

# Bethlehem Community Survey

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## Perceptions of Neighborhood Crime and Resident Satisfaction with the Police

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This project was funded by DeSales University. For questions regarding the report, please contact:

Michelle A. Bolger, Ph.D.  
DeSales University



P. Colin Bolger, Ph.D.  
Kutztown University



## Purpose

The purpose of this study was primarily to investigate the perceptions of safety felt in Bethlehem neighborhoods by household residents in order for the Bethlehem Police Department to better target areas of concern. Secondly, the study aimed to better understand the degree to which Bethlehem residents are satisfied with the Bethlehem Police Department. Some key goals included identifying specific places where residents feel unsafe and what about the physical space(s) makes them feel unsafe during the day and at night. Another goal is to examine how residents feel about the Bethlehem Police Department in terms of their presence, professionalism, and responsiveness and how neighborhood and individual demographic factors may relate to these perceptions. The main hope is that this information can be used to better inform the police and the community about crime and police-community relations.

## Highlights

- **Response Rate:** There was an overall response rate of 12%. While the sample of surveys distributed mirrored the distribution of households within each Bethlehem city zipcode, the responses from 18015 were under-represented. Additionally, the majority of the sample were older and white, thus there was a relative under-representation of younger and ethnic minority residents.
- **Neighborhood Problems:** In resident neighborhoods, respondents reported no or very few problems with crime, physical decay, or social disorder. About 80% percent reported no crime problems, 66% reported no physical decay problems, and 75% reported no social disorder problems in their neighborhoods.
- **Fear of Crime:** Respondents reported nearly no fear of crime while doing routine activities in their neighborhoods. The most commonly reported fear was walking or jogging alone at night, followed by taking public transportation after dark. Even so, the majority of respondents did not report being fearful of these activities. Additionally, very few respondents reported characteristics of their neighborhoods which made them feel fearful. The two most commonly reported factors were poor lighting or places to hide, but the majority of respondents did not report that these or any other factors made them feel fearful in their neighborhoods.
- **Confidence in Police:** In general, respondents were quite confident in the Bethlehem Police Department. About 74-95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in a variety of items such as responding to calls, investigating crimes, and trusting the leadership of the Bethlehem police.
- **Satisfaction with Police:** Overall, respondents were satisfied with the Bethlehem Police Department. About 67-94% agreed or strongly agreed that the Bethlehem police performed a number of duties such as providing quality service, acting professionally, and using the appropriate amount of force. The lowest level of support was expressed for informing the public of major issues (67%), but the rest of the items had 88-94% satisfaction.

- **Citizen Cooperation with Police:** Citizen cooperation with the police was measured in two main ways: citizen perceptions of involvement in active crime prevention and willingness to call the police. The majority of respondents reported that residents taking an active role in crime prevention is important. The item with the least support was getting involved with trash or illegal dumping in their neighborhoods, with only 42% suggesting that they would get involved. However, all other items ranged from 74-99%, suggesting that respondents take active measures to prevent crime. Regarding willingness to call police, 93-99% of respondents stated that they would call the police for burglary, drugs, prostitution, and violent crime. Overall, respondents report high levels of cooperation with the police.
- **Potential Target Areas:** The most common area of concern reported by respondents was speeding in their neighborhoods. Several respondents identified it as the main problem in their neighborhoods, especially those near schools. Litter and trash, overgrown lots, vandalism, drug use, poor lighting, and places to hide were other areas of concern for some respondents. Regarding the police, while most respondents were satisfied, some would like the Bethlehem police to improve their communication; particularly in terms of informing the community of major issues and crimes in their neighborhoods.
- **In sum,** respondents reported little to no crime, decay, or disorder problems in their neighborhoods. They had very low levels of fear of crime in general and in specific places. Respondents reported high levels of both confidence in, and satisfaction with, the Bethlehem police, and they reported willingness to call and cooperate with the police. While the sample was not entirely representative of the Bethlehem city population, those who did respond conveyed favorable views of their neighborhoods and the Bethlehem police.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample Selection**

The study design was a community survey of residents in households in Bethlehem, and all residents 18 years and older living in a household within Bethlehem city limits were eligible to be included in the sample. Specifically, this included the following zipcodes: 18015 18017, and 18017. A simple random sample of 12% of households within those three zipcodes was selected. Selected households were sent a pre-survey postcard informing them of the survey, its purpose, those affiliated with the research, and the time frame in which to expect the survey. Next, selected households were sent a cover letter, informed consent statement, the survey, and instructions about returning the survey. Participants were then asked to return the survey within 3 weeks in the prepaid envelope provided. A reminder postcard was sent two weeks after the initial mailing. The sample was comprised of 3261 households: 21% from 18015, 31% from 18017, and 48% from 18018. This distribution mirrors the distribution of households within each zipcode.

### **Sample Descriptive Statistics**

The response rate for the survey was 12% which, while lower than preferred, is within the range of expected response rates for a mailed general survey. Unfortunately, the sample was not entirely representative of the Bethlehem residential community. Specifically, the 18015 zipcode was under-represented. About 52% of the respondents came from 18018, 38% from 18017, and only 11% from 18015. The average age of the sample was 58 years-old, though respondents ranged as young as 22 years-old to the eldest at 98 years-old. Only about 8% of the sample was under 30 years-old, 24% of the sample was between 31-50 years-old, 43% was between 51-70 years-old, and the remaining 25% was 71+ years-old. Therefore, the sample is heavily skewed toward older residents. Regarding race/ethnicity, about 84% identified as White, 11% as Hispanic, 3% as Black, and the remaining 2% as other ethnic group (such as Asian, Native American, and Indian). As such, our minority population, specifically Hispanics, was also under-represented. About 54% of the respondents were female, and the remaining 46% were male. The vast majority of the sample reported being employed full time or retired (81%), with just about 2% of the respondents reporting being unemployed. The sample was also well educated, with 80% of the respondents reporting that they had completed some college or higher, with the most common response being a college degree (35%). Many residents reported having lived in their Bethlehem households for an extended period of time with the average length of residency being 18 years, and 77% of the respondents owned a home, with the remaining 23% renting. About 47% of the sample reported some kind of contact with the Bethlehem police within the last 12 months. Of those, the most common types of contact were a call for service or a complaint, a simple conversation, or having been the victim of some type of crime. See Table 1 for more sample descriptive details.

