

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

# 2010 Analysis of Incivility Complaints

June 2010

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# Foreword

As the Police Ombudsman, I have a statutory duty to ensure an independent and impartial police complaints system that has the confidence of the public and the police. Our role must be, in my view, more than just holding the police to account. We must also contribute to increased confidence and improved policing for the community.

As the organisation tasked with dealing with complaints from the public concerning police actions, we in the Police Ombudsman's Office are in a unique position to see both the range and frequency of situations which give rise to such complaints. We make recommendations and monitor their outcome in an attempt to avoid repetitive occurrences.

One of my ongoing concerns has been the relatively high percentage of incivility complaints. While I acknowledge that some police and public interactions can be stressful, it is possible to be professional in all situations.

During the first eight years of this Office, 20 percent of the complaints we received involved allegations about a range of police officer behaviour which we grouped together under the term 'incivility'. This term covers allegations such as the police officer being rude, showing a lack of respect, being abrupt or displaying a general lack of sensitivity in some situations. I am certain that the Chief Constable, the Policing Board, District Policing Partnerships and the public would agree that this is unacceptable.

Irrespective of whether the complaint has been substantiated or not, collectively such complaints provide a picture of some people's perception of the quality of service provided and where problems appear to arise in the delivery of that service.

With these issues in mind, I asked my staff to conduct research into incivility based upon our data and to capture the picture that emerges.

Arising from that picture, I have made a number of recommendations that will hopefully be of benefit to the Police, this Office, the Policing Board, District Policing Partnerships and the community. These focus on training, supervision, and continued monitoring to demonstrate changed behaviours. It also highlights for me the need to push some responsibility and accountability back to the police and police officer in the first instance for these quality of service issues. Accountability cannot be solely imposed from outside the police service.

I would like to thank my staff and acknowledge their effort in producing a thorough and critical analysis of incivility complaints. It adds some valuable information and focus to a needed debate around the standards and the quality of service expected of the police by the public.

**Al Hutchinson**  
**Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland**

# Executive Summary

- **Results from a yearly survey commissioned by the Police Ombudsman show that the most common type of unacceptable behaviour experienced by the general public was that an officer was disrespectful or impolite.**
- **Overview of allegations received between November 2000 and March 2009**
  - Twenty per cent (5421) of all complaints received between November 2000 and March 2009 contained one or more allegations of incivility.
  - Fourteen per cent (5821) of allegations received between November 2000 and March 2009 were classified as incivility.
  - North Belfast Area Command Unit recorded the highest number of allegations involving incivility (556 allegations).
  - Thirty five per cent of incivility allegations occurred on the street or road.
  - Incidents leading to an incivility allegation were more likely to take place on Saturday or Sunday than any other day of the week.
  - The most common factor specified behind incivility complaints was ‘arrest’ (i.e. during or immediately after arrest) (18%).
  - Sixty five per cent of allegations were made by men.
  - Of those complainants who provided details regarding their religious belief, 38% were Catholic and 48% were from the three main Protestant Religions.
- **Between April 2001 and March 2009, 2,502 complaints with one or more allegations of incivility were considered suitable to offer the complainant the opportunity of having their complaint dealt with through Informal Resolution.**
- **Characteristics of Police Officers who attracted incivility allegations**
  - Males and younger police officers were over-represented and females and older police officers under-represented among those police officers who attracted incivility complaints.
- **Analysis of 384 incivility allegations closed between April 2008 and March 2009**
  - When the exact nature of the incivility was explored many complainants tended to report that the police officer was “incivil”, “rude” or had a “bad attitude”.
  - When it was possible to isolate the exact nature of the incivility allegations the most common reasons were as follows:

- the police officer made an inappropriate comment (around one third of allegations)
  - the police officer used foul language (around one quarter of allegations)
  - the police officer was abrupt, dismissive or disinterested (around one quarter of allegations).
- **Complainants who made an incivility related complaint were more satisfied with the level of service provided by the Office of the Police Ombudsman than overall complainants to the Office.**

# Introduction

The Office of Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (the Office) was established under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 to provide an independent system for the investigation of complaints against police.

During the period between November 2000, when it opened, and March 2009 it received 5,821 allegations from members of the public that police officers had been guilty of incivility. That represented 14% of all the allegations received during that period and represents a significant 'quality of service' issue for the police.

Given the volume of such allegations, the Office undertook an analysis to establish if any trends or patterns could be established and any recommendations made which would help prevent such situations from arising in the future.

The report draws on a variety of sources of information including public responses to the annual Omnibus surveys, complaints recorded on the Police Ombudsman's Case Management System (CMS) prior to November 2008 and complaints recorded on its Case Handling System (CHS) after that date.

The report gives detailed information about the alleged behaviour of police officers which some people have found unacceptable, it provides a profile of the people who have made such complaints and the police officers they have complained about, of the issues at dispute and how this Office has dealt with them.

Arising from this analysis, the Police Ombudsman has made a number of recommendations for both the PSNI and for his own Office to consider.

# Methodology

## **Findings of Public Attitude Survey: Incivility Type Behaviour Experienced by the General Public**

As part of a programme of research, the Office has commissioned a survey of public awareness of the police complaints system every year since 2000. Data were analysed using information from surveys conducted from 2004-2009. Over these six years interviews were achieved with 7,081 individuals, representing a response rate of 59 % of the *eligible* sample.

## **Analysis of Incivility Allegations Received November 2000- March 2009 and Incivility Complaints referred to PSNI for Informal Resolution**

Prior to December 2008 complaints were recorded using the Case Management System (CMS). The CMS was complaint based and one complaint closure was made against each complaint.

From December 2008 complaints and allegations are recorded in the Case Handling System (CHS). The new CHS is allegation based and Police Ombudsman staff make one or more recommendations against each allegation.

The Police Ombudsman CMS and CHS were used to identify incivility allegations which were received from November 2000 until March 2009. The systems also record details such as the time and location of incident, the circumstances of the incident, the demographics of the complainant and the outcome of the complaint including whether the complaint has been informally resolved.

All complainants were also asked to fill in an equality monitoring form asking for information relevant to the nine categories specified in Section 75 of the NI Act. Of the 5,421 complainants who made one or more allegations of incivility, 2,115 returned forms (39%). In addition to those who declared their gender on the monitoring form it was also possible to determine gender from their title or salutation so that there was a sample of 99% for whom gender was known. In addition to those who declared age on the monitoring form it was also possible to determine age from date of birth, giving an overall sample of 63% for whom age was known.

Data were extracted from the CMS, CHS and equality monitoring databases and analysed using a statistical software package called SPSS.

## **Characteristics of Police Officers Associated with Incivility Allegations**

The new CHS allows each incivility allegation to be associated to individual police officers. During the period from 1 January 2009 – 31 December 2009, 607 individual

police officers were associated with incivility allegations. The characteristics of these individual police officers eg age and gender were obtained from the Police Service of Northern Ireland and analysed using SPSS.

### **Analysis of Incivility Allegations April 2008-March 2009**

A detailed examination was undertaken of 384 incivility allegations received between April 2008 and March 2009. Documents in the relevant complaint files, including complainant statements and progress logs were examined in order to build up a synopsis of each case. This facilitated an analysis of the nature of the incivility allegation and the circumstances surrounding the incident.

### **Complainant Satisfaction Survey**

The Complainant Satisfaction Survey allows complainants to express their views on services provided by the Office. When a complaint is closed complainants are mailed a confidential self-completion questionnaire asking their views. This report uses data from complainants whose complaint was closed between April 2006 and March 2009. During this time period 8,152 questionnaires were sent out and 1,710 replies were received, representing a response rate of 21%.

# Training

Prior to commencing the Student Officer Training Programme (SOTP) in Garnerville, potential recruits are invited to attend an induction programme which provides the individual with information on the training programme and introduces the PSNI Code of Ethics. During this induction the students are briefed on a number of definitions which have to be learned and followed. One of the first definitions that the student comes across is the one for courtesy:

*‘Courtesy is an essential quality and one, which will smooth many a path. The public have the right to expect it, and with it, its complementary quality – good temper. It should be remembered that an angry person is quite incapable of exercising the judgement and discretion so often needed in the performance of police work. A police officer should be careful to avoid giving any justification for complaints of over-zealousness or the causing of unnecessary embarrassment to any individual. In carrying out my duty the confidence of the public should be retained by exercising courtesy, discretion and common sense’.*

The 21 week SOTP for student PSNI officers encompasses the following six modules; Police and Community Relationships, Criminal Justice System, Crime, Road Policing, General Police Duties and Officer Safety & Wellbeing.

One of the key elements of the SOTP is Effective Communication and the ability of students to communicate effectively in a professional manner with any member of the public whom they may come into contact with, whether this is a victim, witness, suspect or other.

Although there is no specific training course dealing with the issue of incivility, emphasis is placed on the quality of service provided by the police and this underpins many of the aspects of the training. Student officers are assessed on how they interact with the public/customers during various scenarios and they are marked on key aspects of the interaction e.g. if they introduce themselves to the individual, whether or not they deal with individuals in an ethical manner, if an officer shows respect and dignity to the individual, if they act in a polite and tolerant manner and whether appropriate behaviour and language are used. This is not an exhaustive list but rather examples of the key areas in which student officers are assessed during the initial training received.

In April 2009 a new policy directive ‘Quality of Service Commitment (PQoSC) was issued. This sets out to the public the minimum standards and services which they can expect when they make contact with the police. This training has been introduced into the SOTP and it is also being rolled out to the Districts.

Probationer officers continue to be assessed by a supervisory officer once they are within the confines of the police station. This is more of a continuous customer service assessment rather than formal ‘incivility’ training.

# Case Studies

These case studies have been included to give the reader a flavour of the type of incivility allegations made to the Office of the Police Ombudsman.

## **Case Study Arrogant and Rude**

A male complained to the Police Ombudsman's Office that he was unhappy with the way a Police Officer spoke to him regarding a minor parking matter, stopping on a double yellow line while letting his passenger out of the car. He complained that the officer was arrogant and discourteous to him and his passenger, and would not listen to his explanation of why he had stopped. The complainant also stated that the officer was not wearing his police hat which he considered was very unprofessional. The Office decided that rather than initiating a full investigation into the matter, it would attempt to resolve the matter informally. The complainant agreed to this. A Senior Police Officer met with the complainant to discuss details of the complaint. He then spoke to the Police Officer concerned. The Officer totally refuted the allegations and felt he had acted professionally throughout the incident. The Senior Police Officer explained the need to portray a professional policing image at all times especially when dealing with minor traffic offences when discretion and courtesy can be used to the best effect. He also reminded him of the impact his words and actions can have on the community. The Police Officer accepted this advice. The Senior Police Officer then met the complainant and outlined the advice given to the Officer regarding maintaining a professional policing image. Following this meeting the complainant said he was satisfied with the actions of the Senior Police Officer and that he considered the matter as informally resolved.

## **Case Study Bad Language and Inappropriate Gestures**

The complainant alleged that when he tried to explain to police that he needed to retrieve his coat from a nightclub he had just left, officers used foul language towards him and gave him the fingers as they drove off. The complainant agreed to engage in the informal resolution process and a senior PSNI officer was appointed to attempt and resolve the matter. When seen by the senior police officer the complainant agreed that his complaint could be dealt with by way of informal resolution if his concerns at the conduct of police were brought to the attention of the officers concerned.

## **Case Study Arrogant and Hung up Telephone**

The complainant alleged that when stopped for a traffic related offence the officer to whom she spoke was arrogant and "talked down to him as if he were a child". The complainant further alleged that when she telephoned the local station the officer

involved hung up the phone stating that their conversation was now over. Following investigation the Office of the Police Ombudsman concluded that there was insufficient evidence to warrant disciplinary proceedings against the officer concerned and the complainant was so advised.

