

THE DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CIVIL PROCEEDINGS ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2021 - PROSECUTIONS AT COURTS AND CASE PROCESSING TIME FOR DOMESTIC ABUSE RELATED CASES DEALT WITH IN 2022/23 – 2023/24

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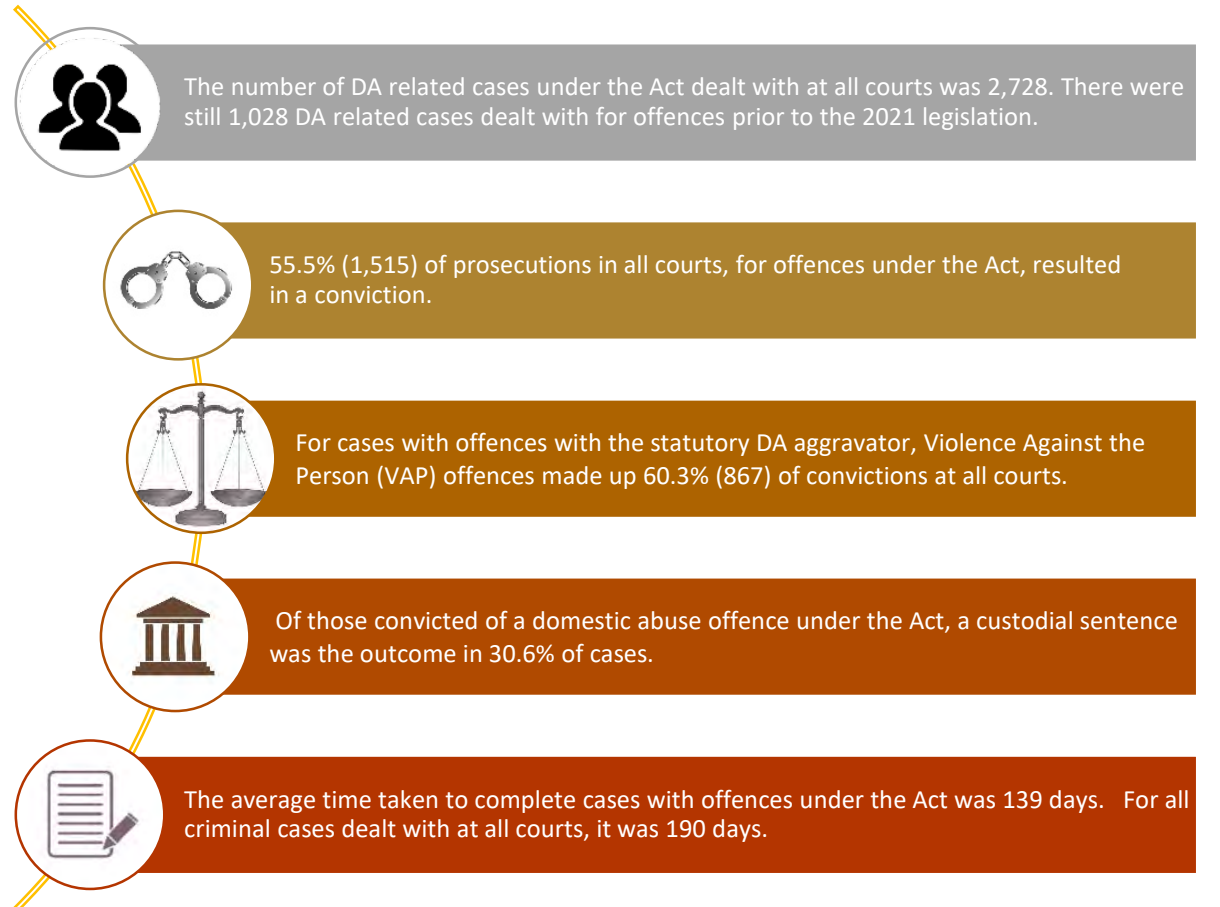
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Key Findings

1.1 About this bulletin

This bulletin presents information on prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse related criminal cases dealt with at courts in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24, as well as out of court disposals completed within the same period. Information on case processing times for such cases is also provided. Cases included in this publication are those relating to the domestic abuse (DA) offence or any offence aggravated by reason of involving DA as laid out in [The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2021](#) (the Act).

Main Points in 2023/24



1 | Key Findings

- As it takes some time for cases to complete their journey through the justice system, not all DA related cases dealt with at courts were for offences under the 2021 Act. In 2022/23 and 2023/24 respectively, while there were 3,384 and 3,756 DA related prosecutions at courts, 1,625 and 2,728 were for offences under the 2021 legislation.
- In 2023/24 and 2022/23 respectively, 55.5% (1,515 out of 2,728) and 51.7% (840 out of 1,625) of all DA related cases under the Act resulted in a conviction; 302 cases in 2023/24 and 211 in 2022/23 were dealt with by out of court disposal.
- Of the 396 cases with the new DA offence dealt with at court in 2023/24, 210 resulted in convictions. Of the 2,656 cases with offences with the statutory aggravator (Section 15), 1,478 resulted in a conviction.
- In 2023/24, there were convictions in 17 cases where there was a child related aggravator (Section 8 or Section 9), with the aggravator proved in 8 of these cases. In 2022/23, there were convictions in 8 such cases, with the aggravator proved in 6 of those cases.
- In 2023/24, 96.6% (2,635) of cases were dealt with at magistrates' courts, down slightly from 2022/23 (99.4%, 1,616), though that may, in part, have been due to Crown Court cases taking longer to complete.
- During both years, the vast majority of people convicted of an offence under the Act were male (2023/24: 91.9%, 1,392; 2022/23: 94.8%, 796).
- People aged 30 to 39 (2023/24: 37.9%, 574; 2022/23: 35.5%, 298) made up the highest proportion of those convicted of an offence under the Act during both years.
- VAP was the main offence category for 60.3% (867) of cases in 2023/24 and 57.2% (461) of cases in 2022/23 were the main offence was an offence with the statutory DA aggravator (Section 15).
- In all courts, of those convicted in a DA related case under the Act, a custodial disposal was the main outcome in 30.6% (463) of cases in 2023/24 and 37.1% (312) in 2022/23. At Crown Court in 2023/24, 72% (59) of cases resulted in a custodial outcome; all 7 DA related cases convicted at Crown Court in 2022/23 resulted in a custodial outcome.
- The sentence imposed in 2023/24 was enhanced in 154 cases where there was a conviction for a DA related offence under the Act. The figure for 2022/23 was 90.
- Special measures were put in place in 206 DA related cases under the Act that were dealt with at courts in 2023/24 and 77 of those dealt with in 2022/23.

