

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.0 Introduction

The core aim of this research was to provide an empirical account of the self-defined needs of victims of crime and their families. In particular the study sought to provide insights into how victims inform themselves about support services, the extent to which they use such services and their assessment of how adequately criminal justice agencies and support organisations meet their needs. A secondary aim of the research was to gauge public and professional awareness of the availability of support services for victims of crime.

Conducting research with vulnerable groups such as victims of crime is challenging. It raises a range of ethical issues and, in the case of this piece of research, it involved continuous accommodation and modification of the research design. The privacy and welfare of victims was a paramount concern and the requirement of victim confidentiality meant that access to victims could only be negotiated through victim support organisations. This posed serious methodological and logistical challenges. Support services for victims of crime are for the most part provided by voluntary organisations, which are often entirely reliant on volunteers. The administrative and time burdens which co-operation with the research process entailed proved significant for some of the organisations. These logistical and ethical limitations impacted on the design of the research and will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

The research design had four components; a postal survey of approximately 1,050 victims of crime who had availed of a support service, in-depth interviews with 20 of these victims, a survey of 50 members of the public to determine awareness of support services for victims of crime and a telephone survey of 23 key community-based professionals and employees of community organisations, likely to be in contact with crime victims, again to determine awareness of support services for victims of crime.

This chapter will discuss the methodological challenges encountered in the study, will describe the research design and data collection tools, and will outline the sampling strategy and response rates.

2.1 Researching Victim Experiences and Needs

The Postal Questionnaire

The primary objective of this research was to identify the self-defined needs of victims of crime and their experiences of support services and criminal justice organisations. A self-completion postal questionnaire for victims was selected as the primary data collection tool. Postal questionnaires provide a relatively inexpensive means of collecting data from a large group over a wide geographical area and given the budgetary constraints in this project provided a viable research tool. Disadvantages of the postal questionnaire relate to the demands it puts on respondents in terms of literacy and the potential this creates for bias in terms of who completes the survey. A further disadvantage is the lack of opportunity to clarify issues, which may arise for the respondent during completion. Notwithstanding these potential disadvantages, the postal questionnaire was selected as the most viable tool for reaching the target population of victims of crime.

The development of the questionnaire was guided primarily by the research objectives. As such it sought information on respondents' experiences and assessment of criminal justice agencies and support organisations. Care was taken in the ordering of questions to ensure that respondents were facilitated in relating their experiences in a sequential way, which corresponded with the actual stages of the victim journey from the experience of crime to the processing of the crime through the criminal justice system and the eliciting of support from organisations. The questionnaire contained seven domain areas: General Information, An Garda Síochána, Crime Victims Helpline, Support Organisations, Court Procedures, Counselling & Compensation, and Suggestions for Service Improvement. (See Appendix 1.) As far as was possible, closed questions with multiple answer options were used to facilitate ease of completion. In total there were 56 questions to answer and it took between 10

and 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was piloted in November 2008 with 50 respondents¹ and no adjustments were made.

2.1.1 Identification of Target Population and Sample and Distribution of Questionnaires

Identifying and accessing the target population (i.e. victims who had used one of the 44 relevant support organisations funded by the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime)² posed a number of practical, methodological and ethical challenges. To be representative of the total population of victims who used support organisations, the sample would have to be drawn systematically from the entire population of victims who had used support organisations for the period 2005-2008. To this end relevant support organisations were asked to supply an anonymous profile of all service users for the relevant period, outlining, sex, age, nationality, and type of crime experienced. However the majority of relevant organisations were not in a position to provide a full profile of client numbers and details as requested. The support organisations identified a number of ethical and practical factors, which prohibited their provision of accurate service user profiles. A minority of organisations kept no client records, as they believed that storage of personal data was in breach of the Data Protection Acts 1988-2003. Others declined to furnish client profiles because they felt it was ethically inappropriate for them to do so. Some organisations, particularly those who did a lot of telephone helpline work, recorded numbers of phone contacts but were not in a position to identify client numbers as many calls could be made by the same client. Lack of time or personnel prohibited other organisations from compiling profiles on all clients in the timeframe requested by the researchers but they offered estimates of client numbers. A full profile of the extent and nature of clients was provided by only 9 of the 44 support organisations. For a further 25 organisations it was possible to derive an estimate of client numbers

¹ The pilot questionnaires were distributed by the Crime Victims Helpline to 50 of its service users and as no changes were subsequently made to the questionnaire, the pilot questionnaire responses were included as data.

