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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Study Completed on Dubuque Crime & Poverty**

DUBUQUE, Iowa – The Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies (NIU/CGS) has completed its 2010 Quantitative Research Study on Crime and Poverty in Dubuque. The study was commissioned last spring by the City of Dubuque after being recommended to the Dubuque City Council by the Safe Community Task Force.

The study was designed to compare community perceptions of crime in Dubuque to actual crime data. The study included: 1) a public opinion survey 2) an analysis of Dubuque's crime rates and trends over time compared to similarly sized communities in Iowa; 3) an analysis of Dubuque's crime incidents over time, and the extent to which Section 8 housing recipients are connected to crime; 4) a review of research studies related to poverty, Section 8 housing assistance, crime, fear of crime, and crime prevention; and 5) a set of recommendations based on the research and evidence. To explore these issues, the following general research questions were posed:

- Do the perceptions of criminal activity and its causes in Dubuque match what is actually happening?
- Within categories of crime with significant increases in arrests, what policies or strategies can effectively decrease crime?
- If there are cases where there are community perceptions of increased criminal activity but no evidence to support the perception, what policies or strategies can effectively address the concerns?

The resulting 782-page study report is complex and the authors warn throughout of various limitations with the data and analysis. NIU also states that readers are “strongly cautioned to not take singular statements, findings, maps or graphs contained in the report and examine or present them as a stand-alone finding. Rather, the analysis and report must be viewed in the full context and breadth of the examination, the totality of the findings and the broader social factors that underlie the phenomenon under study.”

NIU/CGS will make a formal presentation of the study results at a public meeting of the Safe Community Task Force on Tuesday, Jan. 25, at 6:00 p.m. in City Council Chambers at the Historic Federal Building at 350 West 6<sup>th</sup> Street. This presentation will be televised live on City Cable Channel 8 on the Mediacom cable system and will also be streamed live and archived online at [www.cityofdubuque.org/media](http://www.cityofdubuque.org/media). A complete copy of the report will be available online beginning at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 18, at [www.cityofdubuque.org/safecommunity](http://www.cityofdubuque.org/safecommunity). Printed copies will also be available at the City Clerk's Office at City Hall at 50 West 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Human Rights Department in City Hall Annex at 1300 Main Street, Carnegie-Stout Public Library Reference Desk at 360 West 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and the Dubuque Police Department at 770 Iowa Street.

The report consists of three main sections: a literature review and Section 8 Assisted Housing Program review, community survey and perception analysis, and quantitative analysis. While the following information represents the attempts of City staff to summarize the findings they think the majority of the public will be most interested in, residents are encouraged to read the study in its entirety and consider it as a whole before drawing conclusions.

### **Literature Review**

As part of the study, NIU/CGS reviewed research that has been done regarding general causes and characteristics of crime in mid-sized communities, the relationship between Section 8 housing and crime, effective crime prevention strategies, and the factors that contribute to perception of increased crime and ways to alleviate those perceptions. They did not review research on the causes of poverty or the reasons poverty and crime tend to be interrelated. In general, the research they reviewed shows:

- Section 8 housing projects that are smaller, more dispersed garden-style, have defensible space, and are located in less resource poor neighborhoods tend not to be linked to crime and crime dispersion, while large high-rise towers that are concentrated in resource poor neighborhoods do tend to affect crime rates.
- Community policing, problem-oriented policing, and hot spots policing are effective crime prevention strategies and community policing tends to reduce fear through improving police relations with citizens and reducing social and physical incivilities.
- There is little evidence to suggest that curfews effectively reduce juvenile crime.
- The use of closed-circuit television is moderately effective in reducing crime in parking lots, but not in other places such as city/town centers, public transportation systems, or public housing areas.
- Areas with high levels of concentrated disadvantages (high levels of poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, and minority concentrations) tend to also have high violent crime rates.
- Researchers caution against blanket strategies such as installing closed-circuit cameras and enacting juvenile curfews as these approaches may not be sufficiently tailored to the particular needs of a distressed neighborhood.

