

March 2015

A View from the Street

a survey of people with no fixed address to complement VicPD's 2014 community survey of attitudes towards policing in Victoria

Acknowledgment of the territories

This survey was done on the traditional territories of the Lkwungen (Esquimalt and Songhees), Malahat, Pacheedaht, Scia'new, T'Sou-ke and WSÁNEĆ, (Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout, Tseycum) peoples.

About Society of Living Illicit Drug Users

The Society of Living Illicit Drug Users (SOLID) is run by and for people who use(d) illicit drugs (PUID). SOLID believes in providing practical harm reduction strategies to improve the well-being of the community. Our work is focused on challenging personal and systemic injustices by addressing stigma, discrimination, and the multiple inequalities that many individuals in our community face.

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Why this research matters

The Victoria Police Department (VicPD) conducted a Community Survey during March - April 2014 aimed at understanding community experiences of local policing and perceptions of safety in Victoria. Their survey is intended to inform VicPD's strategic planning for 2015. Due to the mail-out nature of the VicPD survey, we recognized this survey would not reach individuals with no fixed address. We also recognized that feedback from this demographic is a critical component in informing strategic planning regarding community policing (as people with no fixed address have among the most frequent interactions with police). To address this, we delivered a modified version of the VicPD survey to 110 individuals with no fixed address (ie. people who are homeless or transiently housed) from May to August 2014. Our intention is that the valuable experiences of individuals with no fixed address will inform ongoing oversight and review of processes concerning VicPD operations.

Our research process

This report summarizes the survey responses of 110 individuals without fixed addresses. We conducted our survey during morning and evening outreach at SOLID, at Our Place, at the Rainbow Kitchen, and at AIDS Vancouver Island during evening drop-in. These locations were selected as key locations accessed by individuals with no fixed address. During a period of 5-10 minutes, individuals were asked 15 multiple choice and short answer questions, and their responses recorded by the interviewer. Two bus tickets and a small pouch of tobacco were provided to respondents as a small compensation for their time. Interview data was anonymous and no names were recorded at any point.

Research Results

Key finding #1: People with no fixed address have very high rates of contact with VicPD

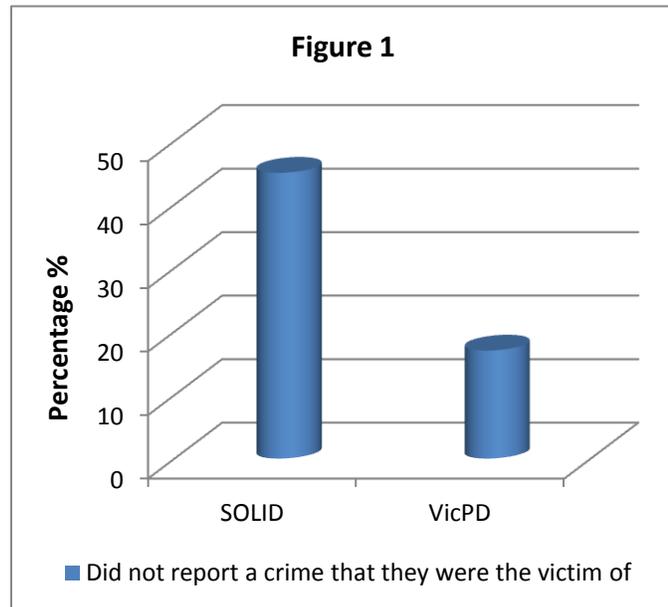
76% of respondents had contact with the Victoria Police within the last 12 months, and 9% had contact 1 to 2 years ago. This means that 85% of respondents were in contact with the police within the past 2 years.

(SOLID Q7, VPD Q14, no police results)

Key finding #2: People with no fixed address are *much less likely* to report being a victim of a crime than those with housing and higher incomes

When asked if they were a victim of a crime in the past five years that they had not reported, 45% of respondents to our survey stated they had not reported this experience.

