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## Latinas' utilization of domestic violence resources

Lillian Navas

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LATINA'S UTILIZATION OF DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE RESOURCES

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

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Lillian Navas  
Lilia Santoyo  
September 2002

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## ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is a subject of much discussion and studied since the late 1970's. However, limited research exists to understand the impact of domestic violence on Latinas. Hence, this study examined Latinas' utilization of domestic violence resources by doing a content analysis of ten face-to-face interviews with women who were or are victims of domestic violence. Findings indicated that Latinas under-utilize community resources due to lack of awareness, reliance on family support, previous history of alcohol/drug use and domestic violence in family of origin, and children's welfare. These findings revealed the barriers encountered by this population and demands intervention from the Social Work Profession.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the women who participated in this study for having the courage to come forth and share their life experiences. In our view they are not victims but survivors of domestic violence as it takes a strong and resourceful individual to endure such adversity.

## DEDICATION

We dedicate this study to all women, in recognition to their struggle to overcome oppression. We also dedicate it to our families who have supported us through our time in school.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Historically domestic violence has been part of women's lives. In Roman times, men were allowed by law to chastise, divorce, or kill their wives for adultery, public embarrassment or for attending public games (Berry, 2000). Gradually society's acceptance of violence against women decreased and efforts to alleviate their condition began. However, as recent as 1970s formal services for women victims of domestic abuse were virtually non-existent.

One of the few services available was Haven House, the first American shelter that opened in 1964, in San Gabriel Valley California (Berry, 2000). It was also during the 1970s that Domestic violence became the focus of extensive research and public awareness increased due to the growing body of knowledge on this topic. As a result several civic and community organizations have undertaken steps to improve their services. Currently, some law enforcement officials receive specialized training to improve responsiveness; shelters and counseling services are available in most cities for women

and children victims of domestic violence (Van Hightower & Gorton, 1998). There is a high prevalence of domestic violence in the United States. It is estimated that 8 to 17 percent of women are victims of domestic violence each year (Wilt & Olsen, 1996). However, one must be cognizant of the fact that definitions of domestic violence vary and there is a problem of underreporting the abuse (Surgeon General Report, 2001). Just as conservative estimates reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report on violence against women, that each year 1 million women suffer nonfatal violence by an intimate (1995).

Domestic violence is a pervasive problem in our society that crosses ethnic, racial, age, national origin, sexual orientation, religious and socioeconomic lines (Bureau of Justice Statistical, 1995). However, there are some populations such as immigrant women who face unique legal, social and economic challenges when they find themselves victims of domestic violence. Anderson (1993) found that domestic violence is more prevalent among immigrant women than among U.S. citizens. It is believed that immigrant women have higher rates of domestic violence because they often come from cultures that accept this behavior, or because they have less access to legal protection and social services here in the U.S. Other

possible explanations are that abusers and victims may believe that penalties and protections of the U.S. legal system do not apply to them (Orloff et al., 1995). Hence, the need for expanding our knowledge and increasing outreach to this population is paramount.

### Policy Context

Several laws have passed to either protect victims of domestic violence or with the purpose to allocate funds in their benefit. One of these laws is The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act of 1984. This law allocates federal funds to help states develop community services, support shelters, and coordinate research to benefit victims of domestic violence. Other law that protects women when crimes are based on gender is the Violence Against Women Act of 1993. This Act also addresses immigrant women victims of domestic violence. It allows a spouse or child suffering abuse from a spouse or parent who is a lawful permanent resident or the United States or American Citizen to file a self-petition for permanent residency (Berry, 2000). Berry goes on to write that beginning in 1994 with the passage of the Crime Act, women are able to sue their perpetrator for violation of the civil rights.

Some of these laws make it possible for perpetrators to get arrested and get jail sentences if convicted (Berry, 2000). However, Berry writes, police offices still have discretion to make or not make the arrest. The problem is compounded in the case of Latinas who lack English-speaking skills. Often they are not able to communicate effectively the extent of the abuse and therefore do not provide the police with enough information to make an arrest. Other times deportation and/or the loss of their children, are threats or intimidations tactics that partners use to intimidate women (Roberts, 1996). Unfortunately, the existence of these laws extending protection to immigrant women does not guarantee that latinass will make use of them. Barriers such as language, distrust of the police and the INS keep women from utilizing these laws (Rivera, 1994).

#### Practice Context

Domestic violence is currently addressed by several agencies. These are local police departments, hospitals shelters, hotlines, and research. Social workers for the most part play the role of therapists, educators, researchers and advocates. The most widely used interventions with women victims of domestic violence individual brief counseling, support groups with an

educational component, and connection with community resources (Mazur, 2000). These are the most used interventions as women respond better to treatment modalities incorporating some or all the above-mentioned treatments.