**Case Study**  
**Aggressive during House Search**

A complainant alleged that during a house search an officer behaved in an aggressive manner, making comments such as " you shut your mouth and sit there ". Having reviewed the available evidence following investigation the Police Ombudsman was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the police officer concerned was uncivil to the complainant and issued a report to police recommending that the officer be reminded of his obligations when dealing with members of the public and the importance of remaining professional at all times.

# Findings of Public Attitude Survey: Incivility Type Behaviour Experienced by the General Public

As part of a programme of research every year the Office commissions a survey of public awareness of the police complaints system.

Part of this survey asks respondents whether police officers have ever behaved towards them in an unacceptable way. The survey also asks what type of behaviour was unacceptable. Results from public awareness surveys carried out from 2004-2009 were used to indicate the level of ‘incivility’ type behaviour experienced by the general public from police officers even though they did not necessarily go on to make a complaint.

Overall, 16% of respondents said that police officers had behaved towards them in an unacceptable way. Those respondents who stated that they had been treated unacceptably by a police officer were asked to think about the most recent incident and indicate from a list of behaviours on a show card what the police officer did that was unacceptable.

Although “Incivility” was not explicitly named on the show card, two of the behaviour categories included could be classified as ‘incivility’ type behaviour - “the officer was disrespectful or impolite” and “the officer swore at you”.

Table 1 shows a full breakdown of the types of unacceptable behaviour experienced by respondents during the most recent incident.

**Table 1: Types of Unacceptable Behaviour Experienced During Recent Incident**

<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>% respondents who were treated unacceptably (n=1123)</b>
Officer was disrespectful or impolite	60
Officer did not carry out their duty properly	21
Wrongly accused of behaviour	15
Harassment	20
Officer didn't follow proper procedures	18
Officer swore	16
Officer was violent	15
Stopped or searched you without reason	14
Discrimination by race, gender, age or religion	12
Officer used sectarian, racist or sexist language	9
Searched house without reason	4
Officer took an item of respondent's property	2
Other	4

(Note: Percentages add to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one response)

As Table 1 shows the most common behaviour reported was that the officer was 'disrespectful or impolite' to the respondent (60%). In addition 16% of respondents reported that an officer had sworn at them.

Overall men (23%) were more likely to say they had been treated unacceptably than women (10%).

Looking at types of behaviour, whilst being 'disrespectful or impolite' was the most common behaviour reported by men and women, women were more likely to report this behaviour than men (65% of women compared to 57% of men).

However men who said they had been treated unacceptably were more likely to say the officer swore at them (19% of men compared to 10% of women).

Looking at age, younger men were more likely to say they had been treated unacceptably than older men (29% of those aged under 45 compared to 18% of those aged 45+).

Whilst older and younger men were equally likely to report 'being disrespectful or impolite' as an unacceptable behaviour, younger men were more likely report that police officers had sworn at them (25% of those aged under 45 compared to 11% of those aged 45+).

Overall, younger women were more likely to say they had been treated unacceptably than older women (13% of those aged under 45 compared to 8% of those aged 45+).

When asked about types of behaviour experienced, younger women were more likely to report the officer was disrespectful or impolite than older women (69% of those aged under 45 compared to 59% of those aged 45+). They were also more likely to say an officer swore at them (13% of those aged under 45 compared to 7% of those aged 45+)

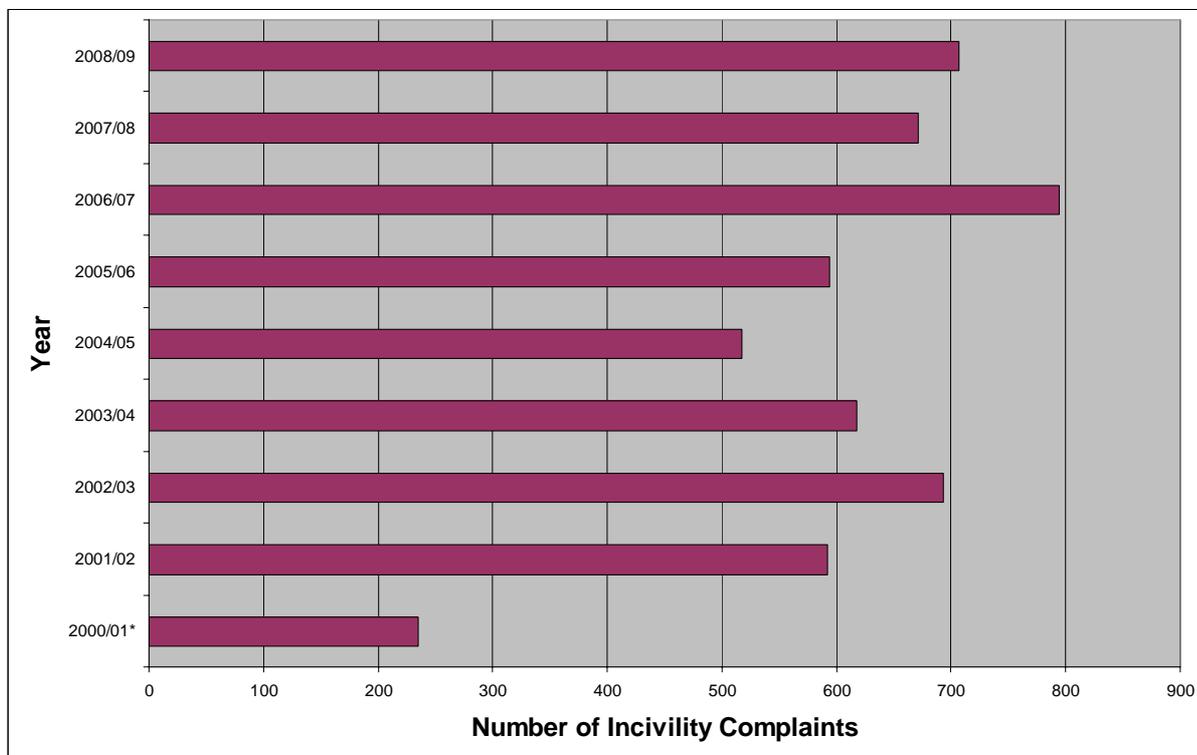
Catholics were more likely than Protestants to say they had been treated unacceptably (18% compared to 14%). Similar proportions of both groups chose the category 'disrespectful or impolite' when asked what type of behaviour they experienced. Catholics were more likely to report that the officer had sworn at them (21% of Catholics compared to 13% of Protestants).

# Overview of Allegations Received November 2000-March 2009

## Number of Incivility Complaints and Allegations

During the period from 6 November 2000 – 31 March 2009 there were a total of 26,709 complaints received by the Office. Of these complaints, 5,421 (20%) contained one or more allegations of incivility (Figure 1).

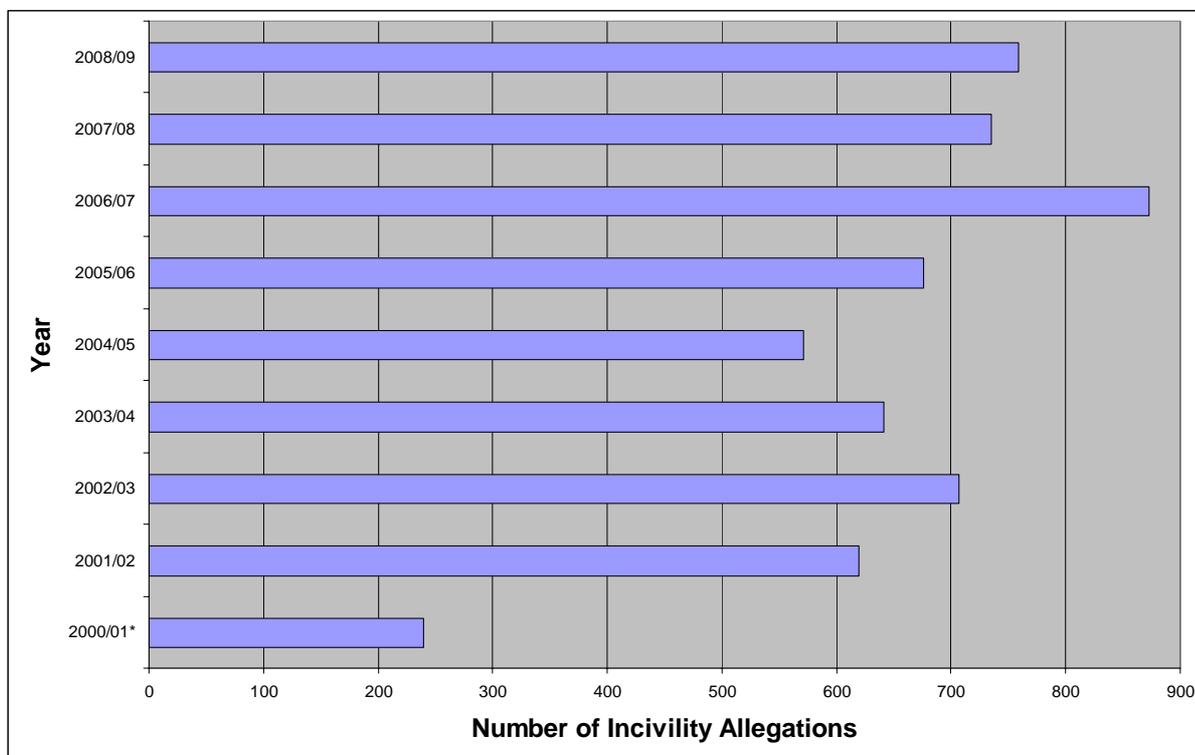
**Figure 1: Number of Incivility Complaints**



\* from November 2000

During the period from 6 November 2000 – 31 March 2009 there were a total of 41,424 allegations received by the Office (Figure 2). Overall 5,821 (14%) of these were incivility allegations.

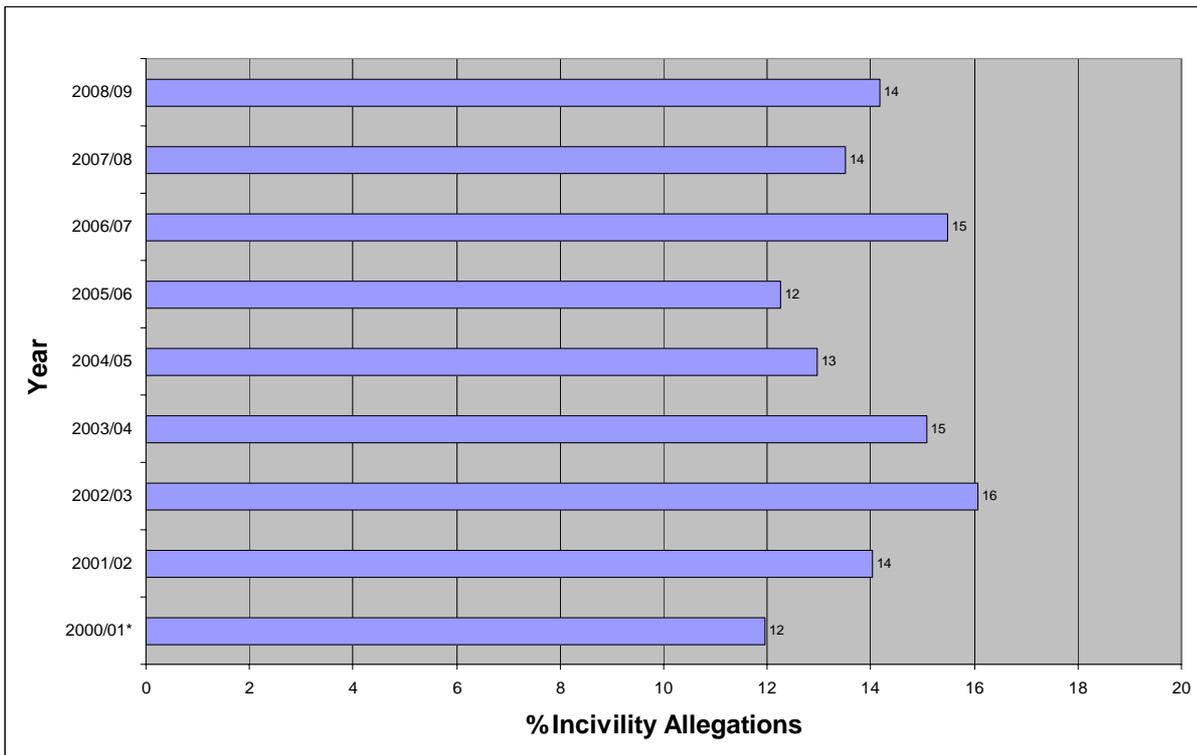
**Figure 2: Number of Incivility Allegations**



