

**Underreporting of Crime by the
Latino Community in the Lyndale
Neighborhood: Perception or Fact?**

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Underreporting of Crime by the Latino Community in the Lyndale Neighborhood: Perception or Fact ?



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Executive Summary

This report is intended to assist the Lyndale Neighborhood Association in finding out more about the underreporting of crime within the Latino community, while at the same time to help to find alternative ways in which the Lyndale Neighborhood Association can assist the Latino community to report crime without fear or trepidation.

In order to obtain information I surveyed Latino residents of the Lyndale neighborhood, hosted focus groups, gathered interviews, attended the Minneapolis Police *Latino Police Academy*, read existing literature, and reviewed online sites. A total of eighty-five individuals were surveyed (including people who participated in the focus groups). The responses of surveyed individuals and groups are a key component of this report.

Each individual interviewed expressed their perspectives and/or experiences in reporting or not reporting crime and facing crime or criminal activity in their immediate surroundings. Some of the most common criminal activities that Latino residents face on a daily basis are: assaults, car brake-ins and drug dealings, yet the crime reports that appear in the official Minneapolis Police Records do not reflect what the participants expressed during the survey. Another issue faced by Latinos in the Lyndale Neighborhood is the fear of retaliation by crime perpetrators, if reported at all.

Some of the recommendations for the Lyndale Neighborhood Association to effectively assist the Latino community in the Lyndale neighborhood to feel safe and secure when reporting criminal activity are:

- Establish a safe place or service where Latino residents who fear retaliation or do

not trust police can go and be assisted in reporting crimes and violations.

- Develop an even stronger relationship with Minneapolis Police Department Precinct No. 5 to address the concerns and/or fears that Latino residents of the Lyndale Neighborhood have in regards to reporting crime.
- Organize the Latino community in Lyndale Neighborhood to serve as self-guardians (Neighborhood Watch) of their street blocks with the assistance of the Lyndale Neighborhood Association and Minneapolis Police Department Precinct No. 5.

Introduction

In fall of 2004, the Lyndale Neighborhood Association (LNA) approached the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs to request a graduate student to conduct a study on the Latino community and their experiences with crime in the Lyndale Neighborhood. Some members of the Latino community had expressed concerns about the level of crime that happens in the blocks where they live, and an active group of Latinas approached the Lyndale Neighborhood Association to ask to help them to address this issue. This report presents the findings of the study on perceptions that the Latino community living in the Lyndale neighborhood does not report crime.

The Lyndale Neighborhood Association is a neighborhood organization that provides technical assistance and service to residents through projects that include activities for youth and families; art and cultural events, environmental programs, crime and safety; and neighborhood-wide initiatives. The LNA has an impressive record of crime reduction, with one of the more effective campaigns to encourage

residents to call 911 when they witnessed or were victims of a crime.

Currently some of the Lyndale neighborhood blocks that are still struggling with crime are those blocks with a predominantly Latino population. It is important that Latinos in the neighborhood enjoy the same degree of safety as the rest of the neighborhood. In order to strengthen the trust and potential of the community, and because Latinos, as much as other groups, should not have to suffer different treatment when they witness or are victims of criminal activity, Latinos must feel safe calling to report crime. The Lyndale Neighborhood Association is seeking to provide some alternatives on how they can help Latinos living in the neighborhood seek and receive assistance from law enforcement in an atmosphere where they feel safe and secure.

Neighborhood Characteristics

Historically, the Lyndale neighborhood has been a highly populated area, a place where people came to seek a place to live. Since the late 1800s and early 1900s, the neighborhood has become one of the most dense geographical areas of the city of Minneapolis. According to the Lyndale Neighborhood Association history of the neighborhood, by the 1880s there were about one hundred buildings located between Lyndale and Pleasant and 34th and Lake (which happens to be the area where Latino immigrants have settled today). In the 1930's the Nicollet Park Baseball field, located at 31st and Nicollet was the site where people gathered to enjoy themselves (with Babe Ruth playing there in 1935). With growing crowds, the field became insufficient and eventually had to close. Today the Wells Fargo Financial Institution as well as some multifamily housing and other small businesses occupy the site.



