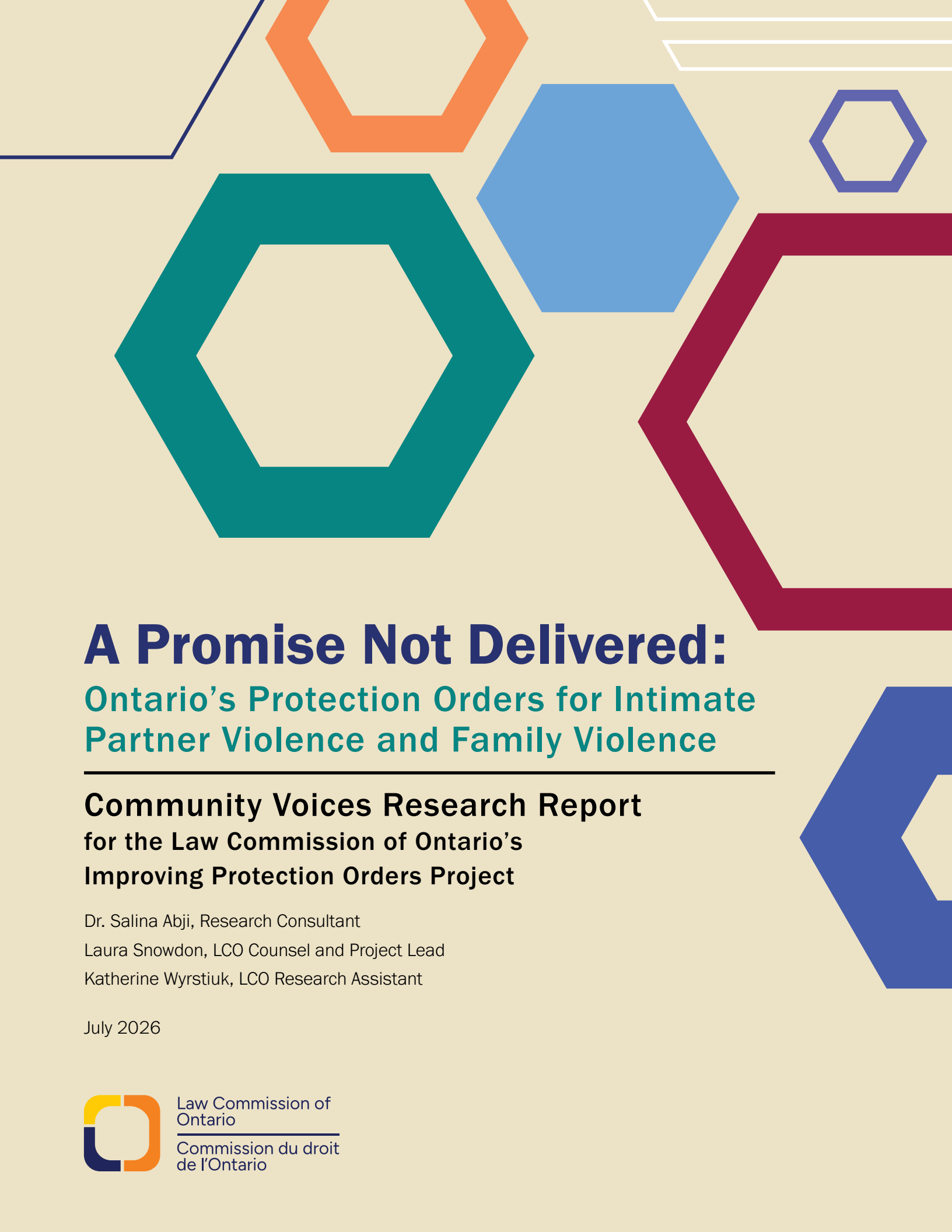




A Promise Not Delivered: **Ontario's Protection Orders for Intimate Partner Violence and Family Violence**

Community Voices Research Report for the Law Commission of Ontario's Improving Protection Orders Project

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Law Commission of
Ontario

Commission du droit
de l'Ontario

Executive Summary

A Promise Not Delivered: Ontario's Protection Orders for Intimate Partner and Family Violence

The Law Commission of Ontario (LCO) is researching how to improve protection orders to better prevent intimate partner violence and family violence in Ontario.

Protection orders are widely understood as a cornerstone of Ontario's legal response to intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence (FV). They are intended to provide safety and accountability by imposing conditions on individuals who pose a risk of harm. Yet, as this report illustrates, the promise of protection orders often falls short in practice. Despite their perceived importance, survivors and community members describe an array of laws and processes that are confusing, inconsistent, and, in many cases, ineffective.

This report summarizes the first of two surveys conducted by the LCO as part of its [Improving Protections Orders](#) project. This report shares findings from 80 participants with lived experience of protection orders—including applicants, protected persons, bound persons, family and friends of those affected, and individuals who considered applying but did not—on what is working, what is not, and what needs to change. A second report, *A Profound Mismatch: Professional Perspectives Research Report*, shares the findings from our survey of people who work with protection orders in a professional capacity.

Overall, the findings from both surveys underscore an urgent need for systemic change. Protection orders remain a vital tool, but without meaningful reform, they risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than effective mechanisms for safety.

The Law Commission of Ontario

The LCO is Ontario's leading law reform agency. The LCO provides independent, balanced, and authoritative advice on complex legal policy issues. We evaluate laws impartially and transparently, in consultation with a wide range of affected individuals, organizations, and experts. We produce evidence-based recommendations that are tested through accessible, inclusive, and comprehensive public engagement processes.

The LCO's reports are practical and principled long-term resources for policymakers, interested parties, academics and the public. Our reports have led to legislative amendments and changes in policy and practice. Our work is frequently cited in judicial decisions, academic articles, government reports and the media.

More information about the LCO is available at www.lco-cdo.org.

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Key Insights

The key insights from this survey include:

- Nearly all participants (94%) agreed that protection orders are an important tool for safety. Many described them as a critical legal safeguard and potential deterrent.
- Despite this, most participants (63%) said protection orders are not working well in Ontario. Only 10% thought protection order are working well. The remainder were neutral or unsure.
- Participants highlighted many systemic issues: lack of enforcement, poor coordination between criminal and family courts, insufficient understanding of IPV/FV among legal actors, and experiences of victim-blaming.
- Safety outcomes, however, were mixed: 44% of those who were granted a protection order said it somewhat improved their safety, and 19% said it improved their safety a great deal. Yet a significant proportion (38%) said the order did very little to improve their safety.
- Breaches were common and enforcement was inconsistent. 78% reported breaches, yet 39% said no action was ever taken when breaches occurred. While 50% were dissatisfied with actions taken by law enforcement, a sizeable portion (31%) were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied.
- The application process was described as overwhelming, slow, and inaccessible. Two-thirds were dissatisfied with the process, and 83% were dissatisfied with wait times. Only 39% of applicants in our sample had help from a lawyer: family and friends were the most common source of support at 54% of our sample, and 8% said they had no support at all applying.
- Conditions were often vague or generic, and durations too short to provide meaningful protection. Several participants said they were unaware that renewal was even an option.
- The emotional toll was significant. Survivors reported stress, anxiety, and burnout from navigating a system that often left them feeling unsafe and unheard.

Recommendations

Participants did not simply identify problems—they offered solutions. Common recommendations included:

- Expanding education and training for police, judges, lawyers, and social workers on IPV, coercive control, and trauma-informed practices.
- Strengthening enforcement through electronic monitoring, automatic no-weapons conditions, and tougher penalties for breaches.
- Improving access by reducing wait times, simplifying processes, and minimizing re-traumatization.
- Making protection order durations indefinite in high-risk cases and ensuring conditions reflect survivors' actual safety needs rather than boiler plate conditions.
- Enhancing coordination between criminal and family courts to prevent conflicting orders.
- Listening to survivors and involving them in policy reform.



More Information and How to Get Involved

The LCO's Improving Protection Orders project will produce an independent, evidence-based, and comprehensive analysis of protection orders in Ontario. The LCO's final report will recommend reforms to laws, policies, and practices where appropriate.

More information about this survey and the LCO project is available on our project website at <https://lco-cdo.org/en/projects/protection-orders/>. Materials include our project Consultation Paper, an Executive Summary, and other background information. The Consultation Paper and Executive Summary are available in English and French.

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Dedicated funding for the LCO protection order survey is provided by the Law Foundation of Ontario.

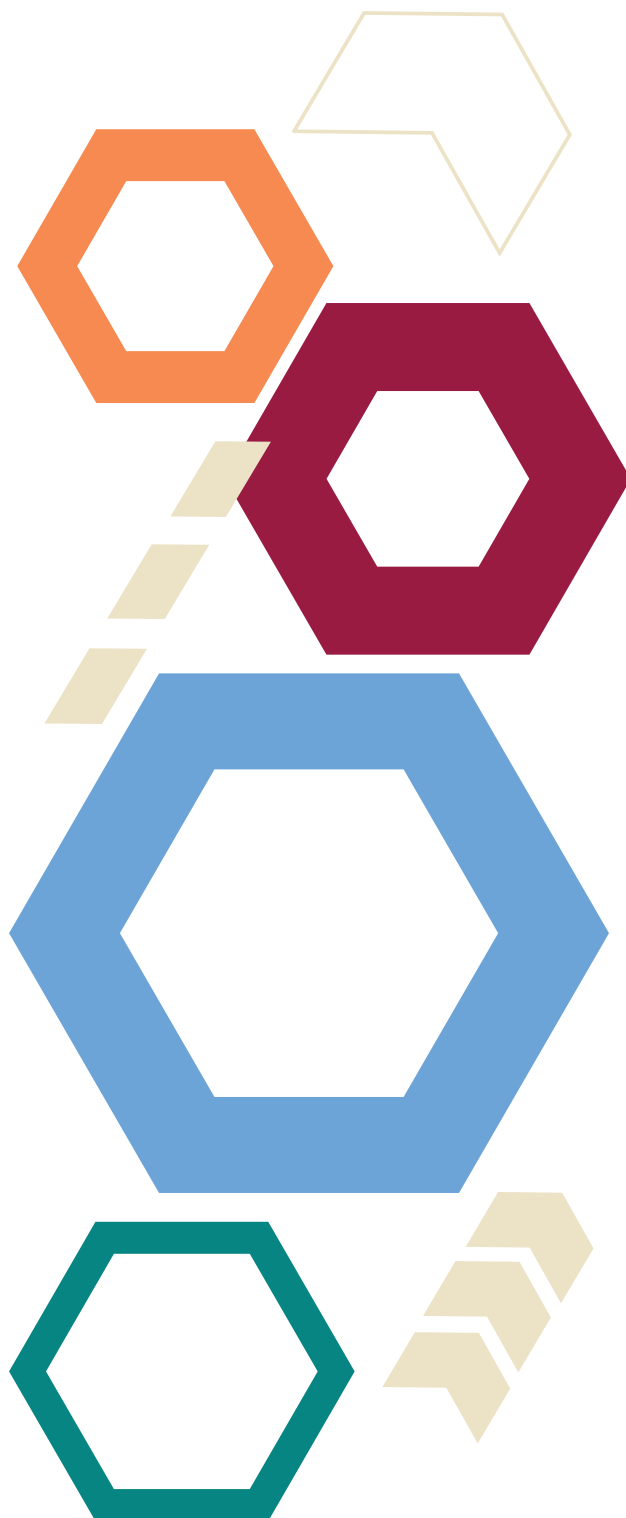
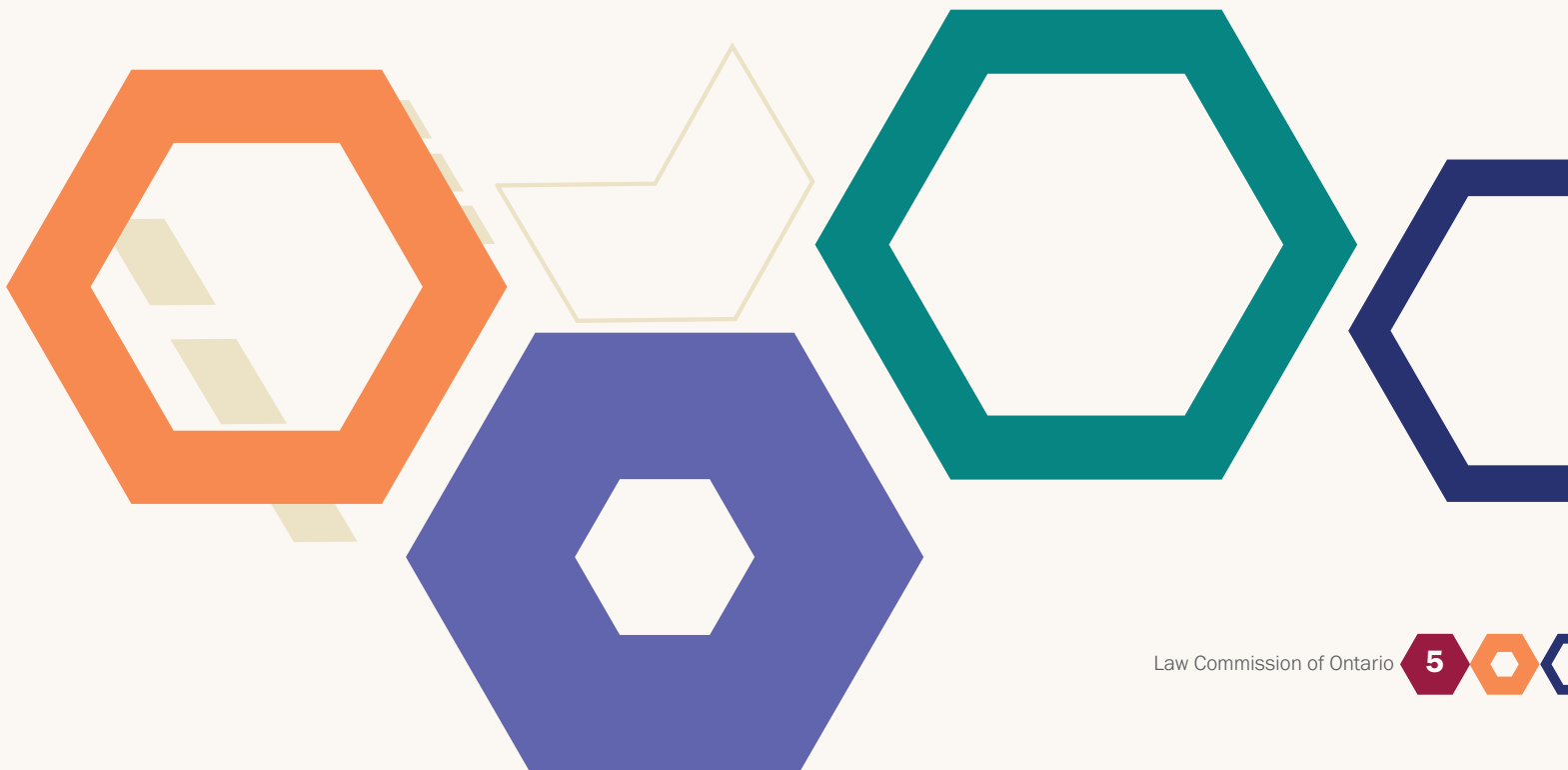


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Project Background

Protection orders are tools in Ontario's legal system that are supposed to protect people from violence. Protection orders are designed to reduce violence by placing specific conditions on someone who is causing harm. For example, a protection order might limit where that person can go, what they can do, and who they can contact.

According to Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, at least 434 people were murdered in acts of intimate partner violence across the province between 2003 and 2021.¹ Most victims were women and children. The overwhelming majority of these murders were preceded by a history of violence – and in a quarter of cases, the perpetrator was known to have breached an existing protection order or other court order.²

The Law Commission of Ontario's (LCO's) [Improving Protection Orders](#) project is examining why protection orders are failing to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence (FV) in Ontario. The LCO's final report will recommend changes to help make protection orders more accessible and effective for everyone affected by IPV and FV.

This project is the most comprehensive analysis of protection orders undertaken in Ontario. The LCO is combining extensive public consultations, legal research, public policy research, and empirical research to make recommendations to improve protection orders and reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence (FV) in Ontario.

An important part of the LCO's research is to hear from people who wish to share their personal and/or professional experiences with protection orders and their ideas for change. This Community Voices report shares findings from one of two anonymous surveys conducted by LCO in Spring 2025. A total of 367 people participated in the surveys. In this report, we share highlights of the community survey, which collected personal experiences of protection orders from community members across Ontario. A second Professional Perspectives report shares findings from our survey with people who work with protection orders in a professional capacity. Both sets of findings will be integrated into the LCO's final recommendations. Both surveys were supported by a grant from the Law Foundation of Ontario.

1 Ontario, Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2021 Annual Report, (Ontario: Office of the Chief Coroner, 2024), online: <ontario.ca> [DVDRC, 2021 Annual Report], pp 13-14.

2 DVDRC, 2021 Annual Report, pp 13-14, 16-17, and 26, showing that in 392 cases involving 434 murders, 76% of cases had a history of intimate partner violence and 27% of cases had a "failure to comply with authority", which was defined as breaching a protection order or other court order.



