

AN ASSESSMENT OF ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES
WITH INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE AMONG LATINA WOMEN
IN NORTH TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

AN ASSESSMENT OF ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES WITH INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE AMONG LATINA WOMEN IN NORTH TEXAS

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Using the grounded theory method, a substantive theory of Latina intimate partner abuse was developed. Latina women above the age of 18, who by self-report were survivors of intimate partner abuse, were recruited via flyers distributed at various locations such as shelters, community gatekeepers, churches, Latina nursing associations, a local Spanish newspaper, and universities. Themes emerged from constant comparative analysis of in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interview transcripts with 15 Latina survivors of intimate partner abuse living in North Texas. Based on the themes, the theory *Sobrevivientes: encontrar el valor de irse* *Survivors: Finding the courage to leave* emerged. Courage to leave included 5 phases, the pursuit, the abuse begins, risk factors associated and cultural considerations, the cycle continues or escalates, and escape and a new life. The basic social psychological problem encountered was self-sacrifice. Because the women wanted what was best for their families and usually had limited

resources, both financially and socially and a great deal of fear, they continued to stay in the abusive cycle. In addition, the women had fear if they left they could not provide for their children, the abusive partner would kill them, or they would lose custody of their children. By self-sacrificing their own happiness and needs in the relationship, in an effort to uphold their cultural values and norms, the women were able to redefine their situation as livable, tolerable, understandable, reasonable and survivable. By internally combining courage and strength they were able to seek a safe place for themselves, and more importantly from their perspective, their children. With the external support of friends, family, law enforcement and shelters these women were able to begin a new chapter in their lives. Through the process of finding the courage to leave, the Latina women interviewed attempted to redirect their lives and begin a new life, free from abuse. Recommendations for outreach and prevention strategies are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Violence against women is an epidemic in this country. Approximately 1.5 million women are raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner each year (FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2000). Estimates can reach as high as 4 million when injury or attack by a current or former partner is considered. Approximately one third of all women will experience domestic or intimate partner abuse during adulthood (Browne, 1993; Wilt & Olsen, 1996). Every day, 11 women die as a result of domestic violence (FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2000). Violence against women is not limited to one specific class, geographical area, or type of person. It cuts across social differences and status lines. A great number of women face violence daily in America simply because they are women.

Despite increased public concern and awareness about domestic violence, there is little research and very few estimates of the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence among minority populations (Krishnan, Hilbert, VanLeeuwen, & Kolia, 1997). Previous research has found that domestic violence occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Gorton & Van Hightower, 2001; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1990). Hispanics/Latinos are currently the largest and fastest growing minority group in the country (U.S. Census, 2001); however, there is a lack of ethnic studies on violence

against Hispanic/Latina women or women from other minority groups (Sorenson, 1996). Those few studies that have focused on this population have been survey-based research, using data collection instruments designed primarily for Euro-American populations. Data have usually been obtained from large samples of survey-based instruments developed on and used with “Anglos” and simply applied to Hispanics/Latinas and other ethnic groups.

Findings on the rates of domestic violence among the various racial/ethnic groups have been inconsistent, with some studies indicating that certain groups have higher rates while other studies refute those findings. Furthermore, it is difficult to find rates on domestic violence among Hispanics/Latinos as a whole, and in particular for the subgroups of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Cuban, Dominican, etc., as ethnicity in most national surveys is commonly listed as simply “White,” “Black,” or “Other” (Sorenson, 1996).

Some research has demonstrated that Hispanic Americans as a group exhibit some of the highest rates of violent behavior toward their spouses. These rates vary by ethnic group (Puerto Ricans, Mexican, and Cuban) (Erez, 2000). The National Family Violence Survey (1994) found that the incidence of wife abuse is higher in Latino households; however, the National Crime Victimization Survey (1998) found the rates for Latinos (5.5 per 1,000) to be more similar to Whites (5.4 per 1,000) (Sorenson, 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 1994; U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Research indicates that there is a 54% rate of domestic violence in the Hispanic/Latino community (Sorenson, 1996). One study showed that domestic violence

is two to six times higher for non-Whites/Hispanics versus Whites (Sorenson, 1996). Another study indicated that 92% of Hispanic/Latino male batterers and 85% of women support group attendees reported witnessing their father abuse their mother when these individuals were growing up (Erez, 2000). Marital rape in Hispanic/Latino marriages appears to be disturbingly high, at rates of up to 80-90% (Perilla, 1999). It is estimated that in Texas, 30% of the abused women sheltered in 1991 were Hispanic/Latino (Texas Council on Family Violence, 2001).

In this study, a qualitative research approach was used to gain a better understanding of the attitudes and experiences with intimate partner abuse particular to Latina survivors by conducting 15 in-depth personal interviews of Latina females living in North Texas. Using the grounded theory method, the transcriptions of these interviews were analyzed for common themes and patterns for identifying the nature of intimate partner abuse among these women.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate the attitudes and experiences of Latina women who are survivors of intimate partner abuse. Through in-depth interviews, a grounded theory emerged that revealed Hispanic/Latina attitudes and personal experiences regarding this issue.

Research Question

This study sought to answer the following research question: What are the attitudes and experiences toward intimate partner abuse among Latina women who are survivors of intimate partner abuse in North Texas?

Grounded theory research is based on symbolic interactionism, which focuses on how persons view their circumstances, how they interact, and how these processes change (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Subsequent interview questions were guided based on the accumulating data and the result of the accumulation of data from the responses received.

Delimitations

The delimitation of this study is as follows:

- 1) The study is limited to Hispanic/Latino women of North Texas only.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- 1) Participation in the study was voluntary and based on a non-random convenience sample of Hispanic/Latino participants.
- 2) The study was limited to a one-time measurement of self-reported attitudes and behaviors. No attempt was made to monitor the changes in attitudes of participants over time. Therefore, no conclusions can be made regarding the permanence of such attitudes and behaviors reported.

Assumptions

Because a qualitative research design was used, the following assumptions were made for this study:

- 1) The focus is process rather than outcome.
- 2) The researcher, using one-on-one interviews, is the instrument for data collection and analysis.
- 3) Qualitative research is descriptive and both deductive and inductive in nature.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be defined for the purpose of this study:

- 1) Grounded theory research – A qualitative research methodology based on symbolic interactionism, which focuses on how persons view their circumstances, how they interact, and how these processes change (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).
- 2) Intimate partner abuse – Actual or threatened physical or sexual violence or psychological and emotional abuse directed toward a spouse, ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, or current or former dating partner (CDC, 2002).
- 3) Hispanic/Latino(a) – Persons who classify themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories. Classifications include: Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, as well as those who indicate that they are other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino. Typically, persons who indicate that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" include those whose

origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, the Dominican Republic, or people identifying themselves generally as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispanic, Hispano, and Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

Importance of the Study

Approximately one third of all women will experience domestic or intimate partner abuse during adulthood (Browne, 1993; Wilt & Olsen, 1996). Previous research has indicated that domestic violence occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Gorton & Van Hightower, 2001). While Hispanics/Latinos are currently the largest and fastest growing minority group in the country, studies on domestic violence against Hispanic/Latino women are sorely lacking (Sorenson, 1996). Differentiation of various Hispanic/Latino groups (Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, etc.), and recognition of the impact of cultural diversities, is essential to the collection of accurate and reliable data. Qualitative research, such as the use of interviews, is key to obtaining the information needed to design effective and culturally appropriate abuse prevention programs and services for this population (Sorenson, 1996).

Information obtained from this study will also be beneficial for health educators to consider when planning and designing effective domestic violence prevention and intervention programs and strategies. This information could assist health educators in ensuring their programs are culturally appropriate for this population.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Every day, 11 women die as a result of domestic violence (FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2000). Violence against women is not limited to one specific class, geographical area, or type of person. It cuts across social differences and status lines: white and black, rich and poor, Asian and European, Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon, urban and rural, religious and secular, professional and illiterate, heterosexual and lesbian, able-bodied and challenged, young and old. A great number of women face violence daily in America simply because they are women.

Previous research has found that domestic violence occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Gorton & Van Hightower, 2001). Despite increased public concern and awareness about domestic violence, there is little research and very few estimates of the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence among minority populations (Krishnan, Hilbert, VanLeeuwen, & Kolia, 1997).

Hispanics are the fastest growing population in the United States, reported to be 22.3 million in 1990 compared to 35.3 million in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2000). However, there is a true lack of ethnic studies on violence against Latina women or other women from minority groups (Sorenson, 1996). Data have usually been obtained from large

samples of survey-based instruments developed on and used with “Anglos” and simply applied to Latinas and other ethnic groups. Research on Hispanic women and violence is crucial in order to address a number of negative stereotypes of this population and explore the ethnic differences that possibly exist in attitudes regarding violence (Sorenson, 1996).

This literature review will: provide a brief overview of the Latino culture; define abuse; provide rates of abuse among Latinas; list factors that place Latinas at a higher risk for domestic violence/intimate partner abuse; describe the cultural barriers associated with Latina domestic violence; explore the unique aspects of acculturation and how it relates to domestic violence; describe the theoretical models that have been used to describe why violence occurs within this population; and list strategies for increasing accessibility/resources for Latina women and finally, explore future strategies to ensure the cycle of domestic violence does not continue.

The Latino Culture

Up until the 1990s, culture was generally not analyzed in great detail (Tamez, 1996). That was considered the specific task of anthropologists. Culture is usually referred to as the customs, attitudes, and worldviews practiced by a society (Champion, 1996; Jajinski, 1998). Customs proceed from traditions and habits; they become normal and part of one’s attitudes. Not all habits and beliefs come from one’s own tradition. For example, Tamez (1996) refers to Latin Americans as embracing Caucasian attitudes and norms because they are viewed as the more “prestigious culture.” The three main groups

gathered under the term “Latinas” includes Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. The majority of Mexican Americans were born in the United States. Also considered as part of this group are the Mexicans who cross the border searching for jobs and a better life. Those who have recently come from Mexico and who work in the agricultural field are now referred to as “migrant and seasonal workers.” Puerto Rican women tend to be concentrated in the northeastern area of the United States and are mostly employed in low-skilled manufacturing jobs. Cubans have come to the United States since 1959. Because they were previously entrepreneurs and professionals seeking asylum from communism, they were given special status and governmental assistance, which helped them do well economically versus the Puerto Rican and Mexican populations. Since the 1980’s, a second wave of Cuban immigration has occurred with a population that is more similar to Puerto Ricans and Mexicans (Isasi-Diaz, 1996; U.S. Census, 2000). The majority of these women are working in jobs that yield less income, have fewer benefits, and provide less stability (Isasi-Diaz, 1996).

The process of immigration for both men and women from developing countries is more often than not a very difficult and traumatic experience, which involves leaving familial support for an unknown foreign land where they may face a great amount of discrimination and prejudice (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002).

It is estimated that 1.5 million Hispanics live in rural areas within the U.S., with a high concentration in the southwest (Gorton & Hightower, 1999). Recent research has focused on migrant and seasonal workers and domestic violence. Though still new, research states that 25-35% have been the victim of domestic violence. Those women

who were pregnant tended to be at a lower risk, which is contrary to some of the research among the general population regarding domestic violence (Gorton & Hightower, 1999). Preliminary studies have also found that a lower and slower level of acculturation takes place within these rural areas. This may be due to a lack of resources (Champion, 1996).

Rodriguez (1993; 1995) looked for abuse rates among Mexican and Mexican American farm worker women and found that 35% reported physical abuse, 21% had experienced forced sex, and 28% experienced fear from their partner. Health was described among this population as a peaceful life and lifestyle.

Definitions of Abuse

The definition of abuse varies widely across cultures; even in the U.S., the definition is constantly changing (Ramos-Lira, Koss, & Russo, 1999). A full understanding of the experience of abuse requires determining how the meanings and definitions of abuse are similar and different for women, depending on their cultural background and context (Ramos-Lira et al., 1999). Abuse can be defined as any act of coercion, physical or verbal force, humiliation, denial of access to resources, deprivation of liberty, or life-threatening situation that results in psychological harm (Davila & Brackley, 1999). One of the most enduring problems in the field of intimate partner abuse is defining violence and abuse (Gelles, 1997). It is far too complex and difficult to specifically define which acts are physical but not violent, and which are, due to the varying cultural and subcultural views. For the purpose of this study the term was self defined by the participants and the researcher incorporated the view held by a number of

researchers, which defines violence as, “an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person” (Gelles, 1997, p. 14).

Rates of Abuse

Studies show that domestic violence occurs among all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Gorton & Van Hightower, 2001; Straus & Corbin, 1998) but the findings on the rates of domestic violence among the various racial/ethnic groups have been inconsistent. Some studies indicate that certain groups have higher rates while other studies refute those findings (Gelles, 1997). There is very limited information on how domestic violence experiences vary by ethnicity. Little attention has been paid to immigrant women who are the victim of domestic violence (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002). Furthermore, it is difficult to find rates on domestic violence among Hispanics/Latinos as a whole, and in particular for the subgroups of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Cuban, Dominican, etc., as ethnicity in most national surveys is commonly listed as simply “White,” “Black,” or “Other” (Sorenson, 1996).

The findings of the few studies that have examined the connection between ethnicity and violence against women are inconsistent (Kalof, 1999). Data from the National Family Violence Surveys (1994) found domestic violence more common among Latinos than whites. In a Los Angeles Study of over 3,000 households, Sorenson (1996) found that Hispanics did not have a higher rate of abuse than non-Hispanic/whites but actually a lower rate (8% versus 20%). It was found that like whites, Hispanics were reluctant to report a sexual assault or domestic violence. Hispanics were also similar to whites in resisting the assault and developing mental disorders from the assault. The only

difference found was that Hispanics sought psychosocial services less often than whites following the assault. This may be the result of lack of services for this population (Sorenson, 1992).

The National Family Violence Survey (1994) found that the incidence of wife abuse is slightly higher in Latino households; however, the National Crime Victimization Survey (1998) found the rates to be more similar for Latinos (5.5 per 1,000) compared to Whites (5.4 per 1,000).

According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (1994) administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, research indicated that there is a 54% rate of domestic violence in the Hispanic community (again, all ethnic categories of Hispanic were combined under the umbrella term “Hispanic”). One study showed that domestic violence is two to six times higher for non-whites/Hispanics versus whites (Sorenson, 1996). It is estimated in Texas that 30% of the abused that were sheltered in 1991 were Hispanic (Texas Council on Family Violence, 2001). Other studies have shown that the rates of domestic violence are very similar to other ethnic groups, such as African Americans.

Kantor, Jajinski, and Aldarondo (1994) examined marital violence among Hispanic American and Anglo American families and found that there were a higher number of assaults among Mexican American and Puerto Rican husbands born in the U.S.

One study of immigrant women found that 25-35% had been the victims of abuse (Hodgeland & Rosen, 1991). Anderson’s (1993) research of immigrant Hispanic women

in the District of Columbia area found that their rate of abuse increased after they moved to the U.S. Anderson (1993) also discovered that the rate of abuse was higher among undocumented or conditional resident Latinas who were married to citizens of the U.S. or lawful permanent residents. One research study found that Hispanic Americans as a group exhibit some of the highest rates of violent behavior toward their spouses. These rates vary by ethnic group (Puerto Ricans, Mexican, and Cuban) (Erez, 2000).

The issue of sexual assault must be noted here since this study included married survivors. According to the New Mexico Clearinghouse on Sexual Abuse and Assault (2002), non-Hispanics were more likely to report sexual assault than Hispanics (32.5% vs. 21.7%), rape/sexual assault involving *strangers* (33.7% vs. 27.3%), and rape/sexual assault by *nonstrangers* (31.8% vs. 17.7%). [“Hispanic” was defined as a person who described himself as Mexican-American, Chicano, Mexican, Mexicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, or from some other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. “Non-Hispanic” was defined as persons who reported their culture or origin as something other than “Hispanic” as defined above, regardless of race.]

A study by Perilla (1999) indicated that 92% of Latino male batterers and 85% of women support group attendees reported witnessing their father abuse their mother as they were growing up. The rate of marital rape in Latino marriages appears to be disturbingly high, at rates as great as 80-90% (Perilla, 1999).

Gondolf and Fisher (1988) found that Hispanic women endured the longest duration of violence, with 32% experiencing domestic violence for over five years as compared with 21% of African American and Caucasian women. Furthermore,

Hispanics tended to be poorer, less educated and more inhibited in their efforts to establish their lives away from their abusers.

Krishnan, Hilbert, VanLeeuwen, and Kolia (1997) found that 35% of 242 women sampled from a domestic violence shelter did experience some sort of violence in their past relationships as well as their “present partner/spouse” for whom they were seeking shelter. Ethnicity was not reported as a variable in this study.

Torres’ (1991) study of Mexican American women living in domestic violence shelters in the U.S. found no difference in severity or type of assault suffered by Mexican American versus Caucasian women; however, Mexican American women, according to Torres, were more likely than Caucasian women to view certain levels of abuse as “normal and acceptable.”

Factors That Place Latinas at a Higher Risk

So what places Latinas at a higher risk for violence compared to other groups? Researchers conclude that the following risk factors may increase domestic violence within the culture (Perilla, 1999; Sorenson, 1996):

- *Alcohol*. Higher rates of drinking for social problems, escapist drinking and binge drinking are very high within the Hispanic community.
- *Poverty*
- *Unemployment*
- *Higher school drop-out rates*

- *Cultural gender roles that portray females as passive, nurturing supporters of men's activities, along with cultural beliefs that emphasize loyalty and sacrifice for the family may contribute to a tolerance for domestic violence* (Bart & Moran, 1993). These themes are particularly strong in cultures where honor is emphasized. One study found that Hispanic students from an "honor culture" rated a woman in an abusive relationship more positively if she stayed with the man. Hispanic students who watched a video where a woman was being pushed and threatened by her fiancé later communicated less disapproval of the violence and more approval of the woman if she portrayed herself as contrite and self-blaming (Jajinski, 1998).
- *Stress.* Researchers looked at the effects of drinking, stress and occupational strain on rates of domestic violence among Hispanics. No correlation was found. The research concluded that alcohol and stress may not increase domestic violence due to Hispanics, primarily men, experience more chronic stress and integrated drinking behavior (such a drinking beer daily) throughout one's lifetime (Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994).

One research study examined the effects of the Catholic Church doctrine as a risk factor for domestic violence. The myths of virgin martyrs may reinforce passivity and the victimization of Catholic girls and women. The passive female may exhibit a potential that is activated by the male. When a man murders a virgin in the course of sexual assault, he facilitates in her the internal reward of heaven that is promised to virgin

martyrs. It is viewed that women are responsible for men's actions. When women do not incite, but resist, they help men to be good (Bart & Moran, 1993).

Why do Latino men batter? Perilla (1999) stated that the reasons may include the following:

- Men learn that violence is an option
- It works
- The consequences are minimal if not non-existent
- Power and control issues

Latina women are not allowed to have male friends; however, Latino men have many women "friends." Latino men learn from a very young age that they are entitled to many rights and possessions, just from the sole aspect of being a man (Perilla, 1999).

Cultural Barriers Associated With Latina Domestic Violence

There are numerous cultural, economic, legal and practical factors that interact to prevent Latina women who are victims of abuse from seeking or receiving the help they need. Several family violence studies suggest that for domestic violence victims who suffer the greatest poverty, isolation, language or other cultural barriers, services are often unavailable or inadequate (Gelles, 1997). This underserved population includes low-income earners, residents of rural areas, immigrants, migrant and seasonal farm workers, and non-English speaking women.

Battered Latina women face many barriers to seeking and receiving assistance (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002). These unique barriers may also prevent a Latina woman from leaving an abusive relationship/marriage. They may include:

- *Stigma of divorce.* Within this culture divorce is seen as a sin. Latina women fear that they may be rejected by their family, church, or friends due to the negative attitudes regarding divorced women (Sorenson, 1996).
- *Deportation.* The fear of being reported to immigration authorities. Dutton, Orloff and Aguilar-Hass (2000) reported that 21.7% of the battered immigrant women surveyed stated their fear of being reported to immigration authorities as their primary reason for remaining in an abusive relationship. According to Bonilla-Santiago (1996) the undocumented status of Latinas keeps them isolated and trapped within violent homes. Dutton et al. (2000) found that 72.3% of the battered Latinas surveyed in their study reported that their spouses never filed immigration petitions for their wives even though 50.8% of the victims qualified to have petitions filed on her behalf. Those abusers who did eventually file took almost four years to do so. Fear of deportation is a very powerful tool used by abusers to prevent battered immigrant women from seeking help and to keep them in violent relationship (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002). If a Latino couple applies for a green card together as man and wife, the couple must stay married or the green-card application is voided for both parties. The Latino batterer may tell his wife that she has to stay with him or she will be deported (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002).

- *Losing the children* (Erez, 2000).
- *Language barriers* (Erez, 2000). Some Latina women have not even heard of protective orders or that there are resources from the state and local agencies due to language barriers. Interpreters are not routinely available and their interpretation may be problematic. Bonilla-Santiago (1996) interviewed 25 incarcerated Hispanic women who had been battered, because of language and cultural barriers, “most of the Latina women had received no assistance or protection from the police, legal aid, welfare, family counseling agencies, or community mental health centers.” For many Hispanics, Spanish is their primary language or the only language spoken. If an individual does not feel comfortable or is unable to communicate with resource agencies due to a lack of Spanish-speaking volunteers, there will be a barrier to access and resources (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002; Sorenson 1996).
- *Skills and language*. The skills and language of shelter staff once intervention services are sought are key to retaining women who are survivors of domestic violence. Shelters are seen by this community as the “point of no return” rather than a resource. It is important to realize that it took a long time and many challenges for Latina women to arrive at a shelter, retention and comfort is important for this culture (Erez, 2000).
- *Machismo and Marianismo*. These are concepts of a fixed male and female role within the Latino culture. These cultural characteristics exist in all aspects of the family, individual, public and private life of Latino communities. In

Latino societies men are viewed as superior, while females are viewed as weak and passive. *Marianismo*, from Mother of God, supports the view that women are spiritually superior to men, and therefore can endure the suffering placed upon them by men (DeVidas, 1999).

