

DMNA

Public Safety Survey

A Closer Look #3: Gender

March 19, 2021

**Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association
Public Safety Task Force**



Public Safety Survey

A Closer Look: Gender

Analysis Summary and Conclusion:

- Large majorities of both women and men support the six key findings of our survey report, with similar levels of agreement.
- Women’s public safety experiences in downtown Minneapolis must be effectively addressed in public safety policies.

The six key findings are:

- Downtown residents are highly dissatisfied with city leadership on public safety policies.
- Among city leaders, residents view Chief Arradondo as being most effective in responding to community safety issues.
- Residents overwhelmingly believe that MPD should report to the Mayor, and not to the City Council.
- Residents strongly want law enforcement to have a central role in responding to public safety calls.
- Lack of police presence downtown is residents’ top safety concern.
- Public safety perceptions have deteriorated from one year ago and contributed to observed changes in transportation, spending, and mobility.

Part I:

Key Findings

Large majorities of both women and men support the six key findings of our survey report, with similar levels of agreement.

A survey recently conducted by the DMNA Public Safety Task Force provides an objective assessment of downtown residents' views on community safety conditions and city leaders' responses to them. Our [survey report](#) includes key findings, a high-level summary of results, methodological information, and detailed data for all quantitative questions. These data show that downtown residents have strong and consistent views on public safety conditions, city leaders' responses, and policy implications. The data also enables us to take a closer look at our results, including how response levels vary with the demographic characteristics of respondents.

This is the third in a series of articles to examine the survey findings in closer detail. We focus here on how gender is associated with respondents' views on public safety. The survey sample is fairly evenly balanced between women and men: of the 1,103 respondents who answered the demographic question, 48% are women, 51% are men. **The overall conclusion of this analysis is that large majorities of both women and men support the six key findings of our survey report, with similar levels of agreement.** (Less than 1% of the sample, 10 respondents, selected the other/non-binary response choice. This number is insufficient for statistical comparisons, but a separate review of these responses shows a similar level of agreement on all key findings.) We will demonstrate this conclusion by examining how women and men responded to the survey questions associated with each of the key findings. In Part II, we extend our analysis of how gender is associated with downtown residents' views of public safety in Minneapolis, by examining additional survey data.

Leadership

Downtown residents are highly dissatisfied with city leadership on public safety policies.

Among city leaders, residents view Chief Arradondo as being most effective in responding to community safety issues.

When asked how satisfied they are with city officials' responses to public safety conditions (Question #17), both women and men were most satisfied with Chief Arradondo's response and least satisfied with the City Council's. Based on a satisfaction scale of 1-10 (1 = not at all satisfied; 10 = highly satisfied), women gave a weighted average of 4.87 to Chief Arradondo, 3.79 to Mayor Frey, and 2.54 to the City Council. Men gave a weighted average of 4.83 to the chief, 3.46 to the mayor, and 2.26 to the council. **As in the survey sample as a whole, survey respondents were generally twice as satisfied with the MPD Chief's response, as compared to the City Council's** (with men being slightly above and women slightly below this ratio).

Respondents' dissatisfaction with city leadership on public safety is further reinforced by Question #18, which asks survey-takers how confident they are that the City of Minneapolis will resolve the public safety issues. Sixty-seven percent of women and 75% of men reported that they were either "not at all confident or "not so confident."

Accountability

Residents overwhelmingly believe that MPD should report to the Mayor, and not to the City Council.

As in the full sample, **an overwhelming level of support for mayoral accountability is expressed by women (74%) and men (76%).**

Roles

Residents strongly want law enforcement to have a central role in responding to public safety calls.

This key finding draws primarily from Question #20, which asks survey-takers to indicate who they believe are the appropriate public safety responders for thirteen 911 call categories. For each call, we asked survey-takers to select whether the primary response should be from law enforcement, a social worker or other non-police employee, or a combined team of LE and non-police responders. The responses for women and men directly parallel those in the full sample:

- Homelessness was considered by most as appropriate for a non-police employee to be the primary responder, by 53% of women and 59% of men (with substantial support for a combined team as well).
- A combined team was considered most appropriate for mental health crisis, by 60% of women and 61% of men and for drug use/overdose, by 55% of women and 51% of men (with substantial support for a non-police responder).

-
- Both women and men strongly favored MPD as the primary responder for the other ten types of calls, by large majorities, averaging 78% for women and 84% for men.

