

# Sexual Violence Against Latina/o Communities

## Terminology

“Hispanic” and “Latino” are often used interchangeably in American English, however, they’re not identical terms.

- In 1970, the term “**Hispanic**” began to be used by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- In 1997, The Federal Register provided revised racial and ethnic definitions:
  - “**Hispanic**” is a term used more often in governmental publications and reports
  - “**Latina/o**” is used to refer to persons of Latin American descent of all generations and regardless of immigration status <sup>1</sup>
  - Hispanics is an adjective used to describe people from Spain or from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, while Latino/a/x/@ is used to describe people from Latin America regardless of language (this includes Brazil, but excludes Spain and Portugal).<sup>2</sup>
- **Latinx** can be defined as relating to people of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina).<sup>3</sup>
- **Latin@** includes both the masculine “o” and the feminine “a” to describe people with Latin American roots.<sup>4</sup>

## Overview

Latina women are increasingly more likely to be victimized by sexual violence in their lifetime than White women and because of this, Latina women are reportedly more likely to leave school and extracurricular activities to avoid being sexually harassed or assaulted.<sup>5</sup> Research indicates that sex, rape, and abuse are rarely discussed among Latinas. Additional studies have found that Latina women report lower rates of victimization than other racial or ethnic groups, and traditional beliefs about marriage may contribute to this reluctance to report sexual assault.<sup>6,7</sup> Due to a lack of comprehensive research on sexual violence in this community, this fact sheet focuses on Latin American women, with limited reference to Latin American men, nonbinary people, and children.

Latina survivors navigate multiple cultural norms when reporting sexual violence including language barriers and sometimes, immigration status. Someone who speaks only Spanish, or has limited English proficiency, might not be aware of sexual assault advocacy services, or find these services hard to access. Immigration status can prevent someone from reporting, particularly if they are undocumented or have unstable citizenship status. For the increasing number of women who make the journey across the Mexico-U.S. Border, rape has become so prevalent that many women take birth control pills or get birth control shots before setting out to ensure that they will not get pregnant.<sup>7</sup>

## Statistics

- **77%** of Latina women were surveyed and stated that sexual harassment was a major problem in the workplace.<sup>7</sup>
- **Over half** of Hispanic women have experienced sexual violence other than rape in their lifetime.<sup>8</sup>
- Based on the U.S. Census, projections for the Hispanic female population in the future, and the one-in-six victimization calculation, by the year 2050, the number of females of Hispanic origin who have experienced some form of sexual violence could reach **10.8 million**.<sup>9</sup>
- **1 in 6** Latina women age 13 and older will experience sexual victimization in their lifetime.<sup>10</sup>
- One descriptive study found that about **83%** of Latina survivors report knowing their abuser, but a little **less than half** of them never actually reported the abuse to the police.<sup>11</sup>
- Campesinas (female farmworkers) are **10x** more vulnerable than others to be sexually assaulted and experience harassment at work.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Lopez, M. Krogstad, J., & Passel, J. (September 2021). Who is Hispanic? Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/23/who-is-hispanic>

<sup>3</sup> Steinmetz, K. (2018, April 2). Why ‘Latinx’ Is Succeeding While Other Gender-Neutral Terms Fail To Catch On. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5191804/latinx-definition-meaning-latino-hispanic-gender-neutral>

<sup>4</sup> NPR, “Latin@ Offers a Gender-Neutral Choice; But How to Pronounce It?,” (2013). <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/01/07/168818064/latin-offers-a-gender-neutral-choice-but-how-to-pronounce-it>

<sup>5</sup> Rousseau, D. (April 2019). Rape Culture in Hispanic Communities. Retrieved from <https://sites.bu.edu/daniellerousseau/2019/04/25/rape-culture-in-hispanic-communities>

<sup>6</sup> Center of Disease Control, “National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report,” 2011

<sup>7</sup> The Center At 909, “Hispanic and Latinx Communities,” (2019). <https://www.thecenterat909.org/hispaniclatinx>

<sup>8</sup> The Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault. (2020). National Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.mecasa.org/stats.html>

<sup>9</sup> Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence. (2021). Latinas and Sexual Violence. Existe Ayuda. Retrieved from [https://oasv.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/factsheet\\_eng.pdf](https://oasv.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/factsheet_eng.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Darkness to Light. (October 2020). Spotlight: Supporting Hispanic Survivors. Retrieved from Spotlight: Supporting Hispanic Survivors - Darkness to Light (d2l.org)

<sup>11</sup> See citation 8.

<sup>12</sup> See citation 7.