2 | Introduction

2.1 Domestic Abuse-related crimes

The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act) created a new domestic abuse offence which criminalises a course of abusive behaviour. The offence, not limited to physical/sexual violence or threatening behaviour, includes controlling or coercive behaviour, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and economic abuse. Recording of this type of offence came into operation on 21 February 2022.

The Act provides for two child aggravators that can be attached to the new Domestic Abuse (DA) Offence, and, if proven, the court may enhance the sentence of the offender. The first child aggravator (Section 8) applies where the victim is under 18^a and the second where a relevant child is involved (Section 9) i.e. the abuse is witnessed by, makes use of, threatens or has an adverse impact on a person under 18.

The Act also introduced a statutory aggravator (Section 15) which can be applied to any offence, other than the new DA offence. An offence is aggravated if, in committing the offence, the person intends to cause, or is reckless about causing, an individual to which they are personally connected, to suffer physical or psychological harm. In this bulletin, these are referred to as offences with the statutory DA aggravator.

^a If an abuser has parental responsibility for a child under 16, the domestic abuse offence nor the aggravator will apply. Such cases are dealt with under child protection measures.

2.2 About this bulletin

Under the Act, the Department of Justice must prepare a report to lay before the Northern Ireland Assembly to set out, among other information, prosecutions, convictions and case processing times for DA offences and offences with the statutory DA aggravator. That report is planned to be laid before the Assembly in October 2025. This bulletin is separate to that report and focusses on cases dealt with at courts and by out of court disposals.

It is the first in a new series in relation to cases dealt with in this way under the Act. The bulletin is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. It presents data on the number of DA related prosecutions and convictions for magistrates' courts and the Crown Court in Northern Ireland for the period from the introduction of the Act to the end of the financial year 2023/24. Data for the youth court, a special magistrates' court that deals with proceedings against juveniles between the ages of 10 and 17, are included with those for magistrates' courts.

Data are also presented on those offenders who were dealt with outside the courts, by way of diversionary disposal, i.e., those who receive a caution, informed warning, a youth conference plan or are subject to the community based restorative justice scheme, or by issue of a penalty notice for disorder (PND).

2 | Introduction

Also included in this bulletin, is the age and gender of the known offending population, a breakdown of the other offences with the statutory DA aggravator committed and the disposals received.

Where an offender has had an out of court disposal imposed or been prosecuted for, or convicted of, several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted. Details of principal offence methodology, data coverage and quality are detailed in Appendix 1.

Data in all tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the Department of Justice website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

The average (median) time, from offence reported date to completion date, for cases where there has been a prosecution at court for an offence under the Act, has been included and some comparison with average time taken for all criminal cases has been provided.

The next update, covering the 12 months to 31 March 2025, is planned for publication in Autumn 2026. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the Department of Justice website.

2.3 Other data sources

The statistics in this bulletin relate only to relevant proceedings concluded in courts and those out of court disposals recorded in Northern Ireland during the period from the introduction of the Act to the end of 2023/24. To provide a more complete picture of DA from incident to conviction, it may be useful to look at other sources such as: [Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland](#). The PSNI publishes figures on the levels and trends in police recorded DA incidents and crimes. These figures relate to those DA incidents reported to the police and are useful for charting the prevalence of DA. However, as not everyone will want to make a report to the police they may only provide an indication of the true extent of DA.

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) plan to publish figures on the number of cases involving DA submitted to them by the PSNI and the number of prosecutorial decisions issued in relation to these cases i.e. continuation to prosecution or not, or diversion from the courts. It is anticipated these data will first be published in late 2025.

It should be noted that data from different sources are not directly comparable as they are collected on different bases (e.g. crimes, suspects, defendants) and are unlikely to cover the same cohort due to variation in the time taken for cases to progress through the criminal justice system.

3 | All cases

3.1 Included cases

Figures reported in this bulletin only relate to those cases with offences covered under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act). They do not include cases with offences prior to the introduction of the Act on 21 February 2022 which may have had a DA motivation. For the purposes of reporting, the small number of cases (16) with offences under the new legislation that were dealt with between 21 February 2022 and 31 March 2022 have been included in the figures for 2022/23.

3.2 Case numbers overall

In total, there were 3,030 separate DA related cases, with offences under the Act, disposed in 2023/24, whether at court or through out of court disposal (Figure 2). This is 1,194 more cases than the number disposed in the previous year (2022/23, 1,836) (Figure 1). The difference in number may, in part, be due to the time taken for a case to go through the criminal justice process. There will therefore have been a number of cases assessed as motivated by DA by PPS that related to offences prior to the introduction of the Act that were still in the system in 2022/23. However, this number will reduce as, with the passing of time, most DA related cases dealt with at courts will relate to offences that fall under the Act.

To illustrate this, an analysis of cases dealt with at courts show that, in 2022/23, a further 1,759 cases were prosecuted at courts, where the PPS considered that there was a DA motivation for an offence prior to the introduction of the Act. Figures for such cases had dropped to 1,028 in 2023/24.

Of all DA cases with offences that fell under the Act that were disposed in 2023/24, 90.0% (2,728) were dealt with at court and 10.0% (302) by out of court disposal. In 2022/23, 88.5% (1,625) were dealt with at court and 11.5% (211) by out of court disposal (Table 1 in accompanying spreadsheet).

4 Prosecutions and Convictions

Figure 1: Outcomes of domestic abuse related cases dealt with at court and by out of court disposal 2022/23.