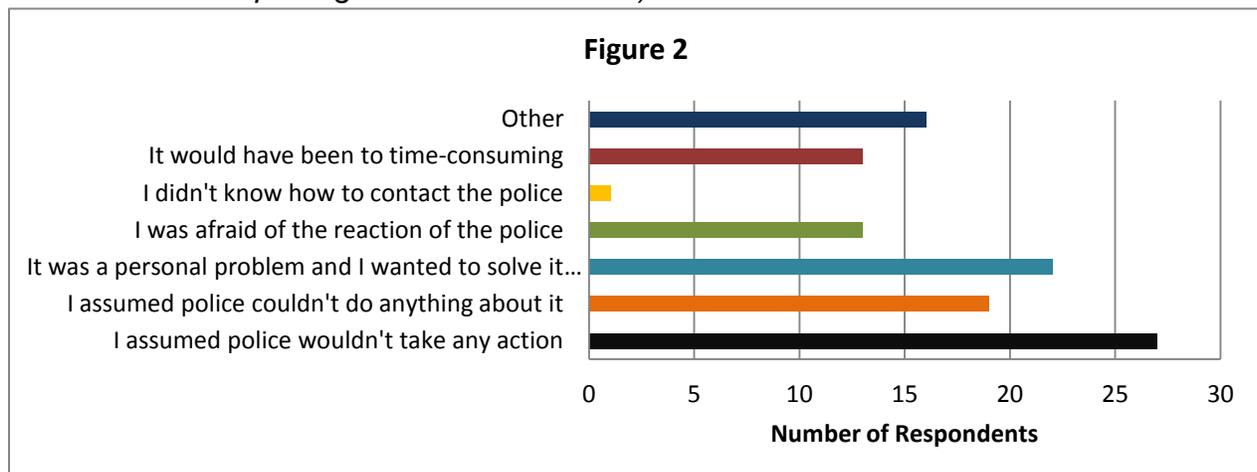
By contrast, 17% of respondents to the same question in VicPD's survey stated that they had not reported their experience to the police (see figure 1). (SOLID Q4, VPD Q11 / slide 23)



Reasons for not reporting were most often tied to a sense that these

experiences either would not or could not be addressed by police (see figure 2)

(SOLID Q5, An undisclosed number of respondents identified `didn't know how to contact police` and `assumed police couldn't or wouldn't do anything about it` as reasons for not reporting. VPD Q11 / slide 23)

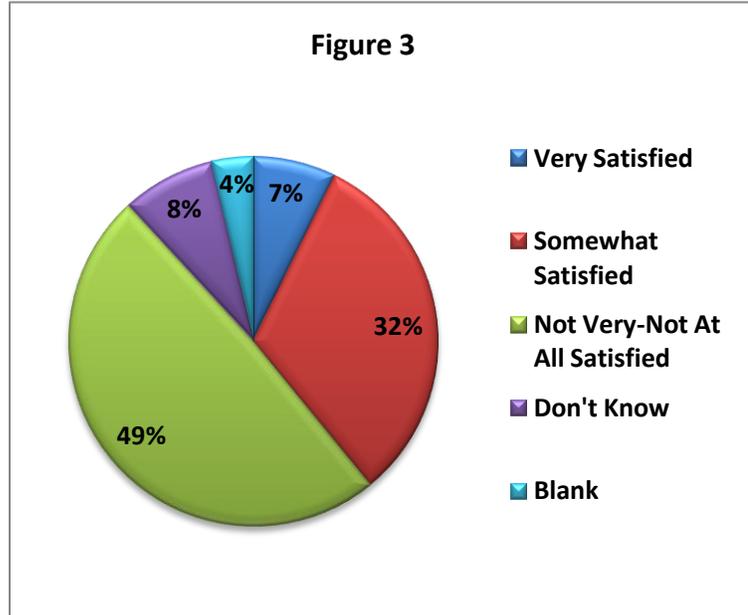


Key finding #3: Overall satisfaction with Victoria Police is much lower among those with no fixed address than for those with housing and higher incomes

When asked how satisfied they were overall with the work of the VicPD, 7% of respondents to our survey reported being 'very satisfied', and 32% reported being 'somewhat satisfied.'

By contrast, 87% of respondents to the VicPD survey reported being somewhat to very satisfied with police (SOLID Q12, VPD Q19/slide 45).

49% of respondents expressed being 'not very' to 'not at all satisfied' with the work of the Victoria Police. (see figure 3)



The relatively low rate of satisfaction with policing among persons with no fixed address was linked to the following responses about feelings of safety and fairness (see figure 4, next page).

Many responses are the inverse of those of respondents to the VicPD survey, showing significantly more strain and mistrust in relationships between people with no fixed address and Victoria police.

Some of the most contrasting experiences between respondents to our survey and respondents to the VicPD survey involve the degree of comfort talking with a police officer, and the sense of appropriate use of force and authority by the Victoria police (see figure 4, next page).

(SOLID Q 11; VPD Q18/ slide 57)