To summarize these results: as in the sample as a whole and prior demographic analyses, there is strong support for additional staffing on homelessness, mental health crises, and drug overdose, but both women and men view **MPD as the most appropriate primary responder in a wide variety of response situations.**

Safety Concerns

Lack of police presence downtown is residents' top safety concern.

Question #4 asks survey-takers what their top safety concern is in downtown Minneapolis, and presents them with a list of 12 response choices (see [survey report](#), Appendix 3 for details). **Lack of security presence was the most selected top security concern in the full sample (42%), and in every subsample we have analyzed to date.** Lack of security presence is also the most selected top security concern by women (36%) and men (46%).

Impact of changing perceptions

Public safety perceptions have deteriorated from one year ago and contributed to observed changes in transportation, spending and mobility.

Safety perceptions (Q1 & 2) are highly consistent among all of the analyses we have conducted. Eighty-three percent of the full sample reported feeling “much less safe” (51%) or “somewhat less safe” (32%) in their neighborhood, compared to a year ago. In downtown Minneapolis, 90% felt less safe than a year ago. In the gender analysis, 82% of women and 83% of men reported feeling less safe in their own neighborhood, compared to a year ago. In downtown Minneapolis generally, 89% of women and 89% of men reported feeling less safe than a year ago.

Changes in the use of various transportation modes because of public safety concerns (Q16) follow the same pattern as in the full sample and other subsample analyses. Use of Metro Transit is down for women (53%) and men (57%). Taxi/ride share use is down (W=48%, M=43%). Bike/scooter use is down for men (36%) and women (29%, with 38% indicating they have never used this mode). Use of a personal car is the one category that has increased for both men (47%) and women (40%). The category that has changed most is a steep decline in walking, reported by 65% of women and 65% of men.

The impact of public safety conditions on spending is directly parallel to the full sample results. Sixty-six percent of respondents in the full sample reported that their spending had “significantly decreased” due to safety conditions (Q10), while another 19% reported that it had “somewhat decreased,” for a combined 85%. Eighty-four percent of women reported decreased spending (65% significantly), as did 86% of men (66% significantly). **When asked whether they are spending more of their entertainment dollars (restaurants, movies, etc.) outside the City of Minneapolis (Q11), 61% of respondents in the full sample answered yes. In the subsample analysis, 59% of women and 63% of men reported spending more outside of Minneapolis.**

Conclusion

Key findings of the DMNA Downtown Public Safety Survey represent a unified downtown community view on public safety issues in Minneapolis.

Analyses of the survey data have found that there is strong agreement among downtown residents on public safety conditions, official responses to them, and policies. Demographic analyses have confirmed that this agreement includes large majorities of renters, homeowners, people of color, and white respondents.

The analysis presented here adds women and men to this list, again by large majorities. Collectively, these analyses demonstrate that **the key findings of the DMNA Downtown Public Safety Survey represent a unified downtown community view on public safety issues in Minneapolis.**

Part II:

How Safety Conditions Affect Living in Downtown Minneapolis

Women’s public safety experiences in downtown Minneapolis must be effectively addressed in public safety policies

The relatively equal balance of women and men in the sample enables us to easily test the statistical significance of even modest differences between female and male respondents. The most revealing difference we found is in how respondents’ lives have been changed by the public safety crisis. Question #8 inquires about the issue directly: “Have you altered how you live, act, or travel in the city due to safety concerns?” Although our principal finding is that large majorities of both women (85%)

and men (80%) answered yes to this question, the modest difference in these percentages is statistically significant.

We address the issue further in an open-ended follow-up question (Q9): “If you answered yes above, what changes have you made?” Qualitative analyses of Q9 and other open-ended responses are still in process, but we found it interesting that quite a few respondents referred specifically to their gender in their comments. As an exploratory analysis we identified 33 such comments, 30 of which are from women. The predominant themes are clearly evident in these excerpts:

“As a woman, I no longer feel safe going anywhere alone in downtown Minneapolis. I either have to gather a large group of friends or take an Uber from door to door.”

“... As a woman the only place I feel relatively safe is the skyway and even then I face verbal harassment every time I go out. There are groups of people loitering constantly, especially around the downtown target.”

“I’m a woman and I live by gold medal park. I used to feel comfortable walking my dog at night through the park. We moved to this neighborhood because it was safe. It does not feel that way any more. I will also not go to any store in the area after dark.”

