

# Immigrant Latinas' Experiences with Intimate Partner Violence, Access to Services, and Support Systems During a Global Health Crisis (COVID-19)

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# Presenter Information

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# Personal Interest

- \* 25 years experience working with the Latino/x population, specifically, immigrant Latinas (ILs) who lack legal status and who live with domestic violence (DV) across the U.S.
- \* Three research projects (2004-2007; 2011-2021; 2021-2023);
  - \* Examining women's romantic relationships, marriage, intimate partner violence (IPV), and self-esteem within their own culture
  - \* Examining ILs experiences access to services during COVID-19/pandemic

# Learning and Workshop Objectives

1. Participants will understand the research study design and the benefits of community-based participatory research and in working with a community partner.
2. Participants will describe the impact of the pandemic on ILs who were experiencing intimate partner violence and access to services and types of support systems.
3. Participants will describe the strengths and challenges of the study.
4. Participants will analyze the implications of the study results on best practices and delivery of services throughout the pandemic and beyond.

# Terms

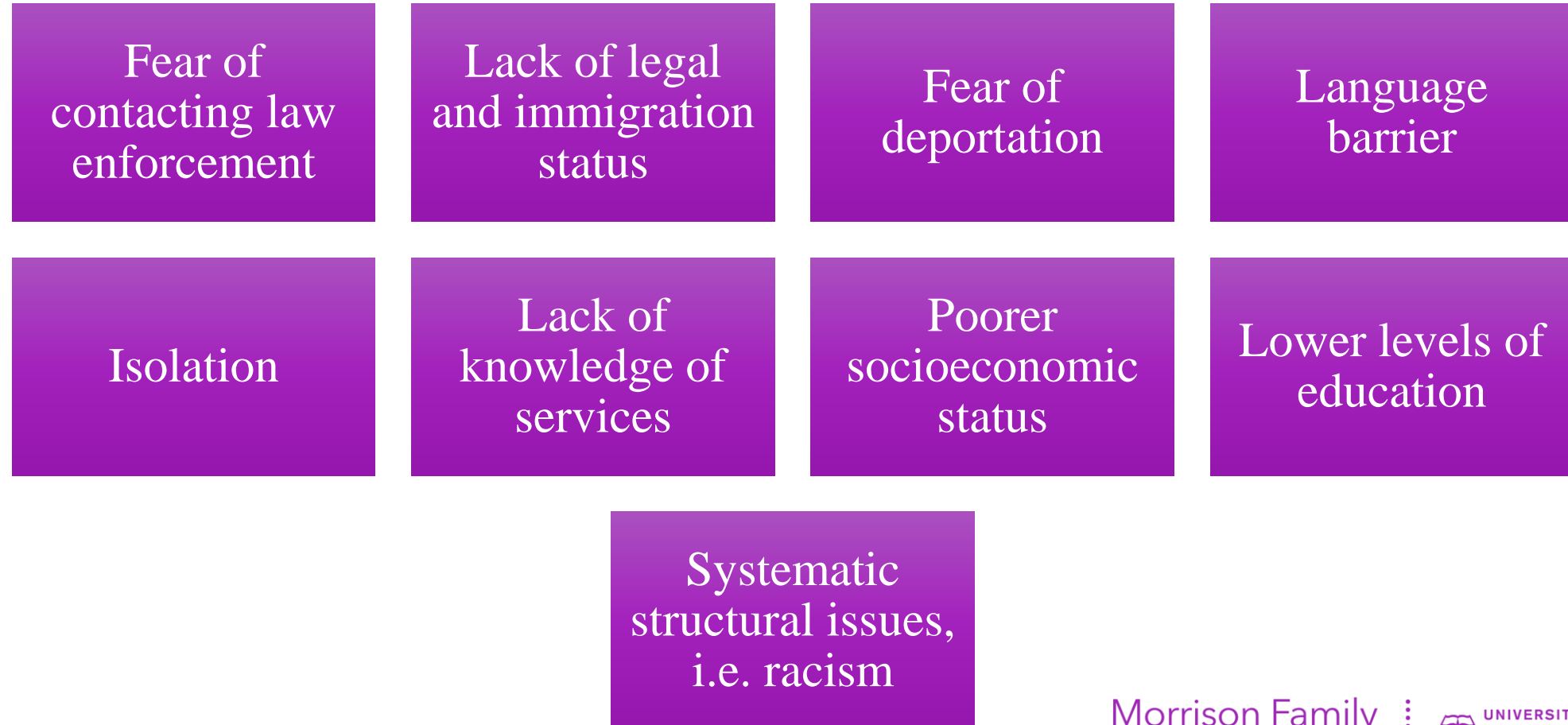
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
- Domestic Violence (DV)
- IPV occurs in any kind of intimate relationship inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community
- Definition: **DV** is any kind of behavior that a person uses to control an intimate partner through fear and intimidation. It includes physical, sexual, psychological, verbal and economic abuse. Examples include battering, name calling and insults, threats to kill or harm one's partner or children, marital rape
- Rooted in power and control
- Feminist and empowerment counseling frameworks ground our work in IPV
- Latinx, Latinos, Immigrant Latinas, Latinas, Hispanic Women

