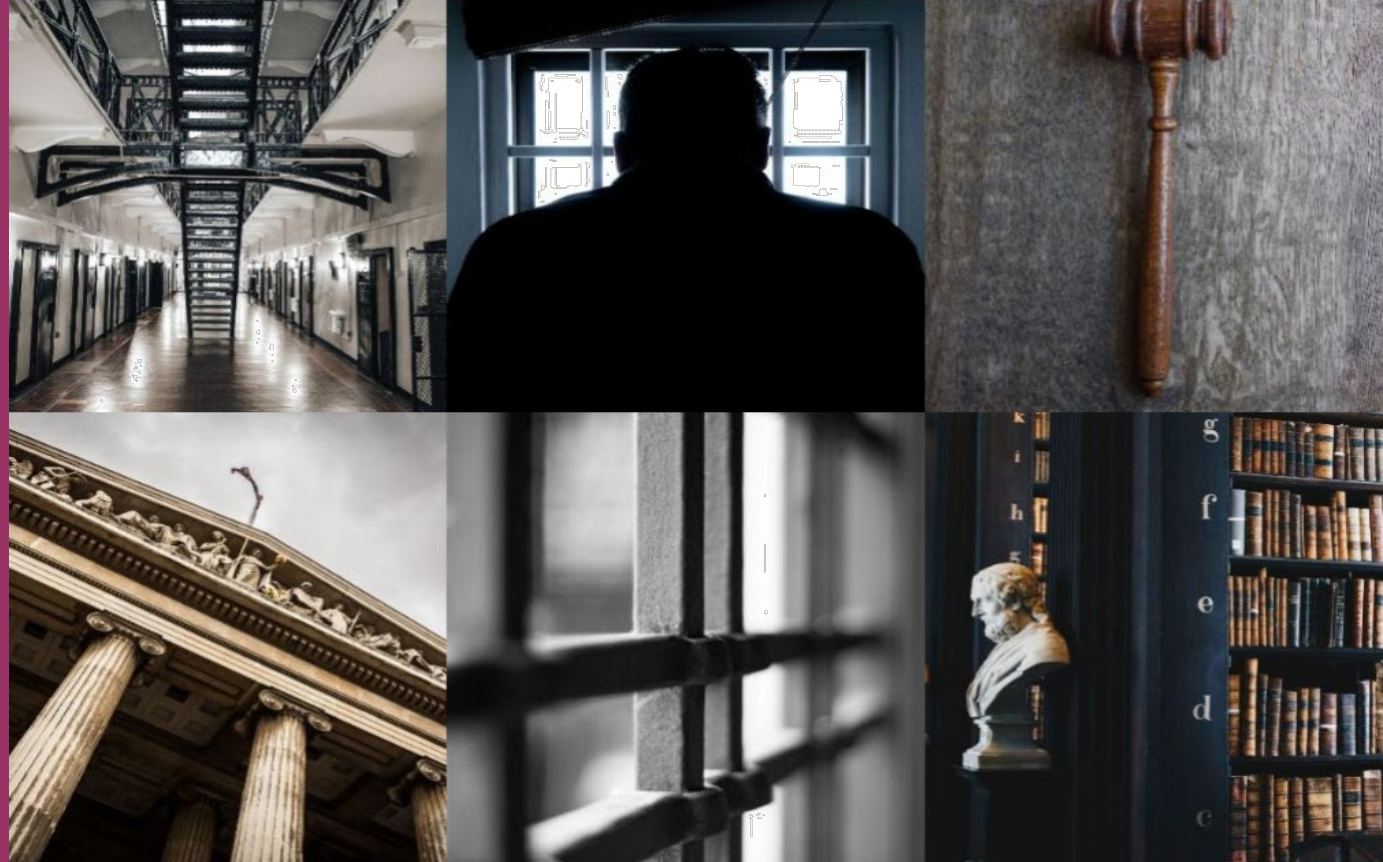# Personal Safety: Findings from the 2019 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

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CONTENTS

1 | Summary Findings

This bulletin presents findings from the 2019 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS).

Perceptions of Safety and Problems in the Local Area

- The vast majority of young people reported feeling safe in the area in which they live, with 61% stating they feel 'very safe' and a further 33% feeling 'quite safe'.

- When asked to select from a list those that were problems in their local area, three-fifths (60%) of young people stated that none of the options provided were a problem in the area in which they lived. Of the issues that were cited, people being rowdy or drunk in public places (21%), people using or dealing drugs (21%) and vandalism, graffiti and deliberate damage to property (19%) were identified by participants as the most common problems in their area.

- Findings from the 2019 YPBAS show that young people did not tend to worry about being a victim of crime or about their personal safety. For each of the crime types and aspects of personal safety asked about, at least two-in-three participants reported not being worried that they would be a victim.

- When considering the proportions who did report being worried, the highest proportions were observed for worry about having their things stolen or having their belongings broken or deliberately damaged (both 33%).

1 | Summary Findings

Experience of Crime

- Findings show that the majority of 2019 YPBAS participants stated that, in the previous 12 months, they had not been a victim of any of the experiences or crime types asked about.

- A fifth (20%) of young people reported that they had had something stolen from them or taken without their permission in the previous 12 months while 18% had been bullied in a way that frightened or upset them.

Perceptions of the Police and Paramilitary Groups

- When asked about their opinion of the police in their area, 43% stated that when they thought of the police they thought of them in a good way, with 10% claiming they thought of them in a bad way. The remaining 47% reported that they did not really have an opinion of the police. Almost four-in-five young people (78%) claimed they would feel comfortable contacting the police for help if needed.

