

# PUBLIC

of the  
Queensland  
Police Service

# PERCEPTIONS

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Findings from the  
2008 Public Attitudes Survey

Public Perceptions Series

April 2009

CRIME AND  
MISCONDUCT  
COMMISSION



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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

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Public confidence in the integrity of the police service is important, not only because the public is the primary consumer of police services but because a positive image of the police is necessary for the police service to be able to function effectively within the community.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the release of the report of the Fitzgerald inquiry into corruption in Queensland. Research has shown that corruption can occur in ten-year cycles; it is therefore important to monitor not only the behaviour of police officers and public servants but also the public's confidence in its police and public services.

Assessing the public's perceptions of the Queensland Police Service (QPS), local government and public sector is an important aspect of the CMC's monitoring functions. Such monitoring alerts us to any concerns held by the public and enables us to inform the QPS and the public sector that corrective actions may be required.

To date, we have conducted seven surveys of Queensland residents — in July 1991, July 1993, June 1995, June 1999, June 2002, July 2005 and, most recently, June/July 2008. This enables us to measure changes over time in public opinion about the behaviour of police officers, public servants and local government staff, and to ascertain the public's willingness to use complaints services.

Importantly, in 2008 we expanded the length and content of the survey and are able, this year, to provide more detailed and meaningful results. For example, we asked respondents additional questions about their ethnicity or Indigenous status, to ascertain whether perceptions of police differ between groups. We asked about their satisfactory experiences as well as their unsatisfactory experiences with police, what the surrounding circumstances were, and the reasons they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the contact. We also asked their views about contact between police and individuals with Indigenous heritage.

These changes to the survey provide richer and more accurate information about the perceptions of the public about a range of important and, at times, contentious issues.

This report summarises the key findings of the 2008 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.

**Robert Needham**  
**Chairperson**

# Acknowledgements

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This report was largely prepared by Dr Melissa Sum with assistance from Vivien Chan. Dr Sum was also largely responsible for amending the 2008 public attitudes survey. Dr Margot Legosz also provided advice on the survey modifications and report drafts. We are grateful to the University of Queensland Social Research Centre for administering the survey. The Communications Unit of the CMC prepared the report for publication.

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# Abbreviations

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ANOVA	analysis of variance
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)
OR	odds ratio
QCC	Queensland Crime Commission
QPS	Queensland Police Service

# Key findings

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Since the first public attitudes survey was conducted by the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) in 1991, there have been considerable changes in both the integrity of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and in how the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC), and formerly the CJC and the Queensland Crime Commission (QCC), handle complaints about the QPS and monitor integrity issues.

In addition to presenting the most recent findings from the 2008 Public Attitudes Survey, this report provides information about trends over the last 17 years. One of the benefits of the survey is its capacity to highlight areas that might require further attention before they become problematic. Given the interest of both the CMC and the QPS in the 'continual improvement' of the police service, this is valuable information. The report also highlights areas where the police are performing well from the perspective of the general public.

## General perceptions of the QPS

The overwhelming majority of Queenslanders surveyed in 2008 had a positive view of the QPS, a finding similar to that of previous surveys. For example, most respondents considered that members of the QPS generally or mostly behave well, and the majority believed that most police are honest. There has also been a significant decrease in the general perception that police in Queensland have a bad image. Although the majority of respondents tended to agree that there will always be some corruption in the police service, there was a significant decrease in the perception that the chances of being caught engaging in corruption are slim.

There were, however, some concerning perceptions of police. For example, the majority of respondents (65.2%) believed that police in Queensland treat Indigenous Australians differently from white Australians. A reasonably large proportion of respondents (56.5%) believed that the police don't have enough powers to do their job properly, and 43.5 per cent believed that the police sometimes need to break the rules to get the job done. However, levels of agreement with the latter statement were significantly less than in earlier surveys.

## Experiences with police

The majority of respondents (65.5%) reported having had an experience, either satisfactory or unsatisfactory, with a police officer at some stage in their lives. One-third of respondents (34.5%) reported that this experience had occurred in the preceding 12 months.

## Satisfactory experiences

Over half of the respondents (54.8%) reported having had an experience with a police officer at some stage in their lives that had left them feeling pleased or satisfied, and over a quarter (27.0%) indicated that this experience had occurred in the preceding 12 months.

The most common reason given for satisfaction was that a police officer had acted in a friendly, courteous or professional manner.

Satisfactory experiences with an individual police officer tended to be related to *positive* perceptions of the police service in general. For example, those respondents who reported having had a satisfactory experience with a police officer in the preceding 12 months were more likely to believe that:

- ▶ most police are honest
- ▶ police officers generally behave well
- ▶ police behaviour has changed for the better in recent years
- ▶ police don't have enough powers to do their job properly.

Respondents who reported having had a satisfactory experience also reported having more confidence that a complaint made to the QPS would be properly investigated. In addition, they were less likely to believe that:

- ▶ the chances of being caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim
- ▶ people who complain against police are likely to suffer for it
- ▶ there is no point in reporting corruption in the QPS because nothing useful will be done about it.

## Unsatisfactory experiences

A considerable proportion of respondents reported either having had a personally unsatisfactory experience with police themselves (27.2%) or knowing someone who had done so (11.9%). (We refer to the latter as *vicarious* experiences.) Favourably, however, in comparison with previous years, significantly fewer of these experiences had occurred within the preceding 12 months. Instead, more had occurred more than six years ago.

The most common reasons reported for dissatisfaction with police were service-related, most often that an officer had acted in an unfriendly, rude or arrogant manner, had done nothing or had not done enough, or had behaved unreasonably or unfairly. Very few respondents reported allegations of serious misconduct.

Respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience with an individual police officer in the preceding 12 months were more likely to have more *negative* perceptions of police in general than those who had not had such an experience.



For example, they were less likely to believe that most police are honest, and more likely to believe that:

- ▶ police officers generally behave badly
- ▶ police behaviour has changed for the worse in the last few years
- ▶ police in Queensland have a bad image
- ▶ Queensland police treat Indigenous people differently from white Australians
- ▶ there will always be corruption in the police service
- ▶ the chances of being caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim.

Respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience in the last 12 months were also less confident that complaints made to the CMC or the QPS would be properly investigated. They were also more likely to believe that:

- ▶ people who complain about the police are likely to suffer for it
- ▶ there is no point in reporting corruption in the QPS because nothing useful will be done about it.

## Indigenous respondents

In 2008, for the first time, respondents were asked to indicate if they identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This allowed us to compare the perceptions and experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. Less than 2 per cent of survey respondents identified as being Indigenous Australians. While this is only slightly less than the estimated proportion of Indigenous people in Queensland (3.5%), the small numbers used for these analyses mean that the results ought to be interpreted with caution.

In contrast to non-Indigenous respondents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were four times more likely to report having had a personally unsatisfactory experience with a police officer in the preceding 12 months. They were also more than 12 times as likely to report knowing someone who had had an unsatisfactory experience (vicarious experience) with an officer in the preceding 12 months.

Differences were also found between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents' perceptions of police. For example, Indigenous respondents were more likely to believe that:

- ▶ members of the QPS generally behave badly
- ▶ police in Queensland have a bad image
- ▶ Indigenous people are treated differently from white Australians by police in Queensland.

Indigenous respondents also reported having less confidence that a complaint made to the QPS would be properly investigated. They were also more likely to believe that there is no point in reporting corruption in the QPS because nothing useful will be done about it.

## **Young people**

Previous surveys have highlighted young people's perceptions of police as an area for improvement. The results of the 2008 survey were consistent with those of earlier years which found that younger respondents, generally aged between 18 and 24 years, are significantly more likely than older respondents to express negative views about the police. For example, in 2008 younger respondents were less likely than older respondents to believe that most police are honest, or that police behaviour has changed for the better in recent years.

Similarly, young people were less likely than older people to report having had a recent satisfactory experience with a police officer, and were more likely to report having had an unsatisfactory personal experience with police in the preceding 12 months. Young people were also significantly more likely to have been contacted by police.

The results of the 2005 survey demonstrated a significant decline in the proportion of young people who reported recent dissatisfaction with the police; however, the 2008 survey results suggest that this finding has now been reversed, again highlighting the need for attention in this area.

## **Regional differences**

The 2005 survey results suggested that there were some regional differences in attitudes towards police, with respondents from the Far North region of Queensland having more negative views than those from other regions. The results of the 2008 survey indicate that these differences have now disappeared. Interestingly, the highest proportion of respondents who reported having had a recent satisfactory experience with a police officer were from North Queensland, which, given the results from previous surveys, is a very positive result.

## **Complaints processes**

In 2008, the proportion of respondents who indicated that they had made or had tried to make a complaint after an unsatisfactory experience with a police officer in the previous 12 months was consistent with that reported in previous surveys (1.3%). Where a complaint had been made, respondents had most commonly reported the matter to the QPS. However, the majority of respondents who had made a complaint to the QPS (71.4%) were dissatisfied with the way their complaint had been handled.

As in previous years, the most common reason for deciding not to make a complaint was a belief that it would not do any good, generally because respondents perceived that

‘police all stick together’. Favourably, however, since 2002 there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents (28.7%) who believe that a complaint would not do any good.

There was also a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents who didn’t make a complaint because they didn’t know how to. This is, again, another positive result. In 2008, for the first time, we asked about the ethnic origin of the survey respondents and discovered that those from an ethnic or cultural group other than ‘Australian’ were significantly more likely to report that they hadn’t made a complaint because they didn’t know how to. This may indicate that targeted awareness programs on how to make a complaint may be beneficial for these groups.

The majority of respondents considered that the QPS would be the best agency to deal with a complaint involving officer rudeness (67.4%) or assault (51.8%). The QPS (41.7%) or the CMC (35.1%) were equally considered to be the best agency to deal with suspected bribery by a police officer. However, the majority of respondents were of the view that complaints against police should be investigated by an independent body, rather than by police themselves. These contradictory perceptions may indicate some misunderstanding of the various complaints processes, and suggest further opportunities for community awareness. Overall confidence in complaints processes has remained fairly steady since 2005, and most respondents reported that they would be confident that a complaint made to the CMC (65.1%) or the QPS (60.1%) would be properly investigated.

## Areas for improvement

Taken together, the findings from the 2008 survey show generally favourable public perceptions of the police, yet also indicate some areas for improvement. In particular:

- ▶ The negative perceptions and experiences of Indigenous respondents, and perceptions that the police treat Indigenous people differently, suggest that the QPS should continue efforts to improve the relationship between police and Indigenous people in Queensland.
- ▶ The reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the police, and the impact that experiences with police have on general perceptions, suggest that the QPS needs to ensure that officers consistently behave courteously and professionally in all interactions with the public.
- ▶ Given the high rates of contact between young people and the police, young people’s negative perceptions of, and experiences with, police suggest that continued attention should be given to improving these interactions.
- ▶ Some misunderstandings of complaints processes suggest that both the QPS and the CMC may need to consider strategies to improve public awareness of complaint matters.

# Introduction

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## About the survey

The 2008 Public Attitudes Survey is the seventh in a series of telephone surveys, beginning in 1991, conducted on behalf of the CJC, and now the CMC. The surveys measure public perceptions of the QPS, public servants and local council employees, as well as public knowledge of and confidence in complaints processes. Changes in attitudes over time have been determined by repeating the survey.

The survey has been modified over the years to respond to emerging issues, to enable a better understanding of public perceptions, and to make it possible to compare results with those of previous surveys. Obviously, the latter is not possible where new questions have been added.

This report presents the public perceptions of the QPS and focuses on the results of the 2008 survey and, where possible, presents comparisons with previous surveys. A separate report examining the public perceptions of the public sector and local government will follow.

## About the QPS and the CMC<sup>1</sup>

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, handle complaints about the QPS and monitor other important integrity issues. We provide a brief overview of those changes here to contextualise the changes in public perceptions over this time frame. This overview also provides readers with a better understanding of complaints processes, enabling them to better interpret the most recent survey results.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry of 1987–89 exposed the paucity of accountability mechanisms for dealing with misconduct by Queensland police officers, and criticised the processes used for dealing with complaints against them. 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.

The CJC was given jurisdiction to investigate allegations of official misconduct<sup>2</sup> against all public officers, including police. In recognition of the importance of police integrity, the CJC was also given broader jurisdiction over behaviour known as police

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1 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](http://www.cmc.qld.gov.au).

2 **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.

misconduct.<sup>3</sup> Less serious police matters were categorised as breaches of discipline, to be to be handled exclusively by the QPS.

Since the creation of the CJC in 1989, there has been continual improvement in the QPS. A number of significant accountability mechanisms have been implemented, and a body of knowledge and expertise in assessing and investigating complaints by the CJC (subsequently the CMC) has been developed. In 1997, for example, the Ethical Standards Command (ESC) of the QPS was created and given responsibility for ensuring compliance with police policy and procedures, 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 of 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 Criminal Justice Committee, 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, although they have a statutory obligation to report to the CMC all complaints of official misconduct and police misconduct. 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 to include alternative resolution strategies such as mediation, and informal and managerial resolution. Minor matters (such as the slow response of a police officer 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 are handled exclusively by the QPS.

While the CMC retains primary responsibility for dealing with complaints of official misconduct, the CM Act requires that it refer such matters to the QPS whenever possible. This is part of the principle of *devolution*, where action to prevent and deal with misconduct in a public sector agency should, wherever possible, happen within the

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3 **Police misconduct** is conduct that is disgraceful, improper or unbecoming to 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 serious conduct in a private capacity which reflects adversely on the QPS.

agency itself. Also, as part of the devolution process, the CMC has given general authority to the QPS to commence dealing with certain less serious complaints without getting the prior approval of the CMC. This general authority is given through directions under section 40 of the CM Act.

In deciding whether it is appropriate for the police to deal with a matter or continue to deal with a matter, the CMC must consider the nature and seriousness of the complaint, the public interest, and the capacity of the QPS to respond effectively.

Most matters are not serious and are appropriate for the QPS to deal with. 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 either to report regularly on the progress of the investigation or be subject to a review by the CMC before or after the matter is finalised)
- ▶ 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. However, the CMC continues to investigate serious matters, particularly if there is reason to believe that the misconduct is prevalent or systemic, or where allegations involve serious criminal conduct that has the potential to undermine public confidence.

## Structure of the report

This report is divided into four main parts:

- ▶ Part A is a brief description of the survey methodology and the sample.
- ▶ Part B examines general public perceptions of police, including police behaviour, integrity and misconduct.
- ▶ Part C examines respondents' experiences with the QPS, both satisfactory and unsatisfactory.
- ▶ Part D explores public opinion about, and confidence in, complaints processes.

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

# Part A: Methodology

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## Survey administration

Survey administration was largely consistent with the methodology used in previous surveys.<sup>4</sup> A random sample was drawn from the population of all Queensland residents aged 18 years and over who were the usual resident in a private dwelling with a telephone.<sup>5</sup> The survey was conducted by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), primarily in June 2008.

The sample was drawn from five statistical divisions—Brisbane, South East (excluding Brisbane), South West, Central and Far North.<sup>6</sup> Telephone numbers were randomly selected from all telephone numbers in each division. One resident aged over 18 years was randomly selected from the household to complete the survey.<sup>7</sup>

A total of 1550 respondents participated in the 2008 survey, and the response rate was 33 per cent. This was lower than in previous years—it had been 48 per cent in 2002, and 43 per cent in 2005. The lower response rate may have been caused by the increased length of the survey (see below), or may reflect a growing reluctance of residents to participate in telephone surveys (e.g. see Kempf & Remington 2007). The relatively poor response rate weakens our confidence in the generalisability of the results provided.

## Survey changes

Several changes were made to the survey in 2008 to increase our understanding of the public's perceptions of police, while maintaining our capacity to examine trends over time.

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- 4 In 2005, a 50–50 gender quota was used to select participants, rather than the random selection of a resident within each household called. In 2008, we opted for a random selection of respondents, consistent with the surveys conducted in 1999 and 2002.
  - 5 The survey responses were weighted for age, gender and geographic location to ensure an accurate representation of the Queensland population. There were some differences in results between the weighted and unweighted responses. However, as unweighted responses have been used in previous surveys, to maintain consistency and comparability of the results across surveys, the analyses presented in this report are based on the unweighted responses. Given the random selection of respondents and similarity of the respondent profile to the general population, we can be confident that the survey is still representative of the Queensland population.
  - 6 Statistical divisions are different 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 13 regions. To ensure sufficient respondents from each region for statistical purposes, we combined several of these, and refer to five regions only. Information on the sampling frame is available from the CMC on request.
  - 7 To randomly select which member of the household would participate in the survey, the resident whose birthday was closest to the day of the survey was selected.

The most notable changes included:

- ▶ asking about satisfactory experiences with police, as well as unsatisfactory ones
- ▶ isolating personal experiences from those that had occurred to someone known to the respondent (we refer to these as *vicarious* experiences)
- ▶ seeking information about who had initiated any contact between the respondent and police, and why
- ▶ seeking information about whether respondents were charged, arrested or taken into custody as a result of their contact with police.

Additional questions were also added to assess:

- ▶ perceptions of police treatment of Indigenous Queenslanders
- ▶ why respondents felt that complaining would not do any good, or that they wouldn't be believed
- ▶ any ethnic, cultural or Indigenous group respondents identified with.

A number of changes were also made to the order and wording of the questions to minimise any potential bias.

