

# PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

## of the Queensland Police Service

Findings from the 2002 Public Attitudes Survey

KELLY EDE

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Crime and Misconduct Commission  
140 Creek Street, Brisbane, Australia 4000  
GPO Box 3123  
Brisbane Qld 4001  
Tel.: (07) 3360 6060  
Fax: (07) 3360 6333  
E-mail: [mailbox@cmc.qld.gov.au](mailto:mailbox@cmc.qld.gov.au)

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# Key findings

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- ▶ The 2002 Public Attitudes Survey found that most people in Queensland had a positive view of the Queensland Police Service (QPS). This is similar to findings in previous surveys.
- ▶ The police ‘image’ continues to improve with around 90 per cent of respondents indicating a belief that most police are honest and that police generally behave well. While a reasonably large proportion of respondents believed that there would always be some corruption in the police service, public tolerance of misconduct has shown a steady decline since 1995.
- ▶ The proportion of people reporting dissatisfaction with the QPS continued to decline in 2002. Almost half of these respondents stated that they had felt like complaining about the dissatisfying behaviour, but only just over 10 per cent actually made or attempted to make an official complaint. For those people who felt like complaining but chose not to, the most common reason was a belief that it would not do any good or that they did not know how to make an official complaint.
- ▶ General public confidence in the complaints process remains reasonably high, although there has been a decline since 1995. In particular, younger respondents report less confidence in the complaints process.
- ▶ Most people continue to agree that complaints against police officers should be investigated by an independent body rather than by the police themselves. However, most respondents who made a complaint reported it directly to the QPS.

While the data generally provide a favourable view of the QPS, some areas — namely, police and young people, the complaints process and satisfaction with police — require further attention. These issues are very similar to those raised in the 1999 survey.

## ***Police and young people***

Younger respondents — aged 18 to 24 — are significantly more likely than other groups to express negative views of the police and to report dissatisfaction with their treatment by police. There are a number of explanations for this finding, including greater contact between the police and young people. While the data suggest that the views of young people will moderate with age, it is possible that public support for the police will weaken over time because of the negative views of this age group.

### ***The complaints process***

The proportion of respondents expressing confidence in the complaints process has declined significantly over the years, particularly among younger respondents. Additionally, respondents who are dissatisfied with police behaviour are less likely than before to make an official complaint.

### ***Satisfaction with police***

People who reported dissatisfaction with the police in the 2002 survey were most likely to say the officer had been rude or unfriendly or had acted unreasonably or unfairly during their encounter. These have consistently been the most common reasons for dissatisfaction reported by respondents over the previous three surveys.

These types of concerns from the public raise various 'customer service' issues for the police. Strategies to improve police-citizen relations should be explored, including an emphasis on improving communication skills among police officers.

It is evident that additional work needs to be done in these three areas to maintain the high level of support currently expressed by the public towards the police. While these issues are cause for some concern, it should not be overlooked that general public perceptions of police behaviour and the police image remained positive in 2002.

# Background

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The 2002 Public Attitudes Survey is the fifth in a series of telephone surveys, beginning in 1991, that have been conducted of Queensland residents on behalf of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) and now the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC).

The primary focus of the survey is to measure public attitudes towards the QPS, as well as public knowledge, confidence and experiences regarding the complaints process. Changes in attitudes can be determined over time by the repeated use of the survey. The survey has undergone some modifications over the years, including the recent addition of questions relating to public service and local government employees and various questions relating to the CMC.

This report presents findings relating to the QPS. Separate reports examining other aspects of the survey will follow.

As not all questions relating to the police have been asked consistently across the years, this report focuses on the responses given in the 2002 survey and, where possible, presents comparisons with previous surveys.

# Structure of the report

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The report is divided into three main parts:

- ▶ Part A describes the survey methodology and the sample.
- ▶ Part B describes general public perceptions of police behaviour and police ‘image’, and examines levels of public satisfaction with the QPS.
- ▶ Part C explores public opinion regarding the complaints process.

In Parts B and C, differences in the way various demographic groups responded to the survey questions are presented. In particular, comparisons are shown for age, gender and employment status, as these were the factors that had the largest impact on public attitudes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Analyses were also run for level of education and geographical location, but few differences were found among these groups. The results of these analyses are available from the CMC, upon request.

# Part A: Methodology

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As with earlier surveys, a random sample was drawn from the population of all Queensland residents aged 18 years and over who were usual residents in a private dwelling with a telephone. The sample was selected using random digit dialling (RDD), and one resident aged 18 years or over was randomly selected from the household to complete the survey.<sup>2</sup> After excluding out-of-scope numbers, the final sample consisted of 1551 residents. The response rate for the survey was 48 per cent.