\* from November 2000

Over the years the proportion of incivility allegations has ranged from 12% in 2000/2001 to 16% in 2002/2003 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Percentage of Total Allegations Classified as Incivility Allegations**

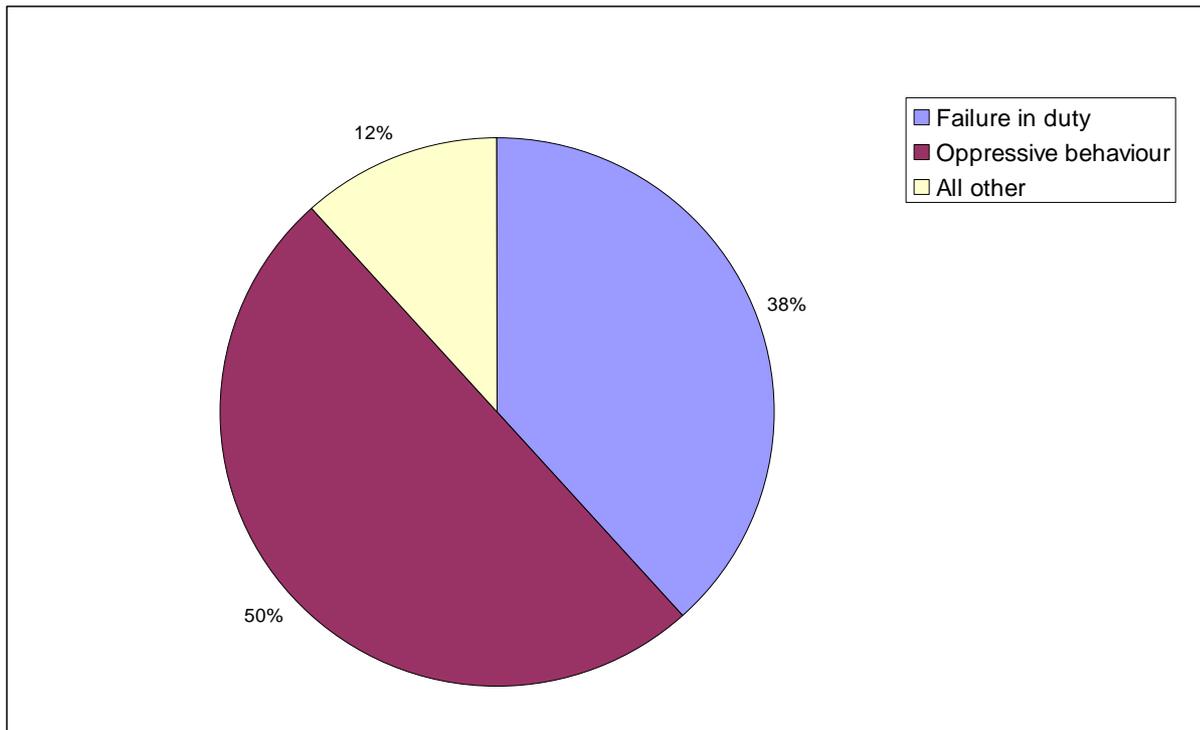


\* From November 2000

## Types of Allegations associated with Incivility Complaints

Figure 4 gives an overview of the types of allegations which were associated with complaints which contained one or more incivility allegations (from this point on referred to as incivility complaints). Half of these allegations were Oppressive Behaviour allegations and 38% Failure in Duty allegations.

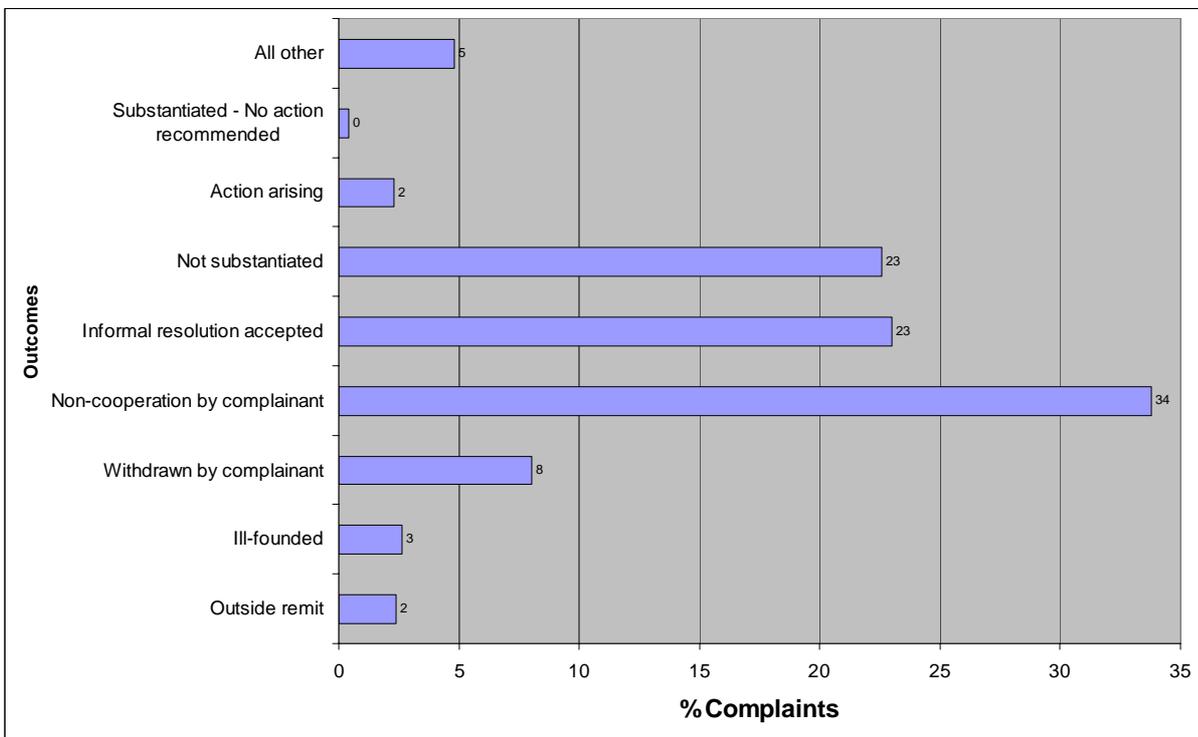
**Figure 4: Types of Allegations Associated with Incivility Complaints.**



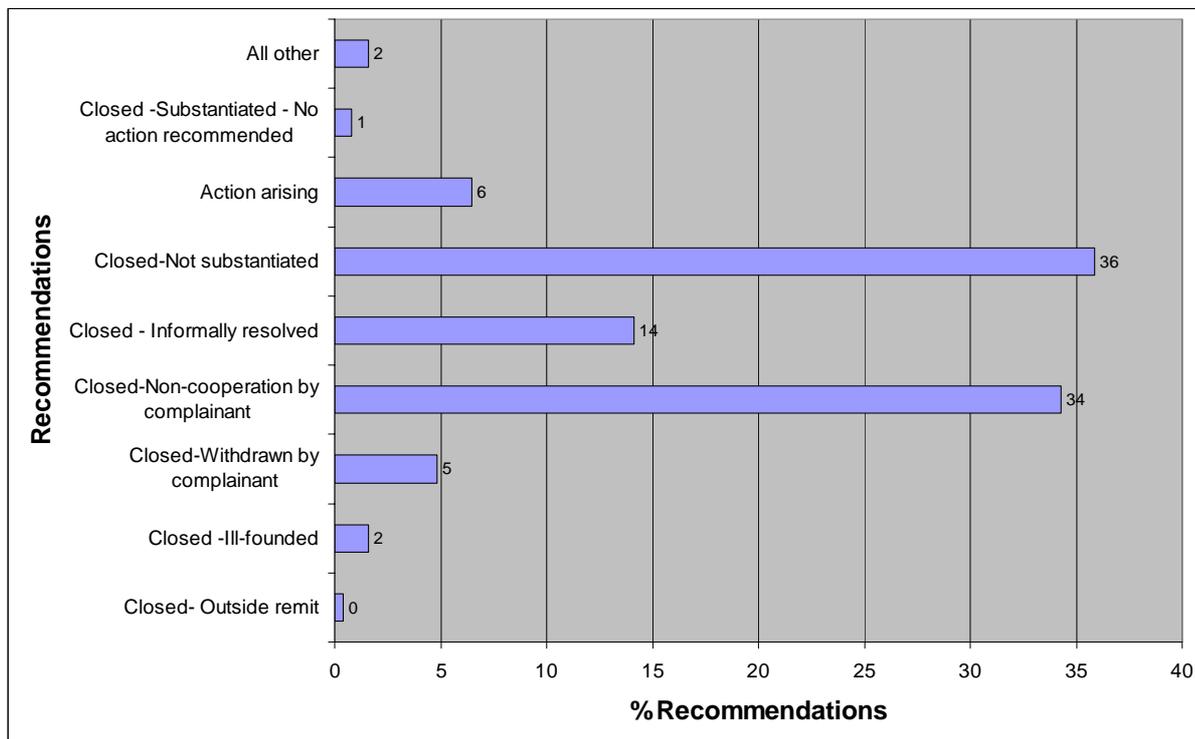
## Outcomes

Prior to November 2008 complaints were recorded using the CMS. The CMS was complaint based and one complaint closure was made against each complaint. Figure 5 shows the types of closures relating to incivility complaints made in the period in which this system was used (1 November 2000 – 30 November 2008). Complainants did not cooperate in 34% of cases and a further 8% withdrew their complaints. Twenty-three percent of complaints were investigated but not substantiated and action arose from 2% of complaints closed.

