

Equality Monitoring Report 2000 - 2007

April 2008

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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.

Between November 2000 and March 2007 there were 20,597 complainants to the Office, of whom 6,403 (31%) returned completed questionnaires. The main findings were:

Gender and Age

- Seventy two per cent of complainants were male and 28% female.
- More than two thirds of complainants were under 45 years old. Only 4% were over 65.
- There was a general upward trend in the proportion of female complainants, from 23% in 2000/01 to 29% in 2006/07.
- Males were over-represented compared to the population generally. Males under 45 years old comprised 27% of the population compared to 48% of complainants.
- Young men were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour while older men tended to make allegations of failures in duty.
- Young women were equally likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour or failures in duty.
- Female complainants were more likely than males to make allegations of incivility.

Religious Belief

- Thirty eight per cent of complainants were Catholic, 20% Church of Ireland, 23% Presbyterian, 4% Methodist, 8% other, including other Christian, and 7% reported that they were of 'no religion'.
- The proportion of complainants with 'other' religious beliefs fell between 2000/01 and 2006/07. The proportion of complainants with no religious belief increased.
- The religious belief profile of complainants was slightly different to the general population, with 7% of complainants declaring that they had no religious belief compared to 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 to the NI census figure of 1%.
- Allegations of racial discrimination comprised less than 1% of those made by White complainants but 7% of those made by people from ethnic minority groups.

Country of Birth

- Eighty eight per cent of complainants who returned monitoring forms were born in Northern Ireland, 5% were born in England, 2% in the Republic of Ireland, 2% in Scotland, 1% in other European countries and 1% in other countries outside the European Union.
- A smaller proportion of complainants had been born in Northern Ireland compared to the proportion recorded in the Northern Ireland Census.
- There were no significant differences in the types of allegations made by people who had been born in different countries.

Marital Status

- Forty two per cent of complainants were married or living with a partner, 37% were single, 18% separated or divorced and 2% widowed.
- The proportion of complainants who were single fell between 2000/01 and 2006/07 and the proportion who were divorced increased.
- A greater proportion of complainants were single or separated or divorced compared to the general population.
- Single complainants were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour than other complainants.

Disability

- Twenty eight per cent of complainants reported that they had a disability.
- The proportion of complainants who described themselves as disabled fell overall between 2000/01 and 2006/07.
- 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 and less likely to make allegations of failure in duty.

Employment

- Twenty six per cent of complainants worked full time, 18% were not working because of illness or disability, 17% were unemployed, 11% were self-employed, 8% were caring for their family or home, 8% were retired, 6% were working part time, 4% were students and 2% otherwise employed.
- The proportion of complainants stating that they were unemployed fell steadily between 2000/01 and 2006/07. The proportion not working due to illness or disability also fell. There were increases in the proportions who were self-employed or carers.
- A greater proportion of complainants compared to the general population were unemployed.
- Those who were unemployed and students were more likely than others to make allegations of oppressive behaviour.

Political Opinion

- Twenty three per cent of complainants supported the DUP, 6% the UUP, 11% the SDLP, 9% Sinn Fein, 4% the Alliance Party, 5% supported other parties and 42% supported no political party.
- Between 2004/05 and 2006/07 there were decreases in the proportions of complainants who supported the DUP and the UUP, and increases in those supporting Sinn Fein and other parties.
- There were fewer Nationalist supporters among complainants compared to the 2007 Assembly election voting patterns.
- Nationalists were most likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour. Those outside the Nationalist/ Unionist umbrella were more likely than others to make allegations of incivility.

Dependants

- Forty four 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 failures in duty and those without dependants were more 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

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, as we consider this to be a reliable indicator of economic deprivation.

This report covers complaints made to the Office of the Police Ombudsman since it opened in November 2000 to 30 March 2007, during which time we recorded 20,597 complaints. Up until August 2004 the questionnaire included the categories of age, gender, marital status, religious belief, race, disability, sexual orientation and employment status. In August 2004 the categories of dependants and political opinion were added. Following Police Ombudsman commissioned research in 2005 into the experiences of the Black and Minority Ethnic communities in Northern Ireland¹, we added a further question on country of birth.

By the end of March 2007 the Office had received back 6,403 completed questionnaires, representing a response rate of 31%.

¹ Policing, Accountability and the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland, Institute for Conflict Research 2006

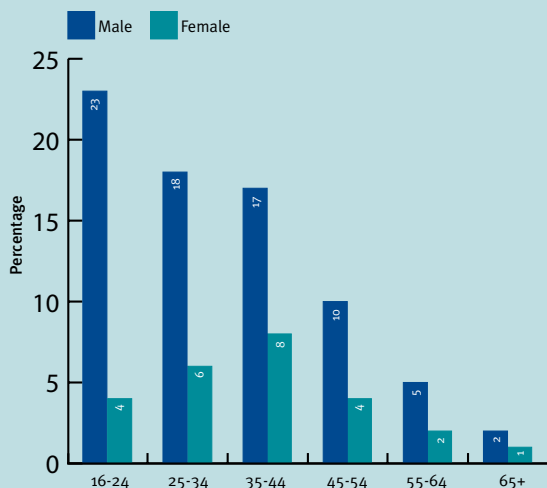
Gender and Age

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, 72% were male and 28% 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 11,114 (54%) for whom age was known. More than three quarters were under 45 years old; over a quarter (27%) were aged 16-24, 24% were aged 25-34 and 25% were aged 35-44. Only 3% of the sample were aged over 65.

An examination of the profile of complainants based on both gender and age shows that more than half were young men (Figure 1); 23% were 16-24 year-old males, 18% 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 (8%).

