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Perceptions of MPD among Persons with a Recent Police Contact: Results of an SMS Survey

In November and December 2018, the National Police Foundation disseminated a six-question survey via text message (SMS), to Madison citizens who had recent contact with the Madison Police Department (MPD). Surveys were sent to persons who contacted the police for assistance or otherwise received assistance and who had a valid cell phone number: These included individuals who reported crimes, persons who reported nuisances or suspicious behavior, and accident victims. The only exclusions were homicide cases, sexual assault victims, and juveniles (under 18 years of age). The survey attempted to capture general perceptions of the Madison Police Department as well as how the police handled the specific incident that the resident was involved in.

The survey was created using Qualtrics software, which allows for the creation of a brief survey that can be distributed via SMS to persons with cell phones. A reminder message was sent 48 hours after the initial SMS invitation to those who hadn't yet responded. Of 1,234 invitations sent, surveys were completed by 209 respondents, yielding a better than expected response rate of 17%. Although the response rate was better than expected, it is nonetheless true that only a small minority of invitations were responded to. That makes it important to determine whether those who responded constitute a representative sample of the overall population of individuals with a recent police contact. The short answer is that, while participation was fairly equal across commands and genders, whites and older

residents were over-represented in the sample and victims of violent crime underrepresented. We provide a detailed non-response analysis in Appendix A

Survey questions

As mentioned, the SMS invite prompted citizen to respond to a six-question survey (see below). The first three questions were specific to the reported incident, a description of which was included in the SMS invitation. Respondents were asked if the responding officer acted professionally, whether the officer explained the reasons for his or her actions, and whether they were satisfied with their treatment by the officer.

Questions four and five solicited general views of MPD by asking whether the department treated residents of all types fairly and whether they were confident in the job the department was doing. A final question allowed respondents to add free text comments about the police department. These comments are presented in Appendix B.

Items 1 – 5 were Likert scale questions. Each requested that respondents gauge their sentiment on a 5-point scale ranging from most positive (1) to most negative (5).

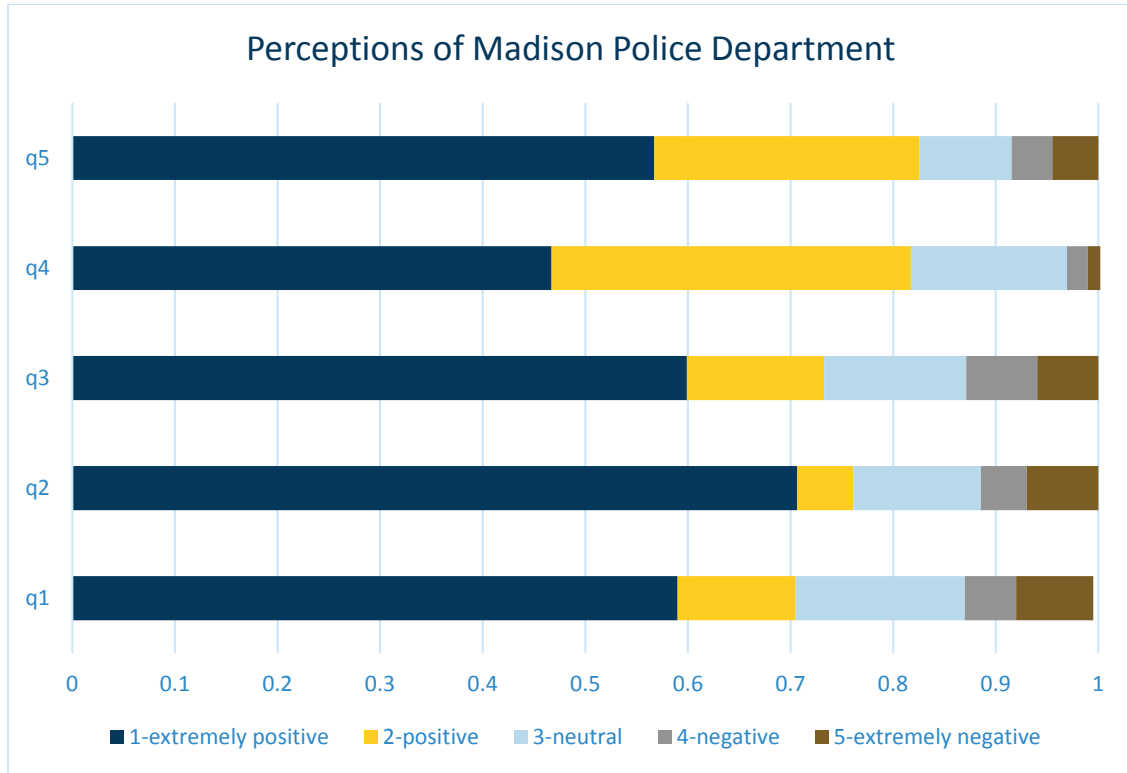
Number	Questions
Q1	How much do you agree: Regarding the [incident type] on [date], the officer clearly explained the reasons for his or her actions?
Q2	How much do you agree: Regarding the [incident type] on [date], the officer acted professionally and you felt you were treated with dignity and respect?
Q3	Taking the whole experience into account, how satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officer in this case?
Q4	How well are the police how work in your neighborhood doing at treating people fairly, regardless of who they are?
Q5	How much do you agree with the following statement: I have confidence that my police department can do its job well?
Q6	Any additional comments? (text box)