**Figure 5: Outcomes of Incivility Complaints (includes complaints closed until 30 November 2008 on CMS)**



**Figure 6: Recommendations Arising from Incivility Allegations (includes recommendations made against allegations closed from 1 December 2008 until 31 March 2009 on CHS)**

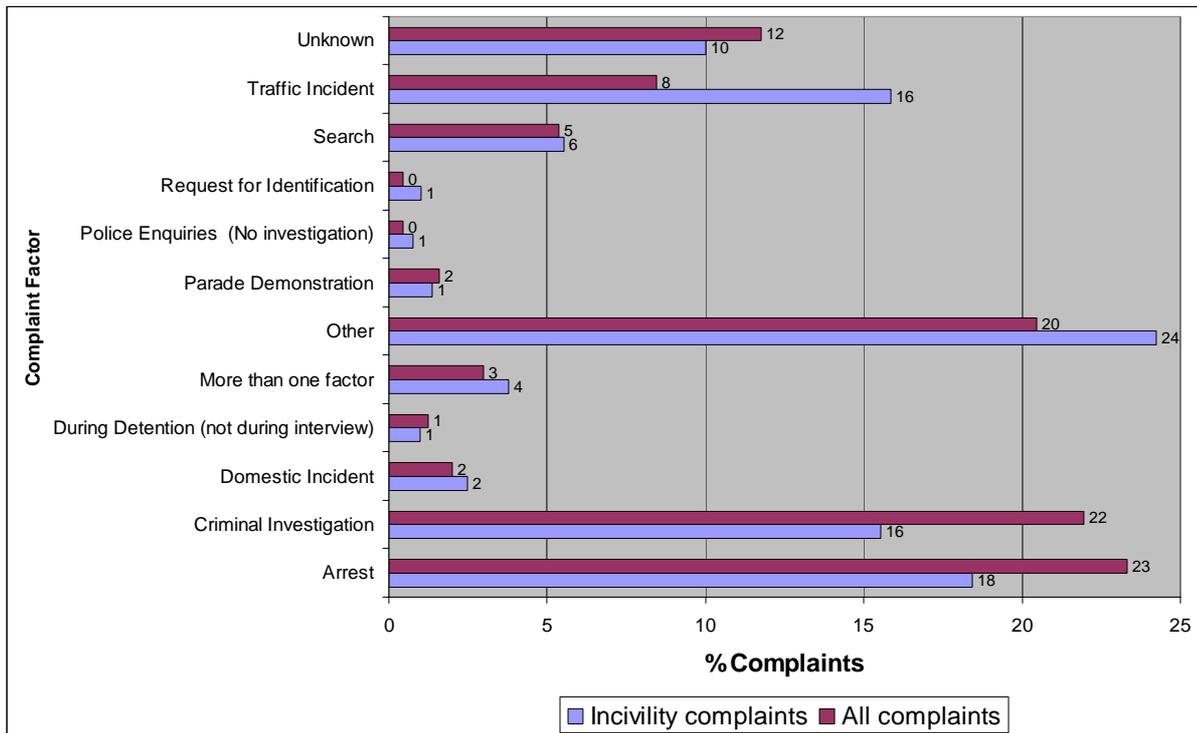


From November 2008 complaints and allegations are recorded in the CHS. The new CHS is allegation based and one or more recommendations are made against each allegation. Figure 6 shows 36% of recommendations arising from incivility allegations closed up until March 2009, were “Closed – Not Substantiated” . Thirty four per cent of recommendations were “Closed- Non cooperation” and a further 5% were “Closed – Withdrawn by complainant” .

### Factors Underlying Complaints

Where practicable, the Office retains information on the factors involved in complaints. Factors behind complaints include criminal investigation, arrest, traffic incident, search and parade/demonstration. The most common factor specified behind incivility complaints was ‘arrest’ (i.e. during or immediately after arrest) (18%) followed by ‘criminal investigation’ and ‘traffic incident’. Comparing factors behind incivility complaints to overall complaints, ‘traffic incident’ was a more common factor behind incivility complaints than overall complaints (16% compared to 8%).

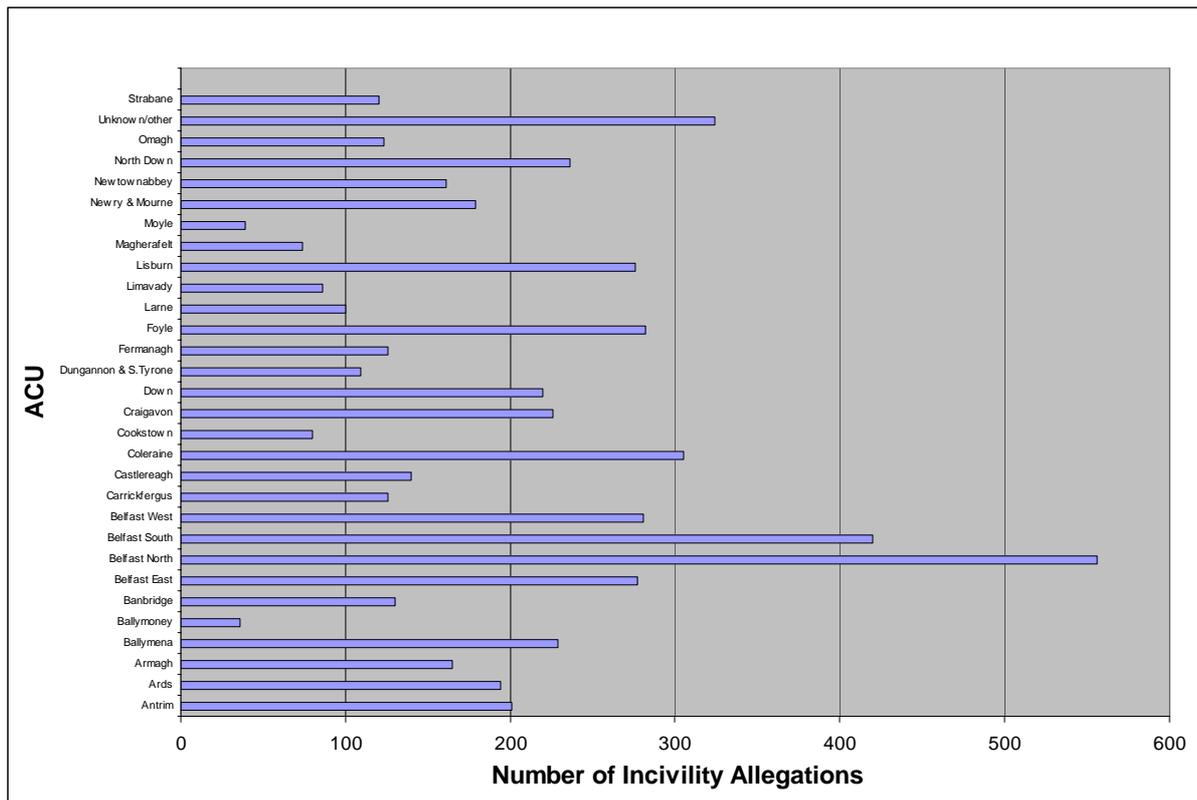
**Figure 7 Complaint Factor Behind Incivility Complaints**



## Location of Incidents Involving Incivility Allegations

The Area Command Unit (ACU) that had the highest number of incivility allegations from 6 November 2000 - 31 March 2009 was North Belfast, with 556 allegations (Figure 8).

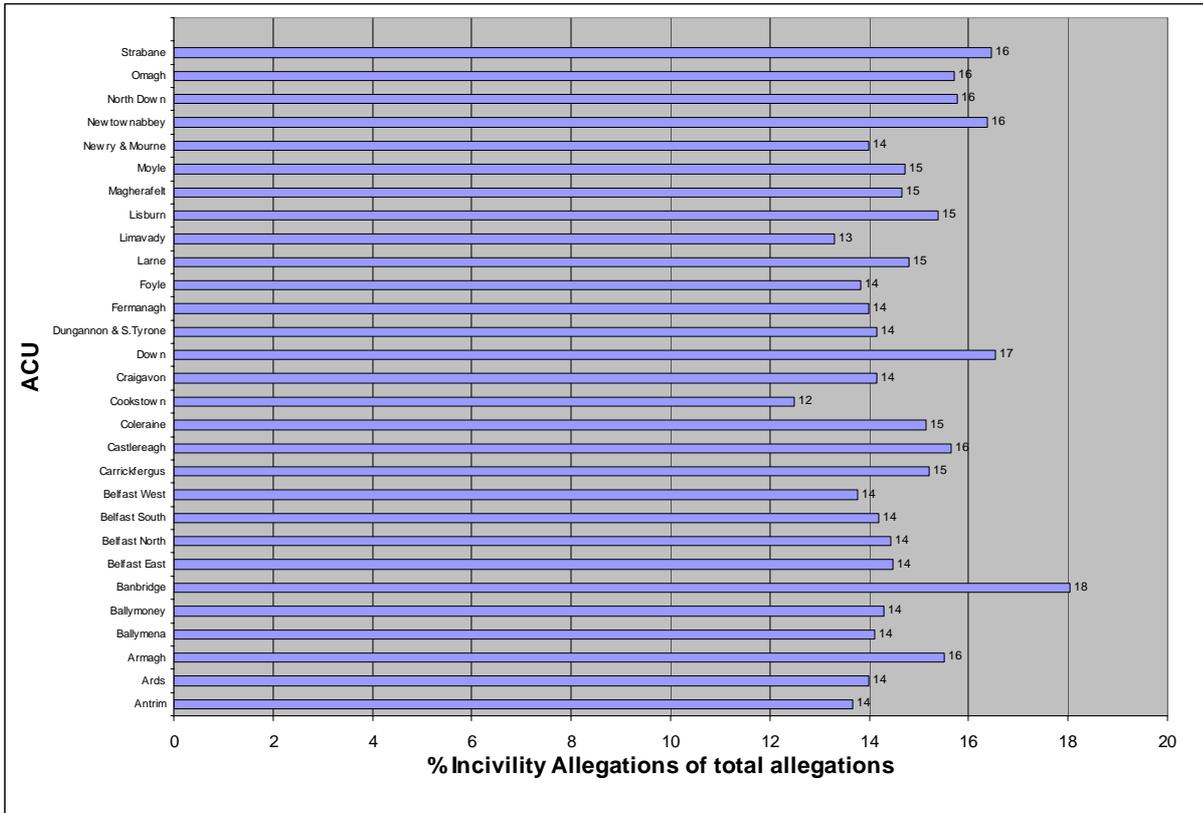
**Figure 8 Number of Incivility Allegations Arising per ACU**



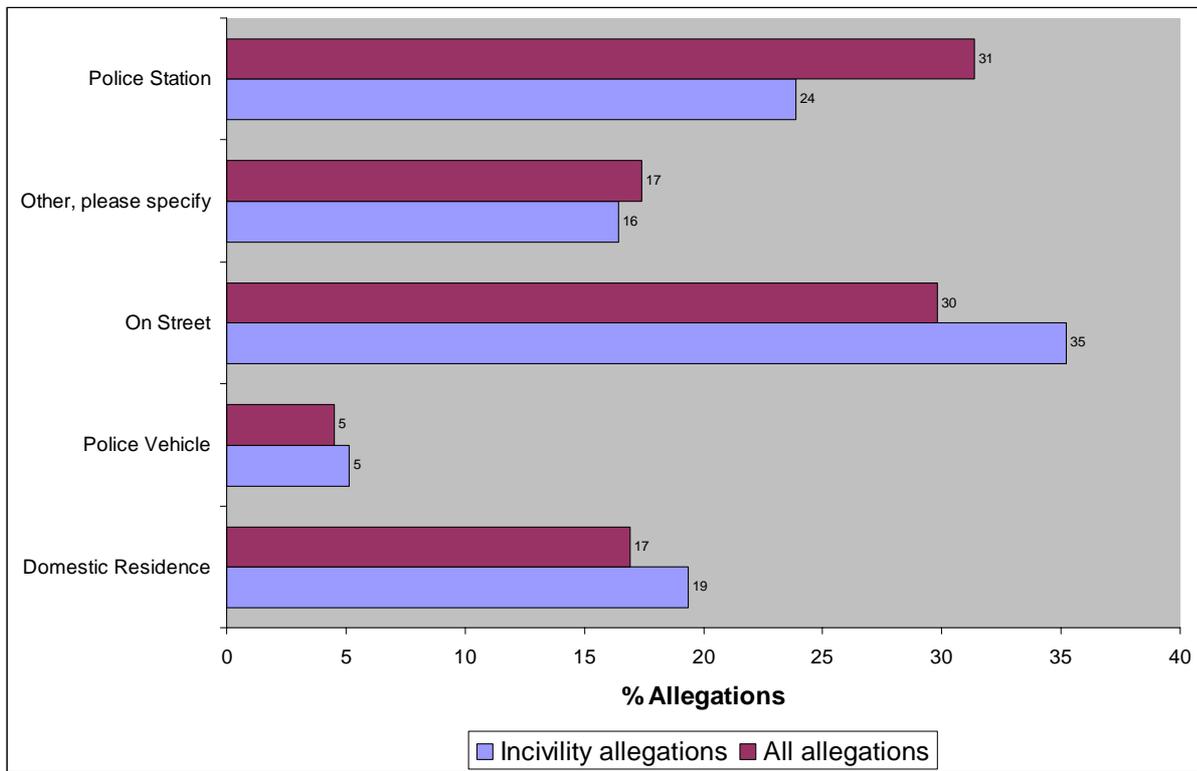
**\*Allegations are recorded by the Area they occur in.**

Figure 9 shows the proportion of allegations received per ACU that were classified as incivility allegations. Overall, in Northern Ireland 14% (5,821) of all allegations were classified as incivility allegations. This was fairly consistent across all ACUs. The highest proportion of allegations classified as Incivility allegations were received in Banbridge ACU (18%) and the lowest proportion in Cookstown ACU (12%).