- At 44%, young people were more likely to state that they did not think paramilitary groups were operating in their local area compared with 12% who believed they were. A substantial proportion of participants, 45%, responded that they either did not know what a paramilitary group was or if they were operating in the area in which they lived.

- Those that thought paramilitary groups were operational in their area were most likely to agree that 'paramilitary groups contribute to crime, drug dealing and anti-social behaviour in my local area' (56%) and least likely to agree that they help keep their area safe (29%).

2 | Introduction

2.1 The focus of this publication

The Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) is a school-based survey carried out among 11-16 year olds. It covers a range of topics and aims to gain an insight into the behaviour and attitudes of young people in Northern Ireland. The survey has previously been conducted every three years (approximately), with the most recent round being undertaken in 2019.

A module relating to personal safety was commissioned by the Department of Justice (DoJ) in the 2019 survey. This bulletin presents findings from the module and focuses on:

- feeling of safety in the local area;
- problems in the local area;
- experience of being a victim of a range of behaviours in the last 12 months such as bullying, physical assault, cyber bullying or whether they have had something stolen/damaged;
- attitudes toward the police; and
- perceptions of paramilitary groups.

Key findings are commented on in the text, with numerical details for each question available in the tables comprising the Tabular Annex (Appendix 1).

To accommodate demand for topics on the 2019 survey two versions of the questionnaire were created. A total of 4,226 pupils completed the questionnaire containing the personal safety module. Further background information on the bulletin and survey is available in the Technical Annex (Appendix 2).

3 | Perceptions of Safety and Problems in the Local Area

3.1 Feelings of safety and problems in the local area

Young people were asked how safe they felt in the area in which they live using a four point scale ranging from 'very safe' to 'very unsafe'. Results are presented in Table 1, Appendix 1.

- Findings show the vast majority of participants reported feeling safe in the area in which they lived, with 61% feeling 'very safe' and a further 33% 'quite safe'. Only 5% reported feeling unsafe.

Figure 3.1: How safe do you feel in the area in which you live? (%)

| 61 | 33 | 5 |

■ Very safe ■ Quite safe ■ Unsafe
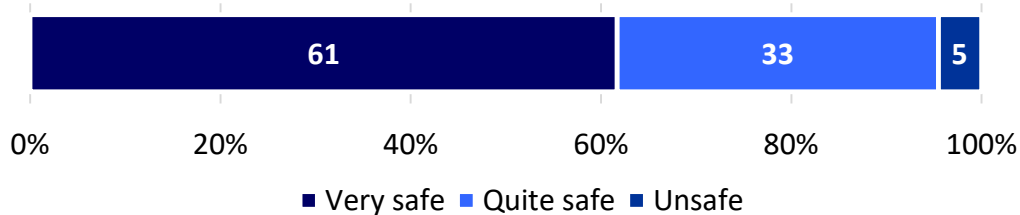
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.
2. Individual figures do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Views were also sought on problems in the local area whereby participants were asked to select from the following list which, if any, were problems in the area in which they live:

1. people using or dealing in drugs;
2. vandalism, graffiti or deliberate damage to property;
3. people being rowdy or drunk in public places;
4. mobile phone theft;
5. people buying or selling goods that are stolen or not genuine;
6. people being insulted, pestered or intimidated in the street;
7. people being threatened by paramilitaries;
8. people carrying knives in the street or at school;
9. people rioting/confronting police; or
10. none of these.

Results are presented in Table 2, Appendix 1.

3 | Perceptions of Safety and Problems in the Local Area

- Three-fifths of young people did not feel any of these were a problem in the area in which they lived with 60% selecting the 'none of these' option when asked. Of the issues cited, people being rowdy or drunk in public places (21%), people using or dealing drugs (21%) and vandalism, graffiti and deliberate damage to property (19%) were identified as the most common problems in their area.

