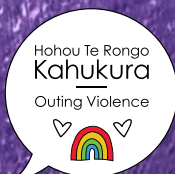


**Summary Report:**  
**Make it  
about us:**

*Victim-survivors' recommendations  
for building a safer police response  
to intimate partner violence, family  
violence and sexual violence in  
Aotearoa New Zealand.*



**Report written by The Backbone Collective and  
Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura**

**March 2024**

## Introduction

This Summary Report is based on our Main Report: Make it about us: Victim-survivors' recommendations for building a safer police response to intimate partner violence, family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand. © 2024 by The Backbone Collective and Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. To view a copy of this license, [visit here](#).

We recommend reading the Main Report for in-depth findings and description of our methodology.

Material from this document may be used in other publications but it is expected that it will be referenced in the usual way.

**Suggested Citation:** The Backbone Collective & Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura (2024) Summary Report: *Make it about us: Victim-survivors' recommendations for building a safer police response to intimate partner violence, family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand*. The Backbone Collective & Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura Aotearoa NZ.

Both reports are available at [The Backbone Collective](#) and [Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura](#).

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## Report authors

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**Graphic Design** by Donny Tonumaipē'a and Little Gem Design

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# Acknowledgements

## Survey participants

The Backbone Collective and Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura would like to say a huge “thank you” to the victim-survivors who took part in our police survey. We appreciate the courage and energy it takes, especially in light of your experiences of violence and abuse, to participate; to reflect on and share the often-distressing responses you received from police. Your recommendations for improving the police response to family violence and sexual violence are invaluable. We sincerely hope that our report brings much needed improvements to how the NZ Police responds to victim-survivors in the future.

## Our funders

The Backbone Collective and Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura would like to extend a very sincere thank you to the funders who supported this project:

### ***J R McKenzie Trust***



### ***Te Puna Aonui***

for providing funding for our advisory group members to participate in hui to support survey design and report recommendations.



### ***The Strathlachlan Women's Fund – Perpetual Guardian***



### ***The New Zealand Police Managers' Guild Trust***

for providing support for Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura to contribute to the survey design, and to analyse and write up responses from sexuality diverse women and trans and non-binary people.



## Our advisory group

We are very grateful to our advisory group who gave specialist feedback on our survey questions; provided context on experiences of particular population groups, for better understanding; and helped shape recommendations. Our advisory group consisted of: Waikato Women's Refuge Te Whakaruruhau; Shama Ethnic Women's Trust; disability advocate Debbie Hager; sexual violence expert Kathryn McPhillips; and family violence experts Ruth Busch and Neville Robertson.

## Snapshot

Our ground-breaking survey of women, trans and non-binary people suggests victim-survivors of family, partner and/or sexual violence are looking for urgent help from police to be safe. Overwhelmingly, they are not receiving what they need. Recent police involvement has made many victim-survivor survey participants less safe – mostly due to inadequate police action, or concerns not being taken seriously. Poor police responses were particularly likely for trans and non-binary people, wāhine Māori and disabled people. These state failures to ensure and uphold victim-survivor safety stem from systemic, structural, legal, organisational, cultural, and educational causes. To ensure all victim-survivors are safe and their rights upheld, police and those working in the wider justice system must be trained, resourced and held to account to centre the needs of victim-survivors. This means listening to them, respecting them and upholding their mana.

---

**Victim-survivors overall were more likely to say police involvement made things worse for them than better; over  $\frac{1}{2}$  of those who said things were worse were more frightened after contact with the police.**

**9 out of every 10 trans and non-binary victim-survivors who said police involvement made things worse, were more frightened after contact with the police.**

---

## Victim-survivors told us:

<p><b>Police involvement often made victim-survivors and their children less safe and made their situation worse. Police inaction which offered few or no consequences emboldened the abuser.</b></p>	<p>Our recommendations include taking action with consequences for the abuser, such as police more often considering using their statutory powers including arrest, enforcing no contact bail conditions and Police Safety Orders to ensure the safety of victim-survivors and children.</p>
<p><b>Some victim-survivors do not contact police, even when they experience ongoing violence and abuse, often because they fear that doing so may make them less safe. There are also specific barriers for particular communities, including victim-survivors in Takatāpui and Rainbow communities.</b></p>	<p>In addition to ensuring police practice increases safety for all victim-survivors, our recommendations include police strengthening ties to marginalised communities, and victim-survivors having the option to report abuse to support workers who are independent of the police force.</p>
<p><b>Victim survivors who contact police do so because they need help urgently and hope police will protect them – often contacting the police is their ‘last resort’. This means without a victim-centred police response, victim-survivors can be left in greater danger, feeling hopeless and without support or options.</b></p>	<p>Our recommendations include creating a national specialist family violence policing unit with respected expertise in centring victims.</p>
<p><b>The first response from police impacts on a victim-survivor’s likelihood of contacting them again. A poor police response stops the victim-survivor from contacting police in the future. Nearly a third of all participants said police took the side of their abuser.</b></p>	<p>As well as a specialist unit, our recommendations include ensuring all police are trained in responding to and assessing risk in family violence and sexual violence situations, to ensure all responses are safe and appropriate.</p>
<p><b>However, some victim-survivors did report the police taking actions which made victim-survivors and children safer, demonstrating the potential for change.</b></p>	<p>Altogether, our recommendations represent an important systems approach for the New Zealand Police to take action so that these positive experiences become those of all victim-survivors of family violence and sexual violence.</p>

## Who we heard from

We heard from 599 victim-survivors of family, partner or sexual violence, living in urban and rural settings around Aotearoa New Zealand, from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>

We heard from 523 women, 139 of whom said they were lesbian, asexual, bisexual, pansexual, Takatāpui or another term to signal not being straight.

We heard from 76 trans and non-binary people, including both transfeminine and transmasculine people. Sexuality diverse women and trans and non-binary people were most likely to describe themselves as bisexual (46%).

We heard from victim-survivors from many ethnicities. The majority (61%) were New Zealand Pākehā/ European, and a further 19% were New Zealand Pākehā/ European in combination with other ethnicities. About one in five (18%) were Māori, 5% were Pasifika, 4% were Asian and 14% chose other ethnicities.

Participants were aged between 16 and 80+ with the highest proportion of participants aged 26–55 years.

Many participants reported having at least one disability including 39% of women in the Backbone sample, 60% of sexuality diverse women and 78% of trans and non-binary people.

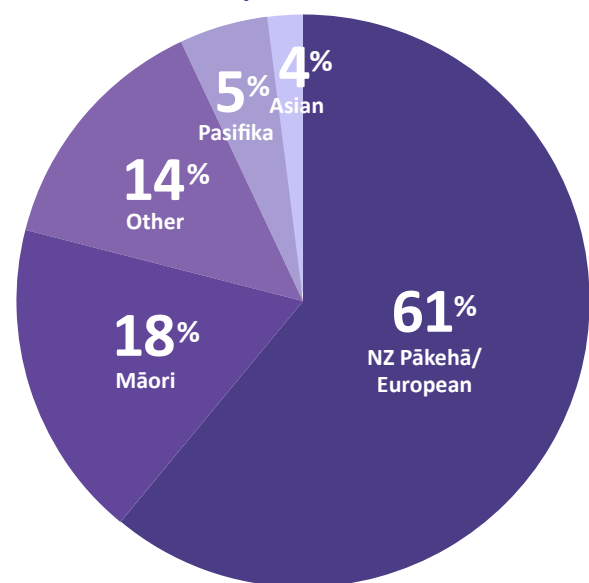
Most participants in the Backbone sample (79%), nearly half (47%) of sexuality diverse women and 29% of trans and non-binary people indicated they have children.

Three quarters of women in the Backbone sample and around half of sexuality diverse women and trans and non-binary people have had police involvement. This was within the last two years for about half of victim-survivors who answered the survey.

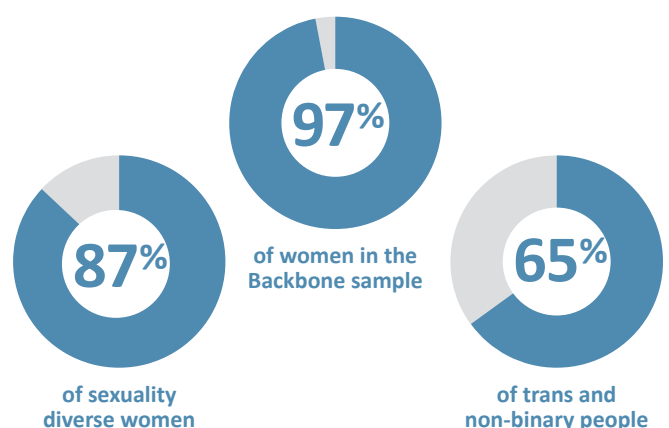
Participants were most likely to say that the person who hurt them and/or their children was a man. However, significant numbers of trans and non-binary people (27%) and sexuality diverse women (13%) said the person who abused or assaulted them was a woman. Importantly, the harmful and transphobic narrative that trans people, especially women, are more likely to be abusers was not supported by this research. No participants reported abuse from a trans woman.



Participant ethnicities



The abuser was a man



1. The Backbone sample is made up of 384 women, 371 of whom identified as straight, and 13 of whom did not provide their sexuality. The HTRK (Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura) sample is made up of 139 sexuality diverse women and 76 trans and non-binary people. These samples were analysed separately, as discussed in the Main Report, Chapter 1.

# Findings

## Victim-survivors with no police contact

There were 205 victim-survivors who had not had NZ Police involvement: 97 women in the Backbone sample, and 67 sexuality diverse women and 41 trans and non-binary people (the HTRK sample).

All participants who did not have police contact had experienced an act/s of family violence and/or sexual violence and three quarters had experienced psychological abuse/coercive control.