² The Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime provided the research team with a list of 48 support organisations to whom it provides funding. However for ethical reasons it was decided not to include three organisations that provide services in relation to children who are crime victims. These were Barnardos, CARI (Children at Risk in Ireland) and the Irish Centre for Parentally Abducted Children. A fourth organisation, Open Door Network, was also excluded as its primary role is in relation to supporting other organisations in their aim of providing accessible safe spaces for women and children experiencing violence or abuse.

based on estimates provided by the organisations and the information on client numbers provided in the reports of the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime between 2005 and 2007. It was not possible to provide an estimate of client numbers for 10 organisations. As it proved impossible to accurately determine the extent and nature of the target client population, a comprehensive sampling frame could not be identified. In consequence it was not possible to draw a representative sample of clients to whom questionnaires could be administered and the results presented here cannot be generalized to the entire body of crime victims.

Based on the calculation of client numbers described above it was estimated that the target population of victims who had availed of support services in the period 2005 – 2008 was approximately 7,764. It is important to note that these figures relate only to victims who have engaged with support organisations. The number of victims experiencing crime in any year would be significantly higher. The Central Statistics Office, for example, indicated that 4.6% (150,700) of the population over 18 in 2006 were victims of personal crime (theft with violence, theft, or physical assault, but excluding domestic and sexual assaults). It also indicated that 11.3% of all households³ in Ireland were affected by property crimes in 2006 (burglary, theft of vehicle, theft from vehicle, and vandalism (CSO 2007). Similarly, the Garda Public Attitude Survey of 2008 pointed out that 9.2% of respondents that they surveyed⁴ indicated that they or a member of their household had been a victim of crime in 2007 (Garda Research Unit 2008: 8)

It was decided to circulate 1,000 questionnaires to a sample of the 7,764 victims who availed of support services.⁵ The quota of questionnaires assigned to each organisation was proportionate to the percentage of clients it had relative to the overall client number. Table 2.1 below details the number of questionnaires which was sent to each organisation for distribution to clients. The questionnaires were sent to the organisations in January 2009 and a return date of the middle of April was specified.

³ The number of relevant households was 171,059, that is 11.3% of the total of 1,513,800.

⁴ The sample involved in-home interviews with 10,000 respondents selected on the basis of quotas in each Garda division.

⁵ 50 questionnaires had already been sent to the Crime Victims Helpline during the pilot phase of the study. As such the overall number of questionnaires distributed to support organisations was 1,050.

The sample of victims to whom the questionnaires were sent was not identified using a random selection method. A random sample was not possible, as the research team were obliged to rely on support organisation personnel to distribute the questionnaires. For legitimate reasons of confidentiality, the support organisations could not release client names and contact details to the research team. Thus questionnaires were supplied to support organisations, which then selected the clients to whom they would be sent. In this method of sample selection it is not possible to eliminate human bias and to guarantee that all members of the potential research population have an equal chance of being included in the study. Indeed in some organisations the staff distributing the questionnaires believed it was necessary — for reasons of client welfare — to exclude some clients from the survey. Many organisations also took the decision to phone clients in advance of distribution of the questionnaire to ensure that its receipt would not cause them distress or put them in any danger. As such the task of questionnaire distribution raised a number of ethical dilemmas for organisations and represented an onerous administrative and logistical task for the support organisations.

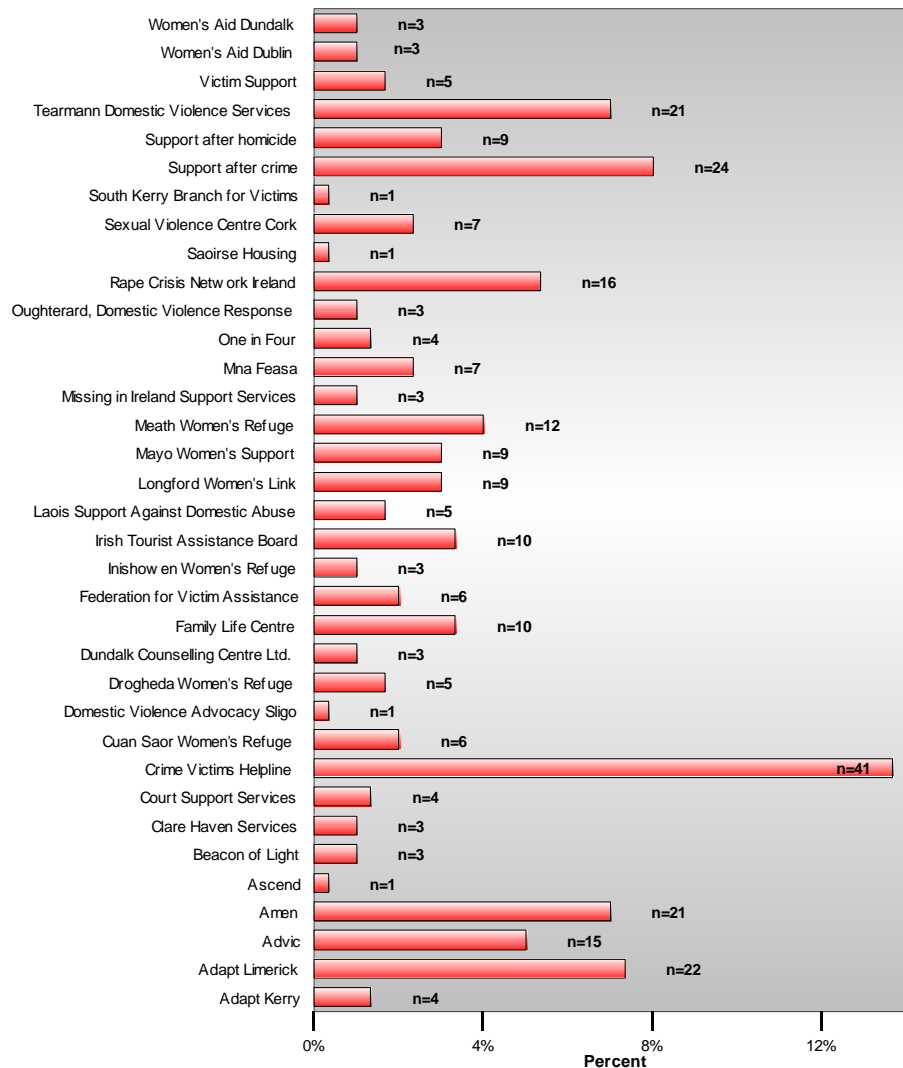
Table 2.1: Number of Questionnaires Distributed to Each Group

