

Political Ex-Prisoners

'An Unaddressed Legacy'

Tar Isteach: A Survey of Conflict-Related Prisoners' Experiences

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Executive Summary

This report is based upon a programme of research that was undertaken with republican former prisoners in 2014. It included a survey of 51 persons, focus groups including men and women and follow-up interviews with survey respondents. The following are examples of some of the findings;

- Within the sample ‘Determinate or Fixed-Term’ imprisonment was the most common type of incarceration (60.8%). More than a quarter (29.4%) had been interned, with a smaller proportion of respondents experiencing remand (23.5%) or Indeterminate/Life/Secretary of State’s Pleasure (13.7%)
- The average length of time in prison was 7 years with the largest share of respondents (41.2%) being released in the 1980s. Around one in eight (11.6%) had been imprisoned for at least 16 years
- As would be expected given labour market exclusion and issues relating to deprivation the majority of respondents (62.7%) live in rented accommodation, with 29.4% living within their own home. In 2011 home ownership in NI was measured at 67.5% or roughly 40% higher
- In NI it has been estimated that ‘21% of the working age population claimed at least one key benefit’. Within this sample the bulk of respondents (68.7%) were in receipt of sickness/incapacity or unemployment benefit. Within that some two-thirds are claiming sickness/incapacity benefits
- Only one in ten respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it had been easy for them to find the type of job that they are qualified for since release

- Just 12% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the peace process has made it easier for former political prisoners to cope financially, emotionally and socially
- **Six in ten** (56.9%) stated that their physical health is poor. This compares to one in ten within the NI population who stated that their health was bad or very bad
- **Almost two thirds** stated that they had accomplished less than they would have liked to over the past four weeks due to their physical health
- Poor physical health and emotional problems interferes with social activities with family, friends, neighbours and groups for the majority of respondents. Around a fifth of respondents (19.6%) stated that emotional and physical problems have **not** interfered at all in routine activities.
- Although a direct comparison cannot be made with the NI population it is worth noting that the stresses and symptoms of trauma and mental ill-health are pronounced. Within the NI population almost 1 in 5 respondents (19%) showed signs of a possible mental health problem, by scoring highly on the GHQ12. Within this sample almost **half of respondents** (49%) have been prescribed medication for anxiety or sleeping difficulties during the past year
- A similar, but smaller, proportion (45.1%) have been prescribed medication for **depression** in the last year
- 8% of those who work **do not** feel physical pain compared **to a third** of those who are unemployed who feel such pain
- Respondents who are unemployed are **more than twice** as likely as those who work to take anti-depressants or medication for anxiety/sleeping difficulties
- Half of those who state high self-esteem are in employment compared to 26.3% who are unemployed
- A quarter of those employed **compared to 46.1%** of those who are unemployed stated that they have considered reducing their alcohol intake

- Less than a third of respondents (31.4%) had ‘not at all’ felt nervous, anxious or on edge over the past two weeks, with more than one in ten (11.8%) feeling this way nearly every day
- In the two weeks prior to surveying a significant proportion of respondents (26.6%) have been bothered by **not** being able to stop or control worrying every day or at least half of all days over the past two weeks
- **Less than a third of respondents** (29.4%) have not ‘worried too much about different things’, with a significant proportion (13.7%) worrying too much about different things nearly every day
- The vast majority of respondents (86.3%) had experienced trouble relaxing over the previous two weeks
- **More than three quarters** (76.5%) of respondents have often or sometimes thought about stressful life events when they did not mean to
- **68.6% have often** or sometimes avoided letting themselves get upset when they thought about stressful life events
- The majority of respondents (58.9%) stated that a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment was linked to moderate or severe physical injury. **A higher share (66.7%) felt** that moderate or severe psychological harm was a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment.

What this report highlights in terms of policy is the following;

- 1) The past remains a site within which present emotional and physical health problems are highly related;
- 2) There is no societal or statutory response to the past and its affects upon diverse communities. The issues of harm and loss are not being re-defined and the problems of this upon individuals and/or communities are not being factored into shared thinking and problem-solving. This is the case despite long-standing commitments to 'joined-up' and community-led solutions to 'sensitive and complex' issues.ⁱ The landscape of assistance is fractured, at times ad hoc and also poorly funded or funded only in the short-term;
- 3) The issues of victims and the past seem to be being 'dealt with' through excluding those with conflict-related imprisonment from entering normal social activities. Such criminalisation is contrary to the Good Friday Agreement and the costs of those exclusions are labour market exclusion, penury and reliance upon benefits. Excluding former prisoners from the labour market undermines good health and creates a financial burden upon the state. It is a reality that is counter-intuitive with regard to building citizenship through employment and related tax contributions;
- 4) A sense that the former conflict-related prisoner position has been resolved or that aging within that community means that somehow it is less relevant in building peace is erroneous. As evidenced here the social, welfare and health needs of such persons are largely unaddressed which means that welfare dependency is actually worsening. The Jamieson, Grounds and Shirlow study (undertaken in 2009) found similar issues of poor health and financial problems but this report suggests that the issues affecting former politically motivated prisoners have worsened;
- 5) Those with problems are effectively state service users but much of what is offered with regard to employment and health is not related to conflict issues. It is contingent upon the providers of public services to factor in, not only for those incarcerated, services that are related to the traumas and issues caused by decades of violence, exclusion and expulsion from normal social activities;

- 6) The issues that affect former prisoners are **not** merely personal issues as they influence family life, community development and the speed at which transitional progress occurs;
- 7) The future of politically motivated former prisoner groups could be undermined by public and other funder cuts. That would basically leave significant sections of those within the most deprived communities in NI without sites in which to gain representation of issues, advice and valuable counselling and emotional support;
- 8) Ultimately peace-building in Ireland rings hollow if any section continues to experience emotional, physical and exclusion problems and issues. That is all the more important if we conclude that many of those issues are worsening. It is not uncommon in post-ceasefire societies for issues such as those presented herein to arise and/or be reproduced for a significant period after the cessation of violence;
- 9) Protecting and developing the capacity of Tar Isteach is prescient and crucial in terms of sustaining forms of post-conflict development and service delivery to a constituency containing many who are vulnerable, susceptible to ill-health and exposed to on-going exclusion.

Introduction

Tar Isteach is an important part of the fabric of peace-building and conflict transformation in Belfast and beyond. Established as a support network for republicans who had been imprisoned during conflict it has evolved into many areas that support societal transition. As a service provider it has offered assistance regarding employability and welfare needs for prisoners and their families. They also provide counselling services that are reflective of extensive emotional and psychological needs that remain and at times are reproduced during the post-ceasefire period. In general terms they have supported the needs that arose not only post Good Friday Agreement but with issues that have stretched over many decades. It is a misnomer to understand conflict-related prisoner issues as only relating to those who were released under the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Similarly, it is important to understand that the issues that relate to imprisonment and release are inter-generational and are linked to family resilience and community experience.

Readjustment, post-incarceration, can present both opportunities and hurdles. Some prisoners emerge and find coping with 'normality' easier than others. However, some find difficulty fitting back into their families due to a sense of lost time, changes in family dynamics and issues of finance. That process of return to family and community is sometimes worsened by laws and processes that undermine entry into the labour market which in turn creates financial problems. Indeed for those with conflict-related convictions there is no equality of treatment within fair employment provisions. Under Section 2(4) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 it states that;

'In this Order any reference to a person's political opinion does not include an opinion which consists of or includes approval or acceptance of the use of violence for political ends connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland, including the use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear.'

Labour market exclusion is paralleled by other prohibitions that include access to insurance, an ability to undertake international travel and increasingly a difficulty in accessing certain roles in society due to increasing security checks. Therefore, advice provided by Tar Isteach, is essential not only due to on-going barriers against entering normal social activities (such as work and travel) but also due to many former prisoners and their families coming from sites of high socio-economic deprivation. This is evidenced by the numerous and literally thousands (c4000 per year) of queries and contacts that are presented to Tar Isteach's Welfare Rights/Benefits Advice group.

Such work is vital as it can aid readjustment and provide an ongoing process that helps inter-link need with positive life trajectories. The importance of work and coping was reflected as follows;

'I was released in 1998 and had been very fortunate cause...I have maintained a job and been (in) employment ever since. That gives support to myself in relation to hopefully helping with the physical and emotional state. I think (it would) be a lot worse if I was unemployed. I am heading towards being unemployed...come next three or four months and I am panicking now cause I have never been without a job.'

Moreover, the importance of ex-prisoner group support and employability was also noted;

'Opportunities (have) been given to me because of the ex-prisoner project in North Belfast. It was a training and employment project that directed me into youth work and community work. So the only opportunities I have had (have) been within my own community particularly with the ex-prisoner community and that has stood by me.'

That work is also important due to aging within the client base and the growth in issues around pensions, health and well-being. Tar Isteach has and continues to provide a support base for thousands of persons affected by imprisonment, and that support covers social benefits, employment, health referral, housing, homelessness, bereavement, money advice and debt and outreach. The support section within Tar Isteach also enables a significant recovery of welfare payments into communities of need.

Tar Isteach is also committed to support for those with emotional and trauma related conditions. Many former prisoners have had their life-course affected by the realities of conflict that include experiencing the harms of violence, torture and the questioning of purpose and action. This is complicated by the failure of the peace-process to inclusively address legacy issues. Furthermore, due to legislation that concerns conflict related acts, many former prisoners view counselling support beyond their constituency as a potential site of information capture. As a society we are increasingly cognisant of the impact of conflict upon individuals, their families and inter-generationally but less aware of how such traumas are masked or linked to self-anaesthetising via alcohol or dependency upon medication.

Tar Isteach's Counselling Service provides care but also promotes the need to appreciate issues such as depression that are taboo-linked. Emotional problems are evidently attached to family life, personal senses of well-being and self-harm. The case load is high for the Counselling Service and has grown despite most individuals

having been released a significant time ago. This is reflective of issues coming forth due to aging, inter-generational affects and referrals among non-imprisoned family members and the burden of financial difficulties and criminalising behaviours and structures.

Tar Isteach has also taken up leadership in other ways. It has engaged, led and developed inter-community contact and sustained relationships with statutory agencies and NGOs, as well as developing links with other community and voluntary organisations. Counselling links have included New Life Counselling Service, the Trauma Resource Centre, Ashton Stress Clinic and SureStart. Tar Isteach, in association with HAZ, has also aided the development and support for the prevention of suicide and self-harm. That work is inter-related with community groups, voluntary organisations and health professionals, including senior figures in mental health provision in the Belfast Trust. This evolving work is a genuine and positive example of dealing with issues that emerge post-release and with other issues that are linked to conflict. This work is concerned not only with linkage within and between communities and agencies but also reflects Tar Isteach's professionalism and the development of approaches and knowledge-building regarding stressors, self-harm and positive life-course development.

The building of relationships is a key part of generating meaningful conflict transformation. In particular, developing inter-community links helps to restore relationships broken by violent discord. It develops shared outcomes and encourages citizen interaction with the peace process. In taking a pro-active stance Tar Isteach have created links with the North Belfast Advice Partnership (NBAP), Ligoniel Improvement Association Advice Centre, the Lower North Belfast Community Council Advice Centre, The Vine Community Advice Centre, Ardoyne Advice Centre, the Ballysillan Community Forum Advice Centre and North Belfast Citizens Advice Bureau. They have done so in order to provide services and stimulate non-partisan communication. Services, which it must be noted, are delivered across the sectarian divide.

This report re-engages with the need to evaluate the position of former prisoners several years after the Good Friday Agreement and seeks to indirectly test the central promise within it, that:

"The Governments continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, retraining and/or re-skilling, and further education."

The funding of this report was based upon;

- Examining, among former prisoners, the state of current personal relationships, material circumstances and factors that shape and continue to shape personal and material lives
- Undertaking interviews regarding the impact of conflict and imprisonment upon the life-course
- Measuring physical, emotional and mental health issues, related concerns and the outstanding issues that shape or affect well-being and resilience
- Determining the needs of those isolated and disconnected as a result of conflict and imprisonment.

In general terms that includes analysing issues such as;

- Aging
- Financial status
- Family relationships
- Benefits
- Imprisonment
- Well-being and the future.

The purpose of the survey, interviews and focus groups was to learn more about the health and well-being of ex-prisoners, their future needs and the continuing impact of conflict and imprisonment on lives. It is hoped that the understanding gained from this study can be used to assist ex-prisoners in accessing services and the support they may need.

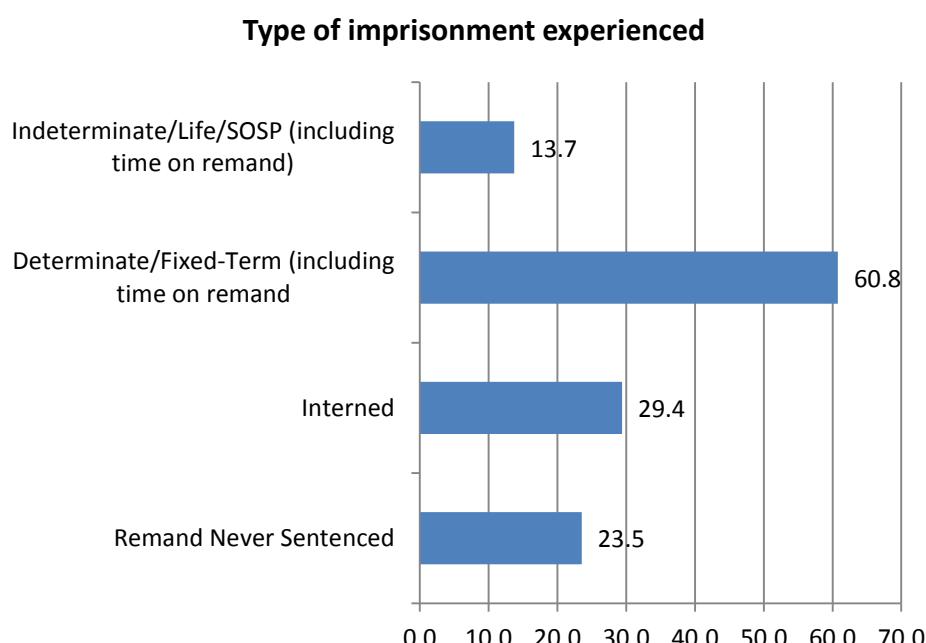
The evidence produced was achieved via the completion of a needs/attitudinal survey and follow up interviews with respondents from within the ex-prisoner constituency. Via the survey we can measure the prevalence and intensity of issues and problems and gain a sense of the variety of experiences within the former political prisoner constituency. As indicated above, this approach shows that there is resilience and coping, but that there are also individuals who feel destabilised by their life-course and their experiences within it. With regard to the diversity of experiences among respondent's, interviews and focus groups were chosen to support the triangulation of results and to tease out why some respondents coped better than others and vice versa.

Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and respondents could refuse to answer any question. A total of 51 questionnaires were returned. Participants were interviewed in their own home or could complete the survey in private. Surveys were conducted between May and July 2014 and all of the respondents chose to complete the questionnaire by interview. The majority of respondents were male (86.3%) which is correlated to the gender composition of those imprisoned. Again, reflective of the span of the conflict, respondent's aged between 40 and 70. The average age was 58. The vast majority of respondents (80.4%) were aged 55 or over, with most aged between 55 and 64. The predominant share of (92%) respondents was from the North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency.

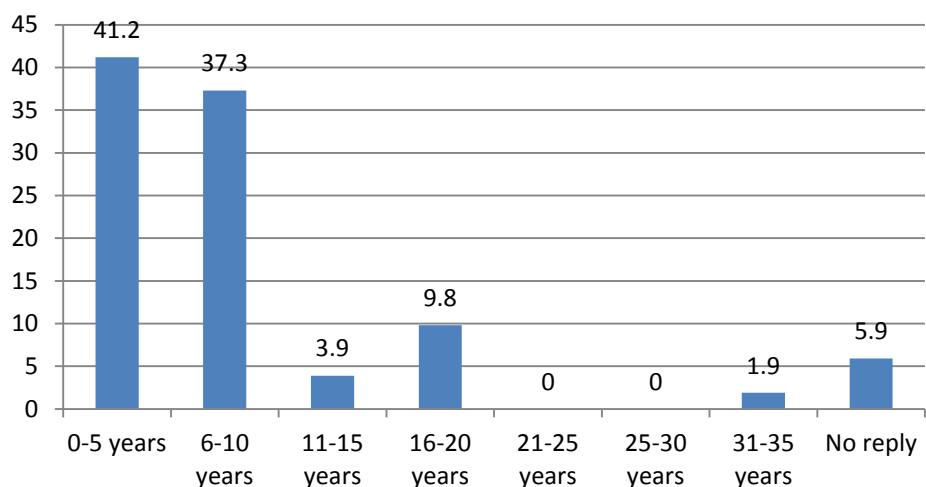
Imprisonment

Respondents had experienced a range of imprisonment type, with some having experienced more than one form of it. 'Determinate or Fixed-Term' was the most common type of imprisonment (60.8%). More than a quarter of respondents (29.4%) had been interned, with a smaller proportion of respondents experiencing remand (23.5%) or Indeterminate/Life/Secretary of State's Pleasure (13.7%). The average length of time in prison was 7 years with the largest share of respondents (41.2%) being released in the 1980s. Around one in eight (11.6%) had been imprisoned for at least 16 years.

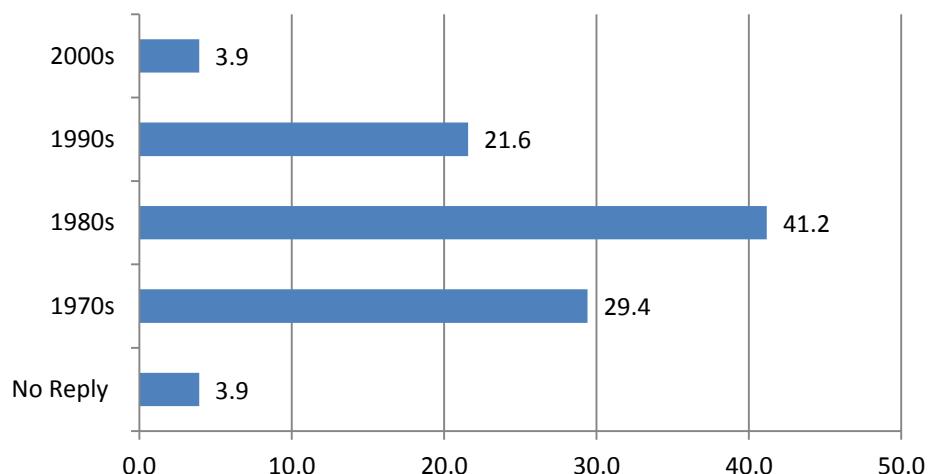
A small number of respondents (3.9%) were released post-2000, with the latest release date being 2004. 29.4% of respondents were released in the 1970s, with the earliest release date being 1973. Just two respondents (3.9%) stated that they had been imprisoned for non-political offences since 1998, although neither respondent specified a release date for these offences.



Total Years imprisoned



Last released from political imprisonment

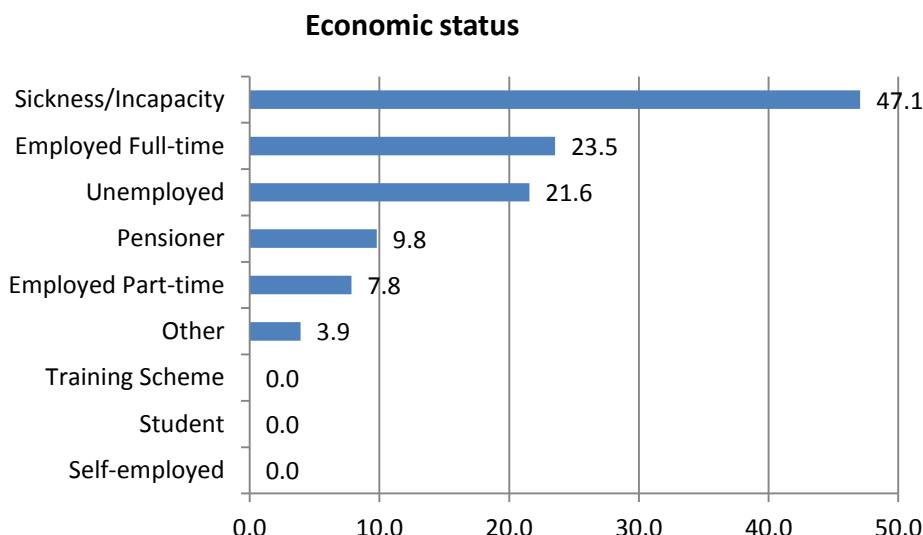


Habituation and Socio-Economic Life

As would be expected given labour market exclusion and issues relating to deprivation the majority of respondents (62.7%) live in rented accommodation, with 29.4% of respondents living within their own home. In 2011 home ownership in NI was 67.5%ⁱⁱ or roughly 40% higher. A smaller number of respondents stated that they live in ‘other ‘types of accommodation such as ‘housing executive’ (3.9%) or living with a ‘partner’ (2%). Low home ownership rates cannot only be reflective of low income but can be problematic in terms of the capacity to raise funds through mortgaging or downsizing. In retirement home ownership and savings can offset complete financial dependency upon a state pension.

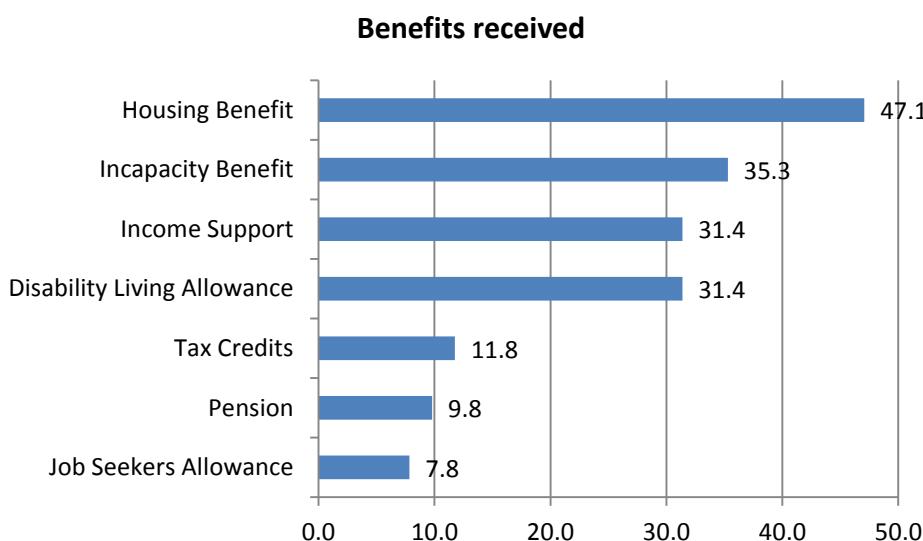
A significant majority of respondents (47%) live with a husband, wife or partner, and a smaller number (15.7%) live with their children, a friend (2%) or ‘others’. There was a significant share, around one fifth (22%), who lived alone. There is also evidence that imprisonment affected partnerships and family relationships. Some 17.6% of respondents stated that they were co-habiting with a different partner than they were pre-imprisonment, and over a third (35.3%) had children before they went to prison. These children are now adults aged between 24 and 50, with an average age of 38. A much higher proportion of respondents (68.6%) had children since being released from incarceration. The youngest child located within the survey is aged two and the oldest fifty, with an average age of 28 for all children. What arises from these findings is that the impact upon family life has spanned the lives of children from the late 1960s and will continue to do so for a significant period of time.

The life-course and positive development within it can be aided by access to regular income, as this increases the likelihood of healthy eating, normal social interaction and positive thought processes. In 2010 in NI it was estimated that ‘21% of the working age population claimed at least one key benefit...’ Here we find the bulk of respondents (68.7%) in receipt of sickness/incapacity or unemployment benefit alone. Within that some two-thirds are claiming sickness/incapacity benefits. To phrase it another way, 79% of those of working age in NI are not in receipt of a key benefit compared to around 30% located within this sample. Just less than one in five respondents was in full-time employment, and when we add in part-time workers, then a mere three in ten are in some form of employmentⁱⁱⁱ.



The range of benefits or multiple benefits received was as follows;

- Half of respondents (47.1%) are in receipt of Housing
- Around one in three respondents receive Incapacity Benefit (35.5%), Income Support (31.4%) and/or Disability Living allowance (31.4%).
- Only 11.8% of respondents are in receipt of Tax-Credits
- A small number of those surveyed are in receipt of some other form of benefit, including ESA and 'attendance allowance'



Respondents were also asked what universal benefits and financial entitlements they believe they will be eligible for when they reach pensionable age. The majority of respondents believe they will be eligible for a Basic State Pension (78.4%), Free Travel (72.5%) and Free Prescriptions (72.5%). Respondents were less certain as to their eligibility for heating allowance, with over a third of respondents (37.3%) unsure of

their eligibility for this benefit. It is important to note the relatively high level of non-response to this item (17.6%) which perhaps reflects a level of uncertainty. None of the respondents stated that they would be eligible for any other form of benefits.

Just over a quarter of respondents (25.4%) have made 10 years of National Insurance Contributions, and 27.5% of respondents will have made 10 years of National Insurance Contributions by the time they retire. A mere two respondents, both of whom are employed full-time, hold a private pension. These respondents have paid into that pension for twelve and fourteen years. But even making National Insurance contributions raises concerns;

'Cause I came into the working environment very late in life my pensions contributions are very small and may in fact do me damage if people weigh that against your state pension. So obviously there are always concerns and you know just think about it. It is like everything, something you put on the back burner and deal with it when the time comes... so not really sitting there working away trying to build a wee nest egg or anything like that'.

This would suggest that benefit-need will continue from working to pensionable age and that few will have the resources to sustain a non-state pension dependent lifestyle. Just 2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have made financial preparations for their retirement, while 91% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 77% of respondents stated that they strongly agreed or agreed that it is too late for them to get a meaningful job, with only 13% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Labour market exclusion seems to not only reduce the capacity to escape benefit need but also drives public sector spending upward and undermines tax contributions for the social good. The link between aging and financial security was also explained during an interview but with the caveat that financial insecurity is always a problem;

'Is it easier to cope as you get older? It depends if you were financial secure you would probably find it easier to cope. Times are hard at the minute, umm the future is quite unsure, and as far as work is concerned, as far as having a job is concerned, it is not really easier or harder'.

The link between finances, labour market exclusion and being ghettoised into certain types of employment was also explored;

'Definitely their finances would worry them more than anything. The vast majority of the labour market, they are excluded from it. Most work is either labouring, taxi driving, door security, general security that type of thing. It can be pretty hit and miss, piecemeal, they get

work now and again. So finances for ex-prisoners is always an issue. Even when you have a job it's how long you're going to have that job for. So its finances, employment, whether I have a pension or not, whether my pension is going to give any sort of decent quality of life. Money is definitely a big issue amongst ex-prisoners, along with their health'.

In an even broader context issues are understood within a terrain of political conjecture, criminalisation and the issue of victimisation and accountability;

'The negatives of being ex-prisoners are that we are still treated as less than second class citizens. We are excluded from the vast majority of the labour market. We are demonised day and daily in the press or TV, someone is always looking for a chance to have a go at us. Unionists, even the likes of the SDLP, they would bang that drum on a regular basis. They put us up in opposition to victims and survivors. The vast majority of ex-prisoners I know have lost someone or had people injured in the conflict. They have been injured themselves, they have been brutalised in the prisons. They are as much victims as anyone who was involved in this conflict... As I said they are excluded from most spheres of employment. Their travel is restricted compared to other people. They can't get into America or Australia. It's always very awkward going through passport control, things like that, there is always the possibility of getting pulled in because of what they perceive as a criminal record...As for social life, there are just places you will just not go, there are things you will not do. There are jobs that you will just not apply for because you know you will definitely not get them'.

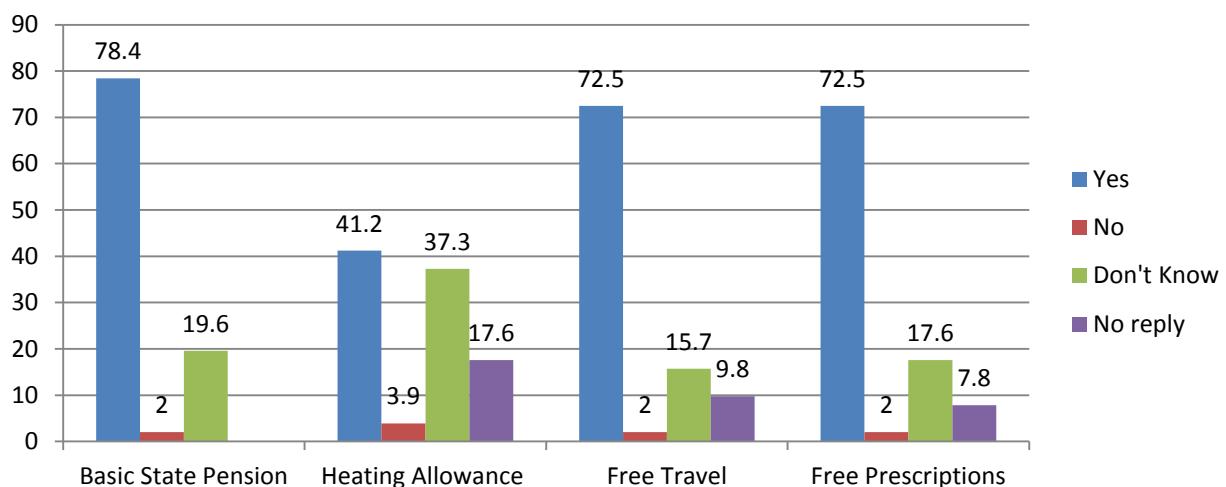
What is also evident is a sense that criminalisation and exclusion has inter-generational effects upon those who were not part of conflict;

'But in the main, in general I don't regret having been to prison. I do feel it has affected the kid's life chances. There are whole areas of work that they will not go for. The both of them are well qualified but if they were asked during an interview what their father did they wouldn't be saying, definitely not saying well he has been to prison. I know there are jobs that they didn't go for because it would eventually come out that I had been in prison and that would affect their employment. I know there are other members of my family have been directly affected, people who were refused jobs, or didn't get a promotion because I had been imprisoned. They were seen as a security risk'.

