

## Summary Discussion of Findings & Implications for Strategies and Policies

It is difficult to attempt to summarize an analysis as complex and multi-faceted as the one commissioned by the City of Dubuque to study crime and poverty. However, this concluding section will endeavor to bring forward some notable elements along with valuable context on the broader question of crime, poverty and community experience. The readers of the analysis that has been presented here 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 of the breadth of the examination, the totality of the findings and the broader social factors that underlie the phenomenon under study.

For those who are committed to serving and leading our civic surroundings, it can be said that great communities come with great expectations. The situation is no different in Dubuque where decades of collective effort have elevated the City to notable recognition. Known as the “Masterpiece on the Mississippi,” the City of Dubuque has been recognized as one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People, a finalist and gold-standard community at the International Awards for Livable Communities (LivCom), the Most Livable Small City, and an All-America City. In 2009, Dubuque received ICMA’s *America’s Crown Community Award* as well as the *Excellence in Economic Development Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation-led Strategies* from the U.S. Commerce Department. Dubuquers also take pride in their community, as 86% of residents rate the community as an “excellent” or “good” place to live (NIU 2010 Comm. Survey). This high level of citizen satisfaction is a reflection of the quality of life Dubuquers associate with their community, their daily activities, and the expectation that local leaders provide a safe, prosperous and progressive community.

Even in progressive communities, such efforts can be a challenge as local conditions are susceptible to subtle societal forces that can alter the local landscape in terms of prosperity, demographics, and cultural patterns. Throughout this report, levels of income and poverty are shown to be strongly associated with various elements of crime. As local economic conditions are mostly determined by public and private factors located counties, states, or oceans away, the preconditions for crime within a city, including Dubuque, are often established apart from any community action. Indeed, a recent report from the Brookings Institution demonstrates how Midwestern states have seen the

largest increases in poverty, which were further exacerbated by the 2008 economic downturn.<sup>50</sup> As times have turned tough, many cities have faced an increasingly noticeable crime problem.

Concerns regarding crime in Dubuque have been amplified by several recent high-profile incidents, including: 1) the 2005 fatal stabbing of a pregnant teenager; 2) the 2007 fatal stabbing of a man outside of a downtown bar, which stirred racial discussions; 3) two fatal stabbings in 2009, 4) the 2009 shootings of a police officer and suspect during an armed robbery attempt; and 5) the 2010 shooting of a man at a pawn shop. Due to the general location of the incidents, the perception that those living in Section 8 housing units are increasing crime in Dubuque has been advanced by some segments of the community. The City of Dubuque has responded to crime concerns by: 1) creating the Safe Community Task Force, tasked with making recommendations to the City in order to increase public safety; 2) establishing several programs to improve the Washington neighborhood; 3) focusing police efforts upon troubled downtown areas; 4) creating a number of programs to assist the unemployed and impoverished in regaining solid financial footing; and 5) tightening Section 8 housing eligibility requirements and aggressively enforcing tenant responsibilities. These efforts represent a proactive response that matches the progressive approach the City has displayed in a variety of community initiatives including redevelopment, economic development, housing and public infrastructure. The exploration and study of the relationships between crime and poverty in the present study represent a continuation of the City's proactive approach to community issues.

The City of Dubuque has been committed to a professional approach to managing its affairs based on analysis, expertise, review, dialogue, and objective decision-making. From this orientation, and recognizing that crime remains a chief concern among residents, the City asked that a broad study of crime and poverty be undertaken. In this context, the purpose of the analysis that has been presented here is not to identify a "silver bullet," but to establish a foundation of understanding based on objective data analysis and sound research principles that will be useful to frame future dialogue regarding crime and poverty in Dubuque. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution or strategy that can be prescribed for the City of Dubuque or any other city. As discussed below, there is not a mysteriously elusive program or policy decision that can be implemented to change the complex factors that contribute to the presence of crime in a community. As the study team confirmed in the search of the literature, there is

