

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

Equality monitoring

Report

2005-2010

Published November 2010

Executive Summary

Complainants to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland were asked to complete monitoring questionnaires to enable the Office to capture data in relation to Section 75 categories, as well as employment, an indicator of social deprivation, and country of birth. Between April 2005 and March 2010 there were 16,040 complainants to the Office, of whom 5,912 (37%) returned completed questionnaires. The main findings were:

Gender and Age

- Seventy per cent of complainants were male and 30% female.
- Almost seventy per cent of complainants were under 45 years old. Only 4% were over 65.
- The proportions of male and female complainants have remained stable over the past five years.
- Males were over-represented compared with the population generally. Males under 45 years old comprised 27% of the population compared with 49% of complainants.
- Young men were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour while older men tended to make allegations of failure in duty.
- Women within all age bands were most likely to allege failure in duty, and women aged over 45 were more likely to allege incivility than younger complainants.
- Female complainants were more likely than males to make allegations of failure in duty or incivility, whilst males were generally more likely to allege oppressive behaviour.

Religious Belief

- Thirty eight per cent of complainants were Catholic, 19% Church of Ireland, 22% Presbyterian, 3% Methodist, 8% other, including other Christian, and 10% reported that they were of 'no religion'.

- The proportion of complainants with religious beliefs other than Catholic, and those with no religious belief, has been stable since 2005/06.
- The religious belief profile of complainants was slightly different to the general population, with 10% of complainants declaring that they had no religious belief compared with 14% of the population.
- Catholic complainants were more likely than complainants of other religious beliefs to make allegations of oppressive behaviour.

Racial Group

- Ninety seven per cent of complainants were White.
- The proportion of complainants who described themselves as White has changed little over the lifetime of the Office.
- A higher proportion of complainants were from ethnic minorities compared with the NI census figure of 1%.
- Allegations of racial discrimination comprised less than 1% of those made by White complainants but 6% of those made by people from ethnic minority groups.

Country of Birth

- Eighty eight per cent of complainants who returned monitoring forms had been born in Northern Ireland, 5% had been born in England, 2% in the Republic of Ireland, 1% in Scotland, 1% in other European countries and 2% in other countries outside the European Union.
- A smaller proportion of complainants had been born in Northern Ireland compared with the proportion recorded in the Northern Ireland Census.
- Complainants who stated that they were born in an 'other EU country' were significantly more likely than Northern Ireland-born complainants to make allegations of Failure in Duty.

Marital Status

- Forty three per cent of complainants were married or living with a partner, 37% were single, 17% separated or divorced and 3% widowed.
- The proportion of complainants within each marital status category has remained steady over the past 5 years.
- Greater proportions of complainants were single, separated, divorced or cohabiting, compared with the general population.
- Single complainants were equally likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour and failure in duty, yet were more inclined than other complainants to allege oppressive behaviour.

Disability

- Twenty six per cent of complainants reported that they had a disability.
- The proportion of complainants who described themselves as disabled has not varied since 2005/06.
- Complainants reported a higher level of disability than found in public survey data.
- People who reported that they had a disability were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour than those who did not, yet were just as likely to make allegations of failure in duty.

Employment

- Twenty seven per cent of complainants worked full-time, 15% were not working because of illness or disability, 14% were unemployed, 12% were self-employed, 9% were caring for their family or home, 9% were retired, 7% were working part-time, 4% were students and 2% otherwise employed.
- The proportion of complainants within each employment status category has been stable since 2005/06.

- A greater proportion of complainants compared with the general population were unemployed.
- Complainants who were unemployed were more likely than others to make allegations of oppressive behaviour.

Political Opinion

- Nineteen per cent of complainants supported the DUP, 7% the UUP, 9% the SDLP, 9% Sinn Fein, 4% the Alliance Party, 5% supported other parties and 45% supported no political party.
- Between 2005/06 and 2009/10 there were decreases in the proportions of complainants who supported the DUP and the SDLP, and an increase in those supporting no political party.
- There were fewer Nationalist supporters among complainants compared with the 2007 Assembly election voting patterns.
- There are no notable differences in the allegation types cited by people of differing political opinion.

Dependants

- Forty three per cent of complainants reported that they had dependants.
- Females were more likely than males to have dependants.
- The level of dependants amongst complainants overall was higher than the NI Continuous Household Survey finding.
- Complainants who had dependants were more likely than those who did not to make allegations of failure in duty and both groups were equally likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour.

Sexual Orientation

- One per cent of complainants reported that they were homosexual or gay.

Statistical Significance

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are only reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ($p < 0.05$) level of probability (two tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance.

Introduction and Methodology

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was set up by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 in order to provide an impartial and independent system for investigating complaints against the police in Northern Ireland. The Office is committed to fulfilling the obligations laid upon it by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) (the “equality duties”). To help us achieve this we send every complainant a confidential self-completion questionnaire, asking for information relevant to the nine categories specified in Section 75. As we are committed to providing a service to all individuals and socio-economic groups within our society, we also ask questions on the additional category of employment status, which we consider to be a reliable indicator of economic deprivation.

This report covers complaints made to the Office of the Police Ombudsman from April 2005 to 30 March 2010, during which time we recorded 16,040 complaints. The questionnaire included the categories of age, gender, marital status, religious belief, race, disability, sexual orientation, employment status, dependants, political opinion and country of birth.

When considering the types of allegation made, there is a difference in the distribution of allegation types between all complainants and the sub-group of complainants who returned equality monitoring questionnaires (respondents). For all complainants, 40% of allegations were of failure in duty and 32% were of oppressive behaviour. However, for respondents, 45% of allegations were of failure in duty and 28% were of oppressive behaviour. This suggests that complainants who make allegations of failure in duty are more likely to return equality monitoring questionnaires than complainants who make allegations of oppressive behaviour.

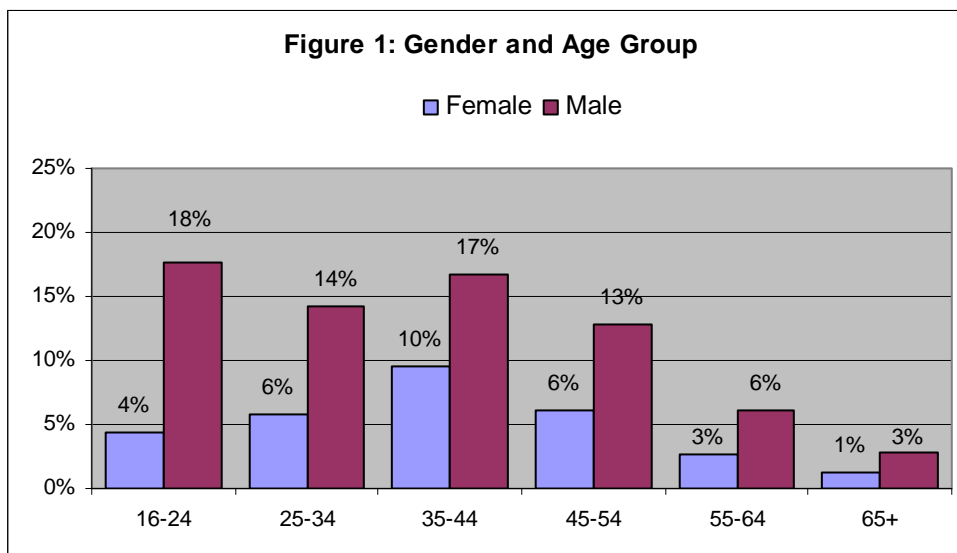
Between April 2005 and the end of March 2010 the Office had received back 5,912 completed questionnaires, representing a sample size of 37%.

Gender and Age

In addition to those respondents who declared their gender on the monitoring form, it was also possible to determine a majority of complainants' genders from their title or salutation, so that there was a total sample of 97% for whom gender was known. Of that total, 70% were male and 30% were female.

In addition to those who declared their age on the monitoring form, it was also possible to determine complainants' ages from the date of birth that they provided, giving an overall sample of 60% for whom age was known. Some 68% were aged under 45; 22% were aged 16-24; 20% were aged 25-34 and 26%¹ were aged 35-44. Only 4% of the sample were aged over 65.

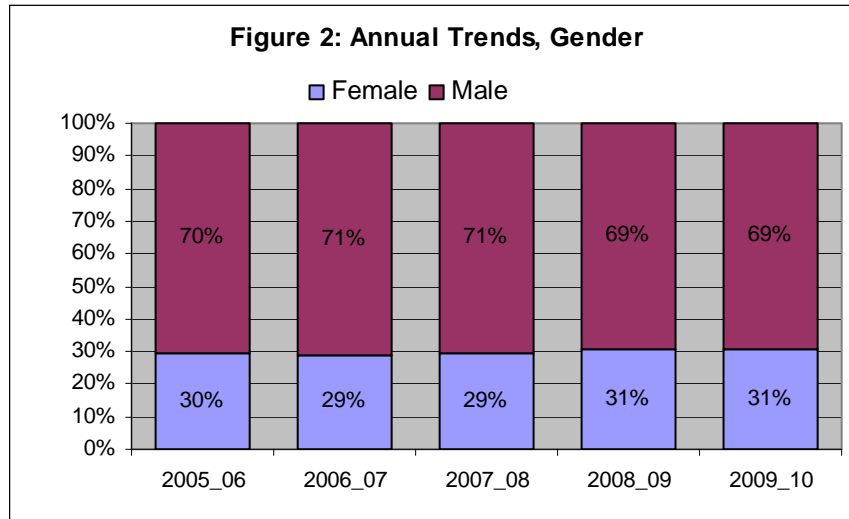
An examination of the profile of complainants based on both gender and age shows that almost half were young men (Figure 1); 18% were 16-24 year-old males, 14% were 25-34 year-old males and 17% were 35-44 year-old males. The largest proportion of females in the sample fell within the 35-44 age range (10%).



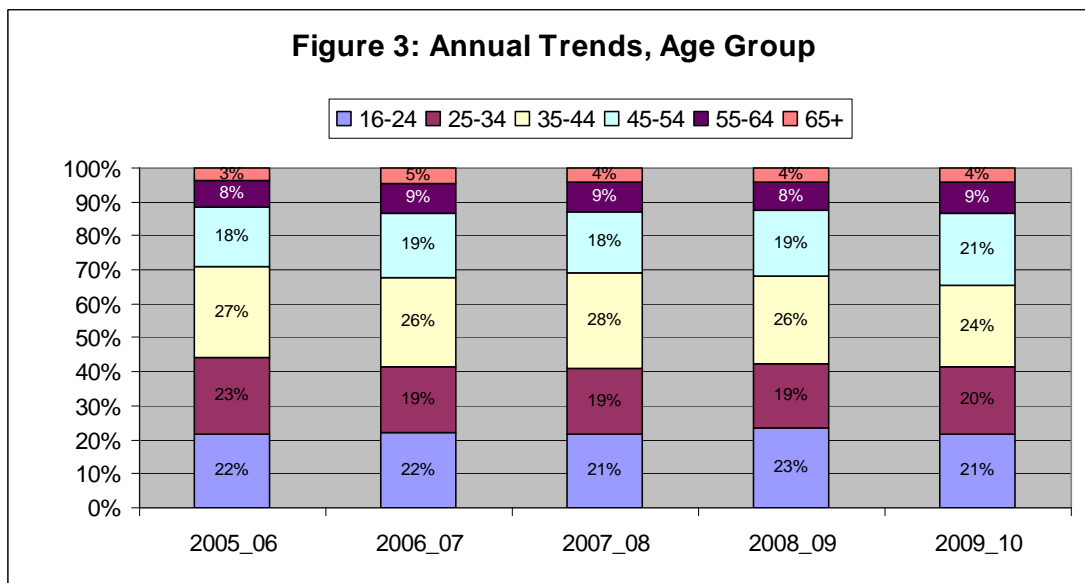
¹ For some complainants only age was known and for others only gender was known, resulting in a slightly different age group distribution within gender, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Trends

In 2005/06 males made up 70% of complainants and females comprised 30%. This has remained stable over the past 5 years, so that in 2009/10, males comprised 69% of those monitored whilst females made up 31% (Figure 2).



