

# NAACP – Albion College Policing Study

2020-2021

*"The problems are deeper than  
our community  
but the size of our community  
gives us a unique opportunity  
for real sustainable change."*

- Community Respondent

*"I would like [ADPS] to be  
known as a service that is truly  
here to help the community,  
not just monitor us."*

- Community Respondent



*This study was conducted by Dr. Lynn Verduzco-Baker (PI), Dr. Jessica Kane and the students in Albion College's Fall 2020 Qualitative Social Research course. Kalli Allen assisted with data analysis and writing the report. This project was funded by the Gerstacker Grant and the Albion NAACP. Our advising partners with the Albion NAACP include Robert Dunklin, Mae Ola Dunklin and Linda Kolmodin.*

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# Executive Summary

- Respondents overall displayed some empathy for the complexities of policing work and Albion Department of Public Safety (ADPS). Many respondents stated they believe ADPS officers are doing the best they can.
- Respondents expressed a belief that ADPS doesn't appropriately investigate or respond to some crimes. This concern stops some from reporting crimes or filing complaints about the handling of their cases. They suggest ADPS find more ways to communicate progress in investigations.
- Respondents want officers to be part of the community in a real way. Many respondents report not knowing the names of many or any police officers other than Chief Kipp and believe the lack of familiarity between officers and community members leads to a variety of problems, including community members not trusting the officers and the officers being rude or more aggressive than necessary.
- Respondents (white people and people of color) feel ADPS officers police different areas of town differently on the basis of race and social class and are not adequately trained to de-escalate situations or help people having mental health crises.

Based on community members' feedback, the research team  
***Recommends ADPS research and implement best practices for:***

1. Increasing accountability to the Albion community through transparency and communication. Community members want more **transparency, communication and accountability** of ADPS.
2. Increasing the **racial/ethnic diversity of the police force** through improved recruiting and hiring practices.
3. Carefully **screening recruits** for implicit bias and other characteristics that might impact their ability to connect to and fairly police the Albion community.
4. **Required and ongoing anti-racism and anti-bias training** for all officers and staff. This should include consideration of social class bias.
5. Increasing **capacity and resources for responding to those experiencing a mental health crisis** or otherwise not cognitively able to understand or respond to officers' requests.
6. Building **community-oriented policing practices** through increased meaningful and frequent informal interpersonal contact with Albion Community members.

*Please see more detailed explanation of these findings and recommendations below.*

# Overview of Study & Respondents\*

## This Study

In summer 2020, Dr. Verduzco-Baker, Associate Professor of Sociology at Albion College, began working with members of the Albion Chapter of the NAACP to design a qualitative study to investigate Albion community members' experiences with and attitudes about the Albion Department of Public Safety. The data collection included two stages:

First, after designing the study in collaboration with NAACP partners, Dr. Verduzco-Baker worked with the students in her Qualitative Research course and Dr. Jessica Kane (Associate Director of Community-Engaged Learning at Albion College) to conduct 22 qualitative interviews. Students in this course completed a preliminary analysis of the interview data.

Second, in order to get information from more community members, Dr. Verduzco-Baker and Dr. Kane created an online questionnaire based upon the interview guide. This online questionnaire ran from late December 2020 through mid-February 2021 and received 53 responses.

Dr. Verduzco-Baker; Dr. Kane; and Ms. Kalli Onai (Albion College sociology/ethnic studies student and paid research assistant) analyzed the interview and questionnaire data and wrote the following report.

*Note: This is a qualitative study designed to collect and analyze the experiences, feelings and opinions of a range of community members. It is not a random or representative sample nor a statistical analysis.*

## Who Talked to Us

There are 75 total respondents: 53 responded to an online questionnaire and 22 Albion residents participated in interviews. It is possible some people participated in an interview *and* responded to the questionnaire, so the total number may be an overcount.

- Most of the respondents, 63%, are white and 29% are people of color (POC), most of whom identify as Black.
- 61% of the respondents are women.
- The largest age group is over 50 years old, 44%, while 16% are in their 40s, almost 11% in their 30s and 29% are 18-29 years old.
- Respondents live across the city with precinct 3, 5 and 6 the most represented.

