revolving doors

Building bridges to safer communities and trusted policing:

Peer research report

May 2024

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Stephen Riley and Gemma Buckland.

The help and support of many agencies across Merseyside was essential to the successful completion of this research. Without the input and assistance of these agencies it would not have been possible to enjoy the reach and scope to engage with some of the most often marginalised groups within society. We would particularly like to thank YMCA Liverpool and Sefton for their assistance in identifying peer researchers and providing a space for training and analysis sessions. Their support for this work was invaluable.

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About Revolving Doors

Revolving Doors is a national charity that aims to break the cycle of crisis and crime. We focus on the 'revolving door' group: those who have repeat contact with the criminal justice system whose behaviours are largely driven by unmet health and social needs. These include combinations of problematic substance use, homelessness, mental ill health, neurodivergence and domestic abuse, often referred to as 'multiple disadvantages'. We combine policy expertise, independent research and lived experience to champion long-term solutions for justice reform that make the revolving door avoidable and escapable. We do this by working alongside national and local decision-makers.

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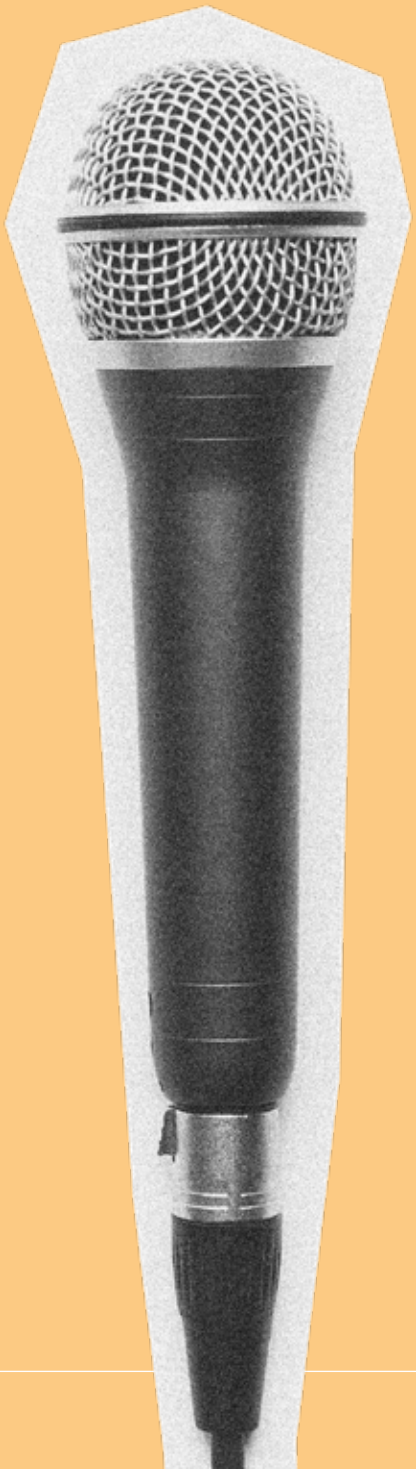

Foreword

People caught in the revolving door of crisis and crime often experience multiple disadvantage. This can include poverty, homelessness, contact with the criminal justice system, mental ill health, trauma, and problems with drugs and/or alcohol.

We believe that everyone will benefit if we can improve systems and services for people with experience of multiple disadvantage. In order to do this, we need to learn more about the views and experiences of this group, so that we can better understand what is going well and what could be improved.

By co-designing and co-delivering this project with people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage who were living in Liverpool, we were able to reach communities whose voices are not always included in research.

Peer researchers helped us to ensure that the survey used was accessible and suggested different ways to distribute it, building on their personal and professional networks. They asked relevant questions, and their insights provided new and additional ways of interpreting and framing the data.

The result is the inclusion of a diversity of opinions and experiences in this research.

We hope that the findings are considered during future work to improve feelings of safety in in Liverpool and when building relationships between Merseyside Police and the communities they serve. It is also our hope that people with lived experience of the issues at hand are meaningfully involved in this.

Background

Building Bridges, Safer Communities is a project delivered by Revolving Doors, in partnership with Shared Future CIC. The specific purpose of the project was to design a participatory process for public safety and resourcing, including developing a community-generated definition of safety in Merseyside.

Merseyside as a region, with a particular focus on Liverpool, was chosen as the geographic focus for this project due to its unique history as an area with a strong sense of shared identity and culture, and a rich tradition of activism and innovation.

The project had a particular focus on groups and communities who are traditionally not included in discourse around public safety. In particular, this focused on people with experience of multiple disadvantage. This was defined as a combination of contact with the criminal justice system, homelessness, problems with drugs and alcohol, mental ill health, and/or poverty. We wanted to better understand how safe people in Merseyside feel, what could help make them feel safer, what the role of the police is in making people feel more or less safe, and how relationships between the police and communities could be improved.

This report captures learning from one stage of this project, which is the peer research conducted by Revolving Doors. Peer research was conducted to shine a light on what feeling safe means to people in Merseyside—with a focus on the City of Liverpool and Birkenhead—and what people felt the police's role should be in helping people feel safer. Research themes were defined in part from initial polling conducted across Merseyside with Opinium, by perceived gaps in existing knowledge, and where local stakeholders such as the police, local authorities and others, felt more information would be most valuable. This included a specific focus on the 'revolving door' cohort of people caught up in a cycle of crisis and crime because of unmet health and social needs, and what impacts their perceptions of safety. A reason for this was our expertise in engaging with this group and, in our experience, the high levels of mistrust of authorities which can make successful engagement with them more difficult.

The Opinium poll took place online between 18 and 27 January 2023 and focused on public safety and policing in Merseyside. Over 1,500 people responded from across all five boroughs. Where relevant, findings from the polling are explored within this report in relation to the peer research findings.

Peer Research

Methodology

In February 2023, Revolving Doors worked with voluntary sector services in Liverpool to identify and train eight peer researchers to undertake research with local people with similar experiences on feelings of safety and attitudes towards policing and their communities. These people all had recent experience of criminal justice contact (e.g. police and probation) and/or other forms of multiple disadvantage, including homelessness, problems with drugs or alcohol and poverty. All peer researchers received an accredited peer research qualification as a result of their training.

Between March and August 2023, the peer research team and Revolving Doors staff carried out 209 facilitated surveys, which took place on 42 occasions in 28 different sites in Liverpool and Birkenhead, some of which were visited more than once. The surveys were largely completed by people who had experienced forms of multiple disadvantage. Respondents also included individuals who had experience of working with people in these groups, people from other often marginalised communities—such as Black and ethnic minority people and young people—as well as those who had encountered the police as victims of crime. This helped us ensure we included the perspectives of people from a range of ethnicities and age groups, and with different experiences.

Revolving Doors identified research participants by building relationships with services within Liverpool and Birkenhead that worked with people experiencing the above issues. Thereafter peer researchers attended those services to speak to the people present. Revolving Doors staff supported the peer researchers in this process and ensured that the process was safe for them. This included making sure that they were familiar with the purpose of the research and survey questions in advance, and being present when surveys were being completed in case any issues arose.

Revolving Doors and the peer research team participated in two workshops to co-analyse the findings from the surveys and discuss potential actions arising from them. The peer researchers identified key themes and interventions that could improve the feelings of safety, police engagement and community cohesion which underpin the recommendations in this report.

Who took part in the survey?

The research aimed to reach a broad section of the demographic makeup of the people who used the services we reached out to.

Demographics

- Respondents had a broad range of characteristics:
- 56% identified as male, 41% identified as female, with the remaining either identified as non-binary or preferred not to say.
- The age of respondents ranged from 18 and 72, with more than a third of respondents aged between 36 and 49.
- Most respondents (80%) identified as White British (see Chart A2 in Annex). 7% of respondents were Black or Black British, 2% were Asian or Asian British, 2% were Arab and 7% were Mixed Race. The 1% in the 'Other' category were Kurdish or White Polish.[1]
- The majority (89%) of respondents identified as heterosexual/straight. 7% identified as bisexual, 3% as gay/lesbian, and a further 1% preferred not to say.
- When asked if they had a religion, nearly half (44%) of respondents said that they were Christian. 39% said that they had no religion and 8% said that they were Muslim.
- Nearly half (46%) of respondents considered themselves to have a disability or long-term health condition.

Experiences of multiple disadvantage

In total, 167 respondents (80%) had experienced one or more additional needs including experience of homelessness, problems with drugs and/or alcohol, contact with the criminal justice system and/or experience of living in poverty. Over half of respondents (53%) had experienced more than one additional need, reflecting how such needs are often interlinked and can exacerbate one another, leading to multiple disadvantage. Nearly one third (28%) of respondents had experienced all four additional needs. Of those who reported additional needs:

- The most common need experienced was problems with drugs and alcohol, identified by 79% of participants.
- Over two-thirds (68%) had experienced homelessness.
- Over half of respondents had experienced poverty (52%) and repeat contact with the criminal justice system (59%).
- The remaining 42 respondents (20%) had not experienced the additional needs we asked about. These were mainly people engaged in youth services and ethnic minority support services, including educational and sporting initiatives. Others were staff of services supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

1 In the 2011 Census, 85% of the population in Liverpool identified as White British, 4.2% identified as Asian/Asian British and 2.6% identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British.

Findings

Respondents were asked questions about the following topic areas: experiences of local communities, experiences of crime, experiences of policing and measures to improve trust in the police and community safety and cohesion. Findings are discussed in more detail below.

Experiences of local communities

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their local communities, how connected they felt to them, what crimes they experienced and how safe they felt where they lived.

Feelings about where they lived

Respondents were asked how they felt about where they lived. They gave mixed responses, but overall people felt more positive than negative. As can be seen in Chart 1 below, 58% of respondents felt some degree of positivity about where they lived compared to 15% feeling a little or very negatively about this.

See Chart 1 below

Reasons for feeling positively about their area included having a relationship with their neighbours, feeling part of the community and feeling safe.

> "I have lovely neighbours of all ages, we do chat and connect. We look out for each other which is great."

> "I fit into the local community, I am less likely to be picked on because of my life experience."

> "The area can be a little rough at times, but it is generally safe and comfortable."

28% had mixed feelings, answering 'sometimes positively, sometimes negatively'. The following quotes illustrate the nuance in how some of these people felt:

> "Some days feel nice, sometimes when gangs congregate at night feel less positively."

> "Feel afraid when crime is being committed and the police don't act quickly enough."

There were some examples of respondents feeling that they were treated badly by the police because of the area in which they lived.

> "Past experiences. Been abused by them since a youngster, been abused and judged by them [the police] from being a certain area."