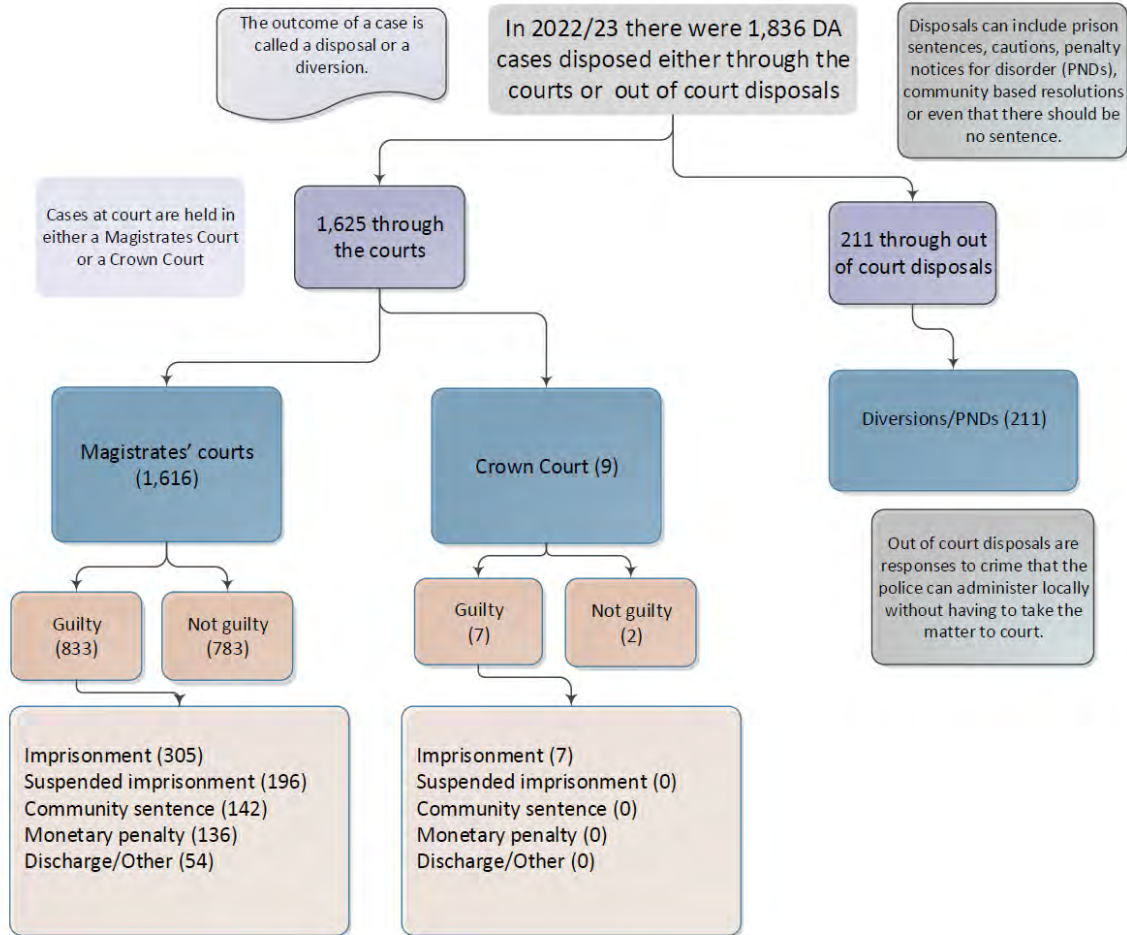
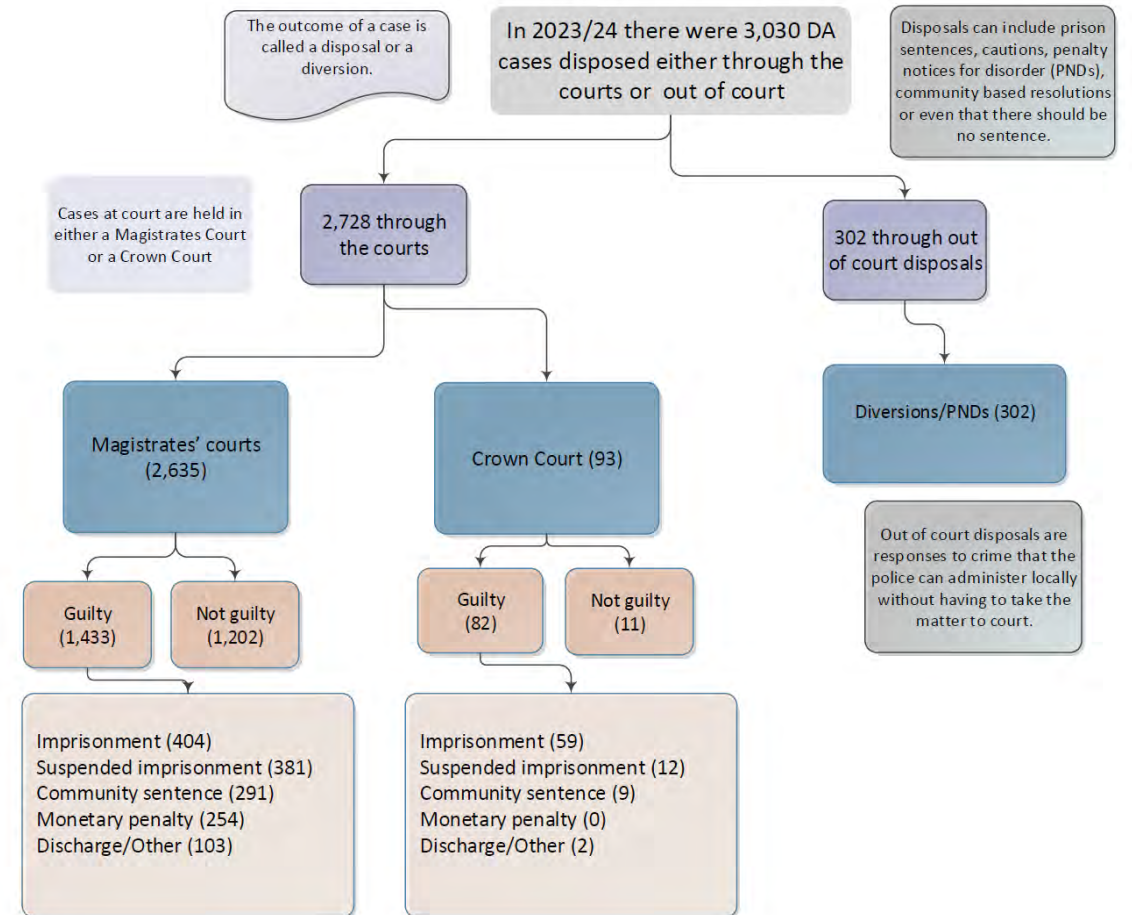


