

VICTIMIZATION OF IMMIGRANTS



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Crime Victims' Institute • Criminal Justice Center • Sam Houston State University

...from the Director

There is little published research on the victimization experiences of Asian and Hispanic immigrants to this country. That which does exist often is based on the impressions of police officers and district attorneys. There are a few studies which look at a particular immigrant group, but little focus on one geographical area and the different ethnicities residing there. Because Houston has an ever increasing number of foreign born residents, learning about their experiences is important to ensuring their safety and providing needed services. This report not only presents information on victimization experiences, but also on what influences whether victims seek assistance.

Even though considerable progress has been made in working with immigrant concerns in the Houston community, there is more that can be done. At the end of this report are a number of recommendations which may further improve assistance to victims of crime among these groups.



Glen Kercher

Crime Victims' Institute



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Crime Victims' Institute is to

- conduct research to examine the impact of crime on victims of all ages in order to promote a better understanding of victimization
- improve services to victims
- assist victims of crime by giving them a voice
- inform victim-related policymaking at the state and local levels.



Acknowledgements

The Crime Victims' Institute is sincerely grateful to all who assisted with the distribution of the immigrant victimization surveys. The Institute would like to acknowledge the participation of the following organizations for their assistance with the collection of data for this report:

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Chinese Civic Center
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Houston Chinese Church
Houston Police Department
Korean Central Presbyterian Church of Houston
Korean Christian Church of Houston
Montgomery County Womens Center (MCWC)
Radio Saigon Houston
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Houston Catholic Church
Our Lady of Lavang Catholic Church
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church
St. Leo the Great Catholic Church
Seoul Baptist Church of Houston
St. Andrew Kim Catholic Church
St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church
Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results from a survey about criminal victimization among Hispanic and Asian immigrants in Houston. A number of personal and contextual characteristics were studied to determine their relationship to victimization.

Criminal Victimization

- 538 out of 907 (59.3%) respondents reported being victimized during the previous three years.
- Of the 538 victims, 259 (48%) claimed to have had multiple victimizations.
- 1,066 incidents of criminal victimization were reported, including 333 (31%) crimes against persons and 733 (69%) crimes against property.
- Robbery (33%) was the most frequently reported crime against persons, and larceny (27%) was the most commonly reported crime against property.
- Victimization varied in the samples of ethnic groups: 43 out of 52 (82.7%) Hispanic respondents, 76 out of 125 (60.8%) Vietnamese respondents, 118 out of 197 (59.9%) Korean respondents, and 301 out of 533 (56.4%) Chinese respondents reported being victimized.
- Carrying large amounts of cash was a significant factor contributing to respondents' victimization.

Reporting to Police

- Of the 538 respondents identified as victims, 277 (57%) reported their victimization to the police as opposed to 212 (43%) who did not. Forty-nine victims did not indicate whether they reported the crime.
- Respondents who had resided in the United States for more than 10 years were more likely to report a crime (62.5%) than those who lived here for less than 10 years (47.9%).
- The greater the amount of loss, the higher the probability that victims reported the crime.
- 29.3% of victims who reported their crime expressed satisfaction with police performance, while a relatively high percentage (43.6%) did not.
- Both immigrant responses and law enforcement interviews underscored how language barriers were an obstacle in reporting a crime to the police.
- According to interviews with police officers, domestic violence may be under-reported among Hispanic and Asian respondents.

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Victimization of Immigrants in Houston

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Since the early 1800s, American history has been shaped by immigration (Miyares & Airriess, 2007). For over one hundred years in American history, European immigrants, such as German, British, Irish, and Dutch, made up the largest portion of immigrants. In the past four decades the trend has changed, and Hispanics and Asians have become the primary immigrants. In the year 2000, for example, among the 27.6 million foreign-born residents, Hispanics accounted for 52% and Asians 26%. Compared to their European counterparts, Hispanic and Asian immigrants demonstrate more heterogeneity in relation to the predominant American culture. This heterogeneity of culture poses unique challenges for these immigrants.

It is likely that criminal victimization is associated with race and ethnicity (Davies, Francis, & Jupp, 2003), though limited information on this topic is provided by official data. Blacks, for example, along with other minority groups, have a higher risk of victimization than Whites (Parker, 1991; Davies et al., 2003; Crime Victims' Institute, 2006). Hispanics are more likely to be the victims of robbery and aggravated assault than non-Hispanics, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The high risk of victimization for minorities might be due to their disproportionate representation among lower socio-economic residents, and their tendency to reside in socially disadvantaged communities (Davies et al., 2003). This statement is supported with the report released by the Center for Immigration Studies. The Center analyzed the data collected from the Census Bureau in 2005 and found that foreign-born residents in general had higher rates of poverty than natives, even if they had stayed in the United States for 14 or 15 years (Camarota, 2005). The major reason cited was that these foreign-born residents tended to have lower educational attainment, which reduced their income potential. This is sustained by the fact that 31% of immigrant adults have less than a high school education, 3.5 times higher than native born citizens (Camarota, 2005).

Even though immigrant victimization is thought to be higher than it is for Caucasians, little systemic research has been conducted. Even less is known about their likelihood of reporting victimization to the police. In estimating the under-reporting of crime among foreign-born immigrants, Davis, Erez, & Avitabile (2001) found that 67% of their sample, including police chiefs and district attorneys of the 50 largest U.S. cities, cited under-reporting of immigrant victimization. Hispanic and Asian ethnicities were most commonly believed to under-report their victimization, accounting for 48% and 55% (N=60) respectively. Two frequently mentioned reasons given by respondents in that study were: language barriers (47%) and cultural differences (22%) (N=60). These officials thought that under-reporting by immigrants hinder efforts to effectively respond to the problem (Davis, et al., 2001).

Presumably, in moving to another country, immigrants not only encounter a new environment, but also a culture with different languages, lifestyles, social norms, and values. The preconceptions these immigrants bring with them about the police and the justice system, as well as the lack of familiarity with the language and culture of the host country, may present significant barriers to reporting crime.

While immigrants have historically constituted a large proportion of the population in the United States, few studies have focused on immigrant victimization and reporting behavior, especially among Hispanics and Asians.

Foreign Born Residents

Foreign born residents of this country comprise 32.7% of the population (Bureau of Census, 2004). Hispanics make up 14.2% and Asians between 4.2-4.7% of the total U.S. population. Hispanics make up 34.9% of the Texas population, and Asians make up 3.2% (Bureau of Census, 2004). Hispanic residents in this country have a median age of 26.9, compared to 40.1 for White and 33.3 for Asians. The majority of foreign born Hispanics (55.5%) and Asians (50.7%) have entered this country since 1990. The exception to this is Korean residents, who mostly immigrated to this country before 1990.

Houston, Texas, the fourth largest city in the United States, has been the home of many immigrants to the United States (Von der Mehden, 1984). According to the U.S Census (2000) 26.4% of the Houston population was made up of foreign born residents. This percentage has increased steadily from 1990 to 2000 (Fig. 1). Of these foreign born groups, residents from Mexico were the largest ethnic group, constituting 52.2%. The second was El Salvadorians (10%), the third Vietnamese (4.1%), followed by Chinese (3.4%), and Hondurans (3.4%) respectively. With such a diverse mixture of ethnic groups and cultures, Houston provides a unique opportunity to study the experiences of immigrants.

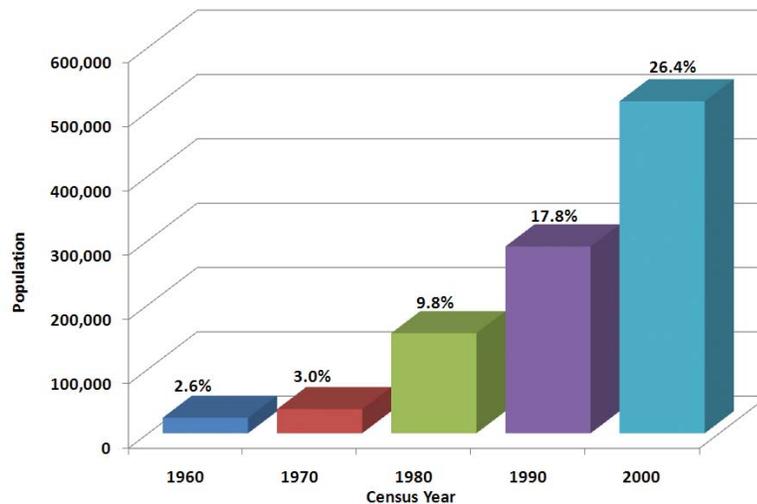


Figure 1. Total Foreign Born Population in Houston
U.S. Census Bureau, 2004

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the concerns about crime among immigrants in Houston. While most studies on immigration target one specific ethnic group, this study focused on four ethnic groups: Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Hispanic. Arguably, each ethnic group brings its own perspectives and needs. The intent of this study was to look at within group similarities and differences among these ethnic groups, and thereby identify ways that both criminal justice agencies and service organizations can more effectively assist immigrants.

Methodology

Participants

It is difficult to obtain representative samples of immigrants largely due to the disinclination of residents to respond to surveys and because there is no current way to accurately identify recently arrived immigrants for the sampling frame (Lee & Ulmer, 2000). For this reason, this study employed non-probability purposive sampling. Many of the venues at which immigrants gather were chosen as distribution points for the surveys. Foley and Hoge (2007) suggest that religious institutions are uniformly seen as readily accessible locations to reach recent immigrants (p. 65). Among these religious institutions, churches appear to be places where immigrants gather with other members of their ethnic groups. This was borne out in Klineberg's study in the Houston area that focused on immigrants and religion (2007). In his study, the results demonstrated that Christians more often attended religious services than did Buddhists. Furthermore, 41% of Asian Americans in Houston are Christian, which accounts for the majority of religious believers (Klineberg, 2007). Aside from churches, other locations were chosen to distribute questionnaires, such as community and service centers where immigrants were likely to congregate. Table 1 exhibits information on the distribution sites.

