A summary report from *Speaking for Ourselves: A Study with Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the Twin Cities*

SPEAKING for OURSELVES

Perceptions of Transportation, Housing, and Safety Perceptions among Immigrants and Refugees in the Twin Cities

Minnesota is home to more than 400,000 immigrants and refugees. The majority live in the Twin Cities. *Speaking for Ourselves: A Study with Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the Twin Cities* looks at the experiences of Hmong, Karen, Latino, Liberian, and Somali immigrants and refugees living in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

With the guidance of our advisory group (see a list on page 15), we interviewed 459 immigrants and adult children of immigrants about their lives – their families, education, jobs, health, and engagement in their communities to learn: What are the biggest needs of immigrant and refugee communities in the Twin Cities? What are the issues that are of greatest concerns? What assets are available to address them? For more information about the study methods and participants, see page 11.

This summary highlights what *Speaking for Ourselves* participants had to say about transportation, housing, and safety perceptions. It highlights common themes, and suggests potential strategies to support these communities. Other *Speaking for Ourselves* summary reports focus on civic participation and social engagement; education; employment; health, mental health, and health care access; personal money management; and the immigrant experience in the Twin Cities. All of these reports can be found at wilderresearch.org.

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Cultural communities at-a-glance

The Latino population makes up the largest foreign-born population in Minnesota. About 7 percent of people living in in the Twin Cities are Latino. The vast majority of these immigrants originate from Mexico, although Minnesota is also home to Latino immigrants from many other Central and South American countries. About 40 percent, or nearly 100,000, are foreign-born.

Hmong refugees began arriving in Minnesota in the 1970s and 1980s following the Vietnam War, with a smaller second wave arriving in the early 2000s as a result of the closing of a refugee camp in Thailand. The Twin Cities metropolitan area is now home to over 64,000 Hmong residents, making it one of the largest Hmong populations in the country. Karen refugees have recently begun to settle in Minnesota fleeing the violence of the Burmese civil war. At least 3,000 refugees have settled in the Twin Cities; 85 percent came to the U.S. within the last 10 years.

Somali and Liberian refugees came to the United States following civil wars in their countries. Somali refugees first started arriving in the U.S. in large numbers during the 1990s. An estimated 32,000 or more Somalis reside in Minnesota, which makes it the largest Somali community in the United States. Over 10,000 foreign-born Liberian refugees have settled in the Twin Cities. About 80 percent have arrived within the last 15 years.

What are some of the most important issues to remember when communicating the study results?

- Because each cultural community is unique, any and all comparisons made between or across communities should consider the unique historical, social, and economic contexts of these communities.
- Recognize the difference between perception data and incidence data. The *Speaking for Ourselves* study mainly focuses on perceptions of respondents from immigrant and refugee communities; this study does not provide representative incidence data.
- Because immigrant and refugee communities are smaller and close-knit (including, in some cases, the interviewers who worked on this study), and the questions may broach subjects that are sensitive, interpretation of findings must take social desirability bias into account.
- In order to ensure positive impact, data from *Speaking for Ourselves* should be used in conjunction with other data sources. Any policy or programming decisions should be made only in collaboration with affected immigrant and refugee communities.

Key findings

Two out of five *Speaking for Ourselves* participants said they have transportation problems; these issues are more common for respondents who are women and those who were born outside of the U.S.

Speaking for Ourselves participants were asked if they have any problems getting where they need to go. Twelve percent of participants said they have significant problems and an additional 27 percent said they have occasional problems (Figure 1). Hmong and Latino participants were least likely, and Karen participants were most likely, to have problems. Female participants were more than twice as likely as male participants to report significant transportation problems. Respondents who were born outside of the U.S. were more likely to have transportation problems when compared with U.S.-born respondents.

Participants who said they have problems getting around were asked what would help them most to meet their transportation needs. The most common responses were getting a car or a new car (22% of those asked, n=12 participants) and language help (18% of those asked, n=10 participants), including things such as the desire to have metro transit flyers and brochures in their native language. Others noted the helpfulness of being with someone who speaks English when trying to get around.

