



# WHY ARE MEMBERS OF AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA RESIGNING?

A Case Study into the experiences and views of  
former members of An Garda Síochána.

Compiled by the Garda Representative Association, October 2023.

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## **1.1 Introduction to the Research**

In 2022, 107 members of Garda rank resigned from An Garda Síochána. To date, (October 2023) 106 Garda members have resigned. In March 2023, the Garda Representative Association (GRA) decided to contact some of these individuals to ascertain the reasons behind their decisions to resign. Until May of 2023, Garda management had not begun to conduct exit interviews so it was felt by the GRA that this information was vital to better understand why the Garda organisation now finds itself in an unprecedented retention crisis.

This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of members of the national police service, An Garda Síochána, resigning in unprecedented numbers, particularly in the past 18 months to two years. The purpose of the research is to explore with a sample of resigned Garda members their reasons for leaving and the various issues that impacted on those decisions. It is anticipated that the knowledge and data generated from this study would afford new insights into police attrition rates, in particular that of the Irish context. This research employed a qualitative case study methodology to illustrate the phenomenon under investigation. Participants of this study included a selected group consisting of 40 former Garda members.

Questions were compiled by the GRA Training Sub Committee by researching typical exit interview questions utilised by several large organisations, and tailoring these questions to elicit the information that was sought. 16 questions were decided upon.

Central Executive Committee (CEC) members provided, on consent, the names of resigned members within their Divisions. These individuals were then contacted by the Assistant to the General Secretary of the GRA, who organised to meet and interview 40 former Gardaí. Although some of these interviews were conducted via online meeting forums, the majority were conducted in person. Interviews were conducted on the basis that names would not be included in the results. Participants provided information on their gender, age and the Garda Division they were attached to on their resignation. The Assistant to the General Secretary holds the information on the names of the participants.

The participants are to be complemented for their openness and honesty in answering the questions. They showed a genuine desire to assist the GRA in identifying the reasons behind the high attrition rates that the Garda organisation is currently experiencing. The GRA wishes them every success in their future endeavours.

## **2.1 Literature review**

The aims of this research were to explore with 40 former members of An Garda Síochána the reasons why they chose to resign from the organisation and to capture their experiences and views of the organisation. To carry out this study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of current literature. The aim of the review was to establish a theoretical framework for this piece of research. This review was ongoing throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the study.

The review of related literature involved the systematic identification, location, and analysis of material related to the research problem and included books, articles, reviews and electronic media. 'A key objective of a literature review is to provide a clear and balanced picture of current leading concepts, theories, and data relevant to your topic or subject of study' (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). They share with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to this work. Reviews also relate this study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature, filling in gaps and extending prior studies (Marshall & Rossman 2006) and provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings (Creswell 2009).

While reviewing the literature for this study, it was found that no research has been done within the Irish context on police resignations. Some limited articles and books written on the British and American contexts were available and these were reviewed.

## **2.2 Work environment**

The work environment can be described as the setting, social aspects and physical conditions in which an individual performs their job. It has the potential to significantly impact employee morale, workplace relationships, performance, job satisfaction and employee health (QuestionPro.com 2023).

Police work, by its nature, is extremely challenging. The conditions that police officers work in are both physically and emotionally demanding and it is seen as one of the most stressful vocations. Martin Gachter et al (2013) spoke about the importance of retention of personnel in police forces over the long term. He also highlighted the challenging environment in which these officers work, as being hugely important for the organisation itself and in particular, for its policy makers. Retention therefore, of experienced police personnel, is seen as vital for maximising performance and ensuring successful outcomes, therefore lowering the cost of training and recruitment in the long term.

### **2.3 Other organisations.**

International research on why people leave their jobs states that while getting paid is the main reason why people work, it is no longer their top priority when deciding whether or not to stay with an organisation. In fact, Gen Zers (defined as those born between 1996 and 2012) put the highest value on a healthy work-life balance with over 60% of that group stating it was the most important factor when considering new job opportunities. (Minschew 2023). Of the same group, 34% said they would leave a job due to the toxic, unhealthy and unsupportive work environment created by their employer, with a further 25% citing inadequate flexibility by management as a further reason for leaving (Minschew 2023).

A study conducted in 2020 (Greenwood 2023) found that some of the most common reasons for people resigning include;

- A lack of appreciation – one of the primary reasons that people leave a job is the perception of being underappreciated and undervalued for the work they do.
- Feeling burnt out – the three primary cause of burnout are unfair compensation, unreasonable workload and too much overtime. Poor management and a negative workplace culture also contribute to burn out (Greenwood 2023).
- Lack of flexible work options – Younger workers are now seeking job opportunities where flexibility is a given.

- Poor mental health – Three in five employees experience work related mental health issues at some time in their career – this number does not reflect those who work in demanding, traumatic roles such as policing, where the figures would be expected to be higher.
- Relationship with management – this relationship is critical to factors such as productivity, morale and engagement. ‘A breakdown of that relationship.....can lead to mistrust, anxiety and job dissatisfaction.’ (Greenwood 2023)
- Organisational culture – people leave companies that do not fit with their individual core values. ‘Strong leadership, open communication, work-life balance and career development’ are seen as essential values for companies that wish to retain their staff (Greenwood 2023).

#### **2.4 Police organisations.**

So why are members of An Garda Síochána choosing to resign in such high, unprecedented numbers? This will be addressed later as we look at the findings of this research. Is this exodus of police officers resigning unique to Ireland? The research would tend to indicate that it is not.

Police attrition rates in the UK have soared. According to the government’s Home Office figures, the number of voluntary resignations more than doubled from 1,158 in the year ending March 2012 to 2,363 by the year ending March 2020 (Charman and Bennett, 2022).

A rolling two year survey by the Police Federation released in September 2019 blamed low morale for the fact that so many officers were leaving the service early in their careers. Of those officers who resigned, 40% stated that stress was one of the major contributing factors in their decision to leave.

A report released in March 2021 by the University of Portsmouth also looked into the high attrition rates of police officers. They interviewed almost 100 former police officers to find out what were the reasons for their leaving. They found that

*'officers are not resigning due to the often challenging and stressful occupational role of being a police officer but rather because of internal, organisational issues.....poor leadership, lack of promotion or progression opportunities and a lack of voice.'* (Charman and Bennett, 2022).

They also described officers feeling that they were not valued and in some instances, that their supervisors didn't even know their names. They felt their relationships with their managers were poor and distant. This contributed to a feeling of a lack of voice – they felt that if they attempted to challenge management's thinking or practices, they would be 'met with defensiveness, exclusion or being told to 'shut up and get on with it'' (Charman and Bennett, 2022).

Similar findings have been reported in American police departments with several of them facing a 'vicious cycle of retirements, resignations and fewer hires.....leaving the communities they protect with understaffed departments and potentially under qualified officers' (Charalambous 2023). A survey released in April 2023 from the Police Executive Research Forum of 182 law enforcement agencies indicated that while police departments are recruiting more officers compared to a 2020 decrease, departments have seen 47% more resignations and 19% more retirements in 2022 compared to 2019 (Charalambous 2023).

These high levels of voluntary turnover can have a damaging effect on an organisation's knowledge and effectiveness (Hom and Griffeth 1995), a negative effect on organisational performance (Hur 2013) and extensive costs are involved in the recruitment and training of new and replacement staff.

## **2.5 Organisational and Occupational Stressors.**

A detailed study in 2021 into voluntary resignations from UK police services looked at the impact of organisational and occupational stressors on officers' commitment to their organisations.

It identified a number of findings that are worth considering in the context of what this research sets out to do i.e. identify why members of An Garda Síochána are choosing to resign in such high, unprecedented numbers.

Within that study, the overall findings demonstrated that resigning police officers

*'highly value the occupation they have joined, the nature of their work, the opportunities for fulfilling public service ambitions and the satisfaction of working with policing colleagues as part of a team'* (Charman and Bennett 2022).

The findings also indicated however, that the same officers are

*'frustrated by the perceived inability of the organisation to manage the demand upon them and by a sense of organisational injustice emanating from perceptions of a lack of voice, leadership, autonomy and support'* (Charman and Bennett 2022).

Interestingly, the authors of the research also found that police officers in the early stages of their careers were statistically more likely to leave or to express an intention to leave policing than their more senior counterparts (McElroy et al.1999, Cooper and Ingram 2004).

The research examined in detail what were the main factors that were driving the high voluntary resignations from UK police forces, and it identified a number of common themes that emerged from that research.

## **2.6 Findings**

Almost two thirds (65%) of the participants of that study said that the impact of the job on their personal life was a major influencing factor in their decision to leave their policing role. They also cited low morale (60%) and a lack of job satisfaction (61%) as strong reasons for making their decision to leave (Charman and Bennett 2022). The impact of their policing role on their psychological health and stress arising from doing the job were also key reasons the officers left, accounting for over 56% of responses.

The findings were broken down in to three main areas:

- Organisational factors
- Organisational 'injustice'
- Personal factors

### **2.7 Organisational factors**

Organisational factors refer to the many elements that influence how an organisation and everybody in that organisation, behave.

For the purpose of the research conducted by Charman and Bennett , they identified three factors that influenced police officers decisions to resign. These were;

- Perceived poor leadership and management
- Increased workload
- Mismatch between the expectations of the job and subsequent realities of the job.

### **2.8 Organisational 'injustice'**

Organisational justice refers to the extent to which employees perceived workplace procedures, interactions and outcomes to be fair in nature (Baldwin 2006). The police officers in the study had a perception of organisational 'injustice'. They cited issues such as

- Lack of promotion and progression opportunities
- Having no autonomy over their job, their role or their future
- A perception that they lacked a voice
- Presence of bullying and harassment, all of which were from managers within the organisation (Charman and Bennett 2022).