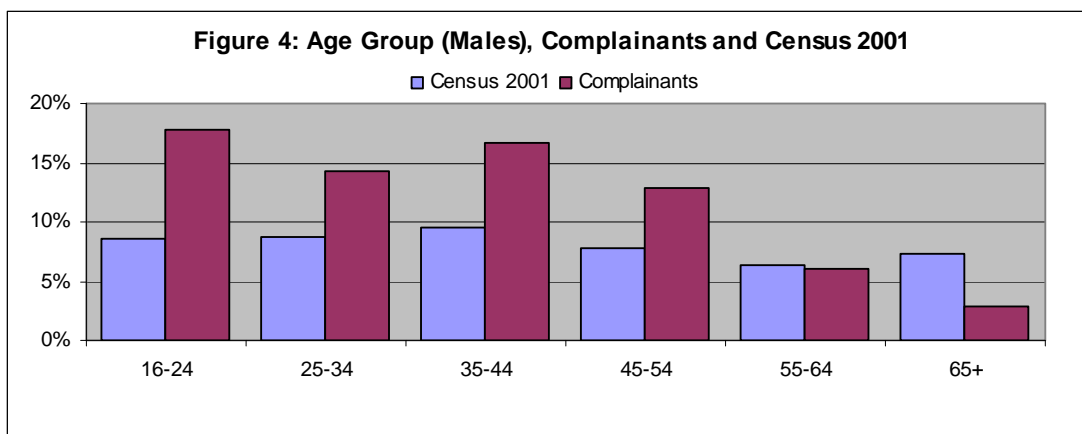
Between 2005/06 and 2009/10, the 35-44 age group consistently made up the largest proportion of complainants, representing at least one quarter of those monitored each year until 2008/09 (Figure 3). The proportions of monitored complainants within each age grouping have remained relatively stable over the past 5 years.



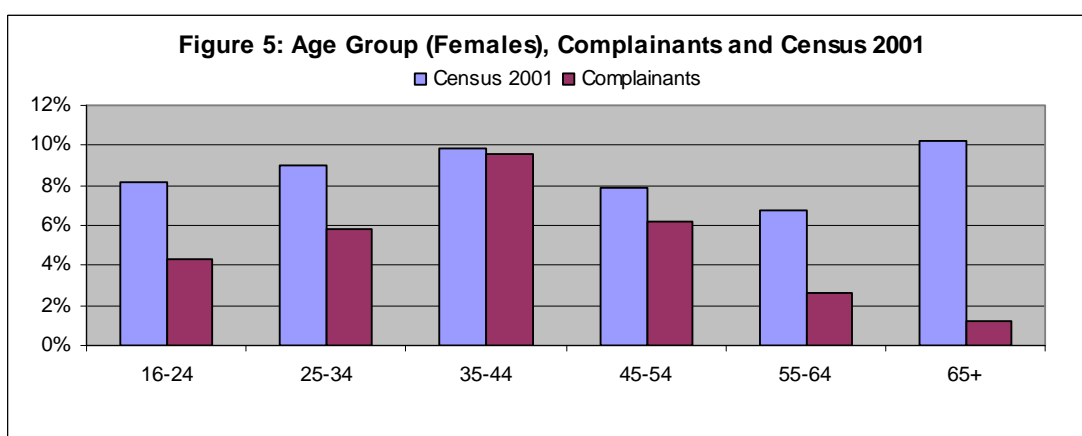
Representativeness

The age and gender profile of complainants is different to that of the population generally, based on the 2001 census of population² (Figure 4). Males make up 70% of complainants compared with 48% of the population. Thus, males are generally over-represented, and young males in particular are over-represented. Whilst cumulatively males aged between 16 and 45 make up just over a quarter (27%) of the population, they comprise almost half (49%) of complainants. Within the age bands presented the biggest differential is for 16-24 year-old males, who comprise 9% of the population compared with 18% of complainants.

² Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Northern Ireland Census 2001, Key Statistics

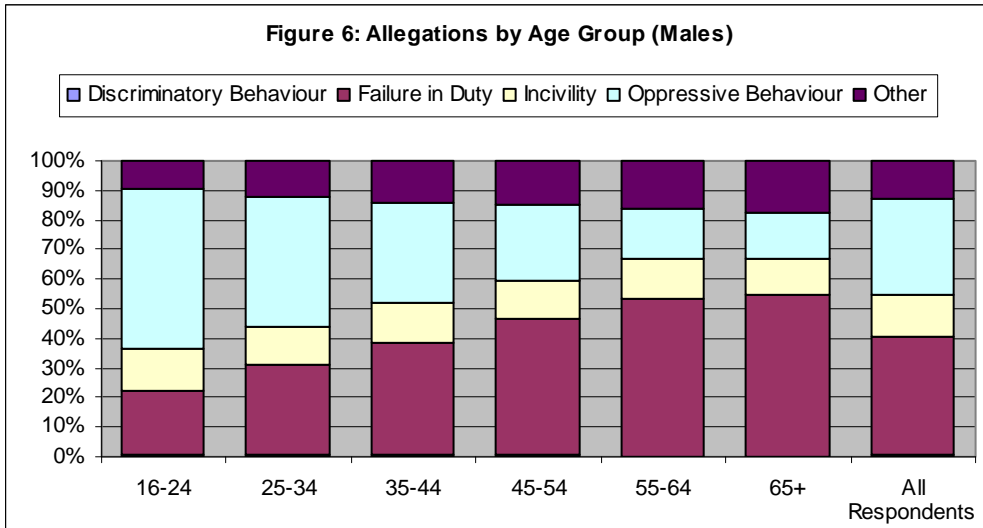


Females are generally under-represented within the complainant profile, comprising 52% of the population compared with 30% of complainants (Figure 5). The greatest differential is for older females; those aged 65 and over comprise 10% of the population compared with 1% of complainants.

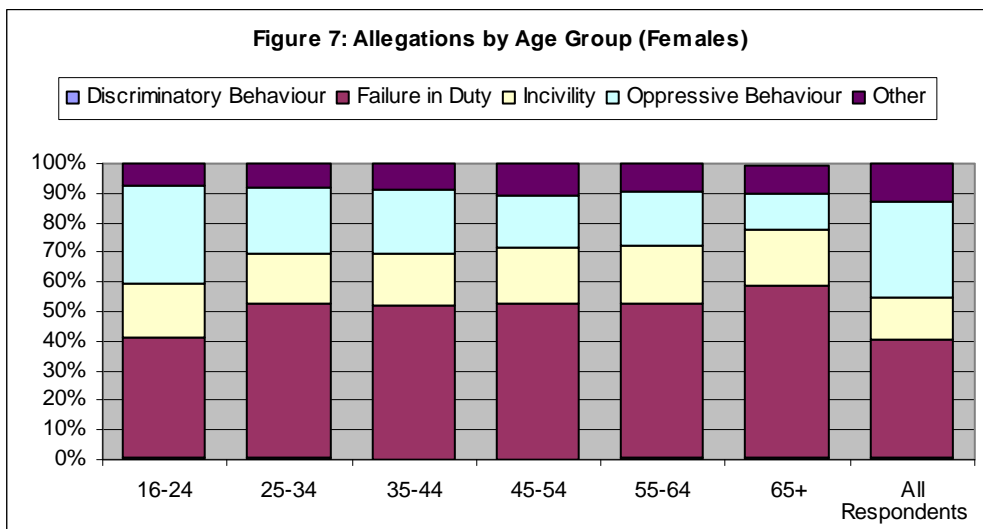


Allegations

Overall, for all complainants, the greatest proportion of allegations related to some form of failure in duty (40%), followed by oppressive behaviour (32%) and incivility (14%). There were differences in the types of allegation made against police officers by men and women of different age groups (Figures 6 and 7). Oppressive behaviour accounted for the greatest proportion of allegations made by 16-24 year-old males (54%) and 25-34 year-old males (44%) whilst the highest proportion of allegations from each older male age group were of failure in duty.



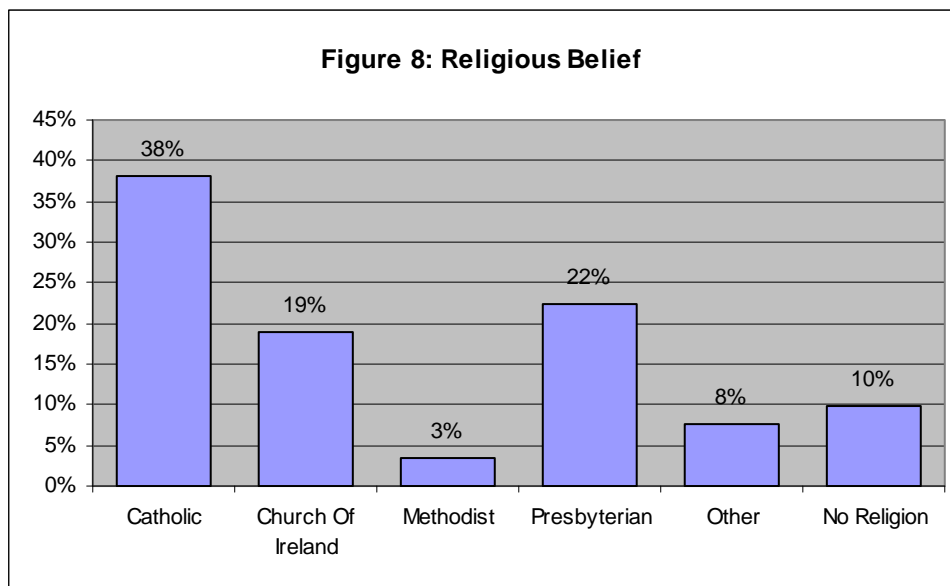
For females across all age bands, the greatest proportions of allegations were of failure in duty (Figure 7). For women aged 16-44, the second highest proportion of allegations made were of oppressive behaviour, whilst women aged over 45 were more likely to allege incivility.



Male complainants were generally more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour than their female counterparts (38% compared with 22%), whilst female complainants were more likely than male complainants to make allegations of failure in duty (50% compared with 35%) or incivility (18% compared with 13%).

