

# Existe Ayuda

Help Exists **FACT SHEET**



## Latinas and Sexual Violence

By 2050, the projected Hispanic population of the United States is expected to be 132.8 million, or 30 percent of the total population. Nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004), one in six females ages 13 and older are victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault. Based on the U.S. Census, projections for the Hispanic female population in the future, and the one-in-six victimization calculation, by the year 2050, the number of females of Hispanic origin who have experienced some form of sexual violence could reach 10.8 million.

According to the 2007 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), 78 percent of Hispanics ages 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

Victim service agencies across the Nation have not kept up with the rapid growth of Latina/o victim populations, which include subcultures with more than two dozen countries of origin. Consequently, many Spanish-speaking survivors of sexual violence are unidentified and beyond the reach of victim advocates, social services, legal service providers, the criminal justice system, and others who could help them.

With this fact sheet, we hope to increase awareness of issues affecting Latina victims of sexual assault.

## What You Should Know About Latinas and Sexual Violence

- Latina girls reported that they were likely to stop attending school activities and sports to avoid sexual harassment (American Association of University Women, 2001).
- Married Latinas were less likely than other women to immediately define their experiences of forced sex by their spouses as “rape” and terminate their relationships; some viewed sex as a marital obligation (Bergen, 1996).
- For the increasing numbers of women who make the journey across the Mexico-U.S. border, rape has become so prevalent that many women take birth control pills or get shots before setting out to ensure that they won’t get pregnant (Watson, 2006.)
- According to a report released by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2009), 77 percent of the Latinas surveyed said that sexual harassment was a major problem in the workplace.
  - Immigrant Latina domestic workers are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation because they depend on their employers for their livelihood, live in constant fear of being deported, suffer social isolation, and are vulnerable to their employer’s demands (Velloso, 1997).



- ❑ *Campesinas* or female farmworkers are 10 times more vulnerable than others to sexual assault and harassment at work; among all the burdens they bear, these are often the heaviest (Lopez-Treviño, 1995).

Latinas in any setting—from corporate offices to college campuses to meat-processing plants—need more linguistically and culturally relevant outreach materials to help them learn their rights.

## Challenges Identified by Victim Service Agencies

- **Lack of bilingual and bicultural direct service staff and volunteers.** Many rape crisis centers do not have a Spanish-speaking advocate available, so the phrase “I’m sorry I don’t speak Spanish” may be the only response many Spanish-speaking victims receive. In other cases, family members or children of Spanish monolingual victims are used as interpreters. This causes secondary victimization of family/child translators and can create additional problems for the agency and the victim as well. For some immigrants, Spanish is a second language to an indigenous language such as Zapotec, Mixteco, Quechua, or Guaraní, among the many indigenous languages spoken in Latin America.
- **Lack of bilingual and bicultural trainers.** *Confianza* or trust issues bear heavily on Latina/o interactions, especially when dealing with a very private and personal issue such as sexual violence. Without a competent pool of bilingual and bicultural trainers, victim service agencies cannot effectively promote the inclusion and meaningful participation of Latina/o communities.
- **Lack of bilingual and bicultural materials.** For the most part, the Spanish language materials that are offered by victim service agencies are literal translations of handouts originally created in English. Although a center may describe itself as offering Spanish-language services, quality and level of availability may vary radically as there are no set criteria for defining levels of language accessibility and cultural sensitivity or understanding. Victim advocates should be aware of diverse Latina/o groups and the differing acculturation levels that may exist and should respect the dialects that may be spoken within their agency service area.

## Recommendations for Eliminating Barriers

- What individual advocates can do—
  - ❑ Avoid stereotypical assumptions about Latinas/os. Enhance your outreach into Latin American communities by avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach, as language, education, and levels of cultural assimilation can vary greatly between and within Latin American groups. Latinas/os may be of any race; while two-thirds of Latina/o U.S. residents are of Mexican origin, the remaining groups identify with various national origins and subcultures from North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean. According to a Pew Hispanic Center report, 62 percent of all Hispanics living in this country are native born and 38 percent are foreign born (2010). Another Pew Hispanic Center report dispels the popular stereotype of undocumented or unauthorized migrants as mostly uneducated single males who perform manual labor in agriculture or construction (2005). Most unauthorized migrants live in families and work in many sectors of the U.S. economy. In terms of education, a quarter has finished high school and another quarter has some college education.
  - ❑ Learn about Latinas/os from diverse communities; get to know their particular cultural origins and level of acculturation (recent immigrants versus established groups with historic ties to the community). Learn about the organizations and groups they have formed, their concerns, and the service providers (e.g., physicians, daycare workers) who serve them.

