Fear of victimization among illicit immigrants in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The widespread fear of crime and its detrimental consequences have propelled various research studies on the correlates of fear of crime. An impressive body of knowledge has accumulated, which informs both scholars and policymakers of the correlates of fear of crime. However, very little is known about fear of crime among immigrant populations. Fear of crime associated with immigrants remains a global phenomenon, which drives political rhetoric, media discourse, policymaking, criminal justice, and immigration control and enforcement. The perceived association between immigrants and criminality is a phenomenon with deep historical roots that transcends any particular culture. It is linked to ethnocentrism and othering; wherein dominant groups react to their exposure to alien cultural practices by criminalizing those practices and dehumanizing the immigrants who practice them. The study aims to explore level of fear of crime among illicit immigrants. Literature analysis was adopted as a methodology to explore the factors impacting on the level of fear and the places where illicit immigrants are likely to be victimised are further discussed. The study contributes significantly on the finding that higher crime levels in countries increase the fear of crime; however, they do not affect feelings of unsafety. Social protection expenditure proves to be an important determinant of both fear of crime and feelings of unsafety. Moreover, distrust in the police, generalized social distrust, and perceived ethnic threat induce fear of crime as well as feelings of unsafety. When considered in the context of social harm, immigrants’ relationship to crime and criminality becomes more complex. The study recommends that protective factors, such as neighborhood informal social control, social networks, cultural norms, and expectations about migration and life overall, may contribute to the lower rates of crime and violence among illicit immigrant groups.

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Introduction

Migration in Europe changed dramatically after the Cold War ended; not only in terms of the size and nature of migration flows but also in the public understanding and tolerance toward it. Public anxiety about uncontrolled levels of migration played out in national policies, while there were simultaneously deliberate policies toward more fluid borders within the single market (Bade, 2004; Bolger & Bolger, 2019). Between 1950 and 1990, the total resident foreign population in the present European Union (EU) countries, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein increased more than four times, predicated on the increased need for workers in certain sectors. However, control and security also became a feature of EU member states’ immigration policies, particularly focusing on a need to ‘control’ migration from non-EU areas and a notion of the problems of integrating ‘foreign’ cultures into those of the West. On 1 January 2012, 33 million people living in the EU were born outside the EU-27 (Eurostat) member states, including 17.2 million persons who were born in a different EU-27 member state from the country of residence. Most ‘third country’ nationals legally admitted to the EU enter for purposes of family reunification (particularly women) or employment (Eurostat, 2011).

South Africa has a higher number of immigrants from African countries and is the largest ‘pull’ country (to use the so-called push and pull factors theory) for migrants from the rest of Africa. These immigrants fall under different categories, such as political

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immigrants, war refugees, and economic immigrants. Most immigrants possess legal documentation that allows them to stay in South Africa. However, others do not have the proper documents and are thus considered illegal and undesirable in the country. Due to the presence of immigrants in the country, many South African citizens have developed fear and hate of foreigners/immigrants, especially immigrants from Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

In many countries, migrants are also not categorized specifically in data on crime and violence. Different categorizations of migrants and classifications of the crimes committed against them mean that international comparisons cannot be made. Furthermore, migrants are believed to underreport crimes, including violent crimes committed against them. In particular, migrants in irregular situations may fear, and actually face, detention and/or deportation if they approach authorities for help. For many migrants, enduring violence may be the better choice than seeking protection from it, where doing so exposes them to risks of retaliation or return to their countries of origin. Even when migrants do report victimization, criminal justice processes may be ineffective to respond for want of capacity and linguistic and cultural adaptability, and migrant victims of violence may lack access to legal aid and other necessary support. As a result, criminal justice apparatus may not be brought to bear in response to significant and often rising violence, which allows it to continue with impunity (Stageman, 2020).