Furthermore,

'When we got out of jail it was same thing, couldn't get jobs cause we were black listed everywhere you went to. I was pretty lucky cause I was a docker at the time and I went straight into the docks. But most of my friends had to slave for what they were doing and there was discrimination.'

What benefits will you be entitled to at retirement age?

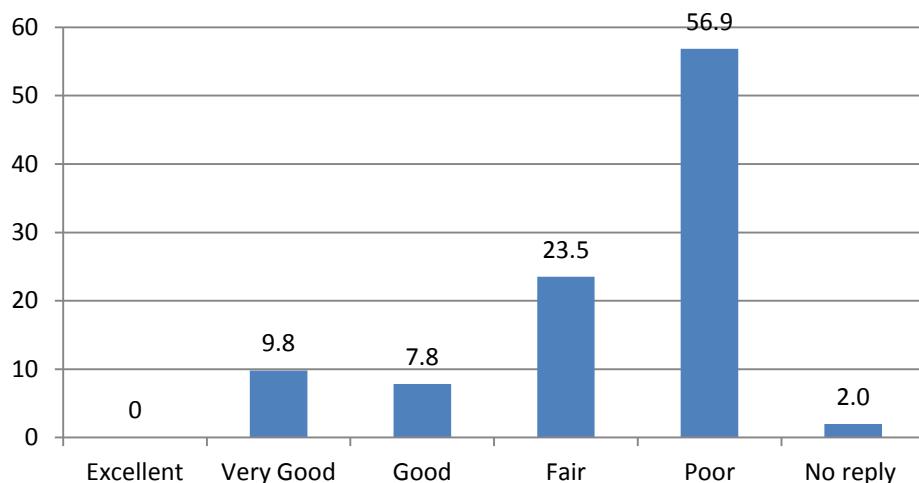


Only one in ten respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it had been easy for them to find the type of job that they are qualified for since their release, with 75% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Just 12% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the peace process has made it easier for former political prisoners to cope financially, emotionally and socially. 57% disagreed or strongly disagreed; with a relatively high proportion of respondents (31%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing that the peace process has made it easier for prisoners to cope financially, emotionally and socially.

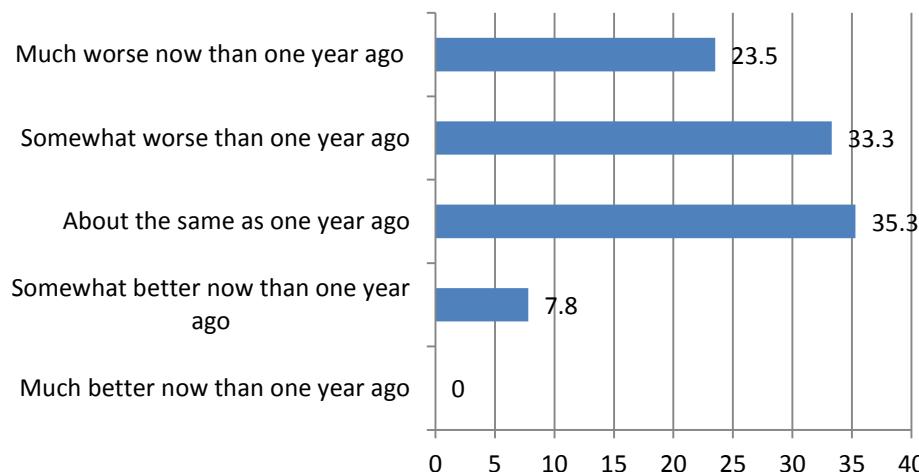
Physical Health

It is unsurprising given the high number of respondents on sickness or incapacity benefit that nearly six in ten (56.9%) stated that their physical health is poor. This compares to 9%^{iv} who stated in 'Health Survey Northern Ireland 2012/13' that their health was bad or very bad. Less than a fifth of respondents (17.6%) thought that their physical health was either 'very good' or 'good' compared to a NI average of 72%^v. Very few respondents (7.8%) stated that they have had noticeable improvements in their health over the last year, and no respondents believed that their health is much better than one year ago. Over half of respondents (56.8%) believe their health to be worse now than one year ago.

Physical Health



How would you rate your health now?



Over three quarters of respondents (85.7%) stated that their physical health is 'a lot' or 'a bit' limited when engaging in vigorous physical activities, and a significant proportion of respondents (45.1%) are also limited 'a lot' in engaging in more moderate activities. Climbing a number of flights of stairs and bending, kneeling or stooping, also cause difficulty for a significant number of respondents. It was found that:

- 1 in 5 are limited a lot when bathing/dressing themselves
- 45.1% are limited a lot when walking 1 mile
- A third are limited a lot in bending, kneeling and stooping
- Nearly a third are limited a lot climbing one flight of stairs
- 45.1% are limited a lot undertaking moderate exercise
- 62.7% are limited a lot undertaking vigorous exercise

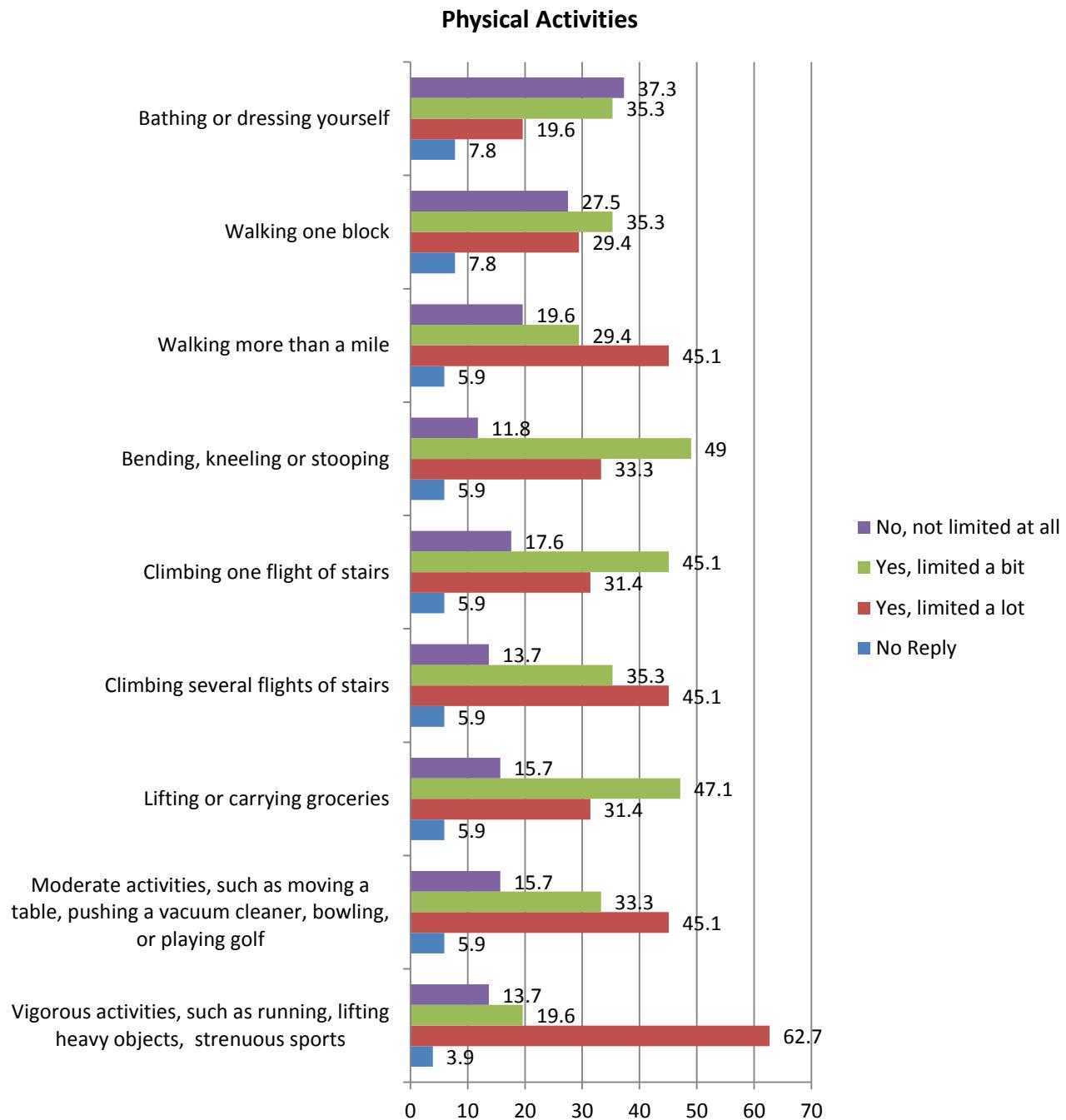
The issue of physical ill-health were directly related in some interviews to the impact of imprisonment;

'Oh yes definitely related to the prison, definitely, I mean we got very little – I mean think about all them years locked up- you got very little exercise. One hours exercise and cramped into a wee cell of course. I have osteoporosis and was told the other week that not seeing sun light and day light and all the rest of it can't have been good for you.'

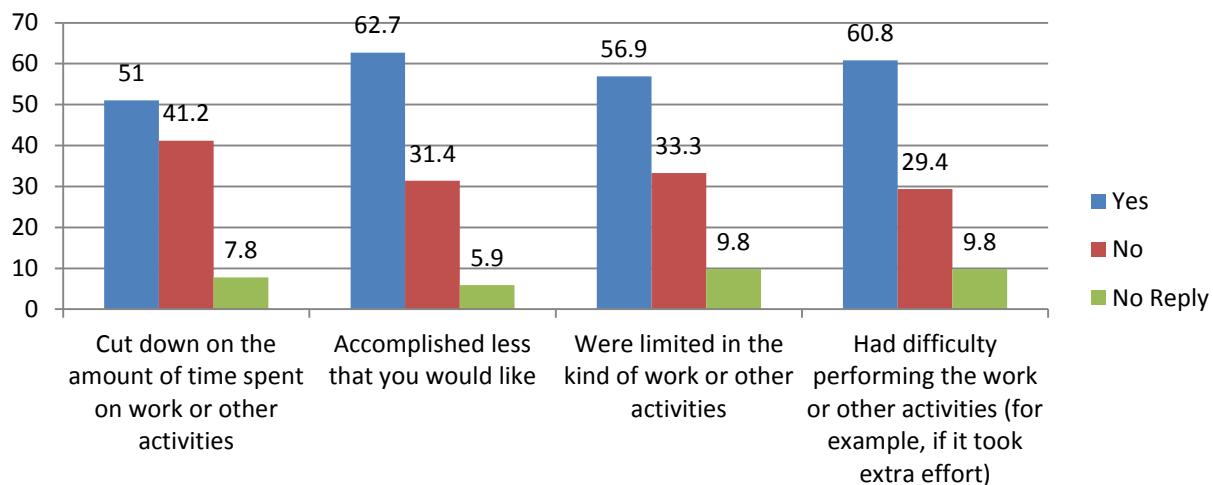
'I agree. I also suffer from COPD and most of the ex-prisoners I meet have also mostly chest problems COPD and emphysema. I reckon it must have been it, like why are so many affected I most definitely believe the jail had something to do with it'.

Respondents were asked if, during the past four weeks, they had any problems with their work or other regular activity as a result of their physical health. Around half of respondents (51%) had cut down on the amount of time spent on work or other activities and the majority of respondents (60.8%) felt that they had greater difficulty in performing work and other activities over the past four weeks. Almost two thirds of those surveyed (62.7%) stated that they had accomplished less than they would have liked over the past four weeks, and over half of respondents (56.9%) felt that they were limited in the kind of work and activities they could engage in due to their physical health. While almost two thirds of those surveyed stated that they had accomplished less over the past four weeks due to their physical health, fewer respondents (51%) felt that they accomplished less as a result of emotional problems. Fewer respondents (37.3%) had cut down on the amount of time spent on work as a

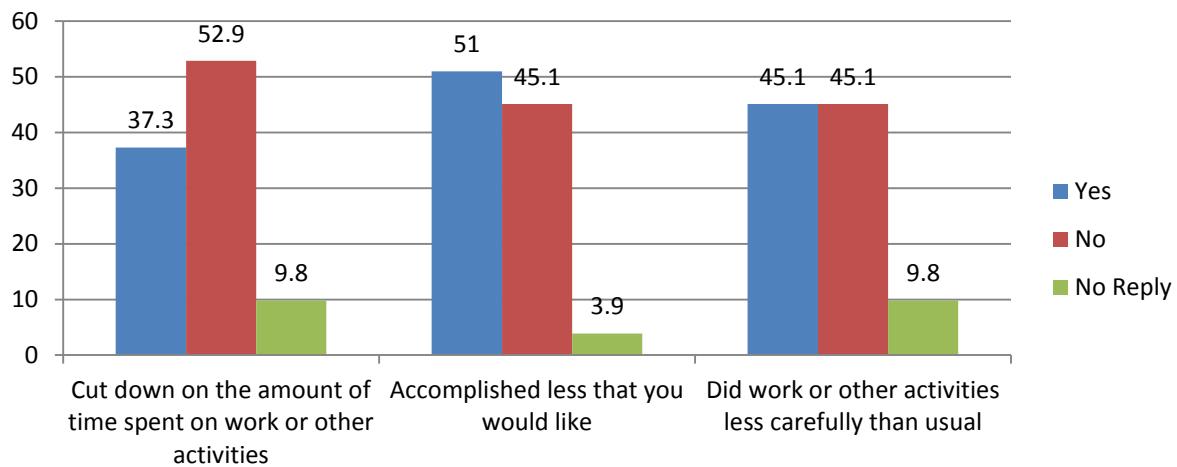
result of emotional problems, but a significant minority (45.1%) stated that they had undertaken work and other activities less carefully than usual due to emotional problems.