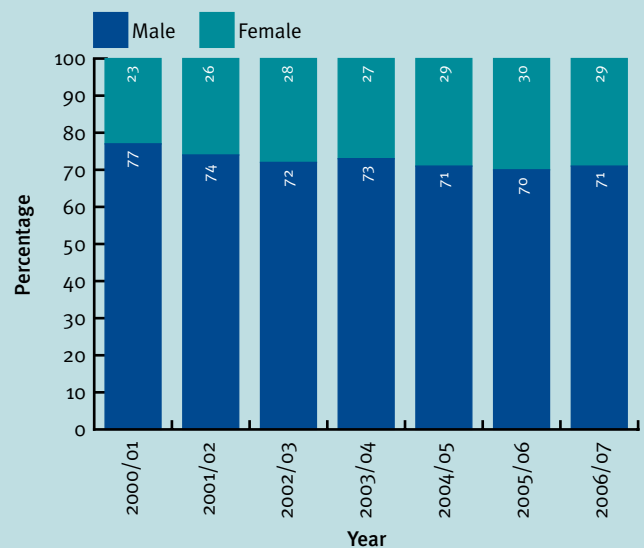
Figure 1: Gender and Age Group



Trends

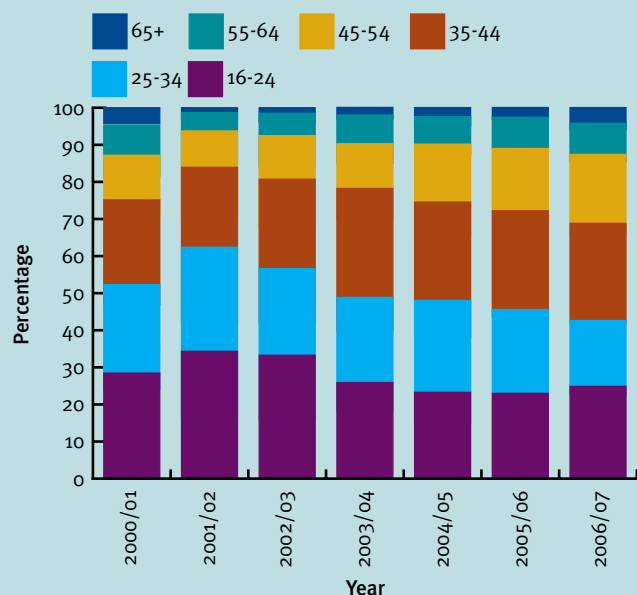
In 2000/2001 males made up 77% of complainants monitored and females comprised 23%. There has been a general upward trend in the proportion of females, so that by 2006/07 this had increased to 29% of complainants monitored (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Annual Trends, Gender



Up until 2002/03 the 16-24 age group made up the largest proportion monitored, with relative proportions falling as age group increased. In 2003/04 the trend shifted and 35-44 year-olds became the biggest group, representing over a quarter of complainants each year (Figure 3). The proportion of respondents aged 45-54 has also increased over the period, from 13% in 2000/01 to 18% in 2006/07.

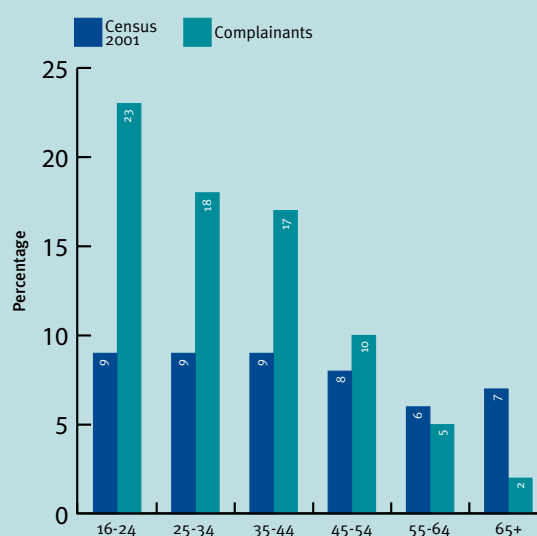
Figure 3: Annual Trends, Age Group



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 are generally over-represented, and young males in particular are over-represented in the sample monitored. Whilst cumulatively males under the age of 45 make up just over a quarter (27%) of the population, they comprise over half (58%) of complainants. Within the age bands presented the biggest differential is for 16-24 year-old men, who comprise 9% of the population compared to 23% of complainants.

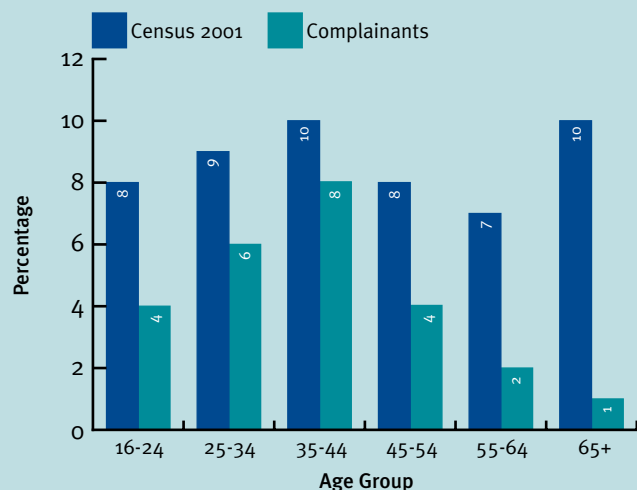
Figure 4: Age Group (Males), Complainants and Census 2001



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

Females are generally under-represented within complainants, comprising 52% of the population compared to 25% of complainants (Figure 5). The greatest differential is for older females; those aged over 65 comprise 10% of the population compared to 1% of complainants.

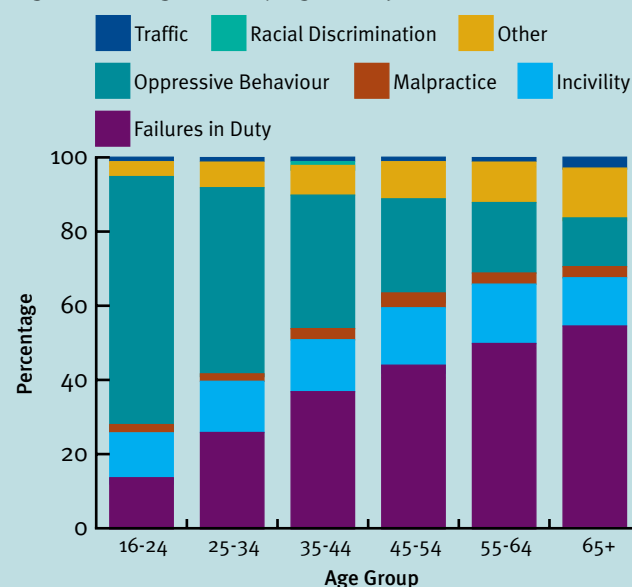
Figure 5: Age Group (Females), Complainants and Census 2001



Allegations

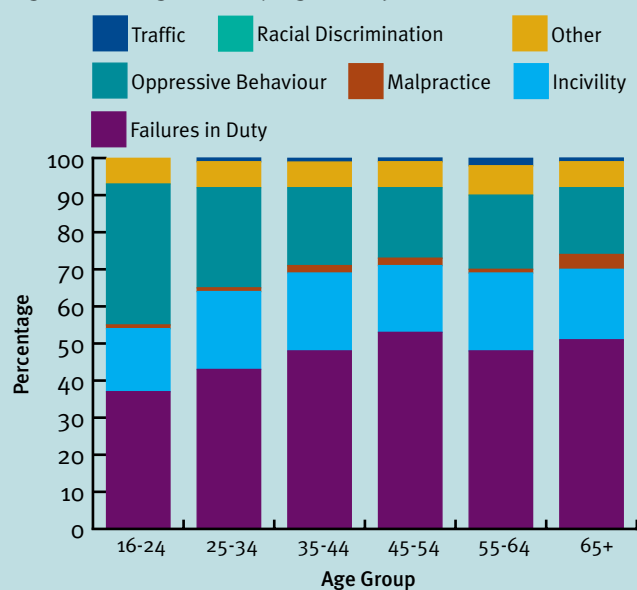
There were differences in the types of allegation made against police officers by men and women of different age groups (Figures 6 and 7). Oppressive behaviour accounted for the greatest proportion of allegations made by 16-24 year-old males (66%), 25-34 year-old males (50%) and 35-44 year-old males (38%), followed by failures in duty. However, for each of the older male age groups the proportions of allegations of failures in duty were greater than the proportions of oppressive behaviour.

