

# HOMELESSNESS AND POLICE CONTACT

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**Title**

HOMELESSNESS AND POLICE CONTACT

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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## ABSTRACT

Research regarding the homeless and their interactions with law enforcement is sparse. The current study examines the perceptions homeless men and women have of police officers in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Data for this study was collected via fifty-one semi-structured interviews with guests at three homeless shelters in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Roughly half of those interviewed have a positive opinion of police officers. The results demonstrate that the perceptions of police officers held by those interviewed is based largely on the amount of respect that they receive. If individuals feel they are respected by police officers, their perception is generally more positive. The results also show several of problems expressed by respondents in regards to how they view the homeless are treated by police. A number of policy implications and directions for future research are discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nobody knows how many homeless people there are in the United States. Estimates vary, in part because there is no uniform definition of homelessness, either in law or in social science research. Many homeless people are transient, moving from one jurisdiction to another in short time periods (Forst, 1997). Some are hard to find, others are living under freeway overpasses, in cars, or in other hidden areas. Homeless people may also want to become invisible for several reasons: some have pending arrest warrants, some fear enforced psychiatric treatment, and some homeless women fear that their children will be taken away (Forst, 1997). In 1994, the Clinton administration set the number of homeless people in the United States at 600,000. Homeless advocacy groups often put the figure somewhat higher – from 700,000 up to 3 million (Forst, 1997; Hombs, 2001). Recent studies have used broader definitions of homelessness and have calculated a larger number of homeless persons. A Columbia University study published in 1994 indicated that roughly 26 million adult Americans have experienced some form of homelessness, including being forced to live on the streets or with someone else (Link, Susser, Stueve, Phelan, Moore, and Struening, 1997).

In the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the federal government defines homeless as an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This definition also includes an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations such as welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill. Those that are defined as homeless may reside in an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized or a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.



This definition does not include any individual that is imprisoned or otherwise detained under an Act of Congress or a State law (Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, 1987).

It is estimated that 6.25 percent of the U.S. population will be homeless at some point in their lives (Brubaker, Amatea, Torres-Rivera, Miller and Nabors, 2012). Recent data suggests that there are approximately 750,000 people living in shelters, on the streets, or in other places unsuitable for living every day (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). In 2013, on an average night an estimated 610,042 people were homeless in the United States (Henry, Cortes, and Morris, 2013). More than one-third of all homeless people live in unsheltered locations such as under bridges, in city parks, in cars, or in abandoned buildings. The number of families and individuals who attempt to access shelters and other services has grown significantly. Between 2007 and 2010, the number of suburban or rural families that access shelters increased from 26.9 to 41.4 percent (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). The number of people accessing services for the homeless grew by nearly 57 percent during that time. Many homeless individuals suffer from the effects of substance abuse and mental health problems along with other health and life concerns. Many find refuge on the streets and in shelters after surviving personal crises such as domestic violence, losing a job, or being overwhelmed by medical bills. Others resist shelters due to negative experiences they have had with shelters and other homeless agencies (Donely and Wright, 2012).

Homelessness in the United States has been categorized into five time periods: (1) the colonial era in which many English colonists were poor and homeless, Native Americans were displaced from their homelands, and Africans were brought to the colonies as slaves; (2) the Post-Civil War era where massive homelessness resulted from reconstruction, the displacement of veterans of both armies, escalating immigration, the forced movement of Native Americans to

reservations, and the migration of former slaves into urban areas; (3) the “Gilded Age” during which homelessness corresponded with an economic “bust”, unregulated capitalism, and increasing immigration; (4) The Great Depression during which an estimated one percent of the U.S. population was homeless, and (5) the current era of homelessness (Forst, 1997).

The deinstitutionalization policies of the late 1960s and 1970s, which prohibited individuals from being involuntarily institutionalized unless they presented harm to themselves or others, has also contributed to the increasing number of homeless especially those with mental illness (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). In the 1970s and 1980s, the rise in oil prices due to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), resulted in the decline of the United States economy (Simpson, 2015). During this time funding for mental health services was significantly reduced which led to the transfer of state mental hospital patients into the community. When combined with veterans of the Vietnam War returning and the loss of affordable housing, increased income inequality and poverty resulted across the United States. In turn, the result was increased numbers of homeless individuals with mental illnesses and veterans on the streets and in contact with police officers and the criminal justice system (Simpson, 2015). More recently, the 2008 economic recession is an example of a crisis that has claimed many homes due to home foreclosures resulting in the eviction of many people to the streets (Brubaker et al. 2012).

The lack of available shelter space leaves many homeless persons with no choice but to survive on the streets. Most cities do not provide affordable housing, shelter space, and food to meet the needs of the homeless. As a result, many cities use law enforcement and the criminal justice system to deter people from living on the street. These measures often prohibit activities such as sleeping or camping, eating, sitting, and panhandling in public spaces and often include

criminal penalties for any violations of these laws (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2009). Some cities have enacted restrictions on sharing food that bans individuals and groups from serving food to homeless individuals.

Police encounter homeless individuals in many situations – when a homeless individual is victimized, intoxicated, in need of food or shelter, the subject of a complaint, or is a crime suspect. Police officers are routinely drawn into situations that involve the homeless because they are often the only 24-hour emergency service providers in a community, and therefore must address these calls for assistance (Forst, 1997). When someone is concerned about the safety of a person who is homeless or feels threatened by a homeless individual’s presence, they generally call the police first (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). When interacting with homeless individuals and especially when interacting with those who suffer from mental illnesses, police must negotiate and respond to the demands placed on them by politicians, police administrators, businesses, and residents to remove the sight of homelessness (Forst, 1997; Simpson, 2015). The police must also determine how to maintain order while also protecting the individual rights of those they are interacting with. The majority of the interactions between police officers and homeless individuals are a result of calls for service by businesses and residents about an individual or proactive policing for low-level, misdemeanor offenses that are often a result of living in public view. These offenses often take the form of public urination, open containers, trespassing, and public intoxication (Forst, 1997; Simpson, 2015).

As a result of contact with police officers and the public perception of homeless individuals, many aspects of homelessness has become criminalized (O’Grady, Gaetz, and Buccieri, 2011). Mechanisms of the criminalization of homelessness have developed as cities enact new laws and ordinances that are intended to limit or restrict the activities of the homeless.

Cities use disproportionate enforcement of existing laws and ordinances to make it illegal to sleep, sit, or store personal belongings in public spaces where homeless individuals live. Many public spaces are designed to restrict its usage by people who are homeless by designing park benches so that people cannot lie down and sleep on them, or moving ventilation grates off of sidewalks and into the streets. This also includes particular enforcement of more neutral laws, such as loitering, jaywalking, or open container laws, against homeless persons (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2009; Simpson, 2015). Other mechanisms of criminalizing homelessness include sweeps of city areas in which homeless persons are living to drive them out of those areas, which frequently results in damage to an individual's personal property (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2009). Cities also enforce a wide range of "quality of life" ordinances related to public activities and hygiene (i.e. public urination) despite there being no public facilities available to people without housing (Forst, 1997; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2009; Simpson, 2015).

A method to criminalizing homelessness includes increased surveillance and policing of public and semi-public spaces by police and private security. This includes targeted 'stop and searches', increased incarceration of people who are homeless, and discharging prisoners into homelessness (O'Grady, Gaetz, and Buccieri, 2011). People who are homeless are also over-represented in prison populations as a result of disproportionate enforcement, not being able to meet bail conditions, and having limited access to legal counsel and defense. People leaving prison – either as convicted offenders or those released from custody – are more likely to become homeless and access emergency services due to the lack of discharge planning and transitional support systems (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). Many of the homeless individuals caught up in the criminal justice system were targeted for violations of minor laws, such as

homelessness, panhandling, public urination, and trespassing. Other reasons for the over-involvement of the homeless in the criminal justice system include the police practice of arresting the homeless to remove them from the streets and substance abuse problems (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013; Simpson, 2015).

There are few research studies that examine how homeless individuals view the police. Of those that do report on perceptions that homeless individuals have of the police, the focus of the research is on other topics. For example, Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) examined homeless people's trust and their interactions with the police and paramedics. They examined homeless people's self-reported trust in emergency service providers by using a sample of 160 shelter users. Using face-to-face interviews, participants were asked if they had interacted with paramedics and police and to describe their best and worst interactions. They also were asked what their level of trust with these emergency providers were based on a Likert Scale. The researchers did not describe the types of circumstances that might have prompted the call. Homeless people expressed a significantly lower level of trust in police than in paramedics. A low level of trust in police was observed in homeless people of all ages and races and was particularly common among homeless people with a history of contact with the police (Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang, 2004).

In their study of homeless people's resistance to homeless shelters, Donley et al. (2012) covered many different reasons as to why the homeless did not access the shelters in their area. While their focus was on the resistance to shelters, they did briefly cover law enforcement. There was no direct question on how the homeless view law enforcement; law enforcement was brought up as a safety concern. Donley and Wright (2012) receive perceptions of the law enforcement from their sample in relatively negative terms, with the majority of the focus groups

voicing negative emotions to interactions with county law enforcement. The participants viewed law enforcement negatively mainly due to the police taking opportunities to harass and intimidate the homeless. Law enforcement was also thought negatively of in regards to the arrests made on “trivial grounds” (Donley and Wright, p.298 2012).

Huey and Quirouette (2010) used eighteen homeless service agencies and 51 homeless service users to examine the attitudes towards reporting criminal victimization among the homeless. Their interviews assessed how gender structures attitudes towards crime reporting creating the “anti-snitching code”. While most of the participants reported that they were frequently victimized, a sizeable portion of the sample stated that they would not report to the police under any circumstances. These reasons included fear or distrust of police, the belief that nothing would be done, the inability to remember details of the crime because of intoxication, and concerns by victims over outstanding warrants. The researchers did not examine the reasons behind why individuals did not trust the police and what types of interactions homeless individuals have with the police.

The purpose of the current study is to answer the following research question: What is the perception of the police among homeless individuals? More specifically, the current study will explore the perceptions that homeless individuals in the Fargo-Moorhead area have of police officers by interviewing those who access the emergency shelters in Fargo and Moorhead. Participants will be questioned on general information about their homelessness, the types of interactions they have had with police officers, outcome of those interactions, and their general perception of police. To the author’s knowledge, this study may be the only study that interviewed homeless individuals that focuses on their perceptions of police officers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Current State of Homelessness in the United States

Based on a report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 578,424 people were experiencing homelessness on an average night in 2014 (Henry, Cortes, Shivji, and Buck, 2014). The number of people experiencing homelessness in America decreased by 2.3 percent from 2013 to 2014. The National Alliance to End Homelessness uses data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to present national and state trends in homelessness (Henry et al. 2015). Of the 578,424 homeless individuals, sheltered individuals made up 69.4% (401,501) and 30.7 percent (177,373) were unsheltered. Around sixty three percent (362,163) were individuals, 37.4 percent (216,261) were families, and family households made up 11.8 percent (67,513) (Henry et al. 2014). Chronically homeless individuals made up 14.8 percent (84,291), 2.6 percent (15,143) of individuals were chronically homeless persons in families, and 7.8 percent (45,205) were unaccompanied children and youth. A total of 8.6 percent or 49,933 homeless individuals were veterans (Henry et al. 2014).

Some states, such as Arizona, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Wyoming, reported decreases in homelessness by more than 20 percent (Henry et al. 2014). In contrast, Idaho and Nevada, reported substantial increases (Henry et al. 2014). From 2013 to 2014, the total number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness fell by 2.5 percent and the majority of them were living in unsheltered locations. Some states, such as Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Wyoming, reported large decreases in individual chronic homelessness, while other states, such as Maine, New Hampshire, and New Mexico reported large increases (Henry et al. 2014). Veteran homelessness decreased by 10.5 percent from 2013 to 2014. The majority of homeless

veterans were in shelters and many states experienced a large decrease in veteran homelessness. New York had a 45.4 percent decrease and North Dakota had a 37.3 percent decrease (Henry et al. 2014).

### **Who are the Homeless?**

Single people make up 85 percent of homeless individuals, and 77 percent are male (Hombs, 2001). The racial/ethnic makeup of homeless individuals includes 41 percent white non-Hispanic, 40 percent black, 10 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Native American, and 1 percent of all other races. People between the ages of 17 to 24 represent 10 percent of this group, 81 percent are ages 25 to 54, and 9 percent are ages 55 and older. Veterans are reported to make up about 30 percent of the homeless adult population (Hombs, 2001). Most studies place the average age of the adult homeless at about 35 years old (Blau, 1993). There is little difference in the demographics of the homeless across the United States. Studies conducted in New York City, Ohio, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles have found the same demographic patterns among the homeless.

Single men make up around 51 percent of the total homeless population while single women account for only 12 percent (Blau, 1993). Homeless women are more likely to be parents and to have children with them when compared to homeless men. Sixty-seven percent of homeless women are parents of minor children and 54 percent of homeless women have at least one child with them (Wilder Research, 2013). Unaccompanied children account for around 3 percent of the homeless (Blau, 1993). Forty-eight percent have not graduated from high school compared with 19 percent of all U.S. adults (Burt and Cohen, 1989). It is estimated that 12 percent of the homeless population consists of adolescents (Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Kang, and Aukward, 2008).



There are large racial disparities among the homeless population. Native Americans make up an estimated 10 percent of the homeless population despite only being 1 percent of the population (Brubaker, Amatea, Torres-Rivera, Miller and Nabors, 2013). Fifty-four percent of the homeless population are of races other than white. Homeless people are three to four times more likely to be black and slightly more likely to be Hispanic than the general population (Burt and Cohen, 1989). African Americans represent 12.6 percent of the population but make up 37 percent of the homeless population.

### **Types of Homelessness**

Current research relies on the types of homelessness as defined by Kuhn and Culhane (1999). In their research, they developed three types of homelessness: transitionally homeless, episodically homeless, and chronically homeless (Kuhn and Culhane, 1999). Transitionally homeless are those who generally enter the shelter system for only one stay and for a short period of time. They tend to be younger and are the least likely among the homeless population to have mental health, substance abuse, or other medical problems. These individuals tend to become homeless due to a catastrophic event such as unemployment, separation, death of householder, utility disconnection, or fire. In most cases, these individuals do not return to homelessness after finding a more stable housing arrangement. The episodically homeless are those who frequently shift in and out of homelessness. These individuals are more likely to be young, but often experience medical, mental health, and substance abuse problems and are often chronically unemployed. The time spent out of the shelters is often spent in hospitals, jails, detoxification centers, or on the street. The chronically homeless are characterized as those who fit the stereotypical profile of the Skid-Row homeless. These individuals tend to view homeless shelters as long-term housing rather than for emergency shelter. These individuals tend to be

older, unemployed, and often suffer from disabilities and substance abuse problems (Kuhn and Culhane, 1999).

### **Criminalization of the Homeless**

The criminalization of homelessness has its roots in British Common Law dating back to the 1300s and has again been on the rise (Forst, 1997). The Statute of Laborers, considered to be the first vagrancy law, was passed in 1349 as a response to the reduction of the labor force from the Black Death. By this statute, “every able-bodied person without other means of support was required to work for wages fixed at the level preceding the Black Death; it was unlawful to accept more, or to refuse an offer to work, or to flee from one country to another to avoid offers to work or to seek higher wages, or to give alms to able-bodied beggars who refused work” (Forst, 1997 p. 23). The punishment of this statute was a fifteen-day imprisonment. By the sixteenth century, vagrancy laws were changed to include anyone considered idle or unwilling to work, and legal actions were stiffened to include whipping, burning, cutting off ears, branding, and death (Forst, 1997). These vagrancy laws made distinctions between different types of people: worthy paupers (usually able-bodied men) who were deemed unwilling to work compared to unworthy paupers (usually women, elderly, children, and the disabled) deemed unable to work. During the era of British colonialism, many of the poor were sent to the colonies either as punishment or as indentured servants in lieu of incarceration. In the colonies, the British vagrancy laws were generally adopted however; these poor individuals were used for another important purpose. Poor people were encouraged to wander into unsettled areas to claim land for themselves, and thus for England. By the turn of the twentieth century, the western frontier began to be settled and those poor individuals no longer had a purpose and therefore became problematic. The area for these poor, migratory men became known as “skid

row”, and the term “homeless” became specifically applied to the single unattached worker who lived on skid row between jobs (Forst, 1997).

As the homeless population has been increasing, so too have the number of ordinances adopted by cities which contributed to the criminalization of homelessness. In a survey of 224 cities conducted by The National Coalition for the Homeless and The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2006) 28 percent prohibit “camping” in public places in the city, 27 percent prohibit sitting or lying down in certain public places, 39 percent prohibit loitering in particular public places; 16 percent prohibit loitering city wide, and 43 percent prohibit begging in particular public places; 45 percent prohibit aggressive panhandling, and 21 percent have city-wide bans on begging.

It is often argued that the criminalization of homelessness is seriously misguided since it fails to address the underlying causes of homelessness (Ali, 2014; Forst, 1997). California cities have responded to the spread of homelessness by enacting such policies, often called “Quality of Life” ordinances that criminalize homelessness or certain aspects of homeless life. California’s homeless population represents almost 21 percent of the nation’s homeless population, making it a model case to examine the effects of criminalization of homelessness (Ali, 2014). City ordinances that are directed at the homeless population can take a number of forms. These restrict homeless persons’ presence in, and use of, public spaces; restrict their solicitation of money and other aid; and restrict organizations that provide aid and services to the homeless. Some of the more extreme measures subject the homeless to police sweeps (Ali, 2014; Forst, 1997).

Forms of criminalization include sleeping ordinances, loitering ordinances, panhandling ordinances, sanitation ordinances, and other restrictions (Ali, 2014). Several cities have passed

sleeping and camping ordinances, yet because many cities do not have adequate shelter space, there is no other alternative but to sleep in public parks, on benches, streets, and parking lots. Another tool used by cities is to prohibit loitering. Cities have used this restriction to target the homeless in public spaces. These laws prohibit sitting or lying down in public spaces, or blocking passage on any sidewalk. Panhandling, solicitation, or begging is prohibited in many cities. These limitations vary in extensiveness where some prohibiting begging at or near public transportation hubs, ATM machines, and parking lots, to others prohibit solicitation within a certain distances of street corners, banks, financial institutions, and sidewalk benches. Sanitation ordinances prohibit urination or defecating in public spaces, yet there is limited supportive housing and related facilities that the homeless can access. When there is no alternative, homeless individuals are forced to violate sanitation laws that regulate litter and bodily wastes in public areas (Ali, 2014; Forst, 1997).

A major consequence of criminalization is that cities do not offer emergency or long-term assistance to those most affected by the ordinances (Ali, 2014). The cities do not have affordable housing, employment, or income assistance to support their homeless residents. Given these circumstances, the homeless have to choose between violating the law and leaving public space. However, violating the law comes with consequences, including fines, jail sentences, deportation, or abandonment. Penalties have also been used to force the homeless out of downtown areas, where they are given the choice of leaving or going to jail and establishing a criminal record. These penalties can impose fines that exceed the amount the homeless can pay, which can then lead to a criminal history, increases their debt, and forces an individual to leave the city to avoid future prosecution (Ali, 2014; Forst, 1997).

## **History of Homelessness and the Police in the US**

The first dramatic increase in vagrancy in New England occurred after King Phillip's War of 1675-76 and Indian uprising. During this time, much of the Massachusetts and Rhode Island countryside was disrupted which forced settlers from their farms into coastal towns (Kusmer, 2002). Shortly after, Massachusetts passed an act requiring those who lived an "idle and riotous life" to work as servants. Before 1700, poverty in New York City and its surrounding area was a minor problem and there were no beggars to speak of in the city (Kusmer 2002). However, due to the immigration of poor people to the colonies, homelessness began to increase. In 1719, Boston ordered the 49 destitute inhabitants of one ship arriving from Ireland to leave the community at once. The poverty and disorder that followed the British evacuation of New York City in 1783, left the city open to vagabonds. Due to over-crowding in the jails and workhouses, officials began to place many vagabonds in the city almshouse, a house built by a person or charity to house the poor, until the city was forced to erect a new, four-story building in 1796 (Kusmer, 2002).