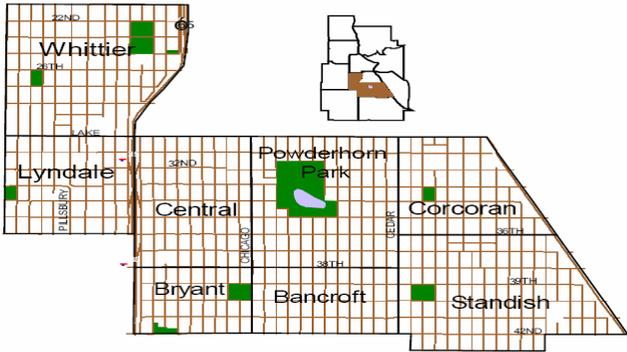
Home of the Minneapolis Millers (Lyndale Neighborhood) 1896 to 1955
(Source: www.Lyndale.org)

Physical and demographic changes that the neighborhood has experienced through the years have been difficult. Examples of these changes are

the construction of Interstate 35W south, and the closure of one of the neighborhood's main arteries- Nicollet Avenue. A major restructuring of the Nicollet /Lake intersection in the late 1970s, a Kmart store was located almost in the middle of the intersection between Lake Street and Nicollet. These types of changes negatively impacted the neighborhood. With business closing and properties falling into disrepair, people started to leave.

Today the neighborhood is back. Although many people left during prior episodes of disinvestments, there are still residents who have been in the neighborhood all their lives. Further changes in demographics that have taken place over the last ten years have added vibrancy to the neighborhood. The Lyndale Neighborhood Association has played an important role in the current state of the neighborhood. During the mid-nineties the neighborhood received national attention for a campaign to eliminate crime. With the idea that "we are not building a community organization we are building community" (*Shelterforce*, p. 32.) the Lyndale Neighborhood Association ran one of the most effective campaigns to eradicate neighborhood crime. By involving many residents, they created a successful mobilization to eliminate crime. Today, the Lyndale neighborhood is a unique place with a diverse community and great opportunities to incorporate people from all economic and ethnic backgrounds for a better future for the neighborhood.

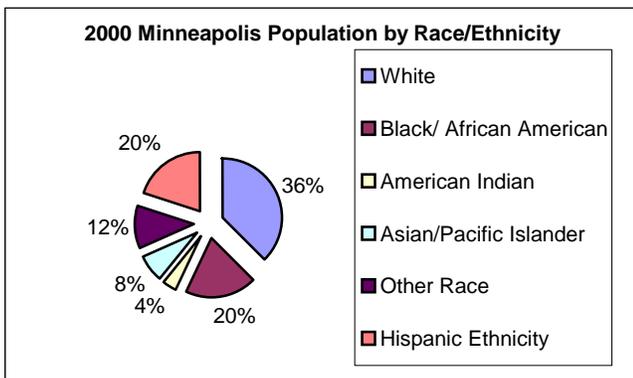
An important geographic characteristic of the Lyndale neighborhood is the boundaries that it shares with other neighborhoods in Minneapolis. This is important to mention because of some of the demographic characteristics of the Lyndale neighborhood are also found in the surrounding neighborhoods. Geographically, the Lyndale neighborhood is located south of Downtown Minneapolis, surrounded by Interstate 35W south on the east, Lake Street on the north, Lyndale Avenue on the west and 36th Avenue on the south. One similarity of the adjacent neighborhoods is the increasing number of Latinos living in the area and the increasing number of businesses. Many Latinos have arrived to the neighborhood during the past seven years.



