Sexual Violence Against Latinx Communities

Terminology

- “Hispanic” and “Latino” are often used interchangeably in American English, however, they are not identical terms.
  - In 1970, the term “Hispanic” began to be used by the U.S. Census Bureau
  - In 1997, 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
      - 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).
    - 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).
    - Latin@ includes both the masculine “o” and the feminine “a” to describe people with Latin American roots.

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. 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. 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.

Statistics

- 77% of Latina women were surveyed and stated that sexual harassment was a major problem in the workplace.
- Over half of Hispanic women have experienced sexual violence other than rape in their lifetime.
- 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.
- 1 in 6 Latina women age 13 and older will experience sexual victimization in their lifetime.
- 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.
- Campesinas (female farmworkers) are 10x more vulnerable than others to be sexual assaulted and experience harassment at work.

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1 Pew Hispanic Center, 2009.