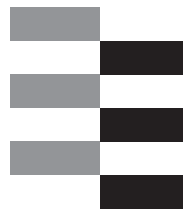


Views of the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Research Study Conducted for
National Probation Service



NATIONAL PROBATION SERVICE
for England and Wales

April 2004

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Introduction

Background

This report details the findings of the programme of research undertaken by MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the National Probation Service's Victim Contact Scheme¹ conducted in February 2004.

MORI was commissioned to explore the views of victims and families of victims² of serious crime about the Probation Victim Contact Scheme:

- **Overall satisfaction with victim services** – *How satisfied are victims and families of victims with victim services in general across England and Wales? How do these perceptions relate to their own personal satisfaction with the Victim Contact Scheme?*
- **Contact with the Victim Contact Scheme** – *How satisfied are victims with the time it took for initial contact to be made? What method of contact do victims and families prefer?*
- **Experiences with Victim Liaison Officer** – *How well do Victim Liaison Officers (VLOs) meet the needs of victims in terms of ease of contact, support and providing information?*
- **Priorities** – *What should the Victim Contact Scheme's future priorities be in order to maximise user satisfaction?*

Methodology

In order to answer these questions a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were employed. Details of the research programme are summarised below:

Sample

A sample of victims and of victims of serious crimes who had come into contact with the Victim Contact Scheme was provided to MORI by the National Probation Directorate. These details had been provided by individual Probation areas across England and Wales and represent a fairly representative sample of all victims who have come into contact with the Victim Contact Scheme and had given permission to be re-contacted for research purposes only. A table describing demographic details of respondents in the quantitative survey is provided in Appendix A.

¹ Throughout this report, for simplicity, the National Probation Service's Victim Contact Scheme is referred to as either the 'Victim Contact Scheme' or the 'Scheme'.

² Throughout this report, for simplicity, victims and families of victims of serious crime will be referred to as 'victims'.

Depth Interviews

Prior to the main quantitative survey, 10 depth interviews were conducted by telephone with victims randomly selected from the sample. The aim of these interviews was to provide an initial exploration of issues and to help develop the most relevant questions for the larger scale quantitative survey. Depth interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes. Issues explored in these interviews included general attitudes and expectations of victim services and a discussion of experiences and levels of satisfaction with the Victim Contact Scheme and their VLO. Verbatim quotes from depth interviews are presented throughout the report to illustrate findings. A copy of the Topic Guide is provided in Appendix B.

Quantitative Survey

After completing the pilot depth interviews, a total of 437 telephone interviews were conducted with respondents aged 16 and over. All interviews were conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATT) between February 9th and 22nd 2004 by specialist telephone interviewers at MORI Telephone Surveys. A copy of the marked up questionnaire with topline results is provided in Appendix C.

Interpretation of the Data

When interpreting the findings it is important to remember that the results of the quantitative survey are based on a **sample** of respondents and not the entire population. Consequently, results are subject to sampling tolerances and not all differences between subgroups are statistically significant.

In tables where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the report an asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half of one per cent, but greater than zero.

Acknowledgements

MORI would like to thank Sheran Ridge at NPD for her help in developing the project. We would also like to thank all Probation areas who provided details of victims willing to take part in the research. Above all, we would like to acknowledge our appreciation to all victims and families of victims who took part in this research.

Publication of the Data

As with all of MORI’s studies, the results presented here are subject to our Standard Terms & Conditions of Contract. Any press or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misinterpretation of the findings.

Summary of Findings

- Respondents are divided in their views about the way victims are generally treated in this country. Around half of those interviewed feel very or quite satisfied with the way victims are treated.
- When it comes to contact with particular agencies, victims are most likely to have had contact with the Police and least likely to have had contact with Youth Offending Teams or the Prison Service. Police, Youth Offending Teams and the Victim Contact Scheme receive the highest satisfaction ratings.
- Around half of victims were contacted initially within two months of the offender being sentenced. Two in five were contacted between two and six months after sentencing. Victims prefer to be contacted sooner rather than later. Around half feel that a time frame of two months is too long after sentencing. A slightly lower proportion feel that two months is 'about right'.
- Over half stated they had first been contacted by mail, with around a third being contacted initially by phone. Victims vary in the method of initial contact they would have preferred. Around half would have preferred to be contacted by letter, around a third by phone.
- On balance, victims tend to be very positive towards their VLO. Around two-thirds agree that in general they find it easy to contact their VLO when they want to. However, a significant minority (one in eight) disagree that it is easy to contact their VLO when they want to.
- Satisfaction with frequency of time spent talking to VLO is high amongst most respondents interviewed but, again, there is a significant minority who feel that they are not kept in enough contact.
- Levels of satisfaction with the emotional supportiveness of VLOs are extremely high amongst those we interviewed. Nine in ten are either very or fairly satisfied with how understanding and supportive their VLO is towards them.
- On the whole, victims are also satisfied that their VLOs are knowledgeable and provide them with the kind of information they require. They are particularly satisfied that the VLO knows what he or she is 'talking about' but there is less satisfaction that their VLO keeps them informed at key stages about the progress of the offender involved in their particular case (although the balance of opinion remains positive).
- Most remember receiving written materials from the Probation Service, such as a leaflet providing information for victims. Satisfaction with written materials is, for the most part, high.

- Knowledge and supportiveness of the VLO are of particular importance to victims when evaluating the overall quality of the service. The ability of VLOs to listen and be supportive, as well as their ability to answer questions and explain things, are the most helpful aspects of the Scheme for victims.
- Victims point out the strong need for more information about individual offenders' progression through the system and more regular VLO contact. These were recurring themes when asked how they thought the Scheme could offer a more useful service to victims in future.
- Priority issues for the Victim Contact Scheme identified in this research include the frequency of contact, timeliness of first contact (need to make sooner), and information around offenders' progress through the system.

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Checked & Approved:

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Checked & Approved:

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Tamara Burrows

Satisfaction with Victim Services

Satisfaction with the way Victims are Treated in England and Wales

Victims are divided in their views about the way victims are generally treated in this country³. Around half of those interviewed (46%) feel very or quite satisfied with the way victims are treated.

[You are treated] really sensitively. You are not pressured into doing anything you don't want to do, for example with the press.

White Female, 19, Family member

However, a large percentage express dissatisfaction (41%)- around one quarter (24%) are *very* dissatisfied.

Quite poorly. His [offender's] needs were met and at court he was rehearsed for his court appearance. Trial victims are not treated well.

White female, 36, Family member

Personally I feel disgusted because I am made to feel like an attacker not a victim.

White female, 49, Victim

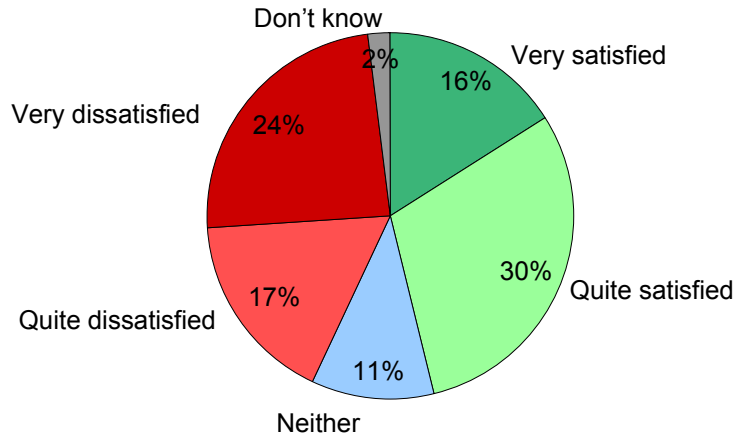
There are few significant differences amongst demographic subgroups in terms of satisfaction with the way victims are treated in general. Although not statistically significant, there is a trend towards younger people being more satisfied with victim services. Around one third (34%) of those aged 16-34 are dissatisfied compared with almost half (46%) of those aged 55+.