Demographics

During the past 10 years, the city of Minneapolis has gone through tremendous demographic change. The 2000 Census reported that experience a decrease of white population (from 1990 to 2000 by 13.8%), followed by a reduction of the Native American population (by 32.1%). Simultaneously, the city of Minneapolis' total increase of population is due primarily to a 20% rise in the Hispanic/Latino population, as shown in Table #1. These numbers create an even stronger statement when they trickle-down to particular neighborhoods in Minneapolis. This translates into the ethnic and racial composition of some neighborhoods in Minneapolis. Table #2 shows the percentage of Latinos in terms of total population in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Table #1

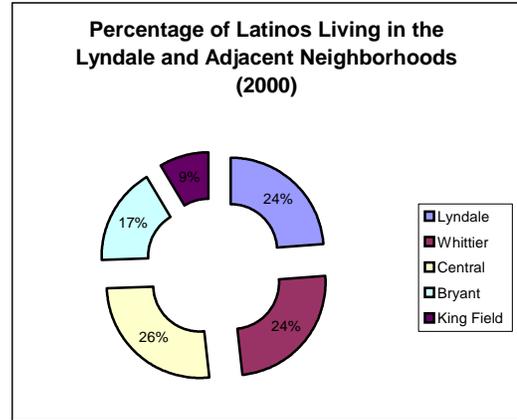


Source: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/census2000/>

As applied to neighborhoods, the Latino population represents a significant number of the population of the Lyndale neighborhood. This change in population is particularly interesting since local neighborhood organizations are trying to adapt to their new residents. The newcomers bring a different set of cultural and linguistic characteristics to their new home. These characteristics have created new challenges for the city and for neighborhood organizations. Having the appropriate cultural and linguistic competencies has proven to be difficult for neighborhood

organizations and institutions that want to serve these new populations.

Table #2



Source:

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/census2000/>

Methods

A series of methods were used to obtain information on whether Latinos living in the Lyndale neighborhood call police when they witness or are victims of crimes, why they do call and / or why they don't call police, and their perception and/ or experiences with the Minneapolis Police Department. A tool was developed to survey Latino residents in the Lyndale neighborhood for this purpose (Appendix A).



Sgt. Veliz addressing Latino participants (Minneapolis Police Department Latino Academy Fall 2004)

A key component of the survey was that it was created to be culturally and linguistically appropriate for the Latino residents of Lyndale with a bilingual native Spanish speaker developing and conducting the survey. In order to carry out the survey, we rely on a variety of strategies, which includes focus groups, in-person and phone interviews, door knocking and attendance to community meetings related to crime and safety. We gathered further information from the Minneapolis Police Department officers and by researching what other communities, such as Frogtown area in Saint Paul have done to address similar issues affecting Latino residents in their neighborhood. In addition, an important source for

information was the Minneapolis Police Department's Latino Academy. This program was established by the Minneapolis Police Department in 2001 and continues serving the community. The goal of this program is to inform the Latino community on how police officers work, and it is lead by Sergeant Giovanni Veliz, who is a native Spanish speaker.

Findings

The survey found that 85% of participants responded that they do not report crime. The reasons why they do not report crime vary. Focusing on the high-ranking responses why the Latino residents in the Lyndale neighborhood do not report crime are: fear of suffering retaliation from the perpetrators of the crimes if they report them; not knowing or having no information about who or where to call to report a crime; people do not speak the language (English) and don't know that there are Spanish interpreters available for them, and not wanting to be identified by the system (government). In addition, respondents expressed being scared of police in general, and some expressed frustration because they claim that the police know where crime occurs but do nothing to prevent it. Lastly, some respondents said that they do not have time to report crime. Without hesitation every single participant agreed that all crimes have tremendous effects on the quality of life in their neighborhood, by people getting hurt, private property being damaged, people losing their freedom and sense of security, along with children being surrounded by negative role models that they may try to imitate in the future. Few participants expressed negative experience with the Minneapolis Police based on the participant's lack of English language and a discriminatory attitude from police. In contrast, some participants expressed that they had positive experiences when interacted with Minneapolis Police Officers.

The types of crimes Latinos experienced, perceived or witnessed happened in the neighborhood where also gathered in the survey. The respondents pointed out that two of the most common crime issues affecting the Latino residents of Lyndale neighborhood are *Asaltos a personas* (muggings) and issues related to *Drogas* (drugs) from consumption to trafficking. Over one third of respondents identify that these two types of crimes

are the ones that endanger their quality of life and their well-being. In some instances some of the participants had been victims of *Asaltos a personas* (*a mugging*) and had witnessed the consumption and trafficking of drugs right outside their doors. Some of the respondents explained that individuals come into the building were respondents live and use the premises to drink and do drugs. The residents say nothing to police because of fear of retaliation. The lack of security systems and controls in the housing complexes where respondents live make it easy for perpetrators to use the buildings as gathering places to commit crimes. Another significant issue for Latinos living in the Lyndale neighborhood is the frequency with which they are victims of *Robo a los Autos* (*car break-in / vandalism*). They expressed frustration; when they come back from work at night they park their cars out on the street and when they come out the next morning ready to go to work, the car has been broken-into.

