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HM INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY IN SCOTLAND

**HMICS Thematic Inspection of Domestic Abuse: Analysis of survey exploring experiences of reporting domestic abuse to the police**

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## Introduction

As part of the HMICS Inspection of Domestic Abuse (Phase 1) an online survey was developed to seek the views of members of the public as to their experiences of reporting domestic abuse to the police, through the investigation stage and to investigative conclusion. The survey was live between 10<sup>th</sup> May and 10<sup>th</sup> June 2022, receiving a total of 94 responses. The survey was advertised through social media, HMICS website, partner and stakeholder organisations and through word of mouth with organisations who support victims. Those who completed the survey spent considerable time to answer a long and detailed survey designed to elicit information relevant to the subject matter. However, it should be recognised that this survey was longer than would normally be desired and this may have impacted on the number of individuals taking part.

The small numbers that did take part have very relevant matters to raise, many of the points were similar to those gathered in face to face interviews.

The numbers completing the survey should be considered in terms of the number of victims who annually report domestic abuse to Police Scotland. The survey had 94 response and annually there are approximately 60,000 reports of domestic abuse, and many would argue that this remains a significantly under reported crime. The sample completing the survey are not a statistically representative selection. This report gives key findings and messages from the survey but care should be taken not to interpret the findings from this survey as a piece of research that provides a full representative view of all victims who have reported to Police Scotland.

## Methods

The survey was developed and piloted across a number of different organisations before going live.<sup>1</sup> The survey was live for a month, receiving 94 responses. The sample was self-selecting, in that having seen or been told about the survey, respondents chose whether or not to participate. Potential biases that may exist as a result of self-selecting samples include: the experiences and/or demographics of those who chose to participate may differ from those people who have also reported domestic abuse to Police Scotland, and who saw the survey, but chose not to participate. There will also be people who have reported domestic abuse to Police Scotland who were not aware of the opportunity to participate in the survey.

Survey responses were analysed using Questback, and thematic analysis for free-text responses. The survey has been analysed as a whole, giving results from all respondents. Data has then been broken down for some questions, to provide a more detailed look at the experiences of different groups. These are males and females, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and people with long-term or chronic health conditions. It should be noted that this means that individual respondents may have been included in more than one group.<sup>2</sup>

There were 77 questions in the survey. Of these, 42 (54.5 per cent) questions were answered by all 94 people, a further 13 (16.9 per cent) answered by at least 90 people, and a further 6 (7.8 per cent) by at least 84 people. The remaining 16 (20.8 per cent) questions were preceded by an 'if' clause, meaning that the question was not relevant to the whole sample, and so the numbers of respondents reflected this.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to in particular to Glasgow Caledonian University which shared its survey questions, and provided extensive feedback on the draft.

<sup>2</sup> For example, someone identifying as male and as Asian/ Asian Scottish/ Asian British would be included in both the 'male' group as well as the minority ethnic group, and their responses considered as part of both of these groupings. This means that numbers listed in reference to one group should not be added to the numbers listed in reference to another group, as they may contain the same individual(s).

<sup>3</sup> Percentages throughout have been rounded to 1 decimal place so may not always exactly equal 100 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> Where respondents could choose more than one option, the responses are not expected to add up to 100 per cent.

## Key findings

This section gives an overview of the key results of the quantitative data, and also a summary of the main themes captured within the free text questions. It should be noted that any numbers/percentages given should be viewed in the context of the whole response to the individual question, in order for the full picture to be understood.

### Nature of domestic abuse

The most common forms of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland by survey respondents were: emotional/psychological (78.7 per cent); coercive control (77.7 per cent); physical and verbal abuse (both 61.7 per cent) with 7 other forms of domestic abuse also identified. When asked if children had been present or witnessed the domestic abuse, 63.8 per cent of respondents said they had been.

### Reporting of domestic abuse

- Most commonly reported directly to the police by the respondent (84.9 per cent)
- Most often prompted by concern for one's own safety (75.5 per cent) followed by concern for children/dependants/other (52.1 per cent)
- Often made after experiencing domestic abuse for over a year (73.1 per cent), and 71.3 per cent had experienced domestic abuse that they had not reported to the police
- Most commonly reported by the telephone (80.9 per cent), either by 101 (53.2 per cent) or 999 (27.7 per cent).

Call handling and online reporting were largely seen as positive:

- Overall, 53.1 per cent were very satisfied/satisfied with the way they were treated by the call handler compared with 24.6 per cent who were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied
- Of those who reported on an online platform, 64.7 per cent had found it very easy/easy to use.

## **Support and engagement with the police when reporting**

Local policing appointments had been requested or offered for 50 per cent of respondents, and, for the majority of these, appointments had been arranged and took place quickly following their report. The overall perception by the survey respondents of reporting domestic abuse to Police Scotland was not very positive:

- 58.5 per cent felt that the police had not provided the appropriate response to their initial report
- 53.2 per cent said the police had not taken into account what they wanted to happen as a result of reporting
- 59.3 per cent said their additional support needs had not been met by the police.

Engagement with the police when reporting was mixed but, overall, more negative than positive:

- A slightly higher number of people agreed that the police had been respectful towards them (42.5 per cent), than those who disagreed (37.3 per cent)
- 51 per cent felt that the police would not try to help them
- 50 per cent did not feel confident that the police had taken their complaints seriously
- 50 per cent did not feel that the reporting and investigative process had been explained clearly.

## **Reporting during COVID-19 restrictions**

During the period of the restrictions, 46.8 per cent had experienced domestic abuse, with 56.8 per cent of these reporting it; over a third had experienced challenges reporting during this time and the most common way of reporting during COVID-19 was by the telephone (46.9 per cent).

## Investigations

Despite some initial negative experiences, 60.6 per cent of respondents wanted to proceed with an investigation:

- Over two-thirds said that their report had gone on to be investigated by the police:, for some after the first report (36.7 per cent), and for others, after multiple reports (26.5 per cent).
- 21.7 per cent felt that the police explained everything about the investigation process to them in a way they could easily understand, with 35.9 per cent answering no and 33.7 per cent answering sometimes.

The process of giving a statement was experienced as more negative than positive, with higher numbers reporting it to be: challenging and lengthy rather than easy and quick; their basic needs had not been met; and they did not have the option of other support during the process. Despite this, a higher number felt safe while giving the statement than not. When describing engagement with the people/person taking the statement:

- Respondents were more positive with regards to feeling that they had a supportive manner
- Slightly higher numbers felt that they had been taken seriously than not
- Slightly lower numbers were more negative about feeling that the people/person appeared knowledgeable in dealing with domestic abuse
- 76.8 per cent had not been given the option of stating whether they would prefer a male or female to take their statement
- For those who had stated a preference for male or female, 44.4 per cent said this had been fulfilled, and 55.6 per cent said it had not
- 57.8 per cent had not been offered a Victim Care Card
- 55.3 per cent had not been informed of their right to support services
- 69 per cent had not been referred to support services
- 59.6 per cent had not been informed about available safety measures.

With regards to the progress of investigations:

- 53.4 per cent did not know who their main contact was, compared to 37.5 per cent who did, 9.1 per cent said they were unsure
- 60.9 per cent had not been advised of their rights to ask about the progress/outcome of the investigation
- 59.8 per cent had not been provided with regular updates
- 46.4 per cent had not had updates communicated in a way that met their needs, compared with 19 per cent who did
- 64.4 per cent had not been asked what their preferred method of communication was, although, for those who had been asked, 57.1 per cent said their preferred method had been used.

### **Outcome of investigations**

- 40 per cent had been informed if the abuser was arrested compared to 17 per cent who had not
- 54.7 per cent were advised of the outcome of the investigation, compared with 29.1 per cent who were not
- After reporting, 69.9 per cent of people said that they did not feel adequately supported and protected by the police, compared with 21.5 per cent who did
- The police response to reports of domestic abuse did not make the majority of people feel safer, with 30.9 per cent feeling less safe, or that nothing had changed, and 40.4 per cent reporting that they had always felt unsafe (and still do)
- 59.6 per cent of people said that their expectations of what would happen when reporting had not been met, compared with 19 per cent who felt their expectations had been met
- 52.8 per cent were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied with the service provided to them by Police Scotland, compared with 26.4 per cent who were satisfied/very satisfied.

## Awareness

Awareness of Police Scotland campaigns on reporting domestic abuse was high (58.1 per cent) but, despite this, 71 per cent had not previously known that there were several different ways of reporting domestic abuse to the police.

## Future

Of the survey respondents, 34.4 per cent said that they would report any future domestic abuse to Police Scotland and 48.4 per cent said they would not. The most common reasons for not reporting future domestic abuse were:

- A lack of confidence that it would help (68.4 per cent)
- A perception that their complaint would not be taken seriously (58.2 per cent)
- Negative previous experiences of treatment when reporting (43 per cent)
- Being scared of reactions or repercussions from the abuser (43 per cent)
- Prefer to report to a support agency (26.6 per cent).

## Free text responses/comments

Several questions had the option of providing free text responses, and the uptake of this option was often very high. Details of the themes, including quotes, are included in each question.

The main theme across free text question relates to **not being taken seriously, or received a dismissive response** to their report, including not being believed, or being ignored. Reasons given included sex and ethnicity, gendered stereotypes, and (perceived) mental health problems. The theme of whether or not a report was taken seriously included the issue of evidencing domestic abuse, which runs throughout the survey. It is perceived that: different types of abuse were taken more seriously; anything other than physical abuse would be dismissed. Some said they had not reported incidents of domestic abuse, or would not in future. Some also described how their abuser had convinced them that they would not be taken seriously.

Many respondents reported **lacking confidence that reporting would help** their situation, including doubts surrounding abuser accountability or whether reporting would change anything. This was often based on previous experience of reporting.

Linked to this was the theme of **fear that reporting would make situations worse** for the person reporting. This included issues related to housing and children, as well as fearing repercussions from the abuser if they reported; and not feeling protected as a result of reporting domestic abuse, including feeling that insufficient or no safety measures had been implemented. In addition, some felt that the onus had been shifted on to them to manage their own safety. Others were subjected to further abuse following their report, or were fearful of what the abuser would do, especially where children were involved, or where there had been no conviction.

**Lack of action or follow-up** was another key theme: frustration of being told that nothing could be done; feeling that the process of reporting or investigation had not been explained adequately; respondents did not know why their report had not been followed up. At other times, this was perceived as a lack of justice served, where there was no prosecution. Limited or no updates was a recurrent theme, with many people stating they did not receive these. Several described having to chase the police for them, with several calls.

Previous **negative experience of reporting domestic abuse** to the police was described or given as reasons for not reporting (again). This theme ranged from not receiving a response at all, to the response prompting the abuse to get worse to the wishes of the victim/survivor about next steps not having been taken into account.

There was acknowledgement that the **response depended upon the individual officer**, variations between attitude and knowledge impacting on engagement being a positive experience or not, impacting upon whether they felt their report was taken seriously, and possibly affecting whether or not they would report domestic abuse in the future. This inconsistency surrounding different officers/staff throughout, and having to repeat their stories, is a cause for concern; lack of continuity is an issue, as too is the concern over being uncomfortable; being laughed at, not being treated sympathetically; or victim blaming. This theme linked strongly to suggestions on improving the reporting of domestic abuse, where the need for better knowledge, awareness, attitudes, understanding of domestic abuse and addressing conscious and unconscious bias, was identified - whether through training or specialist officers (as well as better screening). Conversely, others described very positive interactions with (and experiences of) officers who they said had helped them greatly.

Some described **processes not being explained clearly**; both the overall process of reporting domestic abuse, and/or the investigative stage, and that they did not know what to expect, or when. Some relied on third-party agencies to help them understand the process better. Indeed, across questions, the theme of making better use of third-party agencies was suggested, including many descriptions of positive, supportive, helpful interactions that had taken place.

**Counter allegations** were a theme raised by several respondents, who described being subjected to these when they made their report of domestic abuse, either with both partners being arrested/accused, or their being accused instead. Some of these respondents felt that these allegations were made because of biases against them.

Within several of the themes was the acknowledgement that the particular issue raised was either out of the control of the police, or difficult for the police to tackle, and several of the suggestions to improve reporting did include the involvement of others, including third-party agencies and providing improved education on domestic abuse (for instance, in schools).

### **Overall survey responses**

Ninety-four responses were received and analysed.<sup>3</sup> Comments have been selected from free text questions to illustrate relevant points.

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<sup>3</sup> All responses were included in the analysis, although blank responses to certain questions were excluded (and the number of respondents noted for each individual question).

## **1 – 5. Consent questions**

All 94 respondents consented to participation in the survey, and for their responses to be used: 25 people (26.6 per cent) said that they did not want their comments to be quoted in the report so, while these have been used in the analysis, their words are not repeated in the report.

## **6. Sex**

What is your sex?

Of the 94 people who responded to the survey:

- 85.1 per cent (80) identified as female
- 14.9 per cent (14) as male
- 0 as intersex
- 0 selected prefer not to say.

## **7. Transgender/transgender history**

When asked if they considered themselves to be transgender or having a transgender history, 98.9 per cent (93) people said 'no', and 1.1 per cent (1) person selected 'prefer not to say'.

## **8. Sexuality**

Eighty-two people (87.2 per cent) identified as being heterosexual or straight; 1 as gay or lesbian (1.1 per cent); 6 as bisexual (6.4 per cent); and 5 (5.3 per cent) preferred not to say.



## 9. Age

Of the respondents, 89.4 per cent were aged between 26 and 55. Just 5.3 per cent were aged under 25, and 5.3 per cent between 56 and 65. No respondents were aged over 65.

18-25	5 (5.3%)
26-35	20 (21.3%)
36-45	35 (37.2%)
46-55	29 (30.9%)
56-65	5 (5.3%)
66-75	0
Over 75	0
<b>N</b>	<b>94</b>

## 10. Ethnicity<sup>4</sup>

Out of the respondents, 87.1 per cent (74) identified with being from a white Scottish/English/Northern Irish/British background and 11.8 per cent (10) identified with being from a black or minority ethnic background, including those who selected other (an additional 1.2 per cent preferred not to say).

Asian/ Asian Scottish/ Asian British - Other, please specify	1 (1.2%)
Black Scottish/British - African	2 (2.4%)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - Please specify	2 (2.4%)
White - Scottish, English, Welsh, Northern Irish, British	74 (87.1%)
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1 (1.2%)
Prefer not to say	1 (1.2%)
Other (Answers were: Polish, white non-British, white, white other)	4 (4.7%)
<b>N</b>	<b>85</b>

## 11. Language

Is English your first language: 95.7 per cent (90) of respondents said yes, 3.2 per cent (3) said no, and 1.1 per cent (1) preferred not to say.

<sup>4</sup> N.B. Other categories were given as options in the survey, but where 0 responses were received, these have been removed from the table.

## 12. Long-term health conditions/illnesses lasting 12 months or more

For this question, 44.7 per cent (42) answered yes; 45.7 per cent (43) said no and 9.6 per cent (9) preferred not to say. Of the 42 people who said yes, 27 gave further details: specific mental health conditions were cited 25 times, and physical health conditions were cited 4 times.<sup>5</sup>

## 13. Religion

In the survey, 27.2 per cent (25) of people identified as Christian (all denominations); 2.2 per cent (2) as Muslim; 63 per cent (58) as no religion; 2.2 per cent (2) as other; and 5.4 per cent (5) preferred not to say.

## 14. Type of domestic abuse

Respondents were asked to identify the type of domestic abuse that they reported to Police Scotland (ticking all that apply). The most common forms of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland by the respondents of the survey were emotional/psychological abuse (78.7 per cent), coercive control (77.7 per cent), and physical and verbal abuse (both 61.7 per cent).

Physical violence/abuse	58 (61.7%)
Sexual violence/abuse	27 (28.7%)
Coercive control	73 (77.7%)
Emotional/psychological abuse	74 (78.7%)
Verbal abuse	58 (61.7%)
Financial abuse	33 (35.1%)
Stalking	35 (37.2%)
Threats against me	47 (50%)
Threats again someone else	17 (18.1%)
Online abuse (including social media, emails, use of the internet)	28 (29.8%)
Telephony (text messages or telephone calls)	43 (45.7%)
Other	4 (4.3%)

**N**

**94**

<sup>5</sup> A combination of health issues was given by one individual, so mentions do not equate to numbers of people.

### **15. Presence of children**

Respondents were asked whether there were any children present, or who witnessed the domestic abuse that was reported. Children were often present during the domestic abuse reported: 63.8 per cent (60) of people said that there were children present, or who witnessed the domestic abuse that they reported; 35.1 per cent (33) said no; and 1.1 per cent (1) said they didn't know.

### **16. Nature of relationship with the abuser**

Slightly more people had reported abuse by an ex-partner than by a current partner: 42.6 per cent (40) said it was their current partner; 51.1 per cent (48) said their ex-partner; and 6.4 per cent (6) said other (all of whom met the survey inclusion criteria).

### **17. Person making contact with Police Scotland to report the abuse**

Respondents were asked who made the contact with Police Scotland to report the abuse, ticking all that applied. The abuse had most commonly been reported directly to the police by the survey respondents (79) (84.9 per cent), followed jointly by: the respondent reporting via a third-party support person/organisation (12) (12.9 per cent); or the abuser making a report against the respondent (12.9 per cent). There were 8 instances (8.6 per cent) where someone else (family/child/neighbour/friend/other) reported to the police, and 2 reports (2.2 per cent) via a third party. Total response equalled 93.

