

PUBLIC

of the
Queensland
Police Service

Findings from the
2005 Public Attitudes Survey

Public Perceptions Series

June 2006

CRIME AND
MISCONDUCT
COMMISSION



QUEENSLAND

PERCEPTIONS



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QUEENSLAND

CMC vision:

To be a powerful agent for protecting Queenslanders from major crime and promoting a trustworthy public sector.

CMC mission:

To combat crime and improve public sector integrity.

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Foreword

The Fitzgerald Inquiry in the 1980s, and its aftermath, had a significant impact on public confidence in the Queensland Police Service (QPS).

Public confidence in the integrity of the police service is important, not only because the public is the primary consumer of police services, but also because a positive image of the police is necessary for the police service to be able to function effectively within the community. In addition, when an organisation is perceived to be unethical it can attract individuals (both internally and externally to the organisation) whose intentions may be to use this weakness and corrupt the organisation even further.

Assessing the public's perceptions of the QPS, local government and public sector is therefore an important aspect of the CMC's monitoring functions. To achieve this we have commissioned a series of surveys of Queensland residents to:

- ▶ measure changes over time in public opinion of the behaviour of police officers, public servants and local government staff
- ▶ ascertain the public's willingness to use complaints services.

These surveys are one way of assessing whether confidence in the QPS has been restored and, importantly, whether this confidence has been maintained over the years since the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Police corruption can be cyclic, and it is important that Queensland maintains the important gains it has made so far.

To date, we have conducted six surveys — in July 1991, July 1993, June 1995, June 1999, June 2002 and, most recently, July 2005. This report summarises the key findings of the 2005 survey with regard to the QPS. It also identifies some interesting changes over time. Separate reports examining the public sector and local government will follow.

This report was largely prepared by Eva Dacre, with the assistance of Margot Legosz and Kelly Ede. We are also grateful to the University of Queensland Social Research Centre (UQSRC) for administering the survey in 2005. The Communications Unit of the CMC prepared the report for publication.

Robert Needham
Chairperson

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| CJC | Criminal Justice Commission |
| CM Act | <i>Crime and Misconduct Act 2001</i> |
| CMC | Crime and Misconduct Commission |
| ESC | Ethical Standards Command (of the QPS) |
| NSCSP | National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing |
| OR | Odds Ratio |
| PCMC | Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee |
| QPS | Queensland Police Service |
| QCC | Queensland Crime Commission |

Key findings

Since the first Public Attitudes Survey was conducted by the CJC in 1991 there have been considerable changes, both in the integrity of the QPS and in how the CMC (formerly the CJC and QCC) handles complaints about the QPS and monitors other important integrity issues.

In addition to presenting the most recent findings from the 2005 Public Attitudes Survey, this report provides information about trends over time. Collectively, this information suggests that most of the general public consider the QPS's response to the findings of the Fitzgerald Inquiry (Fitzgerald 1989) in relation to matters of integrity to have been largely effective, and public confidence in the QPS is relatively strong.

One of the benefits of this survey is its capacity to highlight areas that might require more attention before they become problematic. Given the interest of both the CMC and QPS in the 'continual improvement' of the police service, this is valuable information. We describe some of these areas below, but again stress that in the 'grand scheme of things' the QPS appears to maintain relatively strong support from the public.

Attitudes to the QPS

- ▶ The overwhelming majority of Queenslanders surveyed in 2005 had a positive view of the QPS; this finding is similar to those of previous surveys. For example, more than 80 per cent of respondents held the beliefs that most police are honest and police generally behave well.
- ▶ While a reasonably large proportion of respondents believed there would always be some corruption in the police service, there has been a steady decline in public tolerance of police misconduct since earlier surveys.
- ▶ While the proportion of people reporting dissatisfaction with the QPS was similar to the proportion in the 2002 results, dissatisfaction with police has generally shown a steady decline over the years.
- ▶ The most common reasons reported for dissatisfaction with police were that an officer had acted in a rude, unfriendly or arrogant manner or had behaved unreasonably or unfairly.

Complaints processes

- ▶ Fewer than 5 per cent of respondents to the 2005 survey — or about half of those who had been dissatisfied with police in the preceding 12 months — stated that they had felt like making a complaint. Even fewer actually made or attempted to make a complaint, largely because they did not believe that it would do any good, or did not know how to make an official complaint.

- ▶ Public confidence in complaints processes remains reasonably high, but there has been a gradual and continuous decline in confidence since 1995. For example, among survey respondents who had never made an official complaint there was a decline from 66 per cent of respondents to the 2002 survey to only 59 per cent of the 2005 survey respondents who said they would be confident of a proper investigation. Among respondents who had been dissatisfied with police in the 12 months before being surveyed there was a relatively high proportion (63%) who were not confident that a proper investigation would be conducted, were they to make a complaint.
- ▶ Most people continue to agree with the statement that complaints against police officers should be investigated by an independent body rather by the police themselves. However, as with the 2002 survey results, most respondents who actually made a complaint reported it directly to the QPS.

Areas for improvement

While the data generally provide a favourable view of the QPS, some aspects — namely police and young people, complaints processes, and the reasons for dissatisfaction with the police — may require some attention. These key issues are similar to those raised in the 1999 and 2002 surveys. For the first time, this paper also provides some evidence of regional differences. Respondents from the Far North region of Queensland, for example, either proffered slightly more negative views of police behaviour than respondents from other regions or appeared to be relatively uninformed or undecided about some police issues.

Police and young people

Younger respondents (aged 18–24 years) were significantly more likely than older respondents to express negative views about the police. They were also more likely to report dissatisfaction about an encounter with the police. There may be a number of explanations for this finding, including some research evidence that young people are more likely to commit offences and therefore more likely to come into contact with the police.¹ Such interactions, therefore, are more likely to lead to dissatisfaction with police than interactions between police and older people, because the latter quite often include more positive interactions within the community, such as Neighbourhood Watch.

Nevertheless, there has been a significant decline since previous surveys in the proportion of young respondents reporting dissatisfaction with police in the preceding 12 months ($p < .001$). In 2002, 26 per cent of respondents aged 18–24 years reported dissatisfaction in the preceding 12 months, and this figure fell to 18 per cent in 2002. This is a good result and may reflect improved police practices in dealing with young people since the last survey. However, there is still room for improvement.

1 *Australian crime facts and figures 2004* (Australian Institute of Criminology 2004) reports that people aged 15–19 years are the most likely age group to be processed by the police for committing a crime. In 2002–03 the offending rate for people aged 15–19 years was about four times the offending rate for the remainder of the population (6546 per 100 000 and 1579 per 100 000, respectively).

Reasons for dissatisfaction with police

Although the proportion of respondents reporting dissatisfaction with police at any stage in their lives has declined significantly over time (as has the proportion of respondents reporting dissatisfaction with police in the preceding 12 months), the primary reasons for dissatisfaction reported by respondents to the 2005 survey were that the officer had been 'rude or unfriendly' or 'had acted unreasonable or unfairly' during their encounter. These responses are similar to those of previous surveys.

Complaints processes

While the proportion of respondents who expressed confidence in complaints processes remained reasonably high, this proportion has declined significantly over the years. This decline was complemented in the 2005 data by a significant increase in the proportion of respondents reporting that they were neither confident nor unconfident that complaints would be properly investigated.

Although the primary reason for not making a complaint in 2005 was, as in previous years, the belief that it would not do any good, the second most common reason given for not making a complaint was that the respondent 'did not know how to make a complaint'. In 2005 there was a marked increase, compared with 2002, in the percentage of respondents who were of this opinion. This may reflect a lack of knowledge about complaints processes, and is perhaps an indication that an education campaign about complaints processes in general may be warranted. Alternatively, it could simply mean that, as stories of police misconduct become less frequent, an awareness of the complaints processes available for responding to allegations of police misconduct becomes less prevalent.

Nevertheless, respondents who were dissatisfied with police behaviour were more likely to make an official complaint in 2005 than they were in 2002. Again, this is a promising result.

Regional differences

The 2005 data show some significant differences in attitudes to police behaviour by survey area. For example, while there were no regional differences in the proportion of respondents who had ever been annoyed or dissatisfied with police behaviour in the preceding 12 months, respondents from the Far North region of Queensland tended to have slightly more negative views of police behaviour than the respondents from other regions and/or be relatively uninformed or undecided about certain police issues.

Because of the relatively high proportion of Indigenous residents in the Far North, these results may reflect, to a certain degree, some unease between police and Indigenous people. Or it may simply reflect the limited presence of police in some areas and the uncertainty about the nature of police work that this brings. The limited scope of this survey does not allow an in-depth analysis of these issues, but there is the potential for future surveys to do so.

Summary

The areas for improvement identified in the 2005 survey are similar to those raised in the 1999 and 2002 surveys, with the exception of the regional differences noted. To maintain, and even enhance, the high level of support currently expressed by the public towards the police, we encourage the QPS to address these issues.

Overall, however, it is evident from the 2005 survey results that in general public perceptions of the police behaviour have remained positive.

Introduction

About the survey

The 2005 Public Attitudes Survey is the sixth in a series of telephone surveys, beginning in 1991, conducted with Queensland residents on behalf of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) and now the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC). The surveys measure public attitudes to the Queensland Police Service (QPS), public servants and local council employees, as well as public knowledge and confidence in complaints processes. Changes in attitudes over time have been determined by repeating the survey.

A number of questions aimed at obtaining information about public knowledge of the role of the CJC were also included in earlier surveys. Because of the amalgamation of the CJC and the Queensland Crime Commission (QCC) to form the CMC in 2001, the 2002 survey included questions about each of the original organisations. In the current survey (2005), only questions relating to the CMC were asked. Where possible, questions about the CMC were constructed in such a way that the results would be comparable with those about the CJC.

This report presents findings relating to the QPS. Separate reports examining the public sector and local governments will follow.