\* Please see the **Appendix** at the end of this document for more information about the sample and research methods.

# Overview of Community Attitudes Towards ADPS

## Community Members Have Mixed Feelings About ADPS

Respondents overall displayed some empathy toward the complexities of policing work and Albion Department of Public Safety (ADPS). Even respondents who described a negative experience with ADPS often (though not always) tended to characterize their feelings towards ADPS as “mixed” and discussed the larger issues at play that influence how ADPS is perceived and operates.

### Experiences with Police

In the online *questionnaire*, we asked “How would you describe your experiences with police?” and gave three answer choices. Almost all respondents selected “Positive or good” or “Mixed (both good and bad)” to describe their experience with police.

- 45% of respondents selected “Positive or good” to describe their experience with police
- 49% selected “Mixed (both good and bad)”
- 6% selected “Negative or bad”

Despite having mostly positive or mixed experiences with ADPS officers, a significant number of respondents expressed negative attitudes about policing in Albion. These attitudes don’t necessarily arise out of direct involvement with ADPS, but come from beliefs community members developed while living in Albion, hearing local news and seeing police officers in the city and in their neighborhoods.

### Attitudes toward Police Officers and ADPS

In order to understand their overall attitudes towards the police, the researchers coded both the *interview* and *questionnaire* responses. We found more people expressed positive or mostly positive attitudes about ADPS but a significant amount of people expressed negative or mostly negative attitudes.

- 47% of respondents expressed positive or mostly positive attitudes towards ADPS
- 37% expressed negative or mostly negative attitudes toward ADPS
- The remaining 16% appeared to feel neutral toward ADPS

***Who was more likely to have a positive or mostly positive attitude toward ADPS?***

- A majority of **white** respondents, 55%, expressed positive or mostly positive attitudes toward ADPS
  - 36% of people of color expressed positive or mostly positive attitudes toward ADPS
- A majority of respondents living in **precincts 1, 3 and 6** expressed positive or mostly positive attitudes toward ADPS
- A majority of respondents **over 50 years old**, 63.4%, expressed positive or mostly positive attitudes toward ADPS

***Who was more likely to have a negative or mostly negative attitude toward ADPS?***

- 50% of **people of color** expressed negative or mostly negative attitudes toward ADPS
- A majority of those living in **precincts 2, 4 and 5** expressed negative or mostly negative attitudes
- Those **under 50 years old** were more likely to express negative or mostly negative attitudes
- **Men** were *slightly* more likely to express negative or mostly negative attitudes

# Findings

## *Positive Attitudes & Experiences*

- Many respondents stated they believe ADPS officers are doing the best they can given the resources they have.
- Some specific positive incidences described by respondents included:
  - Officers being helpful when someone was having a health emergency or car trouble,
  - Officers responding quickly and
  - Officers giving people a warning rather than a ticket or fine for small infractions.
- Although a few respondents were critical of Chief Kipp, most of those who mentioned him said they believed he was doing a good job and is trying to be responsive to the community.

*"I have much respect for the APS. I feel that they do their job to the best of their knowledge."*

*"I have had a couple of instances of traffic violations that I found to be, um, all the officers to be very helpful and accommodating to whatever situation I was in at the time."*

*"... we've got some officers here that care about the people. My grandson has a...problem, and they were instrumental in helping him get help."*

*"I do recall a time in which I've locked my keys [in my car and] Albion public safety came in ... and unlocked my door so that I could retrieve my keys. That [had] a positive effect on me and an impact on me when it comes down to public safety. Because they were able to come really quickly, and were able to sort of alleviate my concerns of not being able to drive my vehicle."*

*"last summer and summer before we had, like, hundred degrees, it was just horrible. And somebody had taken a picture because they went to one of the subdivisions and opened up a fire hydrant. And the kids were playing in the water and the police were there because they had opened it for them to be able to play, which is kind of nice. So I think they try really hard to show the kids and the parents and people in this town that they do care ...they're going to do their job that they do genuinely care about you as well as a person."*

