A qualitative study of Hispanic female college students, indirect experience of domestic violence

Michele Hazel Pacheco

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HISPANIC FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS, 
INDIRECT EXPERIENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A Thesis 
Presented to the 
Faculty of 
California State University, 
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment 
of the Requirements for the Degree 
Master of Arts 
in 
Psychology

by 
Michele Hazel Pacheco 
June 1997
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Date: 6/9/97
The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes, perceptions, and coping skills of college Hispanic women who have witnessed domestic violence committed against a family member, close friend or have experienced it personally. An interview was conducted to examine the women’s attitudes toward the culture’s role in the occurrence of domestic violence. The women’s responses were tape recorded. This study also focused on how domestic violence affected the lives of these women who witnessed the abuse. The majority of these women indicate that the culture’s beliefs and rules play a large role in the occurrence of domestic violence. The results indicated that these women have been adversely affected by domestic violence. The man’s machismo attitude and how they viewed women inferior to men was reported to be a factor in domestic violence. The culture’s belief that women should be subservient to men was another factor contributing to domestic violence according to the interviewees. They have developed negative perceptions of men, relationships, and/or of themselves as a result of observing domestic violence. Most of these women were young when they observed the first abusive incident. Some were too young to do much to help the person who was abused. Most of the women who helped did so by listening or being there for the person who was abused. There were a variety of coping strategies used, some withdrew, some became passive, and some were verbally outspoken. Approximately half of the interviewees had also experienced an abusive relationship themselves. Overall, the majority of these women who witnessed domestic violence were negatively affected in one way or another.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Cowan, Dr. Stahly, and Dr. Chavez for their help and support with my thesis. I would like to especially thank Dr. Cowan for her invaluable assistance and serving as a mentor. Thank you for taking time from all your professional duties to guide me through this challenging process of achieving my goal. I also would like to thank my Aunt Christine and Uncle Greg for their hospitality, support, and for my Uncle's continuous computer assistance in helping me complete this thesis. Your help was very much appreciated. And a very special thanks to my parents for their encouragement, support and belief in my ability to succeed. Thank you for instilling in me the esteem necessary to persevere and believe in myself.
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INTRODUCTION

Conflicting findings have been reported regarding the prevalence and incidence of domestic violence among Hispanics. Some researchers find spousal abuse to be more prevalent among Hispanics than Anglos. For example, Straus and Smith's (1990) study reported that the spousal violence rates in Hispanic families are much greater than in Anglos families. Other studies have found that this is not the case at all; there is less or no difference in domestic violence among Hispanics compared to the Anglo population. For example, Sorenson and Telles (1991) found no differences between Mexican-Americans and Anglos rates of domestic violence. However, Sorenson and Telles (1991) found that Mexican-Americans born in the United States were 2.4 times more likely to experience domestic violence than those born in Mexico. Other researchers have found no differences in attitudes, perceptions, nature and extent of wife abuse (Torres, 1991; Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, Aldarondo, 1994). Why are there mixed results and what factors are the researchers considering when studying Hispanics? This seems to be a question that remains to be answered. Another important issue is how domestic violence affects those who have watched it occur with a loved one (a parent, sister, close relative, or a friend); how does it affect their attitudes, perceptions, self-esteem, etc.? And what do they do about it?

No clear answers exist as to why spousal abuse occurs in the Hispanic population. Suggestions, such as acculturation, financial stress and machismo (male domination) have been offered (Torres, 1991; Kantor et al., 1994). However it is known that domestic violence does occur in every culture, social economic status and ethnic group. Stress is often a mediator of spousal abuse (Torres, 1991; Kantor et al., 1994). “When attempts to cope fail, violence occurs, violence is often used as an adaptation to stress” (Torres, 1991, p. 116).
The Mexican Man and Woman

Examination of the cultural history of Hispanic men will hopefully give some insight on how the Mexican-American man and woman have evolved over time. The Mexican writer, poet, and sociologist, Octavio Paz (1991) describes a Mexican man as an individual (regardless of economic status, age, etc.) who shuts himself off as a way to protect himself; he hides behind the facade of a smile. Paz suggests that the various behaviors, such as silence, irony, arrogance, and acquiescence, serve as a defense for him (1991). The Mexican man establishes a wall of detachment and seclusion between reality and himself. He secludes himself from the world, from other people, and from himself (Paz, 1991). The belief underlying the Mexican Man is that "the ideal man is to never break down, never back down and those who open themselves up are cowards" (p. 30)

This opening of the self is seen as a weakness in the Mexican culture. The Mexican man cannot allow the outside world to enter his private world. Paz (1991) defines this guarded distrustful behavior as a sign that Mexican men see the world and the people in it as dangerous; they are hesitant in reacting to tenderness and sympathy out of fear that the feelings are phony. For Hispanic men, love is seen as a conquest to win the possession of a woman; the man uses his feelings, real or made up, to conquer the woman (Paz, 1991). It is an interesting contradiction that the Hispanic man hesitates in becoming vulnerable to tenderness from another, due to his disbelief that the other person’s feelings are real, yet he can deliberately uses tender, loving feelings to possess a woman. The Mexican's masculine integrity is threatened by kindness as it is by hostility, and any lowering of his defenses is a decrease of his manliness.

In their relationships with male friends, they are hesitant to confide due to fear of relinquishing power, and the Mexican man's fear is that the person he confides in will humiliate him. This fear of being used by those he has confided in and the shame of giving
up his solitude instigates his anger (Paz, 1991). This distancing seems to serve as a buffer of security between the Mexican man and other people in the world. To get close to another is seen as giving up his power to another because they are at the other person's mercy of possibly being humiliated. Paz (1991) posits that all these characteristics of how the Mexican man views life as a battle is not different from other individuals in the world because for others "the ideal man is one of an open and aggressive preference for combat, whereas the Mexicans emphasize defensiveness, the readiness to repel any attack" (p. 31). The Mexican yearns to devise an orderly world for himself; this orderliness brings security and stability (Paz, 1991). Paz (1991) contends that traditionalism is a characteristic of Mexicans which results from their need for order.

Mexican women are described as modest and as having a calm tranquillity. They are not provocative in attracting men as other women are described as being (Paz, 1991). The Mexican woman is a symbol of stability and continuity, "she is submissive by nature and her frailty is made a virtue and the myth of the long suffering Mexican women is created" (Paz, 1991, p. 38). This description of women is traditional in nature; the women are meek, dependent, subservient and are to endure great sufferings at the same time the men are aiming to possess/own them (Paz, 1991). Women are socialized to espouse traditional feminine cultural values of selflessness, family and home ordinance, subordination to male authority, and free emotional expression; likewise, they carry responsibility for the moral and spiritual well being of the family and the community (Betancourt, 1995/96). It is important to note that Paz’s construction of the Mexican man and woman is not empirically based.

Marianismo is a concept used to describe Latin women as Machismo is used to describe Latin men. This includes the traditional Hispanic values the females adheres to, such as self sacrificing behaviors, giving care and pleasure without receiving them in
return, and living in submission to men (including father, brother, husband, boyfriend) (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The concept "Marianismo" also gets its definition from the church through the Virgin Mary, the veneration of the Virgin Mary (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Many Hispanic women are to follow this model of the Virgin Mary. They are valued and seen as worthy only if they can take on the role of the Virgin Mary, to put the other person’s needs first even if they deliberately do harm. One of the many traditional rules of marianismo is "do not express unhappiness with your man by criticizing him for gambling, infidelity, drug or alcohol abuse, and for verbal and physical abuse" (Paz, 1991, p. 8). It is imperative for the people of this culture to realize that it is impossible for humans to do such superhuman behaviors. This can be one of the reasons for continued spousal abuse (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). What rights do women have in this way of life? They are not socialized to be strong and independent, and they are not given choices in this lifestyle. So what does this mean for women in this culture and for their future? How does this affect them? This portrayal contrasts greatly with the American values of independence and autonomy and standing up for oneself.

