



police  
ombudsman  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland  
**PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLICE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM**



I am pleased to present the first report to be produced by the Police Ombudsman's Research and Policy Directorate, "Public Awareness of the Northern Ireland Police Complaints System". It describes the results of a survey looking at people's experiences of policing and their knowledge of the system for dealing with complaints against the police. The survey was carried out in October and November 2000 at a time when the new Office of the Police Ombudsman was just coming into operation.

It is essential that there is widespread public knowledge of the new system if it is to work effectively. So the results of the survey are encouraging, even at this early stage. They show that there is already a wide awareness of the Ombudsman's Office in the community and recognition of the fact that it offers for the first time an independent and impartial system for dealing with complaints against the police.

The survey also shows, however, areas in which public knowledge of the new system should be improved. As Police Ombudsman I wish to address this issue, so my Research and Policy Directorate is currently taking forward a number of initiatives based on the findings of this report. The Directorate will also undertake further research into this, as well as into a range of other issues related to complaints against the police. It is my intention that all resulting reports will be published as part of my commitment to inform the community about the powers, role and activities of the Police Ombudsman's Office.

Mrs Nuala O'Loan  
***Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland***

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# INTRODUCTION 1.0

- 1.1 The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was established by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 to provide an impartial and independent system for investigating complaints against the police, following recommendations contained in the Hayes Report <sup>(1)</sup>
- 1.2 Prior to the establishment of the Office of the Police Ombudsman, complaints made by members of the public against the police were investigated by the police themselves, although the investigation of certain more serious, types of complaint was supervised by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC). The ICPC could not, however, undertake independent investigations of police complaints. The ICPC ceased to exist when the Office of the Police Ombudsman opened on the 6 November 2000.
- 1.3 The Office of the Police Ombudsman is committed to a programme of research and consultation to improve the quality and effectiveness of the police complaints system and to inform its policies for raising public awareness of this system. Surveys carried out in Northern Ireland to date have shown that public awareness of the police complaints system, and the role of the ICPC within that system, has generally been low. For example, the Community Attitudes Survey <sup>(2)</sup> (CAS) has, since 1992, consistently shown that only around one quarter of people in Northern Ireland were aware that the ICPC was responsible for overseeing complaints against the police while one third could not say who was mainly responsible for carrying out this task. These findings suggest that the issue of the lack of public awareness of the police complaints system needs to be addressed.
- 1.4 In the first of a programme of regular surveys to be undertaken by the Office of the Police Ombudsman, the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) was commissioned to carry out research into public awareness of the Police Ombudsman.
- 1.5 The research sought to provide information on:
  - Public awareness of the Police Ombudsman.
  - How respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman.
  - Where respondents would go to make a complaint about the police.
  - Public awareness of the independence of the Police Ombudsman.
  - Whether respondents had complained to the police about unacceptable behaviour.
- 1.6 The findings from the survey are presented in this report. The data for the survey were collected through a module in the NISRA Omnibus Survey, the field work for which took place from 16 October to 10 November 2000. It should be noted that the Office of the Police Ombudsman was only open for business during the last 5 days of the fieldwork period.

(1)  
(2)

Hayes, M. (1997) A Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland? Northern Ireland Office.  
Community Attitudes Survey, Northern Ireland statistics & Research Agency.

## 2.1 AWARENESS OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

- More than half (57%) of all respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.
- Sixty-two percent of males compared with 54% of females had heard of the Police Ombudsman.
- More Protestants (61%) than Catholics (53%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman.
- Awareness of the Police Ombudsman was highest among respondents who were aged between 45 and 64 years (72%) and lowest among those aged between 16 and 24 years (23%).
- There were differences across income groups in awareness of the Police Ombudsman. Figures ranged from 71% awareness among respondents with gross annual household incomes of £25,000 or more to 45% awareness among respondents with incomes of £9,999 or less.
- Almost three-quarters of respondents who had professional managerial or intermediate non-manual occupations had heard of the Police Ombudsman (both 73%). In contrast, only 32% of those who had never had a job had heard of the Police Ombudsman.
- More respondents who were employed (63%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman than those who were economically inactive (52%).
- Awareness of the Police Ombudsman was highest among respondents who had tertiary level qualifications (77%) and lowest among those with no qualifications (48%).
- More respondents who lived in owner-occupied properties than those who lived in rented properties had heard of the Police Ombudsman (63% and 37%, respectively).
- Of those respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman, 74% said they had heard about her on the television.

## 2.2 AWARENESS OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN

- Of those respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman, 81% thought the Ombudsman was independent of the police.
- Protestants (84%) were more likely than Catholics (76%) to think the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police.
- Respondents who were aged between 45 and 64 years were most likely (88%) and those aged between 16 and 24 years least likely (69%) to believe the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police.
- More respondents who had tertiary level qualifications thought the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police than those who had secondary level qualifications or no qualifications at all (91% 82% and 74%, respectively).

## 2.3 MAKING COMPLAINTS

Just over half of all respondents (52% said they would go to their local police station to make a complaint against the police, 10% would go the ICPC while only 3% would go to the Police Ombudsman.

- More Protestants (59%) than Catholics (45%) would make a complaint at their local police station, while 3% of both Catholics and Protestants would go the Police Ombudsman.
- Respondents with gross annual household incomes of £25,000 or above were more likely to say they would go to the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint against the police than respondents with household incomes of £9,999 or less (8% and 1%, respectively).

## 2.4 PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE BEHAVIOUR

- Almost one in five of all respondents (19%) said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (14% said this had occurred once or twice and 5% said this had occurred more than once or twice).
- More Catholics (23%) than Protestants (15%) said a police officer had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way and more of the former than the latter said these behaviours had occurred more than once or twice (9% and 2%, respectively).
- Almost three times as many males as females said a police officer had behaved in an unacceptable way towards them (28% and 10%, respectively).
- Respondents who were aged between 25 and 44 years were most likely (24%) and those aged 65 or over least likely (7%) to say that a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable.
- Of those who said a police officer had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way, 57% said the officer was disrespectful or impolite.