Figure 2: Outcomes of domestic abuse related cases dealt with at court and by out of court disposal 2023/24.



4 | Prosecutions and Convictions

4.1 Prosecutions and convictions overall

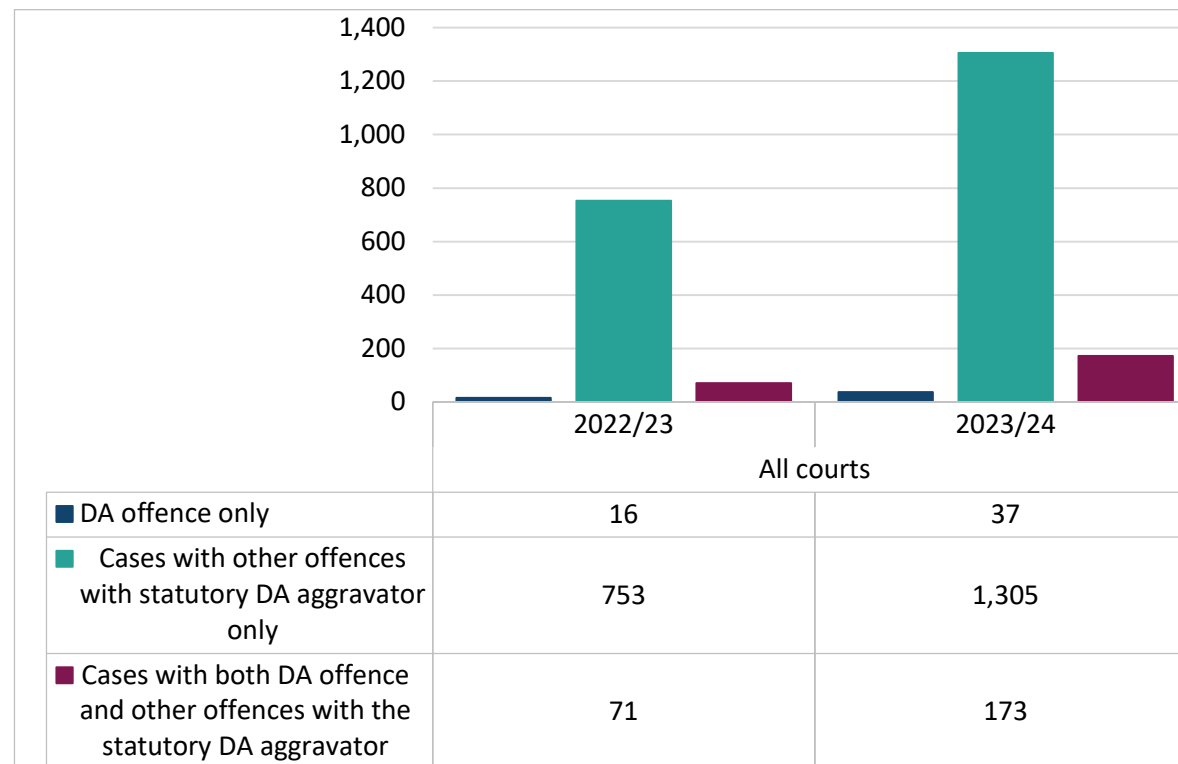
The number of cases prosecuted at courts in 2023/24 and which had at least one offence under the Act was 2,728, 67.9% more than in 2022/23 (1,625); 55.5% (1,515) and 51.7% (840) of these cases resulted in convictions in 2023/24 and 2022/23 respectively (Figure 3).

Of prosecutions completed during 2023/24 and 2022/23, 72 and 41 were for cases where the new DA offence was the only offence, with convictions in 51.4% (37) and 39.0% (16) of these cases respectively.

For other offences with the statutory DA aggravator, there were 2,332 prosecutions completed in 2023/24, resulting in 1,305 (56.0%) convictions. The number of convictions for the 1,456 similar cases in 2022/23 was 753 (51.7%).

There were a further 324 prosecutions in 2023/24 for cases which included both the new DA offence and offences with the statutory DA aggravator (128 in 2022/23). This resulted in 173 (53.4%) convictions in 2023/24, compared with 71 (55.5%) in 2022/23 (Table 2a in accompanying spreadsheet).

Figure 3: Convictions for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 dealt with at court, 2022/23 and 2023/24.



4 | Prosecutions and Convictions

4.2 Crown Court

There were 93 cases with at least one offence under the Act prosecuted at Crown Court in 2023/24. The figure for 2022/23 was 9 cases, though that number may have been low due to the time taken for cases to work their way through the justice system, given the new legislation came into force in February 2022. Of the cases dealt with in Crown Court in 2023/24, 82 (88.2%) resulted in a conviction. This compared to 7 (77.8%) convictions for cases completed in 2022/23.

Of the 2 cases dealt with at Crown Court in 2023/24, where the sole offence was the new DA offence, all resulted in a conviction (2 cases).

Cases where there were other offences with the statutory DA aggravator but no DA offence, resulted in a conviction in 89.3% (67) cases in 2023/24, compared to 87.5% (7) in 2022/23.