### **18. Factors prompting the report of domestic abuse**

Respondents were asked what had prompted the report of domestic abuse, ticking all that applied. The report was most often prompted by concern for one's own safety (75.5 per cent), followed by concern for children/dependants/other (52.1 per cent), and ongoing abuse getting worse or new abusive behaviours starting (51.1 per cent). The other most influential factors were encouragement from third-party support organisations (34.0 per cent), and encouragement from another person (30.9 per cent).

Concern for own safety	71 (75.5%)
Concern for safety of children/dependants/other	49 (52.1%)
Encouragement of other person (e.g. family/child/neighbour/friend/other)	29 (30.9%)
Encouragement of third-party support organisation	32 (34.0%)
Ongoing abuse got worse, or new abusive behaviours started	48 (51.1%)
Ongoing domestic abuse got more frequent	26 (27.7%)
Planning/attempting to leave abuser	24 (25.5%)
The abuser made a report against me	10 (10.6%)
A 'right to ask' or 'right to know' application under the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS), also known as Clare's Law	5 (5.3%)
Don't know	1 (1.1%)
Other	1 (1.1%)

**N**

**94**

## 19. Method of reporting

The most common way of reporting domestic abuse was by the telephone, with 80.9 per cent of respondents having done so (53.2 per cent calling 101, and 27.7 per cent calling 999 (50 and 26 respondents respectively). A further 40.4 per cent (38) had reported in person. Support services helplines were used by 16 per cent (15) of respondents; and 10.6 per cent (10) of respondents reported online; with 1 per cent (1) stating 'other'.

## 20. Satisfaction with treatment by staff member/call handler when reporting

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the way they were treated by the staff member/call handler if they had made the report in person/on the phone (N/A responses have been excluded from this question). Of these, 53.1 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with the way they were treated by the call handler - more than twice the number than those who were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied (24.6 per cent).

Very satisfied	18 (22.2%)
Satisfied	25 (30.9%)
Neutral	18 (22.2%)
Unsatisfied	10 (12.3%)
Very unsatisfied	10 (12.3%)

N

81

In response to a later question, one person commented: *“The call handlers I spoke to on 101 were more empathetic and understanding of the distress and trauma when reporting than the beat officers”*. (R89).

## 21. Ease of reporting domestic abuse using an online platform

When asked about the ease of reporting domestic abuse using an online platform, 77 people who answered this question said that it was not applicable to them (81.9 per cent). When N/A responses are excluded, of the remaining 17 people who said they had reported domestic abuse using an online platform: 64.7 per cent found it easy/very easy (4 and 7); 17.6 per cent (3) were neutral about their experiences; and 17.7 per cent found it difficult/very difficult (1 and 2).

- Not taken seriously/dismissive response (28)
- No action/follow-up (6)
- Delayed/response took too long (5)
- Falsely accused/counter allegations (4)
- Inadequate procedural issues (3), including inadequate collection of evidence, inadequate medical checks, and inappropriate involvement of the abuser.
- Acted against my wishes (2)
- Not knowledgeable enough (2)
- Encouraged not to pursue (1)
- Inadequate protection (1).

## 22. Appropriateness of response provided by police

Several people felt that their report was not taken seriously, that they were not believed, that the officer(s) did not care, or that the response they received when reporting was dismissive or ignored. Reasons for not feeling that reports were taken seriously included the sex and/or ethnicity of the complainant. This included a man who felt that his ethnicity prevented his report from being taken seriously (R6); a female police employee who did not feel believed (R7); and a female whose domestic abuse was being perpetrated by a police officer, who felt that this prevented her report from being taken seriously (R75). There were males who felt that their reports were not taken seriously because of their sex, and perceptions that they must be the abuser because of being male. There were also females who felt that their reports were not taken seriously for a variety of reasons, including because: the behaviour they were reporting was “*Dismissed as ‘normal’ male behaviour*” (R92); it was seen as in the context of the matrimonial property (R94); they were (accused of being) drunk; or their reports were dismissed as mental health issues (or being ‘mad’), or they were treated as if they were having a psychotic episode, because of the reports that they had made. Some people said that they were accused of trying to take children away from the abuser when reporting. For example:

- *“The[y] failed to do anything, 2 male officers were sent and 1 took my phone read the abusive messages and stated ‘looks to me like these are from a dad that misses his child, I can’t see what the problem is. We don’t like to get involved in domestics’. The text read [physical threat]”* (R54)
- *“I was accused of being drunk by a male attending officer (I’d had one drink at a friends house which prompted my now ex partner to threaten to shoot me.) I offered to do a blood alcohol test if necessary. This was ignored”* (R38)
- *“Told I had Postnatal Depression and to make GP apt”* (R92)
- *“I was treated as if I was having a Psychotic episode of some kind... I was left on a room whilst my abuser was spoke to by the police. I was then removed to the local doctor’s surgery and treated for mental health concerns. The abuse I was reporting was not taken seriously. This had a huge impact on the evidence which may have been available within the home that evening”* (R48).

Some stated that whether or not a report was taken seriously depended upon the individual officer(s) taking the report, and others felt that a counter allegation made against them prevented their own report from being taken seriously: *“It was mixed - some officers took it seriously, another accused me of wasting their time”* (R13); and *“Wasn’t taken seriously as my abuser made a complaint about me. He know I was leaving him and he planned to destroy me”* (R23).

The issue of evidence is one that runs throughout the survey, and the difficulty of evidencing abuse, e.g.: *“Domestic abuse is mainly done behind closed doors so why does there need to be a witness who visibly sees abuse? Why is hearing it through the wall not collaborative evidence?”* (R89). Several people described how, despite having evidence, they felt they were not taken seriously when they reported. A couple of people stated that they felt that, despite large amounts of evidence from different sources, the police did not follow any of it up adequately, and were dismissive of most of it, one saying that threats were treated as jokes (R56). Another said that the diary of the abuse she had experienced was not taken seriously, and she was *“Laughed at for using Women’s Aid service”* (R92). Another stated that her fear of her ex-partner was not taken seriously, again, despite lots of evidence showing that it was justified fear, and that she was just told to get security cameras (R94). One person stated that the police talked about problems and not possible solutions, or how they could help (R63), with another saying that their attitudes made her feel as if she was boring them and wasting their time (R78).

Another key theme throughout the survey is the different types of domestic abuse, and how these are perceived. A few people felt that because their report did not involve physical violence, it was not taken seriously (for example, in the case of financial abuse (R90)). Another respondent stated that her report was compared with *“more severe’ cases e.g. some people are being attacked with an axe”* (R88), and not taken as seriously as these. One respondent felt that, because her abuser had been released without charge, her subsequent reports were not taken seriously (R91).



Six respondents stated that the response to their report was not appropriate, either because there was no follow-up to their report, or because the police said that no action could be taken. One stated that she felt that this was because of the poor knowledge of officers: *“Officers have not been appropriately aware of the new abuse laws”* (R18). Others expressed frustration at having been told that there was nothing that could be done, which might indicate the limits of the ability of police to help e.g.: *“2 years of abuse and harassment and still nothing can be done to stop him and his partner”* (R57).

There were some respondents (five) who felt that the response to their report took too long, or was delayed, resulting in negative repercussions, one saying that it *“Took them 2 days to arrive”* (R3), and another who stated that the police had *“Waited a week before even speaking to my abuser, within which time 2 further incidents occurred”*. (R59).

Five respondents (two males and three females) felt that the response to their report had resulted in counter allegations, where they were accused instead, or where both the accused and the respondent had been arrested. In such cases, respondents felt that their reports had not been taken seriously, or that police had been biased against them. For example: *“Despite being called to my residence on several occasions and charging my ex partner, the police believed I was the abuser after my ex turned the tables after beating me severely”* (R12).

Some felt that the police response to their reports had involved inadequate procedural issues, including inadequate collection of evidence, inadequate medical checks, inappropriate involvement of the abuser, and inadequate protection provided. For example: *“At the time I thought so but further down the line I realised we needed further evidence to secure conviction as fell through in court”* (R80). One female stated that she had asked the police to stay until her abuser collected his belongings from her home (as she did not feel safe being there alone) but he continued to stay in the home. *“They do not see this as part of their role. They simply tell me to use a third party, which I do not have access to”* (R95).

Less prevalent themes included police acting against the wishes of the respondent (two people), police who were not knowledgeable enough (two people), and police encouraging a respondent not to pursue their report (1 person).

- *“I was told by the DA team that I should phone 101 and raise a concern report. I did this and the police raised a crime report against my wishes” (R10)”*
- *“Was actually discouraged despite severity, she told me I’d need to testify in court and made out that was something I shouldn’t do. I insisted because I knew/know I’m not his only victim” (R15)*
- *“They separated us into different rooms and took statements. It wasn’t explained to me despite my asking for clarification that I couldn’t choose not to press charges and that they had to prosecute, which I did not want. While we were in different rooms I could hear my partner talking” (R85)*

### **23. Time experiencing domestic abuse before report made to the police**

Most people did not report domestic abuse immediately upon experiencing it. Over two-thirds of survey respondents (73.1 per cent) had experienced domestic abuse for over a year before reporting it to the police. And 37.6 per cent had experienced it for more than 5 years before reporting.

Less than a week	4 (4.3%)
Less than a month	2 (2.2%)
1-6 months	10 (10.8%)
7-12 months	9 (9.7%)
1-2 years	10 (10.8%)
2-5 years	23 (24.7%)
5-9 years	12 (12.9%)
9+ years	23 (24.7%)

**N** **93**

### **24. Domestic abuse not reported to the police**

In line with the length of time it took many to report, a very high number of respondents had experienced domestic abuse that they had not reported to the police, with 71.3 per cent (67) of people answering yes to this question, and 28.7 per cent (27) of people answering no.

## 25. Reasons for not reporting previous domestic abuse to the police

Of the 67 people who said that they had experienced domestic abuse that they had not reported to the police, 62 provided further details of why they had not reported.

Responses included:<sup>6</sup>

- Fear of not being believed/fear of not being taken seriously (17)
- Fear that reporting would make it worse/fear (unspecified) (13)
- Did not realise was being abused/did not think it was serious enough (10)
- Lacked confidence reporting would help (10)
- Hope of reconciliation/hope abuse would stop (4)
- Previous negative experience (4)
- Logistics (1)
- Children (1)
- Fear of counter allegations (1)
- Embarrassment (1).

The most common theme in the free text responses for not reporting domestic abuse to the police was a fear of not being taken seriously. Several just stated that they had not reported incident(s) of domestic abuse because they thought that they would not be believed by the police. For example, one female respondent who had experienced sexual abuse said she was shocked and ashamed, and did not report it because she felt that that she would not be believed.

Some described how previous experience(s) made them feel that they would not be believed, which led them not to report: *“I don’t want to go through it again; particularly as it feels as though you are having to prove yourself”* (R29). Again, several respondents felt this was affected by their sex, and preconceptions related to this. For example, one female said that her mental health had been called into question previously when reporting, which put her off reporting again: *“Also had a comment from police when attempting to report and explain, if the financial abuse actually happened, and are you sure you didn’t forget to take a tablet that day. I will never forget these comments”* (R80).

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<sup>6</sup> Some respondents’ comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

There were four males who felt that their sex was the reason they wouldn't be believed or taken seriously (for example: *"As a man wasn't believed"* (R11)). One male respondent felt that the police would just laugh at him if he reported domestic abuse: *"I would only get laughed at and mocked"* (R4); another male respondent wrote: *"Never thought I'd be believed, I was right. I wasn't and it's totally ruined me. Financially, mentally and I don't see my children as the abuser used the police as an extension of her abuse"* (R5).

The difficulty of evidencing domestic abuse was raised again, with some respondents stating that they had not reported incidents of domestic abuse because they felt that limited/lack of evidence meant that they would not be believed. For example: *"Wasn't taken seriously, not enough evidence. Was told that they weren't interested in my tit for tat as my abuser made a complaint about me"* (R23). *"...felt it would be too hard to prove the sexual abuse and I was too scared I would be made out to be a liar and I wouldn't be believed"* (R65).

For some, the fear of not being taken seriously was related to their abuser, rather than the police: *"He had drummed it into me that I wouldn't be believed and if said anything he would have me arrested and he would be believed"* (R45), and *"Ex partner carried out initial threats. Hate campaign to friends family school isolating me further then using my emotional distress to make me appear unstable mentally to police so I then felt I wouldn't be believe"* (R80). For others, it was the fear of not being believed, coupled with the fear of their abuser if they reported, that stopped them from reporting; for example: *"Scared of the repercussions from abuser and scared if not being believed"* (R51).

Several people said that they feared that reporting would exacerbate the situation, and have negative consequences. This was mostly related to potential repercussions from abusers if they reported the abuse, for example: *"I was frightened of the repercussions of doing so. My ex partner was controlling"* (R12). However, for some, it was related to a fear of other consequences, such as loss of children or accommodation: *"Fear of losing my home"* (R39); *"Was threatened, verbally abuse, my kids were used against me and I wouldn't see them until I came home and show my abuser respect and that I loved him and that he was special to me"* (R61);

*“Scared of what would happen next, abuser told me social services would take my children” (R88).*

Those who lacked confidence that reporting would help, gave fear of negative repercussions as a reason for not doing so. These respondents doubted that the abuser would be held accountable, or that reporting would change anything, often based on past experience. Comments included: *“There’s no point” (R53); “Cos they don’t do anything” (R57); “I have no faith in the police” (R54); and “They won’t do anything” (R64).*

Several respondents had not reported incidents of domestic abuse because they had not realised at the time that they were being abused, or did not think that it was serious enough to report. Some people did not realise that anything other than physical abuse was actually domestic abuse. Others had been manipulated or persuaded by their abuser into thinking that the abuse was their fault, or was not abuse. Examples included: *“my abuser manipulated, coerced and used emotional abuse to make me believe everything was my fault; I created situations that made him behave in certain ways” (R71); “Wasn’t physical and didn’t realise that I could report it to police at the time” (R79); and “I didn’t realise it met the criteria of abuse” (R81).*

A few people described having not reported domestic abuse incident(s) because they were hoping that the abuse would stop without intervention, or because they were hoping for a reconciliation within the relationship: *“Hoped it would stop, didn’t want to get the abuser into trouble” (R20); and “Thought it was a one-off; thought it was due to his mental health condition; thought we could resolve things within the relationship” (R59).*

Some people said they had not reported domestic abuse because of previous negative experiences of reporting, ranging from no response or action at all, to their response prompting the abuse to get worse. Lesser-given reasons for non-reporting included logistics, children, fear of counter allegations, and embarrassment.

## 26. Local policing appointment requested/offered

Respondents were asked whether, when the report of domestic abuse was made, they either requested or were given the option of having a local policing appointment.<sup>7</sup> Half of the respondents (47) answered yes, that they had either requested or had been given the option of a local policing appointment, 42.6 per cent (40) answered no, they had not, and 7.4 per cent (7) answered don't know.

## 27. Arrangement of local policing appointment

If respondents said that they had requested or been offered a local policing appointment and wanted this, they were asked whether it had been arranged. Thirty-four respondents said that the question was not applicable to them. For the other 49 who answered the question, the majority – 90 per cent (44 people) - said that one had been arranged; and 10 per cent (5) said that it had not been arranged.

## 28. Length of time for local policing appointment to take place

Where a local policing appointment had been made, respondents were asked when it took place. For over half of people (52.9 per cent) it had taken place within 1 – 2 days; for a further 23.5 per cent it took place within 2 – 4 days; and for the remaining 23.5 per cent it took 4 days or more.

1-2 days	27 (52.9%)
2-4 days	12 (23.5%)
4 days or more	12 (23.5%)

N

51

## 29. Support needs met by the police

Respondents were asked whether, if they had particular support needs (e.g. related, but not limited to, disability/ethnicity/language/living situation) these had been met by the police. Once the N/A responses (67 people) had been excluded from the calculation, 11.1 per cent (3) of people said yes their support needs had been met; 59.3 per cent (16) said no they had not been met; and 29.6 per cent (8) said that they did not know if their support needs had been met.

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<sup>7</sup> Where local policing officers make an arrangement to attend to meet them at a certain time/date.

### 30. Details of unmet support needs

Of the 16 people who said that their support needs had not been met, 10 provided further details of their needs. Responses included:<sup>8</sup>

- Practical support needs ignored (3)
- (Variety of) support needs not met (3)
- Chronic illness – COVID risk (2)
- Mental health issues (2)

Some felt that the practical support needs they had, had been ignored, including assistance to retrieve belongings from the family home, and support when an abuser was retrieving his belongings from the home, e.g.: *“I also asked for assistance to retrieve my clothing from the family home as advised by Woman’s Aid Both requests for assistance to recover my belongings were refused”* (R55).

Others described a variety of needs that they had that they felt had been ignored or not met, including homelessness, financial precarity, the safety of their children, and not having English as a first language.

Two people described how their chronic health conditions meant that reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic presented an extra risk to them, that they felt was ignored: *“I’m high risk and on immunosuppressive medication and during COVID-19 the police arrested and charged me twice with no thought or care, no masks”* (R5).

