

## It takes more than translating a flier: Considerations in serving immigrants as victims of crime in a large Midwestern city

Kelly A. Yotebieng<sup>Y</sup>  
Kenneth J. Steinman<sup>±</sup>  
Lauren Phelps<sup>¥</sup>  
Samantha Schoeppner<sup>µ</sup>  
Deanna L. Wilkinson<sup>±</sup>

### Abstract

*Recent public discourse on the possible threats posed by immigrant populations as potential perpetrators of crime seems to ignore the accumulating scholarly literature that shows that immigrants have a documented crime reducing effect on the general population in the United States. Yet, immigrants themselves are placed at heightened risk for a wide variety of victimization experiences. Their needs as victims of crime have rarely been studied. This study aims to partially fill that void by investigating how service providers funded to assist victims of crime work with and attempt to meet the needs of immigrants, including large numbers of refugees, in one large Midwest city. The state's Attorney General's office supported a needs assessment that included a focus on the needs of victims from immigrant (and other) underserved populations. We conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with key informants who had varying degrees of expertise serving crime victims from immigrant communities across the state. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, coded and analyzed using a collaborative, team-based approach. Our analysis describes the challenges faced by service providers serving immigrant victims and recommends directions for future research and policy.*

**Keywords:** *Immigrant; refugee; victims; trauma; crime.*

### Introduction

There is a critical need to examine the experiences, needs, and gaps of agencies that are on the front lines serving immigrants who experience criminal victimization in the United States. The purpose of this study is to examine the struggles that service-providing agencies face in serving the needs of victims of crime in a large Midwestern city, and the important

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<sup>Y</sup> Kelly A. Yotebieng, MPH, Department of Anthropology and College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, 4046 Smith Laboratory, 174 W. 18th Avenue, Columbus OH 43210, USA. E-mail: Yotebieng.3@osu.edu.

<sup>±</sup> Kenneth J. Steinman, PhD, MPH, College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, 105 Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus OH, 43210, USA.

<sup>¥</sup> Lauren Phelps, MPA, Center for Health Outcomes, Policy and Evaluation Studies, College of Public Health, The Ohio State University, 250 Cunz Hall | 1841 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43210, USA.

<sup>µ</sup> Samantha Schoeppner, BA, College of Education and Human Ecology and College of Social Work, The Ohio State University, Stillman Hall, 1947 College Road, Columbus OH, 43210, USA.

<sup>±</sup> Deanna L. Wilkinson, PhD, College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, 105 Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus OH, 43210, USA.

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factors that hinder the availability and effectiveness of victims' services. This study uses data from in-depth interviews of employees of two broad categories of victims' service providing agencies: those that provide victims' services to the general population, and immigrant service providing agencies who provide a broad array of services to immigrants that may include support for immigrant victims of crime. These interviews shed light on the struggles that these two categories of service-providing agencies face while simultaneously underlining some of the perceived, often unmet, needs of immigrant victims of crime in the United States. We suggest that exploring immigrant victimization offers a topic of study to better understand the links between immigration and crime. Furthermore, it can provide the impetus for a more productive conversation about immigration and crime in society.

Over the past few years, immigrants are increasingly portrayed as perpetrators of crime. In the United States, for example, the Federal government recently created an office of "Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement" (VOICE) to help victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants (Nixon & Robbin, 2017). Mainstream media also tends to make generalized associations between increased migration and surges in crime among the general population (Sampson, 2008; Skardhamar et al., 2014). Such developments reflect a global environment of fear, distrust, xenophobia, and corresponding more stringent immigration policies that have often make it harder for immigrants to access legal means to live and work in their host countries.

The research literature offers little evidence to corroborate claims that crime rates increase as a result of immigration. On the contrary, ample evidence from the United States and Europe suggests increases in immigration are associated with reductions in overall crime (Bell & Machin, 2013; Lauritsen, 2001; Martinez et al., 2010; Nunziata, 2015; Zatz, 2012). Moreover, whatever crime immigrants do perpetrate often involves other immigrants as victims (e.g. domestic violence), further refuting that immigration increases crime in the general population (Lee, Martinez & Rodriguez, 2001).