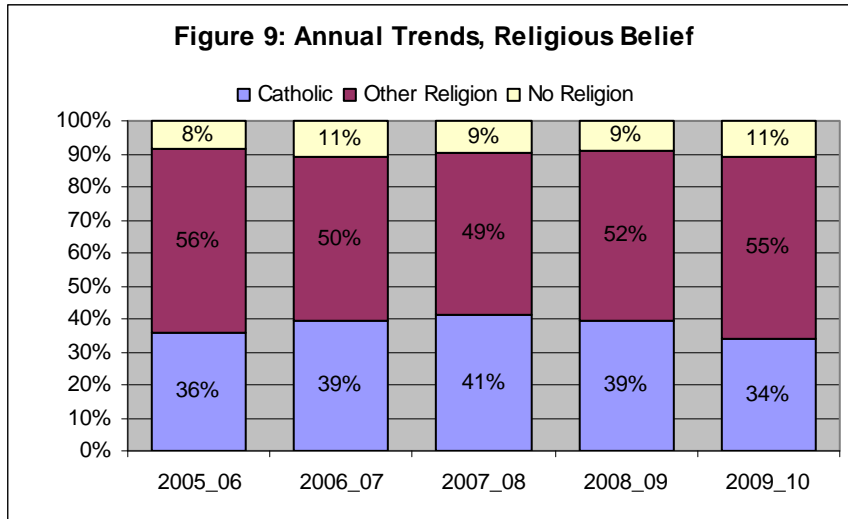
Religious Belief

Of the 5,912 complainants who returned forms, 5,798 declared their religious belief. This represents a sample of 36% of all complainants. Of those 5,798, 38% were Catholic, 19% Church of Ireland, 22% Presbyterian, 3% Methodist, 8% other, including other Christian, and 10% reported that they were of 'no religion' (Figure 8).



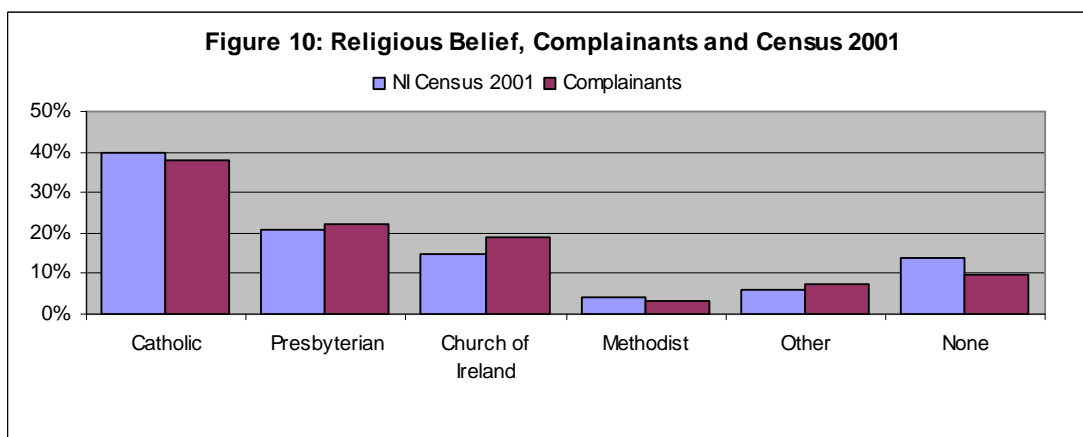
Trends

In 2005/06 the proportion of complainants who described themselves as having religious beliefs other than Catholic made up 56% and those stating that they were of no religion represented 8%. These proportions have remained stable over the past five years such that in 2009/10, 55% of complainants stated religious beliefs other than Catholic whilst those citing having no religious beliefs made up 11% of all complainants (Figure 9).



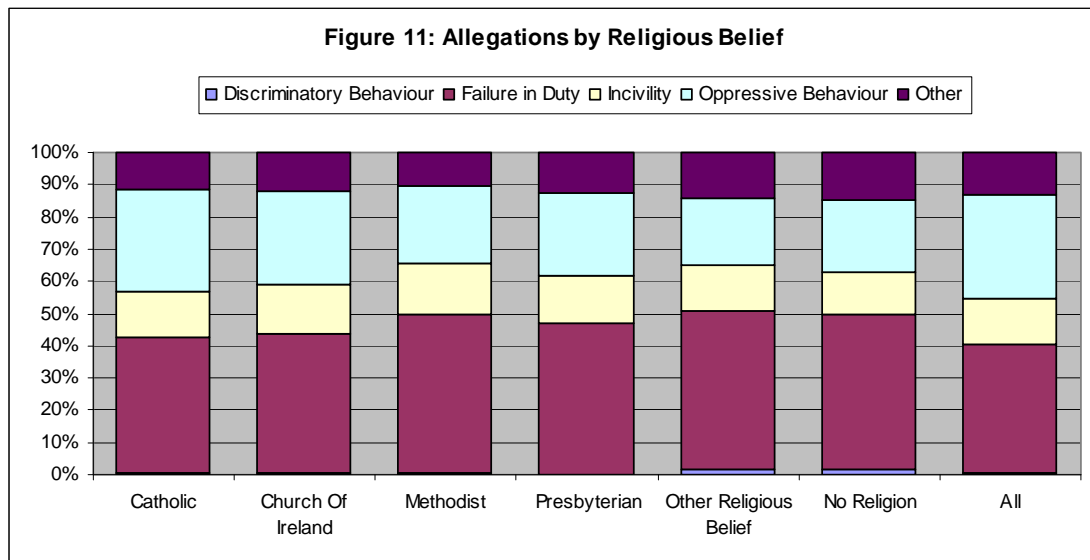
Representativeness

The profile of complainants is slightly different to that of the population generally, based on the 2001 population census (Figure 10). The most marked differences were for people who stated that they were Church of Ireland or were of no religious belief; with Church of Ireland comprising 19% of complainants compared with 15% of the population and those with no religious beliefs amounting to 10% of complainants compared with 14% of the population.



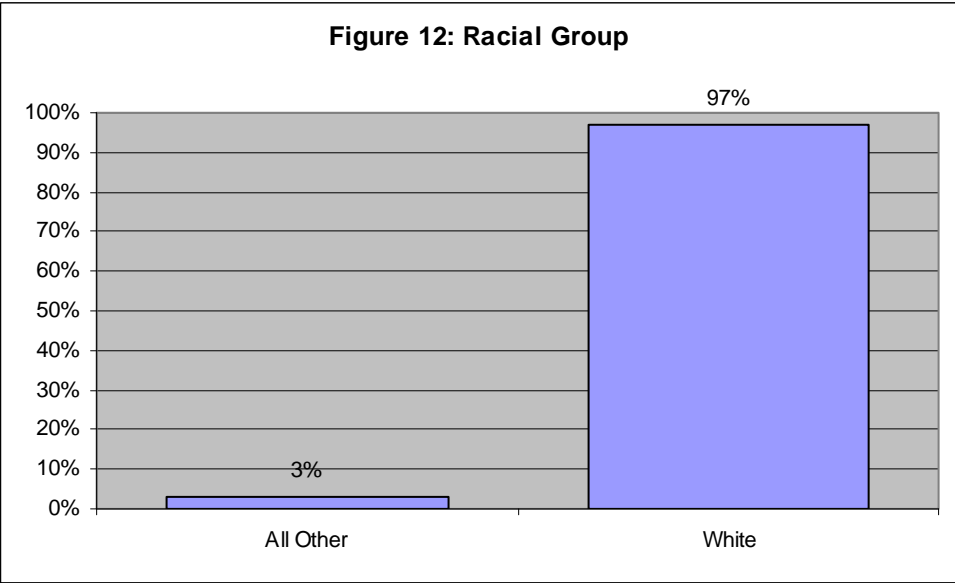
Allegations

There were some differences in the types of allegation made against police officers across the various religious beliefs monitored (Figure 11). For all categories of religious belief the greatest proportion of allegations were of failure in duty, and the second greatest proportion related to oppressive behaviour. Catholics were generally more likely to allege oppressive behaviour than Presbyterians, complainants with 'other' beliefs and those who consider themselves to have no religion. It is only within the categories of 'other' and 'no' religious beliefs that allegations of discriminatory behaviour accumulate to more than 1% of the total.



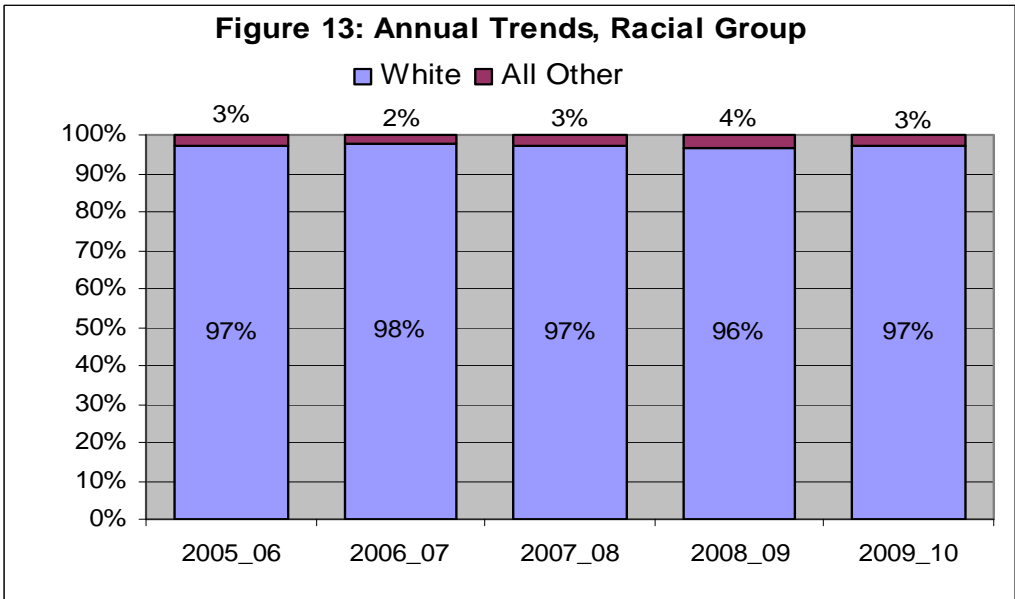
Racial Group

Of the 5,912 complainants who returned forms, 5,596 declared their racial background. This represents a sample of 35% of all complainants. Of those 5,596, 97% described themselves as White (Figure 12). Three per cent of respondents were from 'other' ethnic groups.