**Table 1. Sample Demographics**

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent %
<i>Age</i>		
20 – 29	25	6.6
30 – 39	48	12.7
40 – 49	44	11.7
50 – 59	60	15.9
60+	200	53.1
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	179	45.7
Female	213	53.8
<i>Race / Ethnicity</i>		
White	330	84.2
Hispanic	42	10.7
Black	11	2.8
Asian	5	1.3
Native American	2	0.5
Indian	2	0.5
<i>Education</i>		
8 <sup>th</sup> grade or less	2	0.5
Did not graduate from high school	9	2.3
High school / GED	66	16.9
Some college	85	21.8
College degree	136	34.9
Graduate degree	92	23.6
<i>Employment</i>		
Not employed	8	2.1
Part-time work	42	10.8
Homemaker	13	3.3
Full-time student	10	2.6
Full-time work	168	43.2
Retired	148	38.0
<i>Household Income</i>		
Less than \$30,000	39	14.1
\$30,000 - \$49,999	76	27.4
\$50,000 - \$74,999	80	28.9
Greater than \$75,000	82	29.6
<i>Home Ownership</i>		
Own	302	77.0
Rent	90	23.0

## **Survey Construction and Measurement**

### **Survey Components**

The survey was 11 pages single-sided and contained 12 questions, some with sub-questions. All questions were framed in reference to the participant's neighborhood, defined as the area within a 5 minute walk from his or her home. There were 6 main sections including perceptions of specific crimes, perceptions of fear, specific places and characteristics of those places which are identified as unsafe (if applicable), routine activities of the participant and how the participant would respond to potential problems in the neighborhood, satisfaction and contact with Bethlehem Police, and demographic information about the participant.

Participants were asked to what degree specific crimes such as violent crime, burglary, drug sales, prostitution, vandalism, and truancy are a problem in their neighborhoods. They were then asked to name up to five problems in the neighborhood that the police should prioritize. The next segment asked about how safe participants felt engaging in a variety of activities such as being home alone, walking, traveling on public transportation, and parking on the street in their neighborhoods during the day and at night. Participants were also asked to identify any specific places that are dangerous and then to check all of the reasons which make the place feel dangerous such as poor lighting, abandoned buildings, lack of police presence, and nearby criminals. The next section asked participants about some of their daily routine activities such as walking or jogging in their neighborhoods during the day and at night, using public transportation, and parking their cars on the street overnight. These questions were important because they provide information about the degree of exposure the participants have to their neighborhoods, which may relate to perceptions of crime. There was also a question which asked how many non-familial members of the neighborhood the participant knows, gauging the level of cohesion and involvement has with other community residents, another factor potentially related to neighborhood perceptions.

The following section inquired about the participants' responses to potential problems in their neighborhoods such as witnessing prostitution and their feelings about the Bethlehem Police Department involving trust, quality of service, respect, fairness, appropriate use of force, crime prevention, presence, and communication with the community. These are all key issues for police departments' service quality. The last substantive question asked if the participant had contact with the Bethlehem police within the past 12 months and the nature of that contact. This is an important question which can affect how the individual views the police. Finally, the last section asked a variety of basic demographic questions such as age, race, sex, education, employment status, length of residency, marital status, and if the participant had been arrested.

### **Measures**

There were a number of variables created from the survey responses. The measures targeting the neighborhood perceptions included the crime problem scale, the physical decay problem scale, the social disorder scale, the neighborhood fear scale, and an index of characteristics of unsafe places. The measures targeting perceptions of the police included the

confidence in police scale and the satisfaction with police scale. Finally, the measures targeting citizen involvement included the active prevention scale and the call police scale. The items for each of the scales is presented below.

**Crime Problem Scale = 9-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=no problem) rate how much of a problem the following are in your neighborhood*

- Drug Use
- Drug Sales
- Gangs
- Burglary
- Stealing Cars
- Violent Crime
- Domestic Violence
- Prostitution
- Hate Crimes

**Decay Problem Scale = 6-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=no problem) rate how much of a problem the following are in your neighborhood*

- Vandalism
- Graffiti
- Illegally parked cars
- Abandoned buildings
- Rundown buildings
- Overgrown lots

**Social Disorder Problem Scale = 5-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=no problem) rate how much of a problem the following are in your neighborhood*

- Homelessness
- Begging
- Public drinking
- Loud music
- Truancy

**Neighborhood Fear Scale = 9-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=not afraid at all) rate how fearful you are of the following in your neighborhood*

- Crime in general
- Being home alone during day
- Being home alone after dark
- Walking/jogging during the day
- Walking/jogging after dark
- Traveling on public transportation during the day
- Traveling on public transportation after dark
- Parking your car overnight on the street
- Visiting a neighborhood park

**Unsafe Characteristics Index = 7 items**

*If there were dangerous places in your neighborhood, which of the following make them dangerous (count all yes)*

- Poor lighting on streets or around buildings and parking lots

- Abandoned or rundown buildings or lots
- Places to hide such as an alley, behind a building, etc.
- Garbage, litter, and other decay in the streets
- Criminal people nearby
- Lack of police presence/ not enough
- Lack of community ties/ cooperation with police

**Confidence in Police Scale = 5-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=strongly disagree) rate how much you agree with the following statements*

- BPD effectively prevents crime
- BPD effectively investigates crime
- I believe the police would respond quickly if I were to call about an emergency
- The police solve crimes quickly
- I trust the leadership of the BPD