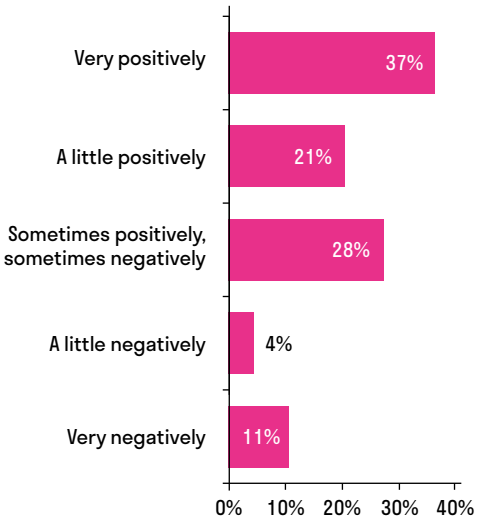

Chart 1: How the respondents felt about where they live (n=208)

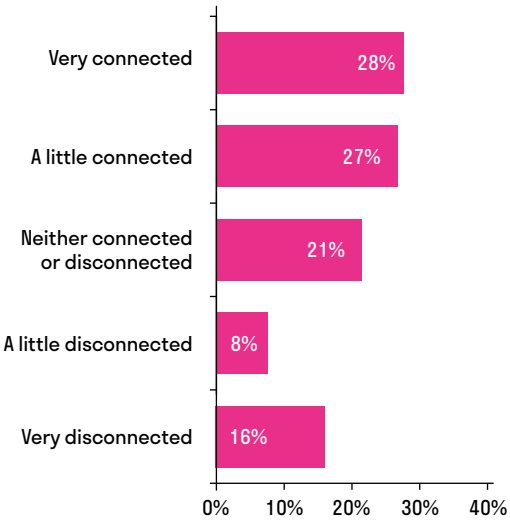

Chart 2: Respondents connections to their local community (n=202)

Community connections

We asked several questions about respondents' feelings towards their communities to explore their perceived connection with this community and how they felt about where they lived.

Responses to how connected participants felt to their local communities varied. Just over half of respondents (55%) felt connected to some degree to their local community, but nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents felt 'a little' or 'very' disconnected.

See Chart 2 below

Of those (28%) who felt 'very connected', 75% always felt safe where they lived. This was compared to 21% of those who felt very disconnected always feeling safe where they lived. Broadly, there was a correlation between feelings of safety and how connected people felt to their community.

See Chart 3 below

Improving connections to the local community

Respondents were asked what could be done to make them feel more connected to their local community. Common themes raised included community cohesion and opportunities for engagement, including better use of community resources. These themes are explored in more detail below.

Community cohesion

A prevalent theme was the importance of bringing communities 'back together' in Liverpool. Many respondents talked about the importance of knowing their neighbours and having social engagement with them, both for themselves and their children, in a pro-social environment.

> "People come together at tough times; they always have done in this city. It takes tough times to help bring people together. Community spirit should be there in the good times too."

Suggestions to improve community cohesion included more social events and community activities.

> "Better improved general approach to community cohesion, community activities, neighbourhood support, including activities for children."

> "More social events you can get involved with."

The notion of community breakdown was felt to have played a part in increased feelings of disconnection and unsafety.

> "Community disintegration has led to feelings of unsafety on not knowing faces and names."

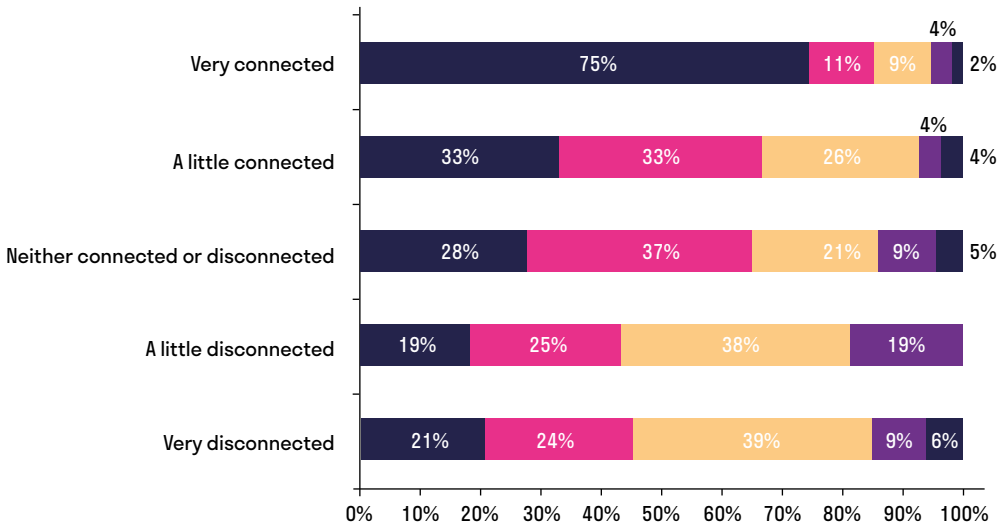

Chart 3: How connected respondents felt to their community, compared to feelings of safety (n=208)

The need for a behavioural change in how individuals interacted with each other within their communities was remarked on as a way to improve connections and build trust between local people.

"Behaviours around the area need to change, people don't engage with each other anymore."

"People are very scared a lot of the time, need more trustworthy people to go to."

Community resources

The need for increased community resources to enable people to feel cohesion and connection to their local community was the most common response to how people could be better connected to their communities.

For example, a common theme that arose was the desire for physical social spaces for the community to mix in:

"More things to mix, social clubs/music, anything socially concerned."

"Housing associations should try and put events on for residents and make sure to visit occasionally."

"More community type things, people isolate too much generally. People don't have reasons to connect as a group."

Bringing the police into meetings to breach the perceived divide between many communities and the authorities was suggested by one respondent:

"More things to bring people together, events, community meetings to voice concerns. More communication between community and police, there's too much of a divide."

Alongside the police being involved in community events, it was also felt that local people should take a lead on enhancing community engagement, with one respondent suggesting community ambassadors to bring everyone together.

"Trying to play a part, local ambassadors for the community from the community, not from statutory services. Highlighting community assets."

An example of good practice in this regard was the coming together of the Toxteth community:

"[On the first Saturday of every month] the Granby community come together, gather and talk, get to know each other"

Another respondent had a positive example of where other community spaces had been used to benefit the community:

"[Where I live has a] nice communal garden area. Residents have made it a nice place to be. It felt really nice and at home in where I live."

Recommendation – Building cohesion and engagement by creating more community spaces

Many respondents remarked that community centres, social events and sporting facilities should be revived. They proposed a multi-agency approach to this across policing, probation, council services and third sector organisations to have the best chance of success. We recommend that increased funding be given to revive shared community spaces and services, and reverse the demise of services due to austerity.

Crime and safety in local communities

Respondents were asked about the types of crime they were most worried about, illustrated in the chart below in order of rank one to six. Rank one reflected the crime type people were the most worried about, and six the least. Participants could order more than one crime type with an equal ranking.

See Chart 4 below

As Chart 4 shows, 'Gun and knife violence' was the type of crime most worried about by respondents, with 60% of respondents ranking it as their number one concern. Historically, such crimes have had a high prevalence in numerous communities across Merseyside, so this has been a significant worry for many communities dating back to the murder of Anthony Walker and beyond. Worries have been exacerbated by high-profile murders involving firearms that took place just prior to this research being carried out. For those who ranked hate crime high amongst their worries, they typically felt less safe due to their disability, ethnicity, religion and/or sexuality.

All other crime types had similar numbers of respondents ranking them as the crime they were most worried about.

The Opinium public polling asked respondents 'Which of the following are contributing the most to making you feel unsafe or preventing you from feeling safe all of the time?' They could select up to three options out of: drugs (both using and dealing), gun and knife violence, anti-social behaviour, hate-crime, burglary, gender-based violence and violence from someone known to the respondent, including domestic violence. They ranked anti-social behaviour first, followed by gun and knife violence and burglary. Hate crime was rated fifth.

Crime reporting

Respondents were asked about whether they would report different types of crime to the police. For most crimes, respondents were more likely to report them than not, with the exception of witnessing a phone being stolen.

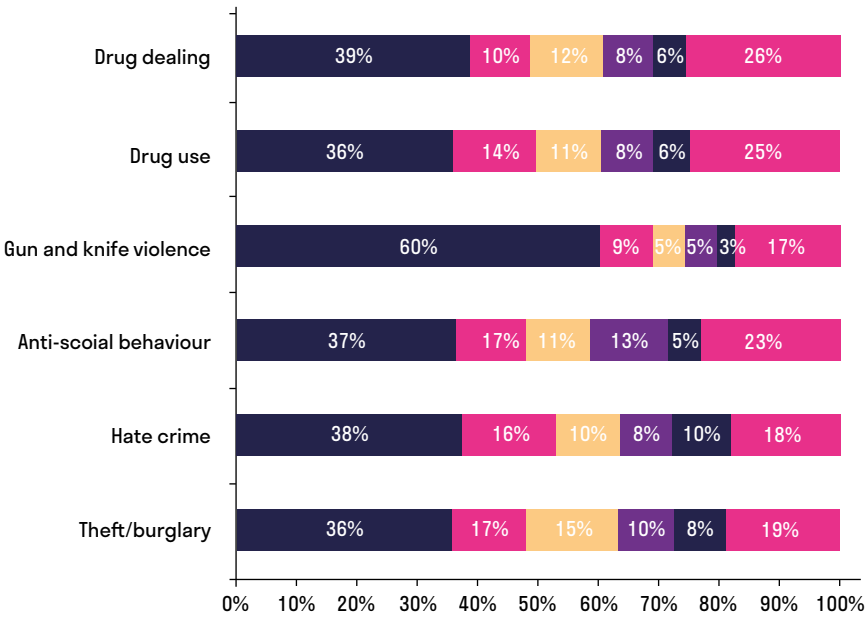

Chart 4: Respondents' worry about crime types (n=199)

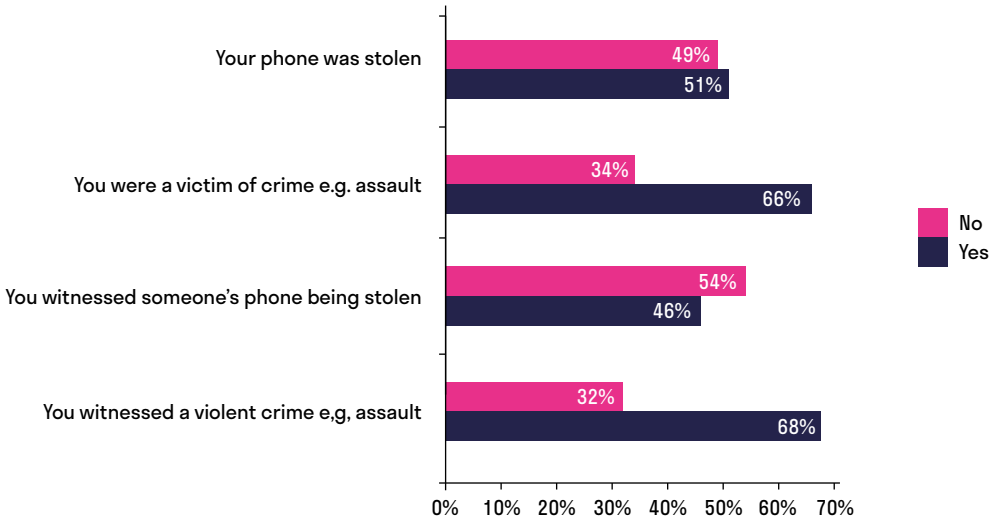

Chart 5: Reporting to the police by crime types (n=205)

See Chart 5 above

Where respondents provided context to whether they would report a crime or not, it appeared that whether the crime was violent or not influenced someone's decision to report this.