Regular activity and physical health during the past 4 weeks

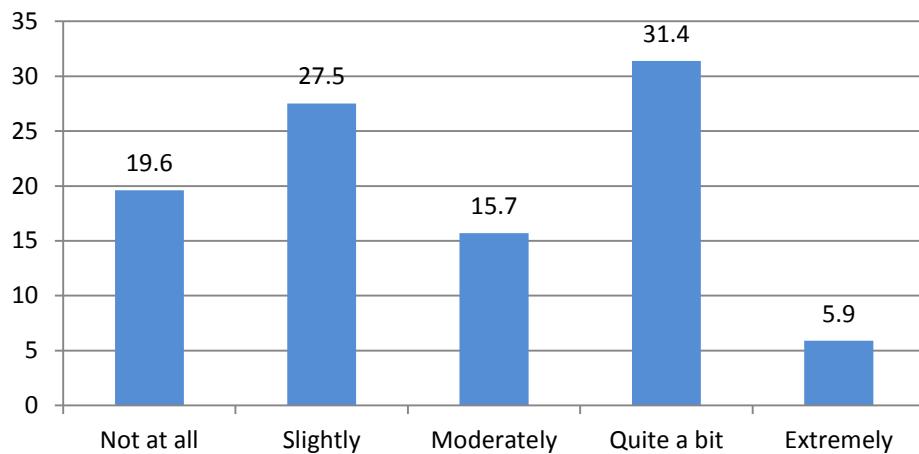


Regular activity and emotional health during the past 4 weeks



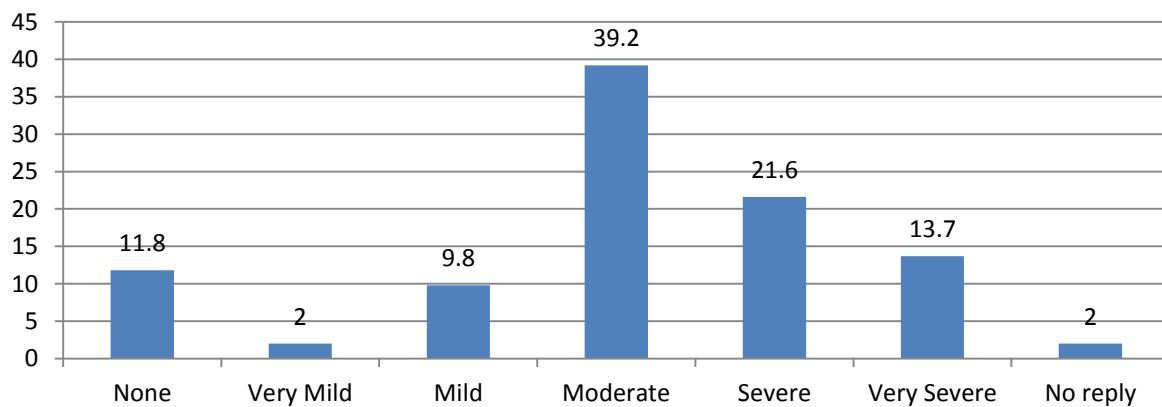
Physical health and emotional problems have interfered with social activities with family, friends, neighbours and groups for the majority of respondents, with less than a fifth of respondents (19.6%) stating that emotional and physical problems have not interfered at all in routine activities. For over a third of those surveyed (37.3%) these problems have interfered 'quite a bit' or 'extremely' in the last number of weeks.

To what extent have physical and emotional problems interfered with social activities?



This reflects the finding that 35.3% of respondents have suffered 'severe' or 'very severe' bodily pain over the last four weeks, whilst only one in five respondents have suffered no bodily pain over the same period.

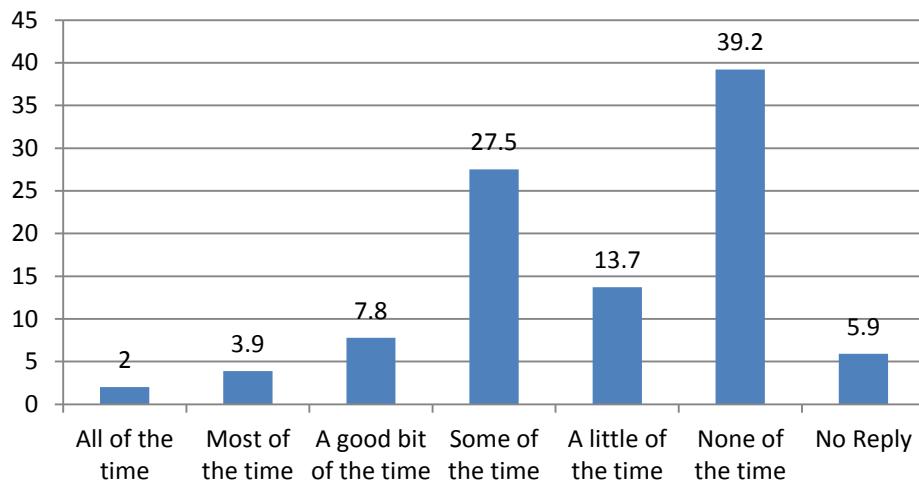
Level of bodily pain experienced during the past 4 weeks



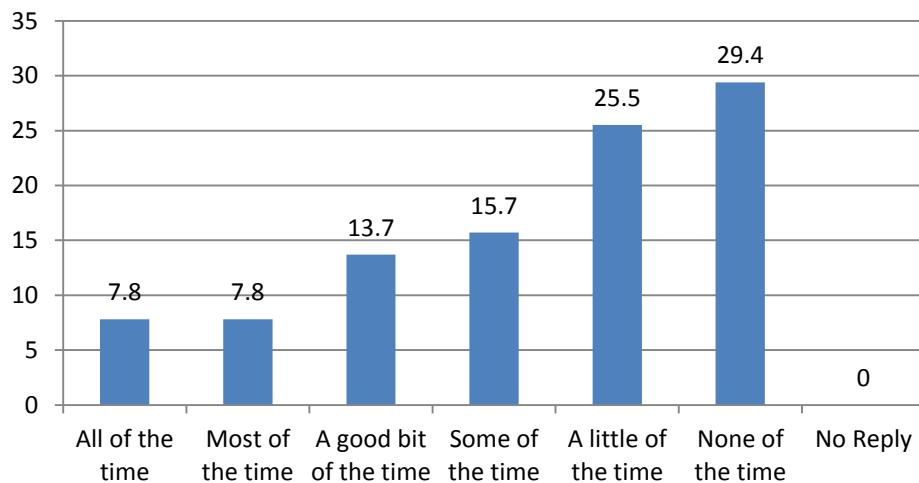
A significant minority of respondents (39.2%) stated that they had felt 'full of pep' none of the time over the past four weeks, while only 5.9% stated that they had felt 'full of pep' all or most of the time. The majority of respondents felt that they had been a 'nervous person' at least some of the time over the past four weeks, with 15.6% stating that they had been nervous all or most of the time. A significant minority of respondents (41.2%) stated that they had not been 'so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer them up' over the past four weeks, with 11.7% stating that they had felt this way all or most of the time. 27.5% of respondents have 'felt calm and peaceful' none of the time, with less than a fifth (17.6%) feeling calm and peaceful all or most of the time over the past four weeks. Almost half of respondents (45.1%) felt that they

had a lot of energy none of the time over the past four weeks, with few respondents (5.9%) feeling that they had lots of energy all or most of the time.

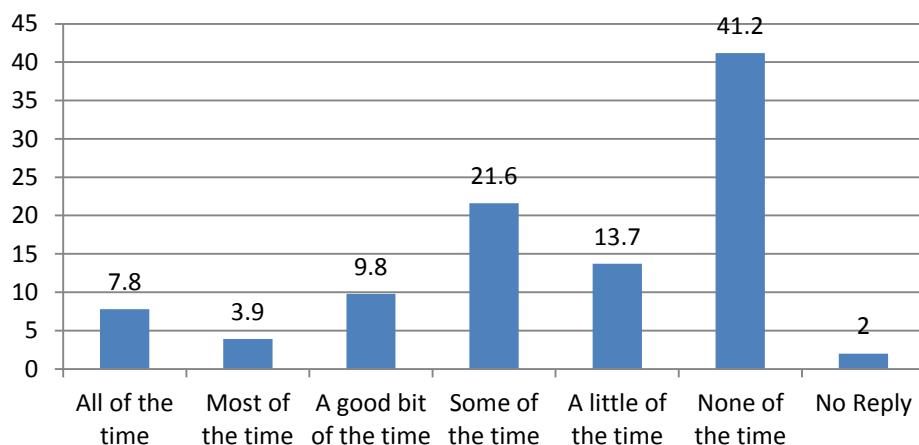
Did you feel full of pep?



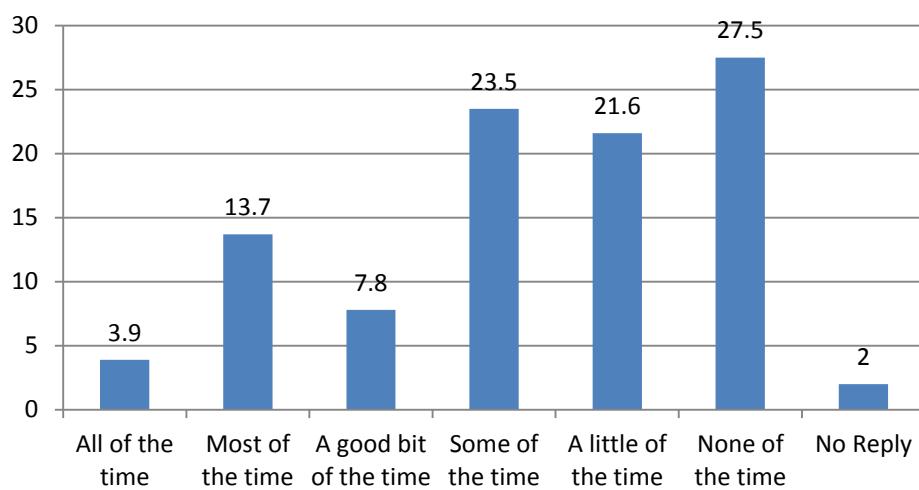
Have you been a nervous person?



Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?

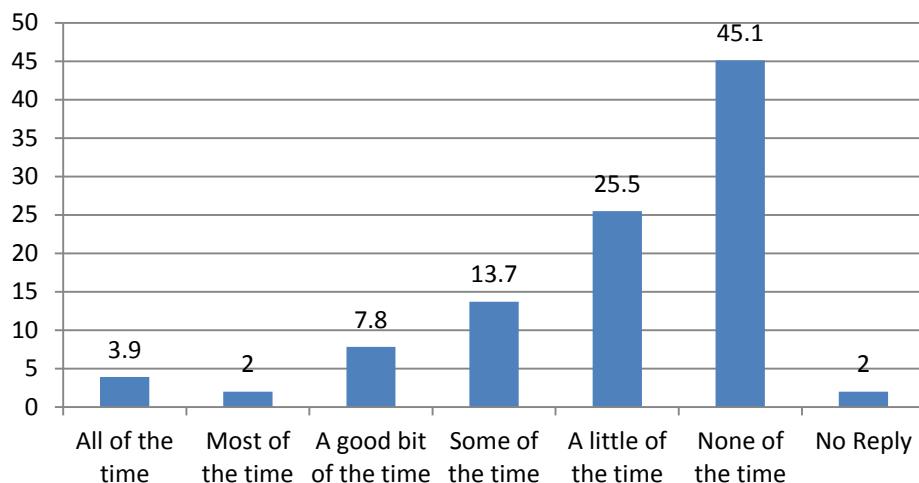


Have felt calm and peaceful?



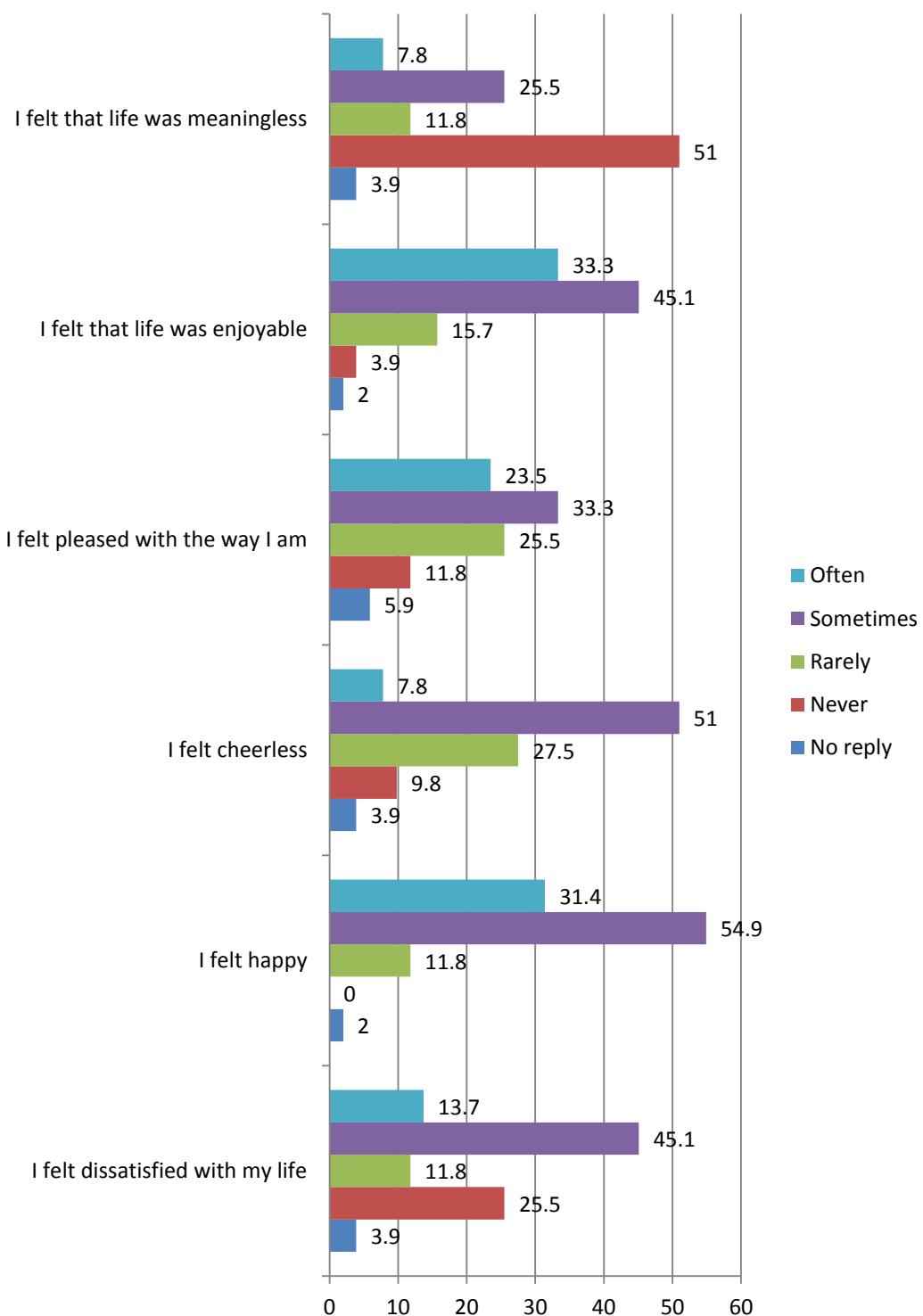
58.8% of respondents have felt dissatisfied with their life over the past seven days, with just over a quarter of respondents (25.5%) never feeling dissatisfied with their life. None of the respondents stated that they had ‘never felt happy over the past seven days’, with one in ten (11.8%) stating that they rarely felt happy. The majority of respondents (58.8%) stated that they had felt cheerless sometimes or often over the past seven days and almost two fifths of respondents (39.6%) were of the view that they had never or rarely felt ‘pleased with the way I am’. A fifth of respondents (20%) had felt that life was never or rarely enjoyable over the past seven days, while 34.7% sometimes or often felt that life was meaningless.