The years 1820-1860 were marked by growing inequality in income and wealth, especially in large cities. By the 1830s, the slums in the northern part of New York City were the largest of any city in the country (Kusmer, 2002). By the mid-1840s, police stations in New York had begun to provide rooms for lodging homeless people overnight, and the number requesting these accommodations were rising. Over a six-month period in 1853, almost 25,000 individuals made use of these police station shelters, while thousands more slept in Battery Park. During 1860s, homelessness did not attract national attention due to the struggle between the North and the South, but also because it was considered a local problem (Kusmer, 2002). After the Civil War, there were many veterans returning with physical and psychological wounds.

Physically wounded ex-soldiers often received assistance from soldiers' homes, charities, or friends, but the psychologically wounded, or those who found civilian life difficult to adjust to, were accorded less sympathy. The negative effects of the war led many of the veterans down a path that ended in homelessness. In the postwar period, a significant number of former soldiers slid into a life of vagrancy or petty crime (Kusmer, 2002).

The 1870s marked the beginning of homelessness being recognized as a national issue (Kusmer, 2002). The depression that began in the fall of 1873 and steadily worsened during the next three years produced widespread unemployment. By 1874, Boston reported the number of homeless was 98,263, more than three times the number in 1872. Between 1874 and 1878, relief was provided to the homeless over 200,000 times each year by city and town authorities in Massachusetts (Kusmer, 2002). During the same period, vagrancy arrests grew by 50 percent in New York City, while the number of men and women using the police stations for overnight lodging in Philadelphia increased almost four times. For most cities, a temporary solution to the increasing homeless population was to provide only the most minimal level of assistance. Most large cities continued to allow overnight lodging in police stations until the 1890s while many smaller communities continued this until the 1930s. The men and women who stayed in these lodgings did so in primitive conditions. An investigation in Boston found that the homeless were found "huddled together in their damp, reeking clothes, no bed but a hard bench, no food if hungry, turned out at daybreak into the snow of a winter morning" (Kusmer, 2002, p. 55).

For the homeless, the transition from the 1920s to 1930s marked one of the earliest signals of weakness in the booming economy. Beginning in 1927, the number of homeless men using homeless shelters increased. Though there were no definitive counts of the numbers of depression-era homeless, there are indicators of the magnitudes (Rossi, 1989). By 1932, New

York's municipal shelter was turning away men because of overcrowding and other cities were experiencing the same increases. In 1931, the number of homeless using shelters increased 280 percent over the previous year in St. Louis, 421 percent in Minneapolis, and 700 percent in Detroit and Cleveland. In 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration housed 125,000 people in its transient camps. A 1934 survey of social agencies in 765 towns and cities estimated that there were 200,000 homeless in all of those places (Rossi, 1989). Nels Anderson, a sociologist, told a Senate subcommittee that by his "conservative" estimate based on a three-day census taken at that time, there were at least 1.5 million homeless people in the United States (Kusmer, 2002).

After 1935, the homeless again became a problem exclusively for the state and local governments, neither of which had the resources to improve the lives of the homeless (Kusmer, 2002). The United States' entry into World War II drastically reduced the homeless population in the country. The permanently unemployed disappeared within months as they were absorbed into the armed forces and the war industries (Rossi, 1989). When the war ended, employment rates remained relatively high, and many returning veterans were eligible for benefits under the GI Bill. This resulted in a drastic reduction in homelessness and Skid Row areas. The aging of the Skid Row populations became more pronounced after World War II (Kusmer, 2002). By the end of the 1950s, most residents of Skid Row were middle-aged or elderly. About half of the skid row populations of Philadelphia and Chicago were between the ages of 45 and 64 (Rossi, 1989).

Skid rows declined steadily in size during the postwar period. The population of Chicago's West Madison Street area, which during the 1930s housed at least 30,000 persons declined to 13,000 by 1958 (Kusmer, 2002). During this time, police were becoming more

forceful in removing the homeless from the vicinity of prominent institutions. In 1964, in one Manhattan police precinct, arrests for disorderly conduct increased dramatically after officials from New York University convinced police to crack down on the number of homeless men wandering around the campus. In addition to routine arrests, cities would enact more widespread “cleanup” campaigns in skid-row districts (Kusmer, 2002). Public awareness of the “new homeless” can be traced to the 1970s when beggars and “street people” became more noticeable in the downtowns of many cities (Barak, 1991). During the recession of the early 1980s, the homeless population continued to increase. The economic recovery of 1983-1984 did little to stop the growth of homelessness. In 1984, the Department of Housing and Urban Development report estimated that there were 250,000 persons living on the street or in shelters, and by 1990, that figure had doubled (Burt, 1992). Both market forces and governmental policies contributed to the creation of a large homeless class (Rossi, 1989). Deindustrialization and the shift to high-tech and service economy eliminated many unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Panhandling, which during the 1950s and 1960s was limited to skid row and nearby neighborhoods, became commonplace in center city areas in the 1980s (Barak, 1991). The 1990s witnessed the return of punitive tactics for dealing with the homeless (Rossi, 1989). Led by New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, cities began to pass “quality-of-life” ordinances that allowed police to arrest homeless persons for trivial misdemeanors (Kusmer, 2002).

There is no dispute that crime and place are closely linked. Empirical research in the United States and Europe has demonstrated that crime is geographically concentrated (Berk and MacDonald, 2010). Social incivilities are common in areas with homeless encampments, which are often associated with public intoxication, loitering, aggressive panhandling, and public urination, drug use, and prostitution. Los Angeles County has the largest number of homeless



individuals compared to any other county in the United States (Berk and MacDonald, 2010). A large proportion of the homeless reside in the downtown section of Los Angeles' Skid Row. In September of 2005, the LAPD pilot tested an effort to clean up "skid row", officially named the Safer Cities Initiative, and was a hallmark of Chief William Bratton's "broken windows" approach. The LAPD also cracked down on crimes such as public intoxication, drug use, and prostitution. Starting in October of 2005, the LAPD placed four to five officers on foot in this section of downtown, and they were to focus on general nuisance crime and basic order maintenance (Berk and MacDonald, 2010; Braga, 2010).

After the pilot phase, the LAPD officially launched the full-scale version on Sept. 17, 2006 by deploying 50 full-time officers on the street in downtown LA (Berk and MacDonald, 2010). The officers worked eastward through the Skid Row section, breaking up homeless encampments, issuing citations, and making arrests for violations of the law. The immediate results of the Safer Cities Initiative seemed effective. The Skid Row homeless encampments were cleared and the concentration of homeless was dispersed. According to LAPD internal documents and media reports, homeless-related drug overdoses, murders, and reported crimes dropped the year after the intervention (Berk and MacDonald, 2010).

Berk and MacDonald (2010) examined three types of crimes, nuisance, violent, and property crimes, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Safer Cities Initiative. There were 419 weeks of data starting on January 1, 2000 and ending on December 31, 2007. There was a very large drop in all three crimes about the time when the Main street project began and a smaller downward shift about the time the SCI was introduced. For nuisance crimes, there was a large increase several months before any interventions were in place followed by a significant drop in crime associated with the Main Street Project and a small drop in crime associated with the SCI.

For both violent crime and property crime, the results show a similar trend to that of the nuisance crimes. Overall, there seemed to be modest but meaningful reductions across a wide range of crimes that could be attributed to the Safer Cities Initiative (Berk and MacDonald, 2010; Braga, 2010).

In their study, Carter and Sapp (1993) used questionnaires mailed to the chief executives of all municipal, county, and consolidated law enforcement agencies serving populations of 50,000 or more or having 100 or more sworn officers to examine police department policies, practices, and experiences in dealing with the homeless (Carter and Sapp, 1993). The results showed that the alcohol dependent, drug dependent, and mentally ill have the most frequent contact with the police, which may explain why police often rate alcohol and drug abuse problems so high. Of those that responded, only one-half of the departments kept records of homeless; and it was typically after the department had received a call about a homeless individual. Another 38.4 percent of all respondents indicated that they kept no records even on calls related to a homeless individual. Generally, the police executives do not see the presence of homeless individuals as a very significant problem in their communities (Carter and Sapp, 1993). Municipal departments were more likely to view homelessness with greater concern than the county or consolidated agencies.

While the police departments felt they would like more referral resource for the homeless, they largely disagreed that there are too many homeless for them to deal with effectively (Carter and Sapp, 1993). They did indicate however, that they have good relationships with the agencies that are available. Over 88 percent of the officers agreed that the homeless are alcohol abusers and 69.3 percent agreed that drug use was a regular problem. In addition, 64.9 percent felt that the homeless are mentally disabled. One major concern expressed

by officers was that the presence of homeless individuals increased the fear of crime among citizens (92.7%) and that the living conditions of the homeless posed a public health hazard (74.6%). Almost half of the officers (49.9%) were provided no training programs concerning the homeless (Carter and Sapp, 1993). Where training did exist, the most common form is roll call training (25.1%) followed by a training session for new officers (19.6%) with 11.5 percent offering in-service training about homelessness. The mean length of training session for new officers on homelessness-related issues was 6 hours and was 4.9 hours for in-service officers. The training subjects received was typically on processes and locations to make referrals for substance abuse, mental illness, and emergency shelter policies for cold weather (Carter and Sapp, 1993).

Research done by McNamara, Crawford, and Burns (2013) consisted of mail-in surveys to police departments regarding their perceptions, policies, and programs to address the problem of homelessness in their communities. Interviews were also conducted with ten chronically homeless individuals to gain insight into how they perceive the police and the problems they experience with police officers and the criminal justice system in general. Their results showed that municipal police departments reported having more frequent contact with the homeless compared to the sheriff's departments. Forty percent of municipal departments reported having a specific policy on homelessness compared to only 11 percent of sheriff's departments (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). The majority of large departments (83 percent) reported having frequent contact with the homeless, whereas less than half of small/medium departments reported frequent contact. Thirty-one percent of large departments reported having an above average number of calls for service involving the homeless compared to 11 percent of small/medium departments. Forty-three percent of large departments reported having a specific

policy on the homeless compared to 22 percent of small/medium departments (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013).

Police officers were also questioned about the role of law enforcement in addressing the problems of homelessness (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). Most of the officers interviewed said that it should not be the responsibility of the police to deal with the homeless. The general feeling among the homeless is that the police dedicate a lot of time to harassing them, and they felt that police officers had quotas demanded of them to issue citations to homeless people. Other homeless individuals argued that the system guarantees that they will be arrested and incarcerated. What occurs most often is that once a homeless individual has finally paid their fine or served their jail sentence, they are arrested for another offense (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013). By getting arrested again, they are forced to pay higher fines or serve longer jail sentences. The homeless individuals that were interviewed at a local shelter noted that a shortage in services has limited the shelter to accept fewer individuals than in the past. This shortage leaves many people out of the shelter each night and they are forced to find other places to sleep. Meanwhile, police officers continue to issue trespassing citations as these and other individuals seek refuge in abandoned buildings or other hidden locations (McNamara, Crawford, and Burns, 2013).

### **Factors that Increase the Odds of Police Contact with the Homeless**

#### ***Shelter Use***

Donely and Wright (2012) used focus groups averaging about eight participants per group to examine some of the reasons for resistance that homeless individuals have toward shelters. Among the reasons for not utilizing shelters was the level of safety. For the participants, the shelters were downtown, and many felt that the woods were safer than traveling

downtown, which they felt was a toxic environment. Companionship was also a common reason for non-utilization. Couples were separated into separate dorms at night and often in living areas. For many, dogs play an important role as protectors, lookouts, and companions. The idea of giving up their dog for shelter was unthinkable. Among the participants, a common safety concern was law enforcement. Some of the groups strongly voiced negative reactions to law enforcement interactions. Some commented that officers took every opportunity to harass and intimidate them. Others complained of arrests that were made for trivial reasons such as “molesting a dumpster, impeding the flow of foot traffic on a public sidewalk, or solicitation of funds without a permit” (Donley and Wright, 2012 p. 298). Nearly all of the participants reported that they have had numerous arrests, averaging as many as one arrest a month in some cases (Donley and Wright, 2012).

Survival strategies that are used by homeless people to combat the lack of adequate housing tend to include alternate forms of street or “makeshift” housing. This includes huts, abandoned subway tunnels, tent cities, and shantytowns (Wakin, 2005). Sustaining these kinds of public communities often means challenging legal and social risks that threaten their life on the streets. Because they typically lack any claim to these spaces they inhabit, most makeshift communities are easily displaced through city sweeps, or other forms of antihomeless regulation (Wakin, 2005). A solution to this problem for some homeless individuals is living in their vehicle, which can provide the owners a degree of privacy and safety that is generally impossible in other makeshift settings. Vehicles also offer the related possibility for legal ownership and mobility. Many of those who live in their vehicles would rather stay in their vehicles than pay rent, deal with neighbors, or live in apartments (Wakin, 2005). Vehicles therefore create an in-

between form of housing, one for those who cannot afford more permanent housing and those who do not want to stay in a shelter.

### ***Substance Abuse***

Mental health and substance abuse problems are pervasive among America's homeless population. Of the total adults experiencing homelessness and living in urban settings, an estimated 38 percent attributed their condition to mental health problems or substance abuse problems and the lack of treatment services available (Brubaker, Amatea, Torres-Rivera, Miller and Nabors, 2013). In Donely and Wright's (2012) study, they found that more than 70 percent of homeless individuals reported having disabilities including mental health problems, drinking and/or drug problems, being physically disabled, chronic asthma, diabetes, bone injuries, heart disease, liver disease, and impaired vision among others. In New York City, the rate of criminal offenses is 35 times higher among the homeless persons with mental illnesses than among their housed counterparts (Benda, Rodell, and Rodell, 2003). One proposed explanation for this difference is attributed to the deinstitutionalization policies implemented in the 1960 that shifted the focus of treatment from inpatient to community services (Benda, Rodell, and Rodell, 2003; King and Dunn, 2004).

In their study of homeless veterans, Benda et al. (2003) investigated the types of offenses committed by homeless veterans who are substance abusers to determine if substance abuse and psychiatric illnesses are related to offenses, and to examine the strongest predictors of offenses among the homeless population. After comparing their sample of military veterans, they found that most homeless veterans experience multiple problems. In the sample, 24 percent had attempted suicide, 42 percent had suicidal thoughts, 45 percent were depressed, 41 percent had committed crimes in the past year, 27 percent had committed nuisance offenses in the past year,

and 40 percent had been in a psychiatric hospital prior to the study. The major findings showed that alcohol abuse, other drug abuse, and a number of psychiatric hospitalizations before the study were related to crimes among the homeless veterans (Benda et al. 2003).

As stated earlier, Native Americans make up the largest portion of the homeless population compared to any other group. Native American homeless individuals more often have a single addiction to alcohol than to any other drug (Lobo and Vaughan, 2003). In a Chicago study, more than one-half of the Native Americans were classified as chronic alcoholics. For many, alcohol use indirectly factors into how individuals become homeless, while for others it serves as a part of the strategy for survival on the streets. Lobo and Vaughan (2003) conducted a study on homeless Native Americans in Tucson, AZ. Nine out of ten participants had used marijuana and/or alcohol. The drinking and drug use occurred in a variety of settings and for various reasons. Some of the reasons for drinking were to become comfortable or brave enough to panhandle, to handle harsh circumstances such as cold weather, to self-medicate for mental or physical stress, for recreation, or as a tool for metaphysical insights or spirituality. These participants acknowledged that there were drawbacks to heavy alcohol and drugs use. One drawback that several participants mentioned was that when using drugs, a person is no longer clean and therefore cannot pass a drug tests while in the labor force. It was also frequently mentioned that drinking can lead to victimization of crimes, such as theft of personal belongings or bodily attacks (Lobo and Vaughan, 2003).

### ***Mental Illness***

Police calls for service due to people with mental illness are often thought of as the most dangerous calls for service that officers respond to. Encounters with mentally ill individuals make up 6 to 7 percent of all public contacts (Morabito and Socia, 2015). Existing research does

not support this perception of increased level of violence. Uniform Crime Reports indicates that few injuries to police officers result from encounters with individuals with mental illness.

Crimes committed by mentally ill individuals tend to be nonviolent crimes, and these individuals are involved in criminal activity similar to those committed by others of the same socioeconomic status (Fischer, Shinn, Shrout and Tsemberis, 2008; Morabito and Socia, 2015). Recent reports estimate that approximately 4 percent of overall violence in the United States can be attributed to those with mental illness (Morabito and Socia, 2015).

In order to determine whether police officers' encounters with people with mental illnesses are more likely to result in injuries to officers or subjects when force is used, Morabito and Socia (2015) examines all use-of-force reports collected by the Portland Police Bureau in Oregon between 2008 and 2011. The results showed that a subject was perceived of having a mental illness without substance abuse approximately 6 percent of the time and as having a mental illness and substance abuse about 5 percent of the time (Morabito and Socia, 2015). Their results also showed that perceived mental illness alone did not significantly influence the likelihood of officer injury when compared to subjects without both mental illness and substance abuse. This finding indicates that subjects with perceived mental illness do not represent an increased chance of injury to officers. Perceived substance abuse was associated with a 23 percent decrease in the likelihood of officer injury. The risk of officer injury increased 13 percent when the subject was perceived to have both mental illness and substance use (Morabito and Socia, 2015). These findings suggest that it is not mental illness that has an impact on police encounters, but substance use for both subjects with mental illness and without that can affect whether the officers and/or subjects are injured (Morabito and Socia, 2015).



Unsheltered homeless make up about 38 percent of the total countable homeless population, and two-thirds of the chronically homeless (Donley and Wright, 2012). In a Phoenix, Arizona study, it was found that shelter non-utilizers were significantly more likely to consume alcohol, had experienced court-ordered psychiatric treatment, were more likely to work as day laborers, and were disproportionately Native American compared to shelter users. Chronically homeless, unsheltered individuals tend to be the most resistant to services and are often the most difficult to place into long-term housing. Those who are resistant to shelter use state that they have had negative experiences in the past to deter them from using shelters and other homeless agencies such as being treated like a child, being subject to arbitrary rules, being treated disrespectfully by staff, and being treated as a number rather than a person (Donley and Wright, 2012).

### ***Physical and Sexual Abuse***

For many homeless individuals, abuse of some form is a major cause of their homelessness. Homeless women report that domestic violence was a leading cause of their homelessness, with as many as 50 percent of women and children are living on the street as a result of domestic violence (Forst, 1997; Goodman, 1991). Thrane et al. (2008) used the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents, which included homeless youth interviews directly on the streets and in shelters in 8 Midwestern cities. They measured physical abuse, delinquent behavior, age on own, deviant peers, substance use, and post runaway arrest and police harassment. Their results showed that physical abuse was an important determinant of street risk factors and police intervention. Physical abuse, strong connections to deviant peers, and drug use all had a direct impact on being hassled by police. Youth who ran away at a younger age reported stronger association with delinquent peers and were at a higher risk of post

runaway arrest. Deviant peer contact was linked with police harassment and after controlling for the effects of gender and age, males were more likely to be arrested and harassed by the police.