About the QPS and the CMC

Since the first Public Attitudes Survey was conducted in 1991 there have been considerable changes in both the integrity of the QPS and the way the CJC, and subsequently the CMC, handles complaints about the QPS and monitors other important integrity issues. To ensure that readers of this report have a better understanding of the most recent survey results and the trends shown over more than a decade, as well as a better understanding of the changes in complaints processes in that time, we provide a brief overview of those changes below.²

The Fitzgerald Inquiry of 1987–89 exposed the paucity of accountability mechanisms for dealing with misconduct by Queensland police officers. Fitzgerald recommended the creation of an independent agency (the CJC) to oversee the police service, deal with complaints and assume a variety of other criminal justice responsibilities.

² This overview has been drawn from the CMC's report *Handling complaints against Queensland police: past, present and future* (2004), which is available on our website at <www.cmc.qld.gov.au>. For a historical appraisal, the reader is encouraged to read the full document.

The CJC was given jurisdiction to investigate allegations of official misconduct against all public officers, including police.³ In recognition of the importance of police integrity, the CJC also had broader jurisdiction over behaviour known as police misconduct.⁴

Since the creation of the CJC in 1989, there has been continual improvement in the QPS, including the implementation of a number of significant accountability mechanisms and the accumulation of a body of knowledge and expertise in assessing and investigating complaints by the CJC (and subsequently by the CMC). In 1997, for example, the Ethical Standards Command (ESC) of the QPS was created and given responsibility for compliance with policy procedures and guidelines, ethics training and internal investigations. Several years later, a joint CJC–ESC project (Project Resolve) showed that a large proportion of complaints against police could be managed and resolved internally, providing there was adequate monitoring by an external agency. It was shown, for example, that managerial resolution for breaches of discipline and less serious misconduct could reduce the time taken to deal with complaints, reduce the number of investigations required by the CJC, retain similar levels of satisfaction among complainants, be cost-effective, and provide better outcomes.

In 2001, the CJC’s oversight body, the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee (PCMC), applauded the achievements of the QPS in dealing with issues of accountability and discipline, and recommended that the ‘CJC continue ... its present policy of gradually devolving responsibility to the QPS for the handling of complaints against police officers, with the CJC always to retain an oversight role’ (p. 37). Consequently, when the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001* (the CM Act) was passed, it introduced a new regime for handling complaints against police — a regime based on devolution of responsibility to the QPS, with the CMC maintaining and strengthening the former monitoring role of the CJC.

Under the new regime, police handle the bulk of complaints against police. The CMC keeps an independent eye on how well the QPS is carrying out this responsibility, including taking over an investigation being handled by the QPS when the public interest is at stake. The CMC continues to encourage the QPS to deal with complaints beyond the traditional investigative response, and include alternative resolution strategies such as mediation, informal resolution and managerial resolution. Minor matters (such as a police officer being slow to respond to a call for service or failing to give his or her name) are considered to be breaches of discipline not within the jurisdiction of the CMC and handled exclusively by the QPS.

3 **Official misconduct** by a public officer is conduct relating to the officer’s duties that is serious enough to warrant dismissal or is a criminal offence.

4 **Police misconduct** is conduct that is disgraceful, improper or unbecoming an officer, that shows unfitness to be an officer, or that does not meet the standard of conduct the community reasonably expects of an officer. Examples might include failure to comply with policies and procedures, or incivility such as swearing at a member of the public.

While the CMC retains primary responsibility for dealing with complaints of official misconduct, the CM Act requires the CMC to refer such matters to the QPS whenever possible. In deciding whether to refer a matter for police investigation, the CMC must consider the nature and seriousness of the complaint, the public interest, and the capacity of the QPS to respond effectively. The CMC and ESC assess each complaint made against a police officer (whether lodged with the CMC or with the QPS) to determine how it should be handled.

Most matters are less serious and are referred to the QPS. However, the CMC retains ultimate authority over all matters involving suspected official misconduct, and can choose to:

- ▶ investigate the matter itself
- ▶ investigate the matter jointly with the QPS
- ▶ refer the matter to the QPS to investigate (with the requirement to either report regularly on the progress of the investigation or be subject to a review by the CMC before or after the matter is finalised), or
- ▶ refer it to the QPS to deal with and provide advice on the outcome.

The CMC also has an auditing role and, from time to time, reviews randomly selected complaints that have been handled by the QPS.⁵ We continue to investigate serious matters, however — particularly if there is reason to believe that the misconduct is prevalent or systematic, or if allegations involve serious criminal conduct that has the potential to undermine public confidence.

Structure of the report

This report is divided into three main parts:

- ▶ Part A is a brief description of the survey methodology and the sample.
- ▶ Part B examines general public perceptions of police behaviour and the police ‘image’, and looks at levels of public satisfaction with the QPS.
- ▶ Part C explores public opinion about complaints processes.

In Parts B and C, differences in the way various demographic profiles affect the responses to the survey questions are presented. In particular, comparisons are shown for gender, age, employment status, level of education and survey region.

5 For example, during 2003 we conducted a timeliness audit of 321 complaints against police received and dealt with by the QPS, and a complaints audit of 106 complaints files randomly selected from these files, to determine the extent of compliance with selected indicators of integrity. We found that the majority of complaints were handled efficiently and to a high professional standard, with only 10% showing some deficiencies. These monitoring exercises resulted in the Commission making some recommendations for policy or procedural changes to the QPS. We have overseen these changes and continue to liaise with the QPS about further change.

Part A: Methodology

Survey administration

The same methodology was employed for the administration of the 2005 survey as for previous surveys. The survey targeted Queensland residents aged 18 years and over who were the usual resident in a private dwelling with a telephone. The survey was undertaken by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) in June 2005.

The sample was drawn from five statistical divisions — Brisbane, South East (excluding Brisbane), South West, Central and Far North.⁶ Telephone numbers were drawn at random from a list of all possible telephone numbers in each division. The sample also approximated a 50–50 gender split. Gender and location quotas were applied to avoid over-sampling. Potential respondents were excluded if they were members of the QPS or of a local council.

There were 1505 respondents to the 2005 survey and the response rate was 43 per cent, which was similar to the response rates of previous surveys. Responses were weighted for age, gender and geographic location to ensure an accurate representation of the state. As with previous surveys, however, very few differences were found between weighted and unweighted responses. The data in this report are therefore based on unweighted responses.

Data analysis

Various statistical techniques were used to analyse the survey data, including frequencies, descriptives, t-tests, cross-tabulations (chi-square analysis) and multivariate analyses (logistic regression).

The bivariate analyses indicated a number of statistically significant associations between demographic factors and survey responses. To exclude confounding between these factors and to determine the most significant predictors of the survey responses, all variables found to be significant at bivariate level were entered into logistic regression models. While some bivariate analyses are presented for illustrative purposes, most of the results presented in this report are from the logistic regression modelling.⁷ Odds ratios (ORs) indicate the strength of these associations; p values

6 Statistical regions differ from police regions in Queensland. Various state government departments also adopt different definitions of regions for administrative purposes. The Queensland Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research and the Australian Bureau of Statistics define eleven regions. To ensure that there are sufficient respondents in each region for statistical purposes, the CMC has combined several of these and refers to five regions only. A complex sampling frame has been used consistently throughout all surveys to ensure comparability over time. Information about the sampling frame is available from the CMC on request.

7 The results of the other bivariate analyses are available from the CMC on request.

and confidence intervals indicate the statistical significance and precision of these associations.

For readers who may be unfamiliar with ORs and confidence intervals, the figures provided can be interpreted in the following way:

- ▶ The larger the quantitative size of the OR, the greater the magnitude of the association between a possible predictor or risk factor (e.g. a demographic factor such as age or gender) and an outcome (e.g. agreement with a statement provided in the survey). The closer the OR to 1, the smaller the measure of association; the larger the OR, the greater the association. Therefore, an OR of 1.5, for example, indicates that the outcome is about 50 per cent more likely to occur among the predictor or risk factor group than its counterparts; an OR of 2.00 indicates that the outcome is twice as likely to occur among the predictor or risk factor group as its counterparts.
- ▶ The width of the confidence interval indicates the amount of variability inherent in the OR estimate and thus the precision of the findings and the confidence we can place in the estimate of the OR. For example, a confidence interval of 1.3–1.8 indicates a much smaller degree of variability than one of 1.2–7.6 and is much more informative about the true magnitude of the OR.

Comparative data

Perceptions of police integrity are regularly reported as an outcome indicator of the Commonwealth Government's objective of police performing their duties with integrity and professionalism (e.g. see *Report on government services 2006* [Australian Government 2006], p. 5.16). The Commonwealth Government reports incorporate some of the results of the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing (NSCSP), which has been conducted since 1996.⁸ Some of the questions in the NSCSP are similar to those asked in the CMC's survey. This allows for some national comparisons and we refer to these, where relevant, throughout the report.

The CMC, and formerly the CJC, has collected Public Attitudes Survey data regularly for a period of 14 years. We are therefore able to report any changes that have occurred over time. Some of these trends are included in the report, but the reader is reminded of the important changes to the QPS and the CJC/CMC during that period and the possible influences that these may have had on public perceptions of the police.

Definition of integrity

We have used a number of measures of 'integrity' throughout this report. These include agreement (or otherwise) by respondents with statements such as 'police are

8 Until November 2000, the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted the survey, with all Australian police jurisdictions meeting the annual cost. In late 2000, the Australasian Centre for Police Research was tasked with continuing the annual survey in conjunction with a private industry service provider.

honest' or 'police have a bad image'. We believe that, combined, responses to such questions provide the reader with a sense of the public's views about police integrity.

Public perceptions may not reflect actual levels of police integrity, however. There are many factors — including individual differences, hearsay and media reporting — that may influence people's perceptions of police integrity (Australian Government 2006, p. 5.17). Analysing complaints against police, assessing levels of ethical behaviour and attitudes among police officers, and carrying out other monitoring activities allows the CMC to take a broader view of QPS integrity, which must be taken into consideration. For more information about these other activities, the reader is encouraged to read the full range of CMC publications about police performance and integrity, many of which are available on our website <www.cmc.qld.gov.au>.

Respondents

Information about the respondents to the CMC surveys is presented graphically in Figures 1–5 (pp. 4–6).