> "Change the bus flyer to Somali language." – Somali respondent
>
> "If we have people who understand English we can follow them to the places we need to go. So I think having friends who know their way around and who can speak English will help my transportation." – Karen respondent

1. Do you have problems getting where you need to go?

	N	No transportation problems	Occasional transportation problems	Significant transportation problems
Cultural community				
All respondents	459	60%	27%	12%
Hmong respondents	105	71%	22%	12%
Karen respondents	101	32%	43%	26%
Latino respondents	101	76%	17%	7%
Liberian respondents	60	65%	25%	10%
Somali respondents	69	54%	32%	15%
Gender				
Female	299	55%	28%	13%
Male	160	71%	23%	7%
Generation				
2nd - born in the U.S.	24	83%	8%	8%
1st - born outside the U.S.	435	59%	28%	13%

One-third of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants reported problems paying for their housing; this was most commonly a problem for respondents with lower levels of income and education, as well as for older respondents.

Eleven percent of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants said that being able to pay for their rent or mortgage is a "serious problem" for their household, and an additional 22 percent said it is a "small problem." The proportion of participants who have problems paying for their housing did not vary much by cultural group. Not surprisingly, participants who have higher levels of education and those with higher incomes reported fewer problems paying for their housing. Participants under age 30 also reported fewer problems than older participants.

When asked whether their housing is affordable (as defined by them), 81 percent of respondents answered "yes." Responses differed greatly by cultural community, with nearly half of Hmong respondents (44%) reporting that their housing is not affordable.

Respondents were also asked if they have any housing-related needs. These needs were highest for Karen and Hmong participants with 44 and 43 percent, respectively, responding "yes" and were least common in the Latino and Somali communities at 23 and 15 percent, respectively. The most common housing-related needs named by respondents were: more space (n=28); repairs, maintenance, and pest control (n=27); subsidized or affordable housing (n=24); utilities assistance (n=21); and household items (n=20).

Of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants age 65+*, about one-third (34%) have no plans for where they will live as they age and start needing help to take care of themselves.

When asked where they plan to live as they get older and start needing help to take care of themselves, 39 percent of Hmong participants who are age 65+ said they will live with their adult child, 29 percent said they don't have plans, and 15 percent said they plan to live in an assisted living, nursing, or other facility for older adults. Thirty-six percent of Latino participants who are age 65+ said they will live on their own or with a spouse and 27 percent indicated that they have no plans for where they will live. Even fewer Latino respondents plan to live in a nursing home, with other family, or with their adult child (Figure 2). (*There were too few participants age 65 and older in the remaining cultural communities to report data for this topic.) The percentage of respondents without a plan increased as education and income levels increased.

2. As you get older and may start to need more help taking care of yourself, where do you plan to live?

	All respondents (N=86)	Hmong (N=41)	Latino (N=11)
No plans / haven't thought about it	34%	29%	27%
Live on your own or with your spouse or partner but no other relatives	17%	12%	36%
With your adult child	27%	39%	9%
With other relatives	6%	5%	9%
In an assisted living, nursing home, or other facility for older adults	11%	15%	9%
Other	6%	0%	9%

When participants age 18-49 were asked about where their parents plan to live as they get older and need more help, one-quarter (24%) of respondents said they had no plans or hadn't thought about it. Twenty-one percent said their parents would live with them. Of all *Speaking for Ourselves* participants (who are all adults), fewer than 2 out of 10 indicated that they currently live with at least one of their adult children, about 1 out of 10 live with one or more of their siblings, and about 1 out of 10 live with a parent.

Most *Speaking for Ourselves* participants reported feeling safe where they live.

A majority of respondents (65%) said that they "always" feel safe where they live, 16 percent said they "often" feel safe, and 19 percent said they "sometimes" or "never" feel safe. There was little variation across cultural groups; however, Hmong respondents were the least likely to report "always" feeling safe and Somali participants were the most likely to report "always" feeling safe. Interestingly, respondents' likelihood of always feeling safe decreased as their income and education level increased (Figure 3).