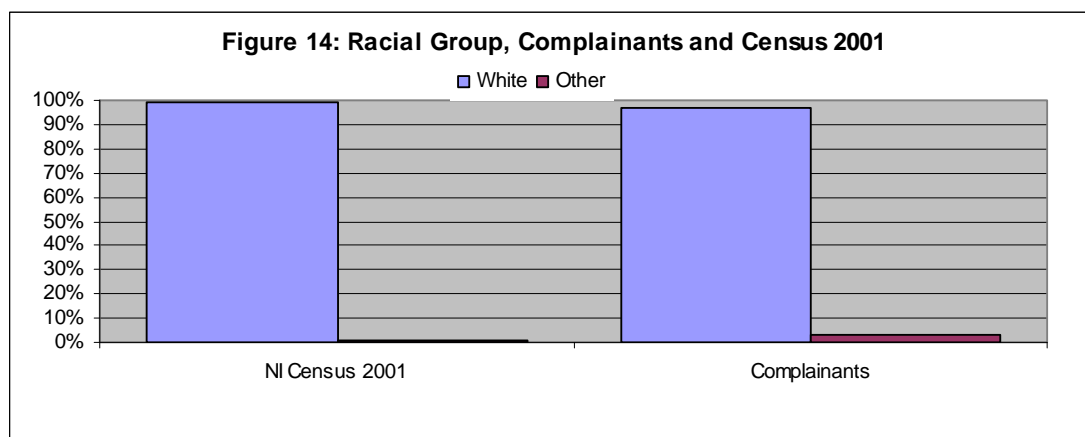
Trends

The proportion of complainants who described themselves as White has changed little over the lifetime of the Office (Figure 13). Whilst every effort is made within the Office to monitor according to the main racial groups in Northern Ireland, the majority of the non-White respondents described themselves as belonging to 'other' race or ethnic groupings.



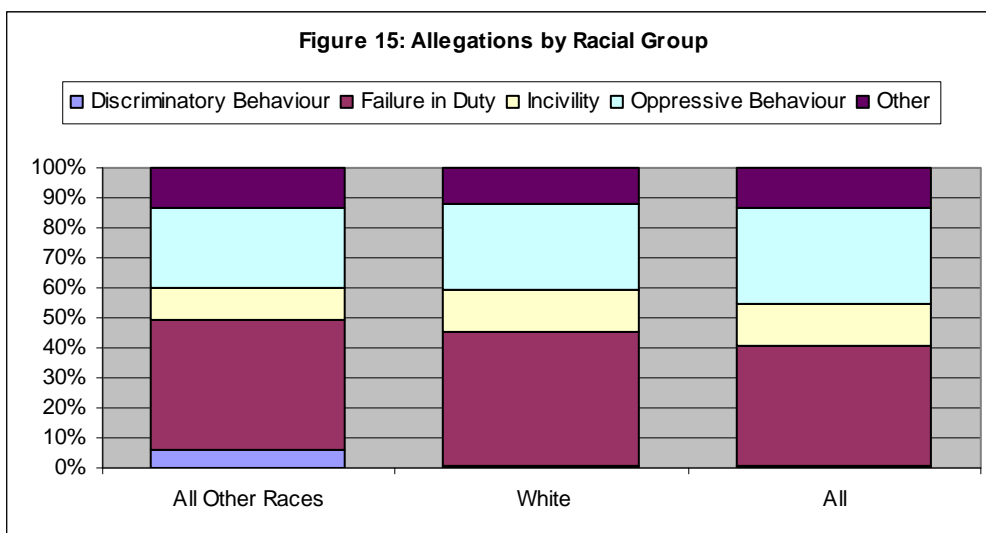
Representativeness

Because of the relatively small proportions of non-White racial groupings in Northern Ireland and the small numbers of complainants involved, it is not possible to do a reliable comparison of the racial profile of complainants against the population generally. However, one general observation is that there appears to be a greater proportion of complainants who are not White than one would expect from the general population, based on census figures (Figure 14). This observation should be interpreted with caution, as the disparity may be a result of factors such as the over-representation of young men within complainants and the changing ethnic composition of Northern Ireland in recent years, rather than an increased propensity for people from ethnic minorities to make complaints about the police.



Allegations

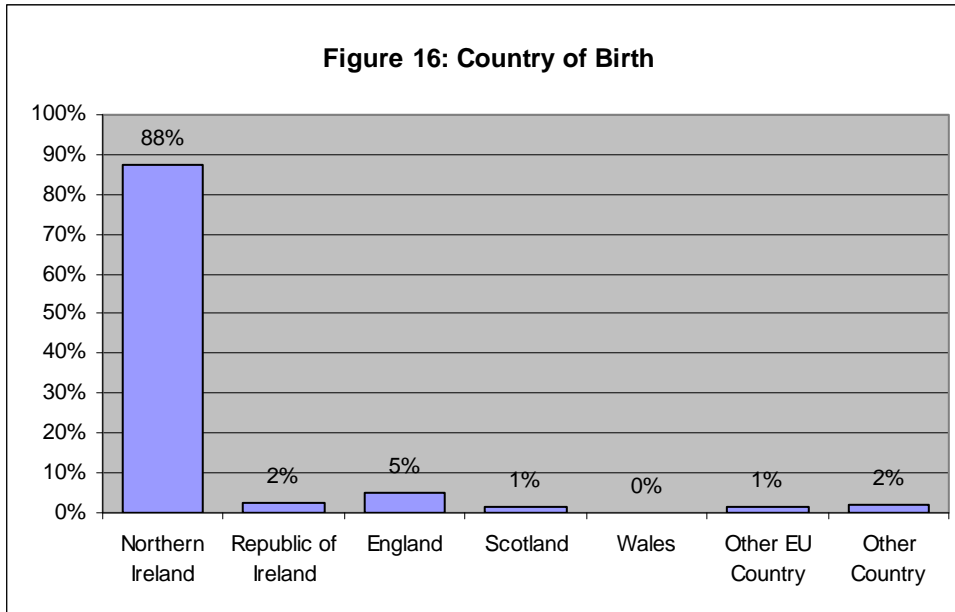
There were some small differences in the types of allegation made against police officers by White and by minority ethnic complainants monitored (Figure 15). Overall, the greatest proportion of allegations made by both White and by minority ethnic complainants was related to failure in duty (45% and 44% respectively). Allegations of discriminatory behaviour comprised fewer than 1% of allegations made by White complainants, but accounted for 6% of those made by complainants from ethnic minorities.



Country of Birth

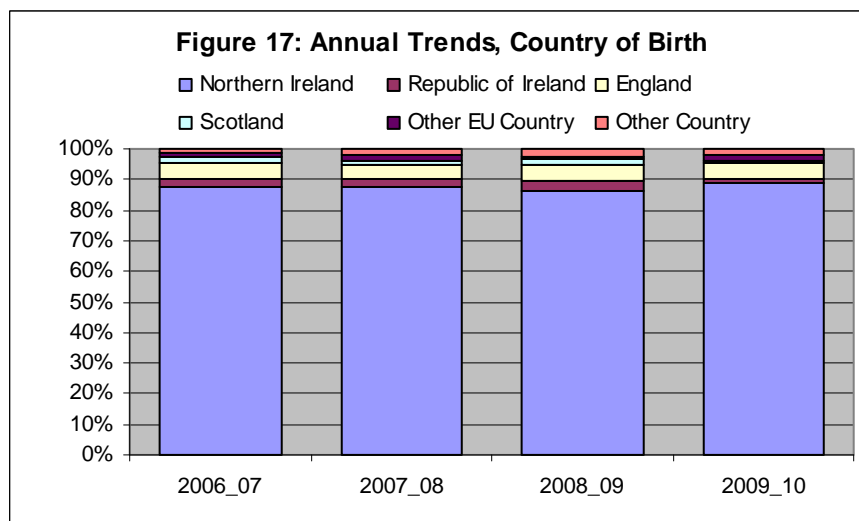
Following OPONI sponsored research into the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland³ a question on Country of Birth was added to the complainant monitoring form in April 2006. By the end of March 2010, 3,909 complainants who returned forms had answered this question, representing a sample size of 24%. Of those 3,909, 88% had been born in Northern Ireland, 5% had been born in England, 2% in the Republic of Ireland, 1% in Scotland, 1% in other European countries and 2% in other countries outside the European Union (Figure 16).

³ Policing, Accountability and the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland, Institute for Conflict Research, 2006



Trends

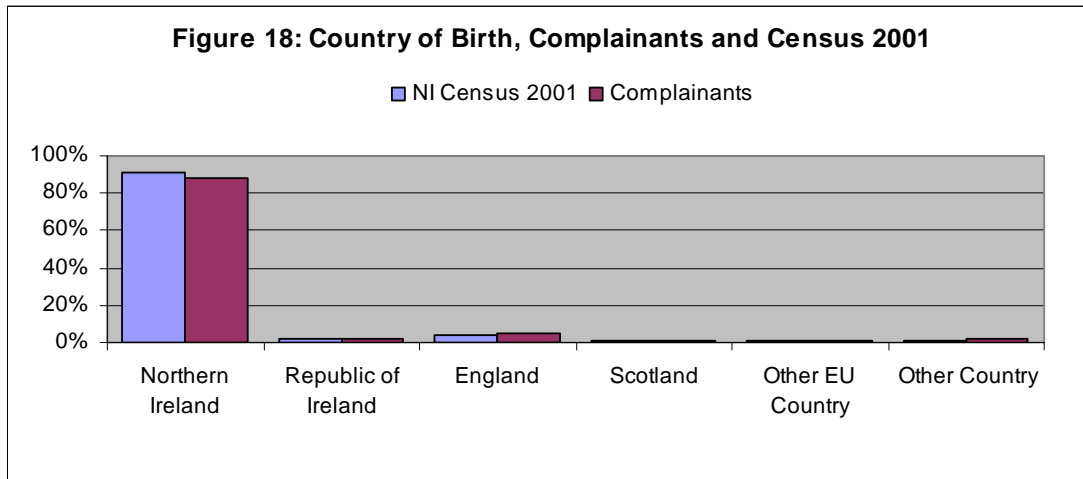
In the three years that we have been recording complainants' country of birth there has been a stable trend, with almost 9 in 10 complainants having been born in Northern Ireland (Figure 17).



Representativeness

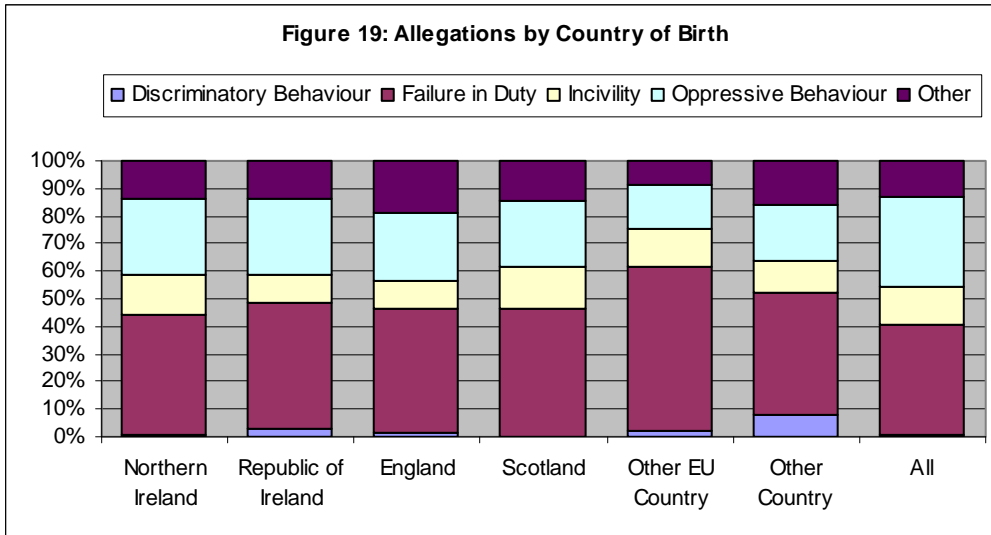
Census 2001 recorded the country of birth of Northern Ireland residents. It reported that 91% of the population was born in Northern Ireland, compared

with 88% of complainants, and that 4% were born in England, compared with 5% of complainants. The distributions of other countries of birth were similar (Figure 18). The small differences observed may be due to the changing racial profile in Northern Ireland in recent years following the Census.



