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# Making the Invisible Visible: Latin American Women with Undocumented Status and their Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence

Maria Teresa (Maytte) Restrepo-Ruiz  
*UConn, MPH Program*, [restreporuiz@uchc.edu](mailto:restreporuiz@uchc.edu)

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Making the Invisible Visible:  
Latin American Women with Undocumented Status  
and their Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence

Maria Teresa (Maytte) Restrepo-Ruiz  
M.A., University of Connecticut, 2005

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Making the Invisible Visible:


Latin American Women with Undocumented Status

and Their Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence


Presented by:

Maria Teresa (Maytte) Restrepo-Ruiz, MA

Major Advisor

  
Jane Ungemack, Dr.PH.

Associate Advisor

  
Judy Lewis, M.Phil

Associate Advisor

  
Zita Lazzarini, JD, MPH

University of Connecticut

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to contribute to the currently scarce literature on unauthorized Latina immigration and intimate partner violence expanding the analysis to include women's reasons for migrating, their experiences during the migration journey, and the intimate partner violence once they arrived in the United States. Through these women's voices, this study shows how the lack of migratory documentation affects the experiences of Latina immigrant women. Qualitative data were collected from 11 in-depth interviews with Latin American women that had an undocumented status and received services from five domestic violence programs in Connecticut. A thematic analysis approach was employed to examine the content of each interview and the entire data set. This study documents how Latin American women with undocumented status immigrate to the United States in search of a better life, escaping from poverty and intimate partner violence. Most of the women in this study crossed one or more international borders in their journey to the United States, and were exposed to severe environmental risks and abuses in the journey. These women sought to remain invisible to people's eyes throughout their migration journey, carrying this invisibility into the United States, living as shadows in their communities. In the United States, they experienced severe obstacles to find safety including fear of deportation if discovered by authorities, the use of their undocumented status by their partners to force them remain in the relationship, fear of losing their children, isolation, and lack of information. These women also experienced physical and sexual violence that led to life-threatening situations. Lack of information about their rights and the social services available to them, combined with fear of being discovered by authorities, make this group of women especially vulnerable to experience violence, as well as being one of the most marginalized and underserved population groups. The findings show how the responses they get from police and social service providers can help or hinder their possibilities for finding safety.

## SETTING THE STAGE

*One always thinks one is responsible for the violence, the guilty one. He used to say to me I was the one guilty. He used to say, "This happened because you did this or the other." And me? I just accepted it. Sometimes one doesn't want to open their eyes. The beating starts and after the first time he apologizes; and then, it starts again and again. One time he hit me and I told him "I can't take this situation any more, I'm leaving" and then he took me by the hair and pushed me against the wall. I got a head open injury as a result. And I thought if I had not said I was leaving, maybe he wouldn't... it wouldn't have happened.*

*I wanted to lock myself in the bathroom but he opened the door. I dialed 911, but I could not say where I was. He snatched the phone away from me. I had asked the other guy to take me (the one living in the apartment), but my husband said that nobody had the right to take me to the hospital. That it was him who was going to take me and that I had to say that I accidentally hit my head. I arrived at the hospital covered in blood. Then the doctor asked me what had happened, but I could not say anything because he was in front of me. He answered, "She hit her head." I agreed, but I sat down and cried, not because it hurt but because it was him who... he was lying. And... no, I could not say it was him who had hurt me. I got stitches. He then took me for a drink so that I would not do anything against him.*

*I think nobody has the right to beat anybody. I have learned this here. I always blamed myself for what was going on... because he would make me feel guilty, he would say I was the one responsible for the violence... and then, he would apologize and take me to the mall to buy me clothes or take me for dinner. He used to say he was the victim and I believed him. I was with him for 5 years in Honduras but when I came here to the United States things changed. He changed when I got pregnant. He didn't want me to have female friends or communication with anybody. He said female friends were bad company. He didn't want me to learn... I met no one here because he never allowed me. Only with him. I didn't know how to get to the hospital by myself because he always said, "if I can't take you, you are not going today." He brought me here. He was already here. And I came not because of him... although I loved him. I came because I have other children in my country and he said it would be better for them if I was here so I would be able to make money and help him. I came with that fantasy.*

*Living here is very difficult. My kids had never sent me a picture before and they sent me one not long ago. Around a week ago, God, I could not stop crying, no... I did not feel like eating in the whole day. Oh God! I have not seen them for three years! They have grown up so much!*

*I sent him to prison and I had a protective order. But he came back to see me and since I didn't answer his calls he left messages saying he was going to make me "picadillo" (cut me in little pieces). I changed my cell-phone number twice and he always found it. He says that I have become stupid because I'm listening to stupid things and that, instead, I should know how things are going in my country.*

*There, men can beat women and women have to stay because men said it is because they love us. One has to stay in the relationship no matter what the man does. He says I'm sick now that I'm crazy. But I think he is the one who is crazy because here everybody has the right to be happy, to be free. I think this is what bothers him.*

*He didn't want me come to the program. We were not together but he was looking for me, insisting that we get back together. He said "What are you going to do there?... You don't know this but I know where that place is located." And suddenly, he came to the program looking for me because I didn't answer the phone.*

*I always live with fear of him because when I separated him I only had the boy. He got inside my place after he broke the door and since I didn't want to have sex with him, he forced me and I got pregnant with the girl. I didn't call the police because I think he can take my boy away from me. He says things to make me feel fearful, such as he has a real home and I don't, he has a job and I don't. As I am not legal here, sometimes I am afraid of many things. He called me and I dared myself to pick up to tell him what had happened. And he said: "I don't know. I can't do anything. You are mine, and you will always be."*

*The hard thing is that I have two young children, I have to pay the rent, I am undocumented, I have no papers. I cannot find a job because they ask me for a work permit. It is even scary to go looking for a job because employing undocumented people is not allowed. There is this saying: "it is better to have a small bite in peace, than an abundance of food with violence."*

Alicia (conversation with author, 2010)

Alicia's story was part of a project I conducted in 2010 through my association with the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence with the purpose of better informing the practices of domestic violence advocates. During the two times that I met her, she kindly shared with me her feelings, experiences, fears and hopes. Before I met Alicia, I worked as domestic violence counselor in the city of New Haven, Connecticut, where I witnessed the impact that immigration raids had in the Latina immigrant community. One day before the Municipal Identification Cards<sup>1</sup> were going to be issued, Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents raided the Fair Haven neighborhood where the majority of the Latina community resides. Very early in the morning when people were still asleep or just getting ready for a work day, ICE agents began knocking on people's homes until someone opened the door and then they pushed their way in. They arrested those that acknowledged their lack of residence status, even with their children present. The New York Times reported that of the 32 arrested, most of who were Mexican, only five had outstanding deportation orders, and only one or two had criminal records (Berstein, 2007). This event had an enormous impact on the daily life of people with undocumented status. Many of them stopped with their daily routines for several days, they did not go to work and children did not attend school. They stayed home in fear of being raided again. Battered immigrant

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<sup>1</sup> These Municipal Identification Cards are given to any resident of New Haven including unauthorized immigrants. The Elm City Resident Card, as it is called, provides identification for any resident of New Haven, access to library services municipal recreational facilities such as Lighthouse Point or the city golf course, the dump and includes emergency contact and allergy information for children.,



women with undocumented status faced the dual dangers of being arrested and potentially deported by ICE agents and being abused by their intimate partners. However, that event was not the only challenge that the women I worked with faced. There were so many obstacles in their daily lives that my work with them as domestic violence counselor seemed to be just a grain of sand on the beach, if not a rock in their path at times.

## INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence is a major public health concern worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between 13 to 69 percent of women globally have experienced physical violence at the hands of their intimate partners. The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) (2008) found that in the United States one in four women reported having experienced intimate partner abuse at some point in their lives. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that in 2007, 1,640 women were killed by their partners, an average of four women each day (Catalano et al., 2009). Intimate partner violence is predominantly an issue of violence against women committed by men. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that in 2005, women represented 84% of spouse abuse victims and 86% of dating abuse victims, while 75% of intimate partner violence perpetrators were men (Durose et al., 2005).

In addition to the physical and emotional impact that intimate partner violence has on each victim and survivor and their families, the socioeconomic costs it entails are staggering. The CDC estimated that the cost of intimate partner violence, rape, physical assault and stalking totaled \$5.8 billion in 1995 for direct medical and mental health care services and lost productivity from paid work and household chores (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). Updated to 2003 dollars, the cost represented more than \$8.3 billion dollars (Brown et al., 2004). Studies examining the health care costs of intimate partner violence found that costs for women suffering ongoing abuse were 42% higher than for non-abused women (Bonomi et al., 2009), while the costs were \$1,700 higher for the former compared to women that had not been abused over a three-year period (Jones, et al., 2006). The health care costs of intimate partner violence are associated with depression, substance use, chronic diseases, chronic mental illness, and injury (Coker et al., 2002), headaches, back pain, sexually transmitted diseases, vaginal bleeding, vaginal infections, pelvic pain, painful intercourse, urinary tract infections, appetite loss, abdominal pain, and digestive, gynecological, chronic stress-related, central nervous system, and total health problems (Campbell, et al, 2002). Intimate partner violence also is associated to unwanted pregnancy, premature labor and birth, as well as sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (Krug et al.,

2002).

There is no consensus on the magnitude of intimate partner violence in population groups such as immigrants. The information presented above is based on reported cases of intimate partner violence and, as it will be discussed further, the underreporting of intimate partner violence in immigrant communities is a major concern.

Few studies have focused on the experiences of women with undocumented migratory status. Latina immigrant women with undocumented migratory status may share similar experiences with other immigrant women in the United States, including language barriers, lack of dignifying jobs, lack of resources and support networks, previous experiences in their home countries, and discriminatory practices at various levels. However, the fact that they are living in this country without legal authorization makes them more vulnerable to violence and less likely to report the abuse to authorities and seek support from social agencies. Abusers often use their partners' immigration status as a tool of control in order to force them to remain in the relationship (Orloff, 2002). The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has established some potential legal remedies for immigrant victims of violence, including those with undocumented status, which are known as VAWA visa and the U visa. There is little information, however, about the views that these women may have about these potential legal remedies and the reasons why they use them or not.

The purpose of this study is to increase understanding of the relationship between unauthorized immigration status and intimate partner violence and specifically examine the factors that are involved in those experiences for Latina women with undocumented status that reside in the state of Connecticut. This study is a response to the lack of studies and understanding of the experiences of intimate partner violence present in this specific group of invisible and marginalized women.

### **A Note about Terminology**

Some common terms used to refer to immigrants that have crossed the border between the United States and Mexico without authorization are illegal, undocumented or, in the best of the cases, unauthorized immigrants. I find, however, the use of these terms problematic since they create a label to describe *who* that person *is* instead of describing the act or condition of their migratory situation. The United Nations System uses the expression “persons with an irregular status”. The term *irregular*, however, is very broad and allows too much interpretation. Still, I find important the expression “persons with,” which helps to construct a different and much more humane image of the people we are referring to. In spite of losing simplicity in the text, I have chosen to speak of immigrant women *with* an undocumented immigration status. Sometimes I alternate the words undocumented immigration status with unauthorized immigration status. Although this expression challenges the language, it contributes to change the social imaginary about Latin American immigrants and provides the opportunity to see these women, and men, as human beings with a migratory condition that can change at some point in the future. When referring to other research, I use the language provided by those authors.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Intimate partner violence is defined as a pattern of behaviors that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Intimate partner abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, and economic and includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone (US Department of Justice <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm>). The 2005 WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women, which collected more than 24,000 interviews in urban and rural settings in ten countries, showed that intimate partner violence is widespread in the countries studied. The prevalence of women experiencing physical violence by a partner ranged from 13 to 61%; 6 to 59% of the

women reported sexual violence by a partner at some point in their lives; and 20 to 75% reported experiencing emotionally abuse from a partner in their lifetime (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). The CDC (2008) reported that in the United States one in four women report having experienced intimate partner abuse at some point in their lives. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that in 2007, 1,640 women were killed by their intimate partners in the United States, an average of four women a day (Catalano et al., 2009).

In Latin America the rates of intimate partner violence varies from country to country, but overall the prevalence of physical and sexual intimate partner abuse is similar or higher to that reported in the United States. The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics Report of the United Nations has provided estimates of intimate partner violence across different countries. In Mexico, 25% of women experienced intimate partner physical violence at least once in their lifetime and 10% of women had experienced sexual assault by their partners. In Peru, 45% of women had experienced physical abuse by their partners, and between 25% (city) and 48% (province) had been sexually abused by them. In Ecuador, 32% and 15% of women said they had been physically and sexually abused by their partners respectively. Thirty-two percent of women reported having experienced physical abuse at least once in their intimate relationships in Nicaragua, while in Colombia, 44% of women reported this experience. These numbers, however, only capture physical and sexual violence at the hand of an intimate partner and do not include emotional violence and other tactics of coercive control.

The situation of intimate partner violence for Latin American immigrant women residing in the United States is unclear. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows that Hispanic and non-Hispanic females experienced intimate partner violence at similar rates (Catalano et al., 2009). However, other studies have shown that Latinas and immigrants experience intimate partner violence at higher rates (Orloff et al., 1995) and that Latina immigrants experience an increased level of intimate partner violence after they migrate to the United States (Dutton et al., 2000).

## **LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

Hispanics make up 16% of the total of the population in the United States, representing the largest minority group (Passel et al., 2011). It is not easy, however, to obtain a clear idea about how many immigrants are in the United States without authorization. Given the secretive nature of undocumented immigration, the data available from official and non-official sources about the status of immigrants with undocumented status are based on estimations. In 2010, the Office of Immigration Statistics put the number of unauthorized immigrants at 10.8 million (Hoefer et al., 2010). These estimates were obtained using “residual methodology” which is the remainder after estimates of the number of the legally resident foreign-born population including legal permanent residents, naturalized citizens, asylum seekers, refugees and nonimmigrants are subtracted from estimates of the total foreign-born population. The Pew Hispanic Center (2010) reported that about four-in-five of the nation’s unauthorized immigrants in 2009 were of Hispanic origin. The official report from the Office of Immigration Statistics also states that the majority (62%) of the unauthorized immigrants come from Mexico followed by El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, the Philippines, Ecuador, Brazil, Korea and China (Hoefer, et al., 2010). Hence, Latin Americans comprise the highest percentage (78%) of all unauthorized immigrants residing in the United States. It was estimated that there were 6.3 million men, 4.1 million women and 1.5 million children under age 18 living in the United States as unauthorized immigrants in March 2008 (Passel and Cohn, 2009). The Office of Immigration Statistics showed that by 2010 males accounted for 57% of the unauthorized population among all ages, while females accounted for 43% (Hoefer et al., 2010). It has been estimated that there are approximately 120,000 unauthorized Latin American immigrants residing in Connecticut (Lopez et al., 2010).

The Pew Hispanic Center (2009) describes the group of unauthorized immigrants as adults residing with

immediate family members—spouses or children. About half of undocumented adults live with their own children under 18. Most children of unauthorized immigrants — 73% in 2008 — are U.S. citizens by birth. These immigrants are especially likely to hold low-skill jobs in construction, cleaning, food preparation and serving, and farming. In 2008, it was estimated that 17% of construction workers were undocumented and one in four farmworkers was an unauthorized immigrant. Adult unauthorized immigrants are disproportionately likely to be poorly educated. Among undocumented immigrants ages 25-64, almost half (47%) have less than a high school education. The 2007 median household income of unauthorized immigrants was \$36,000. A third of the children of unauthorized immigrants and a fifth of adult undocumented immigrants live in poverty. More than half of adult unauthorized immigrants (59%) had no health insurance in 2007. Among their children, nearly half (45%) of those who are unauthorized immigrants were uninsured and 25% of those who were born in the U.S. were uninsured.

### **Female Migration to United States**

People have migrated for centuries, and human evolution itself has involved migration processes. Human migration can be explained as the consequence of macrosocial factors such as economic insecurities, a globalized economy (NAFTA Treaty in North America, for instance), and vast poverty in countries of origin and the demand for cheap labor in receptive countries. However, as Lourdes Arizpe (1985) states, migration occurs not only because of macrosocial factors, but it can happen because of immediate factors such as the push of political exclusion or the pull of urban life, and precipitating factors such as the death of a family member. People also migrate because they are seeking to reunify with family members or because they are escaping interpersonal or societal violence such as armed conflict, generalized gang violence, and drug wars.

Research has typically examined migration dynamics without differentiating between documented and undocumented migration. The last two decades have seen a great proliferation of studies looking at migration patterns and consequences from a gendered approach. Adanu and Johnson (2009) looked at the

impact of migration on women's health and found that an array of factors determine the health effects of migration in women, including the conditions of the migratory journey, the extent of integration in the new country, a woman's social status in the host country, and the new country's health conditions. These authors argued that although immigrant women that come from low-income to high-income countries are more likely to benefit from the host country's health system, they are highly vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse, and do not seek the intervention of the legal system in those cases.

Some research has specifically focused on the experiences of sexual exploitation and sexual harassment of Latina immigrant women. Morales-Waugh (2010) found that Mexican immigrant women farmworkers are highly exposed to sexual abuse and harassment from coworkers and supervisors due to working alongside men in an environment where they are isolated with very little supervisory authority. Menjivar (1999) documented that while immigrant Centro American women experienced some gains when they entered the labor market, such as increase in their self-esteem, they did not experience egalitarian relationships with their partners as a result, but rather an increase in their work load. Grzywacz et al. (2009) found that Mexican immigrant couples experienced stress in the relationship as a consequence of the challenges to gender-based beliefs that women's employment entail. These stressors were related to men resenting having to do household chores that they considered women's work, men feeling frustrated by not being the primary breadwinners, women feeling less trapped in the relationship and no financially dependent on their partners, and women's increased opportunities to interact with other women and men.

There is a vast amount of research on intimate partner violence from different perspectives (feminist, legal, anthropological, sociological, psychological and medical), but the literature addressing the intersection between intimate partner violence and migration is limited. The majority of these studies have been focused on the barriers facing battered immigrant women. Vidales (2010) found that Latina immigrant women facing domestic violence experience cultural barriers, structural barriers such as poverty and low educational attainment, and institutional barriers that enable the violence and prevent its



disclosure. Rodriguez et al. (2008) found that 51% of pregnant Latina women, the majority being immigrants, who had experienced intimate partner violence suffered from depression, in comparison to 14% rate of depression among white women who had experienced intimate partner violence. Erez (2009; 2002) examined the role immigration plays in women's understanding of domestic violence and their access to resources and found several challenges to women's safety related to the criminal justice system, legal dependency on batterers, women's economic marginalization, and fears of family retaliation.

### **WOMEN AS UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

There are several ways through which women may become immigrants with an undocumented migratory status in the United States. The first one is by crossing the border between Mexico and the U.S. without legal authorization, which is a very dangerous and risky action for anyone attempting to get into the U.S. It is not just the very possible encounter with U.S. immigration enforcement authorities, but mainly the challenges that the vast terrain pose and the risks of being subjected to violence, kidnapping, extortion, rape or murder by the "coyotes" or drug gangs that have entered into the human smuggling business.

Women may come to the U.S. through legal channels with a tourist visa or a student visa, for instance, and decide to stay after their visa expiration date. Women also may become undocumented when they come with a conditional residence visa based on marriage to a U.S. legal permanent resident and the process to remove the conditions of their visa is not successful. In these situations, women are being petitioned by a first-degree relative, usually their legal permanent resident husband, and then having that petition withdrawn or not appropriately completed after the woman has already arrived in the country. Salcido and Aldeman (2010) have described the way this situation by itself puts women in a subordinated position in their intimate relationship. In this way, U.S. policies have at times contributed to gender and race migration patterns.

The 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act established that preference for entry into the country be given to spouses of American citizens. Subsequent immigration reforms have contributed to making women dependent on and vulnerable to men's power. The immigration reform of 1965 that led to family reunifications enabled Mexican men in the Bracero program to sponsor immediate family members and withhold or withdraw that sponsorship (DeGenova, 2002). Twenty years later, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 extended Legal Permanent Residency (LPR) to millions of immigrants including Mexican men with an undocumented status. This led to an increase in undocumented migration including the migration of women and children seeking to reunify with their partners and fathers. Once again, the immigration reform allowed legal permanent residents, which were disproportionately men, to petition on behalf of their wives and children. With the power to petition for family members, LPR gave men the power to stop the legalization process. If a husband wanted it, he could withhold or withdraw the petition for his wife to become a legal resident.

In 1986, in order to avoid the immigration of foreigners through fake marriages, the U.S. government passed the Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendment (IMFA), which allowed spouses of legal permanent residents to enter the country with a conditional resident status for two years. After that period, couples had to jointly petition to remove the conditions of the residence status and change it to permanent resident status. Separation, divorce or an end of the relationship during these two first years meant the loss of legal status for the alien spouse, which implied the prohibition to work legally and the threat of deportation. While the IMFA established the possibility for alien spouses to petition for permanent legal residence to the U.S. attorney general, a woman in these circumstances had to demonstrate that the marriage was in good faith, she was not the responsible for ending the relationship, or the deportation would cause extreme hardship for her and her children (Abraham, 2000). However, too often these women may not have the information about the process to remove the conditions of their residence or their partners may use their conditional or unauthorized migratory status to exercise control and violence.

