

Sexual Violence Awareness Fact Sheet

Hispanics/Latinos

Overview

In this fact sheet, we use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino”¹, which refer specifically to people from Latin America. Hispanics/Latinos do not identify as a single racial group, but rather as a mixture of various cultures from over 22 countries in North, South, Central America, and the Caribbean. Many Hispanics/Latinos identify themselves by their country of origin (such as Puerto Rican, Mexican, Colombian). Self-identity is very important and very personal, so it is important to ask a Hispanic/Latino how s/he identifies herself or himself and not make assumptions.

■ Hispanics/Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., soaring from 22 million to 35.3 million in the last 10 years (an increase of more than 80 percent). According to the 2000 Census, 4.7% of people living in Virginia are Hispanic/Latino. *Overview of Race & Hispanic Origin, Census 2000.*

■ Married Hispanics/Latinas are less likely than other women to immediately define their experiences of forced sex as rape and terminate their relationships; some view sex as a marital obligation. *Bergen, R. K. 1996, Wife Rape.*

■ The National Violence Against Women Survey found that Hispanics/Latinas were less likely to report rape victimization than non-Latinas. *Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes. November 1998. Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women.*

■ Eighteen percent of Hispanic women/Latinas and nearly 23 percent of Hispanic men/Latinos in Virginia reported experiencing a sexual assault in their lifetimes. *Prevalence of Sexual Assault in Virginia, Virginia Department of Health, April 2003.*

■ Six percent of victims served by Virginia’s Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies in 2003 were Hispanic/Latino. *VAdata: A Report from Virginia Sexual Assault Crisis Centers and Domestic Violence Programs, 2003.*

These statistics clearly show that Hispanics/Latinos are in need of sexual assault services, yet due to a variety of factors, it is often difficult for them to get the services they need. It is critical that sexual violence victim advocates in Virginia understand the needs and barriers of Hispanics/Latinos to provide culturally appropriate and sensitive outreach and services to this community.

¹“Latinos” refers to males or a group of males and females. “Latina” or “Latinas” refers specifically to women. “Hispanic” refers to both males and females.

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Myths

Fact:
...just because an advocate may speak the same language as an Hispanic/Latin survivor, does not necessarily mean s/he understands that survivor's culture.

Cultural competency is a learning process that requires understanding of a specific culture.

Myths about Hispanics/Latinos can make it more difficult for them to access and receive appropriate services if they have experienced sexual violence. They may fear being stereotyped based on these myths, or they may have internalized the myths and believe these things are true of them—therefore believing that they don't need or deserve services. As advocates, it is important to understand these myths and the realities in order to provide appropriate services.

Myth: *All Hispanics/Latinos are undocumented or are in the U.S. illegally.*

Fact: **Many Latinos/Hispanics are U.S. citizens whose families have been here for generations. Others have immigrated here legally. Regardless of their legal status, survivors of sexual violence deserve support. Assumptions about a survivor's legal status may lead to inappropriate service or referrals. It is important to provide all survivors with all possible options and let them determine what they want to do.**

Myth: *All Hispanics/Latinos speak the same language, so any Spanish translator can provide interpretation services.*

Fact: **It is not appropriate to assume that all Hispanics/Latinos speak Spanish, or the same kind of Spanish. In fact, many rural and indigenous people from Central and South America speak Mayan dialects, and Brazilians speak Portuguese. Many speak English to varying degrees. Advocates should ask survivors if they are more comfortable speaking in their own language and access the appropriate interpretation services if necessary.**

If you have a staff member who speaks Spanish, it is important to remember that because s/he speak Spanish does not mean that s/he understands the culture in which the survivor lives. Cultural competency is a learning process that requires cultivating an understanding of a specific culture in addition to the language.

Myth: *All Hispanic/Latino immigrants have come to the U.S. willingly.*

Fact: **Although many immigrants are in the United States willingly, some are victims of trafficking. Often sexual violence plays a large role in the trafficking of women and children. It is important not to assume that an Hispanic woman/Latina is here with her family.**

Many victims of trafficking are women and children who were smuggled into the U.S. willingly under false promises of jobs or through fraudulent mail order or matchmaking services. However, once in the U.S., they are forced into prostitution or abusive marriages. Many victims of trafficking will not tell you about the circumstances by which they came to the U.S., and will be reluctant to disclose this information out of fear for their safety or of deportation. It is therefore important that advocates educate themselves on the issue of human trafficking to better know how to address these issues.