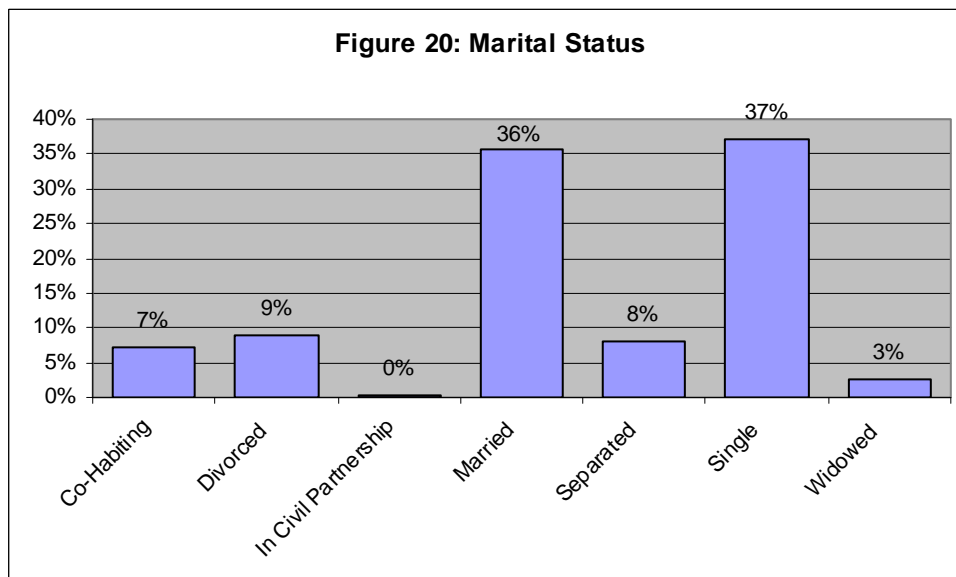
Allegations

Failure in duty made up the greatest proportion of allegations of complainants irrespective of their country of birth, however complainants who stated that they were born in an 'other EU country' were significantly more likely than Northern Ireland-born complainants to cite this allegations type. There were no other significant differences in the types of allegations made by people who had been born in different countries (Figure 19).



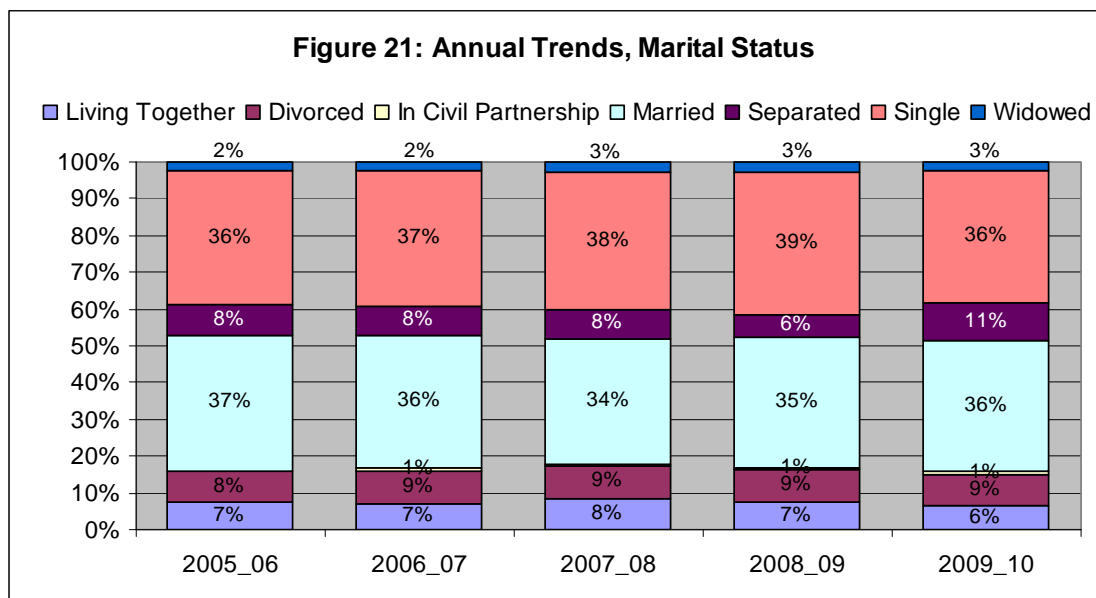
Marital Status

Of the 5,912 complainants who returned forms, 5,844 declared their marital status. This represents a sample of 36% of all complainants. Of those 5,844, 36% were married, 7% were living with a partner, 37% were single, 8% were separated, 9% were divorced and 3% were widowed (Figure 20).



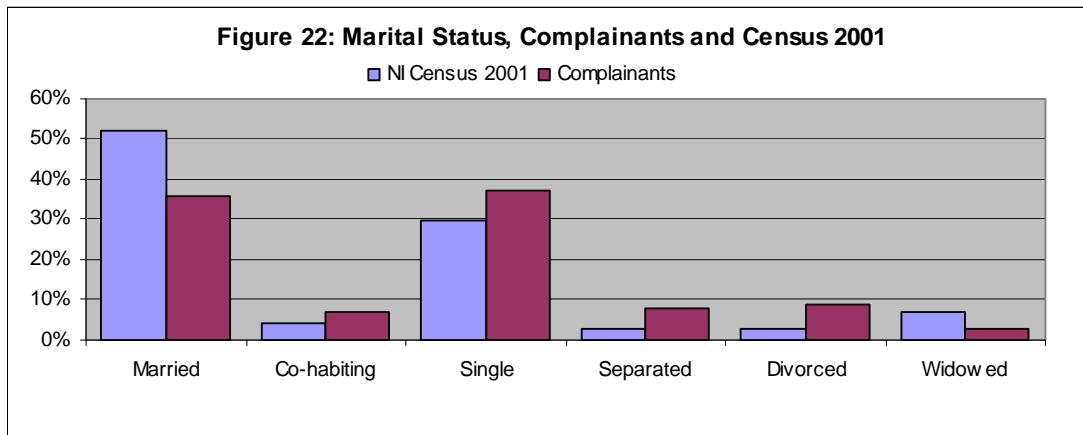
Trends

The proportions of complainants within each marital status category have not varied greatly over the past 5 years; more than one third of complainants each year described themselves as being married, with similar proportions reporting being single. The proportion of divorced or separated respondents consistently accounted for at least 15% of monitored complainants. In April 2006 the Office added the category of “in civil partnership” to the questionnaire. During 2006/07, 2008/09 and 2009/10, 1% of complainants who returned forms were in civil partnership (Figure 21).



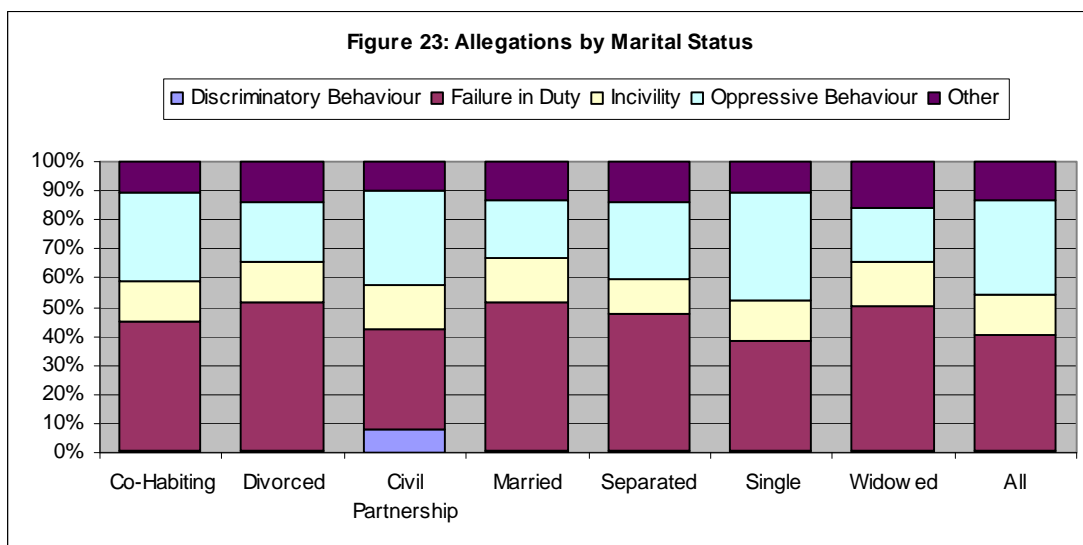
Representativeness

The marital status profile of complainants is not what would be expected from the population profile based on the 2001 census (Figure 22). There is a greater proportion of single complainants (37%) compared with the population generally (30%). The proportions of complainants who were separated (8%) or divorced (9%) were also higher than the census figures (3% in each category). Married people are therefore under-represented among complainants (36%) compared with the population generally (52%).



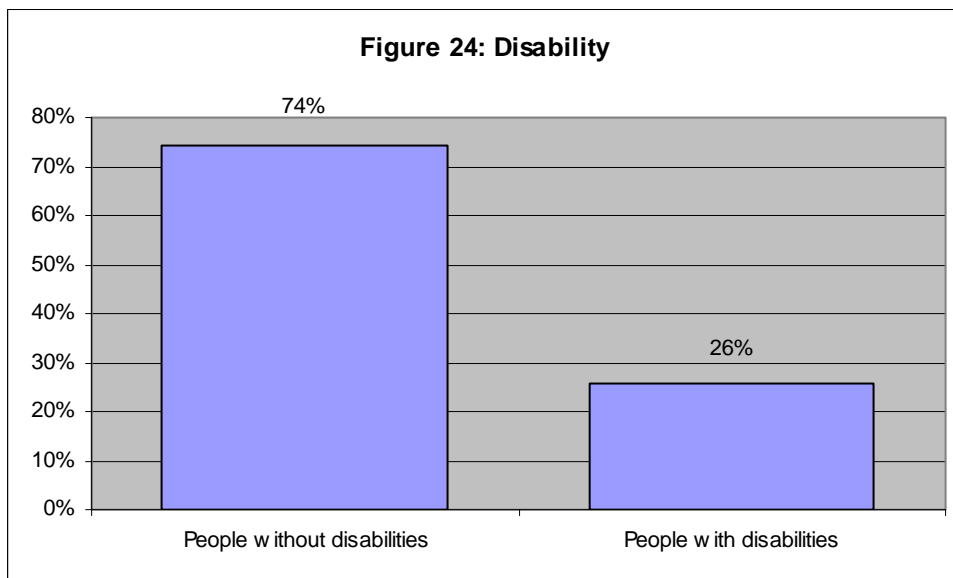
Allegations

There were some differences in the types of allegation made against police officers depending on the marital status of complainants (Figure 23). Failure in duty was the dominant allegation type in all marital status categories with the exception of single people; equal proportions (37%) of complainants who reported being single alleged either failure in duty or oppressive behaviour. Significantly fewer divorced (21%) married (19%) and widowed (18%) complainants made allegations of oppressive behaviour than other marital status groups. These differences may be related to the age profile of complainants. Complainants who were in civil partnership were more likely to make allegations of discriminatory behaviour.