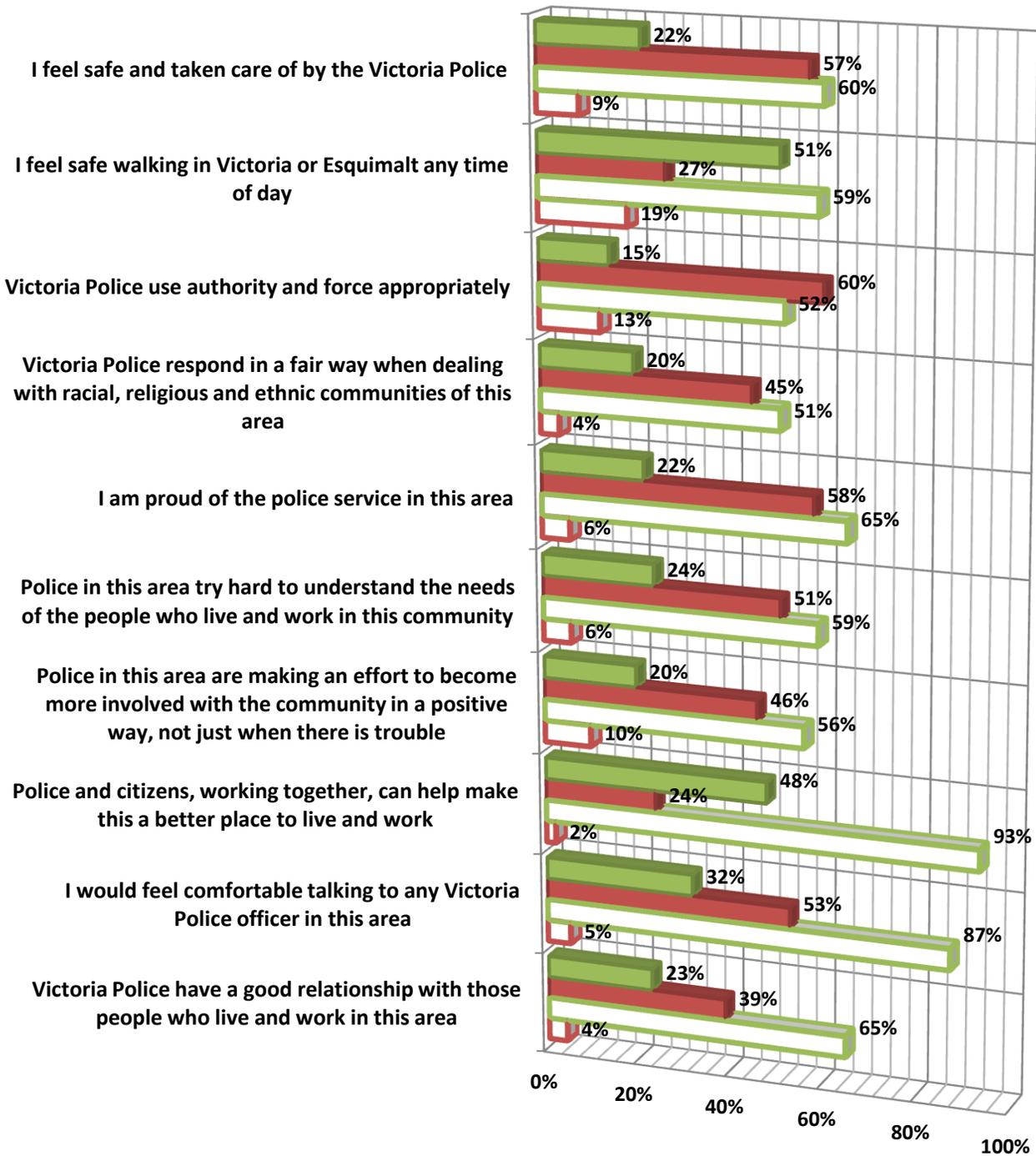
Figure 4

■ Agree-Completely Agree (SOLID)

■ Agree-Completely Agree (VicPD)

■ Disagree-Completely Disagree (SOLID)