**Satisfaction with Police Scale = 7-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=strongly disagree) rate how much you agree with the following statements*

- The police provide quality service to the residents of my community
- BPD officers treat people with respect
- BPD officers treat people fairly
- BPD officers are willing to help people
- BPD officers act professionally
- BPD officers use an appropriate amount of force
- BPD informs the public about major issues

**Active Prevention Scale = 5-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=strongly disagree) rate how much you agree with the following statements*

- It is important for community members to work with the police to solve local problems
- It is important for citizens to take an active role in preventing crime
- Crime prevention is the responsibility of the police; NOT citizens like me (reverse recoded)
- If I saw children in my neighborhood causing problems, I would likely first ask them to stop before I called the police
- If there was trash or illegal dumping going on in my neighborhood, I would likely try to take care of the problem myself before I called the police

**Call Police Scale = 4-items**

*Scale 1-4 (1=strongly disagree) rate how much you agree with the following statements*

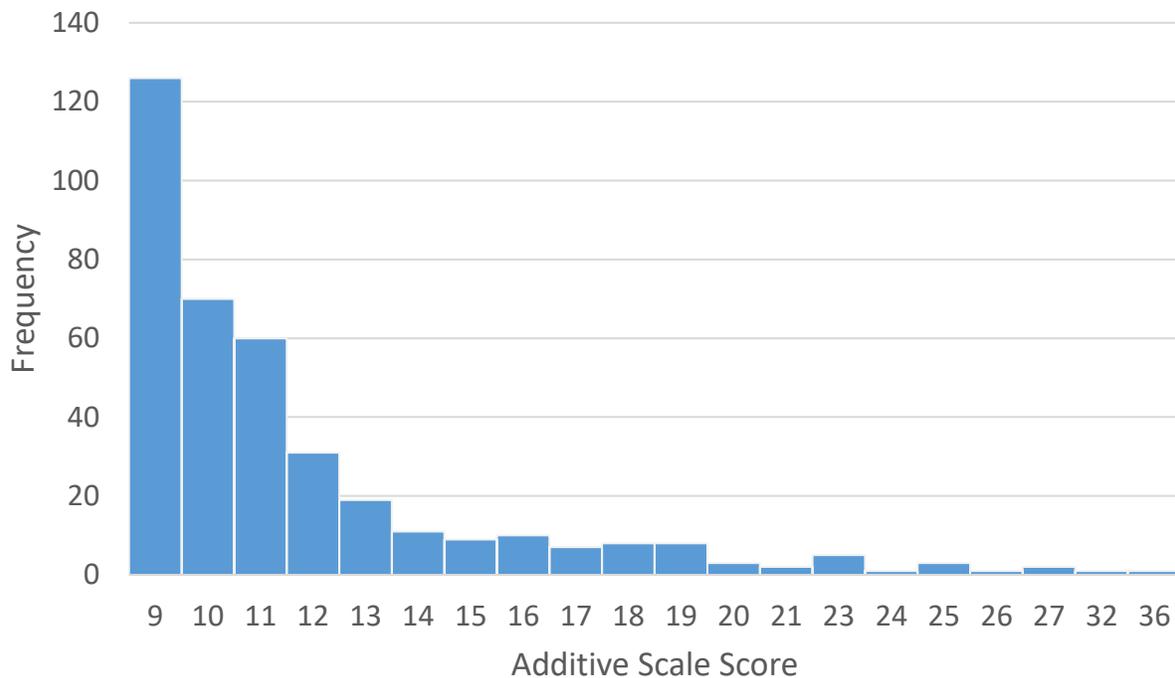
- If I witnessed or knew of a property crime like theft or burglary in my neighborhood, I would call the police
- If I witnessed or knew of a violent crime like robbery or assault in my neighborhood, I would call the police
- If I witnessed or knew of prostitution in my neighborhood, I would call the police
- If I witnessed or knew of drug dealing in my neighborhood, I would call the police

## Results: Perceptions of Crime

### Crime Problems

Overall, the vast majority of residents did not report many crime problems in their neighborhoods. The nine item scale for crime problems ranged from 9 (no problem) to 36 (big problem). The average score was 11.7, but the most common score for the additive scale was 9, meaning that the respondent reported no problem for all 9 items. Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of scores for the crime problem scale.

Figure 1. Citizen Perceptions of Crime Problems



Regarding individual items in the crime problem scale, the top three problems identified were burglary, drug sales, and drug use. However, even for these items, the majority of respondents felt they were only a “small problem” if any.

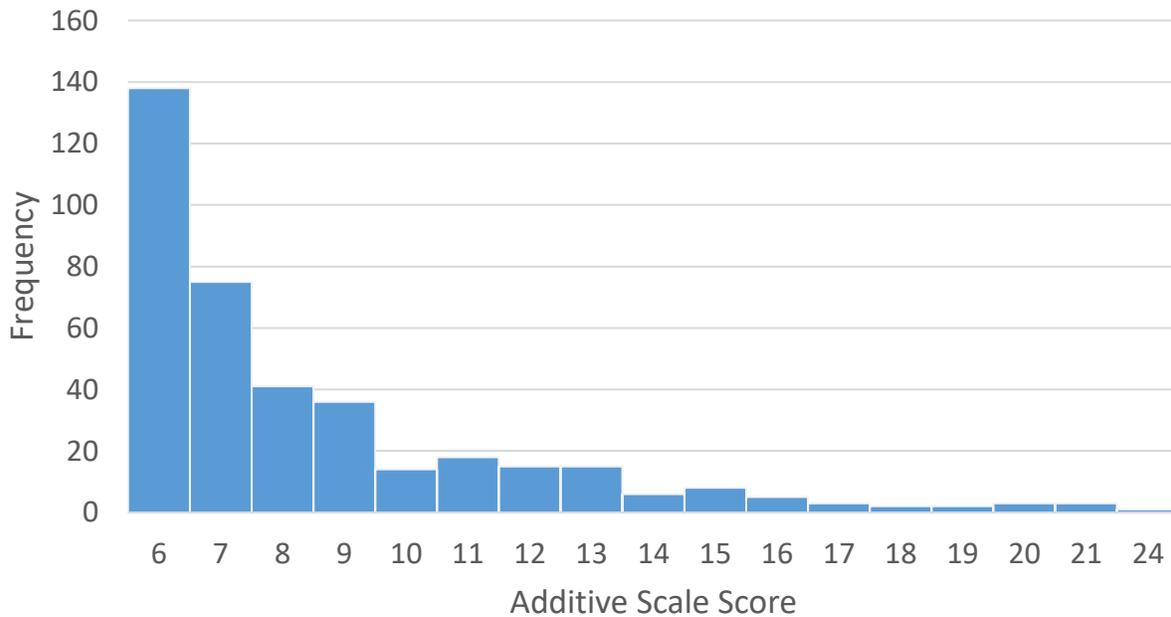
**Table 2. Neighborhood Crime Problems**