### **2.9 Personal factors**

Three predominate issues that emerged under this heading that impacted officers decisions to resign from the police service were;

- Difficulties of managing caring responsibilities alongside a career on the police service
- Physical and or mental health issues
- Work related stress (Charman and Bennett 2022).

### **2.10 Why stay?**

The same piece of research also examined reasons why participants might reconsider their choice to resign from the police service and stay within the organisation. Four main factors were identified by over 40% of the participants. These were;

- Improvements in officer welfare supports
- Better career developments
- Better work-life balance and
- A different organisational culture.

Other factors cited included more opportunity for flexible working, lower workload, better training opportunities and a change in the senior leadership team. Interestingly, a higher salary only accounted for 17% of participants answers.

### **2.11 Summary**

The aim of the literature review was to establish a theoretical framework for the research into why Garda members are choosing to resign from An Garda Síochána. No research has been done within the Irish context on police resignations. Some limited articles and books written on the British and American contexts were available and these were reviewed.

These articles examined the work environment and its impact on morale, job satisfaction and employee health. The author then examined organisations and internal occupational stressors such as feelings of organisational ‘injustice’ and personal factors, and how they impact on an individual’s choice to resign from police organisations. The literature also examined why a police officer might chose to remain on in the police service and the factors that could influence that decision.

### **3.1 Methodology**

There are different approaches to research which depend wholly on what the researcher wishes to achieve or what question they wish to answer. In this study, the author sought to understand the reasoning behind Garda members decisions' to resign from An Garda Síochána.

The author approached this research as a case study into the experiences, views and opinions of this group of former Garda members. A case study is 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context' (Yin 2009). From a sociological approach, the case study can be seen to strive to highlight the features or attributes of social life. In general, case studies are the preferred method when '(a) 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context' (Yin 2009).

It was clear that a qualitative approach to the research methodology was the most suitable approach, given that the research was seeking to find out 'why' Garda members are resigning. The intent of qualitative research is to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and attempt to achieve a holistic rather than a reductionist understanding (Bogdan & Biklen 1998, Merriam 1998, Patton 1990, Schram 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that 'the qualitative inquiry movement is built on a profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying'. Qualitative methodology implies an emphasis on extracting and interpreting the meaning of experience (Bogdan & Biklen 1998, Merriam 1998) and attempts to 'engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features' (Johnson 1995 as cited in Golafshani 2003). These objectives are contrasted with those of quantitative research, where the testing of hypotheses to establish facts and to designate and distinguish relationships between variables is usually the intent (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe 2008 ).

It was the author's opinion that a quantitative approach to the research was unlikely to elicit the rich data necessary to address the proposed research questions. The method of research that the author has chosen i.e. a qualitative interviews, has allowed for a dynamic and considered dialogue with the participants, resulting in a rich data of answers to the research questions posed.

### **3.2 Focused Interviews**

The interview method was felt to be of the most use in this study because it had the potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions. Further it gave the researcher an opportunity to clarify statements and probe for additional information. Dale Bloomberg & Volpe (2008), Creswell (2009), Marshall and Rossman (2006), and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that a major benefit of collecting data through individual, focused interviews is that they offer the potential to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience.

Interviews also form an essential source of case study information because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioural events. Rubin & Rubin (2005 as stated in Yin 2009 ) state that the actual stream of questions is more likely to be fluid rather than rigid in a case study interview. Yin describes the job of the researcher in a case study interview as having two distinct roles: '(a) to follow your own line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and (b) to ask your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of your line of inquiry' (2009).

The researcher was of the opinion that focused interviews, in which a person is interviewed for a short period of time, for example an hour, (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall 1990) were the most suitable type of interview to use. The use of focused interviews allowed for a detailed exploration of the topics covered in the questionnaire and afforded the researcher an opportunity to gauge the feelings, attitudes and experiences of resigned members of An Garda Síochána.

### **3.3 Interview Process**

The author was provided with the names and contact numbers of Garda members who has resigned in the past two years, by members of the GRA Central Executive Committee, who did so with the express permission of the individuals. They were then contacted and asked if they wished to partake in an interview to discuss the various reasons around their decision to resign. Participants were selected randomly.

The interviews took place from March to July 2023. Due to distance and the time restraints of the participants, a number of interviews were done via online platforms but the majority agreed to meet with the author at times and locations suitable to them. All participants were assured that their personal details such as their names and the Garda stations that they were attached to would remain confidential – participants are identified only by their gender, age and Division they were attached to.

### **3.4 Analysis and Synthesis of Data**

The challenge throughout the data collection and analysis was to ‘make sense of large amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns and construct a framework’ (Merriam 1998 as cited in Dale Bloomberg & Volpe 2008 ). In order to do this the author employed a coding system which is when each category of a variable can be coded with a letter, group of letters or words, or be given a number. This allowed the author to identify themes that emerged from the research which could be linked back to the conceptual framework of the research and also to the theoretical framework of the research as stated in the review of the literature.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

In any research study, ethical considerations relating to the protection of the participants are of vital concern (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe 2008, Merriam 1998, Schram 2003). Ethical issues usually arise during a piece of research for many reasons including the purpose of the research, the subject matter and the types of methods that are used. According to Kitchener

(1984) there are five ethical theories to keep in mind when conducting a piece of research. These will be explained with reference to their impact on this research.

- Respect Autonomy – The research should respect individuals and not interfere with their welfare.
- Do no harm – This is concerned with not inflicting harm on others which was the case with this research.
- Benefit others – This is concerned with benefiting the group, organisation or population studied.
- Be just – This explains that all participants should be treated equally throughout the research. All information received was treated in the same manner. Judgements or assumptions on the experiences or choices of individuals were not made; ensuring that the data was processed in an unbiased and fair manner.
- Be trustworthy – This involves keeping any promises made, telling the truth and being loyal to the research. It is the 'ethical responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the data are accurately collected, coded, entered, analysed and interpreted, so as not to perform a disservice to the subject population' (California State University 2003). The author was aware that as the researcher, she had certain power over the findings and how they were manipulated. However, she remained loyal to the findings even though at times, they were unexpected and unusual.

### **3.6 Limitations of the Study**

This research study contained a number of limitations and constraints which were related to the subject of the research and the researcher herself. One such limitation was the number of participants used for the interview process. The researcher would have liked to interview a larger number of resigned Garda members but was precluded from doing this due to time and geographical constraints. However, choosing to interview 40 participants, in light of the fact that at the time of conducting the research approximately 200 Garda members had resigned in the preceding 18 months to two years equated to approximately 20% of that population. This assists in making the results more generalisable.

Another limiting factor is the short time frame in which this research was carried out. Also, as the analysis ultimately rests with the thinking and choices of the researcher, the research can be limited by subjectivity; as a member of An Garda Síochána and specifically, in her role as the Assistant to the General Secretary of the GRA, the researcher brings her own biases and opinions on the organisation to the research.

According to Flyvbjerg (2006) researchers, and particularly those who have conducted case studies, can at times bring their own preconceived views, assumptions, concepts and hypotheses to the research. This may influence the types of questions that are asked and the order in which the questions are asked. The author was at all times conscious of this and took precautions to limit her influence on the questions posed by referring the questionnaire to the GRA Training Sub Committee on several occasions for their opinion and analysis before agreeing on the final draft.

While organising the interviews, the author used a random selection process to identify potential interviewees to avoid a 'sampling bias'. While conducting the interviews, the author remained as impassive as possible and allowed interviewees to talk as little or as much about a particular subject as they wished. This was to allow for more qualitative data to be generated from the interviews and supports Beveridge's conclusion that 'there are more discoveries stemming from the type of intense observation made possible by the case study than from statistics applied to large groups.' (1951)

## **4.1 Findings**

This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of members of the national police service resigning in unprecedented numbers, particularly in the past 18 months to two years. The study is focused on Ireland's national police service, An Garda Síochána. The purpose of the research is to explore with a sample of resigned Garda members their reasons for leaving and the various issues that impacted on those decisions. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 40 focused interviews. A number of major findings emerged from this study.

### **4.2 Question 1. Service**

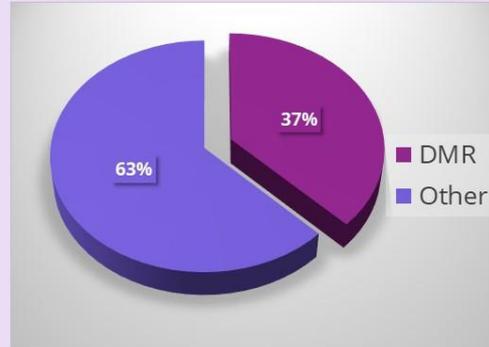
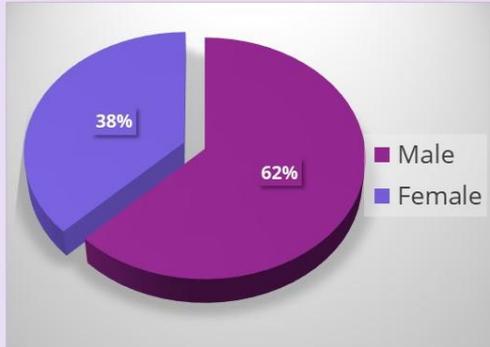
Interviewees were not asked to include their names in the research. They are identified only by their age, gender and the Garda Division they were attached to when they resigned.