## Data analysis

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

We used multivariate analyses to assess the impact of demographic factors on survey responses. As there were a high number of bivariate relationships among the demographic variables, we included all variables in each analysis. This allowed us to assess the impact of each variable on the survey responses, and to take the others into account.

Odds ratios (ORs) indicate the strength of the association between demographic factors and survey responses, p values indicate the statistical significance of these associations, and confidence intervals indicate the precision of these associations. These results can be interpreted in the following way:

- ▶ The larger the OR, the greater the magnitude of the association between a predictor or factor (e.g. age or gender) and an outcome (e.g. being dissatisfied with police). The closer the OR is to 1, the smaller the measure of association; the larger the OR, the greater the association. An OR of 1.5, for example, indicates that the outcome is about 50 per cent more likely to occur among the factor group than its counterparts; an OR of 2.0 indicates that the outcome is twice as likely to occur.
- ▶ The significance of a statistical test, shown with p values, estimates whether or not the association is true, rather than being simply a chance result. Significance levels of 'p < .05' and 'p < .01' are used throughout this report to indicate either a less than 5 per cent chance or a less than 1 per cent chance, respectively, that the differences or relationships found were simply due to random variation, 'luck of the draw' or chance.



- ▶ The width of the confidence interval indicates the amount of variability in the OR estimate and, therefore, 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 1.3–8.1, and is much more informative about the true magnitude of the OR.

Throughout the report, we have graphically illustrated only the most pertinent results or new data that has not been examined in previous surveys or reports.

## Comparative data

The CMC, and formerly the CJC, has collected Public Attitudes Survey data regularly for 17 years. We are thus able to compare public perceptions over time, and many of these trends are presented throughout the report. In assessing these trends, it is important to remember the significant changes that have been made to the QPS and the CJC/CMC during that period, and their possible impact on public perceptions of the police.

Perceptions of police integrity are also regularly reported as an outcome indicator of the Commonwealth Government's objective for police to perform their duties with integrity and professionalism (Australian Government 2008). The 2008 report (SCRGSP) incorporates some of the results of the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing (NSCSP), which has been conducted since 1996. 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.

## Definition of integrity

The Public Attitudes Survey uses a number of measures of 'integrity' throughout this report. These include respondents' level of agreement (or otherwise) with statements such as 'police are honest' or 'police have a bad image'. We believe that, when combined, the responses to such questions give the reader a sense of the public's views about police integrity.

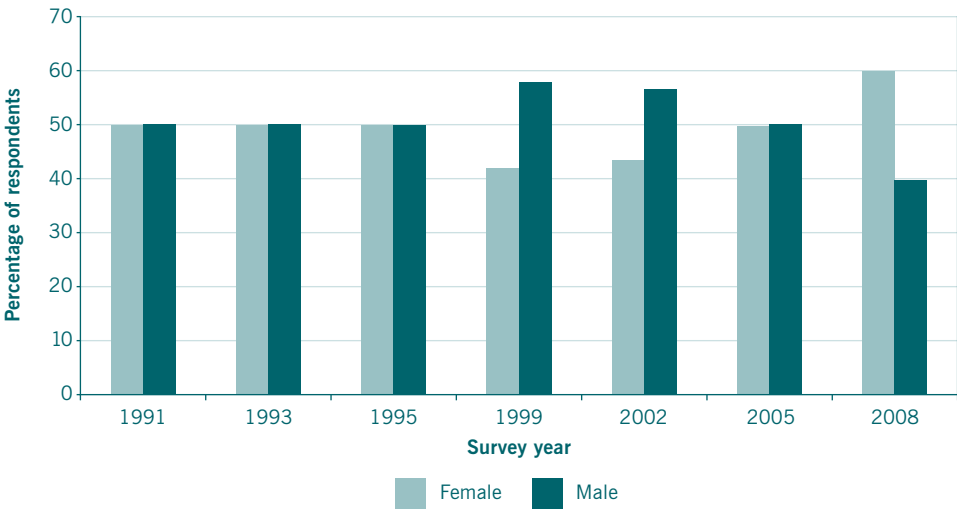
However, as public perceptions of police integrity can be influenced by factors such as media reporting and consumption (e.g. see Donlon-Cotton 2007; Weitzer & Tuch 2005) which the Public Attitudes Survey does not measure, they may not reflect actual levels of police integrity. Analysing complaints against police, assessing levels of ethical behaviour and attitudes among police officers, and carrying out other monitoring activities enable the CMC to take a broader view, and it is important to take this 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, available on the CMC website ([www.cmc.qld.gov.au](http://www.cmc.qld.gov.au)).

# Respondents

## Gender

Figure 1 shows the proportion of male and female respondents to each survey. The proportion of females (60.3%) was significantly higher in 2008, while the proportion of males was significantly higher in 2002 (56.5%) and in 1999 (58.1%) ( $\chi^2 = 129.8, p < .01$ ). This is a result of random sampling rather than quota sampling in these years (see Figure 1).

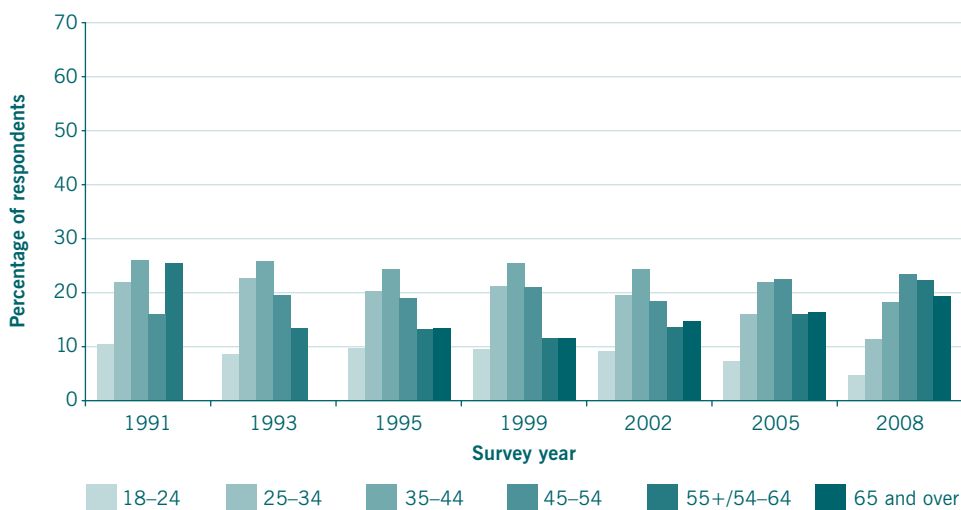
Figure 1. Survey respondents by gender (1991–2008)



## Age

The data presented in Figure 2 show a significant difference in the age of respondents over time ( $\chi^2 = 2504.90, p < .01$ ). From 2002 to 2008, the proportion of respondents aged 55–64, and over 65 years, increased, with a corresponding decrease in those aged 18–24 and 25–34 years.

Figure 2. Survey respondents by age (1991–2008)



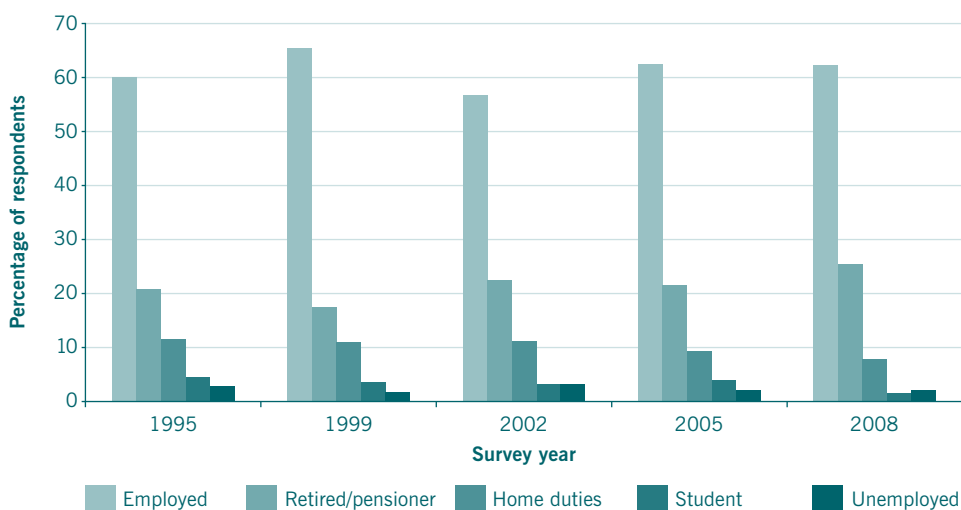
Notes: In 1991 and 1993, older respondents were classified as those over 55 years. This category was later subdivided into those aged 55–64 years, and those 65 years or more.

Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who refused to answer this question.

## Employment status

From 1995 onwards, respondents were asked about their employment status. Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents for each year were employed. In 2008, a slightly larger proportion were retired or receiving a pension, and a smaller proportion than in previous years ( $\chi^2 = 181.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were students.

Figure 3. Survey respondents by employment status (1995–2008)



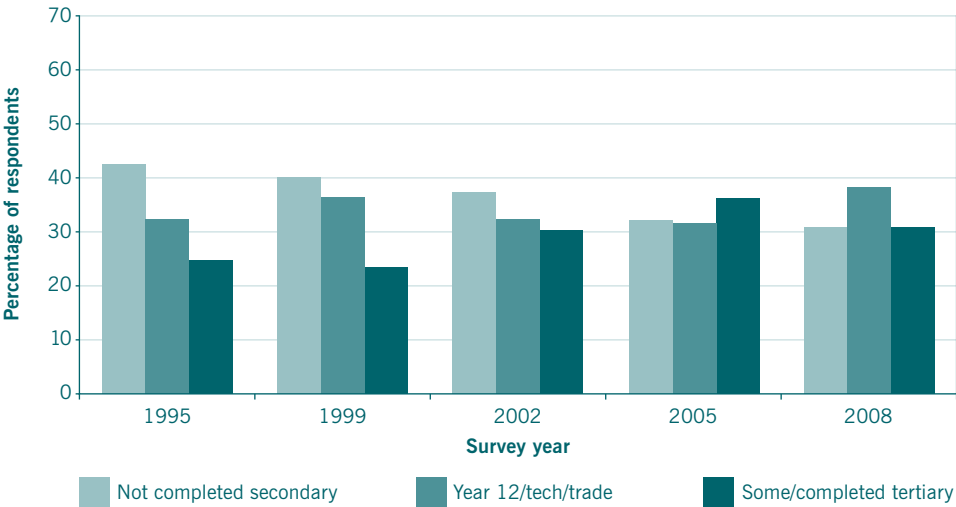
Notes: These data were not collected in the 1991 or 1993 surveys.

Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who refused to answer this question.

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 education. In 2008, however, there was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who had completed Year 12 or had achieved a technical or trade certificate ( $\chi^2 = 99.38, p < .01$ ).

Figure 4. Survey respondents by highest level of education (1995–2008)



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

Ethnicity

In 2008, respondents were asked for the first time if they identified with a particular ethnic or cultural group. The majority identified themselves as ‘Australian’ (86.7%), followed by ‘British’ (2.8%), ‘Southern European’ (1.5%) and ‘New Zealander’ (1.3%). A small number also identified with other ethnic and cultural groups.

Indigenous status

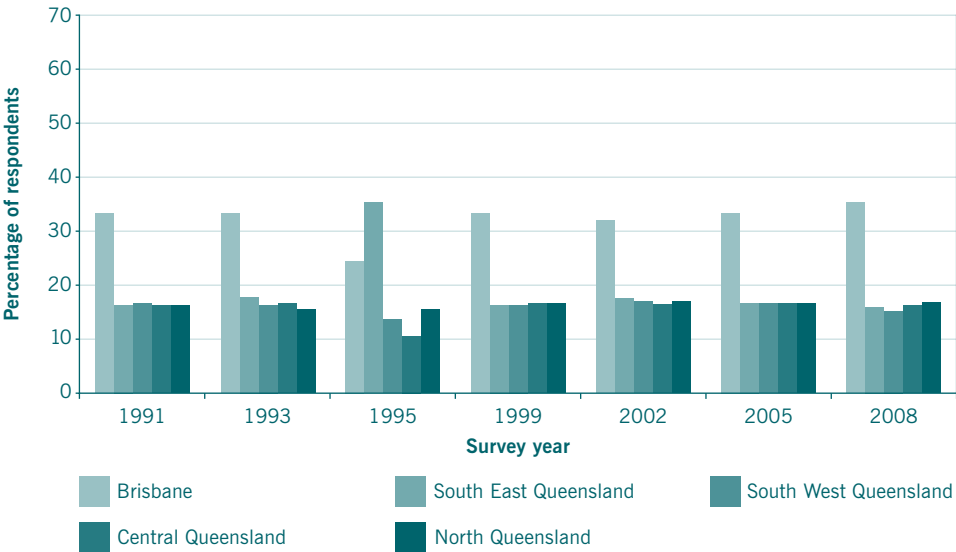
In 2008, respondents were also asked for the first time if they identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Twenty (1.3%) identified themselves as Aboriginal, and two (0.1%) identified as Torres Strait Islander. The proportion of Indigenous respondents is slightly less than that in the estimated Indigenous population in Queensland.<sup>8</sup>

8 The estimated resident population of Indigenous persons in Queensland, as of 30 June 2006, was 3.5% (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006, *Experimental estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*).

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 data for 1995 differ significantly because police regions were used in that year, and the categories were later collapsed to approximate the statistical regions use in the other years.

Figure 5. Survey respondents by region (1991–2008)

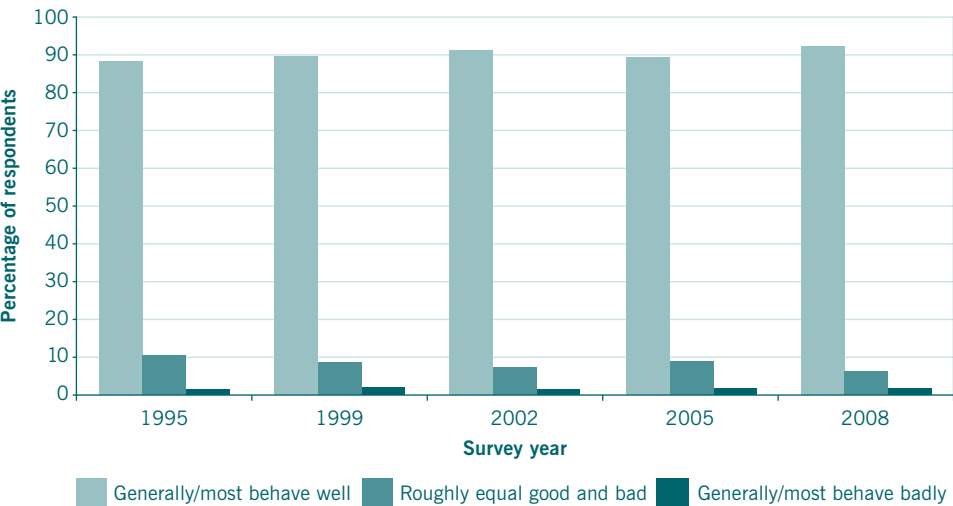


# Part B: General perceptions

## Perceptions of police behaviour

Consistent with their responses to previous surveys, the overwhelming majority of Queenslanders surveyed in 2008 had a positive view of how members of the QPS behave (see Figure 6). Over 90 per cent considered that police generally or mostly behave well, while less than 2 per cent considered that they generally or mostly behave badly. Since 1995, there has been a steady increase in the average level of agreement with perceptions of how the police generally behave, as well as a significant increase between 2005 and 2008 ( $F = 17.66, p < .01$ ).

Figure 6. Proportion of respondents who believe that members of the QPS behave 'generally or mostly well', 'roughly equal numbers good and bad' or 'generally or mostly badly' (1995–2008)



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

Data exclude a small number of respondents from each survey who did not answer this question.

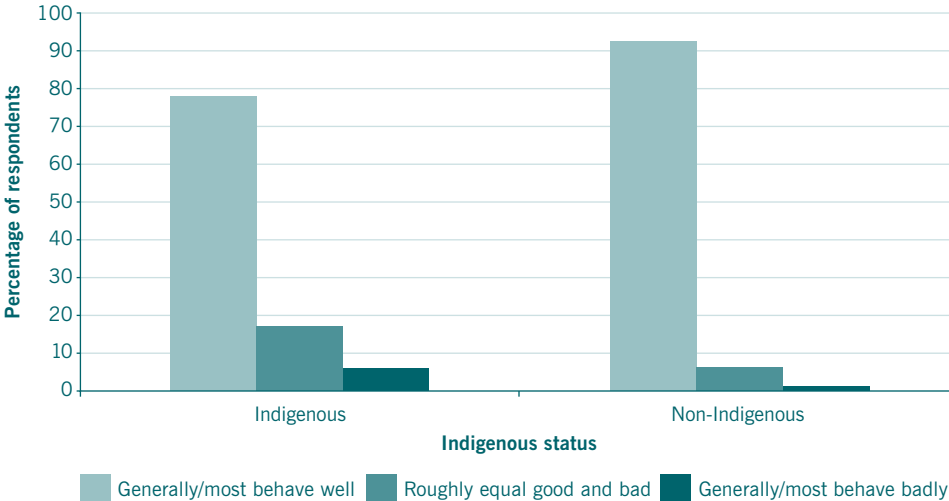
## Perceptions of police by various demographic factors

Despite these generally favourable perceptions, previous research has shown that certain demographic groups tend to differ in their perceptions of police. For example, older people tend to hold more favourable attitudes than do younger people, while males have been found to be more critical than females (Brown & Benedict 2002; Reisig & Chandek 2001).

