

**Women's**  
**Policy Group NI**

After Violence:  
Attitudes and Reporting  
Violence Against Women  
and Girls

WPG NI PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

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## Introduction

In 2022, the Women's Policy Group NI conducted primary research into the scope, scale and prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Northern Ireland. This new piece of research, 'After Violence,' is the second chapter to the original research, with a particular focus on women's experiences and attitudes towards reporting VAWG, *after* they have experienced violence.

This research was undertaken by several members of the Women's Policy Group including:

- Elaine Crory, Women's Sector Lobbyist at WRDA
- Aoife Mallon, Policy Assistant at WRDA
- Jonna Monaghan, Director of Women's Platform

This report presents the findings from this research and has been compiled by Elaine Crory and Aoife Mallon at the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). For any questions or queries regarding this piece of research, or the work of the Women's Policy Group NI, more generally, please contact [elaine.crory@wrda.net](mailto:elaine.crory@wrda.net).

### *A Note from the Women's Sector Lobbyist*

We launched this survey with the intention to collect data to inform several consultation responses, including consultations by the Westminster Women and Equalities Committee, the NI Executive Office and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO).

Thinking back to our previous research on the scope, scale and prevalence of VAWG in Northern Ireland, we wanted to build on this research by asking more detailed questions about one specific aspect of VAWG, which is reporting. What we received in response to a relatively brief survey was a deluge of experiences, a wealth of insights and a testament to the ways that the state fails survivors of abuse and violence in Northern Ireland.

We hope that the testimonies shared throughout this report become a rallying call for change in the fight for a better justice system in Northern Ireland.

### *A word of thanks*

The Women's Policy Group NI would like to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to respond to this survey and share their experiences with us. We are committed to amplifying the voices of women in order to raise awareness of issues relating to VAWG and lobby for transformational change.

### *Trigger Warning*

The focus of this report is on the experiences of women and girls with violence. This includes experiences of sexual and domestic violence. As a result, you may find some of the content triggering or upsetting to read, and we encourage you to look after your mental health when reading about these issues. A full list of signposting information has been included on pages 32-33 of this report.

## *Recent publications*

### *Consultation responses*

- WPG (2023) [Response](#) to TEO EVAWG Draft Framework
- WPG (2023) [Response](#) to Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into the escalation of VAWG
- WPG (2023) [Response to DoE Relationships and Sexuality Education \(RSE\) Consultation](#)
- WPG (2023) Response to TEO [EVAWG: Experiences and Attitudes of 16 year-olds in Northern Ireland](#) - Readership Survey
- WPG (2023) Response to [PPS Policy on Prosecuting Cases of Domestic Abuse](#) Consultation
- WPG (2022) [Response to Call for Views](#) on TEO EVAWG Strategy

### *Primary Research*

- WPG (2022) [Primary Research](#) into VAWG in Northern Ireland
- WPG (2021) [Primary Research](#) into Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women in Northern Ireland
- WPG (2020) [Primary Research](#) into Stalking in Northern Ireland

### *Briefings, Reports and Statements*

- WPG (2023) [Women's Manifesto](#) for Local Councils
- WPG (2023) Where's Our Democracy? Campaign's [Common Sense Budget](#)
- WPG (2022) Briefing on [Disabled Women's experiences](#) of men's violence

## Executive Summary

### *Experiences of violence*

- 87% of women have experienced VAWG
- 80% of women disclosed their experience of VAWG to someone
- 60% of disclosures of VAWG were made to a friend or family member

### *Types of violence*

- The three most frequently mentioned forms of violence included:
  1. Assault/ rape
  2. Domestic abuse
  3. Sexual harassment

### *Domestic Abuse*

- 65% of respondents have experienced domestic abuse
- 67% of women who have experienced domestic abuse did not report it to the police or take legal action
- 63% of domestic abuse victims who reported it to the police or took legal action said that this was a negative experience

### *Perpetrators of violence*

- The 3 most common perpetrators of violence were:
  1. Intimate partner
  2. Stranger
  3. Colleague or acquaintance

### *Police Reporting*

- Only 27% of disclosures of VAWG were to the police
- Only 22% of women feel comfortable reporting VAWG to the police
- 85% of women think there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police

### *Court system*

- Only 9% of women think that courts in NI take VAWG seriously
- 54.5% of women who engaged with the courts were not satisfied with the outcome

### *Alternative forms of justice*

- 77% of women think convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program
- 61% of women were unsure if mediation and other forms of alternative justice are working

## Methodology

The survey was open for 2.5 weeks between 17<sup>th</sup> August and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2023. During this time, 92 responses were received. The following information was provided at the beginning of the survey:

*This survey aims to capture women's experiences and attitudes towards reporting Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG\*). It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and will be open until 3rd September 2023 at 00:00.*

*\*When we refer to VAWG throughout this survey, we are referring to actions, behaviours and attitudes that are motivated by misogyny and cause women harm. This includes harassment, stalking, cat-calling, assault, online abuse, spiking, honour-based abuse and domestic abuse.*

*The data collected will be used to inform the work of the Women's Policy Group NI, including but not limited to: consultation responses, briefing papers and other lobbying materials. All responses received to this survey are anonymous.*

*Content warning: This survey includes questions that make reference to issues that some people may find triggering, such as, sexual assault and domestic abuse. If you require support please see a list of support organisations and their contact information [here](#).*

*Please note that many of these survey questions are optional and you do not need to answer questions that do not apply to you or you find upsetting to answer. Any responses not directly related to attitudes and reporting of VAWG will be discounted. This research is conducted in line with the WRDA Research Ethics Policy which can be accessed [here](#).*

*By completing this survey you consent to allowing WRDA to anonymously store and use the information you provide for the purposes of the research outlined above. This anonymised information may also be used to inform WRDA's future research and policy work. You will not be identified in any of this research. Please be aware that information about this survey may be stored in your browser history which you can erase from your personal device.*

## Survey Findings

### Demographics

The first section of this survey collected data relating to the demographic composition of survey respondents, including their age, sexuality and protected characteristics.

#### Q.1(a) What is your age? (Compulsory – 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked to select their age category from the following options:

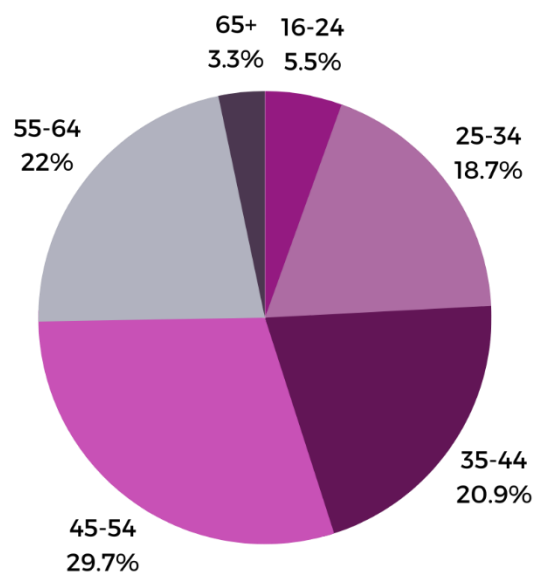
- 16-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

Survey data from this question showed that:

- 5.5% of respondents were aged between 16-24 years
- 19% of respondents were aged between 25-34 years
- 21% of respondents were aged between 35-44 years
- 30% of respondents were aged between 45-54 years
- 22% of respondents were aged between 55-64 years
- 3% of respondents were above the age of 65

This data is visualised on the graph below.