# Background Information: Immigrant Latinas' Experiences with IPV

- ILs make up 17% of total native and foreign-born Latinx population living in U.S.
- Foreign-born women living in US make up 20% of IPV incidences
- 1 in 3 Latinas experience IPV in their lifetime

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# Background Information: Barriers for ILs





# Background Information: IPV and Covid-19

- Increased IPV during pandemic
  - Multiple police agencies reported increased calls and arrests related to IPV
- COVID-19 restrictions amplified risk of sexual exploitation/abuse
- Strict regulations likely made it easier for abusers to restrict women from money, medications, support and services
- Increased alcohol/substance abuse, depression, PTSD during stay-at-home orders
- Recommendations for services from community-based agencies during restrictions





# Background Information: IPV-related Services

- Reaching out to police departments, hospitals, healthcare settings
- Seeking help from community-based agencies
- Working with legal advocacy
- Support or educational groups
- Mental health counseling
- Services in domestic violence shelter
- Housing at a domestic violence shelter

# Aim of Study

- Examine ILs:
  - Help-seeking behavior and who have experienced IPV during the pandemic
  - Experiences with types of support systems
  - Experiences with accessing services during the pandemic



# Methods, Sample, Recruitment

- Between October–November 2021, 19 participants recruited from Progreso Latino, Inc. (community partner)
- Qualitative Research Design
- Participants completed telephone interviews in Spanish using interview guide by the researcher
- **Criterion sampling:** ILs who received services from the AYUDAME Domestic Violence Program in the past 1-3 years
  - Age range 22-60 years old ( $M$  age = 37.36,  $SD$  = 8.10 years)
  - Each participant received \$100 gift card for completing telephone interview



# Continued

- Inclusion criteria included:
  - Receiving services from the AUYDAME Domestic Violence Program
  - Experiencing an IPV-related incident
  - 18 years or older
  - Spanish and English speaking
- Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Case Manager conducted recruitment
  - Long-standing relationship with participants
  - Used detailed script explaining process for participation
- The case manager and researcher attempted 3 times to contact previous participants within a 3–6-week period



# Data Collection and Analysis

- A 15-item Spanish-English interview guide was used inclusive of:
  - 9 demographic questions
  - 6 open-ended questions
- All participants completed the interview in Spanish
- A Verbal consent was received by all participants
- Validity and Reliability of data
  - Transcripts of phone calls were translated to English word-for-word, line-by-line
  - Notes were transcribed and translated by the research assistant and verified by the researcher

**Descriptive Demographic Questions**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. Where were you born?
4. How long have you lived in the United States?
5. Are you in a committed relationship with a partner? If yes, are you married or co-habiting?
6. What are you currently doing now? For example, are you working outside of the home, in the home, or in school?
7. What is the highest level of education?
8. Do you have any children? If so, how many?
9. What is your religious affiliation?

**In-Depth Interview Questions (i.e., Questions related to help-seeking behaviors and accessing intimate partner violence [IPV] related services)**

10. Can you describe how you have managed and/or coped since the pandemic (COVID-19) began?
11. Can you describe your experience with family members in relation to domestic violence incidences since the pandemic (COVID-19) began?
12. Can you describe your experience with friends in relation to domestic violence incidences since the pandemic (COVID-19) began?
13. What are your experiences in trying to access domestic violence related services in the community since the pandemic (COVID-19) began? Do you find it challenging? If so, why?
  - a. For example, what are your experiences with the police department since the pandemic (COVID-19) began?  
  