25 men and 15 women were interviewed (62.5% & 37.5%)

25 interviewees were based in Divisions outside of the DMR, 15 were based in the DMR (62.5% & 37.5%).



## Interviewee Demographics & Geographics

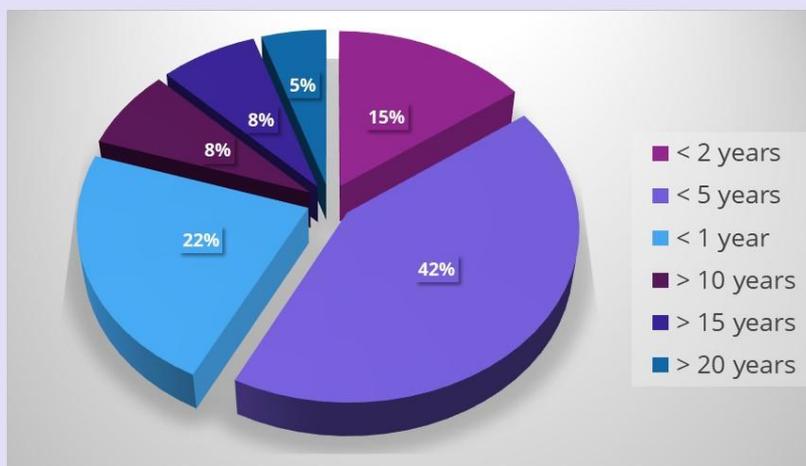


Of the 40 interviewees, six had less than two years' service and 17 had between two and five years' service, meaning that in total, 23 interviewees had less than five years' service. This accounts for 57.5% of all participants.

- Nine participants had between five and ten years' service; (22.5%)
- Three participants had between ten and 15 years' service; (7.5%)
- Three participants had between 15 and 20 years' service; (7.5%) and
- Two participants had more than 20 years' service. (5%).



## Q1 - What service within An Garda Síochána did you have?



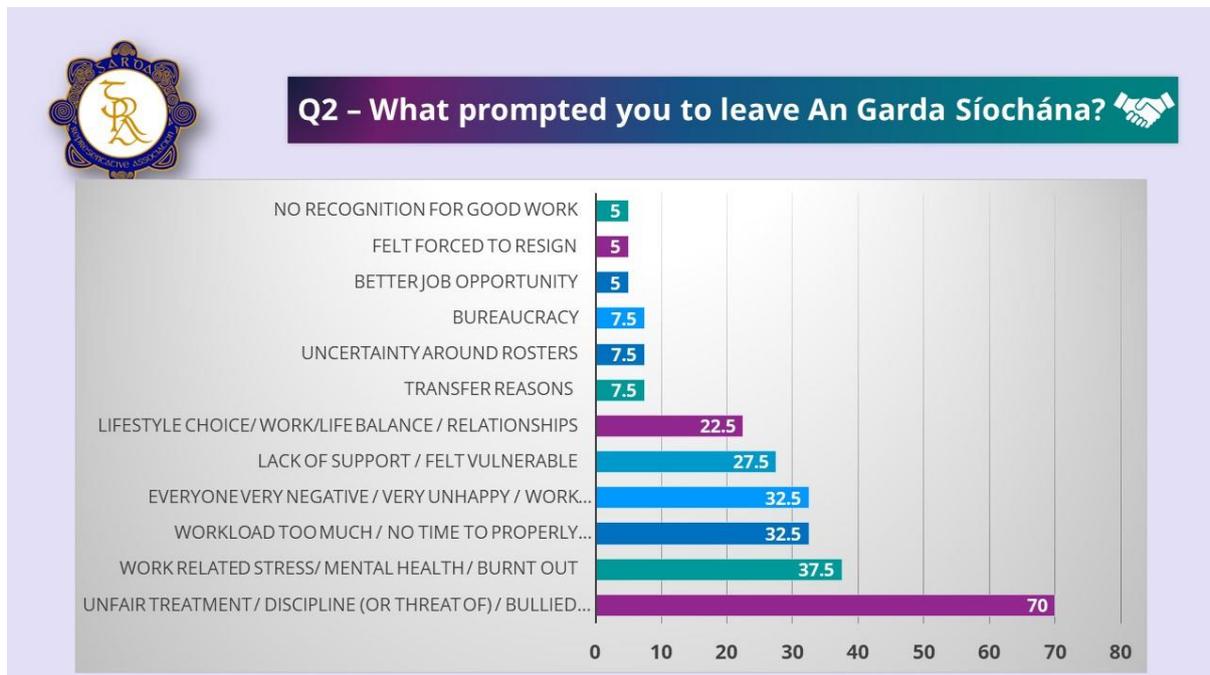
### 4.3 Question 2. Why leave?

All participants, when asked why they chose to resign from An Garda Síochána, gave a number of reasons for their decision. Faced with over 200 answers to analyse, the author established common themes which ran through the responses and has categorised them accordingly.

This question produced six predominant themes which were more common than others.

They are;

- Unfair treatment / discipline (or threat of) / bullied by management – 28 (70%)
- Work related stress/ Mental health / Burnt out – 15 (37.5%)
- Workload too much / No time to properly investigate / No resources- 13 (32.5%)
- Everyone very negative / Very unhappy / Work environment was toxic – 13 (32.5%)
- Lack of support / felt vulnerable – 11 (27.5%)
- Lifestyle choice/ Work/life balance / relationships – 9 (22.5%).



Other issues cited included;

- Transfer reasons – 3 (7.5%)
- Uncertainty around rosters – 3 (7.5%)

- Bureaucracy – 3 (7.5%)
- Better job opportunity -2 (5%)
- Felt forced to resign- 2 (5%)
- No recognition for good work – 2 (5%).
- Poor salary/pension
- Felt I was too ambitious to be a Garda
- Poor standard of training
- Ambition – blocked at every opportunity
- Betrayal of trust
- They came after my family
- Didn't like unpredictability

#### **4.4 Question 3. Under what circumstances would you consider returning to AGS?**

Participants were asked if their personal situation could be changed from where they were when they resigned, under what circumstances would they consider returning to An Garda Síochána.

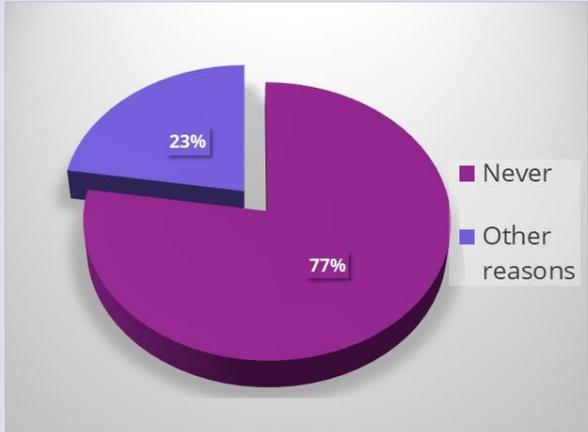
31 participants said that there were no circumstances under which they would consider returning (77.5%) and nine (22.5%) said that there were some circumstances under which they would consider returning.

These included:

- If they were transferred closer to home
- If the job tackled pension/salary
- More support
- More flexibility



**Q3 - Under what circumstances, if any, would you consider returning to An Garda Síochána?**



- Transferred closer to home
- Tackle pension / salary
- More support
- More flexibility

**4.5 Question 4. Do you think management adequately recognised your contribution?**

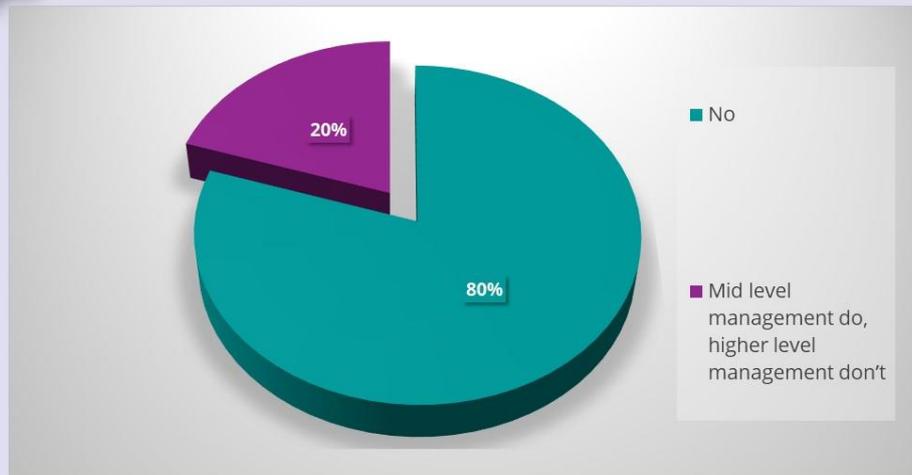
Participants were asked if they believed that their contributions within their time in An Garda Síochána were recognised by management.

32 participants said no (80%).

8 participants (20%) stated that they felt mid management (sergeants and inspector ranks) did, but that ranks higher than that, did not.



#### Q4 – Do you think management adequately recognized your contributions?



#### **If not, how do you think recognition could be improved?**

There were numerous varied responses to this question. Most participants didn't particularly directly answer the question, but used it as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with how this particular issue is dealt with within the Garda organisation.