This victimization creates a struggle for them, because they do not have the time to call police and make a report due to their need to get to work. Their employers would not understand their situation if they get to work late, so they end up neglecting to report the crime. Further areas of concern the participants expressed during the survey were *Asalto a las casas* (Burglary), fear of being a victim of *Homicidio* (Murder) as they had heard of people having been killed on the streets (thankfully none of their family members had suffered this crime nevertheless the concern is high among the participants regarding murder because of their concern for their family's safety). The following crimes were also mentioned during the survey; *Balaceras* (shootings), *Prostitution* (prostitution) and *Discriminacion*. *Balaceras* are "*nuestro pan de cada día*" ("happen on the daily basis") as one participants expressed. Shootings happen and police always arrive "when everything (everyone) is gone" they said. *Balaceras* (shootings), like *Homicidios* (murders), represent a significant fear among the participants. Appendix B chart reflects the respondents' experiences in relation to crime in the neighborhood. Some respondents expressed that because this type of crime happens too often they do not allow their children to go out and play. This creates a stressor they said as some of the participants are stay-at-home mothers, and they live

with a constant fear of being home by themselves while their husbands are at work. They prefer not to go out rather than to be a victim of some of the crime that occurs in the neighborhood. Regarding prostitution, participants of the survey view it as another crime that needs some attention. A respondent expressed that she witnessed a lady almost naked in front of her home offering services.



“El Proyecto el Seguro” session
Fall 2004

The participants perceived *Prostitución* (prostitution) as a crime with strong negative effects on the quality of life in the neighborhood. They expressed concerns about their children witnessing these types of activities happening in plain daylight. Literature suggests that engaging all members of the community is an essential step in making a neighborhood safe “whatever the share basis for the connection between individuals, it is clear that robust social networks are crucial to the development and maintenance of their collective action strategies.” (Gilchrist p. 267) However, the issue that the Lyndale Neighborhood Association is trying to approach goes beyond just engaging neighborhood residents to participate in reporting crime and crime prevention activities. The issue presents a particular set of characteristics that require different approaches to successfully engage residents in reporting crime. Many neighborhood community organizations have struggled to serve their residents.

However, the fact is that when the demographics of the neighborhood change and neighborhood community organizations are not equipped to serve their newer residents, the needs are not met. With the issue of fear of retaliation, responses from Lyndale Latino participants stated they were afraid that by being identified as someone who reported a crime, a personal act of violence against them or their family members would occur. Field research in two Latino neighborhoods in New York and Philadelphia indicates that “underreporting was

especially acute in ethnic communities that were poorly organized or disenfranchised from the local power structure.” (Davis and Henderson p. 568) In the same study Davis and Henderson found that not reporting crime goes along with “the fear of retaliation by the offender, feelings of hopelessness, confidence [or lack of] in the ability of police to apprehend the offender, and mistrust of authorities.” (p. 566) The issue of not knowing who to contact or where to call to report crime activity was the second highest response in the Lyndale survey. As previously noted, underreporting crime occurs when ethnic or minority groups are not organized or have not been considered as part of the overall community. Research shows that “frustration with limited social and economic opportunities has frequently led to negative relations with police.” (Mayhall, Barker and Hunter p. 230) Another reason why Latinos do not report crime is the inability of some residents to speak the language (English). This issue becomes more critical when the law enforcement agents do not speak the language of the people they serve.