Figure 3.2: Which of the following, if any, do you think is a problem in the area in which you live? (%)[1,2]
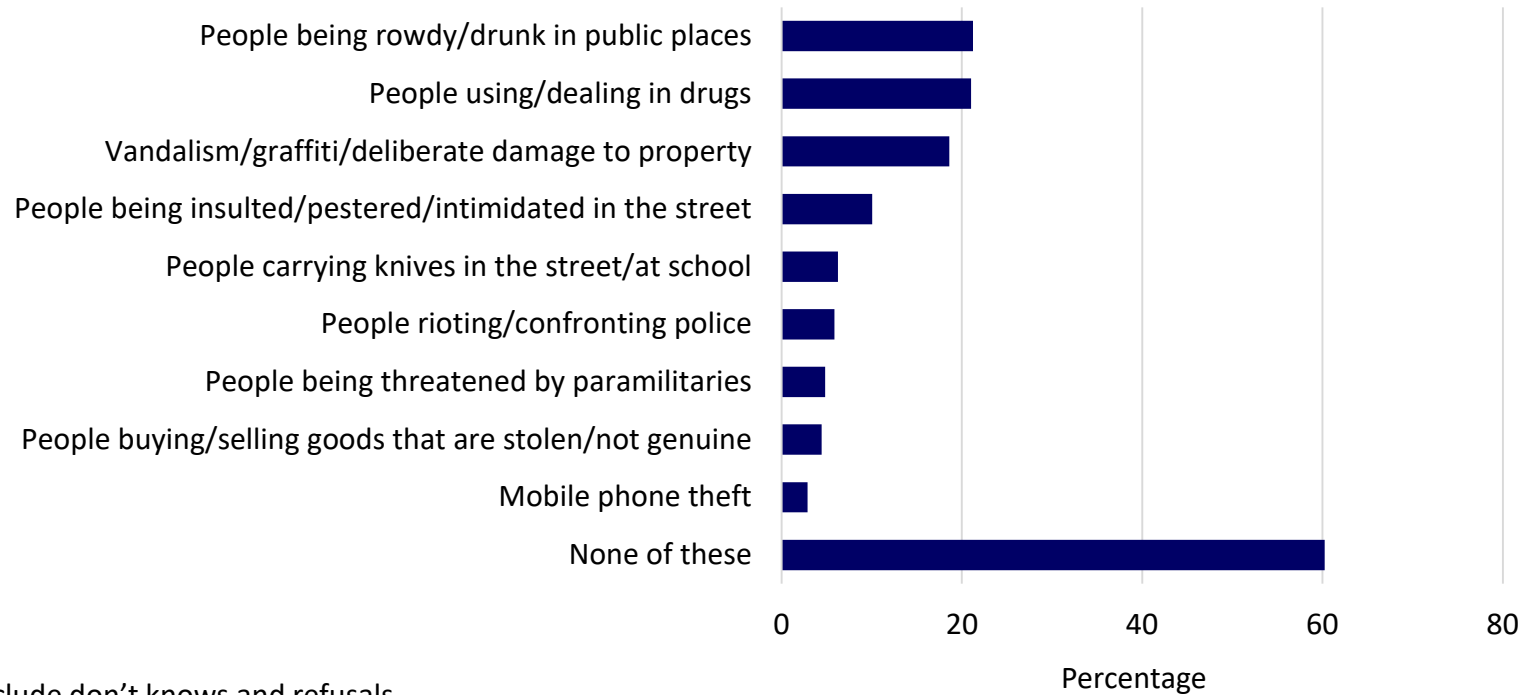
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

2. Participants could select more than one response.

3 | Perceptions of Safety and Problems in the Local Area

3.2 Worry about personal safety

In addition to being asked about how safe they feel and problems in their local area, a number of questions relating to worry about crime and personal safety were also included, results for which can be found in Table 3. With a 'yes/no' response option for each, young people participating in the survey were asked if they were worried about each of the following happening to them:

1. being bullied;

2. being sexually abused;

3. being physically hurt (e.g. being kicked, slapped, punched, pushed, hit with a weapon);

4. being threatened by paramilitaries;

5. being harassed/bullied/abused via the internet;

6. being bullied/harassed via texts/videos/images or calls to their mobile;

7. having things stolen from them including anything they are carrying/wearing; and

8. having their belongings damaged/deliberately broken.

- Findings from the 2019 YPBAS suggest that young people did not tend to worry about becoming a victim of crime/their personal safety with the majority of participants responding 'no' when asked if they worried about each of the above happening to them. This was the case for all eight aspects of personal safety considered.

3 | Perceptions of Safety and Problems in the Local Area

- At 33% each, young people were most likely to report being worried about having things stolen from them or having their belongings damaged or deliberately broken. These were followed by worry about being bullied or being physically hurt at 29% and 28% respectively. Participants were less likely to state they were worried about being sexually abused (19%) or being threatened by paramilitaries (20%).

Figure 3.3: In relation to your own personal safety, are you worried about any of the following happening to you? (%)[1]

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.
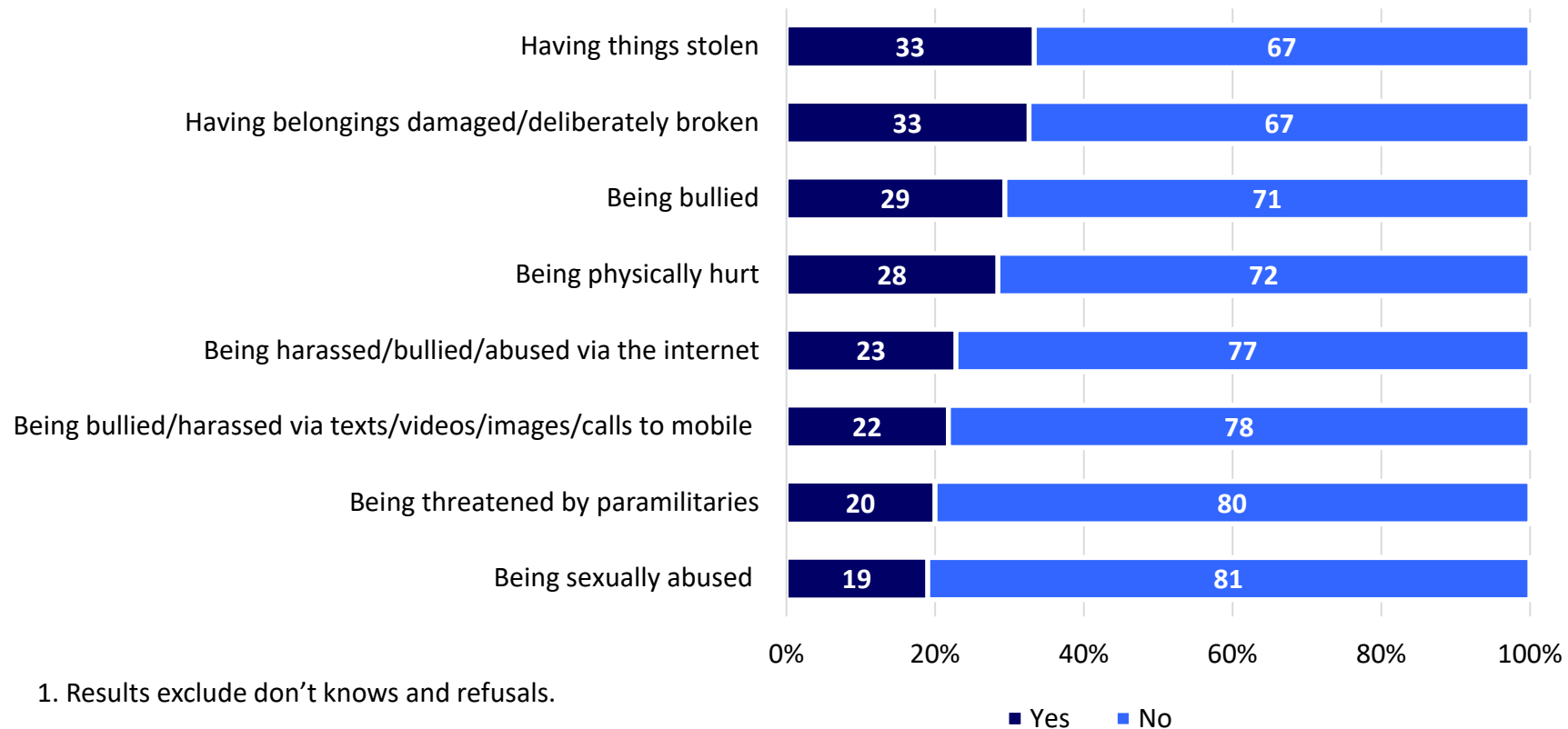
4 | Experience of Crime