Compared with the 1991, 1993 and 1995 surveys, a significantly higher proportion of female respondents were included in 1999 and 2002 ( $p < .001$ , see Figure 1 next page).<sup>3</sup> This change resulted from the use of random sampling in the 1999 and 2002 groups, rather than quota sampling, which was used previously.

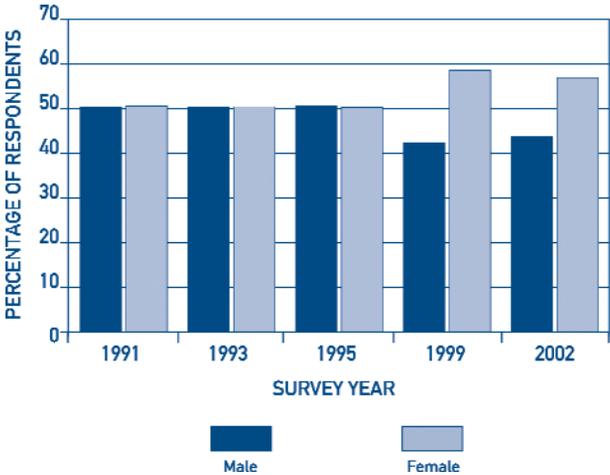
While there have been some changes in the age profile of respondents across the five survey groups, the differences between the years are not significant (see Figure 2 next page).

From 1995 onward, respondents have been asked to indicate their current employment status. Data presented in Figure 3 (page 7) show a significant difference in the profile of respondents over the 1995, 1999 and 2002 survey periods ( $p < .001$ ). In particular, there was a higher proportion of 'employed' respondents in the 1999 sample when compared with the other years. The 2002 sample included a larger proportion of respondents who said they were 'retired or on a pension' or 'unemployed'.

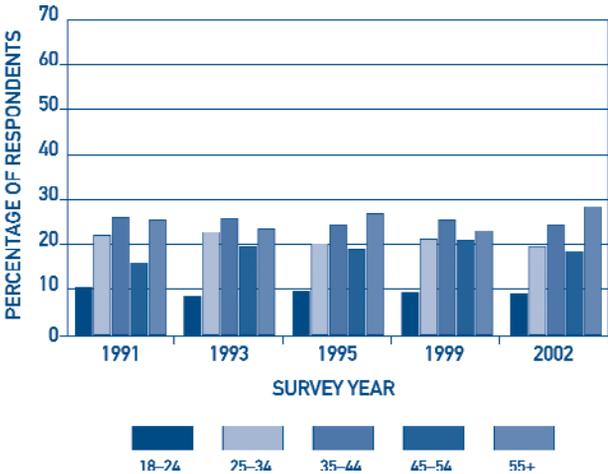
The survey results for each year were weighted for age, gender and geographic location to ensure an accurate representation of the State. This paper presents the unweighted data, as only slight differences were found between the weighted and unweighted responses.

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- 2 A sample unit (telephone number) was deemed to be finalised when contact with the household/person had been completed, or the telephone number was found to be out of scope for the survey, or the predetermined number of attempts to reach numbers not answering had been reached.
  - 3 Chi-square tests were used to examine whether differences between survey years or demographic variables were statistically significant.

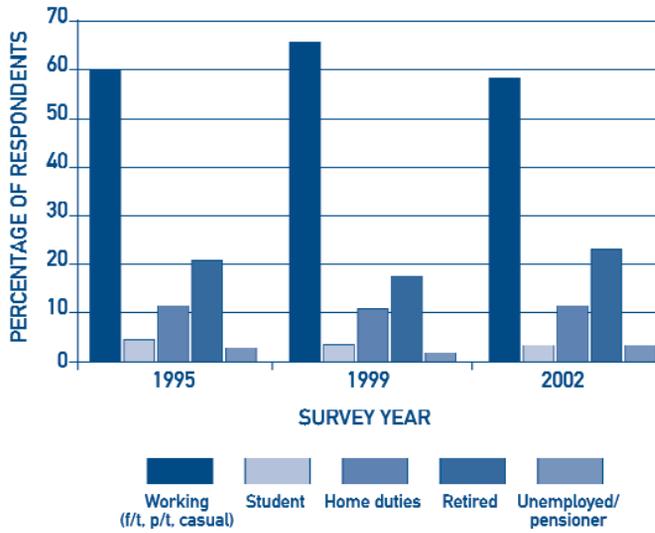
**Figure 1. Respondents by gender (1991 to 2002)**