There are complex reasons why victim-survivors chose not to contact police. Victim-survivors must weigh up the perceived risks versus benefits for their specific context. **How family violence and sexual violence are currently perceived by society in general and concerns about the impact of police involvement act as a deterrent for many victim-survivors.**

The participants who had not contacted the police said they were:

Worried the police would treat them badly (two thirds of women without police contact in the Backbone sample, 86% of sexuality diverse women and 74% of trans and non-binary people).

Embarrassed or ashamed about what happened to them (over half of all those who did not contact the police).

Afraid it would make their situation worse (37% of women in the Backbone sample, 25% of sexuality diverse women and 49% of trans and non-binary people).

Afraid the police would not believe them (37% of women in the Backbone sample, 42% of sexuality diverse women and 44% of trans and non-binary people).

Unsure if what happened to them was a crime (33% of women in the Backbone sample, 38% of sexuality diverse women and 49% of trans and non-binary people). Most participants who didn't know that what had happened to them was a crime described experiencing forms of violence and abuse included in the Crimes Act.

Unsure police could help them and nearly half said they did not think the police could help them.

Worried police would share their information with others which could be dangerous for them.

Worried about the impact of police involvement on the abuser particularly in terms of retaliation against them or their children, or other agencies such as Oranga Tamariki becoming involved.

Worried police involvement would impact negatively on their relationships with those around them with nearly a third of women in the Backbone sample, and a quarter of those in the HTRK sample worried that their friends, family, whānau or community would react badly if they contacted police. One in five trans and non-binary victim-survivors said they did not want to 'come out' and that stopped them contacting police.

Worried about the impact on their work, or their immigration status.

## Victim-survivors who did not contact the police fear they will be treated badly; their reasons include:

**Gender** 19% of women in the Backbone sample, 33% of sexuality diverse women and 46% of trans and non-binary people.

Just under  $\frac{1}{5}$  of participants in both the Backbone and HTRK samples (18%) said they were worried the police would treat them badly because the person who abused/hurt them is a leader or has influence in the community.

**The abuser has influence**

**Age** 30% of participants in the HTRK sample and 15% in the Backbone sample worried about bad treatment because of their age.

Nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  of trans and non-binary participants and 16% of sexuality diverse women worried about bad treatment because of their sexuality.

**Sexuality**

**Victim blaming** Some participants worried they would be treated badly because they were drunk or drugged at the time the assault/abuse took place. Others worried the police would pass judgement on them for being a victim-survivor.

Participants who are disabled worried the police would treat them badly due to their disability or illness (including mental health) – 24% of women in the Backbone sample, and 31% of trans and non-binary people.

**Disability or illness**

**Financial & social status**

Participant's responses reflected that worries about police contact may exist for people who see themselves as having high financial or social resources, as well as for people without adequate income or housing including being on a benefit and/or homeless.

Some participants, particularly trans and non-binary people (33%) said they were worried the police would treat them badly because of how they look.

**Appearance**



“ I didn't think anything good would come of it but knew bad things might. **Wahine Māori(straight)**

My age. I was in my teens at the time and I thought the police would be dismissive due to my age and gender. **Pākehā lesbian woman**

Afraid police would just see me as an emotional unstable woman as partner was so manipulative and smooth talking. **Pākehā straight woman**

I'm Transgender and from my previous experiences with the police, and friends' previous experiences. They don't understand how to communicate with trans people. My friend and I were constantly deadnamed, our identities were not respected and we felt uncomfortable and unsupported. **Pākehā pansexual trans woman**

I was scared my partner would make me out to be the crazy one and the police would believe him. Then he would take it out on me after and I would never be believed. **Pākehā woman**

While they might be able to help, I think they're more likely to help cis white men like my abuser rather than a Queer trans person like me. **Another ethnicity gay trans man**

## Contact with police

There were 394 participants who had involvement with police after family and/or sexual violence, including 287 women in the Backbone sample, and 72 sexuality diverse women and 35 trans and non-binary people (the HTRK sample). For around half of survey participants their involvement with police had been within the last two years.

### **Most participants had multiple contacts with police after violence:**

**75%** of participants in the Backbone sample had police involvement on multiple occasions and over one third (**37%**) had police involvement five or more times.

**63%** of participants in the HTRK sample had multiple contacts, and nearly one in four victim-survivors (**23%**) had police involvement five or more times.

Trans and non-binary people were most likely to have only one experience of police involvement (**40%**).

### **Police first response is crucial for victim-survivors**

First contact is extremely important as it may be the first time a victim-survivor has asked for help.

Over a third of trans and non-binary people (**37%**), over a quarter of sexuality diverse women (**28%**) and **15%** of women in the Backbone sample rated their first contact with NZ Police as very poor.

Only **3%** of trans and non-binary victim-survivors gave their first contact with NZ Police a very good rating, compared with **17%** of Backbone participants and **18%** of sexuality diverse women.

Overwhelmingly, participants in both samples who rated their first contact with police as OK to very good said their first contact with police did not stop them from contacting police in the future.

### **Poor police first response stops victim-survivors accessing protection**

One quarter of women in the Backbone sample, **32%** of sexuality diverse women and **40%** of trans and non-binary people said their first experience with police stopped them from contacting police in the future.

Many victim-survivors described feeling like a nuisance or 'wasting police time' with police advising victim-survivors not to press charges, showing no empathy and having no time.

Participants described being stereotyped and blamed by police for being a victim, including police failing to understand that their state of panic, distress and trauma was a result of the violence and abuse. Police failed to see abusers as dangerous which resulted in substandard reporting by police of the violence and abuse.

Many victim-survivors in the HTRK sample reported disrespect related to their gender, including overt transphobia and being misgendered while trying to report violence.

Many participants in both samples discussed how traumatic the reporting process was. They were afforded no privacy, they were not given time to recount their experiences, and there was no continuity of care provided.

Participants described a failure of police to provide immediate protection and support. They were not informed about support services, their rights or available options. Some spoke of police abdicating their responsibility and instead deferring to the Family Court.

Participants in the Backbone sample explained that police are ill equipped to deal with the nuances of family violence and in particular the different forms of abuse, the manipulative behaviour of abusers, how victim-survivors might present and how to take a trauma and violence informed approach.

Participants in the HTRK sample said the police response was not what they had expected including no safe referrals to teams within police, slow responses and responses that significantly compromised their safety.

*I had no privacy. I had to tell the Police in front of other people waiting to be seen. I already felt very ashamed and having other people (who were also Māori) over hear what had happened to me caused me more shame and made me feel afraid of being outed if seen again by them. **Māori, Takatāpui person***

*When they arrived, they didn't believe [my child's] story, they told me and the abuser that we seemed like a nice family in a nice area and that they knew we were 'good people'. Both my [child] and I realised that the police would not ever believe us because we don't look like the kind of people they assume to be victims and we don't live in areas they assume victims live in. **Pākehā straight woman***

*Growing up I always viewed police as people who'd protect me. After getting in contact with the detective police in [area] about my domestic violence situation, their actions looked nothing like what police websites say. I was not taken seriously by policemen and felt like I have to land in hospital from abuse to be taken seriously. My experiences were belittled, I was repeatedly over talked and hurried out when I'd break into tears because they couldn't seem to handle me expressing tears. **Pākehā lesbian woman***

*They were very dismissive about the violent nature of my then partner as there was no visible bruising or blood. **Wahine Māori (straight)***

*I went to police to report being strangled, and was told they would follow up. They did, then told me my husband was handsome, charming and didn't believe me. **Pākehā bisexual woman***



*I am Non Binary and autistic. They didn't respect my pronouns or need for a support person during the process. I felt pressure to say I didn't need a support person when I did. **Pākehā bisexual non-binary person***

*They [police] were more focused on finding a crime than on supporting me and my children. I felt like an after thought and felt intimidated by their presence and impersonal processes. **Pākehā straight woman***

## Most recent or significant experience with police

Participants contacted the police because they were scared (**63%** of women in the Backbone sample, **56%** of trans and non-binary people and **44%** of sexuality diverse women). Many participants, especially in the Backbone sample, said they needed help urgently and/or they needed help to protect their children.

Some participants contacted the police to prevent the person from assaulting or abusing them right now. Many said they wanted to prevent the abuser from assaulting or abusing them or anyone else in the future.

Over half of participants said they wanted the abuser held accountable for the violence and abuse.

Based on their recent experience with police half the participants in the Backbone sample, **46%** of sexuality diverse women but just **26%** of trans and non-binary people said they probably would contact police again.

### **Three quarters of participants contacted the police themselves**

When someone else contacted police it was likely to be a family or whānau member. Wāhine Māori in the Backbone sample were more likely to say someone else contacted police and in these cases **20%** said that person was a stranger. No tauwiwi participants said a stranger contacted police.

Some victim-survivors welcomed others calling police, particularly if they were part of decision-making, but others were made less safe and wished police had not been involved.

### **Victim-survivors hope calling the police will make them safer**

Many participants hoped that by calling the police, the violence they were experiencing would stop. Many were motivated by protecting children or young people. Victim-survivors said they wanted the police to use their unique statutory powers to physically protect them from violence and abuse. Fewer Māori than non-Māori participants across both samples hoped the abuser would be arrested/prosecuted and sentenced.

Keep the abuser away from me – **62%** of women in the Backbone sample, **54%** of sexuality diverse women and **72%** of trans and non-binary people.

Scare the abuser and stop the violence – **51%** of women in the Backbone sample, **48%** of sexuality diverse women and **40%** of trans and non-binary people.

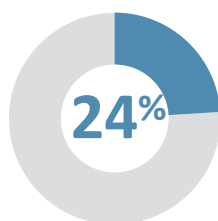
Arrest/prosecute and sentence – **46%** of women in the Backbone sample, **38%** of sexuality diverse women and **48%** of trans and non-binary people.

### **But too often, police did not act as victim-survivors hoped**

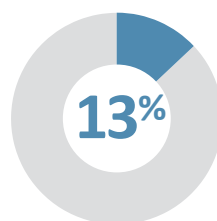
The hopes of victim-survivors had little to no correlation with (or likely impact on) action taken by the police. For example, whether victim-survivors hoped for an arrest or a warning or not, the rate at which police took that action remained the same.