#### Q1(a) What is your age?





### Q.1(b) Do you identify as any of the following? (Compulsory – 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they identified with any of the following characteristics:

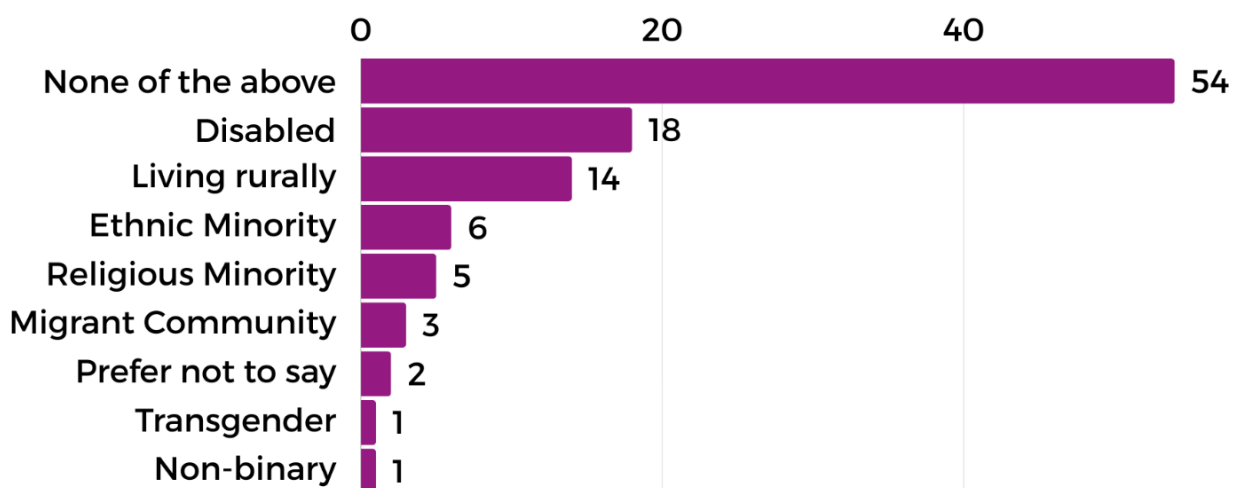
- Disabled
- Living rurally
- Ethnic minority
- Religious minority
- Migrant Community
- Transgender
- Non-binary

Respondents also had the option to select 'none of the above' or 'prefer not to say.' Survey data from this question showed that:

- 18% identified as disabled
- 14% said they were living rurally
- 6% identified as being from an ethnic minority community
- 5% identified as being from a religious minority community
- 3% identified as being from a migrant community
- 1% identified as non-binary
- 1% identified as transgender
- 54% identified as none of the above characteristics
- 2% preferred not to say if they identified with any of these characteristics

This data is visualised on the graph below.

### Q1(b) Do you identify as any of the following?



### Q.1(c) What is your sexuality? (Compulsory – 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked to select their sexuality from the following options:

- Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Gay

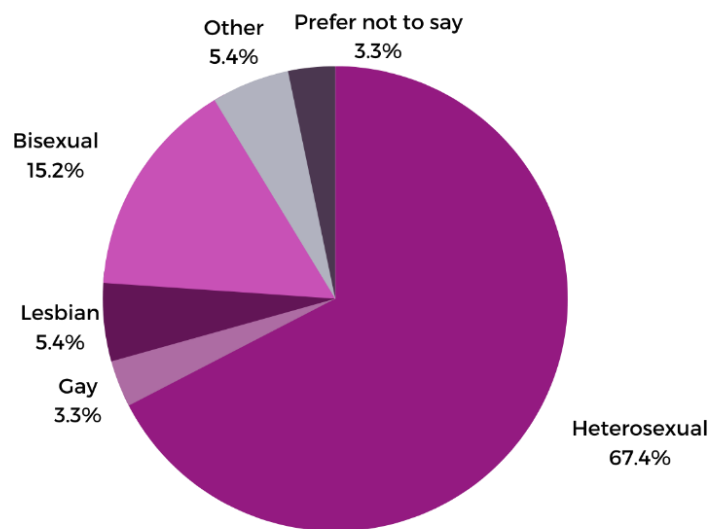
- Lesbian
- Other

Respondents also had the option to select 'prefer not to say.' Survey data from this questions showed that:

- 67% identified as heterosexual
- 15% identified as bisexual
- 5% identified as lesbian
- 3% identified as gay
- 5% identified as a sexuality other than the options listed above
- 3% preferred not to say what their sexuality was

This data is visualised on the graph below.

### Q1(c) What is your sexuality?



### Disclosing Experiences of VAWG

Section 2 of this survey asked questions relating to experiences and disclosures of violence against women and girls (VAWG). This included collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.

#### Q.2(a) Have you experienced a form of VAWG? (Compulsory – 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked if they had experienced a form of VAWG and were asked to select one of the following options:

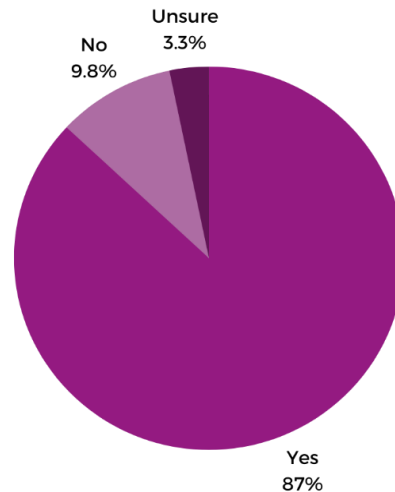
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Survey data from this question showed that:

- 87% of respondents had experienced a form of VAWG
- 10% of respondents had not experienced a form of VAWG
- 3% of respondents were unsure if they had experienced a form of VAWG

This data is visualised on the graph below.

### Q2(a) Have you experienced a form of VAWG?



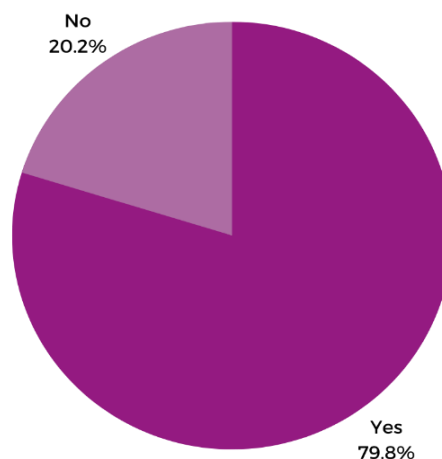
### Q.2(b) Did you disclose this to anyone? (Optional – 84 responses)

Survey respondents who stated above that they had experienced a form of VAWG were asked to indicate 'yes' or 'no' to whether or not they had disclosed this experience to anyone. Survey data from this question showed that:

- 80% of respondents who experienced VAWG disclosed their experiences to someone
- 20% of respondents who experienced VAWG did not disclose their experiences to anyone.

This data is visualised on the graph below.

