Fear of Crime among Somali Diaspora Women

Executive Summary

Gender, ethnicity, housing, addiction, opportunity, community well-being, and neighborhood safety must be understood as intersecting issues. Using literature from research on poverty and crime, the goal of this report is to show how individuals, specifically Somali diaspora women, feel in regards to safety in light of rising violence in their neighborhoods like North Minneapolis, as well as gather their recommendations for creating holistic community safety. While participants were from various neighborhoods in this report, our focus is on North Minneapolis for two reasons: 1) respondents reported a heightened feeling of abandonment by their local officials, particularly city councils, and 2) the proximity of the attacks to the houses of the participants. One major limitation of this research was constrained time, resources to conduct more robust interviews with a larger group.

Crime is a difficult subject to study, more difficult to analyze into its sociological elements, and most difficult to cure or suppress. It is a phenomenon that stands not alone, but rather as a symptom of countless wrong social conditions. W.E.B. Du Bois

Introduction

Events over the past year, particularly in Minneapolis, MN, clearly demonstrate that the well-being of seemingly separate neighborhoods and communities are intertwined and affect one another. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, income and racial disparities have been substantially amplified and indicate greater risks to the safety, health, and opportunity of our most vulnerable communities. The pandemic is still not over, and it's essential to continue to interrogate what we accepted as "normal" before COVID-19, and instead prioritize fostering safe and prosperous communities. We call on our city, county and state legislators. and community leaders to propose bold approaches to reduce factors that put people at risk to experience violence, and to increase factors that protect them from risk.

Because people are currently at risk everyday, simply by trying to live their lives in their communities. Poverty continues to be one of the strongest indicators of crime. Women of the Somali diaspora community are victims of crime in their own neighborhoods, and they express fear of victimization. We surveyed 20 Somali women living in Minneapolis to gather their reactions and fears to crime they were victims. Our results align with previous research that show the association between community social capital and crime victimization.

Neighborhood Poverty

Though Minneapolis ranks among the best places to live in the nation, and several of the biggest companies in the U.S. have their headquarters here, including Target, Best Buy, General Mills, and Ameriprise; Minneapolis also ranks near the bottom for racial equality. Moreover, the last three decades have seen the number of concentrated-poverty neighborhoods double, not only in the Twin Cities but across the country. In 2018, 24 million people were living in high-poverty neighborhoods across the U.S., about 12 million more than in 1980.

According to research by the Neighborhood Poverty Project, directed by Economic Innovation Group (EIG), a policy and advocacy organization dedicated to economic advancement, both Hennepin and Ramsey County have expanding areas of concentrated poverty. EIG has monitored changes in the number and composition of many metropolitan high-poverty neighborhoods from 1980 to 2018, and states "high-poverty neighborhoods are a unique force in perpetuating poverty from one generation to the next, erecting barriers to economic opportunity for poor and non-poor residents alike." They describe a high-poverty areas a neighborhood with a poverty rate of 30 percent or higher. While the demographic composition of high-poverty neighborhoods varies substantially, Black poor folks are much more likely to live in a high-poverty neighborhood than white poor people. EIG claims "not only has the number of high-poverty neighborhoods surged over the past several decades, but that income growth has stalled for these neighborhoods at the same time, decreasing the likelihood that their high-poverty status will only be fleeting."

As data reporter Greta Kaul wrote in MinnPost, the number of neighborhoods in Hennepin and Ramsey counties that meet this standard has increased more than double folds since 1980 (from 19 to 41).

EIG establishes three measures to categories different types of neighborhoods:

- *Newly poor* describes neighborhoods that were low poverty (a poverty rate below 20 percent) in 1980 and became high-poverty (a poverty rate above or equal to 30 percent) in 2018. Due to the proliferation of high-poverty neighborhoods since 1980, a majority of 2018 high-poverty neighborhoods fall into this category.
- *Persistent poverty* describes neighborhoods that had a high poverty rate in both 1980 and 2018. Although this category does not consider whether a neighborhood temporarily fell out of the high-poverty bracket at any point between 1980 and 2018, 75 percent of these persistently poor neighborhoods were high poverty at every decade mark between 1980 and 2018.
- *Deepening poverty* describes neighborhoods that had a poverty rate between 20 and 30 percent in 1980 and were high poverty (over 30 percent) in 2018.

In Minneapolis, neighborhoods that could be identified as newly-poor would be Near North, Camden, Powderhorn and Cedar-Riverside. Minneapolis' persistent poverty neighborhoods include several tracts in Near North and Phillips, much of the area near downtown, as well as Cedar-Riverside. Deepening poverty areas include the northwest portion of Seward along Hiawatha, Stevens Square and a swath of Near North. Here is an interactive map that shows all U.S. metropolitan high-poverty areas in 2018 and earlier.