Fear of crime depends on many factors; perhaps the most obvious being actual crime. At the micro level, it might be expected that people who suffer more crime also experience more fear and, at the macro level, that regions that experience more crime are also considered to be less secure. Violence can occur between and within migrant communities (Feldmeyer et al., 2019). Ethnic and other tensions may be imported from countries and regions of origin, which manifest in violence in countries of destination. Such tensions may be exacerbated where migrant populations are concentrated in particular areas and result in gangs or other allegiances being formed and divided along ethnic, racial, sectarian, or other lines that disproportionately affect migrant populations. Immigrants may also migrate to urban environments, which places them at a particularly high risk of violence. Furthermore, violence may occur within certain migrant communities in the form of domestic and gender-based violence that may be more prevalent in some ethnic migrant groups (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2015; Erdman & Bates, 2017). Particularly in developed countries, persons vulnerable to violent traditional and cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and honor crimes are more likely to be migrants or come from migrant backgrounds than from the non-migrant population. Such persons may be particularly isolated from the information and resources they need to have recourse against such violence and its perpetrators, who may be members of their own family or respected persons within their community (Crush & Peberdy, 2018).

The dearth of empirical studies on immigrant populations is less than desirable given the rapid growth of immigrant populations in recent years. Significant attention has been paid to the horrors endured or tragically succumbed to by many people in the process of migrating. Reports of deaths are increasingly common around the world, with the numbers of people victimized en route increasing as organized criminals realize the profit to be made from exploiting human hope and desperation. Violence perpetrated against migrants by border and police officials may pose additional threats to migrants. Many people become stranded enroute and thus rendered more vulnerable to violence. This study sought to explore illicit immigrants’ fear of victimization. The factors that perpetuate the level of fear of victimization and places where illicit immigrants are mostly victimized are explored. First section provides literature pertaining to fear of crime and the different types of undocumented migrant flows. The second section deals with factors perpetuating level of fear of victimisation and places where illicit immigrants are mostly victimised are further explored. The theoretical framework adopted is discussed in the third section while research methodology, findings and discussions are presented in the fourth section.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

Critical scholars argue that this juxtaposition demonstrates that fear of crime is in fact a proxy for racial and ethnic animus, originally deployed due to social desirability or as an explicit political strategy intended to expand popular support. Given that both racial animus and criminalization are rooted in othering and dehumanizing people who are distinct from the majority or dominant group due to physical and cultural markers, participation in proscribed or taboo activities, and so forth, this explanation is logically sound, if difficult to operationalize, and therefore understudied.

Theoretically, strong social ties might also influence residents’ fear of crime. Fear of crime is “an emotional response of dread or anxiety to crime or symbols that a person associates with crime” (Ferraro, 1995). Theory and research on the etiology of fear of victimization make it clear that people's fear is not based solely on actual levels of crime in one’s immediate environment or one’s personal experiences of victimization. Rather, fear is largely the product of perceptual processes and information gleaned through associations with others and the environment. Signs of physical disorder (e.g., abandoned or run-down buildings or cars) and social disorder (e.g., groups of teenagers hanging out in the street unsupervised or loud parties) are primary examples of perceptual cues of danger that are not necessarily criminal, but are theoretically relevant because they can increase perceptions of the likelihood of victimization or evoke emotional reactions related to the possibility of crime. People also learn of the threat of victimization through others, including friendship networks, social media, and the media. The degree to which one is embedded in a social or friendship network, and the messages received through these channels, can therefore have a profound influence on the perceived risk of victimization and emotional fear of crime, irrespective of one’s personal experiences with victimization or crime rates in an area.
A theory previously tested thoroughly at the contextual level is the social disorganization theory (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) argue that a lack of social cohesion causes incivilities and deprivation, as well as crime. In deprived areas, (violent) crime rates tend to be higher. The higher the level of social disorder or the lack of social cohesion, the higher the levels of crime and the higher the levels of fear of crime and feelings of unsafety (Mothibi & Roelofse, 2017). Illicit immigrants in South Africa live in communities with social disorder and lack of social cohesion; hence an increased level of fear of crime.

Higher crime levels may also display an effect at the country level, as the mass media portrays neighborhood-level crimes on national television, which makes local social disorganization apparent and more tangible for national audiences. Through exposure to various national media (e.g., television, newspapers, and websites), opportunities are provided to self-identify with victims of crime when they are portrayed in the media, which induces fear of crime and feelings of unsafety (Altheide, 1997). In addition, the mass media contributes to shaping the public image of certain ethnic minority groups, the police, and the severity of crime levels. Media exposure in South Africa is highly influential when it matches the experiences of crime victims or the crime reality of people, which increases the level of fear.

