Intimate Partner Violence Among Latinas in Central Alabama: Sociodemographic Characteristics, Perceptions of Abuse and Help-seeking Behaviors

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as a pattern of physical assault, psychological and forced sexual assault by an intimate partner (husband, boyfriend, ex-partner) (Campbell, 2002).

IPV generally consists of four parts: physical assaults, sexual assaults, threats and emotional abuse (Saltzman, 1999).
Background/Definitions (2)

While both males and females are victims of IPV, the majority of victims are female and suffer more serious injury than men. For those reasons, this study focuses only on females.

For the purposes of this study, Latina is defined as a woman who speaks primarily Spanish or self-identifies as Latina through the use of services at the Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama (HICA).
Victimization status will be determined by:

- Score of 4 or greater on the WAST survey (community sample)
- Self-identification to ¡HICAN! as a victim (interview sample)
Basic Incidence/Prevalence

- Nationally, 5.3 million incidents of IPV each year.
- More than 2 million women are physically assaulted or raped each year.
- Calculates to 47 assaults/1000 women per year.
- CDC estimates over 2 million injuries and over 1300 deaths each year due to IPV (CDC, 2003).
Prevalence in Latino Community

Current statistics provide conflicting viewpoints as to prevalence of abuse in Latino families – one study (Straus, 1990) found abuse levels higher than in White families while another similar study (Sorenson and Telles, 1991) found rates lower among Latinos.

Lifetime prevalence of abuse among Latinas was found to be 23.4% in a nationally representative study (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).
Effects of IPV

Physical Health:
- Injuries
- Joint and bone problems
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- GI symptoms

Mental Health:
- Anxiety
- Depression
- PTSD
- Mood disorders
- Eating disorders
- Suicide
Effects of IPV (2)

Reproductive Health:
- Pelvic pain
- Problems with urination
- Genital irritation
- Risky sexual behaviors
- Frequent STDs
- Increased HIV risk

Health During Pregnancy:
- High risk of unplanned pregnancy
- Negative health behaviors while pregnant
- Blunt force trauma to fetus
- Low maternal weight gain leading to low birthweight
Culture and IPV

How IPV is experienced varies between cultures. The expression of IPV is intertwined with the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs (Pinn, 1997).

Because many immigrant communities wish to preserve their culture, the community may inadvertently establish traditional gender roles which favor men (Dasgupta, 2000).
Culture and IPV (2)

- Stressful situations brought on by immigration to a new country may increase the dangers for IPV.

- Barriers for immigrants in responding to IPV can include: fear, language issues, lack of education, inability to navigate the “system” and more.
Aims of the Study

1) To describe the burden of IPV in the Latino community and socio-demographic characteristics of Latino victims and non-victims of IPV in central Alabama.

2) To examine how Latinas perceive IPV and how this perception affects their help-seeking behavior.
Aims of the Study (2)

3) To determine knowledge of available resources, help-seeking behaviors and barriers to help-seeking for IPV among different groups of Latinas in central Alabama

4) To apply the Woman Abuse Screening Tool (WAST) among different groups of Latinas in central Alabama to assess for reliability and validity
Conceptual Model

- Socio-cultural context of Latinos in AL
- IPV Victims
  - Non-Victims
- Recognition of Violence (Perceptions)
- Help-Seeking Behaviors
- Influencing Factors
Use convenience samples of women accessing services at ¡HICA!

Cross-sectional study design used to examine a portion of the Latino population in 2007-2008
Study Population

Two separate population groups being used:

- Women from ¡HICA! service population for survey completion
- Identified IPV victims from caseload at ¡HICA! for in-depth interviews
Latinos in Alabama

- 2000 Census found 75,380 Latinos living in Alabama with close to 15,000 living in the central Alabama area

- 2005 American Community Survey found population in central Alabama had grown to 22,687
Latinos in Alabama (2)

Three of the counties in central Alabama (Shelby, Chilton, and Blount) have some of the highest populations of Latinos in the state.

Three counties served by community partners are among the fastest growing for Latinos (DeKalb, Chilton and Blount).
Latinos in Alabama (3)

- Median age of Latino population is 25.1 years; 71.5% are under 35 years
- Majority (58.7%) are of Mexican descent
- Almost one-fourth have less than 9 years of education; 43% have not received high school diploma
- In 1999, 25% of the Latino population in Alabama lived below the poverty level
Inclusion Criteria

Criteria for inclusion include:
- Latina (as defined earlier)
- Female
- Age 19 or older
- Able to read
- Speaks/reads either English or Spanish
IRB approval was granted from UAB IRB.