In 2008, respondents' Indigenous status ( $F = 9.04, p < .01$ ), employment status ( $F = 3.37, p < .01$ ) and geographical region ( $F = 2.46, p < .05$ ) were all significant factors influencing perceptions of police behaviour. For example:

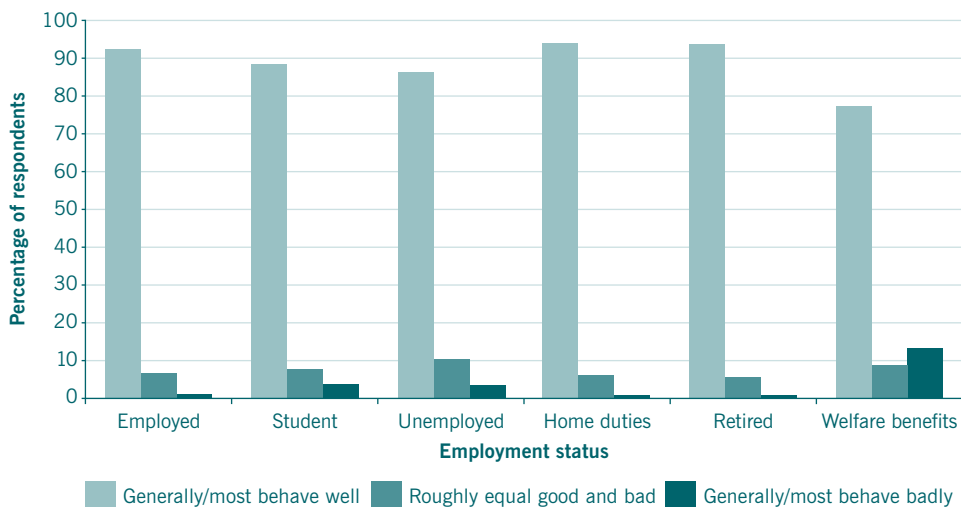
- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were less likely (78.0%) than non-Indigenous respondents (92.5%) to believe that police behave generally or mostly well (see Figure 7).
- ▶ Respondents receiving welfare benefits (13.1%) were more likely to believe that police behave generally or mostly badly, than respondents who were employed, retired or engaged in home duties (average of less than 1%) (see Figure 8).
- ▶ Respondents in South West Queensland generally rated police behaviour more positively than those from the Brisbane, South East, Central and North Queensland regions (see Figure 9).

Figure 7. Proportion of respondents who believe that members of the QPS behave 'generally or mostly well', 'roughly equal numbers good and bad', or 'generally or mostly badly', by Indigenous status (2008)



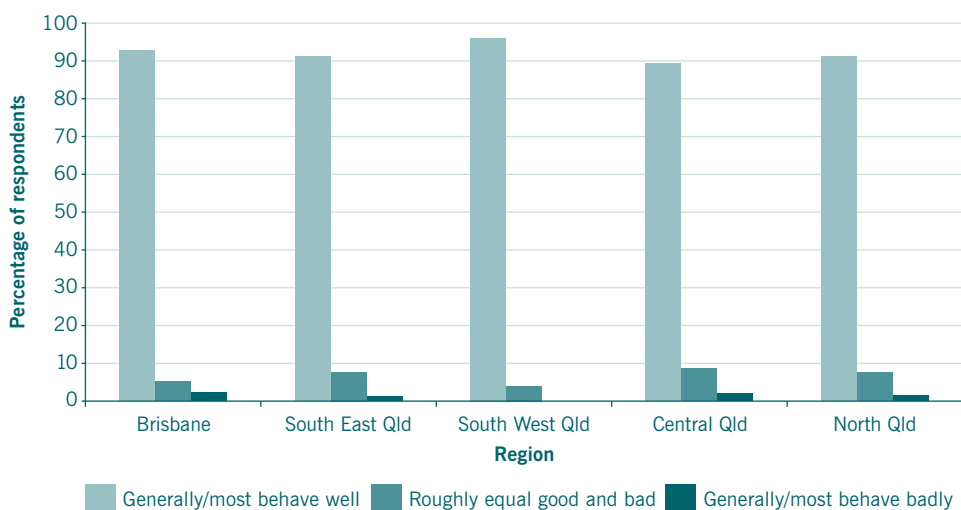
Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents who did not answer this question or did not provide their Indigenous status.

Figure 8. Proportion of respondents who believe that members of the QPS behave 'generally or mostly well', 'roughly equal numbers good and bad', or 'generally or mostly badly', by employment status (2008)



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

Figure 9. Proportion of respondents who believe that members of the QPS behave 'generally or mostly well', 'roughly equal numbers good and bad' or 'generally or mostly badly', by geographical region (2008)



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



## Perceptions of police by satisfactory and unsatisfactory contact with police

Previous research has shown that, in addition to demographic factors, experiences with police also affect general perceptions of police (Allen et al. 2005; Bartsch & Cheurprakobhit 2004; Brown & Benedict 2002; Miller & Davis 2008; Weitzer & Tuch 2005). Given this, to further understand perceptions of police, in 2008 we asked respondents whether they had ever had an experience with a police officer that had left them feeling pleased or satisfied. Respondents were also asked if they or anyone they knew had ever had an experience with a police officer that had left them feeling annoyed or dissatisfied. (These experiences are discussed in full in Part C.)

Figure 10 shows the proportion of respondents who reported having had a satisfactory experience, an unsatisfactory experience, both types of experiences or neither type of experience at some time in their lives. Figure 11 shows the proportion of respondents who reported having had these experiences in the preceding 12 months.

**Figure 10. Proportion of respondents who reported having had a satisfactory or unsatisfactory experience, both types or neither type at some stage in their lives (2008)**

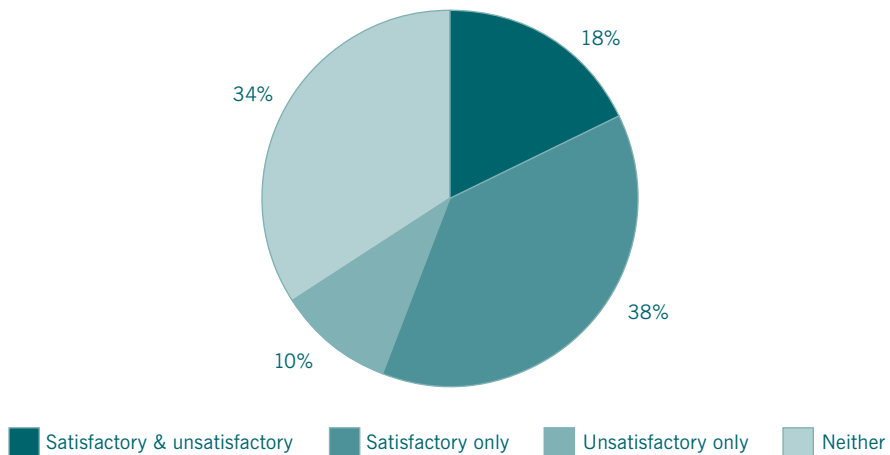
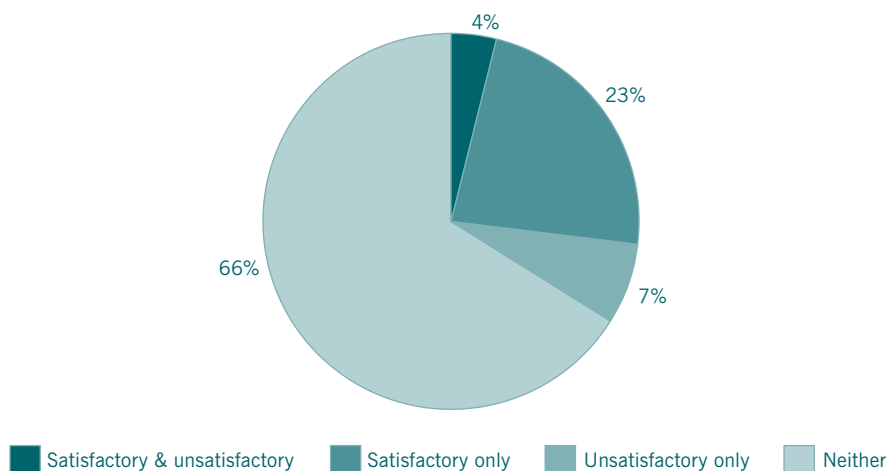


Figure 11. Proportion of respondents who reported having had a satisfactory or unsatisfactory experience, both types or neither type in the preceding 12 months (2008)



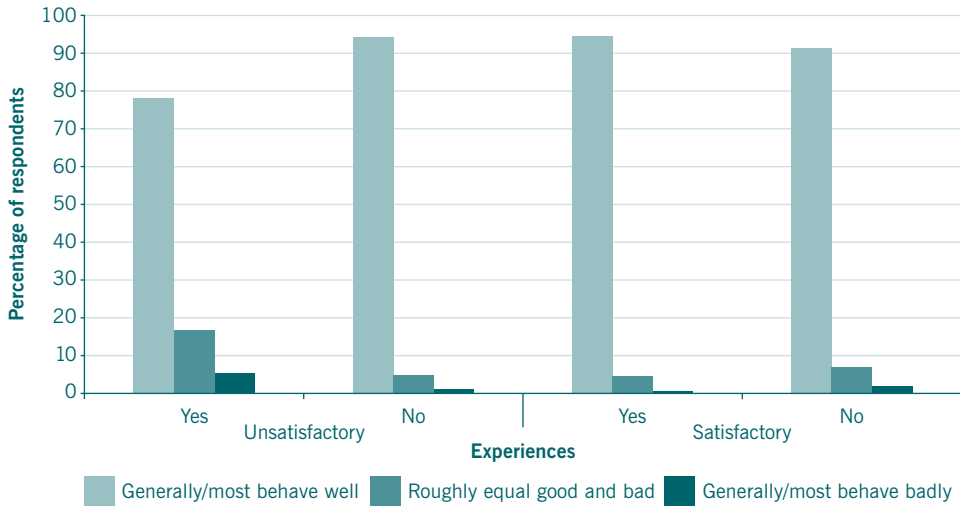
We examined the impact of these satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences with a police officer on general perceptions of police by comparing the perceptions of those who reported having had a recent satisfactory experience with the perceptions of those who did not report such an experience. We also compared the perceptions of respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience with those who had not reported having had one<sup>9</sup> (see Figure 12).

Respondents who had had an unsatisfactory experience (78.2%) were significantly less likely than respondents who had not had one (94.1%) to report that the police generally or mostly behave well ( $F = 53.32, p < .01$ ).

Similarly, those who had had a recent satisfactory experience (94.7%) were significantly more likely than those who had not had one (91.3%) to consider that the police generally or mostly behave well ( $F = 7.47, p < .01$ ) (see Figure 12).

<sup>9</sup> We also compared the general perceptions of those respondents who reported having had any type of experience (i.e. satisfactory or unsatisfactory) with those who had had no contact with the police in the preceding 12 months (i.e. an interaction effect). Across all of the general perceptions, these results revealed only one significant effect — that those who had had no recent contact with the QPS were significantly ( $p < .01$ ) more likely to report that the police generally or mostly behave well than those respondents who had had some experience (satisfactory or unsatisfactory) with an officer in the preceding 12 months. As there were no other significant effects, for simplicity and ease of interpretation these results are not discussed in this report.

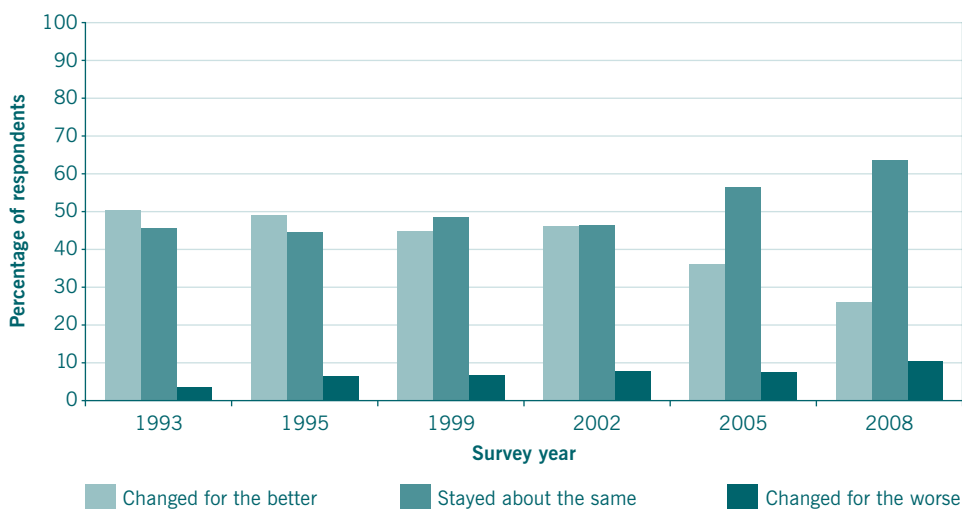
Figure 12. Proportion of respondents who believe that members of the QPS behave 'generally or mostly well', 'roughly equal numbers good and bad', or 'generally or mostly badly', by recent satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences with an officer (2008)



## Changes in police behaviour

Since 1993, respondents have been asked to indicate whether they believe police behaviour has 'changed for the better', 'stayed about the same' or 'changed for the worse' over the last few years. Figure 13 shows significant differences between responses to the surveys ( $F = 42.16, p < .01$ ). Unfortunately, in 2008 more respondents (10.2%) considered that police behaviour had 'changed for the worse', and fewer (26.0%) considered that it had changed for the better. However, the majority (63.8%) considered that it had stayed about the same over the last few years.

**Figure 13. Proportion of respondents who considered that police behaviour has ‘changed for the better’, ‘stayed about the same’ or ‘changed for the worse’ (1993–2008)**



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

Data exclude a small number of respondents from each survey who did not answer this question.

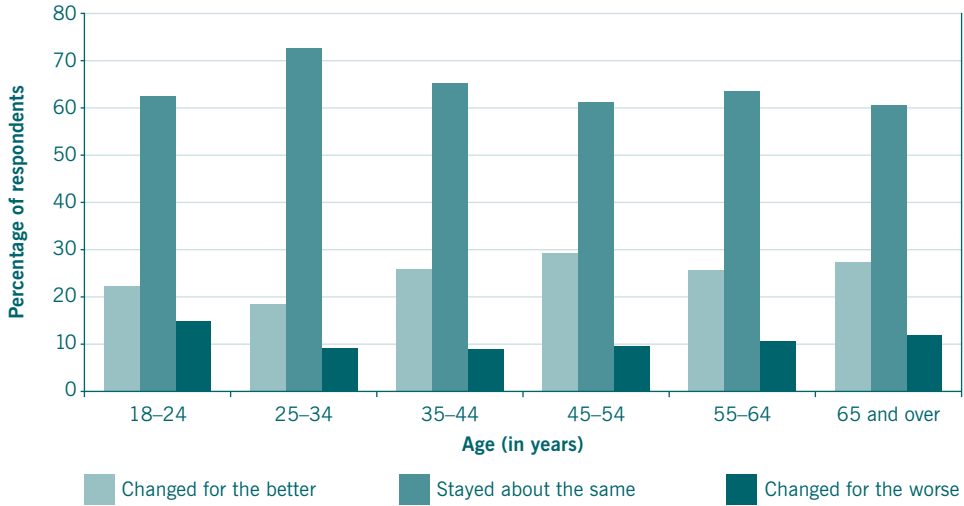
### Perceptions of changes in police behaviour by various demographic factors

Younger respondents were significantly less likely than those in other age groups to believe that police behaviour has ‘changed for the better’ ( $F = 2.59, p < .05$ ). About 20 per cent (an average of 20.4%) of respondents aged 18–24 years or 25–34 years indicated they believed that police behaviour had improved, compared with an average of 27.1 per cent across the other age groups (see Figure 14). This may be because older people are more likely to have witnessed the significant improvement in police behaviour that followed the Fitzgerald Inquiry.

### Perceptions of changes in police behaviour by satisfactory and unsatisfactory contact with police

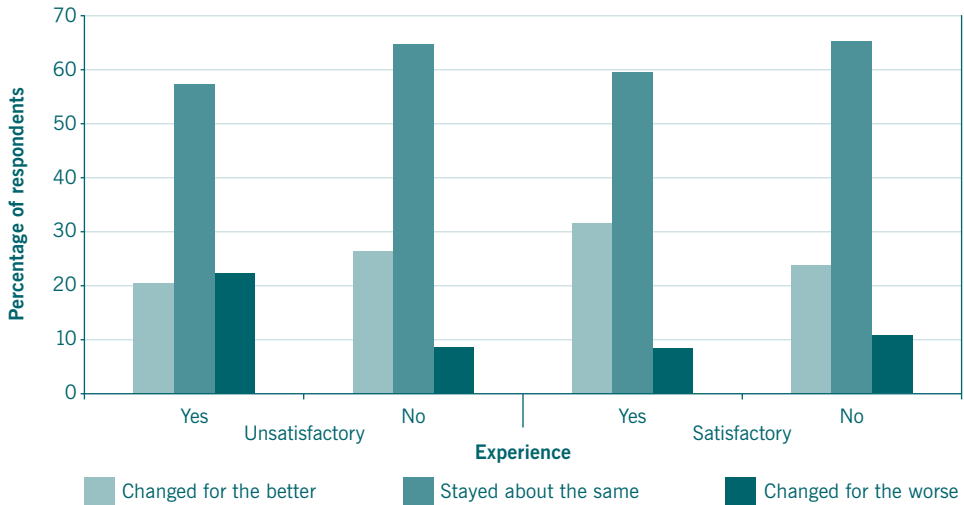
Respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience (22.3%) were significantly more likely ( $F = 15.81, p < .01$ ) to consider that police behaviour has ‘changed for the worse’ than those who had not had one (8.7%). On the other hand, respondents who reported having had a recent satisfactory experience (31.8%) were significantly more likely ( $F = 11.69, p < .01$ ) to rate police behaviour as having changed for the better than those who had not had one (23.8%) (see Figure 15).