## **INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE FOR WOMEN WITH UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATORY STATUS**

The experiences of intimate partner violence for Latina women with undocumented migratory status are related to their condition as Latinas, as immigrants, and as unauthorized immigrants. As Latinas, they bring with them cultural beliefs and norms that dictate gender roles and expectations as well as particular notions of family and childbearing. As immigrants, they experience a multitude of barriers such as language, understanding of the culture of the host country, educational disadvantages, limited access to dignifying jobs, lack of resources and support networks, separation from their family and friends, and discriminatory practices at various levels. However, their immigration experience also provides them with a new way of considering the relationship with their intimate partners, children and themselves. As unauthorized immigrants, they experience critical barriers in accessing law enforcement and social services due to their fear of deportation, which makes them vulnerable to experiencing violence.

Only a few studies have focused exclusively on the experiences of women with undocumented migratory status. Hancock (2007) found that undocumented Mexican women gained awareness of their individual self and personal agency after they migrated to the United States, which did not diminish their strong family orientation. Campbell (2008) examined undocumented Mexican women's resilience in overcoming cultural, social, economic and legal barriers of living in the United States. Her study documented unauthorized Mexican women desires for social independence, not relying on social benefits, feeling as productive human beings through their employment and looking to advance their education. Salcido and Adelman (2004) examined the interrelations between battering and undocumented status and the role that immigration policies have in men's battering. Raj and Silverman (2002) found that culture beliefs and legal immigration status increase immigrant women's vulnerability to intimate partner violence, which are consciously used by batterers to maintain control over immigrant women.

### **Cultural Norms as Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Violence**

In looking at differences in the impact of intimate partner violence between Latinas and non-Latinas, Edelson et al. (2007) found that Latinas are more likely to be bothered by intrusive thoughts, experienced more trauma-related symptoms, and had more symptoms of depression compared to non-Latina women. Latina women had lower self-esteem related to social situations as well as lower self-esteem with regard to personal attributes than did non-Latina women. The authors argued that these results may be linked to cultural beliefs that are reflected in sayings such as, “La ropa sucia se lava en casa,” (“the dirty laundry is washed at home”) and “¿El qué dirán?” (“What will people say?”), which imply that intimate partner violence is perceived as a shameful and private problem. Consequently, Latina women may stay in abusive relationships for an extended time and prefer not to report it to the authorities. Studies looking at the role that the Latino family plays when seeking support have found that, on one hand, the family can be a protective factor (Rodriguez et al., 2010), but on the other hand, disclosing issues such as intimate partner violence can be perceived as shameful (Vidales, 2010) which makes seeking family support a challenge.

Latina women are raised to believe that the family and becoming a mother are the paramount state of life, even more important than their own personal well-being. Within the Latino culture, *la familia* plays a central role in everyday life and the identity of Latinos and Latinas. According to Galanti (2003), the notion of *familism*, family loyalty and solidarity, is a pervasive value in the Latina culture. This belief is reinforced through machismo and *marianismo* values. Machismo dictates the way men should behave, including positive traits as well as negative ones. Positive attributes of machismo are responsibility, honor, and obligation to the family, while negative attributes associated with machismo such as sexual prowess, aggressiveness and high alcohol consumption increase the likelihood of domestic violence (Perilla et al., 1994). Machismo is also related to the idea that men have the power in the house and their authority should not be questioned. *Marianismo*, which shapes the way women interact with the world, emphasizes submissiveness, deference to others and self-sacrificing behaviors. Together, machismo and

*marianismo* increase the risk of domestic violence for Latina women. Latina women also see themselves as the pillar of the family functioning; if something does not work or the family is dissolved, it is the woman's fault.

Other key concepts that influence the relationships between men and women in the family refer to the value of *respeto*, or respect, and the strict gender roles and hierarchies, which emphasizes the prohibition to challenge the father's power in the family (Perilla, 1999). Gender roles establish rigid expectations and behaviors for both women and men such as types of work, household chores, sexuality, etc. All of these factors influence social perceptions of domestic violence in the Latina community, especially the notion that husbands are entitled to be physically abusive towards their spouses and be the decision-makers. Furthermore, physical and emotional abuse is sometimes associated with love. Most typically, acts of jealousy are considered an expression of love and commitment. In their research on the challenges faced by Latinas experiencing intimate partner violence, Postmus et al. (2014) documented that Latina women perceive that their community fails to identify abusive behaviors, especially those that are not physical, and instead consider them normal or acceptable within the relationship. The authors also found that community members that do recognize intimate partner violence do not know how to intervene or where to seek resources.

### **Barriers in the Lives of Battered Immigrant Women in the U.S.**

Besides the cultural beliefs and practices that Latina immigrant women bring with them, they face a series of obstacles and challenges once they are in the United States that are specific to the immigrant experience. Although any immigrant may undergo the same barriers, the situation gets much more dangerous for immigrant women that are being abused by their intimate partner. As listed below, the existing literature has described a variety of barriers.

- **Language.** The most obvious barrier that Latina immigrant women face when coming to the United States is language. Immigrant women that have limited English proficiency find it difficult to learn

about and access available services. They are prevented from communicating their needs, understanding written communications, and determining what services are available and how to access them. Nah (1993) observed that the ability (or inability) to speak the host country language greatly influences the process of resettlement and adaptation into the new culture. Vidales (2007) reported that among Mexican immigrant women, language barriers were one of the most frequent obstacles mentioned by these women. Not only do these women have limited-English skills, but there is also a lack of law enforcement officers and service providers that speak Spanish and are culturally sensitive. Frequently, Latina immigrant women find themselves confronted with trying to explain the intimate partner violence situation in an unfamiliar or unknown language, while the men may be more capable of communicating in English because of their experiences outside of the home. In these situations, it is not unusual for police officers to only obtain the version of the aggressor. Furthermore, these women also find it challenging to understand written communications from court services when they are in English, as well as communications with court-related staff. These factors contribute to women's isolation and vulnerability to being abused.

Menjivar (2000) notes, however, that some women, in the absence of host-country language skills, become adept at networking informally in their communities. They manage to access information and services, often independent from their male partners or family members. Merry (1990, 2000) found that immigrant women gain greater understanding of their rights the longer they reside in the host country. Finally, although learning English may be a protective factor for immigrant women facing intimate partner violence, the ability to speak or learn the host-country language does not always lead to an improvement for immigrant women in domestic violence situations. In fact, it may exacerbate the abusive behavior since male control and traditional gender roles are contested (Mejivar, 2002).

- **Isolation.** With the move to a new country and environment, immigrant women find themselves isolated from their support network, including their family and friends. For new immigrants,

everything is new and unknown, from the streets of their place of residence and the public transportation system to cultural norms and laws. This isolation allows men to exercise coercive control over women's lives even more easily. Conflict arises when women establish links in their communities making new friends that serve as support or getting information from community organizations (Menjivar, 2000). In a study conducted by Erez et al. (2009) with 137 immigrant women from different countries, it was found that women have an added risk of victimization due to relocation. For half of the women who came with their partners, the violence increased following their arrival, for 22% of them the violence began after they came to the United States, for 20% it stayed the same, for 6% the violence decreased and for 2% it stopped. They point out that the escalation of abuse was particularly difficult for immigrant women who had left their natal families behind. Lacking their natal families and extended kin networks led to a high sense of social isolation and vulnerability for immigrant women.

- **Poverty.** Among the reasons Latina women move to the United States is the search for a better financial situation. However, after their arrival they realize that getting a job is very difficult and their work possibilities are limited to very low paying jobs that do not offer social or health benefits. In 2008, the Urban Institute reported that of the 13.4 million families with children in the United States that fall into the low-income category, 4 million, or 30% of families is Hispanic. Nearly two-thirds of low-income Hispanic families are headed by an immigrant, compared with half of middle- and high-income Hispanic families (Simms et al., 2009). Vidales (2010) noted that women in families with incomes below \$10,000 per year were more likely than other women to be violently attacked by an intimate partner. Women's economic dependency is a major factor that prevents termination of an abusive relationship. Vidales' study was conducted with Mexican immigrant women and its results corroborate that women's economic difficulties interfere with their ability to access and secure the resources needed to exit abusive relationships. Eighty percent of the women in her sample experienced financial stress.

- **Women's own income.** Employment frequently comes with migration from Latin American countries to the United States (Grzywacz et al., 2009). The Mexican Migration Project estimates that approximately 50% of women who migrated to the this country work for pay while in the United States, whereas fewer than 24% of women who did not migrate have employment in Mexico (Cerruti and Massey, 2001). For those immigrant women who find a paid job, the likelihood of being abused by their partners is not clear. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) argued that employment could increase a woman's bargaining power and control over resources, which in turn, can be the basis for more personal freedom and egalitarian relationships within the home. On the other hand, women's entrance to the labor force contributes to changes within their intimate relationships that can alter power dynamics within the relationships, which is perceived by men as threatening (Grzywacz et al., 2009; Menjivar, 1999). Murdaugh et al. (2004) found that a wife's paid employment is strongly associated with domestic violence among immigrant Mexican couples, while Curandi et al. (2002) found that men's unemployment is also associated with intimate partner violence.

When Grzywacz et al. (2009) conducted a study with 10 women and 10 men from Mexico who had experienced intimate partner violence in North Carolina, their results confirmed that women's entrance to the work force after migration to the United States was a source of conflict. This was due to several factors. First, women's employment defies the cultural tradition of machismo and gender roles that stipulate women have to stay home and take care of the household chores and children, while men are the breadwinners and are entitled to obedience from the wives and children. Second, women's employment led them to challenge the traditional division of labor in the household that was not always met without conflict and abuse. Third, women felt empowered and independent by earning their own money, which led them to seek participation in the decision-making. Men felt they were no longer being given the respect they received in Mexico and were not respected as the head of the household and the sole decision-maker. Women felt they did not have to obey and serve their partners



unquestioningly, which was interpreted by the men as disrespect. Fourth, women's employment also provided the opportunity to meet new people and witness different ideas about couples dynamics and their interaction with other people. When these ideas were brought into the relationship, women were accused of abandoning their own culture. Men also reacted with extreme jealousy to women's interaction with different people, especially other men. Aldarondo et al. (2002) found that when there is marital disagreement, dominating immigrant husbands resort to physical violence as a means of resolving conflict. Forty-eight percent of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the United States (Dutton, et al., 2000).

- **Country of Origin as a Reference.** Menjivar and Salcido (2002) point out that in evaluating their situation, immigrants frame their current experiences using their home countries as a point of reference; they assess their present situation in relation to what they left behind. Often, women arrive from countries where domestic violence simply is not reported because of a lack of legal protection or cultural proscriptions that prevent women from reporting violence. Resources for women in these situations are few and far between, leaving them to infer initially that the same applies in the destination countries. Vidales (2010) stated that it is not surprising that battered immigrants do not leave their abusive partner or seek help from authorities given that in Mexico there is a law called *abandono de hogar* (abandonment of the home), under which a woman may lose her children if she leaves them for a certain period of time. Many immigrant women do not know what their rights are in the United States and that intimate partner violence is considered a crime in this country.

### **The Implications of Having an Undocumented Status for Battered Latina Women**

In addition to the factors enumerated above, battered Latina women with undocumented migratory status are even more vulnerable due to their legal status. Abusers often use their partners' immigration status as a mechanism of control. In such situations, it is common for a batterer to exert control over his partner's

immigration status in order to force her to remain in the relationship (Orloff and Kaguyutan, 2002). In Erez's (2009) study, 75% of the women reported that men used immigrant status to force the women into compliance, while 40% said that men threatened them with calling ICE officials to report their status. Additionally 15% received threats about getting them deported; 10% of the women were told by their abuser that they would withdraw the immigration petition, and 5% were threatened by the men with taking the children away or denying the mothers' custodial rights. The control tactics that abusive partners may use in these cases include refusing to petition to remove the conditions of the wife's residence status, withdrawing his sponsorship or preventing her from completing the application process by stealing mail, destroying official documents, or reporting her illegal work arrangements (Salcido & Adelman, 2004).

Battered women with undocumented status see their chances to stop the abusive relationship diminished due to several factors. The threat of deportation may be the main issue influencing women's decision to stay in abusive relationships. The fear of deportation has implications in their ability to access services (Ingram, 2007). Women with undocumented status feel that by calling the police they will be interrogated about their immigration status and once the police find out they are not authorized to reside in the United States, they will be arrested and deported. Deportation for these women may imply that they have to leave their U.S.-born children in this country with child welfare authorities. They also fear that their partners will be deported because of their seeking help, which threatens the family's economic security. They surely wish the end of the abuse, but they do not necessarily want to end the relationship and divide the family.

This fear is reinforced by the anti-immigrant policies and law enforcement actions by immigration authorities. A study conducted in California observed the detrimental effects of an anti-immigrant proposal on Latino/a residents' perception of the police, citing a substantial reduction in reporting crimes and increased fears of deportation (Vidales et al. 2009) Another reason that battered Latina women with

undocumented status do not seek police help is women's distrust of racist demeaning attitudes by police officer toward non-English speakers.

Similarly, domestic violence legislation also influences whether a battered women with undocumented status may seek help from the police. In Connecticut, for instance, the mandatory arrest law has led to an increase of dual arrests when police officers are not able to determine who the primary aggressor is. The U.S. Department of Justice reported in 2007 that Connecticut had the highest dual arrest rate in the country, 20%, compared to the 2% national average (Hirschel et al. 2007). Women know that if they call the police they may be in danger of also being arrested and given their undocumented status, they risk being subsequently deported and separated from their children.

The results of a study by Salcido and Adelman (2004), conducted with ten Mexican women with undocumented status, showed that among the reasons women avoided police involvement was the lack of protection in doing so. These women were not only concerned that calling the police may lead to their own arrest and deportation or that of their family and friends, but also they were concerned with the safety risk in the abusive relationship from calling the police. Calling the police or trying to obtain restraining orders may lead to an escalation of the violence or the partner's unwillingness to support an LPR application.

Another factor affecting battered women with undocumented status is the lack of social services available to them that could improve their odds of leaving abusive relationships. Women in this situation are not eligible for government support programs such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, or medical care, except in emergencies (Romero, 2003). Women with undocumented status cannot apply for temporary housing assistance in cases of domestic violence, such as vouchers for rent deposits. Other barriers affecting these women's situation are the difficulties for

obtaining a driver's license, opening a bank account and a credit history (Hancock, 2007). In order to survive while eluding deportation, these women may work illegally, drive without a license or present fraudulent papers to obtain financial aid for education or other forms of public assistance such as child care (Salcido and Adelman, 2004).

### **Possible Legal Remedies for Battered Women with Undocumented Status**

In 1994, the U.S. government enacted the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which provides funding from the federal government to support victims services and law enforcement programs. VAWA also modified aspects of the federal criminal law to make punishable crimes against women such as interstate stalking and for abusers crossing state lines to injure or harass a victim (Tiefenthaler et al., 2005). Under the immigrant provisions of VAWA, a battered immigrant was given the opportunity to self-petition for legal status provided that she was married to a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident, had entered her marriage in good faith, was of good moral character, was a victim of domestic violence, and had evidence that deportation would result in extreme hardship for herself or her family members (Ingram et al., 2010).

With the reauthorization of VAWA in 2000, other additional relief for immigrant victims of crime was established. With VAWA 2000 came the creation of the U visa, which allows any immigrant with undocumented status to file for legal authorization to reside in the country. The U visa provides help for domestic violence victims without regard to the immigration or citizenship status of the abuser and even if the abuser is not the victim's spouse or parent. The U visa was designed to provide relief to immigrants who are victims of crime (Battered Women's Justice Project, no date). However, applying for this type of immigration relief comes with a high cost. The battered immigrant woman has to demonstrate that she suffered substantial physical or emotional abuse stemming from criminal activity such as intimate partner violence or other crimes such as rape, torture, prostitution, blackmail, among other illegal acts. The

battered immigrant woman also has to provide information about the criminal activity to authorities and cooperate with the law enforcement system. The immigrant victim must have certification from the police, prosecutor or other government official that the victim has been, is being, or is likely to be helpful to the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity (Battered Women's Justice Project, no date).

Besides these complex barriers to file for immigration relief, women lack information about it. Abusers commonly convince immigrant women that they have no rights or that they are not entitled to any rights in this country. For those battered women married to a U.S. citizen or LPR, the man may threaten the woman with canceling her legal resident status at any time by withdrawing the petition or telling ICE officials that the woman married for the sole purpose of legal residency (Erez et al., 2009).

## **METHODS**

### **Research Purpose**

This study sought to understand the relationship between Latin American women's undocumented migratory status and their experiences of intimate partner violence, as well as the barriers they may have encountered to access social and legal services to protect themselves from more violence. Specifically, this study attempted to provide a rich description of the intimate partner violence these women experience, the strategies they employ to keep their children and themselves safe, as well as the factors that influence their help-seeking behaviors. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide service providers with a better understanding of these women's needs and strategies to improve their access to services.

The specific research questions were:

1. What types of intimate partner abuse do Latina women with undocumented immigration status experience?
2. What are the safety strategies these women use to protect themselves and their children against the violence?
3. What types of supports (informal and formal) do they have access to?
4. What are the barriers and facilitating factors they experience when they access social and legal services?
5. What do they know regarding child welfare system, legal system and domestic violence legislation including legal benefits for crime victims?
6. What role do their cultural beliefs play in their help-seeking behaviors?
7. How do their immigration status and their partner affect their support seeking behaviors?

### **Research Design**

An exploratory qualitative research design was used for this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 Latina American women who were 18 years or older, had an undocumented status, had received services from a domestic violence program, and were emotionally capable of going through the interview

process.

Qualitative interviewing was the approach used for conducting the in-depth interviews in this study. This approach is based on a set of topics to be discussed in depth rather than based on the use of standardized questions (Babbie, 2010). This type of questioning allows the researcher to have a broad plan of inquiry that can change depending on the interaction with the participant. The questions were not asked exactly as written in the interview guide (see Appendix 1) but served as a conversational model for the interviewer. The interview guide covered eight topics with a sample of open-ended questions for each one of them. The interview guide covered the following themes: experiences as immigrants in the United States, types of intimate partner abuse, safety strategies employed by survivors, access to informal and formal supports, perceptions and experiences with the police and court system, and cultural beliefs about intimate partner violence. Some socio-demographic information was also collected: length of time residing in the U.S., number of years of the relationship with the intimate partner, number of children, country of origin, and respondent's age. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and tape recorded with verbal consent from the participant. The interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, and were transcribed and thematically analyzed using Atlas.ti software. This research study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC) in April 2013.

## **Recruitment**

Given the vulnerable and hidden nature of this population, conducting research with unauthorized immigrants is a very difficult undertaking and methodologically challenging. The researcher has many years of experience working with survivors of intimate partner violence and she developed a recruitment procedure and protection measures designed to assure the maximum possible safety for women who agreed to participate in the study. The researcher began by contacting and receiving support from the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV), the umbrella organization of domestic

violence programs in Connecticut. These programs provide services to victims of intimate partner violence, including shelters, counseling, advocacy, and support groups, and have bilingual (Spanish and English) counselors/advocates available to work with Spanish-speaking victims. CCADV contacted the domestic violence programs about this research study and the researcher followed up with programs that indicated interest in supporting the study. The researcher met with the executive directors and advocates of five domestic violence programs to explain the purpose of the research, the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants, the research design and the protections established to guarantee safety for the participants.

The advocates acted as liaisons between potential participants and the researcher. They invited their clients to attend a group presentation in which the researcher explained the research purpose, methodology, possible risks involved, measures planned to reduce those risks, and the benefits of the study. The researcher emphasized to the women that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to skip any questions or end the interview at any point. The researcher also explained that choosing to not participate did not affect any services that they were receiving at the study site, along with confidentiality considerations, and a statement that participation in the interview implies consent. During the group presentation, the researcher instructed potential participants to contact the domestic violence advocate if they wanted to be part of the study or had additional questions. To eliminate the risks of getting identifiable information, the researcher asked potential participants to contact her only from the offices of the domestic violence program. Additionally, attendees to the group presentation received a flyer (see Appendix 3) providing a written summary in Spanish of the same information provided verbally. The advocates also had copies of the flyer that they distributed to participants that fulfilled the inclusion/exclusion criteria but were unable to attend the group presentation. Advocates scheduled a date and time with potential participants that agreed to be interviewed for the study. Alternatively, the researcher went to the domestic violence programs at the time that support-educational groups were being carried out to conduct the interviews. The interviews



were conducted at the domestic violence programs' location where the women received services. A private office was used to conduct the interview.

### **Consent process**

Extensive efforts were taken to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of the women who participated in the study. Since their signature on a consent form would be the only identifiable information linked to their participation in the study, the investigator obtained a Waiver of the Requirement to Document the Consent of Subjects from the UCHC Institutional Review Board (see Appendix 6). To minimize the risks associated to breach of confidentiality, participants were told that information that could potentially identify their identity such as name, date of birth, address, and phone number was not going to be collected and that they did not need to sign a consent form if that was their preference. After explaining that their signature would be the only identifiable information linked to their participation on this project, participants were given the option to sign or to not sign the consent form. They were told that participating in the interview implied that they had given consent. The verbal consent was obtained before the interview began. The researcher provided a written statement in Spanish and verbally informed participants about the risks and benefits of participating in this study (see Appendix 2-A and 2-B for the English and Spanish versions respectively).

