

Including the Needs of Latina Women in Domestic Violence Services:

An Analysis of Washington, DC

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Abstract

This research examines domestic violence in Washington, DC when perpetrated against Latina women. The Latino community, with its unique cultural attitudes and language, is underserved by existing support services for domestic violence. This study examines how DC can better tailor its services to meet the needs of Latinas, as well as limit the barriers they sometimes face when looking for help. It primarily focuses on the perspectives of stakeholders who work directly with Latinas in the community.

Qualitative data was compiled through ten detailed individual interviews with domestic violence service providers. A DC-based colloquium on domestic violence and the immigrant community offered additional information. Interviews with five Metropolitan Police Department officers rounded out the research.

Based on this research, several recommendations were developed. Some of the issues include: greater communication between service providers about cultural competency issues, additional outreach with the Metropolitan Police Department (especially in districts three and four), more creative education and mobilization initiatives within the Latino community, and finally, improved targeting of grants so that money goes to organizations with the specific knowledge needed to utilize them effectively. This research will add to the existing literature on domestic violence and clarifies the need for more scholarship based on “intersectionality,” which examines how factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender intersect to effect individuals.

Keywords: domestic violence, Latinas, District of Columbia

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Including the Needs of Latina Women in Domestic Violence Services:**An Analysis of Washington, DC**

There is little doubt that domestic violence, a pattern of behavior in which a person uses any means necessary to assert power and control over an intimate partner, is a pervasive and complex social problem. Domestic violence has a variety of negative outcomes for its victims (World Health Organization, 2010). These outcomes include not only physical injury, but also higher rates of depression, low self esteem, and post – traumatic stress disorder, which can impact all aspect of life, including job performance (Swanberg & Logan, 2005) and parenting (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001).

Domestic Violence happens throughout the world and impacts people of all social, cultural, economic and ethnic backgrounds. I will generally be using the word “survivor” to refer to these people, as it is often the preferred term to “victim.” While domestic violence can occur in many different contexts, for this analysis the focus will be on the classic paradigm of the male-perpetrated female battery. Some controversial studies have found that men and women perpetrate domestic violence at the same rate in The United States. However, most dismiss this as unlikely. Regardless, female victims are more likely to suffer severe injuries or death as a result of domestic violence, and are disproportionately represented in clinical populations (U.S Department of Justice, 2000, Archer, 2006).

While domestic violence is one of the most chronically underreported crimes, most estimates are that about one in every four women will experience it in her lifetime (DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011). Domestic violence does not necessarily involve physical violence, however about 1.3 million American women are

victims of a physical assault by their intimate partners each year (DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011). Because domestic violence impacts so many victims, often leaving them with physical and emotional damage, its cost exceeds \$5.8 billion each year in The United States, \$4.1 billion of which is for medical and mental health services (DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011).

This analysis will concentrate on domestic violence when perpetrated against Latina women, a topic which has not received much coverage in the literature (Klevens, 2007). It is important to note that not all “Latina” women are the same, and even grouping these women together may be problematic. Most people of Latin American ancestry describe themselves as being from a specific country of origin, not as “Latina/a” (Corbett, 2009). With these preferences in mind, this analysis is only a starting point for understanding the more nuanced differences that exist between different women from Latin America.

Research on Latinos and the ways in which they reach social services is direly needed. It is estimated that Latinos will constitute about twenty-five percent of the U.S. population by 2050, and, as a result, there is an increasing need for more effective, customized responses when Latina women are the victims of crime (Shattell, Hamilton, Starr, Jenkins, & Hinderliter, 2008). Within the feminist movement there has traditionally been an emphasis on women’s shared experience of domestic violence, however “growing scholarship has acknowledged the significant role of race, culture, and ethnicity in assessing and intervening when domestic violence occurs.” (Bent-Goodley, 2001,196).

Many local agencies report that a smaller proportion of the Latina population utilizes their domestic violence services compared to other ethnic groups. This report will

focus on the barriers Latinas in the DC metropolitan area may face in reporting and leaving an abusive relationship, and what existing institutions can do to make it easier for Latinas to reach out. Current research about domestic violence in this community will be analyzed, and information gathered through in-depth interviews with social service providers and police officers will be assessed. Knowledge of these potential barriers can inform more culturally competent treatment of Latinas by these structures, as well as increase understanding in DC regarding how the community can better serve survivors of violence. It also aims to add to current research in the fields of cross-cultural and community psychology, and explore the importance of intersectionality in understanding domestic violence.

Literature Review

As mentioned previously, only a very small proportion of the literature on domestic violence pertains specifically to Latina women. However, the existing literature does give insight into important barriers Latina women may face in seeking domestic violence services. It also helps elucidate the academic point of view on domestic violence in the Latino community. Though many of these articles do not focus on Latina's experiences in DC, they give us a basis for being able to understand some of the barriers they may face in The District.

Domestic Violence Prevalence in the Latino Community

Research on the prevalence of domestic violence amongst Latinos is often contradictory. While some sources believe that domestic violence happens as frequently among Latinos as among non-Latinos when confounds are controlled for (e.g. Klevens, 2007), others suggest that the prevalence is much higher, up to fifty percent amongst

recent immigrants to the United States (Whitiker, Baker, Pratt et al., 2007, Ingram 2007). However, The World Health Organization suggests that these measures may have limited utility, as “mainstream” measures of domestic violence often come from a predominantly white, western perspective. As a result, these measures may not accurately quantify what women from other cultures experience as domestic violence. What signifies more or less severe abuse may also differ (2010).

Grouping Latinos together also ignores the differences in domestic violence prevalence rates depending on country of origin (Basuk, Dawson & Huntington, 2006). Feminists have also acknowledged that white Americans are quick to apply harmful stereotypes and assume that domestic violence happens much more often in minority communities (Crenshaw, 1991). Regardless of prevalence rates, some scholars have suggested that domestic violence is “deeply woven into the tapestry of Latino culture in The United States,” though this could be said of other communities, including among Caucasians (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994, 325).

Help-Seeking

Though the pervasiveness of domestic violence in the Latino community is difficult to measure accurately, there is relative agreement that battered Latinas seek help less often from informal sources such as friends, and formal sources such as the legal system, when compared to other ethnicities (West et al., 1998, Ingram 2007, Sokoloff, & Dupont, 2005). One study found that less than ten percent of battered Latinas sought help from domestic violence programs (Dutton, 2000). This fact is alarming because it may create the illusion that Latinas need less domestic violence services than other groups (Casa de Esperanza, 2010). Latinas also tend to stay longer in abusive

relationships before seeking assistance and are more likely to return to their abusers than are white women (Klevens, 2007). Latinas are even less likely to seek help if they are immigrants, (Dutton et al., 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002, Ingram, 2007). Finally, Latinos in the U.S receive fewer mental health services than other ethnic groups, even while experiencing a similar prevalence of mental health issues. This has been a concern for many government agencies (Shattell et al, 2008). Unfortunately, a study conducted in DC found that only half of the Latinas who do seek help from informal or formal sources found the support they received useful (Santiago & Morash, 1995).

Domestic Violence in Latin America

Perhaps a first step in understanding domestic violence in the Latino community in the United States is to understand domestic violence in Latin America. According to The World Health Organization, domestic violence is often prevalent in countries where poverty levels are high (this includes most of Latin America) as opposed to countries with lower levels of poverty, such as The United States (2010). However, it is important not to stereotype entire regions. As in The United States, an accurate view of the prevalence of domestic violence in Latin America is very hard to determine due to underreporting, differences in sampling methods amongst studies, and other complex factors. However, regardless of exact numbers, violence against women is a huge concern, as about 60% of female homicides in Latin America are due to domestic violence (Castro & Riquer, 2003), compared to about 33% in The United States (United States Department of Justice, 2003).

Because Latin America is such a large region, most studies focus on domestic violence in particular countries. However, it is hard to find data that gives a full picture of

the extent of the problem. For example, one study found that Chile lost 2% of its gross domestic product due to domestic violence, whereas other countries experienced less loss (.85% and 1.6% for Columbia and Nicaragua respectively) (Sanchez, 2004). A study in Buenos Aires found that 75% of so called “spontaneous abortions” were the result of domestic violence (centro de informatica de Argentina, 2006). Lastly, a study in Guatemala found that only 17% of women surveyed reported that they had not experienced violence in their home. (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). With the studies’ variations in methods and time periods it is hard to talk about domestic violence in the region as a whole.

However, the situation for many women in some Latin American countries appears quite dire. In some countries men are able to perpetrate violence with almost complete impunity (Pan American Health Organization, 2008). Women may have very little power to leave their situations because of economic constraints, and poor countries have very few resources to help compared to the huge amount of need (Pan American Health Organization, 2008). There may also be very few laws in place to protect survivors of violence (Macaulay, 2006).

Characteristics of some Latin American countries may contribute to higher rates of domestic violence. A first factor is a history of war or civil conflict, which may desensitize some communities towards extreme violence. Men who were forced to commit horrendous acts of violence may be back with their families, without any support during the transition (World Health Organization, 2010). Cultures where violence (particularly femicide) is prevalent may be more accepting of domestic violence as “normal” (Pan American Health Organization, 2008).

A second factor is the prevalence and acceptability of alcohol abuse among some men in Latin America, which has been shown to increase the occurrence and brutality of domestic violence (Gage, 2005, Moraes & Reichenheim, 2002). The third factor is the rigid gender roles for men and women. In some regions of Latin America women grow up with the idea that they must endure violence without questioning their husbands or partners (Galanti, 2003). The higher poverty rate in Latin America is a final factor that has been shown to increase the prevalence of domestic violence (Gage, 2005, Moraes & Reichenheim, 2002). The violence Latina women experience may force them to leave their countries of origin. One study found that about four percent of Latinas surveyed in The United States had fled Latin America because of domestic violence (Zarza & Adler, 2008).

Identified Barriers

Status as Women of Color in The United States. Whether a Latina woman is born in The United States or immigrates here from Latin America, she is a marginalized member of US society because she is a woman of color. Understanding the status of Latina women as a minority group in The United States is vitally important in understanding the specific challenges that Latina women face in reporting and leaving their abusers. Latina survivors of domestic violence tend to be less educated and more economically disadvantaged than white survivors, reflecting characteristics of Latinos in the U.S. overall (Klevens, 2007). Economic and social disadvantage may have a direct impact on help-seeking behavior (Shattell et al, 2008).

Furthermore, the unique experiences of Latinas as women of color, and the institutionalized racism and discrimination they may face from social service providers,

courts, health services, and other sectors of society, plays a large role in their willingness to seek domestic violence services (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Research has shown that “many women of color do not leave abusive relationships because they do not feel protected by [these] systems” (Bent-Goodley, 2005, 198). This may be why, according to one study, only twelve percent of battered Latinas would seek help from people within institutional settings (Sanitago & Morash, 1995). If a Latina has this general distrust of “the system,” it may add to all of the other obstacles they face in help seeking.

Hesitance to Utilize Police and Judicial Systems. A distrust of existing institutions because of discrimination contributes to the hesitance of many Latinas to contact or cooperate with police and other arms of the criminal justice system. Latinas are only half as likely to report abuse to authorities as survivors from other ethnic/racial groups (Zarza & Adler, 2008). Like other minority groups, Latinas may experience that the trauma of domestic violence is increased by the difficulties they face in seeking help from police, who expose them to unfair treatment and discrimination (Sokoloff, & Dupont, 2005). Some studies have shown that minority women, especially those of low economic status, are more likely to experience dual arrests (where they, as well as their partner are arrested), as well as unwanted removal of their children (Coker, 2001). In sum “these conditions create tensions for poor women of color between the need for some kind of state intervention to protect them from abuse in their homes and the recognition that many of the women most in need of such protection are made more vulnerable by these very interventions” (Sokoloff, & Dupont, 2005, 55).

Latinas may be especially fearful of police contact because of traumatizing experiences with police in their countries of origin, as corruption and police brutality are

common in some parts of Latina America (Paterson, 2006). Latinas who are undocumented may also fear deportation, or not being able to communicate with authorities if adequate linguistic services are not available (Raj & Silverman, 2002). These issues will be addressed later in this report.

Rigid Gender Roles. Gender roles are also important when examining domestic violence in the Latino community. It is important to note that many cultures have similarly unequal roles for men and women, including mainstream US culture. However, from an early age, Latino culture sometimes dictates that “men are the dominant, authoritarian figures, whereas women are the caregivers and nurturers, learning to take care of everyone else before themselves” (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994, 326). Men have the control in relationships, which means that women must depend on them for all decision-making (Shattell, Hamilton, Starr, Jenkins, & Hinderliter, 2008). In fact, one study suggests that Latina survivors of domestic violence are about twice as likely to be living in a male-dominated relationship compared to white female survivors (West et al., 1998).

In addition to traditional gender roles, two unique “cultural scripts” influence the roles of men and women. Marianismo, based upon the Christian ideal of the Virgin Mary, posits that a woman should be “submissive, self-sacrificing, and stoic” no matter what her husband does (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994, 326). Marianismo is coupled with the idea of Machismo, that men are superior to women, and should act out their most basic aggressive and sexual urges.

It is easy to see how an imbalance of power between males and females can exist based upon Machismo and Marianismo, and how resolutions of conflict in some Latino

relationships might be achieved by the absolute dominance of the male (Klevens, 2007). This is not to say that these cultural scripts impact every victim, as the rigidity of gender roles varies across socioeconomic levels and countries of origin (Marin & Marin, 1991) as well as by level of acculturation (Sabogal, Martin, Otero-Sabogal & Perez-Stable, 1987). However, research has found that many of these ideas are ingrained into the psyche of Latina survivors of domestic violence, leading many women to believe that it is their job to preserve family harmony, that they should be submissive and obey their husbands, that abuse is “acceptable and normal” to relationships, and that they should stay with their batterers because they are “devoted” (Raj & Silverman, 2002, 373).

Because their mothering role is so important to the identity of many Latina women, some choose to stay with their abusers, believing that it is better for the family to stay intact for the sake of the children (Kelly, 2009). Furthermore, because Latinas are expected to be the foundation of their family, some are reluctant to talk to outsiders about their problems. When they do talk to others in their community, they may be confronted with the attitude that it is their responsibility to “resolve” problems like domestic violence on their own. This attitude may even come from friends, family, and spiritual leaders (World Health Organization, 2008, Perilla, 2009). Latinas who do divorce or report their batterers may also be alienated from their communities because they have violated these traditional roles (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Some researchers and feminists believe it is important to look at these attitudes towards women as harmful patriarchal customs, not as a “culture” which needs to be respected (Delvechio, 1999, Daly, 1978).

Language Access. Language is another important barrier for Latinas, as “lack of access to linguistic services has prevented people of color from obtaining needed

services” and is, in general, a deterrent in any type of help-seeking behavior (Bent-Goodley, 2005, 199). If a Latina client is a native Spanish speaker she may be unaware of what domestic violence services are available to her because educational materials and websites are usually in English. Her abuser may force her to sign immigration or court papers that she doesn’t understand, and lie about their contents (Cultural Competency and Immigrant Women, 2011). Depending on country of origin, some Latinas may not be aware that domestic violence is a crime in The United States. Without this information available in Spanish, they may never know that they can seek legal help (Raj & Silverman, 2002).