About the Survey

As the first survey of its kind in Ontario, the LCO's Community Survey invited community members to share their personal experiences with protection orders and their recommendations for change. The anonymous survey was open to participants with a range of experiences, including survivors of IPV/FV who had applied for, been named in, or were denied a protection order, as well as those who thought about applying but chose not to. The survey was also designed for "respondents" or "bound persons", which are terms used to describe people who have defended themselves against a protection order or have been ordered to comply with the conditions of a protection order. Survivors' friends, family, and any community members concerned about protection orders were also welcome to participate. The Community Survey was released in March 2025 in conjunction with a survey for professionals and ran for 8-weeks.

The Community Survey was designed in consultation with the LCO's project Advisory Committee and a range of legal and gender-based violence (GBV) experts to help ensure the accuracy and relevance of questions. All questions were optional except for a consent to participate question, and included:

- Baseline information about participants, in terms of their connection to the topic and socio-demographic characteristics (12 questions).
- A core section that asked all participants how protection orders can be improved in Ontario (16 questions).

- An optional section for those with lived experience of seeking or receiving a protection order (up to 50 questions depending on applicability).
- An optional section for those with experience being ordered to comply with or defend against a protection order (up to 25 questions depending on applicability).

Each section covered key themes around access, process, evidence, conditions, duration, breaches, enforcement, and overall impact. Most questions were framed in a way that participants could share their experiences with any type of protection order, whether in family court, child protection proceedings, or criminal court. The survey also included a full glossary with definitions of key terms linked directly from the survey, along with a page of Frequently Asked Questions and self-care resources.

While the survey was comprehensive, it had several limitations. First, because of the scope, the survey was quite long, particularly for those participants who had multi-layered experiences as both protected persons and bound persons. Second, the survey was only available in English due to limited capacity for translation and analysis in French or other languages spoken in Ontario. To mitigate this barrier to participation, the LCO is conducting focus groups and interviews with Francophone communities. Participants' contributions will be incorporated into the LCO's final report and recommendations.

Survey Sample

100 individuals started the community survey. 80 surveys were included in the final sample.

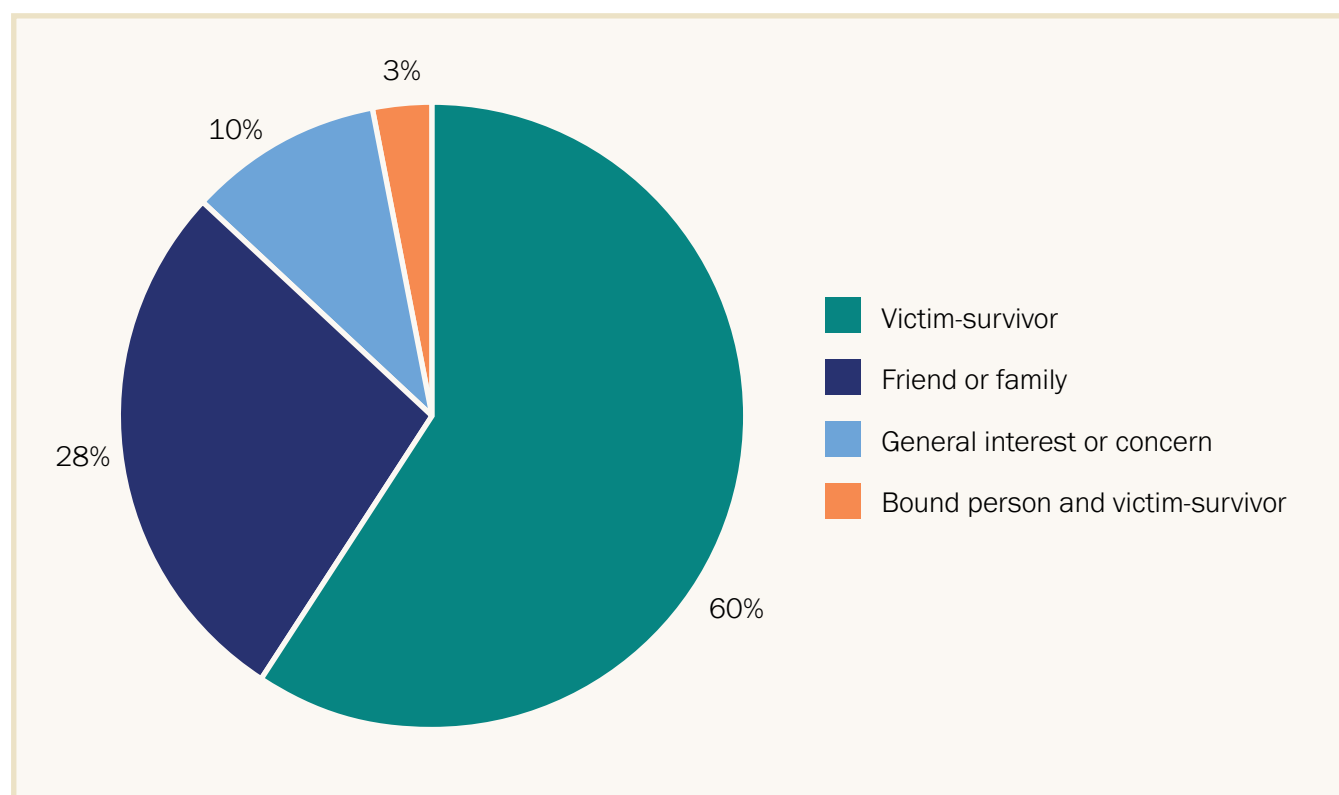
Participants had multiple connections to the topic (see Fig. 1). 60% identified as a victim-survivor of IPV/FV, compared to 28% who answered the survey as a friend or family member of someone with experience of protection orders. 10% answered the survey out of a general interest or concern about the topic.

Interestingly, 3% of the sample identified as a bound person, defined as personal experience defending against or being ordered to follow the conditions of a protection order. However, all bound persons also identified as victim-survivors, so we created a separate category of “bound person and victim-survivor.” Future research may want to expand engagement with people bound by protection orders to help understand the diverse experiences of this group.

Experience with protection orders

Half of the survey sample frequently engaged with protection orders as part of their professional role (see Fig. 1). Another 29% did occasionally and 8% did but rarely, 5% used to. The 8% that did not engage with protection orders included academics, social workers, and clergy.

Figure 1: What is your personal connection to protection orders? (Select all that apply)

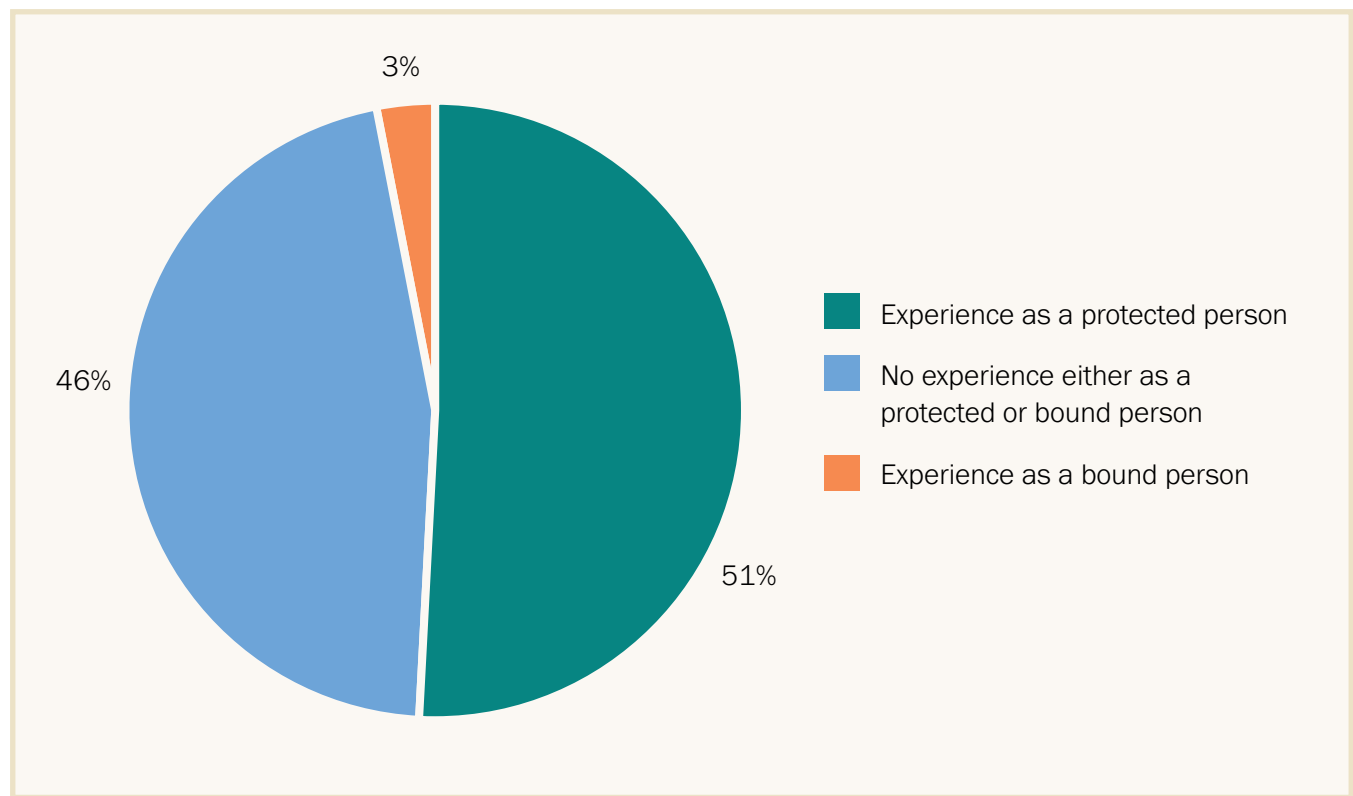


Sample = 80

Among those who identified as victim-survivors (Fig. 2), 51% had experience as a protected person, meaning they had experience requesting or having a protection order put in place to protect them from IPV/FV. 46% of survivors did not have experience either as a protected person or a bound person, and the remaining 3% had experience as a bound person.

In some cases, participants recalled that they had been bound by a protection order or named as a protected person at later stages in the survey, so these numbers should all be taken as approximate.

Figure 2: Victim-Survivors subsample by connection to the topic

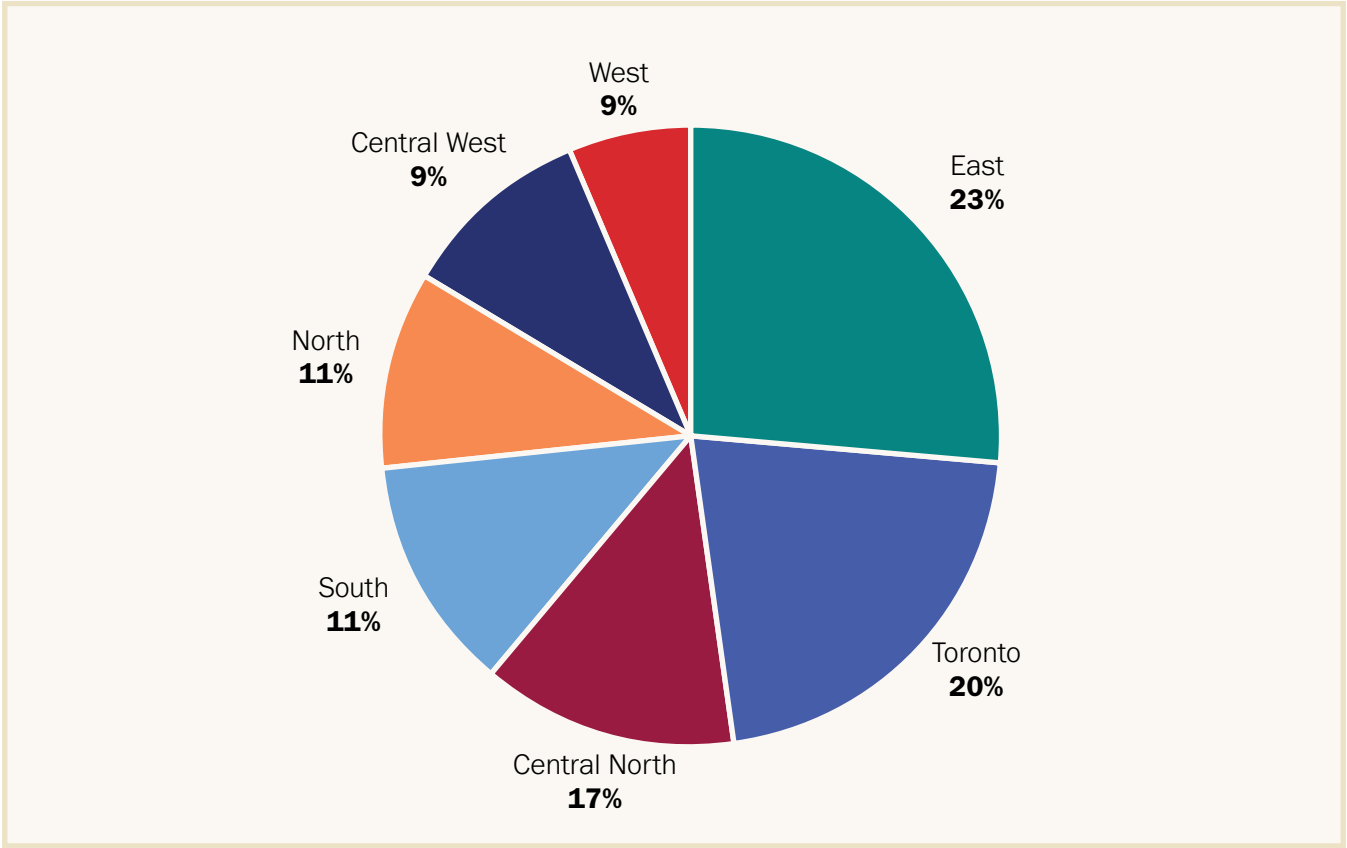


Sample = 50

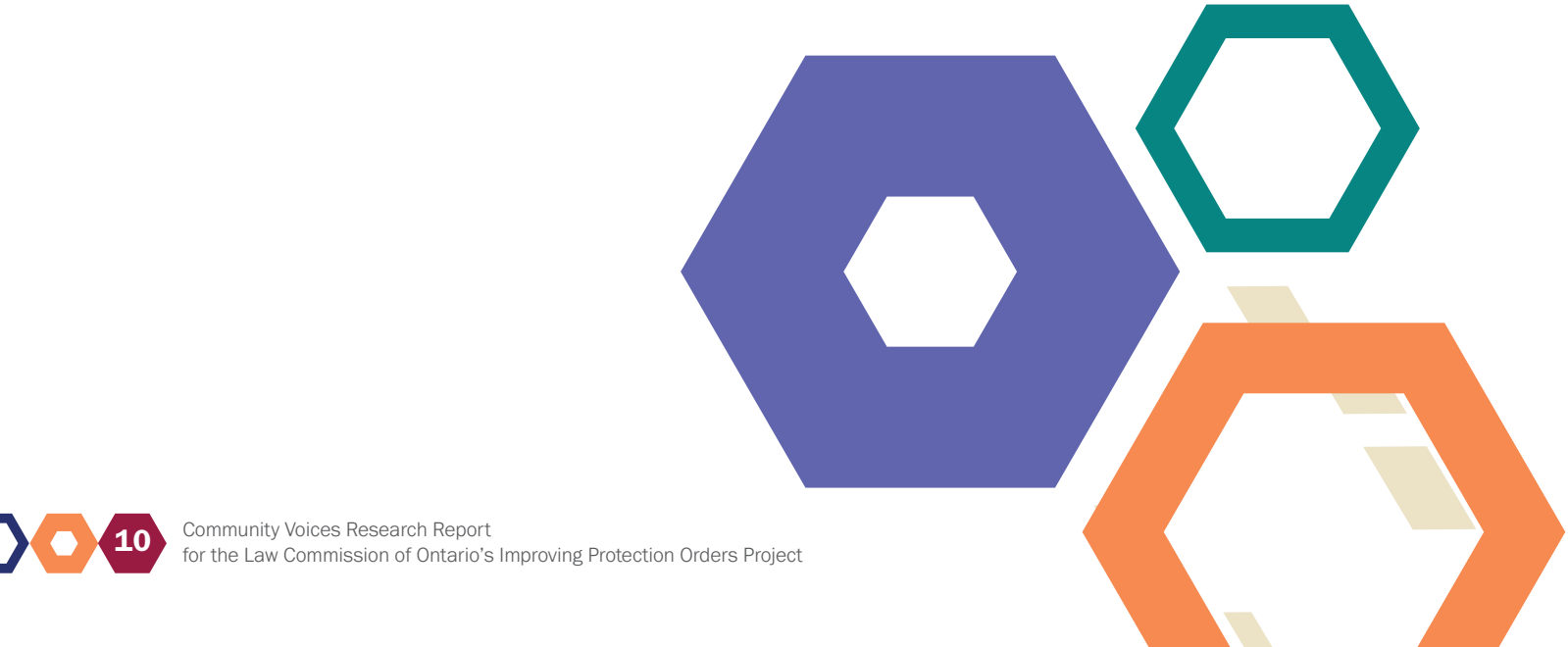
Socio-demographic characteristics

98% of participants were based in Ontario. Among those from Ontario, there was a good distribution across the province (see Fig. 3), with highest participation from Eastern Ontario (26%) and Toronto (21%). Most survey participants were based in an urban setting (70%). A smaller number identified as being from rural or remote communities (14%, including those who self-identified as being from First Nations reserves), and suburban communities (14%).