Before initiating the interview, the researcher explained to each participant the purpose of the interview, the objectives of the research study as well as the potential discomfort that questions may cause her and their rights as research participants. They were also informed that the interviews were going to be recorded and transcribed, and that the researcher was a mandated reporter under Connecticut General Statutes §17a-101. Women were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and there would not be any negative consequence if they decided to not participate in the study. Before initiating the interview, the researcher asked participants to refer to people during the interview not by their names

but by their relationship with them (i.e., “my partner”, “my husband”, “my sister”). It was also explained that the only person with access to the recordings and transcriptions would be the researcher, and that any name provided in the interview would be changed in the transcription process to help maintain the participant’s anonymity. Also, they were told that the transcriptions would be kept secure in a password-protected system, would not include any information that could link them with the research project, and would be erased as soon as they were transcribed. After all the information was explained, participants had an opportunity to ask questions and were asked to summarize their understanding of what their participation in the study entailed.

Participants were informed about the risks of feeling uncomfortable and sad answering questions about their experiences of intimate partner violence, and that their advocate was available to meet after the interview if they felt the need to talk further. They were also told that the product of the research was a written document that was going to show the stories by themes and not by individuals, with the purpose of presenting it to the UHC community and CCADV community. Participants were informed that one benefit they were going to receive for their participation was the opportunity to reflect about their stories and help the researcher to identify factors that prevent women like them from accessing help and services. Participants received a \$15 gift certificate to compensate for their time.

### **Confidentiality**

The interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder and immediately transferred to a password-protected computer after the interview was completed. Each interview recording was destroyed after it was transcribed. Transcriptions did not include any identifiable information and first names provided by participants were changed during the transcription process. A hardcopy of each transcription is being stored in a locked cabinet at the Department of Community Medicine and Health Care under the supervision of the researcher’s major advisor. They will be destroyed six months after the researcher presents her thesis document.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

A thematic analysis approach was employed to examine the content of each interview and the entire data set. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) with the goal of “providing knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Thematic analysis grew out of the sociological tradition, which treats text as a window into human experience (Ryan & Bernard, 2000), while remaining descriptive and making it more suitable for exploratory investigations like this one. In particular, this study adopted a realist thematic analysis approach to report the experiences, meanings and the reality of immigrant women with undocumented status facing intimate partner violence. This kind of approach assumes that language reflects and enables us to articulate meaning and experience of individuals (Braun and Clarke, op.cit.)

The themes within the data set were identified by a combination of theoretical and inductive analysis. The theoretical thematic analysis is characterized by the researcher’s analytic interest in the area of study (Braun and Clarke, op.cit), and existing theory or prior research which provides a guide to identify key concepts as initial coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The inductive thematic approach is characterized by identifying themes that are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990) and by being data-driven (Braun and Clarke, op.cit). Inductive analysis is especially helpful when existing research literature on a particular phenomenon is limited (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Given the abundance of knowledge on intimate partner violence, several of the themes were identified for the interview protocol and coded for specific research questions (deductive approach.) For example, the questions around the types of intimate partner violence provided initial codes such as “physical,” “emotional,” “sexual” and “use of children” among others. However, many codes were created from the

data themselves (inductive approach). For instance, after reading the whole data set, several participants talked about having faced killing attempts by their partners, which led to the creation of a separate code to identify these experiences. Another example the immigration experiences, which were not considered at the beginning of the analysis but came to provide very relevant information. This study made use of the guide provided by Braun and Clarke (ibid) for developing thematic analysis described below (Table 1).

Table 1. Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

<b>Phase</b>		<b>Description of the process</b>
1.	Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2.	Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3.	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4.	Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Generating a thematic map of analysis.
5.	Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, an the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6.	Producing the report:	Final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

The analysis of the data started with the transcription of each interview. Interviews were being transcribed while new participants were still being interviewed. The process of transcribing while interviewing helped to refine the questions asked during subsequent interviews. With the purpose of obtaining a sense of the whole (Tesch, 1990) and getting immersed in the data, each transcription was read and typo errors were corrected before the coding system process was initiated. As explained above, the process of creating the coding system used a combination of theoretical and inductive analysis. The coding system started by

taking the interview protocol as a guide to create meaningful categories (Code Families) for analysis and codes were created to capture specific themes within these categories of content. Each code was defined by providing criteria for inclusion and exclusion. After this initial code system was developed, each transcription was read carefully one more time but not coded to allow for the identification of other themes of interest for the data analysis. Getting very familiar with the data allowed for identifying themes that initially were not included in the initial coding system but that were relevant to the topic of analysis and were added to the coding system, as they appeared meaningful through the thematic analysis.

Atlast.ti 7 (Scientific Software Development GmbH, 1991-2009) was used for the analysis of the data. After creating the code system in Atlas.ti and initiating the coding process of the data, a few more codes were added when something very important in the narrative was not possible to code with the existent schema. A couple of codes were erased from the coding system given their lack of prevalence in the data. Furthermore, some codes that belonged to a Code Family were converted to a main category with specific codes giving the relevance of that theme across the data set. This was the case for “Police,” which initially was a code within the “Support” Code Family; it became its own Code Family with a couple of subcategories: Police Access and Police Perceptions. For a full description of the coding system see Appendix 4.

After each transcription was coded the extracts for each code were printed and reviewed with the aim of determining which themes had enough information to be included in this study and which ones did not. Next, the collated extracts for each theme were reviewed to analyze whether they formed a coherent pattern. After this, each theme was reviewed in terms of its place within the whole data set and its relationship with the topic of this study. With the purpose of not losing focus, during this phase of analysis, each theme was considered through the light of two questions: 1) How much is this theme unique to the experiences of immigrant women with undocumented migratory status; and 2) If this theme

is not unique to the experiences of immigrant women with undocumented status, to what extent does it help to understand the barriers to access to services that these women experience.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of this study are based on the analysis of in-depth interviews conducted between May 2013 and March 2014 with 11 immigrant women with undocumented migratory status who had experienced intimate partner violence. Three of these women came from Honduras, three from Ecuador, two from Mexico, two from Guatemala and one from Colombia. Their ages ranged from 19 years old (1) to 54 years old (1), with the majority of them being in their early thirties (7) and two in their forties. They had resided in the United States between three and 16 years. Only two had been here for less than five years, three between five and ten years, and several (6) had lived here for more than ten years. All of them had had an undocumented migratory status at some point of their lives in the United States. Four women still had an undocumented status, while two had obtained a U-Visa, two were in the process of obtaining a U-Visa, two were applying for a VAWA Visa, and one had obtained asylum relief. All of them were one and 28 years old. Two of the women had left their children in their country of origin and had not seen them since they migrated several years previously. Of the children residing in the United States, 18 were U.S. citizens, one was a legal resident and two had an undocumented migratory status. The women's educational background varied from a few years of elementary school (4), middle school (4), completed high school (1), technical education (1) to one being a professional engineer (1).

### **MIGRATION EXPERIENCES**

To provide a broad contextual view of the experiences of coming to the United States, I present in this section an analysis of women's reasons for migrating, their migration journey including the risks they faced and how it has been for them to live in the United States with an undocumented migratory status.

Table 2. Demographic information of participants in the study.

<b>Participant *</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b># Years in USA</b>	<b># Of Children US/Country of Origin</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Immigration Status</b>
<b>Marina</b>	Honduras	30	7	0/3	Elementary	Asylee status
<b>Susana</b>	Mexico	33	16	2	Elementary	Undocumented
<b>Liliana</b>	Ecuador	54	12	2	Professional	VAWA process
<b>Patricia</b>	Guatemala	19	3	1	Middle School	Undocumented
<b>Juliana</b>	Honduras	41	8	0/3	Middle School	Undocumented
<b>Leticia</b>	Colombia	42	12	3	Middle School	VAWA process
<b>Lucero</b>	Guatemala	31	4	1	Technical	U-Visa process
<b>Linda</b>	Ecuador	31	13	3	High School	Undocumented
<b>Monica</b>	Honduras	30	8	2	Middle School	U-Visa process
<b>Carmen</b>	Ecuador	30	12	5	Elementary	U-Visa
<b>Victoria</b>	Mexico	31	13	2	Elementary	U-Visa

\* All names are pseudonyms.

### Looking for a better life

The majority of the women came to the United States by crossing the border with Mexico. Two of them came with a tourist visa that later expired and they decided to stay. The reasons to emigrate and begin the journey to the United States were diverse and unique to each individual story. However, the narratives of these 11 women show that their motives always had to do with finding a better life for themselves, their children and families. Their reasons included escaping violent relationships, to reunite with partners/boyfriends, to build a better economic future to help their families back in their country and their families in the United States.

Sometimes, finding a better life meant escaping from the violence they were experiencing with their husbands in their native countries. Marina and Leticia experienced years of physical and emotional abuse from their partners to the point that the only solution to live in safety was to undertake the journey to the United States where they had some family members that would help them start a new life. Marina went



to live with her partner when she was 14 years old and after nine years of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, she decided to leave her country and come to the United States as the only means to stop living in violence.

The abuse started, he would leave me alone, I had nothing to eat, he would not let me go out, ... sometimes he would push me, hit me. After my second child, the beating became worse. I wanted to leave him but he would say no. One time we went to my grandma and he told her, "here is your daughter, tell her I'm with her and make her understand that she can't kill herself." Because that time I tried to kill me because I couldn't bear that situation any longer... I went to live with my aunt, and he would go to look for me but that day I didn't want to see him and closed the door. He broke the door and got inside. I didn't want to be with him but he raped and I got pregnant. I stayed by myself for a year but he took my son from me. He said that the child I was pregnant with was not his but he counted the days and said if that child is mine you are coming with me. After the birth of my daughter he went to the hospital and took me to his house... After that, I got pregnant but didn't realize it until the fourth month. He told me "you are not going to have that child." I told him I wanted to have him but he said he couldn't maintain another child. He bought some abortion pills. He told me "you are going to take them even if you don't want. If you don't, you will face the consequences." I didn't know what was going to happen to me. In the middle of the night I got all wet and I felt a push like when you are having a child... the baby was all formed. He wanted to take the baby out and I remember that one of his little feet got entangled in his sleeve. We had to go to the hospital because he couldn't get the baby out and the doctor said, the baby is coming without a foot and I couldn't tell him that it was because he tried to take him out. I told him I was taking the baby to bury him but he told me to leave him in the hospital... that has been the most difficult thing... After mother's day, my children were so little, they were sleeping, I left in the early morning. My soul hurt from the pain I had for leaving them but it was the only way to break free from him so my children didn't continue suffering. There were times in which my youngest would say to me "mama, don't fight anymore" and I couldn't forget those words. I said I don't want to continue this way and I made the decision, I said it is now or never. I left to the United States leaving my children, I left them sleeping. It hurt me, but I decided to leave to avoid so much maltreatment. (Marina)

Similarly, Leticia's reasons to come to the United States reflect a history of intense violence from her husband.

Practically, I came fleeing from the father of my son. I also suffered domestic violence with him. He beat me since I was pregnant with my son, he treated me very badly and we were very poor. I came practically escaping from him because he also threatened me with killing me and I was afraid. He would say to me he was going to burn me alive with my son or chop me in little pieces and put me in a bag... I went to the police, but the police in my country don't serve for anything. The only thing they told me was "if you can't live together, then get the divorce." I told him that a separation was better but he said he was not going to do it. He didn't want to give me the divorce. The only way to get away from him was with the visa. (Leticia)

The majority of these narratives reveal that one of the main reasons to immigrate to the United States is the desire to have a better economic future and fulfill the American dream. The United States is seen as

the place that offers the possibility of earning decent money through hard work and being able to have a house, a car and provide education for the children. In some cases, this desire to have a better economic future is mixed with other motives such as wanting to reunite with their partner or the need to pay for loans that were made in order to pay for the trip.

The story of Carmen from Ecuador shows pieces of all these motives. Even though she did not want to leave her country, she had to do it because her parents had made a loan and put their land as a guarantee after her boyfriend had convinced them that it was a good idea. She made three attempts to get to the United States until she finally was able to cross the border. It took a year for her to get to the United States after being arrested in and deported from Guatemala and Mexico.

I came to live here because I had a boyfriend. I came from a very poor family. We didn't have electricity; we didn't much to eat... We lived in a little house that we built; we are seven siblings and I'm the oldest. I met my boyfriend and we got engaged. I worked a lot and gave money to eat to my siblings and parents. When I was 16 years old I met the man who was my husband. He told me that he had plans to come here and I didn't agree but he asked to wait for him two years. He didn't communicate with me for a year and one day he called at work. Since that moment my life started... He started talking to my mother and father and began sending money from the United States. I don't understand, even today, how my parents sent me here by putting some little pieces of land as guarantee. (Carmen)

Half the number of participants in this study emigrated because they wanted to reunite with their partners or boyfriends. In the case of Linda, she became pregnant soon after she married her boyfriend, a U.S. legal resident, when she was 17 years old. Her husband wanted the baby to be born in this country, but she did not know if she could come legally given her husband's status, so she crossed the South border to enter the United States illegally. Lucero and Monica wanted to reunite with their boyfriends who had immigrated earlier. Carmen's boyfriend contacted her parents and convinced them to get a loan to pay her trip to the United States to live with him here. For Juliana, the reasons to come to the United States had to do with being in love, having her partner in the United States and looking for a dream.

I came here because of the father of my children. I was very in love with him. When he was there he didn't behave so well with me, but when he came here he began to tell me that he loved me, that he missed me, that he had learned to value me... He said that we could both work here and be able to do what we had dreamed... have a little business, a little car, a little house for the children. He said it was just two years and

the sooner I was here, the sooner we could go back. And you see.... it was because of the love I had for him I came here. (Juliana)

Susana and Victoria, both from Mexico, said that they wanted to leave a life of poverty and escape the lack of opportunities in their country. They believed they would be able to have a better life in the United States.

But one comes to this country because of necessity... because one wants to progress because Mexico is very poor and sometimes one wants to improve. It is hard to leave loved ones there in Mexico...I was 17 years old when I came here. (Susana)

Because people think that life here in the United States is prettier, we come looking for work because in Mexico there are not jobs, and the pay very bad. We were told that we could earn more here. We don't get better paid but it is possible to sustain ourselves. We came here because there is a lot of poverty there in Mexico. (Victoria)

To migrate to the United States, women and their families obtain loans to pay for the trip with the idea that they would be able to pay those loans once in the United States. Carmen attempted to do this trip three times before she was finally able to get in the United States without being arrested by immigration authorities. She was 17 years old and it took about one year for her to finally enter the United States. She was arrested several times and consequently deported to Ecuador. She attempted to do the trip again and again because her parents insisted she had to do it in order for them to repay the loan they had taken for her to go.

I told them I didn't want to leave because I knew that the trip was very dangerous, that people get raped and killed. People from Ecuador died coming here, some drowned, women came having been raped. I was scared and I told him but he said he had talked to my parents and he was going to help me pay the loan back when I would get there. I had my job and lived in my bosses' house. I didn't have to worry about having to eat or for money because I had that there. I told my bosses and they ask why, if I had everything with them, a whole salary, food and we are your family. But my father and mother insisted that I have to come. (Carmen)

For others, it is the curiosity of seeing what life is like in the United States. Often, the only way to come to the United States is by crossing the border since the immigration policies of the United States toward developing countries are very limiting. The story of Lucero, from Guatemala, speaks to this:

I came on a December 4th. I came because you know how it is in our countries, people want to know the United States, people see on television how life is here, Manhattan, the Statute of Liberty ... and my boyfriend was here for a while. He said he was doing well, he had a job, and he was doing well economically. He didn't have papers, but we talked... I didn't think about it too much and I decided to come to see the United States. The plan was to come for 10 months to spend one Christmas here and go back to Guatemala before the next Christmas ... it was anything but.... he started to mistreat me a week later..(Lucero)

### Crossing the Border: A Journey Full of Risks

The majority of these women undertook a long and dangerous journey to find a better life in the United States. Crossing international frontiers presented lot of challenges and risks and required determination on their part. While they were successful in making it to the United States, their travel involved experiences of physical exhaustion, rape attempts, dehydration, and abuse by others. Furthermore, their new life in the United States entailed violence, discrimination and poverty while they continued looking for that better future.

For those women that crossed the border and entered without legal permission to the United States, the migration journey constituted one of the hardest experiences in their lives. For women from Honduras, Guatemala or Ecuador, they had not only to cross the frontier between Mexico and the United States, but also several international borders, transit through other countries and cross over entire nations, such as Mexico. For them, the migration journey meant a longer and more dangerous trajectory since being an immigrant in Mexico also entails risks such as kidnapping, rape, robbery, arrest, or the possibility of being killed. Some of these women were arrested by authorities at different points of their trajectory and a few of them were consequently deported back to their country of origin where they initiated their attempts to get to the United States again.

When they were asked about what they knew about migrating to the United States illegally before they left their country of origin, the majority of them reported that they did not know how challenging it really was to get to the United States. Even though many of the women had husbands or boyfriends who had crossed the border and were already in the United States, information about the dangers and challenges of doing such journey was not shared. The story of Monica (age 30), from Honduras, talks about the lack of information about what the trip entails.

It was difficult. I suffered a lot. It took me a whole month, 34 days, to get here. There is a lot of suffering. No one tells you how the trip is going to be; everybody says that it's nice, but the reality is the opposite. People suffer a lot. Everybody tells you that it's easy but that's not true, the reality is other. To get here without documents is very difficult. The majority of the time you have to walk, sometimes you don't have anything to eat, you get robbed, abused, assaulted... the same police in Mexico do that. (Monica)

Like Monica, Juliana also reported having being abused by the Mexican police. She also developed dengue fever during her journey through Mexico before attempting to cross the border with the United States. Fortunately, she was able to get to La Casa del Migrante, which is an organization that has several sites located in four Mexican states: Baja California, Chiapas, Sonora and Chihuahua and Guatemala. There, migrants can receive provisional housing, basic medical services and hot meals.

We were bitten by the mosquitos and got sick with malaria; I had a fever during the trip.... those mosquitos were so big; I had not seen mosquitos of that size before. When we got to Veracruz we went to La Casa del Migrante; we got there at midnight... they gave us medicine and we slept there on the floor. They tested us for malaria and dengue fever and it came positive for me. They told us to wait there while we got better, but I was feeling okay. I took the medicine and we started the trip again when it got dark. We went to hide in some abandoned train cars but when we were walking, the police assaulted us, the same Mexican police... they hit us with sticks and asked us for money; they said they would get us naked to check if we were hiding the money. They didn't hit me, but they hit my friends. (Juliana)

When asked about the most challenging experience during their journey toward the United States, they responded that it was the lack of food, dehydration and physical exhaustion what made the crossing so dangerous.

In Mexico everything was fine, like I was in my country, but after I left Mexico it was terrible.... a lot of suffering. I walked a lot, I didn't have more water, you can't bring many things because the bag has to be light so you don't get tired... walking a lot, climb hills, go through rocks, forest, ... it is horrible! They told us we had to keep walking, they left the ones who couldn't continue right there... We had to walk fast all the time, and we had to hide because there are lights, helicopters flying around and there is a radar to detect movement. The coyotes know very well how to do it. I was very afraid of not being able to keep the pace. I thought what would happen to me if they left me here, I don't know anyone, I can get lost.... You see things in your way here that people have left, backpacks, shoes, clothes. It is scary. The coyotes told us about people called bajadores, who rob and rape people making the trip. They said they are armed and we shouldn't put up resistance. Thanks to God, nothing like that happened. (Lucero)

I had a very hard time during my trip... it took me 15 or 20 days... we walked through the desert, stayed at one house... we were a group of 6. We stayed in the desert for many days and there was nothing to eat, there was nothing to drink... One day, we found gallons of water and for one day we just drank water... It was very difficult. People risk their lives. (Susana)

The most difficult thing? The desert. The three days that I walked, sometimes there was no food and no water. It's very sad to see... there are people that can't keep walking and stay just there in the path... We were a group of 63 people and three of them were left on the wayside. No one knows if they are alive or dead or if immigration caught them, ... I don't know. They couldn't keep walking because there was no food. They started vomiting blood... because of lack of food, dehydration, the sun, there is no water... it is very difficult. I almost stayed there... during the third day in the morning; some guys carried me because I fainted, I couldn't keep walking more... I was walking like I was drunk. It happened because of hunger. I could not keep going. It is sad... one says, "I regret it" but you are already there; it's no sense going back. (Monica)

During my interviews for this study, all the participants that came crossing the border mentioned stories of other women being raped, and one the participants had closely missed being raped herself.

When we arrived to a city in Mexico, we came at night and they were drinking... they were very drunk. One of them wanted to rape me... he grabbed me by force and turned my body. If not for the wife of the coyote that came and took him off from me, that man would have raped me. (Marina)

As mentioned earlier, Central and South American migrants have to cross one or more international borders before they attempt to cross the United States-Mexico border. It is estimated that each year 150,000 migrants enter Mexico through the South border, mainly through Chiapas with the goal of coming to the United States (Secretaría de Gobernación de México, 2010). The story of Carmen is a good example. She attempted to travel from Ecuador to the United States four times. She was deported back to

Ecuador three times, two from Guatemala and one from the United States. She was also arrested in Mexico but deported to Guatemala, where she continued with her effort to get to the United States. It took more than a year for her to finally get to the United States. As her story describes, migrants use several means to make this journey, including flying to a Central American country to start crossing Mexico by bus or train. Fishing boats are also used by migrants in their attempt to immigrate to the United States.

