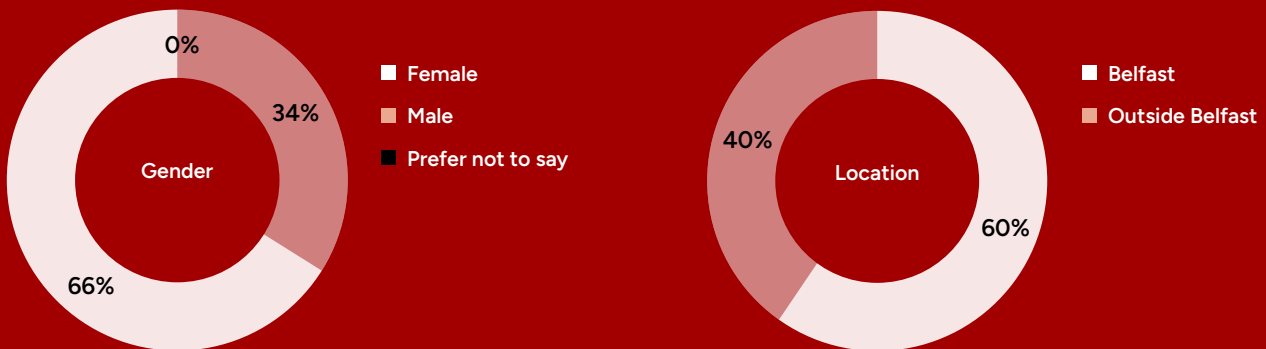


# Solicitor Safety Survey Findings

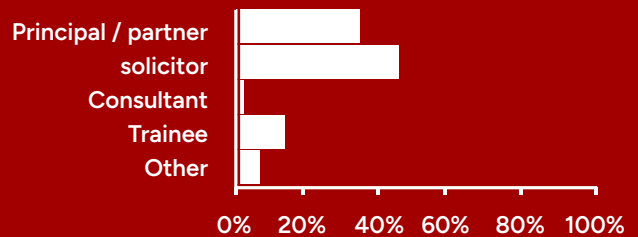
A short survey was carried out by the Law Society of Northern Ireland via Survey Monkey between 6-16 February 2026. Its primary aim was to gather insights into the prevalence of personal safety risks and incidents experienced by solicitors whilst carrying out their professional duties in Northern Ireland. The survey received responses from a total of 480 members.

## Respondent's background



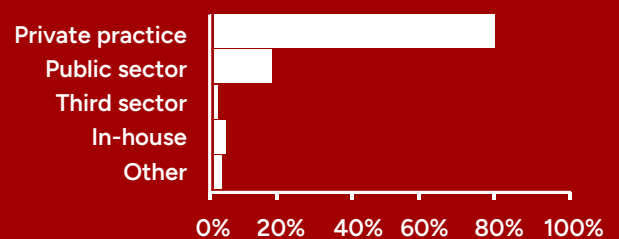
Most respondents to the survey were female (66%), and were located within Belfast (60%), with the other 40% based relatively evenly across other Local Association areas.

Over one-third of respondents were Principals or Partners, alongside representation from practising solicitors, consultants, trainees, and others. 64% had more than 10 years' post-qualification experience. This demonstrates strong senior-level engagement in the survey.



Survey respondents were largely based within private practice (79%). Respondents represented a broad mix of practice areas. The most common included:

- Family
- Conveyancing
- Criminal
- Litigation
- Accidents/personal injury



These are frontline areas of legal practice involving high levels of direct client contact and often adversarial work.