A couple of respondents stated that their mental health issues had been ignored during the reporting process, exacerbating these issues: *“I have CPTSD due to the abuse I’ve suffered and no breaks of support given. Left in severe distress on my own after each session of the statement”* (R15).

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<sup>8</sup> Some respondents’ comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

### 31. Police taking into account what victim/survivor wanted to happen

It was more common for respondents to say that no, the police had not taken into account what they wanted to happen as a result of reporting. While 29.8 per cent (28 people) said yes; 53.2 per cent (50) said no; 13.8 per cent (13) said don't know; and 3.2 per cent (3) said N/A.

### 32 - 36. Engagement with police when reporting

Respondents were asked how they found their engagement with the police when reporting, and were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. While slightly more people felt that the police had been respectful towards them and their situation than those who did not, fewer felt that the police would try to help them, or had taken their complaint seriously, or had explained the reporting and investigative process clearly: 42.5 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the police had been respectful towards them and their situation, while 37.3 per cent disagreed/strongly disagreed; 33 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that the police would try to help them, compared with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed (51 per cent); 36.1 per cent agreed/strongly that they felt confident that the police had taken their complaint seriously, compared with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed (50 per cent); 31.9 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that the police explained the reporting and investigative process clearly, compared with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed (50 per cent).

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>I felt that the police were respectful towards me and my situation</b>	22 (23.4%)	18 (19.1%)	19 (20.2%)	12 (12.8%)	23 (24.5%)	94
<b>I felt reassured that the police would try to help me</b>	16 (17%)	15 (16%)	15 (16%)	18 (19.1%)	30 (31.9%)	94
<b>I felt confident that the police had taken my complaint seriously</b>	18 (19.1%)	16 (17%)	13 (13.8%)	18 (19.1%)	29 (30.9%)	94
<b>The police explained the reporting and investigative process clearly</b>	9 (9.6%)	21 (22.3%)	17 (18.1%)	18 (19.1%)	29 (30.9%)	94

### 37. Desire to proceed with an investigation

It was more common for respondents to want to proceed with an investigation than not, following their report of domestic abuse: 57 (60.6 per cent) people said yes, 22 (23.4 per cent) said no, 5 (5.3 per cent) said don't know, and 10 (10.6 per cent) said N/A. Of the 27 people who said that they did not want to proceed with an investigation, or did not know, 19 provided further details. Responses included:<sup>9</sup>

- Wasn't taken seriously/believed (4)
- Lacked confidence anything would happen (3)
- Police did not take into account what I wanted to happen (3)
- Scared of repercussions (3)
- Just wanted it logged in case of future abuse (3)
- Was not directly involved (1)
- Problem was solved (1)
- Was not ready (1).

Four people stated that they did not want to proceed with an investigation because they had not been taken seriously, or believed, leaving them either reluctant to take it any further, too afraid to make a complaint, or feeling discouraged by the police. Examples included:

- *"If what I told the police was swept under the carpet how could there have an investigation, although I was informed agencies may want to get in touch with me, none did"* (R14)
- *"Man officer was present and I felt uncomfortable after he said it was "normal" behaviour I experienced. Woman officer said I need "help" and that I have postnatal depression and she "knows because she has been there". The officers made me question if the abuse I had suffered was real or if it was all my imagination - they asked if I had mental health issues and as soon as I said Bipolar Disorder they treated me like I was mental and not to be believed because I may not be in my 'right mind'"* (R92).

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<sup>9</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.



Some people lacked confidence that anything would happen if they proceeded with an investigation, feeling that nothing would happen as a result and that it was pointless, for example: *“I felt no one would follow anything up and didn’t know what was and wasn’t an action that could be prosecuted”* (R88).

Others felt that the police had not taken into account what they wanted to happen, and that an investigation had taken place despite them not wanting this, for example: *“I explicitly gave a statement to begin with in order to get in writing, somewhere, my wish that a case not be brought. The police told me that they had to bring a case. The case in the end was prolonged for six months while my partner sought legal aid, and that was the most stressful time of my life”* (R85).

Fear of repercussions was a reason for some not wanting to proceed with an investigation, either for themselves or others, for example: *“I was scared my children would be put in the middle/used as a weapon”* (R13) and *“I was threatened by abuser not to go ahead and drop the charges”* (R51).

Fearful of future abuse, three people just wanted their reports logged in case of anything further happening, either to themselves or to future partners of the abuser *“I wanted to log it to protect other women in the future should he do the same again”* (R36) and *“I just wanted the abuse reported/recorded in case it continued i.e for future protection”* (R20).

Other reasons for not proceeding included one individual who felt that the problem was now solved, and another who said she did not feel ready to report: *“I do not have the strength to go through a court process at the minute. I simply wanted him out of my home before I could look at any criminal action”* (R95).

### 38: Experiences of domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced any domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and, if so, whether they had reported it. Of those responding to the survey, slightly fewer had experienced domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (46.8 per cent), than those who had not (53.2 per cent). Of those who said they had experienced it, 56.8 per cent had reported it.

Yes – I experienced domestic abuse and reported it	25 (26.6 %)
Yes – I experienced domestic abuse but did not report it	19 (20.2 %)
No – I did not experience any domestic abuse during this time	50 (53.2 %)

**N**

**94**

### 39. Barriers to reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

Respondents who said yes to experiencing domestic abuse during the restrictions were asked whether they had experienced any barriers to reporting it, and were asked to tick all that applied. For those who said that they had experienced domestic abuse, 31.7 per cent said they had experienced one or more of the challenges listed when reporting; 11.4 per cent said they had not experienced any of these challenges, and 54.4 per cent said that the question was N/A. A further 20.3 per cent answered 'Other', with 16 people providing further details.

I was not able to report because my abuser was present/I could not leave the house	6 (7.6 %)
I did not want to report because my abuser was present/I could not leave the house	6 (7.6 %)
I did not want to report because I did not want the police to attend the house	10 (12.7 %)
I did not want to report because I did not want the police to phone me when I could not leave the house	3 (3.8 %)
I reported to the police but there were delays in the police responding because I/someone in my household had COVID-19 symptoms.	0 (0 %)
I did not experience any challenges in reporting.	9 (11.4 %)
Other (please provide details)	43 (54.4 %)
N/A	16 (20.3 %)

**N**

**79**

16 people provided additional details of barriers to reporting. Barriers that related specifically to reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions included: fear of limited access to children who needed support; and having to break COVID restrictions in order to get to safety before reporting. Other barriers described were more general as outlined in the rest of the report.

#### **40. If you have reported domestic abuse since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, how did you do this?**

As in the pre-pandemic period, the most common way of reporting domestic abuse during the pandemic was by the phone and 46.9 per cent used this method: 16.3 per cent (8 people) dialled 999, and 30.6 per cent (15 people) dialled 101. Another 12.2 per cent (6 people) had reported online; 10.2 per cent (5) in person; and 12.2 per cent (6) to a support services helpline. Fewer people reported in person during the pandemic, and slightly more reported online. Of those who listed 'Others' (3), this included one person who had reported via a Family Mediation Service, and another via email.

#### **41. Reports of domestic abuse proceeding to investigative stage**

Respondents were asked whether their reports of domestic abuse went on to be investigated by the police. Of those who answered this question, over two-thirds said that their report had gone on to be investigated by the police (36.7 per cent after their first report, and 26.5 per cent after multiple reports). Almost one-third said that their report did not go on to be investigated, with 18.4 per cent saying that they did not understand why it had not been investigated.

Yes, after the first report of domestic abuse	18 (36.7 %)
Yes, after multiple reports of domestic abuse	13 (26.5 %)
No, and I understand why	6 (12.2 %)
No, and I do not understand why	9 (18.4 %)
Don't know	0 (0 %)
N/A	3 (6.1 %)

**N**

**49**

## 42. Investigation process explained easily

Respondents were asked whether they felt that the police explained everything to them about the investigation process in a way that they could easily understand. More people said that they did not feel the police explained everything to them about the investigation in a way that they could easily understand than those who did: 21.7 per cent (20) of people said yes; 35.9 per cent (33) said no; 33.7 per cent (31) said sometimes; and 8.7 per cent (8) said don't know. Of those who said no, don't know, or sometimes, 30 provided further details. Responses included:<sup>10</sup>

- Process was not explained adequately (14)
- Was not followed up/investigated (7)
- Felt lied to/dismissed (3)
- Calls to relevant person ignored (1)
- Counter allegation/sided with perpetrator (1)
- Dependent on individual officer (1)
- I did not co-operate (1)
- Inadequate response (1)
- Unclear with COVID restrictions (1)

The main reason given was that the overall process itself had not been explained adequately. This included: feeling that the arrest and bail processes had not been explained; after providing a statement, next steps were never explained; other support services had to explain the process as the police did not; respondent asked to provide various evidence and contacts without the overall process being explained; although some of the process explained, differentiating between the different parts of the process, and the terminology, was confusing; and process explained inconsistently by different officers: *“I don't feel as though things were explained to me thoroughly by the officers dealing with the case and instead I had to turn to family members who were ex-police for them to explain to me what should be happening”* (R65); *“Processes were never explained clearly each time. Different police officers had different things to say each time”* (R91); and *“They didn't explain anything and I had to chase them for updates”* (R15).

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<sup>10</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

The second most common reason given for feeling that the process had not been explained in an understandable way was not being given an adequate reason for why a report had not been followed up or investigated, or not being given a clear rationale for steps that were taken. For example:

- *“They never investigated- when I did the officer on the phone told me “ suck it up big boy” (R5)*
- *“It wasn’t explained, he was arrested for domestic array and released without charge the following morning. No one interviewed me in any depth or asked about other abusive incidents or followed up with me afterwards” (R38)*
- *“I received an email late on a Friday afternoon stating the police had attempted to arrest my abuser and he was untraceable. I contacted by phone the officer lead and was told she was in the office although not available - I asked her to call me as I understood from being told this that there was a risk to me as he was untraceable. This had signification impact on me. I was terrified. The officer eventually called me 3-4 days later and stated they had attempted to arrest him and he was not at home. I asked if they attended at his work which they had not. He was not untraceable at all, they only attended at his home address during work hours - he was working in the office” (R71)*

Three people described feeling that they had either been lied to during the process, or dismissed, and that the investigation process was not explained or continued: *“They actively lied to me, and about me during the investigation process...[identifying details]...Since then I was shut down every time I tried to report it” (R13).* *“They felt there was no sign of abuse - they told me” (R92).*

### 43. Experience of giving statement

The survey asked, did respondents provide a statement and, how did they find the process? Respondents ticked all responses that applied,<sup>11</sup> revealing experiences that were more negative than positive:

- 56.5 per cent (52) found it challenging compared with 12 per cent (11) who found it easy
- 28.3 per cent (26) found it lengthy compared with 9.8 per cent (9) who found it a quick process
- 15.2 per cent (14) felt that their basic needs were met compared with 13 per cent (12) who did not
- 30.4 per cent (28) did not have the option of support from a friend/family/third party and 9.8 per cent (9) did
- 31.5 per cent (29) found having their statement read back to them at the end was difficult
- 21.7 per cent (20) said they felt safe when giving their statement compared with 15.2 per cent (14) who did not.

A total of 15 people chose 'other' and gave further details. Responses included:<sup>12</sup>

- Uncomfortable due to manner/attitude of officer/not taken seriously (5)
- Not informed of importance/right to having a lawyer present (2)
- Not given opportunity to make statement (2)
- Fear of giving statement due to repercussions (1)
- Lack of privacy (1)
- No follow-up (1)
- Positive experience of police (1)
- Statement not read back to me (1)
- Submitted complaint (1)

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<sup>11</sup> Respondents could pick as many as they felt applied, which meant that not everyone responded to each statement.

<sup>12</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.



The main theme in response to this question was that the respondent felt uncomfortable due to the manner/attitude of the officer(s) taking the statement, or felt that they were not taken seriously while giving the statement. This included officers who did not have a sympathetic or empathetic manner and/or whose attitudes inhibited the person from disclosing details. Some felt as if they were subjected to victim blaming while giving their statements.

- *“I had to call them back due to the accused breaching his bail and one officer was very abrupt and actually made me feel uncomfortable” (R24)*
- *“The two female officers laughed when they asked me what my sex life was like and I stated mostly vanilla. This then stopped me continuing to disclose sexual abuse to them. There were other points where one or both laughed and I stated that I did not think any of what I was disclosing was funny. I question the training, skill and knowledge of these officers. Victim blaming and shaming also evident” (R71)*

This, however, could vary depending upon the individual officer: *“A female officer came round and it was actually harder with her as she seemed less experienced and less methodical than the male officers I had spoken to before. It was rushed, I was getting confused, it was late and I was tired but she kept saying 'almost done'. She also asked why didn't I just leave. Explained it was my house, my mortgage. At which point she asked why I hadn't asked him to leave. She had already heard of him [act of violence]. What about that made her think it would be safe or appropriate to ask him” (R45).*

Not having the opportunity to provide statements or detail was described by some. One respondent explained how she had wanted to provide a full picture of the abuse she had experienced, and report several incidents over years, but was not permitted to do so, and felt that her report was not taken seriously (R56). A couple of people said that they had not been given the opportunity to make a statement, and that there had been no follow-up to their reports, for example: *“I wasn't given the option of a statement. I was taken from my house to my mums in pyjamas with none of my property at 1am having been threatened and in fear of my life. No follow-up other than telling me he'd denied everything and been released without charge” (R38).*

Other experiences of giving a statement included those who experienced fear because of potential repercussions, and a lack of privacy while giving the statement: *“I was asked to give a very personal and upsetting account of my abuse in an interview room in the reception of the Police station, where other members of the public were in the waiting room right outside and could hear everything. I know this because I heard everything the person said in his interview while I was waiting”* (R59).

Some respondents noted that their statement had not been read back to them, and another person said that the police had failed to record several reports that they had made: *“Police failed to record my reports in [5 separate dates given]; the only time anything was taken forward was because I made formal complaints”* (R3); *“Didn’t have statement read back which ended up meaning he got away it”* (R64).

One person described how the process had been difficult but that she had a positive experience of the officers taking the statement: *“It was difficult not because of the police process, just because its emotional. The police were fantastic and supportive”* (R36).

#### **44-47. Engagement with person/people taking the statement**

Respondents were asked how, if they gave a statement, they found the engagement with the person/people taking the statement, and were asked to indicate to what extent do they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>The person taking the statement had a supportive manner</b>	18 (22%)	20 (24.4%)	19 (23.2%)	14 (17.1%)	11 (13.4%)	82
<b>The person taking the statement appeared knowledgeable in dealing with domestic abuse</b>	17 (21%)	16 (19.8%)	12 (14.8%)	16 (19.8%)	20 (24.7%)	81
<b>I felt that the police took me seriously when taking my statement</b>	18 (22%)	17 (21%)	13 (16%)	13 (16%)	20 (24.7%)	81

Overall, the experiences of engagement with the people/person taking the statement were more positive in relation to supportive manner, and being taken seriously; but slightly more negative regarding knowledge of handling domestic abuse:

- 46.4 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that the person taking the statement had a supportive manner, compared with 30.5 per cent who disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- 40.8 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that the person taking the statement appeared knowledgeable in dealing with domestic abuse, compared with 44.5 per cent who disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- 43 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that they felt the police took them seriously when taking their statement, compared with 40.7 per cent who disagreed/strongly disagreed.

#### **48. Option of male or female to take statement**

When asked if they were given the option to state a preference for a male or female to take their statement, the majority (76.8 per cent or N=63) had not been given that option, while 11 per cent (9 people) said yes, and 12.2 per cent (10 people) said don't know.

#### **49. Preference for male/female to take statement fulfilled**

When respondents stated a preference for a male/female to take their statement, was this preference fulfilled? Of the 18 people who responded to this question, indicating that they had stated a preference, 44.4 per cent (8) of those said that their request for a male or female to take their statement had been fulfilled, and 55.6 per cent (10) said that their request had not been fulfilled.

#### **50. Victim Care Card**

Did Police Scotland offer respondents a Victim Care Card?<sup>13</sup> More had not been offered a Victim Care Card than those that had: 57.8 per cent (52 people) had not, 33.3 per cent (30 people) said yes; and 8.9 per cent (8 people) said don't know.

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<sup>13</sup> Card providing contact details and information about standards of service, victim's rights and referrals to support services

### **51. Right to support services**

Did Police Scotland inform respondents of their right to support services. Again, more people said that Police Scotland had not informed them of their right: 55.3 per cent (52 people); as opposed to 34 per cent (32) who said yes; and 10.6 per cent (10) who said don't know.

### **52. Referral to support services**

Did Police Scotland refer respondents to support services? A far higher number of people said that Police Scotland had not referred them to support services than those who said yes or don't know: 19.1 per cent (18 people) said yes; 69.1 per cent (65) said no; and 11.7 per cent (11) said they didn't know.

### **53. Available safety measures**

Had respondents had been informed of safety measures that may have been available to them? Again, more people said that they were not informed about safety measures that may have been available to them, than those who said they had been: 59.6 per cent (56 people) said no; 30.9 per cent (29 people) said yes; and 9.6 per cent (9) said they didn't know.