When I started the trip, I flew to Nicaragua and then, I think, it was in Guatemala that immigration caught me and sent me back. I came to Ecuador and told my parents and him that I didn't want to come to the US but they asked me to make a second attempt. I traveled by boat and they caught me again in Guatemala and sent me back. I did it for a third time and traveled by boat to Mexico. It wasn't a nice boat; it was one of those fishing boats with 200 or 300 people and eight days of travel in plain ocean. The first time I did by boat I stayed in a little room but the second time I stayed upstairs. The boat got to Guatemala and we cross the border to Mexico. We walked across Mexico, sometimes in car and he would be mad because it had been already a year since the first time. Because I spent two months in prison in Guatemala, then we had to wait four months for the coyote to bring us... That time I was able to get to Arizona but immigration caught me. Many people died in that trailer. I was in prison four months in Arizona because my boyfriend didn't pay the bond, which was \$5,000. The judge told me that I was going to be deported and I couldn't come back for 10 years. I went back to Ecuador and I said I'm not doing it again. I don't have any need to go to the United States. But my mother and father started telling again that if I didn't do it they were going to lose the land. I did it once again... by boat again. I got to Mexico and was caught but I lied to them I said I was from Guatemala. I had already learned the words that people from Guatemala use. They took my fingerprints but it was God that made things happen. They sent me to Guatemala. Then, I met a guy and we started talking and became friends and it happened what it shouldn't have happened. We had relationships and I got pregnant. Since that day, my life ended, my life was destroyed. I wanted to go back to Ecuador... I wished that immigration or the police caught me because I didn't want to come to my boyfriend that way. Well, when one wants to get back it doesn't happen. I cross Mexico, walking through mud, mountains, hills, and grasses. I did that trip with three months of pregnancy. I came to Los Angeles with three months of pregnancy. The coyote put me in a bus toward Manhattan where he was waiting for me. (Carmen)

Depending on the economic resources they have, the migrants may be able to travel through Mexico by bus or airplane. Some, however, attempt to do it through the most inexpensive and undetectable way, which is riding the train known as La Bestia or 'The Beast' in English. This train is also known as the Train of the Unknown, el Tren de los Desconocidos or the Train of the Death. To get on the train, people have to jump in when authorities are not around, which means mostly at night and jump off when they are getting close to a train station. Using the train is known as one of the most risky ways for migrants to

cross Mexico. Juliana was one of them. During the interview, she told me about her experience riding La Bestia. Here is just a brief extract of her story:

I think I can't describe to you with words what people experience there, what people suffer... I'm just giving you a little bit... When I was coming in the train, I heard when the train passed over someone... it sounded like when meat is being ground. People said "someone fell"... Those situations were very sad, we would cry... one feels like miserable. Coming in those trains makes you feel like you don't have self-esteem, like you don't have any value at all. I asked myself why I was doing that, but once there I had to do. If I had known about all the things I had to go through, I would have stayed in my house. I don't want to go back feeling defeated, but it is hundred thousand times better to be in my country than to be here. (Juliana)

### **LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES: BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND ILLEGALITY**

Immigrant women with undocumented status arrive in the United States looking for a better life, to escape violence and their countries' poverty. Some of them have traveled for weeks, months or years to get here. They have gone through some of the most dangerous experiences of their lives during their journey toward the North. They found, however, that their life in the United States was very different from what they had dreamed and planned. The lack of documented status greatly influenced almost every aspect of their lives, from getting jobs with decent wages to reporting crimes including intimate partner violence. The lack of documented status contributed to these women seeing themselves as individuals with no rights, in both public and private spheres.

### **INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES**

All of the women interviewed faced experiences of physical and emotional violence by their partners, and many of them were also sexually abused. Three of them experienced violence by partners they met in their country of origin. Three of the women separated from the partners they came to reunite with and experienced intimate partner violence by a new partner that they met in the United States. Four of the participants met their abusive husbands/partners after residing in the United States for some time. One woman continued being emotionally abused after immigrating to the United States by her partner who stayed in Honduras and who used their children as a way to control her life in the United States.



Table 3 shows the types of intimate partner violence that each participant experienced and the time they endured it. It includes references to the main types of violence the women reported. Some spaces were left blank because there was no information to confirm or deny the presence of that particular type of violence. Although overall the women who participated in this study were very open about their experiences, they may have opted to not disclose some information.

Marina experienced ten years of physical, emotional and sexual violence by her partner. The emotional violence also included forcibly taking her boy from her while they were separated. Nine of these years occurred in Honduras, which was the reason she escaped and immigrated to the United States. After she came here, the father of her children continued blackmailing her with not letting her talk to her children if she did not do what he said. Susana immigrated to the United States and not long after she began dating a man she married later. The violence started a few years later and although the most frequent type of violence she experienced was emotional, she also endured episodes of physical and sexual abuse as well. Her husband made her believe she would get deported if she called the police and her children would be removed from the home. When I interviewed her, she was still living with her husband. Liliana met her husband several years after being in the United States. For her the violence began pretty soon after she went to live with him. She faced physical, sexual, and emotional violence, which included threatening her with deportation due to her status. He also took money from her that was never paid back and stalked her. He was put in the GPS ankle bracelet program<sup>2</sup> for offenders due to his high risk for violence. However, after the program stopped he began stalking Liliana again. When I interviewed her she was afraid of staying at her house by herself.

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<sup>2</sup> The goal of the Alert Notification/GPS pilot program is to enhance the monitoring of high-risk family violence cases in Connecticut. The pilot program began at the end of 2010 in three court districts: Hartford, Bridgeport and Danielson. It was interrupted temporarily due to lack of funding but reestablished again in 2013.

Table 3. Types of Intimate Partner Violence and Length of Time.

	# Years in USA	Length of Time in Relatio nship	Violence Length of Time	Type of Violence				
				Physical	Emotional	Sexual	Immigration Related Threats	Other
<b>Marina</b>	7	9	10	Y Hondura s	Y Honduras/ US	Y Honduras	NA	Forced abortion, use of children in Honduras
<b>Susana</b>	16	15	11	Y	Y	Y	Y	Threats -DCF removing kids
<b>Liliana</b>	12	7	6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Economic/Stalking
<b>Patricia</b>	3	21 months	20 months	Y	Y	Y	Y	Imprisonment, Child abuse, threatening with getting the child custody Economic
<b>Juliana</b>	8			Y	Y	Y	Y	Threats of murdering her and killing her children
<b>Leticia</b>	12	11	10	Y	Y		N	Child abuse
<b>Lucero</b>	4		1	Y	Y	Y	Y	Imprisonment Murder attempt
<b>Linda</b>	13	8	8	Y	Y	Y	?	Murder attempt
<b>Monica</b>	8	1	10 months	Y	Y	Y	?	Murder attempt, Threats of Killing Family
<b>Carmen</b>	12	10	10	Y	Y	Y	N	Murder attempt, Calling DCF on her
<b>Victoria</b>	13	10	10	Y	Y		?	Murder attempt, Destroyed household

Patricia immigrated to the United States while she was still a teenager and she met the father of her baby a couple of months after she arrived. She became pregnant and went to live with him. From that moment on she began experiencing physical, emotional and sexual violence. On several occasions he locked her inside a room without food and water for hours or days. He also took her baby on those occasions. He hit her while she was pregnant. After she separated from him, he used to take the baby on the weekends. One time he brought the baby back to her with his skull and a rib fractured. Juliana reunited with the father of her children but separated from him few years later. She then dated a man, went to live with him and

started experiencing physical violence almost immediately. He also threatened her with killing her oldest son.

Leticia met the father of her two youngest children about a year after she immigrated to the United States. She came to this country with her oldest son after escaping from a very violent relationship. She experienced physical and emotional violence by her partner here; he also physically and emotionally abused her oldest son. Lucero came to the United States to stay with her boyfriend for a year and see the country. She began experiencing physical, emotional and sexual violence 20 days after she immigrated; it lasted for one year until she was able to escape. She was almost killed when he beat her with a machete. He made her believe she would be arrested if she went to the police. Linda reunited with her husband but divorced him some time later. She met the father of her two younger children and experienced physical, emotional and sexual violence. He was ordered to stay away from her by the police, but he was able to get inside her home and tried to kill her with a kitchen knife in front of her children. Monica also reunited with her boyfriend and separated from him few years later. She met a new boyfriend and the violence started very soon after. He threatened her with killing her family back in her country. He attempted to kill her in front of her daughter with a baseball bat and a screwdriver.

Carmen immigrated to the United States to reunite with a boyfriend she had not seen for about three years. She was 18 years old when she came here. She started enduring physical, emotional and sexual violence within few days after she reunited with him. This situation lasted ten years until he almost killed her with some scissors after having raped her. Victoria immigrated to the United States with her husband and not long after that he began emotionally abusing her. He also hit her and destroyed everything she was able to obtain for her children after the police ordered him to stay away from the family.

### **Tactics of Intimidation**

The experiences of violence these women faced show that abusers simultaneously employ many tactics to

increase their dominance over the women and to make women afraid of seeking help and being able to stop the violence. The information collected indicates that these women were greatly intimidated through threats based on their undocumented status such as being arrested, deported, murdered or having family members residing in their country of origin assassinated. Moreover, the use of extreme physical and sexual attacks were often combined with tactics that included making women believe they were responsible for the violence, isolating them and impeding them to create other relationships, episodes of short imprisonment and locking women out of the house. The physical violence reached such a high level of intensity that nearly half of the women reported being almost killed.

#### The Use of Immigration Status as an Intimate Partner Violence Strategy

The stories collected for this research indicate that batterers use their partners' undocumented status as a tool to exert control over their lives and decisions, in particular with the goal of forcing them to remain in the relationship. In many instances, the abusers threaten the women with reporting their undocumented status to the authorities to have them deported. Liliana's husband, who had a legal resident status and later obtained his American citizenship, used his status to prevent Liliana from defending herself and from calling the police to report his violence.

He was always threatening me... He used to tell me and my daughters that we couldn't say anything to him because he was a resident and had papers and that for any motive he was going to take us to the police and make us get deported. For the most little thing, we were threatened with that. I didn't pay him attention and I learned to block my mind and stop listening. He didn't hit me because he was told that if he were accused of domestic violence he wouldn't get the citizenship. He felt threatened because of that. But when he got it in May of last year, he was very happy and said to us "now I am an American citizen and you will see what I'm able to do... I can deport you and no one can say anything to me." There were two critical episodes in which I should have called the police but I didn't because I didn't want to make things much bigger than what they were already. He said that if I called, the police would arrest me because I was illegal. Always the threat! And I didn't call. But those times, he broke everything in the house and he threatened us.  
(Liliana)

Besides batterers using women's undocumented status to control their decisions and actions, they also make use of the information women have shared with them to increase the fear of deportation. Patricia

was arrested by immigration authorities and spent several months in a juvenile detention center until her parents were able to pay for the bond. She had to attend immigration court hearings but did not attend her third hearing. Her boyfriend knew about this and used the information Patricia had entrusted him with to prevent her from stopping the violence.

When I got out of that place, they gave some dates to go to court and I went only to two. The judge said the next time I was going to be deported because there was no case I could fight for. He said I had to sign a voluntary deportation exit. Then I didn't go to the third hearing. The father of my child knew about it and he used to say that he was going to deport me to Guatemala and call immigration. He used to say that if I would call the police, immigration was going to check all my records and find that issue. I didn't want to go back to Guatemala because I didn't want to leave my parents and my son. I was very scared. But today I know that was not true; that it was just a fear I had because the police didn't do anything like that to me. I really believed what he told me, that he was going to get me deported to Guatemala and take my son away from me. (Patricia)

Furthermore, these women with undocumented status also experienced insults by their partners for their migratory condition. Juliana's partner was an American citizen of Puerto Rican origin. Her narrative shows how he attacked her dignity and made her believe that if she called the police they both would be arrested.

He used to say, "this immigrant pig, you people are nothing, you people have to come here to survive." I told him I didn't come because I was dying of hunger but because of the father of my children. I told him that I preferred to go back and take care of my children than to take care of an addict. I didn't let him get away with that... I never had the courage to call the police because I was afraid. He used to tell me "if you call the police they are going to take you too because they arrest both." That's why I was afraid because I have never had problems with anyone and I don't have any police record. (Juliana)

The use of women's immigration status is also combined with other types of threats and coercions such as isolation, economic abuse, and taking the children away. Women who came to reunite with their partners were at high risk of being isolated from the rest of their surroundings, which enabled batterers to intimidate and control the women's lives. Lucero's story is an example of this a situation. She did not know anyone else in the States but her boyfriend. She was terrorized by him soon after she immigrated. He imprisoned her and subjected her to any and every type of physical, emotional and sexual degradation in addition to make her believe she would go to jail if she reported what was happening.

I came here on a December 4th and on the 24 I got the first beating. I was so scared, I was terrified... every night I'd feel like that... because he would rape me and not only that, but also beat me. He made me horrible

things and forced me to do horrible things. He threatened me by saying that if I would do anything, call the police, they would send me back to Guatemala after spending a lot of time in jail... He told me so many horrible things. My morale got to the floor. I didn't value myself... I was doing very badly. He threatened me with killing me and cutting me in little pieces if I reported him to the police. He would say that to me with so much certainty, firmness... He said no one would know anything because he would cut me in little pieces and give them to the dogs... I disappear you and no one would know... I didn't have anyone here... I thought what I can do, I thought about it more and more... but the time passed, days, weeks, months... I endured that situation for one year. (Lucero)

Batterers also created fear by making them believe that because of their undocumented migratory status they would lose their children. In the case of Patricia, her partner who was more than ten years older than her, made her believe that he would get the custody of their baby because he was a legal resident, and had a job and a place to live. Since the migratory status of Susana's husband was undocumented as well, he made her believe that their children would be taken away from the home if she reported the violence.

I never called the police because he would say to me that if I did it or if I left him he would take my baby away from me. I couldn't live with that idea because I'd die if I don't have my baby with me. He said he was going to take him away from me so I opted to stay and endure his abuse for not losing my child. He said to me "If you leave, I will leave with the boy and you will never see him again." I was scared of that and since he has papers and I don't have anything, I thought he could take my son from me and I would end losing the baby. He always told me that if I leave him he would keep my child with him because he had everything in the house and I didn't have anything and I was very young. I thought he was right, I really believed that the authorities will take my child away from me and give the custody to him because I didn't have papers and I didn't have anything, so they are going to let him stay with my son. (Patricia)

He always told me that since I don't have papers they would take my daughters away if I said something or that they would not believe anything that I said. I was very afraid because my daughters are everything for me.... The social worker came and I told her I didn't want to talk because I was afraid. And she asked me, "Why are you afraid?" I said "because my partner has always told me that you could take away my daughters and because I don't have papers and that could make things worse. (Susana)

In the case of Liliana, her husband not only threatened her with being able to have her deported given that he was a legal resident, but also used his legal status to exploit her economically. He put the couple's assets only in his name, hid his financial situation from her, and extorted her by not paying the household bills as a way to get reimbursed for giving her a legal status.

The tricks he did to keep the house to his name were horrible; it didn't matter that my daughters and I gave the 70% for the initial payment. But because we didn't have papers, he put the house only in his name. The lawyer told him that he could add our names a week after we bought the house but he never wanted to do it. Economically I have suffered a lot. He has been in debt for long time but I didn't know it. I put his name on

my bank account without knowing that he had a repossessed car. The bank took all my money, about \$3,500, when I deposited the money for the mortgage. The court later gave me back \$2,000. But he never acknowledged that and all his debts started to appear. He asked me to pay for his citizenship application so I could get the papers later. I also paid for my application. He received a lot of money from the taxes and I didn't see a cent of it. He used to tell me that any person would have charged me for the papers and for that reason he would not give any money towards the household. He said that was the only way to charge me. We got married three years ago and he said he would file for my residence the next day... well, he did it two years and a half later because he didn't want to do it sooner. I had to give him money all that time. I decided that it was better to get a divorce than keep experiencing his threats. (Liliana)

Liliana's husband did not stop there. After she received a protective order, he called her saying he would continue with the application process for her residence if she stopped the domestic violence case. When that tactic did not work, he then threatened Liliana's daughter with having her deported to Ecuador.

He called me one time to tell me that he will go with me to the immigration appointment if I drop all the charges against him and say everything was a lie so his name gets clean. I told the lawyers and the counselors here what he said, and they said I shouldn't do that because it was not the true and that he was harassing me. He even called my daughter to threaten her. He told her that if I didn't remove the charges, he would get her deported and she would have to live without her daughter. My daughter told me that she felt afraid because she doesn't have the papers. A week ago, he called her again and told her "fuck you!"

### Physical Violence: From Punches to Murder Attempts

The stories collected during this research describe a very high level of physical violence against these women, which reinforced the threats of deportation and assassination made by batterers, and consequently intimidated the women from looking for help. Batterers also made use of other abusive tactics such as blaming the women for the violence and promising they will change. Some of the physical abuse employed included beating, choking, throwing objects at the women, pushing, hitting, forcing their way inside the house, ripping the women's clothes, throwing hot food, pulling hair and ears, punching, and destroying household objects. Batterers also used weapons against women such as machetes, knives, baseball bats and screwdrivers.

For some of these Latina women the frequency of the physical violence was an everyday situation they had to face; for others it happened sporadically. The intensity of physical violence increased at times

when these women were making significant decisions in their lives. For instance, for some of them violence intensified when they trying to stop the violence by calling for help or when trying to end the relationship; for others, the violence increased when they showed signs of independence such as working outside the house. In a few cases, the violence intensified when they were starting relationships with other men. For five of these women the escalation of violence rose to levels of murder attempts.

Patricia met the father of her baby a few months after she came to Connecticut. She was still an adolescent and he was more than 10 years older than her. After beating her, he blamed her for his own actions and she believed it.

He was very violent with me. We were together for one year and nine months and I couldn't put with it any longer. The last time he hit me, he did it so badly... my face was all bruised, and my mouth was bleeding.... For a month he was good to me, but after a month he began hitting me, getting upset for any little thing, he didn't like when I wore a miniskirt or used makeup... He would say that I was going to see other men. When I was pregnant, he used to push me... One time he pushed me in the stairs but I didn't lose my baby. After that, he would punch repeatedly my face or grab me by my hair... He would do anything to hurt me... or he would say horrible things to me ... He would say "I deserve someone better than you" and he would blame me for everything... "You are the one responsible... if I hit you it is because it's your fault." And I thought that he was right, that it was my fault, and that he does that because I get him mad... I had that in my mind.... that it was because I get him mad that he beat me. He would say to me "see what happens to you for not obeying me?" (Patricia)

The violence increased when Patricia tried to protect herself and seek help. As a consequence, he imprisoned her and took the baby away. He did not allow her to speak freely with her parents, which was her main resource of support. The physical violence combined with making her feel responsible for it, isolating her, threatening her with taking her son away and having her deported created an environment of intimidation that prevented Patricia from leaving and seeking help.

When I said I was going to call the police or my parents, he locked me inside a room all day and all night and didn't let me use my phone. I had many cellphones that he broke! That time when I was going to call the police, he unplugged the telephone and locked me in a room all day and night and he took my baby all that time and I didn't know where my child was. The next day he came and told me that it was my fault he had done that... he locked me in all that time and left me without food and anything... My mom would say to me, "I feel you are different today, you are not the same, you look so sad today with your eyes all watery, and I don't know what's going on, what is making you sad?" and I would answer, "nothing, mom." Because he never left me by myself at my parents' house, he was always close by. If I'd go to my mom's room he would call me quickly or would get mad at my mom. He didn't allow me to visit by myself and if I



called my mom over the phone he had to listen what I was telling her. When he went to work he used to disconnect the house phone and hide it so I couldn't talk to anyone. At night, when I used to call my mom, he had to be there... He didn't like it if I went out when he wasn't there and I was scared. I didn't attempt to leave because I knew he was going to look for me, and who knows what he would do to me. (Patricia)

Victoria also experienced increased episodes of physical violence as a result of her making her own decisions and acting independently from her husband. He assaulted her on three occasions after she had been outside the house without him visiting family, working or buying groceries. The last time he hit her after she said she was leaving with the children.

He hit me like three times. One time it was because I came late after I went to visit my family in NY. That day it snowed a lot and the car got stuck and because of that I was late. He was very upset when I came home, he insulted me and said a lot of things, then he threw me on the bed and punched me in the mouth. He broke my lip. After that I found a job and I told him I was going to start working but he said no. But he didn't have much work to do because at his workplace they didn't want him anymore there because of his drinking. I went to work and I remember very well that first day. I came back home after working all day and I hadn't eaten anything. I was doing some cleaning work and when I served the soup and put it on the table he grabbed it and threw the plate. The hot soup splashed all over on me. The other time (he hit me) he was drunk and fell asleep. I didn't have any food in the house so I took the car and went to buy some food. When I came back, he had woken up and said to me "Where were you?" "I went to buy some food because we don't have anything," I told him. He said, "Why did you take so long?" "Because the place is far," I said. "Give me the car key," he said and I told him, "No, you are drunk, go to sleep." The kids were watching. And I said, "You know what? I'm tired that you are always fighting, fighting, fighting. I'm going out." He said, "You go through that door and I will... I'm going to hit you." And I said to him, "Oh, do you want to hit me again?" He said yes but I didn't believe him. I said, "I better leave with the kids. I'm not going to let the kids keep looking at your insults, yelling, throwing things." When I was going through the kitchen he pushed me against the stove. I got up and told him, "You know what? Move." When I said that he grabbed me and punched hard in the face and I fell. I got up and told him, "You know what? This is the last thing, no more!" I thought, if they deport, it is okay, they can deport me. I'd leave with my children. (Victoria)

The story of Juliana with her boyfriend illustrates many of these intimidating tactics. She went to live with a boyfriend after her relationship with the father of her children had ended. The physical violence started early in their relationship and she tried to leave, but he found her every time. Besides the physical abuse he subjected her, he also intimidated her by threatening to kill her and her oldest child who was living in Honduras. Juliana's story shows that even when battered women seek protection and leave the relationship, they may continue experiencing violence. Furthermore, seeking help may be a factor that triggers an increase of violence.