- *Familialism*. There are strong expectations that Hispanic women and men will procreate and have children (DeVidas, 1999).
- *A greater tolerance of abuse*. What constitutes abuse is very different than that of Anglo women. It appears that Hispanic women may not view slight pushing or forced marital sex as “abuse” (Banillo-Santiago, 1996; Torres, 1991).
- *Isolation*. Low-income women and those who live in isolated conditions (such as in rural areas, with no telephone, or remote areas; and who only speak Spanish) are at the highest rates for abuse (Pinn & Chunko, 1997).
- *Transportation*. Many Hispanic women do not have cars or a driver’s license. Therefore, to leave a highly abusive relationship with children is a challenge without the resource of transportation.
- *La Familia Solamente*. The Hispanic culture believes that problems should be solved in the home and not with outside sources such as counseling or friends. One interview conducted by Sorenson (1996) stated that seeing a psychiatrist or counselor is seen as something for psychotic or crazy people.
- *Lack of income*. Many Hispanics live at or under poverty level (U.S. Census, 2000).

- *Employment.* It is not uncommon for Latina women to be working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Their resources are somewhat limited as most of these jobs are at minimum wage or under with very limited growth potential.
- *Multiple children.* Most Hispanic families have at least two children. Therefore, leaving would be a huge burden to the Latina woman. This is compounded by the fact that many shelters have limited, if any, space. Having accommodations for four to six family members is problematic for many shelters (Friends of the Family, 2002).
- *Shelters.* Many domestic violence shelters may require proof of citizenship and many do not have Spanish-speaking workers on staff. However, an estimated 30% of Texas women in shelters are Latina indicating a greater need for culturally appropriate shelters. The issue of shelters not providing culturally appropriate food (for example: tortillas, beans and rice) and grooming aids (African American hair care products for example) may add to the complexity of Hispanic women residing comfortably in abuse shelters (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002; Sorenson 1996).
- *Perceived lack of privacy and loss of confidentiality.* It is important that the Hispanic home remain scared and loyal. If a battered woman leaves and reports the incident, the privacy and confidentiality of the family is perceived as broken.
- *Religiosity.* Research indicated that some Catholic priests and leaders were not supportive of divorce or for wives leaving their abusive husbands (Sorenson, 1996).

- *Police*. The police have an extraordinary lower response time for low-income neighborhoods. Families, particularly Mexican American families, felt the police are not a respected and resourceful community service.
- *Pride*. The Hispanic culture has a tremendous sense of pride (Abalos, 1994).
- *Respect/Respeto*. Being a patriarchal dominated culture, respect and entitlement are key components of the Latino family (Erez, 2000).
- *Lack or loss of friends/extended family*. Friends and family will not support the woman's choice to leave. The research shows that Latina women are frightened and feel they may risk losing their children or be rejected by their more extended family. One woman shared that if she returned to Mexico divorced she would be rejected by her family (Sorenson, 1996).
- *Strict gender/sex roles*. One study found that Hispanics have more supportive attitudes toward traditional sex roles than both African Americans, Caucasians and Asian students. Previous research has demonstrated that family relations, including gender role expectations and social support are associated with risks of wife assault (Jajinski, 1998). Latino families share strong feelings of loyalty, pride, reciprocity and solidarity, factors that may put this population at risk for domestic violence. Abalos & Becker (1994), among others, described the Latino family as a "sealed container" impenetrable by anyone from the outside. The Latino male is seen as the powerful head of family, the decision maker, the sole provider, the protector. The Latina female is seen as the moderator and heart of the family, ready to take care of others before herself. Patriarchy is the

foundation and backbone of this culture. Men are viewed as the “head of the household” (*jefe de la casa*) and make all the major decisions in the family. Latinos, as a culture, have a hard time distinguishing between love and power. The male is respected in the family. Anything less is seen as a loss of his sense of manhood. Children in this culture may be over-protected and pampered compared to those in Caucasian cultures. Latino children are socialized from an early age to show respect (*respeto*). Hispanic mothers are seen as very attached, whereas fathers are viewed as somewhat distant (Bart & Moran, 1993).

- *Myths*. In Latin American cultures there are many culture-based myths which reflect the violent ways in which women are perceived simply because they are women. Rural Latina society refers to the myth of the *candeleja/llorona*, or *patasola*. These are beautiful, elegant women with long black hair who attract men. They turn out to be evil spirits who terrorize the men and in extreme cases, eat their young. Rumor is that the *candeleja* is the spirit of a grieving soul, a woman who was raped because she chose to live alone on a farm. This perception reinforces the ferocity of man against women, and that living alone makes a man violent towards women, and puts a woman at risk. In addition, the patriarchal myths of Christianity have reinforced the aggravated violence against women (Tamez, 1996).

- *Folklore*. In the culture of *mestizo*-white world, machismo is imposed with violence. Much of the time it is an accepted tradition. Popular traditional Spanish songs include lyrics that portray the husband beating his wife in the head

to teach her to obey. Or the Mexican *corridos*, which refer to the macho man in terms of a king. In this song, a man comes home drunk and beats his wife, but he is still the king. These songs reflect the patriarchal society.

Unique Aspects of Acculturation

One theory of violence is from acculturation, which is defined as the process whereby immigrants come to adopt the values and behaviors of the host country (Jajinski, 1998). Acculturation may reduce the incidences by providing economic stability. However, it may also increase it. Jajinski (1998) found from 800 Latinos sampled from the National Family Violence Survey (1998) that:

- There was a strong identification with the family (family described as cohesive and supportive).
- Strong gender roles were prevalent.
- Restrictive attitudes toward women existed (this was found in prior research to be reduced as a result of acculturation).
- High acculturation rates seem to lead to a greater utilization of English, leading to better jobs and thus higher incomes.
- Acculturation may increase rates of domestic violence by causing an increase in stress with stressors such as pressures to learn English, economic barriers, issues of discrimination, etc.

- Third generations of Hispanic Americans had the highest rates of domestic violence (when controlling for age, poverty and education).

It was concluded in this research study that acculturation does increase rates of spousal/partner abuse among Hispanic women (Jajinski, 1998).

Theoretical Explanations for Violence Among Hispanics

Family Systems Theory

According to this theory, the family is subject to societal stressors that cause family members to be violent toward one another. The families (in this case, the Hispanic families) accept violence as a means to resolve conflict in the same manner that society does, thus the most powerful family member is the most violent (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Perilla, 1999).

Ecological Approach

This model looks at the Hispanic batterer not individually, but as human beings operating in the spiritual, social, political, historical, and economical realms of reality and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Perilla, 1999).

Feminists Perspective

The Feminists Perspective Model looks at the inequality of power within the family structure (Perilla, 1999). The need for more qualitative data such as focus groups is highlighted with this model (Sorenson, 1996).

Strategies for Increasing Accessibility and Resources for Latina Women

The issue of violence is multi-faceted, involving many social, psychological, cultural, and systems aspects. Violence, coupled with the cultural issue of being a Latina female, makes this issue an even more complex and challenging one.

- Effective treatment programs for batterers that include group counseling are important.
- Governmental policies and regulations are still in need of reform. It is important for voters, primarily of various ethnicities, to vote on legislation to protect and fund domestic violence programs.
- Our schools are also an effective mechanism for prevention and intervention. Starting at elementary level, educational/anti-violence programs should be included as key components to the curriculum. Assistance for ESL courses and education courses are important for this population, which may have higher rates of violence due to additional stressors caused by its members not speaking English or having a lack of resources.
- More resources and navigators need to be provided for Hispanic women in shelters and social service arenas. By providing Spanish-speaking, culturally competent social service workers, Hispanic women may be more comfortable with utilizing these services. For example, there are now many Web sites in Spanish for shelters and hotlines; however,

estimates on Internet usage by Hispanics have been very low, at approximately 2-5% (Kingsnorth et al., 2001).

- The church is a key place for education and resources, as the Catholic Church is so integrated within this culture.
- Traditional coping measures, such as going outside of the family for help, do not apply to the Hispanic population.
- The need for translated materials is important. Extra time is needed for outreach workers in ethnic communities to provide adequate services to individual survivors.
- Language and transportation issues are huge barriers among this population, which in-turn, requires extra time and extra funding for social service agencies.
- The children come first, so their consideration is paramount. If a domestic violence shelter serves a predominately ethnic minority population, the “average” number of occupational hours that need to be allocated are much higher.
- Qualitative research, such as focus groups is key to the success of future programs and services for this population.
- Differentiation of various Hispanic groups such as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, etc. is essential to accurate and reliable data. We must distinguish the different cultural levels and recognize cultural diversities.

- Grant proposals for innovative programs are a good strategy to increase funding for special outreach. A major issue for the East Los Angeles Rape Hotline was how to include families, especially men, in their services, which was essentially to gain legitimacy in the Latino community. In 1983, through an innovative grant, they produced a fotonovela about a family in which a teenage girl is sexually assaulted by her uncle. The story line upholds the cultural value placed in the family, but modifies it so the young girl's integrity is not jeopardized. They also have a theater education program. However, both of these programs were fairly expensive to maintain and develop.
- The OCJP (California Office of Criminal Justice Planning) looked at high crime, economic factors, and a lack of social and criminal services. Target money was then granted to the crisis center as well and led to the establishment of two African-American centers in downtown Los Angeles (Bart & Moran, 1993).
- The early 1980's were a period of increasing awareness of racial and ethnic issues in the U.S. anti-rape movement. Although there were relatively few women of color in the movement in California the formation of the Southern California Rape Hotline Alliance ("the Alliance") and the statewide Coalition of Rape Crisis Centers ("the coalition") brought women of color together and provided the forum in which to raise issues about doing rape crisis work among Black, Latina,

and Chicana, Asian, and Native American women. The East Los Angeles Rape Hotline, a grass roots development founded in 1976, was one of the few and earliest anti-rape organizations that was not predominantly white. It was founded by Latina women concerned about providing bilingual and appropriate services in the largely Latino, Chicano, and Mexicano areas of East Los Angeles. As one of the few bilingual hotlines of any kind it also provided other community services, such as domestic violence. Hotlines and centers need to continue to focus on integration and culturally appropriate services as well as recruitment of women of color (Bart & Moran, 1993).

- Cultural gender roles that portray females as passive, nurturing supporters of men's activities, along with cultural beliefs that emphasize loyalty and sacrifice for the family, may contribute to a tolerance for domestic violence.
- Teaching egalitarian concepts to Latino children is also a key component to decreasing family violence. Instructing children that women have just as much decision making power, and an important role in the family as men is critical. In this culture, sex roles are strongly established leading to power issues. If children learn a more egalitarian structure they may, in-turn, refrain from power struggles where they feel compelled to abuse their partners/family.

- Women should seek an intercultural dialogue that embraces mutual respect and recognition. Women can be just as much a protagonist within a culture as men, in terms of ignoring violence or perpetuating myths and barriers (Tamez, 1996). Only by working together can Latina women begin the cultural transformation that is needed through resistance, interpretation, and shared action, to overcome violence against women.

Summary

The literature clearly illustrates the prevalence of intimate partner abuse among Latina women. The literature, or lack thereof, also shows a clear need for qualitative, culturally appropriate research for this population. The voices of battered women are rarely heard in the published literature, and this is especially true of Latina women. We need to learn what is effective, the barriers, outcomes and recommendations for programs from the women themselves (Thurston et al., 1998).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers the method of grounded theory research that guided this qualitative study in relation to its participants, procedures implemented to recruit participants, the collection of data, and the techniques used to analyze the data.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in the greater Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas. Participants were Hispanic women over the age of 18, and, according to self-report, were survivors of intimate partner abuse. These participants were volunteers who spoke English and Spanish, or Spanish only.

Interviews were conducted with 15 Hispanic/Latina women. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 56 years, with a median age of 39 years. Seven of the women were Mexican, six were Mexican American, one was Puerto Rican, and one was Argentinean. Marital status was reported as six married, seven divorced, one separated, and one widowed. Their formal education backgrounds ranged from junior high school to some college. Employment was reported as four administrative assistants, two general business, one in the cleaning industry, two computer support specialists, three homemakers, and three part-time teacher's aids. Their household incomes ranged from \$10,000-\$20,000 to \$31,000-\$40,000 annually.

The participants had experienced a range of physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, and property abuse, with physical, verbal, and emotional abuse most frequently noted. At the time of the interviews, the women were in all stages of safety. Some were currently living with their abusive spouse or partner, others were currently remarried to a different spouse, one participant was a surviving widow, and one participant was in a transitional housing (shelter) arrangement.

Twelve of the participants spoke Spanish as their primary language; the remaining three spoke English as their primary language. Four of the participants spoke Spanish only, so a translator was needed to transcribe the data and assist with the interviews. Both translators utilized in this study were community gatekeepers with whom the participants felt comfortable and with who they had a prior relationship.

Protection of Human Participants

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas Woman's University. Each prospective participant was informed of the purpose of the study and the method for data collection (audio-taped interview either in person or via phone). Written consent, as required by Texas Woman's University's IRB, was obtained from each participant. Participants were also verbally informed that the information collected was confidential and anonymous, and was only being utilized for the purpose of this study. Participants were informed that the researcher would transcribe the interview and then erase the audiotape when the study was complete. A bilingual translator was utilized at each of the interviews when the participant only spoke

Spanish, to assist in translation, answering questions, and transcribing of Spanish audio-taped interviews. All audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Audiotapes and transcripts were alphabetically coded to further ensure confidentiality. Participant quotes were cited with no identifying information.

Interviewees were informed that reflection of their personal experience of intimate partner violence may arouse and elicit strong or painful emotions. Participants were informed they could terminate the interview at any time and not be penalized in any way. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were offered a list of support services.

Participants who met the criteria for the study and signed the informed consent form received a \$10 gift certificate to Wal-mart as a small appreciation for their time and involvement. The certificate was given at the end of the in-person interviews. If the interview was conducted via phone, the gift certificate was mailed to the participant. Participants were informed that they could still receive the gift certificate even if they chose not to continue with the interview. Three of the participants declined the gift certificate. All participants were informed that they could review their transcript if they wished. One of the participants accepted. To establish inter-rater reliability, a pilot group of two initial participants were interviewed. Their information was transcribed and shared back with them by the researcher for accuracy. Both of the participants were satisfied and felt that their transcript accurately reflected their feelings and responses.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were recruited via a bilingual flyer (see Appendix A) distributed at women's shelters, employee break rooms, Hispanic community leaders, churches, and university bulletin boards, and a copy of the flyer was published in a local Hispanic newspaper. Additional participants were referred from the researcher's personal contacts with social workers, women's shelters, and nurses or via a snowball flyer effect from members of the Hispanic/Latino community. The distribution points were designed to recruit a varied sample representing Hispanic women from different socioeconomic levels, ages, and current status of abuse. Flyers were distributed during December of 2002. All interviews were conducted between December of 2002 and March of 2003.

Potential participants were screened for eligibility when they contacted the researcher by either phone or email. Those meeting the stated criteria scheduled interview times, dates, and locations that were convenient for them. Arrangements were made to interview the participants at restaurants, residences, or a gatekeeper's office, or to conduct the interview via phone calls to the participant's home. Interviews were held in public locations and conducted in private secluded areas. Phone calls to the participant's home were scheduled at a time when confidentiality could be ensured by both parties. All interviews were audio taped. There was not a maximum length for each interview, but most averaged 60-75 minutes. Consent forms were read and signed prior to the interview and the participant was given her gift certificate. If the interview was conducted via phone, then both the consent form and gift certificate were mailed to the participant immediately following the interview. Eleven of the interviews were conducted in person and four were

conducted via phone. At the conclusion of the interview, each woman was offered a referral list of domestic violence resources. Fourteen of the 15 participants completed demographic information in addition to the interview.

The field notes and recordings were transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible after each interview was conducted. Researcher notes were collected in addition to the interviews for use in the data analysis.

Instrumentation

Applying the grounded theory methodology, the participants guided the interview process. Interview questions became more detailed and specific to the responses of the participants as the themes emerged. The seven core questions, available in both Spanish and English, were:

- 1) Define “abuse.”
- 2) Have you, or someone close to you, experienced intimate partner abuse by a spouse, boyfriend, or loved one?
- 3) When did this abuse begin?
- 4) How often did you or someone close to you experience the abuse?
- 5) What feelings and emotions did you experience as a result of the abuse?
- 6) How do you feel intimate partner abuse is viewed among people in your culture?
- 7) What resources such as support services, housing, etc. do you have available to you?

Data Analysis

This research was analyzed using grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that grounded theory is a method of research that derived a theory from data that was systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. “In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). Grounded theory is a qualitative method that does not start with hypothesis or research questions like deductive methods. Instead grounded theory starts with a phenomenon which the researcher finds to be inadequately explained in theory and with a well-defined research problem. It is often used in case studies for the investigation of new concepts and theory.

Grounded theory assumes that people living with a similar experience share a specific social-psychological problem or issue that is often unarticulated (Hutchinson, 1993). The theory is particularly useful for areas in which existing theory is weak or does not seem applicable to practice. One approach to grounded theory is to study cases such as a single tribe, culture, town, or company (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is designed to help us “find answers to issues that seem important but remain unanswered” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 37). In this study, the researcher utilized grounded theory methodology because of its unique attributes for studying a population with limited culturally appropriate research available that addresses the issue of intimate partner abuse.

In grounded theory, codes are developed from the analysis of the data as it is collected. Out of this coding process, additional questions evolve that need to be asked

and additional data which need to be examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that the researcher start the coding of data and analysis as soon as the data are collected. Once initial data were collected, the researcher began open coding of the data, looking for patterns. Coding involved dividing the data into concepts, identifying categories of concepts, assigning properties to the categories, determining dimensions of properties along a continuum, and breaking properties into dimensions.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend summarizing the results in a memo, with reference to the coded items. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), memos are the processes for documenting the findings in a grounded theory investigation. They are prepared as the study progresses, and follow each of the coding sessions of the raw data. The researcher wrote a memo with coding notes to document the coding process, and integrated all the data simultaneously. Each piece of data collected was continually compared to what was already collected.

Diagrams are used to demonstrate the relationships between the phenomena documented in the memos. Matrices show the relationships of the phenomenon and how the processes affect them as observed in the study. They set the context for the study and provide the linkage to the area under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Informal diagrams were used by the researcher to verify a relationship between the researcher's memos, field notes, and the theory. Matrices were then used to categorize the data and further demonstrate the emerging themes.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend theoretical sampling to discover categories and their properties, and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory. An adequate sample is determined by the researcher, but occurs when further sampling fails to reveal additional categories, properties, or interrelationships. The researcher then makes the decision to discontinue collecting data and proceed to another research step (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By the thirteenth participant, the researcher noted that categories, themes, and interrelationships were emerging. The last two interviews were utilized to verify these categories that had emerged.

Theoretical saturation, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), occurs after many rounds of coding where no new categories emerge from the process. Once this point is reached, further data collection no longer is productive. Repeated data collection only adds bulk to the coded data and nothing to the theory. Once theoretical saturation had occurred, the researcher began determining the relationships between categories using a process called axial coding.

As recommended, each interview was analyzed line-by-line, asking the question, “What is emerging from these data?” The initial codes, often noted in the words of the participants, clustered into categories, and then into themes, and finally emerged into theoretical constructs. For example, analysis revealed that the main concerns of participants were issues of lack of resources and fear. Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to these central themes as the basic social psychological problem.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), it is important to step back from the research to maintain an objective stance. For qualitative research, this usually means an

openness and willingness to listen. To do this, the researcher must think comparatively of each incident within the data and obtain multiple viewpoints. One way to accomplish this is through multiple interviews; to periodically step back and ask, "What is going on here?"; to obtain an attitude of skepticism; and to follow the research procedures as rigorously as possible (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 45-46). Because intimate partner abuse is a sensitive and highly charged issue, these methods for ensuring objectivity were implemented by the researcher.

The goals of inductive research differ from the goals of deductive research, and so do the techniques used to evaluate the achievement of those goals. "When building theory inductively, the concern is with representativeness of concepts and how concepts vary dimensionally" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 214). "The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser, 1992, p. 75). Hutchinson (1993) states the goal as accurately perceiving and presenting another's world. Glaser contends that grounded theory is credible because it "fits the real world, works in predictions and explanations, is relevant and readily modifiable" (Glaser, 1978, p. 142).

Grounded theory has its own sources of rigor. It is driven by the data in such a way that the final shape of the theory is likely to provide a good fit to the situation. Glaser (1992) suggests two main criteria for judging the effectiveness of the emerging theory: that it "fits" the situation and that it "works" by helping the people in the situation to make sense of their experience. Hutchinson (1993) explains that a quality grounded theory has codes that fit the data. Readers of quality theories can actually sense

or feel this fit. Validity is achieved after much fitting of words, when the chosen one best fits the pattern (Glaser, 2002). “Fit” for this study was confirmed by three of the participants who reviewed their summaries and transcription and by the chair of the dissertation committee that reviewed the coding of the data. With qualitative research, the validity will be further documented as readers and researchers respond to the relevance and usability of the data collected (Kearney, 2001).