**Figure 2. Respondents by age (1991 to 2002)**



**Figure 3. Respondents by employment status (1995 to 2002)**



Note: Employment status was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

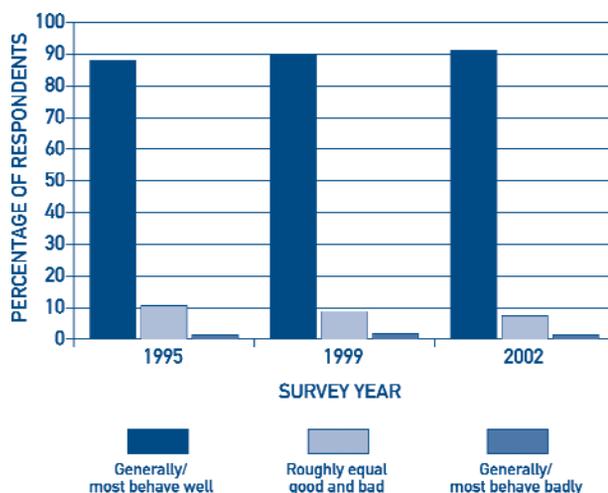
# Part B: Perceptions of police behaviour

## General perceptions

The 2002 survey found that most Queenslanders had a positive view of the police — a finding that is consistent with data from previous survey periods. Figure 4 shows that around 90 per cent of respondents in the last three surveys thought that police ‘generally/mostly behave well’. Less than 2 per cent of respondents in each group stated that police ‘generally/ mostly behave badly’.<sup>4</sup>

Respondents who were unemployed or engaged in home duties were significantly less likely than other groups to believe that police generally behave well ( $p < .05$  — see Table 1).

**Figure 4 — General perceptions of police behaviour (1995 to 2002)**



Notes:

1. This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.
2. Data excludes a small number of respondents from each group who answered ‘don’t know’.

<sup>4</sup> The differences across the years were not statistically significant.

Across each of the five survey periods, the vast majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘most police are honest’ (see Table 2). Male respondents generally held this view more strongly than female respondents — however, the difference between the two groups was only significant in 1995 and 2002 ( $p < .05$ ). Additional data (not presented) showed that the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement also differed significantly based on their employment status ( $p < .05$ ). In particular, respondents who were unemployed were significantly less likely to agree — 71 per cent compared with 85 per cent of all other respondents.

**Table 1. General perceptions of police behaviour by employment status (2002 survey)**

	generally/ most behave well	roughly equal numbers good and bad	generally/ most behave badly	TOTAL
Retired/pensioner	320 (93%)	20 (6%)	4 (1%)	344 (100%)
Student	45 (92%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	49 (100%)
Working (f/t, p/t, cas.)	798 (92%)	63 (7%)	11 (1%)	872 (100%)
Home duties	149 (87%)	22 (13%)	1 (1%)	172 (100%)
Unemployed	44 (86%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	51 (100%)
TOTAL	1356 (91%)	112 (8%)	20 (1%)	1488 (100%)

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may add to more than 100%.

**Table 2. General perceptions of police**

	1991 (n = 901)	1993 (n = 900)	1995 (n = 900)	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)
Most police are honest	84.1	87.8	87.2	80.7	85.0
Male	84.7	88.0	89.6	82.7	87.5
Female	83.6	87.6	84.9	79.2	83.0
The police have a bad image in Queensland	59.3	48.1	28.7	30.3	24.2
Male	60.7	49.6	27.1	29.2	24.5
Female	57.9	46.7	30.3	31.1	23.9

Note: Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

Table 2 also shows that the proportion who agreed or strongly agreed that ‘the police have a bad image in Queensland’ has dropped significantly over time — from almost 60 per cent in 1991 to less than 25 per cent in 2002 ( $p < .001$ ). Similar proportions of male and female respondents agreed with this statement. This encouraging result represents an almost 60 per cent reduction in negative public perceptions of the police in the last ten years. Further, it suggests increased public recognition of the changes the QPS has made over the last decade to policy and practice and to dealing with misconduct.

Of some concern is the fact that respondents who indicated that they were employed either on a full-time, part-time or casual basis were significantly more likely than any other group to agree that ‘the police have a bad image in Queensland’ ( $p < .01$ ). Data for 2002 (not presented) show that 27 per cent of ‘employed’ respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement compared with around 20 per cent of respondents from all other employment groups combined.

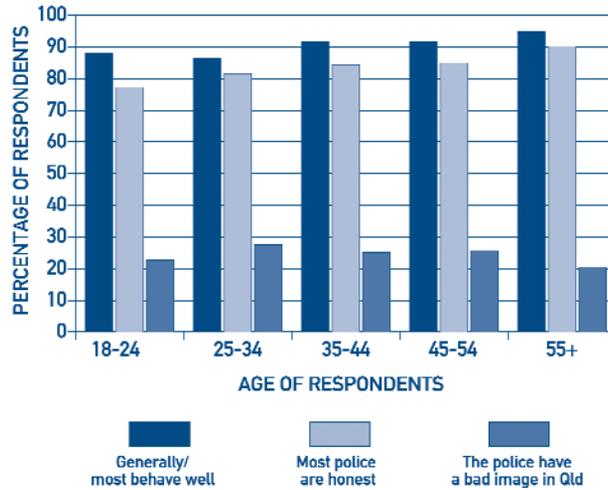
Interestingly, some respondents agreed with both of these statements (‘most police are honest’ and ‘the police have a bad image in Queensland’), suggesting that, while they *personally* held the view that most police were honest, they believed police *generally* had a bad image — possibly due to the inappropriate behaviour of a small number of police.

