UNDOCUMENTED VICTIMS:  
AN EXAMINATION OF CRIMES AGAINST UNDOCUMENTED MALE MIGRANT WORKERS

Jacob Bucher  
Baker University

Michelle Manasse  
Towson University

Beth Tarasawa  
St. Norbert College

Abstract
This study investigates the victimization of undocumented male migrant workers in a southern metropolitan area. Interview data from a sample of undocumented male workers indicate that these workers experience a high rate of victimization, yet they are unlikely to report the crimes or pursue criminal justice aid. Our findings suggest that their immigrant/undocumented status may make these workers particularly susceptible to victimization and limit reporting of victimization due to perceived deportation risk. The reluctance to involve law enforcement, however, may increase their suitability as targets, and ultimately serve to further increase their likelihood of victimization. The importance of recognizing the potential victimization of this population and policy implications for the criminal justice system are discussed.

Key words: Victimization, Immigration, Latino, Ethnicity, Criminal Justice

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of undocumented migrant workers (illegal immigrants) has been brought to the forefront of public discourse, and contemporary debates about undocumented workers tend to be framed by public anxiety over the perceived economic and social consequences of increased immigration. Along with fears of lost jobs and rising health care costs, Americans voice concern that new immigrants will engage in high rates of crime.
Despite societal fears, the bulk of research on immigration and crime suggests that immigrants are actually less likely than non-immigrants to engage in criminal activity (Butcher & Piehl, 1998; Hagan & Palloni, 1999; Reid, Weiss, Aderman & Jaret, 2005).

A limited body of research on immigration and crime has also focused on immigrants as victims of crime (e.g., Biafora & Warheit, 2007; Catalano, 2005; Sorenson & Lew, 2000), however due to research focus and methodological constraints, existing studies examine the victimization of legal immigrants – sometimes even second or third generation immigrants – rather than undocumented workers. As undocumented workers are not captured by census data, official victimization datasets, such as the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), do not measure victimization within this population. This gap in the literature is particularly problematic as undocumented workers may be prime targets for victimization. For instance, many are paid in cash and keep their wages in their residence until they can send it home to their families (Hansen, 2005), which may make them attractive targets. As their “illegal” status, by definition, puts undocumented workers in violation of immigration law, they are also unlikely to report any victimization to law enforcement; this only serves to increase their attractiveness to potential offenders.

This research addresses an under-researched aspect of immigration and crime by investigating the victimization of this marginalized population. By administering self-report victimization surveys to a sample of undocumented workers in Memphis, Tennessee, we are able to compare the victimization rate of this population to national averages and determine if/how their undocumented status affects their risk of victimization.

**Immigration and the South**

Much like European immigrants before them, today’s immigrants left their Latin, Asian, and African countries in search of occupational opportunity and political refuge in the United States. Historically, European newcomers settled in large port cities, and by the early 1900s the majority of immigrants were located in the Eastern seaboard or upper Midwest working in urban factories (Bump, Lowell & Petterson, 2005). These immigration patterns were guided by U.S. institutional policy and restrictions that related to historical economic labor supply demands, native and ideological sentiments, and international political interests (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1977; LeMay, 1986).

Today’s immigrants are mostly from Asia and Latin America (particularly Mexico, Central American countries, Philippines, Korea, and Southeast Asia), and the majority continues to settle in just six states: California, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois (Gozdiak, 2005). Specific industries such as meat processing, agriculture, and construction companies recruit immigrants for low-wage labor. The Latinization of workers

---

1The term “illegal immigrants” is the popular public terminology for undocumented migrant workers violating immigration laws of the host country.
picking apples in the orchards of Washington, oranges in the groves of Florida, grapes in the 
crops of California and mushrooms in the sheds of New England all reflect contemporary 
immigration patterns (Gozdiak, 2005). Government has also brought newcomers to areas with 
growing economies through refugee resettlement programs.

Unlike the traditional settlement states, the foreign-born undocumented Latino population 
drives the majority of the immigrant growth in the South. The category of “undocumented 
imigrant” captures a diverse population. Generally, the undocumented population is defined 
as foreign-born persons living in the United States without proper authorization papers (Passel, 
2005). These individuals can range from immigrants who overstay their student visas, to people 
who come looking for occupational opportunity, to those who flee persecution from their home 
countries and could qualify for temporary protection with refugee status. Recent figures 
estimate that more than 10 million undocumented immigrants reside in the U.S., including more 
than six million Mexicans (Passel, 2005).

