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## Community Knowledge and Attitudes toward Refugees and Asylees in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties: An Analysis for the International Rescue Committee

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**COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD  
REFUGEES AND ASYLEES IN MIAMI-DADE  
AND BROWARD COUNTIES: AN ANALYSIS FOR  
THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE**

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*This paper presents the findings of a research project on knowledge and attitudes about refugees and “asylees” in two South Florida counties. The project was a collaboration between the International Rescue Committee (IRC), an international NGO that assists refugees and asylees with resettlement in the United States and other countries, and four graduate students in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Florida International University in Miami. South Florida receives large numbers of refugees and asylees, principally from Latin America and the Caribbean, and the IRC was interested in finding out more about the knowledge and attitudes in the community about refugees and asylees for the purpose of planning a possible public education campaign and fund-raising efforts. A survey was administered to 280 people in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties. Analysis of the findings shows that the community does not have a clear understanding of the differences between refugees, asylees, and immigrants. The respondents did not have an understanding of refugees and asylees as people who have fled political or religious persecution in their countries of origin, with the exception of refugees from Cuba. However, they generally had a favorable opinion of refugees and asylees. Other findings led to recommendations for public education and fund-raising and suggestions for future research. Key Words: refugees, immigrants, Florida, resettlement, community*

During the last 60 years, the South Florida population has been changing; it has grown in size and has seen changes in its socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Historical events and international political disputes have produced a very diverse and multiethnic community. Additionally, South Florida’s geographic position also has helped create a special social and economic relationship with other communities, especially in Latin American and Caribbean countries. According to the U.S. Census Bureau

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*NAPA BULLETIN* 27, pp. 224–236, series ISSN 1556-4789, eISSN 1556-4797; this edition ISBN 1-931303-33-9. © 2007 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/napa.2007.27.1.224.

(2004), more than 35 percent of Miami-Dade and Broward county residents are foreign born, and 45 percent are of Hispanic descent. As hundreds of people arrive in South Florida every day, for a variety of reasons, this community continues to change and develop.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is “a world leader in relief, rehabilitation, post-conflict development, resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted by violent conflict” (2005). The main purpose of this organization is to provide services to support refugees in the process of resettlement, adjustment, and acquisition of basic skills, with the ultimate goal of making them self-sufficient individuals within their new environment (IRC 2005). The IRC’s Miami office was created in 1960 primarily to assist refugees from Cuba; however, it has helped in the resettlement of tens of thousands of refugees from countries as diverse as Vietnam, Bulgaria, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Bosnia, Haiti, Sudan, Iran, and Kosovo, among others (IRC n.d.). The IRC programs in Miami are designed specifically to assist refugees in their transition to life in the United States. The IRC in the United States uses the U.S. definition of *refugee*, which is contained in the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol: “A refugee is defined as a person outside of his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (IRC 2006). Refugees are admitted into the United States for resettlement outside of the country after initial security and medical screening following the steps delimited within the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Asylees share the same legal definition as refugees, but status is conferred once the person arrives in the United States or at a U.S. border (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2005).

The IRC Miami is constantly challenged by the diversity of its clients and the different community responses toward them. The IRC Miami team believes that learning more about the changing community and its knowledge of and attitudes toward refugees and asylees will facilitate their work. Realizing the need for systematic research that could help them to better understand and serve the needs of their clients, the IRC Miami staff contacted Dr. Alex Stepick, an internationally known researcher on migration at Florida International University, with a specific research proposal. Dr. Stepick’s undergraduate students developed preliminary studies responding to IRC guiding questions concerning the media’s influence on knowledge and attitudes toward refugees. Several methodological problems such as vague survey questions and the appropriateness of the sample yielded results that were not statistically or demographically significant, and thus the need for further research became evident. Using lessons learned from the preliminary studies during summer 2005, we took over the IRC research proposal and modified it according to our resources and time frame.