Figure 3: Ontario sample by region



Answered = 77



We included several socio-demographic questions (all optional) near the end of the survey. 52 participants chose to answer these questions. Among those participants:

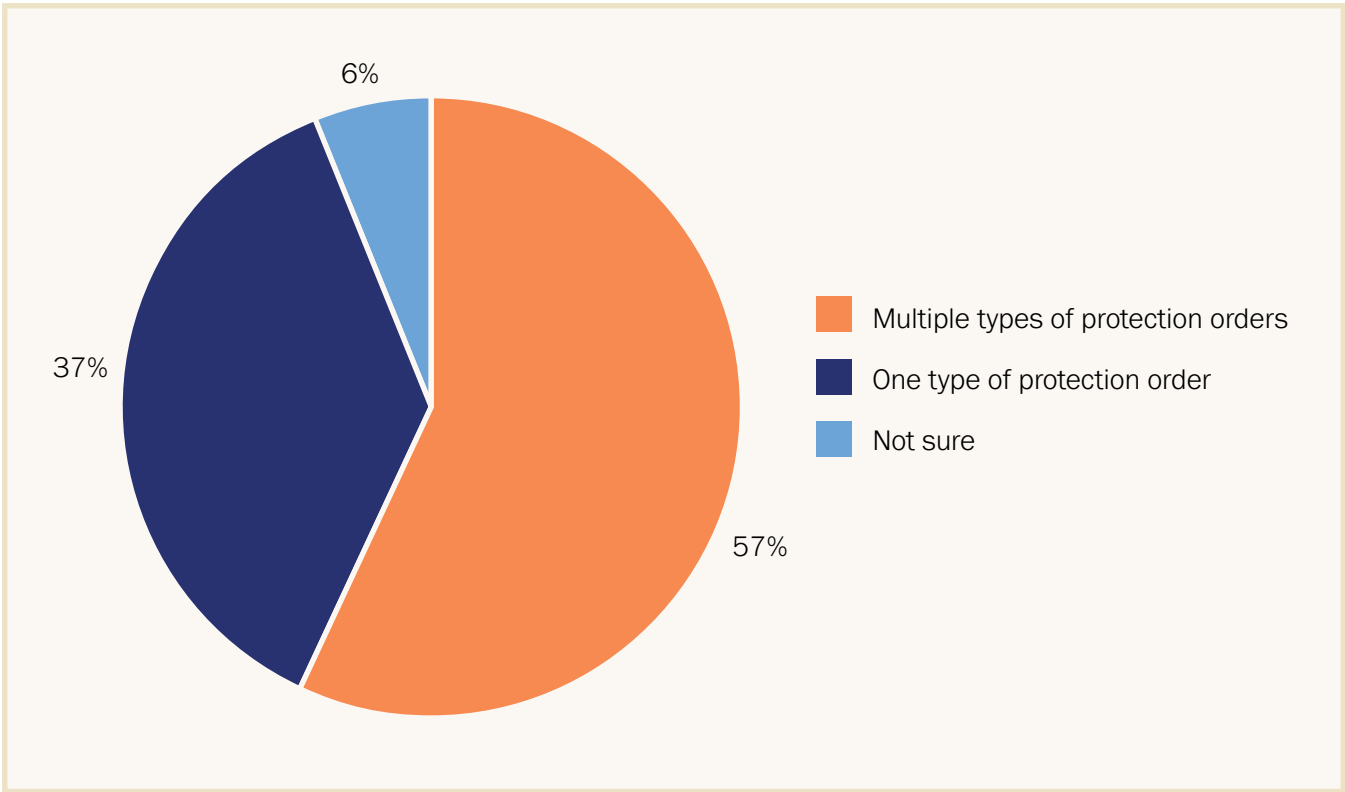
- **Age:** All participants identified as adults (18+). Most were between 45-54 years of age (33%) or 35-44 years of age (27%). The youngest were between 18-24 (4%) and the oldest were 65+ (17%).
- **Gender Identity:** 92% identified as women, 4% identified as men, with 2% non-binary/ gender diverse and 2% Two-Spirit.
- **Race/Ethnicity:** 81% identified as White, 11% identified as Indigenous or First Nations, 8% as Black, 8% as Mixed Race, 2% South Asian, and 2% East Asian.
- **Disability:** 38% of the sample identified as a person with a disability.

Future research may want to expand engagement with communities under-represented in this sample.

What types of protection orders did participants have experience with?

More than half of participants (57%) had experience with multiple types of protection orders, compared to 37% who had experience with one type of order (see Fig 4). 6% were not sure what type of order(s) they had experience with.

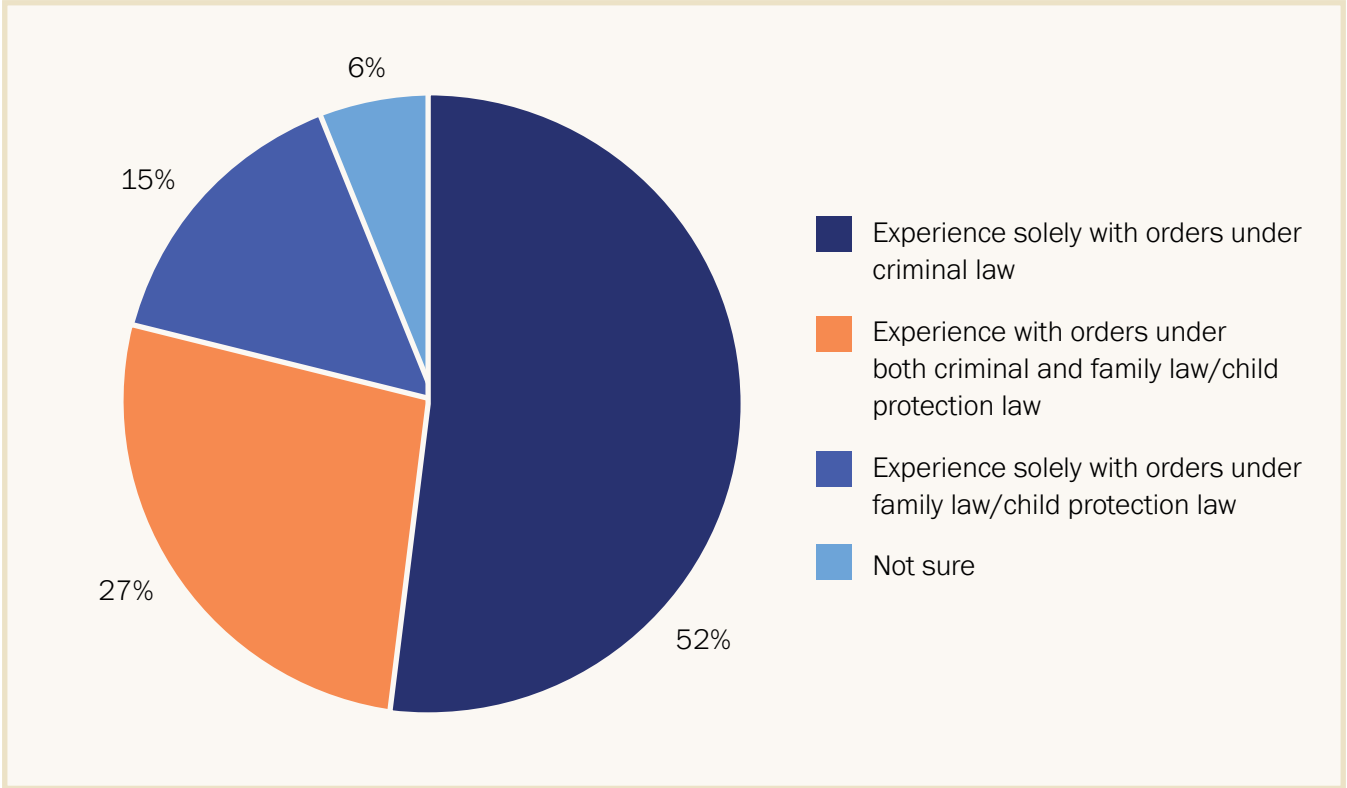
Figure 4: Sample by how many types of protection orders they have experience with



Sample = 67

More than half of participants (52%) had experience solely with protection orders under criminal law e.g. peace bonds, bail release orders and undertakings, and sentencing orders (see Fig. 5). 27% had experience with orders under both criminal and family law/ child protection law. 15% had experience solely with protection orders under family law/child protection law e.g. restraining orders, orders for the exclusive possession of the matrimonial home.

Figure 5: Sample by experience with orders under different areas of law



Sample = 67

Among protection orders under criminal law, the most common types of orders that survey participants had experience with were bail release orders and undertakings (38%), followed by criminal sentences with protective conditions (e.g. conditional sentence, probation order, and/or parole order) (32%), and peace bonds (30%).

Among protection orders under family law/ child protection law, the most common types of orders that survey participants had experience with were restraining orders (81%) and exclusive possession of the matrimonial home (19%).

4% of the sample also had experience with protection orders in First Nations legislation and/or federal legislation for Indigenous survivors.

9% of the sample had experience with mutual protection orders, where a judge or court orders both parties to comply with a protection order.

Methods

As noted above, the survey was designed in consultation with the LCO's project Advisory Committee and a range of legal and GBV experts to help ensure the accuracy and relevance of questions.

Data analysis was conducted over several months. The survey included many opportunities for participants to further elaborate on their answers, to share lived experience and recommend potential solutions. This yielded a large data set that was manually coded by the researchers using grounded analysis, memo-writing to identify broader themes, and regular research team meetings to compare and triangulate results.

The research team also took care to situate community voices within the LCO's broader research on the landscape of protection orders in Ontario. While this report captures lived experiences of 80 community members with respect to protection orders, the survey sample is not representative of the large and diverse pool of people who interact with protection orders and should be interpreted as such. Nevertheless, the findings yield important considerations for policy makers and legal system actors on how survey participants are experiencing protection orders and potential areas for improvement.



Survey Results

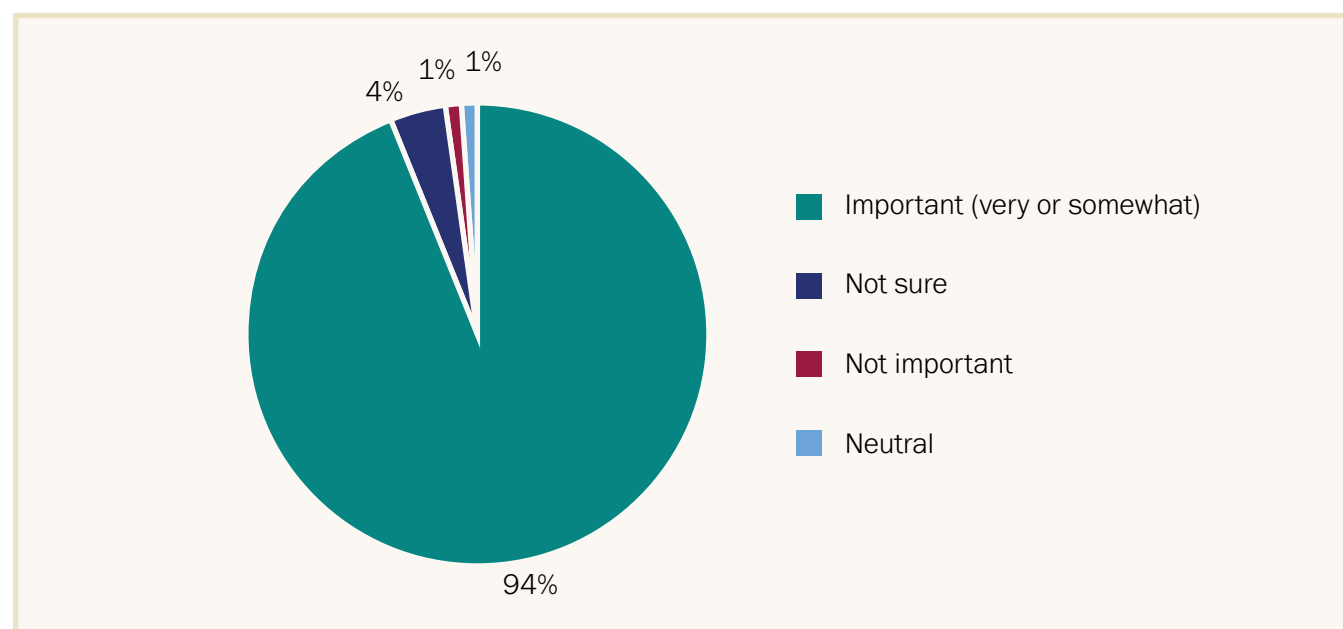
1: Community Perceptions of Protection Orders

We asked participants about their overall perception of protection orders. We asked them how important they are for keeping people safe from intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence (FV), and how well they are currently working in Ontario. We explore these findings in more detail below.

Protection orders were seen as very important

Most participants in our survey said that protection orders are a key tool for keeping people safe from IPV and FV. As illustrated in Fig. 6 below, 94% of participants said protection orders are an important tool for keeping people safe. 4% said they were not sure. 1% said they are not important and 1% were neutral.

Figure 6: How important are protection orders for keeping people safe from intimate partner violence and family violence?



Answered = 80

Participants shared several reasons why they believe protection orders are important:

Legal protection: Many participants said protection orders are a legal safeguard that shows abuse is taken seriously by the legal system. Even in cases when an order is breached, it acts as a legal document of the abuse.

Prevention and deterrence: Some participants said protection orders helped stop the violence or prevented it from getting worse.

“...It adds a safeguard that some offenders require to make them aware the law takes their behaviours seriously.”

“This was the only way to keep me safe.”

Consequences for abusers: Other participants mentioned how the risk of losing a job or going to jail were important deterrents when combined with protection orders.

“It didn’t stop the behaviour, but I believe that it likely stopped the behaviour from escalating.”

“Fear of losing employment is the only reason this person is complying. Which, on one hand is helpful to me but also unfortunate because it means there’s still no accountability for their actions.”

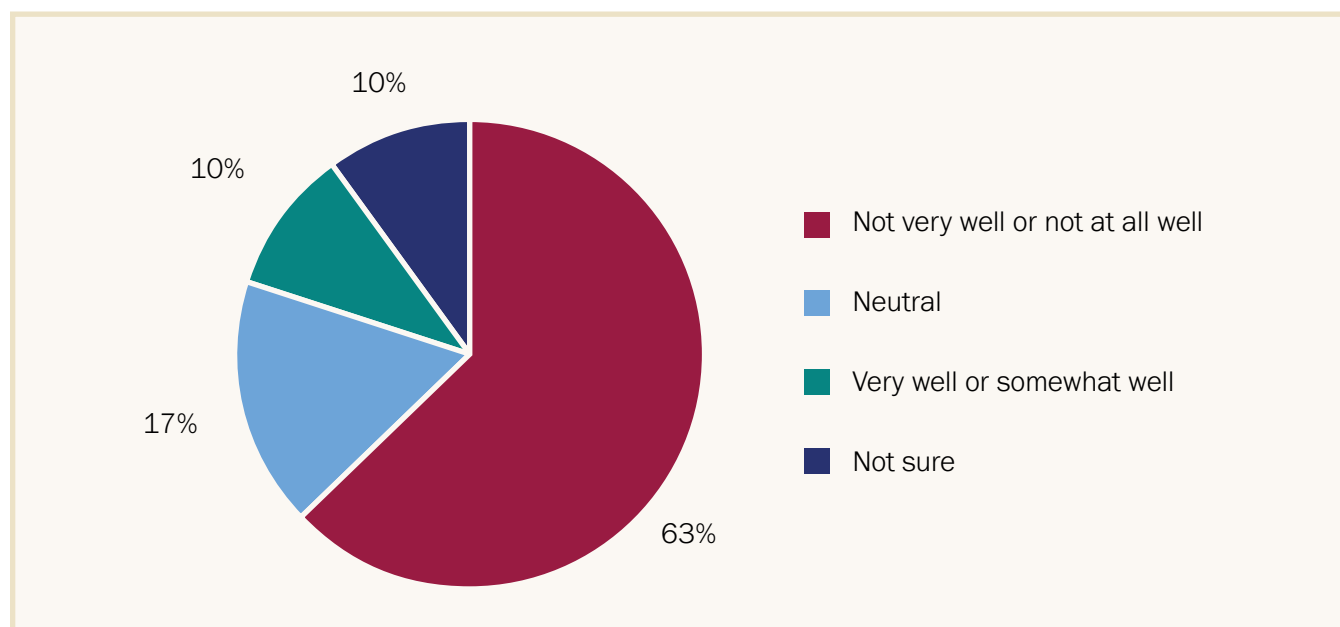
Emotional support and validation: A few participants said that getting a protection order helped them feel seen and supported.

“When you are a victim of intimate partner violence you feel so alone. You feel like you have no way to protect yourself. When you can finally get a protection order, you feel validated... it isn’t a secret anymore, and someone is finally trying to protect you.”

Despite their importance, protection orders are not working well according to survey participants

Even though most participants said protection orders are important, 63% said they are not working well in Ontario (see Fig. 7). 17% were neutral on this issue, and 10% were not sure. Only 10% of our sample thought protection orders are working well.

Figure 7: How well are protection orders currently working in Ontario?