He said I couldn't leave him because if I did he was going to shoot me and throw me to the sea... that he was going to put cement on my feet so the sharks will eat me... He scared me! I told him many times "if this is going to be like this, it is better that we end the relationship and just leave it like it is." But no, he got in love... No, I don't think he got in love, he had an obsession with me. He said, "You are mine. If you are not mine I'm going to kill you and kill your family. I'm going to Honduras and kill your family." One day he came all drunk and I was with my two neighbors talking outside. Another guy came to say hi and my partner began saying I was flirting with him. He pushed me and I fell from the second floor to the first. I remember I was wearing shorts and a little blouse... when I fell I had the blouse open. My neighbors were afraid and took me inside but when I was there he got inside too and hit me in front of everyone. He grabbed me by the hair and punched me. He was very jealous... At any time he would come to my place and kicked the door until he opened it or he would get inside through the window and hit me. I moved and rented another room but if he would see me at the bar, he would hit me right there. He found out where I was living and got there and hit me again in front of everyone. I moved again and he found out my phone number again... He apologized and said he was going to change and we continued as friends. But when he saw me at the bar he hit me again. I told him that I was moving to Stamford and he grabbed my purse and punched me once again. I ended calling the police. I had everything in my purse and he didn't get it back to me. I got a protective order but he kept bothering me. (Juliana)

Violence continued even when these women sought help from the police and their partners were ordered to leave the house and stay away. Protective orders did not guarantee these women's safety. Like Juliana, Victoria had a protective order against her husband. However, one night he forced his way into her apartment after he learned she had been at a party, and threatened her with killing her. When she escaped, he destroyed everything she had.

I went to a party with his sister and the kids stayed with his mom. I remember that night we went back to my apartment after the party when he got in and says to me "What are you doing? Are you in parties with my sister?" I told him "You don't have the right now to come here, and I'm going to call the police." But his sister asked me not to do it because he would get arrested. And he was looking for a knife and said he was going to kill me. I told her "Let's go, let's go." And I picked up the kids and we went to her apartment. Then the landlord called to tell me that he had called the police because my ex was breaking the apartment. The police officer called me too and told me it was better I did not go to the apartment because it was completely destroyed. I mean, everything I had bought for the children. I was starting a new life, I was stable, I was working, I had a car, I was doing great! The officer asked about the knife, and I told him he had come and wanted to kill me but I had left. He asked me why I didn't call the police and I explained his sister asked me not to do it. I went and when I got in I looked at my apartment... he broke everything, everything, the kids' things, the television, the bed. He made a disaster. I felt like the world came over me and I said "What I'm going to do now? How I'm going to get ahead?" I began to cry alone... The officer asked me to calm down, and says, "I understand, this is very ugly, very ugly." "He had no right to destroy everything," I said. That was a life that I had made for my children. He said sorry and my child just kept thinking, moving his head, his face got all red and said "Mami, he also broke my Xbox." Then the sister said, "I do not understand how he came and destroyed everything if those things were for his children." I said, "Well, I will have to start again." They arrested him. Then the lawyer called and told me he was going to help me to divorce him and he was going to help with a visa. (Victoria)

The story of Monica is another example of when her batterer reached extreme levels of violence in spite of police intervention. Her boyfriend apologized after he had beaten her every time and promised he was going to change and she believed him. His violence increased progressively. Monica ended the relationship for a short time and after she agreed to reestablish it, he beat her to the point of almost killing her. After she was able to escape and sought police help, he kidnapped her and threatened to kill her for having involved the police.

I knew there was something I didn't like. Then it happened... he beat me because he was jealous... He took me by the head and the neck... He was choking me. He was very big and it was difficult for me to (defend myself)... then he apologized and I let it go. But I began to see him more and more jealous... He beat me a lot, every time he beat me a lot... When I slept at his place he hit me, threw things at me, ripped my clothes, threw the food at me... He did a lot of things... and he always apologized. He would say "I won't do it never again, I promise." I would say okay... but the next time was even worse. Every time he hit me he tried to make things better by giving me a present like earrings, a ring, taking me out for dinner or do something nice, anything to compensate for what he had done. I had stopped seeing him for a month because I didn't want more of his abuse. When I got back with him he said "I'm going to change, I promise, I want us to be okay." He called me and cried, he asked me to forgive him and I believed him. I said, he is sorry. I had not seen him and when I saw him he looked skinny... I thought he had changed. Well, the first week was fine, and everything was nice. The second week he started asking me who I had been with the previous month, where I had been... He started again. We started arguing very badly and suddenly he hit me. I said to myself "This is the last time" because the way he hit me... he hit me in the face, threatened me with a knife, he broke several bones in my face, I was bleeding... he left me very badly. He put a knife in the middle of my foot and told me that if I left he was going to kill me. I had just a towel because I was going to shower... then he took a bat from the closet and said he was going to kill me with that bat. With all the things I had gone through I thought he was going to kill me that day. I asked him not to do anything more to me... but he beat me a lot, he hit me on the head, he hit me in my ear and burst my ear drum... He sent me to the hospital. After he beat me, he took me into his car. He had a knife, a bat and a screwdriver. I was in the car. He stopped to buy some food and he wanted us to eat like nothing had happened. My daughter was there too. She was three years... I had my nose broken, he beat me all my face... the mouth, everything inside. Then I saw that a police car parked close to us and I got out of the car, took my daughter and asked the police officer for help. (Monica)

From the police station, Monica called a friend to take her to her home.

I was getting out of my friend's car when he hit me again. He poked me with the screwdriver in my back; he grabbed me by the hair and forced me to get in his car. He said I was going to go back with him because I was his woman. He told me that he was going to kill me because I had reported him to the police. He was driving toward the woods and said he was going to kill me there. I was so nervous, anxious... I almost couldn't see him because from the beating I couldn't open my eyes. The people saw what he did and called the police. The police got him. He is in prison now... He got 7 or 8 years in jail. (Monica)

The stories of Linda and Carmen illustrate the use of physical and sexual violence by batterers when they suspected or learned the women had relationships with other men. In Linda's case, her partner had been ordered to stay away from the house.

I tried to go back with my partner but he tried to rape me because I didn't want to have anything with him. One time he raped me but I didn't say anything to anyone... I don't know, he never hit me, there were pushing, I yell a lot, when I get upset I yell, but he never hit me... But the night he forced me I ended up with bruises all over my body because it was a forced relationship. He threw me from the floor to the bed and from the bed to the floor.... It was very bad... I didn't say anything. He tried to rape me many times but really did it only once. We continued having a lot of problems... One night he came and we started arguing and the police got him out of the house. I told the police officers that I wanted him out of the house because we were fighting a lot. The officer told him to leave and he did. Then one night, I was with my friend. We were kind of dating but that night we were doing nothing. That day we have been at the Zoo with him and my children and other friends... We were very tired and were sleeping when we felt that the door opened and the father of my children was there all naked. I don't know how he got in. It was 3 am. He didn't knock at the door but opened it with a knife. I felt his body next to me, I said "Oh my god!" And he started fighting with my friend. That was the reason I started coming here. We called the police and the officers told him what are you doing here? Because they had taken him out of my house. He was looking for me and calling me "Whore, where are you?"... The children told the police all of that. When the police came they saw the guns, many things broken in the living room, blood because they (my friend and my partner) fought there. I didn't see him with the knife; I don't know what could have happened if he found me and if the police didn't come... I was only able to see his feet while he was walking looking for me... I didn't see he had the knife; it was a kitchen knife. I still ask myself what would have happened to me if the police don't come. He was so furious! The police arrested him and didn't even let him to get dressed. He was naked just with a towel... I don't know what his intentions were...He wanted to have intimacy with me but I didn't want to. (Linda)

He would say to me "Why do you sleep with that? You have to learn to take it off"... I told him "No, I can't. Give me time... I will do it." One night he went out to do something and I thought, "He is right, I should take it off." So I did. He came back, hugs me and said, "Who were you with? Who took your bra off?" and punched me so hard my eye was all black. He took all my clothes, threw me to the floor and said, "Get out of here, bitch, because you were wallowing with someone!" It was a day like now in December. It was snowing. He didn't want me to take the baby with me. He started choking me when his brother came and stopped him. (Carmen)}

After years of physical, sexual and emotional violence, Carmen told her husband she did not want to continue living with him. He asked her if she had another relationship and she said yes. However, she changed her mind and told him that she would not see the other man anymore. One day, this man appeared at her door after she had told him not to look for her again. He got inside and Carmen's husband came home. He believed she was being unfaithful and as a consequence, he beat her, raped her and almost killed her.

The other guy had forgotten his cellphone. When I saw it I put it quickly inside the drawer. I convinced my husband to come with me to bring the boy to school and when we got back he asked me "Where is the cellphone that was there?"... I said, "you know who it belongs to"... He started beating me; he hit my face, dragged me and said, "Why did you do it again?" I said, "What I have done?" He threw me to the bed, hit

me and then apologized. I sat on the bed and then he took my clothes off and raped me vaginally and anally... He took the baby out of the room and I was screaming to let me go and he was raping me. I don't understand how in a situation like this that thing gets erected when the woman is screaming she doesn't want to. I told him so many times I didn't want to and when he finished he said "Now you can call the police so they arrest me for raping you." But he crushed my phone. He had used the money I saved to buy a touch-phone for him. He gave me his phone and said call. But I didn't know how to use those cellphones and I told him that I didn't want to call the police. He put all his clothes and shoes in the car. I went downstairs and I wanted to run but he told me to go up or he was going to beat me right there. I went upstairs and sat at the kitchen table. He came and grabbed one of those big knives and came towards me. He pointed the knife at me many times... like for half an hour I was begging him not to hurt me. I said "Please, I will go with you anywhere you want to go but don't hurt me." The baby was there; she kept telling him "Papi, drop the knife," but he said everything is fine. Then someone knocked at the door and he told me to go to open it and tell that guy to come upstairs because he was going to kill him, kill me and the children and himself. I went but no one was there. I didn't go back upstairs again but I went to my neighbor. I was crying and crying. After all the things he did to me, he beat me, rape me, destroyed my phone, almost kill me with that knife. If it weren't for the Holy Spirit my children wouldn't have a mom... (Carmen)

Lucero was also almost killed by her boyfriend. Her story shows that extreme violence can be a constant in the lives of these women, in a way that resembles the dynamics of violence in human trafficking cases. Although Lucero decided by herself to come to the United States to stay with him, she ended up experiencing daily sexual and physical abuse that she endured due to his intimidation tactics. He told her she would go to jail if she reported him due to her undocumented status. She finally escaped when she felt he was going to kill her.

It is a miracle that I am alive! He tried so many times to choke me.... until I was all purple from the lack of breathing. He had a knife threatening me all the time...I had to bear his drunkenness, the drugs, his friends that would come to get drugged and order women... I would have to stay in the car bearing the cold. I didn't know anyone. I went to the police on December 5th a year later. It was when he was very close to killing me that night, because he gave me a beating with a machete... He used the planed side to hit me in the back and then put the machete on my neck threatening me with chopping off my head. Can you imagine? I thought he was going to kill me that time. He left at the next day and I escaped. I thought I was going to die when he hit me with the flat side of the machete., That machete was so sharp... At that moment I thought if he hits me again and puts the machete straight he is going to crack all my back. I knew the next beating was going to be the last one, that I wouldn't be able to escape because he had come to all the extremes. I knew the next time would be my last one. I said to myself "Next time he is going to kill me." It was a Saturday, December 5th, I said tomorrow that is Sunday he is going to do it because there was not a day he didn't beat me. I got walking to the police station, they took me some pictures, I gave them evidence... the machete, the little knife, the pornography... because he forced me to do everything he saw in those pornographic movies... It is horrible, frightening. (Lucero)

## **The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence**

The stories reported by these women show the enormous impact that intimate partner violence has had on the lives of these women and their children. For each of these women, the effects of the violence range from symptoms of chronic stress such as body aches to posttraumatic stress symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares. Moreover, intimate partner violence has directly affected the physical and sexual health of these women, as well as their own sense of safety, or lack of it, and the emotional wellbeing of their children.

For Liliana, for instance, the impact of intimate partner violence affects many aspects of her life. She feels sad for having experienced the abuse, and she still lives in permanent fear of experiencing an attack. She experiences physical pain in her body and she attributes being separated from her daughter as a consequence of her husband's violence.

I feel very sad because I stayed in that relationship for so many years. I never experienced yelling, mistreatment, abuse in my life before. My daughter left the house because of so much abuse but I never lost communication with her. She said she would never come back home again to live with me because she was always the one that tried to stop him. My youngest is quieter but she ended breaking up with her boyfriend because he couldn't bear the abuse from my husband. My life has changed a lot because I made a mistake, the mistake of not getting to know people better. All of this is very painful. I wish this didn't happen to me especially at this moment of my life. I have been sick for some time. The doctors said I have fibromyalgia and the problems have made my nervous system very sensitive. My body hurts a lot and I can't work at the same pace as before. I'm very scared. The other day, my counselor told me to make sure that all the doors are locked and also that there is not any fuel in the house because he could be able to burn the house with me inside. When I go to the house, I let my neighbor know in case she hears anything. For six months, I was brave and stayed at my house, but when my daughter got this job in Stamford, it was very difficult for her to come every night to stay with me. I'm very afraid. I'm scared. I never feared anything and I try not to show my daughters how afraid I am, but there are moments that I say, I fear for my life. (Liliana)

Susana's story also illustrates the emotional effects of experiencing intimate partner violence on a daily basis.

I feel very anxious now, but only when he is in the house... When he is not, I'm calm. When I realize it is almost time for him to get home, I start feeling nervous because I feel that at any time he is going to scream at me, to insult me. I have been very afraid of what he is going to do when I tell him that I'm going to leave him. (Susana)

As a consequence of the physical attack that Monica experienced, she almost lost one of her eyes. She worries constantly about her and her family's well-being due her boyfriend's threats.

Then, since you are living in violence, you believe what you are told. "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to cut your face." One says yes, he is going to do that... if he is doing this to me right now and he says he loves me. I thought that he was going to do something to my parents. I called them many times to ask if they were okay because it was so real everything he said. I got scared. He put that in my mind... I thought he really was going to do something to my family and kill me. He swore he was going to do that. He beat me a lot but every time he would ask for forgiveness until the last time when he almost killed me... I almost lost my eye. My eye was like a ball of blood. I thought I was going to lose it. He broke the bones of my eye. I stayed in the hospital for one day. They checked me, did a CT scan, and gave me medicine for the pain and infection. I recovered little by little. I think they are not going to let him free with all the charges he has and if he does, I won't be here. I am sure he is going to do something against me and I am very afraid. And I am very afraid for my family too. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. (Monica)

Lucero and Marina were sexually abused by their partners in addition to being physically and emotionally battered. Both have experienced symptoms of posttraumatic stress and impairments in their sexual life.

My morale got to the floor. I didn't value myself... I was doing very badly. That has affected me so much... I am a woman who is not sexually active. I got pregnant and didn't know until I have seven months of pregnancy. I didn't know that I was pregnant. I can't trust anyone...I felt traumatized for about five months, I couldn't sleep... every night I had so many nightmares. Every night I would close my eyes and I would see him. It is horrible! I could be deeply asleep and I'd have nightmares of him raping me and beating me... I woke up screaming. It is horrible. He was in prison for more than a year and then he was deported. I have constant headaches, pain in my waist, cramps, pain when urinating, painful bowel movements. I was very badly and the hospital bill was so high too, \$8,000 dollars...The court hearing was terrible. It happened when I was feeling better and had a normal life, working... But seeing him brought all the memories. I became hysterical and couldn't contain myself, I became very nervous, I was shaking...The court advocate was there with me and told me not to worry because he couldn't do anything to me. But I went through much suffering... The judge told him he was going to be deported and he said he was guilty of all those things he did to me. (Lucero)

Marina began a new intimate relationship after she immigrated to the United States. The violence she experienced with the father of her children in Honduras still affects her life with her current husband.

The thing is that sometimes I do not want him to touch me and when he wants to have sex I say no, do not touch me ... but I told him all my life, and he said now I understand why you are like that with me. He talked with the psychologist and she explained to him why I am like that, because sometimes at night I get scared. Sometimes when I'm asleep and he touches me I get scared. (Marina)

Another serious effect of intimate partner violence is related to the children. The stories show that children not only witness of the violence, but are both direct and indirect recipients of it. Leticia's children were severely affected because of the violence. Her oldest son was abused physically and emotionally by his stepfather for approximately ten years and as he grew older, he abused drugs, dropped

out of school and became involved with the juvenile justice system. Her two younger children also experienced the indirect emotional impact from the violence she experienced with her husband.

My son got into drugs because of that situation. He dropped out of school.... that was another problem I had. I had to deal with that and I'm still doing so. Last Sunday he was arrested again, he has been arrested three times since last year. He was with a kid who is 16 but my son is already 18 and they passed into private property and he was arrested as an adult. He was the most affected with all the problems we went through. For his stepfather he was the worst, he wasn't good for anything, he was like trash. And my son believed what my husband told him. My youngest son also had problems because he started saying he wanted to die. When he was just 6 he said, "I don't want to live" and took a knife and put it in his chest. I was in the dining room and my daughter started yelling "Mami, Julian has a knife!" And I run to him and took the knife from him. He was always saying that he was going to kill himself; that he was going to open a window and throw himself down... I had to block the windows so well and I had to bring the kids to therapy... My daughter also started to be violent towards me, pushing me, yelling at me, telling me that she hated me, that she didn't love me, that she hated this life.... that she wanted his father back home. It was a lot. (Leticia)

After Patricia ended the relationship with the father of her baby and was able to be safe from his violence, the baby became the direct victim of it.

He would take the boy on the weekends and one time he brought him back all beaten. I was scared and took him to the hospital. He didn't tell me anything about what happened. I was told in the hospital that my baby had his skull fractured and also a fractured rib. (Patricia)

Victoria's children witnessed the violence by their father toward her and as a result they also experienced emotional consequences. She and the children began attending family therapy.

My oldest said he was afraid. The little one was traumatized. If you say "police", he gets scared, anxious. Or if someone yells, he gets quiet like he would like to hide. A friend of mine told me "For everything you and your children have gone through, your children feel bad and are traumatized." She said, "You know what you have to do? You have to go to see a counselor, a therapist for the three of you." And I went and we are still there. We are still seeing a counselor who gives therapy to the three of us. The first time we went there we were crying, the three of us started crying and little by little we have been talking and everything is going well. The children said everything they have gone through and what they felt. The counselor asked my little one why he was afraid and he said, "I'm afraid of many things, because when that lady took the car from my mom, she hit her too. My daddy destroyed our apartment and I don't want to see the police again." (Victoria)

### **Living the in the Shadows**

The intimidation used by these batterers is effective in part because it takes place within a generalized hostile environment that blames poor Latin American immigrants of stealing "American" jobs,



impoverishing “American” cities and breaking the law. From the moment they arrived in the United States, these Latina women perceived that they could not access support from the police or other social services due to their undocumented status without risking being arrested and separated from their children. The option left to them was to live in the shadows, being undetected in the streets, especially from the police. Their lack of information about the rights they have in this country and the social and legal benefits they may be eligible for greatly contribute to this perception. As a result, they became more vulnerable to experience abuse from their partners but also from others such as employers and neighbors. Marina’s story illustrates both the fear of detection and the social isolation.

When I arrived here, my mom kept saying to me that we had to walk carefully, because if immigration caught us they were going to send us back. She kept saying we couldn’t work because we were illegal and that fear of going outside. For that reason I wouldn’t go out. I was afraid something could happen to me... and I was scared when I saw cops ... I said, please God, don’t let them catch me because I did not want to go back to my country... It is very difficult because of all the laws. People said they were going to get us all and send us back to our countries. I didn’t go out too much, I would spend time inside the house with the fear of being caught. (Marina)

The belief that immigrants with undocumented status cannot access any type of services and could be deported to their countries of origin without their children is not only emphasized by batterers but also by family members and the immigrant community in general. This perception is supported by actual events, such as the one described in the preamble of this document, and other incidents that have happened in the country in which Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) has raided workplaces or arrested people after being detained by the police for reasons such as driving violations or police profiling. The fear of authorities for living illegally in this country permeated the daily lives of these women, even in their dreams.

One time I had a dream about immigration arresting me. It was around the time when immigration was around... I was afraid that they would only arrest me, without my daughters... It is okay if they would do send me back to Mexico with my daughters. For some time, people said immigration was around this area but every morning I cross myself and ask God to take care of me. I always say, “Whatever God says.” If that get to happen I just ask that they send me back with my daughters. I will be fine because I’d see my mom too. (Susana)

The narratives of Victoria and Carmen illustrate their beliefs of not being allowed to access services because of their undocumented status, as well as other people’s advice against getting the police involved

and reports of other immigrants being deported. Victoria's story shows that her neighbor was afraid she could call the police because they, as Victoria, did not have documents either.