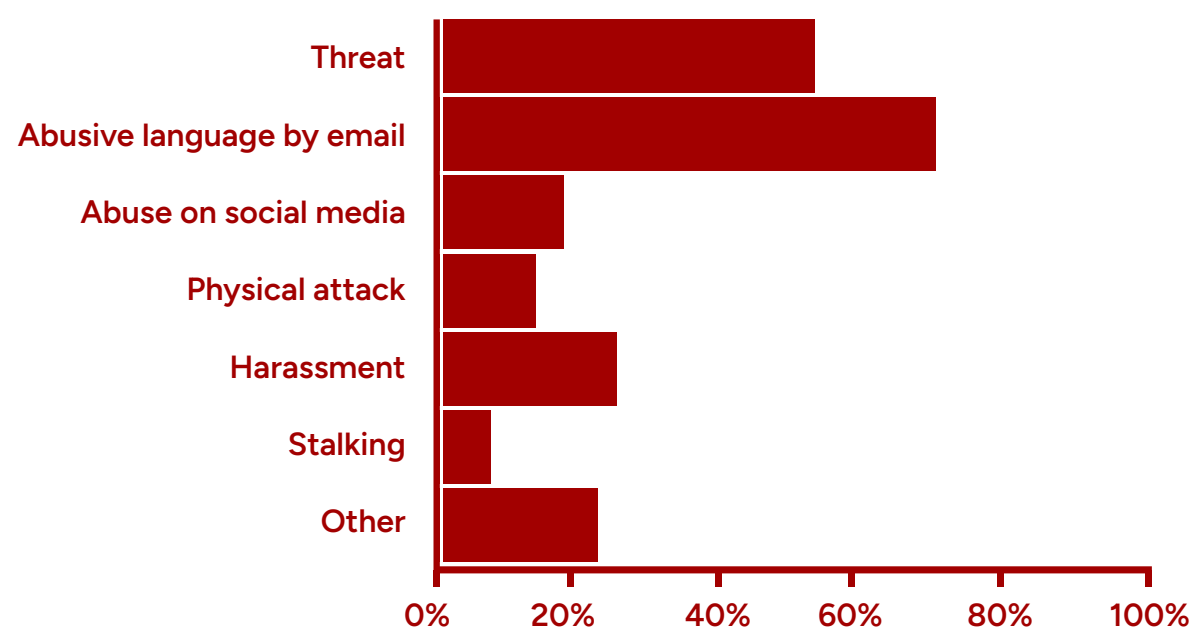
# Key Findings

**66% of the total respondents said they had been subjected to some form of threat or abuse in the course of their work, ranging from online harassment to physical attacks.**



## Nature of threats/incidents

Many respondents had experienced multiple types of threats and attacks whilst carrying out their professional duties. Abusive language via email was the most common form of incident reported (71%), followed by direct threats (56%).



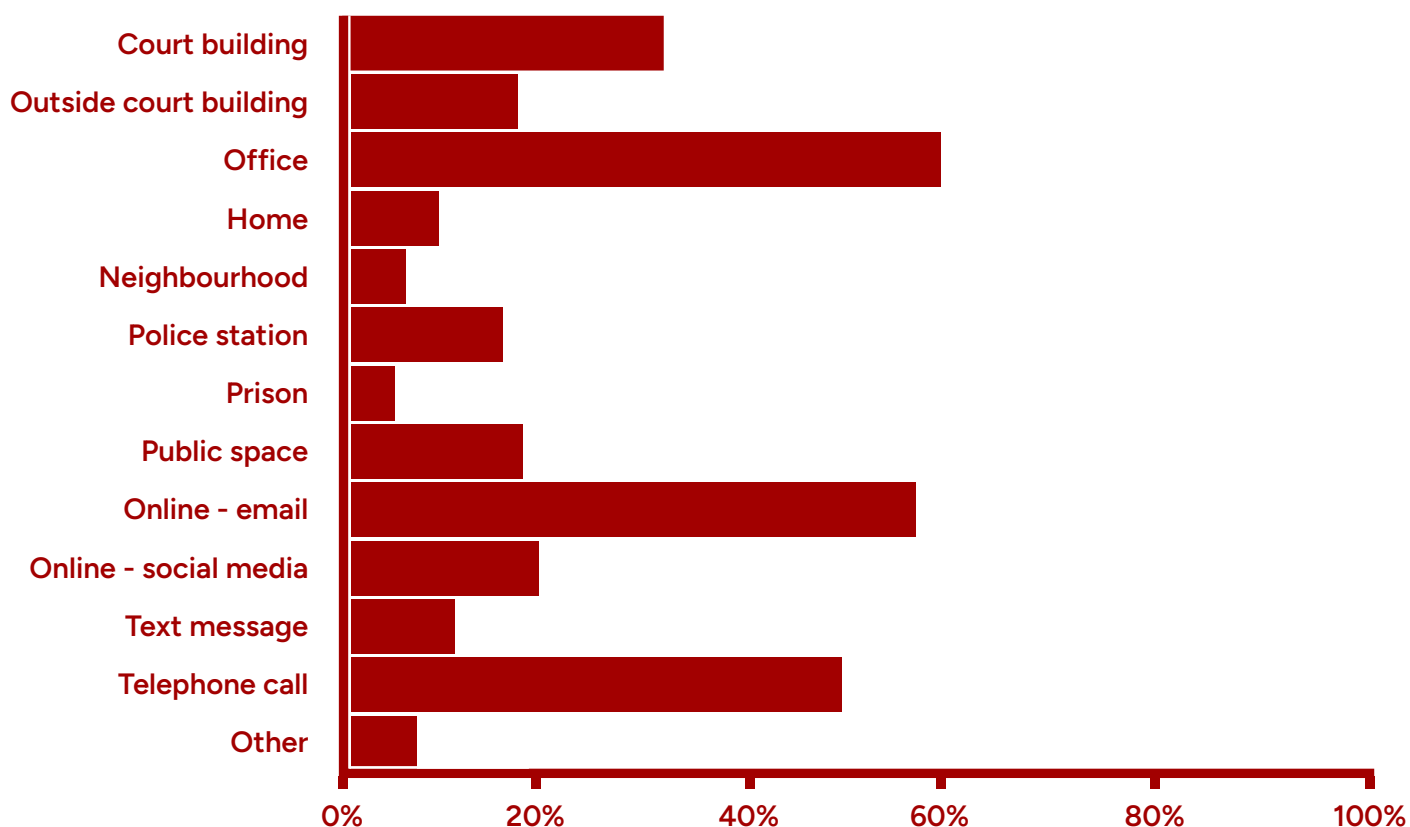
For those who selected “other”, a significant majority reported abusive language by phone or in person. A wide range of other behaviour included for example criminal damage, IT hacking, blackmail, threatening letters, and terrorist threats.