## 2.5 COMPLAINTS TO THE POLICE

- Only 21% of respondents who said a police officer had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way said they had complained to the police about their treatment.
- Similar proportions of Catholics and Protestants said they had complained to the police (20% and 21%, respectively).
- There was little variation between the sexes with 21% of males and 20% of females saying they had made a complaint to the police.
- Of those respondents who did not make a complaint to the police about the way they were treated, 30% said they did not do so because they thought the police would not do anything about it while a further 26% did not complain because they thought the incident was not serious enough.

### 2.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

- Fifty-three percent of all respondents were female and 47% were male.
- Just over half (53%) of all respondents described themselves as Protestant and 42% as Catholic. One percent said they had no religion and 4% refused to state their religion.
- The vast majority of respondents (99%) were of white ethnic origin.
- Thirty-seven percent of respondents were aged between 25 and 44 years and 31% between 45 and 64 years. A further 18% were over the age of 65 and the remaining 14% were aged between 16 and 24 years.
- More than one quarter (28%) of respondents said their gross annual household income was £9,999 or less while 26% said they had a household income which was £25,000 or more.
- Just over half of all respondents (530/a) were employed and 47% were economically inactive.
- Approximately one in five respondents were currently or had previously been employed in skilled manual occupations (21%) 17% in semi-skilled manual occupations, 16% in professional managerial occupations and a further 16% in junior non-manual occupations. The remaining respondents were employed in intermediate non-manual occupations (14%), unskilled manual occupations (4%) or had never had a job (12%).
- Of those respondents who were under 70 years of age, 320/a had tertiary level qualifications, 480/a had secondary level qualifications and 200/a had no educational qualifications.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents lived in dwellings that were owned by their household.

- 3.1 Respondents were asked if they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. More than half of all respondents (57%) had heard of her.
- 3.2 More males (62%) than females (54%) and more Protestants (61%) than Catholics (53%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman.
- 3.3 Figure 1 shows that awareness of the Police Ombudsman was highest among respondents who were aged between 45 and 64 years and lowest among those between the ages of 16 and 24 years (72% and 23%, respectively).

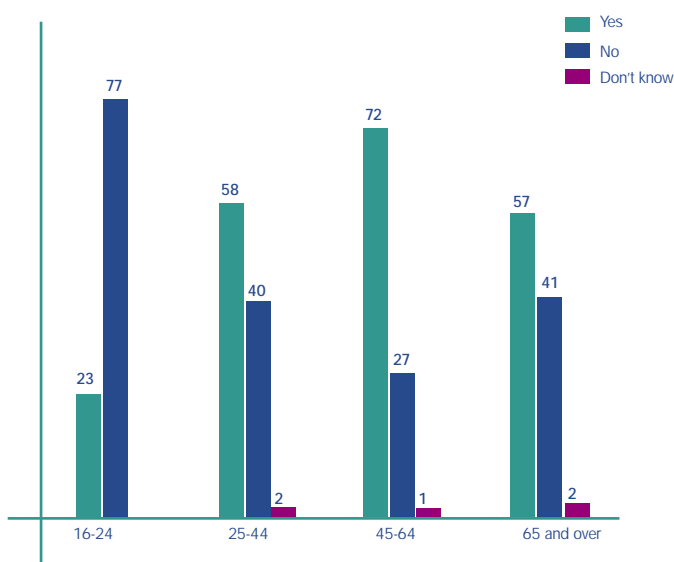


Figure 1: Heard of the Police Ombudsman by Age

- 3.4 Analysis of respondent awareness of the Police Ombudsman by gross annual household income showed that awareness levels were highest among respondents who said their annual household income exceeded £25,000 (71%), followed by those whose income was between £15,000 and £24,999 (66%). Respondents whose annual household income was £9,999 or less were least aware of the Police Ombudsman (45%) (Appendix Table A1).
- 3.5 There was some variation across occupational groups in awareness of the Police Ombudsman. More respondents who had professional managerial or intermediate non-manual occupations were aware of the Police Ombudsman (both 73%) than those in other occupational groups. Least likely to say they had heard of the Police Ombudsman were respondents who had never had a job (32/o) (Figure 2).



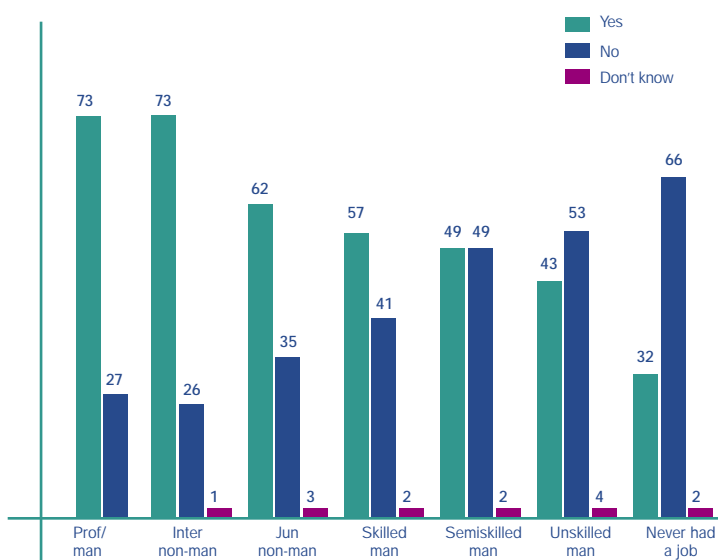


Figure 2: Heard of the Police Ombudsman by Occupation

3.6 Respondents who were employed were more likely to have heard of the Police Ombudsman than those who were economically inactive (63% and 52%, respectively) (Appendix Table A2).

3.7 A higher proportion of respondents with tertiary level qualifications (77%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman than those with secondary level qualifications (56%) or no qualifications at all (48%) (Appendix Table A3).

3.8 Analysis of awareness by tenure showed that more respondents who lived in owner-occupied properties (63%) had heard of the Police Ombudsman than those who lived in rented properties (37%) (Appendix Table A4).

SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN

3.9 Respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman were asked how they had heard about her. As shown in Table 1, almost three quarters of respondents (74%) had heard about her on television, 35% had heard about her through newspapers or magazines and 23% had heard about her on the radio. Other sources included word of mouth (8%), friends or family (4%), leaflets (3%) and posters (1%).