**Fear of crime**

The literature suggests that fear of crime is essentially a function of the person and the criminal victimization (Lee & Ulmer, 2000; Yun et al., 2010; Yuan et al., 2022). The personal factors that have been found to influence fear of crime include age, gender, income, education level, neighborhood dangerousness, and neighborhood disadvantage such as signs of physical and social incivilities (Lee et al., 2020). Although most recent studies emphasize the importance of environmental factors, the personal factors play a central role. After all, fear of crime is fundamentally fear for oneself, and it results from a personal assessment of one’s vulnerability to criminal victimization (Ackah, 2000). Socio-demographic factors are the personal factors that have been most extensively studied, and relatively well-established patterns have emerged. Firstly, studies of general population samples indicate that females report more fear of crime than males (Ackah, 2000; Lee & Ulmer, 2000). Age is positively related to fear of crime, while income exhibits a negative association with fear. The association between these socio-demographic correlates and fear of crime can be explained by invoking the vulnerability thesis (Yun et al., 2010; McNeely & Overstreet, 2018; Bersani et al., 2018).

The vulnerability thesis posits that individuals who are physically or socially more vulnerable are more fearful. Physical vulnerability renders women and the elderly more fearful of crime, while social vulnerability makes those from lower socio-economic backgrounds feel more fear. The vulnerability thesis is intuitively appealing, and research findings thus far have been consistently supportive of the model (Lee & Ulmer, 2000). Given the empirical findings, researchers tend to simply assume that the observed associations will hold true even for samples from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Whether such an assumption is viable, however, is fundamentally an empirical matter. Socio-demographic characteristics and criminal victimization experiences seem to affect fear of crime (Mothibi & Roelofse, 2017).

**Different types of undocumented migrant flows**

A migrant may become undocumented in three key ways (flows). One is through the geographical flow; these are ‘visible’ flows of people physically crossing borders either by land or sea. The geographical flow is measured mainly by changes in the number of apprehensions by border guards. Demographic flows relate to the naturally changing size of undocumented migrant populations through births and deaths. Very little is known about the size of demographic flows (UNODC, 2015). The third way is the status-related flow, which points to people’s move between ‘undocumented’ and ‘documented’ status. These are changes due to acceptances or rejections of migration status applications.

**Factors impacting on the level of fear**

Women and older people tend to feel more insecure (Xie & Baumer, 2021), and ethnic minorities and poor people tend to be more fearful (Vaughn & Sala-Wright, 2018). Having some familiarity with an area reduces concerns about suffering a crime. One of the most frequently considered causes of the fear of crime is the media. However, the audience of different media channels is self-selective and messages often depend on the interpretation of the consumer. Crime reported in the media is not a reflection of reality, with the media placing more emphasis on violent crime (Gerber et al., 2010); the impact of the media on the fear of crime is therefore unclear (Hollis et al., 2017). The South African media reports extensively on the level of victimization of illicit immigrants in South Africa. For example, the xenophobic killings of Zimbabwean nationals were highly televised, which might have increased the fear of victimization among illicit immigrants in South Africa.

**Structural factors**

Structural factors may also play a role in the complex relationship between crime commission and victimization. Immigrants who find themselves as linguistic minorities in their destination countries may have difficulty communicating with authorities in instances of victimization or witnessing a criminal act. Cultural insularity may also be a factor, particularly where perpetrators are fellow immigrants or members of the victim’s community (Stageman, 2020). Unauthorized or undocumented immigrants may fear self-reporting criminal victimization or other kinds of interaction with legal authorities in destination countries, for fear of exposing their status. Illicit immigrants in destination countries where anti-immigrant sentiment is a strong and consistent presence in the national discourse may lack the necessary trust in their host society or the legal authorities, whom they perceive to represent its own interests.
to solve crime problems experienced by the immigrant community (Gover et al., 2020). Underreporting by illicit immigrants of crimes such as domestic abuse, interpersonal violence, fraud, and theft, among others, may thus obscure community-level crime rates, and assuming that a significant proportion of the perpetrators of these unreported crimes are themselves immigrants obscures per capita rates of immigrant criminality.