Homeless adults and youth often face challenges that encourage deviant behavior (Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Kang, and Aukward, 2008; Tyler, Kort-Butler, and Swendener, 2014). Most homeless youth have experienced some form of child abuse, whether physical or sexual, which tends to result in chronic and persistent developmental risks. Many homeless youth have high rates of illicit drug use. Some of these risk factors include physical and/or sexual abuse, lower self-efficacy, deviant values, being a victim of partner violence, posttraumatic stress disorder, and depression. Tyler et al. (2014) hypothesized that youth who have experienced more child abuse, street victimization, and partner violence will be more likely to react to these strains with illegal behavior. Those with higher levels of depressive symptoms and posttraumatic stress disorder will be more likely to engage in illegal behaviors, and these symptoms will mediate the relationship between strain and illegal behavior. They sampled 199 young adults, 144 who were homeless and 55 who were housed. They measured child maltreatment, street victimization, mental health, and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. Protective factors included self-efficacy, low deviant beliefs, and religiosity. Results showed that greater physical and/or sexual victimization, lower deviant beliefs, and higher self-efficacy matter the most for property and violent crime involvement. For illicit drug use, more child physical abuse, more partner violence, and lower deviant beliefs were important correlates. Higher levels of depression were associated with more property crime involvement (Tyler et al. 2014).

### *Criminal History among Homeless Populations*

Previous studies have found that homeless individuals are at risk for engaging in non-violent criminal activity, often being arrested for nuisance crimes such as camping without a permit or indecent exposure (Fischer, Shinn, Shrout, and Tsemberis, 2008). Others are arrested for crimes that result from living on the streets, such as being charged with trespassing or sleeping on a park bench. There are several studies that have examined the high level of involvement within the criminal justice system among homeless adults and youth. Studies have estimated that up to 50 percent of homeless adults have a history of incarceration (Tsai and Rosenheck, 2012). Among homeless individuals with severe mental illness, those with a longer history of incarceration had more psychopathology and substance use and showed less improvement over time, particularly on psychiatric problems. Past studies have found that the rate of homelessness among inmates ranged from 7.8 percent to 20 percent at the time of incarceration and 25 percent to 33 percent who had an episode of homelessness in the two months prior to incarceration (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2008).

A study of crime among Texas males in the mid-1980s found that homeless men were arrested for only 1 percent of violent crimes despite being arrested for more than 50 percent of alcohol-related offenses (Thrane, Chen, Johnson, and Whitebeck, 2008). For Midwestern homeless males, 30 percent reported a felony conviction and 40 percent reported incarceration. A possible explanation offered for the arrest rates among homeless males is the criminalization of routine activities. An example includes carrying backpacks and possessing cardboard cutters have resulted in arrests for squatting and carrying concealed weapons. Police contact among Midwestern homeless adolescents is quite common. Forty-four percent reported an arrest, and among Northeastern runaways, 33 percent of boys and 21 percent of girls reported being arrested

in the past 3 months. Fifty percent of runaways reported police harassment, 61 percent of homeless boys and 39 percent of girls were harassed by police. One study conducted participant observation and interviews with 20 San Francisco homeless youth and found that most of the youth reported distrustful and fearful attitudes toward the police.

Despite the research, there remain many state and federal policies that restrict access to needed housing, public assistance, unemployment, and mental health services for people with criminal histories. Tsai and Rosenheck (2012) examined the incarceration histories of a sample of 751 chronically homeless adults participating in a multi-site demonstration program of supported housing. Participants were measured on socio-demographic variables in addition to disabilities, housing, community adjustment, employment and income, health status, and community service use. Their results revealed that participants who were incarcerated for more than one year were more likely to be male, had less education, and were more likely to be diagnosed with drug abuse/dependence than participants with a shorter incarceration period (Tsai and Rosenheck, 2012).

Fischer, Shinn, Shrout, and Tsemberis (2008) used a longitudinal design to track changes within individuals across observation periods to examine how patterns of deviant behavior change as participants experience changes in housing status and severity of psychological symptoms. They hypothesized that individuals will be more likely to commit a non-violence crime when they are homeless, particularly for offenses that may be related to subsistence strategies, with street homelessness having stronger association with this type of non-violent crime than sheltered homelessness. The researchers examined the likelihood of homeless individuals committing violent and non-violent offenses when experiencing greater psychological symptom severity. The relationship between sheltered and unsheltered

homelessness and violent criminal activity was also studied (Fischer, Shinn, Shrout, and Tsemberis, 2008).

The results showed that the likelihood of an individual committing a crime increased as homelessness and severity of mental illness symptoms increased across the observation period of 48 months (Fischer, Shinn, Shrout, and Tsemberis, 2008). The findings supported the hypothesis that sheltered and unsheltered homelessness would be associated with higher likelihoods of committing non-violent crimes. These crimes may be related to subsistence strategies, but the results were weaker for sheltered homelessness. Sheltered homelessness significantly predicted increases in violent crime. This could be due to the increase among individuals who already are experiencing high levels of stress and increased violent tendencies from being homeless and the shelter atmosphere could unintentionally increase the stress level and create confrontational living conditions. Psychological symptom severity predicted increases in non-violent and violent criminal activity, with greater symptom severity being associated with an increased likelihood of committing a violent crime (Fischer, Shinn, Shrout, and Tsemberis, 2008). This study suggests that homeless mentally ill individuals are more likely to commit violent crimes than non-homeless mentally ill individuals and that homelessness and mental illness have additive effects.

The rate of homelessness in the state and federal prison population was examined by Greenberg and Rosenheck (2008). They examined if very high rates of homelessness and evidence of poor health status and disadvantageous socio-economic characteristics were major contributors for the incarceration of US adult state and federal prison inmates. The sample was gathered from the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities. They measured housing status, demographic characteristics, mental health and substance abuse, trauma, and crime (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2008). Their results showed that over 9 percent

of the adults in state and federal prison inmates were homeless prior to incarceration, a rate 4-6 times higher than in the general population. Homeless inmates were more likely to have been incarcerated for index property crimes and violent offenses, in addition to being more likely to have histories of trauma, mental health, ill-health, substance abuse, and live in poverty. About 40 percent of homeless inmates reported use of mental health services or medications for a mental illness prior to incarceration, a proportion twice of those of domiciled inmates (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2008). Being older and a male increased an inmate's odds of being homeless at the time of arrest. Homeless state and federal inmates were more likely to have committed violent and property offenses in the past and had a number of other problems that suggest coping with the material stresses of homelessness is not the only risk factor for incarceration (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2008).

Metraux and Culhane (2004) conducted a large study by analyzing administrative data from prisons and shelters in New York City. Of the 48,424 prisoners who were released from 1995 to 1998, those who had previous experiences with homelessness were almost five times more likely to be homeless again upon release. Within a two-year period, 11.4 percent of the sample had entered a shelter and of those, 32.8 percent had returned to a state prison. This suggests that a shelter stay is associated with an increased risk for a subsequent re-incarceration. Of those who entered a shelter after their release, 54 percent did so within a month of their release. The risk of shelter use was greatest upon community reentry and then decreased substantially after the first two months after their release from prison (Metraux and Culhane, 2004).

## *Crime Victimization*

Homeless individuals are victimized at a disproportionality high rate compared to the general population. Homeless literature reports that anywhere between one-quarter to over half of homeless individuals have been victimized since becoming homeless (Garland, Richards, and Cooney, 2010). Padgett and Struening (1992) found that the victimization rate in cases such as robbery and forcible rape were more than 20 times higher for men and women and the overall victimization rate was 56 percent higher than the general population. Homeless men are more likely to be victims of all types of crime when compared to homeless women with the exception of rape and sexual assault (Garland et al. 2010). Evidence suggests that factors associated with criminal activity within the homeless population can also predict victimization. Health problems such as mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse, and degenerative diseases significantly increase the likelihood of being a victim.

A common strategy employed by the homeless population is the “anti-snitching code” (Huey and Quirouette, 2010). A frequent practice among homeless individuals is to choose not to report their victimization to law enforcement. An explanation of this phenomenon is that victims weighed the benefits of reporting the crime against the costs. They then made the determination of whether to inform the authorities. Anti-snitching is also linked with the victim’s past positive or negative experiences with the police and whether they are motivated by fear that reporting might lead to further victimization by the criminal justice system. In recent literature, the failure to report crimes to law enforcement is represented by three factors. These factors are the distrust of the police, the police practice of checking victims for outstanding warrants, and a normative code within the homeless population that prohibits individuals from reporting to the authorities (Huey and Quirouette, 2010).

Huey and Quirouette (2010) used data drawn from a larger study conducted in 2008 of police response to the criminal victimization of the homeless in Edinburgh, Vancouver, and Toronto. They examined the “anti-snitching code” on attitudes towards reporting criminal victimization among the homeless. Their sample included representatives of participating service organizations and homeless service users. Both groups were included in the sample to gain the views of those who work most closely with the homeless and are in a situation to observe and understand the patterns of crime and victimizations. The most common form of victimization cited by the homeless in this study and previous research is the theft of personal property. The respondents cited that the shelters were a frequent site for the theft. A number of the respondents reported being the victim of violent crimes. These crimes ranged from assaults to robberies, with robberies being particularly common. Gender also plays a significant role in the risk of criminal predation on the streets. Relatively high rates of sexual exploitation, harassment, and sexual violence experiences by homeless women have been found in previous research. Huey and Quirouette (2010) found that each of the women admitted to being victimized. The crimes ranged from petty thefts to violent sexual assaults, with physical assaults being the most common. Most women reported having been assaulted by a male offender.

The most frequently occurring reason for not wanting to report victimization to the police was the operation of the anti-snitching code (Huey and Quirouette, 2010). Over half of those interviewed stated that the possibility of being labeled a snitch within the community was a reason why they and/or their friends would not report criminal victimization to the police. It was also viewed as a ‘crime’ within their communities. Several respondents noted that snitches lose access to goods and services in the homeless community. When asked under what circumstances it would be acceptable for a homeless person to report criminal victimization to the police, a



common answer was that reports would only be acceptable within the community if the victim was a member of the 'weaker' social groups who need protection. Those categorized as weak included children, the mentally ill, senior citizens, and women. Women constituted an exception because they were among those more frequently victimized on the street. Women participate in the anti-snitching code in order to try to increase their personal safety on the street (Huey and Quirouette, 2010).

### ***Black's Theory of Law***

Black's theory of law explains variations in law across societies and among individuals within societies. Black argues that if a poor person commits a crime against another poor person, it is less serious than if both are wealthy; less is going to happen (Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1979). According to Black, the quantity of law varies with other aspects of social life: stratification, morphology, culture, organization, and social control (Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1979). Stratification is the vertical aspect of life and emerges when wealth and rank is unevenly distributed (Kuo, Cuvelier, Shue, and Chang, 2011). People with less wealth and of lower social rank are less likely than those who are wealthier and of higher rank to mobilize the legal system. Gender, race, age, and income have been linked to the concept of stratification. Females, people of color, the young, and the less affluent are less likely to access, or have access to, legal resources than males, whites, the mature, and the more affluent. Victimitizations between people known to each other (and likely to be similar in social rank) are more likely to be reported to the police by people of higher rank than those of lower rank (Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1979). Therefore, Black's theory predicts that crimes between strangers are more likely than crimes between nonstrangers to be reported to the police.

Morphology is the horizontal aspect of social life, the distribution of people in relation to one another (Doyle and Luckenbill, 1991). The more socially integrated people are, the more likely they are to mobilize the law when compared to those who are less socially integrated (Kuo et al., 2011). An employed or married person is considered to be more integrated than those who are single or unemployed. Black also hypothesizes that the quantity of law is related to population density (Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1979). The greater the population density, the greater the law. Culture is defined as the symbolic aspect of social life, including the expressions of what is true, good, and beautiful (Kuo et al., 2011). Black theorizes that law varies directly with culture and that some societies have more culture than others, some groups have more than others, and some individuals have more than others (Doyle and Luckenbill, 1991). Black maintains that culture can be measured by the level of literacy and education.

Organization is the corporate aspect of social life. A more organized society will have more extensive legal activity than a less organized society (Kuo et al., 2011). People who are more integrated into organizations would tend to be more litigious than those who are not as integrated. Black considers two or more individuals more organized than a single individual (Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1979). Crime reporting behavior can also be predicted by organization. The most likely to report their victimizations to the police are two or more persons who are victimized by a single individual. The least likely to report a victimization is a lone victim of two or more offenders. The final component of Black's theory of law is social control. Social control refers to the normative aspect of social life that defines what is right, what is a violation, obligation, abnormality, or disruption (Kuo et al., 2011). Social control deters some deviance which reduces law. In settings in which people are permitted to continuously observe and react to each other's conduct, law is less important as a mechanism of social control.

## **Police Contact with the Homeless**

There are two primary arguments about why people are homeless and commit crime in this country (Benda, Rodell and Rodell, 2003). The first argument is that people who are homeless are rational, free thinking beings that choose to be homeless, either directly or indirectly through substance use. These personal and social losses frequently lead homeless substance users to engage in crime due to diminished capabilities to purchase alcohol and other drugs. The second argument is that homeless crime rates are higher due to the result of ecological forces. These forces include abusive or dysfunctional families, peer associations, traumatic experiences, and a lack of opportunity to world economies (Benda et al. 2003). These forces then lead to psychiatric problems which results in criminal behavior due to the circumstances of being homeless. Finding a place to sleep is trespassing, waiting to eat at a soup kitchen is loitering, trying to obtain the necessities of life is panhandling, and carrying around one's belongings is squatting. According to this argument, alcohol and drugs are used to cope with these problems or a disease out of their control (Benda et al. 2003).

One of the responses police departments have used when dealing with homeless individuals has been police-initiated transjurisdictional transport, or PITT. PITT is a low-visibility police action that involves a police officer who has come in contact with a person who is mentally ill, someone who is homeless, a prostitute, a juvenile, an intoxicated person, or a person who is under the influence of drugs, and the officer views this person as troublesome (King and Dunn, 2004). The officer decides to resolve the situation by transporting that individual outside of that department's jurisdiction and releases that person with instructions to not come back. An example of this would be an officer giving a homeless individual a ride to their jurisdiction's border, release the individual, and instruct them to not come back (King and

Dunn, 2004). PITT does not include situations where an officer transports someone to a capable guardian, such as a hospital, jail, or shelter (King and Dunn, 2004).

Causes of PITT include organizational factors, situational factors, and community factors. Organizational factors include the department's emphasis on order maintenance, the implementation of COP and how widely these policies are implemented (King and Dunn, 2004). Situational factors include the suspect's demeanor, the victim or complainant's preference for arrest or leniency, and the seriousness of the alleged offense. Community factors include the presence of a suitable dumping area, easy access to the dumping area, ease of access to other transportation, and if there are suitable alternative placements. One way that PITT is being controlled is by using social service placements for the troublesome persons. These services can include detoxification centers, homeless shelters, psychiatric units at hospitals, and juvenile drop-off centers (King and Dunn, 2004).

Police departments have found dealing with the homeless to be a significant law enforcement challenge (Melekian, 1990). Departments are learning that an effective approach to policing the homeless is not easily devised and that there is not a single solution. The responsibility of dealing with the homeless on a day-to-day level ultimately falls on the police department. There are two distinct political points of views on what the role of the police department should be in regards to the homeless population (Melekian, 1990). The first view is that the issue of homelessness is a social problem and that it should not and cannot be pushed onto other jurisdictions. This view was popularized by the city's attorney's office in May of 1990 in Santa Monica and holds that homelessness stems from a failure of the national and state governments to deal with the problems with affordable housing and to provide an effective public mental health policy (Melekian, 1990). This view also holds that the local government,

including the police department, must provide a temporary solution until more effective, long term policies are put into place. The alternative view holds that though unfortunate, a city cannot and should not attempt to deal with homelessness due to the magnitude of the problem. This view was supported by both business owners and individual citizens who were often confronted by intoxicated persons or those who were mentally unstable (Melekian, 1990).

There are three problem areas for police departments that result from the debate on how to deal with the homelessness issue. These are the conflict over the use of public space, public demands for law enforcement action against activities that are often only marginally criminal, and the need to provide police services to an economically disenfranchised group of people (Melekian, 1990). The traditional law enforcement response would have been to advise the homeless people to leave the area. This often created an additional problem for law enforcement because when homeless people believed that they were victims of police harassment, they often brought their complaints to the attention of the police department's Internal Affairs Unit. Frustrated officers would find that arrests and citations for drinking in the park, sleeping after midnight in the park, and panhandling were not being consistently prosecuted (Melekian, 1990). Officers then began to issue warnings or simply ignore the situation when possible.

Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) studied homeless people's self-reported interactions and trust with police and paramedics in Toronto, Canada. The researchers interviewed a sample of 160 persons from 18 of the shelters and drop-in centers for homeless single adults and youths in Toronto, Canada. Subjects were asked whether they had interacted with police during the past 12 months, how many interactions were "good overall" and to describe the best interaction. They were also asked how many were "bad overall" and to describe what happened during the worst interaction. Subjects were asked to rate their trust in police on a Likert scale of 0 to 5, with

0 was defined as “no trust at all” and 5 as being defined as “absolute trust”. The same set of questions was asked of the paramedics in Toronto as well.

Among 160 homeless shelter users, 15 (9%) had reported experiencing an assault by a police officer in Toronto within the past 12 months (Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang, 2004). The frequency among the unsheltered was around 8 percent. A large portion of the homeless shelter users (36%) and unsheltered individuals (50%) reported having been assaulted by police at some point in the past. In the shelter sample, age was a significant predictor of self-reported assault by police. The reports were made by 26 percent of the shelter users younger than 20 years, 11 percent of those 20 to 39 years of age, and 2 percent of those 40 years of age and older. Homeless shelter users reported lower levels of trust in police compared to paramedics and individuals who reported ever having been assaulted by a police officer tended to have much lower levels of trust. Unsheltered individuals were more likely than shelter users to have interacted with police at least once in the past 12 months (80% vs. 61%, respectively). Overall, the homeless persons in Toronto showed significantly less trust in the police than in paramedics across all ages and races, and this low level of trust was particularly common among homeless people with a history of contact with the police.

Simpson (2015) conducted ethnographic fieldwork that included participant observation, interviews, a focus group, participation in relevant community and District of Columbia agency meetings, and document analysis of primary and secondary texts. She conducted seventeen interviews with police officers; twenty-eight with homeless or formerly homeless individuals with mental illness; nine with mental health professionals, and two with criminal justice professionals outside of law enforcement (Simpson, 2015). There are competing demands placed on police officers between homeless individuals and businesses, residents, property

owners, and city officials. Police officers are often asked to “do something” about homeless individuals and are also requested to respond to mental and physical health emergencies (Simpson, 2015). This leads to the enforcement of laws concerning behaviors in public space which leads to a cycle of brief jail stays, court hearing, and then the release back into the community for homeless individuals.

Police officers also describe frustration due to the lack of resources and options available to them when responding to calls for service regarding the homeless. One of the resources for police officers comes in the form of partnerships with homeless outreach workers (Simpson, 2015). These partnerships evolved when the police department, the law, and the criminal justice system did not offer policies or procedures that were responsive to the needs of the homeless population. Many of the partnerships formed as a result of police officers working directly with homeless outreach workers at a personal level. An important aspect of these relationships was the ability of the outreach worker to help the officers understand homelessness and mental illness as an individual pathology rather than criminality or deviance. In many training programs, mental illness and crisis response was not provided to officers until around 2009 (Simpson, 2015). Few officers have had training on mental illness, and as a result, before partnering with homeless outreach workers, they felt ill equipped to handle mental health calls for service (Simpson, 2015).