However, most social workers do not come in contact with victims of domestic violence in settings like police departments, hotlines, or even in shelters. Lay people doing social work often do the first interventions and social workers get involved once a victim has been identified and referred for services. This is the area in which more professional social workers need to heighten their presence to make sure that even if only one contact is made proper crisis intervention and referrals are made.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop a better understanding of the barriers faced by Latinas when confronted with domestic violence. It looked at cultural, economic, financial, educational legal and access to resources as barriers that contribute to Latinas remaining in abusive relationships. The study also looked at psychological problems that other studies have linked to victims of domestic violence and see how they apply to

Latinas. An assumption prior to undertaking this study was that Latinas did not respond differently to domestic violence than other women in the larger population. The difference is that Latinas encounter greater challenges and have less accessible resources available to them.

Presently there is very poor outreach to the Latina population of victims of domestic violence. The problem seems to be lack of understanding of the Latino culture and the ingrained cultural practices in Latino populations. Domestic violence in the Latino community is very pervasive and cultural beliefs, religion and strict gender division are but a few of the problems that need to be understood when working in outreach programs designed to help this population. One important fact that one needs to understand is that regardless of the cultural differences Latinas face the same psychological problems that go hand in hand with domestic violence such as poor self-esteem, depression, isolation, and helplessness.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

The findings of this study can help change social work practice in Latino communities and contribute to the larger body of research of a special population for social work in general. Knowing what drives people to seek help

or what deters them is a great tool when shaping the way in which services are delivered to Latinas. Perhaps Latinas are more responsive to community based services and not so much apt to access institutions such as shelters. In addition, cultural sensitivity needs to be taken into account when dealing with this population. It is known that the Hispanic culture has a strict code as far as taking care of problems within the family. For many Latino families it is an embarrassment when strangers are brought into personal family affairs. The culture and traditions play a significant role in seeking services, therefore, this study sought to explore Latinas' utilization of domestic violence resources and the issues around it.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

So far the literature found addressing Latinas deals with their help-seeking patterns, lack of suitable resources, mistrust of the legal system, cultural deterrents, and psychosocial stressors. Possible theoretical frameworks that help explain the problem are that of Bandura's social learning theory and Saligman's theory of learned helplessness.

#### Help-Seeking Patterns

Issues related to domestic abuse and immigrant women almost always address the need for appropriate programs that welcome women of different ethnic groups. The Women's International Network News, (CITATION NEEDED) reports the need and the high response to programs established in New York. These programs ranged from hotlines, safe houses to appropriate community referrals. In addition, women fluent in the language of the population they served staffed the hotlines. For instance, hotlines targeting Asians, Arabs, Hindu and Spanish women, each reported high volume of calls within the first week of existence. These results

show that if the services are tailored to the specific need of a given population, the women will seek help.

Another study (West, Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998) compared help-seeking behaviors among Latina and Anglo-American battered women. The study focused in the socio-demographic predictors and cultural barriers. It concluded that battered latinas were younger, less educated, and more impoverished than the Anglo women. In addition, latinas described their marriages as male dominated and their husbands were heavier drinkers. Moreover, the authors specifically noted that Mexican women were less likely to seek assistance and that low acculturation, measured by preference to speak Spanish, was the only significant cultural barrier in help seeking.

Accessing police protection is additionally underutilized. Wiist (1998) found that abused Hispanic pregnant women police utilization rate is low especially among monolingual Spanish speakers. The lack of bilingual personnel by law enforcement partially accounts for this. Other fact that is taken into consideration is that in some instances calling the police stops the physical violence, yet other times the violence increases.

Likewise when studying immigrant women victims of domestic violence and their accessibility to health care,

research suggests that the most prevalent barriers were family, legal status and lack of knowledge of existing services. In addition, women complained of inadequate translation in healthcare settings and feared that seeking medical help would lead to deportation. Latinas especially viewed their suffering as fair trade off in the benefit of their children (Bauer & Rodriguez, 2000).

#### Theoretical Orientation for Study

Social learning theory assumes that aggression is stimulated and learned through modeling, observation, or direct experience. At the same time observing inhibition of aggression by models can inhibit aggression. Models for aggression are found within families, the mass media, and society at large (Bandura, 1973). This theory could help explain and explore history of previous violence in the family of origin and its results in family violence. Bandura also proposed a better understanding of human behavior by assessing the reciprocal relationship between the environment and behavior. Behavior can influence the environment through reinforcement and observational learning, thus in turn the environment can influence behavior through both reinforcement and observational learning (Wiggins, Wiggins, & Vander-Zanden, 1994).