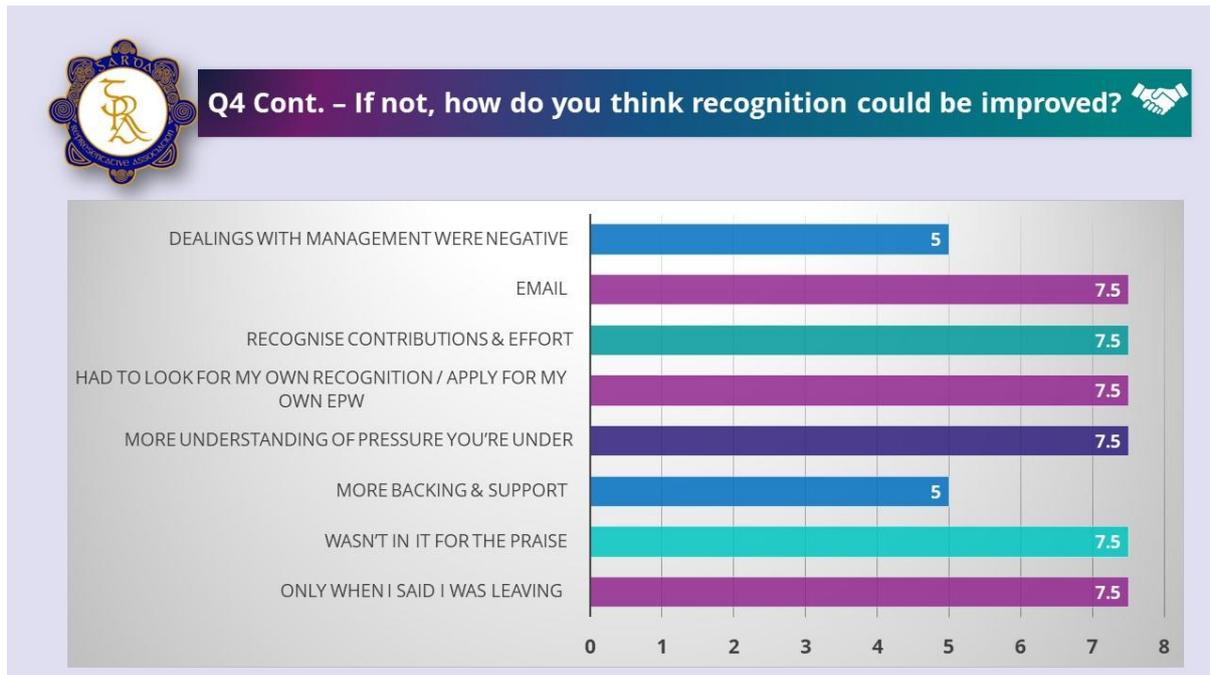
Responses included;

- Only got praise when I said I was leaving - 3 (7.5%)
- Wasn't in it for the praise – 3 (7.5%)
- More understanding of pressure you're under – 3 (7.5%)
- Had to look for my own recognition / apply for my own EPW<sup>1</sup> – 3 (7.5%)
- Recognise contributions & effort – 3 (7.5%)
- Email – 3 (7.5%)
- Dealings with management were negative – 2 (5%)

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<sup>1</sup> Certificate of Excellent Police Work

- Need more backing & support – 2 (5%)
- No one cares
- Superintendent didn't know my name!!
- No mechanisms in place to indicate that you're doing a good job.
- Listen to the Gardaí on ground
- Females don't have a voice

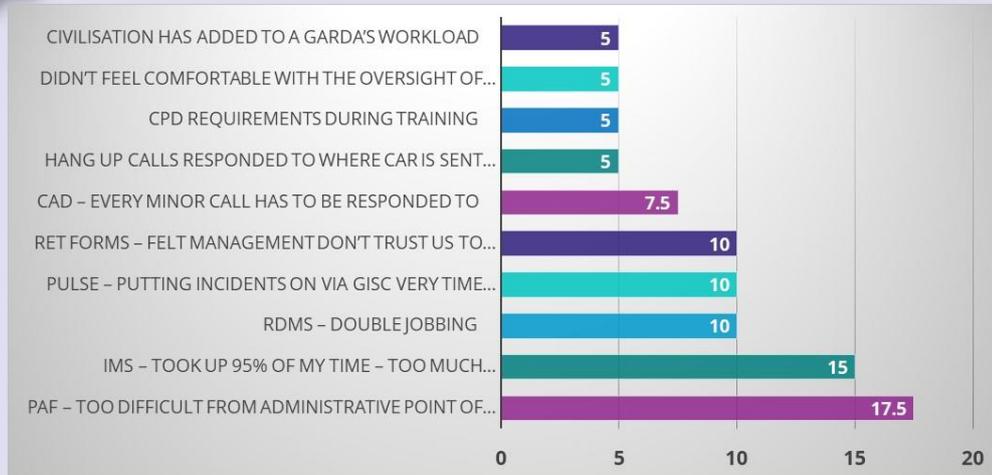


**4.6 Question 5. Were there any polices or procedures that you found difficult to put into practice?**

Participants were asked to describe difficulties, including polices or procedures, that negatively impacted on their ability to effectively do their job. The majority of participants mentioned four or five different areas and these have been categorised into common or recurring themes, by the author.



## Q5 – Were there any policies or procedures you found difficult to put into practice?



- PAF<sup>2</sup> – too difficult from administrative point of view, too heavy of a workload – 7 (17.5%)
- IMS<sup>3</sup> – Took up 95% of my time – too much paperwork for minor investigations – 7 (17.5%)
- RDMS<sup>4</sup> – Double jobbing – 4 (10%)
- PULSE<sup>5</sup> – putting incidents on via GISC very time consuming – 4 (10%)
- RET<sup>6</sup> forms – felt management don't trust us to make our own decisions, putting words into victims mouth. – 4 (10%)
- CAD<sup>7</sup> – Every minor call has to be responded to – 3 (7.5%)
  - hang up calls responded to where car is sent to a phone mast – 2 (5%)
  - calls holding.
- CPD<sup>8</sup> requirements during training – 2 (5%)
- Didn't feel comfortable with the oversight of both personal & work life – 2 (5%)

<sup>2</sup> Performance Accountability Framework

<sup>3</sup> Investigation Management System

<sup>4</sup> Roster and Duty Management Systems

<sup>5</sup> Police Using Leading Systems Effectively – Garda computer system.

<sup>6</sup> Risk Evaluation Tool – For Domestic violence victims

<sup>7</sup> Computer Aided Dispatch

<sup>8</sup> Continuous professional development

- Civilianisation has added to a Garda's workload – 2 (5%).
- Withdrawal statements.
- CBD1<sup>9</sup> Driving
- Callbacks were difficult.
- Discipline regulations are unfair and archaic

**If so, how could the organisation make this easier?**

Participants were asked what steps could the Garda organisation take to alleviate the difficulties that they had experienced during their time as Garda members. This question is further developed later on in the interview but initial answers included:

- Driver training in Garda College
- Allow people to make mistakes without penalty
- Provide more computers for people
- More in classroom based training – LMS<sup>10</sup> not sufficient.
- Need better structures in place regarding people management.
- Allow people use discretion more freely

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<sup>9</sup> Competency Based Driving

<sup>10</sup> Learning Management System



**Q5 Cont. – If so, how could the organization make this easier?** 



- Driver training in Garda College
- Allow people to make mistakes without penalty
- Provide more PC's for people
- More in-classroom based training – LMS not sufficient
- Need better structures in place regarding people management
- Allow people use discretion more freely

#### **4.7 Question 6. Did you feel your job description changed since you first joined?**

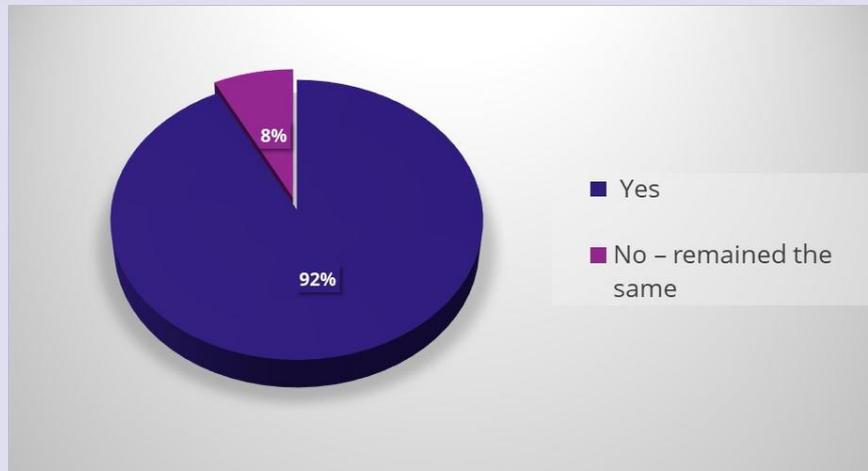
Participants were asked if their perceptions of what being a Garda might be like on first joining, had changed throughout their service.

Yes – 37 (92.5%)

No – 3 (7.5%).