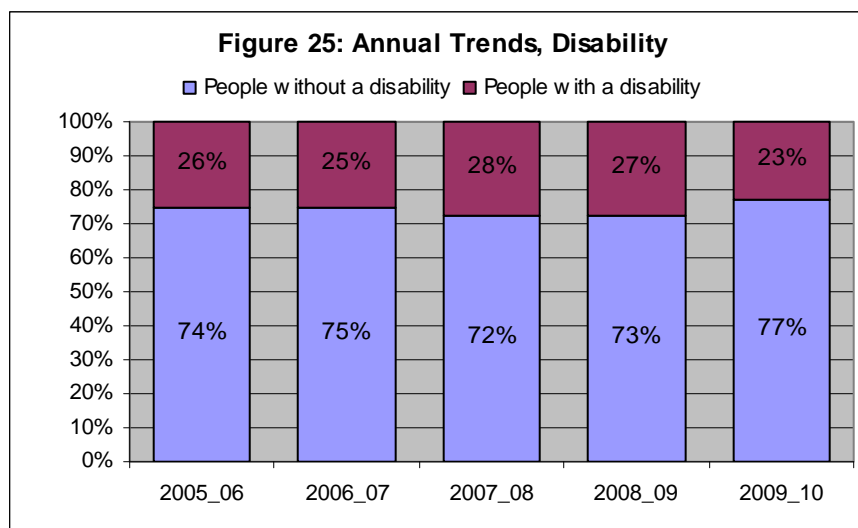
Disability

Disability is a complex concept and there are a number of ways of defining it. For monitoring purposes we provided respondents with a description of disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and asked whether or not they considered themselves to be disabled. Of the 5,912 complainants who returned forms, 5,575 declared their disability status. This represents a sample of 35% of all complainants. Of those 5,575, 26% stated that they had a disability and 74% stated that they did not (Figure 24).



Trends

Between 2005/06 and 2009/10, the proportions of complainants who described themselves as disabled have remained fairly stable (Figure 25).



Representativeness

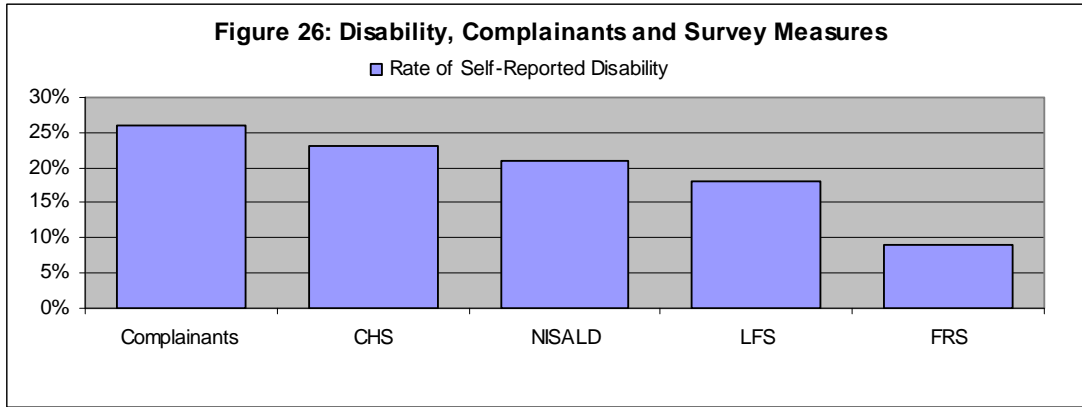
There is no one definitive accepted measure of the level of disability in Northern Ireland. A number of government departments have estimated the level based on survey or administrative data, depending on their particular policy needs. The level of 26% reported by complainants is high compared with some Northern Ireland wide surveys; the NI Survey of People with Activity Limitations and Disabilities (NISALD)⁴ estimated that 21% of the adult population in Northern Ireland are limited in their daily activities for reasons associated with a disability or long-term condition. The Family Resources Survey (FRS)⁵ estimated 9% of adults to be permanently sick or disabled and the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS)⁶ found that 18% of respondents (from the working age population) self-reported as disabled. However, the NI Continuous Household Survey (CHS)⁷ estimated that 23% of adults are disabled (Figure 26).

⁴ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, The Prevalence of Disability and Activity Limitations Amongst Adults and Children Living in Private Households in Northern Ireland, Bulletin 1, July 2007

⁵ Department of Social Development, Family Resources Survey 2008/09

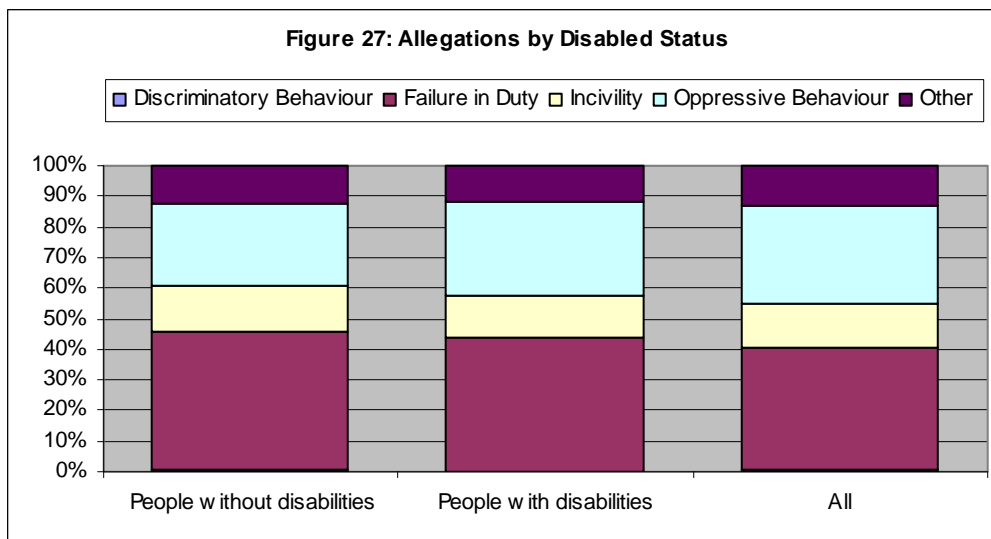
⁶ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Labour Force Survey Jul-Dec 2007

⁷ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Continuous Household Survey 2009/10



Allegations

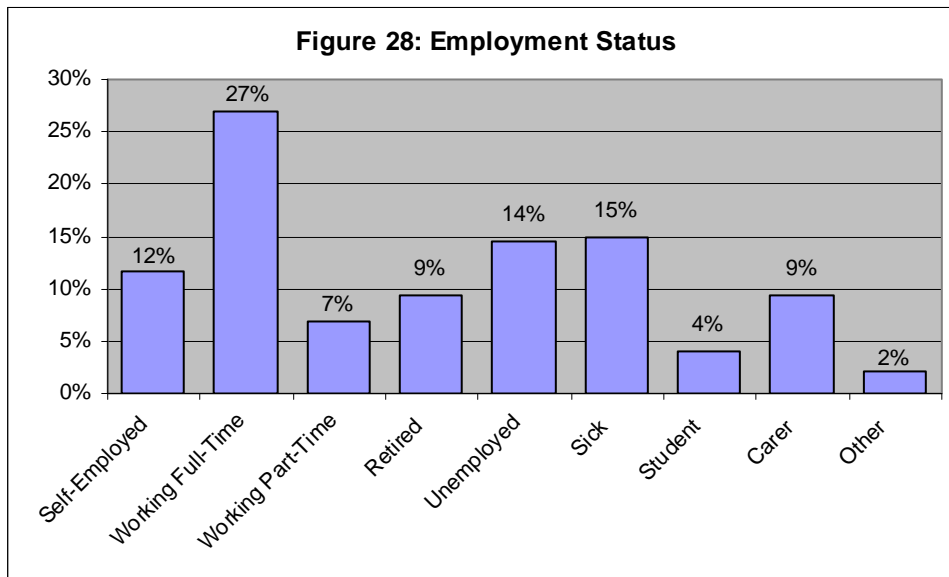
People who reported that they had a disability were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour (31%) than those who did not (27%), yet similar proportions were likely to make allegations of failure in duty (43% and 45% respectively) (Figure 27).



Employment

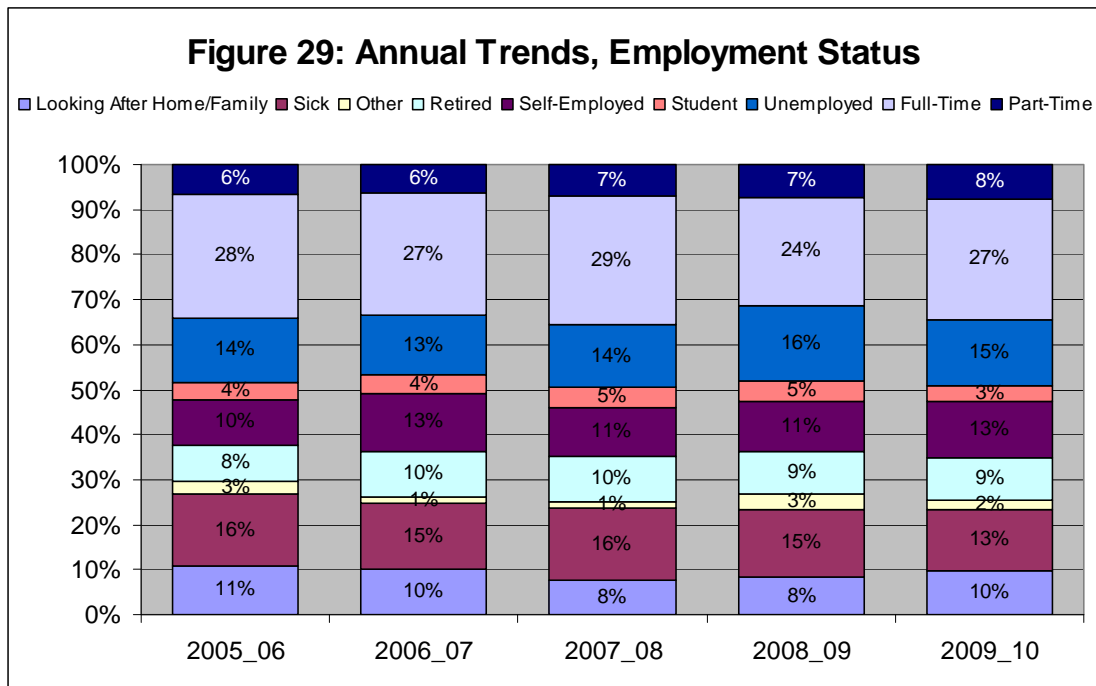
Of the 5,912 complainants who returned forms, 5,834 declared their employment status. This represents a sample of 36% of all complainants. Of those 5,834, 27% were full-time employed, 15% were not working because they were sick, 14% were unemployed, 12% were self employed, 9% were

caring for their family or home, 9% were retired, 7% were part-time employed, 4% were students, and 2% were otherwise employed (Figure 28).