Beyond the sheer magnitude of growth in the Latino population in the South, the 
characteristics of these immigrants are distinctive. The occupational opportunities attract large 
numbers of young workers who are likely to have arrived recently, to be foreign-born, to have 
low levels of education, and to speak English poorly or not at all (Kochhar, Suro & Tofoya, 
2005). These patterns are defining characteristics of the first waves of Mexican labor migration 
(Durand & Massey, 2004).

Although Latinos previously had a relatively small presence in Tennessee, they are now a 
visible player in the state’s demography. Tennessee saw the fourth highest rate of increase 
(278%) in Latino population within the U.S. between 1990-2000 (Kochhar, Suro & Tofoya, 
2005). Like most southern states, the rapid growth in Tennessee’s Latino population is largely 
driven by undocumented migrant workers, and Tennessee is one of the states with the highest 
percentage (40-54%) of unauthorized residents in its foreign born population (Passel, 2005; 
Passel, Capps & Fix, 2002). As of 2004, the estimated number of unauthorized immigrants in 
Tennessee was roughly 100,000-150,000 (Passel, 2005).

Immigrant Victimization

Census data do not account for undocumented migrant workers; therefore, undocumented 
workers are not represented in the NCVS, and there are no official data on victimization rates 
for this population. However, official data can provide comparisons of the victimization rate for 
Hispanic and Non-Hispanic citizens/permanent residents. According to 2004 NCVS data, 
Hispanics and non-Hispanics were at equal risk for many forms of victimization, including 
rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and theft, and Hispanics were actually less 
likely than non-Hispanics to be victims of overall violence and simple assault (Catalano, 2005). 
In 2004, Non-Hispanic and Hispanic males were also equally likely to report victimizations to 
the police (Catalano, 2005).

Although research in the area is quite limited, comparisons of victimization rates between 
immigrant and non-immigrant groups also show little significant variation between the groups.
In a comparison of homicide rates among immigrant and non-immigrant populations in Los Angeles, Sorenson and Lew (2000) found immigrants were at only a slightly higher risk of homicide than non-immigrants. In a large-scale study of self-report victimization among immigrant groups in South Florida, Biafora and Warheit (2007) found no difference in victimization rate between Hispanic immigrants and non-immigrant groups.

While the above findings suggest little difference in the victimization risk for Hispanics and non-Hispanics or immigrant and non-immigrant groups, these data do not consider “illegal” immigrants. Undocumented workers are likely to have lifestyle characteristics that put them at a significantly higher risk of victimization than U.S.-born Hispanics or legal Hispanic immigrants represented in most self-report victimization data.

An individual’s lifestyle plays a fundamental role in victimization rates, according to routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Cohen and Felson (1979) suggest that for crime to occur there must be a convergence of a motivated offender, suitable target, and the lack of capable guardian, such that, even if the number of motivated offenders remains constant, shifts in victimization rates may increase with shifts in the availability of suitable targets or capable guardians. Therefore, to the extent that undocumented workers are more likely to be perceived as suitable targets and/or find themselves in environments lacking capable guardians, their risk of victimization would increase.

Undocumented workers are likely to have characteristics and engage in behaviors that make them particularly suitable targets for victimization. First, immigrants tend to face a language barrier and have little familiarity with their new living area; this alone can make them susceptible to offenders looking for an easy mark. As undocumented workers generally enter the country illegally in search of financial opportunity, they often live in poverty and thus tend to reside in low-income areas (Bump, Lowell & Petterson, 2005). Undocumented workers may therefore be suitable targets simply by living in high crime areas. Undocumented migrants, who often do not have bank accounts, also tend to carry large amounts of cash on their person. This behavior – as well as the knowledge of this behavior among offenders – makes undocumented workers lucrative targets for robberies and theft (Hansen, 2005).

The circumstances of undocumented migrant workers also make them less likely to have the protection of capable guardians. Data from the 2004 NCVS show that the risk of increases with the number of people living in a residence and research on immigration finds that undocumented workers often live with other undocumented workers (Passel, 2005). In theory, multiple people in a single home could provide effective guardianship. However, undocumented workers living together are highly transitory and tend to not be related; multiple

---

2 The NCVS defines “Hispanic” as persons who identify themselves as Mexican-American, Chicano, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American (if Spanish speaking countries) or of other Spanish origin. This category includes persons of any race.