Perhaps not surprisingly, victims' own experiences appear to have an impact on their views of the general treatment of victims. Those who are personally satisfied with their experiences are more likely to express satisfaction with the treatment of victims in general. For example, around a half (52%) of those satisfied with their particular experiences with the Victim Contact Scheme are also likely to be satisfied with the treatment of victims generally. Likewise, 84% of those dissatisfied with their experiences with the Victim Contact Scheme are likely to be dissatisfied with the treatment of victims generally.

³ In this report, 'this country' refers to England and Wales.

Satisfaction with the Way Victims are Treated

Q1 In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way victims are treated in this country?

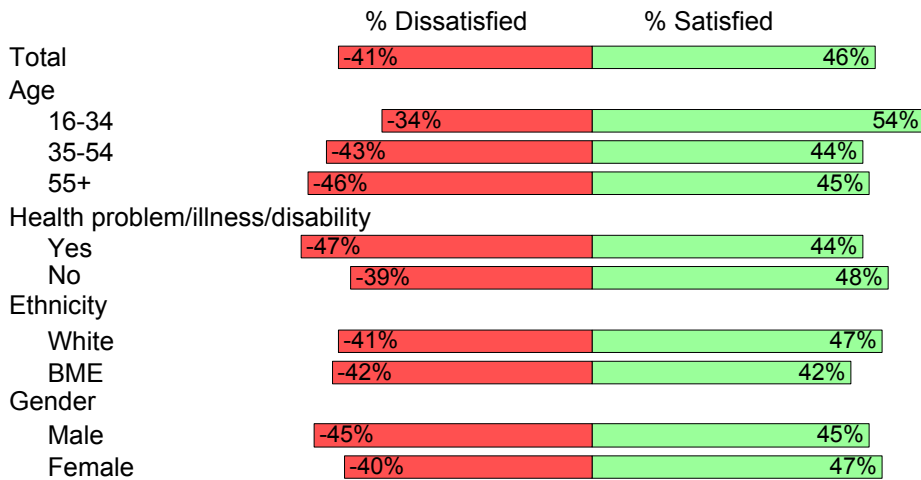


Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Satisfaction with the Way Victims are Treated

Q1 In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way victims are treated in this country?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Contact and Satisfaction with Individual Victim Services

Contact

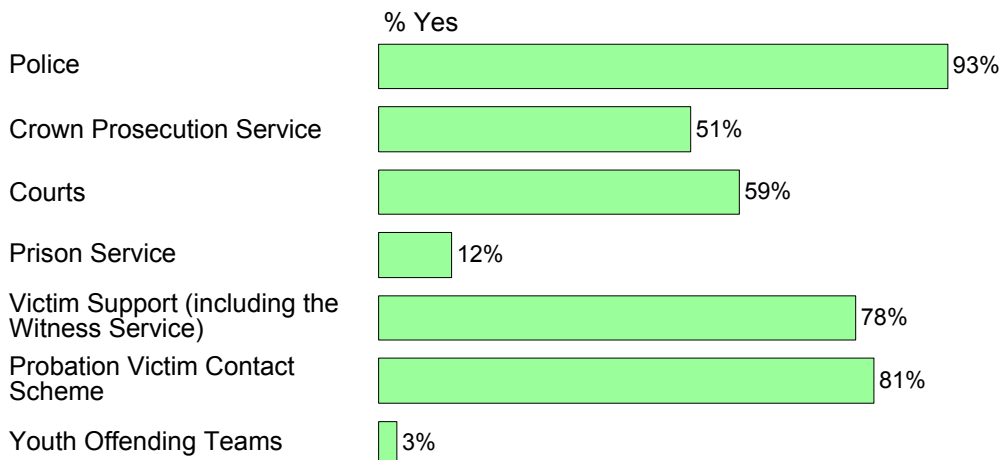
Victims were asked about their contact with a range of individual agencies including the Police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Courts, the Prison Service, Victim Support (including the Witness Service), the Probation Victim Contact Scheme and Youth Offending Teams.

Victims were most likely to have had contact with the Police (93%) and least likely to have had contact with Youth Offending Teams (3%) or the Prison Service (12%).

Despite all respondents being drawn from a sample of victims who had come into contact with the Victim Contact Scheme, one in seven interviewed (15%), when asked at the start of the interview, thought that they had *never* had contact with the Victim Contact Scheme. This may reflect a lack of association with the name of the Scheme, rather than lack of recall.

Contact with Victim Services

Q2 Can you tell me whether you have had any contact with each of these?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Satisfaction

On the whole, victims report higher satisfaction with individual agencies than with how victims are treated by the system as a whole. Whilst only 46% report being satisfied with the way victims are treated in general in this country, satisfaction levels range between 56% and 85% for specific agencies.

Police, Youth Offending Teams and the Victim Contact Scheme receive the highest satisfaction ratings. Eighty-five per cent of those who have come into contact with these agencies are satisfied with them. Only one in 10 (11%) are dissatisfied with the Police, around one in seven (15%) with Youth Offending

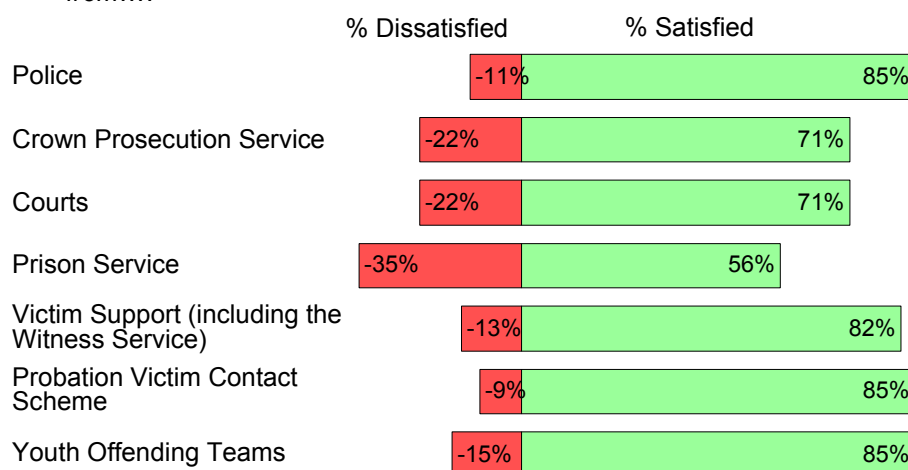
Teams, and one in 11 (9%) with the Victim Contact Scheme. However, it should be noted that the relatively low numbers of respondents who have had contact with Youth Offending Teams means that these findings are indicative only.