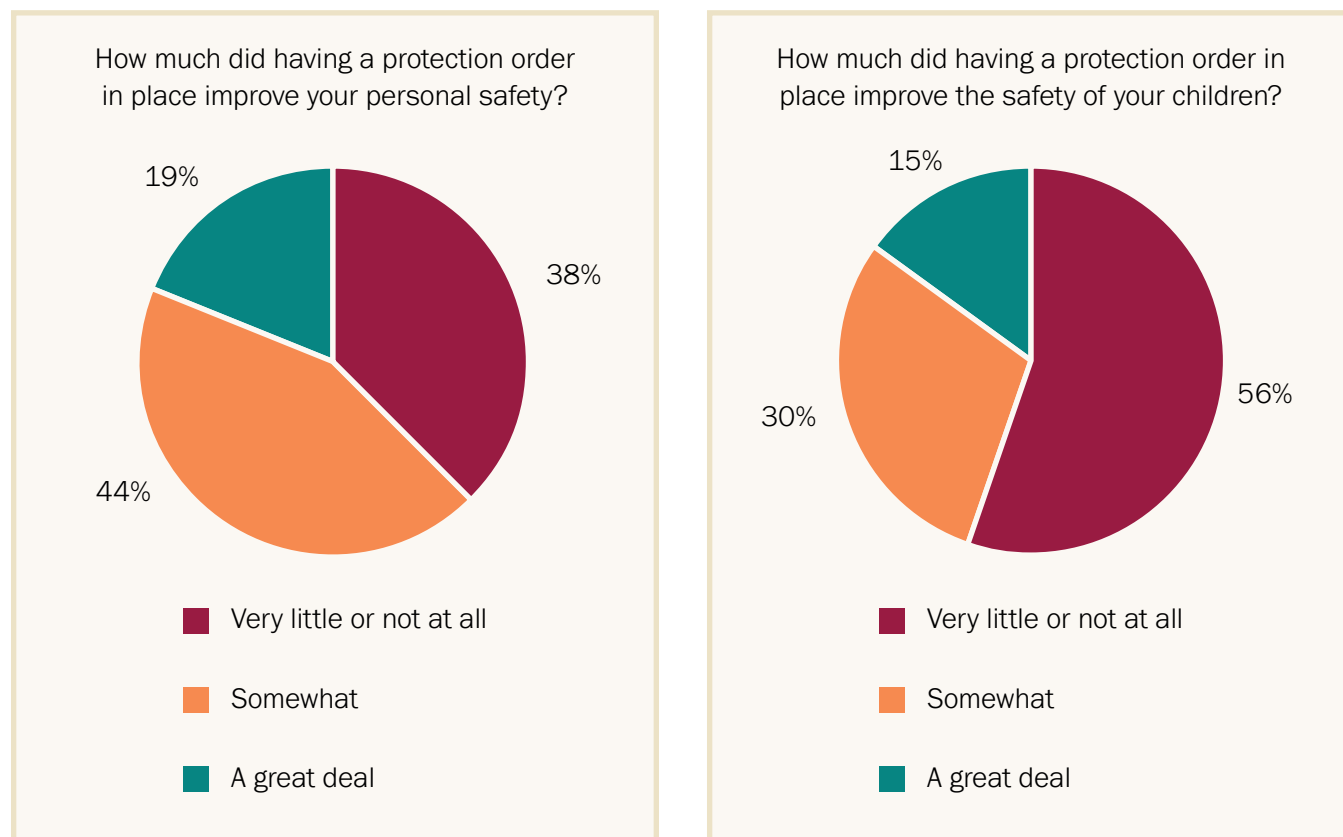


Answered = 78

Among a smaller sample of protected persons, the survey also showed mixed results in terms of how much having an order in place improved safety for the survivor and others (see Fig. 8 and Fig. 9). When it came to their personal safety, 44% of participants said that having a protection order in place somewhat improved their safety. However, a high proportion (38%) said it did very little to improve their safety or not at all. 19% said it improved their safety a great deal.

For cases where children were involved, 56% said having a protection order in place did very little to improve their children's safety or not at all. 30% said it improved their children's safety somewhat. 15% said it improved their children's safety a great deal.

Figure 8: Improved safety for self or children

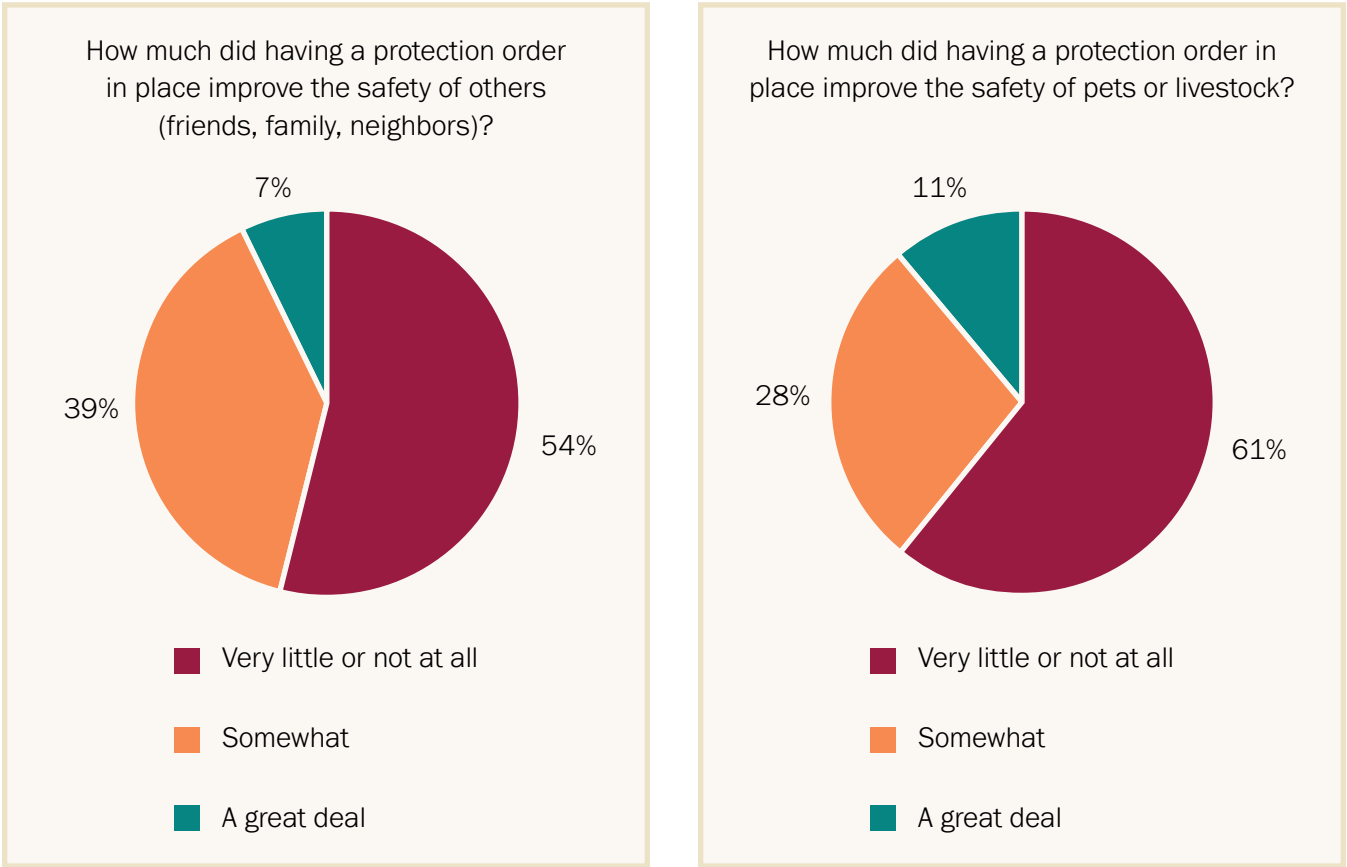


Answered = 33

When it came to safety for others like family, friends, or neighbours, 54% said having a protection order in place did very little to improve others' safety or not at all. 39% said it somewhat improved others' safety. 7% said it improved others' safety a great deal.

In cases involving pets or livestock, 61% said having a protection order in place did very little to improve the safety of their pets or livestock or not at all. 28% said it somewhat improved safety for pets or livestock. 11% said it improved safety for pets or livestock a great deal.

Figure 9: Improved safety for others



Answered = 33



Why protection orders are falling short

Our analysis of qualitative responses identified many reasons why participants felt protection orders are falling short:

Lack of enforcement: This was the most common concern. Participants described how the failure of different legal system actors (including police, crown attorneys, and others) to enforce protection orders undermined their effectiveness as a legal safeguard or deterrent.

“They are completely useless. My ex-partner continually breaches the 250 meter no contact bail conditions and despite my reporting to the IPV Unit of the [regional] Police and the Crown Attorney and Deputy Crown Attorney, this has not been taken seriously.”

“A police officer even admitted to us that they are a useless tool because so many offenders breach them and NO ONE does anything about it. Offenders are laughing at the cops and the system.”

Lack of understanding surrounding IPV/FV: Many participants felt that the various legal professionals and law enforcement actors did not have a sufficient understanding of IPV/FV issues such that the survivor felt as though their case was being mishandled.

“Lawyers, police, judges, courts need to take the ongoing emotional abuse more seriously. Just because there are no bruises, etc. does not mean that the victim(s) are without trauma!”

“Police, especially, need more education regarding the plight of women who are subjected to IPV. If they know the perpetrator, they should not be the one investigating as I have seen them side with him and disregard the victim, failing to protect her and the children from further abuse.”

“Rights of a father to continue to see the children and inflict more emotional pain on children and the mother happens too often.”

Some participants added that lack of knowledge of IPV/FV dynamics and/or bias among professionals working in the system could be easily manipulated by the person causing harm:

“Social workers can have their own biases and so can lawyers and judges. A good sociopath can really tilt things in their direction...”

“Too many times, abusers are riding the line, a line that they know how to ride without getting into trouble when they should be.”



Survivors not being taken seriously: A related theme that was also common in the data involved survivors' reports of not being taken seriously by police or being victim-shamed when reporting abuse or breaches. This also extended to survivors' perceptions that judges were not taking their evidence or victim impact statements seriously, leading to weak conditions on protection orders or denial of orders altogether.

"Police were VERY slow to help, victim-shamed me. I have lost faith in the police following this experience."

"I was questioned in a manner that made me feel I was in the wrong and needed to prove why I felt unsafe."

"[The judge's comments] didn't in any way reflect listening or having read my victim impact statement about the years of abuse leading up to his eventual arrest."

"I shouldn't have to act perfect or professional or clear to be believed or helped."

Frustration and mistrust of the legal system: As a result of their experiences, many participants expressed increased mistrust of the legal system. Some also linked their success in navigating the system either as being lucky that everything aligned or because of their own determination to keep trying.

"This entire experience has made me not trust the police."

"You have to have everything align for anything to work properly - you have to have people who believe you, believe in you and truly want to keep you safe..."

"I think it is a bit of a crap shoot to be honest."

"... So, what is working well? A victim's will to not give up and determination to keep herself and children safe is what is working well!"

There were many other reasons why participants saw protection orders as ineffective. Many of these are elaborated on in the remainder of the report. Highlights include:

- **Lack of coordination:** Many participants cited a lack of coordination or communication among legal professionals and law enforcement, making the process confusing and frustrating for survivors and their families when they get *"caught in the middle."*
- **Smaller communities:** Some participants living in smaller communities or on First Nations reserves described the challenges of enforcing protection orders *"when everyone shops at same stores"* or when emergency response times are slow or there are *"not enough police"* to respond or enforce orders.
- **Substance use and mental health:** Several participants described that their current or former partner had challenges following conditions, especially when substance use or mental health issues made it *"difficult to abide by the orders."*
- **Escalation and litigation abuse:** Some participants commented on how seeking a protection order escalated their risk of violence and opened them up to new *"psychological harms"* from having to interact with their abuser through the legal system.
- **Privacy breaches and further harm:** In a few instances, participants described how the legal system itself caused harm. For example, one participant described how their privacy was breached and courts *"failed to protect [their] personal information or location"* from the person causing harm, placing them at further risk. Another described lost evidence.
- **Potential criminalization:** A few participants described being criminalized or treated by police or courts not as victims but as the person causing harm. Participants linked this to the *"coercive tactics"* used by the other party, *"lack of a trauma-informed lens,"* and/or *"power imbalances"* in the resources that the other party had at their disposal to influence police and courts.



Overall satisfaction with various professionals involved with protection orders

We also asked participants about their overall satisfaction with the various professionals involved in helping people with protection orders (see Fig. 10).

- **Support services** had the highest satisfaction ratings by far, at 44% of the sample. Yet a significant number (33%) of participants were dissatisfied with support services. 23% were neutral on this indicator.
- **Lawyers** had the second highest satisfaction ratings after support services, yet this was significantly lower at 28% of participants who were satisfied with the involvement of lawyers in protection order proceedings. A much more significant number, 46%, were dissatisfied with lawyers. 26% were neutral.
- **Judges** had lower satisfaction levels and higher dissatisfaction levels compared to support services and lawyers. 22% of participants were satisfied with the role of judges in protection order proceedings, but 56% were dissatisfied with judges. 22% were neutral.
- **Police** had the same satisfaction levels as judges at 22% of participants. However, they also had the highest dissatisfaction levels, with 66% of participants expressing dissatisfaction with police. Police also had the lowest number of participants who were neutral on this indicator, at 12%.
- **Courts** had the lowest satisfaction ratings of all of the professionals listed in the survey, at 14% of participants who were satisfied with courts. Courts also had the second highest dissatisfaction ratings after police, at 63% of participants dissatisfied with courts. 23% were neutral on this indicator.

Figure 10: Overall, how satisfied are you with the various professionals involved with protection orders?



Answered = 73

When we asked participants to elaborate on their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, several themes emerged.

Participants were most satisfied in cases where professionals:

- Had training or knowledge of the risk factors and dynamics of IPV/FV.
- Were perceived to be taking victims' safety needs seriously.

"My lawyer has taken the protection orders seriously and has fought vigorously to ensure permanent restraining orders were obtained for me and my daughter through family court knowing the non-association order through criminal court had an expiration date. My lawyer took my case with high concerns for our safety and knew we needed maximum protection the law allowed."

"I have appreciated the judges with criminal law backgrounds; they were able to identify the serious risk factors in my case fluently and issued orders in accordance with these risk factors. Once police began to take my case seriously, their actions and results were paramount to the protection orders becoming issued."

- Had a good understanding of the legal system and how to navigate it.

- Took concrete, practical, and effective actions that were viewed as being aligned with their knowledge of IPV/FV risk factors or dynamics.

"The crown attorney worked with me, talking to me about the nuances of what would keep me safe (locations I'm at often, conditions not to own animals which allowed me to keep our shared dog safe and in my care, being able to advocate for the maximum amount of time on probation)"

"VWAP [Victim Witness Assistance Program] was very helpful once we got connected. There is nothing scarier than needing to sit in a room with someone who has victimized and threatened you and your family... As mentioned previously, it is more complex when criminal and family court issues are intertwined."

- Demonstrated a trauma-informed approach e.g. offering care, reassurance, kindness, and being well attuned to the impacts of trauma for victims.

"I appreciate that the judge ordered the probation, allowed my victim impacts statement to be read. The police - the night of the assault encouraged me, helped me clean up, protected me, spoke to my daughter in an appropriate way explaining things... reassured us."

"I appreciate my family lawyer whom I trust implicitly. He is very trauma informed and treats me with respect and kindness. Support Services I have engaged with have been even more trauma informed and well educated on the system and how to navigate."



2: Access to Protection Orders & Process

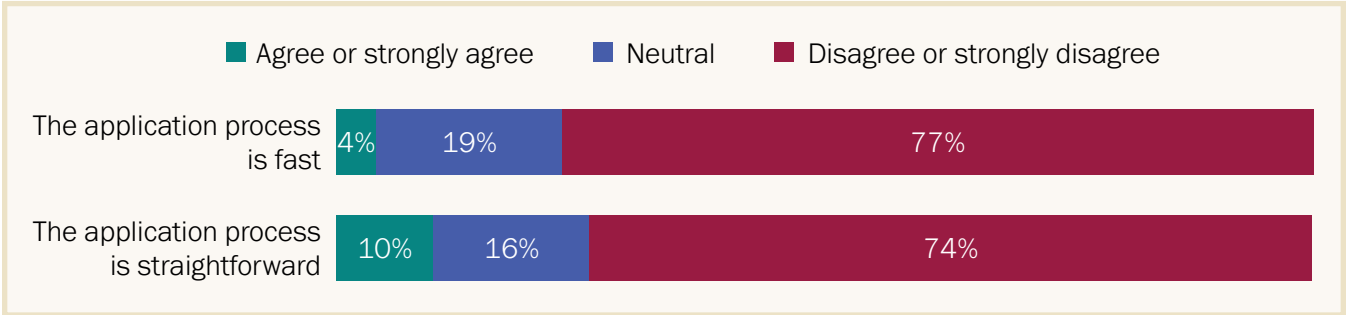
We asked participants about several access to justice issues, including their perceptions of the application process, why they applied for a protection order and their experiences applying for an order.

Community perceptions of the application process

77% of all survey participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the application process is fast, with 19% neutral on this indicator (see Fig. 11). Only 4% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the application process is fast.

Likewise, 74% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the application process is straightforward, with 16% neutral on this indicator. Only 10% thought the application process is straightforward.