By far the most significant demographic factor is respondent age. Older respondents — particularly those aged over 55 years — have the most positive views of police behaviour, while younger respondents — between 18 and 34 — have the least positive views. The relationship between age and general perceptions of the police for 2002 is presented in Figure 5.

The results reveal that the proportion of respondents who believed that ‘most police behave well’ and who agreed that ‘most police are honest’ increases significantly with age ( $p < .05$  and  $p < .001$  respectively). This trend is consistent with previous surveys. As expected, the proportion of respondents who agreed that ‘the police have a bad image in Queensland’ declines with age.

When interpreting the results, it is important to note that respondents’ perceptions are influenced by a range of factors in addition to the demographics presented in this report. The level of contact that a person has had with the police and, perhaps, the reason for the contact may account for some of the differences. From the current data, it is not possible to determine the amount or type of contact that respondents had with the police.

**Figure 5. General perceptions of police behaviour by age (2002 survey)**



## Changes over time

Results reported in Figure 6 (next page) reveal that most of the people surveyed believed that police behaviour had either improved or stayed the same over the last few years.

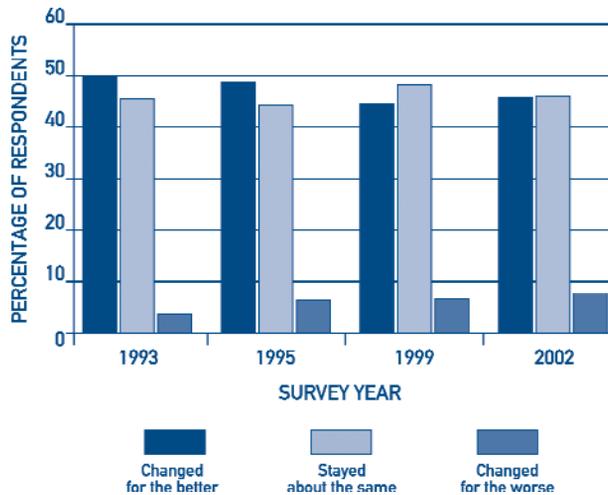
Respondents who thought police behaviour had improved were most likely to be male and aged over 55 years, while those who thought police behaviour had stayed the same were more likely to be female and aged 18 to 24 years.<sup>5</sup>

Less than 10 per cent of respondents in each survey thought that police behaviour had changed for the worse. Equally small proportions of males and females held this view, but again these were more likely to be younger respondents.

Given the consistently positive responses to police behaviour over time, it is perhaps not surprising that many respondents felt police behaviour had ‘stayed about the same’ in recent years. This is increasingly apparent when we consider the views of respondents in different age groups. Respondents who thought police behaviour had changed for the better were likely to be older and may have seen a dramatic improvement in the police since the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Younger respondents, on the other hand, have a shorter time frame over which to measure change and, consequently, an already improved level of behaviour as their basis for comparison.

<sup>5</sup> For 2002 data,  $p < .001$  for both age and gender.

**Figure 6 — Changes in behaviour over time (1993 to 2002)**



Note: This question was not asked in the 1991 survey.

## Tolerance of police misconduct

In each survey, respondents were asked a number of questions designed to measure their tolerance of police misconduct. The statements presented below are those that were asked in the 2002 survey and, where possible, results are compared with those from earlier surveys.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive views held by most respondents, results in Table 3 show that around 90 per cent of people still believed that ‘you always get some corruption in the police service’. This represents an increase from 1991, but a slight decline from 1995.

In 1995, 63 per cent of respondents agreed that ‘sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done’. By 2002, this proportion had dropped to 43 per cent ( $p < .001$ ), representing a 32 per cent decline. This level of decline is significant and perhaps reflects greater public awareness and intolerance of police misconduct.

A similarly significant decline in the proportion who agreed that the ‘police don’t have enough powers to do their job properly’ ( $p < .001$ ) was observed in 2002.

Overall, older people tend to be far more tolerant of police misconduct when compared with other age groups. In the two most recent surveys, the proportion of respondents who agreed that ‘you will always get some corruption’ increased significantly with age (1999  $p < .01$ ; 2002  $p < .05$ ). Age was also a significant factor in attitudes towards rule breaking, with respondents aged over 55 being far more tolerant when compared with younger respondents ( $p < .01$  across the last three surveys).