A grounded theory is said to “work” when it illustrates variations in the participants processing of the issues. This study, considering the criteria of being Hispanic female, still had a fairly diverse sample of women from various backgrounds such as occupation, age, and type and stages of abuse. A theory that works can predict what will happen under certain conditions (Hutchinson, 1993). An example from this study is the observation that Hispanic women who are/were abused by their husbands or boyfriends feared that their children would be taken away from them.

Lastly, the theory must be relevant and modifiable. In this study, when comparing the transcripts and identifying key words and phrases such as “important,” “my biggest concern,” “what upset me the most,” etc., the researcher was able to identify the most relevant experiences to include in the phases. Modifiability refers to the flexibility of the theory. As more data are collected throughout the study, the theory continues to be modified based on incoming data. The theory proposed from this research consists of five theoretical constructs conceived from 19 categories. It is the saturation of the data that contributes to its relevance and modifiability.

Summary

This was a qualitative study based on the grounded theory method. Data were obtained from in-depth one-on-one interviews, notes, and the researcher's memos. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of simultaneously collecting, coding, and sorting. Participant quotes were used to support and validate the theories that resulted from the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the experiences of Latina women who are survivors of intimate partner abuse. The participants' narratives are analyzed using grounded theory methodology. Block quotations were extracted from the interview transcripts and used to illustrate the constructs of the proposed theory, *Sobrevivientes: Encontrar el Valor de Irse* (*Survivors: Finding the Courage to Leave*).

Fear, sadness, immobilization, lack of resources, self-blame, and wanting to be a good mother and wife propelled the women to stay in their abusive relationships. The basic psychological problem encountered was self-sacrifice. Because the women wanted what was best for their families and usually had limited resources, both financially and socially, and a great deal of fear, they continued to stay in the abusive cycle. In addition, the women had fear that if they left they could not provide for their children, that the abusive partner would kill them, or that they would lose custody of their children. By self-sacrificing their own happiness and needs in the relationship, in an effort to uphold their cultural values and norms, the women were able to redefine their situation as livable, tolerable, understandable, reasonable, and survivable.

The basic social psychological process of finding the courage to leave consisted of five phases (see Figure 1). The women experienced various forms and occurrences of

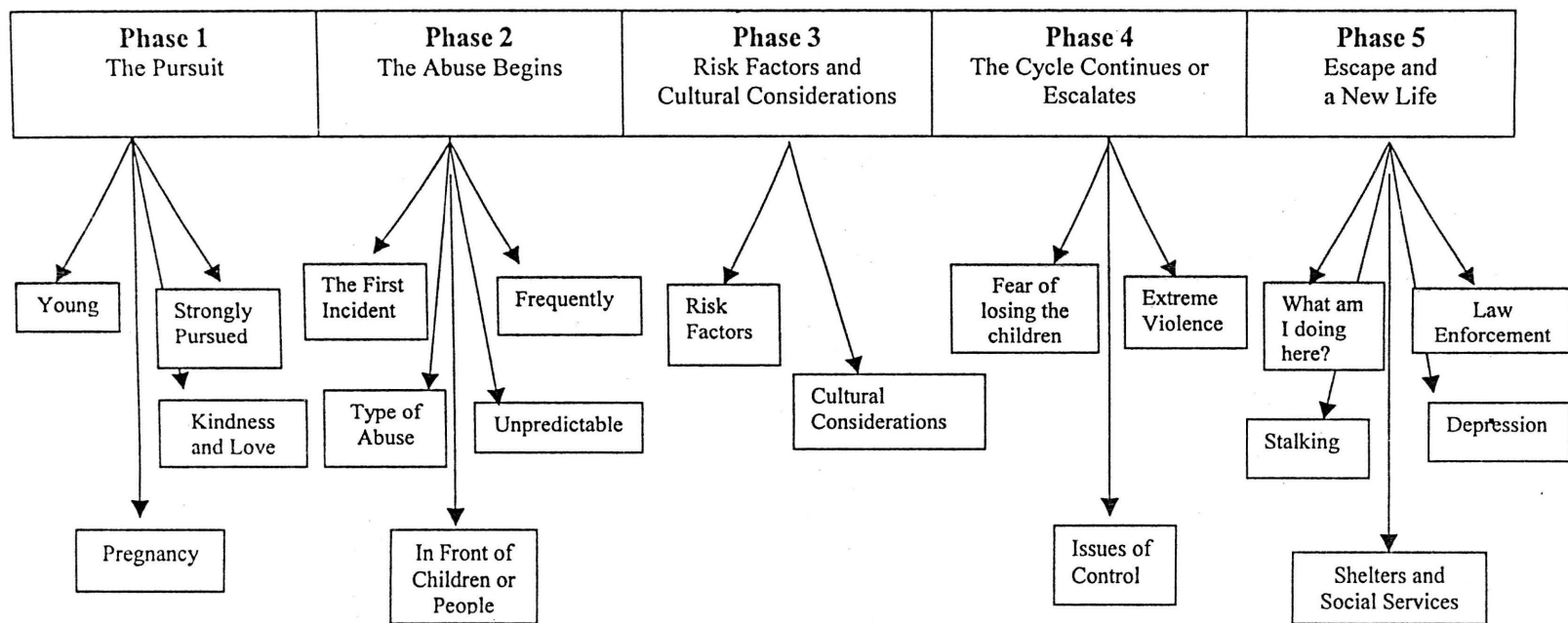


Figure 1. The Process of Finding the Courage to Leave

abuse from their partner through a five-phase process. The phases that emerged from the data included 1) the pursuit, 2) the abuse begins, 3) risk factors and cultural considerations, 4) the cycle continues or escalates, and 5) escape and a new life. By finding the courage to leave, the Latina women interviewed attempted to redirect their lives and begin a new life, free from abuse. By internally combining courage and strength, they were able to seek a safe place for themselves, and more importantly from their perspective, their children. With the external support of friends, family, law enforcement, and shelters, these women were able to begin a new chapter in their lives.

There is a way, it is not easy. It is never easy. But I look at my life now...I am a mother of four beautiful children. My oldest is going to the marines. My other ones are graduating from high school. My daughter wants to be a nurse. We have goals. I on the other hand, I am an administrative assistant at the elementary school, I am buying my own home. I work a second job and there is a way out. You are either a survivor or not. There is a light down there...you don't see it at first, but you do. [Participant G]

Phase 1 - The Pursuit

The first phase in finding the courage to leave was meeting the abuser and the courtship pursuit. Concerning this first phase, the participants discussed their age when they met their partner, the intensity of the abuser's pursuit, the initial nature of the relationship, and their pregnancy situation in the relationship.

The women shared that they were young when they first met their abusive partner. This seemed to contribute to an increased dependency and a lack of resources for the women.

We were actually very young. He was about 16 and I was about 17. [Participant B]

I was young and had someone approach me, at a bus stop on my way to school. Back then I was a kid, 17. You were not raised then the way kids are raised now. I got married the year I graduated (high school). [Participant C]

Our first date was in February, 1983. I was 17 at the time and in June I left my home to go live with him. I was 17 and he was 36. [Participant G]

I met “R” when I was 19. Nobody told me his family was going to be part of the package. [Participant K]

I met him when I was 19. He used to own this nightclub. My girlfriend and I used to ride our bikes around and jog in this neighborhood and we used to stop at this little place where they had hamburgers. And this is where I met this man. He said, I have this nightclub across the street and were we looking for a job, on the weekend-did we want to help him clean – he just got this place. [Participant N]

...we were teenagers...[Participant O]

Three women reported that their future partner strongly pursued them:

I was young and had someone approach me, at a bus stop on my way to school. But he approached me in a very peering form. We just talked. But I would see him every morning at the bus stop – we grew to know each other. [Participant C]

When we met, we were both working at a restaurant. I was very shy and I was so conservative, I would not flirt or go with the waiters. He would pursuit me over and over trying to get together with me. [Participant D]

I worked in hotel in Cancun. He was there for fun. He noticed me. I didn’t notice him. I didn’t want to know of anyone. He was there constantly looking for me. Later on I thought that he wanted something good with me. [Participant M]

The beginning of the relationship was usually filled with “romance” and “kindness.” Most of the women viewed their abusive partners as very sweet and attentive.

The romance was like I never had seen before! I had him over for dinner with my friends. He stayed in the kitchen the whole time. And they were like-wow he stays in the kitchen with you-he helps out, but that wasn’t it. He didn’t want to be

with them. My friend wanted me to stay with her and have the baby. She was real jealous, I just thought she was being jealous - because she didn't even like her sister's husband and he was really a great guy! So I didn't give her credit. [Participant A]

...he was very great before I got married...He was very gentle, very care giving, kind - but I was wrong. [Participant D]

He had money. I was so happy. I thought I married a millionaire. [Participant E]

Yes, he was real nice in the beginning. The perfect man for me. But after that he start to abuse me. [Participant I]

He was real nice to me. I was in love with him. I had boyfriends but I was the last one to stay with my Mom and then I met this monster. I did love him and I love him now too. Maybe he still does love me. [Participant J]

He was sweet in the beginning. [Participant K]

He used to be so nice. He would send flowers to my house. He would wine me and tell me everything a woman wants to hear. He would go to my Mom and tell her how much he was in love with me. He would send me stuff for my son, for Christmas he would send him all this stuff and in the back of my mind I thought, this could work. [Participant N]

In the beginning it's love and this and that. [Participant O]

One unique aspect of the first phase was that participants would become pregnant early in the courtship, thereby becoming involved with a partner after only knowing him a short period of time. The women either married their partner or moved in with him within a few months or less.

I got pregnant after we were only together three months and went with him. I do wonder, what if I listened to my instincts and didn't get together with him? I think I had the second child to help keep us together, make me feel whole, because I was missing something. [Participant A]

Once I got pregnant I was 18 and I did what I thought my family wanted me to do. The marriage thing and move in with his parents as we were way too young to have anything. [Participant B]

How long were you seeing each other before you got married? [Interviewer]
Three months. He was very gentle, very care giving, kind – but I was wrong. [Participant D]

Our first date was in February, 1983. I was 17 at the time and in June I left my home to go live with him. I was 17 and he was 36. We started living together in June, by August I was pregnant. [Participant G]

Well, I met him in Mexico in 1997 no 1996. He was my boyfriend for half a year. After that we got married. [Participant I]

Well I met my husband at a club and the abuse started right away, right when I moved in with him. What happened was, we were teenagers, I got pregnant and he felt it was the right thing to do. We need to move in together, this and that. [Participant O]

Phase 2 - The Abuse Begins

In the second phase, women shared how the abuse began for them. The women described the first incident of abuse; the type, and frequency, the early incidences of abuse; the inconsistency of how and when it would happen and the fact that the abuse sometimes occurred in front of the children and other people.

In most cases, the women reported the first incident of physical abuse as fairly violent and shocking.

I would say the abuse started about four-five months into the relationship. It started real light. It started with a slap. And then nothing happened and you really don't realize when all of a sudden you are in over your head and it is happening all day long. [Participant A]

I remember the first time it happened. We went to a friend's house. We were meeting there and my best friend and I, we got there first. So we decided to break

into his house and we did this with a credit card. We thought it was so funny. We get there and we told him and he gets really mad. And we're at some stairs on the porch. So all of a sudden he just punches me in the face. And I fall down the stairs. I wasn't really hurt. I was just shocked. I was more shocked than anything. I really don't remember the apology or how everything worked itself out. [Participant B]

How long were you married before the first incident happened? [Interviewer]
Not long, about two-three months. But the abuse started when...I didn't tell him about my single life, how many boyfriends I had, etc. One time he went to my house and found out they were talking about my life when I was single and how it was. One of my brothers said that he used to know my boyfriend. That night we went to the apartment and he was asking me all these questions, who was this who was that, etc. And he just started hitting me. I was shocked, scared. [Participant D]

The first time my husband beat me was when I saw my husband serving coffee to my sister in law who was in bed in her bedroom. She was single when she came from Mexico with my cousin and we gave them shelter until they could find a job and place to live. She said she was in love with my brother and my husband let them use the bedroom for a place to sleep. When I saw my husband's behavior and their glances. I realized I had made a mistake. [Participant F]

The first time he ever hit me had to have been two weeks after he [my son] was born – we were arguing about something that happened. He went in the bathroom, I put my son in the stroller and left, I was trying to get away from him. I went through the apartments trying to escape – and he came running down after me and grabbed me by the throat – and I couldn't breath. He said you can leave but you have to leave mijó here (our son) and you can leave but you can't take the baby. You can leave but you can't take the baby. Well I can't do that. I need my son. He was a newborn. That was the first time. [Participant G]

It was in 1998. When I was sleeping and he went out with his friends to the party and he came home and was very drunk and he started kicking me. And after that he told my Mom it was my fault. And I used to have a lot of problems with that because my Mom she always try to stay in the middle. I told him, "You know what – don't mess with my family because when I have problems with you I don't go to your family and say – he kicked me or whatever." I used to have bruises on my face and when the people would ask me, "I hurt myself." I felt it was my problem and nobody's business. [Participant I]

We eloped from Oklahoma from Texas-80 miles away from my Mom. We stayed a week. We went with a family that had three kids. Everyone slept in one room

(crying). I tell you it's a long story. He forced himself on me. He raped me on my wedding night. We were in a trabajo house. They made a pallet in the middle of a room. I felt so humiliated. [Participant J]

The first time he beat me was in 1992; he hit me to bleed on my ear. One day my husband went to drink with his brother. At one o'clock, I was sleeping and somebody knocked on the door. When I opened the door my brother in-law started accusing me, he grabbed me and told me accusations that I heard for the first time. He started beating me and shaking me for one side to the other. In a moment my husband was close to us, he hit me on my ear to bleed and I passed out. It was so painful that I passed out. Some of our neighbors called the police. My husband and my brother in law were in the parking lot when the police came and took them. I spent all night on the sofa crying. [Participant L]

At first it was just a slap. He would say, I didn't mean it. I am sorry. He used to be like that. [Participant N]

It was years ago...it was a push or shove. I don't remember exactly. We were living with his Mom so trying to keep it quiet, stay in our room, that type of thing. [Participant O]

Participants described the type of abuse as emotional, physical, verbal, or mental.

One woman even shared that she had a hard time classifying it as physical abuse because she was not maimed.

Initially, it was only physical. But definitions change. Looking back you realize there's so much more to it. Mental and abuse to your self-esteem. But even physical people don't necessarily bruise. Which was the case in my situation. But people can feel in your personality. Something that was most obvious to my family was that I changed to being moving airy outgoing person to someone who was very guarded. Unapproachable really. [Participant B]

Twice there was physical abuse – but not to where I was maimed. It was the type of abuse that if I went to complain, nobody would believe it. There were times when I would cook and he would throw the pots on the floor. I thought it was normal and that's the way it had to be. [Participant C]

When my husband would hit me. Or verbally abuse me. He would mostly hit me with his hand. It was physical and emotional [Participant G]

According to my attitude of if there was a bad discussion. It was physical, emotional and mental. [Participant H]

Emotional and physical. He would pull my hair. [Participant M]

I guess before I went through all this, my idea of abuse was someone who was physically abused. But I think what especially Hispanics or minority people what they don't realize what I learned is that it is just not physical abuse, it can also be verbal abuse and you don't think about it until you start going through counseling and you think, yeah I did feel that way. I think this point in time it is both physical and verbal abuse as opposed to before in the beginning when it all started I thought it was physical abuse only that was abuse. [Participant O]

Participants reported the abuse fairly frequently. Most of the women shared that the abuse was daily, sometimes as verbal incidences, with the physical violence more intermittent. Others shared that the abuse was less frequent, occurring once or twice a month or every couple months.

Frequently, at least once or twice a month. Even when I was pregnant we had visitors at my house. He is younger than me, by one or two years. The issue came up of our age, I said my age and he got so mad. I was pregnant at the time and the next day I got up and went to a clinic and explained, but I was pregnant and he was apologetic, so I went back. [Participant D]

Daily. It is verbal, financial and physical. I am left locked in the house with no money, no phone. (Gatekeeper) has to take me to the clinic and pay for my medical bills when my health issues arise. I am sad. [Participant F]

He always was ugly to me, verbally or whatever. He would always say it was my fault. I provoked him. If I would just shut my mouth he wouldn't hit me. And I liked to provoke him so he would hit me. I for some reason, liked for him to hit me, and that was his excuse. You knew when he walked in the door if there was a chance to get hit. I knew that. Today was not the day to press his buttons. Something didn't go his way. Sometimes I took it to heart, sometimes I would provoke him. But that didn't necessarily mean I was going to get it. It was hard, you would not know day to day if you were safe or not. [Participant G]

Every two or three months – according to your attitude of if there was a bad discussion. It was physical, emotional and mental. [Participant H]

We started having a lot of problems because I was scared to death on Fridays because I knew he was not going to get back to the house. He used to come back to the house on Sundays with no monies and he would have spent the money on packets and we needed the money for groceries. I used to support him a lot and try to help but it was not working. After that he started to beat me up and hurt me a lot of times and I got separated from him for a year, I came back to the U.S. and a year later he came back to the U.S. to find me. [Participant I]

There is verbal abuse daily...he is always calling me names. [Participant J]

...all the time. [Participant M]

...but it just got to the point where you went with it, because of threats and stalking. He was consistently stalking me. I couldn't go to work, I would lose jobs because he would stop me on the way to work and hold me back. They expect you to be there and show up on time. I would end up losing jobs and then I would have no financial resources. So you end up right back. [Participant O]

Although the frequency of abuse varied from person to person, the inconsistency was a constant theme of the abusive incidences. The abuse was random, incongruent, and unpredictable. One woman described her situation as "walking on egg shells."

I wouldn't know from one moment to the next what would set him off. I was watching Seinfeld, which was real big in the 90's. And he got pissed, because he wanted to watch Spanish TV. I was by myself cracking up and he threw a book across the room at me because he wanted me to change the channel. [Participant A]

One moment they would be fine, the next moment was crazy. [Participant D]

It was hard, you would not know day to day if you were safe or not. [Participant G]

Participants shared that the abuse was sometimes in front of the children or people, with the most painful recollections being when the abuse would occur in front of the children. Because the children and family are the most important things to Latina

women, they are more apt to tolerate and endure the abuse. It is the cultural belief of Latinas that emphasizes loyalty and sacrifice for the family that may contribute to a tolerance for domestic violence (Bart & Moran, 1993).

Yes, my cousins, his brother, everyone was there. He attacked me. I was a rag doll. I didn't know which way my body was which way. He just full on attacked me for 20 minutes. To the point where he bit his brother's arm because they were all trying to help me. I have pictures of his arm. [Participant A]

They [friends and family] could tell by the way he looked at me sometimes. If I said anything he didn't like. He did hit me one time in front of his brother. We were in the back seat of his car, we were going to the store. I don't know what caused it, but his brother just keep looking straight ahead. Not my business. [Participant B]

He tried choking me – I was already seeing stars, dark...It was my oldest son that started hitting him on the knees, saying, "leave Mom alone!" and that is when he let go. I never did accuse him of anything. [Participant C]

He tells me that I am nobody at home. Now my children do the same and when I ask them to do something they say I am not anybody that everything belongs to Daddy. [Participant F]

My little girl would say, "Daddy – Why are you mean to my Mommy? Why do you hit my Mommy?" [Participant G]

When I opened the door my brother in law started accusing me, he grabbed me and told me accusations that I heard for the first time. He started beating me and shaking me for one side to the other. In a moment that my husband was close to us, he hit me on my ear to bleed and I passed out...One day I was making tamales; he came and spat on my face and insulted me. My son was crying and told me to push my husband or do something. He called his uncle and told him that his father was drunk, and my mother is crying. He did not do anything, so my son called the police at 911. . .I only cried and cried and my children were hidden in the corners or under the table. [Participant L]

If my girlfriend wasn't with me I wouldn't have been able to get out of there because he was so vicious. The only person I had to talk to was my girlfriend. She was in the same situation I was...the two of us together. If her husband

would try and beat her up when I was with her, I would stick up for her. And vice-versa. [Participant N]

Phase 3 – Risk Factors and Cultural Considerations

Risk factors and cultural considerations compose the third phase. This phase is unique because of its integrated structure. It is not linear, but actually weaves and interplays continually with the other phases. This phase illustrates the cultural component of intimate partner abuse for this population, and the risk factors that were found to be associated with the abusive relationship. The self-identified risk factors were drugs and alcohol, infidelity, and history of parents having been abused. The themes of cultural considerations unique to this population that emerged included the definition of abuse as told by Latinas, fear of deportation, “family is first and marriage is forever”, “this is normal,” “pride,” “silence...don’t talk about it,” religiosity and faith in God and Bruharia.

Risk Factors

The women shared that drugs and alcohol, infidelity, and coming from a family origin of abuse were all factors that, in their opinion increased their risk for abuse.

Drugs and Alcohol

Kantor , Jajinski, and Aldarondo (1994) stated that Hispanics that have high rates of acculturation may experience high levels of stress from the mundane burdens of poverty. These stressors contribute to an increase in the consumption of alcohol, which in-turn increases rates of violence. Most all of the women shared that drugs and/or

alcohol played a large part in the abusive relationship. They further shared that when their partner would drink or use drugs the abuse would escalate further or be more intense. This supports the literature, which identifies alcohol use as a strong predictor of abuse in Latinas (Perilla et al., 1994). A few of the women did not know their partner was using drugs and later found out. An interesting comment that one-third of the women made was that they were scared for Friday to come because of the increase in alcohol and abuse.