Figure 11: Perceptions of the Application Process



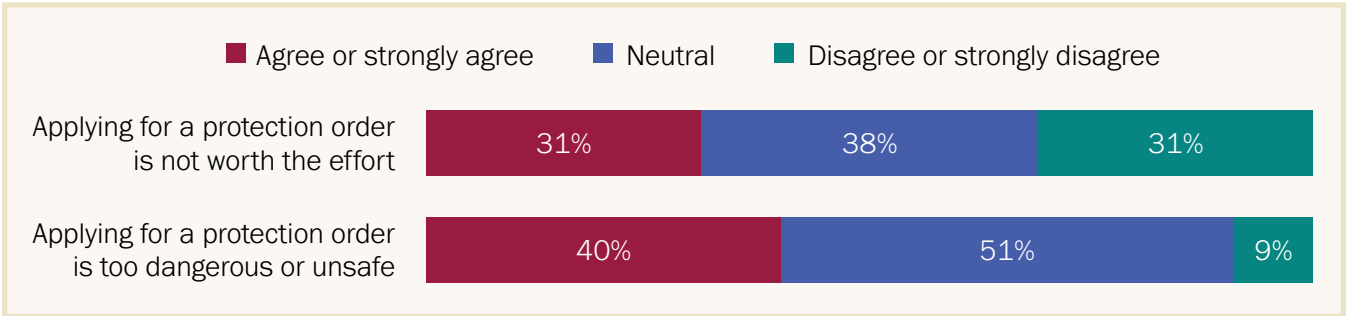
Answered = 67

Results were more mixed when it came to how survey participants perceived the potential costs/ benefits of applying for a protection order (see Fig. 12).

Most participants (38%) were neutral on whether applying for a protection order is worth the effort. But the remaining participants were equally split, with 31% who agreed that it is not worth the effort of applying, and 31% who disagreed.

Likewise, over half of participants were neutral on whether or not applying for a protection order is too dangerous or unsafe (51%). However, a significant proportion (40%) agreed that it is too dangerous or unsafe. Only 9% disagreed.

Figure 12: Perceived costs/ benefits of applying for a protection order



Answered = 67

Reasons for applying

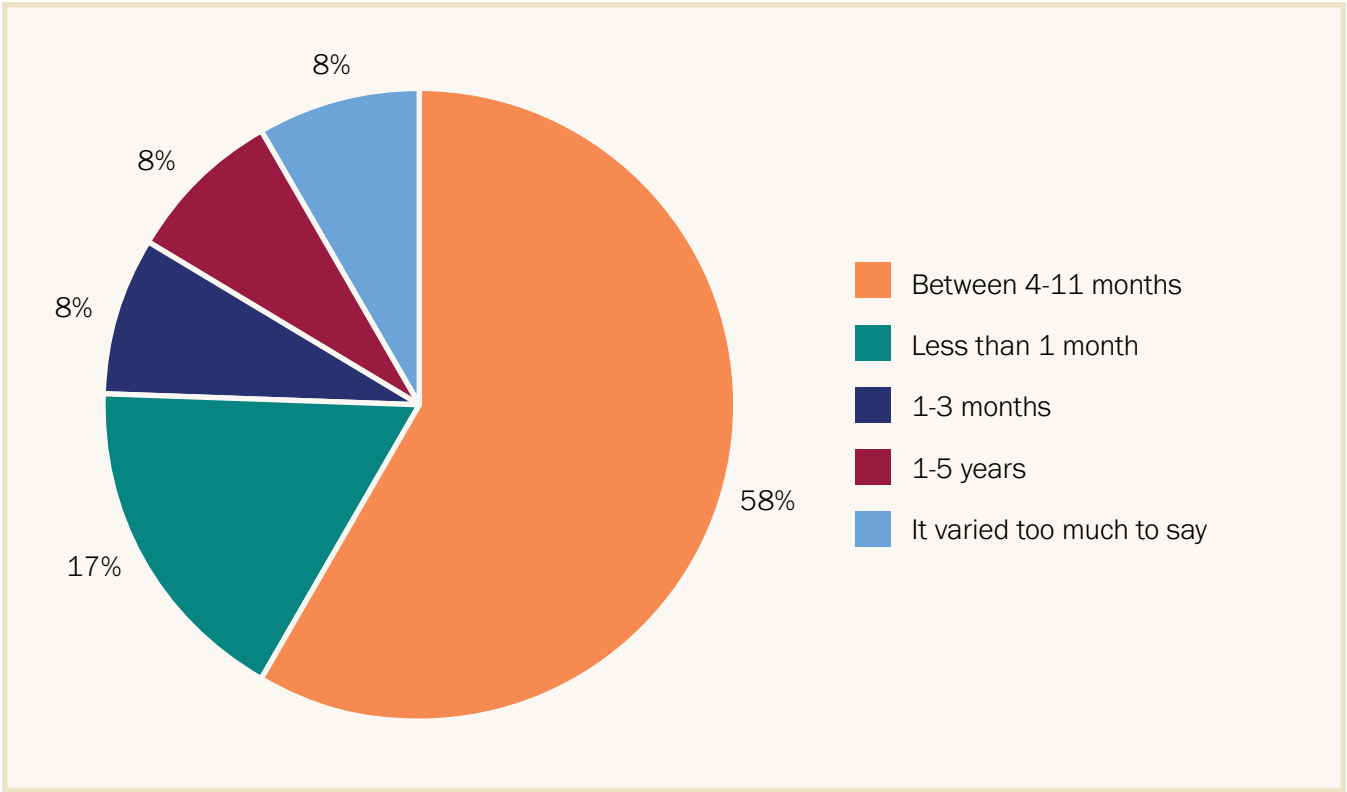
Among the protected persons in our sample, 36% had applied once for a protection order, 36% had applied twice, and 28% had applied 3 or more times.

In their qualitative responses, survivors described many reasons for applying, including physical and sexual violence, stalking, coercive control, and threats of violence. For many, fear for their children’s safety was a motivating factor in addition to their own safety.

Application wait times

Among those who were granted at least one protection order, most participants (58%) waited between 4-11 months on average to be granted the order (see Fig. 13). 17% waited less than one month, 8% waited 1-3 months, and 8% waited between 1-5 years to be granted a protection order. 8% said it varied too much to say.

Figure 13: On average, how long did it take to be granted a protection order?

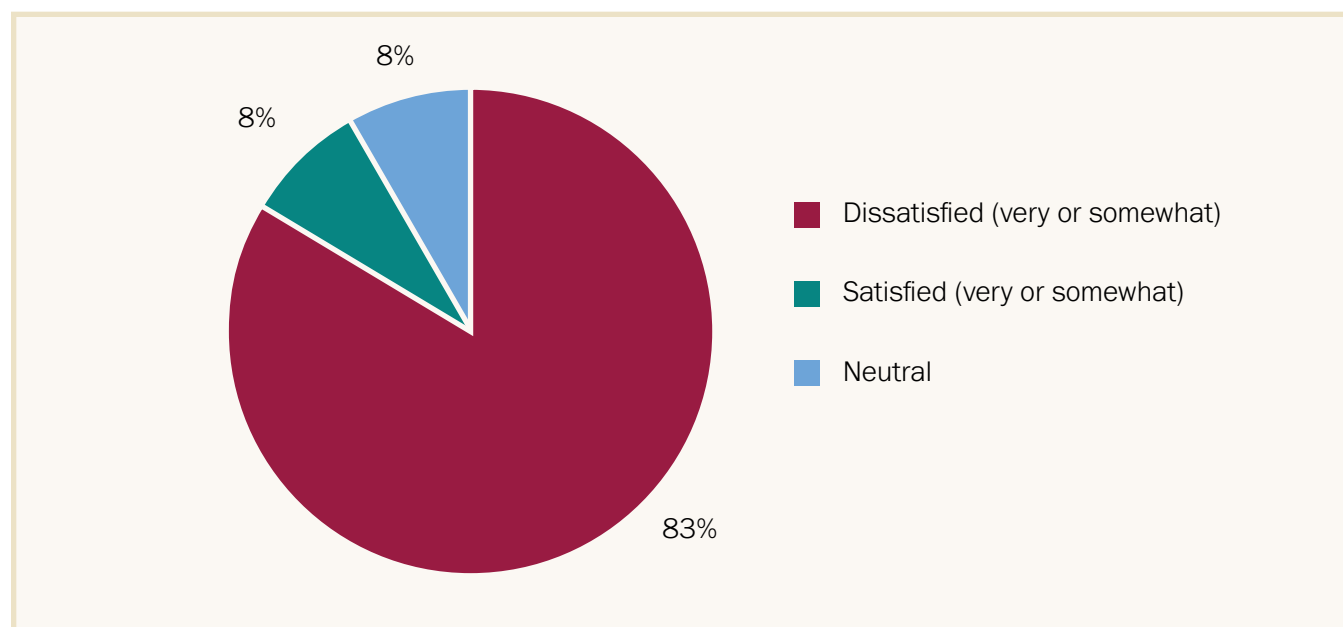


Answered = 12



As illustrated in Fig. 14, 83% of participants who applied for a protection order were dissatisfied with the length of time it took to get one, compared to 8% who were satisfied and 8% who were neutral.

Figure 14: How satisfied were you with the length of time it took to get a protection order?

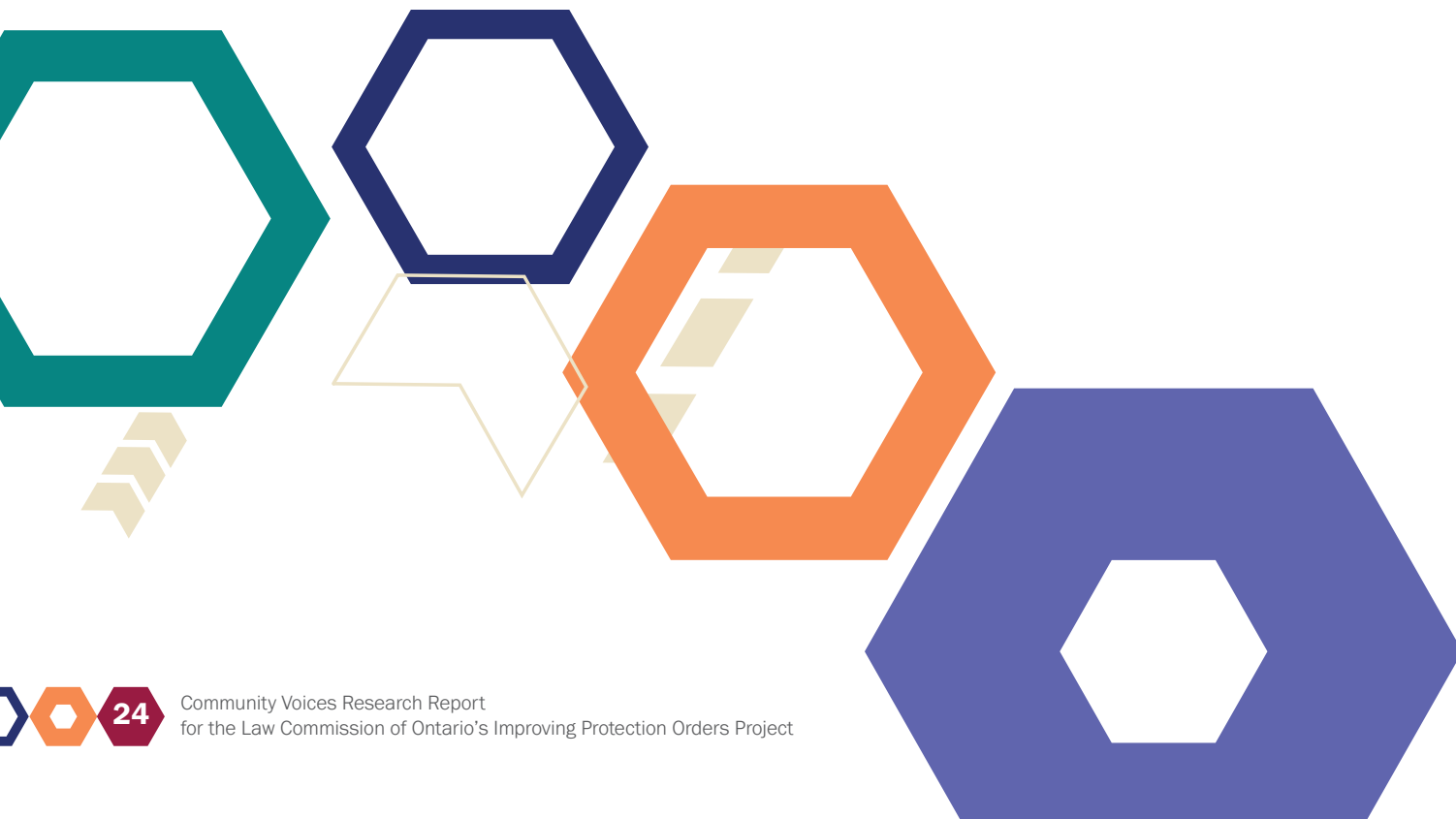


Answered = 12

Several elaborated to say that wait times increased their vulnerability to violence.

“The wait allowed further abuse to continue through family court and allowed offender to have supervised visits when it was unsafe for the infant involved and further added to my mental stress and wellbeing.”

“If someone is seeking protection it needs to be immediate.”



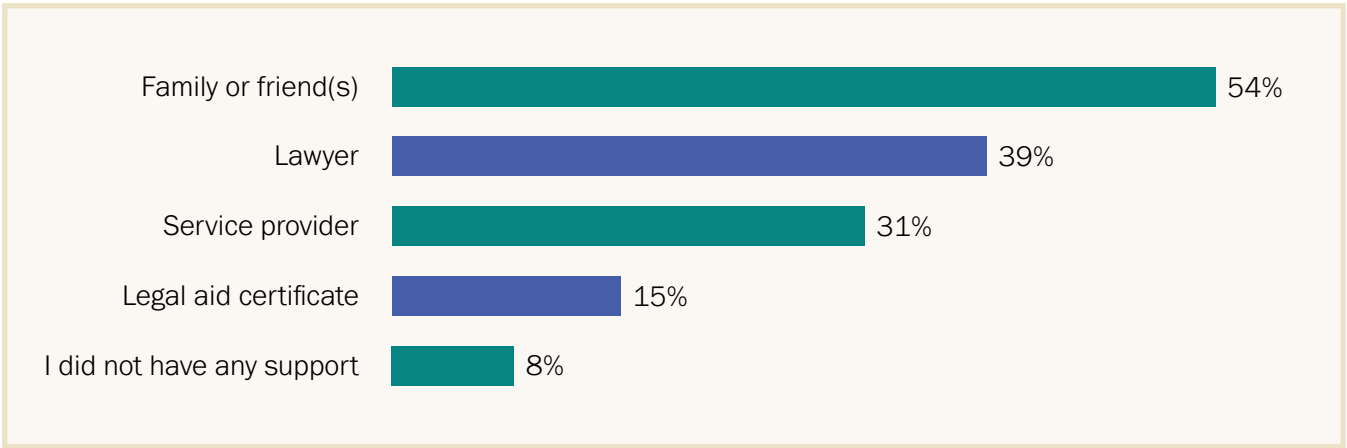
Legal representation & other supports

Roughly 39% of participants who applied for a protection order in our sample had help from a lawyer (see Fig. 15). About 15% had a legal aid certificate.

Other common types of support were family and friends (54%), service providers (31%), and help from police or victim's services (23%).

8% of participants said they did not have any support.

Figure 15: What kind of support did you have when applying? (Select all that apply)



Answered = 13

Finding the right lawyer and obtaining legal advice was seen as cost-prohibitive and inaccessible for some participants.

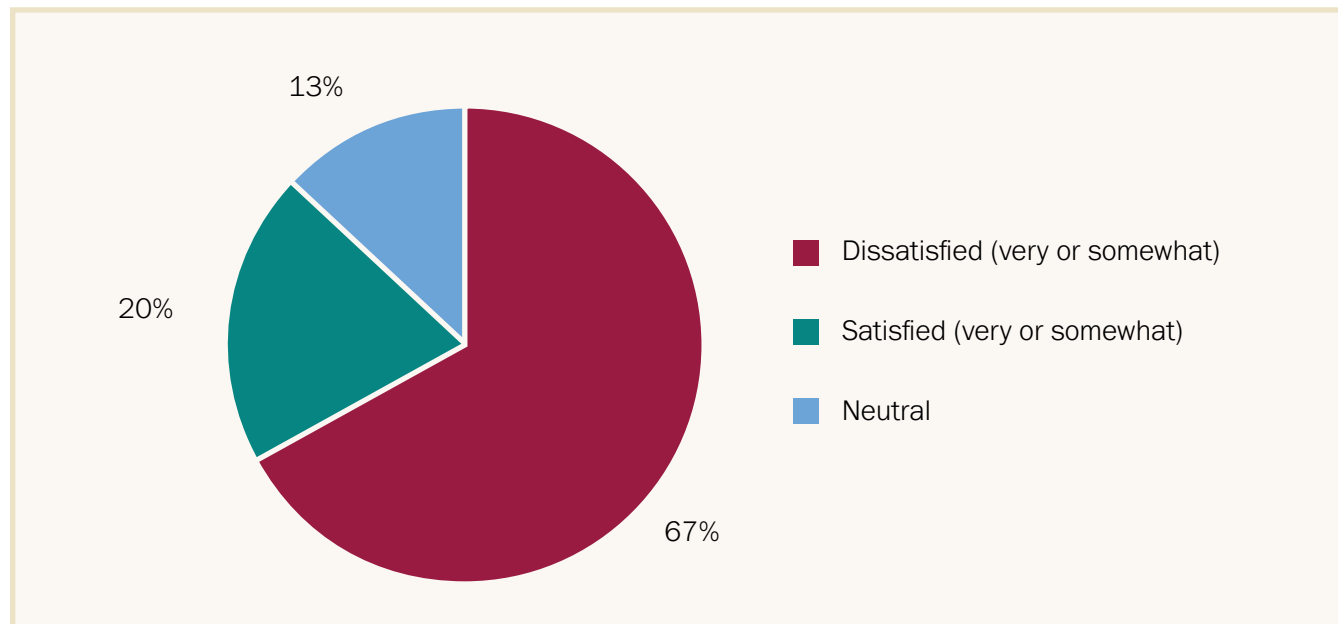
"I had no idea how to go about this. And lawyers are incredibly expensive."