It is important for domestic violence information to be available, not only in Spanish, but also in a way that is culturally appropriate. Using complicated language, or terms such as “batterer” and “rape” which have stronger implications in some Latin American cultures, may deter or confuse clients (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Even when Spanish speakers do seek help, one in three shelters do not have any Spanish speaking staff, and the process of using a translator, most often male, can be complicated (Shattell et al, 2008, Lyon, Lane, & Menard, 2009). Finally, embarrassment about language skills can be a barrier in itself, and can lead to feels of isolation, helplessness and depression, impacting a woman’s desire and ability to change her abusive situation (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994).

Acculturation. Level of acculturation also plays a large role in the seeking of domestic-violence resources. Acculturation, the “modification of groups' and individuals' culture, behavior, beliefs, and values by borrowing from or adapting to other cultures,” is a process that all Latina’s not born in the US must go through (Merriam Webster

Dictionary, 2011). While some studies have shown that rates of domestic violence increase the longer a Latino couple is in The United States (Ingram, 2007), others have shown that Latinas may have a greater susceptibility to abuse if they do not feel that they are assimilated into US culture (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994). However, most research agrees that higher acculturation level increases help seeking among Latinas (Raj & Silverman, 2002, Lipsky et al., 2006).

Several factors play into why being less acculturated may make it harder to get out of an abusive relationship. In many relationships among Latino immigrants the male partner has come to the US first. As a result, he may have a better knowledge of English and the ways in which US society works, and take care of everything related to living here (Perilla, Bakeman & Norris, 1994). A woman's reliance on her husband may leave her feeling unable to function in the U.S. without him, whether he is abusive or not (Raj & Silverman, 2002). This can limit her ability to be financially independent (Robert Wood Foundation, 2009).

Furthermore, the "trapped" feeling experienced by abused women in general may be exacerbated by a Latina immigrant's perceived inadequacy at functioning in US culture, where she may not be aware of legal options or social customs. Without basic information about US society and what is available to her, she may feel that she has very few options but to stay in a relationship with domestic violence (Murdaugh et al., 2004). For example, the most used social services by battered Latinas are Medicaid, food stamps, immigration assistance, and maternal and child health care. However a large number of Latinas who are eligible for these government benefits never obtain them (Dutton et al., 2000). Other studies have found similar results: fewer than three in ten

Latinas had heard of a restraining order, and very few were aware of local domestic violence agencies (Moracco et al, 2005). Many Latina immigrants are also isolated from family and friends and have little contact outside of their household, since, traditionally, their job is to stay home and watch the children. This makes it feel nearly impossible to reach out (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994).

Immigration Status. Acculturation and immigration issues are deeply tied and can be significant barriers to Latina's help seeking for domestic violence. Immigration-related barriers are especially important, as forty percent of all Latinos in the United States were born in other countries (Shattell et al, 2008). Prevalence of domestic violence amongst immigrants is believed to be higher than in the general population, some even say it is at "epic proportions," though definite data is not available (Raj & Silverman, 2002). It also may be more severe, as murder rates from many large US cities, including New York City, show that immigrant women are disproportionately represented among female victims of male-partner-perpetrated murder (Frye, Wilt, & Schomberg, 2000). However, this may be indicative of a failure of service providers to reach and help these women, rather than an indicator of more severe abuse (Robert Wood Foundation, 2009).

Immigrants often experience severe economic and cultural pressures, as well as discrimination, which can impact the incidence of abuse. Batterers may take advantage of a woman who has recently attained or is trying to attain citizenship. He may hide, destroy, or threaten to destroy the immigration documents of his partner or their children if they tell anyone about the abuse (Abraham, 1998). Batterers may also visit their victim's place of work and cause 'disruptions' which may jeopardize her ability to gain a

green card (Mehotra, 1999).

If a Latina woman is undocumented and abused, her situation may be infinitely worse. According to The Pew Hispanic Center, approximately 11.5 million to 12 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, accounting for about thirty percent of the U.S. foreign-born population. Since 2000 the undocumented immigrant population has increased by more than 500,000 persons per year (Black & Breiding, 2008).

Undocumented status often provokes intense fear and anxiety, “which influence[s] how individuals s[ee] themselves, interact with others in the community, and access resources” (Shattell et al, 2008, 357). Some Latinas have even suggested a lack of legal immigration status may be the most “salient element of their lives” in The United States (Casa de Esperanza, 4, 2010). Because of anti-immigrant sentiment in this country, Latinas may limit the exchanges they have with Anglos, even those who may be trying to help them (Dutton et al., 2000). Undocumented Latinas may believe that their lack of legal status prevents them from being eligible for services (and sometimes it does). Unless they are aware of their rights under the Violence Against Women Act, they may also believe that they are dependent on their husbands in order to gain legal status. This further inhibits them from reporting abuse (Raj, & Silverman, 2002).

Batterers often consciously control their victims by playing upon their deportation fears (Pan et al, 2006). Research has found that in relationships marked by domestic violence, seventy two percent of citizen and Legal Permanent Resident spouses do not file immigration papers for their wives (Dutton et al., 2000). This statistic suggests that batterers are aware that the undocumented status of their partner will make it easier to assert their power and control over them. Sadly, this strategy often works. Many

immigrant women report that threats of deportation against themselves or their children kept them in a relationship with domestic violence (Dutton et al., 2000). It may also stop women from contacting the police (Shattell et al, 2008). Unfortunately, “with little or no opportunity to report abuse or violence, get advice, services, or help, emotional distress, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder were not uncommon” amongst undocumented Latina immigrants (Shattell, et al, 2008, 359).

Conclusion. Though not all Latina women have the same experiences, current research makes it clear that there are several barriers that may explain the hesitation of some Latina women to seek help when they are being abused. These factors often interact closely with one another. For example, the isolating process of acculturation to an unfamiliar place where you do not fluently speak the language, combined with a crippling fear of deportation, exacerbated by stifling cultural norms, may all make it harder for a Latina immigrant to feel that they have many options to escape domestic abuse. Economic and social discrimination will only add to the difficulty. Knowledge of these barriers, with programs designed to combat them, may help more women get the help they need.

Method

Objectives

There are six main barriers identified by academics that Latina survivors of domestic violence face in seeking help for abuse. These barriers are: their overall status as a minority group in the United States; culturally-engrained gender roles and expectations; a distrust of police and the legal system; language barriers;

acculturation/knowledge of US systems; and immigration status. With this academic background as a guide, the following analysis seeks to examine this issue from multiple perspectives within a smaller context: The DC Metropolitan area. The main objective was to see if the barriers identified by academia are the same ones that affect Latinas in DC, in order to explore how service providers in the community can ensure that these barriers do not stop Latinas from reporting abuse. Though the original research proposal sought to include survivors themselves, participant safety and confidentiality is a problem when dealing with such sensitive issues. To get around this setback I sought the perspectives of service providers in domestic violence organizations who serve Latina clients. It is my hope that these stakeholders can accurately convey the concerns of the women they work with so closely.

Materials and Procedure

The first step was to gain greater insights into the issues surrounding domestic violence in the DC- based Latino community. To approach this issue I attended the *Dialogue on Diversity 2011 Domestic Violence Awareness and Immigration Colloquium* in the U.S Capitol Visitors' Center on October 26, 2011. This colloquium lasted from 11am to 4:30pm. I was able to hear twenty-two service providers, whose titles ranged from clinical psychologists, to attorneys, to executive directors, speak on the challenges of dealing with domestic violence in DC. Fifteen of the speakers work as direct service providers with domestic violence survivors or Latina immigrants. Of the twenty-two speakers, one spoke only Spanish. Her answers were later translated into English for ease of understanding in this paper. All of the largest domestic violence organizations in DC, such as The DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Ayuda, and WEAVE (which has

since closed) were represented. Topics included the psychological scars of domestic violence, the stressors related to being an immigrant, the link between substance abuse and domestic violence in the Latino community, and finally, the economic, social, psychological, and legal barriers Latina immigrants face in seeking help. I was able to take notes on the speakers, as well as on the questions and discussion that followed.

Further information about the colloquium is available online at <http://www.dialogueondiversity.org>. A video recording will also be available online in the coming months.

After the colloquium I wanted to explore some concerns in more depth. I saw the need to meet with service providers individually because they may not have been completely open about some issues in front of an audience. I was especially interested in asking how they believe that DC can improve its services for Latina survivors (for a copy of questions utilized, see Appendix 1. They will also be included in the *Barriers Identified by Service Providers* section). I completed ten detailed interviews with employees of domestic violence organizations throughout DC, Maryland and Virginia. There was no overlap between those I spoke to in individual interviews and those who spoke at the colloquium.

I first completed an internet search to find as many domestic violence agencies as I could in the area. These providers could help with a wide-range of services-housing, legal aid, counseling groups, etc. but I was only interested in those that work specifically with survivors of domestic violence. The organizations did not have to work only with Latinas, because I wanted insights from all types of domestic violence agencies. Those

who cater specifically to the Latino population would not represent service providers as a whole.

I then emailed the deputy directors or executive directors of all of the organizations I encountered (or the main office, if the director's information was not available). In my emails I explained that I would not use the respondents name or their organization's name in my final paper. Ensuring anonymity was key to getting honest answers. Because of low response rates, I also called each organization and asked if there was anyone available who could speak to this issue.

Due to concerns expressed both in individual interviews and the colloquium, I determined that the perspectives of police officers would add to my research. Because this issue is so complex, the more unique viewpoints I gathered the more I hoped to come closer to shedding light on key issues. To interview police officers, I completed five "Ride-Alongs." The Ride Along program allows any DC resident to accompany a police officer for their four hour shift in order to see what they do on an average day. I chose to complete these interviews in stereotypically low socioeconomic status neighborhoods and higher Latino-populated areas where there may be higher percentages of domestic violence calls (this has nothing to do with actual rates of domestic violence), as well as more interactions between police and Latinos. Because I work for a domestic violence organization as an advocate, I was assigned to police officers who were designated go on domestic violence calls if they were available. In some cases I was able to be with officers for their entire eight-hour shift. I would then be asked to help domestic violence survivors plan for their safety or contact other resources if needed.

During downtime, I asked officers if they would be willing to be interviewed, ensuring their complete anonymity. All police officers agreed to participate. In order to get honest answers, I kept the interviews very conversational. For the questions used in interviews please see *Appendix 2*. The views of the officers I talked to do not express the views of all police officers or of The Metropolitan Police Department as a whole, but they do shed light on some of the fundamental issues facing Latina women when dealing with the police.

Finally, I searched for themes in the data collected through the colloquium and individual interviews with police and service providers. I also drew upon my own experiences as a participant observer. As stated above, I worked for two semesters at a local domestic violence organization as an advocate on a hotline. I spent sixteen hours a week talking to police officers and domestic violence survivors over the phone. This experience added another viewpoint to the opinions expressed in interviews.

I used a simple coding procedure to identify trends in all of the interviews using the computer program excel. I then used this data to formulate recommendations for how institutions in The DC Metropolitan area can better serve Latina survivors of domestic violence. Though these recommendations are neither exhaustive nor universal, I believe more Latina survivors of domestic violence would get the help they need if they were implemented.

Sample

At the Dialogue on Diversity Colloquium I was looking to gather data from only the organizations that participate in direct service to Latinos or domestic violence survivors in the DC Metropolitan area. In total, fifteen providers did direct service, and

all worked in the DC Metropolitan area. Though speakers came from a variety of ethnic and work backgrounds, only two speakers included were male.

For the individual interviews needed for this analysis, I contacted about twenty-five organizations. I was able to complete ten full interviews. This makes my overall response rate forty percent. The low number of respondents was the main struggle I had with this part of my research. Some organizations may be too overloaded, and therefore did not have time to respond. Several organizations also said they would not have anything to say about the issue because they work almost exclusively with African Americans or other groups.

My final interview population included four people who worked at Latino-focused organizations and six who did not. Six interviewees identified as Latino/a, and eight interviewees spoke Spanish. This is one limit to my research. Because the organizations that responded were the ones that had more interest in the Latino community, I may not have gained an accurate picture of the opinions of service providers as a whole. I was also not able to tape record all responses. This means that all quotes, while as accurate as possible and reflective of the viewpoints intended, may not be verbatim. A final limit is that I was only able to interview one male about this issue.

For the police interviews, my final population was five white male officers who worked in DC. All officers had worked for the Metropolitan Police Department for between two and seven years. There are limits to this sample because it is so small, and because I wasn't able to gain the perspectives of Latinos or other minorities who work with in the department.

Results

Dialogue on Diversity Colloquium

Introduction. Many of the questions I hoped to address in my Capstone were presented on and discussed at the Dialogue on Diversity colloquium. Because I did not complete individual interviews with the speakers, I will keep this data separate from the data collected during my own interview process. However, as explained in the *Methods* section, all of the speakers included here (fifteen from the total number of twenty-two) provide direct services to domestic violence survivors or Latina immigrants. I am including this data first because it was completed before the majority of individual interviews, and went on to inform some of my later research questions.

To put this analysis within the context of domestic violence in DC, it is important to note how large-scale the problem is. According to the executive-director of one organization, the DC Metropolitan Police Department received one domestic violence call every seventeen minutes in 2010. This means that over 31,000 calls were placed in that year. Local social service agencies come in contact with many of these survivors, serving about 30,000 clients per year. However, some of these clients have never had contact with the police, and those who do have police contact may never come in contact with social service agencies. Some survivors never come in contact with either. This makes the prevalence of domestic violence in DC nearly impossible to determine. However, based on these figures and her experience, the executive-director determined that domestic violence is a “serious” and “widespread” phenomenon in DC, as it is in the country as a whole.

Identified Barriers

Immigration Status. Immigrant survivors were the main focus of the colloquium, and nearly every speaker mentioned lack of legal status as a major barrier for undocumented Latinas. This is largely because undocumented women may fear deportation if they come forward to social service agencies or the police. Though DC's local immigration laws are more progressive than national laws, even attendees who work for DC government agencies acknowledged that immigration laws might be preventing some survivors in DC from seeking help, a problem they are working to confront.

Secure Communities is one of the most controversial new immigration procedures. This nationwide initiative allows state and local police to check the fingerprints of people they book into jail against immigration databases. Several immigrants' rights advocates at the colloquium believe this policy prevents those who are undocumented from contacting police because of fear that they, or others involved in an incident, will be booked and then deported. This may be especially true in cases of domestic violence, where women are afraid for themselves and may also not want their partner deported. When women think about the futures of their children, this choice may become even more difficult to make.

These types of immigration initiatives may also affect an immigrant woman's desire to come in contact with social service agencies. One provider at the colloquium noted that after the implementation of *Secure Communities*, the two domestic violence intake centers in DC saw a large decline in the number of Latinos they served. Where before about eleven percent of clients at the intake centers were Latino, after *Secure*

Communities this number dropped to five percent. Data kept on lethality assessments, which measure the severity of domestic violence, showed that the Latinas who did come in to the intake centers were experiencing extreme forms of abuse. The speaker believed that this was because many Latinas had waited longer to come in to the center than they would have if *Secure Communities* were not in place.

Other speakers who mentioned *Secure Communities* concurred that the new executive order rejecting DC's full participation was helpful. Now, in theory, only very violent criminals are run through immigration databases. However, no one claimed that the fight for immigrants' rights in DC was over. As one provider asserted, "the increasing pull to unite local police departments with national immigration offices means that 'la migra' (immigration authorities) and 'la policía' (the police) are more and more the same thing...to the disadvantage of victims of crime in our city."