Connecting Poverty and Crime

Theories suggest community economic deprivation and inequalities may cause a wide range of social dysfunctions, including crime, lower social trust, drug addiction, and failing education systems (Pratt and Cullen 2005)

For example, Researchers like Iyer and Topalova (2014) have shown absolute poverty (when the household income is below a certain level, which makes it difficult for the person or family to meet basic needs) is associated with higher property crime rates. While Fajnzylber et al. (2002) show relative poverty (when the households' income is less than average household incomes, thus unable to afford anything above the basics) can be linked with a surge of aggression and violent crime.

Another model is the social disorganization theory, introduced by Shaw and McKay, (1942) which alleges that a neighborhood's characteristics can be formed by various factors, which determines the community's level of social organization. This organization, in turn, impacts the amount of social control the neighborhood holds over its residents, and therefore influences the level of crime and decline within that neighborhood. According to this theory, certain neighborhood features – mainly poverty, housing instability, and ethnic/racial heterogeneity – can influence the neighbor's level of organization. Each of these factors influences in differing ways to a community's inability to self-regulate, which can result in increased crime and delinquency.

Fear of crime is itself a form of indirect victimization, and causes psychological distress, diminishes opportunity for free movement, and decreases faith in neighborhood stability, according to research by Moeller (1989). Crime victims often suffer wide ranging psychological

and communal injuries that last long after their physical wounds have healed. Research of fear and crime demonstrates residents who are afraid of being criminally victimized change their habits. They tend to limit their movements, stay at home more, and put additional safety measures (income permitting) such as locks, chains bars and alarms. They do not go out after dark, or if necessary, go out in groups, shown by Warr & Ellison (2000). Others researchers like Wyant (2008) highlight the gendered aspect of fear and crime and claim that women are more likely than men to feel more vulnerable to crime because they are more physically vulnerable, despite statistically being at lower risk for violence.

Somali Diaspora Integration in High Poverty Neighborhoods

Near North is a community on the north side of Minneapolis and has the largest African American residents since 1900. It included neighborhoods of Harrison, Hawthorne, Jordan, Near North, Sumner-Glenwood**,** and Willard-Hay**.** According to the University of Minnesota's Mapping Prejudice project, in early 1900s, Minnesota real estate introduced racially restrictive covenants, which are legal contracts inserted in property deeds to prevent Blacks from buying or occupying land. This practice of racial restrictions in warranty deeds was banned in 1953, however its legacy remains in place in Minneapolis today. Residential segregation reinforces other disparities in employment, education and health care.

As the Somali diaspora came to seek the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their children, they realized achieving those dreams are inextricably connected to finding a stable, affordable place to call home. For many immigrants, including Somalis, North and South Minneapolis became that stable place and provided affordable housing. Thus, during the 1990s, an influx of immigrants added their ethnicity to the racial composition of North Minneapolis.

Immigrants are integral to the communities they settle in. However, even years after they arrive, many immigrants face significant and urgent challenges finding and maintaining adequate and affordable housing. Many residents pay more than they can afford for housing, forcing them to live in substandard conditions or forgo other necessities like food, medicine or transportation — and these challenges disproportionately impact communities of color, including immigrants. Immigrant tenants face housing problems to a degree much greater than native-born Minnesotans. Not only do families pay a significantly higher portion of their income for rent, but we are learning that they may also be exposed to higher violent crimes and dealing with fear.

To better understand these challenges and move toward policy solutions, Ayada Leads conducted a study to examine the crime victimization of Somali women in North Minneapolis.

Participants Profile

20 Somali diaspora women, all residents of North Minneapolis, were interviewed for this project. The respondents' ages ranged between 35-55 years, and they were all mothers. Respondents have been in Minneapolis for less than 10 years and in process of integrating into the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres of Minnesota. Regarding the socioeconomic status of the respondents, all respondents in this sample were employed in the low-waged jobs, 6 part-time and 14 full-time. Most of them experience systemic and language barriers.

Methodology

Over the course of two months, participants were asked about safety, specifically if they have safety concerns in their neighborhood or have been victim to any crimes. We focused on victims' personal response and continued worries about the incident(s).

Interviews were conducted over the phone and in person individually, and by an in person focus group. For the focus group, the environment was comfortable and in circle seating. Moderators were skillful in group discussions and used pre-determined questions and established a safe and permissive environment, which was essential since many respondents continued to deal with fear and trauma at the time of the focus group.

Measures

Our questions for the interviews focused on the following:

Q1: Did they experience any type of crime in the last year leading the survey?

Q2: (if YES at Q1) Did they report the crime to the police?

