

May 2016

Perceptions of Public Safety

Report on the 2015 DC Public Safety Survey



Community Preservation and Development Corporation

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Local Initiatives Support Corporation

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Executive Summary

In the summer of 2015, Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC), one of the District's premiere not-for-profit providers of affordable housing, partnered with the Council for Court Excellence, a policy-focused civic organization dedicated to improving justice for the DC community, to survey District residents about their perceptions of public safety. The survey is part of the larger "Collaborating for Prevention" initiative that CPDC is leading with support from Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

This initiative grew from the aftermath of violent crime close to home. On February 14, 2014, an eleven-year-old girl was shot in the chest while playing outside with other children at CPDC's Wheeler Terrace Apartment Community, located in Ward 8 in Southeast Washington, DC. Thankfully, the girl survived. Then, on July 13, 2014, a homicide was committed at a neighboring CPDC-owned property, Meadowbrook Run. The seven CPDC-owned properties in Ward 8 also saw an increase in visible drug activity and drive-by shootings in 2014. Shell casings were removed from resident homes in two instances, and a stabbing was reported by CPDC's private security company.

These incidents increased awareness of and concern about the safety and security of CPDC residents and the surrounding neighborhoods. It is within this context that CPDC designed a four-phase public safety initiative, "Collaborating for Prevention," to address crime in the neighborhoods in which property residents work, live, and play.

The first phase included administering the citywide Perceptions of Public Safety survey to create a population-level baseline of DC residents' perception of public safety. Because the survey is part of a larger effort to create community-driven public safety plans, a number of questions were asked related to community-police relations. Finally, respondents were asked for their ideas for improving public safety.

Over a thousand people were surveyed across the city, mostly in face-to-face interviews in parks and recreation centers, at public events, at Metro stations, and in business districts. In addition, the online survey was distributed via listservs of local Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and the DC City Council. The survey was available in both English and Spanish language versions.

Key Findings in Perceptions of Public Safety:

- As shown in the table below, most respondents feel safe in their neighborhoods during the day across DC, but most do not feel safe or only feel somewhat safe in non-enclosed spaces (that is, not at home or in a car) at night. Respondents in Ward 8 feel the least safe of all respondents (*See "Respondents' Perceptions of Public Safety" in report*).

Perception of Safety, Day and Night

How safe to do you feel in the following places:	During the Day			At Night		
	Not Safe	Somewhat Safe	Safe	Not Safe	Somewhat Safe	Safe
Inside Your House	1%	12%	87%	4%	21%	75%
Outside on the Streets in Neighborhood	5%	29%	66%	24%	48%	28%
On Public Transportation	7%	34%	59%	24%	46%	30%
In Public Places in Neighborhood like Stores and Restaurants	3%	21%	76%	14%	37%	50%
In Parks and Playgrounds in Neighborhood	6%	27%	67%	42%	35%	23%
While in a Car	2%	15%	83%	8%	32%	60%

- Few youth reported bullying, and while youth typically felt safe going to school, at school, and at school-related activities, two in five only felt somewhat safe going to school and at activities as shown in the table to the right. Youth in Wards 7 and 8 reported feeling the least safe. (See “School-Related Safety” in report).

School-Related Safety			
Youth School-Related Safety by Location			
How Safe Do You feel:	Safe	Somewhat Safe	Not Safe
Walking To/From School or Bus Stop	55%	40%	6%
Riding on Bus to School	52%	40%	7%
In School	71%	28%	1%
At School-Related Events	58%	41%	1%