## 4.1 Experience of being a victim over the previous 12 months

A set of questions was included to gauge whether young people had been a victim over the previous 12 months with the questions covering a range of experiences, more specifically whether they:

1. had been bullied in a way that frightened or upset them;

2. had been the victim of sexual abuse;

3. had been threatened by paramilitaries;

4. had anything stolen or taken without their permission, even if they later got it back;

5. had anything belonging to them broken, damaged or ruined on purpose; or

6. had experienced cyber bullying.

For each of these questions a 'yes/no' response option was offered. Results for these questions are given in Table 4. Two additional questions were also asked; one relating to experience of physical assault and another regarding cyber-related crime whilst using the internet or smartphone. These two questions differed from those above in that they asked more specifically about the nature of what had happened as opposed to providing a yes/no response. For example, in relation to physical assault, participants were asked whether they had been kicked or hit/slapped/punched, while for cyber-related incidents response options included 'loss of money' and 'unauthorised access to/use of personal data'. Full results are presented in Tables 5 and 6 respectively.

- Findings from the survey show that, in the previous 12 months, a fifth (20%) of young people had something stolen or taken without their permission, while 18% reported they had been bullied in a way that frightened or upset them.

- At 1% each, participants were least likely to say they had been the victim of sexual abuse or been threatened by paramilitaries.

**Figure 4.1: Experience of being a victim over the previous 12 months[1]**
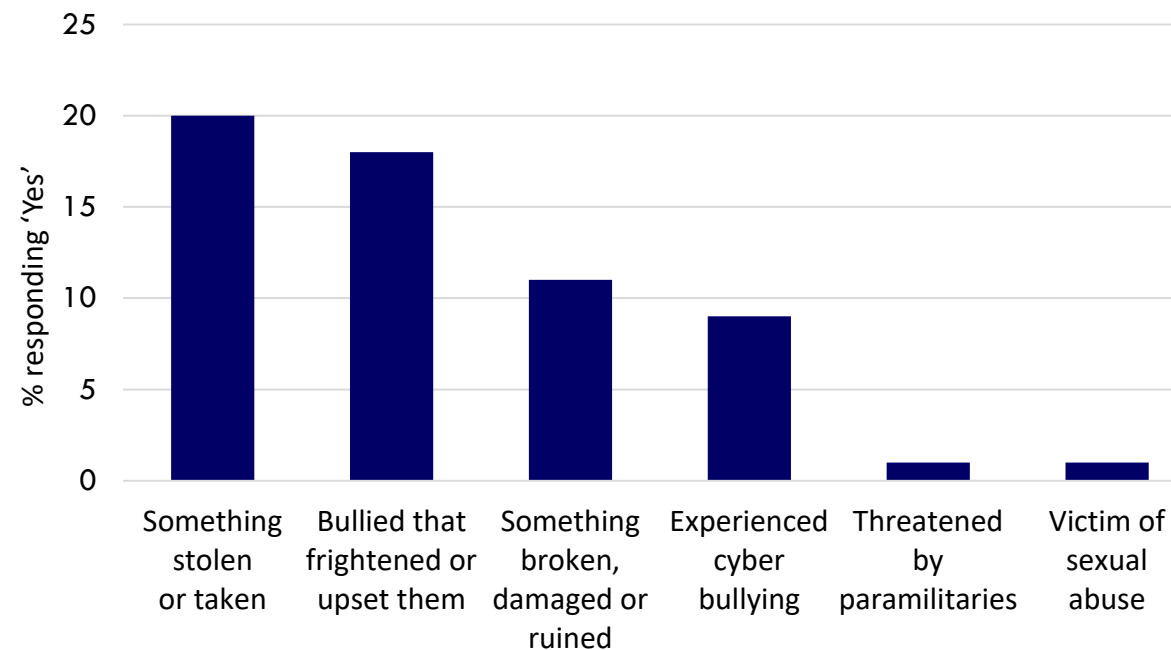
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

4 | Experience of Crime

With regards to experience of physical assault, young people were asked whether anyone in the last 12 months had kicked, hit/slapped/punched, pushed or shoved, used or hit them with a weapon or been physically violent with them in some other way. Participants were able to select more than one options; a 'none of these' option was also included.

