



Northern
Ireland
Office

Statistics and Research Branch

Public attitudes
towards crime and
recovery of assets
by the Assets
Recovery Agency in
Northern Ireland:
Findings from the
July 2005
Northern Ireland
Omnibus Survey

Research and Statistical Bulletin 1/2006

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KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ Four fifths (80%) of those surveyed had heard/read something about ARA.
- ◆ Of those who had heard/read something about ARA, television was the main method of communication (80%).
- ◆ Approximately two thirds (64%) of those surveyed believe that ARA has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community.
- ◆ Nearly nine tenths (87%) of those surveyed agreed that there are 'many people in Northern Ireland these days who are living off the proceeds of crime'.
- ◆ Over one fifth (21%) of those surveyed suspected that someone in their own neighbourhood had obtained a large part of their wealth from crime, while over two fifths (41%) of people believed that there were people living in their local community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime.
- ◆ Almost nine tenths (89%) of respondents would react with some anger and concern if someone whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime, moved into their immediate neighbourhood.
- ◆ More than four fifths (86%) of those surveyed agreed that 'many criminals who go to jail manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over'.
- ◆ More than four fifths (83%) of those surveyed said that wealth confiscation and a prison sentence are equally important objectives in dealing with criminals.
- ◆ Almost three quarters (72%) of those surveyed thought that drug dealing financed serious or organised crime.
- ◆ The majority (91%) of respondents supported ARA's power to act through civil courts to recover assets resulting from crime even if the person has not been convicted in the criminal courts. Over one third (36%) expressed concern that these powers could be abused.
- ◆ Over one quarter (26%) of respondents were concerned that people they knew could be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers.
- ◆ Six tenths of those surveyed (60%) thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community.

INTRODUCTION

The Assets Recovery Agency (ARA) was established under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to co-ordinate activity across the UK in recovering unlawfully obtained assets from those with no civil right to hold them. ARA became operational in February 2003. It is an independent Government department. The Agency's Director, Jane Earl, reports to the Home Secretary but is operationally independent. The Agency will take on cases only on the basis of referral from the police, Customs and law enforcement authorities according to agreed criteria.

Northern Ireland is a separate jurisdiction within the UK with unique challenges, which include a history of paramilitary involvement in crime. The Government therefore committed itself to setting up a branch of the new ARA in Northern Ireland, headed by an Assistant Director who reports to the Director.

In order to assess public attitudes to crime and the recovery of assets from criminals in Northern Ireland the Northern Ireland Office Statistics and Research Branch, on behalf of ARA commissioned a number of questions in the January 2004 and July 2005 Northern Ireland Omnibus Surveys. A comparison of these two surveys can be found in Annex 1 of this bulletin. A similar on-line survey was carried out in GB by YouGov Ltd in January 2005. A comparison between NI and GB is also included in this bulletin and a tabular comparison between the January 2004 and July 2005 Omnibus surveys is included as an Annex.

The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is conducted several times each year by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of people in Northern Ireland.

The survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients.

The sample to be surveyed was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up-to-date listing of private households in Northern Ireland. At each address one person aged 16 or over was selected to participate. From an eligible sample of 1,953 individuals, 1,148 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 59%. The sample is designed to be representative of the population of Northern Ireland. Further information relating to the sample can be found in the Technical Notes section.

Analysis by religion is based only on those respondents who said that they were either Catholic or Protestant. Respondents who refused to answer the religion question or those who said they were a religion other than Catholic or Protestant were excluded from the analysis.

Analysis by area is based on three areas in Northern Ireland: Belfast; East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland. These areas are formed using the 26 District Councils in Northern Ireland. Further information relating to area breakdown can be found in the Technical Notes section.

SURVEY FINDINGS

1. Do you suspect that someone in your own neighbourhood has obtained a large part of their wealth from crime?

Over one in five (21%) respondents suspected that at least one person/family in their neighbourhood had derived much of their wealth from crime. Younger age groups were more likely than older age groups to think this - nearly one third (30%) of 16-24 year olds said that they suspected at least one person/family in their neighbourhood, compared to 9% of those aged over 65.

