

Community Perspectives on Policing



A summary of a study conducted by East Hawai'i Cultural Center and University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Context

In the mid-1900s, the building that East Hawai'i Cultural Center (EHCC) currently inhabits housed the Hawai'i Police Department (HPD). With this rich history, EHCC was interested in understanding the impacts of policing in East Hawai'i, as well as how the local community feels towards law enforcement. So, EHCC contacted University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo) faculty to initiate a study on this topic.

Why Does This Matter?

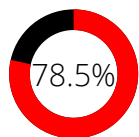
Rooted in EHCC's belief in acknowledging difficult untold stories from the past, this project recognizes and shares diverse experiences to foster understanding and a sense of justice. By utilizing EHCC's rich history, it seeks to explore community-police relations and guide future directions for the East Hawai'i community.

Study Methods

UH Hilo criminology students created and carried out interview-surveys with 250 residents in East Hawai'i. These community members were diverse: they ranged from 18-95 years old, and were of varying economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. To ensure well-rounded data, law enforcement personnel were also included.

Key Findings

- Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) reported feeling safe or very safe while out in the East Hawai'i community alone during the day. This sense of safety dropped to roughly one-third (36%) while out alone at night.
 - Women generally felt less safe than men while alone at all times of day.
- Roughly half of surveyed individuals (49%) do not believe that the Hawai'i Police Department treats all people fairly.
 - Women (55%) are more likely than men (43%) to believe that HPD treats people unfairly.
- Fewer than one in three people (28%) believe that the Hawai'i Police Department makes efforts to develop relationships with the community. Thus, a common recommendation for HPD was to do more community engagement and develop connections.
- Roughly half of respondents (48%) report being satisfied or very satisfied with police services in East Hawai'i.
- Despite feelings of unfairness or lack of connection, most (78.5%) who interacted with the police in the past five years found their interaction to be fair and equitable, and their personal stories of police were generally positive. This hints at the possible impacts of negative national media attention and local anecdotes on peoples' perceptions.

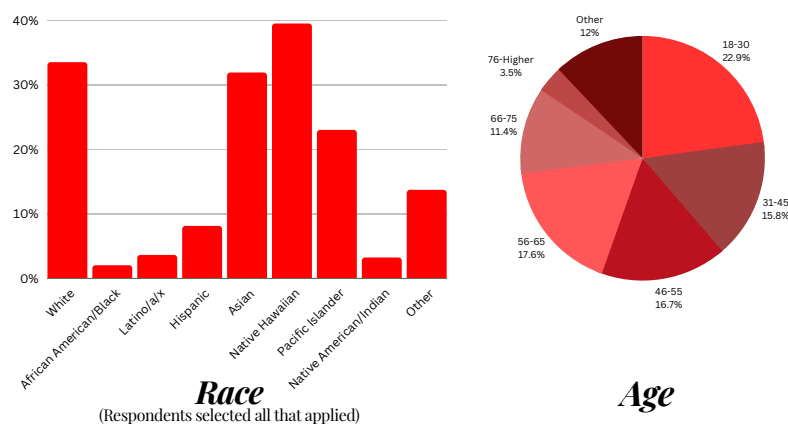


For more information, scan here or visit:

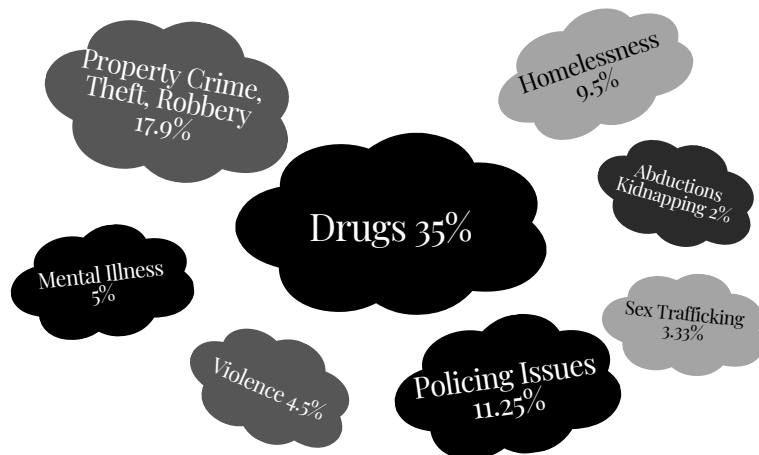
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Demographics of Survey Respondents