The majority of victims are also satisfied with Victim Support (including the Witness Service, 82%), the Crown Prosecution Service and the Courts (both with 71% satisfied), albeit not to such a high extent. Slightly higher dissatisfaction levels are reported, however, for these groups when compared with those for the Police, Youth Offending Teams and the Victim Contact Scheme.

Victims are least satisfied with how the Prison Service has treated them: only around a half (56%) of those who have had contact with the Prison Service (12% of the total sample) are satisfied with the treatment they received, whereas around a third (35%) of those having had contact are dissatisfied. Again, it should be noted that the relatively low numbers of respondents who have had contact with the Prison Service means that these findings are indicative only.

Satisfaction with Victim Services

Q2 How satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the treatment you received from...?



Base: All who say they have had contact with: Police (408); Crown Prosecution Service (221); Courts (257); Prison Service (54); Victim Support (including the Victim Service) (340); Probation Victim Contact Scheme (356); Youth Offending Team (13) Source: MORI

Demographic Profiles of those Satisfied and Dissatisfied with the Victim Contact Scheme

There are some demographic differences amongst those who are satisfied or dissatisfied with the Victim Contact Scheme.

Those who are younger tend to be more satisfied. Over nine in 10 (92%) of those aged 16-34 are satisfied, compared with eight in 10 (79%) of those aged 55+.

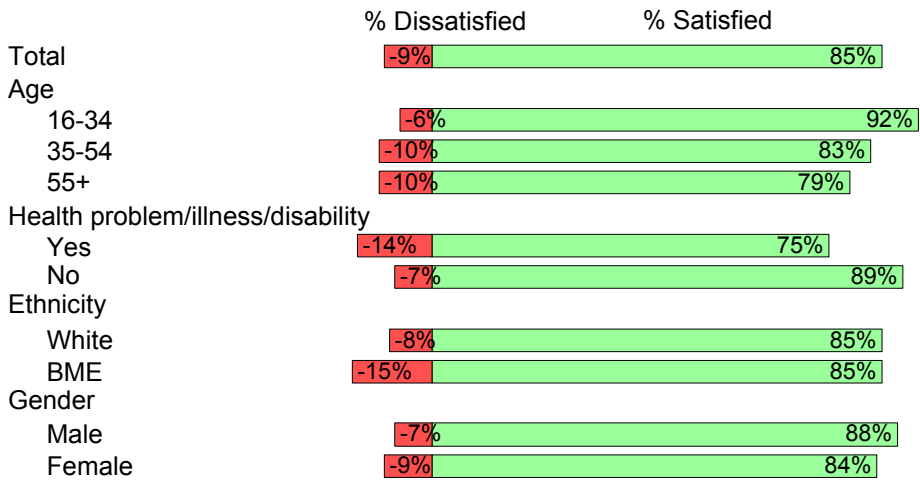
Those with health problems, illnesses, or disabilities are also slightly less satisfied with the Victim Contact Scheme. Whilst one in seven (14%) of those with health problems, illnesses, or disabilities are dissatisfied, only one in 14 (7%) of those

without these problems are dissatisfied. These differences may partly reflect differences in age, as noted above.

However, it should be noted that the balance of opinion towards the treatment received from the Scheme is positive across all sub-groups; the proportions of satisfied victims far outweigh those expressing a negative opinion.

Satisfaction with the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Q2 How satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the treatment you received from the Probation Victim Contact Scheme?



Base: All who have had contact with the Probation Victim Contact Scheme (356)

Source: MORI

Contact by Victim Contact Scheme

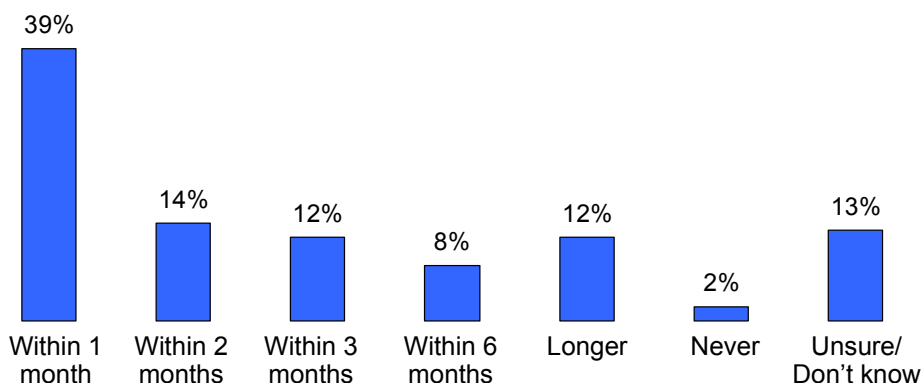
Time to First Contact

There are variations in the length of time it took for victims to be contacted initially by someone from the Scheme.

Around half (53%) of those interviewed were contacted initially by a Victim Contact Scheme representative within two months of the offender being sentenced. Two in five (20%) were contacted between two and six months after sentencing, and around one in 10 (12%) say they were contacted later than six months after the offender was sentenced.

Length of Time to First Contact

Q4 How long after the offender was sentenced were you first contacted by someone from the Probation Victim Contact Scheme?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

They came over last month. It's good they came over then and just at the right time.

White female, 19, Family member

They wrote soon after sentencing and explained who they were, they wondered if I wanted contacting to discuss his licensing conditions.

White female, 36, Family member

It was at least six months to a year after the court case.

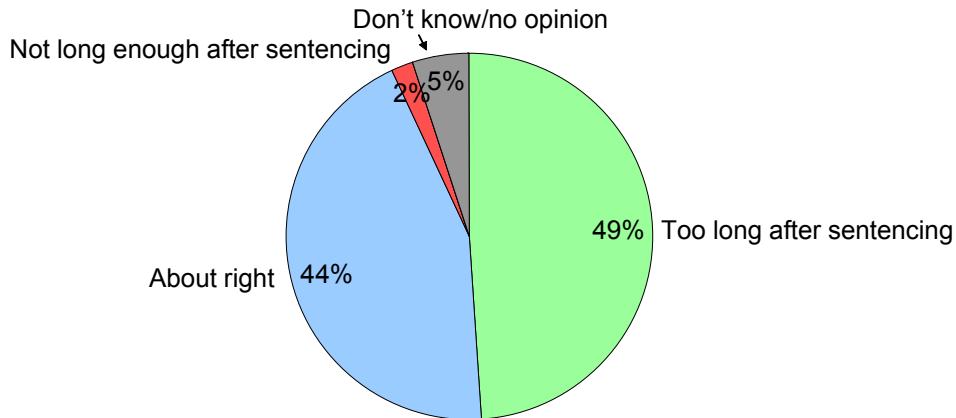
White female, 60, Family member

Two percent (one in 50) say they have never been contacted by the Victim Contact Scheme and 13% were unsure or did not know. Again, this perhaps reflects a lack of association with the name.

Victims prefer to be contacted sooner rather than later after sentencing of the offender. Around half (49%) feel that a time frame of two months is too long after sentencing. A slightly lower proportion (44%) feel that two months is 'about right'. Only a very small minority feel that this is too soon.