Did you have a lot of energy?

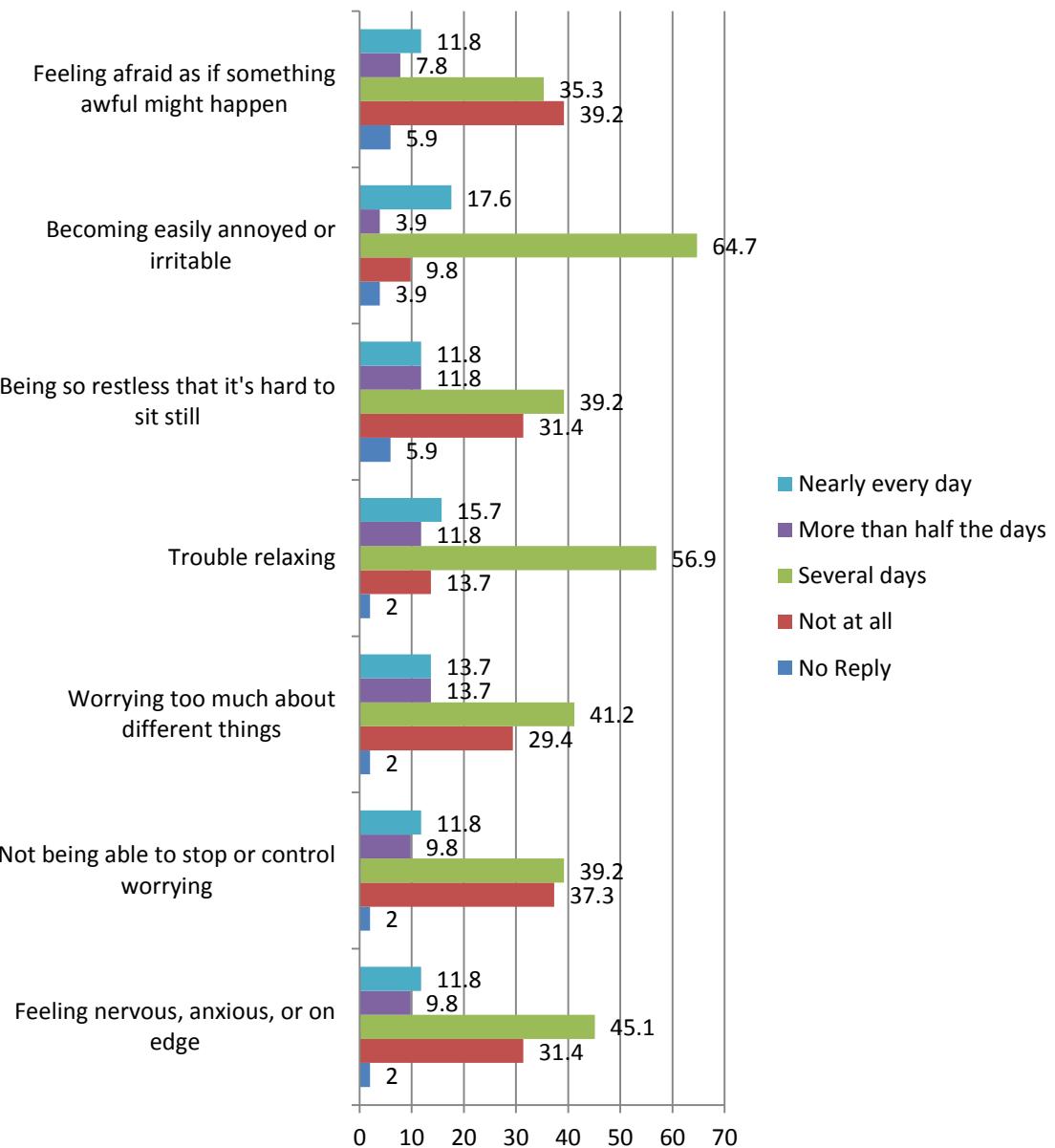


Less than a third of respondents (31.4%) had ‘not at all’ felt nervous, anxious or on edge over the past two weeks, with more than one in ten (11.8%) feeling this way nearly every day. Over the last two weeks, a significant proportion of respondents (26.6%) have been bothered by not being able to stop or control worrying more than half the days or nearly every day. Less than a third of respondents (29.4%) have not ‘worried too much about different things’, with a significant proportion (13.7%) worrying too much about different things nearly every day. The vast majority of respondents (86.3%) have had some trouble relaxing over the past two weeks. Almost a quarter of respondents (23.6%) have been bothered by being ‘so restless that it is hard to sit still’ more than half the days or nearly every day, and 21.5% are bothered by becoming easily annoyed or irritable on more than half the days or nearly every day. The majority of respondents have at some time over the past two weeks felt ‘afraid as if something awful might happen’, with almost a fifth (19.6%) feeling this way on more than half the days or nearly every day.

How have you felt over the past 7 days?

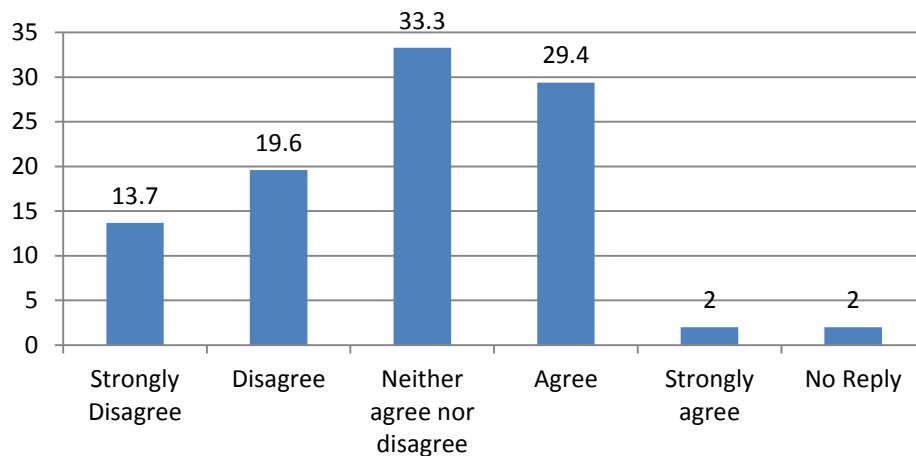


Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

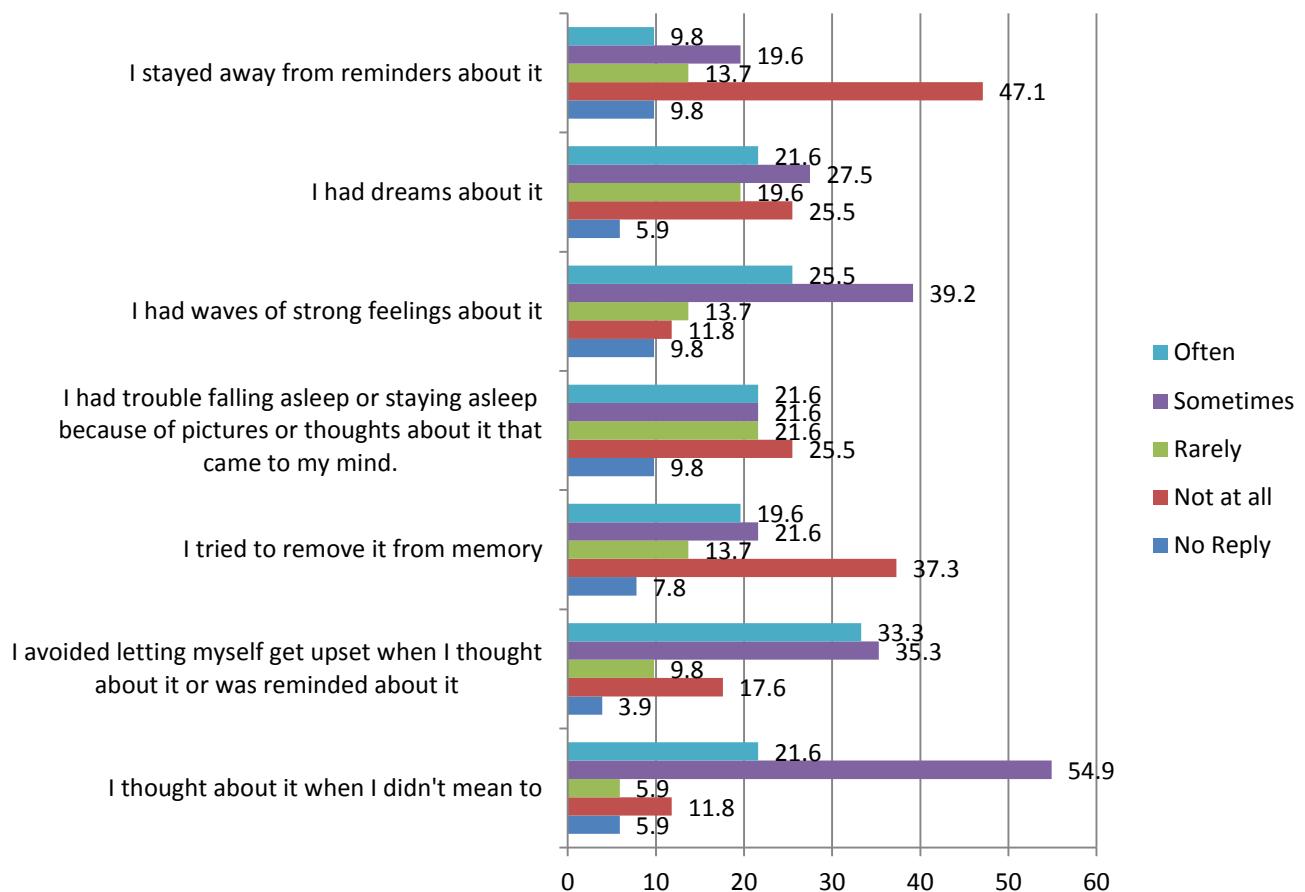


A third of respondents (33.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I have high self-esteem'. 31.4% agreed with the statement 'I have high self-esteem', however just 2% strongly agreed.

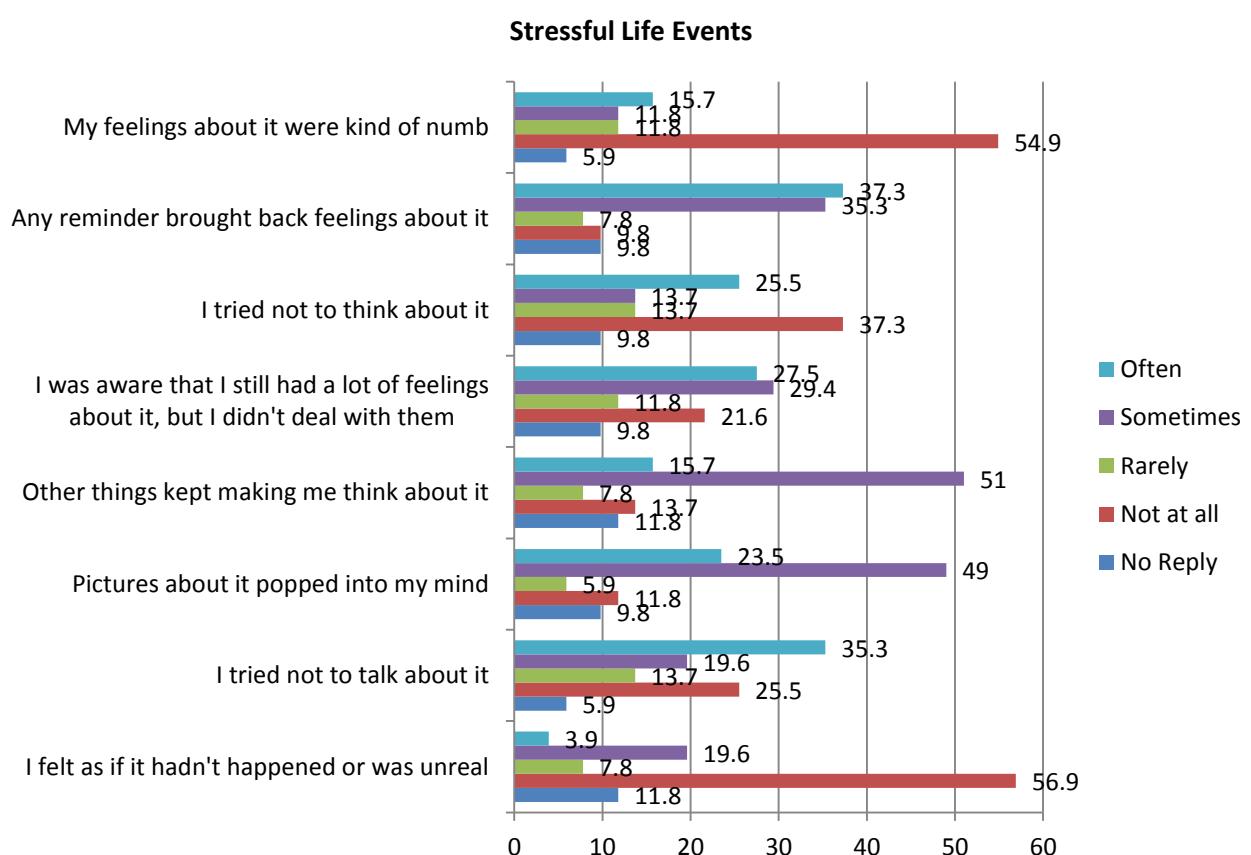
How much do you agree with the statement 'I have high self-esteem'?



Stressful Life Events



More than three quarters (76.5%) of respondents have often or sometimes thought about stressful life events when they did not mean to and 68.6% have often or sometimes avoided letting themselves get upset when they thought about stressful life events. Over two fifths of respondents (41.2%) have often or sometimes tried to remove events from memory, with almost three-quarters of respondents having, at some time, trouble falling asleep or staying asleep because of pictures or thoughts coming to mind. 64.7% of respondents have often or sometimes had strong waves of feeling about stressful life events, with almost half (49.1%) often or sometimes having dreams about it. 29.4% of respondents often or sometimes avoid reminders of stressful life events and 31.3% at some time felt that it hadn't happened or was unreal. 35.3% of respondents often avoid talking about stressful life events, with just 11.8% of respondents stating that pictures of stressful life events never 'popped into my mind'. 66.7% of respondents often or sometimes felt that other things made them think about stressful life events, while over half were often or sometimes aware that they had strong feelings about it, but that they did not deal with them. Almost two fifths of respondents sometimes or often tried not to think about stressful life events, and for the majority of respondents (72.6%) any reminders brought back feelings about stressful life events. For over a quarter of respondents, their feelings about stressful life events were often or sometimes 'kind of numb.'