Many service providers used examples from their work to illustrate the obstacles that immigrant survivors face. One speaker talked about a woman who was arrested after a fight with her partner, who had abused her for years. Because of *Secure Communities*, both were searched in the immigration database upon being booked. Her partner was released from jail because he is a legal resident, and the survivor was deported back to her country of origin, despite the best efforts of the organization to advocate for her. Her children were then left in the care of the man who had abused her. The service provider pointed out that, while abusers have always used deportation fears as a way to control their victims, now that real life experiences of those in their community back up these fears, survivors become increasingly resistant to police contact. A speaker later

mentioned that most women are worried about what will happen to their children if they report the abuse, and stories like this one make them feel like it is not worth the risk.

Another service provider talked about how the United States is “wearing Latinos down” with its immigration laws. “Why,” he asked rhetorically, “do we want to constantly subjugate people to the point that they desperately want to leave our country?” He also pointed to the anti-immigrant rhetoric, such as calling a person *illegal*, as another regrettable sign that immigrants in the United States are not treated with the respect and empathy that they deserve. He believes that many undocumented women would never think help is available to them because they are never treated as equal members of our society. He talked about one survivor he worked with who called the police three times in one day begging for a Spanish interpreter while her husband was beating her. Each time the police came unaccompanied by anyone who spoke Spanish. Her husband spoke English, and repeatedly told the officers they were in a fight because his wife had stolen money from him. Eventually, without anyone to hear her side of the story, the client was arrested and spent two months in jail, while her batterer walked free. The provider pointed to the 14th amendment of the Constitution, which provides for equal protection under the law, noting that American ideals are violated when injustices like this occur.

One survivor named Lucy, an immigrant from El Salvador, spoke as a part of one of the presentations. She explained that people in her neighborhood knew about the abuse she faced because they could hear it all the time, but never said anything to her or offered to help her. The friend she talked to about it told her it would be a bad idea to leave her husband, saying, “you have to put up with it because he is your husband.” Lucy felt that she didn’t have anywhere to turn to. Unfortunately, when Lucy tried to get help from a

domestic violence agency, she felt that no one believed her. When she was finally able to get into a shelter, she was asked to show immigration documents which she did not have. Though she now has found the help she needed with one of the Latina-focused organizations in DC, she explained, “This is why it took me so long to leave, and I kept going back.”

Economic Restraints. The intersectionality of immigration status with many other barriers was very evident in the discussions and presentations of service providers. One significant barrier addressed by the majority of speakers, was the economic constraints that face many immigrants, especially women. Because most Latin American immigrants in DC come from Central American, where social mobility and opportunity may be limited, they often come with low levels of education (this is especially true for females), job skills, or much extra income. Many women, entirely dependent on their husbands for income, do not know how they could support themselves without him. They may not have access to extra money to learn English or obtain new job skills. This predicament “force[es] women to choose between staying in an abusive relationship or facing economic hardship, extreme poverty, and homelessness,” according to one social worker.

Especially when children are involved, the decision to leave an abuser may be almost impossible. Supporting a family alone on a low-wage job may mean long hours and added life stressors. Another service provider explained, “It is hard for most immigrants to find a job where they are not being abused sixteen hours during a work day. How can you tell [a survivor] that this is better than being beaten by her husband—because it may not be!” From service provider’s experience, these types of hard

decisions, which those outside of this context may not be able to understand, characterize the situations of many immigrants.

Alcohol Use. One clinical psychologist also mentioned the pervasiveness of alcohol abuse in the Latino community as a barrier that often intersects with the context of immigration. Alcoholism has been linked to domestic violence in several studies in The United States and Latin America (for example Gage, 2005, and Moraes & Reichenheim, 2002). This service provider believes that alcoholism in Latino immigrant communities in the United States derive from Latin America. In Latin America alcohol abuse is sometimes considered more acceptable and tolerated because it is commonly used as a coping mechanism. High alcohol use, the cultural ideal of machismo, and the war and street violence in Latin America, make for an especially violent combination. This behavior often passes from generation to generation, and can be carried to The United States, where the stress of being an immigrant in a new culture sometimes exacerbates alcohol use.

Language Access. Language was also identified as a significant barrier, especially among recent immigrants. One service provider asked everyone in the room to close their eyes and imagine that they were dropped in a country where they did not know the language and did not have the resources to learn it. This would make finding help for any situation seem “almost impossible.” Almost everyone in the room nodded in agreement. Another provider added that language barriers contribute to the isolation many Latinas feel in The United States.

Hesitance to Utilize Police and Judicial Systems. It was also common for speakers to talk about the problems survivors encounter in dealing with the police. Most

police officers are not trained in cultural competence or methods for assisting survivors of domestic violence. One service provider asserted that the lack of female officers makes it nearly impossible for most Latinas to feel comfortable talking about domestic and sexual violence, and the response they receive from male officers is often “lacking.” Another said it more bluntly, claiming, “They [the police] often abuse her more than the man.” A third provider linked the similarities in the way women are treated by their batterers and, sometimes, by police. “The actions of these men reflect something that is going on in society, and reflect the way society “thinks.” The abuser and the macho police officer who does nothing to help her are inspired by the same social phenomenon.” Another added “when a police officer just leaves because he doesn’t understand [a survivor], this is a violence in and of itself; when a woman is treated as “illegal” when she really hasn’t done anything wrong, that is also violence. ”

The negative experiences Latinas may have with police in the United States only magnifies the hesitance some women already feel in interacting with police officers. In Latin America, police abuse and hesitancy to get involved in matters of domestic violence is commonly acknowledged. One provider noted, “If you’re from rural Mexico and try to report the abuse you are experiencing, the police won’t do anything. They will tell you: ‘He’s your husband, figure it out.’”

Latina women In The U.S., especially recent immigrants, may have comparable experiences with the judicial system, which can be similarly plagued with discrimination and a lack of cultural competence. In order to get a criminal protection order or apply for legal status as a victim of violence, a survivor must go to court. Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), immigrants who are survivors of domestic violence may

be able to gain citizenship. However, according to one speaker, it is common during the process for a prosecuting lawyer to accuse women of making up the abuse in order to gain citizenship. Some defense lawyers say similar things about these women in open court, showing a lack of regard even for their own client. Furthermore, women who are immigrants may not have any idea how the system works. Entry into rehabilitative domestic violence programs for men in DC requires a court-mandate or a protection order. If women are hesitant to use the legal system, men may never get the therapeutic help that could stop the cycle of violence.

Some domestic violence service provider's lack of understanding of Latina immigrants and the barriers they face was also a concern. Though speakers generally emphasized the strengths of the anti-domestic violence and feminist movements, some do not think that marginalized women, such as Latina immigrants, are always represented in these movements. Some speakers also acknowledged that mainstream domestic violence organizations in DC lack "necessary cultural competence."

Role of Intersectionality. Many providers stressed the need to understand the complexities faced by those who have immigrated to The United States, whether legally or not. While a lack of opportunity and social mobility in Latin America is obviously a key factor, many women also come because they are fleeing violence or political unrest in their countries of origin. Eighty percent of Latinos in DC are from El Salvador, a country plagued by civil war. Several service providers talked about the additional layers of trauma that these women may have experienced. These experiences may differentiate them from other domestic violence survivors.

Many Latina immigrants grow up in high violence areas, where they may have experienced civil wars, police brutality, childhood sexual abuse or other violence against them or their families. In addition, some immigrants endure extreme hardship when crossing the border. Many women are sexually assaulted. This means that when some of these women step into an agency they are coming not only with a history of domestic violence, but also with layers of other trauma. A service provider's role has additional significance for immigrant clients and must be used to carefully build trust with them. Without any knowledge of the context of immigration, it is possible providers will be insensitive to the various needs and feelings of Latinas.

Another service provider spoke about the importance of dual identities to Latina women. A survivor should not be considered just a "battered Latina." She is also from a certain country of origin, lives in a particular US city, and belongs to a particular social class, etc. These dual identities impact the way she may reach and obtains services. It is very important to understand these different contexts and use them to best serve the client. There are several strengths to be found in these dual identities, as well as layers of discrimination that clients may face because of them. Asking women about their backgrounds and identities may be important when establishing a rapport with them.

Service Provider Limitations. Finally, speakers were candid about their limitations. Once survivors have restraining orders, or have separated from their abusers in some form, they may not have anywhere to go. For those who do not speak English or do not have many job skills, life in The United States may be difficult without their partner, and their options may be limited. Like all domestic violence survivors, their

abuser will be an omnipresent force in their lives, and they may suffer from depression, anhedonia, and anxiety.

Several speakers said that their lack of resources limits the amount of support they can provide to help survivors through this difficult period. Some providers were frustrated that programs that support undocumented immigrants are especially short of funding. One asked, “is someone’s life more important if they are rich? If they have papers? I do not think so.” Another echoed a similar sentiment. He believes that, by putting more money towards “mainstream” domestic violence services, the government is implying that some lives are more important than others. In response, one provider mentioned that non-profits must work together instead of competing for the few resources directed towards the Latino community.

Actions to undertake in DC. Developing best practices or discussing needed changes was not a focus of the colloquium. Though many barriers were identified, concrete solutions were generally not discussed in detail. However, there was a consensus about some possible actions that could be undertaken in DC.

Outreach. Education and outreach were the main priorities of the agencies that attended the colloquium. Some suggested more seminars such as Dialogue on Diversity to allow for more idea sharing between agencies. Others recommended that more outreach be directed towards the Latino community itself. There was some disagreement on what the focus of community outreach should be. Most speakers stressed the need to educate women on the services available to them in Spanish. Others saw the need as more basic. According to one provider, recent immigrants often have very narrow definitions of what constitutes domestic violence. They may also not believe that sexual assault can

happen within a relationship. This means that some women might not label what partners have done to them as abuse, and without this knowledge there may be little incentive to seek help. In her opinion, outreach should address these more basic issues as a first step.

Because of the hesitance to talk about domestic violence within some Latino communities, several speakers saw the need for more creative outreach. One talked about a successful initiative in another city called Salon Secret. In this project Spanish-language pamphlets were left in women's salons in neighborhoods with high Latina populations. These pamphlets explained domestic violence and listed the help available to immigrants. The goal was to spread domestic violence awareness in more discrete ways in all-women environments. Another provider mentioned a similar outreach effort in laundromats, another typically all-female space.

One government representative spoke of using technology to reach out to survivors through campaigns such as "App Against Abuse," to create phone "apps" of use to survivors of violence. However, though useful in reaching young people, these services may not be available or relevant to the most vulnerable survivors. Another speaker believes that outreach with health clinicians could also be used to reach more clients. Health clinicians may be the only people outside of the family a Latina woman will reach out to, even if indirectly. Others mentioned working through the religious community, as many Latinos identify as Catholic. It is important for these people who work with Latinas to know the signs of abuse. Finally, one Obama aid stated that the formation of community-wide coalitions is key, so that no matter how a survivor reaches out, someone is ready for them.

Comprehensive Care. Because of the wide variety of barriers immigrant Latinas may face in seeking help, several providers identified the need for comprehensive care not specifically directed towards domestic violence. A few comprehensive programs are already in place in DC. Two speakers heralded specific women's groups in the district. In these groups women can improve their confidence while sharing information that may be relevant to other women (e.g. best child care) as well as talk about the violence they have experienced. Some Latinas may not be ready to talk about the domestic violence very openly, but by providing other services and building a rapport, an atmosphere is developed in which clients may be more willing to come forward.

System Advocates. Though group work can be very helpful, it was clear that many Latinas would also benefit from advocates who can help them navigate court and police systems. A lack of Spanish-speaking system advocates was a concern for several agencies. However, Spanish Hotlines were identified as one important way to help fill this gap. Women can call these lines directly without having decided to take action against their abuser. They also do not have to give their names. By talking to a hotline operator, women can be informed of their rights, given lists of agencies with language access, and educated on direct services available to them. According to one speaker, these types of programs should receive more funding so they can expand.

Advocacy. A final idea to improve services for Latinas was to ensure that survivors are included in advocacy in their community and on a national scale. Several speakers identified removing the shame and inability some Latinas feel in discussing private matters as a goal toward this end. As one speaker stated, "I tell my clients 'even once you get into a shelter, don't stop talking about the lack of adequate shelters until

everyone has access.’’ A social movement approach must also be used in domestic violence therapy, because ultimately, survivors “want to feel like they have political impact. ”According to another speaker, the batterers themselves must be held accountable, and society must be examined more closely as a whole. While sharing woman’s stories is important, providers need to make sure not all the onus is on women to change the societal contexts that make it so hard to escape domestic violence. Another added that policy changes might make things much easier for women, but cannot completely solve the problem.

Other Possible Measures. From the barriers discussed at the colloquium, one can assume some general changes speakers believe would help Latina survivors, though they were not mentioned directly. For example, less stringent immigration enforcement would increase the number of undocumented immigrants who seek help for domestic violence. Though this is not a direct action that providers can take, lobbying or campaigning with survivors for immigration reform might help achieve this end. Increased language skills, and mandatory cultural competence training by those who come in contact with survivors (e.g. police and judicial officials), though never mentioned specifically, would address the systems barriers many Latinas confront. Finally, many providers mentioned budgetary constraints as limiting the provision of more comprehensive services to Latina women. Presumably more resources directed toward this growing population would provide for more culturally specific programs. I wanted to see if these issues were addressed in the individual interviews I carried out.

Individual Interviews with Non-Profit Employees

Introduction. As previously mentioned in the Methods section, I completed detailed interviews with ten domestic violence service providers in the DC Metropolitan Area after the Dialogue on Diversity colloquium. I saw the importance of individual interviews to explore issues in more depth and to overcome the limits speaking in front of a crowd of peers might have imposed. For example, it might be hard for a service provider to criticize a program if the director were in the room. Because I wanted to encourage providers to be both analytical and critical, it was important to guarantee complete anonymity. To maintain this promise, no identifiable information (other than job title when pertinent) will be used to identify interviewees.

Though the colloquium examined the barriers Latina women sometimes face, it still left me with some unanswered questions about the issue. I hoped to learn more about what services are available in DC, the resources and grants put towards the Latino community, and what service providers themselves might be missing in their perspectives on the issue. I tried to get an idea of ways in which providers communicate with each other, conduct outreach with the community, or get in touch with clients. I was especially concerned with actions that might not be in the best interest of Latina women. All of this information will be used in the final analysis, in hopes of showing a more complete picture of how Latina women can be better included in support services for domestic violence. Responses will be broken up by the questions asked.

1. What is the general process that survivors must go through to receive your services? There were a variety of ways in which survivors got in touch with the service providers I talked to. For several organizations, contact was very client-specific, as women might walk in, be referred by another organization, “piggyback” on the

appointment of a friend, or call. While some organizations claim that many of their clients found them through a simple “google search,” others found the need to be more proactive to ensure women are aware of their programs. One program that offers therapy and case management used extensive outreach, especially with local shelters, to get other organizations to refer clients to them. Their executive director mentioned that Latina clients sometimes come in through “unusual” referrals, (e.g. through schools or lawyers), so general outreach throughout the community is important to the organization. Another interviewee works closely with the Metropolitan Police Department. When a domestic violence situation occurs the police are supposed to give the survivor the organization’s number. The majority of clients get in touch with this organization through police contact.

