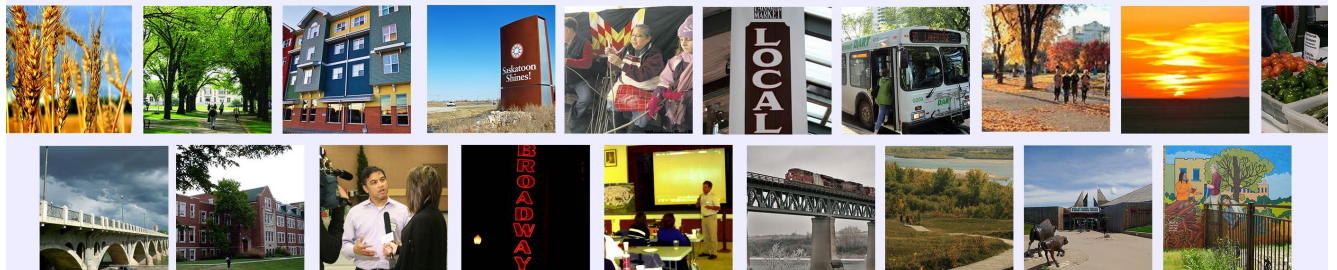




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COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

Toward a Community of Safety and Care: Exploring Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon

Isobel M. Findlay, Renée Penney, Kate Loseth,
Daniel Owusu Nkrumah, John Hansen,
Elisabeth Miller, Michael Kowalchuk, Jonathon
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Community-University Institute for Social Research

Building healthy, sustainable communities

Since 1999, the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR)—formally established as a university-wide interdisciplinary research centre in 2000—has remained true to its mission of facilitating “partnerships between the university and the larger community in order to engage in relevant social research that supports a deeper understanding of our communities and that reveals opportunities for improving our quality of life.”

Strategic Research Directions

CUI SR is committed to collaborative research and to accurate, objective reporting of research results in the public domain, taking into account the needs for confidentiality in gathering, disseminating, and storing information. CUI SR has five strategic research priorities:

1. Community Sustainability
2. Social Economy and Social Relations
3. Rural-Urban Community Links
4. Indigenous Community Development
5. Community-University Partnerships

These strategic directions build on the research priorities/ modules—quality of life indicators, community health determinants and health policy, and community economic development—that led to the formation of CUI SR to build capacity among researchers, CBOs, and citizenry.

CUI SR research projects are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), local CBOs, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

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Knowledge mobilization: CUI SR disseminates research through website, social media, presentations and workshops, community events, fact sheets, posters, blogs, case studies, reports, journal articles, monographs, arts-based methods, and listserv.

Hub bringing university and community together to address social issues: CUI SR facilitates partnerships with community agencies.

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Student training: CUI SR provides training and guidance to undergraduate and graduate students and community researchers and encourages community agencies to provide community orientation in order to promote reciprocal benefits.

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Community-University Institute for Social Research

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- Safe Community Action Alliance
- Downtown Business Improvement District (BID)
- The Lighthouse Supported Living
- Metis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Inc.
- Friendship Inn
- Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
- Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC)
- Saskatoon Fire Department
- Saskatoon Police Service
- Saskatoon Tribal Council Live Well/Mental Health Clinic
- Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. (CUMFI)
- Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) and City of Saskatoon Mayor's Office
- Population Health Promotion, Population Health, Saskatchewan Health Authority
- Saskatoon Public Library
- Community Support Program

To all who completed the online survey and/or took the time to share their experience and perspectives in interviews and focus groups, we offer our sincere thanks. You have importantly enriched understandings of public safety in downtown Saskatoon.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the face of ongoing concerns about public safety in Saskatoon, as in cities around Canada, efforts are underway to revitalize downtown and make it a safe, welcoming, vibrant, and attractive place where people can “live, work, learn, spend their leisure time and play.”

Following World War II, city centres around the world were hollowed out through neoliberal processes of disinvestment in favour of privatization, deregulation, and market capitalism’s presumed trickle-down benefits. This disinvestment, particularly within older inner-city neighbourhoods, where community design concentrated Indigenous and racialized communities and perpetuated inequalities, created a crisis of housing divides where families were occupying substandard housing while resources were invested in affluent suburbs.

A legacy of these housing divides has been called the “politics of exclusion” that has entailed “a bad image of ‘affordable housing’,” fears about impacts on “property values and the invasion of the poor”—despite the right to housing recognized by international United Nations covenant and by the 2019 National Housing Strategy Act. Yet, those in greatest need continue to have difficulties accessing safe, affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing while Indigenous peoples continue to be disproportionately impacted by systemic and structural forces in ways often invisible to settler Canadians.

Such thinking about affordable housing and encroachments of the poor is replicated today in fears about “public nuisance behaviour” among people displaced in 2020 by the closure of City Centre Inn and Suites to the Lighthouse and again when the Lighthouse shelter services were

defunded and the unhoused relocated to the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) Wellness Centre on 1st Avenue and then to Fairhaven where blame for harms (despite police crime data showing no increase in crime) has been targeted at STC Chief Mark Arcand rather than the provincial government that leased the property to STC; nor do the complaints relate to concerns about those experiencing homelessness and facing frigid, even deadly, winter weather.

Even when crime statistics tell a different story, fears persist about public safety. But criminologists warn that the perception of crime does not match Western Canadian city realities. If the media report more violent crimes, they remain rare in Canada and disorder calls should not be confused with violent crime. Meanwhile, hate crimes continue to be underreported and those at greatest risk are Indigenous and racialized people. The 2022 PIT Count reported an increase in homelessness to 550 (from 475 in 2018), including an even more disturbing 90.1% of Indigenous people. In addition, 68% reported experiencing violence; 100% of trans people reported being victims of violence. The increasing incidence of hate crimes against the LGBTQ2S+ community has motivated the 5-year, \$100 million federal action plan to address the ongoing inequities.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), the problem of homelessness is the result of a colonial legacy of land appropriation, dominant thinking in our institutions, intergenerational trauma related to “cultural genocide” manifesting in health and addictions issues, and ongoing structural and systemic discrimination. Despite the right to adequate housing, housing is being treated largely as a commodity to be “financialized,” impacting negatively housing access and affordability. In Canada, systems failures (child welfare, foster care, custodial institutions) continue to compound housing precarity and other challenges.

Addressing the root causes of the complex, intersecting challenges can be effectively addressed only with a major community effort respecting the principle of “Nothing about us without us” and taking an intersectoral, interdisciplinary, intercultural, and intersectional approach to build on existing strengths and assets and produce new capacities and energies in the process. An intersectional analysis is critical to exposing and understanding how structural inequities produce and reproduce the material realities that shape unique experiences of disadvantage and oppression—and to generating solutions. Then we might rebuild together good relations guided by Indigenous thinking to “deconstruct” state policy and bureaucratic silos.

Building on City of Saskatoon street activity baseline perception studies, this mixed methods research study explores factors driving inequities and understandings of as well as perceptions of safety to develop an evidence-informed, collaborative response to public safety in downtown Saskatoon. A literature review outlines existing inequities and ongoing efforts to address public safety.

Defining Public Safety

Public safety is widely understood as about protecting the public from crimes, disaster, and other dangers so inimical to economic prosperity in a responsibility typically assigned to governments. The primary goal of achieving public safety is, then, widely understood as preventing danger and protecting the property and wellbeing of individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities, a view represented in Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners community conversations on the biggest challenges facing public safety. They highlighted increasing social issues impacting community safety and difficulties accessing supports when there were no

24/7/365 coordinated outreach services and policing was not equipped to deal with the social issues. There were calls for more visible police presence, better training to deal with diverse groups, and trust building as well as strengthened compassion, respect, and professionalism. While some respondents simply wanted an end to crime, there was also recognition of the responsibilities of “a more caring community” and a request for “respect for basic human rights and respect for the Canadian Charter.”

Consistent with this human rights perspective, it has been argued that public safety is not just about prevention but “depends on . . . food, clean water and air, housing, a basic income and the means to obtain it--an education and a job” along with “health care, health insurance, and the freedom from discrimination.” This expanded notion of public safety elevates these broader governmental responsibilities while showing the harms from their neglect.

Valuing Public Spaces/ Public Assets

Public spaces play significant roles in people’s lives and wellbeing. Urban centres are supposed to be “residence hubs” in addition to being places for “civic interactions” but over time policy has encouraged a movement to the periphery that has led to decline of urban centres. Such is their importance to the health of the economy, ecology, and community, that public spaces represent an “important asset” needing attentive, integrated management but facing academic neglect, especially in the context of United Nations sustainable development goal 11 and target 7: “by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.” Instead, it is

argued that those spaces are increasingly privatized as consumption spaces so long as there is an economic return with negative impacts on democratic access and participation.

A 2021 Saskatoon study identified key assets including 21st Street East with bars, restaurants, retail, and landmarks; the Saskatchewan River and Meewasin Valley as natural sites of special events and activities; and a convenient lifestyle of diverse activities and amenities within walking distance. The public library, art gallery, and theatre were considered worthy of investment, while a desire was expressed for diversified housing, repurposing of vacant or underutilized buildings, high quality building and streetscapes, a pet-friendly downtown, and outdoor green public spaces supportive of socializing year round, and a downtown brand emphasizing community and cohesion.

Understanding Ongoing Colonial Legacies

The systemic and structural forces marginalizing and excluding racialized and other vulnerable populations remain largely invisible to those who have inherited their understanding of place and their relation to it from what is called “the dominant epistemology of settler society” that “provides racialized, anthropocentric, and capitalistic understandings of *places*.” The pathway to justice is to challenge these normalizing processes in a new understanding of “how place intersects with race, gender, and colonialism”—and how settler “homemaking” has been achieved “at the expense of previously dominant Indigenous worldviews.” These studies on settler colonialism build on literature on the raced, gendered, and classed views of land, private property, value extraction, and economic “progress” associated with economic modernity’s

hierarchies that rationalized settlers' theft of land, displacement of Indigenous peoples, segregation and surveillance, and exploitation of racialized and vulnerable communities.

Learning Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

In cities across Canada, homelessness has become a more visible problem on city streets, in parks and other public spaces—a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic: workers lost their jobs, especially those in the bottom earnings quartile, widening the gap between rich and poor. If COVID-19 exposed and intensified existing inequities, it also added to the vulnerability of the marginalized by exacerbating their suffering in cities that left them with “*nowhere to go*.” The COVID-19 pandemic has also spawned “shadow pandemics” such as violence against women and the isolation, technology deficits, housing and food insecurity that spawn them. Public health measures (lockdowns and sheltering at home) designed to protect proved a further source of danger for women and reduced access to services. COVID-19 cut the marginalized off from lifelines such as the public library and public washrooms—a public safety **and** a health and a human rights issue. During the pandemic, Saskatoon’s public washrooms were closed for over 100 days leading a committee to study the issue, surveying 300 residents online in 2021, 94% of whom favoured a washroom model available 24/7/365 and 90% favouring a downtown location.

If COVID-19 was especially damaging, even lethal, for some, including seniors in long-term care, racialized people, people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, and, disturbingly, “essential workers,” it also taught many about our interdependence and the extent to which our health depends on the behaviours and actions of others, others’ knowledge and expertise, and the importance of an “ethics of care.”

Mobilizing Collaboration

COVID-19 has indeed reminded us that historically crises have led to renewed cooperation. In addition to the Saskatoon Public Washroom Advisory Committee, other collaborations were mobilized to respond to the safety and needs of Saskatoon citizens. Housing First initiatives continued, along with Rapid re-housing, Indigenous-led initiatives (such as CUMFI's Outreach Community Support Teams and Mobile Housing and Community Resource Centre or STC's Sawēyihotān project), or outreach services by EGADZ and the Health bus, and other prevention strategies. Yet homelessness and housing precarity persist despite innovative collaborations including the Safe Community Action Alliance and the 35-person Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID-19 emerging from the pandemic to fill information and service gaps.

Reorienting Policing and Protective Services

Grassroots movements from civil rights to Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, and Every Child Matters have raised their voices about inequities and injustice in systems and structures, powerfully underlining what Anatole France made clear about equality centuries ago: “The majestic equality of the law forbids rich and poor alike from pissing in the streets, sleeping under bridges, and stealing bread.” Their voices have highlighted an injustice system that has bred fear and suspicion among marginalized and racialized communities so disproportionately overrepresented in Canada's prison system. They are also often so overpoliced and underprotected that they are reluctant to report when they have themselves been victimized with the result, for example, that sexual assault cases are seriously underreported.

Recognizing the larger systemic and structural factors that impact their roles and responsibilities, Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) is part of collaborative efforts to keep people safe in the city, emphasizing “holistic” approaches deploying Alternative Response Officers (AROs)—in addition to the Community Support Officers (CSOs)—augmented by the Community Mobilization Unit introduced in 2020 to patrol and build relationships with community organizations in a move away from an “enforcement” model. The Riversdale and downtown plan focuses on relationships and referrals to housing and other services, collaborating with Sawēyihotān Mobile Services to support the most vulnerable. The AROs were made permanent in 2022 after exceeding project goals, responding to 6,700 calls in 2021 and saving 12 lives.

Saskatoon Fire Department similarly finds itself responding to social issues, working with other agencies to keep people safe from drugs and frigid weather and finding shelter, services, or supports for the 100 plus they find living outdoors. As much as 70% of their work is health-related, though they also have jurisdiction over housing (their 2022 data show a 20% reduction in fires). When people do not accept help, inspectors build relationships to ensure safety. What is more, their data collection (covering more than 500 interactions) has shown that homelessness is not limited to the core or the riverbank but is dispersed through 56 of 66 city neighbourhoods.

Preventing Crime through Environmental Design

Recent studies have documented crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)-inspired strategies including increasing availability of trees and green space, reducing litter and graffiti, and securing abandoned buildings. All are effective in crime reduction, hence enhancing public safety. Although studies on crime reduction with respect to lighting systems are

inconsistent, several studies have shown that improved and targeted lighting reduces the rate of crime. A theme in the 2021 Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners Conversation Report related to poor infrastructure (including “lack of street lighting, poor property maintenance, lack of beautification efforts, cleanliness and street cleaning, and lack of pavement in well-used back alleys”) increasing crime. Still, a better understanding of how and where lighting works to impact crime is needed, but no crime prevention measure can guarantee public safety. In its current approach to social policy and planning, the City of Vancouver emphasizes “research and data toward a healthy city for all.”

Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Communities and Economies

The 2021 federal government Quality of Life Strategy reflects on how the global pandemic has caused Canadians to rethink what matters, to reconsider health and safety issues related to structural and systemic inequalities. It notes the limits of GDP as a measure of success, recommending instead “more holistic and comprehensive” data reflective of “the diverse views and lived experience of Canadians” for evidence-informed decision making. The United Nations (2020) similarly calls for better measures that engage the historically marginalized in the interests of equity, justice, and sustainability.

Similarly, Indigenous researchers and their allies have reinforced the costs of the status quo, produced and rationalized by a colonial history and geography and research priorities that continue to pathologize in ways that locate blame within individuals rather than within systems and institutions. While the marginalized and impoverished are often blamed for their own fates in ways that rationalize inequities, it is important to account for the wasted lives and talents of

those historically excluded by economic modernity. If Canada closed the significant opportunity gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, it would boost Canada's economy by \$27.7 billion annually, the young and growing Indigenous population driving Canada's future economic growth. Closing the education gap for Indigenous people in Saskatchewan alone would equal \$137.3 billion in benefits or "half again more than the total market value of everything we do in Saskatchewan." A 2022 Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership study urges attention to a range of costly exclusions from equitable resource distribution and social and economic opportunity, including not only marginalized communities but also the nonprofit sector representing 8% of provincial GDP, in assessing vibrant communities and economies. The study recommends that the nonprofit sector, business, and government work together "to ensure all members of our communities have access to greater social and economic wellbeing."

Survey Findings

Ranging in age from 18 to 85+ years of age, including 60% female, 7.5% Indigenous identity or ancestry, the 262 respondents represented neighbourhoods across the city and were unusually well-educated (44% with university degrees and over 24% graduate degrees) with high employment (77.48%) and high household incomes (over 21% reporting \$90,000-\$124,999 and a further 36% reporting over \$125,000). Close to 97% enjoyed secure housing (almost 80% home ownership). The majority of respondents had never accessed the food bank (over 90%), nor had they ever received supplemental security income (almost 90%).

Overall Perception of Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon

Over 47% are downtown every day, while another almost 20% are downtown 1-2 times weekly.

The top three reasons for being downtown include shopping (63.22%), going to bars and restaurants (62.07%), and working (55.46%), reinforcing the idea of downtown as an economic centre. Only 58 (22.22%) indicated they lived or accessed accommodations downtown.

The overall perception of public safety in downtown Saskatoon is a close split between good (31.42%), fair (34.87%), and poor (29.50%), with a small percentage of respondents choosing excellent (4.21%). While 12% or less of respondents indicated the downtown had become “much safer” or “somewhat safer” over time, the majority indicated they felt there was “no change” (50.59%) in public safety downtown, or that public safety had worsened over time (“somewhat less safe” at 27.57% and “much less safe” at 13.83% compared to one year ago; “somewhat less safe” at 37.55% or “much less safe” at 23.72% compared to three years ago; and “somewhat less safe” (30.40%) or “much less safe” (34.40%) than five years ago).

When asked how or if the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their sense of public safety downtown, 50% of respondents experienced an increased sense of vulnerability and anxiety, 61.42% experienced reduced access to services, and 75.10% felt the pandemic aggravated existing inequalities, confirming the literature findings. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents felt safer downtown during the daytime hours; 76.92% indicated it was unlikely they would walk alone downtown after dark, aligning with the results of the City of Saskatoon street activity baseline studies.

Reasons for Feeling Unsafe in Downtown Saskatoon

While 126 (48.28%) respondents said they felt safe walking and cycling downtown, 109 (41.76%) respondents said they did not; their top three reasons were these:

- Fear of crime such as mugging or assault (77.98%)
- Fear of groups loitering and gangs (74.31%)
- Fear of people they were “not comfortable to be around (67.89%).”

The reasons provided reflect respondents’ focus on public safety as protection from ‘others’ and protection of the ‘public’ (undefined) from dangers imposed by ‘others’. Conversely for some respondents, it is precisely their personal identity as a woman, an Indigenous woman, a First Nations person, or as a transgender person that makes them feel unsafe downtown.

When asked whether they felt safe in *all* public spaces in downtown Saskatoon, 63.42% of respondents said “no”. When asked about areas downtown where respondents felt the *most safe*, they often described ‘conditions’ that made them feel safe rather than identifying specific neighbourhoods or streets. Safety is experienced when “community members,” “other people,” and “more people” are around, yet paradoxically, respondents also feel ‘unsafe’ when *particular types* of other people are around. This division of ‘others’ into groups that reinforce safety, and groups who instill fear speaks to the “the dominant epistemology of settler society.”

Enhancement of Personal Safety and the Safety of Others

When describing how they enhance their own personal safety, and the safety of others, “avoidance” is a primary tactic: 64.98% avoid people loitering, 64.20% avoid darkness, and 64.20% keep to populated areas. In addition, 62.65% monitor their behaviours to respect others’ space and safety, while 47.08% said they carry something that makes them feel safe (e.g., cell phone, keys, etc.). Women were identified as being the most negatively impacted by current levels of public safety, followed by seniors, people with disabilities, and Indigenous people, although all groups were viewed as vulnerable.

Public Services that Positively or Negatively Impact Perception of Public Safety

When identifying the *public services and activities* in downtown Saskatoon that respondents felt positively impacted the perception of public safety, protective services rated high, as did garbage collection and street maintenance. Bars and restaurants were the next highest choice, which aligns with the data about why respondents spend time downtown. Transportation, health services, and Indigenous-led initiatives were also positive, whereas public washrooms (44.6% strongly agree or agree), supported living accommodations (31.6%), and outreach services (40.8%) rated low. The three activities identified as being *the most negative* were nuisance behavior/public disorder (93.67%), gangs/large groups of people (90.09%), and abandoned/boarded up buildings (82.05%).

When identifying the *activities and situations that positively influence* the perception of public safety downtown, festivals, fairs and arts and cultural events – which can also be categorized as economic initiatives that increase tourism, and/or ‘family activities’ – were consistently rated as

positive. When rating overall satisfaction of quality of services downtown, the majority of respondents were satisfied.

Experience of Victimization in Downtown Saskatoon

A total of 53.56% of respondents indicated they had not been victimized in downtown Saskatoon, while 43.93% of respondents indicated they had; 60.87% had experienced verbal assault, including hate speech, slurs, cat calls. Of those, 75.97% of respondents *did not* report the incident to police. Another 61.21% indicated that a friend or family member had been victimized in the downtown area: 36.24% experienced verbal assault, while 30.20% experienced physical assault, and 42.33% of respondents did not report the incident to police.

Perceived Responsiveness of Saskatoon Police Service

When asked whether they think the Saskatoon Police Service responds with equal intensity to all calls, 45.53% said “no”, 17.45% said “yes”, and 37.02% answered “don’t know.” For respondents who answered “no”, the top three factors included type and severity of crime (70.62%); number of calls at the same time (58.19%); and neighbourhood (51.41%). Race is also viewed as a significant factor (41.24%).

Understanding of Root Causes of Activities and Behaviours that Impact Public Safety

Asked to consider the reasons or root causes for activities and behaviours that made them feel unsafe, 75% or more of respondents generated five answers of “important” or “very important”: high levels of poverty (83.25%), barriers to appropriate health/mental health services (80.84%), access to appropriate substance use services (79.16%), domestic violence (75.24%), and

intergenerational trauma (75%). Over 70% of respondents also identified inadequate social assistance (72.43%), and barriers to appropriate, secure employment (72.37%) as “important” or “very important” reasons or root causes.

Recommendations to Improve Feelings of Public Safety

Not surprisingly, improved access to appropriate health/mental health services and improved access to appropriate substance use services were the top two measures identified by 86.16% and 79.91% respondents respectively. Two additional measures received responses from at least 70%: improved access to appropriate youth programming, and improved access to affordable rental housing. Additional suggestions included trans and gay acceptance, better social programmes, moving the Lighthouse, bringing more people downtown, better lighting, lower taxes as incentive for longer business hours, more events and a grocery store.

In sum, when asked about their satisfaction with their overall quality of life, 80.44% of respondents indicated they were “satisfied with [their] overall quality of life.”

Interview Findings

Eighteen key informant interviews (representing those who live and work downtown, policing and fire services professionals, planners, students, and business owners and managers) offered a deeper understanding of how public safety is perceived in downtown Saskatoon. Still, there were similarities with survey responses about public safety, including time of day respondents felt safest, areas where respondents felt more or less safe, and situations that prompted feelings of

being more or less safe. Experiences of victimization were similar; however, cases of stabbing, mugging, and murder were also shared.

Understanding Those Most Impacted by Public Safety Levels

When asked who were most impacted by current public safety levels, interviewee responses were comparable to the survey results highlighting Indigenous peoples, women, LGBTQ, marginalized people, those experiencing homelessness, seniors, youth, and “everyone.”

However, they also emphasized the impact on the residents and homeowners as downtown, as well as business owners downtown.

Defining Public Safety

When asked what public safety means to them, respondents provided considerable insight raising important issues of definition of crime and safety (and their fluidity), questioning social media simplifications and amplifications, coded communications that obscure the worst inclinations.

When connecting the idea of public safety to a sense of community, respondents communicated a desire for connection and the sort of neighbourhoods as “complete communities” where “[e]very citizen feels a sense of belonging” imagined by the City’s Strategic Plan for 2018-2021.

Understanding Collective Responsibility

Public safety and community were understood as important for everyone, and the reasons provided demonstrate an implicit understanding of collective responsibility. Respondents stated

that “comfort level increases with knowledge” and respondents emphasized the importance of “understanding” between people, of cultivating a sense of “belonging,” and being “comfortable with the population around them.”

Amplifying Contradictions between Safety in Numbers and Fears of Groups Gathering

When asked whether they felt public safety downtown had changed over time, respondents reflected on their personal experiences and memories, thereby reinforcing the value placed on the importance of community, and the loss of community. In elaborating, interviewees amplified some of the contradictions between safety in numbers and fears about people congregating without purpose noted in survey responses.

The contradictions regarding groups of people gathering is linked to discussions of *legitimate* people and activities vs. *illegitimate* people and behaviours. Legitimate activities included shopping in stores, eating in restaurants, playing, and having a picnic in the park (associated with conspicuous consumption of goods, services, and *spaces*). Conversely, *illegitimate* behaviours included drug use, loitering, public intoxication, panhandling, sleeping in public spaces, “being shady,” and congregating in crowds “for no reason”—as opposed to creating “inviting spaces to sit and congregate.” To address these behaviours, several respondents felt that additional support services and activities were needed to prevent boredom, which was associated with an increased risk of criminal activity.

Identifying Responsibilities for Poverty Levels

When asked who is responsible for addressing poverty levels and public safety downtown, municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies were identified, as well as community organizations, and community members. Responsibility for health services and social agencies, as well as the location of these services was assigned to municipal government who were also accused of being disconnected from the community. Responsibility for economic issues and income assistance was assigned to provincial and federal governments.

NIMBYism was revealed in responses to the location of social services and facilities, while those facing poverty were associated with a need for recreational facilities because “they’ve had absolutely nothing to do.” This idea contrasts sharply with a 2016 study that argued that surviving on social assistance may be the hardest work there is.

Several respondents commented that community organizations and community members also had a role to play. When discussing community organizations, respondents felt there was a lot of competition for funding, which impacted service levels. Respondents felt more cooperation among community organizations was needed; however, they acknowledged that the structure of the funding perpetuated this problem. Even a promising initiative like coordinated access “that relies on everyone sharing the data of homeless people. . . . can be a real problem for Indigenous people. . . . So it’s really important to have representation.”

Recommending Public Safety Improvements in Downtown Saskatoon

With improved public safety, businesses could be open later and “draw more people into the downtown core area during evenings and weekends.” However, based on current perceptions of public safety, business owners and patrons expressed trepidation about being downtown. Calls for improved public transportation, and cheaper parking were also noted. Better lighting and brighter lighting was also recommended, although some respondents felt increased lighting could subject them to more harm because they would be more visible and easier to target.

While several respondents applauded the relationship-building between communities and policing and their increased presence downtown, concerns were expressed about overpolicing, surveillance without cause, unequal policing, double standards, stereotyping, inadequate support for business, misunderstandings about roles and schedules of Community Support Officers and Alternative Response Officers, and ambivalence about Indigenous-led initiatives. Policing would not make people safer “if that police isn't from the community and engaged with the community.”

Services that were identified to improve downtown public safety included the following: clean cold water (especially during heat waves), reduced barriers to housing and shelters, warm-up and cool-down locations, more self-help kiosks, a grocery store, medical offices, harm reduction services, public washrooms, peer navigators, free public phones, the addition of more community support workers to check in on people, and increased police presence. Health and safety standards also needed to be addressed downtown including clean spaces, disease control,

maintenance of building codes, fire inspections, and improved security of downtown buildings. Some respondents felt support services should be centralized in one area, while others felt they should be scattered across neighbourhoods.

Several respondents indicated that increased lighting in downtown Saskatoon would be beneficial. Attitudes towards CCTV cameras downtown were mixed. Some were uncomfortable with the idea of cameras downtown, while others pointed to high cost of security cameras and hiring staff to monitor and act on camera activity. An app for emergency support for youth who are sexually exploited, and crime mapping apps were recommended.

Interviewees also singled out intergenerational trauma, colonization, neoliberalism, and capitalism as root causes for poverty, addictions, and crime and recommended public education and “a wholesale systemic change in school system for public and Catholic school so that next generation can be more aware.”

Focus Group Findings

Three focus groups were conducted with 21 respondents who live and work downtown, those who provide support and protection, and those who seek out support and protection, including women, Indigenous people, youth, the working poor, and tenants of affordable rental housing. Some responses were comparable to survey and interview results including these: perceived vs.

actual public safety downtown; perceptions of “unhoused” people as posing a threat; legitimate vs. illegitimate people and behaviours; and areas downtown where respondents felt most unsafe.