### **Immigrants as Victims of Crime**

Understanding the risk factors and experiences of immigrants as victims of crime through the lens of those providing services to them is a useful topic of study because victimization reflects many aspects of the immigrant experience, including trauma and violence. Moreover, in the United States, funding through the Victims of Crime Act has been used to support



immigrant crime victims (Conyers, 2007). Yet information on immigrant victims of crime is not readily available and thus difficult to assess. In the United States, researchers lack quality data on crimes committed against immigrants, in part because of measurement issues stemming from the fact that criminal justice surveillance data (e.g. NCVS, NIBRS) does not capture the immigration status of victims (Davis & Erez, 1989; Shively et al., 2014). This lack of quality data hampers the ability to build accurate projections or programs to service victims' needs (Conyers, 2007; Shively et al., 2014).

Even though we do not know with certainty the actual victimization rates among immigrant populations, the limited evidence that exists suggests that immigrants, particularly those with lower socio-economic status, may experience domestic violence, sexual assault, and gang violence at higher rates than other demographic groups in the United States (Davis & Erez, 1998; Pitts, 2014; Wu & Altheimer, 2013; Zatz, 2012). Others have suggested that immigrants can be seen as attractive targets for crime because of perceptions that immigrants may be more likely to carry a lot of cash on them; which can make them more susceptible to robbery and burglary (Biehl & Kersch, 2013; Pitts, 2014).

Research on barriers to providing victims' services to immigrants is scant. What literature does exist tends to focus on specific populations (e.g., Latina and South Asian women, refugees, Central American immigrants, and Muslims) and specific types of crime (e.g., domestic violence, hate crimes) in the U.S. and Europe. Nonetheless much of this research consistently suggests that language barriers; cultural differences between concepts of justice and what is considered a crime; and a lack of understanding of the criminal justice system, including where to go in order to report a crime, as among the reasons why immigrant victims are often inadequately served by the criminal justice system and service providing agencies (Biehl & Kersh, 2013; Sabina et al., 2013; Shively et al., 2014). Language barriers and interpretation services can be particularly challenging for service providing agencies because the close-knit nature of some immigrant communities may make interpretation embarrassing or uncomfortable to the victim. The victim of crime may know the interpreter, causing shame and confidentiality concerns (Shively et al., 2014). Furthermore, it has been suggested that previous experience in their original countries or in the United States with corrupt, and what they perceive to be ineffective police may limit their willingness to seek help from law enforcement and the range of social service providing agencies (Cantor & Johnson, 2016; Davis & Erez, 1998; Lakhani, 2014). Not only does the failure to report crime demonstrate that immigrants may be receiving inadequate support when they are victims of crimes, it also provides the



perpetrators with a high level of impunity, as they remain unpunished for the crimes they committed (Burman & Chantler, 2005; Davis & Erez, 1998).

Service providing agencies that serve victims of crime face key challenges related to the above. The blanket term “immigrants” captures enormous linguistic, cultural, economic, and legal status diversity (Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Lakhani, 2014). Each of these comes with unique needs and barriers that a population faces when accessing services when they have become a victim of crime. It may be hard for one single agency to be able to understand all of the various nuances associated with this diversity (Luo & Bouffard, 2016; Pitts, 2014; Shively et al., 2014; Zatz, 2012).

While there are several national initiatives that aim to support immigrants who have been victims of crime, budget cuts often mean that services to immigrant populations within these programs are more likely to be scaled down or phased out completely (Ewing, 2015; Herman, 2003; Khashu, 2008). Examples of these programs include the Violence Against Women Act of 2006 (VAWA) to support victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and human trafficking without regard to immigration status (Blitzer, 2017; Burman & Chantler, 2005; Schladen, 2016; Vivero et al., 2013). Budget cuts also cut into the other necessary temporary services to address their structural needs that resulted from being the victim of domestic violence, including support for housing, support for school fees for their children, medical care, and transportation support (Vivero et al., 2013).

