

# Fact Sheet: Sexual Violence and the Impact on Latin@ Communities

By Liz Zadnik & Enid Melendez



As of 2010, at least 6% of Pennsylvania's population identifies as Latin@<sup>1</sup>- many of whom have been born in the state or U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2011) and have strong community bonds. This fact sheet will review some of the most recent research on sexual violence within Latin@ communities and provide some recommendations to practitioners within the anti-sexual violence movement on ways to create or strengthen services that will support and affirm the realities of these diverse communities' lives and experiences.

## Sexual violence in Latin@ communities

Several studies have found that Latin@s do not report higher rates of victimization than other racial or ethnic groups. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) (Black et al., 2011) found that 1 in 7 Latinas reported experiencing a completed rape at some point in

their lifetime, as compared with 1 in 5 in other racial and ethnic groups. This was also true of sexual violence other than rape – with 1 in 3 Latinas and 1 in 4 Latinos reporting experiencing sexual violence, as compared to multiracial non-Latin@s (1 in 2 and 1 in 3, respectively). This is reflected in the Sexual Assault Among Latinas Study (SALAS) (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010), where a large-scale survey of 2,000 Latinas found that approximately 17% reported experiencing some form of unwanted sexual activity or coercion. Of the entire sample, 7% reported experiencing this trauma as adults, while 12% experienced it as children.

## Cultural norms and reporting sexual violence

Although Latinas and Latinos do not report higher rates of victimization or experiences with sexual violence, there are practical considerations



when it comes to service delivery and outreach. Just as services must reflect the realities of all survivors of sexual violence, survivors who identify as Latin@ have a lived experience in the United States that may not always be similar to other racial or ethnic groups. Acculturation can be understood as the process – sometimes life-long – of navigating multiple cultures or cultural norms. For many Latin@s, this means navigating their family culture or country of origin's culture, as well as dominant U.S. culture. Dominant U.S. understandings of rape and sexual violence can have a big impact on how Latin@s who identify more with U.S. culture report rape, with many U.S.-identified Latinas reporting higher rates of sexual violence and sympathy for victims of specific racial or ethnic groups (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Lira, Koss, & Russo, 1999).

In addition to cultural factors, there are also logistical or reality-based barriers that prevent someone from reporting sexual violence: language and immigrant status. Someone who speaks only Spanish, or any other language for that matter, or someone who is learning English after a lifetime

speaking another language may be unaware of services available. This highlights one reason for outreach materials in Spanish; these materials can be placed in areas where individuals would see them. If an individual is an undocumented immigrant or has an unstable citizenship status, they may fear deportation, discrimination, and/or being reported to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE – formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS).

### **Tips for practitioners in the anti-sexual violence movement**

#### **Services**

- Become familiar with translation services available in your local community or through the telephone or internet. These will help staff who only speak one language have the ability to interact with all survivors who contact your agency.
- All staff participate in regular (quarterly, biannual) trainings regarding the needs of Latin@ communities and survivors who identify as Latin@.
- Actively and visibly support the needs of Latin@ communities – this could mean sitting on an organizational board of directors or community task force or making advocacy needs of Latin@s a priority in strategic plans.
- Have a strong understanding and commitment to ending racism and inequality. Sexual assault centers and prevention programs have an obligation to address the ways oppression impacts the lives of people in your community.
- Engage family members, friends, and significant others in services, as opposed to an individual approach. Offer this as an option for counseling and advocacy.

#### **Bilingual and Bicultural Capacity**

- A person who is bilingual can speak two (or more) languages fluently. These individuals can identify with any racial or ethnic identity. It is important to give preference to or specifically hire individuals who can speak the languages present or prominent in the



community your agency serves. However, it must be clear that providing translation or service delivery be part of their job description as they are hired. It should not become someone's responsibility to translate materials or conduct outreach because they are bilingual. For example, someone who is in data entry or finance should not be doing outreach to the Latin@ community because they are bilingual. An education or outreach specialist that is bilingual should be hired if that is the priority of the agency.

- Someone who is bicultural has spent significant time (years, decades) as part of or growing up in a culture different from their own. Individuals who are bicultural can bring a wider perspective to service delivery and development.

### **Outreach**

- Given potential differences in cultural understandings of rape and sexual violence, make sure outreach materials have a clear definition or language about sexual violence as a problem and that there are services available to everyone.
- Messaging and content should also reflect the realities of the community – talk to Latin@s in your community or Latin@ community organizations to build messaging that reflects the lived experience of those you are serving. This is best practice for all community organizing and prevention strategies. It is important to give preference to or specifically hire individuals who are bicultural and reflect the community or communities your agency serves.
- When providing community education or messaging campaigns, address gender roles and attitudes about sexuality. Create opportunities for discussion and sharing of personal experiences. These conversations, to start, may be in gender-specific groups. This can support programming that is informed by the perspectives of the community.

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> The @ symbol is used to represent that feminine (Latina) and masculine (Latino) versions of words in order to promote a more inclusive approach to language.

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**PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST RAPE**

125 North Enola Drive • Enola, PA 17025

717-728-9740 • 800-692-7445 • TTY 877-585-1091 • [pcar.org](http://pcar.org)