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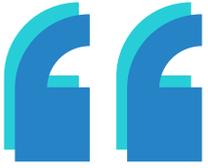
Operation Soteria

Rape and sexual assault survivors' experience of
the police in England and Wales
Survey Report II: July 2023 – June 2024

Katrin Hohl, Merili Pullerits, Sarah Molisso and Abigail-Kate Reid

City St George's, University of London

Published: 13th November 2024



“Nothing could have prepared me for the trauma I have experienced as a result of making a police report. I am more traumatised by the experience of being investigated for my own rape, than I am by the rape itself [...] I will never trust the police again.”

“The officers assigned to my case have been angels [...]”

“The police have made things 100 times worse. I wish I’d never spoken to them and I would never report anything to them again.”

““The officers that dealt with my case were kind, supportive and understanding. I can not fault them and would like to sincerely thank them for their help.” [sic]

“He was a serving officer. It was kept quiet to protect [the] force.”

“[...] The police have grown in many ways and have a more empathic approach [...]”



Acknowledgements

We thank each and every survivor for their time and courage in completing this survey. We felt immense gratitude and humility when reading every survey entry. Knowing that someone somewhere had gifted us with their knowledge from lived experience and trusted us with their story is a privilege and a responsibility. To all survivors who completed this survey: thank you for trusting us with your response, we hope that you know how much your contribution means to us and that we have done your survey response justice.

We are grateful for the additional funding that kept this survey going for an additional 12 months. The additional year gave many more survivors a chance to get their voices heard and enabled us to publish this second survey report. We sincerely thank victim support organisations, police forces, the Joint Soteria Unit, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Victims' Commissioner's Office, and numerous individuals for raising awareness of the survey through their websites, social media or in other ways - survivors would not have found the survey without you doing so. It takes courage and humility for police forces to actively seek out survivor feedback, and we commend all forces who promoted the survey.

We thank Vicky Maddrell for creating the Easy Read version of the survey and Duncan Smith at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary and Lipspeaker UK for creating the British Sign Language video.

The survey was developed over the course of 18 months (2021-2022) with the generous input of survivors, those supporting and advocating for survivors, officers, and academic colleagues. We are indebted to South Wales Police and the New Pathways ISVA Service for piloting an earlier version of this survey and the Safe Link ISVA service in Avon & Somerset for the cognitive testing of this questionnaire with their clients. We thank the dozens of sector organisations, police forces, and individuals who have provided valuable feedback on the questionnaire and the survey methodology as it went through its countless iterations. We also thank our sector consultation group.

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Acknowledgement of funding

This survey was funded by the Home Office as part of Operation Soteria.

Content warning

Please note that this report makes recurring reference to sexual violence, domestic abuse, and suicide which some readers may find distressing.

If you are affected, you can find a list of support organisations and their contact details in the [help section](#) at the end of the report.

Suicide is preventable.

Help is available from the [Samaritans](#) and [other support services](#).

Correction note

For text on the 11th page of the report (page numbered page 10).

Text now reads: "Worryingly, this stands in stark contrast to only four in ten respondents saying they would report a sexual offence to the police again."

Text previously read: "Worryingly, this stands in stark contrast to one in ten respondents saying they would report a sexual offence to the police again."

Date of correction: 13 November 2024

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	2
Acknowledgement of funding	3
Content warning	3
Correction note	3
Table of contents	4
Table of figures	6
About the survey	8
Key findings	8
1. Introduction	15
1.1. Aims and context.....	15
1.2. How to read this report.....	15
1.3. Terminology.....	15
2. Methodology	17
2.1. Sampling and dissemination	17
2.2. Survey mode	18
2.3. Questionnaire development.....	18
2.4. Sample size and questionnaire completion time.....	19
2.5. Analysis of the data	20
2.6. A note on interpreting the results	20
2.7. Responses by police force area.....	21
3. Respondent profile	22
3.1. Demographic characteristics	22
3.2. Do police experiences vary between demographic groups?	25
3.3. Mental health, disability, and neurodiversity	25
4. Case Profile	27
4.1. Who are the perpetrators?.....	27
4.2. How do police experiences differ according to the type of perpetrator?	28
4.3. Time between the assault and police recording.....	28
4.4. Time since police disclosure and current case status	29
4.5. Victims' Right to Review.....	33
5. Reporting, non-reporting and 'victim withdrawal'	35
5.1. Reasons for reporting	35
5.2. What would be a good outcome for you?	38

5.3.	Reasons for non-reporting	39
5.4.	Reasons for not continuing with the case ('victim withdrawal')	41
5.5.	Things that would have helped survivors continue with the case	42
6.	<i>Survivor experiences of the police</i>	44
6.1.	Police (in-) actions in case	44
6.2.	Information and communication	45
6.3.	Understanding, kindness, and respect.....	46
6.4.	Feeling safe, believed, and like I matter	47
6.5.	The impact of the police experience on survivors' lives.....	49
6.6.	Willingness to report (again) in future	50
6.7.	Are survivor experiences improving over time?	54
6.8.	The importance of the availability of independent support.....	62
7.	<i>Easy Read survey findings</i>	65
7.1.	Respondent profile	65
7.2.	Case information	66
7.3.	Access to support.....	66
7.4.	Reporting, non-reporting and withdrawal	66
7.5.	Survivors' experiences of the police	66
7.6.	Willingness to report (again) in the future	68
8.	<i>In my own words: survivors' free-text responses</i>	69
8.1.	Introduction.....	69
8.2.	The profile of free-text respondents	69
8.3.	Theme 1: Lack of knowledge, care, and empathy	70
8.4.	Theme 2: Negative impacts on survivors	77
8.5.	Theme 3: Lack of protection from and consequences for perpetrators.....	80
8.6.	Theme 4: Officers as perpetrators and officers as victims	81
8.7.	Theme 5: The power of positive police experiences.....	83
8.8.	Theme 6: The wider criminal justice system	86
8.9.	Theme 7: What survivors want from the criminal justice system.....	88
9.	<i>Concluding remarks</i>	90
10.	<i>Help if you have been affected by this report</i>	91
11.	<i>Methodological appendix</i>	92
11.1.	Survey promotion.....	92
11.2.	Method for tracking survey promotion	92
11.3.	Changes to survey versions	93
Endnotes	94

Table of figures

Table 1: Survey response breakdown: Excluded entries	19
Table 2: Number of survey responses per police force	21
Table 3: Survey respondent ethnicity	23
Table 4: Survey respondent sex, age, sexual orientation, and highest qualification	24
Figure 1: Proportion of respondents with conditions or disabilities (% selecting each item)	26
Figure 2: Type of perpetrator (% selected)	28
Figure 3: Length of time before the police knew about the assault (%).....	29
Figure 4: Length of time police have known about the case (%)	30
Figure 5: Case status (%)	31
Figure 6: Reason why case was closed (%)	32
Figure 7: Whether Victims' Right to Review was used (%)	34
Figure 8: Reasons for reporting (% selected)	35
Figure 9: Reasons for reporting over three time periods (% selected)	37
Figure 10: Importance of each potential outcome of case being known to the police (%)	39
Figure 11: Reasons for not reporting (% selected)	41
Figure 12: Reasons for not continuing with the process (% selected).....	42
Figure 13: Things that would have helped those who withdrew to continue (% selected)	43
Figure 14: How experience of police compares to expectation (%).....	44
Figure 15: Steps police have taken in case (% selected).....	45
Figure 16: Police empathy, kindness, and respect (%).....	47
Figure 17: How police made survivors feel (%) (i).....	48
Figure 18: How police made survivors feel (%) (ii).....	48
Figure 19: Benefits and harms of police action or inaction (%).....	49
Figure 20: Likelihood of future reporting behaviours (%).....	51
Figure 21: Future reporting behaviours with other factors (% selecting 'likely' or 'very likely' to report a sexual offence again)	53
Figure 22: Whether police are doing a good job overall by time period reported and recency of contact (% selecting 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agree).....	56
Figure 23: Steps police have taken in case by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)	57
Figure 24: Steps police have taken in case by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)	58

Figure 25: Communication with the police by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)	59
Figure 26: Police empathy, kindness, and respect by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)	60
Figure 27: 'Police made me feel' by time period reported and recency of contact	61
Figure 28: 'Police always made me feel' by time period reported and recency of contact	61
Figure 29: Whether respondents had a support worker in place or not (%).....	62



About the survey

This report is the second to document findings of an online survey of survivors of rape and sexual assault and their experiences of the police in England and Wales as part of [Operation Soteria](#). This report contains the voices of the 2,858 survivors with police experience who completed the survey between 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024. A further 345 survivors whose cases were not known to the police at the time they completed the survey shared their reasons for choosing not to report. This report follows on from the report [“Rape and sexual assault survivors’ experience of the police in England and Wales. Survey Report I: January – June 2023”](#) published last year containing findings from the data collection period of 16 January – 30 June 2023 of the same survey.

Key findings

1. [The Survey Report I: January – June 2023](#) findings hold, but new analyses provide important additional insights.

Data from this second data collection period lend additional empirical support to the key findings of the 2023 report. The extended survey period allowed thousands more survivors to share with us their experience of the police, and this in turn has enabled additional analyses and new insights to help our understanding of the range of police experiences survivors of rape and sexual assault have had in England and Wales. For example, it allowed us to examine whether experiences have changed over time.ⁱ

2. Survivor experiences appear to be improving.

Respondents had, on average, significantly better experiences if their police report took place during or after 2021 (and even more so during or after 2023) compared

ⁱThe consistency of findings from the two data collection periods does not mean that survivor experiences have remained unchanged over time. Instead, it means that a simple Year 1 to Year 2 survey report comparison cannot answer that question, and that dedicated statistical analyses are required to do this (which we include in this report). This is because of the way the survey was set up. The Year 1 survey report was based on the survey responses collected between January and June 2023 (approximately 2,000 responses). The survey then continued for a further 12 months, resulting in over 3,000 additional survey responses collected in that July 2023 – June 2024 period. Crucially, and the reason why a direct Year 1 to Year 2 report is of little use, is that during both survey periods survivors were invited to share their experiences *regardless of when* the case they told us about first came to police attention or how long ago their last police contact was. This means that one cannot infer from comparing the Year 1 report findings to the Year 2 report findings whether survivors’ experiences of the police have improved between the publication dates.

to respondents whose case was reported before 2021.^{ii,iii} Specifically, compared to those who reported before 2021, respondents who reported since 2021 (and even more so since 2023) were substantially less likely to say that the police requested counselling notes or other third party material from them (something often experienced as an unnecessary intimate intrusion and over-focus on the credibility of the survivor). They also report (on average) significantly better officer empathy and communication, and that they are more likely to feel they had some agency over what was happening in their case. They were also more likely to state that officers took steps to protect them from the suspect, informed them of their victim's rights, and referred them to support services.

Importantly, these significantly better experiences in most cases only apply to respondents who still had police contact within the three months before completing the survey. Respondents who (already) no longer have police contact, even though their case only came to police attention since July 2023, report experiences that are no better, or in some cases that are even worse, than the experiences of those reporting before 2021. We must further caution that it is possible the findings may be partly the result of survivor experiences in the initial stages of the investigation tending to be more positive than in later stages of the process. This would however not explain the marked difference between those with and without recent police contact whose cases have come to police attention around the same time.

In sum, the findings appear to be an indication that the police response to rape and sexual assault is better for survivors who reported more recently (since 2021 and especially since 2023) and who still have police contact, compared to those without police contact in the three months preceding the completion of the survey and/or whose case predates 2021. We must caveat that our survey design means we cannot draw causal or population inferences beyond the approximately 5,000 survivors who participated in the survey over the 18-month survey period.^{iv}

3. To sexual violence survivors, prevention and validation matter more than a criminal conviction.

When asked about what would be, or would have been, a good outcome for the survivor, 88% of respondents said that stopping the perpetrator from doing it again was '*extremely important*' to them, rendering prevention of further harm a near-universal priority to survivors. This is followed by the perpetrator understanding

ⁱⁱ Controlling for whether the respondent still had police contact within the three months prior to completing the survey.

ⁱⁱⁱ When using the term 'reported', we are referring to all cases brought to police attention, whether by the survivor, a third party, or through other means, such as during unrelated police contact.

^{iv} For these analyses we used data from the entire survey period (January 2023 - June 2024) to maximise sample size (and thus the precision of the estimates).

what they did was wrong, the survivor feeling safer, validation that what had been done to them was wrong, a sense of closure, and so there is an official record of the rape/sexual assault. Crucially, only 56% of respondents said that the perpetrator being convicted was extremely important to them, *ranking last out of the seven* potentially good outcomes for the survivor that may flow from a police report.

Reasons for reporting were similarly multi-faceted. Only a minority of survivors named just one reason for reporting. Instead, the majority named a range of reasons from: stopping the perpetrator from doing it to others, making the perpetrator understand that what they did was wrong, reporting because it is the right thing to do, or to get closure, among a range of further reasons. These findings are consistent with previous academic research.¹

This finding points to a need for a public debate as to what justice means to survivors of sexual violence in today's world, and the relative importance of prevention and safeguarding, retribution, restoration, and conventional punishment.

4. Large numbers of survivors lose subjective access to police safeguarding and criminal justice because of a poor police experience.

Most survivors completing the survey did at one point entrust the police with their report and supported the police investigation. Nearly 80% of our survey respondents reported the rape or sexual assault to the police themselves^v and only 12% of respondents whose case was closed when completing the survey had withdrawn from the investigation. Worryingly, this stands in stark contrast to only four in ten respondents saying they would report a sexual offence to the police again. These survivors' personal perceptions of their ability to access and receive what they need from the criminal justice system has been eroded to a point where they feel they have lost access to police safeguarding and criminal justice (loss of subjective access).^{vi}

Our findings further suggest that this loss of trust and subjective access to police safeguarding and justice may be preventable for a majority of survivors. Future willingness to report (and overall evaluations of the police experience) were significantly better for survivors who felt officers had:

^vA further 12% were reported by a third party and 7% were 'telling, not reporting' where the survivor did not intend to make a formal complaint of rape or sexual assault, but it came out as part of police contact about something else.

^{vi}This is not to imply that all survivors would wish to access police intervention or the criminal justice system.

- i. Offered a referral to independent victim support²
- ii. Told survivors about their victims' rights³
- iii. Did things to protect the survivor from the suspect⁴
- iv. Looked at all the evidence⁵

When none of these steps were taken only 17% of respondents were willing to report a sexual offence to the police again. This rises, on average, by 18 percentage points for any one of these actions taken and continues to increase, on average, by this amount with every additional action. A full 90% of survivors who had all four actions taken in their case said they would report a sexual offence to the police (again) in the future.

5. Experiences of disadvantage, discrimination, and contextual incompetence impact survivors' experience of and access to justice.

In the free-text section of the survey some survivors shared that they felt officers did not understand the nature of sexual offending when it takes place in the context of marriages or long-term relationships. Others felt officers did not understand how sexual offending impacts on them as male, autistic, or disabled survivors, that officers did not know how to appropriately engage with them, or that officers did not understand how their protected characteristics were directly relevant contextually to the sexual violence they had disclosed. These findings underline the importance of officers taking into consideration the context of the survivor, suspect, and survivor-perpetrator relationship when interacting with survivors and within their investigations.⁶

Black and Minority Ethnic survivors' experience of the police was significantly worse than that of White survivors across a range of indicators. For example, Black and Minority Ethnic survivors were less likely than White respondents to feel like the police had looked at all the evidence, made them feel comfortable, or made them feel like the rape or sexual assault was not their fault.

Survivors with a physical disability reported poorer experiences with the police compared to respondents without a physical disability. Free-text responses by survivors with disabilities further supported the existence of inequalities in the police experience. Some respondents said the officers in their case lacked understanding of certain conditions and their impacts, and some reported their accessibility needs or other additional needs had not been met. Police forces must ensure that officers have the knowledge, skills, and resources to understand and meet these needs, especially because they are so prevalent. In the survey, 79% of respondents said

they had at least one of the following characteristics or conditions: disability, learning difficulty, neurodiversity (including autism) or mental health condition.

Survivors of intimate partner sexual violence consistently reported the poorest experiences with the police compared to all other survivor-perpetrator relationship types. For example, survivors of intimate partner sexual violence were less likely to feel like their needs were considered and were less likely to say they would report sexual offences again in the future, compared with survivors of familial sexual abuse or those assaulted by complete strangers. Reasons for reporting to the police also differed by survivor-perpetrator relationship, with reporting for personal safety and 'telling, not reporting'⁷ more prevalent where the perpetrator was a current or former intimate partner.

6. Independent victim support can dramatically improve survivor experience.

However, not all respondents who wanted independent support received it. These survivors reported significantly poorer police experiences compared to respondents who were being supported by an independent victim support worker, or those who said they did not want a support worker. A lack of availability of independent victim support is also a driver of survivors withdrawing from the investigation, with 39% of respondents who had withdrawn saying that having access to a support worker might have enabled them to continue with the case.

A significantly higher proportion of survivors whose case came to police attention between January 2021 and June 2023 had access to a support worker compared to respondents whose case came to police attention before 2021. Concerningly, the percentage of survivors who wanted but did not have a support worker significantly increased for respondents whose case has come to police attention since July 2023. This is possibly indicative of a shortage of independent support workers. Of respondents whose case came to police attention since July 2023 and was still open at the time of survey completion, 46% said they are currently on a waiting list or do not have support even though they want it, compared to 24% of those whose case came to police attention between January 2021 and June 2023, and 37% of those whose case dates back prior to 2021. For respondents of the Easy Read version of the questionnaire – designed for survivors with learning difficulties – this percentage was higher still.^{vii} Given the importance of independent victim support, the large percentage of survivors going un- or under-supported is a concern.

^{vii}Findings from the main survey and the Easy Read survey are not directly comparable because the questions are phrased slightly differently. Therefore, results from the Easy Read version are reported separately in section 7 of the report and in the Data Appendix.

7. Survivors are not asking for the impossible.

More kindness and understanding from officers could have prevented 47% of those respondents who had withdrawn from withdrawing and having a support worker may have enabled nearly 40% to stay engaged with the process. When officers complete basic duties such as informing survivors about their Victims' Rights, referring them to support services, taking steps to protect them from the perpetrator, and thoroughly examining all the evidence, the likelihood of survivors expressing a willingness to report sexual violence to the police significantly improves (see also point 4 above). What matters to survivors is remarkably universal: officers acting in ways that show understanding, care and kindness, that afford survivors their rights, dignity and respect, and last but not least, officers carrying out their safeguarding and investigation duties with care and competence. In short, survivors are asking for procedural fairness.⁸ Sexual violence survivors are not asking for the impossible.

8. How police treat survivors has a profound and lasting impact on survivors.

In the survey, 73% of survivors said their mental health had worsened as a direct result of what police did or did not do in their cases. Many disclosed in the free-text section of the survey that they suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a direct result of their experience with the police. Over half of respondents (53%) noted a negative impact on their physical health and 58% reported a loss of trust in the police. Some respondents said their perpetrator was enabled or even emboldened to continue to offend against them because the police did not act appropriately, or at all, to the rape or sexual assault disclosure. Some survivors said that as a result of their police experience, they currently have (or have had) suicidal thoughts and attempts. Some were subjected to more sexual violence or domestic abuse (by the same or different perpetrators) but did not call the police for help or justice again. For some respondents, the police experience has affected, among other things: relationships in their lives; family life; motherhood; ability to work; where they live; or ability to trust anyone. For survivors of police perpetrated sexual assault who endured subsequent attempts of the police to cover this up, their total loss of subjective access to safeguarding and criminal justice particularly stood out.

For other survivors, the police experience was life-changing in a positive way. One in six respondents said their personal safety and trust in the police had improved because of how the police treated them and their case. One in twelve respondents said their police experience improved their mental health and helped them in their recovery from the sexual violence. These respondents often expressed deep gratitude to officers, and emphasised the empathy, kindness, and commitment of the officer(s) in their case. These positive experiences show that a good police response to sexual violence is possible and that there are already countless officers doing right by survivors. Hundreds of survivors took the survey to acknowledge

these officers, and to share their experiences to help improve the police experience for others.

1. Introduction

1.1. Aims and context

This survey aimed to document how survivors of rape and sexual assault experience the police as an independent piece of research within Operation Soteria. The survey is a tool for learning for police forces, and of measuring, understanding, and reflecting on survivor experiences with a view to acting on these findings to improve how police interact with survivors, and investigate what happened to them.

Key sources to find out more about Operation Soteria: there is a [short summary](#), a [research report](#) and the [National Operating Model](#) for rape and serious sexual offences.⁹ This is the second survey report since the survey launched in January 2023. This report covers the survey responses received between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024. You can read the Year 1 survey report (covering responses received from January to June 2023) [here](#).

1.2. How to read this report

The data collected by the survey are extensive and rich. We did not want any of it to be diminished, which has resulted in a long report. The main body of the report contains the high-level findings and outlines key differences between groups of survivors and their experiences with the police. All tables as well as a large range of additional tables with detailed breakdowns by case and respondent characteristics are provided in the [Data Appendix](#) which is a supplementary document. This is an effort to make as much of the survey findings as possible accessible to the wider public. We have included free-text quotes from survivors throughout the report to illustrate and contextualise some of the findings of the closed survey questions. All free-text quotes are included in their original form with no changes to spelling or grammar.

1.3. Terminology

This report uses the term 'survivor' throughout, recognising the empowering effect it can have, and in recognition and thanks to survivors who took the time to contribute to this study. The only use of 'victim' will be alongside established phrases such as 'victim withdrawal', 'victim support organisations', or when quoting other reports and texts. The report also uses the term 'perpetrator' rather than 'suspect' or 'offender' because this report is about survivor perspectives. The terms 'suspect' or 'offender' are terms used when writing from a criminal justice system perspective. Additionally, when the report uses the term 'reported', it refers to all cases brought to police attention, regardless of whether by the survivor, a third party, or through other means, such as during unrelated police contact. The survey

asked about rape and sexual assault, and at times we summarise this as 'sexual violence' in the report.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sampling and dissemination

This survey was for people whose rape or sexual assault is known to a police force in England and Wales. For research ethics reasons, respondents must have been aged 18 or over when they filled in the survey. The survey was advertised by police forces and victim support organisations, and participants self-selected into the survey.

This was a large survey completed by around 5,000 survivors over an 18-month period. However, the large sample size does not make it a representative survey because we did not use a probability sampling method to select and recruit survey participants. Instead, we aimed to advertise it as widely as possible, allowing survivors to complete it voluntarily and safely. This means we cannot generalise from the findings of this survey to the experience of all rape and sexual assault survivors whose case has come to the attention of an English or Welsh police force. Probability sampling - done through using, for example, victim data from police systems or conducting a large-scale population survey - far exceeded the budget of this survey. We also knew that directly contacting survivors about the survey via text, email or phone may have put some at risk (for example, if the perpetrator was their current partner and may have been monitoring their calls, texts, mail, or emails).

This survey received ethics approval from the Sociology and Criminology Research Ethics Committee, City, University of London, references ETH2223-0383, ETH-2223-21334, and ETH2324-1634 for its extension to 30 June 2024.

Responses to this survey were voluntary and remain anonymous.

The survey opened on 16 January 2023 and closed on 30 June 2024. The findings presented in this report pertain to the second period of the survey spanning 12 months: 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024. For a small set of analyses, specifically where we break down responses by when police became aware about the rape or sexual assault to shed light on changes in police experiences over the past years, we use data from the full survey period (16 January 2023 - 30 June 2024) to maximise sample size.

The survey link and supporting materials (available in both English and Welsh) were regularly distributed to a mailing list of police contacts and sector partners that expressed interest in the promotion of the survey. We tracked as best we could the online impact of the survey and where it was advertised. Promotion of the survey was tracked from 184 different sources, organisations, and community groups with a total of 802 promotions. Of these, the survey was advertised by 37 (out of the 43)

police forces in England and Wales, one national special police force (the British Transport Police), six Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and 71 sector organisations (including sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) and charities). The channels used to advertise the survey included Facebook (55% of those tracked), X (formally known as Twitter) (31% of those tracked), police and third sector organisation websites (9%), Instagram (2%), press releases (2%), and LinkedIn (1%). Further detail about the survey promotion process and the approach to tracking this promotion is available in the Methodological appendix.