### **54. Safety measures put in place**

Respondents were asked what safety measures had been put in place for them, with 40 people describing safety measures. Responses included:<sup>14</sup>

- Marker and/or alarms (12)
- Third party agency advice/support (5)
- Bail conditions (4)
- None (4)
- Measures for child under 12 (1)

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<sup>14</sup>Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

The largest number of people who described safety measures that had been put in place for them described markers and/or alarms (12 people), sometimes in conjunction with other measures, for example: *“A marker was put in my address so if I called the police I’d get help quickly. I was given personal alarms”* (R23); and *“I was told that a marker was going to be put on my abusers home address. I was told to always have someone with me when I had to collect my children”* (R48).

Not all respondents felt that these measures had been put into place quickly enough, for example: *“I received a door bar, fireproof letterbox and an alarm for a period of time. This was months after my first report of threats”* (R40); and *“Police marker on the house - this was done in one instance as incidents by the abuser escalated. There had been other incidents reported over the years and no action taken”* (R88).

The second most common theme when describing safety measures that had been put in place involved third-party agency advice or support. However, this was largely not prompted by the police; respondents were usually already receiving third sector support. For example: *“Women’s aid put a marker on my home address. The police didn’t suggest this. The police suggested I put cameras up in my home we shared as they didn’t believe I was being abused”* (R53).

Four people said that bail conditions for their abuser acted as safety measures, such as *“Ex partner was told not to come near my house”* (R90), but respondents felt that these did not always act sufficiently to protect them, for example: *“1 year order of no contact. Charge was reduced in court...The order was no longer present and he started coming to my house”* (R80).

Some felt that no safety measures had been put in place to protect them. This included one person who described measures that had been put in place for a child, although she was unsure as to why nothing had been put in place for a slightly older child. *“They claim that telling me to lock my door, was a safety measure. Completely nonsense”* (R3) and *“They just said to call 999 if he did show up”* (R16).

### **55. Children/dependants to be included in protection/safety planning**

Respondents were asked whether they had been asked if they had any children or dependants who might need including in protection or safety planning? Slightly more people said no, they had not been asked whether they had any children or dependants who might need including in protection or safety planning, than those who said they had: 40.9 per cent (38 people) said no; 36.6 per cent, (34 people) said yes, 11.8 per cent (11 people) said don't know, and 10.8 per cent (10 people) said that the question was not applicable.

### **56. Satisfaction with police engagement with children**

Respondents were asked whether, if they had said they had children/dependants to be included in safety measures, whether they were satisfied with how the police engaged with their children? Of the 28 people who said that the question was applicable to them (45 said it was not), 60.7 per cent (17) said, yes, they were satisfied with how the police engaged with their children, and 39.3 per cent (11) said, no, they were not.

### **57. Knowledge of main police contact**

Respondents were asked whether they knew who their main police contact was during the investigation. More people said that they did not know who their main police contact was during the investigation than those who said that they did: 37.5 per cent (33 people) said they did, but 53.4 per cent (47) said they did not, while 9.1 per cent (8) were unsure.

### **58. Rights to ask about progress and/or outcome of police investigation**

Were respondents advised of their rights to ask about the progress and/or outcome of the police investigation? Many more people said they were not advised of their rights to ask about the progress and/or outcome of the police investigation than those who said they had been: 60.9 per cent (56) said they were not advised; 15.2 per cent (14) said they were advised; 14.1 per cent (13) said they didn't know; and 9.8 per cent (9) said N/A.



## 59. Provision of regular updates

Were respondents provided with regular updates to their report by the police throughout the process? Again, many more people said they were not provided with regular updates to their reports by the police throughout the process than those who said they were: 59.8 per cent (52) said they were not; 20.7 per cent (18) of people said they were; 5.7 per cent (5) said they didn't know; and 13.8 per cent (12) said 'other'. Ten people provided details of their experiences of not being given regular updates. Responses included:<sup>15</sup>

- Had to chase the police for updates (5)
- Was provided with very little information throughout process (2)
- No investigation/did not want to proceed with investigation (2)
- Delays due to COVID (1)
- Was not the complainant (1)

The main free text response given was having to chase the police for updates, rather than being contacted by them. *"I always had to call the police for updates myself"* (R48). Even when contacting the police, it was not always a straightforward or quick process to get the updates: *"I did get updates but had to call and be put i hold for lengthy periods then 1-2weeks before updated"* (R89).

Others said that they had received some updates but, overall, had very little information throughout the process, including a lack of information about what would happen next: *"Updates are few and far between"* (R71). One person said that updates were delayed due to COVID.

## 60. Appropriate communication method of updates on progress

Were updates on progress communicated in a way that met their individual needs? Many more people said that updates on progress had not been communicated in a way that met their individual needs than those who said they had: 46.4 per cent (39 people) said no; 19 per cent (16) said yes; and 34.5 per cent (29) said sometimes.

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<sup>15</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

For those who said, no, updates had not been provided in a way that met their individual needs, 31 people provided further detail. Responses included:<sup>16</sup>

- No updates yet/very few updates/had to call them many times (20)
- Counter allegations (2)
- Communication method request ignored (1)
- No investigation (1)
- Not believed (1)
- Prevented from calling police for updates (1)
- Unexpected call (1)

For those who said that updates had not been provided in a way that met their individual needs, the most common response was that they had either: not had any updates yet; had had very few updates; or had needed to chase the police for updates:

- *“There has been no further communication from police despite assurance that there would be” (R18)*
- *“I was not informed. I remember worrying about when they would be talking to my ex and what repercussions there then might be, but I didn’t know when it was going to happen. In the end I called them to see because I couldn’t take the waiting and worrying anymore” (R78)*
- *“I had to ring to chase and rape crisis team ended up chasing further when I didn’t hear back” (R8)*
- *“I was given the Domestic Abuse Officers phone number however he ignored my calls and when he finally answered told me that he could not help me and told me not to call him again without explanation” (R55)*

A couple of people said that they had not received updates to their report, but that - subsequently – counter allegations were made against them, for example: *“No further contact, on the last occasion when my partner falsely reported me, I was charged” (R12).*

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<sup>16</sup> Some respondents’ comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

Of the five other people who gave details about how updates had not met their individual needs, one said that their requested communication method had been ignored; another said that there had been no investigation, hence no updates; another said that they had not been believed by the police, so it had not gone any further; and one said that their emails to the police had led to their contact with the police being restricted for a certain period of time.

### **61. Preferred method of communication for updates**

A lot more people said that they had not been asked what their preferred method of communication for updates was than those who said that they had been asked: 64.4 per cent (56) said no; 21.8 per cent (19) said yes; and 13.8 per cent (12) said don't know.

### **62. Preferred method of communication used**

For those who said they had been asked what their preferred method of communication was, they were then asked if this was actually used. Of the 28 people who said felt that the question was applicable to them (45 said it was not applicable), 57.1 per cent (16) said that, yes, their preferred method of communication had been used; 10.7 per cent (3) said no; 10.7 per cent (3) said sometimes; and 21.4 per cent (6) said they didn't know.

### **63. Informed of arrest of abuser**

Of the respondents, 40 per cent (36) had been informed by the police about the arrest of their abuser, compared with 17.8 per cent (16) who had not been informed. A further 7.8 per cent (7) had been present at the time of the arrest, with a further 3.3 per cent (3) (don't know); 4.4 per cent (4) other; and 26.7 per cent (24) reporting not applicable.

### **64. Advised of outcome of police investigation**

A far higher number of people had been advised of the outcome of the police investigation than had not: 54.7 per cent (47) said, yes, they were advised of the outcome; 29.1 per cent (25) said they were not; 11.6 per cent (10) said the investigation was still ongoing; and 4.7 per cent (4) said they didn't know.

## **65. Satisfaction with police action/investigation into report**

Respondents were asked whether they thought that the police action/investigation into their report was sufficient. Only 12 people answered this question (there is no indication as to why this occurred). Of these, more answered, no, action into their report was **not** sufficient - 83.3 per cent (10 people) - than those answering **yes** it was (16.7 per cent (2 people)). Of the 10 people who said no, they did not feel the police action into their report was sufficient, 8 provided further details. Responses included:<sup>17</sup>

- Counter allegations (2)
- Delayed/no investigation (3)
- Very few updates (1)
- Negative experience but no reason given (1)
- Varied – sometimes it was sufficient and at other times not (1)

Two people described being subjected to counter-allegations during the police action to their reports, which they said were false, for example: *“They only showed interest when my partner lied and had me arrested when I was defending myself”* (R12). Others said that there had been no follow-up action or investigation (or in one case, that this was very delayed), or that they had not received any follow-up on action taken, for example: *“2 reports made, First one, complaint re investigation submitted and took 7 months to be concluded. Second report of threatening and Intimidating behaviour(witnessed) was not investigated at all”* (R89).

## **66. Awareness of Police Scotland campaigns on reporting domestic abuse**

More people had seen or were aware of a Police Scotland campaign on reporting domestic abuse than were not: 58.1 per cent (54) said yes; 36.6 per cent (34) said no; and 5.4 per cent (5) said they didn't know.

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<sup>17</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

### **67. Awareness of options for reporting domestic abuse to Police Scotland**

Respondents were asked whether they had been aware before they made their reports, that there were several different ways/options to report domestic abuse to Police Scotland (such as online/domestic abuse organisation/helpline). A far higher number of people were **not** aware that there were several different ways of reporting domestic abuse to Police Scotland, than were aware: 25.8 per cent (24) said yes; 71 per cent (66) said no; and 3.2 per cent (3) said they didn't know.

### **68. Intentions to report any future domestic abuse**

The survey asked if they experienced domestic abuse in the future - how likely would they be to report it to Police Scotland? Fewer people said they would report future domestic abuse to Police Scotland than those who would not: 34.4 per cent (32) respondents said they were extremely likely/likely to report future domestic abuse, compared with 48.4 per cent (45) who were unlikely/extremely unlikely, with 17.2 per cent (16) remaining neutral.

### **69. Reasons for not reporting any future domestic abuse to Police Scotland**

Respondents were asked what their reasons would be for not reporting domestic abuse, ticking all that applied. The most common reasons given were:

- A lack of confidence that reporting would help (68.4 per cent)
- A perception that their complaint would not be taken seriously (58.2 per cent)
- Negative previous experiences of treatment when reporting (43 per cent)
- Being scared of reactions or repercussions from the abuser (43 per cent)

Another 26.6 per cent said they would rather report a future experience of domestic abuse to a support agency.



I don't know how to report domestic abuse offences	0
I am not confident that reporting it to Police Scotland will help me	54 (68.4%)
I do not think my complaint will be taken seriously by Police Scotland	46 (58.2%)
I did not like the way that I was treated by Police Scotland when I reported before	34 (43%)
I am too scared of reactions or repercussions from the abuser(s) to report it	34 (43%)
I have difficulty as English is not my first language	0
My disability makes it difficult for me to communicate with people	0
I require additional support which was not available as I am deaf	0
I would rather report it to a support organisation	21 (26.6%)
N/A	11 (13.9%)
Other (please provide details)	11 (13.9%)

N

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Eleven people provided additional details of why they would not report a future experience of domestic abuse to Police Scotland, and responses included:<sup>18</sup>

- Lack of confidence will be taken seriously, or will result in conviction (8)
- Did not take into account what I wanted to happen (1)
- Lack of support for victim (1)
- Treated badly by police (1)

The main theme in reasons given for not reporting a future experience of domestic abuse, as in the tick box options, was thinking that it would not be taken seriously. This include three respondents who felt they would not be taken seriously, or would be ridiculed, because they were male. Some respondents based these predictions of not being taken seriously on previous negative experiences; one had been told what she was experiencing was not domestic abuse; another said that the police minimised and dismissed the report. For example: *"It's pointless. Your officers ridicule victims, make crass comments and don't actually care. They don't even bother charging even with a dossier of evidence. So what's the point?"* (R15). *"I have absolutely no faith in the police and they cause me more distress than feelings of safety and security. I continue to live with my abuser and I will not approach the police again for support"* (R95).

<sup>18</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

Other negative experiences, included one person who said that the police had not taken into account what they wanted to happen; another cited the lack of support she and her family had received from the police on a previous occasion when reporting; and one described having been treated badly by the police, causing her to lose any trust: *“I was treated appallingly I can no longer give the Police any trust. They were as bad as my abuser and I feel they supported his actions and empowered him to abuse me more”* (R55).

## **70. Adequate support and protection from the police**

Did respondents feel adequately supported and protected by police? After reporting, many more people said they did not feel adequately supported and protected by the police than those who did: 69.9 per cent (65) said no; 21.5 per cent (20) said yes; and 8.6 per cent (8) said they didn't know.

Of those who said no, they didn't feel adequately supported and protected by the police after making their report of domestic abuse, 58 people provided further details.

Responses included:

- Not taken seriously (14)
- Treated badly/inappropriately by police, including feeling police don't care (11)
- Didn't feel protected, including inadequate response for children (7)
- No support given (7)
- Feel let down by outcome and no investigation/updates (6)
- Counter-allegations (5)
- Variation in officers (4)
- Continuing abuse (2)
- Multiple officers/questions (1)
- Police protecting their own (1)

Those who said that they did not feel adequately supported and protected by the police after reporting (because of not being taken seriously), talked of:

- not being believed;
- being blamed;
- how hard it was to 'prove' the domestic abuse they had experienced; and
- How, in a couple of cases, they felt the police had been 'charmed' by their abusers, believing them instead.

Reasons given for not being believed included assumptions and gendered stereotypes. One respondent said that it was only with the involvement of a third-party support agency that the case had progressed. Specific examples included:

- *"No protection what so ever I'm fact I was made to feel I made up the whole thing and that I was a love sick woman"* (R67)
- *"My anxiety and fears were around not being believed and not taken seriously. I felt the male officers actually listened without judging whereas the female officer saw an older mother of a young child with extensive university education and so should have done better....I felt weak and pathetic. Especially when asked why I didn't just leave. For a young officer I would have thought her training would have moved beyond not so subtle victim blaming"* (R45)
- *"Gave statement, told there was not enough evidence, it would be his word against mine and that was it, no further support, no victim support, no counselling, no further communication. It feels I just need to forget about it"* (R92)

One said she was only taken seriously as the abuse escalated: *"Initially I was not taken seriously but the police latterly took it seriously"* (R40).

Eleven people felt that they had been treated badly and/or inappropriately by the police, with experiences ranging from feeling dismissed and unprotected, judged and blamed, ridiculed, and a general lack of care. *"I did not feel protected at all I felt ridiculed and made to feel ashamed"* (R15). *"No from speaking to police I have since felt judged as they do not understand the hate campaign element of domestic abuse and its effects on the victim"* (R80).

Several people described feeling unsupported following their report, either with no support given at all, or very limited support: *“I was only given an incident number and told to change the locks. There was no support”* (R31).

There were a number of people who described feeling let down by the outcome of their report, or that there had not been any investigation or updates.

- *“They couldn’t do anything, he broke bail conditions hundreds of times by contacting me and continuing to stalk me but police said they couldn’t do nothing because he wouldn’t admit to sending the messages/emails etc”* (R76)
- *“I was told they would investigate it and never given an update”* (R79)
- *“I reported sexual abuse as well and even though he was charged and another woman also made sexual accusations to him, it was never taken to court and nothing came of it”* (R66)

Feeling unprotected after reporting domestic abuse was a common theme, with several people talking of being threatened or attacked, and remaining fearful of what their abuser might do next, especially if there had been no conviction. This theme included those who felt the support for children had not been adequate. For example:

- *“After police left my abuser came to my house as promised in his text and attacked me”* (R54)
- *“They said they couldn’t help even when my worker called them to let them know he was stalking me”* (R60)
- *“My ex partner now seems untouchable and above the law. I’ve had to install cctv and alarms. He can treat me how he wants in front of my child and I have no confidence that reporting him brings me anything but more repercussions”* (R89)
- *“Abuse has increased in last 6 months, I have requested police assistance 4 times. It continues”* (R18)

Some people said that, rather than feeling supported and protected, they had been subjected to counter allegations after reporting domestic abuse. For others, whether they felt adequately supported and protected after reporting domestic abuse depended upon the individual officer(s), with a variety of experiences. Most who said that it depended upon the individual, said that some officers had been really helpful, informative, supportive and provided a good service, but that others had not. Others complained of having had to deal with multiple officers and questions during the process, which had been hard. One person felt that the police were protecting an abuser because he was in the police.

- *“It depends on the officer. Some have been fantastic, others have been awful” (R53)*
- *“It just felt like a lottery whether I got someone who understood the situation or not” (R13)*
- *“Some officers were very informed and supportive, others minimised my report and didn’t offer any next steps” (R88)*
- *“I dealt with 8 separate officers, not including 4 calls to 101 to report the incidents. I was asked the same 22 domestic abuse questions every single time I reported it” (R59)*
- *“No, as my ex [partner] was a police officer I feel that they were more worried about protecting him. My abuse lasted 30 years due to not being supported in the past when reporting the abuse and the police closing ranks” (R75)*

### **71. Feeling more/less safe following police response to report**

Respondents were asked whether, in general, the police response to their report had made them feel more or less safe. The police response to reports of domestic abuse did not make the majority of people feel safer. A total of 71.3 per cent either felt less safe (30.9 per cent) (29 people), or said that nothing had changed and they had always felt unsafe (40.4 per cent) (38 people). A total of 28.8 per cent felt: safer (27.7 per cent) (26 people), or said that nothing had changed and that they had always felt safe (1.1 per cent) (1 person).