*“My colleague and I were contacted at home by police who delivered a death threat from a third party.”*

*“He (the client) made a point of stalking both my staff and me at the office and at court which made us extremely uncomfortable. The person was quite sinister and had threatened to put a tracker on my car.”*

*“He (the client) started shouting at me and then lifted a chair which he started swinging in the air in front of my face.”*

## Location of threats/incidents



Survey respondents reported that threats and incidents occurred across a range of locations, with the office being the most frequent location (61%), highlighting this as a major risk area. Digital communications were the second most common, including via email, telephone calls and social media. 41% reported that they had been subjected to threats/incidents within or outside a court building (41%).

*“Lawyers feel unsafe at court and at their offices. The increased level of online harassment and threat means that abuse is shared in such a way as to make the victimisation very public... this type of abuse reaches into every aspect of your life.”*

## Source of threats/incidents

The primary source of threats/incidents came directly from active clients (35%), while 19% was from the opposing client, 9% from a client relative and 18% from a former client. This shows that risks persist even after the professional relationship ends. Many also described incidents which involved litigants in person and members of the public.

A number of respondents highlighted the vulnerabilities of clients that they work with, including the prevalence of those with mental health issues, which has been particularly exacerbated post-covid.

*“Contact with the law/legal process is so stressful for the public. This stress often bubbles over and clients/participants can easily lash out at whoever is at hand.”*

*“We deal with very heightened individuals some of whom are very aggressive and whose behaviour can be very intimidating and threatening...(we) vastly understate the regular threats we contend with as we pass it off as part of the job.”*

**52%** of respondents said that they had been subject to a threat or incident in the past year.

Of those who had experienced a threat or incident in the past year, 16% reported a single occurrence and 30% reported multiple incidents.

## Reporting

70% of respondents said that they did not report the threat/incident, highlighting a significant underreporting of safety incidents in the profession.

The main reason cited by 59% for not reporting was "did not think it would make a difference".

*"It is my opinion that solicitors feel that there is no point in complaining to police and when they do the defendant receives a sentence that does not equate to the offence and the impact this offending (which seems to be increasing) has on our system of justice."*

*"Complete uncertainty as to outcomes. A threatening client will lie and deny and respond with more threats and/or a complaint. The whole area is fraught."*

*"I felt it would inflame matters and also make matters worse for my own client."*

*"When reported, the PSNI informed me that there was no evidence and therefore it would not be taken any further. I was not taken seriously, not listened to and my complaint was not advanced."*

Of those who did report the threat/incident, the majority reported to their employer, followed by the PSNI. Other reports were made to individuals/organisations such as G4S, the Court Office, Judges and their Professional Body.

## Impact

Participants in the survey were asked what the impact of the threat/incident(s) were on them, and responses highlight that threats and incidents have significant consequences for solicitors. .