The issue of past and intrusive dreams was also understood as part of a context that of affects behaviour and sleep patterns. But for some the reason for having such dreams is not understood which remains confusing for some... As noted;

'I always get intrusive memories and dreams and say what does that mean? You know? I don't know...?'

'People then think if they analyse dreams definitely it's the emotional content of dreams that are important. So if you are feeling fear or anxiety whatever it is that is the important thing. (It) doesn't matter what you are dreaming about. The dream, the dream is symbolic telling you in relation to what your anxiety and fears are about.'

With these dreams come very evocative images, and individual interpretations of stress and traumas, but there is also recognition that the past is symbolically raised by stressors that are in the present;

'Well that whole thing. People who have PTSD we have nightmares and the nightmares may not necessarily be about the particular event but the nightmares are about something similar happening so it is symbolic in that sense but it is the extent to the emotion and the physiology symptoms that they would have. Like cold sweats and stuff and if it was about prison then you could say that it has to do with something in prison but it could well also be something to do with what they are feeling now in their lives...'

'I know people have general dreams about people who are dead, and you know, you are having full conversations in the dream with somebody who (is) dead and I find anyway more often that's just cause they were the people I knew most. You know close friends and stuff, but often that happens to me, you know, people who were killed during the conflict and people I knew who were in jail with (who are) now dead. I seem to dream more about them. They would appear to me in dreams more than average, other people you know? ... that's the way it seems to be anyway you know? ...real lucid dreams (in which) people are having actual conversations with me... that was a big experience there for me you know? I felt sometimes waking up from dreams like that, very emotional about it, you know? But I don't know how to explain that'.

Although a direct comparison cannot be made with the NI population it is worth noting that the stresses and symptoms of trauma and mental ill-health are pronounced. Within the standard population almost 1 in 5 respondents (19%) showed signs of a possible mental health problem, by scoring highly on the GHQ12. Within that 16% of respondents in the 65-74 age group scored highly^{vi}. Within the ex-prisoner sample we are locating majorities of respondents who have traumatic memories and who are attempting to control negative thought processes and intrusive thoughts.

Respondents were asked to describe events during the conflict that they had found particularly distressing and 74.6% of respondents chose to respond. A number of central themes emerged from this open question. 15.7% of respondents described particularly traumatic periods of imprisonment such as the hunger strikes or blanket protests and over half of respondents (52.9%) explicitly mentioned the deaths of family or friends. A smaller number of respondents (17.6%) described their experiences as '*witnesses*' to traumatic events such as bombings, shootings and deaths. 7.8% of respondents described how the death of a family member, whilst the respondent was in prison, was a particularly distressing event.

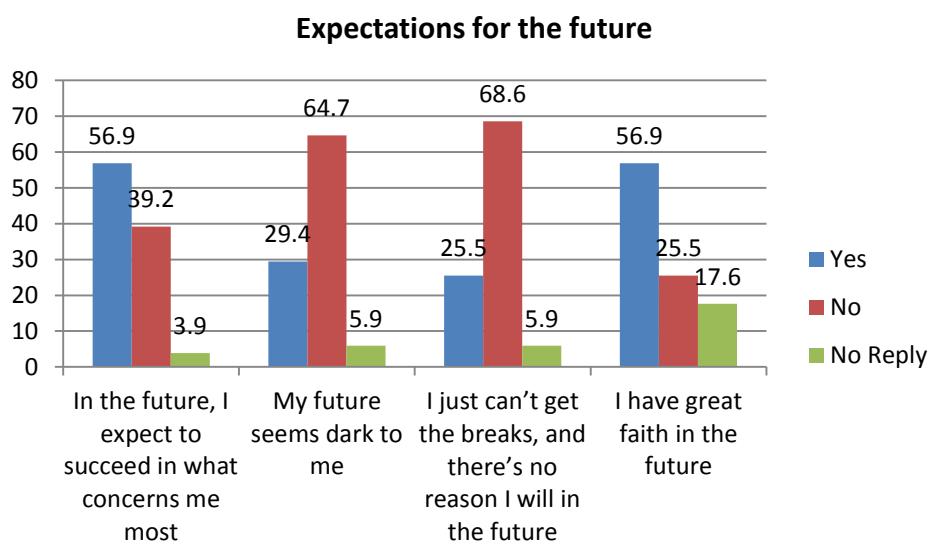
With regard to positioning the impact of these stressors and concerns, the majority of respondents (56.9%) expect to succeed in the future 'in what concerns me most', though a significant minority (39.2%) disagreed with this statement.. Over a quarter of respondents (29.4%) agreed with the statement 'my future seems dark to me' and just over a quarter of respondents (25.5%) agreed with the statement 'I just can't get the breaks and there is no reason why I will in the future.' In line with the findings for respondent's expectations of the future, 56.9% agreed with the statement 'I have a great faith in the future.

There are variant positions regarding the future and it is evident that some respondents coped while others found post-incarceration of present a series of other issues and problems. As explained there are evident social issues and impacts of criminalisation but also other factors that affect well-being such as the negative sense attached to having not returned to the conflict post-incarceration. This too can be emotionally limiting;

'...see that thing about day to day issues that affect everyone. I think that was a big thing when people got out (of) jail (and) on (a) high (then) the disappointment of it all. The severe disappointment often followed with a lot of people...involved in conflict or imprisonment. Then trying to deal with the everyday things and not been able to. Not having enough money, not ...able to get proper job or everything else. People who didn't want to get back involved with the struggle...and tried to cope....the damage... it's like a weight they have carried, and people who explain to others why they didn't return to the Movement. You know? And that's been (a) conversation for years every time you met them. Guilt, as if they done something wrong'.

For another respondent some of the changes in the positive status of ex-prisoners in their community have caused distress;

I know a friend...and he has problems with drink and stuff like. (He was) just walking down the street there and not so long ago in the New Lodge and these kids give him dogs abuse and he said he went back to his flat and started crying because he realised now he was nothing and that's the way he felt in himself. These kids could talk to him the way they did even though the fact he done 20 years in jail. ...they kicked him. He went back to his flat feeling totally powerless and feeling like he was a waster cause he was drinking and everything else and, just you know, he told me this. How many people do feel like that?'



31% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are not getting help for psychological problems, with 43% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Over a quarter of respondents (26%) neither agreed nor disagreed that they are not getting help for psychological problems. 96% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their fellow prisoners are good at hiding the problems they face, with only one respondent disagreeing and one respondent neither agreeing nor disagreeing. For a female interviewee, there was a sense of a combination of affects, behaviours and hardships that are symptomatic of a range of factors;

'Yes I do think that ex-prisoners suffer a lot of symptoms more so than the local community who were not in prison. Because a lot of people have a lot of bad memories of being in jail and I know for a lot of females, the time I was in, we had emotional problems. Some would have locked themselves in their cell and didn't come out. Some women would self-harm and just couldn't deal with the issue that they had to face, so yes, we do have all those stresses and have to this day kept them... Now I think in the community as time goes on the ex-prisoner population isn't such a big issue to people and as people are getting older people (and) are dying

it is not the same whereas in the 70s 80s and even 90s people... I think yes the local community were concerned about people and the injustice that the British were doing and the beating and everything else that they went through. So yes there is a change now isn't all them kind of memories, the community doesn't carry all them memories with them and younger people don't remember or don't know even what some of the things that were done on people who have been in jail'.

This perception is explained further;

'Lots of ex-prisoners do have...emotional problems from the different issues they have had to deal with in the jails and the brutality they had to suffer and a lot of ex-prisoners do just bottle up their emotions, try to cover it up, put it away...a lot of these people do have long term stress and have been stuck in a situation. I mean today the situation is not the same but there is no sign of change like sun shining in for people, still living in a mundane place, still have the politicians bickering and no real sign of things changing for the good for people....it does but they seem to fall back into the past and what we went through was such a black time for them and I think some of them do need help and I know some of them do get help, are receiving help, but a lot of people have been left with real bad problems that they find difficult to deal with'.

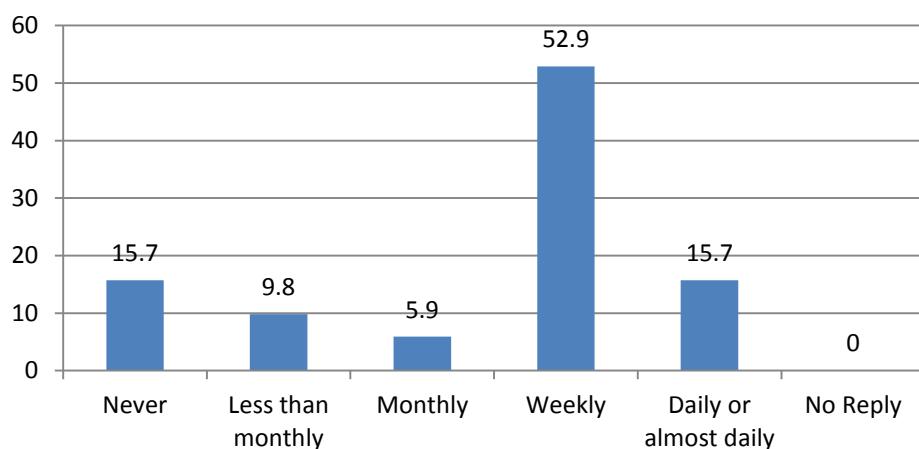
Moreover;

I have yes I have health symptoms um I sometimes think about this, is it related to imprisonment on a number of occasions, not just imprisonment but also in interrogation centres. I got severe beatings. I remember being left to kneel on icy cold ground for hours on end and um having problems in later years with my legs and stuff. I don't know I can't answer for sure, doctors can't tell me that my problems with my legs, which were broken. I still have problems. Yeah that relates to the way I was treated in prison so yes I suffer from physical health problems.... I know a lot of other people, particularly people that were on the blanket. It seems to be because of the conditions they were living in. I know lots of people that obviously have health problems and I think they are directly related to that'.

Alcohol and Medication

Almost four-fifths of those surveyed (79%) stated that they drank alcohol, while 15% said that they had never drank alcohol. The majority of respondents (52.9%) will have more than six/eight drinks weekly, though a smaller proportion (15.7%) will have more than six/eight drinks daily or almost daily. A similar (15.7%) proportion stated that they would never have more than six/eight drinks on one occasion. In sum, we can tentatively conclude that 68.6% of respondents are involved in hazardous drinking. This compared to 28% of males and 13% of females in NI^{vii}.

How often do you have EIGHT/SIX or more drinks on one occasion?

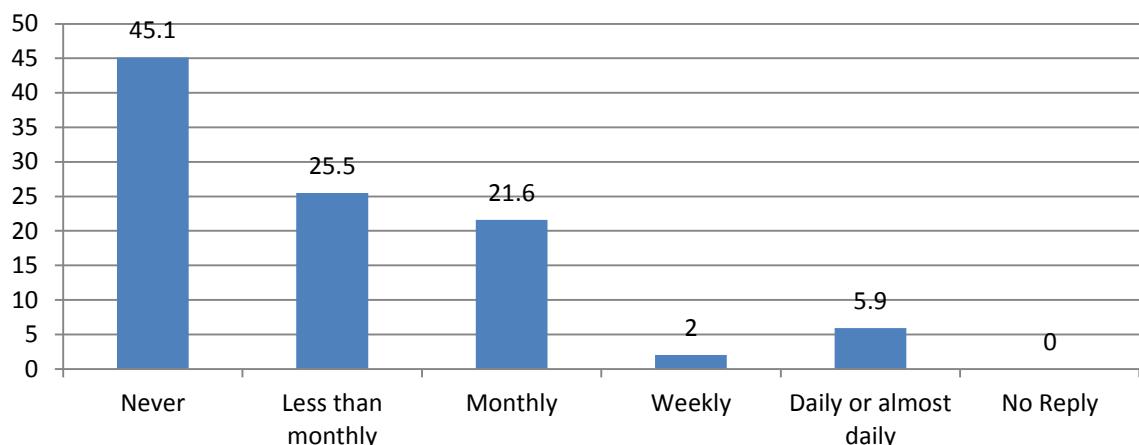


The majority of respondents stated that at some time over the last year they have been unable to remember what happened the night before because they had been drinking. For almost half of respondents (47.1%) this would be a monthly or less than monthly occurrence, 2% would be unable to remember what happened the night before weekly, and 5.9% would be unable to remember what happened the night before daily or almost daily.

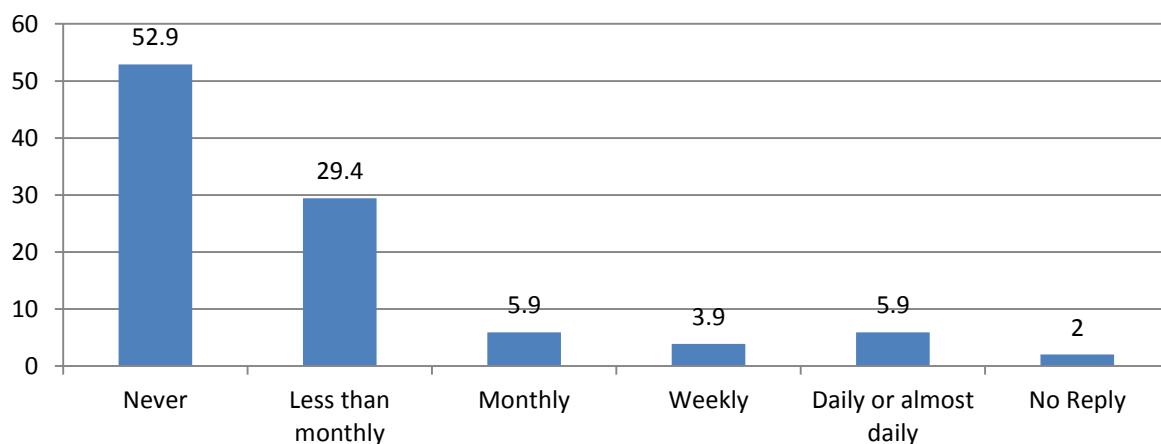
52.9% of respondents stated that they had, over the last year, never failed to do what was normally expected of them because of drinking, while 29.4% of respondents stated that they failed to do what was normally expected of them less than monthly. Almost one in ten (9.8%) respondents failed to do what was normally expected of them because of drinking weekly, daily or almost daily.

A significant proportion of respondents (43.2%) stated that over the last year a relative, friend or health worker has been concerned about the respondents drinking or have suggested that the respondent cut down on their drinking. For 31.4% of respondents, this has occurred on more than one occasion over the past year.

How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?



How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drinking?