For most victim-survivors who said they hoped police involvement would keep the abuser away from them, stop the abuser hurting them and/or prevent the abuser from having any contact with them in the future, police involvement did not achieve those hopes.

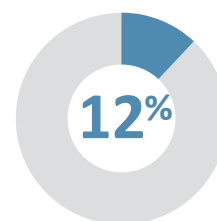
#### **The abuser was arrested**



of women in the Backbone sample



of sexuality diverse women



of trans and non-binary people

Arrest rates of abusers were low overall. Despite being less likely to hope for arrest, Wāhine Māori in the Backbone sample (**37%**) were more likely to say the abuser was arrested than tauwi women (**22%**).

Police Safety Orders were not made in most cases.

Many victim-survivors hoped that the abuser would be connected with social support services. Only **2%** said this happened.

Over one quarter of participants in both samples said the police took their statement and no further action was taken and a smaller percentage said they came but took no action or the police gave the abuser a warning only.

About a fifth of participants said police gave them information or referred them to other community services, around one in ten said police contacted other supports for them and a small number of women, but no trans and non-binary people, said police stayed with them until they felt safe/other services arrived.

In the Backbone sample, disabled women (32%) were far more likely than non-disabled women (22%) to say police took their statement but no further action was taken and far less likely to say police referred the abuser to social support services.

Women in the Backbone sample who experienced NFSV<sup>2</sup> were nearly twice as likely as women who experienced IPV/FV to say police arrested the abuser and that the police contacted other supports for them.

Half of participants were given a reason by police for not arresting the abuser. These reasons mostly indicated poor police approaches to and understandings of family violence and sexual violence, including: victim blaming and/or not believing victim-survivors, or choosing not to pursue arrest based on police perceptions of an unlikely prosecution.

### **Rates of helpful actions from police were low**

All participants reported low rates of helping actions, but this was significantly worse for trans and non-binary and disabled people. Police helpful actions included acting promptly, removing and arresting the abuser, following up by issuing Police Safety orders, enforcing no contact bail conditions or keeping the abuser in custody and returning children to their mother's care.

Participants described helpful police behaviour such as taking concrete action in response to the violence and abuse, providing follow up information, helping them understand their experience or know when it was safe to return home.

Some participants said police officers showed compassion, understanding about family and sexual violence and were supportive or provided practical support. Participants often mentioned that more experienced police seemed to understand their context better, and provide more respectful responses.

*The police officer came to my house stayed for over 2 hours carefully and respectfully listening and immediately actioned a number of things to investigate. **Asian straight woman***

*I was left to decide whether i wanted to name the offender and was explained my options. **Pākehā bisexual woman***

### **Rates of harmful responses from police were high**

Unfortunately, participants described high levels of a range of harmful responses and behaviours from police. Many regretted calling police because police had taken little or no action, and the police response was harmful to the victim-survivor, meaning they no longer trusted the police to protect them.

Survey participants reported poor police practice which demonstrated a lack of understanding, skill and specialisation in responding safely and appropriately to victim-survivors.

Less than half of women in the Backbone sample and sexuality diverse women, and less than a quarter of trans and non-binary people, said police took the violence and abuse seriously.

Close to a quarter of women participants but just one in eight trans and non-binary people said police understood family and sexual violence.

Overall, half of participants said police minimised the violence and abuse and 30% said police took the side of the abuser.

Only about a half of sexuality diverse women and women in the Backbone sample, and a third of trans and non-binary people said the police believed them.

2. **Non-Familial Sexual Violence (NFSV)** relates to sexual violence/abuse perpetrated by someone who is not an intimate partner, an ex-partner, or a member of someone's family or whānau. **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)** relates to partner violence and abuse and **Family violence (FV)** relates to violence and abuse perpetrated by family or whānau member/s (sibling, parent, extended whānau).

Some participants said the action police took was negative for them including coming much later than they were needed (particularly sexuality diverse women and trans and non-binary people), being treated as if they were the violent one or being arrested themselves and some women had their children removed.

**Trans and non-binary people were more likely to be treated as the one who was violent (15%), given a warning (9%) or arrested (6%) than other victim-survivors.**



*At the time I was a minor. They came but the perpetrator had already left so they were like meh. **Pākehā bisexual woman***

*He [the police officer] really didn't care at all was acting like it wasn't his problem. **Wahine Māori (straight)***

*They reduced his charges....and they didn't charge him for the damage he done to [property]. They refused me a protection order. They told ME to "calm down and stop being hysterical," after he tried to [seriously injure me]. He knew the system, he gloated when he breached the safety order that his charges got lowered, and I had to pretend to be ok with that. **Pākehā pansexual non-binary person***

*My ex was a [professional] they believed whatever he said...they didn't fully investigate, just took him at face value. **Pākehā straight woman***

*I was at fault because the abuse had happened at his house. **Pākehā pansexual woman***

*I was living somewhere that didn't have 24 hour police service so they take a long time to get there. **Another ethnicity straight woman***

*They questioned my actions my mental health and left me feeling unsafe... It was horrendous. I was shaking and incoherent by the end I asked for help but they just left. **Another ethnicity, bisexual woman***

## Police treatment of victim-survivors

### **Victim-survivors are treated differently depending on who they are**

Overall, women participants were more likely to say police treated them well than poorly. However, trans and non-binary people, wāhine Māori and disabled people were far more likely to say the police treated them very poorly and far less likely to say police used helpful behaviours.

Trans and non-binary participants were three times as likely to say police made fun of them than sexuality diverse women and women in the Backbone sample.

Disabled women in the Backbone sample were much less likely to say police had put their safety first or connected them with other support services.

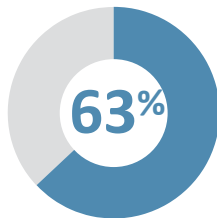
Wāhine Māori in the Backbone sample were less likely than non-Māori participants to say the police listened to them and treated them with respect and dignity.

Disabled participants in the HTRK sample were much less likely to say police treated them with respect and dignity or took the violence and abuse seriously.

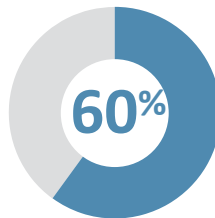
Disabled participants were three times more likely to be accused of being mentally unwell by police than non-disabled participants.

Participants in both samples who experienced NFSV gave lower average ratings of police treatment.

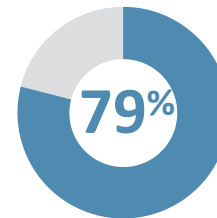
## Most victim-survivors experienced bias or mistreatment from police



of women in Backbone sample



of sexuality diverse women



of trans and non-binary people

More than one third of trans and non-binary victim-survivors said they had been misgendered (38%) and 35% percent said they had been treated without respect because they were trans or non-binary.

A fifth of trans and non-binary people (21%) said they had been treated without respect because of their sexual identity.

Some participants said police disrespected them, accused them of being mentally unwell and made fun of them. Trans and non-binary victim-survivors reported the highest rates of these behaviours.

Victim-survivors in both samples who said they were racially profiled, experienced the use of racist language or racist attitudes or said police ignored or failed to understand their ethnicity and culture were overwhelmingly Māori and Pasifika people.

Participants described police treating victim-survivors poorly by accusing them of making up the allegations to get back at their ex-partner, being told to stop calling police, being rude, humiliating the victim-survivor and being insensitive to children present. These behaviours left victim-survivors feeling distressed and traumatised.

Disabled participants in both samples reported much higher proportions of most discriminating practices from police than non-disabled participants.

Participants who experienced NFSV in both samples were more likely than those who experienced IPV/FV to say police used many of the harmful behaviours.

About one in four women and half of trans and non-binary people said they experienced mistreatment from police because they were victim-survivors, and some said the poor police response was because they had called police numerous times in the past.

About one in five women and half of trans and non-binary people said they were mistreated because of their gender.

Just under one quarter of trans and non-binary participants and just over one in ten women said they were treated badly by the police because of their financial or social status.

Many disabled participants were treated poorly by police due to their disability or illness and were far more likely to say they were mistreated because of how they look than non-disabled participants.

One third of trans and non-binary people, one in ten sexuality diverse women and 7% of women in the Backbone sample said the police mistreated them because of how they looked.

*I shake uncontrollably when scared or nervous so they thought I was just over reacting. **Wahine Māori (straight)***

*Minimised my experience. Told me he was a good guy who raped me. Made sexist comments when I asked for a female officer. **Another ethnicity bisexual woman***

“ Initially misgendered me until I corrected them. **Pākehā pansexual trans man**

They asked me if it was so bad why had I stayed so long with my husband... I was so traumatised by the way police dealt with me and minimised me I don't think I will ever trust them again. **Another ethnicity straight woman**

Spoke loudly on the phone outside my flat where my neighbors could hear and gave out personal details of my relationship and health problems. **Pākehā pansexual woman**

I'm an educated professional and was often mocked that I should know better than be a victim of domestic violence!!! Such an unhelpful ignorant attitude which was/is very debilitating. **Pasifika straight woman**

The police officer who took me to the station for interview lied to me about what had been done with my partner and didn't tell me he'd been arrested until I was taken home, several hours later. **Pākehā bisexual woman**

One officer was amazing, a woman and the other did not believe me as he only spoke to the abuser. **Pākehā straight woman**

They should have provided a private space for me to talk to them. It was humiliating doing the statement in front of strangers in a police foyer. I did not have the courage to ask for a private area. **Māori Takatāpui person**

## Outcomes of police involvement

### Some victim-survivors were safer

Close to four in ten women in the Backbone sample (39%) and sexuality diverse women (37%), but only 15% of trans and non-binary people, said police involvement made them a little or a lot safer. Police made victim-survivors safer by:

Listening to and believing them	Acting swiftly
Providing information and referral to support services	Women officers trained in domestic violence being present
Arresting, charging, removing, catching, or issuing a Police Safety Order against the abuser	Ensuring their safety and that of their children

“ I felt like they truly believed me and that I was taken seriously. I didn't feel judged. **Māori bisexual woman**

He was locked up this time, a second breach of protection order and held in custody...thank God as that week gave him enough time in the cells to deescalate...[during his time in the cells] he realised he was in the wrong so it saved my life. **Wahine Māori (straight)**

Making my ex partner leave me alone for 48 hours (wasn't long enough but it was a start) and they couldn't be at my house. having this space from them gave me the strength/power/courage to end the relationship. **Pākehā bisexual trans man**



“Immediately located and removed her to [a significant distance away]. **Pākehā lesbian woman**

They asked my ex, the abuser to leave. They issued a Police Safety Order until I could get a Protection Order put on him. Although they didn't arrest him, they told him he could not come back to the property. He ignored their warnings, but initially for a week or so after he was first removed, my children and I were finally safe in our own home. **Pākehā straight woman**

They came with me into the house and helped me pack my things while they talked to my [family member]. They got me in touch with Womens refuge and they were able to find counseling options for me. Womens Refuge would call me and ask me how I was going every week and if I needed further help. **Māori pansexual woman**

### But many victim-survivors were less safe

Of great concern was that police involvement made many victim-survivors less safe, especially trans and non-binary people, wāhine Māori and disabled participants. One in four women in the Backbone sample, 29% of sexuality diverse women and 51% of trans and non-binary people said police involvement made them less safe.