The IRC revised proposal had a threefold purpose. The first was to learn more about community knowledge and attitudes toward the Miami-Dade and Broward refugee, and asylee communities. The second was the collection of information that would aid in developing an effective public education campaign. Third, there was a desire to collect demographic data that would be useful in planning fund-raising efforts. The present study attempts to give an answer to the first objective of the IRC and provides several

recommendations for the development of objectives 2 and 3. The ultimate goal of this project is to contribute to the improvement of the IRC services for refugees and asylees in South Florida.

The organization of the paper is as follows: First, a brief review of the literature on general knowledge and attitudes toward refugees, asylees, and immigrants that serves as the background for the research is provided. Second is a detailed explanation of the methodology used and some of the limitations and obstacles faced during the data collection. Third is a complete description of the findings, focusing on the knowledge of and attitudes toward refugees and asylees in South Florida. Finally, a list of recommendations for a public education campaign and fund-raising as well as some suggestions for further research are provided.

## **BACKGROUND**

For many decades, Miami's location has made the city particularly attractive to Caribbean and Latin American immigrants. In the city, Spanish is spoken as much as English, and in some neighborhoods Spanish and Creole have surpassed English as the primary means of communication. Scores of Hispanic businesses such as restaurants, supermarkets, and clothing stores line the streets of the city. Ethnic enclaves such as Little Havana, Little Managua, and Little Haiti are statements of the city's legacy of immigration. Certainly the arrival of immigrants to the city is fueled greatly by conditions in the migrants' countries of origin, as political and economic crises in Latin America trigger the growth of the Latino population in Miami (Stepick et al. 2003). Relevant to this notion is the experience of thousands of immigrants who have settled in Miami in past decades: settlers who dealt with different—often harsh—conditions in their native countries but whose establishment in the United States has followed different patterns of entry, relations, and development. In Miami, these communities have found a place to strive while re-creating the living conditions of the places they left behind (*Economist* 1990).

People from all over the world continue to cross social, cultural, and political frontiers to pursue different goals and engage in diverse activities, yet the modes of departure and reception are as varied as the settings themselves. In such light, understanding attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in the community requires a deeper look at the contextual relationship that exists between individuals and their migratory experience. As Allport (1979) explains, the degree to which groups reduce prejudice and increase common social experiences depends on different contextual variables, such as the pursuit of common goals, situational contact, and the group's sanction by institutional supports.

Traditionally, immigration literature has dealt with immigration in terms of assimilation and economic impact (Stepick et al. 2003). Common hypotheses regard the conditions of ethnic relations in terms of a labor market split in which the price of two or more groups' labor differ for the same work (Bonacich 1972). Others, such as the "power threat" or "real conflict" hypotheses, have been used to explain the determinants of conflict

among ethnic groups (Oliver and Wong 2003). According to this argument, the proximity and growth of a subordinate group threaten the superordinate group's social and economic privileges. In spite of these theories, changes in the contexts of arrival and the populations of great American cities have led to new ways to analyze and theorize the subject. As Stepick et al. (2003) suggest, a theoretical framework in the area of immigration should emphasize interactions between immigrants and Americans. However, because of the ethnic composition of South Florida, it is arguably safe to take an approach that incorporates interactions among different ethnic groups and minorities as well as the American community.

It is precisely because of the ethnic composition of South Florida that a different analytical approach should be instituted when looking at immigrant or ethnic issues. As described by Grenier and Stepick (1992), the presence of Cubans in Miami is expressed not only in economic, cultural, and political terms but also in terms of the ambience of the city. Cuban migration to South Florida dates back to the late 1950s when political changes were produced by the revolutionary efforts of Fidel Castro (Grenier and Stepick 1992). In the next four decades, South Florida saw the arrival of Cubans characterized by periods of massive exodus and constant flows of rafters willing to cross the Florida straits (Portes and Stepick 1993). In political and economic terms, Cubans in Miami achieved a level of control never before attained by first-generation immigrants in the United States as they gained important roles in local electoral politics and the public school system (Stepick et al. 2003). Arguably, the transformation of the Cuban community into a successful ethnic elite has been, in part, a product of federal policy and helpful refugee benefit packages. In contrast, other immigrant groups and refugees have struggled with Cuban–Miami politics, “unjust” federal policies, and racial issues, which have dramatically truncated their social, political, and economic development.

