

Realidades Latinas: The Impact of Immigration and Language Access A National Domestic Violence Hotline Survey

Executive Summary

national
latin@
network
casa de esperanza

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

Increasingly, domestic violence advocates across the United States have reported stories of immigrant survivors and their families who have been negatively impacted by immigration enforcement policies that increasingly rely on local law enforcement involvement. Additionally, advocates report that immigrant survivors are more fearful of calling the police or going to the courts to seek help. This difficult, and at times life-threatening, situation has been compounded by the challenges that survivors may encounter with language access. The National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, a project of Casa de Esperanza, partnered with the National Domestic Violence Hotline, with support from the US Department of Health and Human Services, to develop and conduct a survey regarding barriers that Latina domestic violence survivors may face when seeking and accessing services.

Over a period of 6 weeks, from June 25th to August 8th, 2012, Hotline advocates administered the survey to callers who identified as Latina survivors of domestic violence. Survivors were included in the survey if they were not in immediate crisis and agreed to participate. During this time period more than 11,000 individuals called the National Domestic Violence Hotline. 12% of the total callers to the Hotline (1,305) identified as being of Latina/Hispanic origin.

The results of the survey documented issues with language accessibility as well as issues related to immigration status. 39% of Latinas who indicated that they had been born in a foreign country reported that they were afraid of calling the police or going to court for help as a result of the general immigration situation. For example, one caller stated: “Yes, I’m afraid because I have heard many cases of people reaching out for help and being deported instead.” Survivors stated that abusers often threaten them that they will be deported if they call the police. They also feared being separated from and losing custody of their children if they are put into detention.

Nearly 1 in 3 Latinas who completed the survey in Spanish (31%) reported that they had encountered challenges accessing domestic violence related services because of language accessibility issues. According to the qualitative responses, women reported issues with language access when calling the police, when reaching out to local DV shelters, and when attempting to access legal assistance or help from the court system. Many programs and services they encountered did not offer services or resources in the survivors’ languages.

It is no coincidence that many of the women in this survey reported an increased sense of fear due to immigration issues. In reality, deportations of immigrants are at a historic high (approximately 400,000 a year), and the increasing involvement of local law enforcement in immigration enforcement efforts may have a chilling effect and drive immigrant victims further into the shadows. The increased vulnerability and stress, compounded by the challenges in accessing services due to language barriers, may put immigrant Latinas at increased risk for experiencing domestic violence or other forms of abuse and less likely to seek or obtain help.

You can access the report on the NLN website (www.nationallatinonetwork.org) under the Research tab. You will find the full survey report, along with recommendations for service providers, law enforcement, courts, and DHS to address these issues.