**Figure 9 Proportion of Allegations Classified as Incivility Allegations Arising per ACU \***



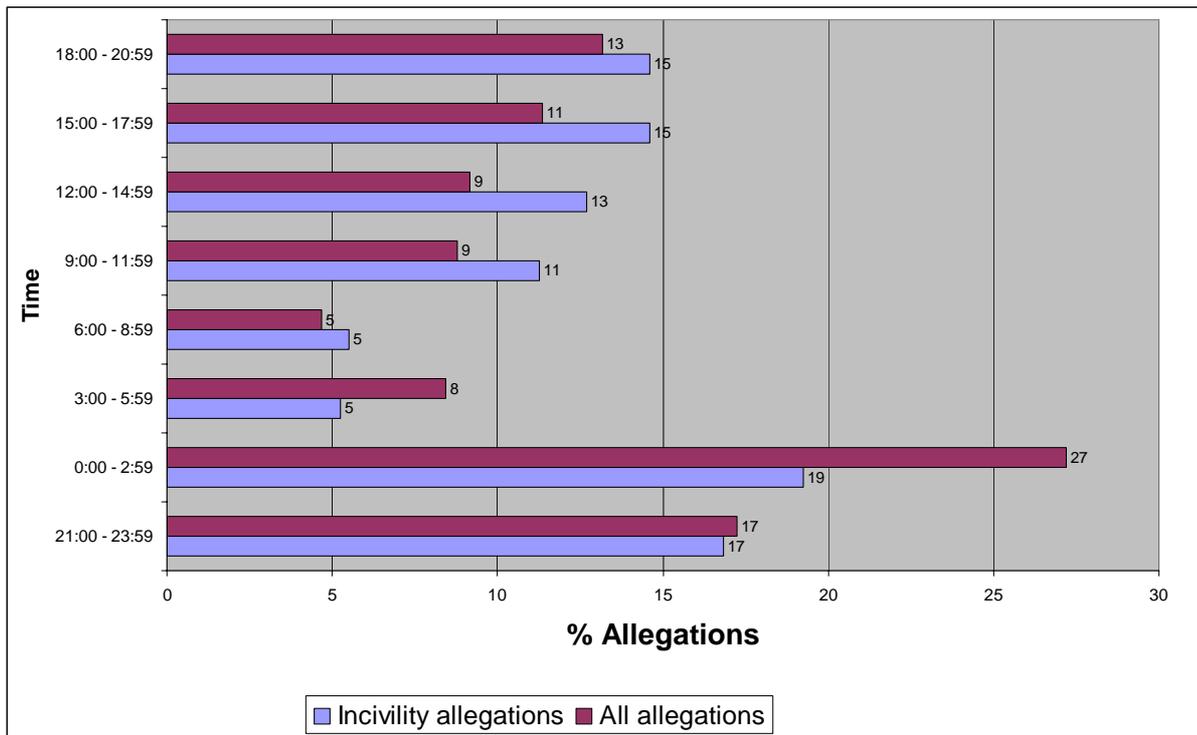
**Figure 10 Location of Incidents Leading to Incivility Allegations**



Where the locations of the incivility allegations were known, they were most likely to occur on the street (35%). The next most frequently occurring location was in a police station (24%) or domestic residence (19%). Comparing the location of incivility allegations to overall allegations the location was more likely to be on the street (35% compared to 30%) and less likely to take place at a police station (24% compared to 31%).

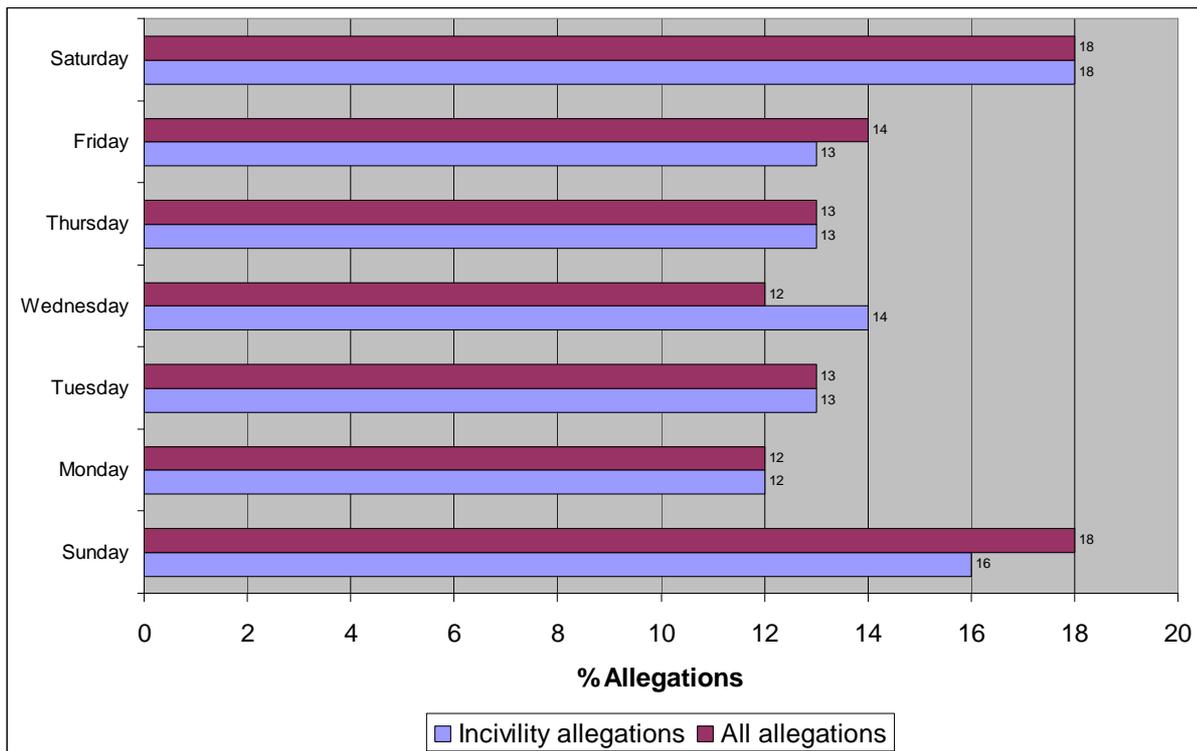
## Time and Day of Incidents Involving Incivility Allegation

Figure 11: Time of incident leading to incivility allegation



Nearly one fifth (19%) of all incidents leading to incivility allegations took place between midnight and 3:00am. However compared to overall allegations received by the Office, incidents involving incivility were less likely to take place in this early morning period.

**Figure 12: Day of Incident Leading to Incivility Allegation**

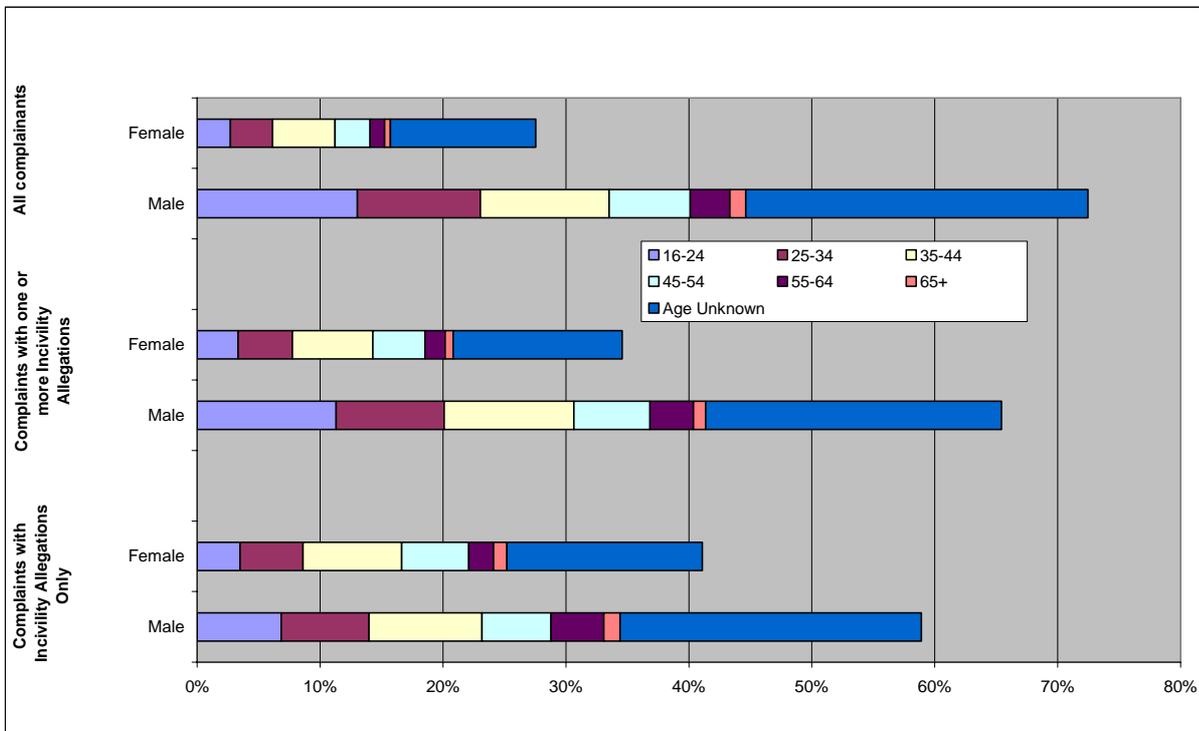


Incidents leading to incivility allegations were slightly more likely to take place on Saturday or Sunday than other days of the week. The distribution of incivility allegations by day is similar to the overall allegations.

## Profile of Complainants

Looking at the profile of complainants generally, 72% of complainants were men and 28% women. However, for complainants who had made one or more allegations of incivility, the proportion of men was smaller, at 65%, and the proportion of women was greater, at 35%. For complainants who made complaints containing only allegations of incivility, the proportion of men is smaller again, at 59%, with women accounting for 41%.