3 The relationship between race and reporting victimization to the police differs by gender. Although there is no difference among males, in 2004, Hispanic females were more likely than non-Hispanic females to report a violent crime, while non-Hispanic females were more likely than Hispanic females to report a property crime.
residents are therefore more likely to reduce effective guardianship, as multiple strangers may enter the home and gain knowledge of the residents’ everyday activities.

Offenders are also aware that immigrants fear the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS; now absorbed by Homeland Security). In many cities, police are affiliated with the INS\(^4\) and thus victims without legal status often do not report thefts or other criminal acts for fear of deportation (Hansen, 2005). Immigrants may fear the police because of traumatic experiences or may not trust the police because they come from societies where law enforcement is corrupt (Gozdziak & Melia, 2005). Additionally, research suggests it is not uncommon for police to improperly stop and investigate Latinos based on their ethnicity or perceived immigrant status within new settlement cities (Schoenholtz, 2005). Such resistance to involving law enforcement and reporting victimization can increase the risk of victimization. Felson, Baumer and Messner (2000) found that reluctance to report crimes to the police among poor, Black males increased offenders’ perception that they were a “good take” and increased the individuals’ overall likelihood of victimization.

By analyzing self-reported victimization data from undocumented workers in Memphis, Tennessee, this research uncovered the victimization risk of this marginalized population and expanded the limited literature on immigration and crime. Based on Felson and Cohen’s routine activities theory, we expected that respondents to experience a higher incidence of victimization than the general population, and this victimization would be linked to lifestyle characteristics related to the respondents’ immigrant status.

**METHODS**

**Sample**

An exploratory study of undocumented migrant workers\(^5\) was carried out during March and April of 2004. The data were collected in Memphis, Tennessee through individual, semi-structured street-based interviews. Due to the difficulty of tracking mobile migrant workers fearful of legal consequences, the initial sample was convenience-based. The initial sample included twelve participants, and a process of snowball sampling rendered the final total sample of ninety participants. Due to potential language and literacy issues, the semi-structured interviews were conducted through an interpreter. As this research seeks to measure the victimization rates of a population not currently represented in the NCVS, respondents were asked a series of questions similar to those in the National Crime Victimization Survey\(^6\). Interviewers explained both the voluntary nature of participation and that there would be no legal consequences to participation.

\(^4\)In Memphis, once the police department has completed an investigation, any undocumented victims/offenders are turned over to INS/Homeland Security.

\(^5\)The two primary violations of United States immigration laws are lack of a valid work visa (an offense labeled “entry without inspection”), and possession of an expired visa; these respondents would be considered guilty of entry without inspection.

\(^6\)See Appendix 1 for interview script
Measures

Respondent Demographics. Demographic measures included age, marital status, occupation, country of origin, and time in the US. All respondents were male.

Respondent Residence. Residence measures include whether respondents rent or own their residence, type of residence (house or apartment), number of people in residence, and length of time in current residence.

Victimization. Respondents were asked if they had experienced victimization in the form of theft, robbery, burglary, motor vehicle theft, violent attacks, and/or vandalism. Regarding these types of victimization, respondents were asked if they had been victimized, how many times, the location of the incident, what was taken, and whether they knew the offender.

Offender Characteristics. If the offender was known, respondents were asked how they learned of the offender, where the offender lived, and whether the offender had a weapon. Respondents were also asked for offender characteristics, including the offender's gender, age, race, gang affiliation, substance use, and relationship to the victim.

Reporting of Crime/Police Involvement. Respondents were asked a variety of questions about police involvement, including if/how police were informed of the incident, police action, and/or reason for non-reporting of the incident.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive results correspond overall to the expected demographic characteristics of a population of undocumented workers (Hansen, 2005). All respondents were Latino, and the majority of those surveyed reported Mexico as their home country. The majority of respondents were married, and the median age was 31 years. Most of the sample worked in the fields of construction and landscaping, and, as would be anticipated by Hansen (2005), all respondents reported that their employers paid them in cash.

Time in country and time in residence can be found in Table 1. All of the respondents claimed that they rented as opposed to owning their residence. Almost all, 83, reported that they rented an apartment. Only 4 participants claimed to live alone, 27 lived with one to two other people, 49 lived with three to four people, and 10 respondents reported living with five or more people. All but two of the respondents reported that they kept their cash in their residence. Table 1 shows the maximum amount of cash that respondents believed they had in their residence at any given time.

The majority of respondents (63%) reported having been a victim of a crime. Some respondents reported being the victim of more than one crime; this is represented in the results. Table 2 shows the breakdown of type of crime with frequencies and percentages.