According to conflict theory, the economically powerful exert their influence over lawmakers to control groups they consider threats in order to preserve economic stratification (Hanink, 2014). Conflict theory also holds that the criminal laws are used by the powerful to define criminal behaviors that threaten their interests and that those definitions are used for the purposes of establishing domestic order (Hanink, 2014). Law enforcement is often used as a

tool, at least in part, to control the “dangerous classes”, such as racial and ethnic minorities, which are perceived to threaten the interests of those in power (Barrick, Hickman, and Strom, 2014). As these dangerous classes grow, they may be perceived as more threatening, which then may lead to greater social control efforts.

In many urban areas, perceptions of disorder can be enhanced by large populations of the homeless, inebriates, aggressive panhandlers, and persons with mental illness (Ruddell, Thomas, and Patten, 2011). These individuals are often seen as requiring heightened supervision and control by those who view them as a threat to social order. Throughout history, poor people have been stigmatized with those who are destitute being separated from society and relegated to workhouses (Phelan, Link, Moore, and Stueve, 1997). In more recent times, the official treatment of the poor has become less harsh, but the public’s inclination to blame the poor for their condition and the stigmatizing nature of public assistance still prevail.

### **Current Study**

There have been a few studies that have examined how the homeless view police officers, but in these studies, this topic comprises only a small portion of the study. In Donley and Wright’s (2012) study on homeless people’s resistance to homeless shelters, they briefly discuss law enforcement. They described that one of the safety concerns that their participants had was centered on law enforcement. One of their focus groups had a positive view of the county law enforcement; the others voiced strongly negative reactions to these interactions. Some described the city police as vicious in comparison to county law enforcement and stated that this was one of the reasons they avoided the downtown shelters (Donely and Wright, 2012). The focus of this study was to examine why some homeless individuals in East Orange County, Florida have



chosen not to utilize the area shelters. Experiences with law enforcement were not a main goal of the research and were not part of their interview guide.

In Huey and Quirouette's (2010) study, they examined the influence of the "anti-snitching code" on attitudes in regards to reporting criminal victimization among the homeless. Many of the participants voiced a concern in regards to reporting victimizations to the police. Many stated that they would not report victimizations to the police under any circumstances; the reasons included fear or distrust of police, the belief that nothing would be done, the inability to recall details of the crime due to intoxication, and concerns by victims from outstanding warrants. The most frequent reason offered for not reporting victimizations to the police was the "anti-snitching" code. Over half of the participants cited the possibility of being branded a snitch within the local community. While this study does briefly explain some reasons why homeless individuals may not report to the police, there was also no explanation into how the homeless view they are treated by the police and the types of interactions they have with police officers. This is also true with Donley and Wright's (2012) study. Neither of these studies conducted an in-depth examination of why the homeless do not trust the police.

One study conducted by Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) examined homeless people's self-reported interactions with police and paramedics in Toronto, Canada, and their level of trust with these emergency service providers. They asked homeless individuals to report the interactions they had with police within the past 12 months, their worst interaction, their best interactions, if they had ever been assaulted by the police, and if they had been assaulted by the police within the past 12 months. Among the homeless shelter users, 9 percent reported experiencing an assault by a police officer within the past 12 months. Thirty-six percent reported having been assaulted by a police officer at some point in the past. The homeless shelter users

also reported lower levels of trust in regards to police officers and those who had been assaulted reported lower level still.

The current study seeks to expand the existing limited research on homelessness and police contact by examining the factors that play a role in how homeless individuals view the police. In studying this topic, the following research question will be answered: What is the perception of the police among homeless individuals? This study will explore the types of interactions homeless individuals have with police officers and how those interactions lead to their perceptions through qualitative interviews with homeless shelter users in the Fargo-Moorhead area. While previous research has examined some of the reasons behind why homeless individuals are reluctant to report victimizations to the police and what their level of trust is with police, research has not yet examined what has led to the distrust of the police. By having homeless individuals explain why they perceive police officers a certain way, it can also aid in creating policies that police departments can use to improve their interactions with homeless individuals.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Sites

The estimated 2014 population in Fargo, North Dakota was 115,863, which is a 10 percent increase from 2010 (Census, 2014). Adults ages 18 and up account for approximately 80 percent of the Fargo population, and persons 65 and older comprise 8 percent of the population. Most (90.2 percent) of Fargo residents are white. About 2.7 percent of residents are Black or African American, 1.4 percent of citizens are American Indian and Alaskan Native, 3.0 percent are Asian, and 2.2 percent are Hispanic or Latino. Approximately 6 percent or 6,836 citizens are veterans. The median household income in 2014 was \$45,458. The demographics of Moorhead, Minnesota follow a similar pattern as Fargo. In 2014 the population of Moorhead was 39,857, a 4.7 percent increase from 2010 (Census, 2014). Persons under 18 years of age account for 20.9 percent of the population and persons 65 years and older make up 11.5 percent. Ninety percent of the population is White, 2.0 percent Black or African American, 1.5 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2 percent Asian, and 4.1 percent Hispanic or Latino. There are 1,904 residents that are veterans. The median household income from 2009-2013 was \$46,600.

Fargo and Moorhead are appropriate research sites for this study as recent data shows that homelessness has increased since 2000 in the Fargo-Moorhead area (Owen, Heineman, Shelton, Pittman, Bosch, Hartzler, Conrad, Ulstad, and Mortenson 2013). In October of 2015, a statewide survey of persons without permanent shelter was conducted in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Five-hundred ninety-one homeless adults, youth, and children were counted in the Fargo-Moorhead area (Wilder Research, 2016). On the night of the survey, shelter providers counted 419 homeless people in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs; 450 of those counted

were 18 years old or older. Men made up the majority of homeless adults (68%) in the Fargo-Moorhead area (73% in Fargo and 59% in Moorhead) (Wilder Research, 2016). The average age of homeless men was 42; for homeless women it was 34. The majority of homeless adults surveyed had completed at least high school or obtained a GED (86% in Fargo and 71% in Moorhead) (Wilder Research, 2016).

Of those surveyed, the racial/ethnic background of homeless adults was 56 percent Caucasian, 20 percent African American, and 17 percent American Indian. The remaining 10 percent consist of Multi-racial, Hispanic, and Asian or Pacific Islander (Wilder Research, 2016). Seventy-nine percent of women and 36 percent of men surveyed experienced some type of violence and sexual exploitation (Wilder Research, 2016). Thirty-two percent of women and 19 percent of men reported being physically or sexually attacked while homeless. Fifty-four percent of homeless adults experience serious mental illness, 41 percent experience chronic physically health condition, 27 percent experience substance abuse disorder, and 31 percent have evidence of traumatic brain injury (Wilder Research, 2016). In Fargo, 40 percent of homeless adults reported having a job. In Moorhead, 36 percent of homeless adults reported having a job (Wilder Research, 2016).

Determining the number of people experiencing homelessness at any one time and assessing their needs is a difficult task (North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People, 2011). North Dakota's prosperous economy has brought dramatic changes in terms of rising housing prices, decreasing vacancy rates and an increase of people seeking employment and housing into North Dakota. Service providers who work with the homeless population have reported an increase of people from across the United States seeking services, many of whom were homeless in their state of origin and have remained homeless once they arrived in North Dakota. Many

have also reported that there are increasing numbers of long-term North Dakota residents who are having difficulty maintaining housing because of the rapidly increasing rents (North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People 2011).

The primary source of participants for this study were the homeless shelters in the Fargo-Moorhead area. There are five emergency shelters in the Fargo/Moorhead area. These shelters are Churches United, Dorothy Day House of Hospitality, Gladys Ray Shelter, New Life Center, and YWCA Emergency Shelter. Churches United provides shelter for over 700 men, women and families annually (“Churches United for the Homeless”, 2013). Churches United for the Homeless was incorporated by local churches in the fall of 1987. Due to the available facilities being above capacity, a core group of churches opened Churches United for the Homeless on October 15, 1987. In the past 25 years, they have grown to 57 member churches. Churches United can accommodate single men, single women, and one- and two-parent families (“Churches United for the Homeless”, 2013). This is the only shelter in the area that focuses on keeping families intact by allowing men and boys. Of those that access the shelter, 26 percent meet the definition of chronically homeless, 28 percent report have a disability of long duration, and the average length of stay was 29.99 days.

Dorothy Day House of Hospitality opened in 1983 after the City of Moorhead expressed concerns about housing the homeless in the basement of the Newman Center Church. The name came from Dorothy Day, a social activist in the early 1900s. She spoke out against war and human rights violations, picketing on behalf of the poor. Dorothy Day House is an emergency shelter for 10 adult men only (“Dorothy Day House of Hospitality, Inc.”, 2013). Guests work one-on-one with a shelter case manager to aid them in their struggles with homelessness. There is no set limit on the length of stay. If a guest continues to work on securing employment, obtain

housing, and/or seek treatment for mental illness or chemical dependency, then he can stay as long as needed. In 2013, 61 guests moved out, with 20 finding permanent, stable housing. The average length of stay for all guests was 60 days, and for those who moved into housing, it was 97 days (“Dorothy Day House of Hospitality, Inc.”, 2013).

The YWCA Emergency Shelter is the largest shelter for women and children in the state of North Dakota. It provides shelter for 65 women and children and provides 45-day emergency shelter for women and children experiencing homelessness and/or domestic violence (“Welcome to YWCA Cass Clay”, 2004). In 1858, the first association in the United States, the Ladies Christian Association, was formed in New York City and it wasn’t until 1866 when the term YWCA was first used in Boston. Since then, the YWCA has worked towards eliminating racism, empowering women, and providing safe shelter for women suffering from domestic violence. When women and children enter the shelter, they are provided with food, clothing, childcare, and extensive case management services as they work towards alternative housing. The YWCA also provides transitional housing and permanent supportive housing programs to provide secure, affordable housing (“Welcome to YWCA Cass Clay”, 2004).

The Gladys Ray Shelter opened on March 10, 2008 as part of the city of Fargo’s 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness and is the only “wet” shelter in North Dakota (“Gladys Ray Shelter”, 2015). Individuals can come to the shelter while intoxicated if they are able to function and not cause a disturbance among the others. The Gladys Ray Shelter was named after Gladys Shingobe Ray, a member of the Ojibwe Nation in Minnesota. She was a human rights advocate and volunteer for all people, especially American Indians, children, and the homeless. The shelter can serve up to 25 adult males and 10 adult females (“Gladys Ray Shelter”, 2015). The shelter is a free shelter for homeless adults regardless of physical or emotional conditions. The

Gladys Ray Shelter (GRS) also houses the Veterans' drop-in center that provides Veterans that are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. A Withdrawal management unit (Detox) is also part of the GRS that provides short term residential, social model detoxification services for adult men and women ("Gladys Ray Shelter", 2015).

New Life Center provides emergency shelter to men, ages 18 and older and provides 110 beds ("New Life Center", 2015). New Life Center is one of the oldest rescue missions in the country, founded in 1907 originally as the Glad Tidings Mission. New Life Center was formed in 1928. New Life Center is a Christian-based emergency and crisis center. It remains the largest provider to the homeless in Fargo. Primary programs include emergency shelter, meals, free clinic, substance recovery program, mental health services, Veteran's Homeless Health Care Program, chapel services, advocacy, and referral. In 2013, the New Life Center provided 38,838 lodgings, averaging 106 per night; 116,640 meals; 574 shelter residents received medical attention; 1878 family members received free clothing, furniture, and other household items; 650 individuals stayed in the men's shelter, and a total number of individuals. New Life Center charges a minimal fee of 7 dollars per night or the option of 4 hours of work ("New Life Center", 2015). Each shelter was contacted to receive permission to gather participants and to conduct the interviews before starting the interview process.

### **Data**

The data for this study was collected from homeless individuals in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Qualitative research focuses on the experience that individuals have in their natural settings and also attempts to describe the meaning associated with these experiences. Qualitative research also considers people's stories, history, and interactions with others (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews were used to gather information

for this study. The interviews asked homeless individuals what their opinions are of the police officers they interact with, and how they feel that police officers view homeless individuals. Using semi-structured interviews allows for open-ended questions and discussions that diverge from the set list of questions which produced more information gathered from the participants that the researcher did not include within the guiding questions. Interviews were used to collect data because it allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences that other people have and the meaning behind the experiences (Seidman, 1991). Interviewing also provides access to the context of people's behaviors and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. By using an open-ended format, it allows for the opportunity to embrace the ambiguity of qualitative research, and allows for probing questions to be used to further understand and conceptualize the individual's perceptions and experiences with police officers (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were conducted in person. This was the most appropriate way to conduct the interviews, as many participants do not have a phone, have limited minutes, or change their phones often. Interviews were also conducted in person due to the topics being covered which many may not feel comfortable discussing over the phone.

To ensure that participants were prepared to participate in interviews, the researcher explained the research process and informed participants that this is a study on homeless individuals' interactions with police officers. All participants were provided an informed consent form, and those who indicated that they were not able to read and understand the form, the researcher read the informed consent out loud and answered any questions the participants had beforehand. It was stated that at any point in time, a participant may choose to not answer a question or to end the interview, either to continue at a different time or to remove their interview from the study. As part of the informed consent process the participants agreed to



have their interviews audio-recorded. The interview sessions were audio-recorded so that an accurate interpretation of the data can be made from recorded and transcribed sessions. This allowed for using the words of the interviewees, as opposed to paraphrasing and inserting impressions from the researcher. The North Dakota State University Institutional Review Board gave approval to waive the signature on the informed consent form. This was requested due to individuals who had been approached to participate in interviews had expressed concern over signing their name on the informed consent due to paranoia and fear of retaliation from the police officers. Upon completing the interview, the recordings were transferred to a computer file and deleted from the audio recorder. During the transcription of the interviews, pseudonyms were used for all names, locations, occupations, and any other identifying information.

The data collection process included face-to-face semi-structured interviews. As part of the initial contact, the researcher briefly described the nature of the study (topic, and process of the interview). If they chose to participate, the researcher asked the participants to identify a public location to meet if they did not want to be interviewed at the shelter they are staying in, in an effort to provide the participant the most comfort while being interviewed. The researcher answered any questions that the participants had and if the participant agreed, they gave a verbal agreement to continue with the interview process.

The interviews lasted between ten minutes and 90 minutes. In order to assure secure treatment of the data, the voice recordings were stored on the recording device and then immediately transferred to a password protected computer. The recordings on the device were then deleted. Upon transcription of the materials, the data files were placed in a password protected file.

## **Sampling and Participant Selection**

The sample consisted of 51 participants. In order to participate in this study, participants had to meet two criteria: (a) they are at least 18 years old, and (b) they considered themselves homeless, either sheltered or unsheltered at the time of the interview. A purposive sampling approach was used in order to obtain participants who meet the outlined criteria. Potential participants were approached in the shelters and were asked if they would be willing to participate in the research study. A snowball sampling approach was used to obtain participants who do not access shelters or only do so periodically. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was any person that they know who does not utilize shelters and would be willing to participate in the study. If they knew of an individual that may be willing, they were asked how to contact that individual.

## **Data Analysis**

During each interview, the researcher took notes on themes that emerged from interview responses in addition to the audio recordings. The notes consisted of key phrases, listed major points made by the participants and key terms or words (Patton, 1980). This was done to act as a check when the data analysis begins. The researcher then transcribed the data and listened to the interview a second time to increase the accuracy of the transcription. This step allowed for increased familiarity with the data (Seidman, 2013). Both the primary researcher and a fellow criminal justice graduate student conducted independent coding of the data. This increased coding reliability as the researcher met with and compared coding outcomes with the second coder to check the interpretations of the data.

## *Coding*

Data analysis began when the interviews began. This method for analyzing the data was based on the constant comparative method as described by Glaser (1967). The constant comparative method was used in order to develop a grounded theory. The researcher began the analysis with the first data collected and continuously compared themes, concepts, and categories throughout the rest of the interviews. The first stage in the constant comparative method was to compare the incidents that are applicable to each category. The researcher began by coding each interview into as many categories as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerges that fits an existing category. Once a particular phenomenon had been identified, the researcher began to group the concepts around them. Properties are the attributes or characteristics of that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This involved taking apart an observation, a sentence, a paragraph, and giving each idea a name that represents a phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

After open coding is completed, the data analysis continued with axial coding. Using axial coding, the researcher made connections between categories. The first step was to determine the thematic connections, including events, incidents, or happenings that led the development of the phenomenon. The central phenomenon was the main idea or event about which the set of actions is related to. The phenomena in this study was the homeless population's perception of police officers in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Coding continued with context, referring to the specific set of properties, such as the location of events or incidents, which pertain to the phenomenon. Intervening conditions were coded to include the general conditions that are bearing upon the action/interactional strategies (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This was included in the coding to allow for analysis of events that played a role in why a

homeless individual has developed their perception of police. Coding included the action/interactions to analyze the strategies devised to manage, handle, or respond to the phenomenon. The last step in axial coding was to involve coding for consequences, or the outcomes or results of the actions or interactions.

Once the categories and the codes are no longer producing new information, or to put it another way become saturated, the researcher began to develop themes. The themes reflected a relationship between the various responses. The final step was to write up the qualitative analysis of the data and present a thematic portrait of the experience that highlights the perceptions the homeless individuals have of police officers and will provide a clearer, evidence-based understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher was working as a Shelter Advocate at the Gladys Ray Shelter during the period of time the interviews were being conducted. A Shelter Advocate provides and enhances safe emergency shelter and meets the immediate needs of homeless people who cannot access other shelter options in the community. As a direct contact for the guests, the shelter advocate provides a safe and respectful environment while conducting guest intakes, assisting guests with housing, helping make referrals to other agencies and services, and performing other tasks during hours of shelter operation. The position at the Gladys Ray Shelter provided the experience of working with homeless individuals.

Due to the potential of a dual relationship affecting the interviews of guests of the Gladys Ray Shelter, another researcher conducted the interviews with those participants. The second researcher was a social work intern at the Gladys Ray Shelter. This researcher followed the same interview protocols to ensure that there are no differences in how the interviews are

conducted. This second interviewer did not have access to any other interviews and had no access to the data once the interviews were completed. After the interviews are completed, the second interviewer gave the recording device to the main researcher, who then followed the same process of transferring the interviews to a password protected computer and deleting the interview off the recording device. The informed consent documents were also given to the main researcher after the interviews were completed.

## RESULTS

### Description of Respondents

The sample used in this study consists of 51 homeless individuals all over the age of 18 years. The mean age of these individuals at the time of the interviews was 40.9 years. The ages range from 20 years old to 63 years old. The majority of the respondents, 78.4% (40) have been in the Fargo-Moorhead area for at least one year. The shortest amount of time in the Fargo-Moorhead area was two days and the longest was 57 years. The average time spent living in the Fargo-Moorhead area was 8.6 years. The average number of times a respondent was homeless was 3.3 times with the average length of time spent homeless was 46.5 months. For 24 respondents (47.1%), this was their first time being homeless. Three respondents reported being homeless at least 10 times, with one participant reporting being homeless 30 times. For many of the respondents, their homelessness lasted over the course of several years, with many reporting that they fluctuated between homelessness and being housed.

Nearly 85 percent of respondents have achieved some level of education. Two-thirds of respondents have either a high school diploma or a GED (49% earned a high school diploma, 17.6% earned their GED). Nearly twenty percent have earned a college education. Of those who have a college degree, six respondents have an associate's degree, two have a bachelor's degree, and 1 respondent has a master's degree. Almost half of respondents are employed either through day labor (23.5%), or as a permanent employee (19.6%). Twenty-nine respondents reported being unemployed at the time of the interview with four respondents stating that their unemployment was due to retirement or disability.