Methodology

The study was literature based and utilized secondary data on the victimization of illicit immigrants and their fear of crime. Secondary research, also known as desk research, is a research method that involves compiling existing data sourced from a variety of channels. This includes internal sources (e.g., in-house research) or, more commonly, external sources such as government statistics, organizational bodies, and the Internet. Secondary research has several formats, such as published datasets, reports, and survey responses, and can also be sourced from websites, libraries, and museums. When using secondary research, researchers collect, verify, analyze, and incorporate it to help them confirm research goals for the research period.

Findings and Discussions

Factors impacting on the level of fear

Fear of crime is a long-standing policy issue of great importance in South Africa, and a large body of literature has emerged on its determinants. This section discusses research findings on factors that impact on illicit immigrants’ level of fear of crime.

Distrust in the police

Research findings highlight that immigrant attitudes toward the police are subject to two sources of influence: universal factors that tend to shape all residents’ attitudes toward the police, and group-specific factors that only apply to foreign-born individuals (Wu, 2014; Wu & Alteimer, 2013; Wu et al., 2017). Within both universal and illicit immigrant-specific factors, there are four subcategories of demographic, experiential, structural, and attitudinal variables. Some of these are post-arrival variables, which means that they involve immigrants’ lives after their arrival in the new country, whereas others are pre-arrival variables, which refer to those experiences or perceptions that occurred or were formed before the migration experience.

Members of the dominant group in a society tend to share a sense of superiority and view members of the subordinate group as both threats to dominant group prerogatives and competitors for limited resources (Bobo & Tuan, 2006). Immigrants, undocumented in particular, may be perceived as a criminal threat to South African society. The social and political marginality status of minorities tends to lead to their more negative views on the police, whereby they see the police as mainly controlling minorities and maintaining the status quo.

The sense-of-injustice perspective proposes that public attitudes toward criminal justice agencies are heavily influenced by their feelings of being treated unjustly by the criminal justice system, including the police (Wu et al., 2013). The core arguments of the sense-of-injustice model are in line with the findings from studies on procedural justice, which suggest that citizens’ perceptions of local legal authorities, including the police, are heavily influenced by whether they perceive criminal justice agencies as fair and equitable in both the procedures for making decisions and the outcomes of the decisions. This model emphasizes the state of mind of individuals, with such perceptions, judgment, or feelings regarding the police being based on the experience of actual or perceived, or both, bias and discrimination in policing (Wu et al., 2017).

Generalized social distrust

Research findings highlight the group consciousness theory, which suggests that people’s trust in political institutions is primarily a function of their levels of group consciousness. A core dimension of group consciousness is racial consciousness, which “encompasses identification with a racial group and the belief that fundamental differences exist between the power and resources of one’s group and those of the dominant group, as well as an understanding that this inequality is illegitimate” (Avery, 2009). Racial consciousness is partially a function of racial socialization, which contains several dimensions of cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, egalitarianism, and others (Wang, 2012). The group consciousness theory can be considered an extension of the group position theory, in that it points out a specific psychological mechanism that connects one’s position in society to one’s political attitudes. By doing so, it also helps to explain the differential attitudes toward the police within the same group of minorities. According to Khondaker et al. (2017), minorities who have strong group consciousness are particularly distrustful of the police. Illicit immigrants bring their primary socialization that occurred during their stay in their home society to their host society, and such imported socialization affects their political behavior (Wals, 2011), and possibly their expectations and evaluations of social institutions in the host country as well. As Orozco (1990, in Wang, 2012) argues, illicit immigrants bring with them their understanding of the social institutions and processes in their home country, and use those as references to interpret their experiences in the new country. Research findings suggest that illicit immigrants’ perceptions of the police in their home country exert some influence on their attitudes toward police effectiveness and integrity in the host country.