In order to protect the safety of women participating, no identifying information will be collected – waiver of signed consent was granted by IRB.
Survey Instrument

- Instrument is based on two surveys used previously in Hispanic populations
- Sections: Demographics, Acculturation, Woman Abuse Screening Tool, Perceptions of Abuse, Help-seeking and Barriers to Help-seeking
Variables

Demographics
- age, education, employment / occupation, income, county of residence, marital status, number of children, length of relationship, alcohol use, religious affiliation, religiosity

Acculturation
- Length of time in US
- Nativity
- Primary language spoken
Variables (2)

- Measurement of Abuse
  - Using Woman Abuse Screening Tool (WAST)
  - Reliability very high: Cronbach’s alpha of 0.95 in English
  - Spanish language version is available with an alpha of 0.91
  - Scores range from 0-8 with scores of 1 or higher indicating abuse is present

- Perceptions of Abuse
  - Using a variety of questions, women will be asked to rate behaviors using a Likert scale, questions will ask about violence in the community and causes of violence
Variables (3)

Help-Seeking
- Questions will be asked about sources of help (formal vs. informal),
- Victims will be asked who they approached for help (list provided)
- Non-victims will be asked who they would refer a friend or family member to

Barriers to Help-Seeking
- Questions will be asked about why help is not sought (options provided)
- For analysis, barriers will be grouped into fears, accessibility, partner-related, knowledge, didn’t want help, other
Results

272 Surveys completed

Demographics:
- Average Age: 30.31 years
- Education:
  - 24.1% Grades 1-6
  - 30.5% Grades 7-8
  - 23.7% High School
  - 9.0% Technical School
  - 11.7% College/University
  - 1.1% Other
Results (2)

Demographics Continued:

Marital Status:
- 13.0% Single
- 39.0% Married
- 32.3% Civil Union
- 11.5% Separated
- 3.7% Divorced
- .37% Widowed

Years in Relationship:
- 47.3% 5 years or less
- 52.7% 6 years or more
### Results (3)

**Demographics Continued:**

- **Number of Children:**
  - 7.3% No Children
  - 25.1% One Child
  - 30.9% Two Children
  - 22.5% Three Children
  - 14.1% Four or More Children

- **Family in the US:**
  - 59.9% Yes
  - 40.1% No

- **County:**
  - 63.0% Jefferson
  - 24.4% Shelby
  - 12.6% Other (mostly Bibb County)
Acculturation Results

- Average Years in US: 7 yrs. 4 mos.
- Country of Origin:
  - 68.3% Mexico
  - 8.0% Colombia
  - 2.7% US
  - 21% Other (15 Countries total)
- Language Spoken:
  - 46.2% Only Spanish
  - 42.1% Spanish > English
  - 10.2% Both Equally
  - .38% English > Spanish
  - 0% Only English
Abuse Status (n=235)

- WAST Scale Runs from 0 – 16
  - 50.2% Scored 0-4
  - 37.9% Scored 5-8
  - 9.4% Scored 9-12
  - 2.6% Scored 13-16

Two interesting findings:
- Only 30 women (including those with higher WAST scores) admitted sexual abuse
- 18 women did not self-identify as abuse victims even though their WAST Score was 6 or higher
Self-Identification of Abuse

- 40.3% of survey respondents (n=231) self-identified as abuse victims – 59.7% self-identified as non-victims

- 43.3% of respondents (n=233) identified as ever having been a victim and 56.7% denied ever being a victim
Perceptions of Abuse

- 252 women completed the Perceptions of Abuse Scale.
- The scale ranges from 11-44 with higher numbers indicating better perceptions of abusive behaviors.
- Of the 216 women who completed the entire scale, 96.7% scored 23 or higher – this was a surprising finding.
Help-Seeking Behaviors

Of the 176 women who answered the question, 51 (29%) said they had contacted the police about the abuse.

70 women admitted contacting someone (not the police) for help.

Most victims sought help from ¡HICA!, the DV Hotline, or a local shelter.

Victims told their families, friends or neighbors most often about the abuse.
Help-Seeking Behaviors (2)

Women knew of a variety of organizations as options for seeking help including:

- ¡HICA! (most popular answer)
- DV Hotline
- Counselors/Psychologists
- Women’s Center
- Law Enforcement
- Hospital (rarely cited)
Help-Seeking Behaviors (3)

Reasons for not seeking help include:
- Embarrassment
- Spouse prevented help-seeking
- Fear of losing children
- Fear of losing financial support
- Don’t want relationship to end
- Help not necessary
- Fear of immigration
Preliminary Conclusions

- Women in this study population had better perceptions of abuse than we expected going into the study.
- Abuse status in this population is higher than other studies have found.
- Women know of some services for IPV but many of the respondents were unaware of available services.
Strengths of Study

- The link between perceptions of abuse and help-seeking behaviors has not previously been examined.
- In-depth interviews with known victims provides rich detail on their experiences.
- Study will add to the body of literature on IPV in Latinos, especially in the Deep South.
Weaknesses of Study

- Study sample is not representative of all Latinos in Central Alabama – results are not generalizable
- Selection of interview subjects will not be random and there is no way to know what opinions non-selected victims would hold and how those opinions would affect results
References