Figure 14. Proportion of respondents who reported that they believed that police behaviour has 'changed for the better', 'stayed about the same' or 'changed for the worse', by respondent age (2008)



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

Figure 15. Proportion of respondents who considered that police behaviour has 'changed for the better', 'stayed about the same', or 'changed for the worse', by satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences with a police officer in the preceding 12 months (2008)



## Public attitudes to police integrity

To examine public perceptions of police integrity, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements ‘*Most police are honest*’ and ‘*Police have a bad image in Queensland*’ (see Table 1).

Table 1. Attitudes to police integrity (1991–2008)

	Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed						
	Average level of agreement (range 1 to 5)						
	1991 (n = 901)	1993 (n = 900)	1995 (n = 900)	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)	2005 (n = 1505)	2008 (n = 1550)
Most police are honest							
% agreed or strongly agreed	84.10	87.80	87.20	80.70	85.00	82.80	89.50
average rating	4.08	4.06	4.12	3.86	3.87	3.89	3.94
Police have a bad image in Qld							
% agreed or strongly agreed	59.30	48.10	28.70	30.30	24.20	26.70	27.90
average rating	3.42	3.14	2.61	2.73	2.59	2.68	2.59
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are treated differently from white Australians by police in Qld							
% agreed or strongly agreed	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	65.20
average rating	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.47

Note: n/a indicates not applicable.

Across the seven surveys, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘*Most police are honest*’. After a significant decrease between 1995 and 1999 ( $F = 22.66$ ,  $p < .01$ ), average agreement with this statement has remained steady, and in 2008 almost 90 per cent of respondents indicated agreement. This result is more favourable than the national result for all Australian jurisdictions reported in the *Report on government services 2008* (SCRGSP). The results of the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing (NSCSP) found that 76 per cent of Australian respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘*Most police are honest*’.

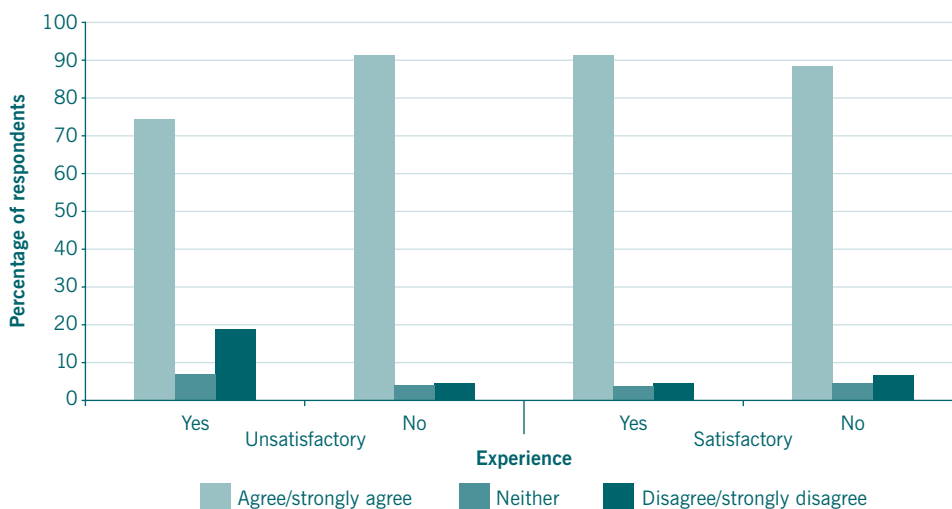
Surveys in 1995, 2002 and 2005 had revealed that gender and (in 2005) regional differences were significant factors determining agreement with the statement.<sup>10</sup> In 2008, these factors were not significant; instead:

- ▶ Respondents aged between 18 and 24 (72.9%) were less likely to agree than older respondents (90% on average;  $F = 3.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ).
- ▶ Respondents who had completed tertiary education (92.1% on average) were more likely to agree than respondents who had completed a trade or technical certificate (80.2%;  $F = 2.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

<sup>10</sup> Multivariate analyses were conducted in previous surveys, and again with the 2008 data, to overcome any potential confounding by various demographic and experiential factors.

- ▶ Those who had had a recent unsatisfactory experience with an officer (74.3%) were significantly less likely to agree ( $F = 50.84, p < .01$ ) than those who had not had an unsatisfactory experience (91.3%) (see Figure 16).
- ▶ Those who had had a recent satisfactory experience (91.5%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 10.51, p < .01$ ) than those who had not had a satisfactory experience (88.6%) (see Figure 16).

Figure 16. Proportion of respondents who 'agree or strongly agree', 'disagree or strongly disagree' and 'neither agree nor disagree' that 'Most police are honest', by having had a recent satisfactory or unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (2008)



In 2008, 27.9 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that '*Police have a bad image in Queensland*'. The proportion of respondents who held this view has remained relatively steady since 2002, although average agreement has decreased significantly since the first survey ( $F = 89.61, p < .01$ ).

Indigenous respondents (52.4%) were significantly more likely ( $F = 4.23, p < .05$ ) than non-Indigenous respondents (27.6%) to believe the statement. Respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience with an officer (46.0%) were also significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 28.36, p < .01$ ) than those who had not (25.7%).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Although Indigenous respondents were significantly more likely to report having had an experience with a police officer in the preceding 12 months (see Part C for these results), these analyses reveal unique effects, taking into account these interactions. Therefore, there is a significant effect of Indigenous status regardless of whether or not Indigenous respondents reported having had an unsatisfactory experience with an officer. There is also a significant effect of having had an unsatisfactory experience, even for non-Indigenous respondents.

## Perceptions of police contact with Indigenous people

For the first time, a new question was included in 2008 to gauge public perceptions of police dealings with Indigenous Queenslanders. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement '*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are treated differently from white Australians by police in Queensland*'. Over two-thirds of respondents (65.2%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Respondents aged 45–65 and over (30.9% on average) were significantly more likely ( $F = 3.00, p < .05$ ) to disagree than those aged 18–44 (24.7% on average). On the other hand, respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (85.0%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 6.15, p < .05$ ) than non-Indigenous respondents (65.0%). In addition, those respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience (81.0%) were significantly more likely ( $F = 30.45, p < .01$ ) to agree than those who had not (63.1%).

## Perceptions of police misconduct

Despite positive views of police integrity, there were mixed results on several questions that aimed to assess perceptions of police misconduct (see Table 2). Almost 90 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that '*You will always get some corruption in the police service*'. Despite a significant increase in agreement between the 1991 and the 1995 surveys, and a significant decrease between the 1995 and 2002 surveys ( $F = 22.72, p < .01$ ), the average agreement with this statement has remained steady since 2002.

The only significant factor influencing agreement was a recent self-reported unsatisfactory experience with an officer, with those who had had one (92.6%) more likely to agree ( $t = 2.56, p < .05$ ) than those who had not (89.3%).

Compared with the 2005 survey results, in 2008 there was an increase in the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that '*The police don't have enough powers to do their job properly*'. Over time, however, there has been a significant decrease in overall agreement with this statement ( $F = 11.70, p < .01$ ). In 2008, ANOVA results also revealed that:

- ▶ Female respondents (60.8%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 12.70, p < .01$ ) than male respondents (50.1%).
- ▶ Respondents aged 18–24 years and 45–54 years (63.0%) on average were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 2.25, p < .05$ ) than those aged 65 years and over (37.4%).
- ▶ Respondents who had some primary or secondary school education (average 69.4%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 5.46, p < .01$ ) than those who had some tertiary education (average 38.2%).



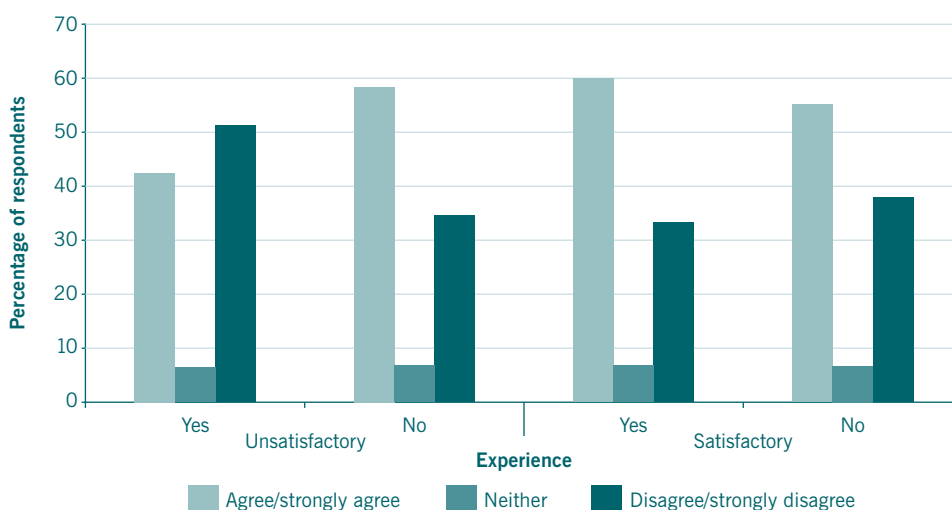
Table 2. Perceptions of police misconduct (1995–2008)

	Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree						
	Average level of agreement						
	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)	2008 ( <i>n</i> = 1550)
You will always get some corruption in the police service							
% agreed or strongly agreed	85.00	87.60	93.20	90.00	89.70	86.70	89.70
average rating	4.04	4.00	4.20	4.10	3.96	3.96	3.91
The police don't have enough powers to do their job properly							
% agreed or strongly agreed	n/a	n/a	60.20	56.90	54.40	49.70	56.50
average rating	n/a	n/a	3.49	3.43	3.31	3.20	3.29
Sometimes police need to break the rules to get the job done							
% agreed or strongly agreed	n/a	n/a	63.10	53.20	43.30	43.20	43.50
average rating	n/a	n/a	3.37	3.17	2.94	2.94	2.88
The chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim							
% agreed or strongly agreed	n/a	n/a	n/a	46.80	43.50	43.70	41.80
average rating	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.10	2.99	3.05	2.94

Note: n/a indicates not applicable.

- ▶ Respondents from Central, South East and South West Queensland regions (average 61.5%) were more likely to agree ( $F = 3.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than those from Brisbane and North Queensland (average 52.6%).
- ▶ Respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (42.3%) were less likely to agree ( $F = 4.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had not (see Figure 17).
- ▶ Respondents who had had a recent satisfactory experience with an officer (60.0%) were more likely to agree ( $F = 15.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had not (55.2%) (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Proportion of respondents who 'agree or strongly agree', 'disagree or strongly disagree' and 'neither agree nor disagree' that 'Police don't have enough powers to do their job properly', by having had a recent satisfactory or an unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (2008)



The proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that '*Sometimes the police need to break the rules to get the job done*' has remained steady since 2002 at about 43 per cent. However, the average level agreement, overall, decreased significantly between 1995 and 2008, from 3.37 to 2.88 on the likert scale ( $F = 36.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Agreement with the statement was influenced by the age of the respondents ( $F = 3.40$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and their level of education ( $F = 4.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Specifically:

- ▶ Respondents aged 18–34 (53.5% on average) were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree than respondents aged 35–65 years and over (37.0% on average).
- ▶ Respondents who had completed tertiary studies (average 28.3%) were less likely to agree than those who had not completed any education after high school (average 54.6%).

In 2008, over 40 per cent of respondents held the view that '*The chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the police service are slim*'. This represents a decrease in the overall agreement with this statement since the question was first asked in 1999, including a significant decrease since 2005 ( $F = 6.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In particular, almost half of the respondents in 2008 (48.7%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed', in comparison with 39.9 per cent who disagreed in 2005. This is a positive result for the QPS.

Gender had a significant effect ( $F = 4.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ), with males (44.9%) more likely to agree than females (39.8%). In addition to gender effects, those who reported having had an *unsatisfactory* experience with police (50.0%) were more likely to agree ( $F = 10.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had not (40.8%), while those who reported having had a *satisfactory* experience (34.0%) were less likely to agree ( $F = 11.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had not (44.7%).

# Part C: Experiences with police

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A growing body of research suggests that personal experiences with individual police officers shape overall perceptions, attitudes and evaluations of the police force in general, with positive encounters having a positive effect and negative encounters a negative one (Bartsch & Cheurprakobhit 2004; Brown & Benedict 2002; Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Weitzer & Tuch 2005).<sup>12</sup> Recent studies also suggest that even vicarious or indirect experiences with police (i.e. learning about the experiences of others) can shape people's general attitudes towards the police service (Miller & Davis 2008; Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Weitzer & Tuch 2005).

In 2008, as in previous surveys, respondents were asked if they had ever had any experience (personal or vicarious) with a Queensland police officer that was unsatisfactory. For the first time in 2008, we also asked if they had ever had a satisfactory experience.

In this section, we first examine the results for *any* experiences with police, before presenting the results for *satisfactory* experiences and then those for *unsatisfactory* ones.

## Any experiences with police

The majority of respondents (65.9%) reported having had some contact with a police officer at some stage in their lives. Over a third (34.5%) indicated that this contact had occurred recently (i.e. in the preceding 12 months).

Multivariate analysis identified that the following demographic features were related to reports of recent contact:

- ▶ Age — respondents over 35 (18.4% on average) were significantly more likely ( $F = 4.32, p < .01$ ) to report recent contact than those aged 18–34 (6.8% on average).
- ▶ Indigenous status — Indigenous respondents (42.9%) were significantly more likely ( $F = 16.31, p < .01$ ) to report contact than non-Indigenous respondents (10.9%).

## Satisfactory experiences

Over half of the respondents (54.8%) reported having had a satisfactory experience with a police officer at some stage in their lives. Of these, 50.2 per cent (or 27% of the total sample) indicated that this contact had been recent.

Table 3 shows the demographic factors that influenced the likelihood of respondents having had a recent satisfactory experience with a police officer.

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<sup>12</sup> These conclusions are drawn from cross-sectional research designs which preclude any analysis of causality. Therefore, it is possible that general perceptions about police impact on experiences with police, rather than the other way around (see e.g. Rosenbaum et al. 2005).

Table 3. Demographic predictors of a satisfactory experience with police in the preceding 12 months (2008)

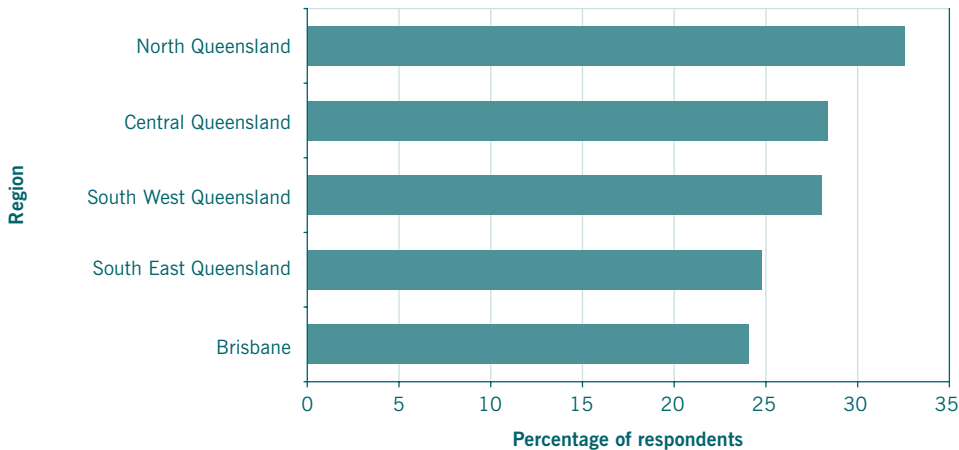
Demographic factor	B	Wald	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp (B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	-0.075	0.378	n.s.	0.928	0.732	1.177
<b>Age (older)</b>	0.147	10.535	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	1.159	1.060	1.266
Indigenous status	-0.628	1.935	n.s.	0.534	0.220	1.293
Ethnicity	-0.017	2.012	n.s.	0.984	0.961	1.006
<b>Education (higher)</b>	0.085	10.158	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	1.088	1.033	1.146
<b>Employment status (employed/studying)</b>	0.058	6.151	<b>p &lt; .015</b>	1.060	1.012	1.109
Time lived in Qld	0.077	2.637	n.s.	1.080	0.984	1.185
<b>Region (outside Brisbane)</b>	0.127	10.240	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	1.135	1.050	1.227

Note: n.s. indicates a non-significant result.