Trends

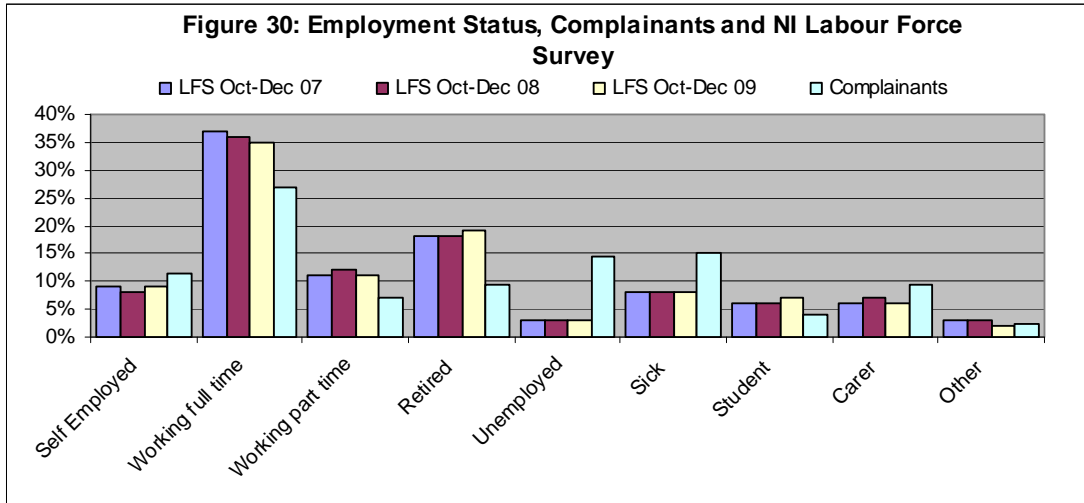
The proportion of complainants within each employment status category has remained fairly stable since 2005/06. The proportion of complainants in either full or part time employment consistently accounts for around one third of respondents each year (Figure 29).



Representativeness

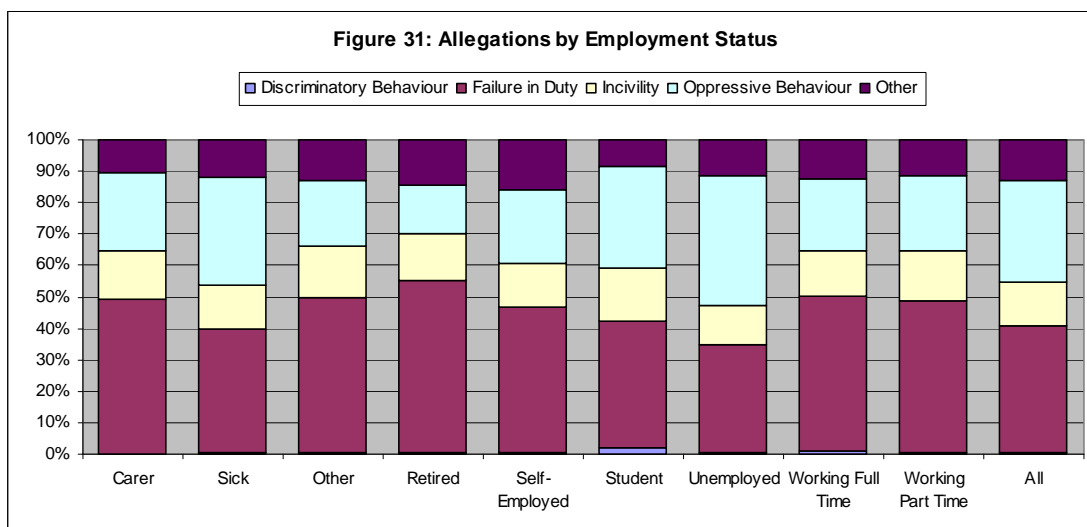
The profile of the employment status of complainants is somewhat different to that of the population generally, based on the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS)⁸ (Figure 30). The most marked difference was for unemployed people, who consistently accounted for 3% of the population compared with 14% of complainants. Related to this, complainants are less likely to be working full-time (27%) or part-time (7%) compared with the general population (36% and 11% respectively). Complainants are also more likely to be out of work due to illness or disability (15% compared with 8%).

⁸ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Labour Force Survey Oct 2007 – Dec 2009



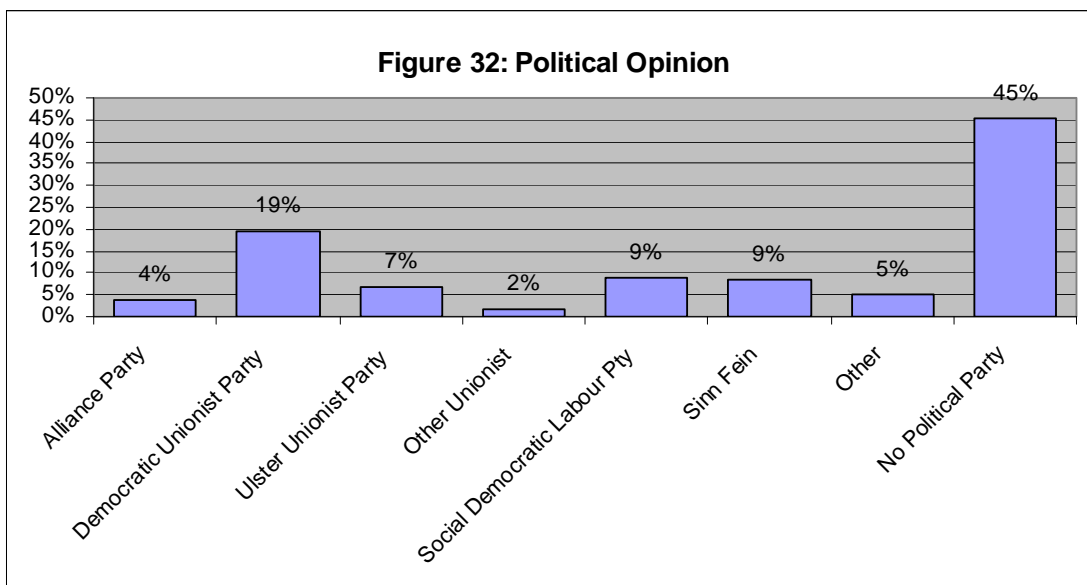
Allegations

There were some differences in the types of allegation made against police officers according to the employment status of the complainant (Figure 31). For most groups the greatest proportion of allegations related to failure in duty. However, for people who were unemployed, the proportion of allegations that was of oppressive behaviour (41%) was greater than the proportion that was of failure in duty (34%). Retired people (15%) were least likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour, with more than half (55%) of allegations made being of failure in duty.



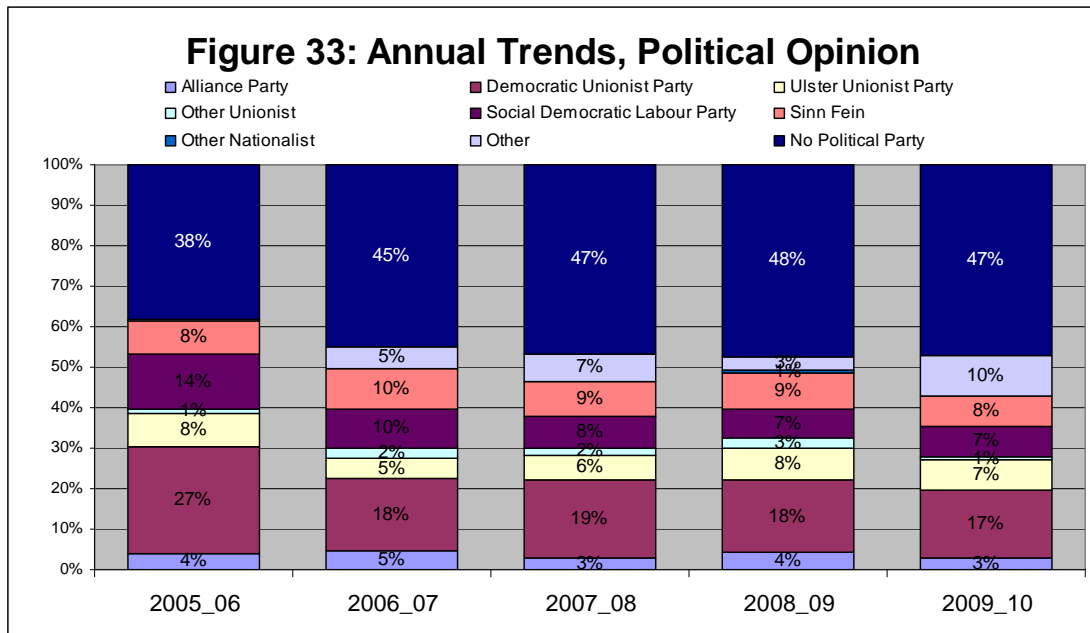
Political Opinion

By the end of March 2010, 3,688 complainants who returned forms had answered a question on their political opinion, representing a sample size of 23%. Of those 3,688, 4% supported the Alliance Party, 19% supported the DUP, 7% supported the UUP, 9% supported the SDLP, 9% supported Sinn Fein, 5% supported other parties and 45% declared that they did not support any political party (Figure 32).



Trends

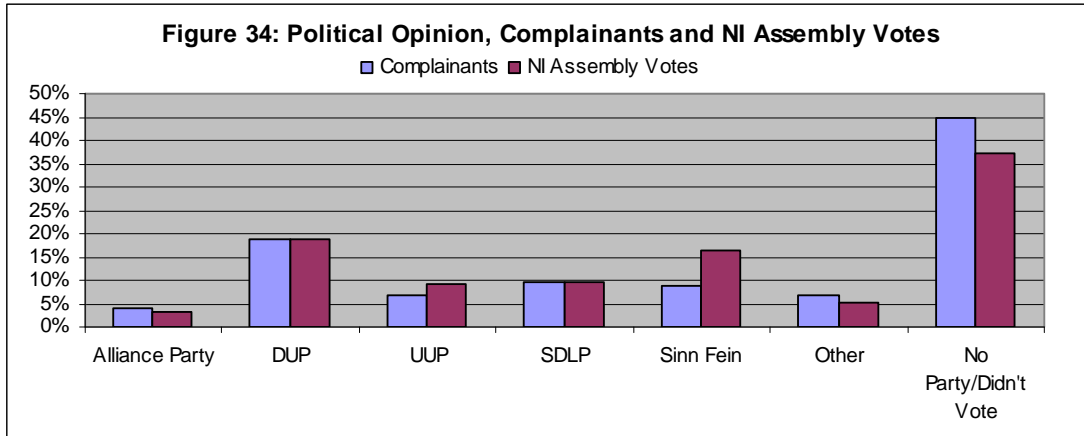
Between 2005/06 and 2009/10 the proportion of complainants who supported the DUP fell from 27% to 17% and the proportion supporting the SDLP fell from 14% to 7%. The proportion supporting no political party increased from 38% to 47%, whilst proportions of complainants in favour of the other political parties remained stable over the 5 year period (Figure 33).