- Findings from the survey suggest that the majority of young people, almost three-quarters (73%), did not experience any of these types of physical assault in the previous 12 months. Eighteen per cent stated they had been pushed or shoved, while 17% had been hit, slapped or punched. One per cent indicated that someone had used or hit them with a weapon in the 12 months prior to taking part in the survey.

**Figure 4.2: Experience of physical assault over the previous 12 months (%)[1]**
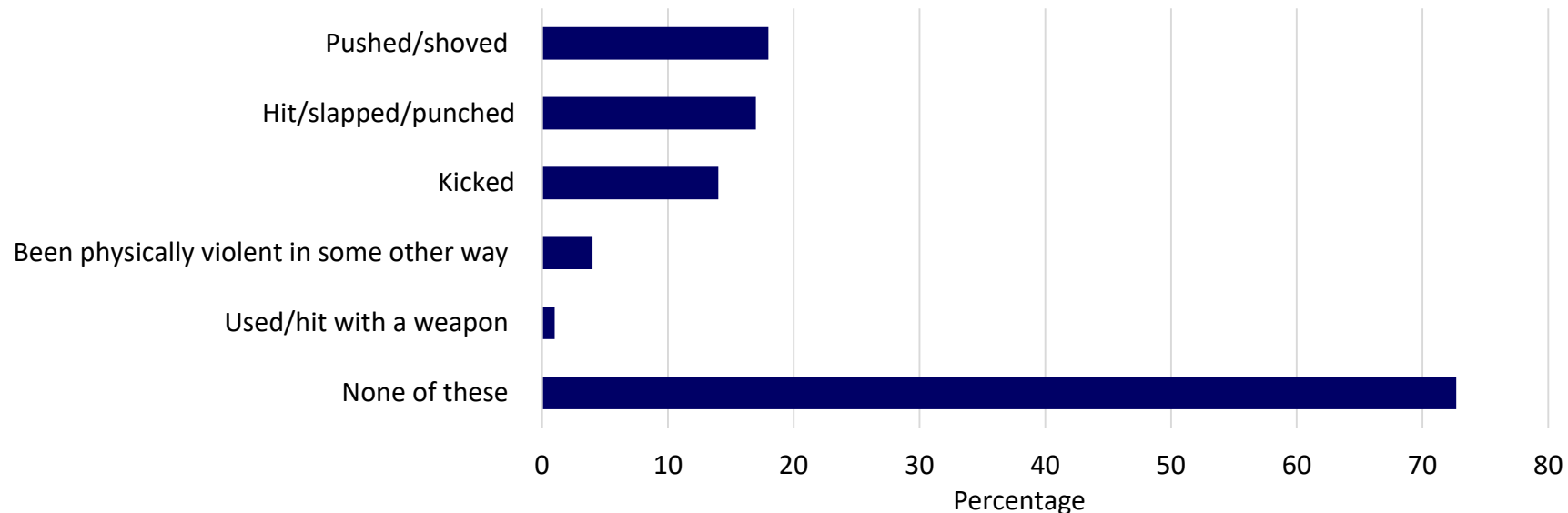
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

4 | Experience of Crime

Participants were also asked whether in the previous 12 months they had experienced any of the following while using the internet or their smartphone: a computer virus; loss of money; unauthorised access to/use of personal data (e.g. e-mail/Facebook etc); upsetting images; or abusive/threatening behaviour. Again, participants were able to select a 'none of these' option or a 'don't use the internet/smartphone' response.

- The majority of young people had not experienced any of these cyber-related incidents in the previous 12 months with four-in-five (80%) selecting the 'none of these' response option. Less than one-in-ten (9%) reported getting a computer virus when using the internet or their smartphone, with lower proportions responding they had experienced the other types of cyber-related experiences considered.