In the Latin culture, women are defined through the rules of machismo, in which women display marianismo characteristics. They define themselves as good or bad based on how much they do for others by being selfless. This, in turn, reinforces machismo (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Gil and Vasquez (1996) contend that the role of selflessness that Latinas are governed by are unrealistic rigid cultural rules that are often times the root of much unhappiness leading to depression, anxiety, and often times physical problems such as ulcers. It is against human nature to be selfless. The fact that these women are trying with all their power to be selfless and to be a perfect women is destructive to their well being. Psychologically and physically marianismo takes its toll (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Research has shown that Latinas have higher rates of psychosomatic disorders than North
American women. Gil and Vasquez (1996) contend that this may be due to martyrdom (self-sacrificing behavior). This belief pattern that the culture has is very unrealistic and is impossible for any human being to attain. In order for a person to give of themselves they must also take time to care and do for themselves so they have more to give. If a person continuously gives and gives, it eventually depletes them of all that they have leaving the person with nothing left to give to anyone. The logical way to give and care for another is to do things for yourself (care, pamper, do things enjoyable) to replenish and fill oneself up with energy, so there will be more to give to others. If women do not take the time for themselves, it eventually leads to burnout and other more severe problems (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Gil and Vasquez (1996) believe that it is important for women to feel responsible for their own happiness by acknowledging there are limits to their time and energy and by acknowledging that not doing the impossible does not make them a bad person. Gil and Vasquez based their perceptions of Latinas on clinical observations, not large scale empirical research.

Research shows that Latinas are more tolerant of abuse and their perceptions of what comprises wife abuse is different from Anglo women (Roberts, 1996; Torres, 1991). According to Robert's (1996) study, Latinas had to be hit or verbally abused more frequently for them to consider it abusive, while many acts perceived as abusive by Anglo-American women were not considered abusive by Latino women, such as verbal abuse or the withholding of food and shelter. This difference could be the result of cultural differences. The fact that Hispanic women are socialized to endure more suffering could very well make a huge difference in their perceptions of abuse compared to Anglo women. The Implications of the Hispanic Culture’s Rules on Women

The culture's rules can be detrimental to an individual's personal growth because they are ingrained into the person and remain a familiar part of their life, which has a great
bearing on their tendency to fall into these patterns (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Cultural pressures can affect a females self-esteem tremendously; guilt can interfere with succeeding in a career or becoming independent and self-reliant because she feels she is neglecting her duties at home (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). According to Gil and Vasquez (1996) women are taught to suffer, sacrifice for others, live their life for others, do what is expected (tasks) of them whether they want to or not, take on more responsibility than they can handle (to look and feel like a good person), never say "no", even when taken advantage of, to accept dysfunctional relationships, to feel guilty for acts of assertiveness, and to feel things are their fault. Many of these learned behaviors have been imposed on them and they learn to follow these rules out of fear of being rejected by their family (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Gil and Vasquez (1996) further posit that the Latin culture believes that the women's role in life is to be unhappy and bear all sufferings. The ideal women in many Latin cultures is one who is dependent, submissive, and subservient to her man. Often times this causes friction with the American way of life because as mentioned before these characteristics were ingrained in these women and is very difficult for them to escape from this pattern of behaving (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). These beliefs are not just old customs according to Gil and Vasquez (1996). Research has revealed that these traditional practices are still going on in Latin America today and remains the foundation of women's self-esteem.

In the Latin culture, family relationships are very enmeshed. Many women are not able to set limits with their parents, specifically their mothers, as it is seen as disrespectful to tell their mothers how they feel and to assert themselves (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The female's self-esteem is not only developed but also affected by the socialization process, either positively or negatively. Self-esteem is tied to approval, so for Latin women the
need for approval is very strong (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The power the family has on these women is tremendous.

Gil and Vasquez (1996) found many similarities among the many Latinas who came through their office for therapy. Latinas believe it is normal for men to seek sex outside their marriage or committed relationships and that it is okay for men to return home to their partner. They were taught that this was a trial a woman must endure submissively (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Latinas also believe they do not deserve respect and appreciation from a man; therefore, they attract abusive or unsatisfying partners (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). This marianism belief system keep these Latinas a prisoner of abuse. Many women are trapped by this belief system out of fear they will be rejected by their own family because women are seen as sinners if they are independent, assertive, and choose what they want from life. This is seen as disrespectful to their elders (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Women who are single and dating many men in this culture are viewed as "loose" women and looked down on because the role of woman is to be a wife and mother (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). This belief system may be a possible reason why some women are unhappy, choose abusive partners, and tolerate abusive relationships.

Gil and Vasquez (1996) posit that depending on others solely for your self-esteem gives them control over your behavior, values, and attitudes. This is one reason marianism causes problems. The way self-esteem is defined by Gil and Vasquez (1996, p. 15) is "to be authentic, accept oneself, as competent successful, worthy Latinas who love themselves." It is very important to accept oneself and appreciate one's own worth because self-acceptance aids in asserting one's rights by telling others how they wish to be treated and more importantly that they deserve it. It seems that these women need to know that it is okay to be independent and to do for themselves and that their belief is not
healthy for their well being. There is another way of life for them that is functional and will empower them to be the best they can be.

**Traditional Sex Roles as a Factor in Domestic Violence**

Traditional sex roles have implications for wife beating. The Hispanic culture has a reputation for having very rigid roles (i.e., men having all the control and women not questioning them). Men in this culture are raised to believe that women are to wait on them, especially when he arrives home from work. If this belief is disturbed in any way, it is likely that he will feel as if his world (i.e. his authority) is shattering, causing him to become frustrated or angry (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). A traditional macho Latino expects women to do all or most of the housework even if she works outside the home (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). He also expects his partner to go along with his decisions without consulting her about them and if the decisions he makes bring him disappointment, he may take his frustrations out on her (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

Straus and Gelles (1990) proposed that the Mexican-American cultural family ties and masculinity appears to hinder a woman’s individual personal development and success. These family ties increase women's dependence and subordination to men. According to Gil and Vasquez (1996) if a man's machismo (masculinity) becomes threatened, he may do whatever he can to force his wife or significant other to become more subservient to recover his own diminishing self-esteem. This concept "machismo" (male supremacy) is acknowledged as a factor relating to wife abuse (Campbell, 1985; Straus & Gelles, 1990). “Machismo” is described as an “exaggeration of masculine characteristics,” such as towering pride, fearlessness, and the conquering of women (Armoni, 1972). Although this image of "machismo" among the Latin culture has negative connotations, machismo also has positive aspects that are rarely mentioned, such as being
a protector of his wife and family and being a gentleman (giving up his seat for a woman, carrying heavy packages, opening doors for a lady, etc.) (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

Maxine Baca-Zinn (1995-96) states that themes of male dominance exist in the Hispanic culture but differ from what has been described in earlier studies. Studies done in the 1970s and 1980s found that husband and wives share in the family decision making process. Such studies as these negate the stereotypical male dominated Hispanic household concept. Marital relationships among Hispanic cannot be solely characterized as female dominated, male dominated or egalitarian. Hispanic families, like families of other cultures, exhibit a range of patterns between the two extremes, but those couples in which both partners are working are more egalitarian than couples in which only the husband is employed (Baca-Zinn, 1995-96). A reverse of tradition has been found in many Hispanic families where the power is held by the mother, the family revolves around the mother, and her rules and directions are followed (Betancourt, 1995-96). This is clearly a change in purported traditional gender roles, especially among the Hispanic culture.

Regarding the influence of gender roles in spousal abuse, Levinson (1989) suggests that spousal abuse is more common among households where the man is dominant (in any culture). Lester (1980) found that domestic violence occurs more often in cultures/societies where women are seen as inferior and in societies where male narcissism rates were high, meaning the men are selfish and see themselves as superior. High rates of spousal abuse may occur because these men have no mercy for anyone, they cared for no one but themselves.

Beating of wives take many forms and serves many motives. It may be an indication of manhood, an avenue of personal control, a reflection of personal enmity, and a result of sexual jealousy (Campbell, 1985). Torres (1991) found that regardless of ethnicity, the major cause of conflict leading to battering was the husband trying to
dominate/control his wife due to jealousy and drinking alcohol. Sexual jealousy is seen as a factor connected to domestic violence by other researchers (Mansumura, 1979; Campbell, 1985; Levinson, 1989). Torres (1991) theorizes that cultural values, rules, and practices among the Hispanic culture that gives men more status and power than women is a factor in spousal abuse. Neff et al. (1991) do not support the stereotypical idea that spousal violence is associated with traditional sex roles. They suggest that other cultural variables, such as approval of violence in different relational settings or inconsistent beliefs in sex roles by husband and wife may be variables that contributes to spousal abuse (1991). In support of this idea Sorenson and Telles (1991) found domestic violence rates to be the lower among people born in Mexico opposed to American born Mexicans. So why is there much contradictory evidence in the literature? This question still remains unclear.