TABLE1: SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN

	%
Television	74
Radio	23
Newspaper/ Magazine	35
Word of mouth	8
Friends / Family	4
Leaflet	3
Poster	3
Other	3
Don't know	1

(Note: Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple responses.)

4.1 Respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman were asked if they thought the Ombudsman was part of the police or independent of the police. The majority (81 %) thought the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police, 11% thought she was part of the police and 8% did not know.

4.2 Figure 3 presents a breakdown of results for knowledge of the independence of the Police Ombudsman by religion. As can be seen, Protestants (84%) were more likely than Catholics (76%) to think the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police.

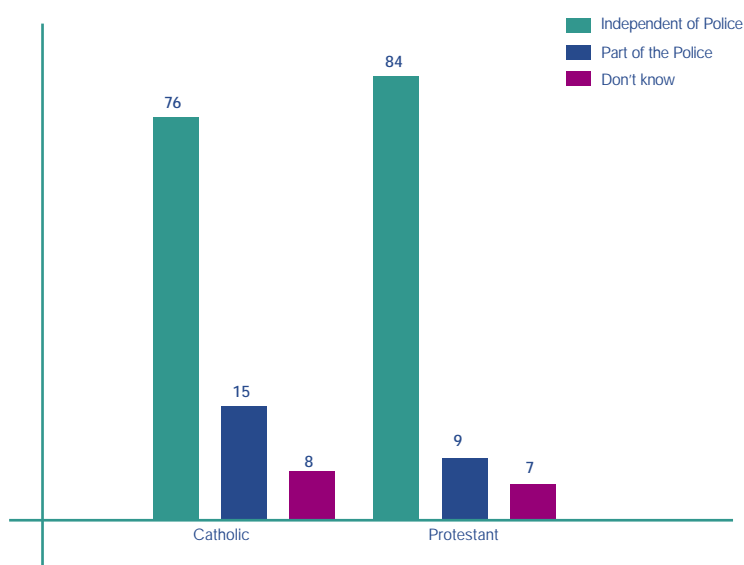


Figure 3: Aware of the independence of the Police Ombudsman by Religion

4.3 Approximately four fifths of both males and females thought the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police (82% of the former and 80% of the latter) (Appendix Table A5).

- 4.4 Respondents who were aged between 45 and 64 years were most likely (88%) and those aged between 16 and 24 years least likely (69%) to believe that the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police (Appendix Table A6).
- 4.5 Ninety percent of respondents with gross annual household incomes of £25,000 or more were aware that the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police compared with 72% of those with annual household incomes of £9,999 or less (Appendix Table A7).
- 4.6 Analysis of awareness of the Police Ombudsman's independence from the police by employment status showed that 84% of employed respondents were aware that the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police compared with 78% of those who were economically inactive. However, more of the latter said they did not know if the Police Ombudsman was part of the police or independent of the police than the former (12% and 5%, respectively) (Appendix Table A8).
- 4.7 Respondents who had tertiary level qualifications were most likely (91%) to think the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police, followed by those with secondary level qualifications (82%). Three quarters of respondents who had no qualifications thought the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police (75%) (Figure 4).

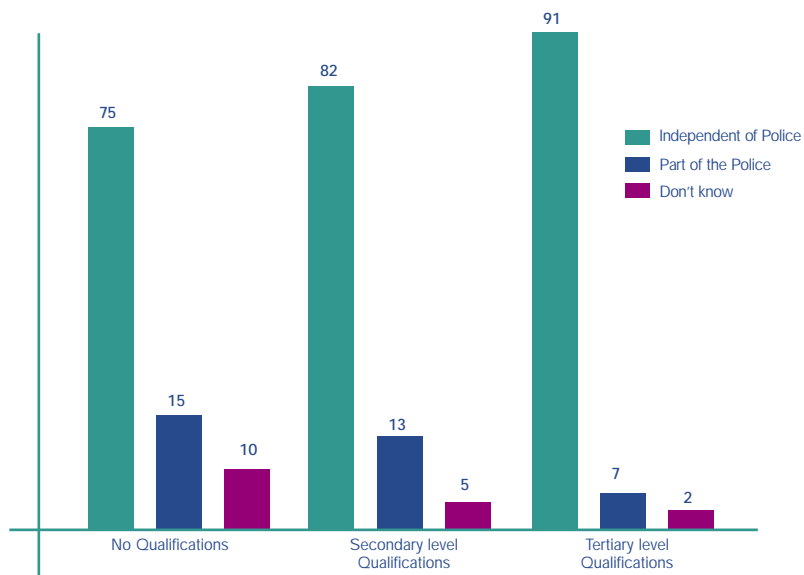


Figure 4: Aware of the independence of the Police Ombudsman by Educational Qualifications

4.8 More respondents who lived in owner-occupied properties than those who lived in rented properties believed the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police (82% and 74%, respectively) (Appendix Table A9).

5.1 All respondents were asked where they would go to make a complaint against the police. While 57% of respondents had said they were aware of the Police Ombudsman, only 3% said they would go to the Ombudsman to make a complaint against the police. Just over half of all respondents said they would go to their local police station to make a complaint (52%) while 10% would go to the ICPC. Six percent of respondents said they would not know where to go to make a complaint and 4% said they would not know how to complain (Table 2).

**TABLE 2: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT**

	%
Local Police Station	52
ICPC	10
Solicitor	9
Chief Constable of the RUC	2
MP / MLA	3
Local Politician e.g. councillor	4
Citizens' Advice Bureau	3
Police Ombudsman	3
Other	2
Would not know where to go to complain	6
Would not know how to complain	4
Don't know / refused	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

5.2 More Protestant than Catholic respondents would make a complaint at their local police station (59% and 45% respectively). Conversely, more of the latter (13%) than the former (5%) would go to a solicitor. Three percent of both Protestants and Catholics would go to the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint (Table 3).