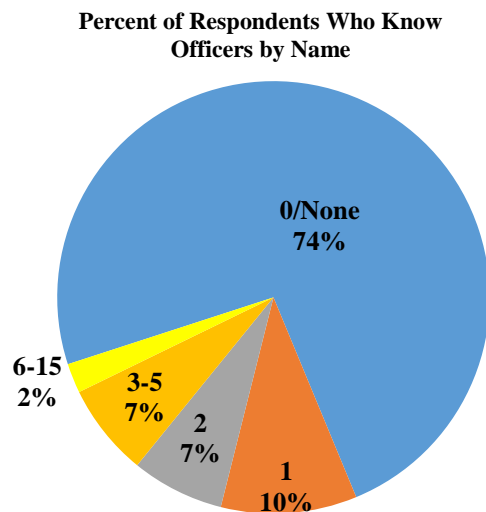
- As shown in the table below, more than half of all respondents indicated that during the past year they had observed or experienced some type of crime, although over two-thirds had never observed or experienced violent crime. Respondents from Wards 7 and 8 and African-American and Latino respondents observed violent crime at much higher rates. Of particular note, young respondents had the highest rates of exposure to violent crime. (See “Experience with Neighborhood Crime” in report).

Past Year Experience with Crime

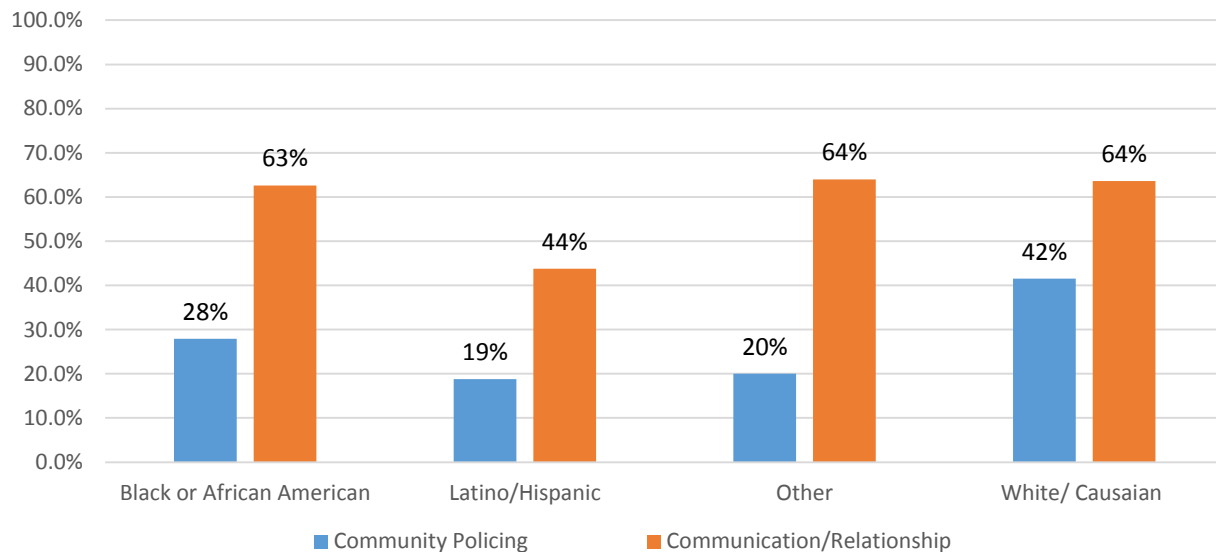
First Hand Experience or Observation of Crime			
In the Past Year, How Often Have You Observed or Experienced the Following Crimes:	Never	Once or Twice	3 or More Times
Gun Crime	74%	16%	10%
Violent Crime Like an Assault that DID NOT Involve a Gun	68%	22%	11%
Property Crime like Shoplifting or Burglary	61%	28%	11%
People Selling/Dealing Drugs	51%	21%	28%
People Using Illegal Drugs (NOT marijuana)	62%	16%	21%
Public Order Crime like Trespassing or Disorderly Conduct	45%	29%	26%

Key Findings in Community-Police Relations:

- As shown in the figure to the right, about one in every four respondents said they know at least one police officer in their neighborhood by name. (See “Community-Police Relations” in full report)
- About half of respondents were satisfied with a response to a 9-1-1 call they made to the police. This result was fairly consistent across all demographics, although somewhat higher for older respondents and those in Wards 1 and 3.
- Very few respondents who observed or experienced a crime called the police.
- When asked how to improve community-police relations, respondents across all Wards and demographic groups most frequently expressed a desire for better communication and relationships with police officers as shown in the table below. Many also wanted more “community policing,” with officers walking or biking in their neighborhoods. Young men were least likely to recommend community policing. (See “Suggestions for Improving Community-Police Relations” in report).

