000 victims from across England and Wales and provides one of the most comprehensive pictures available of victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. What emerges is a picture of a system containing many examples of excellent practice and dedicated professionals, but one that remains fragmented, difficult to navigate and too often reliant on victims themselves to hold the pieces together.

What struck me most about this year's findings was not any single statistic, but the consistency of victims' experiences across very different crime types and very different stages of the justice process. While the circumstances of each case may vary, the barriers that victims encounter are remarkably similar.

Only 14% of victims in our survey had heard of the Victims' Code. Just 15% recalled receiving a needs assessment. More than half of victims reported having to contact the police themselves for updates about their case. Even where rights existed, many victims only learned about them through their own research rather than through the agencies responsible for delivering them.

Too often, victims experienced the justice process as a siloed system rather than a coordinated journey. As victims moved between agencies, communication broke down, accountability became blurred and support diminished, leaving victims to navigate an increasingly complex system alone.

At the same time, the survey provides clear evidence of what works. Victims told us about the positive impact of specialist support services, advocates and professionals who communicated clearly, treated them with compassion and understood the impact of trauma. Where victims felt informed, supported and safe, they were far more likely to remain engaged with the criminal justice system.

Conversely, delays continue to have a devastating impact. Victims described feeling trapped in lengthy investigations, waiting years for trials and putting their lives on hold while the criminal justice system slowly progressed around them. For many, justice delayed did not simply mean lives paused; it meant trauma prolonged. Victims told us that uncertainty, repeated adjournments and a lack of information left them unable to move forward, delaying recovery and extending the impact of the crime on their lives. Again and again, we heard how poor communication compounded these harms, leaving victims feeling powerless, anxious and forgotten.

The findings also highlight the continued importance of victim support services. Time and again, victims described support as one of the most positive aspects of their experience. Many viewed specialist support services, advocates, ISVAs, IDVAs, Witness Service volunteers and other support professionals as the people who helped them understand the process, exercise their rights and stay engaged when the criminal justice system felt overwhelming. Yet access to support remains inconsistent, with too many victims still struggling to obtain help when they need it most. Victims frequently described navigating multiple agencies, support services and professionals throughout their journey, often experiencing very different levels of communication, coordination and support along the way. Too often, the quality of a victim's experience depends on who they happen to encounter, rather than being underpinned by a consistently high standard of care.

A theme that runs throughout this report is the inconsistent delivery of trauma-informed practice. Victims who encountered professionals with a strong understanding of trauma consistently reported better experiences, feeling listened to, supported and able to engage with the justice process. Conversely, victims often described feeling re-traumatised, dismissed or excluded when that understanding was absent. These findings reinforce my long-standing view that trauma-informed practice must become a defining feature of the criminal justice system. While there are examples of excellent practice across the system, a victim's experience should not be determined by luck. Too often, the support a victim receives depends on where they live, which service they access or which individual professional they encounter. Trauma-informed practice must be embedded across the criminal justice system so that it becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Taken together, these findings expose three persistent shortcomings that I have repeatedly encountered through my work as Victims' Commissioner.

First, victims remain largely invisible within a system that is organised around agencies and processes rather than people.

Second, trauma-informed practice remains inconsistent and, in some cases, entirely absent. Victims continue to receive very different experiences depending on which individual professional, agency or service they encounter.

Third, communication and support are among the strongest determinants of whether victims remain engaged with the justice process.

This is why I continue to believe that, in the longer term, we need a fundamentally more joined-up and victim-centred approach across the Criminal Justice System. A Victim Care Hub model, centred around a dedicated Victim Navigator who supports individuals throughout their justice journey, supported by a cross-criminal justice Victim Identifier that

enables safe and effective information-sharing across agencies, and underpinned by trauma-informed practice, offers the clearest vision for achieving this.

Victims should not have to navigate a fragmented system alone. They should have a single point of contact to help them understand the justice process, access support, exercise their rights and receive coordinated communication throughout their journey. This model would not replace existing criminal justice agencies or specialist support services. Rather, it would bring together currently fragmented victim-facing functions into a more coherent and accessible system, ensuring victims receive the information, support and safeguarding they need at every stage.

The recommendations in this report are intended to move the criminal justice system towards a more co-ordinated and victim-centred model. They include an end-to-end review of the victim journey, implementation of a cross-criminal justice Victim Identifier, a stronger framework for monitoring compliance with the Victims' Code, development of a national trauma-informed framework and improvements to support for victims affected by delays. Together, they provide a practical roadmap for reform while recognising the financial and operational pressures facing the justice system. In the longer term, these reforms are also likely to deliver better value for money than the current fragmented approach, which too often fails victims and creates inefficiencies across multiple agencies.

I am deeply grateful to every victim who took the time to complete this survey. Sharing experiences of crime and the justice process is not easy. The honesty and courage shown by those who contributed has provided invaluable insight into what is working, where change is needed and how the experiences of future victims can be improved.

Victims should not have to fight to be informed, supported or heard. They deserve a criminal justice system that recognises the impact of crime, responds to their needs and supports them throughout their journey. For too long, many victims have been left to navigate a system that does not consistently meet those expectations. I hope the findings and recommendations in this report help drive the long-overdue reforms needed to change that.



Claire Waxman OBE

Victims' Commissioner – England and Wales

Executive Summary

This report, produced by the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, presents the findings from the Victims' Survey 2026. This survey provides key insights into the victims' journey through the criminal justice system, from victims' experiences of reporting crime to the police, to investigations and charging; to their experiences in courts; receiving support from victims' services and the delivery of their rights and entitlements under the Victims' Code.

In 2026, the Office of the Victims' Commissioner commissioned TONIC, a social research organisation to undertake a Victim Survey. The survey ran between 8th April and 20th May 2026. The survey was online and asked victims of crime in England and Wales about their experiences of the criminal justice system. The survey is one of the largest surveys ever undertaken with victims of crime. This research gathered 6,248 responses from individuals who had been a victim of crime or had reported a crime since 2021. To ensure as many recent victims of crime as possible had the opportunity to participate, multiple recruitment strategies were used to reach them. Respondents were identified through open promotion, where the survey was disseminated through the communication channels of key partners, including national charities, police services, local authorities and NHS services across England and Wales, as well as using specialist panel recruitment to randomly select eligible respondents to complete the survey. The data has been weighted to align the sample with the demographic profile of adult crime victims in England and Wales on age, gender, region, ethnicity, and disability (see Annex B for the demographic breakdown of respondents).

In the report, several comparisons are made to the 2024 Victims Commissioner's Victims' Survey results. However, these should be interpreted with caution as the 2026 survey question set and sample are considerably different to previous years (see Annex A for the detailed methodology).

Key findings

Victims are not made aware of their rights:

- **Only 14% had heard of the Victims' Code.**
- When no one was charged following a report to the police, **only a fifth (20%) of respondents had heard of the Victims Right to Review (VRR).**
- Only 67% of those who wanted their Victim Impact Statement read out, had it read in court

Victims lack confidence in CJ agencies:

- **Over a quarter (28%) of respondents chose not to report the crime** to the police. This increased to **38% for Black victims and 45% for Asian victims.**

Victims are not consistently assessed or supported:

- Only 15% recalled having a needs assessment.
- Only around **a quarter (24%) of victims recalled being referred or self-referring to victims' support services.**
- Of those who did not receive a referral, **over a fifth (22%) would have wanted to be referred for support.**

Communication failures occur throughout the journey:

- 46% were dissatisfied with police communication
- Only **around a third (35%) of victims said they were kept informed by the Witness Care Unit** about post-charge case progression.
- Where there was a conviction, **a fifth (20%) of respondents said the conviction and sentence were not clearly explained** to them.
- Where victims said the defendant had appealed against their conviction or sentence, **a quarter (25%) said they were not notified prior to the appeal taking place** and **28% said they were not informed of the outcome of the appeal.**

Victims feel they have to drive the process themselves:

- **51% had to contact the police themselves** for updates.
- **Awareness of Victims' Code and VRR both most commonly came from respondents' own internet search,** rather than information being given to them by criminal justice or support agencies.

Victim support services are valued:

- 61% said support services had helped them to cope and recover.
- **Over half (58%) of victims said they had received some form of support within a month** of being referred.

Court delays continue to affect recovery:

- **Almost half of Crown Court victims experienced postponements.**
- For a **fifth (20%) of victims, the trial took place between 1 and 2 years after the original trial date.**
- Over a third (36%) of victims said they were not satisfied with court timeliness.

Key recommendations

This report contains five recommendations to address three underlying systemic issues that continue to shape victims' experiences throughout their journey.

Please turn to page 119 for a full, detailed list of our five recommendations.

The three systemic issues identified in this report are:

- Victims remain invisible within the system
- Trauma-informed practice remains inconsistent
- Communication and support determine engagement

To take practical steps to address these issues and the need for a more joined-up, victim-centred support model, the Victims' Commissioner recommends:

1. An end-to-end review of the victim journey to assess victims' experiences, outcomes, risks and support provision across the criminal justice system to identify opportunities for improvement.

To support this review and enable future transformation of victim services, the Victims' Commissioner recommends the following priority actions:

2. Introduce a cross-criminal justice Victim Identifier to improve information sharing, support and tracking of victims' rights.
3. Fully implement and strengthen the Victims' Code compliance framework to improve accountability and monitoring of victims' rights.
4. Establish a Criminal Justice Taskforce to develop a national trauma-informed framework to ensure consistent, victim-focused practice across the criminal justice system.
5. Review and strengthen victim support services and funding, particularly for victims affected by lengthy delays and prolonged proceedings.


The victim journey – a roadmap through the criminal justice system
Findings from the Victim Survey 2026
6,248 victims of crime in England and Wales filled in the victims' survey
DECIDING WHETHER TO REPORT
Will I be believed?
Will reporting make things worse?
Where can I get support?
28% of victims had chosen not to report the crime to the police.
REPORTING THE CRIME
How do I report?
What happens next?
Only 15% said police carried out a needs assessment
For 68% of victims, the police were aware of the crime.
Only 13% of victims said the police referred them to victims' services.
Am I being taken seriously?
Only 14% had heard of the Victims' Code
11% said they self-referred or were referred by another agency
How do I get help?
ACCESSING SUPPORT
Almost half (46%) were dissatisfied with police communication
What happens next?
Why was this decision made?
CHARGING DECISIONS
Why haven't I heard anything?
Is my case progressing?
What support am I entitled to?
15% of victims had seen someone charged for the crime.
INVESTIGATION
Will support continue if my case ends?
Can I challenge it?
Where there was no charge, only 20% had heard of the Victims' Right to Review
Who is responsible?
When someone had been charged for the crime, 76% had seen the case go to court.
20% said the conviction and sentence was not clearly explained
46% experienced a Crown Court postponement
What should I expect?
67% had their impact statement read out in court
How long will this take?
COURT PROCESS
Where the case had gone to court, 81% said someone was convicted.
SENTENCING AND BEYOND
Where the defendant had appealed, 28% were not informed of appeal outcome
91% had special measures implemented at court
Will I have to give evidence?
What sentence was imposed?
Will I receive updates?
Where do I go for support now?

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1. Deciding whether to seek help or report the crime

After a crime has taken place, every victim's justice journey will likely look and feel different. For some victims, this will involve reporting the crime to the police and taking the first step in engaging with the criminal justice system. Other victims may choose not to report the crime to the police at all or may do so at a later stage when they feel more ready. Some victims access help and support from support services immediately; some later and some not at all.

Key Findings

- Over a quarter (28%) of victims in our survey told us they chose not to report the crime to the police.
- Rates of non-reporting were higher for Black and Asian victims, younger victims, victims of online harm, hate crime, rape and sexual assault and anti-social behaviour.
- Reasons for not reporting including lack of trust in the police, not understanding it was a crime at the time or lack of understanding of procedure, concerns around negative impacts of reporting such as previous bad experiences, poor wellbeing and repercussions from the perpetrator.
- There was a worryingly low awareness (14%) of the Victims' Code.
- Only around a quarter (24%) of victims said they had been referred or self-referred to victims' services. Only 13% said they had been referred by the police.
- Almost two thirds (61%) agreed the support they received helped them to cope and recover from the impacts of the crime. Where victims had positive experiences of support, it was lifesaving.
- Almost a fifth (19%) of victims disagreed it was easy to get access to victims' services; this was particularly high for rape and sexual assault victims (29%).
- Barriers included systemic issues such as funding cuts on services, uncertainty and lack of information about whether they could access services, as well as being advised not to have therapy until after trial.

Choosing not to report

Main reasons victims did not report

- They had a lack of trust in police or the criminal justice system.
- They feared not being believed.
- They had previous negative experiences with reporting.
- There was a fear of repercussions from the perpetrator.
- The trauma, stress and emotional burden of reporting.
- They did not realise the behaviour was a crime.
- They did not consider the incident serious enough to involve the police.
- Embarrassment, shame or self-blame.
- They received advice from others not to report.
- Desire to move on rather than engage with the process.

Over a quarter (28%) of respondents told us they did not report the crime to the police. As in previous Victims' Surveys, non-reporting was higher amongst some groups of victims, including Black and Asian victims.[4] Research has indicated that victims from minoritised communities will face additional barriers to accessing help from the police, having their needs effectively met and receiving support referrals.[5] They may also experience social stigma and isolation, community pressures, unmet needs for social support, hostile immigration policies and fear racism from service providers.[6] In addition, half (50%) of victims responding to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) agreed that the criminal justice system discriminates against particular groups or individuals.[7] However, a lack of routine data collected by statutory agencies on protective factors, including ethnicity, makes it challenging to further understand why these characteristics may act as potential barriers or enablers to engagement with the justice system.[8]

Rates of non-reporting for our survey were also higher for younger victims,[9] and victims of online harm, hate crime, anti-social behaviour, fraud, and rape and sexual assault.

Victims described a range of reasons for not reporting. The most common related to confidence in the criminal justice system, concerns about the personal impact of reporting, and fears about how they would be treated. Some did not recognise what

[4] At 38%, these were statistically significantly higher than for white victims (28%).
[5] Intersectional injustices: police responses to migrant, Black and minoritised victim-survivors of rape and other sexual offences in England and Wales: Policing and Society: Vol 34, No 8
[6] Black and Minoritized Women's Experiences of Specialist Domestic Violence Services in the United Kingdom (UK): A Scoping Review
[7] Perception and experience of police and criminal justice system, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[8] Adult victim-survivor's journey through a sexual violence support service in Essex - GOV.UK
[9] 48% of victims aged 16-24 did not report, which was statistically significantly higher than for victims aged 25-34 (37%), 35-44 (30%), 45-54 (25%), 55-64 (20%), 65-74 (19%), and 75+ (26%).

they had experienced as a crime, while others felt the incident was not serious enough to warrant police involvement.

> *I don't have faith in the police system when the incident could be brushed off as hearsay. (Victim of antisocial behaviour, Male, 35-44)*

> *I did not believe the Police can help because I felt so embarrassed that it happened to me. (Victim of fraud, Female, 55-64)*

Groups with particularly high levels of non-reporting

Group	% not reported
Victims of online harm	**63%**
Victims of hate crime	**54%**
Victims of fraud	**50%**
Victims aged 16-24	**48%**
Asian victims	**45%**
Victims of anti-social behaviour	**41%**
Victims of rape and sexual assault	**39%**
Black victims	**38%**

Many victims also described concerns about the potential consequences of reporting. These included fears of retaliation from perpetrators, concerns they would not be believed, and worries about the stress and emotional impact of engaging with the criminal justice process. This has been reflected in research specifically with victims of sexual violence, which has identified that decisions about whether to report to the police are often driven by concerns about personal safety and wellbeing, not simply by whether someone wants justice. In addition, victims must factor in the distress and re-traumatisation they may experience as a result of engaging with the justice process.[10]

> *Because I was afraid of the perpetrator response and also afraid of the police and justice system interrogating me and people make me out to be a liar and the unbearable stress of all of the above and of court. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*

[10] The role of safety and wellbeing in reporting decisions of sexual violence victim-survivors in England and Wales in: Journal of Gender-Based Violence - Ahead of print

Because reporting it would have made me more vulnerable to further violence and reprisals. Fear that that police would mishandle any investigation or not investigate properly or at all. Absolutely traumatised and terrified in the aftermath of the attack. (Victim of assault, Female, 55-54).

Others reflected that they did not understand that what they had experienced was a crime or did not believe it was significant enough to report to the police.

I did not know being harassed can be reported to the police. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)

Although the incident was stressful, I did not feel it was significant enough or that I was in enough danger to report it to the police. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Male, 16-24)

What this means for victims

The decision to report is often influenced by much more than the crime itself. Victims weighed the potential benefits of reporting against concerns about safety, wellbeing, the likelihood of being believed, and confidence that reporting would lead to a meaningful outcome. The findings suggest that improving trust in criminal justice agencies, increasing awareness of victims' rights and available support, and addressing fears about the impact of reporting may help reduce barriers to reporting and improve access to justice.

Awareness of the Victims' Code

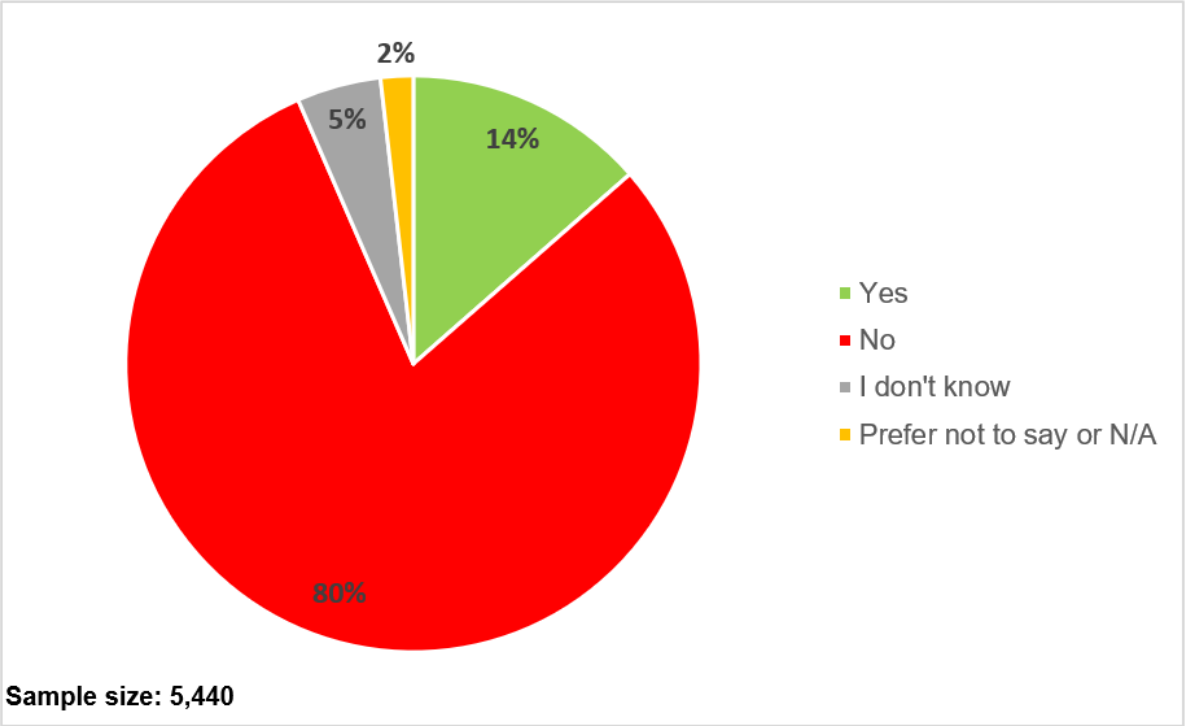
The Victims' Code[11] sets out the minimum standards of service that criminal justice agencies must meet when dealing with victims of crime.[12] Despite this, awareness of the Code remains consistently low. Four in five respondents (80%) told us they had not heard of the Victims' Code (Figure 1).[13] Awareness remained low even among victims whose crime had been reported to the police (78%) and, although it increased as cases progressed through the criminal justice system, nearly two-thirds (65%) of victims whose case resulted in a charge had still not heard of the Code. Regardless of whether victims are aware of their rights under the Victims' Code, these entitlements are the minimum of what criminal justice agencies should deliver to victims.

All criminal justice agencies with responsibilities under the Victims' Code have a duty to inform victims of their rights.[14] These findings suggest that many victims continue

[11] The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales
[12] The Victims' Commissioner responded to the Ministry of Justice's consultation on the new Victims' Code, which is expected to be published later in 2026.
[13] This compares to 75% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.
[14] Victims and Prisoners Act 2024

to progress through the criminal justice system without knowledge of the entitlements and support available to them.

Figure 1. Proportion of respondents who had heard of the Victims' Code.



What victims told us about why they were unaware of the Victims' Code

- Nobody told them about the Victims' Code or explained the rights available to them.
- Information about victims' rights was not consistently provided by criminal justice agencies.
- They received information at a time when they were overwhelmed by the impact of the crime and unable to absorb it.
- Information was difficult to access, buried within lengthy documents or not presented in a memorable way.
- They were focused on the investigation or court process rather than understanding their rights and entitlements.
- They only became aware of their rights after conducting their own research online or through support services.
- They assumed they would be informed if a particular right or service was relevant to them.
- Limited contact with criminal justice agencies reduced opportunities to receive information about the Victims' Code.
- They did not realise that the support, information and services they received were rights under the Victims' Code.
- Awareness of the Victims' Code was often discovered by chance rather than through proactive communication by agencies.

Victims commonly described not being told about the Code, receiving information at a time when they were overwhelmed by the impact of the crime, or having to find information independently. Several victims also reported that they were unaware that certain forms of support or information were rights under the Code rather than discretionary services.

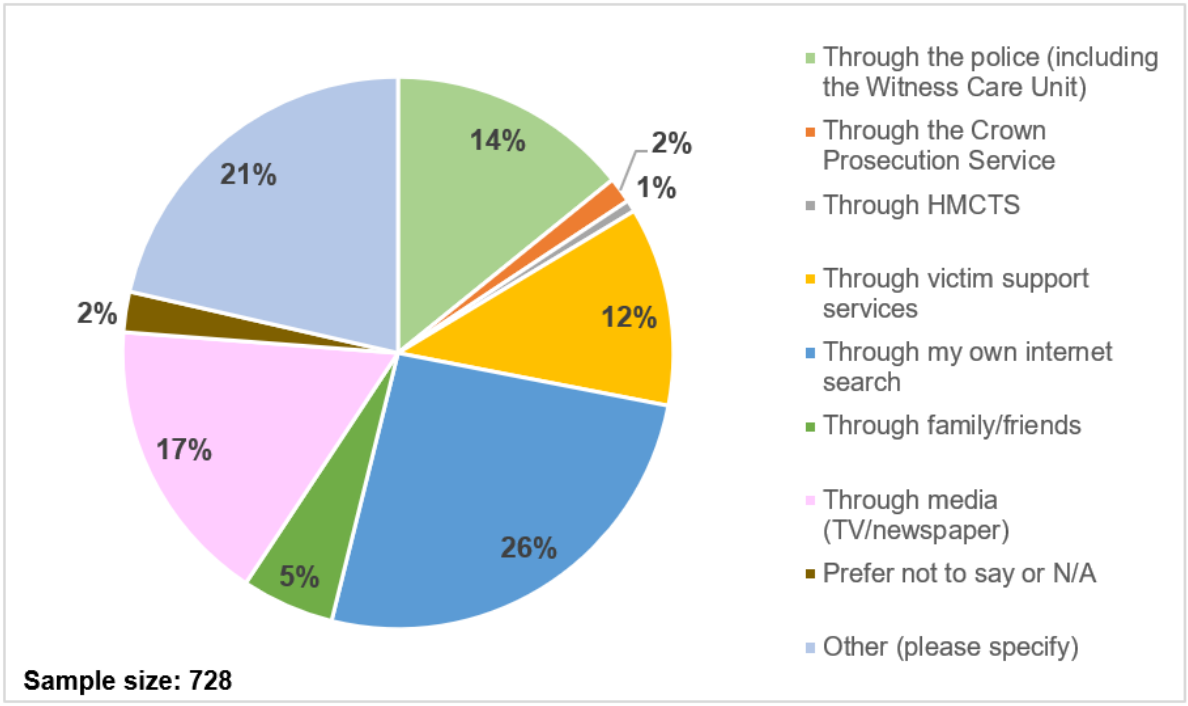
> *I was not made aware of my rights on how I should be treated during the investigation […] I was also not given much information on what was going to happen or what was happening with my case […] more consistent check-in's with what was going on no matter how small it would of made me feel more at ease knowing my case hasn't been forgotten. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

Awareness of the Code matters because victims need clear, transparent information about their rights, available support and what to expect throughout the process in order to access justice and make informed decisions about their journey.

Victims also cannot readily exercise rights they do not know they have and low awareness may limit their ability to challenge poor service or request the entitlements available to them under the Code.

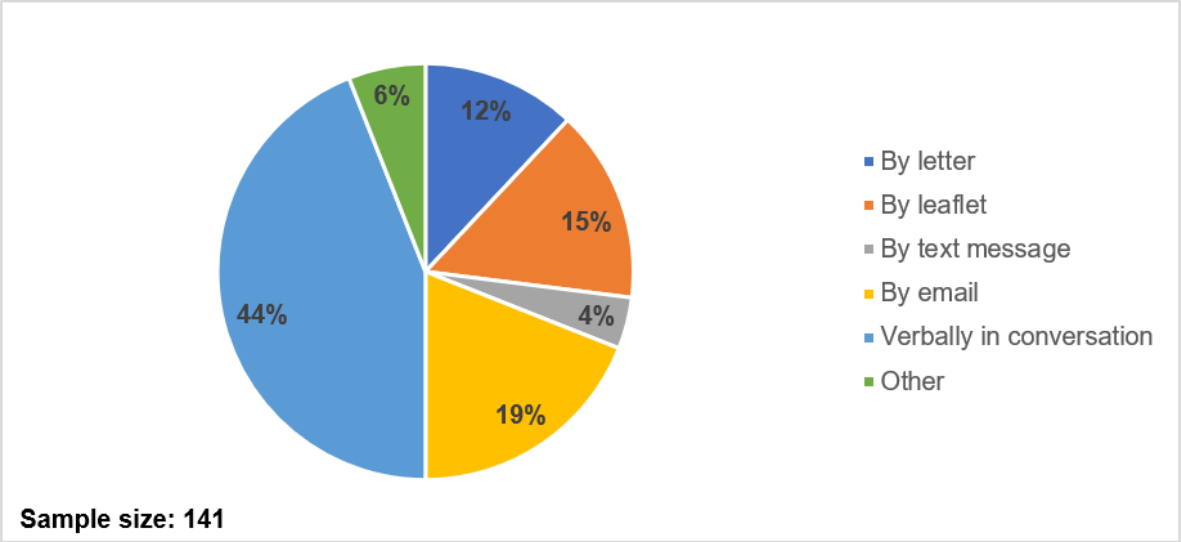
Among respondents who had heard of the Victims' Code, the most common source of information was victims' own online research (26%). By comparison, only 17% reported learning about the Code directly from a criminal justice agency (figure 2).