TABLE 3: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY RELIGION

	Catholic %	Protestant %
Local Police Station	45	59
ICPC	9	11
Solicitor	13	5
Chief Constable of the RUC	2	2
MP / MLA	4	2
Local Politician e.g. councillor	6	3
Citizens' Advice Bureau	4	2
Police Ombudsman	3	3
Other	2	1
Would not know where to go to complain	7	5
Would not know how to complain	4	5
Don't know / refused	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

5.3 More males (54%) than females (50%) would make a complaint at their local police station while twice as many males as females would go to a solicitor (12% and 6%, respectively). Three percent of both males and females would make a complaint to the Police Ombudsman (Appendix Table A10).

5.4 Respondents aged 65 years and over were most likely to say they would go to their local police station to make a complaint against the police (64%), followed by those who were aged between 45 and 64 years (55%). Similar proportions of respondents who were aged between 25 and 44 years and 16 and 24 years said they would make a complaint at their local police station (both 46%). Four percent of respondents who were aged between 25 and 64 years said they would go to the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint. Respondents who were aged between 25 and 44 years (13%) were more likely to say they would go to the ICPC to make a complaint against the police than respondents in any other age group (Table 4).

TABLE 4: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY AGE

	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+
Local Police Station	46	46	55	64
ICPC	9	13	11	4
Solicitor	13	12	6	3
Chief Constable of the RUC	2	1	4	2
MP / MLA	3	4	2	1
Local Politician e.g. councillor	4	4	5	4
Citizens' Advice Bureau	7	3	2	1
Police Ombudsman	0	4	4	1
Other	6	4	4	4
Would not know where to go to complain	4	2	1	2
Would not know how to complain	6	5	5	8
Don't know / refused	1	2	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

5.5 There was an association between gross annual household income and where respondents would go to make a complaint against the police. Of those who had annual incomes of £9,999 or less, 58% said they would go to their local police station to make a complaint. This compares with 55% of respondents with annual incomes between £10,000 and £14,999, 48% of those with annual incomes between £15,000 and £24,000 and 46% of those with annual incomes of £25,000 or more. Respondents with higher annual household incomes were more likely to say they would go to the ICPC or the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint than those with lower household incomes. For example, 16% of respondents with annual household incomes exceeding £25,000 would go to the ICPC compared with 5% of those with annual incomes of £9,999 or less. Similarly, 8% of the former would go to the Police Ombudsman compared with only 1% of the latter (Appendix Table A11).



5.6 Of those respondents who had no formal educational qualifications, more than half (56%) would go to their local police station to make a complaint against the police. This compares with 50% of respondents with secondary level qualifications and 41% of those with tertiary level qualifications. Conversely, twice as many respondents with tertiary level qualifications as those with secondary level qualifications would go to the ICPC (20% and 10% respectively). Only 7% of those with no qualifications would go to the ICPC to make a complaint. Similarly, a smaller proportion of the latter group than either of the two former groups would go to the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint (1% of those with no qualifications, 3% of those with secondary level qualifications and 8% of those with tertiary level qualifications) (Table 5).

TABLE 5: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

	NO QUALIFICATIONS %	SECONDARY QUALIFICATIONS %	TERTIARY QUALIFICATIONS %
Local Police Station	56	50	41
ICPC	7	10	20
Solicitor	9	10	7
Chief Constable of the RUC	2	2	4
MP / MLA	4	3	1
Local Politician e.g. councillor	3	5	4
Citizens' Advice Bureau	2	5	2
Police Ombudsman	1	3	8
Other	3	1	2
Would not know where to go to complain	7	5	4
Would not know how to complain	4	4	5
Don't know / refused	3	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: Respondents over 70 years of age.

- 5.7 Fifty-seven percent of respondents who were employed compared with 47% of those who were economically inactive would go to their local police station to make a complaint. Almost twice as many employed as economically inactive respondents, would go to the ICPC to make a complaint (13% and 7%, respectively). More employed respondents (5%) than respondents who were economically inactive (1%) would go to the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint against the police (Appendix Table A12).
- 5.8 More respondents who lived in owner-occupied properties said they would go to their local police station to make a complaint than those who rented their accommodation (53% and 48%, respectively). Four percent of the former compared with 1% of the latter would go to the Police Ombudsman to make a complaint against the police (Appendix Table A13).

6.1 All respondents were asked if a police officer had ever behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable. As Figure 5 shows, almost one in five respondents (19%) said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (14% said this had occurred once or twice and 5% said this had occurred more than once or twice).

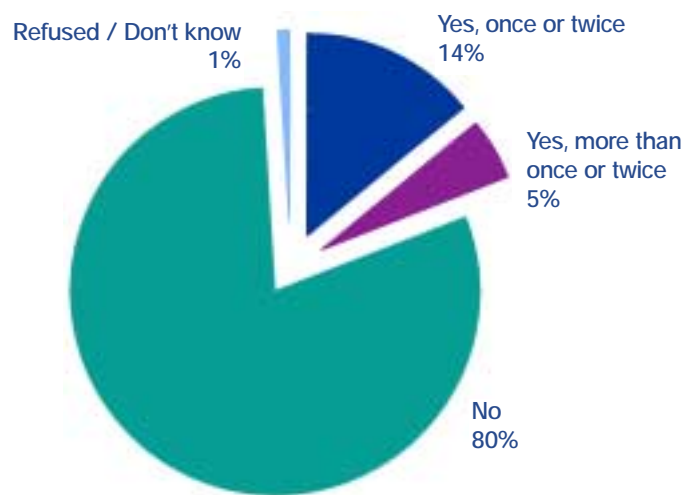


Figure 5: Police officer ever behaved in unacceptable way

6.2 As Table 6 shows, more Catholics (23%) than Protestants (15%) said a police officer had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way and more of the former than the latter said these behaviours had occurred more than once or twice (8% and 2%, respectively).

**TABLE 6: POLICE OFFICER EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY (by religion)**

	CATHOLIC	PROTESTANT
	%	%
Yes, once or twice	15	13
Yes, more than once or twice	8	2
No	76	85
Don't know / refused	1	0
<b>Total</b>	100	100

6.3 Figure 6 shows that almost three times as many males ( 28%) as females (10%) said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (9% of males and 4% of females said these behaviours had occurred more than once or twice.