### Q2(b) Did you disclose this to anyone?



### Q.2(c) Who did you disclose these experiences to? (Optional – 67 responses)

Survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced VAWG and disclosed this experience to someone were asked who they disclosed to. The following options were provided in response to this question:

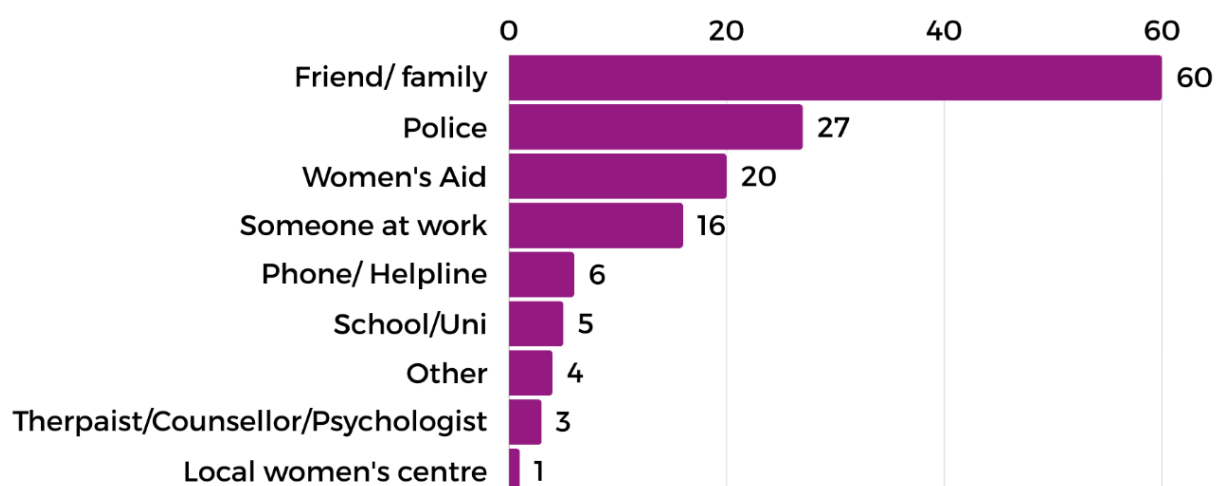
- Friend/ family
- Police
- Women’s Aid
- Someone at work
- School/ Uni
- Phone/ Helpline
- Therapist/ Counsellor/ Psychologist
- Local Women’s Centre
- Other

Survey data from this question showed that:

- 60% of respondents disclosed their experience to a friend or family member
- 27% of respondents disclosed their experience to the police
- 20% of respondents disclosed their experience to Women’s Aid
- 16% of respondents disclosed their experiences to someone at work
- 6% of respondents disclosed their experience to a helpline or phonenumber
- 5% of respondents disclosed their experience to someone at school or university
- 3% of respondents disclosed their experience to a therapist, counsellor or psychologist
- 1% of respondents disclosed their experience to their local women’s centre

This data is visualised on the graph below.

### Q2(c) Who did you disclose these experiences to?



2d) Please use the box below to tell us more about this experience (Optional – 47 responses)

Qualitative analysis of responses to this question showed that the most common categories of perpetrators were:

1. Intimate partner
2. Stranger
3. Colleague or acquaintance

Other perpetrators mentioned included family members and authority figures.

This analysis also showed that the most frequently cited forms of violence were:

1. Assault/ rape
2. Domestic abuse
3. Sexual harassment

Other forms of violence mentioned included:

- Intimidation/ threats
- Stalking
- Child abuse
- False imprisonment (e.g. kidnapping, being held hostage)

The following quotes provide a sample of responses that were received for this question.

*"I have been followed and yelled at in the street, and almost every time I go to a nightclub I am groped."*

*"I was subject to DV, coercive control, financial control and marital rape in my first marriage. I told nobody. I was ashamed."*

*"Multiple experiences. I could fill in this form 50 times all with different experiences. Some I told, eventually, a lot I swallowed up at the time, internalised with humiliation and shame."*

*"Cat called from very young - it does something to your insides, to your sense of self and safety in the world, the disgust and disappointment in the world, and boys and men. a profound disappointment at a very young age."*

*"Direct experiences of verbal intimidation, manipulation, coercive control, violence and sexual violence... I suspect absolutely none of this is in any way extraordinary and I think that's what makes it extraordinary, and why I'm filling in this survey."*

*"Two guys I thought were friends waited until I was off my face drunk and carried me into a bedroom and both of them had sex with me. I was barely conscious."*

*"Have endured long-standing domestic abuse, still in the marriage as police did not support me at my worst and lost all trust, so I suffer in silence."*

*"A gang surrounded me and while one or two of them distracted me the others lifted my whole dress right over my head."*

## Reporting Violence to the Police

The third section of this survey focused on respondents' experiences of reporting experiences of violence to the police. This included questions relating to how respondents felt about reporting violence to the police and beliefs they held regarding the ability of the police service to respond to VAWG.

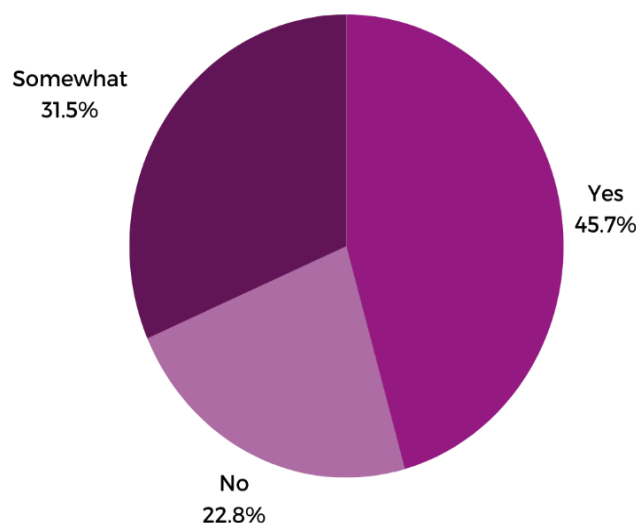
**Q.3(a) Are you aware of how to report an incident of VAWG to the police?**  
(Compulsory - 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they knew how to report VAWG to the police. The response options included 'yes,' 'no' and 'somewhat.' Survey data from this question showed that:

- 45.7% of women are aware of how to report VAWG to the police
- 31.5% of women are somewhat aware of how to report VAWG to the police
- 22.8% of women do not know how to report VAWG to the police

This data is visualised on the graph below:

### Q3(a) Are you aware of how to report an incident of VAWG to the police?



**Q.3(b) Would you feel comfortable reporting an incident of VAWG to the police?**  
(Compulsory - 92 responses)

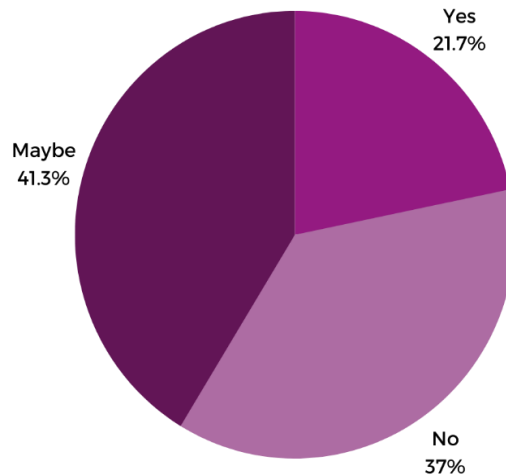
Survey respondents were asked if they feel comfortable reporting an incident of VAWG to the police. Survey data from this question showed that:

- 22% of women said they would feel comfortable reporting an incident of VAWG to the police

- 41% of women said they would 'maybe' feel comfortable reporting an incident of VAWG to the police
- 37% of women said they would not feel comfortable reporting an incident of VAWG to the police

This data is visualised on the graph below:

### Q3(b) Would you feel comfortable reporting an incident of VAWG to the police?



### Q.3(c) Why or why not? (Optional - 64 responses)

When respondents were asked why they would or would not report experiences of VAWG to the police, the following themes emerged.

Several respondents expressed a distrust in the police as a whole, with a number specifically saying so because of their membership of marginalised communities. In addition a number of people spoke about the police as an institution riddled with systemic problems such as misogyny, racism and queerphobia, and some referred to recent revelations about abuse and misogyny among certain police forces.

*“As a recent report by The Detail showed, the PSNI is full of domestic abusers who've never been meaningfully dealt with. The org is also institutionally sectarian and racist and as a queer, nonbinary person I'm not convinced they give a toss about my community following their divestment from Stonewall's programme.”*

*“Not anymore as a result of lived experience. Plus with all the scandals coming out about the police force, its hard to believe that our stories would be treated fairly/taken seriously. Unfortunately.”*

*“I am wary of the sensitivity around VAWG in the police. things like the Met Police's text chains and the general lack of sensitivity towards VAWG in NI make me believe that i would not be taken seriously or would be mocked behind my back.”*

A significant number of these responses included a rationale based on a distrust of the justice system as a whole, rather than the police in particular, fearing what reporting to police may lead to and the possible repercussions; that victim-blaming would follow from either the police themselves or from the justice system more broadly, that they would be forced to disclose personal information such as their phone and their medical records, that they would not be taken seriously or even be mocked.

