



# WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE IN POLICING

A FILIA SURVEY: MAR - APR 2020



# WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE IN POLICING

To coincide with International Women's Day, FiLiA conducted a survey of women, with the aim to find out how confident a snapshot of the female population in the UK feels in the police force and its ability to protect women, not just from male violence but also from harassment and abuse directed at women because of their sex.

The survey was sent out to our networks via our newsletter, on Twitter and on Facebook, and we encouraged respondents to share onwards with their own networks.

In total we received 291 responses, of which one was disqualified (Respondents were asked their sex; those answering 'male' were disqualified. It was made clear to respondents at the outset of the survey that this was a survey of female respondents only.). There were therefore 290 responses in total.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents were asked about their personal characteristics. We adopted the language of the Equality Act 2010 to ask about these characteristics. All respondents were female. Figures are rounded to the nearest percent.

The age of respondents varied. The smallest number were in the 18-24 category while the largest bracket (34%) were aged 45 – 54, closely followed by the 35 – 44 and 55 – 64 bracket with 25% each.

- 19% of respondents said they had a disability.
- 98% were not undergoing, planning to undergo, or have undergone gender reassignment.
- 76% were white British.
- 73% said they had no religion or faith.
- 74% were heterosexual, 10% lesbian and 10% bisexual.
- 49% were not married or in a civil partnership while 49% were (the remaining 2% declined to say).
- Only 1% were pregnant or had an infant of under 6 months.



# LIMITATIONS AND ADVANTAGES

This survey does not attempt to analyse the quality of policing in the UK; it is about perception alone. We recognise that any such survey must come with caveats: as with any online survey, respondents will be those with access to the internet and those who feel they have something particularly positive or negative to say, so it is a self-selecting group.

This is an issue with all online surveys. It could also be repeated with a larger group, although with nearly 300 respondents across the whole of the UK we believe that the FiLiA survey offers a reasonably broad scope.

The advantages of using an online format are that dissemination can be conducted quickly and with relative ease, moving through online women's networks. Additionally, the anonymity of the format allows women to respond without fear of repercussion or of having their experiences denied or minimised, which means that responses are more likely to be honestly given.



# Results

The first questions were about confidence and trust in the police. This is a subjective question but extremely important, because a population which lacks confidence and trust in the police will be more reluctant to engage with them. The impact of a lack of confidence in the police is discussed in more detail in the section of this report entitled 'Analysis.'

It is vital that the police in the UK have the confidence and trust of the whole population.

The responses to these questions were not encouraging. Less than 1% in total reported that they were 'extremely' or 'very' confident in the police. The majority (53%) reported that they were 'not at all' confident.

Similarly, only 1% of respondents felt 'a lot' of trust in the police. The majority (55%) trusted them 'not a lot' and a worrying 18% did not trust the police at all.

The next question sought to understand the responses to the previous two, and respondents were asked "Which of the following has affected your trust in the police as an organisation?" Options included positive personal experience with the police, negative personal experience with the police, relatives and

/ or friends' experiences, word of mouth, reporting on police involvement in high profile incidents, broadsheet newspapers, tabloid newspapers, local newspapers, TV documentaries, news programmes, social media or something else.

10% of respondents reported a positive personal experience with the police – this correlates with the 10% combined who were 'extremely,' 'very' or 'fairly' confident in the police. Positive police interaction is crucial for the development of confidence and trust in policing.

However, 27% had a negative experience with the police. 21% had been affected by reporting on police involvement in high profile incidents, and a further 6% by broadsheet newspapers. Nobody reported being affected by tabloid newspapers and only 2% by local newspapers, TV and news programmes.

Of the 29 who gave a written response, five indicated that they would have chosen a combination of the options above had this been available. The majority of the others highlighted the perceived difference between treatment of women as suspects and treatment of women as complainants, as well as the perceived indifference to physical harm to women as compared to the

enthusiasm for policing social media. This was representative of the comments:

*“Lack of investigation into rape/sexual assault and policing of “wrongthink” on social media. Pursuing women for “annoying” comments made on social media and ignoring harassment, death threats, abuse.”- Respondent 103*

Rape conviction rates, indifference to grooming gangs, poor performance on VAWG and failure to protect working class communities were all of significant concern to respondents. Several respondents contrasted this with perceived heavy-handedness over reports made by other groups, citing Humberside's treatment of [Harry Miller](#). Some named the arrest and prosecution of [Kate Scottow](#) as sitting uneasily with the failure to take any action at all over worse abuse directed at women. There was a general perception that the police were swayed by political influence of lobby groups rather than policing impartially as required by the College of Policing's [Competency Values](#). The comparison with [rape conviction rates](#) was of significant concern to respondents.