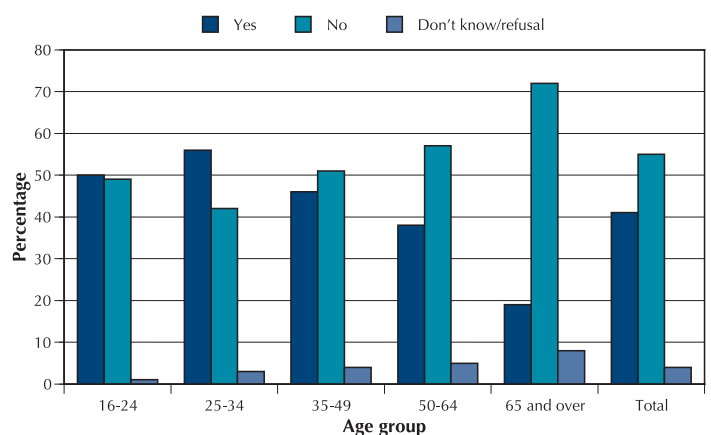
Respondents from the East of Northern Ireland (24%) were the most likely to suspect that someone in their neighbourhood had derived much of their wealth from crime, compared to those living in Belfast (17%) or the West of Northern Ireland (22%).

A higher proportion of respondents in paid employment (24%) suspected someone in their neighbourhood had derived much of their wealth from crime, compared to those not in paid employment (19%).

2. Whether or not you know anyone in particular whom you suspect of making money from crime, do you think there are people in your immediate community, who have acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime?

Over two fifths (41%) of those surveyed believed people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime. Younger age groups are more likely than older age groups to believe this (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Respondents' views on whether they believe that there are people living within their immediate community who have acquired a large part of their wealth from crime: by age



A higher proportion of Catholics (44%) than Protestants (39%) believed that people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime.

People living in the East of Northern Ireland (46%) were more likely to believe that people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime. This compares to 32% of those living in Belfast and 38% of those living in the West of Northern Ireland.

Nearly half of respondents in paid employment (48%) believed people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime, compared to 32% of those not in paid employment.

3. How do you think you would react if you found out that someone had moved into your immediate neighbourhood, lived quietly and caused no trouble but whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime?

Nearly nine out of ten people (89%) would react with some anger and concern if a criminal (i.e. someone with wealth derived from crime) moved into their immediate neighbourhood. This proportion was identical for both females and males.

Proportionately more Protestants (92%) than Catholics (85%) would react with some anger and concern if a criminal moved into their immediate neighbourhood.

People living in the East of Northern Ireland (93%) were more likely to react with some anger and concern if a criminal moved into their immediate neighbourhood, compared to those living in the West of Northern Ireland (86%) and the Belfast area (84%).

Respondents in paid employment (91%) were more likely to react with some anger and concern if a criminal moved into their immediate neighbourhood, compared to 87% of respondents not in paid employment.

4. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many people in Northern Ireland these days who are living off the proceeds of crime'?

Nearly nine tenths (87%) of respondents believed that many people in NI are living off the proceeds of crime (Table 1). Those in paid employment (90%) were more likely than those not in paid employment (84%) to say that this was the case. A higher proportion of those living in the East of the Province (90%) thought that many people were living off the proceeds of crime compared to those living in Belfast (80%) or the West of the Province (84%).

Table 1: Respondents' views on people living off the proceeds of crime ('There are many people in Northern Ireland living off the proceeds of crime')

	Male	Female	Total
Slightly or strongly agree	86	87	87
Slightly or strongly disagree	10	8	9
Don't know/Refusal	4	4	3

5. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many criminals who go to jail but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime, and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over'

A high proportion (86%) of respondents believed that many criminals who go to jail manage to hang onto the proceeds of crime and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over (Table 2). A higher percentage of people in paid employment (88%) than those not in paid employment (83%) were of this opinion.

Respondents from the East of Northern Ireland (89%) were more likely to think that this was the case than respondents from the West of Northern Ireland (85%) or Belfast (82%).