Gender: Figure 1 shows the proportion of male and female respondents to each survey. The significantly higher proportion of female respondents included in the 1999 and 2002 survey groups is the result of random rather than quota sampling in those years ($p < .001$).

Age: The data presented in Figure 2 show a significant difference in the age of respondents over time ($p < .001$). From 1999 to 2005 there was an increase in the proportion of respondents aged 55–64 and 65+ years, and a corresponding decrease in those aged 18–24 years.

Employment status: From 1995 onwards, respondents were asked about their employment status. Overall, the majority of respondents for each year were employed. However, as shown in Figure 3, there have been some fluctuations over time in the proportions of respondents who have been unemployed, retired or receiving a pension ($p < .001$).

Education: From 1995 onwards, respondents were asked to state their highest level of educational achievement. Figure 4 shows a significant decline over time in the number of respondents who had not completed secondary school and a complementary increase in the number who had completed some tertiary training ($p < .001$).

Region: The data presented in Figure 5 show the breakdown of respondents by region. The similarity in proportions across years is a result of quota sampling. The reason the data for 1995 differ significantly from the others is that police regions were used in that year, and the categories were later collapsed to approximate the statistical regions used in the other years.

Figure 1. Survey respondents by gender, 1991–2005

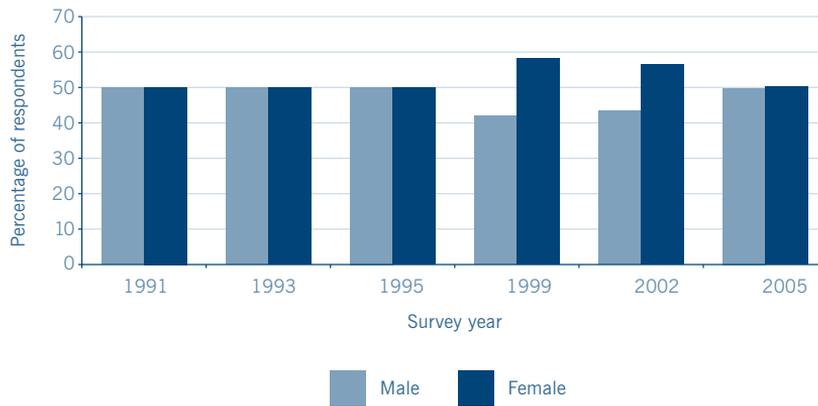
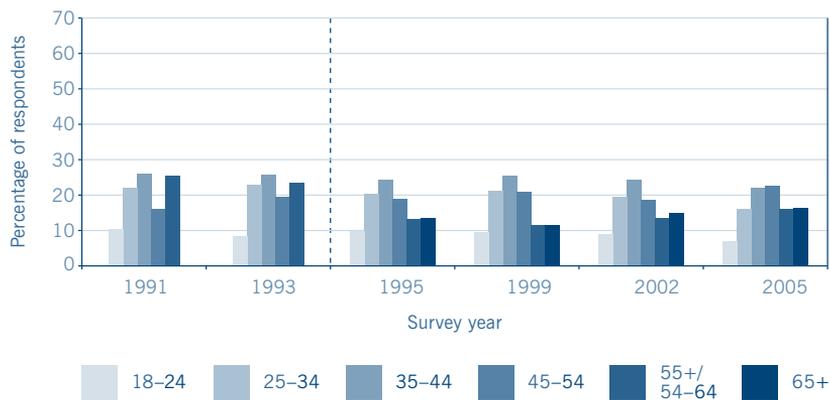


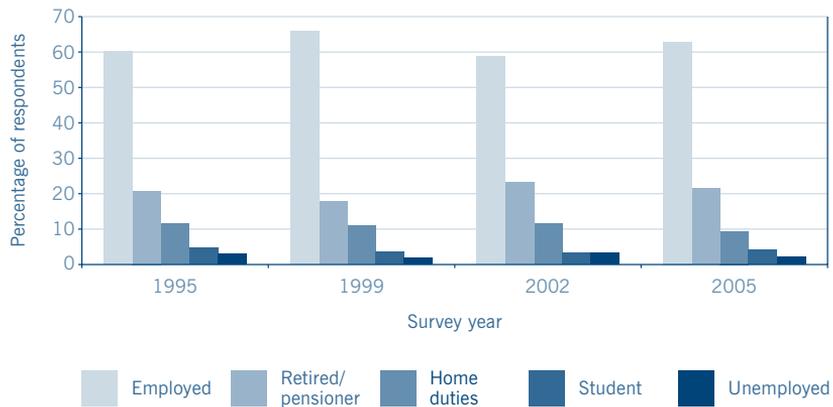
Figure 2. Survey respondents by age, 1991–2005



Notes:

- 1 The classification of respondents in the older age group in 1991 and 1993 is not consistent with later years. Respondents in the earlier years were classified as 55 years or more. In later years this category was subdivided into two groups: 55–64 years and 65 years or more.
- 2 In 2005, 1% of respondents did not state their age.

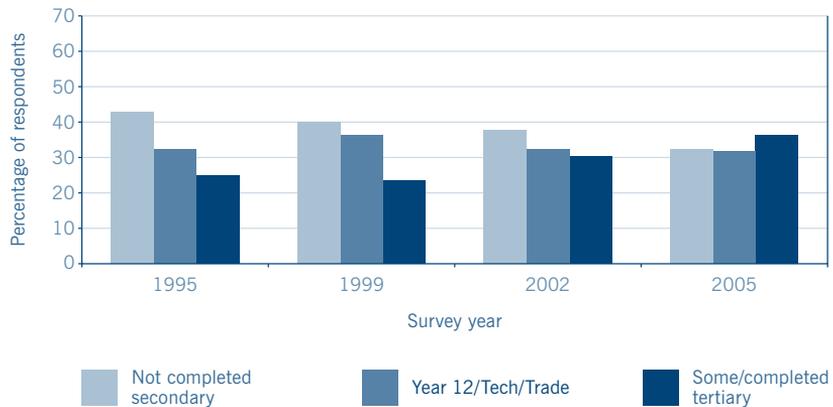
Figure 3. Survey respondents by employment status, 1995–2005



Notes:

- 1 These data were not collected in the 1991 or 1993 surveys.
- 2 Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who refused to answer this question.

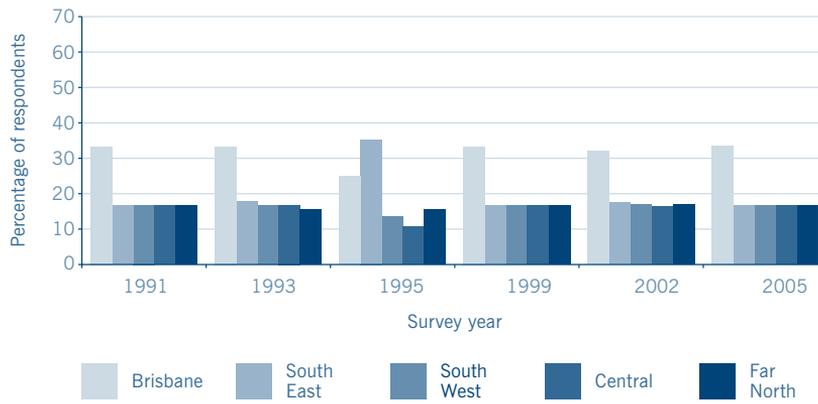
Figure 4. Survey respondents by highest level of education, 1995–2005



Notes:

- 1 These data were not collected in the 1991 or 1993 surveys.
- 2 Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who refused to answer this question.

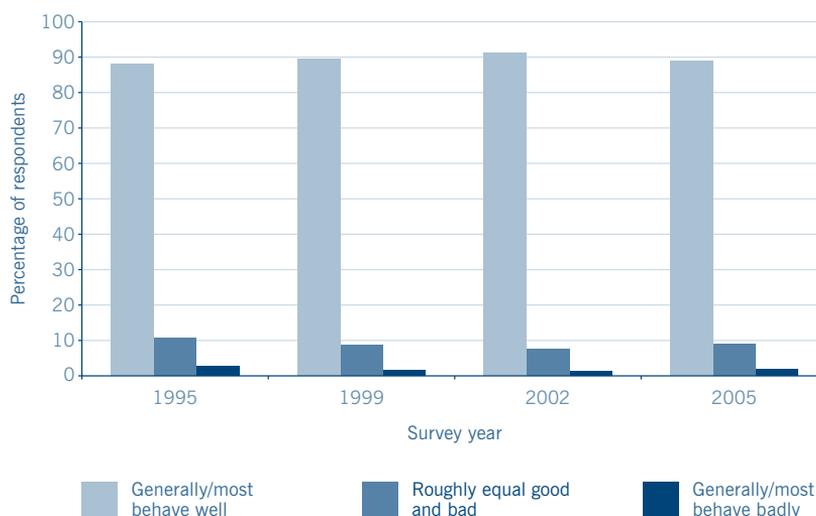
Figure 5. Survey respondents by region, 1991–2005



Part B: General perceptions

The overwhelming majority of Queenslanders surveyed in 2005 had a positive view of the police. Figure 6 shows, for example, that almost 90 per cent of respondents in the preceding four surveys consistently thought that police generally or mostly behave well. Less than 2 per cent of the respondents from each year stated that police generally or mostly behave badly.⁹

Figure 6. General perceptions of police behaviour, 1995–2005



Notes:

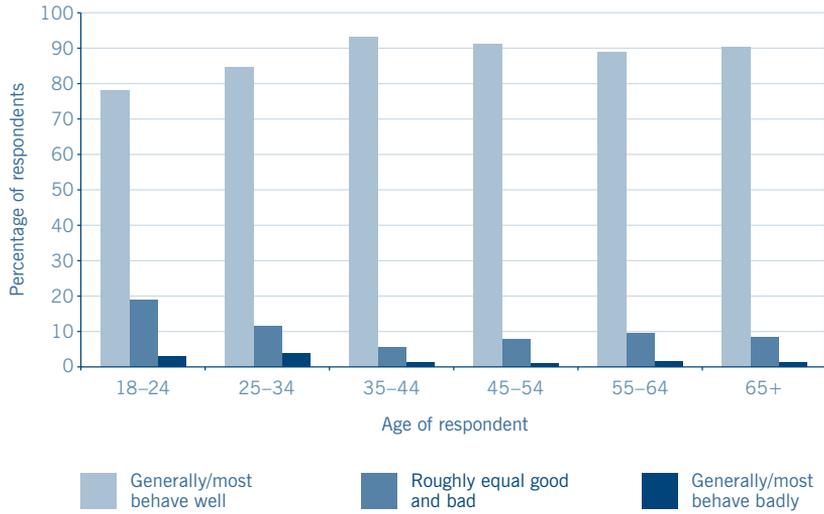
- 1 This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.
- 2 Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question.