2.2. Survey mode

The survey was an online questionnaire hosted on the platform Qualtrics and was available in both English and Welsh. An Easy Read version of the survey, available in English both online and as a downloadable paper version, went live in December 2023 and a British Sign Language video about the survey became available in June 2024. Easy Read responses were analysed separately from the main questionnaire responses due to differences in question wording. The findings from the closed question of the Easy Read version can be found in section 7 and the free-text comments are included in section 8 alongside those from the main questionnaire.

2.3. Questionnaire development

The survey questionnaire and methodology were developed over the course of 18 months. The questionnaire was tested and reviewed by over 100 survivors through focus groups, cognitive testing with survivors by Safe Link ISVAs in Avon & Somerset, as well as through a pilot study with South Wales Police and the New Pathways ISVA service. In addition, the survey received comments and feedback from well over 100 victim support advocates, academics, police officers, and third sector groups.

The questionnaire was programmed so that survey routing and question wording displayed to respondents was adapted to their survey responses in order to minimise asking questions that did not apply to the respondents' situation. Minor changes were also made to the survey over the course of the data collection period in response to survivor feedback and in order to streamline the survey. Further detail about these changes is available in the Methodological appendix.

A first report covering survey responses collected between January to June 2023 was published on 21 September 2023 and the report received broad media coverage. This report can be found [here](#). This means that respondents who completed the survey on or after 21 September 2023 may have been aware of these findings when completing the survey. We cannot exclude the possibility that awareness of the Year 1 report findings may have affected their survey responses, although the direction of this potential influence is not known.

2.4. Sample size and questionnaire completion time

A total of 5,436 people clicked the survey start button between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024. After excluding incomplete, ineligible, hoax, and duplicate responses 2,858 analysable responses remained, as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Survey response breakdown: Excluded entries

Category	N	%
Total survey clicks	5,436	-
No usable information	817	15
Police not aware of their case ^{viii}	586	11
Under 18 (ineligible)	138	3
Identified hoax responses (majority bots)	955	18
Declined consent	48	1
Accidental incomplete duplicate entries	34	1
Valid responses for analysis	2,858	53

On average, the survey received 238 analysable responses per month. The lowest number of responses were provided during July and August 2023, with an increase in responses since September 2023 following the media coverage of the [Year 1 survey report](#). As mentioned above, it is possible that this media coverage may have influenced survey responses, though it is not possible to know in what way.

Most respondents first heard about the survey through police publicity, including on their social media pages and websites (52%). One in five (18%) heard about it via survivor advocates or support organisations, including on their social media or websites, and 23% heard about it via social media or websites which were not related to either the police or support organisations. All eligible responses were in English with no respondents making use of the Welsh language option of the questionnaire. Most respondents (96%) said they were taking the survey for the first time, with just over 1% completing the survey for more than one case, and just over 1% taking the survey again about the same case. Less than 1% (n=41) of respondents indicated they had previously started the survey and were returning to complete it.

The median (average) response time to complete the survey was nine minutes and 85% of respondents who started the survey completed all survey questions.

^{viii} These respondents were given the option of telling us more about why they chose not to disclose to the police: 393 selected the option to do so and 345 went on to provide reasons why they did not report.

2.5. Analysis of the data

We used basic univariate and bivariate descriptive statistics and three-way crosstabulations in this report. A comprehensive set is provided in the [Data Appendix](#) which also includes many tables and crosstabs not included in the main report. We used Chi-Square tests to test the statistical significance of differences between groups presented in the crosstabs. *For readability, p-values are not included in the main body of this report. Interested readers can find this information in the Data Appendix. Where the report states that differences are 'significant' this means they are statistically significant at least at $p < 0.05$.*

2.6. A note on interpreting the results

The findings reflect the experiences of nearly 3,000 sexual violence survivors across England and Wales. Despite its size, the survey is not a representative survey of all survivors' experiences with the police because a non-probability sampling procedure was chosen whereby respondents self-selected into the survey. Respondents were asked to consider only one case per survey entry, but were free to take the survey multiple times, for multiple cases or forces, or for the same case at different time periods (although the majority completed it only once).

This sampling approach also limits our ability to compare results between different police forces. Variation in whether and how the police forces and local victim support organisations promoted the survey led to uneven response numbers and potential biases in which survivors saw the survey advertisement, and which did not. Due to these limitations to direct comparability of police force areas, this report does not break findings down by police force area.

The survey was open to all survivors who had experience(s) with police forces in England and Wales, no matter how long ago this experience was from. As such the report covers current and past experiences. The report and [Data Appendix](#) comment on differences between police experiences for survivors who had reported prior to 2021 and those who reported in the years since, as well as those who had recent contact at the time of completing the survey, and those who had not. Our sampling approach means we must be cautious when drawing inferences or making interpretations of changes in police experiences over time.

Our findings naturally exclude those who cannot complete this survey because they did not survive sexual violence or the police experience (more on this is in section 8 where suicidal thoughts and feelings feature). The survey is likely to exclude survivors who might have seen an advertisement for it but chose not to partake because it may not have been safe for them to do so, for example because they might be in an ongoing relationship with the perpetrator. The findings also do not include survivors who do not speak English or Welsh, do not have access to a digital

device, and/or for whom the late availability of a British Sign Language version of the question prevented them from taking part. This is a common issue in survey research and a source of bias because it excludes the voices of some survivors.

2.7. Responses by police force area

Table 2 below details the number of survey responses received within each police force area from 1 July 2023 up until 30 June 2024. Police forces who worked with local victim support organisations and/or local media to advertise the survey and repeatedly promoted the survey themselves through their social media received the most responses.

Table 2: Number of survey responses per police force

Force	Total responses	Force	Total responses
South Yorkshire Police	228	Nottinghamshire Police	43
Metropolitan Police Service	154	Essex Police	40
West Midlands Police	154	Humberside Police	38
Devon & Cornwall Police	152	Northumbria Police	36
Hampshire and IOW Constabulary	134	Suffolk Constabulary	35
Staffordshire Police	120	West Mercia Police	35
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	108	North Yorkshire Police	34
Norfolk Constabulary	100	Sussex Police	34
Greater Manchester Police	99	Lincolnshire Police	28
Dorset Police	96	Cambridgeshire Constabulary	27
West Yorkshire Police	94	City of London Police	27
Hertfordshire Constabulary	81	Warwickshire Police	27
Lancashire Constabulary	77	Kent Police	25
Northamptonshire Police	77	Surrey Police	25
Derbyshire Constabulary	75	Bedfordshire Police	24
Thames Valley Police	73	Cheshire Constabulary	24
Durham Constabulary	71	Dyfed-Powys Police	21
Gwent Police	65	Police Scotland	21
Merseyside Police	63	Cumbria Constabulary	13
South Wales Police	61	Gloucestershire Constabulary	13
Leicestershire Police	54	Wiltshire Police	9
Cleveland Police	52	British Transport Police	5
North Wales Police	49	Police Service of Northern Ireland	3

3. Respondent profile

3.1. Demographic characteristics

A total of 88% of respondents were White British, rising to 91% when including all White backgrounds (see Table 3). Two percent preferred not to share their ethnicity. All other ethnic groups jointly accounted for 7% of the respondents, with no one ethnic group making up more than one percent of respondents. By comparison, 2021 Census data shows that 81.7% of the population in England and Wales are White, 9.3% are from Asian ethnic groups, 4.0% from Black ethnic groups, 2.9% have mixed ethnicity, and 2.1% are from other ethnic groups.¹⁰

National police recorded data on the ethnicity of survivors of sexual assault are not available, which means we cannot assess to what extent this survey is comparable to the national police recorded rape and sexual assault picture regarding survivor ethnicity. Extensive missing data on survivor ethnicity in police data was also highlighted in the Year One findings from analysis of Operation Soteria pathfinder force data.¹¹ Prevalence data from the nationally representative Crime Survey for England and Wales found the following prevalence rates for rape and sexual assault by ethnicity: 3.6% for respondents of Mixed ethnicity; 2.9% for Black or Black British; 2% for White; 1.4% for Asian or Asian British; and 0.8% for respondents of any other ethnic group.¹² These data again are not directly comparable to our survey data because of differences in methodology (e.g. sampling, survey questionnaire, survey mode), because they pertain to prevalence rates of these crimes within the general population, and because rape and sexual assault data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales include survivors regardless of whether they reported the sexual violence to the police.

Table 3: Survey respondent ethnicity

Ethnicity	N	%
White English/Welsh/Scottish/N. Irish	2127	88
White Other	56	2
White and Black Caribbean	28	1
White Irish	24	1
Mixed Other	22	1
Asian Pakistani	18	1
White and Asian	17	1
Black British	15	1
Asian British	12	<1
White and Black African	10	<1
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	6	<1
Asian Indian	6	<1
Asian Other	5	<1
Black African	5	<1
Black Caribbean	5	<1
Arab	3	<1
Asian Bangladeshi	2	<1
Asian Chinese	2	<1
Black Other	0	0
Any other ethnic group	13	1
Prefer not to say	49	2
Total	2425	100

Female respondents accounted for 90% of the sample, male respondents for 7%, non-binary respondents for 2%, and 1% preferred not to say (Table 4). For police recorded sexual offences for the year ending March 2022, the proportion of female survivors was 86%.¹³

The most common survey respondent age was between 25 to 34 years (27%), with respondent age ranging from 18 years to between 75 to 84 years. When excluding child survivors (those aged below 18) from police recorded data for comparability purposes, our survey sample and police recorded sexual offences include a similar proportion of survivors aged 25 to 34: for the year ending March 2022, 29% of both male and female survivors aged 18 and above fell in this age bracket in police recorded data. However, the proportion of younger survivors was lower in the survey than in national police recorded data. Whilst survivors aged 18-24 comprise 21% of the respondents of the survey, the corresponding proportions in police recorded data are 33% for female survivors and 24% for male survivors.¹⁴

Regarding respondent sexual orientation, 76% of respondents were heterosexual, 12% bi- or pansexual and 5% lesbian or gay, with an additional 6% preferring not to say and 1% stating some other sexual orientation. Police recorded data on the

sexual orientation of sexual assault survivors is unavailable, which means we cannot assess to what extent our survey make-up is representative of police recorded rape and sexual assault. The Crime Survey for England and Wales contains data on survivor sexual orientation and shows a higher prevalence of sexual violence among gay/lesbian survivors (12.8%) and bisexual survivors (16.4%) compared to heterosexual survivors (1.7%).¹⁵ However, for the same reasons outlined above regarding survivor ethnicity, these data are not directly comparable to our survey.

Half (50%) of respondents reported having a university degree or were studying for a university degree at the time of completing the survey. A third (33%) reported having some other educational or vocational qualification and only 10% of respondents reported having no qualification.

Table 4: Survey respondent sex, age, sexual orientation, and highest qualification

Characteristic	N	%
Sex		
Female	2188	90
Male	163	7
Non-binary/other	44	2
Prefer not to say	32	1
Age		
Under 18	27	1
18-24	509	21
25-34	654	27
35-44	560	23
45-54	432	18
55-64	170	7
65-74	38	2
75-84	1	0
85+	0	0
Prefer not to say	38	2
Sexual orientation		
Straight/heterosexual	1840	76
Lesbian/gay	117	5
Bisexual/pansexual	301	12
Other sexual orientation	23	1
Prefer not to say	142	6
Highest qualification		
Degree level or above	1006	42
Other educational qualification	733	30
Studying for degree	202	8
Vocational qualification	82	3
No qualification	244	10
Prefer not to say	139	6

3.2. Do police experiences vary between demographic groups?

When comparing police experiences between respondents of different ethnic groups we had to use the crude binary categorisation of White, and Black and Minority Ethnic, because the survey reached too few Black and Minority Ethnic respondents to allow for differentiated analyses. Black and Minority Ethnic survivors' experiences of officer kindness, understanding, respect, empathy, and feelings of safety were significantly worse than those of White survivors. That said, Black and Minority Ethnic survivors were more likely to say they would report a similar offence again in the future.

Survivor sex did not appear to influence survey responses across most indicators. However, male survivors were less likely than female survivors to feel that the police actively protected them from the perpetrator or investigated their cases fully, less likely to experience officers as kind, and less likely to feel that the officers made them comfortable or treated them like they mattered.

In the free-text response section of the questionnaire some respondents shared that they felt they were discriminated against, or officers were unable to understand their experience because of their gender. Further, some male survivors noted that they felt discriminated against because they were gay, were not taken seriously as an adult man reporting something that had happened to them as a child, or that there was a lack of understanding of male survivors of domestic abuse.

"It's not only women who get raped. It's men too. Including myself [...] I feel like more can be done for men who has been subjected to this [...]" [sic]

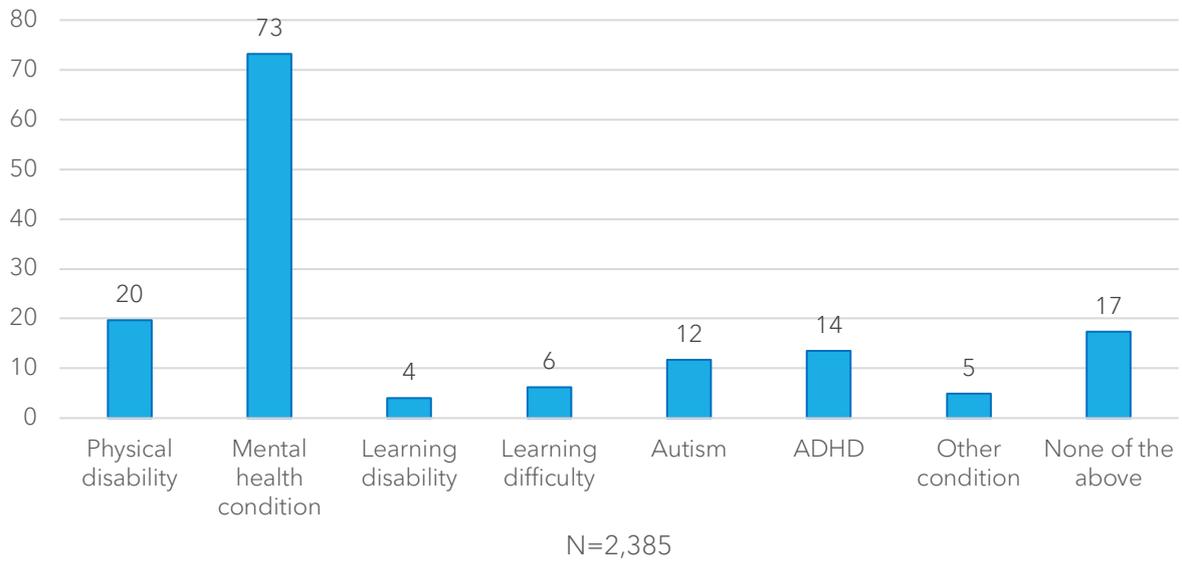
3.3. Mental health, disability, and neurodiversity

Three quarters (73%) of respondents disclosed mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Physical and learning disabilities, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other forms of neurodiversity were prevalent, too (see Figure 1). A third (35%) of respondents had more than one of these conditions, and only 21% of respondents reported that they had no condition.^{ix} Based on our findings, having at least one of these conditions is the norm. This means that police forces must equip officers to adequately engage with survivors with additional needs.

^{ix}17% of respondents selected 'none of the above' as shown in Figure 1. This figure includes survey respondents who did not select any option from the list of conditions offered.

It is worth noting that some respondents used the free-text section at the end of the survey to make clear they have developed mental health conditions as a direct result of a damaging police experience.

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents with conditions or disabilities (% selecting each item)



4. Case Profile

4.1. Who are the perpetrators?

Operation Soteria research, in line with other studies, has shown that criminal justice outcomes vary systematically depending on the relationship between the perpetrator and survivor. For example, perpetrators who rape their partners are far less likely to be charged than perpetrators who rape complete strangers.¹⁶

Current and ex-partners accounted for over a quarter (28%) of the perpetrators of the rapes and sexual assaults reported in this survey, followed by family members (19%), and friends or colleagues (17%) (see Figure 2).^x Cases involving strangers accounted for about one in five (21%) cases: 13% were complete strangers, and a further 8% were someone the survivor had only met that day.

One in ten (9%) of rapes and sexual assaults were perpetrated by individuals in professional roles or positions of trust. Respondents' responses to the 'other' free-text section revealed the wide range of positions of trust or power perpetrators exploit in their sexual offending. Respondents named taxi drivers, model agents, social workers, police officers, nurses and doctors, as well as roles such as youth club workers, sports coaches, and babysitters, highlighting the various and insidious ways in which trust and authority were abused by perpetrators. Respondents also described being survivors of grooming, child sexual exploitation, and trafficking.

"[...] myself and other under age girls were groomed by an adult who ran our local youth theatre club [...]"

Survivors also described instances where the perpetrators of sexual violence were their customers, clients, and patients. For example, one respondent identified the perpetrator as a service user, while others mentioned being assaulted by patients they were caring for in a healthcare setting. These accounts highlight the risks faced by individuals in various care roles and customer-facing positions, where their professional responsibility to assist and support others can be exploited.

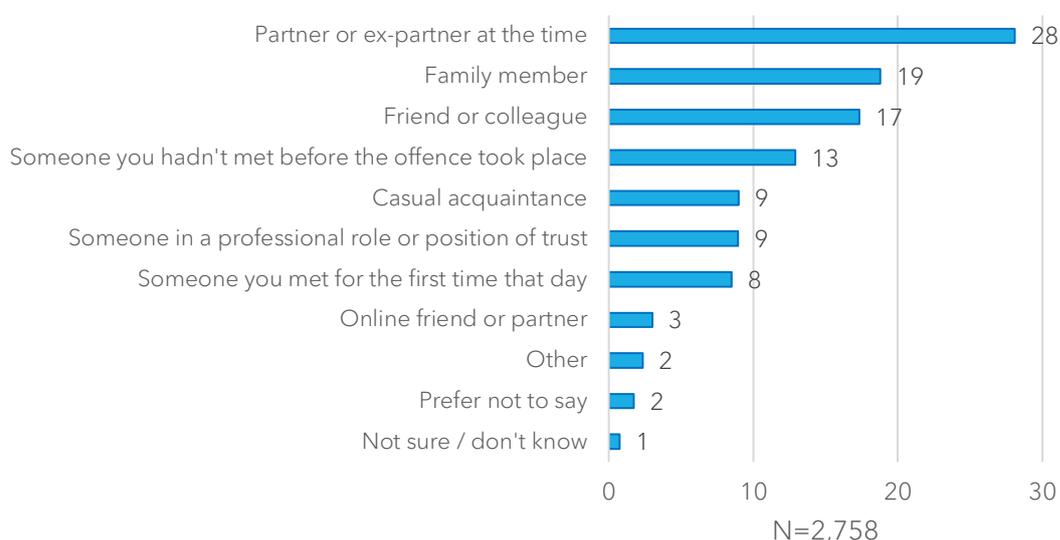
Differences in type of perpetrator were visible by survivor gender: for women, the most common type of perpetrator was a current or former partner (29%), whilst for men the most common type of perpetrator was a family member (28%). Additionally, women had a higher proportion of friend or colleague perpetrators (18% compared to 12% for men), whilst men had a higher proportion of

^xRespondents could choose more than one option for this question, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

perpetrators who were in a professional role or position of trust (15% compared to 9% for women).

It is not possible to directly compare survivor-perpetrator relationship in our survey data to national police recorded sexual offences due to differences in how these are recorded and categorised. However, for women we see a similar pattern between our survey and official police recorded rapes for the year ending March 2022, where the most common type of perpetrator for female survivors of rape was an intimate partner (46%). For men on the other hand, the most common type of perpetrator for both police recorded rapes and other sexual offences was an acquaintance (38%), followed closely by family member perpetrators for rape (37%).¹⁷

Figure 2: Type of perpetrator (% selected)



4.2. How do police experiences differ according to the type of perpetrator?

Experiences of the police vary depending on whether the perpetrator is an intimate partner, family member, or complete stranger. Survivors of intimate partner sexual violence (on average) reported the poorest police experiences across indicators. Specific examples will be discussed throughout the report and tables with detailed breakdowns of the differences are provided in the [Data Appendix](#).

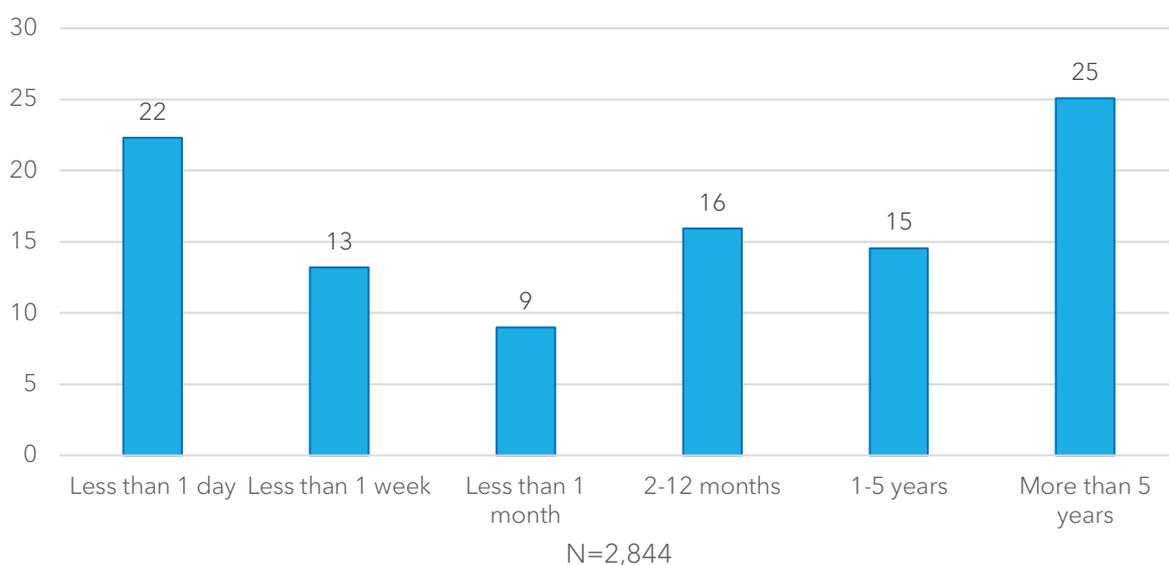
4.3. Time between the assault and police recording

It is common for survivors to not report a rape or sexual assault to police immediately. This is normal and often due to range of reasons and barriers, such as fear of the perpetrator, concerns about not being believed, worries about being blamed for the assault, or taking time to realise and be able to name what happened was rape or another form of sexual offence. In the past this was often referred to as

'delayed' reporting and research has shown this to be associated with lower prosecution and conviction rates.¹⁸

In this survey, police were told about the rape or sexual assault on the same day in 22% of cases, and within a week in a further 13% of cases (see Figure 3). A quarter (25%) were brought to police attention more than five years after they happened. The survey included a higher proportion of 'delayed reporting' cases than national police recorded sexual offences between April 2019 and March 2022, where 75% of cases were recorded by police less than a year after the offence, and only 15.3% were recorded 5 years or more since the assault.¹⁹

Figure 3: Length of time before the police knew about the assault (%)



4.4. Time since police disclosure and current case status

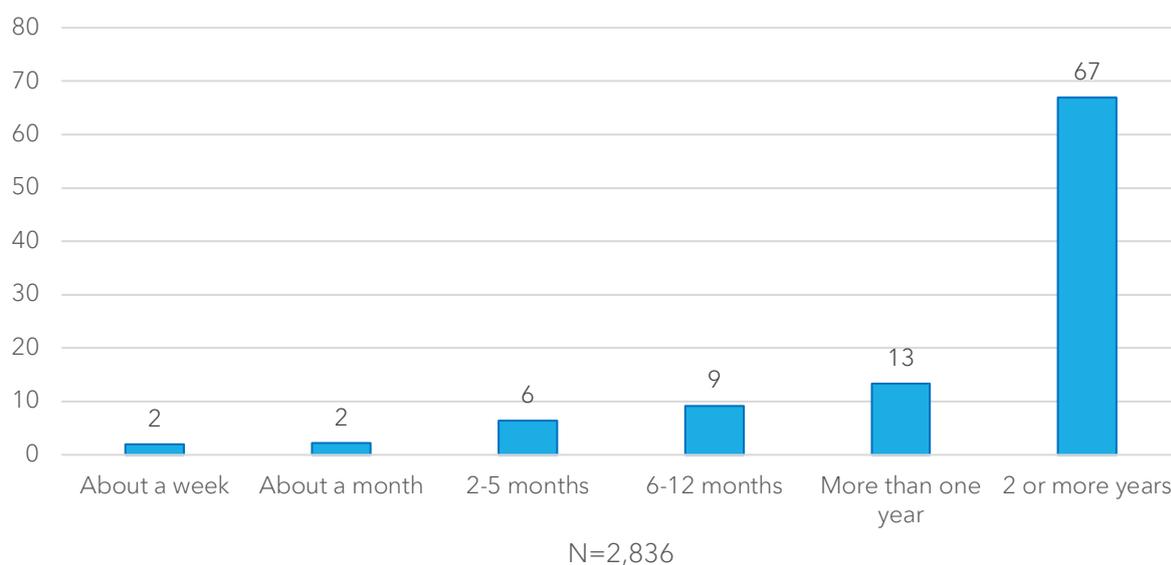
This survey overwhelmingly captures survivor experiences that have come to police attention some time ago (see Figure 4). A majority (67%) of cases respondents told us about have been known to police for over two years, a further 13% have been known to police for one to two years. At the time of taking the survey, only 4% of cases had come to police attention within the last week/month, 6% in the past 2-5 months, and a further 9% in the past 6 to 12 months.

Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents told us about a case that was closed at the time they completed the survey (see Figure 5). These survey responses are no less relevant than those from respondents with more recent/ongoing cases. Many survivors whose police contact ended some time ago highlighted that the police interactions had enduring effects on their safety, mental or physical health, and various other aspects of their lives (see section 6.5 and 8.4). Measuring long-term consequences of police response to sexual violence is only possible when the

survey includes survivors with police experiences from months, years or even decades ago.

During this reporting period, 12% of cases discussed were likely^{xi} to have been reported between July 2023 and June 2024, the final year of the survey. A quarter (27%) were reported between January 2021 and June 2023. The remaining 61% were reported before 2021. In subsequent sections of this report, we describe similarities and differences in survivor responses according to when cases came to police attention.^{xii} We will often use graphs to do this, and alongside the likely timeframe of reporting also consider whether the survey responses had recent police contact or not. Because of the smaller number of respondents whose case has come to police attention in recent years, we combine the data from the first survey report (January - June 2023) with the data from this survey period (July 2023 - June 2024) to maximise the sample size.

Figure 4: Length of time police have known about the case (%)

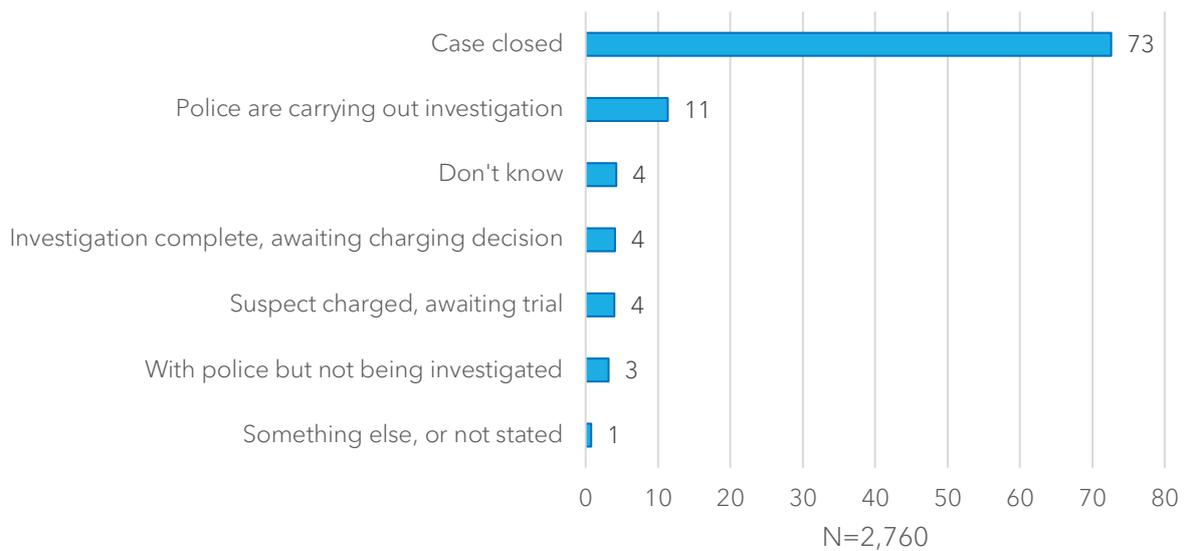


The majority (73%) of respondents completed the survey about a case that is now closed (see Figure 5). One in ten (11%) had an ongoing police investigation, 3% said the investigation was technically ongoing, but they felt that the police had stopped actively investigating, and 4% of cases were awaiting a Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decision on the case. A further 4% of respondents spoke of a case that was awaiting trial at the time of completing the survey.

^{xi}We did not ask respondents for exact dates and therefore the combination of the 'how long have police known about the rape/sexual assault' variable and the date of survey completion were used to produce estimates rather than exact dates.

^{xii}Note that this does not mean all interactions with the police occurred exclusively during that time period.

Figure 5: Case status (%)



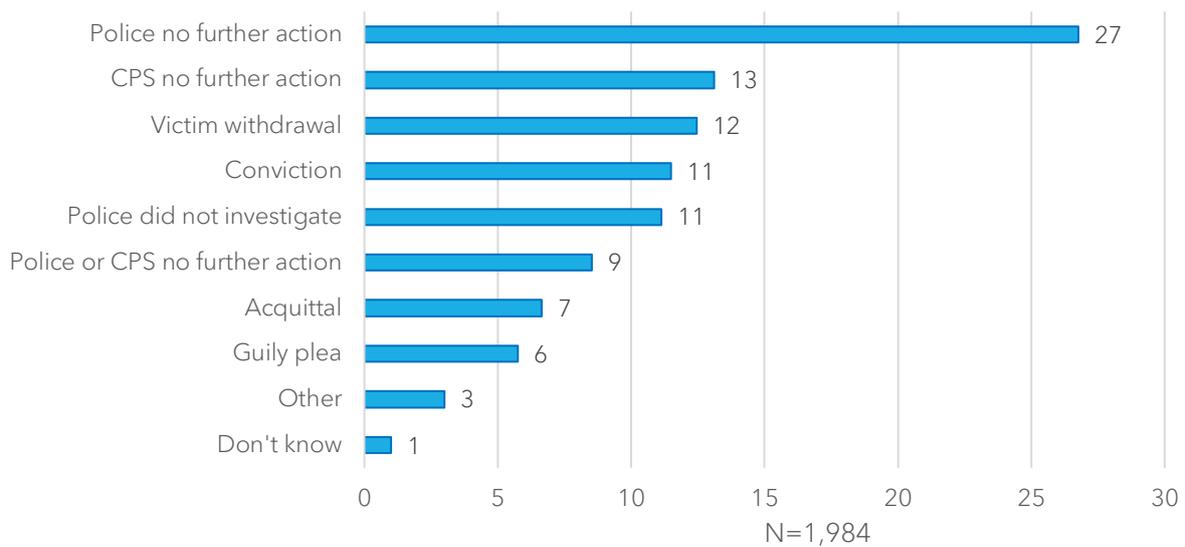
Some 4% of respondents said they did not know what their current case status is, and free text responses further highlighted that this was often the result of a lack of communication from the police:

"It would be nice if they could contact me to tell me what's going on with the case I havnt heard anything for weeks" [sic]

"[...] I have not heard from the OIC [officer in charge] for many months [...]"

Turning to reasons why the case closed, the most common route to case closure was a police 'no further action' (27%), which means the police took the decision to close the investigation without referring the case to the CPS to consider whether any suspect should be charged (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Reason why case was closed (%)



Some survivors elaborated on their experience of a 'no further action' police decision, revealing that they felt the police had not sufficiently investigated before closing the case. For instance, one survivor shared:

"[...] Police said intent couldn't be proven so closed case- they only spoke to suspect by phone [...]" [sic]

Some also used the free-text to explain that while the case was closed, the sexual violence itself or other forms of abuse from the perpetrator were still ongoing. This theme re-emerged in the free-text box at the end of the survey where some respondents said that the sexual abuse continued because the police failed to stop the perpetrator even though a rape or sexual assault had been reported to the police (see section 8.4.1).

"[...] Nothing was done in my case and my abuser continues to harass me."

Respondents also used the free-text section to share further details on the reasons police gave them for closing the case with 'no further action', citing insufficient evidence or inability to locate the perpetrator. Some survivors felt this reflected inadequate efforts or willingness from the police, especially when the survivor had evidential material that could assist the investigation, yet which the police failed or declined to look at (e.g. phone messages or CCTV footage).

For respondents whose case had gone to trial, 60% of cases resulted in a guilty verdict and 35% resulted in an acquittal. The remaining 5% resulted in another outcome. These other outcomes included, for example: the defendant entering a plea bargain, receiving a caution, being found guilty of a lesser charge, being found

guilty of only some but not all the sexual offences charges, being found guilty of other offences but not the sexual offence, or being found guilty of sexual offences against other victims but not for sexual offences against the survivor completing the survey.

“suspect found guilty but i was not allowed to persue the sexual side of things, during the trial they told me not to say anything about it” [sic]

A small proportion of respondents saw a suspect charged but the case did not go further for reasons beyond the control of the justice system. Some perpetrators died of natural causes before the case could go to court (n=4). Seven respondents said their perpetrator died by suicide prior to the court case (in one case on the morning of the trial itself). For others, their perpetrators lacked the capacity to stand trial (for example they had been sectioned, had Alzheimer’s disease, or were terminally ill). Some cases that went to trial had resulted in a hung jury (no verdict) or the trial outcome was not yet known at the time of survey completion.

4.5. Victims’ Right to Review

The survey asked respondents if they were aware of the Victims’ Right to Review (VRR) scheme. VRR entitles the victim to request a review of police or CPS decisions not to charge and/or prosecute a suspect in their case.²⁰

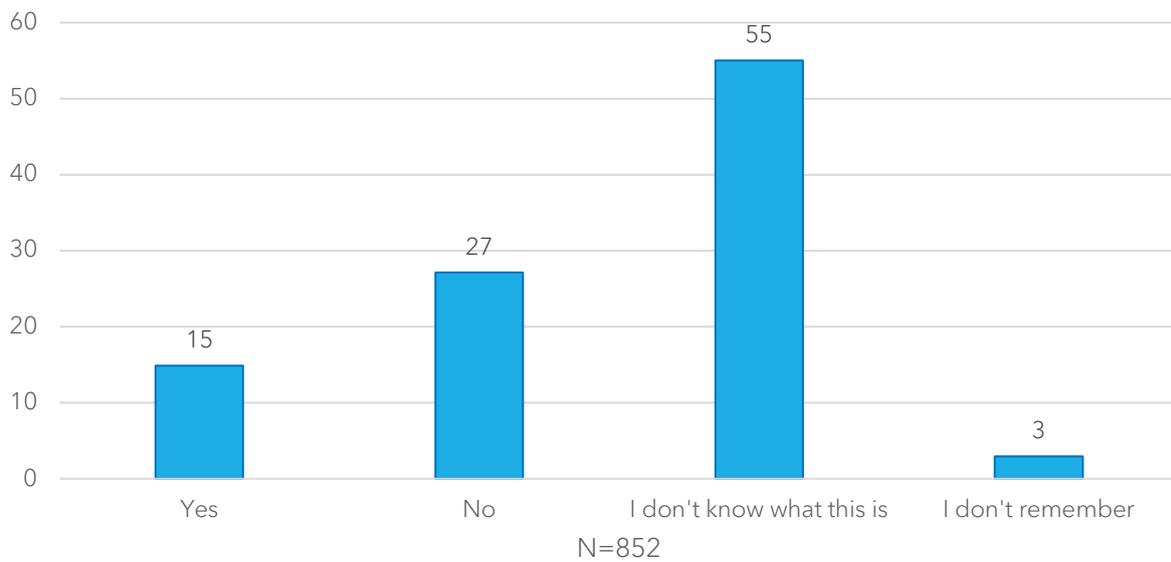
Our survey reveals that more than half of survivors (55%) to whom the VRR scheme might have been relevant did not know about it (see Figure 7Figure 7). Free-text responses showed that even when survivors did know about VRR, they sometimes found the police to be obstructive.

“[...] The police did not support once I had my right to review served [...]”

Others felt they unable to not go ahead with a VRR because they felt too exhausted and traumatised by their police experience to engage in the VRR process and the further police contact this would entail.

Of those whose cases were never investigated by the police, or whose cases were closed by the police or the CPS, only 15% made use of the VRR scheme. Elsewhere in the survey we asked respondents whether police had told them about their victim rights, and two in three (68%) said either that the police did not do this or that they were not sure whether the police had done this. Collectively, these findings point to the need of raising awareness to ensure that survivors are aware of their rights and can exercise them, if they would like to do so.

Figure 7: Whether Victims' Right to Review was used (%)



Within the survey data, there is indication of a significant improvement in police telling victims about their rights within the past 12 months. Four in ten survivors whose case became known to the police after July 2023 said that police had told them about their victim rights, compared with 27% reporting prior to 2021. The figures are similar for those with recent police contact: 42% had been told about their victim rights compared with 28% who had not had contact, regardless of how long ago the case was initiated. Looking at all the survey data across both data collection periods (January 2023 - June 2024), less than half of recent rape cases with recent police contact had been told about their victim rights (43%) (see [Data Appendix](#)). This was reduced to less than one in four (24%) survivors within the 1% of respondents with a recent case but no recent police contact (see section 6.1).

5. Reporting, non-reporting and 'victim withdrawal'

5.1. Reasons for reporting

Reporting a rape or sexual assault to the police takes courage. Survivors disclose a rape or sexual assault to police for a variety of different reasons: in this survey, survivors said they reported to keep others or themselves safe (61% and 38%, respectively), and so the perpetrator(s) would face the consequences of their offending (59%) (see Figure 8). Survivors' own words from free-text responses emphasise these motivations:

"[...] I did not refer my own case directly to the police - my aim was so that the perpetrator could not reoffend. I wanted to protect others in my position [...]"

Other reasons central to the reporting decision included to get closure (36%); to have an official record of what happened (35%); or because others had told them they needed to report it (30%).

In this survey, nearly one in five respondents did not report the rape to the police. Instead, either a third party (someone else) made the report (12%), or the rape came up as part of something else, so-called 'telling, not reporting' (for example, during police contact during a domestic abuse incident; 7%). This is a slightly lower proportion of 'telling, not reporting' cases than those identified through Operation Soteria case file reviews.²¹

Figure 8: Reasons for reporting (% selected)



In the survey, 9% of respondents ticked 'other' in addition to or in place of the other response options. The 'other' option allowed respondents to give further detail via a free-text response box. Reasons for reporting not covered by the closed question response option included: reporting an underage offender so that the perpetrator would get help (not punishment); in order to gain custody of a child where the father of the child is sexually offending against and coercively controlling the survey respondent; and reporting a recent rape (as an adult) as part of survivorship of childhood sexual abuse.

"Because I am a victim of CSA [child sexual abuse] and found it insufferable to have to experience a sexual assault as an adult without fighting back"

In some cases, a change in circumstance meant the survivor now felt they would be supported and believed, whereas they did not feel this way previously. Examples of such changes in circumstances included additional evidence coming to light, or the perpetrator having been publicly exposed for or convicted of committing sexual offences against others. Some survivors said they felt pushed into making a report, others were motivated by their fear of what the perpetrator could do to others, especially those with access to children, or in professional positions of trust.

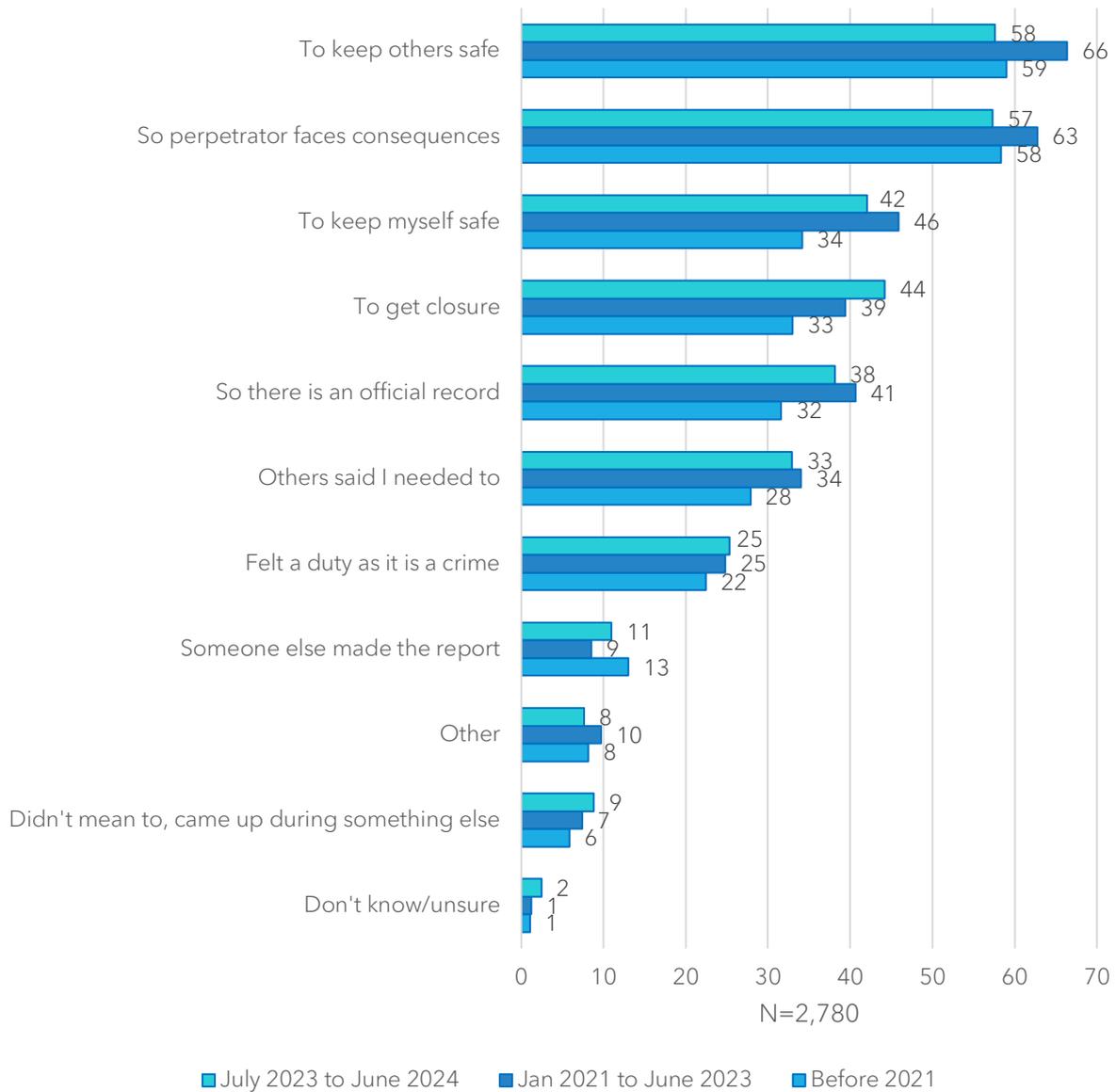
One survivor felt confident disclosing a non-recent sexual offence to the police following a positive police experience of reporting a different (non-sexual) assault. Conversely for another, reporting again was an act of courage of refusing to be silenced by a terrible past police experience. Some respondents said they reported to the police precisely because others pressured them not to report. Some survivors wanted to stand up to the perpetrator and send a signal of inner strength.

"To let the perpetrators know I am no longer that scared child"

Others were motivated to stand up on behalf of other survivors (either of the same perpetrator or other perpetrators in general) or otherwise for the benefit of others. Some reported in the hope of preventing additional sexual assaults or because they felt guilt that someone else had now been hurt which they (wrongly) felt responsible for due to not reporting previously.

The percentage of respondents who said they reported as part of seeking closure has grown significantly in more recent years, with 33% of those reporting before 2021 citing this as a reason, compared to 44% of those reporting since July 2023 (Figure 9). Additionally, since 2021, a higher proportion of survivors said they reported because they wanted there to be an official record of the crime or/and because others said they should report the police.

Figure 9: Reasons for reporting over three time periods (% selected)



The reasons for reporting vary significantly depending on the relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator, as explored in the next section.

Current or former intimate partner perpetrator:

Reporting to 'keep myself safe' was more common among intimate partner perpetrators (50%) compared to other relationship types. 'Telling not reporting' was far more common where the perpetrator was a current or former partner at the time, compared to all other victim-perpetrator relationship types. For context, other Operation Soteria research has shown that sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner is a strong indicator of coercive controlling behaviour.²² Coercive control is highly dangerous and we recommend that officers are attuned to signs of coercive control surrounding a rape or sexual offence disclosure and take this into

consideration when interacting with the survivor, and in any actions officers take – or decide not to take – in response to the disclosure.²³

Complete and de-facto strangers:

Compared to survivors attacked by perpetrators previously known to them, survivors of attacks by complete or de-facto strangers (i.e. someone they first met that day) are significantly more likely to report out of a sense of duty, because others said they must report, or so there is an official record. These reporting reasons were also more prevalent where the perpetrator was a casual or online acquaintance compared to survivors of attacks by perpetrators exploiting closer/long-term connections to their victims.

Family members as perpetrators:

'Reporting to get closure' was a significantly more prevalent reason for reporting for survivors of familial sexual abuse compared to other relationship types.

These are of course just tendencies: each case is different, and three quarters (73%) of survivors gave more than one reason for reporting, highlighting that reasons for disclosure are often complex and multi-faceted. Additionally, sometimes there was more than one perpetrator/relationship type present. However, the findings make clear the importance of officers actively considering the reasons for reporting. This is important because understanding a survivor's reasons for disclosing may carry vital information, for example about risks and safeguarding, and about what a survivor might need from the police to stay engaged in the process.

5.2. What would be a good outcome for you?

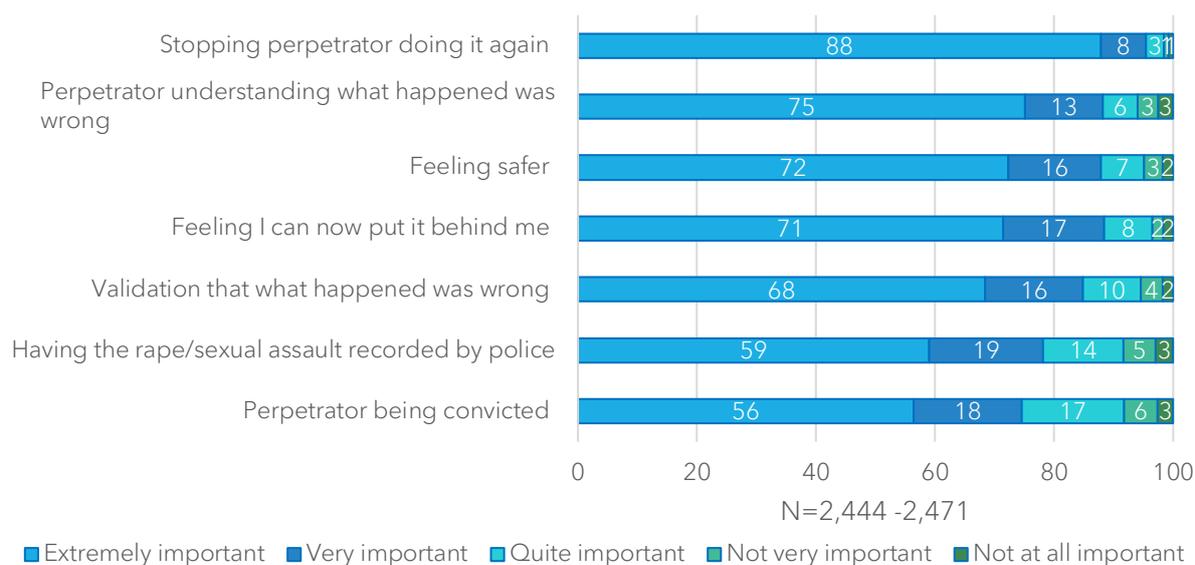
We also asked respondents what they personally would have considered a good outcome from the case becoming known to the police. While survivors' initial reasons for reporting reflect their motivations for contacting the police, this question focused on what, in hindsight, would have made the process worthwhile for them. Unlike the question about reasons for reporting, this question is applicable to all survivors whose cases came to police attention, including those who did not make to report in the first place (i.e., third party reports or 'telling, not reporting' disclosures).

