

Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence

Encuentro Latino
National Institute on Family Violence

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Domestic violence affects everyone!

- Neighbors
- Co-workers
- Extended family members
- Domestic violence occurs among all:
 - Age groups
 - Genders
 - Races
 - Educational Backgrounds
 - Denominations
 - Socioeconomic Groups



Domestic Violence Along the Border

- “Transition areas” have higher rates of domestic violence
- Related to stress and reduced protective factors such as:
 - church
 - friends
 - family
 - community



Why Immigrants Are More Vulnerable

- A lifetime abuse rate of 49.8%
- 50.8% are married to citizens or lawful permanent residents
- 72.3% of those married to a citizen or lawful resident have never had their spouse file legal immigration papers for them
- The lethality factor is 8x higher in relationships with physical/sexual abuse as opposed to psychological abuse



Barriers for Immigrant Victims

- Inability to make police report or ensure accurate report has been made
- Inexistent, inadequate, or substandard interpretation in court system
- Services often not offered in victim’s native language
- Complicated legal issues often compounded by language barrier
- Increased social isolation



Socio-Economic Barriers

- Unable to work due to immigration status
- Exploited wages
- Language
- Lack of formal education
- Lack of work experience in U.S.
- No access to government benefits due to legal status
- Abuser takes money earned or restricts work outside of home



Immigration Status

- Fear of deportation
- Threats by abuser to get the victim deported if she contacts the police or leaves him
- Fear that if police are called or protection orders filed, ICE will be contacted
- Inability to work and provide for family for lack of work permit
- Refusal by abuser to petition to legalize victim's status or threats to withdraw pending petitions



Access to Resources

- Welfare reform had detrimental effects on many immigrants
- No access to or inability to afford child care
- No health insurance for self or family
- Housing
- Little or no access to government benefits
- Little knowledge of domestic violence services



Cultural Incompetence/Acculturation

- Institutions
 - lack proper demographics such as bicultural or Spanish-speaking workers
 - don't understand needs of the community
- Lack of knowledge (by victim) about:
 - Criminal justice system
 - Family law
 - Public benefits
- Distrust of professionals
 - Especially health and mental health



History of Oppression

- Distrust of authority figures
- Negative experiences with law enforcement and other governmental institutions in country of origin
- History of war, persecution, and economic depression



Isolation

- Victim is often far from family and support system
- Family unaware of situation due to geographical distance
- Victim often unable to contact family
- Victim unable to travel to country of origin as a result of immigration status
- Abuser often limits victims contact with English speaking community



Cultural/Religious Issues

- Community influence
 - cultural mores
 - gender roles
 - sanctity of marriage
 - abuser's power/standing in the community
- Fear of being ostracized
- Family issues remain private
- Victim blamed for the violence
- Legal issues
- Lack of support from religious leaders



Psychological Abuse

- Threats to harm family in victim's country of origin
- Threats to flee the country with children
- Hiding or destroying important documents/immigration papers
- Destroying personal items from country of origin
- Accusing victim of marrying him only to legalize status



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