The results show that there was a significant effect of:

- ▶ Age — respondents aged 45 and older (average of 32.1%) were significantly more likely ( $p < .01$ ) to report having had a recent satisfactory experience than those aged 18–44 (average of 23.1%).
- ▶ Education — respondents with post-secondary school qualifications (average of 34%) were more likely ( $p < .01$ ) to report having had a recent satisfactory experience than those who had undertaken only some schooling or had completed secondary school to Year 12 (average of 20.7%).
- ▶ Employment status — respondents who were employed full-time or part-time or were studying (average of 34.4%) were more likely to report having had a recent satisfactory experience than those who were casually employed, retired or unemployed (average of 20.1%).
- ▶ Region — 32.6 per cent of respondents from North Queensland reported having had a recent satisfactory experience, while 24.1 per cent who lived in Brisbane (or an average of 26.3% who lived in other regions) reported having had one (see Figure 18). This is a favourable result for North Queensland police, as respondents from that area reported significantly more negative perceptions of police in 2005 than respondents in other regions.

**Figure 18. Percentage of respondents who reported having had a satisfactory experience with a police officer in the preceding 12 months by region (2008)**



**Initiation of contact**

Previous research has found that people who have initiated contact with the police themselves (i.e. have self-initiated it) tend to be more satisfied with the experience than those involved in a police-initiated encounter (Allen et al. 2005; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [NISRA] 2002; Reisig & Chandek 2001; Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Sced 2004a, 2004b).

In 2008, for the first time, respondents were asked whether their contact had been self- or police-initiated. Self-initiated contacts were reported by 60.5 per cent of those who reported having had a recent satisfactory experience. No demographic factors significantly influenced who initiated the contact.

Figure 19 shows that the main reasons for self-initiated contact were:

- ▶ to report a crime (31.4%)
- ▶ to get assistance or service (17.1%)
- ▶ to report being a victim of crime (15.7%).

Figure 19. Reasons for self-initiated contact with police (2008)

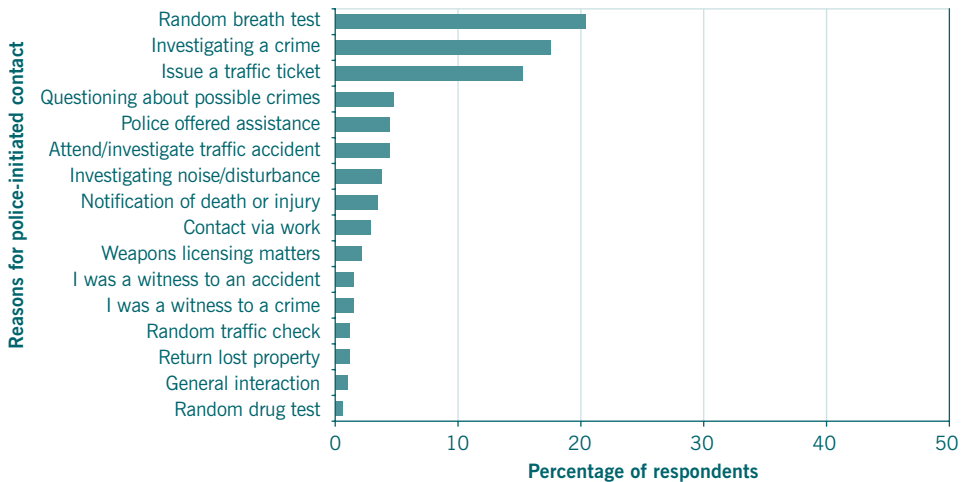


Police-initiated contacts were reported by 37.8 per cent of respondents who reported having had a recent satisfactory experience with a police officer.

Figure 20 shows that the main reasons for police-initiated contact were:

- ▶ to conduct a random breath test (20.4%)
- ▶ to investigate a crime (17.5%)
- ▶ to issue a traffic ticket (15.3%).

Figure 20. Reasons for police-initiated contact with respondents (2008)



## Level of satisfaction

In 2008, respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their experience with police.

Of those who had had a recent satisfactory experience:

- ▶ 71.2 per cent indicated they were ‘very satisfied’
- ▶ 23.7 per cent indicated they were ‘somewhat satisfied’
- ▶ 5.1 per cent indicated they were ‘a little bit satisfied’.

## Reasons for satisfaction

The most common reasons given for a satisfactory experience were that the police:

- ▶ had behaved in a friendly/courteous/professional manner (51.2%)
- ▶ had taken appropriate action (31.4%)
- ▶ had arrived promptly/come when sent for/were available (21.1%)
- ▶ were concerned/caring/interested (20.4%) (see Figure 21).

Figure 21. Reasons for satisfaction with the police (2008)

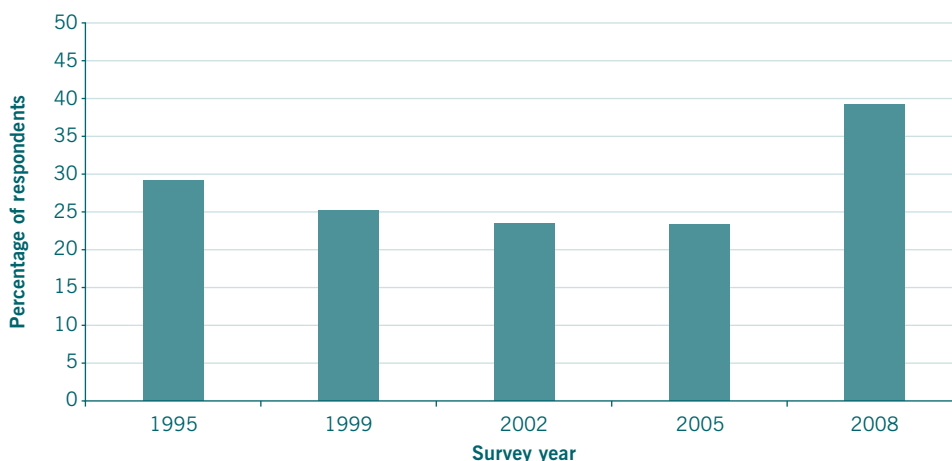


## Unsatisfactory experiences

In previous surveys, respondents were simply asked if they or anyone they knew had ever had an unsatisfactory experience with a Queensland police officer. However, as respondents are known to distinguish between personal and vicarious experiences (see e.g. Miller & Davis 2008; Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Weitzer & Tuch 2005), in 2008 they were first asked if they'd ever had a *personal* unsatisfactory experience. If they had not, they were then asked if they'd ever had a *vicarious* unsatisfactory experience. We report on their responses to both these questions, and then combine the results so they can be compared with those of previous surveys.

In 2008, 27.2 per cent of respondents reported having had a personal unsatisfactory experience with a police officer at some stage in their lives, while 11.9 per cent said they had had a vicarious unsatisfactory encounter. That is, almost 40 per cent of respondents reported having had either a personal or a vicarious unsatisfactory experience. This is a significant increase on that reported in previous surveys ( $\chi^2 = 133.114$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. Proportion of respondents who had had either a personal or a vicarious unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (1995–2008)



In 2008, the 27 per cent of respondents who reported having had a *personal* unsatisfactory experience was comparable to the combined percentage (23–29%) of those reporting having had *personal* and *vicarious* unsatisfactory experiences in each of the surveys since 1995. This suggests that in previous surveys respondents may have largely reported their own unsatisfactory experiences with police, rather than the experiences of others.

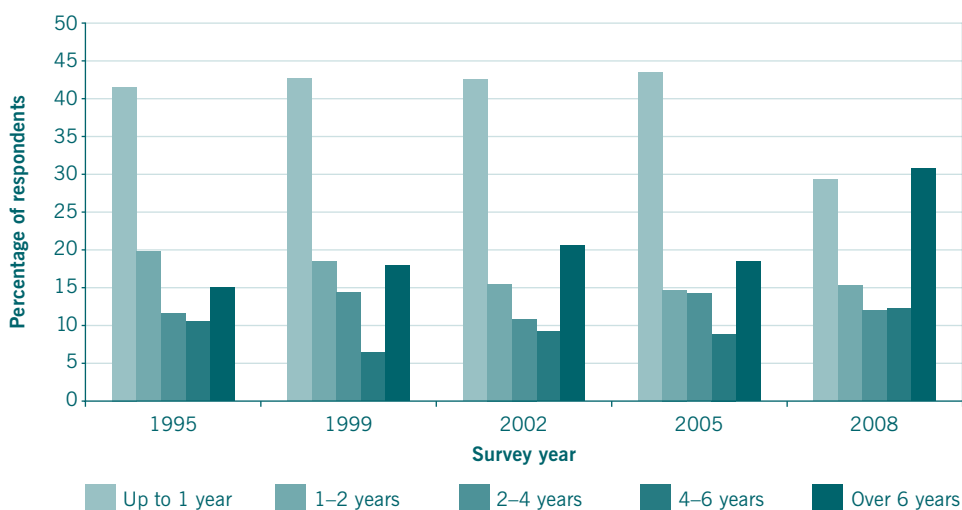


Unsatisfactory experiences were reported as *recent* by:

- ▶ 29.4 per cent (or 11.4% of the total sample) of those whose experience had been personal *or* vicarious
- ▶ 29.5 per cent (or 7.9% of the total sample) of those whose experience had been personal
- ▶ 29.3 per cent (or 3.4% of the total sample) of those whose experience had been vicarious.

When compared with the results of previous surveys, these figures show that significantly fewer respondents ( $\chi^2 = 63.576$ ,  $p < .01$ ) reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience (see Figure 23), while more reported having had one more than six years ago.

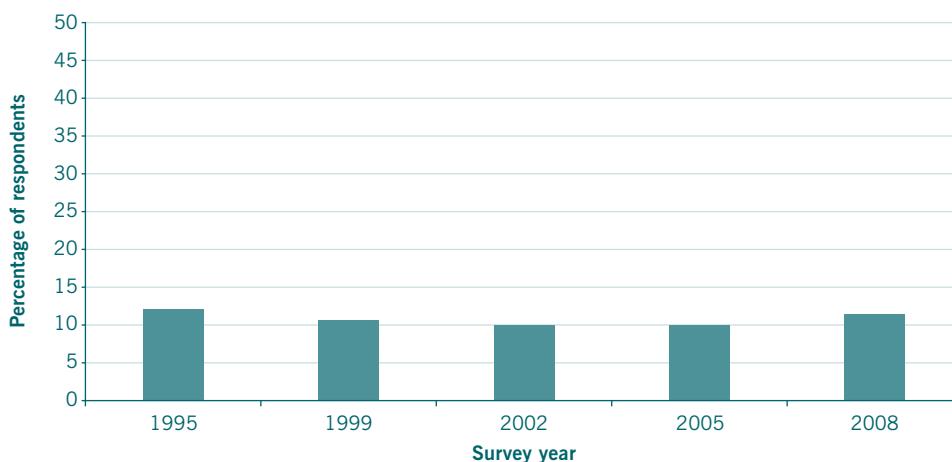
**Figure 23. Number of years before the survey that the personal or vicarious unsatisfactory incident had occurred (1995–2008)**



These results suggest that significantly more 2008 survey respondents had had either personal or vicarious unsatisfactory experiences at some stage in their lives, but that significantly fewer of these incidents had occurred in the preceding 12 months.

Overall, the results show stability ( $\chi^2 = 4.26$ , n.s.) in the proportion of all survey respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience in the last 12 months (see Figure 24).

Figure 24. Percentage of all respondents who reported having had a recent personal or vicarious unsatisfactory experience with police (1995–2008)



### Personal unsatisfactory experiences

We then examined respondents' personal and vicarious experiences separately to assess what demographic factors might have influenced the likelihood of their having occurred recently. Table 4 shows the results of multivariate analysis of personal experiences.

Table 4. Demographic predictors of a recent personal unsatisfactory experience with police (2008)

Demographic factor	B	Wald	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp (B)]	95% confidence interval	
<b>Gender (males)</b>	0.550	7.920	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	1.730	1.180	2.540
<b>Age (younger)</b>	0.399	31.300	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	1.490	1.296	1.713
<b>Indigenous status</b>	1.199	7.020	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	3.317	1.366	8.052
Education	0.029	0.418	n.s.	1.029	0.944	1.122
Employment status	-0.016	0.178	n.s.	0.984	0.912	1.061
Time lived in Qld	0.013	0.297	n.s.	1.013	0.967	1.060
Region	0.005	0.005	n.s.	1.005	0.885	1.141

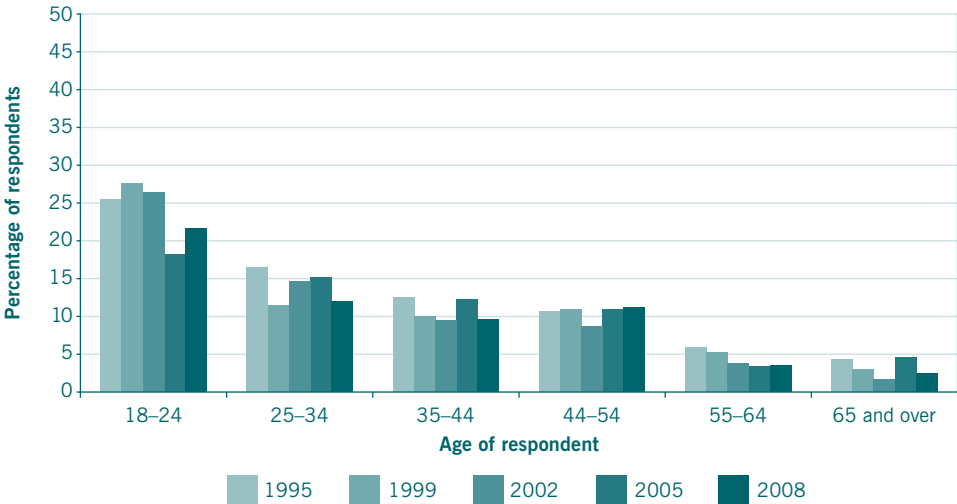
Note: n.s. indicates a non-significant result.

Consistent with previous research (Allen et al. 2005; Sced 2004a), these results indicated that the groups most likely to come into contact with police were males, younger people and those from ethnic minorities.

Specifically, there was a significant effect for age, with younger respondents about 50 per cent more likely than older respondents to report having had a recent personal unsatisfactory experience. In the 2008 survey, 22 per cent of respondents

aged 18–24 years reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience, slightly higher than the 18 per cent reported in 2005 (see Figure 25). The 2005 result had represented a significant decrease in the proportion of young people who had had unsatisfactory experiences, but unfortunately that finding appears to have been reversed in the 2008 survey.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 25. Proportion of respondents by age who reported having had a recent personal unsatisfactory experience (1995–2008)**



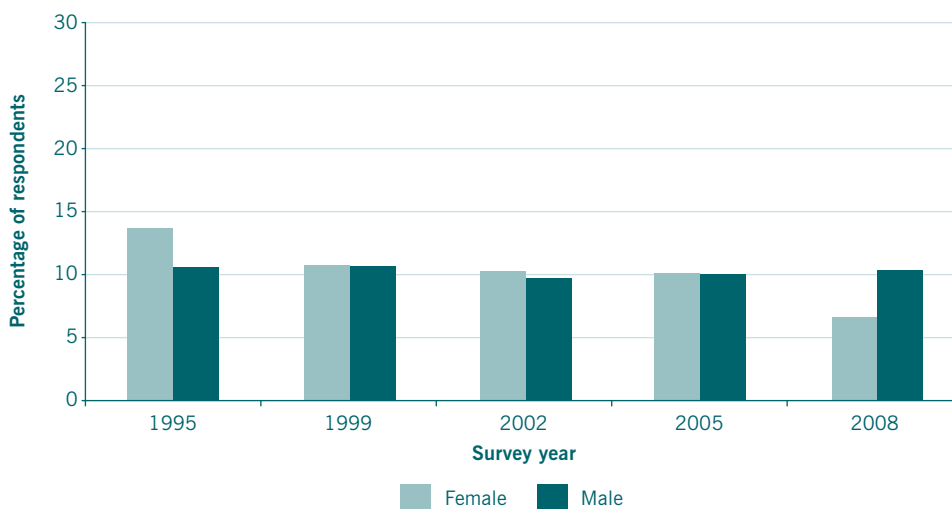
Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents from each survey who did not answer this question.

Unlike previous surveys, the 2008 survey revealed a significant effect of gender, with males 50 per cent more likely than females to report having had a recent personal unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (see Figure 26).

Respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were more than four times as likely as non-Indigenous respondents to report having had a recent personal unsatisfactory experience with a police officer. However, as the number of Indigenous respondents surveyed was small, the confidence interval is wide, and the result should be interpreted with some caution. None of the other demographic factors had any significant effect on this parameter.

<sup>13</sup> We have recently examined in greater detail the relationship between police and young people in a collaborative project with the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology and have published that report (see Crime and Misconduct Commission 2009).

Figure 26. Proportion of male and female respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory personal experience with police (1995–2008)



Note: Unsatisfactory experiences in 1995–2005 reflect personal and vicarious experiences combined.

### Vicarious unsatisfactory experiences

Respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were more than 12 times as likely as non-Indigenous respondents to report having had a vicarious unsatisfactory encounter (see Table 5). Again, however, the wide confidence interval suggests that this result should be interpreted with caution. No other demographic factor had any significant effect on this parameter.