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<sup>50</sup> Kneebone, Elizabeth, and Emily Garr. 2010. *The Suburbanization of Poverty: Trends in Metropolitan America, 2000 to 2008*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

not a singular recommendation available to direct a community on how to fight crime—every strategy must be tailored to the needs, context, values and assets of the individual community. However, by 1) gauging resident perceptions, 2) comparing crime attributes with similar communities, 3) examining patterns of crime in Dubuque, 4) exploring potential connections of various demographic groups to crime, including Sec. 8 participants, and, 5) canvassing the academic literature regarding crime and poverty, this study provides Dubuque policymakers with an objective assessment of local crime and poverty that can move the discussion beyond competing perceptions toward reasoned solution.

Based on the public perception survey conducted as part of this study, a majority of Dubuque residents (57%) believe the City of Dubuque is doing an “excellent” or “good” job addressing public safety. Likewise, 68% believe the Dubuque Police Department is doing an “excellent” or “good” job fighting crime. However, these high grades do not translate to satisfaction regarding the level of crime in Dubuque. Approximately three-quarters (76%) of those surveyed stated that crime was a “major” or “moderate” problem in Dubuque. For those respondents who have lived in Dubuque for at least five years, 89% say that crime has “significantly” or “somewhat” increased over the past five years. The safety issues most often identified as major problems are: 1) drugs (33%), 2) violent crime (23%), 3) gang activity (22%), 4) unsupervised children (18%), and 5) property crime (17%). Crime concerns tend to be specific in nature, as 88% of respondents rate their respective neighborhoods as “excellent” or “good” places to live and only 12% rate crime as a “major” or “moderate” problem in their neighborhoods. Conversely, 19% stated that downtown was unsafe during the day and 71% believed downtown was unsafe at night. The study also found differing views among respondents’ fear of crime, as a greater fear was generally associated statistically with those who 1) had lived in Dubuque longer, 2) were prior crime victims, 3) were less-educated, 4) were women, and 5) were older residents.

While not overlooking that a portion of residents perceive a “crime problem” in Dubuque, comparative data demonstrates that the level of crime and poverty in Dubuque is at or below the average of the ten largest Iowa cities. Here perception and reality differ. Based on the most current data, Dubuque is not statistically different from the other nine communities in terms of crime, poverty, income, income inequality, law enforcement staffing, or amount of assisted housing units.

The following is a listing of Dubuque's rank among the ten cities in these areas:

- 7<sup>th</sup> in property crime
- 5<sup>th</sup> in UCR violent crime (includes simple assault, 3<sup>rd</sup> without simple assaults included)<sup>51</sup>
- 6<sup>th</sup> in family poverty, 7<sup>th</sup> in household poverty, near income inequality average
- 5<sup>th</sup> in median household income
- Is staffed with 1.7 sworn officers per 1,000 residents, compared to a 1.6 average
- Is staffed with 1.8 law enforcement employees per 1,000 residents, compared to a 2.0 average

The data indicate that the crime and poverty situation in Dubuque is not significantly different than that faced in other large Iowa communities, and in some cases it is better. Although Dubuque is a typical large Iowa community regarding crime and poverty, resident perceptions seems to indicate that they hold the community to a higher standard. Some selected perceptions from the RFP and survey data with corresponding findings are highlighted below:

*Perception:* Crime in Dubuque is worse than in other large cities in Iowa.

*Finding:* As noted in the comparative analysis, the inspection of comparative UCR crime rates during 2004 to 2009 for the ten comparably sized Iowa cities reveals that, overall; Dubuque's crime profile is not uniquely different from the other cities. However, the analysis did point to some differences with regard to offenses classified as violent crime, using the standard UCR coding approach.

*Perception:* There is a higher rate of crime in the center city but that most neighborhoods are safe.

*Finding:* Hotspots are more likely to occur downtown, except for UCR property (mostly larceny). Thus, perception is accurate.

*Perception:* Section 8 is the cause of crime.