Figure 6: Allegations by Age Group (Males)



For females aged 16-24 the greatest proportions of allegations were of oppressive behaviour (41%). For each of the older age groups, women were most likely to make allegations of failures in duty. Female complainants were more likely than male complainants to make allegations of incivility.

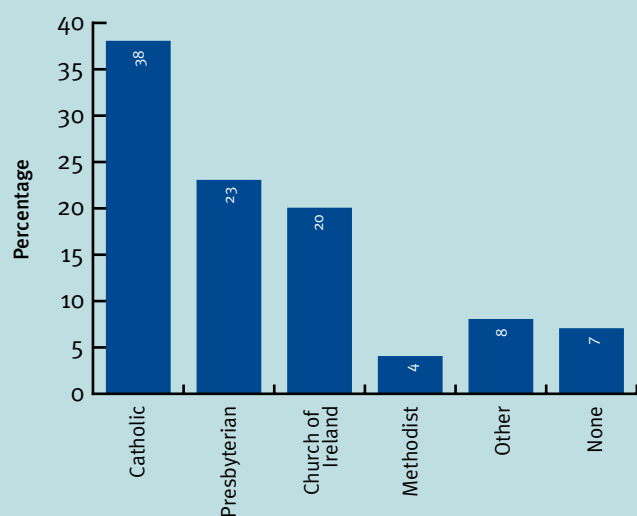
Figure 7: Allegations by Age Group (Females)



Religious Belief

Of the 6,403 complainants who returned forms, 6,340 declared their religious belief. This represents a sample of 31% of all complainants. Of those 6,340, 38% were Catholic, 20% Church of Ireland, 23% Presbyterian, 4% Methodist, 8% other, including other Christian, and 7% reported that they were of 'no religion' (Figure 8).

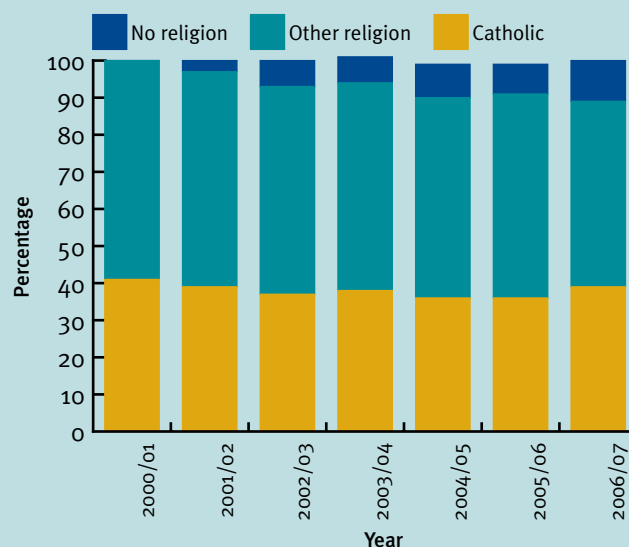
Figure 8: Religious Belief



Trends

In 2000/2001 the proportion of complainants who described themselves as having religious beliefs other than Catholic made up 59% and those stating that they were of no religion represented less than 1%. By 2006/07 the proportion who had 'other' religious beliefs had fallen to 50%, while those with no religious beliefs had risen to make up 11% (Figure 9).

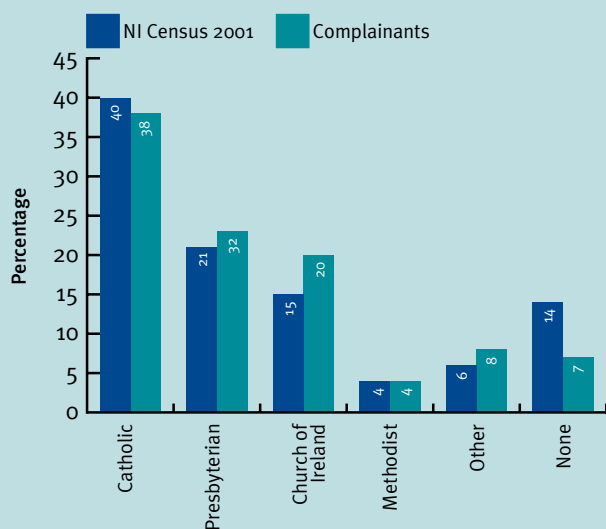
Figure 9: Annual Trends, Religious Belief



Representativeness

The profile of complainants is slightly different to that of the population generally, based on the 2001 census of population (Figure 10). The most marked difference was for people who stated that they were of no religious belief, who accounted for 14% of the population, but only 7% of complainants.

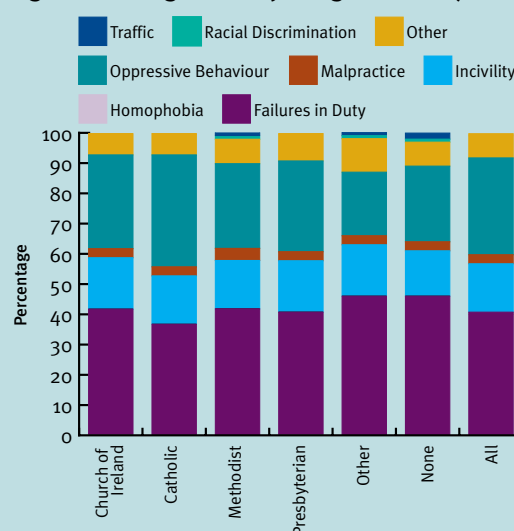
Figure 10: Religious Belief, Complainants and Census 2001



Allegations

There were some differences in the types of allegation made against police officers across the various religious beliefs monitored (Figure 11). Overall, the greatest proportion of allegations related to failures in duty (40%), followed by oppressive behaviour (32%) and incivility (16%). This trend was common across religious beliefs, apart from Catholics, who were least likely to make allegations of failures in duty (36%) and for whom the greatest proportion of allegations related to oppressive behaviour (37%). It is only within the categories of 'other' or 'no' religious beliefs that complaints of racial discrimination accumulate to make up 1% of the total (in the case of Methodists, the proportion of allegations that were of racial discrimination was 0.5%).