In cases with both the new DA offence and other offences with the statutory DA aggravator, there was a conviction in 81.3% (13) in 2023/24. There was only one such case in this category completed in 2022/23, though it did not result in a conviction. (Table 2b in accompanying spreadsheet).

4.3 Magistrates' courts

There were 2,635 cases with at least one offence under the Act prosecuted at magistrates' courts in 2023/24. The figure for 2022/23 was 1,616 cases, though as stated in the Crown Court section that number may also have been lower due to the time taken for cases to work their way through the justice system. Of the cases dealt with in magistrates' courts in 2023/24, 1,433 (54.4%) resulted in a conviction. This compared to 833 (51.5%) convictions for cases completed in 2022/23.

There was a conviction in 50.0% (35) of cases in 2023/24, where the sole offence prosecuted was the new DA offence. The equivalent figure for cases dealt with in 2022/23 was 39.0%(16).

Cases where there were other offences with the statutory DA aggravator but no DA offence, resulted in a conviction in 54.9% (1,238) of cases in 2023/24, compared to 51.5% (746) in 2022/23.

In cases with both the new DA offence and other offences with the statutory DA aggravator, there was a conviction in 51.9% (160) in 2023/24, compared to 55.9% (71) cases in 2022/23. (Table 2c in accompanying spreadsheet).

5 | Out of Court Disposals

5.1 About Out of Court Disposals

Non-court disposals allow the police to deal quickly and proportionately with low-level, often first-time, offending which could more appropriately be resolved without a prosecution at court. In Northern Ireland a range of options exist, such as cautionary disposals, informed warnings, completion of Public Prosecution Service (PPS) ordered Youth Conferencing Plans and resolution through the Community Based Restorative Justice scheme.

Additionally, PNDs were introduced in Northern Ireland on 6th June 2012, under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. PNDs are a fixed penalty designed to tackle low-level, anti-social and nuisance offending for offenders aged 18 and over and are issued for a range of minor offences. Unlike other out of court disposals, acceptance of a PND does not result in a criminal record.

Further information about out of court disposals is available in Appendix 1 and at the [nidirect website](#).

5.2 Out of courts disposals

In 2022/23, there were 320 cases dealt with by way of out of court disposal, where the PPS considered there was a DA motivation for an offence prior to the introduction of the Act. Figures for such cases had dropped to 241 in 2023/24. The number of out of court disposals (diversionary disposals and PNDs) for offences under the Act was 302 in 2023/24, up from 211 in 2022/23.

Of the 302 cases dealt with by out of court disposals in 2023/24, 4 were for cases where the new DA offence was the only offence in the case, 294 were for other offences with the statutory DA aggravator and 4 were for cases which included both the new DA offence and other offences with the statutory DA aggravator.

The 211 cases dealt with by out of court disposals in 2022/23 were all for cases with other offences with the statutory DA aggravator. (Table 1 in accompanying spreadsheet).

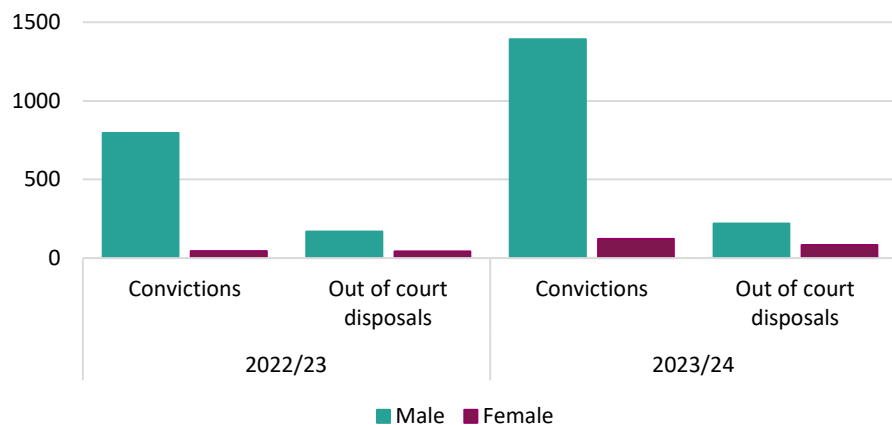
6 Defendants

6.1 Gender

In most cases where there was a conviction or out of court disposal for a case with offences under the Act, the defendant was male. In 2023/24, 91.9% (1,392) of those convicted in cases dealt with at courts with offences under the Act were male. The proportion for 2022/23 was 94.8% (796).

For cases dealt with by way of out of court disposal, in 2023/24, 72.5% (219) were cases where the defendant was male, whilst in 2022/23 80.1% (169) were cases where the defendant was male. (Figure 4) (Tables 3a and 3b in accompanying spreadsheet).

Figure 4: Convictions and out of court disposals for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 by gender of defendant, 2022/23 and 2023/24.



6.2 Age

Defendants in the 30 to 39 age band made up the highest proportion of defendants where there was a conviction or out of court disposal for a case with offences under the Act. In 2023/24, 37.9% (574) of defendants in DA related cases dealt with at courts were in this age range. The proportion for 2022/23 was 35.5% (298).

For cases dealt with by way of out of court disposal, in 2023/24, 23.2% (70) were cases where the defendant was aged 30 to 39, the equivalent figure in 2022/23 for such cases was 23.7% (50).

For DA related cases dealt with at courts, only 0.4% (6) were for cases where the defendant was aged under 18 in 2023/24 (0.7%, 6 in 2022/23), compared to 14.2% (43) in 2023/24 (12.3%, 26 in 2022/23) dealt with by way of out of court disposal. (Tables 4a and 4b in accompanying spreadsheet).

7 | Offence Category

7.1 Convictions at courts

The new DA offence falls into the Violence Against the Person (VAP) category, therefore all cases (34 in 2022/23; 77 in 2023/24) where the new DA offence was the main offence at disposal are categorised as VAP.