*Finding:* Crime is multi-causal and poverty does play a big role. The association between poverty and crime shows in the city level comparative analysis and in the moderate overlap of section 8 (the poorest of the poor net of the homeless) hotspots and crime hotspots. But no causal assertions can be made - many Section 8 concentrated areas do not have concentrated crime hotspots.

*Perception:* Crime is expanding or diffusing from Section 8 to other areas.

*Finding:* The loglinear analysis shows that the probabilistic tendency is for crime to remain local: section 8 victims more likely to be victimized at section 8 locations. crimes with section 8 victims more likely to see section 8 arrestees. crimes committed at section 8 locations more likely to have section 8 arrestees.

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<sup>51</sup> See pages 192-94 for a discussion of this distinction.  
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Dubuquers expect safe neighborhoods, and as the survey results indicate, a large majority believes that most are safe. However, spatial analysis confirms that crime *hotspots* do exist in the city center, especially along the Central Avenue corridor. Does the presence of Section 8 housing generate these crime hotspots? Having the full benefit of spatial analysis, the results indicate that Section 8 hotspots have a low to moderate overlap with crime hotspots (on average, 26% of Section 8 hotspots coincide with eight different types of crime hotspots, mostly due to property crime). As the body of research examined indicates, other factors such as poverty, population density, security, neighborhood characteristics and the business composition are contributors to generating crime hotspots in a community. The analysis further shows that most crime attributed to Section 8 housing does not diffuse into other areas; victims of crime who live in Section 8 housing are more likely to be victimized at Section 8 addresses by those 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. Simply put, no statistically determined *causal* assertions between Section 8 housing and crime can be made from the analysis. At the same time, the analysis does indicate that there is a greater propensity for crime victimization, location or arrests within clusters of the Section 8 community.

In particular, the data indicates that authorized Section 8 participants have nearly the same proportional arrest rate in Dubuque as the non Section 8 segment of the population. For example, for the period under study, authorized Section 8 participants represented 5.2% of Dubuque's total population and 5.8% of total unique arrestees. It is important to note, however, that the analysis did demonstrate that victimization and arrestee rates increase noticeable when those reporting a Section 8 address but *who are not* included in the Section 8 program database are added to the analysis. If these addresses are taken at face value, an "unaccounted" Section 8 population may be contributing additional disadvantage to those who are already at significant crime risk. Section 8 addresses also witnessed a substantial increase of local ordinance charges in 2008 and 2009, perhaps reflecting more aggressive enforcement practices by police. The analysis indicates that the pattern of crime in Dubuque has remained fairly constant, and that crime, in general, is not diffusing to other neighborhoods. To summarize, broader perceptions of increased crime attributable to Section 8 related locations contains an element of validity, but the analysis indicates that the preponderance of crime in Dubuque, whether or not it is associated with authorized or non-authorized Section 8 persons, is concentrated around the city center and that crimes that reflect an element of Section 8 involvement (victim, incident location or

arrestee) tend to be clustered within the Section 8 community.

To further understand the multi-causal nature of crime, a review of academic literature reveals the linkages between public housing, population density, crime, and poverty. The presence, extent and type of crime that takes place in a community is attributable to a number of complex social factors that extend well beyond the mere presence of Section 8 housing. Typically, assisted housing tenants have been placed in dense residential settings (such as multi-unit or high-rise buildings) located in resource-poor neighborhoods. Research shows that these neighborhoods suffer from *cumulative disadvantage*, where the simultaneous presence of negative factors such as families below the poverty line, families receiving public aid, the unemployed, and female-headed households with children in a dense setting combines to create social and physical disorder. As disorder increases and crime blossoms, residents feel that they are unable to exert formal and informal control over the neighborhood and become fearful of crime, further weakening *collective efficacy* and social networks. This creates hotspots of crime that can be difficult, if not impossible, to immediately reverse. It is the concentration of low incomes and poverty in resource-poor neighborhoods that can be blamed for many high-crime neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, academic research has also pointed to a number of promising strategies to address crime-susceptible neighborhoods with concentrated public or assisted housing. Foremost among these strategies is the following: public housing units should be located in garden-style settings, widely geographically disbursed into neighborhoods with sufficient social resources. This helps ensure that residents are supported socially, can create *defensible space* where residents can control their immediate external surroundings, dampens the fuel that fires crime hotspots, and, has been proven not to diffuse crime into the surrounding neighborhood. In addition, police should engage residents by involving themselves into the problem neighborhoods. Since no single community policing strategy can be applied successfully in every setting, the guiding principles should be to increase contact with residents, pursue community partnerships, and be proactive in preventing crime.