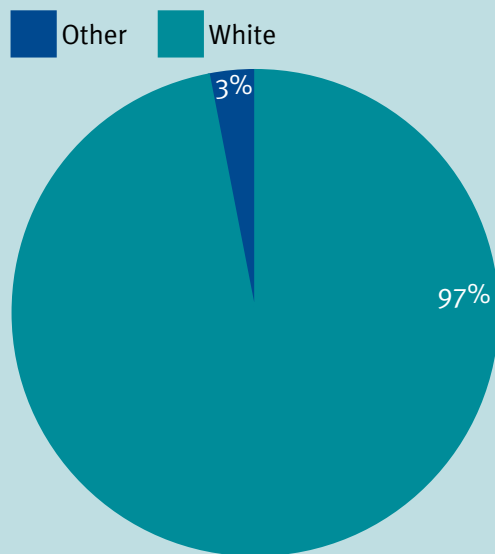
Figure 11: Allegations by Religious Belief



Racial Group

Of the 6,403 complainants who returned forms, 6,188 declared their racial grouping. This represents a sample of 30% of all complainants. Of those 6,188 97% described themselves as White (Figure 12). Three per cent of respondents were from 'other' ethnic groups.

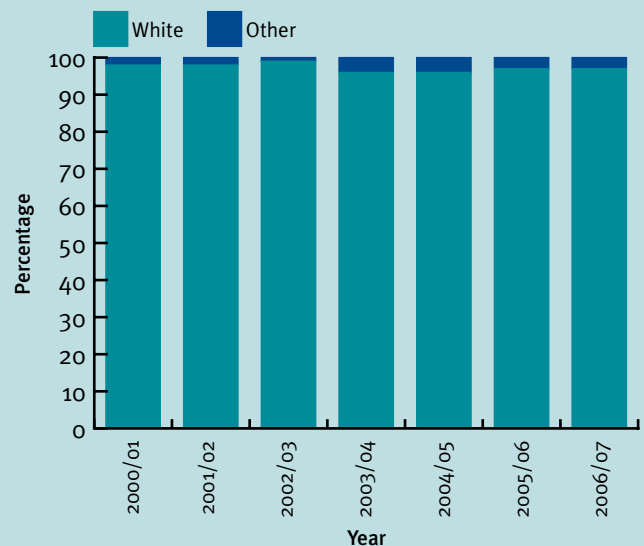
Figure 12: Ethnic Group



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 to the monitoring described themselves as belonging to 'other' race or ethnic groupings.

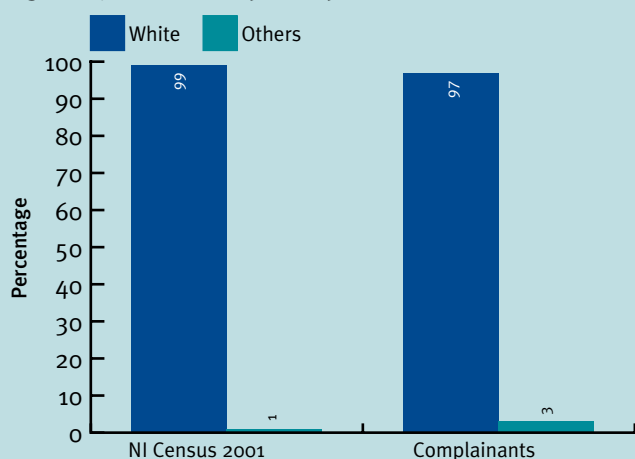
Figure 13: Annual Trends, Ethnic Group



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 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.

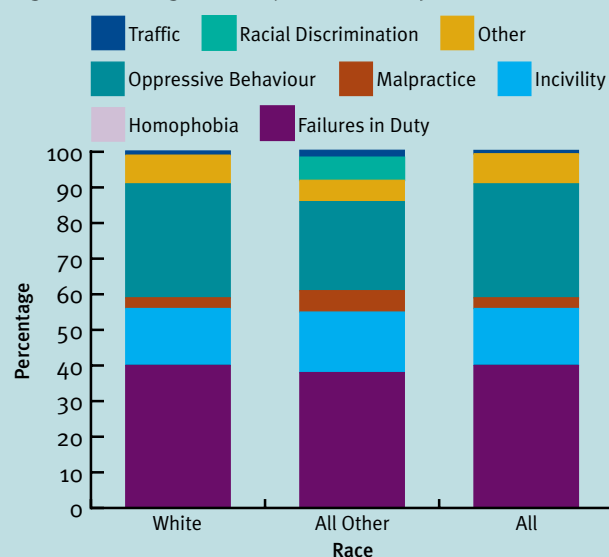
Figure 14: Racial Group, Complainants and Census 2001



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 failures in duty (40% and 38% respectively). White complainants were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour (32%) compared to minority ethnic complainants (25%). Allegations of racial discrimination comprised fewer than 1% of allegations made by White complainants, but accounted for 7% of those made by complainants from ethnic minorities.

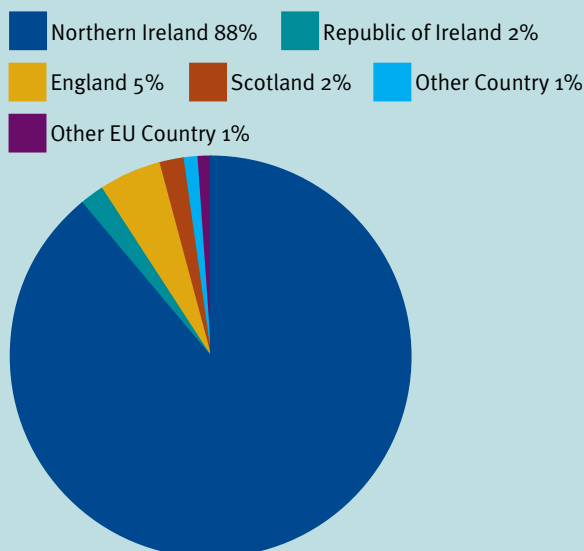
Figure 15: Allegations by Racial Group



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 2007, 1,187 complainants who returned forms had answered this question. During 2006/07 88% of complainants who returned monitoring forms had been born in Northern Ireland, 5% had been born in England, 2% in the Republic of Ireland, 2% in Scotland, 1% in other European countries and 1% in other countries outside the European Union (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Country of Birth



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 to 88% of complainants and that 1% was born in Scotland, compared to 2% of complainants. The distributions of other countries of birth were similar (Figure 17). The small differences observed may be due to the changing racial profile in Northern Ireland in recent years following the Census.