Table 1. Frequency of Distribution Sites

Distribution Sites	Number Visited
Churches	12
Community and Service Centers	7

Questionnaires were distributed between June 30 and September 9, 2007. The staff of the Crime Victims' Institute visited each of the distribution sites to hand out surveys to persons over 18 years of age. At the church sites, questionnaires were handed out as parishioners left the services. At the community and service centers, surveys were disseminated by staff members of those agencies along with a Crime Victims' Institute staff member. Both English and native language versions were provided so that respondents could select the survey with which they were most proficient. The survey packets contained a self-addressed and postage-paid envelope in which respondents could return the completed survey. Additionally, respondents were provided a list of agencies and their contact numbers, in the event they experienced any discomfort, anger, or anxiety from responding to the survey questions.

There were 7,996 questionnaires distributed to churches and community service centers, of which 907 (12%) valid surveys were returned. Table 2 shows the proportionate distribution of surveys for each ethnic group along with the percentage of returns.

Table 2. Number of Distributed and Valid Questionnaires

Ethnicity	Number of questionnaires distributed	Completed questionnaires	Percentage completed
Chinese	2,750	533	19%
Korean	948	197	21%
Vietnamese	2,674	125	5%
Hispanic	1,424	52	4%
Total	7,796	907	

Return rates for surveys are typically low unless the audience is captive and concerned about the issue being investigated. Low rates of response are not only characteristic of printed surveys, but phone interviews and online surveys as well. Over and above that, two plausible explanations may account for the low response rate in this study. One is that immigrants who held illegal status may have been reluctant to respond for fear of exposing their status. This is indirectly supported by the extremely low percentage (1.9%) of undocumented immigrants in the data. Also, persons who have not been victimized may have felt that the survey did not pertain to them.

Interviews were conducted with two Hispanic and five Asian police officers, as well as one victim service provider in Houston from June 20, 2007, to August 7, 2007. The persons interviewed all had experience working with immigrants.

Although the primary focus of this study was to assess the nature and extent of criminal victimization among immigrants in Houston, Texas, it is equally important to understand the context in which that victimization occurs. Conceptually, this was accomplished by assessing not only victimization, but acculturation as well.

The following maps (Figures 2-5) show the distribution of respondents across Harris County, Texas.

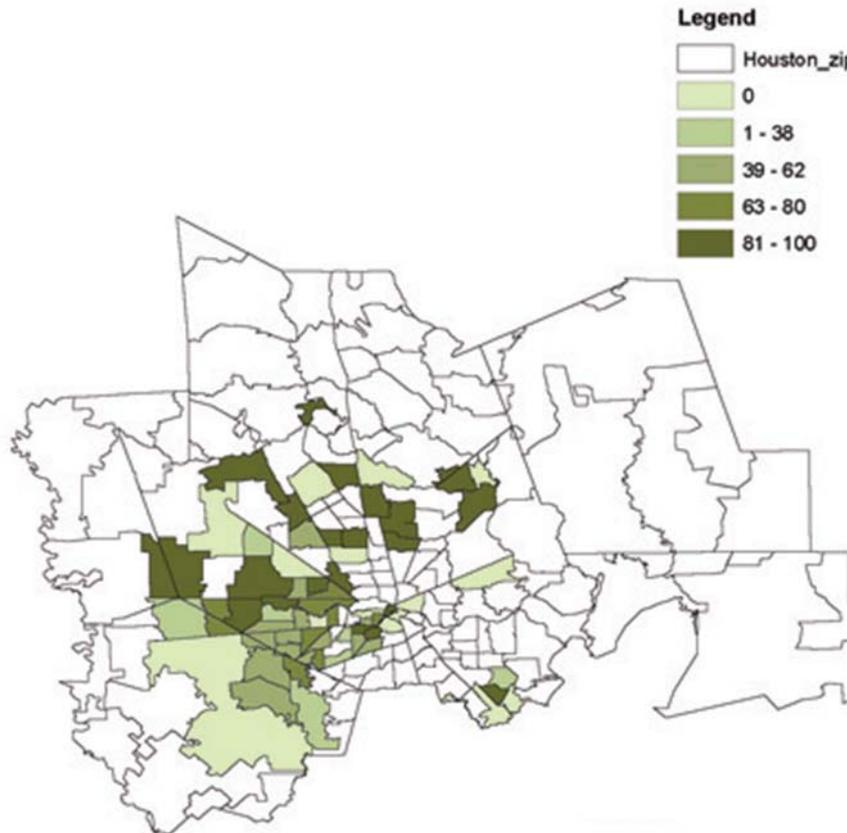


Figure 2. Distribution of Chinese Respondents in Harris County

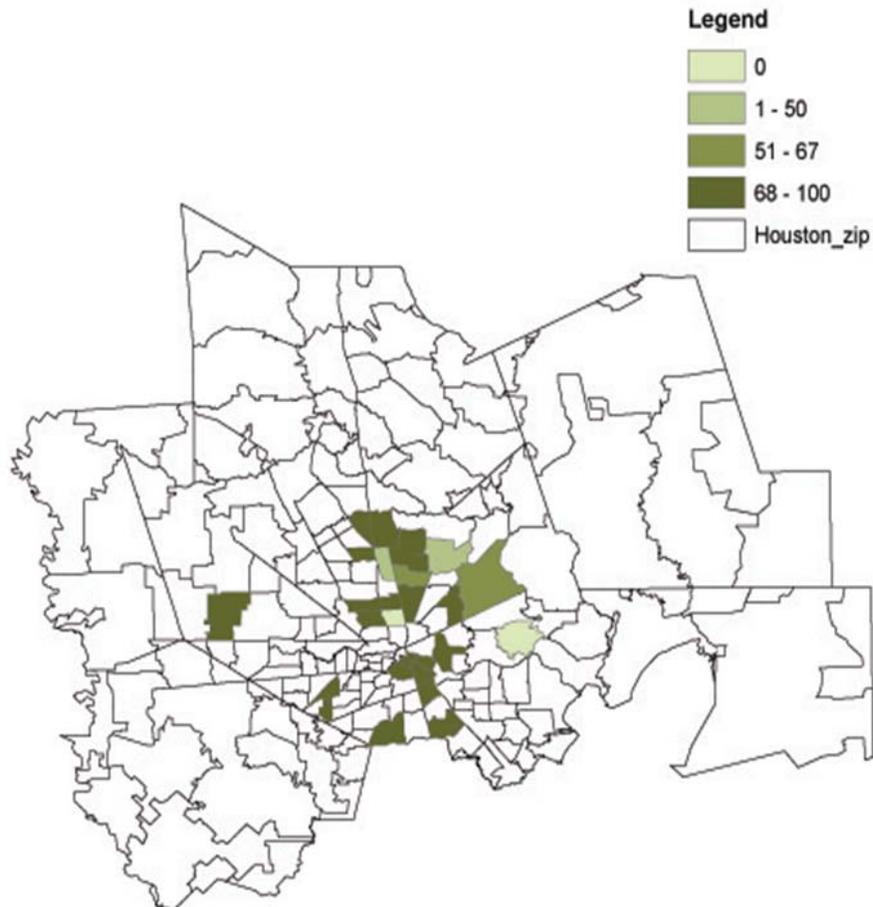


Figure 3. Distribution of Hispanic Respondents in Harris County

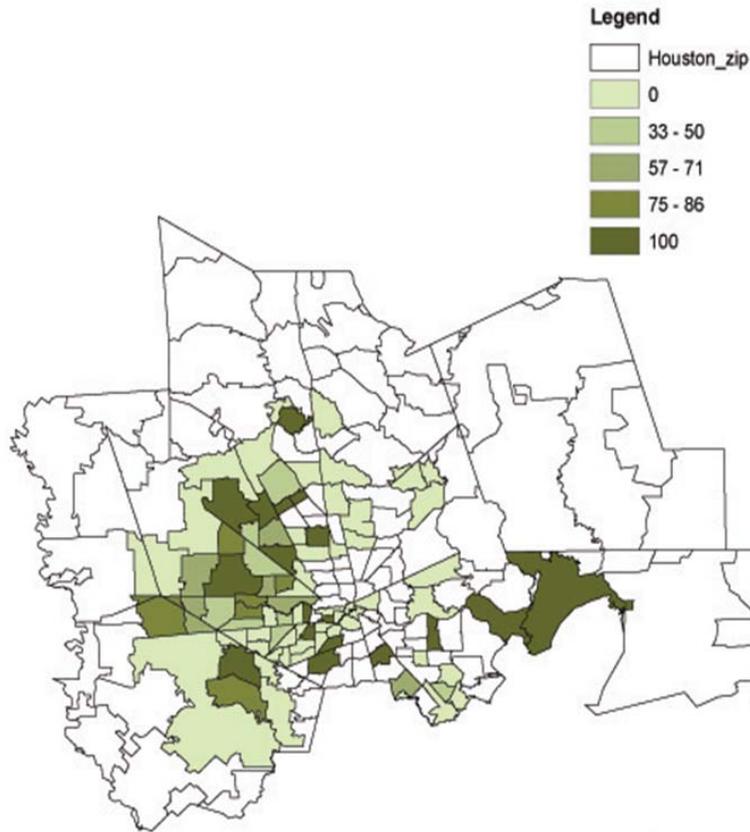


Figure 4. Distribution of Korean Respondents in Harris County

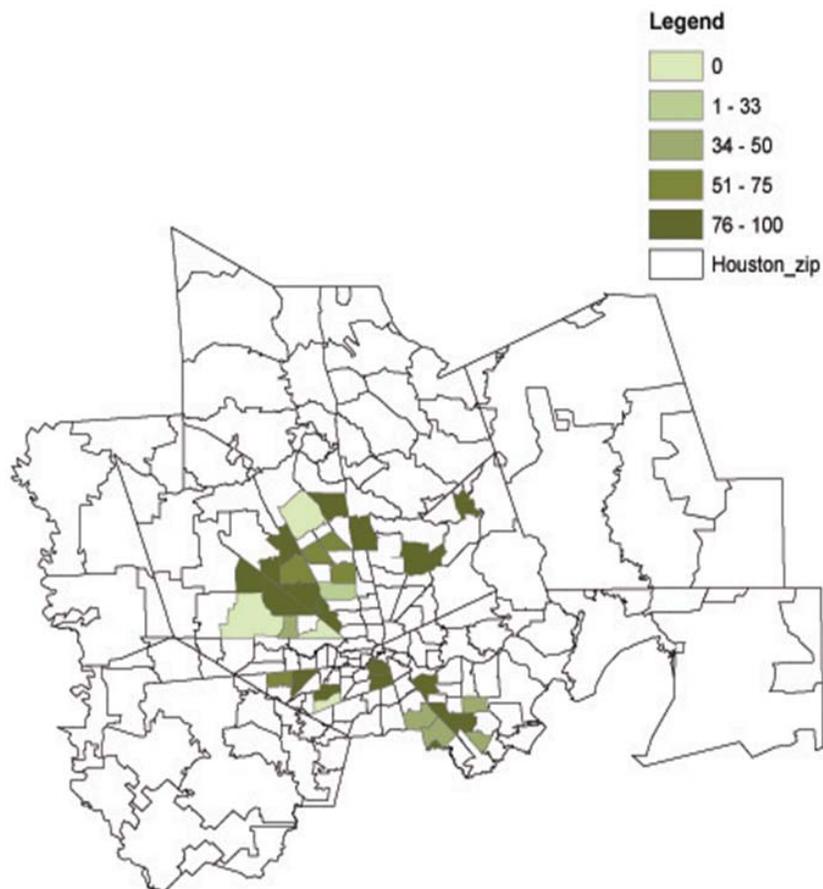


Figure 5. Distribution of Vietnamese Respondents in Harris County

Criminal Victimization

Criminal victimization was measured by asking whether immigrants had experienced any of the following incidents during the last three years:

- Threatened with a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, stick, or other object)
- Attacked with a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, stick, or other object)
- Attacked by being punched, bitten, kicked, pinched, slapped, pushed, or twisting your arm(s)
- Forced to do something sexual against your will
- Robbed in person of your money, wallet, or purse
- Had items stolen from your purse or wallet such as money, checkbook, or credit cards without your knowledge
- Had things stolen from your home, business, or vehicle without your knowledge
- Had items charged to your credit cards or bank account without your permission
- Had your car, truck, SUV, or motorcycle stolen
- Had property you own or rent intentionally damaged or destroyed (breaking windows, slashing tires, painting graffiti on property you rent or own)
- Forced you to pay money to someone so you, members of your family, or your business would not be harmed
- Held you or a member of your family captive until someone's demands were met
- Repeatedly received unwanted phone calls, emails, letters, or notes from a person who was either threatening you or expressing an apology or love to you
- Repeatedly watched or followed by someone

The total number of incidents reported by a respondent comprised that person's victimization score, which could range from 0 to 14.

Assimilation

An assimilation scale was developed to assess the extent to which respondents were integrated into the main culture of this country. Six questions were used to measure assimilation:

- What language(s) do you read and speak?
- What was the language(s) you were taught as a child?
- What language(s) do you usually speak with your friends today?
- In general, in what language(s) are the movies, T.V., and radio programs you prefer to watch and listen to?
- What is the ethnicity of your close friends?
- What kind of foods do you usually eat at home (American or traditional ethnic)?

The sum of these 6 items made up the assimilation score. U.S. census data (2004) reveal that the language spoken at home by foreign born residents is different across groups (Figure 6).

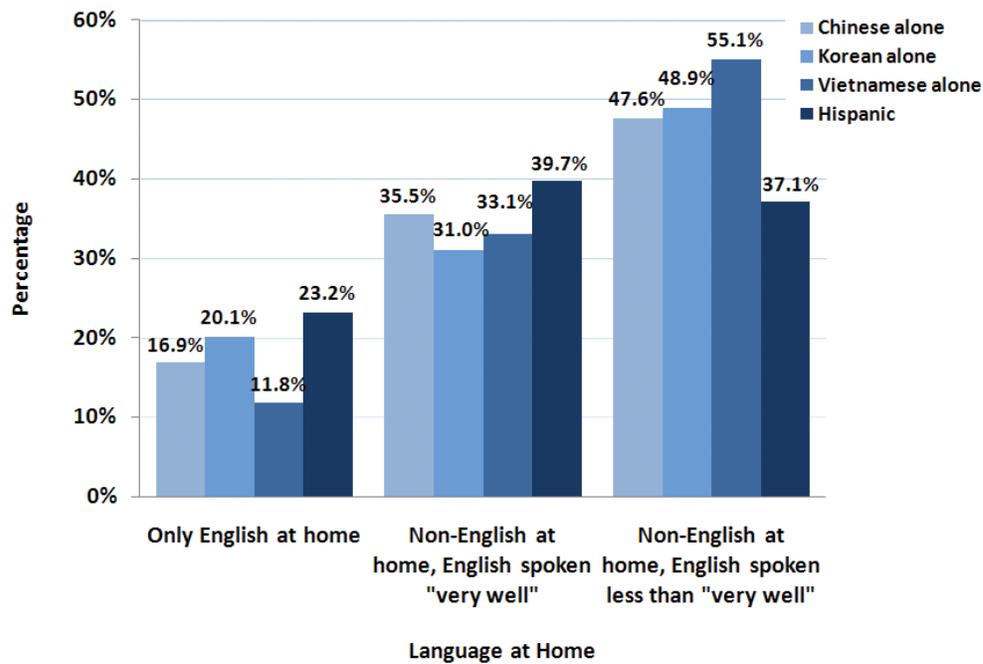


Figure 6. Language Spoken at Home and English-Speaking Ability: 2004
U.S. Census Bureau, 2004

Understanding of the Criminal Justice System

Questions were asked to assess respondents' understanding of the criminal justice system in the United States. Six statements were asked to which the respondent indicated if he or she thought it was true or false:

- In the United States, a person must always answer questions asked by the police.
- If a person is arrested for a crime he or she must stay in jail until the trial.
- In the United States, the police usually decide whether or not to take an arrested person to a judge.
- In the United States, a husband cannot be arrested for hitting his wife.
- If a doctor suspects that a child has been abused or neglected by the parents, the doctor does not have to say anything about it to the authorities.
- If the police think a crime has been committed, they must arrest the person who did it.

The sum of scores on these questions was used as a measure of respondents' understanding of the criminal justice system.

Characteristics of Respondents

Length of Stay. The average length of time respondents (N=907) had lived in this country was 15.6 years.

Age. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 86 years of age. Their average age was 48.3 years. Forty-five percent of participants were over 50 years of age (Figure 7). Those between 35-49 years of age made up the second largest group (38.5%), and those under 34 were the smallest proportion (16.6%). The respondents who were 35-49 years of age consistently made up the largest percentage across all the ethnic groups: Chinese, 36.1%; Korean, 43.5%; Vietnamese, 37.8%; and Hispanic, 42.9%. Chinese respondents had the highest percentage of persons over the age of 50 (47.2%). The mean age for each ethnic group from oldest to youngest was: Chinese (49.14), Korean (48.57), Vietnamese (47.60), and Hispanic (41.10).

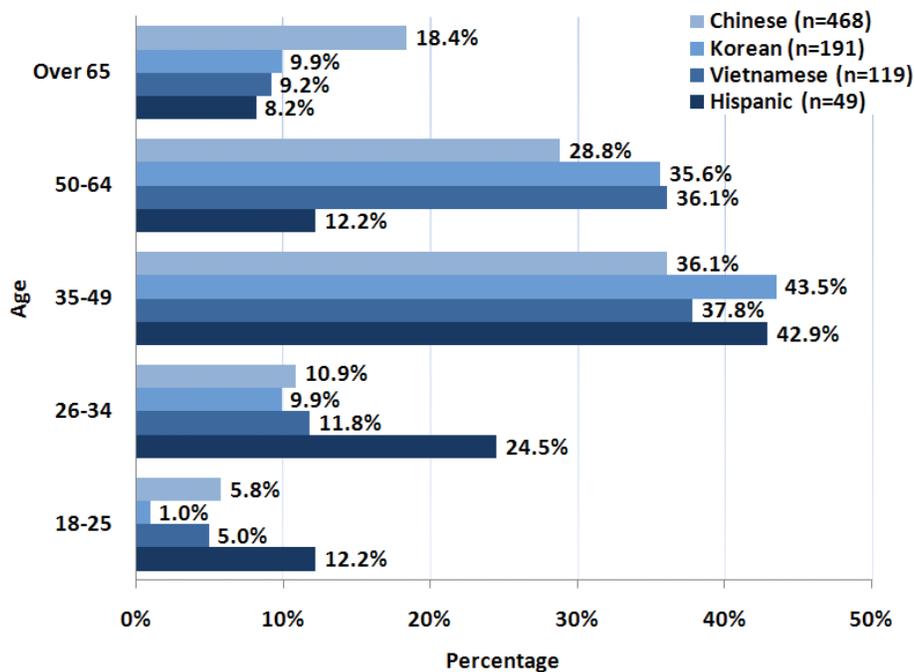


Figure 7. Age of Respondents by Ethnic Group (N=827)

Gender. Just over half of the sample was females (54.9%). This was true in all ethnic groups except Vietnamese (59.3% males).

Marital Status. Married respondents comprised 79.9% of the sample. This may be a function of the surveys having been distributed primarily at churches and community centers, which tend to be family oriented.

Education. Figure 8 shows the percentage of educational achievement for each ethnic group. Over 50% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher, which limits the generalizability of these findings to persons with lower levels of education. Over half of Chinese respondents (58.6%) reported having a bachelor's degree or higher, which was greater than for the other three groups. This is consistent with national census figures (Bureau of Census, 2004). Compared to the sample as a whole, only 13.5% of Hispanic respondents had a bach-

elor’s degree. This too is in line with national figures (Bureau of Census, 2004). However, in terms of having at least some college experience or higher, Korean respondents accounted for the largest percentage (78.3% vs. 90.2% nationwide). Here again, Hispanics reported the lowest percentage (44.3% vs. 59.6% nationwide).