Table 5. Demographic predictors of recent vicarious unsatisfactory experiences with police (2008)

Demographic factor	B	Wald	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp (B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	0.247	0.699	n.s.	1.280	0.717	2.284
Age	0.150	1.751	n.s.	1.162	0.930	1.451
Education	0.058	0.830	n.s.	1.059	0.936	1.199
<b>Indigenous status</b>	2.522	14.306	<b>p &lt; .01</b>	12.452	3.370	46.003
Employment	-0.006	0.009	n.s.	0.994	0.888	1.113
Time lived in Qld	0.072	0.379	n.s.	1.075	0.854	1.353
Region	-0.034	0.124	n.s.	0.966	0.798	1.170

Note: n.s. indicates a non-significant result.

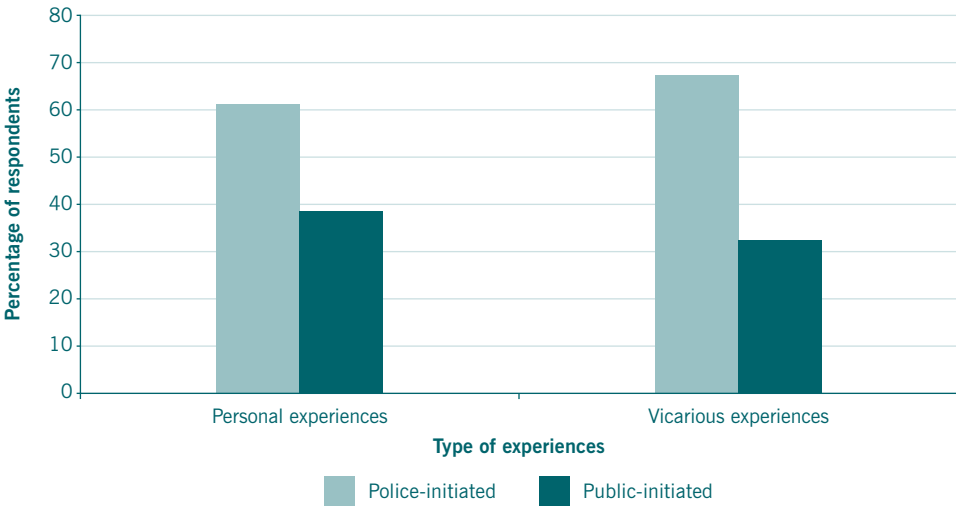
Together, the results from personal and vicarious experiences show that males and younger respondents are more likely than female or older respondents to report having had a personal unsatisfactory experience with a police officer. In 2008 we asked about Indigenous status of respondents for the first time, and these analyses show that Indigenous respondents were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to report having had both personal and vicarious unsatisfactory experiences with police.

### Initiation of contact

Respondents were asked to indicate whether contact in a recent personal or vicarious unsatisfactory experience had been self- or police-initiated (see Figure 27).

- ▶ 61.2 per cent of respondents who reported having had a personal experience, and 67.3 per cent of those who reported a vicarious one, indicated that contact had been initiated by the police.
- ▶ 38.8 per cent of respondents who reported having had a personal experience, and 32.7 per cent of those who reported having had a vicarious one indicated that they, or someone they knew, had initiated the contact.

**Figure 27. Percentage of dissatisfied respondents by the nature of the contact initiation with police for both personal and vicarious experiences (2008)**



The results discussed earlier for unsatisfactory experiences contrast distinctly with the satisfactory experiences. While respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience were most likely to report that the experience had been police-initiated, contact in satisfactory experiences was most commonly reported as self-initiated. These findings are consistent with research which suggests that people are likely to be less satisfied with police if their contact with them is police-initiated (Allen et al. 2005; Sced 2004a, 2004b).

Multivariate analyses revealed that:

- ▶ younger respondents were about 50 per cent more likely than older respondents to report recent police-initiated unsatisfactory *personal* experiences (see Table 6)
- ▶ males were almost five times as likely as females to report recent police-initiated unsatisfactory *vicarious* experiences (see Table 7).

**Table 6. Demographic predictors of police-initiated contact for recent unsatisfactory personal experiences (2008)**

Demographic factor	B	Wald	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp (B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	0.377	0.860	n.s.	1.457	0.657	3.230
<b>Age (younger)</b>	0.398	5.679	<b>0.017</b>	1.489	1.073	2.065
Indigenous status	0.817	0.563	n.s.	2.264	0.268	19.117
Education	-0.069	0.486	n.s.	0.934	0.770	1.133
Employment status	-0.003	0.002	n.s.	0.997	0.855	1.162
Time lived in Qld	0.271	2.041	n.s.	1.132	0.904	1.903
Region	-0.245	3.064	n.s.	0.782	0.594	1.030

Note: n.s. indicates a non-significant result.

**Table 7. Demographic predictors of police-initiated contact for recent unsatisfactory vicarious experiences (2008)**

Demographic factor	B	Wald	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp (B)]	95% confidence interval	
<b>Gender (males)</b>	1.592	4.058	<b>p &lt; .05</b>	4.911	1.044	23.104
Age	0.002	0.000	n.s.	1.002	0.595	1.687
Education	-0.141	0.920	n.s.	0.868	0.651	1.159
Indigenous status	-1.868	2.029	n.s.	0.154	0.012	2.019
Employment	0.096	0.377	n.s.	1.100	0.811	1.493
Time lived in Qld	0.140	0.179	n.s.	1.151	0.600	2.206
Region	-0.285	1.425	n.s.	0.752	0.471	1.201

Note: n.s. indicates a non-significant result.

Figure 28 shows the reasons for police-initiated unsatisfactory contact for both personal and vicarious experiences. The most common reason police were in contact for both personal and vicarious experiences was to issue a traffic ticket, followed by contact through the course of the investigation of a crime.

**Figure 28. Reasons for police-initiated unsatisfactory contact (2008)**

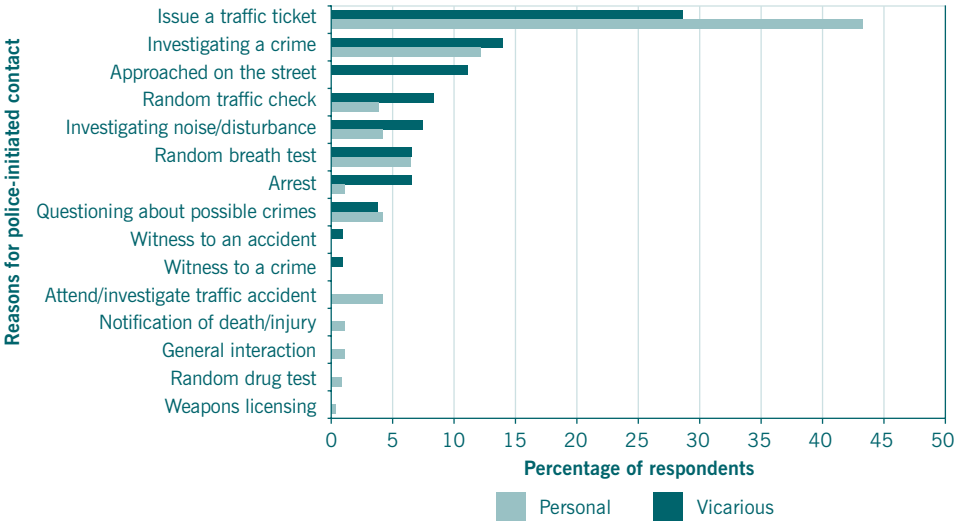
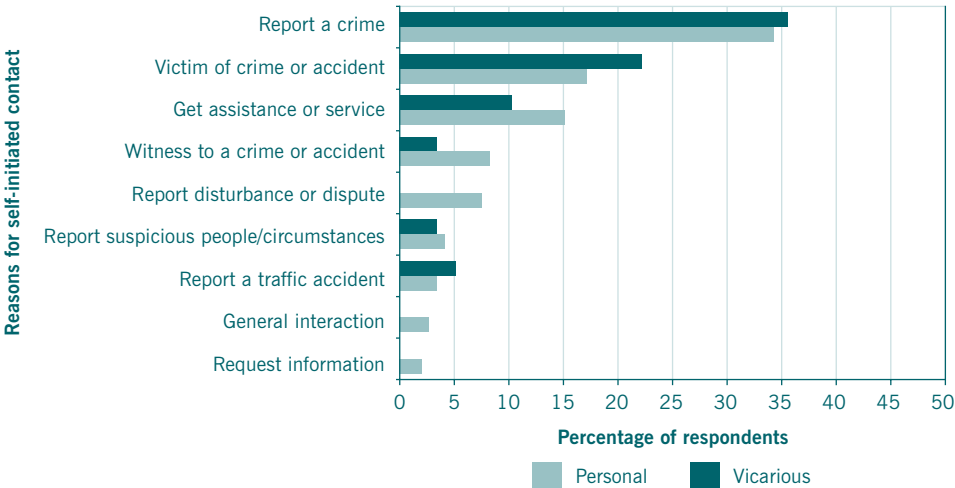


Figure 29 shows the reasons for self-initiated contact. For both personal and vicarious experiences, the most common reason for contact with the police was to report a crime or because they were the victim of a crime or accident.

**Figure 29. Reasons for self-initiated personal and vicarious unsatisfactory contact (2008)**



## Reasons for dissatisfaction

In 2008, the most common reason respondents gave for their dissatisfaction was that the officer's manner 'had been unfriendly, rude or arrogant' during the encounter (see Table 8). Other common reasons given were that the officer 'had done nothing or hadn't done enough', 'had behaved unreasonably or unfairly', or 'had showed a lack of concern, care or interest'. These reasons were the same for both personal and vicarious experiences.

**Table 8. Reasons for dissatisfaction with police in recent personal and vicarious experiences (1995–2008)**

	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)	2008 (n = 123)	Change since 2005 (%)
Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant	35.8	39.1	40.9	34.0	26.7	-21.5
Did nothing/didn't do enough	22.0	23.0	18.8	14.7	21.0	42.9
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	22.0	31.1	37.0	28.7	20.5	-28.6
Lack of concern/care/interest	3.7	20.5	14.3	11.3	15.3	35.4
Did the wrong thing/were incompetent	10.1	12.4	11.7	11.3	10.8	-4.4
The officer assumed guilt	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9.1	n/a
The officer did not consider all sides of the story	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7.4	n/a
Disagreed/unhappy with police decision	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.0	n/a
Discriminatory/racist behaviour or language*	2.8	2.5	1.9	1.3	4.5	246.2
Did not keep the person informed/did not come back	4.6	3.7	4.5	4.0	4.0	0.0
Behaved illegally/broke the rules	7.3	3.7	5.8	4.7	5.1	8.5
Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no one available	13.8	16.1	14.9	7.3	3.4	-53.4
Unprofessional behaviour/attitude	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.8	n/a
Used undue force/assaulted someone	2.8	7.5	1.9	3.3	2.3	-30.3
Offenders not caught/property not recovered	2.8	3.7	1.3	2.7	0.0	-100.0
Other	19.3	12.4	7.8	10.7	9.1	-15.0

\* In previous surveys, this response option was 'racist behaviour or language'. In 2008, this was expanded to include other types of discriminatory behaviour or language. Because of this, the increase in the proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied for this reason in 2008 may not reflect a true increase in the proportion of Queenslanders who are dissatisfied with police experiences for this reason.

Note: n/a indicates not applicable.



The 2008 survey results show that since 2002 there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied because a police officer 'did nothing or did not do enough', but this change is not significant. Since 2005, there has been a significant increase ( $\chi^2 = 19.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in the proportion of respondents who reported dissatisfaction as a result of a police officer's 'lack of concern, care or interest'.

In contrast, the results suggest that there has been a significant decline in recent years in respondents' dissatisfaction as a result of a police officer's 'unfriendly, rude or arrogant manner' ( $\chi^2 = 36.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or because a police officer 'behaved unreasonably or unfairly' ( $\chi^2 = 14.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There has also been a decline in the proportion of respondents who indicated that the reason for their dissatisfaction was the more serious allegation of undue force or assault ( $\chi^2 = 11.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ). More serious allegations, such as taking a bribe, stealing money or goods, or releasing confidential information, were not reported as reasons for dissatisfaction, or were reported very infrequently.

The proportion of respondents who indicated that they were dissatisfied because of the more serious allegation that an officer 'had acted with undue force or assault' had also declined ( $\chi^2 = 11.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ). More serious allegations, such as taking a bribe, stealing money or goods, or releasing confidential information, were not reported as reasons for dissatisfaction, or were reported very infrequently.

Overall, it is important to note that the respondents' main reasons for dissatisfaction with the police were not concerns about official misconduct or serious maladministration by the police service but about officers' manner and attitudes in their daily interactions with the public. However, these issues are still very important, particularly as they can significantly affect people's perceptions of police, as indicated in the previous chapter.

To further understand reasons for dissatisfaction, we compared the reasons for dissatisfaction for both personal and vicarious unsatisfactory experiences and both police-initiated and public-initiated contacts.

In personal experiences:

- ▶ in self-initiated encounters, respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied because a police officer 'had done nothing or hadn't done enough' or 'had lacked concern, care or interest'
- ▶ in police-initiated encounters, respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied because a police officer 'had assumed guilt', 'had not considered all sides of the story' or 'had behaved unreasonably or unfairly'.

In vicarious experiences:

- ▶ when the contact had been initiated by someone they knew, respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied because the police officer ‘had done nothing or hadn’t done enough’
- ▶ in police-initiated encounters, respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied because a police officer ‘had behaved unreasonably or unfairly’ or ‘had acted in an ‘unfriendly, rude or arrogant manner’.

We also examined whether respondents who had been fined or charged, or arrested or taken into custody in the course of an encounter with police reported different reasons for their dissatisfaction.

In personal unsatisfactory experiences:

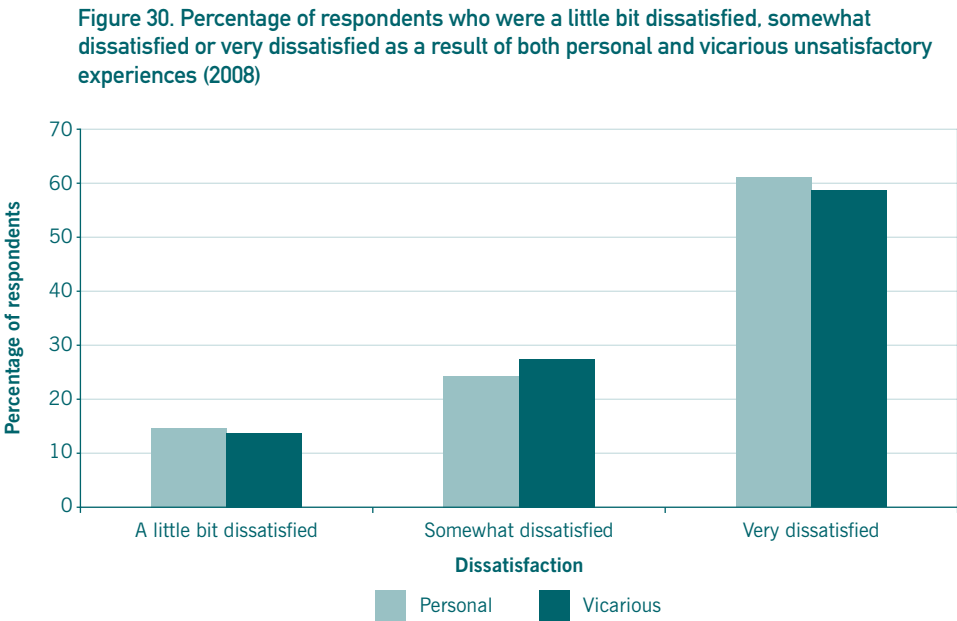
- ▶ 32.6 per cent (or 8.8% of the total sample) reported having been fined or charged and these respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied because they ‘had disagreed with or were unhappy about a police decision’, or because they considered that the officer ‘had assumed guilt’ or ‘had not considered all sides of the story’
- ▶ 5.2 per cent (or 1.4% of the total sample) reported having been arrested or taken into custody; however, there was no clear pattern of reasons given for dissatisfaction for these respondents.

In vicarious unsatisfactory experiences:

- ▶ the 35.8 per cent (or 4% of the total sample) who reported that someone they knew had been fined or charged were more likely to be dissatisfied because the officer ‘had behaved unreasonably or unfairly’
- ▶ there was no clear pattern of reasons given for the dissatisfaction of the 37.1 per cent (or 1.5% of the total sample) who reported that someone they knew had been arrested or taken into custody.

**Level of dissatisfaction**

In 2008, we also asked respondents to indicate their level of dissatisfaction with any unsatisfactory encounter they’d had with police (see Figure 30). Respondents most commonly reported being ‘very dissatisfied’ as a result of both personal experiences (61.0%) and vicarious experiences (58.8%). Interestingly, respondents were as dissatisfied about vicarious experiences as they were about their own.



# Part D: Complaints processes

According to the *Report on government services 2008* (SCRGSP), complaints against police are an important indicator of the government's objective for the police to perform their duties in a professional manner. Moreover, complaints-handling processes are one of the key mechanisms for ensuring police integrity (Crime and Misconduct Commission 2004).

As in previous years, in 2008 we asked those respondents who had been dissatisfied with a police officer whether they had ever felt like making an official complaint (see Table 9).<sup>14</sup> The proportion of respondents who stated that they had was similar for those who reported having had a personal experience (35.8%) and for those who reported having had a vicarious experience (29.4%). Overall, less than 4 per cent of respondents from the 2008 sample—or about a third of all of those who reported having had any unsatisfactory experience in the preceding 12 months—stated that they had felt like making a complaint. This represents a decline in the proportion of respondents who felt like making a complaint over previous years, and reflects positively on the police.