3. Respondents' self-reported feelings of safety in the neighborhood where they live

	Always	Often	Sometimes or never
All respondents (N=456)	65%	16%	19%
Cultural community			
Hmong (N=104)	52%	27%	21%
Karen (N=99)	70%	10%	20%
Latino (N=101)	64%	15%	21%
Liberian (N=60)	70%	10%	20%
Somali (N=69)	78%	10%	12%

3. Respondents' self-reported feelings of safety in the neighborhood where they live (continued)

	Always	Often	Sometimes or never
Highest level of education			
No formal education (N=76)	66%	15%	20%
Some schooling, no diploma or GED (N=122)	69%	12%	19%
High school diploma or GED (N=120)	68%	15%	18%
Some college or Associate degree (N=98)	60%	18%	21%
Bachelor's degree or higher (N=39)	56%	31%	13%
Household income			
Less than $10,000 (N=73)	77%	8%	15%
$10,000 - $19,999 (N=74)	60%	19%	22%
$20,000 - $29,999 (N=98)	62%	16%	21%
$30,000 - $49,999 (N=105)	68%	13%	19%
$50,000+ (N=40)	60%	25%	15%

When asked about a range of public safety issues, the items of most concern among all respondents were the **lack of access to emergency assistance in their native language**, **youth delinquency**, and **gang activity**. Other issues that were considered major problems among one-third or more of participants included **bullying among youth** and **domestic violence**. Issues like neighborhood crime, sex trafficking, and rape/sexual violence were viewed as major problems by about one-fifth of respondents.

There was great variation across cultural groups in terms of what participants considered to be of significant concern for their community (Figure 4).

- Somali, Latino, and Hmong participants most commonly reported that gang activity is a major problem for their community.
- Three-quarters of Liberian participants reported access to emergency assistance/911 in their native language as a major problem. (Although most Liberians speak English, they may have an accent that makes it difficult for them to communicate with 911 operators and others who speak American English. Also, many Liberians speak a native language or dialect that is not spoken by 911 operators. This may particularly be a challenge for older Liberians in Minnesota who may not be as likely to speak or understand American English.)
- Domestic violence was identified as a major problem in their community by two-thirds of Latino participants. This could be related to the fact that a higher proportion of Latino respondents are women compared with other cultural communities that participated in *Speaking for Ourselves*.

4. Percentage of participants who rated these issues as a "major problem" for their cultural community (respondents rated items provided in a list)

	All respondents (N=454)	Hmong (N=105)	Karen (N=101)	Latino (N=101)	Liberian (N=59)	Somali (N=66)
Emergency assistance/ 911 in native language	46%	32%	41%	44%	77%	53%
Youth delinquency	43%	43%	23%	52%	33%	71%
Gang activity	41%	46%	10%	53%	23%	83%
Domestic violence	38%	41%	8%	68%	37%	34%
Bullying among youth	35%	31%	8%	62%	18%	62%
Rape/Sexual violence	21%	29%	3%	44%	7%	12%
Sex trafficking	17%	21%	3%	38%	8%	7%
Neighborhood crime	17%	22%	5%	26%	12%	17%

Speaking for Ourselves participants indicated several different reasons people from their community might not report crimes to the police.

When asked why people in their community might not report crimes to the police, the most common reason given across the cultural communities that participated in *Speaking for Ourselves* was **language barriers**, which was mentioned by 18 percent of respondents.

Here are the most common reasons listed by each specific cultural community:

- 35% of Hmong respondents said that they turn to elders, friends, families, community, and clans to resolve issues (including domestic violence issues).

> "Hmong don't tell because we have elders who can help us with situations." – Hmong respondent

- 26% of Karen participants said that their community may not contact the police in the hopes that things will get better and that people will tolerate or forgive each other.

