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IMMIGRANTS AND VICTIMIZATION: UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND THE FEAR OF SEEKING HELP

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Immigrants and Victimization: Understanding Immigrant Communities and the Fear of Seeking Help

Synopsis:

Like other vulnerable populations, immigrants are at increased risk of victimization. Immigrants are less likely to report due to fear of police, deportation, among other reasons. Using semi-structured interviews, this study explores victimization in the immigrant communities. Participants revealed being threatened and harassed because of their immigrant status and the reasons that kept them from reporting.

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The topic of immigration has been at the forefront of national headlines for the past three years. One of the issues most often discussed is whether immigrants commit more crime than their U.S. citizen counterparts. While the research continues to find that immigrants are less likely to offend, compared to U.S. citizens, the misconception of criminality follows them. One area of research that warrants further study is the victimization of immigrants, particularly during a time of heightened tension surrounding the topic of immigration. Like other vulnerable populations, immigrants are at increased risk of victimization. This is especially the case for undocumented immigrants. Immigrants are less likely to report being victimized due to fear of police, deportation, retaliation, among other reasons.

It is difficult to assess the level of victimization in immigrant communities. This contributes to the dark figure of crime. Immigrants are often not as willing to report as their U.S. citizen counterparts. They face unique challenges when they come into contact with the criminal justice system. For example, there is often a lack of understanding about the criminal justice system itself. Even as victims of a crime, they may fear being penalized. They may also distrust police officers and other criminal justice agents. In their country of origin, there may be a perception that police are corrupt and will further victimize an individual. This perception will discourage them from cooperating with police. Immigrants also face language and cultural barriers. Often times, criminal justice agents are not aware of these barriers and as such do not understand how to overcome them. One of the other reasons why immigrants choose not to report is due to the fear of deportation. They fear that coming into contact with the criminal justice system will put them more at risk of deportation.

Using semi-structured interviews, this study explores victimization in immigrant communities. Participants in this study revealed being threatened and harassed because of their immigrant status and the reasons that kept them from reporting. The findings from this study revealed several cases of victimization. In one case, an employer threatened a participant with reporting them to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In another case, a legal resident threatened an undocumented immigrant with deportation due to a failed relationship. Other instances revolve around threats of violence and being chased out of a neighborhood. Participants failed to report in every instance.

It is critical to understand why a large segment of the population fails to report being victimized. Their lack of willingness to report may also affect their willingness to come forward as witnesses to a crime. Immigrants are not aware of their rights or measures put in place to protect. Future research should assess ways to encourage immigrants to report victimization.