Satisfaction with the application process

67% of participants who applied for a protection order were dissatisfied with the application process, compared to 20% who were satisfied (see Fig. 16). 13% were neutral.

Figure 16: Satisfaction with application process



Answered = 15

Among those who were satisfied, most qualitative comments focused on the timing and impact. As one participant explained: *"It was quick. It sent a necessary message."*

Another participant pointed to the differences between applying for different types of orders. As they explained, getting protective conditions on the offender's probation order was an *"easy process"* compared to getting a restraining order, which they thought *"was a terrible process. I did not feel supported and was unsuccessful."*

Some of the issues raised by participants that led to feelings of dissatisfaction included:

- **Lack of information:** Several participants described not being provided with necessary information about the process in a timely or sufficient manner.
- **Overwhelming system:** Some pointed out that navigating the legal system is confusing and overwhelming for the average person, let alone for someone who is experiencing trauma.

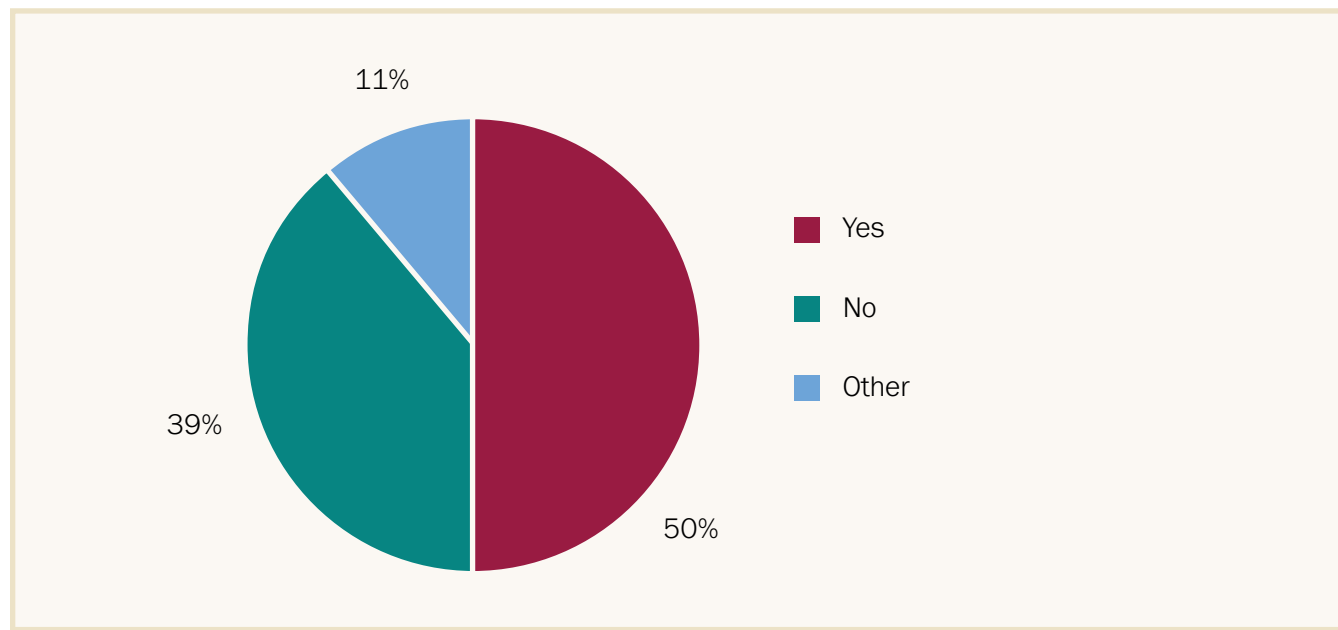
"Through the school of hard knocks, I am very familiar with how to apply for a peace bond and report breaches. This is not because the information is readily available or that the legal system does a good job of educating victim/survivors. It is because I am relentless in exercising my rights to the fullest of my abilities in a system that is broken."



Choosing not to apply

We also asked participants if they had ever considered applying for a protection order but chose not to or were otherwise unable to (see Fig. 17). 50% of participants said yes, they had considered applying but chose not to or were unable to apply. 39% said no and 11% said other (the reasons for which we elaborate on below).

Figure 17: Have you ever thought about applying for a protection order, but chose not to or were otherwise unable to for reasons outside your control?



Answered = 32

Some of the reasons why participants said they chose not to apply included:

- Being advised not to apply e.g. by police, probation officers, or others.
- Fear of police.
- Fear of retaliation or escalation of abuse.
- Fear they would not be believed.
- Not enough evidence.
- Lack of knowledge of how to apply.
- Lack of faith in the legal system.

"The probation officer advised me that they would be unlikely to grant it because nothing he had done since the previous order was 'bad enough' for them to grant it. That it was not enough for me to still be scared of him."

"I wasn't confident that I would be able to get one due to the police attitude I experienced. I was afraid that a legal process would take too long and make me unsafe while waiting."

I was concerned about the impact on my children if their father had them in his care and I was taking these steps. I thought he would keep them and not give them back."

Among the 11% who said "other," all described being so unaware or uninformed about the option of a protection order that it did not feel like a choice.

"...the court was ordering contact with her dad. They were not taking the abuse allegations into consideration... and they never even involved the Office of the Children's lawyer despite our request to do so. So, I don't know if I could have applied for a protection order, but no one ever informed me that it was even an option I should think about."

"I was unaware that we were even able to apply for a protection order outside of the police service charging the individual."

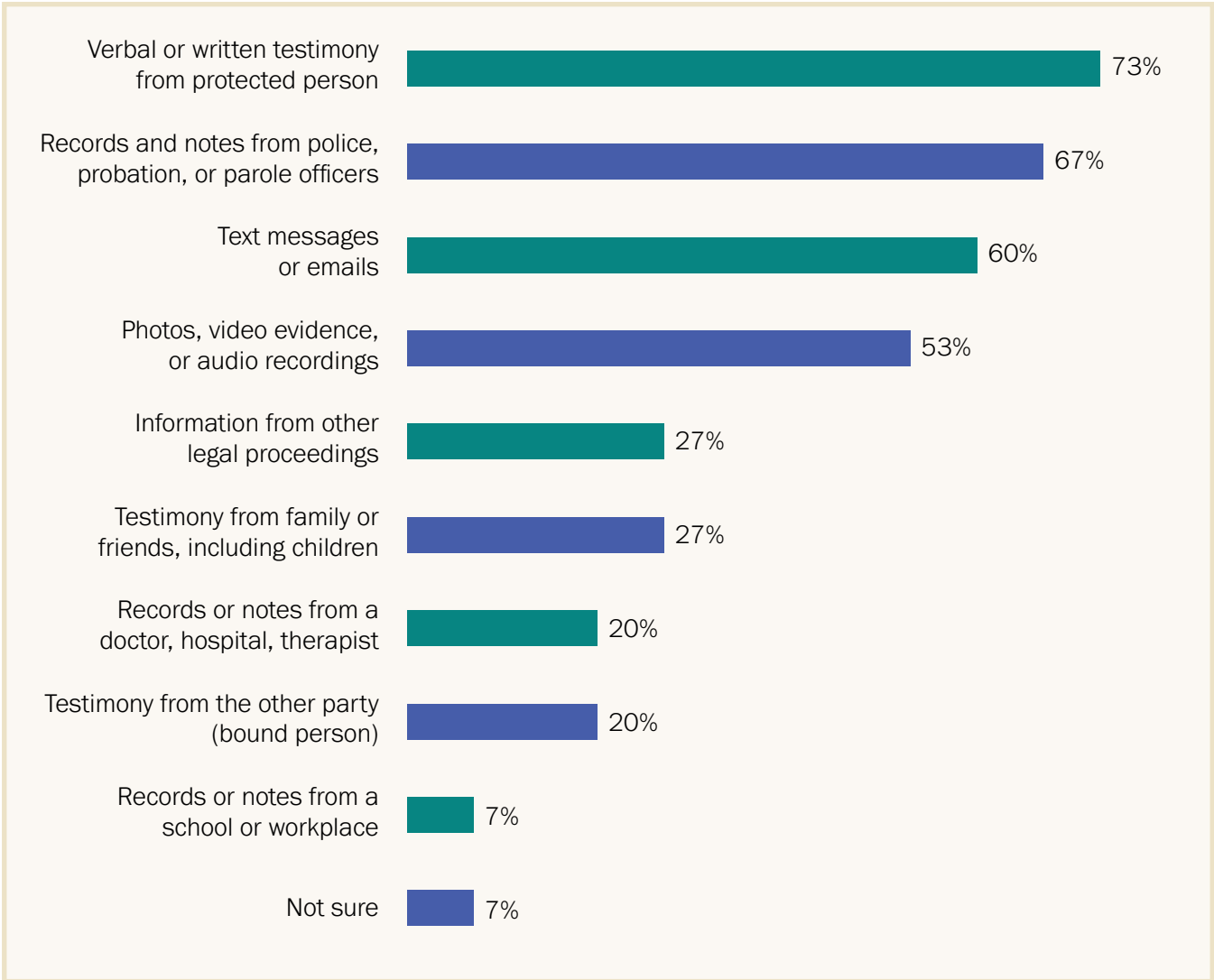
"I didn't know I could do this."

3: Evidence in Protection Order Proceedings

The most common type of evidence provided to the court when applying for a protection order was verbal or written testimony from the person seeking protection (73%) (see Fig. 18). This was followed by records and notes from police, probation, or parole officers (67%), text messages or emails (60%), and photos, video evidence, or audio recordings (53%). About one quarter (27%) included information from other legal proceedings, and 27% included testimony from family or friends, including children.

The least common types of evidence for the participants in our sample were records or notes from a doctor, hospital, or therapist (20%), testimony from the other party whom the victim-survivor was seeking protection from (20%), and records or notes from a school or workplace (7%). 7% of the participants said they were not sure what evidence was used.

Figure 18: What evidence was provided to the judge or court when you applied for a protection order? (Select all that apply)



Answered = 15

Under “other,” participants added *“testimony from another victim of the same perpetrator,”* and *“evidence provided by police and through legal counsel.”*

In their comments, some participants added that they found the evidentiary requirements very challenging or re-traumatizing.

In some cases, this had to do with feeling tasked with collecting *“compelling”* evidence while experiencing harassment and violence. Others described the re-victimization of providing evidence in front of the person causing harm, or frustration when evidence was not considered by the judge from their perspective. A few described wanting to protect their children or other family members from having to provide testimony in court.

“It is extremely difficult to provide compelling evidence in IPV cases [while undergoing] repeat attempts at harassment through a variety of methods.”

“I had to provide a verbal testimony in front of my intimate partner, the judge didn’t look at the doctor notes.”



4: Protection Order Conditions & Duration

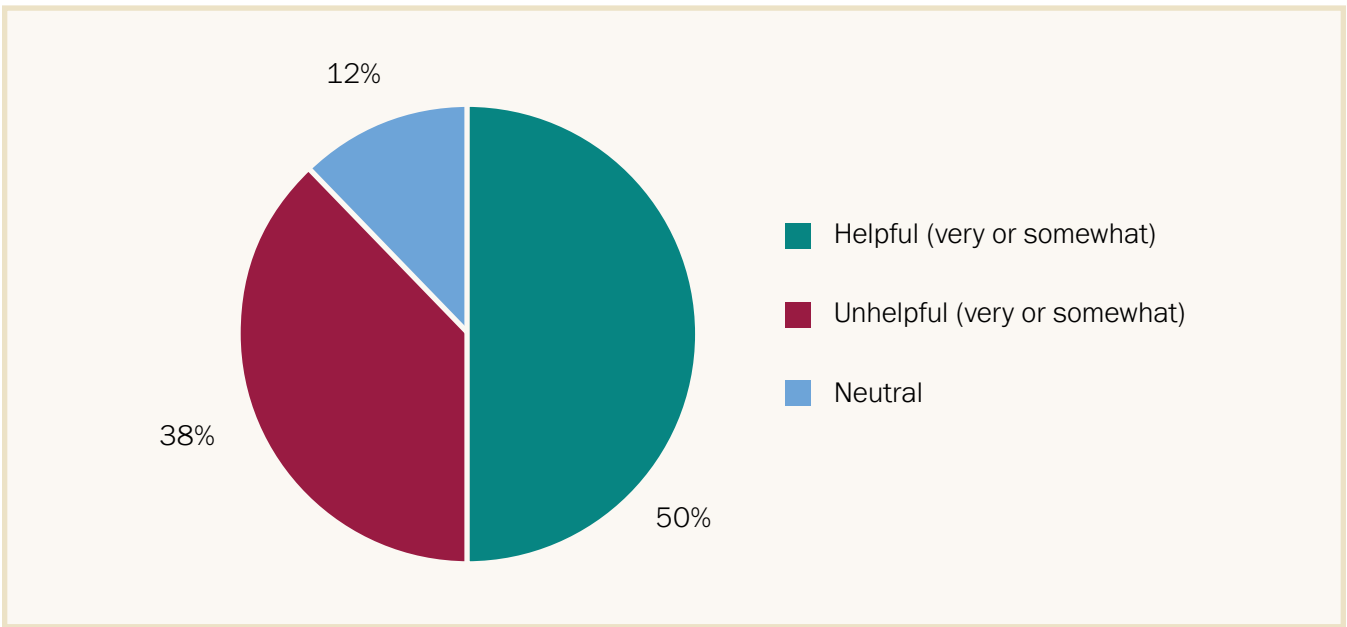
We also asked a series of questions about the conditions that were applied to their protection orders, as well as the duration of orders that were granted.

Protection order conditions

We asked participants an open-ended question about the types of conditions that were imposed on the person they wanted protection from. A variety of conditions were included in protection orders for the participants in our sample. The most common were “no contact” and “no go” conditions. A few participants also mentioned that the bound person could not have possession of animals and could only contact children with third party supervision. There were also some participants who were not informed of what the conditions were.

When asked how helpful the conditions were, there were mixed results (see Fig. 19). 50% of participants found the conditions very helpful or somewhat helpful. 38% said the conditions were unhelpful or very unhelpful, and 12% were neutral.

Figure 19: How helpful were the protection order conditions in keeping you and others involved safe?



Answered = 35



Among those who found the conditions helpful, some elaborated that they offered a deterrent and gave a sense of peace in a tense situation. As one participant described: *“It sent a message, and for a little while there was peace.”*

Some of the reasons why participants found the conditions unhelpful had to do with:

- Conditions that were generic or what could be described as boiler plate.
- Conditions that were ineffective because they were not based on actual safety needs.
- The victim-survivor not being consulted on what was needed.
- Vague or unclear conditions, which were challenging to enforce.

“No one asked our daughter [the protected person] if 100m distance was acceptable. She lives on a cul-de-sac, and each entrance is just on the limit... So her ex can be in those areas and has [been] frequently. It would have been ideal if the crown attorney or judge even cared to ask - but they did not care.”

“Very vague order with many spelling errors.”

We also asked participants if there were conditions that they needed that were not included. We received a variety of responses including:

- Wider area of restriction for “no go” conditions.
- No contact on social media or dating apps.
- No indirect contact or through 3rd party.
- No substance use (drugs or alcohol).
- No weapons.
- Conditions related to emotional abuse.
- Victim-survivor gets immediate sole custody of children.
- Taking into consideration intimidation tactics, such as a case where the bound person would drive down the protected person’s street but without stopping, or a case where the bound person moved next door.

“He should never have been allowed to live next door. We have been living in a prison for almost a year with so many ‘near breaches’ ... in the forest watching us, dead animals on our property...”

“The legal system needs to consider IPV to be an elevated issue with stronger repercussions in order to even begin to keep victims safe.”