For brevity's sake, the survey did not ask demographic questions. However, each phone number was given a unique identifier that permitted researchers to match survey data to the information contained in the MPD CAD data, including gender, race, sector, and incident type.

Overall Results

Overall, the survey results indicate a high degree of satisfaction with MPD among Madison residents. The graph below depicts responses to each question. For each of the incident-specific questions (q1

through q3), at least 70% of respondents registered a favorable opinion. Respondents were even more positive regarding their overall feelings about the department: For q4 and q5, responses were over 80% positive. Negative views constituted less than 15% of responses to each question.



Differences in Perceptions of the Police between Subgroups

This section breaks down the survey results by gender, race, age, incident type, and sector. Because we had a modest number of cases for analysis (N=209), we were limited to examining gross categories within these variables. Gender was evenly split between males and females (102 versus 106), so categorization was easy. For race, we had a total of 5 categories in the data provided by MPD. However, since 75% of the sample was white *and* race was missing for 15% of the incidents, we were forced to categorize race simply as “White” versus “Other”. For age, we broke the sample roughly into quartiles yielding categories of 30 & under, 31-40, 41-60, and 61 & over. The response dataset contained more than 30 different incident types. These were recoded into violent crimes, burglary, other non--violent, crimes, and other (primarily nuisance complaints, suspicious persons, and vehicular accidents). Lastly, the 73 sectors in the response dataset were recoded into the geographic areas based on the MPD designations—west, midtown, south, central, north, and east.

We created scales to measure (1) satisfaction with officer behavior in specific police encounter that respondents reported on and (2) overall satisfaction with MPD. The first scale was created by summing q1 through q3; the second by summing q4 and q5. For both scales, lower scores represent more positive perceptions. We used Cronbach’s alpha to measure internal consistency of the two scales: Both alphas indicated that the items were strongly intercorrelated (0.93 and 0.84 respectively).

We first conducted bivariate analyses examining how perceptions of officer behavior and general opinions of the department varied across subgroups of respondents. Based on prior studies of police contacts, we expected to find the most positive perceptions among whites, females, and older respondents. The results are presented in the table below.

	<i>Perceptions of Incident, M(SD)</i>	<i>Opinions of Department, M(SD)</i>
Gender		
Female (n=106)	5.32 (3.68)	3.40 (1.99)
Male (n=102)	5.24 (3.53)	3.29 (1.81)
Race		
White (n=152)	5 (3.32)	3.22 (1.70)
Other (n=25)	5 (3.77)	3.8 (2.53)
Age*		
30 and under (n=50)	6.92 (4.22)	4.36 (2.58)
31-40 (n=50)	5.2 (3.43)	3.18* (1.38)
41-60 (n=62)	5.26 (3.49)	3.35* (1.64)
61+ (n=42)	3.38* (1.46)	2.33 (1.14)
Incident Type*		
Violent (n=26)	5.08 (3.83)	3.54 (2.63)
Non-Violent (n=123)	6.08 (3.90)	3.58 (1.95)
Burglary (n=33)	3.97 (2.19)	2.94* (1.34)

<i>Other (n=27)</i>	3.37 (1.52)	2.59* (1.01)
Sector		
<i>West (n=33)</i>	4.61 (2.41)	2.70 (1.29)
<i>Midtown (n=44)</i>	5.61 (3.72)	3.66 (2.02)
<i>South (n=18)</i>	5.33 (3.83)	3 (1.53)
<i>Central (n=34)</i>	5.76 (4.13)	3.62 (1.88)
<i>North (n=33)</i>	5.76 (4.18)	3.45 (2.03)
<i>East (n=45)</i>	4.71 (3.24)	3.42 (2.16)

**significant at .05 level or better*

Statistical tests were used to assess the reliability of subgroup differences. We found that age and incident type were significant predictors of both perceptions of how officers handled the specific incidents sampled and general opinions about the department. Older respondents were more satisfied with the department and the officer’s handling of their incident; victims of theft and other non-violent crimes were less satisfied according to both indicators. We did not find any significant differences in perceptions according to gender, race, or police command. Results of the one-way ANOVA tests conducted to assess differences are presented in Appendix C.