**Table 3. Tolerance of police misconduct**

	1991 (n = 901)	1993 (n = 900)	1995 (n = 900)	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)
You will always get some corruption in the police service	85.0	87.6	93.2	90.0	89.7
Sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done	—	—	63.1	53.2	43.3
The police don't have enough powers to do their job properly	—	—	60.2	56.9	54.4

**Notes:**

1. — indicates that this question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.
2. Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

Employment status also had a significant effect on attitudes towards rule breaking. Consistent with the finding relating to age, the 2002 survey found that respondents who were retired were more likely than any other group to agree or strongly agree that 'sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done' — 53 per cent, compared with 40 per cent for all other groups combined ( $p < .001$ ). Students were most likely to disagree with this statement, closely followed by respondents who were working either full-time or part-time or in casual employment.

In the 1999 survey, male and female respondents also held quite different views on rule breaking, with a significantly higher proportion of males tolerating such behaviour ( $p < .001$ ). By 2002, however, no differences between males and females were observed.

Older females held most strongly to the view that 'the police don't have enough powers to do their job properly'. Respondents who indicated that they were 'students' were least likely to agree that 'the police don't have enough powers to do their job properly'. Only 29 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared with 55 per cent of all other respondents ( $p < .001$ ).

## Dissatisfaction with the QPS

Almost 25 per cent of respondents in the 2002 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. This finding is consistent with 1999, but represents a significant decline when compared to the 29 per cent reported in 1995 ( $p < .01$ ).

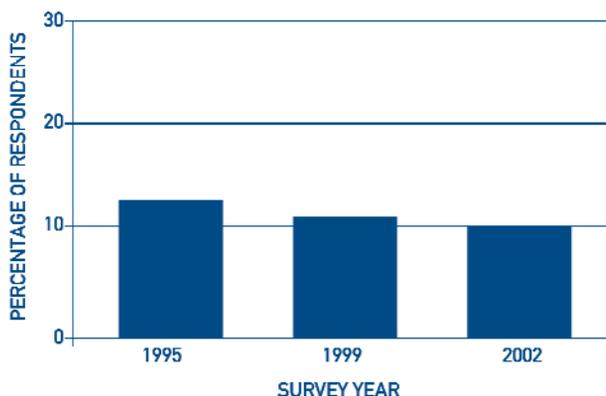
Forty-two per cent of those respondents — or around 10 per cent of the total sample — reported that an incident leading to their dissatisfaction had occurred in the last 12 months (see Figure 7). Although the graph shows a slight decline in the proportion of dissatisfied respondents over time, this difference is not significant.

Information on the relationship between age and dissatisfaction with the police is reported in Figure 8. The results for 2002 reveal a significant decline in the proportion of respondents who reported dissatisfaction with the police in the last 12 months as age increases ( $p < .001$ ). Just over a quarter of respondents aged 18 to 24 reported that they had been dissatisfied with a member of the QPS in the last 12 months, compared with less than 3 per cent of respondents aged 55 or over.

Even when compared with the next closest group, the difference was considerable — only about 15 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds reported dissatisfaction with the police in the previous 12-month period.

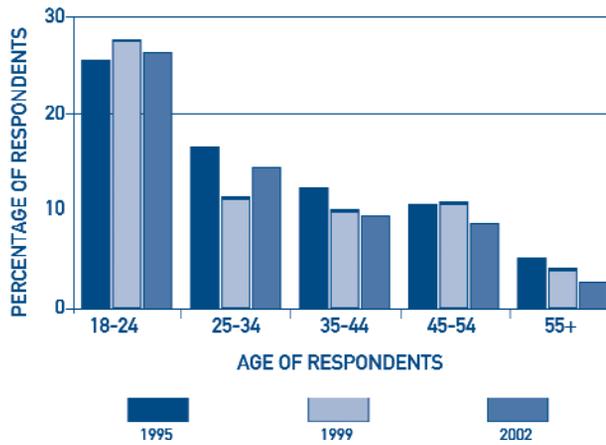
The overall relationship between age and dissatisfaction with the police is similar across previous surveys, with respondents aged 18 to 24 reporting the highest level of dissatisfaction over the previous 12 months. This finding clearly shows that respondents' levels of dissatisfaction with the police seem to moderate as they age, with respondents in the 18 to 24 age group consistently reporting the most dissatisfaction over time. One of the most likely explanations for the high level of dissatisfaction among respondents in this group is the high level of contact that young people have with the police.

**Figure 7. Proportion of all respondents dissatisfied with the police in the last 12 months (1995 to 2002)**



Note: This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

**Figure 8. Age of respondents dissatisfied with the police in the last 12 months (2002 survey)**



## Reasons for dissatisfaction

Among respondents reporting dissatisfaction with the police in 2002, the largest proportion reported that the reason was that the officer had acted in a rude or unfriendly manner during the encounter (see Table 4, next page). The second most common reason was because the officer had behaved unreasonably or unfairly. Over the last three survey groups, the proportion of respondents who gave this reason has increased significantly ( $p < .05$ ).

