

## Public Perceptions of Human Trafficking and Immigrant Victims

Previous research has found that, despite being subjected to what many consider to be extreme human rights violations, individuals who have been trafficked are often not viewed or treated as victims in the U.S. criminal justice system. This phenomenon is pronounced among trafficking victims who are immigrants, especially when they are undocumented. This may be partially attributable to current portrayals of immigrants as threats to America, a quality which is antithetical to the dominant conceptualization of “victims” as people who are innocent or blameless. This study will examine public perceptions of different types of human trafficking as well as human trafficking victims who are immigrants. It is hypothesized that people will view the trafficking and victim status of immigrants as less severe and less legitimate, respectively, than the trafficking and victim status of citizens. These hypotheses will be tested using a 2 (type of trafficking) x 3 (victim immigration status) vignette study design. Each participant will be randomly assigned to read one of the six possible human trafficking vignettes and answer questions relating to the severity of the scenario and the legitimacy of the victim. The data from this study will be analyzed using a series of ANOVAs.

The results from this study will yield a more nuanced understanding of the social construction of “the victim,” as well as how people perceive individuals who have been victimized but who also have a salient identity (i.e., immigrant) that conflicts with role expectations for “victims.” By providing clarity regarding how the public views trafficking victims, these results may also be used to explain why many immigrant victims of trafficking often do not seek help and what cultural beliefs regarding human trafficking victims should be targeted for change in order to promote a safer environment for trafficking victims to come forward and receive protection.