

Latin@s* and IPV - Evidence-Based Fact Sheet

The number and quality of studies aimed at understanding intimate partner violence (IPV) in Latin@ populations is still very limited. We have compiled what we believe are the most current data on this topic and summarized it below.

Incidence and Prevalence

National statistics about the experience of IPV among women in the United States and throughout the world are never entirely accurate. The different methods used by researchers to collect data (e.g., phone vs. in-person surveys), the specific questions asked (i.e., number of acts of physical violence vs. the context of the violence), and the social/community conditions where the study is conducted (e.g., new immigration laws) all impact the results of the study. For Latin@s, the language in which the study is conducted (including the use of variations in the Spanish language) can also affect the results. Below we present some of the most recent prevalence information published on Latin@ populations. It is important to remember, however, that these findings must be considered within the context of the issues outlined above.

- Nearly 1 in 4 Latinas will experience IPV during their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and 1 in 20 in the previous 12 months (McFarlane et al., 2005).
- Reported rates of IPV were lower for Mexican-born individuals than for persons of Mexican origin born in the United States (Aldarondo, Kantor, & Jasinski, 2002).
- These differences are consistent with the larger literature on physical and mental health outcomes (Vega et al., 2004), school achievement (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002), and substance abuse (Ojeda, Patterson, & Strathdee, 2008). There are also differences among Latin@s based on their country of origin and level of acculturation. The apparent protective nature of being an immigrant is the subject of several current studies (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Vega et al., 2004).
- Immigrant women (including Latinas) who were married were more likely to experience IPV than unmarried women (Dutton, Orloff, & Haas, 2000).
- Religious beliefs and strong family values may make it difficult for many married Latinas from traditional societies to speak out about the violence.



Photos by Douglas Beasley, douglasbeasley.com

** Casa de Esperanza has chosen to use "@" in place of the masculine "o" when referring to people or things that are either gender neutral or both masculine and feminine in make-up. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that both men and women make to our communities.*



Help Seeking

Low rates of reporting and self-help seeking among Latinas experiencing IPV may create the illusion that IPV services are not needed by this population.

- Latinas reported seeking access to shelters less than women from other ethnic/racial groups; this is especially true for immigrant Latina survivors (Ingram, 2007).
- Latinas are only half as likely to report abuse to authorities as survivors from other ethnic/racial groups (Zarza & Adler, 2008).
- Latinas prefer to tell family members, female friends, or neighbors about IPV, while non-Latinas are more likely to tell health care workers or clergy (Ingram, 2007; Zarza & Adler, 2008).
- Nearly half of Latinas in one study did not report abuse to authorities (Zarza & Adler, 2008), possibly due to a variety of reasons, including fear and lack of confidence in the police (Rivera, 1994), shame, guilt, loyalty and/or fear of partners (Heise et al., 1994), and fear of deportation (Perilla, 1999).
- About 4% of Latinas in this same study had fled their countries of origin in search of protection and safety from IPV (Zarza & Adler, 2008).
- Low-aculturated Latinas (both abused and non-abused) are less likely to seek and use social services than their more acculturated counterparts (Lipsky et al., 2006).
- Non-immigrant Latina survivors contact formal services for IPV resources more often than immigrant Latinas (Ingram, 2007).

Commentary: Latina survivors' help-seeking behaviors are closely tied to their level of acculturation.

- More recently immigrated Latinas are usually unaware of the laws, options, and possibilities regarding their experience of abuse.
- Latina survivors who have been in the United States for a longer period of time or were born in this country have had the opportunity to learn about resources and are more likely to use them. However, where they seek help varies from other ethnic/racial groups. Latina survivors are more likely to depend on family members and friends, rather than health care workers, clergy, and police.

Needs

The needs identified by Latina survivors point to the importance of culturally appropriate resources and approaches to assist Latin@ families experiencing IPV. Below is a list of needs identified by Latina survivors and community advocates (Murdough et al., 2004).

Information about:

- Rights as a survivor
- Legal services
- IPV
- Help when going to court
- English lessons
- Protection/safety
- Transportation
- Education for independence
- A place to stay
- Someone to talk to in private



Commentary: Despite the focus on shelters as the preferred mainstream strategy to assist IPV survivors, Latina survivors did not mention shelters among their most urgent needs. This finding should be viewed in the context of not only the potential unawareness of the existence of shelters in this country but also the reluctance of Latina women to leave their house for a variety of reasons. This in no way negates the need for Latina survivors to have access to emergency shelters and housing to address their experience of IPV.

Contextual Factors

IPV happens within the context of a family's daily life, which is deeply affected by numerous factors, both personal and systemic, that impact and are impacted by IPV. Some of these have been documented in the literature.