"I would report a violent crime if it was domestic abuse."

Some of the reasons given by those who would not report crimes included the 'grass' label, discussed further below, or a sense that the police would not investigate so 'what is the point?'. Without trust in the police, many felt unwilling to engage with them. There was a feeling amongst some respondents that reporting was a lot to go through when there was little chance of a prosecution.

"My daughter was assaulted, a friend stood up for her. There was evidence and the police wouldn't pursue it."

Worries about being seen as a 'grass' or 'snitch' for reporting a crime

Respondents were asked how worried they would be about being seen as a grass/snitch if they reported a crime on a scale of one (very worried) to 10 (not at all worried). When asked this question, some respondents asked for context, saying they would 'grass' in certain circumstances when they felt it was the right thing to do. Again, this was largely based on the crime type. For example, some mentioned that they would report domestic violence and sexual assaults, and other crime types where vulnerable people were the victims.

Analysis showed that a higher number of respondents were worried about being seen as a 'grass' (47%) than not (37%). Nevertheless, the overall levels answering on each end of the scale also illustrated a quite polarised view. 32% of respondents answered one – very worried, and one quarter (25%) answered 10 – not worried at all, which reflected the nuance based on factors such as crime type.

Others had had it ingrained in them culturally not to engage with the police, while some respondents took the view that they would not be bullied into being a 'good' citizen and reporting a crime.

Historic mindsets that have existed within families and communities across Merseyside for generations were also identified as a significant factor in respondents' concerns about interacting with the police.

"You cannot be seen speaking to the police around here."

"Programmed from childhood not to trust or talk to the police at any time."

Some respondents talked about the police themselves not 'grassing' on their colleagues when they had witnessed wrongdoing by other police officers. They expressed frustration that these officers expected communities to 'grass on their own' when they did not do this themselves. Such individuals felt that it would be necessary for the police to lead by example and call out criminal behaviour amongst their own colleagues to be able to increase the reporting of crime from the wider community.

Relationships between individuals who had experienced additional needs and/or multiple disadvantage, their communities and the police are considered in more detail below.

Feelings of safety in local communities

In response to a question about how safe they felt where they lived, two-thirds (66%) of respondents said that they always or often felt safe.

See Chart 6 below

Many respondents lived in supported housing with staff on duty, which may have influenced their response. For example, while many of those living in this type of accommodation said they felt safe where they lived, but that they did not feel as secure in the surrounding area. Some had been displaced into new locations in emergency circumstances, with unfamiliarity with their local area leading them to feeling unsafe outside of their accommodation.

> "I feel safe in the housing, but not so safe in the community."

Those who had grown up in their locality remarked on their feelings of safety being linked to being familiar with their environment. They felt safe as they were known to the community, whilst recognising that for other non-residents the area could be perceived as risky.

> "I can look after myself, the community and Scousers look after each other."

> "I feel safe because of the community that I live in, friendliness of my neighbours."

Levels of policing and experiences of the police also played a part in respondents' feelings of safety as discussed later in the report (pp.19-21).

Places where respondents felt less safe

The city centre of Liverpool was frequently commented on as a place where the respondents felt less safe, along with other areas where late night drinking establishments were prevalent. In particular, the potential for street level crime led some participants to feel less safe in these areas.

> "I wouldn't walk around town [city centre] alone at night, there's people drinking [on the] streets, I have personal experience of alcoholism, I have seen the outcome."

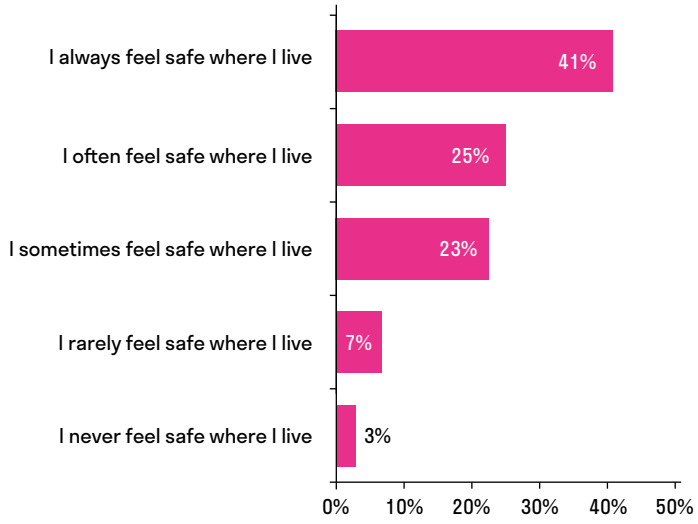

Chart 6: How safe respondents felt where they live (n=208)

"Pick pockets and drunken gangs."

"Lark Lane, lots of young ones with drugs, drinking, anti-social behaviour. Late in the evening it was dodgy, lots of bars etc."

Birkenhead town centre was mentioned as another specific place where some respondents felt unsafe.

"In Birkenhead loads of addicts on the streets and it's intimidating."

"In the Conway Street area [in Birkenhead]. I feel the police should be manning it more regarding the gangs up there. I don't think the police realise how violent they are."

Areas where young people gathered also led to feelings of unsafety:

"By the shops, gangs of youngsters also in local park. Mainly in evenings but day too. With heavy looking dogs with them."

"Usually in front of local shops I can see gangs of young people I feel less safe there."

"Sense of intimidation on street by youths, it's like this across the city. Not nice on doorstep especially for my children."

Refugees also spoke of feeling unsafe in their community, partly due to the type of accommodation they were living in. Likewise, some respondents who were in temporary accommodation explained that they felt unsafe because of negative experiences there and the lack of security this provided.

"We feel less safe because we're still living in a hotel, and we're still refugees."

"People coming in and stealing stuff, medication taken [in the hostel]."

"It's a B & B and I just don't feel safe..."

However, others living in supported accommodation highlighted how staff being available 24 hours a day helped make them feel safer.

See Chart 7 below

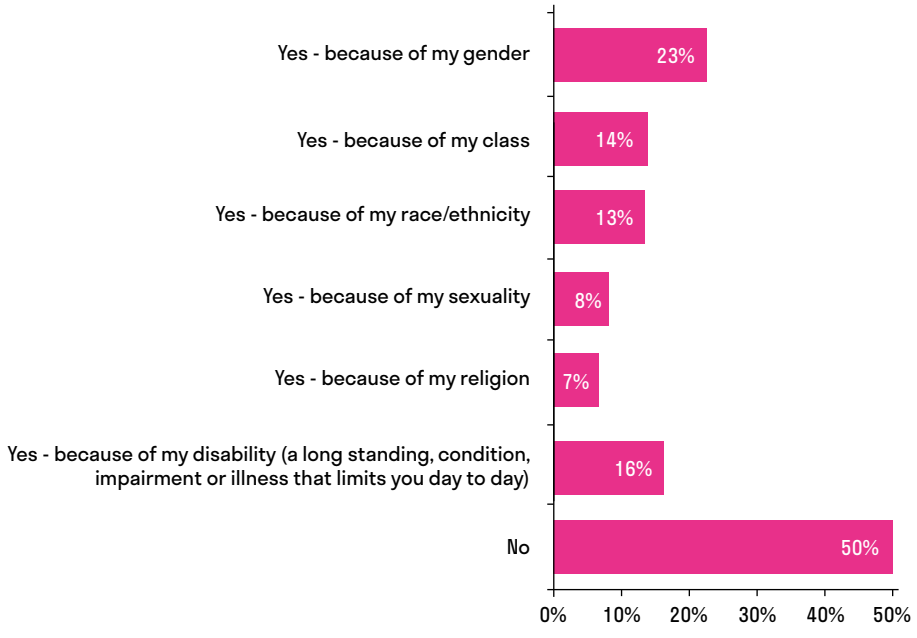

Chart 7: Feelings of safety and particular characteristics (n=201)

Three-quarters of respondents who felt unsafe because of their gender were female. The rest were men who had experienced a higher level of multiple disadvantage than the average amongst respondents.

"Attacks on women, as a woman feel vulnerable a lot especially in the evening. Where I park my car, there are too many attacks on women."

"Anywhere outside of house, I'm in police protection from domestic abuse."

"Sense of intimidation on street by youths, it's like this across the city. Not nice on [my] doorstep especially for my children."

Half (50%) of Black or ethnic minority respondents felt less safe because of their ethnicity.

"When I was in college I worked in healthcare, had to do visits and racist insults were frequent."

A small number of Black respondents also referenced racism when explaining why they felt positively or negatively about where they lived. For example, one person had moved area and said that a reason that they were happy about this included that there had not been "any racist issues." In contrast, another respondent explained that they felt negatively about where they lived "because of racism". Furthermore, a different respondent highlighted that they did not feel safe in the L25 postcode area because this had anti-social and racist behaviour.

Muslims were the religious group that felt the least safe because of their religion. One third of LGBTQ+ respondents felt less safe because of their sexuality, the majority (80%) of whom identified as male.

"That I will be judged on appearance or GPS tag or sexuality or offence."

Two-fifths (44%) of those stating they had a disability or long-term health condition felt less safe because of it.

"Because of different personalities in here, I'm often cruelly tricked because of blindness."

A small proportion (14%) told us that they felt unsafe because of their class.

"The police are always targeting to make trouble for the underclass."

The relationship between communities and policing

Policing was a prominent issue when we explored feelings of safety amongst respondents. In this section we explore themes regarding the purpose of the police and what respondents would like them to do, issues relating to trust and fairness, crime types and how they are dealt with, and how respondents believed that the police could do better.

Trust in the police

Respondents were asked a series of questions looking at their perspectives on trust in the police from various angles.