Seligman's (1975) "theory of learned helplessness" and its associated apathy and listlessness are used as an explanation for why victims of domestic violence tolerate abusive situations. After long periods of violence exposure women internalized the belief that no matter what they do they cannot stop the violence. Learned helplessness is a deceptive term because it does not mean that the women have learned to be helpless, but rather than the women have learned that they cannot predict the effects of their behavior, therefore they must acquire new coping skills.

#### Cultural Factors

The existing research addressing Latina victims of domestic violence point at several reasons why they do not utilize existing resources. Acevedo (2000) found cultural factors such as gender-role expectations and familialism have a greater influence in Mexican women's attitudes towards seeking services for domestic violence. In this study cultural factors were the main barriers to seeking services over psychosocial stressors such as immigrant status and financial dependency.

In the Hispanic culture, the needs of the family take precedence over the needs of the individual (Becerra,

1988; Florez-Ortiz, 1993). In addition Becerra argues that Catholicism, the predominant religion amongst Latinos, often reinforces this value system. It is widely known that Catholicism disapproves divorce in a marriage and has a history of adhering to strict gender-roles within its structure.

In addition, research has have found that Hispanics adhere to specific gender roles in marriage. The male is designated as the breadwinner and head of household while the woman is the submissive wife who cares for the home and children (Becerra, 1988), which in turn may result in greater tolerance for violence.

Bonilla-Santiago concluded in her study of cultural barriers to services for domestic violence that traditional gender roles, family, marriage, and divorce are important factors to Latinas' reluctance to seek services in their communities for domestic violence (1996).

Lastly, Torres (1991) found in a study conducted in domestic violence shelters that in comparison to Anglo-American women, Mexican-American women viewed some levels of abuse as normal and acceptable.

## Psychosocial Stressors

In Bonilla's study of 25 incarcerated Latinas who had been battered, it demonstrated that because of language and cultural barriers, most of the women had not received appropriate protection and/or assistance from the police, legal aid, welfare, and counseling agencies. In addition, for undocumented latinas, she reported that their illegal status keeps them isolated and in violent relationships.

In addition, Acevedo's study further found that their children's welfare played a salient role; it either served as a deterrent or motivating factor in seeking services (2000). The women viewed their gender-role expectations as having maternal responsibility to the children as far as protecting them, however the importance of family was the deterrent by wishing that their children grow with a paternal figure. Furthermore in her study, the women did not find lack of financial stability as a barrier, it was a concern for providing to their children, but it did not override the children's welfare as they figured that remaining in a violent environment had greater detrimental effects on the children.

Research addressing the effectiveness of treatment for women victims of domestic violence has been studied, but not specifically to Latinas. In general women respond

better to treatment when all aspects of their lives are addressed, such as food, shelter, clothing, childcare, healthcare, job skills and employment, and mental health. Nevertheless, a study conducted by Turner and Shapiro (1986) concluded that social service workers spend too much time addressing the hierarchy of needs and fail to treat the women's loss of the relationship. Therefore women go back to their abusers numerous times.

#### Summary

In conclusion, literature relevant to the topics of latinas and access to resources for domestic violence has been presented in this chapter. The following chapter will delineate the process taken by both researchers in conducting this study to explore the barriers faced by the population chosen.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Granted that appropriate measures have not been designed to capture the variables of interest in this study, the researchers employed qualitative, open-ended interviews to acquire such data. The interviews were aimed at obtaining the experiences of Latinas whom suffered from domestic violence and the reasons/obstacles encountered when seeking services for domestic violence.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why Latinas do not seek formal institutions for help when faced with domestic violence issues. Among Latinas, the best research method for this type of exploratory research was face-to-face interviews. This method helped capture more data of a qualitative nature by allowing interviewers to ascertain emotional responses and probe for additional information and/or clarity from the respondents.

#### Sampling

The sample for this study was obtained from an existing community based program for Latino women, Latin American Women's Program at the Central City Lutheran



Mission (see Appendix A). This particular community program was chosen due to prior knowledge of an existing group of women with issues of domestic violence and willingness of the director to participate. With the agency's consent, the researchers went out to recruit the subjects. The selection criteria was willing Latina participants who have or were currently experiencing domestic violence in their homes. In addition to gathering subjects from the agency, the researchers sought a snowball sample from that group. The total number of subjects was ten. The goal of the researchers was to obtain a sample group that included all Latino ethnic groups. Nevertheless the particular community studied has a high concentration of Mexican women.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

As stated, due to non-existing appropriate measures at obtaining the variables of interest, the researchers employed a self-designed interview guide when conducting interviews. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, pre-test were not conducted. The interview guide consisted of a few demographic and open-ended questions (see Appendix B). Demographic questions were age, marital status, ethnic background, acquisition of English

Language, employment, years of education, number of children and their ages, status in this country, and number of years living in the United States. Open-ended questions consisted of religion and its importance in their lives, ability to travel in the community, history or current substance abuse in relationship and/or family of origin, their definition of domestic violence, their perspective of domestic violence in their home, history of domestic violence in their family of origin, history of leaving a violent relationship, family support and advice, and awareness of services for Domestic violence.