By then he'd started drinking pretty heavily. His friends were the only thing that mattered to him. Looking back on it I understand it now - not the drinking but the friends. [Participant B]

He would invite them (friends) every weekend. I would have to cook, clean, for his friends. It was an every weekend thing, every Fri/Sat – the beer, the drinks, etc. "C" cooks, "C" cleans to 3:00am. Every Monday he gets up with a hangover – it's just an every weekend thing. It was the same thing, he was drinking every weekend. The physical abuse I experienced only once, but right after that, I left. We tried to get back together, but after two months I couldn't handle it and had to leave again. But I was too terrified - for Friday to come along. [Participant C]

I found out about four years ago that he was using drugs [Participant has not been with her husband for 10 years.] Alcohol yes, but we don't view it as a drug. But marijuana and cocaine were used too. He could have put us in so much danger. He was careful not too take it at home, but it is just too much. [Participant D]

He was drinking, getting drunk, and one night he tried to asphyxiate me seizing my throat. [Participant F]

I used to think he was alcoholic because he used to drink on the weekends. We started having a lot of problems because on the Fridays I was scared to death on Fridays because I knew he was not going to get back to the house. He used to come back to the house on Sundays with no monies and he would have spent the money on packets and we needed the money for groceries. When I was sleeping and he went out with his friends to the party and he came home and was very drunk and he started kicking me. When he got drunk, he used to be offended to me. He would make me cry. [Participant I]

My husband drank in his bedroom. He would eat first and the children would have to wait to eat. [Participant J]

He wouldn't get home until two, four, six in the morning. I would just wait for him to get home. He would go out with his friends, drinking, there was always a girl in the middle seat of the car. I would see them. [Participant K]

One night he came home real drunk. When he would come home, we would hide in the closet. He was very mean and aggressive. One time we hid in the back patio, we could see in and he couldn't see out. I still have scars on me feet because I was holding my kids and there were a pile of red ants on the ground. [Participant K]

My husband liked to drink. During weekends and.... Both [week days]... My son told the police the truth about every thing my husband was doing. Coming home drunk every night, he does this and this. [Participant L]

He was involved with a lot of drugs. I didn't realize it. He would go in jail, get out and then start doing drugs again. And that is how the years passed. Then Federal agents came one day, they had them [guns] pointed at my family, that's when I decided to change my life and come to America from Mexico. He said he would change over here [U.S.], that he was going to work. But no, he was the same. He did drugs here also. He had a problem and got a felony. He went to jail. I took him out...he was on probation. I realized I was pregnant when I suspected he was doing something wrong with the drugs. [Participant M]

Because of the nightclub there was a lot of drinking and drugs he was taking. I think that is why he ended up killing himself because he was already going to court over drugs. But he said he would never ever get locked up, but it didn't phase me when he said that. [Participant N]

I am not saying the alcohol was the reason for his abuse, but when he wasn't drinking it was like day night and day. Sober he was the nicest. He was sweet...What do you need?....let me help you. Very supportive. Then the minute he started drink and it was Jekyll and Hyde. I used to dread when I started seeing him drinking. I would never knew what was going to happen, where I was going to end up. He would drink on the weekends, then it grew to the week. Then towards the end, it really got bad, because he got into drugs and it just got worse and worse. His idea of going out was walking across the street to this bar. [Participant O]

He would drink, so I put a bunch of Tylenol's in his beer, he knew something was wrong but he thought it was the beer. [Participant O]

Infidelity

Over half of the participants shared their frustrations of when their husband was unfaithful. One woman explained that the reason she received the abuse was because she confronted her husband about his affairs. Another woman shared that she wished she had never found her husband with the other woman (who was her sister in-law) because now she is “the bad woman” for leaving the house because she was angry.

He also told me [on the phone] that he had an affair, had a little girl, the little girl is younger than my girl. At the time everything was happening, we were married. He also had another family [crying]. [Participant D]

He had three families at one time? [Interviewer]

Yes, one on the border of Mexico, one in Mexico and me. [Participant D]

My husband was 51 years old. He had this girl who was 26 years old. He was very close with her. He said it was like a daughter figure. What kind of daughter is this? She only wants your money. It was too strange. I saw his savings account, and it had many withdrawals made out to her. I said what you did before you met me was one thing, now you are married and it is another. He said, “For me she is my daughter. If you like or you don’t like I will talk with her (stay with her).” [Participant E]

He does not want to admit this situation but he spends more time with his lover than with my children. [Participant F]

He was a stranger because the reasons a lot of time I got slapped or hit was because I would call him on cheating on me. The women would leave notes, call my house or whatever. And I would call him on that. I would say you can not do this. There were several different ladies, but this one particular woman would call and say “I was with him. You need to leave him alone...” I told her you know I really don’t care what you do with him, as long as he pays the bills and takes care of the kids. [Participant G]

When my daughter was three or four years old, he cheated on me. He got another lady. We were working on our relationship for two years. After that, he used to have another girlfriend in Fort Worth. [Participant I]

One day my Mom [Participant J] and I caught my Dad embarrassing and kissing this woman in the backyard. She was beautiful. She said, "Pancho was hugging and kissing me!" I wanted to get away. We believe she was telling the truth. My sister and I tried to push him away. [Participant K]

I would say to him I know you are a mentirosa, I didn't give you that hicky on your neck, that isn't my lipstick on your underwear. I kept it, when my husband's Mom was calling me "puta" I threw the underwear at her and said, your son is the "puta." He was living in a house with mojos - working class. When I called one time I heard a lady laughing, giggling right next to him. [Participant K]

He would put prostitutes in my house. I would wonder what was happening and he would just say, "GO TO THE ROOM!" I felt like I wasn't worth anything. [Participant M]

Parents Were Abused

Women voluntarily shared that their own parents were the victims of abuse. The women stated that they felt their mother was their role model and because they witnessed their mother's abuse they felt it was either acceptable or a reason why they were in abusive relationships. This is consistent with the focus group research found by Rodriguez (1999). Some of the women reported that they were also the victims of child abuse and/or sexual molestation growing up.

My Dad beat my Mom for 15 years straight. He would abuse my brothers and sisters, he raped my sister and I think he molested me on two occasions. I may remember him pressing his penis up against me while I was in bed one night. My cousin was molested by my father every time she would come over. My uncle would molest both of us. [Participant A]

My mother was in that situation. I made this decision to never allow myself to be treated that way. But for whatever reason I just let it slip and said, "OK, it's not gonna happen again." I remember my Mom telling me her hair was in a braid and

one night while she was sleeping, my Dad cut her braid off. My Mom doesn't talk with me about it really – and I don't need her too. She doesn't want to think about it anymore. My Dad dropped me off [to sisters after leaving abusive husband]. I could see the look in his eyes with him wanting to say something but he couldn't because he had been that person. [Participant B]

I saw my father take everyone's food and flip it off the table, on to the floor. It makes you a stronger person. I wish I was raised the way my kids were raised. You have to break that chain. Abuse seems to be rising and rising. [Participant C]

My father used to beat my mother very often but she never complained. Just the opposite, she used to tell us that he was right. [Participant F]

Plus I see a lot of abuse in my family. Like my Dad used to abuse so bad my Mom. He controlled my Mom – a lot. He take away the money. One night when she was pregnant, she was asleep and my daddy comes back to the house and he starts kicking my Mom, and my Mom started bleeding and she lost the baby so I pretty much have a lot of abuse in my family. [Participant I]

My father is verbally abusive to my Mom. He calls her names, everything. [Participant K]

But see my mother was in a relationship like that. She was married to an abusive man and I said I would never ever get involved with somebody like that. When we were small we would put on a pair of shorts, in the house and he would get this green switch and hit us on the back of the legs and say you don't wear shorts in this house! My Mom would allow this man to do whatever he wanted to us. Hit us, whatever. I used to say I will never get in a relationship like that. [Participant N]

Cultural Considerations

The voices of battered women are rarely heard in the published literature, and this is especially true of Latina women. We must learn what is effective, the barriers, the outcomes, and the recommendations for programs from the women themselves (Thurston et al., 1998). It is vital to understand the unique cultural aspects of domestic violence for

the Latina population to ensure the design and implementation of effective preventive programs that are culturally appropriate.

Abuse Defined

Most all of the women self-defined abuse as physical, mental, emotional, and/or verbal.

Dysfunctional, unfair, mistreatment, all the bad adjectives. Like humiliation, pain, sorrow. Sorrow because it doesn't have to be happening to you or anyone else. [Participant A]

For me physical - mostly physical. Initially it was only physical. But definitions change. Looking back you realize there's so much more to it. Mental and abuse to your self- esteem. Participant B]

...whether its physical or mental - they are all forms of abuse. Physical, verbal, mental – all forms, even avoiding someone or ignoring them – those are all types of abuse. [Participant C]

To me it is violence, physical and also there is mental. [Participant D]

For me abuse goes with agressivity goes with frustration with violence. Abuse can be somebody use a belt and whip you but abuse can also be a look and an expression. [Participant E]

For me abuse is to be treated badly, abuse is to give somebody a hard time in different ways. For example, to call somebody with bad nicknames, to beat somebody, to take off the authority as a mother, to disconnect the telephone. [Participant F]

Mistreatment in any form – to belittle or control another individual. Verbal, emotional, and physical. [Participant H]

What that means is when you husband- sometimes it happens to the mens too, when they are cussing at you and bad words or offended to you or bad things. Or abuse you physically, verbal, and it's a lot ways. Different ways. [Participant I]

Somebody beating you up constantly. Saying negative things to you. [Participant N]

I guess before I went through all this, my idea of abuse was someone who was physically abused. But I think what especially Hispanics or minority people what they don't realize what I learned is that it is just not physical abuse, it can also be verbal abuse and you don't think about it until you start going through counseling and you think, yeah I did feel that way. When they start degrading you telling you how fat you are, how ugly you are, nobody else is going to want you and this starts affecting you because you start thinking less of yourself, and they got you right where they want you. I think this point in time it is both physical and verbal abuse as opposed to before in the beginning when it all started I thought it was physical abuse only that was abuse. [Participant O]

Fear of Deportation

Some of the women who were born in Mexico and came to the US shared that their abusive partner would threaten them with deportation:

I was waiting for my citizenship. They asked – are you still married? And now I have my citizenship. For some reason, They accidentally left off my married name, and just left my maiden name. I think God was trying to tell me something. [Participant E]

Because I did not have Social Security he said that I would be deported. (He would tell the children), “Your mother will be in jail, she will go back to Mexico and you never will see her again.” [Participant L]

Family Is First and Marriage Is Forever

Time and time again, the women shared that “marriage is forever...for life.”

Divorce was not an option or even a concept for these women.

The culture that I am from, you are going to put up with anything. You can't get a divorce. Marriage is for life. Family first. Oh my god- a child without a husband- no way! [Participant B]

People in our family thinks that marriage is forever and every thing husbands do is normal. [Participant F]

Because if you get married with this man - you have to accept it for the rest of your life. No matter if they hurt you, not hurt you, cause you bleeding or not, if they make your bruises or not – you have to be with him because that is the man you choose for the rest of your life. That is what the parents teach you.

[Participant I]

For Latin women family is first, marriage is forever; you have to marry being a virgin. So, my parents told me: “your are going to marrying, it will be forever, if you like or not. You will live with him forever.” [Participant L]

This Is Normal

The word “normal” emerged many times in the data analysis.

Abuse to them is when they whip you - but if they yell and scream at you, that is normal. The women feel that it is my fault. If he wants rice and you cook beans and he comes home and throws the beans on the floor. It's normal-it's my fault. I should have known! If they have a lover – it is normal. They can have a lover, they can be drunk, it is OK. If you rebel and try to change this, you are a bad woman – a black sheep if you don't follow the path. [Participant E]

I think it is accepted. I think they cover it up. I think it is very common for the fact it has been passed on from generation to generation. It is just something you deal with. It is normal. My mother is Mexican American and my stepfather that I was raised with was Puerto Rican. With this culture it is just a way of life. I think that it is their manhood too, machismo. It is just normal. [Participant G]

They were so many things that I thought it was normal. [Participant L]

It is a tradition. They don't have a lot of culture as a person. The men think that women should take it and deal with it. That women should do whatever they say. Because the women depend on the men. [Participant M]

There is a lot of Hispanics that think that is just how it is supposed to be. This is exactly how it should be - that the man rules. He rules the house. I have a few girlfriends say that they are not happy unless they are being smacked upside the head. I say that is not normal. When you love someone you try your best not to hurt them their feelings or anything. I had to learn that the hard way, I was 23 years old with false teeth. I tell them I would never permit another man to put his hands on me. [Participant N]

Pride

A few of the women shared that pride was a factor. Pride when asking for help, resources or admitting that the marriage was over.

There is pride. It is OK to have pride, but not to the extreme. I remember after he left me, being so poor that I was finding wood to boil water inside the house. I had too much pride to ask for handouts. [Participant D]

Silence...Don't Talk About It

The notion to keep the abuse quiet is seen across all cultures who are survivors of domestic violence. However, this seems to be more pronounced in the Hispanic population, where women are taught from childhood to tolerate and “put up” to be a good wife (Rodriguez, 1999).

You just deal with it. You don't talk about it. In our household that's how you deal with it. You just shut up and take it. I find that in a lot of Hispanic households, kids don't matter. Just shut up and do what your told. Authoritarian. You don't talk about the dysfunction. It is hard being from a culture that is based on shutting up and doing what your told. [Participant A]

It's like everyone knows about it but nobody says a word. [Participant B]

Hispanic women will not talk about abuse...the few times I complained to my mother, her comment was, “No, that is your husband – you have to respect him. Don't say anything about it – don't tell anyone.” ...the few times I complained to my mother, her comment was, no that is your husband – you have to respect him. Don't say anything about it – don't tell anyone. [Participant C]

The problem is that it is something that the culture wants to hide and to think it doesn't happen... Sometimes that it does not exist. [Participant H]

That's why a lot of Hispanic ladies are afraid to stay something because they are thinking there is nothing that can be done. [Participant I]

I think it is the norm and you don't talk about it. You keep it behind closed doors. You don't tell people what you are going through. True, no you don't go advertising it to everybody, you don't carry a flag. But you don't need to keep it locked up. It is good to express your feelings. It is good for other people to know so they don't have to go through it. Other people are shamed, they don't know what to do or how to leave. [Participant O]

Religiosity: Faith in God

Beliefs attributed to religion are thought to encourage women to stay in abusive relationships. Some Latina women believe that it is the cross they have to bear (Rodriguez, 1999). The interviews were fairly consistent with the research. Some women felt that the Catholic Church was not supportive to their needs.

There were a lot of things I didn't agree with and still don't. I think I stay with the Catholic Church because it is habit- all I know. There is the attitude, stay with your family- that God will take care of it. Yes, I believe in God. Yes I have faith. But I don't think God wants me to get my ass kicked every day. This is why I identify more with the Virgin Mary. I like speaking to her - woman to woman. It's not that I don't feel comfortable speaking to God, but I feel she understands me more. I don't feel the Church ever offered any sanctuary. [Participant B]

I was Catholic, I was raised Catholic, and I know it is a sin to leave your husband but I don't think God wants you to be beat up and abused. I felt that there was no support there [in the Catholic Church]. [Participant D]

You read the Bible, if someone hits you, you have to put the other face - turn the other cheek. You have to respect your husband because this is one of the commandments. If you don't do this - you will go to hell. [Participant E]

I read the Bible, the Psalm 23. It is beautiful. Every day I praise to God: "My Lord, please, let me live with dignity, give this day with dignity." Do you know what does dignity mean? Dignity is not crying for a man who hurt me so much. Do not cry for a man who does not talk with his children. Do not cry for a man without soul. I am more spiritual. For me the family is very important, my children. If God had gave me a husband like this [I used to think] why not give him another opportunity? [Participant L]

It just seemed like God put everything there [in another city to escape] for me.
[Participant O]

Bruharia

Two of the women interviewed referenced Bruharia, a Mexican tradition of witchcraft or folklórico. Although not a major theme, the researcher felt it was pertinent to illustrate the cultural aspect of this folklore.

Participant K brought out a small packet during the interview that had yarn and charms in it to show the translator and myself. She asked us what it was. The translator/gatekeeper explained that it is “bruharia” (witchcraft) and that this particular packet was to encourage love from another, not the one you are with (according to a note inside the packet written in Spanish). K explains that she found it in her husband’s wallet. When she asked her husband, he replied that his Mom gave it to him. The translator/gatekeeper instructed her to burn it in the backyard.

There was this woman who was a Mexicana la bruhita and she would say if you meet someone else, another man would stand up to him. He will leave you alone.
[Participant N]

Phase 4 – The Cycle Continues or Escalates

In phase four of courage to leave various techniques were utilized by the abusers in an attempt to further manipulate and control the women into staying in the relationship. Techniques included the threat of taking the children, extreme or excessive violence (kidnapping and confinement, threats to kill, the use of murder weapons, rape,

or abuse to the woman while she was pregnant or having the baby), and issues of control (social, financial, appearance, driving, working, and other).

Fear of Losing the Children

Many women shared that they feared leaving because of the possibility of losing their children. This seemed to be correlated with women who came from Mexico rather than the Mexican American women.

He said, I am going to take the two older kids to Mexico for two weeks so you can have a break and be with the baby alone. After two weeks passed, I didn't hear anything from him. I talked to my mother in-law and she said that I wasn't a good mother and that they were keeping the kids - that I gave them junk food etc. So I went to Mexico and didn't leave. I said I wasn't leaving without my kids. So I stayed for 6 months. [Participant D]

He says if I leave this house again, he will talk to the police and take the children with him. [Participant F]

He said you can leave but you have to leave mijó here (our son) and you can leave but you can't take the baby. You can leave but you can't take the baby. Well I can't do that, I need my son. He was a newborn. He would take the children he would do whatever it takes so I would be the loser in the end. [Participant G]

[When this participant called her mother from the shelter, she was informed that her husband was there threatening to take the children.] "G - he was here last night and he is looking all over for you. He is livid. He is threatening to get a lawyer and take the kids from you. I said, "Mom, how can he take the kids from me?" He came and said I want to see my kids. I said, "Today is Thursday, you can pick them up tomorrow or Saturday and spend the day with them." I said you can take the boys, but not the baby. And I knew he wouldn't take two without the baby. [Participant G]

One woman shared that her husband actually called the police and made up lies regarding her treatment of the children. He asked his sister to lie as well.

They opened up a criminal investigation, however the police were very supportive and believed her.

The interpreter was a police officer and he told me that the police called my son because my sister in-law told the police that I was very aggressive with the children. He said that I was illegal and I have to go to jail because you hit my son and go back to Mexico. My husband can have my children because he is legal. The lawyer told me that my husband wanted me to be deported, so he could have the children. I wanted to die. I came home, and I wanted to kill him. I was crying until my children came from school. I told them that his father wanted to send me to Mexico and take them. They told me that the police had told them and they were very scared. I told them do not be scared, only God can separate us. [Participant L]

He beat me on my head and told me that he will call the police and will take my children away from me. He pushed me and I fell and hurt my head. [Participant L]

Because he threatens that he is going to take away the kids, he stalks you comes and takes the kids away. [Participant O]

Extreme Violence

Straus and Gelles (1980) reported that Hispanics rate of severe husband to wife violence was 7.3%, which is two times greater than the rates for whites. Participants shared their experiences with extreme violence, which included confinement and kidnapping, marital rape, the threat from a lethal weapon such as a gun or knife, threatening to kill, or abuse while the woman was pregnant or delivering the baby.

Confinement

Some of the women explained that on one occasion or period they were locked in a room with no way out. This period lasted hours, a full day, for another a month. One

woman shared that she is locked in the house daily, with no telephone, heat or way to leave. She does not speak English and is unable to write in Spanish.

For some reason he did not want me leaving the bedroom that morning. I couldn't tell you why, but he had me locked in the bedroom and the kids were crying and they wanted to see me. He kept me locked in the room and I was pissed – I was like, "This is stupid! You are an idiot!" That's the time he pushed me hard and my head landed first and I blacked out. He took me to the doctor in TJ, Mexico. Four hour drive to the hospital so nobody would know. My face and hand were badly bruised. The doctor there wanted me to be on disability for 8 weeks. But I had to go back to work on Monday because I didn't want anybody to know. [Participant A]

He would come out and visit me while I was at my mom's house, and we would go out in the truck and talk. One day he just starting driving, and took me to his house. He had disconnected the phone. In the back, there was a dog that hated me. I remember there were scissors on the dresser, and I thought, I should just kill him. I always wanted to be a police officer, and I thought to myself this would be perfect, this would work out. I'm just praying, "How am I going to get out of this?" I kept thinking, my mom is going to be so disappointed thinking that I'm going to be back with him. Eventually I got back home. [Participant B]

I had to been at home with the kids. I couldn't go out, I couldn't do this – Actually he would take the keys when he would go to work. I didn't realize it wasn't normal. [Participant C]

He won't give me a house key. I can't get in the house – I have to break a window or call one of his friends to help me come in which is embarrassing. He doesn't give me a key for one year now to the PO Box. [Participant E]

I am locked in the house all day. When he leaves, he locks me in. There is an electric locked fence around the house that he turns on, so during the day I cannot get out. There is no phone, no heat on these cold winter days I freeze. I can't read or write, I don't know what to do. [Participant F]

He would put prostitutes in my house. I would wonder what was happening and he would just say, "GO TO THE ROOM!" [Participant M]

He totally locked me in the room for a month. He had never done that before, but he totally locked me in. At that point in time, I looked at myself, and thought I

was not raised like this. Why am I doing this? This isn't me! Why am I letting him get to me? [Participant O]

Marital Rape

The rate of marital rape in Latino marriages appears to be disturbingly high, at rates as great as 80-90% (Perilla, 1999). These interviews confirmed this statistic. One woman shared very painfully that she was raped, in front of another family that they were sharing a room with, on her wedding night.