For Haitians, reception in South Florida has not been a story of success and achievement. Constant power changes and political struggle on the island have caused a constant outflow of people since the assumption of power in 1957 of François Duvalier (Grenier and Stepick 1992). Traditionally, Haitian arrival and settlement in South Florida have been characterized by negative stereotypes and a hostile migratory policy. As Grenier and Stepick (1992) point out, political and legal issues related to Haitian immigrants are complex and confusing. As a result, Haitians in the United States are often treated as illegal immigrants even if they have the right to remain legally in the country (Grenier and Stepick 1992). The disparity in the reception of Miami's various immigrant groups is one of the major issues in the troubled state of affairs of the city's ethnic relations. As Portes and Stepick (1993) explain, the U.S. government justifies such differences by distinguishing between “political” refugees and “economic” migrants. However, such justifications by Miami residents and U.S. policymakers seem to be influenced by the Haitian immigrants' country of origin, their receiving community, and their color (Portes and Stepick 1993).

As with many other migratory groups, the growth and consolidation of the Nicaraguan community in Miami began as a reaction to revolutionary turmoil (Portes and Stepick 1993). Nicaraguans began arriving in South Florida in the late 1970s, partly

as a response to the Sandinista revolution (Edmondson 1989; Fernandez-Kelly and Curran 2001). Throughout the 1990s, stories of deportation and family separation were well documented by several Miami media outlets. Unlike their Cuban counterparts, Nicaraguans in the United States lived in limbo, not given political asylum yet regularly granted work permits (*Economist* 1997). Despite the political situation in Nicaragua, through 1985 only about 10 percent of applicants were granted political asylum, although in subsequent years, changes in immigration policy shifted the number to about 50 percent (Portes and Stepick 1993). After the fall of the Sandinistas from power in the late 1980s, the federal government felt that the Nicaraguans should return home. They received a “kick in the pants”—their welcome was officially over, and thousands began receiving letters of deportation (Portes and Stepick 1993).

Much like the mobilization of Nicaraguans to South Florida, Colombian immigration has been characterized by periods of interrelated waves (Collier et al. 2001). Political turmoil, international drug trade, and harsh economic conditions have prompted Colombian migration to the United States (Collier et al. 2001; Guarnizo et al. 1999). Guerrilla warfare has immersed the country in a relentless bloodbath similar to that of Central American countries during the 1980s. As a result, many Colombians claim the right to the Temporary Protected Status given to Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans in past decades (Collier et al. 2001). However, an ongoing debate exists about the legitimacy of Colombian immigration as a result of political turmoil, as many believe that Colombian migration is related to economic conditions and not to political ones.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In an extensive process of research design evaluation, the research team and the IRC discussed several methodologies. The goal was to examine the views of a representative sample of the residents of the combined Miami-Dade and Broward counties in Florida, which make up the South Florida community as we defined it, in a study time of three months. The three research objectives of the IRC led us to produce a tool that would provide useful baseline data on the community’s knowledge and attitudes toward refugees and asylees and generate recommendations for public education and fund-raising campaigns.

In the first phase, we developed survey instruments in both Spanish and English with input from the IRC based on its experience working in South Florida. Approval was obtained from the Florida International University Institutional Review Board for the research proposal and the survey instruments. Initially we chose to conduct phone interviews with those in the sample. Two thousand randomly generated phone numbers were used to produce a calling list of Miami-Dade and Broward county residents. The survey was pretested and revised by several Florida International University professors who recommended changes that were then implemented.