When assessing the effects of a number of variables on a measure such as the police perception scales, it is useful to conduct not only bivariate analyses, but also multivariate analyses. The latter allow one to assess the contribution of each variable while holding constant the effects of the other variables. The multivariate analysis that we conducted is contained in Appendix C. It confirmed the results of the bivariate analysis: Older respondents had more positive perceptions of the way officers handled the incident and the most positive perceptions of MPD. This finding is exemplified by a 65 year old respondent who commented, “Officer [name redacted] went above and beyond in courtesy, professionalism and thoroughness throughout our son’s arrest. She also called me days later to check up on our status. We couldn’t have asked for a better police interaction throughout a tough ordeal. Thank you so much....!”

Victims of theft and other non-violent crimes had less positive perceptions on both of the scales. It seems that the lesser satisfaction of these victims was related to the fact that many reported the crime online and did not receive feedback on the status of their report. For example a theft from auto victim commented, “I still have yet to receive a follow up or acknowledgement of the situation of car break ins in the neighborhood. This situation combined with the lack of speeding enforcement on our street has led to my extreme dissatisfaction with our police service available in our area.”

Discussion

The test of using SMS as a vehicle for assessing satisfaction with police encounters was largely successful. The response rate of 17% was considerably higher than the 10% we had hoped for. At just one cent per survey invitation, the Qualtrics costs were slightly over \$12. Labor costs in generating the invitations and reminders were also low. This method of collecting sentiment toward the police is a fraction of the cost of phone surveys or survey invitations delivered by mail, and the response rate is not substantially lower than either of the more expensive alternatives.

The sample was biased in some respects: Whites and older residents were over-represented relative to other racial and age categories, and victims of violent crime underrepresented. Similar bias is often found in surveys administered by other means as well, and is handled by weighting data to make up for underrepresentation of certain subgroups. Future use of SMS surveys should seek ways to increase response rates among young and minority members of the community.

Overall, the survey found a high degree of general satisfaction with MPD as well as with the handling of the specific incidents that respondents were involved in. Consistent with other studies, older residents generally held more positive opinions of the police than younger respondents; victims of non-violent crimes held less positive opinions than victims involved in other types of incidents. We did not find differences in satisfaction according to police command or (in contrast to much past work) according to race or gender. However, since sample size limited the analysis to whites versus other races combined, more data is needed to confirm that specific non-white subgroups – especially African Americans -- share similar satisfaction rates to whites.

One actionable result from the survey is that satisfaction among persons reporting non-violent crimes online could be increased by providing feedback to complainants on case progress or final outcome of their complaint. This survey also can serve as a benchmark for satisfaction with MPD. We recommend

that the department repeat the survey process quarterly to determine changes in satisfaction that may result from changes in police policies or training or media coverage.

Appendix A: Non-response Analysis

	Response	
Gender		
<i>Female</i>	17%	
<i>Male</i>	17%	
Race		
<i>White</i>	19%	P < .001
<i>Non-White</i>	10%	
Age		
<i>30 and under</i>	10%	P < .001
<i>31-40</i>	17%	
<i>41-60</i>	19%	
<i>61+</i>	30%	
Incident Type		
<i>Violent</i>	13%	P < .05
<i>Non-Violent</i>	17%	
<i>Burglary</i>	21%	
<i>Other</i>	20%	
Sector		
<i>West</i>	15%	
<i>Midtown</i>	20%	
<i>South</i>	17%	
<i>Central</i>	15%	
<i>North</i>	16%	
<i>East</i>	18%	

Appendix B: Additional Comments of Respondents

In this section, we present the free text responses that some respondents added to the survey. They are grouped according to Affirmations, Online reports, Lack of response/Follow Up, Grievances, and Suggestions.

Affirmation

Eighteen respondents offered praise for the officers who responded to their incident. These respondents were focused on the professionalism of officers, with a number commenting on the fact that officers went out of their way to provide helpful service.