## 72. Reasons for feeling more/less safe after reporting

A total of 61 people provided further detail to why the police response made them feel more or less safe. Responses included:<sup>19</sup>

- Feel let down by outcome / didn't feel protected / wasn't taken seriously (28)
- Counter allegations (8)
- Felt protected (7)
- Poor communication/felt protected but communication was inadequate (5)
- Fear of repercussions (4)
- Variation in officers (3)
- Continuing access due to child contact (3)
- Treated badly/inappropriately by police (3)
- Police not knowledgeable enough (2)

When describing why the police response had made them feel either more or less safe, or whether nothing had changed for them with regards to feeling safe, the most common theme was that respondents felt let down by the outcome, although some of those who felt let down said that this was because of the outcome of having gone through court, and was not related to the process of reporting to the police. Others said that they did not feel more safe because the police action had not left them feeling protected: *"My ex partner was coming to my home. Being told to just change the locks did not help me feel safe in any way"* (R31). *"I had hoped that by getting the police involved that I would be supported and that they would speak to/arrest my ex-partner. But on more than one occasion when I was giving a statement and I then asked would they be speaking to my ex, the response was 'well we would have to arrest him to speak to him and everyone has their legal rights you know'. In short no I didn't feel safe after the police were involved I felt very vulnerable"* (R94).

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<sup>19</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

One person described how multiple reports had not been followed up, with others very frustrated that, despite lots of evidence, their cases had not progressed, or the abuser had not been charged. Several described how they had been told that a lack of evidence was stopping their report from progressing any further. In all of these cases, because of the outcomes, the respondents felt less safe than before: *“Because my husband was never physically violent I feel that despite coercive control being criminal, it’s pointless and impossible to prove yet the catastrophic damage mentally to myself and my children is more than apparent. Not enough evidence still”* (R72). *“Lack of police response has emboldened the abuser. Abuse is getting more frequent and without any remedy”* (R18).

In addition, another four people described fearing the repercussions of having reported, indicating also that the police response had not alleviated this fear. Examples given included an account of domestic abuse being changed by the person reporting, so that the case did not proceed to court, because the victim/survivor did not feel they would be protected from repercussions. Another person described how *“I felt less safe as now I live with an abuser who knows I contacted the police and uses that against me at every turn”* (R95). One person, however, stated that she felt the outcome was out of the hands of the police: *“There isn’t much the police can do if I didn’t want an investigation. The officer offered to call the abuser to ask him to remove non consensual videos from his phone. I did not want the abuser to know I had contacted the police”* (R36).

Others felt that they had not been taken seriously, and therefore did not feel any safer. Some felt like their cases were not prioritised, that it was not until the abuse became physical that it was taken seriously:

- *“I was not supported I was told I would only get a police presence after my ex had been to the house which was too late . I sustained broken bones and trauma and the police didn’t care”* (R54);
- *“Being made to feel that my concerns were not taken seriously made me feel unsafe; how would the police respond/react if I had to contact them again?”* (R41)



- *“I only felt safer when bail conditions were put in place after my ex husband assaulted me and I therefore got physically hurt, after months of reporting domestic abuse, threats, coercive control with evidence of excessive communication. There were occasions where I reported things and police officers looked bored and it was as if I was wasting their time” (R91).*

A couple of women described having their reports dismissed due to being seen as mentally ill or ‘love sick’: *“I feel that police listened to my abuser that I was mad. It took months before I was properly interviewed by police. This gave my abusers time to destroy evidence which had a huge impact on the case. I do not trust the police and would not report abuse again” (R48).* *“I was made to feel like a liar and that I was a love sick woman. I was the victim made out to be a perpetrator. I was treated like a criminal and very much misunderstood. I now dislike the police as I felt traumatised and unheard by them” (R67).*

Several respondents said that making their reports had resulted in their being subjected to counter allegations, either through police assumptions, or by their partner reporting this (as in the quote above). This included men who said that they felt that their male status meant that - rather than their report being taken seriously - they were seen instead as the perpetrator. One said that, despite reporting, and then complaints and investigations: *“I am scared, I do not know what to do, and this will just keep happening to me. Help me” (R3).* Another said that he felt it was his ethnicity and gender that meant he had been subjected to counter allegations. Another respondent said that it was not until her partner falsely accused her of being the perpetrator that police took interest (R12).

A number **did feel** that the police response had made them feel **more protected**, because of being believed, and/or because of the outcome of reporting:

- *“I felt safer knowing that I had reported anything to the police and that I was keeping myself right and following his bail conditions” (R24)*
- *“With the storm maker put in my address it meant that if my abuser came near the house the police were there within minutes, which made me feel safer and knowing they drive past my house to check as well” (R61)*

- *“The police officers kept me updated, along with the local police station. When officers arrived, they took my statement seriously, were tasked that weekend with apprehending and arresting my ex and clearly took that seriously. [Named officers] were professional at all times and also showed compassion. At no point did I feel my ex's actions that evening were taken lightly. Both officers demonstrated knowledge of domestic abuse and were exactly how, in my opinion, all officers should be. ....Having confidence in the police when it comes to domestic violence is of utmost importance. Police Scotland should be proud of the officers who attended after the attack on me, they are a credit to them” (R62)*
- *“I had previously reported domestic abuse 7 years ago and had a different experience. I felt that I was wasting police time and they told me it was a domestic matter and to sort it out ourselves. I reported further domestic abuse with encouragement from social work as there was also child abuse 18 months ago. The response was completely different. I felt staff had a greater awareness of different types of domestic abuse and that they believed me. I felt safer knowing that they had taken me seriously. I felt confident they would investigate it thoroughly. Due to that confidence in them I was able to support my children to make statements too as I knew they would be treated respectfully and with understanding. I would be more confident now turning to the police if anything happened in the future and in encouraging others to do so” (R77)*
- *“The Detective [name] is an extremely sympathetic knowledgeable officer who is definitely in the right area of work. He made me feel very comfortable (esp being a male) he is a valuable asset to police Scotland. He put my my mind at ease explained the process and went above and beyond to make sure there was no stones left unturned. [names] are also lovely [names] I can't put into words how amazing this whole team is” (R68)*

Poor communication from the police was described by five respondents, which affected how safe the police response had made them feel, even if, overall, they felt safer:

- *“I did feel safer but it was a long process, and that safety mostly came after he was convicted and sent to jail and I was given a non harassment order. My statement was never read back to me or shared with me and I only saw it before his trial about a year later. The process could have been more transparent or clearly communicated to me and I wish someone would have told me about women's aid or given me a leaflet on what domestic abuse is one of the first times the police attended our house after an incident”* (R66);
- *“each incident seems to be being dealt with in isolation and all of my other reports are never mentioned nor do they seem to be used to consider the appropriate response to the ongoing abuse”* (R81);
- *“At every point I’ve had to chase up responses and have had no point of contact. PS domestic abuse team were in touch immediately after the first incident, but it would have been better if they could proactively deal with the case, regularly checking in perhaps sending specialist officers to take statements rather than response officers. I’ve had to relive this trauma 4 times in the past 3 weeks”* (R89)
- *“I did feel protected but not supported by the police. And they did take me seriously and made me feel safer. The lack of communication was why I didn’t feel supported. But they did a good job. They actually got him sent to prison. They enabled me to get a 3 year NHO at sentencing. There just needs to be more communication”* (R9)

Some respondents said that whether they felt more or less safe was dependent upon the individual officer(s) responding; others that they continued to feel unsafe because of continuing contact with the abuser due to child contact; a few people said that they had been treated badly or inappropriately by the police; and two people said that the police had not been knowledgeable enough about domestic abuse to make them feel safer. Others were fearful of repercussions from the abuser:

- *“Initially the policemen thought everything was a joke but after my ex threatened me again, the police were fantastic....The police have finally seen the person I’ve been telling them about and they are looking out for me. How can they see past the abusers charm? They didn’t see the scary man I was dealing with until my ex turned on them” (R40)*
- *“I had a couple of good responses which were reassuring and supportive, including one who told me not to hesitate to phone 999 if I felt threatened. However I had another officer who I felt didn’t understand the situation or coercive control at all” (R13)*
- *“I felt belittled about my experience of domestic abuse as a whole. Even at the time I felt like I was wasting their time. They zoned in on one tiny physical element of what I had reported and they seemed to completely brush off the decade+ of psychological, financial, emotional, sexual abuse, which is what had been far more insidious” (R78)*
- *“I felt less safe as now I live with an abuser who knows I contacted the police and uses that against me at every turn. I worry that any further report I made would also potentially end in me receiving a conviction despite being a victim” (R95).*

### 73. Expectations of reporting domestic abuse

Overall, had the respondents' expectations of what would happen if they reported their domestic abuse experience(s) been met? More people said that their expectations had **not** been met, than those who felt they had: 59.6 per cent (56) said no, 19.1 per cent (18) said yes, and 21.3 per cent (20) said they didn't know.

Of the 56 people who said that their expectations had not been met, 40 gave further details, with responses including:<sup>20</sup>

- Feeling let down by outcome/process/no investigation or updates/continuing abuse (22)
- Counter allegations (5)
- Not being taken seriously (4)
- Being treated badly/inappropriately by police (5)
- Not trusting police (1)
- Police not knowledgeable enough (1)

The main theme in responses given by people who said that their expectations had not been met was that they felt let down - either by the outcome of reporting, or by the reporting process itself. Some of the answers focused on what respondents perceived as a lack of justice served (where cases did not go to court, etc.); some people were still experiencing abuse; others felt that they had not been offered support or given referrals to other agencies, or that they had not been given the opportunity to talk about other incidents of domestic abuse that they had experienced; others felt that the process was not at all transparent or clear.

- *"No, my children and I are still at risk from abuser"* (R75)
- *"Not at all. I fail to understand the method, process and procedures and compliance with Police Scotland own standard operating procedures and internal processes"* (R71)
- *"Should have been interviewed and arrested within 24hrs to avoid multiple incidents occurring in the days after, which further compounded the hurt, fear and trauma I've suffered"* (R59)

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<sup>20</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

- *“I’d have expected support, referral to other agencies, to have been allowed to make a statement, to be asked about other abusive incidents, for coercive control to have been recognised and for my ex partner to have been charged with threatening behaviour and coercive control. None of these things happened”* (R38)

One respondent felt that, while their expectations were not met, this was not the fault of the police: *“I believe the police officers took the complaints seriously but couldn’t reply help, despite trying incredibly hard. Their ends seemed tied by the fact that they had to prove the individual was guilty and they couldn’t without him admitting to the crimes”* (R76).

Some people described how there had not been an investigation following their report, which was not what they had expected. At times people had not been updated about this:

- *“I expected an investigation or for my ex partner to have at least been spoken to”* (R31)
- *“Despite years of reports, it is unclear why action against my ex husband have not been progressed. However, I am not being updated so it is not clear whether or not it has”* (R81)
- *“was done by the police that attended. They didn’t go and arrest my ex, they didn’t speak to him, even though I had video evidence. It was [support agency] that helped me”* (R94)

Not being taken seriously by the police was again given as a reason why some people said their expectations had not been met (as in other questions in the survey): *“It wasn’t until I was physically hurt, was action taken, which is horrendous”* (R91) and *“I thought they would at least speak to him about it to warn him off but they didn’t”* (R60).

Some said that their expectations had not been met because they had been faced with counter allegations upon reporting their experience of domestic abuse: *“not taken seriously which led me being charged for it to go to court and my ex be caught lying with no punishment”* (R5); *“I’m male I’m ignored, the perception is males are abusers, females are incapable of abuse”* (R14); *“I ended up being the perpetrator as my words were twisted and I was unheard”* (R67).

Being treated badly or inappropriately by the police was another reason for expectations had not being met: *“I thought I would be treated with more understanding and compassion by the many officers I had to deal with”* (R68); *“...I was a crying mess and not once was I offered a break or a drink or a tissue. It was a young male police officer and he looked bored the whole time, and a kind of gruff woman who seemed to side with my ex and belittled me, who even said things like ‘...but do you think if you’d said at the time that you didn’t want to...?’”* (R78).

#### **74. Overall satisfaction with the service provided by Police Scotland**

Double the number of people responding to the survey were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied (52.8 per cent) than were satisfied/very satisfied (26.4 per cent) with the service provided to them by Police Scotland, with (20.9 per cent) remaining neutral.

#### **75. Suggestions for improving domestic abuse reporting**

Sixty-one people gave suggestions of how reporting domestic abuse could be improved, with responses including:<sup>21</sup>

- Better knowledge/awareness/understanding/training/specialism (25)
- Less bias (12)
- For all officers to take it seriously (8)
- Better use of third-party agencies (6)
- Better communication/joining up of cases (5)
- Improve investigations (2)
- Better support/protection (2)
- Better complaint mechanisms (1)
- More rehabilitative outcomes (1)

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<sup>21</sup> Some respondents’ comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.



The main theme in free text responses about how reporting domestic abuse could be improved was of the opinion that the police need better knowledge, awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, which might indicate the need for better or more training, and for some people to have specialism in this area.

Several people wanted to see (more) specialist domestic abuse officers (*“Have specialist officers who only deal with DV”* (R9)), and others suggested having the same officers assigned to individual people, to save repetition and to build up knowledge (including making people aware that they can ask for a male/female officer). Some stressed the need for better screening of police, and regular checks, even for those in specialist domestic abuse roles - for continued suitability to the role – so as to guard against people becoming desensitised. Training was suggested across the whole of policing, including those personnel in police stations who might be encountered by victim/survivors. *“I want to highlight that my first report was dealt with fantastically with two of the most supportive officers I’ve ever met. This was following a physical assault. They helped me the whole way. I have since made a further 5-10 reports which have been dealt with horrifically...”* (R95).

A need for more (and more regular, ongoing) training in domestic abuse, including the different types of domestic abuse that might be experienced was a key theme (particularly coercive control). The need for better awareness regarding domestic abuse experienced in same sex relationships was also mentioned, as was that experienced by men. Some stressed the need to better recognise types of abuse that might be harder to evidence/prove, as this was a source of frustration:

- *“Victims reporting domestic abuse should be offered contact and support directly from officers specifically trained in domestic abuse. The officers I have met with were not very familiar with the terms of the 2018 Domestic Abuse act and were unwilling to look at it in more detail”* (R18)
- *“I think more officers in police stations should have a greater awareness of domestic abuse. The specialist officers from the domestic abuse unit were amazing but I’m not sure this level of understanding would be there for all officers”* (R77)
- *“police officers need to have a true understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse* (R41)”

- *“More officers with domestic abuse awareness and perpetrators behaviour is and coercive control knowledge” (R51)*
- *“educate officers on the long lasting impact of psychological abuse and harm by abusers” (R59)*

Respondents suggested that training should be in trauma-informed methods, recognising the different and long-lasting impacts of domestic abuse, and that it should address attitudes, awareness and possible (unconscious) bias. They also suggested that training for police officers should recognise the impact that any personal history of experiencing domestic abuse may have had:

- *“If people grow up with an abuser, they will be unable to see it in others” (R40)*
- *“Compassion, empathy and compassion training provided for all police officers dealing with domestic abuse” (R91)*
- *“You need to learn the different forms of abuse and how they affect different people. Not everyone reacts/acts/looks the same even with the same type of abuse” (R31)*
- *“Make sure no officer ever asks “why didn't you just leave” or “why didn't you tell them to leave”. Instantly puts blame on the abused. I became defensive at those questions (was asked both) and wanted to shut down and just tell her to leave and forget it, tear up the statement and not come back” (R45)*

Upskilling police to be better able to guide those reporting through the process was considered important; for example, one respondent said that most people do not know that they can make an appointment, and should be informed of this. It was suggested that training should involve clearer guidance for victim/survivors on the process, what is required, and the support available. Training should also involve stressing the importance of (and duty to provide) regular updates to victim/survivors. One person also suggested that more information should be given from an earlier age:

- *“there needs to be more interaction with schools, this is the place where young adults need to be shown how domestic abuse affects theirs and everyone else's lives” (R47)*

- *“I have kept detailed notes of all incidents and I’d like for victims to be given this kind of practical advice on how to make them feel like there’s something they can do. I think more information about support groups and what to do next should be provided by the police”* (R91)
- *“Have informed officers who are sensitive to abuse and can inform reporters of what will happen next and how they can be safe through that process”* (R88).

Addressing perceived bias, both conscious and unconscious, was a key theme. Several people felt that the police were biased in certain ways, affecting how they responded to domestic abuse – this included male respondents and a respondent from a minority ethnic background, who felt that these characteristics led to bias. Several respondents felt that police were biased against men and often failed to recognise or ignore that they could also be victims, with a couple of people stating that they felt the domestic abuse legislation was also biased towards women’s experiences:

- *“As a male then makes need to be believed more, woman use the false allegations as a way to “take the man down” or stop them seeing their kids. I picked up a lot of courage to leave after years of abuse and the abuse continued via the police”* (R5)
- *“Change the DA framework to make it sex neutral. A victim is a victim whether they are male or female”*(R10)
- *“Ensure police receive unconscious bias training (R3)”*.