The majority of thefts (92%) occurred at the home of the victim, five of the fourteen robberies happened at home (the rest were at work or in public), two of the nine violent attacks occurred near the home, two at work, and there were three who did not respond to the location
of their violent attack. All of the car thefts and all of the vandalism reportedly happened at home.

Of those who were victimized, thirteen (23%) said they knew the offender(s), twelve (21%) did not respond, and thirty-two (56%) did not know their offender(s). Four respondents (7%) reported that they lived with the offender(s) whereas thirty-six (63%) did not and seventeen (30%) did not answer. The age of the offender(s) and their race/ethnicity can be found in Table 2. All of the offenders were male. As noted above, 76% of the victims did not report being victimized. Only fourteen of the fifty-seven (24%) victims stated that the crime was reported to the police. Not only is that a low percentage, but when these crimes were reported, only one was reported by the respondent himself. The rest were reported by someone official such as a supervisor/landlord (5) or by someone else (8). Reasons varied for why the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS’ OCCUPATION, TIME IN COUNTRY, TIME IN RESIDENCE AND AMOUNT OF CASH IN RESIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial/Cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time In Country</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Months to a Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time in Residence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Months to a Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount of Cash in Residence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1-$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$251-$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$501-$750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$751-$1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1001-$1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1501-$2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF TYPE OF VICTIMIZATION AND OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Victimization</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Attack</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Theft</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offender Characteristics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

crimes were not reported, as shown in Table 3. It is evident from this distribution that most of the victims did not report the crime(s) because they did not trust the police or they did not want to get in trouble with the police or immigration services.

Of the fourteen crimes that were reported, the majority of those victims had negative interactions with the police. In three cases the police took a report and in two cases the police searched and looked around for suspects. However in four cases the victims themselves were arrested or detained; and in the five other cases the police did little or nothing. It is this kind of police interaction that contributes to the underreporting of victimization of undocumented workers.
Additional findings are groundbreaking in the understanding of victimization within this population. The data reveal three important patterns: the relationship between type of crime and time in country and/or residence, knowledge of offender and residence proximity, and reasons offered by victims for not reporting.

**Victims**

Two of the most striking results from the data are the relationship between length of time in the U.S./victimization and length of time in current residence/victimization. Table 4 shows the cross-tabulations for time in country and time in residence and experience of theft, robbery, and violent attacks.

To further these findings, regression analysis confirms the relationship between time in country and time in residence with crime. The less time in country, the more likely it is that the undocumented worker will be victimized. The same can be said for time in residence; the lower amount of time in current residence, the more likely there is to be victimization. This could be the result of being a suitable target, perhaps due to lack of familiarity with the community and its risks or fear of the criminal justice system. Table 5 shows the standardized regression coefficients for when theft, robbery, and violent attacks are the dependent variable.

We find a similar strong relationship between cohabitants and crime. The more cohabitants an immigrant lives with, the more likely it is that he will be victimized. This relationship is shown in the cross tabulations in Table 4 and it supports the previously discussed data from the 2004 NCVS that provided evidence about the effects of number of residents in a
household. The regression coefficients explaining the effect of cohabitants on theft, robbery, and violent attacks are .401, .269, and .384 respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic of Victim</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Violent Attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time in Country</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Months - Year</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Years</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ Years</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time in Residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Months - Year</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Residents in Home</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Alone</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Cohabitants</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 Cohabitants</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ Cohabitants</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, despite the fact that all the participants were paid in cash and all kept cash in their residence, the amount of money kept in residence did not have a significant impact on whether or not the participants were victims of theft or robbery. Routine Activities theory would suggest that the more money kept in a residence, the more likely it is that the person would be victimized (Felson, 1998). Our data did not show this to be true for this population, perhaps because offenders were unaware the amount of money, such that keeping money in residence at all was the true risk factor.