An overwhelming majority (88%) of respondents said that an extremely important outcome would be to stop the perpetrator from doing this again (see Figure 10). Other extremely important outcomes were the perpetrator understanding that what they did was wrong (75%), the survivor feeling safer (72%), and the survivor feeling like they could put what happened behind them (71%). Importantly, the perpetrator being convicted in court was the least extremely important outcome, with only over

half (56%) of respondents saying it was extremely important (see section 8.9 for free-text responses outlining what survivors want from the criminal justice system).

This finding has significant implications when considering what survivors need from the police: to stop known perpetrators from committing the crime again. It underlines the importance of police acting to disrupt known perpetrators and making good use of the range of legitimate tools police have at their disposal for perpetrator intervention (see 'Pillar 2' of Operation Soteria).^{24,25}

Figure 10: Importance of each potential outcome of case being known to the police (%)



5.3. Reasons for non-reporting

"My experience meant that when I was raped again last year, I didn't even consider going to the police, even though "on paper" it should have been considered more "blameless" on my part - stranger rape. But there was no way I would go to them now. Never. They laughed at me."

A total of 586 people said at the start of the survey police did not know about their case and of these, 345 responded to the multiple-choice question about reasons for not reporting. The most common reasons for not reporting were embarrassment or shame (57%), followed by not thinking that the police would believe them (44%), the impact on loved ones (42%), and fears they were partly to blame (38%) (see Figure 11).

Respondents who chose the 'something else' response option used the free-text to bring to our attention a range of further reasons why survivors may not report to the police, or to contextualise their other response(s) to this question. This included: the perpetrator was their partner or ex-partner; that they were too young at the time to realise that it was a criminal offence or to make the report; or that they not realised

that what had happened was rape/sexual assault at the time. Some mentioned feeling “stupid” in some way, some referred to their broken trust or lack of faith in the police, and in some cases the perpetrator was a police officer. Others simply felt unable to put themselves through the reporting experience, especially in the presence of male officers.

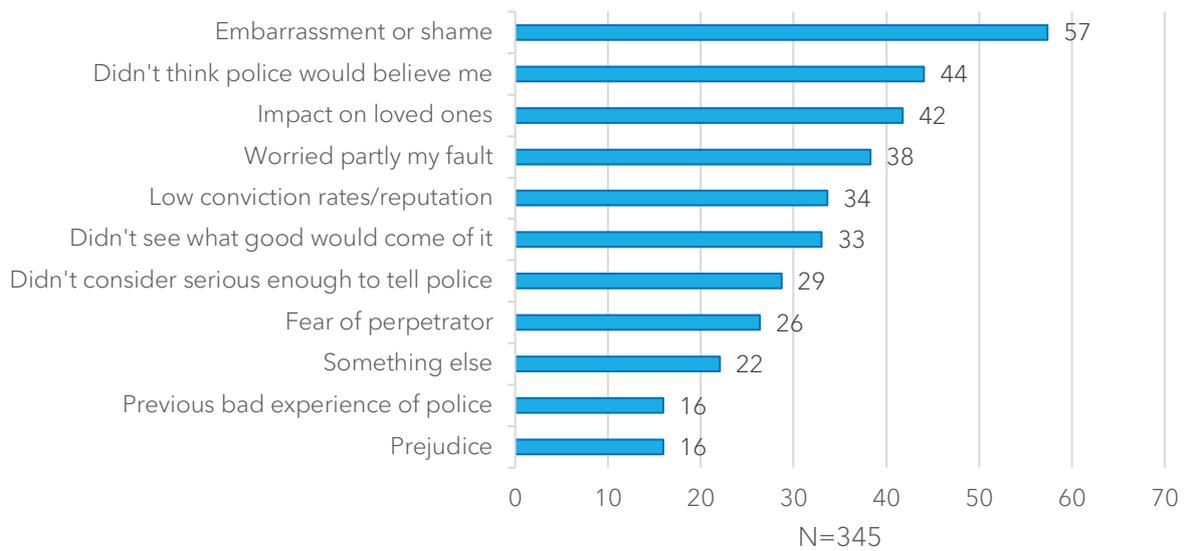
“Police by default are intimidating, and you already feel vulnerable and scared after someone has exerted power over you, deprived you of your autonomy after these events, and police are people in a position of power who can take away your autonomy. You would rather go home where you feel safe, or tell a friend than be in put yourself in a scary situation with (usually) male strangers who feel inyimidating [intimidating] due to their position. [A]lso the fear of the unknown, what will happen next” [sic]

“[...] I froze in response to the rape assault and trauma. Being so disassociated, I wasn't able to go through reporting to the Police. I wasn't going to be put through the experience of reporting, rape kit, having to explain and not be believed, to undergo cross examination by a defence lawyer, scrutiny of my clothes, sexual history and of course the low rate of convictions in these sexual assault and rape prosecutions. So that's why and it's important the police know why.”

As one survivor noted, not reporting to the police can also speak loudly about perceptions of how police treat cases of rape and sexual assault:

“Please also do a survey explicitly for people who chose not to go to police - people's experiences with police matter but so do perceptions of police and how they'll handle a report as I would argue (and stats seem to back this up) more people don't report than do so [...]”

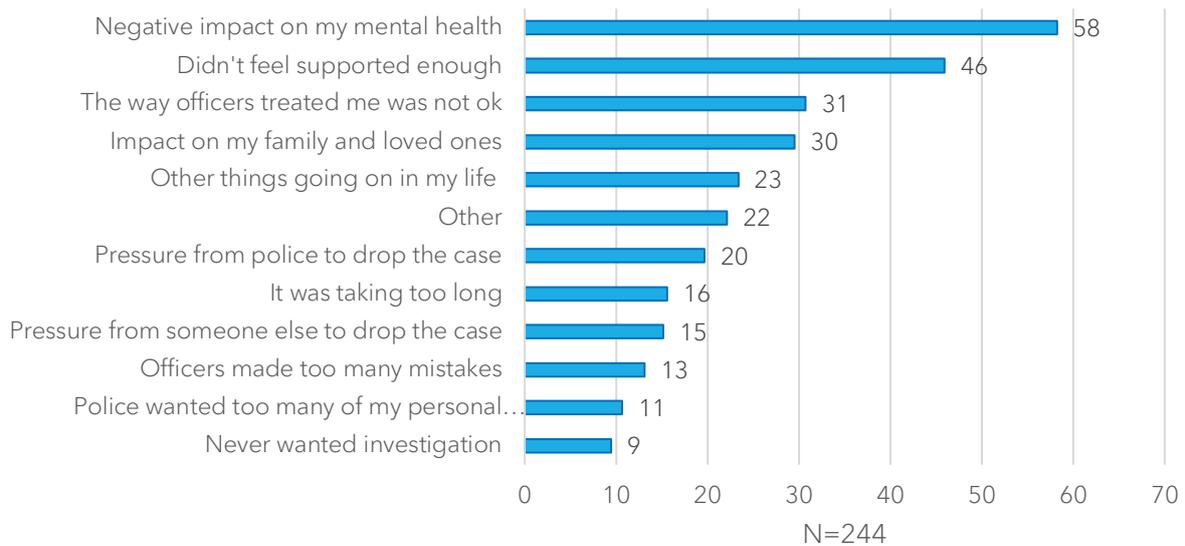
Figure 11: Reasons for not reporting (% selected)



5.4. Reasons for not continuing with the case ('victim withdrawal')

Responses to the question about why survivors chose not to continue with the investigation or prosecution of their case highlight the toll of the criminal justice process on survivors' mental health, with negative mental health impacts being the most frequently mentioned reason for withdrawing (58%) (see Figure 12). About half (46%) of respondents who did not continue with the case said that one of the reasons was because they did not feel supported enough within the process. Further, one in three (30%) cited the 'impact on family and loved ones'. This brings to the fore the negative impacts that can extend beyond the survivor, affecting those close to them so deeply that survivors may feel compelled to withdraw from their case.

Figure 12: Reasons for not continuing with the process (% selected)



Responses highlight the shortcomings in the quality of police investigations and interactions with survivors, resulting in survivors feeling unable to carry on: 31% of respondents said a reason for withdrawing was that the way police treated them ‘was not okay’. Additionally, delays in case progress were also a factor (16%), as were officers making too many mistakes (13%), and the police wanting too many personal records and data from the survivor (11%). Concerningly, one in five survivors said that police actively pressured them to withdraw.

“The officers were intimidating. Very negative to all. Quite aggressive in approach to make me not carry on reporting [...]”

Some respondents shared that the police had discouraged them from pursuing their cases, either by discrediting their case or by convincing them that continuing would be too emotionally taxing for them.

“Police put me off by telling me how hard it would be on my mental health when taking it to court, and how intense [the] court process would be.”

Survivors also mentioned fear of the perpetrator(s), fear of the process itself (including the prospect of going to court), or concerns that the process might compromise their safety and put them at risk of harm.

5.5. Things that would have helped survivors continue with the case

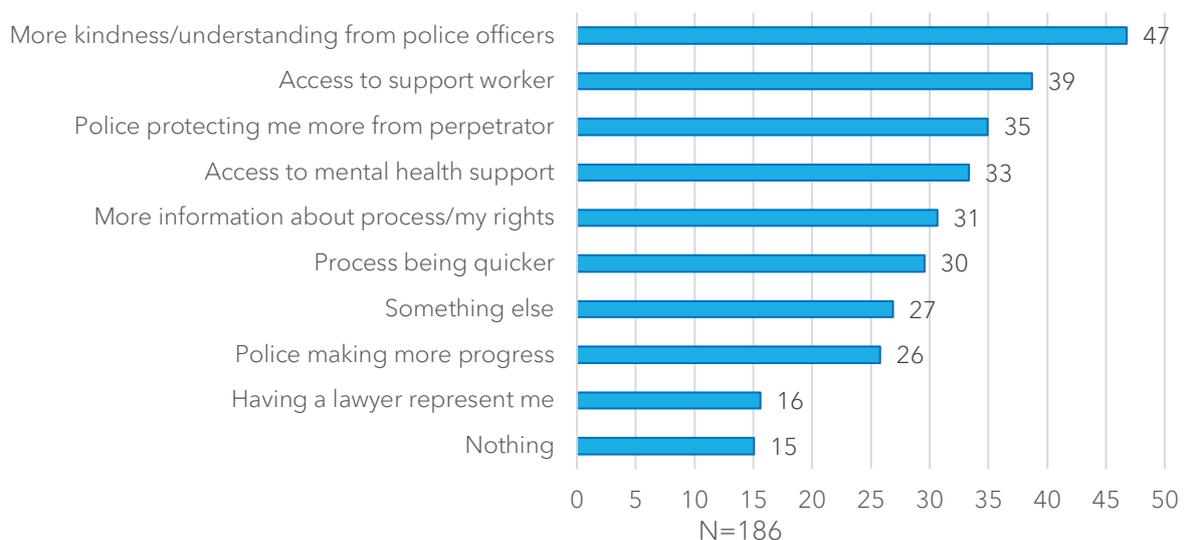
Respondents who withdrew from the process were asked what, if anything, could have enabled them to continue. The most common response was ‘more kindness and understanding from officers’ (47%), highlighting a straightforward area where

the police could make a difference. Additionally, survivors frequently mentioned ‘access to a support worker’ (39%). Other factors included the ‘police protecting me more from the perpetrator’ (35%), ‘access to mental health support’ (33%), ‘more information about the process/my rights’ (31%) and the ‘process being quicker’ (30%) (see Figure 13).

The role that police understanding, behaviour, and communication plays in survivors’ ability to carry on with the process was also evident in free-text comments at the end of the questionnaire. In these, some respondents said that honest and open communication or improved police understanding of the context of the offence would have helped. Other respondents noted how even the most basic actions such as not being subjected to inappropriate comments from the police; not being coerced into dropping the case; being believed and respected; or the police simply being open and honest with them would have helped them continue.

“If there’s anything about my case that would of changed (positively) the course of my experience, would have enabled me to fully open up, feel less scared & would have helped me move on/process and deal with what had happened. It would be for the police officers to have been more open and honest with me, not hound me with questions when I showed visable signs of distress (crying, hiding, holding my head). I felt I couldn’t escape, and being in a position of power and seeing the police as an authoritative figure I felt I couldn’t get out, take a break or ask them to stop (I wasn’t equipped with the skills to ask them in a reasonable way). So, I appreciate you needed to do your job, but short breaks, transparency about the situation and to have someone solely for the my welfare (as a child) would have been very helpful, for both parties I believe.”
[sic]

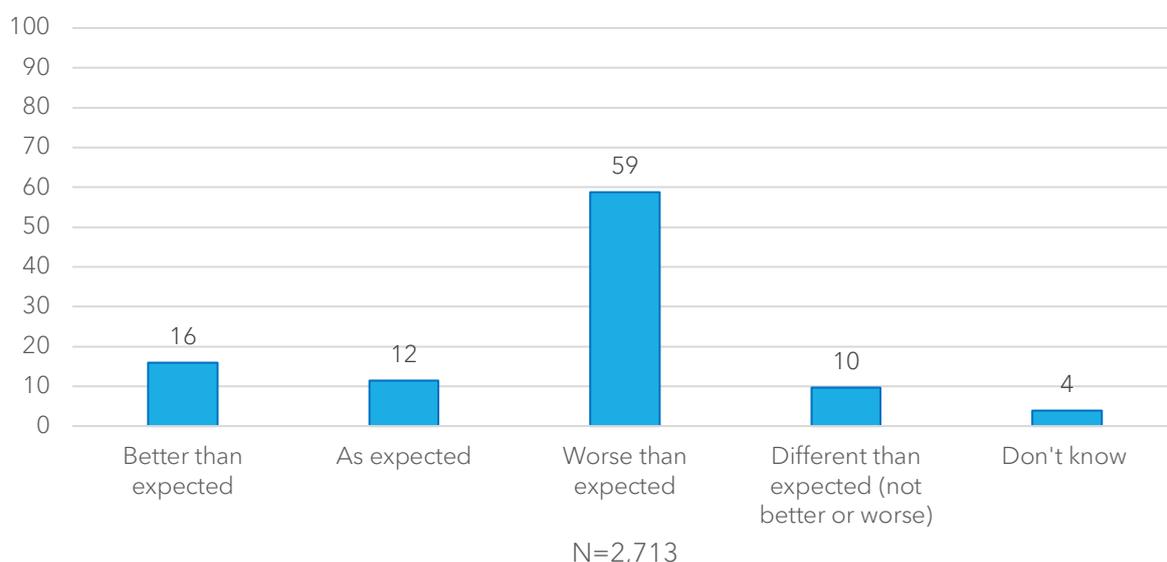
Figure 13: Things that would have helped those who withdrew to continue (% selected)



6. Survivor experiences of the police

Turning to respondents' evaluating their experiences with the police, survivors were first asked questions about their overall experience and how this compared to their expectations (see Figure 14). The findings reveal negative overall evaluations by survivors regarding the police's handling of their cases by almost three in five (58%) respondents. When asked about how their experiences aligned with their expectations, again almost three in five (59%) stated that their experience with the police was worse than they expected. Conversely, only 16% of survivors stated that their experience was better than they expected.

Figure 14: How experience of police compares to expectation (%)



The findings also reveal differences in survivor evaluations of the police experience between respondents with different case characteristics. Only 36% of survivors of intimate partner sexual violence (cases where the perpetrator was a current or ex-partner) strongly or somewhat agreed that the police were doing a good job overall, compared with 47% among survivors where the perpetrator was a family member. On the other hand, those who had more recent contact with the police, or with a more recently reported case had a higher proportion of survivors agreeing that the police were doing a good job overall (60%, and 57% respectively).

See the [Data Appendix](#) for a full breakdown of survivor evaluations of their police experience by the respondent demographic variables and case characteristics captured in the survey.

6.1. Police (in-) actions in case

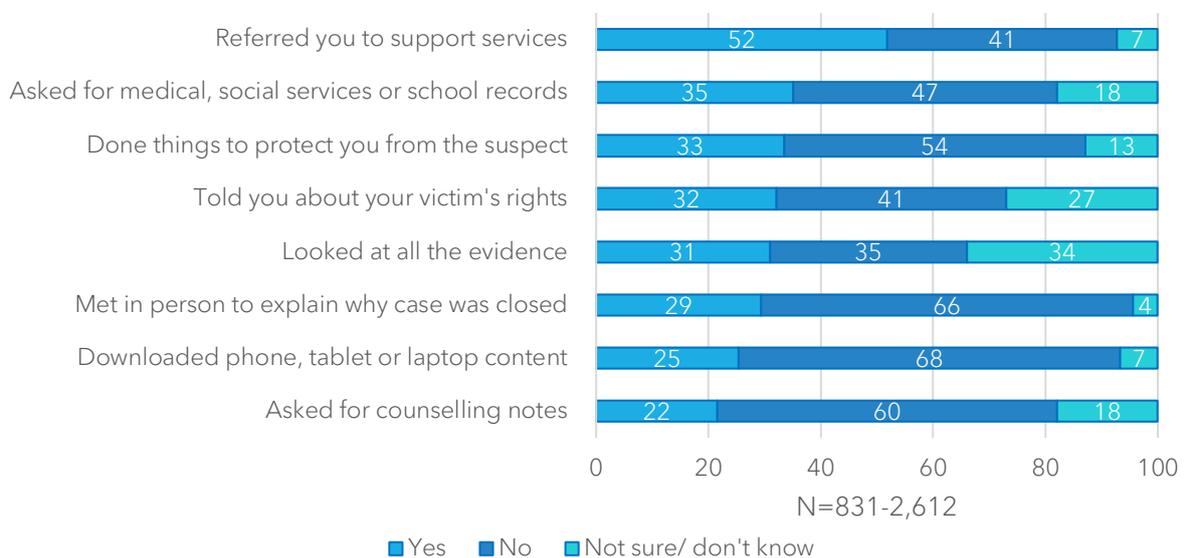
Respondents were asked about a range of actions the police may or may not have taken in their case (see Figure 15). The list includes investigative and safeguarding

steps, for example, downloading the survivor’s phone, asking for their counselling notes, doing things to protect the survivor from the suspect(s), or looking at all the evidence in the case. It also includes steps to support or engage with the survivor, such as making a referral to an independent victim support service, telling them about their victim rights, or if police closed the case, meeting with the survivor in person to explain the reasons for this decision.

Making a referral to an independent victim support service was the most frequent supportive step taken by the police and occurred for half (52%) of the respondents. Other supportive actions occurred less frequently, for example, telling survivors about their rights, looking at all the evidence, meeting in person to explain why the case was closed (if applicable), or doing things to protect them from the suspect(s), with only about a third of respondents saying that the police took these steps.

Notably, a third (34%) of respondents did not know whether the police had looked at all the evidence, and 27% were not sure whether the police had told them about their victim rights, pointing towards a possible gap in communication from the police. When it comes to digital and thirty party evidence, a marked finding is that asking for survivors’ counselling notes (22%) occurred almost as frequently as downloading their phone, tablet, or laptop content (25%).

Figure 15: Steps police have taken in case (% selected)



6.2. Information and communication

Respondents were asked about the quality of police communication, including whether officers were easy to get hold of, whether they contacted survivors when they said they would, whether they contacted them in good time when key things happened in their case, and whether they explained things well. Across these

indicators only just over one third of survivors (34-38%) felt that the police always or mostly did these things.

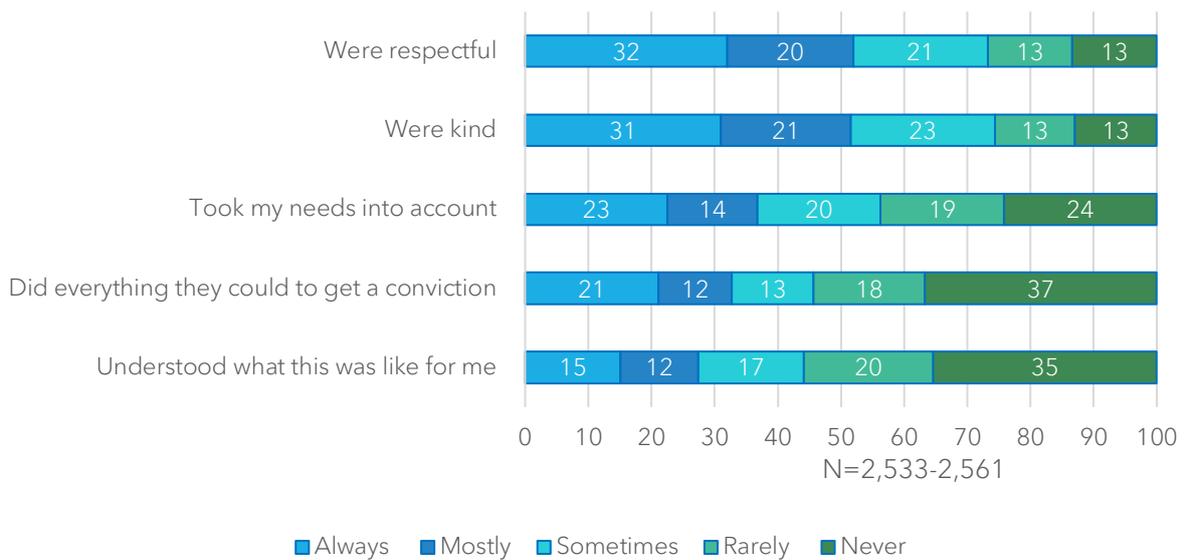
Respondents' evaluation of the quality of police communication varied systematically depending on who the perpetrator was. Survivors of intimate partner sexual violence were less likely to have positive experiences of police communication than survivors of familial sexual violence or where the perpetrator was a complete stranger.

Communication with the police was experienced much more positively by survivors who had a support worker, or did not want a support worker compared to those who wanted support but were unable to get one. For example, more than half of survivors receiving support and who did not want support said police explained things well (52% and 54% respectively) compared with only one in five of those who had wanted a support worker (22%). Communication was experienced as better by survivors reporting historic cases to the police (more than 5 years from offence to report) compared to those who reported within a few weeks of it happening. On average, male respondents reported worse communication overall than female respondents. Possible explanations for this finding include male survivors feeling the police were less available to them, that women's expectations were lower than men's expectations to begin with, or a combination of both.

6.3. Understanding, kindness, and respect

Survivors were asked questions relating to their experiences of aspects of procedural fairness.²⁶ Only about half of respondents said officers were always or mostly respectful and kind (see Figure 16). Most respondents felt a lack of understanding from the police: only one in four (27%) felt that the police always or mostly understood what this was like for them, whilst more than a third (35%) felt that the police never empathised in this way. Furthermore, only 37% said that the police always or mostly took their needs into account, even though this is essential for enabling all survivors to fully participate in the police investigation process more effectively.

Figure 16: Police empathy, kindness, and respect (%)



Differences in experiences related to procedural fairness were present by type of survivor-perpetrator relationship. Survivors of intimate partner sexual violence were less likely to feel officers did all they could to secure a conviction (28%), compared to 45% of survivors of familial sexual violence.

6.4. Feeling safe, believed, and like I matter

A further core aspect of procedural fairness is to feel that officers act with one’s best interest at heart (sometimes called ‘trustworthy motives’).²⁷ Less than half of respondents (43%) felt that the police always acted in a way that made them feel what happened to them was serious (see Figure 17). Only one in five respondents felt that officers always cared about them.

Procedural justice theory also concerns the importance of survivors being believed and listened to. The survey findings show only slightly over two in five survivors always felt listened to (45%) and believed (41%) (see Figure 18). While recognising that trauma can make survivors feel generally unsafe around others, another key finding is that one in three survivors (32%) did not feel safe in the presence of the police officers investigating their case. Autistic respondents and respondents with a physical disability were significantly less likely to say they felt safe in the presence of police officers.