Victim-survivors described police responses that supported the abuser and resulted in violence and abuse escalating as the abuser saw they could get away with using violence and/or retaliated for police involvement.

Māori participants in the Backbone sample were slightly more likely than tauwiwi to say police involvement had made them less safe.

Disabled participants in both samples were more likely to say they were made less safe by police.

For many participants this was a result of police failing to take action in response to the violence and abuse including failing to arrest, prosecute, respond to breaches of orders, or discouraging victim-survivors from making a statement. Failures of an effective police response led to victim-survivors being unsafe, traumatised and feeling hopeless and some described being treated as the wrongdoer, not being able to see their children or having to leave their homes. Many participants described treatment by police that felt like an extension of tactics the abuser used including intimidation and harassment, belittling, abuse, accusing them of lying about the abuse, making the victim-survivor out to be the criminal, minimising the violence, blaming the victim-survivor or treating them with disrespect.

“By effectively preventing me from leaving for a safer place (I had one to go to, I just couldn't get there... They have also made me less safe in the past by various kinds of transmisogynistic discrimination, misgendering, deadnaming etc – I don't know if they did that this time or not...but their very involvement also makes me less safe. **Pākehā lesbian trans woman**

My ex continued to breach protection order. It was torture. Police kept saying its a family court matter and family court saying the police didn't see it as a breach as no report was made. **Wahine Māori (straight)**

They viewed my distressed mental health state and didn't believe me so I was issued with a PSO which my partner later used against me with litigation abuse. **Another ethnicity, bisexual woman**

They did nothing. I wasn't even referred to any support services, just told to call again if felt unsafe. I tried to file a report with police 3 times and each time was denied this right for protection. **Pākehā straight woman**

I was perceived as the offender when this was not the reality of the nuanced situation. I was pressured to sign a statement that did not accurately reflect what I communicated and threatened that I would “spend the night in the cells” if I did not sign. **Pākehā lesbian woman**

“Hearing the police phrase the reason for the case being closed in such a way (“consent was given”/“you consented”) made my mental health plummet. I completely lost all my faith in the police after this. I cannot imagine a scenario where I would ever make another report, knowing how horrific the experience was. I would like to be able to encourage others to report their own assaults, but doing so feels almost irresponsible now. **Another ethnicity, trans man**

I feel less safe because now my abuser knows that even when the Police show up they will still not do anything or choose to believe him over me. I feel so hopeless now because I have no other way to turn and he knows it. **Another ethnicity, straight woman**

### Many children were not safer after police involvement

Survey participants in both samples were far more likely to say police involvement made no difference to their children’s safety or their children were made less safe after police involvement.

Māori sexuality diverse and/or trans and non-binary people were more likely to say police involvement made their children less safe than tauwiwi participants.

Victim-survivors said that when police take no action, children are made less safe because:



“My children no longer have any trust in the police system. One child [said if they were] ever in trouble again [they] would call [a different service] cause they would actually show up. **Pākehā straight woman**

They sure know not to turn to the cops. **Māori pansexual non-binary person**

My [child] believes that the police did not believe [them] and/or did not care about [their] safety. [They] would never contact police again, even in an emergency. **Another ethnicity, straight woman**

My children were terrified of him and still had to go to his house because of a parenting order. **Pasifika bisexual woman**

By not believing me and blaming me for maliciously making up the sexual abuse allegations, they (along with Oranga Tamariki and the Family Court) placed my children back with the perpetrator (their father) without any further investigation of the risk that he posed to them. **Another ethnicity, straight woman**

When the altercation was brought up in a parenting order dispute, the fact that the police had found no major issues was used as reasoning for why supervised visits and a stopping violence programme were not necessary. **Māori bisexual woman**

**But sometimes police action increased children's safety**

**The safety of an adult victim-survivor is directly connected to the subsequent safety of their children**

When children had positive interactions with police (calm, reassuring, friendly and kind communication, validating the child's experiences, keeping the children informed and taking action to remove the abuser), children were more likely to trust police and have confidence in their ability to keep them safe.

When police work with other agencies like Oranga Tamariki or the Family Court to promote non-contact with the abuser, children are made safer.

Many victim-survivors with children said that police action that resulted in no contact between the children and the abuser made the children (and the participant) much safer. Actions that stopped contact included:

<b>Issuing Trespass Orders</b>	<b>Sentencing the abuser to prison</b>
<b>Issuing Police Safety Orders which included the children</b>	<b>Returning the child/ren to the participant</b>
<b>Enforcing non-association bail conditions following arrest</b>	<b>Removing the abuser from the property</b>
<b>Arresting and holding the abuser in custody</b>	<b>Getting the victim-survivor and the children out of the house safely</b>

Māori women in the Backbone sample were more likely than tauwiwi women to say police involvement made their children a lot safer.

“ *When the childrens father is not around, we are all a lot safer. **Pākehā straight woman***

*By issuing a Safety Order and removing the abuser when he came back. **Māori bisexual woman***

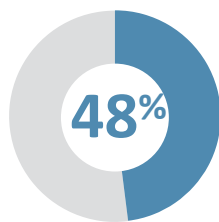
*By arresting him and refused bail my child knew he wouldn't just show up and felt safer for me and them. **Another ethnicity, straight woman***

*They were put on the safety order. In this case it was enough to make him stay away. I was really scared though because he was unstable and I thought I was less safe at the time. But it did work. **Pākehā bisexual woman***

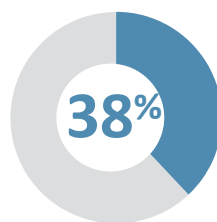
### **Most victim-survivors said the police response made the abuser more abusive**

Most participants said police involvement had not disrupted the abusive behaviour. Many participants said that because police took no action towards the abuser, nothing changed. Abusers were emboldened by police involvement, putting the victim-survivor in greater danger and in some cases reducing support from people around them.

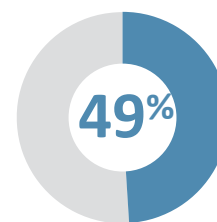
#### **Involving the police showed the abuser they could get away with using violence or abuse:**



**of women in Backbone sample**



**of sexuality diverse women**



**of trans and non-binary people**

In about a third of cases in both samples, abusers used police involvement to further harm the victim-survivor by taking revenge on them for contacting police or making out to police the victim-survivor was abusive/violent and presenting themselves as the victim, particularly for women in the Backbone sample.

One fifth of women and more than a quarter of trans and non-binary people said the abuser felt supported by the police and some said the abuser had more information about the victim-survivor because of police involvement.

Nearly one in three trans and non-binary people, 19% of sexuality diverse women and 16% of women in the Backbone sample said their friends/family/whānau/community felt sorry for the abuser as a result of police involvement and supported them and not the victim-survivor.

### **But for a small minority, the police response stopped the abuse**

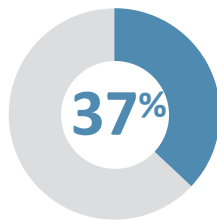
A small number of participants said that police involvement had resulted in the abuse stopping or changing. Some of these victim-survivors explained that when police finally arrested the abuser after previous call outs and taking no action, the abuse stopped.

Some participants in both samples said that while the physical assaults had stopped after police involvement, the abuser was using other ways to continue to abuse them – stalking, threatening, and using the courts.

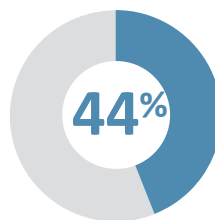
Many sexuality diverse and trans and non-binary participants said they did not know what the impact had been on their abuser because they had not been kept informed by police.

## Victim-survivors were more likely to say the police response made things worse

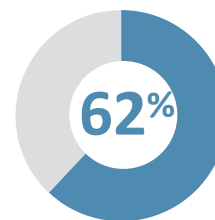
### Police contact made things worse



of women in Backbone sample



of sexuality diverse women



of trans and non-binary people

Over half of Backbone participants (58%), two-thirds of sexuality diverse women (67%) and nearly all trans and non-binary people (90%) who said police involvement had made things worse for them, said they were more frightened after contact with the police.

A significant number, particularly trans and non-binary people, were punished or banished by their friends/family/whānau/community and some were made less safe as their information was shared with the wider community or the abuser.

Over a quarter of women in the Backbone sample, close to one third of sexuality diverse women and 42% of trans and non-binary people who said things got worse for them after police involvement, were threatened or harmed by associates of the abuser.

Some participants were punished because of police involvement via organisations that are part of a wider system response to family and sexual violence. Many participants said Family Court professionals now saw them as a troublemaker/making up the abuse/seeking revenge as a result of police involvement. Some said a notification was made to Oranga Tamariki about their children and some said they lost access to their children.