In addition, respondents reported a varying response from police when they have interacted with them more than once. Similar evidence was found in WPG research into Stalking in 2020<sup>1</sup>.

*“I know women personally who have reported to the police, and have received little-to-no support. None of them got justice for what happened to them. I know the statistics, and I know it's very unlikely I would get justice either.”*

*“One trauma is enough. There is no protection of well-being. I would feel unsafe after a person was questioned. I do not believe the police can protect me. What is the point? The prosecution of rape is flawed from reporting to judicial system.”*

*“My experience with the police has been good, they listen and are friendly and approachable. The issue lies with the justice system as a whole. The process takes a long time and it feels at times impossible to try to heal from the trauma whilst knowing that courts ect remain in your future. It's also hard to find information about what could happen. Police and other agencies are very reluctant to say what the process could look like as it depends on each case; it's hard to decide whether or not to report it when you don't know what the process and end result could look like.”*

*“Some police staff excellent. Others poorly trained. I have ended calls to the police based on the staff member who picked up the call.”*

*“Too intrusive to my life- phones and medical records.”*

Among these responses were also a number of comments from people who had themselves reported to the police and found that the response was inadequate or even counter-productive. Some even said that the police themselves were the aggressors in their case.

*“While my ex-partner was on bail for crimes against me the male officer assigned to look after me made inappropriate advances / sexual suggestions to me. Kind of a ‘I'll look out for you if you look after me’ scenario.”*

*“I have seen the police in similar situations and have found them to be arrogant and misogynistic”*

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<sup>1</sup> WPG (2020) [Primary Research](#) into Stalking in Northern Ireland.



*“Previous experiences with police hasnt been good.”*

*“The police did not come out and I was nearly killed, when they did, i had lost all trust.”*

In addition, a number of respondents qualified that they would feel comfortable reporting some kinds of VAWG to the police, but not others.

*“It depends on the type of VAWG. If, for example, I was a victim of rape, I would most likely not report this to police as I understand the evidential threshold for prosecution is so high and I'd only probably have a 3-5% chance that the perpetrator would be convicted. The criminal justice response is mostly not trauma informed and/or meets the needs of victims/survivors.”*

*“Reported non domestic violence . Domestic violence much harder.”*

A number of respondents clarified that they think that the PSNI may be better now than they were in the past, when they first experienced violence or considered reporting, citing reforms since the end of the Troubles.

*“It is easier maybe now that they have training but my experience was not good over 20 years ago. There is still work to do I think”*

*“the incidents happened many years in my 20's; just after troubles - would feel safer now going to police”*

Others reported that they had themselves reported and found the police helpful.

*“I have found the police to be helpful in the past.”*

*“They respond immediately to remove the perpetrator from the home.”*

On balance, there are many more responses expressing reservations or outright fear of the consequences of reporting to police than there are positive experiences or optimistic perspectives on the possibility of a good outcome. Public confidence in police plays a significant role, but evidently there is a real concern about the capacity of the justice system overall - so that police responses cannot be fully considered in isolation from the wider justice system.

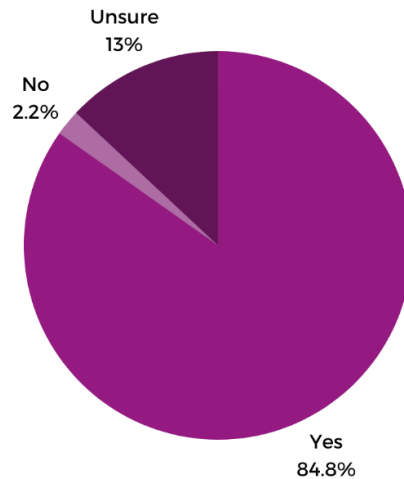
### **Q.3(d) Do you think there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police? (Compulsory - 92 responses)**

Survey respondents were asked if they think there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police. Responses to this question showed that:

- 85% of women think that there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police
- 13% of women were unsure if there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police
- 2% of women do not think there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police

This data is visualised on the graph below:

### Q3(d) Do you think there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police?



In response to 3c, one respondent also expressed concerns about specific phone lines for the purposes of reporting VAWG, reporting that an abusive ex saw the number of the 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline on the phone bill, and subsequently removed access to her phone. Given that abusive partners are so often controlling of their partner's phone access, it would be wise to ensure that any such numbers - including those already in operation - do not appear on phone bills.

## VAWG in the Courts System

This section of the survey focused on attitudes towards the courts system and the experiences of victims in navigating this system.

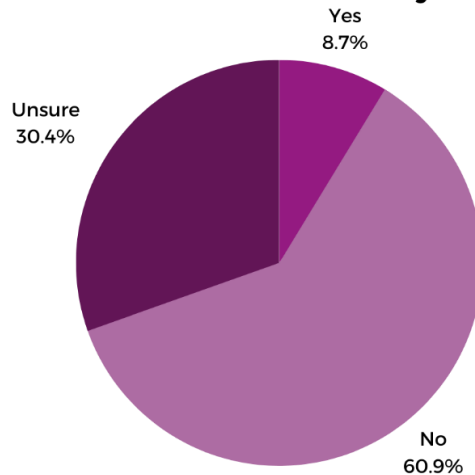
### Q.4(a) Do you think courts in Northern Ireland take VAWG seriously? (Compulsory - 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked if they think courts in Northern Ireland take VAWG seriously. Respondents could select 'yes,' 'no' or 'unsure' in response to this question. Survey data showed that:

- 9% of women think courts in Northern Ireland take VAWG seriously
- 61% of women think courts in Northern Ireland do not take VAWG seriously
- 30% of women are 'unsure' if courts in Northern Ireland take VAWG seriously

This data is visualised on the graph below:

## Q4(a) Do you think courts in Northern Ireland take VAWG seriously?



### Q.4(b) How could the court system better support victims of VAWG? (Optional - 52 responses)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that 61% of respondents felt that, at present, courts do not take VAWG seriously, there were a lot of responses to this question, asking what could be done to better support victims/survivors.

A number of themes emerged that we will outline below, but it would be remiss not to acknowledge that many respondents felt that total reform was needed, or indeed despaired of the possibility of achieving reform on the scale needed because so many complex factors are involved.

*“Completely reform and restructure.”*

*“I really don’t know. I served on a jury for an historic sex abuse case and I was horrified at how uneducated some other jurors were (suggesting an 8 year old invented rape allegations against a babysitter because she fancied him and it was unrequited) and at the absolute trauma the victim experienced in court. I don’t know how to improve this”*

In addition, many respondents listed numerous changes they believe is necessary, combining to amount to the kind of radical reform alluded to above. Overall, issues that recurred frequently are outlined below.

Many respondents referred to the ways that the judgement handed down can leave survivors feeling as though their efforts to secure a conviction were pointless or not worth the effort. These included concerns about perpetrators being allowed out on bail while awaiting trial for very serious offences, and in particular the kinds of sentences handed down when a conviction takes place.

Several responses suggested that the sentence was not enough to deter the crimes, that it amounted to a cursory sentence, or that a suspended sentence or

similar did not protect them from an abuser. It also included processes that increased frustration and retraumatised survivors, such as delay and poor communication.