Barriers

Language Barriers

Language is key to establishing safety and trust. It is always helpful to have an interpreter available to assist with victims when there is a language barrier. Remember to assess the situation to determine the appropriate interpretation services. It is extremely important to avoid using children or family members to translate for a survivor. Use of family members or children may inhibit the survivor's willingness to speak openly and can put children in the inappropriate and potentially dangerous position of explaining the sexual violation of a parent.

Fear of Deportation

Many Hispanic/Latino immigrants suffer sexual violence, exploitation, and ongoing harassment by perpetrators who take advantage of their fear of deportation and lack of knowledge about their rights. Perpetrators often use threats of deportation to keep the victim fearful and silent. As advocates, it is vital to have access to accurate immigration information while providing emotional support and validation to victims of sexual violence.

Cultural Issues

Emphasis is placed on virginity in many Hispanic/Latino communities. In many Latino/Hispanic cultures a woman or girl who loses her virginity to rape, incest, or molestation is seen as a "promiscuous" woman. As an advocate, it is important to remember that these issues may arise with the survivor as well as with her family. It may be helpful to focus on the fact that sexual violence by nature is not an act of the victim's choosing, but instead an act of violence. It is important to be respectful of the cultural beliefs while reminding the victim and her family that the blame for the sexual assault lies with the perpetrator, not the victim.

Fear of the Legal System

Hispanics/Latinos may mistrust and fear the police and judicial authorities because in many Latin American countries these entities may be corrupt and oppressive. Take time to carefully explain the American justice system and the options available to the survivor and answer any questions s/he may have. As with any survivor, it is important to explain the pros and cons of utilizing the services of the judicial system so that s/he can make an informed decision. Most importantly, support whatever decision the survivor makes.

What Crisis Centers Can Do to Make a Difference

- Build alliances and trust with Hispanic/Latino community leaders. Canvass the community and find out who these leaders are and contact them to build bridges, share information, and resources. Listen to their ideas and suggestions on how to best connect with local Latino/Hispanic communities.
- Strive for cultural competency in your agency. Having someone on staff who speaks Spanish is only a beginning. Cultural competency involves much more. It requires a continual commitment on the part of you and your agency to provide culturally competent services and pursue education and training on cultural diversity.
- Make your presence known in the community. Attend Hispanic/Latino community events. Provide resources in Spanish to bodegas (Spanish markets), churches and other gathering places of the Latino/Hispanic community in your area.
- Recruit volunteers, Board members and staff from the Hispanic/Latino community. This will increase cultural awareness and sensitivity in your agency and will help with outreach to the Hispanic/Latino community.

Resources

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance provides technical assistance and support for conducting outreach to underserved populations. The Action Alliance also has regional Hispanic Forums, which focus specifically on enhancing services to Hispanic/Latino survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

www.vsdvalliance.org

Technical Assistance Line: 866.3.VSDVAA

Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline provides hotline services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence 24 hours a day. Services are available in Spanish and other languages.

Hotline: 800.838.8238 (v/tty)

Arte Sana (art heals) is a nonprofit agency for underserved survivors of gender and racial violence that promotes healing and empowerment through the arts and community education. Their website also includes fact sheets and resources on direct services, immigration issues and how to work towards cultural competency.

www.arte-sana.com

Alianza Latina en Contra la Agresion Sexual/ALAS (Latina Alliance Against Sexual Aggression) created a position statement regarding the elimination of barriers to services for Latino survivors of sexual violence, including steps on how to eliminate these barriers. The position statement can be downloaded at www.arte-sana.com/press_releases/pr_alaspositionstatement04.htm

For information email artesanando@yahoo.com

Legal Momentum provides legal information and technical assistance on immigration, discrimination and violence against women.

www.legalmomentum.com

National Sexual Violence Resource Center has a variety of resources in Spanish. The list is available at www.arte-sana.com/articles/materials_in_spanish.pdf



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