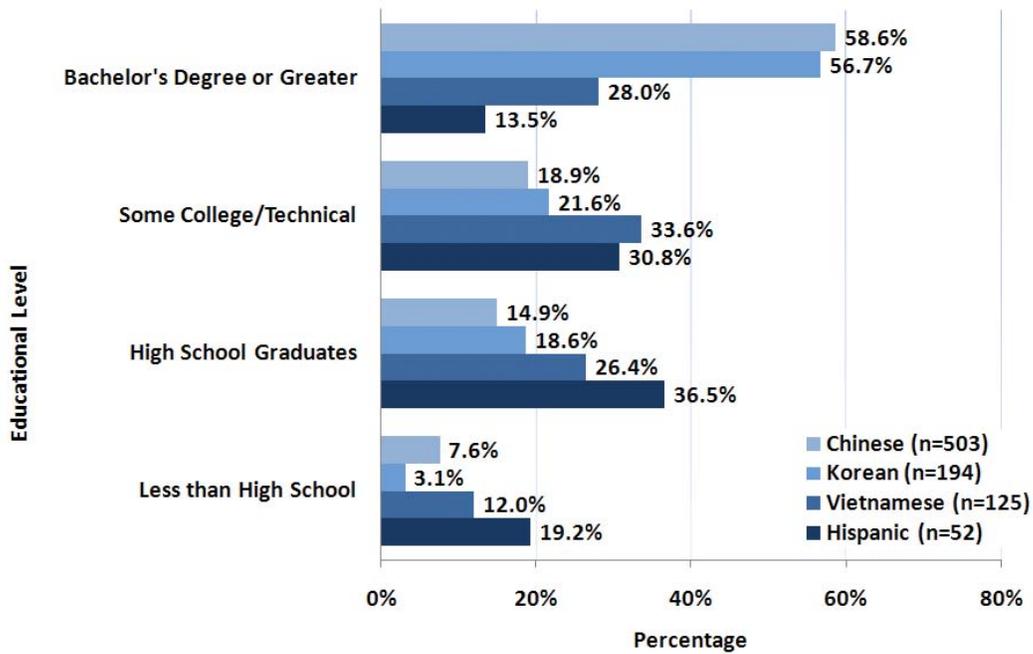


Figure 8. Highest Educational Level in each Ethnic Group (N=874)

Annual Household Income. Thirty percent of respondents had an annual income that fell below \$19,999, while 27.1% of the respondents had an annual income of more than \$75,000 (Figure 9). Korean respondents had the highest percentage (71.3%) of persons whose annual household income was over \$40,000, followed by Chinese (46.1%), Vietnamese (44.3%), and Hispanic (23.5%).

It is known that educational attainment is positively associated with income (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics), and the results presented in Figures 5 and 6 reflect that. Among the immigrant groups, the percentage having some college or more, arranged from highest to lowest, is Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hispanic. The annual household income from the most to least corresponds exactly to educational level: Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hispanic.

Employment. More Vietnamese respondents were working full time (74.1%), as compared to other ethnic groups (Figure 10). The second was Hispanic (63.8%); followed by Korean (63.2%), and lastly Chinese (52.3%).

Even though the majority of the Vietnamese respondents were employed full time, 55.7% (Figure 9) had an annual household income of less than \$39,999. The high employment rate and low annual household income implies that many Vietnamese respondents worked at lower paying jobs. Fifteen percent of Chinese respondents were retired, which was the highest among all ethnic groups. This may have been due to surveys being distributed at Chinese service centers, where elderly people are likely to congregate.

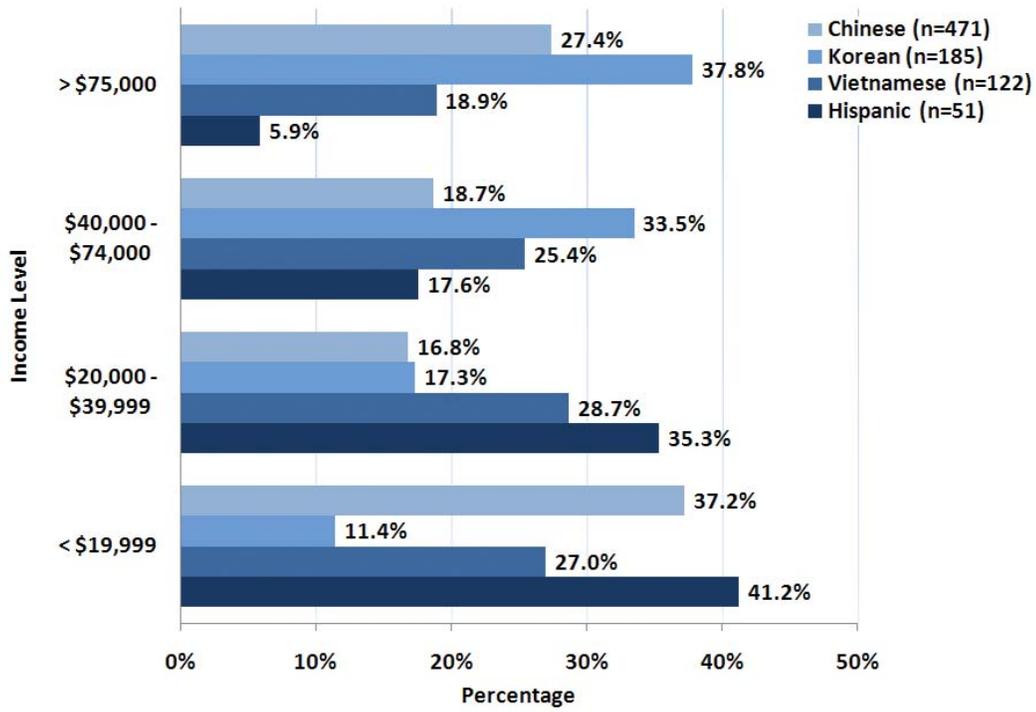


Figure 9. Annual Household income in each Ethnic Group (N=829)

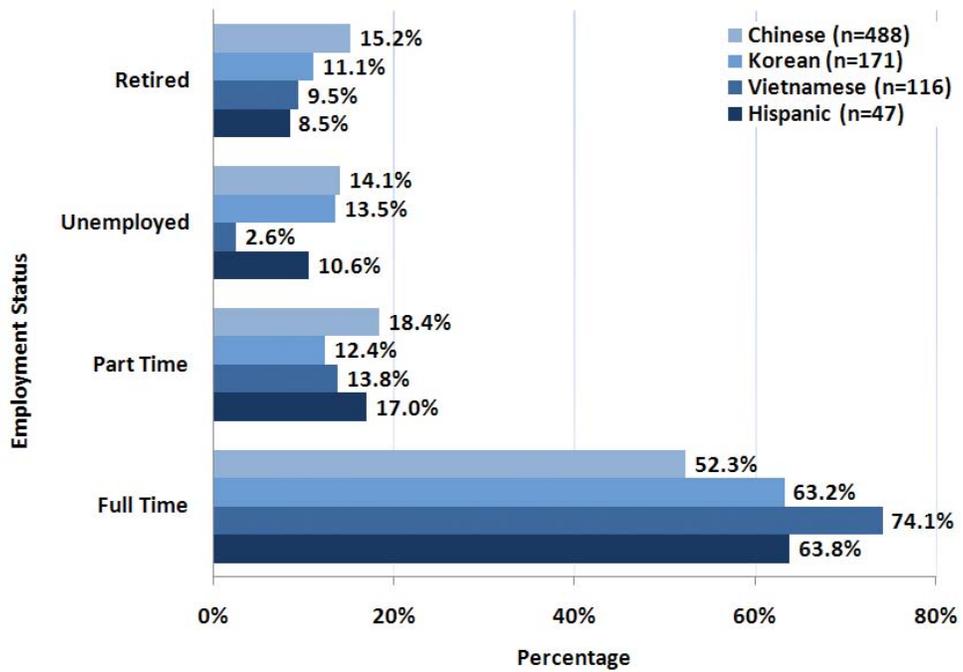


Figure 10. Employment Status in each Ethnic Group (N=829)

Criminal Victimization of Houston Immigrants

Of the 907 completed surveys from immigrants in Houston, 538 (59.3%) reported that they had been victimized during the previous 3 years. The average number of times victimization occurred was 1.24. These figures provide some indication of the prevalence of victimization among immigrants in Houston. This finding is consistent with the report 2006 *Criminal Victimization of Texas Residents* (Crime Victims' Institute, 2006), which reported that minority groups were at greater risk for victimization. It should be noted that the high percentage of victimization found among participants may be due to victims having a greater stake in the concerns raised by this study, and therefore, their willingness to complete the survey. For example, over 50% of the respondents in all of the ethnic groups had been victimized. More specifically, 82.7% of Hispanic respondents, 56.4% of Chinese respondents, 59.9% of Korean respondents, and 60.8% of Vietnamese respondents were victims. A cautionary note: it may not be accurate to conclude that differences in victimization percentages among the groups are representative of those ethnic residents, since the respondents in each group were not randomly selected. Consequently, motivations for participation in this study may also have varied for each group. While looking at differences among the groups may not be justified, within group comparisons may be informative.

There were 1,066 separate incidents of criminal victimization reported, including 333 (31%) crimes against persons and 733 (69%) crimes against property. Of the 907 respondents 210 (23.1%) of them reported the 333 personal crime instances and 447 persons (49.2%) reported the 733 property crimes. There were 259 respondents out of 538 (48%) who claimed they had multiple victimizations. One hundred thirty-seven of them had experienced both a personal and a property crime.

Personal Crimes

The most frequently reported personal crime was robbery (33%) (Table 3). This is consistent with the interview data from police officers in Houston which indicated that immigrants were most likely to be victimized by robbery. The five Asian police officers independently confirmed that immigrants were most vulnerable to robbery (personal communications, 2007). The habit of carrying large amounts of cash and not paying adequate attention to the dangerous environment were the primary reasons given. One respondent explicitly expressed that "Robbers all know that ...Asians carry cash and they use more cash than credit cards" (personal communication, June 22, 2007). The Hispanic interviewees did not address what led to Hispanic immigrants becoming victims of these crimes.

However, it was pointed out that in addition to robbery, theft and domestic violence were also frequently experienced by Hispanic immigrants (personal communication, July 18, 2007).

Table 3. Types of Personal Victimization (N=333)

Type of Victimization	%
Threatened or attacked with weapons/other objects	24.8%
Attacked by being punched, bitten, kicked, etc.	11.0%
Forced to have sex against will	2.0%
Robbery in person of money, wallet, or purse	33.0%
Forced to pay for the safety of family members or business by intimidation or holding a hostage (extortion)	5.0%
Stalked or harassed by emails, letters, phone calls, or notes	25.0%

Age. Contrary to the National Crime Victimization Survey (2004) that reported young people were more likely to be violent crime victims, the present data showed the percentage of personal victimization was roughly equal across the age groups. This finding may be due to the under-representation of respondents under 25 years of age. Respondents over 35 years of age in the four ethnic groups were more likely to be victims of personal crimes, such as robbery and to be threatened/attacked with objects, than other age groups. Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hispanic respondents, for example, who were between 50 - 64 years of age, reported more personal crime victimization than younger respondents. Korean respondents, who fell into the age category of 35 - 49 years old, reported the most personal victimization.