**DISCUSSION**

While attention has been paid to the offending rates of documented and undocumented immigrants, research on the victimization of this population is extremely limited. This paper makes an important first step by capturing the victimization experiences of undocumented male migrant workers. Due mostly to fear or lack of trust of law enforcement, the majority of crimes
# TABLE 5: OLS REGRESSION OF TIME IN RESIDENTS IN HOME, COUNTRY/RESIDENCE AND OTHER KEY VARIABLES ON ALL CRIME, THEFT, ROBBERY AND VIOLENT ATTACKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Crime</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Violent Attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Residents in Home</td>
<td>.674* (.022)</td>
<td>.401* (.084)</td>
<td>.269* (.092)</td>
<td>.383 (.169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Country</td>
<td>-.406* (.021)</td>
<td>-.269* (.079)</td>
<td>-.326* (.086)</td>
<td>-.457* (.158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Residence</td>
<td>-.386* (.026)</td>
<td>-.244* (.099)</td>
<td>-.237* (.109)</td>
<td>-.423* (.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.118 (.053)</td>
<td>-.174 (.190)</td>
<td>.007 (.208)</td>
<td>-.126 (.281)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money in Residence</td>
<td>-.130 (.106)</td>
<td>.412 (.152)</td>
<td>.196 (.140)</td>
<td>-.063 (.169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-squared</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.643</td>
<td>.561</td>
<td>.612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
committed against undocumented workers go unreported and unresolved. Offenders are therefore often aware that the victims will not contact police and could be more vulnerable targets. These workers are also paid in cash and tend to keep cash on their person or in their residence until they can use it for purchases or send it back to their families. Our findings support routine activities theory in that the combination of profit and ability to avoid consequence make undocumented workers prime targets for victimization.

It is important to understand that not only is there a lack of action on the part of the victims, but a lack of action from the criminal justice system. Police officers are not motivated to assist victims who are themselves technically criminals. Whether it is the robbery of a drug dealer or the burglary of an undocumented migrant worker, police officers do not expend resources to assist those who themselves violated the law. According to a local Memphis police officer, most police officers in this location simply turn the case over to immigration services. There are no “safe-zones” or ways that these workers can report victimization without fearing INS sanction. It is also difficult to find law enforcement agencies that provide agents who have sufficient training in other languages to deal with these types of victims. The lack of bilingual services, and/or the inadequacy of these services in the criminal justice system further contribute to the underreporting by victimized undocumented workers.

Beyond the front line law enforcement agencies, there is little being done at a policy or legislation level. Much of this can be attributed to the desire of law makers to appeal to public sentiment. They fear that providing outlets for reporting and protection of these victims would be perceived by the public as enabling illegal immigrants. This persists due to the larger issue of illegal immigration as a national ‘hot button’ political issue. Many policy makers are reluctant to support policies that could be viewed as sympathetic to undocumented migrant workers. Furthermore, there is no data to motivate law makers to make any changes as the leading source for victimization data (NCVS) fails to account for this population in the United States. This is a growing population and regardless of immigration laws and policies, it is the responsibility of the criminal justice system to protect, investigate, and sanction crimes committed both by and against those living in a given jurisdiction.

Some local community efforts are emerging to deal with undocumented victimization. Bridging The Gap (BTG) is a multi-dimensional Atlanta-based project that operates from the premise that the challenge of immigrant integration stems from cultural misunderstandings more than racial barriers. BTG uses two main strategies to reduce misunderstandings between immigrant communities and law enforcement. First, a crisis intervention program initiated to respond to 911 calls from non-English-speaking callers with more than twenty-five staff members who speak fifteen different languages. This effort signaled emergency services were willing and wanted to take calls from the immigrant community. Second was the Mediation Project, an education initiative for immigrants, landlords, and law enforcement to educate immigrants about social services, employment, and translation services to better interact with governmental institutions.

In addition to the examples found in the BTG project in Atlanta, there are other measures that the criminal justice system could take to assist undocumented workers who are victimized.
One method could be the establishment of a hotline for victimization that is not tied directly to the police department. Victims who fear or distrust the police would then have a government sponsored service to help them after being victimized. Another alternative would be to disconnect the police department from the INS and Homeland Security. In a post-9/11 world this alternative may not be entirely feasible, but if the operating procedures of police departments were changed in reference to undocumented workers, this might alleviate fear and distrust while simultaneously increasing reporting. Rather than turning undocumented victims over to immigration services, police could process the case as is and assist the victims as they would assist documented victims. Finally there could be victim assistance programs that are government funded but do not involve the police or immigration services. The program could potentially involve the aforementioned hotline and offer other forms of community outreach services. These would further assist victims by providing bilingual services as well as other resources that may help victims regardless of their race, ethnicity, or legal status.

This research is limited mostly in terms of potential generalizability. The study was done in one metropolitan area and only looked at male undocumented workers. Future research should look to other areas that vary on region and population, and should consider female undocumented workers. Another suggestion for future research is to expand beyond NCVS measures and measure victimization of this population with variables more conducive to further and varied statistical analyses. The research also is limited in terms of when the data was collected. In order to continue a more substantial discourse on the relationship between immigration status and victimization, more recent data would prove useful.