\*If you called 911 since the pandemic (COVID-19) began, what was that experience like for you?
  - b. For example, what are your experiences with health care and/or hospital organizations since the pandemic (COVID-19) began?
  - c. For example, what are your experiences with accessing services with Progreso Latino, Inc. since the pandemic (COVID-19) began?
  - d. For example, what are your experiences with other community-based agencies? For example, family service centers?





# Data Analysis

- Content analysis (conceptual analysis) was conducted to examine the occurrence of selected terms in the data
- Codes and categories were created from open-ended questions
  - Themes were developed:
    - IPV experiences during the pandemic
    - Types of support systems and seeking help
    - Experiences with accessing services during pandemic
- Rich and triangulated data were obtained to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the codes
- Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure anonymity in the study



# Results

## Descriptive Analysis:

- Total:  $n = 19$
- All participants were immigrants from other Spanish-speaking countries: Guatemala (7); Dominican Republic (6); Columbia (2); Brazil (1); Mexico (1); El Salvador (1); Ecuador (1)
- Medium age was 37 years old (age range: 22-60 yrs. old)
- Lived in the U.S. approximately 8 years (range 1-21 years)
- (74%) of the participants reported some type of employment, outside of the home
- Most participants reported working entry-level jobs regardless of education



| Name     | Age | State of Birth                    | Years in U.S. | Relationship Status | Employment            | Education                  | No. of Children |
|----------|-----|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Emily    | 22  | San Francisco, Dominican Republic | 7             | Single              | Factory               | High School                | 1               |
| Ines     | 30  | Guatemala, Guatemala              | 2             | Partnered           | Supermarket           | Some College               | 1               |
| Rebecca  | 30  | Guatemala, Guatemala              | 3             | Single              | None                  | None                       | 2               |
| Yessica  | 31  | Guatemala, Guatemala              | 2             | Married             | Cashier               | Bachelor's Degree-Teaching | 2               |
| Belicia  | 32  | Morona de Santiago, Ecuador       | 9             | Single              | Takes Care of Elderly | High School                | 1               |
| Elenora  | 33  | Guatemala                         | 15            | Separated           | Factory               | None                       | 4               |
| Paola    | 33  | Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic | 6             | Separated           | None                  | Bachelor's Degree          | 3               |
| Dulce    | 36  | Guatemala, Guatemala              | 6             | Partner             | None                  | 3 Years of High School     | 2               |
| Leticia  | 36  | Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic  | 6             | Single              | Janitorial Work       | Some High School           | 2               |
| Catalina | 36  | Quiché, Guatemala                 | 4             | Single              | Works from Home       | High School                | 5               |
| Amanda   | 37  | Salcedo, Dominican Republic       | 5             | Single              | Factory               | Some College               | 3               |
| Dolores  | 37  | Quiché, Guatemala                 | 18            | Single and Divorced | Grocery Store         | 6th Grade                  | 4               |
| Rita     | 40  | Armenia, Columbia                 | 8             | Divorced            | Sells Food            | Bachelor's Degree-Nursing  | 2               |
| Mari     | 40  | La Paz, El Salvador               | 21            | Single              | Factory               | None                       | 2               |
| Lola     | 42  | Guianas, Brazil                   | 7             | Separated           | Cleaning              | Bachelor's Degree-Business | 0               |





# Qualitative Results

- 74% experienced IPV during pandemic
- Several reported partners abusing children
- One reported daughter experiencing sexual abuse
- 26% experienced IPV prior to the pandemic
- Several received ongoing legal support from community-based agency



# Types of Support Systems and Seeking Help

## Informal

- 74% lacked informal support from family and friends
- Leading to feelings of isolation
- Often embarrassed to discuss IPV with friends/family
- Many lacking informal support received formal support

## Formal

- 47% called police, some reported positive experiences
- Of those who didn't call police, fear was a motivating factor
- Others had negative experiences due to language barriers, discrimination, racism
- Overall relief felt with police intervention



## Continued

- Sofia’s affirmative testimony included, “When I called 911, they spoke Spanish. When the police came to my house, they also spoke Spanish. The police officers had information for me, and they helped me find a place to stay.”
- Rita stated, “The police officers did not help me. I could not understand English, and they only spoke English. I felt discriminated against because I did not know English.”
- Paola described experiencing racism by one police officer. She indicated, “When I called the police to file a report, one of them did not speak Spanish and he was racist. The other police officer who took the report was better and I felt like he believed me.”