### **Research setting**

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2016), the state in which the targeted Midwestern city is located was home to 503,911 foreign born individuals in 2015. It is estimated that about 49.7% of these immigrants are citizens, and most have valid visas or other immigration documents (American Immigration Council, 2015; Biehl & Kersh, 2013). Increasing numbers of immigrants have relocated to this large Midwestern city, in recent years, with 85% of the area’s growth since the 1990s attributed to immigration (citation blinded). The target city is estimated to house 25% of the state’s immigrant population (citation blinded). The large Midwestern city which is the site of this study is a primary and secondary refugee resettlement site, and home to populations from a wide range of countries including Somalia, Bhutan, Nepal, Iraq, Syria, and certain sub-Saharan African countries (American Immigration Council, 2015; citation blinded).

Because of the changing demographics in the targeted metropolitan area, social service agencies across the city serving crime victims are



increasingly serving immigrant populations (Erez, 2002: 279; citation blinded). A 2016 state Family Violence Needs Assessment reported that many victim service providers felt ill-equipped to meet the needs of immigrant populations, with particular challenges including cultural competency and working with interpreters (citation blinded).

## **Methods**

### **Study Design and Population**

The protocol for the study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Ohio State University. Our research team conducted a needs assessment for the state's Attorney General's Office, Crime Victims Services section in order to understand the needs of the state's crime victims and identify which of those needs the Crime Victims Service section is best positioned to address through funding for agencies through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA is a federal program administered by each US state that since 1985 has provided significant funding to organizations that serve victims of crime.

In this paper, we focus on the needs of victims of crime from foreign-born populations (persons who were born outside of the U.S.) who are now residing in the large Midwestern city that is the focus of this analysis- a metropolitan area of 1.4 million residents. Over the course of 21 key-informant interviews, we interviewed 24 professionals who serve immigrant and victims of crime populations to talk about the broad needs, gaps, and recommended solutions. While the agencies that we interviewed serve a wide variety of immigrants, the focus was mainly on refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, and Bhutan as well as immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala who were primarily working in the agricultural and construction sectors.

The larger project involved multiple components. This included in-depth literature reviews, key informant interviews, 359 completed online surveys, an analysis of program data about VOCA grantees, asset mapping of other victim service providers across the state, and analysis of crime data from the state. The data from this paper came from the 21 semi-structured interviews with 24 key informants.

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

We spoke with 8 agencies who serve only immigrants (referred to in this paper as immigrant service providing agencies), as well as 13 agencies who serve victims of specific types of crime (referred to in this paper as general



victims service providing agencies) that spoke of their challenges in effectively serving immigrant victims of crime. The immigrant service providing agencies provided a wide-range of services to immigrants, with the crime victims services being either a small program within their agency, or informal services that were provided on an *ad hoc* basis. The general victims' service providing agencies were providing services to any population that came in that was a victim of crime. Some of these agencies were specialized (i.e. focusing on domestic violence, or on persons with disabilities who were victims of crime) while others provided services to any type of crime victim.

We used a purposive sampling approach to identify these agencies (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In collaboration with staff from the Crime Victims Services section, we generated a list of potential key informants who regularly work with crime victims in local immigrant communities. From there, we reached out to 27 service providing agencies. Two of the agencies replied that they did not think they would be best places to answer these questions and referred us to other people, and 4 additional agencies never responded. All other agencies who responded (21) agreed to participate in the interview. Three of the agencies had two persons present during the interviews, hence the reason why we had 24 participants with 21 interviews.

As such, 7 participants were service providers from agencies that predominantly serve immigrants, most of whom were from the same countries of origin as the communities they served and spoke fluent English as well as their languages of origin. The additional 17 participants were service providers from agencies that served the general population, but discussed some of the specific challenges in serving immigrant and refugee communities in the target city. All participants were either social workers who were in regular direct contact with victims, or the person who oversaw the victims services programs at the agency they worked for. Nearly all agencies focused on communities in the target city –a city with far more refugees and foreign-born residents than anywhere else in the state.

Our small sample size and qualitative design limits the generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, we only spoke with service providers in the context of this research. However, we posit that this still lends important insight into the needs, including potential barriers and solutions to serving immigrant victims of crime.