Figure 17: How police made survivors feel (%) (i)

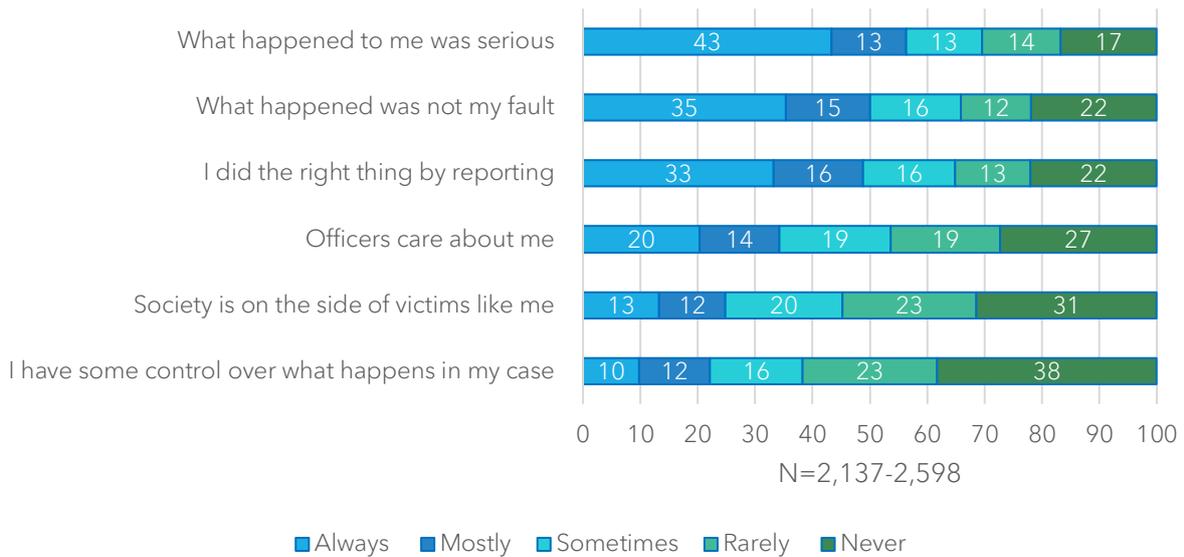
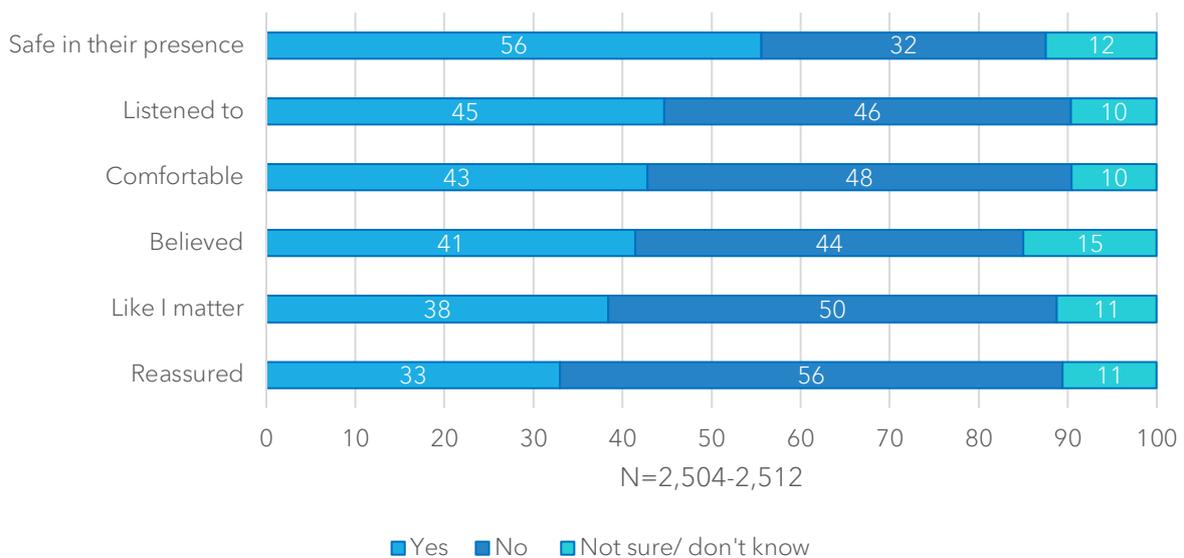


Figure 18: How police made survivors feel (%) (ii)



Concepts of procedural justice stress the importance of survivors having a sense of voice and active participation. Whilst victims are not decision makers within the criminal justice process (their role within it is effectively that of a witness), officers can give victims a sense of active participation and control over their involvement in the process, and influence how they are supported and safeguarded. Examples of this include considering: whether they wish for an ISVA to support them through the process or for another support service referral; whether they would like to meet the officer ahead of their Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview; the timing of the ABE interview; and whether they consent to officers accessing their medical or school records, or making a digital download from their phone once the officer has explained the reasons for doing so, as well as discussing with them the parameters

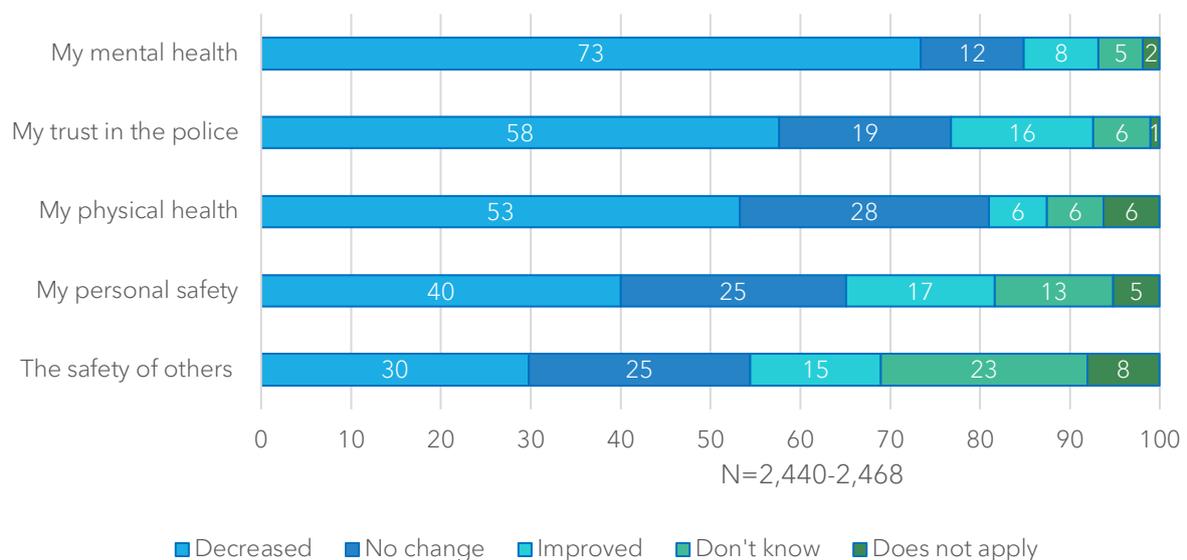
of the phone download.²⁸ A marked finding is that survivors felt they had limited control over what happens in their case, with three in five (61%) feeling that they rarely or never had some control, and only 10% feeling that they always had some control over their case.

6.5. The impact of the police experience on survivors' lives

Respondents were asked whether police actions (or inactions) impacted on various aspects of their life (see Figure 19). An overwhelming 73% of survivors said their mental health had worsened as a result of what the police did or did not do in their case. Almost three in five (58%) respondents said their trust in police declined, 53% said their physical health declined, 40% said their personal safety declined, and 30% stated the safety of others reduced as a result of their police experiences. Reporting of improvements as a result of the police response to the disclosure were rare, ranging from physical health increasing for 6% of respondents, to personal safety increasing for 17%.

Notably, 61% of intimate partner sexual violence survivors experienced a decline in trust in the police, in contrast to 47% for survivors of familial sexual violence and 52% of those assaulted by strangers. Additionally, survivors with mental health conditions showed higher proportions of decreases across all indicators. Most indicators also reflected similar trends for survivors with physical disabilities or ADHD (see [Data Appendix](#) for figures).

Figure 19: Benefits and harms of police action or inaction (%)



The devastating mental health impacts of police engagement were extensively highlighted in survivors' free-text responses. Some stated that their experience with the police was so traumatising that it was worse than the assault itself.

"[...] The trauma of dealing with the police was comparable with the trauma of being abused [...]"

Although police investigations can potentially enhance survivors' personal safety and mental health, and even though some life-changing positive impacts were noted in free-text responses, these instances appear to remain the exception rather than the norm.

6.6. Willingness to report (again) in future

We asked survivors about their likelihood of reporting sexual offences to the police (again^{xiii}), encouraging a friend to report sexual offences, or reporting other crimes to the police (see Figure 20). This can be seen as an approximate measure of a survivor's overall feelings toward the police as well as a gauge for the likelihood of their willingness to report to the police in the future. Only one in four respondents would be very likely to report a sexual offence to the police again, while a slightly higher proportion - one in three (36%) - would be very likely to encourage a friend to report a sexual offence. When considering these findings, it is important to note that 19% of respondents did not report their assault themselves but said that their case came to light through other circumstances or was reported by someone else. Nevertheless, it still shows that while some people may not be likely to report a sexual offence again personally, they may still encourage a friend to do so.

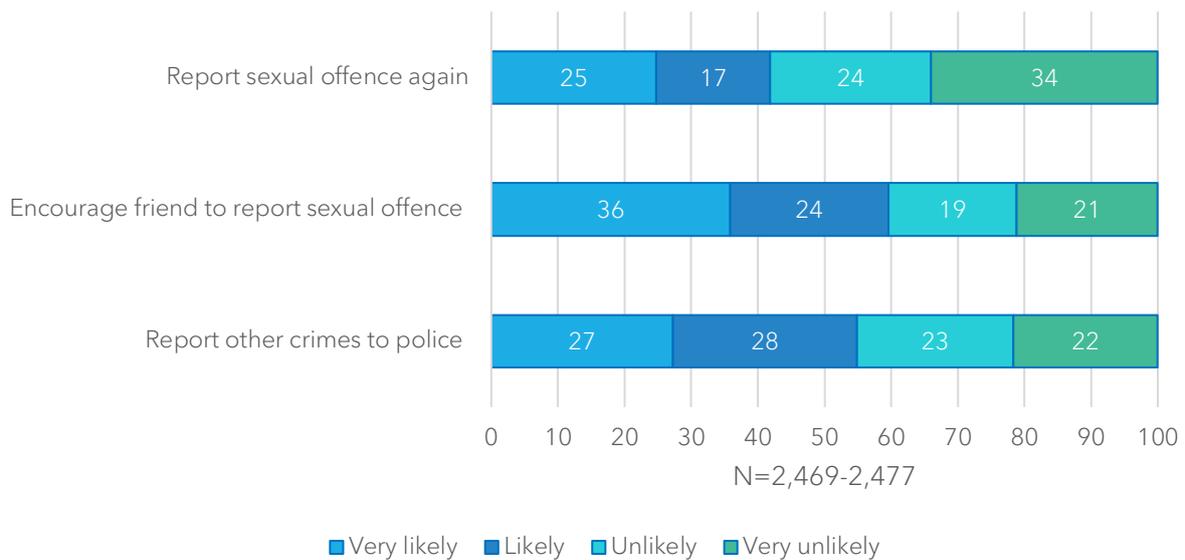
Willingness to report other crime types (non-sexual offences) is also shaped by survivors' experiences and judgments of the police.²⁹ In this survey, only one in four (27%) respondents would be very likely to report other crimes to the police. Additionally, only 27% of those who said they would be very unlikely or unlikely to report a sexual offence again would be likely or very likely to report another crime to the police. Conversely, almost all (94%) of those who said they would be likely or very likely to report a sexual offence to the police again would also be likely or very likely to report another crime to the police (see [Data Appendix](#)).

Responses to free-text questions also highlighted the extensive impacts that survivors' experiences with the police had on their trust in the police and their willingness to engage with the police again.

"[...] I very much felt I was under intense scrutiny & victim blamed. The original OIC, didn't keep in touch & just wasn't very nice including making inappropriate comments. I feel very let down & would never report anything again."

^{xiii}About one in five respondents had not reported the rape or sexual assault to police, instead someone else had reported it (third party report), or it was an instance of 'telling, not reporting'.

Figure 20: Likelihood of future reporting behaviours (%)



There is a significant difference between those who did not intend to report to the police in the first place and those who did, in terms of their overall likelihood of reporting a sexual offence in future: 43% who intended to report said they were likely or very likely to report a sexual offence in the future, compared with 35% who did not intend to report the sexual offence on this occasion.

Differences in likelihood of reporting a sexual offence again were present across respondents with different socio-demographic and case characteristics (see Figure 21). Interestingly, a significantly higher proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic respondents said they would be very likely or likely to report a sexual offence again compared to White respondents (51% compared with 41%). Survivors of intimate partner sexual violence were also less likely to say they would report future sexual offences (40% likely or very likely) when compared to survivors of familial (52%) and stranger sexual violence (50%).

Respondents also reported being more likely to report a sexual offence again if they had police contact within the last three months. This could be due to a range of reasons, such as having had less time to become disillusioned with the police and the wider criminal justice system response and timelines, or due to improvements having taken place. Respondents whose cases were open were also more likely to report a sexual offence again compared to those whose case was closed, and who had therefore been through a full process and knew the outcome of their case.

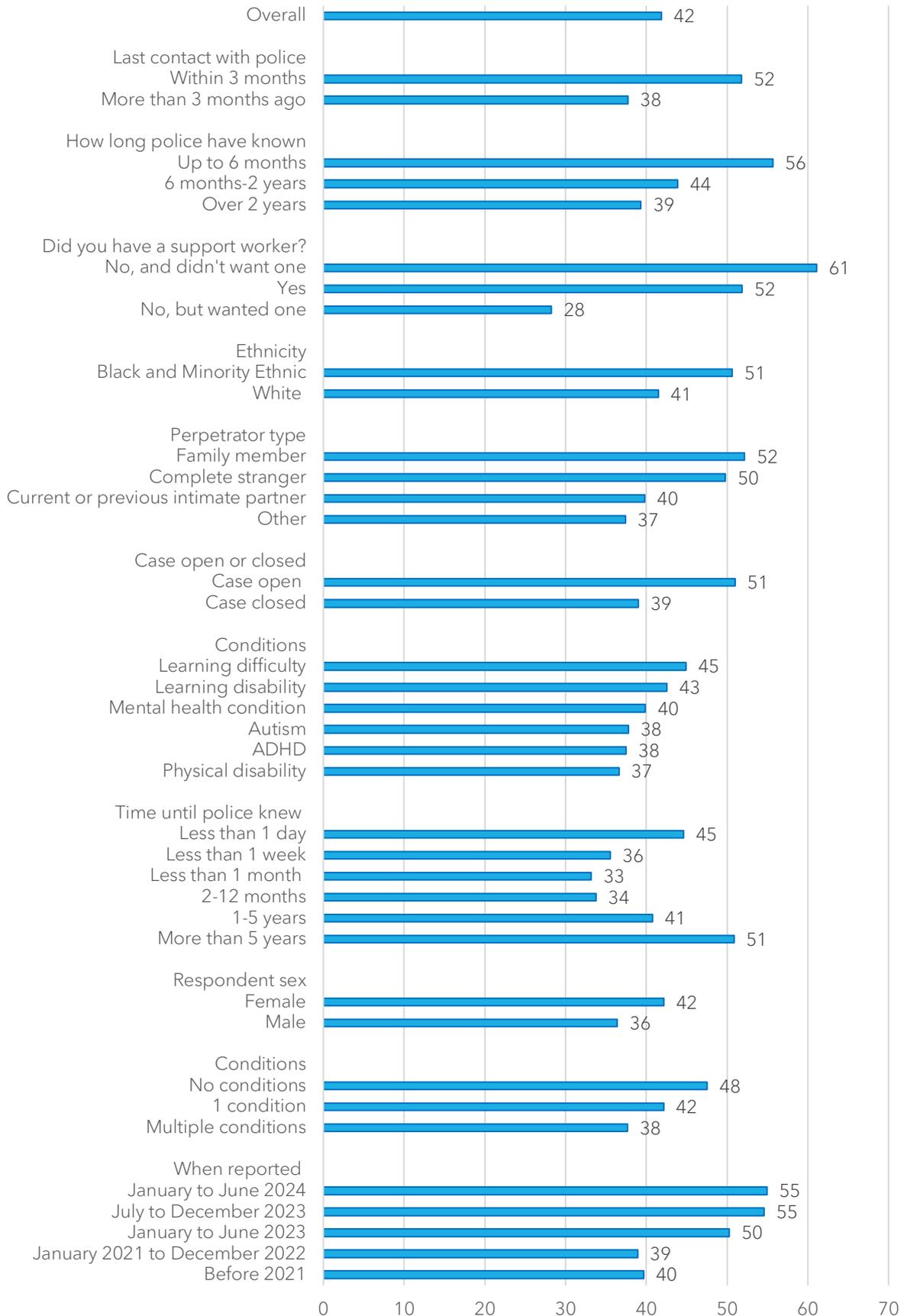
The findings also underscore the connection between supportive police actions and a survivor's likelihood of reporting a sexual offence again in the future. Among survivors who experienced all four supportive police actions (looking at all the evidence, protecting them from the suspect, telling them about victims' rights, and

referring them to support services), 90% were likely or very likely to report a sexual offence again.^{xiv} In contrast, this likelihood dropped to only 17% among those who did not experience any of these supportive actions. Relatedly, the likelihood of reporting a sexual offence again was high for those who always felt like they had some control over their case: 92% who felt that way were likely or very likely to report a sexual offence again in the future, compared with 36% of respondents who did not always feel that way.

These findings give clear and specific pointers on actions the police can take to enhance the experiences of survivors and increase survivor willingness to report sexual offences to the police.

^{xiv}The additional supportive action of *'met in person to explain why their case was closed'* was excluded from analysis here as it did not apply to all respondents.

Figure 21: Future reporting behaviours with other factors (% selecting 'likely' or 'very likely' to report a sexual offence again)



6.7. Are survivor experiences improving over time?

6.7.1. What this survey can and cannot tell us

A key area of interest is whether there is any indication that survivor experiences with the police are improving over time. Specifically, do survivors who have reported their rape or sexual assault more recently have better experiences with the police than those who have reported earlier? While this majority of this report focuses on the last year of survey data (July 2023 to June 2024), for this analysis, we use the full dataset (January 2023 to June 2024) to increase the sample size for the analyses in this section (n=4,823).

To gain some initial insight into whether there may be some improvements in survivors' experiences with the police, we look at how recently a survivor reported their rape or sexual assault to the police.^{xv} We did not explicitly ask survivors when they reported, so we gleaned an approximate estimate based on respondents' survey completion date and their answers to the question of how long the police have known about the rape or sexual assault. The data reveal that survivors who reported their cases since 2021, and especially since 2023, generally report statistically significantly better experiences with the police across most indicators (see [Data Appendix](#) for detailed figures).

However, a potential confounding factor in interpreting these findings is the recency of survivors' contact with the police. Survivors who reported more recently are also more likely to have had recent contact with the police, compared to those whose cases were reported longer ago. For instance, someone who reported six months ago is more likely to have had recent contact than someone who reported two or three years ago, let alone ten years ago. The data clearly show that survivors who have had contact with the police within the last three months prior to completing the survey are significantly more likely to report better experiences with the police compared to those without recent contact (see [Data Appendix](#) for specific figures). This raises the question of whether the apparent improvements in police responses over time are partly due to the fact that more recent cases are also more likely to involve recent police contact.

Therefore, in this section, we not only examine the timeframe in which survivors reported their cases, but we also account for (or 'control for' in statistical language) whether they had recent police contact (defined as contact within the three months prior to them completing the survey). By considering both variables together, we aim to better understand whether any observed improvements are indicative of genuine changes in policing practices over time or are primarily driven by the fact

^{xv} When using the term 'reported', we are referring to all cases brought to police attention, whether by the survivor, a third party, or through other means, such as during unrelated police contact.

that survivors who reported more recently are also more likely to have had recent police contact.

However, while such analyses can begin to unpick the effect of when survivors reported to the police from the impact of having recent engagement, they only partially address whether police experiences are genuinely improving. Police contact in itself can be a sign of an engaged and committed service. However, whether or not a survivor (still) has police contact over their case may signify something different for survivors at different stages in the investigation and prosecution process. For respondents whose case has only recently come to police attention, we would expect to see ongoing police contact. As such, the lack of recent contact may have a greater (and possibly different) impact for more recently reported cases compared to those closed a long time ago.

Finally, it is important to note that due to the survey design these findings are not representative of the general population and we are unable to make generalisations about whether any of these findings would hold nationally beyond our sample. We also cannot draw any causal inferences about the relationship between time of reporting and survivor experiences with the police. Other factors may explain some of the patterns we observed, and we outline such potential alternative explanations.

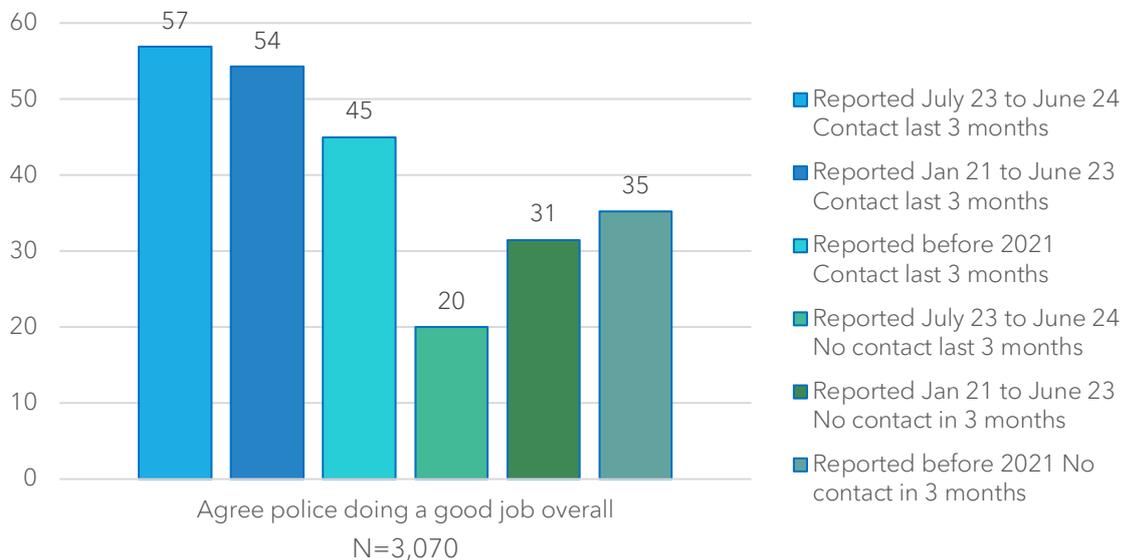
6.7.2 Changes in overall experience

Among the group of survivors who did have police contact within the three months prior to completing the survey, those who reported more recently tended to have better experiences than those who reported longer ago, both when measured as agreement that the police are doing a good job overall and the proportion of respondents whose experience with the police was better than expected. For example, 57% of those who reported between July 2023 and June 2024 reported agreeing with the statement that the police were doing a good job overall, compared to 45% of those who reported before 2021 (see Figure 22). This suggests that there may have been improvements in police practices over time. It is also possible however that this pattern in the data is partly explained by frustrations experienced by survivors whose cases are still ongoing after several years (hence the ongoing police contact), indicative of the toll a protracted investigation and prosecution process has on survivors. The nature of this survey does not allow for causal conclusions as to whether these observed patterns are due to genuine improvements in policing, the toll of prolonged investigations on survivors, or a combination of both.

For the subgroup of respondents without police contact within the three months prior to survey completion, a reverse pattern is observed, with those reporting more recently tending to report worse police experiences than those who reported longer ago (see Figure 22). This finding is unsurprising as lack of contact at this early stage

may indicate a failure by the police to actively investigate the case or an inability to instil confidence in survivors to pursue the case - especially if survivors feel dismissed or disbelieved from the beginning.