Respondents were asked what they thought about the police in their area. 2% felt the police in their area were “excellent,” 11% said “good.” 47% thought the police in their area were 'fair,' 30% “poor” and 10% “very poor.”

Of the 2% of respondents who felt the police in their area were 'excellent,' all but one were in England, and all but one felt that a positive experience with the police had affected their trust in the police as an organisation. Almost all had been a victim of crime or harassment. One had had a negative experience in reporting crime but felt the police in her area were excellent nonetheless.

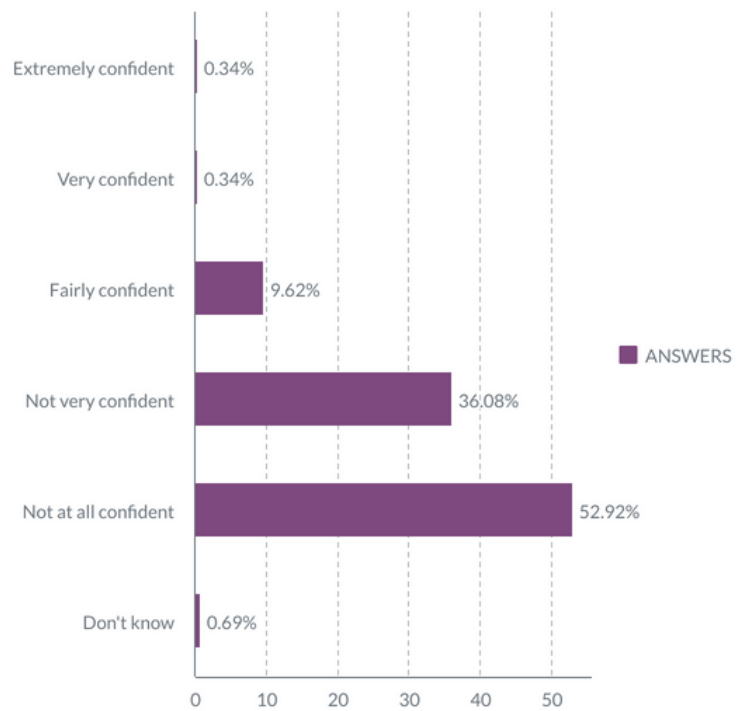
Respondents were asked to place on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree seven statements about the police in their area as shown in the table above. Broadly speaking, similar results were again seen: relatively few women strongly agreed with statements that indicated a high level of trust in the police, and the majority either held no opinion or disagreed, many strongly.

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with the statement that the police and local council were dealing with the crime issues that matter in their area. 11% in total replied that they 'strongly agreed' or 'tend to agree,' 25% neither agreed or disagreed, and 64% tended to disagree or strongly disagreed. This is a considerable majority of women who feel that the police do not deal with crime issues that matter in their area.

**Only 46%** of crime victims had actually reported the crime to the police either by telephone or in person.

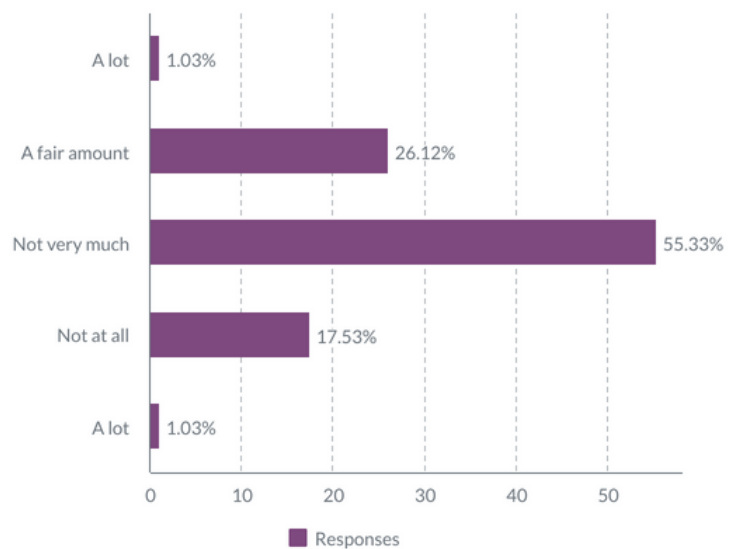
### Q10

The police in the UK are responsible for keeping women and girls safe by preventing crime and catching criminals. How confident are you that the police are effective at catching criminals?



### Q11

In general, how much do you trust the police as an organisation?