However, previous research has indicated that situational factors (such as type of contact or experience) and individual factors (such as age, gender and education) can influence levels of satisfaction with police (Sced 2004a, b).

In 2005 the most significant factors influencing positive perceptions of police, such as the belief that most police behave well, were age ($p = .002$) and education ($p = .007$). Older respondents were about 20 per cent more likely than younger respondents to hold a positive view of police, and respondents with higher levels of educational achievement were about 30 per cent more likely than those with limited educational achievements to hold a positive view. (See Table 1, p. 9, for the multivariate analysis. Figures 7 and 8, on p. 8, show the bivariate data.)

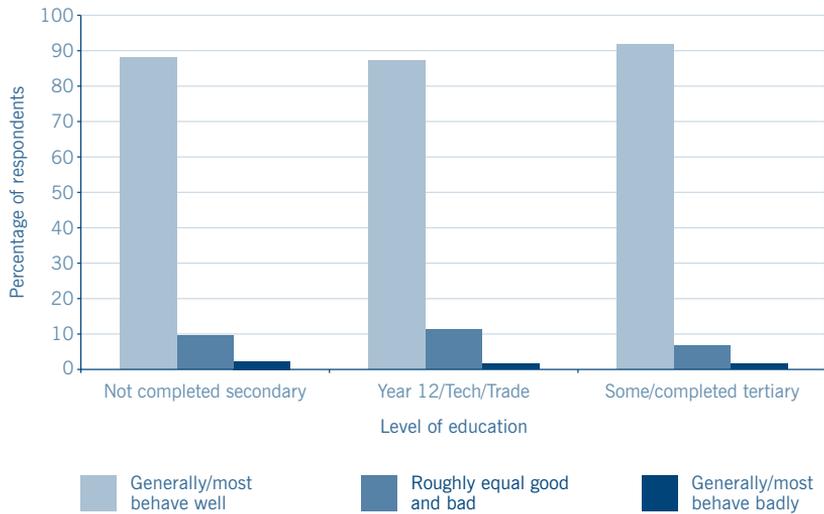
⁹ The differences across the years were not statistically significant.

Figure 7. General perceptions of police behaviour by age, 2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question or who did not provide their age.

Figure 8. General perceptions of police behaviour by level of education, 2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question or who did not provide their level of education.

Table 1. Demographic predictors of agreement with the statement that police ‘generally or mostly behave well’

| Demographic factor | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Gender | n.s. | 1.338 | 0.945 | 1.894 |
| Age (older respondents) | 0.002 | 1.203 | 1.070 | 1.352 |
| Employment status | n.s. | 1.018 | 0.894 | 1.158 |
| Education (respondents with some tertiary qualifications) | 0.007 | 1.335 | 1.081 | 1.647 |

Note: n.s. = not significant

Public attitudes to police integrity

To examine public attitudes to police integrity, the survey sought responses to statements such as ‘Most police are honest’ and ‘Police have a bad image’.

Across each of the six survey periods, the vast majority of respondents (81–88%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘Most police are honest’.¹⁰ However:

- ▶ male respondents held this view more strongly than females in 1995, 2002 and 2005 ($p < .05$) (gender differences were not detected in the other years; see Table 2, next page)
- ▶ in 2005, respondents from the Far North region were less likely (78%) than the respondents from other regions (an average of 86%) to agree with this statement ($p < .01$).

Importantly, the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the police have a bad image in Queensland has decreased significantly over time, from almost 60 per cent in 1991 to 27 per cent in 2005 ($p < .001$); although there has been a slight increase (3%) since the last survey was conducted in 2002.¹¹

This proportional decrease over time represents an almost 55 per cent reduction in negative public perceptions of the police in the last 14 years. Further, it continues to suggest increased public recognition of the changes the QPS has made over the last decade to policy, practice and dealing with misconduct (see Ede 2003). It is important to note that respondents’ perceptions can be influenced by a range of factors in addition to the demographics presented in this report (e.g. the level of contact a person has with the police, and the reasons for that contact). However, the survey data do not allow us to analyse these factors.

10 The results of the CMC’s survey indicate about a 10% higher level of agreement with the statement that ‘most police are honest’ than was reported in the *Report on government services 2006* (Australian Government 2006, p. 5.18). In that report the results of the NSCSP indicate that, nationally, 70.9% of respondents ($n = 21\ 605$) agreed with this statement, and that the responses across all jurisdictions were remarkably similar. The report notes, however, that these results represented a significant national decline since the results reported in 2003–04.

11 Differences between males and females were significant in 2005 only ($p < .01$).

Table 2. General perceptions of police, 1991–2005

| | Proportion of respondents who agree or strongly agree (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | 1991 (n = 901) | 1993 (n = 900) | 1995 (n = 900) | 1999 (n = 1502) | 2002 (n = 1551) | 2005 (n = 1505) |
| ‘Most police are honest’ | | | | | | |
| All respondents | 84.1 | 87.8 | 87.2 | 80.7 | 85.0 | 82.8 |
| Male respondents only | 84.7 | 88.0 | 89.6 | 82.7 | 87.5 | 84.7 |
| Female respondents only | 83.6 | 87.6 | 84.9 | 79.2 | 83.0 | 80.9 |
| ‘Police have a bad image in Qld’ | | | | | | |
| All respondents | 59.3 | 48.1 | 28.7 | 30.3 | 24.2 | 26.7 |
| Male respondents only | 60.7 | 49.6 | 27.1 | 29.2 | 24.5 | 25.7 |
| Female respondents only | 57.9 | 46.7 | 30.3 | 31.1 | 23.9 | 27.7 |

Note: Percentages represent respondents who stated that they ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement.

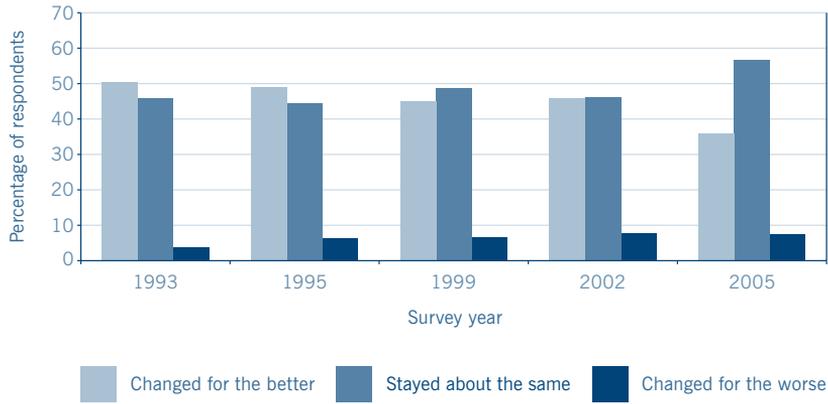
Changes over time

In each survey, respondents were asked to state whether they believed police behaviour had ‘changed for the better’, ‘stayed about the same’ or ‘changed for the worse’ in recent years. Figure 9 shows that, over time, most respondents believed that police behaviour had either improved or stayed the same; less than 10 per cent of the respondents in each survey indicated a view that police behaviour had changed for the worse.

However, the responses to the 2005 survey differ significantly from previous surveys ($p < .001$). Fewer respondents to the 2005 survey (36%) believed that police behaviour had ‘changed for the better’ than in previous years, and a larger proportion of respondents (57%) were of the view that police behaviour had ‘stayed about the same’.

Older respondents were significantly more likely to agree with the statement that police behaviour has ‘changed for the better’ (see Table 3 and Figure 10). As Figure 10 shows, there is also a marked decline in the belief that police behaviour has ‘stayed about the same’ as the age of respondents increases.

Figure 9. Changes in police behaviour over time, 1993–2005



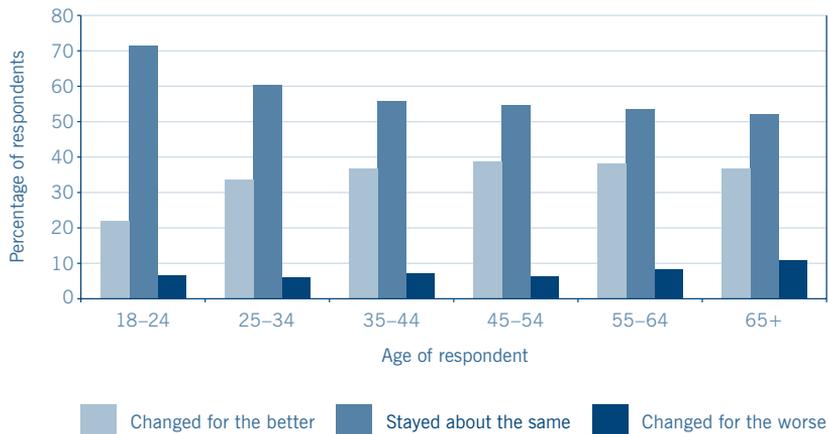
Note: Data exclude respondents who did not answer this question (between 6 and 15% in each survey group).

Table 3. Demographic predictors of the belief that police behaviour has changed for the better

| Variable | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Gender | n.s. | 0.823 | 0.650 | 1.042 |
| Age (older respondents) | 0.025 | 1.096 | 1.011 | 1.188 |
| Employment status | n.s. | 0.968 | 0.883 | 1.061 |
| Education | n.s. | 1.146 | 0.995 | 1.321 |

Note: n.s. = not significant

Figure 10. Perceptions of change in police behaviour over time by age, 2005



Note: Data exclude approximately 13% of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not provide their age.