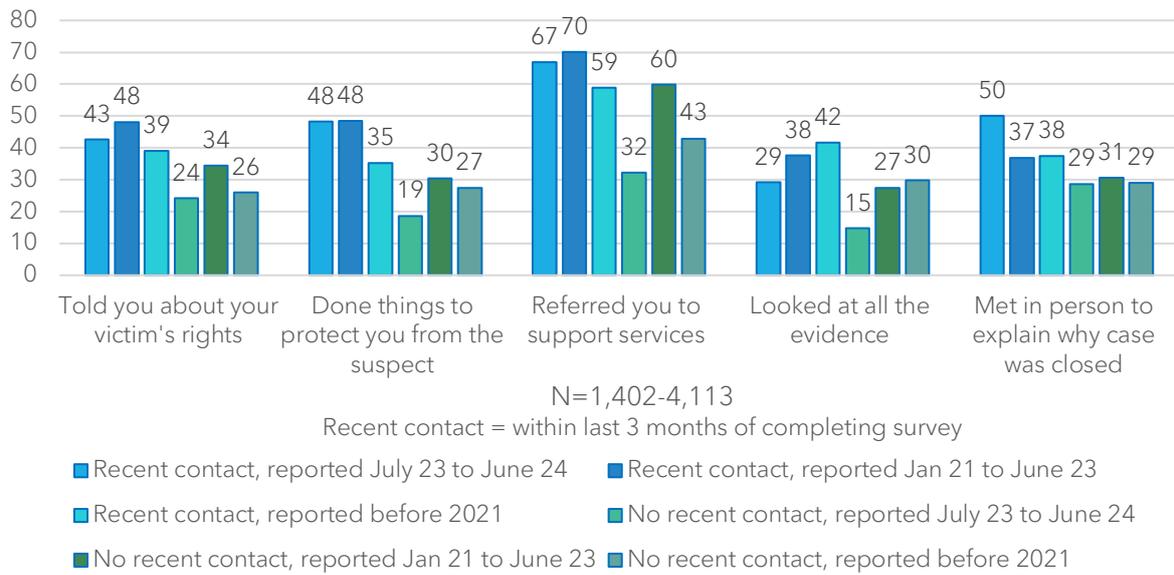
Figure 22: Whether police are doing a good job overall by time period reported and recency of contact (% selecting 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agree)



6.7.3 Police actions and inactions

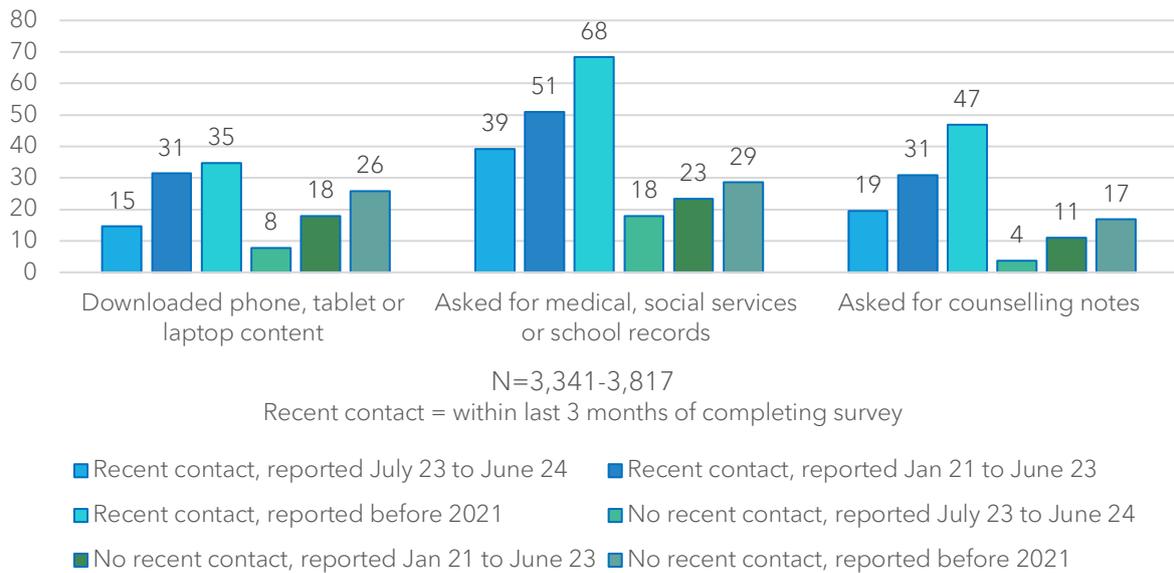
Previous findings have highlighted the importance of police taking basic positive steps and the influence this has on survivors' likelihood of reporting a sexual offence again. Encouragingly, the data suggest improvements in some of these areas (see Figure 23). Among those with recent police contact, a higher proportion of respondents who reported since January 2021 compared to before 2021 indicated that the police took steps to protect them from the suspect, told them about their victims' rights, and referred them to support services. Although there seems to be an improvement in police meeting with survivors in person to explain case closures - rising from just over one third of those who reported before July 2023 to 50% of those who reported between July 2023 and June 2024 - this increase is not statistically significant. In addition, respondents with recent contact whose cases were reported more recently were less likely to say the police looked at all the evidence. This might be because their investigations were still ongoing.

Figure 23: Steps police have taken in case by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)



A recurring concern among survivors is that police investigations excessively overfocus and overreach into their personal backgrounds, with police requesting extensive third-party materials such as medical, social service, and counselling notes, as well as access to survivors' electronic devices and social media accounts.³⁰ Our data suggests potential improvements in police practices in this area, with a lower proportion of survivors saying they experienced these for the three reporting time periods for both those who had and did not have recent contact with the police. Among those with recent police contact and who reported before 2021, almost half (47%) experienced the police asking them for counselling notes, falling to one in three (31%) for those who reported between January 2021 and June 2023, and dropping to only one in five (19%) for those who reported since July 2023 (see Figure 24). Similar patterns are visible for digital downloads and accessing of third-party material. Note that some of the cases reported since July 2023 were ongoing at the time the survivor completed the survey and it is possible that in a proportion of these cases survivors will still be asked for third party material or digital downloads at a future date.

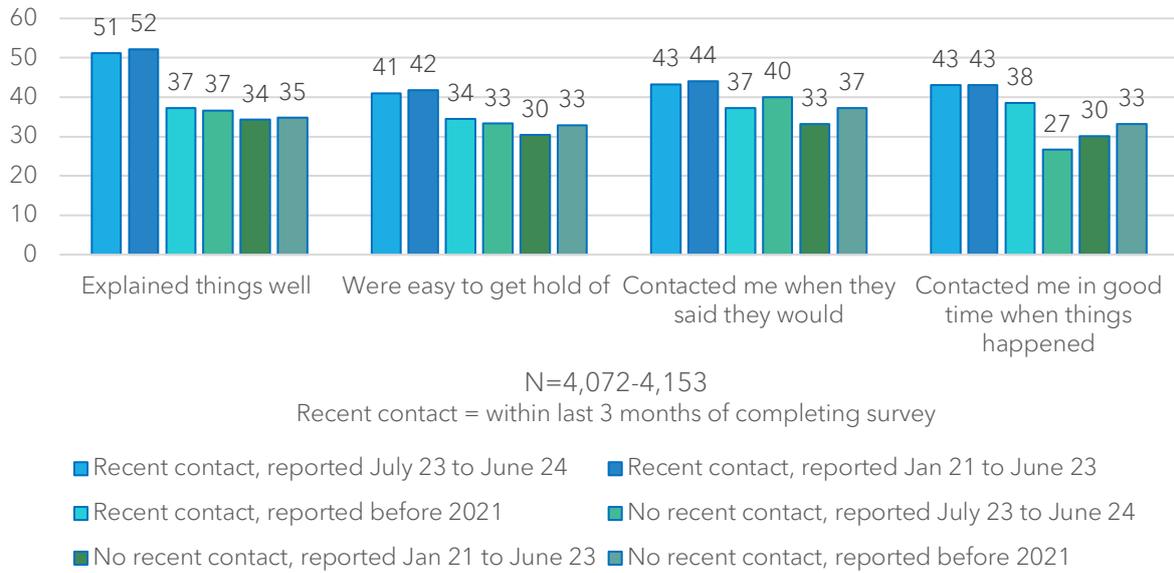
Figure 24: Steps police have taken in case by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)



6.7.4 Police communication and behaviour

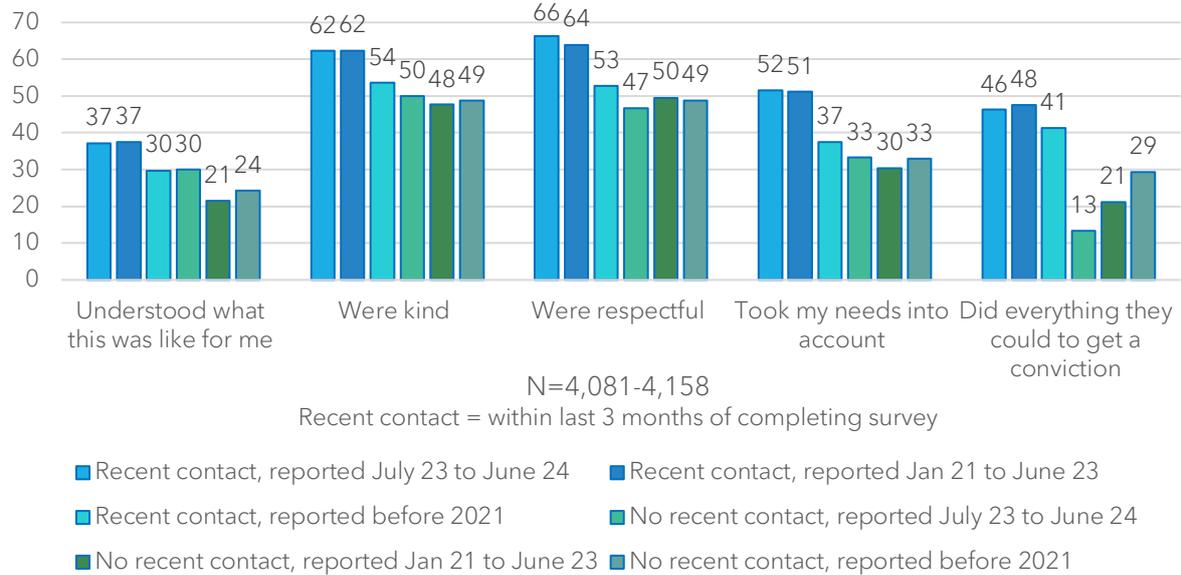
A higher proportion of respondents who reported since 2021 and had recent police contact stated that the police always or mostly contacted them when they said they would, and explained things well, with the latter being an area of particular improvement. While only 37% of those with recent contact who reported before 2021 said the police always or mostly did this, this was half (51-52%) of those who reported since 2021 (see Figure 25). For survivors without recent police contact, there was no difference in experience between those whose case was reported more recently compared to longer ago (i.e. there was no indication of improvements amongst this subgroup of respondents).

Figure 25: Communication with the police by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)



The findings also suggest apparent improvements in police empathy, kindness, and respect (see Figure 26). For example, among those with recent police contact, 51-52% of respondents who reported since 2021 felt the police took their needs into account, compared to just 37% of those who reported before 2021. Similarly, for those with recent contact, 30% out of those who reported before 2021 said that the police always or mostly understood what it was like for them, rising to 37% for those who reported since 2021. While it may seem that this improvement extends to those without recent police contact - with 21-24% of respondents who reported before July 2023 feeling understood by police, rising to 30% for those who reported since July 2023 - this difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 26: Police empathy, kindness, and respect by time period reported and recency of contact (% selected)



Encouragingly, the findings are similar for other indicators of procedural fairness, with apparent improvements in experiences for those who had recent contact with the police. For example, while only 20% of those with recent police contact who reported before 2021 stated having some control over what happens in their case, this was 36% for those who reported between July 2023 and June 2024 (see Figure 27). Similarly, while only 38% of those with recent police contact who reported before 2021 felt like the police always made them feel like they matter, this was 54% for those reporting between July 2023 and June 2024 (see Figure 28).

The one area where there seems to be improvements for both survivors with and without recent contact is in feeling safe in the presence of officers. Among those with recent contact, 56% of respondents who reported before 2021 felt safe around officers, compared to 66% of those reporting since 2021. For respondents without recent contact, there were improvements in the more recent reporting period: 52% of those reporting before July 2023 felt safe in officers' presence, rising to 57% for those reporting since July 2023 (see Figure 28). However, for other indicators, there is no evidence of improvements for those without recent police contact. There is even an indication in the data that those who reported since July 2023 perceived their experience as more negative than those who reported in recent years across some procedural fairness indicators (Figure 27 and Figure 28).

Figure 27: 'Police made me feel' by time period reported and recency of contact (% selecting 'always' or 'mostly' agree)

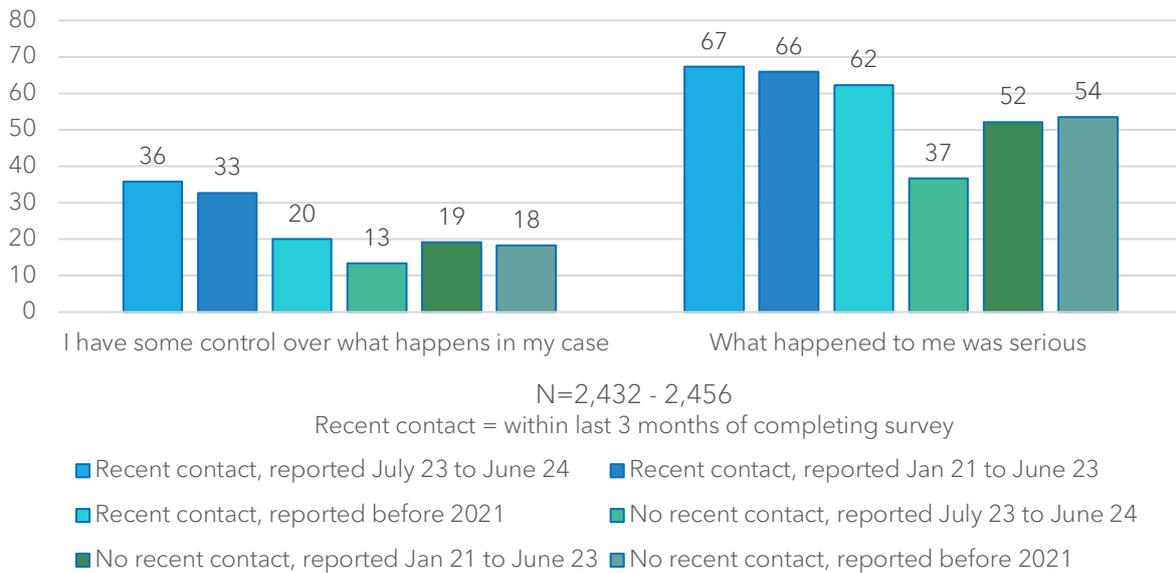
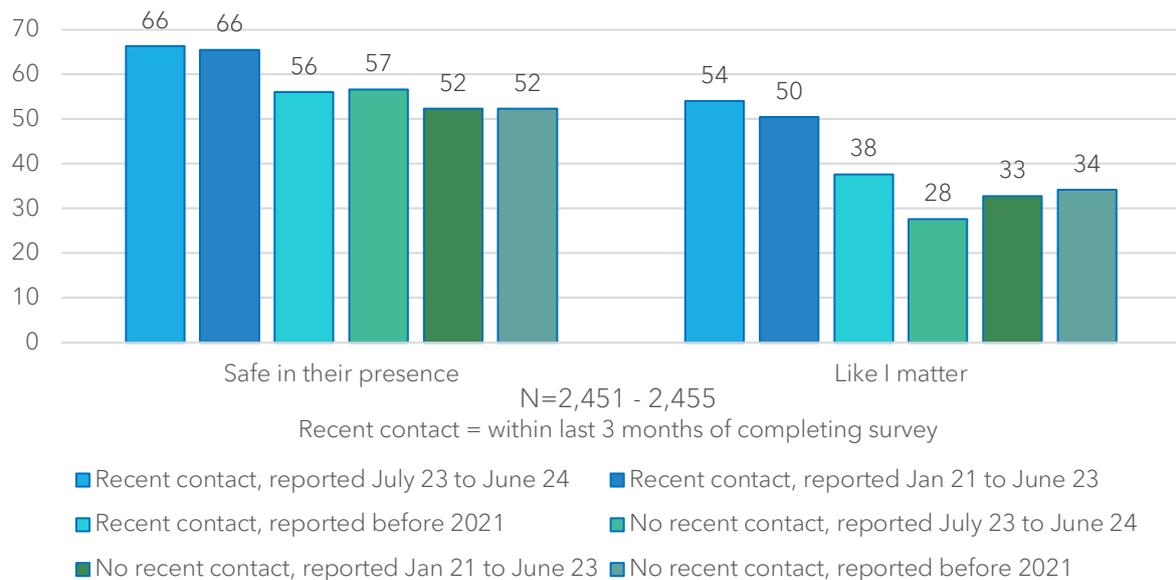


Figure 28: 'Police always made me feel' by time period reported and recency of contact (% selecting 'yes')



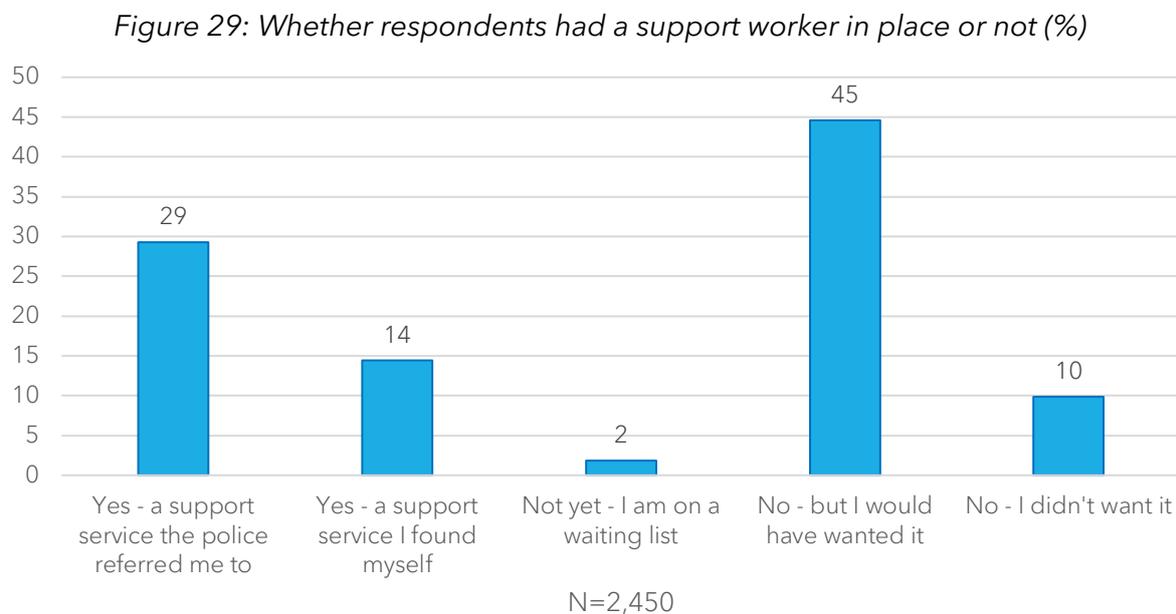
6.7.5 The impacts of the police experience

The apparent changes over time in how police experiences affect survivors seem to mirror the observed trends in police interactions and behaviours discussed above. For example, among those with recent contact, 67-68% of those who reported their case to the police since 2021 experienced a decline in their mental health as a result of what the police did or did not do in their case, compared 75% of those whose cases were reported before 2021 (see [Data Appendix](#)). This empirical finding is consistent with suggestions of some improvements in police practices. However,

this finding could also reflect the delayed onset of mental health impacts, or the gradual accumulation and worsening of these impacts over time. Elsewhere in the survey some survivors highlighted prolonged investigation times as contributing to their mental distress (see section 8.8).

6.8. The importance of the availability of independent support

The availability of an independent support worker to support a survivor through the criminal justice process significantly impacts on how survivors experience that process. In our sample, 29% of respondents received support from a support service the police had referred them to and 14% were supported by a support service they had found themselves (see Figure 29). Only one in ten respondents said they did not want support. Just under half of respondents (45%) expressed a desire for a support worker but did not have one, while an additional 2% were on a waiting listing for support services.



Respondents who wanted a support worker but did not have one reported significantly worse experiences with the police compared to those who either had support (through police referral or self-referral) or to those who did not want a support worker. Only 28% of survivors who wanted a support worker but did not have one said they were prepared to report a similar crime to the police again, compared with 52% of respondents who had one. This finding points to the importance of independent support for survivors' subjective (future) access to justice and police safeguarding.

For survivors who had support, more than half (54%) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the police were doing a good job in their case overall, compared to only one in five (21%) of those who wanted support but did not have it. In addition, those

who did not have support but wanted it consistently reported poorer experiences across the various survey indicators of what the police did in their case, how officers made them feel, and the impact of the experience on them.

Some survivors used the free-text option to express gratitude for the support they received from their ISVA. They highlighted the reassurance ISVAs provided and their assistance in following up with the police and explaining the process. These findings collectively underscore the significant value of ISVAs and other support workers for survivors who want the support. They also emphasise the importance of police informing and referring survivors to these services, to ensure survivors are aware of them and can make decisions about accessing independent support.

It is therefore encouraging that referrals to support seem to be increasing. Survivors whose case came to police attention between January 2021 and June 2023 were more likely to have been referred for support by the police (65%) compared with 45% of respondents whose case came to police attention before 2021 (see [Data Appendix](#)). The actual availability of support for survivors also appears to have improved for cases reported in 2021-2023. For respondents whose cases were reported before 2021, only 38% said that they had support. This figure was 57% for those whose cases were reported between 2021 and mid-2023. Worryingly however, this figure was lower for those who reported since July 2023 (43%), suggesting a possible shortage of independent support workers. Additionally, 12% of respondents who reported since July 2023 were on a waiting list for support.

Free-text responses further highlight concerns about lengthy waiting times. One respondent, for example, reported being told that the police would refer them to an ISVA, yet a year later, they were still waiting to be contacted. Additionally, responses pointed to instances where police provided little to no information about available support services or offered only vague details.

"[...] The term ISVA or an explanation of the role was never used- there was a general offer of support but it was framed more as if needed due to accessibility [...]"

Free-text responses also underscore how survivors' support needs can evolve during the investigation, emphasising that a survivor declining support at the start of the process does not mean that they may not require it later in the process. Consequently, we recommend that offering support referrals is not considered a one-off event, but that officers should consider repeating the offer of support to survivors, for example when it becomes apparent that a survivor is no longer coping well with the investigation, when there are long delays or when complications arise within the investigation that may impact on survivor needs and wishes for ISVA support.

"[...] I felt supported so refused additional support services. Afterwards it hit me but I felt forgotten about then [...]"

Moreover, it is clear from the free-text comments that simply having an ISVA or other support worker is not enough, and that the quality of the offered support is vital. Some respondents described how their ISVAs were overworked, changed frequently, or did not adequately meet their specific needs. There were also concerns about poor communication between ISVAs and the police.

"[...] I was 18 months into the case before I discovered ISVAs existed then in following 12-18 months I had 2 ISVAs leave at key points in the process [...]"

7. Easy Read survey findings

We commissioned an 'Easy Read' version of the questionnaire to increase accessibility of the survey for survivors with learning difficulties. To do so, we engaged a learning difficulties/learning disabilities/neurodiversity specialist who also works as an ISVA supporting survivors with these characteristics. A link to this questionnaire version was embedded in the opening screen of the main survey and circulated to police forces and support organisations. The Easy Read version became available from 6 December 2023. Survey participants could then choose between the main questionnaire or the Easy Read version of the survey. One police force accidentally began to promote the link to the Easy Read version only, meaning survivors who found the survey through this police force area only saw (and were able to complete) the Easy Read option.