Crime	No Problem	Small Problem	Total that said no problem or small problem
Violent crime	76.7	17.7	94.4
Gangs	82.2	11.7	93.9
Drug sales	72.9	14.3	<b>87.2</b>
Drug use	78.7	11.9	90.6
Burglary	48.2	40.9	<b>89.1</b>
Stealing cars	82.6	14.1	96.7
Domestic violence	66.6	24.9	91.5
Prostitution	92.6	5.4	98.0
Hate crimes	90.1	8.1	98.2

**Physical Decay Problems**

Overall, the majority of respondents did not report many problems with physical decay in their neighborhoods. The scores on the additive scale ranged from 6 to 24. The average score was 8.5, but the most common score was 6, meaning that the respondent reported no problem for all six items. Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of scores for the physical decay problem.

**Figure 2. Citizen Perceptions of Physical Decay Problems**



Regarding individual items in the physical decay measure, the top three problems identified were vandalism, overgrown lots, and illegally parked cars. Even so, the majority of respondents rated these items as generally a “small problem” if any.

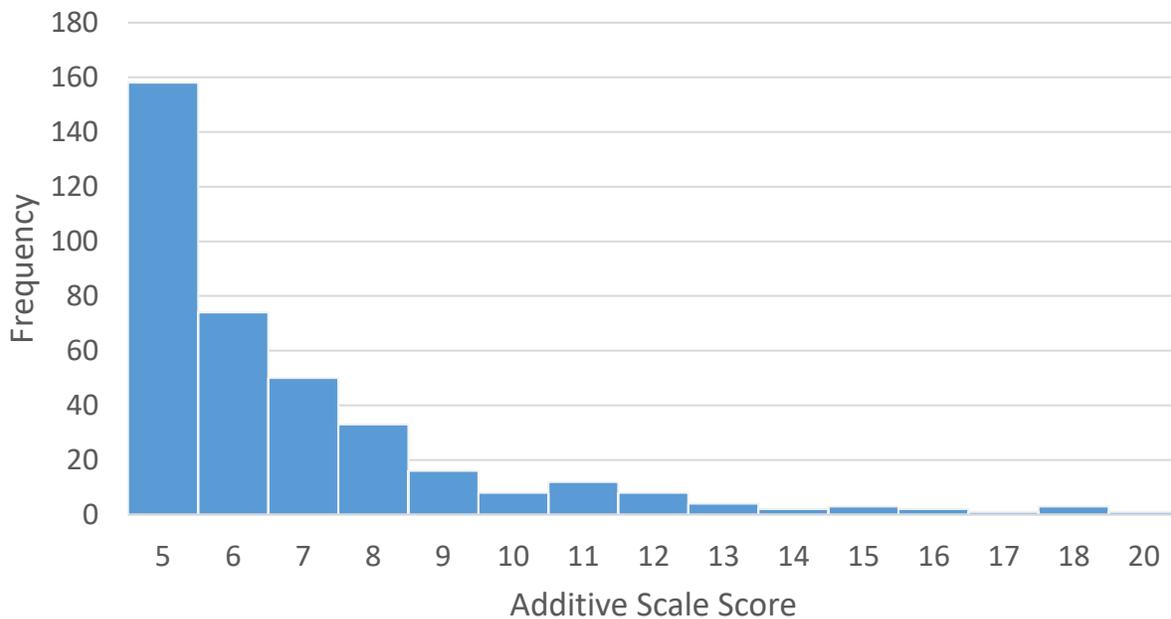
**Table 3. Neighborhood Physical Decay Problems**

Problem	No Problem	Small Problem	Total that said no problem or small problem
Abandoned Cars	83.8	10.7	94.4
Illegally Parked Cars	66.6	23.7	90.2
Rundown Buildings	73.1	17.3	90.4
Overgrown Lots	63.5	25.8	<b>89.4</b>
Graffiti	76.3	16.7	93.2
Vandalism	53.8	33.8	<b>87.6</b>

### Social Disorder Problems

Overall, the majority of respondents reported few problems regarding social disorder. The five item scale ranged from 5 to 20, with the average score being 6.8. The most common score was 5, meaning that the respondents reported no problems for all five items. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of scores for the social disorder scale.

**Figure 3. Citizen Perceptions of Social Disorder Problems**



Regarding individual items of social disorder, the top two identified problems were loud music, and drinking in public. Nonetheless, the vast majority reported only a “small problem” if any.

**Table 4. Neighborhood Social Disorder Problems**

Problem	No Problem	Small Problem	Total that said no problem or small problem
Loud Music	59.7%	25.8%	<b>85.6%</b>
Drinking in Public	72.9%	16.7%	<b>89.6%</b>
Truancy	73.1%	20.8%	93.9%
Homelessness	80.0%	13.3%	93.2%
Begging	86.1%	9.9%	95.9%

Table 5 presents the overall results of the three domains of neighborhood problems.