Opinion on Time to First Contact

Q7 *Someone from the Probation Victim Contact Scheme was supposed to contact you within 2 months of the offender being sentenced. Regardless of how long they took to contact you, how does 2 months sound to you? Does it sound...*



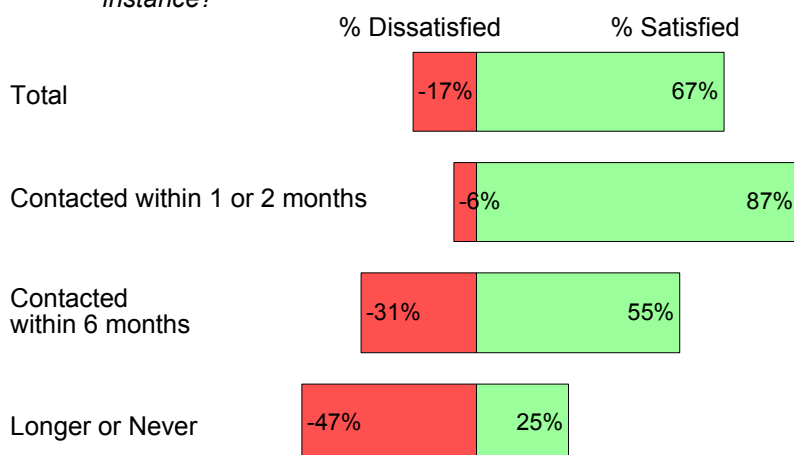
Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

In total, over two thirds (67%) are satisfied with how long it took someone to contact them. Almost nine in 10 who were contacted within one or two months are satisfied, but almost half (47%) of those contacted after six months are dissatisfied with how long it took them to be contacted.

Satisfaction by Time to First Contact

Q4/5 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with how long it took for someone from the Probation Victim Contact Scheme to contact you in the first instance?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

If they had have spoken to me earlier on, like maybe after a couple of months rather than a year down the line

White female, 49, Victim

[if I could make improvements it would be] if we were approached earlier after the incident occurred – even before court.

White female, 49, Victim

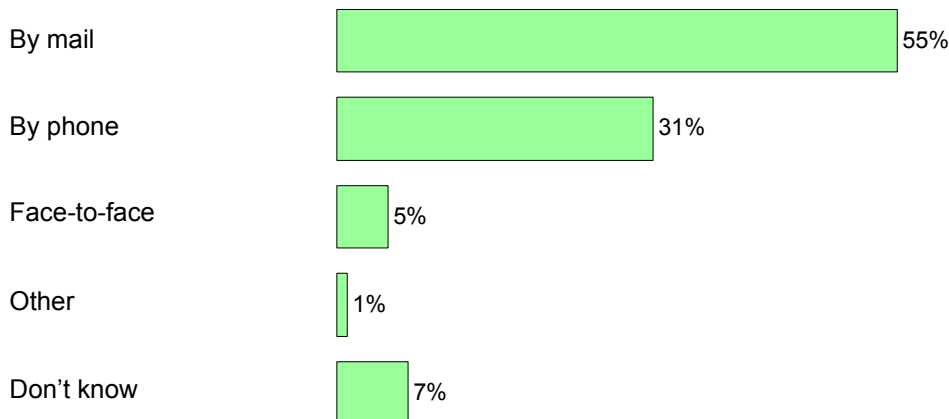
There were few differences between demographic subgroups in terms of preferences for initial contact time. There were, however, some age differences. Those older victims are more likely to feel that two months is ‘about right’ whereas younger victims feel that this is too long. Around half (52%) of those aged 16-54 believe two months is too long after sentencing to be contacted, but this percentage drops to around two in five (38%) for those over 55.

Method of First Contact

Over half (55%) of those interviewed stated they had first been contacted by mail, with around a third (31%) being contacted initially by phone, and 1 in 20 (5%) face-to-face. Fewer than 1% of respondents were initially contacted by email.

Method of First Contact

Q9 How did the Probation Victim Contact Scheme first make contact with you – it would have been by your Victim Liaison Officer or someone else at the Probation Victim Contact Scheme? Was it ...



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

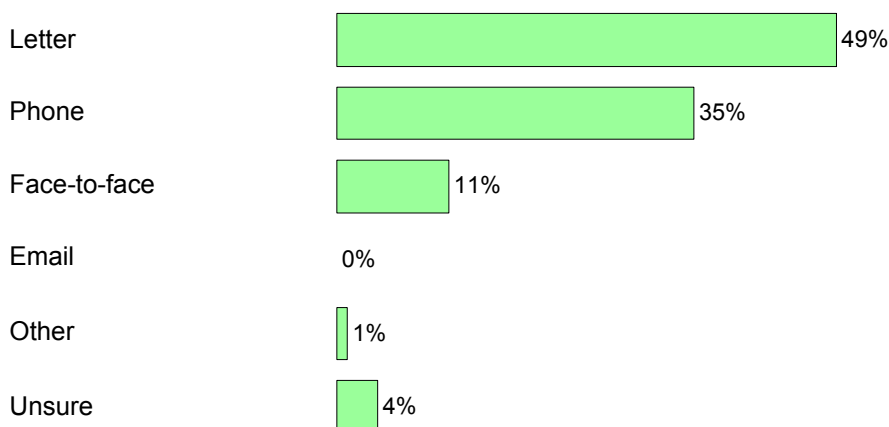
Source: MORI

Victims vary in the type of contact they would have preferred for initial contact. Around half (49%) would have preferred to be contacted by letter, around a third (35%) by phone, and around one in 10 (11%) face-to-face. No respondent said they would prefer email as their initial method of contact.

Younger victims are relatively more likely to want contact by letter (over half preferring this, 55%, compared with 39% of those over 55). Older victims are relatively more likely to prefer face-to-face initial contact (21% preferring this method compared with 7% of those aged 16-34).

Preferred Contact

Q11 How would you have preferred to have been contacted initially?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Experiences with Victim Liaison Officer

Overall Satisfaction

On balance, victims tend to be very positive towards their VLO. Over two thirds (68%) are 'very satisfied' and 17% 'fairly satisfied' with the treatment they have received from their VLO.

She was very helpful. I cannot fault her.

White male, 66, Family member

Fairly good. Not a bad job because he has kept me up to date when we have had meetings.

White female, 19, Family member

She was very helpful. She asked if I could talk about what happened and explained what happened at the prison

White female, 49, Family member

It has been a step in the right direction being able to know what was going on through the Victim Liaison Officer. If it wasn't for him, there would have been an awful lot of blanks. He makes me feel excellent, like people have listened and that I have a voice.

White female, 40, Victim

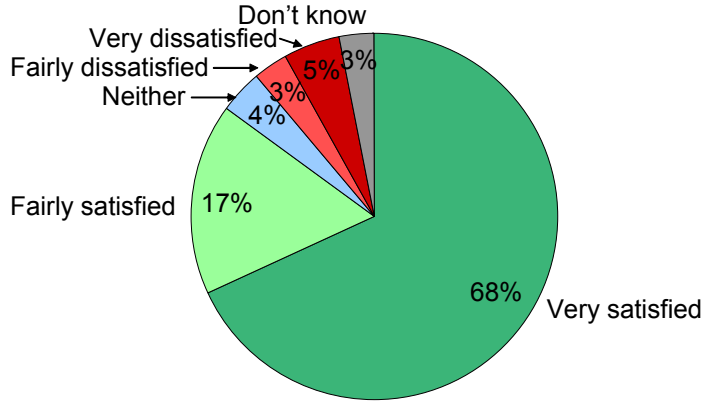
A small but significant minority of one in 20 (5%) are 'very dissatisfied' with the treatment they have received from their VLO, with a further 3% 'fairly dissatisfied':

It depends on who the probation officer is of the person who's done the crime. My kids ask how he is but when I ring the Victim Liaison Officer she says she'll find out for me or she has nothing to add.