### **Community Survey and Perception Analysis**

The NIU Public Opinion Laboratory performed a community perception survey by telephone. Beginning on June 17, 2010, they interviewed 502 residents over the age of 18 whose land-line phone numbers were randomly selected. Some of the perceptions survey findings include:

- 84 percent of those surveyed have lived in Dubuque for 11 years or more; 42 percent have lived in Dubuque for 35 years or more.
- 88 percent of respondents said their neighborhood was an excellent or good place to live.
- 19 percent of respondents said they felt very or somewhat unsafe downtown during the **daytime** and 70 percent said they felt very or somewhat unsafe downtown at **night**. (“Downtown” was not geographically defined by the survey.)
- 2 percent of respondents said they felt very or somewhat unsafe in their own neighborhood during the daytime. Eleven percent said they felt very or somewhat unsafe in their own neighborhood at night.
- 76 percent indicated crime was a major or moderate problem in Dubuque.
- Of those who have lived in Dubuque at least five years, 89 percent said that crime has increased significantly or somewhat within the past five years.
- 57 percent indicated the City of Dubuque was doing an excellent or good job in addressing crime, while 68 percent indicated the Police Department was doing an excellent or good job in addressing crime.

## **Comparative and Trend Analysis**

NIU/CGS used the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) from 2004-2009 to analyze how Dubuque's average crime rate and crime trends compared to the following peer communities in Iowa: Ames, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Iowa City, Sioux City, Waterloo, and West Des Moines. The analysis focused specifically on UCR property crimes and UCR violent crimes.

In the process of conducting the analysis, NIU/CGS discovered an anomaly in the data related to aggravated and simple assaults. Dubuque reported much higher levels of aggravated than simple assaults, while all other cities reported the reverse. Further investigation revealed that Dubuque has been classifying all "assaults with injury" as "aggravated assaults." However, whether or not an "assault with injury" qualifies as an aggravated assault for UCR reporting purposes depends on the extent of the injury. Most of the "assault with injury" cases in Dubuque involved minor injuries such as scratches, bumps, and bruises, which do not fit the UCR definition of "aggravated assault" and, consequently, should have been reported as "simple assaults," and not reported as "aggravated results" included in the UCR violent crime count. If Dubuque assaults for 2009 would have been accurately classified, the numbers reported to UCR would have been only 15 aggravated assaults, rather than the 265 that were reported. As a result, NIU/CGS analyzed violent crime in two ways: using the UCR violent crime numbers alone (which, for Dubuque, include numerous simple assaults misclassified as aggravated assaults) and then using the violent crime numbers including both simple and aggravated assaults for all communities.

In conducting the comparative analysis, NIU addressed the perception that crime is increasing and that it is worse in Dubuque than in other comparable Iowa cities. The statistical analysis indicated that:

- Overall, Dubuque's crime profile is not uniquely different from other cities.
- Across the 10 cities, as the percent of families with incomes below poverty level increases, so does the average violent crime rate.
- Dubuque does not have uniquely high rates of violent crime, with the only exception being aggravated assault, the most common violent crime. When analyzing UCR violent crime, Dubuque reported the third-highest average UCR violent crime rate and this difference from the average was statistically significant. This can be attributed to the misclassification previously mentioned.
- However, when simple assault and aggravated assault rates are added together for all of the communities, Dubuque's average violent crime rate is in the middle instead of in the top three.
- Dubuque ranks as follows amongst the 10 cities:
  - Third lowest in property crime
  - Fifth in violent crime (includes simple assault; third highest without simple assault)
  - Fourth lowest in family poverty, third lowest in household poverty, near income inequality average
  - Fifth in median household income
  - Is staffed with 1.7 sworn officers per 1,000 residents, compared to 1.6 average

## **Local Crime and Arrest Data**

NIU/CGS analyzed over 350,000 individual arrest records and Section 8 housing program files for the 2006-2009 timeframe. There were approximately 15,900 adult arrests during this timeframe. NIU/CGS analyzed the demographic characteristics of arrestees and victims, along with arrestee addresses, victim addresses, complainant addresses and incident locations, comparing that information to the Section 8 database to determine the extent to which authorized Section 8 voucher recipients were committing, being victimized by, and reporting crime as compared to the non-Section 8 population. NIU also performed a spatial analysis to show where

crime is concentrated in the City, where Section 8 units are concentrated, and to then show the extent to which the areas where crime is occurring overlap with areas where Section 8 rental recipients live. Throughout the report, evidence of income and poverty are shown to be strongly associated with various elements of crime.