Open-ended questions were aimed at finding out why Latino Women seek or do not seek services in their communities for domestic violence.

#### Procedures

Each participant was interviewed for 45-90 minutes due to some participants' need to share more of their emotions and the frustrations they experienced. The data collection process took three weeks due to difficulty in scheduling participants and time constraints of the researchers. Interviews took place in the participants' homes or place of choice. Most of the interviews were conducted in Spanish due to participants being

monolingual. Researchers went over consent forms with participants. In addition, consent forms were given in Spanish (see Appendix C). At end of each interview participants were given a list of local agencies that served women victims of Domestic violence and a debriefing statement (see Appendix D).

### Protection of Human Subjects

Not requesting names and allowing subjects to withdraw from the study at any time <sup>will protect the</sup> protected confidentiality and anonymity of subjects. A code number ~~was placed on the debriefing statements, which~~ corresponded with the interview guides. In addition, the subjects were given consent and debriefing forms in Spanish thus they remained informed of the nature and purpose of this study through the interview process. Lastly, the names of the researchers and the advisor along with a phone number to contact the researchers if they had any questions concerning the study were given on the consent forms for any further clarification.

### Data Analysis

Once the data was gathered, descriptive statistics were drawn to analyze the demographic data. The researchers then used a content analysis approach to view

any emerging patterns and/or concepts. Key concepts, as well as phrases, were delineated and a list created that permitted like concepts to be identified in the text of the interviews. Some key concepts that were chosen were help-seeking behavior, which was assessed by questioning the participants' ability to use transportation, knowledge of services and/or support from family members.

Acculturation was another key concept that was assessed by requesting information on years lived in the United States and acquisition of the English Language. Approval of violence was also assessed upon request of a history of violence in family of origin, own definition of domestic violence, perspective of their relationship in terms of domestic abuse/violence, and importance of religion in the participants' lives. Lastly two other concepts were assessed, that of substance/drug use by either partner and/or in family of origin and psychosocial stressors which were assessed by source of income, number of children and their ages, and legal status in this country.

#### Summary

In short, chapter three depicts the process taken in gathering the data for this study. Findings and results

will give a clearer picture of what was found by using the methodology described in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Analysis included women who reported ever experiencing domestic abuse at the hands of their current or past partner during the course of their relationship. The sample consisted of ten Latino women who identified themselves as Mexican ( $n = 8$ ), and Central/South American ( $n = 2$ ).

#### Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The age range of the respondents was 25 to 54 years old with an average of 38.1 years. Almost half (40%) were still married, about a third of the respondents (30%) were separated and only one (10%) of the respondents was widowed. In addition, half of the respondents (50%) spoke both English and Spanish fluently and the other half (50%) spoke only Spanish.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondent

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (N = 10)	Mean = 38.1	
25-30	1	10
31-40	6	60
41-50	1	10
51-54	2	20
Marital Status (N = 10)		
Married	4	40
Divorced	2	20
Separated	3	30
Widowed	1	10
Ethnicity (N = 10)		
Mexican	8	80
Central/South America	2	20
Language (N = 10)		
English	5	50
Spanish	5	50
Employment (N = 10)		
Yes	5	50
No	5	50
Education (N = 10)	Mean = 10.7	
Elementary School	2	20
Middle School	3	30
High School	1	10
Some College	2	20
Graduate School	2	20
Legal Status (N = 10)		
Document	8	80
Undocumented	2	20
Years in US (N = 10)	Mean = 20.6	
1-10	2	20
11-20	5	50
21-30	2	20
31-51	1	10
Religion (N = 10)		
Catholic	5	50
Seven Day Adventist	2	20
Christian	3	30

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Importance of Religious Values (N = 10)		
Very important	5	50
Somewhat important	4	40
Not at all	1	10
Number of Children (N = 10) Mean = 2.6		
One child	2	20
Two Children	3	30
Three Children	2	20
Four Children	3	30
Ages of Children (N = 26) Mean = 11.9		
1-10	14	53.8
11-20	9	34.6
21-30	3	11.6
Transportation (N = 10)		
Own car	8	80
Family transportation	1	10
Public transportation/walked	1	10
Substance abuse family of origin (N = 10)		
Yes	7	70
No	3	30
Substance abuse in current/past relationships (N = 10)		
Yes	6	60
No	4	40

Similarly, half (50%) of the respondents reported full or part-time employment while the other half (50%) reported no employment at the present time. The respondents' level of education ranged from two years of elementary school to graduate level education with a mean of 10.7 in years of education. Three respondents reported having a middle school education, two respondents reported completing elementary school, and 2 others reported having completed or working on graduate school, while another two



respondents reported completing some college, and one respondent reported completing high school.