Black female, 35, Victim

Satisfaction with Victim Liaison Officer

Q3 Can you tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the treatment you received from your Victim Liaison Officer?



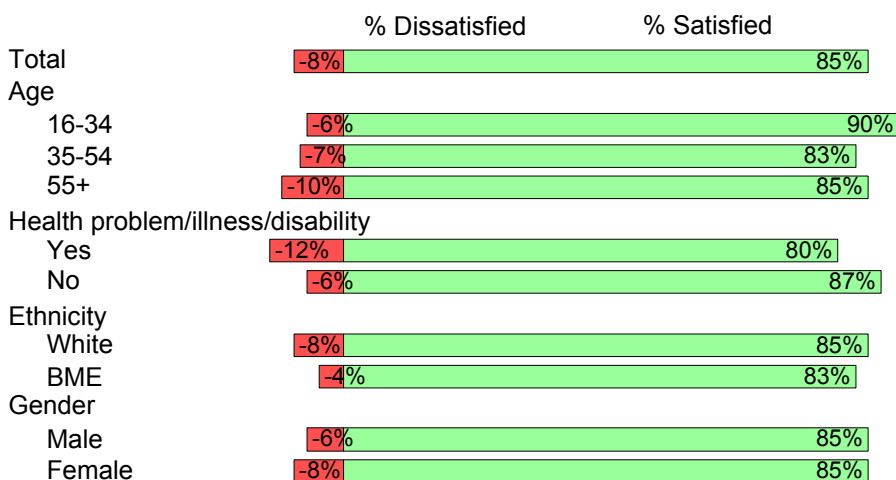
Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme Source: MORI

There are some sub-group differences in terms of levels of satisfaction with treatment from VLOs. Those who have a health problem, illness, or disability are generally less satisfied with their VLO than others, with over one in eight of these (12%) dissatisfied compared with only one in 17 (6%) of those without health problems. This will, to some extent, reflect differences in perceptions by age.

There is a similar, understandable, overlap between those dissatisfied with their VLO and those dissatisfied with the Victim Contact Scheme in general – 65% of those dissatisfied with the Victim Contact Scheme are also dissatisfied with their VLO, whereas just one in 100 who are satisfied with the Scheme in general are dissatisfied with their VLO.

Satisfaction with Victim Liaison Officer

Q3 Can you tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you have been with the treatment you received from your Victim Liaison Officer?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Ease of Contact

Around two thirds (64%) of victims strongly agree that in general they find it easy to contact their VLO when they want to and around one in five (19%) ‘tend to agree’. However, a further one in eight (13%) either strongly disagree, tend to disagree, or ‘neither disagree nor agree’.

Because I had to get in touch with her all the time and surely it should have been the other way around.

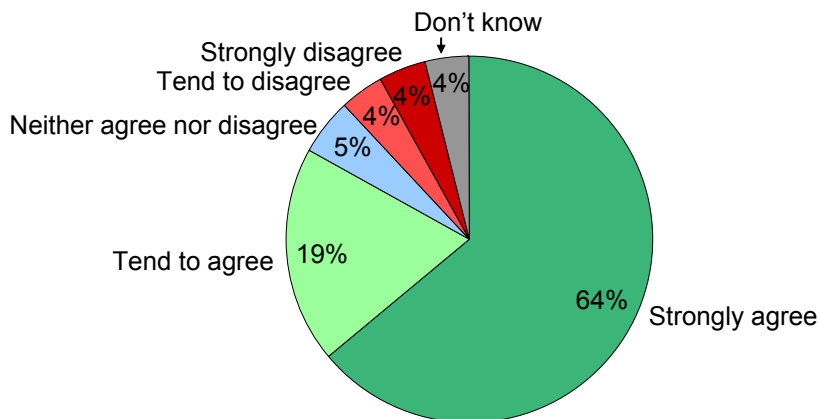
White male, 66, Family member

I would like to have had more contact with her. That would have been nice. Every little bit of information buoys you up.

White female, 60, Family member

Ease of Contacting Victim Liaison Officer

Q14 To what extent do you agree or disagree that in general you have found it easy to talk, to see, or otherwise have contact with your VLO when you have wanted to?



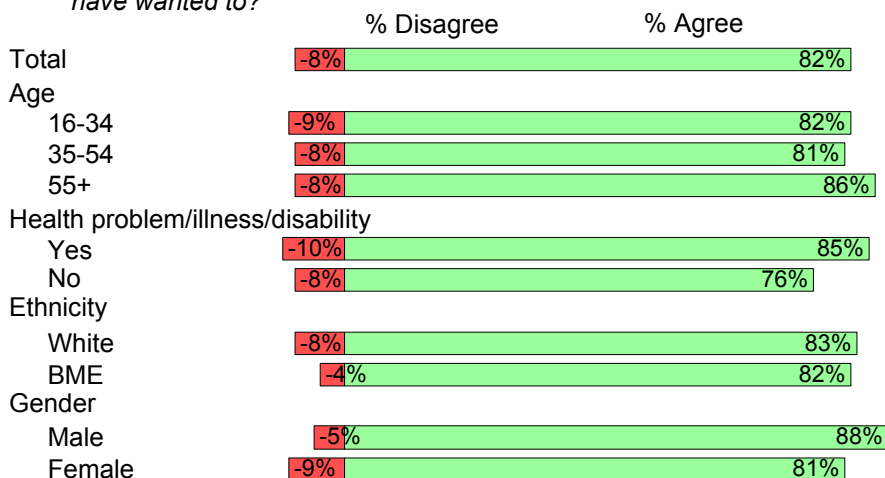
Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme Source: MORI

Those who have a health problem, illness, or disability feel less able to access their VLO. Whilst 85% of those without a health problem feel they can easily access their VLO, this drops to 76% of those with a health problem.

Ease of contact is related to satisfaction with the Scheme in general. Of those who feel dissatisfied with the Victim Contact Scheme, almost half (45%) feel that they have not easily been able to talk, to see, or otherwise to have contact with their VLO when they have wanted. In contrast, almost nine in 10 (88%) of those satisfied with the Scheme feel they have been able to access their VLO easily.