Gender. Overall, there was no significant difference between the rates of victimization for men and women in this study. The percentage of females reporting personal victimization (25.9%) was slightly higher than males (20.7%). Although this contradicts much of the literature which has shown that males usually have higher violent victimization rates than females (Meier & Miethe, 1993; Craven, 1996), the over-representation of female respondents in this study may indicate that males are less willing to report their victimization. It is not surprising that women reported being sexually assaulted more (1.2%) than men (0.3%). Women (15.3%) were also more likely to be victims of robbery than men (8.8%).

Annual Household Income. Annual household income showed a significant association with personal victimization, but not property victimization. The respondents whose annual income was less than \$49,999 reported more instances of being attacked, threatened, raped, robbed, extorted, or harassed (57.1%, n=117) than those respondents whose annual income was above \$50,000 (38.9%, n=80). In personal victimization, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean respondents who had higher annual incomes reported less personal crime, while Hispanic respondents who had higher incomes reported more personal victimization. This may be due to the fact that those with lower family incomes are more likely to reside in neighborhoods with higher crime rates and fewer security measures. This, then, increases the probability of exposure to perpetrators who are in the area in search of appropriate targets.

Ethnicity. Personal victimization differed among ethnic groups. The order of reported victimization among these groups was: Hispanic (82.7%), followed by Vietnamese (60.8%),

Korean (59.9%), and Chinese (56.4%). Hispanics (38.5%) reported the highest percentage of personal victimization and Vietnamese the lowest (20%). Keep in mind that these comparisons are only suggestive and may not reflect true differences among the groups.

Marital Status. Marital status showed a significant correlation with property victimization, but not personal victimization. It is unclear if the lower personal victimization percentages reflect actual lower victimization rates, cultural expectations that this kind of experience is “normal,” or a disinclination to reveal personal information in an anonymous survey.

Educational Level. Respondents who had a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education reported less personal victimization (19.7%) than those who had less education (27.4%). Hispanic respondents with higher educational attainment were less likely to be personal crime victims than were those with lower educational levels. However, Vietnamese respondents with a college degree reported more personal crime incidents than those who had less education. The reason for this exception is not clear.

It may be that educational level per se may not have a direct effect on whether these events occur. Rather, educational level may be associated with place of residence or lifestyle, which results in less exposure to the risk of victimization. More specifically, educational level is well known to be positively related to economic affluence. Perhaps people with more education tend to have the financial means to live in more secure neighborhoods and to shop or seek entertainment in safer areas; therefore, their exposure to predatory crime is decreased.

It may also be the case that immigrants who came to this country specifically to get an education have different experiences than those who came here to escape oppression, to be with family members, or to obtain a better job.

Employment Status. Employment status was not significantly related to type of victimization (personal vs. property) among the ethnic groups (Figure 11). Therefore, both personal and property crime victimization data were examined as a whole. Within each ethnic group victimization was most common among those who worked full-time.

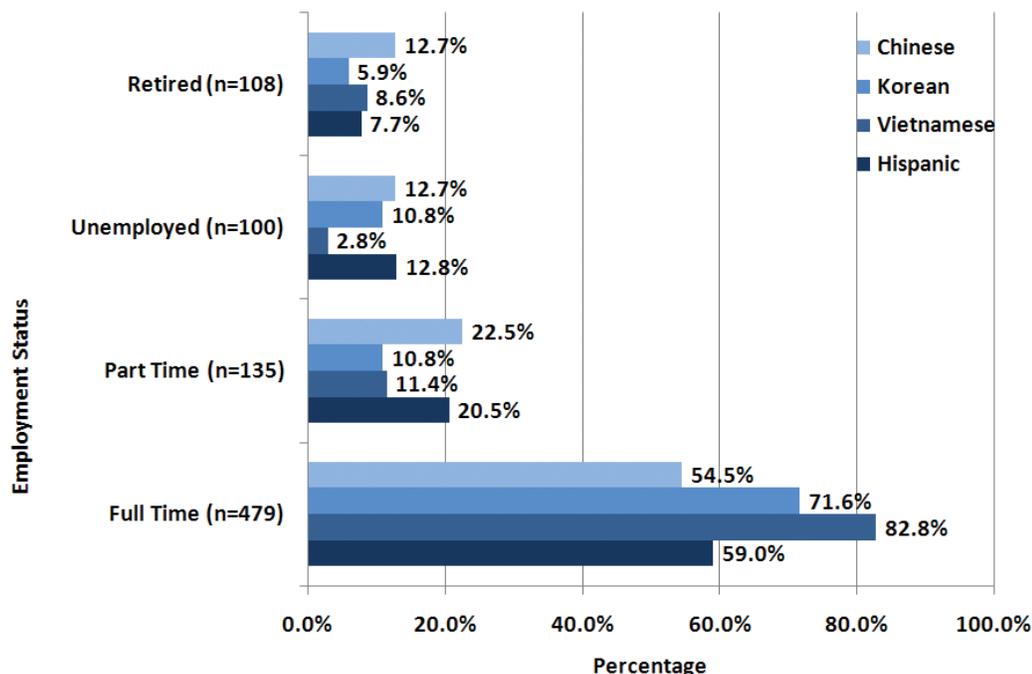


Figure 11. General Victimization by Employment Status/Ethnic Group

Property Crimes

Larceny was the most commonly reported property crime (27%), which included items being stolen from a home, business, or vehicle (Table 4). Vandalism (property damaged or destroyed, such as breaking windows, slashing tires, and graffiti, etc.) and identity theft (credit cards or bank accounts) tied as the second highest form of victimization (26%) among immigrants. The high percentage of identity theft victimization seems inconsistent with interview data that suggested that Asian immigrants prefer to carry cash rather than use credit cards. However, since a large percentage of Asian respondents had college degrees, they may be more likely to be involved in businesses that require bank accounts and/or credit cards. This, then, might also reflect a higher degree of integration of immigrant and American cultures.

Table 4. Types of Property Victimization (N=733)

Victimization Type	%
Items stolen from purse, wallet, etc. (money, checkbook, credit card(s), etc.)	12.0%
Items stolen from home, business, or vehicles	27.0%
Charges to credit cards or bank accounts (identity theft)	26.0%
Car, truck, SUV, or motorcycle stolen	10.0%
Property damaged or destroyed (breaking windows, slashing tires, graffiti on property) (Vandalism)	26.0%

Age. Age was associated with property victimization, but not personal victimization. A closer examination of property victimization reveals that only identify theft was statistically related to age (Figure 12). That is, identity theft was most likely to occur when the respondents were most active in their careers.

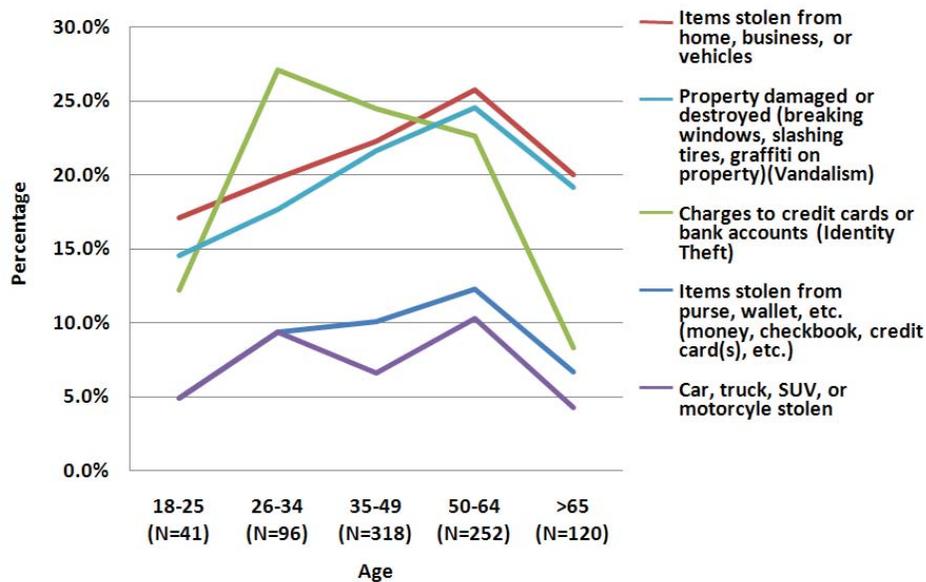


Figure 12. Property Crime Victimization by Age

Gender. Male respondents reported a higher percentage of property crime victimization than did females. This was true across all of the ethnic groups except for Korean respondents. Korean females in this study had a slightly higher percentage of property victimization (52.7%) than Korean males (51.2%). Female respondents, with the exception of Vietnamese respondents, were more likely to have items stolen from their purses (wallets) than their male counterparts. Females may be perceived by perpetrators as easier prey for this kind of crime than are men.

Annual Household Income. Annual household income was not found to be significantly related to property victimization. Korean and Vietnamese participants with higher family income were somewhat more likely to be property crime victims than those having lower family incomes. By contrast, Chinese and Hispanic respondents with higher family incomes were less likely to report being victims of property crimes.

Ethnicity. Hispanics reported the most property crime victimization (67.3%) and Chinese the least (46.3%) (Table 5). Hispanic victims reported the highest proportion of motor vehicle theft (34.3%), followed by Vietnamese (21.8%), Chinese (15%), and Koreans (7.8%). It appears that Hispanics reported both more personal and property victimizations. Keep in mind, however, that Hispanics were under-represented in the survey (n=52) and, therefore, their responses may not accurately reflect the type and extent of victimization that occurs in this group. It is also possible that auto theft is related to the neighborhoods in which the immigrants live and work.

Hispanic and Chinese immigrants reported burglary and larceny victimization the most frequently (46.2% and 20.6% respectively), while Korean and Vietnamese reported more vandalism (25.4% and 22.4%, respectively).

One should use caution in assuming that the differences among ethnic groups found in this study apply to each ethnic group as a whole, since the samples of immigrants participating in this research were not randomly selected.