Acculturation as a Factor in Perceptions of Domestic Violence

Acculturation has been defined by Kantor et. al. (1994, p. 208) as "the extent to which an immigrant group has taken on the norms of the new society in which they presently live." It is suggested that stress is very high among acculturated Mexican-Americans due to the adaptation of a new culture and feelings of deprivation of the Mexican culture (Kantor et. al., 1994; Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The stress that accompanies acculturation is compounded with other stressors, such as unemployment, inability to speak English, poverty, lack of education and knowledge, all of which can precipitate abuse of Latinas. The spouse may blame the woman for their situation or take out his frustrations on her to avoid his low sense of self worth (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). This stress is believed to create or lead to many psychological disorders (e.g. alcoholism, depression, etc.), which in turn may lead to spousal abuse (Kantor et. al., 1991). Acculturative stress may result in marital conflicts leading to battering; things such as sex role expectations,
family obligations, and relationships are areas of conflict in vulnerable Hispanic marriages (Torres, 1991). Sorenson and Telles (1991) also suggest that being a minority and/or recent immigrant may be a stressor for Hispanics that may contribute to higher rates of spousal abuse. Sorenson and Telles (1991) further suggested that non-immigrant Hispanics (born in U.S.) may have higher rates of spousal abuse due to the conflicting demands of their culture and the culture in which they live. Some husbands may have difficulties adapting to the norms of the host society or they may feel like a failure trying to meet the demands of the new society, therefore feeling intense frustration and stress. Some husbands may not like the fact that the traditional Hispanic values are not being practiced any longer, that their wives are no longer subservient as they were; hence, they may feel they have lost control and are no longer dominant in the household (Sorenson & Telles, 1991). This may also aggravate the husbands, so they try to regain their power through abuse. It has been suggested that violence is often an adaptation to stress produced by structural inequalities (Kantor et al., 1991). Roberts (1996) suggests that a major cause of domestic violence is when a society has developed unequal power between men and women.

Gil and Vasquez (1996) offer a more positive view of acculturation for many people who feel alienated from their country of origin. They state that acculturation is not only a process of adapting to a new culture, but it also allows individuals to grow and survive because it is marked by many changes, such as how to behave, how to live, born of conflicts of whether to adhere to the behaviors that were part of the traditions of the culture from which the person came from (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The authors believe that acculturation can bring about a positive change without losing or discounting the individual's ethnicity or culture. It can be a great experience to gain the best of both
cultures and develop a broader scope of perception from which the individual can use to their advantage.

**Socioeconomic Status as a Factor in Domestic Violence**

Financial problems or stress has been another area which has been proposed to contribute to spousal abuse. Neff et al. (1995) found that financial stress increases spousal abuse among married couples only; lower income is associated with higher odds of spouse beating of Mexican-American females. Other researchers also suggest that low income Hispanic families are at a higher risk of domestic violence (Kantor et al, 1994; Torres, 1991). This is a relevant statement because many of the marital disputes and divorces are over finances. Because Hispanics, due to religious reasons, are less likely to divorce, a build up of frustration over finances may lead to abuse. According to the Congressional Research Service (1983, in Torres, 1991) and Neff et al. (1995), Hispanics live in more stress producing situations; they have higher school drop out rates, higher unemployment rates, poor housing, and higher incidence of poverty. Neff et al. (1995) contend that these individuals are faced with a larger amount of stressors and possible language, cultural and racial barriers which compound the stress. Families that experience stress are more likely to experience violence (Torres, 1991). Torres (1991) also found socioeconomic status (SES) to contribute to higher rates of spousal abuse. She further suggests that socioeconomic status may be a principal factor of spousal abuse rather than ethnicity. In support of the author’s results, a telephone survey revealed that Hispanic women married to manual laborers who were of low SES reported higher rates of spousal abuse than non-Hispanics (Sorenson & Telles, 1991).

**The Family Structure of the Hispanic Culture**

Mexican-Americans have a more closely knit family structure than Anglos (Keefe & Casas, 1978; Straus & Gelles, 1990). Mexican-American are more likely to have more
family members in their immediate vicinity to go to with their problems for emotional support (Keefe & Casas, 1978). A study done by Keefe, Padilla and Carlos (1978) found that Mexican-American immigrants are more likely to have relatives in town and are related to a larger number of households. They seem to establish a tightly integrated extended family network in their immediate environment. Mexican-Americans family members are available to share and help alleviate any emotional problems of an individual family member. This emotional support seems to be of greatest importance to Hispanics (Keefe, Padilla & Carlos, 1978; Baca-Zinn, 1995/96). The bond is so tight with family members that Mexican-Americans would rather not to talk with a friend over a relative about any personal problems; family members are far superior to others in regards to support for emotional problems (Keefe et. al., 1978). A statement from an informant helped to explain the reasoning behind this mind set by saying:

"Mexicans are proud people. They're the type of people that would rather stay together in a little circle within their own family and try to work out their problems themselves than go outside even to discuss it with a friend. We would really have to be very close in order for a person to tell me what was happening, as far as their child was concerned or their husband or themselves, because they keep that to themselves" (Keefe et al., 1978 p.58).

Over half the Mexican-Americans in a study done by Keefe, Padilla, and Casas (1978) reported only seeking help from one very close relative with whom they share a special bond of affection and trust, usually another female.

Cazenave and Straus (1979) believe that the tendency for many ethnic groups to place great value on extended family and kin ties is attributed to cultural characteristics. A family system is important in providing social support. A study done by Cazenave and Straus (1979) found that the family and neighborhood network serve as a violence control
mechanism and is related to fewer incidences of family violence. The family and other close ties serve as a buffer against higher rates of family violence (1979).

The Utilization of Mental Health Facilities among Hispanic-Americans

Many researchers have found that Hispanics underutilize mental health facilities (Keefe, 1978; Keefe & Casas, 1978; Keefe, Padilla & Carlos, 1978; Roberts, 1996). It is a fact that Hispanics in general rely solely on family members for emotional support, which reduces the use of mental health services (Keefe, 1978); however, Keefe (1978) found tight family integration was not significantly related to underutilization of mental health facilities. There are many other suggested reasons for underutilization of mental health facilities. Perceptions of mental health clinics and their treatments is a possible reason for understanding clinic underutilization by Mexican-Americans. Seeking help is a sign of weakness, and they fear they will be viewed as "crazy", or they think only crazy people seek therapy (Keefe, 1978; Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Mexican-American women believe if they can't handle problems on their own then they are unworthy individuals who are not able to handle being a good wife and mother (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Latin women believe that personal problems belong inside the doors of the home (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

Some researchers have suggested that low economic status may be a factor in not utilizing mental health services (Glasser & Duggan, 1975 in Keefe, 1978). Keefe (1978) found that blue collar workers and low SES households underutilize mental health services. It is also suggested that Hispanic attitudes towards health facilities is associated with their amount of education, which also indicates that SES factors are more important than ethnic differences in explaining why Hispanics are less likely to seek help than Anglo-Americans (Mc Lemore, 1963 in Keefe, 1978). But Keefe (1978), on the other hand,
found that socioeconomic status, level of education or occupation was unrelated to seeking mental health care.

Keefe and Casas (1978) found that first generation Mexican-Americans (immigrants) are most unfamiliar with local mental health facilities while native born (Mexican-American born in the United States) are more knowledgeable about mental health facilities than Anglos. Further, they found that acculturated Mexican-Americans have a higher probability of continuing therapy than unacculturated individuals regardless of whether the therapist was bilingual and bicultural (Keefe & Casa, 1978). A study done by Bonilla-Santiago (1996) found that language and cultural barriers was primarily the cause of many Latina women not receiving any assistance. These women described in Bonilla-Santiago's study were more than likely first generation or unacculturated Latinas, who found themselves alienated from the new culture. In a study done by Keefe (1978), it was found that level of acculturation was not strongly associated with seeking mental help. First generation Hispanics were just as likely to seek help as third generation Hispanics. These differences may reflect a time difference. Keefe's study was published almost 20 years ago, whereas Bonilla-Santiago's study is recent.