However, some service providers do not believe that outreach is always necessary. One interviewee explained that her organization wants clients to utilize their program only when they are ready. They wait for clients to call them and do minimal outreach, focusing funds on clients who have put the effort toward helping themselves. She believes it can be disempowering for too much of the “legwork” to be done by the organizations themselves.

Most organizations were in the middle of these approaches, doing some outreach but mostly relying on clients to call or be referred by another organization. Many of these organizations would have conducted more outreach if they had extra money to do so.

Sixty percent of interviewees also mentioned the importance of “word of mouth” when dealing specifically with the Latino community. According to one provider,

“commonly [Latina] clients come in because of what they have heard from family members or friends about the services our organization provides...so they already know what to expect and who to talk to [in the organization].” Another provider noted that, because “word of mouth” is so important, keeping up a rapport within the Latino community is vital. If the rumor is that an organization has few Spanish-speakers or isn’t very helpful, few members of the community will decide to reach out to it. Another service provider explained that there are also key players in the Latino community who have huge weight in informing and dialoguing with Latinos about services and programs in DC. This provider used the example of a female radio host on *EL Zol*, the largest DC-based Spanish language radio station, who hosts several programs tailored towards women. If she gets word that an organization has treated Latinas poorly, she does not hesitate to let community members know. This is why first impressions and making an extra effort to help clients of other cultures is so important, because a single incident may alienate women who would have otherwise sought help.

Good “word of mouth” was surprisingly identified as a problem for some organizations. While positive buzz helps to reach more survivors, thirty percent of providers mentioned that organizations known for having Spanish-speaking staff are flooded with calls asking for help unrelated to domestic violence. One provider speculated that this is due to a lack of language services available for Spanish-speakers. Examples given by a few organizations were: clients calling for translations of bills that come in English, help communicating with an English-speaking landlord, or assistance in finding job placements. One provider said that Spanish-speaking clients she helped years ago at another organization not related to domestic violence have followed her and still

call her, even though she is working now with a completely different issue. While providers seemed happy to help in these situations, these types of calls can also take up a lot of staff members' time.

All organizations I talked to work with clients regardless of immigration status. This may be because I contacted organizations saying that I was looking for information about Latinas. Organizations that have restrictive policies may not work with many Latinas, and therefore may not have responded. However, two providers noted that, with very limited Spanish speaking staff, they end up having to refer many Latinas to other organizations who can better serve them.

2. Do you often work with other agencies/ groups when providing services to survivors? If so, what other organizations? Fifty percent of the organizations I talked to work closely with other agencies either formally or informally. Some even share grants. According to one provider "working together is important because no single agency can provide all of the needed services in the needed areas." These organizations cultivated relationships not only with other non-profits (which I won't mention here to ensure anonymity) but also with Latin American consulates, judges or police departments. Several organizations also mentioned that they work extensively with religious and volunteer groups and hire interns from local universities to help fill gaps in service.

The other half of providers did not work closely with other organizations for a variety of reasons. One organization in Virginia explained that they do not have these types of relationships because there aren't many other agencies in the area. Two other agencies viewed their services as basically comprehensive, so connecting with other

organizations was a low priority. The others admitted that they might refer clients to other organizations if needed, but don't have any real connections because they haven't had time to focus on forging these relationships.

3. Approximately how many Latinos do you serve per month (if you keep data on this)? If you have any services tailored specifically to Latinas, can you let me know a little bit about them? Depending on the organization, the percentage of clients that were Latino varied. Most organizations reported around ten to twenty percent of their clients were Latino, while some served almost exclusively Latinos. The number also depended on the specific programs. For example, in one agency seventy-two Latinas a month come in for individual counseling, twenty a month come in for group therapy sessions, and ten a year come in for a quarterly small group session. These numbers don't include those who just call looking for resources, or who ultimately decide not to come in. This makes the actual number of Latinos that come in contact with organizations hard to determine.

The services offered by the organizations I talked to vary significantly, but included: twenty-four hour hotlines, help applying for protection orders, individual/group therapy, case management, emergency housing, transitional housing, lock changes, education services, immigration and legal counseling, and food assistance. These cover all of the main needs identified for survivors of domestic violence in the literature, meaning that at least one of my interviewees had experience in the most important areas (Santiago, A & Morash, M, 1995).

Seventy percent of the organizations I talked to have separate programs focused solely on the Latino community (though they vary greatly in complexity and scale). The

others do not see the need, do not have the resources, or have not been successful in implementing programs in Spanish. For example, one organization tried to start a financial management class in Spanish in 2010. They found a teacher, a classroom, and had all of the supplies ready. Unfortunately, though the class was free, only three people signed up. As a result, the class had to be canceled. Though the provider admitted that the amount of paperwork to enroll in the class might have been a deterrent, she believes that these types of frustrations make it hard for organizations to want to tailor services specifically to the Latino community.

In speaking with these providers there was also the general attitude that if they have any services available in Spanish, they have “a lot of” services geared toward Latinas. For example, one provider mentioned that they serve many Latinos through their workshops. However, upon my investigation, only one out of sixty possible workshops, on a variety of topics, was available in Spanish. Because some of the organizations had few programs for Latinas, it is worth going into more detail about some of the more vanguard Latina-focused programs. These programs were identified as successful not only by the providers who work for them, but also at the Dialogue on Diversity colloquium by unaffiliated speakers. Aspects of certain programs have been omitted to help make these programs less identifiable.

One program that focuses exclusively on Latinas considers itself a comprehensive health program, not just a domestic violence program. It began as an HIV/AIDS program for Latinas, but when providers saw the prevalence of domestic violence amongst the women in the group, they reshaped their focus. According to one of the co-facilitators I spoke with, domestic violence puts women at a greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and

other sexually transmitted diseases. While the focus of the program is domestic violence, other aspects of health and wellness are also included in group therapy sessions. This program also conducts sixteen-hour personal formation workshops, which talk about violence, the psychological impacts of migration, economic independence, and reproductive health. Women can additionally enroll in one-on-one counseling. Finally, the organization trains bilingual health workers and advocates who can accompany group members to appointments or court. According to the co-facilitator, “Things tend to go badly for these women when they are alone... they are so terrified all the time...providing them with someone who not only translates for them but also provides emotional support, is vitally important.” This more holistic approach to domestic violence and health has made this program one of the most popular Latina-focused programs in the metropolitan area.

Another heralded program provides pro-bono legal representation for women involved in human trafficking, fleeing violence in their countries of origin, or facing domestic violence in The United States. According to the lawyer I talked to, the organization has a ninety-nine percent success rate in these cases, even though they operate at the “legal cutting edge” of immigration law. This organization also can provide legal help for clients who need a divorce, protection order, or custody/visitation support. Most of the organization’s clients are Latina, so they have a full-time staff attorney who solely represents Latinas and performs outreach to providers who work with the Latino community. However, what makes this program so successful is the presence of in-house social workers that assist clients in finding shelter, employment, mental health, and food resources to help them once they are free from their abuser.

The organization also has a large network of partners in the community. For example, they have connected with a specific medical network to provide free medical and dental care to clients. They also provide training for police departments and execute extensive education, public policy, and advocacy work. According to the interviewee, the organization “has hopes of one day ensuring all women are safe from violence.”

4. Do you think there are a sufficient number of appropriate domestic violence services available to Latina survivors? All interviewees agreed that there were not enough services available to survivors of domestic violence in general. The situation appeared especially dire in Virginia and Maryland. One service provider believes that breaking the issue down at all by ethnicity isn’t useful because all survivors are in similarly difficult situations. For example, in her area a survey was conducted in 2011 in which twenty-nine percent of families in shelters stated that they were there because they were fleeing domestic violence. However, all of the shelters have at least a three-month long waiting list to get in. Three months is far too long for people in abusive, harmful situations. Survivors, regardless of ethnicity, may not be able to leave their abuser if they have nowhere to go. Across the board, it was clear more support services are needed for everyone.

The nine other providers I talked to believe that Latinas, especially those who are undocumented immigrants, are particularly underserved. One employee of an organization that provides legal help to undocumented Latinas acknowledged that the need for legal services is so great that at least twenty people are turned away every day. She characterized her work as a “constant struggle” because of the large amount of need in the community. Other providers talked about similar, though less extreme, client

overload. “There is simply not enough staff to deal with the overwhelming amount of need,” summed up one provider who works solely with Latinas. A lack of linguistically appropriate services was identified as the most pressing issue facing Latinas in particular. Because many clients have a variety of needs, not only direct domestic violence services must be available in Spanish but also legal, housing, and mental health services. This topic as well as other barriers will be discussed in more detail in question six.

5. Do you feel like your organization has enough resources to adequately serve the survivors you come in contact with? All interviewees believed that, due to the high amount of demand for domestic violence services, they do not have adequate resources to assist all the clients who come to them. This also limits their ability to provide all of the services they would like to. As one provider explained, “There is so much more we could do if we had the resources. We do not have enough resources to serve the current clients, and we desperately want to grow to alleviate the shelters of their overwhelming need to move families on to transitional housing...unfortunately we are stuck where we are now.”

Organizations with very comprehensive programs may have the hardest struggles, because covering the variety of needs of individual clients may be costly. For example one provider explained, once survivors are away from their abusers, “[our organization] lets clients choose the education program that fits their goals. [We] absorb the expense of their education including paying for childcare, transportation, counseling, and other basics such as food and clothing, so the client may concentrate on their education and career goals. [We] move them into safe housing that we own and pay for maintenance and monthly utilities. Clients only pay for their own phone service.” All of these services

can add up very quickly, and may mean fewer survivors can be served by the organization.

Even the money and grants organizations do have sometimes come with restrictions on their use. This makes it even harder for organizations to utilize their resources in the ways they see fit. An employee of an organization that works specifically with the immigrant population noted that one of their grants must be used only for immigrants from Africa, although the need is much greater for Latin American women. She believes that money often goes to causes that seem more “exotic.” Because Latinas come from a seemingly similar culture, donors have less desire to give money to the programs that help them.

While most organizations assist clients free of cost, programs that include therapy or legal aid generally have a fee, sometimes on a sliding scale. While organizations want to provide everything they can at a low cost, budget restrictions do mean there are some limits. Unfortunately, forty dollars for a legal consultation may be prohibitive for some clients. However, one provider noted that, with budget cuts, organizations should take the opportunity to “go back to basics.” Though she admits that budget cuts aren’t ideal and do put stress on domestic violence organizations, she reminds us that the domestic violence movement, “didn’t have any funding when it first started... it was just women, sitting together with coffees, talking about their experiences and supporting one another...the power of women to help one another still exists regardless of budget cuts.” She added that, though volunteers and interns may not have personal experience with domestic violence, they are able to support others and help organizations just as well as anyone else. Instead of focusing on the negatives of budget cuts, she concluded by

saying, “You gotta get smarter in this economy, and the organizations that really know what their mission is will do just that.”

6. Do Latinas face unique barriers in seeking help for domestic violence? Are there additional barriers for those who are undocumented? If so, what are some of the barriers you have observed, or your clients have shared? While one interviewee answered this question by saying that, “If there are additional barriers for Latinas they really have not stood out in our program,” the other nine interviewees saw additional or unique barriers for their Latina clients. There seems to be general agreement among these organizations about what obstacles were the most important.

Cultural Norms. Though they acknowledged each client is different, many providers saw cultural trends that have served as barriers to some Latina clients. In agreement with the literature review and the views of the providers at the Dialogue on Diversity colloquium, traditional gender roles sometimes prevent women from reaching out or labeling their experiences as abuse. While machismo was mentioned by several interviewees, one saw the problem slightly differently, saying that “gender inequality can be seen in a lot of cultures, and although we all know about machismo in Latin culture, marianismo is really not talked about a lot, but is probably even more powerful in keeping women down because it comes from the women themselves.” This internally formed sense of inferiority can be very hard to change, she believes. Also, because some Latin American cultures have largely ignored the issue of violence against women, women from these countries may be shocked that services are available, or that violence is even something that is acceptable to talk about.

Another provider focused on the relationship inequality that sometimes exists in marriages in Latin America. She is troubled by the practice in some countries of women or girls marrying men who are much older than them. Because older men are seen as more established and financially ready for a family, this practice may even be encouraged. In her own Latino family, she saw the imbalance that this could create, as her mother was sixteen and her father thirty-six when they married. Because some women marry at such a young age, they may never learn how to live on their own without their husbands, and have very little sense of their own independence. In immigrating to The United States, women may feel even more strongly that they need their husbands, no matter how they are treated.

Finally, one provider believed that the family-focused and collectivist attitudes of some Latinas are a barrier in the US, a culture that is traditionally seen as individualistic. She explains that many Latinas have a “family and community first, you second” mentality that the average service provider in the United States may not understand. This is why, as mentioned by several interviewees, many Latina women want therapy or services, but do not leave their partners. If women do decide to leave, their focus on family may cause issues in systems where their cultural norms are not well understood. This service provider used the example of shelters in DC, which often have stringent restrictions. Many family shelters do not accept boys over fourteen, and do not allow extended relatives to visit or stay with survivors. According to the interviewee, this is extremely problematic for many Latina women. A Latina might prefer to stay with the abuser than be separated from her children or family members. Family may be more important to her than her safety. Because many Latinas live with their parents or

extended family, they may also worry that if they leave, the abuser will harm or harass these family members if they do not have somewhere to go.

Economic Stress. A lack of economic independence was another common barrier identified by service providers. According to one provider, economic access is *the* main barrier, because fifty to sixty percent of her female clients are unemployed. It is very hard for unemployed women to separate from a partner on whom they may be financially dependent, especially if they have children. If a woman is undocumented she will not be eligible for welfare or many other types of government assistance. A lack of financial freedom means that domestic violence services need to be offered free of charge to many Latina survivors.

Some clients also have very low levels of education or are illiterate, which leaves them with even more limited opportunities for supporting themselves. For these women there are very few work programs, especially if they are undocumented. Even when programs exist, the likelihood that women will attend is low because transportation, especially if they live outside of DC, is very expensive. One provider argued that the lack of and high cost of transportation is the most overlooked barrier that can isolate clients from needed services. Because organizations themselves are sometimes low on resources, they might not always be able to provide metro cards or other financial assistance to clients in need.

Language Barriers. Language, though more obvious, is still one of the most severe barriers identified by service providers. “There are just not enough bilingual services in general,” said one provider “Spanish-speakers often don’t have any idea of where to go or who to turn to.” Latino-focused providers in Maryland and Virginia

particularly felt that Spanish-speaking Latinas have very few places to go when in crisis. Two providers focused on the lack of Spanish-speaking therapists. As one mentioned, “These women are in a particularly vulnerable position, and they need a therapist who they feel they can really communicate and connect with...but I don’t know where to send them. The therapist I normally referred to worked at WEAVE, which has shut down.”

Interviewees expressed similar concerns about the lack of appropriate legal and housing resources for Spanish-speakers. A common example was shelters, which are desperately needed by many survivors of domestic violence. Most shelters in the DC area do not have services for Spanish speakers. While some shelters may have one Spanish-speaking staff member, this staff member cannot be at the shelter all of the time. As a result, Spanish-speaking clients may be left staying in a place where they are unable to communicate with anyone. As one provider asserted “this is why Spanish-speaking women only go into shelter programs when they are really desperate, because it is so uncomfortable and confusing to live somewhere without being able to understand everything that is going on. These programs are really not tailored at all for our clients, but there isn’t much of an alternative.” Shelters are not the only places where language access is a problem, but seemed to be an area where the problem was particularly obvious.