Participants in both samples said they were arrested by police; some lost housing or income support and a small percentage said their immigration/visa status is now under threat.

One third of trans and non-binary people also reported being “outed” as trans or non-binary without their consent and one in five had their sexuality “outed” without their consent.

Participants described examples of poor police practice including breaching their privacy, having a poor understanding of family violence dynamics, believing the abuser over them, minimising the violence and abuse, producing poor reports that impacted negatively on other court proceedings, and waiting to respond to assaults until they were very serious.

About a third of women participants in both samples but just 20% of trans and non-binary people said the police had made things better for them.

“ Losing custody of your child for no safety reason or safety concerns except that you have apparently raised false allegations of sexual abuse is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever experienced. **Pākehā bisexual woman**

It didn’t put a stop to the abuse and it made my abuser realise he had all the power and control and the police believed him and not me. **Asian straight woman**

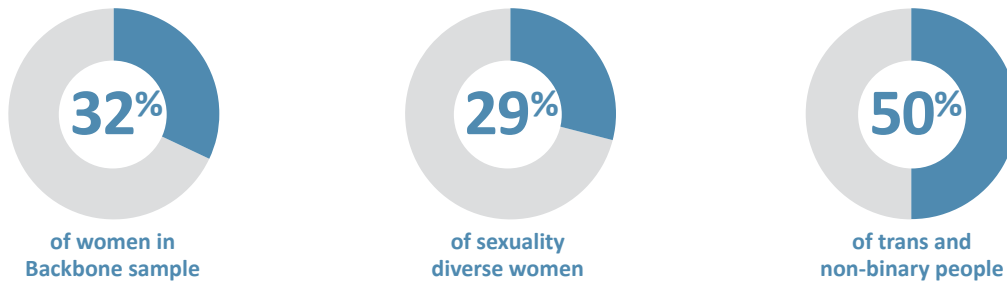
It made clear to my abuser that they could be seen as the victim. **Māori bisexual woman**

I have a Protection Order but am too scared to use it now due to the police response. **Pākehā straight woman**

I was diagnosed with PTSD and a panic disorder from the experience of reporting to police. I am deeply traumatised by police bc of how they dismissed my assault. **Māori lesbian woman**

## Many children no longer trust police to keep them safe

### Police contact made things worse for children



Participants described examples of police ignoring children's accounts of violence and abuse, not recording the violence correctly and making mistakes which had long lasting impacts in terms of how other agencies responded to children and the victim-survivor parent and placed children in greater danger while in the abuser's care.

Participants described a lengthy list of negative impacts on their children from poor police responses including children suffering from mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, self-doubt, self-harming behaviour and suicide attempts and in some cases, children learned that the behaviour of the abuser was OK and acceptable.

Participants said many of their children felt unprotected and continued to live in fear because of police inaction, and some children were now frightened of the police and the world in general.

A small number of participants in the Backbone sample described experiences of the abuser using police to destroy their relationship with their children.

Over a third of women in the Backbone sample, a quarter of sexuality diverse women and 17% of trans and non-binary people said police involvement left things about the same for their children.

“ It placed them in the same situation as me. Living in complete and utter fear. We never left the house. **Wahine Māori (straight)**

The child lost all access to me. The police who attended assisted in education of the abuser of how to hide child abuse more effectively. **Pākehā trans woman**

Children's names were mixed up to the different incidents. This led to wrong information going to agencies. **Pasifika straight woman**

He ranted and raved at the kids, lectured them for hours on what a bad person I am. They came home traumatised every single time. **Pasifika bisexual woman**

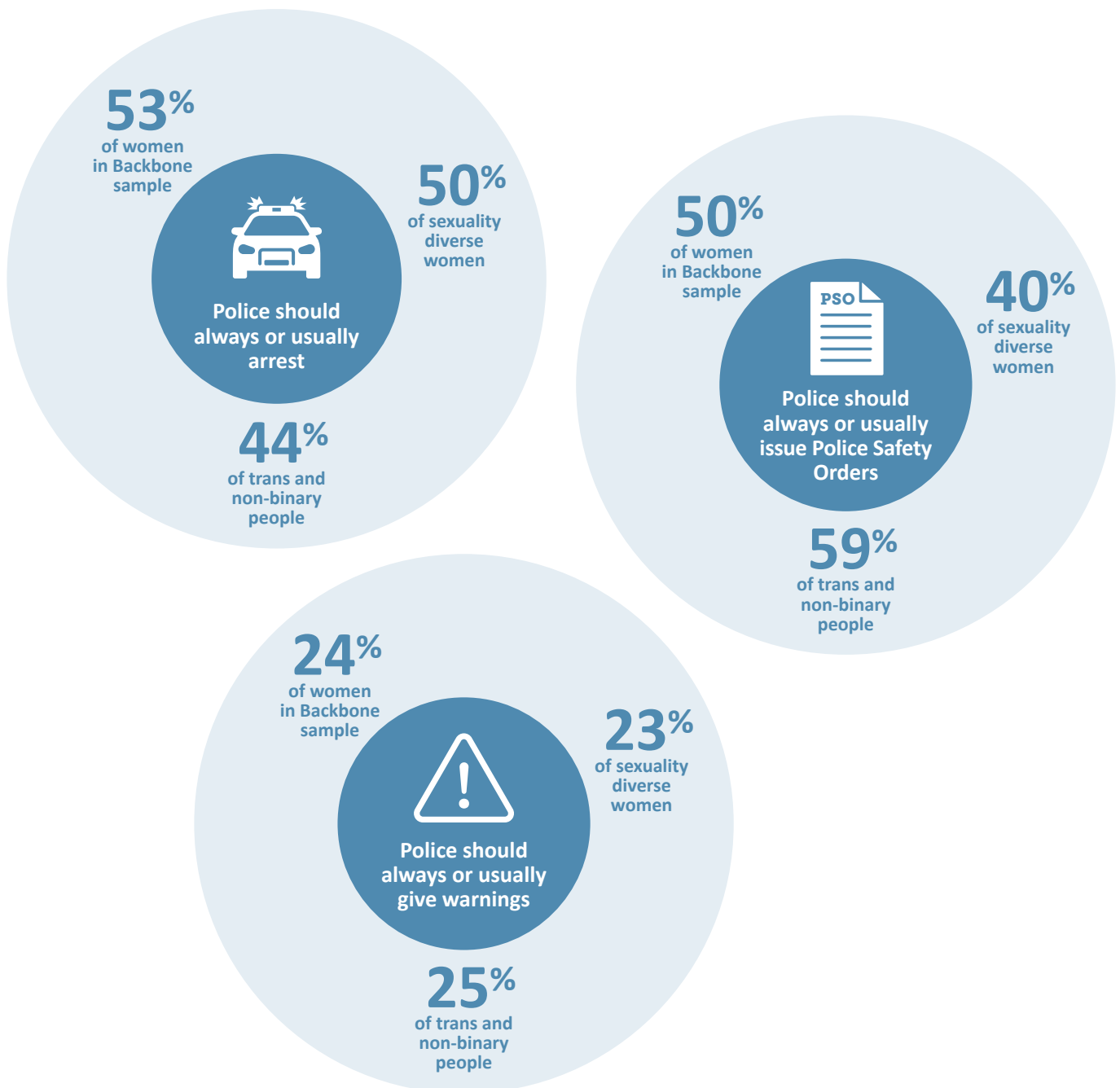
My children used to trust the Police and believed that they were to help you when in trouble. They certainly don't believe that now, after our experiences. **Pākehā straight woman**

The fact that no criminal charges were laid & that our community found out caused severe anxiety in my children. My eldest suffered PTSD & wanted to kill [themselves]. [They were] afraid to leave the house, even [their] room, stopped attending school, lost friends etc. **Māori bisexual woman**

## Practical improvements to the NZ Police response

### **Victim-survivors strongly support police statutory actions**

Participants indicated strong support for the use of arrests and Police Safety Orders and to a lesser extent the use of warnings.



There were some differences between Māori and non-Māori victim-survivors' views about the use of arrest. Māori victim-survivors were more likely to say arrest should always be used by police than never. When compared with tauīwi victim-survivors, Māori were more likely to say arrest should never be used and less likely to say arrest should always be used.

### ***Victim-survivors want police best practice***

Victim-survivors supported the following best practice responses for police when responding to family and sexual violence:

Take family and sexual violence seriously	Believe victim-survivors
Put victim-survivor safety at the centre of everything they do	Understand that psychological harm is violence
Understand the impact of the violence or abuse on victim-survivors	Understand family and sexual violence and the tactics of people who use violence and abuse
Understand that victim-survivors cannot always do the things police want them to do because that might make them less safe	Understand and respond to specific needs of victim-survivors relating to their culture, religion, disability, sexuality and gender

### ***Victim-survivors want police to serve their needs***

About three-quarters of all victim-survivors want the police to come when they are needed.

**85%** of sexuality diverse women, and nearly **three-quarters** of women in the Backbone sample and trans and non-binary people want the option of a woman police officer.

**Over two-thirds** of all victim-survivors in the HTRK sample and **over half** in the Backbone sample want to see more specialist Police Liaison Officers with expertise in cultural, sexuality, disability and other needs.

**Two-thirds** of trans and non-binary participants (**63%**), half of sexuality diverse women (**48%**), and a third of Backbone participants (**32%**) want to be provided with more information about Diversity Liaison Officers (DLOs).

Just **over a third** of women in the Backbone sample (**36%**) want more police available where they live; these women were much more likely to be living in rural or small urban areas than major cities.



**Two thirds** of trans and non-binary participants, **half** of sexuality diverse women and **a quarter** of women in the Backbone sample want to be sure that police will not treat the person harming them badly because of their sexuality.

**A third** of participants in the Backbone sample, **60%** of trans and non-binary victim-survivors and **56%** of sexuality diverse women want police to have interpreters (including New Zealand Sign Language) easily available.