- We worked with [redacted]. She was fantastic. Kind, empathetic, professional, patient
- The officers were helpful and professional
- Police officers need to be able to do their jobs. All the red tape protecting these kids who are committing these crimes is ridiculous and puts others at risk. Give them the tools, resources and latitude to effectively do their jobs. Project and serve. Thank you to those who do their best every day. They have a very difficult job.
- [The officer] has superb customer relations/service skills while [the detective] is very professional and thorough.
- I was amazed that they caught the person who entered my car and stole my property. Excellent work.
- The dispatcher and [redacted] were very calm which helped me calm down. Both were highly professional and responsive to my questions and recent trauma.
- The officer made efforts above and beyond what I expected. I think that his handling of the situation increased the safety and security of my business in terms of this particular area of vulnerability. I am very thankful for that!
- Officer [redacted], he did an excellent job
- Unfortunately, I have had to call the non-emergency police line a few times in the past few years regarding my neighbor. I have always felt listened to and acknowledged; however, each officer has told me not much could be done. My most recent encounter with the police, has been my best as this officer did try to explain the processes to me regarding what my options were. I cannot tell you how appreciative I was for him to try and take an extra second to help me understand my rights and their actions. I felt completely supported that my safety, and the safety of my family, should be protected. He was very thorough with my report and was able to have a conversation with my neighbor and then was able to again follow up with me. The emotional toll from my neighbor has weighed heavy on our families every day interactions. Again, I cannot tell you how appreciative I have been of this officer.
- Officer [redacted] took a personal approach to our case and made us feel important. You could tell she cares and we both feel very good that she is working in our city
- MPD has come a long way. When I was younger and on the wrong side of the law, I would not answer the questions as I did here with such positivity. I have to take my hats off to the police because they have a hard job to do. They usually only get attention when something goes wrong. But since I've been on the up-and-up, I have had pretty much nothing but good experiences with all of my police contacts and encounters

- Appreciate the efforts even if the courts don't work. Hopefully the criminals will leave buy you and the community continually riding their [expletive].
- The officer was a super nice guy, did a great job at explaining what i could do, and it was honestly the best overall experience ive had with any police officer to date. Thank you for your service and everything you do for our community!
- Thanks for your kindness and help during a stressful time Officer [redacted].
- I am super pleased with how everything went regarding the actions of police that night and follow up thereafter. I felt confident trusting them and safe.
- Officer [redacted] went above and beyond in courtesy, professionalism and thoroughness throughout our son's arrest. She also called me days later to check up on our status. We couldn't have asked for a better police interaction throughout a tough ordeal. Thank you so much, Officer [redacted]!
- We are a gay couple and felt the MPD officers who were present that evening were all respectful, helpful and professional in demeanor.
- The police officer that worked with us did a great job very professional and gave us a peace of mind after all that happened to us!

Online Reports

Persons who filed online reports were generally unhappy with the fact that they did not get updates on their complaint and were not notified of the final outcome.

- I filed a report online, and did not interact with any officer.
- There was no officer involved
- I was surprised and slightly frustrated to get absolutely no feedback except the automatic reply when I filled out the citizen self-report for my stolen bicycle. Even a one line email a week or two later saying unfortunately nothing had turned up would at least have told me my claim did not get stuck in an electronic holding pattern.
- No follow up after submit online report
- I filled out a report online and never had any contact with an officer. No follow up communication.
- Twelve days after self-filing a theft report with no follow-up from MPD is a poor time to receive a satisfaction survey. Whomever I spoke to on the phone was absolutely not helpful, condescendingly directing me to the website to self file. I realize a stolen hat isn't a priority matter to the police, but it is to me. A bit of empathy would've gone a long way.
- I had no contact with any officers. I filed an online report and have not been contacted.
- I filed my police report online, and thus did not have any contact with an officer. I am, however, concerned with the amount of turnover in the department, and the insufficient funds to keep things like drug-related violence and drunk drivers at bay on the East side
- I didn't receive any help with my situation. I was told to fill out an online report and I have never heard anything from the police. It was worthless.
- I did not have any actual contact with the police. I did an online theft report and never heard a word from anyone

Lack of response/Lack of Follow-up

Twelve respondents commented on lack of follow up with their complaints, many filed online. These respondents, similar to those in the previous category (Online Reports), were upset that they did not get feedback on the status of their report or the final outcome.