*“Keep victims properly supported and updated throughout the process. Proper sentencing. Special measures properly explained and made easier to access.”*

*“More frequent updates about the courts. For example, I would only find out that the court date had been postponed through looking at the listings online, rather than being informed by a person. Unfortunately I think a lot of the issues are with the criminal justice system as a whole. It doesn't seem worth putting yourself through potentially years of turmoil and re-traumatisation for the offender to potentially receive only a few months/suspended sentence.”*

*“Every stage is off putting. Time and again successful court cases are followed by weak sentencing and victim statements highlighting their bravery and resilience to the process of seeking justice. This is normalised but utterly profoundly disgraceful.”*

Further, many suggested that this kind of sentencing spoke to a culture that was not trauma-informed, did not understand the devastating impact of VAWG and, in one case, showed that violence against women was punished less than violence against animals.

*“By taking the current situation more seriously. I feel it is very difficult to report a rape/sexual assault or sexist act. Women often chose to chat to family or friends rather than report as they are afraid that nothing will be done or a conviction/punishment is too difficult to get. If the courts had a clear outline on what happens in this situation and how it was support the victims it could help.”*

*“Top down reform. Starts with judges. A lot of education is needed on these topics. Offenders aren't deterred. A friend of mine was raped as a minor, the fella who did it didn't get jail time for what he done to her, but he did get jail time for attacking an animal.”*

There were several concerns raised around parts of the legal system and the court process, including the physical set up of the court buildings and courtrooms, as well as the ways that those operating the legal levers can be blind to the trauma survivors have experienced and make things worse. The need for better training was raised repeatedly, particularly around the use of language and deployment of myths during trials. A number of respondents also raised concerns about specific dynamics in family court that leaves survivors of abuse very vulnerable.

*“Listen to them, protect them from the abuser instead of taking the abusers side and being complicit in continued abuse through the court system.”*

*“Police and legal system do deals with perpetrators of violence against women - my ex traded info on criminal activity in return for having 2/3 charges dropped.”*

*“Judiciary need trained, prosecutors and defence also need trained to understand these behaviours and the risks posed.”*

*“Family court: Get rid of the dinosaur judges first, many of whom hold deep-seated misogynistic and sexist views about women. Then train the rest on the dynamics of coercive control, perpetrator tactics, and victim responses to trauma. There's currently a pilot in England and Wales happening which aims to improve information sharing between agencies. This could include DA professionals sharing risk assessments with the court to spare victims and parties in the case the trauma of having to unnecessarily repeat their experiences.”*

Other issues raised involved procedural restrictions on the operation of the courts; the fact that the offender's history is often not deemed relevant, the outstanding Gillen recommendations - some of which have actually been brought in since the survey closed, such as restrictions on the public gallery in sexual offences trials. Other responses included the lack of joined up service provision, such as the need for housing support for survivors of Domestic Abuse, particularly when the court process ends and the accused is not imprisoned, in order to secure the physical safety of survivors who may be, in practice, left with no option but to return to a shared home with their abuser.

The overwhelming takeaway from the responses to this question was that there are significant problems throughout the courts, and that the legal system itself was built upon and continues to be underpinned by the misogynistic attitudes and norms that are rampant in society.

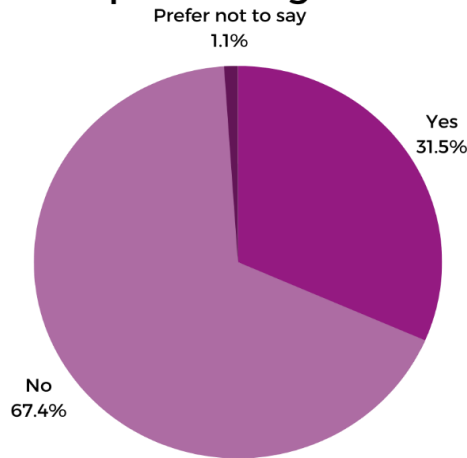
#### **Q.4(c) Have you engaged with the court system as a result of experiencing VAWG? (Compulsory - 92 responses)**

Survey respondents were asked if they had engaged with the court system as a result of experiencing a form of violence against women and girls. Respondents had the option of responding 'yes,' 'no' or 'prefer not to say.' Survey data from this question showed that:

- 32% of women have engaged with the court system as a result of experiencing VAWG
- 67% of women did not engage with the court system as a result of experiencing VAWG
- 1% of women preferred not to say whether or not they had engaged with the court system as a result of experiencing VAWG.

This data is visualised on the graph below:

### Q4(c) Have you engaged with the court system as a result of experiencing VAWG?



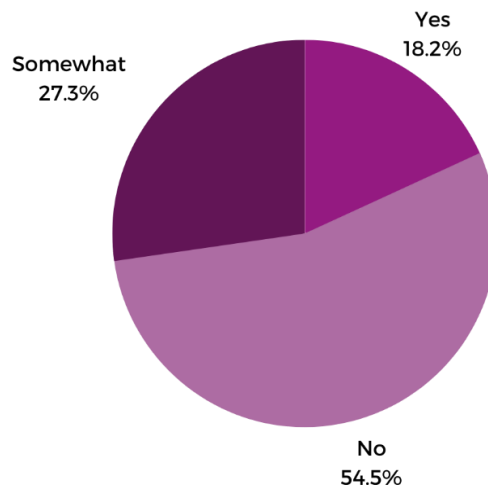
### Q.4(d) If you have engaged with the courts, were you satisfied with the outcome of this engagement? (Optional - 33 responses)

For those who indicated that they had engaged with the courts, as a result of experiencing VAWG, they were asked if they were satisfied with the outcome of this engagement. Survey data from this question showed that:

- 18% of women who engaged with the courts as a result of experiencing VAWG were satisfied with the outcome of this engagement
- 27% of women who engaged with the courts as a result of experiencing VAWG were somewhat satisfied with the outcome of this engagement
- 55% of women who engaged with the courts as a result of experiencing VAWG were not satisfied with the outcome of this engagement

This data is visualised on the graph below:

### Q4(d) If you have engaged with the courts, were you satisfied with the outcome of this engagement?



## Alternative forms of justice

This section of the survey focused on attitudes towards alternative forms of justice, such as rehabilitation programs and mediation.

**Q.5(a) How should non-criminal instances of VAWG be addressed? For example, cat-calling, sexual harassment in schools, misogynistic bullying or intimidation? (Optional - 66 responses)**

More than any other question in this survey, respondents to this question overwhelmingly argued for education as a method of dealing with non-criminal instances of VAWG.

As well as robust relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in schools, many respondents advocated for the introduction of public information campaigns to encourage public conversation on the issue. It was widely acknowledged that in order to address the misogynistic culture we live in and to target the “boys will be boys” attitude so common in non-criminal instances of VAWG, education is key. A number of respondents used examples of existing public awareness campaigns for other issues and encouraged a similar approach to be taken for VAWG, with mentions of speeding awareness among other issues.

*“Education and RSE to get the issue understood! Think the police could do more on this like how they go into schools and do road safety etc and teach young people about the consequences of both criminal and non-criminal VAWG”*

*“Through education at a very early age.”*

*“Education and clear message of condemnation from society.”*

*“The ads currently doing the rounds are not sufficient. Hearing a voice saying 'you're not going out like that' whilst a woman has a sad face, will do nothing to deter coercive control or reduce VAWG. This needs shock provoking advertising. Not showing a woman upset but showing a man shamed and shunned.”*

*“Firstly, to tackle VAWG there needs to be mandatory, comprehensive, and inclusive relationship and sexuality education in all schools, pre and post primary. Education is the first step to eradicating VAWG as well as queerphobia, transphobia and racism. This should also be offered to youth groups, sports teams, religious groups, etc. RSE, healthy relationships, consent, healthy masculinity etc are all important to tackling VAWG”*

*“I think it starts with education. Sexual harassment in schools is swept under the rug a lot, 'boys will be boys' attitudes and victim-blaming is very commonplace. If our boys aren't taught to respect women, they will turn into men who abuse them.”*

In addition, a number of respondents suggested that schools, workplaces and all institutions should introduce training on the topic to reinforce a wider programme

of education and to enable them to hold perpetrators to account in some way within the system without involving the police. Restorative justice schemes were mentioned, as was the importance of avoiding the criminalisation of children when appropriate interventions might prevent escalation.