Women were then asked about their own experiences, being asked if in the last three years they had been the victim of a crime committed against them because of their sex, for example domestic assault, sexual assault, or sexual harassment. These types of crimes are known as VAWG crimes, or 'violence against women and girls,' and are recognised by the Crown Prosecution Service as a particular type of anti-female offending.

They were also asked if in the last three years they had been the victim of an 'incident' because of their sex, such as street harassment, online abuse, unsolicited dick pics, or misogynist name calling. This is the type of 'hate incident' which would be recorded as such if hate crime legislation were expanded to cover sex.

**34% of women had experienced a crime committed against them related to their sex in the last three years.**

**74% of women had experienced anti-female incidents.**

**Of those who had been the victim of a crime, only 46% had reported the crime to the police either by telephone or in person.**

One in ten had reported to a women's organisation and the remainder had taken no action. Of those who had been the victim of an anti-female incident, just under a tenth had reported it to the police.

A few had reported to a women's organisation and the majority had taken no action.

Both fields contained the option for a text answer. The text answers given in reply to both the question about crimes and incidents were strikingly similar: women had sought support from one another, or from a workplace if the crime / incident took place at work.

One respondent had confronted the perpetrator directly. *"I have no confidence in the police as they don't believe women"* - Respondent 281

A typical response was "No point reporting" and this was a theme in these responses.

Women were asked how their experience of reporting crime (if they had done so) affected their confidence in the police's effectiveness and fairness. Options included that their experience made them feel "very confident," "somewhat confident," "did not affect my confidence" "less confident" or "not at all" confident in effectiveness and fairness. These questions were not restricted to the last three years. 60% of respondents answered the question.

13% of women reported that their experience left them 'very' or 'quite' confident in the effectiveness of the police, and 14% that their experience left them feeling 'very' or 'quite' confident in the fairness of the police.

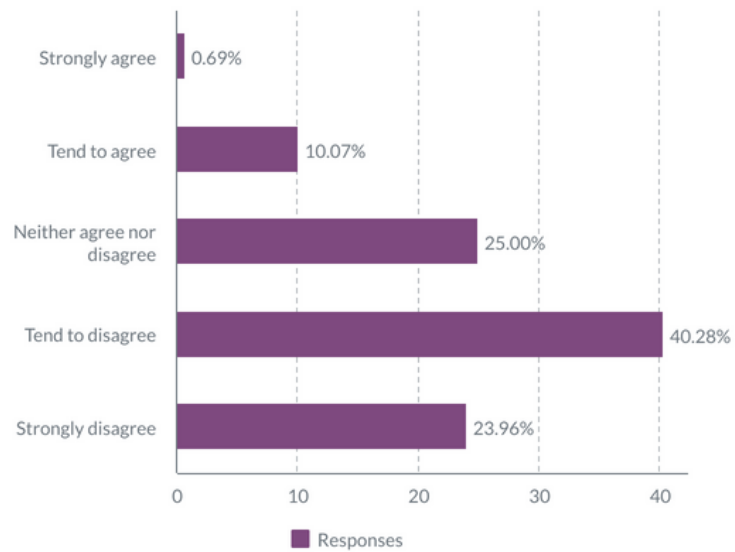


# “I have no confidence in the police as they don't believe women”-

RESPONDENT 281

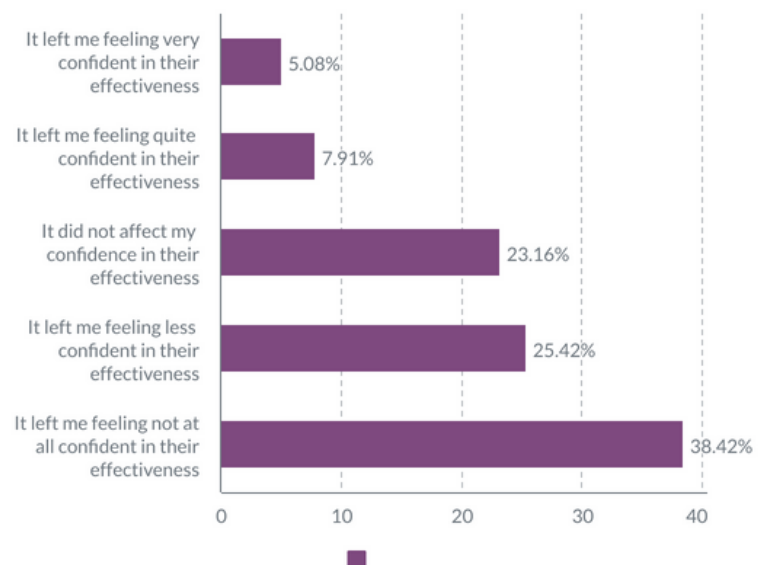
## Q15

It is the responsibility of the police and local council working in partnership to deal with crime in your local area, including crimes against women and girls. How much would you agree or disagree that the police and local council are dealing with the crime issues that matter in your area?