Table 2: Respondents' views on criminals' lifestyles after serving a prison sentence ('There are many criminals who go to jail but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over')

	Male	Female	Total
Slightly or strongly agree	86	86	86
Slightly or strongly disagree	9	7	8
Don't know/Refusal	5	6	5

6. Still thinking about the people who have grown wealthy from the proceeds of crime, which do you think is more important – to send them to prison, or to confiscate their wealth, or do you regard both as equal objectives?

A higher proportion of respondents thought that it is more important to confiscate criminals' wealth (13%) than to send them to prison (3%). For the vast majority (83%), wealth confiscation and prison are equally important objectives.

7. What type of crime do you think should be tackled in the prevention of the financing of serious or organised crime?

Respondents were asked to rank the top five crimes from a comprehensive list according to how important they think it is that they should be tackled in the prevention of the financing of serious or organised crime. Table 3 details the results.

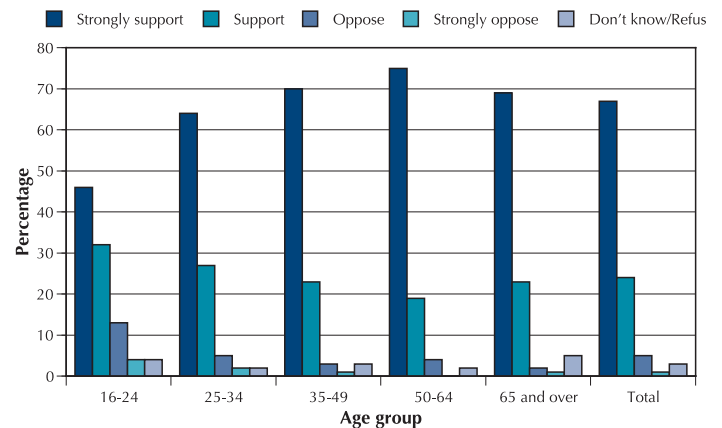
Table 3: Respondents' views on the types of crime that should be tackled to prevent the financing of serious or organised crime

Type of Crime	%
Drug dealing	72
Armed robbery	67
Drug trafficking	56
Drug supply	52
Benefit fraud	35
Money laundering	31
Theft	27
Extortion/blackmail	25
Serious fraud	25
People smuggling	16
Producing counterfeit goods	16
Handling stolen goods	14
Deception eg selling goods and services that don't exist	12
Evading duty on alcohol and/or cigarettes and/or fuel	12
Prostitution	10
Selling counterfeit goods	10
VAT fraud	2
Refusal/Don't know	1

8. Do you support the Assets Recovery Agency having the powers to act through the civil courts?

The majority (91%) of people support ARA's powers to act through the civil courts to recover assets resulting from crime even if the person has not been convicted in the criminal courts. Only 6% oppose such powers and opposition is greatest among 16-24 year olds where 17% oppose or strongly oppose the agency having these powers (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Respondents' views on ARA having the power to act through the civil courts: by age



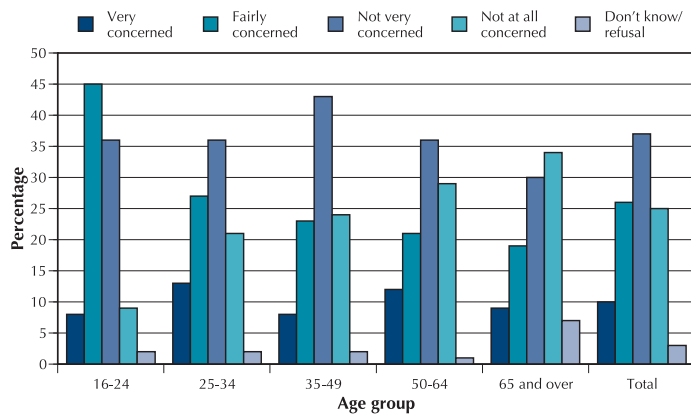
A higher proportion of respondents living in the East of Northern Ireland (93%) supported ARA being able to apply to the civil courts for to recover assets than those living in Belfast or the West of the Province (both 88%).

Catholics (10%) were more likely than Protestants (4%) to oppose ARA having such powers.