Given the positive responses to police behaviour described in the previous section (i.e. most respondents to all CMC surveys believed that police behave well and most are honest), it is not surprising that many respondents felt that police behaviour had ‘stayed about the same’ in recent years. It is also interesting to note that the respondents who thought police behaviour had ‘changed for the better’ were more likely to be older than those who did not agree with this statement. These respondents were probably more likely to have witnessed the dramatic improvement in police behaviour since the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Younger respondents, on the other hand, have a shorter timeframe over which to measure change, and consequently their benchmark for comparison is an improved level of behaviour.

Attitudes to misconduct by police

Each survey sought answers to a number of questions that aimed to measure perceptions of police misconduct. Despite the overwhelmingly positive views held by most respondents, Table 4 shows that around 87 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement ‘You will always get some corruption in the police service’. However, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of respondents holding this view since 1995 (when the proportion was 93%). There has also been a significant decline over time in the proportion of respondents with the belief ‘Sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done’ ($p = .001$). The decline in the proportion of respondents agreeing with either of these statements indicates that there may have been a growing public awareness of, and intolerance towards, police misconduct in recent years.

Table 4. Attitudes to misconduct by police, 1991–2005

| | Proportion of respondents who agree or strongly agree (%) | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | 1991 (<i>n</i> = 901) | 1993 (<i>n</i> = 900) | 1995 (<i>n</i> = 900) | 1999 (<i>n</i> = 1502) | 2002 (<i>n</i> = 1551) | 2005 (<i>n</i> = 1505) |
| ‘You will always get some corruption in the police service’ | 85.0 | 87.6 | 93.2 | 90.0 | 89.7 | 86.7 |
| ‘Sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done’ | – | – | 63.1 | 53.2 | 43.3 | 43.2 |
| ‘The police don’t have enough powers to do their job properly’ | – | – | 60.2 | 56.9 | 54.4 | 49.7 |

Notes:

- 1 Percentages represent respondents who stated that they ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement.
- 2 Only the first statement was used in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

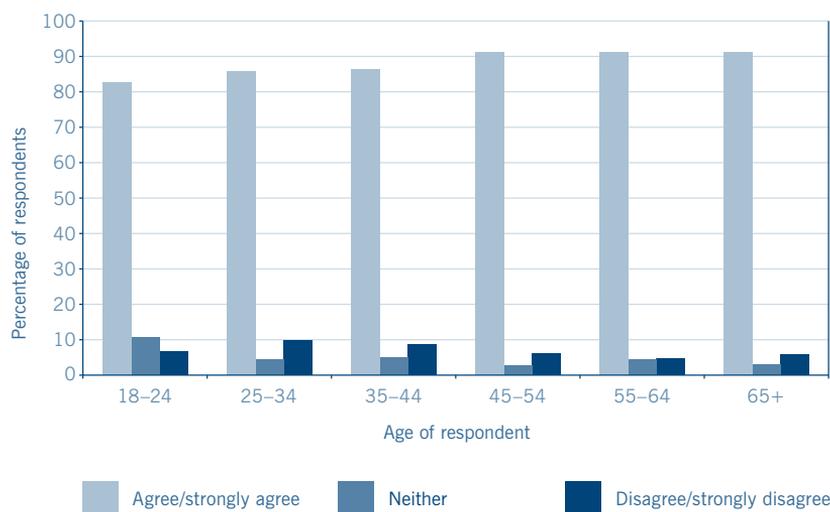
In 2005 the most influential factor determining agreement with the statement ‘You will always get some corruption in the police service’ was age, with respondents aged 45 years and older significantly more likely to agree with this statement than younger respondents ($p = .007$). Education was also a significant factor influencing this statement ($p = .017$); respondents with at least some tertiary qualifications were about 20–30 per cent less likely than those with fewer academic achievements to agree with this statement (see Table 5 and Figure 11).

Table 5. Demographic predictors of agreement with the statement ‘You will always get some corruption in the police service’

| Variable | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval |
|---|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Gender | n.s. | 1.183 | 0.842 1.662 |
| Age (older respondents) | 0.007 | 1.165 | 1.042 1.303 |
| Employment status | n.s. | 0.919 | 0.814 1.037 |
| Education (respondents with at least some tertiary qualifications) | 0.017 | 0.775 | 0.629 0.956 |

Note: n.s. = not significant

Figure 11. Agreement with the statement ‘You will always get some corruption in the police service’ by age, 2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not provide their age.

Surprisingly, age was not a significant predictor of agreement with the statement ‘Sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done’. In this case, each of the other demographic factors retained their significance. (See Table 6 below.)

For example:

- ▶ males were about 50 per cent more likely than females to agree with this statement (p = .000)
- ▶ respondents who were retired or on a pension were more likely than those in the other employment categories to agree with this statement (p = .039)
- ▶ respondents who had completed some tertiary qualifications were about 20 per cent less likely than those who had fewer academic achievements to agree with this statement (p = .000).

There has also been a significant decline in the number of respondents with the belief that police ‘do not have enough powers to do their job properly’ (p < .001). In 1995 about two-thirds of the respondents agreed with this statement (60%). This proportion fell to 57 per cent in 1999 and 54 per cent in 2002; by 2005, only half (50%) of the respondents felt this was the case. However, it is interesting to note that female respondents in the 2005 survey were about 30 per cent more likely than male respondents to hold this view (p = .014). (See Table 7.)

Table 6. Demographic predictors of agreement with the statement ‘Sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done’

| Demographic factor | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Gender (male) | 0.000 | 1.513 | 1.216 | 1.883 |
| Age | n.s. | 1.030 | 0.957 | 1.107 |
| Employment status (retired/pensioner) | 0.039 | 1.089 | 1.004 | 1.181 |
| Education (respondents with at least some tertiary qualifications) | 0.001 | 0.796 | 0.698 | 0.907 |

Note: n.s. = not significant

Table 7. Demographic predictors of agreement with the statement ‘The police don’t have enough powers to do their job properly’

| Demographic factor | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Gender (female) | 0.014 | 1.312 | 1.055 | 1.631 |
| Age | n.s. | 1.033 | 0.960 | 1.111 |
| Employment status | n.s. | 1.039 | 0.958 | 1.128 |
| Education (not completed secondary) | 0.000 | 1.339 | 1.174 | 1.526 |

Note: n.s. = not significant

Education was also a significant factor influencing agreement with this statement. Respondents who had not completed secondary school were about 30 per cent more likely than those with higher educational achievements to agree with the statement 'The police don't have enough powers to do their job properly' ($p < .000$).

At a bivariate level, the data showed that survey region also accounted for differences in some of the responses to these questions. For example:

- ▶ Respondents from South East and South West Queensland were more likely to state that police do not have enough powers to do their job properly (60% compared with an average of 47% in other areas; $p < 0.001$).
- ▶ Respondents from Brisbane and Central Queensland were less likely to think that sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done (40% compared with an average of 48% in other areas; $p < 0.05$).
- ▶ Respondents from Far North Queensland were less likely to state that the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim (40% compared with an average of 45% in other areas; $p < 0.05$).
- ▶ Respondents from Far North, Central and South West Queensland were more likely to state that there is no point reporting corruption as nothing useful will be done about it (19% compared with an average of 14% in other areas; $p < 0.05$).

However, when examined by multivariate analysis in the presence of other demographic factors that had exhibited significant relationships with these responses (gender, age, highest level of education and employment status), these regional differences lost their significance and the other demographic factors proved to be stronger predictors of these outcomes.

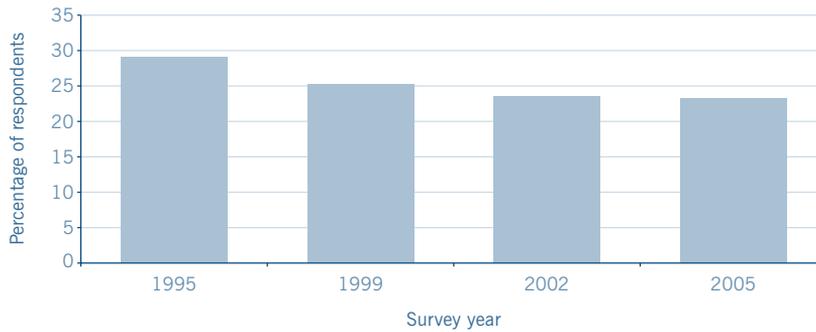
Dissatisfaction with the QPS

Respondents were asked whether they had ever been annoyed or dissatisfied with a member of the police service, when that had occurred, and the reason(s) for their dissatisfaction.

A little less than a quarter (23%) of respondents in the 2005 survey reported that they had been annoyed or dissatisfied with the behaviour of a Queensland police officer, or with the way in which the QPS had handled a matter relating to them (see Figure 12, p. 16). Although this finding is similar to the 2002 result, there has been a significant decline in the proportion of dissatisfied respondents since earlier surveys ($p < .001$).

Around 10 per cent of the total sample (or almost 43% of those who reported that they had been dissatisfied at some stage) indicated that the incident that had led to their dissatisfaction had occurred in the preceding 12 months. These findings are consistent with the results of the 2002 survey. However, over time (i.e. since 1995), there has also been a significant decline ($p < .001$) in the proportion of respondents who reported having been dissatisfied with the police in the preceding 12 months (see Figure 13, p. 16).