Another widespread factor in Hispanics not seeking help is the fact that these women are illegal immigrants who fear deportation if they do seek help (Bonilla-Santiago, 1996; Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The female's spouse may use her fear as a way of intimidating her by threatening to report her to immigration, so she feels she has no choice but to put up with the abuse (Bonilla-Santiago, 1996). This situation gives the woman no choice but to continue to stay in the abusive relationship. She probably has nowhere to go and she cannot seek help from a clinic or the police because she is not a citizen.

Many researchers have had problems getting Hispanic women to admit that they were battered. It has suggested by Neff et al. (1995) that Hispanic women report in
socially desirable ways, specifically underreporting of spousal violence in interview studies. This hypothesis was confirmed in their study. They used a socially desirability measure which included questions to reveal if the participants were answering the questions the way they thought the questions should be answered (in a socially desirable way) instead of answering them honestly. This measured revealed that Mexican-Americans answered the questions in a socially desirable manner; Mexican-American women were less likely to report spousal abuse than Anglo women, even when they were being battered (Neff et al., 1995). The fact that these women do not admit to being battered or report in socially desirable ways may be due to their culture's rules of not disclosing personal information to anyone outside of their family.

If it is true that Hispanic women underutilize health facilities, then it creates problems in determining the occurrence rate of domestic violence among Hispanics. Not much can be known about their rates of domestic violence if they do not seek help. This could lead to an underestimatation of domestic violence rates. They are also probably less likely to utilize shelters, therefore adding to the problems of underestimating domestic violence rates.

Through qualitative research, the unraveling of such factors will be helpful in revealing attitudes and behaviors of those who have been indirectly affected by domestic violence. Qualitative research studies issues by interpreting circumstances in terms of the meaning people bring to the situation. This type of information can bring much insight and knowledge to the topic at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research is fit for this topic, especially since past quantitative research has yielded mixed findings. Qualitative research captures the individual's point of view through elaborate interviewing using first person accounts to gain knowledge and enter the process of the interviewee's world (their culture, community, historical traditions, etc.) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).
Qualitative research emphasizes the processes and meaning of the socially constructed reality, which can not easily be measured in quantitative research whose focus is more typically on causal relationships between variables and involves large scale surveys (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to reveal the following:

1. The attitudes and perceptions that Hispanic college women have as a result of their experience of domestic violence. The participants will be women who have observed a family member or friend suffer from domestic violence and/or have suffered from domestic violence themselves.

2. What they think contributed to the abuse that occurred with their family member, friend, or themselves, with specific focus on cultural factors.

3. How their experience affected their life and how they view men and relationships.

4. How they coped with this experience or what did they do when their family member, friend, or they were experiencing abuse by a partner.

5. Their feelings about their culture’s roles in domestic violence.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 21 female Hispanic college students from California State University, San Bernardino who have themselves experienced domestic violence or had a close relative or friend experience domestic violence, or both.

Measures

The measure that was used is a series of questions devised to assist in gaining insight in the participants’ attitudes and perceptions regarding their experience of domestic violence.
Interview Protocol

Introduction to the Interview

Hi, my name is Michele Pacheco. I am doing this study for my Master’s Thesis. I am interested in domestic violence among Hispanic because I am Hispanic and I have studied domestic violence in my coursework and found the literature really does not know a whole lot about domestic violence in the Hispanic population. The literature does not focus on the individual attitudes, perceptions and how domestic violence affected their life. I would like to explore these issues and know more about its occurrence and why it happens by using this opportunity to talk with women who have experienced domestic violence in their life.

Demographics

1. Age 5. Marital status
2. Ethnicity 6. Income
4. Educational level 8. Employment title

Cultural Questions

First, I’d like to ask you about your views of the Hispanic/Latino culture.

1. How does your culture view strong and independent women who holds off getting married and having a family?
2. Can you think of any rules that are part of your culture that many adhere to that you believe are misconceptions? What are they and why?
3. How do the rules and beliefs of your culture portray women and their role in society?
4. Do you think these rules put women at a disadvantage leading to their abuse or do you think they place women up on a pedestal? What is you opinion of this?
5. Do you feel your culture’s rules played a significant part in the occurrence of domestic violence in your experience?

6. Can you describe the specific belief or rules of your culture that you believe is the basis or domestic violence in your experience?

**Domestic Violence Questions**

Now I will be asking you questions about the domestic violence and specific questions about the person who experienced the abuse.

7. Who experienced the abuse? What was their relationship to you?

8. How did you find out about it? Who else knew?

9. Can you tell me a little about what happened?

Probe: Now I am going to get more specific to the kinds of abuse.

10. Typically abuse includes emotional and verbal abuse (name calling, threats, telling the person they are ugly, fat etc.). Many women experience this. Did the person experience: being threatened?, name calling?, being told they are ugly, fat? anything else?

11. It is very common in abusive situation that physical abuse takes place, such as; pushing, shoving, slapping, punching, choking, kicking, biting, using weapons, throwing the person or objects at the person. Was there any physical violence that the person experienced? If so, which of these did the person experience?

12. Many women who are in abusive relationships also experience sexual abuse. Do you know if the person experienced this?

13. How did the abuse start?

14. What do you think was the cause of the abuse?

15. What do you remember about it? How did it affect you, your feelings, attitudes, and behavior?
16. What did you do (did you help the person get out of the relationship, go to a shelter, help them seek help, go to a counselor, or support them emotionally)? Was anything helpful? Did it make a difference?

17. What would you have wanted to do? If you didn't do it, why? Was it because you were afraid of the abuser?

18. How did you feel about the help you did give?

19. If you did help can you think of anything else you did to help?

20. How did your experience with domestic violence shape your beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about men?

21. How did your experience with domestic violence shape your beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about relationships in general?

22. How did this experience of domestic violence change your life?

23. Can you think of anything else to add that will help give more information to this area of domestic violence among the Hispanic/Latino population?

Now I am going to ask about whether you have experienced any of these things.

24. It is common for women to get into abusive relationships when they have seen it happen with their parents or family members. Have you experienced any of these things we talked about? If you have can you tell me about it? What happened? How did it start? What did you do about it? How did you feel?

(Ask only if participant experienced domestic violence) I am going to ask you specific questions about the type of abuse you may have experienced.

25. Have you experienced verbal or emotional abuse (verbal threats, name calling, etc.) by a significant other (boyfriend, husband)?

26. Have you experienced any of the physical abuse that we talked about (slapped, pushed, shoved, kicked, punched, hit with an object, etc.)?
27. Have you experienced sexual abuse by a significant other?

28. How did your own experience of domestic violence shape your beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about men?

29. How did your own experience with domestic violence shape your beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about your relationships and relationships in general?

30. How did your own experience of domestic violence affect or change your life?

31. Can your think of anything else to add that will help give more information to this subject area of domestic violence among the Hispanic population?

Procedures

The participants were solicited through a networking process by asking them if they were interested in participating in an interview regarding domestic violence among Hispanics. The participants were also solicited by means of the psychology bulletin board. The participants were given five extra credit points for a psychology course for participating in this study.

The interview was tape recorded and transcribed for analysis with confidentiality. All participants were informed that the interviewer is interested in their beliefs and opinions regarding domestic violence, and that their responses would be confidential.

Analysis

The analysis of this information consisted of looking for commonalties and differences in the attitudes and perceptions of the participants regarding domestic violence and their culture's roles. The analysis also consisted of providing information about the specific mechanisms of coping and subjective experiences of the participants. The analyses provided percentages of participants who mentioned common themes and illustrates these common, as well as unique, responses with quotes or paraphrases of relevant information from the interview.
RESULTS

The majority of the women in this study stated that it was their mother who experienced domestic violence. Twelve out of the twenty-one interviewees stated that their mother was the person who had been abused by a husband or significant other; four of the twenty-one stated their aunt experienced domestic violence; two of the twenty-one stated their sister experienced domestic violence, one experienced both parents being abusive toward one another, the father verbally abusive and the mother physically abusive; and two women mentioned experiencing domestic violence themselves and never experienced it in their own family. Most of the women in the interviews stated they were young when the abuse first occurred; one mentioned that her mother divorced the abuser by the time she was five years old. There were a few women who first experienced domestic violence as a teenager and one woman in her late teenage years. Most of the interviewees were either first, second, or third generation American. Nine women were first generation, five women were second generation, four women were third generation, and three women did not know.