Support Organisation	Number of Questionnaires Sent to Organisation
Adapt (Kerry)	45
Adapt (Limerick)	30
AdVic	35
Amen	40
Ascend (North Tipperary)	20
Beacon of Light Counselling Centre	10
Carlow Women's Aid	10
Clare Haven Services	10
Court Support Services	15
Crime Victims Helpline	100
Cuan Saor Women's Refuge Clonmel	20
Domestic Violence Advocacy Sligo	20
Domestic Violence Response Ltd Oughterard	6
Donegal Domestic Violence Service	20
Drogheda Women's Refuge	15
Dundalk Counselling Service	6

Family Life Centre Boyle	20
Federation for Victim Assistance	50
Inishowen Women's Refuge	10
Irish Tourist Assistance Service	53
Laois Support Against Domestic Abuse	5
Letterkenny Women's Centre	Did not participate
Living Life Voluntary	1
Longford Women's Link	50
Mayo Women's Support Service	15
Missing in Ireland Support Services	5
Meath Women's Refuge	15
Mná Feasa	25
Muintir na Tire	5
Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service	5
One in Four	15
Rape Crisis Network	100
Ruhama	5
Saoirse Housing	25
Sexual Violence Centre Cork	15
South Kerry Branch for Victims	3
Support After Crime	60
Support After Homicide	15
Tearmann Housing Association	45
You Are Not Alone (Mallow)	25
Westmeath Support / Domestic Abuse	5
Victim Support	36
Women's Aid Dublin	25
Women's Aid Dundalk	15
Total	1,050

Despite strenuous efforts by the research team to encourage the distribution of all questionnaires, some organisations did not feel they were in a position to do so. Due to these logistical difficulties it is not possible to state definitively how many of the 1,050 questionnaires sent to the support organisations were subsequently sent to service users. In consequence a response rate cannot be definitively calculated. As figure 2.1 below indicates, 303 questionnaires were returned and 35 out of a potential 44 organisations were represented among the respondents. The data from the questionnaires was analysed using SPSS and descriptive statistics were produced.

Fig 2.1: Breakdown of Survey Participants by Support Organisation (Victim Postal Survey)



Despite being unable to identify an accurate sampling frame and to draw a random sample, organisations were requested, as far as possible, to stratify the distribution of the questionnaires on the basis of gender, age, race and type of crime experienced.

The details of respondent characteristics provided in the next section indicate that a wide range of victims was accessed.