There were 1,438 cases in 2023/24, where the main offence at disposal was an other offence with the statutory DA aggravator. VAP was the main offence category in 867 (60.3%) of these cases, followed by Criminal Damage and Arson (19.5%; 280 cases) and Public Order (8.4%; 121 cases) (Figure 5).

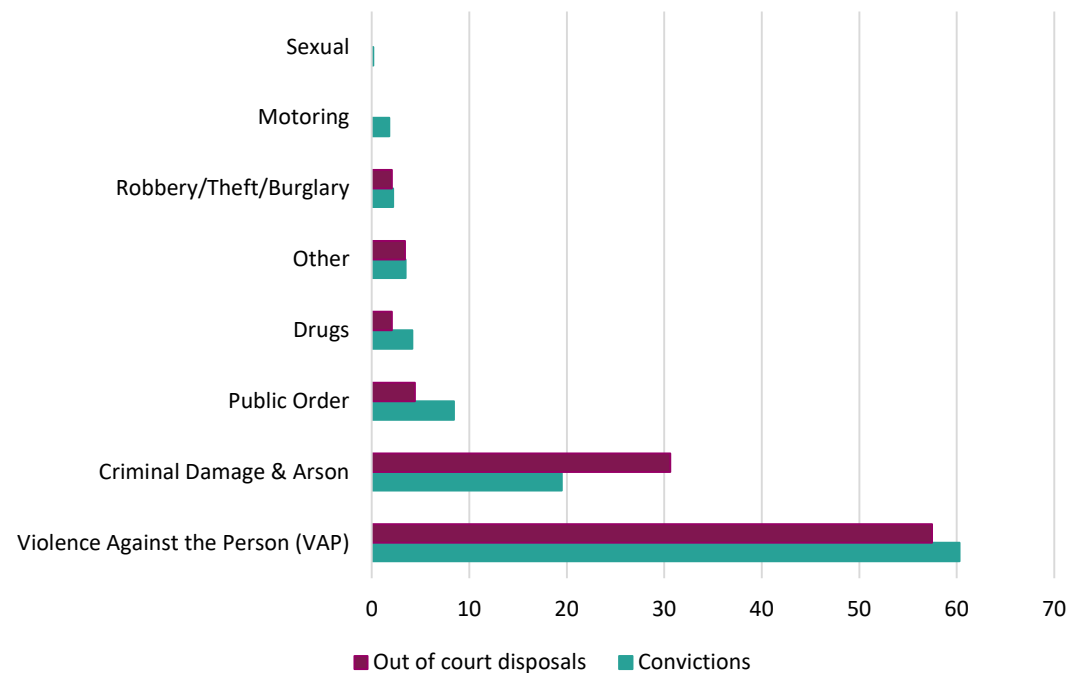
Comparative figures for 2022/23, were 806 cases in total, with VAP the main offence category in 461 (57.2%), followed by Criminal Damage and Arson category (22.0%; 177 cases) and Public Order (11.3%; 91 cases). (Table 5a in accompanying spreadsheet).

7.2 Out of courts disposals

Cases where the main disposal was an out of court diversionary disposal or a PND, and where the main offence was an other offence with the statutory DA aggravator, followed a similar pattern to those dealt with at courts. VAP was the main offence category in 57.5% (169 out of 294) and 59.2% (125 out of 211 cases) of cases dealt with in 2023/24 and 2022/23 respectively (Figure 5).

This was followed by Criminal Damage and Arson (2023/24: 30.6%, 90 cases; 2022/23: 33.2%, 70 cases) and Public Order (2023/24: 4.4%, 13 cases; 2022/23: 2.8%, 6 cases). (Table 5b in accompanying spreadsheet).

Figure 5: Percentage of convictions and out of court disposals for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 by offence category, 2023/24.



8 | Convictions by Main Disposal Type

8.1 All Courts

In 2023/24, where there was a conviction in a case with a DA related offence (whether the new DA offence or another offence with the statutory DA aggravator under the Act), at all courts, the most common type of disposal was a custodial one (30.6%, 463 cases). This was the same for 2022/23 (37.1%, 312 cases). In 2023/24, at all courts, 25.9% (393) of cases were dealt with by way of suspended sentence, while, in 2022/23, the proportion was 23.3% (196 cases). A community sentence was the main disposal in 19.8% (300) of cases in 2023/24 and in 16.9% (142) of cases in 2022/23. A monetary penalty was the main disposal in 16.8% (254) of cases in 2023/24 and in 16.2% (136) of cases in 2022/23. Other penalties, such as a discharge, were the main disposal in 6.9% (105) of cases in 2023/24 and in 6.4% (54) of cases in 2022/23. (Table 6a in accompanying spreadsheet).

8.2 Crown Court

In 2023/24, where there was a conviction in a case with a DA related offence under the Act, at Crown Court, the most common type of disposal was a custodial one (72.0%, 59 cases). In 2022/23, there were only 7 cases with an offence under the Act completed at Crown Court and all resulted in a custodial disposal.

In 2023/24, at Crown Court, 14.6% (12) of cases were dealt with by way of suspended sentence. A community sentence was the main disposal in 11.0% (9) of cases in 2023/24 whilst no cases resulted in a monetary penalty being imposed as the main disposal. Other penalties, such as a discharge, were the main disposal in 2.4% (2) of cases in 2023/24. (Table 6b in accompanying spreadsheet).

8.3 Magistrates' Courts

In 2023/24, where there was a conviction in a case with a DA related offence under the Act, at magistrates' courts, the most common type of disposal was a custodial one (28.2%, 404 cases). This was the same for 2022/23 (36.6%, 305 cases). In 2023/24, at magistrates' courts, 26.6% (381) of cases were dealt with by way of suspended sentence, while, in 2022/23, the proportion was 23.5% (196 cases). A community sentence was the main disposal in 20.3% (291) of cases in 2023/24 and in 17.0% (142) of cases in 2022/23. A monetary penalty was the main disposal in 17.7% (254) of cases in 2023/24 and in 16.3% (136) of cases in 2022/23. Other penalties, such as a discharge, were the main disposal in 7.2% (103) of cases in 2023/24 and in 6.5% (54) of cases in 2022/23. (Table 6c in accompanying spreadsheet).