Table 1

*Demographics of Respondents (N=51)*

Characteristic	f	%	M
Current Age			40.9
20-30	9	17.6	
31-40	17	33.3	
41-50	11	21.6	
51-60	12	23.5	
61-70	2	3.9	
Sex			
Male	40	78.4	
Female	11	21.6	
Race			
White	30	58.8	
Native American	10	19.6	
Black	9	17.6	
Hispanic	2	3.9	
Highest Level of Education			
High School Graduate	25	49.0	
College Graduate	9	17.6	
GED	9	17.6	
Less than 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8	15.7	
Employment Status			
Unemployed	25	49.0	
Day Labor	12	23.5	
Employed	10	19.6	
Retired	2	3.9	
Disabled	2	3.9	

A majority, 74.5% (38/51) of respondents reporting being unsheltered at least once. Of those who reported being unsheltered, 24 have been homeless more than once. When unsheltered, respondents described staying in a variety of locations. One male stated that when he was unable to find a place in a shelter, he would walk the streets all night. Others explained that they would spend summer nights camping along the river stating that they liked “sleeping

under the stars”. Respondents described sleeping under bridges, outside buildings, in hallways, parks, sleeping in their cars, GTC (Ground Transportation Center) and spending nights in detox or jail. Several reported that they stayed by the river sleeping in bushes, trees, weeds, or forests. Others had no specific place where they stayed but commented that they spent the night “wherever I am comfortable”, “wherever I pass out”, and “wherever I put my sleeping bag”.

Twelve respondents reported carrying a weapon. Weapons included knives (7), pepper spray (1), rope (1), and rocks (1). Some of those who did not carry a weapon reported that because of their felony status they did not want to risk being caught with a weapon. Others said that their hands and their heads were enough of a weapon with two respondents reporting that they practiced martial arts. Three respondents stated that they refuse to carry weapons because they dislike weapons or did not believe in weapons.

Where I was raised, a lot of stuff you can handle yourself. I don't use weapons, because my brain is a weapon. (M/B/39)

I don't know, whatever I have in my bag that's strong enough to beat somebody or hit somebody. (F/NA/43)

No, not since I got the felony. I can't carry a weapon. Not even a knife... Legally, I can't and I won't. And I'm a good shot. (M/W/61)

Eighty-percent of respondents reported being arrested at least once in their life. One respondent reported being arrested 50 times and another reported 46 total arrests. Driving under the influence (DUI) was the most common arrest with nine respondents reporting at least one DUI. Nine respondents reported an arrest due to possession of a drug, six respondents were arrested for shoplifting, six for aggravated assault, six for open container, and five for drinking in public. Of the reported crimes that resulted in an arrest, 90 percent of the arrests reported were



nonviolent crimes. Only 8 (10%) of the reported crimes were violent crimes (aggravated assault, terroristic threats, and robbery). About half of the arrests for nonviolent crimes consisted of drug or alcohol related charges (DUI, open container, possession of drug paraphernalia, etc.).

Table 2

*Crimes leading to arrest (N=41)*

Nonviolent Crimes	Frequency	Violent Crimes	Frequency	Drug/Alcohol related crimes	frequency
Shoplifting	6	Aggravated assault	6	DUI	9
Minor assaults	4	Terroristic Threats	1	Possession of drug paraphernalia	9
Disorderly conduct	4	Robbery	1	Open container	6
Trespass	4			Drinking in public	5
Non-sufficient funds	3			Drug Sales	3
Driving with suspended license	3			Drug use	2
Resisting arrest	2			Attempt to distribute	1
Grand theft	2			Minor consumption	1
Domestic violence	2				
Child endangerment	1				
Wrongfully obtaining assistance	1				
Coercion	1				
Vagrancy	1				
Theft of property	1				
Burglary	1				
Dealing stolen merchandise	1				
Fleeing	1				
Criminal mischief	1				

Thirty-seven of the respondents reported some type of substance use, most commonly alcohol, with some reporting marijuana use in addition to alcohol use. A small number of respondents disclosed using other drugs, including meth, cocaine, and heroine. Nineteen respondents stated they did not engage in substance use, other than the occasional drink of

alcohol. Thirty-one participants acknowledged that they have had encounters with police due to either alcohol or drug use.

When your homeless man, you're depressed. You don't have nothing to look forward to. So you are; you get numb. (M/NA/49)

I think that's part of why I'm an alcoholic. It's just to slow my fucking brain down so I don't have to fathom that shit. I can just walk around and go, "My name is ..." (M/W/41)

The main reasons for homelessness is mental illness, drug-addiction, alcoholism, there's no denying that, so with me it's drug addiction. With me it's drugs, it's the money that I've spent on drugs as opposed to a place to live, but then at the same time I don't really want a place to live. (M/W/42)

### **General Opinion of Police**

When asked, "what is your general opinion of the police?", just over half (27/51) of those interviewed reported that they have a positive opinion of the police. Twenty-three of the 27 who have a positive opinion of the police stated that they also trust the police. Despite having a positive opinion of police officers, several respondents explained that they do not trust police officers. This lack of trust was due to the belief that police officers "shoot first, ask questions later" and that police officers would have no hesitation about firing a weapon at a homeless individual. Lack of trust also resulted from situations involving police officers that were disconcerting to respondents.

Those who have a positive opinion of police said that they have been treated fairly in their interactions with police. Many stated that when they were respectful towards police officers, those police officers were respectful in turn.

That's one thing that I've learned to get people is respect. You don't have respect, don't come near me. Respect me, I respect you. Ask me a question, I'll try to answer it. If I don't have the answer, I will direct you to the proper people that take care of that situation. (M/W/61)

I mean they were for the most part, for the most part, police as long as you treat them with respect and aren't loud and obnoxious, they're usually just gonna treat you the same, you know, so I think a lot of the problems people have with police is when you are loud and obnoxious they are going loud and obnoxious and it's just a bad cycle. (M/W/36)

I was raised better than that. These are pretty polite. I don't try to fight and argue with them. They respect that, because they deserve the respect. They respect me back for that reason. The way I look at it anyway. (M/W/52)

One respondent stated that he has the utmost respect for police officers. Once becoming homeless, he said that he sees the positive side, that the police are there to help by bringing donations and buying meals for the homeless. He said "police are great people; they are my friends...I feel like police are watching over me". When talking about his most recent encounter with police he explained:

[Police are] a lot more helpful than they need to be. They're doing a job that is asked of them but yet there's still those few that kind of go above and beyond. And you don't see that too often. At least I haven't. Growing up with my grandfather and two cousins and what not but yes, I've never seen it at all, even growing up. But I've noticed that between Moorhead and Fargo, they're there. Whether it be helping people out of their own pocket or just being there. Just like one cop I had in Fargo. Me and him sat in the squad car and I ended up in tears. I was just venting and releasing. And he was this kind

of like, wow. Here's a handkerchief. And for me, just that kind of experience was just possible. I really don't every cry. I still talk to him at least once a week. And he asks me how I'm doing, ask me if I ate. (M/W/39)

Some respondents mentioned that their opinion towards police officers was based on whether or not a police officer has a personal code of ethics and that trust in police is based on whether or not those officers uphold that code they have sworn by. Their positive opinion is based on their adherence to that code of ethics and whether police are there to protect and serve. Positive opinions also depend on if police officers are observed protecting citizens and acting vigilant rather than as vigilantes.

I don't presume every single one of them is an angel but every single one of them who's in that uniform has sworn to put his or her life on the line to keep me safe. That to me is worthy of some respect. (M/W/42)

I believe that any individual that becomes a police officer upholds a code that you have to be sworn by. And I believe that those words are written was to say, "Hey, this is your opportunity to be someone who says, I will not compromise to people that will break the law. And that I want to be a person of society to make sure that evil will not surpass the righteousness of good." And I believe that people that take the oath have a right to do that, be that type of person. And I commend them for it. (M/W/46)

They seem to stick within the boundaries of the legal system and exercising self-restraint and fairness and good judgment from all I can tell. They're vigilant and yet they're not vigilantes. (M/W/55)

Many of the respondents with a positive opinion of police officers stated that police officers are carrying out their responsibilities. Respondents explained that they understand what

the police are trying accomplish and that there are reasons for their actions. Many respondents are thankful that the police are present and that they are available to assist individuals when needed. One respondent explained that his positive opinion of police has more to do with the department itself than the patrol officers. He explained:

I think Fargo Police Department overall has a very good police department with good public relations. He's top in the administration but I don't think he's chief. He seems to have a really good rapport with his officers and he has a really good rapport in the way of talking to the public, reassuring them, seems to really be there to protect and serve. It doesn't seem to me to be like a quota system, like some cities have of getting so many tickets to prop up the revenue for the police department, that kind of thing. (M/W/55)

When it comes to trust in police officers, 22 respondents who have a positive opinion of police stated that they also trust the police. Respondents expressed that they trust that police would not purposely endanger their lives. Respondents also explained that their level of trust of police officers differs between officers, locations, and the day. Some respondents described trusting police less in larger cities compared to police in smaller cities. Most respondents stated that they trusted in police when officers are performing their duties appropriately and that the police have never provided them a reason to distrust police officers.

I'm going to answer that in a slightly different way by saying that I don't have any reason to distrust them yet. But I also haven't had any encounters, aside from very casual ones that say, yes these officers would have my back. (M/W/46)

I do trust the police because I don't know, they're just, I don't know, they're the police.

You got to trust somebody. You can't trust the police it's a fucked up world. (M/NA/34)

[Trust police] Yes. With my life... They're doing their job. I'm not going to hop in this situation. They want information, I'll give it to them. Whatever. I don't want – I don't, what's the word – I don't get involved in their situation. They need help, I'll help them, I have a multi background. I'll help if they needed help. If they're awake, they're doing their job... They're doing their job. And they do a good job at it so I can't –they, as an officer of the law, they did it for one reason, because they want to do it and I respect that 100%. (M/W/52)

Twenty-four of the respondents stated that they have a negative opinion of the police. Respondents explained they have no respect for police because police officer “ruin lives”, and “don't give a shit” about the homeless. Respondents talked about how being disrespected by the police have played a role in their negative opinions. Many stated that the police do not treat them respectfully because of their housing status or because of their race.

I hate the police. I think they ruin lives. (M/B/37)

I just don't like them, because of the way they treat Native Americans. (F/NA/43)

They're just a street gang to me. I can understand taking violent offenders off of the streets, and pedophiles, rapists too, but as far as people making common mistakes, like issuing them what I call it like ransom money ... it's kind of, I don't know, just thuggish to me. (M/W/25)

Respondents also believe that police harass and pursue the homeless because the homeless are easy targets for the police. Respondents expressed that they feel labeled due to their name, race, and because of past felony convictions. Several respondents reported a history of being involved with gangs before coming to the Fargo-Moorhead area and feel that police target them because they continue to wear their gang colors. Police are believed to treat Native

Americans differently which leads to a negative opinion of police by many respondents.

Respondents also stated that they feel they are looked at with suspicion and cannot go anywhere without being followed by police officers due to being homeless.

I can sit on a bench and they come off and say you can't sit here. It's like, you know, what? It's a bench. I'm in a city park, I'm just sitting down. I'm not drinking and then, you've got squad guards coming up, you can't sit on this bench. It's a park. Just got a backpack and I'm wearing camouflage and you know, remember, I just got off work. I'm not drinking. You can check my tank. The community leaders had to get a get in together with the officers and the shelters, get together and kind of say, what can we do to help you? We've got a lot of long termers that come in here and that is great but you got people that shun us just because we're walking down the street, riding a bicycle, carrying a backpack. They don't know me. If they knew me, I'd understand. I'm a veteran, legion member for 35 years. I do a lot of stuff for the community and anything else. But they just have this label. Labeling is the worst thing, just to label you. (M/W/52)

[told to move] Every night. They know where we go, they know where the homeless people are sleeping – by the riverfront, underneath bridges, in the parks, downtown, Moorhead, Moorhead riverfront. They run through there with dogs now and actually sniff people out. It's getting to the point where it feels like it's illegal to be homeless. (M/NA/31)

Trespassing, basically they roast me out of my can spots a lot, or they will take your property and throw it in the garbage. I've gotten threatened for trespassing. Basically, you're trespassing anywhere you go when you're homeless because everybody owns something. (M/W/35)

Several respondents explained that their negative opinion of police was due to police brutality. Respondents stated that police have been physically abusive and aggressive towards them. One respondent said that he was assaulted by a police officer and another reported that his friend was beat up by police. Several respondents commented that police officers will use excessive force but suffer no consequences by deliberately carrying out their aggression in ways that their cameras cannot record. Respondents also stated the police are too aggressive when responding to intoxicated individuals.

Yes, it was more or less worrying about if I'm going to get roughed up, getting put in the backseat or on my way to jail, and they put me in detox for three days when I'm already sober, and by the next morning, you know what I mean? Just the little bull-crap they pull. (M/NA/31)

They get that adrenalin and they'll be like, "Stop resisting." I think that they are physically abusive because when you're drinking, they get too rough I think. (M/W/31)

I've also had the cops for no reason at all fuckin' take my arm and wrench it completely up here where my shoulder's been; ripped to shreds... Too many times to count and it ain't even because—yes, they were probably taking me to detox, but I wasn't fighting them. That's just how they fuckin' manhandle drunks. They don't care if they break your arm. (M/NA/49)

One female respondent explained that her negative opinion was due to being raped by a police officer in another state who she thought was trustworthy. This resulted in PTSD and she reported that she still has issues during encounters with the police.

...when that one incident happened with that officer, I went to court for that, he had his fellow officers show up and take off their jackets and have their guns showing and stuff



like that... Yes, very big intimidation, in fact, and made it very clear to me that “You don’t know about the brotherhood, the chivalry brotherhood.” After that I couldn’t really trust or go to cops because I didn’t know if they knew him. I wasn’t going to take the chance because I was falsely arrested for things that I didn’t do. (F/NA/40)

The negative opinion held by respondents was also due to how they view the police organization. Respondents stated that they believe police officers think that they have a higher authority due to their badge. Respondents felt that many police officers have a militant type attitude and one respondent went so far as to say that police “act like Nazis”. Police are also thought to be more concerned about criminal activity and catching criminals than the safety of others. Several respondents stated that despite the statement on patrol cars, they do not observe that police protect and serve the public.

It kind of pisses me off but I can’t do nothing about it. It’s called protect and serve on their cars, what does that mean to you? That doesn’t mean shit to me because you know what they’re doing to me. (M/NA/50)

They're supposed to be here to protect and serve, but every time I see them I don't feel fucking safe. (F/NA/26)

They’re going to help us, serve and protect our country or protect our people for a better place or better security or better protection. They should be to serve us as – what they are doing, as a job, not just come here and harass us or look down on us. (F/W/20)

Respondents also believe that there is corruption among police officers. This belief in corruption resulted from seeing too much “crooked shit happen”. Some respondents have a negative opinion of police because of the personalities of people who become police officers. They stated that many police officers go into the profession for the wrong reasons.

Because a lot of people join the force in the agencies because they want to be cops.

Because they're kids and they're coming with a feeble mind to try and play cops and robbers. And that's how people get hurt. They go in it for the wrong reasons, instead of going in to protect the law, to protect and serve, they go in to be police, a real copper.

(M/B/37)

My view on police in general is not very great because I've watched so much crooked shit happen. So I mean, do I trust them? No. Do I trust them to save my life if I'm in a car accident? I hope to God they do their job. (M/W/30)

You've got good police, you've got bad police. You've got good officers that do their job and you've got some crooked ones. It's hard to separate the two because you never know what the hell is going on, so I mean, it is what it is. (M/B/36)

Negative opinions of police were also due to police intimidation. Many stated that they feel intimidated by police and that police officers suffer from aggressive exercise of power. Respondents also think that police are very suspicious of homeless individuals and are therefore unapproachable. It was also expressed by respondents that the police never offer any chances or opportunities and are harsher with a homeless individual compared to someone who is housed. Respondents also explained that police will try to acquire information about crimes by calling them a liar in an attempt to extract a confession. Respondents also feel that there is no one to advocate for them and feel like they are not taken seriously by a police officer. Respondents reported distrust due to interrogation, harassment, and intimidation. Police are thought to try to intimidate and scare people for no apparent reason. Respondents also feel that the police do not care if a person committed a crime, but will accuse them of that crime regardless. Respondents

expressed that they feel that police consider them are guilty until proven innocent. Respondents also stated that police do not communicate or pay heed to them.

They usually get me, it just seems like they fuck with me over the dumbest things.

(M/W/30)

Now they can stop you for just virtually anything. A person just doesn't seem like he has the right anymore. The freedom. And I don't know how you're going to get that back

(M/W/63)

Just interrogation. Harassment and instigating, basically. Intimidating other people.

(F/W/20)

Nineteen respondents stated that they have no trust in police. Many of the respondents explained that they do not trust anyone, police or average citizen. One respondent stated he trusts police “no further than I can throw them”. Some respondents explained that they do not trust police because police do not trust people. Another stated that he does not trust police because of a general lack of trust in the government and how it has treated the Native Americans. Respondents also do not trust the police to help them out when it is needed. A couple of respondents stated that the media has led to distrust in the police because the officer involved shootings of unarmed Black individuals.

I do not trust the police. Because sometimes they do make a deal, like you do this and this and your name will not be on paper, but obviously my name will be on paper. So, no, I don't trust the police. I'll talk to the police if I'm recommended to talk to a police officer. But, other than that, I'm still the same person. I'm not going to trust them, I'm not going to not trust them, I'm just saying I'm me and they're them. (F/W/20)

No, I don't trust the police... No. I have more trust in his uniform than I do on him.

(M/B/37)

Absolutely no trust in law enforcement at all... I think it's because, you know, with all this stuff with all the people that have cameras and what happened, and look what happened in Ferguson, in Ferguson, Missouri, or whatever. And what happened with that Garner guy out in New York. I think law enforcement has been doing a lot of things that's just coming to light because of our cellphones and I think they've been doing a lot of just things that they shouldn't be doing. And I think people's perception of them is that they're not the good guys anymore. (F/W/53)

While half of respondents have a negative opinion of police, they acknowledge a need for the police. They made comments about the society being “the wild west” and chaotic without the police and that having police discourages individuals from criminal activity. Respondents also believe that a majority of police officers are trying to accomplish their job despite their negative opinion.

Well they're necessary or else there would be absolute chaos. I don't believe in chaos. I want people to be safe and happy and smiling and with their kids be running in their yards not have to have criminals running around. (M/W/41)

I guess I am more in favor of the cops than I'm not because if it wasn't for them, it would be much worse than it is now and I know there's a lot of people that probably would rather have it that way because they like chaos. (M/W/31)

It all boils down to virtues and morals... So as a police officer, I think a police officer is probably the best thing that ever happened to America. Without them, it would be total chaos. (M/W/42)

## Racism

Thirteen respondents reported that racism is a factor in their opinion of police.

Respondents felt like the police are reluctant to cooperate with minorities, specifically Native Americans. They also stated that they think that police are unfair to Native Americans when compared to those of other races. Some reported that they feel they have lost credibility due to being Native American. Respondents also stated that police view them as a “drunk Indian” and are treated differently because they are Native American.

For me, I believe most officers that are out there, are out there to do their job. But there's a few officers that are out there, are out to stalk, racially profile and predatory -- predatory feast, basically, on Native Americans. (M/NA/47)

They don't want to deal with the minorities. They don't want to deal with the black guys, period. It's always been like that and not against homeless activity and don't want to deal with the Native Americans because they drink. They got their own category for each race. (F/B/60)

The bottom line is the white has always shit on the Indian and he's always going to, no offense. Nothing's ever going to change the cops. (M/NA/49)

Respondents reported that police are against Native Americans who drink and “Drunk Natives” get singled out. Respondents explained that Native Americans are often an easier target for police officers because many of them drink. Respondents also commented that police are always looking for intoxicated Native Americans, and that intoxicated Native Americans are viewed by police officers as their biggest problem in the community. This results in the police constantly watching Native Americans and will stop groups of Native Americans when walking around downtown Fargo.