> "Some don't report because they still hope that things will get better for them and their family so they continue to tolerate." – Karen respondent

- 46% of Latino participants reported fear of deportation as the primary reason many people in their community may not report crimes to the police.

> "Scared of the police. They will arrest me. No confidence in them. They are scared of being found out that they are here illegally." – Latino respondent

- 23% of Liberian respondents said that fear of the aggressor and potential retaliation would keep people in their community from reporting crimes.

> "Fear of retaliation – say if my uncle is abusing me, I would not tell the police for fear of being afraid to be kicked out of the house." – Liberian respondent

- 53% of Somali respondents said the language barrier was the most likely reason for not reporting crimes to the police. Also, 20% noted that it is often part of Somali culture to deal with issues within the community.

> "Most of Somali like to report crimes to community elders to solve the issues. Therefore, most people do not like to report it to police officer, because we like to solve our problems within ourselves."
> – Somali respondent

Self-reported experiences with profiling or discrimination by law enforcement vary across cultural communities; one-third (33%) of *Speaking for Ourselves* participants overall indicated there are "always" or "often" problems in their community.

Perceived problems in their community with profiling or discrimination from law enforcement varied for each cultural community that participated in *Speaking for Ourselves*. Fifty-five percent of Latino respondents, 47 percent of Liberian respondents, and 41 percent of Hmong respondents indicated discrimination from law enforcement happens in their community "often" or "always." On the other hand, 91 percent of Karen respondents and 64 percent of Somali respondents said this is "never" a problem in their community (Figure 5).

5. Is profiling or discrimination from law enforcement a problem for your community?

	All respondents (N=439)	Hmong (N=100)	Karen (N=95)	Latino (N=98)	Liberian (N=57)	Somali (N=69)
Always	14%	13%	0%	20%	28%	15%
Often	19%	28%	0%	35%	19%	9%
Sometimes	31%	52%	10%	32%	40%	13%
Never	37%	7%	91%	13%	12%	64%

Issues to consider

Anecdotal evidence and discussions with advocates in immigrant and refugee communities indicate there is a significant concern with a hidden homeless population within immigrant and refugee communities, because official U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) homelessness counts do not include couch surfing and doubling up with other family members temporarily; there may also be cultural differences in whether people within immigrant and refugee communities think these conditions define a person or a people as homeless or not. Better data on the extent of homelessness, near-homelessness, and precariously housed members of immigrant and refugee communities could help providers provide better services and seek resources to provide services to these groups.

Ideas for action

Mobility is one of the most crucial components for facilitating economic opportunity for new immigrants. Ideas for consideration include: (1) Support carpooling or community-based transit services (leverage assets such as strong ties within these communities), (2) provide education in multiple languages on public transit options and usability, (3) encourage public transit policy to consider ways to alleviate language barriers so that those with limited English proficiency may use the system comfortably.[1] This could include developing a "buddy system" where bilingual adults who have experience using the transit system could orient newer immigrants to the system.

Many of the immigrants and refugees who participated in this study reported challenges in paying for their housing. Ideas for community consideration include making the Section 8 housing choice voucher more accessible to low-income immigrant families. (Even if a family qualifies for Section 8, it is unlikely they will get the support due to waiting lists that have been closed or are very long.[2]) In addition, ensure enough larger housing units are available through these programs to accommodate the needs of larger families. The *Speaking for Ourselves* study results indicate that Hmong and Karen immigrants may not be as connected to housing resources as respondents form the other cultural communities. It may be helpful to provide outreach and education on housing assistance programs in appropriate languages. Outreach from Community Action and other organizations that provide energy assistance and other housing-related services to these cultural communities may also be needed.