**Table 5. Overall Perceptions of Neighborhood Problems**

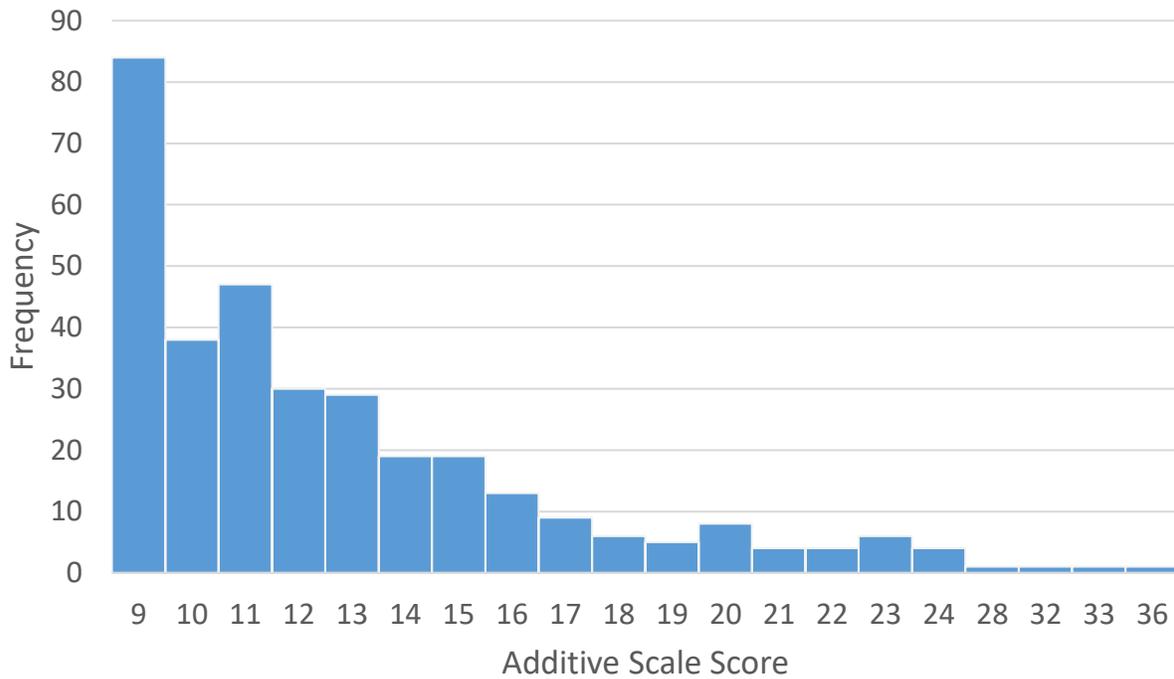
	<i>No problem</i>	<i>Small problem</i>	<i>Total that said no problem or small problem</i>
Crime Problem	79.9%	16.2%	96.1%
Physical decay	66.0%	27.0%	93.0%
Social Disorder	75.2%	20.5%	95.7%

## Results: Fear of Crime

### Fear of Crime in Neighborhoods

In general, respondents reported low fear of crime in their neighborhoods. The nine item scale ranged from 9 to 36. The average score was 12.8, but the most common score was 9, which meant that respondents reported no fear for all nine items. Figure 4 presents the distribution of scores for the fear of crime scale.

Figure 4. Citizen Fear of Crime



Of the nine items in the neighborhood fear scale, the top two items where respondents reported elevated levels of fear were walking or jogging alone at night and taking public transportation after dark. Even among these two items, the majority of respondents reported that they were “only somewhat afraid.”

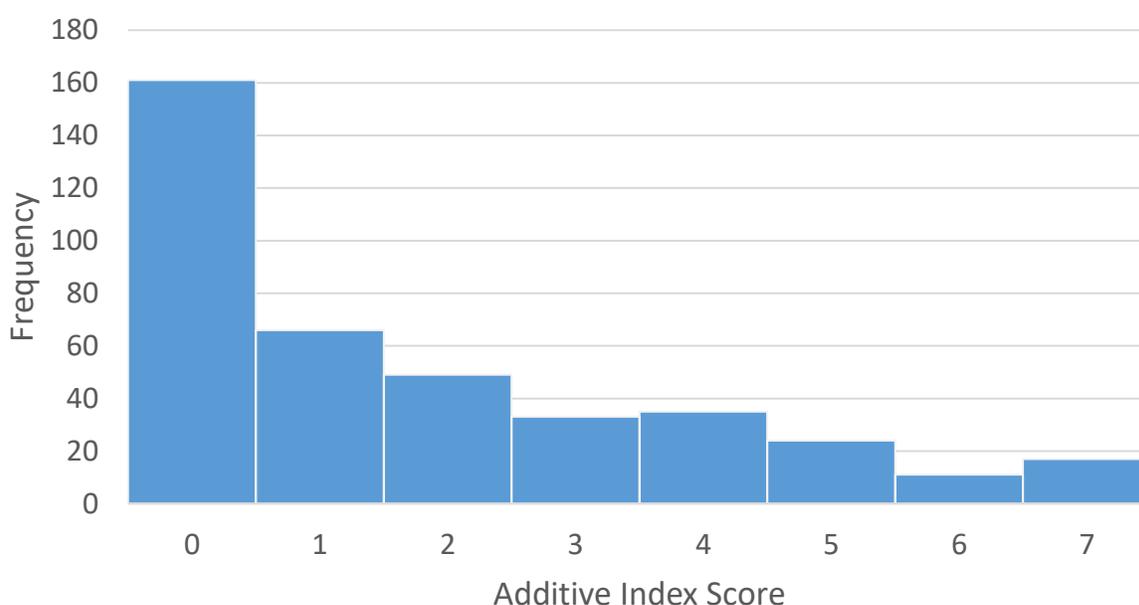
**Table 6. Neighborhood Fear Situations**