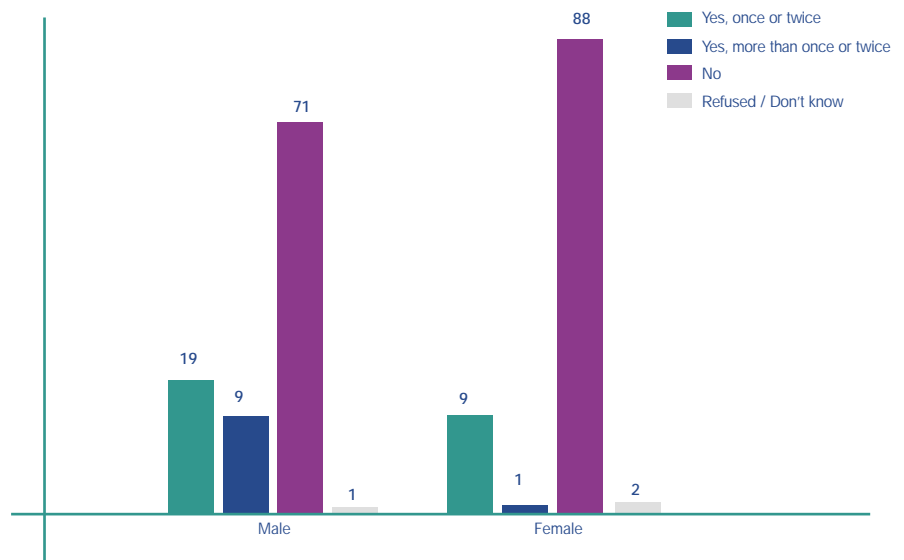


Figure 6: HPolice Officer ever behaved in an unacceptable way by Gender

6.4 Respondents aged between 25 and 44 years were most likely (24%) and those aged 65 or over least likely (7%) to say that a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (Appendix Table A14).

6.5 Analysis of perceived police behaviour by annual household income showed some variation across the income groups. More respondents with incomes of £25,000 or above (24%) said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable than respondents in any other income group. Respondents with incomes of £9,999 or less were least likely (14%) to say that a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (Appendix Table A15).

6.6 Respondents who worked in professional managerial occupations or intermediate non-manual occupations were most likely to say that a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (both 23%), followed by those who had skilled manual jobs (21%). Least likely to say a police officer had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way were respondents who had never had a job (12%) (Table 7).

**TABLE 7: POLICE OFFICER EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY (by occupation)**

	Professional managerial	Intermediate non-manual	Junior non-manual	Skilled manual	Semi-skilled manual	Unskilled manual	Never had a job
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, once or twice	19	19	10	15	12	8	7
Yes, more than once or twice	4	4	3	6	7	6	5
No	77	77	85	78	78	85	85
Don't know / refused	0	0	2	1	3	1	3
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

6.7 More respondents with tertiary level qualifications (26%) than those with secondary level qualifications (20%) or no educational qualifications (17%) said a police officer had behaved in an unacceptable way towards them (Appendix Table A16).

6.8 Almost one quarter (24%) of respondents who were employed said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable compared with 13% of those who were economically inactive (Appendix Table A17).

6.9 There was very little tenure variation. Nineteen percent of respondents who lived in rented properties and 18% of those who lived in owner-occupied properties said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable (Appendix Table A18).

6.10 The findings reported above indicated that there is an association between socioeconomic grouping (as assessed by variables such as income, occupation and education level) and respondents' perceptions of police behaviour. Respondents from higher socio-economic groups were more likely than those from lower socio-economic groups to say a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable. This variation might be attributable to differing expectations of police behaviour across socio-economic groups. It is possible that people from higher socioeconomic groups expect a better standard of behaviour from police officers than people from lower socio-economic groups and may, therefore, be more critical of officers whom they perceive fall below this standard.

**TYPE OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR**

6.11 Respondents who said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable were asked what the police officer had done <sup>(3)</sup>. Fifty-seven percent said the officer was disrespectful or impolite while 23% said the officer did not follow proper procedures. Nineteen percent of respondents said they were stopped and searched with out reason and 17% said they were harassed by the police officer. Other unacceptable behaviours mentioned by respondents included a failure to carry out his/her duty properly (15%), the use of sectarian, racist or sexist language (12%) and accusations that the respondent had done something he/she had not (12%) (Table 8)<sup>(4)</sup>.

**TABLE 8: TYPE OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR**

	%
Was disrespectful or impolite	57
Did not follow proper procedures	23
Stopped or searched without reason	19
Harassment	17
Did not carry out his/her duty properly	15
Used sectarian, racist or sexist language	12
Wrongly accused of behaviour	12
Behaved in a violent way, e.g. pushing	11
Discrimination due to race, gender, age, etc	11
Swore	10
Searched house without reason	4
Took an item of respondent's property	2
Other	3

*Note: Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple responses*

(3) If more than one incident had occurred, respondents were asked to consider the most recent one.

(4) Further analysis of the data was not possible due to small numbers in some cells.

COMPLAINTS TO THE POLICE

6.12 Respondents who said a police officer had behaved towards them in a way they thought was unacceptable were asked if they had complained to the police<sup>(5)</sup>. Only 21% said they had complained to the police, the remaining 79% said they had not (Figure 7).

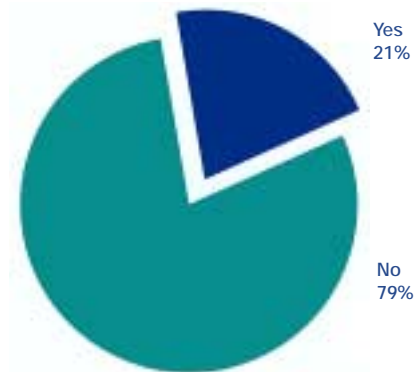


Figure 7: Complained to the police

6.13 Similar proportions of Catholics and Protestants said they had complained to the police (20% and 21 %, respectively). There was also little variation between the sexes with 21 % of males and 20% of females saying they had made a complaint to the police<sup>(6)</sup>.

REASONS FOR NOT COMPLAINING TO THE POLICE

6.14 Respondents who did not complain to the police about the unacceptable behaviour they had experienced were asked why they had not done so. The main reason given by respondents was a belief that the police would not do anything about it (30%). Just over one quarter of respondents (26%) said they did not complain because they felt the incident was not serious enough and 15% felt the police would not take it seriously. Only 4% of respondents said they did not know how to make a complaint (Table 9).