It was also sexual control. He would have to have sex every night, even if I was sick or didn't want to. [Participant A]

And that night, it's like you don't know what to call it, but he actually raped me. I mean it's your husband. What do you call that? Even now I still question it – Was it? Was it not? [Participant B]

He forced himself on me. He raped me on my wedding night. We were in a *trabajo* house with another family there. They made a pallet in the middle of a room. I felt so humiliated. [Participant J]

Sometimes when he wanted to have sex I put a pillow on my face. If I said no, he would get mad, aggressive and would accuse me, so with a pillow I did not see him. I would like to be a big pig. No shower, not be touched by him. When he wanted to have sex, he did not care about me if I was clean, or if I had my menstruation. [Participant L]

Did your husband always want sex? [Interviewer]

Every day, in the morning, in the evening, at night, he did not care about my health. It was awful. But I thought that this was a marriage, my life, and my family. [Participant L]

What he would do is go in the room I rented from my mother and unlock the window and he would break in at night, rape me, beat me and say if you scream and tell your mother I will kill you. Once I knew that was how he got in, I would shut the locks and tell my Mom, "Don't let him in here! Look what he is doing!" And she responded, "I didn't hear you scream." [Participant N]

Threatening to Kill and the Usage of Weapons

Very little research has been done on this topic with Latina women. For white women, this has been an issue with domestic violence research. In a sample of 450 Latina women Rodriguez (1999) found that, of the 15 that reported being abused, none of the women reported being threatened with weapons. However, this study found that three of the 15 participants were assaulted with a weapon.

Then I married a second time and my second husband was abusive. The second one was worse. He almost killed me actually. He held a gun against my forehead – and I was pregnant and couldn't get any kind of treatment. I went to emergency – and my face was not mine. For three weeks I had a black eye. [Participant C]

The other one I can remember very well is when he had vacation from his work. He wanted to go to Mexico. We were first going to go by Chihuahua and see my family first and then his. He didn't want to see my family and I did. Then I said I wouldn't go. He grabbed a rifle, hit me with the rifle, and threw me in the car and we drove off to Mexico. [Participant D]

He tried to asphyxiate me...I couldn't breath. [Participant F]

One day he changed his expression and told me "I will kill you." [Participant L]

He had told me he was going out of town, he wasn't going to be here. When I got home, he was sitting right there in the kitchen. He had not been out of town. He pulled out this knife. He cut my four fingers where you could just see the nerves. I grabbed the knife and would not let it go. He pushed me back toward the stove and I grabbed one of the iron skillet and I remember hitting him in the head with the skillet. He fell down and I was hitting him and kicking him. My Mom came in and said, "Stop it, you are going to kill him!" But look what he did to me! My leather jacket was all torn up from the knife. My Mom called the paramedics and they came. After that, he became calmer. It was the first time I fought back. [Participant N]

I had walked in the club where I had been there in the morning to order the beer, wine coolers, and clean. I would help him. I forgot something in there and went back and he was teaching this girl how to play pool. And it was real seductive. And he said, "What are you doing in here?! You are not supposed to be in here!"

And it seemed so easy to me, but I grabbed a pool stick, I don't know why, but I hit him with the pool stick. I ran out of there and turned around because he called my name, and he had threw the cue ball and it hit me right in the mouth. It hit my teeth and shattered them. If my girlfriend wasn't with me I wouldn't have been able to get out of there because he was so vicious. [Participant N]

We were living in a garage, where they fix cars, a body shop. We were all living in one room in the garage - all four of us were living in this one room. We would take a bath with a water hose, we had a tiny refrigerator, a little stove top burner, we lived in a bad neighborhood, his idea of going out was walking across the street to this bar. At that point in time, it was really bad, it was one time where he really abused me bad. That is when I opened my eyes. When he was done with me I looked like one of those posters at the shelter. He had totally disfigured my face. I thought I was going to stay that way. He actually put a gun to my head and actually pulled the trigger. I thought I was going to die. He said, "See I can kill you anytime I want." [Participant O]

Abuse During Pregnancy and Delivery of the Baby

Research indicates that 14% of Hispanics incur abuse while they are pregnant (McFarlane & Young, 1991). The abuse may often begin during pregnancy and pregnant women are more likely to have multiple injury sites when compared to nonpregnant women (Helton, 1986). The women shared their stories of abuse while being pregnant or while delivering their baby.

Did you notice an increase in abuse when you were pregnant? [Interviewer]
Yes, with the second child. [Participant A]

The worst one that kept me going was when I had my son. I remember I had a cesarean so I had to go into the operating room. I told the nurse, "Can you call him? - I don't want this baby out until he's here." Even then it was awful. I don't remember much of that because we ended up going into the recovery room. I remember when they took me back to my room all these people were there - my family was there, and everyone left and we were there alone. And he had asked, "Why did you only ask your mom to go into the recovery room?" And he hit me. We were in the hospital. I remember right at that time his brother was passing by, and his brother said, "What are you doing? - She just had a baby." [Participant B]

The second one was worse. He almost killed me actually. He held a gun to against my forehead – and I was pregnant and couldn't get any kind of treatment. I went to emergency – and my face was not mine. For three weeks I had a black eye. [Participant C]

Even when I was pregnant - we had visitors at my house. He is younger than me, by one or two years. The issue came up of our age, I said my age and he got so mad. I was pregnant at the time and the next day I got up and went to a clinic and explained, but I was pregnant and he was apologetic so I went back. But after I got pregnant again, it got worse. [Participant D]

I was like three months pregnant with my second son and he hit me and gave me a black eye. And that I remember because he had three other children and we were arguing about that and he was leaving me, he wasn't leaving me forever but leaving me to be with the other children. I was pregnant and he hit me in the face and I got a black eye because I am real "wetta" (real light) but his hand was so hard that it black and blued my eye. I remember lying to my family saying that I hit myself, knowing that it was just protecting him. [Participant G]

When he got drunk, he used to be offended to me. He would make me cry. When you are pregnant you very sensitive. Very very. For small things you feel like you are going to cry. [Participant I]

When we arrived home, we went into a big argument. He beat me on my head and told me that he will call the police and will take my children away from me. He pushed me and I felt and hurt my head. My son was in my womb. [Participant L]

I had the baby and he wasn't there in the hospital. I had to be operated on for the baby. I had a lot of pain and he wasn't there to help me. I left the hospital and had to take a taxi home. After that I didn't know what to do at all. [Participant M]

Issues of Control

Social

The women shared how their partners would alienate them from the outside world. A few of the women had moved here from Mexico in search of a better life, so they had limited resources once they arrived.

I had no friends that I could go to. [Participant C]

I am telling you if we went out I would not put my head up, I would keep my head down. I wouldn't speak to people - he would speak. I wasn't supposed to. He would tell me. I was at home. I stayed in the house all day. The only time I ever went out was on the weekends, when I either walked to the grocery store or to do the wash. [Participant G]

Here, I only have a husband who prohibits me to talk to somebody, to have friends, to go to church. We do not have telephone. I am not allowed to go and take out the trash outside. When my husband comes back from work, he will put the trash on the sidewalk. I cannot walk to the store alone; my children are my chastity belt. Just now, I realized about that. Now I think. My kids are my chastity belt! You are like a leaf in the air, lonely, no friends, no family, no money, no job. [Participant L]

He didn't want them to talk or study with me. He would make them stay in the room by themselves, and I would have to go in the bedroom with him. [Participant M]

I was only allowed to go to work and come home. If there was nothing to benefit him, forget it. [Participant O]

Financial

Qualitative studies have shown that a male partner's abuse directly affects the female partner's ability to work and become economically independent. One study illustrated that visible injuries, stalking, making harassing calls, and breaking promises for childcare and transportation have prevented abused women from working (Raphael, 2000). These women shared their frustration with trying to work and support themselves financially.

When he opened up the statement [from a Nordstrom's credit card for a pair of jeans] and saw that I spent that money— and I was on the bed with Julian (my son) he was 4 months old – he started walking at 6 months old. He stormed in a grabbed me by my hair and threw me on the floor. My son, being a tiny baby, he threw himself on me and cried. [Participant A]

Financially, they have all the control. Finances they have everything.
[Participant C]

If I didn't have a scholarship for school he would not give me any money for school! He was out of work for 6 years and I paid the bills. He received a credit card-one for me and one for him. He never gave one to me. He said he doesn't trust me. [Participant E]

He does not give me any money. He said he lent me money to go to the doctor. So I have to pay him back. I lost WIC benefits because my husband will not take me to Denton to fill out the applications. [Participant F]

The money I would never touch. If the kids needed something he would go to the store and he would pay-but not me. [Participant G]

I never worked. He always has taken care of things. [Participant J]

I need a job. I need money to put away. He doesn't give me money and I don't like asking for money. He gave me a debit card but told me that in order for me to get money, they said that he has to sign off or give permission to get money. I get screamed at from him if I take out money without his permission. I am going through this money thing with him. I am tired of cleaning people's houses for money. [Participant K]

The abusive spouse/partner would prohibit some of the women from working.

I told him that I wanted to work. I wanted to do something for myself. He accepted and I found a job at Kroger. I worked from 5:00 – 11:00pm. I choose this timetable because he could stay with the children. Everything was OK during the first month. Later on [I had to quit], he did not let me use the car because he said I was going around with my lovers. [Participant F]

Once, I got a job as volunteer in a school. It was in my children's kindergarten. There the teacher told me that I had skills to work with children. I answered her that I went to school and I was a teacher. So she told me to go with a man called Mr. D, I think. He was the superintendent. He told me that he could help me but I have to study English from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. I talked with my husband and he told me that I could go. The first day I went and when I came back my children were crying. My husband was sleeping. The next day, I went back to my class. Before going, I have to leave everything done at home, his meals, children bathed and with pajamas, and his dinner ready. He only had to come home, have dinner, and send the kids to bed. He would not do it and kids will be crying at home and he

would be in bed covered with the blanket. When I came home he told me that he did not want me to go to anyplace. He wanted to come home and find me there. So, I did not do anything, I started crying, I did not go to school, say thanks and apologize for leaving my English classes. [Participant L]

He said I was a bad woman because I wanted to study and work – I was liberal. It bothered me that he was trying to get into my work. He said I was doing what women shouldn't do – work...He wouldn't let me work. [Participant M]

I would lose jobs because he would stop me on the way to work and hold me back. They expect you to be there and show up on time. I would end up losing jobs and then I would have no financial resources. So you end up right back. [Participant O]

Appearance

Participants shared that their abusive partner would control how they could dress, what they could wear, and the money they could spend on clothes, make-up, and shoes for themselves.

...I couldn't dress up... After two years of marriage I was wearing his t-shirts and regular jeans because I couldn't wear nice blouses. [Participant C]

I never wore make-up. He would tell me how to dress. I wore those Mexican dresses like if I just came straight from Mexico. My friends couldn't believe it, I tell them that I have pictures and they started laughing. I had one pair of shoes that my Mom bought for me. I remember I needed glasses and someone gave them to me, because he would not buy them for me. [Participant G]

Everything had to be perfect, including me. I couldn't get dressed up, wear make-up, nice clothes or be fat. [Participant O]

Driving

The abusive spouse/partner would prohibit some of the women from driving, getting rides, or having access to the car.

I would have to take the bus to work [Note that her spouse drove freely, paying for a truck with the money she earned]. [Participant B]

Actually he would take the keys when he would go to work. I had an emergency at home – and my oldest son got hurt. With the car in the driveway – I had to ask a neighbor to take me to the emergency. That's when I started questioning, why this? Why that? [Participant C]

Later on he did not let me use the car because he said that I was going around with my lovers. [Participant F]

What about a car? [Interviewer]

Oh my God, no! I was at home. I stayed in the house all day. The only time I ever went out was on the weekends, when I either walked to the grocery store or to do the wash. [Participant G]

My husband does all the driving. I don't even have a license. [Participant J]

I came here in 1985. I think I got my driver's license in 1992, even when he said that I was stupid that I will never pass the test. He did not let me drive the pick up because I will create a problem to him. Because I did not have Social Security he said that I would be deported. I did not drive, I was hungry, and my children did not have milk or food, or diapers. I could not go to the store. He had the car. He would go to the store if he would feel like. [Participant L]

I had the baby and he wasn't there in the hospital. I had to be operated on for the baby. I had a lot of pain and he wasn't there to help me. I left the hospital and had to take a taxi home. Sometimes he wouldn't pick me up and I would just wait and have to walk home from work. I saved up money and bought a car for myself. [Participant M]

Other

The women also shared random stories of control and jealousy that fit within the general theme of control.

I lived in a second story house – every time I would hear the car pull up in the driveway –I would have to make sure dinner was warmed up and served by the time he came up the stairs. I would constantly be checking...is he home? Worried about dinner, the table being set, etc. It was constant monotony. [Participant C]

He won't give me a house key. I can't get in the house – I have to break a window or call one of his friends to help me come in which is embarrassing. He doesn't give me a key for one year now to the P.O. Box. [Participant E]

I used to have plans on getting my GED. When we would talk about it, he always say no – for what? You are an old woman [Participant was in her late 20's when this was told to her]. Always cussing at me. He thinks I am going to do something wrong. [Participant I]

He was jealous of Elvis Presley records – he broke them all and would turn off the TV when Elvis came on. [Participant J]

When we would eat, he would barely eat because he was on drugs. When he was finished eating he would grab everyone's plate and say you don't need to eat anymore, you are fat. His priorities were the house had to be spotless. [Participant O]

Phase 5 – Escape and a New Life

The final phase, escape and a new life is actually a turning point. This is where the courage to leave comes to fruition. The women who had left their abusive partners shared that for various reasons the abuse was no longer tolerable, and they left the abusive partner very suddenly or for the last time after many attempts. Although sudden, the act of leaving was contemplated many times internally (and still is, for those women who are currently with their partners), but was finally completed in this stage. This final phase was associated with one or more of the following strategies that made leaving possible: “What Am I Doing Here?” (an internal cognitive process where the hurt, pain, anger and frustration finally outweighed the fear); the assistance of outside agencies, such as the local law enforcement, shelters, or social services; and support of friends, family, or outside influences. This final component concludes with a newfound freedom and life.

“What Am I Doing Here?”

The following are excerpts from abuse survivors who were currently no longer living with their abusive partners. At the initial stage of this turning point, the women shared how they cognitively processed leaving and physically left. Most of the participants shared that by the time they left, they were broken down, angry, depressed, disgusted, or felt no more love toward their partner.

After the incidences would happen. I would say I hate you and every single time this happens you take a little bit more away from my love. Every time you do this, it happens you take away from love. I am just going to let it end, and when I am empty I am just going to walk away. I would picture a glass vase with a little bit of water and when anything happened, I would drop a rock in it. I wanted my love to be completely gone by the time I walked away. Your tolerance is up high because you are abused as a kid. I didn't want to break up and being going back and forth and nobody would believe you. [Participant A]

I just packed up and left. I came back from a trip in Dallas and told him that I had met someone else, haven't done anything, but I totally feel this is my soul mate. I am moving out. That night he tried to keep me in the bedroom again. He twisted my arm under my leg so I couldn't move and was hitting me. My cousin lived across the hall. They busted down the door. I was packing because I wanted to get out before he got out of jail. [Participant A]

So many times I wanted to just walk, walk to the bus station and leave. After that I actually moved back in with him. Probably when my son was six weeks old. But by then I'm angry. I'm just waiting for the right moment. It's hard to remember what we started fighting about. I remember we were in bed, my son was in his crib, and I remember being like, don't touch me. He tried to hug me, and I was like, ugh. He said, you won't even hug me anymore. At that point he got insulted, and totally started punching me in the face. I screamed as loud as I could, and his Mom came in. She knew what was going on – I mean it was obvious - my hair was everywhere. So his sister came in and took the baby. I remember at that point it was like, OK dude, bring it on. I just gave it all I had. It was awesome. I was not a timid person. I think the next day is when my Mom came and got me and I left for the final time. [Participant B]

I started to speak up for myself. I don't think I was disrespectful but I started questioning why this? Actually it was my oldest son. I had an emergency at home – and my oldest son got hurt, with the car in the driveway, I had to ask a neighbor to take me to the emergency. That's why I started questioning, why this? Why that? After a year of questioning, yeah I got a little loud. I woke up. ...After the incident when he choked me, I didn't stay too much longer after that – maybe a year after. I just picked up and left. Once he pushed me to where he “accidentally” pushed me into a door. After that – he had an affair – this was all within one year. After that it took me six months to just pack up my things and go. [Participant C]

I just had enough. I called my best friend crying and stayed with her. She helped me get through it because she had also been abused. I am now out on my own. We are separated. [Participant H]

When my daughter was three or four years old, he cheated on me. I was very sad you know because I used to be double people in one – father and mother at the same time – for two years. That's why I take the decision to come back to the US because I know I can get better things for my kids. So I got my two kids, come to the U.S., I had two jobs. It was hard for me, because I am a single mother I have two children. So he came looking for me in the U.S. Finally he finds me. He asked me to give him another chance, so I gave him another chance. We were working on our relationship for two years. I used to work for this restaurant, and they knew I was abused. They gave me the phone number. I was thinking a lot. For the decision – six months. The last time he hurt me he was in the parking lot and he kicked me and I called the police and he had to spend the night in the jail. I make the decision to get the separation. [Participant I]

One day my husband came from work. It was at night. I was serving him dinner and he started: “I do not want to see you again, why do not go away? Go away! You do not give a dime for me!” He had his plate and I was warming the tortillas. He took the tortillas and with his full mouth he kept insulting me: “I am sick and tired with you, go away!” I do not know what happened with me, but I told him “You know something? You are right!” And I went outside. I breathed and I said, “You know something? You are right! No more! No more! I told my husband, “That was it” He answered me “You are a stupid one.” I replied, “You are right, I am stupid but until now. No more.” I talked with my boys and I asked them if they wanted to come with me or stay with their father. They answered, “No, we go with you.” I only asked because of the situation but I knew that the children were mine. “Take your stuff...,” I told them, “...the most important things, a pillow, your tooth brush, underwear, a pant, and a shirt.” We left while I was crying and hoping that maybe my husband could tell me, “Please do not go,” but he never said anything. Oh Lord, I cried and cried and waited for his words, but

he never did. I was leaving the house and I turned and looked for him but he was not outside. We went to the car and I realized that my son was not with us. Where is "S"? I asked. "S" was in the yard. He climbed a tree and wrote his name on the tree. He came down and we left the house. We drove about three hours without direction and I was constantly crying. My son told me to stop crying. If we would drive to Mexico, my husband could accuse me to take my children away from him. I started thinking about what I have done. Usually in this kind of situation we do not think maybe my husband could accuse me for kidnapping the boys. I did not know what to do. I have \$100 in my purse. Tomorrow morning kids have to go to school. It was April. In one month school would be finished. I cried and I did not know what to do. I stopped by the police station and I told them that I did not have a house, my husband threw us from the house. [Participant L]

I was about to kill myself. They told me not to take it. I felt bad because I depended on him. When I wanted to kill myself was because it would hurt me a lot the way he would treat my daughter. I was by myself, and ready to cut my veins and this man called and said, you don't sound good. Don't do something that you may regret. I feel like something is happening to you. There are organizations that can help you and he gave me the name. He said to think about, decide and call. I said I am. I am deciding today. I left that day. [Participant M]

Look how many years I tried to get away from him. From the beginning, the first time he threatened I said I don't want to be in a relationship like that. I could not get away from this man. I could not get away. There was this woman who was a Mexicana la bruñita and she would say if you meet someone else, another man would stand up to him. He will leave you alone. That's what made me so scared, for me to get involved with someone and have this man do something to this person, have him deal with this man. I met my husband [second]. He would ask me out. I just didn't want to go out with him because I didn't want to put him at risk. I had to tell him that was the only reason I couldn't go out with him. I told him that he [first husband] was abusive. I thought he was going to say, I won't talk to you no more because I don't want to get involved. But he said, I am going to pick you up and I want him to say something to me. It was my birthday, he picked me up - he took me out. When he brought me home, he was out there waiting for me. He saw me with this man. I said, "D" there he is. He said don't get out of the car. "D" went over to his car and said, "I am going out with her..." He told him lots of stuff, then he pushed "D". "D" punched him once and that was it. We never heard from him again. [Participant N]

Things were calm, steady. And then all of sudden it started erupting again. Why am I doing this? This isn't me! Why am I letting him get to me? After that he must have seen how bad he treated me, he said things are going to change, we need to move to Coleman, things could possibly change there, to get away from

city life. I felt I had no choice. If I left him he was just going to stalk me again. I can't get away from him. He really degraded me. I think towards the end, you go through these steps, you love him, you are afraid of losing the kids. Then it gets to where you lose it. Then it gets to the step that it's either you or me. You want to see him dead. I would get so scared that if I attempted to kill him, I wouldn't kill him all the way and he would come back and kill me. I used to see that movie, *The Burning Bed*, and thought, I wish I had that will power. Toward the end he would see me, and one of the times he hit me. I would say, "Go ahead and hit me, do it, do whatever you got to do, because I don't care anymore, you will kill me, I am so tired of it. Just kill me! Kill me!" He could see that he was losing me emotionally. I think they get the satisfaction of conquering and making you feel intimidated. And he couldn't do that anymore. He had already worn me out. The worst you can do is kill me and I am going to be satisfied, finally at peace. But then he started picking on my son. He was now going to that mode. And that is when I left and said I need to figure out something to do. I called the cops in Coleman and they referred me to their shelter in Brownwood. [Participant O]

He Is Leaving Me

In a few cases, the abusive partner was the one who left; or in one instance, her partner was killed:

He left to Mexico, he grabbed his stuff and left me. He went to Mexico, I thought he would come back, but he left me with no money or anything [crying]. He came back, but he was working down there. I had my third child. He said, I am going to take the two older kids to Mexico for two weeks so you can have a break and be with the baby alone. After two weeks passed, I didn't hear anything from him. I talked to my mother in law and she said that I wasn't a good mother and that they were keeping the kids. That I gave them junk food etc. So I went to Mexico and didn't leave. I said I wasn't leaving without my kids. So I stayed for 6 months. We all came back and we tried to work things out. Things were going better. One moment they would be fine, the next moment was crazy. He left to Mexico again, by himself, and called me on the phone and told me that he never loved me, he got married on a bet. Where we met, we were both working at a restaurant, and he had a bet with the other waiters that, because I was so conservative, I would not flirt or go with the waiters, that he could get together with me. He also told me (on the phone) that he had an affair, had a little girl, the little girl is younger than my girl. At the time everything was happening, we were married. [Participant D]

It was Saturday July 13, he went to work at about four in the morning. And his car, he was going, and a drunk driver hit him, his car flipped and burned and whoever hit him left him in there. He died of smoke inhalation. A friend asked me today, "Do you miss him?" Well naturally I do. This is somebody that I loved, the father of my kids, but the thing was there were some good times there. People don't think that there could have been. But there was. We talked about things, about our future. Before he died I felt he got it together. My daughter, my baby was 10 months old. The physical abuse stopped when my youngest daughter was a year or something. I said, "J, I will not do this again. I will not put another kid through what we put these other 3 kids through. We will not put her through this." And God must have known this because he took him away when she was 10 months old. [Participant G]

Law Enforcement

Some women thought about calling the police but did not for either fear or because they were able to leave with the support of friends or family.