One of the problems that communities experience when residents face language barriers, is their “unwillingness to report crime or to prosecute criminals.” (Pace and Curl p. 34) The results of the surveys corroborate that language plays a significant role in the Latino community in the Lyndale neighborhood not reporting crime. Along with the fact that law enforcement authorities do not communicate with minority communities “is a critical problem.” (Pace and Curl p. 74) Language barriers have a long history of being a major reason why (Latino residents) in this case do not report crime. Law enforcement authorities are not equipped (willingly or unwillingly) with sufficient officers that have the ability to speak Spanish. According to Pace and Curl’s research, sometimes “victims of crimes feel that they cannot talk freely to criminal investigators. Many refuse or are unable to furnish information because of language barriers.” (Pace and Curl p. 34)

Last but not less important was the reason of not wanting to report crime in order to avoid being identified by the system. This particular response was given without more detail. However, research indicates that this issue may be related to the fear of being identified by the system (government), which

may not be necessarily perceived as a good thing for some people. Studies have identified this issue to be related to previous experiences people have had in their country of origin with authorities. In addition, recent immigrants “often shy away from political participation, and by default, defer to authority.” (Kratcoski and Dukes p. 250) For the purpose of this survey we did not ask people to disclose their legal status.

Unfortunately, there was no literature found that spoke about this particular reason.

Alternatives/Recommendations

The results of the survey and the literature review for this project provide an opportunity for the Lyndale Neighborhood Association to approach the underreporting of crime in the Latino community. The following are some alternatives that Lyndale Neighborhood Association could implement to encourage/include the Latino community in the neighborhood to speak out and/or to report acts of crime that they see happening or to which have been victims. These alternatives don’t any way purport to be the only ones available, however and according to the research; they can hopefully be the ones to assist in correcting the underreporting of crime in the Latino community in the Lyndale neighborhood. In order for community neighborhood organizations to engage people in speaking and reporting acts of crime, they need to provide to all residents an atmosphere where they feel safe to do so. In this case, such atmosphere has to contain a mechanism to understand the population the organization is serving, both linguistically and culturally.

- The first suggestion I propose to the LNA is to establish a conversation with other organizations that are working on addressing this particular issue. Locally, one of those organizations is Civil Society. Civil Society’s mission is “to provide underreports with the safety and security needed to report crime” (<http://www.pressenter.com/~civilsoc/>). Under Civil Society’s programs is the Freedom from Fear Program, in which the primary goal is to assist residents in a neighborhood with large number of immigrants and refugees in reporting crimes. According to their executive director

attorney Linda Miller, “in order to break the cycle of revictimization, Freedom from Fear will focus on education and extensive community outreach in the neighborhood. This will in turn foster trusting relationships between victims of crime and the organizations who serve them, thereby making neighborhood residents more likely to seek out these organizations when they are the victims of a crime”. A recent report in the Star Tribune newspaper indicates that Saint Paul Police Chief John Harrington gives high remarks to the program “I really thing she's on the right track, especially with the immigrant community," He said. With this approach, the Lyndale Neighborhood Association can start encouraging the Latino community in Lyndale to feel safe and secure when reporting crime.

- A second alternative is to strengthen the already established relationship that Lyndale Neighborhood Association has with the Minneapolis Police Department with the emphasis to reach out to the Latino community in the neighborhood. As discussed early, the Lyndale Neighborhood Association is a recognized organization with a tremendous capacity to engage residents to take an active role in deterring crime and making the neighborhood a better place to live for its residents. The Lyndale Neighborhood Association’s crime prevention and safety program has an extraordinary number of strategies on how to address the crime prevention and safety in the neighborhood. Crime prevention programs intending to include and engage the Latino community, the Lyndale Neighborhood Association can successfully achieve its goal of making the Lyndale Neighborhood a safe place to live for all of its residents including the Latino community.
- A third alternative is to bring “*El Proyecto Seguro*” from the Minneapolis Police Department to the Latino community in Lyndale neighborhood. *El Proyecto Seguro* was purposely created in Spanish to address and improve the relationship between the

growing Latino population in Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Police Department. One of the *El Proyecto Seguro's* core elements is education. The Spanish version of the Citizen's Academy includes a series of classes about the workings of the police department. "Police 101" is intended to inform the Latino community about how the police department works and the department's culture. Lyndale Neighborhood Association can specifically tailor the Spanish version of the Citizen's Academy to Latino residents who live in Lyndale, to improve the underreporting of

crime. Another session of the academy is the "How to Use 911", intended to communicate the operations of the Minneapolis Police Emergency Communications Center and that this center is able to communicate in Spanish. This course would also be very valuable if offered in Spanish to the Latino residents in Lyndale.