Only 1.3 per cent of the total sample—or about 11 per cent of those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months—actually made or attempted to make an official complaint. Expressed as a ratio, one in three people who felt like making a complaint in 2008 actually did so. This is consistent with results of previous surveys, except in 2002 where almost one in four who reported having felt like complaining actually did so. The majority of those who made or tried to make a complaint in 2008 (80%) did so in response to their own personal unsatisfactory experience, rather than to a vicarious one.

**Table 9. Proportion of respondents personally or vicariously dissatisfied with police in the preceding 12 months who felt like making, made or tried to make a complaint (1995–2008)**

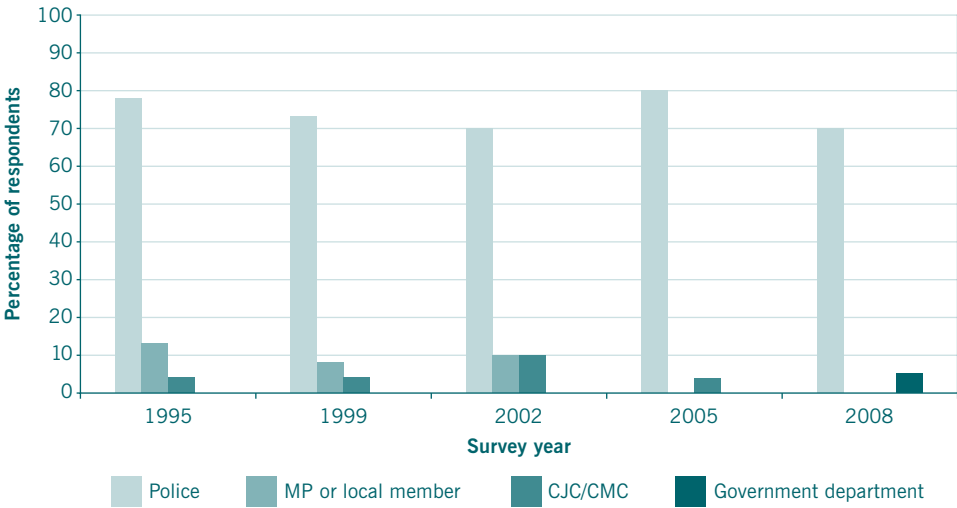
	1995 (n = 900)	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)	2005 (n = 1505)	2008 (n = 1550)
Have been dissatisfied (ever)	262 (29.1%)	379 (25.2%)	364 (23.5%)	351 (23.3%)	421 (27.2%)
Dissatisfied in the last 12 months	109 (12.1%)	161 (10.7%)	154 (9.9%)	150 (10.0%)	176 (11.4%)
Felt like making a complaint	61 (6.8%)	71 (4.7%)	76 (4.9%)	73 (4.9%)	59 (3.8%)
Made or tried to make a complaint	23 (2.6%)	26 (1.7%)	20 (1.3%)	25 (1.7%)	20 (1.3%)
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	3:1

<sup>14</sup> Official complaints are those made to the police, the CMC (or formerly the CJC or the QCC), a member of parliament or local councillor, a lawyer or the Ombudsman.

Respondents who had made or had tried to make a complaint were asked to which agency they had complained. However, over the past five surveys only a small number of respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience made or tried to make a complaint ( $n = 114$ ). Therefore, these results should be interpreted with caution.

As in previous surveys (see Figure 31), the majority of 2008 respondents (70%) stated that they had reported the matter directly to the QPS. A small proportion (5%) had taken their complaint to a government department. The proportion of respondents who have made their complaint to the CJC/CMC has been very small over the past four surveys, and in 2008 no respondents reported having taken their complaint to the CMC.

**Figure 31. The organisations to which complaints about police were reported (1995–2008)**



Note: Twenty-eight (28.3) per cent of respondents to the 2008 survey who had been dissatisfied with police in the last 12 months and had made a complaint during that period had complained to another person or agency not categorised above.

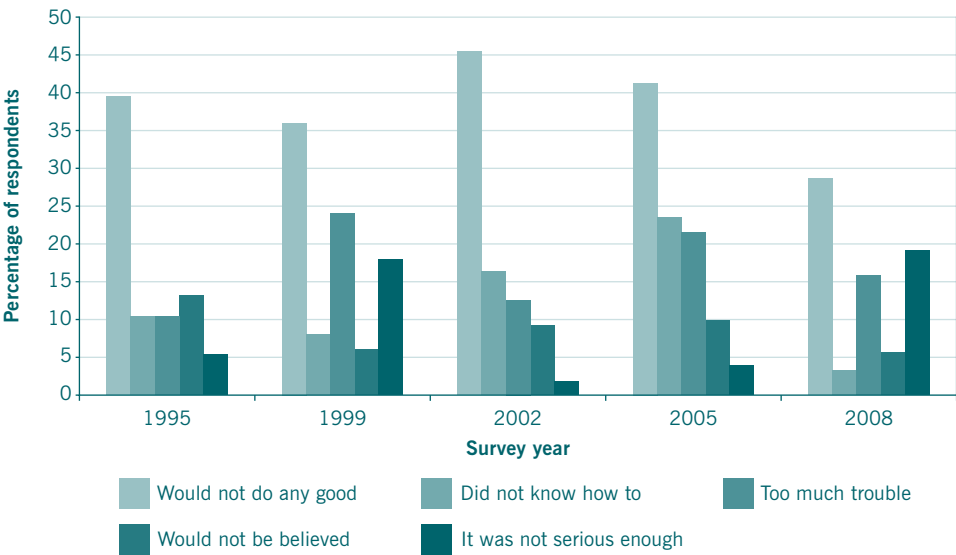
Of those respondents who had made or had tried to make a complaint directly to the QPS, over 70 per cent had been ‘fairly dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied’ with the way the complaint had been handled. The remaining respondents reported being either ‘fairly satisfied’ or ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’. No respondents reported being ‘very satisfied’ with the way their complaint had been handled by the QPS. The small proportion who had taken their complaint to a government department did not indicate how satisfied they had been with the way their complaint had been handled. (As no respondents reported taking their complaint to the CMC in 2008, there are no results for levels of satisfaction with the CMC.)

## Reasons for not complaining

Those respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience with a police officer but had not made an official complaint were asked why they had chosen not to do so (see Figure 32).

Over the last five surveys, the most common reason respondents have given for not having made an official complaint has been a belief that it ‘would not do any good’. However, since 2002, the proportion of respondents who have given this reason (45.5% in 2002 and 28.7% in 2008) has significantly declined ( $\chi^2 = 11.62$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The proportion of respondents who had not made an official complaint because ‘they did not know how to’ also dropped significantly—from 23.5 per cent in 2005 to 3.2 per cent in 2008 ( $\chi^2 = 21.51$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, in 2008 more respondents (19.1%) had not made an official complaint because they considered that the incident that had left them dissatisfied had not been ‘serious enough’. This percentage was similar to that reported in the 1999 survey, and higher than that in both the 2002 and 2005 surveys, although this change was not significant.

Figure 32. Reasons for not making an official complaint (1995–2008)



Note: The 2008 data do not add up to 100 per cent because 26 per cent of respondents provided other responses to this question which did not fit into the main categories identified above.

Multivariate analyses were used to determine whether any demographic factors predicted why respondents chose not to make an official complaint. Those respondents who identified with an ethnic or cultural group other than ‘Australian’ were 20 per cent more likely than those who identified as being ‘Australian’ to indicate that they had not made a complaint because they ‘did not know how to’ (see Table 10). There were no significant relationships between any other demographic factors and the other reasons for not making a complaint.

Table 10. Demographic predictors of respondents not making a complaint because they did not know how to do so (2008)

Demographic factor	B	Wald	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp (B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender (males)	-1.358	1.1900	n.s.	0.257	0.022	2.950
Age (younger)	-0.741	2.5990	n.s.	0.477	0.194	1.173
Indigenous status	-20.594	0.0000	n.s.	0.000	0.000	
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>0.180</b>	<b>6.3450</b>	<b>p &lt; .05</b>	<b>1.197</b>	<b>1.041</b>	<b>1.377</b>
Education	-0.099	0.1470	n.s.	0.906	0.546	1.502
Employment status	0.226	0.1606	n.s.	1.254	0.884	1.779
Time lived in Qld	0.570	0.4800	n.s.	1.769	0.353	8.872
Region	0.029	0.0070	n.s.	1.030	0.509	2.085

Note: n.s. indicates a non-significant result.

To better understand why dissatisfied respondents chose not to make a complaint, in 2008 additional questions were asked of those respondents who had not made an official complaint because they considered ‘it would not do any good’, felt ‘they would not be believed’ or considered ‘it was not serious enough’. However, as these results are based on a small number of respondents, they should be interpreted with caution.

Respondents who suggested that they had not made an official complaint because ‘it would not do any good’ or because they ‘felt they would not be believed’ were asked why they had felt this way. The majority of respondents who indicated that they thought ‘it would not do any good’ (35.6%) believed that this was the case because ‘police all stick together’, while 15.6 per cent believed that a complaint would be ‘their word against mine’. Similarly, respondents who ‘felt they would not be believed’ thought that this was because ‘police all stick together’ (33.3%) and because it would be ‘their word against mine’ (33.3%).

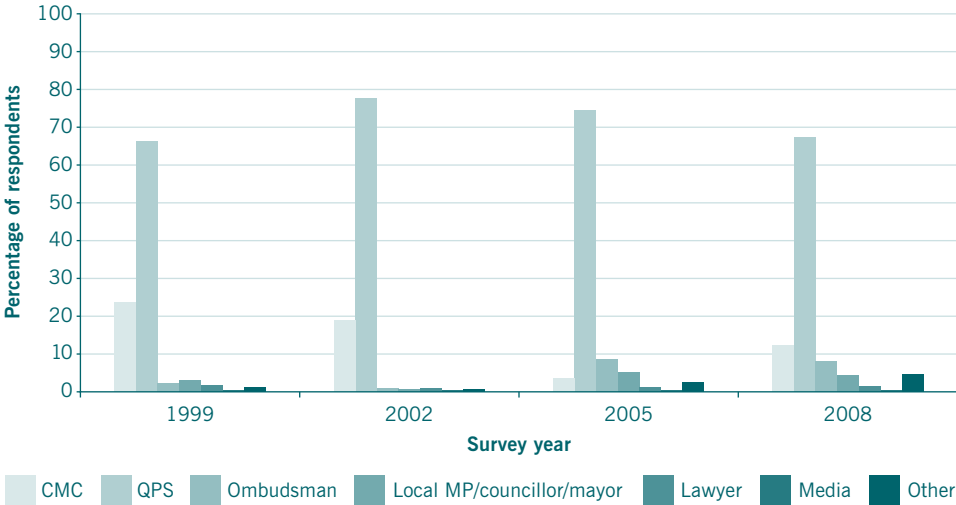
Respondents who had indicated that they had thought their experience with police ‘was not serious enough’ to make an official complaint about were asked what types of behaviour they would consider serious enough. The types they considered serious enough were police officers who ‘behaved illegally or broke the rules’ (37.9%), ‘used undue force or violence or assaulted someone’ (34.5%), displayed ‘discriminatory language or behaviour’ (17.2%) or ‘took a bribe’ (13.8%).

## Complaint agencies

In the last four surveys, all respondents were asked, if they were to make a complaint, which agency they believed would best deal with their complaint if (a) an officer had been rude to them, (b) they had been assaulted by a police officer, and (c) they suspected a police officer had taken a bribe. Respondents were asked to indicate either the QPS or the CMC, or to nominate an alternative.

In 2008, the majority of respondents indicated they believed that the QPS would best deal with the complaint if an officer had been rude to them (see Figure 33).<sup>15</sup> However, the proportion of respondents giving this answer has declined since 2002. In 2008, about 12 per cent of respondents indicated they believed that the CMC would best deal with such a complaint, representing an increase since the 2005 survey. Consistent with the 2005 survey, about 8 per cent of 2008 respondents indicated their belief that the Ombudsman would best deal with this complaint.

**Figure 33. Agency perceived to be the best to deal with a complaint involving an officer being rude (1999–2008)**



Notes: Excludes a small number of respondents who indicated they would not make a complaint.

‘Other’ includes higher/independent body, complaints body/tribunal, state government department and consumer affairs.

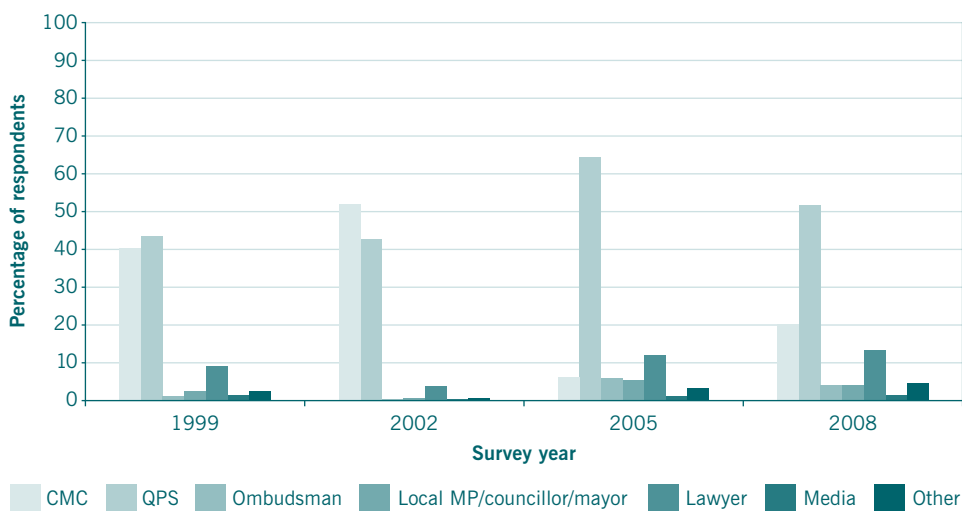
In 2008, over half of the respondents considered that a complaint of assault by a police officer would be best dealt with by the QPS (see Figure 34),<sup>16</sup> which represents a decrease from the 2005 survey. About 20 per cent of 2008 respondents considered the CMC the best agency to deal with such a complaint—an increase from about six per cent in 2005. Since 2002, however, there has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents who believe that the CMC is the best agency to deal with a complaint of police assault. Consistent with the 2005 results, in 2008 several respondents considered that the Ombudsman, a lawyer, or the local MP, councillor or mayor would best handle such a complaint.

<sup>15</sup> Rudeness by a police officer is an example of a ‘breach of discipline’ matter. These types of matters generally relate to police conduct that contravenes police procedures, standards or directives. The QPS has exclusive responsibility for dealing with all breach of discipline matters; if the CMC receives a complaint of this nature, the matter is referred to the QPS.

<sup>16</sup> Assault by a police officer would constitute ‘police misconduct’.



Figure 34. Agency perceived to be the best to deal with a complaint involving assault by a police officer (1999–2008)



Notes: Excludes a small number of respondents who indicated they would not make a complaint.

‘Other’ includes higher/independent body, complaints body/tribunal, state government department and consumer affairs.

If an officer had taken a bribe, most 2008 respondents considered the QPS (41.7%) or the CMC (35.1%) the best agencies to deal with the matter.<sup>17</sup> These results represent an increase in the proportion of respondents who nominated the CMC, and a decrease in the proportion who nominated the QPS, since the last survey in 2005. Over the past four surveys, however, there has been an overall decrease in the proportion of respondents who consider the CMC the best agency to deal with this type of complaint, while the proportion of respondents who believe that the QPS would be best has increased (see Figure 35).

## Confidence in the complaints process

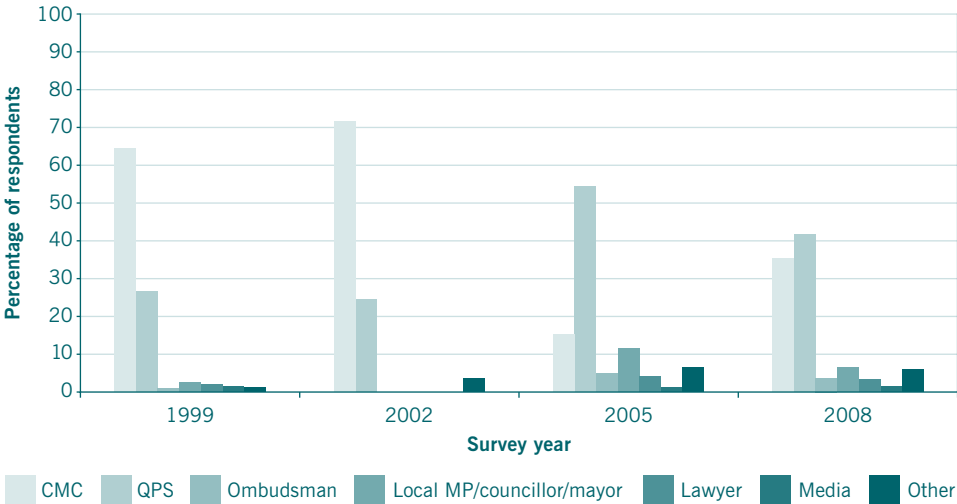
In previous surveys, respondents were asked to indicate how confident they would be, if they were to make a complaint, that the matter would be properly investigated. As confidence in the complaints process may depend on the agency, in 2008 respondents were asked to indicate their level of confidence if they had made a complaint to the QPS and if they had made a complaint to the CMC. An average of these responses was taken so they could be compared with the results from previous surveys.

