



Northern
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Office

Statistics and Research Branch

Public attitudes
towards crime and
recovery of assets by
the Assets Recovery
Agency: Findings from
the January 2008
Northern Ireland
Omnibus Survey

Research and Statistical Bulletin 14/2008

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KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ 83% of those surveyed had heard/read something about ARA. Of these, the most frequently cited method of having heard/read about ARA was television (82%).
- ◆ 73% of respondents believed that ARA has acted in a way which is fair to all sections of the community.
- ◆ 86% of those surveyed agreed that there are many people in Northern Ireland who are living off the proceeds of crime.
- ◆ 18% of those surveyed suspected that someone in their own neighbourhood had obtained a large part of their wealth from crime.
- ◆ Irrespective of whether they suspected any specific individual or family, 34% of people believed that there were people living in their local community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime.
- ◆ 87% of respondents would react with at least some anger and concern if someone whose wealth had come largely from the proceeds of crime, moved into their immediate neighbourhood.
- ◆ 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'.
- ◆ 83% agreed that wealth confiscation and a prison sentence were equally important objectives in dealing with criminals.
- ◆ The types of crime most frequently identified for tackling in the prevention of financing serious or organised crime were drug dealing (73%) and armed robbery (61%).
- ◆ 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; 36% expressed concern that these powers might be abused.
- ◆ 25% of respondents were concerned that people they knew might be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers.
- ◆ Just over half (51%) thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community.

INTRODUCTION

- ◆ This Bulletin outlines the results of the January 2008 Omnibus Survey on 'Public Attitudes towards crime and recovery of assets by the Assets Recovery Agency (ARA).' Since this survey was undertaken, ARA has merged with the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA).
- ◆ 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. Further information can be found in the Technical Notes Section.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Annex 1 compares the results from the January 2008 survey with those from a similar survey carried out in January 2007.

SURVEY FINDINGS

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

18% of respondents suspected that at least one (ie specific) person/family in their neighbourhood had derived much of their wealth from crime. A smaller proportion of those aged 65 and over (8%) thought that this was the case compared with other age categories.

A higher proportion of those living in Belfast (28%) were likely to suspect at least one person/family in their neighbourhood compared with those living in the East (19%) or West (14%) of Northern Ireland.

2. Do you think there are people in your immediate community, who have acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime?

Irrespective of whether they suspected any specific individual/family, 34% of those surveyed believed there were people in their immediate community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime. A smaller proportion of those aged 65 and over (20%) were likely to think that this was the case than all other age categories.

There were wide differences in relation to the area in which the respondents lived. Almost half of those living in Belfast (49%) thought that there were people in their immediate community who had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime compared with 34% in the East of Northern Ireland and 28% in the West of Northern Ireland.

Those in paid employment were more likely (36%) to believe that people in their immediate community had acquired a significant part of their wealth from crime, compared with 29% among those who were 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?

87% said they thought they would react with at least some anger and concern if someone with wealth derived from crime moved into their immediate neighbourhood. Proportionately, more Protestants (91%) than Catholics (84%) were of this opinion.

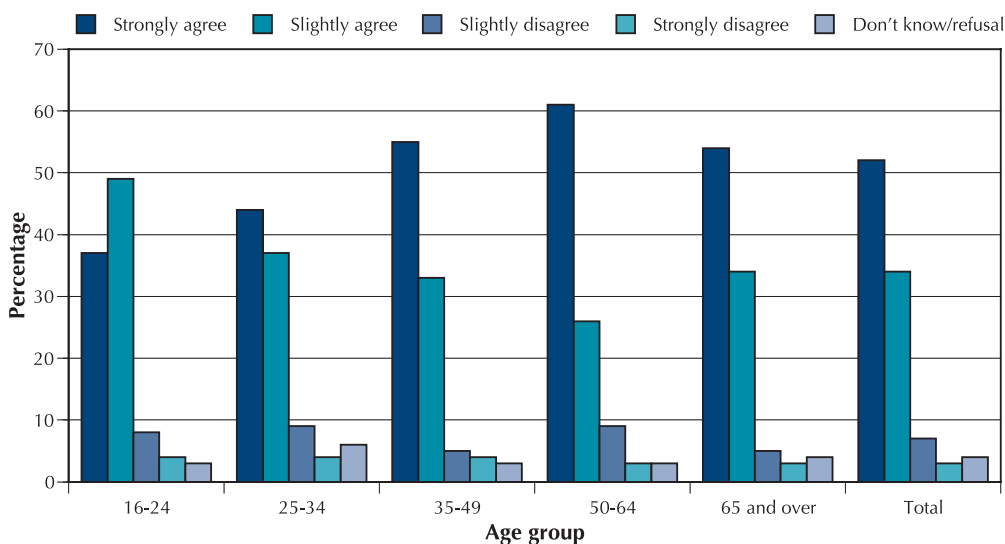
People living in the West of Northern Ireland (83%) were less likely to react with some anger and concern if a criminal moved into their immediate neighbourhood, compared with those living in the East of Northern Ireland (90%) and the Belfast area (91%).