Fear Situation	Not Afraid at All	Only somewhat afraid	Total that said not or somewhat afraid
Home alone after dark	66.4%	27.3%	93.7%
Home alone during the day	86.6%	11.6%	98.2%
Parking car overnight	61.6%	27.3%	91.2%
Taking public transportation after dark	48.7%	24.7%	<b>86.4%</b>
Taking public transportation during the day	76.5%	7.6%	96.8%
Visiting park/playground	78.3%	16.4%	95.4%
Walking/jogging after dark	34.4%	48.2%	<b>82.6%</b>
Walking/jogging during the day	84.6%	12.6%	97.5%

## Characteristics of Unsafe Places

In general, most respondents reported few characteristics of places that made them fearful. As fear of crime in neighborhoods was generally low, this is consistent. The seven item index ranged from 0 to 7 with an average of 1.8. However, the most common response was 0, indicating that none of the specified characteristics made respondents feel unsafe. Figure 5 presents the distribution of responses.

Figure 5. Citizen Perceptions of Sources of Danger



Of the seven items, the top three characteristics that respondents reported made them feel unsafe were poor lighting in streets and lots, places to hide, and garbage and litter in the streets.

**Table 7. Characteristics of Dangerous Places: Which of the following make them dangerous?**

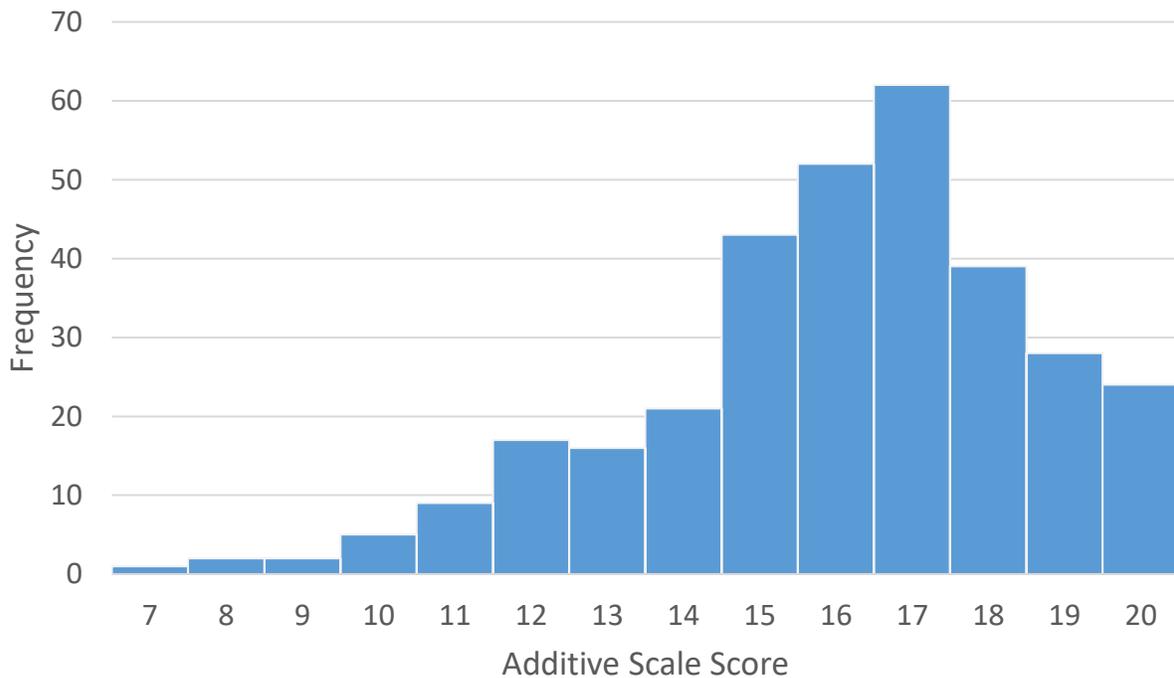
	<i>Percent of sample that said yes</i>
Poor lighting on streets or around buildings and parking lots	<b>37.9%</b>
Abandoned or rundown buildings or lots	17.9%
Places to hide such as an alley, behind a building, etc.	<b>35.2%</b>
Garbage, litter, and other decay in the streets	<b>25.3%</b>
Criminal people nearby	22.3%
Lack of police presence/ not enough	23.5%
Lack of community ties/ cooperation with police	17%

## Results: Perceptions of the Police

### Confidence in the Police

In general, the majority of respondents have high levels of confidence in the Bethlehem police. The 5-item scale ranged from 5 to 20, with higher values indicating greater confidence. The average score was 16, and the most common score was 17, indicating that respondents have high levels of confidence in the police. Figure 6 presents the distribution of scores for the confidence in police measure.

Figure 6. Citizen Confidence in BPD



Of the five items in the confidence in police scale, the item with the lowest levels of confidence in the police was that the “police solve crimes quickly.” However, a large majority, 74.3%, reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Overall, the respondents have high levels of confidence in the police across all 5 items.