Representativeness

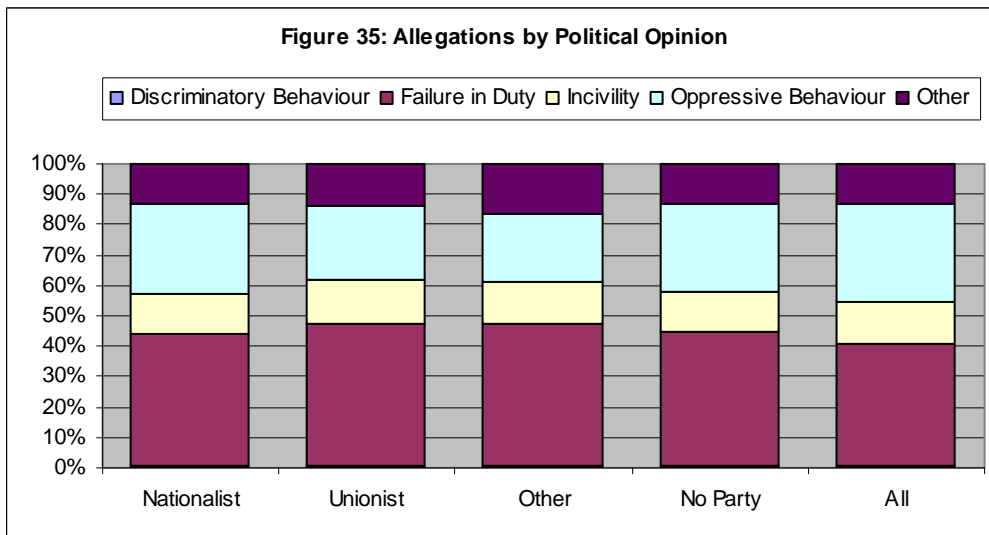
The political opinion profile of complainants is slightly different to that of the population generally, based on voting patterns to the NI Assembly in 2007⁹ (Figure 34). The proportion of complainants who supported the main Unionist parties (26%) was similar to the proportion of votes casts in the 2007 Assembly elections (28%). The proportion of complainants who supported the main Nationalist parties (18%) is smaller than might be expected compared with the votes cast (25%). The proportions supporting other parties are similar; 7% of complainants and 5% of votes cast. A higher proportion of complainants (45%) stated that they supported no political party, compared with the proportion of the eligible electorate who did not vote in the election (37%).

⁹ Electoral Office, 2007 Northern Ireland Assembly Elections



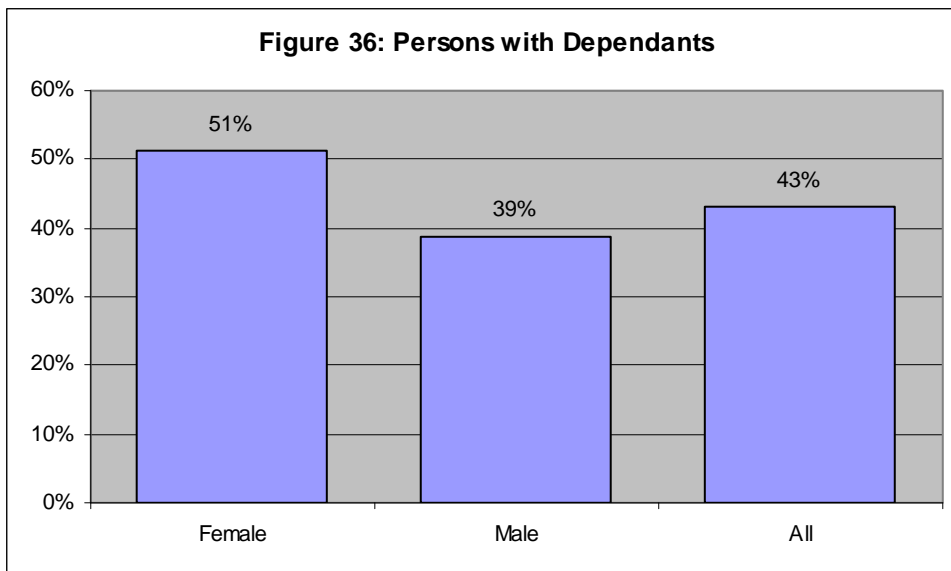
Allegations

There were no real differences in the types of allegation made against police officers according to the broad category of political opinion stated by respondents in terms of Nationalist or Unionist support (Figure 35). The greatest proportion of allegations made by all those who expressed a political opinion was related to failure in duty, followed by oppressive behaviour.



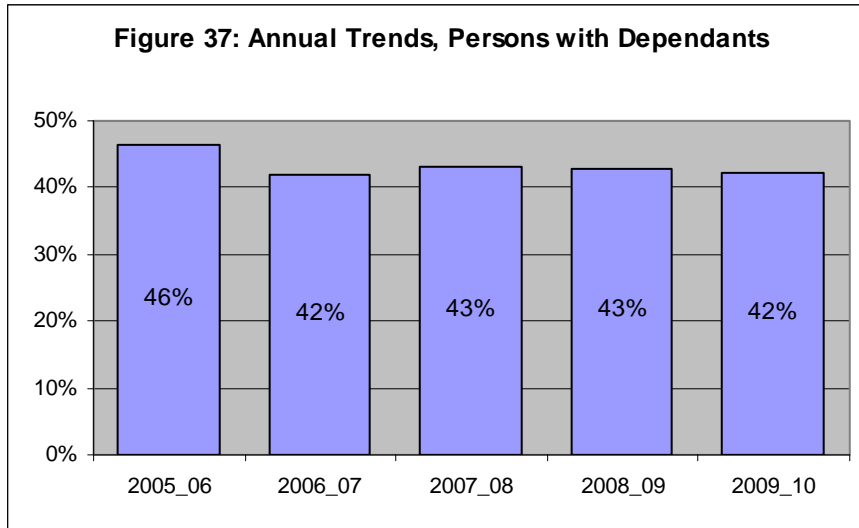
Dependants

By the end of March 2010, 4,640 complainants who returned forms had provided information on whether they had dependants, representing a sample size of 29%. Of those 4,640, 43% stated that they had dependants and 57% stated that they did not. Female complainants (51%) were more likely than male complainants (39%) to state that they had dependants (Figure 36). Most complainants stated that their dependants were spouses/partners and children or elderly parents or relatives. However, a number described their dependants as friends or members of their community.



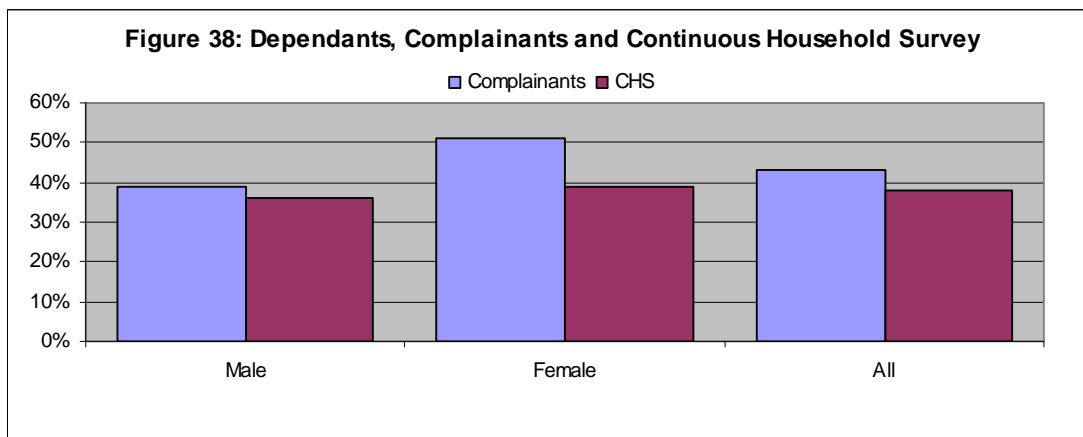
Trends

During the past 5 years, trends in the proportions of respondents stating whether or not they have dependants have been stable (Figure 37).



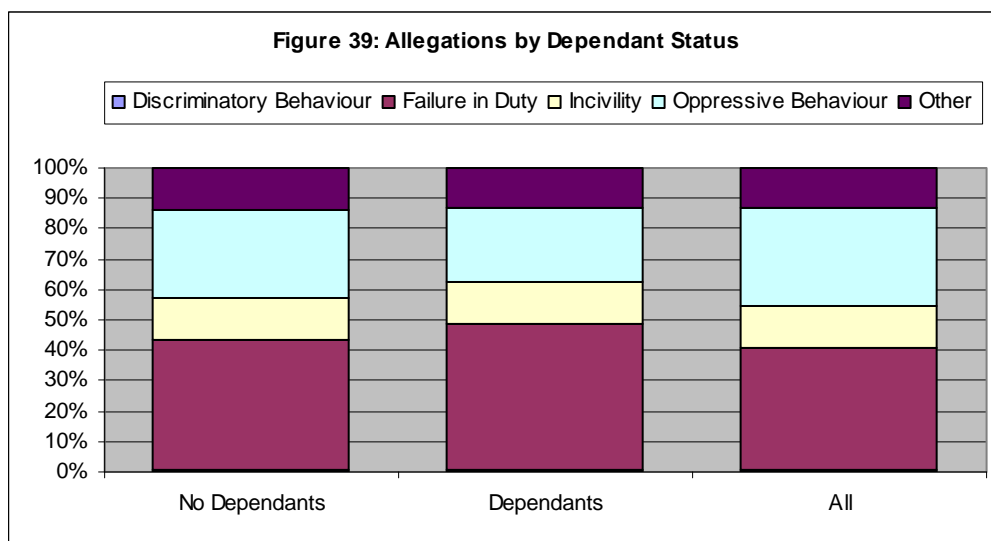
Representativeness

There is no one definitive accepted measure of the number of individuals in Northern Ireland who have dependants. A number of government departments have estimated the level based on survey or administrative data, depending on their particular policy needs. The NI Continuous Household Survey (CHS) estimated that 38% of adults have dependant children (36% of males and 39% of females), a lower level than the 43% overall figure estimated by the monitoring data. This will not, however, cover all dependants, including other relatives, friends, neighbours etc., which the complainant data capture and this may account to some degree for the differences found (Figure 38).



Allegations

There were some small differences in the types of allegation made against police officers according to whether or not the complainant had dependants (Figure 39). Whilst failure in duty made up the greatest proportion of allegations made by people with and people without dependants, those who had dependants (48%) were more likely than those who did not (43%) to make this type of allegation. However, both groups were just as likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour.



Sexual Orientation

Overall, 2% of complainants declared that they were bi-sexual or gay. Due to the small numbers involved it has not been possible to analyse these cases for the purposes of this report.

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