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’?

86% of respondents believed that many people in Northern Ireland are living off the proceeds of crime.

There were several differences in relation to age groups (Figure 1). A lower proportion of respondents aged 16-24 years (37%) strongly agreed with this statement compared with 61% of those aged 50-64 years.

Figure 1: Respondents’ views on whether there are many people in Northern Ireland who are living off the proceeds of crime by age group



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’?

86% believed 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.

38% of those aged 16-24 strongly agreed with this statement compared with 62% of those aged 50-64.

6. Still thinking about 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 were 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. The two areas most frequently cited in this respect were drug dealing (73%) and armed robbery (61%) (Table 1).

Table 1: 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 | 73 |
| Armed robbery | 61 |
| Drug trafficking | 54 |
| Drug supply | 49 |
| People smuggling | 30 |
| Money laundering | 29 |
| Benefit fraud | 27 |
| Serious fraud | 27 |
| Extortion/blackmail | 26 |
| Theft | 23 |
| Handling stolen goods | 17 |
| Prostitution | 17 |
| Producing counterfeit goods | 14 |
| Deception eg selling goods and services that don't exist | 12 |
| Evading duty on alcohol and/or cigarettes and/or fuel | 9 |
| Selling counterfeit goods | 9 |
| VAT fraud | 2 |
| Don't know/Refusal | 1 |

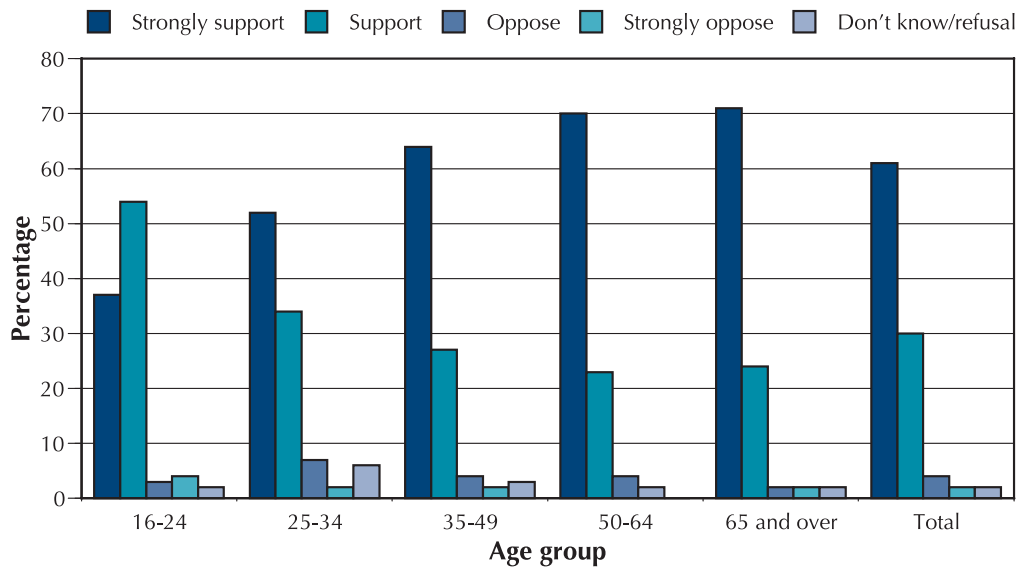
8. Do you support ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts?

61% of people strongly supported and a further 30% supported 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.

53% of Catholics compared with 69% of Protestants strongly supported ARA having such powers.

There are variations in relation to age and the extent to which people support or oppose the agency having these powers (Figure 2). In the main, older respondents tended to strongly support ARA acting through the civil courts to recover assets.

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



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

Over one third (36%) of people expressed concern that these powers might be abused – 39% of Catholics compared with 33% of Protestants.

People living in the West of Northern Ireland (40%) were most likely to express concern over the ARA abusing its powers compared with those living in Belfast (37%) or the East of Northern Ireland (32%).

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

25% of respondents were concerned that people they know might be unfairly targeted. 35% 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 with 19% of those aged 65 and over.

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?