Public Safety and the Lack of Trust

Despite many positive comments, the sense of community-based optimism in the interviews was notably absent in the focus groups. One participant commented, “Public safety? When you grew up in the hood, it’s kind of hard to have public safety. So I’ve been in fights a lot. I lost like seven people in this last two months.” When asked about the types of situations that make them feel unsafe, respondents revealed a complex set of dynamics amongst people who live and work in the downtown area, shedding light on socio-economic, cultural, and systemic issues, including gangs and people openly using drugs and alcohol in public prompting considerable distress. For some, youth were the most vulnerable in these circumstances.

One participant reported being beaten up on transit—an attack “recorded on the bus camera.” However, they didn’t go to court with the case because they were fearful of repercussions. While increased police presence was frequently cited as a way to improve public safety in the interviews, some focus group respondents did not associate the police with safety and described a number of provocations by police.

Dissatisfaction with Support Services and Self-blame

When asked about their experiences accessing support services, respondents shared a variety of perspectives. The general response was one of dissatisfaction, frustrations with access, which resulted in respondents giving up, or blaming themselves for not being supported.

Over-extended Shelters and Inadequate Mental Health Supports

Shelters were not safe places for many; those with religious affiliations can trigger intergenerational trauma and lack culturally-responsive resources. Support workers also acknowledged the limited number of shelters in downtown Saskatoon and their inability to address the complex mental health issues of their residents.

Vulnerable Populations and Perceptions of Public Safety

When asked who they feel are the most vulnerable in downtown Saskatoon, many responses were similar to the survey and interview findings and included women, seniors, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, Indigenous peoples, youth. For some respondents, people with mental health challenges were considered the most vulnerable because of the lack of supports, the lack of funding, and more generally, the lack of understanding about mental health issues. According to one support worker, “Homelessness does not equal unsafe... over 50% of the people we deal with that are unhoused; they just don’t have a home. They’re just looking to survive.”

Switching the understanding of “safety in numbers” to describe the reason for “groups” of homeless people, sheds light on the inherent power dynamics in downtown Saskatoon: who is

afraid of whom; and who actually holds the power to safely and comfortably occupy the public sphere? The desire to constantly move unhoused people from one area to another in order to prevent them from ‘loitering’ in one place is reinforced by municipal bylaws that implicitly distinguish between the legitimate and illegitimate use of public spaces.

One respondent offered a particularly salient comment about Indigenous cultures and the importance of community: “so I think taking that social aspect away from somebody who's a very social person, I know it drove me crazy [during COVID]. So, I can’t imagine you topple that, on top of not having a home, and all the other issues they’re dealing with.

Root Causes, Responsibilities, and Recommendations

In addition to drug culture in Saskatoon, respondents identified intergenerational trauma as a root cause of many of the problems in downtown Saskatoon. Government was seen to have significant responsibilities. When asked what could be done to improve public safety downtown, focus group respondents offered feedback that was comparable to the survey and interview results including better lighting, more cameras, more youth centres, more Friendship Centres, and more places like Prairie Harm Reduction. There was also a lot of discussion about the value of public activities downtown and the ways in which they can help improve public safety.

This study has aimed also to add to the literature, complementing the City of Saskatoon (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b) street activity baseline studies that focused exclusively on participant perceptions to explore also the diversity of participant knowledge and understanding of safety

issues and their root causes. Findings have confirmed, but also complemented, and even complicated literature findings, refusing tendencies to locate blame within individuals, addressing consoling myths that obscure root causes, highlighting data and research as a basis for policy and other decision making, and underlining local experience of larger systemic and structural issues.

Report findings aim to contribute to an important community conversation on public safety and what a community of safety and care might look like and what it might mean for a revitalized downtown Saskatoon where all feel welcomed, engaged, and supported. The following recommendations emerging from the study findings are offered to help guide such conversation in the interests of “a vibrant hub for culture, commerce and civic life” imagined by the City of Saskatoon so that we can rebuild together good relations guided by Indigenous thinking.

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- Invest in coordinated, collaborative, and accessible data and research to support a healthy, sustainable city.
- Respect our commitments to national and international human rights instruments.
- Adopt an intersectional lens in all policy, planning, and practice, knowing that one size does not fit all.
- Establish and co-design policy and practice with a Lived Expert Advisory Committee.
- Redouble commitments to Reconciliation, unlearning old narratives and practices and relearning for good relations.
- Invest in public assets and socializing activities year round.
- Map social infrastructure and address barriers to access.

- Invest in coordination of interagency collaboration, engaging government, business, the nonprofit sector, and universities and colleges.

INTRODUCTION

A 2021 study by Hagen and Walker exploring reasons for and potentially creating demand for living downtown in Saskatoon has shown that perception of Saskatoon city centre safety is low: 51% considered downtown unsafe or somewhat unsafe (p. 28). In the face of ongoing concerns about public safety in Saskatoon, as in cities around Canada and beyond, efforts are underway to revitalize downtown and make it a safe, welcoming, vibrant, and attractive place (Burayidi, 2018) where people can “live, work, learn, spend their leisure time and play” (City of Saskatoon, 2018a). Following World War II, city centres around the world were hollowed out through neoliberal processes of disinvestment in favour of privatization, deregulation, and market capitalism’s presumed trickle-down benefits. This disinvestment, particularly within older inner-city neighbourhoods, where community design concentrated Indigenous and racialized communities and perpetuated inequalities, created a crisis of housing divides where families were occupying substandard housing while resources were invested in affluent suburbs (Diamantopoulos & Findlay, 2007; Olauson et al., 2022; Spence, 2004).

A legacy of these housing divides is what Spence (2004) calls the “politics of exclusion” that have entailed “a bad image of ‘affordable housing’,” fears about impacts on “property values and the invasion of the poor”—despite “the fundamental right to decent and affordable housing and the growing injustice” facing those experiencing service and housing deficits (Spence, 2004, p. 16). The right to housing is recognized by international United Nations covenant (UN, 1966) as “the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” as well as source of “duties to other individuals and to the community of which he [sic] belongs” (Preamble). It is also recognized in

Canada by the 2019 National Housing Strategy Act: “housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities as well as a strong national economy in which the people of Canada can prosper and thrive” (Preamble). Yet, those in greatest need continue to have difficulties accessing safe, affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing while Indigenous peoples continue to be disproportionately impacted by systemic and structural forces (Findlay et al., 2018; Kunzekweguta et al., 2022; Olauson et al., 2022) in ways that often remain invisible to settler Canadians (Seawright, 2014).

Such thinking about affordable housing and encroachments of the poor is replicated today in fears about “public nuisance behaviour” among people displaced in 2020 by the closure of City Centre Inn and Suites to the Lighthouse and calls for policing performance metrics to include “perceived safety” (Bridges, 2020; Young, 2020). A similar outcry has followed the defunding of the Lighthouse emergency shelter and the relocation of the unhoused first to the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) Wellness Centre on 1st Avenue and now to Fairhaven. Blame for harms—despite police crime data showing no increase by late February 2023 when police increased their presence in the neighbourhood as part of a safety plan with the Fire Department to address inadequate housing (James, 2023)—has been targeted at STC Chief Mark Arcand rather than the provincial government that decided to buy and lease the property to STC; nor do the complaints relate to concerns about those experiencing homelessness and facing frigid, even deadly, winter weather (Tank, 2023).

Despite documented reductions in crime reports June-August 2020 compared with the same period in 2019 for the downtown—56% reduction in robberies, 19% decrease in weapons

offences, a 70% decrease in vehicle thefts, and a 46% decrease in property crime (Bridges, 2020; Young, 2020)—and statistics fluctuating during and after COVID-19 restrictions, fears persist about public safety. Police calls increased with the end of restrictions (drug use related to increased property crime and also overdose deaths) and disturbance calls doubled (James, 2022b). Though not policing matters, police, especially alternative response officers, have a role in keeping people safe as part of “the community response” to those “social disorder” calls and the police chief continues to lobby for more Police and Crisis Team (PACT) resources given a 2022 45% increase over 2021 (James, 2022b, A2). But criminologists warn that the perception of crime does not match Western Canadian city realities (Smith, 2022). If the media report more violent crimes, they remain rare in Canada and disorder calls should not be confused with violent crime. Also, if sexual assault numbers are increasing, it can be attributed to some progress in making “a safer space for survivors to come forward,” according to Professor Tamara Humphrey (cited in Smith, 2022, p. A6). Meanwhile, hate crimes continue to be underreported and those at greatest risk are Indigenous and racialized people (Smith, 2022).

Saskatoon’s 2022 Point-in-Time Homelessness Count (Kunzekweguta et al., 2022) reported an increase in homelessness to 550 (from 475), chronic homelessness at 59%, 50.9% with the first experience of homelessness as children or youth, and an even more disturbing 90.1% of Indigenous people among those facing homelessness. Kunzekweguta et al. (2022) document the health impacts associated with homelessness (36% reporting learning or cognitive limitations, 48% had a physical limitation, 53% managed an illness or medical condition, 53% experienced residential school / intergenerational trauma, 67% had a mental health issue, and 86% reported dealing with a substance abuse issue) as well as the violence experienced by those facing

homelessness: 68% reported experiencing violence; 100% of trans people reported being victims of violence (Kunzekweguta et al., 2022). The increasing incidence of hate crimes against the LGBTQ2S+ community has motivated the 5-year, \$100 million federal action plan to address the ongoing inequities and advance the rights of gender diverse people in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022).

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015), the problem of homelessness is the result of a colonial legacy of land appropriation, dominant thinking in our institutions, intergenerational trauma related to “cultural genocide” manifesting in health and addictions issues, and ongoing structural and systemic discrimination. These factors as well as neoliberal disinvestments in safe, affordable, appropriate housing and social supports has produced mass homelessness (Findlay et al., 2018; Kunzekweguta, 2022; Olauson et al., 2022). In 2017 Special Rapporteur Leilani Farha reported to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council that in this modern world, despite “the right to adequate housing,” housing is being treated largely as a commodity to be “financialized”; thus, financial markets and corporations are taking over the housing sector, aggravating inequalities and impacting negatively housing access and affordability for the marginalized, including especially people living with disabilities. She called on all states to merge disability human rights and the right to housing in support of her efforts in the world-wide Shift movement to limit financialization so that cities can become inclusive places where people can access safe, affordable, and secure housing. Then states might address the systemic inequities impacting the human dignity and autonomy of a billion of the world’s population living in inadequate housing conditions and homelessness (United Nations General Assembly, 2017). In Canada, systems failures (child welfare, foster care, custodial

institutions) continue to compound housing precarity, poverty, and educational and employment challenges (Gaetz et al., 2016).

While some community members have called for the relocation of services and people associated with “nuisance behaviour” (Bridges, 2020; Young, 2020) and one business person urged removal of the downtown bus mall, relocation of the Ministry of Social Services offices and the Lighthouse that he claimed were “killing” downtown (Levy, 2022), studies show that crime reduction efforts often do little more than displace crime and even increase it elsewhere (Hodgkinson et al., 2019). Addressing the root causes of the complex, intersecting challenges can be effectively addressed only with a major community effort respecting the principle of “Nothing about us without us” and taking an intersectoral, interdisciplinary, and intercultural approach to build on existing strengths and assets and produce new capacities and energies in the process. It requires too an intersectional analysis (Abrams et al., 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015; Statham, 2021) that factors the effects of overlapping social identities, including age, abilities, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and race, uniquely impacting disadvantage and injustice. An intersectional analysis is critical to exposing and understanding how structural inequities produce and reproduce the material realities that shape unique experiences of disadvantage and oppression—and to generating solutions (Statham, 2021). Then we might rebuild together good relations (Thistle & Smylie, 2020) guided by Indigenous thinking to “deconstruct” state policy and bureaucratic silos (Thistle, 2017, pp. 14-15).

This research addresses the City of Saskatoon’s (2018a) Community Safety and Wellbeing Priority Area, its vision of Downtown Development, and Quality of Life goals, as imagined by

community members in Saskatoon Speaks (detailed in the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan adopted by City Council). In particular, this research addresses the City’s Quality of Life goal to create “neighbourhoods that are “complete communities” where access to diverse amenities, services, and opportunities are available to all, where “[e]very citizen feels a sense of belonging” and is “actively engaged in the future and governance of their city” and “we work as one community to move forward, together” (City of Saskatoon, 2018a). This research will also help shape and be shaped by the priority action items “to support community collaboration on health lifestyles, income disparities, crime reduction, and access to education, employment and housing” and to “continue to support Truth and Reconciliation initiatives and coordinate racism education and awareness.” Understanding the barriers to equitable access to community resources will inform policy and programming for the City and its partners committed to community safety, wellbeing, and quality of life –and a City Centre that is “a vibrant hub for culture, commerce and civic life” (City of Saskatoon, 2018a).

Report Purpose

Building on the City of Saskatoon (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b) street activity baseline perception studies, this mixed methods research study explores factors driving inequities and **understanding of as well as perceptions of safety** to develop an evidence-informed, collaborative response to public safety in downtown Saskatoon.

1. To assess how community stakeholders understand and experience their safety in the downtown
2. To identify systemic and structural impediments to safety in the downtown

3. To understand barriers to equitable access to services and supports for those most marginalized
4. To identify evidence-informed best practices to enhance public safety in Saskatoon
5. To make recommendations for policy and programming for the City and for partner organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of peer-reviewed and gray literature (especially but not exclusively in the last ten or so years) begins by engaging with competing definitions of public safety and shifting emphases over time. It draws on Canadian literature but also on literature from other jurisdictions where relevant. It builds on the Introduction's framing of the study in terms of the historical hollowing out of downtown centres in the West made possible by neoliberal processes and the colonial history that has constructed their sense of place for settler Canadians —and current efforts to revitalize those downtowns.

Defining Public Safety

In a free-market think tank dialogue on policing with William J. Bratton, Paul Romer asserts, “Across the world, public safety is the most important task facing city governments. In many poor countries, crime holds back the kind of urbanization essential for economic development” (Romer & Bratton, 2013, np). Similarly, Huan (2018) contends that public safety encompasses all aspects of society and its citizens, living safely in society, as well as contending with natural disasters. Public safety is in this view all about protecting the public from crimes, disaster, and other dangers so inimical to economic prosperity in a responsibility typically assigned to governments. The primary goal of achieving public safety is, then, widely understood as preventing danger and protecting the property and wellbeing of individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities, a view represented in Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners (2021). The Board's community conversations on the biggest challenges facing public safety highlighted increasing social issues impacting community safety and difficulties accessing supports when there were no 24/7/365 coordinated outreach services and policing was

not equipped to deal with the social issues (pp. 3-4). Gangs, property crimes, and “poor infrastructure” increasing criminal activity led to calls for more visible police presence, better training to deal with diverse groups, and trust building as well as strengthened compassion, respect, and professionalism. While some respondents simply wanted an end to crime, there was also recognition of the responsibilities of “a more caring community” and a request for “respect for basic human rights and respect for the Canadian Charter” (p. 9).

Consistent with this human rights perspective, Friedman (2021b) argues that public safety is not just about prevention but “depends on much more: food, clean water and air, housing, a basic income and the means to obtain it—an education and a job” along with “health care, health insurance, and the freedom from discrimination” (p. 1). This expanded notion of public safety challenges the priority given to protection (though interestingly housing and homelessness is often criminalized and delegated to protection workers). It elevates these broader governmental responsibilities while showing the harms from their neglect (Friedman, 2021b). In the context of the United States, Friedman (2021a) underlines the harms that can be caused by policing—shootings, stops, searches, seizures, to name a few—that are shaped by “racial disparities”, harms that are often managed by “harm-regulating” tools such as suits and prosecutions. Indeed, Friedman argues, “Harm is not collateral to policing, it is innate to it” when what police face daily are “social problems” such as homelessness, addictions, mental health, it is ill-equipped to address (pp. 925-926). When underpolicing (and failure to protect some communities and neighbourhoods from violence and abuse) is as problematic as overpolicing, Friedman asks, then, how policing might be changed, including “civilianizing,” “co-response” models, “super-trained generalist first responders,” and “inter-agency cooperation” to better respond to public

needs and safety. In summary, he argues that “to reduce the harms of policing, we need to reimagine public safety from the ground up” (2021a, pp. 926, 934, 986).

Public safety can, indeed, be inhibited by what Henry and Tator (2002) call democratic racism prevalent among Canadians as well as a “discourse of denial” (p. 23). They define democratic racism as failing to acknowledge that cultural, structural, and systemic racism exists. They point out that commitments to democratic principles such as “justice, equality, and fairness conflict with but also coexist with negative feelings about minority groups and discrimination against them” (Henry & Tator, 2002, pp. 24). A wealth of literature has established that Indigenous peoples and other racialized as well as gender minorities are systematically marginalized and excluded from socio-economic and educational opportunity with serious impacts on their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (Abramovich, 2012; Findlay & Weir, 2004; Kidd et al., 2017; Kidd, et al., 2019). Discrimination, especially in the distribution of national resources, such as employment, housing, and social policies, affect individuals’ wellbeing (Baskin, 2007) and impede public safety efforts, pushing more people to the streets—and prompting in many Western jurisdictions “the exclusionary policing” of marginalized groups in public spaces (Baillergeau, 2014, p. 354). The “financialization of housing,” amidst increased rates of poverty, hunger, and unemployment, is increasing homelessness (United Nations, 2017, p. 3) as well as NIMBYism and demands to address “nuisance behaviours” understood as threatening public safety, adding to pressures to “the invisibilisation of social problems” but also to the mobilization of public health and social justice rationalities in inter-agency collaborations (Baillergeau, 2014, p. 358).

A case in point is a 2022 Ontario Superior Court of Justice decision, where Justice M.J. Valente declined the Regional Municipality of Waterloo’s application under section 440 of the *Municipal Act* for the removal of a homeless encampment from the region’s property in downtown Kitchener. The decision ruled that the encampment was not in breach of the region’s bylaw on public conduct in the regionally-owned property, citing section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedom in an application that went against the residents’ rights to life, liberty and security of the person when the region lacked sufficient shelter space. The decision confirmed case law in British Columbia (Doolittle, 2023). If the region could show that it had sufficient and accessible shelter space, then it could apply “to terminate the declaration.” The Region of Waterloo Chair Karen Redman remained committed to implementing solutions to end homelessness (Doolittle, 2023). Expert witness Dr. Andrea Sereda spoke to health harm and mental health impacts of failures to address underlying poverty and food and housing insecurity; one resident was clear on the meaning of the encampment: “This encampment may seem like garbage to some people, but to the people living there, it’s everything” (Doolittle, 2023).

Valuing Public Spaces/ Public Assets

Public spaces play significant roles in people’s lives and wellbeing (Baillergeau, 2014; Birch, 2008; Duivenvoorden et al., 2021; Kim, 2015; Moroni & Chiodelli, 2014). These public spaces where “the drama of communal life unfolds,” where “significant human rights” can be shaped and protected, are best guided by three values making them “responsive, democratic, and meaningful,” according to Carr et al., (1992, pp. 2, 19). Urban centres are supposed to be “residence hubs” in addition to being places for “civic interactions” but over time policy has encouraged a movement to the periphery that has led to decline of urban centres (City of

Calgary, 2021; Peyman et al., 2020, p. 17). Such is their importance to the health of the economy, ecology, and community, that public spaces represent an “important asset” needing attentive, integrated management but facing academic neglect (Duivenvoordenn et al., 2021, p. 1). This is especially the case in the context of United Nations sustainable development goal 11 and target 7: “by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” (Duivenvoordenn et al., 2021, p. 1). Instead, Turner (2002) argues that those spaces (in a study of US cities) are increasingly privatized as consumptions spaces so long as there is an economic return with negative impacts on democratic access and participation.

Downtowns are expressive features of cities’ quality of life. According to Lea et al. (2003, p. 1), “a city is often judged by the economic, social and cultural vitality of its downtown.” Downtown shopping areas have historically played a significant role in defining the image of a city.

Basically, downtowns are the economic centre for larger market areas or regions, providing a major source of employment, mix of business types, and access to a broad range of goods and services. Therefore, downtowns are expected to be associated with several factors, such as the existence and growth of residential population, a significant downtown workforce, a mix of high-quality retail and services, a well-established and funded cultural infrastructure, a strong tourism base, fewer criminal activities, a clean environment, ease of access and availability of parking (Lea et al., 2003). All these attributes influence downtown safety.

Hagen and Walker (2021) point to the absence of grocery stores in Saskatoon’s downtown coupled with the low safety perceptions as disincentives to individuals wanting to live

downtown. Key downtown assets identified in their study included 21st Street East with bars, restaurants, retail, and landmarks; the Saskatchewan River and Meewasin Valley as natural sites of special events and activities; and a convenient lifestyle of diverse activities and amenities within walking distance. The public library, art gallery, and theatre were considered worthy of investment, while a desire was expressed for diversified housing, repurposing of vacant or underutilized buildings, high quality building and streetscapes, a pet-friendly downtown, and outdoor green public spaces supportive of socializing year round, and a downtown brand emphasizing community and cohesion (Hagen & Walker, 2021). Maintaining, promoting, and investing in the multi-functioning of these areas remains key to avoiding decline. Thus, social safety concerns need addressing and transit options improved when people's perception of downtown safety promotes its liveability and helps achieve the City of Saskatoon's strategic goal of Sustainable Growth (Hagen & Walker, 2021).

Hernandez and Jones (2005) concluded that traditional Canadian downtowns are safe, healthy, and vibrant places when compared to other places, particularly their United States counterparts. In the street activity baseline studies conducted in Saskatoon, participants' perception of the city's safety softened over the years, especially during the night downtown and in some specific places (City of Saskatoon, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b; Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners, 2021). In 2011, the City baseline study focused first on businesses associated with "high concentrations of negative street activity" and panhandling in particular before broadening when consultations showed panhandling was not the primary issue but "sketchy/strange" people, gangs, public drunkenness, drug trafficking, and street fights (p. ii). Interestingly, people felt the root causes of behaviours needed to be dealt with and education, training, affordable housing,

and uniformed presence, including bylaw officers, would be of more use than fines and jails. In 2013, the baseline study update continued to be focused on perceptions and overall found people still felt safe, especially in Broadway with its festivals and events (followed by Downtown and Riversdale) and considered the Community Support Officers (CSOs) had made a difference, although business opinion was that it was too early to tell. In the 2015 study both the general public and vulnerable people felt safer with CSOs, though safety was softening and most wanted increased hours. In 2018, 51% felt as safe as three years earlier but the perception of negative activity increased, including homelessness, panhandling, public drunkenness, drug trafficking, prostitution, street fights, and people with mental health issues. There was a doubling of reports of increasingly aggressive panhandling (from 5% in 2015 to 10%) and business reported an increase in violence and aggression (from 9% in 2015 to 17% in 2018). Perceptions of CSO visibility, interactions, and effectiveness increased with strong support for increased hours.

The hollowing out of and public safety concerns related to downtowns, and specifically Saskatoon, is impacted by the high rates of homelessness, poverty, and other systemic and structural factors. These and other evidence of downtown decline in urban Canada has signaled the increased interest in downtown revitalization, regeneration, and renewal (Filion et al., 2004; Holle & Owens, 2002; Levy, 2001; Mason, 2003). Over 20 years ago Levy (2001) found hope in the revitalizing work of Business Improvement Districts, but the decline has persisted in the face of the overdependence on neoliberal policies and other systemic and structural factors. These in turn have created the high rate of homelessness, unemployment, poverty, among other issues (Corno, 2017; Leviten-Reid et al., 2021).

Understanding Ongoing Colonial Legacies

The systemic and structural forces marginalizing and excluding racialized and other vulnerable populations remain largely invisible to those who have inherited their understanding of place and their relation to it from what Seawright (2014) calls “the dominant epistemology of settler society” that “provides racialized, anthropocentric, and capitalistic understandings of *places*” (p. 554). That understanding of place “normalizes domination,” while formulating “an ideal social actor” that “mirrors and reinforces . . . the operative modes of domination” and cuts the land off from its histories, and its economic, ecological, political, cultural, social, and spiritual meanings (Seawright, 2014, p. 555). The pathway to justice, Seawright (2014) argues, is to challenge these normalizing processes in “a shift in awareness towards our most intimate environments” and a new understanding of “how place intersects with race, gender, and colonialism”—and how settler “homemaking” has been achieved “at the expense of previously dominant Indigenous worldviews” (pp. 555, 563). Bonds & Inwood (2016) similarly challenge “common sense temporalities and spacialities” to underline the ongoing impacts of race and racism in settler states (p. 715). These studies on settler colonialism build on literature on the raced, gendered, and classed views of land, private property, value extraction, and economic “progress” associated with economic modernity’s hierarchies that rationalized settlers’ theft of land, displacement of Indigenous peoples, segregation and surveillance, and exploitation of racialized and vulnerable communities (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; DuBois, 1935; Henderson et al., 2022; Mills, 2003; Nunn, 2018; Seawright, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). As Tuck and Yang (2012) argue, within settler colonialism “land is remade into property. . . . Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward.

Made savage” (p. 5). Such constructions legitimize settler entitlements while masking the violence of “toxic geographies” (Nunn, 2018, p 2).

Learning Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

In cities across Canada, homelessness has become a more visible problem on city streets, in parks and other public spaces—a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic within and beyond Canada (Banerjee & Bhattacharya, 2021; Falvo, 2021a). With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers lost their jobs, especially those in the bottom earnings quartile, impacting their ability to live a decent life and widening the gap between rich and poor (Hou et al., 2020; Lemieux et al., 2020). Worldwide it was estimated that 25 million could lose their jobs (ILO, 2020). If COVID-19 exposed and intensified existing inequities, it also added to the vulnerability of the marginalized by exacerbating their suffering in cities that left them with “*nowhere to go*” (Doll et al., 2022, pp. 11-12). The COVID-19 pandemic has also spawned “shadow pandemics” such as violence against women and the isolation, technology deficits, housing and food insecurity that spawn them (Alhassan et al., 2021; Doll et al., 2022). Public health measures (such as lockdowns and sheltering at home) designed to protect proved a further source of danger for women, for example, and reduced access to services (UN Women, 2020). Women, girls, and the gender diverse representing about 50% of those experiencing homelessness face multiple forms of oppression (related to their intersecting identities (race, abilities, ethnicity, immigration status), including access to sufficient gender-specific, transitional and permanent affordable housing (Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, 2022). Insufficient shelter capacity for women means too that they are more likely to turn to couch surfing (7% experience hidden homelessness)—and to face violence and exploitation (Centre for Equality Rights in

Accommodation, 2022). Still, Indigenous women are “15 times more likely to use an emergency shelter” than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Falvo, 2021b, p. 1).

COVID-19 cut the marginalized off from lifelines such as the public library and public washrooms (Vescera, 2022a; 2022b). Public libraries proved in successive PIT Homelessness Counts in Saskatoon, 2018 and 2022, as the most used service—"consistent with the well-documented changing role of libraries in communities across Canada where they are magnets for those in search of information and knowledge, access to computers, and a warm, welcoming, and supportive environment" (Findlay et al., 2018, p. 45; Lederman, 2022). The Saskatoon Public Libraries' outreach worker program (launched in 2018) offers everything from help with housing and employment to connecting people to mental health services, help with legal issues or ID (Vescera, 2022b).

The lack of access to public washrooms is a public safety **and** a health and a human rights issue (Saskatoon Public Washroom Advisory Committee, 2021; Vescera, 2022a). During the pandemic, Saskatoon's public washrooms were closed for over 100 days leading a committee (co-led by the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership and the City of Saskatoon) to study the issue, surveying 300 residents online in 2021, 94% of whom favoured a washroom model available 24/7/365 and 90% favouring a downtown location (Vescera, 2022a). In December 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared sanitation a distinct human right together with the human right to safe drinking water. Everyone, without discrimination is entitled to “have physical and affordable access to sanitation, in all spheres of life, that is safe, hygienic,

secure, and social and culturally acceptable, and that provides privacy and dignity” (United Nations Human Rights, 2015).

If COVID-19 was especially damaging, even lethal, for some, including seniors in long-term care, racialized people, people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, and, disturbingly, “essential workers” (Rao et al., 2021), it also taught many about our interdependence and the extent to which our health depends on the behaviours and actions of others, others’ knowledge and expertise, and the importance of an “ethics of care” (Blauwet et al., 2020, p. 1038; Fracassetti, 2020). In fact, “global crises can strengthen global cooperation” and teach us “to build back better” despite unprecedented shocks to “health, education, and income” (Fracassetti, 2020). In efforts to support Canadians, the Government of Canada turned to the charitable and nonprofit sector “serving critical social inclusion, well-being and safety needs during the pandemic” (ESDC, 2021).