Just that they -- I'm not saying harassing, but they kind of more or less put the Native brothers in. They're always watching Native brothers, always. You get three or four of us walking around together, you know they're going to stop us or do something. (M/NA/50)

And blacks. I had a lot of black friends, so they be telling me stuff, too; the little side jabs, the comments and shit. I can't remember most of them, but I know that—(M/NA/31)

Yes, all I do is see them chasing around the natives. I mean, you don't see them chasing a group of college kids. The guys—guaranteed that these natives they're chasing around are probably drinking. I get it. I understand it all. I'm native myself. (M/NA/49)

Two respondents blamed the police for the deaths of the homeless that resulted from falling in the river.

Of course, I know all these bums that have been falling into the river. That's bullshit... Because it always happens at the same place, the same bend where - I don't know if you know where the library is - the bridge that goes underneath, going north by the Oak Grove. Just before that bridge there's an off-shoot right there that goes back there; dirt road that goes back here. That's where they bring people and they beat them. And leave them there and they probably fall in the river, or something. I don't know the exact circumstances, but I know it can't be no coincidence that it's only homeless people falling in this river. (M/NA/31)

Never in my life will I ever trust one. Because of what happened in the past. And what I've heard is that that's the reason why majority of the Native Americans are missing, thrown in the lake, river, because of them. So that's the reason why. Fuck them. Fuck them. I hate them. (F/NA/43)

## Officer X

Ten of the respondents talked about one officer in particular. Five of these respondents were Native American, four were White, and one was Black. Respondents stated that this officer often targets the Native American population and has racially motivated actions towards them. Respondents reported that this officer only incarcerates Blacks and Native Americans. Several commented that they only encounter Officer X and they feel like they are repeatedly singled out by this officer.

Officer X here in Fargo really, really goes after all drunks but it seems like he zoomed in on the native population. I've witnessed that. (M/W/51)

Because he arrests, I'm not to be racist or sound like I'm racist or anything, he only locks up natives and blacks. (M/B/36)

There's some really nice officers that I've met and there's some that are assholes. I'm not scared to say it because there is. [officer] X is the main one. (M/NA/50)

Many who commented on this officer described his actions as devious. Respondents explained that this officer is continually watching for those who are drinking and would crouch behind the bushes waiting for someone to take a drink of alcohol. Respondents also state that this officer knows whether or not they are an alcoholic. They also said that he is underhanded, exhibits stalking behavior towards them, and describe him as crooked and dishonest.

Only by one cop, that was officer X. It seemed like he was following me around and watching me. That's not probable cause. If you've got a reason to see somebody if you notice something, that's fine. But you don't single somebody out follow them around, so yes. (M/W/41)

I hate that bastard. He'll sneak some shots, nobody's looking, put you in the back seat, and before you get into the camera, he'll hit you with his cane at the side of your shit. Yes, push you in the car, make sure you bang your head; just bullshit. Put one pair of cuffs on my big ass. My hands come this close in the back. They put one pair of cuffs on me this close. (M/NA/31)

And we went under there, and we cracked it, I took a shot. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw movement and there fucking [officer] X running out of bushes. Just waited for us to crack that jug and have shot. And he's got us, and it's his word against mine. I told the judge one time-- because I've had a lot of open containers, maybe 20 of them over the years. I said, "you call it drinking in public, but it's not like I'm drinking on a corner or in front of a bunch of nuns or kids. I'm in the alley, or I'm by the river, or by the tracks." But I get it, it's still drinking in public. But it's not like I'm right there on the corner of Main and Broadway. (M/NA/49)

Officer X also described as very suspicious and disrespectful. Respondents explained that he often uses excessive force and gets too physically rough with them. He is also described often as someone who will stop Native Americans for no legitimate reason and many reported that they feel labeled and targeted by this officer since that he knows where everyone goes.

I can't always blame officer X ... it's just the first time he caught me and he would watch me, watch me, watch me without me knowing and boom. And I felt like I was being picked on. (M/B/36)

Fargo has a real fucking hateful attitude, there are down-- I'm sure you've heard of officer X. If he knows you're an alcoholic that doesn't give probable cause to follow somebody around the town all day and expect-- You got to have some kind of reason to



say, "I don't like this guy. I want to find out if he's drinking or whatever." He is way out of his zone. He does not belong in the homeless. (M/W/41)

Yes, physically rough. Just stopping people to simply see if there- there's no legitimate reason for anybody to stop this person or these people. They make it their business or he does anyway but I'm sure there's other ones too. I'm sure on his side of the boat, he just could tell you while he's trying to help people so we're up too. (M/W/51)

Respondents also explained that this officer is the only officer arresting the homeless in downtown Fargo and has "set the record for open container tickets". They also state that he will not take intoxicated individuals to detox, and is always looking for a criminal charge to get a homeless individual in jail and off the street.

He said, "... I will find something." He said, "If you don't leave right now, then I'll figure out something to charge you, then you'll go to jail." (F/NA/26)

There's some younger officers that bring me back here to detox all the time and they're cool about it. Then like [officer] X, he wouldn't even bring me to detox, he'd take me right to jail. (M/NA/50)

Because I was with a friend of mine and I ran in this more friends of mine and we're on the corner, talking for 10, 15 minutes and that's probably when he's seen us. So then I'll say, "I'll buy a bottle and go to my house" and we got under that bridge, let's take a shot. Boom. There he is and because all of them dudes were homeless, there was five of us, but I had an apartment, see those guys gave me the Gladys Ray or like New Life or that address. I said, "No, I live at 10, 11, 12<sup>th</sup> street, 12 Avenue North. He gave me a ticket but all these guys went to jail for a shot of fucking – one shot. (M/NA/49)

Only one respondent had a positive encounter with this officer which came as a surprise to him.

Told him I'm going to be locked up for a while. He's like, "Can't do it." He let me smoke a cigarette. You know, he understood I was going to be gone for a while. So there is you know, and the fucked up thing about it is, it was officer X. (M/NA/34)

### **Victimization and Reporting Crime**

Thirty-eight respondents (74.5%), reported being a victim of crime at least once in their lifetime. Seventeen (44.7%) of those who had been a victim said that they did not report the crime. Twenty-one (41.2%) respondents stated that they did report the crime to police. Perceptions of police officers also play a role whether or not a crime will be reported. Of the respondents who have a positive opinion of police officers, 81 percent stated that they would report a crime. For respondents with a negative opinion of police, only 33 percent stated that they would report a crime. When it comes to reporting crimes, domestic violence was the most common crime that would be reported to police. A majority of respondents would also report crimes against children and the elderly, explaining that these individuals are less capable of protecting themselves. A majority of respondents also stated that they would report most types of violence towards another individual. Crimes that involved serious injury, or threat of life would be reported to police. Some respondents also commented that they would report drug use, a large theft, and if they were a witness to a crime. Many also would report if they found a weapon, mainly to avoid a child finding the weapon and injuring themselves or others.

If you've got a drunkard, he's not going to listen to you at all. Are they sleeping outside and are going to end up killing themselves? Or freezing to death or something. If they're hurting children or women, they're just going to get beat. You're not going to say nothing. (M/W/51)

Thefts, murder, rape -- it's the worst thing you could ever do to somebody -- I'd report it, yes. Without a doubt, yes. Because you never know what took that person to get to that point. (F/B/39)

You know yeah, like cause I mean you see something like that, I'm a big, big liker of kids so like kids could find that gun or find that knife. Like or anybody that hurts kids, bad in my book man, I cannot stand a molester at all. (M/W/30)

When describing whether or not respondents would report a crime, most stated that it would depend on the severity of the crime. Respondents explained that they would report a crime if they could not take care of it themselves, if they were outnumbered, or if they suspected a threat. Several respondents also expressed that they would not hinder police, or hid crimes by not reporting reasoning that it “creates a burden on society”.

If somebody did something and I did not agree with it, and they got away from—then yes I would. I mean, if I could not take care of it myself and I thought the person should be punished; then yes. (M/W/20)

Again, if I actually see an actual crime. If I see somebody breaking in a car or breaking a building that he ain't supposed to be in, see a burglar or something like that. Or see somebody actually get hurt or if you see an accident or something like that I'll report that.

I have reported a couple of accidents I've seen on the road. (M/B/53)

It would depend on the crime and the situation. If it was just minor like somebody fighting over something stupid, I'd probably just let it go. If it was a major crime then yeah, I'd probably report it as long as I could stay anonymous. (F/W/53)

For minor crimes, such as shoplifting or marijuana use, most respondents would not report the crime. Most also would not report fights between two men, stating that those who are

fighting are generally fighting for a reason and need to work it out themselves. Fifteen respondents stated that they would not report if they found weapon, such as a knife or firearm. The main reasons as to why they would not report a weapon is that that they believe that the police would think it belonged to them, that the police would not believe that they only found it, and a fear that police are watching who picks the weapon up.

Twenty-one respondents stated that they would not report crimes to the police. Respondents reasoned that it is a waste of time reporting to the police because police are not able to do anything or will say that nothing happened.

What were the police going to do for me? You know, women have this perception and it's so true. It doesn't matter if you call the cops because they're going to arrest that person, they're going to go to jail, they're going to get out. And sure, you can get a protection order, but protection orders is nothing but this, it's nothing but this and all of he violates that you're going to send him to jail. (F/W/53)

A piece of crime towards the way the cops treat the individual. They just don't give a shit.

They just throw you around like you're fucking -- Like you're a ragdoll (F/NA/43)

I mean its because anything would be done with it. Even if I had a name or something, I don't think they would just go, you know, hunting stuff down, hunting the person down or anything like that. Cause even when I haven't been homeless, in Spokane before I came here, I had a job and all my tools were stolen out of my car. Like we are talking about like \$2000 worth of tools. I filed a police report and the cop told me, "Sorry, not much I can do about it". (M/W/36)

Many respondents who do not report crimes do not want to deal with police and feel that police "need to mind their own business". Most respondents stated that they would rather try to take

care of their own affairs rather than call police. They would try to take care of it themselves as a way to protect themselves from police and would do “whatever it takes” to handle the situation. Worry about being labeled a snitch was another common reason why respondents would not report a crime to the police.

My name is good. I don't want to be labeled a rat or a snitch because that's just going to cause problems for that person saying that to me because I'm going to man up.

(M/NA/49)

It's a code. Street code. Get more shit telling on people, than you would if you'd just let it go. (M/W/51)

I'm never going to snitch on anyone, never. Snitches don't make it, either not right away.

They will reveal themselves. (M/W/51)

Respondents also explained that they do not want to invite problems by calling the police, stating they know the consequences of reporting such as losing friends and family.

Not having access to phone service and not wanting to lose whatever friendship I have with that person and having them becoming an enemy and then having their family go against me too. Because a lot of people I know have family around here and they're all natives, most of them. Whether they're right or wrong, they'll stick up for one another even if it's wrong. (M/W/31)

### **Variation in Officer Treatment of the Homeless**

Thirty-seven respondents acknowledged differences between police officers, some differences due to location and some differences due to age. Several respondents described differences between Moorhead and Fargo police officers. Some stated that Moorhead police are more likely to “gives breaks” and are more laid back and honest. Others stated that Moorhead

police has no sense of community focus, and are racist against Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans. One respondent described how Moorhead police will use dogs to chase the homeless away from the river. Fargo police are described as more professional, friendly, polite, and have a sense of community focus. For those who have lived in larger cities, they felt that Fargo police were more relaxed, not as tense, and more willing to talk with the public. Fargo is also described as having more caring, hometown attitude compared to other, larger cities.

Respondents also observe differences in officers due to the officer's age. Respondents stated that older officers are easier to deal with and are more knowledgeable about how to react in situations they encounter. Older officers are thought to be more mature and have more knowledge and experience. These older officers are also described as more understanding of the homeless, more "heartful", and concerned over their wellbeing.

I don't think they – I would say a young generation do, probably judge it in a bad situation or bad predicament a person is in because of drug use or something of that nature, but I think more older cops understand that everybody falls, it just depends on how you get back on your feet. (M/B/46)

I've seen interaction. I've been kind of involved in, not directly, but I've seen differences, but then I've seen some the same. I guess it depends on the situation and how well the cops know...They know certain people. They know the troublemakers. They know the alcoholics, the homeless, and they can name them by name. If you are standing anywhere near them and you're associated with them, which all of a sudden you could just come up on it and it's like...or walk by or whatever, it's like, "Oh, you're with them?" "No." I guess it depends on...there again it depends on the individual officer and the situation. (F/W/53)

It's all about people. I look in people, that's what I look for now. I don't look in the state you are because when you're judging someone in that aspect that mean you judging to be judged. But if someone I know-- Say for instance pop here. If seven cops came to the place where we was in the hallway, now right off the back I can tell a young prick right off the bat because when he gets out the car he wants to flex a little bit. The old guys that came down here, didn't do no search even though I'd walk the other way. He was like, "There's nowhere to go." [laughs] "Where are you going?" (M/B/46)

Younger officers are described by respondents as acting as though they have something to prove and are out to make a reputation for themselves. Young officers are also thought to be hesitant about how to act in certain situations and often jump to conclusions. Respondents also believe that younger officers judge the homeless more, are power hungry, and antagonize the homeless in hopes of a confrontation.

The young guys, they—they're itching to use that Taser man. They're itching to fuckin' slam you and put those cuffs on. Believe me, it sounds crazy, but it's true. (M/NA/49)

If you're younger, you might want to try and get in there and try and arrest everyone or try and go too hard on certain people because you haven't reached that point where you've looking at it from both ways. I think the training needs to be more to deal with different people, to come off a certain way and to just walk the line. (M/B/39)

They're just like juvenile delinquents, but they're more mature. And you've got them older police officers that have more knowledge, they know more, they probably know what they expected, what happens and them young ones that just start out, they don't know what's going on. (M/W/26)

Many respondents explained that though there are differences between police officers, it is due to differences that exist between individuals. They understand that police officers are people and each person is different. Wisdom and experience are also described as characteristics that determine how officers will treat people. Differences in police officers are also due to differences in personalities and their level of compassion. Respondents explained that some officers are more willing to work with people to solve problems. These officers are described as having good rapport with people and are able to communicate effectively with those they interact with. One respondent explained that the differences he sees is due to how a person was raised.

Some you could tell off hand that they have love in their heart and are not bitter. And there some you can tell there's just fucking...you can just see the anger, the unhappiness. You can see it. (M/B/46)

Well, yes, that goes with the human race period. There's some people that are more understanding than others period. You only understand what you have experienced, you know what I mean? What you haven't experienced you don't understand. You got one cop who's willing to sit back, and listen, and investigate, and see what's going on, and another cops who's gung ho, "I'm mister shit, I'm mister power, I'm the authority, you're going to listen to me, I'm going to talk to you anyway I want to" fuck you, pig. [laughs] (M/W/42)

The way they act. It's just the way they act towards people. You can't always tell by the way they act. Some of them have attitudes, some of them don't. Some of them, they act like they don't have an attitude but, at the same time, they've got something else brewing in their little heads and you never know. People are just people. (M/B/36)



## Officer Understanding of the Homeless Population

Seventeen respondents believe that police officers understand homelessness and its causes. Respondents talked about police sometimes give rides to the homeless so they can get to a shelter as a way to provide assistance to the homeless. Police are also thought to have compassion for the homeless and that most police officers have sympathy for the homeless. One respondent stated that in his experience, the Fargo-Moorhead area has been very supportive. Respondents also explained that police officers have the knowledge and education about homelessness and that police understand the substance abuse and mental health problems that often accompany homelessness. Respondents commented that some police have empathy for the homeless, but are not able to help the homeless as they would like to.

They're trained and programmed for that specific duty. They can tell, they use their eyes, they use everything. They know everything. (M/W/51)

Most police officers feel bad for people in this situation. I have seen plenty of stories, either on YouTube or secondary media sites, even sometimes major news of cops reaching out to people in tough situations, so I know there is caring there. (M/W/32)

I think that some of the guys understand the whole, whether it is substance abuse or mental illness or something along those lines. I think most of them realize that. That the people can't honestly help it. And then some I guess it falls back on depending on the person. (M/W/34)

Twenty-eight respondents reported that they think that police are not capable of understanding homelessness. Several respondents explained that they felt that police officers believe in the typical homeless stereotype; that they are lazy, mentally ill, or an alcoholic.

Respondents also feel that police assume that they are not working hard enough to find housing or a job.

They understand that some of that is bad, but they don't really understand, truly understand what's behind that because they have been homeless themselves. I mean, I think being homeless is something that everybody should do. (M/W/20)

I think that stereotype is especially common amongst, not just police, but all the emergency services. Even some people I know in FM have treated me differently since I have been homeless. (M/W/46)

Oh they figure that, “Oh, well, half of them are drug addicts, half of them are sex offenders, half of them are ex cons.” They stereotype them. They profile them. They racial profile them. These things are added when you're looking at a polices' points of views. (M/B/37)

### **Perceptions of how Police View Homelessness**

Thirty-four respondents stated that they think police officers have a negative view of homelessness. Of those 34 respondents, 23 have a negative view of police officers. Respondents stated that they believe police disapprove of having homeless individuals in their community and view homelessness as “an insect to exterminate” and are a menace to society. Respondents believe that they are not treated respectfully and that the police do not think the homeless deserve their respect. Some stated that police officers will give homeless individual a “hard look” when they pass by and those facial expressions make the homeless feel uncomfortable. Respondents feel that police view crimes against the homeless “with a grain of salt” and that they are not as significant as a crime against someone who is housed. They believe that police officers' goal is to “catch something big” and that they think twice about what they say in front of a police

officer. One respondent believes that police would not think twice about shooting a homeless person and that the homeless are not important, unless they are doing something to draw attention. Respondents also feel that the homeless are looked at differently by police. Respondents explained that police officers observe the homeless as less than human or “trash” and that the homeless are just number and exist to put money into the state’s pocket.

I would say that I think they think we’re a burden on society because they get a lot of calls on homeless people because we’re – like I said – we’re always being seen, we’re always out in the open. Loitering it’s like a homeless person’s job to loiter. Go places with little money. (M/W/35)

They are like two-faced. Sometimes they will seem so nice and whatever and just, I don’t know, I think that their goal is trying to catch something big because they’d stop me a lot and do different things but they had, I know they had their suspicions of illegal activity and stuff but they couldn’t, you know, prove anything so they try to get me, but you know that’s their job too. (M/W/30)

You know I think they take it with a grain of salt. Like, “yeah, ok”. They shouldn’t because if someone is victimized that is homeless, you know, they don’t give a homeless person the same serious they give a homeowner. You know, that’s the truth. If I, we’re homeowners and if we call they probably going to try and question and follow-up on it whereas if a homeless person calls they are going to give them “ok” don’t offer a card or anything. (F/B/60)

Respondents stated that they believe homelessness “sickens” police, and that the homeless are meaningless to the police. Other statements made by respondents in regards to how police view them include: “view me as a piece of shit”, “don’t give a fuck if homeless”, “bottom

of the barrel”, “treat like a dog”, and “homeless are bad for downtown businesses and are an eye sore”. Respondents also felt like they are targeted and profiled by police because they are homeless and that police believe the homeless stereotypes. Respondents stated that the police will assume that the person is not trying hard enough or assume that they are homeless due to drinking. Respondents also think that police are more likely to talk to a disheveled person and target people with history of alcohol or drug use, criminal history, or groups of homeless individuals. Respondents also stated that the police know who are the alcoholics, the “homeless drunks”. Some believe that police assume that homeless drink, and often label individuals as “some drunk dude”.