One respondent talked about the police treating accused abusers from within the police force differently: *“when dealing with a serving police officer who is the abuser, treat them not like a colleague but treat them as the aggressor”* (R75).

Here, as with other questions, it was felt that the reporting of domestic abuse could be improved if *all* police took reports seriously, listened to and believed victim/survivors, and acted upon their reports. Several people felt that unless the abuse they experienced was physical, the police did not take it seriously enough: *“Take gaslighting seriously. They only cared about physical abuse”* (R49); *“Believe the person reporting, give them proper support, do not make them feel like they are the guilty one”* (R94).

Several people thought that better use could be made of third-party agencies to improve the reporting of domestic abuse. This was both because respondents felt that these organisations already had the right knowledge, experience and attitude to deal with reports, but also because it sometimes felt safer for victim/survivors than going directly to the police.

- *“Reporting domestic abuse would be much easier and less stressful through womens aid where they have the training and expertise to investigate and support women/men in this situation”* (R40)
- *“Police should have much more support by specialised organisations that are actually trained to deal with the specifics of domestic abuse so that victims such as myself are actually seen and heard”* (R65)
- *“I think womens aid are a vital part in this. They really do make women feel safe. I also know it not always possible but where could happen female should attend to take statement”* (R42)
- *“I think that the police should work far more closely with organisations such as Women’s Aid. I was far more supported by Women’s Aid and I felt much safer and actually heard when speaking to them. As they are dedicated to helping people like myself, they have the time to do so”* (R65)
- *“You can put all sorts of avenues in place for reporting through schools, NHS, 3rd sector organisations, where non-uniformed officers can go to victims without drawing attention”* (R45)

Better communication between police, and with complainants, was also proposed as a way to improve the reporting of domestic abuse. Suggestions included improved communication with victim/survivors, this (including improving communication methods), as well as the need for better joining up of related incidents/cases/reports.

- *“Provide more information on domestic abuse and where to get support every time you are called out to a domestic disturbance”* (R66)
- *“By researching history at the address”* (R12)
- *“I think the first responders were brilliant and kept me and my children safe but after that it was hard to find out what was happening, the domestic abuse with the knife and the other domestic abuse were split up. He was taken to court over the knife crime but said it was a 'one off mental episode' and got not guilty”* (R8)

Other less commonly-mentioned suggestions included: the need to improve subsequent investigations; providing better support and protection to victims/survivors; and improving the complaints mechanism. A couple of people drew attention to delays between reporting and actions being taken, leading to repercussions such as repeated domestic abuse, and destruction of evidence by the abuser. Others suggested that the requirement for a certain amount of evidence should be reconsidered due to the difficulty in gathering this, and highlighted the need to monitor someone who has been accused (even if this did not result in charges).

- *“I was not taken seriously when I reported the abuse, my mental health was assessed. It took 4 months before I was interviewed properly, then went through hours and hours of intense police interviews. The officer who carried this out appeared very considerate of my needs, but in the end it was clear I was not been believed”* (R48)
- *“Officers experienced in DA be allocated to these reports and followed up by specially trained officers rather than being told that we are not a priority and taking months to fully investigate. Witnesses by spoken to in a timely manner”* (R89)

## **76. Suggestions for improving support provision to victim/survivors**

Responding to the survey, 63 people provided suggestions for how Police Scotland might improve support provision to victim/survivors after reporting domestic abuse.

Responses included:<sup>22</sup>

- Better resources/follow-up care (13)
- Take complaints/reports seriously/reduce bias (13)
- Better knowledge/awareness/understanding/training/specialism (11)
- Better communication/joining up of cases (10)
- Designated point(s) of contact (4)
- Support third-party agencies to provide support (2)
- Consult more family/friends/other reports (2)
- Better investigation of both parties (2)

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<sup>22</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

- Legal changes (2)
- Police Scotland has already improved (1)
- More community policing (1)
- Clearer guidance on reporting (1)

The main theme was to provide better resources and improved follow-up care. Another was to offer support and provide resources for everyone, regardless of whether they appeared to need them, not simply by handing out leaflets, but by offering better resources for children, and improving the resources available on the Police Scotland domestic abuse website page by linking to services and support networks (including information on rights and the reporting process). Having a support programme or course was also suggested, or referral to existing programmes (specific programmes mentioned included the Freedom Programme and Own My Life).

- *“I really do think support is the one thing lacking and it’s the most vital part. It’s mentally tough going through this and I feel like there really isn’t enough support. I have spent time going online looking at laws figuring out my rights when I shouldn’t have to. That’s the police job to support and let me know”* (R42)
- *“a team of people with lived experience who can support people reporting; connecting with other services”* (R71)
- *“make them aware of their rights and how things like the Domestic Abuse Protection Bill and the Domestic Abuse Bill can help them, rather than have to Google to find out my rights weeks later”* (R59)

Suggestions for better follow-up care included the need for better protective measures, and for practical protective support: *“I requested police support to accompany me back to his house to retrieve my belongings after I left and he was threatening to throw it all away. They had told me this was possible but were then too busy and I had to go alone”* (R66)

A number of people suggested that support provision might be improved if police had better knowledge, awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, including the need for training and specialised officers, and also the knowledge to refer on to other agencies when appropriate. This included having qualities such as empathy and patience, and addressing attitudes such as victim blaming. Having a better knowledge of domestic abuse included a focus upon coercive control and emotional abuse, as well as stalking and harassment, and knowledge of patterns/repeat episodes/ continuums of domestic abuse. It was suggested that this improved training and knowledge was needed across all police roles:

- *“Training, and more training and then a bit more. Officers need to hear from victims and survivors and give consistent care across the board - no matter the age, income or education of the abused”* (R45)
- *“Training on coercive control and emotional abuse. Abuser tactics. Look at the overall situation not just the one incident being reported at that time”* (R79)
- *“ think further training/ funding needs to go into stalking and harassment, I as the victim had to move home, change phone numbers and addresses etc and due to perpetrator mental health he was allowed to continue his abuse with zero repercussions”* (R76)
- *“The call handlers I spoke to on 101 we’re more empathetic and understanding of the distress and trauma when reporting than the beat officers”* (R89)

Again, as with other questions, respondents said that support provision for victim/survivors would be improved if they felt taken seriously by the police and that, as a result, their reports were investigated. One respondent said that she had not been taken seriously because her ex-partner had persuaded the police that her reports of domestic abuse were caused by mental health problems, *“When trying to speak about him manipulating family etc against me, isolating, not taken seriously, comment are you sure you didn’t forget to take a tablet that day”* (R80), with another describing misogynistic attitudes (R17). Others felt that they were not taken seriously because of being male, and also felt that police were less aware of domestic abuse services for men: *“Work with male domestic abuse services. I asked for information on male support orgs and services, and police gave me a couple and I could not*

*access them due to things like them functioning outside my local area. The police just left me and were unhelpful. I had to do it all myself” (R3).*

Better communication - both within Police Scotland about cases, and with complainants - was suggested as a way that support might be improved. This included the need for reports to be connected together and not viewed in isolation. The need to keep people updated on the reports that they had made was key, including information about future actions so that victim/survivors could be better prepared, or more safe, and therefore might be encouraged to report any future abuse:

- *“Give clear updates, and don’t split up charges” (R8)*
- *“That any future action against the abuser is notified in advance to the abused person to prepare them for the inevitable repercussions from the abuser that will result” (R20)*
- *“Inform the victim at every stage of their investigation. I was told the police would formally interview my ex-partner and would report it to the PF. I heard nothing from the police” (R10)*
- *“Keep updated with what will happen next. Make sure they feel heard and would report ongoing abuse. The abuser has already minimised their actions so much if the police don’t respond I think the abuser is right and maybe it’s not that bad” (R88)*
- *“I really do think support is the one thing lacking and it’s the most vital part. It’s mentally tough going through this and I feel like there really isn’t enough support. I have spent time going online looking at laws figuring out my rights when I shouldn’t have to. That’s the police job to support and let me know” (R42)*

A few people said that having a designated point of contact would improve support, including having direct contact details of specialist officers and not having to repeat stories to multiple different people: *“I found it hard when the bail conditions were broke and reporting them going over the same 10 questions time and time again and found it hard all the different officers you dealt with throughout” (R24);* and *“have one point of contact, who can provide details on the progress being made, rather than feeling you are a nuisance by requesting an update” (R59).*

Other suggestions included consulting more friends/family/other reports when investigating a case of domestic abuse (to ensure all evidence is gathered), and supporting third-party agencies to provide support. Some respondents found the help that they received from the latter was invaluable, and a more helpful and less traumatic experience than reporting to the police: *“make victims referrals to support agencies immediately, not when someone can be bothered”* (R59).

A couple of respondents wanted to see better investigation of both parties, including where counter allegations were received: *“The police scotland should also consider reported person as potentially a victim of domestic abuse. False allegations is form of domestic abuse!”*(R11).

Legal changes or better application of legal measures were suggested made by a few people (e.g. *“Extending laws to cover abuse through family courts”* (R34)). Bail conditions and non-harassment orders were also mentioned as ways of better supporting victim/survivors: *“Non harassment orders are desperately needed by survivors just to go back out into the world. It also makes us safer in our homes until divorce can be progressed”* (R8).

More community policing to establish better relationships was suggested (so that police would be in a better position to provide support), and clearer guidance on what exactly is needed in reporting: *“More officers and those same officers in each area on the beat patrolling streets, so that woman and kids can build up relationships with them and trust them enough to go to them if something happened”* (R51); *“for there to be clear guidance on exactly what is needed in reporting. To give us hope that this will come to an end, that we are protected and feel safe”* (R91).

Some respondents spoke of the positive support they had received when reporting domestic abuse to the police, including one person who said that, in her experience, Police Scotland had improved from the time she first reported. Others also expressed gratitude for the way their cases had been handled:

- *“Since leaving my abuser and been to woman's aid. I have learned more about how police Scotland work and how much it has changed since I was being abused. It has become a safer and reliable option to help the bad situation victims are in. I have talked to police persons who are dealing with domestic abuse and they are a credit to their profession”* (R47)
- *“I would like to thank the officers who did deal sensitively with my case, and provided reassurance I wasn't crazy or just being melodramatic”* (R13)
- *“My case is due at [named] court in [month] and I feel confident in appearing even though my ex has pled not guilty. This is in part due to the officers who attended that evening. Had they not shown empathy and professionalism I may have spent the past few months dreading the court case and viewing it as a waste of time. Having confidence in the police when it comes to domestic violence is of utmost importance....Police Scotland should be proud of the officers who attended after the attack on me, they are a credit to them”* (R62).

## **77. Other comments**

Respondents were asked whether there was anything they wanted to add or expand upon. Thirty-two people responded, giving further information or expanding upon answers (comments have largely been incorporated into the other relevant sections of the report). Their responses included the following:<sup>23</sup>

- Previous negative experiences meant didn't/ wouldn't report subsequent experience of domestic abuse (4)
- Bias against male victims of domestic abuse in policing and in law (3)
- Better training is needed about how to treat and respond to victims of domestic abuse (3)
- Need better support for children within the reporting process (3)

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<sup>23</sup> Some respondents' comments referred to more than one issue, so the overall number of comments within the themes do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who gave a response to the question.

- Police Scotland needs to be held accountable and scrutinised more (3)
- Need better support for children within the reporting process (3)
- Variation in service, due to different officers (2)
- Court system (2)
- Need specialist domestic abuse teams to help people recognise abuse (1)
- More awareness raising in schools (1)
- Mental health of victim called into question (1)
- Delays due to staff shortages (1)
- Legal changes needed (1)
- Problem of evidence/witnesses (1)
- Clearer guidance on reporting/support (1)
- Grateful to the police (1)
- Police not responding to complaints due to counter allegations (1)
- Feel like unless the abuse is physical, not taken seriously (1)
- Better communication/joining up of cases (1)

Some people used this question to emphasise that they would not report domestic abuse to the police again because of their previous negative experiences of having done so, including perceptions of not having been taken seriously, or feeling victimised by the police.

A few people re-emphasised their views of the police being biased against men who report domestic abuse, and of certain legal protocols/documents (Joint Protocol Guidance, Domestic Abuse Standard Operating Procedure) not being used to support male victims/survivors. Others described their views of misogynistic treatment and/or assumptions made about female victims/survivors, such as that their abuser must be male, or that they would prefer a female officer to speak to.

The need for better/more training on how to treat and respond to victims/survivors of domestic abuse came up several times, including training about the dynamics and different types of domestic abuse, and appropriate attitudinal ways of responding to these.

Needing better support for children caught up in situations of domestic abuse was raised again in this section. One person said that the children involved were let down as the only help given was through social services, which did not help adequately. Another raised the point that children should not be interviewed in the presence of the abuser, as this can leave them open to influence or manipulation by the abuser. Another respondent described how meetings about domestic abuse conducted with children should be more tailored towards and supportive of children with additional needs, and children who have experienced trauma: *“I don't know how u expect a traumatised child and especially ones with additional support needs to open up to complete strangers whole being recorded. It then raises anxiety for already traumatised children and is then abandoned due to this and the perpetrators then get away with it”* (R51).

Some people commented that Police Scotland should be scrutinised and held accountable more than it currently is, in order for its response to domestic abuse reporting to improve. A couple of people pointed out that the response they received varied according to the individual officers. For one, this was dependent on the seniority and level of experience of the responding officers, but for others it was dependent upon the individual: *“had it not been for the police sergeant who arrived after the first two officers, no action would have been taken, as they did not take my concerns seriously, and did not sufficiently pursue obtaining a witness statement, until directly instructed by their sergeant”* (R41).

There were two comments about the court system, with one stating that the police need to be better prepared with evidence available so that cases are not delayed, causing additional stress to complainants.



## Group comparisons

Comparisons have been conducted on the basis of sex (males and females); ethnicity (minority and majority ethnic groups); and health (long-term health conditions or not).<sup>24</sup> The numbers of respondents within each group are small and, for this reason, caution should be exercised, since what can appear as large percentage differences often reflect only a very small number of people. It should be noted that any differences reported cannot be described as statistically significant due to the type of sample and also the numbers of respondents being compared.

## Sex

In this section, the responses of females (80) are compared with those of males (14). The data is mixed, and does not follow the general pattern of the overall survey of more negative responses/experiences but, on the whole, female respondents were more positive about their experiences of reporting domestic abuse to the police than male respondents. This included engagement with the police, expectations of what would happen if they reported, and satisfaction with the service received from Police Scotland. Despite these findings, females were less positive about the outcome of the police investigation than were males, and may also face more barriers to reporting domestic abuse (as demonstrated by their experiences of reporting during the pandemic).

## Key demographics

Of those responding to the survey, 80 (85.1 per cent) identified as female, and 14 (14.9 per cent) as male. Overall, the female respondents were slightly younger than the males: 30.1 per cent of females were aged under 35, compared with 7.1 per cent of males. The largest group for both males and females was the 36 – 45 age group.

	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	Over 75	N
<b>Female</b>	6.3%	23.8%	36.3%	30.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	80
<b>Male</b>	0.0%	7.1%	42.9%	35.7%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	14

<sup>24</sup> Comparisons on any other possible groups were not conducted because the numbers identifying in certain groups were too low for comparison purposes.

### **Possible support needs**

The percentage of males who did not have English as a first language was higher (14.3 per cent) than for females (1.3 per cent). A slightly higher number of females (45 per cent) reported physical/mental health conditions or illnesses expected to last for 12 months or longer than males (42.9 per cent).

### **Nature of domestic abuse**

Respondents were asked what type of domestic abuse they had reported to Police Scotland, and could select as many as applied. Across all types of domestic abuse (bar the 'Other' category), the percentage of females reporting was higher.

For females, the most common types of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland were:

- Coercive control (83.8 per cent)
- Emotional/psychological abuse (81.3 per cent)
- Verbal abuse (65 per cent)
- Physical violence/abuse (63.8 per cent)

For males, the most common types of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland were:

- Emotional/psychological abuse (64.3 per cent)
- Physical violence/abuse (50 per cent)
- Coercive control (42.9 per cent)
- Verbal abuse (42.9 per cent)

Females (70 per cent) were more likely to report that children had been present (or witnessed the domestic abuse) than were males (28.6 per cent).

### **Reporting of domestic abuse**

Respondents were asked who had made contact with Police Scotland to report the abuse (they could tick all options that applied). For both females (87.3 per cent) and males (71.4 per cent), it was most common that they had reported the abuse directly to the police themselves. The second most common method for females was reporting to a third party (13.9 per cent), the second most common way for males was that the abuser had made a report against the respondent (35.7 per cent).



The most common ways of reporting domestic abuse for both females (51.3 per cent) and males (64.3 per cent) was a 101 call, followed by reporting in person (females 40 per cent, males 42.9 per cent). Females were more likely than males to use all other methods listed - the other most striking difference being use of a support services helpline (females 17.5 per cent, males 7.1 per cent).

Satisfaction with treatment by the staff member/call handler when reporting in person/on the phone was far higher for females than males: 52.5 per cent of females were very satisfied/satisfied, compared with 7.1 per cent of males; and 15 per cent of females were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied compared with 57.2 per cent of males.