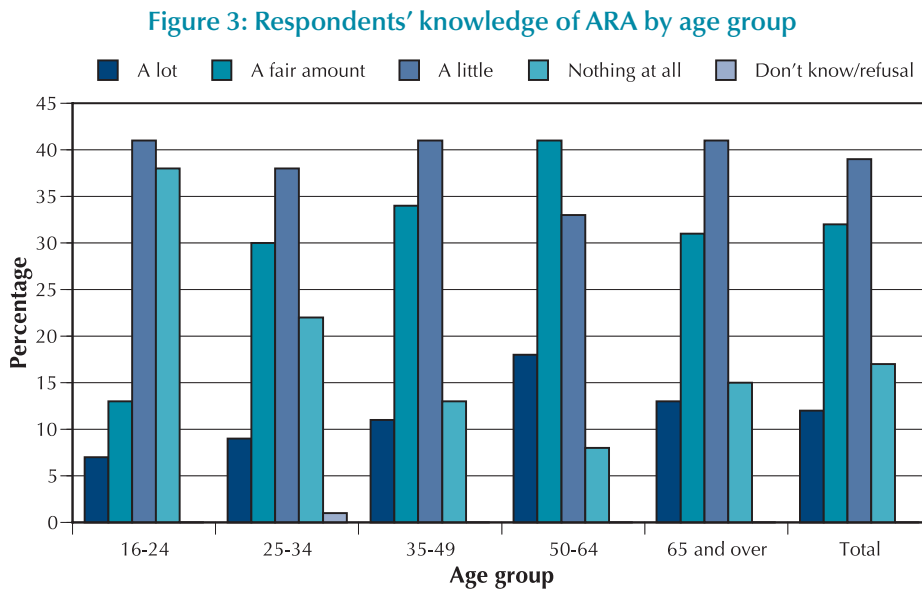
Just over half (51%) of respondents thought that the recovery of significant sums of money would have a positive effect on their community.

41% 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?

83% of respondents had heard or read about ARA - 86% of males and 80% of females.

61% of those aged 16-24 years had heard or read about this government organisation compared with 92% of those aged 50-64 years (Figure 3).



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

Of those who had heard or read about ARA, the most frequently cited method was television (82%) (Table 2).

Table 2: How respondents heard or read about ARA

| | % |
|---|----|
| Television | 82 |
| Regional newspapers (eg Belfast Telegraph) | 39 |
| Local radio | 32 |
| National newspapers (eg Times, Express) | 30 |
| Local newspapers (eg Newtownards Chronicle) | 20 |
| National radio | 12 |
| Word of mouth | 11 |
| Website | 3 |
| Other | 2 |
| Don't know/Refusal | 0 |

14. Do you believe that the 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?

73% of respondents were of the opinion that ARA acted in a way which was fair to all sections of the community, while 18% of respondents were unsure how fair ARA was.

A slightly higher proportion of Catholics (76%) than Protestants (72%) believed that ARA was fair to all sections of the community. Protestants (12%) were more likely than Catholics (2%) to believe that ARA acted in a way that focused too much on assets in loyalist hands. In contrast 4% of Catholics compared with 1% of Protestants thought that ARA has focused too much on assets in republican hands.

TECHNICAL NOTES

- ◆ The sample of those surveyed in the January 2008 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up-to-date listing 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 a set sample of 2,200 addresses, 1,986 were eligible and 1,238 interviews were achieved giving a response rate of 62%.
- ◆ Selecting only one individual for interview at each address means individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in smaller households. The data presented in this bulletin have 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 3 shows a comparison between the January 2008 Omnibus Survey sample and the Northern Ireland adult population (16+) from the 2001 Census of Population.

Table 3: Sample Profile

| | | 2001 Census of Population (Adults) % | January 2008 Omnibus Survey Selected Respondent % |
|------------------|------------------|--|---|
| Gender | Male | 48 | 48 |
| | Female | 52 | 52 |
| Age Group | 16-24 | 16 | 13 |
| | 25-34 | 19 | 17 |
| | 35-49 | 27 | 28 |
| | 50-64 | 20 | 23 |
| | 65 and over | 17 | 19 |
| Base | 1,292,169 | 1,238 | |

- ◆ The area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 4. 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 the bulletin.

Table 4: Areas of Northern Ireland by District Council

| 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. |

- ◆ 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 this analysis.
- ◆ Percentages denoted in both tables and figures do not always sum to 100%. In some instances this is because respondents had the opportunity to offer more than one answer to the question. In other cases it is a consequence of rounding.
- ◆ In the tables, if the figure is less than 0.5% the cell is denoted with a '0%'.

Annex 1: Comparison of January 2007 and January 2008 Northern Ireland Omnibus Surveys

| Question | Main Findings | January 2007 (%) | January 2008 (%) |
|--|--|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Do you suspect that someone in your own neighbourhood has obtained a large part of their wealth from crime? | Suspected at least one person/family | 17 | 18 |
| 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 | 34 | 34 |
| 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 at least some anger and concern | 85 | 87 |
| 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 | 84 | 86 |
| 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 | 83 | 86 |
| 6. Still thinking about 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 | 78 | 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 | 75 66 56 | 73 61 54 |
| 8. Do you support ARA having the powers to act through the civil courts? | Support/strongly support | 88 | 91 |
| 9. How concerned are you that ARA might abuse its powers? | Concerned/very concerned | 36 | 36 |
| 10. How concerned are you that people you know might be unfairly targeted by ARA because of its powers? | Concerned/very concerned | 27 | 25 |
| 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 | 52 | 51 |
| 12. How much have you heard or read about ARA? | Had heard/read at least a little | 82 | 83 |
| 13. Where have you heard or read about ARA? | Television Regional newspapers Local radio | 80 39 33 | 82 39 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 | 71 | 73 |

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