On the other hand, reports of using undue force or violence and illegal behaviour or breaking the rules were far less common. It should be noted that these two categories — undue force and illegal behaviour — have fluctuated a little over the three years. This can be partly explained by an overlap in the coding definitions used for these types of behaviour. If the two categories are combined, we can see that they comprised about 10 per cent of the reasons for dissatisfaction in 1995 and 1999 and have dropped slightly to just under 8 per cent in 2002.

Across the 2002 sample, the reasons given for dissatisfaction with the police did not vary by age or gender of the respondent. The only differences identified across any of the demographic variables related to the employment status of the respondent. Specifically, respondents who were unemployed were significantly more likely than any other group to state that the reason they were dissatisfied was that the police behaved illegally or broke the rules ( $p < .05$ ) or that offenders were not caught or property not recovered ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 4. Reasons for dissatisfaction with the QPS (1995 to 2002)**

	1995 (n = 109)	1999 (n = 161)	2002 (n = 154)	% change since 1995
Manner unfriendly/rude/ arrogant	35.8	39.1	40.9	+14.2
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	22.0	31.1	36.4	+65.5
Did nothing/didn't do enough	22.0	23.0	18.8	-14.5
Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no-one available	13.8	16.1	14.9	+8.0
Lack of interest	3.7	20.5	14.3	+286.5
Did wrong thing/were incompetent	10.1	12.4	11.7	+15.8
Behaved illegally/broke the rules	7.3	3.7	5.8	-20.5
Did not keep person informed/did not come back	4.6	3.7	4.5	-2.2
Used undue force or violence or assaulted someone	2.8	7.5	1.9	-32.1
Racist language or behaviour	2.8	2.5	1.9	-32.1
Offenders not caught/ property not recovered	2.8	3.7	1.3	-53.5
Other	19.3	12.4	8.4	-56.5

**Notes:**

1. This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.
2. Numbers will add up to more than 100% as multiple responses were allowed for this question.
3. Percentage change will be affected by the small sample size.

# Part C: The complaints process

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Those respondents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with the police were asked if they had felt like making an official complaint.<sup>6</sup> As shown in Table 5, just under 5 per cent of the total 2002 sample — or about half of those dissatisfied in the last 12 months — stated that they had felt like complaining. However, only about 1 per cent of the total — or 13 per cent of those dissatisfied in the last 12 months — actually made or attempted to make an official complaint.

Respondents who were unemployed were significantly less likely to report that they felt like making an official complaint when compared with all other groups ( $p < .05$ ). Only 20 per cent of unemployed respondents who had been dissatisfied in the last 12 months reported that they had felt like making an official complaint, compared with 53 per cent of respondents from all other groups.

While, overall, more dissatisfied people in 2002 felt like complaining compared with the 1999 respondents, about the same proportion reported that they had actually made or attempted to make an official complaint (see Table 5 next page). Expressed as a ratio, almost one in three people who felt like complaining in 1995 and 1999 actually made a complaint, compared with almost one in four in 2002.

This decline in willingness of dissatisfied respondents to make an official complaint raises some concerns about how the public perceives the complaints process. In the following sections, reasons for not making a complaint and general issues related to public confidence in the complaints process are discussed.

## Reasons for not complaining

For those respondents who stated that they felt like complaining but chose not to, the most common reason given in the last three surveys was a belief that ‘it would not do any good’. The second most common reason given was that the respondent ‘did not know how to make a complaint’.

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<sup>6</sup> Official complaints are those made to the police, the Commission, an MP or local member, a lawyer, the Ombudsman etc.

**Table 5. Summary table of dissatisfied respondents (1995 to 2002)**

	1995		1999		2002	
	n	% of total (n = 900)	n	% of total (n = 1502)	n	% of total (n = 1551)
Have been dissatisfied	262	29.1	379	25.2	364	23.5
Dissatisfied in the last 12 mths	109	12.1	161	10.7	154	9.9
Felt like making a complaint	61	6.8	71	4.7	76	4.9
Made or tried to make a complaint	23	2.6	26	1.7	20	1.3
Ratio of 'felt like' complaining to 'made' or 'tried to make' a complaint	2.6:1		2.7:1		3.8:1	

**Notes:**

1. These questions 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.

Although the small numbers of people involved mean that some caution should be exercised when interpreting these results, it is clear that the proportion of respondents giving these reasons has increased over time. This increase raises concerns about the public's knowledge and understanding of the complaints process. It is possible that people assume complaining will not do any good because they are uncertain about how the process works.

