

Street Survey of People Living in the North of England

During July and August 2017 a face-to-face street survey of 2218 adults living in the North of England was conducted in 22 different on-street locations. At least 110 people were interviewed in each of the 11 police force areas involved in the N8 Policing Research Partnership. The objective of the survey was to capture more in-depth information about people’s views on police and universities working together. This latest update from the public engagement strand provides an overview of the top-line findings from the survey.

How much interest do the public have in police issues?

Respondents were asked to indicate how much interest they had in issues to do with the police. Figure 1 (below) provides an overview of the percentage of respondents selecting each response option. More than half of respondents said they no or very little interest in police issues. Only 15% said they had quite a lot of interest or thought about police almost every day.

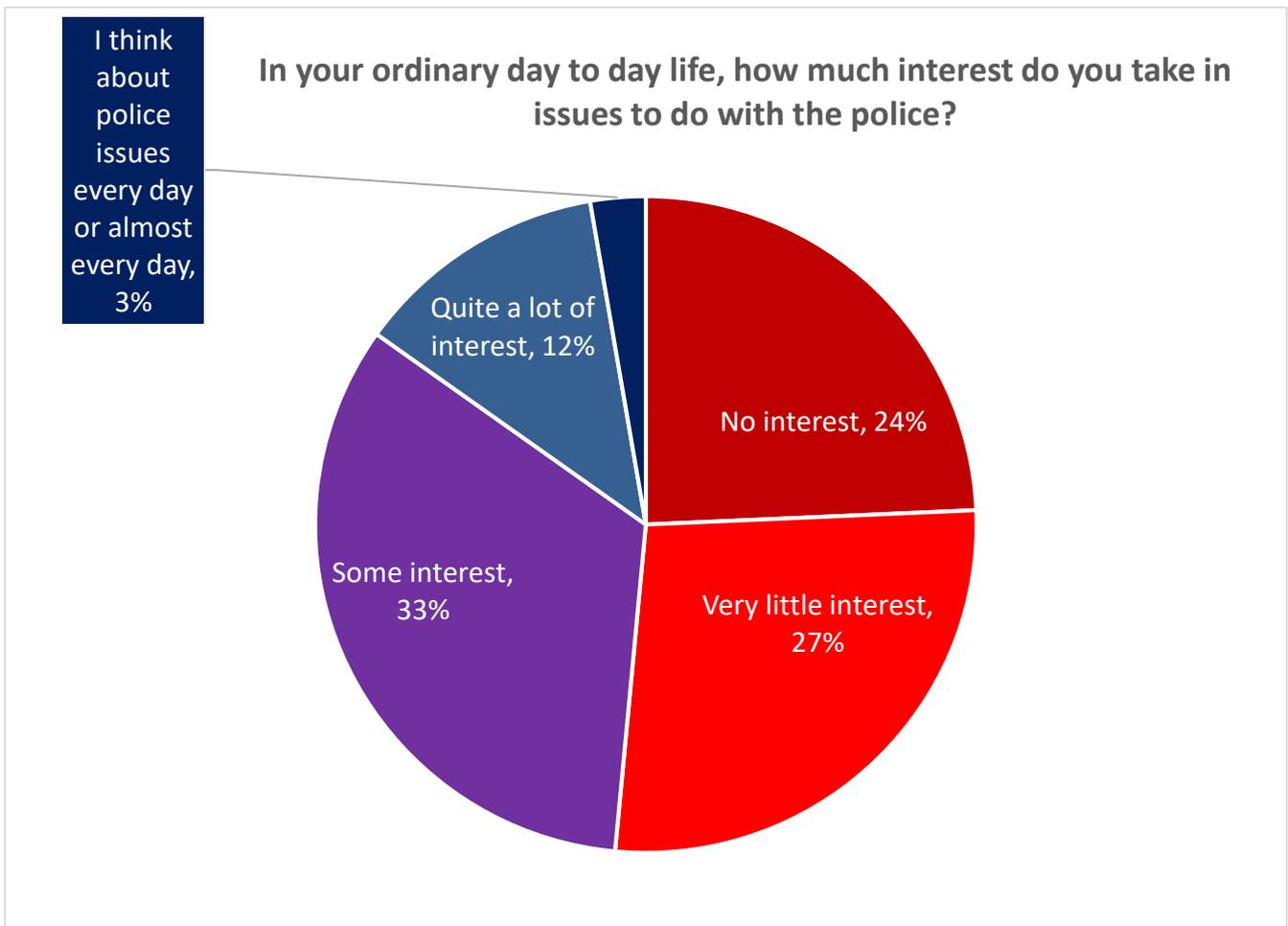


Figure 1: In your ordinary day to day life, how much interest do you take in issues to do with the police?