This comparison shows that public confidence in complaints processes seems to have remained stable after a steady decline between 1995 and 2005 (see Figure 36). About

<sup>17</sup> Bribery by an officer would constitute ‘official misconduct’.

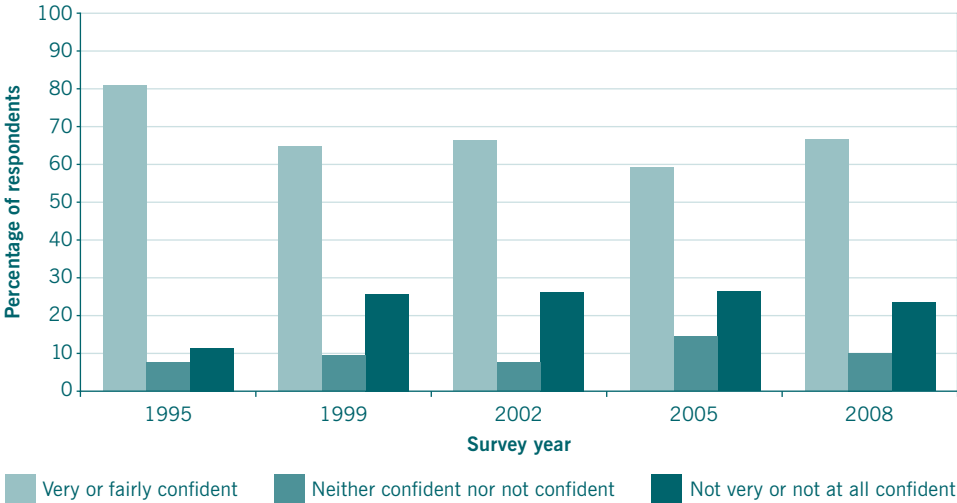
60 per cent of respondents in both the 2005 and the 2008 surveys indicated that they would be ‘very confident’ or ‘fairly confident’ that their complaint would be properly investigated. The proportion of respondents who indicated that they were ‘not very confident’ or ‘not at all confident’ that a complaint would be properly investigated has also remained relatively stable, at about 25 per cent since the 1999 survey.

**Figure 35. Perception of which organisation would be best to deal with a complaint if they suspected a police officer had taken a bribe (1999–2008)**



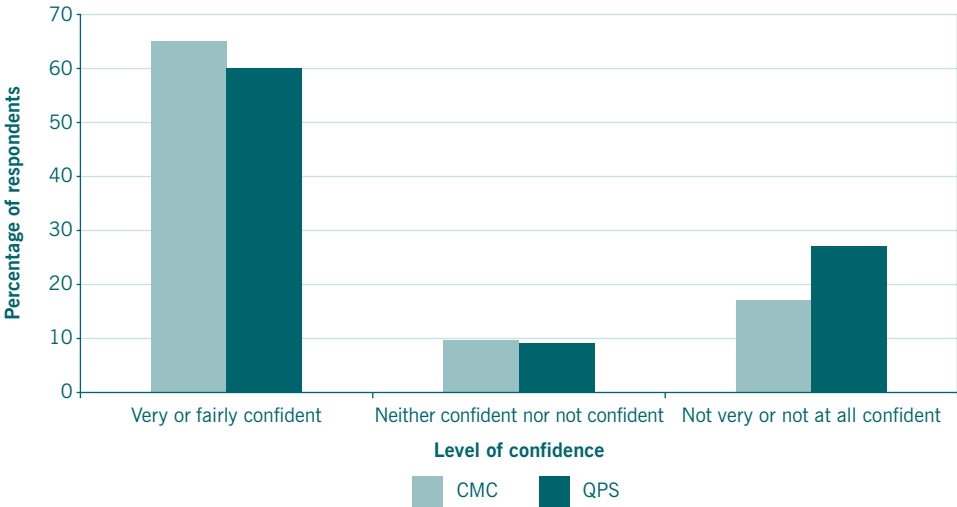
Notes: Excludes a small number of respondents who indicated they would not make a complaint.  
‘Other’ includes higher/independent body, complaints body/tribunal, state government department and consumer affairs.

**Figure 36. Level of confidence that a complaint would be properly investigated (1999–2008)**



Similarly, the results from the 2008 survey revealed that the majority of respondents would be ‘very confident’ or ‘fairly confident’ that their complaint would be properly investigated if made to the CMC (65.1%) or the QPS (60.1%). The proportion of respondents who would be either ‘not very confident’ or ‘not at all confident’ that their complaint would be properly investigated was slightly higher for the QPS (27.1%) than for the CMC (17.1%) (see Figure 37).

**Figure 37. Level of confidence in complaints being properly investigated by the CMC or the QPS (2008)**



Multivariate analyses revealed that gender, Indigenous status and experiences with police influenced confidence that a complaint made to either the CMC or the QPS would be properly investigated. Females were significantly more confident than males that a complaint made to the QPS would be properly investigated ( $F = 8.59, p < .05$ ); 66 per cent of females compared with 58 per cent of males reported being very or fairly confident that a complaint would be properly investigated. In contrast, Indigenous respondents reported having significantly less confidence than non-Indigenous respondents in the QPS ( $F = 11.80, p < .01$ ). Over 60 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents indicated that they would be very or fairly confident that the QPS would properly investigate complaints, compared with 36.8 per cent of Indigenous respondents.

Finally, respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience with a police officer in the last 12 months were significantly less confident that a complaint would be properly investigated by either the QPS ( $F = 40.45, p < .01$ ) or the CMC ( $F = 19.74, p < .01$ ). In contrast, respondents who reported having had a satisfactory experience with a police officer in the last 12 months were significantly more likely to have confidence in the QPS ( $F = 17.83, p < .01$ ). Having had a recent satisfactory experience with a police officer had no impact on respondents’ confidence that the CMC would properly investigate a complaint.

## General perceptions of complaints against police

To explore general perceptions of the complaints process and any possible reasons for a lack of confidence in complaints processes, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements about complaints against police (see Table 11).

Table 11. Perceptions about complaints (1995–2008)

	Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree				
	Average level of agreement				
	1995 (n = 900)	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)	2005 (n = 1505)	2008 (n = 1550)
People who complain against police are likely to suffer for it					
% agreed or strongly agreed	34.70	27.40	25.10	25.20	27.90
average rating	2.76	2.67	2.63	2.68	2.63
There is no point in reporting corruption in the police service as nothing useful will be done about it					
% agreed or strongly agreed	n/a	18.50	12.50	16.60	17.90
average rating	n/a	2.38	2.24	2.34	2.33
Complaints against police should be investigated by an independent body not the police themselves					
% agreed or strongly agreed	88.70	90.20	84.30	85.80	91.50
average rating	4.31	4.29	3.94	4.08	4.12

Note: n/a indicates not applicable.

In 2008, almost 28 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement ‘*People who complain against police are likely to suffer for it*’. Over time, there has been a significant decrease in average agreement with this statement, although this has remained fairly steady in recent years ( $F = 2.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Agreement with this statement was significantly related to various demographic factors. Specifically, in 2008:

- ▶ Respondents on welfare benefits (48.8%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 2.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than respondents employed full-time (23.7%).
- ▶ Respondents from Central or North Queensland (average 31.6%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 3.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than respondents from Brisbane, South East Queensland or South West Queensland (average 25.5%).
- ▶ Respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (49.4%) were significantly more likely to agree ( $F = 45.05$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than respondents who had not (42.3%) (see Figure 38).
- ▶ Respondents who reported having had a satisfactory experience in the preceding 12 months (69.9%) were significantly less likely to agree ( $F = 14.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had not had a satisfactory experience (60.1%) (see Figure 38).

Figure 38. Proportion of respondents who 'agree or strongly agree', 'disagree or strongly disagree' and 'neither agree nor disagree' that 'People who complain against police are likely to suffer for it', by having had a recent satisfactory experience and an unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (2008)



Since 1999, fewer than 20 per cent of respondents in each survey have agreed or strongly agreed with the statement '*There is no point in reporting corruption in the Queensland Police Service because nothing useful will be done about it*'. Though there have been some fluctuations in the average agreement between 1995 and 2008 ( $F = 5.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ), responses have remained steady during the last two surveys.

Multivariate analyses revealed that various demographic factors influenced respondent agreement with the statement in 2008:

- ▶ Indigenous respondents (45%) were more likely to agree that there is no point in reporting corruption ( $F = 11.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than non-Indigenous respondents (17.5%) (see Figure 39).
- ▶ Respondents' highest level of education also influenced agreement with this statement. Those respondents who had completed tertiary education (average 9.4%) were less likely to agree ( $F = 3.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had completed primary or secondary school, or had completed a trade certificate (average 24.7%).
- ▶ Respondents who reported having had an unsatisfactory experience with an officer in the preceding 12 months were more likely to agree with this statement (36.5%) than those who had not had an unsatisfactory experience (15.5%,  $F = 57.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while those who reported having had a recent satisfactory experience with an officer were less likely to agree (11.7%,  $F = 13.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those who had not had a satisfactory experience (19.7%) (see Figure 40).

Figure 39. Proportion of respondents who ‘agree or strongly agree’, ‘disagree or strongly disagree’ and ‘neither agree nor disagree’ that ‘There is no point reporting corruption in the Queensland Police Service because nothing useful will be done about it’, by Indigenous status (2008)

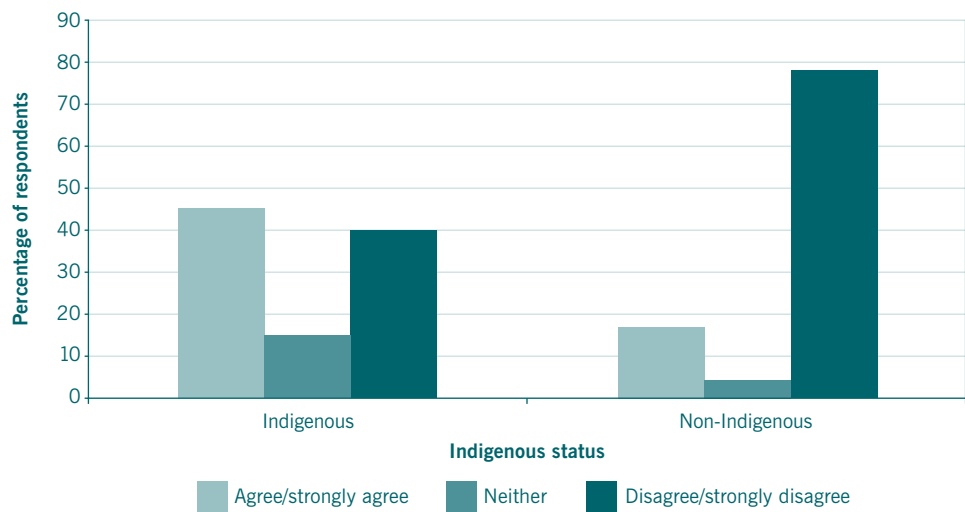


Figure 40. Proportion of respondents who ‘agree or strongly agree’, ‘disagree or strongly disagree’ and ‘neither agree nor disagree’ that ‘There is no point reporting corruption in the Queensland Police Service because nothing useful will be done about it’, by having had a recent satisfactory experience and an unsatisfactory experience with a police officer (2008)



Finally, the majority of respondents in 2008 (91.5%) believed that '*Complaints against police should be investigated by an independent body rather than the police themselves*'. However, over time, there has been a significant decrease in the level of agreement with this statement ( $F = 44.84, p < .01$ ).

There was a significant effect of education on agreement with this statement, where respondents who had had some education up to Year 12 (94.9%) were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree ( $F = 2.15, p < .05$ ) than those who had completed some type of post-secondary school education (average 90.6%). There was also a significant effect of having had a satisfactory experience in the preceding 12 months, where those who had not done so (93.0%) were more likely to agree ( $F = 6.28, p < .05$ ) than those who had done so (87.6%).

# Conclusion

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This report presents the findings of the 2008 Public Attitudes Survey in relation to public perceptions of the QPS, as well as trends in perceptions since the first survey was conducted in 1991.

Overall, it is evident that public perceptions of the police in Queensland remain positive. Police behaviour is perceived to have remained relatively steady over the past few years and the majority of respondents believed that the police behave generally or mostly well. There were also generally favourable perceptions of police integrity, the public tending to believe that most police are honest and that the police generally have a good image in Queensland. Although a reasonable proportion of respondents reported having had recent unsatisfactory experiences with police, fewer respondents reported having had these experiences in the preceding 12 months, and it is pleasing to note that the reasons for dissatisfaction were not related to matters of official misconduct. Moreover, for the first time in 2008, we assessed satisfying or pleasing experiences with police and found that a significant proportion of respondents reported having had a satisfactory experience with a police officer, many within the preceding 12 months.

There was also some potential evidence of improvement since the last survey in regard to regional differences. The 2005 survey revealed that respondents from Far North Queensland reported significantly more negative perceptions of police than those from other areas. It is encouraging to find that this was not the case in 2008, and the QPS is to be congratulated on its efforts to address negative perceptions in this region.

The results have also drawn attention to several areas where improvement may be warranted, including Indigenous Queenslanders, interactions with the public and with young people, and awareness of complaints processes. These areas provide the QPS with an opportunity to improve public perceptions of police.

## Indigenous Queenslanders

The results revealed some significant differences in perceptions of and experiences with the police between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. For example, Indigenous respondents generally reported having more negative perceptions of police and less confidence in complaints processes. They were also less likely to report having had a satisfactory experience with a police officer, yet were significantly more likely to report having had either a personal or a vicarious unsatisfactory one.

Although the small number of Indigenous respondents means that these results should be interpreted with some caution, strained relations between Indigenous Queenslanders



and the police have been of continued concern for both the CMC and the QPS.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the results suggest that the majority of survey respondents in 2008 believe that police in Queensland treat Indigenous people differently from white Australians.

## Interactions with the public

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings from the 2008 survey is the impact of experiences with police on perceptions of police. Generally, those respondents who reported having had a recent unsatisfactory experience with a police officer were significantly more likely to report having negative perceptions of police, while those who reported having had a satisfactory experience tended to report more positive perceptions. Moreover, it was the police officer's manner or behaviour that was the most common cause of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Respondents were most commonly satisfied with an officer who acted in a friendly, courteous or professional manner, while the most common reason for dissatisfaction was that an officer had acted in a rude, unfriendly or unprofessional manner.

This is an important finding and highlights an opportunity for the police to improve public perceptions. If officers consistently behave in a courteous and professional manner in their interactions with the public, there is a greater chance that the public will have satisfactory experiences with them. More importantly, this may lead to more positive general perceptions of police. It is clear that officers must take responsibility for setting the tone of the service in everything they do, and in all contact with the public. Given the role that perceptions of police have in contributing to public cooperation, crime prevention and police effectiveness (Brown & Benedict 2002; Frank, Smith & Novak 2005; Rosenbaum et al. 2005), improving the behaviour and manner of police officers in their interactions with the public may be worthwhile.

## Interactions with young people

Consistent with results from previous years, the survey has also shown that young people (aged 18–24 years) tend to hold less favourable perceptions of police. Respondents in this age group were also less likely to report having had satisfactory experiences with police, and were more likely to report having had a personal unsatisfactory experience. The results from the 2005 survey suggested that there had been some improvements in young people's perceptions of and experiences with police. Unfortunately, however, this effect seems to have reversed in 2008. For the first time in 2008 we also assessed contact initiation and found that younger responders were significantly more likely to have had their unsatisfactory contact initiated by police. This finding supports previous research that has found that young people tend to come to the attention of police more often than older people (e.g. see Cunneen & White 2007).

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18 The CMC will release its public report on an inquiry into the relationship between police and Indigenous people in remote communities later in 2009.

Although the frequency of contact is often considered one of the reasons for young people's negative perceptions of police, our results suggest that the reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the police were consistent across age groups and related to officers' general manner and behaviour. These results are also consistent with our recent complaints analysis involving young people, where we found that complaints made by or on behalf of a young person tended to focus on police demeanour and attitude (Crime and Misconduct Commission 2009). To further address young people's perceptions of police, the QPS might need to continue considering ways of improving officers' behaviour and manner when dealing with young people.

## **Awareness of complaints processes**

The survey results also identified some possible misunderstandings of complaints processes. For example, a reasonable proportion of respondents chose not to make a complaint because they perceived that police all stick together and so making a complaint 'would not do any good' or 'they would not be believed'. Respondents from ethnic or cultural groups other than Australian were also significantly more likely to report that they had not made a complaint because they did not know how to do so.

There also seemed to be some confusion about the most appropriate agency to deal with complaints against police. Although the majority of respondents agreed that an independent body, rather than the QPS, should investigate complaints against police, most respondents believed that the QPS would best handle complaints involving rudeness or assault by a police officer. The CM Act sets out the principle of devolution which requires that, generally, agencies should deal with misconduct within their own agency. The survey results suggest that, to some extent, the general public may not understand why complaints against police should be investigated by the QPS, yet at the same time they appear to recognise the value of having the QPS investigate some types of complaints.

These findings suggest some misunderstandings of complaints processes, and are also consistent with the results from the 2005 survey. They suggest that both the CMC and the Ethical Standards Command of the QPS may need to develop strategies to increase public awareness about complaint matters. Raising of public awareness may be needed in the areas of the purpose and importance of complaints, the systems available to make complaints and how complaints are investigated.

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