*“A code of conduct in any group or institution is a good idea, as it allows participants to be held to a standard of behaviour as well as informing them of what that standard is. But that's one idea that I have seen successfully used in some contexts, and I'm hurrying to get this form finished before it expires, so I'm not trying to say that it's a solution in itself. Really you need culture change.”*

*“There should also be increased mandatory training and screening for businesses, statutory bodies, and community and volunteer groups to tackle workplace harassment. For example, mandatory training for all food and entertainment venues in order to protect workers and customers from harassment.”*

With that said, a number of respondents favoured on-the-spot fines, automatic penalties or anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) for street harassment, and some advocated for changing the laws to make some of these harms into criminal offences. Others focused on the experiences of those harmed, and advocated for supports for those impacted and others suggested the maintenance of a register of some kind, both to hold perpetrators to account and also to provide statistical data.

*“On-the-spot SUBSTANTIAL fines, or as close to this as possible.”*

*“Women/girls should be provided with all support they require to deal with abuse they've been subjected to.”*

*“They should be put on a harassment register which will affect their background checks. The register should be widely known about so perpetrators know that there is zero tolerance for non criminal instances of VAWG and it can affect their job prospects, ability to rent/buy a house etc.”*

*“reported to police, to school, workplace etc. statutory requirement on all to record details and report quarterly and annually on numbers, range, severity, age of victim, and any outcome. these stats should be made publicly available as a matter of course.”*

**Q.5(b) Do you think convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program? (Compulsory - 92 responses)**

Survey respondents were asked if they thought convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program. They had the following response options: 'yes,' 'no' or 'unsure.' Survey data from this question showed that:

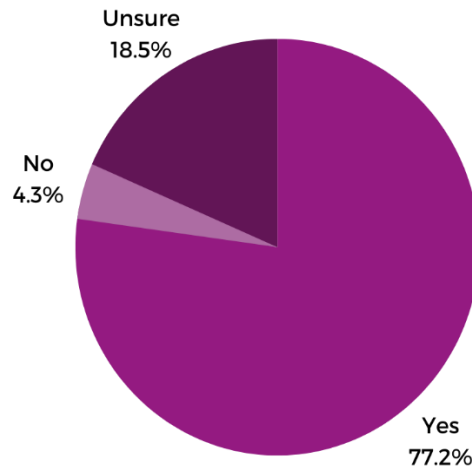
- 77% of women think that convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program



- 19% of women were unsure if convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program
- 4% of women don't think that convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program

This data has been visualised on the graph below.

### Q5(b) Do you think convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program?



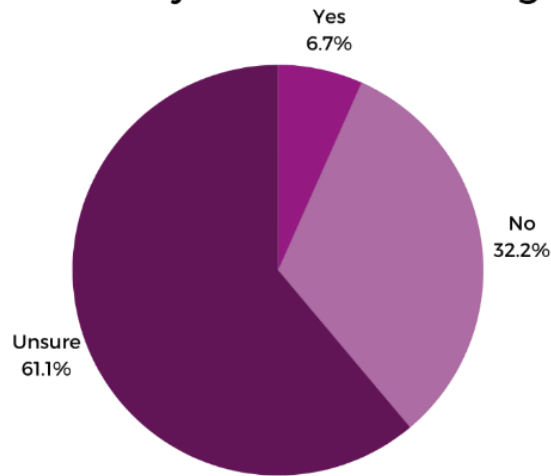
### Q.5(c) Do you think mediation or other forms of alternative justice are working? (Optional - 90 responses)

Survey respondents were asked if they think mediation or other forms of alternative justice are working. The optional responses included 'yes,' 'no' or 'unsure.' In response to this question:

- Only 7% of women think mediation or other forms of alternative justice are working
- 61% of women were unsure if mediation or other forms of alternative justice are working
- 32% of women do not think mediation or other forms of alternative justice are working

This data has been visualised on the graph below:

### Q5(c) Do you think mediation or other forms of alternative justice are working?



#### Q.5(d) If not, why not? (Optional - 40 responses)

All of the written responses to this question expressed serious doubts, not just over whether this form of justice is working, but whether it could ever work, given the nature of the offence committed and the deep and lasting damage caused by VAWG.

The vast majority of responses highlighted the power imbalance - both between the abuser and their victim, and between the mediator / facilitator and the survivor - which they believe makes it impossible for such a process to work.

*"I was assessed or mediation with perpetrator of DA - the mediator did not understand DA and the experience was traumatic for me. Being asked to talk about the 'good times' with a man I had fled from because he raped me. It was appalling and I would never recommend any victim have mediation."*

*"Abusers don't change."*

*"Concerned rehab might lead to misogynistic encouragement and compound attitudes or group settings. Thinking people need to own prob first."*

*"It's not a safe option. DV survivors have been manipulated as part of their DV. Regardless of whatever journey you go through after that experience, that trauma is always there, a perpetrator preys on the vulnerable. Survivors will always be a little bit vulnerable, we are too trusting. We should not be put in vulnerable situations like that after abuse has occurred."*

*"The power imbalance and lack of empathy could make things even worse for victim. As could value base of facilitator. I wouldn't want to enter into a mediation process with my perpetrator. I don't want to empathise with his reasoning. I want recognition for harm done for me and punishment for him"*

Others highlighted the fact that abusers can manipulate the process to appear changed and remorseful, when in fact it is easy to say something in front of a mediator. Others said that hearing how much they harmed the survivor may even give the abuser exactly what they want, since that kind of damage is precisely what they set out to cause.

*"It is well known in the literature on coercive control that perpetrators will take advantage of things like mediation (likewise, therapy, and also the court system) and use them against their victim - effectively furthering abuse by co-opting systems designed to respond to it. It's very common for this to succeed."*

*"Think often so much emphasis on being empathetic can dilute how serious the issues are. It's easy to say the right things in a mediation session."*

*"I feel that mediation could play into the wants of some men who harm women. Hearing how hurt and destroyed the female is, is exactly what these men set out to achieve."*

Even the few cautiously optimistic responses were focused on the theory of how it could help, and cautious about the reality of the process and its outcomes.

*"I don't have the evidence - this needs proper research - but I like to think it could work. But probably not in isolation, and not for everyone. The causes are complex and multi faceted."*

*"I think that restorative justice could work, but that the justice system as a whole does not invest enough in that as a process for it to be effective."*

*"In theory I think both rehabilitation and mediation are great tools, but I rarely come across people who have had good experiences with them. Research on rehabilitation shows that it is largely, unfortunately, ineffective."*

## Domestic Abuse

This section of the survey asked respondents about experiences of domestic abuse and reporting abuse.