13% of respondents with quite a lot of interest in police issues said this was because they had been recent victims of crime, 16% said it was because they did not think the police were dealing with things they should be dealing with and 13% either worked for (or had worked for) the police or had a personal connection to somebody who did. Amongst those with some, little or no interest in the police 14% said this was because there was no point in taking an interest as they could not change anything. 75% of respondents who said they had no or very little interest in police issues said this was because it did not affect them or their family, or they only thought about the police if they had a problem.

Older people were slightly more likely than younger people to say they had quite a lot of interest in or thought about police issues almost every day. Almost 60% of 18-29 year olds said they had no or very little interest in police issues. There were no significant differences in the levels of interest shown by women as compared to men, or between people from different ethnic groups.

What are the issues the public most expects the police to be dealing with?

All respondents were asked to identify up to three issues that mattered to them personally and that they expected police to deal with. They were not given any prompts in relation to this: their responses were recorded as free text and subsequently coded under relevant categories. Figure 2 (below) shows the 12 most frequently identified issues.

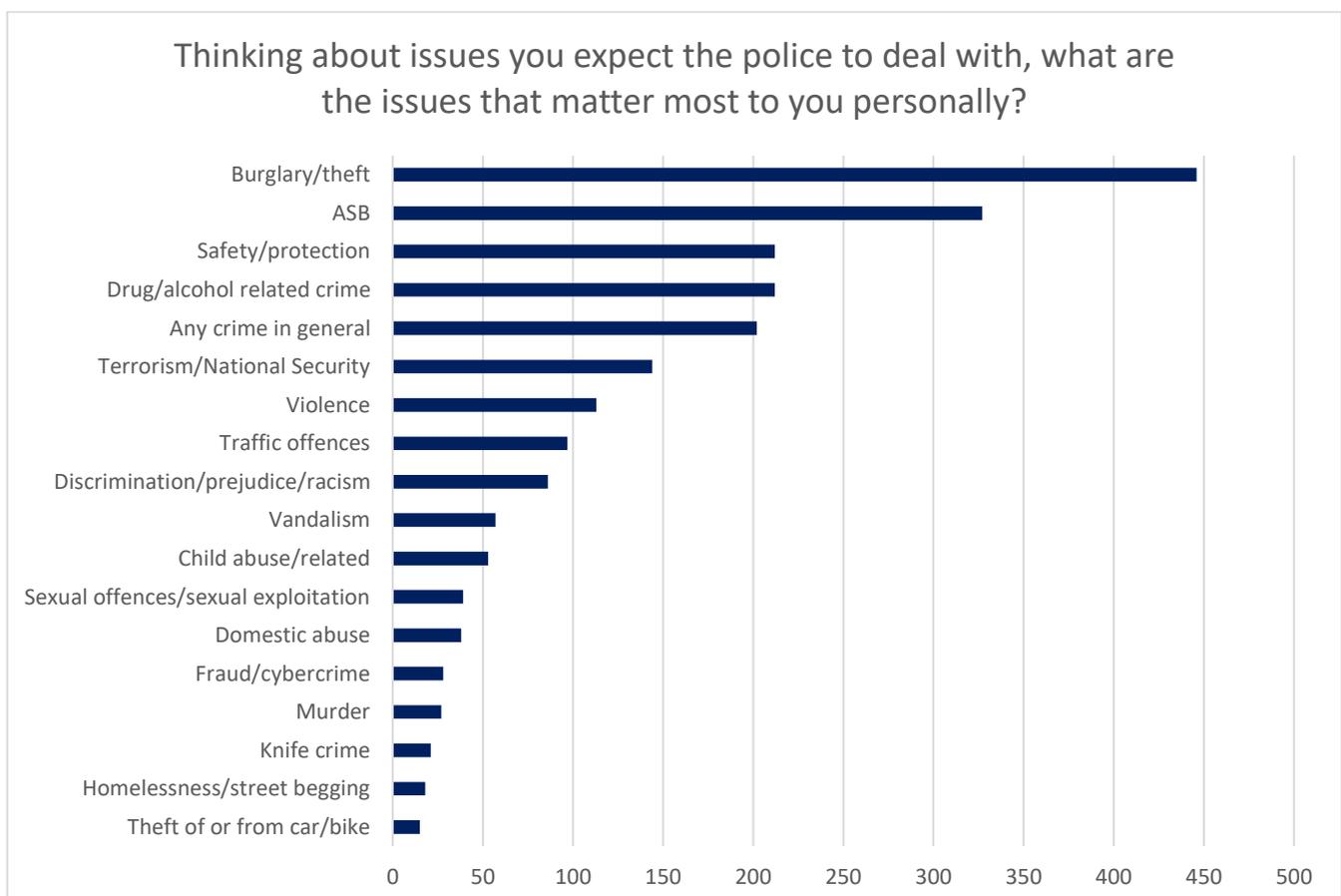


Figure 2: Thinking about issues you expect the police to deal with, what are the issues that matter most to you personally?

