



M U J E R E S
L A T I N A S E N A C C I Ó N

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Mujeres Latinas en Acción Unveils Report on Domestic Violence

10% increase of Latinas served by domestic violence programs compared to 2006 data

Chicago, Illinois - Mujeres Latinas en Acción unveiled the comprehensive research study *Latina Portrait: Domestic Violence and Latinas*, which examines the challenges and barriers that many Latinas face when accessing Domestic Violence services. The report shows that cultural, familial and religious values, low-income level, transportation and immigration status are the main obstacles Latinas face when seeking resources for domestic violence.

Key findings reveal that:

- As of March 2011, the 12th Police District, where Mujeres Latinas en Acción's main site is located, reported an average of **1-9 cases** of domestic disturbance, domestic battery, and violation of orders of protection **each day**.
- In 2010, out of the 30 domestic violence homicides that took place in the City of Chicago, **four of the victims were Latina**.
- The 2010 Domestic Violence Help Line Report states that **29,641 phone calls** were answered: **6%** of the calls were conducted in Spanish.
- 93% of the victim series callers were female and most of them sought shelter and legal services. **21% of the victims were Latino**.
- Out of the **1,226 Latinas** who sought domestic violence services at Mujeres in 2011, **only 158** pursued an order of protection.
- While the overall number of clients served by Domestic Violence programs in Chicago in the last 5 years dropped, the number of Latinas served **increased by nearly 10%**.

“This report brings light to the different factors that are unique to Latinas that experience domestic violence,” said Marala Goode, policy expert and co-author of the report. “One of the main barriers that prevent Latinas to speak up about the abuse is the fear to being excluded by the family. It may be perceived as they are violating the value of family unity and risk not only losing their abusive partner but also the respect and acceptance from their own family and community,” added Goode.

The following are other barriers that Latinas face:

- **Cultural and Religious Beliefs:** Cultural concepts of machismo and marianismo create an unequal power structure. The socialization of many Latinas under the influence of the Catholic Church reinforces rigid gender roles and acceptance of God's will in relation to the abuse.

- **Socioeconomic Conditions:** Widespread low socioeconomic and educational levels limit options for battered Latinas. Many are economically dependent of their abusers.
- **Shelter Accessibility:** Safe houses for battered women are scarce. Existing shelters do not have bilingual and bicultural staff to assist the needs of monolingual Spanish-speaking Latinas.
- **Parental Visitation Rights:** Scarce numbers of centers ensure a safe exchange and supervised visits so victims remain protected from their abusers while fulfilling court expectations of visitation.
- **Immigration Status:** Fear of deportation especially when abusers use deportation as a threat.
- **Legal System:** difficulty to access the police and legal system for Latina domestic violence cases, pinpointing language services as the primary barrier
- **Services for Latina lesbians:** Latina lesbians are at greater risk of having their sexual orientation disclosed by the abuser, which may isolate them from traditional, possibly disapproving communities.

The report also offers recommendations for both policy makers and service providers to respond more effectively to domestic violence affecting Latinas. “With the growth in population of Latinos, it is imperative to increase the scope of services for this group,” said Neusa Gaytan, Director of Programs at Mujeres Latinas en Acción and co-author of the report. “It is crucial for all agencies to be equipped to address the unique cultural and language barriers that Latinas encounter.”

Among the key recommendations, the report underscores the need to expand funding to address the Latino population growth. It also highlights the need to provide resources that are effective and unique as the needs for Latinas who experience domestic violence. Among key recommendations:

- Establish positions for interpreters and bilingual staff in areas of high Latino/a growth.
- Mandate cultural and domestic violence sensitivity training for all employees of the criminal justice system, especially state and local law enforcement and court personnel
- Fund bilingual legal advocacy positions to help survivors navigate the court system
- Hire bilingual and bicultural staff in both administration and direct services

Finally, consideration of and responsiveness to cultural and racial differences must be central to any strategy to respond effectively to domestic violence affecting Latinas.

This briefing and research was supported by the Chicago Foundation for Women, the Woods Fund of Chicago, and Verizon Wireless.

About Mujeres Latinas en Acción

Founded in 1973, Mujeres is one of the longest standing Latinas incorporated organizations in the United States primarily administered by, and working on behalf of, Latina women. Mujeres Latinas en Acción is a bilingual/bicultural agency that empowers Latinas through providing services, which reflect their values and culture and being an advocate on the issues that make a difference in their lives.

www.mujereslatinassenaccion.org

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