Mobilizing Collaboration

COVID-19 has indeed reminded us that historically crises have led to renewed cooperation (Fracassetti, 2020). In addition to the Saskatoon Public Washroom Advisory Committee, other continuing and new collaborations were mobilized by the COVID-9 pandemic to respond to the safety and other needs of Saskatoon citizens. Housing First initiatives continued, along with Rapid re-housing, Indigenous-led initiatives (such as CUMFI’s Outreach Community Support Teams and Mobile Housing and Community Resource Centre or STC’s Sawēyihtotān project), or outreach services by EGADZ and the Health bus, and other prevention strategies (Findlay et al., 2018; Kunzekweguta et al., 2022). Yet homelessness and housing precarity persist despite

innovative collaborations including the Safe Community Action Alliance and the 35-person Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID-19 emerging from the pandemic to fill information and service gaps (Alhassan et al., 2021; Doll et al., 2022; Safe Community Action Alliance, 2020; SPRP, 2021)

The Saskatoon Tribal Council introduced the Sawēyihotōtān project to address the rate of homelessness and addiction in the downtown area to get people off the streets (MacPherson, 2020). Also, this project was intended to meet those affected by the closure of the City Centre Inn and Suites. According to the City of Saskatoon (2021), “the project has worked within the system gaps and coordinated with broader systems of services, resources, organizations, policies, relationships, structures, in order to provide support to Saskatoon’s most vulnerable. In only six months, the project outcomes have strengthened relationships, enhanced understanding of Indigenous case management and demonstrated culturally relevant approaches.” (p. 2). This commitment is partly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.1 which is dedicated to ensuring and accessing, adequate, safe and affordable housing and other basic services for all by 2030 (United Nations General Assembly, 2017), now less than a decade away.

Reorienting Policing and Protective Services

Grassroots movements from civil rights to Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, and Every Child Matters have raised their voices about inequities and injustice in systems and structures, powerfully underlining what Anatole France made clear about equality centuries ago: “The majestic equality of the law forbids rich and poor alike from pissing in the streets, sleeping under bridges, and stealing bread.” Their voices, along with infamous events across the country,

including Starlight tours in Saskatoon (Hubbard, 2004) and deadly wellness checks (Tunney, 2020), as well as formal commissions and inquiries have highlighted an injustice system that has bred fear and suspicion among marginalized and racialized communities so disproportionately overrepresented in Canada's prison system (Findlay & Weir, 2004). They are also often so overpoliced and underprotected (Corcoran, 2012) that they are reluctant to report when they have themselves been victimized with the result, for example, that sexual assault cases are seriously underreported (Tabassum et al., 2023).

As people become homeless, they are often associated with “public nuisance,” especially in gentrified public places, shaping how police, municipalities, and businesses respond (Baillergeau, 2014). Nuisance has become a public concern on the premise that minor forms of deviance lead to serious forms of offences and affect, even threaten, the quality of life of individuals in the broader community (Charest, 2003; Harcourt, 2001; Millie, 2009; Sylvester, 2010). Those experiencing homelessness, as we have seen, suffer from a wide range of medical problems (Kidd et al., 2021). The very precarious living conditions of street life become conducive to physical health problems, which relate to inadequate sleep, poor diet, and hygiene, and vulnerability to physical and sexual violence for women, the gender diverse, and Indigenous people (Kidd et al., 2021). Baillergeau (2014, p. 354, 365) explores within the city of Montreal public order responses to “public nuisance” of marginalized groups in relation to alternative responses such as social justice and public health, identifying some “balanced collaboration under certain circumstances” in a “hybrid mobile team” format of the three strategies Wacquant (2009) identified as “socialisation, medicalisation and penalisation” (p. xxi).

Recognizing the larger systemic and structural factors that impact their roles and responsibilities, Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) is part of the larger collaborative efforts to keep people safe in the city, similarly emphasizing “holistic” approaches deploying Alternative Response Officers (AROs)—in addition to the Community Support Officers (CSOs) whose effectiveness was tracked in City of Saskatoon street activity baseline studies (2013, 2015, and 2018b)—augmented by the Community Mobilization Unit introduced in 2020 to patrol and build relationships with community organizations in a move away from the previous “enforcement” model in its 2021 community safety plan for Riversdale and downtown (James, 2021a). The plan focuses on relationships and referrals to housing and other services, collaborating with Sawēyihotān Mobile Services to support the most vulnerable (James, 2021a). The AROs were made permanent in 2022 after exceeding project goals, responding to 6,700 calls in 2021 and saving 12 lives (James, 2022c).

The SPS (2021) Strategic Plan 2020-2024 (based on internal and 75 external stakeholder consultations) is likewise “anchored by five pillars: Crime & Safety, Our People, Partnerships, Communication, and Innovation” (p. 5). While respectful of community concerns around “road safety, addictions and mental health issues” in a changing landscape, it is innovative in its “methods to address both crime and community safety. Community partnerships and solutions outside of traditional policing are key to addressing the root causes of crime and achieving community safety” (p. 6). SPS is committed to responding to “the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls to Action, and responding to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice” (p. 8).

Saskatoon Fire Department similarly finds itself responding to social issues, working with other agencies (including the police and the Saskatchewan Health Authority) to keep people safe from drugs and frigid weather and finding emergency shelter and other services or supports for the 100 and more they find living outdoors, as well as putting out fires in makeshift shelters (James, 2021b; 2022b). As much as 70% of their work is health-related, though they also have jurisdiction over housing and their data show a 20% reduction in fires in 2022, while police-reported arson in 2021, according to Statistics Canada, is at 31 per 100,000 below the ten-year average to 2021 of 33—thanks to proactive strategies (James, 2022b). When people do not accept this help, inspectors build relationships and visit to ensure safety. What is more, their data collection (covering more than 500 interactions) has shown that homelessness is not limited to the core or the riverbank but is dispersed through 52 of 65 city neighbourhoods (James, 2022b).

A ride along with Saskatoon Fire Department Assistant Chief Yvonne Raymer was enlightening for one CBC journalist as they checked for wellness and safety of the unhoused living outdoors in temperatures between minus 20 and 25 degrees plus wind chill. Saskatoon Fire Department had 600 interactions in December 2022 alone and covered 56 of 66 neighbourhoods (Dayal, 2023). Reasons for not seeking shelter included shelters at capacity, but also addictions and mental health issues, as well as fear of being “judged” or “embarrassed” by those in downtown Saskatoon where government services are concentrated. The situation for the unhoused has been aggravated by the Saskatchewan Income Support program which saw an end to direct payments of rent and utilities to landlords and utility companies and increased arrears and evictions, according to Len Usiskin, executive director of Quint Development Corporation (Dayal, 2023). Law professor Sarah Buhler commented on actions “contrary to the international human rights

law to evict someone into homelessness,” arguing that “the justice and equity” of such evictions need to be taken into account (Dayal, 2023).

Preventing Crime through Environmental Design

Recent studies have documented crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)-inspired strategies including increasing availability of trees and green space (Bogar & Beyer, 2016; Kondo et al., 2016), reducing litter and graffiti (Braga & Bond, 2008), and securing abandoned buildings (Branas et al., 2018). All are effective in crime reduction, hence enhancing public safety (MacDonald et al., 2019). Although studies on crime reduction with respect to lighting systems are inconsistent (Atkins et al, 1991; Pease, 1999; Ramsay, 1991), several studies have shown that improved and especially targeted lighting systems reduce the rate of crime (Cohen & Felson 1979; Mayhew et al., 1979; Painter, 1994; Painter & Farrington, 1997) when it is estimated that about half of all recorded crime occurs after dark (Painter, 1996). Samuel (2001) asserted that “fear of crime is experienced disproportionately after ... dark” (p. 95). A good lighting system has been shown to make people feel safe (Nair & Ditton, 1994; Painter, 1991, 1994; 1996; Warr, 1990). Welsh & Farrington (2008) asserted that street lighting reduces crime by approximately 20%. A theme in the 2021 Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners Conversation Report related to poor infrastructure, including “lack of street lighting, poor property maintenance, lack of beautification efforts, cleanliness and street cleaning, and lack of pavement in well-used back alleys” increasing crime (p. 5).

More importantly, street lighting as an effective tool has become a major type of investment in environmental design (Farrington & Welsh, 2002; Welsh & Farrington, 2008). Further studies

suggest that improvement in lighting tends to reduce fear of crime and improve perceptions of community safety (Chalfin et al., 2021; Herbert & Davidson, 1994; Painter, 1996), though Pease (1999) argues for a better understanding of how and where lighting works to impact crime, while stressing that no crime prevention measure can guarantee public safety. Boyce & Gutowski (2016) likewise advise that we need better understanding of how and why lighting impacts public safety if it is to be a better crime prevention strategy, while Bonner & Stacey (2021) found only “modest effects” in a pre- and post-comparison design in two locations. Also, Lorinc (2022) warns of smart lighting (installed in San Diego determined to make better use of an “underutilized asset”) that has raised concerns about undue surveillance and commercial extraction, and the danger of unintended consequences and “function creep” impacting privacy with insufficient public oversight (p. O3).

Downtown safety issues are not only affected by homelessness and technology (lighting, closed camera circuit television (CCTV) or surveillance cameras, etc.). A 2002 study by Holle & Owens focused on policy remedies to Winnipeg’s downtown, including friendly zoning policies, ending rent control to release private capital, removing barriers to enterprise, policing for results, traffic and parking-friendly policies, and reducing property taxes. By contrast, a 2019 study reported that improving downtown safety needed a broad range of strategies starting with identifying work underway, who is already doing what to ensure no overlapping services and resources, collaboration on the new entertainment district and lessons learned, foot patrols, CCTV cameras, improved lighting, communication connectivity, stronger enforcement of panhandling bylaws, better coordination among policing, private sector, and prosecutions, addressing prolific offenders, community engagement, audit of funding for downtown services,

CPTED, critical mass downtown, downtown safety partnership, Intoxicated Persons Detention Act, health services including drug treatment and mental health resources, and social services to address homelessness and poverty (Manitoba Police Commission, 2019).

Homelessness is both a consequence of and a contributing factor to mental health problems among youth (Folsom et al., 2005; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006). In an Australian study, Martijn & Sharpe (2006) found that trauma is common before homelessness, increased mental health diagnoses followed homelessness, including alcohol and drug use, and criminal activity followed homelessness. According to the City of Vancouver (2012) downtown eastside area profile, residents included a significantly higher percentage of Indigenous people, seniors, the poor, the underemployed, and people with mental illness and addictions. It is noteworthy that these developments are associated with the rapid growth of neoliberal policies and cutbacks to health services, housing, and other social and economic supports (Gaetz et al., 2014; Grabb & Hwang, 2009). While individuals experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to psychological distress, substance use and mental disorders, as well as premature mortality caused by suicide and drug overdose, their access to and use of mental health care is very limited (Abdel-Baki et al., 2019). In its current approach to social policy and planning, the City of Vancouver (2023) emphasizes “research and data toward a healthy city for all.” Vancouver draws on diverse sources of data to understand what change happens and how it impacts differently diverse individuals and groups, emphasizing decolonizing and equity, while mapping social infrastructure access and working “with community partners to share information, build capacity, and foster ongoing conversations about the future of the city.”

Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Communities and Economies

The 2021 federal government Quality of Life Strategy reflects on how the global pandemic has caused Canadians to rethink what matters, to reconsider health and safety issues related to structural and systemic inequalities. It notes the limits of GDP as a measure of success, recommending instead “more holistic and comprehensive” data reflective of “the diverse views and lived experience of Canadians” for evidence-informed decision making (Department of Finance Canada, 2021, pp. 3-4). The United Nations (2020) similarly calls for better measures that engage the historically marginalized so that we might “reimagine and rebuild health, social and economic systems so that they leave no one behind” (p. 9). Nothing about us without us is powerfully invoked nationally and globally in the interests of equity, justice, and sustainability.

In Saskatoon, Findlay et al. (2014a) explored Indigenous understandings of quality of life and the implications of treaty, constitutional, statutory, and normative frameworks, including constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights and Canada’s obligations as signatory to such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They highlight guarantees under Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, & 10 to Aboriginal rights to spirituality, education, employment, living conditions, and equality, but find that “discrimination, the legacies of residential schools, and social problems marginalized urban Aboriginal people, decreased social inclusion, and even alienated them from their own culture and traditional teachings and adversely affected QoL. Largely because of these factors, as few as 6-11% reported their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being as excellent” (p. 2); the

findings made clear “the need to focus not only on meeting basic survival needs of Aboriginal persons, but also on their cultural and spiritual needs which are the foundation of Q of L [Quality of Life]” (p. 2).

Similarly, Indigenous researchers and their allies have reinforced the costs of the status quo, produced and rationalized by a colonial history and geography and research priorities that continue to pathologize in ways that locate blame within individuals rather than within systems and institutions (Battiste et al., 2018). Even when injustices are disclosed, the self-images of people, who confront “injustice dissonance” create “an illusion of justice through assumptions, arguments or stereotypes about the blameworthiness of the victim” (Hanson & Hanson, 2006, p. 417). As Hanson and Hanson (2006) argue, the “*blame frame* shields us from ugly truths and, in part for that reason, perpetuates them” (p. 425). In this way ignorance is maintained along with misguided investments in notions of “white racial superiority. . . . White ignorance also impacts social and individual memory, erasing both the achievements of people of color and the atrocities of white people” (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007, p. 3).

While the marginalized and impoverished are often blamed for their own fates in ways that rationalize inequities (Battiste et al., 2018; Hanson & Hanson, 2006; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007), it is important to account for the wasted lives and talents of those historically excluded by economic modernity (Bauman, 2003). Despite the fact that investments in Indigenous economic development could yield \$6.9 billion annually, government funding of Indigenous small business has actually decreased by 170% since the 1990s (Ekelund, 2021). If Canada closed the significant opportunity gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, it would boost

Canada's economy by \$27.7 billion annually, the young and growing Indigenous population driving Canada's future economic growth (NIEDB, 2019). Closing the education gap for Indigenous people in Saskatchewan alone would equal \$137.3 billion in benefits or "half again more than the total market value of everything we do in Saskatchewan" (Howe, 2017, p. 2). A 2005 Royal Bank of Canada study found that removing age, gender, and culture barriers would result in 1.6 million more Canadians in the workforce and \$174 billion more in personal income circulating in the economy. The World Economic Forum estimates the costs of excluding workers with disabilities as up to 7% of GDP in some countries; including people with disabilities could leverage 28% higher revenue and 30% higher profit (cited in McQueen, 2022). For Black Canadians who still face racism on the job and earn 66 % of white male earnings; speaking up and advocating is a matter of life or death, "silence a death sentence" (Frankson, 2022, O2).

A 2022 Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership study makes clear the need to attend to a range of costly exclusions from equitable resource distribution and social and economic opportunity, including not only marginalized communities but also the nonprofit sector representing 8% of provincial GDP, in assessing vibrant communities and economies. Often forgotten players, those in the sector help build "inclusive, healthy, and vibrant economies" (p. 3). The study recommends that the nonprofit sector, business, and government work together "to ensure all members of our communities have access to greater social and economic wellbeing" (SPRP, p. 3). The study also argues that equity should be at the heart of policy, public, and private decision making (which should also in this regard act on the TRC call to action #47), and that the

nonprofit sector be represented in the governance of the Business Improvement Districts to add accountability, transparency, and diversity.

Summation

This literature review has discussed competing definitions of public safety and tracked shifting responses over time in the face of grassroots and official commission and inquiry challenges to a status quo that has preserved privilege for the mainstream and spelled disadvantage for those marginalized by colonial legacies. In light of learning about structural and systemic inequities impacting the lived experience of the marginalized and about public spaces and assets so important to the health of people, places, and prosperity, individuals and institutions are increasingly embracing human rights, public health, and social justice approaches.

Saskatoon shares with other cities in North American and beyond the neoliberal hollowing out of downtowns and a colonial legacy of homelessness, poverty, and decline. The forces behind these phenomena often remain invisible to settler Canadians who have inherited dominant narratives of economic modernity's view of progress and the racial and gender hierarchies that rationalized the taking of land and displacement of peoples.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both shed light on and exacerbated inequities and injustices, pushing more people into precarious living while adding dangers to the vulnerable, including women, girls, and the gender diverse, redoubling the impact on racialized communities. The pandemic created shadow pandemics and cut people off from resources, supports, and services,

but it also mobilized new intersectoral, intercultural, and innovative collaborations, including policing and protective services, rethinking crime prevention and public safety, and renewed interest in CPTED. The 2021 federal government Quality of Life Strategy is similarly committed to engage more of us in decision making, rethinking what matters in a post-pandemic world. Instead of blaming victims, we are encouraged to respect human rights, Aboriginal and Treaty rights, and our obligations under international instruments, so that we can develop together a sustainable, inclusive, and healthy city where all can prosper.

METHODS

The study was reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BEH# 2963) on January 24, 2022; amendments were approved to cover the addition of focus groups (June 13, 2022); a new student research assistant and changed data collection site from the Lighthouse to Station 20 West (December 2, 2022); and new student research assistant along with a Certificate of Re-Approval (February 2, 2023).

The study uses mixed methods—literature review, environmental scan, survey, interviews, and focus groups—building on the City of Saskatoon street activity baseline studies (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b) which focused exclusively on participant perceptions to explore also participant knowledge and understanding of safety issues and their root causes. The study employs an intersectional analysis (Abrams et al., 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015; Statham, 2021), decolonizing, participatory action research (Findlay et al., 2014), drawing on Indigenous methodologies emphasizing relationships, reciprocity, and respect (Thistle & Smylie, 2020). Such a participatory approach is a critical means of respecting the principle of “Nothing about us without us” for culturally appropriate projects. Importantly, formative research also allows researchers to build a stronger relationship with the community (in community consultation and Community Advisory Committee meetings) prior to implementing any program or intervention, which can help increase uptake and success. Lived experts with experience of poverty and homelessness on the research team helped address social and cultural needs, physical and mental health, while helping address the TRC call to redress colonial legacies in the name of justice and an inclusive history and future.

For the quantitative phase, a survey was administered online (paper versions were offered but not implemented given the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 protocols and closed facilities, including the public library, during the time the survey was open). Even with extended deadlines to May 3, 2022, and the support of Community Advisory Committee members, recruitment was challenging and the survey closed after 262 participants.

For the qualitative phase of this study, we aimed to recruit up to 60 individuals to participate in individual semi-structured interviews led by the research assistant to probe topics more fully than a survey allows. Interview questions (Appendix A) were developed by the research team with input from the Community Advisory Committee, based on results from the quantitative phase, literature review and scan. Participants could choose Zoom or in-person interview format. If participants agreed, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the research assistant who had signed a confidentiality agreement and then coded inductively and analyzed using thematic analysis. Audio recordings were saved on the researcher's local password-protected computer (backed up on One Drive U of S); researchers and participants agreed not to make any unauthorized recordings of the interviews. All participants were taken through COVID-19 protocol and an informed consent process. Consent (oral or written) was collected from key informants, who were invited to agree or not to have interviews recorded and/or to agree or not to review interview transcripts (see Appendix B for consent forms). Recruited participants were offered a cash honorarium where appropriate. Despite significant efforts to recruit, only 18 interviews were completed to January 2023, representing those who live and work downtown, policing and fire services professionals, planners, students, and business owners and managers.

The defunding of the Lighthouse by the Ministry of Social Services added to recruitment difficulties and we had to move our interview/focus group site to Station 20 West.

On the advice of the Community Advisory Committee, focus groups were added (between August and December 2022) to reach those who proved hard to reach and under-represented in both survey and interviews: service users, youth (18-24), Indigenous people, working poor, and renters. A total of 23 individuals representing those groups as well as service providers participated in focus groups covering the same questions as in the interview guide. See Appendix C for the focus group consent form.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are divided into three sections, discussing in turn survey, interview, and focus group findings. As the Methods section makes clear, the study importantly deploys mixed methods, including literature review and scan of major city policies and practices across the country, in its efforts to complement and add to the City of Saskatoon (2011, 2013, 2015, and 2018b) baseline street activity studies that focused exclusively on participant perceptions to explore also participant knowledge and understanding of safety issues and their root causes. The mixed methods aimed to be true to the participatory approach, drawing also on Community Advisory Committee input, the insight of those with lived expertise, and reaching in focus groups a diversity of stakeholder groups underrepresented in the online survey and even in the key informant interviews. .

Survey Findings

After discussing respondent demographics (survey questions 32-48 illustrated in tables and figures in Appendix D), discussion of the survey findings is organized around eight interconnected themes:

1. Overall Perception of Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon
2. Reasons for Feeling Unsafe in Downtown Saskatoon
3. Enhancement of Personal Safety and the Safety of Others
4. Public Services that Positively or Negatively Impact Perception of Public Safety
5. Experiences of Victimization in Downtown Saskatoon
6. Perceived Responsiveness of Saskatoon Police Service
7. Understanding of Root Causes of Activities and Behaviours that Impact Public Safety

8. Recommendations to Improve Feelings of Public Safety

Respondent Demographics

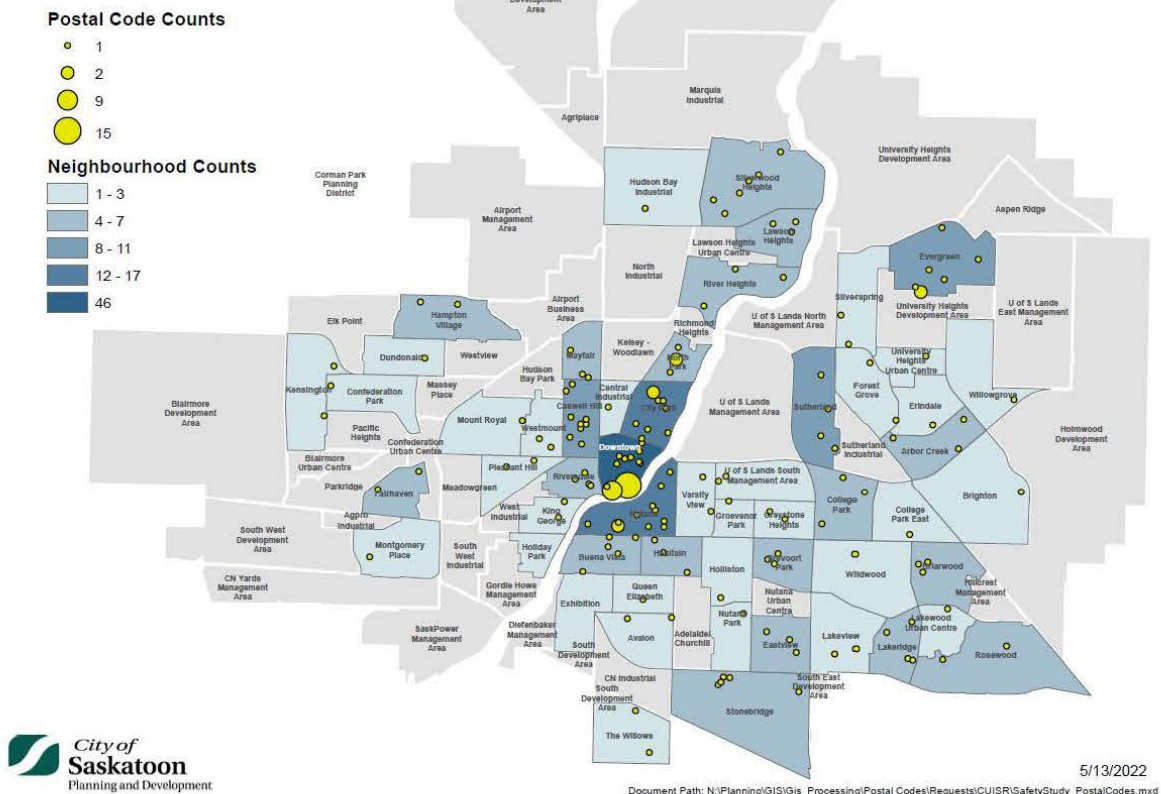
For this study, 262 respondents completed the survey. The age of respondents ranged between 18 and 85+ years of age. The majority of participants identified as female (59.64%), while 37.22% of respondents identified as male. 4.92% of respondents identified as First Nations, 2.19% identified as Métis, and .55% identified as having Indigenous ancestry. Detailed data about the racial and ethnic identity of respondents were not collected: however, of the 65.57% who did not identify as Indigenous or as having Indigenous ancestry, some respondents self-identified as “white” or “Caucasian.”

A total of 44.34% of respondents indicated they had completed a university diploma or degree, and 24.43% indicated completion of a graduate degree (Master, PhD). 77.48% of respondents indicated they were employed, and the dominant industry selected by 37.85% of respondents was “Education-Law Social-Community & Government”. With regards to the household income of respondents, 35.98% reported a salary of more than \$125,000 while 21.03% reported a salary range of \$90,000 to \$124,999, and 17.76% reported a salary range of \$70,000 to \$89,999.

The overwhelming majority (96.86%) of respondents indicated they had a secure place of residence, and 79.46% of respondents own their home. The majority of respondents had never accessed the food bank (over 90%), nor had they ever received supplemental security income (almost 90%). The map of respondents, created by the City of Saskatoon Planning and Development, provides a visual reference for the neighbourhoods where respondents live indicating the extent to which they represent neighbourhoods across the city.

Postal codes and neighborhood counts

CUISR - Downtown Safety Study Survey Results

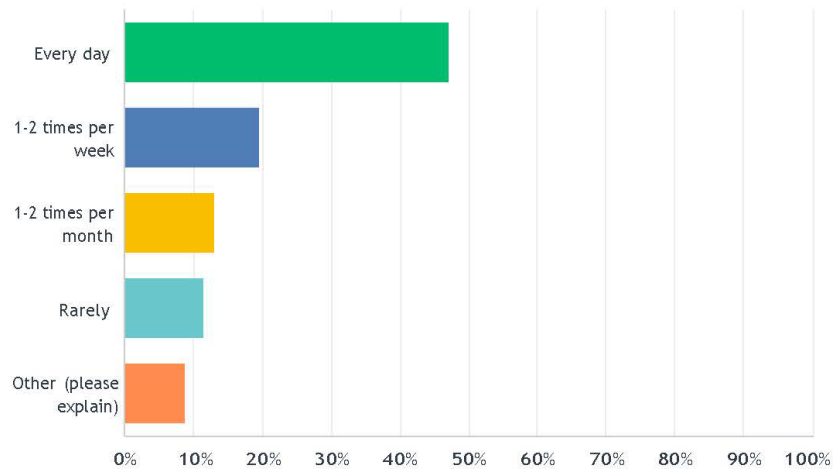


1. Overall Perception of Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon

With regards to time spent downtown, 47.13% of respondents indicated they are downtown every day. The remaining respondents spend time downtown 1-2 times per week (19.54%), or less frequently. The top three reasons that respondents spend time downtown include shopping (63.22%), going to bars and restaurants (62.07%), and working (55.46%), thereby reinforcing the idea that downtown can be viewed as an economic centre. Only 58 respondents (22.22%) indicated they lived or accessed accommodations downtown.

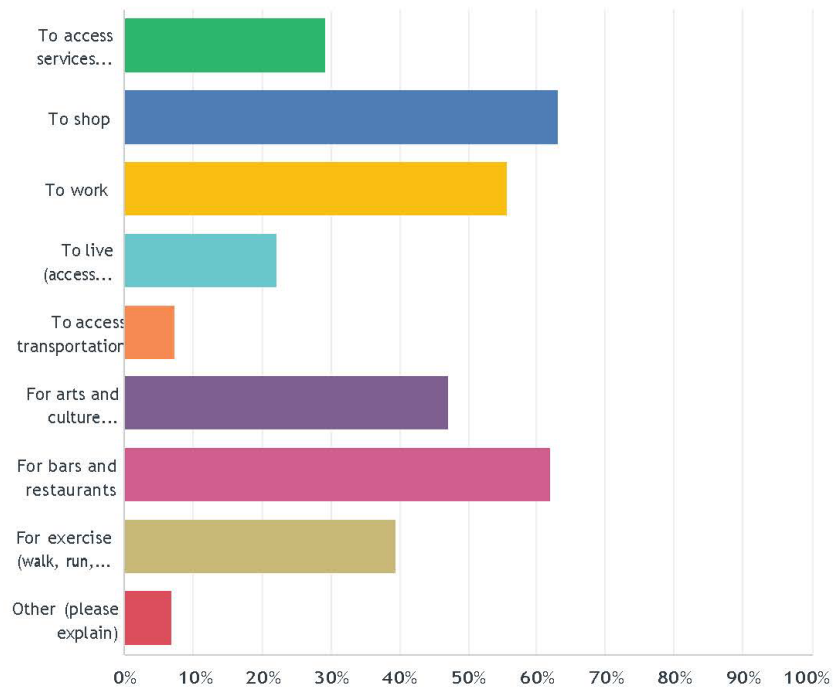
Q1 How often do you spend time in downtown Saskatoon?