Postal Questionnaire Respondents: Demographic Profile

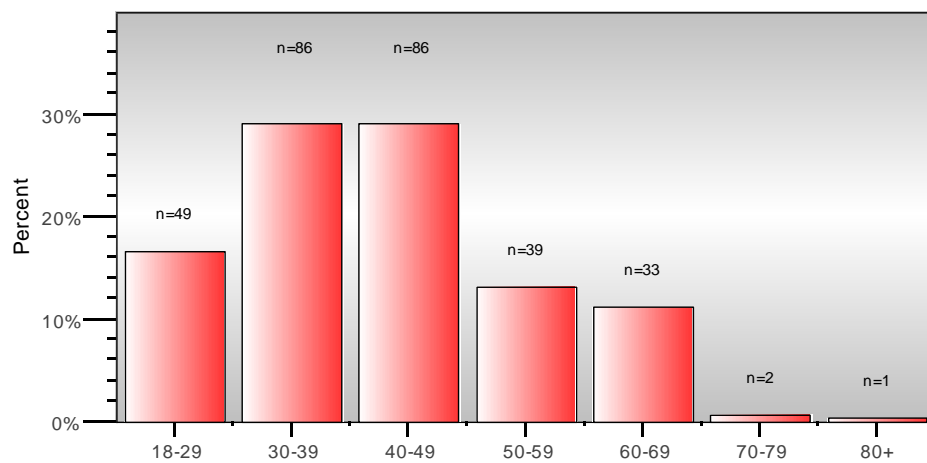
The majority of respondents to the questionnaire survey were women (75.6 %). If we exclude the crimes of domestic violence and sexual offences from the analysis, female respondents remain in the majority (at 72%). This predominance of women merits comment given that the *Garda Public Attitude Survey* (2008) indicated that in 2007 more men (57.1%) than women (42.9%) were victims of crime (Garda Research Unit 2008: 8). Similarly the Central Statistics Office noted in 2006 that there were 91,800 (5.7%) male victims of personal crime (theft with violence, theft, or physical assault), compared with 58,900 females (3.6%).⁶ The significantly higher proportion of women contributing to this survey may be explained in part by the high prevalence of returns from organisations catering for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, crimes that are more frequently experienced by female victims.⁷ However, even when these offences are excluded from our analysis, the preponderance of female respondents remains very high, indicating that men are not availing of the services offered by support organisations to the same extent as women.

The age of respondents ranged across the full spectrum of adulthood (18 – 80+). As figure 2.2 indicates, the greatest number of responses came from the age ranges 30-39 and 40-49, both producing a cohort of 29.1 %. The next largest group was 18-29 (16.6 %) and the smallest response with just one person responding was in the 80+ range.

⁶ It is important to note that the CSO survey did not include domestic violence or sexual offences in the personal crime category.

⁷ Irish crime figures for 2006 indicate that females accounted for 74.4% of victims of sexual assault (Central Statistics Office, 2008:50) while research from the National Crime Council and the Economic and Social Research Institute shows that 15% of women, compared to 6 % of men, have experienced severely abusive behaviour from an intimate partner at some point in their lives (Watson, 2005:24).

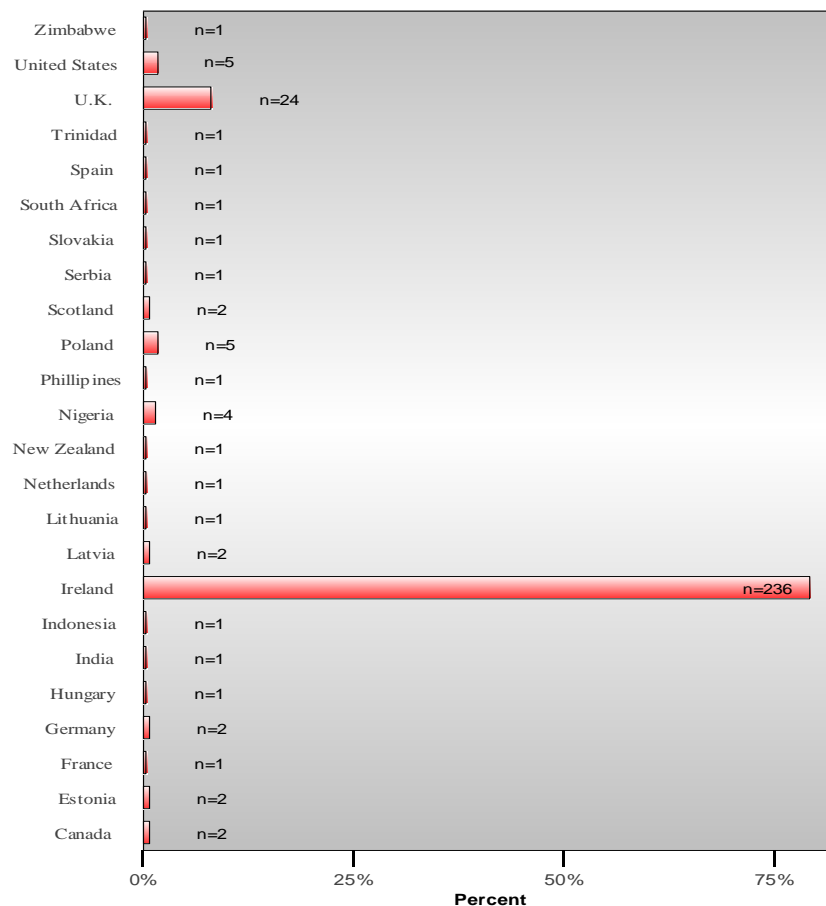
Fig 2.2: Age of Respondents (Victim Postal Survey)



These responses do not appear to significantly deviate from those in the Garda Public Attitudes Survey 2008 in which the breakdown of age in relation to victims in 2007 was as follows: 16.9 % between 18-24 years, 49.7 % between 25-44 years, 24.3 % between 45- 64 years and 9 % over 65.