The non-utilization of language translation services by the police was another problem for Spanish-speakers. Though police officers legally must use translation services, and should never use witnesses on the scene of a domestic violence incident as translators, it is clear that most providers are not convinced that the law is always followed. Abusers can use their language skills to turn the tables on their partners. Some

providers stated that clients have been arrested because the abuser spoke English and language services were not brought for their client.

Because Latin America is such a large region, the use of standard translations or interpreters may also cause confusion for some women, as accents and linguistic styles vary, even within the same country in Latin America. One provider explained that this has caused problems in DC, because many police officers and social service providers who are Latino come from the Caribbean (particularly Puerto Rico and The Dominican Republic), whereas the majority of the DC community comes from Central America (particularly El Salvador and Guatemala). These regions have distinct accents and mannerisms, which can cause communication problems. There are also long histories of oppression and conflict between some Latin American countries, which add another complex layer to the translation process.

In addition, Spanish is not the only language spoken in Latin America. Women from indigenous communities often cannot find language services. One interviewee used the example of a client who was an indigenous Mayan woman who spoke Spanish as a second language. Coming from a rural community in Guatemala she was also illiterate and did not have much formal education. After calling the police and talking to a Spanish-speaking officer, she was told she must have been lying because her story seemed “confused” and “inconsistent.” This attitude ignores the fact that this woman was not communicating in her first language, and combined with stress, found it harder to explain herself. Another provider asserted that many police officers assume that if there is a language barrier with a Latina she must be undocumented. She has seen cases where, because of this false belief, officers have encouraged women not to report what has

happened to them because it would put them at risk for deportation. Though officers think that they are doing the woman a favor, these types of assumptions can be harmful.

Immigration Status. Undocumented status was again identified as a major barrier for Latina immigrants. Interviewees believe, as did the Dialogue on Diversity speakers, that many undocumented women do not know their legal rights, and therefore think they must depend on their husbands in order to gain citizenship. Some are also afraid that if they reach out to others their partners will retaliate by reporting them to authorities. Others may assume that organizations or police will not work with them if they are undocumented, or will treat them in a discriminatory manner. Undocumented women may also distrust the non-Latino's around them. For example, Prince Georges County, according to one interviewee, is known for having the second highest number of racially motivated crimes in the country. Women may fear contact with people outside of their immediate community if they feel they may be targeted.

For those who mentioned it, *Secure Communities* was felt to have played a harmful role in the lives of many undocumented women. Three providers believe clients are more afraid to seek help since *Secure Communities* was put in place. Another provider experienced an increase in the numbers of survivors reaching out to her organization, but believes there was a decrease in calls by Latinos to the police. The *Secure Communities* guidelines are very complicated, especially because DC policy is to only enforce the law in cases of severe violent crimes. However, one interviewee believes it is still widely imposed because police and other services do not want to risk losing government funding, especially in the current economy.

While ICE (U.S Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) maintains that *Secure Communities* does not harm victims or witnesses of crime, interviewees seemed to disagree. One said that, though police sources claim they have a policy of no dual arrests (where both partners are arrested), “everyone” knows that they do them all the time. This means that even those who haven’t instigated a crime might be run through immigration databases. However, since police do not keep track of the dual arrests they make, it is nearly impossible to know how often this happens.

Several service providers had stories about the misuse of secure communities and ICE against survivors. For example, one organization had a client whose husband called ICE to pick her up at the court building during their domestic violence case, to try and intimidate her into dropping the case. The client was terrified. Eventually the judge had to intervene because this was not an appropriate use of ICE powers. However, the threat of deportation is always very real for many survivors of domestic violence.

Fear of deportation can also lead to a proliferation of misinformation. For example, one interviewee has worked with clients who believe that if they are deported their children will be left uncared for in their homes. Another service provider talked about a recent Spanish-language radio report that claimed there would be an immigration raid in one of the largest Latino neighborhoods in the metropolitan area. This caused fear and panic within the neighborhood. The rumor began when immigration authorities picked up an undocumented immigrant in the community under unclear circumstances. The rest of the story was speculation and misinformation. This is why service providers often do not know how to approach the topic of immigration policy within the community. Most providers who work with Latinos want to emphasize that these policies

are harmful, but they also want to avoid fear mongering, due to concerns domestic violence survivors will be afraid to come forward. This balance is often a delicate one.

Police and Legal Systems. The complexity and lack of cultural competence in DC police and legal systems, as well as clients' past experiences in their countries of origin, impact many Latina's desire to seek from police. Coming from Latin America, some women have idealized views of the US justice system, and become disenchanted when faced with the reality. Conversely, they may have received such poor treatment by the justice systems in their countries of origin that they don't want anything to do with the American system. According to one provider, "I can't tell you how many clients say that in Latin America they called the police twenty times and they were laughed at and told to 'figure it out.' Even many of those who did get in front of a judge say that the judge dropped the case because he was afraid of repercussions from the abuser, or there was corruption in the case...so a lot of my job is convincing women that the system does work in The US." Another added, "several of my clients were abused or raped by police without being able to denounce what happened...why would they ever want to reach out to the justice system again?"

Compared to many Latin American systems the US legal system "works." Still, it is known for being difficult to navigate. Especially for those without knowledge of English or documented status, it can feel intimidating and impossible to understand. According to one provider, immigration laws are extremely complex and legally challenging, even for lawyers, so expecting someone from another culture without a legal background to understand their rights is "absurd." Because they do not know their legal rights, some miss the opportunity for legal status. One provider explained that most

immigrants do not know that to gain asylum they must apply within their first year of entrance to The United States. “With the average level of education and language ability of the women who enter the country, how are they supposed to know their legal options? I joke with my colleagues that I want to put up a billboard talking about asylum rights at the border. It sounds ridiculous, but really it would be helpful.” Without extensive legal support, this provider believes it is impossible for immigrant Latinas to apply for legal protection from abuse.

Additionally, several interviewees found that judges are not always sympathetic to the psychological impacts of violence. For example, a client might lose a case because her actions seem “erratic” or she can’t explain why she did not leave the abuser earlier. The judge does not consider that this type of behavior may be symptomatic of the trauma she has experienced. Judges may also not be aware of how intimidated and reluctant immigrant survivors sometimes feel in sharing their stories, due to the shame they may feel.

One interviewee, who works as a lawyer, believes that her Latina clients face even more barriers than other survivors because of the biases of some judges. In spite of US laws that offer protections for immigrants who are abused, she says, “There is a deep-seated fear in government that if we were to open our arms to all survivors of domestic violence in Latin America, there would be a floodgate of women that we couldn’t absorb.” She believes that this should be a non-issue, as the number of women who have the resources to come to the United States to flee domestic violence is relatively small. However, because of this judicial bias, many Latina women are held to a higher standard in court. Those involved in the court system think “This is happening in

DC too, why are we giving extra help to people that are no different from us? ” They can more readily label African or Middle Eastern women as “oppressed” and therefore deserving of asylum. In sum, another provider concluded, “ The legal system is not an ally at all to [Latinas], it doesn’t care or understand them, so we always maintain a healthy skepticism about it.”

Many service providers hold a similar skepticism about police. Though the role of police is a crucial one, several interviewees alluded to discriminatory practices and a lack of open communication between non-profits and police. “I want to encourage clients to call 911, but in some ways it is a risk,” stated one provider. This was especially a concern in Virginia, where one interviewee noted that many police officers do not take women who report abuse seriously, especially if they are Spanish-speaking. She has also encountered a huge reluctance on behalf of police to help with the U-visa, which is available for women applying for legal status who have survived domestic violence. Several providers agreed that police should be more sensitive to the barriers women face in reporting abuse, especially if they are from a different cultural background.

Domestic Violence Agencies. Even some domestic violence service providers were recognized as perpetuating discriminatory or inadequate practices. For example, some organizations that receive grants targeting the Latino community were criticized for acting as though the Latino community is a priority for them, when it really isn’t. Because these organizations want more funding, according to one provider, they say that they do outreach with the Latino community when they really do not do so adequately. With grant money doesn’t necessarily come know-how. Because of the importance of

word of mouth, this provider believes that when organizations default on the trust of the Latino community, it is a huge barrier to future efforts in that community

7. What, if anything, can be done to better serve Latina survivors of domestic violence in the DC community? Though two providers did not share any thoughts on what could be done to better assist Latinas in DC, eight of the providers I talked to had ideas about what could be done better.

Resources. One of the most common responses was that more resources need to be dedicated to Latina survivors. All of the organizations were tight on resources, and targeting a specific community may be less feasible when resources are particularly scarce. One executive director was more specific, and believes that recipients of grant money must be assessed more stringently. This would ensure that the organizations receiving grants targeted to the Latino community use them effectively. Another service provider believes that, though it seems logical for domestic violence funding to go towards immigrants from more “exotic” countries, organizations need to make donors aware of the large amount of need in the Latino community. Raising money through key Latino community members might address this issue. Finally, another interviewee believes that working to evaluate the barriers that Latina women face would help organizations know how to target existing resources towards areas that will really make a difference.

Language Access. Increased language access was another identified need. Ideally, more functionally bilingual and bicultural people are needed in all areas of social services. As one provider put it “preferably, the [people] who work with the Latino community should not just be people who have taken Spanish in school, but people who

are *functionally* bilingual and bicultural, that are familiar with different cultures within Latin American and can truly understand where Latina women are coming from.”

However, language services are not always a high priority for the providers themselves when budgets are tight. As one interviewee stated, “[we] could translate some of our website or other information into other languages, however, with limited funds you have to choose where you spend your precious dollars and at this time, the shelters all know about our program and how to refer clients in need.” One interviewee mentioned that more general language services are needed so that Spanish-speakers do not have to rely as heavily on social service agencies.

Two service providers also mentioned that increase access to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes would help empower Spanish-speaking survivors. ESL classes should be offered free of cost if possible. One provider explained that in the process of separating from an abusive partner, increasing language skills can help greatly, as “even going to court they understand legal terms better the more English they speak.” There are more job opportunities available for English speakers, which can help foster economic independence. Most importantly, with increased language abilities can come an increased sense of empowerment and control, which was identified by one interviewee as the most important psychological outcome for survivors.

Outreach. An increase in outreach, though identified as a lower priority for some organizations, was one change that might benefit Latinas. Like the speakers at The Dialogue on Diversity Colloquium, several providers observed that Latinas sometimes suffer due to a lack of information about what options are available to them. One provider began to think about possible outreach her organization could undertake. “[We]

are currently doing presentations to local congregations about the signs of DV and the response and available services. We could translate this into Spanish as well to present to the all-Latino congregations.”

Another interviewee believed that more outreach between organizations and the “movers and shakers” of the Latino community would be helpful to ensure that the communities needs are being met. Because some Latinos are very isolated from the American mainstream, it is important to build trust with the leaders of the community. She also added, “if my organization had gotten grants to do outreach with the Latino community, instead of spending \$40,000 on billboards that might not reach anybody (referencing an outreach effort by another organization), I would have gone and done outreach where the fake ID dealers are on Columbia Road, at beauty salons, food places-I would go where the people actually are.” Two others said that seeking more business partners to fund programs for Latinos, or reaching out for more Spanish-speaking volunteers to fill gaps in services could be effective. One added, “We need to increase community awareness and advocacy so that more of our businesses and community members realize the great need to help these families.”

One interviewee mentioned that an increase in outreach between non-profits and police would be beneficial to survivors. Though police do receive some basic training about domestic violence, she believes it should focus more in-depth on the psychological impacts it has on women. Another service provider in Maryland believes that, though training for the police department and other first responders does include basic Spanish words to help out in emergency situations, her county could include more bilingual Spanish/English staff as EMT’s and police in areas with more Latinos. Finally, one

provider believes that outreach with the judicial system to educate in cultural competence could help Latinas win “the silent battle” over discrimination.

Immigration Reform. Immigration reform, especially for “Latino-focused” organizations, was seen as important in helping Latina survivors of violence who are undocumented. As one provider explained, “ the biggest thing that would help my clients would be if they knew for a FACT that they would not be deported for reporting domestic violence. The fear they feel is the most powerful deterrent to getting help.” Though most providers did not elucidate on the particular roles organizations could play with this issue, one explained that improving the relationship between providers and police and legal systems could help. Another explained that her organization always publically denounces initiatives such as *Secure Communities*, and that is really all that they can do. One lawyer believes that simplification of these laws would also benefit survivors so that immigration regulations are clearer. However, because organizations have to work within current systems, their role may be limited with respect to immigration reform.

Role of Service Providers. One interviewee believed that increasing cultural competence amongst all domestic violence service providers would be of huge assistance to Latina survivors. As she stated, “ I think the main thing that would benefit these women would be if more of us met them where they are at. If being able to help them with the violence they have experienced first means translating their PEPCO bill, then we need to accept that that’s ok.”

This interviewee also explained that providers should understand that the knowledge base of some immigrants may be very low, depending on level of acculturation and other factors. The people that work with them must be able to patiently

explain parts of daily life we may take for granted. For example, some of her Spanish-speaking clients have had problems getting to appointments at different organizations. To help them, she now gives them print outs of what the signs of the buildings look like, and lists of who the Spanish-speaking staff are where they are going. She also gives them instructions in Spanish for how to use the Metro. She believes that if more organizations took these simple steps, Latina immigrants would feel more comfortable working with them.

Individual Interviews with Police officers

Introduction. As explained more completely in the *Methods* section, I decided to explore the point of view of police regarding domestic violence in the Latino community. Though it is often underreported, about half of the violent crime calls the DC Metropolitan Police Department receives are related to domestic violence.

Because several service providers had negative attitudes about police involvement in domestic violence cases, I wanted to explore the police perspective. The prevalence of dual arrests, for which there are no statistics in DC, was of particular interest because of the harmful role it can play for women who are undocumented. I also wanted to learn more about the types of training police receive for dealing with domestic violence survivors or Latinos, and how they believe Spanish language policies are enforced. The five officers I interviewed are not representative of the views of the police department as a whole. However, I am hopeful that their insights and opinions can help inform a better understanding of how providers and police can work together to better serve the community. Information will again be organized by question.

1. Are there many Latinos in your district? The officer I spoke to from district seven (headquartered on Alabama Avenue in Southeast DC) says the district is exclusively African American. Similarly, district six (headquartered on 42nd street in Northeast DC) serves mostly African Americans, but also a small percentage of Latinos. Both districts three (headquartered on 1620 V Street in Northwest DC) and four (headquartered on 6001 Georgia Avenue in Northwest DC, where I completed two ride alongs) work with the largest population of Latinos. This was in agreement with available demographic data. The rest of the report will exclude any mention of these districts so as to maintain the anonymity of the officers I spoke with.

2. Do you know if there is a large undocumented Latino population in your district? Do you have contact with this population? Four of the officers I talked to believe that the number of undocumented Latinos was significant in their districts, though one admitted it is “hard to know for sure.” Because officers have to ask for identification, undocumented immigration status usually becomes evident when someone has a forged identification card. The officers do nothing on the scene if they suspect someone is undocumented. As one officer explained, “They are treated like everybody else, and then if Immigration wants to pursue a case that is done separately.”

One officer mentioned that a particular problem with undocumented Latinos in his district is that some illegally “squat” in residences. For example, one person who is a legal resident (and therefore has the required documents) will pay rent for an apartment, but then will rent to people without documents. Sometimes there will be eight or ten people in a single room sleeping on the floor. This allows the documented person to make money or live for free in the apartment. However, these types of situations can be

dangerous for those involved. The officer observed that these types of close quarters seem to instigate domestic and other types of violence, especially when alcohol use is involved.