Figure 17: Country of Birth, Complainants and Census 2001



Allegations

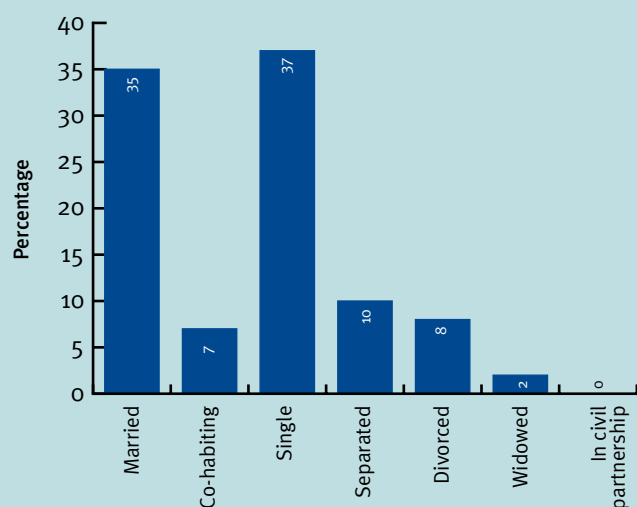
There were no significant differences in the types of allegations made by people who had been born in different countries.

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

Marital Status

Of the 6,403 complainants who returned forms, 6,381 declared their marital status. This represents a sample of 31% of all complainants. Of those 6,381, 35% were married, 7% were living with a partner, 37% were single, 10% were separated, 8% were divorced and 2% were widowed (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Marital Status

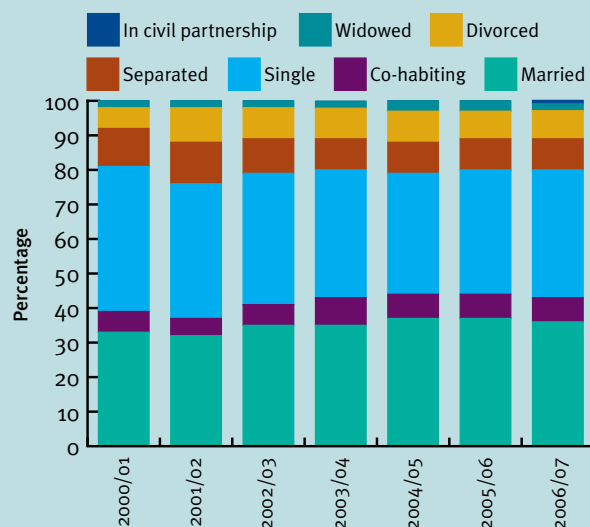


Trends

In 2000/2001 the proportion of complainants who were single was 42%. This decreased over the following four years, making up 35% in 2004/2005 but increased to 36% in 2005/06, falling to 34% in 2006/07.

The proportion of complainants who were divorced increased from 6% to 8% over the same period. In April 2006 the Office added the category of “in civil partnership” to the monitoring form. During 2006/07 1% of complainants who returned forms were in civil partnership (Figure 19).

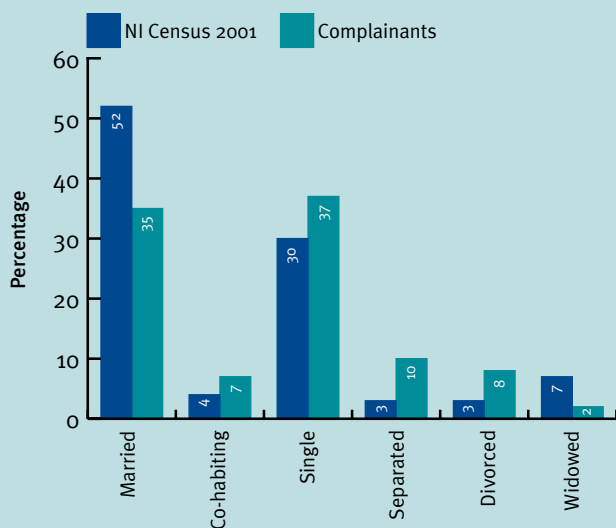
Figure 19: Annual Trends, Marital Status



Representativeness

The marital status profile of complainants is not what would be expected from the population profile based on the 2001 census (Figure 20). There is a greater proportion of single complainants (37%) compared to the population generally (30%). The proportions of complainants who were separated (10%) or divorced (8%) were also higher than the census figures (3% in each category). Married people are therefore under-represented among complainants (35%) compared to the population generally (52%).

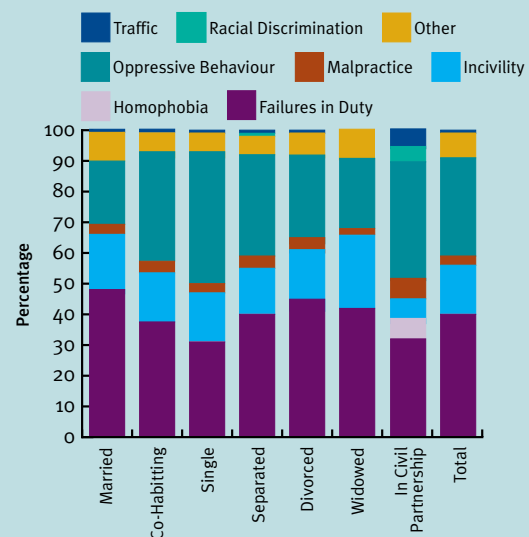
Figure 20: Marital Status, complainants and Census 2001



Allegations

There were some differences in the types of allegation made against police officers depending on the marital status of complainants (Figure 21). While the greatest proportion of allegations overall was related to failures in duty (40%), the greatest proportion of allegations made by single complainants (43%) related to oppressive behaviour. This may be related to the age profile of complainants.