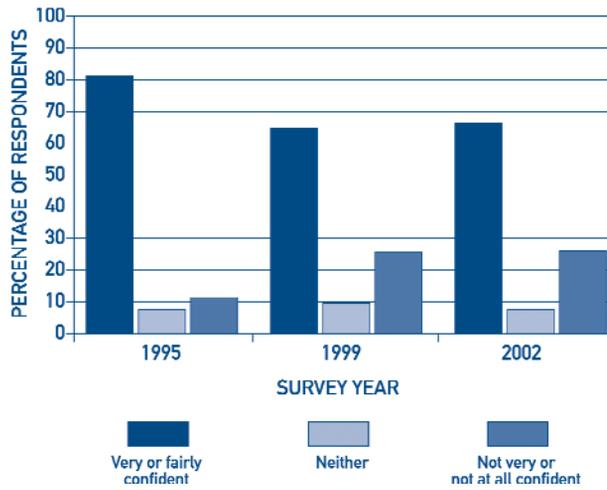
## Public confidence in the complaints process

Are the results given above a reflection of diminishing public confidence in the complaints process in Queensland?

In the last three surveys, respondents who had never made an official complaint against a police officer were asked the following question: 'If you were to make a complaint, how confident would you be that your complaint would be properly investigated?'. In general, the response was positive (see Figure 9); however, the proportion of respondents who indicated that they would not be confident of a proper investigation more than doubled between 1995 and 1999 and has remained high in 2002 ( $p < .01$ ).

In particular, results in Figure 10 reveal that respondents aged 18 to 24 reported the least confidence in the complaints process. Older respondents were most likely to report that they would be very or fairly confident of a proper investigation ( $p < .001$ ). This trend has been consistent across the last three survey periods.

**Figure 9. Public confidence in complaints being properly investigated (1995 to 2002)**



Note: This question was not asked in the 1991 and 1993 surveys.

**Figure 10. Confidence in a proper investigation by age (2002 survey)**

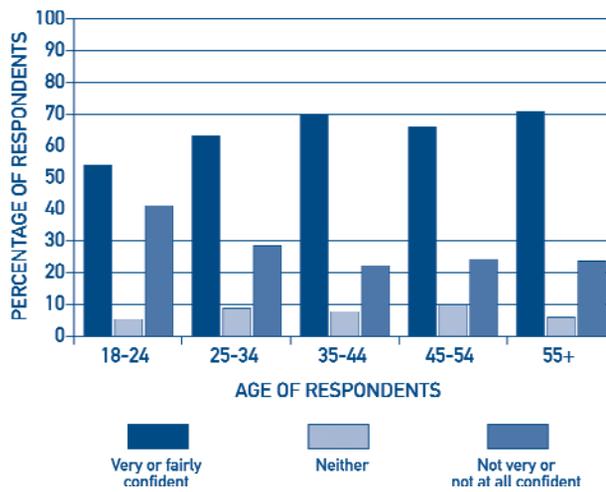
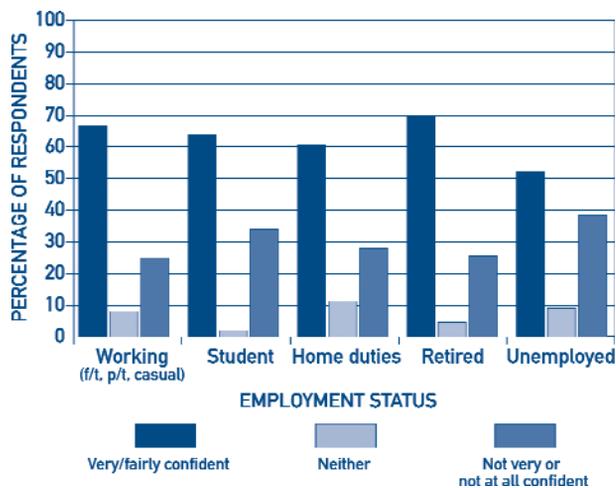


Figure 11 reveals a significant difference in public confidence in the complaints process based on the employment status of the respondent ( $p < .05$ ). Unemployed respondents were less likely to report confidence in a proper investigation when compared with other groups. Consistent with the findings for age, respondents who were retired or on a pension were the group most likely to report confidence.

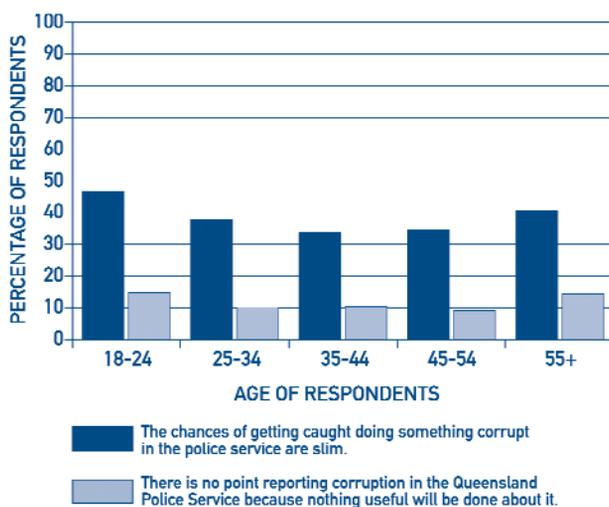
In 2002, approximately 40 per cent of respondents believed that ‘the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim’. This is similar to the proportion for 1999. As shown in Figure 12, respondents aged 18 to 24 were most likely to agree with this, but were closely followed by those aged over 55 years ( $p < .01$ ). When comparing groups by employment status, respondents who were retired were significantly more likely than all other groups combined to agree ( $p < .05$ ).