Ease of Contacting Victim Liaison Officer

Q14 To what extent do you agree or disagree that in general you have found it easy to talk, to see, or otherwise have contact with your VLO when you have wanted to?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme Source: MORI

Satisfaction with Frequency of Contact

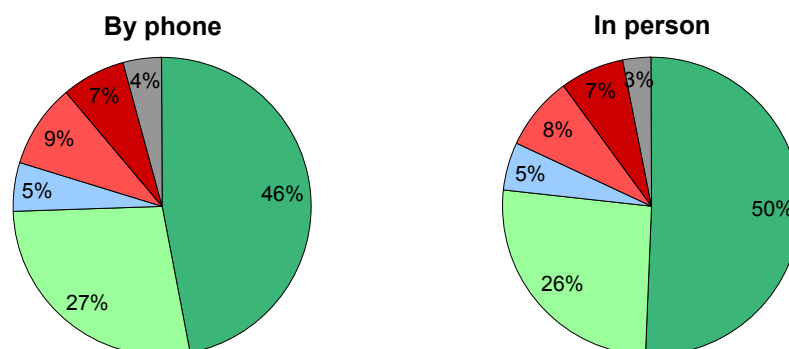
Examining how satisfied victims are with the frequency of contact they have (both by phone and in person) with their VLOs, we find this is high amongst most respondents interviewed but that there is a significant minority who feel that they are not kept in enough contact.

Around three-quarters of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with contact both by both phone (73%) and in person (76%). However, around one in seven were either fairly or very dissatisfied with the frequency of phone contact (16%) or the frequency of face-to-face contact (15%) they received from their VLO.

Satisfaction with Frequency of Victim Liaison Officer Contact

Q15 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the frequency of contact you have had with your Victim Liaison Officer?

■ Very satisfied
 ■ Fairly satisfied
 ■ Neither/nor
 ■ Fairly dissatisfied
■ Very dissatisfied
 ■ Don't know



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Of those who are dissatisfied with the frequency of phone contact, the vast majority wish for more frequent contact by phone (98%).

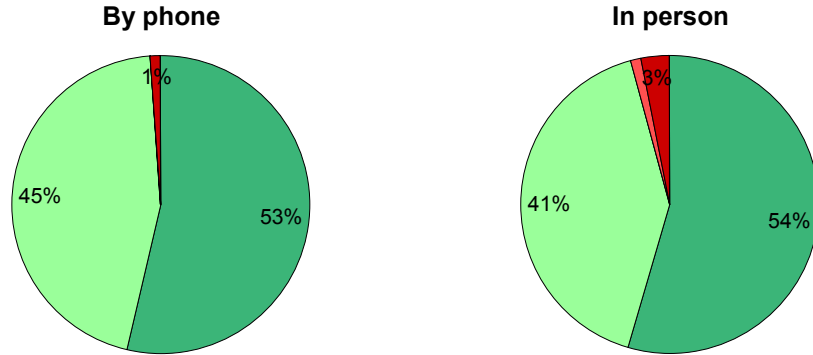
Over half (53%) want much *more* frequent phone contact and most of the remainder (45% of the total) want *somewhat* more frequent contact. Only one person interviewed wants *less* frequent phone contact.

Similarly, over half (54%) want much more frequent contact in person, and most of the remainder (41% of the total) want somewhat more frequent contact. Only one in 33 of those interviewed (3%) wanted somewhat less frequent contact in person.

Preferences for Victim Liaison Officer Contact

Q16 You said you were dissatisfied with how much contact you had with your Victim Liaison Officer. Would you prefer more or less contact?

- Much more frequent contact
- Somewhat more frequent contact
- Somewhat less frequent contact
- Much less frequent contact



Base: All dissatisfied with the amount of contact they have had with their VLO by phone (73) or in person (68) Source: MORI

The following quotes from the depth interviews give some indications of the kinds of frequency of contact victims would like:

...not much time to speak to him. But when I did it was good.

White female, 19, Family member

More meetings would have been nice.

White female, 19, Family member

No one has kept in touch to let me know when he's to be released.

White female, 49, Victim

It wasn't until last week when they called to ask about [me doing] this interview that I asked him and found out he'll be released this week.

White female, 49, Victim

They don't contact enough, and the lack of information. Don't make promises you can't keep...she came and gave lots of info...and said she'd let me know...but she didn't.

White male, 66, Family member

Satisfaction with VLO 's Support

Levels of satisfaction with the emotional supportiveness of VLOs are extremely high amongst those we interviewed. Nine in ten (90%) are either very or fairly satisfied with how understanding and supportive their VLO is and only one in 20 is dissatisfied (5%).

In my case, it's been excellent – open, constructive, and very supportive. They do care... they can inform me as much as possible under the law and have to protect the prisoner as well.

White female, 44, Victim

Yes, she was friendly, outgoing, and very in touch with how I was feeling.

White female, 36, Family member

Seemed sensitive, down to earth. It was nice to speak with someone on your level.

White female, 19, Family member

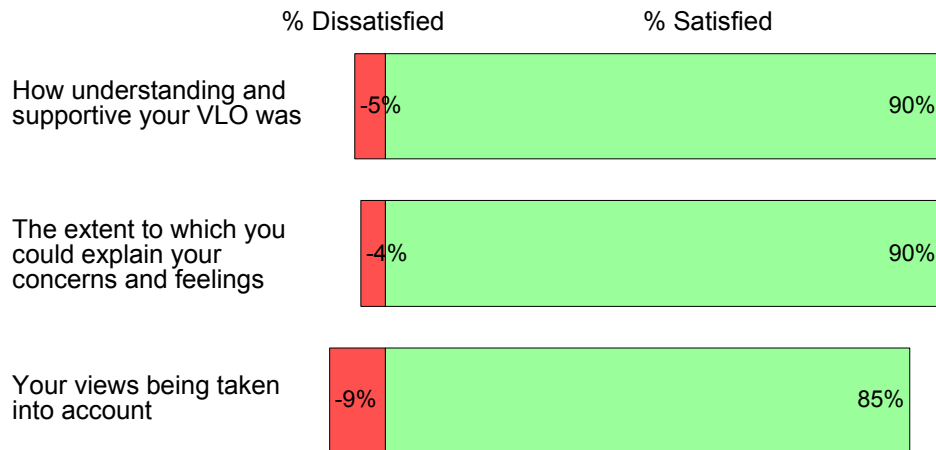
Similarly, nine in ten (90%) are very or fairly satisfied with the extent to which they feel they can explain their concerns and feelings to their VLO, and only one in 25 (4%) are dissatisfied. Victims also feel that their views are taken into account by their VLOs (85% very or fairly satisfied). Around one in ten (9%) - are dissatisfied with the extent to which their views are taken into account.

It is good to know that somebody's at the end of the phone to answer some questions...She was good. I could explain myself.

Black female, 35, Victim

Satisfaction with Support from Victim Liaison Officer

Q18 Thinking about the last occasion you saw or talked to your Victim Liaison Officer, how satisfied were you with the following?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Satisfaction with VLO's Knowledge

On the whole, victims are satisfied that their VLO is knowledgeable and provides them with the kind of information they require. They are particularly satisfied that the VLO knows what he or she is 'talking about' but there is less satisfaction that their VLO keeps them informed at key stages about the progress of the offender involved in their particular case.

Knows what he or she is talking about

Victims are satisfied that their VLO knows 'what he or she is talking about'. Almost nine in 10 (89%) are satisfied and just one in 17 (6%) are dissatisfied with this aspect of their VLO.

Explain about prison sentences

Similarly, respondents are generally satisfied that their VLO explained about prison sentences in general and how prisoners proceed through the system. Over four in five (84%) felt that prison sentences in general and the general progress of prisoners through the system was explained satisfactorily to them, with one in 12 (8%) dissatisfied.

Answer questions

On the whole, victims also feel that VLOs are able to answer any questions they have about the case, with 85% being satisfied that this is the case, with one in 13 dissatisfied (8%).