Chart 8 below illustrates respondents' overall trust in the police. Whilst almost one-third (28%) of respondents said they completely or mostly trusted the police, a further third (30%) said that they did not trust the police at all. With trust between the police and the community being central to policing by consent and feelings of community safety, these were important findings.

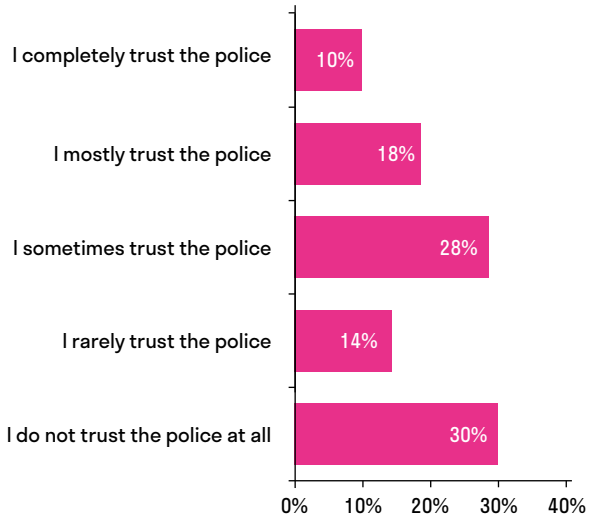

Chart 8: Trust in the police (n=208)

See Chart 8 above

In the Opinium poll, two thirds (65%) of Merseyside adults felt that the police had treated them fairly in their lifetime, whilst a tenth (10%) felt that the police have been unfair to them. As respondents to the Revolving Doors survey had higher levels of additional needs and multiple disadvantage than the general public, this could be interpreted as evidence of this group feeling less able to trust or be treated fairly by the police due to their needs and experiences.

Trust in the police amongst different cohorts

Further analysis of these responses was undertaken to identify whether particular groups of people felt more or less trusting in the police.

There was a difference in the responses by gender as illustrated in Chart 9 below, with men being much more likely than women to say that they did not trust the police at all, and most women (68%) choosing statements which reflected some degree of trust.

Gendered experiences of trust in the police

See Chart 9 below

A possible explanation for this is gender differences in respondents' past experiences of the police. For example, 61% of men mentioned having negative experiences of the police which had dented their trust in them.

> "First hand seeing a wilful abusing of their power and position."

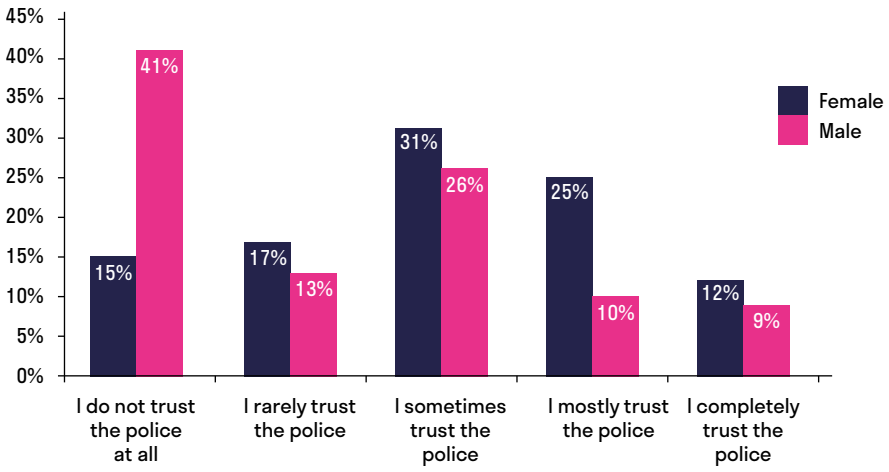

Chart 9: Trust in the police by gender (n=203)

"Personal experiences. Been to court and they've lied. So you know they can't be trusted."

"Police also intimidating and do whatever they want, treat me like aggressive. Don't trust them."

35% of women mentioned having a negative experience of the police, which included how they had responded to domestic violence and sexual assault investigations, how they had treated their children and how they responded after a crime had been reported more generally.

"The way they responded to my attack, I felt forced to do something I was not comfortable with and they pushed the issue"

"Being victim blamed by male officers when reporting sexual crimes by being asked questions like 'what were you wearing' 'were you flirting' 'why did you drink?' 'you could have said yes and forgot?'"

"I reported an incident a while ago, but the police didn't take it seriously, instead they were trying to put me off and to drop charges."

"My son has been targeted since he was a kid."

"I feel less safe with [domestic violence] due to experiences, I was [assaulted] and because I hit him with a belt, they wanted him to prosecute me."

Experiences of trust in the police by ethnicity

As can be seen in Chart 10, responses across different ethnic groups varied and there was a not a clear pattern between ethnicity and levels of trust in the police amongst survey respondents. In total, 29% of Black/Black British respondents did not trust the police at all, compared to 31% of White/White British respondents and 36% of mixed-race respondents. 43% of Black/Black British respondents completely or mostly trusted the police, compared to 27% of White/White British respondents and 29% of mixed-race respondents. A reason for this could be the prevalence of multiple disadvantage amongst White/White British respondents – as a third of this group reported experience of all four additional needs (discussed more below).

See Chart 10 below

Experiences of trust related to additional needs

Another important question was whether people with experiences of additional needs, such as homelessness, had more or less trust in the police than those who had not experienced them.

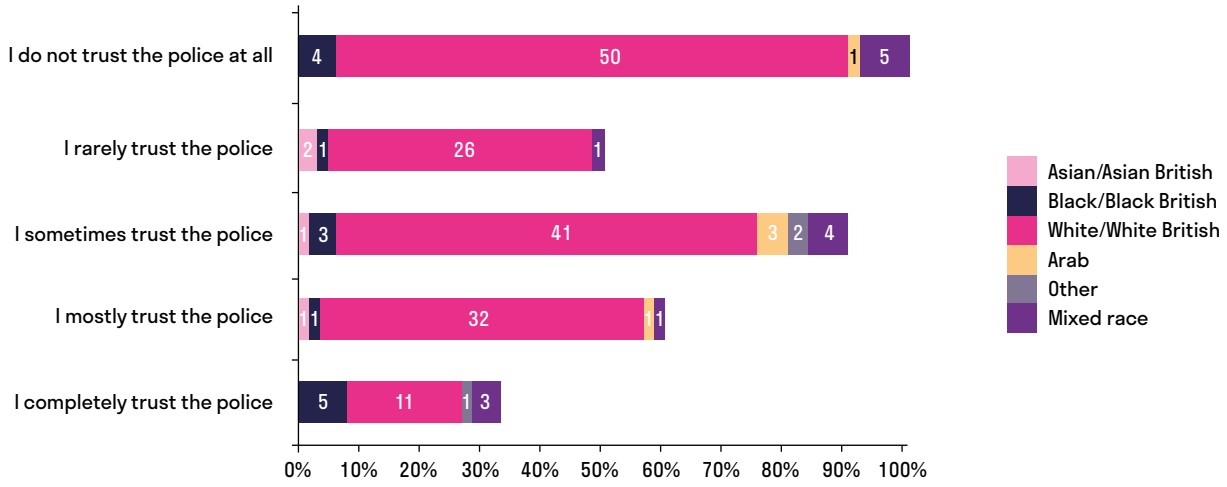

Chart 10: Trust in police amongst different ethnic groups (n=200)

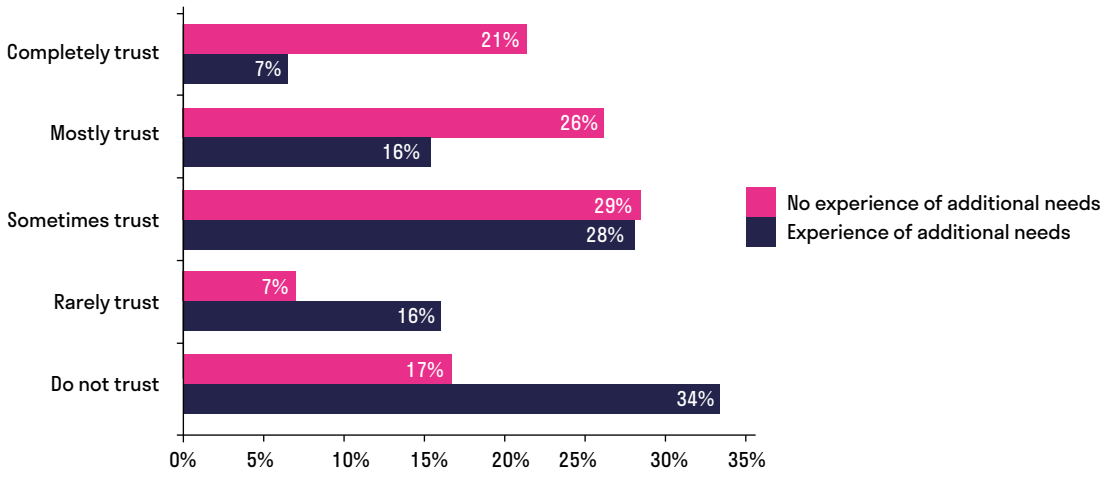

Chart 11: Trust in the police amongst those with and without additional needs (n=209)

Chart 11 below illustrates a clear link between experiencing additional needs and trust in the police, with people with experiences of additional needs twice as likely to say that they did not trust the police at all (34%) than those who had never experienced any additional needs (17%).

See Chart 11 above

There were also important trends of trust in the police related to the nature and range of need people had experienced. For example, the more needs a person had experienced, the less trust they had in the police: just over two fifths (42%) of respondents with experience of all four additional needs having no trust in the police, compared to one-fifth (20%) for those who had experienced one additional need.

People who had experienced poverty had the most significant distrust in the police, with 43% saying they did not trust the police at all.

How fairly respondents felt treated by the police

Continuing the theme of trust in the police, respondents were asked how fairly they felt they were treated by the police by rating on a scale of one to ten, with one being 'not at all' and ten 'completely'. As Chart 12 shows, one quarter of respondents answered one or not at all, nearly a fifth (19%) were in the middle, and 10% said that they felt 'completely' fairly treated by the police.