Answered: 261 Skipped: 1



Q2 If you spend time in downtown Saskatoon, please explain why. Tick all that apply.

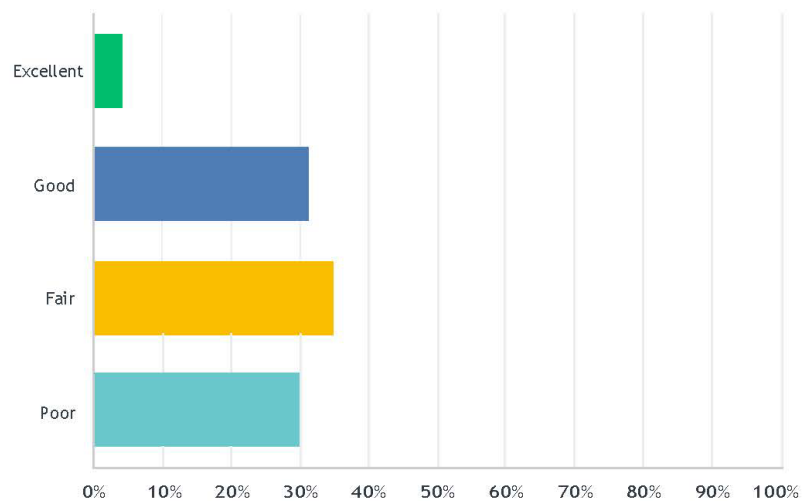
Answered: 261 Skipped: 1



The overall perception of public safety in downtown Saskatoon is a close split between good (31.42%), fair (34.87%), and poor (29.50%), with a small percentage of respondents choosing excellent (4.21%).

Q3 What is your perception of public safety in downtown Saskatoon?

Answered: 261 Skipped: 1



When asked how their perception of public safety in downtown had changed over time, 12% or less of respondents indicated the downtown had become “much safer” or “somewhat safer” over time. The majority of respondents indicated they felt there was “no change” (50.59%) in public safety downtown, or that public safety had worsened over time (“somewhat less safe” at 27.57% and “much less safe” at 13.83% compared to one year ago; “somewhat less safe” at 37.55% or “much less safe” at 23.72% compared to three years ago; and “somewhat less safe” (30.40%) or “much less safe” (34.40%) than five years ago.

- Compared to one year ago, 233 respondents indicated their perception of safety downtown reflected “no change” in public safety (50.59%), or it was “somewhat less safe” (27.57%) or “much less safe” (13.83%)
- Compared to three years ago, 224 respondents indicated their perception of safety downtown reflected “no change” (27.27%), or it was “somewhat less safe” (37.55%) or “much less safe” (23.72%).
- Compared to five years ago, 219 respondents indicated their perception of safety downtown reflected “no change” (22.80%), or it was “somewhat less safe” (30.40%) or “much less safe” (34.40%).

The perception that public safety in downtown Saskatoon has decreased over time aligns with the results of studies conducted by the City of Saskatoon. (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b).

Q4 What is your sense of how public safety in downtown has changed over time?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 6

	MUCH LESS SAFE	SOMEWHAT LESS SAFE	NO CHANGE	SOMEWHAT SAFER	MUCH SAFER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Compared to one year ago?	13.83% 35	27.67% 70	50.59% 128	7.11% 18	0.79% 2	253	2.53
Compared to three years ago?	23.72% 60	37.55% 95	27.27% 69	10.67% 27	0.79% 2	253	2.27
Compared to five years ago?	34.40% 86	30.40% 76	22.80% 57	10.40% 26	2.00% 5	250	2.15

When asked how or if the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their sense of public safety downtown, 50% of respondents experienced an increased sense of vulnerability and anxiety, 61.42% experienced reduced access to services, and 75.10% felt the pandemic aggravated existing inequalities. These responses run parallel with the literature.

Q5 How has COVID-19 and public health measures impacted your sense of downtown public safety? For good or ill?

Answered: 255 Skipped: 7

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Increased sense of vulnerability and anxiety	13.49% 34	36.51% 92	22.22% 56	23.41% 59	4.37% 11	252	2.69
Reduced access to services	16.93% 43	44.49% 113	19.69% 50	15.75% 40	3.15% 8	254	2.44
Reduced capacity to meet basic needs (food, housing, utilities costs)	13.55% 34	29.08% 73	25.50% 64	23.51% 59	8.37% 21	251	2.84
Aggravated existing inequalities	38.74% 98	36.36% 92	13.44% 34	9.49% 24	1.98% 5	253	2.00
Reduced capacity to care for self and family	9.64% 24	25.70% 64	28.51% 71	28.11% 70	8.03% 20	249	2.99
Enhanced sense of community	4.74% 12	14.23% 36	27.27% 69	37.55% 95	16.21% 41	253	3.46

Given the level of anxiety indicated in the data, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents felt safer downtown during the daytime hours; 76.92% indicated it was unlikely they would walk alone downtown after dark. These responses align with the results of the City of Saskatoon street activity baseline studies (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b) described in the literature.

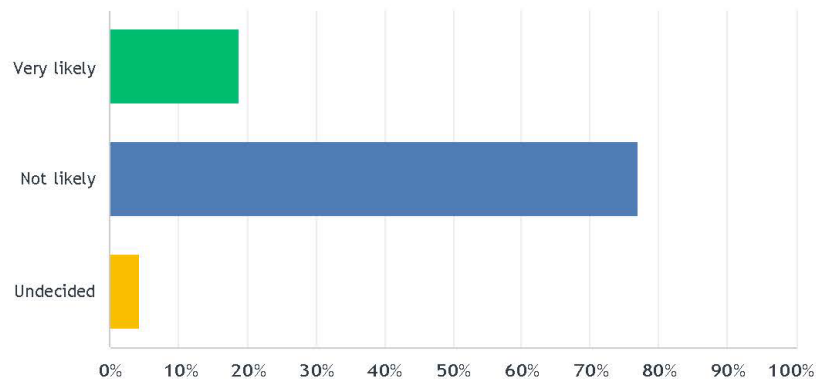
Q6 Please indicate your feeling of safety during the following times of day in downtown.

Answered: 258 Skipped: 4

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I feel safe during daytime.	21.40% 55	47.47% 122	7.78% 20	18.68% 48	4.67% 12	257	2.38
I feel safe during evening.	6.25% 16	32.03% 82	11.72% 30	29.30% 75	20.70% 53	256	3.26
I feel safe during the night.	2.75% 7	10.59% 27	15.69% 40	33.33% 85	37.65% 96	255	3.93

Q7 How likely are you to walk alone after dark in downtown?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 2

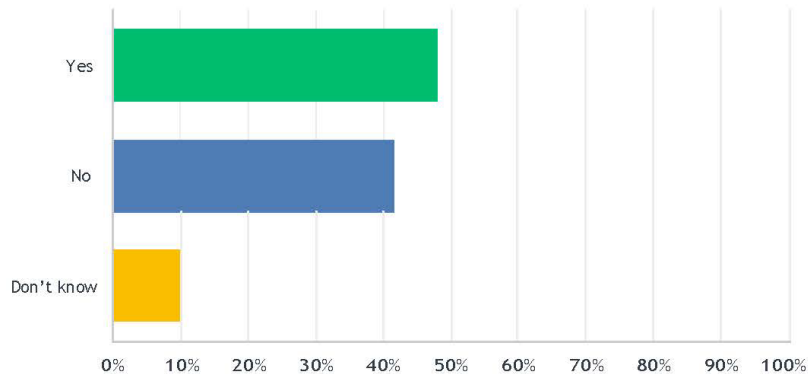


2. Reasons for Feeling Unsafe in Downtown Saskatoon

While 126 (48.28%) respondents said they felt safe walking and cycling downtown, 109 (41.76%) respondents said they did not.

Q8 Do you feel safe walking or cycling in downtown?

Answered: 261 Skipped: 1



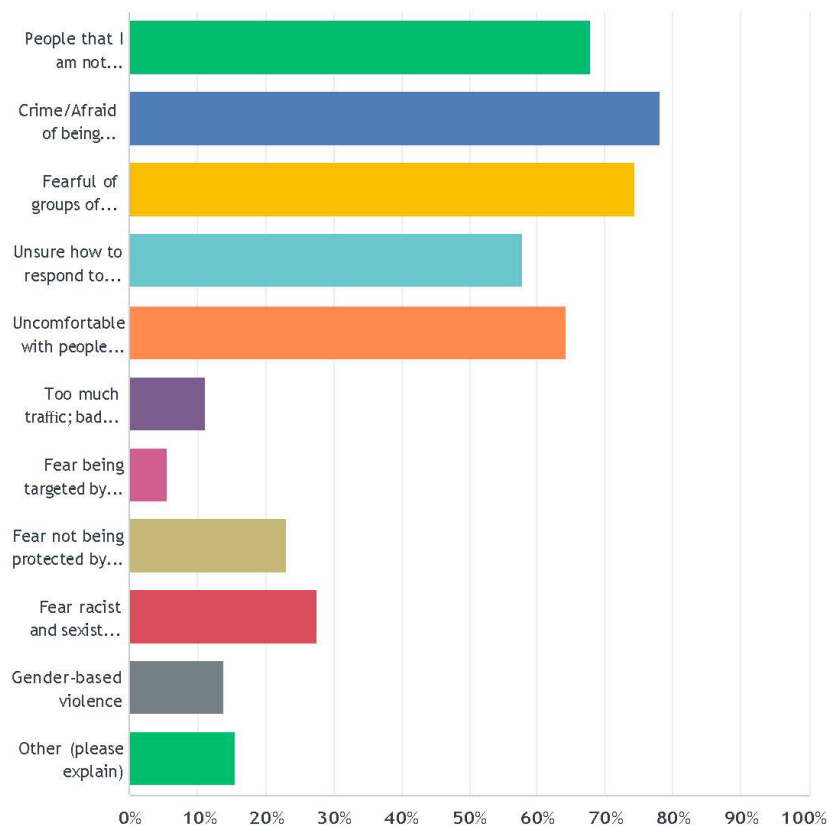
The top three reasons respondents provided for not feeling safe were these: fear of crime such as mugging or assault (77.98%); fear of groups loitering and gangs (74.31%); and more generally, fear of people they were “not comfortable to be around (67.89%).” It is worth noting that discomfort about people using substances, and an uncertainty about how to respond to panhandlers also ranked high on the list of reasons provided. Respondents provided additional comments about why they felt unsafe downtown, including these factors:

- mental health aggression is everywhere
- panhandlers can be very mean and rude.
- not enough camera/video coverage on streets for protection
- less people downtown during all times of day
- Lighthouse creates substantial safety risks to me and my kids.
- Police are not enforcing existing laws to permit safe passage of common pedestrian traffic.

The reasons provided reflect respondents' focus on public safety as meaning protection from 'others' and protection of the 'public' (undefined) from dangers imposed by 'others'. As stated in the literature, perceptions of public safety in downtown Saskatoon are impacted by the high rates of homelessness, poverty, and other systemic and structural factors, especially colonial legacies. The reference to the enforcement of laws to "permit safe passage of *common* pedestrian traffic" invites the question of what *uncommon* pedestrian traffic is, and whether they too are deserving of safe passage.

Q9 If no, why do you not feel safe walking or cycling in downtown? Tick all that apply.

Answered: 109 Skipped: 153

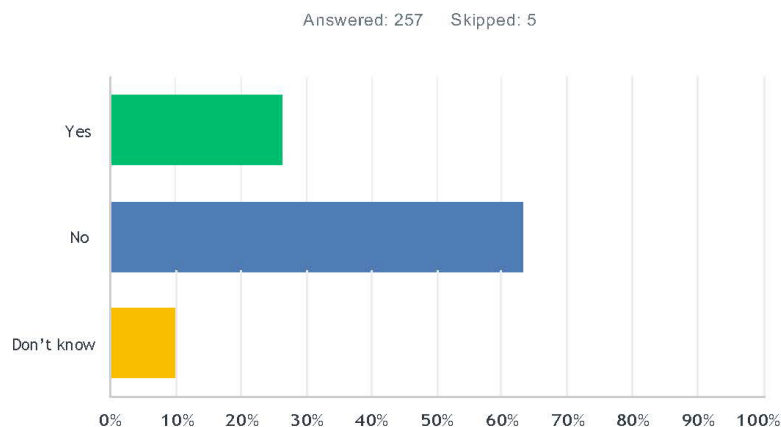


Within the additional comments, references to the “legitimate” users of public spaces demonstrated implicit bias towards anyone presumed to be *illegitimate* based on their circumstances, their behaviour, their perceived condition, or their perceived identity. Conversely for some respondents, it is precisely their personal identity as a woman, an Indigenous woman, a First Nations person, or as a transgender person that makes them feel unsafe downtown.

Within these comments there are several references to “my own business,” “my parking lot,” “[my] personal space,” “[my] office,” “my car,” “my home,” “my condo,” or “my building.” While these references are simple expressions that describe a person’s place of work or their residence – and by association, ‘safety’ – these references also signal a territoriality that reinforces the idea of legitimate / illegitimate personhood.

When asked whether they felt safe in *all* public spaces in downtown Saskatoon, 63.42% of respondents said “no”.

Q10 Do you feel safe in all public spaces in downtown Saskatoon?



The neighbourhoods and streets respondents identified as being the *most unsafe* were Riversdale, 21st Street and Lighthouse area, the public library, Midtown Plaza, 1st and 2nd Avenue between River Landing and 24th St., River Landing, 20th St, Spadina East and “4 blocks in every direction from City Hall.” Respondents also identified specific sites downtown: the Lighthouse, the Downtown Saskatoon Bus Terminal, the Frances Morrison Library, the Midtown Plaza, Scotiabank Theatre and VIP, City Hall, and the Saskatchewan Social Services office were identified as particularly unsafe areas. It is interesting that specific spaces like the public library, the Midtown Plaza, the bus terminal, and the movie theatre are viewed as unsafe given the amount of pedestrian traffic and in some cases, the presence of security.

Q11 If no, can you please state where you have felt unsafe and your reason(s).

Answered: 174 Skipped: 88

- Riversdale community
- Everywhere downtown where people are on drugs
- 21st Street and Lighthouse area
- Public library, midtown plaza, 1st and 2nd Ave between River Landing and 24th St. River Landing
- Alleys at nighttime
- Downtown parks and trails
- Movie theatre
- 20th, Spadina East
- Bus Terminal

When asked for additional feedback about where respondents felt unsafe, 168 comments were collected. They revealed that the perceived lack of public safety extended across the entire downtown core and surrounding areas: however, the Lighthouse was frequently singled out:

- Lighthouse, transit terminal and social services office – the perfect storm!
- the Lighthouse manner of operations has clearly facilitated street life for mentally unwell/addicted people in the south downtown area.

- on sidewalks near the Lighthouse [i]ndividuals outside stare and make comments.
- Lighthouse creates substantial safety risks to me and my kids.

When asked about areas downtown where respondents felt the *most safe*, they often described ‘conditions’ that made them feel safe rather than identifying specific neighbourhoods or streets.

134 additional comments were collected from respondents, which included:

- feel safe in public spaces especially when other community members are walking, shopping, enjoying the surroundings.
- I feel very safe downtown during the daytime. Anytime there are other people around I feel safe.
- during the day, there is enough situational awareness, occupants and activities that promote safety that do not hinder my activities.
- main streets well-lit at night. More people and some community security.
- Midtown Mall has great security and does a good job of having a clean welcoming space.

It is interesting that safety is experienced when “community members,” “other people,” and “more people” are around, yet paradoxically, respondents also feel ‘unsafe’ when *particular types* of other people are around. This division of ‘others’ into groups that reinforce safety, and groups who instill fear speaks to the “the dominant epistemology of settler society” that “provides racialized, anthropocentric, and capitalistic understandings of *places*” (Seawright 2014, p. 554).

Q12 If yes, can you explain where you feel safe and why.

Answered: 145 Skipped: 117

- Feel safe in public spaces especially when other community members are walking shopping, enjoying the surroundings.
- In public areas such as in midtown where there is a visible security presence.
- I feel very safe downtown during the daytime. Anytime there are other people around I feel safe.
- Main streets, well-lit at night. More people and some community security.
- Midtown mall has great security and does a good job of having a clean welcoming space.

Some respondents chose to situate themselves *in relation to* homeless and vulnerable people and in doing so, they shed light on the question of what it means to be ‘safe’ vs. ‘unsafe’ in downtown Saskatoon:

- I feel safe in all areas because I am not scared of people simply because they are accessing a shelter or are more vulnerable than others.
- Anywhere downtown. I have not met anyone that has felt threatening. I felt more unsafe when on campus than downtown.
- I think the notion of safety needs to be further unpacked and explained in conjunction with the public's discomfort with interacting with people living in poverty. I personally don't feel that anywhere downtown is particularly unsafe and wonder if the coverage on downtown safety is coded language for racism and discrimination.
- I feel safe downtown. I work with the community and have a strong understanding of the barriers that folks who live downtown face and I feel that those factors do not affect.

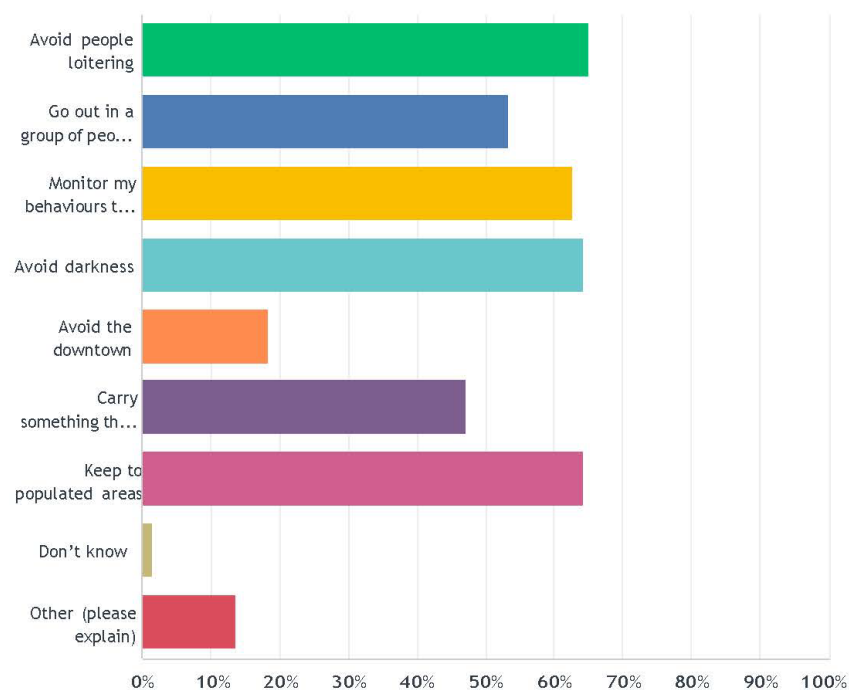
3. Enhancing Personal Safety and the Safety of Others

When describing how they enhance their own personal safety, and the safety of others, “avoidance” is a primary tactic: 64.98% avoid people loitering, 64.20% avoid darkness, and

64.20% keep to populated areas. In addition, 62.65% indicated they monitor their behaviours to respect others' space and safety, while 47.08% said they carry something that makes them feel safe (e.g., cell phone, keys, etc.).

Q13 What do you do to enhance your own and others' personal safety in downtown? Tick all that apply.

Answered: 257 Skipped: 5



Respondents provided additional comments to describe how they enhance their personal safety:

- very mindful of my surroundings, especially when turning corners or walking past a recessed door.
- walk with purpose, head up, look like you know where you're going.
- treat ppl [sic] with kindness.

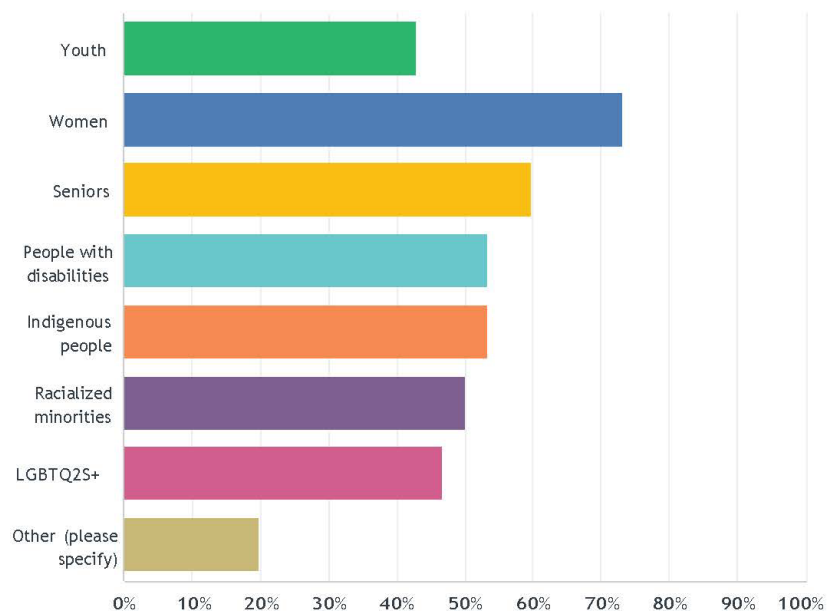
- be assertive at all times!
- carry an umbrella/stick/spray.
- always aware of surroundings.
- promote equity and inclusion.

These added details suggest acute anxiety and a level of vigilance that reads as defensive, preventative, but also compassionate.

In the survey results, women were identified as being the most negatively impacted by current levels of public safety, followed by seniors, people with disabilities, and Indigenous people. That said, all groups included in the answer choices were viewed as vulnerable.

Q14 Who do you think are most negatively impacted by the current levels of public safety? Tick all that apply.

Answered: 238 Skipped: 24



Respondents offered additional comments about who is negatively impacted:

- vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.
- visitors to our neighborhood feel it is worse than we as residents feel it.
- people who appear to struggle with addictions or mental health challenges.
- everyone is affected when there is a problem with public safety.
- business owners and staff downtown.
- people who appear to struggle with addictions or mental health challenges and the homeless.

The above responses to this question reveal an awareness of systemic and structural issues; however, the “discourse of denial” appears to be just under the surface. As described in the literature review, commitments to democratic principles such as “justice, equality, and fairness conflict with but also coexist with negative feelings about minority groups and discrimination against them” (Henry & Tator, 2002, pp. 24). This paradox is evident in the comments provided since the majority of respondents felt “everyone” or “all people” are negatively impacted or at risk downtown. A few respondents also argued that men were negatively impacted or equally at risk downtown, and they expressed frustration that this category was not explicitly included in the answer choices for the question.

4. Public Services and Activities in Downtown Saskatoon that Positively or Negatively Impact Perception of Public Safety

When identifying the *public services and activities* in downtown Saskatoon that respondents felt positively impacted the perception of public safety, protective services rated high, as did garbage collection and street maintenance. Bars and restaurants were the next highest choice, which aligns with the data about why respondents spend time downtown. Transportation, health services, and Indigenous-led initiatives were also positive; however, these three categories had some of the highest rates of ‘undecided’ responses (23.81%, 28.76%, and 27.95% respectively). The public services and activities that rated the lowest were public washrooms, supported living accommodations, and outreach services (such as EGADZ and Lighthouse vans). In addition to being rated the lowest regarding positivity, the undecided responses are particularly high for these three categories as well, at 24.68%, 24.56%, and 20.18% respectively.

It is worth taking a closer look at these final three categories. Public washrooms generated 103 positive responses, 57 undecided responses, and 71 negative responses. With regards to supported living accommodation, 95 responses were positive, 56 were undecided, and 77 were negative. Finally, 116 respondents felt outreach services were positive, while 46 were undecided and 66 were negative. Based on these numbers, more than half of the respondents did not take a position, or they disagreed with the idea that public washrooms and supported living accommodations have a positive impact. As indicated above, the number of respondents who were undecided about outreach services or viewed them as having a negative impact was just slightly below 50%.

Q15 These services positively impact my perception of public safety in downtown.

Answered: 236 Skipped: 26

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Garbage/Waste collection	24.56% 56	51.75% 118	14.04% 32	8.33% 19	1.32% 3	228	2.10
Street repairs	15.15% 35	52.38% 121	16.45% 38	13.42% 31	2.60% 6	231	2.36
Public transportation	17.32% 40	42.86% 99	23.81% 55	12.12% 28	3.90% 9	231	2.42
Public washrooms	16.02% 37	28.57% 66	24.68% 57	21.65% 50	9.09% 21	231	2.79
Health	16.81% 38	44.69% 101	28.76% 65	7.96% 18	1.77% 4	226	2.33
Hospitality/bars/restaurants	24.35% 56	50.43% 116	17.39% 40	5.65% 13	2.17% 5	230	2.11
Supported Living Accommodation	11.40% 26	30.26% 69	24.56% 56	16.23% 37	17.54% 40	228	2.98
Indigenous-led initiatives	22.71% 52	39.30% 90	27.95% 64	7.42% 17	2.62% 6	229	2.28
Outreach Services (EGADZ, Lighthouse vans)	20.18% 46	30.70% 70	20.18% 46	14.91% 34	14.04% 32	228	2.72
Saskatoon Police Service	30.04% 70	44.64% 104	12.88% 30	9.44% 22	3.00% 7	233	2.11
Fire and Protective Services	29.52% 67	49.34% 112	13.66% 31	5.73% 13	1.76% 4	227	2.01
Alternate Response Officers	32.31% 74	42.79% 98	18.78% 43	4.37% 10	1.75% 4	229	2.00
Community Support Program Officers	37.99% 87	39.74% 91	15.28% 35	5.68% 13	1.31% 3	229	1.93

When identifying *activities and situations* that *negatively influence* the perception of public safety downtown, the only two categories that were not viewed as negative were busking and hospitality/bars and restaurants. All remaining categories, many of which can be linked to socio-economic conditions and intersectional discrimination, were viewed as negatively impacting the perception of public safety. The three activities identified as being the most negative were: nuisance behavior/public disorder (93.67%), gangs/large groups of people (90.09%), and abandoned/boarded up buildings (82.05%).

Q16 These activities or situations negatively influence my perception of public safety in downtown.

Answered: 239 Skipped: 23

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Busking	9.17% 21	13.54% 31	15.28% 35	45.85% 105	16.16% 37	229	3.46
Panhandling	29.49% 69	33.76% 79	16.24% 38	17.52% 41	2.99% 7	234	2.31
Loitering	32.76% 76	36.21% 84	15.09% 35	15.09% 35	0.86% 2	232	2.15
Nuisance behaviour/Public disorder	56.96% 135	36.71% 87	3.38% 8	2.53% 6	0.42% 1	237	1.53
Littering	32.17% 74	46.52% 107	10.87% 25	8.70% 20	1.74% 4	230	2.01
Graffiti Vandalism	29.79% 70	39.57% 93	14.47% 34	11.06% 26	5.11% 12	235	2.22
Sex Trade	42.79% 98	33.19% 76	13.97% 32	8.73% 20	1.31% 3	229	1.93
Gangs/large groups of people	56.90% 132	33.19% 77	6.90% 16	1.72% 4	1.29% 3	232	1.57
Hospitality/bars, restaurants	2.21% 5	4.87% 11	15.49% 35	52.65% 119	24.78% 56	226	3.93
Abandoned or boarded up buildings	39.74% 93	42.31% 99	9.83% 23	6.84% 16	1.28% 3	234	1.88
Impaired driving	51.53% 118	30.57% 70	12.23% 28	3.93% 9	1.75% 4	229	1.74
Motor vehicle theft	44.49% 101	38.77% 88	12.33% 28	3.08% 7	1.32% 3	227	1.78

When identifying the *activities and situations that positively influence* the perception of public safety downtown, festivals, fairs and arts and cultural events – which can also be categorized as economic initiatives that increase tourism, and/or ‘family activities’ – were consistently rated as positive. Based on respondent answers throughout the survey, it is not surprising that panhandling was not identified as a positive influence.

