



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Stop & Search Survey Summary Findings

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Background

The online survey

As part of the work carried out by the stop and search working group regarding children and young people (formed in November 2020), an online survey regarding stop and search was designed in conjunction with several external bodies and launched by PSNI on the 30th of April 2021, closing on the 2nd of July 2021. On closure, the survey had been completed 3235 times. The survey was targeted at people between the ages of 11 and 18 years and was designed to find out how children and young people feel about stop and search and to give them an opportunity to share their experiences, thoughts and opinions, both good and bad. The social media plan carried the message *"We are asking young people aged between 11 and 18 years old to take part in a survey to tell us how they are affected by stop and search and what we can do to improve our engagement with them."*

Before discussing the result, it is worth noting that any survey has limitations. For example, persons who have particular issues or views about stop & search may be more likely to participate than those who do not. This may result in non-response bias, which occurs when some respondents who have been asked to participate in a survey do not respond. Non-response bias may cause the results of a survey to be more non-representative of your study group, because those persons who did respond disproportionately possessed certain traits/views which affect the analysis. Also, it may be possible for a respondent to have complete this survey more than once.

Summary of respondents

Even though the survey was targeted at people between the ages of 11 and 18 years, it is clear from the results that the younger respondents engaged less. The largest age group represented in the survey was 18 years and engagement flowed downwards as age reduced. A good representation was achieved with regards to gender, with around 51% of respondents indicating that they were male and 44% female. Regarding community background, 45% of respondents indicated that their background was that of the Protestant community and 39% Roman Catholic community. The largest single council area represented in the respondents was Derry & Strabane with the lowest being South Belfast (although when taken as a whole, Belfast achieved the highest response representation).

Summary of results

Only 34% of respondents (some 870 people) indicated that they had actually been subjected to a stop search by police, however, the survey was designed to gather the views and opinions of young people regarding stop search, meaning that valuable information was still captured from the remaining 66% of survey respondents.

Alarmingly, 38% of respondents stated that they were not at all aware of the reasons why they may be stopped by police nor their rights if they are stopped, along with 44% indicating that they were not at all aware of the information a police officer should provide them with if they intend to carry out a stop search. A point of note was that 41% of respondents indicated that they thought an adult

needed to be present before a person under 18 years of age can be stopped and searched by Police. These responses may indicate that general awareness around stop and search powers is low amongst young people, which may lead to increasingly negative views / experiences.

32% of respondents indicated that they have been stop searched once within the last 12 months, with wide ranging data being provided around the amount of stop searches others had experienced (analytical support is required to explore this area in more depth).

Unfortunately, 77% of survey respondents described their experience of stop search as negative whilst 65% of respondents described the officers who searched them as not polite, 64% as not respectful, 55% as not professional, 66% as not fair, 50% as not calm and 69% as not understanding.

Furthermore, 41% of respondent stated that the officer who searched them did not explain what they were looking for, 66% said that the officer did not provide their details, 67% said that they were not informed of their rights and 72% said that they were not informed that they had the right to ask questions during their search. These feelings apparently resulted in 65% of respondents stating that they had decreased confidence in the local police as a result of their stop search encounter and 72% felt that their search was not justified. Only 58% indicated that they were aware that they could make a complaint, if they felt a stop search was not carried out fairly.

Importantly, 42% of respondents indicated that they did not feel that young people in their community were stop searched fairly, however, 50% did feel that stop & search was a good way to detect and prevent crime.

When asked "What approaches other than stop and search in its present form would be effective in tackling crime?" there were a variety of results produced. For example, 31% of respondents indicated that relationship-building with communities was highly effective, 36% felt that building relationships with police through schools was highly effective and 29% felt that operational tactics to focus on places and not people would be highly effective. Surprisingly, 26% indicated that police engaging young people through social media was not at all effective.

This report provides summary findings from the data gathered during the survey process and a request is now made for analytical support to provide a more in depth analysis of the survey results. Analytical support is required due to the variety of results across the survey questions and due to the fact that a large amount of free text narrative has been provided in response to / additionally to many of the survey questions. *(An in depth analysis of the free text responses has now been carried out and the results of this are outlined below).*

Summary of respondents

Out of the respondents that completed the survey regarding age:

2.53% - 11 years old
4.36% - 12 years old
6.00% - 13 years old
9.74% - 14 years old
14.50% - 15 years old
16.85% - 16 years old
17.06% - 17 years old
28.96% - 18 years old

Gender:

51.49% - male
44.16% - female
1.44% selected "other"
2.91% selected "prefer not to say"

Community Background:

45.02% - Protestant Community
39.24% - Roman Catholic Community
10.82% selected "Prefer not to say"
4.92% selected "Other" (but specified in free text comments)

Council area:

9.93% - Antrim & Newtownabbey
9.68% - Ards & North Down
11.72% - Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon
8.57% - Causeway Coast & Glens
12.19% - Derry & Strabane
5.45% - Fermanagh & Omagh
6.06% - Lisburn & Castlereagh
6.45% - Mid & East Antrim
6.77% - Mid Ulster
7.31% - Newry Mourne & Down
3.30% - North Belfast
2.44% - South Belfast
4.77% - East Belfast
5.38% - West Belfast

Summary findings

When asked “Have you ever been stopped and search by the police?”