People’s trust in other law enforcement personnel may well affect their trust in the local police. When illicit immigrants interact with an employee in the law enforcement industry, such as a border patrol officer or an immigration official, they form their first
perceptions of whether the law enforcement system can be trusted. Once the trust (or mistrust) in the law enforcement system is established, that trust may be translated into trust in another employee of the system, such as the local police. Importantly, immigrants’ attitudes toward the police may be particularly affected by their experience with South African immigration officers. Masuku (2006) and Human Rights Watch (2020) posit that not all immigrants have direct experience with the police, yet almost all have some experience with South African immigration officials. Some immigrants, particularly those from countries with centralized civil service systems, may not distinguish between police officers and immigration officers. The blurring of roles between immigration officials and local police may add to immigrants’ fear and mistrust of the police.

Structural and attitudinal factors

From a broader perspective, matters of police-community relations can also be intrinsically related to the fabric of the social structure of any given society. For illicit immigrants, their confidence in and satisfaction with South Africa’s law enforcement may be influenced by the very society or culture that they originate from (Stageman, 2020). Perhaps, the foremost structural variable that research on immigrant perceptions of the police needs to consider is the nature of the regime that immigrants come from. In other words, structural factors may be extended beyond neighborhood and locality characteristics to the broader political realm of a country. Closely related to the structural dimension is the cultural dimension of antecedents of attitudes toward the police. Culture develops around structure, yet may serve as the more direct or immediate influencer of immigrant perceptions compared to structure (Alami, 2018).

Migration status / fear of deportation

Illicit immigrants are often unable to protect their property and their human right to security. Arguably out of fear of deportation, illicit immigrants who become crime victims are shown to underreport such crimes to the police, which generates an essentially unenforced space for ruthless criminals. Amnesties might not only improve the labor market opportunities of immigrants, thus lowering their criminal propensity, but they are also shown to increase reporting rates and alter the expected cost of criminal behavior (Arriga, 2017). Since police investigations are unlikely to start without a formal report of the offense, amnesties are also likely to increase the conviction rate of criminals whose victim is a newly legalized individual, which therefore changes the relative benefits of victimizing immigrants versus natives. Whenever ethnicity or other observable characteristics signal the legal status of immigrants, criminals may choose their targets based on such signals; not only in that illicit immigrants are unable to protect some of their fundamental human rights, but also that the absence of this fundamental human right makes them even more vulnerable (Altman & Small, 2019). It also means that the deterrent effect of law enforcement might be severely damped by the mere existence of such victims. Undocumented immigrants who are poor and who fear that they could be deported if they contact the police have the smallest propensity to report crime.

Community Structure / Social Fabric

One recurrent theme under this literature review finding is that social networks play an important role in influencing residents’ fear of crime; however, there is considerable debate about the nature of that role (Kubrin et al., 2018). For instance, residents who have more local knowledge might have more information about criminal activities in the area and hence express more fear, but residents with more local alters might also perceive more potential for collective action in the neighborhood and therefore express less fear (Yuan et al., 2022). The importance of alter locations for the types of ties that ego is likely to have to them, and the types of exchanges taking place through those ties, suggests that the spatial dimension of a network structure may help disambiguate the relationship between personal networks and fear of crime. In particular, Yuan et al. (2022) posit that different mechanisms of social ties related to fear of crime have distinct spatial implications.

Mechanisms through which social ties could influence fear of crime

Although there are a variety of potential mechanisms for how social ties may have an impact on fear of crime, research findings by Yuan et al. (2022) focus on four key potential mechanisms:

1) More local social ties facilitate collective action in response to local problems.
2) More social ties provide a greater level of familiarity and trust with persons in the areas in which alters reside.
3) More social ties provide greater access to emotional and social support.
4) More social ties create the opportunity for more exposure to and hence awareness of information about crime.

It is argued that the first three mechanisms are associated with reduced fear of crime, whereas the last mechanism is associated with enhanced fear of crime. Each of these mechanisms makes general predictions about fear of crime. Few studies have directly measured the personal networks of residents, and most studies used proxies for the number of social ties that residents have (i.e., degree), such as length of residence, with the idea being that residents who have lived in a neighborhood for a longer time will have more social ties and will be able to more easily collectively organize with residents to solve problems.