The data indicate that many respondents were concerned about acquisitive crimes, such as burglary, and about various kinds of anti-social behaviour. It is also clear that there are overlaps between these different categories of concern that it would require more detailed qualitative research to unpick. For example, just over 200 respondents expressed a general concern about safety and protection. This category encompassed concerns about the safety of both the home/property and person, and clearly could overlap with concerns about burglary or car crime, as well as about violence, terrorism and perhaps even traffic offences.

Do the public think the police have the necessary understanding to be effective in dealing with these issues?

Whilst most respondents indicated that they felt the police had the necessary understanding to be effective in dealing with the issues that mattered to them, a significant minority (about 1 in 3 respondents in relation to the main issues) indicated that they did not think police had the understanding to be effective. It is also interesting to note that the proportion of respondents who stated that police did not have the necessary understanding to be effective was higher for some types of issues than other. For example, whilst 77% of respondents identifying violence as an important issue felt the police had the necessary understanding to be effective, only 58% of respondents identifying child abuse/protection and domestic abuse as important felt the same. This suggests that confidence in police effectiveness is lower in relation to certain types of issue. Members of the public who are particularly concerned about these issues may be likely to support the police seeking research-informed guidance from other organisations (such as universities) about how they approach the issues. This will be explored further in subsequent analysis of the data.

Do the public think police and universities should work together?

There was strong support for the statement that “University researchers can produce knowledge to improve policing” and that “Police and University researchers should work together to make policing more effective”. There was also a significant degree of support for the statement that “the police know better than anyone else how best to do their job” (65% agreed). However, rather than reading this latter result as an indication that the public are sceptical of the idea that university researchers might have something to add to policing (which the other results clearly refute), we can probably understand this result as at least partly an artefact of an imperfect research method. The positioning of this statement at the beginning of this group of statements and its simplistic phrasing which has a common-sense appeal (after all nobody in any job likes the idea that someone who is not doing the job knows better than them how to do it) probably contributed to the high level of agreement it received.

As Figure 3 (below) shows, whilst the public may approve of police and universities working together, there is also significant public interest in research on police being independent, so that researchers are not unnecessarily prevented from studying aspects of police organisations, or in making their findings public when they do so. Respondents indicated their support for the idea that police and university

researchers should work together, that researchers should have freedom to carry out independent research and publish their findings, and that such researchers can help to improve the police.