See Chart 12 below

In contrast, the Opinium poll of the wider public found that 10% of people across a lifetime felt that they had been treated unfairly. Given that 78% of those who said that they did 'not at all' feel treated fairly by the police had reported experience of at least two additional needs out of homelessness, criminal justice system contact, poverty and problems with drugs and/

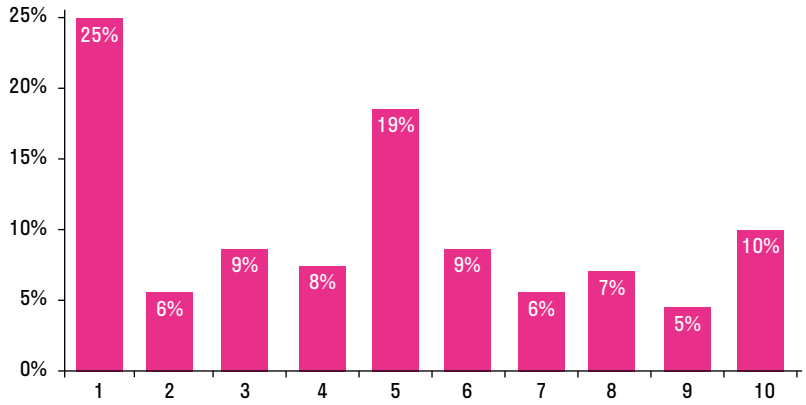

Chart 12: Level of fairness of treatment by the police – low to high (n=199)

or alcohol, this is further demonstration of the negative impact stemming from the way the police treat people who have experience of additional needs.

Another related question was whether respondents felt that they were treated differently by the police based on various demographics, set out in Chart 13.

See Chart 13 below

The most common reason that respondents felt they were treated differently by the police was because of where they lived, as reported by two-fifths (40%) of respondents. People living in particular areas of Merseyside felt they were treated differently by the police and often stigmatised by reputation. Some communities had felt the need to band together to improve things.

"Not cast every person living in certain areas the same especially if they are not from that area, they may have preconceived prejudices."

"Beaten up by the police victimised based on area (being) from Kensington police are like the mafia - it's gone to their heads."

"Where I live it is policed by the people and not the police, the families within that area are in control (L8)."

There is also an apparent correlation with the highest levels of mistrust in the police being amongst respondents who had experienced poverty. Many respondents also felt that poverty was an important factor driving people into crime.

"There is more crime because people can't afford to live."

"A greater realisation that crime and criminality is not caused through greed but a necessity to living."

"Better jobs, prospects with better pay would probably stop people committing crime as it is a direct consequence of lack of money."

Nevertheless, respondents also felt that this causal link should not be an excuse for the police to target people from deprived areas, thus compounding the low levels of trust in the police amongst those communities.

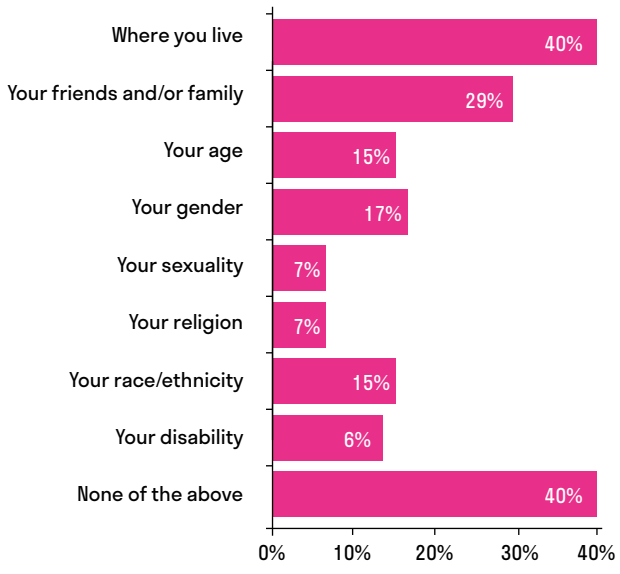

Chart 13: Treatment by the police according to demographic criteria (n=197)

There were also important gender and racial differences. Further analysis showed that half of the respondents that identified as from an ethnic minority background felt treated differently because of this, and two-fifths (40%) of women felt treated differently because of their gender.

Feelings of safety in police presence

Respondents were asked a range of questions about their perceptions of safety related to the presence of the police.

Firstly, when asked about feelings of safety in their communities and where they felt more or less safe, some respondents identified that recent violent events had led to greater police presence in certain areas. The way that this increased policing impacted feelings of safety differed amongst respondents, with some feeling safe and others less so.

> "The police presence on the Woodchurch estate since the shootings, I feel safe."

> "Because they're the police, the younger generation don't feel safe."

> "Less police presence, people getting stopped and searched, too intimidating. Eight police to pull one person, I've been a victim of police assault."

Secondly, participants were asked questions about how they felt when more police officers came into the area where they lived following a serious incident, and about how they felt once they had left. Around half (49%) felt much or a little safer, whilst 34% said it did not impact them. A similar proportion, (50%) of respondents said that the police leaving had no impact on how safe they felt and 43% felt less safe after the police had left, with the remaining 7% feeling safer after they had left. Unsurprisingly, this cohort had very high levels of mistrust of the police, with almost two-thirds (65%) stating 'I do not trust the police at all'.

Finally, respondents were asked specifically about their feelings about being approached by a police officer. Most respondents (70%) had some degree of nervousness when approached by the police, with one-third feeling very worried. We explore some of the reasons behind these feelings below.

See Chart 14 below

Many respondents attributed their concerns about being approached by a police officer to past negative experiences with the police, resulting in them not knowing if the police officer approaching them could be trusted or not. For example, some questioned whether the approaching officer might have bad intentions towards them, might hurt them, or might blame them for something they had not done.

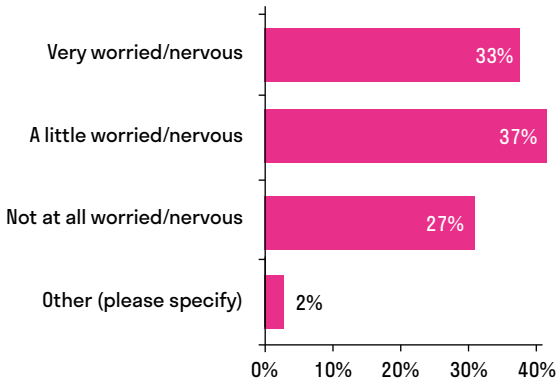

Chart 14: How worried respondents were when approached by a police officer (n=201)

"The police generally have ulterior motives and are not speaking to you for good reasons."

"I know I haven't done anything, until he opens his mouth, I'd worry about what they'd say. If I fit a description etc."

"Previous experience. Police as a potential threat."

"I'm scared they'll blame me, I am so intimidated by them."

One respondent had had a conversation with a police officer that seemed to indicate they would do whatever was necessary to secure an arrest, regardless of due process:

"We're just 'scallies with badges' was how one officer described himself to me when arresting me. In other words, he'd sink to a scallies level to get what he wanted. Found most have bad attitude, look down on me. Feel beneath them"

These fears of the unknown and uncertainties over consequences led to anxiety for many of the respondents.

"Have panic attacks, feel like someone's coming to kill you."

Female respondents often reported feeling anxiety when a police officer approached them. Some had concerns that the officer may have preconceived stigmas towards them, particularly for those involved in sex work.

"In case they treat me unfairly because I'm a sex worker."

"Safe to say I feel vulnerable to approach male officers especially if they're working by themselves."

"Police abusing sex workers because they have power."

On the other hand, some respondents had become so used to being stopped by the police they had resigned themselves to it.

"I am not worried when they approach me because I am used to it at this point, I am sick of it."

Another issue raised was feelings of being judged by the past and the stigma that followed, and the seeming unwillingness for the police to accept that people were able to move on with their lives in a positive direction.

"It's been 25 years since my conviction they still pull me."

"Previous convictions, previous treatment has made me paranoid."

"They judge you soon as they are given your name or if they know relation or face."

Respondents' experiences with the police are explored in more detail below.

Reasons behind distrust in the police

As referred to above, over half (53%) of respondents who were distrustful of the police told us that they felt that way because they had had a past negative experience with the police. Many respondents specifically referred to their perceptions of the police in Merseyside:

"I think Merseyside Police are the biggest bully, their ego takes over and they think they can manipulate us."

"Repeated failures to serve the public in the most appropriate way, acting as private police in civil and political matters, and presenting as a paramilitary organisation where everyone is guilty."

"If you ask me the police are the biggest gangsters in the city. All they do is arrest the kids."

It was also believed that police attitudes play into trust. For example, where officers were considered to be aggressive or lacking in 'soft skills' to engage effectively with the public, this was felt to further escalate problems rather than solve them.

Direct and indirect influences on trust

Some respondents cited more specific examples based on their direct experiences. For example, some women explained that their trust in the police had been damaged after trying to report crime. Several respondents mentioned a lack of action following reporting of crimes of domestic violence and sexual assault being committed against them.

"I reported an incident a while ago but the police didn't take it seriously, instead they were trying to put me off and to drop charges"

"Because of the way I was treated when I reported my assault and retracted the statement [would make me worry]"

"I feel less safe with DV due to experiences, I was held hostage and battered, sexually assaulted and because I hit him with a belt they wanted him to prosecute me"

Others had direct experiences regarding police honesty and trustworthiness:

"Personal experiences, I've been in jail, and they fit you up and entrap you. Blag you to take TICs but it's a blag. Use their powers better"[2]

"I've had my run ins with them, they also set my dad and uncle up with a crime I done, so I knew they lied."

The latter comment also illustrated that less direct experiences also play a role in perceptions of trust, demonstrating the long-lasting nature of negative incidents involving the police breeding mistrust for future generations.

"[It's the] way I've been brought up."

"Because I don't trust them, I am programmed that way from a young age growing up in Liverpool, it's just a part of most areas not to trust them."

Variation in trust

Some respondents acknowledged that their trust in the police was inconsistent, having had positive experiences of engagement with the police and other times having very negative experiences:

"Having mental health issues and lived experience of being homeless I've found it contradictory how you are treated – for example being put in a police cell or taken to hospital."

"The police have helped me amazingly in the past but sometimes they don't have time to fully listen."

"I have good relations with Merseyside police but that is mainly female officers. Some officers are rude, disrespectful and passive aggressive, certainly need more training around domestic abuse for both male and female officers."

2 A TIC (Taken Into Consideration) is when someone who has been convicted of a crime has other similar unsolved crimes 'Taken Into Consideration' by the court for admitting to these crimes (which in some cases they may not have done but felt pressured to accept). The defendant is then able to this use as mitigation during sentencing. This quote refers to the police offering things they cannot promise in order to boost their crime solving rates.

Where respondents said that they mostly trusted the police, they had sometimes had negative experiences but recognised that most police officers were trustworthy and well meaning. Nevertheless, they also cited examples of the likelihood of there being one or two 'bad apples', or rogue officers within the force. Other respondents reported exclusively positive experiences with the police, which meant that they trusted felt supported by them:

"When I was homeless the police were probably the most proactive organisation that helped me."

"They are always there for you."

"In [my] involvement with the police they've been ok with me, they were firm but compassionate. At station they gave me clothes and a drink."