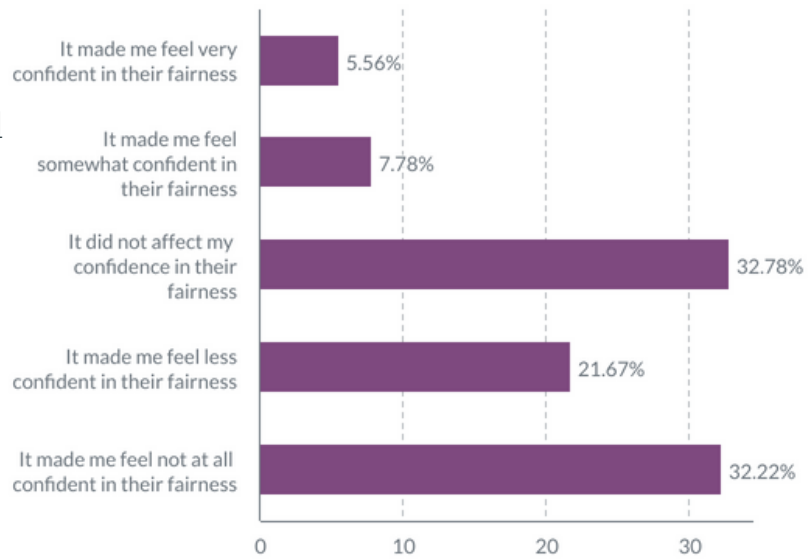
## Q20

If you have been a victim of crime and reported to the police, how did your experience affect your confidence in their effectiveness?



## Q21

If you have been a victim of crime and reported to the police, how did your experience affect your confidence in their fairness.



The majority of respondents felt less or not at all confident in the effectiveness (63%) and fairness (54%) of the police after reporting a crime.

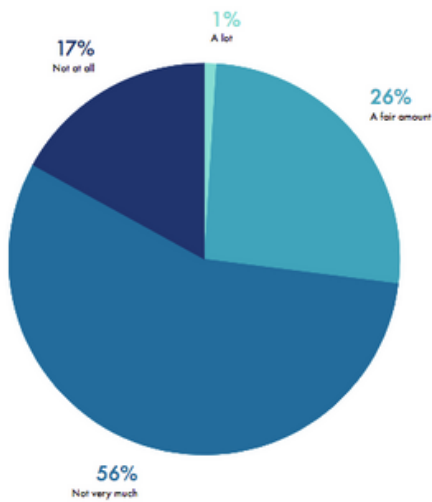
Women were also asked how important it is to their confidence in the police that the police remain politically impartial. 95% said it was “very important,” 3% said “somewhat important” and 2% said “not at all important.”

Finally women were asked where they were in the UK. Results did reflect geographical differences: Northern Ireland reflected least trust in the police and those in Scotland most – 33% of respondents in Scotland answered that they trusted the police a ‘fair amount,’ representing the largest number who trusted the police a lot or a fair amount combined.

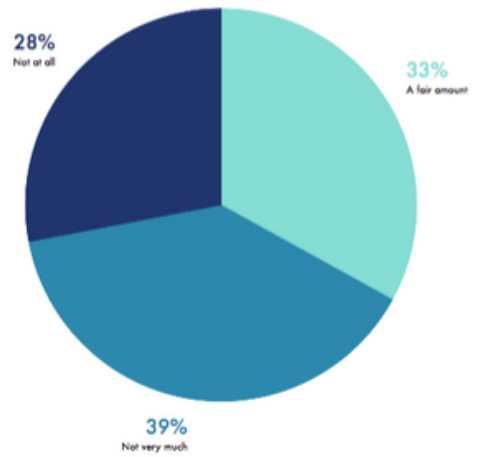
	STRONGLY AGREE	TEND TO AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	TEND TO DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
The police in my area can be relied on to be there when you need them	2.76% 8	16.21% 47	29.66% 86	36.55% 106	14.83% 43	290
The police in my area would treat you with respect if you had contact with them for any reason	4.14% 12	35.17% 102	33.45% 97	18.62% 54	8.62% 25	290
The police in my area treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are	3.11% 9	13.15% 38	31.83% 92	32.18% 93	19.72% 57	289
The police in my area understand the issues that affect this community	1.72% 5	24.14% 70	38.97% 113	23.10% 67	12.07% 35	290
The police in my area are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community	0.35% 1	16.26% 47	29.07% 84	37.02% 107	17.30% 50	289
The police in my area can be trusted	2.44% 7	18.12% 52	37.63% 108	27.53% 79	14.29% 41	287
Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police in my area	3.10% 9	15.86% 46	28.28% 82	34.48% 100	18.28% 53	290