Checks about concerns

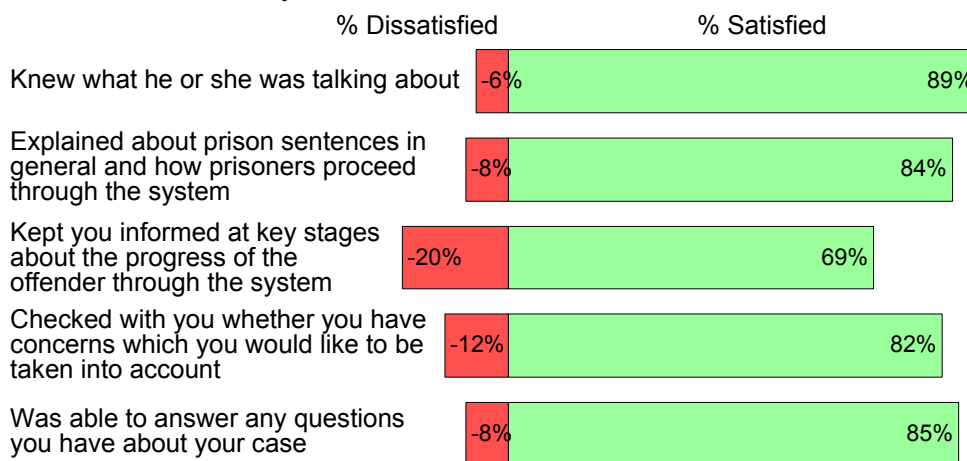
Over four in five (82%) are satisfied that their VLO checks with them whether they have concerns which they would like to be taken into account. However, one in eight (12%) are dissatisfied with this aspect.

Keeps informed at key stages

Victims, however, are less satisfied that their VLO keeps them informed at key stages about the progress of the individual offender (involved in their particular case) through the system. Over two-thirds (69%) feel satisfied that this is the case, but a significant number – two in five (20%) – feel dissatisfied with the extent to which this occurs.

Satisfaction with Knowledge of Victim Liaison Officer

Q20 *Again, thinking about the last few times you have had contact with your Victim Liaison Officer, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the extent to which your Victim Liaison Officer...?*



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

The following quotes from the depth interviews give some indications of the kinds of information victims would like:

Letting me know exactly where he is – keeping me up to date as to whether he has been released because he is still making threats

White female, 49, Victim

I've been given quite good information. Prior to the court case, they gave me good information about court and I visited court. Then after for a lay person they explained what the prison process was, and were very forthcoming.

White female, 36, Family member

She has done a good job and has always kept me informed about what is happening with his sentence. When I was worried about him, I could get some information.

Black female, 35, Victim

Yes, she gave me information about the length of sentence, the date of release, and when the sentence runs out... [The most helpful thing about the VLO] was letting me know how long he'll serve.

White female, 44, Victim

[The Victim Liaison Officer] was very helpful. He asked if I could talk about what had happened and explained what happened at the prison.

White female, 49, Victim

Me, Mum, and XX sat down and we spoke and he took notes. They had seen the offender's family and tried to sort something out about them being moved. [The best thing about the Victim Liaison Officer] is the fact that he's the only one who's spoken to us about how we felt and has taken time out to listen to our feelings about the offenders and the family and the court case.

White female, 19, Family member

She said who she was, and we had a cup of tea. She explained what had happened to him (the offender) in terms of prison and explained the levels of security. She said how he was doing in terms of his behaviour and so on. It made me feel as though he was being punished. Before that I had no inkling...so it was a nice feeling.

White male, 66, Family member

I really didn't expect to be talked to after so it's been positive because I didn't think I'd be able to have input into things

White female, 36, Family member

She came over and asked me how I felt about the sentence, and did I understand the meaning of the sentence, did I understand the meaning of the licence agreement and then I asked specific questions and she answered. She asked me whether I wanted input into his probation.

White female, 36, Family member

I want more information about the criminal and where he is, and his behaviour...it's like a closed book and secret society...the Victim Liaison Officer has not explained why she cannot tell me which prison the criminal is in... I think they should keep people informed about the criminal, the murderer.

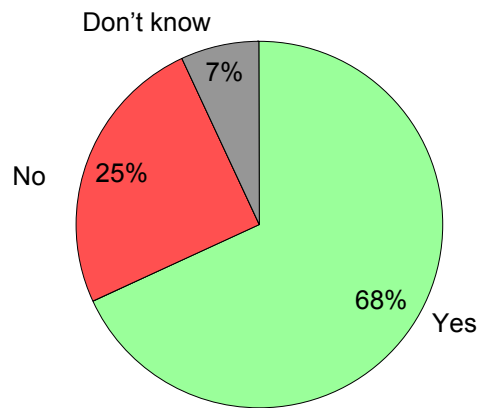
White female, 60, Family member

Written Materials

Nearly seven in 10 remember receiving written materials from the Probation Service, such as a leaflet providing information for victims. However, one quarter (25%) do not recall receiving any written information. Around seven per cent do not know or cannot remember.

Written Material

Q22 Do you remember ever receiving any written materials from the Probation Service, such as a leaflet providing information for victims?



Base: 437 victims and families of victims of serious crimes who have used the Probation Victim Contact Scheme

Source: MORI

Satisfaction with written materials is, for the most part, high. Most are satisfied with the quality of the written materials (85%), and how clear and easy they were to understand (89%). Slightly fewer were satisfied that the written materials were relevant (83%) and useful (78%). One in 12 (8%) felt dissatisfied with how useful they were.

Yes, they sent me information about the length of sentence, the date of release, and when the sentence runs out.

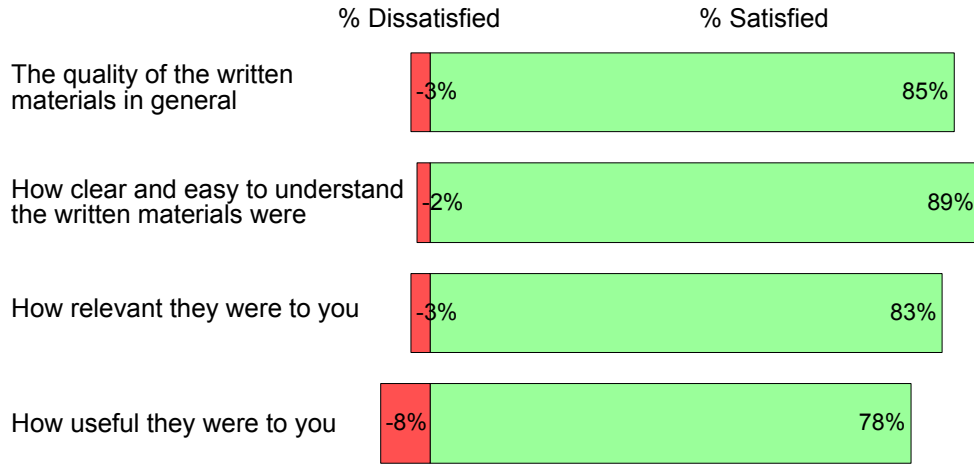
White female, 44, Victim

I thought they were too wordy and could have been [more] simple, one flier would be easier, people get frightened and some would be cagey.