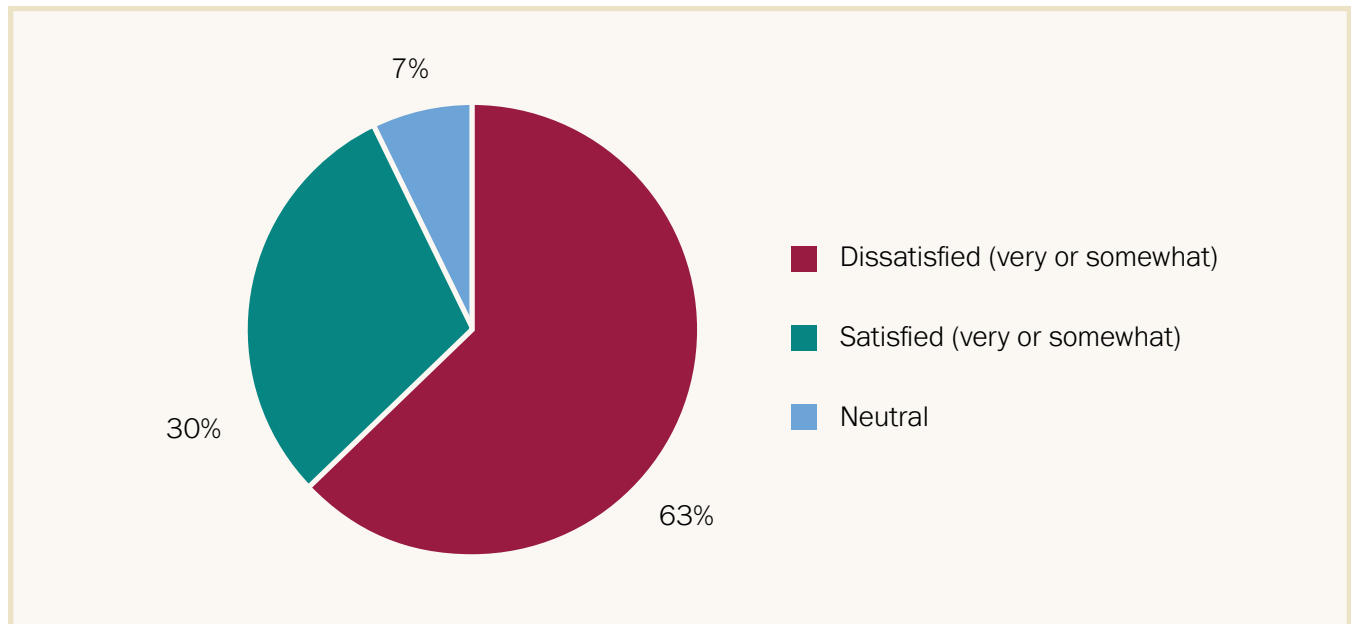


Duration of protection orders

Most protection orders for the protected persons in our sample lasted between 1-5 years (58%). 29% were not sure or could not remember. 10% lasted for less than a year, and 3% said it varies too much to say.

Over half of the participants (63%) were dissatisfied with how long the protection order lasted (see Fig. 20).

Figure 20: How satisfied are you with how long the protection order(s) lasts?



Answered = 32

Participants' qualitative comments about their dissatisfaction with the duration of their protection orders reflected the following themes:

- **Lack of information:** A few described not knowing that the order could be renewed or not knowing what would happen when the order ended.
- **Challenges renewing:** A few described challenges renewing the order, and how this placed them *"in harms way."*
- **Duration too short to prevent harm:** Among the reasons for lack of satisfaction, many participants raised concerns about the risks of harm between a protection order being discontinued and the process for seeking renewal or subsequent orders.

"Once the order was discontinued, I felt like I was open prey, and that the system did not care about my well-being, nor that of my children."

- **Need for indefinite duration:** Some participants recommended that duration should be *"indefinite"* for repeat offenders or high-risk cases. Or that orders should remain in place so long as safety concerns or risk factors are present.

"I believe protection orders should be reassessed at intervals and if safety concerns and risk factors remain present, then the order remains in place. The victim should be an active participant in deciding when the protection order is removed. If there is a pattern of breaches, then the order should continue and further actions for protection and accountability should be considered and discussed."

We elaborate on this suggested reform in Section 6.

5: Breaches & Enforcement of Protection Orders

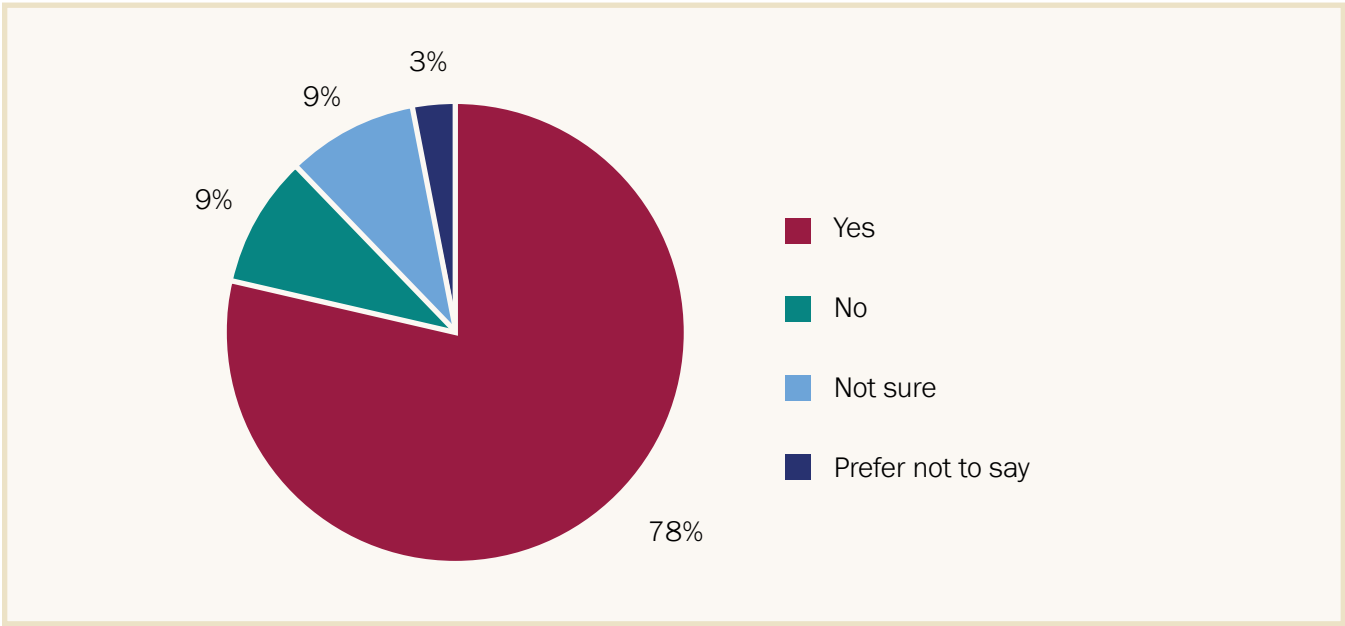
We also collected data on breaches and enforcement. Because our sample of persons bound by protection orders was small, we focused our analysis mainly on the experiences of protected persons and their concerned family and friends.

How often did breaches occur?

Among participants who had a protection order in place, 78% reported that conditions had been breached (see Fig. 21). Only 9% said there had been no breaches to their knowledge, 9% were unsure, and 3% preferred not to say.

Among the 78% who said yes, 44% said there have been “many” breaches and 34% said there have been “a few” breaches of the conditions.

Figure 21: To your knowledge, has the person you wanted to be protected from breached any conditions?



Answered = 32



Types of breaches

The most common breaches were of “no contact” and “no go” conditions, which makes sense because these were the most common types of conditions noted earlier. Participants reported that the bound person initiated both direct and indirect contact and described instances of the bound person coming near their homes and workplaces.

Some also described “near breaches” or actions that were not considered chargeable offences but that nevertheless formed part of an overall pattern of violence and intimidation.

“My ex contacted me over 20 times since the no contact order. He came by my work, came by my place, contacted my family, and actually sent a judge an email, and copied me on it, telling the judge about my sex life (it was sent around 2 am so I assume he was intoxicated).”

“My child reports that he has multiple weapons in his possession (the weapons he described are ones that I know him to have as I was present when they were purchased).”

How often were breaches reported to police?

We asked participants how many of the breaches were reported to police or law enforcement. 68% of participants said all breaches were reported, 24% said some of them, and 4% said none of the breaches to their knowledge were reported to police. 4% were not sure.

In many cases, it was the protected person or their family/loved ones who reported the breach to police.

Some reported facing retaliation or experiencing negative effects in their concurrent processes in family court.

“The onus has been 100% on me to report these breaches, which is then used against me in family court saying that I have ‘unilaterally imposed criminal charges’ or that I am making ‘malicious reports’.”

“The detective told [my daughter, the protected person] ‘don’t poke the bear.’ She reported him to his superior and nothing was done... [Later] he gave her a warning not to go over his head if she wasn’t happy with his handling of her case.”

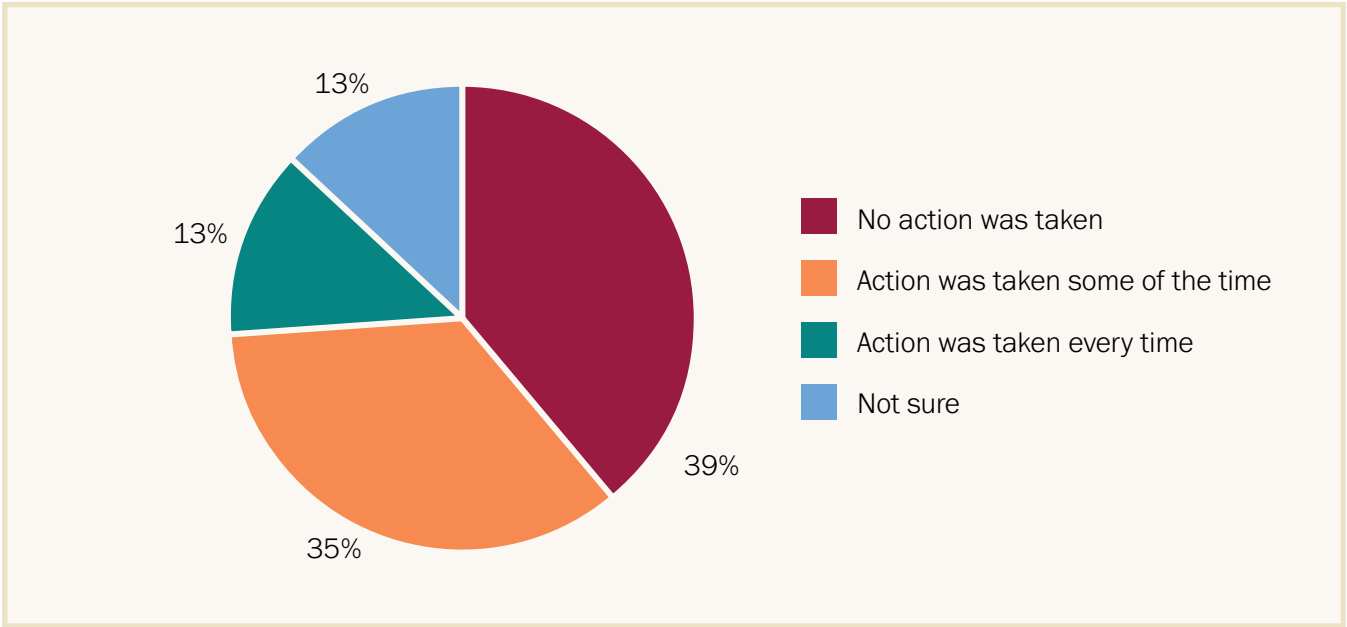


How often was action taken?

We also asked participants how often, to their knowledge, the police or law enforcement took action to respond to the breaches (see Fig. 22). Results were mixed. 39% of protected persons in our sample said no action was ever taken. 35% said action was taken some of the time, and 13% said action was taken every time. 13% were unsure.

Among those who said action was taken some of the time, several commented that it took many breaches before any meaningful action was taken.

Figure 22: How often was action taken by police or law enforcement to respond to the breach(es)?



Answered = 23

What types of action were taken to respond to breaches?

In terms of the action taken, according to our participants, more than half of the time (56%) the person who breached was charged with a crime. The most common charge was breach of a court order or breach of probation. In 38% of cases, the person who breached was given a verbal warning not to do it again. In 31% of cases, there was an investigation by police, but no action was taken.

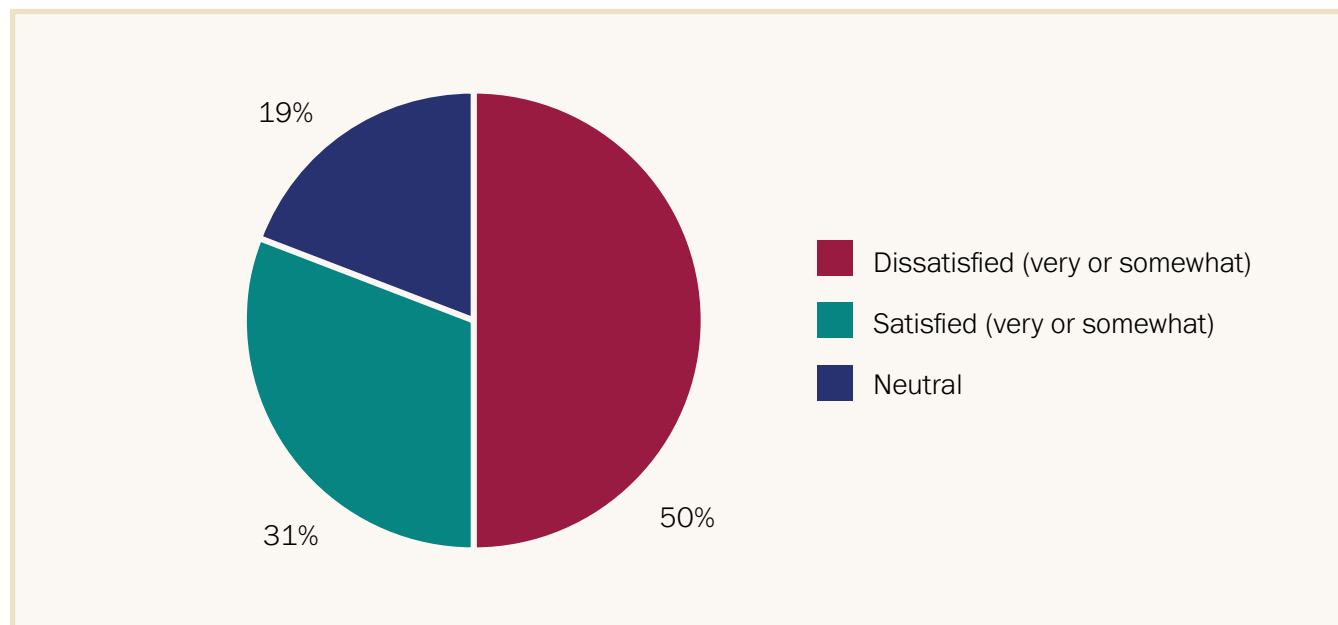
In 19% of cases, no one informed the participant about any action taken. Some participants elaborated that they only found out about action taken because of their own sustained efforts to stay informed.

“To be clear the only reason we learned of any action taken was due to a meeting we had with the crown and police to discuss the situation and what was being done about it.”

Satisfaction with actions taken

When we asked participants how satisfied they were with the action taken, results were mixed (see Fig. 23). Half were dissatisfied (50%), roughly a third were satisfied (31%) and 19% were neutral on this indicator.

Figure 23: How satisfied were you with the action taken?



Answered = 16

Impact of actions taken

Qualitative responses paint a more complex picture of how survivors experienced breaches and enforcement, and the impact that both actions taken and lack of action had for survivors and their families. The following case examples illustrate these nuances.

Example 1

This participant expressed high levels of satisfaction with the enforcement of the protection order. In response to “*many*” contact breaches, all of them reported to police by the protected person, law enforcement took action “*every time*.” The person who breached was charged with a “*breach of a court order*.” When asked what impact the actions taken had on them, the participant said that: “*It showed that I was serious about no contact*.”

Example 2

This participant expressed that enforcement actions “*Just made me more frightened*.” This was a case where the bound person, according to the participant, had been “*charged with assault, sexual assault – but was not convicted never even went to trial because of the judge*.” In this case, the bound person breached the no contact order by calling the protected person. Police also told the protected person that there had been a breach of the no go order: “*police came to me... he was spotted near my home*.” The actions taken were an investigation by police, a verbal warning not to do it again, but no further action taken. When asked about the impact of actions taken by law enforcement, the participant expressed that “*it increased my fear*.”

Example 3

This participant expressed that they were “*somewhat*” satisfied with the actions taken by police yet nevertheless reported high levels of mental distress and negative impacts of the process. In this case, there were “*many*” breaches over a period of six years, including “*indirect contact, communication breaches, and breaches of the 500-metre condition.*” The participant said they reported all of the breaches to police “*with evidence.*” When asked what actions were taken, they explained that “*Action was never taken until the last breach*” where the respondent was “*charged on 3 counts of breaches, which led to the judge issuing a new non-association order through criminal court.*”

When asked about the impact of the actions taken, the participant described significant negative impacts on their mental health that they felt could have been avoided if action had been taken sooner.

“I was relieved when police and the Crown Attorney took the most recent breaches very seriously and acted on them immediately. But they acted on it because of the accumulation of breaches I have consistently reported over the course of the last several years. It shouldn’t have come to this. There shouldn’t have been this many opportunities given to him to stop when he was escalating, not abiding by the orders... I am broken down and beyond exhausted - I am burnt out from this vicious cycle of advocating for our needs of protection.”

Over the six-year period of time where no action was taken, the participant described the toll on their health and their loss of faith in the justice system.