Q17 These events/activities positively influence my perception of public safety in downtown.

Answered: 237 Skipped: 25

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Festivals	48.51% 114	40.85% 96	6.38% 15	2.55% 6	1.70% 4	235	1.68
Food events	49.36% 116	39.57% 93	7.23% 17	2.13% 5	1.70% 4	235	1.67
Public arts & Culture	49.57% 116	41.45% 97	5.13% 12	2.56% 6	1.28% 3	234	1.65
Fireworks	32.33% 75	38.79% 90	17.24% 40	6.90% 16	4.74% 11	232	2.13
Street fairs/vendors	45.53% 107	43.83% 103	6.81% 16	2.55% 6	1.28% 3	235	1.70
Busking	20.61% 47	37.72% 86	22.81% 52	12.28% 28	6.58% 15	228	2.46
Panhandling	1.74% 4	7.83% 18	29.13% 67	31.30% 72	30.00% 69	230	3.80

When rating overall satisfaction of quality of services downtown, the majority of respondents were satisfied. The results for this question run parallel to the results for public services and activities downtown that are viewed as positive, including the levels of undecided responses; however, there is one discrepancy: attitudes towards Saskatoon Police Services, Alternative Response Officers, and Community Support Program Officers are lower.

When questioned about the positive influence of Saskatoon Police Services, Alternative Response Officers, and Community Support Program Officers on public safety, 74.68% “agreed” and 77.73% of respondents “strongly agreed” that these services had a positive impact. When reframed as a question about whether respondents were satisfied with the *quality* of these services, the number is lower: 53.05% were “mostly” satisfied and 58.85% of respondents were “very” satisfied. Although details were not provided, this discrepancy about ‘quality’ may relate to Friedman’s (2021) point that police are ill-equipped to deal with social problems such as

homelessness, addictions, and mental health challenges. It may also relate to the perception of homelessness and panhandling as “nuisance behaviour,” which in turn is perceived as a threat to public safety, and to the downtown economy. When framed this way, aggressive police tactics are presumed to be justifiable. As stated in the literature, there is a need to re-think current models of policing.

Q18 Please rate your satisfaction of the quality of each of the following services in downtown.

Answered: 233 Skipped: 29

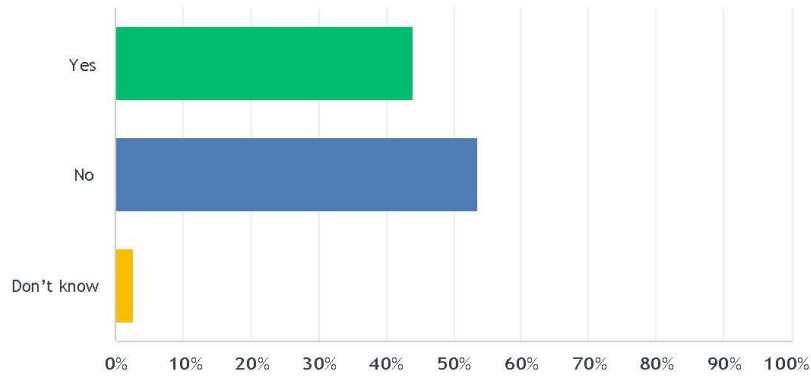
	VERY UNSATISFIED	MOSTLY UNSATISFIED	UNDECIDED	MOSTLY SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED	TOTAL
Fire and Protective Services	4.31% 10	9.05% 21	18.97% 44	49.57% 115	18.10% 42	232
BID cleanup crew	4.31% 10	7.76% 18	17.67% 41	48.28% 112	21.98% 51	232
Garbage/Waste collection	3.48% 8	13.04% 30	10.87% 25	63.04% 145	9.57% 22	230
Street repairs	5.19% 12	23.38% 54	23.38% 54	42.86% 99	5.19% 12	231
Public transportation	6.55% 15	20.52% 47	32.31% 74	37.99% 87	2.62% 6	229
Indigenous-led initiatives	4.80% 11	11.79% 27	40.17% 92	34.50% 79	8.73% 20	229
Outreach Services	10.00% 23	18.70% 43	33.04% 76	31.30% 72	6.96% 16	230
Saskatoon Police Service	8.23% 19	14.72% 34	21.21% 49	45.89% 106	9.96% 23	231
Alternate Response Officers	3.48% 8	7.83% 18	35.65% 82	39.57% 91	13.48% 31	230
Community Support Program Officers	5.19% 12	7.79% 18	28.57% 66	38.96% 90	19.48% 45	231

5. *Experiences of Victimization in Downtown Saskatoon*

A total of 53.56% of respondents indicated they had not been victimized in downtown Saskatoon, while 43.93% of respondents indicated they had.

Q19 Have you been victimized in the downtown area?

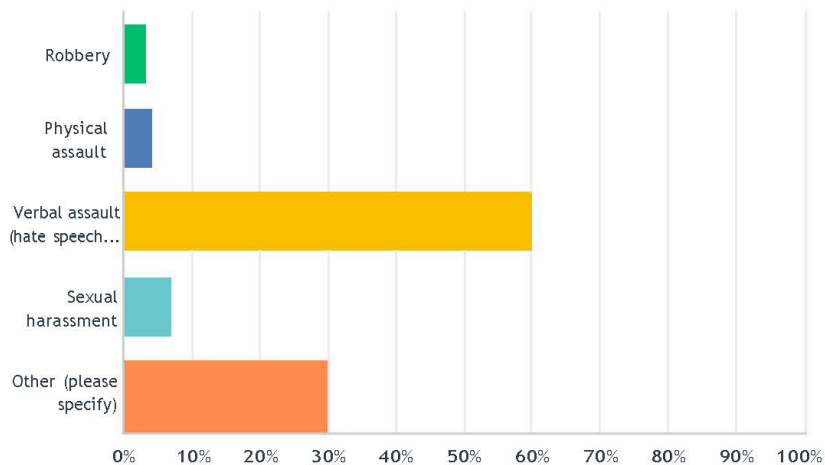
Answered: 239 Skipped: 23



The type of victimization experienced by 60.87% of respondents was verbal assault, including hate speech, slurs, cat calls. Of those who had experienced victimization, 75.97% of respondents *did not* report the incident to police.

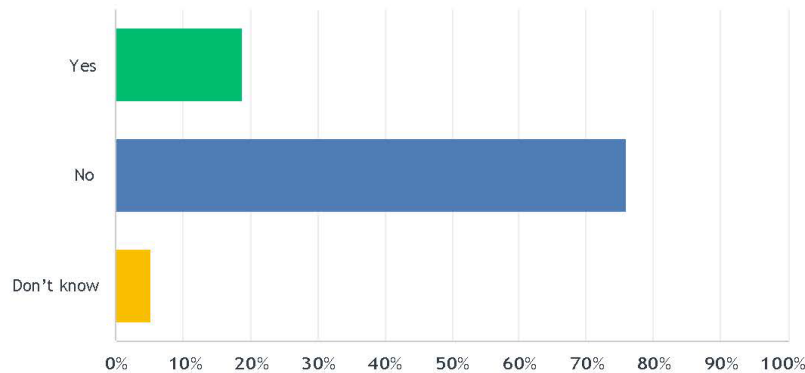
Q20 If yes, what happened?

Answered: 115 Skipped: 147



Q21 Did you report it to Saskatoon Police Service?

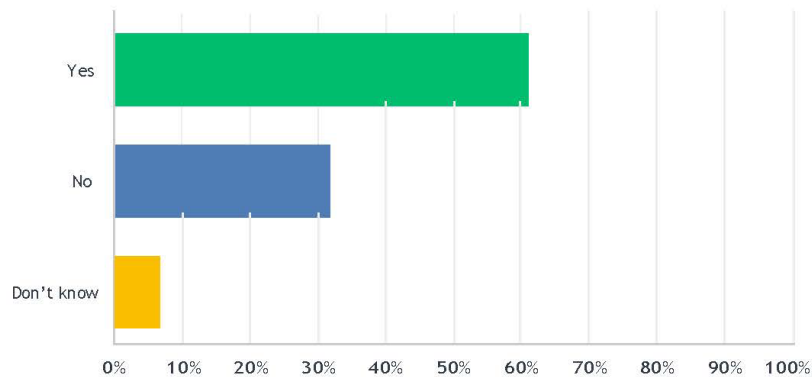
Answered: 154 Skipped: 108



In addition to personal experiences, 61.21% of respondents indicated that a friend or family member had been victimized in the downtown area.

Q22 Do you know of a friend or family member who has been victimized in the downtown area?

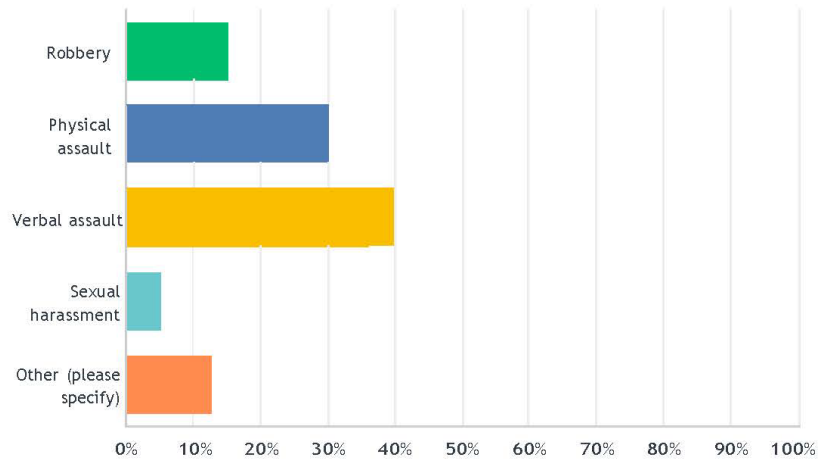
Answered: 232 Skipped: 30



In this case, 36.24% experienced verbal assault, while 30.20% experienced physical assault. 42.33% of respondents did not report the incident to police, while 39.88% did.

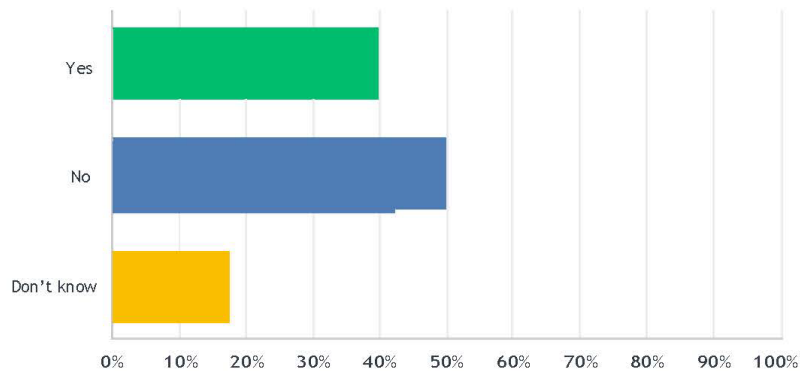
Q23 What happened to this person?

Answered: 149 Skipped: 113



Q24 If so, was it reported to Police?

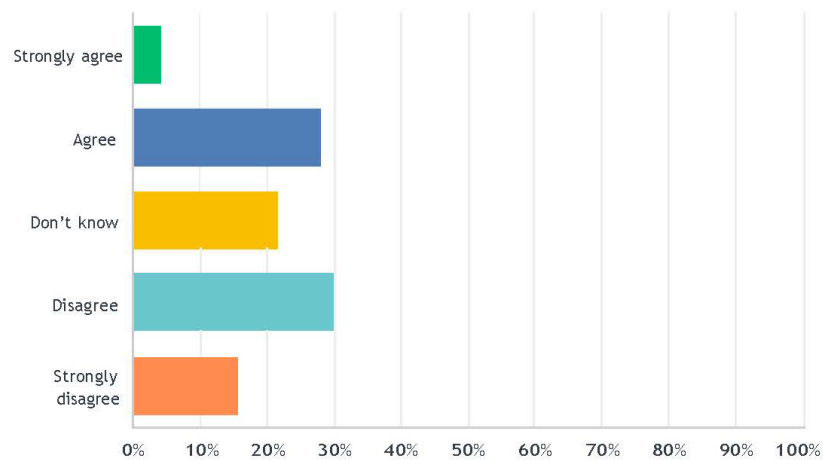
Answered: 163 Skipped: 99



When asked to respond to the question, “I am safe from violent crimes in downtown,” 45.72% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 32.48% agreed or strongly agreed.

Q25 I am safe from violent crimes in downtown.

Answered: 234 Skipped: 28



Respondents provided additional information about the types of victimization experienced, which included: physical threat with a weapon, physical attack with a weapon, sexual harassment, indecent exposure, verbal assault, being followed, being spit on, intimidation, transphobic insults, racial slurs, vehicle break-in and theft, bike theft, vandalism and property damage, attempted robbery, and theft.

6. Perceived Responsiveness of Saskatoon Police Service

The perception of the Saskatoon Police Service evolves throughout the data. When asked whether they think the Saskatoon Police Service responds with equal intensity to all calls, 45.53% said “no”, 17.45% said “yes”, and 37.02% answered “don’t know.” For respondents who answered “no”, the top three factors they identified as influencing calls for service included type and severity of crime (70.62%); number of calls at the same time (58.19%); and neighbourhood (51.41%). Race is also viewed as a significant factor, with 41.24% of

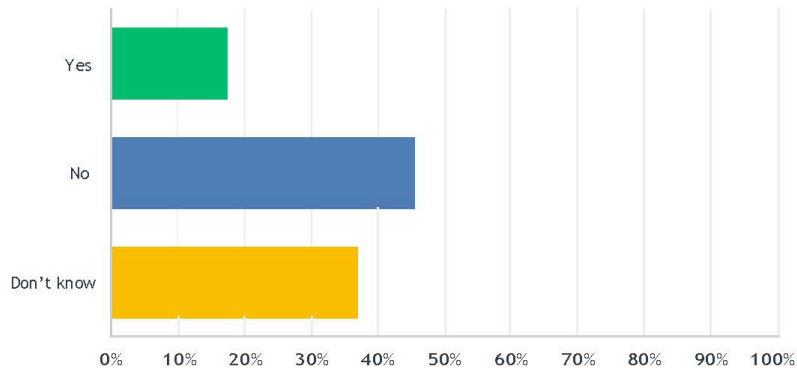
respondents choosing this option. Respondents provided additional comments about other factors they believed influenced police responsiveness:

- gender diverse victim.
- race. No doubt about it. Any South Asian, Middle Eastern or visibly Muslim person I know who has been assaulted hasn't been treated equally as a whites person [sic], especially in the same case where both victims were present and both were assaulted. This really says something about who can actually count on police services. Also leads to lack of trust from minority communities.
- they take their time when it's a person they don't want to deal with (repeated offender/intoxicated person).
- there are so many crimes in this city going on at one time that it is difficult to respond downtown to calls that are of lesser problems.
- priority. Not all calls warrant equal intensity.

The final comment that “not all calls warrant equal intensity” can be read as pragmatic and common sense; however, as demonstrated by some of the other comments above and in the literature, marginalized communities are not prioritized to the same degree, and in many cases, they are not viewed as belonging to the “public” that requires protection. Several questions must be considered to gain full comprehension about what responsiveness actually means: what types of crimes are considered severe; how are high volumes of police calls triaged; and what neighbourhoods and “races” are prioritized?

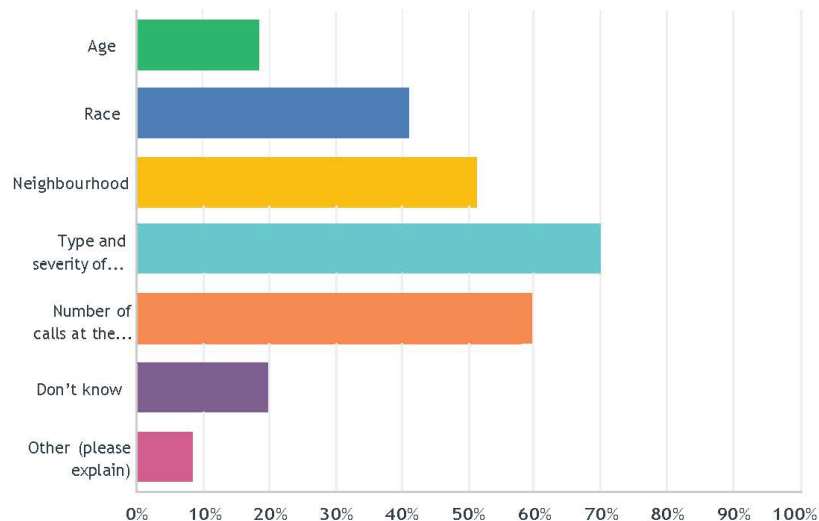
Q26 Do you think the Saskatoon Police Service responds to calls with equal intensity?

Answered: 235 Skipped: 27



Q27 If no, what factors do you think influence calls for service; tick all that apply

Answered: 177 Skipped: 85



7. *Understanding of Root Causes of Activities and Behaviours that Impact Public Safety*

In reflecting on the activities and behaviours that contributed to making respondents feel unsafe, they were asked to consider the reasons or root causes for those activities and behaviours. Five answers generated a response of “important” or “very important” for 75% or more of

respondents: high levels of poverty (83.25%), barriers to appropriate health/mental health services (80.84%), access to appropriate substance use services (79.16%), domestic violence (75.24%), and intergenerational trauma (75%). Over 70% of respondents also identified inadequate social assistance (72.43%), and barriers to appropriate, secure employment (72.37%) as “important” or “very important” reasons or root causes.

Q28 What are the reasons or root causes of activities and behaviours that contribute to making you feel unsafe? Indicate how important each of the following factors are.

Answered: 218 Skipped: 44

	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	TOTAL
Lack of affordable rental housing	30.84% 66	36.92% 79	13.08% 28	9.81% 21	9.35% 20	214
Barriers to appropriate health/mental health services	52.34% 112	28.50% 61	10.28% 22	6.07% 13	2.80% 6	214
Access to appropriate substance use services	51.85% 112	27.31% 59	9.72% 21	6.94% 15	4.17% 9	216
Barriers to appropriate, secure employment	32.39% 69	39.44% 84	16.90% 36	7.51% 16	3.76% 8	213
Inadequate social assistance	43.46% 93	28.97% 62	11.68% 25	9.81% 21	6.07% 13	214
Family breakdown	31.90% 67	34.29% 72	18.10% 38	10.48% 22	5.24% 11	210
Domestic violence	40.95% 86	34.29% 72	15.24% 32	5.24% 11	4.29% 9	210
High levels of poverty	53.02% 114	30.23% 65	9.30% 20	6.05% 13	1.40% 3	215
Intergenerational trauma	42.45% 90	32.55% 69	12.26% 26	8.49% 18	4.25% 9	212
Child and Family Services involvement	25.00% 53	30.66% 65	25.94% 55	10.38% 22	8.02% 17	212
Inadequate policing	22.01% 46	29.19% 61	22.49% 47	18.66% 39	7.66% 16	209
Inappropriate policing instead of prevention and intervention services	36.36% 76	27.75% 58	16.75% 35	10.53% 22	8.61% 18	209
Inappropriate private security interventions	19.43% 41	27.49% 58	21.80% 46	14.69% 31	16.59% 35	211
racism/sexism/discrimination	41.71% 88	25.12% 53	15.17% 32	10.43% 22	7.58% 16	211

This list of reasons and root causes paints a picture of a dysfunctional and disaffected ‘subculture’ within the public sphere, one that is created by the same systems and structures that enable and privilege affluent communities. This is a central paradox within perceptions of public safety.

8. *Recommendations to Improve Feelings of Public Safety*

The root causes described above are also identified as measures that could be taken to improve public safety in downtown Saskatoon. Not surprisingly, improved access to appropriate health/mental health services and improved access to appropriate substance use services were the top two measures identified by 86.16% respondents and 79.91% respondents respectively. However, two additional measures received responses from 70% or more respondents: improved access to appropriate youth programming, and improved access to affordable rental housing.

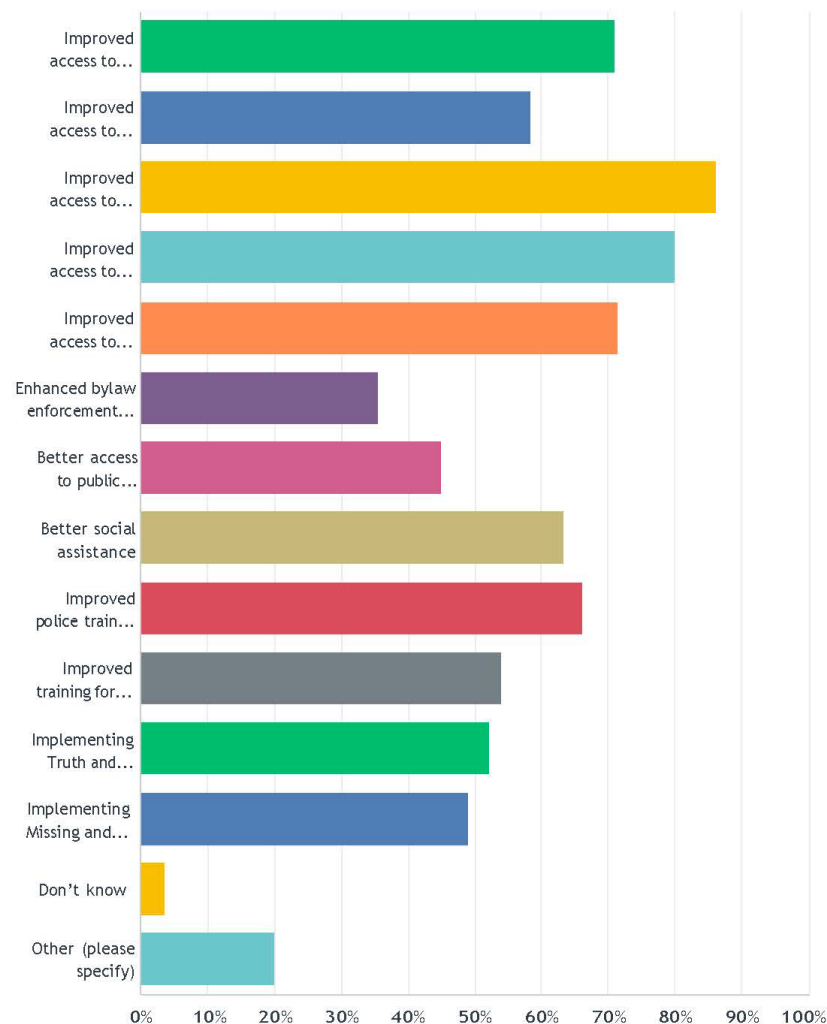
Respondents offered additional feedback about other types of measures to improve public safety in downtown Saskatoon:

- trans and gay acceptance.
- intervention and better social programming, move Lighthouse out of the downtown and closer to social programs so people are better assisted and less likely to commit crimes for money.
- bring more people downtown.
- get city workers back downtown.
- better street and sidewalk lighting, lower taxes for downtown business to encourage longer open operating hours, have more downtown events, have a grocery store downtown.

- better access to public washrooms as long as they aren't located directly across the street from the front doors of the La Renaissance condos [sic].
- remove anyone that looks homeless and take care of them but not downtown.

Q29 What are some of the measures that you think would help improve safety in Saskatoon's downtown? Tick all that apply.

Answered: 224 Skipped: 38



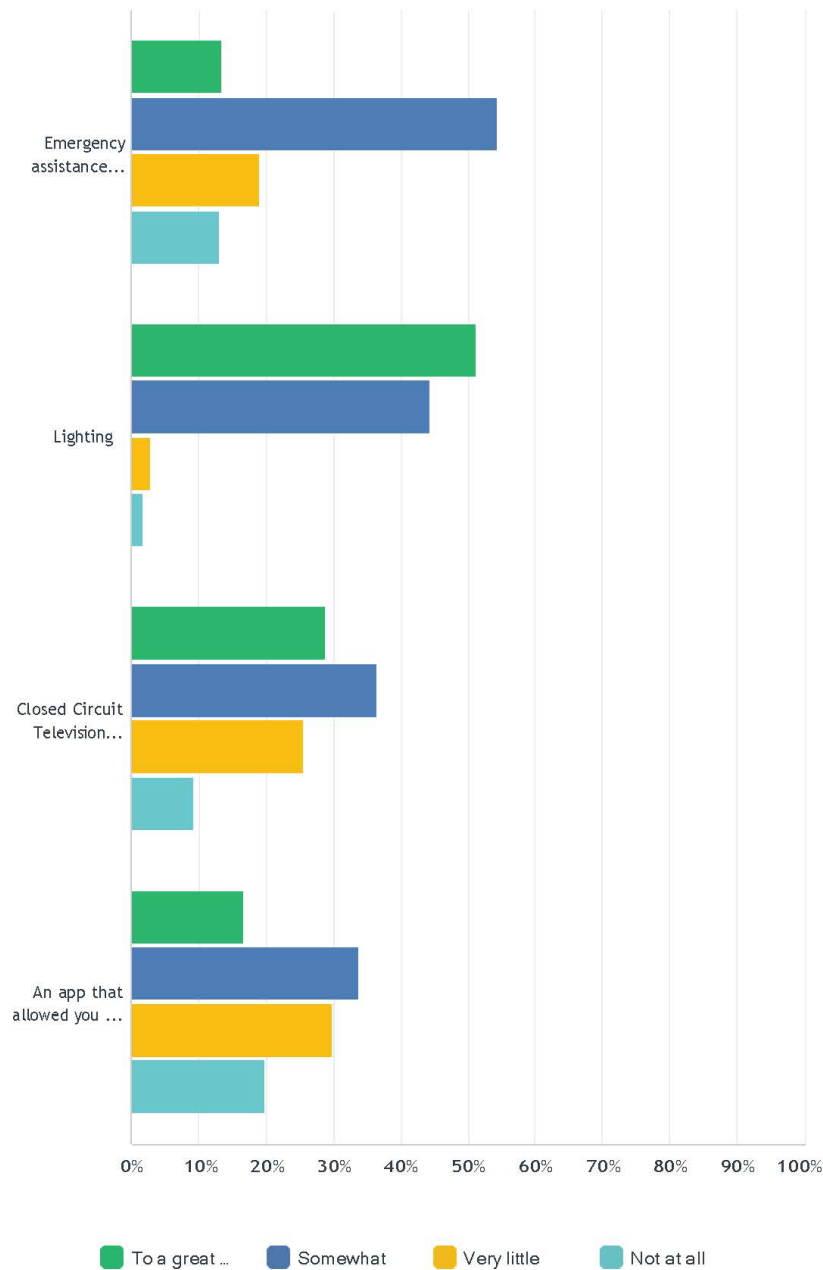
These comments reflect a “discourse of denial,” NIMBYism, and gentrification. A connection can be made with what Henry and Tator (2002) refer to as “democratic racism,” that is, a failure

to acknowledge that cultural, structural, and systemic racism exists (p. 24). It is also interesting to note that some respondents perceived mainstream media reports and social media activity about downtown Saskatoon as perpetuating fear and anxiety in downtown residents and creating or increasing “moral panic about the situation.”

Four additional measures were presented to respondents to rate: emergency assistance signage, lighting, closed circuit television (CCTV/security cameras), and an app that allowed one to report where they felt unsafe and why. Lighting received the highest response: 51.13% of respondents indicated lighting would improve their sense of safety “to a great extent,” while 44.43% said lighting would improve their sense of safety “somewhat.” CCTV also received a notable response in that 28.77% chose improved safety “to a great extent,” and 36.53% chose “somewhat.”

Q30 To what extent would these factors make you feel safer?