# Findings

## Community Concerns

### Unfair or Inadequate Policing

- Many respondents (both white people and people of color) feel ADPS officers police different areas of town differently. Some point out that minority neighborhoods and people of color are policed more aggressively than white neighborhoods (including the Albion College area) and white people.
- Some respondents commented that ADPS presence in their neighborhood simply means a lot of tickets.
- Several respondents believe that bias, specifically racial bias and bias against low-income people of any race, leads some officers to treat community members badly.
- Some believe police target poor neighborhoods of color for drug enforcement while ignoring drug crime in wealthier, whiter parts of Albion.
- A few respondents noted officers seem to protect or ignore certain people breaking the law because they were friends with or otherwise knew that person.
- Respondents expressed concern about officers not being adequately trained in how to de-escalate situations and instead responding with unnecessary and unhelpful aggressive behavior
- Respondents are concerned with the police's ability to appropriately handle things like mental illness and mental health issues they encounter in the community.

*"Contradictory to its Name. Albion College Police or Downtown Police would be more appropriate until ticket quotas need to be met and they Patrol the Northwest Neighborhood and Sycamore Project Areas for "Suspicious Activity"."*

*"Response seems to depend on where the "disturbance" is happening. If it's W[est] of Superior it takes more than death to get action. East of superior, well apparently yelling at an officer is grounds for arrest."*

*I did see bias in some of the officers towards citizens, which I was uncomfortable with...certain officers seem to take a, I won't say a delight, but a special interest in harassing people and low income whites. They weren't as courteous to them as they were to other citizens of the city."*

*"... A person who has been sexually assaulted or abused should be confident that the perpetrator will be brought to justice if they go to ADPS for help, but instead, they know that APS is not a service to be trusted in this situation."*

*"I don't know what the hiring process is. My opinion is the hiring process, if it doesn't already, needs to, the hiring and onboarding of new officers needs to include appropriate training, to interact appropriately with all members of the community...And honestly, I know one and done doesn't work. And so there should be regular training around racial disparities, economic disparities, and other issues that are prevalent in Albion and elsewhere. So that the officers really understand the community that they're serving."*

# Findings

## Community Concerns

### Lack of Follow Up and Communication Regarding Incidents

- Respondents expressed concern or suspicion that ADPS doesn't appropriately investigate or respond to some crimes. They explain they don't know what actions police took after an incident and wonder if any investigation occurred.
  - Some mentioned unsolved publicized murders and sexual assaults, others talked about incidents they were involved in and about which they did not receive further communication from ADPS.
- A few respondents expressed a belief that ADPS did not properly investigate or respond to some crimes and saw racial bias in those decisions.
- Only a few respondents said they had reported grievances to Albion Public Safety; however, those that did were generally dissatisfied with the way the report was handled. Some cited they never received follow up to their complaints. Others reported that the follow up they did receive was inadequate for the issue they were reporting.
- Many respondents were reluctant to report mishandlings of their cases to Albion Public Safety. Several cited that they feared retaliation, or being made a target, if they came forward. Some also cited that they didn't think anything would come of reporting their incident.

*"so often crimes happen here in this community and they never get resolved."*

*And then there's the the widely known issue with [the thirteen-year-old] that happened a little over almost two years ago. And I don't feel like it's been properly addressed. And the community certainly doesn't know even how it's really been addressed, as far as I'm concerned."*

*"There was a murder last year in 2020 and ADPS has not informed the community of any progress in finding the shooters. It will be a year from that time very soon."*

*"My friend has filed a report, but officials didn't seem interested in continuing with it, until they were pressed with legal action."*

Question: If you thought about filing a complaint but decided not to, please explain why you chose not to file the complaint here.

Some of the answers:

*"Nothing would have happened, but made a target"*

*"Assumed it wouldn't be listened to"*

*"Because I don't need to be harassed even more."*

*"I don't know how."*

*"Retaliation"*

# Findings

## *Community Concerns*

### Lack of Relationships/Connection

- Those who had personal relationships (through their work, community involvement or social lives) reported overwhelmingly more positive experiences with and attitudes about ADPS.
- Respondents believe ADPS officers should be a part of the community and not just enforcement. They want officers to be a real part of the community.
- Respondents mentioned they no longer know the officers by name, nor do they have enough opportunities to have casual, informal interactions with them. Some respondents noted the only officer whose name they know is Chief Kipp.
- Respondents also mentioned the importance of children and young people having the opportunity to get to know ADPS officers in non-enforcement contexts to help them develop trust and respect.
- Rudeness from officers during both official and non-official interactions was mentioned as a concern.
- Respondents identified this lack of relationship as a problem because it means the first time most people encounter an officer is when a crime or other problem occurs. This lack of relationship or acquaintance increases the chances the community member will not trust or respect the officer and/or the officer will not trust or respect the community member.
- Respondents are concerned the lack of community connection with ADPS officers makes it harder for community members to call on them when they are in need and trust the officers will respond appropriately.
- Some respondents who are long-time residents commented that ADPS officers used to have a particular “home” neighborhood and would get to know that neighborhood through a combination of time spent there and literally walking the beat, which no longer happens.

*“When the mask thing came into play, many Albion Policemen came into the store without a mask and when asked to wear one, they stated ‘I’m the police, I do what I want’...I lost respect for them.”*

*“The Police now aren’t as community oriented. You used to know them by name. Now, I can’t name but the chief. And the other officers? I have no idea of their names.”*

*“More community involvement in the schools and public events other than just policing. Get to know the residents and form relations that could help deter negative behavior and activities.”*

*“I would like to see them out of their vehicles and walking on the street [because] that forces them to interact with the community.”*

# Recommendations

The fact that respondents' experiences were rarely completely negative and the majority of respondents discussed at least something positive about ADPS officers shows ***there is an opportunity for growth and collaboration between ADPS and Albion residents***. Things are not as polarized as they may feel.

Based on community members' responses, the research team ***recommends ADPS research and implement best practices for:***

## **1. Increasing accountability to the Albion community through transparency and communication with the community.**

- Respondents strongly desire a greater line of communication between Albion Public Safety and the Albion community. They would like to be updated on cases as they are being investigated, even if the follow up given is that there has been no movement.
  - Minimally, it was suggested ADPS publicize case logs again as was done in prior years.
- Communicating progress or lack thereof would address some community members' belief that ADPS doesn't investigate or respond to some crimes. If confidence is increased in ADPS' ongoing efforts to solve crimes (even if the investigations are ultimately unsuccessful), more community members may be willing to report crimes or file complaints about the handling of their cases.
- Communication plans should carefully consider Albion's media context, i.e., the current dependence on digital and social media platforms.

## **2. Increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of the police force through improved recruiting and hiring practices. Institutionalized racism/bias in current hiring practices should be examined and addressed.**

- Both white respondents and respondents who are people of color want more diversity in ADPS - more officers of color and more women officers.
- Some noted they know it can be difficult to recruit and keep officers of color but believe ADPS needs to work harder to make this happen.
- It was suggested that more effort be put into hiring Albion residents of color because they would already have a connection to the community.

- 3. Carefully screening recruits for implicit bias and other characteristics that might impact their ability to connect to and fairly police the Albion community.**
  
- 4. Required and on-going anti-racism and anti-bias training for all officers and staff. This should include consideration of social class bias.**
  - Some community members identify patterns of certain people being treated more aggressively or rudely by police officers because of their race/ethnicity and/or social class.
  - One person suggested some of these trainings include members of the community so it can also be an opportunity for developing relationships and trust and understanding between officers and community members.
  - If officers are already engaging in this training, the respondents are not aware of it, which would indicate a lack of communication.
  
- 5. Increasing capacity and resources for responding to those experiencing a mental health crisis or otherwise not cognitively able to understand or respond to officers' requests. This should include training in de-escalation.**
  - Respondents would like to see alternative forms of assistance offered to those experiencing mental health crises or other problems. When these people come to the attention of police it is often because they and their families do not have access to resources they need to address those issues.
  - Some respondents argued for less aggressive policing—for police to learn how to de-escalate situations and to find resolutions for situations that address the problem without resorting to arrest/incarceration.
  
- 6. Building increased community-oriented policing practices through increased meaningful and frequent informal contact with Albion Community members.**
  - Respondents want more community engagement from the police - walking the beat, attending fun public events, being visible around town and living in Albion, or at least living nearby so relationships can be developed in informal (i.e., not official) interactions between officers and community members.