A combination of these alternatives would assist the Lyndale Neighborhood Association in addressing the underreporting of crime and in involving the Latino community in feeling safe and secure in reporting crime.

Appendix A

Name (Voluntary): _____

Questions

1. What type of crime do you see happening in the community?

2. How do you know that these crimes are occurring?

3. Do you call the police to report those crimes? Yes or No ?

If yes, Why do you report them?

If no, Why you don't report them?

4. What would stop you from reporting a crime or certain type of crime?

5. Do these crimes affect your quality of life in your the community?

6. How do the affect you?

7. If you need or want to report a crime do you know whom to contact?

8. Are there any crimes that concern you the most?

9. When you call to report a crime how the police respond to that report?

10. What has been your personal experience with the police here in the neighborhood?

11. Is there anyone else that you think I should talk to about these questions?

Nombre (No es obligatorio):_

Preguntas

1. Que tipo de crímenes ves que ocurren en la comunidad?

2. Cómo sabes que estos crímenes están sucediendo?

3. Le hablas a la policía para reportar esos crímenes?

4. Que te detiene para reportar esos crímenes o ciertos tipos de crímenes?

5. Estos crímenes afectan la calidad de vida en tu comunidad?

6. Cómo te afectan?

7. Si tu quieres reportar un crimen sabes a quien contactar?

8. Que tipos de crímenes son los que te preocupan mas?

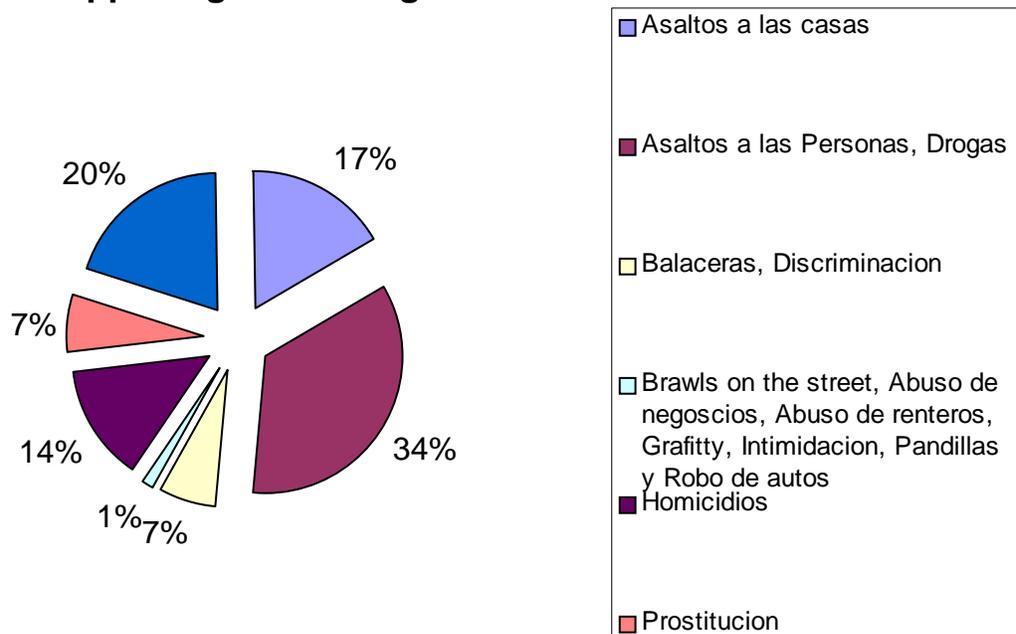
9. Cuándo hablas para reportar un crimen como responde la policía a ese reporte?

10. Cuál ha sido tu experiencia personal con la policía aquí en el vecindario?

11. Hay alguien más que tu creas que debo de entrevistar sobre este cuestionario?

Appendix B

Crimes either experienced, witnessed, or told by some happening in the neighborhood



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