### **Data Collection**

These interviews were conducted in-person (18 interviews) or by telephone (3 interviews), each of which lasted 40 -75 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English. One member from the research team led the interview while another took notes. The interview guide included open-ended questions that focused on perceived needs of crime victims, examples of how agencies were (and were not) successfully able to meet these needs, and recommendations for how resources for crime victims could be tailored and redirected to best support immigrant victims of crime. Sample questions include: Please tell me a little about your work and how it relates to immigrant victims of crime?; Pretend that I am an immigrant that was a victim of crime, what would I have to do in order to access support from your program?; Our project is specifically focused on people who are victims of a crime, especially sexual assault, family violence and human trafficking as well as surviving family members of a homicide victim. What do you see as the most important needs of immigrants who are crime victims?; What could be done to better serve the needs of immigrant victims of crime, and what are the barriers to achieving this?; and What recommendations would you have to improve services to immigrants who are victims of crime? All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by a member of the research team within 72 hours.

### **Data Analysis**

Five members of the research team (one co-PI, two graduate research associates, and two public health analysts) participated in analyzing the transcripts during a series of meetings over six weeks. Through this process, we developed a codebook with iterative revisions that refined code definitions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). We first developed a set of initial *a priori* codes based on a review of previous research. We then shared our draft codes with the staff from the Crime Victims Services section of the state's Attorney General's office to ensure that it was not missing any critical information that they would like to see. Subsequently, each of the five members of the team tested those codes against two transcripts, and we reconvened to discuss how to revise and expand the codebook to include other emergent categories (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Memos were included to draw attention to any remarkable events, justifications for the use of specific codes, and discussions of relationships emerging between codes. The five team members then went back and applied that codebook to a third transcript and discussed the coding to ensure interrater reliability. The code book will be continuously revised as new interviews are coded if



additional important themes emerge (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). This qualitative research was the first, exploratory, phase of data collection for this project, and the analyses were used to develop the subsequent quantitative survey instrument.

Pseudonyms are used in the excerpts from data in the following pages, to protect participants' confidentiality.

## Results

### **Access to immigrant communities comes from trust and cultural awareness**

Trust and cultural awareness emerged from our data as a crucial component of providing quality services to immigrant victims of crime. Yet, the ways in which this could be effectively done was a consistent challenge noted across the interviews. One suggestion from both immigrant and general victims' service providing agencies we heard a need to better connect the two types of agencies. Several KIs from immigrant service providing agencies acknowledged noted that there was a need for formal linkages with general victims' service providing agencies that could support with quality, specialized services immigrant victims are eligible for (e.g. legal representation, emotional support in the form of counseling or support groups, temporary cash-assistance, securing longer-term housing situations, and referrals to other services for childcare and other unmet needs).

Many of the general victims service providing agencies that we spoke with echoed a sentiment of immigrants being hard to reach because of both language barriers. Kate, an employee from a general victims' service providing agency focused on victims of elder abuse explained:

*I mean I think [crime victims services] is a new area for [immigrants] so I think... being able to network with other [immigrant service] providers and trying to figure out what the needs are and how to better connect services is important... they already do needs assessments for seniors in the [immigrant] community so, it's just a matter of narrowing that down and having a process for identifying victims so that way we can provide the services...*

Both types of agencies underlined the fact that immigrants were more likely to reach out to agencies they knew and had served them in the context of other ongoing needs in their lives. These immigrant service providing agencies were trusted, and often times staffed by other individuals from their community. Regina, an employee from an immigrant





service providing agency, suggested that hiring staff who are from the communities being served or work closely with grassroots organizations that are trusted by the communities is a crucial best practice. To illustrate this point, Katya, an employee from a general victims' service providing agency focused on serving the needs of survivors of domestic violence suggested "it is much more than translating our brochures.... It's being there in the community. And it's hiring people that can reflect and are humble, within the community, and are respected in the community..." Mohammed, a program manager from an immigrant service providing agency, suggested that despite the effectiveness of working with more culturally diverse agencies, most of the grant support and services were still provided by predominately "white" organizations:

*...well you need to identify the community organization that are really, really working with the population [immigrant communities]. No more funding for the same, white organization that, you know, doesn't know how to reach that population.*

### **Insufficient capacity to address the diverse needs of the immigrant community**

Many of the individuals whom we spoke with felt that immigrant populations experienced heightened vulnerability to crime over the course of their lives. One reason for this that arose frequently during the interviews was related to the already high crime rates in the impoverished neighborhoods where many new and low-income immigrants resided. Yet, despite the perception of heightened vulnerability, the immigrant service providing and general victims' service providing agencies that we spoke with were struggling to provide adequate support.