Who was going to help me here? I am an illegal and we don't get help of any kind. I thought I couldn't get help because I was an illegal. I heard that they would send women like me to Mexico and I was worried for what could happen to my child. During that time I heard that people were being deported and have the children taken away. His mom told me not to call the police again because they were going to take my son... The lady that lived in the same building asked me what happened to me and I lied to her, I said I had fallen in the stairs. She said, "Are you sure?" and I said yes, I said to her that I fell when trying to get upstairs with the kid and the bag. She then told me that I should be careful because here it is risky and they didn't have papers; but she never explained to me that perhaps I could get some help and was not going to get deported if I called the police. I was very afraid; that's why I endured the situation. (Victoria)

I didn't call the police because I didn't know. I was scared that they will arrest me too and send me to jail because no one had told me that if I had suffered something like it (violence) I could get papers. I thought I would be arrested because I'm an illegal. I didn't have any papers and what was going to happen to my children? Since I heard that immigration separate families apart and send the parents to their home country but the children stay here. I was scared of that. (Carmen)

Furthermore, public policies that limit the rights of immigrants with undocumented status create a social context that makes them vulnerable to other types of abuse and exploitation. For instance, immigrants with undocumented status may ask, when possible, legal residents transact legal issues such as obtaining driver licenses and car insurances, which may open the door for experiencing abuses. The story of Victoria is very telling. After being able to save enough money for a car so she could go to work and take her children to school, a neighbor offered to get the car insurance and title in her name. Victoria paid this person for the insurance, but she never insured the car and at the end called the police to take the car from Victoria.

I remember the day the lady that took my car from me she hit me in front of my children. She hit me and said I was an illegal and she was going to take the car from me because she had it in her name. I was paying her \$130 monthly for the insurance, but the police stopped me and told me that the car had no insurance or registration and they removed the plate. I told her about it and she got upset. She said, "You don't yell at me! You don't have papers and if I wish I can take it from you." I paid her again to insure the car but she came back one day and hit me and told me that she could take the car from me and was going to call the police because I didn't have papers. The children were screaming. The next day, when I went to the laundry, a police officer came and said "That car is not yours" and I said, "How is that if I paid for it?" He said, "You know that the owner is that lady" and my oldest child told the police officer "That lady has insured my mom's car and my mom has worked very hard to buy that car. My mom bought it out of necessity because I go to school and my school is walking distance and it is very cold now." The police officer said "But she showed me the title in her name." I was so angry because before that happened she called me privately to tell me she didn't want problems but I should give her the car or she would send me

to Mexico. I said why are you going to send me to Mexico?" "Because you do not have papers, you are an illegal, you have nothing. I can send you to Mexico, Do not cause trouble." When the police arrived I said yes, I could not fight ... had no papers or license. "Here are the keys," I told the police with great courage and crying. The world came over me ... I lost my job and could not do anything because many people told me that I had no papers and couldn't fight for it because I was illegal.

### Police Responses to Intimate Partner Violence

In regard to the actual responses that these battered immigrant women with undocumented status had from the police, their stories show that the quality of intervention by the police is a crucial factor in determining whether the violence ends or persists. There was police involvement in nine of the cases. In the majority of these cases, the women themselves sought police help in intimate partner violence situations. In two cases, other stakeholders (hospital personnel, school worker) were the ones who called the police to report that these women were victims of intimate partner violence. In one case, the police became involved not as result of intimate partner violence but because of child maltreatment. None of these women reported having problems communicating with the police because they spoke English or because officers spoke Spanish.

The stories of Liliana and Lucero provide examples of situations where battered immigrant women found that the police did not represent a threat to their safety in spite of their undocumented migratory status. To the contrary, in these instances the police protected them and worked to keep their batterers away.

Starting with the police, everyone has been good to me. It took only two minutes for the police to come after I called. They didn't speak Spanish but they were so kind to me, and they helped me psychologically. They were so professional. Sometimes people say that because one is Hispanic the police treat us differently, but that didn't happen to me. I was always afraid of the police, I didn't know what to expect. But I passed the test the first time I called them and then, every time they had to come to check on me when the GPS system alarm went off. I felt they were protecting me. But now since he is not being monitored, he started abusing me again. I know the police can't protect me all the time. I have to do it. Something I never forget is my cellphone because I know that if I need it I can call 911 and they will be there. (Liliana)

I still remember the police officer that talked with me. He is a great person, he helped me... I couldn't believe he had been arrested. I couldn't believe it! They took me to the hospital and then when I was released they told me he was already in the police station. I couldn't believe it. It is like when you have been carrying a heavy bag on your back forever and then someone removes it... I told them I was illegal and I didn't have papers. They asked why I haven't reported what was happening and I explained it was

because of my papers, because he told me so many lies that I was scared you would just arrest me and deported me and he would stay free. They just looked at each other... The police also told me that I could get my papers... and I said how is that? I don't know anything about it. The police explained to me that I was going to go to court and that I could get help there because they saw all the things I had to go through... at the hospital they saw that I was so beaten up. They tested me for everything.... a complete scan, x-rays, tests for HIV, any sexual transmitted disease and pregnancy, medicine, I was there for one day and the police officers pick me up at night... The police helped me a lot. The brought me here, waited for me, explained everything. They told the doctors what I needed. I don't know what because they spoke in English (Lucero)

Nevertheless, a few of the other women's stories indicate that the experiences with the police are not always positive. These stories show that sometimes police failed to make an assessment of the danger that the batterer represented which consequently put the woman in even more danger. The first time that Victoria called the police she was told by the police officer she should not be calling them because she did not have documents and could be deported. On that occasion, the police officer did not provide her with any information about resources available for intimate partner violence cases that could have been helpful to her. As a result, she and her children continued being victimized by her husband's violence for many more years. She called the police two years later. This second time, the police officer arrested him and gave Victoria information she had not received before.

When the police officer came he said, "You know you don't have papers, you are illegal and I can deport the two of you back to Mexico. If you call again, I will deport you. How many children do you have?" he asked. And I got so scared; I thought they were going to take my children from me. And I said, "I have one." "Look," he said, "the best thing you can do is not to call again and look for problems because you are immigrants and they can deport you." My oldest child was six and the youngest one was two. I was afraid and told the police it was okay. The police officer left and then I tolerated the same situation and his abuse and bad language was pure, pure profanity. I never called the police again because what the officer told me. I said, and now what can I do? And with no papers... I said I would have to tolerate everything he says to me because I can get deported. (Victoria)

The second time I called was very different. The police officer said to me, "You know that you can get help. Why haven't you called?" I told him what happened the first time I called the police and he got very upset. He asked for the other officer's name but I didn't know it. He asked me, "And you didn't call again?" I told him that I was afraid and he said I shouldn't be. He told me I could receive help because of the things he did to me. He said that what my ex did was not right especially in front of the kids. The officer told me, "Look, I'm going to give you this paper. It's called domestic violence. They are going to help you a lot." He spoke Spanish. And I asked him, "But are they going to do something to me? Are they going to take the kids from me?" He said, "Don't be afraid, they are not going to take the children from you. They are yours." He told me several times to call. That night I felt like things were going to be different in my life, that my life was going to change. From that moment on, I thought, there will not be alcohol in my house or bottles anywhere, no one will be yelling at me. I'm going to get back home calmly with the desire of coming back. But it hurt because of the children. (Victoria)

Carmen went to the police station when she suspected her husband was going to physically attack her. The police told her that they could not help her because it was not an emergency. She called again after she experienced an episode of violence. When the police came, the officers only asked her husband to leave and come back when he felt calmed down. They did not arrest him nor did they call child protective services even though the children were present. She also did not receive any information about resources such as the domestic violence program.

Two days later both of us went to downtown and guess who was there? My lover was waiting for us, I don't know how. I said, "Oh, my God, what I'm going to do?" We paid that money and when we came out he approached us and said to my ex-husband "I want to talk to you." I didn't know what the best thing to do was. They started arguing and fighting. I took my children and left, began walking towards the police station. I told the police officer please to help me because my ex-husband was going to kill me and I was very scared. He said he couldn't do anything, that I should go home and call them when he beat me. I told him that I was very scared and wanted someone to come with me, but he said that they couldn't do anything, only if it was an emergency call to 911. They closed the doors to me. When I got home with my children he was there and he was furious. He asked me for a check that the bank had given us after the house was foreclosed; they gave us \$2000 to help us move. He asked me for the check and I said no. And again, he started calling bitch and saying if you don't give me that money I'm going to kill you. I grabbed the phone and called 911. They came but they never said to me I could go to a shelter because I was in danger. They told him to leave and come back when he was calmed. They never asked what was going on, neither they said anything about the children. The only thing they did was to tell my ex-husband to leave and come back later when he feel calmed. (Carmen)

After that episode, Carmen's husband continued abusing her physically, emotional and sexually to the extreme of almost killing her, as described previously. Immediately after that event, Carmen and her husband took one of the children to an appointment with a therapist. The therapist called the police after she disclosed to the therapist what had happened.

The therapist came and asked me why I was crying. When she asked me that I started a sea of tears. She told me if I wanted to talk to her and I said yes. He came after us but I don't know how I had the courage to tell the therapist that I didn't want in front of him. It was then when they called the police and they arrested him. (Carmen)

It was apparent that police officer response might vary depending upon the police department. Some police departments may be very well trained in the dynamics of intimate partner violence while others may lack understanding how dangerous intimate partner violence could become. Monica's story

illustrates this point. In just a few hours, she interacted with two different police departments. From her story, which I described on page 49, it can be deduced that during her first contact with the police the danger of her situation was not completely assessed. She approached a police officer immediately after a very extreme episode of violence with her partner. He had beaten her with a bat on the head, face, and body; she had been bleeding, her eye was bruised, and she had her 2 year-old daughter with her. She was in his car in a parking lot while he had gone to buy some food. She saw the police officer and left the car with her daughter. She was able to escape from him with the help of officers from the first police department, and they filed a report with Monica's description of the physical violence she endured. However, even though the signs and consequences of the violence were evident she was not taken to the hospital. She did not receive any type of information about services available to help her nor did they call DCF to report the risk of injury to a minor. It is unclear whether the police officers from this department explained to her the level of danger she was in and the need for her to go to a place where he could not find her such as domestic violence shelter. She left that police station with the help of friend who was taking her to her house where her partner found her again and abducted her along with her daughter. The lack of a comprehensive danger assessment made her more vulnerable to her partner's violence to the point of being abducted and almost killed. She was rescued by officers from a different police department.

After he beat me, he took me into his car. That happened in Meriden. He had a knife, a bat and a screwdriver. I was in the car. He stopped to buy some food and he wanted us to eat like nothing had happened. My daughter was there too. She was three years... I had my nose broken, he beat me all my face... the mouth, everything inside. Then I saw that a police car parked closed to us and I got out of the car, took my daughter and asked the police officer for help. He was in the restaurant. When he saw that I was talking to the police he flew and escaped. The police officers took me to the police station, took me pictures, made a report. I was there in the police station and they only took me pictures and made the report. But they didn't call anyone. They didn't give me anything. I came to Waterbury and it was the Waterbury police that helped me... When they got him they called the ambulance because they saw how I was... My daughter was there and she saw everything. At the hospital they checked me... I almost lost my eye. My eye was like a ball of blood. I thought I was going to lose it. He broke the bones of my eye.  
(Monica)

### Lack of Information

A theme that continued appearing throughout these interviews was the lack of information the women have about their rights to report intimate partner violence, the social services available to women

experiencing it, and the potential legal benefits for immigrant battered women. For instance, none of these women knew about the existence of programs that provide services in intimate partner violence situations. They learned about the domestic violence programs through the police, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or through other sources such as attorneys and school workers. During the interviews, it was clear that these women's lack of accurate information is a crucial factor in the continuation of the violence.

There are so many women like me because we lack information. If I would know about the domestic violence program and what the counselors do, I wouldn't have waited so long. I didn't know what the program was about. I didn't really know how they could help me because in my country there is help but I didn't imagine that starting with the police. Everybody was going to help me. (Liliana)

Because of this lack of information about how the system works here in the United States, immigrant women find themselves in situations they have not expected. One day Leticia received a phone call from a social worker and she accepted to see her the next day. After she disclosed the situation she was facing to the worker, this person called the police even though Leticia did not want their involvement.

But I wanted to leave that place because I was very afraid; I didn't know how things worked. She said, "I'm sorry but I can't let you go and I have to report this situation." I begged her not to do it. She told me that the situation had to change... and that little room was filled with police officers, DCF. The police took pictures. I didn't know things were like that... Everyone was talking to me and meanwhile, the police went to look for him. (Leticia)

Carmen's story speaks to missed opportunities that providers of social services had for helping battered immigrant women with undocumented status. Carmen talked about encounters with her children's school workers, doctors, bosses, therapists, but none of them talked to her about intimate partner violence or services that she could access. Perhaps these stakeholders did not know about risk factors for intimate partner violence or available services, suggesting opportunity need for domestic violence programs to educate providers to be able of reaching out to this population. Likewise, her narrative illustrates the importance of providing information about the existent social benefits that can help these women be less dependent economically on their partners.

I didn't know that there was an option and support for us. If I had known that I wouldn't have had all my children. I don't reject them, but I would have had only my two daughters. If someone had told me "Look, here there is this and this is the way how you do it, get out of there, you can work, you can overcome this,

here there are food stamps and cash that will help you, the police will help you, there are apartments where you can go and live, here you can access WIC.” No one told me about that. I was enclosed in my world completely. From my job to the house. From a doctor's appointment with my children to the house again. I talked to no one. I didn't find help and I was with my eye all bruised. I didn't know who could help, where I could go... I didn't know anything. I did go to get food from a church but no one asked me if I was doing fine in my relationship. Not even my own boss. In the train no one said anything to me. I went to hospitals when I was going to give birth and no one talked to me about it or that I was experiencing physical and emotional violence. Nothing. No one, no nurses, doctors, police officers.... no one. I looked for some speech therapy for my children and they didn't tell me anything either... There was no a pamphlet, a card, anything with information. When my ex-husband tried to kill me, I didn't even know what a shelter was. (Carmen)

The story of Carmen also speaks to the need to use terms and language that these women can understand and make sure they really do. Her story shows that it is not only about translating into Spanish the messages we hear in English; even when women receive messages in their language, this is not a guarantee that they understand the meaning of the messages. Carmen, for instance, did not understand what people meant when they said “legal” and “sexual assault/asalto sexual”.

But that December 3rd when the violence happened with my ex-husband, the police gave a little paper that I still have. The paper says Chrysalis sexual assault, but I never read it to find out. I don't remember if it was in English or Spanish. But I also had the number of Chrysalis, the number for a lawyer, and Chrysalis the shelter. They just said call this person to make an appointment with a legal attorney. But, legal for what? They never told me that it was so I can get help. They never said they would help me with shelter, food, they never said anything like that. They never said I was going to be safe. If they had said that, I would not have called the lover, I would not have gotten pregnant. One sexual assault advocate came to the hospital and left a pamphlet but in English. I didn't know what they were talking about because I didn't understand any English... I got a pamphlet about sexual assault but what is sexual assault? I had not heard those words in my life. (Carmen)

This study cannot determine whether it was Carmen's low educational level, her language barriers, her cultural beliefs about sexual assault within the relationship, or the impact of trauma that impeded her understanding of the information given to her. Perhaps all of these factors contributed to her lack of understanding. What is clear is that after that episode of violence with her husband Carmen did not reach out to programs for domestic violence and sexual assault because she did not understand the messages that the sexual assault advocate and the police gave her at that time. Instead she went through a time of extreme poverty and became pregnant after her new boyfriend convinced her that he would be responsible for her well-being. She finally called the domestic violence program many months later. At that time, the advocate explained in detail the social services and legal benefits Carmen could access. She recounts that



time as the moment when her life started to change.

One day, my mom's husband came with a paper that said Wallingford-Meriden Chrysalis... I called and made an appointment. I am thankful to that lady, I will never forget her... She sat with me and explained all the services I could get. She told me they were going to give shelter and food to my children and me; that my children were going to be safe. Then she said when you are in the shelter we are going to help you to get an apartment, your papers and go to court. She explained to me how things were and what I have to do. At last, I have someone to explain carefully, with details everything, every service. She said we are Chrysalis, these are the attorneys and this is the help we can give you. She said that the only thing I needed was a fund and I said I have it. I had \$700 from the food I sold and with that I paid my TLP where I lived almost a year and a half. This lady then sent us to a shelter in Norwalk and that was like a mansion for us. They gave us a bed for each of us, a bathroom only for us! The food was shared. From that moment our lives changed. They took us to an amusement park, coco-keys... but I told this lady that I wanted to come back to Meriden to have my baby here. I didn't want to have the baby anywhere else because my mom would be able to take care of the rest of my children when I am in the hospital. She understood and helped me a lot. I had to come from Norwalk to Meriden sometimes to sign the documents for the TLP (transitional living program) and I had such a big belly by then. It has hot (summer) and my children would ask for food or something to drink but I didn't touch that money. We would go to the bathrooms and drink from the water there (in the toilet). That hurts a lot because my children suffered a lot. We would come here to Chrysalis to sign the papers and then go to my mom's and stay there for the night. The next day we would take the train for Norwalk and they would receive us with open arms. We stayed there for two months. When I came here to the TLP my life changed, I was paying \$140. We lived there very well. (Carmen)

As Carmen's story shows, domestic violence programs played a crucial role in the lives of these women. However, they learned about the services available to them only after the violence reached dangerous levels and the police or other authorities became involved. The majority of them called the domestic violence program because they were told to do so by the police or by DCF. In only two cases, the referral source was different; Marina was referred by her immigration lawyer and Susana was referred by a school social worker.

I came here through the police... they sent me here; they forced me to come. DCF also got involved in my case because my children saw what happened. DCF forced me to come here but I like it. They told me I have to come... that I had to call and make an appointment. (Linda)

DCF sent me here. I stopped coming for a while but it has been like a year coming frequently. I was working and couldn't come before. It's good to come. I come to English classes and that's good. (Leticia)

It is important to note that the women that participated in this study were only recruited through the local domestic violence programs. They were women that were attending support groups, English classes or

had a trusting relationship with the advocate and, in that sense they were positive cases for these programs. Every story collected shows that the domestic violence advocates helped women emotionally and with basic needs such as shelter. Some of them also were able to access services that helped them to obtain stability in their lives such as transitional living programs (TLP), as Carmen's story showed.

The domestic violence program opened the doors to help me the first time I called. I think that if it hasn't been for them, I don't know where I could be. (Liliana)

The advocate here gave me many tokens for the bus and a \$50 card to buy food... She helped me so much. I started coming here to talk with her. She gave me a lot of advice; she has been working in this for so many years. But it took me long time to feel a little better. I had a lot of trauma from what I experienced and took me long time to recover. (Lucero)

When I told the police about the abuse they told me to come here. The program has helped me a lot.... When I started coming, at the beginning, I was very sad, I was feeling very bad, I didn't have desires for anything. But I have moved forward, I see life different, I feel well now. I like coming here; it helps me a lot. I come to the support group. (Patricia)

Now I know that I am a woman with rights, a person that is not perfect but I'm not a bitch or a prostitute. I am a woman like any other... I am mother and father for my children. (Carmen)

My children are very happy because they did very well this year. The domestic violence program gave them a lot of presents, toys and a Christmas tree. For three years we couldn't buy a Christmas tree and this year we had one, a big one. We didn't have money for the ornaments, and the domestic violence program gave them to us. They had their presents...they couldn't wait for the moment to open them up. They were so happy! The advocates helped me to get the divorce and gave me the papers and a work permit; it is something I never expected. Their advice... I would come here to vent, I was depressed. I would ask and they would tell me this way or that way. I bothered them so much! I said to them "I don't have a job, what I'm going to do? If I get a job, I have to walk so far, what I'm going to do?" and the advocates here were always looking for work for me nearby, and yes, I got a job and I'm saving to buy a little car. I'm now taking driving classes so I can have a license. People are surprised! (Victoria)

The domestic violence advocates provided these women with information regarding the potential legal benefits they qualified for and connected them with legal services that helped them process, and obtain in some cases, a U-Visa or a VAWA visa. As indicated in the demographic information, four women still have an undocumented migratory status, two had obtained U-Visas and four more were waiting to get their visa approval, two for U-Visa and two for VAWA. One of them had been granted asylum relief which enabled her to get a social security number and work legally.

There are several reasons why the women that continued to have an undocumented status had not sought some type of immigration relief. Susana, for instance, never called the police when her husband abused her physically and for that reason she was not considered a victim. The U-Visa, which would be the one that applies to her given her husband's undocumented status, requires that victims of crime collaborate with the criminal and justice system. Juliana, who could also be eligible for a U-Visa, had not been able to start the process due to economic reasons. Although the cost associated with the visa application is low, sometimes it is still too much for poor immigrant women. Patricia was not able to file for a VAWA self-petition because she was not married to the father of her baby, who is a legal resident. She did not call the police to report the violence when she was experiencing it and didn't have the means to prove she had experienced it. Linda did not want to file for a VAWA because she felt that she was the one to blame for the violence and that by applying for it she would be doing something wrong against the father of her children.