Figure 2. Proportion of respondents hearing about the Victims' Code through various sources.



Where victims said they had heard of the Code through their contact with a criminal justice agency, just under half (44%) said they were informed of it verbally in conversation (figure 3) and around a fifth (19%) said they were informed by email.

Figure 3. Proportion of respondents hearing about the Victims' Code via various communication channels through criminal justice agencies.



These findings suggest that the responsibility for understanding victims' rights is often falling to victims themselves rather than the agencies required to provide this information. This is particularly concerning given that police and Witness Care Units are often victims' earliest and most frequent points of contact with the criminal justice system.

Some victims who were aware of the Code expressed frustration that their rights were not reflected in their experience of the criminal justice process.

> *My experience was very poor on each occasion. […] As a professional, reporting a crime in my personal capacity, I tried to assert my rights in respect of the victims' code, but this was treated as if it was meaningless. (Victim of domestic abuse and stalking, Female, 25-34)*

It is important that the burden does not fall to victims and their ability to research their rights, advocate for themselves and challenge the system. However, in order to understand whether agencies are providing sufficient information to victims about their code rights and entitlements when engaging with the justice system, as well as understanding the quality of this information, code monitoring data must be collected.

The Victims' Commissioner has previously highlighted the difficulties with understanding the victims' journey without robust data.[15] Reports looking at victim data from Ministry of Justice[16] [17] also identify the fragmented victim data landscape,

[15] A new Victims' Code: consultation response - Victims Commissioner
[16] Linking police and sexual violence support service victim data - GOV.UK
[17] Adult victim-survivor's journey through a sexual violence support service in Essex - GOV.UK

with data relating to each part of the victim's journey through the system recorded on different databases and owned by different organisations.

This lack of quality data significantly hinders the ability to understand the victims' journey and makes monitoring performance, such as compliance to the Victims' Code, problematic. In the words of the Justice Select Committee, the lack of data, on whether the Victims' Code is being adhered to, means the onus is "on the victim to claim rights they are often unaware of, rather than requiring the relevant agencies to deliver them".[18]

What this means for victims

Where criminal justice agencies are not consistently meeting their responsibility to provide victims with their rights and ensure they understand them, it creates a risk that victims miss opportunities to access support, request services or challenge poor treatment. For victims to fully access justice in a system that is often completely unfamiliar to them, it is important that the information they receive from criminal justice agencies is delivered consistently and transparently.

Accessing support to cope and recover from the crime

What victims told us about accessing support

Barriers to accessing support

- There was a lack of information about available services.
- They were not being referred to support services.
- There were long waiting lists and funding pressures.
- There was uncertainty about their eligibility for support.
- Difficulty accessing specialist or tailored services.
- Being required to repeatedly explain traumatic experiences.
- There were accessibility barriers for some groups of victims.
- Some victims were advised not to access therapeutic support until after trial.

What victims valued about support

- Having someone who listened and understood.
- Emotional support and reassurance.
- Practical guidance through the criminal justice process.
- Advocacy and support in exercising their rights.
- Support tailored to individual needs.
- Consistent contact from a trusted person.
- Feeling less alone and more able to cope with the impact of the crime.

[18] Pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Victims Bill

Victims do not need to report a crime to the police to access support. Following a crime, victims may wish to receive practical or emotional support to help them cope and recover, regardless of whether they choose to engage with the criminal justice system.

Services available to victims may include advocacy, counselling, therapy, emotional support, practical advice and specialist support tailored to specific crime types or victim needs.

Under the current Victims' Code, victims who report a crime should be informed about available support services and their right to be referred to services that support victims.[19] [20]

Referrals to support services

Only around a quarter (24%) of respondents said they had been referred or self-referred to services that support people who have been a victim of crime (figure 4)[21], with just 13% reporting that they had been referred by the police.[22]

This is particularly concerning given that, over one fifth (22%) of respondents who were not referred, said they would have wanted support. These findings suggest that some victims who would benefit from support are not being connected with services or informed about the support available to them.

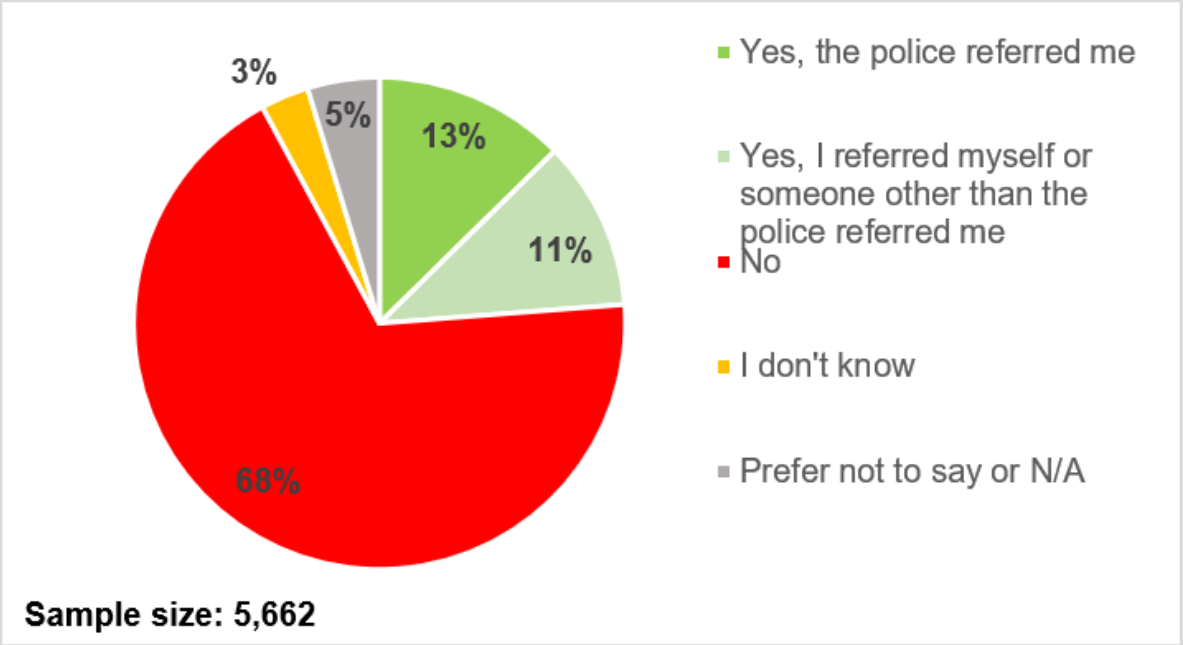
Research undertaken by the Victims' Commissioner has previously identified victim advocacy and support services as a key factor in helping victims remain engaged with the criminal justice process[23]. Support services can play an important role in helping victims understand the process, access their rights, manage the impact of crime and maintain confidence in the system.

> *Information [should be] given about how you can get support and what this includes […]. Someone mentioned the ISVA's support but was never given information […] (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *I feel I was constantly pushed from pillar to post with everyone trying to pass the buck, while services are advertised, they are either not running programmes or don't have funding. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)*

[19] Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code) - GOV.UK
[20] A consultation on a new Victims' Code took place in 2026 with outcomes awaiting publication - A new Victims' Code - GOV.UK
[21] This compares to 27% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.
[22] This compares to 16% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.
[23] Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner

Figure 4. Proportion of respondents referred to victims' services.



Waiting for support

It was encouraging that over half (58%) of respondents who accessed support received some form of help within a month of referral (figure 5). However, victims frequently described waiting lists, funding pressures and service capacity issues that delayed access to vital support.

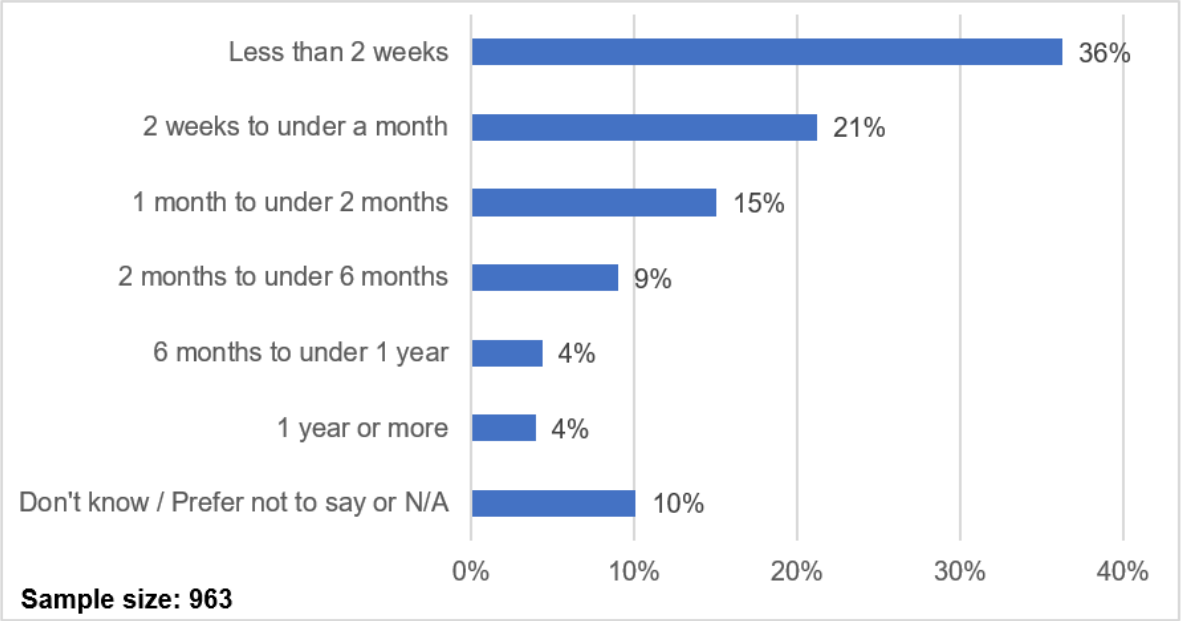
Several victims also highlighted the impact of wider criminal justice delays, particularly where ongoing investigations or court proceedings created sustained demand for support over long periods. This reflects previous Victims' Commissioner research which found that court delays increase both the length and intensity of support required by many victims.[24]

> *Just the wait times, I had to go through years of trauma that nearly ruined my life just because I couldn't get help sooner. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

> *There are long, long waiting lists for limited time services, not enough money and I have waited too long and am still waiting. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

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

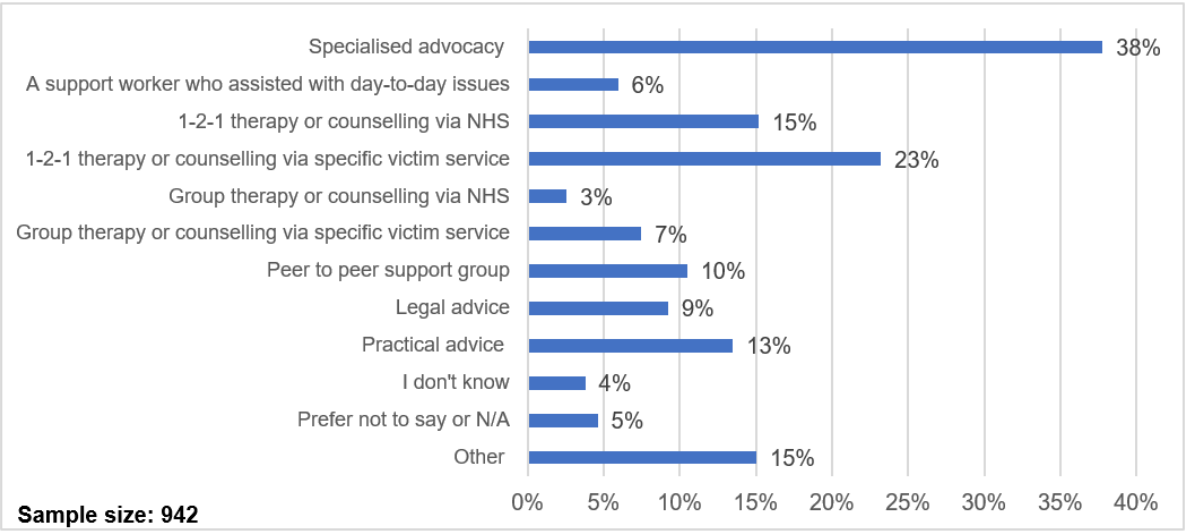
Figure 5. Time respondents reported waiting after referral to receive some form of support



Receiving support

Of those who had received support, over a third (38%) reported receiving specialist advocacy support such as an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) or Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA). While almost a quarter (23%) of respondents said they had received one to one therapy or counselling via a specific victim support service (figure 6).

Figure 6. Proportion of respondents receiving different types of support.



Among victims who accessed support, experiences were largely positive. Almost two thirds (61%) agreed that support helped them cope and recover from the impact of

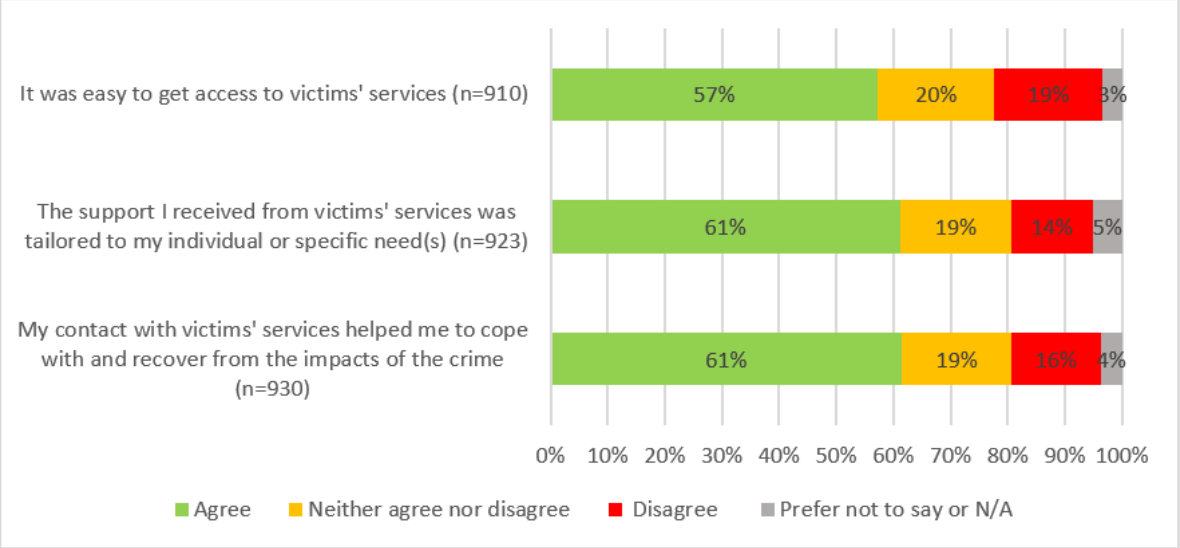
the crime, while a similar proportion said support was tailored to their needs (figure 7).

Victims frequently described support services as providing empathy, reassurance, practical guidance and a consistent source of help throughout their journey. Many suggested that support services were the most positive aspect of their experience and, in some cases, critical to their recovery.

> *The support that I have received and continue to receive from my local Rape Crisis centre (which includes the ISVA support) has been incredible and I would not have coped with the process of reporting and the investigation so far without it. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*

> *ISVAs and the Women and Girls network were truly invaluable. I genuinely do not know how I'd have gone through the process without them. (Victim of rape and sexual abuse, Female, 25-34)*

Figure 7. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about victims' services.[25]



Unmet support needs

Despite the positive impact of support services, many victims reported difficulties accessing the support they wanted or needed. This is of real concern, given how valuable those who were able to access support found it in terms of helping them to recover from the impact of crime.

[25] Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

What support victims said they could not access

- Specialist support.
- Advocacy services.
- Counselling and therapy.
- Long-term emotional support.
- Peer support.
- Mental health support.
- Practical support and advice.
- Restorative justice services.

Why victims were unable to access support

- Long waiting lists.
- Funding and resourcing pressures.
- Support not being offered or signposted.
- Lack of awareness about available services.
- Uncertainty about eligibility.
- Being advised not to access support before trial.
- Limited-service availability.

Particularly concerning were reports from victims who believed they could not receive support because they had not reported the crime to the police. This suggests a continuing lack of awareness that victim support services can still be accessed without making a formal report.

Victims also described being advised not to access certain therapeutic interventions until after criminal proceedings had concluded. This mirrors previous findings from the Victims' Commissioner's research on court delays[26], where victims reported waiting months or years for support while cases progressed through the system. Victims of rape have routinely been told to avoid therapy until after the conclusion of a criminal trial. This was because until recently, notes of therapy were routinely requested during rape investigations. This material is disclosable to the defence and therapy notes were being used by the defence team to undermine the prosecution case during the trial. The Keep Counselling Confidential Campaign,[27] along with the Victims' Commissioner made calls for a change in the law to prevent the routine use of notes of therapy in this way. The law was changed in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024[28] and the changes came into force in January 2026.[29]

> *Traumatic experiences throughout. I wasn't allowed support until my trial has ended…3 years later I'm finally receiving the support I fought for. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

[26] Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner
[27] Keep Counselling Confidential | Rape Crisis England & Wales
[28] Victims and Prisoners Act 2024
[29] New rules on police requesting counselling notes come into force - GOV.UK

There were some victims who did not feel that they needed support at the time or did not know what support was available. Sometimes this was because they felt their experience was not important enough to seek support or they felt ashamed of what had happened.

> *At the time I felt as though my experience was insignificant and it was not important enough to reach out and seek help from others. (Victim of hate crime, Male, 16-24)*

> *I don't know if this kind of support exists. I did not look into it myself. (Victim of online harm, Male, 45-54)*

It is concerning that victims of crime types that are less likely to be reported to the police such as online harm and hate crime, feel less willing to seek out support due to a perceived lack of offence seriousness. Too often, this means that vulnerable individuals are left without help.

What this means for victims

Support services emerged as one of the most consistently positive aspects of victims' experiences. Where victims were able to access timely, tailored support, they frequently described it as helping them cope, recover and remain engaged with the criminal justice process. However, access remains inconsistent. Low referral rates, gaps in awareness, long waiting lists and funding pressures mean many victims are not receiving the support they need, at the point they need it. The findings suggest that improving access to support services may be one of the most significant opportunities to improve victims' experiences and outcomes across the criminal justice system.

2. First contact and investigation

For those victims who choose to engage with the criminal justice system following a crime, reporting the crime is often the first stage of their justice journey. Alternatively, the crime might be reported to the police on the victim's behalf, for example, by a family member, friend, neighbour, community leader or statutory service. Just over two thirds (68%) of victims said the incident was reported to the police.

Key Findings

- The victim journey begins with a needs assessment, yet only 15% of victims recalled receiving one. This is concerning as it is the gateway to receive support, enhanced rights, special measures and safeguarding.
- There were some positive experiences with the police where victims felt believed, respected and supported.
- Victims experienced poor communication during the investigation from the police. Just under half (46%) were dissatisfied. This is a big predictor of future engagement with reporting. Where they were dissatisfied with communication, 85% said they would not report again.
- Disabled victims also reported increased dissatisfaction with communication they received from the police, citing feeling dismissed and a lack of training to assess their communication needs as well as specific risks and vulnerabilities.
- Victims described issues with information being recorded incorrectly, details lost and correspondence regarding victims shared inappropriately. Half of respondents disagreed that police investigated their allegations thoroughly. This is another driver of future engagement with police – 83% of those who felt that the police had not investigated their allegations thoroughly said they would not report again.
- Victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in particular, also expressed concern that there was a lack of understanding amongst police of patterns of behaviour such as coercive control which meant they did not take these issues seriously enough and led to safeguarding concerns.
- Timeliness was also an issue for victims with investigations – almost half (48%) said the police did not act quickly enough to investigate.
- Victim attrition – 4% of victims said the outcome of reporting the incident to the police was that they had withdrawn from the process and just under a fifth (19%) would not report again. Victims cited reasons including the negative repercussions that continuing had on their safety and wellbeing, feeling discouraged by not being believed by criminal justice professionals and a lack of trust in the system.

Reporting the crime and having needs assessed

A key right under the Victims' Code is to be offered support. To help identify victims' needs, police should carry out a needs assessment when a crime is reported.[30] Needs assessments are intended to identify support needs, safeguarding concerns, communication requirements and eligibility for Enhanced Rights and special measures.[31]

Needs assessments

Only 15% of respondents recalled the police carrying out a needs assessment with them, which is worryingly low as all victims should have their needs assessed at initial contact. Although this was higher for victims of domestic abuse (25%), victims of rape and sexual assault (19%) and victims of stalking and harassment (18%), this still falls significantly short. Victims of these offences also qualify for Enhanced Rights so we would expect that there would be much higher numbers reporting having their needs assessed by the police. Victims with Enhanced Rights are often more likely to have experienced trauma, have additional vulnerabilities or face safeguarding concerns, increasing the importance of receiving appropriate support, safety planning and adjustments. In addition to being carried out at the victims' first encounter with the justice system, the needs assessment should be revisited and updated throughout the victims' journey.[32]

Around half (51%) of respondents said a needs assessment was not carried out at all. This was significantly higher for victims of anti-social behaviour (61%)[33] and criminal damage (67%). Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has called for improvements to police training and assessment processes, to ensure the police are equipped to better identify the risk and vulnerabilities of victims including those experiencing anti-social behaviour.[34]

[30] Identify and record needs and vulnerabilities | College of Policing

[31] Those who qualify for Enhanced Rights under the Victims' Code are vulnerable or intimidated victims, close relatives bereaved by a criminal offence, victims of domestic abuse, hate crime, terrorism, sexual offences, human trafficking, modern slavery, attempted murder, kidnap, false imprisonment, arson with intent to endanger life and wounding or causing grievous bodily harm with intent and victims who have been persistently targeted. Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code) - GOV.UK

[32] Victims' Code of Practice: Right 4 Initial victim needs assessment (IVNA)

[33] Anti-social behaviour is not a specific criminal offence but many of the behaviours, such as criminal damage or harassment, are criminal. Victims of persistent anti-social behaviour will be entitled to the rights in the new Victims' Code.

[34] Still living a nightmare: Understanding the experiences of victims of anti-social behaviour - Victims Commissioner

What victims told us about needs assessments

- They were not aware that a needs assessment had taken place.
- Their vulnerabilities, disabilities or communication needs were not identified.
- Opportunities to access specialist support were missed.
- They did not feel their individual circumstances had been properly understood.
- Failures to identify needs sometimes affected the quality of evidence gathered.
- Victims wanted clearer explanations about available support, enhanced rights and special measures.

I should have been offered an ISVA or supportive person, but they failed to conduct a needs assessment so missed my vulnerabilities. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

I was not need assessed by [police force], I'm neurodivergent and have complex PTSD […] This led to a statement that did not reflect the true extent of what was happening. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

Awareness of the Victims' Code

Awareness of the Victims' Code also appears to be associated with higher levels of reported needs assessments. Among respondents who had heard of the Victims' Code, the proportion reporting that a needs assessment had been carried out increased to 24%. This may suggest that victims who are familiar with the Code are better able to recognise when a needs assessment has taken place. Either way, the finding highlights the importance of clear communication by criminal justice agencies about victims' rights and the support available to them. Where victims are unaware of the Victims' Code, they may not realise that their needs, vulnerabilities and support requirements should be formally assessed. It is important to note however, that the burden should not lie with victims. It is the responsibility of relevant agencies to provide these rights to victims and to ensure they are aware of them.

I was not made aware of my rights on how I should be treated during the investigation e.g. victims code and when I initially reported the crime, I received no advice on keeping myself safe in the situation and from the perpetrator there was also not much information given to me in ways of mental health support so it would be nice if I could of had more advice and information. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

Victims were more likely to report having received a needs assessment as their case progressed through the criminal justice system, with 29% reporting that an assessment had been carried out once a suspect had been charged. This may be because needs assessments become increasingly important as cases progress towards court, helping to identify any additional support, communication or accessibility needs, as well as any adjustments or special measures that may assist

victims to engage with the criminal justice process and give their best evidence. However, the proportion of victims receiving an assessment at this stage still remains low.

Victims' needs can change over the course of a case and guidance states that criminal justice agencies should provide opportunities for needs to be reassessed as circumstances change. Victims who are required to attend court should also be offered a further assessment by the Witness Care Unit to identify any additional support needs and determine whether special measures would assist them in giving their best evidence. The findings therefore raise concerns not only about initial assessments, but also whether victims' changing needs are being identified and addressed throughout their journey.

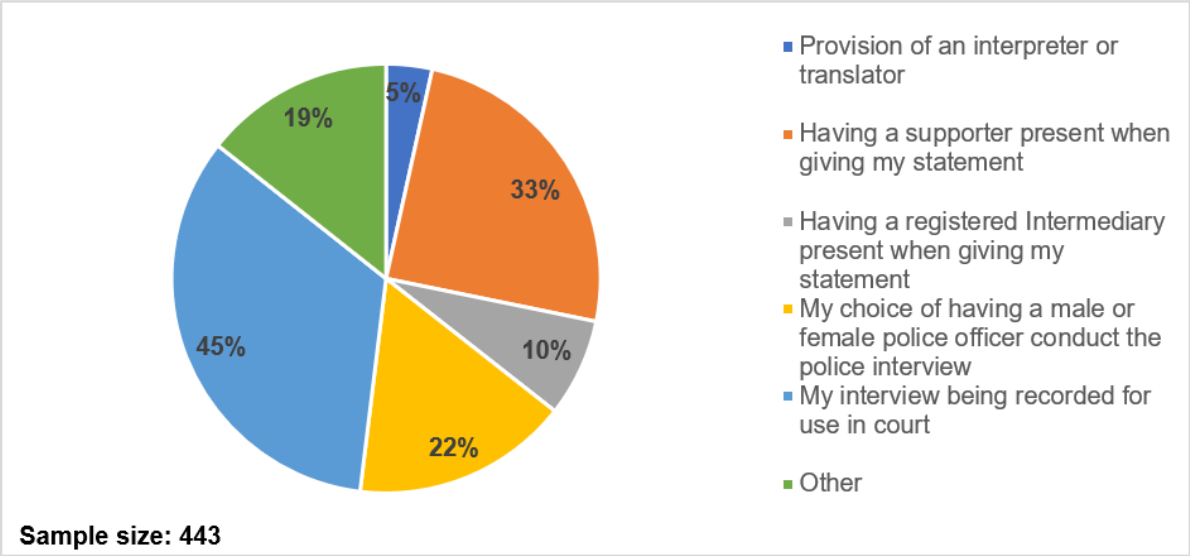
Outcomes of needs assessments

Of respondents who said they had received a needs assessment, the largest proportion (45%) said it resulted in having their interview recorded for use in court (figure 8). A third (33%) said it resulted in them having a supporter present when giving their statement and just over a fifth (22%) said it resulted in having their choice of male or female police officer conduct the police interview.