Table 5. Property Victims in each Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	%
Chinese (N=533)	46.3%
Korean (N=197)	52.3%
Vietnamese (N=125)	49.6%
Hispanic (N=52)	67.3%

Marital Status. Marital status was significantly related to property victimization. Separated/divorced persons reported property victimization the most (72.3%), followed by married respondents (50.9%). Married respondents may have accumulated more material things than younger and single persons, which make them more vulnerable to property crimes. The high percentage of property victimization for separated/divorced persons may be due to property disputes that occur between them and their ex-partners. Although the descriptive statistics seem to support this speculation, in that separated/divorced persons are more than twice as likely to know their offenders when compared to married respondents (18.2% vs. 9.5%), the sample size of known offenders are too small to statistically confirm this speculation.

Educational Level. Whether or not respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher level of education was not significantly related to the likelihood of property victimization.

Employment Status. Employment status was directly associated with property, but not personal, victimization. The order from the highest to the lowest percentage of property victimization by employment status was: part-time, 54.1% (n=73); full-time, 52.8% (n=253); unemployed, 44.0% (n=44); and retired, 39.8% (Table 6). This lower incidence for retired persons may be attributable to their reduced likelihood of being out in public as often as working persons, and, therefore, their risk of victimization is less. The lower risk of property victimization for unemployed respondents when compared to working respondents may be due to their having fewer valuable possessions. On the other hand, since the unemployed persons may spend more time in relatively unsupervised and unstructured public places, they may be more likely to be targeted by perpetrators than are retired persons, who may spend more time at home or at places that are more structured and supervised, such as community centers.

Table 6. Property Victims by Employment Status

Employment Status	%
Full Time (n=253)	52.8%
Part Time (n=73)	54.1%
Unemployed (n=44)	44.0%
Retired (n=43)	39.8%

The Contexts of Criminal Victimization

Assimilation

Although the data did show that people with higher levels of assimilation were victimized less, it was not statistically significant. In other words, given the way assimilation was conceptualized, the evidence does not support the contention that victimization is related to the language spoken, nationalities of one's friends, or types of food eaten.

Amount of Cash Carried

Respondents who carried more cash reported more property victimization. The amount of cash a person carried was found to be one of the strongest predictors of victimization. Table 7 shows the percentage of victimization by the average amounts of cash carried.

Certainly, perpetrators may not have known how much money these victims carried but may have assumed that they carried a large amount of cash, since that is a common practice among persons of certain ethnicities. Police officers who were interviewed reinforced the perception that Asian immigrants have the habit of carrying cash. This practice may make them greater targets for crime (Meier & Miethe, 1993).

Table 7. Victimization by Amount of Cash Carried

Amount of Cash Carried	%
Less than \$100 (N=785)	59.7%
\$101 - \$200 (N=68)	64.2%
Greater than \$200 (N=48)	75.6%

Degree of Understanding the Criminal Justice System

Overall, respondents who had a better understanding of the criminal justice system in this country were less likely to be victimized. Interestingly, non-victims had both a better understanding of the criminal justice system and had more education. This may imply that their knowledge of the legal system resulted directly or indirectly from their education. Since education is also associated with reduced victimization, the relationship between knowledge of the criminal justice system and reduced victimization may be spurious. Moreover, knowledge of the criminal justice system is seemingly related to the degree of assimilation.

Assimilation and length of stay, when considered together, were significantly and positively related to understanding the criminal justice system. This suggests that the longer immigrants live in the United States, the more assimilated they become, and, thus, their understanding of the criminal justice system increases. However, when considered alone, length of stay was not significantly related to respondents' knowledge of the criminal justice system. This implies that length of stay itself does not increase the understanding of the criminal justice system, but it is in conjunction with assimilation to the culture of the U.S. that understanding increases. Assimilation may be easier for immigrants who come to this country to go to school, as compared to those who come to join their families.

Seriousness of the Crime Problem

As predicted, the respondents who had been victimized perceived crime in Houston as more serious (58.7%) than those who had not been victims (50.5%). This is consistent with previous research (National Crime Victimization Survey, 2004).

Reporting to the Police

Of the 538 persons identified as victims, 277 (51.5%) reported their victimization to the police; 49 victims (9.1%) did not disclose whether they reported the crime. These findings indicate that under-reporting among immigrants is similar to that of native born citizens (Crime Victims' Institute, 2006). This result is also supported by the statements of interviewees, who consistently claimed that Asian and Hispanic immigrants were not likely to report many types of crime to the police. This is also similar to the findings by Davis et al. (2001), who found Asian and Hispanics reported crime the least among various ethnic groups in their study. When the victims in this study were asked their reasons for not reporting the crime:

- 37.3% did not think the police could do anything about it.
- 20.8% too much trouble to report.
- 19.3% the police did not speak their language.
- 18.4% no real value in the item(s) taken.
- 12.3% it was a private matter.
- 11.8% did not know enough about criminal justice system procedures.

The interview data was also helpful in understanding why immigrant victims did not report crimes. The most frequently mentioned reason was the language barrier (five officers), followed by not wanting to get involved with the criminal justice system (three officers), immigrants' illegal status (two interviewees), and negative impressions about the police in their native country (two officers). Both victims and interviewees agreed that language barriers make it difficult for immigrants to report crime. By comparison, in their study on immigrants' reporting behavior, Davis et al. (2001) found that the subjects, including police and prosecutors, perceived that the language problem (47% among 60 subjects) posed the greatest obstacle to immigrants in reporting crime. While the results found here agree that language is an obstacle, even more important is the perception that the police would not be able to effectively assist them. This runs counter to the viewpoints reported by Davis et al. (2001). In their study, only 3% of law enforcement personnel agreed that "the criminal justice system is not responsive to the needs of immigrants" (p. 190). Table 8 lists the reasons for not reporting crimes in each ethnic group.

Table 8. Reasons for not Reporting Crimes by Ethnic Group

Reason	Chinese (N=125)	Korean (N=49)	Vietnamese (N=20)	Hispanic (N=18)
I do not trust the police				11.1%
Police do not handle such things in the country from which I came		12.2%		
Afraid the person who did these things might hurt me again		11.2%	20%	16.7%
Not understanding how the U.S. criminal justice system works	12.8%			16.7%
A private matter	12.8%		20%	
Afraid of becoming involved with the authorities		18.4%		
No real value of item(s) taken	19.2%	16.3%	30%	
There was no officer who could speak my language	24.8%		15%	16.7%
Nothing the police could do	40%	30%	30%	44.4%

Five police interviewees said that domestic violence was the most under-reported offense among immigrants. This may be related to the reason given by 12.3% of the victims that the incident was a private matter. Three officers asserted that domestic violence was commonly seen among Hispanic and Asian immigrants (personal interview, June 20, 2007; July 22, 2007; August 7, 2007). Three possible reasons for this were given:

- (1) The patriarchal culture from their country of origin.
- (2) The shame of disclosing family disputes to the public.
- (3) The financial crisis that would result from the arrest of the spouse.

It is difficult to assess the nature and extent of domestic violence among these ethnic groups because of their reluctance to discuss it.

Among victims who reported crime to police, 29.3% were satisfied with police handling of the case. However, a relatively high percentage (43.6%) said they were not satisfied with police performance. About 27% of victims were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Age. Age was not significantly related to whether or not a victim reported crime to police (Table 9). The percentages of reporting behavior across age groups: 18-25 years old (35.3%), 26-34 years old (63.2%), 35-49 years old (56.1%), 50-64 years old (59.2%), and over 65 years old (54.7%).

Table 9. Reporting Behavior by Age Group

Age Group	%
18-25	35.3%
26-34	63.2%
35-49	56.1%
50-64	59.2%
Over 65	54.7%

Gender. There was also no significant difference in reporting behavior by gender. Among male victims 55.4% reported the crime (note: mostly property), while 58.2% of female victims reported their victimization.

Annual Household Income. There was also no significant difference in reporting behavior and annual household income (Table 10).

Table 10. Reporting Behavior by Annual Income

Annual Household Income	%
Less than \$19,999	61.2%
\$20,000 - \$39,999	61.9%
\$40,000 - \$74,999	52.3%
Greater than \$75,000	68.7%

Race/Ethnicity. More than half of the victims in each ethnic group made a report to the police. Vietnamese victims reported the most (72.6%), followed by Hispanics (56.1%), Korean (53.8%), and Chinese (53.5%) (Table 11).

Table 11. Reporting Behavior by Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	%
Chinese (N=269)	53.5%
Korean (N=106)	53.8%
Vietnamese (N=73)	72.6%
Hispanic (N=41)	56.1%

Marital Status. Marital status of the respondents was not significantly related to reporting behavior (Table 12). Fifty one percent of single respondents, 55.4% married respondents, 63.6% widowed respondents, and 68.8% respondents who are divorced or separated reported the crime to police.

Table 12. Reporting Behavior by Marital Status

Marital Status	%
Married	55.4%
Single/Never Married	51.3%
Separated/Divorced	68.8%
Widowed	63.6%

Educational Level. Respondents' educational level was not significantly related to reporting behavior: 65% of those with less than a high school diploma, 55.3% for those who were high school graduates, 65.1% for those with some college, and 52.1% college degree or higher (Table 13).

Table 13. Reporting Behavior by Educational Level

Educational Level	%
Less than High School	65.0%
High School Graduate	55.3%
Some College	65.1%
College Degree or Higher	52.1%

Value of Loss. It is not surprising to learn that the likelihood of reporting a crime increased as the value of what was taken or destroyed increased (Figure 13).

Greenberg and Beach (2004) found that a victim's decision to call the police was related to the value of the loss. The greater the loss, the more likely the victims will report the offense to the police. To some extent this may be related to the necessity of having a police report in order to qualify for insurance reimbursement.

Physical Harm. Of the victims who received medical treatment, 81% reported the crime to police. Of the victims who needed medical treatment but did not seek it, 65.9% reported to the police. Also, among those who did not need medical treatment, 52.9% reported their victimization to the police. These results suggest that the willingness to report a crime or not was contingent on the seriousness of the injuries experienced.

Length of Stay. The length of time a victim had lived in this country was significantly related to reporting behavior. The respondents who had resided in the United States for more than 10 years were more likely to report a crime (62.5%) than those who had lived here for less than 10 years (47.9%). This may reflect differences in assimilation.