In terms of nationality, the vast majority of respondents were Irish (77.9 %) with the next largest group being UK nationals (7.9 %) and USA nationals (1.7 %). As figure 2.3 outlines, 24 different nationalities were represented among respondents.

Fig 2.3: Nationality of Respondents (Victim Postal Survey)

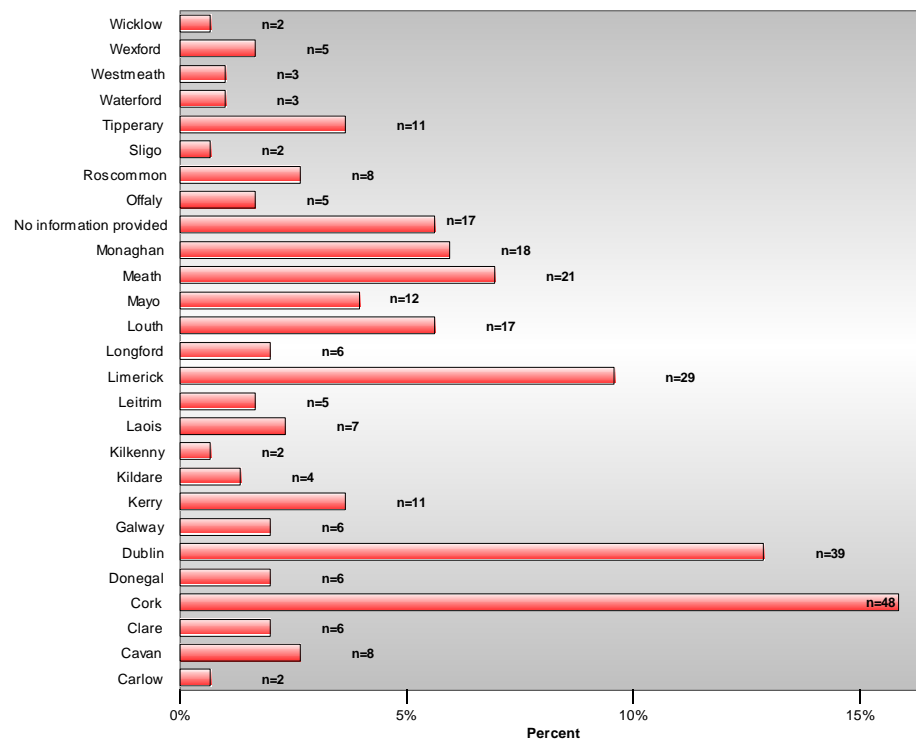


Respondents were spread across the full range of geographical locations as outlined in figure 2.4. The greatest numbers of respondents were from Cork (15.8 %), Dublin (12.9 %) and Limerick (9.6 %) while Carlow, Kilkenny, Sligo and Wicklow produced the lowest number of respondents (0.7 %). The geographic spread of offences in this survey does not reflect the geographical spread of offences more generally. This suggests that service organisations are not distributed proportionately having regard to the geographical distribution of crime. Dublin, in particular, appears to be underrepresented in relation to the prevalence of crime. For example, the CSO Quarterly National Household survey in 2006 revealed that Dublin was the region with the highest prevalence of both personal and property crime. In that year, 18% of Dublin households were affected by property crime (household burglary, theft of

vehicle, theft from vehicle, and vandalism), but only 7.7% of households in the South-East and South-West were similarly affected. In respect of personal crime (theft with violence, theft without violence, physical assault excluding domestic violence and sexual offences), 6.1% (56,600) of persons over the age of 18 in Dublin were the victims of personal crime in 2006, whereas only 3.5% (16,800) of persons over the age of 18 in the South-West were similarly affected. The Garda Public Attitude Survey of 2008 also noted that crime victimisation varied considerably across Garda divisions, with the Mayo division recording the lowest rate of crime victimisation at 2.3%, and Dublin South Central the highest at 19.3%. The Cork city Garda division recorded a crime rate of 7.3% in 2007. The average rate of crime victimisation per Garda division was 8.5% (2008: 9).