- ❑ Find creative ways to partner with community organizations to integrate an awareness of sexual violence into common areas of concern and to promote safety, health, and well-being.
- What agency leaders and directors can do—
  - ❑ Ensure that staffing patterns adequately reflect the demographics of groups being served. Second-language access includes being able to communicate with someone immediately following the initial trauma and throughout the process of healing. This includes access at the moment of need via a crisis line, access to information regarding the rape exam, and access to the various levels of supportive services and legal advocacy that an agency may offer. Bilingual personnel are crucial for eliminating access barriers at every stage of the help-seeking process.
  - ❑ Promote cross-training and collaboration opportunities. Established Latina/o organizations—including local *centros Latinas/os* (community centers) and grassroots groups such as *promotoras* or community health workers that already have bilingual/bicultural staff, programs, and community trust—can be valuable allies and agents of change. They offer multidisciplinary collaboration opportunities for a more holistic and culturally specific approach to sexual violence prevention.
  - ❑ Earmark certain funds for second-language materials, bilingual and bicultural staff, interpreters, and so forth. Many bilingual employees of victim service agencies often find themselves overtaxed, underpaid, and sometimes expected to fulfill or supervise most of the center’s translation and interpretation needs. To bridge the communication gap, it is better to formally address an agency’s communication needs rather than rely on temporary patchwork attempts, such as soliciting in-house translation help or using online or electronic translation services.
  - ❑ Include a specific description of the bilingual services offered. For example, replace “services offered in Spanish” with a detailed list of specifically which services are provided. This should be written in Spanish on all agency materials and Web sites (e.g., *Servicios que se ofrecen en español*).

## About the Terms

Although “Hispanic” and “Latino” are often used interchangeably in American English, they are not identical terms. In 1970, the term “Hispanic” began to be used by the U.S. Census Bureau. In 1997, a notice in the *Federal Register* provided revised racial and ethnic definitions in which “Hispanic or Latino” replaced the single term. Although “Hispanic” is a term used more often in governmental publications and reports, “Latina/o” is used to refer to persons of Latin American descent of all generations and regardless of immigration status. Another consideration to be aware of is the preference among Latinas/os ages 16–25 to identify themselves first by their family’s country of origin (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

## References

- American Association of University Women Educational Foundation. 2001. *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in Schools*. New York, NY: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation.
- Bergen, R.K. 1996. *Wife Rape: Understanding the Response of Survivors and Service Providers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2004. National Crime Victimization Survey. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Lopez-Treviño, Maria Elena. 1995. "The Needs and Problems Confronting Mexican American and Latin Women Farmworkers: A Socioeconomic and Human's Right Issue." (Unpublished on file with author.) Cited by Maria Ontiveros. 2003. "Lessons from the Fields: Female Farmworkers and the Law," *Maine Law Review* 55: 157, 168.
- Pew Hispanic Center. 2010. *Latinos and the 2010 Census: The Foreign Born Are More Positive*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Available at <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=121>.
- Pew Hispanic Center. 2009. *Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Available at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/117.pdf>.
- Pew Hispanic Center. 2005. *Pew Hispanic Center Offers Fuller Portrait of Unauthorized Migrants*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Available at <http://pewhispanic.org/newsroom/releases/release.php?ReleaseID=33>.
- Southern Poverty Law Center. 2009. "Sexual Abuse/Discrimination." *Under Siege: Life for Low-Income Latinos in the South*. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center. Available at [www.splcenter.org/publications/under-siege-life-low-income-latinos-south/4-sexual-abuse-discrimination](http://www.splcenter.org/publications/under-siege-life-low-income-latinos-south/4-sexual-abuse-discrimination).
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2008. *An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. Available at [www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html).
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2007. American Community Survey 2007. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Vellos, Diana. 1997. "Immigrant Latina Domestic Workers and Sexual Harassment." *American University Journal of Gender and the Law* 5(2): 409, 413, 419–428. Available at [www.wcl.american.edu/journal/genderlaw/05/vellos.pdf?rd=1](http://www.wcl.american.edu/journal/genderlaw/05/vellos.pdf?rd=1).
- Watson, Julie. 2006. *Women Risk Rape, Death in U.S. Journey*. New York, NY: Associated Press.