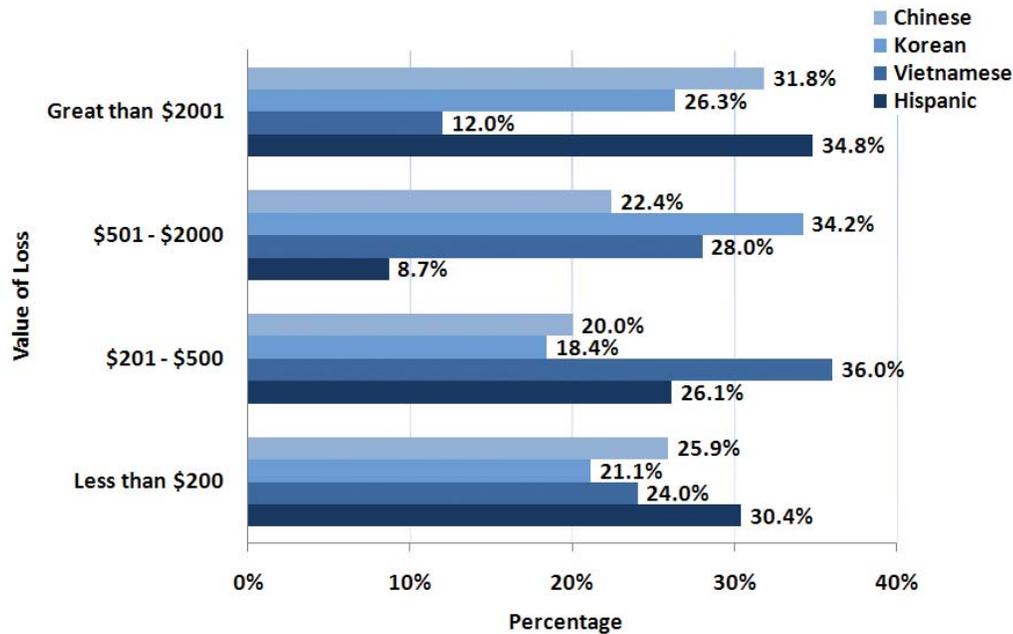


Figure 13. Reporting Behavior by Value of Loss

Victim/Offender Relationship. There was no significant difference in reporting behavior based on whether the victims knew the offenders, although the percentage was slightly higher when the offenders were unknown (57% for unknown and 51.4% for known, $p > .05$).

Assimilation. Although the data indicated that the more assimilated immigrants were more likely to report a crime, this was not statistically significant. This finding might have been different if the sample of immigrants had included more young people. Also, the effects of assimilation may erode to some extent in older age groups (Markides; Ray; Stroup-Benham; & Trevino, 1990). For example, as immigrants approach their senior years they may interact less with other groups.

Understanding of the Criminal Justice System. No relationship was found between a person's knowledge of the criminal justice system and reporting a crime. Recall, however, that those who had a better understanding were less likely to be victimized.

To summarize, only two variables were significantly related to reporting behavior: ethnicity ($p < .05$) and the value of the loss ($p < .05$). Given the lack of random selection and the different sizes of the groups, these group differences may not reflect true differences on willingness to report. Compared to the other ethnic groups, Hispanics were less likely to report the victimization to the police. This finding may be related to a person's immigration status.

Summary

Little information has been available on Hispanic and Asian immigrants' criminal victimization in this country and their likelihood of reporting those crimes to the police. Most of the victimization research to date has focused only on one ethnic group or one kind of victimization. This study explored personal and property crime victimization across four groups: Hispanic, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants in Houston, Texas.

It is difficult to obtain random samples of participants across these ethnic groups because of methodological and logistical problems, so purposive samples were obtained by distributing surveys at 19 sites in the Houston area. These sites were chosen because it was known that immigrants tended to congregate at these locations. The implication of this is that meaningful comparisons across the ethnic groups cannot be made with confidence.

Victimization Experiences

Among those who completed the surveys for this study, 538 reported that they had been victims of a crime. Reported victimization was highest in the small sample of Hispanic respondents and lowest among the larger group of Chinese respondents. Thirty-one percent of the crimes reported were personal crimes and 69% were property crimes. Robbery was the most often mentioned crime against persons, and larceny was the most frequently reported property crime. Almost half of the victims indicated that they had been victimized more than once.

Age of Victims

Persons over 35 years of age were more likely to report being victimized by either personal or property crimes than did younger respondents.

Marital Status

No consistent pattern was found between marital status and type of criminal victimization among ethnic groups. Therefore, the data for both types of victimization were combined in order to examine their association with marital status. Victimization among the ethnic groups was highest for Chinese, divorced/separated respondents; Korean, married respondents; Vietnamese, widowed and divorced/separated respondents; and Hispanics, single, never married respondents. Respondents who reported the least victimization were: Chinese and Korean, widowed; and Vietnamese, married.

Education

Educational attainment was consistently found to be inversely related to both personal and property victimization. That is, the more education one attains, the less likely they are to be victims of either of these types of crime.

Reporting to the Police

Almost half of the victims did not report the crime to the police, saying either that there was nothing the police could do, or no one spoke their language. Thus, many victims may not have received the assistance available to them, and apprehension of offenders may have been stymied.

The decision about reporting a crime was related to the value of the thing that was lost and the length of time the respondent had been in this country. Over 43% of those who did report the crime were dissatisfied with the way their report was handled.

Understanding the Criminal Justice System

Limited knowledge about the workings of the criminal justice system was significantly associated with a greater likelihood of criminal victimization.

Assimilation and Length of Stay

No significant relationship was found between assimilation and victimization. This finding may be related to the way the concept of assimilation was conceptualized. Also, length of stay showed no significant relationship with criminal victimization. It would have been interesting to see if respondents who had come to this country to further their education versus those who came for other reasons have a lower likelihood of victimization. What was found, however, is that an interaction between assimilation into the indigenous culture and learning about the criminal justice system is related to the risk of being victimized. In turn, the degree of knowledge of criminal justice was related to the level of assimilation into the culture.

Language Barriers

Language barriers deter immigrants from accessing many essential government services beyond the criminal justice system. Participation in their children's education and health care are affected by limited English proficiency. In the criminal justice arena language barriers can adversely affect both victims and defendants. This lack of ability to communicate can deter victims from reporting crimes, cases taking longer to process, and criminals remaining at large because victims cannot communicate with the police (Khashu, et al, 2006). It is often the case that victims must communicate in English with the police and prosecutors despite their limited English proficiency. When the police are unable to communicate clearly with a victim, they are often unable to document the circumstances of an incident.

Trials may sometimes be delayed because a qualified interpreter cannot be found for a witness or a defendant with limited English proficiency.

The results of the present investigation clearly suggest that language barriers and understanding the criminal justice process are major factors in determining whether or not immigrants report crime and assist the police and prosecutors in bringing offenders to justice. Toward these ends, efforts should be directed at improving immigrant assimilation to the U.S. culture and criminal justice agencies making their processes and procedures more accessible to immigrants.

Recommendations

Facilitating Assimilation of Immigrants into U.S. Culture

Language Proficiency. Language proficiency is important in helping relatively recent immigrants feel comfortable participating in American culture. Without this, many immigrants may insulate themselves by only associating with persons who speak their language. While preserving one's cultural heritage is important, becoming comfortable in this country is facilitated by actively participating in it. There are a number of opportunities available in the Houston area to assist immigrants in developing better English facility. However, merely announcing the availability of an opportunity may be insufficient in overcoming the reluctance of some immigrants to take advantage of it. Ongoing educational efforts through radio, TV, newspapers, and church bulletins need to underscore the importance of this training for members of these groups regardless of their gender or age. Immigrants need to be convinced that developing this skill may improve the quality of their lives in this country.

The following are services provided by various organizations that immigrants can draw upon to overcome language deficiencies.

- **Academic institutions.** A number of universities, commercial schools, and community colleges in the Houston area offer a variety of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. These classes are designed for different levels of students who are non-native speakers. Among these institutions, community colleges offer relatively less expensive options compared to those provided in universities or private language institutes (Crandall and Sheppard, 2004).
- **Public libraries.** Other than universities and colleges, local public libraries also offer face-to-face or on-line English classes through collaboration with other institutes (Library Services for Immigrants, 2004). The Walter Neighborhood Library in Houston, for example, provides immigrant residents with English classes taught by instructors from community colleges (Houston Public Library, 2005). Another example is the Parker Williams Branch Library that extends its service to part of the Houston area, using a grant to provide ESL programs for the Vietnamese community (Case Study Report, 2008). Additionally, the Parker Williams Branch Library gathers a collection of Vietnamese language materials to meet the high demand for its Vietnamese communities.
- **Ethnic and/or non-profit organizations.** To meet the special needs of language acquisition, some ethnic organizations (centers) design English courses suitable for persons of the same ethnic background. For instance, the Chinese Community

Center assists adults residing in Houston in learning English through the Adult Education Program (Asian Women in Business, 2008). Literacy Volunteers of Houston establishes ESL classes with funding from a private business that specifically targets the Hispanic community (Organization detail, 2007; Hispanic PrWire, 2008).

- **Churches.** Churches are also involved in providing ESL programs. St. Charles Borromeo in the Houston area, for instance, offers free language acquisition classes. Moreover, English Bible studies offered by most ethnic churches can assist immigrants in becoming more proficient in English.

Assimilation. Becoming comfortable interacting with persons outside one's own ethnic group is facilitated in participating occupationally, educationally, and socially. With these experiences a person's understanding of the other culture improves. Participation in these things can also correct misunderstandings people have of other cultures. Non-immigrants in these settings may become resources for immigrants as they attempt to navigate through American culture. The results reported earlier suggest that whether an immigrant reports a crime is related to his or her understanding of the criminal justice process. Also noted above is the suggestion that such knowledge is related to the degree of assimilation to American culture. Here again, it is not enough to inform residents of opportunities to interact with persons who are not members of their ethnic group, but they must also be shown why this is so important to both men and women of any age.

There are a number of venues in Houston that do or could assist in immigrant assimilation to this culture.

