

Rhode



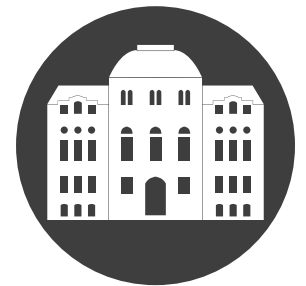
Island



Public



Spaces



Survey



Rhode Island Public Spaces Survey Executive Summary

In November of 2015 Providence College students conducted a public spaces survey of 100 pedestrians in the Kennedy Plaza/Burnside Park areas of downtown Providence. Questions asked whether the respondent had been cited or arrested for a variety of activities including sleeping, sitting, laying down, asking for money, sleeping in a car, and smoking. Other questions asked about whether police had asked the respondent to move on, for identification, or searched their possessions without their permission. After these questions were asked, respondents were also asked if they had a permanent place to live, if they had ever been homeless, and to report demographic information such as age, race/ethnicity, veteran status, gender, and sexual orientation.

The results were striking. Just over half (52%) of those surveyed were homeless or formerly homeless; but **95% of the citations, (21 of 22) and 94% of the arrests (31 of 33), were experienced by homeless and formerly homeless persons.** Answers to other questions on the survey such as whether law enforcement had asked them to “move on” or to leave a particular area; how often they were asked for identification; and how often law enforcement searched their belongings without their permission show the same pattern of disproportionate harassment of homeless and formerly homeless persons by police. Other potential reasons for such targeting such as race, ethnicity, or age were not found to be relevant.

Rhode Island Public Spaces Survey Results

On November 14th and November 21st of 2015 approximately a dozen Providence College students conducted a public spaces survey in the Kennedy Plaza/Burnside Park areas of downtown Providence. They introduced themselves to every third person they encountered in these areas. Questions asked whether the respondent had been cited or arrested for a variety of activities including:

- Sleeping
- Receiving free food
- Having a pet
- Sitting
- Laying down
- Loitering
- Jaywalking
- Asking for money
- Sleeping in a car
- Appearing homeless
- Smoking
- Other (respondents were asked to specify)

Other questions asked whether law enforcement had asked them to “move on” or to leave a particular area; how often law enforcement threatened to have them arrested if they did not leave a particular area; how often they were asked for identification; and how often law enforcement searched their belongings without their permission.

Respondents were also asked if they had a permanent place to live, if they had ever been homeless, and to report demographic information such as age, race/ethnicity, veteran status, gender, and sexual orientation.

RESULTS

100 pedestrians were surveyed in November of 2015. 52 reported that they were homeless or formerly homeless. 48 had never been homeless.

Housing status was the one statistically significant factor influencing the likelihood that a person was cited or arrested for these behaviors. Other characteristics that might have been expected to be predictive of being cited or arrested such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age or other demographic characteristics were not relevant.

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95% of the citations, (21 of 22) and 94% of the arrests (31 of 33), were experienced by homeless and formerly homeless persons. 13 (59%) of the total citations and 14 (42%) of the total arrests were currently homeless persons. In fact, the two arrests and one citation to "Never Homeless" persons were in the "Other" categories, for skateboarding, biking, and stealing money from a car. Answers to four other question on the survey show the same pattern of harassment of homeless and formerly homeless persons by police.

Number of recorded reasons for arrest or citation

	# of Citations	# of Arrests
Loitering	3	9
Asking for money	0	5
Smoking	2	4
Sitting	3	3
Sleeping	2	2
Laying down	2	2
Appearing homeless	1	2
Receiving free food	2	0
Sleeping in car	2	0
Jaywalking	1	0
Having a pet	1	0
Other reason	3	6
Total	22	33

Frequency of Police Harassment

About how often in the past year has law enforcement asked you to "move on," or leave a particular area?

	Homeless or Formerly Homeless	Never Homeless
Daily or more	21%	4%
Weekly	12%	4%
Monthly	10%	4%
Once or twice	17%	10%
Never	40%	77%

About how often in the past year has law enforcement threatened to have you arrested if you don't leave a particular area?

	Homeless or Formerly Homeless	Never Homeless
Daily or more	8%	0%
Weekly	8%	0%
Monthly	13%	2%
Once or twice	8%	6%
Never	63%	92%

About how often in the past year has law enforcement asked you for identification?

	Homeless or Formerly Homeless	Never Homeless
Daily or more	6%	2%
Weekly	4%	2%
Monthly	27%	10%
Once or twice	23%	15%
Never	40%	71%

About how often in the past year has law enforcement searched your belongings without your permission?

	Homeless or Formerly Homeless	Never Homeless
Daily or more	2%	0%
Weekly	4%	2%
Monthly	11%	2%
Once or twice	14%	2%
Never	69%	94%