34.17% - Yes

65.83% - No

When asked “Are you aware of the reasons a PSNI officer can stop you, including your rights if you are stopped and searched by the PSNI?”

18.64% - Very aware

43.54% - Somewhat aware

37.82% - Not at all aware

When asked “How aware are you of the information a police officer should provide you with if they intend to stop and search you?”

17.97% - Very aware

38.35% - Somewhat aware

43.69% - Not at all aware

When asked “If you are a child or young person under the age of 18 an adult does not need to be present before the police can carry out a stop and search. Do you think this statement is:”

36.83% - True

41.03% - False

When asked “How many times have you been stopped and searched in the last 12 months?”

22.56% - I was stopped and searched over a year ago

32.18% - Once

17.67% - Twice

7.61% - 3 Times

5.46% - 4 Times

2.30% - 5 Times

12.21% - More than 5 times

When asked “How would you describe your experience of Stop and Search?”

76.71% - Negative

14.26% - Positive

9.02% - other

A free text narrative was also given via 365 responses (this makes up approx. 11% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 365 free text response were broken down into 9 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Uncomfortable, intimidating or frightening (12%)
- Waste of time (3%)
- Neutral (8%)
- Unrelated (14%)
- Harassed (3%)
- Stereotyped by police or prejudice towards certain group (6%)
- Overall positive (8%)
- No reason for being stopped and searched or no reason given by police (17%)
- Police were unprofessional and /or aggressive (29%)

When asked “How would you describe the behaviour of the police officer who conducted your stop and search?”

	Yes	No	Can't remember
Polite	29.30%	64.72%	5.98%
Respectful	30.23%	63.66%	6.10%
Professional	36.60%	54.47%	8.93%
Fair	28.47%	66.13%	5.40%
Calm manner	44.80%	50.07%	5.12%
Understanding	24.71%	69.44%	5.85%

When asked “Thinking about your most recent experience of stop and search, please answer the following questions.”

	Yes	No	can't remember
The officer explained what they were looking for	55.09%	40.55%	4.36%
The officer provided their details	23.11%	66.42%	10.47%
You were informed about your rights during the stop and search	23.26%	66.57%	10.17%
You were informed that you had the right to ask questions during the stop and search	16.28%	72.09%	11.63%

When asked “Has your stop and search affected your confidence in the local police?”

Increased confidence	6.97%
No change	28.30%
Decreased confidence	64.73%

A free text narrative was also given via 224 responses (this makes up approx. 7% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 224 free text response were broken down into 7 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Overall it was a positive experience and I understand why it had to happen (6%)
- It discriminates and harasses certain groups in the community (12%)
- No confidence, respect or trust in the police – can be unprofessional and/or have the wrong attitude (21%)
- Yes, it has had a negative impact on me (25%)
- Unrelated (19%)
- No, nothing has changed (4%)

- The search was pointless or unjustified (11%)

When asked “Overall, in the circumstances, do you feel that your search was justified?”

Yes 13.66%
 No 71.51%
 I don't know 14.83%

A free text narrative was also given via 168 responses (this makes up approx. 5% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 168 free text response were broken down into 13 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Yes (5%)
- No (26%)
- Discrimination towards youths, young males (3%)
- Racial discrimination (1%)
- Religious discrimination (2%)
- Police had no reason to carry out search / it was a random stop and search (16%)
- Unrelated (13%)
- I don't know (4%)
- Intimidation / harassment (4%)
- Searched because I fitted a description (2%)
- General characterisation / bias or being in a certain location (9%)
- Mistaken identity (6%)
- Unprofessionally carried out or no reason given as to why they were being searched (9%)

When asked “In general, do you feel that young people in your community are stopped and searched fairly?”