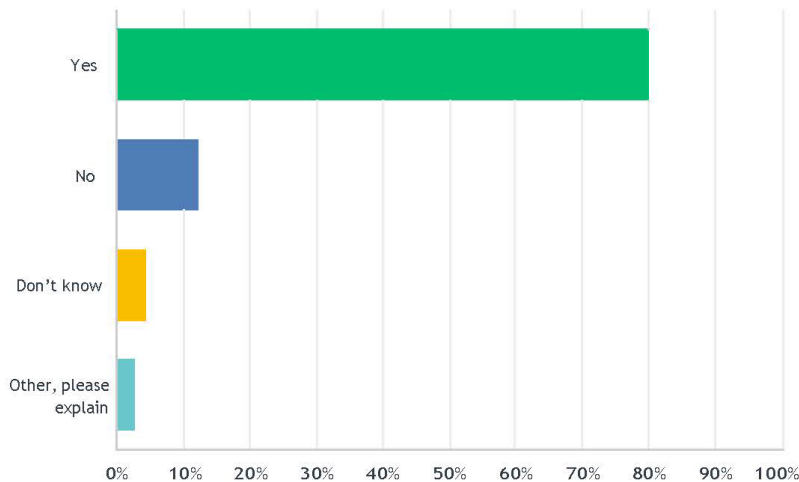
Answered: 221 Skipped: 41



In sum, when asked about their satisfaction with their overall quality of life, 80.44% of respondents indicated they were “satisfied with [their] overall quality of life.”

Q31 Are you satisfied with your overall quality of life (income, health, employment, housing, security, utilities)?

Answered: 225 Skipped: 37



Interview Findings

While interview subjects representing those who live and work downtown, policing and fire services professionals, planners, students, and business owners and managers provided comparable responses to the answers provided by survey respondents, they also offered a deeper understanding of how public safety is perceived in downtown Saskatoon. A number of responses from the 18 key informant interviews aligned with survey results about downtown Saskatoon including these: time of day respondents felt safest; areas where respondents felt more or less safe, and situations that prompted feelings of being more or less safe. Experiences of victimization were similar; however, cases of stabbing, physical assault, mugging, and murder were also shared.

When asked who is perceived as being the most impacted by current levels of public safety downtown, interviewee responses were comparable to the survey results highlighting Indigenous peoples, women, LGBTQ, marginalized people, those experiencing homelessness, seniors, youth, and “everyone.” However, they also emphasized the impact on newcomers to Canada, on the residents and homeowners (including condo owners) downtown, as well as business owners downtown.

Some notable differences in responses included how the idea of public safety is understood or defined, and connections between public safety and the idea of community. In addition, interviewees provided additional insight about “legitimate” vs. “illegitimate” people and behaviours, and overt contradictions about “safety in numbers” vs. anxiety about groups of people congregating “for no reason.”

Defining Public Safety

When asked what public safety means to them, respondents provided considerable insight raising important issues about definitions of crime and safety (and their fluidity), questioning social media simplifications and amplifications, coded communications that obscure the worst inclinations, and adding significant nuance to survey findings:

- what is safe, comfortable varies from person to person – very fluid.
- having a downtown that doesn’t have a little bit of an edge is probably utopian thinking.
- there's a difference between perceived public safety and actual public safety.

- people perceive homelessness as being unsafe. A lot of chatter online, social media doesn't help.
- what is actually a crime? Sleeping on a bench? Sleeping on the sidewalk? Loitering? These are all ways poverty is criminalized.
- when we moved here we moved downtown and people would be like "a code downtown is 'sketch'." And sometimes I was kind of like coded, for you know, there are a lot of poor people... non-white people around.
- people's perception of safety comes down to their familiarity with a situation.

When connecting the idea of public safety to a sense of community, respondents communicated a desire for connection and the sort of neighbourhoods as "complete communities" where "[e]very citizen feels a sense of belonging" imagined by the City's Strategic Plan for 2018-2021:

- public safety is just about having an environment where [it] doesn't matter what walk of life you're from or what your role in the community is; everyone feels that sense of security there.
- public spaces are where folks experience community. It's important to be able to [get] together as a community or you know socialize with members of the community.
- [public safety is] an indicator of the success of the community and how well its members are doing.

Public safety and community were understood as important for everyone, and some of the reasons provided demonstrate an implicit understanding of collective responsibility:

- it's important because it affects whether people want to go to that certain area and it'll affect the businesses and whether they want to live there...affects everything honestly.
- that fear shuts down activities and it stops people from doing things that they would like to do... all of that creates issues and challenges.
- the responsibility for helping people has become more organizational than individual...let's make sure everybody is okay, not just ourselves - [that] would be a cultural shift of mammoth proportions.

Respondents were also cognizant of public safety *for* vulnerable and marginalized people rather than focusing exclusively on safety *from* unhoused people. Their responses point to the importance of empathy, and awareness of systemic inequities when addressing socio-economic divisions:

- [when] people who are actually unhoused are saying, “how safe do I feel living, trying to get the resources I need, trying to get fed... am I going to get robbed, am I going to get assaulted am I going to get this and that?” ... that's a much harder public threat to deal with than, like “oh someone's going to ask me for money and I’m going to feel awkward about it,” which is more often than not what it comes down to.

- we've built up (inflated) a fear about gangs, drugs... being able to go out and feel like you can *see* those people and realize that they're *not a problem*...they're seeing the same things, they're experiencing the same things *to see you*.
- [homeless people] have no intention of intimidating anybody right? Like they're just making the best of their situation...it's unfair for us to be to be nervous around somebody who...has a different lifestyle than us, right? It's massively unfair.
- you can't look at homelessness as one thing by itself without looking at who is homeless and why, and what can be done.

Naming practices were viewed as important when creating a community of understanding and respect, as evidenced by the reference to the “unhoused” rather than the “homeless” in the comment above. Some respondents also renamed and re-framed the terms, “shelters,” “addicts” and “the homeless” and in doing so, foregrounded human dignity and an ethics of care:

- I don't like calling my facility a shelter. I call it an emergency wellness centre... If we can get people rehabilitated...they can get some sort of employment or education, [they] can take care of their family, or get their children back.
- when we use the term “relatives” I wanna get people away from using the word “addicted” or “homeless”... “Relatives,” they belong to somebody's family. They're still cared for... and we gotta treat 'em like people.

Public safety was also understood as the ability to trust government representatives who are elected by “folks on the ground” to represent all members of the downtown community.

Respondents emphasized the need to be “listened to” and to see “actions being taken” in order to build “confidence” and “trust” in governments at all levels.

When asked whether they felt public safety downtown had changed over time, respondents reflected on their personal experiences and memories, thereby reinforcing the value placed on the importance of community, and the loss of community:

- it's less consumers or, or everyday people for lack of a better phrase to describe them, especially through COVID, and more displaced people....there's just more individuals who need help and the services aren't there for them.
- history has caught up, compounded by drugs, exacerbates mental health...Vast majority of public not aware, ignorant of drug crisis and impacts of government policies and residential schools. Many Indigenous peoples downtown are part of an adverse childhood experience.
- mom was a part of the system... cut hair downtown in most elite salon with most elite clients... [I] remember thousands of people downtown during street fairs, etc. Lighthouse changed everything....Drug component changed, more prominent now. Grew up on 20th, seen how it transitioned in lifetime from barber shops and bakeries to safe consumption.

Respondents also noted how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the real and the perceived sense of public safety downtown. On the one hand, some respondents felt public safety in downtown Saskatoon “took a nosedive” during COVID-19. On the other hand, respondents also noted that the absence of business activities downtown during the pandemic meant that unhoused people and people “hanging around” became more visible, which increased the *perception* of a decline in public safety, and an increase in purported “unsafe” street activity.

Contradictions Between Safety in Numbers and Congregation Without Purpose

The perceived relationship between public safety and community was similar to the survey results; however, interviewees provided additional details that are interesting to consider:

- feel safer in a park where folks are around (i.e. having picnics).
- the more people, the safer people.
- safety comes with numbers, make downtown vibrant again.
- presence of people, diverse groups of people.
- someone sitting on a bench by the street having lunch...families playing in the park.
- scenes on the street where people are enjoying themselves.

Conversely, respondents also felt unsafe around groups of people. Their responses are similar to the survey results in that they identified people’s presumed characters, their perceived condition, and/or public acts as negatively impacting the perception of public safety; however, once again additional details were provided:

- people sitting around watching me makes me feel less safe.
- being outnumbered.
- gang members – some of them are so young.
- people who are too friendly, [who] talk to strangers.
- [people] engaging in sexual acts in public.
- people asking for money.
- when people tend to gather on streets or block people.

These collective responses reinforce the survey results; however, they paint a more detailed picture of how civic engagement and participation in public spaces is experienced. Distinct lines are drawn to the point where *seeing* and *being seen by* certain types of people is, in and of itself, perceived as a threat.

Legitimate and Illegitimate People and Behaviours

The contradictions regarding groups of people gathering is linked to discussions of *legitimate* people and activities vs. *illegitimate* people and behaviours. Legitimate activities included shopping in stores, eating in restaurants, playing, and having a picnic in the park. It is interesting that most of these activities are associated with conspicuous consumption of goods, services, and *spaces*. Conversely, *illegitimate* behaviours included drug use, loitering, public intoxication, panhandling, sleeping in public spaces, “being shady,” and congregating in crowds “for no reason.” This final comment is particularly interesting since it is in direct opposition to respondents who emphasized the importance of creating “inviting spaces to sit and congregate.”

To address these behaviours, several respondents felt that additional support services and activities were needed to prevent boredom, which was associated with an increased risk of criminal activity and destructive behaviors “especially for youth and young adults.”

Recommendations included: community organizations, drop-in centres, places for people to go where they feel comfortable.

Perception of Poverty and Homelessness

When asked about their views on the effects of high levels and concentrations of poverty on public safety downtown, respondents offered a variety of perspectives. Several respondents identified links among poverty, addictions and crime:

- visible street level poverty certainly impacts the perception of public safety. Whether it impacts actual safety levels, I don't know for sure...there's also a difference between personal safety and, you know, property security.
- you make minimum wage, you can't afford to rent anywhere like and plus pay for groceries and gas. So the more desperate people become, the more theft there will be. I don't have the answer to that one.
- I think more people sleeping rough, more people outside, more people desperate, maybe turning to drugs...[to] cope with poverty.

Poverty and homelessness were viewed as having a negative impact on tourism because visitors to Saskatoon see “people that have got obvious issues in life” on the streets downtown, which “turns them off.” Homelessness was also described as a “job”:

- most of the ones that we see, they're there every day, like it's their job for all intents and purposes, to get the five or ten or twenty or whatever dollars, that they can get in a day.

Government and Community Responsibilities

When asked who is responsible for addressing poverty levels and public safety downtown, municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies were identified, as well as community organizations, and community members. Responsibility for health services and social agencies, as well as the location of these services was assigned to municipal governments. Municipal governments were also accused of being disconnected from the community, not open to feedback, and not taking action. Responsibility for economic issues and income assistance was assigned to provincial and federal governments.

Some respondents indicated that excessive “finger pointing” and “passing the buck” attitudes are impacting the ability of government agencies, community organizations, and community members to work together to effect change:

- your mayor isn't doing enough, and then the mayor says well that's actually up to the police department to handle, and the police department says, well, we aren't doing it because we don't have enough resources from the city or the provincial government, and our unions restrict us.

Collective responsibility was also extended to the ways in which government agencies, community organizations, and community members work together. Respondents felt more cooperation among community organizations was needed; however, they acknowledged that the structure of the funding perpetuated this problem. They felt there was a lot of competition for funding, which impacted access to services, and the quality of services provided. A key issue was identified regarding the ways in which information about Indigenous communities is used are also important to consider:

- Indigenous data has been really abused... coordinated access is this really promising approach that relies on everyone sharing the data of homeless people. And that can be a real problem for Indigenous people to give their data over to a bunch of largely white organizations who are going to manage it and manage them. So it's really important to have representation.

Respondents emphasized the value of a ground-level approach rooted in relationship-building that includes in-person, on-the-street contact to assess needs and get people the assistance they require. An emphasis on sharing public spaces by increasing “the amount of *users* or *uses* within them” was also noted. Some respondents encouraged the creation of a “one-stop-shop” service model. For example, the Saskatoon Tribal Council invested in an on-site paramedic who can “trouble-shoot” some of the calls they receive. In doing so, they create an access point for emergency support, they can reduce the number of 911 calls for police and ambulance, and they can save lives.

The idea of consolidating services is directly connected to the question of whether to centralize or disperse support services. Centralized services were viewed by many respondents as more beneficial for community members who do not have the means to travel across the city (and back again) to access the diverse range of support services they require. However, some respondents who work or live downtown were adamantly opposed to centralized services in downtown Saskatoon:

- as much as you don't want to be kind of like NIMBY and just “get this these people with needs away from me,” you don't want that mentality, there's also a bit like there needs to be somewhere else you can go and this place needs to be secure.
- I don't want a centralization of the lower class stuck in [my] community... they should go to the area that's tightly controlled, tightly monitored, they should be together, and live with high emphasis on a mandatory hand-holding program.
- I think the city has to be, and the government departments have to be, more aware of where they're putting these facilities...[and] what can happen to a neighbourhood if they put too many of these facilities in... I don't believe that a lot of these things, these places, should go up in the residential areas.... You have to have something near transportation...somewhat near even a recreational facility, because you know a lot of these people they've had absolutely nothing to do.

The idea that poverty is associated with doing "absolutely nothing" is interesting as CCPA (2016) commented, surviving on social assistance may be the hardest work there is. A poverty

expert commented in Findlay et al. 2023), when politicians say that people should get a job, “it is a slap in the face for those working five jobs.” These comments also speak to the ways in which domination is “normalized” and internalized within settler colonialism. This perspective is further evidenced by references to public safety for “the greater population,” and for “the people that really pay the taxes.”

Questions were raised about whether too many accommodations were being made for people who are unhoused or who have addictions, without consideration for those “who have worked very hard and who made the right decisions.” In the comment below, the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous peoples have experienced is trivialized. The “*blame frame*” is activated and used to “shield” the respondent “from ugly truths,” and in doing so, they “perpetuate them” (Hanson and Hanson, 2006, p. 425):

- did it begin with [how] a white man treated the Indigenous? There's a point where we all have to pick up our socks and carry them...[Condominium owners] are just as important as the homeless. It all comes down to decision-making, and we're all just one decision away from a bad decision or a good decision and the accommodation of the bad decisions are almost overwhelming.

Impact on Business Community

Several respondents emphasized the impact of public safety issues downtown on businesses. Many respondents felt that with improved safety, businesses could be open later and “draw more people into the downtown core area during evenings and weekends.” However, based on current

perceptions of public safety, business owners and patrons expressed trepidation about being downtown:

- I'm scared of someone on meth who walks into my business. It's the addiction part of it that they have no fear of having a confrontation with me, they have no fear of having a confrontation with any of my staff.
- I mean you got security systems, you've got video cameras, you've got bars on the windows, you've got, you know, double doors at the back, you know you've had to make your place as Fort Knox as you can.
- in terms of how safe it is, a month and a half ago I got mugged, I got attacked in my own store....I got slugged, I got hit and knocked down.
- on a consumer level...there's a lot of people who don't want to come shop downtown or access services, simply because of the residents of downtown.
- business[es] can't be successful if they can't draw us, the people, [downtown] due to safety.

Quality of Policing, Community Support Officers, and Alternative Response Officers

The survey results demonstrated the importance of policing, community support officers, and alternative response officers; however, the *quality* of those services was questioned. While

several interviewees applauded the relationship-building between communities and officers and their increased presence downtown, some respondents felt the police had failed to maintain relationships, or that they were “too friendly with [the people] they have come to know.” The negative comments below reveal other areas of concern for respondents:

- searching pockets for no reason – stereotyping, assuming
- treating Indigenous people different than white people.
- the number of times that I've seen the police, they're moving somebody who doesn't have a house along and it just is like a super uncomfortable experience because they're not doing anything. They're just sitting there because they have nowhere else to go.
- police presence isn't going to make people feel safer, especially if that police isn't from the community and engaged with the community.

Some respondents communicated that police uniforms are a “barrier” to public safety because they perpetuate feelings of “alienation”:

- part of the public safety piece we have to be conscious of is the fact that uniforms don't make some people feel comfortable...[they] influence whether someone feels safe or not.
- one barrier that the police deal with is just that alienation that comes with wearing a uniform, especially a police uniform... People still get antsy around a uniform and that increases a thousand-fold when it's police.
- the difference in...how people respond to like a police uniform versus the uniforms that the inspectors and firefighters wear when they're just out and about is really interesting.

Members of the Saskatoon Fire Department were viewed in a more positive light. The stigma associated with police uniforms was attributed to global protests, a history of police targeting “marginalized” communities, and media coverage about police “brutality.”

Respondents were also cognizant of some of the challenges that police experience. Concerns were raised about changes to the “provincial contact-interview policy,” which influences how or *if* police officers can approach citizens and ask questions:

- when you look at our panhandling bylaw, almost every section has been repealed to the point [where] I can’t really come out and talk to you about anything, or I can come out and talk to you about something, but the way they’ve shaped the provincial contact-interview policy, I can’t really come out and talk to you unless I’m actively investigating something.

Inconsistencies between the Criminal Code of Canada, and the “common law duty of the police” were also identified as impacting police services:

- [when] you read the Criminal Code with some court decisions they still talk about the common law duty of the police to preserve the peace and prevent commission of offenses but when you look at the way decisions have gone, and policies have been enacted, and legislation has been [passed], that doesn’t actually fit the principles in the Criminal Code.

The perception of when police officers and alternative response officers are available to provide public safety was sometimes misunderstood. For example, one respondent indicated:

- We have all these special constables but they can't work. Like they work Monday to Friday 8 to 4:30. It's ridiculous. And, as I understand it, that's a Union thing because they don't carry weapons because them working on the weekends or working in the evenings would put them in danger because they don't have weapons. Well yeah, I absolutely understand that, because my staff works evenings and weekends dealing with criminals and we don't carry weapons, so yeah.

The above comment speaks to feelings of vulnerability for business owners and simultaneously a lack of awareness about the types of support that are available to them. Community Support Program Officers work Tuesday and Saturday 10am to 8 p.m and Wednesday to Friday 8am-10p.m. They work exclusively in Downtown, Riversdale, and Broadway BID areas. The Alternative Response Officers work 8am to 6 p.m., and Saskatoon Police Officers operate 24/7/365. Interesting questions that emerge are: why are businesses unaware of these services; and where does information about union restrictions and the use of weapons come from? One answer may be the perception that laws are enforced differently depending on who the perpetrator is and whether enforcement will have any impact:

- I do disagree with their policy on enforcement in some aspects. For example, they don't like to write tickets to individuals for open liquor or for loitering because I've had them tell me there's no point. They're not going to pay them. Whereas one of my co-workers

who also lives downtown in an apartment stepped outside of his door to grab his mail and had a beer in his hand and received a ticket for it. He lives near the Lighthouse. He pointed out the group of seven on the corner openly passing around a bottle of alcohol. And cop said there's absolutely no point in giving them a ticket so there's two sets of laws, it seems, one for the regular populace and then one for the people who can do whatever they want because they refuse to pay their ticket or follow [rules].

These comments demonstrate frustration about a perceived lack of support for businesses downtown, and a double-standard in law enforcement that pits “the regular populace” against “others.”

When respondents were asked whether they felt Indigenous-led initiatives to address homelessness, mental health, and addiction in the downtown would help improve public safety, responses were mixed. Some respondents supported this type of initiative and acknowledged the work that is currently being done:

- the change needs to be Indigenous-led because of the mistrust built over years of violence from police, institutions.
- [the] Indigenous way of looking at the whole rather than the part and all of that, I think it's super important to addressing it in a way that is relevant to the people and addresses everything in a way that is the most likely to be culturally sensitive and appropriate.

- Chief Arcand is doing something... He sees there's a need. He's like, okay, if nobody else is going to do anything, I'm going to do something and he has, and I applaud him for that. But the city seems to be stepping back and letting him do the work... it shouldn't be just on him.

Other respondents were ambivalent, skeptical or opposed to Indigenous-led initiatives:

- doesn't necessarily have to be Indigenous-led, but definitely they have to be included.
- I think it needs to be city-led, Indigenous-advised... I don't think it's fair or appropriate to take an ethnic group... and say, "this is on you to fix."
- we've tried being led by white Christian type of organizations for centuries and that clearly hasn't worked.
- that's too wide a scope. It's like asking me if I think that the white man should be in charge of the world or an Indigenous man... You have programs here that I don't agree with and that's Indigenous-led.

Measures to Help Improve Downtown Public Safety

Current services that were identified as beneficial for addressing downtown public safety included: Housing First initiatives, Reaching Home initiatives, Refugee Engagement and Community Health Clinic (REACH), the Police and Crisis Team (PACT), the Saskatoon Tribal

Council (STC), and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The former Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP) was viewed as more beneficial than the current Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS), which replaced SAP.

Services that were identified to improve downtown public safety included the following: clean cold water (especially during heat waves), reduced barriers to housing and shelters, warm-up and cool-down locations, more self-help kiosks, a grocery store, medical offices, harm reduction services, public washrooms, peer navigators, free public phones, the addition of more community support workers to check in on people, increased police presence, expanded wifi coverage, and youth after-school programming for youth living in poverty. Calls for improved (and more frequent) public transportation, and cheaper parking were also noted.

Respondents also identified health and safety standards that needed to be addressed downtown including the following: clean spaces, disease control, maintenance of building codes, fire inspections, improved security of downtown buildings, and hand-washing. Safe injection sites and sharp bins for needles were also identified.

While some respondents opted for a “one-stop-shop” model where community organizations offer a range of supports and “wrap-around” care in one facility, other respondents cautioned that “alcohol and drug rehab programs” should not be delivered in the same facilities where people are “dealing and doing drugs.” It was also recommended that the City limit the number of liquor store permits they provide to businesses in downtown Saskatoon since they were viewed as perpetuating the problem.

Environmental Design and Technology to Promote Public Safety

Several respondents indicated that increased lighting in downtown Saskatoon would be beneficial; however, respondents also voiced concerns about the idea of ambient lighting and increased lighting in general:

- when things are running smoothly, I would agree that maybe in certain areas ambient lighting might work; however, I think in terms of a safety issue that's the worst thing you could do for downtown.
- we need bright lights, similar to what they have on 20th Street.
- some literature suggests that more lighting might not help. [It would] spotlight the person who is concerned with safety [and] let people off the path know when someone is on the path, what items they have.

Attitudes towards cameras and CCTV downtown were mixed. Distinctions were made between cameras in businesses—whether real or a decoy used as a deterrent—and cameras on the streets that are monitored by the police. Several respondents felt more cameras downtown would be beneficial due to real and perceived issues with downtown security; however, respondents also expressed discomfort with the idea of cameras downtown, or felt they would not be helpful:

- as much as I dislike Big Brother, I do think they need more cameras... even if something didn't happen at your property...maybe your camera picked up something close by... like peripheral vision.

- things like CCTV are weird. I think they can be great when used properly, like in super-duper high violence areas they have been known to actually decrease violence quite a bit.
- there are so many problems with [cameras], like they often use like facial identification technologies which only really work on white people, there's also a high chance of those being a further tool of marginalization, which would be unsafe for so many people.

Respondents also noted the high cost of security cameras, and the costs associated with hiring staff to monitor camera activity and take appropriate action if they witness something. One respondent cautioned that while an increase in cameras and police presence may improve safety, the perception of over-policing and increased surveillance could also signify a lack of safety in a particular area. They emphasized the need for a balanced response. Another respondent noted that while cameras in downtown Saskatoon would be highly beneficial for collecting data and identifying demographic trends, the introduction of a city-wide CCTV system may not be possible due to federal and provincial privacy rights as identified by the Privacy Commissioners.

A few ideas for apps were identified, including a bus app that tells people where the bus is and when it will arrive, an app for emergency support for youth who are sexually exploited, and a crime mapping app. Conversely, apps were also viewed as “privileged” access to support services.

With regards to signage, “no loitering” signs and “no trespassing” signs were viewed as beneficial for business owners and for customers because it reduced the “problem with hang-around” and “clustering” that was associated with intimidation and crime. “No loitering” signage was also associated with contradictions between congregation of people in public spaces, vs. “hanging around.” Deterrents like the “mosquito alarm,” which uses sound frequencies as an anti-loitering strategy were strongly opposed.

Root Causes of Activities and Behaviours that Make People Feel Unsafe

Interviewees singled out intergenerational trauma, colonization, neoliberalism and capitalism as root causes for poverty, addictions, and crime:

- we view poverty as connected to morality... that comes from like Victorian sensibilities that have come back with the rise of neoliberalism in like the 80s, that's a huge part of it.
- the biggest crisis right now is addictions, [it's] driving a lot of the negativity in Saskatoon.
- colonization. We are making progress. 15 or so years ago we didn't recognize the treaty or land we are on... we didn't use words like reconciliation.
- in terms of education, people need to understand why we are dealing with these issues...Public might see a bunch of “drunk Indians,” but public doesn't understand the root causes. We need a wholesale systemic change in school system for public and Catholic school[s] so that next generation can be more aware.

- if we don't deal with the trauma... people are gonna continue in that cycle, right?
- homelessness is a big root cause... from what I know the shelters need people to be gone by a certain time of the day, right, and if you don't have anything to do, you know, what are you supposed to do?

Focus Group Findings

Three focus groups were conducted. They included respondents who live and work downtown, those who provide support and protection, and those who seek out support and protection, including women, Indigenous people, youth, the working poor, and tenants of affordable rental housing. Some responses were comparable to the survey results and the interviews including these: perceived vs. actual public safety downtown; perceptions of homelessness and “unhoused” people as posing a threat; legitimate vs. illegitimate people and behaviours; and areas downtown that respondents felt the most unsafe.

Key themes that emerged in the focus groups include:

- Public Safety and the Lack of Trust
- Dissatisfaction with Support Services and Self-blame
- Over-extended Shelters and Inadequate Mental Health Supports
- Vulnerable Populations and Perceptions of Public Safety
- Root Causes, Responsibilities, and Recommendations

Public Safety and the Lack of Trust

Some respondents in the focus groups applauded community support workers and police services in downtown Saskatoon, and called for increased police presence and an increase in the number of community support workers downtown to improve public safety:

- More community support workers that go around making sure, like, people are ok if they need any help because, despite what people may think, the downtown areas are not that safe.

- [Saskatoon police are] doing a good job. It's just that we need more of them, yeah, they just need more staff... they're doing a good job don't get me wrong they just need a bit more. Because, quite frankly, the downtown area could use more of their support in communities for people.

- Knowing that there's some kind of security or something there to be able to help... it would be really important to have around, you know?

Members of city and community protective services acknowledged their commitment to public safety and shared some of the positive feedback they receive from the community:

- There's so many community members that thank us for being around. It just makes them feel like they're able to exist more freely and safely, so I think police presence is definitely one of them.
- I think it's been good finding that balance between enforcement education and community engagement, rather than going down there heavy-handed enforcing everything and giving as many tickets as we can... [alternative response officers] don't do that.

Despite these positive comments, the sense of community-based optimism that was present in the interviews was notably absent in the focus groups:

- Public safety? When you grew up in the hood, it's kind of hard to have public safety. So I've been in fights a lot. I lost like seven people in this last two months.

When asked about the types of situations that make them feel unsafe, respondents revealed a complex set of dynamics amongst people who live and work in the downtown area. Their answers shed light on socio-economic, cultural, and systemic issues.

The presence of people openly using drugs and alcohol in public prompted considerable distress for some respondents:

- Even though they may not, may not be looking for it, there's always, like, open public friggin' drug abuse and all that. It's like, was it last week Wednesday? There was someone outside, outside the front of the Lighthouse smoking dope through a fricken' pipe or something and I told the staff inside and they did absolutely nothing. Absolutely, pardon the language, absolutely f... all. It just, it kind of disgusted me.

- First and foremost with the opioid epidemic and the amount of drug presence in downtown Saskatoon, I think it's really alarming to a lot of people who don't see it on a day-to-day basis, like people using downtown openly in public when there's children around or when they're just trying to walk on the sidewalk and enjoy their day kind of thing. So I think that makes the public safety decrease and makes people feel less comfortable down there.

- I think public intoxication by drugs or alcohol is a big one... [and] large groups of unhoused individuals just hanging out in the downtown area.

While respondents in the interviews suggested that the fear of gangs was “inflated,” respondents in the focus groups expressed considerable concerns about gangs:

- Gang members that go around claiming areas saying that's their spot while walking down a certain street... It's just the gang members, all in all ... makes me unsafe.

- Kids being, where the kids are, like, 10 or 15 of them walk around all the time, and they just attack, bother people. Yeah, it's youngsters. Like, just kids. They shouldn't be doing that. They should be, they should have something to do, take their mind off that stuff, you know?