All of the immigrant service providing agencies that we spoke with underlined that they were overwhelmed by the demand, and unable to adequately serve the needs of everyone who walked in the door. Jeanne, the director of an immigrant service providing agency, admitted that because of tight funding and overwhelmed staff, they did not even attempt to conduct outreach despite their awareness that the needs in the community were enormous. She suggested that her agency rather tried to focus their services on clients that they were already serving under other programs:

*For example, you know, let's say we have funding to serve 25 Bhutanese seniors... right? We know there are about 600 of them. And who do we go to? We go to seniors we know. Which means those who*



*are resettled by us. Which means, what happens to everybody else? I mean, the needs are staggering, truly...*

Not only where the needs of immigrant crime victims enormous, they were diverse, requiring a wide range of skill-sets and expertise to address. All immigrant service providing agency key informants also spoke about challenges related to legal documents such as green cards, passports, and visas of the victims being confiscated by the perpetrator in situations of family violence. Four of the key informants from immigrant service providing agencies specifically noted that this was an area where they spent significant time working with clients. Little could be done about securing work, housing, or other benefits for immigrant crime victims without valid immigration papers. Kay, a social worker at an immigrant service providing agency, suggested that their clients at times had to spend up to 9 months (far longer than the typical few weeks) in transitional housing until their legal documents were re-issued so the client could sign a lease and secure employment. She further lamented:

*...for most of my clients their documents have been taken away from them as part of the abuse. So, I mean, they are here legally but they don't have access to their green card so they can't work. So, they can't leave an abusive situation because them and their kids will be left to fend for themselves.*

In terms of what were the staff needs to best serve these overwhelming needs, Molly, an employee of an immigrant service providing agency, spoke of the balance between hiring staff from the immigrant communities they were serving, and hiring staff who were trained social workers, case managers, and knew how to navigate the different crime victim's services. It emerged that much of the case management ended up being informal because immigrant service providing agencies did everything they could to hire people from the communities so that their clients felt welcome and understood when they walk in the door.

### **Knowledge of the U.S. criminal justice system**

Confusion about the criminal justice system, including a lack of understanding of what is considered to be a crime in the first place, emerged as important barriers to reporting crime and seeking justice. Huberto, a program manager from an immigrant service providing agency, reflected on the needs in understanding the criminal justice system,



suggesting it was a challenge enough for non-foreign-born populations, let alone someone who is new to the country.

*...because they [immigrant population] are new to the country, new to the system, they don't know where to go, or how to navigate things. They don't know the language. Their level of education is often low, and these things are already confusing for native, you know, American people. So you can give them a stack of papers and say, 'fill this out and come back,' you know? Or 'use online,' or 'apply online,' no they may not even have computers, you know?*

Several informants also spoke of confusion related to different cultural concepts of crime and justice. For example, Katya pointed out, "Like, is harassment a crime, is bullying a crime, is sexual harassment a crime, or just, whatever. You know, it's a cultural thing." As an antidote to the confusion about what constitutes a crime and the criminal justice system, Celina, the director of another immigrant service providing agency reiterated the need to be a "translator in everything." She advocated for all agencies providing services to immigrants and refugees to be empowered and funded to support immigrant crime victims through the criminal justice process, stating:

*You have to be strategic and really move into those communities and be a trusted source of education. And be constantly re-educating about what your rights are, who does what, you know, what the police do, what's legal, what's not, all these questions, and then be there with them through the process.*

KIs from both immigrant and general victims' service providing agencies reported that victims' general dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system reflected a lack of understanding of concepts of justice and punishment in the United States and deterred their reporting crime or seeking services. Reflecting on perceptions by immigrants that the criminal justice system was easy on criminals, Fardosa, an employee from an immigrant service providing agency explained:

*Let's say in our country is an eye for an eye. If a person kills, then they have to be killed the same way they killed. In most cases, we have a problem with saying plea bargaining... It's a lot of work for nothing.*

### **Mistrust and fears of deportation if they report crimes**

Yet, education on available services or how to access the criminal justice system was insufficient on its own. Several KIs reiterated the importance of



quality, responsive, and respectful services being rendered when an immigrant victim does come into contact with the criminal justice system and service providing agencies so as not to cause a victim to decide not to continue seeking justice:

*...when we are able to educate the people to report to the police and then we have the problem when the police arrive, not providing interpreter services and not even filing a report, how can we go back to these people and say, 'You know what? You can trust the system.'?*

One major concern was trust in law enforcement which stemmed from fear of being deported, or past experiences with law enforcement in their countries of origin or in the U.S. that jaded their perception of whether it was a worthwhile pursuit to seek justice. For this reason, many persons who were receiving victims' services were reticent to officially report the crimes to law enforcement. This was especially true with undocumented immigrants, with Huberto noting,

*... particularly now that the climate that we are facing you know, with this administration and the increased deportation, there is a significant increase in fear and alarm in the community... If there is a crime that I am involved in, I'm going to be deported. It doesn't matter that I'm the victim.*

Hayley, a social worker from a victims service providing agency, suggested that these fears of deportation also hindered the ability of her agency to provide services to victims of crime, as they often would not seek services, not wanting to be associated with a crime in any way:

*But it's hard because you're seeing it on the news. And you are seeing people who maybe were undocumented who got deported because they were seeking help in a domestic violence situation... I think that our clients are fearful. I mean, you start to associate crime with deportation.*

This was corroborated by Sharma, an employee from another victim's service providing agency who spoke about the challenges in victims' coming forward in an environment of fear and mistrust:

*And she'll say, "I'm gonna stay either in an abusive relationship, or I might have other things that trigger me, but I am never coming forward because if I do, the system has already shown me that whether they want it or not, somebody is watching, and somebody might deport me." And if I seek from help, what is going to secure us [herself and her children] from, being safe.*



Sarah, a victim advocate from an immigrant service providing agency who worked mainly with immigrants legally residing in the United States, suggested it was not just deportation fears that held people back from reporting. Immigrants did not like to draw any attention to themselves. She explicitly mentioned fear of hate groups, explaining “There are so many hate groups in [name of state]. And they’re like, watching... what they do is they watch. And they, you know, probably put it on their website, so they can harass people on social media.”

### **Discussion**

Addressing the needs of immigrants who experience criminal victimization in the United States is a neglected area of research that is worthy of attention. According to demographic patterns, immigrants represent an important source for population growth in the United States as current fertility rates are declining (citation blinded). The target city has experienced recent population gains directly as a result of foreign born immigration to the region (citation blinded). Immigrants, as a vulnerable population, have distinctive needs and experiences as they adjust to American life (Wu & Altheimer, 2013). Our findings confirmed prior studies and offer several recommendations the distinctive needs and experiences of immigrant victims of crime. According to immigrant-serving agency providers, nuances to providing quality services to immigrant victims of crime include: (1) Access to immigrant communities comes from trust and cultural awareness; (2) There is insufficient capacity to address the diverse needs of the immigrant community (3) Knowledge of the U.S. criminal justice system; (4) Mistrust and fears of deportation are significant deterrents to reporting crimes and accessing victims services.

It is imperative for service providing agencies to establish trust with immigrant communities if they are to effectively reach them in their times of need. The complexities of seeking justice for recent immigrants to the U.S. include some persistent barriers that immigrants from earlier eras faced such as language barriers and learning new social norms (Khashu, 2008). Often times, service providing agencies either specialize in a population (i.e. immigrants) or a type of service (i.e. supporting survivors of domestic violence). Successful service providers cultivate trusting relationships in order to reach clients and provide for their specific needs while gaining credibility among immigrant clients. Large organizations that lack adequate cultural understanding organically or training to gain understanding may have difficulty meeting the needs of immigrant crime



victims. Investments in cross-training between grassroots organizations with credibility and elite organizations with organizational capacity would likely improve victim service system delivery (Hicks, Wilkinson, and Snyder, 2015).