Figure 4.3: Experience of cyber-related incidents over the previous 12 months (%)[1,2]
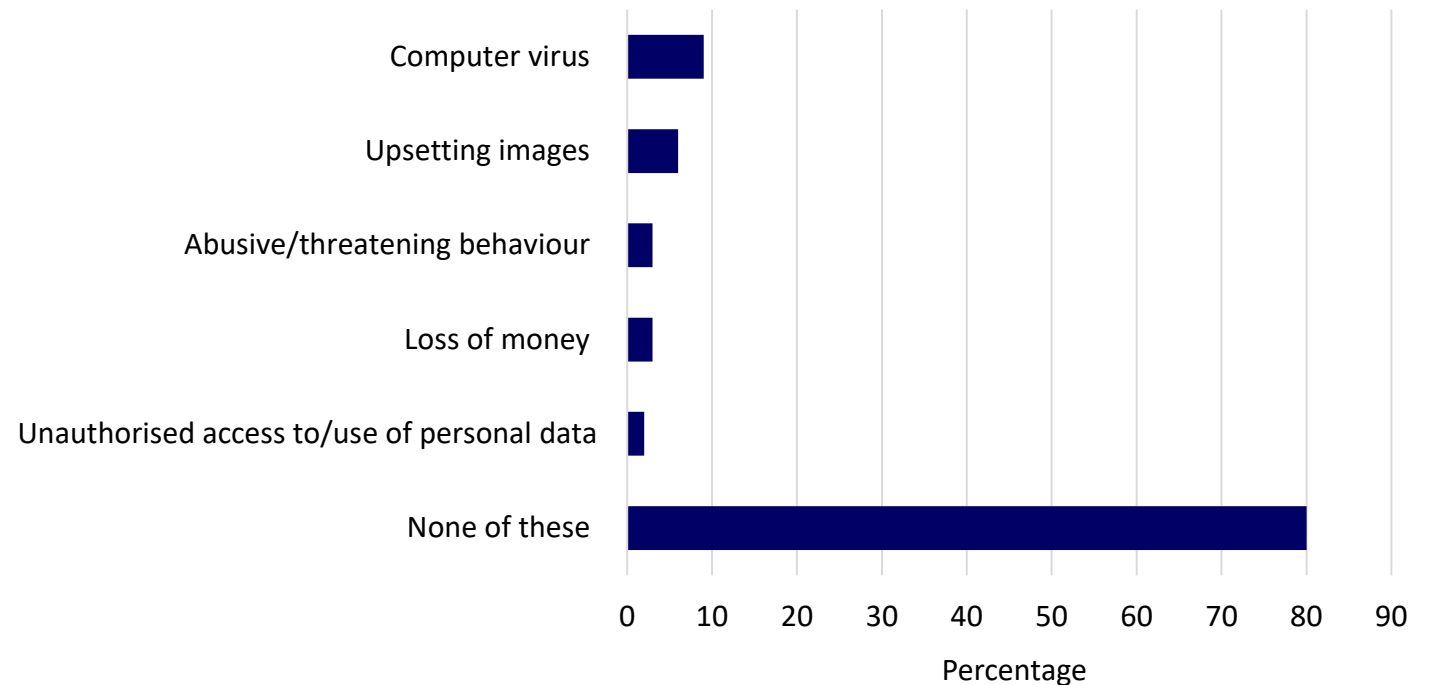
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.
2. One per cent of participants selected the 'Don't use the internet/smartphone' option.

5 | Perceptions of the Police

5.1 Perceptions of the Police

Views on the police were also sought from young people. YPBAS participants were asked which of the following best described their opinion of the police in their area:

- when I think of the police, I think of them in a good way;

- when I think of the police, I think of them in a bad way; or

- I don't really have an opinion of the police.

Survey participants were also asked whether they would feel comfortable contacting or asking the police for help if they needed them. Results for both questions are presented in Appendix 1, Tables 7 and 8 respectively.

- Participants were much more likely to have a positive perception of the police with 43% responding they thought of the police in a good way compared with 10% expressing a negative opinion and thought of them in a bad way. A substantial proportion, 47%, reported that they did not have an opinion of the police.

- The majority of young people, just under four-fifths (78%), stated they would feel comfortable contacting or asking the police for help, while the remaining 22% would not feel comfortable seeking help if needed.

Figure 5.1: What best describes your opinion of the police in your area? (%)[1]

I don't have an opinion of the police (47%)

I think of the police in a good way (43%)

I think of the police in a bad way (10%)
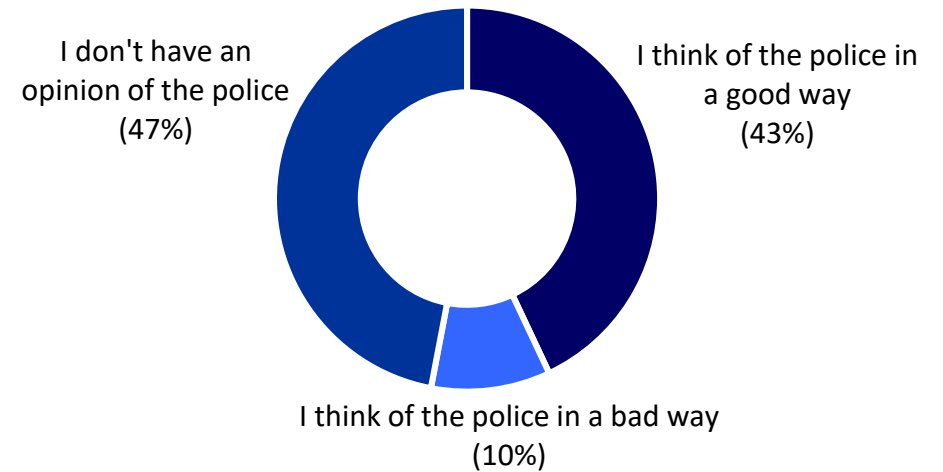
Figure 5.2: Would you feel comfortable contacting/asking police for help if needed? (%)[1]

No (22%)

Yes (78%)
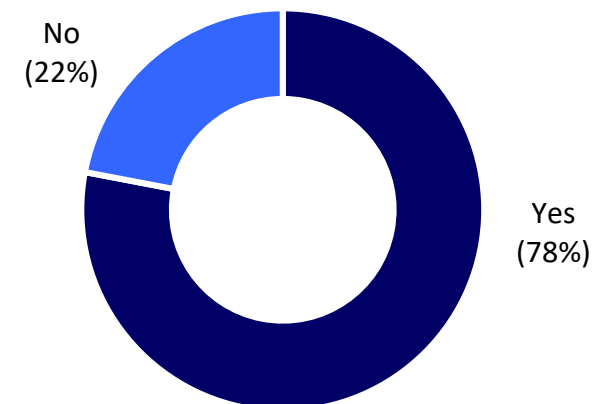
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

6 | Perceptions of Paramilitary Groups

6.1 Perceptions of Paramilitary Groups

Questions were also included in the module to gauge young people's perceptions of paramilitary groups, findings for which are presented in Tables 9 and 10. Participants were asked whether they thought paramilitary groups were operating in the area in which they lived. The alternative response options were 'yes', 'no', 'don't' know' and 'I don't know what a paramilitary group is'. Those who believed paramilitary groups were operational in their area were subsequently asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements:

1. paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in my area;
2. paramilitary groups help keep my area safe;
3. paramilitary groups contribute to crime, drug dealing and anti-social behaviour in my area; and
4. young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in my area.