"I would be dead without them [the police]."

Respondents also recognised that the need for the police was unavoidable.

"I say I don't like the police, but they would be the first phone call, it is how I've been treated in the past."

When analysing the research findings and discussing recommendations, the peer research team were struck by how, despite such seemingly negative perceptions of the police amongst respondents, all seemed to call for solutions to improve safety that involved police presence and activity. For example, peer researchers themselves highlighted that they had experience of intergenerational mistrust amongst their communities. Reflecting on the findings, a peer researcher said:

"I was brought up not to trust the police, ever. I was shocked to see a lot of people need and want them. It was ingrained in my mind that they were the enemy."

The peer researchers described the research findings as 'eye-opening', as respondents' views on the police were not as one-sided as they had expected, with many respondents calling for more visible policing and conceding that they felt the police were necessary. Despite deep-seated distrust of the police due to past experiences, the peer researchers themselves were similarly quick to recommend more visible policing as a viable solution to community issues. For example, they spoke about the benefits of seeing the "same officer regularly" who is known and recognisable.

Police use of their powers

This section explores issues of police responsibility and accountability and how respondents felt the police could use their powers in a way to keep communities safer.

See Chart 15 below

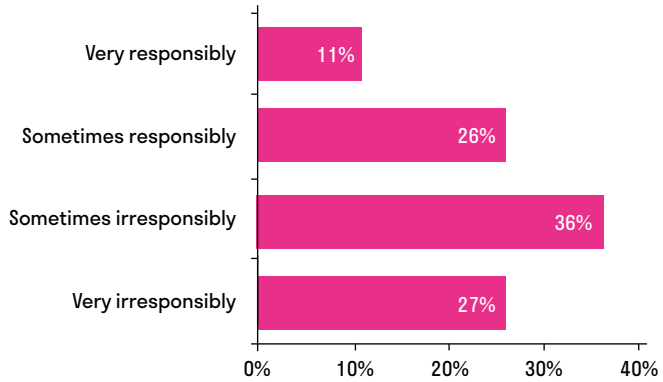

Chart 15: How responsibly the police use their powers (n=203)

It is clear from Chart 15 that respondents do not generally think the police are responsible in their use of their powers, with almost two-thirds (63%) feeling that on some level they used their powers irresponsibly.

"Because they are bullies, they think they are above the law."

"The police are the biggest gang of criminals going. They stick together, make things up and are worse than the real gangs."

Misuse of powers

The misuse of powers was a significant driver of distrust in the police, undermining feelings of safety when in police presence. Respondents cited examples where they had witnessed the police misusing their powers and subverting procedures and processes which should have been followed to uphold the law.

Misuse of body worn cameras

The use of body worn cameras was a particular case in point. For example, respondents had experienced these cameras being switched off and they felt they could trust the police more if these cameras were kept switched on. Respondents and the peer researchers discussed how turning cameras off undermined trust because they anticipated untoward behaviour by the police being preceded by the approaching officer turning the camera off, as this meant there was no video evidence of what was about to transpire.

"Body cameras used as they should be."

"Turn body cameras on."

A peer researcher commented further on these findings, stating that:

"Police should not be allowed to turn their body worn camera footage off."

Disproportionate policing

Throughout the survey, respondents spoke of instances of unnecessary and excessive use of force. Both currently and historically, the legacy these instances leave in the minds of the generations should not be underestimated in terms of their impact on how communities perceive the police.

"I've been assaulted, and family have been assaulted by multiple officers. I witnessed this at the age of 10, never forgotten it."

"Bad experiences, I've been battered in the cells, they always target me."

"Abused me, no respect, broke my arm, worried about family and being targeted."

Some respondents spoke of being subjected to stop and search and pepper spray when they were not committing any crime.

Recent media reports had reinforced the perception that the police were misusing their powers.[3] For example, some respondents referenced the media and social media when explaining their levels of trust in the police. Others referenced recent and historical cases, including the murder of Sarah Everard and the handling of the 'Yorkshire Ripper murders'.

"Police have been in the news for all sorts of allegations. Social media gives a negative picture, police seem to abuse their powers."

"[The] media shows how they abuse their authority. I've personally seen it."

Another example of disproportionate police responses mentioned by some respondents and the peer research team was the 'Matrix' unit operating in Liverpool. Another example of disproportionate policing responses mentioned by some respondents and the peer research team was the 'Matrix' unit operating in Liverpool.

3 See, for example, **Merseyside Police officer who had sex on duty guilty of misconduct in public office**

This is a reactive, specialist unit dealing with gun crime, gangs, robberies and disorder situations. The unit's slogan: 'A force to be reckoned with,' was thought by respondents to mean that the police could do whatever they wanted and had to pay no heed to restraint in their policing methods.

"Matrix are not community policing, they're like an army."

The Matrix unit's reputation amongst the respondents and peer researchers who had interacted with them or were aware of them was not positive. Concerns raised included that they were involved in the policing of all types of crime, were going beyond their remit, were applying disproportionate level of policing to low-level crimes and in some cases mistreating people. For example, the peer research group discussed how an individual shoplifting was met by ten police officers jumping out of a van, which was seen as a form of over-policing, and not something for Matrix to be dealing with. Some survey respondents and peer researchers believed that units like the Matrix should be disbanded and replaced with policing structures more fitting and targeted for the crime types they seek to address.

"They take the law into their own hands. Not all police are bad but certain units are. Matrix"

"Disband Matrix, put every unit in probation."

"Make their approach to the job better, make more effort to communicate, show more respect especially the Matrix."

Recommendation: Building trust through community oversight of specialist crime units

The Matrix approach needs to be reconsidered to improve trust between the community and the police. One option that could help this would be improved oversight through community scrutiny of policing by the unit, similar to the Stop Search Scrutiny Panel[4].

Police accountability

Another influential factor on respondents' levels of trust in the police was the extent to which the police took responsibility and demonstrated accountability when things went wrong. Some respondents talked about the issue of the police being concerned with reputational damage for admitting any failures. When these later come to light, this was felt to do more damage to trust than the initial issue itself.

Respondents also mentioned changing their views of the police through positive engagement, shifting the negative perceptions that they once held. This demonstrates how the police can help foster trust through positive interaction.

"My views have changed since I've been in recovery. I'm no longer getting in trouble. Some [police officers] are amazing; some are despicable. Now I work with them on a Board I see them less as the enemy and more as humans. A Sergeant approached and told he had taken down picture of me in the station "that's not her anymore" - that was massive. I know how to conduct myself with the police now."

What the police could do better

We explored respondents' thoughts about what they thought the police should be there to do alongside responses to questions of what the police should do differently and what the police could do to make them feel safer. Many varied suggestions were given which can be broken down into the following themes.

Perspectives on policing activities

Respondents were asked if they thought there was any difference in what they thought the police should be doing and what they currently do. As Chart 16 shows, a fifth (20%) of respondents thought the police never did what they wanted them to and just under a third (31%) thought the police rarely did what they wanted them to.

4 See Merseyside Police Stop Search Scrutiny Panel

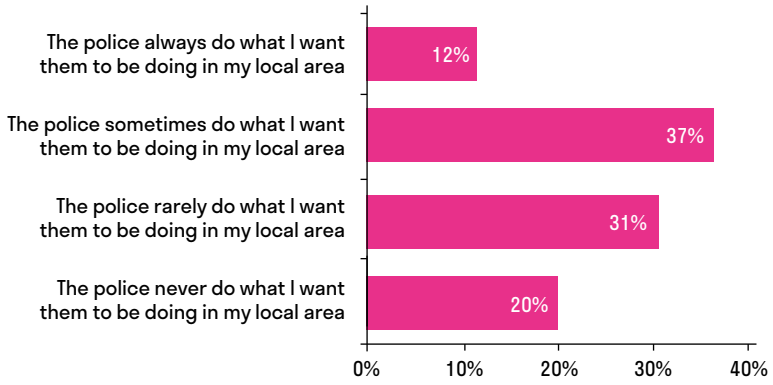

Chart 16: The role of the police (n=193)

See Chart 16 above

We explored respondents' thoughts about what they thought the police should be there to do alongside responses to a question about what the police should do differently. Many varied suggestions were given which can be broken down into the following themes.

Serving justice, upholding the law

Delivering justice was seen by many respondents as an important element of what the police should be there to do. They felt the police should be there to serve justice and bring a sense of criminal and social justice to their communities. This reflects a wider sentiment across Merseyside, connected to the justice campaign following the Hillsborough disaster.

"Stand up for justice instead of causing injustice."

"Protect public, uphold the law & not use powers to oppress."

"Enforce justice. Bring communities together and show support where they live, they [the police] should have respect for them [the community]."

Linked to this sense of justice, respondents wanted what they considered to be police misuse of their position of power to be addressed, especially when this was something that they had witnessed and/or experienced.

"[The police should be there] To help people, to actually help. The media shows how they abuse their authority. I have personally seen it."

"Treat everyone how they would like to be treated. If there's more than two [police officers] I worry. With certain police you know you're in for trouble. They sit off round the corner from the hostel swooping on us."

The role of community-based policing

The importance of community engagement and community policing was widely commented on by respondents. They felt that such approaches would reassure the community that help was at hand if needed, leading to more mutual respect and better outcomes for both the communities and the police, and in turn leading to a reduction in crime and savings to the public purse in the long run.

"Community known officers. Consistent local work, pre-crime work, youth work, bobbies on bicycles."

"A smile and a walk instead of looking from a car. Back to community policing."

"The police must show that they are very close to the people."

A theme that arose frequently was more visible policing within communities and improved patrolling, and the different forms this could take. This was felt to be important considering many respondents concerns about anti-social behaviour.

"More patrol in the evening and nighttime because of kids and gangs."

"More police on street on the beat, visible and approachable"

As previously mentioned, community policing was discussed amongst the peer researchers. Peer researchers also spoke about police officers creating relationships with people "in a specific place" and the benefits of the police "walking around the local area".

Recommendation: Building trust through community-led policing and swifter responses

Respondents and the peer researchers called for increased levels of community and visible policing, so communities could develop better relations with the police. Faster response times and improved attitudes when addressing crimes, particularly domestic violence and hate crimes, were emphasised. We recommend taking this approach to create more mutual respect and better outcomes for both the communities and the police.

Improving policing of particular cohorts of people

Preconceived assumptions of criminality

The feeling of being judged before the police even opened up a dialogue was common amongst respondents with a history of coming into contact with the police. Many felt targeted (for example stopped and searched) for no other reason than their past, irrespective of whether there was any evidence. For some this made them feel trapped by their past, and they struggled to move forward.

"Previous convictions, previous treatment has made me paranoid."