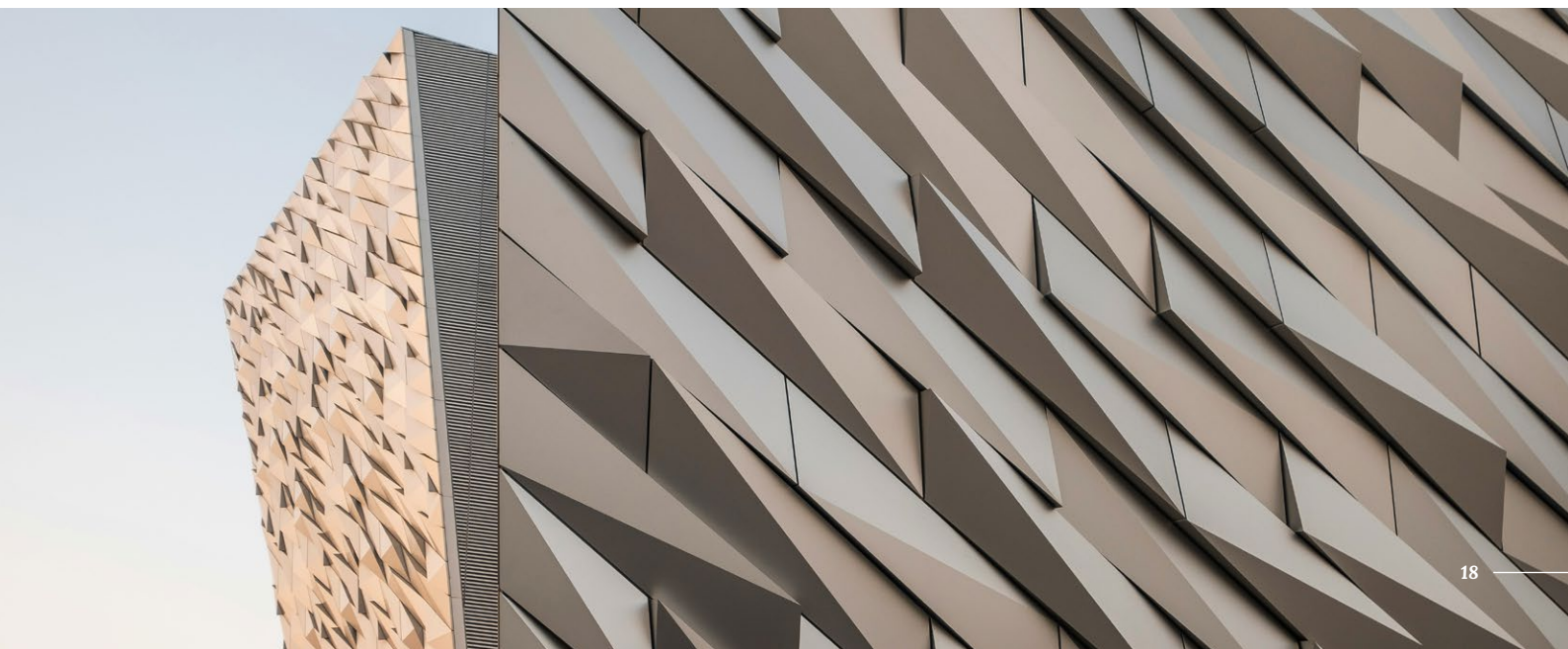
## Wellbeing

58% of respondents highlighted that it had a negative impact on their wellbeing, with many reporting stress, anxiety, hyper-vigilance and cumulative effects over time. This demonstrates that mental health and emotional wellbeing are heavily affected.

*"As a female lawyer in a family setting we deal with misogyny every day. A lot of our male clients, if disgruntled about the case 'not going their way' or paying their bill, will threaten to or make complaints about you, which is stress inducing and impacts on your mental wellbeing even though you have done nothing wrong."*

*"As a manager, I'm concerned for the safety of my staff. One of my solicitors was on stress leave given the very personal nature of the online allegations made against her."*

*"I was stalked by a witness in a harassment case. My home was broken into... it was a very personal invasion of my home. This behaviour lasted a number of months and as it was a female stalking a male no one took it seriously."*



## Safety concerns

Almost half of respondents (48%) felt their personal safety or that of their family was at risk. This resulted in many implementing safety measures, including upgrading home and office security, such as installing security cameras. Others considered moving home, while two respondents reported that they moved home.

*“I had a client who was extremely volatile... he mixed me up with another solicitor and wrongly blamed me for a sentence. He then admitted to turning up at court houses, outside our office and at the bar library looking for me and a barrister. He admitted to carrying a knife and wanted to stab myself and another barrister. He also made admissions that he often fantasied about stabbing myself and another lawyer.”*

*“While personal safety was never actually compromised, I worried constantly that it would be. The individual knew where I worked and frequently attended our office demanding to speak to me.”*

*“In Sainsburys I was confronted by a Respondent in an NMO case. He screamed in my face whilst my young son was in the trolley. I realised then how vulnerable we are to attack.”*

## Professional impact

21% reported that it affected their ability to carry out their role, with 17% saying that they considered leaving their practice area or role. Some respondents noted that they actually left their role as a result.

*“I left private practice as a criminal solicitor owing to threats made from male clients including statements about how they would come to my house.”*

*“You question why you continue to do a job where this type of behaviour is par of the course. It has a significant impact on your psyche and causes great worry and stress.”*

*“Often it is dismissed as ‘part of the job’... the impact of this causes such anxiety and disruption to life that many people I know in the family sphere have had to consider whether it’s worth it / or whether to leave the profession.”*