Another officer also observed a connection between alcohol use and domestic violence in the Latino community in his district (which he believes is largely undocumented). While he acknowledged that most immigrants work very hard, he thinks that many Latino men get intoxicated as soon as they are done working, and can become violent. He regularly sees Latino men so drunk that they have passed out on sidewalks or in the street. In some of the worst domestic violence cases he has seen within the Latino community, the male perpetrator was extremely intoxicated. For example, he once came to a house where a fight was in progress, and the man was trying to throw bricks at his wife. Thankfully he was too drunk to be able to actually hit her, but this type of violence was not out of the ordinary at the house. Another added, “The Latinos we do have can really get at each other with the domestic calls when they are drinking. A few days ago I showed up at a call and an entire family was just bloody and there was glass everywhere.”

3. What do you do if you encounter a Spanish speaker who needs help? All of the officers claimed that language services are always used when they are needed. Two of the officers interviewed spoke some Spanish from school. However, the officer who tried to get certified as fluent failed the exam. He says this means he can help out in some basic, non-life threatening cases with Spanish-speakers but would not be relied on in something as serious as a domestic violence case. Another two officers mentioned that they had received training in basic Spanish, but both admitted they did not remember any

of it and could not communicate with Spanish speakers. The officers from districts with larger Latino populations said that a Spanish-speaking officer is usually available in every section of the district. When a Spanish-speaking officer is not available, interpreters are immediately called to the scene. However, while waiting for the interpreter, officers often start talking to the parties involved if one or more of them knows English. One officer said that the translators are vital because sometimes people will say one thing in English, and then when the translators come they will change their story. He believes it is easier to get the truth about a situation when someone speaks in his or her native language.

4. Do you think Latinos, particular those who are undocumented, are hesitant to contact the police? Answers differed greatly about this question. Most officers were hesitant to answer because they said there is really no way of knowing. However, about half of the officers believed this was possible, while others didn't believe so. One of the officers said that maybe those without documents "do not want to call attention to themselves," while another said that Spanish-speakers might be intimidated because of the language barrier. However, all officers agreed that they felt "hated" or "distrusted" by minority communities (all the officers I talked to were white males). This could perhaps lead to a hesitance from the community to contact police. Police tended to think of this issue more from their own perspective. To them, it is hard to work with a community when most of the people will not like you, and may accuse you of prejudice no matter what you do. They do not feel there is much they can do to get the community to be more willing to ask for police assistance.

5. What is your understanding of domestic violence? The officers expressed a variety of opinions and understandings of domestic violence. One officer was quite sympathetic to the problems survivors have when attempting to leave their abusers. Because a family member had experienced domestic violence, he tries to be particularly sensitive to women in similar situations. He said that after this experience with his family member he understands why women do not leave, because her partner threatened her life multiple times and controlled her finances. He has also seen through his work how abusers can harass survivors not only in person, but also through family members/friends or technology (phone messages, text messages, etc).

It was clear that the other officers I interviewed based their knowledge of domestic violence on what they observe through their work. All officers acknowledged that domestic violence is a terrible crime. However, they expressed annoyance at often having to come back to the same houses over and over again because of domestic violence. Several officers said that their intervention seems “pointless” because so many survivors stay with their abusers no matter how many times police are called.

Police also feel that survivors are often difficult and unresponsive to help. For example, some women will lie about what happened to protect their partner so that no charges can be pressed against him. Others will respond negatively when officers try to connect them with domestic violence organizations. Police resources are overwhelmed with domestic violence calls, and having to come back to the same place over and over again, when the survivor doesn’t accept any help, can be aggravating. As one officer articulated, “its easy to be a bleeding heart, but dealing with these types of situations on a day to day basis....it sucks.”

6. Did you receive training about domestic violence or training about working with Latinos/Spanish-speakers? If officers did receive any training on either of these topics, it was very minimal. While one domestic violence organization does do some police outreach, they work almost exclusively with districts six and seven. These districts do not have high populations of Latinos. The officers from other districts were unaware of many of the domestic violence resources available. It was also clear that working with survivors of domestic violence, and being mindful of their psychological needs, was not a focus of such outreach. Similarly, other than occasional work with the Latino Liaison police unit and learning a few forgotten words of Spanish, there was no training about working with the Latino community. The sentiment of all of the police officers I spoke with can be summed up in this quotation: “I mean in training obviously they tell you to be more sensitive to the victim... but its not really a focus...I mean that’s your job (referring to my work at a local organization) isn’t it?”

7. What is the policy on dual arrests in cases of domestic violence? Have you done/seen many dual arrests? Several officers were annoyed that many of the domestic violence calls they get are “ridiculous” and involve mutual combat. They believe that it is not their job to be breaking up arguments, which is what they feel they spend much of their time doing. One poked fun at some domestic violence situations, saying, “I mean some of the stories are just ridiculous. People will start talking about how they were fighting over who left the dishes in the dishwasher and then they’ll start wailing on each other...sometimes its hard to keep a straight face about it.” However, the prevalence of situations involving mutual combat means that dual arrests are a reality.

All officers were in agreement that the official policy was not to do dual arrests in domestic violence cases. Several mentioned that they could get in trouble for doing it. While one maintained that dual arrests don't really happen, the other four admitted that they do sometimes occur. According to these officers police always try to figure out who the primary aggressor is (the one who instigated the violence) but sometimes it is not possible. If both parties have injuries and neither is cooperating, then both have to be taken in to the station. There, they may be put through immigration databases. The unfortunate part of this situation is that these cases are rarely ever "papered" (which means no one is ever charged with an offense) because of a lack of evidence. However, the consensus was that dual arrests were fairly rare and only happened in cases where there was no other possibility.

Discussion and Final Recommendations

Introduction

This section will attempt to synthesize all of the information collected for this analysis. Individual interviews with police and service providers as well as information gathered from the Dialogue on Diversity colloquium and the literature review will be utilized. I will also add my own experiences as a participant observer when appropriate. I spent two semesters working as an intern on a domestic violence hotline, where I interacted frequently with survivors, including Latinas. I also completed forty hours of domestic violence training. These experiences have given me some insights that may be useful when looking at this issue.

Integrating the large amount of data collected for this analysis is not easy. From my initial academic research, the barriers for Latina women seeking domestic violence

help were: their overall status as a minority group in the US, culturally-engrained gender roles and expectations, a distrust of police and legal systems, language barriers, acculturation/knowledge of US systems, and immigration status. However, through talking with stakeholders we can see that the issues are more complex. While the barriers identified and perspectives given sometimes differ, they can give us a more complete view of what can be done to help Latina survivors in the DC community. However, many stakeholders could list the barriers that Latinas face, but very few could point to concrete solutions to address these barriers. I will concentrate on some of the issues that were overlooked in this final section. Please see Tables 1 and 2 for a complete breakdown of the analysis.

Recommendations for Domestic Violence Service Providers

Language Services. There is a clear need for more Spanish language services in DC non-profits. Though language was identified by ninety percent of the service providers I interviewed as a major barrier for Latinas, very few had information about their services available in Spanish (which I asked them to send). Only fifty percent of these organizations' websites had any information available in Spanish. Most service providers seemed to depend on word-of-mouth to get information about their programs into the Latino community. It is clear that when budgets are tight translating outreach brochures and other materials may become a low priority. However, most of these organizations did have Spanish-speaking staff. Staff members could be asked to do such translations, even of only basic information.

It is important that people working directly with Spanish-speaking Latinas are not only bilingual, but also bicultural. As several interviewees stated, having a deep

understanding of Latin American culture is vital to understanding the backgrounds and needs of many Latinas. Ideally, more Latinas should be hired (when possible) by non-profits who work with Latina clients. If this is not possible, non-Latinas who have experience working or living in Latin America can also fill in these gaps. The need for more bicultural/bilingual system advocates and shelter assistants is especially dire in DC. Fleeing domestic violence and going through the justice system can be extremely stressful and frightening experiences, and having a knowledgeable person supporting a Latina survivor is especially important.

Perhaps most surprisingly, I found that all of the domestic violence service providers I spoke with have access to a language phone service when Spanish-speaking staff is not available. Though this process is not ideal, it does ensure that Spanish-speaking women can at least get basic help. A similar no/low cost language line that community members could use might be helpful. Such a language line would alleviate the problem some service providers have with being asked to translate materials not related to domestic violence.

In order to alleviate the overwhelming need for services in Spanish, more low or no-cost English as a Second Language (ESL) classes could be offered in non-profit settings. Very few low-cost ESL programs seem to exist in the DC metropolitan area. With already tight resources this may be implausible, but would be a great measure to empower women and allow them to become more independent from their abusers. Low-cost English programs might also educate more members of the El Salvadorian community in Spanish to English translation. This would assuage some of the cultural

and linguistic differences that sometimes arise when using translators from other countries.

Community Outreach. More outreach with the Latino community must be undertaken in DC. Many domestic violence providers expressed concerns that some Latinas are not aware of the services available to them. Latinas who are immigrants may also not know what domestic violence is or that it is a crime. However, outreach was a low priority for several of the organizations I spoke with. The idea of waiting until women empower themselves to contact organizations is a good one in theory; however this practice is to the detriment of immigrants who do not know that services are available. A lack of resources was identified as the main hindrance to doing more outreach. However, many outreach initiatives do not have to cost much money or time. Simply calling other organizations (even organizations that do not typically work with survivors, such as health clinics and religious groups) and letting them know about domestic violence programs might be helpful. Printing and distributing flyers in key areas of Latino communities is another low-cost outreach option.

It is also clear that current outreach efforts in the Latino community are not always successful. While the need for creative outreach initiatives was a main focus of the Dialogue on Diversity colloquium, my interviewees had no knowledge of new or innovative outreach efforts being conducted. The outreach that is being carried out was criticized as not having the unique needs of Latinas in mind. As one provider said, putting up 40,000 dollars worth of billboards in Spanish may be helpful, but will probably not reach the most vulnerable women. Most of these billboards are in the Metro, which many Latinas, especially immigrants, do not use frequently. By going directly into

the community and working with laundry mats or hair salons, more women might be made aware of domestic violence services.

Involving members of the Latino community in outreach, including Latina survivors, is also important. This would ensure that needed information is included in campaigns and is disseminated effectively. It is vital that Latinas are mobilized against domestic violence and survivors have a voice in reaching out to other women. Mobilization could help end the shame and guilt some women experience for being a survivor. This type of “word of mouth” outreach may be particularly effective in the Latino community.

Furthermore, half of the interviewees reported that their non-profits did not work together or communicate consistently with other domestic violence organizations. Not every non-profit can possibly have all of the services Latina survivors might need. Forming coalitions and working together across organizations to share knowledge and the small amount of resources available may be the most effective way to work with survivors of violence. Furthermore, if all organizations could rally around the most important issues facing Latina survivors (such as *Secure Communities*), advocacy campaigns might become stronger and more capable of exacting real change. More seminars establishing formal outreach and networking plans should also be conducted between organizations in DC. This would allow service-providers opportunities to make these sorts of connections and share ideas about how to best serve clients.

Program Evaluation. If making connections between organizations is not feasible, organizations must work to honestly evaluate their services and ensure that they are comprehensive. Even if communication between agencies is established, program

evaluation is necessary to ensure that clients get the support they need. On the advice of one of my DC interviewees, I talked to a woman who runs one of the largest Latina-focused domestic violence organizations in the country, based in a midwestern city. This executive-director talked candidly about how her organization came to be more comprehensive and tailored to the unique needs of Latina women.

Several years ago, the executive director realized that her organization was not making progress with many survivors. Many Latinas did not use the services the organization offered, despite a high domestic-violence rate in the city. The executive director felt that she was not adequately fulfilling her mission, and decided that her organization had to go into the Latino community itself and ask women directly what they wanted and needed. The organization completed a variety of interviews, surveys and forums and found some interesting results.

What the director realized was that many Latinas did not want to leave their abusers. These women felt that the organization was forcing them to make that choice and not respecting how important the family unit is. The pressure women felt made them uncomfortable, and the word of mouth within the community was somewhat negative. While the organization believed that it was helping save women, it was actually disempowering them and taking away their ability to choose.

As a result of these efforts, the organization developed “resource centers” for Latinos in the community. Anyone can come in to these centers and get free information about a variety of topics in Spanish. The director believes that when women have access to all of the information they need and have people available to answer their questions, they will do what it is in the best interest of the family. These centers help address

misinformation about a variety of topics important to survivors, such as immigration rights.

These centers also allow women to get information about domestic violence without feeling pressured to make quick decisions or leave their abusers. The employees of these centers are specially trained to work with women looking for domestic violence resources. However, making these resource centers “all purpose” takes away the stigma and encourages women, who may have otherwise felt too embarrassed, to go in. The staffers won’t force a woman in any direction, but give out relevant information to empower her to make the choice that is right for her.

The organization also learned that there was a dire need for more long-term shelters where family members could stay with survivors. Many Latinas reported fearing that they would have nowhere to go, and more importantly, no community to be apart of, after leaving the abuser. The organization put more money into their shelter program so that women can now stay for as long as they need to get on their feet (e.g. until job skills training is finished).

According to the executive director, the shelters feel like real communities where women can help one another. Survivors and their children can bond with others who understand their experiences. Shelter residents often help with basic tasks needed by the organization. They also offer programs that address needs in the community, such as language classes and education assistance. Having more comprehensive services makes it easier for survivors, who do not have to navigate multiple systems at once. Offering programs unrelated to domestic violence can sometimes help survivors build trust with those around them and later open up about their abuse.

The organization also decided that mobilizing the community, something they had never before considered, was the most important part of their mission. As the executive-director said “It’s not the organization that will end domestic violence, it is the community itself.” Some women in the shelter eventually go through the Lideres (Leaders) program. This program trains Latina women to conduct workshops in the community on topics of interest to women, incorporating information about domestic violence. The organization also offers a similar program for teens, which trains them to hold workshops with their peers about topics such as dating violence. As the interviewee said, “one of the greatest assets of the Latino community is its own people.” Community members generally understand their own problems. Organizations can open dialogues about these problems, but shouldn’t force their own points of view. Many of these programs are funded by outside donors, such as large corporations.

In sum, this executive-director found that Latinas in her community had needs that differentiated them from other survivors. She believes that Latina women should be given complete access to resources and information, and then be allowed to become their own experts, ideally sharing their knowledge with others in the community. Domestic violence organizations should work to support survivors through this very individual process when needed. Though this is just one example from one specific city, similar evaluation efforts and outreach should be completed in DC. This would allow organizations to focus more of their time and resources on the real needs of Latinas, and make services more comprehensive.

Help Navigating Police and Judicial Systems. Measures must be taken to address the difficulties that Latina women often face in navigating difficult and

unfamiliar systems, such as the police and courts. An increase in outreach is one way non-profits can address this issue. If more information about these systems were easily obtainable in Spanish, some Latinas might lose their hesitance to use them. Outreach should also focus on what type of legal assistance is available, especially for immigrants. Disseminating the Spanish language domestic violence hotline number is important for this reason. Several interviewees believed that hotlines offer a great resource that is especially useful to Latinas. Women do not have to give any identifying information or have made any decisions about leaving their partner to get assistance from hotlines.