**Figure 13: Complainants by Age and Gender**

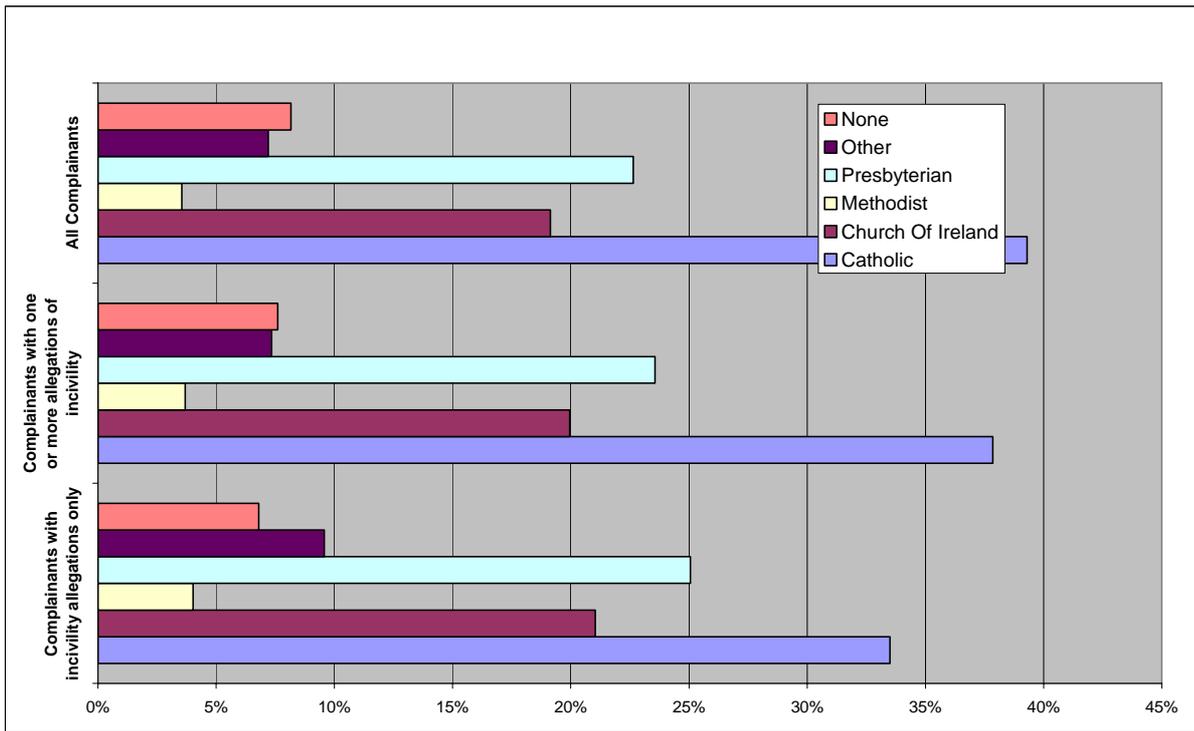


Within the gender breakdown, the age distribution of complainants varied depending on the types of allegation made. Younger men were less likely to make complaints with only allegations of incivility and women aged between 25-54 were more likely (Figure 13).

Of those complainants who provided details regarding their religious belief, 38 % were Catholic and 48% were from the three main Protestant churches.

Catholic respondents made up a smaller proportion of complainants making allegations of incivility than they did of all complainants and complainants with religious beliefs outside of the main Christian religions in Northern Ireland made up a greater proportion (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Complainants by Religious Belief**

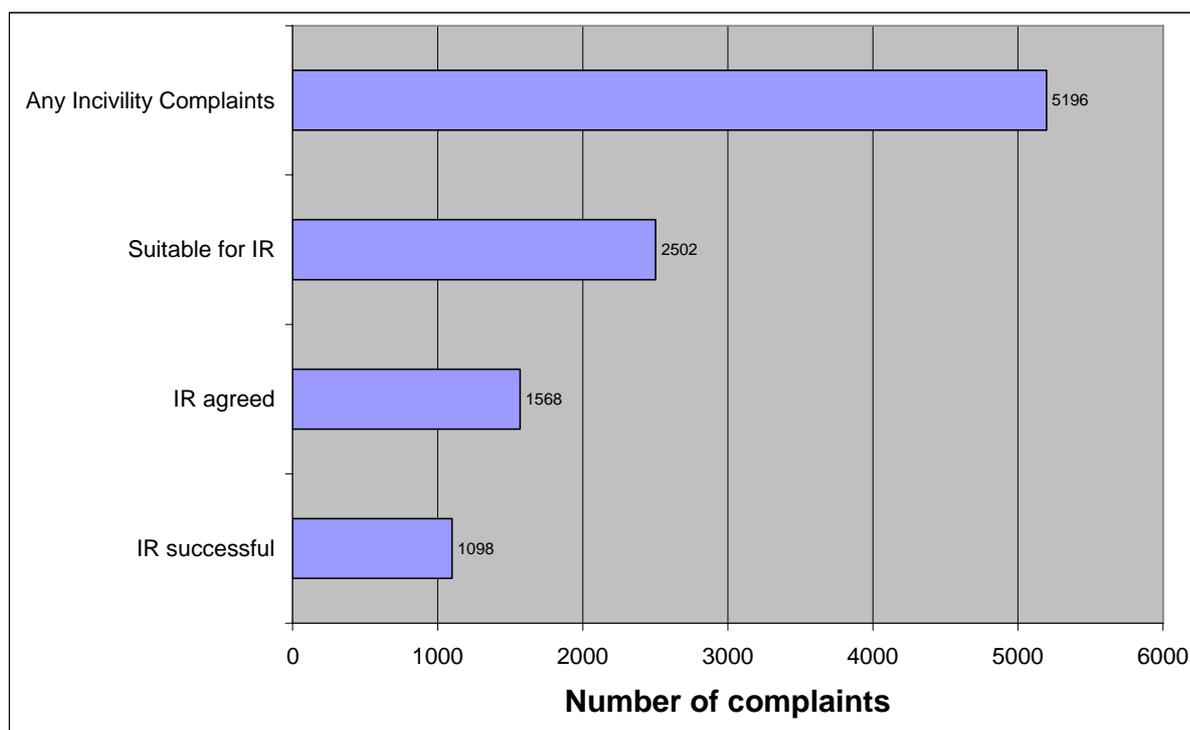


# Complaints Referred to the PSNI for Informal Resolution

When an allegation is made to the Office of the Police Ombudsman which is of a less serious nature such as incivility the Office determines whether the matter is suitable for Informal Resolution (IR). An incivility allegation that is associated with a more serious allegation is not deemed suitable for IR. When a complaint is deemed suitable for IR the complainant's consent is required before the process can be initiated. In the absence of complainant consent IR cannot be pursued. Consent of the police officer complained of is not a prerequisite for attempting to informally resolve a complaint. Having secured complainant consent for the process the complaint is referred to the PSNI Professional Standards Department (PSD) who appoint an officer of at least Inspector Rank (the Appointed Member) to try and resolve the complaint. If the Appointed Member, having spoken to the complainant, succeeds in resolving the matter the Office is informed in writing of the outcome and the complaint is closed. Should, for whatever reason, the complaint fail to be resolved the matter is referred to the Office for investigation.

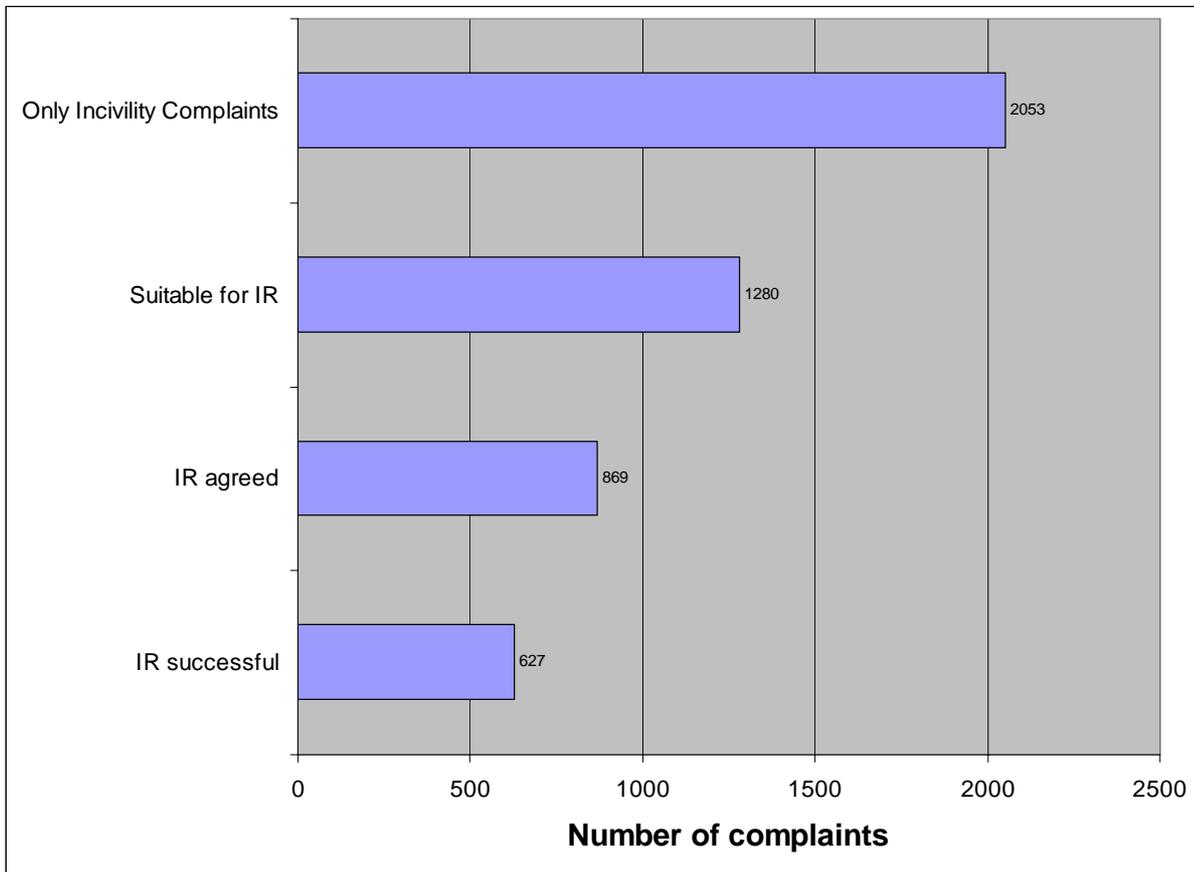
Between April 2001 and March 2009 2,502 complaints with one or more allegations of incivility were considered suitable to offer the complainant the opportunity of having their complaint dealt with through IR. This represents 48% of all such complaints. Sixty three per cent of the complainants (1,568) agreed to the IR process and of those, 70% (1098) were successfully informally resolved (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Complaints with one or more Incivility Allegations Considered Suitable for IR**



Of the 2,053 complaints that had only allegations of incivility, 1,280 (62%) were considered suitable for IR. Sixty eight per cent of the complainants (869) agreed to the IR process and of those, 72% (627) were successfully informally resolved (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Complaints with only Incivility Allegations Considered Suitable for IR**



In cases where complainants were not offered IR typical reasons included: the complaint being withdrawn at an early stage or the complainant failing to indicate whether they wished to proceed with the complaint; non co-operation on the part of the complainant; the complaint being linked to another more serious complaint; or there being related criminal proceedings.

# Complainant Satisfaction with Incivility Complaints

The Complainant Satisfaction Survey allows complainants to express their views on services provided by the Office. The survey includes the following questions:

- Overall, do you think you were treated fairly by the Office?
- Overall, taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from the Police Ombudsman’s Office?
- If you had a new complaint about the police, would you use the complaints system again?

Table 2 compares the results from all complainants who had complaints closed between April 2006-March 2009. Results show that complainants who made a complaint which included one or more incivility allegations were more satisfied with the level of service provided by the Office than overall complainants to the Office who had a complaint closed during the time period. Looking at complainants whose complaint contained only incivility allegations satisfaction rates were even higher. However, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings due to the small number of complainants whose complaint contained only incivility allegations and returned questionnaires during the time period (n=147).