- **Cultural values** must be identified and understood to develop effective IPV interventions (Pan et al., 2006). Two values of particular importance in the occurrence and prevention of IPV in Latin@ communities are the importance of family (familismo) and strong gender role expectations.
- *Familismo* refers to the central place that the family has in most Latin@s' lives. Strong family roles point to the father as the primary breadwinner (although this role is rapidly changing due to economic realities) and to the mother as the person responsible for the well-being and cohesiveness of the family (Perilla, Lavizzo, & Ibañez, 2007).
- *Gender role expectations* change as Latin@ immigrants acculturate to their new environment. However, for many Latinas their role as mothers is still the most important aspect of their lives, a responsibility against which most of their decisions and actions are weighed. A study found that Latina survivors prioritized their children over themselves, protected them, and provided for them as best as they could (Kelly, 2009).
- **Religion** often plays a strong role in Latinas' decisions on how – or if – to address IPV.
- Religious beliefs may stop some Latinas from using services because they believe that the “sanctity of marriage” precludes their taking steps that could result in divorce or separation.
- Negative and/or uninformed reactions of religious leaders to disclosures of IPV often result in Latina survivors feeling responsible for making their marriage work regardless of the violence they are experiencing (Perilla, 2009).
- **Racial/ethnic conflicts** between Somali and Mexican communities in San Diego were identified as having an impact on IPV in the Latin@ community. This illustrates the role of apparently unrelated societal factors on the occurrence of IPV in Latin@ populations (Pan et al., 2006).
- **Economic factors** (such as employment issues related to immigration status) were also identified by Latina survivors as important elements that affect IPV (Pan et al., 2006).



- **Immigration** is, for many Latin@s, the most salient element of their lives. As a result, Latina survivors' decisions about IPV are deeply affected by their immigration status. As discussed in the Barriers to Services section, this contextual factor is a prime barrier to their ability to access resources.

Resilience and Resistance Strategies

Although the literature in the field has begun to highlight how IPV affects Latina survivors and their children in negative ways, a few studies have focused on the strengths and resistance strategies used by the women.

- Latina survivors report multiple strategies to survive abuse. Among them (Brabeck & Guzman 2008):
 - Avoiding (placating batterer, walking away, talking batterer down, and encouraging counseling for the batterer)
 - Defending (protecting one's body, fighting back, locking self in room, and teaching children to call the police)
 - Spiritual or psychological (joining a support group and maintaining a relationship with God)
 - Social or familial (maintaining relationships with supportive people, not involving family members to protect them, and support/advice from other battered women)
 - Escaping (moving to an undisclosed location, disguising themselves, and saving personal money)

- Other strategies reported by Latina survivors who had used violence against their partners (Perilla, Ramírez González, & Alvarez, 2003):
 - Religion
 - Dialoguing with partner
 - Using threats
 - Hobbies or studying
 - Exercising
 - Flight
 - Calling police
 - Divorce

Commentary: Regardless of their immigration status, Latina survivors of IPV demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in addressing their plight. These strengths should be investigated further and used in programs and services that attempt to assist them.

Barriers to Services

In addition to immigration, studies have found that language and cultural differences act as significant barriers to Latina survivors' ability to access services.

- Fear of deportation has become the most salient barrier for many Latina survivors.
 - Immigrant Latinas may fear deportation while seeking help from social services (Dutton et al., 2000).
 - Latina survivors report that immigration status is often used as a control mechanism to ensure that they do not leave the abusive situation (Pan et al., 2006).



- Threatening Latina survivors to take away their children if they leave their partners was an especially powerful strategy used by men against undocumented, non-English speaking women (Kelly, 2009).
- Immigration status is a common and powerful control mechanism used by partners of immigrant women to force them to stay in a relationship (Dutton, Orloff, & Haas, 2000).
- There is little awareness of IPV services and options among Latina survivors.
 - Women report a lack of knowledge about available resources in the community as a common barrier to services (Murdaugh et al., 2004).
 - Less than 3 in 10 Latinas had heard of IPV protective orders. Not many knew about local domestic violence agencies. (Moracco et al., 2005)
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services is also a barrier for many Latina survivors, as it is for women from many other racial/ethnic groups.
 - A study found that 1 in 3 shelters did not have any Spanish-speaking staff.
 - Only half of the participating shelters offer child-related services.
 - Additionally, many of the problems stemming from diverse cultural values were not respected and went unresolved (Lyon, Lane, & Menard, 2009).

Future Steps

Future studies exploring IPV among Latin@ populations must address two general areas:

- **Methodology**
 - Future national studies need to include sufficiently large Latin@ samples that permit teasing apart the relevant differences and commonalities of Latin@ subgroups.
 - Many of the scales and methods used currently may not be appropriate for capturing information that accurately reflects the experiences of Latin@ populations. The relevance and appropriateness of current measures and methods should be explored and new ones developed as needed.
 - The direct voices of diverse Latin@ populations need to be incorporated into research to explore in greater depth the context in which violence occurs.
- **Resilience and Prevention**
 - In order to recognize the resilience of Latin@s, studies of physical and mental health outcomes of Latin@s should also incorporate a focus on the strength and protective factors of this population.
 - Because IPV is a worldwide public health issue of epidemic proportions, prevention strategies that are developed within culturally specific and relevant frameworks will ultimately be required. This is particularly important in the case of Latin@ populations, given their increasing presence and prominence throughout the United States.



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