In considering demographics of arrestees, victims, and complainants, the analysis shows:

- The majority of adult arrestees was adults under age 40 and included 9,182 males and 3,528 females.
- Dubuque's proportion of arrestees who are white is 79.3 percent, compared to 78.5 percent at the State level and 69.8 percent at the national level.
- Dubuque's proportion of arrestees who are Black/African-American is 19.9 percent, compared to 19.3 percent at the state level and 27.9 percent at the national level.
- Dubuque's proportion of adult arrestees who are of "other races" is 0.8 percent as compared to 2.3 percent at the State and national levels.
- Authorized Section 8 participants on average represent 5.2 percent of Dubuque's population; 5.8 percent of Dubuque's unique adult arrestees were, on average, Authorized Section 8 participants.
- Authorized Section 8 participants experience a higher ratio of adult arrests (5.4 percent) within their population group than non-Section 8 residents experience (3.4 percent) within non-Section 8 population.
- Authorized Section 8 participants experience slightly higher victimization rates than non-Section 8 residents (5.9 percent on average compared to 5.4 percent) and somewhat lower complainant rates than non-Section 8 residents (5.7 percent on average compared to 6.2 percent).
- When adding in the persons who gave Section 8 addresses at the time of a crime incident but who were not matched as an authorized Section 8 participant at that time, the rates of victimization overall are 1.6 times greater for Section 8 residents than non-Section 8 residents and the adult arrest rates are overall 2.49 times as high as the rates for non-Section 8 residents.

In considering the general perception that there is a higher rate of crime downtown and that crime generally tends to spread to neighboring blocks, the analysis revealed that:

- Except for UCR property crimes, crime hotspots are more likely to occur downtown.
- UCR violent and UCR non-violent crimes appeared to diffuse, especially downtown – some blocks with low or average rates of violent crime in 2006 that neighbored blocks with high rates became blocks with high rates in 2008.
- Property crimes in the downtown area exhibited the opposite tendency, to become more average when neighboring blocks with high rates in 2006.
- These generalizations, and the hotspot analysis in particular, are tentative, not conclusive. How hotspots are defined can alter results significantly.

In considering the perception whether Section 8 could be the cause of crime and whether crime is expanding from Section 8 areas to other areas of the City, the statistical analysis shows that:

- There is a general association between poverty and crime in the comparative analysis of Iowa cities.
- In looking at "hotspots" (areas where there is either a concentration of Section 8 participants or a concentration of certain types of crime occurring):
  - The hotspot analysis helps visualize where crime and Section 8 properties are located but does not support a conclusion that there is a causal relationship.
  - The preponderance of crime in Dubuque is concentrated around the city center, as are the preponderance of Section 8 participants.

- Many Section 8 concentrated areas do not match concentrated crime hotspots; crime hotspots emerge in locations where there is not a concentration of Section 8 housing.
- On average 26 percent of Section 8 hotspots coincide with eight different types of crime hotspots, mostly due to property crime.
- A total of 7 out of 10 UCR violent crime hotspots overlapped with Section 8 hotspots in 2006 and 11 out of 13 overlapped in 2008. But this implicates only 17.5 percent of the total number of Section 8 hotspots; 82.5 percent of Section 8 hotspots are not implicated in UCR violent crime.
- Two-thirds of Section 8 hotspots overlap or are contingent with UCR Property crime hotspots.
- Most crime attributed to Section 8 housing does not diffuse into other areas; more than random chance predicts, victims who live in Section 8 housing are more likely to be victimized at Section 8 addresses, by arrestees who live at Section 8 addresses and crimes occurring at Section 8 addresses are more likely to be perpetrated by arrestees reporting a Section 8 address.
- Violent crimes make up nearly twice as high a percentage of crimes occurring at Section 8 addresses than the share reported at non-Section 8 addresses.
- The only other type of crime that occurs at a much higher proportion at Section 8 addresses than non-Section 8 addresses involves local ordinance charges; the Section 8 rate is over five times larger than the non-Section 8 rate.
- Property crimes, DUIs, drug and alcohol related crimes and civil disorder make up a lower proportion of crimes at Section 8 locations.

### **NIU/CGS Recommendations**

NIU/CGS offered the following recommendations based on the analysis:

- use the data analysis in the study as a springboard for objective dialogue to make informed decisions;
- invest in, partner with, and empower at-risk neighborhoods;
- address downtown crime hotspots after using community policing strategies to build relationships;
- disperse Section 8 housing unit locations into neighborhoods with greater social resources; and
- address poverty wherever it occurs and provide assistance to the impoverished so they can regain their financial footing

### **Next Steps**

The Safe Community Task Force will review the report and consider additional recommendations to the Dubuque City Council.

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