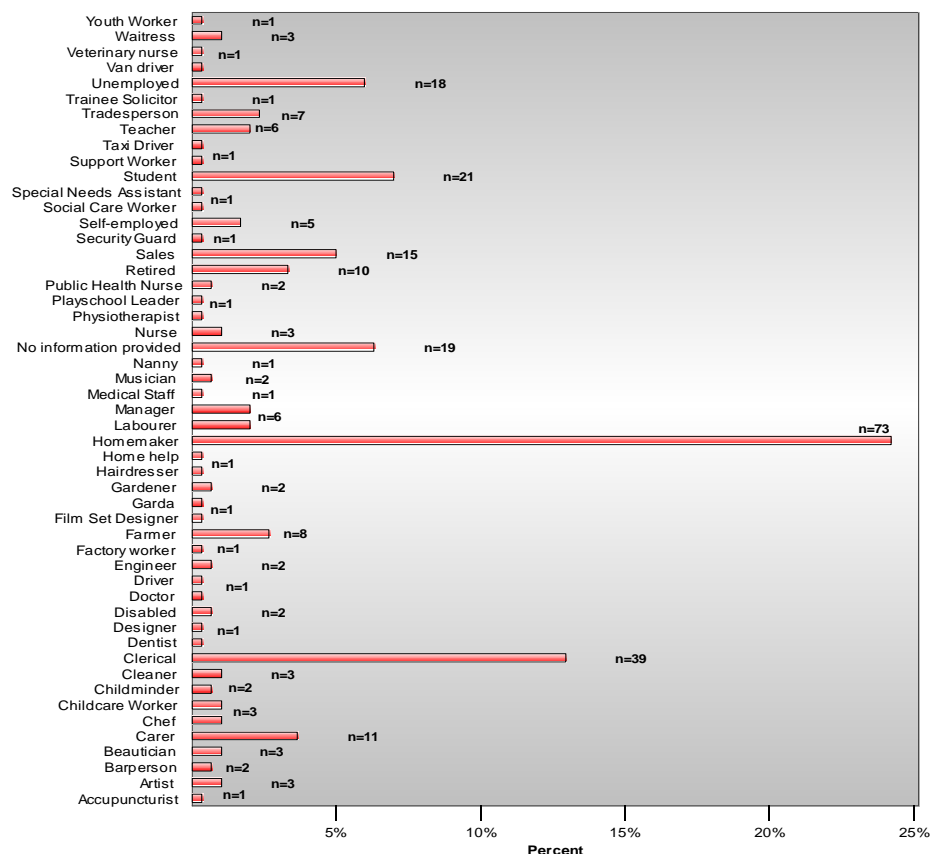
Analysis of whether the crime had taken place in an urban or rural location revealed a relatively even split with 48.2 % of victims experiencing crime in a rural context while 51.8 % experienced crime in an urban setting. Again, these statistics do not mirror the more general spread of criminal offences in relation to urban and rural locations. The CSO Quarterly National Household Survey in 2006, for example, revealed that households in rural areas had less than half the prevalence of property crime (household burglary, theft of vehicle, theft from vehicle, and vandalism) as those in urban settings. Residents in urban areas were also twice as likely to be victims of robbery and three times more likely to have been assaulted (excluding sexual assault and domestic violence) than those in rural areas (CSO 2007).

Fig 2.4: Place of Residence of Respondents (Victim Postal Survey)



With respect to the question of occupation, by far the largest group of respondents reported that they were homemakers (24.1 %), followed by clerical workers (12.9 %), students (6.9 %), unemployed (5.9 %) and those working in the sales sector (5 %). As figure 2.5 reveals, respondents identified 50 different occupations including manual, clerical and professional jobs.

Fig 2.5: Occupation of Respondents (Victim Postal Survey)



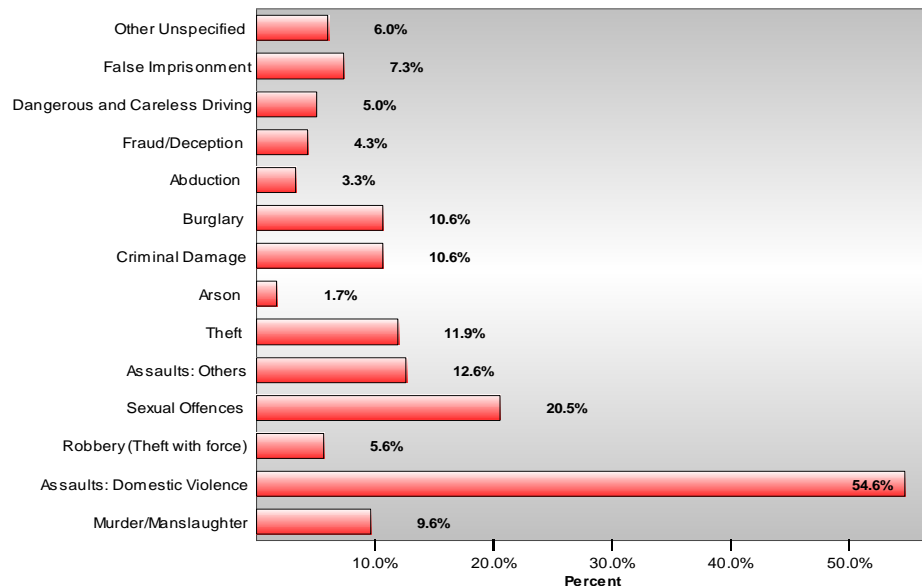
The breakdown of respondents in relation to type of crime experienced revealed that the greatest number of respondents (165), representing 54.6% of total valid responses, reported being victims of domestic violence. The next most common type of crime experienced by respondents was sexual offences, which accounted for 20.5 % of total valid responses. Figure 2.6 indicates the level of respondents who experienced all other specific offences listed on the questionnaire. A further 10 other types of offences were also identified by respondents. This data is significantly different from the last Garda Public Attitudes Survey in which the crimes most frequently reported to the Gardaí were burglary (26 percent of victims) and criminal damage to car/vehicle (17 %) (Garda Research Unit 2008: 9). Sexual assault and domestic