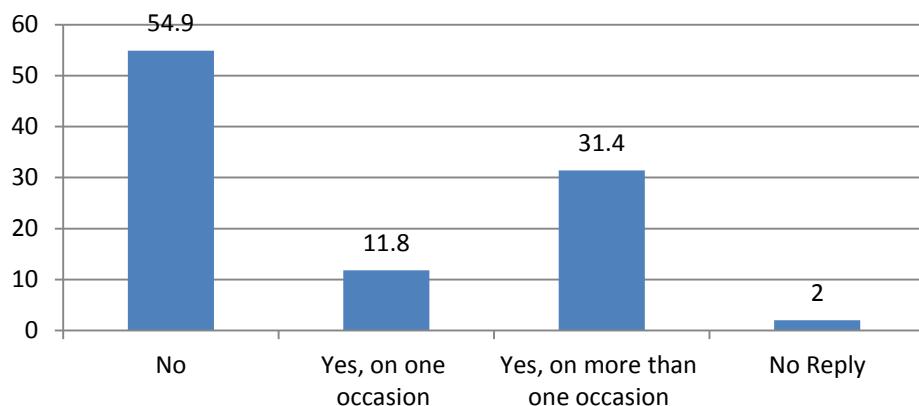


The issue of alcohol use and how it is linked to other familial and employment issues was explained as follows;

'...I think I lapse into alcohol. I don't drink every day but do drink more often than I should and I think it is down to that kinda release, of going into a bar and sit have drink and see such and such then drink too much. But it over comes the stress and in particular now my employment state is not good and very soon I'm going to be out of work. That is building up the stress more and things like that there so I try to do what is possible as said going back to...the bonding is very very important in trying to deal with that there don't know what I would do without that and just try and deal with it. I have done a lot of years in prison probably like a good part of my life and that's difficult to deal with. In relation to family, when I came out I had no family in relation to a partner or children and was on my own thing and that'

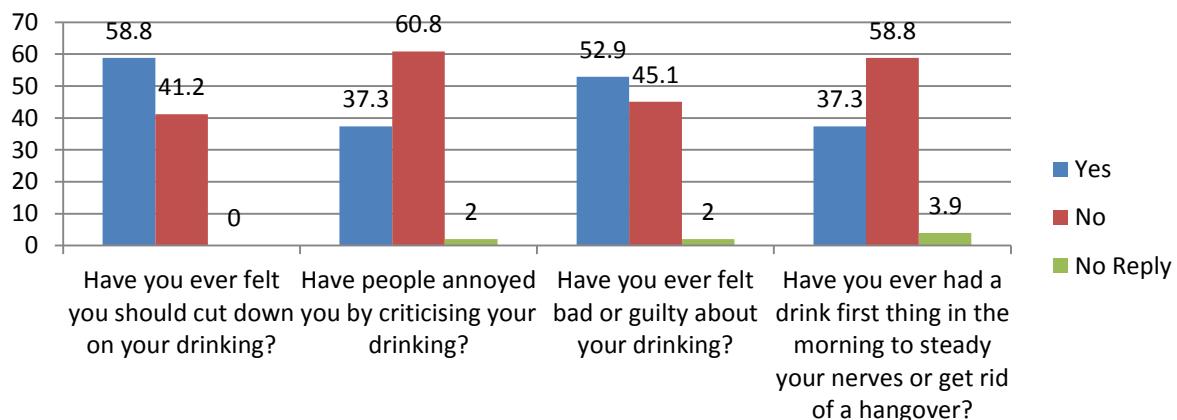
'kinda brings stress and don't know if I could effectively have a stable relationship . I did at one time for 8 years, but I think the anxiety, I mean my former partner says I seem to be far away. My heads in the clouds sort of thing and just couldn't cope with things like that there.'

In the last year has a relative or friend, or a doctor or other health worker, been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?



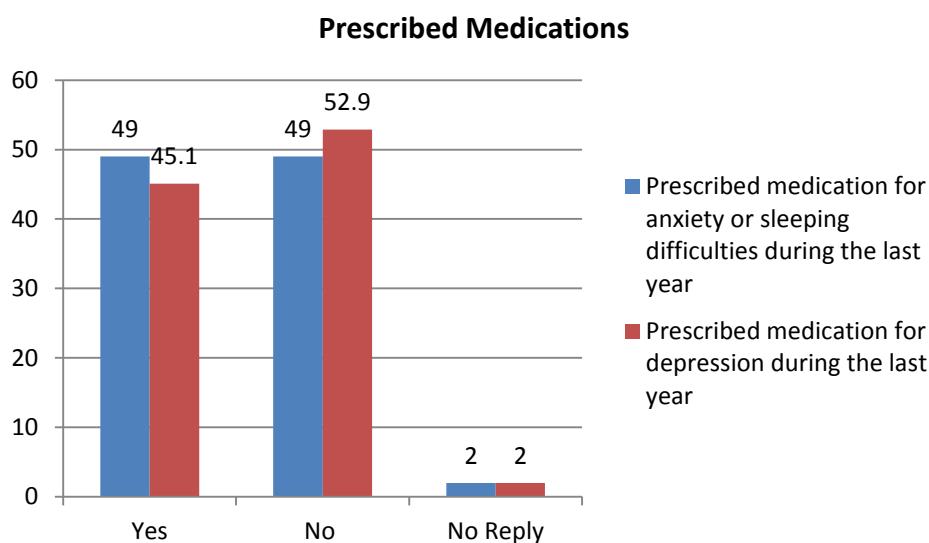
Well over half of respondents (58.8%) have felt that they should cut down on their drinking, while 52.9% have felt bad or guilty about their drinking. More than a third of respondents (37.3%) have been annoyed when other people criticised their drinking. A significant minority of respondents (37.3%) have had a drink first thing in the morning to 'steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover.'

Attitudes to Drinking



Given the evidence of stress and trauma-related anxiety it is not surprising that almost half of respondents (49%) have been prescribed medication for anxiety or sleeping difficulties during the last year, while a similar but smaller proportion (45.1%) have

been prescribed medication for depression in the last year. When we analyse these results by employment we find that 92% of those who work do not feel physical pain compared to a third who do not work. Moreover, respondents who are employed are at least half as likely as those who are unemployed to take anti-depressants or medication for anxiety/sleeping difficulties. Half of those who state high esteem are in employment compared to 26.3% who are not. The same type of relationship also affects alcohol use with a quarter of those employed compared to 46.1% who are not employed that they have considered reducing their alcohol intake.



With regard to the use of medication for anxiety or sleeping other relationships emerge. 50% of respondents aged 45-54 took such medication. However, this rises to 76% among those aged 55-64 suggesting that such issues may worsen with age. Those taking such medication compared to those who did not were more likely to be estranged from family members (64%), disagree that it was easy to find work (79.1%) or agree that they experience moderate or severe psychological harm (92%).

What emerges within focus groups and interview is a sense of emotional unease that is reflected in normal social activities being sites of anxiety and alarm. As noted;

'I remember I developed this and think I still have it you know the locking the door and walk back up street again to check if locked the door cause wasn't sure if I locked the door or not and was talking to another person, an ex-prisoner, but happened to say to them they said 'do you know something I do that'. And do you know what I think? That is when in your cell you went out and when you went back closed it. You know? I think something to do with that there. I wonder but just don't know. How do you make these connections?'.

There was also an explanation that gaining employment can be related to imprisonment;

'There is no doubt people who spent long enough periods in jail it affected their ability to get work and no doubt about that it affected their confidence and then that had a knock on effect and how many of those people. ...you may have got a job like taxi or on door all (the) rest of it but always within, all that constantly struggling just to get by and then you know drink coming into the equation. To cope with that there and then also coming into the equation was things we talked about maybe no longer involved in anything politics or struggle and finding themselves condemning themselves nearly as a waster you know and this having a knock on effect. I know people like this who would spend time just talking about it trying to explain that they are not wasters. You say 'Oh!' I know that you are not but it's not good enough and you can actually see that knock-on effect -couldn't cope... all of these things are interconnecting and then come out the other end. Nearly like resentful beat out and you know drink problems and all the rest of it.'

The context of aging and the impact of imprisonment was also mentioned by an interviewee;

'I think maybe health problems in later life for ex-prisoners is more to do with their lifestyle over a long period of time. The conflict went on for an awful long time. A lot of prisoners were in jail for long periods of time. There is an awful lot of psychological pressures to being in prison. There is also a lot of psychological pressures when you are not in prison during the conflict. It might be some sort of combination of all that but in general lots of ex-prisoners have health problems'.

However, there were those who had coped better which in this instance was reflected upon as mobilising and utilising skills to maintain a positive position in life;

It is a part of my life it is something that happened at the time and you know it was a sense of achievement I would say and develop skills yes while in the jail with people that you didn't know and...you had to deal with so many issue with people and get to know people and if they are (in a) good mood or bad mood. Think all them kinda skills are social skills and have empathy for people....I got that out of being in jail and dealing with different issues - issues we had to deal with and conflict issues with Screws so yes wee things like that all wear on you and has helped me I think it has help me to be a better person after I got out. Been able to help other people and just see things in a different way to. No, I think in a weird sense it was good experience and has helped me when I got out within the community and having that ability to mix with people and help them and want to help them and relation to finances...'.

Well-being and the future

The majority of respondents (58.9%) stated that a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment was moderate or severe physical injury, while a higher number of respondents (66.7%) felt that moderate or severe psychological harm was a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment. More respondents felt that they had suffered *severe* psychological harm (37.3%) more than they had suffered *severe* physical harm (21.6%). Over a quarter of respondents (27.5%) felt that they had suffered severe harm due to their inability to form a close relationship with a partner and 17.6% stated that a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment was severe harm with regard to their ability to express affection. 58.8% of respondents stated that a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment was severe or moderate harm when linked to their inability to express worry and unhappiness. A greater number of respondents (64.8%) stated that a personal cost was related to their inability to confide about personal problems. Over a quarter of respondents (27.5%) stated that a personal cost of the conflict and imprisonment was moderate or severe harm due to estrangement from family members, while over half of respondents (51%) stated that suffering to family members had caused them severe or moderate harm. The issue of confiding is also linked to trust and bonding within the ex-prisoner community as noted within the following four quotes from the male and female focus groups;

'I have good friends but that bond with them is completely different (than) with ex-prisoners. That bond lasted all these years because you were confined for so long with these people and it is a bond that (will) just be there forever. Can't be broken'.

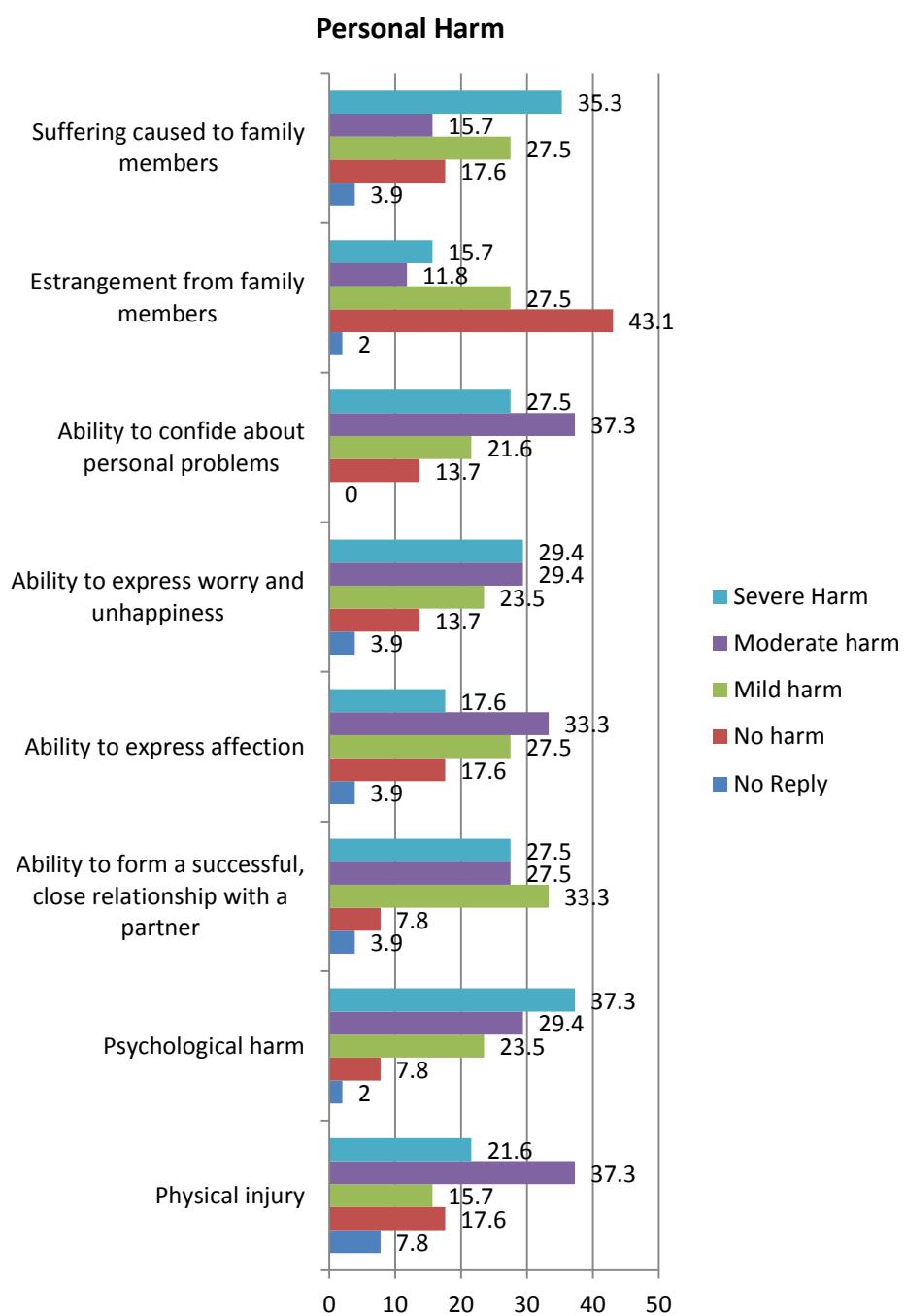
'Again it is the confidences. There is a lot of things I couldn't share with other friends they just would not understand but even ex-prisoners I haven't seen in a long time when we meet the bond is still there and the trust still there and even though haven't seen them in years, I still feel can tell them'.

'I say definitely, at the beginning, yes totally isolated and you did only want to be in the company of ex-prisoners but as time went on and on and on, you sort of make friends but you still want to go back to that group for security or being like a family, you feel safe – not sure don't know what it is'.