However, simply disseminating information in a more complete way may not be enough to address system advocacy concerns. It is clear that the role of advocates, who work as allies with survivors, may be particularly important for Latinas. The emotional support and language services they can provide may assuage the fears that often accompany going through the legal process. Ideally, more bilingual advocates should be available to Latina women. Domestic violence non-profits should also promote more widespread reforms to help simplify the legal processes that survivors must go through. Immigration reform would be a key component to this process.

It is also vital that the people that frequently work with Latina survivors have the proper training to do so. The non-profit employees I spoke with do not feel like the best interests of survivors are always protected by the systems in place. Though this will also be discussed in the *Police Recommendations* section, outreach between domestic violence non-profits and the institutions that come most in contact with survivors is direly needed. Outreach could also incorporate some basic training on domestic violence. A focus on cultural competence and the psychological effects of domestic violence would

be the most important aspects of such training. Non-profits should share their knowledge about the best ways to approach clients and what their needs might be. It is also important to acknowledge that working with these clients may not always be easy or straightforward. Police and legal systems play a vital role in protecting and assisting survivors, and should not be told how to do their job. Open communication between non-profits and legal systems, where both can share information and ideas, would truly be of benefit to survivors. Latina survivors would especially benefit from increased cultural competence in these systems.

Cultural Competency in Domestic Violence Non-profits. According to my interviews, it is not just outside institutions that suffer from a lack of cultural competence. Non-profits themselves, though presumably more knowledgeable about domestic violence, may not know much about the Latino community or its specific concerns. This is why cross training between agencies is so important. Non-profits with knowledge of certain cultural backgrounds can help other agencies become more culturally competent. According to my interviews, such training should concentrate on the dual identities and layers of trauma that may be important for some Latinas, as well as a basic understanding of the different cultures in Latin America (it may be most important to concentrate on El Salvador in DC). It is also essential that organizations that do not have the resources to adequately serve Spanish-speakers or Latinas know the best places to refer these clients.

Because I did not ask about the different evaluation techniques used by non-profits, in future research it would be interesting to see what these may be. Internal evaluations (e.g. from clients) as well as external evaluations (e.g. from Latino advocacy organizations), might be helpful to ensure that non-profits treat Latinas respectfully.

Addressing Deportation Fears. A barrier for undocumented Latina women is their fear of deportation. This was the barrier that was most often mentioned, but no service providers had clear answers about what they could do to address it. I believe, that although non-profits do not have the power to directly change immigration laws, their say on the issue does have weight. By coming together with survivors and supporting immigration reform measures, non-profits may be able to change or eliminate the laws that compromise the safety of immigrant women. Because so many domestic violence organizations are against *Secure Communities*, this may be a logical issue to begin with. Domestic violence service providers need to particularly emphasize why maintaining distance between police and immigration officers is so important to survivors.

In the Dialogue on Diversity Colloquium, the client stories that speakers shared made the problems with current immigration policy impossible to ignore. Sharing these stories in broader forums and ensuring that survivors are included in advocacy might have the most impact, and inject humanity into this polarizing issue. Along with Latino advocacy organizations, domestic violence non-profits can encourage dialogue that begins to reduce anti-immigrant or racist immigration arguments. It is important that these dialogues include the ideas and concerns of multiple sides of the issue in open communication forums, such as rallies and town hall meetings.

While community mobilization can impact longer-term change, non-profits need to work within current immigration-law frameworks. A working knowledge of these frameworks must be maintained to best serve Latinas who are undocumented. This means that it is also important to ensure clients that their undocumented status does not hinder the organizations ability to work with them (this was true for all of the organizations I

talked to in DC). This information should be included in outreach initiatives. However, through my work at a domestic violence non-profit, I have found that many organizations outside of DC do not work with undocumented women. Virginia is especially sparse on non-profits that help undocumented people, and organizations that use government funds may not be able to. These practices should be questioned.

Examining Cultural Norms. Rigid gender roles and scripts were also identified as barriers for some Latina women. Traditional roles may prevent some women from reaching out for help. Interviewees were again unsure what role they could play in changing these attitudes, which are usually deeply ingrained and present in many cultures, including mainstream US culture. Again, outreach and engaging Latino communities may be the keys to exploring, and perhaps challenging, these attitudes. In creating an open dialogue within the community (e.g. through outreach with “movers and shakers”) domestic violence organizations can help foster positive attitudes about women that stop victim blaming. This would help ensure that communities work together to make violence against women unacceptable. Non-profits can engage already existing feminist and Latina rights movements within communities to call additional attention to this issue.

While activism may change attitudes in the community over time, trying to change the attitudes of individual clients may not be easy or advisable. Therapy may be important to help cultivate a sense of self-esteem and independence that can empower women to break from existing norms. Organizations can also make sure that domestic violence is always labeled in outreach materials as a punishable crime for which survivors are entitled to help. However, many cultures have gender norms for women,

and it is important not to impose one's own biases onto clients. Women need to examine the role culture plays in their lives individually.

Similarly, there should be more dialogue and communication around alcohol use in the Latino community. Again, this dialogue should be fostered within the Latino community itself, not be imposed by those outside of it. Outreach and education efforts in Spanish may be one way to curb alcoholism. More affordable Spanish-language alcohol programs could also help abusers get the assistance they need. There is a lack of such services, especially in DC. Helping alcoholics may alleviate some of the problems that lead to domestic violence in the Latino community.

It is also important that the systems that work with Latinas are aware of cultural norms, many of which are positive. For example, familismo, the emphasis on the importance of the family, is seen in many Latin American cultures and is generally viewed positively. However, these cultural norms may be to the disadvantage of some Latina survivors in the United States. One example is in emergency shelters. These shelters often have requirements regarding legal status and lack Spanish-speaking staff. They also have strict rules about family visits and what members of the family can stay with a survivor. Especially problematic are rules disallowing preteen and teenaged boys in emergency housing units. According to several interviewees, Latinas may be hesitant to use shelters because of such regulations. Even extended family may be very important to a Latina, and asking her to leave them may make staying in a shelter unfeasible. Such rules should be eliminated or altered when possible. Even if it is not feasible for family members to stay with a survivor, helping Latinas arrange safe ways to meet or stay in touch with family members is vital. Shelters and other institutions that are flexible and

aware of cultural differences will be more effective in serving Latinas than those that try to force women to change their cultural beliefs.

Men's Programs. Another barrier mentioned by some interviewees was that Latina women, more so than other survivors, are sometimes hesitant to leave their partners. This was another barrier that service providers didn't know how to address. While it is important that organizations do not force women to do anything they don't want to do, it can be hard to watch a women stay with someone who is hurting her physically or emotionally. However, it disempowers women to deny them services when they do not want to leave their partners.

Instead of leaving these women without many choices, culturally appropriate domestic violence and anger management classes should be created in the DC area. So few programs exist that men have to be court-mandated into taking them in most cases. While non-profits focus on the survivors of domestic violence, this focus often does little to stop the cycle of violence. If domestic violence classes for men are not made more available, women who want to stay with their partners have few options but to put up with their abuse. These types of programs can also be proactive in preventing domestic violence in the Latino community. Batterers programs get at the root of the problem of domestic violence, rather than simply removing one woman to, in many cases, be replaced by another.

There are also a few examples of men's groups that help fight violence against women through advocacy and education initiatives. One such example is the DC-based group Men Can Stop Rape. In California, the National Compadres Network uses Latino men to teach other Latino men about domestic violence. Through these efforts, men,

women, families and communities can all stand in solidarity against domestic violence. By working together, more attention is brought to this issue, making it easier for Latino communities to feel accountable for what happens within them. A similar initiative could work together with Men Can Stop Rape to educate Latino men and boys in DC.

Addressing Economic Restraints. Economic barriers were another concern, especially for Latina immigrants. Immigrant women may have fewer job skills and therefore a lesser ability to achieve financial independence, which is important when separating from an abusive partner. These economic barriers can also prevent women from utilizing existing services that might be of benefit to them. An increased availability of low or no cost ESL and job skills workshops, as well as assistance in paying for the cost of education, may be helpful to foster more long-term financial independence. Economic literacy classes and financial support can help women manage their money effectively. Transportation assistance may also be essential to ensure that women can achieve these education and job attainment goals.

Non-Profit Funding. In order to properly address the economic barriers of their clients, as well as implement any of the previously mentioned reforms, it is clear that non-profits themselves need more funding. All interviewees agreed that budgets were tight, and that there is so much more that they could do with even slightly more funding. Unfortunately, this issue is often out of the hands of non-profits, who may depend largely on government funds. However, seeking donations from large private corporations and the community through fund-raising drives can help fill resource gaps.

Because of budget cuts, getting “creative” and using money where it really counts is vital. Non-profits could consider working together instead of competing for the small

amount of resources that are available, especially for Latinas. For example, cross-training and dialogue between organizations can help ensure that funds are used appropriately and where most needed. Outside evaluations of grant use may also be important in ensuring that the non-profits that do get grants to work with the Latino community are the ones who can utilize such grants to their fullest potential.

Finally, as one interviewee put it, there isn't anything wrong with "going back to basics." For example, a dedicated team of interns and volunteers (especially those who are bilingual) can help alleviate staff and budget shortages. However, because these organizations already hugely rely on the work and dedication of volunteers, burn out is not uncommon. This can be especially problematic when organizations have invested a great deal of money and time into training. More resources invested in providing stipends to volunteers/interns, or at least provide outings or lunches for them, might help stop such turn over.

Recommendations for Police

Introduction. From interviews with both police and non-profits, it seems clear that police officials in DC should work to improve relations with the Latino community and rethink some of the ways they interact with domestic violence survivors. The most logical way to approach these two issues would be through initiatives and outreach conducted by Latino-focused domestic violence agencies. Police assist domestic violence survivors everyday, many of whom are Latina. Increased knowledge of how to treat these individuals would make the jobs of police officers easier, and ensure that survivors get the assistance they need. My individual interviews highlighted some of the areas in which there may be misunderstandings between non-profits and police sources that could

be addressed when working together in outreach. Though these institutions function in different ways, their end goal is the same-to help protect and serve victims of this crime.

Police/Community Relations. Before analyzing possible outreach initiatives, it may be helpful to examine both the non-profit and police points of view on this issue. My findings as a participant observer of police activities are in agreement with the opinions expressed by non-profits. Most of the officers I interviewed do not have a deep understanding of domestic violence and feel cynical about their ability to help survivors. Some officers seemed to blame the survivor for staying with the abuser, instead of the abuser for their maltreatment of the survivor. Their annoyance at coming back to the same house over and over again is understandable, but shows a lack of understanding of the complicated cycle of abuse.

Furthermore, while fights may start in ways that seem “stupid,” to outsiders, they may be reflective of how severe the abuse is (e.g. that even doing the dishes “wrong” can trigger extreme violence). Instead of laughing at these situations, there may be cause for extra sensitivity and alarm. Officers also did not acknowledge that the way they interact with community members impacts the trust those people will have in them. For instance, a survivor may be uncooperative in working with police if she sees them belittle her for how arguments came about (something I myself witnessed).

Officers did not seem to understand why they do not have the full trust of the Latino community, and didn’t link this lack to their own stereotypical thinking and cultural ignorance. Many of their opinions about Latinos seemed to be based on stereotypes (e.g. of all Latino men as lazy alcoholics). The officers had little familiarity with the Latino Liaison, which is designed to help relations between the police and

Latino communities. Overall, I found many police officers were quick to point out the difficulties of their job without acknowledging ways in which they could improve (something that could also be said of the non-profit employees I spoke to).

Re-Visiting The Role of Non-Profits. It is easy to condemn the way officers sometimes treat survivors. However, we have to ask ourselves whether it is fair for officers to be expected to know about domestic violence or cultural competence without any training. It is always unacceptable to belittle or make fun of situations that are very serious. However, it was clear that these officers were not badly intentioned; just genuinely unaware of how their attitudes and behavior might affect the way they are perceived by survivors. It is simply unrealistic to expect everyone who goes into law enforcement to have a preexisting understanding of psychological trauma or Latino culture.

While it is easy to tell police officers what they should do, domestic violence non-profits may also not be aware of the difficulties police officers face. This point may seem trivial because white male police officers have many more privileges than Latinas that may be low-income. However, one cannot deny that it is difficult to work within a community that has negative attitudes about police intervention. Furthermore, while non-profits often interact with people who are ready to get help, police often deal with women still stuck in the cycle of violence who may be unresponsive to any type of assistance. As a result, non-profits may not understand the complexity of the situations police are faced with, including how difficult it may be to determine who the primary aggressor is in a domestic violence situation. Non-profits should respect that police officers are doing the best that they can given the knowledge that they have. Though some outreach efforts

have been met with resistance from police departments, if non-profits tried to be more understanding of the day-to-day realities facing police officers, they might be able to develop more positive working relationships.

However, because police officers work so often with domestic violence cases, it is important that survivors are treated as appropriately as possible. This is why more in-depth outreach and training between domestic violence non-profits and police would be helpful in DC. Though districts six and seven have been the focus of such outreach, more should be done in districts with higher Latino populations (particularly districts three and four). This would ensure that police are more sensitive to the needs of Latinas. Outreach and training should be more comprehensive in who it targets and what it covers.

There are several problems facing Latinas that police training could address. The most important goal should be increasing officers' knowledge of the psychological impacts of domestic violence. Though it may be impossible for training to look very deeply at this complicated issue, a basic understanding of the different effects of trauma would be helpful. For example, police officers should understand that a woman may have conflicting feelings about a domestic violence incident and may need time to figure out how to best deal with it. This means that her story may not always add up, and she may seem "combative." However, she may become cooperative if she is given some time to calm down away from the abuser.

Giving police officers concrete steps they can follow to calm down women who do not want to cooperate could also be helpful. This is particularly important for Latinas who are undocumented and may face deportation. For example, it was clear that officers often address survivors in a manner that could be perceived as severe. Even telling

officers that they should first check if the survivor is okay and ask if she is ready to talk before questioning her might help the process go along more smoothly.

Other police outreach initiatives would be important for the Latino community. Explaining the reason dual arrests can be harmful to domestic violence survivors might curb the amount that occur. Statistics about the prevalence of dual arrests would also be helpful, especially because there was such a discrepancy between what police officers and non-profits report.

Some basic training by the Latino Liaison about respecting cultural differences could also be implemented. This group has useful information available online, and would be a great resource if utilized more often by the district police departments. Police might be more accepting of these messages if they come from within their departments and not from outside sources like non-profits. Officers do not have to know Spanish, but they should be exposed to information about working with people from other cultural backgrounds.

Inclusion of More Female Police Officers. Outreach and greater understanding between police and domestic violence non-profits would help with many of the barriers Latinas sometimes experience in dealing with police. However, there are other measures that would be of benefit to Latina survivors. One possible measure would be to actively recruit more female officers. Females may have different perspectives on inter-partner violence than male officers. As discussed in the Dialogue on Diversity Colloquium, Latina survivors may feel more comfortable disclosing what has happened to them to another woman. Because I did not ask about police recruiting procedures, I am not sure if recruiting more female officers is plausible. This area should be explored in further

detail. Alternatively, police departments could send available female officers specifically to domestic violence police calls when possible.