In regards to legal status, four fifths (80%) of the respondents reported having legal status in the U.S., while only one fifth (20%) reported being in the country without legal status. The length of residency in U.S. ranged from 9 to 51 years with an average of 20.6 years. Half of the respondents (50%) identified themselves as Catholics, 20% of the respondents reported being Seventh Day Adventist, and 30% identified themselves as Christians.

All the respondents had children ranging from one to four children with a mean of 2.6. Their ages ranged from 1½ year old to 29 years old with a mean of 11.9 in years. In regards to staying with spouse due to children's well-being, three fifths reported staying with spouse for the sake of the children in addition to other reasons. Four fifths of the respondents reported having their own transportation, while one fifth (20%) reported using public and family transportation. Seven respondents (70%) reported substance use in their family of origin and 60% reported substance use in their current or past relationships.

In defining domestic violence five out of ten respondents included verbal and physical attacks. Three respondents included verbal, physical and control as part of their definition. One included verbal only, and another stated control only. Respondents included forceful sexual intercourse, which was included under reported under physical abuse. For purpose of this study rape was included under physical abuse.

According to respondents' self-definition of domestic violence, they all considered themselves as victims of domestic abuse. In addition, seven out of ten reported history of domestic violence in their family of origin. Two reported none and one did not recall any domestic violence.

Participants reported different range of attempts to leave the relationship. Three of the respondents reported never leaving the relationship and two indicated that their husbands left them for other women. The other five respondents had made from at least two to ten attempts at leaving. Reasons identified for staying in relationships were as follows; four were promised change from their partners, six reported returning due to the children's well-being, three returned due to concern over finances, one reported lack of suitable services, one reported fear

of being and staying alone, while lastly one reported being threatened with harm if not return and/or kidnapping of children.

In measuring respondents' family support, out of the ten respondents only two identified lack of family support while the rest (n = 8) reported high emotional and financial family support once family became aware of abuse. Most women were not aware of services in their respective communities. Seven out of ten were not aware of resources at all. Of the three that were aware of services, two experienced frustration due to language barrier, restriction on eligibility criteria, poor condition of shelters and awareness of the stigma attached to shelters and the people who access them.

Lastly, when asked religion influencing them in remaining in their relationships, four out of the ten respondents reported being influenced by their religious values in deciding to remain in the relationship. Three out of these respondents reported identification with the Catholic Church and one was Christian.

#### Summary

Relevant factors in relation to help seeking behaviors were reported by participants. The significance

and possible implications of these factors will be discussed in the following discussion section.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Further discussion to the relevance of the findings is addressed in this section. This study set out to explore Latinas' utilization of domestic violence resources in the San Bernardino area. The study has identified barriers encountered by participants and consequently hope for infusing change due to such barriers may make things better in the delivery of services to this population.

#### Discussion

##### Help-Seeking Behavior

Data from an interview guide was used to investigate help seeking efforts of Latinas. It was found that transportation was not a significant barrier to the access of services due to the fact that eight out of ten respondents owned their own vehicles. However, respondents' lack of awareness of services in their communities was found. Similar to other studies addressed in chapter two, the women in this study stated that they had no awareness of the services and a level of inadequacy due to programs lacking Spanish-speaking personnel. One

respondent stated, "I did not know that someone could help me." Another respondent stated, "I have heard that there are services but I don't know how to go about getting them." In addition to lack of knowledge about services respondents who sought services, identified inadequacy of services as a barrier. A respondent commented, "I called but I was either put on hold too long, the phone was disconnected, and no one spoke Spanish at the places I called." Another respondent did access a shelter but she stated that, "The place was dirty, facilities didn't work, there were five families to one house and I was placed amongst violent women."

Family support was significantly high in this study due to eight out of ten women receiving financial and/or emotional support from their immediate families. Just as Acevedo (2000) described the topic of familialism, which in turns goes back to dealing family problems within the family and not allowing others to intervene. Nevertheless, the family is a major barrier in accessing outside services such as counseling, legal protection, and financial resources.