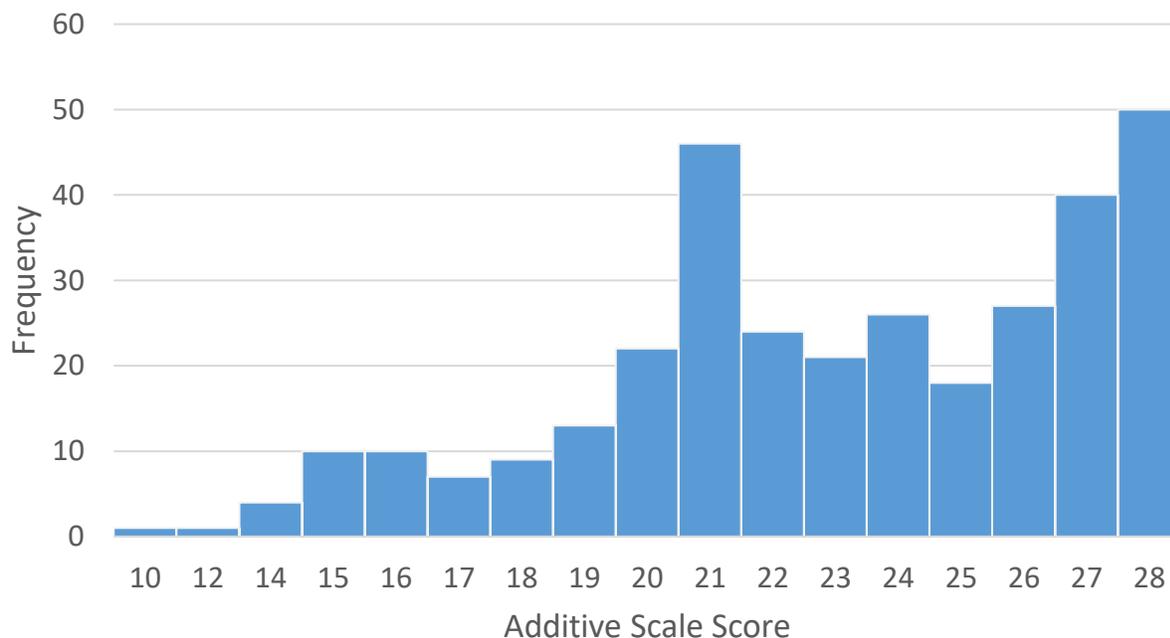
**Table 8. Confidence in BPD**

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Total that said agree or strongly agree</i>
Prevent crime	56.6%	27.9%	84.5%
Investigating crime	50.3%	34.9%	85.2%
Police respond quickly if I call for an emergency	45.9%	46.9%	92.8%
Police solve crimes quickly	62.6%	11.7%	<b>74.3%</b>
I trust police leadership	46.5%	48.3%	94.8%

**Satisfaction with Police**

Overall, respondents were generally quite satisfied with the Bethlehem Police. The 7-item satisfaction scale ranged from 7 to 28, with higher values indicating greater satisfaction with the police. The average score was 23, but the most common value was 28, indicating that respondents generally have high levels of satisfaction with the police. Figure 7 presents the distribution of scores for the citizen satisfaction measure.

**Figure 7. Citizen Satisfaction with BPD**



Of the seven items on the satisfaction scale, the item with the lowest level of satisfaction was that “BPD informs the public of major issues.” Even for this item, a majority, 66.7%, still agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In general, respondents reported satisfaction with the police across all seven items.

**Table 9. Satisfaction with BPD**

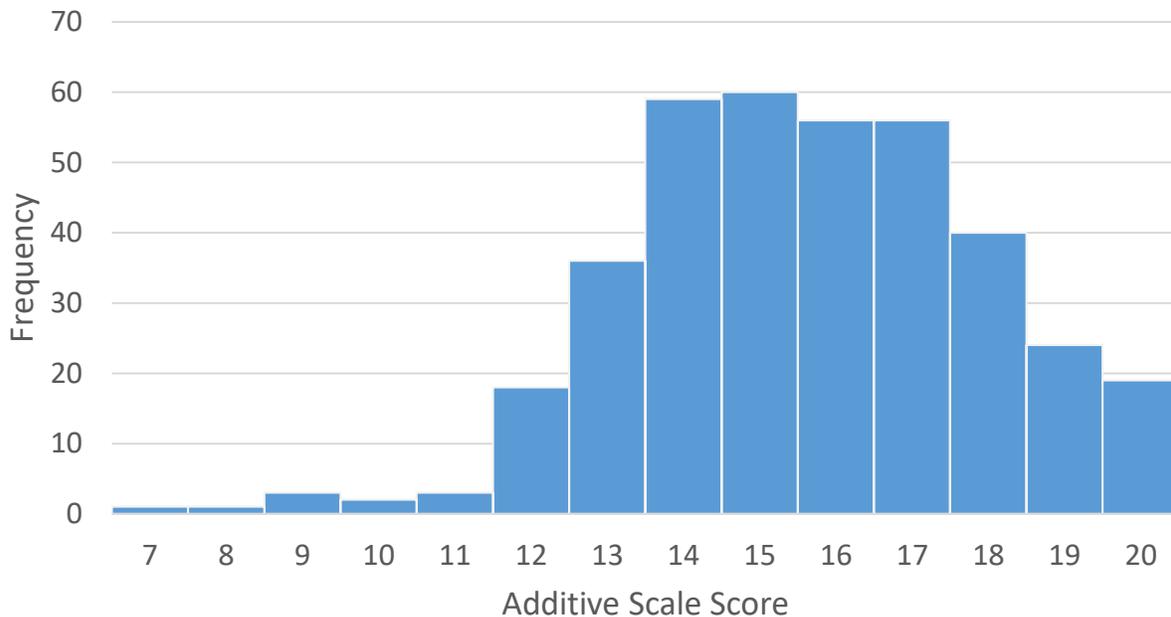
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Total that said agree or strongly agree</i>
Police provide quality service to residents	47.8%	46.5%	94.3%
Officers treat people with respect	50.1%	39.0%	89.1%
Officers treat people fairly	51.1%	37.2%	88.3%
Officers are willing to help people	36.7%	55.1%	91.8%
Officers act professionally	40.1%	49.9%	90.0%
Officers use an appropriate amount of force	49.3%	39.7%	89.0%
BPD informs public of major issues	38.5%	28.2%	<b>66.7%</b>

## **Results: Citizens’ Attitudes of Cooperating with Police**

### **Taking an Active Role in Crime Prevention**

We also measured how citizens perceive their roles in taking measures towards preventing crime. The 5-item crime prevention scale ranged from a possible score of 5 to 20, with the average score being 15.6 and the most common score being 15. Respondents were somewhat mixed on certain items in crime prevention roles, but overall the majority responded that they did believe that it was important to take an active role in preventing crime. Figure 8 presents the distribution of scores for the active crime prevention measure.