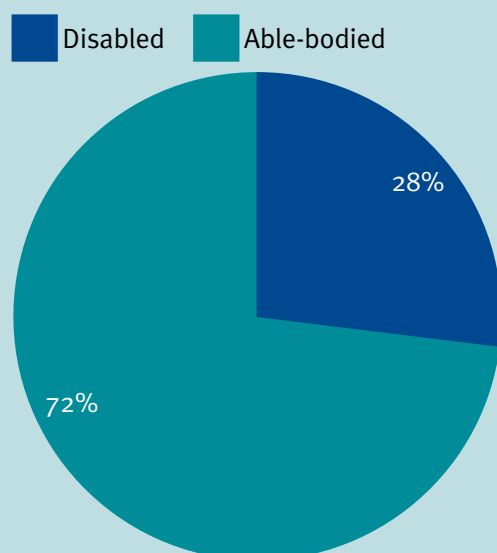
Figure 21: Allegations by Marital Status



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 6,403 complainants who returned forms, 6,189 declared their disability status. This represents a sample of 30% of all complainants. Of those 6,189, 28% stated that they had a disability and 72% stated that they did not (Figure 22).

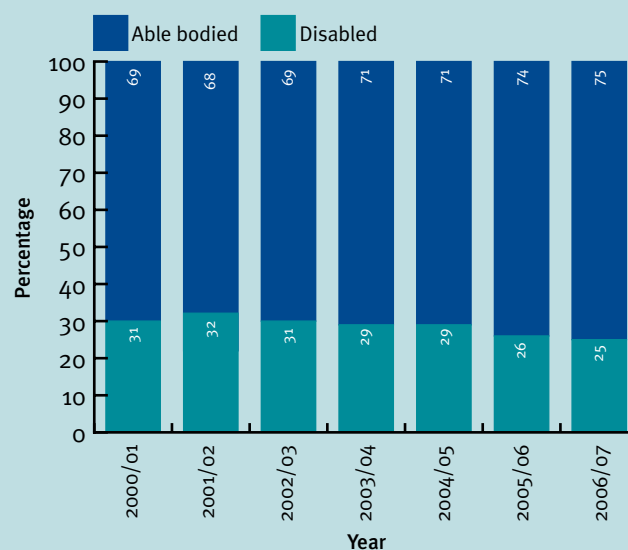
Figure 22: Disability



Trends

In 2000/2001 the proportion of complainants who described themselves as disabled was 31%. This proportion decreased over the following six years, falling to 25% in 2006/07 (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Annual Trends, Disability

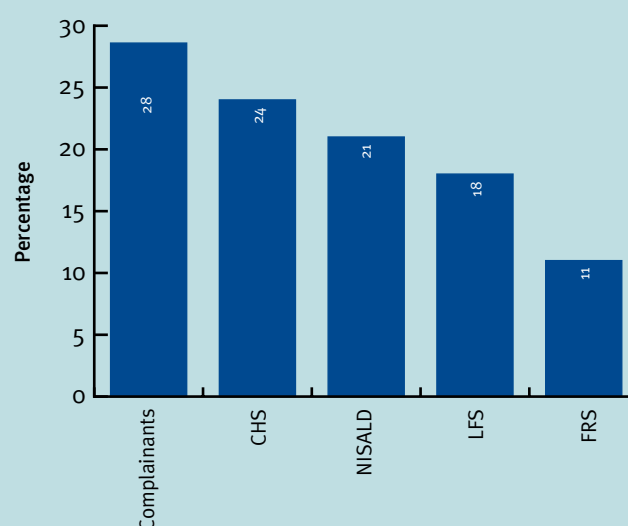


Disability

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 28% reported by complainants is high compared to some Northern Ireland wide surveys (Figure 24); the NI Continuous Household Survey (CHS)⁷ estimated that 24% of adults are disabled. 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 11% 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.

Figure 24: Disability, Complainants and Survey Measures



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 2006/07

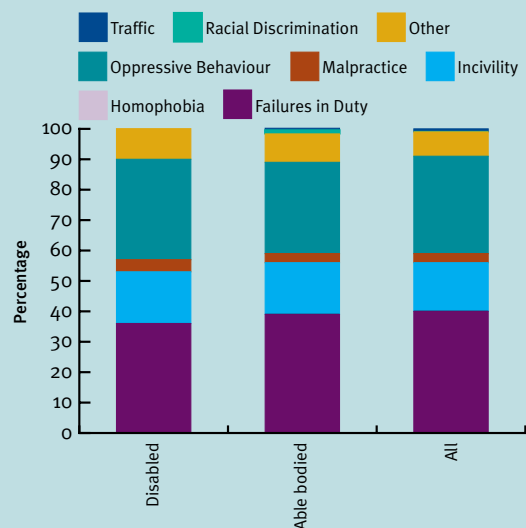
⁶ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Labour Force Survey Jul-Dec 2007

⁷ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Continuous Household Survey 2006/07

Allegations

People who reported that they had a disability were more likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour (33%) than those who did not (30%) and less likely to make allegations of failure in duty (36% compared to 39%) (Figure 25).

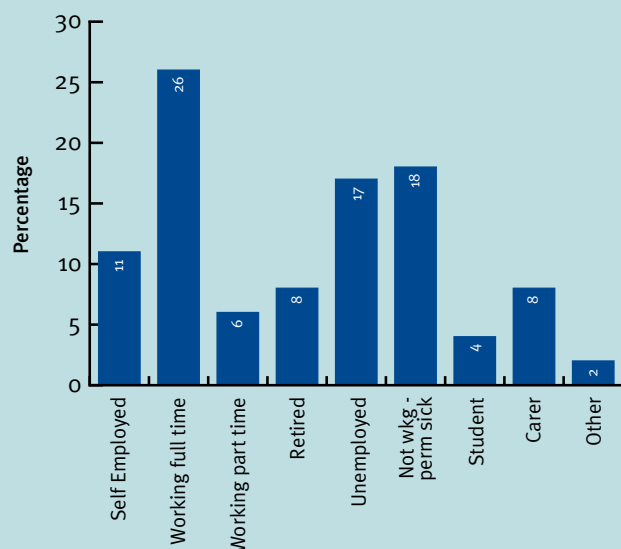
Figure 25: Allegations by Disabled Status



Employment

Of the 6,403 complainants who returned forms, 6,361 declared their employment status. This represents a sample of 31% of all complainants. Of those 6,361, 26% were full time employed, 18% were not working because they were sick, 17% were unemployed, 11% were self employed, 8% were caring for their family or home, 8% were retired, 6% were part-time employed, 4% were students, and 2% were otherwise employed (Figure 26).