**Table 2 Complainant Satisfaction Rates April 2006-March 2009**

Area	All complainants (n=1710)	Complainants whose complaint included one or more incivility allegations and other allegation types (n=418)	Complainants whose complaint contained only incivility allegations (n= 147)
% complainants thought they were treated fairly	73	80	86
% complainants satisfied or very satisfied with service	60	66	71
% complainants would use service again	73	77	82
% complainants satisfied with time taken to resolve complaint	59	63	71

# Analysis of Complaints Received April 2008-March 2009

During the period April 2008- March 2009 there were a total of 707 complaints received that contained one or more allegations of incivility . A sample of over half of these complaints (361 complaints containing 384 allegations) were examined in detail.

Areas examined included:

- Nature of Incivility
- Location of incident within police station

The majority of the allegations (99%) were made against a member of PSNI and only 1% against a civilian member of staff.

## Nature of Incivility

Around one fifth of incivility allegations stated that the officer was “aggressive” “intimidating”, “overbearing” or “verbally abusive”. Similar type allegations may also be recorded as Oppressive Behaviour allegations.

Some complainants alleged that the police officer was “incivil” , “rude” , “had a bad attitude” or was “unprofessional” and the exact nature of the incivility could not be determined from an analysis of the case documents. In some cases the exact nature of the incivility could be isolated. The nature of the incivility allegation can be categorised under a number of areas which are discussed below:

## Inappropriate Comments

Around one third of allegations stated that the police officer made an inappropriate comment or asked an inappropriate question.

In several cases these comments contained references to the complainant’s family:

One complainant alleged that when he asked the police officer what the caution meant the police officer replied, “Ask your da”. The complainant believes that this was a reference to the fact that his father was in prison and would be known to police.

Another complainant alleged that the police officer said “Your son is a child from hell.” Another alleged that her daughter overheard a police officer say, “I see the crow and widow crank have left us in peace” referring to the complainant’s sister.

Several complainants alleged that officers were not sensitive to the fact that there were children present at the scene. In one instance the complainant alleged that when she expressed concern about what would happen to her son if she was arrested the officer replied - "Sure I'll get social services up now to take him away". She claims that this upset her son and the officer should have asked her first if she had anyone to collect him.

A number of complainants said that police officers made inappropriate comments about the Police Ombudsman or about the fact that the complainant had previously made a complaint: One complainant alleged the police officer said, "Sammy doesn't like me, he made a complaint against me . Didn't you Sammy?". On other occasions the complainants alleged that the police officers referred them to the Office of the Police Ombudsman in a rude manner.

Some complainants alleged that the police officer made more personal comments: One complainant said that a police officer called him "big ears" and another claimed that a police officer said to him, "You are not right in the head".

Several complainants alleged that the police officers referred to other investigations inappropriately: One complainant claimed that a police officer asked her had she anything to do with an earlier stabbing incident.

A few allegations were of a lewd nature: One complainant alleged that a police officer said to him, "Stop perving at those girls - there are better looking ones over there in the Subaru."

## **Foul Language**

Over one quarter of allegations stated that the police officer used foul or bad language. The majority of these allegations contained explicit details of what language the police officer allegedly used during the incident.

## **Abrupt, Disinterested, Dismissive or Insensitive Behaviour**

Around one quarter of allegations stated that the police officer was abrupt, dismissive, disinterested or insensitive.

Many complainants alleged that the police officer used an abrupt tone: One complainant alleged that a police officer was "abrupt and unhelpful" when the complainant was paying a television licence fine. Another complainant alleged that a police officer abruptly asked him if he knew why he was stopped when driving.

Several complained about the police officer refusing to listen: One complainant alleged that the officer was "rude and abrupt, continuously raised her voice, refused to listen and didn't let me answer any questions". Another officer kept 'clock watching" and the complainant felt the police officer thought he was time wasting.

Some of these complaints concerned traffic incidents: One complainant alleged that the police officer ignored him when he tried to explain why the driver of his car stopped on yellow lines. Another complainant alleged that the police officer was just being smart and was just looking for someone to give a ticket to.

Some complainants alleged that police officers were dismissive: One complainant alleged that the police officer was dismissive of what had happened during an incident and said that, "The damage didn't amount to more than £2" . Another complainant alleged that the officer's manner was very dismissive leaving him "feeling in the wrong rather than the victim".

Several complainants alleged that police officers were insensitive: One complainant alleged that an officer was uncivil to him in relation to his child with autism. Another officer did not show any sympathy to the complainant when he was stopped on the way to see his mother in hospital. Another complainant alleged that a police officer was "shouting all over the street" and "should have been more discreet".

### **Inappropriate Laughter**

Around one tenth of allegations included the fact that the police officer laughed inappropriately during the incident: One complainant alleged that the that police officer laughed at him and said, "Sure you did that yourself" when referring to the injuries which the complainant received during an alleged assault by the police.

Another complainant said that when he told the officer he was going to make a complaint the officer sniggered and laughed at him, pointed at his shoulder and told him to go ahead.

Another complainant alleged that a police officer was 'over zealous' in his approach. He claimed that when the police officer returned to his vehicle after issuing a fixed penalty notice he laughed with his colleague. The complainant felt he was showing off.

### **Inappropriate Body Language**

Under one tenth of allegations stated that the police officer used inappropriate body language: One complainant alleged that the female police officer looked at the complainant "as if I was filth and beneath her".

Another complainant alleged that a police officer pretended to be getting an electric shock, mocking the complainant being 'tasered'.

Another alleged that the police officer "gave the fingers" during a stop and search incident.

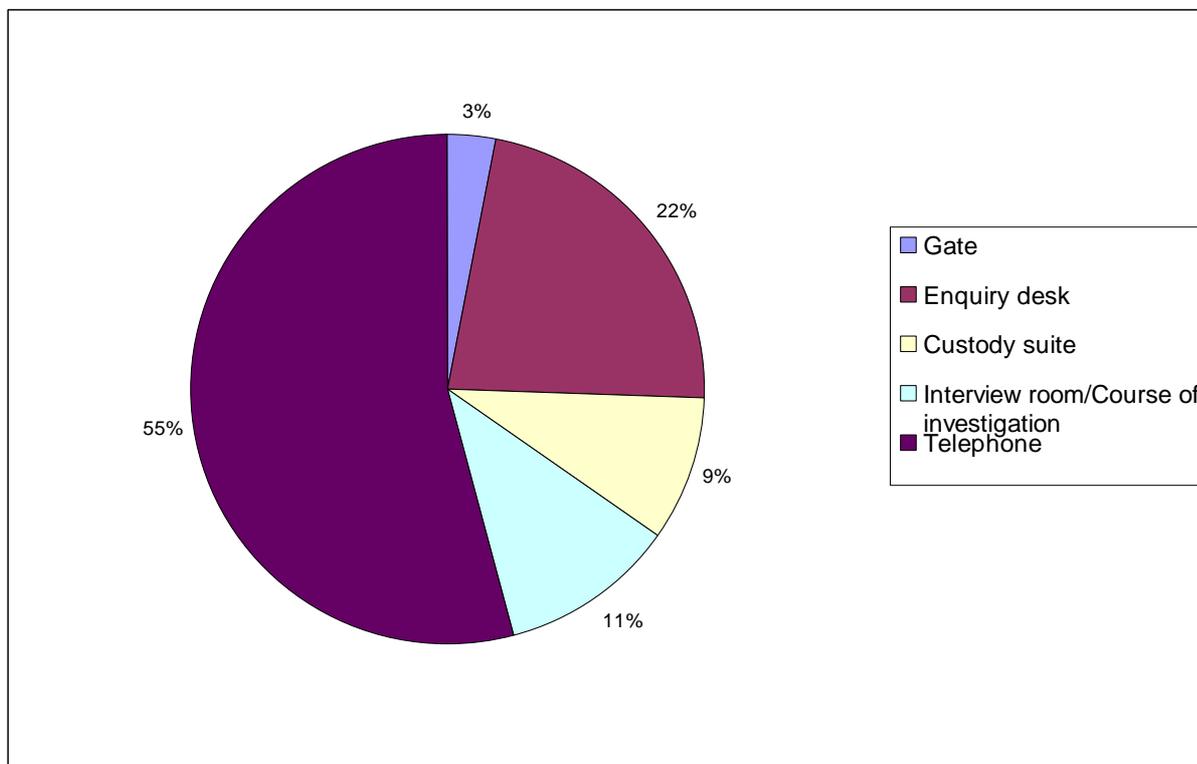
## Lack of Courtesy

Other complaints concerned a general lack of courtesy: Some complainants alleged that the police officer did not introduce himself, failed to explain the nature of his enquiry, ask the complainants permission to carry out a task or thank the complainant at the end of the process.

## Location of Incident within Police Station

Overall 104 (27%) of the 384 allegations examined in detail occurred in a police station. These 104 complaints were further analysed in order to determine the location within the police station.

Figure 17: Location of incident within police station



Over half (55%) of the incidents which occurred in the police station took place on the telephone and 22% at the enquiry desk.

# Characteristics of Police Officers

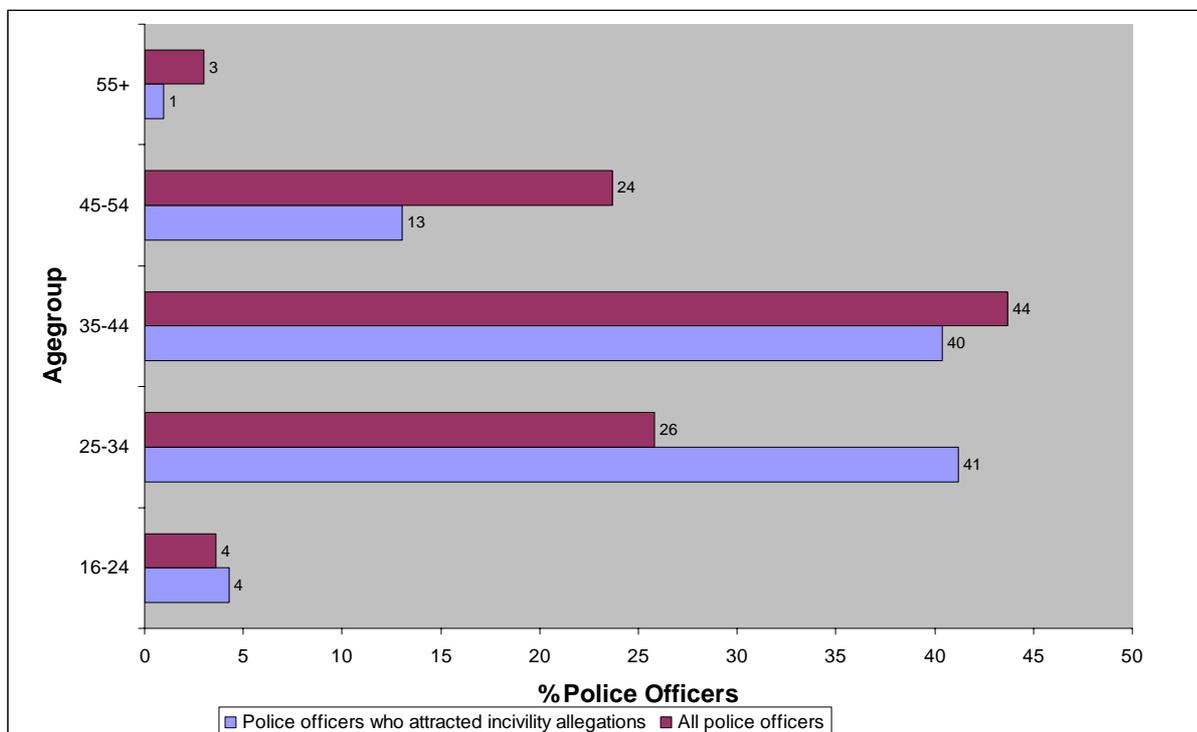
The new CHS allows each incivility allegation to be associated to individual police officers. Six hundred and seven individual police officers were identified specifically in relation to incivility allegations received during the period from 1 January 2009 – 31 December 2009. The following section explores the characteristics of these police officers. When an individual officer attracted more than one incivility complaint during the time period concerned the characteristic (eg age) at the time of the first complaint received is used.