- Just over one-in-ten (12%) young people thought paramilitary groups were operating in the area in which they lived, with 44% believing they were not. The remaining respondents either did not know what a paramilitary group was (9%) or whether they were operating in their local area (36%).

- In terms of the four follow-up statements, participants were most likely to agree that 'paramilitary groups contribute to crime, drug dealing and anti-social behaviour in my local area' (56%) and least likely to agree that they help keep their area safe (29%).

Figure 6.1: Young people's perceptions of paramilitary groups (%)[1,2]
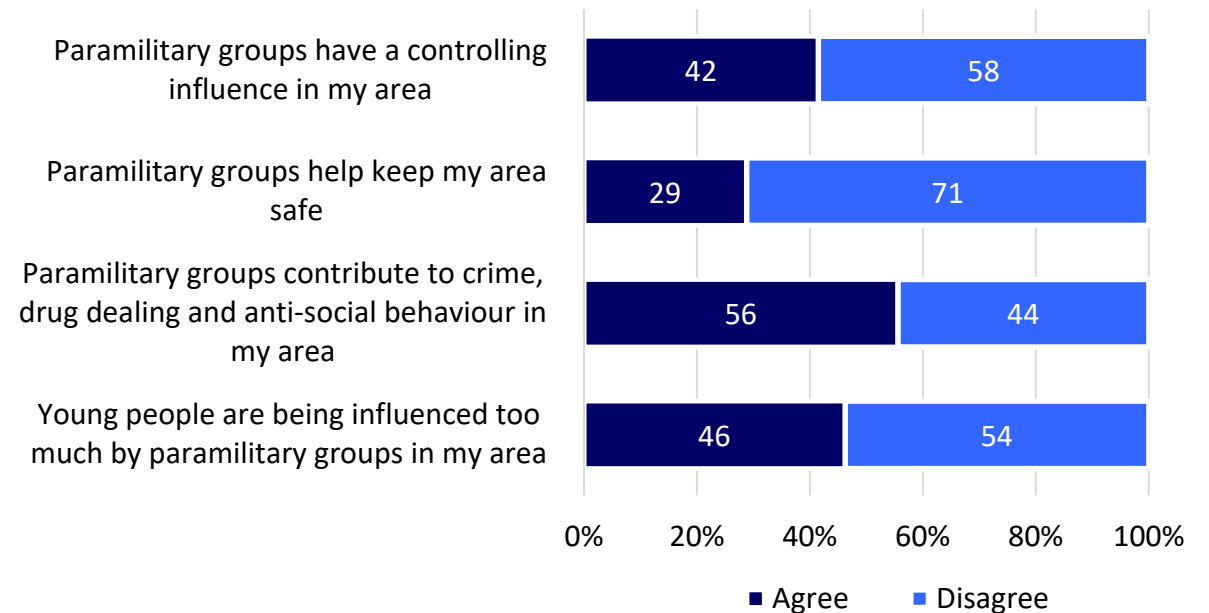
1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.
2. Questions were only asked of those who believed paramilitary groups were operating in the area in which they lived.

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Appendix 1: Tabular Annex

Table 1: How safe do you feel in the area in which you live? (%)

% saying they feel….	
Very safe	61
Quite safe	33
Slightly unsafe	5
Very unsafe	1
Unweighted base	*4,209*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 2: Which of the following, if any, do you think is a problem in the area in which you live? (%)

% saying the following are a problem in their area…	
People using or dealing in drugs	21
Vandalism, graffiti or deliberate damage to property	19
People being rowdy or drunk in public places	21
Mobile phone theft	3
People buying or selling goods that are stolen or not genuine	4
People being insulted, pestered or intimidated in the street	10
People being threatened by paramilitaries	5
People carrying knives in the street or at school	6
People rioting/confronting police	6
None of these	60
Unweighted base	*4,126*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 3: In relation to your own personal safety, are you worried about any of the following happening to you? (%)

Worried about……	%	
	Yes	No
Being bullied	29	71
Being sexually abused	19	81
Being physically hurt (e.g. being kicked, slapped, punched, pushed, hit with a weapon)	28	72
Being threatened by paramilitaries	20	80
Being harassed/bullied/abused via the internet	23	77
Being bullied/harassed via texts/videos/images or calls to your mobile	22	78
Having things stolen from you including anything you are carrying/wearing	33	67
Having your belongings damaged/deliberately broken	33	67
Unweighted base	*4,205*	

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

2. Unweighted base refers to being bullied. Other bases will be similar.

Table 4: In the last 12 months has any of the following happened to you? (%)

In the last 12 months…..	%	
	Yes	No
Has anyone bullied you in a way that frightened or upset you	18	82
Have you been the victim of sexual abuse	1	99
Have you been threatened by paramilitaries	1	99
Has anyone stolen or taken something that belonged to you without your permission	20	80
Has anyone broken, damaged or ruined anything that belonged to you on purpose	11	89
Have you experienced cyber bullying	9	91
Unweighted base	*4,184*	

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

2. These questions were each asked separately.

3. Unweighted base refers to 'has anyone bullied you in a way that frightened or upset you'. Other bases will be similar.