However, after many hours of utilizing the telephone strategy, several problems arose. First, the rate of response was very low (less than 10 percent), regardless of the different

timing and days scheduled to conduct the interviews. Additionally, the few respondents represented a very selective group of people within their demographic characteristics (primarily Caucasian adults with higher levels of education). Given our time constraints, a change of methodology was approved, and a self-administered survey was created. Once again, the survey was pretested, reviewed, and revised accordingly. This survey consisted of a single page, front and back, with a total of 32 closed- and open-ended questions, administered to 268 individuals (for a combined sample size, with the phone respondents, of  $N = 280$ ). The topics included the respondents' knowledge of refugees and asylees (six questions), their attitudes toward refugees (15 questions), and their general demographic information (11 questions). The surveys were administered in locations such as Miami-Dade and Broward county government centers, beaches and parks, metro rail stations, and Florida International University's Biscayne Bay Campus, among others.

An intensive process of data input and analysis followed the data collection. Using standard statistical software, we coded and input the responses for statistical analysis. Basic descriptive statistics, chi-square cross-tabulations, and logistic regression were performed in the process of analysis. Additionally, examination of the open-ended questions allowed us to obtain a more comprehensive and direct understanding of the knowledge and attitudes of South Floridians toward refugees and asylees.

#### **KNOWLEDGE OF REFUGEES AND ASYLEES**

The first main area of the study focused on the community's knowledge about refugees and asylees. The findings show that there is no agreement in South Florida on the meaning of the term *refugee*. When asked how they used the term *refugee*, respondents were evenly split between using it to mean someone who comes to the United States seeking better economic conditions (47.5 percent) and to mean someone seeking political or religious freedom (48.9 percent). This could reflect either a lack of knowledge about refugees or the feeling that even those who have officially been designated refugees nevertheless have primarily economic motives for coming to the United States. Even those respondents with a refugee/asylee acquaintance in South Florida were no less likely than those who did not have a refugee or asylee as an acquaintance to associate the term *refugee* with political or religious freedom.

Responses about the reasons that refugees and asylees from particular countries come to the United States reveal an important pattern (see Table 1). On average, almost three-quarters of the respondents chose "better economic conditions" as the reason that refugees/asylees from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Haiti come to the United States. Only for Cuban refugees/asylees did the majority (65.7 percent) of respondents indicate that "political or religious freedom" is the primary motivation. Even those respondents who early in the survey answered that refugees come to the United States for political or religious freedom did not consistently check "political or religious freedom" as the primary motivating factor for refugees from each of the countries listed. Only for Cuba did the majority of these respondents (65.7 percent)



**TABLE 1** South Floridians' ( $N = 280$ ) Knowledge of Refugees' Reasons for Immigration by Country of Refugee Origin (%)

COUNTRY	BETTER ECONOMIC CONDITIONS	POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM	OTHER
Cuba	40.5	65.7	19.8
Nicaragua	72.8	23	18
Guatemala	80	16	11.6
Honduras	83.2	11.5	12.3
Colombia	59	33	22.4
Venezuela	62.8	32	17.8
Peru	74.9	17.4	17.4
Haiti	75.9	33.8	10.4

consistently choose political or religious freedom. For example, of the respondents who originally claimed to use the term *refugee* to mean someone who comes to the United States looking for political or religious freedom, only 39.7 percent answered that *Nicaraguans* come to the United States for political or religious freedom.