Our results pointed to the challenges to adequately address the breadth and depth of needs of immigrants who become victims of crime in the United States, and the insufficient capacity to address these needs. While the immigrant communities in this study's target city are significant in size, most are much smaller than their sister communities that have settled in the largest U.S. metropolitan areas. One of the challenges of serving immigrant victims of crime in mid-sized cities is that a single agency must serve victims from a variety of counties of origin. Rather than individual agencies serving the distinctive needs of one population (i.e. Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese immigrants), one agency must serve all. Both types of service providing agencies in this study underlined challenges in meeting both the number of victims, as well as the magnitude of needs that may emerge in relation to their victimization. Immigrants coming to the target city as refugees fleeing war and conflict in their home country may have limited financial resources or human capital to "buy" their way into safer areas of the city. Furthermore, crime victimization further complicates the precarious housing situation. For example, like other DV crime victims, access to safe and affordable housing can be a barrier for recovery for immigrant domestic violent survivors. The reissuance of key documents can be a long painstaking process that leaves people without status to secure housing, employment, transportation, or other basic needs. These crime victims have fewer available sources of social support compared to European immigrants in the past and non-immigrants today.

The criminal justice system and services available to victims were deemed to be confusing and hard to navigate, not only for immigrant victims of crime, but also service providing agencies. Immigrants face a daunting task of accessing and understanding the U.S. criminal justice system. As Davis, Erez, and Avitabile (2001) explained, police and prosecutors need to learn from immigrants just as victims need to learn from working with criminal justice system actors. Well-equipped service providers can bridge the gaps in understanding. The stakes are higher for immigrant victims as the perception among providers is that police attention of any type would have negative consequences to victims.

Misunderstandings and lack of trust in the criminal justice system have been common throughout immigration history but the most recent immigrants face concerns related to racial, ethnic, and religious stereotypes. Fear of deportation or other negative outcomes that could



result from coming into contact with the criminal justice system were revealed to be substantial impediments for servicing providing agencies to reach immigrant victims of crime who may prefer to avoid anything that could potentially place them in contact with this system which they fear. It is clear from the KI data that efficacy depends on building to social capital—first bonding social capital to promote within group cohesion – and second, bridging social capital to assist victims in dealing with other groups such as law enforcement and other systems actors (Putnam, 2001). Seeking justice through a formal mechanism is not cost neutral for any victim but immigrants who fear deportation may choose informal ways of seeking justice rather than risk deportation.

Service providers can help build bridging capital between victims and law enforcement /other institutions so that immigrants can feel protected as their risk of victimization (e.g., hate crimes, robbery, fraud, and domestic violence) is heightened by their immigrant status. Victim service providers can play an important role in educating immigrants on the U.S. criminal justice system so that system contact is protective rather than further traumatizing.

### **Future Directions**

Many articles related to immigrant victims of crime study the perspective of the victims (Burman & Chantler, 2005; Davis & Erez, 1998; Lee et al., 2000; Luo & Bouffard, 2016; Nunziata, 2015; Pitts, 2014), without considering the perspective of the providers who serve them. This study represents a useful contribution to the literature because it highlights the perspective of agency professionals who may be best understand the legal and practical challenges of changing service delivery to more effectively serve victims of crime. That said, human service professionals and the people they serve sometimes differ in their understanding of the experience of being an immigrant victim of crime (Yyskä, Dinshaw, Redmond & Gomes, 2012). Future research should speak with victims to understand how they have experienced crime and their perspectives on the specific barriers identified in this study. Furthermore, we suggest further examination of what kinds of quantitative crime data would help collect data about immigrant victims of crime as an important topic in criminology, without jeopardizing trust in the criminal justice system or putting anyone at risk. This still remains a contentious issue, but without some way to assess these issues, it is hard to plan for the specific services that are needed, as well as understand how future crimes can be prevented.



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