The Easy Read survey closely followed the main survey in terms of question intention and response options, with some omissions and changes in wording. The Easy Read survey questions all included a response option for respondents to indicate if they did not understand a question. Because of these differences between the main and Easy Read questionnaire, and because we do not know how these differences may have impacted survey responses, we are reporting the Easy Read findings separately from the main questionnaire survey findings. The following section outlines key findings from the Easy Read survey, making comparisons with the main survey where relevant and appropriate. A comprehensive report of findings from the Easy Read survey can be found in the [Data Appendix](#).

Overall, 253 individuals accessed the Easy Read survey, resulting in 135 eligible responses (53%). Participants took an average of 11 minutes to complete the Easy Read version of the survey, slightly longer than the 9-minute average for the main survey. The completion rate (at least 95% of the survey completed) was also slightly lower for the Easy Read version at 79%, compared to 84% for the main survey.

7.1. Respondent profile

Respondents to the Easy Read survey were predominantly female (92%), White British (86%), and straight/heterosexual (67%). The most common age groups were 18-24 years and 25-34 years, each comprising 25% of respondents. As a reflection of the aim of the Easy Read survey, 38% of respondents reported having autism, ADHD, a learning disability, a learning difficulty, or a combination thereof, compared to 25% in the main survey. Additionally, when considering all conditions, including mental health conditions, a higher proportion of Easy Read respondents reported having multiple conditions (51%) compared to respondents in the main survey (35%).

7.2. Case information

In the Easy Read survey, the majority (77%) of cases reported had been known to the police for two or more years, with only 13% known for up to a year. At the time of respondents completing the survey, most cases (74%) were closed and most (59%) respondents had their last contact with the police more than three months ago. The most common reasons behind the closure of cases were due to the police closing the investigation (26%) or the survivor themselves deciding not to continue (17%).

Regarding the perpetrator's relationship to the survivor, 32% involved a partner or ex-partner, 11% a family member, 17% a friend or family friend, and 19% someone the survivor met on the day of the incident. In 2% of cases, the perpetrator was someone involved in the respondent's care.

7.3. Access to support

In the Easy Read survey, 44% of respondents reported having a support worker or receiving support from a service, a proportion which mirrors that of the main survey. However, some differences between the Easy Read and main survey were visible in the support experiences of the remaining respondents. A lower proportion of Easy Read respondents reported that they did not have and did not want a support worker (2% compared to 10% in the main survey). Although the questions are not phrased identically, when matched as closely as possible, 47% of respondents from the main survey did not have or were waiting for support, whereas this figure was slightly higher at 54% in the Easy Read survey. Focusing specifically on respondents with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 45% of those in the main survey reported that they were waiting for, or did not get the support they needed, compared to 33% of those answering the Easy Read version.

7.4. Reporting, non-reporting and withdrawal

In line with the main survey findings, the most common reasons for reporting rape or sexual assault to the police in the Easy Read survey were to keep others safe (50%) and to ensure the perpetrator faces consequences (38%). However, a slightly higher proportion of Easy Read respondents indicated that someone else made the report (16% compared with 11% in the main survey) or that the incident was disclosed during police contact about an unrelated matter (16% compared with 7% in the main survey). As above, it should be noted that the survey response options were not phrased identically.

7.5. Survivors' experiences of the police

Significant dissatisfaction with police performance in their case was visible among Easy Read survey respondents, again mirroring findings from the main survey: 45%

of Easy Read respondents strongly disagreed that the police were doing a good job overall in their case, compared to just 20% who strongly agreed. When examining how it looked compared to initial expectations, half of respondents (53%) felt that their overall experience was worse than expected.

The Easy Read survey results similarly highlight significant gaps in how survivors felt they were treated by police officers. Only between a third and two fifths of respondents felt the police always made them feel believed (35%), listened to (38%), comfortable (39%) and like they matter (37%). Understanding was notably lacking, with only 22% feeling that officers always or mostly understood what this was like for them, while 41% felt this was never the case. Only about half (45%) believed the police were considerate of their condition or disability. In some instances, it was evident from the free-text responses that survivors experienced demeaning or derogatory comments from officers:

"[...] Then two inspectors rang and came to my house, they mocked some white goods that had yet to be installed in my fitted kitchen saying that normal people don't have an oven there or cook like that [...]"

Additionally, only 46% felt the police always or mostly made them feel like what happened to them was serious, which is lower than the 56% of respondents who reported feeling so in the main survey. On the other hand, a majority (65%) of Easy Read respondents felt the police were polite.

The Easy Read survey responses further underscore the profound negative impact on mental health stemming from police experiences, with 73% of respondents reporting a decline in mental health as a result of police action or inaction, contrasting with only 4% reporting an improvement. Free-text responses further illustrated the enduring negative consequences of police encounters:

"[...] This has had a huge impact on my mental health. I have not reported a sexual assault that happened recently because of my treatment and it has caused me to have trauma responses when being questioned as part of my job as I get flashbacks to the police interrogating me and laughing at me."

Additionally, half noted a decrease in physical health, and more than half (56%) stated a loss of trust in the police. Only 11% of respondents felt that others' safety improved as a result of police action or inaction, while 39% believed it had decreased - a notable finding given that Easy Read respondents' most commonly selected reason for reporting to the police in the first place was to keep others safe.

7.6. Willingness to report (again) in the future

Finally, looking ahead to future reporting behaviours, 48% of survivors responding to the Easy Read survey indicated that they would definitely or maybe report a sexual offence to the police again. A higher proportion expressed willingness to definitely or maybe encourage a friend to report such an offence (77%), and to definitely or maybe report a different type of crime to the police (69%). Although the phrasing of these questions varied slightly between the two survey versions, the figures in the Easy Read survey were all higher than in the main survey. The overall pattern remained consistent however, with respondents in both survey versions showing the lowest likelihood of reporting sexual offences again themselves and the highest likelihood of encouraging a friend to report.

8. In my own words: survivors' free-text responses

8.1. Introduction

The free-text space at the end of the questionnaire allowed respondents to tell us in their own words anything further that they felt important for us to know. Some used the space to explain or contextualise their survey responses, to tell us more detail about their police experience, to share ideas for how police might improve, or to talk about things they felt was not sufficiently covered by the survey. Free-text responses give a window into the breadth of experiences and views, and they enable us to hear survivor voices in their own words rather than through the pre-set response options of standard survey questions.

Free-text responses do not lend themselves to quantification and we therefore avoid quantifying in this section, except for broad descriptive terms indicating when themes appeared relatively frequently, or rarely. A total of 1,218 respondents from the main questionnaire (43%) and 49 from the Easy Read questionnaire (42%) made use of the free-text option. This section gives an overview of their responses, grouped into seven broad themes:

- Theme 1: Lack of knowledge, care, and empathy
- Theme 2: Negative impacts on survivors
- Theme 3: Lack of protection from and consequences for perpetrators
- Theme 4: Officers as perpetrators and officers as victims
- Theme 5: The power of positive police experiences
- Theme 6: The wider criminal justice system
- Theme 7: What survivors want from the criminal justice system

8.2. The profile of free-text respondents

The free-text responses in the survey capture a wide range of survivor experiences, from highly positive to deeply negative, with some survivors expressing profound harm. To understand these responses better, we examined two aspects: first, the likelihood of someone providing a free-text response at the end of the survey, and second, the profile of those who did provide a free-text response.

The likelihood of leaving a free-text response varied based on survivors' police experiences, how they found the survey, and their demographics. Survivors who had a negative experience of the police were more likely to leave a free-text comment, with 55% of those who disagreed that the police were doing a good job overall leaving a comment, compared to 40% of those who agreed. Similarly, 54% of those unlikely to report sexual violence to the police again provided a free-text comment, compared with 42% of those who said they would likely report again.

Survivors who found out about the survey through survivor advocates or support organisations, or other social media/website were more likely to leave written comments (54 and 56% respectively) than those who found out about the survey via the police (47%). Older respondents and those with a degree level or other qualifications were more likely to provide free-text responses than younger respondents or those with lower levels of education, including those who were still studying, have vocational qualification(s) or no qualifications.

Taking a closer look at the profile of respondents who did provide a free-text response, a third (29%) of free-text comments came from survivors who had contact with the police within the last three months, and 34% came from survivors whose case had come to police attention since January 2021. Furthermore, 29% of free-text comments were about cases where the perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner and 18% referred to cases involving a family member.

One third (33%) of the free-text responses were from survivors who agreed that the police were doing a good job overall in their case, while 67% came from survivors who disagreed. Similarly, more than 36% of free-text respondents said they would likely report a sexual offence again, and 64% indicated they would not. Nearly half (49%) of all free-text responses came from survivors who found out about the survey via the police, while 20% came from those directed to the survey by survivor advocates and 26% from those who found the survey online.

8.3. Theme 1: Lack of knowledge, care, and empathy

8.3.1. Rape myths and misconceptions cloud officer professional judgement and victim engagement

Respondents shared experiences of officers speaking or acting in ways that suggested what had happened was not serious, not a matter for the police and/or did not meet the legal definition of rape.

"[...] They explained why it didn't meet the criteria for rape but I didn't really understand why it didn't, especially after I sought advice from the rape crisis phone line [...]"

It is in this context that survivors noted rape myths, stereotypes and misconceptions surfacing in what the officer(s) said to them. Some survivors felt officers signalled through their words or demeanour that they had not behaved in a way typically 'expected' by sexual assault survivors, such as not appearing upset enough. Others were made to feel as if the officer blamed them for having been sexually assaulted, making comments about their alcohol consumption or what they were wearing at the time. Others felt officers signalled disbelief or that what they reported was not

criminal, not a police matter or as if they were wasting police time through comments such as “[he] seemed like a nice bloke”; “you were married”; “he was your boyfriend”; “some women do lie”; “are you sure”; and “it’s your word against his”. Some survivors added that officers needed to have more training on sexual offending, safeguarding, understanding neurodiversity, and communication skills towards survivors of sexual assault.

“I remember at the time I had a bikini style top on- the pc said you will probably have colleagues looking at you because what your wearing and your quite large “there”” [sic]

“[...] I was asked questions of whether I was attracted to the perpetrator and another question about whether I thought what I was wearing at the time of the assault would have provoked the perpetrator to assault me. [...]”

Officer assumptions about ‘real rapes’ and ‘real victims’ also became apparent to some of the respondents who *did* feel believed and taken seriously, as exemplified in this quote:

“[...] what sticks in my memory is the initial officer who came when I reported it saying “well we can tell you’re telling the truth because you’re so upset”. Until this point I hadn’t even considered I wouldn’t have been believed reporting it and really made me question myself and why that comment was made.”

Finally, officers readily accepting perpetrator attempts at denial, or apparent suggestions that survivors enjoyed ‘rough sex’ emerged as a new theme, as illustrated by this survivor quote:

“Even though I met the perpetrator that day, the police took him saying that “I like rough sex” as enough not to press charges [...]”

8.3.2. Empathy and trauma-responsive engagement

Respondents commented on officers lacking empathy and seemingly not knowing how to engage with survivors in a trauma-responsive manner. For example, one survivor described how the investigating officers had clearly not received training on engaging with traumatised survivors of sexual assault, while another recounted being spoken to in a rude and cold manner and felt as though they should “apologise for being an inconvenience”. This lack of understanding was sometimes accompanied by victim-blaming attitudes or survivors feeling a general sense of being unsupported through the investigation.

“[...] There was no victim support, I was told by the two officers I was a “silly girl” for meeting someone online I’d never met. There was no discussion of an

investigation. I was never asked if I was ok. I blamed myself for so many years, I thought I'd encouraged the rape. I believed it was because of my action that it happened [...]"

A recurring theme in free-text responses were female survivors' expectations that female officers would display greater empathy, understanding and belief. Some survivors were initially relieved or reassured that they had been assigned a female rather than male police officer. This resulted in a heightened sense of betrayal and shock when female officers treated survivors poorly, adding to the trauma already inflicted on them.

"[...] What made it worse was that it was the female officers that were derogatory [...]"

"The first thing one of the two female officers said to me was "it says in my notes your wife handcuffed you to the bed when you were asleep and tortured you - well, you must have enjoyed it or you would have reported it sooner"."

8.3.3. (Mis)understanding the repeated nature of sexual violence within domestic abuse

For some survivors, the incident they told us about when completing the survey was not the first rape or sexual assault that had come to police attention. For some this included attacks by the same perpetrator (often a current/former husband or boyfriend), potentially revealing ongoing domestic abuse. Officers appeared to minimise, discredit, or outright dismiss survivors who name their current or former partner their rapist. Officers lacking an understanding of rape and sexual assault in intimate partner relationships and lacking the ability to recognise domestic abuse as the backdrop to non-consensual sexual acts was a core theme running through the free-text responses of survivors of intimate partner sexual violence.

"Domestic abuse and coercive control was unrecognised [some] years ago by [police force], I was branded mentally unwell and a fruit loop by officers [...]"

"My case was a number of sexual assaults and rape during an abusive relationship. I was told by officers my case would not be taken further as it looked "a loving relationship" [...]"

Another survivor spoke of how when reporting a rape by her husband, *"I had a male [Higher Ranking Officer] shout in my face that he didn't believe I was raped [...]"*. The majority of survivors who spoke of rape and domestic abuse said that their treatment by the police led to further trauma, and there were also several accounts of how sexual assaults alongside domestic abuse (or vice versa) were overlooked by the police, CPS or courts, rather than considered as context for the wider abuse.

"My rape was mixed in with domestic abuse in which he was sentenced [...] I feel as if the rape was over looked [...]"

"[...] the domestic abuse and continued harassment by the perp was ignored. I was in real danger and they let it all slide because it wasn't 'relevant to the rape' [...]"

8.3.4. Protected characteristics and marginalised groups

Survivors with mental health conditions often felt that these conditions led officers to discredit their accounts or view them as less credible witnesses to their own assault. Some mentioned that this directly affected the outcome of their cases.

"I felt that my case was not taken seriously and because I have a mental health condition I felt that I was discriminated against because of this [...]"

Neurodivergent survivors, survivors with autism, and survivors with disabilities at times felt officers did not understand how these conditions affected on how they presented during the investigation. They also reported that officers did not know how to make adjustments to meet their needs, and that some even used the survivors' condition(s) to discredit their account or to blame them for what happened.

"Lack of awareness about how my autism made me perceive the situation and didn't take this into account when conducting interviews. Led to comments like 'could you not see what it was leading to?' so I had to explain that I struggle to recognise people's intentions and this makes me more vulnerable"

Other survivors with protected characteristics or from marginalised groups described experiencing a lack of support and understanding of their situation, including respondents who were children in care at the time the sexual assault took place.

"[...] Officers who come to ask questions, saw me as a troubled child and assumed I was lying [...]"

Male survivors commented that officers did not take them seriously because of their gender, and that officers reproduced myths and stigmas attached to male survivors of sexual violence, with one male survivor noting that he was made to feel worthless and like he should just "get a grip". Another male survivor felt myths and stereotypes about gay men affected the officer's behaviour and decision-making in his case:

"The police seemed to think as a gay man I consented to anything [...]"

8.3.5. Pressure to drop the complaint

Some survivors felt pressured by officers to withdraw their complaint in overt and less overt ways. This ranged from officers expressing disbelief, making clear that the case would go nowhere, or over-emphasising the seriousness of a rape allegation, a tactic used that made survivors feel like they had to reconsider their complaint.

"I felt pressured to drop the case. They kept saying things like "you know it's a very serious crime" as if I didn't know what happened to me [...] I dropped it just two weeks after reporting it"

8.3.6. Officer incompetence, lack of professionalism and sabotage

Collecting and looking at all the evidence, pursuing all lines of enquiry, and carrying out a competent investigation matters deeply to survivors.³¹ In the free-text, survivors catalogued mistakes, errors, and oversights that many attributed to carelessness or incompetence. This included basic failures such as not seizing the suspect's electronic items or not examining evidence available on the survivor's phone. Some survivors reported that officers had deliberately lost or destroyed evidence.

"[...] police took the phone that had voice recordings and videos and screenshots of him admitting what he did, destroyed it, and then dropped the case for "lack of evidence" [...]"

Others felt officers had wilfully ignored their rape report altogether, with one survivor describing how the police officer who was supposed to be investigating their case lied about visiting them. This left some survivors feeling officers had deliberately or carelessly sabotaged their ability to receive justice and meant their perpetrator did not face consequences and/or was enabled to carry on their sexual offending and/or domestic abuse.

Other survivors reported grossly unprofessional behaviour. For example, one officer asked the witness in a survivor's case out on a date and another survivor described an officer seemingly hungover:

"One of the officers seemed hungover or ill like he was about to vomit from the get go [...] I didn't feel like they cared. I left that day feeling like the police were not going to help me going forwards."

At times, officers asked survivors for their accounts of rape or sexual assault in public areas of the police station where they could be overheard by other members of the public, or chose otherwise unsuitable rooms, seemingly unaware of, or uncaring of how this may impact on a survivor.

"[...] The police interviewed me in a storage room at the sexual violence suite which was filled with a box of Christmas decorations, a dyson hoover and other junk [...]" [sic]

8.3.7. Officer inaction as denial of validation

Officers dismissing survivors' reports or displaying a lack of interest in what happened can profoundly impact a survivor's sense of self-worth. Survivors reported that officers left them feeling "silly", "little", "worthless", that their cases were treated as "nothing". Some survivors wrote about how officers apparently did not understand the importance of reporting, as well as the importance of police taking their report seriously, and the impact this had for them as sexual violence survivors.

"The man leading the case made me feel little and worthless [...]" [sic]

"Police treated what had happened like it was nothing and as though I was silly for reporting it. They made me feel like a liar and as though I had made it up. The whole process felt so undignified and I regretted reporting it every minute of it. I felt blamed and humiliated and extremely let down [...] Going through the process of reporting it was worse for me than not reporting it would have been."

"I felt my officer was kind, but did not really understand what reporting meant to me. He asked questions that made me feel like I had to defend myself and my actions on the night of the incident [...]"

8.3.8. Poor information provision and communication with survivors

Many survivors reported that officers provided no or insufficient information about the police investigation and the criminal justice process, mirroring the closed question finding of the large numbers of survivors who had not been made aware of their Victims' Rights, including the Victim Right to Review (VRR). Some commented that the first time they heard of VRR was through this survey and that this has now prompted them to find out more about it and use this right.

"[...] Think they should make it more clear that you have a right to get cps to re look at a case [...]" [sic]

Insufficient or poor communication also extended to information about what was/is happening in their cases, for example, having to 'chase' for updates, not being told when the perpetrator was being interviewed or released on bail (even though this had direct implications for the survivors' safety), not being told when the officer in the case (OIC) changed, not being referred to support services, and a lack of consistency in the information received about the case progression.

"When i was told that my case got NFA i asked her [the OIC] if i could get any form of protection from him once his bail was up which her response was 'i don't know you'll have to find that out yourself' [...]" [sic]

Many survivors commented on the negative impact such poor and inconsistent communications had on their mental health. Others pointed out the officers' lack of awareness of or consideration for their learning difficulties, disabilities, neurodiversity, or mental health issues resulted in what survivors experienced as inappropriate or insufficient communication.

"I feel that the police have not taken into account my mental health condition when communicating with me. I feel disappointed that I have had to seek out support myself and not been signposted to support services"

Some survivors felt officers contacted them too often or at inappropriate times, such as late at night or while they were at work. One survivor, for instance, described consistently being contacted late at night, including being advised of the outcome of the investigation via text message at 10:40pm, resulting sleep disturbances and issues with work the following day. This frequent and/or untimely contact often caused significant distress for survivors.

"[...] I had just gone 16 and was called throughout the late night, being asked "are you sure it was rape, he was your boyfriend?" [...]"

"[...] The police officer would call me a lot and a bit too much to be honest I would be at work and then get all upset."

8.3.9. Inconsistency between officers and police force areas

Survivors with experiences of more than one police force, or experiences of different police officers within the same force frequently commented on the vast differences in their experiences. This finding suggests large variation and a lack of consistency in investigative procedures, processes and victim engagement.

"I found my local police force more helpful, caring, reassuring and made me feel like a person [...] the police force where the crime took place and was significantly different and more police process driven and too matter of fact; their language was seriously poor and felt like o was standing trial [...]" [sic]

Where cases were passed from one police force to another there was a lack of continuity and support, or problems of communication and coordination between the forces.

There was also a lack of consistency within the same police force. Survivors reported frequent changes in investigating officers over the course of their investigations,

with one respondent noting they had 11 different detectives. These changes could lead to conflicting information being provided, and significant differences in the officers' approach and behaviour:

"At first my case was handled by a female officer who was great and who I felt genuinely cared about me and what happened. Then this officer moved teams and was replaced by a male officer who has been less than sympathetic to say the least. The language used was very victim blaming and I felt like him and the police as a whole were on the side of my abuser [...]"

8.4. Theme 2: Negative impacts on survivors

The most common way in which survivors used the free-text section of the questionnaire was to explain how the police investigation and officer behaviour had affected them. This included impacts on survivors' personal safety and the safety of others; their mental and physical health; their finances and ability to work; family life; and on their children and on others, including those victimised by perpetrators reported to the police who did not have any action taken to stop them from further offending.

8.4.1. Lack of safety for oneself or others

For some survivors, the police report resulted in further harm, or threat of harm from the perpetrator, including stalking, harassment, threats to kill, abuse and assault. The worry about being further harmed by the perpetrator, even if it did not come to pass, is in and of itself detrimental to survivor mental health and the ability to move forward and freely go about their lives. Survivors described not feeling safe because the perpetrator worked and lived in the same area as them, that they had spent years worrying about bumping into the perpetrator, or were worried that the perpetrator could track them down. In the absence of police taking action to keep survivors safe from perpetrators, some reported losing faith in the police and resorted to taking actions themselves, such as moving away from the area and/or taking matters into their own hands applying for protective orders themselves.

"[...] Over the last few years I have been harassed in the street by him, which I reported to the police. I was told to seek psychological help [...]"

"My ex partner was asked for a voluntary interview and not given any bail conditions. I have had to get my own court order as the police didn't have time to help me. I have no faith in the police what so ever." [sic]

8.4.2. Loss of trust and loss of access to police safeguarding and criminal justice

Survivors spoke about the total loss of trust in the police because of a poor police experience, and a sense of despair, with one commenting *“what’s the point?”* and another noting how it *“still haunts me to this day”*. Countless survivors said they would never contact police again or that they have not contacted the police again, even when they have once again survived another serious crime, including sexual violence and domestic abuse. This means some of the most vulnerable in our communities have de-facto lost access to police interventions and criminal justice because of traumatic past experiences of the police.

“[...] I felt more deterred by the police rather than supported to continue. They didn’t say or do anything to make me feel hope that I would ever feel safe again or have some form of justice [...]”

“The police have made things 100 times worse. I wish I’d never spoken to them and I would never report anything to them again.”

8.4.3. Psychological and emotional harm

The negative impacts of poor police experiences on survivors’ mental health were a major theme in the free-text responses. Respondents wrote how they felt *“completely let down”* by the police and how this had a detrimental and often long-term impact on their mental health, with one noting how *“that day is forever etched into my core memories”*. For some survivors, their police experience resulted in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or the compounding of existing PTSD. These emotional and psychological harms in turn create(d) further negative consequences for survivors, for example: the inability to work, feeling unable to leave the house or socialise with others; creating feelings of guilt and issues in caring for their children (see also section 8.4.47979); and a general difficulty in trusting others. Some suggested that the mental health impact of the police response was worse than the harms caused by the sexual violence that prompted the police contact.

“[...] I rarely leave my house anymore. I’ve lost my job due to my mental state and my life has fallen apart since what happened to me. The police are meant to help and punish people who do this horrific stuff to people but they didn’t. But they didn’t help, protect or make me feel safe. They did not take me seriously, even though the perpetrators has history of this. They are as bad as him and my trust will never be restored in them [...]” [sic]

“Nothing could have prepared me for the trauma I have experienced as a result of making a police report. I am more traumatised by the experience of being

investigated for my own rape, than I am by the rape itself [...] I will never trust the police again."

In some cases, survivors mentioned their own suicidal thoughts and feelings, as well as past suicide attempts related to their police experience. Some also mentioned the suicidal thoughts and feelings of friends and family members, and one survivor described how the lack of police action to protect them and their sibling contributed to their sibling taking their own life. Another described the lasting toll of their experience:

Suicide is preventable. Help is available from the [Samaritans](#) and [other support services](#).