9. How concerned are you that the Assets Recovery Agency might abuse its powers?

Over a third (36%) of people expressed concern that these powers could be abused. The younger age groups were more likely to express concern than the older age groups. Over a half (53%) of 16-24 year olds expressed concern, compared to 28% of those aged 65 and over (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Respondents' views on how ARA might abuse its powers: by age



People living in the West of Northern Ireland (42%) were most likely to express concern over the ARA abusing its powers compared to those living in Belfast (35%) or the East of Northern Ireland (31%).

A greater proportion of Catholics (40%) compared to Protestants (33%) were concerned that ARA would abuse its powers.

10. How concerned are you that people you know might be unfairly targeted by the Assets Recovery Agency because of its powers?

Over one quarter (26%) of people were concerned that people they know could be unfairly targeted. Almost one half (47%) of 16-24 year olds said that they were concerned that someone they know might be unfairly targeted by the ARA because of its powers compared to 19% of those aged 65 and over.

Catholics (31%) were more concerned that someone they know will be unfairly targeted compared to Protestants (22%).

People living in the West of Northern Ireland (30%) and the Belfast area (29%) were more concerned that someone they know will be unfairly targeted compared to people living in the East of Northern Ireland (21%).

11. If the Agency does succeed in reclaiming significant sums of money, what effect, if any, do you think it is likely to have on your community?

Six tenths (60%) of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community. A greater proportion of Protestants (62%) compared to Catholics (56%), thought that this was the case. Approximately two thirds (65%) of those living in the East of Northern Ireland thought that the recovery of significant amounts of money would benefit their local community compared to those living in Belfast (57%) or the West of the Province (54%).

Around one third (32%) of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of criminal money would not have an impact (either positive or negative) on their community.

12. How much have you heard or read about the Assets Recovery Agency?

Four fifths (80%) of respondents had heard/read about ARA, of which 86% were male and 75% were female. The percentage who had heard of ARA has substantially increased since the January 2004 Omnibus Survey when 58% of respondents had heard of ARA.

Those in employment (86%) were more likely than those not in paid employment (76%) to have heard or read something about ARA.

The same proportion of Protestants and Catholics (81%) had heard/read about this government organisation.

13. Where have you heard or read about the Assets Recovery Agency?

Of those who had heard/read about ARA, television was the main method of communication (80%) (Table 4).

Table 4: Source of where respondents heard or read about ARA

	%
Television	80
Regional newspapers (eg Belfast Telegraph)	43
Local radio	32
Local newspapers (eg Newtownards Chronicle)	23
National newspapers (eg Times, Express)	19
National radio	11
Word of mouth	11
Website	2
Other	2
Refusal/Don't know	0

14. Do you believe that the Assets Recovery Agency has focused too much on assets in Loyalist hands, Republican hands or has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community?

Approximately two thirds (64%) of respondents were of the opinion that ARA acted in a way which was fair to all sections of the community. Almost one fifth (17%) of respondents said they didn't know how fair ARA was.

Catholics (70%) were more likely than Protestants (60%) to believe that ARA acted in a way that is fair to all sections of the community. On the other hand, Protestants (22%) were more likely than Catholics (4%) to believe that ARA had focused too much attention on assets relating to loyalist paramilitaries.

15. Comparison of results from the Northern Ireland and Great Britain survey

A larger proportion of NI respondents than GB respondents have heard/read about ARA (80% compared with 41%).

In NI, 60% of respondents think that if ARA is successful in the recovery of significant sums of money it will have a very or fairly positive effect on their community, compared to 45% of respondents in GB.