1 Kim, S. (2009). Immigrants and transportation: An analysis of immigrant workers' work trips. *Cityscape*, 155-169.
2 Department of Human Services. (2015). *Housing benefits 101.* Retrieved from http://mn.hb101.org/

Public safety and specific concerns about police-community relations were observed in the study results. Ideas for community consideration include: More efforts are needed to build trust and relationships between the immigrant community (including community leaders and organizations, as well as individual community members) and the police, and to ensure that immigrant communities have equal access to police and emergency services. One suggestion is for police to attend more events in these cultural communities and to develop and sustain relationships with members of the communities. Interpreters and other language services may also need to be developed or enhanced within police departments. We also recommend improving police training regarding profiling and how to work within immigrant communities, as well as working to continue to increase the diversity of the police workforce. Finally, further work is needed to ensure immigrant and refugee communities, as well as other communities of color, do not experience illegal and excessive policing in their communities, including issues related to immigration status and anti-terrorism efforts.

Study results indicate that more resources are needed to support immigrant elders and their adult children regarding living arrangements after they can no longer live on their own. For some of the cultural communities that participated in *Speaking for Ourselves*, the tradition is for elders to move in with their adult children when they are no longer able to live on their own (and doubling-up also occurs across and between generations as family finances require). Other families may prefer to live with multiple generations under one roof so that elders can care for children and help with household duties while the adult children go to work.

Some of the elders and adult children who participated in the *Speaking for Ourselves* study appear to be unsure if they should follow the tradition of their cultural community to have their elders live in the home of their adult child, or follow the more typical U.S. approach, where elders are given care in their own homes by paid staff and/or institutionalized when they are no longer able to care for themselves. Immigrant and refugee communities may need more support to continue and sustain traditional approaches to in-home elder care or have more culturally competent options for elder care from public institutions, addressing culture in a holistic manner – inclusive of native language, food, and cultural norms. More information is needed about available resources to support elders in the community, housing options, paying for long-term care, and related topics. In addition, more efforts are needed to develop an adequate supply of culturally responsive elder care providers. Finally, more discussion and thought is needed to understand how the values and traditional elder care and community engagement approaches from these cultural communities can be harnessed to address the broader challenges related to our aging population in Minnesota and the U.S.

Study methods

A community advisory board made up of individuals who are members of and/or work with one or more of the participating communities provided guidance throughout this study. Wilder Research designed the survey instrument, developed and implemented the data collection approach, and conducted the analysis and reporting after gathering input from the advisory board and directly from the community.

An innovative data collection approach called Respondent Driven Sampling was used to identify and recruit eligible community members to participate in the study. This approach involves randomly selecting a handful of "seed" respondents within each community and asking those respondents to refer up to three additional people from their community. Those respondents are then asked to refer other respondents, ultimately creating respondent referral "chains" that in some cases carried out as far as 11 "waves" (Figure 6).

Adults who were born outside of the U.S., or had a parent who was born outside of the U.S., who were from one of the cultural communities included in the study, and who live in Hennepin or Ramsey counties were eligible to participate. Respondents who were referred to the study could **not** be a biological family member or live at the same address as the person who made the referral.

Speaking for Ourselves
Buy-A-Question Partners

The following partner organizations contributed to this study by funding one or more study questions and by committing to using the results to improve service access or delivery:

- Hennepin County Public Health
- Metropolitan Library Service Agency
- Minnesota Children's Museum
- Minnesota Historical Society
- Minnesota Humanities Center
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts
- Science Museum of Minnesota
- Family and Community Knowledge Systems Project, Wilder Research, and Training and Development, Inc., with funding from the Kellogg Foundation

6. Respondent Driven Sampling: Number of seeds, referrals, and waves in the referral chains

Total number of:	All respondents[a]	Hmong	Karen	Latino	Liberian	Somali
Seeds	52	11	7	11	3	9
Referrals	407	94	94	90	57	60
Maximum number of waves	--	11	7	8	9	6
Total number of respondents	459	105	101	101	60	69

[a] In addition to the five main cultural communities listed in the table, the "all respondents" group also includes 6 Lao, 7 Oromo, and 10 Vietnamese respondents. We did not obtain enough completed surveys from members of these cultural communities to be able to report data for these communities separately.

