

# University of the District of Columbia

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a new opportunity"*

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **UDC's Institute on Public Safety & Justice Analyzes Motor Vehicle Thefts in the District of Columbia**

*Washington, D.C.* – The Institute for Public Safety and Justice at the University of the District of Columbia recently completed the first phase of a comprehensive analysis of motor vehicle theft in the District of Columbia. This is a pervasive crime, constituting a major quality of life issue in our communities that is often overlooked amidst a background of other more publicized offenses. A fact sheet summarized the findings of this analysis follows this release.

Dr. Angelyn Flowers, a professor of Criminal Justice in the Department of Urban Affairs, Social Sciences, and Social Work at UDC and the author of the report, observes that “the conditions contributing to the escalating incidents of stolen cars when unchecked form the breeding ground for other more serious crimes. Strengthening neighborhoods enables communities to better resist crime and its effects.” Future reports will analyze neighborhood asset and deficit mapping to facilitate an analysis of the dynamics of particular neighborhoods to support intervention and prevention strategies.

In an analysis of more than 48,000 motor vehicle thefts occurring in the District of Columbia over a 79-month period, characteristics of neighborhoods with high numbers of motor vehicle thefts as compared to those neighborhoods with low numbers have been preliminarily identified.

**Population** - Neighborhoods with high numbers of motor vehicle thefts were more likely to have high percentages of:

- Juveniles
- An adult population lacking either a high school diploma or G.E.D.
- Low participation in the workforce, and high unemployment among those adults who are participating

**Households** - Neighborhoods with high numbers of motor vehicle theft hold households that were primarily:

- Occupied by unrelated by blood or marriage
- Family households are more likely to be single-parent households
- Household income is below the poverty level (A family of 4 with an annual household income under \$19,350 would be considered to be living in poverty under the 2005 poverty guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

**Housing Stock** - Neighborhoods with high numbers of motor vehicle thefts were more likely to have a housing stock that is:

- Renter rather than owner occupied
- Consists of large multi-unit buildings
- Has a high vacancy rate

The Institute for Public Safety & Justice is the research, training, and evaluation arm of the Administration of Justice Program at the University of the District of Columbia. It is under the direction of Dr. Flowers and Dr. Sylvia I.B. Hill, also a professor of Criminal Justice.

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The University of the District of Columbia is the fully-accredited sole public source for accessible, inclusive, affordable, and comprehensive public higher education in the District of Columbia and provides additional life-long learning opportunities. The University delivers quality instruction and uses student-centered approaches to empower and benefit both individuals and its local communities. The University, an urban land grant institution, is a very diverse community, a gateway to the world, and a significant investment engine for the District of Columbia. The University is located at 4200 Connecticut Ave, NW Washington, and is conveniently located at the Van Ness/UDC stop on the Red Line of Metro. For more information on other University activities, contact Mike Andrews, Senior Director for Communications and University Spokesperson at (202) 274-5685 or visit the University's web site at [www.udc.edu](http://www.udc.edu).

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# MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

in the

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY & JUSTICE  
UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

*Translating Research into Policy, Translating Policy into Practice*

By

Angelyn Spaulding Flowers, JD, PhD

### Introduction

Motor vehicle theft is endemic in the District of Columbia. Between 1960 and 2003 the number of motor vehicle thefts increased fourfold from 2,003 to 9,147. This increase occurred despite the fact that in this same time-period, the city lost 210,433 residents, almost one-third of its population. Since 1977 motor vehicle thefts have also increased as a percentage of all serious crimes.

48,481 motor vehicle thefts were reported to the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department between January 1, 1998 and July 26, 2004. These thefts occurred at 8,563 different locations throughout the city.

The District of Columbia witnessed an increase in motor vehicle thefts while nationwide these same offenses were decreasing. The overarching question is to what factors this dual anomaly can be attributed? This *FACT SHEET* is derived from a longer Institute report, and is the first in a series of research reports examining motor vehicle theft in the District of Columbia.

Motor Vehicle theft is a complex property crime. At one end of the spectrum motor vehicle theft can be considered a gateway crime. It is among the first crimes engaged in by those who, if undeterred may escalate to the commission of other more dangerous crimes. At the other extreme, motor vehicle theft has replaced drug smuggling as a major endeavor of organized crime.<sup>1</sup> Intertwined is the impact of motor

vehicle theft on communities. Motor vehicle theft is also a costly crime for the victims. The largest percentage of time missed from work by crime victims, is due to motor vehicle theft.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-two percent of motor vehicle theft victims must miss time from work. The next closest is robbery, which results in work absences of 12%.

### When Motor Vehicle Thefts Occur

*Month of the Year:* More motor vehicle thefts occurred in November 2002 than during any other month in this 79-month period with 908 motor vehicle thefts reported to police. September 2000 had the lowest number of motor vehicle thefts during this same time period with 429 incidents reported. With the exception of 1999 and 2001 when October had the highest number of motor vehicle thefts, there was no discernable pattern in the month when motor vehicle thefts occurred over this seven-year period.

*Day of the Week:* More motor vehicle thefts occurred on Saturday, than on any other day of the week, with the exception of 1998. The day of the week most likely to have the second highest number of motor vehicle thefts was Sunday.

*Time of Day:* The sequential nature of the two highest days suggests a single overnight pattern coupling the late night period of one day with the early morning period of another day. On a daily basis, approximately 44% of all motor vehicle thefts were reported to MPD between 7:00 pm and 11:00 pm. This period represents the peak of a slope beginning during the 2:00 pm hour and increased steadily, followed by a precipitous drop-off between midnight and 4:00 am. Two minor peaks follow this decline, first at 8:00 am and again at noon.

**Table 1**  
**Motor Vehicle Theft in the District of Columbia**

Year	Number
1998	6,691
1999	6,400
2000	6,124
2001	7,077
2002	8,142
2003	9,147
2004*	4,900

\* Seven months only

<sup>2</sup> Schmallegger, Frank. (2006). *Criminology Today*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, Inc.

<sup>1</sup> National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB). *Vehicle Theft*. <http://www.nicb.org/publications/NICBthefteng.pdf> ( May 26, 2006).