

Title: Exploring Immigrant Women’s Fears of Criminal Victimization

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WP Number: 08-10

Research Question: How do immigrant women understand their fear of crime? What factors contribute to their fears? How do these fears influence their daily routines and what types of strategies do immigrant women employ to remain safe?

Importance: This project will help us to examine how crime prevention strategies directed at women and members of racial/ethnic communities address the needs of immigrant women.

Research Findings: Fear of criminal victimization for immigrant women is fraught with multiple layers of concerns shaped by issues of gender, race and class differences. The respondents in this study have shown that while they share similar concerns with women generally over fears of being in public, they have also highlighted more nuanced differences in how their fears are influenced by their identities as racialized women. Their responses echo those of other researchers who note that the interlocking systems of race, class and gender generate experiences that differ materially for each combination of traits. The fears expressed by women in this study are a product of daily incivilities, mixed media messages about women’s responsibility for “protecting themselves” and the underlying threat of personal and/or sexual attack. For racialized women, these incivilities include the possibility of encountering racist conflict or racial discrimination in public. The self-regulating behaviours the respondents engaged in are not just a response to their fears, but it is also a way make daily life manageable so that they are able to engage in their normal routines and activities. In the absence of their ability to stop crime from occurring, the respondents take the only action they can—imposing limits and boundaries on their own activities to prevent the possibility of becoming a crime victim.

Implications: This study highlights how making immigrant women feel safer in public involves recognizing the different issues and concerns women hold. It also points to the need to speak to women and include them in the preparation and implementation of crime prevention programs so that more effective services can be provided to a broader range of women.