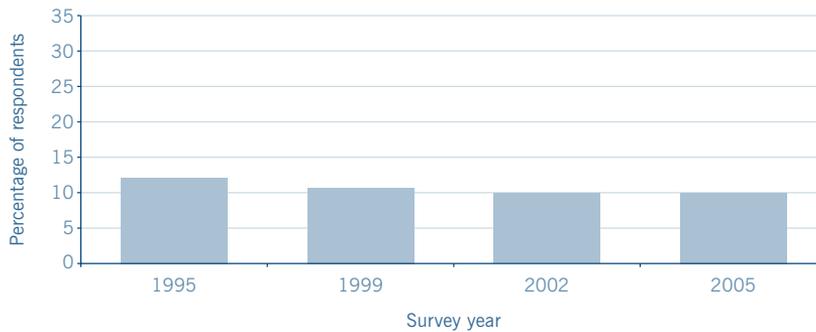
Figure 12. Proportion of respondents dissatisfied with police (ever), 1995–2005



Notes:

- 1 Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.
- 2 This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

Figure 13. Proportion of respondents dissatisfied with police in the preceding 12 months, 1995–2005



Notes:

- 1 Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.
- 2 This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

Previous research has consistently found that, as age increases, so too does satisfaction with police contact (Brandl & Horvath 1991; Cheurprakobkit 2000; Mirrlees-Black & Budd 1997; Sced 2004a, b). It has been posited that as younger people are more likely to commit crimes they are also more likely than older people to have negative interactions (e.g. arrests) with police. Older people, on the other hand, might have greater contact with police in a helping capacity (e.g. neighbourhood watch).

The results of the Public Attitudes Survey replicate these findings (see Table 8), showing that younger respondents were about 40–50 per cent more likely than older respondents to state that they had been dissatisfied with the police in the preceding 12 months.

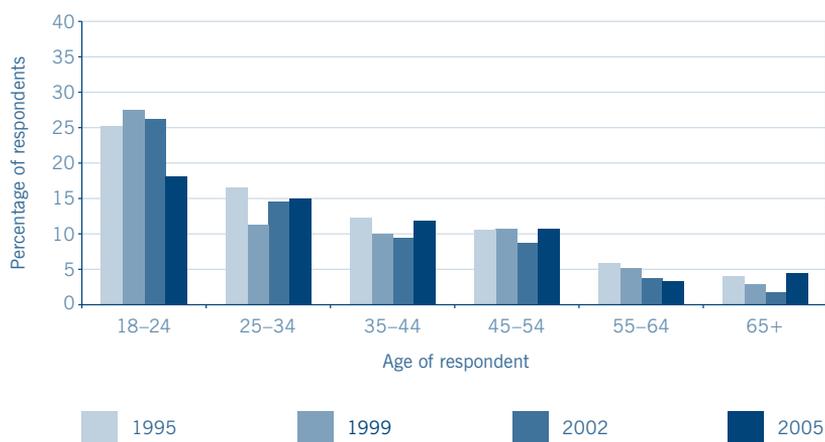
However, there has been a significant decline, compared with previous surveys, in the proportion of young respondents reporting dissatisfaction with police in the preceding 12 months ($p < .001$, see Figure 14). In 2005, for example, only 18 per cent of respondents aged 18–24 years reported dissatisfaction in the preceding 12 months compared with 26 per cent in 2002. This is a very good result and may reflect improved police practices in dealing with young people.

Table 8. Demographic predictors of dissatisfaction with the police in the preceding 12 months

| Demographic factor | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Gender | n.s. | 1.509 | 0.953 | 2.390 |
| Age (younger respondents) | 0.000 | 1.469 | 1.247 | 1.730 |
| Employment status | n.s. | 1.125 | 0.933 | 1.357 |
| Education | n.s. | 0.960 | 0.729 | 1.263 |

Note: n.s = not significant

Figure 14. Dissatisfaction with police in the preceding 12 months by age, 1995–2005



Note: Percentages are based on the total number of respondents in each survey group, but exclude a small number who did not answer this question or did not provide their age.

Reasons for dissatisfaction

The results of the most recent NSCSP showed that, during negative targeted contacts, perceptions of unprofessional or unfair treatment by police (20.2% of all respondents) and reports that police had made a false allegation (24.8%) were the most common reasons for dissatisfaction (Sced 2004a); among self-initiated contacts dissatisfaction occurred when police were perceived to have behaved in a manner considered unsuitable or inappropriate (Sced 2004b).

The most common reasons provided by respondents to the CMC's 2005 survey in Queensland for dissatisfaction with police in the preceding 12 months were that an officer had acted in a rude, unfriendly or arrogant manner during an encounter, or that an officer had behaved unreasonably or unfairly (see Table 9). However, between 2002 and 2005 there appears to have been a decline in the proportion of respondents giving these as their reasons for dissatisfaction.¹²

A CJC study in 1997 found that inadequate communication by police officers was a major factor contributing to the escalation of police–civilian conflict (CJC 1997, p. 57). To some extent this concern has been addressed by the QPS in recent years by making the option of engaging in communication tactics during critical situations quite explicit. The QPS has also introduced a tactical communication program which places particular emphasis on the necessity for police recruits to develop listening and communication skills (Police Education and Advisory Committee 2001). Combined, these efforts may have had some effect on the decline in dissatisfaction expressed about inappropriate police behaviour or attitudes.

It is important to note that more serious allegations (e.g. undue use of force or violence, and illegal behaviour), were quite infrequent reasons given by respondents for dissatisfaction with the police in the preceding 12 months (see Table 9).

12 The nature of respondents' concerns has fluctuated over the last four surveys. This may partly be explained by some overlap in the coding definitions used for these types of behaviours.

Table 9. Reasons for dissatisfaction with police in the preceding 12 months, 1995–2005

| | Proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied with police in the preceding 12 months | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | 1995 (n = 109) | 1999 (n = 161) | 2002 (n = 154) | 2005 (n = 150) | Change since 2002 (%) |
| Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant | 35.8 | 39.1 | 40.9 | 34.0 | -16.9 |
| Behaved unreasonably or unfairly | 22.0 | 31.1 | 37.0 | 28.7 | -22.4 |
| Did nothing/didn't do enough | 22.0 | 23.0 | 18.8 | 14.7 | -21.8 |
| Lack of interest | 3.7 | 20.5 | 14.3 | 11.3 | -21.0 |
| Did wrong thing/were incompetent | 10.1 | 12.4 | 11.7 | 11.3 | -3.4 |
| Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no-one available | 13.8 | 16.1 | 14.9 | 7.3 | -51.0 |
| Behaved illegally/broke the rules | 7.3 | 3.7 | 5.8 | 4.7 | -19.0 |
| Did not keep person informed/did not come back | 4.6 | 3.7 | 4.5 | 4.0 | -11.1 |
| Used undue force or violence or assaulted someone | 2.8 | 7.5 | 1.9 | 3.3 | +73.7 |
| Offenders not caught/property not recovered | 2.8 | 3.7 | 1.3 | 2.7 | +107.7 |
| Racist language or behaviour | 2.8 | 2.5 | 1.9 | 1.3 | -31.6 |
| Other | 19.3 | 12.4 | 7.8 | 10.7 | +37.2 |

Note: Numbers will add up to more than 100%, because multiple responses were allowed for this question.

Part C: Complaints processes

‘Complaints against police per 100 000 people’ is now counted as an output indicator of the Commonwealth Government’s objective that police perform duties in a professional manner (Australian Government 2006, p. 5.19), and can provide a valuable resource for systemic reform.

Respondents to the CMC’s survey who indicated that they had been dissatisfied with the police were asked whether they had ever felt like making an official complaint.¹³ Less than 5 per cent of the total 2005 sample — or about half of those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months — stated that they had felt like making a complaint (see Table 10).¹⁴ However, only 1.7 per cent of the total sample — or about 7 per cent of those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months — had actually made or attempted to make an official complaint.¹⁵

Table 10. Dissatisfaction with, and making a complaint against, police, 1995–2005

| | 1995 (<i>n</i> = 900) | 1999 (<i>n</i> = 1502) | 2002 (<i>n</i> = 1551) | 2005 (<i>n</i> = 1505) |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Have been dissatisfied (ever) | 262 (29.1%) | 379 (25.2%) | 364 (23.5%) | 351 (23.3%) |
| Dissatisfied in the last 12 months | 109 (12.1%) | 161 (10.7%) | 154 (9.9%) | 150 (10.0%) |
| Felt like making a complaint | 61 (6.8%) | 71 (4.7%) | 76 (4.9%) | 73 (4.9%) |
| Made or tried to make a complaint | 23 (2.6%) | 26 (1.7%) | 20 (1.3%) | 25 (1.7%) |
| Ratio of ‘felt like complaining’ to ‘made or tried to make a complaint’ | 2.7:1 | 2.7:1 | 3.8:1 | 2.9:1 |

Notes:

- 1 The questions listed in the table were not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.
- 2 A small number of people who made or tried to make an official complaint initially indicated that they did not feel like complaining.

13 Official complaints are those made to the police, the CMC/CJC/QCC, a member of parliament or local councillor, a lawyer or the Ombudsman.

14 Respondents who were either unemployed or students were significantly less likely than all other groups to state that they had felt like making an official complaint ($p < .001$). These results are similar to those of the 2002 survey findings.

15 The *Report on government services* (Australian Government 2006, p. 5.20) shows that the level of complaints about police in Queensland is similar to that in other states (except Vic. and NT), at about 100 per 100 000, although the authors note that jurisdictions are not directly comparable because of differing counting rules.

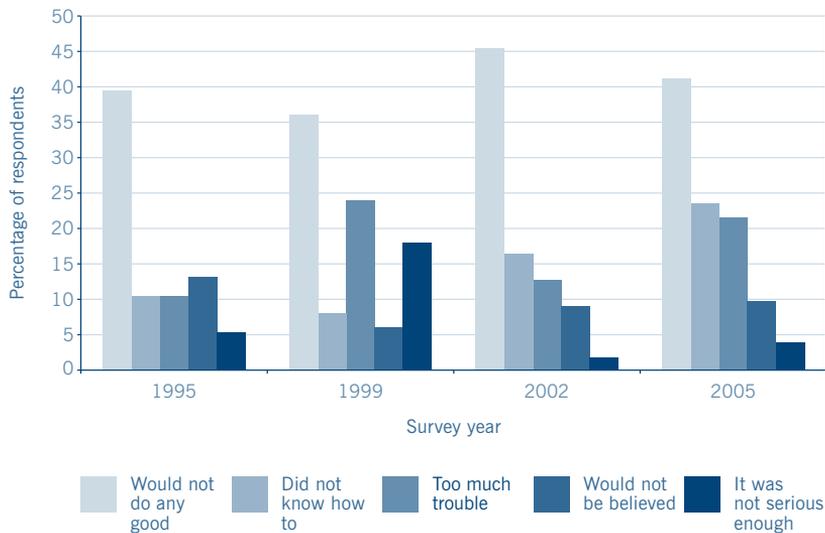
While these results are consistent with the 2002 findings, they show an increase in the proportion of respondents who had actually made or attempted to make an official complaint (a return in 2005 to the 1999 level of 1.7%, compared with 1.3% in 2002).