Descriptions of the Abuse

There were a variety of abuses included in domestic violence. The characteristics range from verbal and emotional abuse, such as name calling, verbal threats, ongoing affairs or cheating; to physical abuse, such as slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, choking, throwing the person, and use of weapons or objects. Sexual abuse is also another form of domestic violence. Some of these women have experienced a few of the characteristic and others have experienced all of them. These are the types of abuse that
occurred mentioned by the interviewees. R said, “Yes, my mother experienced verbal and emotional abuse. She experienced verbal threats. When my father was angry he would yell and cuss at her calling her “bitch” and using other vulgar language. I say she was emotionally abused because my father had extra marital affairs and that caused my mom emotional anguish. Physical abuse is the main type of abuse my mom experienced. He pulled on her earring and tore it out of her ear, causing her to bleed. He kicked her while she was pregnant with me, threatened her with a knife, pushed and shoved her.” G said: “My father verbally threatened my mom. He said he would hunt her down and kill her if she ever left him. He told her he would ruin her face so that no man would want her. Emotionally he was abusive because she never knew what mood he would be in when he got home from work. My father physically abused my mom; he threw things at her, pushed her, shoved her, and punched her. The thing I remember the most and the most severe was when he beat her head up against the fireplace until the brick chipped. My mother was also raped by my father when they were separated.” These two examples represent common experiences in the sample.

Besides the types of abuse, the specific incidents the interviewee experienced can be described. M said, “My aunt and uncle came from Los Angeles and my dad had been drinking and playing poker with the men. My parents got into an argument about something and my dad got up and started calling my mother names. They went into another room and my dad was hitting her. My aunt and uncle went in there and restrained my mother from fighting back while my father was allowed to hit her. My dad even went for his gun and threatened to shoot her.” Y stated this, “My father would come home,
throw his clothes everywhere, and my mother would have to pick up after him. She would have dinner ready for him and his alcoholic beverage. She wanted him to stay home and be with us (the family), so if it took having the alcohol there she did, so that he would spend more time with us, even though it wasn’t good time. The quality time sucked. She did this in her own way, to keep our family together. He would hit her, slap her, drag her down the stairs beating the shit out of her; it didn’t matter what room in the house they were in. He did this for any reason- for spending too much money, to him there was no valid reason for spending money. It was crazy. He was an alcoholic. I think he didn’t want money spent because it took away from his drinking money. He drank at least a pint of whiskey everyday.”

Not all of the interviewees reported domestic violence occurring to their mother. One interviewee reported that her mother was physically abusive, while her father was verbally and emotionally abusive. Here is what S said; “My dad would get drunk and come inside the house and argue with my mom. He’d want to have sex with her and she would say no. He would become angry with her calling her names, and she’d get mad and start hitting him. At first I thought it was my dad hitting my mom and I would go out and find her hitting him. I never saw my dad hit my mom. The only thing he would do is put his hands up to block her hits. My mom made it seem like my dad hit her, but my dad said he has never hit her. She said my dad pushed and shoved her. I could never believe her because I always saw her hitting him. I always took my dad’s side.”
Perceived Role of Alcohol and Drugs

Most of the women reported alcohol and/or drugs as being a contributing factor to the occurrence of domestic violence in their situation. The degree of alcohol varied from problem drinking to alcoholism. About half of the women believed alcohol was a very strong factor in the occurrence of domestic violence. And two women felt drugs were a strong factor in the occurrence of domestic violence in their situation. Here is what one woman said: “My dad would get mad at something, he drank a lot, and he would start beating on my mother. We weren’t allowed to eat cookies without permission. He’d come home and count the cookies and if he thought there was one missing, he would ask us who ate the cookies and beat us all up. My father drank every day, and my mother said he was always drinking when he hit her.” Another woman reported this: “One night my brother-in-law came home and my sister didn’t have food ready for him and he got mad; he was drunk. Most of the time when he abused her he had been drunk. I don’t think he’s been abusive when he hasn’t been drinking. He was in front of one of his brothers and a friend and I guess he wanted them to think he was a man or something because he was showing off. Once my sister prepared the food, he threw it on the floor and made her pick it up in front of the people.” This woman also stated that she thought drinking had a lot to do with the abuse. Here is what T said when she was asked what she believed the cause was for her father abusing her mother; “Drugs because he was brought up during the hippie days. He took acid. I think this was the reason why the abuse occurred.” S, the interviewee mentioned previously who stated that her mother abused her father, said, “Drugs and alcohol were the cause of abuse. Whenever my dad would get drunk he would
get loud and my mom would tell him to be quiet. This made him mad. He would start
cussing at her and it would escalate from there. My father would also take drugs. He
wasn’t the same person after taking drugs and this really upset my mom. I think she felt
she had to have control over him and beat it out of him to make him come to his
senses.” These are a few examples of the incidents that occurred when alcohol and/or
drugs are involved in domestic violence. As mentioned earlier many of the women in this
study believe alcohol and/or is a primary cause of domestic violence.

**Perceived Role of Jealousy**

Another factor that many women typically mentioned as a factor for the
occurrence of domestic violence is jealousy or the man’s “macho” attitude. The majority
of the women stated these as being the basis of the domestic violence. Here are some of
the interviewee responses to what they believed was the basis of the domestic violence in
their experience: “Men want 100% of everything and the women are expected not to give
their opinion. They want to keep the power,” “The man’s macho attitude,” “The man is
domineering and the woman is inferior,” and “The men wanting to stay in control.” Here is
a situation that occurred in the life of one of the interviewees: “My uncle is a very jealous
man. He would ask their youngest daughter to tell him everything that happened while he
was at work. And he would pay her for telling him something. It got to where she was
making up stuff, she didn’t know any better. Instead of telling him the neighbor came
over to borrow the shovel, it was the neighbor came and he and mom were in the bedroom
for a long time. He was so jealous that he became obnoxious and he would accuse her of
looking at other men. He would go on jealous rages and push her across the room and throw her on the floor. She miscarried twice because he abused her so badly.”

Perceptions of the Culture’s Role in their Experiences of Domestic Violence

In terms of the culture’s role in domestic violence, most of the interviewees view their Hispanic culture as extremely traditional with the man being dominant and the bread winner in the household and the woman being submissive to the man and taking care of the household duties and the children. Nineteen out of the twenty-one women reported that they believe the rules and/or beliefs of the culture played a significant role in the occurrence of domestic violence toward women. Here is an example of common responses by many of the interviewees: “Women have to stay home and have food ready when the men come home from work.” “Women are expected to stay home and take care of the kids and household duties, such as cleaning.” A common theme throughout the responses was that men have a traditional “machismo” attitude, that things are to be done his way and the women must obey or suffer the consequences. This means at times being hit (abused) by the husband or significant other. An interviewee said; “I feel that in the Hispanic culture the number one thing that is being passed down from generation to generation is that men are taught to be “macho,” they’ve got to have it their way and they believe this. My mom told me that when they were in Mexico my dad slapped her in front of people and it was considered okay because she was a woman. I guess that was done to keep their women in line, at least that’s how they saw it.” L said, “I think it goes back to culture. The men want all the power, and you can’t do much about it.”
Approximately 50% of the interviewees stated explicitly that women are seen as less than the man in their culture, rather than an equal partner to the man. They state that women are often viewed as weak by the culture. Here is what one woman said: “Women are viewed as submissive; men don’t portray them equally. They see men as number one and women as number two.” “The culture thinks men should dominate the women.” Another woman stated: “The culture brings up men to be “macho” and women have to do everything for the men.” Still, another woman stated: “Women are seen as inferior to men by the culture. And until now women were not countable for anything, they are seen as not capable.” The majority of the woman in the interview believe that this is the case even though it may not have been explicitly stated. They have stated it in their own way, but all of them made the same point. At the same time, the interviewees stated these beliefs of the culture, it was clear that they did not personally believe that women are inferior to men.

The message that females are inferior to males is detrimental to women in general. If a young girl continues to hear this message, she may begin to believe this by the time she becomes a grown women, causing her to become vulnerable to the man’s abusive behaviors. To clarify this point, one interviewee states, “The basis of domestic violence is that women are seen as weaker and for so many years they have been told this that they just believe it.” It seems that there were consistent themes to back up this idea that women have been socialized to tolerate maltreatment in this culture because they lack the confidence and self-esteem necessary to stand up for themselves. Another interviewee described that the basis for domestic violence occurring in her situation was, “The man is domineering and the woman is inferior.” This was a reoccurring theme throughout the
interviews. This leads to a strong possibility that this view of women as being weak or inferior has been passed down from generation to generation and leaves Hispanic women vulnerable to abusive relationships, despite their attempts to disavow this aspect of their culture.