While both females (55 per cent) and males (78.6 per cent) were more likely to report that they did not feel that the police had provided an appropriate response to their report, a higher percentage of females (36.3 per cent) than males (7.1 per cent) reported that they *did* think an appropriate response had been provided.

Many males had reported domestic abuse earlier than females, with 22.8 per cent of females reporting in a year or less, compared with 50 per cent of males. However, 28.6 per cent of males had not reported until 9+ years, compared with 24.1 per cent of females. A slightly higher percentage of males (78.6 per cent) than females (70 per cent) said that they had experienced domestic abuse that they had not reported to the police.

### **Support and engagement with the police when reporting**

The percentage of females and males requesting or having the option of a local policing appointment were more or less identical (50 per cent of each said, yes, they had). However, more females (54.2 per cent) than males (45.5 per cent) said this had been arranged. Where it had been arranged, it took place more quickly for females than for males. None of the males who described having particular support needs felt that these had been met by the police, compared with 15.8 per cent of the females who had described having particular support needs. Likewise, a higher percentage of males (78.6 per cent) than females (48.8 per cent) felt that the police had not taken into account what they wanted to happen as a result of reporting.

When it came to how respondents found their engagement with the police when reporting, females were more likely to strongly agree/agree with the following statements:

- Felt that the police were respectful: females 46.3 per cent, males 21.4 per cent
- Reassured that the police would try to help me: females 36.3 per cent, males 14.3 per cent
- Felt confident that the police had taken my complaint seriously: females 37.5 per cent, males 28.6 per cent
- Felt that the police explained the reporting and investigative process clearly: females 35.1 per cent, males 14.3 per cent

Following their reports of domestic abuse to the police, more females (62 per cent) than males (50 per cent) wanted to proceed with an investigation.

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

A slightly higher percentage of females (47.6 per cent) than males (42.9 per cent) had experienced domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. More females (21.3 per cent) than males (14.3 per cent) had not reported it to the police. Higher percentages of females than males identified with barriers to reporting named in the survey.

### **Investigations**

Overall, 65.9 per cent of females said that their report of domestic abuse went on to be investigated by the police, compared with 50 per cent of males. 17.1 per cent of females said that they did not understand why their report had not been investigated, compared with 25 per cent of males.

Higher numbers of females felt that the police had explained everything about the investigation process to them in a way they could understand, than did males. 61.6 per cent of females said yes or sometimes, compared with 21.4 per cent of males.

Respondents were asked how they found the process of giving a statement and, on the whole, both females and males were more negative than positive about this (they could tick several statements). Females were overall slightly more positive about their experience than males (higher percentages highlighted).

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Easy process	13.9%	0%
Challenging process	55.7%	61.5%
Quick process	10.1%	7.7%
Lengthy process	31.6%	7.7%
Basic needs met	16.5%	7.7%
Basic needs NOT met	12.7%	15.4%
(Option of ) support from other	11.4%	0%
No (option of) support from other	29.1%	38.5%
Felt safe when giving statement	24.1%	7.7%
Didn't feel safe giving statement	13.9%	23.1%
Hearing statement read back difficult	36.7%	0%

When asked about engagement with the person taking their statement, females were more likely to strongly agree/agree with the following statements:

- Felt that the person had a supportive manner: females 49.3 per cent, males 30.8 per cent
- Felt the person was knowledgeable in dealing with domestic abuse: females 44.1 per cent, males 23.1 per cent
- Felt that police took them seriously: females 45.6 per cent, males 30.8 per cent

### **Support, protection and updates during the investigation**

Respondents were asked about the following services/supports/issues, and could answer yes, no or don't know. Across the board, responses were more negative than positive, so these responses have been presented.

- Not given option of stating whether they would prefer a female or male to take their statement: 73.9 per cent of females and 92.3 per cent of males
- Not offered a Victim Care Card: 55.8 per cent of females and 69.2 per cent of males
- Not informed of their right to support services: 50 per cent of females and 85.7 per cent of males

- Not referred to support services by Police Scotland: 67.5 per cent of females and 78.6 per cent of males
- Not informed about available safety measures: 53.8 per cent of females and 92.9 per cent of males
- Had been asked about children/dependants who might need including in protection or safety planning: 38.8 per cent of females and 23.1 per cent of males
- Did not know who their main police contact was during the investigation: 49.3 per cent of females and 76.9 per cent of males
- Not advised of their rights to ask about the progress and/or outcome of the police investigation: 60.3 per cent of females and 64.3 per cent of males.
- Not provided with regular updates: 56.8 per cent of females and 76.9 per cent of males.
- Where updates given, not communicated in a way that met individual needs: 42.3 per cent of females and 69.2 per cent of males (for females, 21.1 per cent said yes, and 36.6 per cent sometimes; and for males, 7.7 per cent said yes, and 23.1 per cent said sometimes)
- Not asked what preferred method of communication was: 63.5 per cent of females and 69.2 per cent of males

### **Outcome of investigation**

The survey showed that 51.3 per cent of females were either present at the time of the arrest of their abuser, or had been informed about it, and 17.1 per cent were/had not; 28.5 per cent of males were either present at the time of the arrest of their abuser, or had been informed about it, and 21.4 per cent were/had not. In their replies, 57.5 per cent of females and 38.5 per cent of males said they were advised of the outcome of the investigation.

Overall, respondents were more negative than positive about the outcome of the police action/investigation, with females less positive than males. When asked about this, 11.1 per cent of females thought that it was sufficient, and 88.9 per cent thought it was not; males were more positive, with 33.3 per cent thinking it was sufficient, and 66.7 per cent thinking it was not.

## Awareness

A total of 57.5 per cent of females and 61.5 per cent of males replied yes to the question, 'have you ever seen/been aware of a Police Scotland campaign on reporting domestic abuse?' However, before making their reports, 70 per cent of females and 76.9 per cent of males were not aware that there were several different ways to report domestic abuse to Police Scotland.

## Future

When asked if they would report future domestic abuse, 36.3 per cent of females said they would be extremely likely/likely to report it to Police Scotland, compared with 23.1 per cent of males. 46.3 per cent of females were extremely unlikely/unlikely, compared with 61.6 per cent of males.

While the four main reasons for not reporting were the same for females and males, females were slightly more positive (in line with the findings that females would be more likely to report than males):

- Lack confidence that it will help: females 68.2 per cent, males 69.2 per cent
- Do not think it will be taken seriously: females 56.1 per cent, males 69.2 per cent
- Did not like the way I was treated by Police Scotland: females 42.2 per cent, males 46.2 per cent
- Too scared of repercussions from the abuser: females 39.4 per cent, males 61.5 per cent

Respondents were far more likely to state that they did not feel adequately supported and protected by the police, having reported domestic abuse, with females (68.8 per cent) slightly less negative than males (76.9 per cent). Fewer people – females and males – felt safer as a result of their report of domestic abuse:

	I felt safer	Nothing changed – I always felt safe	Nothing changed – I always felt unsafe	I felt less safe	N
<b>Female</b>	30.0%	0.0%	41.3%	28.8%	80
<b>Male</b>	14.3%	7.1%	35.7%	42.9%	14

When asked if their expectations of what would happen if they reported domestic abuse had been met, 56.3 per cent of females and 78.6 per cent of males said they had **not** been met, and 21.3 per cent of females and 7.1 per cent of males said they had been met. Overall, 29.1 per cent of females and 8.3 per cent of males were very satisfied/satisfied with the service provided to them by Police Scotland, and 46.8 per cent of females and 91.7 per cent of males were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied.

## Ethnicity

In this section, the responses of those from a minority ethnic group (10) were compared with the responses of those in the main ethnic group (74). The picture painted by the data was mixed. Those from a minority ethnic group did report higher support needs which were not always met, and greater barriers to reporting. Several possible communication issues were identified, including feeling that processes had not been explained clearly, that fewer updates were received, and that fewer respondents were advised about the outcome of the investigation. There were, however, also many areas in which responses from the minority ethnic group were more positive about their experiences than those from the main ethnic group.

## Key demographics

In total, 85 people responded to the question regarding ethnicity. Of these, 10 (11.9 per cent) identified as being from a minority ethnic group, and 74 (87.1 per cent) identified as being white (Scottish, English, Welsh, Northern Irish, British). One (1.2 per cent) preferred not to say. For those who selected 'other', these were: Polish, White Non-British, White and White Other; 7 were females, and 3 males. Of those who identified as being from a minority ethnic group:

Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British-Other, please specify	1
Black Scottish/British-African	2
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups-Please specify	2
White-Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1
Other	4

**N**

**10**

### **Possible support needs**

The percentage of people from an ethnic minority background who did not have English as a first language was far higher (30 per cent) than for those from the main ethnic group (0 per cent). A lower number of people from an ethnic minority background (20 per cent) reported physical/mental health conditions or illnesses expected to last for 12 months or longer than the main ethnic group (48.6 per cent).

### **Nature of domestic abuse**

Respondents were asked what type of domestic abuse they had reported to Police Scotland, and could select as many as applied. For those from minority ethnic backgrounds, the most common types of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland were:

- Physical violence/abuse, coercive control and emotional/psychological abuse (all 70 per cent)
- Sexual violence/abuse, verbal abuse and threats against me (all 60 per cent)

For those from the main ethnic group, the most common types of domestic abuse reported were:

- Emotional/psychological abuse (81.1 per cent)
- Coercive control (77 per cent)
- Physical violence/abuse and verbal abuse (both 59.5 per cent).

### **Reporting of domestic abuse**

Respondents were asked who had made contact with Police Scotland to report the abuse (they could tick all options that applied). For both groups it was most common that they had reported the abuse directly to the police themselves: people from a minority ethnic background 80 per cent; and people from the main ethnic group 84.9 per cent.

A 101 call was the most common way of reporting domestic abuse for people from a minority ethnic background (50 per cent) and for people from the main ethnic group (55.4 per cent), followed by reporting in person (minority ethnic group, 40 per cent; main ethnic group 37.8 per cent), then other methods. Slightly higher numbers from an ethnic minority background were likely to report via a support services helpline (20 per cent) than those from the main ethnic group (13.5 per cent).

Satisfaction with treatment by the staff member/call handler when reporting in person/on the phone was lower for people from a minority ethnic group: 30 per cent of people from a minority ethnic background were very satisfied/satisfied and 20 per cent were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied; compared with 48.6 per cent of those from the main ethnic group who were very satisfied/satisfied and 21.6 per cent were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied.

When asked about whether they felt that the police had provided an appropriate response to their report, percentages were very similar for both groups: 60 per cent of those from a minority ethnic group and 59.5 per cent of those from the main ethnic group were more likely to report that they **did not** feel that an appropriate response had been provided.

Similar percentages of people from a minority ethnic group (30 per cent) and those from the main ethnic group (25.7 per cent) had reported domestic abuse in a year or under. However, 30 per cent of people from a minority ethnic group reported within 1-2 years, compared with 9.5 per cent of those from the main ethnic group. Percentages of reporting within timeframes of up to 9+ years were higher for those from the main ethnic group. A higher percentage of people from a minority ethnic group (80 per cent) than those from the main ethnic group (68.9 per cent) said that they had experienced domestic abuse that they had not reported to the police.

### **Support and engagement with the police when reporting**

A lower percentage of people from a minority ethnic background (40 per cent) said that they had requested or been given the option of having a local policing appointment than those from the main ethnic group (51.4 per cent). While percentages were similar for those who said they had not (40 per cent and 41.9 per cent respectively), there was a higher percentage of don't knows from those from a minority ethnic group (20 per cent) than those from the main ethnic group (6.8 per cent). Fewer people from a minority ethnic group (44.4 per cent) than those from the main ethnic group (52.2 per cent) said that such an appointment had been arranged. Where it had been arranged, it took place more quickly for those from the main ethnic group.

When asked about whether their particular support needs had been met by the police, far more people from the main ethnic group said that the question was not applicable (75.7 per cent) than those from a minority ethnic group (50 per cent), suggesting a higher degree of need in the latter group. With this in mind, there were higher percentages of people from a minority ethnic background who felt that their particular support needs: **had** been met by the police (10 per cent); and **had not** been met (30 per cent), compared with those from the main ethnic group (where 2.7 per cent said their needs **had** been met, and 13.5 per cent said they **had not**).

When asked if they felt the police had taken into account what they wanted to happen as a result of reporting, people from a minority ethnic background were more positive, with 40 per cent saying yes, and 30 per cent saying no. Of those from the main ethnic group, 28.4 per cent said yes, and 55.4 per cent said no.

When respondents described their experience of engagement with the police when reporting, those from a minority ethnic background were again more positive, and were more likely to strongly agree/agree with the following statements:

- Felt that the police were respectful: 50 per cent minority ethnic group, 40.6 per cent main ethnic group
- Reassured that the police would try to help: 50 per cent minority ethnic group, 29.7 per cent main ethnic group
- Felt confident that the police had taken complaint seriously: 50 per cent minority ethnic group, 33.8 per cent main ethnic group
- Felt that the police explained the reporting and investigative process clearly: 40 per cent minority ethnic group, 32.4 per cent main ethnic group

Following their reports of domestic abuse to the police, a slightly higher percentage of people from a minority ethnic background (60 per cent) than those from the main ethnic group (58.1 per cent) wanted to proceed with an investigation. Strikingly, no one from a minority ethnic background said that they did not want to proceed, compared with 27 per cent of those from the main ethnic group.



## **COVID-19 pandemic**

A lower percentage of people from a minority ethnic background (40 per cent) said they had experienced domestic abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic than from the main ethnic group (47.3 per cent). However, of these, everyone from the ethnic minority group said they had reported it, compared to just 25.7 per cent of the main ethnic group. Despite this, higher percentages of people from a minority ethnic background than those from the main ethnic group identified with barriers to reporting named in the survey. Higher percentages of people from a minority ethnic background than those from the main ethnic group identified with barriers to reporting named in the survey.

## **Investigations**

A higher percentage of people from a minority ethnic background (83.3 per cent) said that their report of domestic abuse went on to be investigated by the police, compared with (60.5 per cent) of those from the main ethnic group. No one from the minority ethnic group said that their report had not gone on to be investigated, compared with 34.4 per cent of those from the main ethnic group.

When asked if they felt that the police had explained everything about the investigation process to them in a way they could understand, a higher percentage of those from a minority ethnic group said that they had not (50 per cent) compared with those from the main ethnic group (33.3 per cent).

Respondents were asked how they found the process of giving a statement, and the data gave a mixed results (higher percentages highlighted), although overall, neither group painted a positive picture.



	<b>Minority ethnic background</b>	<b>Main ethnic group</b>
Easy process	22.2%	12.3%
Challenging process	55.6%	57.5%
Quick process	0%	12.3%
Lengthy process	22.2%	28.8%
Basic needs met	22.2%	16.4%
Basic needs NOT met	0%	13.7%
(Option of ) support from other	0%	11%
No (option of) support from other	33.3%	30.1%
Felt safe when giving statement	22.2%	23.3%
Didn't feel safe giving statement	33.3%	11%
Hearing statement read back difficult	11%	37%

When asked about engagement with the person taking their statement, again, the data was mixed. The percentages who strongly agreed/agreed with the following statements were as follows:

- Felt that the person had a supportive manner: 37.5 per cent minority ethnic group, 46.2 per cent main ethnic group
- Felt the person was knowledgeable in dealing with domestic abuse: 50 per cent minority ethnic group, 36 per cent main ethnic group
- Felt that police took them seriously: 50 per cent minority ethnic group, 40.6 per cent main ethnic group

### **Support, protection and updates during the investigation**

Respondents were asked about the following services/supports/issues, and could answer yes, no or don't know. Responses were generally more negative than positive.

- Not given option to state whether they would prefer a female or male to take their statement: 50 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 78 per cent from the main ethnic group
- Not offered a Victim Care Card: 55.6 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 59.2 per cent from the main ethnic group
- Not informed of right to support services: 50 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 58.1 per cent from the main ethnic group
- Not referred to support services by Police Scotland: 60 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 73 per cent from the main ethnic group

- Not informed about available safety measures: 40 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 59.5 per cent from the main ethnic group (30 per cent of the minority ethnic group had been informed) Asked about children/dependants who might need including in protection or safety planning: 33.3 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 37.8 per cent from the main ethnic group (22.2 per cent from a minority ethnic group and 41.9 per cent from the main ethnic group had not been asked)
- Knew who their main police contact was during the investigation: 55.6 per cent from a minority ethnic background (33.3 per cent did not), compared with 33.3 per cent from the main ethnic group who did (and 58 per cent who did not)
- Not advised of rights to ask about the progress and/or outcome of the police investigation: 50 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 61.1 per cent from the main ethnic group
- Not given regular updates throughout the process: 66.7 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 60.3 per cent from the main ethnic group
- Updates on progress not communicated in a way that met individual needs: 22.2 per cent from a minority ethnic background and 48.5 per cent from the main ethnic group (for those from a minority ethnic background, 66.7 per cent said sometimes and 11.1 per cent said, yes, they had been; for those from the main ethnic group, 31.8 per cent said sometimes and 19.7 per cent said, yes, they had been)
- Not asked what preferred method of communication was: 33.3 per cent from a minority ethnic background (44.4 per cent did not know and 22.2 per cent said they **were** asked), compared with 67.6 per cent from the main ethnic group (11.8 per cent didn't know and 20.6 per cent said they **were** asked).