**More than half** of trans and non-binary victim-survivors (**59%**) and sexuality diverse women (**52%**) and **35%** of women in the Backbone sample want police who can speak te reo Māori if requested, including people who interview children after violence and abuse. In the Backbone sample, Māori wāhine were far more likely than tauwi women to select this option.

More than two thirds of women in the Backbone sample and sexuality diverse women and three quarters of trans and non-binary people want clear information about what will happen if they contact police for help in the future.

### ***Victim-survivors want independent advocates***

Most victim-survivors want the police to connect them, **with consent**, to support services in their area.

Nearly three quarters of the Backbone sample (72%) and sexuality diverse women (73%) and just over two-thirds of trans and non-binary victim-survivors (69%) want to have an independent advocate to support them with the police.

Three quarters of sexuality diverse women (75%), two thirds of the Backbone sample (64%) and 70% of trans and non-binary people want somewhere to go to get help from police that is not a police station.

Participants want an alternative place that is safe, welcoming and staffed by specialist workers, but allows them to seek help without drawing attention to themselves. They suggested neutral options such as healthcare settings, supermarkets, community organisations or centres, marae or phone/text online options. Rainbow community groups were not a popular option for sexuality diverse women or trans and non-binary people, probably because they are too identifying.

### ***Victim-survivors want practical support from the police***

About two-thirds of all victim-survivors who had police contact want the police to provide access to a safe place to stay.

About two thirds of all participants want tools and services to identify and remove stalking apps or devices.

Over half of participants want the police to provide information about police involvement to the Family Court.

Nearly half of sexuality diverse women (45%) and over a third of other participants wanted the practical support of access to a phone or other device so they can contact the police if they need to.

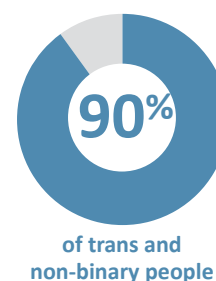
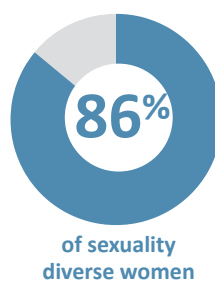
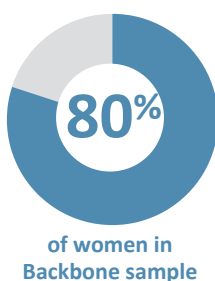
Victim-survivors suggested additional practical actions, tools and services police could use to improve their response to family and sexual violence. Many suggestions focussed on victim-survivor safety, physical and emotional wellbeing and trauma and violence informed practice.

Believe victim-survivors, take help-seeking seriously and validate victim-survivor experiences	Provide information about process in an accurate, easily understandable and timely way
Trauma and violence informed practices, including improved soft skills, demonstrating respect and listening are all likely to create better experiences for victim-survivors	Build evidence of abuse and support victim-survivors to report abuse over time
Take the needs of children seriously	Develop understandings of different community needs
Provide tools to help victim-survivors to communicate their needs to the police quickly and confidentially	Provide specialist training to police to enhance their knowledge of family and sexual violence and responding to people with diverse backgrounds
Take a multidisciplinary approach in which advocates and support people to work alongside the police	Improve record keeping
Prioritise whānau involvement and support alternative justice models as determined by victim-survivors	Improve specific roles within police to respond more safely to victim-survivors
Provide appropriate help to abusers to change their behaviour – but not at the cost of victim-survivor safety	Have dedicated specialist family and sexual violence police teams
Sexual and family violence are criminal acts not 'family court matters' – take them seriously	Improve internal police communication

### **Victim-survivors want control of information sharing**

The overwhelming majority of participants say consent for information sharing must be sought by police. However, around half of participants said police did not tell them their information would be shared.

#### **Police should gain consent before sharing information with others**



## Improving the knowledge base

### Police need better understanding of family and sexual violence

Victim-survivors need police to know how to respond safely to victim-survivors, how to understand abusers and their behaviour, how to improve their own practice and the importance of getting the response right. Victim-survivors identified an urgent need for specialist training on family and sexual violence for NZ Police to:

Recognise signs of violence and abuse, the dynamics and tactics abusers use, particularly psychological/emotional abuse, coercive control, online abuse and stalking and financial abuse.	Understand the barriers to safety including that leaving is dangerous and difficult.
Understand that abusers are manipulative. They may present well to police, be convincing and charming and not 'look like a typical abuser,' but a charming exterior often hides violence, and friends and family may help hide abuse.	Take a trauma and violence informed approach of listening to understand the context, including the impacts of the violence and abuse, respond without judgement, with sensitivity, empathy and compassion, always treat them with respect and dignity and show genuine concern.
Learn how to take a victim-survivor led approach to family and sexual violence. This requires police to trust that victim-survivors are telling the truth, believe them and understand and accept that victim-survivors know the abuser best and are experts at ascertaining the danger they are in.	Prioritise the safety of victim-survivors and children by listening to what victim-survivors and their family say they need to be safe, and ensuring this drives police practice.
	Act swiftly when victim-survivors call for help.

“When I rang to check if the protection order had been issued yet. The person cheerfully said yes, you are safe now. When that was the unsafest time for me. Most likely time he was going to do something big.  
**Pākehā bisexual woman**

*Police need to know that Family and Sexual violence is never a single act in a single instance on a single occasion... it is an infinite number of looks, glances, expressions, movements, sighs, tuts, silences, shifts in body language, a noise, being seen to be too happy, too sad, too attractive, too unattractive, too shy, too gregarious along with hundreds of other completely random things that set off that feeling of fear and impending doom that means it's going to happen and you have no idea when it will happen or when it will end but you know that when it does end, you'll promise yourself that it will never happen again because you'll be better. It never crosses your mind that his abuse isn't because of who you are, it's because of who he is. **Another ethnicity, straight woman***

*People respond to trauma differently. I believe that one of the reasons I was not fully believed was because I seemed to lack emotion when I gave my account. That is a trauma response ...and should not have been used against me to question my credibility. **Another ethnicity, queer trans man***

*It is easy for police to tell women to "leave" when they have not experienced what it's like to be stuck in the cycle, especially if it's generational. **Wahine Māori (straight)***

### **Police racism is a significant barrier for victim-survivors**

Māori participants reported that current police responses fail to understand or recognise historic and ongoing colonisation, leading to intergenerational trauma and related struggles. Māori, Pasifika and other non-Pākehā victim-survivors said police can improve their cultural awareness and responsiveness in the following ways:

Be aware of assumptions and judgements that are racist – including racism blinding police to those causing harm.	Do not assume they have safe places to go.
Be patient, kind and considerate when responding to people with language barriers or who come from diverse cultures. Listen to victim-survivors and give them time to understand the police process and the law.	Provide training for all police staff on cultural and religious practices, values, beliefs about and experiences of violence and abuse and barriers to reporting for victim-survivors. This needs to be informed by those working in Māori, Pasifika and ethnically diverse communities. Training must also address racism.
Demonstrate an understanding and respect for victim-survivors of all cultures and ethnicities, by being aware of and responsive to cultural differences including language barriers.	Have culturally appropriate support people or advocates available to safeguard police practices towards Māori, Pasifika and ethnic peopl.
Understand the morals, values and practices of diverse cultures.	Have more available interpreters to assist police practice.

“ Systematic racism for Māori/Pasifika is real. **Wahine Māori (straight)**

*Racism prevents victims going to the police if their abusive family member is non white because most victims care about this person and don't want to see them treated in a racist manner. They just want the abuse to stop. **Another ethnicity, lesbian woman***

*Don't judge someone because they've got a hood on and they're brown. **Pasifika straight woman***

*Be aware of cultural differences and possibly a language barrier, if something isn't 100% clear double check if they understood the statement correctly. **Another ethnicity, bisexual woman***

Specialist ethnic service, Shama, offered additional insights from their social work team, about the specific barriers for ethnic, migrant and refugee victim-survivors. Those barriers include:

<p>Ethnic people may have a fear of authority based on their previous experiences and therefore they may be reluctant to call police.</p>	<p>For many ethnic people involving police risks their immigration status, and most particularly if they are reliant on the abuser for their residency status. This means calling police might impact on the victim-survivor's ability to stay in New Zealand, or result in deportation.</p>
<p>Some people may have had poor interactions with police in New Zealand and encountered racism or prejudgments because of their culture which may reinforce negative views about police.</p>	<p>Some victim-survivors may be scared that if they call police for help the issue will get escalated and they will have no control over the information that is shared following the callout.</p>
<p>Ethnic people understand that they will be asked a lot of questions if they contact the police and if they struggle with English and find it difficult to respond to verbal questioning or written questions. Sometimes police will not have an interpreter available.</p>	<p>Victim-survivors from ethnic populations may have a lack of confidence that calling police will improve anything for them and/or their children, and fear it may make things worse.</p>
<p>It can be difficult for victim-survivors to get to police stations due to having to rely on buses (cost and timetables) and get childcare. There can be many little things that make it difficult to contact police.</p>	

### Victim-survivors want better responses to children

Victim-survivors suggest police improve their response to children in the following ways:

<p>Believe children.</p>	<p>Have multidisciplinary teams to meet child safety.</p>
<p>Create safe environments for children and take a trauma informed approach.</p>	<p>Provide education at schools about grooming and red flags.</p>
<p>Prioritise the voice of the child.</p>	<p>Remove the abuser and provide accommodation for the abuser so children don't have to leave their home.</p>
<p>Have specialist training in child safety.</p>	

“ Believe them, have a specialist family/sexual violence child worker available to support the child who the child can build a relationship with before making statements if they want. **Pākehā bisexual woman**

Make sure they are in a comfortable environment, use toys dolls or stuffed animals, don't hound the children or go straight in to questioning, build friendships and trust. Don't doubt the kids or say [they said] something they don't mean. **Wahine Māori (straight)**

Stop segregating them, or sending them away with other family etc, don't put your hands near your taser anywhere near the children, do not touch the children, do not make the children leave their home if they don't want to. **Pākehā pansexual non-binary person**

Have the parent who is not the abuser be allowed in the interview so the child can relax and give information. **Pākehā straight woman**

### **Takatāpui, trans and non-binary people need respect for who they are**

The near-universal theme from Takatāpui, trans and non-binary victim-survivors was that they wanted to see NZ Police demonstrate respect for them. At its most basic, this means avoiding derogatory terms of any kind.