There were three interviewees who didn’t want to blame the culture for the domestic violence. They were hesitant to look at the culture’s negatives aspects, possibly out of fear of putting the culture down and making the culture look bad. This is what they said: M: “I don’t blame domestic violence all on my culture. Things that I have seen were that the men think they have authority over everything in my experience. It happens a lot to a certain point depending on both the man and the woman. It takes two to (create and) solve a problem.” T said, “I don’t blame my culture for the abuse. I think it was my dad and his beliefs that the women should cook and take care of things at home. The culture believes this, but it’s changing. I don’t like putting my culture down. There is a richness in the Latino culture. I feel the negative side to the culture is that the Latino women don’t have a strong self-esteem. I do think it is the culture’s fault. This is the negative aspect of the culture.” Another interviewee said, “I’m really into my culture and the beliefs they have. I don’t think the rules and beliefs of the culture portray women in a bad way because they bring women up to have more respect for themselves as a young lady, not like other cultures where the women are really easy. We have more respect for ourselves in regards to men. But men have the “macho” attitude, most men have it. This is something that’s wrong with our culture. Yes, I think this is something that puts women at a disadvantage leading to possible abuse.” Even though these women did not want to say anything.
negative about the culture they all still mentioned the man having or wanting power. And one of them stated that this is something wrong with the culture and that she believes this leads to possible abuse of women.

Effects of the Abuse

As we know up to this point observing abuse or experiencing abuse can have a traumatic affect on the individuals who are involved directly or indirectly. Many of the women experienced negative emotions personally and toward the abuser. The majority (19 out of 21) of the women reported being angry or scared that the domestic violence had occurred to their family member. Approximately 25% of the women also reported feelings of sadness. Here are some examples of how the interviewees felt, behaved and what their attitudes were as a result of witnessing the abuse; L said, “It hurt to see my parents fight like that. I didn’t expect to see my dad get to that point to hurt my mom like that. I felt sad, confused, dissapointed not knowing what to do. I had less respect for my father.” S says this: “I was scared, I wanted my mom to leave him. I wanted to leave. I hated it and hated him. My grades suffered because of it.” M said, “It made me feel angry, confused, and very insecure. It occupied my mind a lot. It affected my grades, I had no motivation to do my work. I was rebellious. I’d get into fights, and I would be truant from school. I didn’t care about anything or anybody, school, or people’s feelings.” This is what C said; “It was scary. I felt like I needed to be loved, and neither one of them could give it to me because they were fighting. I was mad because they were fighting and should have been acting more like an adult. I felt like I had to be the more of an adult, and I couldn’t be a child because I was always watching what they were doing.” With one exception, these
women who witnessed domestic violence experienced a variety of negative emotions which manifested in some form of maladaptive behavior. One woman responded differently. She transferred her negative emotions into excelling at school. This is what she said; “I was very angry and I transferred my negative emotions into school. I did very well. I would stay after school and help my teacher grade papers. I knew that doing well in school would keep me out of trouble and help get me on my dad’s good side.” This is a case where she channeled her anger and negative emotions in a positive way, but she did it as a way to please the abuser. This is still a form of maladaptive behavior because it is a way to survive the abuse, so to speak.

As a result of the anger held toward the abuser, many of the women avoided the abuser to some extent. Some of them stayed away from the abuser altogether, and some avoiding talking to him as much as possible. They disliked the fact that he was abusive and wanted to disassociate themselves from this somehow. Here are some typical responses by the women: L: “I was very angry with my dad. I couldn’t see him because I was so angry.” H said, “I was very quiet around my stepfather. I had hatred toward him.” M said, “I didn’t really talk much to my stepdad, unless he talked to me first.” As you can see many of these women had much anger and some even hatred towards the abuser.

Approximately 50% of the women reported having a negative attitude toward men in general, especially Hispanic men, as a result of experiencing domestic violence with a family member. Here is what one of the women said about men, “Men are all the same. I think men in my culture are the same. They cheat, treat women badly they hit them and/or order them around.” About 25% of the women stated that they have lost trust in men.
Because most of the abusers were the interviewee’s fathers, they felt that if they could not trust their father, how can they trust another man. One interviewee stated, “I feel like I can’t trust men. If I can’t trust my own dad how can I count on any other man.” As described above many of these women have difficulty trusting men, especially Hispanic men.

As a result of experiencing domestic violence with a family member, all twenty-one of the women reported they would never put up with abuse if it occurred to them personally, while at the same time about half of them have also experienced abuse to some degree. Ten out of twenty-one women in the interview reported being abused themselves. So, a high percentage of these women have repeated this cycle of being in an abusive relationship. This is what some of them said; M: “I will not put up with a man hitting on me.” Here’s what M said when she was asked if she has experienced an abusive relationship: “Yes, my husband is an alcoholic and he would get nasty when he drank. I would want to leave and he would corner me so I wouldn’t leave. Then he’d push me up against the wall. He kicked me at times or threw me down on the ground. He told me that if I didn’t stay with him I’d be miserable, that no one would want me. He put a gun to my head, asking me if I have ever seen anyone’s brains blown out. It started because he was jealous. He would go through my things. And he would even accused me of seeing other men. I felt like an idiot for doing the same thing as my mother. I was disappointed in myself. I thought I should have known been smarter.” H said this: “I thought to myself I would never allow someone to treat me like that, after seeing my uncle abuse my aunt.” When she was asked if she had experienced an abusive relationship later on H said; “Yes,
when I first got married it was verbal abuse. He would order me around like he was above me. I would tell him not to talk to me that way. He was nicer to me little by little. Then one day he grabbed me and pushed me against the wall. I got really scared. I thought he was really going to hurt me. I called the police and he was arrested. We separated temporarily, then we got back together and he has never touched me again. I think it was his domineering personality that started it. He would go from one extreme to the next.”

These are two examples of the women who said they would not put up with abuse and yet they found themselves in the exact situation. This gives some support to the idea that the cycle is often repeated.

Coping Strategies

Another purpose of this study was to reveal the coping strategies of the women who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence. There are many ways to cope with domestic violence. Some may withdraw, some may retaliate by saying something to the abuser, and some may passively deal with it. Some of the interviewees were too young to do much when the abuse occurred. Most (about half) of the interviewees said they helped by listening or being there for the person who was abused. None of the interviewees suggested going to a counselor, shelter, or a mental health facility. One did suggest bringing an alcohol or marriage counselor to the house. Here are some responses.

P said, “I would see my mom cry a lot I would ask her ‘What are you crying for mom?’ I was always warm and loving toward her. I would support her emotionally.” R: “I have suggested bringing a alcohol or marriage counselor. But I didn’t because I didn’t think my dad would have went for it.” One interviewee became aggressive with her siblings. This is
what M said: “I became aggressive with my siblings. We were beating up on each other while I was living at home until I was 18 years old. Now that I am married I still have the aggressive behavior and I have no patience. Seeing everyone beating up on one another I began to see this as a natural thing.” One interviewee dealt with the abuse in a passive manner. This is what she said; “I became passive as a result of my aunt being abused by my uncle. I withdrew and watched TV a lot.” A few of the interviewees were outspoken about the domestic violence that happened. This is what L said: “I told my dad what I thought was right and wrong. I wanted to change him by telling him it wasn’t right what he was doing, to step back and look at what he was doing so he could be aware of it.” These are some examples of how these women dealt with the violence while it was happening. Even at these young ages, different patterns of coping occurred (passive, aggressive, avoidance, consoling). There was no consistent pattern of responses given the young age of these interviewees. It limited their responses; they were too young and small to intervene. They were all clearly angry, but how they outwardly displayed this anger varied among the interviewees.