- **Public libraries.** There are a variety of activities designed to help immigrants adjust to cultural heterogeneity. These "bridge" activities vary among libraries. Sample programs include: health seminars, community resources seminars, cultural activities, holiday events, and book clubs (Library Services for Immigrants, 2004). The Houston Public Library exhibits arts and crafts from diverse cultures, such as Asia and Africa, intending to transmit the concept of cultural diversity and integration.
- **Churches.** Numerous cross-cultural activities have been suggested and implemented among churches. For example, the churches that primarily serve a particular immigrant group might invite members of churches or organizations who primarily serve other residents to present a program, share a meal, join in sporting activities, etc. (Cross-Cultural Activities for Churches, 2008). Church camp programs might particularly reach out to children of other ethnicities to promote understanding. Moreover, holding a conference or series of meetings that includes people from different cultural backgrounds to discuss contemporary issues is another alternative to broaden the scope of understanding of cultural diversity.
- **Community service organizations.** Some communities provide immigrant integration services to foster meaningful interactions between immigrants and the receiving community. The programs and services consist of: holding workshops for immigrants to educate them concerning legal rights and knowledge, making the public aware of the contribution of immigrants to the community, and holding community meetings for sharing information in an effort to facilitate the process of integration between immigrants and the residents of the receiving community.

Enhancing Access to Services

Immigrant participation in U.S. society is enhanced when foreign speaking residents feel accepted and are provided with same accommodations as those who speak English. Toward this end, governmental and community agencies need their services to be readily accessible to immigrants. Although improvements have been made in this regard, there are other areas that should be considered.

Mayor's Office. The Houston mayor's office assigns a language liaison to handle requests for interpretation or translation services from various agencies in the city. Furthermore, this office encourages immigrant participation in the civic, economic, and cultural life in the city. This office also refers immigrants to appropriate agencies and organizations for individual needs.

Community Services. Many agencies serving immigrant communities provide them with information concerning naturalization. In Houston there are volunteers who also help immigrants prepare for naturalization (Helping Immigrants Become New Americans, 2004).

Community Victim Service Agencies. These agencies include family violence programs, women's centers, sexual assault programs, and children's centers, (Crime Victims' Institute, 2007). According to a survey conducted by the Crime Victims' Institute (CVI) in 2007, in Texas, most victim service agencies provide 24-Hour Hot-Line counseling, referral, and explanation of the criminal justice process. Assisting Spanish speaking immigrants is usually not difficult due to the availability of Spanish speaking staff members or because they can get assistance from other agencies.

Providing translations for Asian immigrants is more challenging, because it is less likely that persons who speak a particular Asian language are available in the agency. When a non-English speaking Asian resident contacts one of these agencies, an effort is made to ascertain which language the person is speaking. If a translator is unavailable in that agency, an effort will be made to contact someone in a local agency that serves persons of that ethnicity. That assistance may not always be immediately available, however. Failing that, phone translation services can be utilized which provide three-way conference call translations. Then, if feasible, the Asian immigrant will be referred to a local agency that provides services to persons of that ethnicity.

Furthermore, given the large Asian and Hispanic populations in the Houston area, concerted efforts must continue to be made to recruit native language translators. This is a challenging task because while a person may be bilingual, they may not be qualified in terms of essential requirements. One way to interest multilingual persons to become involved with these agencies is to recruit volunteers or part-time students from high schools, local community colleges, and universities. Another suggestion is to offer pay incentives to bilingual applicants. Some agencies are specifically providing foreign language training for at least some of their employees.

District Attorney's Offices (DAO). In Texas, DAOs assign Victim Assistance Coordinators (VACs) to assist victims in applying for compensation, to escort victims to court, and

to refer them to support services in the community. However, having someone available who can speak the victim's language is important in developing trust and a willingness on the part of the immigrant to participate in the process. If it is not feasible to hire multilingual staff, it would be helpful if DAOs would identify language resources available to them through cooperation from other agencies.

Improving accessibility to immigrants could also involve having documents immigrants are handed or receive in the mail translated into their native languages. This is more frequently available for Spanish speaking immigrants, but given the size of Asian groups in Houston, there is a need for all relevant documents to be available in the language of the various ethnicities.

Law Enforcement. Law enforcement agencies face the demanding task of providing easy access to immigrants who seek assistance. Access to persons who speak their language needs to be available when someone calls 911, when a person walks into the station, or when law enforcement officers respond to a call.

- **Calls to 911.** It is usually impractical for a department to have persons who can speak all of the languages represented in the community and to have them available for every shift. Certainly, efforts should be made to hire Spanish speaking dispatchers, since Spanish speaking residents make up a large segment of the Houston population. Some departments will refer immigrant calls to officers who speak that language. However, those officers may not always be available. The Houston Police Department uses a phone translation service to provide assistance in those cases. These telephonic language line services provide interpretation in as many as 170 languages (Khashu, Almo, & Rahman, 2006). However, these services tend to be costly. The Anaheim Police Department in California recruits students in high schools, community colleges, and local universities who speak Spanish or one of the Asian languages to volunteer in the emergency call center (Shah, S; Rahman, I., & Khashu, A., 2007). These volunteers can also assist in translating documents. They also may serve as receptionists or answer special language phone lines to assist with calls from someone who speaks a foreign language.

Organizing an Explorer Club (social group for students interested in learning about law enforcement) in high schools is a way of introducing law enforcement careers to students and demonstrating for them how they could play a special role in their communities.

- **Entrances to Law Enforcement Agencies.** To overcome immigrants' hesitation in contacting the police, the areas immediately inside the front doors of the station should have information on the walls or in the form of pamphlets that are in various immigrant languages. The Anaheim Police Department in California has TV monitors on the wall that have information lines scrolling in several languages simultaneously (Shah, S; Rahman, I., & Khashu, A., 2007). If the person at the front desk cannot speak the resident's language, he or she should have several people to contact who can assist that person.
- **Responding to Calls for Assistance.** Immigrants who are not proficient in English will often be most comfortable talking to someone who can speak their own language. Toward this end, many departments recruit Hispanic and Asian officers and assign

them to precincts where these immigrants reside. This, however, is no small task, since many immigrants in making career choices find other opportunities more attractive to them. While comfortable communicating with similarly speaking residents, they may not be as comfortable trying to fit into an organization that requires interaction with officers whose backgrounds are different from their own. This once again underscores the importance of working with bilingual students in high schools, community colleges, and universities and having them consider a career in law enforcement.

The Texas Code of Criminal Procedure requires that victims of crime be given written notice of their rights as victims and provides them with a list of local resources that can assist them. The requirement is that this document be available in both English and Spanish. However, in communities with large immigrant populations from Asia, this document should also be available in the first languages of these residents.

“Language assistance technology” is another way to help people whose English proficiency is limited (Rahman, Hirsch, and Shah, 2007, p. 4). One-way technology refers to handheld devices, similar to PDA or BlackBerry, which can pre-record phrases in several target languages. Another option is remote, simultaneous interpreting technologies that allow a distant interpreter to provide oral interpretation over the telephone. This is currently used in some courtrooms and hospitals (Rahman et al., 2007, p. 6).

- **Victim Liaison Officers.** Victim liaison officers (VLOs), which are required in every police department, are given special duties to serve victims. VLOs are often first responders in providing assistance and guidance for victims. Either speaking the victim’s language or quickly connecting that person with someone who can speak his or her language can greatly assist victims in coping with what has happened.
- **Local Interpreter Resources.** Some agencies contract with local interpreters to be available as needed to assist residents and officers and to translate relevant documents into the various immigrant languages. These interpreters may also assist in language interpretation for hearings and for police interviews.
- **Pooling Resources.** Another option available in some communities would be to pool resources across agencies (e.g., district attorney offices and community victim assistance agencies). Centralizing language services in a community might lower overall costs while still improving service quality.

New York City consolidated the call centers of 17 government agencies into a single citywide Citizens Service Center with one simple phone number (311) (Khashu, et al., 2006). This call center uses bilingual operators and Language Line, a company that provides interpreter services for as many as 170 languages. The call center is run through a partnership with a local university.

New York City has also developed in association with the Vera Institute (2007) both Spanish and Chinese glossaries as an aid to workers who need to communicate with these immigrant groups.

As important as it is to develop translation resources, it is equally important to notify the public about language assistance services.

- **Shaping Attitudes.** Another task of law enforcement agencies is to shape immigrants’ perceptions of crime and the police. Consistent with previous

research (Khashu, Busch, Latif, & Levy, 2005), this study also found that having a limited understanding of the American justice system deters immigrant victims from contacting the police. Most insulated immigrants rely on local social services to obtain information (Khashu, Bushch, Latif, & Levy, 2005). These services, therefore, can assist to alleviate the suspicions of immigrants toward law enforcement and at the same time disseminate accurate information about how the justice system operates. Other agencies that can share in these efforts are religious organizations, victims' services organizations, and immigrant social services. Police agencies may hold seminars with leaders and advocates of local services and ethnic organizations. These persons can then act as liaisons between the criminal justice agencies and immigrants. Additionally, police may approach immigrant residents directly to pass on information. The Houston Police Department (HPD), for example, has set up store front offices in places like China Town in order to educate people about crime prevention and personal safety. Other important ways to communicate with immigrants is through local newspapers and ethnic radio stations to offer safety tips and answer questions about the criminal justice system (Personal communication, June 20, 2007).

- **Training.** Law enforcement agencies need to ensure that all officers are provided with training related to cultural diversity and languages other than English. Each department should establish guidelines that instruct officers about the things they are expected to do when working with non-English speaking persons and the variety of resources available to the officers.

Funding

One of the most frequently mentioned obstacles encountered by victim services is insufficient funding (Crime Victims' Institute, 2007). If this is true for victim services generally, it is certainly true for immigrant services (Guo, 2006). Most victim services are funded by short-term grants, usually running from year to year. It has been suggested that services would be of higher quality if organizations could obtain stable and long-term funding, in addition to short-term grants and public appeals for donations. Without this, the ability of these agencies to commit to a long-term plan of addressing victim needs is limited. Federal funds for these grants are distributed by each state. These funds have been cut over the past couple of years, resulting in increasing competition for those dollars. Competition for local support can be intense as a variety of agencies ask for more and more money to support their community programs. Efforts should be increased to work collectively in each community to both solicit and distribute funds where they are needed. Fund raisers are not uncommon, but businesses should also be asked to contribute to better serve victims of crime in their communities.

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