A large body of research has shown that residents’ fear of crime is higher at night than during the day (Ferraro, 1995). This temporal distinction in fear of crime is not surprising given that darkness can enhance concealment for offenders, according to McNeely and
Overstreet (2018) and Ferraro (1995), which makes crime at night more likely. Nonetheless, few studies have examined the determinants of this temporal distinction. One study showed similarity in the determinants of fear of crime at different times of the day. Another study found that when residents know more about their neighbors (i.e., have a higher degree of safety within their neighborhood), they have less fear at night (Yuan et al., 2022), but it is an open question whether these ties are associated with less fear during the day or even a change in fear from night to day. This paper discovered that fear of crime differs between daytime and nighttime in part because of differences in the structural, spatial, and temporal context of the four mechanisms identified earlier.

Xenophobic attacks

Xenophobia in the police was given a public face in South Africa in 1999 when six white police officials were shown on national television assaulting and abusing two illegal immigrants from Mozambique. Since then, other media and research reports have documented the abuse and ill-treatment of foreign nationals by police officials in South Africa. According to Bruce et al. (2007), the intolerance of foreigners is partly because foreigners are generally blamed for problems such as unemployment and crime, but also because of their marginal and vulnerable status. Members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) of all races frequently harass black legal and illegal immigrants. The extent of this problem is such that South African citizens who appear to be foreign often experience harassment at the hands of the police. Xenophobia in the police has become especially relevant considering the enormous influx of immigrants into South Africa, with many of them being undocumented (Masuku, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The large numbers of immigrants make their treatment by state officials an important issue, particularly since the key operational strategy of the SAPS has resulted in the frequent targeting of illegal immigrants for arrest.

Institutions/Places where immigrants are mostly victimized

Illegal immigrants are victimized at all public places, such as parks, schools, hospitals, and police stations. This section discusses places or institutions where illicit immigrants are mostly victimized.

Police stations

The police believe that undocumented immigrants are involved in crime in South Africa. This perception makes undocumented immigrants more vulnerable to police abuse and immigrants thus avoid seeking help from police stations. According to Human Rights Watch (2020), “many foreigners are deprived of their liberty, some with legal residence papers, some claiming asylum, who say they have been arrested arbitrarily and are not able to contest the validity of their detention”. Segatti and Landau (2011) also observed that immigrants are easy targets for police extortion, often due to their tenuous legal status and/or inadequate identity documents. This, coupled with immigrants’ need to carry cash, has led a significant number of police officials viewing them as ‘mobile ATMs’. From a police perspective, arresting foreigners serves multiple purposes. Most obviously, it helps to meet arrest targets. The pressure to make arrests can have many negative consequences for police performance, not least with regard to the mistreatment of immigrants.

Educational institutions

Illegal immigrants have children and upon arrival in South Africa, they search for schools that would accommodate their children. Due to their migration status, the parents become vulnerable to victimization in many ways, such as being forced to pay a bribe for their children to be admitted to a government school. They are also threatened should they voice their concern regarding school practices.

Health facilities

Historically, migrants within the Southern African region have been at an increased risk of a range of negative health outcomes, largely because of their inability to access positive social determinants of health, which are defined as “the full set of social conditions in which people live and work” (Segatti & Landau, 2011). It is not being a migrant per se that increases health risks but the context associated with being a poor migrant. Positive social determinants of health include the health system, food and nutrition security, adequate housing and tenure, access to safe water and sanitation, secure livelihood activities, social networks, and family support. Despite policy guidelines and frameworks in South Africa, international migrants continue to face challenges when they attempt to access public health services in South Africa (Polzer & Segatti, 2011; Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa [CoRMSA], 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2020). International migrants often struggle to communicate with healthcare providers because interpreters are not present, and some public health facilities generate their own guidelines and policies that run counter to national legislation, by continuing, for example, to demand South African identity documents and denying access to international migrants (Vearey, 2008; CoRMSA, 2009). Although they rarely deny healthcare outright, frontline healthcare providers (including clerks and administrators) often act as “street-level bureaucrats” who develop their own access systems for migrants (Moyo, 2010). Regional migrants experience discrimination and negative attitudes from frontline healthcare workers, who often vent their own frustrations over working within an under-resourced and overstretched public healthcare system on “the other” (Moyo, 2010).