"I have a criminal background, I get anxious [around the police] even though I know I haven't done anything wrong."

"They judge you soon as they are given your name or if they know relation or face."

People experiencing problematic substance use

Many respondents had experienced problems with drugs and/or alcohol, and some of them felt that they had been treated in a derogatory manner by the police which they felt further reinforced their exclusion from society and kept them marginalised.

"Help when needed for addicts, not treat us like we're nothing and not bully us or hurt us on arrest."

"[The police] Shouldn't say they'll do something then don't. They should keep their word, or I feel I can't trust them. They should help me feel protected. Shouldn't assume we're all guilty. Confidence in them has been broken."

Victims of crime

Some respondents felt more could be done by the police for victims of crime. Domestic violence and sexual assaults in particular were cited as issues that the police struggled to deal with effectively. For example, some people were of the view that a presumption of truth when acting on allegations would help to speed up the process of obtaining justice for victims of domestic violence.

"Protect victims and witnesses more, ask victims how they feel. Listen to victims."

"Domestic violence against women is not acted on quickly enough."

"Not being believed when reporting crimes. Being victim blamed by male officers when reporting sexual crimes by being asked questions like 'what were you wearing' 'were you flirting' 'why did you drink?' 'you could have said yes and forgot?'"

Ethnic minority groups

A small number of respondents (with different ethnic backgrounds) outlined their desire for the police to be more 'open-minded' to people from different ethnicities. For example, one respondent recalled a time when, as a Black man, they were the only person that police stopped in the group that they were with. Another White respondent commented that they did not think Black people were 'treated fairly'. Diversity within police ranks was therefore seen by some respondents as important and something that could be improved, so that the demographic make-up of Merseyside Police better reflected the communities that they serve.

"Possibly look at people that have a minor criminal record that could have been given unfair treatment due to racism and try to put more diversity in the police force."

"I was pulled up, only black lad. More black police on the beat - don't see many."

Young adults

Lastly, some respondents suggested that the police need to reconsider how they interact with young people. It was suggested that they should show more respect to this group.

"Respect, be more inclusive, especially with the young."

"Treat young people with more respect."

Policing and safety

Respondents were also asked how the police could help them to feel safer. Respondents could select more than one theme regarding what they would like to see the police do to improve safety.

See Chart 17 below

Again, police attitudes and conduct towards respondents were seemingly a greater driver of how safe they felt, above more practical policing issues. Responses tended towards the importance of respect, fairness and being approachable, although addressing practical issues such as response times and presence were also regularly cited.

Some quotes from the 'other' category largely linked to the idea of the police being more approachable and respectful, including being less intimidating, friendlier, actively listening to people, being less judgmental and being honest.

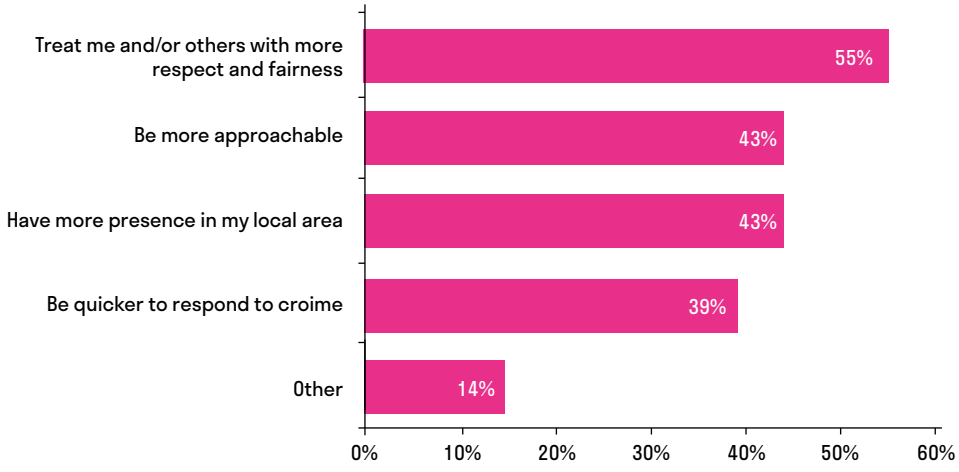

Chart 17: How the police could help respondents feel safer (n=200)

"Be less intimidating and less feeling of being above the law, for the youth it would help grow respect for each other. Respect breeds mutual respect."

"Not judge people's hidden issues, more respect."

Measures to improve the trustworthiness of the police

Many themes evident in explaining these responses were consistent with themes arising from other questions, including about whether or not respondents trust the police and how best to improve community safety and reduce crime.

Increasing trust through humanity of approach

Respondents commented on how the police presented themselves to the public, and in particular how they could improve their behaviour towards people who have experienced additional needs. Taking the time to understand the person and the underlying issues that they may be facing and approaching people with humanity were often raised as proposals for change.

"Need to adjust how they enforce. Show more care and empathy to those who are struggling."

"Have a greater understanding of the predicament the person is in and what led them to that situation."

"Treat everyone the same regardless."

"Police model of engaging with people tends to escalate situations. Need a uniform approach with respect and no assumptions. Need to support community in their time of need. They're human but need user friendly approach."

Respondents believed that if the police used person-centred approaches where they showed understanding and respect of individuals circumstances, this would help improve relationships and trust.

"Come into situations with their eyes open and not judge people by past mistakes. Be open minded."

"Be more approachable and considerate of peoples background."

"Respect people 100%. Balanced thinking, patience, tolerance, values."

One specific issue raised by respondents was attitudes displayed by the police towards homeless people and the desire for the police to be more supportive towards people in this situation, rather than stereotyping them.

Respondents felt that in order to achieve this the police needed to change by developing different mindsets and improved social skills.

"Be more approachable, more professional, less confrontational, and less aggressive."
"Experience of very negative and patronising attitude towards my son when having interactions with the police."

"Be less intimidating and less feeling of being above the law, for the youth it would help grow respect for each other. Respect breeds mutual respect."

"Teach them better social skills. Better ways of diffusing situations and calm rather than taunt people in the street, be more understanding."

Another common topic throughout these findings was the issue of how the police could change the way they engaged with local communities. However, there was some sympathy amongst the respondents and the peer researchers towards how difficult the police's job was.

"Local bobby in local communities would develop community needs and solve problems before arrest."

"We need police, just need them to be better and more responsive."

"The police are probably doing the best they can do, most of them anyway, but how easy it is for them."

Recommendation: Building personal growth and safety by reducing stigma

Respondents saw addressing stereotypes, biases, and preconceived prejudices held by the police toward specific communities, such as people experiencing homelessness and people with histories of problems with drugs and alcohol, as paramount to enabling people to move on from the deprivations they had experienced.

Increasing trust through training and attitude change

Positive engagement between the police and communities they serve was viewed as important to improve relationships and trust. Respondents called for meaningful education and training for the police for them to improve attitudes, be less confrontational, help people feel more comfortable when engaging, and build up trust.

"They've a tough job, I understand they've got to protect themselves, but should be more sensitive with better training, psychology etc."

"Training in how to engage with people."

"Community police need more support and education on the different groups in their areas."

"Police themselves should be educated about the communities they are approaching, treat people appropriately because of background religious/ethnicity."

Recommendation: Building healthy police cultures through training and attitude change

The need for the police to be able to engage positively with people they come into contact with was seen as essential to building bridges between them and the communities they serve.

In particular, it was felt that stigma perpetuated by the police against those experiencing multiple disadvantage needed to be challenged. Meaningful training to actively improve attitudes was suggested as a priority. Changing attitudes and approaches were seen as a low-cost exercise that would reap the most benefits.

Building trust through police accountability and openness

Greater accountability when the police get things wrong was seen as an essential in restoring trust, given the strength of local feeling that the police's reputational damage came before justice:

"More transparency, accountability for cover ups/abuse and miscarriages."

"Complete overhaul of how police operate, public accountability. Recruitment, training, retention of quality staff."

Respondents also raised the importance in building trust of the police having open, two-way communication about listening to communities rather than imposing on them what respondents saw as a one-sided view.

"Better training in some areas, be open as a force about what has happened in other forces and let the public know how you intend to do this, just by speaking out."

"They need to listen to people with lived experience."

Recommendation: Building trust through openness and accountability by the police

Respondents felt the police needed to be more open to admitting wrongdoing and owning up to mistakes. Being fully accountable to the public would enhance the reputation of the police, building higher levels of confidence, respect and trust in the police for all communities in the long term.

Police measures to improve safety

Police presence

When respondents were asked what would help them feel safer where they lived, nearly a quarter referred to the police – largely in terms of increased police presence and/or visibility, but sometimes in reference to changing their behaviour or having less police.

Whilst many respondents did not trust the police, they recognised the need for their presence to address the crimes they were worried about, not only for speedy interventions but as a deterrent:

"A greater police presence, better social services and easier access to those services."

"More presence outside clubs and bar. Keep watch on vulnerable girls."

"More open-minded police walking the streets, more community-based officers."

The approach to policing was seen as particularly important, with many respondents wanting more of a community feeling towards policing, with 'bobbies on the beat'.

"More police patrols, both on the beat and in cars, but more on the beat"

Several respondents remarked that visible policing presence currently tended to be in the form of cars or vans driving past with no real interaction with the community.

"Street bobbies. More visible police presence not just in cars, you can't have a conversation if in cars."

Many respondents who had had experience of criminality and repeated contact with the police felt that this stigma stayed with them and inhibited their ability to re-engage with the police and their communities. The following quotes illustrate some of their suggestions on how things could be improved.

"A community liaison that bridges the gap between police and criminal classes."

"When police don't treat everyone [that] they interact with as a suspect, would help."

"More friendly, less targeting."

Recommendation: Building a more visible police presence responsive to community need

While some respondents felt unsafe in the presence of the police, others called for an increased police presence, especially "bobbies on the beat" who could engage with the community and improve attitudes through training.

Other policing-related measures to improve safety were raised in response to a question about how best to address the crimes respondents felt most concerned about. These are set out below.

Targeted policing

Many respondents felt that crimes were being committed 'out in the open' and that the police were not dealing effectively with them. A suggestion made was targeting the areas and people involved in those criminal activities with a more tactical approach, like hotspot policing, rather than simply being reactive.

"Target high risk areas properly, not just for a very short period and the same people each time."

"Drug dealing shouldn't be tolerated openly; intervention is needed by police. Open drug dealing should be stamped out. More interventions around gun and knife violence and youths who are being groomed by organised crime gangs."

However, it should be noted that there were tensions between this perspective and that of others who felt some communities and people were overpoliced, or who disliked the behaviour of the police. This is summed up by the below responses:

"More police, but that could cause more problems. Community officers think they are sheriffs, they have an attitude so I wouldn't turn to them."