Wilder Research hired bilingual staff from participating communities to help with data collection; interviews were conducted in the respondents' preferred languages, either over the phone or in-person. Respondents received $20 for completing the survey and $5 for each referral they made, up to three.

By using Respondent Driven Sampling, we were able to survey a group of study participants who are more representative of these cultural communities in the Twin Cities than if we had used convenience sampling methods (i.e., survey people who are all affiliated with one program, religious organization, housing site, neighborhood group, etc.) However, study participants are **not** statistically representative of their broader cultural communities because scientific random sampling was not used, and the full Respondent Driven Sampling method for weighting and analyzing data was not appropriate given these data.

Therefore, the data presented here should be interpreted with caution; we do not claim that the results exactly mirror the overall experiences of the broader community. Rather, we suggest that in many cases the data produced by this study are better than any other existing source of data about these immigrant and refugee communities in the Twin Cities. The key findings included in this report have been endorsed strongly enough by a wide enough range of study participants and community stakeholders to be considered valid and actionable for all practical purposes.

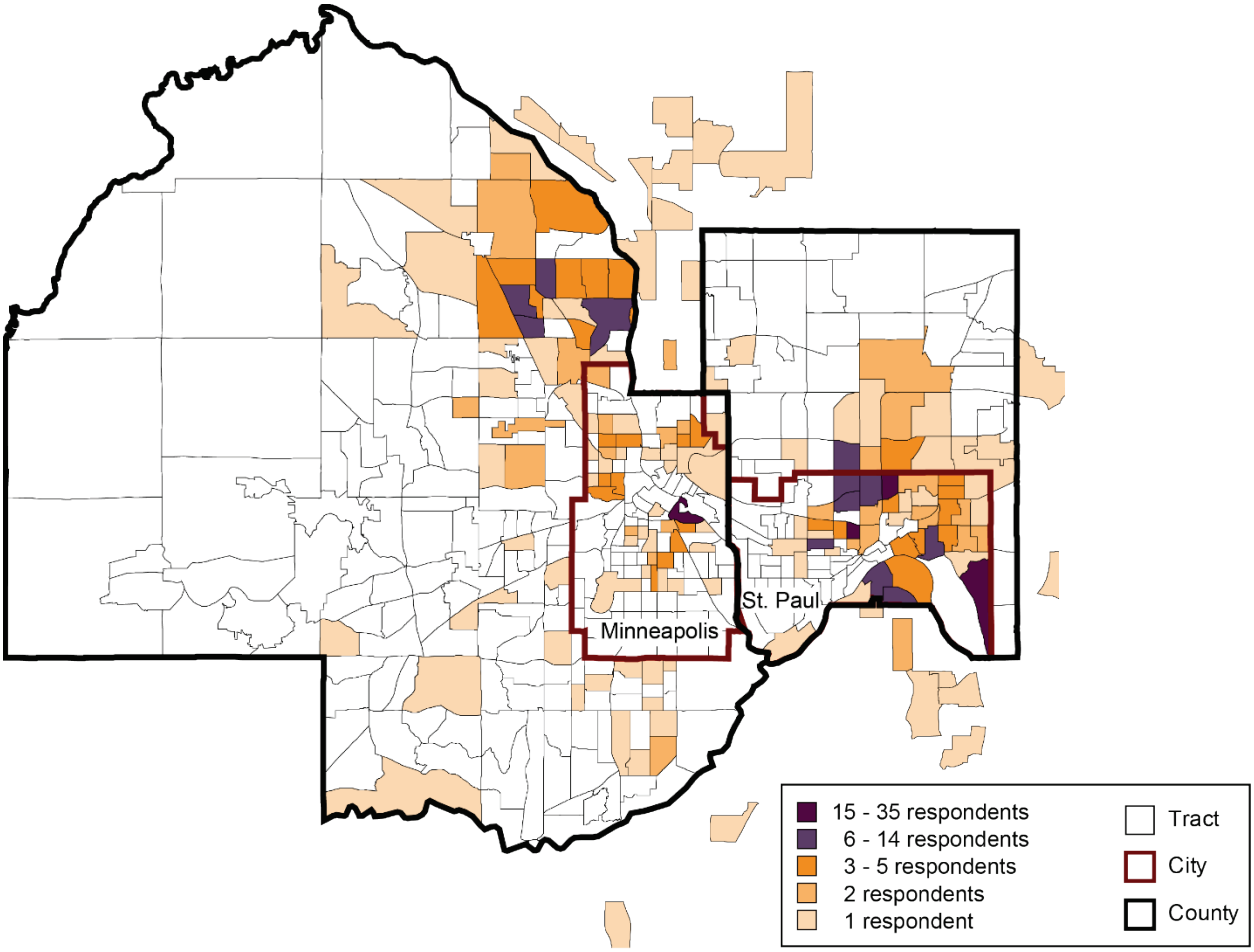
Differences among groups may be attributable to actual differences in their experiences, but may also be due to differences in survey responding patterns (e.g., some groups are more likely to give moderate responses, other groups are more likely to give extreme responses, regardless of the type of question). Therefore, as noted previously, comparison across communities should be done with caution and only with consideration of the unique contextual factors that influence these and any research findings.