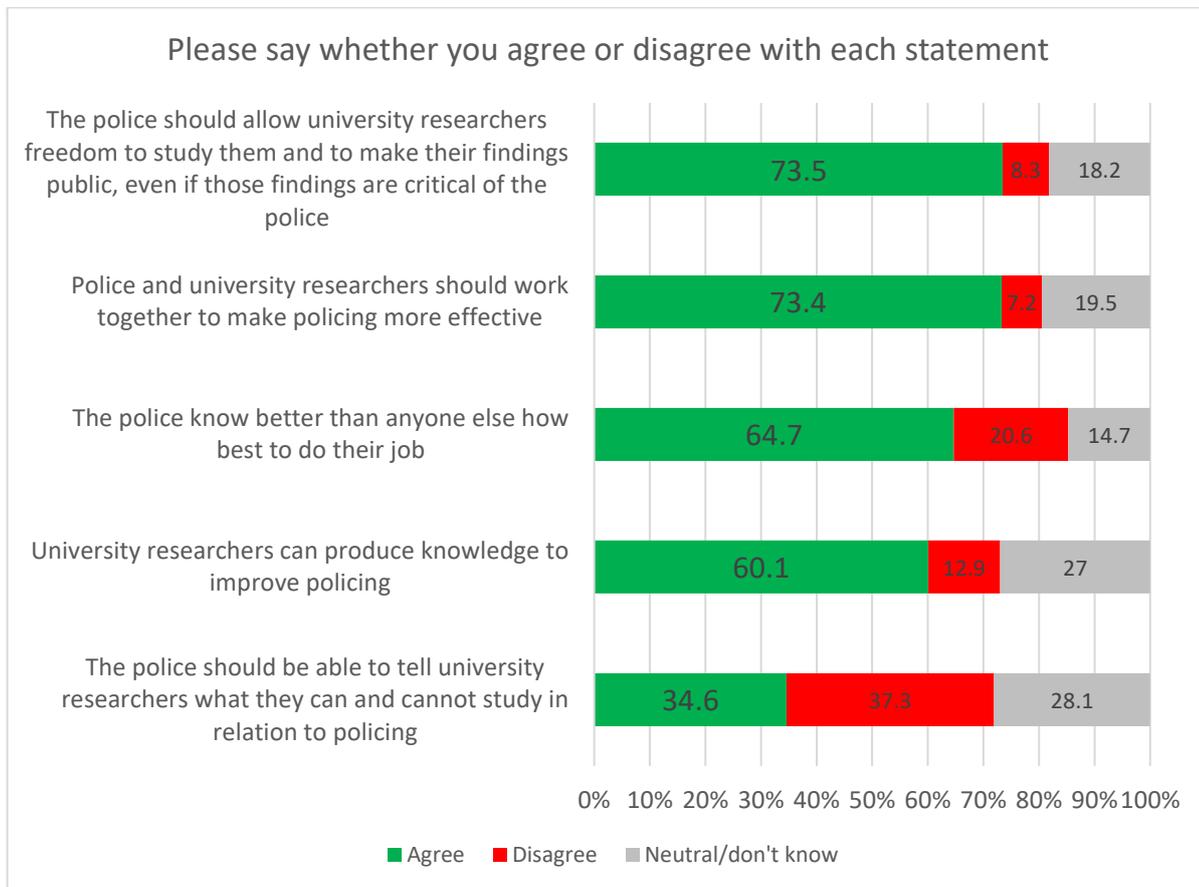


Figure 3: Please say whether you agree or disagree with each of the statements

Do different parts of the public think differently about this issue?

There were some clear differences between different groups of respondents in terms of their views about whether and how police and universities ought to work together. The main statistically significant differences are outlined below.

Age

Respondents aged 75 and over were significantly more likely than respondents from the other age groups to agree with the statement that “The police know better than anyone else how best to do their job” (77% agreed, but for all other age groups the percentage agreeing was between 62% and 64%). This oldest age group were also significantly less likely to agree that “University researchers can produce knowledge to improve policing” (only 47% agreed with this, whereas for all other groups at least 57% agreed). The youngest respondents (those in the 18-29 age group) were significantly more likely to agree with this statement (67% of them agreed). This pattern in relation to age was repeated in relation to the statement that “Police and University researchers should work together to make policing more effective”. This difference is likely to reflect differences in the educational experiences of different age groups, as those aged 75 and over were significantly less likely to have achieved higher

educational qualifications and indeed 59% of these respondents said they had no qualifications. It is interesting to note that although the oldest respondents were also the least likely to agree that “the police should allow University researchers freedom to study them and to make their findings public, even if those findings are critical of the police”, more than 2 in 3 of these oldest respondents still agreed with this statement. Not having attended university or obtained higher educational qualifications does not appear to significantly diminish support for independent and potentially critical research on police.

Gender

Female respondents were more likely to agree with the statement that “The police know better than anyone else how best to do their job” (69% agreed, compared to 61% of male respondents). They were also less likely to oppose the idea that the police should be able to set research agendas for university researchers (only 34% of them disagreed with this, compared to 41% of male respondents). There were no significant differences between the educational qualifications gained by the male and female respondents.

Ethnicity

There were no statistically significant differences in the responses of people from different ethnic groups to the questions about how police and universities should work together.

Conclusion

This update offers an overview of the top-line findings from this survey. Further analysis will enable us to probe the data in more detail. The key messages from this initial analysis though are:

- Only a minority of people have a significant level of interest in policing. Most people are only interested when it affects them or people close to them.
- Acquisitive crimes such as burglary or theft, and anti-social behaviour are the issues that people are most likely to mention when asked about the police issues that matter to them personally.
- A significant minority of people (about 1 in 3) do not think that the police have the necessary understanding to be effective in dealing with the issues that matter to them. Confidence appears to be lower in relation to some issues compared to others (for example child abuse/protection and domestic abuse).
- Across different parts of the public there is strong support for the idea that police and universities should work together, coupled with a clear preference for researchers to be given the freedom to do research on police organisations and publish their findings, even when these are critical of police.

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