violence were recorded at a level of just 1 % in the Garda survey. Similarly the murder/manslaughter of a family member was indicated in 29 of the 302 valid responses in our survey, representing 9.6% of cases. The Annual Report of the Garda Síochána in 2007, however, reveals that of the 104,946 indictable offences recorded in that year, only 84 related to murder or manslaughter (excluding vehicular manslaughter).⁸ Therefore, in terms of crimes experienced, the respondents in our survey are over representative of particular types of crime, reflecting the type of crimes which victims are likely to seek help for, and/or the type of crimes for which organised help is available, rather than the pattern of crime more generally.

In relation to response rates by types of crime, responses from victims of domestic violence were closely proportionate to the number of questionnaires distributed to organisations which support victims of this crime (50% of questionnaires were distributed to Domestic Violence organisations and 54.6% of respondents reported that they were victims of this crime). Regarding sexual offences, relative to the percentage of questionnaires distributed to organisations supporting victims of sexual offences (12%), the response rate from victims of this crime was almost double (20.5%).

⁸ Murder and manslaughter offences (excluding vehicular manslaughter) therefore represented 0.08% of all indictable crime reported in that year.

**Fig 2.6: Types of Crimes Experienced by Respondents
(Victim Postal Survey)**



2.1.2 The Semi-Structured Interviews

To elicit greater insights into victim experiences of support services and criminal justice agencies, and in particular to elicit their views on the adequacy of same, a semi-structured interview schedule to be administered on a one to one basis, was developed. The schedule covered five thematic areas: the experience of the support group, the experience of reporting the crime, the experience of ongoing investigation/court proceedings, the experience of counselling and compensation, and suggestions for service improvement (See Appendix 2). Given the constraints of time and budget, a decision was made to interview 20 victims. A key priority in identifying respondents for participation in the semi-structured interviews was to ensure, as far as possible, that participation in the interview would not in any way compromise the welfare of the respondent. To ensure the anonymity of respondents, pseudonyms are used in this report and care was taken to remove any identifying

information, which might jeopardise the privacy of the respondent. To make certain that participation was strictly on a voluntary basis, a question was included in the service user postal questionnaire asking respondents to include their contact details if they were willing to participate in a follow up interview with the research team. Ninety seven respondents indicated their interest in participating in an interview. A proportionally representative sample was determined to accurately reflect the breakdown of respondents by ‘type of crime’ and ‘provincial location’. Details of the location and type of crime experienced by the interview respondents are provided in table 2.2 while table 2.3 provides a more comprehensive demographic profile of the interviewees. Twelve of the interviewees were female and eight were male.

Table 2.2: Breakdown of Victim Interviews by Province and Type of Crime

	Murder/ Manslaughter	Domestic Violence/Sexual Violence	Other	Totals
Leinster	2	5	2	9
Munster	2	2	3	7
Connacht	0	1	0	1
Ulster	0	2	1	3
Totals	4	10	6	20

Table 2.3: Demographic Profile of Victim Interview Respondents

Pseudonym of Respondents	Place of residence	Age range	Occupation	Crime experienced
Harriet	Munster	30-39	Homemaker	Theft
Paul	Munster	40-49	Hairdresser	Murder & sexual assault of family member
Bernice	Munster	30-39	Health care worker	Murder of family member
Tracy	Munster	20-29	Homemaker	Domestic violence
Anne	Munster	60-69	Receptionist	Domestic violence
Carol	Connacht	40-49	Not specified	Sexual assault
Donal	Munster	70-79	Retired	Burglary
Catherine	Leinster	50-59	Self employed	Murder of

				family member
Barry	Ulster	40-49	Self employed	Assault
Gerry	Munster	40-49	Self employed	Kidnapping
Brendan	Leinster	50-59	Retired garda	Domestic violence
Ted	Leinster	60-69	Company director	Domestic violence
Phil	Leinster	30-39	Gardener	Assault
John	Leinster	30-39	Personal assistant	Sexual assault, assault & theft
Kate	Ulster	40-49	Homemaker	Domestic violence
Kylie	Ulster	18-29	Student	Domestic violence
Valerie	Leinster	30-39	Public health nurse	Dangerous driving causing death of family member
Mary	Leinster	50-59	Homemaker	Murder of family member
Clodagh	Leinster	50-59	Homemaker	Domestic violence
Heather	Leinster	40-49	Public health nurse	Domestic violence