## Q6 – Did you feel your job description changed since you first joined?

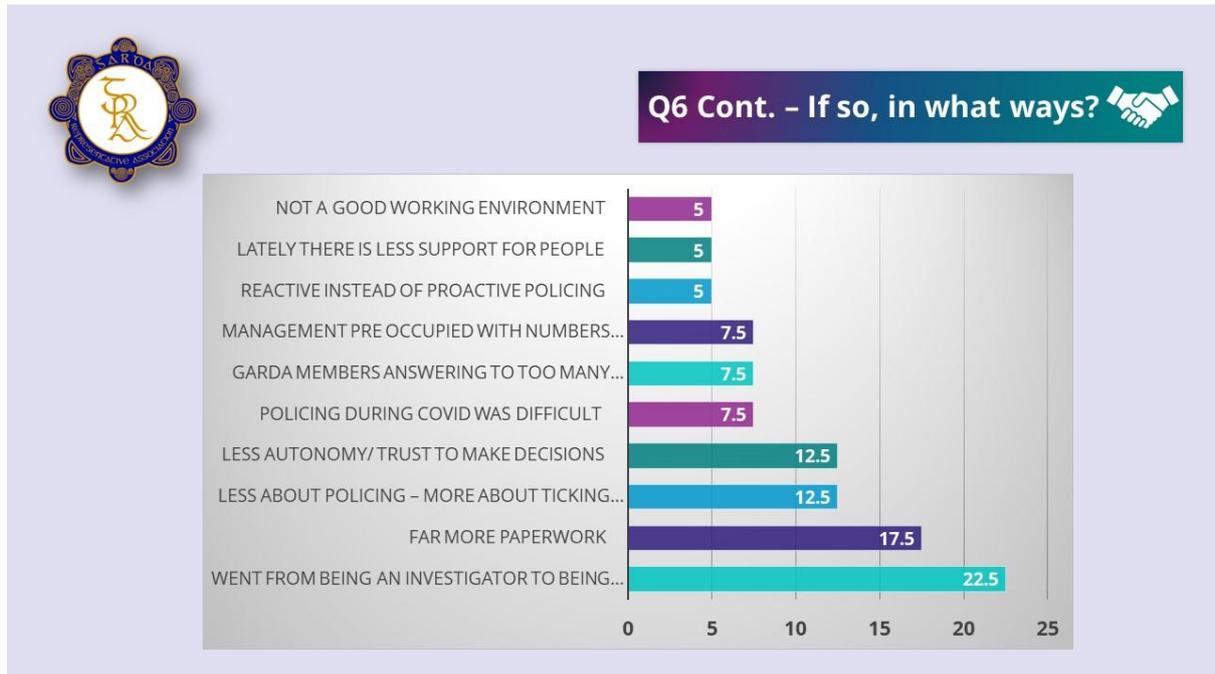


### If so, in what ways?

Participants were asked to describe how that perception had changed. Common themes emerged during this question and they have been summarised and placed together. Again, like most questions, participants gave several examples in their answers.

- Went from being an investigator to being an administrator – 9 (22.5%)
- Far more paperwork – 7 (17.5%)
- Less about policing – more about ticking boxes – 5 (12.5%)
- Less autonomy/ trust to make decisions – 5 (12.5%)
- Policing during Covid was difficult - 3 (7.5%)
- Garda members answering to too many agencies – 3 (7.5%)
- Management pre occupied with numbers & statistics – 3 (7.5%)
- Reactive instead of proactive policing – 2 (5%)
- Lately there is less support for people – 2 (5%)
- Not a good working environment – 2 (5%)
- Under resourced/ over worked
- Became less rewarding

- I was policing for management not the community
- Attending non Garda related calls
- Too many expectations
- Too many policies to adhere to
- Wasn't provided with the proper tools to police effectively



**4.8 Question 7. Did you feel you had the necessary tools, resources and working conditions to be effective in your role?**

Participants were asked to comment on their working conditions on a day to day basis and whether or not those conditions allowed them to be effective as police officers.

No – 34 (85%)

Yes – 4 (10%)

Somewhat agree – 2 (5%).

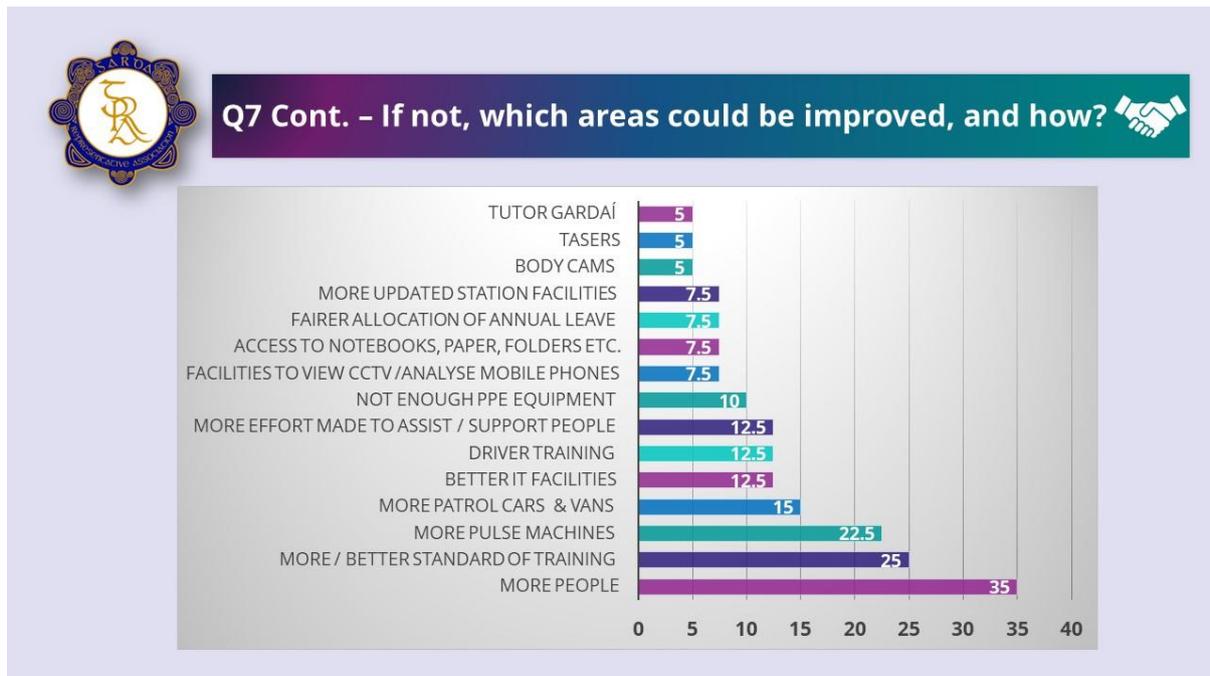


**If not, which areas could be improved and how?**

Participants gave more than one answer to this question.

- More people – 14 (35%)
- More / better standard of training – 10 (25%)
- More PULSE machines – 9 (22.5%)
- More Patrol cars & Vans – 6 (15%)
- Better IT facilities – 5 (12.5%)
- Driver training – 5 (12.5%)
- More effort made to assist / support people – 5 (12.5%)
- Not enough PPE equipment – 4 (10%)
- Facilities to view CCTV /analyse mobile phones- 3 (7.5%)
- Access to notebooks, paper, folders etc.- 3 (7.5%)
- Fairer allocation of annual leave -3 (7.5%)

- More updated station facilities -3 (7.5%)
- Body cams – 2 (5%)
- Tasers- 2 (5%)
- Tutor Gardaí -2 (5%).



#### **4.9 Question 8. Did you feel you had the necessary training to be effective in your role?**

Participants were asked to comment on the training they had received and whether or not that training allowed them to be effective as police officers.

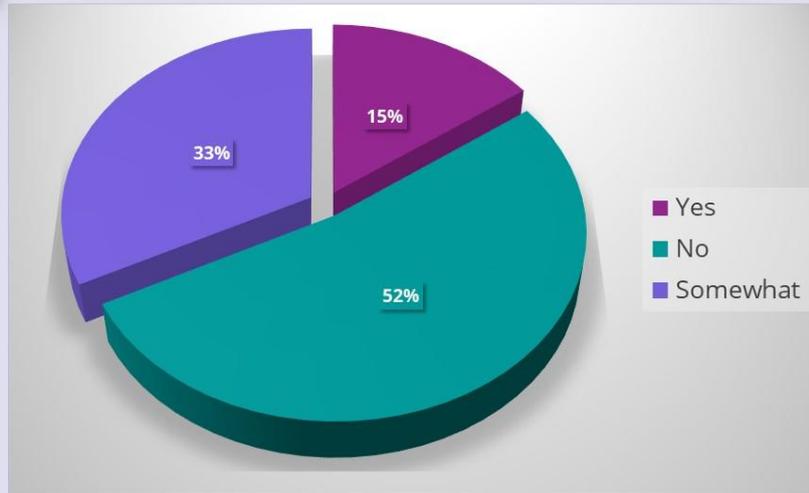
No – 21 (52.5%)

Yes – 6 (15%)

Somewhat agree – 13 (32.5%).



## Q8 – Do you feel you had the necessary training to be effective in your role?



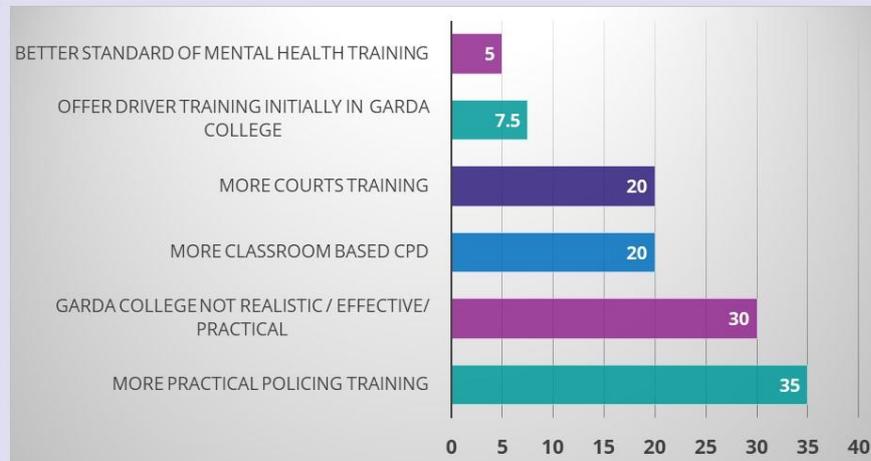
### If not, how could it have been better?