As a result of observing frequent episodes of domestic violence several of these women began to normalize the abusive behaviors. Even though they may have know it was wrong they didn’t know any other way of relating. Here are what a few of the interviewees said. P: “I thought it was something you were supposed to tolerate. I realized differently after going to school.” G said, “You think this is normal even though you know it’s not right.” M, who mentioned earlier that she became aggressive with her siblings says, “I think as a kid I began to see this abusive behavior as a natural thing, so I went on
with it too and became aggressive with my siblings.” Y said this; “I was involved in an abusive relationship as a result of growing up observing abusive behavior. All I heard was arguing, arguing, arguing. This was normal to me.” And R said, “At first I thought it was acceptable for a man to hit me and call me names, after seeing it with my parents. I never had a firm guide of what a healthy relationship is.” These are just a few examples of how these women thought it was normal to display or experience abusive behaviors. These women mentioned thinking this was normal behavior at one point in their lives. It is clear that they now know this is not acceptable behavior. This is a strange dynamic because three of the four women either are or were in abusive relationships (two of the four are still presently in an abusive relationship); even though they know it is not acceptable behavior. The fourth woman, on the other hand, became aggressive and is aggressive in her marriage. It seems that although they are consciously aware it is not right, unconsciously they are still functioning with the belief system that this is how relationships are, because they are still in an abusive relationship or display abusive behaviors.

All the women were asked how their experience with domestic violence affected their opinions and feelings about relationships. Most of these women reported they would be more aware of who they are dating. They would get to know him first and make sure he does not have these abusive tendencies. These were some of the different responses mentioned. C said, “It made me more careful of who I dated, prior to getting married. Made me more aware to know abuse was not right.” L: “I’m scared to get married. I don’t picture myself getting married. I feel like something bad is going to happen in the relationship. Like relationships don’t work out. It’s better just to have boyfriends.” P:
“I’ve had bad experiences with men. It’s hard for me to relate to them on a good level. It made me more skeptical. I would get to know them and what their thinking is to make sure the men I dated are not like my dad.” S says, “It made me stronger. I know I was not going to take anything from anyone. I guess it empowered me. I have never experienced violence in any of my relationships.” Each individual developed different perceptions and coping strategies of relationships as a result of observing domestic violence. But the majority mentioned it made them more careful and aware of who they dated and/or married, despite the fact that some did get into abusive relationships.

All of the interviewees were also asked how observing domestic violence has changed their lives. The most common response (about half of the interviewees) was that it has somehow made them a stronger individual and they are unwilling to put up with it. One individual said it made them stronger emotionally. Here is what she said about how it made her stronger. P: “It empowered me. In my relationships there was never any violence.” The others did not mention how it made them a stronger person. They just said they would never allow it to happen to them personally. There were a variety of responses to this question, “How did this experience with domestic violence change your life?” These are some of the negative responses. T: “Not wanting to get married. Thinking that I can do everything on my own and not wanting to depend on men for anything.” L: “Before I would trust more easily, especially guys because I grew up with many. After what happened to my mom I thought, I don’t really know guys because this man seemed really nice at first, then he became abusive toward her. I wouldn’t like being with a guy by myself, especially on a date. I’m always on guard.” H said after she had been abused by a
boyfriend (the father of her daughter), “I didn’t want to be susceptible to what my parents went through. I decided to go to school, get out on my own and become independent, so I wouldn’t have to depend on a man or marry anyone who treated me like that (abusive). I felt this was the best way to take care of me and my daughter first, then maybe I can share a life with someone.” N, who was abused by a boyfriend said; “This gave me a broad world view of reality. I was raised in a good family. I was pretty sheltered. It’s like the world is really like this, and I can’t just trust anybody on the streets. It’s really tough. It changed my life to be a more cautious person when making decisions with my relationships.” And R said; “It made me not want to put up with it in my life. It did affect me emotionally and mentally. It lowered my self-esteem, and I didn’t feel secure with myself.” All but three of the interviewees who said they would never put up with abuse did get into abusive relationships. Overall, the women say they feared getting into relationships, after observing domestic violence it made them cautious and non-trusting.

As a result of observing domestic violence, these interviewees have been adversely affected. They have developed many negative perceptions of men, relationships, and/or themselves. Many of these women say they have become stronger, but did not provide details about their strengths. Some said they wouldn’t put up with domestic violence their lives and they haven’t. Strength for many of these women may mean they have been able to cope and make it through the violence without falling apart. For some individuals this means avoiding abusive relationships themselves. This is the best scenario in this sample. Overall, the majority of these women have been affected negatively and it is apparent in their lives emotionally and/or behaviorally.
DISCUSSION

In these women’s account the overall effects of observing domestic violence were negative. All of these women have been affected negatively in one form or another. All of the interviewees knew that abuse was wrong even though it may have been a way of life for them. Almost all of them were very young when they observed the first abusive incident. It is apparent that this traumatic event, domestic violence, has wounded the individuals who have observed it happening.

The traditional macho attitude and behavior of the man was reported to be the primary basis for the domestic violence. The interviewees stated in one form or another that the man displayed behaviors indicative of “Machismo.” That means the man was demanding, domineering/controlling, viewed women as inferior, selfish, insecure/low self-esteem, jealous, a womanizer, and/or as the head of household and the woman should obey him. These are the characteristics that were the basis of domestic violence in all of the interviews. Three of the interviewees were reluctant to blame their culture, but they did state that it is a problem that culture brings up macho men. The results of this study confirm what the literature suggests, that cultural rules of the Hispanic culture, which give men more power than the woman, is a factor in domestic violence (Torres, 1991). This is definitely the case in this sample. This does not mean the culture creates machismo men, but it does provide an ideology for men who would be this way. Not all Hispanic men are machismo. I specifically selected to explore women who experienced abuse directly or indirectly by observing it in their families. The women who did observe it did implicate the culture.
All of the women reported that verbal, emotional and physical abuse took place. The types of abuse commonly mentioned was; name calling, pushing, shoving, slapping, punching, grabbing, and objects being thrown at the victim. Some of the women indicated sexual abuse occurred. It was a common theme in all of the cases, that if physical abuse took place there was always verbal and emotional abuse. Not one person reported only verbal abuse occurring. In all cases both verbal and physical abuse occurred. Abuse is progressive, it starts with verbal and emotional abuse and in many cases progresses to physical, and sometimes sexual. Physical abuse never occurs without verbal and emotional abuse, but verbal and emotional abuse can occur without physical abuse.

The use of alcohol and/or drugs (mostly alcohol) was a prevalent factor in many of the incidents. At least half of the interviewees reported alcohol being a primary factor leading to the violence. Many of them stated they felt alcohol was the cause of the abuse. In some of the cases the abuse occurred only when the man was under the influence of alcohol. It may be true that the individual was only able to release built-up stress after drinking, which caused him to take his frustration out on his significant other. What is also true is alcohol is used as a way of coping with stress. An individual who uses alcohol as a way to relieve stress is a dysfunctional individual. Alcohol can be and is used as an excuse for wrongful behaviors. Zubretsky and Digirolama (1996) suggest that the cultural norms regarding men drinking alcohol play a role in abuse. Research has shown that abusive men are more likely engage in aggressive behaviors when under the influence than when sober, if it is seen as normal male behavior in the cultural (Zubretsky & Digirolama, 1996). Alcohol serves as a socially acceptable excuse for the man's violence (Zubretsky &
Digirolama, 1996). Do these individuals already have abusive characteristics that are part of their personality or is alcohol really the cause of abuse in some cases? It appears in many cases alcohol was a contributing factor to the abuse. One researcher stated that the major cause of domestic violence is when the man tries to dominate/control the woman due to jealousy and drinking alcohol (Torres, 1991). Zubretsky and Digirolama (1996), on the other hand, state there is little evidence to imply a correlation of drinking with abusive behaviors. They further suggest that abusive behaviors are part of the batterers method of abuse, with little or no link to alcohol use (1996). The interviewees stated that the men who drank frequently also had traditional beliefs about women’s roles and that they were very controlling and demanding. It appears that alcohol was not the cause of the abuse. The occurrence of domestic violence seems to occur due to abusive personality characteristics and the traditional beliefs that the man held.