What victims told us about adjustments and support following a needs assessment

- Having a supporter present helped them feel safer and more confident.
- Choice of officer could affect how comfortable they felt sharing information.
- Victims valued officers who demonstrated empathy, understanding and professionalism.
- Some victims felt officers lacked understanding of trauma, coercive control and abusive behaviour.
- Practical adjustments helped victims provide information and engage with the investigation.
- Where adjustments were not offered, victims sometimes felt unsupported or less willing to continue engaging.

Figure 8. Proportion of respondents reporting what their needs assessment resulted in them receiving.



The support and adjustments resulting from needs assessments often played an important role in helping victims engage with the investigation. Victims described valuing practical adjustments that helped them feel safe, understood and able to provide information about what had happened. In particular, victims highlighted the importance of being given appropriate support, having choice where possible, and being treated by officers who understood the impact of trauma and abuse.

> *I was given a female chaperone (another officer on duty) which helped make me feel more comfortable. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)*

> *My case has since been reopened. I have a female detective who I think is brilliant. The stuff I reported before I was dealing with male officers who did not understand anything and also had zero empathy for my situation. I was even victim blamed multiple times. Even when my case was reopened when I spoke with male officers again, I was victim blamed had no understanding for my situation. Men do not understand what a woman, a wife, a mother does for their family. Men do not understand the sacrifices a woman makes for her family. They also did not understand that I was being manipulated and coerced into things. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

It was clear that some victims would have liked the opportunity to have the choice of a male or female officer when conducting the interview but were hesitant due to the lack of resource that appeared available. In some cases, this negatively impacted on victims' experience of their initial contact with police, as they felt uncomfortable or scared.

> *It was the first time in [long period] of marriage, I had the courage to call the police. I was very upset and would have very much liked to have been*

offered to talk to a woman officer, but that offer was not made. I was made very aware that a long delay in coming out to my call was due to a lack of available officers and my low self-esteem did not make me feel as if I could request to speak to a woman, which I would have preferred. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)

When I made the statement, I hoped it will be a woman who would interview me. However, I understood that they were short of officers on that day. I then received a call from another officer who asked me in a harsh tone: Do you want to take this to court? I did not know what to say initially. He then said: Yes or No. This interaction scared me. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

Several victims described how practical adjustments, such as having a supporter present or being interviewed by an officer they felt comfortable with, helped them feel safer, more respected and better able to participate in the investigation. These experiences illustrate the importance of identifying victims' needs early and responding appropriately. Conversely, where victims felt uncomfortable, unsupported or misunderstood, confidence in the criminal justice process was undermined from the outset.

What this means for victims

Needs assessments are a critical gateway to support, safeguarding, Enhanced Rights and special measures. The findings suggest that too many victims either do not receive a needs assessment, do not recognise that one has taken place, or do not experience the benefits that should follow from it. This raises concerns that vulnerabilities, communication needs and support requirements are not being consistently identified at the earliest stage of the victim journey. Where victims' needs were recognised and appropriate adjustments were made, they described feeling safer, more supported and better able to engage with the investigation. Conversely, where needs were missed, victims reported feeling misunderstood, unsupported and less confident in the criminal justice process. This is particularly concerning for victims who qualify for Enhanced Rights and may require specialist support, safety planning or other adjustments to participate effectively throughout their justice journey.

Special Measures

A key part of assessing victim needs is considering their eligibility for special measures,[35] which are designed to help vulnerable and intimidated victims give their best evidence, participate effectively in proceedings and reduce the stress associated with attending court. Examples include giving evidence from behind a screen, via live link, through a pre-recorded interview, or with communication support

[35] The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced a range of measures that can be used to facilitate the gathering and giving of evidence by vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. The measures are collectively known as ‘special measures’. Special measures help to relieve some of the stress associated with giving evidence and apply to prosecution and defence witnesses, but not the defendant.

where required. Under the Victims' Code, the police or Witness Care Unit are responsible for determining whether victims are eligible for special measures and explaining the options available to them.

Just under half (48%) of respondents disagreed that the police officer in their case discussed special measures with them to determine whether they might be eligible (figure 9).[36]

What victims told us about special measures

- Special measures were not routinely discussed with them.
- They were often unaware of what support or adjustments were available.
- Some victims only discovered special measures through their own research or after chasing information.
- Failures to discuss special measures contributed to wider concerns about communication and support.
- Victims linked a lack of discussion about special measures to broader concerns about risk assessment, safeguarding and understanding of their needs.

If special measures are mentioned, they should be applied for. Specifically, pre-recorded cross examination. If a special measure is chosen, live-link, it should be respected and we should not feel pressured to change our decision to screens in the court and no live-link. There should be dedicated support, trauma support, for victims of childhood offences, through the police. (Victim of child sexual abuse, Female, 25-34)

There was a total failure to carry out proper risk assessments, trigger multi-agency safeguarding, provide trauma-informed support, or ensure adequate special measures and communication support for court. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

What this means for victims

Special measures can play an important role in helping victims feel safe, supported and able to give their best evidence. The finding that almost half of respondents did not recall discussions about special measures raises concerns that opportunities to identify and meet victims' needs may be missed. It also reinforces wider findings in this survey about communication, as victims cannot access adjustments and support if they are not informed that they are available. For some victims, particularly those with Enhanced Rights, failures to discuss special measures may have implications

[36] This is as a proportion of all victims, meaning it includes victims who will not be eligible for special measures. Eligibility is for vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses, this includes victims under 18, victims with mental and/or physical vulnerabilities as well as victims of certain crime types. Victims who do not qualify for special measures are less likely to be told about them. Special Measures | The Crown Prosecution Service

for both their experience of the criminal justice process and their ability to participate effectively in it.

Video recorded interview

What victims told us about video recorded interviews

- Being able to meet officers beforehand and understand the process helped reduce anxiety.
- Victims valued being able to take breaks and access support during interviews.
- Clear explanations about what to expect helped victims feel more in control.
- Some victims felt unprepared for the process and would have welcomed more information in advance.
- Others described the interview as feeling interrogative rather than supportive.
- Victims wanted greater emotional support during the statement-taking process.

A key special measure available to eligible victims that takes place at the investigation stage, rather than the majority which are provided at court stage, is having their police statement video recorded. Also known as Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews, this measure is designed to help vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses provide their best evidence as early as possible in the criminal justice process.[37] They can reduce the need for victims to repeatedly retell their experiences and may help minimise the impact of giving evidence later in proceedings.[38] Overall, just under a fifth of respondents (18%) said they had their police statement video recorded.[39]

Victims' experiences of video recorded interviews were mixed. Positive experiences were characterised by good preparation, clear communication and access to support. Victims valued opportunities to meet officers in advance, understand the process and take breaks where needed.

> *The process was actually ok (given that I was recalling my experiences of sexual violence). I met the officer doing the interview in advance […] I was able to take breaks whenever I needed […] My ISVA […] provided support during the breaks. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*

Where victims felt less positive, they often highlighted a lack of information about what to expect, limited control over the process and insufficient emotional support.. Some suggested that this negatively affected how they responded to questions when their statement was taken.

[37] Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings
[38] Impact Evaluation of Pre recorded Cross Examination for Vulnerable & Intimidated Witnesses
[39] This is as a proportion of all respondents, so includes victims who would not be eligible for special measures including video recorded interview.

Having an idea of the nature of questions before hand would be helpful so as to reduce the panic on the spot. […] Describing what the room will look like, what the building may look like and what to expect on the day. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

The police seemed to be paying attention, but it felt interrogating to me instead of creating a safer more comfortable space for me to speak. (Victim of theft, Female, 16-24)

I feel there is a need for personal and emotional support at the point of recording statements. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)

What this means for victims

Video recorded interviews are intended to help victims provide their best evidence whilst reducing the stress associated with giving evidence later in the criminal justice process. Victims' experiences suggest that the benefits of ABE interviews are greatest where they are delivered in a trauma-informed way, with clear explanations, practical support and opportunities for victims to feel prepared and in control. Where these elements were absent, some victims described the process as intimidating or distressing, potentially affecting both their experience and their ability to engage effectively with the investigation.

Experiences with the police investigation

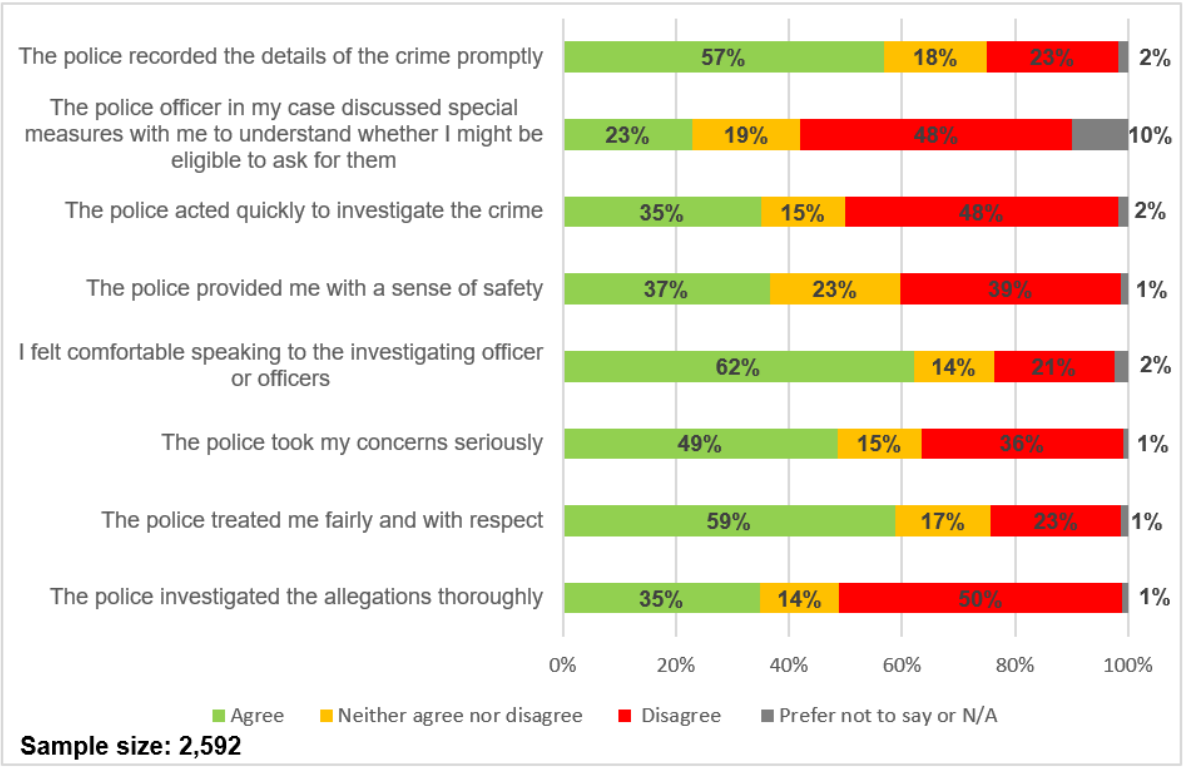
Following their reporting of a crime, interactions with the police often give victims their first impression of the criminal justice system. It was therefore positive to see that over half (59%) of respondents agreed the police treated them fairly and with respect and almost two thirds (62%) agreed that they felt comfortable speaking to the investigating officers (figure 9).

Interacting with the police at first contact

What victims told us about their first interactions with police

- Feeling believed, listened to and taken seriously was highly important.
- Victims valued officers who demonstrated compassion, empathy and professionalism.
- Positive early interactions helped victims feel safe, supported and confident in the criminal justice process.
- Some victims described a marked difference in the quality of support they received from individual officers.
- Negative experiences often involved feeling dismissed, disbelieved or treated as though they were wasting police time.
- Poor treatment at this stage could have a lasting impact on victims' willingness to engage with the criminal justice system in the future.

Figure 9. Respondent levels of agreement and disagreement with various statements about their experience with the police.



Many victims described positive experiences with police officers who treated them with respect and understanding. These victims often highlighted the importance of feeling heard and believed, particularly when reporting traumatic or highly personal experiences.

> *The police were incredibly compassionate to my situation, made sure I felt heard and believed, and discussed options with me on how to proceed. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)*

> *Everything that happened with the police was better than I could of hoped for. I felt heard and understood. They were very understanding and non-judgmental […] I felt very supported from the police. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *The ongoing support, compassion and understanding I received was amazing and made me feel safe throughout the process of gathering my statement. (Victim of assault, Female, 55-64)*

Several victims reflected that positive interactions with individual officers helped build trust and confidence, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed practice and victim-centred approaches.

> *Those interactions made a significant difference. They reinforced the importance of trauma-informed practice and the impact that individual*

officers can have on a victim's experience. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

However, not all victims had positive experiences. Victims who felt they were treated dismissively or with a lack of respect were significantly more likely to report reduced confidence in the police and the wider criminal justice system. Dissatisfaction was particularly high among victims of hate crime (32%) and stalking and harassment (39%).

I felt the attitude and level of respect I was given was so, so, bad I would not feel confident to do this again. (Victim of hate crime, Male, 35-44)

The police were terrible and made us feel like we were wasting their time and berated us. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)

One victim described how support appeared to diminish after evidential difficulties arose, leaving them feeling disbelieved at a particularly vulnerable point in the process.

I had a couple months of being used to them offering support, to suddenly acting like I was overreacting or lying. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

What this means for victims

First contact with the police can set the tone for a victim's entire justice journey. Victims consistently described feeling believed, respected and supported as fundamental to building confidence and trust in the criminal justice system. Where these elements were present, victims were more likely to feel safe and engaged with the process. Conversely, where victims felt dismissed, disbelieved or poorly treated, confidence in the system was undermined, with some stating that they would be reluctant to report future incidents. These findings reinforce the importance of trauma-informed, victim-centred policing from the earliest point of contact.

Having the crime investigated and safeguarding of the victim

What victims told us about police investigations

- Victims wanted their allegations to be investigated thoroughly and accurately.
- Being taken seriously was critical to confidence in the police.
- Poor record-keeping, lost information and repeated retelling of experiences undermined trust.
- Victims of domestic abuse, stalking and hate crime often felt police failed to recognise patterns of behaviour and escalating risk.
- Safeguarding failures could leave victims feeling less safe after reporting.
- Positive experiences were characterised by proactive safeguarding, referrals to support services and trauma-informed practice.

Thoroughness is fundamental to victims' confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice process. It was therefore concerning that half of respondents disagreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly (Figure 9). Dissatisfaction was particularly high amongst victims of stalking and harassment (56%). This was also strongly associated with future reporting behaviour, with 83% of victims who felt their allegations had not been investigated thoroughly saying they would not report a crime in future.[40]

What victims told us about the quality of investigations

- Information was recorded incorrectly.
- Victims had to repeatedly provide the same information.
- Investigative opportunities were missed or delayed.
- Information was shared inappropriately.
- Victims felt that details of their experiences were not fully understood.

Police falsely said they examined medical records, mistakenly copied me in on emails talking about me negatively and were rude when I challenged this. They also blind copied the ISVA with neither telling me. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, age not given)

The police were slow to respond and required constant contact from me. The response felt impersonal and gave me the impression they did not care, like I was wasting their time. They miscategorised my case on their system as not a crime and told me they would not do anything and then called me two months later to apologise and say it was a crime, but it was too long after to justify doing anything about the offence. (Victim of hate crime, Male, 16-24)

[40] This is compared to 34% disagreement from those who said they would report a crime again.

Spoke to many different people within the [police force]. We needed to repeat the same information. Lots of things were not recorded correctly. They were given all the information needed to prevent the crime from happening, yet no action was taken. I could have done a better job myself had I lived closer. Not sure what we pay for. This is the third time we have needed police help and have been let down on each occasion. (Victim of antisocial behaviour, Female, 35-44)

Being taken seriously

Just over a third (36%) of respondents disagreed that the police took their concerns seriously. This was higher for victims of domestic abuse (41%), hate crime (46%) and stalking and harassment (52%).

What victims told us about being taken seriously

- Reporting often required significant courage.
- Feeling disbelieved undermined confidence in police.
- Some victims felt officers minimised their experiences.
- Victims of stalking, harassment and domestic abuse felt patterns of behaviour were overlooked.
- Delayed recognition of risk left some victims feeling unprotected.

I am very put off by the fact I was not taken seriously even though it took a lot of courage to report. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

In my case, the police were very dismissive and ignorant. The officer on my case actually said to me that she did not believe what happened was true. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Male, 16-24)

Some of the officers I spoke to about the situation when reporting incidents did not take it seriously and I was given wrong advice. It was only since the latest officer has taken over the case (after 18 months!) that it was taken seriously as she witnessed the stalking first hand… (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

Victims of some of these offences highlighted that the lack of understanding and action taken by police to identify a pattern of behaviour led to unaddressed risk, as a result of escalating behaviour.

I have been a victim of stalking, harassment and domestic abuse for several years and, in my experience, police responses too often focus on isolated incidents rather than the wider pattern of behaviour. Repeated reports should be treated cumulatively, especially where there is an established history, previous court orders, escalating conduct and clear safeguarding concerns…Too often victims are left

waiting until matters become more serious…Police training should continue to improve so stalking is understood as a course of conduct driven by obsession, control and escalation, not a series of minor separate incidents. Victims need to feel believed, protected and acted upon before tragedy occurs. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

Male victims of these offences often felt that less effort was taken to look into the perpetrator's behaviour and take their report seriously due to their sex and the sex of the perpetrator. Some of these victims reported feeling unsupported, disregarded and discouraged from contacting the police again.

As a male victim of domestic abuse, I was not provided with any support services or contact from [the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub], was very disappointed and felt that I was being disregarded as a male. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 35-44)

I have been in contact with the police twice about domestic violence. Both times no one checked on me or put safety measures in place. Instead of making the situation better, it only made it worse as then my abuser knew she could get away with doing anything and I wouldn't be taken seriously. It's made it so I wouldn't call the police again and by not taking the matters seriously the police report did not have enough evidence to help in family court. Calling the police did me no benefit and made things worse than ever. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)

Overall, it was handled well but after too much time spent in custody due to conflicting statements from the other party, the assumption by the police that the male in this case was automatically the aggressor against a female caused the biggest issues. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Male, 35-44)

Safeguarding and victim safety

Over a third (39%) of respondents disagreed the police provided them with a sense of safety. This was particularly high for victims of domestic abuse (47%), rape and sexual assault (44%) and stalking and harassment (56%). It was also higher for female respondents (42%) compared to male respondents (32%).

What victims told us about safeguarding

- Information about the victim was shared with the perpetrator inappropriately.
- Victims were not informed about changes to bail conditions.
- Delays reduced access to protective measures.
- Some victims felt police action increased their level of risk.
- Safeguarding concerns were particularly prominent amongst victims of violence against women and girls.

> *The police contacted my husband whilst I was still living with him which put me at greater risk and was extremely stressful. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*
>
> *I was never kept updated about what was happening. I wasn't even informed when he was bailed on 3 separate occasions breaking all his bail conditions. I found out he was released when I saw him in the street on two occasions and on the third when he found out where I'd moved to and came to my address. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)*

Some of these safeguarding issues included failing to meet the timeline for the victim to have bail conditions or a protective order applied as well as incorrectly sharing the victim's personal details with the perpetrator, which put them at risk. This led to victims feeling that their safety was directly compromised by the police's failure to act appropriately.

> *Police failed […] to charge in statutory timelines even though CPS approved the charge. I was going to get a non-molestation order applied for as well, but all disappeared as police did not meet timeline. I chased for video interview for over 6 weeks. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*
>
> *The police did not keep me up to date on whether they had spoken to the perpetrator, they took months to take action by which time it was too late for me to seek support from charities with civil injunctions etc, and worst of all they gave the perpetrator my personal information, without my permission, on a bail notice. Up until that point I had managed to keep myself safe for 12 years. The police took that from me. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)*

Violence against women and girls

For violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences, reporting to the police can put victims in a more vulnerable and at-risk position, therefore safeguarding is crucial. Many victims of domestic abuse and stalking suggested that police staff need better training in these areas, to ensure they take offences seriously and act appropriately to protect victims.

What VAWG victims told us

- Police did not always recognise coercive control.
- Patterns of abuse were sometimes treated as isolated incidents.
- Victims wanted greater understanding of stalking and controlling behaviour.
- Some victims experienced victim-blaming.
- Trauma-informed approaches were inconsistent.

> *More training around domestic abuse and especially coercive control. I had my investigating police officer tell me my abuser 'seems lovely' which is exactly what they want people to think. Hearing that as a victim was devastating. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)*
>
> *After years of abuse via text and in person and numerous times reporting, it I was told that they couldn't do 'anything' because the perpetrator hadn't carried out a threat, yet has a criminal record for the threats he was making. I was told that I couldn't have an injunction because it was an infringement on his human rights and I had to basically shut up and put up with it. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)*
>
> *Police did not even look at the evidence I had, and victim shamed me and the whole experience was awful, and I will never go through the police again. It's left me with PTSD, and I get triggered just by seeing the police. I also think the police force needs more training on coercive and controlling behaviour and stalking. I feel like my case was not taken seriously by [police force] and it made me look at the police in a different way after the experience and how sloppy their investigation was. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

These findings are consistent with wider evidence from Operation Soteria[41] and other research, such as that conducted by the Independent Office for Police Conduct which highlighted the need for improved understanding of stalking, patterns of behaviour and centring of the victim.[42] Previous Victims' Commissioner research has also highlighted the importance of trauma-informed responses by the police.[43] It is clear that communication and safeguarding responses must be improved if the government is to achieve their commitment to halve VAWG and fulfil the wider 'Safer Streets' mission. Learnings can be taken from Scotland's National Trauma Transformation Programme,[44] which has taken a national approach to embedding trauma-informed practice. The programme has developed a framework for working with victims and witnesses affected by psychological trauma, informed by a Victims

[41] Operation Soteria Year One Report - GOV.UK
[42] Qualitative research into the perspectives of stalking victim support service providers on the police response to stalking | Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)
[43] Forgotten victims: Barriers to justice following a road traffic collision - Victims Commissioner
[44] National Trauma Transformation Programme (NTTP)

Taskforce which helps to ensure agencies engage with the framework and promotes compliance with trauma-informed practice.[45]

Victims' experiences of effective safeguarding

While many victims described safeguarding concerns, there were also examples where police proactively identified risks and took action to support victims. These victims often highlighted the value of referrals to specialist support services, advocacy and multi-agency approaches to managing risk.

> *The police referred me to protection against stalking and so I had a stalking advocate who raised issues directly with police regarding safeguarding and risk and was able to offer support to me and instigated MARAC and a multi-agency stalking meeting. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)*

> *[The] police were the ones who referred me to a specialist 'by and for' organisation which eventually accepted me into refuge. This was very important in feeling comfortable and guided throughout the process of the crime I experienced. The investigating officer was patient, explained my options and rights, and importantly, believed me. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)*

What this means for victims

Being taken seriously, feeling safe and having confidence that allegations are being properly investigated emerged as some of the strongest drivers of victim confidence in the criminal justice process. Victims frequently linked poor investigations, failures in safeguarding and a lack of understanding of coercive control, stalking and trauma to a loss of trust in the police. These experiences had a direct impact on future engagement: victims who felt unsafe, unsupported or that their concerns were not taken seriously were significantly less likely to say they would report a crime again. Conversely, where police identified risks early, communicated effectively and connected victims to specialist support, victims described feeling safer, better informed and more able to engage with the investigation.

Timeliness of police investigations

For almost half (48%) of respondents, they felt the police did not act quickly enough to investigate the crime. Dissatisfaction was particularly high amongst victims of stalking and harassment (58%), where risks are often ongoing and can escalate over time.

Looking only at victims who said they would not report a crime to the police again, 79% disagreed that the police acted quickly enough to investigate the crime, compared to 33% of victims who said they would report again. This suggests that

[45] Trauma Informed Justice Knowledge and Skills Framework

victims' experiences of timeliness play a significant role in future confidence and willingness to engage with the criminal justice system.

What victims told us about timeliness

- Investigations progressed too slowly.
- Victims frequently had to chase officers for updates or action.
- Delays increased anxiety and uncertainty.
- Victims worried that evidence was lost as time passed.
- Delays had implications for safeguarding and victim safety.
- Long investigations left victims feeling unable to move on and recover.

> *The main issue was the delay in the police coming to see me, […] I live alone and was scared and did not know what I was meant to be doing. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)*
>
> *The appointment [to record my statement] was 6 months following my original report to the police. I had to chase constantly to get my statement taken. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*
>
> *I reported my case in 2023….it is now 2026 and still has not been sent to the CPS. Time scales are shocking. I'm living in limbo. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

What this means for victims

Timeliness emerged as an important driver of victims' confidence in the criminal justice system. Delays affected more than the pace of investigations; victims described increased anxiety, concerns about safety, and difficulties moving forward with their lives. For some, lengthy delays also risked affecting the quality of evidence and their confidence that their case would be taken seriously. The strong relationship between dissatisfaction with timeliness and unwillingness to report future crimes suggests that delays may have wider implications for public confidence and victim engagement.