Yes 19.93%
 No 42.37%
 I don't know 37.71%

A free text narrative was also given via 632 responses (this makes up approx. 20% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 632 free text response were broken down into 11 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Yes, they are needed / should be carried out more often (12%)
- Never been stopped and searched or have any experience of this (21%)
- It can target and discriminate certain groups (primarily young people) (22%)
- Don't know or depends on the situation (5%)
- Miscellaneous (21%)
- They need to be justifiable and not an abuse of power (6%)
- No, they are not fair or should be stopped (3%)
- Should be targeted more towards crime gangs / criminals (1%)
- Unrelated (3%)
- Sectarian prejudice (3%)
- Racial prejudice (2%)

When asked “Are you aware that you can make a complaint if you thought a stop and search wasn't carried out fairly?”

Yes 58.02%
No 30.74%
I don't know 11.24%

A free text narrative was also given via 707 responses (this makes up approx. 22% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 707 free text response were broken down into 10 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Yes (22%)
- No (20%)
- Nothing would be done about it (14%)
- Depends on the situation (9%)
- Yes if there was no reason for being searched or that it was unfair, inappropriate or carried out aggressively (15%)
- Miscellaneous (14%)
- Could affect someone with a mental health disability or unseen disability (1%)
- Sectarian / racial (1%)
- Fear of then becoming a target for police or the implications it may have (2%)
- Unrelated (2%)

When asked “Why do you think the police stop and search young people in your area?”

A free text narrative was also given via 1474 responses (this makes up approx. 46% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 1474 free text response were broken down into 8 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Underage drink/drugs/antisocial behaviour (51%)
- Miscellaneous (21%)
- It targets certain groups and allows bias (10%)
- Prevents / Stops crime (5%)
- Don't know (6%)
- Because they look suspicious or police think they are acting suspiciously (4%)
- Haven't witnessed or it doesn't happen in my community (1%)
- Keeps people and community safe (2%)

When asked “What do you think are the benefits of stop and search?”

A free text narrative was also given via 1451 responses (this makes up approx. 45% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 1451 free text response were broken down into 10 broad themes / categories, which are:

- None (13%)
- Helps prevent crime and general anti-social behaviour in the community (12%)
- Can take drugs and weapons off the streets (14%)
- Could save lives and keeps people safe (16%)
- Identifies, detects and stops crime as it happens (10%)
- Miscellaneous (16%)
- Protects young people specifically from committing offences and underage drinking & drug Taking (8%)
- Waste of time / it doesn't work (4%)
- Don't know (6%)
- It's harassment / police bias (1%)

When asked “Is using stop and search a good way for police to detect/prevent crime?”

Yes 50.16%
No 28.75%
I don't know 21.09%

A free text narrative was also given via 541 responses (this makes up approx. 17% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 541 free text response were broken down into 11 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Can be good if used correctly (14%)
- Miscellaneous (26%)
- It can have a positive effect on the community and act as a deterrent (27%)
- It can cause further trouble and fuel negative feelings towards the police (6%)
- Depends on the situation (5%)
- I don't know (1%)
- It doesn't work and doesn't solve any problems (7%)
- It can be discriminatory towards certain groups, it harasses and bullies (9%)
- It can be intrusive, aggressive and at times intimidating (5%)
- It can affect people with mental health or disabilities (>1%)
- It should not be carried out on under 18s (>1%)

When asked “What approaches other than stop and search in its present form would be effective in tackling crime?”

(This question generated a range of responses across several pre populated answers, the most highly effective of which was “Building relationships with police through schools, e.g. assembly talks, police base in colleges.”)

A free text narrative was also given via 95 responses (this makes up approx. 3%% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 95 free text response were broken down into 11 broad themes / categories, which are:

- Police need to be made more approachable (5%)
- Set up police cadets or youth training groups (7%)
- Miscellaneous (27%)
- Utilise their online presence more and online related (5%)
- More help in the community with addictions and mental health (1%)
- Sectarianism (8%)
- Police attitudes need to change (4%)
- Target more serious crime and crime gangs (5%)
- Unrelated (15%)
- This question is too complicated and hard for children to understand (11%)
- Stop and search needs to stop and more focus put on to places and people (12%)

When asked “Have you any additional comments to add regarding Stop and Search?”

A free text narrative was also given via 757 responses (this makes up approx. 23% of the total survey responses) with regards to this question and on analysis, these 757 free text response were broken down into 14 broad themes / categories, which are:

- No (62%)
- No Negatively (1%)
- Should be more targeted (1%)

- Discrimination of youths (2%)
- Sectarian element (1%)
- Miscellaneous with neither a positive or negative outlook (8%)
- Miscellaneous with positive comments (6%)
- Miscellaneous with negative comments and an emphasis on it needing to be stopped (6%)
- Disability worries (1%)
- Should have a reason to be carrying out a search (3%)
- Scared of police (2%)
- Harassment (1%)
- Unrelated (5%)
- Racial Element (>1%)