# TRUST IN POLICE ACROSS THE UK

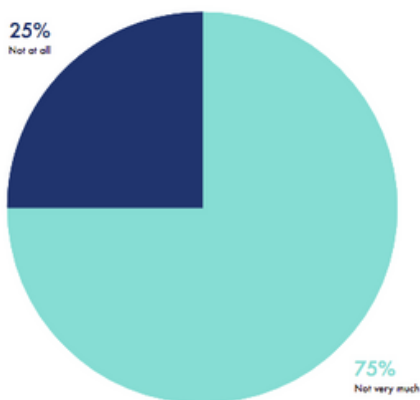
## England - Trust In Police



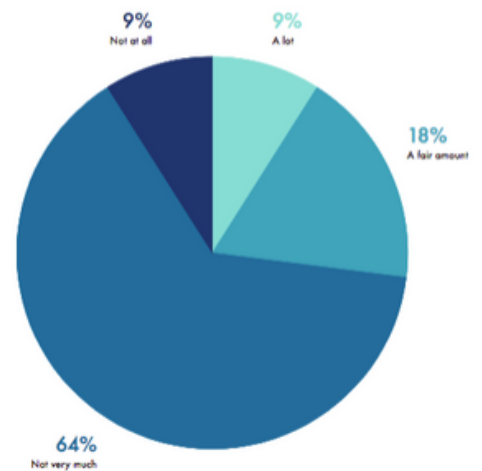
## Scotland - Trust In Police



## Northern Ireland - Trust In Police



## Wales - Trust In Police



# ANALYSIS

The overwhelming conclusions of the survey are that women do not feel confident in the police.

Policing in the UK is modelled on the framework of 'policing by consent.' It is a model which works only when those who are policed have some measure of trust and confidence that they will be dealt with fairly, if suspects, and adequately supported, if complainants.

Lack of confidence in the police has serious repercussions for women. A population which lacks confidence and trust in the police will be reluctant to engage with them. This can be displayed as:

- Not reporting crimes or incidents
- Not disclosing the 'full picture' at the outset, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of loss of trust
- Suspicion of official figures and statistics
- Not believing that the police have women's best interests at heart
- Taking the law into one's own hands

When women do not report crimes or incidents against them because they have no faith that the police will be fair or effective at dealing with them, it leads to a false picture that fewer crimes are taking place. Of the women surveyed here, more than half had not reported VAWG crimes or incidents against them.

When fewer crimes are believed to have taken place than in fact have, it is

easy for the authorities to become complacent about crime numbers.

This survey suggests that there are far more crimes of VAWG committed than are reported.

There was also a perception amongst respondents that the police were overenthusiastic about non-crime incidents which took place online, such as the 'advice' given to [Harry Miller](#) over his use of Twitter, except when those incidents were directed at women. There was a perception that the police are willing to support other communities, particularly the trans community, who experience online abuse, but that equally or more serious abuse directed at women is ignored when reported.

FiLiA is aware that some of the most egregious abuse directed at women online is not investigated or prosecuted when it is reported, and we have [previously raised concerns](#) about this double standard.

The results demonstrate that where women have a positive experience of reporting crime, they are much more likely to trust the police. Where that experience is negative, trust and confidence plummet.

The primary way to increase women's confidence in the police is to ensure that strenuous efforts are made to support women and that abuse of women on or off line is taken seriously, and suspects pursued. If a prosecution is not possible, a coherent explanation must be provided so that women understand that they are not being ignored due to their sex.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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The police force in the UK need to work with women to ensure that women's trust and confidence in the police is improved.

In particular we would recommend police take seriously women's reports of harassment, death and rape threats, unsolicited pictures of genitals, and abuse online; a trial of recording misogynist 'hate incidents' committed against women; specialist support to be available to women reporting crimes of VAWG; police work with women's groups to build trust and confidence.

**FiLiA would be happy to host a discussion with police, the Victims' Commissioner, and women's groups with a view to further work on this topic.**

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**FILIA'S VISION IS A WORLD FREE FROM PATRIARCHY  
WHERE ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE LIBERATED.**

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Filia's mission is to contribute to the women's liberation movement by:

-  Building sisterhood and solidarity (Locally, nationally, globally)
-  Amplifying the voices of women (Particularly those less often heard or purposefully silenced)
-  Defending Women's Human Rights

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