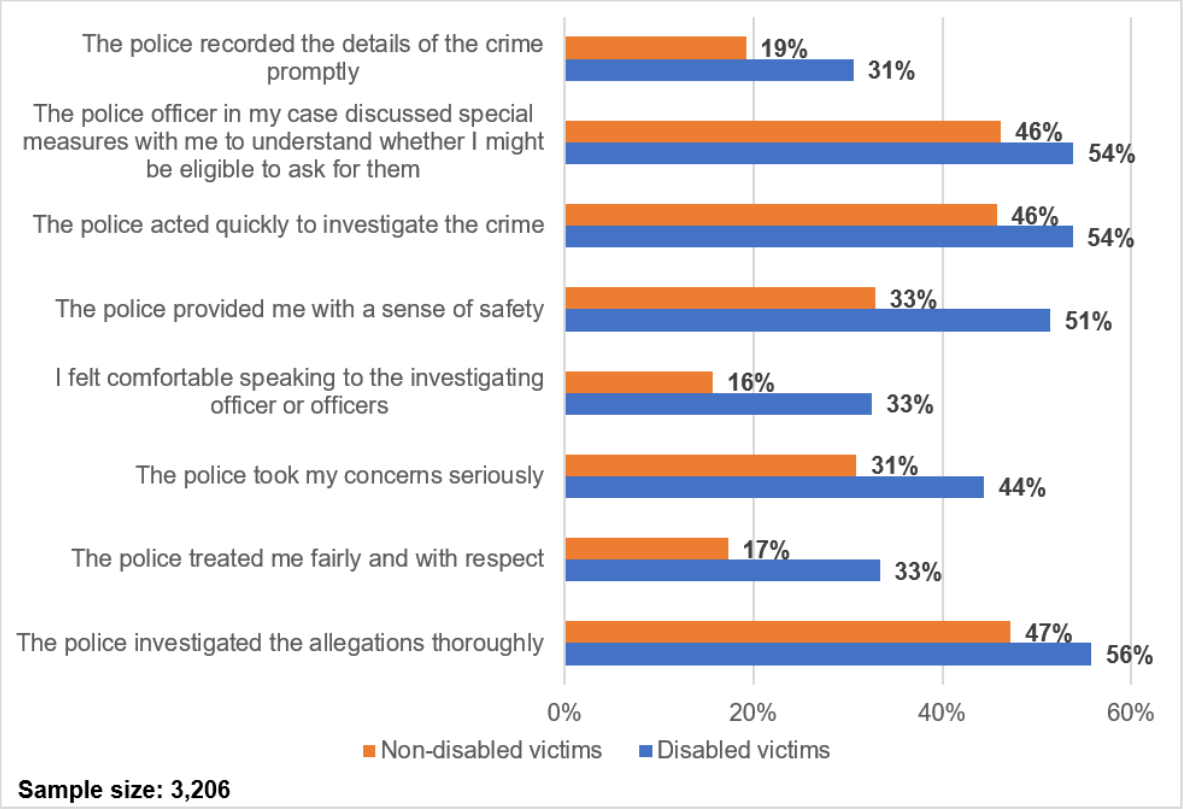
Disabled victims' experiences of the police

Disabled victims reported consistently poorer experiences of policing than non-disabled victims across a range of measures, including feeling safe, being taken seriously and being treated with fairness and respect.

What victims told us about their experiences of policing

- They often felt less safe than non-disabled victims.
- Their concerns were not always taken seriously.
- Communication and safeguarding arrangements were sometimes inadequate.
- Negative experiences affected confidence in the police and willingness to report future crime.
- Some felt they had to advocate for themselves to obtain information, protection or support.

Figure 10. Disabled and non-disabled respondents' levels of disagreement with various statements about their experience with the police.



A third (33%) of disabled victims disagreed the police treated them fairly and with respect[46] (figure 10) and similarly disagreed that they felt comfortable speaking to investigating officers.[47] Just over half (51%) disagreed that the police provided them with a sense of safety,[48] while almost half (44%) disagreed the police took their concerns seriously.[49] This replicates findings from the Victims' Commissioner's review into disabled victims' experiences of the criminal justice system which

[46] Compared to 17% of non-disabled respondents.
[47] Compared to 16% of non-disabled respondents.
[48] Compared to 33% of non-disabled respondents.
[49] Compared to 31% of non-disabled respondents.

highlighted instances of police dismissing and minimising crime against disabled people as well as identifying barriers to receiving support.[50]

> *Based on my experience, I have very little trust in the police to properly safeguard victims or keep them informed. In my case, I was not told when my ex-partner breached bail conditions or when he was released, despite him continuing to stalk me near my home. This left me in constant fear and feeling that I had to protect myself without support from the police. There was also a lack of clear communication, incorrect information at times, and no effective safeguarding put in place, even though I was clearly at risk. This had a serious impact on my sense of safety and mental health. Because of this, I do not feel confident that reporting a crime would lead to appropriate action or protection, and I am unsure whether I would report again in the future. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

What this means for victims

Disabled victims reported consistently poorer experiences across a range of policing measures, including feeling safe, being taken seriously and being treated fairly. These findings are consistent with previous Victims' Commissioner research and suggest that barriers faced by disabled victims remain a persistent issue. Given the higher rates of victimisation experienced by disabled people, these findings raise concerns that some victims, who may be particularly vulnerable, are not receiving the support, safeguarding and responsive service they need when engaging with the police.

Making a Victim Impact Statement

Under the Victims' Code, victims should be offered the opportunity to make a Victim Impact Statement, enabling them to explain in their own words how the crime has affected them. In the first instance, victims should be provided with information about the Victim Impact Statement process by the police when reporting a crime.[51] The Victim Impact Statement is considered by the judge or magistrate when determining what sentence the defendant should receive and can also help service providers to consider what additional support the victim and/or their family may require.

Almost two thirds (60%) of respondents said they had been offered the chance to make a Victim Impact Statement (figure 11).[52] This increased to 66% where there had been a court hearing. This is an important right under the Victims' Code, as it is

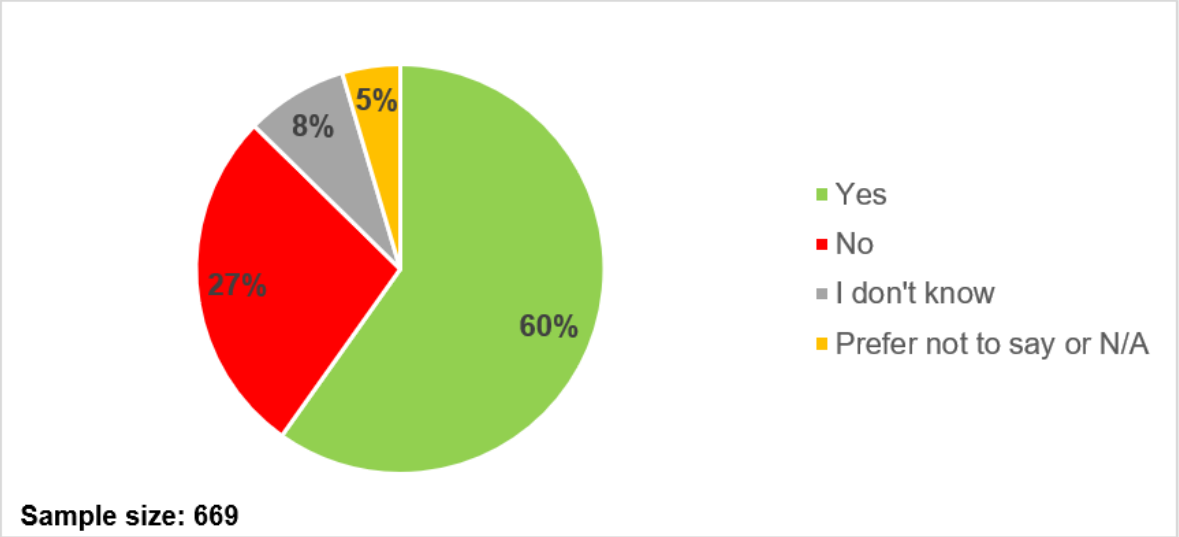
[50] Disabled victims' experiences of criminal justice systems: A systematic literature review - Victims Commissioner

[51] If a victim decides to make a Victim Impact Statement, they will be asked for their preference about whether they would like to read their statement aloud in court or have it read on their behalf. They can also request a copy from the police and should be given an opportunity to make an additional impact statement to reflect the changing impact of the crime.

[52] This compares to 30% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

one of the few opportunities victims have to ensure the impact of the crime on their lives is formally considered as part of the criminal justice process.

Figure 11. Proportion of respondents who recalled being offered the chance to make a Victim Impact Statement.



What victims told us about Victim Impact Statements

- Victims valued having an opportunity to explain the impact the crime had on their lives.
- Being able to provide a statement helped some victims feel their voice could be heard within the criminal justice process.
- Some victims reported having to chase opportunities to make a statement.
- Victims were frustrated where statements were not taken, not shared or were perceived not to have been considered.
- Not being offered the opportunity to make a statement left some victims feeling overlooked and unheard.

Where victims were not given the opportunity to make a Victim Impact Statement, they described feeling that their experiences and the impact of the crime had not been fully recognised and were left feeling unheard by the criminal justice system.

> *I wanted a victim impact statement read out to my abuser, but this was never taken and not therefore read out. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

> *The police did not seem interested in taking a Victim Impact Statement - I had to press for it - and then once I did, seemingly did not pass it to the CPS! If I hadn't of attended court myself, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to present this. (Victim of stalking and harassment, personal details not shared)*

What this means for victims

Victim Impact Statements provide an important opportunity for victims to describe the personal consequences of crime and have their experiences recognised within the justice process. While most respondents recalled being offered the opportunity to make a statement, a substantial minority did not. Victims who were not offered this opportunity, or who felt their statement was not properly considered, often described feeling unheard and marginalised. The findings suggest that greater consistency is needed to ensure all victims are informed about their right to make a Victim Impact Statement and supported to do so if they wish.

Restorative Justice

Under the Victims' Code[53], victims are entitled to receive information about Restorative Justice and how to access it. Restorative Justice enables victims who wish to do so, to communicate with the person responsible for the crime in a safe and controlled environment, with support from trained practitioners. 76% said they did **not** receive information from the police about access to Restorative Justice services and support. This went down to 62% when only looking at those where there was a court hearing.

> *The thief subsequently confessed to our burglary along with many others when he was arrested for another crime in order to get mitigation for those previous burglaries. We were not given the chance to make any form of statement in court or any form of restorative justice. (Victim of burglary, Male, 55-64)*

> *Probably [would have liked to be offered] restorative justice, the chance to talk to the other person. (Victim of theft, Female, 35-44)*

> *I think more restorative practices like mediation and restorative justice should be focussed on more and pushed for cases relating to Hate, to create empathy and understanding rather than always pushing to criminalise people which does not always create a change in someone's belief. The info regarding Restorative Justice could be supplied at multiple points throughout the process and by multiple agencies but definitely the police. (Victim of hate crime, Male, 25-34)*

One victim described how being offered information about Restorative Justice shortly after reporting a rape felt inappropriate and distressing:

> *As a victim of rape I was disgusted and badly triggered by being offered restorative justice […] it [was] not a good time to talk about restorative justice, when I was at the early stage of the investigation - this would have been much better after I had time to process what had happened. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

[53] The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales and supporting public information materials - GOV.UK

What victims told us about Restorative Justice

- Many victims were not given information about Restorative Justice.
- Victims wanted information provided in a way that allowed them to make an informed choice.
- Timing was important, with some victims feeling that discussions took place too early in their recovery.
- Victims' views on Restorative Justice varied depending on the nature of the offence and their personal circumstances.
- Victims emphasised the importance of having control over whether, when and how Restorative Justice was discussed.

What this means for victims

The findings suggest that many victims are not receiving information about Restorative Justice, despite this being a right under the Victims' Code. However, the victim testimony also highlights the importance of timing and victim choice. Providing information about Restorative Justice is important, but victims may not be ready to consider it immediately after reporting a crime, particularly where they have experienced significant trauma. The findings suggest that information about Restorative Justice should be offered in a victim-centred way, allowing victims to make informed decisions at a time that feels appropriate for them.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Under the Victims' Code, victims who have suffered a serious physical or mental injury as a direct result of a violent crime[54] have the right to be told by the police how to apply for compensation through this scheme. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) is responsible for administering the Scheme. The standard time limit for applying for CICA is two years from the date of the incident.[55]

Only 7% of respondents said they had been given information on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme by the police and only 5% reported making an application.[56] Awareness and take-up increased amongst victims who had heard of the Victims' Code and amongst those whose cases progressed further through the criminal justice system.

When factoring in those victims who had heard of the Victims' Code, this increased to 11%, and it also increased as victims progressed through the justice system, with

[54] Criminal injuries compensation: a guide - GOV.UK
[55] Applications must be made 'as soon as reasonably practicable'. Extensions are possible in cases including psychological trauma, historical child abuse, delayed police reporting, or other exceptional circumstances.
[56] This includes victims who may not be eligible for this type of compensation.

20% of respondents applying where there had been a suspect charged and 22% of respondents applying where there had been a court hearing.

What victims told us about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

- Many were not informed about the Scheme or learned about it too late.
- Lack of information from police created barriers to applying.
- Delays obtaining information or evidence affected applications.
- Long waiting times and limited updates left victims feeling unable to move on.
- The application process could be emotionally difficult and retraumatising.
- Some victims felt compensation could never properly reflect the impact of the crime.
- Positive experiences were often associated with clear information and support from police or other professionals.

Victims frequently described difficulties accessing the Scheme because they were unaware of it or did not receive information in sufficient time to apply.

> *I did not know about this until the end of the investigation which had taken 2 years. So, it was outside the time frame because the police did not give me this information. (Victim of assault, Female, 45-54)*

> *The police have yet to supply the info needed by CICS for it to be assessed so this has also been delayed. (Bereaved family member, Male, 65-74)*

Several victims also described lengthy waits and limited communication after submitting claims.

> *It's draining. You have no updates and I've been waiting over 3 years for my claim. […] I haven't been able to move on from my crime as it's still lingering with the CICA not finishing my claim. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*

> *Absolutely horrendous. I applied in 2022 and still have not had any outcome. Cannot get a hold of anyone to enquire. (Victim of anti-social behaviour, Male, 16-24)*

Some victims also found the process emotionally challenging, particularly in terms of having to assign a monetary value to their experience.

> *Confusing and was very emotional to fill out the form and put my experiences to a pound sign, I would have preferred justice over money. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

However, not all experiences were negative. Where victims received support and clear information, they often described the process as straightforward.

It was a good experience. The police were very helpful in helping me with this. (Bereaved family member, Female, 35-44)

My experience with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme was generally straightforward, and the process was clear. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

What this means for victims

The findings suggest that awareness of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme remains low and that many victims are not receiving information about it from the police, despite this being a right under the Victims' Code. For some victims, a lack of information meant they missed opportunities to apply altogether. Those who did apply often described lengthy delays, poor communication and uncertainty about the progress of their claim, which could hinder recovery and prolong the impact of the crime. Conversely, where victims received timely information and support, experiences were generally more positive. The findings reinforce the importance of ensuring eligible victims are informed about the Scheme early in their journey and supported throughout the application process.

Communication and case progression

Following the initial reporting of a crime, victims should be provided with a single point of contact within the police and receive regular updates about the progress of their case.

Receiving a police contact

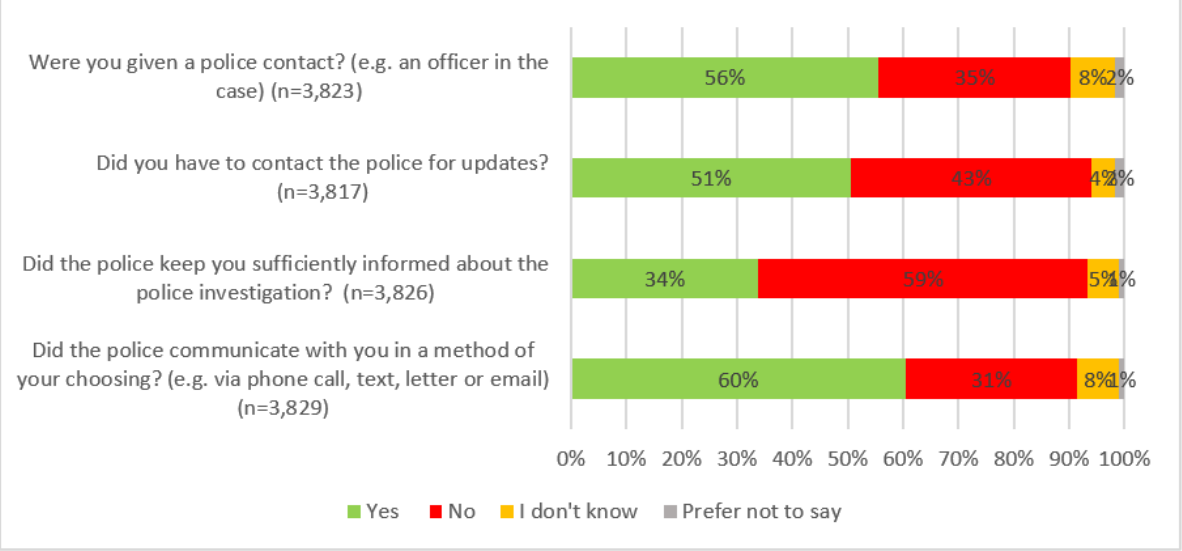
Just over half (56%) of respondents said they were given a police contact, such as the officer responsible for their case (figure 12).

Around half of victims (51%) said they had to contact the police themselves for updates rather than being proactively informed about developments in their case. This was particularly high amongst bereaved families (66%), victims of domestic abuse (64%) and victims of rape and sexual assault (61%).

What victims told us about receiving updates

- They frequently had to chase the police for information about their case.
- Communication often reduced as investigations progressed.
- Victims valued having a named contact and regular updates.
- Delays in providing information increased anxiety and uncertainty.
- Positive communication helped victims feel listened to and taken seriously.
- Victims wanted communication that was proactive rather than reactive.

Figure 12. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about the police.[57]



Many victims described having to take responsibility for obtaining information about the progress of their own case.

> *I was given a contact name, but I never received any proactive updates about the investigation and had to chase them down myself just to find out what was happening with the case'. (Victim of street violence, Male, 25-34)*

> *Getting updates is unnecessarily hard […] I am made to feel like I am just a case number, not a person. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)*

However, where communication was timely and consistent, victims often described feeling reassured, listened to and supported.

> *The two officers were reassuring, and they both kept me updated, which helped me take some of the stress out of having my home broken into. (Victim of theft, Female, 75+)*

> *[Police officer] made me feel heard and understood […] Both of them were reassuring and acted swiftly'. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 16-24)*

One victim highlighted the importance of having a specialist-trained officer who was able to communicate in a way that recognised their needs and vulnerabilities.

> *My specialist trained officer was patient and understanding. At the time she first made contact I did not realise what had happened or processed the extent of the 12 years of abuse fully. She went out of her*

[57] Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

way to meet me in a place I felt safe and liaised with a person who made me feel safe. She made sure I knew after my ABE [Achieving Best Evidence interview] that if I had anything to add as memory gaps filled that I was able to reach out to her. When the case was reviewed and allocated to a [Detective Constable], I found the first contact with the OIC was traumatic and upsetting. It was done via phone call despite me saying how I struggle to speak over the phone and I felt like I was being interrogated like I was the one in trouble. Having a voice but not a face to put to that voice has really stuck with me to the point that even a year into the investigation, I still get anxious to reach out to ask a question or report a breach of bail. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

Communication during the investigation

Almost half (46%) of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the communication they received from the police (figure 13). This is not a new finding. Previous surveys undertaken by the Victims' Commissioner have consistently highlighted communication as one of the most significant issues affecting victims' experiences of the criminal justice system.[58]

Communication also appeared to be strongly linked to future reporting behaviour. Among respondents who were dissatisfied with police communication, 85% said they would not report a crime to the police again.[59]

What victims told us about communication during investigations

- Processes, terminology and next steps were not always clearly explained.
- Victims wanted more regular and meaningful updates.
- Generic updates were often viewed as insufficient.
- Poor communication increased anxiety and reduced confidence in the investigation.
- Victims wanted communication that demonstrated empathy and understanding.
- Lack of information left victims feeling forgotten or unsafe.

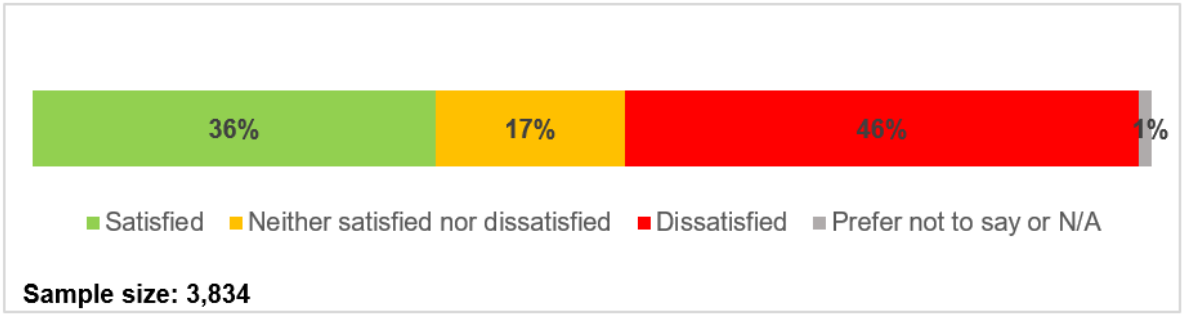
Remembering that it is usually the first time someone has ever been through this would help. Ensuring things are explained in dummy terms, words and processes were just thrown around as if I'd know what any of it meant. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)

They don't realise how valuable a 5 min phone call would be to update, even if there isn't a lot to say, it would reassure me that they care and are trying. When I don't hear anything, or very little, it is easy to think

[58] Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner
[59] Compared to 27% who said they would report a crime to the police again.

they aren't doing anything and I'm being left at risk. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Figure 13. Respondent satisfaction levels with the communication they received from the police.



Victims of stalking and harassment

Dissatisfaction with communication was particularly high amongst victims of stalking and harassment (58%). Over two thirds said the police had not kept them sufficiently informed (67%), while 68% said they had to contact the police themselves for updates.

What victims of stalking and harassment told us

- The investigation process was not clearly explained.
- They were often expected to understand procedures and legal processes without support.
- Poor communication increased feelings of vulnerability.
- Lack of updates reduced confidence that risks were being actively managed.
- Victims wanted clearer explanations about what was happening and why.

Victims of stalking and harassment consistently reported poorer communication experiences than victims overall. While 31% of all victims said the police had not communicated with them in a method of their choosing, this rose to 40% amongst victims of stalking and harassment.

Victims frequently described feeling that processes, procedures and investigative decisions were not adequately explained, leaving them uncertain about what was happening with their case and whether risks were being actively managed.

Police made an arrest and collected an admission […] At no point was the process of investigation, the terminology of crimes, criteria, the legal processes explained to me - unless I asked. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)

This is particularly concerning given the ongoing and often escalating nature of stalking behaviour. It also reflects findings from the recent super-complaint

investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the College of Policing into police responses to stalking[60], which identified communication and victim engagement as key areas requiring improvement.

Communication with disabled victims

Rates of dissatisfaction with communication were also significantly higher amongst disabled victims (57%).[61]

They reported not being kept up-to-date as a matter of course, having to chase the police for updates, and even then, not always receiving them.

What disabled victims told us about police communication

- They frequently had to chase for updates.
- Communication was not always delivered in a way that met their needs.
- Police did not always understand the impact of disability or neurodivergence.
- Communication and support needs were not consistently recognised.
- Victims wanted better awareness and understanding of autism and other disabilities.

I feel like the communication between the victims and police should be more consistent as it wasn't and I had to chase them for updates. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

I wasn't kept informed at all. Police did not consider multiple reports I made of stalking and harassment together and closed the cases around these rather than looking at them as a pattern. I had one male police officer who seemed bemused and laughed at me when I was reporting intimidation and harassment. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

I think that the police should have better awareness and understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and how an autistic person's condition can affect the way they interact with public services such as the police. (Victim of hate crime, Male, 35-44)

My husband and I are both victims, but police only talk/email my husband. I am disabled but not incapable. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 55-64)

The most critical area requiring immediate improvement is the catastrophic lack of neurodivergent-specific, trauma-informed training

[60] The police response to stalking - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

[61] Compared to 41% of non-disabled respondents.

among investigating officers and support services. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

This echoes findings in previous iterations of the victims' survey,[62] which highlighted concerns among disabled victims about communication and their experiences of policing more generally, including feeling less fairly treated and identifying a need for greater awareness and training amongst police officers.

They are also reflected in the higher proportion of disabled victims who said the police did not communicate with them in a method of their choosing (37%, compared with 28% of non-disabled victims). This is consistent with findings from the Victims' Commissioner's review of disabled victims' experiences of the criminal justice system, which identified barriers relating to accessible communication and information-sharing within policing.[63]

What this means for victims

Communication emerged as one of the strongest influences on victims' confidence in the criminal justice process. Victims frequently described having to chase updates, navigate unfamiliar processes without explanation and manage uncertainty about the progress of their case. These issues appeared particularly acute for victims of stalking and harassment and for disabled victims. Conversely, where communication was proactive, personalised and trauma-informed, victims described feeling supported, reassured and more able to engage with the investigation. The strong relationship between dissatisfaction with communication and unwillingness to report future crimes suggests that improvements in communication could have a significant impact on victim confidence, trust and ongoing engagement with the criminal justice system.

Bail and protective orders

While the police investigation is taking place, the offender may be placed on conditional bail.[64] Bail conditions are imposed in order to address risks linked to victim or community safety, which would not be addressed by granting unconditional bail.[65]

Under the Victims' Code, the victim should be consulted on the original bail conditions, and on any occasion when these bail conditions are amended or changed.

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[62] Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner

[63] Disabled victims' experiences of criminal justice systems: A systematic literature review - Victims Commissioner

[64] Conditional bail is a legal term which refers to circumstances where the defendant remains out of custody while their case is pending, provided they follow specific conditions set by the police or court. Examples of conditions include prohibiting communication with alleged victims, travel restrictions and electronic monitoring. If the defendant breaches the conditions, they can be arrested and taken back to court where the court may consider remanding them in custody.

[65] Bail | The Crown Prosecution Service

What victims told us about bail conditions

- Bail conditions were not always discussed with them.
- Victims were not consistently informed when bail conditions changed.
- Some victims were unaware when perpetrators had breached bail conditions.
- Delays and poor communication left victims feeling unsafe.
- Victims expected breaches of bail conditions to be acted upon.
- Bail conditions were seen as an important safeguard during the investigation.

In our survey, 16% of respondents said the offender had been placed on conditional bail. However, less than two thirds (61%) of these respondents said the original bail conditions were discussed with them.

Where the bail conditions had been varied during the criminal justice process, even fewer (57%) had the new bail conditions discussed with them. This is a concern because bail conditions offer a key safeguarding measure for victims, protecting them from repercussions and ongoing offending from the perpetrator.

Victims also described concerns about the response to breaches of bail conditions, reporting that failures to take action left them vulnerable to continued harassment and abuse.