- Police never get back to you....
- Never followed up with me, no calls or emails other than case number
- still waiting to hear about my car theft
- I was surprised and slightly frustrated to get absolutely no feedback except the automatic reply when I filled out the citizen self [online] report for my stolen bicycle. Even a one line email a week or two later saying unfortunately nothing had turned up would at least have told me my claim did not get stuck in an electronic holding pattern.
- They haven't contacted me at all. I feel like they do not care about my case at all. And about other cases that I have heard about either.
- Never had any follow up on the theft ... obviously never caught the thief
- I wish the department would have updated us more. We got most of our info from the Rockford department even though it was recovered in Milwaukee.
- Police never came back to check on video camera who stole my wallet or call back the store or me the person will continue doing the same theft in the same or different store i asked the manager and he said police never came to rewind the tape of who stole inside my purse
- I was never contacted by a police officer after my report of theft on my property. This was very frustrating and I feel like nothing has been done about it and nothing ever will.
- Due to the fact that no officer or anyone else has contacted me about the fraud I am extremely dissatisfied.
- I still have yet to receive a follow up or acknowledgement of the situation of car break ins in the neighborhood. This situation combined with the lack of speeding enforcement on our street, Monroe has led to my extreme dissatisfaction with our police service available in our area.
- I never talked to him. He left me a voicemail with no way to contact him. I made many calls trying to find a way to contact him. I was able to get his email address and sent him an email on 12/17/18. After more phone calls someone offered to take a message to give him the next day. I gave my name, contact info and case number. That was on 12/27/18 and i still have not heard from him. I understand he must be busy. But this is time sensitive and i don't want to be evicted because the officer didn't get back to me in time to be able to offer me the help that believe only the police can help me with. I dont know if he will be able to be of much help after the 5th. At which point i will be freaking out wondering if the person who stole my rent will ever be identified I believe the footage of them cashing it will be recorded over very soon... I am very depressed about this. Thank you

Grievances

Six respondents had various complaints about the way their incident was handled or about MPD in general.

- I find it hard to believe they would not enter my house unless i was present. My ex husband had drive over to let them in. Then i was told they did a half ass sweep of the house, stating [my ex husband] was not here (never even checked my bedroom but ex heard water running in the master bath...that's when they found him, in my room.
- Updated response: Am sad that the thieves stealing cars can't be caught. Am sad that the petite thieves who are breaking into peoples homes cannot be caught. Either we need more police presence, or we need more aggressive action, but when we hear from one neighbor after another how we are having our doors checked later at night to see if we're forgetful and are then robbed later. That stuff is kid stuff and needs to be stopped.

- ***Original response:*** Did not answer question on how well police treat people . . .
Because I have no knowledge except for my one meeting
- I did not speak with an officer, but a volunteer. I was thankful for the call, but disappointed the MPD has to rely on volunteers to follow up on criminal complaints. Would have appreciated some information on what I can do to prevent further theft and what MPD is doing with this crime info.
- The officer was a complete [expletive] dumb[expletive] and next time I won't call you [expletive] because you can't do your job I'll take matters into my own hands you [expletive] [racial slur toward a black person]
- I don't trust the police anymore. They are a society that protects their own even when they have done something wrong.
- I'm a bit uncertain that I can say the police are doing their job, because the crime in my neighborhood has increased incredibly in the past 6 months. I feel that we need more patrol officers to keep up with this.

Suggestions

Two respondents offered suggestions about how public safety could be increased.

- Need more cameras on East Washington
- The department could benefit greatly from the judges not immediately releasing the people who are continually breaking into vehicles.

Appendix C: ANOVA Results

Bivariate ANOVA tables

Perceptions of Officer Interaction

	<i>df</i>	F	p-value
Gender	1, 206	0.03	0.864
Race	1, 175	0.00	1.000
Age	3, 200	8.37	0.000*
Incident	3, 205	6.63	0.000*
Sector	5, 201	0.77	0.573

General Opinions of MPD

	<i>df</i>	F	p-value
Gender	1, 206	0.15	0.706
Race	1, 175	2.17	0.142
Age	3, 200	10.04	0.000*
Incident	3, 205	2.68	0.048
Sector	5, 201	1.30	0.263

Multivariate ANOVA tables

Perceptions of Officer Interaction

	<i>df</i>	F	p-value
Gender	1, 187	0.10	0.921
Race	1, 187	0.599	0.664
Age	1, 187	12.35	0.001*
Incident	3, 187	2.786	0.042*
Sector	5, 187	0.537	0.748

General Opinions of MPD

	<i>df</i>	F	p-value
Gender	1, 187	0.004	0.947
Race	1, 187	0.615	0.652
Age	1, 187	16.66	0.000*
Incident	3, 205	1.074	0.361
Sector	5, 201	1.52	0.187