Participants gave more than one answer to this question.

- More practical policing training – 14 (35%)
- Garda college not realistic / effective/ practical – 12 (30%)
- More classroom based CPD – 8 (20%)
- More courts training – 8 (20%)
- Offer driver training initially in Garda college – 3 (7.5%)
- Better standard of mental health training – 2 (5%)
- More emphasis on fitness



## Q8 Cont. –If not, how could it have been better?



### **4.10 Question 9. What can the Garda organisation improve on?**

Participants were asked to comment generally on how the Garda organisation could be improved. Common themes emerged during this question and they have been summarised and placed together. Again, like most questions, participants gave several examples in their answers.

- Standard of Training – 7 (17.5%)
- Address disconnect between Garda management & Gardaí on the ground – 7 (17.5%)
- More people / resources – 7 (17.5%)
- Addressing Garda morale – 6 (15%)
- Welfare supports – 4 (10%)
- More support for regular units - 4 (10%)
- Work / life balance – 4 (10%)
- Greater trust in members to make decisions – 3 (7.5%)
- New Commissioner – 3 (7.5%)
- Promotion / appointments systems – 2 (5%)

- Quality of new uniform -2 (5%)
- Current discipline regulations – 2 (5%)
- More even distribution of work – 2 (5%)
- Reduce paperwork & bureaucracy – 2 (5%)
- More timely information
- Fix the post 2013 pensions
- Rosters
- Abolish IMS
- Improve Garda fleet

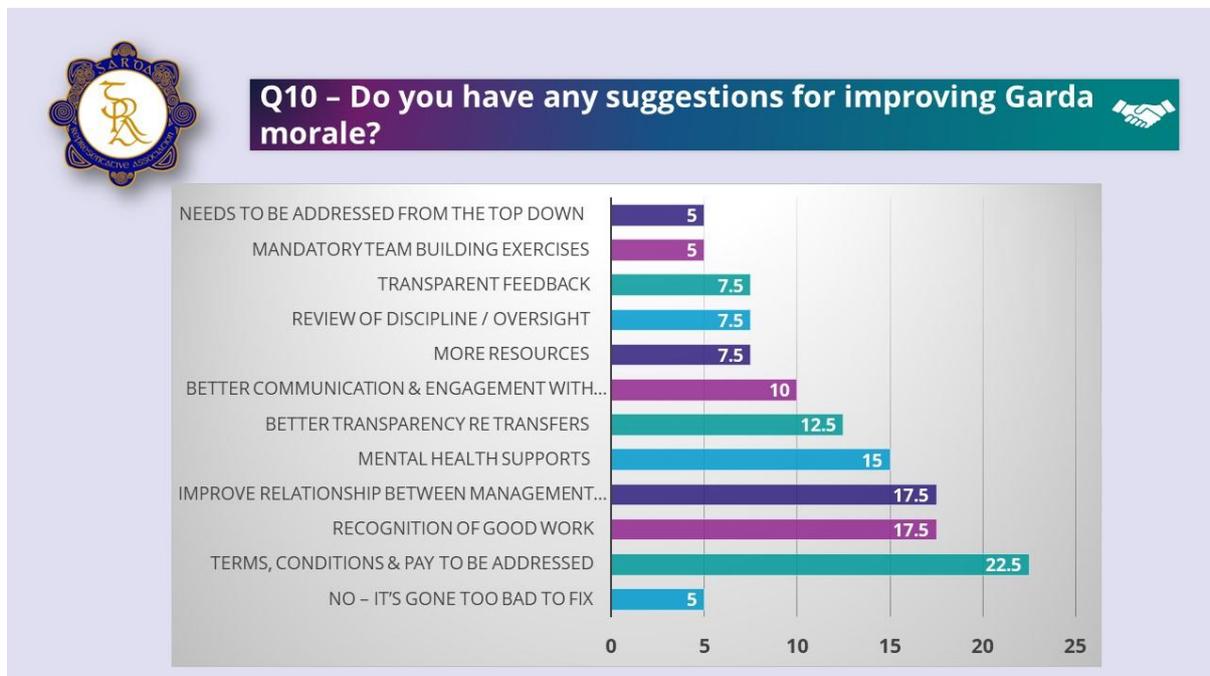


#### **4.11 Question 10. Do you have any suggestions for improving Garda morale?**

Participants were asked initially if they felt there was an issue with Garda morale – all 40 participants stated that there was a serious issue with morale in the organisation. They were then asked did they have any suggestions on how this could be improved within the organisation. Common themes emerged during this question and they have been summarised and placed together. Again, like most questions, participants gave several examples in their answers.

Two participants (5%) stated they had no suggestions to improve morale as they perceive the situation to be too bad to fix.

- Terms, conditions & pay to be addressed – 9 (22.5%)
- Recognition of good work – 7 (17.5%)
- Improve relationship between management and Gardaí – 7 (17.5%)
- Mental health supports – 6 (15%)
- Better transparency re transfers – 5 (12.5%)
- Better communication & engagement with people – 4 (10%)
- More resources – 3 (7.5%)
- Review of discipline / oversight – 3 (7.5%)
- Transparent feedback – 3 (7.5%)
- Mandatory team building exercises – 2 (5%)
- Needs to be addressed from the top down - 2 (5%)
- Acknowledge there is morale issue.
- Sort out rosters!



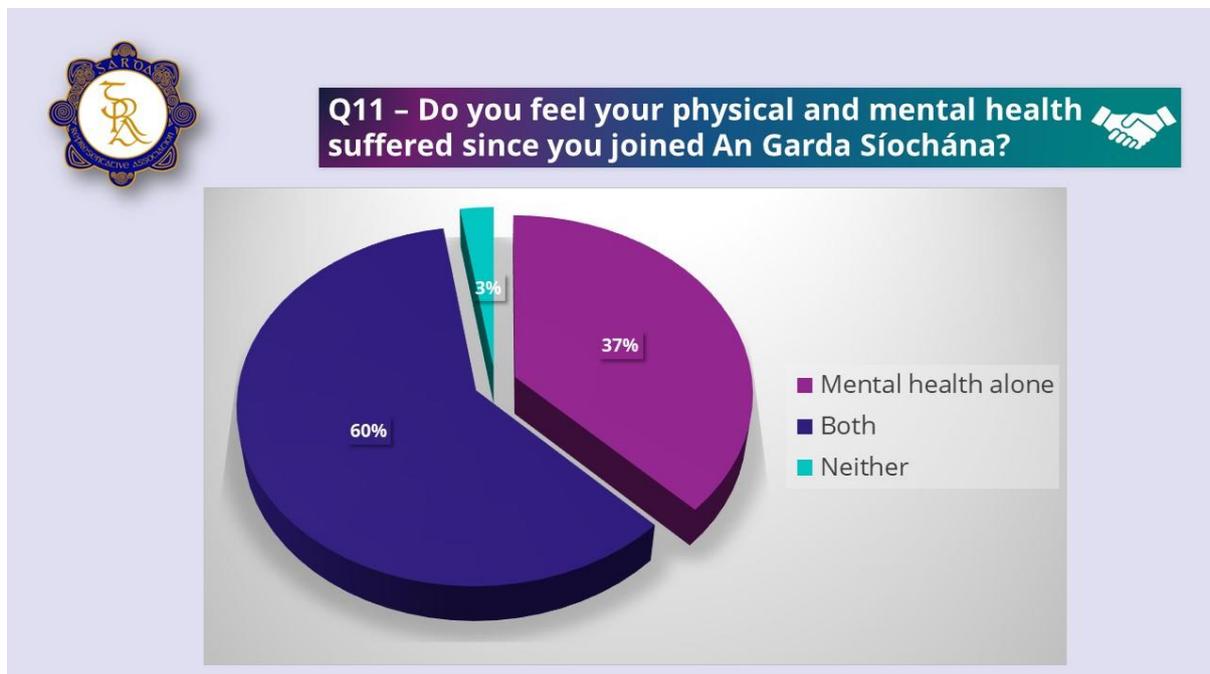
**4.12 Question 11. Do you feel your physical and mental health suffered since you joined An Garda Síochána?**

Mental health alone – 15 (37.5%)

Both - 24 (60%)

Neither – 1 (2.5%)

In total 39 of the 40 participants (97.5%) reported that their mental health suffered since they joined An Garda Síochána.