Q3: Did they feel targeted?

Q4: Did the crime impact their wellbeing?

Q5: (if YES) How were they impacted? Did they seek professional help?

Q6: After the crime, did they take any precautions?

Q7: (if YES to Q6) Did the precautions make them feel safer?

Results

Prone to Victimization

The respondents reported that since offenders can perceive nonverbal cues from their potential targets, they go after those they perceive to be easy to overpower. Due to some patterns related to the respondents' behavior and culture, respondents felt they were an easy target.

Respondents mentioned that during the attack they were inattentive to those around them including their attackers. For example, most of the respondents reported that they were on the phone or busy with other things when they were attacked.

Dressing in certain ways such as wearing a long dress or the Muslim attire like a hijb or burka was another factor that respondents alleged made them prone to victimization, as this type of dress limits their ability to move quickly or run from danger.

They also asserted crimes in their neighborhood are a consequence of youth substance abuse. Respondents talked about a growing drug addiction among East African youth, and how some of these youth know community members' habits and behavior, and participants felt they had an increased exposure and vulnerability to robbery and other crimes. For example, respondents believed these youth were aware of the habits of East African women to carry cash for their daily purchases, thus another reason they were attacked. Because of the lifestyle of carrying cash, respondents shared that some offenders called them a "walking ATM".

The Impact of Crime

Assault and robbery are serious offenses. While money is often the reason, these cases are considered crimes of violence because they involve physical and emotional harms as well as real injuries. Respondents said the crime, directly and indirectly, affected them and their families on a variety of levels including physically, physiologically, emotionally, and financially (see Table 1). Those who experienced the crime directly shared their experiences of anxiety, including feeling terrified, helpless, and/or out of control. In the days, weeks, and months following the crime, respondents continue to have high levels of fear, anxiety, and generalized distress. They think about the crime a great deal, talk about it, and/or have flashbacks. One respondent said her nephew who was with his mother during a robbery did not leave his room and stayed in bed for weeks. Respondents stated they are always concerned about their safety, and the safety of their family members, from another attack. All of them experienced negative changes in their belief systems and no longer think that their neighborhood is a safe place where they can trust other people.

Table 1: Reported Consequences of Crime Victimization

Physical Injuries	*Psychological/Emotional Stress*	*Financial Burdens*
- Fractures - Lacerations - Sprains - Bruises - Sleep disorders - Increased risk of future victimization	- Confusion - Fear or Terror - Anger or rage - Shock or Helplessness - Feeling out of control - Concerns about being believed - Concerns about being blamed - Increased feelings of vulnerability	- Medical Bills - Prescription medications - Purchasing new phone - Replacement of items damaged, destroyed, or stolen - Costs of replacing locks - Lost days at work

Precautions Taken After the Crime

In response to the experienced assaults, and to reduce the opportunity for future criminal victimization respondents shared some crime prevention strategies they undertook. Respondents said they avoid going out alone during the day and night. They use extra locks in their apartments and do not keep cash with them. They stopped parking their car far from their apartments/homes. They said they are sure to pay attention to the people around them and be aware of their surroundings in general.

Conclusion

This report documents the concerns of neighborhood safety experienced by Somali diaspora women residing in North Minneapolis.

Community safety requires a sense of collective accountability to prevent and address violence/harm when it occurs, as well as approaches to healing trauma that may already exist within the community. An individual's neighborhood and community should seek holistic and transformative methods of encouraging safety and confronting harm that work to repair relationships and address the underlying forces or circumstances that allow the harm to occur. With the understanding that many behaviors and actions that may harm a community's sense of safety are rooted in lack of access to critical resources. Promoting community safety inevitably requires the fostering of life-affirming conditions for all such as access to good jobs, quality affordable housing, healthcare, local businesses, and social support. Crime prevention is largely

about understanding the factors which give rise to criminal or lawless behavior and acting before matters can escalate.

Further Recommendations

It is not the purpose of this report to provide guidance on all the various ways that North Minneapolis residents can eliminate crime. However, it is worth emphasizing some of the ways that can assist the residents to be more connected with their neighborhood and city.

• The city of Minneapolis should generate accurate data about the level of crime and to consider its effects on the community, particularly women.

• State, local and county elected officials should hold a monthly community focused problem-solving meeting in North Minneapolis

• Secure the support of the local business owners

• Secure funding for residents that experience economic hardship due to crimes

• Evaluate the impact of a range of current policies and procedures, e.g., addressing reducing youth addictions

• Mobilize cross-sector community partnerships to address lack of opportunities

• Work with community organizations that are skilled in de-escalation and peacekeepers who have mechanisms in place to review emergencies, establish protocols, develop and maintain rapid response networks

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