I thought about calling the cops that day, but I never did, and I regret that. [Participant B]

Back then I could have so easily called the police for domestic abuse, but he told me, you ever do that I will beat you worse than I beat you now. [Participant G]

I felt it would make it worse. [Participant N]

For others, the police were very helpful and pivotal in their escape from their abusive partner:

In the interim I called 911 but I had hung up. The police came anyway from tracing the call. The police officer came he was a rookie and he talked to me, he took pictures, I gave him pictures from 2 years ago. I wanted to have proof the first time. I dated them, because I thought if I ever need to have custody of the children this would help me. He took a recorded statement and stayed with me until they found [him] because he had fled once he knew the police were coming. He actually drove himself to the police station. My cousins and brother was there and they beat him up in the police station. I think when he went to court, they gave him two or three counts because of the pictures in the past [Participant A].

The last time he hurt me he was in the parking lot and he kicked me and I called the police and he had to spend the night in the jail. Because you hurt me you pay the price for it, you make me a bruise, I'm gonna call the police and you are going to jail. Because in Mexico, if you call the police, they can take it to the jail but they are not going to do anything because he is going to give you money and it is corruption. They gonna let it go. I gave you money, you let me go and nothing is happen over here. [Participant I]

Some of our neighbors called the police. My husband and my brother-in-law were in the parking lot when the police came and took them. I spent all night on the sofa crying. I do not know who called Friend of Family because a social worker came and told me that she will take me to a secret place. I went to Friend of Family. I was there twice, the first time in 1991. [The second time] I stopped by the police station and I told them that I did not have a house, my husband threw us from the house. They put me in Friends of Family [Shelter] again. [Participant L]

He started to hit my daughter and I called the police. He asked to please forgive me and I said, "My children are first." I called Friend's of the Family and every since then I just have tried to go forward with my children [crying]. [Participant M]

The police suggested that we go to a shelter. We ended up in one of those Salvation Army shelters. I called the cops in Coleman and they referred me to their shelter in Brownwood. I now have lost her name, but the counselor was real supportive. [Participant O]

Two participants perceived the police as unsupportive and unhelpful:

My daughter called the police, but they never showed. Two days later one officer came and asked him some questions but the officer did not talk to me. [Participant F]

And the cops were like whatever, you are just another Hispanic, you probably wanted it. Actually the times I got a white cop, they were more supportive. The cops would come and say you have to leave. But this is my apartment?! That was the only downfall was the legal system. They would say "We need to see him actually hitting you." I would say, "Do you want to see me dead?!" What really upsets me is the legal part of it. We have no support. I had no support. Whenever I would call the officers – they would never even offer to press charges. I would have been the first to press charges. It seemed like back then he

had more rights. Why? I am the one being abused! They usually told me, just go somewhere else. Go somewhere else? Do you know that when you leave, he is going to be right back at my door? Or they would say, unless we see him hitting you there is nothing we can do. Hold on let me see – I have no hair here, a bruise here, a have this... “You could have self afflicted it.” It’s like OK – whatever. [Participant O] *It should be noted that with this participant this incident took place in the mid 1980’s when the law of automatic arrest was not yet implemented.

Stalking

As they tried to leave, or left many of the women were stalked by their former partner/spouse once they did leave. They shared feelings of fear. Some of the stalking incidences included crossing borders to other states or the U.S. to find them. Two of the participants filed restraining orders against their partner/former partner to ensure their safety.

He went to my Aunt’s house and searched the premises and searched my Mom’s house. He was hot. He was pissed. I told my Mom he would cool down and realize that you guys didn’t help me. [Participant G]

So he came looking for me in the U.S. Finally he finds me. He asked me to give him another chance, so I gave him another chance. We separated another year and I moved from Fort Worth to Dallas with my kids. When I came back to Dallas, he started looking for me again. He has a restraining order, but those don’t really work. At least he is not messing with me. He is staying away from me, he is let me live my life and living his own life. And I already told him, “Don’t mess around with me, because I am not playing any more games.” [Participant I]

He used to call me on the phone and asked me to go back, he asked for forgiveness. He used to call me around six in the morning and told me: “L, come back, if you do not come, I will kill myself.” I used to answer him: “You can do it.” One day he changed his expression and told me, “I will kill you.” I answered him, “OK, I will be with God and pay there my bills, but you will be in jail, and what about the kids?” “I have no problem, you can do it, kill me, I am very tired.” He calls me every day and crying is asking me for forgiveness, and to go back home. [Participant L]

...I could not get away from this man. I could not get away. If I went to work he would follow me from my house. He would follow me everywhere. Wherever I would go, I would turn around and see him or one of his friends. I used to walk my son to school, to kindergarten, and you could feel someone watching you. [Participant N]

It just got to the point where you went with it, because of threats and stalking. He was consistently stalking me. I couldn't go to work, I would lose jobs because he would stop me on the way to work and hold me back. They said, we can go and put a restraining order against him. I was working at the shelter in Brownwood and he knew where I worked. He would call me. He didn't take me seriously, he would call me, I would hang up the phone, the cops would come and arrest him. I don't know how many times this would happen. [Participant O]

Shelter Life and Social Services

Four of the women obtained support and services through domestic violence shelters. All women were referred to the shelters by the police department. If the experience was reported as negative, the women were less likely to stay at the shelter and return to their abusive environment. If it was perceived as a positive experience the women would begin a new life without their abusive partner.

That's why two years ago, I contacted Genesis. They helped me a lot. Gave my kids some counseling. Because I was tired. [Participant I]

They put me in Friends of Family again. It was the second time. I was there for six weeks. [She then left her husband for the final time]. [Participant L]

Yes, they [Friends of the Family] are helping me a lot. When I got there I didn't know what was going to happen in my life. I didn't understand what was going on. All I would do is cry, cry, I didn't know what to do. They helped me and gave me a lot of strength. They gave me a lot of love and now I give that back to my family. [Participant M]

Actually Brownwood helped me, I didn't know there was a difference between a restraining order and a peace bond. They said, we can go and put a restraining order against him. I said, I have done that before and it doesn't help. And they said, no you probably had a peace bond, which means he only has to stay away a

certain feet from you. Now a restraining order, if he even calls you the cops will be there picking him up. That was never even said to me. That was never even brought up. [Participant O]

Negative experience with shelters were shared by two of the women. In both cases, they were in Salvation Army shelters, with no privacy and minimal security. These shelters were general shelters, not specific to survivors of intimate partner violence.

The next day I did go to a shelter. It was a Salvation Army. And they didn't have rooms for me from the shelter, so I just had to stay in rooms with people off the street and that scared me. My youngest daughter - I had two boys and a girl and my youngest baby cried the whole night. We were in one bed. It wasn't a good situation and it was very traumatizing for them. [Participant G]

We ended up in one of those Salvation Army shelters. It was just a warehouse with bunk beds, it was mixed with men and women. I was scared to fall asleep. My kids were scared. I had to go back and just deal with it. [Participant O]

Some women expressed feelings of regret or skepticism in seeking these services and other women felt that these resources were not available:

I wish I had gone through resources, and counseling. Don't keep it in. Let someone know. Don't be in silence. It is hard being from a culture that is based on shutting up and doing what your told. But just let someone know. [Participant A]

I was pregnant at the time [early 1970's] and there wasn't anything back then. [Participant C]

I didn't go to any government resources because usually they ask you a lot of questions and they don't follow through. [Participant D]

Shelters, support groups, church, etc [were available]. I didn't use these resources. Many women do not look for aid or help because they don't want

others to know there is a problem or feel shame from others. Another reason is the language barrier and level of education. [Participant H]

No. I felt it would make it worse. [Participant N]

Depression

A few of the women interviewed shared that they experienced sadness and depression as a result of the abuse and stressful experience. Two of the women came very close to suicide.

It was hard working through the grief. I would just eat, eat, eat. I gained 80 pounds. Even now, I have to force myself to feel. [Participant B]

I was depressed. I was sleeping more than usual. [Participant E]

Because I was tired. I used to have a lot of stress on myself. I was real stressful. Everything scared me. I used to try and hurt myself several times. I tried to cut my veins, because I thought my life did not make sense. And all these things because him abuse me physically, emotionally. He always say bad words to me. I am on medication right now. I am taking depression medication. I am taking Centraline. But this year, I am getting better. I am doing my counseling. My counselor is always pushing me. I am not ready to have friends. I do not need a friend. Right now, I don't need anything. I still get depressed, so quickly. Just for small things I get very sad. I get depressed so fast so I don't need it. I just try and stay away. [Participant I]

I became depressed and started crying and crying. I was mad with God, Lord where are you? I was very sad, crying, working and crying. I want to die. I became very depressed, crying constantly, eating without control, I gain weight. I cried if my child did not do the homework, I cried when my husband came drunk, I cried when he came OK. I cried for everything. I did not care about myself. [Participant L]

I was destroyed emotionally. I didn't feel like getting dressed up, going out going anywhere. Just ate and slept. I would take my children to school sometimes, sometimes I wouldn't. I was by myself, and ready to cut my veins and this man called and said, you don't sound good. Don't do something that you may regret. I feel like something is happening to you. There are organizations that can help you and he gave me the name. [Participant M]

A New Life

And finally for the women that have left their abusive partners, they shared their renewed view of life. It is a new chapter in their life, free from abuse.

If I see it [abuse] - something is not right here. I will say something to a woman. I don't care if it's a stranger or what. I will usually find them alone, maybe in a restroom or something and say, "You don't have to put up with this...there are shelters, resources, people to go to." With my son, we are so close, he is my partner...my little man. I was on a strong career path for two years. I remember one time he asked me to put him in my Outlook Calendar- I thought this is crazy I have to scale back my workload. I try to raise him completely different then his Dad, because I worry it is genetic. He is real sensitive and compassionate. His teachers have told me that. It is nice I have raised someone to be compassionate and caring. If he is an ice cream man when he grows up – that is fine. [Participant B]

I quit school, didn't go to college. I went back to school in 1996 – today I received my second certification. I am real happy. I am an A+ certified technician and today I received my computer network technology certificate. I am glad we talked today. [Participant C]

I am not saying that I don't want anyone in my life, because I do. I have my kids that are teenagers now. I do not want anyone to come in and tell me how to raise my kids. I am cautious now. [Participant D]

There is a way, it is not easy. It is never easy. But I look at my life now Sloane, I am a mother of four beautiful children. My oldest is going to the marines. My other ones are graduating from high school. My daughter wants to be a nurse. We have goals. I on the other hand, I am an administrative assistant at the elementary school, I am buying my own home. I work a second job and there is a way out. You are either a survivor or not. There is a light down there...you don't see it at first, but you do. [Participant G]

I was talking to my counselor and he explained all the things I was feeling and he said I was trying to protect myself. I am a survivor from the violence. "It is not a lot of Hispanic people that can do what you do." I didn't realize it. He opened my eyes and let me know what is good for me. So, I made plans last month so I am doing my GED now and one of my wishes is soon as I get finished my GED, I want to be a teacher in the school. I want to be proud for my kids. I want my

kids to be proud. All those things I do. I make sacrifices, for my kids. They are the only thing that I have in my life. [Participant I]

My only wish is to be good with God and that my kids know about God. And that I have a stable life, so I don't have to rely on a man. [Participant M]

How are your kids now? [Interviewer]

Happy. My daughter wanted to sell gum so I would leave my ex. My daughter is so intelligent, she always talks like an adult. She says that she knows God is watching over me, since I have been through a lot. She wanted to work at a grocery store as a bagger and save so she can pay rent. She collects all the pennies she finds on the ground and says she is saving for a house for us. She is real social and speaks really good English. When her tooth pops out, she puts it under her pillow and tells her Uncle that there is a tooth there so please give me the money. She is very intelligent. [Participant M]

My biggest disappointment is that I feel I lost all those years. I feel like my husband [current] got shorted out. My husband said we got two grandchildren we can raise now. I needed him, he needed me. His father now lives with us, he had a stroke so we take care of him. His dream was to see him get married, that's why we got married kind of early. It all worked out. Everything worked out good. Now we have everyday problems, with bills and money problems, back to reality, we have the bills the job...[laughing]. This is life. The more income you have the more you spend. Donald Trump is going through the same. [Participant O]

Summary

This chapter utilized participant statements to illustrate the five phases of “courage to leave,” the process used by Latina survivors of intimate partner violence to leave their abusive partners. In most cases, the women were actively pursued by their abuser. They reflected that in the beginning, the relationship was filled with kindness and love. Often the women were young (in their teens) and became pregnant which led to an accelerated commitment. The women shared that the abuse began fairly early (usually within two to three months into the relationship) and occurred fairly frequently, unpredictably, and sometimes in front of the children and other people. Participants

shared possible risk factors and cultural aspects that they felt provoked, escalated, or aided them to tolerate the abuse. Because of control issues, extreme violence, and most importantly the fear of losing their children, the women stayed in the abusive relationship. Sometimes they would gain the courage to leave, but because of a lack of resources or psychosocial issues they found themselves back with their abusive partner. When the women experienced an internal accumulation of hurt, pain, and disappointment that finally outweighed the hope of improvement or of gaining a positive home-life for their children, they gained the courage to leave.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study used a grounded theory approach to gain an understanding of Latina women's experience with intimate partner violence. This chapter discusses the findings reported in Chapter IV by comparing the proposed theory to the existent literature. This chapter will also compare the phases and constructs within the theory to the *Enduring Love* theory, which was a grounded theory developed by Kearney (2001) by comprehensively summarizing 13 qualitative research reports that reported women's responses to relationship violence. A comparison of the phases and constructs formulated in this study with those in the documented research supports the theoretical adequacy and transferability of the proposed theory, *Sobrevivientes: Encontrar el Valor de Irse* (*Survivors: Finding the Courage to Leave*). Discussion, implications, and recommendations for further research are presented

Summary

In this study, a qualitative research approach was used to gain a better understanding of the attitudes and experiences with intimate partner abuse particular to Latina women by conducting 15 in-depth personal interviews of Latina females living in North Texas. Using the grounded theory method, the transcriptions of these interviews

were analyzed for common themes and patterns for identifying the nature of intimate partner abuse among these women. Based on the themes, the theory *Sobrevivientes: Encontrar el Valor de Irse* (*Survivors: Finding the Courage to Leave*) emerged.

The basic social psychological problem encountered was self-sacrifice. Because the women wanted what was best for their families and usually had limited resources, both financially and socially, and a great deal of fear, they continued to stay in the abusive cycle. In addition, the women were afraid that if they left they could not provide for their children, the abusive partner would kill them, or they would lose custody of their children. By self-sacrificing their own happiness and needs in the relationship, in an effort to uphold their cultural values and norms, the women were able to redefine their situation as livable, tolerable, understandable, reasonable, and survivable.

Through the basic social and psychological processes of finding the courage to leave, the Latina women who were interviewed attempted to redirect their lives and begin a new life, free from abuse. By internally combining courage and strength, they were able to seek a safe place for themselves, and more importantly from their perspective, their children. With the external support of friends, family, law enforcement, and shelters, these women were able to begin a new chapter in their lives.

Conclusions

The data revealed that for the Latina survivors of intimate partner abuse, finding “the courage to leave” was a great challenge filled with many hardships, struggles, fears, and painful emotions. Eleven of the 15 women interviewed were able to find the

resources, both internally and externally, to leave their abuser. The decision was not made overnight. Many of the women felt propelled to go back to their abuser for the children, for lack of resources, for the sanctities of marriage, or for love. They eventually found the courage and strength to permanently leave for a better life free from abuse.

Discussion

The theory presented is relevant to the experiences of the participants at this time. The goal of naturalistic inquiry is not to produce generalizations, but to offer a shared construction of a particular context contest that may serve as the stimulus for investigation for other researchers (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Some qualitative researchers maintain that the standards by which quantitative studies are judged are quite inappropriate for judging the merit of qualitative studies (Guba, 1989). "The usual scientific standards include significance, theory-observation compatibility, gneraliziblity, consistency, reproductively, precision and verification." (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 266).

Because of the nature of grounded theory, it was not the intention in this research study that a broad, substantive theory be created. Because the study was one small area of investigation of one specific population, the real merit lies in speaking for the population from which it was derived, and to apply the theory back to them, or provide it for other researchers (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is the hope of the researcher that future studies examine the transferability of this theory to other populations of Latina women,

investigate these findings using various methodologies, or examine how the theory and constructs change over time.

Comparing the results of this grounded theory research to the results of the studies conducted by Perilla (1999) Rodriguez (1999) and Sorenson (1996) reinforces the findings of this study. Research has been inconsistent with what constitutes abuse (Banillo-Santiago, 1996; Rodriguez, 1998; Torres, 1991). What constitutes abuse is very different for Hispanic women when compared to that of Anglo women. One research study stated that the definition of abuse does not include slapping or pushing/shoving, and that Hispanic women may not view forced marital sex as abuse (Torres, 1991). In another study, however, participants' definition of abuse did include these acts, as well as unwanted sexual activity, pulling hair, etc. (Rodriguez, 1999). Because of the inconsistency found in the research, one of the core questions guiding this study asked participants to define abuse, and what abuse meant to them. Most all of the women self-defined abuse as being physical, mental, emotional, and/or verbal. Words such as: "humiliation," "pain," "sorrow," "ignoring," "frustration," "bad nicknames," "belittle," "control," "cussing," and "degrading" surfaced to describe and illustrate the type of abuse they experienced.

Research indicates that higher rates of drinking for social problems are found within the Hispanic community. Rodriguez (1999) data from focus group indicated that alcohol was the number one contributing factor for abuse. Kantor, Jajinski, and Aldarondo (1994) stated that Hispanics that have high rates of acculturation may experience high levels of stress from the mundane burdens of poverty. These stressors

contribute to an increase in the consumption of alcohol, which in turn increases rates of violence. This supports other literature that has shown that alcohol use and intoxication are strong predictors of abuse in Latinas (Perilla, 1994). Most of the women said that drugs and/or alcohol had played a large part in the abusive relationship. They further shared that when their partner would drink or use drugs, the abuse would escalate further or be more intense. A few of the women did not know their partner was using drugs and later found out. An interesting comment that about one-third of the women made was that they were afraid for Friday to come because of the increase in alcohol and abuse.

This study confirmed the research that Hispanic women that tended to be of low socioeconomic status and who live in isolated conditions (such as in rural areas with no telephone, or remote areas; and who only spoke Spanish) are at the highest rates for abuse (Pinn & Chunko, 1997). One of the women interviewed who lives on a rural farm is locked in her house and further confined with an electric fence and no telephone.

Beliefs attributed to religion are thought to encourage women to stay in abusive relationships regardless of the abuse they are enduring. Some Latina women believe that it is the cross they have to bear (Rodriguez, 1999). Research indicates that some Catholic priests and leaders were not supportive of divorce or for wives leaving their abusive husbands (Sorenson, 1996). Consistent with this finding was one interview where a participant was told by her Catholic priest that he could not help her. Some of the women said they were more comfortable praying to the Virgin Mary; as a woman, she is perceived as more understanding than God. Some of the women responded that they found solace in reading the Bible to help them through their stressful recovery.