#### Acculturation

This concept was measured by asking questions about years of residency in the United States and acquisition of

the English language. Results were inconclusive as number of years of residency did not necessarily resulted in acquisition of the English language. As other literature found that lack of acculturation, measured by acquisition of the English language, was a barrier in Latina women seeking services, for this study findings could not uphold acculturation as a significant barrier. Given that 50% of respondents did speak English and 50% did not. Of those that did speak English, length of residency was not different from the non-English-speaking respondents. However, of significance is the fact that of those that do not speak English; they tend to live in ethnic enclaves where they are able to communicate in their own language, and thus acculturation does not play a survival element.

#### Approval of Violence

Upon examining the participant's approval of violence certain variables were examined. First variable examined was that of the participant's level of education. In this category, relevance was not established. Participants' education ranged from as little as second grade education to working on graduate degrees. Nevertheless, this implies that domestic violence affects all women regardless of the level of educational attainment.

Next variable examined was that of the participant's definition of violence. Interestingly nine out of the ten participants included verbal abuse in their definition of domestic violence. One participant depicted her verbal abuse as; "he often calls me names, yells at me, humiliates me in front of others, and belittles my womanhood by stating that I am not even good as a woman." Of those that included physical abuse to their definition reported being pushed, slapped, hair pulled, stabbed, raped, and punching in the face and body. One woman stated, "I had three miscarriages due to him raping me." Another woman reported fear; "I had to make arrangements to leave because I could not sleep at night for fear that he would stab me during my sleep." Control was also included in the definition of four participants. They stated that their partners requested to know where they were all of the time by calling them at home throughout the day and would have complete control over the finances. Interestingly, they all acknowledged being victims of domestic violence upon conclusion of their own definition.

Another variable that helps understand the problem and was of significance in this study was that of history of domestic violence in their families of origin. Having witnessed or coming from such dysfunction and not knowing



any different influenced them into staying and tolerating the abuse. Seven out of the ten reported witnessing and/or experiencing family violence in their families of origin. Several participants reported feeling scared when their fathers would hit and/or yell at their mothers. Another respondent stated that she wanted to kill her father due to his brutal beatings of her mother. Yet, she grew up to tolerate violence in her own relationship. These findings strongly support the theoretical approach taken to examine the problem of domestic violence. Social learning theory states that models for aggression can be found within families and that it is learned through modeling, observation, and/or direct experience. Most of the women in the study had directly experienced and grew up day after day witnessing their fathers beating-up on their mothers and at times they were also targets of the aggression.

In addition to their perspective of victimization of domestic violence, the researchers examined their attempts at getting out of their abusive relationships. All except for three had made attempts at leaving their abusive relationships several times of which the highest was ten attempts. Most of those attempts involved leaving their spouses to go live with family who were able to provide

their basic needs and who would also threaten to take away the aid should they return to their spouses. As Turner and Shapiro (1996) found that social workers tend to spend too much time in addressing the women's hierarchy of needs, yet ignore the loss of the relationship, thus women return to their abusers. The family thus helps financially, yet it is not always equipped to help with the loss of the relationship and in turn may be the culprits as to why the women return to their abusive partners. Another important cultural factor is the high importance that the Latino has on the family unit and maintaining that family unit. Becerra, Acevedo, and Florez-Ortiz (1993) found that the family was of high importance to women staying in their relationships. They strongly adhere to the strict gender-roles of being the one who cares for all their family members.

Lastly, when measuring influence of religion in staying with the abusive partner, results yielded little significance in this study's sample. Only four reported being influenced to stay. One of the four women stated that, "Marriage is a holy sacrament and it is for life." Thus religion may influence some women to remain in the abusive relationship as reported by Becerra. The Catholic religion adheres to strict gender roles and discourage

divorce, thus it may be reason but no relevance was found in this study.

#### Substance/Drug Use

When taking in consideration the variables of substance/drug use in the family of origin, a high level of significance was found in this sample. Seventy percent of the respondents reported alcohol and/or drug use in their family of origin. Several respondents reported that the violence often occurred when the father came home drunk. One respondent sum things up by stating, "when our father got home drunk, we knew better to stay out of his way or else we would end up getting hit like our mother." In addition, 60% reported drug and/or alcohol abuse by their partners and in which in most cases the abuse of the drugs and/or alcohol would lead up to physical and verbal abuse at home. The relationship between alcohol/drug abuse and domestic violence is pretty strong as suggested by Coleman and Strauss (1979) who found a strong correlation in their study. Yet it does not mean that alcohol/drug consumption is the culprit, although it is a relevant factor (1979).

#### Psychosocial Stressors

As part of examining psychosocial stressors, the first variable examined was the number of children and

their ages. High significance was found in this category due to 60% of the women stating that they stayed and/or returned to the relationship for the well being of the children. Little significance was found in the number and specific age of children. This result was also noted in Acevedo's study as the children played a salient role in whether the women left or stayed in the relationship. The women stated that they stayed due to wanting to keep an intact family and/or so the children could have a father figure in their lives. Yet others left their spouses so that the children did not have to grow-up in such horrible environment.