Improving Community Relations. As well as maintaining relationships with domestic violence non-profits, police should cultivate open dialogue with community members about police performance. Existing measures to evaluate police performance have been criticized by many scholars (see Reisig, 1997 for a comprehensive assessment). As I did not ask about internal or external evaluations measures of police performance in DC, a more thorough analysis is needed than can be explored here. However, it seems clear that holding forums or using community input in police evaluations would help police departments improve. If the Latino community were included in such evaluations it could help develop relations with the Metropolitan Police. External organizations could potentially be involved in evaluating cultural competence in the police department.

Stricter Police Regulations. Finally, there should be more ways in which police officers can be punished if they do not follow the rules set out by the police department. For example, though police say that language services are always used for Spanish-speakers, some non-profit organizations did not believe that this was the case. It is impossible to know what the truth is here, but if these services are not being used, officers should be punished. There should also be more concrete and easily accessible systems in place so Spanish-speaking women can report if they believe they have been subjected to discrimination by the police. Website materials about this process must be made available in Spanish (currently they are not).

Other Police Departments in The Metropolitan Area. I could not complete ride alongs in Maryland or Virginia. However, in my work as a domestic violence advocate I completed some outreach with police departments in northern Virginia. I called to ask police sources about the services that exist for Latinos within the police department, as well as the enforcement of *Secure Communities*.

The general attitude towards my questions was very negative. When I asked about the resources they have available to Latinos, several officers did not know who to have me talk to. It seemed that there were not many services available for Latinos. For example, even though the Latino population is large in many parts of Virginia, none of the police departments I talked to had any idea if a Latino Liaison unit existed.

Virginia is also traditionally seen as more anti-immigrant than DC, and that stereotype proved true in the cases of the officers I spoke to. These officers did not know what an “undocumented” immigrant was, and only responded to the term “illegal.” Police departments in Virginia also utilize ICE more frequently, even in cases that do not include severe violence. This may mean Latinas are even more hesitant to contact the police than in DC. Lastly, most officers I talked to were unsure if their departments worked with domestic violence organizations or had access to victims’ advocates. There appeared to be less integration between police and domestic violence services in the region. My experience was not broad enough to draw conclusions. However, it does support the need to further examine differences between police departments in the metropolitan area.

Conclusion

Domestic Violence is one of the most pressing social problems our country faces, as one in four women will be a survivor in her lifetime. Domestic Violence also has a high financial, emotional, and physical cost. As the Latina population in The United States has grown, the need for tailored programs and targeted outreach to Latina survivors of domestic violence has become imperative.

Domestic violence is a complicated issue, and there are no easy solutions to address it. The anti-domestic violence movement has often focused on campaigns they believe will work to protect all women. However, non-profit and police institutions tend to be dominated by middle-class Caucasians, so most domestic violence policies are formed by people with this background. It is important to look critically at how this bias results in the marginalization of some survivors from domestic violence services. This analysis supports the need to further examine and address the varying needs of survivors based on individual factors such as culture.

Because Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in DC and the U.S, it is especially important that non-profits consider this population when evaluating their services. Domestic violence disproportionally affects women, so special focus should be placed on how programs can be better tailored to Latinas. Through this analysis it is clear that patterns of interaction and programs developed through experiences with women who do not share a Hispanic ethnic background may be of limited help to a Latina client. This is because a Latina's struggle with domestic violence may be marked by different barriers. We should be proud that DC has many organizations that are dedicated to assisting and empowering domestic violence survivors. However, we have to ensure that

the work they are doing responds to the varying needs of an increasingly diverse community.

Most of the people I interviewed agreed with the information I had gathered from academic literature. The literature says that it is often an interplay between multiple factors (e.g. immigration status and a lack of economic resources) that prevents some Latinas from seeking help from domestic violence organizations. However, these interviewees added layers of complexity to this issue. For example, academics did not focus heavily on cultural factors such as familismo that were identified as very important by the non-profits I interviewed. There is also not much consensus in the literature about how to best confront the challenges Latinas face. This is why the insights of stakeholders helped greatly in formulating my recommendations for police officers and domestic violence non-profits.

Though the literature was helpful in formulating my research questions, it is clear that the situation for survivors in DC is somewhat unique. The services needed by Latinas and the barriers to obtaining those services, vary depending on a wide-range of factors. Immigration laws, mainstream attitudes toward the Latino community, the availability of Spanish-speakers, and non-profit resources can all be factors. DC may be a better place for survivors in the metropolitan region because it is more liberal than Maryland or Virginia (e.g. DC rejected full participation in *Secure Communities*). However, this does not mean DC has all of the services that are needed for Latinas, and more research should be done to examine domestic violence programs in other areas.

Despite the need to look at specific contexts, the recommendations in this analysis could be a starting point for developing more general best practices around the country.

These recommendations are not exhaustive, and it is possible that some may not be feasible due to budget restraints. However, smaller analyses like this one can help bring about larger discussions concerning domestic violence and Latina survivors. Not every barrier Latina women face can be completely eliminated, but it is important to increase awareness of the challenges that can be easily addressed by service providers.

There is much more to be done to ensure that women are comfortable seeking help for domestic violence in DC. Most importantly, Latina survivors need to be viewed as social actors in their own right. Women should be encouraged to give their opinions and join in advocacy efforts when they want to. As one interviewee stated, “It is not [non-profits] that will end domestic violence, it is the community itself.” Empowering and activating the Latino community from within, when possible, would make a huge difference in DC.

From the information I gathered, no such mobilization program has ever been established in the metropolitan area. Domestic violence has traditionally been seen as a shameful and private matter in the Latino community. Such campaigns could help take shame away from survivors of abuse and place it on abusers. Non-profits should consider more mobilization of volunteers in these efforts because it can be done at a low cost.

Because resources are limited, domestic violence agencies are forced to prioritize and make difficult choices about what kinds of services they can provide. Through dialogue with Latina survivors, these organizations can ensure that the services they do offer are client-driven. Non-profits in DC should work together to share best practices and client suggestions, something that we now see rarely. It is also important to open up

communication between organizations in the metropolitan area and work to make services more comprehensive. These steps would ensure that clients are not forced to go through a complex web of different services, which may deter them from getting help.

Police departments also play an important role in ensuring the safety of Latina survivors of domestic violence. In DC, police departments could improve through cooperation and outreach with domestic violence non-profits. This would be of benefit to survivors and would also make the jobs of police officers much easier. Survivors might be more cooperative with officers who show some understanding of what they are experiencing. Training must be done in a way that is sensitive to the different perspectives of domestic violence workers and police officers. Non-profits must not try to tell police officers how to do their jobs, and officers should be more open to learning about the complexities of the problems they are faced with everyday. I am confident that if these institutions productively worked together, it would benefit survivors of all backgrounds in DC.

There are several important steps that need to be taken to ensure that Latina survivors are treated with the respect and empathy they deserve. Latina women were the focus of this analysis, however, more work should be done to understand how these services can be improved for survivors of different sexual, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. While we hope that domestic violence will one day be eradicated, until then we must ensure that survivors can easily find services that could potentially save their lives.

Future Directions for Research

It seems that many of the service providers who work with Latina survivors are very aware of the barriers Latinas face in seeking domestic violence services. However, very few proposed concrete ways in which they could improve the programs available for Latinas. It is possible that the people I interviewed, many of whom had little role in police/organizational policies, did not know what their organization could do better because it is not part of their job. In future research more interviews should be conducted with executive directors and police sergeants who may have a better idea of the inner-workings of their institutions. I was also only able to conduct ten interviews across DC Maryland and Virginia. Because most of these interviewees worked in DC this analysis may not accurately represent other areas. Additional research should look into these regions separately, and interview more stakeholders if possible.

Future research should also work to identify the strengths that are present in the Latino community. For example, men's domestic violence programs in other areas have successfully used positive aspects of machismo (such as the importance of male responsibility to the family), to help abusers change their behavior. Furthermore, Latina women surely have strengths as well as challenges. There are aspects of family and community life that can work as protective factors for survivors. What these factors are, and how they can be developed, should be studied more fully. It is easy to get discouraged by the barriers that women face, but it is important to note that many still do seek help. The factors that contribute to their doing so must be further explored.

The role of the "movers and shakers" of the Latino community, who were identified by non-profits, should also be investigated. These community members could

be utilized in the development of outreach efforts. Identifying the beliefs and issues most important to these prominent Latinos might be helpful in understanding their relevance for survivors. Finally, the attitudes identified in the Latino community as a whole, though one of the first goals of this research, were not explored in the analysis. The messages abusers and survivors get from their communities, and what community members do if they witness domestic violence, must be studied. It is also important to try and contact women in the community who have experienced abuse and have not sought assistance from non-profits.

Future research should additionally explore the points of view of diverse community organizations. Because many of my non-profit interviewees work with undocumented immigrants and low-income clients, their advice is not appropriate for all Latina women in all situations. Because most of these interviewees work frequently with Latinas, they may not accurately represent the range of attitudes about the role of Latinas in domestic violence services. Much of the research that has been done on this issue, including this analysis, has focused on domestic violence amongst Latino immigrants. This leaves Latinas born in the U.S. out of the picture. More research needs to examine if cultural ideals, discrimination, and other factors that can cause immigrants to avoid seeking help, impact the next generation and beyond.

Latina women are far from a homogeneous group (if we can even consider them a group at all) and more research needs to examine the differences between women from different countries, regions, ethnic/language backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. It is also important to explore how these differing identities converge with the experience of immigration to the United States, when applicable. It was impossible in this analysis to

differentiate between Latina women because organizations work with women from all different backgrounds.

Future research should obtain the perspectives of survivors themselves, and begin to explore possible differences between them. It is hard to know whether non-profits and police have accurate views of what they can do to improve their services without the direct input of survivors. White women are often used in domestic violence studies, and it is important that the voices of other women are equally valued and explored. Further research could help refine our view of domestic violence in the Latino community in DC. It could also inform the development of practices that improve the effectiveness of intervention and social service programs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Non-Profit Questionnaire

1. What is the general process that survivors must go through to receive your services?
2. Do you often work with other agencies/ groups when providing services to survivors?
If so, what other organizations
3. Approximately how many Latinos do you serve per month (if you keep data on this)?
If you have any services tailored specifically to Latinas, can you let me know a little bit about them?
4. Do you think there are a sufficient number of appropriate domestic violence services available to Latina survivors?
5. Do you feel like your organization has enough resources to adequately serve the survivors you come in contact with?
6. Do Latinas face unique barriers in seeking help for domestic violence? Are there additional barriers for those who are undocumented? If so, what are some of the barriers you have observed, or your clients have shared?
7. What, if anything, can be done to better serve Latina survivors of domestic violence in the DC community?

Appendix 2- Police Questionnaire

1. Are there many Latinos in your district?
2. Do you know if there is a large undocumented population in your district? Do you have contact with this population?
3. What do you do if you encounter a Spanish speaker who needs help?
4. Do you think Latinos, particular those who are undocumented, are hesitant to contact the police?
5. What is your understanding of domestic violence?

Table 1- Domestic Violence Non-Profit Recommendations

| Identified Barrier | Possible policies that could reduce the effects of barrier |
|---|--|
| Language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater availability of translation services • Recruitment of more truly bilingual/bicultural advocates • More domestic violence materials and information available in Spanish, especially on provider websites. • Increased availability of low or no-cost ESL (English as a Second Language) classes |
| Some women don't know what services are available or how to navigate unfamiliar systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute information in more creative ways, where Latinas are (e.g. targeting Mount Pleasant/Columbia Heights neighborhoods). Particular focus should be placed on typically all-women spaces such as hair salons • Make sure outreach includes even basic information, such as the definition of domestic violence • Continue and expand funding of hotlines where women can easily get information without having to have any decisions made • Outreach with health workers and religious community to disseminate this information to those who may come in contact with survivors but not know what to do • More bilingual/bicultural advocates to accompany women to places like court • Encourage and support legal reform to simplify immigration laws |
| Fear of deportation (if undocumented) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign against <i>Secure Communities</i>, support immigration reform measures. The need for distance between police and immigration officers should be emphasized • Encourage dialogue that can begin to eliminate anti-immigrant or racist sentiments in communities, include the ideas and concerns of multiple sides of the issue in open communication • Ensure clients that documented status does not impact organizations ability to work with them, include this information in outreach initiatives |
| Lack of resources to direct to Latinas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profits might consider working together instead of competing for the few resources directed towards the Latino community. If this is |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>not possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-training between organizations so that existing resources are utilized effectively • Outside evaluation of grant use to ensure that the non-profits that get funding to target Latinas are the ones who will utilize this funding to its fullest potential • Utilize and recruit bilingual volunteers and interns |
| Some women are intimidated by police and judicial systems; these systems may not treat them the way they hoped to be treated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach and training between domestic violence non-profits and the systems that most often come in contact with survivors (such as lawyers, judges, police). Non-profits can share their knowledge about how to best approach clients, while also acknowledging that working with survivors is not always easy • Outreach should include an expansion of the On Call Advocacy Program to districts with higher Latino populations (particularly districts three and four) • Increased number of bilingual/bicultural advocates • Increased availability of legal help to Latinas |
| Cultural scripts and traditional roles may prevent some women from reaching out or labeling what has happened to them as abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and outreach directly in the community and through group and individual therapy about domestic violence. Emphasize that survivors and their children have the right to services if they want them • Always label domestic violence as a punishable crime in outreach materials • Create an open dialogue with community about these issues; involve as many stakeholders as possible • Long-term goal should be to challenge some of these attitudes |
| Women may be economically dependent on the abuser | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased availability of ESL courses and job skills training • Assist in paying for cost of education • Transportation assistance to make sure women can complete education/job attainment goals • Economic literacy classes that are easy to enroll in |
| Emergency shelters sometimes do not suit needs of Latinas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate requirement that women must have legal status to stay in some shelters • Increased number of Spanish-speaking staff, use of language translation service when necessary |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow family members to visit with survivor or meet survivor somewhere else if the location is confidential• Eliminate requirements against children staying with survivor |
| Women do not want to leave abuser, just want their behavior to change but do not know where to turn | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizations should be careful not to force their own views onto the survivor• Do not limit the survivor's access to services because she does not want to leave• Reincorporate men's domestic violence and anger management programs in Spanish into non-profits in DC |
| Alcoholism, which can exacerbate domestic violence, is acceptable in some communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education and dialogue around alcohol use in the community• Greater availability of culturally appropriate alcohol programs in Spanish |

Table 2-Recommendations For Police

| Identified Barrier | Possible policies that could reduce the effects of barrier |
|--|---|
| Survivors do not always get the language services they need | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training about the importance of language service • Use of translation service with every Spanish speaker if police officer is not completely fluent in Spanish; wait to talk to the parties involved until the interpreter arrives • Punishment if language service is not utilized when needed |
| Clients feel they are sometimes treated with a lack of respect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended Cultural competence and domestic violence training, focusing on the psychological impacts of partner abuse • Recruit more female officers who survivors may feel more comfortable with • Keep an open dialogue with the community and non-profits about police performance; while police and non-profit systems are different, their goals should be similar • Concrete, easily accessible systems in place so Spanish-speaking women can report if they believe they have been subjected to discrimination. It is important that website materials about this process are available into Spanish |
| Dual Arrests, which can put Latina women at risk for deportation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training about why determining the primary aggressor is important and how to approach women who are reluctant to cooperate with police • Outreach with the community to develop more trust for the police department • Informing women about their rights and what might happen if they are undocumented and booked into the police station • Police should keep data about the number of dual arrests made in situations of domestic violence |