# Appendix

## Sample & Method

Respondents were recruited through announcements in Albion e-News (email based news service), Albion Recorder (weekly newspaper), Marshall Ad-Visor, Battle Creek Enquirer, NAACP members' Facebook pages and community organizations' newsletters.

1.5% of the adult population in the city of Albion\* participated in this study and the reported race of the respondents is very similar to the demographics of the city. The key to generalizing results from a sample of respondents is not the total number of participants, but rather the demographic characteristics of the participants. When the rates of various characteristics in a sample are similar to the rates of those characteristics found in the population as a whole, the sample can be used to make generalizations about the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the population in question.

As the data below demonstrates, our sample's racial/ethnic rates are very similar to the 2019 US Census's estimates for the city. The respondents, therefore, can be considered a representative sample of the city's adult population, and it is safe to assume the findings of this study accurately represent the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of Albion's adults within a small margin of error.

In other words, it is safe to assume the findings of this study accurately represent the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of Albion's adults.

*\* Based on 2019 census estimate for Albion, Michigan.*

*Adults living in Albion: 5,151*

*White population in Albion: 63%*

*Black population in Albion: 30.9%*

*Respondents in the study (all adults): 75*

*White respondents in the study: 63%*

*Black respondents in the study: 29%*

*The census estimated there were 6,151 total adults in Albion including Albion College students who don't otherwise live in the city. Here we've deducted 1,000 (conservative estimate) from the total to account for students who don't otherwise live in the city.*

At the same time, **this is primarily a qualitative study** and

*"it is important to remember that, first and foremost, unlike quantitative research, inquiry conducted in the qualitative tradition seeks to answer the question 'What?' as opposed to 'How often?'. Qualitative methods are designed to reveal what is going on by describing and interpreting phenomena; they do not attempt to measure how often an event or association occurs. Research conducted using qualitative methods is normally done with an intent to preserve the inherent complexities of human behaviour as opposed to assuming a reductive view of the subject in order to count and measure the occurrence of phenomena." (S. Agius, Cambridge University Press, Jan 2018).*

***Because we (the researchers and the NAACP) were most interested in understanding "what" Albion community members were experiencing/thinking about ADPS and not "how often" they experience/think something, qualitative research was an appropriate choice for this study.*** We did not deliberately try to draw a representative sample of Albion adult residents, but as the aforementioned data demonstrates, we received something very close to a representative sample.

Qualitative interviews and questionnaires are open ended and allow the respondents to go into more detail and to decide for themselves which aspect of the issue is most important to them. This allows the respondents to bring issues to the forefront that the researcher might not have been aware of.

The findings from a qualitative study are "deeper" in that they give respondents the opportunity to provide as much detail as they like and go in whatever directions with the topic they like. Qualitative researchers analyze this data to find patterns of opinions, experiences and ideas.

As a result, qualitative studies can uncover concerns within the community that community leaders and researchers weren't aware of or didn't consider a priority.

***The fact that these qualitative findings are drawn from a quantitatively representative sample of the population should only give more weight to the validity of the findings presented in this report.***

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

As mentioned in the beginning of this report, the data collection included two stages:

First, after designing the study in collaboration with NAACP partners, Dr. Verduzco-Baker trained and advised the students in her Qualitative Research course and Dr. Jessica Kane as they conducted 22 qualitative interviews.

Second, in order to get information from additional community members, Dr. Verduzco-Baker and Dr. Kane created an online questionnaire based upon the interview guide. This anonymous online questionnaire was open to anyone with the link from late December 2020 through mid-February 2021 and received 53 responses.

Students in the Qualitative Research course completed a preliminary analysis of the interview data in December 2020. Guided by grounded theory methods, students used Dedoose, data analysis software, to identify themes and patterns in the interview data.

Dr. Verduzco-Baker, Dr. Kane and Ms. Kalli Onai analyzed the combined interview and questionnaire data. Respondents' attitudes were categorized separately by Ms. Onai and Dr. Verduzco-Baker. They then compared their categorizations and reconciled any differences. In the case a categorization could not be clearly made, Dr. Kane would have made the final decision, though this was not ultimately necessary. Qualitative findings were identified using grounded theory methods and were agreed upon by all three researchers.