**TABLE 9: REASON RESPONDENT DID NOT REPORT INCIDENT TO POLICE**

	%
Felt police would not do anything about it	30
Felt incident was not serious enough	26
Felt police would not take it seriously	15
Could not be bothered	10
Scared of police reprisals	6
Did not want to make trouble for police	4
Did not know how to complain	4
Other	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>(5)</sup> Respondents were not asked if they had complained to anyone other than the police.

<sup>(6)</sup> Analysis by other demographic variables such as age and occupational classification was not possible due to small numbers in some cells.

Base: Respondents who did not make a complaint about unacceptable behaviour

## GENDER

7.1 Just over half of all respondents were female (53%); the remainder were male (47%). These figures are similar to the gender breakdown for all females and males over the age of sixteen in the general population in Northern Ireland (52% and 48%, respectively)<sup>7)</sup>.

## RELIGION AND ETHNIC ORIGIN

7.2 Fifty-three percent of respondents described themselves as Protestant and 42% as Catholic. One percent said they had no religion and the remaining 4% refused to state their religion (Figure 8). The vast majority of respondents (99%) were of white ethnic origin.

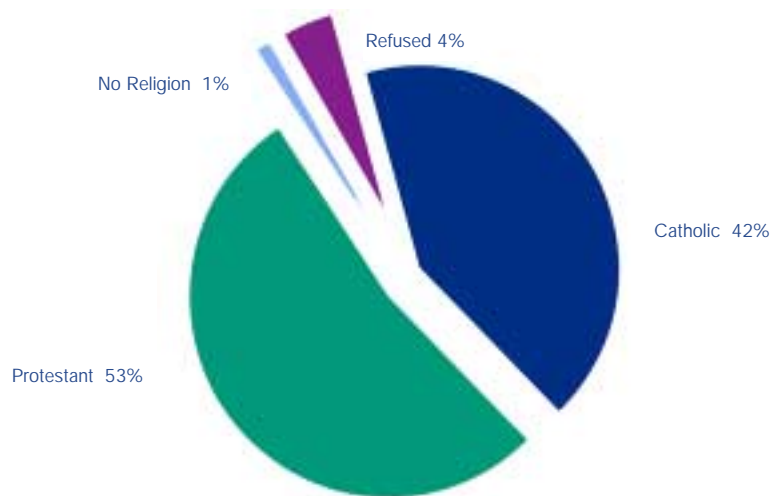


Figure 8: Religion of respondents

7) Mid-Year Population Estimates in Northern Ireland 1999, NISRA.



AGE

7.3 Figure 9 shows that the largest proportion of respondents (37%) were aged between 25 and 44 years, and the smallest proportion (14%) between 16 and 24 years.

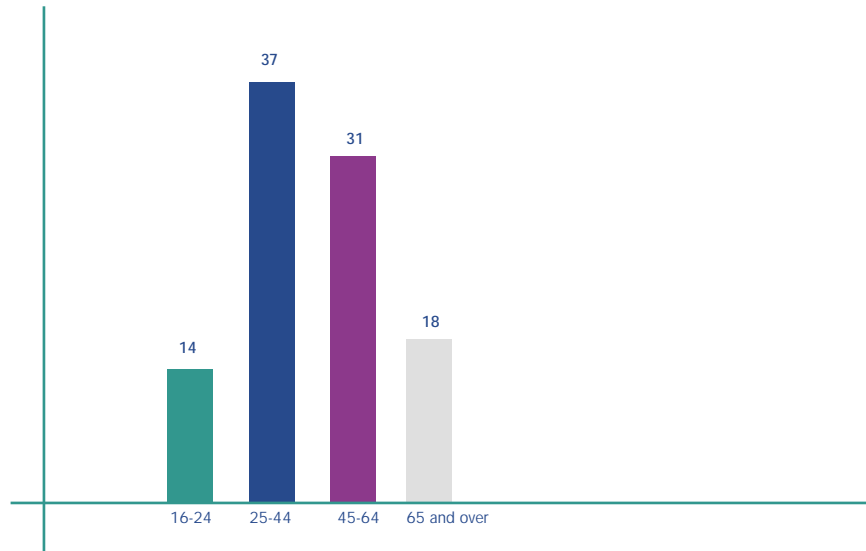


Figure 8: age of respondents

GROSS ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

7.4 More than one quarter of respondents (28%) said their gross annual household income was £9,999 or less. A further 15% said their household income was between £10,000 and £14,999 and 18% that their income was between £15,000 and £24,999. Twenty-six percent of respondents had a gross annual household income of more than £25,000. The remaining respondents either said they did not know their household income (8%) or refused to provide the information (4%).

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

7.5 Just over half of all respondents (51 %) said they had worked in the week before the survey took place, 2% were away from work that week, 3% were looking for work or waiting to take up a job, 1% were not looking for work, 39% were economically inactive (including retired respondents) and 4% were still at school<sup>(8)</sup>.

(8) This variable was recoded into two groups for analysis purposes- employed (53%) and economically inactive (47%)

OCCUPATION

7.6 Respondents were categorised into groups based on their present or most recent job. Figure 10 shows that one in five respondents were currently employed or had been employed previously in skilled manual occupations (21%) and 17% in semi-skilled manual occupations. The next two largest categories of respondents were currently or had been employed in professional managerial or junior non-manual occupations (both 16%). Fourteen percent of respondents had intermediate non-manual occupations, 4% had unskilled manual occupations and the remaining 12% had never had a job.