On the other hand, only around 12 per cent of respondents in 2002 agreed that ‘there is no point reporting corruption as nothing useful will be done about it’. This is a significant drop from over 17 per cent in 1999 ( $p < .001$ ). Again, respondents who were most likely to agree with this were aged either 18 to 24 or over 55 years ( $p < .01$ ; see Figure 12). Additional data (not presented) also revealed that respondents who were retired or on a pension were significantly more likely than any other group to agree ( $p < .01$ ).

**Figure 11. Confidence in a proper investigation by employment status (2002 survey)**



**Figure 12. Perceptions of corruption by age (2002 survey)**



## Experiences with the complaint process

Data for the last three survey periods reveal that between 80 and 90 per cent of respondents agreed that complaints against police officers ‘should be investigated by an independent body rather than by the police themselves’.

Given the small number of respondents who actually made a complaint against a police officer — and particularly those who complained within the last 12 months — it was not possible to conduct any meaningful analyses of the results in relation to experiences with the complaints process. Over the last three surveys, only 69 respondents made or attempted to make an official complaint because of dissatisfaction in the last 12 months. The following discussion is based on aggregate data from the last three survey periods.

It is interesting to note that while most people agreed that an independent body should handle complaints against police, almost three-quarters of respondents who actually made or attempted to make an official complaint stated that they had reported the matter directly to the QPS. A small percentage reported it to an MP or local member or to the Commission.

While the small numbers involved mean that some caution should be exercised when interpreting these data, an emerging trend here and throughout this report is the need for greater communication with the public regarding the complaints process.

# Summary

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Although the findings from this survey are generally positive, there are several issues that warrant further attention. These relate to:

- ▶ police and young people
- ▶ the complaints process
- ▶ satisfaction with the police.

## Police and young people

Age of the respondent was the most significant factor when examining the attitudes of the public towards both police behaviour and the complaints process. In general, younger respondents — aged 18 to 24 — were considerably more likely than other groups to express negative views of police and to report dissatisfaction with their treatment by police.

The high level of contact between the police and young people is clearly a factor in the increased levels of dissatisfaction among this group. While it seems likely that the views of young respondents will moderate as they get older, it is possible that public support for the police will weaken over the longer term unless steps are taken to improve relations between the police and young people.

## The complaints process

While overall public confidence in the complaints system remains high, there has been a decline in recent years. In particular:

- ▶ the proportion of respondents who expressed confidence that if they made a complaint it would be properly investigated has fallen from 80 to 60 per cent since 1995
- ▶ young people report far less confidence in the complaints process compared to the rest of the sample
- ▶ respondents who report dissatisfaction with the police are less likely to make an official complaint than was the case in 1995.

Over the last three survey periods, the most commonly stated reasons for not making an official complaint have been the belief that ‘it would not do any good’ and the fact that they ‘did not know how to make a complaint’. The proportion of respondents giving these reasons has increased over time.

These findings indicate that further work needs to be done to improve public knowledge of the complaints process and to ensure that public confidence in the process does not decrease further.

## **Satisfaction with the police**

While most people indicated a positive view of police behaviour, those who reported dissatisfaction were most likely to have perceived the officer as being unfriendly, rude or arrogant, or having acted unreasonably or unfairly during their encounter.

By placing a greater emphasis on ‘customer service’ and on communication skills, it is likely that the police would see a reduction in the number of complaints of this nature.

# Conclusion

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This report has highlighted a number of important issues in relation to both police behaviour and police practice. The three main issues to arise out of the 2002 survey data — police and young people, the complaints process, and satisfaction with the police — are similar to those raised in the 1999 survey. It is evident that additional work needs to be done in these areas in order to maintain the high level of support currently expressed by the public towards the police.

While some of these issues may be cause for concern, we should not overlook the fact that, overall, public perceptions of police behaviour and the police image remained positive in 2002. Where negative perceptions existed, they were primarily related to procedural issues and to the complaints process in particular.

The data illustrate the continued importance of monitoring in relation to the handling of complaints against the QPS. The CMC's emerging role in capacity development provides an ongoing opportunity to ensure that complaints are dealt with effectively and appropriately. In this regard, the data presented in this report will act as an important benchmark from which we can assess future achievements in this area.