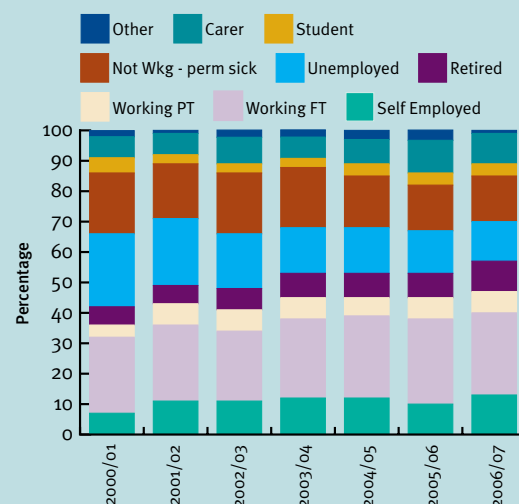
Figure 26: Employment Status



Trends

The proportion of complainants who described themselves as unemployed fell steadily from 24% in 2000/01 to 13% in 2006/07. The proportions who were not working because they were permanently sick also fell over the period, from 20% to 15%. There were increases in the proportions who were self-employed (from 7% to 13%) or carers (from 6% to 10%) (Figure 27).

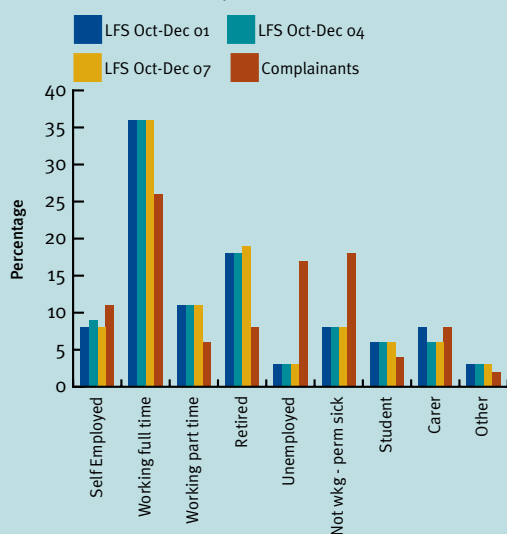
Figure 27: Annual Trends, Employment Status



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 28). The most marked difference was for unemployed people, who accounted for 3% of the population compared to 17% of complainants. Related to this, complainants are less likely to be working full time (26%) or part time (6%) compared to the general population (36% and 11% respectively). Complainants are also more likely to be out of work due to illness or disability (18% compared to 8%).

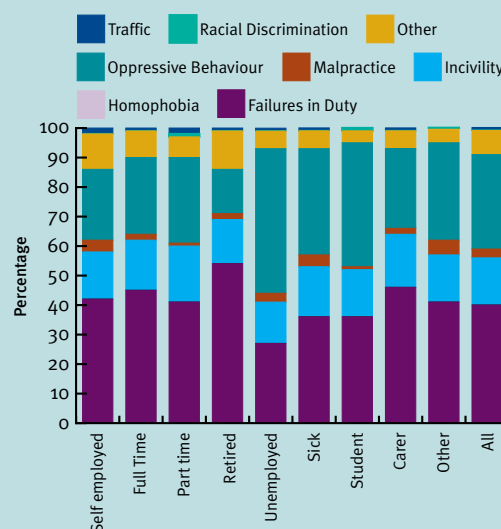
Figure 28: Employment Status, Complainants and NI Labour Force Survey



Allegations

There were some differences in the types of allegation made against police officers according to the employment status of the complainant (Figure 29). Overall, the greatest proportions of allegations related to failures in duty (40%), oppressive behaviour (32%) and incivility (16%). This trend was common across groups, although for people who were unemployed (49%), or students (42%) the proportions of allegations of oppressive behaviour were greater than those of failures in duty. Complainants who were not working due to sickness or disability were equally likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour or failure in duty (36%). Retired people (15%) were least likely to make allegations of oppressive behaviour, with more than half (54%) of allegations made being of failure in duty.

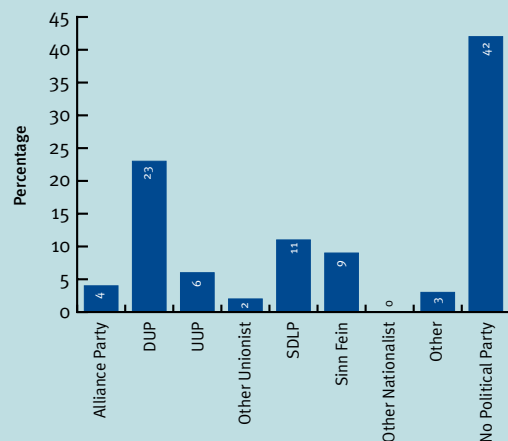
Figure 29: Allegations by Employment Status



Political Opinion

A question on political opinion was added to the complainant monitoring form in August 2004. By the end of March 2007, 2,140 complainants who returned forms had answered this question. This represents a sample of 10% of all complainants. Of those 2,140, 4% supported the Alliance Party, 23% supported the DUP, 6% supported the UUP, 11% supported the SDLP, 9% supported Sinn Fein, 5% supported other parties and 42% declared that they did not support any political party (Figure 30).

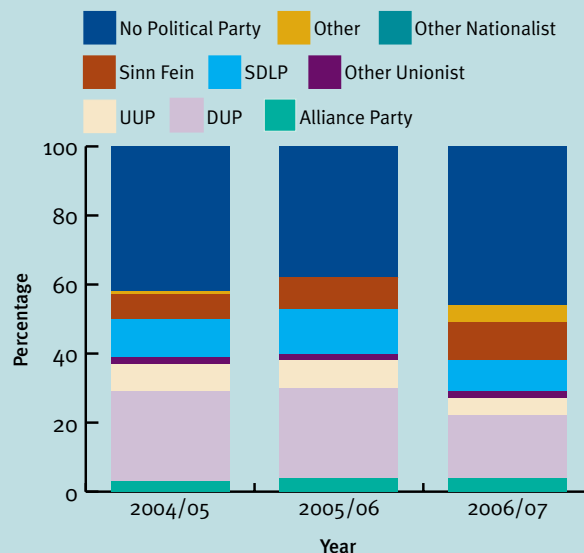
Figure 30: Political Opinion



Trends

Between 2004/05 and 2006/07 the proportion of complainants who supported the DUP fell from 26% to 18% and the proportion supporting the UUP fell from 8% to 5%. The proportion supporting Sinn Fein increased from 7% to 11% and the proportion supporting other parties increased from 1% to 5% (Figure 31).