This finding indicates that the public is well aware of the situation of political and religious repression in Cuba and believes that this repression is the primary motivating factor for Cubans coming to the United States. This is expected, given the high profile of the Cuban exile community in South Florida and the large percentage of South Florida residents who either were born in Cuba (most of whom consider themselves refugees) or are descendants of Cubans. Interestingly, despite the fact that the majority of Nicaraguans in South Florida are refugees who arrived during the political upheaval in Nicaragua of the 1980s (U.S. Census Bureau 2000), there appears to be a lack of knowledge of Nicaraguans as political refugees. The same is true for Colombians, Venezuelans, and Haitians, all of whom have been fleeing political oppression in their home countries in recent years. This lack of recognition of refugees from countries other than Cuba should be a key area for a public education campaign by the IRC.

Even though there is little consensus on the meaning of the term *refugee*, there is agreement about the countries of origin of refugees and asylees in South Florida. The overwhelming majority of respondents listed Cuba and Haiti as the major countries from which refugees and asylees in South Florida originate, with Colombia and then Venezuela completing the top four. The association of the terms *refugee* and *asylee* with those countries that have been experiencing difficult political situations and not with other countries with noticeable populations in South Florida such as Jamaica, Brazil, and Canada suggests that the terms are not simply synonymous with *immigrant* or *foreigner* in the minds of the community. The association of refugees and asylees with difficult political realities lies close under the surface even for those who believe that other motives primarily account for the presence of refugees and asylees in South Florida.



**ATTITUDES TOWARD REFUGEES AND ASYLEES**

The second area of the study focused on the community’s attitudes toward refugees and asylees. In general, the community views refugees and asylees favorably, with over 80 percent indicating a favorable or very favorable opinion of refugees and asylees (see Table 2). Interestingly, slightly more people indicated a favorable opinion of immigrants (86.8 percent), a difference not within the margin of error (2 percent). Predictably, the majority of respondents indicated that their opinion of undocumented immigrants was unfavorable or very unfavorable.

Comments covered the whole spectrum from very favorable to very unfavorable. One respondent spoke favorably of the work ethic of refugees, saying, “Refugees put in tremendous amounts of effort. They appreciate the opportunity here.” Other respondents wrote unfavorably about people who leave their countries of origin because of structural problems. One person commented, “People should stay and make a change in their government. Don’t flee from the problems of your society.”

A statistical analysis of attitudes toward refugees by knowledge of the reasons that refugees migrate to the United States produced no significant difference in the attitudes of respondents who chose economic conditions, political or religious freedom, or reuniting with family as the reason refugees come to the United States. Respondents who chose “political or religious freedom” were no more likely to have a favorable opinion of refugees than respondents who chose “better economic conditions” or another reason. Having a refugee acquaintance also was not a significant predictor of favorable opinion of refugees when controlled for being Hispanic/Latino (as a group, Hispanics/Latinos are five times more likely than non-Hispanics to have a refugee acquaintance).

However, knowledge does appear to affect attitudes in the case of Cuban refugees. When asked about their opinions of refugees from certain countries of origin, those respondents who checked “political or religious freedom” as the reason Cuban refugees come to the United States were more likely to have a very favorable opinion of Cuban refugees and asylees ( $p = .063$ ). The same is true for Venezuelans ( $p = .039$ ), but the pattern is not found for the remainder of the countries. Several respondents’ comments convey sympathy for people who flee war, danger, or oppression. One respondent remarked, “If people are coming because of real danger, that’s fine.” However, many respondents found this question difficult to answer because they felt their opinion of refugees

**TABLE 2** South Floridians’ ( $N = 280$ ) Attitudes toward Refugees, Asylees, Immigrants, and Undocumented Immigrants (%)

GROUP	VERY FAVORABLE		VERY UNFAVORABLE	
	FAVORABLE	UNFAVORABLE	FAVORABLE	UNFAVORABLE
Refugees	16	65.8	13.4	4.8
Asylees	17.7	63.9	10.9	7.5
Immigrants	20.8	66	8.7	4.5
Undocumented Immigrants	6.5	36.3	35.9	21.4

**TABLE 3** South Floridians' (*N* = 280) Perceptions of Refugee/Asylee Usage of Public Funds and Social Services

REFUGEE/ASYLEE USAGE	%
Drain	48.9
Not a Drain	51.1

depended on factors such as the character of the individual refugee, the willingness of the refugee to assimilate, or the reason the person fled his or her country of origin. Factors such as these would be an important question for future research on attitudes toward refugees/asylees.