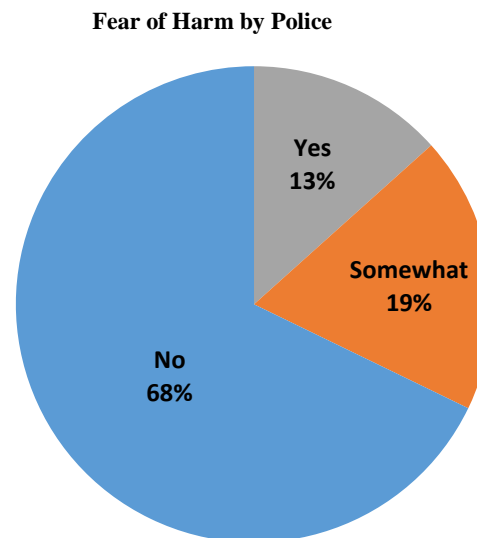


Recommendations on Improving Community-Police Relations, by Race/Ethnicity



- Most respondents said they trust the police. However, younger respondents, Latino and African-American respondents, and respondents in Wards 7 and 8 were least likely to say they trust the police.

- About two in three respondents indicated they had a positive interaction with the police, while about one in four indicated they had had a negative interaction with the police. Younger respondents and those in Wards 7 and 8 were most likely to report negative interactions, but positive interactions were seen across all groups.
- Respondents who mentioned negative interactions with the police were least likely to report trusting the police.
- As shown in the figure to the right, over two-thirds of respondents did not fear police would harm them or a loved one. Young adults and respondents in Wards 7 and 8 expressed the greatest fear. (See “Do Respondents Fear the Police Will Harm Themselves or Loved Ones?” in report).



Key Findings in Improving Public Safety:

- Only one-third of respondents indicated that the police focused on the “right” problems in their neighborhood, i.e., ones that really concerned them. Latinos and African-Americans and those in Wards 7 and 8 had the highest rates of saying that police do not focus on the right problems.
- As shown in the table to the right, no suggestion on how to improve public safety garnered the majority of responses. The three top responses were for more police and enforcement, more community policing, and more positive social investments in the community. (See “Suggestions on How to Improve Public Safety” in report).
- Of those recommending more police and enforcement to improve public safety, almost none indicated this was a way to improve community-police relations. These respondents also wanted better communication and relationships with officers, and specifically mentioned a desire for more community policing.

Recommendations on Improving Safety

Public Safety Improvement Recommendations	
More Police/Enforcement	46%
Community Policing	19%
Positive Social Investments	13%
Community Engagement	13%
Environmental Improvements	10%
Local Development/ Business Responsibility	4%
Police Quality/Training	4%
Personal/Family	4%
Other	3%

Note: Respondents could have reported answers that were coded into more than one category. Percentages are out of the total number of respondents.

Recommendations:

Based on the above findings, CPDC has developed several recommendations for improving public safety and community-police relations:

- The police department and community groups should create more opportunities for communication between neighborhood residents and law enforcement.
- Schools, residents, and law enforcement should work together to make sure all youth feel safe going to and being at school, and more trauma-informed services should be provided for young people exposed to violence.

- Law enforcement should meet with residents to discuss what type of policing they feel is appropriate and effective in their neighborhood.
- Environmental approaches to improving public safety should be more fully incorporated into public safety plans.
- Law enforcement training and practice should be improved and should include young people in planning so that young adults—particularly young adults of color—are part of the public safety strategy and do not feel targeted by police.
- Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) and other agencies should be part of neighborhood safety conversations.
- Law enforcement should share clear, comprehensible, and detailed public safety data with neighborhoods so residents can understand—and work to reduce—crime risks.

View full report at: www.cpd.org



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