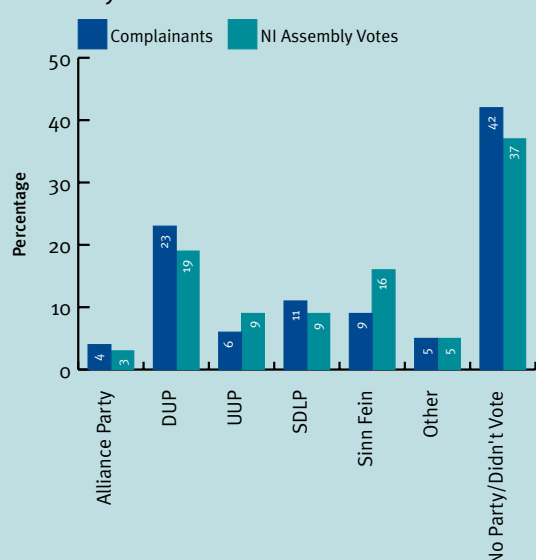
Figure 31: Annual Trends by Political Opinion



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 32). The proportion of Unionist complainants overall (29%) was close to the proportion of votes cast for the main Unionist parties in the 2007 Assembly elections (28%). The proportion of complainants who supported the main Nationalist parties (20%) is smaller than might be expected compared to the votes cast (25%). The proportions of other parties supported are similar; 5% of complainants and 5% of votes cast. A higher proportion of complainants (42%) stated that they supported no political party, compared to the proportion of the eligible electorate who did not vote in the election (37%).

Figure 32: Political Opinion, Complainants and NI Assembly Data

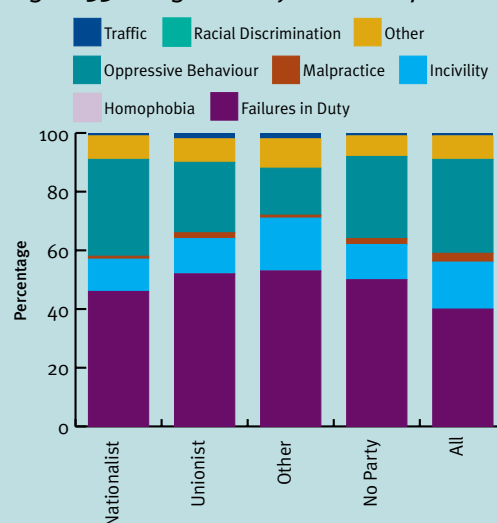


Allegations

There were some small differences in the types of allegation made against police officers according to the political opinion stated (Figure 33). Overall, the greatest proportion of allegations was related to failures in duty (40%), followed by oppressive behaviour (32%) and incivility (16%). This trend was common across all groups, apart from those who supported other parties outside the Nationalist/Unionist umbrellas, where a greater proportion made allegations of incivility (18%) than oppressive behaviour (16%).

While the overall trends were common across groups, the proportions varied. Nationalists (33%) were more likely than Unionists (24%) or others (16%) to make allegations of oppressive behaviour.

Figure 33: Allegations by Political Opinion

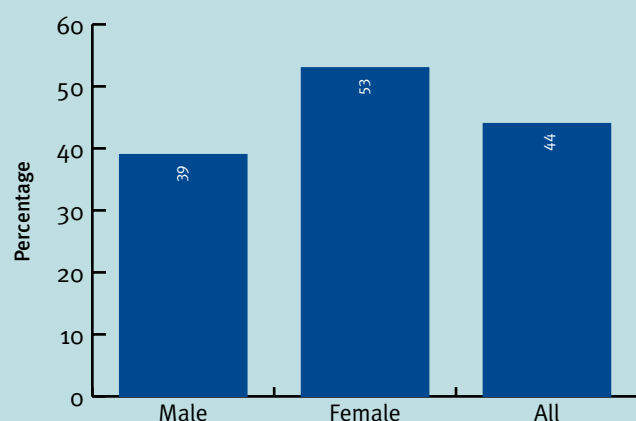


⁹ Electoral Office, 2007 Northern Ireland Assembly Elections

Dependants

A question on dependants was added to the complainant monitoring form in August 2004. By the end of March 2007, 2,864 complainants who returned forms had answered this question. This represents a sample of 14% of all complainants. Of those 2,864, 44% stated that they had dependants and 56% stated that they did not. Female complainants (53%) were more likely than male complainants (39%) to state that they had dependants (Figure 34). 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.

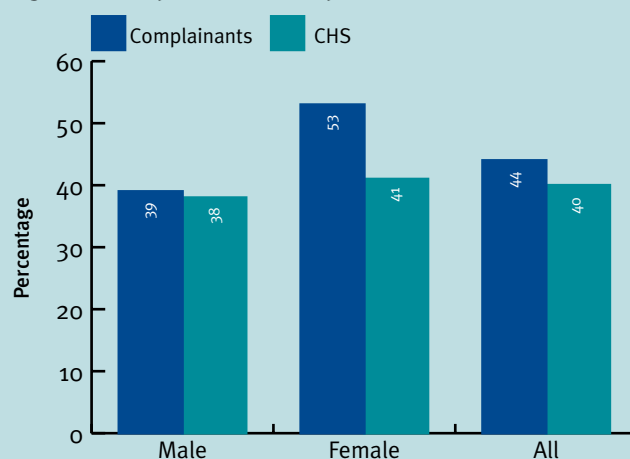
Figure 34: Persons with Dependants



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 40% of adults have dependant children (38% of males and 41% of females), a lower level than the 44% 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 35).

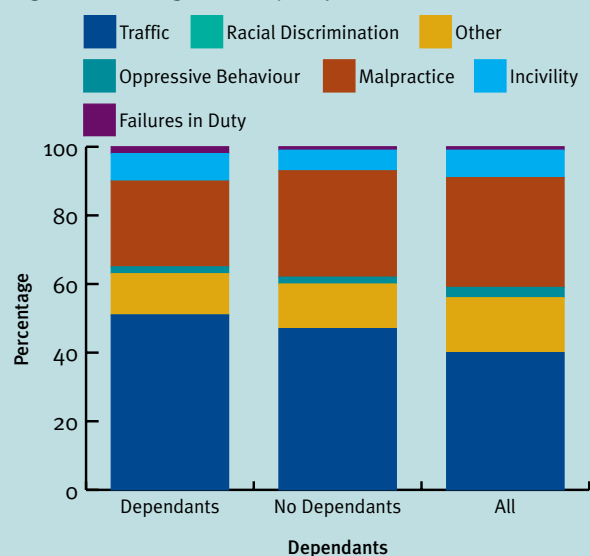
Figure 35: Dependants, Complainants and CHS 2006/07



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 36). Overall, the greatest proportion of allegations was related to failures in duty (40%), followed by oppressive behaviour (32%) and incivility (16%). This trend was common across both groups. However, 51% of those with dependants compared to 46% of those without dependants made allegations of failures in duty and 30% of persons without dependants made allegations of oppressive behaviour compared to 26% of those with dependants. As noted earlier, this may be related to the age profile of complainants.

Figure 36: Allegations by Dependants Status



Sexual Orientation

Overall, 1% of complainants declared that they were homosexual 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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