White female, 36, Family member

Satisfaction with Written Materials

Q23 How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the written materials provided to you in terms of the following?



Base: All who remember receiving written materials (299)

Source: MORI

What are the Most Important Aspects of the Scheme?

Importance of Various Aspects

VLO knowledge and supportiveness are key to providing a good service for victims.

Victims were asked about how important a range of aspects (such as contacting victims within reasonable time, supportiveness of VLO, method of initial contact, etc.) are in providing a good service to victims.

Most aspects asked about were rated as either 'very important' or 'essential' by the large majority of victims. The table on the following page shows the percentage of respondents who rated various specific aspects as essential versus not very/ not at all important in providing a good service.

Although little differentiates the importance of each of these aspects, knowledge and supportiveness of the VLO are of particular importance to victims in providing a good service. Over four in five (83%) believe it is essential that VLOs know what they are talking about with the remainder (17%) thinking it is 'very important'.

'Softer' traits are also extremely important to victims. Four in five (80%) believe it is essential that VLOs are supportive and understanding.

Table 1. Importance of Various Aspects in Providing a Good Service.

<i>In providing a good service, how important is...</i>				
	Essential	Very/ Fairly Important	Not very important / Not at all important	Don't know
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	%	%	%	%
VLO knows what he/ she is talking about	83%	17%	0%	0%
VLO is understanding and supportive	80%	20%	0%	0%
Able to explain concerns and feelings	74%	26%	0%	1%
VLO takes into account victim's views	71%	28%	*	1%
VLO explains about prison sentences and prisoners' progression through system	71%	26%	3%	1%
VLO keeps victims informed about offender's progress	70%	29%	1%	1%
VLO checks whether victim has concerns to be taken into account	70%	30%	0%	*
VLO is able to answer any questions	69%	30%	*	*
Contacting victims within reasonable amount of time	64%	34%	*	1%
Reasonable contact throughout case	59%	36%	1%	3%
Method of first contact	53%	41%	3%	4%

Source: MORI

Most Helpful Aspect of the Scheme

The ability of VLOs to listen and be supportive, as well as their ability to answer questions and explain things, are the most helpful aspects of the Scheme for victims.

When asked what has been the most helpful thing about their VLO or the Victim Contact Scheme, almost a quarter (24%) of respondents spontaneously mention having someone to talk to/ someone who listened as the most helpful aspect of

the service. Similarly, almost a quarter (23%) spontaneously mention the helpfulness of having their questions answered or having things explained to them.

Q25 In your opinion, what has been the most helpful thing about your Victim Liaison Officer or the Probation Victim Contact Scheme?

Base: All respondents	(437) %
Someone to talk to/ Listened to me	24%
Answered my questions/ Explained things	23%
Good people/ Helpful/ Sympathetic/ Professional	23%
That someone is there if I need them	22%
Informed me of sentences/ Release dates	18%
Kept me informed	17%
Personal/ Home visits	12%
Practical help	8%
Regular contact/ Kept in touch	7%
Very good/ Better than I expected	7%
None/ Nothing	4%
Other	3%
Don't know	5%

Source: MORI

How can the Victim Contact Scheme be Made More Useful?

Victims point out the strong need for more information about individual offenders' progression through the system and more regular VLO contact. These were recurring themes when asked how they thought the Scheme could offer a more useful service to victims in future.

Around a quarter (24%) suggested that regular updates after sentencing and specifically about release dates would increase the usefulness of the service. Similarly, almost one in five (19%) spontaneously mentioned the importance of more regular contact.

However, it is important to bear in mind the overall satisfaction levels with the Scheme that have been shown to be consistently high throughout the findings.

Around a quarter (24%) said they did not know what could be done to make the Scheme more useful.

Q26 How do you think the Probation Victim Contact Scheme could offer a more useful service to victims in the future?

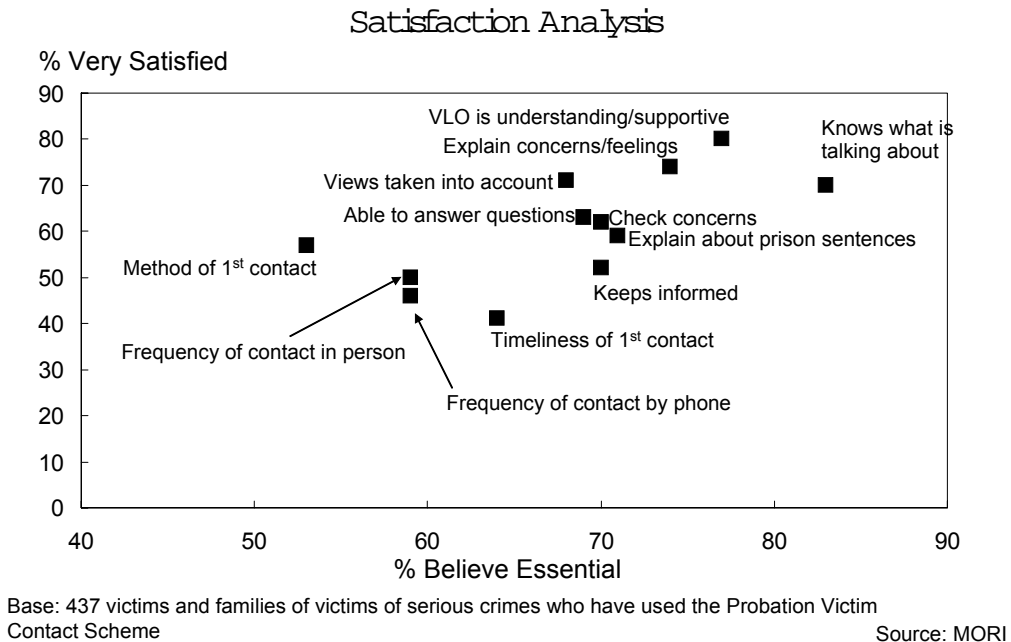
Base: All respondents	(437) %
Regular updates/ Kept informed after sentencing/ Release dates	24%
More regular/ Contact	19%
Nothing/ Fine as is/ Doing a good job	14%
More support/ Kept informed from the start	13%
More sensitivity/ Focus on what victim needs	11%
Be more informed themselves	11%
More personal support/ Home visits	8%
Should be contacted sooner	5%
That they can always be contacted	3%
More written information	3%
Listen to the victims	5%
System is biased towards offenders	5%
Other	6%
Don't know	24%

Source: MORI

Priorities for the Future

The scatter chart below plots the perceived importance of various aspects of the service (% who believe they are 'essential') against how satisfied victims feel they are with each particular aspect of the service (% very satisfied)

The top right area of the chart highlights those issues that have the highest importance attached to them and where victims feel most satisfied. The priority issues for the Victim Contact Scheme would be towards the bottom right corner – that is aspects that are rated as relatively important but which are not currently as well rated. Currently these issues would be the frequency of contact, timeliness of first contact (need to make sooner), and information around offenders' progress through the system.



Appendices

Demographic details

	%	n
Male	22%	94
Female	78%	343
16-34	27%	116
35-54	55%	241
55+	18%	80
White	94%	412
BME	5%	24
Disability/ Illness – Yes	29%	126
Disability/ Illness – No	71%	310

Note. N=437.