Rodriguez's (1999) research with focus groups of Latina women showed that they are expected to have strong family values, which prohibit their leaving the abusive relationship. The women must stay "for the children." This study supported this notion. Many women said that they feared leaving because of the possibility of losing their children. This fear seemed more common among the women who came from Mexico than among the Mexican American women. Some women stated that their children were their most important priority. This love and devotion for the children actually assisted the women in finding the courage to leave, saying they did it so the children could have a better life, free from seeing the abuse. This was consistent with other research findings (Erez, 2000). One study illustrated that Latina women are worried that they may be rejected by their extended family (Sorenson, 1996), but this fear was not found in this study. To the contrary, participants shared that their extended family was usually supportive of them leaving the abusive situations; and for two of the women interviewed, their extended family was pivotal in their termination of the relationship.

One of the most startling discoveries from the interviews was that half of the women were confined or locked in a room or car as part of their abuse. This was not found in the prior research on Latina survivors of domestic violence. Some of the women reported that they were locked and confined in a room. For a couple of women this lasted for hours and for one woman it was an entire month. One woman reported being locked in her house daily with no telephone, heat, or way to leave. She does not speak English and is unable to write in Spanish.

The rate of marital rape in Latino marriages appears to be disturbingly high, at rates as great as 80-90% (Perilla, 1999). This study confirmed that marital rape is an issue for Latina women. Of the 15 women interviewed, six had been the victims of marital rape. As the researcher interviewed them, two of the women were still uncertain that it could be classified as rape because they were married at the time. One woman shared very painfully that she was raped in front of another family that she and her husband were sharing a room with, on her wedding night. The actual incident rate may have been higher, with some incidences of rape not disclosed due to participants' lack of comfort in discussing it with the researcher. The rates disclosed in this study are more consistent with those identified by the New Mexico Clearinghouse on Sexual Abuse and Assault (2002), which included married couples and reported rates of rape/sexual assault by nonstrangers as 31.8% for Hispanics versus 17.7% for whites.

A study by Perilla (1999) indicated that 92% of Latino male batterers and 85% of Latina female support group attendees reported witnessing their father abuse their mother as they were growing up. The findings from this study strongly support this research. Most of the women voluntarily shared that their own parents were the victims of abuse. It appeared that the women in this study really wanted to share their stories of the abuse they witnessed and experienced as they grew up. Because the family is so important to Latina women, the abuse they witnessed growing up seemed to have an especially profound and lasting effect on them.

The women stated that they felt their mother was their role model, and because they witnessed their mother's abuse, they felt it was either acceptable or a reason why

they found themselves in an abusive relationship. This is consistent with the focus group research conducted by Rodriguez (1999), in which he found that a family history of violence and abuse was a factor for intimate partner violence. Some of the women reported that they were also the victims of child abuse and/or sexual molestation growing up. Numerous studies support that living with intimate partner violence during childhood produces the batterers and victims of the next generation. In Wang and McKinney's (1997) research, 55% of their female participants reported they were abused as children, and 68% of their partners had a history of abuse.

Very little research has been done on the issue among Latina women of abusive partners threatening them with weapons such as guns and knives. For white women, this has been an issue with domestic violence research. Rodriguez (1999) found in a sample of 450 Latina women that of the 15 who reported being abused, none of the women reported being threatened with weapons. In contrast, this study found that three of the 15 participants were assaulted with a weapon such as a gun or knife.

Cultural gender roles that portray females as passive, nurturing supporters of men's activities, along with cultural beliefs that emphasize loyalty and sacrifice for the family, may contribute to a tolerance for domestic violence (Bart & Moran, 1993). These themes are particularly strong in cultures where honor is emphasized. One study indicated that Hispanic students from an "honor culture" rated a woman in an abusive relationship more positively if she stayed with the man. Hispanic students who watched a video where a woman was being pushed and threatened by her fiancé later communicated less disapproval of the violence and more approval of the woman if she

portrayed herself as contrite and self-blaming (Jajinski, 1998). This was not found as a direct theme of this study, however. When issues of control (financial, social, appearance, etc.) were discussed, the women shared that this was how their partner wanted them to be.

Although it is culturally acceptable for Latino men to have many women “friends,” it is not generally acceptable for Latina women to have male friends (Perilla, 1999). Rodriguez (1999) reported that abuse of Latina women occurred at higher rate when the abuser was involved in extramarital relationships. In this study, infidelity was identified as a risk factor for the abuse. Because of its frequency and continual interplay within the constructs, it was a strong emergent theme of the study. Over half of the participants shared stories of their husbands’ unfaithfulness, and how that affected the abuse inflicted upon them. One woman explained that the reason she received the abuse was because she confronted her husband about his affairs. Another woman shared that she wished she had never found her husband with the other woman (who was her sister in-law) because now she is “the bad woman” for leaving the house because she was angry. In addition, most of the women reported that the men were not only having extramarital affairs (sometimes with multiple women), but had produced children with these women as well.

Dutton, Orloff, and Aguilar-Hass (2000) reported that 21.7% of the battered immigrant women surveyed identified fear of being reported to immigration authorities as their primary reason for remaining in an abusive relationship. According to Bonilla-Santiago (1996), the undocumented status of Latinas keeps them isolated and trapped

within violent homes. Fear of deportation is a very powerful tool used by abusers to prevent battered immigrant women from seeking help and to keep them in violent relationships (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002). In this research, the fear of being reported to immigration authorities or deportation was found as a slight emergent theme. Over half of the participants in this study were American citizens, which may have factored into this attribute. Again, the comfort level of the participant with the interviewer regarding a highly sensitive topic such as illegal immigration status may have influenced the amount of disclosure regarding this topic. One woman did report excessive worry of being deported, based on her spouse's threats of making this happen to her.

Erez (2000) found that, due to language barriers, some Latina women are not aware of protective orders or that there are resources from the state and local agencies. Interpreters are not routinely available, and their interpretation may be problematic. Bonilla-Santiago (1996), when interviewing 25 incarcerated Hispanic women that had been battered, discovered that because of language and cultural barriers, most Latina women received no assistance or protection from the police, legal aid, welfare, family counseling agencies, or community mental health centers. For many Hispanics, Spanish is their primary language or the only language spoken. If an individual does not feel comfortable or is unable to communicate with resource agencies due to a lack of Spanish-speaking volunteers, there will be a barrier to access and resources.

Several studies have indicated that Mexican American families do not perceive the police as a respected and resourceful community service (Shetty & Kaguyutan, 2002; Sorenson 1996). This was found to be consistent with the findings of this study. One

Latina women living in rural Texas who is not a U.S. citizen called the police for assistance when her husband was being abusive. She did not read or write English, so when the police arrived and they did not speak Spanish or provide a translator, she was unable to effectively communicate with them. Her husband spoke with the police officers in English, and they left. She was not sure what was said.

Another participant shared that she did not know the difference between a peace order and restraining order, and the shelter she was at was pivotal in navigating her through the legal system. Once intervention services are sought at a shelter, the skills and language of shelter staff are key to retaining women who have been the victims of domestic violence. Shelters are seen by this community as the “point of no return” rather than a resource. It is important to realize that it took a long time and many challenges for Latina women to arrive at a shelter. Retention and comfort are important for this culture (Erez, 2000). Most Hispanic families have at least two children, and many shelters have limited, if any, space, therefore, having accommodations for four to six family members is problematic for many shelters (Friends of the Family, 2002). This was found to be an issue in this study for two of the women who sought refuge in a Salvation Army shelter. They explained that they were assigned to bunk beds with limited space (sometimes three family members to one bed) and had to stay in a co-ed environment of homeless men, recovering alcoholics, etc. They shared that they were extremely uncomfortable and not willing to stay. In both of these cases, the women went back to their abusive husbands. The women who were in shelters that were specific to survivors of domestic violence and that had Spanish-speaking resources reported an extremely positive attitude toward the

shelter experience. One woman felt so connected with her shelter counselor that they are still friends two years later. Another woman began working at the shelter after she reestablished her life. It was discovered in this study that the shelter services were not sought directly by the Latina women, but were utilized when recommended by the police.

The Hispanic culture believes that problems should be solved in the home, not with outside sources such as counseling or friends. Sorenson (1996) found that some Hispanics regard seeing a psychiatrist or counselor as something for psychotic or crazy people. This concept could not be supported by this study. The interviews revealed that six of the women sought formal counseling as recommended by the shelter. The attitude toward counselors may be changing as Latina women and society have a less negative view of utilizing their services. The women in this study had reached their breaking point. Leaving took all the strength and what little resources they had.

Based on the outcomes of focus group interviews, Rodriguez (1999) reported that one of the factors that discouraged Latina women from leaving their abuse partners was their economic dependence on them. Qualitative studies have shown that a male partner's abuse directly affects the female partner's ability to work and become economically independent. One study illustrated that visible injuries, stalking, making harassing calls, and breaking promises for childcare and transportation have preventing abused women from working (Raphael, 2000). This was strongly supported by this study. The women shared their frustration with trying to work and support themselves financially. The abusive partner would prohibit some of the women from working, either by denying them access to transportation, telling them they could not work because they

had to stay home and take care of the kids, or by physically restraining them from going to their job.

Research indicates that 14% of Hispanics incur abuse while they are pregnant (McFarlane & Parker, 1994). The abuse may often begin during pregnancy, and pregnant women are more likely to have multiple injury sites when compared to nonpregnant women (Helton, 1986). Rodriguez (1999) found that 7.9% of Mexican respondents were abused while pregnant. This was a definite theme of this study. The women shared that the abuse escalated during their pregnancy or while they were delivering their baby. Over half of the women reported extreme abuse during their pregnancy. Of those, many had to seek medical attention while they were pregnant. For two of the women, the husbands were not present when they gave birth, despite numerous attempts to contact them. One woman said that she had a very difficult birth that required surgery, and had to take a taxi home after the surgery because the husband was nowhere to be found. Another woman said that her husband struck her while she was in the hospital bed, just an hour after she gave birth.

Abalos (1994), among others, described the Latino family as a “sealed container,” impenetrable by anyone from the outside. The notion to keep the abuse quiet is seen among survivors of domestic violence across all cultures. However, this characteristic seems to be more pronounced in the Hispanic population, where women are taught from childhood to tolerate and “put up” to be a good wife (Rodriguez, 1999). This was a strong emergent theme of this study. The women expressed that they were told by their parents – their own – to “take it,” not talk about the abuse, and deny that it exists. This is

consistent with prior research. The Latino family is one of pride and loyalty. To talk openly about the abuse and unhappiness would go against the grain of the culture. This is illustrated in one woman who revealed in the interview that the researcher was only the second person with who she had shared her story of abuse. The first person was a stranger on an airplane that she never saw again. It had been 10 years since she left her abusive husband, and only two people knew the intimate details of her hardship.

The Basic Psychological Problem

Grounded theory aims to go beyond the description of the actions of a group to understand their underlying problem or issue, and the process used to address it (Glaser, 2002). Analysis of these data revealed that the core problem confronting these women was self-sacrifice. Because the women wanted what was best for their families, usually had limited financial and social resources, and felt a great deal of fear, they continued to stay in the abusive cycle. In addition, the women were afraid that if they left they could not provide for their children, the abusive partner would kill them, or they would lose custody of their children. By self-sacrificing their own happiness and needs in the relationship in an effort to uphold their cultural values and norms, the women were able to redefine their situation as livable, tolerable, understandable, reasonable, and survivable.

The Basic Psychological Process

Through the basic psychological process of finding the courage to leave, the Latina women interviewed attempted to redirect their lives and begin a new life, free from abuse. By internally combining courage and strength, and overcoming many of the

barriers unique to this population, they were able to seek a safe place for themselves, and more importantly from their perspective, their children. With the external support of friends, family, law enforcement, and shelters, these women were able to begin a new chapter in their lives. Each phase served as a process because it brought the women closer and closer to having the courage to leave. The four women who are still with their partners have an increased awareness level that the abuse is not acceptable. Based on the data obtained from their interviews, these women have cycled through the process of courage to leave and obtained the courage to speak out.

The five phases of courage to leave run somewhat parallel to the four stages of *Enduring Love*, a grounded formal theory identified by Kearney (2001) based on 13 qualitative studies on intimate partner abuse. As the participants encountered many of the phases of creating comfort, they also worked through some of the phases and components of *Enduring Love* that achieved similar outcomes (see Table 1). Note that not all phases of courage to leave paralleled *Enduring Love*.

Phase 1 – The Pursuit

The first phase in finding the courage to leave included meeting the abuser and the courtship pursuit. Concerning this first phase, the participants discussed their age when they met their partner, the intensity of the abuser's pursuit, the initial nature of the relationship, and their pregnancy situation in the relationship.

The women said that they were young when they first met their abusive partner. This seemed to contribute to an increased dependency and a lack of resources for the women. Twelve of the 15 participants interviewed were either 19 years old or younger

Table 1. Comparison of Phases of Enduring Love with Phases of Courage to Leave

Enduring Love	Courage to Leave
<p>Phase 1: <i>All I Wanted</i> Romantic involvement fulfilled their dreams of loving of being loved, propelled by culturally defined roles of and expectations.</p> <p>Phase 2: <i>The More I Do, The Worse I am</i> Partner's love and violence seen as unpredictable or inconsistent. Help unavailable or unacceptable. Salvaging relationship as woman's role.</p> <p>Phase 3: <i>I Had Enough</i> Violence unacceptable Relationship not salvageable Self, children more important</p> <p>Phase 4: <i>I Was Finding Me</i> Depleted resources Uncertainty Vulnerability</p>	<p>Phase 1: <i>The Pursuit: Meeting the Abuser</i> Romance was filled with kindness and love. Relatively young when they met their partners. Pregnancy was a factor in staying in the relationship.</p> <p>Phase 2: <i>The Abuse Begins</i> First abusive incident reported as fairly violent. Abuse was frequent, unpredictable and sometimes in front of other people.</p> <p>Phase 5: <i>Escape and a New Life</i> Questioning and depression Violence unacceptable Community resources</p> <p>Phase 3: Risk Factors and Cultural Considerations This phase is not linear but actually interacts to some degree with all the phases. Risk factors such as alcohol use, infidelity, social isolation seem to parallel Phases 1 and 4 of Enduring Love. Cultural considerations tie strongly to Phase 1 of Enduring Love. Marriage is forever and religion, fear of deportation or example add to the culturally defined roles and expectations.</p>

when they first met their partner. Many of the women shared that they had to move in with the parents of abusive partners due to a lack of financial resources, which added to their stress level. Some of the women reported that the abuser strongly pursued them and repeatedly asked them out. The beginning of the relationship was usually filled with “romance” and “kindness.” Most of the women viewed the initial treatment of their abusive partners as very sweet and attentive. Through the interviews, some of the women seemed sad and nostalgic as they reminisced of a day gone by.

One very unique aspect of the first phase was that participants shared that they became pregnant early in the courtship, thereby becoming involved with a partner after only knowing him a short period of time. The women either married their partner or moved in with him within a few months or less. One woman said that she wished she would have stayed with her best girlfriend and not even told her boyfriend (who later became her abusive spouse) about the pregnancy. Because the women were usually young, without economic resources, and pregnant, it seemed that the most logical decision was to marry or move-in with their boyfriend.

Phase 2 - The Abuse Begins

In this second phase, women shared how the abuse began for them. The women described the first incident of abuse; the type and frequency of the early incidences of abuse; the inconsistency of how and when it would happen; and the fact that the abuse sometimes occurred in front of the children and other people.

In most cases, the women reported the first incident of physical abuse as fairly violent and shocking, usually starting with a slap, push, or shove. Some of the women explained that they were endured hits to the face, asphyxiation, kicking while they were asleep, marital rape, and use of such force that one woman was bleeding from her ear. Their stories suggested that abuse does not necessarily escalate, and that the first incidences can be near fatal. This, compacted with the psychological abuse endured, shows the pain these women had to endure.

Participants described the type of abuse as emotional, physical, verbal, or mental. One woman said that she had a hard time classifying it as physical abuse because she was not maimed. Participants reported the abuse as occurring fairly frequently. Most of the women said that the abuse occurred daily, sometimes as verbal incidences or forced isolation, with the physical violence being more intermittent. Others shared that the abuse was less frequent, occurring once or twice a month or every couple months. Although the frequency of abuse varied from person to person, the inconsistency was a constant theme of the abusive incidences. The abuse was random, incongruent, and unpredictable. One woman described her situation as “walking on egg shells.” Another woman expressed that she never knew what was going to incite her abuser, and that she “got tired of being his punching bag” when things did not go well with him at work. One woman said that she and her cousin were looking at apartment guides, and that her husband threw a book at her in front of her cousin for no reason at all. It is the intent of the abuser, as a method of control, to keep the person being abused in a state of inconsistency and incongruity.

Participants shared that the abuse was sometimes in front of the children or other people, with the most painful recollections being when the abuse would occur in front of the children. Because the children and family are the most important things to Latina women, they are more apt to tolerate and endure the abuse. It is the cultural belief of Latinas that emphasizes loyalty and sacrifice for the family that may contribute to a tolerance for domestic violence (Bart & Moran, 1993). One woman spoke of the time when her husband was abusing her, and her children (three of them) were hiding under the table, covering their ears, crying hysterically. Another woman shared that she hated how she appeared in her children's eyes when she was being abused. She wanted them to be proud of her – to respect her.

Phase 3 – Risk Factors and Cultural Considerations

Risk factors and cultural considerations compose the third phase. This phase is unique because of its integrated structure. It is not linear, but actually weaves and interplays continually with the other phases. This phase illustrates the cultural component of intimate partner abuse for this population, and the risk factors that were found to be associated with the abusive relationship. The self-identified risk factors were drugs and alcohol, infidelity, and history of parents having been abused. The themes of cultural considerations unique to this population that emerged included the definition of abuse as perceived by Latinas, fear of deportation, “family is first and marriage is forever,” “this is normal,” “pride,” “silence...don’t talk about it,” religiosity, and faith in God and Bruharia.

Most all of the women (13 of the 15) shared that drugs and/or alcohol played a large part in the abusive relationship. They further shared that when their partner would drink or use drugs, the abuse would escalate further or be more intense. A few of the women did not know that their partner was using drugs, and later found out. An interesting comment that one-third of the women made was that they were afraid for Friday to come because of the increase in alcohol and abuse. Although not a direct risk factor for abuse, alcohol is a well-documented indirect risk factor associated with intimate partner violence. The alarming rate of drinking among this small sample indicates that this would be an important topic for future study.

Over half of the participants shared their frustrations concerning their husband's unfaithfulness. One woman explained that the reason she received the abuse was because she confronted her husband about his affairs. Another woman shared that she wished she had never found her husband with the other woman (who was her sister in-law), because now she is "the bad woman" for leaving the house because she was angry. Another woman shared that her abusive partner would leave for days at a time. When she would find out where he was staying and call, she would hear women laughing next to him. He would come home with "hickies" and lipstick on his clothing while she cooked, cleaned, and took care of their two children.

Many women voluntarily shared that their own parents were the victims of abuse. The women stated that they felt their mother was their role model, and because they witnessed their mother's abuse they felt it was either acceptable or a reason why they were in abusive relationships. Some of the women reported that they were also the

victims of child abuse and/or sexual molestation when they were growing up. One woman reported that her father probably felt that he was unable to offer her advice as she left her abusive spouse because he “had been that person before.” They felt that because they witnessed abuse growing up, it was more acceptable and a normal part of marriage.

Some of the women who were born in Mexico and came to the U.S. shared that their abusive partner would threaten them with deportation. They feared that they would have to go to Mexico without their kids. This is an important and unique cultural consideration for those working with this population. It is important to note that the interviewer was of Caucasian descent, and the participants may not have felt comfortable sharing this information. Also, only one-third of the participants were born outside the U.S.

One of the strongest cultural consideration themes that emerged was the notion of silence – to not share the abuse with anyone; to “shut up and take it,” as one participant described it. This is a main theme for all survivors of intimate partner violence, regardless of race or ethnicity; however, it is especially strong within the Hispanic culture that emphasizes, trust, loyalty, pride, marriage, strong maternal role, and commitment.

In examining religiosity and faith in God, the Catholic Church or belief in God was considered a solace for some and an unsupportive entity for others. Most women did feel that it was God’s intention for them to marry their loved one, but not to endure the tremendous abuse. Upon finding the courage to leave, they began to question God’s intentions. One woman shared that she no longer feels an intimate spiritual relationship with God, and feels more comfortable with the Virgin Mary.

Two of the women interviewed referenced Bruharia, a Mexican tradition of witchcraft or folklórico. Although not a major theme, the researcher felt it was pertinent to illustrate the cultural aspect of this folklore. One of these women who had salts around her house and a witchcraft packet was Catholic and an avid member of the church.

Phase 4 – The Cycle Continues or Escalates

In phase four of courage to leave, the abusers utilized various techniques in an attempt to further manipulate and control the women into staying in the relationship. Techniques included the threat of taking the children, extreme or excessive violence (kidnapping and confinement, threats to kill, the use of lethal weapons, rape, or abuse to the woman while she was pregnant or having the baby), and issues of control (social, financial, appearance, driving, working, and other).

Again and again, women said that they feared leaving because of the possibility of losing their children. This seemed to be more common among the women who came from Mexico rather than the Mexican American women. One woman shared that her children were number one and that only God could separate them. All of these women had at least two children to provide and care for as they struggled for a new life free of abuse.

Participants shared their experiences with extreme violence, which included confinement and kidnapping, marital rape, the threat from a lethal weapon such as a gun or knife, threatening to kill, or abuse while the woman was pregnant or delivering the baby. Some of the women reported that on one occasion or they were locked in a room for a period of time with no way out. This period of confinement ranged from a few

hours to a month. One woman who does not speak English and is unable to write in Spanish said that she is locked in the house daily, with no telephone, heat, or way to leave. This was an extremely traumatic and painful experience for these women; but for a few of them, it this was a bittersweet moment, as it became the turning point - the point where they decided to leave or at least question why they were in the abusive relationship.