Another variable examined that measured a psychosocial stressor was legal status. Others studies have found that legal status to be a significant barrier to accessing services, yet in this study it was irrelevant. This variable showed no significance as 80% of the sample had legal status and none of the women reported illegal status as a reason for staying in the relationship and/or not accessing services for domestic violence. Nevertheless, as Becerra (1998) found that Hispanic women's undocumented status keeps them isolated and trapped in violent relationships.

Lastly, source of income yielded mixed results. Less than half of the sample stated that they stayed in the relationship for financial support. They reported family, spouses, and/or public assistance (TANF) as sources of financial support. This finding applies only for this sample due to 50% of the respondents reporting full-time or part-time work.

#### Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study was the nature of the subject and the target population. The researchers sought women in the community who had not been previously identified and or linked to a domestic violence program. Therefore accessibility to this population was only possible through a snowball sample. Interestingly, none of the subjects referred for interview refused to participate. Nevertheless out of eighteen willing subjects only ten followed through with the interview process. Potential subjects displayed resistance through avoidance, continual rescheduling of interview appointment, and phone hang-ups. The final limitation was the small sample size, which resulted from the above constraints. Therefore, having a small sample size limits the researchers' ability to generalize the findings of this study to all Latinas.

Furthermore because it was a snowball sample the study contains a high concentration of Mexican women. Thus it does not represent other Latin American women.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

This project's recommendations for social work practice are to increase outreach to underrepresented populations such as this one. This sample identified lack of awareness of services. Therefore, it is imperative that social workers increase their presence in the community and be educators of resources and the evils of domestic violence. Furthermore, it is necessary to have bilingual social workers to serve the growing demand in the Hispanic population. In addition, domestic abuse should be assessed at every encounter with women especially Latinas. Social workers can impact policy by advocating for adequate funding so local programs can tailor their services to different populations. Cultural competency should be required for programs providing services in order to better understand the needs, the barriers and service modalities favored by Latinas. Outreach efforts may include social work presence in church gatherings, agency health fairs, and cultural festivities in the community. Social workers could distribute pamphlets to educate about

domestic violence and availability of resources.

Recommendations for future research are a larger sample size with more variation on ethnicity so findings can be generalized. Additional time is also needed to compensate for the ambivalence of the subjects.

### Conclusions

This study explored Latinas' utilization of domestic violence resources. The findings for this study indicate that Latinas lack awareness of existing services in their communities, rely heavily on family support, are influenced by previous experience of alcohol/drug use and domestic violence in their families of origin, and put the welfare of their children above their own. Those were the barriers identified by the participants as the reasons why they do not utilize services. Therefore, the need to increase outreach and provide education about existing community resources is a pressing challenge for all social workers.

APPENDIX A  
AGENCY LETTER



**CENTRAL  
CITY  
LUTHERAN  
MISSION**

*A Neighborhood Development Project Empowering People*

*"Bringing The Word  
Through Creation Of  
Community"*

1354 North G Street San Bernardino, CA 92405 Phone: 909-381-6921 Fax: 909-884-5104 e-mail: cclm@mindspring.com

March 7, 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

By means of this letter I would like to confirm my agreement to permit the use of this facility for data collection by social work interns Lillian Navas and Lilia Santoyo, students from California State University-San Bernardino, Dept. of Social Work. They will be gathering information from our Latin American Women's Program.

Sincerely yours,



(The Rev.) David J. Kalke

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your marital status? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your ethnic background? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you speak English? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you employed? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a.) What is your source of Income \_\_\_\_\_?
6. How many years of education do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you have legal status in this country? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How many years have you been living in this country? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you practice a specific religion? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a.) How important is your religion to you?  
0) A lot    1) Somewhat    2) Not at all
  - b.) Do you believe your religion influenced staying in the relationship?
10. Do you have any children? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a.) How many and what are their ages?
11. How do you get to places? Do you drive? Own a car? Bus stops nearby? Explain
12. Is there any hx of substance abuse in your family of origin? Are there any problems with substance abuse (alcohol and illicit drugs) with you and/or significant other?
13. What constitutes Domestic Violence to you?
14. From what you describe as Domestic Violence, at any point in time have you considered yourself a victim of domestic violence?  
Yes/No        Why?