'I don't know how to explain that but it's because maybe then I was very young and the people I met and the impression they made on me, it was a sense of being in it together, going through hardship together, particularly the burning of the Kesh and the camp and everything that went with that, living in those type of conditions, right down to the basics, you were living literally

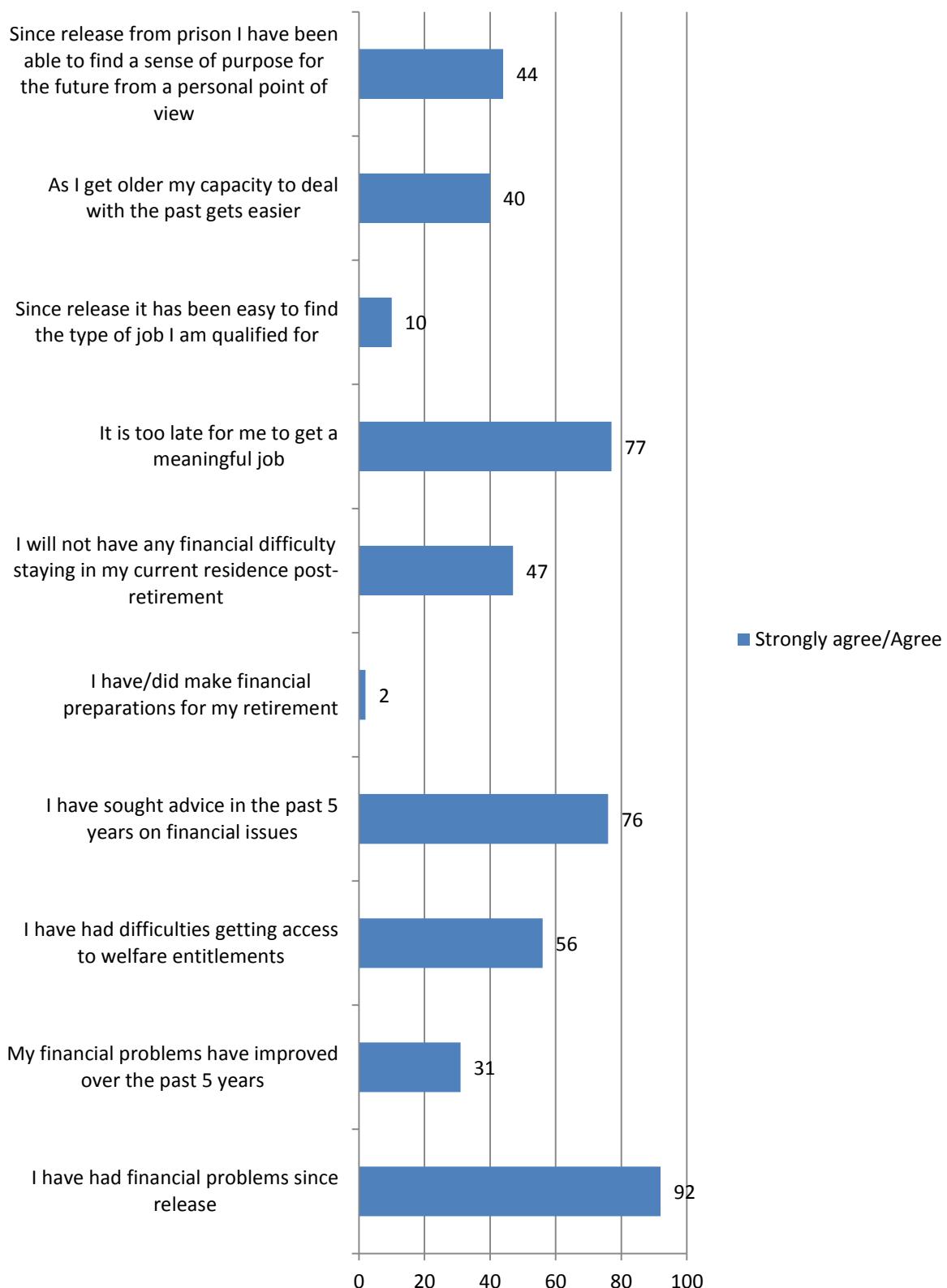
on starvation diets, you were not getting looked after properly, not getting washed, and everything was so close. There is something about that'.

This suggests that the service needs of the ex-prisoner community, as they are for police and prisoner services members, have been largely 'in-house' due to the emotive effects of the issues faced. Those involved in conflict are generally capable of confiding in-group and find it more difficult to speak with family, friends or standard/state funded service providers.

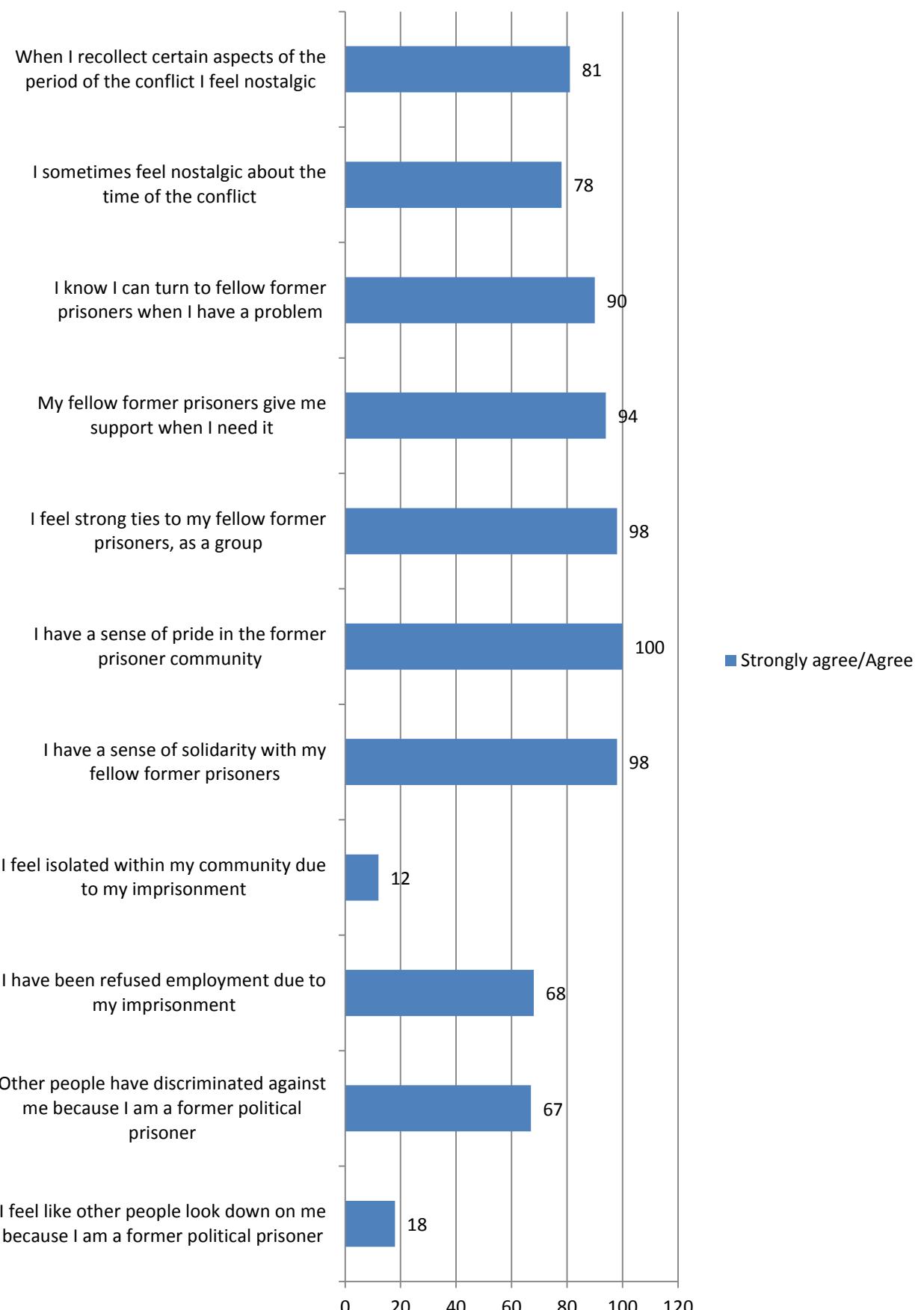


67% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that other people have discriminated against them because they are a former political prisoner, with a quarter of respondents (25%) strongly agreeing. 68% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that they have been refused employment due to their imprisonment, with over a quarter of respondents (26%) strongly agreeing. Just 12% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel isolated within their community due to their imprisonment, with a large proportion of respondents (41%) strongly disagreeing. 53% of respondents strongly agreed that they have a sense of solidarity with their fellow former prisoners and 45% agreed. Just one respondent neither agreed nor disagreed and no respondents disagreed. 94% of respondents agree or strongly agree that fellow former prisoners give them support when needed, with just one respondent disagreeing. 90% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they can turn to fellow former prisoners when they have a problem, with just one respondent disagreeing.

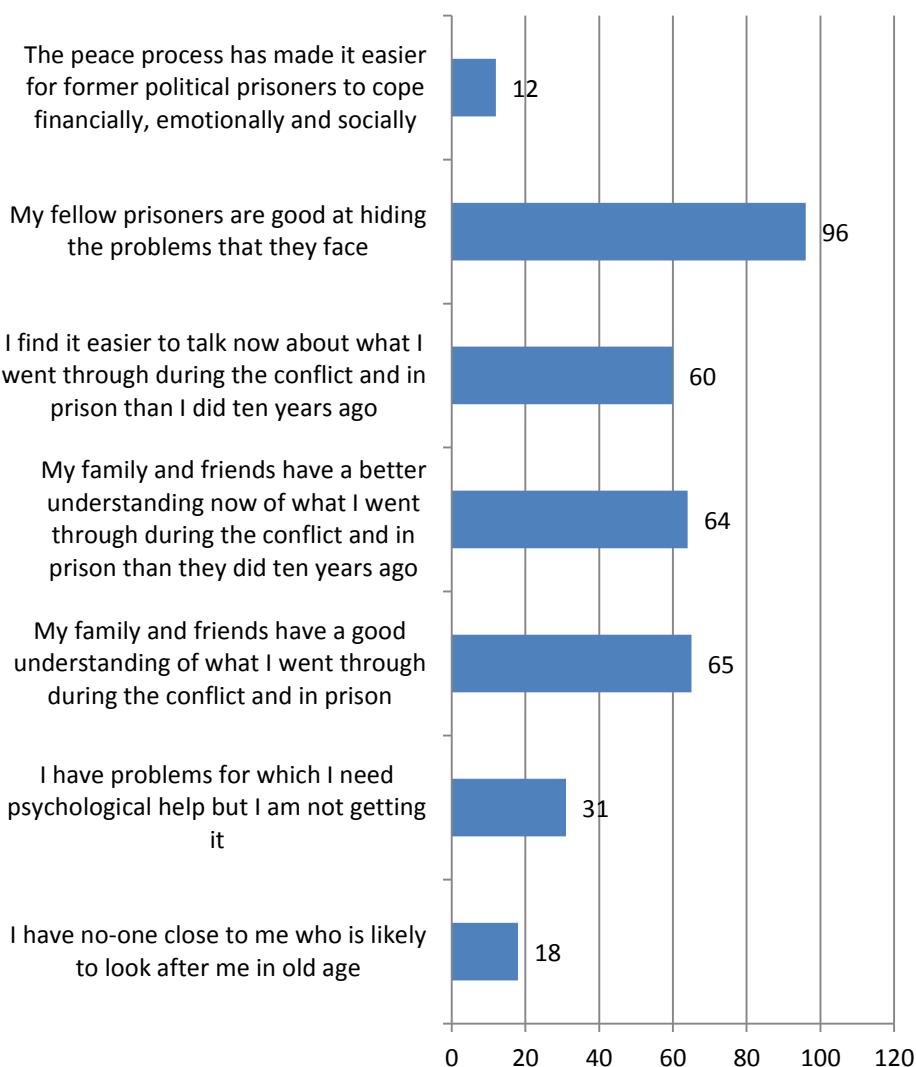
How do you feel about the following statements? (%)



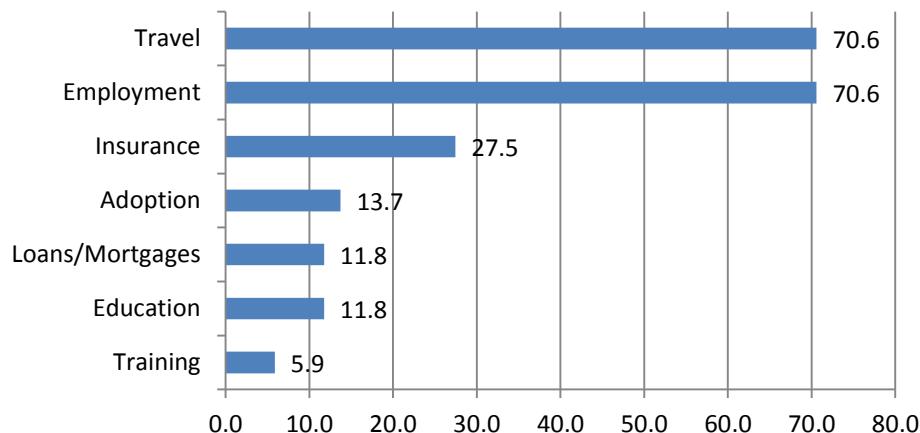
How do you feel about the following statements? (%)



How do you feel about the following statements? (%)



**Have you ever avoided applying for something because
you are a political ex-prisoner?**



A large number of respondents (70.6%) have avoided applying for employment, with a significant proportion of respondents citing the fact that they do not wish to reveal or discuss their imprisonment status with potential employers. For some respondents, their ex-prisoner status would make applying for certain jobs 'a waste of time', whilst some respondents are uneasy about revealing their background to strangers. For some respondents, employment is also a mobility and security issue, with some expressing a fear that they may have to work in loyalist/unionist areas or that they may be attacked, and hence a proportion of respondents state that they do not like to work outside of their own community. A majority of respondents (70.6%) have avoided travel opportunities. Generally this is because of visa issues (for the US or Australia), with respondents having been denied a visa, or not applying for a visa because they believe they will be refused. Many respondents regret that they cannot visit family or friends because of visa issues. A smaller number of respondents (27.5%) have had issues with insurance. Some respondents stated that they have been refused insurance, but for most respondents, the main issue with insurance is that they have 'to lie' on insurance application forms by not addressing the question of criminal convictions. For some respondents, this causes significant worry, as they have concerns that the insurance policy will be void if 'something happens'.

In sum, a fundamental shift in the position of former conflict related prisoners has been a sense of lost status but at the same time, as this report indicates, issues of despair and dislocation remain and in some cases are worsening. As explained;

'The ex-prisoners many years ago when the war was on and when they were released from prison they were treated like hero's as such...Now being an ex-prisoner means nothing you know? You can go round people's doors...most of the ex-prisoners are involved in the door canvassing when Sinn Fein standing for votes or standing for election. We go round the doors. Years ago people would have been glad to see you and it would've been 'how are you?'. Now nobody's any interest now. It's the old cliché of the usual suspects, the same people support you, the same people being at marches, the same people are willing to talk to you'.

Fundamentally the loss of support services within the former prisoner community will leave a constituency whose needs are unaddressed. In simple terms Tar Isteach's membership will have nowhere to locate bespoke services required to address the trauma of conflict and an unresolved past.

ⁱ http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news_-_dsd-270109-minister-ritchie_announces

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-20355160>

ⁱⁱⁱ www.ds dni.gov.uk/key_facts_august10.doc

^{iv} http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-dhssps-200314-health-survey-northern?WT.mc_id=rss-news

^v http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_survey_northern_ireland_-_first_results_from_the_2011-12_survey.pdf

vi http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_survey_northern_ireland_-_first_results_from_the_2011-12_survey.pdf

^{vii} http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-dhssps-200314-health-survey-northern?WT.mc_id=rss-news