Jealousy was another frequently reported factor contributing to domestic violence. Almost half of the interviewees reported that jealousy was a factor in the occurrence of the abuse. As stated above jealousy is believed to be a cause for men trying to dominate/control women (Torres, 1991). Many of the interviewees mention that the man’s jealous mind would have him think and do absurd things, such as thinking the woman is seeing another man, or snoop through her things expecting to find something to confirm his falsified thinking. It appears that as a result of insecurity these men have distorted perceptions of reality. Jealousy also appears to be part of the batterer’s abusive characteristics and method of abuse. It is clear that the man’s jealousy is a component of abuse.
The culture’s rules and beliefs played a large role in the incidents of domestic violence according to the interviewees, specifically, the traditional rigid gender roles of the Hispanic culture. These rigid roles that are strictly followed put men and women at unequal levels, putting the man above the woman. These rules and beliefs put women at a disadvantage causing them to be viewed as weak, inferior, and only good for serving men. These beliefs are passed down over many generations, giving power to men to rule over women. This way of life has been harmful to the culture and the families who abide by these rules. I am not saying this is the case in every Hispanic family. This is a strong belief system that is clearly part of the Hispanic culture. It was a significant part of the lives of the women in this sample, which ultimately lead to domestic violence. Every single interviewee in this sample, despite a few disclaimers, mentioned that the cultures rules/beliefs was the basis of the occurrence of the domestic violence. This gives some evidence that the culture’s rules and beliefs contribute to the transpiration of domestic violence. It is important to remember that not all Hispanic families abide by these rules and beliefs. This was the case in this sample, which gives some understanding of the occurrence of domestic violence in the Hispanic culture. Even the though these women attribute the abuse to their culture, it may be the characteristics of batterer’s in general (in any culture).

This belief system which is passed down generation to generation seems to affect how these women view themselves. Many of these women reported that the culture does not facilitate a high self-esteem in women. The rules of the culture promote the women to become passive, weak, and dependent, instead of strong, independent, and having a mind
of her own. These rules do not facilitate the women to nurture her strengths nor help a woman to develop a high self-esteem. The culture places value on women who are or want to be mothers and housewives. It is not acceptable for a woman to be independent and outgoing; she is looked upon negatively. This means all women are molded into a certain pattern, having only one role in life. What about the young women who have talents to do something else and who want to do something else with their lives? Women learn that they can not do anything else but be good housewives and mothers. The consistent view of women as being weak and inferior causes women to believe it, hence developing low self-esteem. Low self-esteem coupled with observing domestic violence may place these women in a vulnerable position to get into abusive relationships, because they have come to believe this is how they will be treated. They don’t know anything else, and they don’t have the self-esteem to believe they deserve to be treated with respect.

The interviewees described the abused Hispanic women in this study as being characteristic of “Marianismo.” This concept has been developed to describe the traditional Hispanic values that woman follow, such as submission to men and self sacrificing behaviors (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). The interviewees mention that the culture to some degree tries to keep women behaving in this manner. They reported that the men demand or expect these type of behaviors from the women. The victims of abuse are described by the interviewee as having some or many of these marianismo characteristics, even if forced upon them by the abuser. Marianismo seems to be developed through the socialization of the culture. This is the way women should be according to the culture, like the holy Virgin Mary (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). As shown by this study, domestic violence
seems to be included with the whole belief system package. It is evident in this study because it appears to reinforce machismo as suggested by Gil and Vasquez (1996).

Witnessing the abuse has affected the lives of the interviewees in many ways. These women have been affected emotionally and psychologically. Some of these women stated that it affected their self-esteem, by making them feel insecure. The instability of their lives definitely would foster insecure feelings. Many of these women developed feelings of anger as a result of observing the abuse. Most of them displayed this anger behaviorally, such as having aggressive behaviors themselves, low grades in school, or withdrawal. They were clearly affected by the abuse. Many of them had hatred toward the abuser, even if it was their father. Many of them avoided the abuser altogether. This was a possible way for the interviewee to cope with the abuse and somehow detach from the abuse and the abuser. They may not have known why the abuser was inflicting harm onto a loved one, but they did appear to know that it was not right for the abuser to hit the person. This was evident with the interviewees. It caused much confusion for the observer of abuse, knowing what was right and seeing the exact opposite.

The majority of the interviewees were either first, second, or third generation American, they are fairly familiar with the traditional Hispanic culture and are able to give valid information regarding the culture. None of the interviewees mentioned acculturation issues as a factor in contributing to domestic violence. This does not mean that acculturation is not a problem for some families. It just means in this particular sample it was not significant in the interviewees perceptions of the occurrence of domestic violence.
As far as what the interviewee did to help the victim of abuse, most of the interviewees' mentioned they helped emotionally, by listening. Most of the interviewees were young at the time the abuse first occurred and if it continued over time, they described their responses when they were young. Only one interviewee in the entire sample suggested bringing an alcohol or marriage counselor. It was not mentioned anywhere that the victims sought help from anyone other than a family member. This gives evidence that Hispanic families are a very close knit unit who seek support from one another, rather than seeking help from mental health facilities (Keefe, Padilla, & Carlos, 1978). In this study the family was an important source of comfort.

After observing domestic violence with a family member, half of these women developed negative perceptions of men, especially Hispanic men. Most of these interviewees, fathers were the abusers. These women have developed a stereotype of all men or Hispanic men. They reported that they saw men as basically bad, wanting to control or inflict harm on a woman. They said that men (or Hispanic men), are all the same. They have difficulty trusting men in general and for some they don’t trust Hispanic men. This seems to be a natural outcome for women after witnessing abusive acts over and over by a Hispanic man (father or father figure). If the man whom they are supposed to trust the most and whom they see as a model of all men abuse women, then what are they to think about all other men? What they see growing up from their male role model is the framework of how they perceive men in general. This is why many of the interviewees perceive men in a negative manner.
As far as relationships go, the majority of the interviewees stated they have become more aware of who they dated after observing domestic violence. Because they don’t trust men, it makes sense that these individuals would be very selective in dating, if they dated at all. It appears that the women who were more severely traumatized had a difficult time even getting close enough to men to date. These women made it very clear that they fear getting close to men. Some of these women stated they do not avoid men altogether, but have never dated a man longer then a few weeks, if at all. These women do not date the same man longer than a few months out of fear they will get to close to the man. Overall, most of these women stated that they have difficulty getting close to men. This make sense that these women keep their distance from men because they do not trust men and fear other men too have abusive tendencies.

The most prevalent overall effect of observing domestic violence was that approximately half of these women were also in an abusive relationship. Most of the women stated after observing domestic violence, it made them a stronger person and they would never put up with abusive behaviors by a man. This may be true to some degree, while at the same time it is also true that they have also repeated this cycle of abuse. They have found themselves in some type of abusive relationship. Yes, they may have gained strength, but for some it was not enough to avoid abusive relationships. It appears that there are strong factors involved in witnessing domestic violence (in their families) repeatedly that causes many woman to become susceptible to abusive relationships. In this case it may be the roles women are socialized to adhere to, the woman’s low self-esteem, and/or they have normalized the abuse (as a result of witnessing it at home). Any or all of
these may be possibilities to why these women get into abusive relationships. It is apparent that most of the women were not able to avoid abusive relationships altogether. This is evidence that while they may know consciously abuse is wrong, but something is going on, perhaps unconsciously that make them vulnerable to abusive relationships. It is not enough in some cases to just think “I would not put up with an abusive man,” especially when the individual has witnessed domestic violence repeatedly. It seems that these individuals may have develop a cognitive framework that normalizes the abuse in order to deal with this traumatic situation. If this is true then these individuals would need to seek therapy to restructure this ingrained framework that has helped them to cope for so many years. This is a suggestion as to why many may find themselves in abusive relationships after witnessing it in their family.

This issue of domestic violence among the Hispanic population is a complex one. This study was done to reveal how it affects the individuals who are indirectly involved. More specifically, the purpose of the study was to reveal how the domestic violence affected their attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs and how they coped with the violence. This study found much useful information that will hopefully add to the sparse amount of information regarding domestic violence and Hispanics. This study focused on the subjective world of the individuals who experienced domestic violence through witnessing it with a family member primarily and secondary those who experienced it themselves. It is important to keep in mind that this was a very small sample of college women and it cannot be generalized to all Hispanics, or the ways in which the culture is involved in non-abusive families. Some suggestions for future research are to explore, older age coping
skills of observing domestic violence, women who have observed domestic violence and repeated this cycle in their relationships, and the inconsistency of what they say they will put up with and what they do tolerate. I would recommend exploring Hispanic men's views of domestic violence or exploring non-abused Hispanic women's views of the culture for future research.
REFERENCES