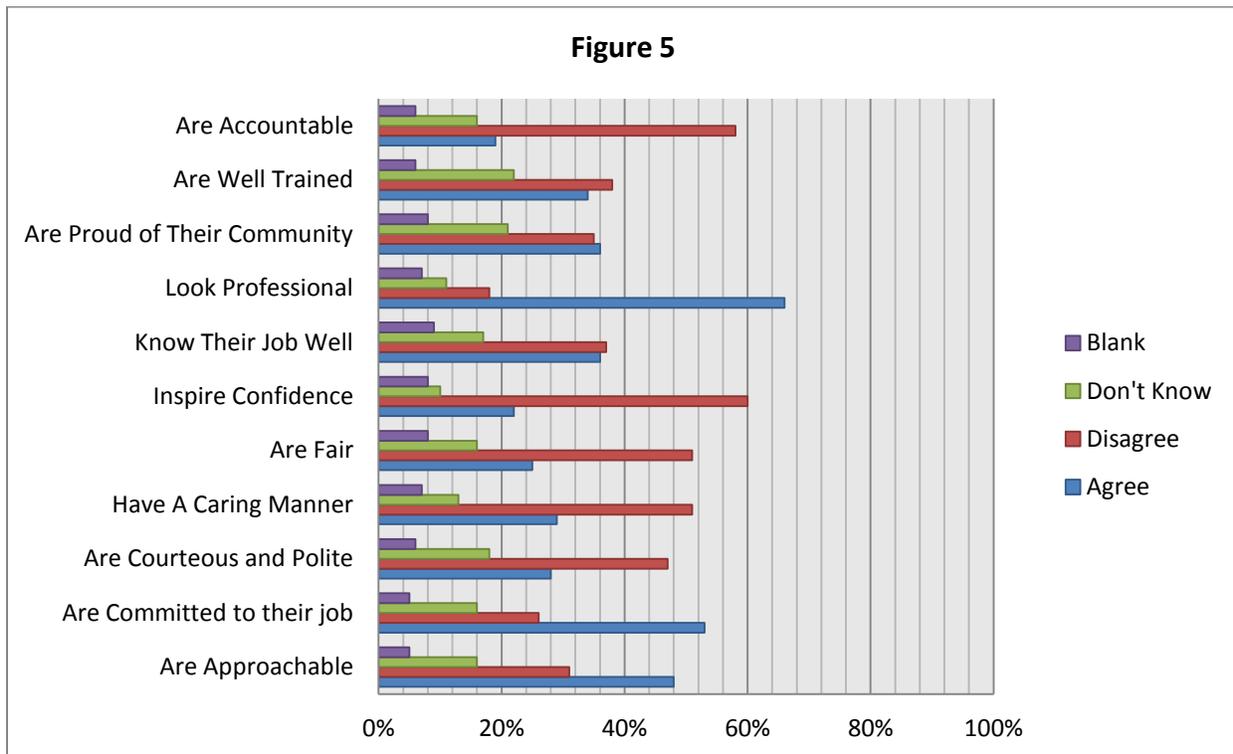
■ Disagree-Completely Disagree (VicPD)



This greater mistrust and lack of confidence of the police among people of no fixed address is supported by responses to the following questions regarding impressions of police accountability and approachability. (figure 5) {note: percentages to VicPD survey are not yet available for comparison}

Notably, while 48% of respondents identified the VicPD as approachable, only 19% agreed officers are accountable, only 28% agreed officers are courteous and polite, and only 25% agreed officers are fair.

(SOLID Q10, VPD Q17/slide 43)



Key finding #4: Discrimination and lack of respect by police officers are high-priority issues identified by people with no fixed address in Victoria

When asked what problem Victoria police should pay closer attention to, the majority of responses addressed experiences of discrimination and a feeling of disrespect from police officers, based on a feeling this discrimination and disrespect are linked to a person's appearance as poor or homeless.

(SOLID Q13 & 14, VicPD Q22/slide 70)

The following provides a snapshot of concerns

The way they treat natives

They are not respectful if there is a language barrier.

They need to address the real issues going on in the community instead of harassing the homeless so much.

They spend a lot of time telling us where we can't sleep but they don't spend any time telling us where we can sleep.

They constantly harass us homeless and treat us with disrespect and bully us

The way they take the law into their own hands and beat people up. They should be more neutral.

I feel physically safe, but emotionally and morally looked down upon

Them being rude and saying sarcastic comments about me...

Seeing them harass the homeless and using abusive language and writing tickets repetitively

We have personal problems but if we were able to trust the police, things would be a lot better.

They need to be more caring and respectful towards citizens and not be so mentally and physically abusive

Conclusion & Recommendations

Too often the experiences of marginalized individuals are written off because marginalization is mistaken for criminality. The individuals we spoke with were not criminals, though many do find themselves at odds with city camping and loitering bylaws simply because they have no other place to go. Further, it's important to recognize that the Community Survey holds community *perceptions* of police as a pressing issue in its own right. This means that claims about inappropriate use of force or abuse of authority don't have to be substantiated to be taken seriously as a pressing issue of perceptions of policing among the street community in Victoria.

Though the results of our survey may not come as a surprise – to police, to housed residents and to those currently living with no fixed address or with experience within the street community – these responses can and should be taken as part of a process for developing a more open and productive conversation about reforms required to improve relationships between police and people with no fixed address in Victoria.

- 1** Ensure organizations representing people with direct and frequent experience of police contact have a seat at the table for police meetings and processes aimed at reviewing and assessing policing practices.
- 2** Enact monitoring measures to deter stops and searches of people who are street-involved during non-criminal encounters with police: ie. Contact Receipts, recording the name and badge number of the officer doing the stop, the reason for the stop, and the questions that are asked of the person being stopped.
- 3** Cease enforcement of (while repealing) city bylaws that encourage ticketing of people who are street-involved for camping and for otherwise existing in public spaces (*Bylaw Enforcement Policy Erecting Temporary Shelters in Public Spaces, Streets and Traffic Bylaw NO. 10-061 s.103, and Streets and Traffic 'Chattel' Bylaw 09-079 s.102*)

** For VicPD survey results - <https://vicpd.ca/aboutus/strategic-plan/community-survey/>