“As a female, I have long been conditioned to pay attention to my surroundings and activity around me. But now, it is an issue CONSTANTLY on my mind...as I walk around downtown, even during the day and with other people about.”

These four women collectively noted the following changes to how they live and travel in the city: avoiding certain geographic areas; never walking alone, and sometimes only in groups; traveling by a car service in lieu of walking; never walking after dark, and being in a constant state of high alert. These excerpts are merely examples: one or more of these changes (along with a number of additional changes) are presented in every one of the thirty gender-referenced comments from women.

Dramatic changes to how people live because of safety concerns are not exclusively a women’s issue. The gender-referenced replies from men all reported similar experiences, as this comment illustrates:

“I’m a male in mid '30s and have lived downtown for almost 10 years. I have always felt comfortable walking in the evenings / dark - whether that was walking home after a Twins game, walking home from a restaurant, or exercise at night running/walking. I felt less safe last summer and this summer it got worse where I would no longer be out past dark. ... It is a huge disappointment because Minneapolis is an awesome city and was at its peak just a few years ago with the Super Bowl and Final Four - clean and safe. Now it is the worst that it has been since I have lived here.”

Beyond the 33 gender-referenced comments in the exploratory analysis, **virtually every one of the comments from the 425 women and 423 men who replied to Question #9 expresses similar changes in how they live, act, or travel in the city because of safety concerns.**

Despite commonalities in men’s and women’s experiences, however, a distinctive women’s dimension to public safety conditions nonetheless emerges from the survey data. This dimension can be seen directly in the gender-referenced comments presented above, but also indirectly, through the effects of safety conditions on relationships. In another exploratory analysis, we identified 41 comments that included references to respondents’ relationships—husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, partner—all of which depict the kind of restricted personal mobility discussed here. These changes affect both partners in a relationship, but most of the comments pointedly describe the more restrictive effects experienced by women, as exemplified here:

“I do not leave my apartment without my husband, even in broad daylight. We do not go out at night to take a walk anymore or even to pick up food or other

necessary items cause of fear for our safety.”

“My wife won't walk alone even during daylight. Particularly around Nicollet Mall, she insists I come with her to whatever errand/appointment she might have.”

“I am a female and I have not left my apartment without my boyfriend in almost a year. I do not feel safe to be outside of our building on my own.”

We are not suggesting that these comments characterize the experiences of all women in downtown Minneapolis. Replies to open-end survey questions cannot be used for that kind of generalization, and there is undoubtedly considerable variation in how people respond to public safety conditions. But we can generalize from the quantitative finding that 85% of women in our sample, along with 80% of men, have altered how they live, act, or travel in Minneapolis due to safety concerns. Thematic consistency among open-ended comments illustrates and reinforces that generalization.

Viewing the public safety crisis as a women’s issue has political and policy-making implications. As noted earlier, both women and men are highly dissatisfied with city leadership on public safety policies. Another survey question (Q21) asks respondents how important public safety policies will be in their November voting decisions. Both women and men reported that these policies will greatly affect their votes, but women did so in greater numbers. In the mayoral race, on an importance scale of 1-10, 70% of women assigned a score of 10, and 90% gave a score between 8 and 10. (Among men, 66% assigned a score of 10, and 87% a score of 8-10.) In the vote for city council member, 73% of women assigned an importance score of 10, and 93% a score of 8-10. (Among men, 70% gave a score of 10, and 89% a score of 8-10.) We followed this question with an open-ended question (Q22): “If you could deliver one message about public safety to your City Council Member, what would that be?” An overwhelming majority of the 850 replies we received from women and men are highly critical of recent council actions on public safety. Two brief but incisive examples suggest the importance of gender in public safety politics:

“Make it safe again for a young female to be able to walk to get groceries or her dog without constantly looking over her shoulder and worrying if she will be assaulted or killed.”

“We are losing a beautiful city. It is a shame. Many policies make it harder for women to live downtown. Parking close to destination [is] harder (fewer places) and walking is dangerous.”

As in the prior paragraph, our generalization is grounded in the quantitative data and illustrated by the comments. Public safety policies will be of paramount importance in the 2021 election, and the gendered effects of public safety conditions are likely to play a critical role in voters’ decisions. **The implication of this analysis for city leaders is that the realities and perceptions of women’s public safety experiences in downtown Minneapolis must be effectively addressed in public safety policies.**