"[...] I live the nightmare not only of the actual assaults but I'd go so far as to say the police investigation and especially the court case and result, have ruined and takes its toll on my life. I battle suicidal thoughts regularly, aggravated by the unjustness of the whole situation. I'm the one with the life sentence [...]" [sic]

Survivors gave many more examples of inappropriate and unprofessional police behaviour. One survivor said an officer "stood up to 'demonstrate' what happened". Some commented on the distress when no female officer was available to interview them resulting in them being questioned by a male officer about the intimate details of the sexual assault. Some survivors described how the traumatising impacts of police behaviours still affects them years or decades later.

8.4.4. Impacts on motherhood

We received several testaments from female survivors that spoke of the specific trauma caused by the police process on motherhood and childbirth. This ranged from not wanting to continue the investigation in order to protect their children from scrutiny or suffering; not being able to start a family due to lack of closure; difficulties bonding with children conceived through a rape that the police did not take seriously; and the stress of the investigation process resulting in pregnancy complications and pregnancy loss.

"I fell pregnant due to the abuse I had experienced [...] I had to carry the baby through the police investigation. I suffered from PPRM [preterm pre-labour rupture of membranes] due to the abuse and stress of the investigation [...]"

8.4.5. Criminalising survivors

Some survivors detailed police threats of criminal charges and criminalising survivors as a consequence of making the report.

"[...] i was threatened by police that id be arrested for aiding and abetting[...]"
[sic]

"[...] I was 14. My phone was confiscated by the police [...] and then destroyed because it contained photos of me that constituted child pornography. I was told I could be prosecuted for this and made to feel like it was my fault [...]"

Some survivors were explicitly threatened with being criminalised for a false allegation of rape or wasting police time.

"[...] I recieved a call threatening that if I didn't drop my case I would have charges filed against me [...]" [sic]

8.5. Theme 3: Lack of protection from and consequences for perpetrators

8.5.1. Sympathy for perpetrators

Survivors reported instances where officers appeared to have greater concern and sympathy for perpetrators than for the survivors themselves, including the police prioritising the perpetrator's mental health over the harm caused to the survivor. In some cases, officers readily believed perpetrator accounts contrary to the evidence or without considering the evidence presented by survivors.

"The police believed the perpetrator when he said I was after money without any evidence to back this up [...] To this day I have to live in hiding and ostracised from every family and community member [...]"

Some respondents described officers covering up the crimes that had taken place, destroying, or failing to look at evidence, and overtly displaying sympathy for the perpetrator and disregard for the survivor.

"My abuser and their organisation were condoned by the police force [...] the police then followed up saying this wasn't a crime"

"[Police force] covered up the rape. I was raped alongside someone else but the police did not document anything about the other person because of their age at the time [...]"

Survivors also described instances where officers involved in the investigation had personal connections to the perpetrators, such as being friends or relatives. One described their experience as *"absolutely shocking and harrowing"*, with the officer investigating their case being named as a witness for the perpetrator. As a result of

these instances, survivors felt that the investigation was biased against them, depriving them access to a fair criminal justice process.

"Due to delayed recollection I was late to name one of the men involved (close friend) I was laughed out of the police station by the investigating officer. The investigating officer knew his family"

Such experiences can have a devastating impact on survivors' trust in the police, and can foster a sense of despair and a sense that there is no justice.

8.5.2. Emboldening perpetrators

Some survivors reported their perpetrators being emboldened by officer sympathies and the lack of police investigations. Some respondents said this meant that the perpetrator continued to sexually abuse, harass, threaten or demean them, with some perpetrators breaching bail conditions in the process. Some respondents were certain that officers' behaviour and inactions made perpetrators feel that they could offend without impunity, and some found out that their perpetrator had escalated their offending.

"[...] Reporting it made it worse. It gave my rapist the confidence that he could do what he liked and get away with it"

"Because my ex partner is/was a teacher, I was told that reporting him would ruin his career [...] He has sexually assaulted numerous women and each time he gets away with it [...]"

Several respondents voiced concerns about others being at risk with survivors identifying perpetrators that are working as teachers, nursery workers, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, and police officers, amongst other professions. One respondent reported feeling "terrified" for the safety of others after discovering that the perpetrator now worked as a mental health nurse at a secure unit, and another expressing concerns for other patients at the hospital where the perpetrator works:

"I feel disappointed and despondent. As far as I know the police have not identified the male physio who groped me in hospital [...] I'm worried that the male physio is still on the wards and other patients are at risk [...]"

8.6. Theme 4: Officers as perpetrators and officers as victims

Several survivors identified their perpetrator as a police officer who assaulted them on or off duty. Some of these survivors were police officers themselves, often disclosing that they lost their jobs, were investigated, or otherwise faced retaliation from colleagues, the organisation, or the perpetrator. One police officer survivor noted how it was "so so traumatic" to have to report the incident colleagues and then

have to face them every day. Many of the officer survivors reported that the perpetrator was able to continue in their career and move up through the ranks, with one survivor describing still having to continue to work with the perpetrator. Some of these reports of apparently retaliatory counter investigations are very recent, suggesting this continues to be a live issue within policing in 2024. Many detailed the devastating impact of their disclosure and the aftermath on their mental health, every day working life, career progression and for some, *all* aspects of their life.

"I reported a rape and sexual assault [...] The police protected him. He received reflective practice. They found pictures of me on his phone that he forced me to send which they found as a result of me reporting the incident. I got a final written warning and lost my job"

"I'm a police officer. I was sexually assaulted twice [...] I am now under investigation because I spoke up about what he did to me. This was why I never came forward at the time as I knew I'd be victimised."

"I received the same outcome as my abuser- we were both serving police officers and were both given a 'Standards Awareness Discussion' for 'having sex at work' [...] This man is still a serving police officer [...]"

Civilian survivors of police perpetrators described how their perpetrator used their police powers, officer status or connections within the force to conceal the sexual offending. In some cases, officers continued serving in public-facing roles despite being under investigation, while other survivors noted that the report was *"kept quiet to protect [the] force"* or that the main focus for the police was *"trying to look after their reputation"*. This profound institutional betrayal left survivors feeling abandoned, hopeless, and in despair.

"I was raped and abused over several years by my now ex-husband who is still a serving police officer in [police force]. He used his knowledge and associates to ensure he was getting away with everything. I felt unsafe. [...] I do feel let down and I have lack of trust and a general sadness in every part of life because of what he subjected me to."

"I may aswell hang myself [as] they are protecting their own officer" [sic]

The consequences of an inadequate (and at times criminal) police response to disclosures of officer perpetrated rape and sexual assault can be particularly devastating, with many saying that the disclosure had become a source of further threat and danger, rather than a means of accessing safeguarding and justice. For some respondents, there is a sense that police forces prioritise protecting their

reputation over the safety of survivors and continue to tolerate sex offenders and domestic abusers within their ranks for this reason.

8.7. Theme 5: The power of positive police experiences

Amongst the hundreds of harrowing free-text responses of poor and police responses to rape and sexual assault disclosures there are beacons of hope. Countless respondents used the free-text to share positive experiences of the police and how this helped them move forward after sexual violence, and for some, saved their lives. Officers were described as “amazing”, “fantastic”, “brilliant”, “tenacious” and “wonderful”. Noticeably, where respondents provided details as to what made the officer “amazing” or “fantastic” it was overwhelmingly about feeling the officer did all they could in their case (regardless of whether this resulted in a perpetrator being charged), officers going above and beyond to display empathy and to make survivors feel “heard”, “believed”, “safe”, and “protected”.

“[...] The officers have been nothing other than kind and courteous, everyone from the response officers to the OIC of my case have made me feel heard and believed. The fact they have taken it all so seriously and validated my experience has been incredibly healing and that has been more important for my longterm mental health than any CPS decision/trial outcome [...]” [sic]

“The police were absolutely amazing, although this was over 10 years ago, I feel it is still important to state that they were fantastic”

8.7.1. Recent improvements in policing

Some survivors who had multiple reporting experiences or recently reopened their cases commented on the improvements seen in the policing of rape and sexual assault. These responses specifically highlighted improvements in the police treatment of survivors. Occasionally, Operation Soteria was mentioned by name by survivors, as was the training that survivors perceived police officers had received leading them to be trauma informed when approaching cases.

“The initial person who contacted me was specially trained in sexual violence and treated me with respect, believing me and helping me [...]”

“[...] I have now re-opened my case again and feel like the police have experienced such excellent training. I have been given the 2 most wonderful officers who are supportive, caring, kind and genuinely there for me [...]”

“[...] My recent experience of reporting rape and sexual assault has significantly been better. It's clear the police are trauma informed. I have been treated with dignity, care and respect by all the police officers dealing with my case. I feel like I am believed [...]”

In addition to being met with “dignity”, “care”, and “support”, another key positive change was survivors being taken seriously when reporting instances of sexual assault.

“[...] They took what I said seriously and acted immediately. I wasn’t expecting things to happen so fast [...] I was reassured by the police that I had been believed and I had been right to report [...]”

“[...] I was surprised each time as the police took it far more seriously than I had expected [...] My experience definitely changed how I viewed reporting to the police, I feel confident that if I have to again, they’d listen and take it seriously [...]”

However, there appeared to be some cases where police officers who were involved in Operation Soteria continued to approach cases with the type of attitudes reported in sections 8.3 and 8.4.

“[...] Had meeting with [officer] who used victim blaming language towards me [...] The [officer] had to have reflective practice after his ignorant & insulting language towards me [...]”

The express mention of Operation Soteria by some respondents suggests a level of awareness about this programme amongst some survivors, along with an (sometimes unmet) expectation that the police response to sexual violence would now have now improved.

8.7.2. Kind, understanding and empathetic approach

To many survivors, a positive police experience was defined by officers showing kindness, empathy, compassion, and understanding, and creating a sense of them being “on my side”. Other important factors were officers showing reassurance and understanding of what the survivor had been through, and of officers making survivors feel like they are believed. These findings underline the power of basic acts of humanity and the profound difference these can make to survivors.

Some mentioned specific actions that officers took that were helpful, such as allowing the survivor to take breaks when needed and providing clear explanations about what to expect in situations such as during the Video Recorded Interview (VRI). Survivors also described how officers who made them feel safe and comfortable in their presence was central and how this helped them during the process.

"[...] I was scared to tell the police at first. Thinking i wouldn't be believed [...] I was listened to and felt safe [...] They helped me every step of the way and listened to my concerns [...] And get you the right support" [sic]

"I have never been shown as much kindness as I have been from all the police who have been involved in my case. The multiple officers who took statements from me were all amazing and made me feel at ease and safe and looked after"

In addition to police kindness, several survivors spoke about the positive impact that their ISVA had on their ability to carry on with the process, including in situations where this felt lifesaving:

"Without the support of ISVA during this process I would have taken my own life"

8.7.3. Dedicated officers who go above and beyond

Survivors described the immense positive impacts of having a dedicated and passionate officer who *"was right there by my side"*. Many respondents recognised the significant pressures and heavy workloads faced by officers, and appreciated the effort put in by officers despite these circumstances. Survivors valued the compassion, dedication and proactive steps taken by these officers. For instance, some described officers providing emotional support, guiding them through the court process, and arranging pre-court visits to familiarise them with the court room before the start of the trial. There was a deep and lasting gratitude for officers doing all they could to support them throughout the process, with some expressing feeling *"forever grateful"* to the officers. These findings underscore the value of officer efforts in making a difficult process more manageable for survivors.

"[...] The CID officer in charge of my case was brilliant. She worked so hard to get the case to court. The CPS made a lot of demands on her and her team [...] I will always be grateful for the hard work and dedication that was given to me by the police [...]"

"The detective in charge of my case [name] was incredible and I believe an absolute credit to the police force. From my first contact with her until the day the verdict was given in court, she was right there by my side and gave me so much reassurance. I don't know if I would have been able to go through with it all if it hadn't been for her perseverance and care throughout. I'll never be able to thank her enough for what she did for me."

8.7.4. Good communication is key

Regular, good communication from first report to case closure appeared central to positive survivor experiences. This included communications that survivors felt were

trauma-responsive, and signalled officers afforded them dignity, care and a voice within the process. Explaining the process clearly, keeping survivors informed about the progress in the case, signposting and referring to support services as part of communications about the process, and where the case did not result in a suspect being charged, clearly explaining the reasons for the decision.

“The initial person who contacted me was specially trained in sexual violence and treated me with respect, believing me and helping me. That individual gave me details about support and local advice that were available to me [...].”

“[...] I was really happy with everything the police did. They phoned me to let me know the second trial was taking place. I felt completely validated and vindicated by the treatment I received from the police and the outcome of the two trials [...].”

8.8. Theme 6: The wider criminal justice system

Although the survey primarily focused on police experiences, the free-text entries from survivors revealed how these are intertwined with their experiences of the broader criminal justice system.

8.8.1. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and courts

While some survivors described the police experience as very good, they contrasted this with poor experiences of CPS decision-making, particularly when no suspect was charged. Survivors commented on the long delays in their case going to court or awaiting trial, cases being delayed, and poor communications (or explanations) about these changes. Some described the CPS and court experience as “chaotic”.

“[...] I can understand why people drop support for prosecution, especially in the first few weeks of chaos. Expectation management is key I feel, as well as being realistic about timescales/actions, and maintaining regular contact. I feel like the officers in my case are trying very hard and I really appreciate that.”

In addition to the frustration at the long wait times for cases to come to court, survivors often reported that they felt as if they were “in limbo” and thus unable to move on from the trauma of both their assault and their experience of the criminal justice system.

“[...] Frustrated but not with the police. The increasing length of time this has taken from CPS deciding to prosecute & actual trial has affected my physical and mental health [...] I feel in limbo and would like to be able to move on from what has happened.” [sic]

"The police side was fine they really were helpful, kind and informative always. The worst part was awaiting the CPS decision then waiting for a court date [...] I waited 3 and half years [...]"

For survivors who commented on their experiences with the CPS, a recurring issue was the perceived lack of effective communication between the CPS and the police, further compounding the sense of disorganisation between the two institutions.

8.8.2. Operating in an environment of underfunding and structural difficulties

Some survivors expressly separated the efforts of the officer from their overall experience, emphasising that they felt officers tried their best and *"did everything they could given the state of policing and funding"*, but the outcome still was not a positive experience because of structural reasons. These structural reasons included: the nature of the adversarial justice system, the laws on rape, and chronic underfunding and cuts to policing and the justice system that respondents felt accounted for the slow or lack of progress in their case. Some respondents appeared acutely aware of, and felt sorry for, officers that seemed overworked, overstretched and barely able to cope.

"[...] The police also told me "there is not enough funding" to fully investigate my case."

"I feel like the officer in charge of my case is supportive of my needs. However, the system around her doesn't support that [...]"

The mentioning of systemic causes of poor experiences was common among survivors who felt that the slow progress and long delays within the police and court process had a detrimental effect on their mental health, financial situation and/or family life.

"[...] My case has taken over 3 years so far for a 'simple' one off assault by a known person. Most of this time has been, by admission, due to delays of the police force and my case not being properly case managed. The result has meant my MH [mental health] has deteriorated, I couldn't have therapy for many years, and now I've got to stand trial whilst my husband takes care of our baby [...]"

"[...] the time it takes from reporting to conviction is unbelievably long. I've heard of it taking 5 years. The police need support to proceed with serious cases urgently [...]"

These responses reveal the direct, profound impact that the lack of capacity within the criminal justice system to process rape and sexual assault cases in a timely manner has on survivors.

8.8.3. Rape in lived experience vs the eyes of the law

Some respondents felt that rape and sexual offence laws were at the heart of the issue. Others were confused about what constituted a sexual assault versus what did not based on what officers communicated them about the law. Some said it was too easy for officers to dismiss reports as 'one word against another' without further investigation or to tell survivors that what felt like rape to them was not rape to the eyes of the law (see section 8.3).

8.9. Theme 7: What survivors want from the criminal justice system

Some survivors spoke about what they wanted from the criminal justice system and how it must change to meet the needs of sexual violence survivors. Some survivors foregrounded that to them, validation that what has happened was a crime, and being believed and taken seriously by the police was in itself a form of justice (see also section 8.7). There were some examples of survivors who had joined the police force to change policing and ensure every victim would receive this form of justice of feeling believed and like they mattered.

"[...] I felt so let down and upset with how they handled this, that I actually joined the police myself. I am now [...] years into my career. I felt that the main way I could change / improve the police was by joining it myself. I make sure that no victim feels not believed or insignificant."

Other survivors advocated for significant structural changes within the criminal justice system's handling of rape and sexual assault cases. Some respondents emphasised the need for every case to be decided by a jury, reflecting their belief that both the survivor and the suspect deserve a thorough evaluation of their evidence in a court of law. Other areas of improvement related to the need for more efficient processes, the establishment of specialised courts for rape and sexual assault, and more funding to support these initiatives, among others.

"[...] More money is needed in the police force for teams investigating sexual offences [...]"

"[...] For improvements, I suggest that the communication between the police and the CPS is faster, defence barristers get paid more, judges are allowed more sitting days, and new specialised courts are set up specifically for rape and sexual assault cases."

Frequently, survivors expressed that justice was not about the perpetrator going to prison. Primarily, they wanted their perpetrators to “face up” to what they did, understand that their behaviour was wrong, and apologise for it. For some, justice and redress meant there should be a clear plan for ensuring the perpetrator would stop offending (desistence and rehabilitation). Survivors wanted to have a role in facilitating this and wanted to retain some agency within this process.

“[...] I would want my offender to face me, listen to the impact on me, face up to his behavior and for the root causes of his behaviour to be dealt with or managed by authorities on an ongoing basis. I would want a direct hand in desistence from the behaviour and for him to never be allowed to do this to anyone else [...] I would want a direct hand in overseeing that rehabilitation and desistence, so I would have opted for a restorative justice approach [...]”
[sic]

“[...] the most we want is for those people who hurt us too apologise too us and accept what they did wrong and give us a valid reason too why they thought it was okay and if it’s something to do with us.” [sic]

These findings chime with those from the closed survey questions on reasons for reporting and what would be a good outcome for survivors. The findings suggest that these are not only or primarily about conventional punishment and conviction, but more are complex, nuanced and multi-faceted (see sections 5.2 and 5.3).

9. Concluding remarks

How police respond to a rape or sexual assault disclosure matters deeply. Survivors rightly expect their disclosure to be treated with a level of care, sensitivity, competence, and professionalism that matches the seriousness of the reported crime. Basic acts of humanity - kindness and compassion - go a long way, but survivors also want competent investigations, police honouring their Victims' Rights, safeguarding and the disruption of perpetrators brought to police attention.

In this survey, thousands of survivors have bravely and generously told us about their experience of the police process, and how it has and is still affecting them and their lives. Some also shared what could be done to make policing and the wider criminal justice system better for sexual violence survivors, and society at large.

The responsibility lies with policing and with us as a society to hear and act upon these survey findings.

10. Help if you have been affected by this report

24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line

247sexualabusesupport.org.uk

 Call free on 0808 500 2222

Victim Support

victimsupport.org.uk

 Call free on 0808 1689 111

The Survivors Trust

thesurvivorstrust.org

 Call free on 0808 80 10818

Survivors UK (for men)

survivorsuk.org

 Chat via SMS on 020 3322 1860

Galop (for LGBTQIA+)

galop.org.uk

 Call free on 0800 999 5428

Imkaan (signposts to local by and for organisations that specialise in supporting Black and Minoritised women and girls)

imkaan.org.uk

Refuge (domestic abuse - including the National Domestic Abuse Helpline)

refuge.org.uk

 Call free on 0808 2000 247

Samaritans (24-hour crisis helpline)

samaritans.org

 Call free on 116 123

A longer list including local organisations can be found in English [here](#), and in Welsh [here](#).

11. Methodological appendix

This section provides additional detail related to the survey methodology, specifically regarding survey promotion, the method for tracking survey promotion, and changes to survey versions.

11.1. Survey promotion

A range of supporting materials were provided to police forces and support organisation to help promote the survey. The supporting materials included: a suggested text to be put on websites; suggested social media text which included the hashtag #OpSoteria; two leaflets/posters (one of which was dyslexic-friendly); the link to the live survey; a QR code to the live survey; a QR code to the Easy Read version of the survey; and the City, University of London^{xvi} logo for promoters to use to differentiate this survey from other police surveys.

These materials were distributed in both English and Welsh. Sector partners were offered a one-off payment of £500 for their help in promoting the survey to cover printing and staff costs, and they, along with police partners, were offered City, University of London's printing and postal services to order the leaflets/posters. In order to engage often marginalised communities, we approached by-and-for organisations^{xvii} across England and Wales to promote the survey within their networks, and they were also offered a one-off payment of £500 for their help.

11.2. Method for tracking survey promotion

For the purposes of tracking, an 'advertisement' is where details of the survey had been published along with a link or QR code to the actual survey itself, and did not count, for example, news articles that talked about the survey without an accompanying link or QR code. In the period July 2023 - June 2024, ten fixed search terms were used to track the online promotion of the survey:

^{xvi} As of August 2024, the university is known as City St George's, University of London.

^{xvii} 'By-and-for' organisations are specialist services run by and for the users and communities they aim to serve.

1. tinyurl.com/1experiencesurvey
2. Soteria + Survey + Victim
3. Police + Survey + Soteria
4. Police Experience Survey
5. Victim + Survey + Police
6. Soteria + Survey
7. Police + Survey + Rape
8. Rape + Survey + Victim
9. Profiad + Arolwg + Heddlu
10. Dioddefwr + Arolwg + Heddlu

This search will not have captured every promotion of the survey on the internet, and it will not have captured physical and face-to-face promotions of the survey via posters or by ISVAs, for example. For the period July 2023 - June 2024 we stopped tracking individual private accounts promoting the survey unless they were activists/campaigners known to us or political/council figures, due to the volume of engagement after the [Year 1 survey report](#) was published in September 2023.

11.3. Changes to survey versions

During the first reporting period (January to June 2023) we made minor changes in response to survivor feedback and in order to streamline the survey. These included removing free text comments in the middle of the survey as these seemed to cause survey breakoff, adding a summary question about overall experience with the police, and adding another question examining potential harms and benefits for survivors as a result of their experience with the police.

Further changes were made on 1 July 2023 in response to the findings of the first six months of data collection. We removed redundant survey questions (e.g., questions that seemed to ask the same thing and produced identical or near identical responses) to reduce the burden on the respondents. From 1 July 2023, the survey landing page stated that respondents were able to take the survey multiple times if there were developments in their case, or if they wanted to tell us about multiple cases or about different police forces. Responses were not linked to prior entries but were flagged as being either a first or subsequent survey entry based on respondents answer to this question.

Endnotes

- ¹ McGlynn, C. and Westmarland, N. (2019) Kaleidoscopic Justice: Sexual Violence and Victim-Survivors' Perceptions of Justice. *Social & Legal Studies*, 28(2), 179-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663918761200>
- ² The National Operating Model for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Pillar 3 resources include guidance to forces on effective partnership working with ISVAs. See: College of Policing (CoP). (2023) *National Operating Model for the Investigation of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences*. Retrieved August 5, 2024 from <https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso>
- ³ The National Operating Model for Rape and Serious Sexual offences provides resources for engaging with survivors such a victim communication toolkit with an information booklet, victim communication plan template, guidance on how to interact with survivors (Pillar 3). See: College of Policing (CoP). (2023) *National Operating Model for the Investigation of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences*. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso>
- ⁴ The National Operating Model for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences provides a perpetrator disruption toolkit (Pillar 2). See: College of Policing (CoP). (2023) *National Operating Model for the Investigation of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences*. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso>
- ⁵ The National Operating Model for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences provides resources to police forces to support suspect focussed investigations to support officers pursuing all relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry. See: College of Policing (CoP). (2023) *National Operating Model for the Investigation of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences*. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso>
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See APPENDIX 9: Pillar Three- Embedding Procedural Justice and Engaging Victims, in Stanko, B. (2023, December 15). *Operation Soteria Bluestone Year One Report 2021-2022*. London: Home Office. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-soteria-year-one-report>

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