“There was a significant impact on my mental and physical health. My stress levels were at an all-time high and this impacted my ability to focus, frequent panic attacks and hyper vigilance, triggered states of obsessive compulsive behaviours that included constant checking of my doors and windows to ensure they’re locked even when I knew they were locked, fear of leaving my home and being out in public. Basically, the

message to me was he could do anything he wanted and there was nothing that could keep me and my daughter safe from him - this made me become physically ill because I was reddened with intense fear and a complete lack of trust in our system.”

Example 4

This participant was the parent of a protected person. In this case, there were multiple breaches. “*Only one breach resulted in a charge. The other breaches were reported but not investigated.*” The detective also told the protected person, “*Don’t poke the bear*” when multiple breaches were reported.

One of the breaches was reported to police by the protected person’s child. When it came to providing evidence of the breach, the protected person was told that her child would need to provide a statement at the police station “*they would not do otherwise*” and how the protected person was in an impossible situation because she “*did not want further trauma to her child who had already experienced years of abuse.*”

The parent of the protected person described how victim-blaming of her daughter just emboldened the abuser and increased her daughter’s vulnerability:

“Our daughter feels afraid, vulnerable and exposed to the abuse of her ex-husband and she feels that her children are also at risk because he is emboldened to break these rules with impunity.”



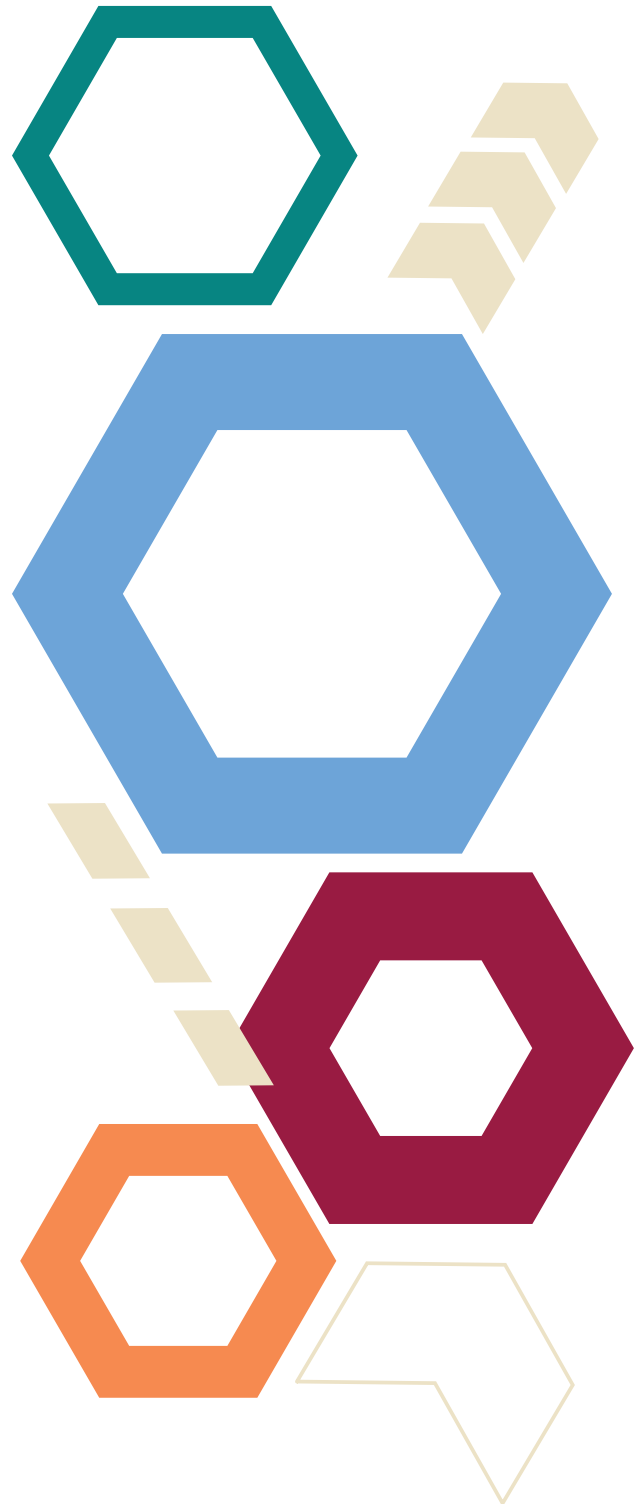
Impact of no actions taken

In cases where no action was taken, we asked participants if they knew why. Reasons included:

- Bound person exhibited “*good behaviour*” and thus no further action was required.
- Lack of police resources.
- Person reporting the breach was not believed/not seen as credible.
- Police stated the protection order had “*unclear conditions*” or the situation was a “*grey area.*”
- Police did not follow through on their investigations.

Another common theme, regardless of whether or not action was taken, involved victim-blaming by law enforcement when breaches were reported according to participants. As noted in the case examples above, several participants described being told by law enforcement that they should expect retaliation for reporting breaches. Another participant described being blamed by the officer for any future retaliation or “*fallout*” from reporting a breach:

“I was told by a police officer that it was my fault if there was ‘fallout’ from reporting my ex-partner breaching conditions and parking at the end of my driveway on the road. The OPP officer told me ‘You wanted me to charge him, so I did. You shouldn’t be surprised if people are pissed off at you because of it.’ Even with security camera footage I was told my ex-partner should just get a warning.”



6: Suggested Reforms

Many participants shared their visions for reforming protection orders in Ontario. We highlight these below, followed by specific reforms suggested around the survey's key themes of access, conditions, and enforcement.

Education and training

As noted previously, participants frequently perceived that police and legal professionals did not understand the gravity of their safety concerns and breaches.

- A common reform involved expanding education and training on risk factors for IPV, coercive control, trauma, and preventing revictimization or further harm to those seeking protection.
- Participants suggested more training for a broad range of professionals, including legal actors such as judges, court staff, and lawyers, as well as law enforcement such as police and probation officers. A few also suggested anti-bias training for social workers and victim services programs.
- Some suggested that training be provided or delivered in partnership with GBV experts and non-profit organizations in the community.

“Educate police and staff the domestic violence teams properly to investigate breaches... Work with the vast array of non-profits (Luke’s Place, Interval House) and LISTEN to their solutions and IMPLEMENT them so that offenders are stopped - not emboldened.”

“More training for professionals so that they learn to see what is really going on instead of just working from their own biases.”

“There should be a common list of primary risk factors used by police, judges, child welfare etc. to better inform the process and decisions made.”

“Evidence can be an issue in matters involving coercive control - providing judges/courts training about the evidence in such matters should be addressed.”

Protecting the safety of children

Results showed that many victims-survivors were motivated by a desire to protect their children, and in some cases, this fueled their sustained action despite setbacks. Not surprisingly, when it came to reforms, many participants suggested having more protections in place for children and creating better understandings of the risk factors involving children as well as the actions of mothers seeking to protect their children from abuse.

- Several pointed out that parenting negotiations can make protection orders much more complicated to enforce, especially when children get *“caught in the middle and confused.”*
- Some participants suggested that time with children, if allowed, should always be supervised by a third party as part of the conditions. One noted that third-party supervisors sometimes also face threats, and their safety should be taken into account.

“Third parties doing exchanges become fearful that they will themselves become victims and it can be challenging for them to continue to be a support person.”

- Because parenting disputes can be used to exert coercive control, several participants suggested more education for legal actors on these patterns and the impacts of IPV/FV on children.
- A few pointed out how their attempts to protect their children from abuse were interpreted by the courts as a *“risk of abduction”* or parental alienation. They suggested that more education on the dynamics of IPV, including the harm to children, could help courts make informed decisions.

“Make judges who issue such orders understand IPV and how it impacts children.”



Listening to survivors

Because many participants expressed feeling isolated in their experience and facing victim-blaming when reporting breaches or seeking access to protection, many emphasized the importance of believing survivors. In terms of reforms, this included consulting with survivors when making legal or policy changes.

Several participants described their own advocacy efforts, which we have not included here in order to protect their identities. Others expressed a desire to lead or inform change once their situation allowed for it.

“Once I am safe, I would most welcome an opportunity to help change this system in ways that are more survivor focused/lead.”

“If there is a pattern of breaches, then the order should continue... The victim should be an active participant in deciding when the protection order is removed.”

Conditions and enforcement

Survey participants had many suggestions to strengthen protective conditions and compliance.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common reforms called for better enforcement.

- While a minority of participants were satisfied with action taken to address breaches, most wanted their concerns to be taken more seriously by courts, Crown attorneys, and police. They wanted conditions that were meaningful and enforcement that was effective in deterring further breaches.
- A common reform participants recommended was electronic monitoring, including the use of video surveillance and electronic monitoring bracelets, particularly in high-risk cases or where access to weapons was an issue. Some noted that electronic monitoring would also reduce the need for survivors to provide evidence of breaches.

- Several suggested that “no access to weapons” be automatically included as a condition and taken more seriously.
- One suggested that a registry should be created to help track breaches of conditions.
- Stronger deterrents, like increased jail time or fines, were also named as strategies for reducing breaches.

“For it to actually work, protections need to be far more stringent, breaches need to be much more firmly dealt with, and the onus should NOT be on victims to constantly provide police and Crown Attorneys with evidence. Victims need to be believed. The justice system needs to actually use the conditions under Bill S205 to require electronic monitoring bracelets for those out on Peace Bonds or Keira’s Law (or Bill C233) for those released on Bail Conditions.”

“Implementing electronic monitoring bracelets would reduce the onus placed on the victim/survivor to provide concrete evidence.”

“I think all protection orders should automatically include a no weapons possession. Someone who displays this kind of behaviour should not be allowed weapons.”



Access and duration

Some participants saw access as directly tied to enforcement, in the sense that more people will want to apply for protection orders if they are more effective. Participants also suggested that longer durations could improve safety and reduce the burden on survivors to re-apply.

- Many saw the process of applying for a protection order as a time of increased risk, with the potential for violence to escalate. Reducing waiting times and providing more information about the process were seen as important actions to mitigate safety concerns.
- Finding ways to reduce re-traumatization was another commonly proposed reform. Several participants mentioned that having the option to attend court online could encourage more survivors to apply for protection orders.
- Some suggested that protection orders be indefinite, particularly in high-risk cases or as long as there was evidence of breaches. This would save survivors from having to re-apply and could avoid the risk of escalation during periods when orders have lapsed.

“Protection orders for domestic abuse, especially repeated domestic abuse including continued harassment outside of the relationship, should be indefinite and released only under very rigorous determination of the risk of repeat behaviour having been eliminated.”

“This man is a repeat offender with very predictable behaviour. In cases such as this, the protection order should be indefinite as he has shown to breach and reoffend once the protection order is done.”

Coordination and communication

Finding ways to improve coordination or communication among the different systems involved with protection orders was another common theme.

“The criminal system and family system need to speak to one another as these situations cannot be dealt with in silos. For example, the Criminal court implements a peace bond with no contact, then the family court overrides that, ordering direct communication... where the perpetrator then has freedom to continue the verbal, psychological, emotional abuse and coercive control.”

Taking action on policy and systems change

A significant number of participants expressed their support for the LCO’s research and consultations on protection orders, and wanted to ensure continued action on this topic.

“Please take action. Please do not stop in pushing for victims’ rights, protections for victims. Please continue to lobby for changes in our horribly broken justice system so that victims of any age or background are not subject to continued victimization, that we do not have continued instances of women, families, children, being killed by perpetrators of IPV. Do not stop - please continue to support, drive and champion change, listen to victims and their stories, and protect families. There should be no alternative.”

“Please change this very broken system so women and children who experience IPV and need protection are not further harmed when they try to seek help through the processes that are supposed to be in place to help them.”





Conclusion

This *Community Voices* report analyzed the lived experience of protection orders for 80 individuals who responded to the LCO's detailed survey. This included voices from applicants, protected persons, bound persons, family and friends of those affected, and individuals who considered applying but did not—on what is working, what is not, and what needs to change. The findings underscore how protection orders are a vital tool in the prevention of intimate partner violence and family violence, but without meaningful reform, they risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than effective mechanisms for safety.

The community voices shared in this report confirm that survivors of IPV/FV seek protection orders to address serious safety issues for themselves and their children. Yet for many this remains a promise unfulfilled.

Indeed, the survey results present a complex but ultimately troubling snapshot of survivors' experience with protection orders. On the one hand, a significant proportion of participants reported some success with protection orders, satisfaction with conditions, and effectiveness of protection orders as a legal deterrent when enforced in ways that are violence-and-trauma-informed. On the other hand, results confirmed major challenges with the application process, wait times, boiler plate conditions, challenging evidentiary requirements, significant lack of enforcement and victim-blaming, and overall loss of faith or trust in the legal system for a significant proportion of the survivors who engaged with protection orders.



For the first time, the LCO survey results provide detailed, nuanced, and empirical evidence of the experiences of community members, including survivors, of Ontario's protection order landscape. Not surprisingly, the survey results confirm longstanding criticisms of protection orders in Ontario: protection orders can be very helpful but in far too many cases they do not protect the safety of survivors or their children.

Specific issues that need addressing include:

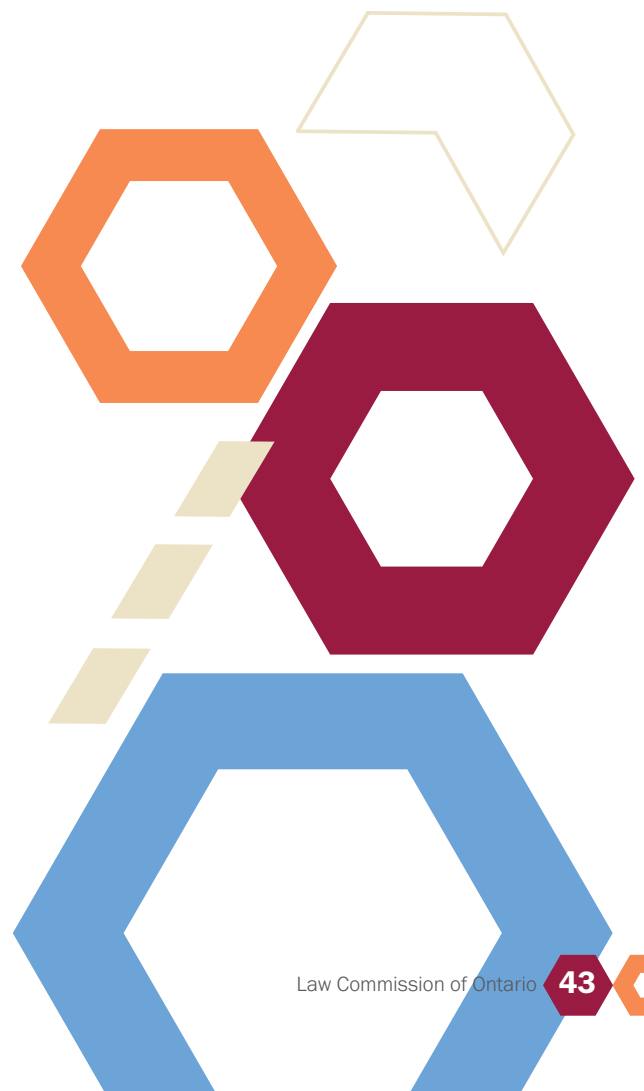
- **Enforcement failures:** These were the most common concern of protected persons, with many reporting repeated breaches and little or no action taken by police or courts. Survivors spoke of feeling abandoned, blamed, and even criminalized when seeking help. Lack of action not only undermined the purpose of protection orders but also eroded trust in the justice system.
- **Access barriers:** The application process itself was another source of frustration. Survivors recounted long delays, complex procedures, and evidentiary requirements that were difficult to meet—especially while coping with trauma. For some, these barriers were insurmountable, leading them to forgo applying altogether. Others described how the process exposed them to further harm, including retaliation and escalation of abuse, as well as troubling failures in protecting their privacy.
- **Inadequate deterrents:** Conditions and durations of orders were frequently criticized as inadequate. Generic conditions failed to address specific safety needs, and short durations left survivors vulnerable once orders expired. Lack of information about renewal options compounded these risks. Participants emphasized that protection orders should be tailored, survivor-informed, and, in high-risk cases, indefinite.

Beyond individual experiences, the findings point to significant systemic issues: poor coordination between criminal and family courts, insufficient understanding of IPV/FV among legal actors, and pervasive victim-blaming. These structural flaws perpetuate harm.

Implications for policy and practice

For the participants of this survey, protection orders are not inherently flawed—they remain a critical component of Ontario's response to IPV and FV. Indeed, participants saw a clear path ahead for reforming the system: invest in education and training, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, improve access and duration, make conditions meaningful and specific, and prioritize survivor voices in policy development and system reform. These changes require coordination and collaboration across legal, social, and community sectors, as well as sustained advocacy and political will.

The LCO's project is examining how to improve all aspects of protection orders, including access, legal processes, evidentiary requirements, conditions, duration, enforcement, and coordination. The stories shared in this report provide a roadmap for change. Policymakers must act decisively to transform protection orders from a broken promise into a meaningful safeguard for those who need it most.



More Information and How to Get Involved

The LCO's Improving Protection Orders project will produce an independent, evidence-based, and comprehensive analysis of protection orders in Ontario. The LCO's final report will recommend reforms to laws, policies, and practices where appropriate.

More information about this survey and the LCO project is available on our project website at <https://lco-cdo.org/en/projects/protection-orders/>. Project materials include our project Consultation Paper, an Executive Summary, and other background information. The Consultation Paper and Executive Summary are available in English and French.

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