Takatāpui, trans and non-binary victim-survivors recommended police:

Use people's correct gender, names and pronouns.	Training should be made available for ordinary police as well as Diversity Liaison Officers.
Access specialist training, including in showing respect for gender journeys and addressing the dynamics of violence towards Takatāpui and Rainbow people, including difficulties with help-seeking due to existing heteronormative and cisnormative understandings of violence.	Have more police from Takatāpui and Rainbow communities.
	Ensure referrals to support organisations were to organisations with specialist knowledge of violence dynamics inside Takatāpui and Rainbow communities.

“ If they could just not call me a faggot for a moment that would be cool. **Māori pansexual non-binary person**

*Use our preferred pronouns, NEVER out us, ALWAYS ASK, Never assume gender, Don't judge us at all, not on anything as that's bias and creates a huge level of mistrust, Don't criticise what we look like, how we dress/present etc, Listen to us and educate yourselves. **Pākehā pansexual non-binary person***

*They need to know and understand that our given name may not match our legal name. To really listen and pay attention when we call about a trans person who's name doesn't match because I don't like misgendering/deadnaming them either and I know that if the police misgender/deadname the person who is hurting me they'll probably get even more angry and stuff. **Another ethnicity, bisexual trans man***

*The police need to undergo thorough training, and to show our community to real action that they have understood and are committed to changing. Irrelevant questions regarding ones gender, medical transition (or lack thereof), absolutely cannot take place. Neither can casual misgendering (especially not when the identify of the victim has been clearly established). Police need to understand that words have immense power, especially when coming from someone of authority (and the people who are meant to protect us). **Another ethnicity, queer trans man***

*There is a history of police abuse towards our community and that's not going to disappear overnight. Police need to be educated in this history to understand it. **Pākehā trans man***

*Quite a few queer people are difficult to communicate with, and extremely idiosyncratic. Police need to understand this is not a crime in itself! Probably having more queer people in the police force would assist, and making sure those people are a variety of personalities. **Māori pansexual non-binary person***

### **Sexuality diverse people want trained police who do not make assumptions**

The overwhelming theme from victim-survivors who were not straight was a desire to be treated as well as anyone else – while acknowledging this required considerable shifts in practice and understanding of family and sexual violence in Takatāpui and Rainbow communities. Sexuality diverse victim-survivors asked the police to:

Demonstrate respect.	Have more police from Takatāpui and Rainbow communities.
Make no assumptions about people's gender or sexuality.	
Provide training so police have a better understanding and a kinder approach to Takatāpui and Rainbow victim-survivors, including for less well-known Rainbow identities.	Recognise internal dynamics in Takatāpui and Rainbow communities that may be part of partner and sexual violence.
Provide training to support police to be comfortable talking to sexuality diverse victim-survivors and to recognise specific forms abuse may take inside Rainbow relationships – rather than only same-sex relationships.	Understand that violence in Rainbow relationships is serious. Access specialist training which addresses dynamics of violence towards Takatāpui and Rainbow people, including difficulties with help-seeking due to existing heteronormative and cisnormative understandings of violence.



*Treat us with no less respect or understanding than you would someone who is straight. Understand that our sexual experiences, and culture, differs in many ways, but are also similar in many ways. Familiarise yourselves with queer sexual behaviour, in a non-judgemental way. Learn our lingo, so we don't have to explain it to you during some of the most painful and vulnerable conversations we will ever have in our lifetimes. **Another ethnicity, queer trans man***

*Don't assume my genitalia. Don't assume the nature of the sexual assault and allow me to explain how and what happened without words being put into my mouth. It will take time. **Pākehā bisexual non-binary person***

*Don't assume bisexual people are promiscuous. Or take people making complaints less seriously if they are. Also remember that offenders acting against the opposite gender aren't necessarily straight either. People could attack anyone. Regardless of gender/sexuality. Violence isn't always about attraction. also, people hurt people. Not man vs woman. Straight vs gay etc. **Pākehā bisexual non-binary person***

*Acknowledge that any demographic of people has people who commit domestic violence. It is not just a straight or queer issue. Be aware of heterosexual couples containing a queer (LGBTQ) person. Some abusers will use a victims queerness as a means of abuse. This can look like: – Threatening to out the queer person – Being homophobic/biphobic, ect to their partner. – Banning partners from being part of queer communities or events. Be aware of parents committing abuse against their Queer/LGBTQ children. – Physical and emotional abuse against their kids. – Conversion Therapy Practices – Parents banning their kids from attending LGBTQ groups Some parents will abuse their straight kids if they suspect them of being queer. Let those kids know that its not their fault, it is their parents fault for their intolerance towards others. **Māori pansexual woman***

## Disabled people want police to take a rights-based approach

The *mamae* (hurt) of disabled victim-survivors was exacerbated by general feelings of being misunderstood, ridiculed, and rushed by police when they tried to report violence or abuse. Disabled participants identified specific risks that are further exacerbated by family and sexual violence, and called for a rights-based approach that is respectful, considerate and recognises the particular needs of disabled people, including:

Specialist training about disabilities so police can better understand disabled victim-survivors particularly in relation to communication, overwhelm and responses to trauma and violence.	Comfort and safety should be of utmost importance when interviewing victim-survivors. Many disabled participants wanted more kindness, respect, consideration and understanding for their needs from the police.
Police should have a basic understanding of the different illnesses, disabilities, and specialised supports that disabled victim survivors in New Zealand may require.	Police need to provide better information about police processes and case status. Referral to other agencies for holistic support should be genuine help.
Police should provide access to paramedic or medical support if needed, and support/community workers with specific skills to ensure victim-survivor needs are understood and communicated to police.	Accessible spaces, private meeting rooms and communication choices should be provided.
Participants said diagnoses were used by abusers, and sometimes police, to discredit or harass victim-survivors. Several participants talked about police needing to challenge assumptions surrounding mental health to demonstrate respect.	Police processes must allow time accommodations with disabled victim-survivors, to facilitate more effective communication, and ultimately, evidence gathering. Feelings of being rushed often added to the anxiety and fear already present because of the abuse from the perpetrator.

“ I am on the autism spectrum though with mild behavioural symptoms compared to others I know. My insistence on detail can be overwhelming for people. My anger rather than victim tears in emotional situations has perhaps lent police to viewing me as the problem rather than a victim. **Pākehā bisexual woman**

I suffer from PTSD from the abuse I received. I may seem frantic, lost, cannot string my words together properly. I sometimes have a panic attack mid sentence. Every time I have spoken to a police officer this has happened and they all look at me like i am crazy, They need people trained to respond to the victims. **Pākehā straight woman**

Understand that disability stops people leaving abusive situations. That includes both mental and physical disabilities. And realise that having a disability affects people in far more complex and extensive ways than most realise. **Pākehā bisexual non-binary person**

If they can't help, have someone with them that can, like a mental health professional for example. **Māori bisexual woman**

More training on mental health and understanding that mental health challenges are often a result of trauma. because someone may be presenting with a mental health condition, does not mean they are at fault and/or lying. **Another ethnicity, straight woman**

Do not be judgemental and hold assumptions about a person's mental health. Everyone manages mental health differently, we are not all the same. **Māori non-binary person**

Mental health shouldn't discredit victims. My abuser used my bpd [bi-polar disorder] diagnosis [public status] to discredit me, and it worked. **Pākehā queer non-binary person**



“ Create systems that allow for neurodivergent people to give interviews and statements in their own way, without feeling like they are rushed or having words put into their mouths. **Another ethnicity, queer trans man**

Understanding and time. Time I understand they may not exactly have. I've had experience with police later on as I have PTSD and I found it difficult to talk or express myself clearly. **Māori bisexual woman**

Just how difficult practical tasks can be – it's all very well telling me to go to the police station and speak to someone but physically that's a major thing for me and I just can't practically do it. Also how an apparently small incident can have an overwhelming effect on the victim because of the trauma from the abuse which adds up over the years. **Another ethnicity, straight woman**

...be patient, know that when I'm struggling to communicate I can't regulate my tone. Also offer a meeting room so I don't have to stand at the front desk and try to talk through the plastic thing [the screen in front of the counter]. **Another ethnicity, bisexual trans man**

Patience, recognising that it takes time to get all the words out, recognising what a “meltdown”, or “overload” looks like. Don't touch people who are struggling, just don't. Respect our space. Don't bully us. Give us time. Don't act like we're wasting your time. **Pākehā bisexual woman**

## Structural changes inside police

Many participants shared serious structural concerns about the police, particularly related to historical and ongoing sexism and misogyny, colonisation, racism, ableism, and homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

Victim-survivors called for police to review their current policies and practice, create organisational cultural change and develop a genuine commitment to creating a response that holds victim-survivors at the centre. This included wanting to see family violence and sexual violence recognised as specialist areas. Victim-survivors suggested:

Police must accept that their current response is not working well. Victim-survivors urgently need police to reflect on their beliefs and practices and make the decision to improve the current response.

When victim-survivors are wrongly judged by police, future incidents may not be responded to or investigated, and people around the victim-survivor may not support them, which may increase danger.

Police responses can make all the difference. Victim-survivors see potential for improved police response by centering victim-survivor needs and experiences.

Some participants do not want police involved in responding to family and sexual violence in Takatāpui and Rainbow communities because the ongoing and historical discrimination from the police means the police system is too broken to respond safely.

Victim-survivors want police to accept the need for specialist police working in family and sexual violence, who are qualified and trained to work in these areas and recognise the intersections, and who have the personal commitment and determination to help keep victim-survivors safe.