See the detailed study methodology report and data book for more information about the study methods and limitations (*Speaking for Ourselves: A Study with Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the Twin Cities Data Book*).

Study participants

A total of 459 immigrant and refugee community members participated in the study. Participants' locations (home address) generally reflect the geographical spread of these cultural communities in Hennepin and Ramsey counties (Figure 7). A few respondents live outside of the target counties.

7. Participants' locations in Hennepin and Ramsey counties



Most participants were born outside of the U.S. They are split nearly evenly between Hennepin and Ramsey counties, although some specific cultural communities are concentrated in one county or the other. Two-thirds of respondents are female; they are split fairly evenly across the age spectrum from younger adults to older adults. Although participants fall into all education levels, most have a high school diploma or less. Similarly, although all income ranges are reflected, over half have household incomes below $30,000 annually (Figure 8).

8. Demographic characteristics of study participants

	All respondents (N=459)	Hmong (N=105)	Karen (N=101)	Latino (N=101)	Liberian (N=60)	Somali (N=69)
County of residence						
Hennepin	47%	40%	0%	58%	85%	57%
Ramsey	49%	51%	100%	40%	10%	35%
Other	4%	9%	0%	2%	5%	9%
Generational status						
1st generation – born outside the U.S.	95%	87%	100%	92%	98%	100%
2nd generation – born in U.S.	5%	13%	0%	8%	2%	0%
Gender						
Female	65%	61%	77%	81%	42%	55%
Male	35%	39%	23%	19%	58%	45%
Age						
18-29	25%	26%	24%	20%	37%	18%
30-49	54%	32%	68%	66%	48%	65%
50+ years	21%	42%	8%	14%	15%	18%
Education						
No formal education	17%	46%	21%	1%	0%	10%
Elementary/some high school (no diploma)	27%	21%	57%	30%	0%	33%
High school diploma or GED	27%	1%	20%	43%	17%	39%
Some college/Associate degree	21%	0%	2%	19%	62%	15%
Bachelor's degree or higher	9%	10%	0%	7%	22%	3%
Household income						
Under $10,000	17%	10%	26%	7%	7%	33%
$10,000 to under $20,000	16%	5%	24%	22%	12%	17%
$20,000 to under $30,000	22%	8%	31%	28%	24%	22%
$30,000 to under $50,000	23%	20%	12%	31%	34%	26%
$50,000 or more	9%	21%	1%	7%	9%	1%
Don't know or refused	13%	37%	6%	4%	15%	0%

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Wilder Research would like to thank the study participants and their communities who entrusted us with their perspectives and shared with us their time. The participation of the *Speaking for Ourselves* advisory board members, our partners, and the community members through each phase of the project, made this study possible and made its findings more meaningful. We would also like to thank our Wilder Research and Wilder Foundation staff who contributed to the completion of this study.

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For more information

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