> *Police should take threats to safety seriously. Breaches of police bail should have consequences as this determines the suspects continued behaviour against the victim throughout the case. No action by police results in ongoing harassment by the suspect. The police should not ask victims to take out non-molestation orders,[66] the family court is weaponised by abusers and gives them access to their victim and continues the abuse. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *I was never kept updated about what was happening. I wasn't even informed when he was bailed on 3 separate occasions breaking all his bail conditions. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)*

It is important to note that a breach of bail conditions is not an offence. Whilst the police can arrest someone they suspect of breaching bail conditions, the only action they can take at the pre-charge stage is to either charge them with the criminal offence under investigation when they were bailed, or release them back on bail with either the same, or amended conditions.[67] However, the police should take action to provide safety and reassurance to victims who may be at risk as a result of the

[66] A non-molestation order is a court injunction designed to protect an individual and their children from harassment, intimidation, or violence by a partner, ex-partner, or family member.
[67] At the post-charge stage, the police can arrest someone they suspect of breaching bail conditions and remand them in custody to attend at the nearest Magistrates Court, usually within 24 hours. The court will then consider the breach of bail and can either remand them in custody or release then back on conditional bail.

breach. Previous work by the Centre for Women's Justice has identified that police often fail to act on breaches of bail conditions.[68]

Similar to bail conditions, protective orders[69] can offer victims safety during the criminal justice process and victims should be consulted on the terms of these orders. 8% of respondents in our survey said they had been offered a protective order during the criminal justice process. Of these, around three quarters (74%) had been consulted on the terms of the protective order. For just over a fifth of these victims (22%), the protective order was changed, and just under a fifth (19%) said they had not been consulted on these changes.

What victims told us about protective orders

- Protective orders were an important source of reassurance and safety.
- Victims wanted greater involvement in decisions about protective orders.
- Inconsistent use of protective orders left some victims feeling exposed to risk.
- Victims of stalking and domestic abuse were particularly concerned about delays in protective measures.
- Some victims felt abusive patterns of behaviour were not recognised early enough to trigger protective action.

Some victims described positive experiences where protection orders and safeguarding measures were used proactively. Others expressed concern that opportunities to use these protections were missed.

> *Protective tools such as Stalking Protection Orders, arrests for breaches, device seizure, and early safeguarding measures should be used more proactively where there is ongoing risk. Too often victims are left waiting until matters become more serious. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)*

> *It also felt contradictory that whenever I was asking for some kind of restraining order it was denied, and when I asked not to impose one it was! (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

Unconditional bail and victim safety

Victims whose perpetrators were released without conditions frequently described feeling vulnerable to further harm, given that the perpetrator knew where they lived and had no bail conditions preventing them from going to that address.

> *Police left me sat like a sitting duck after he was bailed, when he knew where I lived and had access to firearms. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

[68] Super-complaint_report.FINAL.PDF

[69] Protective orders are legal measures designed to safeguard individuals from harm, abuse or harassment, by restricting the actions of another person.

After 23 hours in custody, they decided not to seize his device, as a result there was no bail conditions, and the offender was able to return to my property following his release. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

What this means for victims

Bail conditions and protective orders are among the most important safeguarding tools available during the investigation stage. However, the findings suggest that victims are not always being consulted about bail conditions, informed when they change, or kept updated when breaches occur. Many victims viewed these measures not simply as procedural decisions, but as essential protections that affected their day-to-day sense of safety. Where bail conditions and protective orders were used effectively, victims reported feeling safer and more supported. Conversely, poor communication, failures to enforce bail conditions, and delays in protective measures undermined confidence in the criminal justice process and heightened fears about ongoing risk from perpetrators.

Victim attrition at the police stage

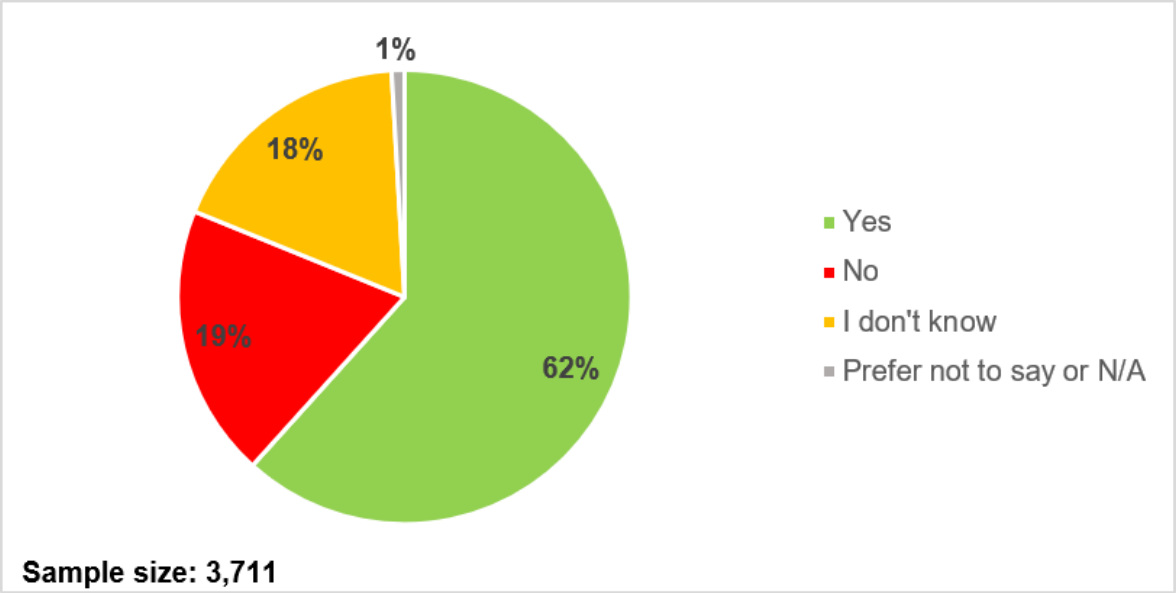
Although some victims initially choose to engage with the police by reporting a crime, some subsequently withdraw from the investigation or decide they will not engage with the police again in future. This is an issue of significant concern, as a functioning criminal justice system needs victims to remain engaged and to engage with the system in the future, for it to successfully deliver justice.[70]

When asked what the outcome of reporting the incident to the police was, 4% of victims said they withdrew from the investigation. Recent police outcome data highlights the continuing challenge of victim attrition across the criminal justice system, with the latest figures showing that 25% of all recorded offences resulted in a police outcome of the victim not supporting further action. This was as high as 51% for victims of rape offences.[71] The discrepancy between these figures may be explained by a disconnect between, what the police are recording as victims withdrawing their support, and what victims consider as them actively withdrawing from the police investigation.[72] Lack of co-operation from victims may be recorded as the victim 'not supporting action', however this perceived lack of co-operation could be down to unmet needs, access or communication issues. The London Attrition Review found that inconsistencies in the application of police outcome codes relating to victim attrition, alongside a lack of systematic recording of victims' reasons for withdrawal, made it difficult to accurately identify and understand the causes of attrition.[73] Similarly, the Year One report from Operation Soteria Bluestone found

[70] Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner
[71] Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables - GOV.UK
[72] It is also important to note that as part of the survey sampling process was self-selecting, those completing the survey might have been more willing and able to stay in the process beyond the police stage.
[73] Understanding Victim Withdrawal in London | London City Hall

incorrectly applied police outcome codes in a significant proportion of cases. [74] The Centre for Justice Innovation suggests that poorly managed data is often a key driver of attrition. This is of concern because, without clear or reliable data on the reasons for victim attrition, it is difficult to identify those individuals and groups who experience barriers to access, withdraw from the process, and do not access help or support.[75] The gaps in victim data more broadly across their journey through the system also mean that practitioners and policymakers do not have the ability to understand when and why victims withdraw from the justice process.[76]Additionally, victim attrition extends beyond those who formally withdraw from a case. Victims whose experiences with the police lead them to decide they would not report a crime again in future are also effectively lost to the justice system.

Figure 14. Proportion of respondents who would or would not report a crime to the police again.



Around a fifth (19%) of respondents said they would not report a crime to the police again (Figure 14).[77] This was particularly high for victims of stalking and harassment (33%), rape and sexual assault (32%), hate crime (29%) and domestic abuse (28%).

[74] Operation Soteria Year One Report - GOV.UK
[75] Adult victim-survivor's journey through a sexual violence support service in Essex - GOV.UK
[76] Fixing data gaps for victims of crime: a briefing | Centre for Justice Innovation
[77] This compares to 13% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

What victims told us about withdrawing from the justice process

- They feared repercussions from the perpetrator.
- The emotional cost of the process outweighed the perceived benefits.
- Long investigations and delays made it difficult to remain engaged.
- Poor communication reduced confidence in the system.
- They did not believe reporting would result in a meaningful outcome.
- Some felt discouraged from continuing by criminal justice professionals.
- Concerns about the perpetrator, particularly where they were a family member, influenced decisions to disengage.
- Some were uncertain whether future crimes would be worth reporting at all.

Fear of repercussions

Some victims described reporting a crime as increasing their vulnerability and placing them at greater risk.

> *[Reporting to the police] causes more danger and damage than keeping quiet. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *I was scared of the outcome and process putting me at risk from someone who wanted to protect their reputation. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

Emotional toll and delays

Many victims described the investigation process as emotionally exhausting, particularly where cases were subject to lengthy delays.

> *The lack of communication, length of time and changing deadlines and a decline in my mental health due to the process meant I was no longer able to continue - the cost was almost my life. (victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

> *I did not want to drag things on or have anything to do with the offender. I just wanted to move on with my life. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

For some victims, the process itself became another source of trauma, and one they would not want to experience again. Experiencing trauma from a source that is meant to support and protect you is a deeply harmful experience that is likely to significantly impact on a victim's recovery pathway.

> *The whole process of being ignored and then left to suffer in silence became worse to my mental health than the sexual assaults themselves. (Victim of assault, Female, 45-54)*

It was truly horrific and frankly deepens my trauma. […] I would not tell the police again because I do not think I would survive the ordeal. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Poor communication and lack of trust

Victims frequently linked their decision to withdraw, or not report again in future, to poor communication and a loss of confidence in the police.

In the end I withdrew support for my case due to a lack of communication. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

I will never trust the police again. I wish I had never reported it. […] The experience has left me feeling more ashamed, embarrassed and

humiliated than needed'. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 16-24)

Feeling discouraged from continuing

Some victims felt that they had been discouraged by the police from pursuing their case, either because of anticipated delays, concerns about court proceedings or perceptions that they would not be believed.

I was discouraged repeatedly […] told the case wouldn't come to court for about 4 years and it would just be hanging over me all that time. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

I felt poorly treated and that I wasn't believed. […] I felt pressured to not pursue. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

Concern for the perpetrator

For some victims, particularly where the perpetrator was a family member, personal relationships influenced decisions about continuing with the case.

I felt guilty as it was a family member who committed the crime and the police made me feel uncomfortable. (Victim of criminal damage, Female, 45-54)

Sensitive family situation - the perpetrator was a family member and a minor. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

What this means for victims

Victims rarely withdrew from the criminal justice process for a single reason. Instead, decisions to disengage were often shaped by a combination of safety concerns, emotional strain, poor communication, delays, being discouraged from continuing, and a lack of confidence that reporting would lead to a meaningful outcome. The findings suggest that victim attrition is not simply a challenge for individual cases; it

also has wider implications for public confidence in the criminal justice system. Where victims conclude that reporting a crime is not worth the emotional, practical or personal cost, future crimes may go unreported and opportunities to bring offenders to justice are lost. Improving communication, reducing delays, addressing safety concerns and ensuring victims feel believed and supported are therefore critical not only for retaining victims within the justice process, but also for maintaining confidence in the justice system itself.

Future reporting decisions

Some victims were uncertain whether they would report a crime again in the future. Their decision often depended on the nature of the offence, their assessment of whether it would be taken seriously by the police, and whether they believed reporting would lead to a meaningful outcome.

What victims told us about future reporting

- Some crimes were perceived as more likely than others to receive a police response.
- Victims weighed the potential benefits of reporting against the emotional cost of engaging with the process.
- Previous experiences influenced expectations about how seriously future reports would be taken.
- Some victims questioned whether reporting less serious offences was worthwhile.
- Confidence in future reporting was closely linked to confidence in the criminal justice system.

> *I think it completely depends on the situation, if it was a "lesser crime", I'd be less likely to report, as I know people are easily brushed off. (Victim of online harm, Female, 25-34)*

> *It would depend on what the crime was, because based on my experience, it's clear that certain crimes are ignores and not deemed proportionate enough to investigate. (Victim of street violence, Male, 55-64)*

> *I would consider how likely they would resolve the issue if it would be important to them, if not, it's not worth the stress. (Victim of burglary, Female, 55-64)*

The findings suggest that victim attrition extends beyond those who formally withdraw from cases. Many victims described reassessing whether future crimes would be worth reporting at all. Where victims lose confidence that they will be taken seriously, kept safe or receive a meaningful response, there is a risk not only that current cases are lost, but that future victimisation goes unreported.

Helping victims to stay in the process

What victims told us would have helped them stay engaged

- More regular and meaningful communication from the police.
- Better information-sharing between agencies and police forces.
- Being listened to and taken seriously.
- Having continuity of contact with the same officer where possible.
- More time to understand their options and make informed decisions.
- Greater emotional and practical support throughout the process.
- Reassurance that reporting would lead to a meaningful outcome.
- Access to specialist advocacy and victim support services.

When reflecting on what might have prevented their withdrawal, victims commonly highlighted the importance of regular communication, continuity of contact and feeling listened to and taken seriously throughout the investigation.

> *If the police had responded as promised, communicated better, done their job properly, and if the justice system was not so close to melt down. (Victim of assault, Male, 75+)*

> *Have the forces communicate with each other - we constantly had to re-tell our story and it seemed like they did not read or couldn't find our previous incident notes. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)*

> *Allowed me space and time and to come back to the same officer, being encourage and supported. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)*

> *[T]he police could have made me feel like they were taking seriously. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)*

Victims also highlighted the importance of practical and emotional support, particularly where decisions about continuing with a case were complex or emotionally difficult. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has similarly found that specialist advocacy services can play a significant role in helping victims remain engaged with the criminal justice process.[78]

> *Some assurance that I'd be supported through the process and that the outcome could justify the process. I was left feeling no choice but to withdraw. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*

> *I wish I had more support. More time to discuss my options. Someone to help me through what those decisions would mean and what would be best for me. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

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

What this means for victims

Victims rarely identified a single factor that would have prevented them from withdrawing. Instead, they described a combination of communication, support and treatment throughout the process. The findings suggest that relatively simple improvements, such as proactive communication, continuity of contact, clearer information about options and access to specialist support, could help more victims remain engaged with investigations. This reinforces a wider theme throughout the report: victims are more likely to stay engaged when they feel informed, supported, believed and confident that their participation will lead to a meaningful outcome.

3. Waiting for a charging decision

Of the 4,861 victims for whom a report was made to the police, 16% saw the perpetrator charged.[79] Victims told us about their experiences of waiting for a charging decision, and case progression following a charge with the Witness Care Unit (WCU) or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Key Findings

- Of victims who reported a crime to the police, 16% said the perpetrator was charged.
- Long waits for charging decisions had a significant impact on victims. Delays, combined with limited communication and poor expectation management, often increased anxiety and prolonged victims' trauma.
- Communication between the police, CPS and Witness Care Units was frequently described as confusing and fragmented, leaving victims uncertain about the progress of their case.
- Around a fifth (22%) of victims said the charge brought against the offender was not in line with their expectations. Victims commonly felt the seriousness, context or cumulative nature of the offending had not been fully reflected in the charges pursued.
- A third (33%) of victims said the reasons behind charging decisions were not adequately explained. Where clear explanations were provided, victims were more likely to understand and accept decisions even when they were disappointed by the outcome.
- Awareness of the Victims' Right to Review (VRR) remained low. Only around a fifth of victims whose case did not result in a charge were aware of the scheme, raising concerns that some victims may miss opportunities to challenge prosecutorial decisions.
- Post-charge communication was a recurring concern. Only 42% of victims reported being allocated a Witness Care Officer and almost a fifth (18%) disagreed that it was easy to contact them or that they were kept sufficiently informed about the progress of their case.
- Where communication from Witness Care Units was timely, clear and compassionate, victims reported feeling more reassured and better able to navigate an often complex and unfamiliar process.
- Victims described safeguarding concerns arising from delays in communication following court hearings and key case developments, particularly where they were not promptly informed about outcomes that affected their safety.

[79] These figures will not include those still progressing through the system or those selecting ‘prefer not to say’ or ‘I don’t know’.

Awaiting a charging decision

For offences which have a maximum sentence of six months (or less) in prison, the police will decide if there is enough evidence to charge a suspect. At this point, the police may decide to deal with the offence with an out of court disposal.[80]

Under the Victims' Code, victims have the right to have their views taken into account when a decision on an out of court disposal is made. Of those respondents to our survey that said there was an out of court disposal, 72% said they were consulted by the police about the disposal before it was imposed and just under a fifth (18%) said they were not.

Additionally, for these types of offences, if the police decide a prosecution is needed then they will charge the suspect and send the case to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). These offences must be charged within six months of the date of the offence.

For offences which carry a sentence of more than six months in prison, the police will send the case to the CPS, and a prosecutor will then decide whether a suspect can be charged and prosecuted. If the police do not think they have enough evidence, they will not pass the case to the CPS, and the suspect will not be charged.

Awaiting a charging decision can take some time, particularly in complex cases. Additionally, in complex cases including rape offences, the CPS may offer the police 'early advice'.

For many victims, the charging decision represents a key milestone in the justice process. Delays and uncertainty at this stage can have significant implications for victims' wellbeing, confidence and ability to move forward following a crime.

What victims told us about waiting for a charging decision

- Charging decisions often took longer than victims expected.
- Delays increased anxiety and prolonged uncertainty.
- Victims sometimes felt their case was not being treated as a priority.
- Ongoing delays could leave victims exposed to continuing risk from perpetrators.
- Poor communication compounded the impact of lengthy waits.
- Victims wanted clearer explanations about why decisions were taking time and what was happening next.
- Being passed between different people and repeatedly having to explain their case caused additional distress.

Many victims described lengthy waits for charging decisions and the impact this had on their wellbeing. Some felt unable to move forward while they waited, while others

[80] This means that the offender will not be formally prosecuted but the details of the investigation will remain on their record and they may be given a caution.

continued to experience ongoing victimisation during the period before a decision was reached.

> *The process needs to be quicker. It was a long wait for the CPS to charge the perpetrator. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

> *They took an extremely long time to make the decision to charge even though they had significant evidence and knew the perpetrators. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Male, 16-24)*

> *The process took an exceptionally long time which made the process so much harder. (Bereaved family member, Female, 55-64)*

Several victims also described how delays left them feeling their case was not being prioritised or that the seriousness of their experiences was not fully recognised.

> *It felt as though the case was not a priority because the perpetrator had mental health difficulties. It caused increased stress. (Bereaved family member, Female, 45-54)*

Communication while waiting for a charging decision

Victims frequently emphasised that delays were made more difficult by a lack of communication. Many said they could cope better with waiting if they were kept informed about progress and understood the reasons for delays.

> *Severe lack of communication about why a charging decision was taking so long. As the victims' family, our emotional wellbeing should have been given more consideration than it was. (Bereaved family member, Female, 45-54)*

> *They are very slow and take a long time to respond to any queries, a different person was in charge of my case each time it went to court, and they repeated questions which was upsetting. (Victim of assault, Female, 35-44)*

One victim described how delays, repeated reviews and communication failures combined to create a prolonged and distressing experience that continued for several years:

> *The case took a year to investigate to go NFA, another year VRR with CPS. Then charges were delayed due to the perpetrator going across county border. 3yrs later charged, 4.5 yrs later crown court trial. I was left without bail conditions for 2 years, CPS prosecutor however did phone me a few times to do a welfare check during VRR process. We were given lots of police protective measures but actually [the] perpetrator stalked us throughout. I had an IDVA and ISAC who helped keep us protected. CPS were poor at collecting the evidence from police. The barrister from CPS mocked my VIS and my vocabulary so I felt humiliated. It was an awful experience. CPS have not acknowledged the seriousness of his crimes and how close to death we got even though armed police were needed to remove him. I had the*

threat of a hitman over me and my children for 6 yrs! (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

What this means for victims

Waiting for a charging decision was often characterised by uncertainty, delay and limited communication. While victims recognised that complex cases can take time to investigate, many felt that the reasons for delays were not adequately explained and that the impact on their wellbeing was not sufficiently considered. The findings suggest that communication is particularly important at this stage of the victim journey. Victims were generally more accepting of delays where they understood what was happening and why. Conversely, where communication was poor, delays intensified feelings of anxiety, frustration and lack of confidence in the criminal justice process.

The charging decision

When a decision is made to charge the suspect, this should be communicated to victims by the police, for example, by the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the investigation. In some cases, the CPS will follow up with further communication.

Just over a fifth (22%) of respondents said the charges brought were not in line with their expectations.

What victims told us about charging decisions

- They felt the seriousness of offending was not always reflected in the charges brought.
- Aggravating factors were sometimes perceived to have been excluded.
- Some victims felt patterns of behaviour had been reduced to a smaller number of offences.
- Victims worried that charges did not accurately reflect the harm they had experienced.
- Changes to charges could affect confidence in the criminal justice process.

Some victims described feeling that offences had been downgraded or that important elements of offending had not been recognised within the charging decision.

It was downgraded and significant aggravating factors like non-fatal strangulation were ignored. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

I reported rape and stalking but he was only charged with coercive controlling behaviour. (Victim of domestic abuse, personal details not shared)

Six years of harassment and stalking were minimised to 36 counts of criminal damage, of which only 12 will be taken to court. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Male, 55-64)

Explaining charging decisions

A third (33%) of respondents said the reasoning behind the charging decision was not clearly explained to them.

What victims told us about communication regarding charging decisions

- They were not always told why particular charges had been selected.
- Decisions made by the CPS were not consistently explained.
- Victims felt frustrated when charges were changed or dropped without explanation.
- Poor communication left victims feeling excluded from the process.
- Clear explanations helped victims understand and accept decisions, even where they were disappointed by the outcome.

Many victims linked dissatisfaction with charging decisions to a lack of explanation rather than the decision itself.

The communication between CPS and the police was terrible […] I was never informed why we could not pursue the additional charge of [coercive and controlling behaviour] given the amount of evidence. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Never heard a thing from them either until after the trial to say they've dropped two assault charges which were not discussed on the day of the trial when he was negotiating his plea deal. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

However, where victims received a clear explanation of how a charging decision had been reached, they often described feeling reassured and included in the process. This reflects findings from the previous Victims' Survey[81] which highlighted the importance of transparent communication and explanation.

They offered a meeting with me to discuss how they reached the charge decision and explained the sentencing guidelines with me. (Bereaved family member, personal details not shared)

[81] Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner

What this means for victims

For many victims, the charging decision represented a significant milestone in their justice journey. While some were disappointed by the charges brought, the findings suggest that communication and explanation were often just as important as the decision itself. Victims were more likely to feel included, respected and reassured when charging decisions were clearly explained, even where the outcome was not what they had hoped for. Conversely, a lack of explanation left some victims feeling confused, disempowered and uncertain whether the full seriousness of their experience had been recognised by the criminal justice system.

Decisions not to prosecute

If a suspect has been identified, the police or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) must tell victims when a decision has been made not to prosecute and explain the reasons for that decision. Victims should also be informed of their right to request a review of certain decisions through the Victims' Right to Review scheme.

The Victims' Right to Review

The Victims' Right to Review (VRR) scheme allows victims to request a review of decisions by the police or CPS not to charge a suspect in an investigation or discontinue a prosecution. Victims have three months to request a review and should be informed of this right when they are told of the decision by the police[82] or the CPS.

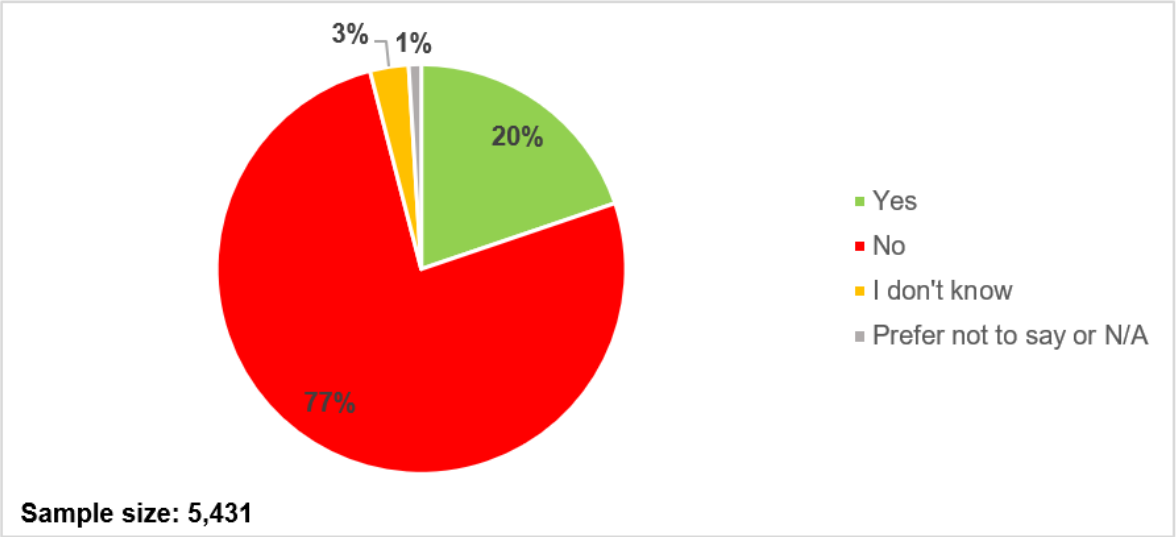
Awareness of the VRR was very low. Only 20% of victims whose case did not result in a charge had heard of the scheme (figure 15),[83] despite it being time-limited and one of the few mechanisms available to challenge a decision not to prosecute. Most victims who were aware of the scheme had discovered it through their own efforts rather than through criminal justice agencies.

What victims told us about the Victims' Right to Review

- Awareness of the scheme was low.
- Victims often discovered the scheme independently rather than through criminal justice agencies.
- The scheme provided an important safeguard where victims believed decisions had been made incorrectly.
- Victims valued having an opportunity to challenge decisions and seek accountability.
- Lack of awareness risked victims missing the opportunity to request a review within the time limit.

[82] If the police make the charging decision, they should provide the victim with information about their local review scheme.
[83] This compares to 14% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 15. Proportion of respondents who had heard of the Victims' Right to Review (VRR) scheme when no one was charged following a report to the police.



For some victims, the VRR scheme provided an important opportunity to remedy failures they had experienced during the original investigation.