Figure 8. Citizen Perceptions of Participation in Crime Prevention



Of the five items on the citizen active crime prevention scale, the item with the least support was reported for taking care of any trash or illegal dumping problems before calling the police. Only 42% agreed or strongly agreed that they would take an active role in that particular problem. The other item with more mixed support was the statement that crime prevention is the responsibility of citizens. While there was not as much support for this statement as some of the other items, a large majority, 74.2%, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, the majority of citizens believe in taking active roles in crime prevention, with the exception of matters related to trash and dumping.

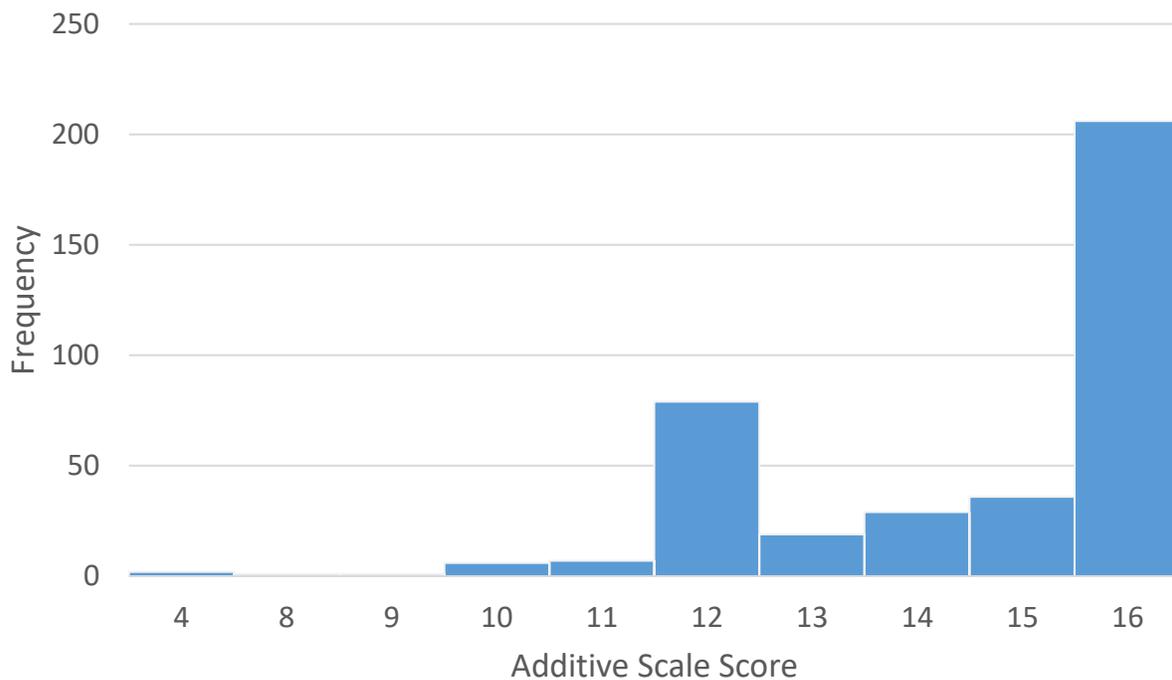
Table 10. Citizen Roles in Active Crime Prevention

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Total that said agree or strongly agree</i>
Citizens should work with the police	30.4%	68.1%	98.5%
Citizens should take role in preventing crime	36.2%	60.5%	96.7%
Citizens are responsible for crime prevention	50.0%	24.2%	<b>74.2%</b>
If fighting, I would ask children to stop before calling the police	47.6%	32.6%	80.2%
If I saw dumping or trash problems, I would take care of it before calling the police	28.5%	13.6%	<b>42.1%</b>

## Citizen Willingness to Call the Police

There were four items on the willingness to call police scale. The scores ranged from a possible score of 1 to 16. The average was 14.5 but the most common value was 16, indicating that respondents strongly agreed that they would call police on all four items. Overall, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they would call the police. Figure 9 presents the distribution for the willingness to call the police measure.

Figure 9. Citizen Willingness to Call the Police



Regarding the four items, a large majority either agreed or strongly agreed that they would call police across all problems. The lowest percent reported was for prostitution, but even so, 92.5% reported they would call the police if they knew of or witnessed prostitution in their neighborhoods. In general, respondents were very willing to call the police.

**Table 10. Citizen Willingness to Call the Police**

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Total that said agree or strongly agree</i>
Would call the police for property crime	27.7%	70.7%	98.4%
Would call the police for violent crime	23.7%	75.3%	99.0%
Would call the police for prostitution	33.4%	59.1%	<b>92.5%</b>
Would call the police for drug dealing	28.6%	65.2%	93.8%

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The Bethlehem Community Survey was conducted to examine resident perceptions of crime and other neighborhood problems as well as examine general confidence in and satisfaction with the Bethlehem Police Department. The resulting sample of respondents was not entirely representative of Bethlehem city residents as a whole. Specifically, residents from the 18015 zipcode, residents under the age of 35 years-old, and minority residents were under-represented. As such, it is difficult to estimate how well results can be generalized to the Bethlehem residential population as a whole. However, of those who responded, it is clear that the overwhelming majority feel safe in their neighborhoods and are content with the Bethlehem police. With the exception of speeding and problems with garbage and litter and some vandalism, respondents described very few crime, physical decay, or social disorder problems in their neighborhoods. Respondents conveyed that they would like to be better informed of major issues in their neighborhoods, but are otherwise very confident, satisfied, and willing to cooperate with the Bethlehem Police Department, suggesting strong police-community relations.