Marital rape was another emergent theme of the Latina survivors. One woman shared very painfully that she was raped in front of another family that they were sharing a room with, on her wedding night. Another woman was raped in her own bedroom when her abusive ex-partner broke into a window and raped and threatened her at night. Two of the women shared that they were still uncertain if it was rape, because they were married. Two other women said that their husbands wanted sex morning, noon, and night, not caring if they were sick or menstruating at the time.

Use of a lethal weapon was a theme identified by some of the participants. For white women, this has been an issue with domestic violence research, but very little research has been done on this topic with Latina women. In this study, four of the 15 participants were assaulted with a lethal weapon. Three were assaulted with guns and the other woman was cut with a large knife. This high incidence rate of suggests that this topic should be addressed in further studies.

Abuse during pregnancy was a definite theme of this study. The women reported that the abuse escalated during their pregnancy or while they were delivering their baby.

Over half of the women reported extreme abuse during their pregnancy. Of those, half had to seek medical attention while they were pregnant.

The women shared how their partners would alienate them from the outside world and use various ways to control them from gaining autonomy or independence. A few of the women had moved here from Mexico in search of a better life, so they had limited resources once they arrived. Qualitative studies have shown that a male partner's abuse directly affects the female partner's ability to work and become economically independent. Participants shared that their abusive partner would control how they could dress, what they could wear, and the money they could spend on clothes, make-up, and shoes for themselves. The abusive spouse/partner would prohibit some of the women from driving, getting rides, or having access to the car. The women also shared stories of jealousy that fit within the general theme of control.

Phase 5 – Escape and a New Life

The women shared that they questioned why were they continuing to stay in the abusive relationship. They were beaten down physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They had no more to give. The women usually went through a series of leaving and coming back to their abusive partner. Sometimes the abusive partner would find them and convince them to take him back. The women obtained the courage to leave internally and with the assistance of external support services such as law enforcement agencies and shelters. Most of the women experienced intense grief, depression, and sadness from the loss of the abusive spouse – loss of the memories, loss of losing a father for their children, loss of what could have been. One woman shared that she missed her abusive

husband that died in a car crash because, “believe it or not, there were some good times....”

Implications

The findings from this study provide many implications for intimate partner violence prevention and assistance programs for Latina women. Survivors of intimate partner abuse experience a wide range of emotions, including shame, fear, guilt, pain, anger, isolation, hopelessness, and alienation. The issue of violence is multi-faceted, involving many social, psychological, cultural, and systems aspects. Violence, coupled with the cultural issue of being a Latina female, makes this issue an even more complex and challenging one.

Women who are suffering from abuse have feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness. Those feelings do not correlate with seeking knowledge or empowering themselves to take a change (Rodriguez, 1999). Most of the women in this study gained the courage to leave their abusive husband because they felt they had no more to give. The pain of the abuse outweighed the exchange of security. What these women need is outreach and prevention strategies that are implemented well before the abuse begins, well before the women are broken down and without resources, well before it is too late.

Community outreach provides some of the most effective opportunities for reaching Latina women. Outreach with a trained community gatekeeper or promotora could be very effective in providing women a safe, confidential person with whom they can talk and seek assistance. To make such assistance effective, outreach workers should be trained on how to assess for signs of abuse (Rodriguez, 1993).

Collaborative projects, symposia, conferences, and focus groups that address the specific cultural needs of this population are imperative. By bringing awareness to this issue, funding agencies will continue to support this cause and view it as an important public health issue that is worthy of financial support.

Our schools are one of the most effective mechanisms for prevention and intervention. Starting at elementary level, anti-violence education programs should be included as key components in the curriculum. Prevention strategies, including warning signals of control and power abuse, should be emphasized. This should include a cultural component that incorporates issues of power and authority that exist within the Latina culture. English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and other educational courses are important for this population, who may have higher rates of violence due to additional stressors such as not speaking English or having a lack of resources. Peer educational resources have proven very effective for Latino youths.

More resources and navigators need to be provided for Hispanic women in shelters and social service arenas. If Spanish-speaking, culturally competent social service workers are provided to them, they may be more comfortable with utilizing these services. Another finding from this study was that the women felt uncomfortable in shelters that were not specific for domestic abuse survivors. If the shelter was perceived as comfortable and friendly, the participants were most likely to stay. This is a key finding that should serve as reinforcement to ensure that referrals are made to the appropriate shelters, that funding agencies provide financial support for these shelters,

that culturally appropriate resources are provided at them, and that ample room is available for these women and their children.

The church is a key entity for the provision of education and resources, as the Catholic Church is so integrated within this culture. This study revealed that many of the women found solace in the Catholic Church for their recovery. Others abandoned it because of the perception that their intimate partner abuse issues were dismissed by the church's representatives. The leadership of the Catholic Church can be a very effective resource in the prevention of intimate partner abuse among this population by providing resource materials and counselors.

Based on the information obtained in this study's interviews, extra time is needed for outreach workers in ethnic communities to provide adequate services to domestic abuse survivors. This is an extremely complex issue that cannot be eradicated at a health fair or by going door to door to deliver health education materials. The outreach worker must gain the trust of the community, and work with gatekeepers and the population at risk to conduct a thorough needs analysis and ask what the participants want. This study indicated that the women who did seek counseling felt very comfortable and that it had helped them. It is crucial that shelter services are provided with the funding and staff they need for bilingual counselors and therapists for these women.

Language and transportation problems are huge issues among this population, which in turn require extra time and funding for them to be addressed by social service agencies. These issues were seen time and time again as barriers to the women who were trying to find the courage to leave. The abusive husband would often not let their

partner obtain a driver's license or own a car. Effective programs must have adequate transportation and well-trained bilingual staff available. Police departments, especially in small rural towns that may have a high percentage of migrant and seasonal farm workers, employ at least one bilingual staff person that is fluent in Spanish and comfortable with this population. As one woman from this study experienced, the police came to her house in response to her domestic violence call, but because the officer did not know Spanish and her husband knew English, her husband was able to talk the officer into leaving without taking any action regarding the abuse.

The children come first, so their consideration is paramount. If a domestic violence shelter serves a predominately ethnic minority population, the "average" number of hours that need to be spent by the staff are much higher. Also, the amount of space required is usually greater for this population because they tend to have more children.

Cultural gender roles that portray females as passive, nurturing supporters of men's activities, along with cultural beliefs that emphasize loyalty and sacrifice for the family, may contribute to a tolerance for domestic violence. Teaching egalitarian concepts to Latino children would serve as a key component to decreasing family violence. Instructing children that women have just as much decision making power and importance in their role in the family as men is critical. In this culture, sex roles are strongly established, leading to power issues. If children learn a more egalitarian structure, they may, in turn, refrain from power struggles where they feel compelled to abuse their partners/family.

Women should seek an intercultural dialogue that embraces mutual respect and recognition. Women can be just as much a protagonist within a culture as men, in terms of ignoring violence or perpetuating myths and barriers (Tamez, 1986). Only by working together can Latina women begin the cultural transformation that is needed, through resistance, interpretation, and shared action, to overcome violence against women (Russell & Rodriguez, 1997).

As this study illustrated, women of this population tended to seek support from their extended family, which emerges as a strong factor in the prevention of abuse (Rodriguez, 1999). Professionals and health educators working with Latina women who are abused must be made aware of the importance of the family within this culture. Professionals need to couch the support function of the family in such a way that battered Latinas can utilize it (Rodriguez, 1999).

Once again, alcohol was identified as a risk factor for the abuse. Programs should be devised by community gatekeepers that emphasize other stress releases and coping strategies for the abuser, such as fitness, recreation, and anger management, rather than focusing on the drinking. This is a very complex condition that requires sequential steps to ameliorate this public health problem.

For the women in this study, pregnancy was identified as one of the main indicators for beginning a committed relationship or marriage with their future abusive partners. Programs that effectively and openly discuss contraception management and pregnancy prevention are crucial for middle and high school students to prevent teen or unwanted pregnancy. A cultural barrier of Latinas may be the Catholic's Church

position on birth control. Community gatekeepers of this population with specialization in family planning and contraception management can be an effective outreach resource, to educate this population regarding this issue.

It is important that Latina women are informed and educated on deportation laws and rights, and to dispel the myth that their children can be taken away from them. Information on these resources should be displayed discretely and confidentially in areas such as markets and local women's clinics that the Latina women frequent.

Most importantly, programs must incorporate cultural aspects that contribute to the abuse. For example, factors found in this study such as the beliefs that "marriage is forever," "silence," and "the children come first" are key considerations for health professionals working with this population. Ensuring counselors at shelters and resource agencies are aware of these cultural considerations can be a powerful resource tool for assisting this population with coping and making lifestyle changes.

Novelas, Telemundo, and media outlets such as the Latin TV talk show "Christina" are key communications media to utilize for public service announcements and dramatizations showing women overcoming intimate partner abuse. The more attention that is focused on this public health issue, the more awareness that is created, thereby helping to dispel the myths surrounding this topic and breaking the silence.

Recommendations for Future Research

Both qualitative and quantitative research must continue to be conducted for this priority population to ensure that funding and attention is given to this necessary and

crucial topic. Conducting of collaborative projects, symposia, conferences, and focus groups that address the specific cultural needs of this population is imperative. Because the most basic data on Latina women as survivors of domestic violence are inconsistent, it is important that research continue to be conducted for this population. Qualitative research, such as focus groups, is key to the success of future programs and services for this population.

Differentiation of various Hispanic groups, such as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, etc., is essential in collecting accurate and reliable data. The different cultural levels and cultural diversities must be recognized in future studies.

Extreme violence such as marital rape, use of weapons, and threats to kill was reported by a number of women in this study. Future research should focus on this area further as it has not been found in the literature from the few studies conducted with Latina survivors of intimate partner abuse. A few of the women indicated that they were unaware of their rights regarding marital rape. Information obtain from future studies could assist practitioners, law enforcement officials and health educators in offering community service and prevention programs specific to protection and informing Latina women of their rights and resources available.

Future research should focus on the self-esteem and vulnerability of this population. Gaining a more in depth detailed view of women's feelings of self-worth and value are key to determining which areas to focus on for more effective health education programs. Classes on empowerment, learning English and career skills would be great resources for self-esteem building for this population.

The male partner as the abuser was not the focus of this study. But it was found that alcohol and drugs played an important part in the abuse experienced by most all of the women interviewed. Therefore, this is a key area for future research with this population to find the most effective, targeted prevention programs.

Future research could also prove effective with a two-part approach using both qualitative data and quantitative data with this population. Focus testing and establishing a reliable, valid instrument that this population is comfortable with is key to effectively collecting and analyzing data for this population. It cannot be stressed enough that in working with the Latina population, their input and feedback on all stages of program design and implementation is imperative to the success of the program or prevention strategy. Nobody knows the population better than the population themselves. For this study, the instrument design (core questions) and implementation was shared with two Latina gatekeepers from this community. They not only provided the translation services but shared their input and expertise on the study design, including key strategies for reaching this population. This is crucial for any study involving priority populations.

Interventions should be evaluated for their effectiveness. This is a challenge for this hard to reach population and in dealing with the extremely sensitive topic of intimate partner violence. Collaboration and funding through state, government, and non-profit agencies are key strategies for health educators to consider in creating effective evaluation strategies.

One area for further research could be to examine verbal and mental abuse versus physical abuse. And to analyze the various tolerance levels and decisions to continue or

leave the abusive relationship associated with each type of abuse. The two women in this study who experienced only verbal and mental abuse were still currently with their abusive partners. This may be because verbal and mental abuse, compared to physical, does not outweigh the negative perceptions of leaving or is considered more acceptable or tolerable. Future research should focus on verbal and mental versus physical survivors of intimate partner abuse to explore the different perspectives.

Another area for future research is to analyze length of abuse. Previous research has found that Hispanic women are more tolerant and long enduring of abuse than their African American or Caucasian counterparts. Though not a theme found in this study, it would be interesting to further examine the length of the relationships with the amount of time it takes to leave the abusive relationship and the internal emotions that are associated with this process. It found that Latina women are more enduring, prevention strategies to empower Latina women from even becoming involved with abusive partners or programs that target women early in their abusive relationships would prove most effective.

One other area for future studies may be a longitudinal qualitative method looking at the long-term psychosocial aspects for Latina survivors who left their partner permanently. Some of the women in this study still had contact with their abusive partners due to childcare and joint custody issues. It would be interesting to explore the possible implications and experiences of continued contact with the abusive ex-partner and to examine the stages of recovery for these women as the years pass. For example, analyzing a survivor's perspective of her recovery one year after leaving an abusive

partner versus five or ten years later. This could further assist counselors with providing the most effective resources and strategies in helping this priority population.

In this study, interviews were conducted in person, sometimes with the assistance of a translator or on the telephone. If this study were to be reproduced, the researcher's recommendation would be to complete all interviews in person rather than on the telephone. It is the belief of the researcher that the data was more thorough, in-depth and detailed when it was obtained in person rather than over the phone. Participants gave their preference based on convenience and comfort level for the medium they chose. However, it is the recommendation of the researcher that the interviews be conducted in person.

Three possible participants later canceled their agreement to take place in the study after the researcher received initial contact from them. It would be interesting for these individuals to share why they decided to cancel their involvement with the study.

Participant recruitment was a definite challenge of this study. Because of the highly sensitive nature of this topic, the time commitment of the interviews and most importantly because some Latinas are considered to be a hard to reach population, recruitment strategies were challenging. The most effective strategy was by word-of-mouth or "snowball effect." One person would hear of the study from a gatekeeper, then they would know of someone else who was the survivor of abuse, recommend them to call, etc. The least effective method that yielded no participants was flyer postings at the universities. All future research should report the most effective ways for recruiting for the Latina population.

The goal for successful health behavior change programs is to provide effective and culturally appropriate prevention and intervention strategies that fit the specific needs of this amazingly rich and complex culture. In accomplishing this, Latina women will have the resources needed to avoid becoming involved with abusive partners, or to obtain the courage to leave and embark upon a new life – a life free from abuse.

The women in this study all met their partners with the intention of having a life of love, comfort, and happiness – to be a good wife and mother. Many envisioned a life free from abuse, control, oppression, and unhappiness. Most of the women lived many years with fear, frustration, pain, anxiety, and feelings of isolation and struggle. By overcoming many of the barriers and cultural challenges associated with intimate partner abuse, these women gained the courage and strength to leave and begin a new life.

For the four women who are still with their abusive partners, they had the courage to take a risk and speak out. They spoke on behalf of Latina women everywhere who are being abused, so one day they will no longer have to suffer in silence - and for that alone, they are courageous.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Flyers



Research Study Participants Needed

Have you, or someone close to you, experienced intimate partner abuse by a spouse, boyfriend, or loved one?

Are you a **Hispanic/Latina Woman**?

If the answer is "yes" to both of these questions, I need your help in furthering research on this topic being conducted at **Texas Woman's University**. Your information could assist in providing more culturally appropriate and effective intimate violence prevention programs for Hispanic women.

I would like to interview you, either in person or by telephone for approximately **45-90 minutes** regarding this issue. For your participation and time, a **\$10 gift certificate** to Wal-Mart will be provided.

As a participant in this study, your information will be **confidential**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

To schedule an interview in **English**, please call [REDACTED]. To schedule an interview in **Spanish**, please call **(940) 382-5681**. **Be sure that you make your call at a time and place when it is safe and private for you.**

Study Contacts:

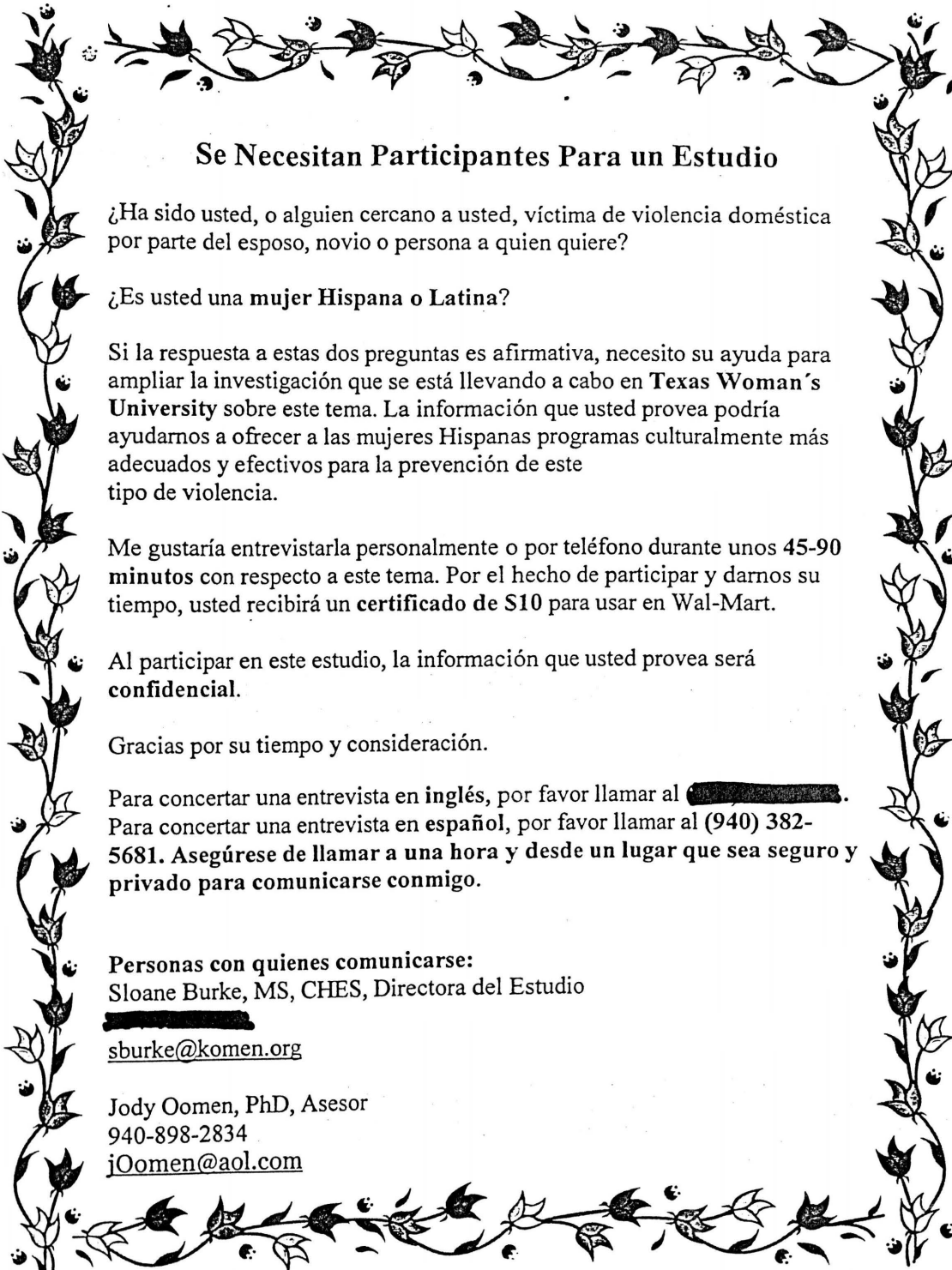
Sloane Burke, MS, CHES, Research Study Director

[REDACTED]
sburke@komen.org

Jody Oomen, PhD, Advisor

(940)898-2834

joomen@aol.com



Se Necesitan Participantes Para un Estudio

¿Ha sido usted, o alguien cercano a usted, víctima de violencia doméstica por parte del esposo, novio o persona a quien quiere?

¿Es usted una **mujer Hispana o Latina**?

Si la respuesta a estas dos preguntas es afirmativa, necesito su ayuda para ampliar la investigación que se está llevando a cabo en **Texas Woman's University** sobre este tema. La información que usted provea podría ayudarnos a ofrecer a las mujeres Hispanas programas culturalmente más adecuados y efectivos para la prevención de este tipo de violencia.

Me gustaría entrevistarla personalmente o por teléfono durante unos **45-90 minutos** con respecto a este tema. Por el hecho de participar y darnos su tiempo, usted recibirá un **certificado de \$10** para usar en Wal-Mart.

Al participar en este estudio, la información que usted provea será **confidencial**.

Gracias por su tiempo y consideración.

Para concertar una entrevista en **inglés**, por favor llamar al [REDACTED].
Para concertar una entrevista en **español**, por favor llamar al **(940) 382-5681**. Asegúrese de llamar a una hora y desde un lugar que sea seguro y privado para comunicarse conmigo.

Personas con quienes comunicarse:

Sloane Burke, MS, CHES, Directora del Estudio

[REDACTED]
sburke@komen.org

Jody Oomen, PhD, Asesor
940-898-2834
jOomen@aol.com

APPENDIX B
IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3375 Fax 940-898-3416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

December 20, 2002

Ms. Sloane Burke

Dear Ms. Burke:

Re: *An Assessment of Attitudes and Experiences with Intimate Partner Abuse among Hispanic/Latino Women in North Texas*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp and a copy of the annual/final report are enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms and final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from the date of this letter. According to regulations from the Department of Health and Human Services, another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way. If you have any questions, feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Dr. Linda Rubin, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

enc.

cc. ✓ Dr. Rob Rager, Department of Health Studies
Dr. Jody Oomen, Department of Health Studies
Graduate School