9 | Aggravators

9.1 Child aggravators attached to the DA offence

As already stated, the Act provides for two child aggravators that can be attached to the new DA offence. The first aggravator applies where the victim is under 18 (Section 8) and the second where a relevant child is involved (Section 9) i.e. the abuse is witnessed by, makes use of, threatens or has an adverse impact on a person under 18.

There were 5 cases prosecuted at all courts in 2022/23, where there was a child victim (Section 8). A conviction was the outcome in 3 of these cases with the aggravator proved in less than 3. In 2023/24, there were 3 cases prosecuted at court but none of these resulted in a conviction.

There were 6 cases prosecuted at all courts in 2022/23, where there was a relevant child involved (Section 9). A conviction was the outcome in 5 of these cases, with the aggravator proved in 4. In 2023/24, there were 24 prosecutions with convictions in 17 of these cases and the aggravator proved in 8 of them. (Table 7 in accompanying spreadsheet)^b.

^b Figures in this section do not sum to the total number of cases, as there will be cases that have more than one aggravator attached.

9.2 Aggravators attached to other non DA offences

The Act also introduced a DA aggravator (section 15) which can be applied to any offence other than the new DA offence. There were 1,584 cases prosecuted at all courts in 2022/23, where there was an aggravator, as specified under Section 15. A conviction was the outcome in 824 of these cases and the DA statutory aggravator was proved in 600 cases. In 2023/24, for cases containing offences with an associated aggravator under Section 15, there were 2,656 prosecutions. There were convictions in 1,478 of these cases and the statutory DA aggravator was proved in 1,108 cases. (Table 7 in accompanying spreadsheet)^b.

9.3 DA offence cases without aggravators

The Act also allows for prosecution of the new DA offence where there are no relevant child aggravators under Section 8 or Section 9 of the legislation. There were 158 such cases prosecuted at all courts in 2022/23. A conviction was the outcome in 79 of these cases. In 2023/24, for cases containing the new DA offence with no associated child aggravator, there were 369 prosecutions. There were convictions in 193 of these cases. (Table 7 in accompanying spreadsheet)^b.

10 | Enhanced Sentences and Special Measures

10.1 Enhanced sentences

The Act allows that, where aggravation of an offence has been proven, whether by virtue of the child aggravators and/or the general DA aggravator, the Judge may increase sentencing for the offence up to the maximum penalty available.

In 2023/24, a sentence was enhanced following conviction for a DA related offence under the Act in 154 cases. The main disposal was a custodial sentence in 67 of these cases and a suspended sentence in 46 of the cases. A community sentence was the main outcome in 28 cases where the sentence was enhanced in 2023/24 and in 8 cases where the main disposal was a monetary penalty.

In 2022/23, a sentence was enhanced following conviction for a DA related offence under the Act in 90 cases. The main disposal was a custodial sentence in 46 of these cases and a suspended sentence in 23 of the cases. A community sentence was the main outcome in 13 cases where the sentence was enhanced in 2023/24. (Table 8 in accompanying spreadsheet).

10.2 Special Measures

The Act allows for the extension of special measures, as listed under the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. This allows for special measures to be put in place for 'witnesses eligible for assistance on grounds of fear or distress about testifying'.

Special measures were put in place in 77 cases in 2022/23 and in 206 cases in 2023/24. These related to 22 cases dealt with at Crown Court in 2023/24 and fewer than 3 cases in 2022/23. At magistrates' courts, special measures were put in place in 184 cases in 2023/24 and in more than 3 cases in 2022/23. (Table 9 in accompanying spreadsheet).

11 | Case Processing Times

11.1 All courts

The efficiency of the criminal justice system is important for victims and witnesses, and their families and communities. Information on the average time taken to complete a DA related case, in comparison to all cases dealt with at courts allows those involved to assess the success of processes in place for DA related cases. Additionally, some, complex cases take a long time to complete and, because of this, it is useful to show not just an average processing time, but the time taken to process the bulk of cases. Therefore, the length of time in which 80% and 90% of cases are completed is also reported. The time taken for a case to complete is measured from the date the offence was reported up to its completion in court. The form of average used is the median.

In 2023/24, the average (median) time taken for a case with at least one DA offence under the Act, in relation to all courts, was 139 days. This is an increase of 28.7% from the median of 108 days taken in 2022/23 but, in both years, the median time taken is lower than the time taken for all criminal cases (190 in 2023/24 and 206 in 2022/23).

In respect of the time by which 80% of cases were completed, the number of days taken was 268 days in 2023/24. This is an increase of 43.3% from 2022/23 (187 days). However, both figures are still lower than the figures for time taken for 80% of all criminal cases to be completed (402 days in 2023/24 and 494 days in 2022/23) (Table 10a in accompanying spreadsheet).

11 | Case Processing Times

11.2 Crown Court

The numbers of cases with an offence under the Act dealt with at Crown Court in both 2023/24 and 2022/23 were low and this should be taken into account when considering the case processing times reported in the following section.

In 2023/24, the average (median) time taken for a case with at least one offence under the Act, in relation to Crown Court, was 403 days. This is an increase of 39.4% from the median of 289 days taken in 2022/23 but, in both years, the median time taken is lower than the time taken for all criminal cases (702 in 2023/24 and 756 in 2022/23).

In respect of the time by which 80% of these cases were completed, the number of days taken was 521 days in 2023/24. Due to the small number of relevant cases completed at Crown Court in 2022/23, it is not appropriate to make a comparison. However, the figure is still lower than the figure for time taken for 80% of all criminal cases to be completed in 2023/24 (1,324 days) (Table 10b in accompanying spreadsheet).

11.3 Magistrates' courts

In 2023/24, the average (median) time taken for a case with at least one offence under the Act, in relation to magistrates' courts, was 135 days. This is an increase of 25.0% from the median of 108 days taken in 2022/23 but, in both years, the median time taken is lower than the time taken for all criminal cases (176 in 2023/24 and 189 in 2022/23).