According to our review, other strategies that offer promise include methods that target *hotspots* of crime with police resources. The literature indicates that this strategy has proven to reduce reports of crime in the hotspot without diffusing crime to adjacent areas, especially when coupled with a *problem-oriented policing* approach that identifies the root causes of the problem and develops solutions that will prevent future incidents. Next, addressing physical and social

disorder through “*broken windows*” *policing* has been demonstrated to reduce fear of crime, but only after community policing partnerships have been developed because the heightened police presence may increase fear absent a strong relationship between the police and residents. Finally, 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.

Although the crime condition in Dubuque is similar to those faced across Iowa’s largest cities, it is evident from the survey results that residents do have concerns about crime in Dubuque. Those concerns were found to vary depending on respondent characteristics. When dealing with an emerging problem, it is essential to step back and assess the situation. This study and other steps the City has taken via the Safe Community Task Force represent progressive and proactive steps in understanding and addressing the concerns that filter through the community. The collection, presentation and analysis of the data collected in this study provides an objective foundation to frame future dialogue regarding crime and poverty in Dubuque. The purpose of the study is to increase understanding; it will be the work of Dubuque policymakers and residents that will craft solutions tailored to the particular needs of the Dubuque community. With this in mind, the research team offers the following broad principles to assist in developing strategies to address crime and poverty:

- **Utilize this study as a springboard for objective dialogue** – Decision-making absent information can create dangerous perceptions and exacerbate existing conditions. The report offers a wealth of data and analysis to help understand crime and poverty in Dubuque. Policymakers, staff, and residents are encouraged to adopt the analytical approaches contained within the study now and into the future to guide public discourse on these vital community issues.
- **Invest in, partner with, and empower at-risk neighborhoods** – By rehabilitating housing stock, addressing physical and social disorder, establishing relationships between police and neighborhood residents, partnering with neighborhood businesses and nonprofits, Dubuque policymakers can help those living in suffering areas to reclaim their neighborhoods. It is not by accident that Section 8 units have a disproportionately higher amount of crime arrestees and victim, but a lower share of complainants. Residents in these areas must have trust in each other and police in order to reclaim their neighborhoods.
- **Address downtown crime hotspots** – Focusing resources toward these areas through efforts

such as saturation patrol and minimizing disorder can have a tremendous effect upon crime; however, it is important to note that these efforts are most effective *after* community policing strategies to build relationships in troubled neighborhoods have been successfully implemented.

- **Disperse Section 8 housing units** – Although not densely concentrated, Section 8 housing remains largely centered in the downtown area of Dubuque. Further efforts are necessary to disperse Section 8 housing units into neighborhoods with greater social resources in order to avoid the cumulative disadvantage negative effects discussed above.
- **Address poverty wherever it occurs** – As poverty and low income are the greatest predictors of crime, Dubuque policymakers would be wise to provide assistance to the impoverished so that they can regain their financial footing. Such efforts could prove to be the most significant crime prevention strategy available and could help ensure that other neighborhoods do not fall prey to the cycles of poverty and crime.

Dubuque, like its peer cities in Iowa and the U.S., faces emerging social issues like changing crime patterns, social change, economic strain and evolving demographics. The completion of this study confirms that the City is exploring the question carefully and that policy alternatives will likely be considered to meet the challenges that lay ahead.