Table 5: In the last 12 months has anyone done any of the following things on purpose because they wanted to hurt you, even if you were not injured? (%)

% saying they have been…	
Kicked	14
Hit / slapped / punched	17
Pushed or shoved	18
Used or hit with a weapon	1
Had someone be physically violent in some other way	4
None of these	73
Unweighted base	*4,214*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 6: In the last 12 months have any of these things happened to you while using the internet/your smartphone? (%)

% saying…	
A computer virus	9
Loss of money	3
Unauthorised access to/use of personal data (e.g. e-mail, Facebook)	2
Upsetting images	6
Abusive/threatening behaviour	3
None of these	80
Don't use the internet/smartphone	1
Unweighted base	*3,969*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 7: Which of the following best describes your opinion of the police in your area? (%)

% saying…	
When I think of the police, I think of them in a good way	43
When I think of the police, I think of them in a bad way	10
I don't really have an opinion of the police	47
Unweighted base	*4,161*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 8: Would you feel comfortable contacting or asking the police for help if you needed them? (%)

% saying…	
Yes	78
No	22
Unweighted base	*4,156*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 9: Do you believe there are paramilitary groups operating in the area in which you live? (%)

% saying...	
Yes	12
No	44
Don't know	36
I don't know what a paramilitary group is	9
Unweighted base	*4,184*

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Results exclude don't knows and refusals.

Table 10: Do you agree or disagree with these statements relating to paramilitary groups (%)

% who agree/disagree that...	Agree	Disagree
Paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in my area	42	58
Paramilitary groups help keep my area safe	29	71
Paramilitary groups contribute to crime, drug dealing and anti-social behaviour in my area	56	44
Young people are being influenced too much by paramilitary groups in my area	46	54
Unweighted base[2]	*440*	

Source: Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

1. Questions were only asked of those who said there were paramilitary groups operating in the area in which they live.

2. Unweighted base refers to 'paramilitary groups have a controlling influence in my area'. Other bases will be similar.

Appendix 2: Technical Annex

Background

In recent years there has been increasing interest in estimating victimisation and perceptions of crime among young people. A paper, '*Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey: Assessment of the feasibility to include children aged 10 to 15 and communal establishments* (opens in a new window)', was published by Analytical Services Group, DoJ, the main purpose of which was to outline the options considered for measuring victimisation among young people. After considering the various options available, the most feasible was to include a module in the 2019 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS). Though not commissioned by DoJ, a Personal Safety module had been included in previous sweeps of YPBAS which asked young people how safe they felt in their area and about a range of experiences in the previous 12 months, such as whether they had been bullied or physically assaulted. Given that the proposed subject matter of the new DoJ module would be similar in nature to the existing Personal Safety questions, it was decided that for the 2019 survey the module would be commissioned by DoJ. While some questions from the previous module were retained, new questions were added to extend the range of experiences asked about and the scope widened to include attitudes towards the police and paramilitary groups.

About the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

NISRA Central Survey Unit was commissioned by a consortium of departments to design and conduct the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS). Carried out among 11-16 year olds, YPBAS is a school-based survey which covers a range of topics and aims to gain an insight into the behaviour and attitudes of young people in Northern Ireland. The survey has previously been conducted every three years (approximately), in the autumn of 2000, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016 and again in 2019. The survey asked young people about a range of subject matter. While topics covered can vary between sweeps, the 2019 survey included questions on health and wellbeing, social media, culture, arts and leisure, care in the sun, education, travelling to school, substance use and volunteering.

Sampling and fieldwork

NISRA was provided with a list of all post-primary schools by the Department of Education, all of whom were contacted and invited to participate in the survey. Schools who had agreed to participate provided details of the number of classes in Years 8-12 and a class from each of the five year groups was then randomly selected to take part. In most cases, selected pupils were assembled in class-sized groups to complete the questionnaire.

In 2019, eighty schools agreed to participate in the survey, 41% of all post-primary schools. Out of a possible 9,428 pupils, a total of 8,118 were surveyed resulting in a pupil response rate of 86%. In order to accommodate demand for topics, two versions of the questionnaire were used; Version A and Version B (copies of the questionnaires are available from the 2019 YPBAS section of the NISRA website, link given below). The personal safety module covered in this bulletin was included in Questionnaire Version B, which resulted in responses from 4,226 pupils. Fieldwork for the survey was carried out between September 2019 and February 2020.

Weighting

Any sample is unlikely to reflect precisely the characteristics of the population it is drawn from. The results contained within this report have been weighted by year group, sex and religion to reflect the distribution of the post-primary school population (available from the 2019/2020 School Census, DE).

Rounding and error

Don't knows and refusals have been excluded from the analyses unless otherwise stated. Percentages may not always sum to 100 or numbers may not sum to an overall total due to the effect of rounding to the nearest whole number, or because respondents could give more than one response. Figures presented in the tables and graphs within this bulletin have been rounded. Unrounded figures are available in the accompanying Microsoft Excel and Open Data Source versions of the Tabular Annex.

Further information

Further information on the 2019 survey, including key findings for other modules, the full technical report and questionnaires, can be found on the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019 (Opens in a new window) section of the NISRA website.   Information on previous sweeps of the survey can also be accessed via the NISRA website.