To be very frank, the homeless people are just the dirt beneath the rug underneath their feet. (F/W/53)

There’s officers that just, I know that they, they just don’t, they just seen a homeless person and it sickens them. I mean if it’s up to them, there’d be no one on the street. (M/H/31)

Some of the cops are, yes. They think it’s bad for business Downtown like, kind of like an eye sore. And you know homeless people in general. I think that’s why they made that no panhandling ordinance. (M/W/35)

Fuck, I don't know, I just -- I don't know. I just don't like them, because of the way they treat Native Americans. (F/NA/43)

Twelve respondents stated that they think police officers have a neutral view of homelessness. Of those 12 respondents, 11 view police officer positively. Respondents commented that police officers treated the homeless similar to everyone else and that police do

not view homeless differently. Some respondents denied knowing how police view homelessness.

I can't really say because I'm not one to judge people because you never know what's going on behind closed doors, so you never know what's going on in the open because you're not around it. (M/B/36)

My general opinion about the police is that they're just doing their job, you know. You can't fault them for getting you. You know. (M/NA/34)

I've pretty much been homeless since 18. I thought they were okay people. I didn't... I was neutral on them. I think just going to jail – I get more a resentment for law enforcement. There's a lot of good ones that are just doing their jobs, but some of them have a chip on their shoulder. (M/W/35)

Four respondents stated that they think police officers have a positive view of homelessness. Some said that they think some police care about homeless and understand that it could happen to anyone. Others commented that some police officers understand substance abuse and mental illness that often accompanies homelessness. One respondent believes that police treat homeless well since they give rides to shelters due to cold weather. Others have been given advice and information from the police. Those with think police have a positive view of homelessness believe that police want to help homeless and understand what kind of people they are.

When I first became homeless I basically, for the first couple of nights I walked around South Fargo and went out and had an interaction with the Fargo police. I didn't have anything. No problems. They did what they needed to do and what not. But yes, it was just a great time. (M/W/39)

Because they understand what most people are, or where most people are coming from.

(M/NA/47)

Yes, I would say because they're more lenient on us because we're in the community, but we're not in the community. We don't have our own place, we don't have a car, they can spot us and they know we're homeless and they give us advice, information, how you can do better with your life. (M/W/26)

### **Suggestions for Change**

Of the 51 respondents, 48 described improvements they would like to see police officers implement in order to improve the interactions between the police and homeless. The majority of the improvements suggested consisted of simple changes police departments could implement. One of improvements suggested by respondents involved the education that police officers receive in regards to causes of homelessness. Several respondents mentioned the need for education in mental illness and substance abuse that are characteristics of homelessness. One respondent stated that he believes police officers need to understand that drugs are the cause of crime, rather than the homeless. It was also mentioned that police officers need to realize that not every homeless person uses drugs or alcohol. They also stated that police officers need education in stereotypes, and that they should learn about homelessness and have more hands-on experience in dealing with homeless. Respondents also commented about how officers need training to learn how to approach people because they are not aware of how to interact with people. It was also mentioned that police officers would benefit from sensitivity training.

I don't think they can, when a cop gets a call, "we got a guy down here wielding a weapon." They're coming amped up, their adrenaline going, when that could be nothing.

But they're coming in and they're going to say, "hey!" And I'll be like, "hey man, I don't

have anything to do with this. They'll cuff you, they'll talk to like you're nothing, and I get it, they're amped up, but sensitivity training. Cops don't know how to talk to a person. (M/B/36)

I think more-- maybe training on that might help them with some of the homeless. There are a lot of the homeless that ended up where they are because of either PTSD problems, have been unable to keep jobs or schizophrenia is huge so, it's just-- maybe a little more training might help them interact a little bit better. Not saying that they're interacting wrong but, if they know what to look for, I think that would really help. (M/W/61)

I think the officers up here need a lot of education in, what I call, the concepts of victimology. I think re-victimization is a very real danger of the system here. So I would like to see them get educated in that. I had heard that Fargo P.D. was adding on some additional mental health training officers, but even so when you're wearing a badge you're a cop first, and a counselor second. (M/W/46)

Respondents stated they would like to see is a change in the attitude towards the homeless that police officers have. Several respondents explained that they would like to see compassion and humanity in police officers, stating that "a little compassion goes a long way".

I think just having compassion instead of looking to see if somebody's a troublemaker or they're on a wanted list, why don't you walk up and ask somebody if you see somebody sitting on the bench at the library, "Sir have you eaten today? If not, here's where you can go get a free meal." More of that approach of having compassion. (M/W/35)

You have to have a little bit of humanity when you're doing your job, no matter what the job is, especially with law enforcement. I've seen it both ways. There's no humanity and there's a point where there's too much humanity even. (F/40/NA)

[A police officer] She's like, "We're not out to be the bad guy" and she's really confessed to me that her job is to work with people and solve problems. One day when I was super fucked up, I was like, "You're the first cop I've actually ever heard have a little bit of compassion for me." And then there are the rough ones who's like, "Fuck it. I got something to do. I want to put my dip in...get in the car. Here you go. Get in. Bye." Bam. Don't give a shit. (M/W/41)

Respondents explained that police should be respectful towards the homeless and to not judge or label them automatically. Several mentioned that police officers appear to believe the "stereotype for the homeless is still lazy, sit around, don't do anything". Respondents would like police officers to realize that many homeless are trying to change, many have jobs, and many of whom were working towards housing during the interviews.

Because they don't have feelings, and I can understand now why they like that, just because of the gang affiliations that's there and the criminal activities that's there. So, I can understand their point, but I still don't understand how can you – if you never show a person a different path or a different character of a person, how do you expect that person to ever change or want to change? (M/B/46)

Don't approach every one of us like we're a bad guy. Talk to us nicely; talk to us with respect. Don't be like, "What are you doing?" Ask how our day is going, maybe, or something, I don't know. Be a little more polite and don't just be an ass. I'm not going off on just Fargo; I'm going off nation-wide. (M/W/30)

You know, I think most officers, like I said, they really try and try to understand, but that's unfortunately a lot of people in the homeless situation and homeless population do have some type of mental illness or substance abuse issues, you know. So it's, they have



to know how to approach it but also how the individual they are talking to might have some I guess ill tensions towards the officers just because they are police or you know.

It's, I think it's one of those tricky two way streets. (M/W/34)

Knowledge about the shelters and the processes involved in accessing shelters was another improvement suggested by respondents. Many respondents stated that the police should be aware of services, such as shelters, healthcare options, and food shelves, that are available in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Of the 51 respondents, only four stated that police gave them information about shelters and other services. One suggestion that respondents had for police officers was for them to carry "Where to Go" cards. These cards offer a list of shelters and services in the Fargo-Moorhead area, their locations, and a map showing each of the locations.

They just told me to stay with a family or friend or – they never recommended any homeless shelters, they never recommended things that – ways that they could help us. Instead of telling us to leave or get out, they need to recommend how to help us instead of to put us down into a gutter.

A majority of respondents stated that they would like to see police officers spend time with the homeless in a proactive rather than reactive setting. Respondents said that they would like police to offer more help towards the homeless by helping out with the programs at the shelters.

Respondents also commented that police should talk with the homeless about their concerns and offer more encouragement. A few respondents stated that they would like to see police officers spend time homeless themselves so that they can truly understand what the homeless are experiencing.

I believe that the police officers earning their uniform and coming down here on Christmas, instead of Bethany Church and coming down here, and handing out clothing,

blankets, wearing your uniform, show the community. Show the community that the police officers aren't about the handcuffs, they're about help. (M/W/42)

I think that before cops graduate the academy I think they should be stripped all money, credit cards, everything like that and just a backpack full of clothes... On the street for a week. (F/W/48)

I think, that it should be mandatory that they all should be homeless so then you get to know the people that they're dealing with one and one personally. (M/W/20)

One respondent stated that although police have positive community activities with children, he would like to see police try improve their image with older adults.

They look at generations. Don't get me wrong which is very positive, very creative, but you got to understand that without new creations – you got to have old foundations to make better. (M/W/42)

Many respondents explained that they would like for police officers to be more active in the community. They would like to see police officers have town hall meetings with the homeless asking about safety and other concerns. One respondent offered the suggestion that police officers should have a barbeque with the homeless. Community outreach to create connections and have more positive interactions with the homeless was also brought up by many respondents. Some stated that there would be improvements if police sat down and talked to people which would result in better communication between both police and the homeless.

My honest suggestion at this point would be to maybe have, not so much focus groups, but some open-table meetings specifically limited to so many officers from this department and this particular shelter. Officers and mediators though, so the officers can express what they see. People might know they're going to get upset, but they know that

they are going to get the same equal say back. Because it's only that kind of dialogue that's really going to solve the problem. People have got to be straight with each other.

(F/W/24)

Come to the homeless shelter and have like a town hall meeting where they introduce themselves and they want to ask, "What are some of the homeless peoples' pressing concerns? How do they feel about the police? How have they've been treated?" and what they can do to start making some bridges to rectify the situation and see eye to eye the community. (M/H/31)

If there was some kind of town hall meeting between the two groups, and I don't know how that could be pulled off. But, there would be things said on both parts that I think both would leave the meeting with a better understanding on both sides. I don't know how anybody could pull that off, because if you invite the homeless they're probably not going to go. (M/H/42)

Some respondents suggested that police officers do not disturb the homeless and to leave them alone rather than suggesting an improvement. These respondents simply want police officers to leave the homeless alone and to recognize that the homeless are doing what they need to do to survive. One respondent stated he would like to see police go after people actually doing harm rather than the homeless just walking down the street.

Leave people alone unless they're putting themselves out there. That would probably be the number one, to be honest. (M/W/63)

Be professional. Why does it say on your car to protect and serve if you're going to just fucking harass people and you're having a slow day. I don't know if that's the case. I'm just speculating. (M/B/36)

Going after people that are actually doing harm, doing something, instead of just walking on the street. If you're staggering right now, that person is just trying to get to their destination, just let them go and pass out. Not pull somebody over and arrest them and put them in the drunk tank. You have to deal with going to court and open containers. That's a homeless person, where do you think they're going to have the money?

(M/W/36)

Some respondents explained that there is nothing that police officers could do that would make a difference for the homeless.

They got no control of changing people, only God can change people. (M/H/42)

Well, we've tried. Everybody's tried. But then they still look down on them no matter what, because we're turning to somebody to seek help, for us, so people can at least – Someone trying to help us. But then, they got so much pull, or whatever they call it, so its just – it doesn't work with them. (F/NA/26)

The white has always got on the Indian and he is always going to. Nothing's ever going to change the cops. (M/NA/49)

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the views that homeless individuals in the Fargo-Moorhead area have of police officers. The findings suggest that the number of positive and negative perceptions held by homeless individuals in the Fargo-Moorhead area are roughly equal with 51 percent having a positive opinion and 49 percent having a negative opinion. Several themes emerged from the interviews that provide insight into how these perceptions have developed and evolved.

The most prominent theme that emerged was respect. Respect determined whether or not a respondent have a positive or negative perception of police officers. Those who have a positive opinion of police officers explained that factors like respect and being treated fairly are what determined their opinion. These respondents stated that they have been given no reason to dislike the police and that they are doing their job. Those who have a negative opinion of police officers state that disrespect plays a significant role in the formation of their opinion. These respondents explained that harassment, physical violence, and aggression towards themselves and others have led to a negative opinion of police.

The majority of respondents believe that police have a negative view of homelessness. These respondents state that police view the homeless as a menace, trash, intoxicated, and are not deserving of their respect. One of the most frequently cited complaints of police officers that respondents had is that officers present negative attitudes towards the homeless. Some respondents reported that officers seemed rude and unfriendly. While calls for service were handled appropriately, respondents felt that the officers were uncaring and unsympathetic towards them. The perception that respondents have on how police view homelessness could be due to social distance. Social distance is the degree to which individuals or groups have positive

feeling for other individuals, institutions, or their legal system (Jones, Penn, and Davenport, 2015). Perceptions of the police often reflect the amount of social distance between those groups and the police (Jones, Penn, and Davenport, 2015). When police view a greater social distance between themselves and the public, they perceive the public as more dangerous. This can affect their interactions with the public (Lee and Gibbs, 2015).

Racism against the homeless also played a role in negative opinions, particularly for Native Americans and African American. These respondents explained that they feel that they are targeted by police due to their race and police often assume that they are drinking. Respondents in this study are not alone in their belief of racial profiling. A majority of Americans surveyed believe racial profiling by police is widespread (Regoeczi and Kent, 2013). They also generally find that racial minorities harbor more negative views of law enforcement and that trust in police is lowest among African American respondents (Regoeczi and Kent, 2013). Regarding public perceptions of the police, race/ethnicity is also one of the most consistent factors (Wu, 2014). African Americans, the most studied minority group, are frequently found to have less favorable attitudes than whites (Wu, 2014). Race, along with negative contacts and exposure to media coverage of police misconduct, is an important predictor of confidence in police (Lee and Gibbs, 2015). When people believe that profiling is widespread and/or that they have been profiled, their support for police fades (Tyler and Wakslak, 2004). Previous research suggests that people react negatively to attributions of profiling, regardless of whether they have experienced it or believe that it generally occurs in their neighborhood and city. People are less likely to infer that they have been profiled when they are treated with politeness and respect by the police (Tyler and Wakslak, 2004).

Past research has found that people with less social capital, and less power, report less trust in police and are more inclined to doubt the legitimacy of the police (Thompson and Kahn, 2016). Mental illness has also been shown to play a role in perceptions of police officers. Those with a history of mental illness are unlikely to trust the police. These individuals do not trust that encounters with police are positive (Thompson and Kahn, 2016). For those who have a positive opinion of police, 19 of the respondents have only been homeless one or two times and have spent a year or less homeless. Sixty-three percent (32) of respondents reported no change in opinion of police.

Previous research has found that socio-demographic factors, such as age, gender, class and place of origin, may all influence public attitudes towards police (Wu, 2014). Age has been among the more consistent predictors, with young citizens having less favorable views than older citizens. Contrary to previous research, young respondents had more favorable perceptions of police officers compared to older respondents in this study. Sixty percent of respondents ages 30 and younger held a positive view of police officers. Some studies also show that males hold less favorable attitudes than females where as others find an opposite pattern of females having the less favorable attitude as is the case with the current study (Wu, 2014). In the current study, males have a larger percentage of positive opinions compared to females. About 58 percent of males have a positive opinion of police compared to only 27 percent of females. The majority of female respondents, 73 percent, have a negative opinion of police officers.

A possible cause of the animosity of the homeless towards police could be explained by conflict theory. The economically powerful often consider economically and culturally dissimilar groups as the largest threat to social order. It has been argued that law enforcement is used as a tool to control those who are considered “dangerous classes”, such as racial and ethnic

minorities but can also include those who are impoverished (Barrick, Hickman, and Strom, 2014). These groups of individuals are perceived to threaten the interests of those in power such as policymakers and business owners. As these “dangerous classes” grow, they may be perceived as more threatening, which then may lead to greater control efforts specifically using police or private security (Barrick, Hickman, and Strom, 2014). The greater the racial or economic threat, the greater the expected police response (Hanink, 2014).

Though there has been little research on the perceptions of police officers that homeless individuals hold, there are several similar results in the current study that have been found in previous studies of homeless individuals. Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) found that the homeless shelter users had lower levels of trust in police than in paramedics and individuals who reported ever having been assaulted by police tended to have much lower levels of trust in police than individuals who did not report any such past experience. Similar findings were also found in the number of respondents who would report an emergency to the police. In Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) study, 69 percent would call the police in an emergency, 21 percent would not call and 9 percent was undecided. In the current study 58 percent of respondents would call police in an emergency, and 42 percent of respondents would not call police. Zakrison, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) found that almost 1 in 10 homeless individuals reported experiencing an assault by a police officer in the last 12 months. This study in contrast had fewer respondents reporting being assaulted by a police officer. Several reported that they were treated too aggressively, but only one participant reported being assaulted by a police officer.

A number of respondents discussed one officer in particular that was described disliking the homeless population. Respondents explained that this police officer is racist towards Native Americans and Blacks and also disrespectful towards the homeless. He is also described as the



only officer to arrest homeless individuals for minor charges. This finding is similar to a finding in the study conducted by Donley and Wright (2012). They found that there was one officer in particular was mentioned repeatedly as “hating homeless people” and taking every opportunity to harass and intimidate them. These participants would also report arrests on what they felt were trivial grounds (molesting a dumpster, impeding the flow of foot traffic on a public sidewalk, or solicitation of funds without a permit).

Many respondents explained that they would not report crimes to law enforcement due to being labeled a “snitch” or “tattle-tale”. This is similar to the results of Huey and Quirouette’s (2010) study. Participants in both studies reported being victims of violent crimes ranging from assault to robberies and that they might report crimes to the police in the future. Huey and Quirouette (2010) found that a majority of their participants stated that they would not report a crime to the police under any circumstances. In the current study, 41.2 percent stated that they would not report any crime to the police. Participants in both studies gave similar reasons why they would not report crimes to law enforcement. These reasons include fear or distrust of police, a belief that nothing would be done, the inability to recall details of the crime due to intoxication, and concerns of outstanding warrants.

The most frequently occurring reason for not reporting a crime to police in Huey and Quirouette’s (2010) study was due to the anti-snitching code. The fear of being labeled a snitch was also a main reason for not reporting a crime in the current study. For participants in both studies, when asked under what circumstances it would be acceptable for a homeless person to report criminal victimization to the police, such reports would only be acceptable if the victim was seen as requiring protection. These individuals include children, the mentally ill, senior

citizens, and women. Men in both studies reported that they have in the past served as protectors by stepping into fights and taking retaliatory action on behalf of female victims.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation of this study was that interviews were not completed at two of the shelters in the Fargo-Moorhead area. The YWCA serves women and children who are fleeing from domestic violence, human trafficking, and other crises. It is also the only shelter in the Fargo-Moorhead area to serve only women and children. The Dorothy Day House is the only shelter that will serve men who have committed sexual offenses. The homeless shelters in Fargo-Moorhead area will refer guests out to other shelters if there is an open bed at a more appropriate shelter. For example, a male guest who does not have chemical dependency issues or severe mental health problems will be referred out of the Gladys Ray Shelter to New Life Center. Due to the referrals being made by the shelters, many of the respondents who were interviewed had been at the other shelters in the area.

A common limitation in qualitative research is the lack of generalizability. The participants of this study were gathered using a convenience sample; those who were interviewed volunteered to be interviewed. This can lead to an inability to generalize the results of a study and the possibility of under- or -over-representation of the population. Based on the results of the Wilder study, the demographic results gathered by the current study are markedly similar suggesting that the results could be generalizable to the Fargo-Moorhead homeless population.

It should be noted that this research was limited because interviews were not conducted with any Fargo or Moorhead police officers. Future studies could greatly benefit by incorporating officer's perceptions of not only themselves but also how they believe the homeless perceive them and their performance while responding to calls regarding the homeless.

The qualitative approach used was appropriate for the study, but there are other research approaches which would also prove useful in further investigating the perceptions of police officers that homeless individuals have. Using a mixed-methods approach with a larger sample could provide useful information that was not uncovered through this particular research process.

### **Homeless Outreach across the Country**

Police administration would benefit from research on factors affecting the homeless' attitudes toward police because widespread confidence in the police makes law enforcement officers' work easier and more effective (Lee and Gibbs, 2015). If police officers demonstrate improved treatment of the homeless, the negative perception of the police might change. Police departments across the country have begun to address the problems between the homeless population and police officers. One solution that police departments have implemented are Homeless Outreach Teams or HOT. San Diego Police Department has also developed a Homeless Outreach Team. The HOT together with the Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) provide outreach and engagement throughout the City of San Diego (Homeless Services, 2016). They are the city's initial point of contact with both chronic homeless and chronic inebriates living on the streets. Each HOT Team is composed of police officers, County psychiatric clinicians and County Mental Health eligibility technicians. The Teams seek out and engage chronically homeless persons and, for those who are willing, place them in housing linked with appropriate services. The San Diego Police Department, along with Community Services provide direct financial support by funding the law enforcement officers in this program (Homeless Services, 2016).