These findings highlight the experiences of undocumented male migrant workers, particularly the danger of criminal victimization associated with their illegal immigration status. These data can further help to inform policy as they call attention to ways in which immigrant status is likely to contribute to victimization, even as illegal immigrants are unlikely to engage in criminal acts themselves. Without such victimization data, we are left with an incomplete understanding of the undocumented migrant experience, and the human rights issues of those who are already politically and socially stigmatized will not be fully addressed.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

1. What country did you migrate from?
2. How long have you been in the United States?
3. What is your age?
4. What would you say is the main type of work do you do?
5. Are you paid in cash?
6. Are you married?
7. Do you rent or own your residence?
8. Is this a house or an apartment?
9. Does anyone live with you?
    If so, how many people live with you?
10. How long have you lived in your current residence?
11. Do you keep cash money in your residence?
    If so, how much money is in your residence at any given time?
12. Do you own a car?
Crime

I'm going to ask you about some crimes that may have happened to you. As I go through them, tell me if any of these happened to you in the United States in the last 6 months. People often don’t think of incidents committed by someone they know, please include times when someone you know did something to you.

13. Was something belonging to YOU stolen from your home, such as –

   (a) Things that you carry, like luggage, a wallet, purse, briefcase, book
   (b) Clothing, jewelry, or cell phone
   (c) Things in your home – like a TV, stereo, or tools
   (d) Things outside your home such as a garden hose or lawn furniture
   (e) Things from a vehicle, such as a package, groceries, camera, or CDs
   (f) Cash

13a. How many times has this happened?

14. Was something belonging to YOU stolen from your person, such as –

   (a) Things that you carry, like luggage, a wallet, purse, briefcase, book
   (b) Clothing, jewelry, or cell phone
   (c) Bicycle or sports equipment
   (d) Cash

14a. How many times has this happened?

14b. Where has this happened?

   (a) At home including the porch or yard
   (b) At work
   (c) At or near a friend’s, relative’s, or neighbor’s home
   (d) Other

15. Have you been physically attacked or threatened?

   (a) Include any grabbing, punching, or choking
   (b) Any face to face threats
   (c) Any attack or threat or use of force by anyone at all
15a. How many times has this happened?

15b. Where did this happen?
   
   (a) At home including the porch or yard
   (b) At work
   (c) At or near a friend’s, relative’s, or neighbor’s home
   (d) Other

16. Have you had any of your property (car or home) damaged?
   
   (a) Include anything that was intentionally broken or damaged
   (b) Include any painting, scratching, etc.

16a. How many times has this happened?

17. Have you had your car or vehicle stolen?

17a. How many times has this happened?

17b. Where did this happen?
   
   (a) At home including the porch or yard
   (b) At work
   (c) At or near a friend’s, relative’s, or neighbor’s home
   (d) Other

Offender Data

18. Did you personally see an offender?

19. Did you live with the offender?

20. Was the offender male or female?

21. How old would you say the offender was?

22. Was the offender a member of a street gang, or don’t you know?

23. Was the offender drinking or on drugs, or don’t you know?
   Which was it? (Drinking or on drugs?)
24. Was the offender someone you knew or a stranger you had never seen before?

25. How well did you know the offender? For example, was the offender a friend, cousin?

26. Was the offender White, Black, Latino or some other race?

27. Was this the only time this offender committed a crime against you or your household or made threats against you or your household?

28. How many offenders?

**Police**

29. Were the police informed or did they find out about this incident in any way?

30. How did the police find out about it?

31. Did the police come when they found out about the incident?

32. What did they do while they were (there/here)?

   Anything else?

33. What did the police do in following up this incident?

   Anything else?

34. What was the reason it was not reported to the police? (Can you tell me a little more?)

   Any other reason?
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Jacob Bucher is an Assistant Professor at Baker University. His current research focuses on inequality, especially as it pertains to crime and victimization, and military crime and deviance.

Michelle Manasse is an assistant professor at Towson University. Her research focuses on empirical tests of criminological theory and the intersection of mental health and crime.

Beth Tarasawa is Assistant Professor of Sociology at St. Norbert College. She received her Ph.D. in sociology from Emory University in August 2009. Her research interests include race and ethnic relations, the sociology of education, and urban sociology.