> *The case was disastrous, endless changes of personnel, lack of evidence collection and shocking rudeness. However, a VRR has made a better experience second time around. If only it had been done that way the first time. (Victim of stalking following sexual violence, personal details not shared)*

The most common way victims became aware of the VRR scheme was through their own internet searches (26%), followed by the media (20%). Only 17% said they had heard about it from the police or Witness Care Unit.

This is particularly concerning because informing victims about the VRR is the responsibility of the criminal justice agency communicating the decision. The findings suggest that many victims are relying on their own efforts to discover a right that should be proactively explained to them.

What this means for victims

The VRR scheme is an important safeguard which allows victims to challenge decisions not to prosecute. However, awareness of the scheme was low, despite the fact that victims only have a limited period in which to request a review. The findings suggest that many victims are not receiving information about this right from criminal justice agencies and are instead discovering it through their own research. This places the burden on victims to identify and understand a key procedural right at a point when many are already dealing with disappointment, frustration or distress following a decision not to proceed with their case. Improving awareness of the VRR

scheme could help ensure that more victims are able to exercise their rights and have confidence that decisions have been properly considered.

Post-charge communication

Following a decision to charge, victims will be allocated a Witness Care Officer (WCO). Certain victims may also be allocated a CPS Victim Liaison Officer (VLO).[84]

The Witness Care Unit

The Witness Care Unit (WCU) provides information and support to victims in cases progressing through the criminal justice system and should act as a single point of contact for victims after a suspect has been charged. WCUs are staffed by police staff. When someone has been charged in an investigation, the WCO assigned to the victim should from that point act as the main point of contact for providing information and updates on the case[85].

In our survey, where someone had been charged, only 42% of victims said they had been assigned a WCO. Given that the WCU is intended to provide a main point of contact following charge, this raises concerns that some victims may not be receiving the support and updates they are entitled to, during the post-charge stage.

What victims told us about post-charge support

- Some victims were unaware that a Witness Care Unit existed.
- Not all victims were allocated a Witness Care Officer.
- Victims valued having a single point of contact.
- For some victims, existing relationships with ISVAs, IDVAs or investigating officers were more valuable than being assigned a new contact.
- Consistency and continuity of support were important.

> *I did not get one was not even offered to me just had to deal with it myself! Had no idea this was a thing even. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)*
>
> *I wasn't ever made aware of the victim care unit. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

While some victims did not receive support from a WCO, others described receiving information and support through alternative contacts, including investigating officers, Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) and Independent Domestic Violence

[84] CPS-EVLO-Leaflet.pdf

[85] The Home Office and NPCC are currently undertaking a review of Witness Care Units and Witness Care Officers across the CJS, including their responsibilities under the Victims' Code and are moving into the implementation phase of the review.

Advisers (IDVAs). For some victims, continuity of support was more important than being assigned a new point of contact.

> *I already had an ISVA so having a witness care officer who was just for the trial was too much. I did not want someone whom I hadn't built a relationship with to support me. My ISVA had built a relationship with me so was in a better place to know me and support me, which she did. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

What this means for victims

WCU's are intended to provide victims with a clear and consistent point of contact once a suspect has been charged. However, the findings suggest that not all victims were aware of the service or recalled being allocated a WCO. While some victims were able to rely on support from ISVAs, IDVAs or investigating officers, others described having limited post-charge support. This highlights the importance of ensuring victims understand what support is available and who is responsible for keeping them informed as their case progresses.

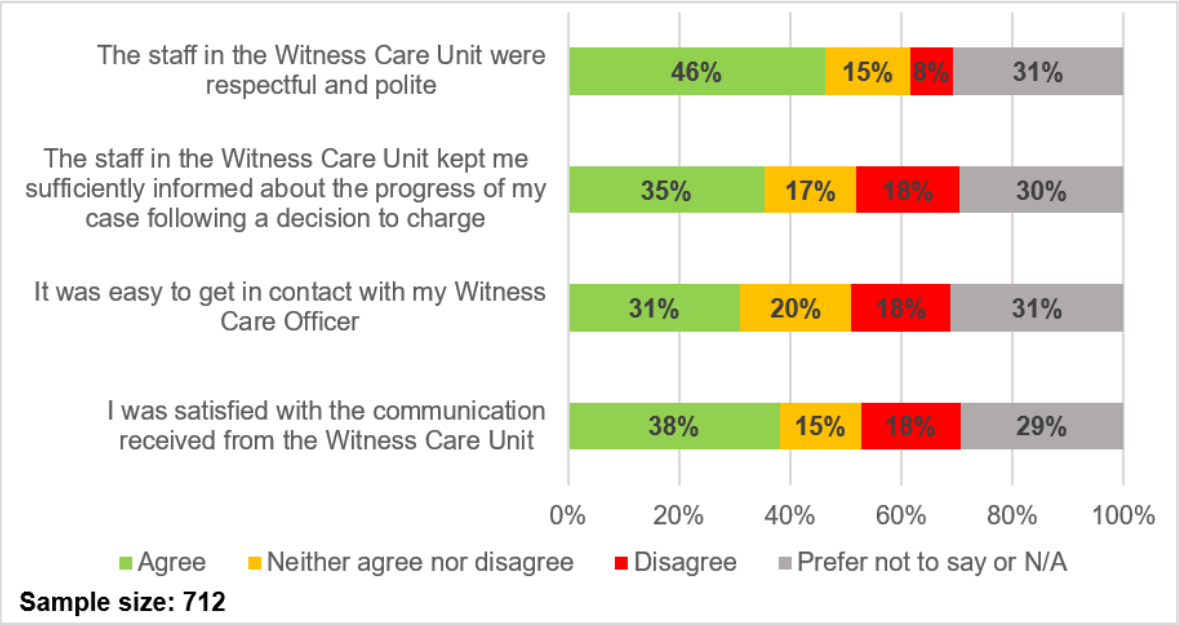
Experience with the Crown Prosecution Service and Victim Liaison Officers

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for deciding whether prosecutions should proceed and for presenting cases in court. Some victims will receive updates via letter from a CPS VLO. Victims of rape and serious sexual assault will receive support and updates from a CPS VLO during the post-charge stage. Under the Victims' Code, victims should receive information about key decisions, case progression and court proceedings from relevant criminal justice agencies.

What victims told us about post-charge communication

- Clear communication reduced anxiety and uncertainty.
- Victims valued staff who were supportive, compassionate and responsive.
- Good communication helped victims understand complex court processes.
- Victims appreciated being treated as individuals rather than case numbers.
- Trauma-informed communication helped victims feel supported throughout proceedings.

Figure 16. Proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with statements about the Witness Care Unit.[86]



Just under half (46%) of victims agreed that staff in the WCU were respectful and polite (figure 16). However, almost a fifth (18%) disagreed that they were kept sufficiently informed about post-charge case progression, and a similar proportion disagreed that it was easy to contact their WCO.

Many victims described positive experiences with the WCU, VCOs and the CPS. They valued clear communication, practical support and staff who took the time to explain complex processes and respond to their individual needs.

> *My witness care officer was absolutely phenomenal, nothing was ever a problem, and she became a really good source of support. Without her help, compassion and understanding I would have really struggled but she was absolutely amazing. I can never thank her enough. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *They [VLO] took time to listen and validate what I had been through and offer options beyond the court process and more towards the impact and needs for me and my young daughter at the time. They are priceless and well needed. (Bereaved family member, Female, 45-54)*

> *The CPS were brilliant. When I met them at court, they were incredibly supportive. They had my best interests at heart, and I am incredibly grateful for them. Without my attendance at court, their acceptance of my VIS on the day, and their support, I believe a completely different sentence would have been given. (Victim of stalking and harassment, personal details not shared)*

[86] Agreement includes respondents who agreed and strongly agreed and disagreement includes respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Communication challenges

What victims told us about communication problems

- Communication was often delayed or reactive.
- Victims struggled to contact staff for updates.
- Some felt the burden was on them to chase information.
- Resource pressures were perceived to affect service quality.
- Victims reported inconsistencies between agencies.

Despite positive experiences, some victims reported difficulties obtaining information and updates during the post-charge stage with just under a fifth (18%) of respondents disagreeing that it was easy to get in contact with their WCO and that they were kept sufficiently informed about post-charge case progression (figure 16). Additionally, 18% of respondents also reported dissatisfaction generally with communication they received from the WCU. They highlighted issues with receiving delayed and insufficient communication. Some respondents suggested that the level of WCU resource and staffing available may contribute to the minimal communication. These issues were not limited to the WCU and victims also spoke of issues with VLO communication, describing instances where they received insufficient communication and often found that the burden was on them to chase for updates from their VLO.

> *Really hard to get through to anyone on the phone. The level of communication leading up to court and after court is minimal. Need more resources to manage phone lines and to inform witnesses as it's a daunting event if it's your first time. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)*

> *I was assigned a WCO but had very minimal contact, the main contact was receiving travel information, in order to attend court. They were very good but seem very overworked and I had little to no contact from them. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *Very little went well. Communication with the CPS Victim Liaison Officer has been minimal, reactive and left entirely to me to chase. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

Trauma-informed communication

What victims told us about trauma-informed practice

- Communications were not always delivered in a way that recognised trauma.
- Formal processes and language could be intimidating.
- Some victims felt blamed, dismissed or re-traumatised.
- Victims wanted greater empathy and understanding from criminal justice agencies.

Communication issues were also found when victims did receive communication from the Witness Care Unit or their Victim Liaison Officer, with some victims reporting that they felt that there had been a lack of trauma-informed care or support. They highlighted feeling that the communication they had received had not been empathetic and, in some cases, had made the victim feel worse. Victims also described issues with their experience of the CPS, with some feeling that they had been re-traumatised by the CPS.

> *After he was charged I was sent a "Court Warning Letter" [from the WCU] which freaked me out, I felt as though I was being treated as though I'd done something wrong, it was so formal and serious threatening me with officers coming to my address if I did not go to Court (a year later) I don't understand why they felt the need to send that when they'd already spoken to me and I had confirmed I would attend and am supportive. It shook me up for weeks, I was already in a bad place and traumatised. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *Victim blaming, ignored it's [VLO] own guidelines & ignored the process of communication & forced to receive information over the phone. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

> *The CPS quite literally re-traumatised me; they denied simple requests such as deleting private sexual images from the offender's devices (a crime he was charged with) and they fully empathised and defended the abuser in court instead of defending me. I've never felt so let down in my entire life. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

Training and knowledge

What victims told us about staff knowledge

- Victims wanted staff to have a better understanding of the criminal justice process.
- Some felt Witness Care staff were unable to answer questions fully.
- Victims wanted more confidence that staff could explain procedures and options.

A small number of victims questioned whether Witness Care Unit staff had sufficient knowledge of the criminal justice process to answer questions and explain procedures confidently.

> *Witness Care attempt to work with police but police have no respect for them and their role and do not respond…Witness Care do not hold enough knowledge about the criminal justice system to adequately inform victims. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

What this means for victims

Post-charge communication can significantly shape victims' experiences of the criminal justice process. Victims who received regular, compassionate and knowledgeable support from a Witness Care Officer, Victim Liaison Officer or CPS representative described feeling reassured, informed and better able to participate in proceedings. However, not all victims received this support. Delays, difficulties contacting staff and a lack of trauma-informed communication often left victims feeling unsupported at a particularly important stage of their journey. The findings suggest that consistency of communication, continuity of support and trauma-informed responses to victims' needs are key to helping victims remain engaged and confident in the criminal justice process.

4. Preparing for court

Of the 730 victims where someone had been charged for the crime, three quarters (76%) had seen the case go to court. Victims have the right to be told by the WCU if the case is going to court. If the defendant pleads not guilty and the victim is required to attend court, they have the right to be told by the WCU if they are required to give evidence.

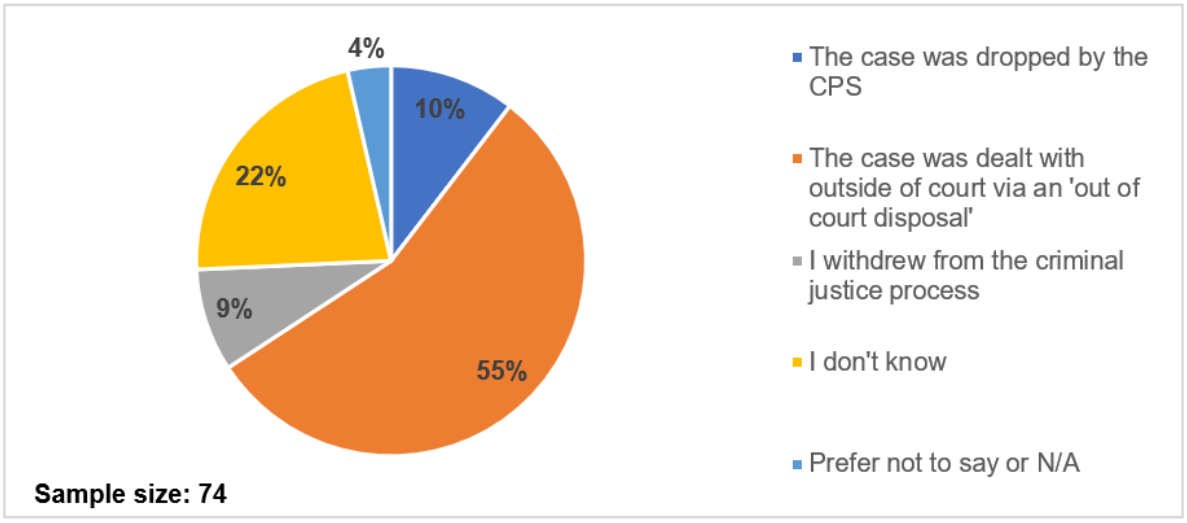
Key Findings

- Long waits during this time due to severe delays in the court system across England and Wales and short-notice adjournments cause further stress and trauma.
- For those whose case went to the Crown Court, almost half (47%) experienced it being postponed.
- Where victims had experienced a postponement and the trial had since taken place, for a fifth (20%) the trial had eventually taken place between one year and two years later.
- Negative impacts include damage to victims' mental health and their recovery, feeling like their life was on hold.
- Negative impacts were compounded by multiple and short-notice adjournments, and poor communication about this.

Awaiting a court hearing or trial

Between charging and a court hearing, there are several reasons why a case may not proceed to court. Of the 10% of respondents who said there was no court hearing, the majority (55%) said the case had been dealt with through an out of court disposal, such as a caution (figure 17). Around a tenth said this was because they withdrew from the process (9%) or because the CPS determined there was insufficient evidence or it was no longer in the public interest to proceed (10%).

Figure 17. Proportion of victims reporting why there was not a court hearing for their case.



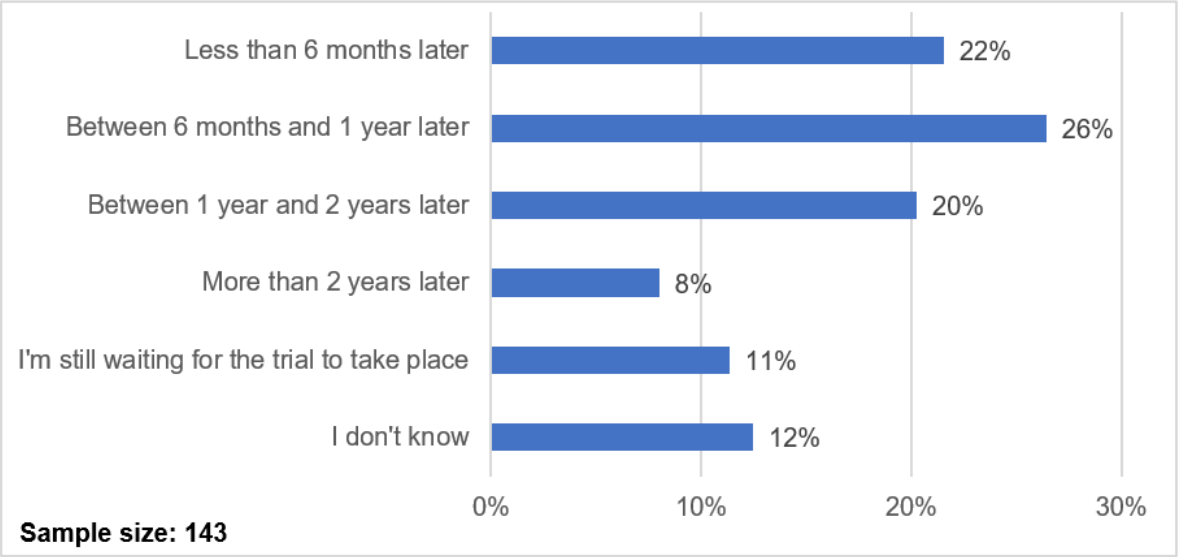
Where cases do progress to court, victims may face substantial waiting periods. Delays remain a significant challenge across the courts system in England and Wales. The latest criminal court statistics found a record high of 23,706 Crown Court cases had been outstanding for more than a year, representing 29% of all outstanding Crown Court cases.[87]. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has also highlighted the detrimental impact that these delays can have on victims' wellbeing and recovery. [88]

What victims told us about delays and adjournments

- Court delays left victims waiting months or years for justice.
- Adjournments often occurred at short notice.
- Repeated postponements were particularly distressing.
- Victims felt their lives were placed on hold while waiting for trial.
- Delays affected victims' mental health, recovery and wellbeing.
- Some victims felt delays worked to the advantage of defendants rather than victims.

Adjournments were a particular concern for victims. Of those whose case was postponed and subsequently heard, one fifth (20%) said the trial ultimately took place between one and two years after the original date (figure 18). For 8% it took place more than two years later, while 11% were still waiting for the trial to be heard. These findings highlight the extent to which adjournments can significantly prolong victims' involvement in the criminal justice process.

Figure 18. How long after the original trial date respondents reported the trial took place.



[87] Criminal court statistics quarterly: April to June 2026 - GOV.UK
[88] Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner

The impact of these delays and adjournments on victims has been well documented by the Victims' Commissioner, as well as in reports by Rape Crisis England & Wales,[89] and Victim Support.[90] Victims often feel like they are left in limbo, with many feeling that the only way they can survive is by withdrawing from the criminal justice system altogether.

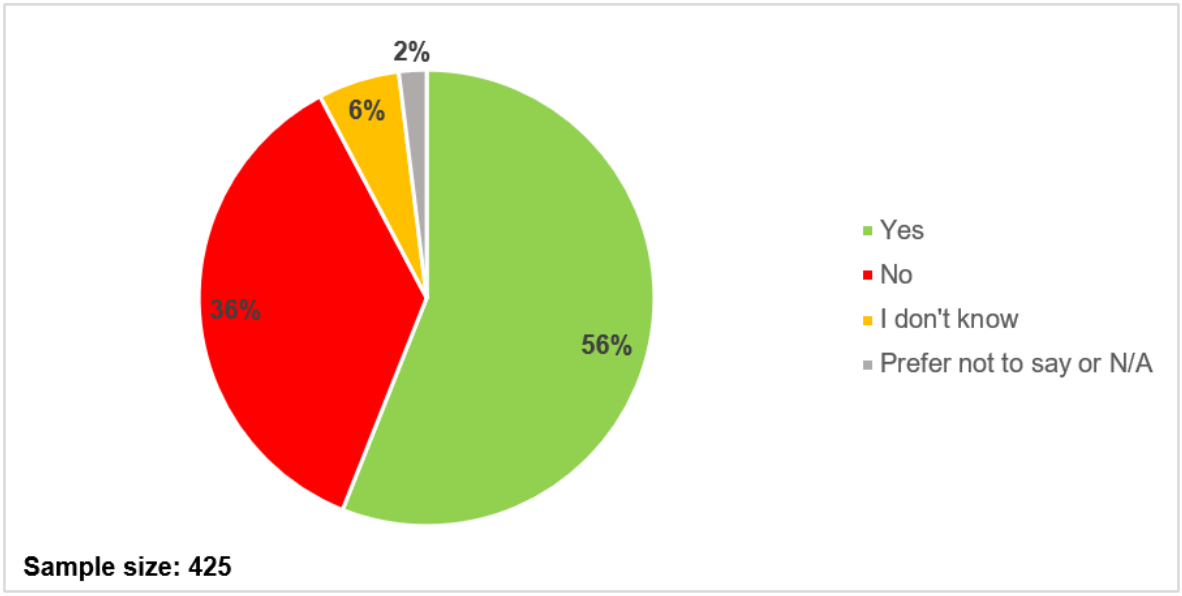
Victims described the severe impact that delays and adjournments had on their lives, relationships and wellbeing.

> *It feels like my life was put on hold for another year, my mental health certainly suffered and while my abuser has been charged, he's free until we go to trial. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 55-64)*
>
> *It was over a year and we could not go ahead with the funeral until this was over, which meant we had to relive this all over again and were left in limbo for over a year. (Bereaved family member, Female, 55-64)*
>
> *Victims have to live in fear for up to several years before going to court. (Victim of assault, Female, 25-34)*

The impact of waiting for justice

Over a third (36%) of victims said they were not satisfied with the length of time taken for the case to progress through court (figure 19).

Figure 19. Proportion of respondents satisfied with the length of time taken for the case to progress through court.



[89] Our new report finds survivors are retraumatised by the criminal justice system | Rape Crisis England & Wales
[90] Sufferingforjusticereport.pdf

What victims told us about the impact of delays

- Delays had a significant impact on victims' mental health.
- Victims felt unable to move on with their lives.
- Ongoing proceedings remained a constant source of anxiety.
- Many described feeling that their lives were on hold.
- Some felt justice became less meaningful the longer they waited.
- Victims believed delays undermined confidence in the justice system.

Victims repeatedly described the emotional burden of living with uncertainty while waiting for their case to conclude. Many felt unable to move on with their lives while proceedings remained ongoing, particularly where delays extended over several years.

> *The time was far too long, leaving everything hanging over you as you try to carry on your day-to-day life is a horrible experience. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Male, 35-44)*
>
> *Because I'm still waiting for justice and the stress and upset and worry and mental and emotional and physical impact it is causing is damaging. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*
>
> *It should not take more than two years to get justice. (Victim of assault, Female, 35-44)*

Many victims described feeling that their recovery could not begin while proceedings remained unresolved.

Communication during delays and adjournments

Victims often recognised that court delays were caused by broader pressures across the criminal justice system. However, many felt that poor communication about delays was avoidable and unnecessarily added to the stress of waiting.

What victims told us about communication during delays

- They were not always informed promptly when court dates changed.
- Adjournments were often communicated at very short notice.
- Victims felt left in the dark about what was happening with their case.
- Poor communication increased anxiety and frustration.
- Some learned about developments through informal channels rather than criminal justice agencies.
- Victims wanted more opportunities to ask questions and understand the process.

Many victims felt that communication about delays and adjournments was inadequate, leaving them uncertain about the progress of their case.

I was dissatisfied because the case took a long time to move forward, and there were periods where I did not really know what was happening. The delays made the process feel more stressful and made it harder to move on while waiting for updates. (Victim of fraud, Female, 45-54)

Justice system is broken, waited 2 years for a court date, for it to be cancelled 3 weeks before the date and pushed back another 2 years. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Moved so many times, had no idea when it was happening as every time it was [moved] it was the day [of the trial]. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

I understood that there were huge backlogs and delays within the court system, but both times spanned multiple years, and the number of adjournments/postponements was ridiculous – and the lack of timely communication about these made it worse. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

Some victims also described receiving little information about the outcome of hearings or being required to attend court unnecessarily.

I was not told anything about trial or sentencing, I knew what happened because I read it in the paper. (Victim of theft, Female, 55-64)

I went to the court to give a statement but was placed in a waiting room for 6 hours and told the person had plead guilty earlier that day. I wasted time sitting for 4 hours after the matter was resolved. (Victim of burglary, Male, 25-34)

More communication and a chance for me to ask questions would have been helpful and much appreciated. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 16-24)

What this means for victims

Court delays and adjournments continue to have a profound impact on victims' wellbeing, recovery and confidence in the criminal justice system. Many described feeling trapped in a prolonged period of uncertainty, unable to move on with their lives while awaiting justice. Delays affected victims' mental health, wellbeing and recovery, while repeated postponements often required victims to repeatedly prepare themselves for court.

Although many victims recognised that delays stemmed from wider pressures within the criminal justice system, poor communication frequently compounded their impact. Victims consistently reported wanting clearer explanations, earlier notification of changes and more frequent updates about the progress of their case. The findings suggest that while reducing delays remains critical, improving communication about delays and adjournments could help victims feel more informed, supported and able to remain engaged throughout the court process.

5. Through the trial

If the defendant pleads not guilty and the victim is required to attend court, they have the right under the Victims' Code to be told by the WCU if they are required to give evidence, as well as the right to have their needs assessed and offered a referral to a witness support service who can arrange a visit to the court before the trial date to familiarise them with the building, and be told of the outcome of any special measures application.

Key Findings

- Most victims felt they received sufficient information about the trial process before attending court (78%).
- The majority of victims felt supported during court proceedings, with 73% reporting they were kept informed about the progress of the trial and 74% saying they received enough support throughout the court process.
- Contact with prosecutors could play an important role in building victims' confidence. Where victims spoke to a member of the prosecution team before giving evidence, over three quarters (76%) said this made them feel more confident about participating in the trial.
- Positive experiences were characterised by clear communication, practical support and respectful treatment from court staff, helping victims feel more comfortable and informed during proceedings.
- Despite this, some victims reported safeguarding concerns when attending court, including encounters or close proximity to defendants and their families, which increased anxiety and distress.
- Poor communication before and during hearings left some victims feeling unprepared for court and uncertain about what to expect.
- Some victims felt that court processes remained focused on the defendant, leaving them feeling that their experiences and needs were secondary. Victims identified improvements that could make courts more accessible and victim-centred, particularly for neurodiverse victims and those requiring additional support.
- Special measures played a critical role in enabling victims to participate in court proceedings. While 87% of victims who were entitled to special measures said these were explained to them and 91% said they were implemented, some victims reported problems with the way measures were delivered in practice.
- Special measures were often decisive in enabling victims to give evidence. Over half (52%) of victims who received the measures they requested said they would have been unlikely to give evidence without them.
- A minority of victims (14%) said they would not attend court again in future. This was linked to delays, negative experiences within the justice system, dissatisfaction with outcomes and a loss of confidence that the process would deliver justice.
- Court attendance was often manageable when victims were informed, supported and protected, but significantly more difficult where communication, safeguarding or special measures failed.

Giving evidence at trial

The majority of respondents who had attended court said they were given sufficient notice and information about their role in the trial process (figure 20). Almost all (95%) agreed they were given sufficient notice that they would be required to give evidence at the trial and over three quarters (78%) of respondents agreed they were given sufficient information about the trial process before attending court.