When I had those problems with the father of my children, the counselor advised me to submit the papers, but I didn't do it. I don't know why, I'm stupid. It has been four years since that happened. I tried to do it not long ago but I couldn't find the police record. I went to court to ask for the record but they didn't want to give it to me... The attorney can't do anything without those papers. The attorney told me that he had cleaned his record and his name is clean. Perhaps he went to classes, I don't know what he did but he cleaned his record. The attorney may be able to do something if I find the police record... The time to do something was when he was going to court... I could have at least a work permit. But I didn't do. The counselor told me to do it but I didn't do because I blamed myself for what was happening. I felt that he came home and found me with another person so I was the one to blame. I felt that doing it (applying for legal remedy) was not right. But then, I saw and still see how he behaves... what he does... he doesn't deserve... I thought that applying for the visa was going to affect him, although my counselor told me that it doesn't. I thought how I was going to do that to him if he had not beaten me... I just looked for excuses for not doing it. Now that I re-think things and I see how they are and that he doesn't deserve anything... I can't. I have made mistakes but I haven't been a bad person... Good things will come. I have a child who is almost 13 and he will help me. (Linda)

Interestingly, although Victoria is one of these women that obtained a U-Visa, she described that she did not file for it immediately but she waited some time to see if her husband would change and gave him another opportunity. After he destroyed her apartment, she was convinced he would not change and then she decided to apply for the U-Visa. Her story shows that although women want to live safe and free of violence, even if that means ending their relationship with their partners, they may not want to do

anything that could lead to their partner's deportation. They may prefer to pay the price of remaining with an undocumented status and what that involves instead of obstructing their partners' intentions of residing in the United States.

When I was coming here (to the domestic violence program), before he destroyed my apartment, I said I wanted to give him an opportunity to see if he would change and if he wouldn't do it, I was going to ask for help for my visa. Then, when he went in to my apartment and destroyed everything, I said I think I don't have any hope, I think it is better to move forward by myself. Now, I said, I'm going to be capable and I have to be capable to move forward with my two sons in any case. I called here (domestic violence program), I came and they helped me to get the divorce and everything. He was deported. The lawyer told me shortly after that I was already divorced. He came to the court many times and then he told me he had been deported. I felt like... I never wanted that for him, but the damage he did to me does not compare to what I've done to him, I told him. I'd suffered a lot because of him... (Victoria)

Obtaining a legal status through the U-Visa or VAWA self-petitioning process opens up a whole new life for these women. Having a documented status means that they can work without the fear of getting arrested by the ICE , and they do not have to accept shameful working conditions. Being able to work signifies that they will be able to provide a safe and stable home for their children. Getting a lawful status also means that they can report crimes and abuses to the police, and access social benefits including healthcare, and travel abroad in the future to reunite with their family or just to travel.

I got my visa almost a year, but I thank God that now with that document I can work and go ahead in life. But I feel alone and one is masochist, I miss... sometimes one feels alone without a man, sometimes I wish that the father of my children were back... He is in Ecuador. He was deported like 10 months ago and he already has a woman and made his life. I also want to make my life but with a man that understands me. In that process they divorced me and I was given the parental rights for my children, a protective order for life and an order for child support for him. He can't talk to me by letters or phone calls. That happened to me. And now, I have what I have thanks to me. One day I told my advocate "Thanks to you I have what I have now" and she said "No, thanks to you because you made the effort." Sometimes I start thinking that she is right because one time when I was in the Norwalk shelter, a woman came with her head so swollen, she was from Mexico, and got back with him later. He left for Mexico and now she doesn't have papers. (Carmen)

I went through so much that I said, I don't know why, God is so great that maybe I will have a nice ending. And look, at the end I got my papers. I thank to all the people that helped me and did something for me because at the end I had a reward and now I can move forward with my children. I tell my children, now I'm going to work and we can take a vacation later, we are going to go where we were never able to go. Nobody is going to threaten us with the police, I say all of that to them. They are so happy! I work only 8 hours a day and don't have pressure for anything. I leave work at a nice time, pick my children from school, make dinner and stay with them at night. I don't need to work two jobs at night now. I could, but I don't want to because I don't want to neglect them, we went through so much already... Everything is

different now. We are going to get ahead in life... In a year, if God wishes, we are going to Mexico for a vacation. They are very happy because everything changed. Nothing is going to happen to us now. Nothing, nothing. That is forgotten, I said to them, what happened, happened. From here now, there will no more suffering. (Victoria)

## DISCUSSION

This qualitative research study was designed to gain a better understanding of intimate partner violence experiences faced by Latina immigrant women with undocumented status. There have been previous studies addressing diverse aspects related to intimate partner violence in the Latina community and in the immigrant community. However, this study specifically sought to increase the knowledge about the experiences of intimate partner violence among Latina women with an undocumented migratory status. This study examined women's reasons for migrating, their experiences during the migration journey, and their experiences with intimate partner violence after they arrived in the United States.

In-depth interviews conducted with 11 Latina women with undocumented status in Connecticut show that these women migrated to the United States primarily to find opportunities for a better life and to escape from a life of poverty. They were looking for the "American Dream" and in some cases, seeking personal safety. Similarly to the findings by Diaz et al. (2007) and Larraitz et al. (2012), one of the main motivations these women had was to obtain better paying jobs to send back money to their families to cover for basic needs and provide better conditions for their children. Some of these women left their children behind in the care of others, suffering the high cost of separating from them. Latin American women also decide to migrate for reasons related to their condition as women, specifically escaping from gender-based violence such as intimate partner violence.

Although a couple of the women came to the United States with a tourist visa and stayed after their visa expired, the majority came crossing the Mexico-United States border. The stories collected for this study show that these women are typically naive about the potential dangers they might experience during their journey to the United States, but even when they do know, they are so motivated that they might make several attempts to enter the United States. The life-threatening situations they faced included rapes, being robbed, extortion, abuses by the police, accidents, diseases, physical exhaustion and dehydration

among others. As Jimenez (2009) and Pickering (2012) have indicated, women and children face a higher risk of death during this journey since they are more likely to be left behind if they cannot keep up. The findings of this study show that the risks associated with the journey increase or decrease depending on factors such as how much the women can pay for their transit, when they made the trip, and how far they had to travel. The non-Mexican women especially faced several risks in their attempt to cross several different countries, including in Mexico at the hands of the coyotes and the Mexican police. Even when women in this study weren't direct victims of violence during their journey, the conditions of their travel were appalling and they were witness to the hardships and tragedies of other migrants as they moved North. For some of them, there was help from their fellow travelers, human rights organizations and random individuals in the countries they travelled through. These particular risks of Latin American migrants have been previously reported. The *Invisible Victims* by Amnesty International (2010) documented many cases of abuse of Central American migrants by the Mexican police, including unlawful restraint, robbery, beating, rape and conspiring to kidnap. According to this report, human rights organizations and health professionals working with migrants estimate that six in ten migrant women and girls are raped.

Crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border has also become harder since 2001 for migrants as consequence of the United States immigration enforcement policies that have focused on making the border inaccessible by building walls and increasing police presence. The narratives in this study attest to very dangerous risks to their health due to physical exhaustion, dehydration and environmental exposures. Holmes (2013) indicates that many of these migrants have died as consequence of these factors. In 2009 alone, 417 people died trying to cross the border between Mexico and United States, including 369 in the United States alone (OIM, 2011). The high likelihood that migrants would die trying to cross the desert makes the U.S.-Mexico border one of the most dangerous migratory corridors in the world.

These Latina women have sought to remain invisible throughout their migration journey and they carry this invisibility into the United States, living as shadows between the people. This study has highlighted, through these women's narratives, the hidden vulnerabilities that they experience because of their undocumented migratory status. Lack of information about their rights and the social services available to them, combined with fear of being discovered by authorities, make this group of women especially vulnerable to being victims of violence, as well as one of the most marginalized and underserved of population groups. This study illustrates, by bringing women's voices, the meaning that the lack of migratory documentation poses for Latina immigrant women.

Battered Latina immigrant women with undocumented status encounter several challenges in trying to remain safe from intimate partner violence. This study shows that the threat of deportation is one of the main factors influencing decision by Latina immigrant women with undocumented status to stay in abusive relationships. The Latina immigrant women in this study believed that by calling the police they would be interrogated about their immigration status and once the police found out they were not authorized to reside in the United States, they would be arrested and consequently deported. Deportation for these women implies that they will be separated from their children. This has been corroborated by other authors (Dutton et al., 2000; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002). As Ingram et al. (2007) have pointed out, this fear has implications for these women's ability to access services.

The stories told by these women documented how batterers make use of women's undocumented status as an intimidation tactic, whether they themselves are United States citizens/legal residents or they too have an undocumented status. The stories of Liliana and Patricia illustrate how batterers with a legal status explicitly used threats about women's undocumented status to force the women to remain in the relationship. The men made use of their privileged status to gain a power differential over the women to intimidate them and prevent them from reporting the violence. This is consistent with other research. A study by Erez (2009) found that 75% of 135 battered immigrant women from 35 countries around the



country reported men's use of immigrant status to force them into compliance, including threatening to call Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, getting them deported, withdrawing their immigration petition and taking their children away.

The stories of Susana, Victoria, and Lucero show that in situations where batterers have an undocumented status, they still may prevent the women from reporting the violence by telling them that both of them would be arrested or that the children will be removed from the home. Batterers' messages are reinforced by messages from other members of the Latina undocumented community, as in the example of Victoria, who was told by her mother-in-law and her neighbor not to involve the police.

The generally hostile environment toward immigrants combined with anti-immigrant policies at local and national levels and the enforcement of these policies reinforce batterers' messages that women would be arrested and consequently deported if they get the police involved. Viales (2009) found that anti-immigrant legislative proposals in California affected Latino residents' perception of the police, reducing the number of crimes reported and increasing immigrants' fear of deportation. The narratives collected in this study show that these women did not see the police as a source of safety until they had an interaction with the police. After that, their perceptions varied depending on the police response.

In my experience as a domestic violence counselor several years ago, I witnessed both the good and the bad experiences that immigrant women had with DCF. In some situations, the DCF social worker played a fundamental role helping these women escape violence. But on several occasions, the DCF social worker represented yet another person using her/his power to control immigrant women's lives by making them sign papers in English that they did not understand and threatened them with taking the children from them if they did not leave the abusive relationship. According to a recent study by the Applied Research Center (2011), 22% of the 397,000 individuals who were deported were parents of U.S. citizen children, while in the previous decade the rate of immigrant parent deportation was 8%. This study found

that in 2011 more than five thousand children were living in foster care whose parents were detained or deported immigrants. The high number of immigrant families being separated by immigration enforcement officials may contribute to the perception that children would be taken away at any time if the police, and consequently DCF, become involved even if the victim is seeking help.

However, contrary to their expectations, the women in this study who became involved with DCF did not experience the threat of removal of their children. All the women with DCF involvement reported obtaining help from the agency. The supportive experience they had with DCF may be a sign of the change in policies and practices by the Department, which now puts a priority on keeping families together. DCF workers may also have more training in understanding the dynamics of intimate partner violence and the risks victims have when trying to leave abusive relationships. Although every single woman reported having been afraid of the police and DCF in the past due to their migratory status, the stories collected in this study illustrate that, with few exceptions, the interactions these women reported with the police and DCF were positive and helpful.

For the women in this study, their undocumented status prevented them from living free of violence and, what is more, often contributed to the escalation of violence. The women's stories reflect many of the power and control tactics in intimate partner violence that have been described elsewhere such as by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program. These tactics include blaming the woman for the violence, making her feel she is crazy, isolating her from her support network and the outside world, demeaning her and making her feel unworthy, and using physical and sexual violence to increase the women's fear and intimidation. Every single woman in this study experienced physical violence and a majority also reported sexual abuse by their partners. Five women experienced murder attempts by their partners. The findings also show that these women did not seek help until the violence had escalated to the point that they feared for their lives and their children. These narratives show the implicit presumption that women are seen as a possession by batterers who will sexually and physically punish the women if they try to end the

relationship, even if that means killing them. Moreover, the narratives describe how batterers will often continue representing a threat for these women in spite of having in place protective orders, being in jail, or having been deported. Several of the women in this study still feared for the well-being of their families in their country of origin.

The findings indicate that the police response to immigrant women's first attempt requesting their intervention becomes crucial to women's safety and determines whether they will seek other services. Although the majority of them reported receiving help from the police, three of these women did not have a positive experience the first time. Their stories show the range of police responses, including direct threats of deportation due to their undocumented status, minimizing the risk to women's safety, and failure to make a real danger assessment of the batterer. Similar findings were reported by Salcido (2004), who showed that among the reasons women with undocumented status avoided police involvement was the lack of protection in doing so. As in Salcido's study, these women's narratives show that immigrant women are not only concerned that calling the police may lead to their own arrest and deportation, but also that they would face more danger in their relationship since calling the police or trying to obtain restraining orders may lead to an escalation of the violence.

The women also worried that by having the police involved their partners would be arrested and deported if they are undocumented, or ordered to be out of the home if they are legal residents. Both situations affect the family's economic security and put the families at risk of being even poorer. These women did not report the violence for fear of not being capable of providing basic needs for their children. They experienced very challenging economic situations after they reported it. Similarly, Vidales (2010) showed that the economic difficulties of immigrant women interfere with their ability to access and secure the resources needed to exit abusive relationships.

One of the main findings of this study is that the Latina immigrant women interviewed had a lack of information about the social services available to them. Nor did they know about their potential legal benefits as victims of crime until they were informed by the domestic violence advocate. This also speaks of the extreme social isolation these women experience not only as a result of their partners' control but also as a result of their condition as immigrants with an undocumented migratory status. These women reported that they did not have any knowledge of existing programs that could help them with their housing needs in the short-term and long-term, or that could address basic needs such as food. Menjivar and Salcido (2002) have contributed to our understanding that immigrants frame their experiences in their new country using their home countries as a point of reference; they assess their present situation in relation to what they left behind. Given that in Latin American countries, laws condemning intimate partner violence and violence against women are rarely enforced, and social services for victims are rare at best, there is no reason why immigrant women would report the violence and look for help. Furthermore, their own perception of themselves as individuals with no rights in this country may further contribute to their notion that there are no services available to them.

Social services for victims of intimate partner violence are scarce in Connecticut, as well as nationwide. A 2013 survey by the National Network to End Domestic Violence found that in a single day, 98 victims were turned away from domestic violence shelters in Connecticut. This stretched capacity may be due in part to the lack of decent inexpensive housing available which leads to longer stays by victims in shelters once they get in. Although domestic violence programs do not differentiate between survivors who have legal documentation and those that do not, the latter find even more challenges for obtaining social services. As Romero (2003) noted, women with undocumented status are not eligible for housing and other social service assistance in cases of domestic violence, including vouchers for rent deposits, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, and Medicaid. Their U.S.-born children, however, are eligible. Other structural barriers further limit the options that immigrant women with undocumented status have to leave an abusive relationship, such as being unable to have a driver's

license, open a bank account and establish a credit history (Hancock, 2007). It does look like the future may offer some relief in this respect. Connecticut recently approved legislation that will allow immigrants with undocumented status to have a driver's license for driving purposes only starting in 2015, and some cities, such as New Haven, now allow these immigrants to open bank accounts.

This study revealed the challenges in providing information that immigrant women are able to understand. The language barriers are only one of the challenges faced by these Latina women. There are other factors playing a role in how well immigrant women may receive and interpret information about intimate partner violence such as the educational background, cultural beliefs and even the traumatic effects of the violence itself. As shown by this study, immigrant women come to the United States with a variety of educational backgrounds and cultural norms, which means that they have different abilities to understand and interpret the information presented to them. Many of them may not have heard the terms "domestic violence/violencia doméstica" or "sexual assault/asalto sexual" because the terminology in Latin American countries may be different. For instance, in several Latin American countries the terms used to denote intimate partner violence are "violencia intrafamiliar/intrafamilial violence," "violencia en la familia/violence in the family," or more generally "violencia en contra de las mujeres/violence against women."

Finally, the study findings indicate that Latin American immigrant women with no legal documents may view seeking legal benefits differently from U.S.-citizens and each other. Women who were able to obtain a U-Visa or a VAWA visa experienced greater opportunities that helped them to realize their dreams, lose their fear and make them feel like a person with legal rights. These opportunities include being able to work, have a car in their own name, have health insurance, open a bank account, and have a credit history, among others. However, making the decision to file for these benefits is not an easy one. The justice system requires that the women be willing to collaborate in the cases against their partners and the fathers of their children. By doing so, they know that their partners will most likely to be deported if they do not

have migratory documentation. The consequence of this is that their children will not be able to see their father for long time, if not ever again, and that they would have frustrated their partners' dreams and returned them to the poverty and oppressive conditions they also wanted to escape. It may also mean that the women are acknowledging that they will not have a future as a couple. Cooperation with the justice system can be interpreted as an act against their own immigrant community, as well.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This qualitative study has several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the number of women participating in these interviews (n=11) is very small, and the conclusions can easily be biased by the stories of one or two respondents. There are also a couple of reasons to believe that this group may not be representative of all Latina women with undocumented status who have been victims of intimate partner violence. These stories represent a small sample of women that were recruited through the domestic violence programs, which creates limitations in understanding the ample range of experiences for immigrant women. While not all of them were receiving services at the time of the interviews, they did already have a relationship with the domestic violence advocate who contacted them about the study. These women are therefore part of a select group of Latina immigrant women with undocumented status that have accessed services, such the ones provided by the local domestic violence program. In this sense, the study may not capture the perspective of women who have not accessed services at all, whether due to their personal strengths and weaknesses, opportunities or cultural assumptions that may prevent them from seeking help. The number of women who accepted to be interviewed was small, which could be an indication of the challenges that these women experience in being able to trust another person and the fears they have in disclosing their status to a stranger. The majority of the participants (7) had a more stable immigration status at the time of the interview, which may mean they felt safe enough to agree to be interviewed. Furthermore, women were only interviewed in only one session consistent with the protections established in the research protocol. It was decided early in the research design phase that no identifiable information, such as name and

telephone number, would be collected to minimize any risks to women's privacy and confidentiality. This meant there was no opportunity to set up a second interview to obtain clarification about issues the women had mentioned during the initial interview or expand on any statements they made.

This research project was perhaps too ambitious in its attempt to answer many questions through a single interview and, as the reader may have realized, some of the questions proposed in the research design could not be as fully addressed as originally planned. During the data collection phase, it became clear that there would not be enough time to address every topic, and some interviewees had little feedback in response to some questions while providing a lot of information for others. During the first interviews, it became apparent that some questions did not elicit much information from the participants while other questions led them to talk quite openly. These women had so much to say about their migration journey and their experiences of intimate partner violence that questions related to cultural beliefs and informal support systems often elicited only short answers or were barely addressed due to time constraints. In particular, one topic that did not result in much feedback from the participants was related to the measures these women employ to keep safe, which may be especially relevant for understanding the strategies of immigrant women with undocumented status who have not accessed services. In subsequent interviews, I opted to focus on those questions that generated more information. Future qualitative research studies are advised to focus on a small number of questions to obtain a deeper understanding instead of trying to gain a broader perspective through numerous questions.

Some of the questions that were not addressed in depth during the interviews were related to cultural beliefs and practices around intimate partner violence. The women participating in this study came from several different Latin American countries, which could have allowed a better understanding of the common experiences they have as Latin American immigrant women, as well as some differences, especially regarding their migration journey. Future research projects may benefit from working with women from one country or selected regions (e.g., Central America, South America, the Caribbean).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study made visible what is invisible. Latina immigrant women with undocumented status live in the United States as shadows hiding from the public eye and trying to avoid the attention of authorities. They are one of the most marginalized and underserved populations in this country. When they experience intimate partner violence, they find themselves '*entre la espada y la pared*' (between a wall and a sword) fearful of asking for help and fearful of staying home waiting for the next violent episode. The experiences of intimate partner violence for these women resemble many of the tactics of power and control that we see in any woman facing intimate partner violence. However, their undocumented migratory status contributes to their vulnerability and to the intensification of violence. Their efforts to keep unnoticed from the public eye, especially from the police to avoid arrest and potentially deportation intertwines with their partners' tactics of control and violence. As consequence, they face extreme isolation that makes them highly vulnerable to continue experiencing more and more violence.

According to figures from the U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics (Hoefer, et al., 2010), there are more than eleven million immigrants with undocumented status in the United States, with the majority of them coming from Latin American countries (78%). It is also estimated that 43% of these immigrants are women, and of those, between a quarter and a third of these women have experienced intimate partner violence at some point in their lives. This means that even if the number of individuals with undocumented status stays the same, more than a million and perhaps close to two million immigrant women would have experienced intimate partner violence at some point of their lives. Intimate partner violence not only has a traumatic impact on the direct victim, but also on the children who witness it or are direct victims, as well. These women face numerous obstacles to access social services, including help from the police. Failed attempts at getting help can have sometimes severe and perhaps life-threatening consequences. Developing strategies to reach out to these women is a public health and human rights



imperative. As the findings of this study have shown, any interaction that public health and other social service providers may have with these women represents an opportunity to help them find safety.

In 2007 – 2008, the Legislative Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities released its recommendations calling for the dissemination of information to key stakeholders in contact with immigrant victims, implementing better training for judicial and law enforcement personnel on immigration issues, and maintaining funding for family violence advocates and language interpreters in the court system. To date, very few of these recommendations have been adopted into legislation, primarily due to fiscal concerns. However, these recommendations continue being pertinent and needed.