To express this as a ratio, almost one in three people who felt like complaining in 2005 actually made a complaint, compared with almost one in four in 2002. This is a promising result, if only on a small scale, as it may reflect greater public confidence in complaints processes. On the other hand, the 2002 results may have been an anomaly and the 2005 survey results may simply reflect the ratios of ‘felt like complaining’ to ‘actually made a complaint’ reported previously for the 1995 and 1999 surveys.

Reasons for not making a complaint

The respondents who were dissatisfied with an officer’s behaviour in the 12 months preceding the survey, and felt like complaining but did not, were asked to provide reasons why they did not make a complaint. The most common reason given over the last four surveys was a belief that it ‘would not do any good’ (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Reason for not making an official complaint, 1995–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data are based on those respondents who were dissatisfied with police behaviour within the preceding year and who felt like making a complaint but chose not to.
- 2 When asked why they did not make an official complaint, respondents were allowed to provide multiple responses and all responses were counted.
- 3 Data exclude respondents who gave some ‘other’ reason, or who stated ‘don’t know’ or ‘can’t remember’.

However, there were some observable differences between survey years. The data presented in Figure 15 show that there has been a continual increase in the proportion of respondents reporting that they ‘did not know how to make a complaint’ (24% in 2005 compared with 11% in 1995). There has also been considerable fluctuation over the years in the proportion of respondents stating that it would be ‘too much trouble’, with the proportion of respondents stating this as a reason almost doubling since the 2002 survey (from 13% to 22%).

Multivariate analyses were undertaken to determine whether there were any demographic factors that predicted these results. The 2005 survey indicated that males were almost twice as likely as females to state that ‘it would not do any good’ (see Table 11). There were no demonstrable links between any demographic factors and the other reasons for not making a complaint.

Table 11. Demographic predictors of respondents’ perceptions that making a complaint ‘would not do any good’

| Demographic | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Gender (males) | 0.023 | 1.904 | 1.094 | 3.315 |
| Age | n.s. | 0.964 | 0.805 | 1.155 |
| Employment status | n.s. | 1.027 | 0.828 | 1.274 |
| Education | n.s. | 0.942 | 0.685 | 1.297 |

Note: n.s. = not significant

Confidence in complaints processes

In the last four surveys, respondents who had never made an official complaint were asked how confident they would be, if they were to make a complaint, that the matter would be properly investigated.

Figure 16 (p. 24) shows a steady decline in public confidence in complaints processes between 1995 and 2005. For example, only 59 per cent of respondents to the 2005 survey said they would be confident of a proper investigation, compared with 66 per cent of respondents to the 2002 survey. Multivariate analyses indicated that there was a gender difference in these views, with females being significantly ($p = .036$) more confident in complaints systems than males (62% compared with 57%).

On the other hand, the proportion of respondents indicating that they were ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ confident that a complaint would be investigated properly has remained relatively stable, at about 24 per cent of all respondents to the last three surveys. Gender differences were again noted, with fewer females than males having concerns about complaints systems (see Figure 17, p. 25).

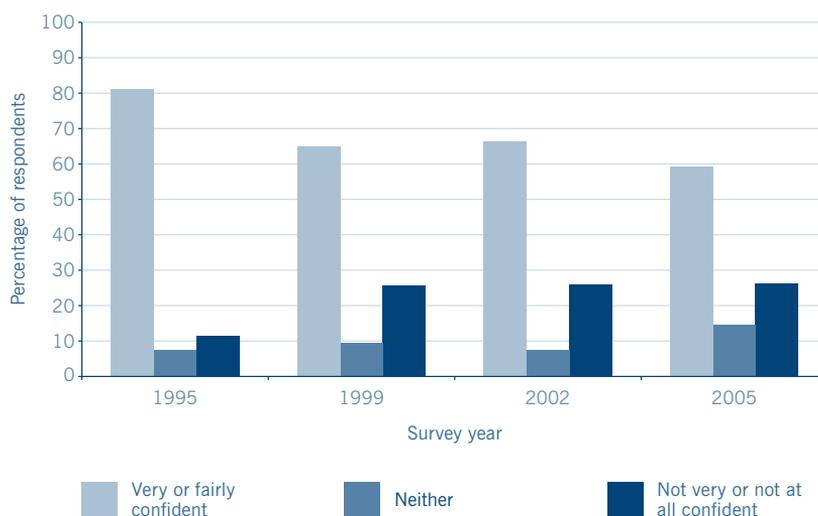
There is a significant body of research evidence that supports these findings about gender-based differences in attitudes to either police behaviour or complaints processes (e.g. see Apple & O’Brien 1983; Cao, Frank & Cullen 1996; Thomas &

Hyman 1977). It has been suggested that women hold more positive sentiments because their contact with police is generally less antagonistic than the contact that typically occurs between males and police. Compared with males, females are more likely to make service requests of the police and are less likely to be involved in situations in which the police are acting against them (Cao, Frank & Cullen 1996, p. 14).

Of greatest interest, however, is the significant increase in the proportion of respondents who reported that they were neither confident nor unconfident that complaints would be properly investigated ($p < .000$). This may reflect a lack of knowledge about relevant processes, and is perhaps an indication that education campaigns about complaints processes may be warranted. Alternatively, it could simply mean that, as stories of police misconduct become less frequent, an awareness of the complaints processes available for responding to allegations of police misconduct becomes less prevalent.

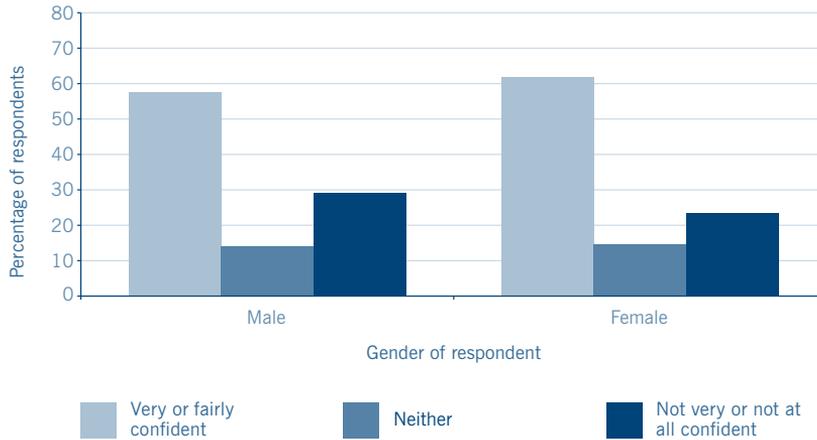
The data presented in Figure 18 show the level of confidence in complaints being properly investigated, expressed by respondents who had been dissatisfied with police in the preceding 12 months but had not made a complaint. Unlike the total sample, where the majority of the respondents (about two-thirds) stated that they were ‘very or fairly confident’ of a proper investigation (see Figure 16), the majority of the Figure 18 respondents (again about two-thirds) stated that they were ‘not very or not at all confident’ of a proper investigation.

Figure 16. Confidence that a complaint would be properly investigated, 1995–2005



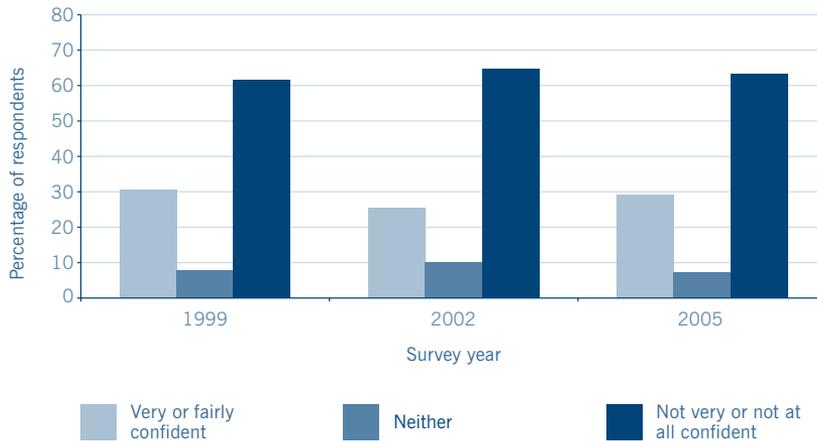
Note: Data exclude a number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question (25% in 1995 but less than 5% for each of the remaining years).

Figure 17. Confidence in complaints being properly investigated by gender, 2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents who did not answer this question.

Figure 18. Level of confidence in complaints being properly investigated, expressed by respondents who had been dissatisfied with police in the preceding 12 months but had not made a complaint, 1999–2005



Note: Data for 1995 are not comparable.

Factors affecting public confidence in complaints processes

To explore the reasons for their lack of confidence in complaints processes, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements about the police.

In 2005, approximately 40 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement ‘The chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim’. This result was similar to those reported in 2002 and 1999.

Agreement with this statement was significantly linked to various demographic factors (see Table 12). For example, in 2005:

- ▶ males were about 60 per cent more likely to agree with this statement than females (p = .000)
- ▶ older respondents (65 years or older) were about 10 per cent more likely to agree with this statement than younger respondents (p = .011)
- ▶ retirees and students were about 13 per cent more likely to agree with this statement than those in the other employment categories (p = .006)
- ▶ respondents who had not completed secondary school were about 20 per cent more likely to agree with this statement than those who had achieved higher levels of education (p = .009).

Approximately 16 per cent of respondents in 2005 agreed with the statement ‘There is no point reporting corruption as nothing useful will be done about it’. This is a significant increase since 2002, when only around 11 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement (p < .001). Demographic factors also influenced these perceptions, with people who had no tertiary qualifications, and unemployed or retired respondents, more likely to agree with this statement than their counterparts (Table 13).