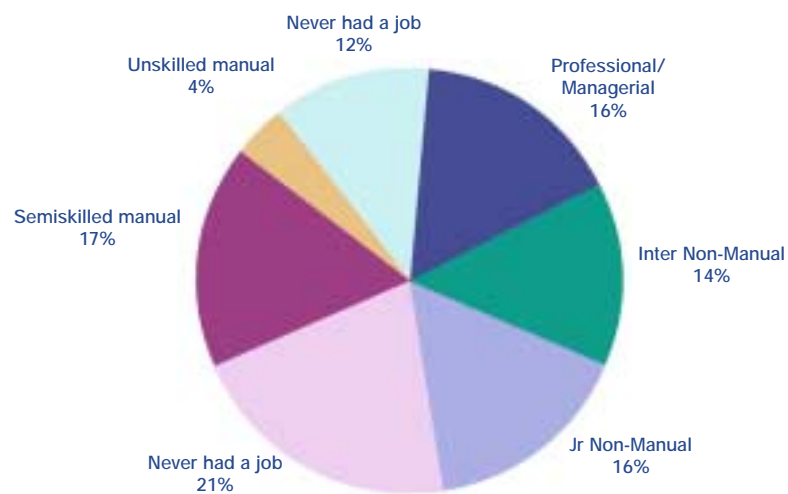


Figure 10: Present or most recent occupation

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

7.7 Respondents who were under 70 years of age were asked about their educational qualifications(9). Of these, 32% had tertiary level qualifications(6) 48% had secondary level qualifications and the remaining 20% had no educational qualifications at all.

TENURE

7.8 Almost three-quarters of the dwellings selected for the survey (73%) were owned by the people who occupied them. A further 26% were rented (17% from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive(6) 6% from private landlords and 3% from housing associations). Households who said they did not pay any rent occupied the remaining 1% of dwellings.

(9) According to NISRA, respondents to the Omnibus Survey who are 70 years and over are not asked to provide information on their educational qualifications.

- 8.1 This is the first survey of public awareness of the police complaints system to be carried out by the Office of the Police Ombudsman. Previous surveys carried out in Northern Ireland have shown that quite a large proportion of people (around one-third) said they did not know who was mainly responsible for overseeing police complaints while only around one-quarter were aware of the role of the ICPC in the police complaints system. In contrast, the findings from this survey showed that respondent awareness of the Police Ombudsman was relatively high (57%). This is encouraging, given that most of the fieldwork took place before the official launch and opening of the Office of the Police Ombudsman.
- 8.2 However, the results showed that there were differences in awareness levels across various socio-economic groups within the community. More respondents from higher socio-economic groups (as measured by variables such as income, occupation and education level) were aware of the Police Ombudsman than those from lower socio-economic groups.
- 8.3 There were also differences across socio-economic groups in awareness of the independence of the Police Ombudsman from the police. Once again, the results showed that respondents from higher socio-economic groups were more likely to be aware that the Police Ombudsman was independent from the police. There was also a community background difference; more Protestants than Catholics thought the Police Ombudsman was independent from the police. These issues will be addressed by the implementation of outreach programmes to increase awareness of the Police Ombudsman across all sections of the community.
- 8.4 Another issue raised by the findings from the survey is that while more than half of all respondents said they were aware of the Police Ombudsman, only 3% said they would go to the Ombudsman to make a complaint against the police. This suggests that many people may not be fully aware of the role of the Police Ombudsman in the police complaints system and that they can make a complaint directly to the Office of the Police Ombudsman. However, it must be emphasised that during the first three weeks of the survey fieldwork the ICPC, not the Police Ombudsman, was responsible for overseeing police complaints.
- 8.5 The findings from this research will assist the Office of the Police Ombudsman to develop a strategy to increase public awareness of the organisation and its role in the independent and impartial investigation of complaints against the police in Northern Ireland.
- 8.6 Further research is planned to monitor the effectiveness of the outreach programmes to be implemented by the Office of the Police Ombudsman and to investigate further some of the findings of this survey. The results of all such research will be published in due course.

### THE SAMPLE

The Valuation and Lands Agency's list of domestic residential properties was used as the sampling frame for the survey. The sample frame was divided into three geographic areas:

Belfast, East Northern Ireland and West Northern Ireland and a random sample of 2,150 addresses was drawn. The number of addresses drawn from each area was in proportion to the number of addresses in the area.

The Valuation and Lands Agency's list provides a good sampling frame of addresses. However, it does not contain any information about the number of people living at an address. At each address, therefore, the interviewer was asked to identify the number of households living at the address and, where necessary, select one household using a standardised selection procedure. The interviewer then listed all members of the household who were aged 16 and over. From this listing of eligible adults, one was selected for participation in the survey.

### FIELDWORK

The fieldwork for the survey was carried out from 16 October to 10 November 2000.

### RESPONSE RATE

The tables below show the response rate for the survey.

**TABLE 10: TARGET SAMPLE**

Total Interviews issued	Non-eligible	Total Eligible	Sample
	2151	237	1914

**TABLE 11: RESPONSE RATE**

	Number	%
Achieved	1189	62
Refused	339	18
Non-contact	234	12
Other	152	8

### WEIGHTING

Selecting one individual for interview at each sampled address means that the probability of selection for the survey is inversely related to the size of the household. Thus, individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being selected to participate in the survey than individuals living in small households.

To compensate for this, the data were weighted before analyses were carried out. The weighting process adjusted the results to those that would have been achieved if the sample had been drawn as a random sample of adults rather than addresses. Table 12 below shows how the weighting was carried out and Table 13 the effect of weighting on responses to the question:

*Are you aware of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?'*

**TABLE 12: WEIGHTING OF THE SAMPLE**

Number of adults aged 16 and over	Number by number	Household size weight	Relative scaled
1	384	384	0.509644
2	570	1140	1.019288
3	15	453	1.528932
4	68	272	2.038576
5	12	60	2.548221
6	4	24	3.057865

$$R=1189/2333=0.509644$$

**TABLE 13: EFFECT OF WEIGHTING**

Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?	Unweighted	Weighted
Yes	56.9	57.4
No	40.9	40.9
Refused	1.3	1.0
Don't Know	0.8	0.7

### SAMPLE ERROR

The proportion of respondents who gave a certain answer was only an estimate of the proportion of the entire population who would have given that answer, i.e. there was a margin of error, plus or minus, the sample error. The size of the error varies with the size of the percentage and the sample size, including all respondents, respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman, and respondents who said a police officer had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way

TABLE 14: SAMPLE ERROR

	Percentage									
	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
	or	or	or	or	or	or	or	or	or	50
	95	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	
Sample size	Sample Error +/- %									
Respondents who said an officer had treated them in an unacceptable way = 220	2.9	4.0	4.7	5.3	5.7	6.1	6.1	6.5	6.6	6.6
Respondents who had heard of the Ombudsman	1.6	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.8
All respondents = 1189	1.2	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.8