The question of attitudes toward refugees and asylees from specific countries of origin yielded rather high “don’t know” responses for the countries Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru. This pattern is probably attributable to the lower profile in South Florida of refugees/asylees from these countries and the relative lack of news about these countries compared with Cuba and Venezuela.

The implications for a public education campaign are clear. When Cuban and Venezuelan refugees/asylees are believed to be fleeing political or religious freedom, they are seen more favorably by the community. The oppressive political climate in these two countries is well known in South Florida, and it is likely that the media attention has helped shape public opinion in this area. A primary objective of the public education campaign must therefore be to increase the recognition of refugee/asylee groups who come from countries that have not had as much media attention focused on the realities of political or religious oppression they present.

A third question addressed by the research centered on perceptions surrounding the impact of refugees/asylees on the community. In communicating with the South Florida community, the IRC occasionally frames its work in terms of providing social services to refugees/asylees that decrease their dependence on public funds. The research suggests that this is indeed a major concern, as almost half of the respondents indicated that they believe that refugees are a drain on public funds and social services (see Table 3). Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of public support refugees receive, including one individual who said, “Sometimes refugees and asylees have unfair advantage over U.S. citizens on education, loans, and government assistance programs.” However, over three-quarters of respondents believed that refugees and asylees also contribute to the South Florida economy (see Table 4). Many recognized that refugees contribute through work. “They do the jobs we don’t want to do,” one respondent said.

**TABLE 4** South Floridians' (*N* = 280) Perceptions of Refugee/Asylee Contributions to the South Florida Economy

REFUGEE/ASYLEE CONTRIBUTION	%
Contribute	78.2
Do Not Contribute	21.8

The true nature of the impact of refugees/asylees on the community, with particular attention to misconceptions about their usage of public funds and social services, would be an important feature of a public education campaign.

## FUND-RAISING

Discussions with the IRC revealed the increasing emphasis being placed on fund-raising to support the organization's activities. There was a particular interest in quantitative data that would show the willingness of the community to give and could be correlated by various demographic variables to indicate where fund-raising could be profitably undertaken. Measuring willingness to donate to a cause that supports the resettlement of refugees and asylees in South Florida also provides support for the findings on attitudes toward refugees. In fact, the percentage of those respondents who indicated they would be willing to donate (78.2 percent) is nearly equal to the percentage of those who indicated a favorable or very favorable opinion of refugees. Only two demographic variables significantly predicted whether a respondent would be willing to donate. Females were more likely than males to be willing to donate, and those born in the United States were less likely than those born outside the United States to be willing to donate (see Table 5).

Several respondents commented that refugees already receive sufficient assistance. "Cubans don't need more help than the one already given," one respondent said. Others commented that their support would depend on the character of the refugee. As one individual explained, "Es necesario ayudar a quienes vienen a tener una vida sociable y honesta" [We should help those who come to have a sociable and honest life].

The IRC wanted to determine if fund-raising would be most profitably undertaken among groups with the same countries of origin as the refugee/asylee populations they assist. The survey asked respondents if they would be willing to donate to a cause that supported the resettlement of refugees and asylees from each of a list of countries that included Cuba, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Haiti. When these answers were cross-tabulated by country of origin of the respondent, we found that all of the respondents born in a particular country who indicated that they would be willing to donate were willing to donate to help refugees from their same country of origin. Because of the small number of respondents from many of the countries listed,

**TABLE 5** South Floridians' (*N* = 280) Willingness to Donate to a Cause That Supports Refugee Resettlement by Place of Birth (%)