All of the interviews were conducted by one member of the research team who made phone contact with each of the selected 20 respondents, and used the phone interview to acquaint herself briefly with the potential respondent, to assess his or her suitability for interview, and if appropriate to make arrangements for the date and location of the interview. Prior to the interview the respondents were requested to read and sign a consent form confirming their understanding of the interview process, the purpose and proposed uses of the data gathered and their voluntary compliance with the interview (See Appendix 3). The interviews took place in a variety of locations including, the victim's home (7), a relative's home (1), the victim's workplace (1), UCC (1), the office of a support organisation (2), the office of the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime (4) and a hotel (4). The interviews were digitally recorded and the mean duration of the interviews was 50 minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically.

2.2 Researching Public & Professional Awareness of Victim Support Organisations

2.2.1 The Street Survey

The secondary aim of this study was to gauge public and professional awareness of the availability of support services for victims of crime. To assess awareness levels among the general public, two of the research team carried out a street survey of 50 members of the public. The survey was conducted in Waterford city in February 2009. An incidental sampling procedure was applied whereby two members of the research team stood outside a shopping centre in Waterford and requested participation from passers-by. The researchers endeavoured to secure respondents who represented a range of gender and age profiles. As table 2.4 indicates 52 % of respondents were female and 48 % were male and the age range of respondents is outlined in table 2.5.

Table 2.4: Street Survey Respondents by Gender

Gender	
Female	Male
26	24

Table 2.5: Street Survey Respondents by Age-range

Age Range	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80 plus
Number	12	10	7	8	10	3	0
Percentage	26	20	14	14	20	6	0

The Street Survey consisted of 7 items, including 5 closed questions and 2 open questions (See Appendix 4). In particular the street survey sought to identify respondents' awareness of the National Crime Victims Helpline and their awareness of a range of victim support organisations. The data were analysed using SPSS and descriptive statistics were produced.

2.2.2 The Telephone Community Awareness Survey of Professionals & Community Organisation Workers

To gauge awareness of the availability of support services for victims of crime among professionals, and employees or volunteers in community services in whom crime victims might confide, a telephone survey was conducted. Table 2.6 provides details of the respondents' professional/organisational affiliation and their location. The Community Awareness Survey was conducted with 23 respondents in February 2009 and interviews took between 5 and 10 minutes. 13 of the respondents came from Cork city and 10 from the West Cork area.

Table 2.6: Professional/Organisational Affiliation of Community Awareness Survey Respondents

Professional/Organisational Affiliation	Northside Community Cork City	West Cork Community
Accident & Emergency Nurse	0	1
Accident & Emergency Doctor	2	0
Active Retirement Group	1	1
Citizen Information Centre	2	1
Community Resource Centre	1	1
Disability Support Group	1	1
General Practitioner	1	1
Immigrant Group	1	0
Public Health Nurse	1	1
Social Work	1	1
Traveller Support Group	1	1
Youth Centre Worker	1	1

The respondents were purposively selected to reflect personnel who provided services to a range of individuals in terms of age, ethnicity and ability level. As the research team were familiar with service provision in the Cork area, the sample was drawn from Cork city and from West Cork. The research team contacted prospective respondents by letter, explaining the nature of the study, guaranteeing anonymity and requesting participation in the phone survey. The survey contained 6 items, relating to the respondent's familiarity with a range of victim support organisations, their assessment of the adequacy of support and their suggestions for the improvement of localised support services for victims of crime (See Appendix 5). The phone interviews took between 5 and 10 minutes and were all completed by one member of the research team. The data collected was analysed thematically.

2.3 Conclusion

The methodology adopted in this study was designed to gather data which would provide the following: an empirical account of the self-defined needs of victims of crime and their families; insights into how victims inform themselves about support services; and an indication of the extent to which they use such services and their assessment of how adequately criminal justice agencies and support organisations meet their needs. As such this research is informed by a victim needs perspective and provides in-depth empirical data on victim use of, and engagement with, support organisations and the criminal justice system. Such data has the potential to inform detailed service and policy development. The data generated on victim satisfaction ratings of various elements of the legal process and support and service provision, provides a more global analysis of the quality of various elements of service provision and can assist in the identification of aspects of provision which are working well and those which need greater attention. Finally, the information generated on public and professional awareness of the availability of support services for victims of crime, while limited, does nonetheless, provide insights into levels of awareness and indicators as to how this might be improved.