## Gender

Eighty one per cent of police officers attracting incivility complaints were men and 19% were women. At the time of the analysis 75% of the total police service were men and 25% women which means that males were over-represented and females under-represented among those police officers who attracted incivility complaints.

## Age

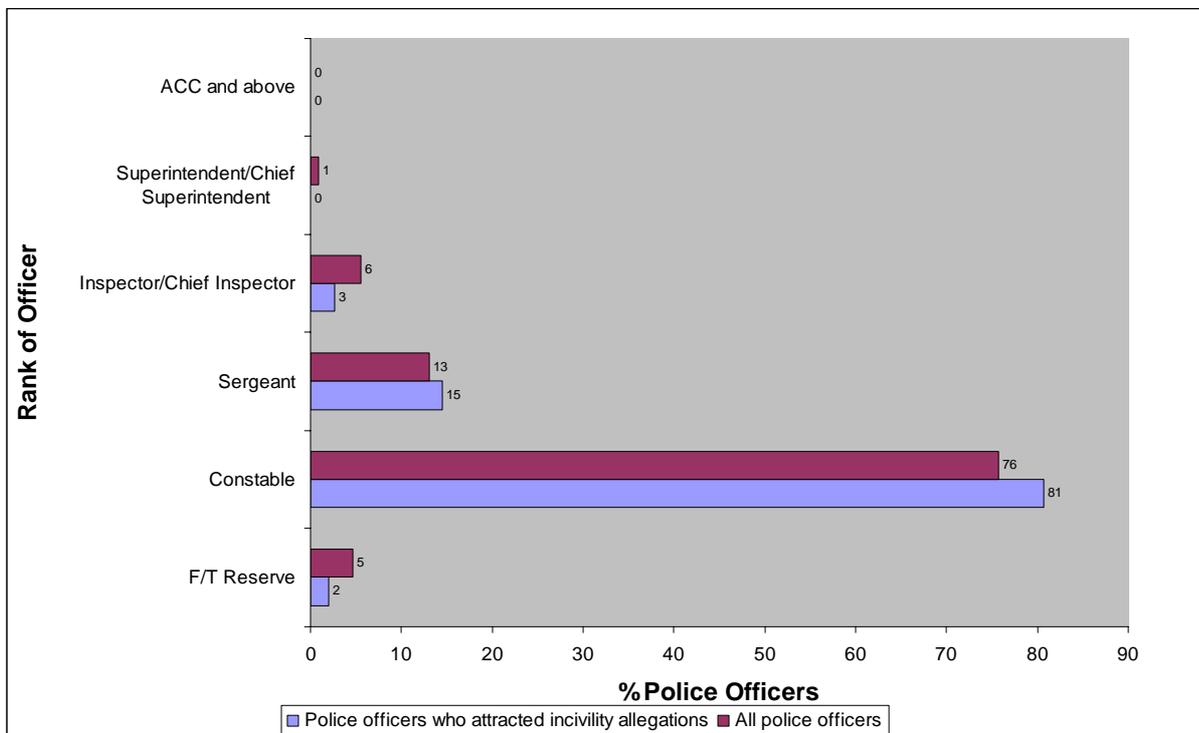
Figure 18: Age distribution of police officers who attracted incivility allegations.



The age distribution of police officers who attracted incivility complaints is different to the age distribution of the total police service. Figure 18 shows that younger police officers (aged 25-34) were over represented among those who attracted incivility

complaints and older police officers (aged 45-54) were under-represented.

**Figure 19: Rank of Police Officers who attracted Incivility Allegations.**



Looking at the rank of the police officer a higher proportion of Constables attracted incivility complaints than would be expected (81% of those who attracted incivility allegations were Constables compared to 76% of police officers overall).

**Figure 20: Department of Police Officers who Attracted Incivility Allegations**

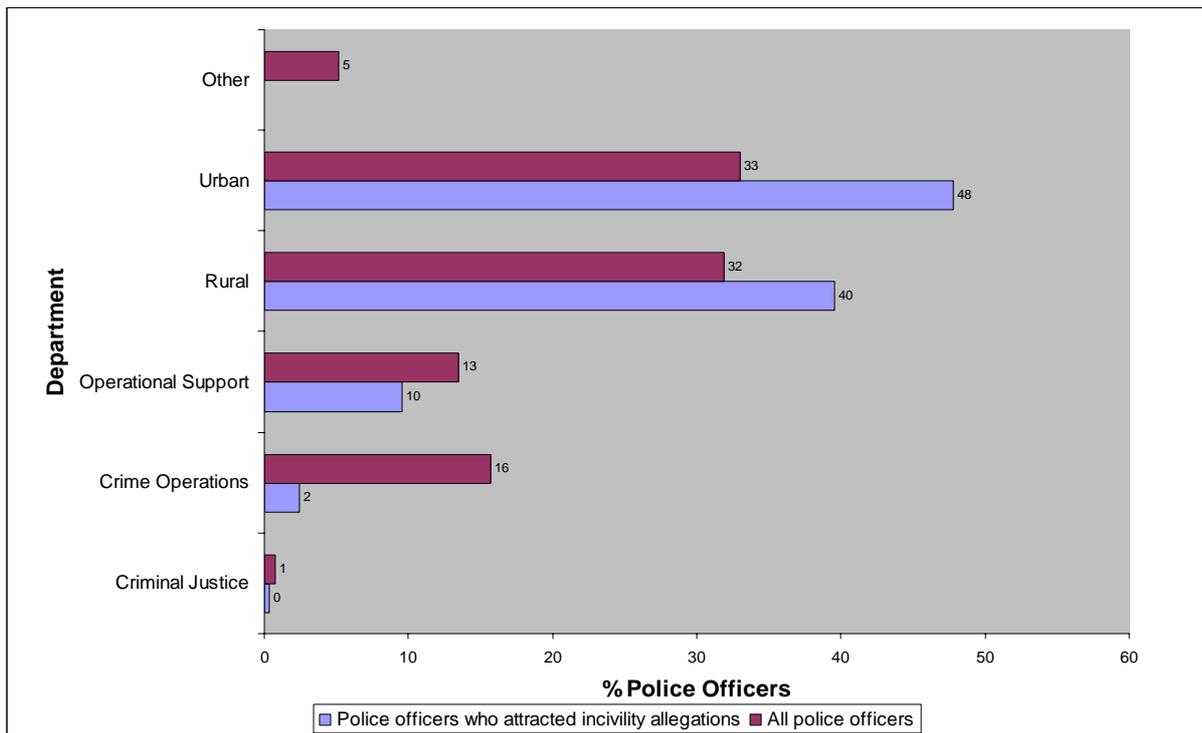


Figure 20 shows that police officers who attracted incivility allegations are over represented in both Urban and Rural Departments and under-represented within the Operational Support Department.

**Figure 21: Years of Service of Police officers who Attracted Incivility Allegations.**

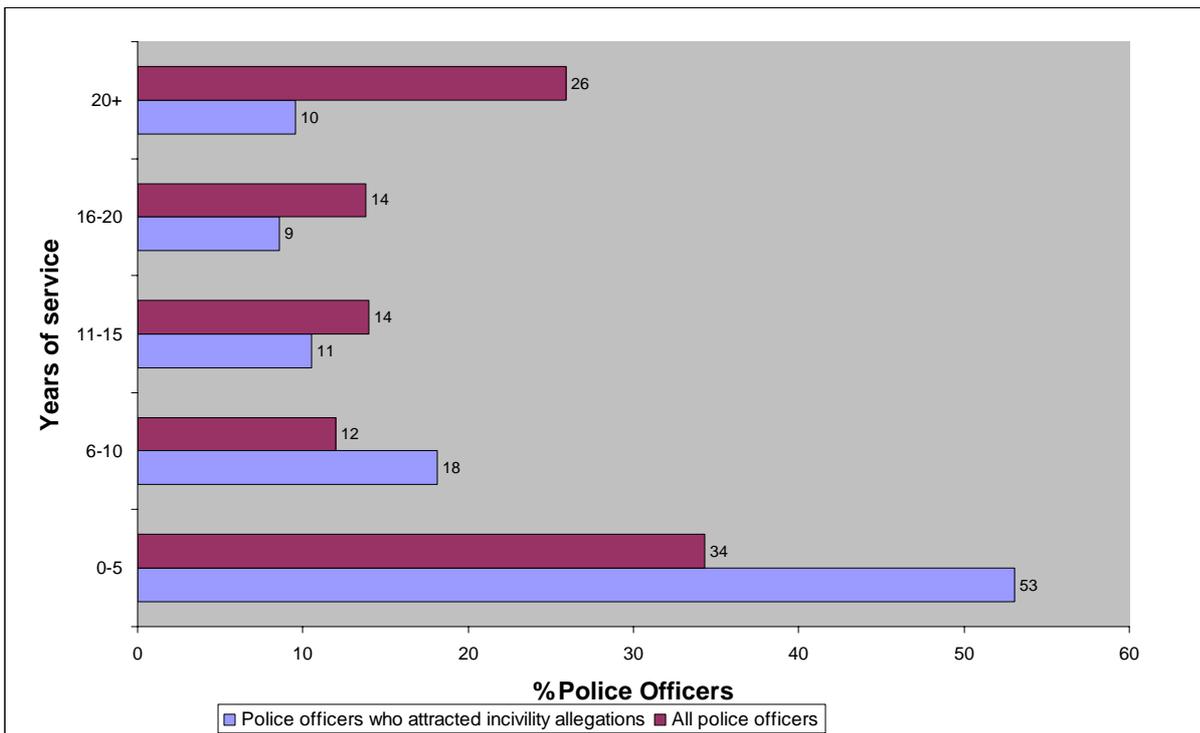


Figure 21 shows that over half of police officers who attracted incivility complaints had completed less than 6 years service compared to only one third of the total police service.

# Recommendations

The Police Ombudsman recommends that:

- PSNI should communicate the results of this report throughout the organisation. In particular results should be used to inform training plans.
- PSNI should make supervisory officers more responsible for the conduct of officers in their charge.
- PSNI should closely monitor officers who attract multiple complaints containing incivility allegations and take appropriate action.
- PSNI should look closely at reasons why traffic related incidents attract a disproportionate number of incivility complaints.
- PSNI and OPONI should continue to explore innovative ways of dealing with less serious allegations.
- PSNI should meet the Northern Ireland Policing Board and outline its response to the findings of this report.

# PSNI Response

The PSNI remains committed to reducing the number of complaints being made and civility is a matter that they believe is essential when effectively delivering a high quality service to the community. In respect of the recommendations:

- The findings of the report have been disseminated throughout the Service.
- The Professional Standards Department has met with the Training College and highlighted the contents of the report. Further consideration is being given to inform training plans and courses in the future. Civility is a key element which is assessed throughout Foundation and Probationary programmes.
- The PSNI currently monitors officers who attract multiple complaints, in all areas, and this is regularly highlighted throughout the Professional Standards Department forum.
- The contents of the report have been raised with the Operational Support Department in relation to the matters highlighted. A number of initiatives have been introduced to address this.
- Liaison continues with various stakeholders to raise awareness through briefings and in districts in relation to avoiding complaints.
- The Professional Standards Department meets regularly with the Northern Ireland Policing Board and updates them in relation to the Complaint Reduction Strategy.

**Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:**

Research and Performance Directorate  
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland  
New Cathedral Buildings  
St. Anne's Square  
11 Church Street  
Belfast  
BT1 1PG

**Telephone:** 028 9082 8648

**Fax:** 028 9082 8605

**Witness Appeal Line:** 0800 0327 880

**Email:** [research@policeombudsman.org](mailto:research@policeombudsman.org)

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