TABLE A2: HEARD OF THE OMBUDSMAN BY GROSS ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	£8,999 or less	£10,000- £14,999	£15,000- £24,999	£25,000- or more
Yes	45%	58%	66%	71%
No	54%	42%	34%	29%
Don't Know / Refused	0%	0%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A2: HEARD OF THE OMBUDSMAN BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	Employed	Economically inactive
Yes	63%	52%
No	37%	46%
Don't Know / Refused	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A3: HEARD OF THE OMBUDSMAN BY EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

	No qualifications	Secondary qualifications	Tertiary level qualifications
Yes	48%	56%	77%
No	50%	44%	22%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Base: respondents under 70 years of age = 1037

TABLE A4: HEARD OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN BY TENURE

	Owner occupied	Rented
Yes	63%	37%
No	36%	58%
Don't Know / Refused	1%	5%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A5: AWARE OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN BY GENDER

	Male	Female
Part of the Police	10%	13%
Independent of the Police	82%	80%
Don't Know / Refused	9%	7%
Total	100%	100%

Base: respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman = 682

TABLE A6: AWARE OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN BY AGE

	16-24	25-44	45-64	65 and over
Part of the Pollice	21%	15%	8%	9%
Independent of the Police	69%	80%	88%	72%
Don't Know / Refused	10%	6%	6%	19%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman = 682



**TABLE A7: AWARE OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN BY GROSS ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

	£9,999 or less	£10,000 £14,999	£15,000- £24,999	£25,000 or more
Part of the Police	15%	11%	9%	7%
Independent of the Police	72%	83%	79%	90%
Don't Know / Refused	13%	6%	11%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman = 682

**TABLE A8: AWARE OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

	Employed	Economically inactive
Part of the Police	12%	10%
Independent of the Police	84%	78%
Don't Know / Refused	5%	12%
Total	100%	100%

Base: respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman = 682

**TABLE A9: AWARE OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN BY TENURE**

	Owner- occupied	Rented
Part of the Police	10%	19%
Independent of the Police	82%	74%
Don't Know / Refused	8%	7%
Total	100%	100%

Base: respondents who were aware of the Police Ombudsman = 682

TABLE A10: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY GENDER

	Male	Female
Local Police station	54%	50%
ICPC	10%	11%
Solicitor	12%	6%
Chief Constable of the RUC	3%	2%
MP/MLA	3%	3%
Local politician	4%	4%
Citizen's Advice Bureau	1%	5%
Police Ombudsman	3%	3%
Other	2%	2%
Would not know where to go to complain	4%	7%
Would not know how to complain	3%	5%
Don't know/refused	2%	3%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

## APPENDIX TABLES

TABLE A11: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY GROSS ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	£9,999 or less	£10,000 £14,999	£15,000- £24,999	£25,000 or more
Local Police station	58%	55%	48%	46%
ICPC	5%	9%	16%	16%
Solicitor	7%	10%	11%	8%
Chief Constable of the RUC	2%	2%	1%	5%
MP/MLA	3%	3%	4%	2%
Local politician	5%	5%	4%	2%
Citizen's Advice Bureau	4%	2%	3%	2%
Police Ombudsman	1%	2%	2%	8%
Other	2%	1%	2%	2%
Would not know where to go to complain	9%	6%	4%	4%
Would not know how to complain	4%	4%	4%	3%
Don't know/refused	1%	1%	2%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A12: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	Employed	Economically inactive
Local Police station	47%	57%
ICPC	13%	7%
Solicitor	9%	8%
Chief Constable of the RUC	3%	2%
MP/MLA	3%	3%
Local politician	4%	4%
Citizen's Advice Bureau	3%	3%
Police Ombudsman	5%	1%
Other	2%	2%
Would not know where to go to complain	5%	7%
Would not know how to complain	5%	4%
Don't know/refused	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A13: WHERE RESPONDENTS WOULD GO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT BY TENURE

	Owner-occupied	Rented
Local Police station	53%	48%
ICPC	11%	9%
Solicitor	8%	12%
Chief Constable of the RUC	3%	1%
MP/MLA	3%	2%
Local politician	4%	6%
Citizen's Advice Bureau	3%	4%
Police Ombudsman	4%	1%
Other	2%	2%
Would not know where to go to complain	6%	6%
Would not know how to complain	4%	4%
Don't know/refused	1%	5%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A14: POLICE OFFICE EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY BY AGE

	16-24	25-44	45-64	65 or over
Yes, once or twice	13%	17%	15%	5%
Yes, more than once or twice	7%	7%	3%	2%
No	80%	75%	81%	88%
Don't Know / Refused	1%	1%	1%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A15: POLICE OFFICE EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY BY GROSS ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	£9,999 or less	£10,000- £14,999	£15,000- £24,999	£25,000- or more
Yes, once or twice	10%	11%	15%	20%
Yes, more than once or twice	4%	4%	7%	4%
No	86%	85%	77%	77%
Don't Know / Refused	0%	0%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A16: POLICE OFFICE EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY BY EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

	No Qualifications	Secondary level qualifications	Tertiary level qualifications
Yes, once or twice	11%	15%	21%
Yes, more than once or twice	6%	5%	5%
No	82%	78%	73%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Base: respondents under 70 years of age = 1037

TABLE A17: POLICE OFFICE EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	Employed	Economically inactive
Yes, once or twice	18%	9%
Yes, more than once or twice	6%	4%
No	76%	85%
Don't Know / Refused	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

TABLE A18: POLICE OFFICE EVER BEHAVED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY BY TENURE

	Owner-occupied	Rented
Yes, once or twice	14%	11%
Yes, more than once or twice	4%	8%
No	81%	77%
Don't Know / Refused	1%	5%
Total	100%	100%

Base: all respondents = 1189

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Police Ombudsman wishes to acknowledge the contribution of all those who were involved in the survey, particularly the following:

*Those members of the public whose goodwill and co-operation made the survey possible.*

*NISRA who carried out the fieldwork for the survey.*