Of those who gave evidence at trial, just under three quarters (73%) said they had spoken to a member of the CPS prosecution team about the process of giving evidence on the day. This increased to 77% for Crown Court trials. Of those who had this conversation, over three quarters (76%) said it made them feel more confident about giving evidence.

What victims told us about preparing for court

- Receiving clear information before attending court helped reduce anxiety.
- Speaking to a member of the prosecution team increased confidence about giving evidence.
- Victims valued opportunities to ask questions and understand what to expect.
- Familiarisation visits helped victims feel more comfortable attending court.
- Some victims wanted earlier and more detailed information about court procedures.
- Better preparation helped victims feel more able to participate effectively in proceedings.

Many victims described positive experiences where prosecutors, police officers and support services helped them understand what would happen at court and what would be expected of them.

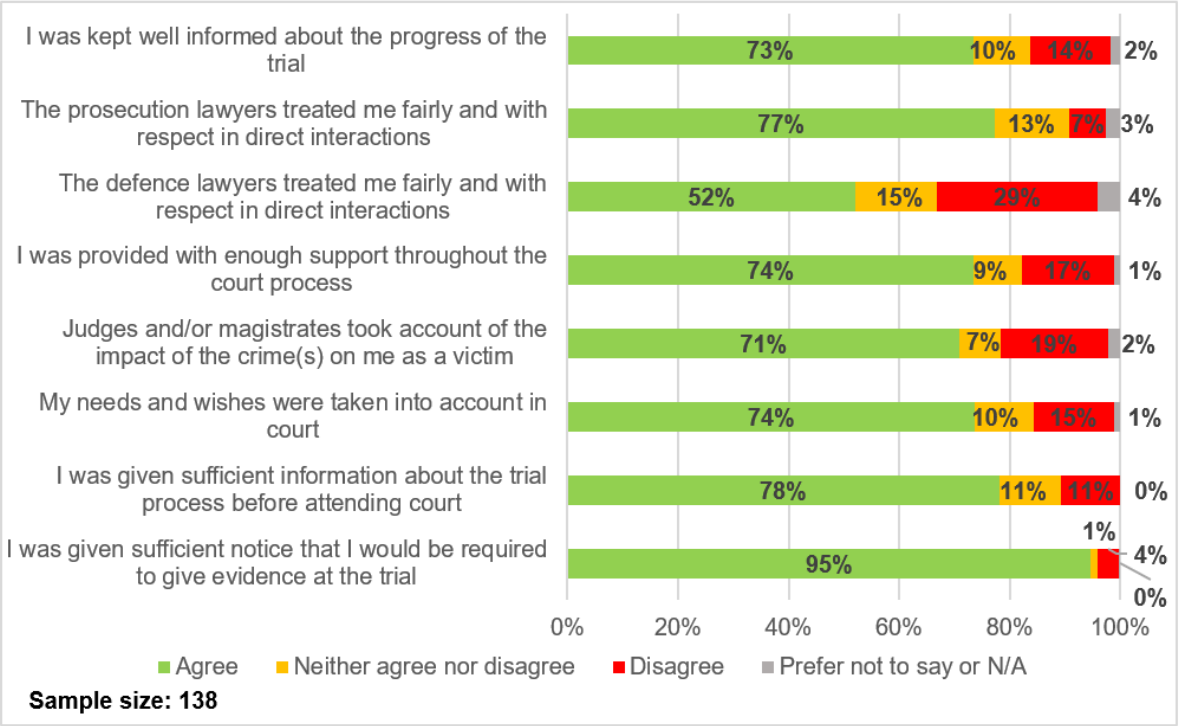
> *I had a meeting with the CPS prosecutor before trial and was given a tour of the court by the DS in my case before court. This was helpful. Court Victim Support Services at [court location] were amazingly helpful. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *The meeting with the prosecution barrister KC was helpful […] She gave a much better explanation of disclosure and the threshold to that than the OIC. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

However, some victims felt there was scope for more preparation before the trial, particularly around the types of questions they might face, and the court processes they would encounter.

> *I would have liked more notice of what was allowed/not allowed to be referred to in court. Better preparation for what type of questions would be asked. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

Figure 20. Respondent levels of agreement and disagreement with various statements about their experience with the courts.



Familiarisation visits also appeared to play an important role in preparing victims for court. However, only 61% of respondents said they had been offered a visit prior to trial, although this increased to 69% for Crown Court cases. Victims of rape and sexual assault were also more likely to report being offered a familiarisation visit (80%).

What this means for victims

Preparation before trial can play an important role in helping victims feel confident and supported when giving evidence. The findings suggest that clear information, opportunities to ask questions and contact with members of the prosecution team can help reduce anxiety and contribute to a more positive experience of attending court. While most victims felt adequately informed about the process, the lower proportion who were offered a court familiarisation visit suggests that opportunities remain to strengthen pre-trial preparation and ensure all victims understand what to expect before entering the courtroom.

Experiences attending court

Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents who gave evidence at court felt they were provided with enough support throughout the court process (figure 20).

What victims told us about attending court

- Positive communication and support helped reduce anxiety.
- Victims valued being treated with dignity, respect and compassion.
- Clear explanations helped them understand what was happening.
- Supportive staff made victims feel more comfortable attending court.
- Many recognised the efforts of court staff to make a difficult experience more manageable.

Many victims described positive experiences of attending court and highlighted the professionalism and empathy of court staff.

> *The court staff were polite and professional, and the process was explained clearly on the day, which helped me feel more at ease. The case was handled respectfully, and I appreciated the support provided throughout the hearing. One improvement would be reducing waiting times and giving clearer updates about scheduling changes, as long periods of uncertainty can be stressful for victims. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Male, 55-64)*

> *My experience with court staff themselves was overwhelmingly positive. They treated me with compassion, dignity and understanding during an extremely traumatic time. I felt that the court staff genuinely tried to make me feel safe and supported, and at times they acted almost as a protective shield from distressing behaviour I experienced elsewhere in the process. Their professionalism and empathy made a significant difference to my ability to attend proceedings. (Bereaved family member, Female, 25-34)*

> *The court staff were respectful, and the process was explained when I asked questions, which helped a little. However, the experience could be improved with clearer updates, shorter waiting times and more support for victims before and after court hearings. (Victim of fraud, Female, 45-54)*

Some victims also highlighted the important role played by witness support services in helping them navigate court proceedings and supporting them through the process.

> *Had an amazing lady from the Citizens Advice witness team who supported me all the way through the court cases from trial to sentencing at crown court. (Victim of assault, Male, 25-34)*

Although many victims felt well supported while proceedings were ongoing, some felt there was a significant reduction in support once the case had concluded, despite continuing to deal with the emotional impact of the crime.

The court process was emotionally very difficult, […] More support for victims throughout the court process, clearer communication and greater consideration of the lasting trauma experienced by victims would improve the experience. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

I think the aftermath of this is very different & needs more attention […] victims need more help & care for the process afterwards. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

Safeguarding and safety at court

Some victims described situations where courtroom arrangements left them feeling vulnerable or uncomfortable.

What victims told us about safety at court

- Contact with defendants and their families caused distress.
- Physical court layouts did not always prioritise victims' safety.
- Safeguarding arrangements sometimes broke down at key moments.
- Victims wanted stronger separation from defendants before and after hearings.
- Positive safeguarding arrangements helped victims feel safer and more supported.

This was very distressing for victims, who described situations where safeguarding had been effective but only up to a certain point, when they were then unexpectedly in the same space as the defendant.

More distance and protection when the perpetrator was giving evidence. As victims of their crime, it was very uncomfortable for them to walk past us within a few feet of where we were sitting and have no protection. (Bereaved family member, Female, 25-34)

We had separate waiting rooms which was good, but I was shown to the sentencing hearing after everyone else had already sat and had to walk past his father to find a seat. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

When the court finished, I came out of the victim witness unit, we thought we wouldn't see him [as] we had waited a long time. We still nearly walked into him, I froze because I did not know what to do. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

At the same time, some victims described positive experiences where practical arrangements helped them feel protected.

> *I did ask that the offender's family be kept at distance from me and we were separated and they entered and left before me. (Bereaved family member, Female, 35-44)*

> *I had the specially trained officer with me during the days I attended, which was very helpful. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)*

Communication about court proceedings

What victims told us about communication

- Court dates were sometimes communicated at very short notice.
- Victims were not always informed about hearings or outcomes.
- Poor communication increased anxiety and uncertainty.
- Victims wanted more opportunities to ask questions and understand the process.

Many victims felt that communication about court hearings and trial arrangements could be improved, particularly around giving more notice of trial dates.

> *I was told at 5:15pm on Friday that my trial starts on the Monday morning, shocking practice. CPS barrister changed as original trial date was reinstated. I did not meet my CPS barrister till 2 minutes before I was due to give evidence. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)*

> *I wasn't given the option to attend court and did not know when the hearing was until the IDVA called during the court session. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

In some cases, victims were unaware that the case had even gone to court until after the event, when they were looking for further information or heard about it in the media.

> *We had no knowledge it was in court until afterwards when it made the news. (Victim of criminal damage, Male, 45-54)*

> *I wasn't even told it had gone to court or the outcome. I found out myself by checking court dates and his name. (Victim of assault, Female, 55-64)*

Feeling heard and treated fairly

Over two thirds (71%) of respondents agreed that judges or magistrates took into account the impact the crime had on them as a victim.

What victims told us about being recognised within the court process

- Victims valued having their experiences acknowledged.
- Being listened to helped them feel included in proceedings.
- Some felt the system recognised the impact of the crime on them.
- Others felt the process remained focused on the defendant.
- Some victims felt their voice was secondary to procedural concerns and the needs of the offender.

While many victims felt supported, some respondents nonetheless felt that their voice was secondary to the needs of the defendant or that they had limited influence within proceedings.

> *A victim is a human, respect and some acknowledgement would be appreciated, victims voice should be heard, victim should feel included. (Victim of road traffic collision, Female, 45-54)*

> *There is not enough care for victims and not enough choice, everything is in the defendant's favour. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

> *The entire process is oriented to supporting the perpetrator. It seems like the victim is very much an afterthought. (Victim of rape and sexual abuse, Female, 35-44)*

Victims' experiences were not always consistent, with some reporting excellent support from court staff and safeguarding arrangements but negative interactions with legal professionals.

> *The security and special measures were excellent. I felt safe and the staff couldn't do enough for us. The CPS barrister was awful and humiliated me. […] He then berated my VIS and laughed at phrases like breadcrumbing and gaslighting. He made me feel like my abuser made me feel. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

Experiences of cross-examination and the adversarial process

While over three quarters (77%) of respondents agreed that prosecution lawyers treated them fairly and with respect in direct interactions, only around half (52%) of respondents felt the same about defence lawyers.

What victims told us about giving evidence

- Cross-examination could be intimidating and distressing.
- Some victims felt as though they were the person on trial.
- Victims felt their wellbeing was not always adequately considered.
- Some believed questioning went beyond testing evidence and became personally damaging.

Due to the adversarial justice system across England and Wales, during a trial, victims are cross-examined by a defence lawyer. This is the only direct interaction victims will have with the defence lawyer, who is tasked with testing the victims' evidence and putting the defendant's version of events to the victim. Several victims described particularly difficult experiences while being cross-examined.

> *I felt like I was bullied on the stand by the defence to make it seem as if none of the abuse even happened in the first place even though I still struggle with the effects every single day as well as multiple suicide attempts. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)*

> *The defence barrister was vile. Acted out a sexual act from a video he was asking me questions about in my rape trial. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

> *The way the defence lawyer spoke to me should not be legal; I felt as though I was on trial. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

Accessibility and additional needs

Some victims felt that greater awareness and training were needed to ensure that additional needs were identified and appropriately accommodated during court proceedings.

What victims told us about accessibility

- Additional needs were not always recognised.
- Courts were not always accessible for disabled victims.
- Victims wanted greater awareness of neurodiversity.
- Some felt their disabilities or health conditions affected how they were treated.
- Victims wanted a more inclusive court environment.

Several victims reported that their needs had not been adequately considered during court proceedings.

> *I have health conditions (physical) and don't feel there were any considerations about how that impacted my ability to attend or needs whilst there. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)*

> *The courts are not good for those with hearing loss. Each time I could not hear. (Bereaved family member, Female, 65-74)*

> *As I have a stammer I was treated like I was thick […] There needs to be more training about disabilities. The way I was treated was disgusting. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

> *I felt like I was mistreated as a victim in terms of the fact that I am a male. I did not feel like I was given the proper measures for my wellbeing... The courts did not take my health into account at all. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)*

Victims also identified broader improvements they believed would make the court process more accessible and responsive to victims' needs.

> *Accessibility – neurodivergence – I think having clear stages and steps and contact info is important for reassurance. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

What this means for victims

For many victims, attending court was one of the most significant and emotionally demanding stages of the criminal justice process. Positive experiences were characterised by clear communication, respectful treatment, effective safeguarding and practical support from court staff and support services. However, victims also identified ongoing challenges, particularly in relation to communication, safeguarding, accessibility and the experience of giving evidence. While many felt supported and recognised during proceedings, others felt their needs were secondary to those of the defendant. Together, these findings suggest that improving communication, accessibility, safeguarding arrangements and trauma-informed practice could significantly improve victims' experiences of attending court and participating in the justice process.

Special measures at court

Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents agreed their needs and wishes were taken into account in court (figure 20). A key part of assessing victim needs is considering their entitlement to special measures.[91] Special measures are designed to help vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses give their best evidence, support their individual needs and reduce the stress associated with attending court.

[91] https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/special-measures

These measures are important as they facilitate the gathering and giving of quality evidence by vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses. Examples include giving evidence behind screens so that the victim and defendant cannot see each other.[92]

Just under two thirds (61%) of respondents said they were entitled to special measures. Positively, 87% of these respondents said their options for special measures had been explained to them.

What victims told us about accessing special measures

- Special measures helped them understand what support was available.
- Having measures explained reduced uncertainty about attending court.
- Victims valued being given information about the options available to them.
- Court familiarisation visits were a useful part of preparing for court.

I was offered visits to the courtroom ahead of the trial dates, special measures to make me feel more comfortable during the hearing. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

They explained to me what was going to happen when I went in to court, I had special measures in place. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

The impact of special measures

Around three quarters (74%) of respondents who were entitled to special measures said they applied for them.[93] Of those who applied, 91% said the measures were implemented in court.

These findings are encouraging and reflect the importance of special measures in helping victims participate in court proceedings. Victims frequently described how they increased feelings of safety, reduced intimidation and enabled them to give evidence more confidently.

What victims told us about the benefits of special measures

- Special measures helped them feel safer when giving evidence.
- Victims felt less intimidated by the presence of the defendant.
- Special measures reduced anxiety and fear.
- They enabled victims to participate more confidently in proceedings.
- Many felt they would have struggled to give evidence without them.

[92] https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/document/next-steps-for-special-measures-a-review-of-the-provision-of-special-measures-to-vulnerable-and-intimidated-witnesses/

[93] The Victims' Commissioner has called for an amendment to the Courts and Tribunals Bill to give eligible victims automatic access to special measures, with the objective of removing unnecessary barriers and providing greater certainty.

It enabled me to give evidence confidently without feeling intimidated by seeing the perpetrator. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

I knew if I saw him or heard his voice or anything I would be triggered with fear, guilt, and might not be able to cope so this helped me try my best to get through it. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

I was able to give my evidence with the perpetrator behind a screen, so I felt less intimidated. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

The importance of these measures is further demonstrated by the finding that over half (52%) of victims who received the measures they requested said they would have been unlikely to give evidence if those measures had not been available.

When special measures did not meet victims' needs

While the overall picture was positive, some victims reported that the measures implemented on the day were not the measures they had requested. Eight per cent of respondents said the special measures provided differed from those they had asked for.

What victims told us about problems with special measures

- Special measures were not always implemented as requested.
- Some felt the measures provided did not adequately protect them from the defendant.
- Poor implementation reduced the effectiveness of the measures.
- Victims with additional needs did not always receive appropriate support.
- Physical court environments could limit the effectiveness of measures that had been approved.

Some victims described situations where the measures in place did not fully meet their needs or failed to reduce the anxiety associated with giving evidence.

I did not feel like they were very good to be honest as there was only a small screen separating me from the accused. I could still see them and hear them very clearly which made me extremely uncomfortable. (Victim of domestic abuse, Male, 25-34)

They [special measures] did not [help] I was sobbing through the trial, I was anxious and very overwhelmed. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)

Other victims highlighted difficulties where appropriate measures were not provided, or where adaptations did not adequately reflect their vulnerabilities or communication needs.

Despite clear evidence of her neurodiversity and vulnerability, the courts failed to provide appropriate special measures or a

communication intermediary, even though her needs had deteriorated markedly. (Survey completed on behalf of victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

To be honest, although I welcomed the screen […] it wasn't great. The screen looked flimsy like it would fall at any minute. The chair/lectern were too high for me, and I struggled to be heard due to distance from the mic. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

What this means for victims

Special measures were one of the clearest examples of support making a tangible difference to victims' experience of the criminal justice process. Most victims who were entitled to special measures reported that they were explained and implemented, and many described them as essential to feeling safe and able to give evidence. However, the findings also demonstrate that approval alone is not enough. Special measures must be tailored to victims' needs and implemented effectively in practice. Where they were not, victims reported feeling exposed, unsupported or unable to participate fully. Given that over half of victims who received their requested measures said they would have been unlikely to give evidence without them, ensuring the consistent and effective provision of special measures remains critical to supporting victim participation in court proceedings.

Court outcomes

Of the respondents whose case progressed to court, over three quarters (81%) said the defendant had been convicted. However, 14% said the defendant had been convicted of a different offence to the one originally charged.

What victims told us about court outcomes

- Convictions did not always reflect victims' expectations.
- Some victims felt offences had been reduced or amended during proceedings.
- Victims sometimes felt the seriousness of the offending was not fully reflected in the final outcome.
- Changes to charges could affect confidence in the justice process.

Victims described a range of situations where convictions were secured for alternative or lesser offences than those originally charged. These included domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, road traffic offences and serious violence cases. Some victims felt that these changes reduced the seriousness of the offending or failed to reflect the full extent of the harm they had experienced.

Charged with ABH but convicted for common assault. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

Non-fatal strangulation down to assault. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 25-34)

Stalking - Fear of Violence. Alternative charge - Harassment with fear of violence. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 45-54)

Original charge was causing death by dangerous driving. Alternative was causing death by careless driving. (Bereaved family member, Female, 55-64)

Court ordered compensation

In some circumstances, courts can order offenders to pay compensation to victims for injury, loss or damage resulting from the offence.

What victims told us about compensation

- Some victims felt compensation awards did not reflect the harm they had experienced.
- Victims expressed frustration with delays or difficulties receiving compensation.
- Payment arrangements sometimes meant compensation was received only in very small instalments.
- Some victims reported not receiving compensation they had been awarded.

Several victims described dissatisfaction with compensation arrangements following conviction.

The court outcome was very poor, £5500 in damages but only awarded £750 compensation, paid at £20 which will take around 3 years to recover. (Victim of criminal damage, Male, 16-24)

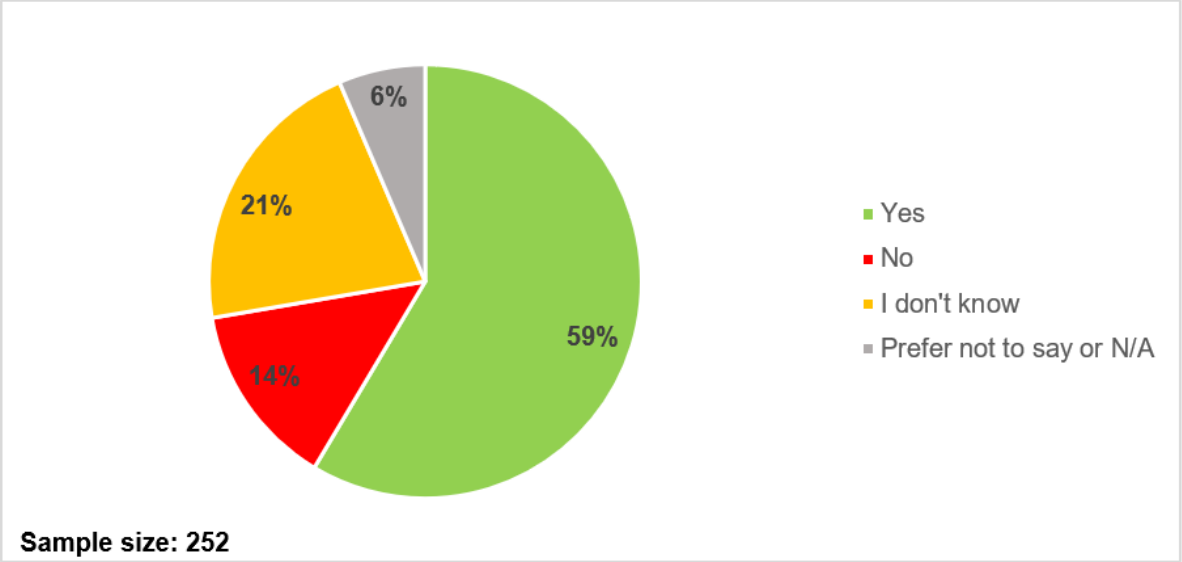
Poor sentencing […] and also not actually giving a victim of assault the compensation promised. (Victim of assault, Female, 35-44)

Future attendance at court

Victims' experiences of the court process can have a significant impact on their willingness to engage with the criminal justice system in future. When asked whether they would attend court again, 14% of respondents said they would not (figure 21).[94] This was particularly high amongst victims of rape and sexual assault (29%), online harm (27%) and stalking and harassment (27%).

[94] This compares to 13% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.

Figure 21. Proportion of respondents who would or would not attend court again.



What victims told us about attending court again

- Some felt they had not received justice.
- Victims described losing trust and confidence in the court process.
- Long delays reduced willingness to engage again.
- Court proceedings had a significant emotional and psychological impact.
- Some felt the system prioritised defendants over victims.
- Negative experiences with legal professionals discouraged future participation.
- Some questioned whether the emotional cost of attending court was worthwhile.

Many victims linked their decision not to attend court in the future to their distressing previous experience, as well as dissatisfaction with the outcome of their case.

> *I previously attended court; however, I felt that the full context of the situation was not presented, and important evidence was not included. This was extremely distressing for me and has affected my confidence in the process. (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 35-44)*

> *Don't know if I could put myself through it again - was extremely disappointed with the charge and length of sentence. (Victim of stabbing, personal details not shared)*

Others described a broader loss of confidence in the justice system.

> *I no longer have faith in the justice system so wouldn't put myself through it emotionally for a probable loss and no justice. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

Seems pointless as the justice system is over loaded. Crimes happen and it takes years to be prosecuted. (Victim of assault, Male, 25-34)

Victims also highlighted the emotional toll of attending court and the impact of delays on their wellbeing.

It's such a long wait to get to court, […] giving evidence is retraumatising. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)

The Crown Court process has dragged on for over six years with no resolution. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)

Some victims explained that court proceedings had affected their recovery from the crime itself.

I believe it's taking me longer to recover from the court experience than it will from the rape. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

Others described negative interactions with legal professionals, particularly defence lawyers, which reduced their willingness to engage with the process again.

I had a bad experience of attending the court, […] I have got enough victimisation and trauma from the defence barrister. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 16-24)

The defence team were barbaric … (Bereaved family member, Female, 45-54)

Victim blaming by the defence and prosecution barrister […] resulting in me feeling like the person on trial. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

What this means for victims

While most victims whose cases went to court secured a conviction, the outcome of proceedings did not always align with their expectations. Some victims felt the final conviction failed to reflect the seriousness or full context of the offending, while others expressed dissatisfaction with compensation arrangements. More significantly, the experiences victims had throughout the court process influenced their willingness to engage with the justice system in future. For some, delays, distressing court experiences, dissatisfaction with outcomes and a loss of confidence in the system led them to conclude that they would not attend court again. These findings suggest that improving victims' experiences of court is important not only for current cases, but also for maintaining future engagement and confidence in the justice system.

6. Sentencing and after conviction

At the end of the case, victims have the right to be told the outcome, including, a brief summary of reasons for the sentencing decision, by the WCU. If the defendant is convicted (pleads or is found guilty), they will be sentenced. Victims have the right to be told the sentence the defendant received, including a short explanation about the meaning and effect of the sentence.

Key Findings

- Only 67% of victims who wanted their Victim Impact Statement (VIS) read aloud in court said it was read during proceedings.
- Victims viewed the VIS as one of the few opportunities they had to have their voice heard within the criminal justice process. Some reported negative experiences where they felt the statement was minimised, challenged or used against them during proceedings.
- Over a third (39%) of victims were not given the opportunity to amend their VIS after initially submitting it to the police, despite lengthy delays meaning the impact of the crime had often changed over time.
- Almost a fifth (18%) of victims said their VIS was edited by the police, CPS or the court prior to sentencing. Some reported becoming aware of these changes only on the day of the hearing, leaving them feeling unprepared and excluded.
- Communication about sentencing outcomes was inconsistent. A fifth (20%) of victims said the conviction and sentence had not been clearly explained to them.
- Where victims felt the sentence did not reflect the seriousness of the offending, poor communication often exacerbated dissatisfaction with the outcome.
- Awareness of the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme was low. Among respondents whose case was heard in the Crown Court, 64% said they had not been informed about the scheme.
- Only 12% of victims of crime that would be eligible, reported being referred to the VCS. Experiences varied, with some victims describing positive communication and safeguarding support, while others reported delays and difficulties obtaining information.
- Communication failures extended beyond sentencing. Of victims whose offender appealed against conviction or sentence, 25% said they were not informed beforehand and over a quarter (28%) said they were not informed of the outcome.
- Victims often felt excluded from decisions and developments following conviction, leaving them feeling disconnected from a stage of the process that continued to affect their safety, wellbeing and confidence in the justice system.

Of the respondents we heard from in our survey where the case had gone to court, over three quarters (81%) said someone had been convicted. However, 14% said the defendant was convicted of a different offence to the one charged.

Reading the Victim Impact Statement at the sentencing hearing

Victims have the right to make a Victim Impact Statement (VIS), which explains in their own words how the crime has affected them. Victims can also request that their statement is read aloud during the sentencing hearing. The judge or magistrate will decide whether the statement can be read, and which parts can be included, while taking the victim's preferences into account.