As a counterpoint, one respondent said that young adults were the most vulnerable. When asked why, they said:

- I know [why]. They're basically scared of growing up, scared of losing their lives, scared of everything that they're headed for in the future. Just because of the way the generation of the older and the younger are doing stuff.

The above comment connects to respondents' concerns about gangs, and youth threatening people on the street. It may also be connected to intergenerational trauma.

The respondent below describes an experience of victimization on public transit, that reinforces the fear of gangs, (and/or groups of people):

- I was beaten up on the bus, by three people. Right on the bus, they beat the shit out of me. I was asking for help defending myself, and everybody left the bus and the bus driver just sat there and watched... what kind of protection is that? No one stepped in. They all just left...

You know, if I'd seen somebody getting beat up, get beaten up by two people, i'd help them.
I wouldn't walk away.... And then she beat me up with a, with a pool ball in a sock.

When asked whether they reported the incident to police, the respondent said the attack was recorded on the bus camera. However, they didn't go to court with the case because they were fearful of repercussions: "I ain't no rat. It'd probably get me choked."

While increased police presence was frequently cited as a way to improve public safety in the interviews, some focus group respondents did not associate the police with safety and described a number of provocations by police:

- The cops. The police. They'll roll up on you for no reason, and you could not be wearing a mask...that would be their excuse. When there is really serious criminals out there that they should be chasing rather than somebody that's got no mask, that's what worries me about the police.
- It's really sad how they treat First Nations... we were here first... and they take over...It's crazy how they treat First Nations and they still do it.

Respondents felt that the police "pick up vulnerable people for any reason, just to arrest people," that they like to "bug [people] for no reason," that they will check a person's pockets even if

they're "not doing anything wrong," and that they treat vulnerable people like "criminals."

Police are perceived as being on a "power trip," which prompted one respondent to say:

- You just power trip them back... you basically walk up to them use your words in a gentle manner, but you're actually being rude.

When asked what they do to improve their sense of safety downtown, one respondent reinforced the idea that assumptions are made based on race and ethnicity:

- I would walk. If I ran it would look like I stole something. So it's better to walk than run. Especially since I'm First Nation.

These perceived provocations and presumptions about some residents are important to address, as they complicate attempts to improve public safety downtown.

Dissatisfaction with Support Services and Self-blaming

When asked about their experiences accessing support services, respondents shared a variety of perspectives. The general response was one of dissatisfaction, which resulted in respondents giving up on trying to access services or blaming themselves for not being supported.

- They'll make you an appointment and then they'll say, "Well, you missed it," even though you're there on time...for anything, an appointment for housing or for employment, stuff like that.
- I feel like a lot of people try to just deal with it on their own...because it's such a scary situation, and we don't really know who to talk to.
- I just need support from people talking positively to me and making me feel better about how stupid I am sometimes. And I admit that I've made a lot of mistakes, and I don't like the mistakes. I just want to change for the better... and I just don't want to feel like I have to ask someone for that.
- I admit, but it's kind of a secret. I'm kicked out of so many places, it's crazy. But some places, I'm back. And some places there's people that really care about me. I appreciated that. I just don't want to start getting kicked out of places. It's the alcohol talking, it's not me. When I'm sober, it's pretty boring, but it's a good thing to do.

Respondents who work in support roles downtown, including alternative response officers, provided insight about some of the experiences described above:

- We get a lot of feedback from people we work with who are trying to access [services]... it's a lengthy process...A lot of people do come back and say that "oh they don't care about

me there, like they won't talk to me, they won't work with me." I believe it's usually because there's a little bit of... they have a low tolerance for aggression and people get frustrated... we usually have to go in with them and sit down with their worker and then actually talk, figure out what the issue is.

- We'll be like you know, "where are you staying," "where did you sleep last night?" And they're like, "oh well, on the sidewalk" or whatever and it's like okay well "do you have a social worker?" Yeah well, "they don't do much for me," or "it's been taking forever."
- The majority of our shelters in Saskatoon require funding. And so, for a lot of our clientele downtown that are lower functioning....it is not an easy process and it does require a lot of time and a lot of work.... A lot of people don't even have identification or things like that, so it makes things quite difficult...I know that people do struggle with that.
- A lot of frustration [about] not being able to get funding, people not being able to get access to their money because they'll require a mailing address.

One respondent commented about the way support resources are spread out across downtown Saskatoon, which perpetuates problems related to access, timely response of support services, and effective interventions:

- Having the resources kind of scattered out around the downtown doesn't help either because you've got your shelters where a lot of people live, you've got social services, which is right in the heart of downtown, there is a liquor store just down the road from that and

another shelter, shelters kind of all around. Whereas people who might be looking to try and get some help, it's actually a lot of work to get help. It's not an easy thing to do...a lot of the issue is just trying to get them from point A to Point B, so they can talk to someone... So, having everything all kind of scattered around rather than [in] one general area makes it a lot easier [a person] to get sidetracked rather than go and talk to your worker. It's like "oh there's an alley right here, I've got some meth, why not?"

Over-extended Shelters and Inadequate Mental Health Supports

Respondents shared their perception of shelters, including personal experiences that made them feel unsafe:

- No, there's not enough shelters. And the people that are running them are corrupt.
- Well, there's, there's danger everywhere you go, really, right?... Especially downtown there's still a lot of danger that you can come across, you know... like I used to be living at an assistance shelter before. It was downtown and there was like lots of stuff happening there. It wasn't the safest space to be...I just kept myself out of the situation and separated myself because of people or a person, or people that were, at different times were...fighting... [there's] other reasons why they were mad, you know? They just end up getting mad at everyone. I guess it's like, drunk people, drug addicts, you know.
- When I was staying at the shelter, at the Lighthouse, all my stuff would always get stolen... I don't like staying in dorms like that, because you can't, you don't have privacy. You know,

you don't, you can't keep your stuff in one area because somebody will always come and shop and help themselves to it. And being in that type of environment, it spreads disease faster, you know, and it sucks. If they're going to open a shelter, they should have like maybe two or three to a room instead of big dorms like that. It's like at the residential schools. Exactly the way it was, big dorms. And it sucks. Brings back all of the memories.

The reference to shelters having religious affiliations that can trigger intergenerational trauma was noted by other respondents and suggests a lack of culturally-responsive resources:

- Trying to find resources for [Indigenous peoples]...they use the Lighthouse... [I] talk to people who have stayed at the Lighthouse, who have worked at the Lighthouse. It's kind of like a church-run organization and there ...it just reminds me a lot of the residential school system....
- A lot of the resources we have to offer [they're] religious-run organizations. If you read the description of what they're about, "you can come to join for a meal but we're going to teach you about Western God," or whatever it says. That's not what everyone believes in, so it's hard. It limits our Indigenous culture.

Support workers also acknowledged the limited number of shelters in downtown Saskatoon and their inability to address the complex mental health issues of their residents:

- We have about three shelters that people really stay at, four if you include the YWCA, but none of these shelters can really handle the more complex needs, and a lot of people [have] more complex needs. It's a lot easier for them to just say no you're out, you're banned when they act up a little bit, and a lot of people get banned. And we end up with a lot of people on the streets because of it...a lot of them have those higher needs.
- There's not a whole lot of resources for mental health downtown...and that's a big issue to the mental health and the addiction issues we have. Those are probably the two biggest things we have to deal with and there just isn't a whole lot of support for that mental health. With Saskatoon Police, we have the PACT unit, but we only have one car usually on, just one social worker and one patrol officer with them. We don't have a whole lot, we don't have the training they have.

Vulnerable People and Perceptions of Public Safety

When asked who they feel are the most vulnerable in downtown Saskatoon, many responses were similar to the survey and interview findings and included women, seniors, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, Indigenous peoples, youth. For some respondents, people with mental health challenges were considered the most vulnerable because of the lack of supports, the lack of funding, and more generally, the lack of understanding about mental health issues.

- Shelters just aren't equipped to deal with [people with complex mental health needs], so they just give them the food and they're stuck on the street and they can't get to their

mentor. They don't take their meds because they don't have the support needed to do it...[It's a] never ending cycle, because you can work with them, get them a place for a little bit, but they can only stay there for so long, or they kind of fall off the rails because they're not getting the support they need.

- There is not enough funding like government funding for mental health....The wait time to see a psychiatrist for schizophrenia, or you know, just to get diagnosed is three years. There's just not enough. People can't afford to go see a private psychiatrist; they just can't. The waitlist is so long, people don't understand how big of an issue it is. They aren't just taking a drunk off the street.
- You're born with schizophrenia, for example, like some of our regulars have schizophrenia, and they just they don't have access to resources to help them, so people are like, "ah, this person is like, screaming and causing issues" and actually, they're not. They're struggling.
- Even if they do have the access to medication, for example, [some] people grow up like very prideful... people are hesitant to ask for help, because they want to be like, "I'm a grown person, I can do this." And so, even if they have those resources there, asking for help isn't always easy... People just don't understand that mental health is just a chemical imbalance in the brain, it's nothing you did. You can come from the best life possible and still suffer from depression or other mental health issues.

- There's stigma attached to addiction and mental health issues. Something simple as like being a man and asking for help, you know there's gender stigma, biases and all that.

Correlations between homelessness, mental health, addictions, and public safety were prominent across the survey and interviews; however, support workers in the focus groups provided additional insight:

- Homelessness does not equal unsafe... over 50% of the people we deal with that are unhoused; they just don't have a home. They're just looking to survive.
- It's an unfortunate stereotype... a lot of the people that we work with downtown...there's nothing wrong with them, they just don't have a home. They're not out there causing Trouble, they're just struggling. Again, there's not a whole lot to do downtown for them so they're just hanging out. But a lot of people with that stereotype that homeless people are scary people see them, [and they think], "oh don't go there, it's dangerous, that person is so unpredictable."
- Addiction is a disease... people need help but there's just this big hesitancy to give people help... There's a lot of people don't see addiction as a disease or like you could just stop but withdrawal's a real thing.

- There's bad people from all walks of life, people that just aren't good human beings but I'd say 98% of the people we deal with are genuinely good people who have just lost their way a little bit.
- Public safety is perceived [as] "oh, a group of homeless people hanging out, it has to be trouble"... There's safety in numbers too. They just feel more secure.

Switching the understanding of "safety in numbers" to describe the reason for "groups" of homeless people, sheds light on the inherent power dynamics in downtown Saskatoon: who is afraid of whom; and who actually holds the power to safely and comfortably occupy the public sphere?

The desire to constantly move unhoused people from one area to another in order to prevent them from 'loitering' in one place (i.e., "congregating for no reason") is reinforced by municipal bylaws that implicitly distinguish between the legitimate and illegitimate use of public spaces:

- There's one place that we noticed that has "no loitering" signs that we don't fully believe in. Down by River Landing is a big set of benches and whatnot in that brand new area between the RBC building and the Alt [Hotel]. A whole bunch of benches, but it says, "no loitering." So we're like, we don't exactly know what you [want]... there's a bench, you can go [sit on] and there's a big fountain there. It's just like a nice area to sit so are you, are we, aiming these "no loitering" [signs at] a certain demographic of people?

One respondent offered a particularly salient comment about Indigenous cultures and the importance of community:

- Our clientele are very social people, I think the Indigenous culture in general...is a very like social community... so I think taking that social aspect away from somebody who's a very social person, I know it drove me crazy [during COVID]. So, I can't imagine you topple that, on top of not having a home, and all the other issues they're dealing with.

Root Causes, Responsibilities, and Recommendations

When asked about root causes for the problems in downtown Saskatoon, drug problems were prominent:

- Just the drugs that are distributed like, yeah I know they've got to distribute them, but do they just got to distribute them in the city? Keep it away from the city and the city would actually grow and be a better place.
- Honestly I don't know [why drugs are such a big problem here], but it's just, all I know is it's there and it's gotta be stopped somehow. Eventually, when it stopped if it ever is I'm pretty sure the city would actually grow to be a better place and actually, become, not become Canada's like least safe city. Yeah, it's pretty bad, believe it or not.

In addition to drug culture in Saskatoon, respondents identified intergenerational trauma as a root cause of many of the problems in downtown Saskatoon. While respondents identify cycles of

trauma and abuse, the ways in which they describe intergenerational trauma sometimes devolves into generalizations, even moralizing:

- It's coming from like, a lost upbringing and just, not knowing any better. Lots have been getting into trouble since they were youth, and now they're an adult.
- No sense of right or wrong, or just, no sense of safety, protection, a roof over your head, that kind of thing. The privilege that comes from that, that we don't even think about on a day-to-day basis. I think that's been something our clients have been dealing with since day one so I can't begin to speak to that, or to understand what that has been like for them in their walk of life...[and] resorting to things that feel good for the moment like drugs or alcohol.
- Yeah, I mean intergenerational trauma, I think is probably the biggest one... it's easy for us to sit here and be like all like just kind of get your life together, you should know right from wrong but we've all grown up pretty fortunately and had food on the table, [a] roof over our heads, where a lot of the people we work with didn't have [that] growing up. They didn't have those positive role models that we've had growing up. And the people they looked up to, maybe they weren't the nicest people...the people they looked up to probably went through some difficult times as well, and just, it's a really hard cycle to break.

When asked who is responsible for addressing poverty and public safety in downtown Saskatoon, the majority of respondents indicated it was a government issue; however, the attitudes about government, and the strategies proposed for government supports varied:

- The government is the problem. I'm serious. They are the problem, and there's no fighting them or anything because they're the upper hand. They're the higher ups. All government!
- It's not [that] the government needs to fund the person, but the person and the bed, in my opinion... I feel like we should also look into funding for beds, and then getting a person to a bed, and then going from there...I feel like we need to fund the resource, not always the person specifically.
- [The] government, like with allocation of funds they do things like...they're building a new public library downtown. Great library that people utilize all the time but that money can go... allocating funding towards the issue is and forever will be...the problem.

One respondent also suggested developing an “Indigenous Policing Model” based on the success of these models in other countries, as a way to “turn things around downtown.”

When asked what could be done to improve public safety downtown, respondents in the focus groups offered feedback that was comparable to the survey results and the interviews including better lighting, more cameras, more youth centres, more Friendship Centres, and more places

like Prairie Harm Reduction. There was also a lot of discussion about the value of public activities downtown and the ways in which they can help improve public safety:

- The 2nd Avenue sidewalk sale and the Taste of Saskatchewan bring people downtown, and people are engaged in something. I feel personally I feel like we see less issues when there's like a bunch of people downtown enjoying downtown.
- Keep people entertained because when you're not entertained your mind wanders...[it] keeps people from being kind of destructive...I guess you can say having those things to do is good for that public safety...because it keeps people occupied rather than doing things they're not supposed to.... Rather than people just hanging out.

Comments about the problems associated with the scattering of support resources across the downtown were prominent in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. One respondent shared their 'wish' about how they would bring support services together in one place:

- I would get a building somewhere, a good, solid building [with] lots of rooms, lots of beds, and have all the resources, the social services - everything right there... it's like a home you can go [to] safely and you can stay safe .., you have your own bed ... you can have entertainment like basketball courts...arts and crafts...green space...cultural [activities]... I literally picture a strip mall in my head.

CONCLUSION

This mixed methods study has documented and amplified competing definitions of public safety and shifting responses to public safety over time in response to grassroots and official challenges to a status quo that has preserved privilege for some while entrenching disadvantage for those marginalized by colonial legacies. Increasing recognition of structural and systemic inequities impacting the lived experience of the marginalized and about public spaces and assets so important to the health of people, places, and prosperity, individuals and institutions are increasingly embracing and operationalizing human rights, public health, and social justice approaches to public safety.

Saskatoon is not alone in its experience of the neoliberal hollowing out of downtown aggravated by a colonial legacy of homelessness, poverty, and decline. The forces behind these phenomena often remain invisible to settler Canadians who have inherited dominant narratives of economic “progress” and the racial and gender hierarchies that rationalized the taking of land and displacement of peoples.

The COVID-19 pandemic has done much to expose and exacerbate inequities and injustices, making it harder to hold on to reassuring narratives about equality, democracy, and justice and opening more minds to the need for change, for investments in what neoliberalism taught many to view as unaffordable luxuries. COVID-19 has heightened perceptions and understanding of how so many people have been pushed into precarious living while adding dangers to the vulnerable, including women, girls, the gender diverse, and racialized communities. In addition,

the pandemic spawned shadow pandemics and cut people off from resources, supports, and services, but it also mobilized new intersectoral, intercultural, and innovative collaborations, including policing and protective services, rethinking crime prevention and public safety, and renewed interest in CPTED. Findings have brought home in local terms how complex, contested, and contradictory the notion of community is, how much tension persists, and how exclusionary the notion of community is for some. The 2021 federal government Quality of Life Strategy is similarly committed to engage more of us in decision making, rethinking what matters in a post-pandemic world. Instead of blaming victims, we are encouraged to respect human rights, Aboriginal and Treaty rights, and our obligations under international instruments, so that we can develop together a sustainable, inclusive, and healthy city where all can prosper.

The literature review, scan of major Canadian city initiatives, together with survey, interview, and focus group findings have reinforced the importance of perceptions of public safety and fears about the impacts of mental health and addictions, intergenerational trauma, poverty, and chronic homelessness. Material realities shaped by perceptions as much as law, policy, and regulation must also be addressed, including inadequate social assistance, insufficient affordable rental housing, and underinvestment in mental health, addictions, and harm reduction efforts. This study builds on the City of Saskatoon street activity baseline studies (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b) that focused exclusively on perceptions. Perceptions do matter and need to be addressed in any strategies going forward, as they have been in changed policing practices that continue to evolve in response to differential experiences of the meaning of a uniformed presence. What spells comfort and safety for some does indeed entail feelings of anxiety, mistrust, vulnerability, and more in others.

Nevertheless, this study has aimed also to add to the literature, complementing the City of Saskatoon (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018b) studies to explore also the diversity of participant knowledge and understanding of safety issues and their root causes. Findings have confirmed, but also complemented, and even complicated literature findings, refusing tendencies to locate blame within individuals, addressing consoling myths that obscure root causes, highlighting data and research as a basis for policy and other decision making, and underlining local experience of larger systemic and structural issues. Naming or language matters too. Relatives are understood very differently than anonymous individuals dealing with addictions or homelessness; the “unhoused” is favoured by many over the “homeless” as better representing their lived experience and right to self-define.

Report findings aim to contribute to an important community conversation on public safety and what a community of safety and care might look like and what it might mean for a revitalized downtown Saskatoon where all feel welcomed, engaged, and supported. The following recommendations emerging from the study findings are offered to help guide such conversation in the interests of “a vibrant hub for culture, commerce and civic life” imagined by the City of Saskatoon (2018a) so that we can rebuild together good relations (Thistle & Smylie, 2020) guided by Indigenous thinking (Thistle, 2017).

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- Invest in coordinated, collaborative, and accessible data and research to support a healthy, sustainable city.
- Respect our commitments to national and international human rights instruments.

- Adopt an intersectional lens in all policy, planning, and practice, knowing that one size does not fit all.
- Establish and co-design policy and practice with a Lived Expert Advisory Committee.
- Redouble commitments to Reconciliation, unlearning old narratives and practices and relearning for good relations.
- Invest in public assets and socializing activities year round.
- Map social infrastructure and address barriers to access.
- Invest in coordination of interagency collaboration, engaging government, business, the nonprofit sector, and universities and colleges.

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APPENDIX A



INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project Title: Toward a Community of Safety and Care: Exploring Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon

Researchers:

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Questions:

1. How do you understand public safety? Why do you think it is important to community members?
2. In your view what activities or behaviours contribute positively to public safety?
3. What activities or behaviours do you think have a negative impact on public safety?
4. What is your perception of public safety in downtown Saskatoon specifically?
5. How safe do you feel going about your activities in downtown Saskatoon? Prompt: During daytime? Evening? At night?
6. Do you feel safe in public spaces in downtown Saskatoon? If not, do some areas feel safer than others? If so, why?
7. Do you feel that you can freely and safely access services in the downtown area (e.g., housing, health care, employment, education, transportation, etc.)? If your access is limited, how so?
8. What sort of nuisance behaviours or other factors impact your feelings of emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical safety in the downtown?
9. Have you, a friend, or family member been victimized in the downtown area? Can you describe? Did you report to the police?
10. What do you think are the reasons for or root causes of activities and behaviours that contribute to making you feel unsafe in downtown Saskatoon?
11. From your perspective, how has downtown public safety changed over the past 2-3 years?
12. How has COVID-19 and public health measures impacted your sense of downtown public safety? For good or ill? (Can prompt: Exacerbated inequities and/or enhanced a sense of community interdependence? Increased sense of vulnerability or not? Reduced access to services or not?)
13. What in your view are the effects of high levels and concentrations of poverty on public safety downtown?
14. Who do you think are most impacted by the current levels of public safety? Can prompt: youth, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, racialized minorities, LGBTQ2S+, women?
15. Who or what do you think have roles and responsibilities to address poverty levels and public safety in downtown Saskatoon? Individuals? Policy makers and planners? Institutions and organizations (government, health, justice, policing, education, business, non-profit sector) or what?
16. Do you think that policing (including Community Support Officers and Alternative Response Officers) is responding adequately to public safety in downtown Saskatoon? How? (prompts: education, protection, enforcement?)
17. Do you think the Saweyihtotan project led by the Saskatoon Tribal Council to address homelessness, mental health, and addiction in the downtown will help improve public safety?
18. In your view, to what extent can technology enhance perceptions of public safety in downtown Saskatoon? Emergency signage? Closed-circuit security cameras (CCTVs)? Lighting? An app to report feeling unsafe and why?
19. What are some of the measures you think would help improve public safety in Saskatoon's downtown? Here we might give options where they can list all that apply: access to affordable rental housing, access to employment, access to mental health services, access to substance use services, better access to public washrooms, bylaw enforcement, a commitment to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and the Missing and Murdered Women and Girls calls to justice.
20. Is there any additional information that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX B



INTERVIEW

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Toward a Community of Safety and Care: Exploring Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon

Researchers:

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. John Hansen, Associate Professor, Sociology, University of Saskatchewan, John.hansen@usask.ca; 306-966-1489

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Isobel M. Findlay, professor emerita and University Co-Director, CUIR, findlay@edwards.usask.ca; 306-966-2120

Michael Kowalchuk, senior planner, City of Saskatoon, Michael.kowalchuk@saskatoon.ca; 306-986-3024

Elisabeth Miller, Neighbourhood Safety Coordinator, City of Saskatoon, Elisabeth.miller@saskatoon.ca; 306-975-7666

Kate Loseth, PhD student, Community Health and Epidemiology, and CUIR RA, University of Saskatchewan, 306-966-2120, kam303@usask.ca

Jonathon Mercredi, CUIR community RA, hjt268@mail.usask.ca; 306-966-2120

Jade Creelman, HQP researcher, CUIR, 306-966-2120 ; wej178@mail.usask.ca

Joanne Hritzuk, CUIR Administrative coordinator, Joanne.hritzuk@usask.ca; 306-966-2121

Purpose and Objectives of the Research:

This research will study factors driving inequities and perceptions of safety to develop an evidence-informed, collaborative response to public safety in downtown Saskatoon. It has these objectives:

3. To assess how community stakeholders understand and experience their safety in the downtown
4. To identify systemic and structural impediments to safety in the downtown

5. To understand barriers to equitable access to services and supports for those most marginalized
6. To identify evidence-informed best practices to enhance public safety in Saskatoon
7. To make recommendations for policy and programming for the City and for partner organizations.

Procedures:

Up to 60 individuals will be recruited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews lasting up to 60 minutes. An interview guide has been prepared by the research team. All participants will be taken through an informed consent process and COVID-19 safety protocol. Interviews will be conducted at the Lighthouse under the jurisdiction of Saskatchewan public health if public health advice allows. For the Lighthouse safety protocols, see <https://www.lighthousesaskatoon.org/> We are taking all safety precautions to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 (e.g., use of PPEs for researchers and participants throughout (disposable masks will be provided), sanitizing of surfaces and shared items, hand washing, physical distancing, etc.) and expect you to follow public health directives as well.

- Self-assessment/screening questions (for researchers and participants): Do you have any of the following new or worsening symptoms or signs:
 - New or worsening cough
 - Shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing
 - New smell or taste disorders
 - Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain
 - Unexplained fatigue, chills or headache
 - Have you travelled outside Canada or had close contact with anyone who has travelled outside Canada in the last 14 days? Or travelled to a community under public health advisory?
 - Have you had close contact with anyone with respiratory illness or confirmed or probable case of COVID-19?
- If interviewer or interviewee answers “yes” to any of these questions, the interview will be postponed and advice will be given about contacting Saskatchewan Health Authority.
- If you feel that you are from a vulnerable group with respect to COVID-19 effects (e.g., senior, immuno-compromised), please discuss your participation with the research team before consenting. You are under no obligation to participate and nothing bad will happen if you change your mind about participating in the research.
- We will be collecting personal contact information that we must retain **for 14 days** in order to follow up with you and/or conduct contact tracing if you may have been exposed to COVID-19 in coming to the research site. Contact information will be kept separate from data collected for the study; after 14 days it will be destroyed securely.
- The research team members adhere to the USask vaccine mandate and are fully vaccinated to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19.
- If an in-person interview cannot take place, the interview will take place by phone or virtually if you choose via a password enabled Zoom meeting. The USask agreement with Zoom ensures that all data will be routed through servers in Canada.
- When conducting the interview from home, the researcher(s) will isolate themselves in order to minimize the chances of the conversation being overheard by a non-researcher. To the extent possible, you are also requested to maintain the privacy of our conversation at your end as well.

- You are free to turn off your video camera if you choose not to be video-recorded.
- If participants agree, the interviews will be recorded by the researcher and the audio recordings will be saved on the researcher's local password protected computer (backed up on One Drive—University of Saskatchewan); researchers and participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the interviews.
- If participants agree, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the research assistant and then coded and analyzed. Recruited participants will be offered an honorarium (\$25 gift card).
- You may choose to review, add, or delete before approving the transcript record of your interview. Once the interview has been transcribed a copy will be sent to you if you choose for your final approval. You have a deadline of two weeks to respond and return any transcript revisions. A reminder email will be sent to participants after one week. If there is no response by the deadline it will be assumed that participants accept the transcript as sent to them.

Please feel free to ask any questions about study procedures and goals or your role.

Funded by:

This study is funded by Research Junction, an initiative of the City of Saskatoon and University of Saskatchewan.

Potential Risks:

There are no anticipated harms from participation, but questions may elicit discomfort or distress as a result of talking about experiences/perceptions you or family members have had in Saskatoon's downtown. This minimal risk is addressed by your voluntary participation and ability to choose not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering or to withdraw from the study for any reason without penalty. If you feel distress, we can refer you to these counselling services available in the community:

- Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Services (24 hours): (306) 933-6200
- CFS Saskatoon at <https://www.cfssaskatoon.sk.ca/services/counselling/no-fee-walk-in-counselling-services-in-the-community/?fbclid=IwAR14Doh4f5i13l8PvbtQEj3-MHYL8szKREyF9Qlc0wwM7vkXuoDKIBZbSE>
- Family Service Saskatchewan at counsellingconnectsask.ca
- The [KUU-US Crisis Line Society](http://www.kuu-us.org) provides an Indigenous-specific crisis line available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's toll-free and can be reached at 1-800-588-8717

Potential Benefits:

Participants often experience appreciation for the opportunity to be heard through a research study. Participants benefit directly by being able to tell their story and also to enhance understanding of the value of their safety in downtown. The research will give the City of Saskatoon and partners a comprehensive evaluation of individuals' understanding and perceptions of safety in downtown.

Confidentiality:

The data from this research project will be published as a final report available on the CUISR website. The results may also be presented at conferences and in an academic paper. The results will be

presented in summary form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. All personal data will be removed before the responses are analyzed and reported. This means that any direct quotes, opinions, or expressions will be presented without revealing names. Confidentiality will be further protected by allowing only the research team access to the recordings of the interviews and by storing the signed consent forms and coding sheets separately from transcriptions. The only case where confidentiality will be waived is when the participant has agreed to have their contributions acknowledged.

You have the right to withdraw from the study. Your data will be deleted if you request it. Identifying factors (such as names, specific locations) will be removed and individuals will be given pseudonyms where necessary. The researchers will safeguard your confidentiality. We cannot guarantee anonymity as the personal contact information collected for COVID-19 safety purposes identifies you as a participant.