**4.13 Question 12. Did the fear of making a mistake affect your decision making?**

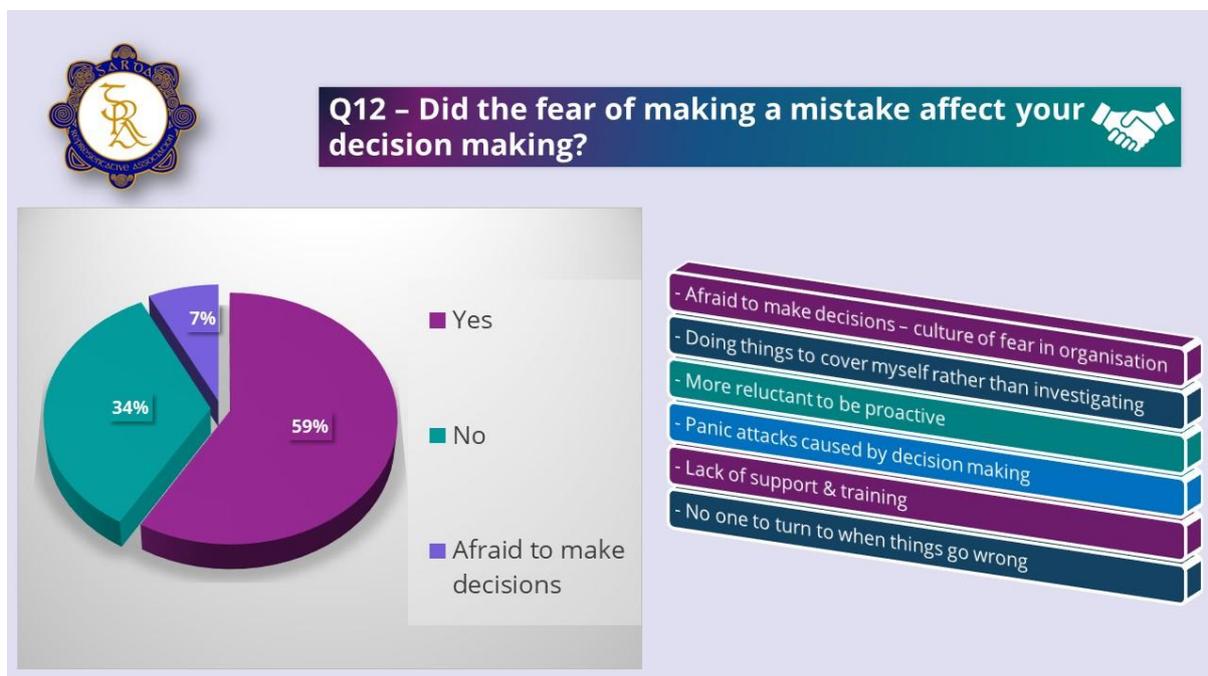
Question 12 and 13 were asked in tandem. Some participants chose to only answer question 13 so this accounts for the discrepancy in overall results for question 12.

Yes – 24 (60%)

No – 14 (35%)

Participants who answered 'Yes' expanded on why they felt a fear of making a mistake;

- Afraid to make decisions -3 (7.5%)
- I was doing things to cover my ass rather than investigating.
- More reluctant to be proactive.
- Would wake up in the middle of the night panicking about my decisions.
- Lack of support & training
- No one to help if it goes wrong
- Culture of fear in the organisation



Those who did not have a fear of making a mistake tended to be more senior in service and more confident in their ability to make decisions.

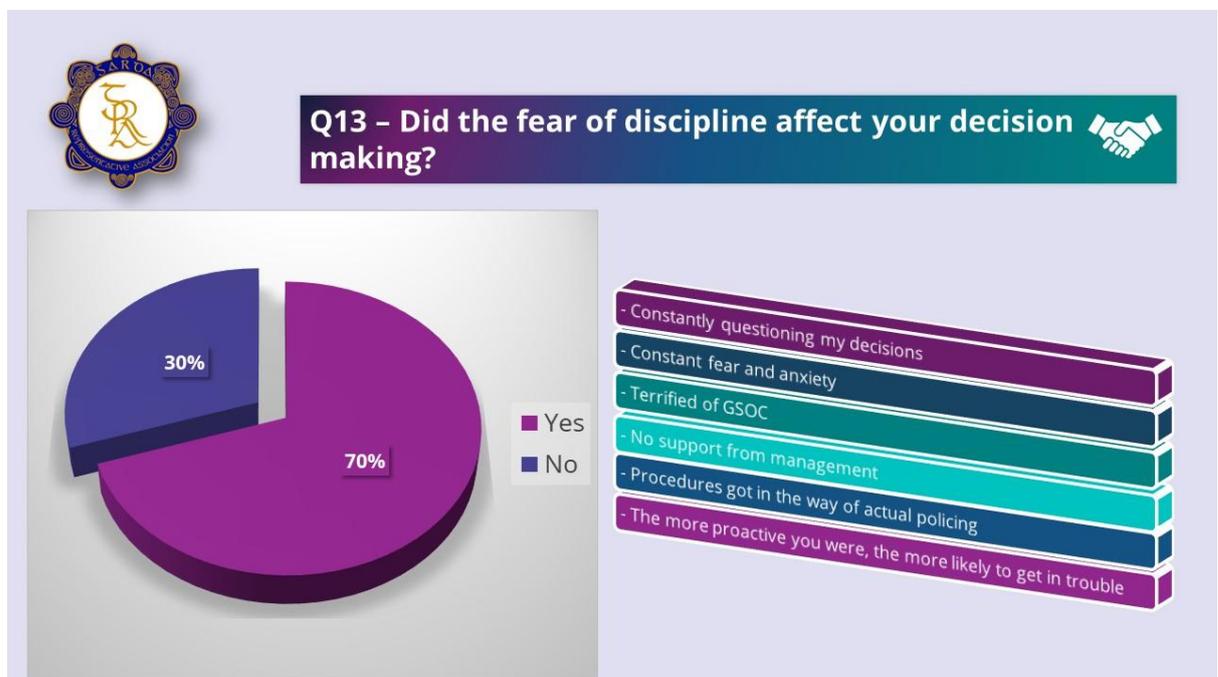
#### **4.14 Question 13. Did the fear of discipline affect your decision making?**

Yes – 28 (70%)

No – 12 (30%)

Participants who answered 'Yes' expanded on why they felt a fear of discipline;

- Constantly questioning my decisions – 10 (25%)
- Constant fear and anxiety – 2 (5%)
- No one to help you if you made an honest mistake.
- Terrified of GSOC
- Procedures got in the way of actual policing.
- The more proactive you were, the more likely you were to get into trouble.
- Guilty until proven innocent
- No support from management.



Participants who answered 'No' provided the following reasons;

- I could always stand over my decisions – 3 (7.5%)
- I always believed if you did your job right you didn't have to worry about it.
- People need to stop being afraid of challenging management.

#### **4. 15 Question 14. What is different in your new job?**

Participants were asked to compare their experience as Garda members with their experience in their new jobs and account for the differences that they perceived in the two roles. Common themes emerged during this question and they have been summarised and placed together. Again, like most questions, participants gave several examples in their answers.

- Better salary – 15 (37.5%)
- Work / life balance – 13 (32.5%)
- Less stress – 13 (32.5%)
- Support system in place – 11 (27.5%)
- Less hours / flexible hours - 10 (25%)
- Freedom/trust to make decisions – 9 (22.5%)
- I'm much happier – 7 (17.5%)
- Everything!– 7 (17.5%)
- No fear of discipline – 6 (15%)
- Better training – 6 (15%)
- Work stays at work – no taking work home – 3 (7.5%)
- Rewarded for your efforts – 3 (7.5%)
- I've been given the tools I need to do my job – 2 (5%)
- Good communication system – 2 (5%)
- Positive environment – 2 (5%)
- I've left a toxic, abusive relationship in An Garda Síochána.



## Q14 – What is different in your new job?



#### **4.16 Question 15. Would you recommend a career in An Garda Síochána to a friend?**

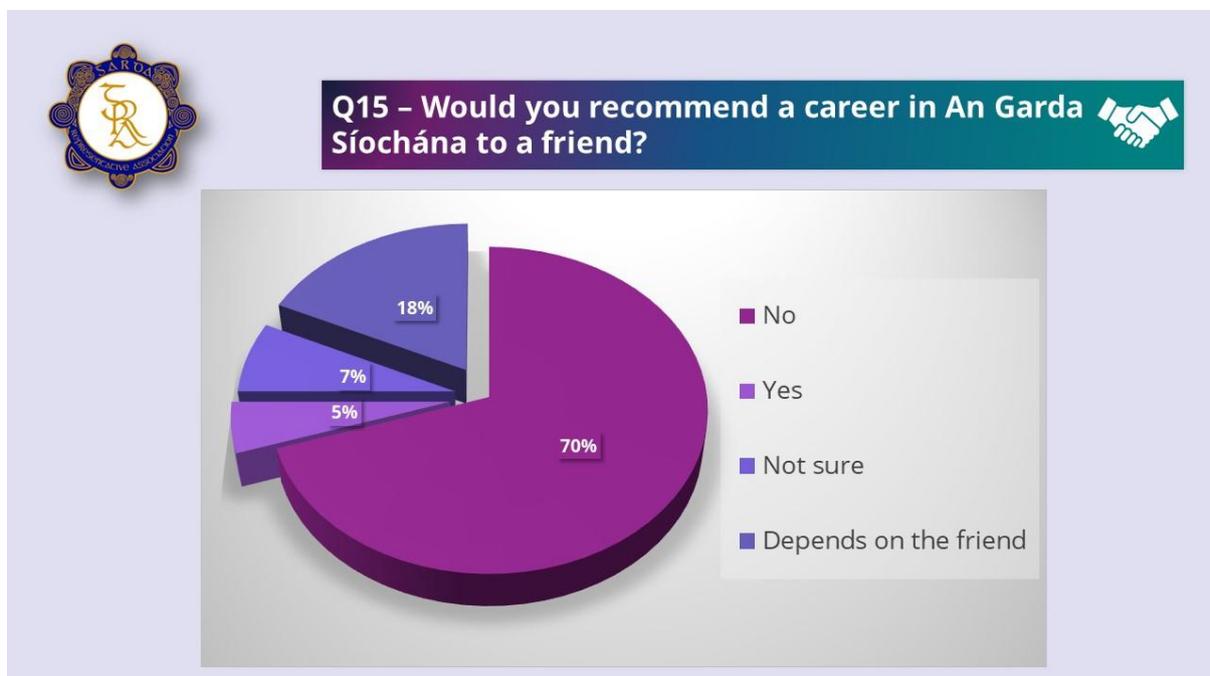
Participants were asked if a friend came to them looking for advice on whether or not to join An Garda Síochána, would they recommend it as a career choice.