Police responses to Māori, people of colour, women and Takatāpui and Rainbow people reflect unconscious bias of individual officers and therefore internal police culture and ways of working with other agencies must be improved.

Police need to centre the needs, safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors and children when responding to family and sexual violence. They can do this by treating victim-survivors well.

Many victim-survivors do not trust police and that hinders the ability and confidence of victim-survivors to speak out about violence and abuse.

Victim-survivors contact the police as a last resort so when they are contacted victim-survivors want thorough investigations to take place.

## Recommendations

Survey participants made a variety of practical suggestions for changes they believe would improve police responses to victim-survivors, children and perpetrators of family violence and sexual violence, which have been incorporated into our recommended police actions.

### Honour the need for change

<p><b>To recognise the current police response and culture is not working for victim-survivors but an improved police response could make a substantial difference to victim-survivor safety and prevent further violence and abuse:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meet quarterly with the report writers to discuss the findings, recommendations and recommendations' implementation.</li> <li>2. Share the report and its findings with relevant police staff and trainers.</li> <li>3. Consult with Te Pūkotahitanga – the Tangata Whenua Ministerial Advisory Group to discuss the findings of this report and how to prioritise an appropriate police response to tangata whenua who experience family, whānau and sexual violence that is governed and led by, and for, tangata whenua in the best interests of their whānau, hapū, iwi.</li> </ol>
<p><b>To understand and eliminate the differences between family violence and sexual violence policies and implementation and practice on the ground:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Resource a wide investigation into the perceived barriers to implementation of current NZ Police policies.</li> <li>5. Establish an advisory group of representatives from community organisations who work with family and sexual violence victim-survivors to consult regarding policy and training developments.</li> <li>6. Engage victim-survivors in future design of NZ Police family violence and sexual violence policy and trainings.</li> </ol>
<p><b>In order to both acknowledge the past and look to the future:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Acknowledge the impacts of historical police culture on community perceptions and contemporary police culture, particularly in relation to racism, misogyny, ableism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, including bullying.</li> <li>8. Develop skills and recruit staff appropriate for contemporary Aotearoa that is increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse, increasingly aware of disabilities, including neurodivergence, and increasingly accepting of sexuality and gender diversity.</li> </ol>

## Establish a specialist family violence police unit

<p><b>To ensure expertise in responding to family violence is resourced, supported, readily available and respected:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Set up a national specialist family violence policing unit with teams in all police districts.</li> <li>10. Develop workforce pathways for officers with commitment to working in family violence and sexual violence areas that acknowledge the specialist and demanding nature of the work.</li> <li>11. Develop professional development and equitable remuneration rates for officers specialising in family violence and sexual violence.</li> <li>12. Develop relationships and competencies across police family violence and sexual violence teams, in particular to build recognition and increase effective responses to intimate partner sexual violence and child sexual abuse in family violence contexts.</li> <li>13. Build police responses based on the eight best practice responses to victim-survivors including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Understand family and sexual violence and the tactics of people who use violence and abuse</li> <li>◦ Understand that psychological harm is violence</li> <li>◦ Put victim-survivor safety at the centre of everything police do</li> <li>◦ Take family and sexual violence seriously</li> <li>◦ Understand the impact of the violence or abuse on victim-survivors</li> <li>◦ Believe victim-survivors</li> <li>◦ Understand that victim-survivors cannot always do the things police want them to do because that might make them less safe</li> <li>◦ Understand and respond to victim-survivor specific needs relating to their culture, religion, disability, sexuality and gender</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p><b>To ensure victim-survivors have access to support and advocacy to improve their safety independent of the police:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. Resource independent advocates to work alongside police when responding to family violence and sexual violence.</li> <li>15. With community guidance, identify gaps inside police-community collaborations, and allocate resources to meet those gaps to ensure all victim-survivors have access to specialist support.</li> <li>16. Encourage training in police-community collaborations in working with disabled, ethnic, and Rainbow and Takatāpui victim-survivors.</li> <li>17. Establish places alternative to police stations to report family violence and sexual violence staffed by specialists who are not police officers.</li> </ol>
<p><b>To ensure police processes are serving the needs of Māori and diverse communities:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. Increase the use of Te Reo Māori by police officers.</li> <li>19. Employ enough specialist women police officers to adequately cover victim-survivor need for such.</li> <li>20. Ensure access to Diversity Liaison officers for Takatāpui and Rainbow victim-survivors.</li> <li>21. Ensure access to Ethnic Liaison Officers and interpreters to assist understanding and support where their presence could be of benefit.</li> <li>22. Establish Police Liaison Officers with expertise in the needs and accommodations required for disabled people. Ensure that police have access to trained NZSL interpreters, supported decision making advocates and others required to ensure accessibility.</li> <li>23. Increase police resources to respond to family violence and sexual violence in rural and small urban areas.</li> </ol>

## Create a victim-survivor-centred approach

<p><b>To centre the needs, safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors and children:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24. Listen to and believe victim-survivors and children, treat them well and allocate more officer and staff time to family violence and sexual violence cases.</li> <li>25. Prioritise victim-survivor safety-act swiftly, remove the abuser, involve victim-survivors in risk assessments and prioritise children's safety.</li> <li>26. Use police statutory powers including arrest, enforcing no contact bail conditions and Police Safety Orders to respond actively to abusers to protect victim-survivors and children and prevent further abuse, regardless of Family Court matters or orders in place.</li> <li>27. Provide access to paramedic or medical support and community support workers if needed.</li> <li>28. Use a trauma and violence informed response.</li> <li>29. Resource and provide tools for victim-survivors such as phones, and services to identify and remove stalking apps and devices.</li> <li>30. Improve police waiting areas and interview rooms to ensure they are safe, accessible, welcoming and warm for all victim-survivors, including children.</li> <li>31. Provide victim-survivors with access to safe and appropriate accommodation if needed.</li> <li>32. Apply a perpetrator focus that upholds the safety of victim-survivors and children including prioritising actions which prevent an abuser having contact with the victim-survivor and children</li> </ol>
<p><b>To ensure police and court processes serve the needs of the victim survivor:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>33. Improve existing police roles to better respond to the needs and safety of victim-survivors as set out in this report including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Front counter staff</li> <li>◦ 111 call takers</li> <li>◦ Attending police officers</li> <li>◦ Detectives</li> <li>◦ Prosecutors</li> <li>◦ Forensic teams</li> <li>◦ Child protection teams</li> <li>◦ Family harm teams</li> <li>◦ Adult sexual assault teams</li> <li>◦ Crisis assessment teams</li> </ul> </li> <li>34. Improve evidence gathering techniques for family violence and sexual violence to improve the likelihood and success of prosecution.</li> <li>35. Develop processes to ensure victim-survivors have the information they need set out in easy to understand and portable formats that explain police processes, their rights, and likely steps and stages.</li> <li>36. Keep victim-survivors regularly updated on case developments and outcomes.</li> <li>37. Uphold victim-survivors' privacy and only share their information with others with their express consent – enhancing victim-survivor control over these processes is the antidote to victimisation.</li> <li>38. Share information with the Family Court if requested by the victim-survivor.</li> </ol>
<p><b>To ensure police processes are serving the needs of diverse communities:</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>39. Be respectful of diverse identities and experiences including practicing cultural safety, ensuring accommodations for disabled victim-survivors, asking about sexuality and gender identity and using correct names, titles, genders, and relationships.</li> <li>40. Attend and prioritise training and skills development in working with diverse victim-survivors to assist with recognising violence in specific contexts.</li> <li>41. Provide accessible information for diverse communities about their options, including pathways for help and alternatives to criminal justice system responses.</li> <li>42. Prioritise connections and referrals to safe and specialist community organisations, particularly those communities currently under-served by family and sexual violence services (ethnically diverse communities, disabled communities, Takatāpui and Rainbow communities).</li> </ol>

## Establish specialist training for police

### To ensure all police responses to family violence and sexual violence are safe and appropriate:

43. Ensure all police have a thorough understanding of family violence and sexual violence – types and dynamics of violence and of abuse, including experiences of women and children, Māori, Pasifika and Asian people, ethnic people, disabled people and Takatāpui and Rainbow people; abuser behaviours, attitudes and range of backgrounds; and the impact of violence and abuse on victim-survivors and children including trauma related responses.
44. Ensure officer training includes improving the safety of children, including taking allegations of abuse seriously.
45. Provide training for officers on how to undertake risk assessments for the primary aggressor that consider the wider context and are informed by how abusers generally behave, and ensure this training includes assessing for diverse relationships, sexualities, and genders, and an understanding of unconscious bias regarding ethnicity.
46. Ensure trainings on family violence and sexual violence are informed by specific communities and reflect the experiences and needs of victim-survivors including Māori, Pasifika and Asian people, disabled people, ethnic people, Takatāpui and Rainbow people.
47. Ensure training is available for all police who might come into contact with victim-survivors, including front counter staff/111 call takers, front-line police, family harm co-ordinators, child protection, and sexual assault teams.
48. Train both Diversity Liaison Officers and Ethnic Liaison Officers in family violence and sexual violence, to allow them to act as safe bridges to police inside their communities.

## Promote the importance of the right response every time

### To codify the improvement of police response to family violence and sexual violence:

49. Improve staff understanding of the existing police family violence policy and adult sexual assault policy and expectation around implementation.
50. Improve police record keeping and internal police communication within teams and districts about family violence and sexual violence.
51. Establish a national monitoring system to track police responses at a local level to highlight good and poor practice, and provide specialist input to improve practice where necessary.
52. Resource an independent victim-survivor organisation to undertake yearly audits of police responses to family violence and sexual violence and allow diverse victim-survivor voice to inform monitoring and evaluation.

### To ensure police responses to family violence and sexual violence are consistently coordinated with appropriate responses from other non-police responders:

53. Work with other organisations to enhance protection for victim-survivors and children.
54. Work with community organisations to enhance referral of abusers to social services to address the violence and abuse, mental health issues and/or drug and alcohol issues.