The rights of migrants and refugees to access the South African healthcare system is a complex matter. Laws and policies clash, and medical staff are left confused – especially as the implementation of these laws differs depending on the staff or the clinic that one comes into contact with. Meanwhile, the South African healthcare system struggles, in some areas, to provide sufficient medical care to any person, regardless of their nationality or status.
Many people in South Africa believe that regional migrant populations are far larger than they actually are, that the movement of people is associated with poor health, and that regional migrants place an additional burden on the public health systems of destination countries (Southern African HIV Clinicians Society and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007). Globally, governments often blame foreigners for introducing and spreading disease (Amon & Todrys, 2009; Harper & Raman, 2008). The resultant marginalization of non-citizen groups has led to the conflation of health with the politics of citizenship, which in many cases lead to the denial of healthcare to non-citizens (Grove & Zwi, 2006). International migrants continue to be portrayed as disease carriers who place burdens on the public health systems of destination countries (Grove & Zwi, 2006; Harper & Raman, 2008; Worth, 2006). Concern over migrants has grown in the context of HIV/AIDS, with destination countries fearing that migrants bring the disease with them and potentially threaten the public health of host populations (Worth, 2006; Amon & Todrys, 2009). As a critical public health challenge in Southern Africa, the region most affected by HIV/AIDS globally, concerns relating to the disease need to be carefully considered within context.

**Churches**

The church is depicted by many symbols, metaphors, and models. The church is also described with regard to its substance and its functions. The church in relation to migrants in theological terms is referred to as ‘hospitality’ and ‘pilgrim’. These two metaphors represent both the substance and function of the church, yet challenge the role of the church in the growing global migration trends and movements. While the church has been a refuge and home for many migrants, the extent to which it challenges the false identities of migrants comes under scrutiny from theological approaches to research on migrants. According to Klaasen (2021), the church has firm foundations, such as tradition, the Word, confessions, and doctrines, which provide constancy. The church gathers all persons from all parts of the world, from different cultures, languages, and habits into a continuous journey of whole-making. Migrants fit this category well and the church affirms their identity based on the affirmation of human dignity and freedom of all people. However, churches in South Africa victimize illegal immigrants in multiple ways. They are forced to abide by the church’s rules and pay for security. Churches instill a feeling of fear and mete out emotional and psychological abuse. Due to fear, illegal immigrants do not report any form of victimization.

**Conclusion**

Fear of victimization among illicit immigrants is a reality. When considered in the context of social harm, immigrants’ relationship with crime and criminality becomes more complex, especially where migration decisions are forced or made under coercive circumstances involving ethnic cleansing, genocide, or other state crimes. Many recent examples of these dynamics have rendered large numbers of migrants effectively stateless. Experiencing the direct or collateral effects of state crimes can, in turn, affect immigrants’ participation in a wide range of crime types, from status crimes such as prostitution or survival theft to terrorism and organized criminal activity such as drug smuggling or human trafficking. Safety ties may influence fear of crime through their role in providing collective action, social support, trust, and/or information on crime patterns. Lack of training in cultural diversity has an impact on law enforcement’s ability to provide adequate policing to illegal immigrants. Despite an overwhelming perception that undocumented immigrants are involved in crime, no statistical evidence is available to substantiate these claims. Consequences of xenophobia among police officials, professionalism, police conduct, efficiency, respect for the rule of law, and the quality of service delivery are fundamentally affected when police officials are racist or xenophobic. These attitudes are often linked to an increase in incidents of corruption, police criminality, and abuse of people’s constitutional and human rights. South Africa’s public health system must be strengthened, particularly in terms of human resources, service provision, and an effective health information system. Healthcare, like other public sectors, is in need of more systematic mainstreaming of migration in its planning and implementation schemes. The health rights afforded to migrants on paper are belied by the harassment and denial they face in hospitals and clinics, while their ability to survive and remain in good health is undermined by violence, displacement, and threat of deportation. It is not only the lives and livelihoods of migrants that suffer the consequences of these abuses. The study recommends that protective factors, such as neighborhood informal social control, social networks, cultural norms, and expectations about migration and life overall, may contribute to lower rates of crime and violence among illicit immigrant groups.

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