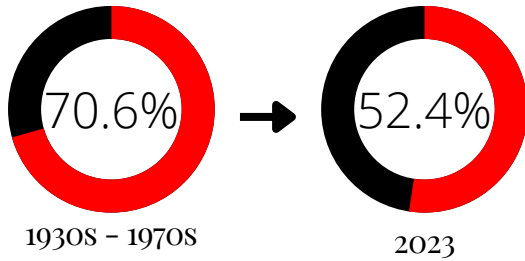
Greatest Safety Issues According to East Hawai'i Community Members



Additional Key Findings

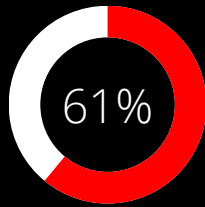
Confidence that police officers act in the best interests of the public has decreased over time.

Percentage of respondents who reported that they have confidence or great confidence that police officers act in the best interests of the public in East Hawai'i.



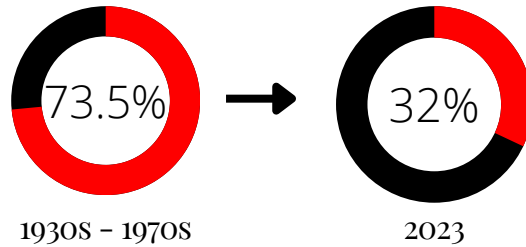
When asked to describe how police generally behave in East Hawai'i, over half (56%) stated that the Hawai'i Police Department is "polite," "friendly," and "professional." However, over one-fifth (21%) describe HPD in negative terms, such as "rude," "authoritarian," and "corrupt."

Most people feel there are not enough police officers in the East Hawai'i region.



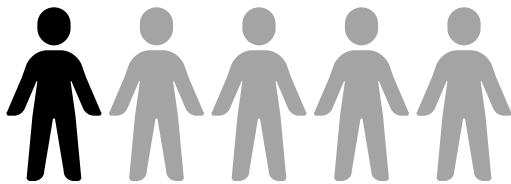
Percentage of respondents who reported that HPD does not have enough police officers in East Hawai'i.

Perceptions that HPD has a positive relationship with the community has decreased over time.



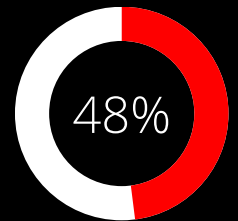
Only one out of three respondents (32%) feel that the Hawai'i Police Department currently has a positive relationship with the community. This is significantly lower than past perceptions. When recollecting about the relationship between the police and the community between 1930 and 1970, 73% of respondents described it as positive.

1 out of 5 individuals report being impacted by incarceration directly or within their family.



This is significantly lower than the national rate of one in two adults (50%) being impacted by incarceration, a statistic found by researchers at Cornell University and FWD.us in 2018.

Roughly half of respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied with police services in East Hawai'i.



Community Desired Improvements

Faster response times. In all of my experiences with them, they have always taken a long time to come.

[HPD needs] better training, learn to be more approachable, more friendly, less bias... and empathetic.

If they had more resources to deal with people struggling with mental health or drug addiction, that would be great.

...We often hear about crimes in Hilo, but don't hear about how the police handled it.

...More stations in different places. Definitely more officers would be an improvement.

[Become] involved more with the community... [which will] humanize cops [as] part of our community.

Offering a program/class to the general public on the training police go through and having the public experience actual scenarios on decision making.

Have more presence in the community. Not just at events, but by patrolling around town and being in more areas. Getting out of their car and walking around, for people to see them and feel more safe.

...They need more education on broken, dysfunctional families, so that they can deal more with [their] heart [on] how to handle [situations] with [the] understanding that not everyone is a criminal, some people are just broken or traumatized.

The police department could improve by hiring and training problem solvers to be on call with a responding officer to deescalate non-violent situations.