"Intervention, education, tactical policing but without the knife jack heavy handed approach."

Swifter police responses

Police response times were often felt to be too slow. If or when the police did arrive, they were seen as arriving too late to prevent a serious incident, or too late to obtain a reasonable chance of a conviction.

"Too slow to respond to hate crime, particularly younger people. Should be quicker to respond with better attitude."

"Take women more seriously, quicker response before it is too late."

"Reports need to be taken seriously not brushed under the carpet and protective measures need to be in place for the victim if no further action is the decision, that puts the victims at risk of further crime."

Recommendation: Building trust through swifter responses

Faster response times and improved attitudes when addressing crimes, particularly domestic violence and hate crimes, were emphasised.

Other measures to improve safety

Respondents had numerous other ideas about steps that could be taken to improve safety and address the crimes they were particularly worried about. These are grouped into themes below.

Community cohesion

As noted previously, improved community cohesion was often raised as a means to improve feelings of safety. Respondents referred to both greater cohesion within the communities themselves and with the statutory services that affect their ability to remain safe.

"Better community stability and community cohesion with improvements made in council and policing services."

"I would probably feel safer if I knew more of my neighbours."

"Yes, police coming to community events, not just looking to nick you."

Security and lighting

The issues of home security, street lighting and feelings of safety were also widely remarked on. The physical environment of the local streets and the home itself were integral to feeling secure and safe. This was particularly true for our respondents, who had often experienced dislocation, insecure housing and homelessness.

"Cameras but to be made aware of where they are in operation, for civil liberty issues but also as a deterrence to committing crime there."

"For those to be fixed (doors and locks) and the landlord to actually take an interest in keeping residents safe."

Housing and location

Given that a large proportion (68%) of those we reached out to had experienced homelessness, housing safety was an important issue for them. Those who had been homeless had often resided in premises they had found poor quality, insecure and unsafe and many remarked that being relocated would improve how safe they felt.

"I'm in recovery, have changed but chaos is still around me. {It's} not known about my recovery locally."

"I lock myself in my room. I'm from another area so I feel unsafe."

Recommendation: Building and fostering safe locations

Respondents made proposals to foster safety in the areas and spaces where they lived. This included improving home security and street lighting to enhance feelings of safety, particularly for those with a history of insecure housing or homelessness. Providing secure and suitable housing for those who have experienced homelessness was also seen as essential to improve housing safety and enable them to leave behind their prior experiences of deprivation.

Early intervention linked to education

Interventions at an early age to steer potential future perpetrators away from these crimes was felt to be an important intervention.

"More help with addiction, deal with root cause [...] with schools and kids. Awareness at school."

"More police, more widely across the area, interventions at schools, a police officer at schools."

"Interventions at school, show a kid the results from someone who's been there to change their minds. Not just preach at them but engage them."

The peer researchers also talked about this subject, giving positive examples of where this was happening. This included 'Everton in the Community' where younger people could find positive sporting activities to steer them away from gang culture, an initiative which was visited on more than one occasion during this research. The peer researchers also mentioned the 'Knives down, gloves up' initiative, where young people in areas across Merseyside were encouraged to take up boxing as a route out of street gang culture and the carrying of weapons.

Youth services

Positive activities for younger people were considered very important by respondents, not solely for the younger people themselves as preventive measures to stop them getting involved in gangs and criminality, but for people who felt anxiety when in the vicinity of groups of young people who had nowhere else to go. Given recent violent events in Merseyside, feeling were strong about this issue.

"Funding for social clubs for the youth to vent energy instead of looking intimidating outside shops and street corners."

"Having youth centre and services properly funded so young people have somewhere to go."

"More community-based police to engage with young people to create a therapeutic relationship."

Recommendation: Building resilience and self-identity through early intervention, education and youth activities

An inter-agency partnership approach to funding for early intervention would increase cost efficiency for the public purse and help communities to both feel safer and be safer. Respondents believed that if young people were steered away from crime, including gangs, through positive activities, early intervention and educational programmes, the long-term cost saving o the police, courts, probation, and prison budgets would more than compensate for the spending on such interventions.

Diversion and rehabilitation

The need for diversion away from the criminal justice system and into supportive services was discussed by the peer researchers. Finding the right help and support to divert someone away from committing the crimes communities worry most about was felt to be the most cost-effective intervention for the public purse. For example, several spoke of the need for drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Rehabilitative services such as probation were seen as playing a part in reducing crime by delivering positive interventions and multi-agency working to reduce offending rates.

"Signposting to services, access to jobs so people don't have to drug deal. More help and community services to deal with them."

"Information/advice for those in need, so they don't feel the need to commit crime."

Recommendation: Building opportunities to overcome multiple deprivation through diversion and rehabilitation

Respondents recommended more options for diverting individuals away from the criminal justice system and into services, and the need for more rehabilitation programmes provided by local partners alongside probation.

Legislative change

Some respondents believed that stronger measures were required to prevent crime related to drugs, including legislative change as had been seen in some other countries.

"Follow suit with America/Canada on legalising drugs so people don't have to deal with drug dealers, tax the drugs like they do with prescription drugs, create safe places for those drugs to be used."

Recommendation: Building legislative power to reduce the impact of drug use on local communities

Some respondents suggested legalising certain drugs and taxing them, creating safe spaces for drug use and reducing harm and criminalisation.

Conclusion

This report underscores the complex dynamics between a snapshot of Merseyside residents and the police. This group's voices are rarely heard, despite their more frequent contact with the police and wider services. It has highlighted feelings of mistrust and apprehension whilst also demonstrating how community policing can contribute towards feelings of safety.

The responses to the survey underline the importance of adopting careful approaches to understanding the complexity of public attitudes about crime and public safety within communities and the particular experiences of individuals who have experienced multiple disadvantage. The findings also emphasise the importance of building trust, improving police attitudes, and fostering a more respectful and empathetic approach towards the diverse communities they serve.

Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a safer and more inclusive environment in Merseyside.

Annex 1: Who took part in the survey?

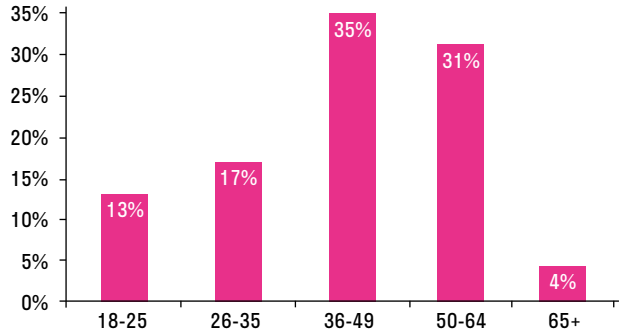

Chart A1: Respondents' age range (n=186)

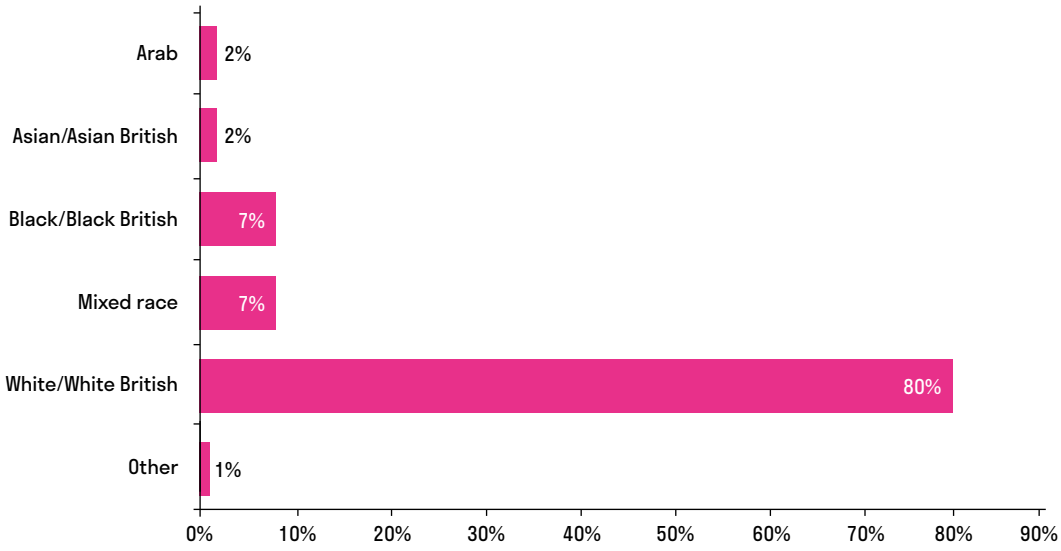

Chart A2: Respondent's ethnicity (n=202)

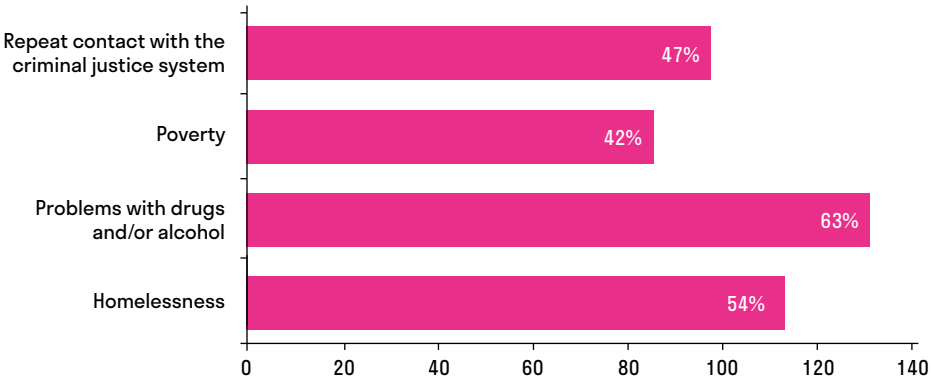

Chart A3: Additional needs amongst all respondents (n=209)

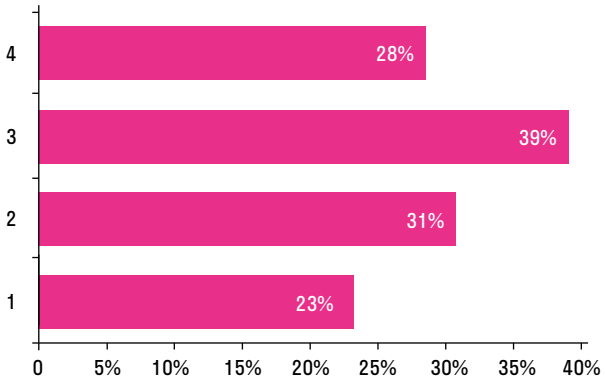

Chart A4: Number of additional needs experienced by all respondents (n=209)

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