If you agree, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. You may request that the recording be turned off at any time and without giving any reason. After the interview and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript if you choose to and to add, alter, or delete information you contributed from the transcript as you see fit.

- The privacy policy of Zoom Video Communications, which hosts the Zoom platform, is available at <https://us02web.zoom.us/privacy-and-security>.
- Please note that despite privacy policy of the organizations supporting the above-mentioned platforms, there is no guarantee of the privacy of data with the use of any web-based platform.

- **Storage of Data:** Data will be securely stored by PI Dr. John Hansen at CUI SR for a period of five years after publication at which time it will be destroyed by the securest available means. Electronic files and recordings will be kept in CUI SR password protected computer files backed up on One Drive-University of Saskatchewan. Hardcopy data will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked CUI SR office and, as mentioned above, transcripts will be stored separately from signed consent forms. Contact information will be kept safely to facilitate follow up/contact tracing in the event of COVID-19 exposure to avoid further spread.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time (before data are combined for the report) without explanation or penalty of any sort. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your safety or access to services in downtown. The deadline to withdraw from the study is one month after your participation. If you do withdraw, we will continue to maintain your contact information and will only give it to Occupational Health if required for contact tracing.

Follow up:

To obtain results from the study, please contact CUI SR by phone (306-966-2121) or by email (cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca) or visit our website <https://cuisr.usask.ca>. Summary of results will be available in May 2022.

Questions or Concerns:

Contact the researchers using the information at the top of page 1. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent

SIGNED CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

ORAL CONSENT

Oral Consent: I read and explained the consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it,

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>

_____ Check the right to remain confidential in contributing to this research (name will not appear in the publications)

OR

_____ Check the right to being acknowledged for your knowledge (meaning your name will appear in the publications)

_____ Check if you would like to have the opportunity to review the transcript.

Email or mailing address (telephone number) if transcript requested/or COVID follow-up required

.APPENDIX C



FOCUS GROUP



Participant Consent Form

Study title: Toward a Community of Safety and Care: Exploring Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon

Researcher(s):

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. John Hansen, Associate Professor, Sociology, University of Saskatchewan, John.hansen@usask.ca; 306-966-1489

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Isobel M. Findlay, Professor Emerita, Management and Marketing, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan, findlay@edwards.usask.ca; (306) 966 2120

Collaborators: Michael Kowalchuk, senior planner, City of Saskatoon, Michael.kowalchuk@saskatoon.ca; 306-986-3024

Elisabeth Miller, Neighbourhood Safety Coordinator, City of Saskatoon, Elisabeth.miller@saskatoon.ca; 306-975-7666 (office)

Research Assistants: Kate Loseth, PhD candidate, Community Health & Epidemiology, and CUIR RA, University of Saskatchewan, kam303@usask.ca; 306-966-2120

Jonathon Mercredi, CUIR community RA, hjt268@mail.usask.ca; 306-966-2120

Jade Creelman, HQP researcher, CUIR, 306-966-2120 ; wej178@mail.usask.ca

Administrative coordinator: Joanne Hritzuk, CUIR, Joanne.hritzuk@usask.ca; 306-966-2121

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

This research will study factors driving inequities and perceptions of safety to develop an evidence-informed, collaborative response to public safety in downtown Saskatoon. It has these objectives:

1. To assess how community stakeholders understand and experience their safety in the downtown
2. To identify systemic and structural impediments to safety in the downtown
3. To understand barriers to equitable access to services and supports for those most marginalized
4. To identify evidence-informed best practices to enhance public safety in Saskatoon
5. To make recommendations for policy and programming for the City and for partner organizations.

Procedures: Data will be gathered via focus groups, designed to reach a broad spectrum of community members in Saskatoon.

- All participants will be taken through an informed consent process. They will have the opportunity to review the consent form and focus group questions before agreeing to participate in the focus group.
- Data collection will occur in a private meeting space at The Lighthouse or via a password enabled Zoom meeting if the group so chooses.
- The USask agreement with Zoom ensures that all data will be routed through servers in Canada. You may choose to use or turn off video. Here is a link to Zoom's privacy policy: <https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/>
- The focus group will consist of up to six people and will take roughly 60 minutes.
- If participants agree, the focus group will be audio recorded for transcription purposes by a researcher who has signed a confidentiality agreement. If any participants do not agree to recording, the researcher(s) will take notes.
- The recording will be saved to the researcher's local USask-managed computer and backed up on One Drive-Uof S with the added security protection of encryption for that recording.
- Please note that, when conducting the focus group from home, the researcher(s) will be in a location where they cannot be overheard. To the extent possible, you are also requested to maintain the privacy of our conversation at your end as well, although we cannot guarantee that all participants will comply.
- Because this discussion will occur in a group setting, we cannot guarantee that all participants will protect your confidentiality. We will emphasize that information shared in the focus group is confidential and should not be shared outside of the focus group.

COVID Procedures: Data collection will take place in person ONLY if public health measures allow. We are taking all safety precautions to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 (e.g., use of masks for researchers and participants throughout (disposable masks will be provided), sanitizing of surfaces and shared items, hand washing, physical distancing, etc.) and expect you to follow public health directives as well.

- The research team members adhere to the USask vaccine mandate and are fully vaccinated to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19.
- Researchers and participants will abide by any additional COVID protocols in place at the location of the focus group.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Funded by: Research Junction

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated harms from participation, but questions may elicit feelings of distress or sadness in reflecting about experiences in downtown Saskatoon. This minimal risk is addressed by your voluntary participation and ability to choose not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering. You also have the right to withdraw from the study for any reason without penalty before the end of the focus group. Should you feel any distress, we can refer you to counselling services as follows:

- Family Service Saskatchewan at counsellingconnectsask.ca

- The [KUU-US Crisis Line Society](#) provides an Indigenous-specific crisis line available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's toll-free and can be reached at 1-800-588-8717.

Potential Benefits: Participants often appreciate the opportunity to be heard through a research study. Participants benefit by being able to tell their story and to help enhance understanding of the value of their safety in downtown. The research will give the City of Saskatoon and partners a comprehensive evaluation on individuals' understanding and perceptions of safety in downtown.

Compensation

In appreciation for your time, you will receive an honorarium.

Confidentiality: The data will be presented in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. All personal data will be removed before the responses are analyzed and reported. This means that any direct quotes, opinions, or expressions will be presented without revealing names. Confidentiality will be further protected by allowing only the research team access to any recordings of the focus group and by storing the signed consent forms separately from transcriptions and recordings. The only case where confidentiality will be waived is when the participant has agreed to have their contributions acknowledged. Contact information will be coded, linking participant identities to pseudonyms, and the master list stored separately from the data collection. The master coding sheet will be destroyed once the data are analyzed and integrated into the draft report (likely within two-three months of the focus group).

We will not collect identifying information. Further, we will ask all participants not to share names or identifying information of fellow participants with anyone. All participants are asked to respect one another's confidentiality. However, we cannot guarantee that all members will respect our request.

The research findings will be presented to the funders before public dissemination of the final report via the CUISR website. In addition to the final report, findings may also be published in academic journals, and/or presented at public and professional conferences. We may use direct quotations from your responses in the final report and in public presentations. There will be no identifying information linked to any quotations used.

Storage of Data: Recordings and notes will be secured in password-protected computers in locked vehicles during transportation and any paper copies of consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet at the Principal Investigator Dr. Findlay's office separate from recordings or other data. Once data have been transferred to electronic format, backup copies will be stored securely on One Drive-U of Saskatchewan on the University of Saskatchewan server. Study data, including recordings, will be stored separately from signed consent forms and securely stored for 5 years following publication, after which they will be deleted beyond any possible recovery. Contact information will be coded, and the master list stored separately from the data collection. The master coding sheet will be destroyed once the data are analyzed and integrated into the draft report.

Right to Withdraw:

- Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time before the end of the

focus group without explanation or penalty. Your participation or non-participation will not affect your access to services, or how you will be treated.

- Should you wish to withdraw, you may leave the focus group meeting at any time; however, data that have already been collected cannot be withdrawn as it forms part of the context for information provided by other participants.

Follow up: If you wish to receive a summary or copy of the final report of this research, please contact us and we will email or mail a copy to you when the report is released. A summary of findings will be available in August 2022. The report will be published on the CUISR website at <https://cuivr.usask.ca/publications.php>

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been reviewed and approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free 1-888-966-2975.

Consent

Option 1 - SIGNED CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant

Signature

Researcher's Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Option 2 - ORAL CONSENT

By signing this segment, the researcher acknowledges having read and explained this Consent Form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

Researcher's Signature

Date

Audio recording

I consent to audio recording of our focus group

Yes _____ No _____

PLEASE NOTE: If one or more participants do not consent to be audio-recorded as part of the focus group, the researchers will take notes instead.

Choose ONE of these two options re confidentiality:

____ Check the right to remain confidential in contributing to this research (name will not appear in the publications)

OR

____ Check the right to being acknowledged for your knowledge (meaning your name will appear in the publications)

APPENDIX D

Demographic Responses (Q 32-48)

Q32 How old are you? Please indicate the category within which your age falls.

Answered: 222 Skipped: 40

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-19	0.90%	2
20-24	8.11%	18
25-29	7.21%	16
30-34	9.91%	22
35-39	10.81%	24
40-44	10.36%	23
45-49	7.21%	16
50-54	8.11%	18
55-59	12.16%	27
60-64	6.31%	14
65-69	8.56%	19
70-74	6.76%	15
75-79	2.25%	5
80-84	0.45%	1
85+	0.90%	2
TOTAL		222

Q33 With what gender do you identify?

Answered: 223 Skipped: 39

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male/ man	37.22%	83
Female / woman	59.64%	133
Trans male/ trans man	0.90%	2
Trans female/ trans woman	0.45%	1
Two spirit	0.00%	0
Non-binary/ gender queer	0.45%	1
Prefer not to answer.	1.35%	3
Self-describe	0.00%	0
TOTAL		223

#	SELF-DESCRIBE	DATE
There are no responses.		

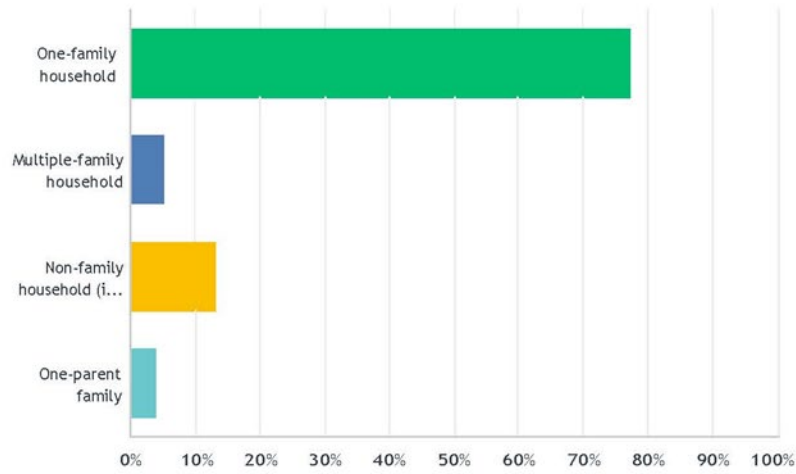
Q34 Do you identify as First Nations (with or without status), Métis, or Inuit, or do you have Indigenous ancestry?

Answered: 183 Skipped: 79

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
First Nations	4.92%	9
Métis	2.19%	4
Inuit	0.00%	0
Indigenous ancestry	0.55%	1
Prefer not to answer	26.78%	49
No, I self-identify as	65.57%	120
TOTAL		183

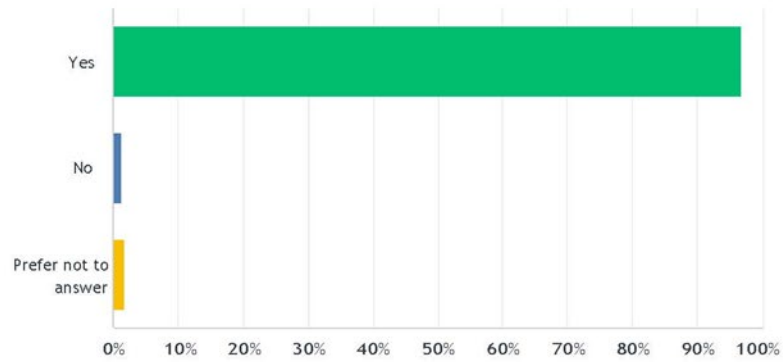
Q35 Please indicate the household structure that identifies you.

Answered: 221 Skipped: 41



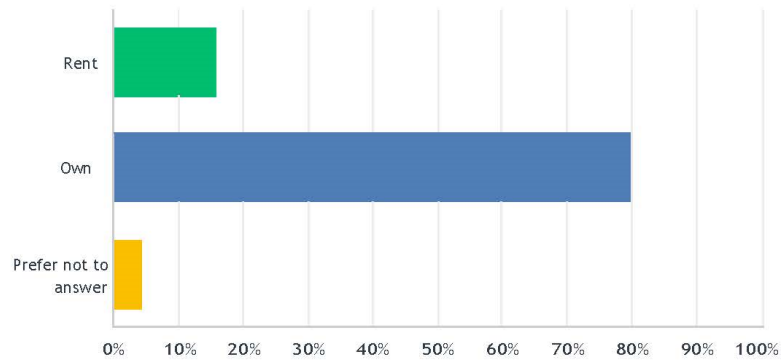
Q36 Do you have a secure place of residence?

Answered: 223 Skipped: 39



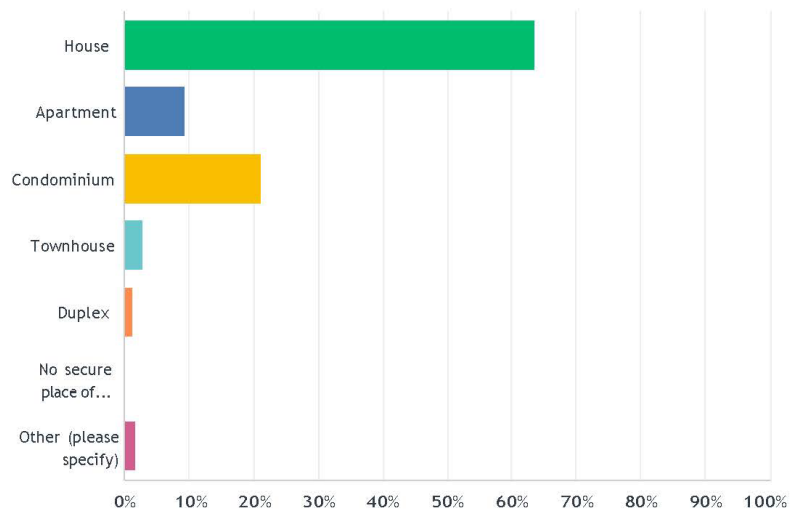
Q37 If yes, do you (or your household) rent or own your residence?

Answered: 224 Skipped: 38



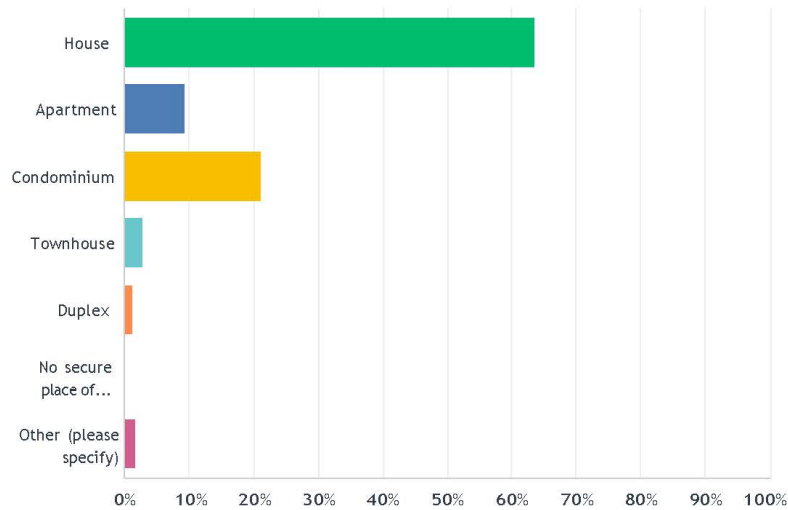
Q38 Which best describes the type of residence where you are currently living?

Answered: 222 Skipped: 40



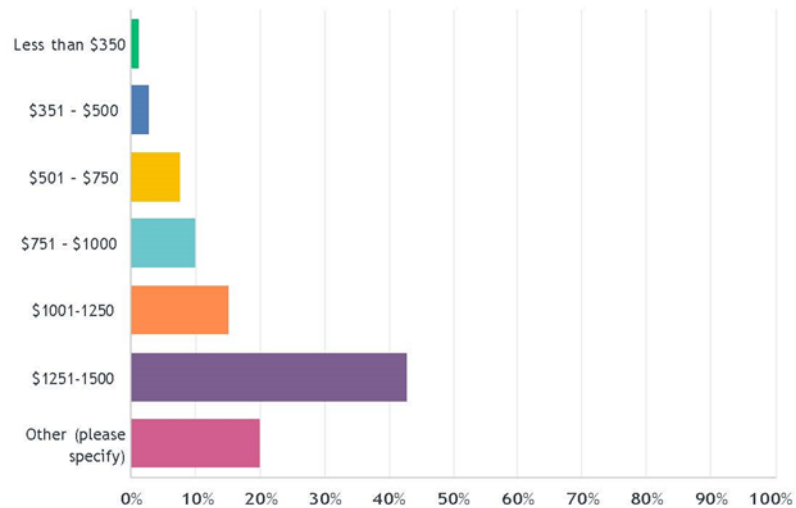
Q38 Which best describes the type of residence where you are currently living?

Answered: 222 Skipped: 40



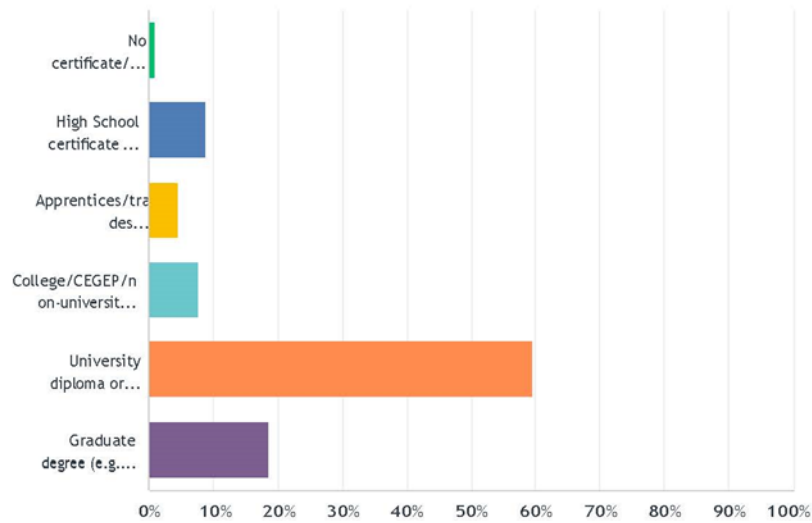
Q39 Which of the following ranges best describes your monthly housing costs?

Answered: 219 Skipped: 43



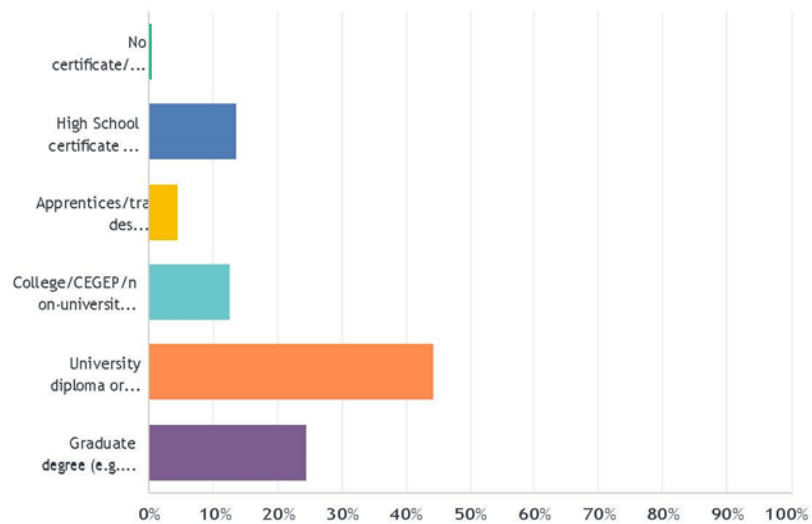
Q40 Growing up, what was your educational goal?

Answered: 220 Skipped: 42



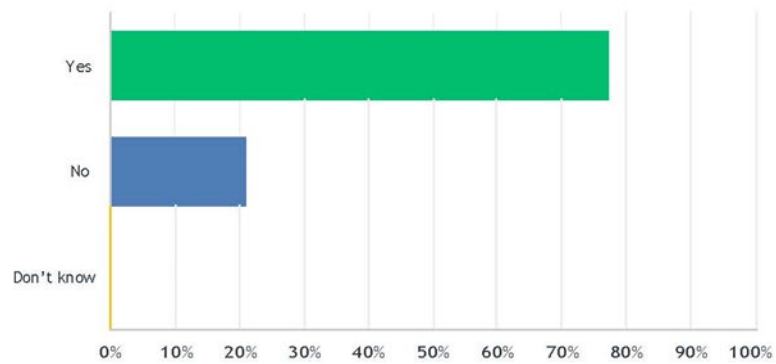
Q41 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Answered: 221 Skipped: 41



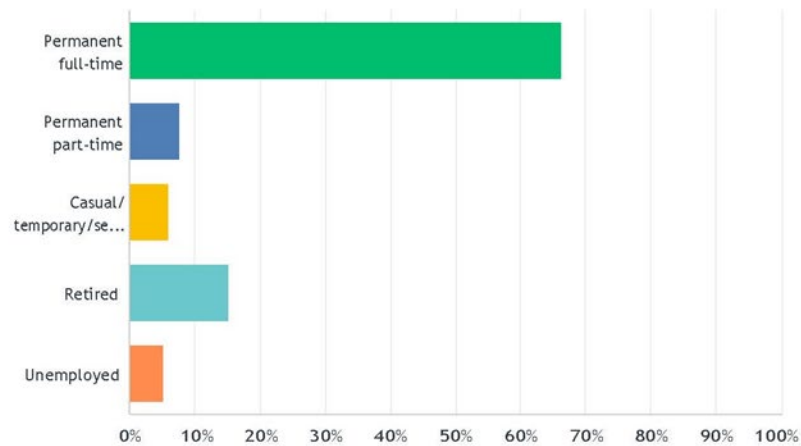
Q42 Are you employed?

Answered: 222 Skipped: 40



Q43 What is your employment status?

Answered: 219 Skipped: 43



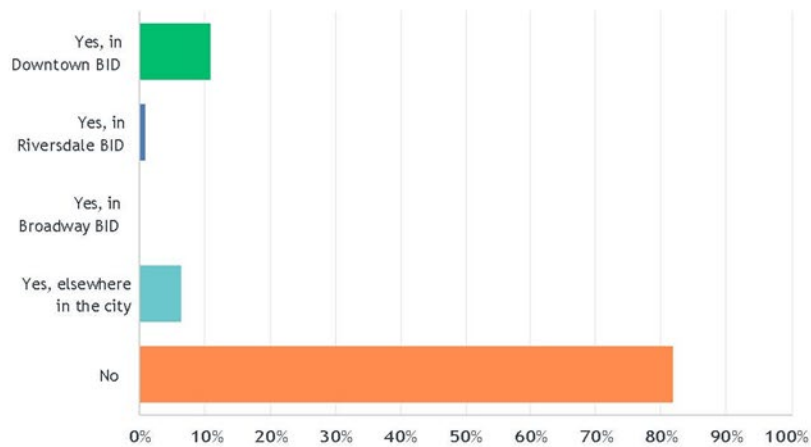
Q44 If employed, please indicate your occupation.

Answered: 177 Skipped: 85

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Manufacturing-Utilities	0.00%	0
Natural resources - agriculture & related	0.56%	1
Trades-Transport-Equip operators and related	0.00%	0
Sale & Service	14.12%	25
Art-Culture-Recreation-Sport	2.82%	5
Education-Law Social-Community & Gov	37.85%	67
Health	10.73%	19
Natural-Applied sciences and related	1.13%	2
Business-Finance-Administration	12.99%	23
Management	19.77%	35
TOTAL		177

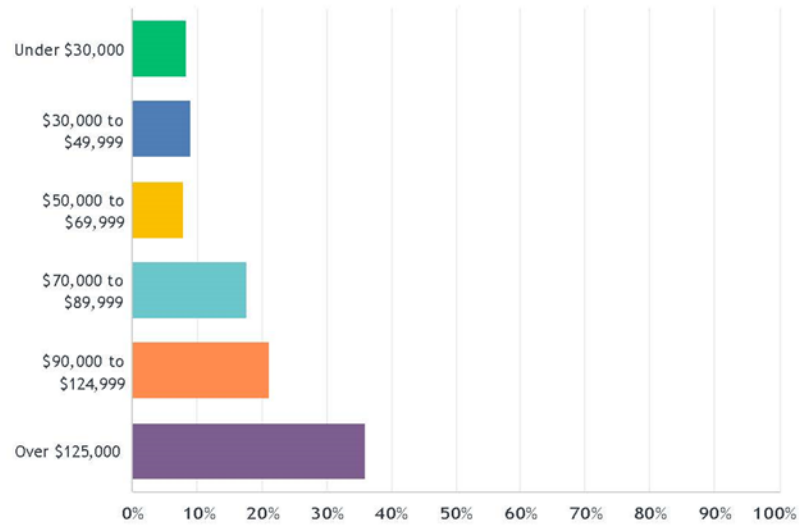
Q45 Do you own a business in Saskatoon?

Answered: 221 Skipped: 41



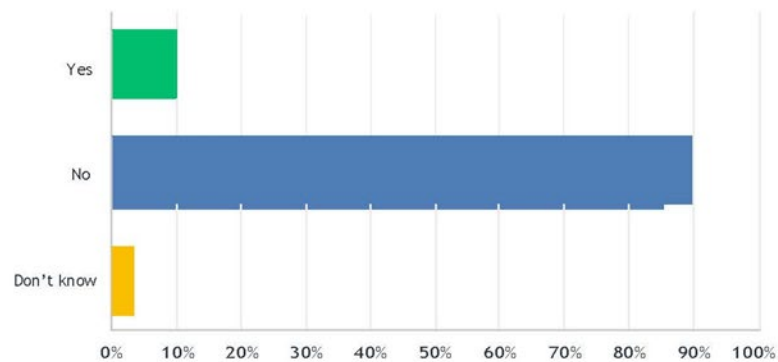
Q46 Which of the following annual household income ranges best identifies you?

Answered: 214 Skipped: 48



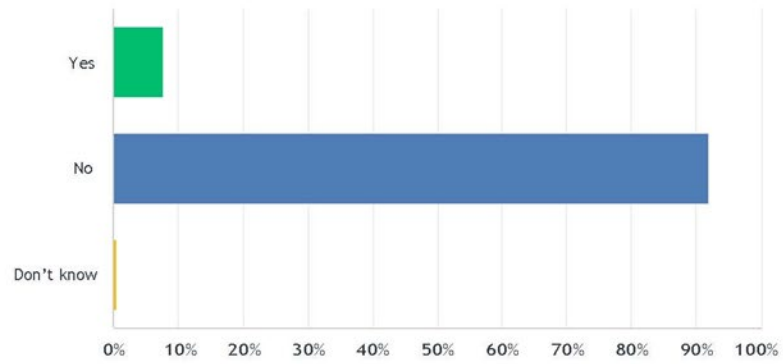
Q47 Have you ever received supplemental security income?

Answered: 220 Skipped: 42






Q48 Have you ever accessed the food bank?

Answered: 222 Skipped: 40



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Community-University Institute for Social Research: List of Publications

- Allan, Nancy, & Michael Gertler. (2006). *Remaking the Links: Fair Trade for Local and Global Community Development*. Saskatoon: Community-University Institute for Social Research.
- Amankwah, Dinah. (2003). *Integrative Wraparound (IWRAP) Process Training*. Saskatoon: Community-University Institute for Social Research.
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