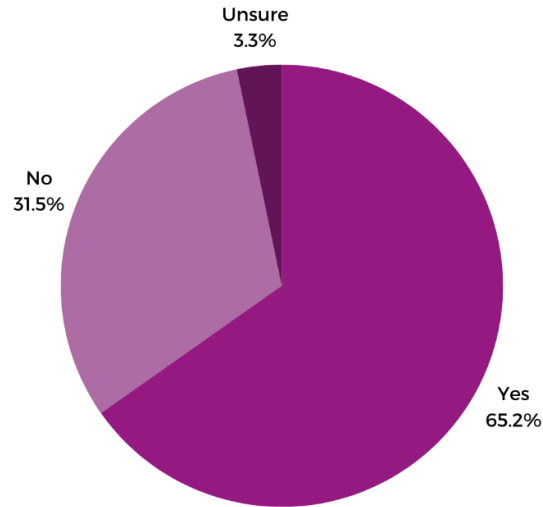
### Q.6(a) Have you experienced domestic abuse? (Compulsory - 92 responses)

Survey respondents were asked if they had experienced domestic abuse and were given the following options for responding: 'yes,' 'no' or 'unsure.' Survey data from this question showed that:

- 65% of respondents had experienced domestic abuse
- 32% of respondents had not experienced domestic abuse
- 3% of respondents were unsure if they had experienced domestic abuse

This data has been visualised on the graph below:

### Q6(a) Have you experienced domestic abuse?



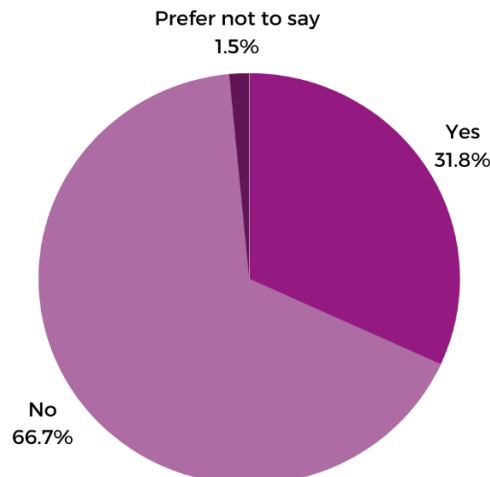
### Q.6(b) Did you report this to the police or take legal action? (Optional - 66 responses)

Survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced domestic abuse were asked if they reported it to the police or take legal action against their abuser. The following options were provided: 'yes,' 'no' or 'prefer not to say.' Survey data from this question showed that:

- 32.8% of domestic abuse victims reported it to the police or took legal action
- 66.7% of domestic abuse victims did not report it to the police or take legal action
- 1.5% of domestic abuse victims preferred not to say if they had reported the abuse to the police or taken legal action

This data is visualised on the graph below:

### Q6(b) Did you report this to the police or take legal action?



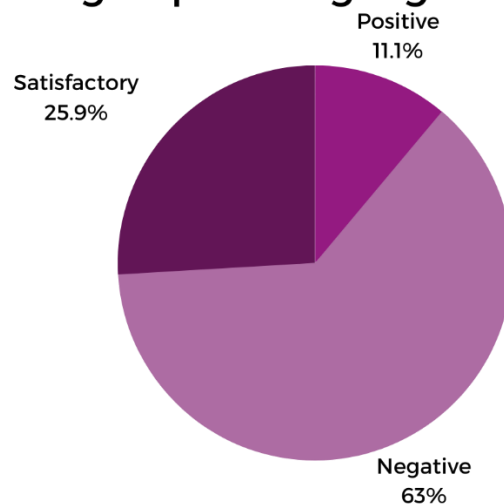
**Q.6(c) How would you describe your experience of reporting or pursuing legal action? (Optional - 27 responses)**

Survey respondents who reported their experiences of domestic abuse were asked to describe their experience of reporting or pursuing legal action. The following response options were provided: 'positive,' 'negative' or 'satisfactory'. Survey data from this question showed that:

- 63% of domestic abuse victims had a negative experience reporting the abuse or taking legal action
- 26% of domestic abuse victims had a satisfactory experience reporting the abuse or taking legal action
- 11% of domestic abuse victims had a positive experience reporting the abuse or taking legal action

This data has been visualised on the graph below:

**Q6(c) How would you describe your experience of reporting or pursuing legal action?**



**Q.6(d) Please use the box below to tell us more about this experience. (Optional - 37 responses)**

A wide variety of themes came up in response to this that covered disappointing behaviour, inadequate protection, poor sentencing and more from police and courts, as well as the role of the PPS in failing to prosecute in cases with a lot of evidence but an unwillingness by the victim to move forward with the prosecution - even when they are deeply traumatised and in danger.

*"Not all crimes pursued by police including multiple instances of rape, sexual assault, physical assault and coercive control. Prosecutions only for 1 x instance of assault by beating (£80 fine) and 1 year of stalking (8 week suspended sentence and a 3 year restraining order. I have since moved house changed job, changed my name and paid for 2 years of counselling for PTSD."*

*"Father was an abuser flagged to authorities multiple times, nothing ever came of it as my mum always backed out due to financial dependence and the circumstances with emotional abuse, and I was never spoken to by social workers etc. He was known for other avenues and potential crimes and it never flagged across the two systems. Dropped charged or reports should be followed up regardless when children are involved especially with a known aggressor. I also had another instance where I was in a bus station and a couple were having an argument and the male partner head butted the heavily pregnant woman. I was only about 16-18 and reported it to the police and nothing ever came of it as the victim never perused it. I don't understand the system where there is CCTV evidence and multiple witnesses of a man attacking a woman and because of the threat she felt from the man never pursued charges. I feel like it should always be followed through. Nothing on his record for that and he could go along and do it again or to someone else but me counted as a first time offender and charged based on that when he has a history of it"*

*"I did not report it as my experience from watching my mum suffer is that the police do not take it seriously, they just tell a man to go away!! obviously they do while the police are there and then they come back even worse in most cases. Therefore i did not see the point of it as it makes things worse and you become a victim of the perpetrator and of the state too. I think things have improved but there is still a long way to go in changing peoples attitudes to the crime of domestic violence and abuse"*

*"One officer said "why don't you just leave the country again". Another said, "we are not bodyguards, can you not make friends with the fella up the street, he's a cage fighter". A judge put a 5 year restraining order in place, when the stalker breached it he placed a 2 year restraining order on him. He literally reduced the restraining order length even though the stalker turned up at my home armed. I would advise any woman to never go near the police or CJS."*

Another theme was varying responses to reporting, from excellent to concerning, including from solicitors and from judges. People spoke of finding the court system traumatic and frightening, and said that the police were often unhelpful when called to a person's home, often shirking responsibility for protecting the victim or trying to resolve the issue inappropriately.

*"Absolutely appalling experience. No real support was given, my case was lost with in the police force system. For me to have to relocate 2 years later because of their incompetency."*

*"Inadequate protection from police after reporting. Was stalked / harassed by ex even after his conviction for assault. My ex partner threatened, harassed and intimidated me, my family and people connected to us for months after conviction. Inappropriate sexual*

*behaviour by officer in charge of case. Legal system not victim focused - deals done between lawyers on both sides behind closed doors without consideration of needs / wishes of victim."*

*"It was really difficult to speak about it in English and I was hopeless. I had not family to support me. I felt so confused, scared because I was emotionally draining from narcissistic ex. It was difficult to stand up for myself."*

*"Police did not understand, they spoke to me then to perp then concluded that he was genuine and I was having a mental health episode. I have no diagnosis or any mental health issues but I am traumatised from the DA. They made the situation worse I am more afraid now as there is nowhere to turn."*

Another theme was women facing the social or financial consequences for ending the relationship, including losing their social circle as people sided with the perpetrator, and again and again women told of escaping only by divorcing the abuser as the legal system did not offer the help they needed.