In order for these women to access services that can help them to live free of violence they need to obtain relevant information. A wide variety of stakeholders can play a key role in this endeavor including but not limited to police officers, DCF caseworkers, and judicial staff. Of special importance are those social services providers that get in contact with these women through working with their children such as school teachers, school administrators, pediatricians and other health care providers. To provide this information it is critical that these service providers understand the experiences of these women, the obstacles they face in seeking help, and what are the services available to them. Service providers should look for and make use of any opportunity to provide Latin American immigrant women with information about their rights as victims and the potential services, including legal benefits, they may be eligible for. It is not only about giving information to these women, but also creating a trusting relationship with them to facilitate their access to those services and supports. Intimate partner violence is an issue that for many brings shame and pain; adding the fears of deportation and family separation makes it even more challenging to disclose. Many women, like those whose narratives are captured in this study, will benefit from being in contact with someone who will take the time to explain carefully every option and make sure they understand the information they are receiving. It is not enough to translate the messages we use in English to Spanish, just as it is not enough to provide the information and believe they have understood

it. The findings of this study do point to the fact that the lives of immigrant women with an undocumented status are very complex and getting appropriate help to them is challenging. That is why it becomes supremely important to make sure that not only these women receive information that can make their lives safer and better but also they understand the information. The lack of information or the misunderstanding of it in conjunction with the fears related to their immigration status create a very unfavorable environment for these women to reach out for help, even after the police are involved. Because as Carmen said in relating her story, “Qué es asalto sexual, anyway? Yo no había escuchado esas palabras en mi vida! / What is sexual assault, anyway? I had not heard those words in my life!” Her words could not better describe the situation that many battered immigrant women experience with service providers. As advocates and activists working with these women, the messages and the quality of the relationship is essential. *Más claro no canta el gallo!*

Although domestic violence programs are a mainstay of help for Latina immigrant women regardless of their legal status, these organizations are limited in their impact and reach because of their lack of financial resources and distribution throughout communities. It is important, however, to build the network of services and agencies that can provide help to these women and to develop creative strategies to reach out to this population. Joining forces with other key stakeholders and developing collaborative partnerships is one approach that can be used to create connections with these women and to provide the information they need. Of particular importance are pediatric offices and schools since immigrant women with children frequent these places regularly. Also, domestic violence advocates and immigration activists could increase their effectiveness by working together. There are several community-based groups working in immigration-related issues, but intimate partner violence is not one of them. Helping the Latina immigrant community to organize themselves and work to prevent intimate partner violence could be the bridge that those invisible women need to step out of the shadows.

This study describing the types of intimate partner violence that Latina immigrant women with undocumented status experience generates some recommendations for future research. One area of research is to assess the impact on the emotional and physical health of these women and the health care costs associated with these experiences. The fields of study on immigration and intimate partner violence will also benefit from assessing the emotional impact of these two situations on the children of these immigrants, whether they are U.S.-born or foreign-born. Another area of research that is needed is a systematic assessment of the legal benefits available to these women. The experiences of immigrant battered women when they file for a VAWA self-petition or a U-Visa and the process and challenges that they go through in these cases should be better understood.

Finally, it would be important to investigate the attitudes, policies and practices of domestic violence advocates, police officers, attorneys and judges have toward immigrant women with undocumented legal status and domestic violence. This information would increase our understanding of the barriers and potential opportunities that Latina immigrant women with undocumented status may have in seeking protection and accessing services when they experience intimate partner violence. This could lead to educational and training efforts to improve the effectiveness of interventions and to ensure that these women and children receive appropriate services.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Interview Guide**

Topic: Immigrant experience in the U.S.

- For how long have you been in the United States?
- How has your experience of living here been?
- What were the reasons you had to decide to come to the U.S.?

Topic: relationship with intimate partner

- Are you living with your partner currently?
  - If yes, for how long have you been with him?
    - How has your relationship with him been?
  - If not, for how long have you been away from him?
    - Would you like to tell me what happened? What led you to separate from him?

Topic: types of abuse and safety strategies

- If interviewee has not brought up IPV experiences, introduce the topic by saying: many immigrant women in the U.S. experience abuse from their partners, has that happened to you at any time?
- What are the things he does/say when he is upset? (Explore types of violence/abuse)
- How do you handle those situations? What do you do to keep yourself and your children safe? (Explore safety strategies)

Topic: informal support systems

- Do you have close friends or family that are or have been of help to you in these situations? How has your experience been looking for their support? (Explore informal support systems)

Topic: formal support systems

- How about organizations or groups, how did you get in contact with them? How has your experience been with them?
- What led you to seek their support?

Topic: Perceptions and experiences with the Police

- How about the police? Have you tried to seek help from them?
- If yes, what made you to call them? How has your experience with the police been?
- Did you consider call the police before that? And what prevented you to do so?
- If not, what has prevented you from calling the police?

Topic: perceptions and experiences with the court and other legal services

- Have you been in court for any reason regarding the relationship with your partner? How has your experience been?
- Have you received information about domestic violence laws and immigrants' rights? What kind of information?
- Have you talked to any attorney about your situation?

Topic: intimate partner violence cultural beliefs

- What do your family members and friends think about the relationship with your partner?
- What do women in your country do when they are experiencing abuse from their partners? Does it happen often or in rare cases? What do people in your country think about violence in the relationship?



## **APPENDIX 2-A**

### **Research Study Description / Consent to Participate in Research**

Dear Participant,

My name is Maria Teresa Restrepo and I'm a student of the public health program at the University of Connecticut. I'm doing a research study that will be the basis of my thesis. One of my professors, Dr. Jane Ungemack, is overseeing this project.

You are being asked to take part in this research study to understand more about the barriers to access services Latina women with undocumented immigration status face when experiencing any type of abuse from their partner/husband. I'm going to give you information about the risks and benefits of participating in this study. After that you can decide if you want to participate or not. You do not have to decide to participate today. You can take time to think about it and then let your advocate or counselor know. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you will still be able to get all the services you receive from this program and nothing will change.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This study has two goals:

1. To know more about the experiences of domestic violence Latina women with non-documented status have.
2. To learn about the problems these women have obtaining services to help them.

I'm doing interviews with 10 to 15 women that have experienced domestic violence and don't have legal documents. The interview will take one and a half hour. The interview has questions about the relationship with your partner, the abuse, and problems when accessing services. I will also ask about your reasons for looking or not looking for help from social agencies, the police or court. These interviews will be recorded and later transcribed.

#### **What are the risks for participating?**

I'm asking you to share some personal information and you may find some questions difficult to answer. You also may feel sad remembering the experiences of abuse. If you feel you don't want to answer a question, you can let me know and we will skip it. You can also stop the interview at any time and you will still be able to receive all the services at the center for which you are eligible, and you will still receive a gift card. You don't have to explain why you don't want to answer a question or stop the interview. Also, your counselor or advocate is nearby in case you feel you want to talk to her about how you are feeling.

Another risk is a potential breach of confidentiality, that is, someone not authorized to see the information I collect gets access to it. To reduce this risk, I'm not using your name or getting any information that can connect you with this study. You don't have to sign any document since your signature could be the only way someone can connect you with the information you give me. However, if you want to sign a form giving me permission to do the interview, you can do it. If you decide to do the interview, I'm going to ask you not to use names during the interview. You will call the person by the relationship with you (for example, "my partner"; "my husband"; "my sister"; "my

friend”).

When we are done with the interview, I will transfer the recording to the computer. The computer has a password that only I know. Then, I will delete the interview from the recording machine. I will also delete the recording from the computer after I have typed it. A hard copy of each transcription will be made and stored in a locked cabinet at the Department of Community Medicine under the supervision of the PI. Only the PI and co-investigator will have access to the data. At the end of the study, I will write a document about the findings and use some of the quotes from the interviews. I will not use your real name when writing these findings. Your name will be changed for a made-up name.

I also want you to know that under the Connecticut child abuse and neglect laws I have to report situations of child abuse. If during our conversation I learn about any situation of child abuse, I will have to report it to the Department of Children and Families.

**What are the benefits for participating?**

There isn't a direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. The information you share will help us to understand the needs women in situations like yours have and their problems when trying to get the help they need.

**Will there be any compensation for participating?**

To compensate for your time you'll receive a \$15 gift certificate at the end of the interview.

**What will it happen at the end of the study?**

I'm going to present a description of the results of this study to the University of Connecticut and to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV). This report won't contain any information that can connect you with this study. CCADV may use this information to advocate for making services better in the state for victims of domestic violence.

**What if I Have Questions?**

If you have any question, I can answer it now. The Principal Investigator, Dr. Jane Ungemack, is willing to answer any questions you have about the research. You are encouraged to ask questions before deciding whether to take part. You are also encouraged to ask questions during your study participation. If you have questions, complaints or concerns about the research, you should call the Principal Investigator at 860.679.5403.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact a coordinator at the Institution Review Board at 860-679-1019 or 860-679-4851. You may also call a coordinator at the Institutional Review Board if you want to talk to someone who is not a member of the research team in order to pass along any suggestions, complaints, concerns or compliments about your involvement in the research, or to ask general questions or obtain information about participation in clinical research studies.

**Consent To Participation:**

By participating in this interview, you (the participant) acknowledge that you have read, or have had read to you, this informed consent document, have talked with research personnel about this study, have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them satisfactorily answered, and voluntarily consent to participate in this project as described in this form.

By signing this form the individual obtaining consent, Maria Teresa Restrepo, is confirming that the above information has been explained to the subject and that a copy of this document, signed and dated the person obtaining consent, along with a copy of the Research Participant Feedback Form, will be provided to the participant.

You do not have to sign any document since your signature could be the only way someone can connect you with the information you give me. If you wish you can sign this document. If you do so, you understand that your signature is the only link that connects you to this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX 2-B

Dr. Jane Ungemack – 860.670.5403  
Maria Teresa Restrepo-Ruiz

*UCHC IRB Valid from 4/23/2013 through 4/14/2014*

### DESCRIPCION DE LA INVESTIGACION Y CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR

Estimada participante,

Mi nombre es María Teresa Restrepo y soy una estudiante del programa de Salud Pública de la Universidad de Connecticut. Como parte de mis estudios estoy realizando un proyecto de investigación, que será la base de mi tesis, con la supervisión de la Doctora Jane Ungemack.

Le estoy invitando a que participe en este estudio de investigación que busca entender mas sobre las barreras que mujeres latinas con estatus de inmigración indocumentado enfrentan al acceder servicios cuando están viviendo cualquier tipo de abuso por parte de su pareja. Antes que nada, voy a explicarle los riesgos y beneficios de participar en este estudio y así usted podrá decidir si desea participar o no. No tiene que tomar esta decisión ahora mismo. Puede tomar su tiempo para pensarlo y luego dejarle saber a su consejera cual ha sido su decisión. También puede contarme directamente, después de que yo le haya explicado de que se trata esta investigación, si quiere participar o no. Su participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Es su decisión de participar o no. Si decide no participar, usted continuará recibiendo todos los servicios que está recibiendo en este programa y nada va a cambiar.

#### **Cuál es el propósito del estudio?**

Esta investigación busca entender:

- 1) cuáles son las experiencias de violencia o abuso por parte de la pareja que viven las mujeres latinoamericanas que no tienen documentos de entrada a este país.
- 2) cuáles son las barreras que las mujeres latinoamericanas indocumentadas enfrentan al acceder a servicios sociales.

Estoy realizando entrevistas con diez a quince mujeres en Connecticut que cumplen con estos criterios. La entrevista tendrá una duración de hora y media y tiene preguntas acerca de la relación con su pareja, el abuso, los obstáculos que haya encontrado al tratar de acceder a servicios sociales y sus razones para buscar o no ayuda de los organismos sociales, la policía o la corte. Yo tambien voy a grabar estas entrevistas y luego las voy a transcribir.

#### **Cuáles son los riesgos por participar?**

Le estoy pidiendo que comparta información que es personal y confidencial. Usted puede llegar a sentirse incómoda al responder las preguntas y puede ser que se sienta triste recordando las experiencias de abuso que ha vivido. Si siente que no desea responder alguna de las preguntas, puede avisarme y simplemente seguiré con la próxima pregunta. Usted también puede parar la entrevista en cualquier momento y aun así podrá seguir recibiendo los servicios que recibe de esta agencia y también recibirá un certificado de regalo. Usted no tiene que explicarme la razón

por la que no desea responder a una pregunta o detener la entrevista. Su consejera está cerca en caso de que usted siente que quiere hablar con ella.

Un segundo riesgo se trata de la posibilidad que alguien no autorizado pueda acceder a la información que usted me dio. Para minimizar este riesgo, no voy a preguntarle ninguna información que pueda identificarla o vincularla con este estudio. Usted no tiene que firmar un formulario de consentimiento, ya que su firma podría ser la única manera de que alguien pueda vincularla con la información que me va a dar. Sin embargo, si usted desea, puede firmar el formulario de consentimiento. Si decide participar, voy a pedirle que evite usar nombres propios durante la entrevista y se refiera a la(s) persona(s) por la relación que tiene con usted (por ejemplo, "mi pareja", "mi marido", "mi hermana"; "mi amiga").

La entrevista va a ser grabada y cuando terminemos voy a descargar la grabación a mi computador que está protegido con una contraseña que solo yo sé y voy a borrar la entrevista de la máquina de grabación. Después de transcribir la entrevista, voy a borrar la grabación de la computadora. Cada transcripción tendrá una copia impresa que va a ser guardada en un gabinete cerrado con llave en el Departamento de Medicina Comunitaria con la supervisión de la investigadora principal (mi profesora Jane Ungemack) Sólo ella y yo tendremos acceso a la información. Al final del estudio, voy a escribir los resultados y el uso de algunas de las citas de las entrevistas. No voy a usar su nombre cuando escriba estas conclusiones. Su nombre será cambiado por un nombre inventado.

También quiero que sepa que por la ley de Connecticut tengo la obligación de reportar abuso infantil. Por lo tanto, si me llegara a enterar durante nuestra conversación sobre una situación de abuso a menores, voy a tener que informar de ello al Departamento de Niños y Familias.

#### **Cuáles son los beneficios por participar?**

No hay ningún beneficio directo para usted por el participar en este estudio., La información que usted proporcione nos ayudará a entender mejor las experiencias que tienen las mujeres en su situación y los obstáculos que encuentran cuando tratan de buscar servicios de ayuda.

#### **Hay alguna compensación por participar?**

Para compensar su tiempo, usted recibirá un certificado de \$15 al finalizar la entrevista.

#### **Qué va a pasar al final del estudio?**

Le voy a presentar los resultados de esta investigación a la Universidad de Connecticut y a la Coalición contra la Violencia Doméstica de Connecticut (CCADV por sus siglas en inglés). Este informe no va tener ninguna información que la pueda conectar con este estudio. CCADV puede utilizar los resultados para abogar por el avance a los servicios del estado para inmigrantes víctimas de violencia de pareja.

#### **Qué hago si tengo preguntas?**

Si tiene preguntas puede hacerlas ahora.

La Investigadora Principal, mi profesora Jane Ungemack, puede responder cualquier pregunta que usted tenga sobre este estudio. Le recomiendo hacerme cualquier pregunta antes de que decida si quiere participar en este estudio. También puede hacerme preguntas durante su

participación. Si usted tiene preguntas, quejas o alguna preocupación sobre el estudio, usted puede llamar a la doctora Jane Ungemack al 860.679.5403.

Si usted tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de investigación, puede contactar a algún coordinador de la Junta de Revisión Institucional al 860.769.1019 o 860.679.4851.

También puede comunicarse con un coordinador de la Junta de Revisión Institucional si a usted quisiera hablar con alguien que no es parte del equipo de investigación sobre sugerencias, quejas, inquietudes o elogios sobre su participación en esta investigación, o para hacer preguntas generales u obtener información sobre participación en estudios de investigación clínica.

### **Consentimiento de Participación**

Con su participación en esta entrevista, usted (la participante) confirma que ha leído, o le han leído, este documento de consentimiento informado, ha hablado con el personal de investigación acerca de este estudio, se le ha dado la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y ha recibido respuestas satisfactorias, y voluntariamente ha dado su consentimiento para participar en este proyecto, como se describe en este formulario.

Al firmar esta formulario la persona que obtiene el consentimiento (María Teresa Restrepo) está confirmando que la información anterior se le ha explicado a la participante y que se le proporcionará una copia de este documento, fechado y firmado por la persona que obtiene el consentimiento, junto con una copia del formulario de comentarios del participante de investigación.

INVESTIGATOR INITIATED PROTOCOL TEMPLATE FOR SURVEY STUDY  
Study Description / Consent Form  
Spanish Version #2 (04.14.2013)

## APPENDIX 3-A

Recruiting volunteers for a research study

### **Intimate Partner Violence and Undocumented Status**

- **Have you been mistreated by your partner/husband?**
- **Were you born in Latin America?**
- **Do you find yourself without legal authorization to reside in the US?**
- **Are you 18 years old or older?**
- **Are you willing to share your story?**

If you answered yes to these questions, you are invited to be part of this study. We want to understand more about the barriers to access services Latina women with undocumented immigration status face when experiencing any type of abuse from their partners/husbands.

Your participation will involve a one and a half hour interview.

**Participants will receive a \$15 gift certificate to compensate for their time.**

Study is being conducted by: **Maria Teresa Restrepo, MPH graduate student at the University of Connecticut, and under the supervision of Dr. Jane Ungemack (Principal Investigator, Community Medicine Department).**

For further information please call the domestic violence advocate at ----  
**(860) xxx-xxxx----** **(this information will change depending of the domestic violence program location)**

INVESTIGATOR INITIATED RESEARCH

Flyer – English Version (Attachment 3)

Version # 1 (02.19.2013)

## APPENDIX 3-B

### **Violencia infligida por la Pareja y la Situación de las Personas Indocumentadas Proyecto de Investigación**

- ¿Eres una mujer nacida en América Latina?
- ¿Has sido maltratada por tu pareja/esposo?
- ¿Te encuentras sin autorización legal para residir en los EE.UU.?
- ¿Tienes 18 años o más?
- ¿Estás dispuesta a compartir tu historia?

Si contestaste sí a estas preguntas, nos gustaría invitarte a ser parte de este estudio. Nuestro propósito es entender más acerca de las barreras para acceder a servicios sociales que las mujeres latinas con estatus migratorio indocumentado cuando sufren algún tipo de abuso por parte de sus parejas

Tu participación consistirá en: una entrevista de hora y media de duración y recibirás un certificado de regalo de \$15 para compensar por tu tiempo.

Este estudio es realizado por María Teresa Restrepo, estudiante de la maestría en Salud Pública de la Universidad de Connecticut bajo la supervisión de la Dra. Jane Ungemack (Investigadora Principal del Departamento de Medicina Comunitaria).

Para más información por favor llama a la consejera del programa de violencia doméstica al ----  
**(xxx) xxx-xxxx---- (this information will change depending of the domestic  
violence program location)**

Investigator Initiated Research  
Recruitment Flyer – Spanish Version  
Version #1 (02.19.2013)



## APPENDIX 4

### CODING SYSTEM

Code Family		Code	Definition (Inclusion)	Exclusions	Notes/Updates
<b>Migration to US</b>	1.	Migration_Reasons	Refers to reasons participants had to migrate from their country of origin to the U.S.		
	2.	Migration_Risks	Refers to any dangers participants mentioned about the experience of migrating to the U.S. including violence, challenges of the journey		
	3.	Migration_Consequences	Refers to the consequences of the migration journey on participants' physical and mental health.		
	4.	Migration_Experience	Refers to what participants think about their migration journey.		
<b>IPV</b>	5.	IPV_Duration	Length of time participants have or had experienced any type IPV.		
	6.	IPV_Physical	Refers to any time physical violence is mentioned (including slapping, hitting, kicking and beating. Also grabbing hair, pushing)		
	7.	IPV_Emootional	Refers to any time psychological/emotional abuse is mentioned (including insults, belittling, humiliation, acts of intimidation such as destroying things or using weapons to frighten, threats of harm anyone in the family.	Excludes threats of calling immigration or DCF.	
	8.	IPV_UseofChildren	Threats of harming or hurting the children, including threats of taking the children away. Also includes any mention of having DCF removing the children as a result of reporting the abuse.		
	9.	IPV_Sexual	Refers to any time sexual violence is mentioned (including vaginal and anal rape, and any type of coerced sexual act)		
	10.	IPV_Deportation	Refers to any threat of calling immigration authorities to report partner's migratory status or any mention of getting arrested and deported as consequence of reporting the abuse to authorities.		
	11.	IPV_Killing-Att	Refers to any time participants mentioned experiences of killing attempts		
	12.	IPV_EcoDep	Refers to any mention of participants being economically dependent of their partners.		
	13.	IPV_Culture	Refers to any mention of cultural practices and beliefs regarding violence in the family.		
	14.	IPV_BeforeMig	Refers to any mention of IPV experiences before they migrated to the US		

## APPENDIX 4

### CODING SYSTEM

	15.	Support_Formal	Refers to any time participants sought help from institutions (schools, churches, hospitals, police)	Excludes seeking help from the DV program	
	16.	Support_DVProgram	Refers to any mention about accessing the domestic violence program.		
Police	17.	Police_Access	Any mention regarding participants' experiences when seeking help from police.		
Law	18.	Police_Perceptions	Refers to beliefs about obtaining help from the police.		
	19.	Law_Court	Any mention regarding participants' experiences with the court system.		
	20.	Law_UVisa	Any time U-Visa is mentioned.		
	21.	Law_VAWA	Any time VAWA visa is mentioned.		
Immigration	22.	Law_OtherBenefits	Any time other legal benefits are mentioned such as political asylum.		
	23.	Imm_Experiences	Refers to participants' perceptions about their life in the US		
	24.	Imm_Vulnerability	Any time participants mentioned situations of violence or abuse against them for their undocumented condition	Excludes IPV strategy of using immigration status	
Information	25.	Info_Lackof	Refers to any time participants mention the knowledge, or the lack of, they had about formal support sources when they were experiencing IPV.		
	26.	Info_Improv	Any mention of how to make things better for immigrant women experiencing IPV.		
Children	27.	Children	Any time children are mentioned including participants values (what they want to see happening with their children)	Excludes IPV_Use of Children	