No – 28 (70%)

Yes – 2 (5%)

Not sure – 3 (7.5%)

Would depend on the friend – 7 (17.5%).

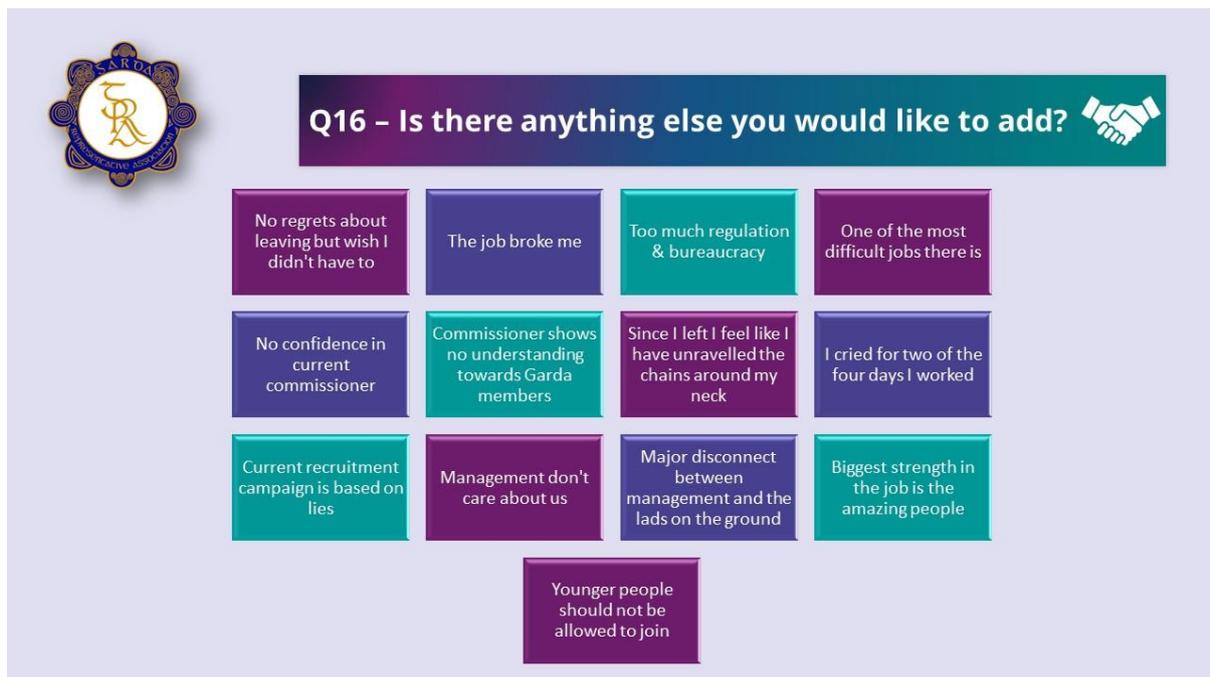


#### **4.17 Question 16. Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

Participants were asked did they feel that the previous 15 questions covered all aspects of their decision to resign from An Garda Síochána. If not, this question allowed them to add any other relevant opinions or contributions that they wished to make. Not all of the participants contributed to this question.

- Major disconnect between management and the lads on the ground – 4 (10%)

- The job broke me – 3 (7.5%)
- Too much regulation & bureaucracy – 2 (5%)
- No regrets about leaving but wish I didn't have to – 2 (5%)
- Commissioner shows no understanding towards Garda members – 2 (5%)
- Since I left I feel like I have unravelled the chains that were around my neck.
- I cried for two of the four days I worked in An Garda Síochána.
- Current recruitment campaign is based on lies.
- Management don't care about us.
- Biggest strength in the job is the amazing people.
- Younger people should not be allowed to join
- One of the most difficult jobs there is.
- No confidence in current Commissioner.



## **5.1 Conclusions**

The aims of this research were to explore with 40 former members of An Garda Síochána the reasons why they chose to resign from the organisation and to capture their experiences and views of the organisation. A number of key themes emanated from the research that will be considered in this chapter.

## **5.2 Length of service at time of resignation**

Of the 40 interviewees, six had less than two years' service and 17 had between two and five years' service, meaning that in total, 23 interviewees had less than five years' service. This accounts for 57.5% of all participants. This is in keeping with the literature which states that police officers in the early stages of their careers were statistically more likely to leave or to express an intention to leave policing than their more senior counterparts (McElroy et al.1999, Cooper and Ingram 2004).

## **5.3 Reasons for resigning**

This question produced six predominant themes which were more common than others.

They are;

- Unfair treatment / discipline (or threat of) / bullied by management – 28 (70%)
- Work related stress/ Mental health / Burnt out – 15 (37.5%)
- Workload too much / No time to properly investigate / No resources- 13 (32.5%)
- Everyone very negative / Very unhappy / Work environment was toxic – 13 (32.5%)
- Lack of support / felt vulnerable – 11 (27.5%)
- Lifestyle choice/ Work/life balance / relationships – 9 (22.5%).

A rolling two year survey by the Police Federation released in September 2019 blamed low morale for the fact that so many officers were leaving the service early in their careers. Of

those officers who resigned, 40% stated that stress was one of the major contributing factors in their decision to leave.

These themes are also reflected in the study carried out in 2021 in the UK by Charman and Bennett who state that almost two thirds (65%) of the participants of this study said that the impact of the job on their personal life was a major influencing factor in their decision to leave their policing role. They also cited low morale (60%) and a lack of job satisfaction (61%) as strong reasons for making their decision to leave (Charman and Bennett 2022). The impact of their policing role on their psychological health and stress arising from doing the job were also key reasons the officers left, accounting for over 56% of responses.

#### **5.4 Circumstances under which you would return to An Garda Síochána?**

77.5% of participants stated that there were no circumstances under which they would consider returning to An Garda Síochána. 22.5% of participants would reconsider their choice to leave if the organisation tackled such areas as transfers, pension/salary, if they received more support and if there was more flexibility. This is very much reflected in the literature.

#### **5.4 Recognition of Contribution.**

Participants were asked if they believed that their contributions within their time in An Garda Síochána were recognised by management.

80% of participants said no.

This is reflected in the study by Charman and Bennett (2022) which describes officers feeling that they were not valued and a perception therefore, that they lacked a voice.

### **5.5 Change in job description.**

92.5% of participants stated that their perception of what it would mean to be a Garda, had changed throughout their service. This is reflective of the research carried out by Charman and Bennett (2022), particularly when they describe the organisational factors and organisational injustice that led to many UK police officers' resignations.

### **5.6 Garda Morale**

All 40 participants reported there was a serious issue currently with Garda morale. Low morale in policing accounts for 60% of responses for reasons for leaving UK police forces according to Charman and Bennett (2022).

### **5.7 Physical and Mental Health**

39 of the 40 participants (97.5%) reported that their mental health suffered since they joined An Garda Síochána. This is an extremely worrying and concerning finding and one that is reflective of findings in other police jurisdictions.

### **5.8 Fear of making a mistake and/or fear of discipline affecting decision making**

60% of participants stated that the fear of making a mistake affected their decision making and 70% stated that the fear of discipline affected their decision making. They cited a constant fear and anxiety around the area of decision making and that they had no support in this area.

### **5.9 Conclusion**

This study emerged out of a desire to explore the phenomenon of members of An Garda Síochána resigning in unprecedented numbers, particularly in the past 18 months to two years. To date there has been insufficient research in this area, particularly in the Irish

context. Based on this study, implications for future retention and recruitment have been highlighted both on the evidence in the literature and the voices and insights of resigned Garda members.

Outcomes reveal that there is a significant problem with morale within An Garda Síochána with 100% of participants citing same. Resigned members feel burnt out, stressed, victimised and unsupported in their roles. They are suffering significantly with mental health issues as a result of working as Gardaí and feel fear in their day to day decision making. The vast majority of these individuals would not consider returning to An Garda Síochána and would not recommend a career in the organisation to a friend. They feel weighed down by heavy administrative and bureaucratic systems and an overwhelming number state that that they did not have the necessary tools, resources and working conditions to be effective. They are also critical of the standard of training they have received throughout their careers.

All participants cite the differences in their personal lives with regards their work/life balance and their mental health since resigning from the Garda organisation. They describe their new occupations as having appropriate support systems in place, with more flexible working patterns, as well as significant numbers stating they are on better salaries.

The research is summed up by a participant who states that they are happier now having 'left a toxic, abusive relationship.'

Though not exhaustive, the research findings can be generalised relating to resigned Garda members and can therefore contribute to the body of knowledge on police retention from an Irish perspective.

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7) Did you feel you had the tools, resources and working conditions to be effective in your role? If not, which areas could be improved, and how?

8) Do you feel you had the necessary training to be effective in your role? If not, how could it have been better?

9) What can the Garda organisation improve on?

10) Do you have any suggestions for improving Garda morale?

11) Do you feel your physical and mental health suffered since you joined An Garda Síochána?

12) Did the fear of making a mistake affect your decision making?

13) Did the fear of discipline affect your decision making

14) What is different in your new job?

15) Would you recommend a career in An Garda Síochána to a friend, and why or why not?

16) Is there anything else you'd like to add?