### **Outcome of investigation**

None of those from a minority ethnic background were present at the time of the arrest of their abuser, but 40 per cent had been informed about it (and 20 per cent had not). From the main ethnic group, 10 per cent of people were present at the time of the arrest of their abuser, 38.6 per cent had been informed about it, and 17 per cent were/had not. A total of 44.4 per cent of those from a minority ethnic background and 56.7 per cent of those from the main ethnic group said they were advised of the outcome of the investigation.

## Awareness

Overall, 55.6 per cent of those from a minority ethnic background and 60.8 per cent of those from the main ethnic group said yes to the question, **have you ever seen/been aware** of a Police Scotland campaign on reporting domestic abuse? However, before making their reports, 88.9 per cent of those from a minority ethnic background and 70.3 per cent of those from the main ethnic group said that they **were not aware** that there were several different ways to report domestic abuse to Police Scotland.

## Future

Those from a minority ethnic background were more likely to report future domestic abuse to Police Scotland than those from the main ethnic group. When asked if they would report future domestic abuse, 55.5 per cent from a minority ethnic background said they would be extremely likely/likely to report it, compared with 33.8 per cent from the main ethnic group; 33.3 per cent of those from a minority ethnic background were extremely unlikely/unlikely, compared with 51.3 per cent from the main ethnic group.

Similarly, while the four main reasons for not reporting domestic abuse were the same for both groups, those from a minority ethnic group were less negative:

- Lack confidence that it will help: 57.1 per cent minority ethnic background, 69.8 per cent main ethnic group
- Do not think it will be taken seriously: 42.9 per cent minority ethnic background, 61.9 per cent main ethnic group
- Did not like the way I was treated by Police Scotland: 42.9 per cent minority ethnic background, 44.4 per cent main ethnic group
- Too scared of repercussions from the abuser: 42.9 per cent minority ethnic background, 44.4 per cent main ethnic group

Respondents generally were far more likely to state that they did not feel adequately supported and protected by the police, having reported domestic abuse. Those from a minority ethnic background (55.6 per cent) were less negative about their experiences than those from the main ethnic group (71.6 per cent).



Fewer people from both groups felt safer as a result of reporting domestic abuse to the police, although the percentage from a minority ethnic group who felt safer was higher.

	I felt safer	Nothing changed – I always felt safe	Nothing changed – I always felt unsafe	I felt less safe	N
<b>Ethnic minority group</b>	40.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	10
<b>White-Scottish, English, Welsh, Northern Irish, British</b>	27.0%	1.4%	41.9%	29.7%	74

Feelings about whether expectations had been met, and satisfaction with the service from Police Scotland were more negative than positive for both groups. When asked if their expectations of what would happen if they reported domestic abuse had been met, 50 per cent of those from a minority ethnic group and 60.8 per cent of those from the main ethnic group said they had **not** been met, and 30 per cent of those from a minority ethnic group and 18.9 per cent of those from the main ethnic group said they **had been** met. Overall, 44.4 per cent of those from a minority ethnic group and 22.2 per cent of those from the main ethnic group were very satisfied/satisfied with the service provided to them by Police Scotland, and 44.4 per cent of those from a minority ethnic group and 55.6 per cent of those from the main ethnic group were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied.



## Long term health conditions

In this section, the responses of those who said that they had any physical or mental conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more (42 people) were compared with those who said they did not (43 people). The results were very mixed but, on the whole, those with long-term health conditions were more positive than those without. The negative areas involved support needs, some aspects of giving a statement, being advised about the outcome of the investigation, and satisfaction with the outcome of the investigation.

### Key demographics

Respondents were asked if they had any physical or mental conditions or illness lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more: 44.7 per cent (42 people) answered yes; 45.7 per cent (43) said no and 9.6 per cent (9) preferred not to say. Of the 42 people who said yes, 27 gave further details: mental health conditions were cited 25 times, and physical health conditions were cited 4 times.<sup>25</sup> From this point onwards, for the purposes of comparison, these two groups are described as people with long-term health conditions and people without long-term health conditions.

The proportions of males and females with and without long-term health conditions were very similar. Of the 85 people who responded to this question, there were 36 females in each group, and 6 males with long term-health conditions, and 7 males without.

With regards to age, people with long-term health conditions were spread across the range of ages (18–65), whereas those people without long-term health conditions were clustered into the 26–55 age groups.

	<b>18-25</b>	<b>26-35</b>	<b>36-45</b>	<b>46-55</b>	<b>56-65</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Health condition</b>	11.9%	19.0%	31.0%	26.2%	11.9%	42
<b>No health condition</b>	0.0%	23.3%	41.9%	34.9%	0.0%	43

<sup>25</sup> Sometimes a combination of health issues was given by one individual, so mentions do not equate to numbers of people.

### **Possible support needs**

All of those reporting long-term health conditions said English was their first language, compared with 90.7 per cent of those without long-term health conditions.

### **Nature of domestic abuse**

Respondents were asked what type of domestic abuse they had reported to Police Scotland, and could select as many as applied. Across almost all types of domestic abuse (bar financial abuse), the percentage of people with long-term health conditions reporting was higher.

For people with long-term health conditions, the most common types of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland were (percentages above 50 per cent given here):

- Coercive control (81 per cent)
- Emotional/psychological abuse (78.6 per cent)
- Physical violence/ abuse (69 per cent)
- Verbal abuse (66.7 per cent)
- Threats against me, and telephony (both 52.4 per cent)

For people without long-term health conditions, the most common types of domestic abuse reported to Police Scotland were:

- Emotional/psychological abuse (76.7 per cent)
- Coercive control (74.4 per cent)
- Physical violence/abuse and verbal abuse (both 53.5 per cent)

People with long-term health conditions (61.9 per cent) were slightly less likely to report that children had been present, or witnessed the domestic abuse than people without long-term health conditions (62.8 per cent).



## Reporting of domestic abuse

For both groups of people it was most common for them to report the abuse directly to the police themselves: 78 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 88.4 per cent of people without long-term health conditions did so. The second most common method for people with long-term health conditions was reporting via a third-party support person/organisation (17 per cent), compared with 7 per cent of people without long-term health conditions. For people without long-term health conditions, the second most common incidence of reporting abuse (16.3 per cent) was where the abuser had made a report against them (this was 9.8 per cent for people with long-term health conditions).

The most common method of reporting domestic abuse for both groups of people was a 101 call: 47.6 per cent for people with long-term health conditions and 60.5 per cent for people without long-term health conditions. There is then a divergence: for people with long-term health conditions the second most common was a 999 call (35.7 per cent, compared with 25.6 per cent of people without); and for people without long-term health conditions, the second most common way of reporting was in person (44.2 per cent, compared with 33.3 per cent for people with long-term health conditions).

Satisfaction with treatment by the staff member/call handler when reporting in person/on the phone was very similar across both groups. 45.2 per cent of people with long-term health conditions were very satisfied/satisfied, compared with 46.5 per cent of people without long-term health conditions; and 21.4 per cent of people with long-term health conditions were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied compared with 23.3 per cent of people without long-term health conditions.

While both people with long-term health conditions (52.4 per cent) and people without long-term health conditions (62.8 per cent) were overall more likely to report that they **did not** feel that the police had provided an appropriate response to their reports, a higher percentage of people with long-term health conditions (38.1 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (30.2 per cent) reported that they **did** think an appropriate response had been provided.

Overall, the time that it took both groups to report domestic abuse was fairly similar: 28.6 per cent of those with long-term health conditions, and 23.9 per cent of those without long-term health conditions, had reported in a year or under.

	Less than a wk	Less than a mth	1-6 mths	7-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2-5 yrs	5-9 yrs	9+ yrs
<b>Health condition</b>	4.8%	2.4%	7.1%	14.3%	7.1%	26.2%	14.3%	23.8%
<b>No health condition</b>	2.4%	0.0%	16.7%	4.8%	16.7%	26.2%	11.9%	21.4%

A lower percentage of people with long-term health conditions (66.7 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (79.1 per cent) said that they had experienced domestic abuse that they had not reported to the police.

### **Support and engagement with the police when reporting**

Fewer people with long-term health conditions (42.5 per cent) said that they had requested or been given the option of a local policing appointment than people without long-term health conditions (53.5 per cent). Likewise, fewer people with long-term health conditions (44.7 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (60.5 per cent) said that where requested/offered, this **had been** arranged. However, where it had been arranged, it was more likely to take place within 1-2 days for more people with long-term health conditions (59.1 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (48 per cent).

When asked if their particular support needs had been met by the police, the picture was mixed. Interestingly, 71.4 per cent of those with long-term health conditions said that the question was not applicable, as did 69.8 per cent of those without long-term health conditions. Of those who felt it was applicable, fewer people with long-term health conditions (2.4 per cent) said, yes, their particular support needs had been met, than people without (4.7 per cent). The percentages who said either no they had not been, or they did not know were similar for both groups (a total of 26.2 per cent for those with long-term health conditions, and 25.6 per cent for those without).

A slightly higher percentage of people with long-term health conditions (54.8 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (51.2 per cent) felt that the police had **not** taken into account what they wanted to happen as a result of reporting. However, people with long-term health conditions were more positive about their engagement with the police than people without long-term health conditions. People with long-term health conditions were more likely to strongly agree/agree with the following statements:

- Felt that the police were respectful: people with long-term health conditions 47.6 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 39.5 per cent
- Reassured that the police would try to help me: people with long-term health conditions 40.4 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 28 per cent
- Felt confident that the police had taken my complaint seriously: 45.2 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 28 per cent
- Felt that the police explained the reporting and investigative process clearly: people with long-term health conditions 35.7 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 30.3 per cent

Following their reports of domestic abuse to the police, similar percentages of people from both groups wanted to proceed with an investigation: 61.9 per cent of people with long-term health conditions said yes, and 23.8 per cent said no; 62.8 per cent of people without long-term health conditions said yes and 23.3 per cent said no.

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

A lower percentage of people with long-term health conditions (21.4 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (25.6 per cent) had experienced and reported domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Fewer people with long-term health conditions (16.7 per cent) than people without long-term health conditions (25.6 per cent) had experienced it but not reported it to the police. The percentages experiencing barriers to reporting were similar for both groups, but more people with long-term health conditions (14.3 per cent) said that they did not experience barriers to reporting, than those without long-term health conditions (5.3 per cent).

## Investigations

In total, 61.5 per cent of people with long-term health conditions said that their reports of domestic abuse went on to be investigated by the police, compared with 70 per cent of people without long-term health conditions. 19.2 per cent of people with long-term health conditions said that they did not understand why their report had not been investigated, compared with 15 per cent of people without long-term health conditions.

Responses to whether the police had explained everything about the investigation process to them in a way they could understand were similar across both groups: 58.6 per cent of people with long-term health conditions said yes or sometimes, compared with 55.8 per cent of people without long-term health conditions.

Respondents were asked how they found the process of giving a statement, and on the whole, people with long-term health conditions were more negative about their experience than were people without long-term health conditions (higher percentages highlighted). The most striking differences were that: it was a challenging process; that they did not feel safe; and hearing their statement read back was difficult.

	People with long-term health conditions	People without long-term health conditions
<b>Easy process</b>	11.9%	14.3%
<b>Challenging process</b>	61.9%	50%
<b>Quick process</b>	2.4%	14.3%
<b>Lengthy process</b>	28.6%	28.6%
<b>Basic needs met</b>	19%	11.9%
<b>Basic needs NOT met</b>	14.3%	11.9%
<b>(Option of) support from other</b>	14.3%	4.8%
<b>No (option of) support from other</b>	35.7%	28.6%
<b>Felt safe when giving statement</b>	23.8%	21.4%
<b>Didn't feel safe giving statement</b>	19%	9.5%
<b>Hearing statement read back difficult</b>	47.6%	16.7%

Despite reporting more negative feelings about the process of giving a statement, when asked about engagement with the person taking their statement, people with long-term health conditions were more positive than those without long-term health conditions. They were more likely to strongly agree/agree with the following statements:

- Felt that the person had a supportive manner: people with long-term health conditions 50 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 41.7 per cent
- Felt the person was knowledgeable in dealing with domestic abuse: people with long-term health conditions 47.3 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 37.1 per cent
- Felt that police took them seriously: people with long-term health conditions 50 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 37.1 per cent

### **Support, protection and updates during the investigation**

Respondents were asked about the following services/supports/issues, and could answer yes, no or don't know. Across the board, responses were more negative than positive, so these responses have been presented. With the exception of being asked about preferred method of communication, people with long-term health conditions were slightly more positive about their experience than those without long-term health conditions.

- Not given the option of stating whether they would prefer a male or female to take statement: 76.9 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 77.1 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Not offered a Victim Care Card: 52.5 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 63.4 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Not informed of right to support services: 54.8 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 55.8 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Not referred to support services by Police Scotland: 64.3 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 74.4 per cent of people without long-term health conditions



- Not informed about available safety measures: 57.1 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 60.5 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Asked about children/dependants who might need including in protection or safety planning: 35.7 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 38.1 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Did not know who main police contact was during the investigation: 47.5 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 60 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Not advised of rights to ask about the progress and/or outcome of the police investigation: 56.1 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 67.4 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Not provided with regular updates: 53.8 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 72.5 per cent of people without long-term health conditions
- Where updates given, not communicated in a way that met individual needs: 46.2 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 48.6 per cent of people without long-term health conditions; 23.1 per cent of those with long-term health conditions said yes, they had been communicated in a way that met individual needs, and 30.8 per cent said sometimes (these figures were 13.5 per cent and 37.8 per cent for those without long-term health conditions)
- Not asked what preferred method of communication was: 66.7 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 62.5 per cent of people without long-term health conditions

### **Outcome of investigation**

A total of 50 per cent of people with long-term health conditions were either present at the time of the arrest of their abuser, or had been informed about it, and 17.5 per cent were not/had not; 45.2 per cent of people without long-term health conditions were either present at the time of the arrest of their abuser, or had been informed about it, and 19 per cent were not/had not.

Fewer people with long-term health conditions had been advised about the outcome of the police investigation than people without long-term health conditions. 48.7 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 64.1 per cent of people without long-term health conditions said they were advised of the outcome. 35.9 per cent of people with long-term health conditions said either that they were not advised or did not know, compared with 30.8 per cent of people without long-term health conditions.

Generally, respondents were more far more negative than positive about the outcome of the police action/investigation, with people with long-term health conditions less positive than people without long-term health conditions. Overall, 16.7 per cent of people with long-term health conditions thought that the outcome was sufficient, and 83.3 per cent thought it was not; people without long-term health conditions were slightly more positive, with 20 per cent thinking it was sufficient, and 80 per cent thinking it was not.

### **Awareness**

A total of 59.5 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 57.1 per cent of people without long-term health conditions replied yes to the question, have you ever seen/been aware of a Police Scotland campaign on reporting domestic abuse. Despite this, before making their report, 69 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 73.8 per cent of people without long-term health conditions were not aware that there were several different ways to report domestic abuse to Police Scotland.

## Future

When asked if they would report future domestic abuse, 42.8 per cent of people with long-term health conditions said they would be extremely likely/likely to report it to Police Scotland, compared with 28.5 per cent of people without long-term health conditions. 47.7 per cent of both groups were unlikely/unlikely to report in future. While the four main reasons for not reporting were the same for both groups, people with long-term health conditions were slightly more positive (in line with the finding that people with long-term health conditions would be more likely to report than people without long-term health conditions) - with the exception of not liking the way they had previously been treated by Police Scotland. Reasons for not reporting included:

- Lack confidence that it will help: people with long-term health conditions 61.8 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 75.7 per cent
- Do not think it will be taken seriously: people with long-term health conditions 47.1 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 67.6 per cent
- Did not like the way I was treated by Police Scotland: people with long-term health conditions 44.1 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 37.8 per cent
- Too scared of repercussions from the abuser: people with long-term health conditions 38.2 per cent, people without long-term health conditions 48.6 per cent

Respondents, generally, were far more likely to state that they did not feel adequately supported and protected by the police, having reported domestic abuse. People with long-term health conditions (69 per cent) were slightly less negative than people without long-term health conditions (71.4 per cent). Fewer people – both people with long-term health conditions and people without long-term health conditions – felt safer as a result of reporting domestic abuse to the police:

	I felt safer	Nothing changed – I always felt safe	Nothing changed – I always felt unsafe	I felt less safe	N
<b>Health condition</b>	28.6%	0.0%	47.6%	23.8%	42
<b>No health condition</b>	30.2%	2.3%	34.9%	32.6%	43

When asked if their expectations of what would happen if they reported domestic abuse had been met, 61.9 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 58.1 per cent of people without long-term health conditions said they had **not** been met, and 21.4 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 18.6 per cent of people without long-term health conditions said they had been met.

Overall, 26.2 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 27.5 per cent of people without long-term health conditions were very satisfied/satisfied with the service provided to them by Police Scotland, and 47.6 per cent of people with long-term health conditions and 55 per cent of people without long-term health conditions were unsatisfied/very unsatisfied.

### **Concluding remarks**

This survey acknowledges the support from the participants who contributed to this research by sharing their experiences and dedicating their time. Without their contributions, such research would not be possible.