# Experiences with Community-Based Agency: Progreso Latino, Inc.

- Overall reports of positive experiences with community partner
- Findings indicated that having a strong, client-centered relationship with professional staff, such as case workers, aided ILs experiences in receiving optimal care and support
- Elenora stated, “The agency helped me with my immigration papers. They also went with me two times to court. I was afraid to tell the judge what happened, but the caseworker helped me tell my story.”
- Rita described her experience, “It was very hard to get help, I could only get help from the agency. When I went to court, she [the caseworker] interpreted for me. She was so supportive. She also helped me with food.”



# Experiences with Hospitals and Health-Care Clinics

- 37% reported going to the hospital during the pandemic
- Mostly encouraging experiences
- Belicia further stated, “Yes, I went to the hospital. I thought I was going crazy, but they [doctors and nurses] told me I was in a domestic violence relationship. I received a lot of help from the doctors.”
- Yessica stated, “I took my daughter to the hospital during COVID-19 because she tested positive. I took all the precautions, masks, hand sanitizers to keep us safe. She also got help from the abuse [child sexual abuse by grandfather].”
- Some reported not seeking medical help due of fear of deportation and COVID-19



# Experiences With Accessing Services During the Pandemic

- Community partner and other community-based agencies offered IPV services with changes to telehealth, more phone calls, limiting in-person appointments
- Some difficulties reported; connection issues, less services available, limited resources, language barriers, lack of understanding how to connect to resources
- Overall, participants described positive experiences with the changes



# Discussion and Implications

## Seeking Help from Police Departments and Police Officers

- Participants in this study understood the significance of reaching out to police officers despite these barriers
  - Findings in this study showed that 47% of the participants who sought out assistance generally had positive experiences with police officers and police departments
  - ILs will most likely continue to utilize police departments in the future as a means of an intervention
- Findings in this study confirm previous research and the value of having **culturally sensitive professional staff who are proficient in both Spanish and English** as a means of eliminating barriers to help-seeking behaviors and providing effective IPV-related service delivery for a vulnerable group of women (Marrs Fuchsel, 2015)





# Discussion and Implications Continued

- Almost half of the participants did not seek help from police officers or departments due to language and other barriers
- Additional barriers related to fear of being deported and immigration status were other reasons participants did not seek help from police departments and police officers (Reina & Lohman, 2015; Silva-Martínez, 2017) and coincided with findings from the present study
- Need more **Spanish-speaking officers, Spanish-English education**, education around immigration rights and services



# Discussion and Implications Continued

## Seeking Help from Hospitals and Health-care Clinics

- Many IL lacked eligibility for health-care service
- Almost half (37%) sought health related services for different reasons
- Findings reveal the relevance of needing front-line workers in hospitals and health-care settings as ILs and other women in general sought out aid from medical professionals throughout the pandemic



# Discussion and Implications Continued

## **Supportive Relationships with Professional Staff and Accessing Services from Community partner and other Community-Based Agencies**

- Participants reported a strong relationship with the community partner (were recruited from this agency)
- Findings solidify the importance of having a client-centered and high-touch relationship approach with ongoing adjustments of delivery of services throughout the different stages of the pandemic at the present time and in the future
- Encouragement for other community-based agencies to remain open and adjust delivery of services
- Findings coincide with other research findings indicating the importance adjusting delivery of services during the pandemic (Forbes Bright et al., 2020; Roesch et al., 2020; Sharma & Bikash Borah, 2020)



# Strengths and Limitations

## Strengths

- Police departments as a formal support; helping regardless of cultural-specific barriers
- Ability of community-based agency to adapt to logistical changes
- Community partnership with Progreso Latino, Inc.
- Findings will aid current professional staff at community-based agencies in providing effective delivery of services

## Limitations

- Change data collection process due to COVID-19 restrictions
- Previous relationship with case worker could have impact on responses; bias in answering questions



# Implication for Practice

- Previous research and findings in this study indicate multiple barriers in accessing IPV-related services for ILs
- Due to the barriers discussed, professional staff need to provide programs and initiatives that might lessen barriers in accessing services for this population
- **Police working with ILs can strengthen services by having more Spanish-speaking domestic violence advocate and interpreters to assist**
- Community-based agencies need to provide wrap-around support
- Immigration-status barriers and fear can be lessened by providing education and information about immigration (in both Spanish and English) for ILs experiencing IPV incidences



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Thank you! Questions?