WILLINGNESS TO DONATE	BORN IN THE UNITED STATES	BORN OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES
Willing to Donate	31.8	68.2
Not Willing to Donate	59.2	40.5

*p* < .001.

it was not possible to obtain statistically significant results for most countries. However, it appears that Cubans, Colombians, and Haitians are significantly likely to be willing to donate ( $p < .056$ ,  $p < .052$ , and  $p < .001$ , respectively). Among Colombians, only 58.3 percent who were willing to donate would be willing to donate to help Guatemalans or Hondurans, and these results are statistically significant ( $p < .10$ ). Also, only 63.6 percent of Colombians who were willing to donate would be willing to support Haitian refugees ( $p < .001$ ). It appears that Colombians are more willing to donate to a cause that would help Colombian refugees and less likely to be willing to support refugees/asylees from other countries. Whether the same is true for respondents from other countries of origin cannot be determined from the data.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings provide useful guidance for a public education campaign and fund-raising efforts. The lack of willingness by those born in the United States to donate to a cause that supports refugee resettlement in South Florida indicates that fund-raising among them could be difficult and that education is needed before such efforts should be implemented. The general willingness of the foreign-born to donate to such a cause suggests that fund-raising activities could profitably be undertaken among this group. Prior research has suggested that some cultural groups, in particular Haitians, are rather mistrusting of outsiders but are very engaged in their churches and extended families (Stepick 2005). Among groups such as these, fund-raising efforts that access the community through churches or networks of families resettled through the churches would have a greater chance of success.

The fact that primarily Cuban and Venezuelan refugees are associated with political or religious freedom, and that this association increases how favorably they are seen by the community, suggests that education about the experiences of refugees and asylees from other countries would increase sympathy for these groups as well. This finding is also part of the overall conclusion that, even though the community has a tacit understanding that refugees and asylees in South Florida are coming from countries with political turmoil or oppression, people nevertheless believe that many if not most come primarily for reasons other than political or religious freedom. Education on the actual plight of refugees and asylees from Latin America and the Caribbean and their legal status as refugees and asylees would perhaps correct some of this misunderstanding.

There also appears to be a misconception regarding the usage of social services and public funds by refugees and asylees. Even though respondents acknowledged that refugees work and contribute to the economy, they nevertheless felt that refugees and asylees are a drain on public funds and social services. Several also expressed dissatisfaction that the government offers any support for noncitizens or that in some cases noncitizens appear to get preferential treatment over citizens. Education on the nature and purpose of refugee resettlement and its benefit to the community would greatly facilitate the mission of the IRC in South Florida.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study attempted to gather some baseline data as a first phase to the research. In the next phase a more qualitative study would greatly move the research forward. In-depth interviews would flesh out nuances of the community's knowledge and attitudes in a way that is not possible through a survey questionnaire. Many people completing this survey were eager to talk with us and explain their responses. People expressed strong feelings on all sides of this issue, and many felt that the questions were too general to capture their true feelings. In particular, the questions about opinions were difficult for people who did not like to put all refugees (or asylees, or immigrants) into one group. Respondents recognized that individual refugees have different personal characters, different backgrounds, and different reasons for coming to the United States, and many commented that these factors are very important in determining their opinions. Further exploration of these factors and their relationship to respondents' opinions could be profitably explored through in-depth interviews.

Another area that would benefit from further qualitative examination is the knowledge level regarding refugees, asylees, and immigrants and the reasons behind their migration to the United States. Many people felt that refugees, asylees, and immigrants move to the United States for a combination of reasons. A real understanding of the differences between the categories of refugee, asylee, and immigrant is not evident.

Last, research on the influence of the media on what people in the community know about refugees and asylees and how they view refugees would be especially useful for planning a public education campaign. South Florida has a variety of English- and Spanish-language media outlets with loyal and mutually exclusive audiences. The research should incorporate a content analysis of media outlets and how they portray refugees and asylees as well as demographic data on viewership.

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