*"I eventually got out - I got out sideways - used travelling or going to university as an excuse bided my time, but I was nearly destroyed by the chipping away, the undermining, the degradation, the taking whenever they wanted, the shame, the silencing, not knowing what or how to say what was happening. and those experiences of being a victim went into the workplace where I was mercilessly bullied my woman boss, until I also, eventually left."*

*"I was emotionally abused by someone in my social circle that I was dating on and off for a year. When I finally left him, I had to experience another two years of him trying to get me back on his hook again as I frequently saw him at social events and he had access to me still in group chats. I needed therapy for over a year to recover from the abuse as he'd worn me down so much I had no idea who I was anymore. Mutual friends who knew him before they knew me didn't want to believe what he is really like. In the end, I have blocked him on everything and essentially stopped hanging out with that group. So I pay the cost of his behaviour. I'm so happy to be free from him, but wish it had been him who was forced out."*

## Conclusion

This report paints a stark picture of the reality of women's experiences and perspectives when it comes to reporting violence against women and girls (VAWG). Some of the key themes that have emerged throughout this report include:

- Women have extremely low levels of confidence in the justice system's ability to effectively tackle VAWG
- Women have extremely low levels of confidence in the police service when it comes to reporting VAWG
- Alternative forms of justice, such as mediation, have not proved effective in terms of tackling VAWG
- Issues with how the justice system and police handle cases of VAWG is preventing victims from coming forward and forcing women to stay in abusive relationships

This primary research has also shown that:

- 87% of women in Northern Ireland have experienced VAWG
- 65% of women in Northern Ireland have experienced domestic abuse
- The 3 most common perpetrators of violence were (1) intimate partner (2) stranger (3) colleague or acquaintance
- Only 22% of women feel comfortable reporting VAWG to the police
- Only 9% of women think that courts in NI take VAWG seriously
- 85% of women think there should be a specific mechanism for reporting VAWG to the police
- 77% of women think convicted offenders of VAWG should take part in a rehabilitation program



## Recommendations

Based on the findings from this research, we have made several recommendations relating to how the experience of victims when reporting VAWG in Northern Ireland could be improved. These recommendations include:

1. PSNI should **establish a dedicated mechanism for reporting** and responding to VAWG. However, care should be taken to ensure that this reporting mechanism is anonymous and personal information such as phone numbers or email addresses are not stored, shared or visible on records or bills.
2. **Participation in rehabilitation programmes** should be made compulsory for perpetrators of VAWG in order to address the attitudes and beliefs that led to their act of violence in the first place.
3. Police training should be urgently improved, including training on **trauma-informed police responses**. Once this training has taken place, monitoring frameworks should be put in place to ensure these standards are adhered to
4. **Victim confidentiality** should be protected at all stages of reporting sexual offences. There should be no requirements on victims to disclose personal information such as phone numbers or medical records when reporting sexual offences.
5. **Institutional reform is needed within the police** to improve women's levels of trust in the PSNI. This research has demonstrated that reports of misogyny and abuse within the PSNI have damaged trust among women and is a disincentive for victims when considering reporting.
6. The **PSNI and PPS must work closely together** to keep victims/survivors and complainants updated on their case.
7. **Sentencing guidelines should be urgently reviewed** with recidivism in mind and public safety. These guidelines should also be tracked more closely and keep pace with those of neighbouring jurisdictions.
8. The Gillen Recommendation on education within courts, including for jurors, must be implemented urgently
9. The **processes and outcomes of family courts** must be investigated urgently. Currently, they are not transparent enough and can be used to further the abuse of abuse survivors.
10. **Widespread education and public awareness campaigns** around misogyny and VAWG should be urgently rolled out in order to tackle pervasive attitudes and beliefs that underpin acts of VAWG.

## Signposting

If you or anyone you know has been affected by any of the issues impacted in this report, please seek support and help. Organisations that can provide support and advice include:

### Victim Support Services

- PSNI - Report crimes to the Police Service Northern Ireland online or by calling 101 if it is not an emergency. You can also call 101 to give information to the police or make an enquiry. [www.psni.police.uk/contact-us](http://www.psni.police.uk/contact-us)
- Victim Support - Offer a free and confidential service helping people affected by crime, whether or not a crime has been reported and regardless of how long ago the event took place. [www.victimsupportni.com](http://www.victimsupportni.com)

### Sexual Health Services

- Common Youth - Offers free, confidential sexual health and wellbeing services to those under 25's in Northern Ireland. [hello@commonyouth.com](mailto:hello@commonyouth.com). Belfast: 028 9032 8866 Coleraine: 028 7034 2178

### Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence support

- Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline - This helpline is open to women and men affected by domestic abuse or violence and is a free telephone service available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Tel: 0808 802 1414.
- Nexus - Nexus is Northern Ireland's sexual trauma charity offering information and support, specialist counselling and therapeutic interventions to anyone affected by sexual assault, violence or trauma. [www.nexusni.org](http://www.nexusni.org)
- Right to be - Offer workshops and resources to take action and respond to harassment of all kinds, such as free online bystander courses. <https://righttobe.org/>
- SOLA - Offer legal advice and support to adult victims of a serious sexual offence from qualified lawyers. SOLAs are based in Victim Support NI and are independent from the police and prosecution services. [sola@victimsupportni.org.uk](mailto:sola@victimsupportni.org.uk). Belfast: 028 9024 3133 Foyle: 028 7370 086
- Rape Crisis - Provide support services for anyone who is 16 and over and has experienced serious sexual assault and rape in adulthood. [www.rapecrisisni.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisni.org.uk). Tel: 08000246991.
- Rowan Centre - The Rowan Centre is the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) for Northern Ireland, they offer a range of support and services for children, young people, women and men who have experienced sexual violence and abuse, recently and in the past. [www.therowan.net/](http://www.therowan.net/) 0800 389 4424
- Surviving Economic Abuse - SEA offers support and advice on how to stop economic abuse. <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/>
- Tell Someone Project - The Tell Someone project was set up to help people who have experienced sexual violence share their story with the people in their life, by offering a range of resources to make this conversation easier. [www.tellsomeoneproject.org/](http://www.tellsomeoneproject.org/)

- Men's Advisory Project - A support line offering confidential counselling, information and referral services for men who are victims of domestic abuse. [www.mapni.co.uk/](http://www.mapni.co.uk/). Belfast: 028 9024 1929 Foyle: 028 7116 0001
- Women's Aid - Addresses domestic abuse and provides services for women and children. [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

### Mental Health Support

- Lifeline - Speak to a qualified counsellor who can provide immediate help and support. Lifeline is Northern Ireland's crisis response helpline. Available 24/7. 0808 808 8000.

### LGBTQI+ Support

- Belfast Trans Resource Centre - A community hub for trans, non-binary and questioning people and their families and friends in the Belfast area. [www.belfasttrans.org.uk](http://www.belfasttrans.org.uk)
- Cara Friend - Provide a range of services that serve and empower the LGBTQI+ community in Northern Ireland. [www.cara-friend.org.uk](http://www.cara-friend.org.uk)
- HereNI - a community organisation, supporting lesbian and bisexual women and their families. Through providing information; peer support; facilitating training; lobbying government and agencies on your behalf. [www.hereni.org](http://www.hereni.org)
- Rainbow Project - Promotes the health and wellbeing of the LGBT people and their families in Northern Ireland. [www.rainbow-project.org/counselling](http://www.rainbow-project.org/counselling)

### Equality Support and Services

- Equality Commission NI - Providing advice and assistance for people who feel they have been discriminated against. [www.equalityni.org/Home](http://www.equalityni.org/Home)
- Labour Relations Agency - Provides free, impartial and confidential services to employers, employer bodies, employees and workers in Northern Ireland. [www.lra.org.uk/](http://www.lra.org.uk/)

### Child Support Services

- Childline - Offer counselling and many other services for children and young people up to their 19 birthday. 0800 1111 - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- Youth Action - Helps inspire young people to find their true potential and excel in areas such as political activism, performing arts, youth work, education, business, technology and international affairs. [www.youthaction.org](http://www.youthaction.org)

### Abortion Support

- Alliance for Choice - For support on how to access safe and legal abortion services in Northern Ireland. [www.alliance4choice.com](http://www.alliance4choice.com)
- ICNI - A counselling platform for pregnant women, based on a pro-choice ethos. [www.informingchoicesni.org/counselling](http://www.informingchoicesni.org/counselling)

**Women's**  
**Policy Group NI**