In respect of the time by which 80% of cases were completed, the number of days taken was 251 days in 2023/24. This is an increase of 36.4% from 2022-23 (184 days).

However, both figures are still lower than the figures for time taken for 80% of all criminal cases to be completed (351 days in 2023/24 and 435 days in 2022/23) (Table 10c in accompanying spreadsheet).

12 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

What counts as a prosecution/conviction/diversionary disposal?

The data included in the bulletin are based on those for whom court proceedings were completed, or who had an out of court disposal recorded in Northern Ireland during the period of the report. The figures reported relate only to those cases with an offence covered under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, whether or not that offence is the main offence at disposal. They do not include cases which may have had a DA motivation prior to the introduction of the legislation on 21 February 2022. The bulletin counts criminal proceedings brought to court by the Public Prosecution Service on behalf of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), other law enforcement bodies and breaches of community sentences brought by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. The numbers of prosecutions completed are split into those where a conviction followed and those which did not result in a guilty finding. Prosecutions brought by government departments, other public bodies and private individuals are not included. The Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland publishes details of the [prosecution process](#) in Northern Ireland on its website, detailing paths through the justice system, whether a case is dealt with by way of court disposal or by an out of court disposal.

For the purposes of this bulletin, out of court disposals include those that result in a criminal record (diversionary disposals) and those that do not (Penalty Notices for Disorder, (PNDs)). Diversionary disposals are those instances where an offender is subject to a caution, informed warning, a youth conference plan, or is subject to the community based restorative justice scheme. Police-issued PNDs are a fixed penalty designed to tackle low-level, anti-social and nuisance offending for offenders aged 18 and over and are issued for a range of minor offences. They were introduced in Northern Ireland on the 6th June 2012 as a result of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. PNDs provide police with a swift financial punishment to deal with misbehaviour and a practical deterrent to future re-offending. Further information on PNDs can be accessed at the [nidirect website](#).

12 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

Case Processing time - What counts as a case?

The figures reported in this bulletin relate to cases dealt with at court in the period specified, where the case was prosecuted by the PPS on behalf of PSNI and other law enforcement bodies. For the purposes of the statistics presented in this publication, a case may be considered to commence when an offence is first reported to, or detected by, the PSNI or an other law enforcement body. The case then proceeds through the various stages of the criminal justice system until it is considered dealt with, as a result of a prosecution at court. The time period measured therefore, is the number of calendar days from Offence Reported Date to Courts Disposal Date, for cases dealt with at courts in the 12 months ending in the year specified in the tables. Court recess dates are not taken into account.

Cases dealt with through an out of court disposal, or which do not reach the end of the full court process for the reasons listed above, do not go through the standard stages of the court system and, as such, are not directly comparable with cases that have gone through the judicial system. They are therefore excluded from these tables. Similarly, cases relating to breaches of court orders previously imposed are excluded from these tables, as they relate to a court order made in relation to a previous offence and have not proceeded through the various stages in the criminal justice process in the same way that cases relating to other offences may have. Due to the exclusions outlined above, the figures in this publication, therefore, should not be considered as the total number of cases dealt with in courts in the years concerned, rather, only as the number of cases in the dataset upon which the calculations derived for the case processing times tables in this publication are based.

12 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

What counts as an offence?

Where an offender has had an out of court disposal imposed or been prosecuted for, or convicted of, several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted. For cases brought before a court, the offence counted and used in the compilation of figures in this report is the one on which the court took its final decision. For out of court disposals, the offence counted is the one recorded at the time the out of court disposal was issued and, where applicable, subsequently recorded as completed with the PPS.

In relation to convictions, the principal offence counted is normally the one that draws the most severe disposal at conviction. Offences for which a defendant is convicted are not necessarily the same as those for which the defendant was initially proceeded against, as charges may be amended during the course of a case. The decision recorded is that reached by the court and takes no account of any subsequent appeal to a higher court. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office; the Department of Justice has developed a [methodology](#) applicable to Northern Ireland based on these. Further, these statistics are compiled on the basis of the date at which a defendant's case is considered dealt with by the justice system, rather than the date at which offences are reported or detected, as is the case for recorded crime statistics reported by the PSNI. More detail on recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland is available in the relevant [User Guide](#) on the PSNI website.

12 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

Data source and coverage

The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were extracted primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV), held on Causeway. CRV utilises data that originated in the PSNI, PPS and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Causeway is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations in Northern Ireland.

These statistics are produced on a financial year basis. This means that they match the reporting periods of police statistics in relation to DA and also the reporting period for case processing time statistics published by the Department of Justice (DoJ). Further, this allows for efficient sequencing of work by the small team that prepare these statistics, as they are also responsible for producing statistics on Prosecutions and Convictions at Courts, First Time Entrants to the Justice System, Case Processing Time Statistics and Youth Engagement statistics in Northern Ireland.

The court structure of Northern Ireland does not equate to the court structures of England and Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland, and therefore no comparisons have been made between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland.

A summary of the strength and weaknesses of the data are included on the following page.

12 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

Data strengths and limitations

Strengths

- Causeway is an integrated messaging system specifically designed to support information sharing between the five main NI Criminal Justice organisations. The information recorded within the individual organisations is used to manage day to day business and to communicate between the other organisations so needs to be highly accurate.
- The system works well and is trusted by the staff who use it. It is reliable and needs minimal maintenance.
- A number of key personnel are involved in managing Causeway and have developed a high level of competence and experience of the system.
- The data are sourced from an administrative data system and therefore are a complete record of all cases (i.e. are not based on a sample). Key fields used for the generation of these statistics are complete and logical.
- Processes and systems have been developed and refined over the years to address any quality concerns that emerged and the statisticians have developed a complex and detailed series of validation checks which are applied to the data to ensure any anomalies are corrected.

Limitations

- The system depends on staff within five separate Criminal Justice organisations inputting details and updating records on their own systems. While there is the potential for problems to occur if details aren't updated on a timely basis or if input errors occur, the nature of the information make accuracy critical.