What victims told us about reading their Victim Impact Statement

- The VIS was one of the few opportunities they had to have their voice heard during the criminal justice process.
- Some victims were disappointed when their statement was not read aloud.
- Victims felt frustrated when they had invested significant emotional effort in preparing a statement that was not subsequently used.
- Some reported feeling that their statement had been used against them during proceedings.
- Others said they were not given the opportunity to provide a statement at all.

Many victims viewed the VIS as their primary opportunity to explain the personal impact of the crime and have their experiences acknowledged by the court.

> *Even though he was found not guilty, I should of been allowed to read my impact statement as this was the only way I was about to have my voice heard. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 55-64)*

> *I don't understand why my VIS was not read to the defendant and the jury. It feels a waste that I spent emotional energy to write something that was discounted because he was found not guilty. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

> *To get the victim impact statement in on time by the police to be read in court. My only voice was removed in court in the trial. (Victim of grooming, Female, 16-24)*

Some victims also described negative experiences where they felt the contents of their statement were used against them during proceedings.

> *I was very upset at the way my VIS was used against me in court. I was not questioned on what's happened, only on the contents of my VIS. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

The VIS is an evidential statement which means that it is disclosed to the defence team with other evidence. This is why the VIS is often taken at the same time as a victim's statement about the offence. Victims should also be informed that the

statement is evidential and their expectations should be managed that they could be asked questions about their VIS by the defence. The Victims' Commissioner has previously commented that the status of the VIS as evidential undermines it's stated function, which is to give victims a voice in the sentencing process.[95]

In cases where someone had been convicted, only two thirds (67%) of respondents who wanted their VIS read aloud said that it was read in court. This is concerning given the importance victims attach to the statement as a means of ensuring their experiences are recognised during the justice process.

Updating the Victim Impact Statement

The Victims' Code states that victims should have the opportunity to add to their statement or make an additional VIS during the course of proceedings at any point before conviction. This allows them to reflect any changes in the impact of the crime over time.

What victims told us about updating their statement

- The impact of crime often changed as cases progressed.
- Long delays meant statements written early in the process no longer reflected victims' experiences.
- Victims were not always informed that they could update their statement.
- Some only became aware of this right because of support services rather than criminal justice agencies.

Over a third (39%) of respondents said they were not given the opportunity to amend their VIS after first submitting it to the police. This is particularly significant given the lengthy delays many victims experienced before their case concluded.

> *The time delay meant my original VIS, which was made in the first 2 weeks of the incident, wasn't really a full picture as to how I was feeling some 18 months after the collision […]. The opportunity to do another VIS was not given to me by the police. (Bereaved family member, Female, 55-64)*

This suggests that some victims may be missing opportunities to ensure that their statement accurately reflects the ongoing impact of the crime.

Changes made to Victim Impact Statements

A VIS may be edited where certain content is not legally appropriate for inclusion in sentencing proceedings. However, victims described feeling distressed where amendments were made without clear communication or at very short notice. It is quite common for the VIS to be edited, however, the reasons for it being edited should be sensitively explained to victims, as far in advance of sentencing as possible.

[95] A new Victims' Code: consultation response - Victims Commissioner

What victims told us about changes to their statement

- Some victims felt their statement had been significantly altered before sentencing.
- Victims were not always aware of changes in advance.
- Last-minute amendments left some feeling rushed and unprepared.
- Some felt that editing removed important aspects of their experience.
- Victims described feeling silenced when sections of their statement were removed.

Just under a fifth (18%) of respondents said their victim impact statement had been edited by the CPS, judge or the police before the sentencing hearing. For some victims, this occurred very close to the hearing itself, leaving them feeling that they had little opportunity to understand or respond to the changes.

> *I read [my statement] in court via a video link, however this was butchered up by the defence barrister with half the content taken out. This resulted in me being interrupted after a few moments of reading and given another set of pages to read which had whole blocks of my statement blacked out. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 45-54)*

> *I was made to edit my statement the day before reading it aloud in court. It was extremely rushed and traumatic for me. (Victim of attempted murder, Female, 35-44)*

What this means for victims

VIS are one of the few opportunities that victims have to describe, in their own words, the impact that a crime has had on their lives. The findings suggest that victims place significant importance on this process and often view it as their main opportunity to have their voice heard within the criminal justice system.

However, not all victims who wished to have their statement read in court were able to do so. Others reported not being given the opportunity to update their statement despite significant changes in circumstances over time, while some described distressing experiences where their statements were amended at short notice or in ways they felt diminished their experiences. Together, these findings suggest that greater attention is needed to ensuring victims understand their rights in relation to VIS and are supported to use them effectively throughout the sentencing process.

Receiving communication about sentencing

Under the Victims' Code, victims have the right to be informed of the outcome of their case and the sentence imposed, including a short explanation of what the sentence means in practice.

In our survey, where the defendant had been convicted and sentenced, a fifth (20%) of respondents said the conviction and sentence had not been clearly explained to them.[96]

Where victims believe a sentence is too low, they may be able to ask the Attorney General to refer the sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.[97] However, only certain offences sentenced in the Crown Court are eligible for referral.[98] Among respondents whose case had been heard in the Crown Court, just under two thirds (64%) said they had not been informed about the ULS scheme.

What victims told us about sentencing outcomes

- Victims were not always given a clear explanation of the sentence imposed.
- Some felt the sentence did not reflect the seriousness of the offending.
- Dissatisfaction with sentencing was often compounded by a lack of information about what a sentence meant in practice.
- Victims wanted greater understanding of the options available where they believed a sentence was too lenient.
- Low awareness of the ULS scheme may prevent some victims from exercising their rights.

Many victims expressed disappointment with sentencing outcomes, particularly where they felt the continuing impact of the offence on them was not reflected in the sentence imposed.

> *Furthermore, the person was a repeat offender and still did not have to go to prison, only got 16 weeks suspended for 1 year […] In the end I as a victim, I'm more worse off than the criminal which is very sad and disappointing. (Victim of criminal damage, Male, 16-24)*

> *The police and CPS were fab and offered a good prison sentence however due to overcrowding and gov rules, it was knocked down from 32 months to just 15 served inside which is just insane. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *Sentencing could be improved and less lenient. How can an abuser walk away completely scott free whilst the victims sit fearing for their lives? (Victim of stalking and harassment, Female, 25-34)*

Receiving information following the conviction

Victims continue to have rights following conviction, including access to information about the offender and significant developments during the sentence.

[96] This compares to 19% in our 2024 survey. Please note, direct comparisons cannot be made due to differences in methodology and sample.
[97] This can only be done if the Attorney General thinks that the sentence was not just lenient but 'unduly lenient', such that the sentencing judge made a gross error or imposed a sentence outside the range of sentences reasonably available in the circumstances of the case.
[98] Eligibility for the Unduly Lenient Scheme is outlined in this guidance.

The Victim Contact Scheme

The Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) is operated by HM Prison and Probation Service and is available to victims of serious sexual and violent offences where an offender receives a custodial sentence of 12 months or more.[99] Eligible victims are offered a Victim Liaison Officer (VLO), who can provide information about key stages of the offender's sentence, including release arrangements.

When looking specifically at victims of assault, street violence, rape or sexual assault, domestic abuse, and families bereaved by a criminal act where there had been a conviction, only 12% said they had been referred to the VCS following sentencing.[100]

What victims told us about the Victim Contact Scheme

- Positive relationships with VLO provided reassurance and support.
- Effective communication helped victims feel safer after conviction.
- Victims valued having a dedicated point of contact.
- Delays and gaps in communication caused frustration and uncertainty.
- Some victims were unclear about the role of the VCS.
- Victims wanted more timely and proactive updates about offenders.

Some victims spoke positively about their experiences with the VCS and described the support they received from VLO.

> *Again, the woman was amazing, she helped me at every step and also helped me to have my restraining order varied from 5 years to indefinite as I had waived my anonymity, and she felt for my safety it would be best. […] She was another amazing person, I'm eternally grateful. (Victim of domestic abuse, Female, 35-44)*

> *I think this scheme is one of the great things that happened to me because the support, empathy and kindness was absolutely incredible. (Victim of street violence, Male, 45-54)*

However, experiences were not consistently positive. Other victims described delays, confusion about the scheme and difficulties obtaining information.

> *They provide you with updates quite late, if offenders are re-categorised or changed prisons. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)*

> *It took ages for contact to be made after stating I wanted it. […] I still don't really understand their role and what I can discuss with them and what needs to go through witness care. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)*

[99] Information about the Victim Contact Scheme - GOV.UK

[100] This proportion may include some respondents who would not be eligible for the Victim Contact Scheme, for example, victims in cases where the sentence received was less than 12 months and victims of certain assault offences.

I wish I could have more updates from them. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 25-34)

Some victims described particularly significant distress where information about offenders was delayed or incomplete.

I was not routinely updated by the service, any updates I requested went unanswered until, upon contacting the service again, […] I had to seek help from my MP and a [support organisation caseworker] to get further information about this. (Bereaved family member, Female, 65-74)

Victims also recognised the pressure under which probation services and VCS staff were operating.

There is seemingly a lot of change in the probationary service, and they are under a lot of pressure, and this has affected my dealing with the VCS. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 35-44)

The victim journey does not end at conviction. For many victims, timely and accurate information about the offender remains important to their safety, wellbeing and recovery.

Appeals

If a defendant appeals against their conviction or sentence, victims have the right to be informed by the WCU and told the outcome of the appeal.

Only 10% of respondents said the defendant had appealed against their conviction or sentence. However, among those whose offender appealed, a quarter (25%) said they were they were not informed before the appeal took place (25%) and over a quarter (28%) said they were not informed of the outcome of the appeal.

What victims told us about appeals

- **Victims were not always notified when appeals were taking place.**
- **Some were not informed about appeal outcomes.**
- **Lack of information left victims feeling excluded from important developments.**
- **Victims wanted opportunities to understand and engage with the process.**
- **Poor communication around appeals undermined confidence in the justice system.**

Victims described situations where they felt excluded from important information relating to appeals.

They failed to tell me when court had been rescheduled. Then did not call witness[es] by their correct names in their letters. After conviction

they did not keep fully up to date about his many appeals. (Victim of rape and sexual assault, Female, 45-54)

Given the potential impact of an appeal on victims' lives and wellbeing, a lack of communication at this stage can leave victims feeling disconnected from decisions that continue to affect them.

What this means for victims

For many victims, the justice process does not end when an offender is convicted. Sentencing outcomes, post-conviction information and appeals can all have a significant impact on victims' wellbeing, safety and confidence in the criminal justice system. While some victims described positive experiences, particularly through the VCS, others felt they were not provided with sufficient information or support following conviction. Low awareness of the ULS scheme, inconsistent communication about sentencing and gaps in information relating to appeals suggest that victims can become increasingly disconnected from the process after conviction. The findings indicate that clear communication and continued engagement remain essential throughout the post-conviction period, ensuring victims are able to understand developments, exercise their rights and feel informed about decisions that continue to affect their lives.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

What victims told us about their journey through the criminal justice system

The findings in this report suggest that victims' experiences are shaped not only by case outcomes, but by how they are treated throughout the justice process. Victims repeatedly described difficulties understanding their rights, accessing support, obtaining information about their case and navigating lengthy delays.

While many victims reported positive experiences with individual professionals, support services and parts of the system, common concerns emerged throughout the journey. These included poor communication, inconsistent awareness of rights, delays, difficulties accessing support and challenges obtaining information about important decisions affecting their case.

The report identifies five cross-cutting themes.

1. **Victims do not know their rights**

    - Low awareness of the Victims' Code, VRR, RJ
    - Confusion around schemes and support services

Victims need to know their rights in order to ask for them and check whether they are being complied with by the criminal justice agencies that are working with them. The Victims' Code forms an important blueprint of minimum standards to ensure victims' needs are being met through the justice system. It is a significant concern that victims are not aware or receiving key cornerstones of this, such as the needs assessment, referrals to support services and the VRR.

2. **Victims carry the burden of navigating the system**

    - Chasing updates
    - Self-referring to support
    - Discovering rights through internet searches
    - Repeatedly telling their story

It is important to remember that for the majority of victims, this will be their first experience of the criminal justice system. They are likely to have experienced significant levels of trauma as the result of the crime committed against them. The burden of the justice process will weigh heavily on them and they should not have to rely on their own energy and resilience to research, chase and pursue communication and support.

3. **Communication is the core systemic failure**

    - Police communication
    - WCU communication
    - CPS communication
    - Sentencing information
    - Appeals information

Throughout the criminal justice journey, victims report not receiving enough communication. Communication to make clear decisions about whether to proceed, to manage their expectations about what the process will look like, to keep them engaged during delays in the system, to explain key decisions such as charging and sentencing, and to keep them safe afterwards.

4. **Support works when victims can access it**

    - The value and benefit of support services is one of the most positive findings in the report
    - The biggest issues are access, timeliness and referrals

Support is often the only thing keeping victims engaged with the justice process. Where it can form a single point of contact, it can shape their experience with the process for the better and make it more manageable and accessible.

In addition, the victim's journey does not just end following the sentencing hearing. Ongoing, sustained support is often needed to help victims recover from the process and keep them safe following conviction, if and when the offender is released in the future.

5. **Delays prolong harm**

Court delays, adjournments and lengthy investigations extended victims' involvement in the justice system, delayed recovery and undermined confidence in outcomes.

Taken together, these five themes suggest that the challenges victims face are not isolated problems at individual stages of the justice process. Instead, they point to underlying systemic issues that continue to shape victims' experiences throughout their journey:

Victims remain invisible within the system

Victims frequently described having to repeatedly explain their circumstances, re-tell their experiences and proactively seek information and support. The system often appears organised around agencies and cases rather than victims, who are then left feeling like an afterthought in their own justice journey.

Trauma-informed practice remains inconsistent

Victims' experiences and trust in the system varied significantly, depending on whether professionals understood the impact of trauma, vulnerability and victimisation. Positive experiences were often associated with compassionate, trauma-informed practice, while poor experiences frequently left victims feeling re-traumatised, disbelieved or excluded.

Communication and support determine engagement

Victims were more likely to remain engaged where they felt informed, supported and safe. Poor communication, delays and lack of support were strongly associated with disengagement, risk to victims and levels of re-traumatisation, as well as reluctance to report again or attend court in future.

Recommendations

The findings in this report reinforce the need for a joined-up, victim-centred approach to supporting victims throughout the criminal justice process. Victims repeatedly described having to navigate a fragmented system, re-tell their experiences, pursue information and coordinate support themselves. The Victims' Commissioner believes that a Victim Care Hub model offers the clearest vision for addressing these issues. Such a model would provide victims with a single point of contact to help them navigate the justice process, access support, understand and exercise their rights, and receive coordinated communication throughout their journey. It would not replace existing criminal justice agencies or specialist support services but instead seek to bring together currently fragmented victim-facing functions into a more coherent and accessible system. The recommendations below represent practical steps towards achieving that ambition.

Recommendation 1

Conduct an End-to-End Review of the Victim Journey

The Lord Chancellor and Home Secretary should jointly commission an independent end-to-end review of victims' experiences across the criminal justice system to identify opportunities to improve victim outcomes and inform the development of a more joined-up victim care model, including the potential for a single point of contact approach for victims.

Recent independent reviews have examined sentencing, courts and prisons, but no equivalent review has examined the victim journey itself. While this survey provides important evidence of victims' experiences, an independent government-commissioned review would enable a broader assessment of services, investment, outcomes, accountability and cross-agency working to identify how the system can better deliver for victims.

The review should:

- Understand and evidence victims' experiences throughout the criminal justice journey, from first contact through to post-conviction support.
- Establish a robust understanding of what constitutes positive outcomes for victims and how these are measured across the justice system.
- Identify systemic risks affecting victims' engagement and outcomes, including victim attrition, victim safety, delays, communication failures, and workforce pressures.
- Map current investment in victim care across criminal justice agencies, including police Witness Care Officers, CPS Victim Liaison Officers, Probation Victim Liaison Officers, victim support services and specialist advocacy roles.
- Assess whether existing victim-facing roles, services and processes improve victim satisfaction, reduce attrition, improve outcomes and represent value for money.

- Identify opportunities to improve coordination between agencies and develop options for a more joined-up victim care model, including a single point of contact approach to help victims navigate the criminal justice process, access support, exercise their rights and receive consistent communication throughout their journey.

To support this review and enable future transformation of victim services, the Victims' Commissioner recommends the following priority actions.

Recommendation 2

Develop and Implement a Cross-criminal Justice Victim Identifier

The Ministry of Justice and Home Office should jointly develop and implement a cross-criminal justice Victim Identifier, enabling victims' information, needs, support requirements and Victims' Code entitlements to follow them throughout their justice journey.

The identifier should support:

- information sharing between agencies;
- reduced duplication of information requests;
- improved safeguarding and support referrals;
- monitoring of Victims' Code delivery and compliance.

Recommendation 3

Implement the Victims' Code Compliance Framework

The Ministry of Justice should complete implementation of the Victims' Code compliance framework by April 2028 at the latest and publish a delivery timetable agreed with the Victims' Commissioner.

The framework should be embedded within future criminal justice governance and accountability arrangements to ensure compliance monitoring becomes a core feature of system performance, rather than a standalone exercise.

Pending implementation, the Ministry of Justice should publish interim arrangements for monitoring compliance with the Victims' Code and commit to continued funding for the Victims' Commissioner to continue to undertake an independent Victims' Survey to gather victim experiences and feedback on Code compliance.

Recommendation 4

Establish a Criminal Justice Taskforce to develop a Trauma-informed Framework.

The Ministry of Justice and Home Office should establish a cross-criminal justice Taskforce to develop a national trauma-informed framework, drawing on learning from Scotland and existing work across criminal justice agencies.

The taskforce should:

- agree a shared definition of trauma-informed practice;

- consider disability, neurodiversity and intersectionality;
- identify workforce capability requirements;
- produce an implementation plan.

Recommendation 5.

Strengthen Support Provision for Victims including those experiencing Lengthy Delays

The Ministry of Justice should assess whether current victim support funding and commissioning arrangements are sufficient to meet the needs of victims including those experiencing lengthy investigations, court delays and adjournments, and publish a plan to address identified gaps.

The assessment should consider:

- waiting times for specialist support;
- unmet demand;
- support available throughout lengthy proceedings;
- support available following conclusion of the case;
- support for victims whose cases are repeatedly adjourned.
- whether current funding, commissioning and partnership arrangements, including the Duty to Collaborate, are delivering coordinated, effective support for victims and making the best use of available resources.

Annexes

Annex A - Methodology

Survey Design

On behalf of the Victims' Commissioner, TONIC (www.tonic.org.uk) conducted a survey between 8 April and 20 May 2026. The survey was designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete and included a combination of closed questions (multiple choice/tick box) and open-ended questions (free-text responses). This mixed-methods approach ensured both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, providing a comprehensive understanding of victims' experiences.

Participant Recruitment

To maximise reach and ensure that all recent victims of crime had the opportunity to participate, multiple recruitment strategies were employed:

1. **Open Promotion**: The survey was disseminated through the communications channels of key partners, including their social media, newsletters and placing posters promoting the survey in court buildings. Key partners included national charities, police services, court services, Police and Crime Commissioners, local authorities, and NHS services across England and Wales.
2. **Specialist Panel Recruitment**: The specialist panel company, Prolific, identified suitable participants from their panel members. Screening questions were used to identify individuals who had been victims of crime or had reported a crime since January 2021 (the last five years). Eligible participants were then randomly selected from this pool to complete the survey. Panel members of Prolific are paid approximately £9 per hour for their participation in surveys.

Accessibility

The survey was designed to be as accessible as possible to all victims. The online survey was built to WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards, ensuring compatibility with screen readers, keyboard-only navigation and adjustable text sizes. To reduce barriers to participation, it was offered in multiple formats and modes: a Welsh-language version ran in parallel with the English version, in line with the Welsh Language Standards; a paper version was available on request; and telephone-assisted completion was offered for victims with limited internet access or who preferred verbal support, delivered by trained researchers following trauma-informed principles. Where a victim wished to take part but faced barriers such as language, limited internet access or other communication needs, a supporter could complete the survey with or on behalf of them. To extend reach to groups who may be underrepresented, the survey was also shared through specialist victim support services and community organisations working with specific victim groups.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained through an explicit opt-in at the start of the survey, where respondents were given clear

information about its purpose, how their data would be used, their anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any point. Respondents were not required to answer any question and could select ‘prefer not to say’ or move on at any time. Given the sensitive subject matter, the survey followed trauma-informed principles throughout. A quick-exit button was provided on every page, allowing respondents to leave immediately. Content warnings were included where appropriate, and respondents were signposted to a range of support services at the end of the survey and on the Victims’ Commissioner’s website.

Screening and Routing

Additional screening questions were integrated into the survey to route respondents based on their experiences. For instance, if a participant indicated they had attended court, they were directed to questions about their experiences in that context. This ensured that the survey captured relevant and detailed data tailored to each participant's circumstances.

Sample Size and Representativeness

A total of 6,248 participants aged 16 or over completed the survey. All participants had either been victims of a crime or had reported a crime to the police between January 2021 and May 2026.

Data Cleaning

Prior to analysis, the dataset was cleaned to ensure data quality. The following responses were removed: 140 respondents who did not consent to take part at the opening question; a further 459 who did not provide any answer to the crime-type question (Q2); and a further 149 who did not answer the first substantive question, on police contact (Q4). This was determined as these respondents did not provide sufficient information to contribute to the survey findings and their inclusion would not add meaningful insight to the analysis. In each case, respondents who selected ‘prefer not to say’ were retained. This left a total of 6,248 completed responses, which forms the base shown at Q2 and Q4. As some respondents did not answer every subsequent question, the base size for individual questions may be lower, with missing data handled on a question-by-question basis. Responses were also checked for ‘straight-lining’ (selecting the same answer — for example, ‘strongly agree’ — across more questions than is plausible) and for unrealistically short completion times; responses showing these patterns were excluded.

Data Weighting

The data were weighted to ensure the sample was representative of all adults aged 16+ in England and Wales who have experienced a crime. Weighting was based on age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity (same/different to birth), region, ethnicity, and disability, using the most recent figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

In line with the OVC’s requirements, Black and Mixed ethnic groups were oversampled to ensure sufficient sample sizes for reliable subgroup analysis. Weights were calibrated to known population demographic distributions using respondents with complete demographic information. A number of respondents did

not provide complete demographic information (for example, 872 did not answer the sex question), meaning a weight could not be calculated for them in the standard way. Because this missing data was not random (the characteristic most strongly associated with non-response was crime type), these respondents were not simply removed. Instead, a cell-matching approach was used: for each crime type, the average weight of respondents who did provide demographic information was calculated and applied to respondents of the same crime type who did not. This approach assumes that demographic non-response is random within each crime-type weighting class.

Data Analysis

Data Tables

Data tables were used to organise, present, and analyse the quantitative information collected. Each row is the proportion of respondents selecting each answer, each column is a subset of the total sample. This structured format facilitated the comparison of data, identification of trends, and derivation of insights.

Statistical Significance

Statistical significance was indicated using letters beneath the percentages in the tables. For example:

- A letter (e.g., ‘B’) beneath a percentage indicated that the figure was statistically higher than the percentage in another group and identified which column it is higher than. For instance, a 12% figure under males might be flagged as significantly higher than 6% under females.
- Significance testing was conducted using the 95% confidence interval, this means that any differences flagged as significant, would be expected to be replicated 19 times out of 20, were the study repeated.
- If no letters appeared, the differences were not statistically significant, meaning no conclusions could be reliably drawn about higher or lower prevalence.
- T-tests were used for mean comparisons, non-parametric equivalents were used for tests of proportions, with Bessel’s correction applied. False discovery rate corrections are applied. Bessel’s correction is a statistical adjustment that removes the natural bias of underestimating a population’s true variance from a limited dataset. False discovery rate (FDR) correction is commonly applied in survey data analysis to prevent false conclusions when running multiple tests simultaneously.

Columns were only compared within the same question, and comparisons were not made across unrelated categories.

Rounding

Due to rounding, not all percentages presented in the analysis sum to 100%.

Qualitative analysis

Open-text survey responses were analysed using an iterative coding approach to identify recurring themes and issues. This was conducted independently by two researchers. The researchers regularly reviewed and compared coding decisions to discuss discrepancies, refine the coding framework and assess saturation.

Following coding, thematic analysis was undertaken separately for each survey question. Researchers identified and agreed overarching themes within each question, considering both frequency of responses and breadth of issues raised. Themes from individual questions were then compared and synthesised across the dataset to identify common patterns and recurring issues. Final themes were agreed through discussion between both researchers.

Representative quotes were selected following analysis and agreed upon by both researchers. The quotes included in this report are used for illustrative purposes to represent common themes, but it is important to note that they do not represent all experiences and views of victims.

Limitations

The methodology relied primarily on online survey tools and partner organisations for participant recruitment, which may introduce biases, such as underrepresentation of individuals with limited access to digital platforms. Efforts to mitigate these biases included offering the survey in paper, telephone-assisted and Welsh-language formats, weighting the data and diversifying recruitment methods.

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

Whilst the survey findings were weighted to enhance the representativeness of victims of crime across England and Wales, the sample used were self-selecting. The survey methodology literature on self-selection bias indicates that respondents with strong feelings may be more likely to respond to surveys.[101]

Additionally, in this report, several comparisons are made to the 2024 Victims Commissioner's Victims' Survey results. However, these should be interpreted with caution as the 2026 survey question set considerably differs to previous years, with some questions from previous iterations of the survey removed and sections of the question set expanded. This includes further questions on victims' experiences of their Victims' Code rights, as well as their experiences of Witness Care Units and experiences at the post-conviction stage.

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

Annex B - Weighted demographic breakdown[102]

Sex at birth: Female (47%), Male (41%).

Gender identity: Gender identity the same as sex registered at birth: Yes (87%), No (1%), Prefer not to say (1%).

Age (years): 16 to 24 (13%), 25 to 34 (17%), 35 to 44 (15%), 45 to 54 (15%), 55 to 64 (13%), 65 to 74 (9%), 75 and over (5%).

Ethnicity: White (74%), Asian/Asian British (7%), Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (4%), Mixed/multiple ethnic group (3%), Other ethnic group (2%).

Sexuality: Heterosexual (81%), Bisexual (2%), Gay/Lesbian (2%), Other (1%).

Disability: Non-disabled (66%), Disabled (20%).[103]

Region: East Midlands (7%), East of England (8%), London (12%), North East (4%), North West (10%), South East (16%), South West (10%), Wales (4%), West Midlands (7%), Yorkshire and the Humber (7%).

[102] Please note, some demographic percentages do not add up to 100% because 'prefer not to say' and missing responses are not included.
[103] Disability was defined using The Equality Act disability definition (EADD).

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