Table 12. Demographic predictors of agreement with the statement ‘The chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim’

| Demographic factor | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Gender (males) | 0.000 | 1.588 | 1.264 | 1.997 |
| Age (older respondents) | 0.011 | 1.103 | 1.023 | 1.191 |
| Employment status (retirees/students) | 0.006 | 1.127 | 1.036 | 1.227 |
| Education (not completed secondary) | 0.009 | 1.199 | 1.046 | 1.375 |

Table 13. Demographic predictors of agreement with the statement ‘There is no point reporting corruption as nothing useful will be done about it’

| Demographic | Significance (p value) | Odds ratio [Exp(B)] | 95% confidence interval | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Gender | n.s. | 0.801 | 0.593 | 1.082 |
| Age | n.s. | 1.077 | 0.976 | 1.188 |
| Employment status (unemployed or retired) | 0.033 | 1.125 | 1.009 | 1.253 |
| Education (respondents who had not completed a tertiary qualification) | 0.001 | 1.352 | 1.130 | 1.617 |

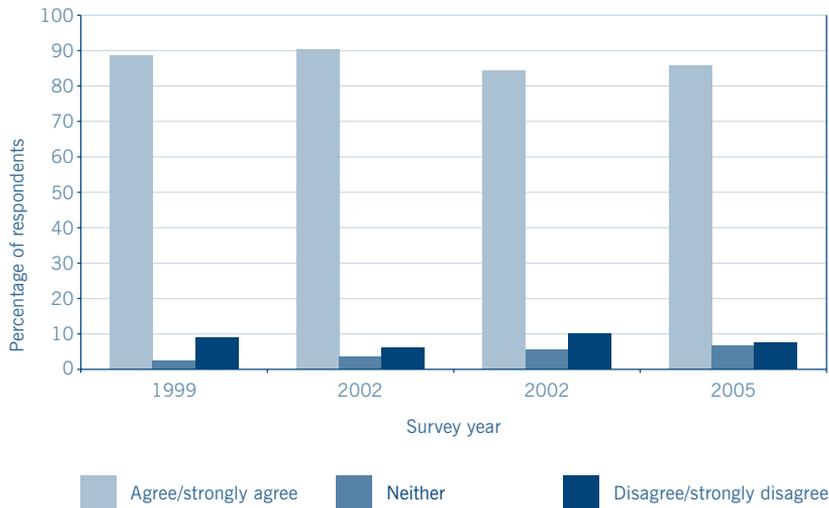
Note: n.s. = not significant

Who should investigate complaints?

Across the last four survey groups, between 80 and 90 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement ‘Complaints against police officers should be investigated by an independent body rather than by the police themselves’ (see Figure 19).

As discussed in the introduction to this report, however, the CM Act introduced a new regime for handling complaints against police, and the CMC is now required to refer most — but not all — complaints against police to the QPS. (The CMC retains ultimate authority over matters involving suspected official misconduct and continues to investigate serious criminal conduct that has the potential to undermine public confidence.) Indeed, the CMC encouraged many complainants to take their complaints to the QPS before the Act was passed. The results shown in the next section of this report illustrate that since the 1995 survey, when we began asking questions about where complainants against the police had taken their complaints, most had taken them directly to the QPS.

Figure 19. Agreement with the statement that complaints against police officers ‘should be investigated by an independent body rather than by the police themselves’, 1995–2005



Notes:

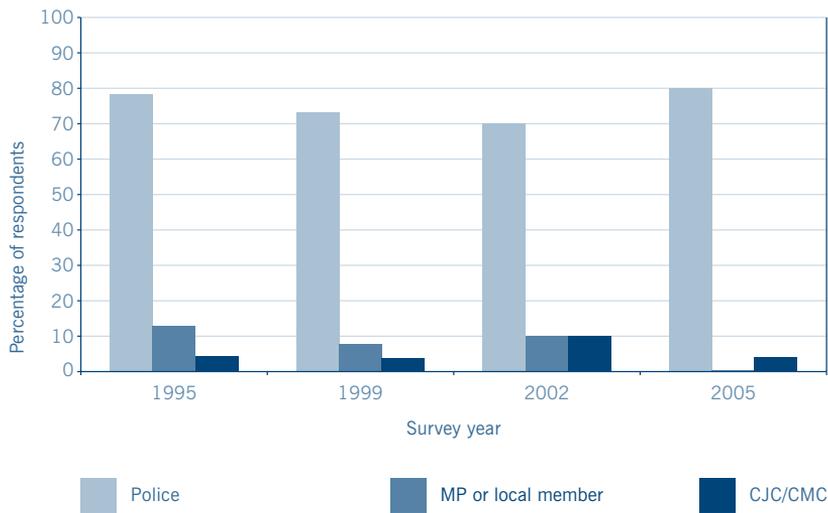
- 1 Data exclude a small number of respondents who did not answer this question.
- 2 This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

Experiences with complaints processes

Over the past four surveys only 94 respondents had made, or attempted to make, an official complaint because of dissatisfaction with police in the 12 months before their participation in the survey. Caution should therefore be applied to the following analyses, as they are based on only a small number of respondents.

The respondents were asked to whom they had made, or attempted to make, their most recent complaint. Just over three-quarters of the respondents stated that they had reported the matter directly to the QPS (see Figure 20). Only a small proportion had taken their complaint either to a member of parliament or a local councillor (7%), or to the CJC or CMC (5%).

Figure 20. The organisations to whom complaints were reported, 1995–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data are based on all respondents who reported that they had made a complaint about an incident that occurred within the preceding 12 months.
- 2 The CMC/CJC category represents CJC data only for the years 1995 and 1999. After 2002, these data represent the CJC and CMC combined.
- 3 Multiple responses were allowed for this question.
- 4 Across the four survey groups, approximately 7% of respondents stated that they had reported the matter to another agency (not including the media, as this was a separate category with no responses) and 4% stated they could not remember to whom they had reported the matter.

Between 1995 and 2002 there was a steady decline in the proportion of complaints being made directly to the QPS (from 78% to 70%). This may reflect public awareness of the CJC/CMC's active role in investigating complaints about the QPS during that period. A complementary increase in the proportion of complaints being made directly to the CJC/CMC endorses this assumption.¹⁶

Between 2002 and 2005, however, the number of respondents taking their complaint directly to the QPS increased again (to 80%). As indicated in the introduction to this report, this approach is encouraged by the CMC. It may also reflect, to some degree, the public's awareness of the CMC's new devolutionary role. Since 2001, for example, the CMC has referred many allegations of police misconduct to the QPS to assess itself, with the CMC taking a monitoring role only. Again, the corresponding decline in the proportion of complaints made directly to the CMC in 2005 endorses this assumption.

¹⁶ Complaints to the CJC or CMC rose from 4% to 10% during this period.

Conclusion

This report presents the findings of the 2005 Public Attitudes Survey relating to the QPS. Overall, it is evident that public perceptions of police behaviour remain positive.

The areas for improvement identified in this report are similar to those identified in the 1999 and 2002 surveys. However, there is some evidence of improvement since the last survey, and the QPS is to be congratulated on its achievements and encouraged to implement further change to continue these pleasing outcomes. For example, there is some evidence of decline in the levels of dissatisfaction with the police overall. The relationship between police and young people also seems to have improved, and is likely to continue to do so with the implementation of a research project by The University of Queensland (supported by an Australian Research Council grant with the CMC as an industry partner). That project will investigate the nature of, and factors shaping, interaction between police and young people; it will also include information about complaints processes and possible strategies for enhancing police–youth relations and increasing the confidence of young people in the police.

For the first time, the survey has indicated some significant differences in attitudes towards police behaviour by survey area. For example, while there were no regional differences in the proportion of respondents who had ever been annoyed or dissatisfied with police behaviour in the preceding 12 months, respondents from the Far North tended to have slightly more negative views of police behaviour than respondents from other areas, or to be relatively uninformed or undecided about certain police issues. For example, bivariate analyses indicated that respondents from the Far North were significantly less likely than respondents from other areas to agree that ‘most police are honest’ (78% compared with an average of 86% in other areas; $p < .01$). The results also indicate some negative perceptions of police in the South West, but the extent of these views is not as great as in the Far North.

The extent to which these results indicate a level of unease between police and the Indigenous communities of the Far North can only be postulated.¹⁷ There is certainly no clear indicator of a causal link, as the data required to illustrate such a link were not collected. However, this is an issue that could be examined in the next Public Attitudes Survey by including some targeted questions about relations between police and the Indigenous community, as well as information about the Indigenous status of respondents. Historically, this survey has not collected information about the ethnicity of respondents, but such information could provide better insight into this and other related issues in the future.

17 The proportion of Indigenous people residing in Cairns (15.3%), for example, is far higher than in Brisbane (1.5%), the Gold Coast (1.0%) or Central Queensland (5% in Townsville; 5.2% in Rockhampton) (Office of Economic and Statistical Research 2001).

There also seems to have been some slippage in the general understanding of complaints systems. These results are a timely message — for both the CMC and the Ethical Standards Command of the QPS — that steps may need to be taken to increase public awareness about the systems available for making complaints. The CMC's current role provides an ongoing opportunity to ensure that complaints are dealt with effectively and appropriately by the QPS, and that the public is aware of the CMC's functions. The data presented in this report will provide an important benchmark for future activity and survey analysis in this area.

The 2005 results have indicated other ways in which the Public Attitudes Survey could in the future be modified to better reflect the changes that have occurred in both the QPS and the CMC during the past decade. For example, recent research (Sced 2004a, b) has shown the importance of seeking information about police-initiated contact (e.g. when carrying out random breath tests, issuing speeding fines or arresting suspects) as opposed to contact with police initiated by the public (e.g. when seeking information, asking for a noise or disturbance to be investigated, or due to a traffic accident). The nature of the contact and its outcome have been shown to have marked impacts on individuals' attitudes to police. It is also possible that the public may respond differently to the ways in which complaints are handled by the QPS or the CMC. Modifications to future surveys will ensure that future data remain relevant to the changes occurring in the policing environment of Queensland, while continuing to demonstrate trends over time.

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