15. In your family of origin did you ever witness any domestic violence? If yes, how did you feel about it?
16. Have you ever left a relationship or current relationship as a result of violence in that relationship?  
What happened to make you take that decision?  
Did you return?  
Yes/No? Why?
17. Have you confided with anyone in your family regarding the domestic violence in your home?  
What did they recommend?  
If your family is aware of the problem, have they shared their feelings about the situation? If so, what were their feelings and advice if any?
18. Are you aware of services for Domestic Violence? Would you know how to access them?  
Have you ever attempted to access such services? Were there any problems with accessing them?  
Are there any services close to your home?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## Informed Consent

Our names are Lilia Santoyo and Lillian Navas and we are MSW students at California State University, San Bernardino. We would like to invite you to participate in our study that investigates the barriers to services for domestic violence in Latinas. Although you are not expected to benefit directly by your participation, it is hoped that the results will expand the knowledge base for those social workers that work with Latinas victims of domestic violence. The Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to attend an interview and answer question related to your experiences with domestic violence. This should take about 45-60 minutes of your time. *the delivery of medical services*

Your responses will remain completely confidential and your identity will not be revealed at any time during and after this study. If you choose to participate, please complete the survey and sign the informed consent letter with an X. Please return consent form to interviewer.

Please feel free to contact our research advisor Dr. Janet Chang, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and/or any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, at 909-880-5184 Department of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you agree to do so please indicate with an X and fill in the date below.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I acknowledge that I am over 18 years of age. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason if I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Please mark this space with an X) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Carta de Consentimiento

Nuestros nombres son Lilia Santoyo y Lillian Navas y somos MSW estudiantes de la Universidad del Estado de California, San Bernardino. Nos gustaria invitarle a participar en un estudio que investigara las experiencias de mujeres con la violencia domestica. Aunque usted no se beneficie directamente con su participation, el deseo es que los resultados expandan el conocimiento para trabajadores sociales que trabajan con clientes de abuso domestico. El Departamento de Trabajo Social sub-Comite de el Institutional Review Board de California State University, San Bernardino, ha aprobado este estudio.

Si usted elije participar en este estudio, se le pedira que participe en una entrevista. Eso tomara aproximadamente entre 45- 60 minutos de su tiempo. Las preguntas son relacionadas con sus experiencias con abuso domestico y el uso que usted haya echo de servicios ofrecidos en la comunidad. Sus respuestas seran mantenidas completamente en confidencia y su identidad no sera revelada durante ni despues de este estudio. Si usted elije participar, por favor complete la encuesta y firme la carta de consentimiento con una X

Devuelva la carta de consentimiento a la persona conduciendo la encuesta. Por favor sientase libre de comunicarse con Lilia Santoyo (909) 820-1290, Lillian Navas (909) 520-9352 o con nuestra consejera de estudio Dr. Janet Chang si usted tiene alguna pregunta o interes hacerca de este estudio. Si usted tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos como participante por favor comunicarse con Dra. Rosemary McCaslin al 909-880-5507, Departamento de Trabajo Social, California State University, San Bernardino.

Gracias por considerar ser participante en este estudio. Si usted esta de acuerdo con participar por favor indique con una X y escriba la fecha de hoy en el espacio de abajo.

Yo reconozco que he sido informada de y entiendo, la naturaleza y proposito de este estudio, y Yo libremente consiento a participar. Yo reconozco que Yo soy mayor de 18 anos de edad. Yo entiendo que puedo retirarme de este estudio a cualquier momento y por cualquier razon si asi lo deseo.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Por favor marque este espacio con una X) Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT



### **Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for participating in the study examining the experiences of Latinas with Domestic Violence and the barriers they face which affect them seeking or not seeking help.

If your participation in this research raises any issues you would like to discuss further, there are resources available for you to talk to someone. A list of resources has been attached.

If you would like more information about the results of the study, a copy will be available in the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino (909)-880-5091.

### **Sumario Breve**

Gracias por su participacion en este estudio que examino las experiencias de Latinas con Abuso Domestico y las barreras que se les presentan lo cual les afecta para buscar o no buscar ayuda.

Si su participacion en este estudio le ha afectado en manera adversa y le gustaria obtener ayuda, hay varios recursos en la comunidad que le pueden ayudar. Una lista de recursos ha sido adjunta.

Si le gustaria mas informacion acerca de los resultados de este estudio, por favor de comunicarse con la Dra. Rosemary McCaslin, del Departamento de Trabajo Social, de la Universidad del Estado de California en San Bernardino al 909-880-5507.

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Lillian Navas and  
Lilia Santoyo

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Lillian Navas and  
Lilia Santoyo

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Lillian Navas and  
Lilia Santoyo

b. Methods

Team Effort: Lillian Navas and  
Lilia Santoyo

c. Results

Team Effort: Lillian Navas and  
Lilia Santoyo

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Lillian Navas and  
Lilia Santoyo