In both areas the vast majority support ARA having the powers to apply for civil recovery (91% in NI and 85% in GB). Further comparisons are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison of results from the Northern Ireland and Great Britain surveys

	NI % Agree	GB % Agree
I suspect that someone in my neighbourhood has got a large part of their wealth from crime	21	18
I would be angry and concerned if I found out that someone has moved into my immediate neighbourhood and had wealth that had largely come from the proceeds of crime	89	89
There are many criminals who go to prison but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime, and are able to live a very wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over	86	83
I support ARA having the powers to apply for civil recovery	91	85
I am concerned that ARA might abuse its powers	36	42
I am concerned that people I know might be unfairly targeted by ARA	26	25
If ARA is successful in recovering significant sums of money, this will have a positive effect on my community	60	45
I have heard/read about ARA	80	41

TECHNICAL NOTES

The sample of those surveyed in the July 2005 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up to date list of private households in Northern Ireland. The complete list of private addresses was stratified into three regions – Belfast, East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland, and a random sample drawn from each stratum.

At each address the interviewer lists all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample, that is, all persons aged 16 or over. The interviewer's computer then randomly selects one person from each household to complete the interview. From an eligible sample of 1,953 individuals, 1,148 interviews were achieved giving a response rate of 59%.

Selecting only one individual for interview at each sampled address means that individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in small households. The data presented in this bulletin has been weighted to prevent a bias towards smaller households.

To assess how accurately a survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, the characteristics of the sample are compared with the characteristics of the current Census of Population. Table 6 shows a comparison between the July 2005 Omnibus Survey sample and the Northern Ireland population aged 16 and over from the 2001 Census of Population.

Table 6: Sample profile of the 2001 Census of Population and July 2005 Omnibus Survey

		2001 Census of Population (Adults) %	July 2005 Omnibus Survey Selected Respondent %
Gender	Male	48	47
	Female	52	53
Age Group	16-24	16	14
	25-34	19	14
	35-49	27	29
	50-64	20	24
	65 and over	17	19
Base		1,292,169	1,148

The area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 7. The 26 District Councils listed in this table were used to form each of the three areas (Belfast, East of Northern Ireland, West of Northern Ireland) described in this bulletin.

Table 7: Areas of Northern Ireland by District Council Area

Area	District Councils
Belfast	Belfast
East of Northern Ireland	Antrim, Ards, Ballymena, Banbridge, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Craigavon, Down, Larne, Lisburn, Newtownabbey, North Down
West of Northern Ireland	Armagh, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Limavady, Derry, Magherafelt, Moyle, Newry & Mourne, Omagh, Strabane.

Annex 1: Comparison of January 2004 and July 2005 Omnibus Surveys

Question	Main Finding	January 2004 (%)	July 2005 (%)
1. Do you suspect that someone in your own neighbourhood has obtained a large part of their wealth from crime?	Suspected at least person/family	20	21
2. Whether or not you know anyone in particular whom you suspect of making money from crime, do you think there are people in your immediate community, who have acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime?	Believed that there were people in their community	43	41
3. How do you think you would react if you found out that someone had moved into your immediate neighbourhood, lived quietly and caused no trouble but whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime?	Would react with some anger and concern	89	89
4. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many people in Northern Ireland these days who are living off the proceeds of crime'?	Agree/strongly agree	88	87
5. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: 'There are many criminals who go to jail but manage to hang on to the proceeds of crime, and are able to live a wealthy lifestyle when their prison sentence is over'	Agree/strongly agree	87	86
6. Still thinking about the people who have grown wealthy from the proceeds of crime, which do you think is more important – to send them to prison, or to confiscate their wealth, or do you regard both as equal objectives?	Wealth confiscation and prison are equally important	83	83
7. What type of crime do you think should be tackled in the prevention of the financing of serious or organised crime?	Drug dealing Armed robbery Drug trafficking	71 71 63	72 67 56
8. Do you support ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts?	Support/strongly support	90	91
9. How concerned are you that ARA might abuse its powers?	Concerned/very concerned	39	36
10. How concerned are you that people you know might be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers?	Concerned/very concerned	28	26
11. If the Agency does succeed in reclaiming significant sums of money, what effect, if any, do you think it is likely to have on your community?	Positive/very positive effect	56	60
12. How much have you heard or read about ARA?	Had heard/read at least a little	58	80
13. Where have you heard or read about ARA?	Television Regional newspapers Local radio	71 46 28	80 43 32
14. Do you believe that ARA has focused too much on assets in Loyalist hands, Republican hands or has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community?	Fair to all sections of the community	56	64

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