The San Diego Police Department also implemented the Serial Inebriate Program (SIP). SIP is offered to chronically homeless, substance dependent people who have been arrested

(Homeless Services, 2016). Each of these programs offers offenders an opportunity to participate in treatment, sober-living environments as an alternative to incarceration as well as access to emergency room care, transitional housing or long-term care. Teams work together to assess the homeless person's problems, and identify how to help them from a range of solutions. Whether their homelessness has been caused by loss of income, psychological problems, substance abuse, lack of job training, or other problems, multiple options are available to assist each person. This approach not only provides short-term answers but also develops permanent solutions. The teams provide care, resources and assistance to approximately 700 individuals per year (Homeless Services, 2016).

The Homeless Outreach Team within the Wichita Police Department works in partnership with homeless service providers and businesses to refer homeless to their resources or programs. The HOT team is responsible for responding to all 911 calls regarding homeless individuals or calls for service (Homeless Outreach Team, 2016). HOT focuses on trying to keep homeless out of jail if possible and divert them to services or shelters. The HOT team also works towards helping make the homeless successful whether it is helping them get back on their medication if they have mental health issues, refer to substance abuse centers if needed, assistance in resume building, job referrals and building partnerships with them to get the homeless the resources they need to make them successful. One component of the Wichita HOT program is the "Finding A Way Home" program which reunited homeless with their family to get them stabilized in a home. The HOT program utilizes three full-time officers with adjustable hours in order to meet the demands and needs of the homeless (Homeless Outreach Team, 2016).

The homeless outreach team within the Houston Police Department started as a pilot program in January of 2011 (Homeless Outreach Team, 2014). It was made a permanent

program in the department after a successful six-month pilot. The HOT is comprised of one sergeant, four police officers, and three mental health professionals. The team help the homeless with housing, social security cards, passports, birth certificate, shelter referrals, medical equipment, employment, bus fare, medical care, and mental health treatment. The goal is to obtain housing for the chronic homeless. In four years, the team had helped about 500 homeless individuals in Houston get off the streets. Team members work to provide the tools and attention needed to get those individuals into the system and able to access services (Homeless Outreach Team, 2014).

A HOT program is also in effect for the Lubbock Police department. H.O.T. is comprised of one Sergeant and two Corporals/Officers (City of Lubbock, 2016). H.O.T. focuses on trying to keep homeless out of jail if possible and divert them to services or shelters. Officers also work to help make homeless successful whether it is helping them get back on their medications if they have mental health issues, refer to substance abuse centers if needed, assistance in resume building, job referrals and building partnerships with homeless individuals to get them the resources they need to make them successful. H.O.T. currently works with homeless providers, churches, and the various City of Lubbock Departments to help clean up temporary camp/shelter areas while assisting homeless into housing or shelters. The team helps with support services referrals (housing, shelter, food, clothing), medical care, mental health treatment, employment, social security cards, bus fare, and birth certificates (City of Lubbock, 2016).

The Mission of the Pasadena Police and Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's Homeless Outreach-Psychiatric Evaluations (HOPE) team is to provide "effective, collaborative, and compassionate mental health and law enforcement emergency response to those in need of mental health, housing, and related social services" (Homeless Outreach

[HOPE], 2016). The Pasadena Police Department created the HOPE team on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The police department entered into a partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health to better handle homeless issues to assist those in need of accessing mental health and social services. According to the Pasadena Police Department, the HOPE team is different from similar units in other departments in that HOPE team members are first responders to emergency mental health crisis calls, and are proactive by continuously seeking of contact with people who are in need of services prior to potentially volatile situations occurring. The team's target population are street-level and sheltered homeless, as well as mental health consumers within the city limits. Another major aspect of the HOPE approach is working on relationship building and planting the seed of trust for the next contact. The goal is to convince people to accept services prior to them being in a crisis and critical in being able to de-escalate a situation when they are in crisis. HOPE Team Officers are specially trained in crisis communications, Violence Threat Risk Assessment, Suicide-Homicide Bomber Terrorist response, and are graduate of Crisis Intervention Team Training Academies throughout the states. HOPE Teams are also specialized in multi-agency, long-term psychiatric problem solving, often involving suspected suicidal/homicidal subjects (Homeless Outreach [HOPE], 2016).

A homeless outreach team has also been developed in the Anaheim Police Department. The mission of homeless outreach is to find long term, supportive housing for homeless individuals and families by offering multi-disciplinary, wrap-around services (Homeless Outreach, 2016) . Anaheim's HOT was created in November 2013 to build and maintain stronger relationships between the Anaheim Police Department (APD) and the homeless population. HOT also addressed criminal behavior through complaint driven enforcement. Since 2013, APD has partnered with regional law enforcement agencies, Orange County Mental

Health and several non-profit services providers to bring as many available resources to end short-term and chronic homelessness. This collaborative approach has reduced the recurrence of homelessness among those who receive and participate in the wrap-around services (Homeless Outreach, 2016).

Homeless Liaison Officers (HLO) are officers assigned to patrol and other assignments who recognize the need in the community for the provision of resources to the homeless community when HOT officers are not available (Homeless Outreach, 2016). These officers receive additional training to connect the homeless population with available resources and services and partnering with governmental agencies and other organizations to provide individualized, specific support to find long-term, supportive housing and other services to address unmet life necessities. These necessities include food gift cards, gas cards, socks, clothing, and hygiene kits which APD officers have access to for those in need. APD HLO's also transport homeless individuals to the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Social Security office, and to various courts and government officers to assist them in navigating the system to receive identification cards, renew driver licenses, pay court fines, and setting the individuals up with employment opportunities to help them get their lives on track. Anaheim's Homeless Outreach Team also focuses on helping those within the homeless community are provided access to care for illnesses or health issues they may be suffering. Officers receive specific training on interacting with and supporting those suffering from mental illnesses. APD has assigned two officers as the Psychological Emergency Response Team (PERT). Paired full-times with an Orange County Mental Health Clinician, PERT responds to emergent incidents in the field involving individuals in crisis, as well as to chronic situations wherein the individuals mental condition is preventing them from escaping the cycle of homelessness. PERT results in

the more rapid identification of available bed space and treatment options for those most vulnerable and most likely to generate additional police calls for service (Homeless Outreach, 2016).

The Salt Lake City Police Department created the Homeless Outreach Service Team (HOST) Program in 2012 to work with community partners to help end homelessness in Salt Lake City (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016). The program started with one sergeant who conducted regular street outreach, drafted initial program strategies, launched public awareness efforts, and worked to develop and enhance relationships with the homeless service providers. Since then, the program has grown to include two additional officers and a downtown resource center across the street from the homeless shelter. In addition, the police department launched a pilot program to hire eight police social workers who work alongside the HOST officers. The police social workers provide individual case management and fill gaps in service that have been identified in the current outreach program (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016).

HOST team members help those who are homeless connect with the resources they need to find housing (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016). HOST officers regularly help people figure out bus routes or TRAX lines (Salt Lake City's rail system) to the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles. Officers will also drive individuals in their HOST vehicle to help them obtain their identification. If an individual does obtain an ID and is ready for employment, officers help them write their resumes, gather proper interview attire, and will drive them to the job interview. HOST officers also work with technical schools and local businesses to find opportunities for homeless individuals, including those with a criminal background who are willing to work.

Between November 2014 and March 2015, HOST made 291 HOST contacts that resulted in 43



physical identifications obtained, 6 social security cards obtained, 7 birth certificates obtained, 25 jobs obtained for homeless people, 77 job applications submitted, 31 successful resource center service meetings held, 15 housing referrals, and 51 people reunited with family members through the Family Reunification program (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016).

There were several challenges that had to be overcome for HOST to be successful. One of the most significant and ongoing challenges that the HOST team faces is improving the trust between police and the homeless population (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016). In order to help build that trust, one strategy was to distinguish the HOST team from officers in other roles. To achieve this, the team wrapped a patrol car with HOST graphics. Another challenge faced by the HOST team was the tracking and organizing of information. In order to keep track of all the individuals that the HOST team comes into contact with, and their needs, the officers designed a database they could utilize and keep notes. Each person the HOST team comes in contact with is asked to fill out a release form specifying what information will be collected and who the information may be shared with. If a person declines to fill out the release form, they still receive service from the HOST team but are not entered into the HOST database (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016).

Panhandling is also a difficult challenge confronted by the HOST team. In an attempt to curb panhandling, the HOST team has implemented two strategies: business cards and donation meters (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016). HOST partnered with local businesses, organizations, and groups to place free cards in popular panhandling areas in the community. The cards are free and customers are encouraged to take a card and give it to panhandlers on the street. This enables the customer the feeling of helping the panhandler and the panhandler gets the contact information for the HOST team. The second strategy to reduce panhandling is

donation meters. When Salt Lake City updated their payment system in their parking meters, the HOST team worked with the Downtown Alliance and other local businesses to repurpose the old parking meters with HOST graphics to differentiate them from standard parking meters. The team then works with businesses interested in sponsoring a meter at their location to encourage people to donate to the meters instead of giving directly to panhandlers. One hundred percent of all meter donations are distributed to service providers to help homeless individuals with food, shelter, and other necessities (Salt Lake City Police Department, 2016).

### **Changes Being Made by the City of Fargo**

In 2006, the Fargo City Commission developed a 10-year plan to end long-term homelessness in Fargo. The 7-point strategy to eliminate the housing crises that create long term homelessness includes increasing the availability of permanent supportive housing, improve consumers' ability to pay for housing, develop partnerships that will move people into housing first, make outreach to long term homeless more effective, stop discharging people into homelessness, enhance the coordination and availability of prevention services, and collect data and share information about homelessness in the metro area. In 2010, a retired Fargo Police officer was named to fill the city's new homeless liaison position (Former Cop, 2010). This officer spent nine years as a downtown resource officer, and during that time, he formed relationships between the homeless population and the resources available to them (Reisenauer, 2010). The position continued to allow those connections and the Fargo police's collaboration with area social services to combat homelessness. The part-time position is funded on an annual basis through a \$20,000 federal grant aimed at helping those with low to moderate incomes (Former Cop, 2010).

The Homeless Outreach Specialist was a position created within the City of Fargo to address the increased number of calls made to police dispatch from the Fargo public library. Calls were made two to three times per week at the library regarding homeless individuals. The director of the Gladys Ray Shelter along with the Director of the Library created the position to address the problem. The position took the city commission about two years to approve. The position is modeled after the library social workers in Sacramento, California. The position creates a point of contact for library employees rather than calling Fargo police. The goal of the position is to reduce the number of calls made to dispatch, reduce the number of people trespassed from the library, deescalate problems that might arise without Fargo police, and to act as a liaison and help connect homeless individuals with services, link unsheltered individuals to local shelters, and work with downtown businesses by being a point of contact and by educating community members about homelessness. The Homeless Outreach specialist works closely with the downtown resource officers within the Fargo Police department.

In January of 2016, the Fargo Police department assigned two officers as the new downtown resource officers, one on the day shift and one on the evening shift. The downtown resource officers (DRO) routinely deal with homeless individuals and the quality of life issues involving panhandling, urinating, and consuming alcohol in public. These officers are specifically assigned in the downtown area to help with communication between businesses, residences, and to help with overall quality of life issues.

I quickly realized, through my own personal exposure and the talk of those around downtown, that the homeless in the area were seen as a pariah and the mentality was to keep hounding them until they left. With making connections downtown and finding a lot of the services the homeless population accesses being downtown, I quickly realized

that was an unrealistic expectation and I took it upon myself to think of some different ideas to help it all make sense. I was also witnessing the same people come in and out of a revolving door of the justice system; ticket leads to a warrant because they don't show up which leads to an arrest which leads to a fine which leads to a warrant because they can't pay it which leads to arrest and the cycle continues. All in all, we (the city) are losing money because of this (DRO, personal communication, July 2016).

One of the DROs researched different cities, similar to Fargo's downtown area and discovered that many of those cities were utilizing a community corrections mentality. It focuses on the same quality of life issues and asks offenders to "give back" to the community they are affecting. The DRO worked with Homeless Outreach Specialist and the director of the Gladys Ray Shelter to make some progress toward community corrections. The result is a community service model. The DRO received approval from their command staff to try it in a trial group. Five individuals that are thought to have some potential success with it and also routinely fit in the revolving door mentality were chosen. The plan is to have these individuals sign on as volunteers for the city so that any mishaps that could potentially happen (e.g. injury) are covered under some sort of insurance. The next step is to contact the municipal court system to determine what kind of fines each volunteer has and if the court would be willing to allow the individual to "work off their time." During her research on similar community service models, the DRO discovered that generally an hour of community service was around ten dollars. Through the current model, if an offender is given a fine, they are routinely set up on a payment plan through the court system. The payment plans start as low as \$50 a month. Based on the new community service model, the offender would complete five hours of community service per month. There is also the potential that the offenders could get enough community service hours

to potentially pay off the fine in a month. According to the DRO, both municipal court judges in Fargo like the idea and are interested in seeing where it goes as they also get frustrated seeing the same people repeatedly. As the downtown resource officer states:

I'm hoping this baby step leads to something bigger but will have to wait and see. My overall goal is to get a re-investment by the homeless in downtown and to stop the revolving door. Some people will not be able to stay out of the revolving door but, through your research, I'm sure you are well aware that "cookie cutter" solutions are not the answer. My hope is to at least influence and change behaviors on some and I consider that a success (DRO, personal communication, July 2016).

### **Recommendations**

Approximately 20 to 25 percent of the homeless population in the United States suffers from some sort of severe mental illness (Normore, Ellis, and Bone, 2015). As a result of the stresses of living with a mental disorder, people with mental illnesses are much more likely to become homeless than the general population. It is estimated that 40-50 percent of individuals who have a mental health problem will have an interaction with the criminal justice system in their lifetime. Interactions between people with mental health problems and police are relatively common, although generally not for violent or criminal acts, but more often for substance use, lack of treatment, homelessness, and hospital emergency visits. Individuals with mental illness are also less likely to trust the police (Thompson and Kahn, 2016).

In order to address the needs of the homeless and mentally ill, police officers and mental health practitioners need to share resources in the field to coordinate street outreach to those in the highest need. The Fargo police department currently has 19 officers and two Sergeants that collaborate with Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) officers from other local law enforcement and

corrections agencies. CIT is a collaborative effort between law enforcement, mental health providers and mental health advocates. CIT officers learn to interact with people with mental illness who are in crisis in a way that deescalates a tense situation. By utilizing this approach, relationships are strengthened between law enforcement and the community through perceived preparedness, quality of response to the mentally ill, diversion from jail, and community safety. If law enforcement officers demonstrate improved treatment of those experiencing mental health crises, the generally negative perception of police by high risk groups (including those with mental illness) may change. If police training practices such as the CIT model are adopted widely by police departments, and if CIT results in improved interactions with the mentally ill, then this distrust in police may decrease (Thompson and Kahn, 2016).

A majority of respondents expressed a desire to have more positive contact with police officers as a way to improve their interactions. Respondents discussed speaking with police officers in group settings, like a town hall meeting, about various issues. Other respondents explained that they would like to see police officers spending time in the shelters and speaking to the guests of that shelter rather than merely responding to a call. This could provide opportunities to make positive nonthreatening contacts with the homeless individuals within the community. By utilizing positive contacts with the homeless population, officers can develop relationships with the community will also alleviating some of the areas of concern that both police officers and homeless individuals have.

Roughly 41 percent of the respondents in this study stated that they would not report a crime to law enforcement. This finding is similar to reporting rates of the general population. During the period of 2006 to 2010, 52 percent of all violent victimizations were not reported to the police with 34 percent going unreported because the victim dealt with the crime another way,

such as reporting it to another official, like a guard, manager, or school official (Langton, Berzofsky, Krebs, and Smiley-McDonald, 2012). Almost 18 percent were not reported because the victim believed the crime was not important enough, 13 percent were in fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble and 16 percent did not report to police due to the belief that police would not or could not help. Not reporting victimizations to law enforcement present potential problems due to misallocation of law enforcement and community resources, offenders go unpunished, and victims are unable to obtain necessary services to cope with their victimization.

A potential solution to the lack of crime reporting by homeless individuals could be implementing a community policing program that facilitates reporting of victimization by homeless victims of crime. The Homeless Remote Reporting program is a community policing program that utilizes local service providers to the homeless community as access point for individuals who wish to report a crime to the police in Edinburgh (Huey and Quirouette, 2010). HRR encourages victims to report crimes to police by using service providers who act as a third party in the process. When a client reports being a victim or witness to a crime, a service provider consults with the client as to whether to bring the complaint to the police. If the client wishes to do so, there are two options available: the victim or witness can report the matter for police investigation or report the information anonymously for police intelligence purposes. This program also allows for anonymous reporting to deal with the problem of victims being stigmatized within the community for “snitching”. To assist in keeping reports anonymous, police officers attend interviews in plain clothes and arrangements can be made for police to meet with victims and service providers at a location away from the service organization’s premises (Huey and Quirouette, 2010).

By utilizing a program such as this, there are a number of potential benefits such as homeless victims of crime can be heard by the criminal justice system and issues related to criminal victimizations of the homeless can be addressed. There could also be awareness of victimizations of the homeless increased within the community. Relationships between the homeless and police can be improved as well as the relationships between police and service providers within the community. This program could also allow for police to receive information about crimes that they may not be aware of and receive information to further existing investigations (Huey and Quirouette, 2010).

This study shows that the common and understandable desire of respondents is to be treated as actual human beings with feelings and sensitivities that police officers need to acknowledge. The homeless population is one that is rarely heard and was given a chance to voice their opinions about the police in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Overall, these results emphasize the importance of treating individuals with respect and that when homeless individuals are treated with respect, they are more likely to show respect towards law enforcement. This research also hopes to help police officers understand the homeless population and how they are viewed among the homeless so that police departments can work towards improving their interactions with the homeless. Because police officer generally the first one to encounter the homeless, they are the first to offer help. If the homeless do not trust the police, they are less likely to get the help they need. Homeless people's perceptions of police can pose a barrier that prevents them from seeking needed care in an emergency. This research also highlights some of the problems that exists in how police treat the homeless, such as racism, officer aggression, disrespect, harassment, and intimidation. Future research could examine police officers' views of homelessness which contribute to a productive dialogue of how they



deal with homeless individuals and the role of policing in dealing with major social and political problem such as homelessness.

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## APPENDIX. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Descriptive Information

1. How long have you lived in the Fargo-Moorhead area?
2. Where did you live before here?
3. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
4. Are you currently employed?
5. How many times in your life have you been homeless?
6. How long have you been homeless?
7. Where do you stay when you are unsheltered?
8. Do you carry a weapon?  
If so, what type and why?

### Interactions with Police Officers

1. How many encounters have you had with the police in the last month?
2. How do you feel you are treated by the police when you interact with them?
3. What usually happens when you interact with the police:  
Are you arrested?  
Told to move to a different location?  
Provided information regarding local shelters?
4. What types of crimes have you been arrested for?
5. How many times have you been incarcerated for those crimes?
6. How often are your interactions with police officers due to alcohol or drug use?

### Perceptions of the Police

1. What is your general opinion of the police?
2. What was your view of the police before you became homeless?
3. Has it changed since you have become homeless?
4. Do you trust the police?
5. How often do you report being a crime victim to the police?
6. If you don't report being victimized to the police, explain why not?
7. Would you report a crime to the police in the future? Why or Why not?
8. Do you feel that some officers are more understanding than others? Explain.
9. How do you think the police view you (as a homeless person)?