

# **GENDER VIOLENCE AMONG LATINAS: KEY CONCEPTS AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS**



National Hispanic & Latino

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**The National Hispanic and Latino Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC) is committed to educating, and increasing awareness about violence against women, contributing to current efforts to eradicate it. As a key source for clinicians working with Hispanic and Latino populations, the National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC provides information, education and resources for the workforce that provides mental health services for Hispanic and Latino populations, including Latina survivors of violence.**

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# KEY TERMS IN UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Sex.** Biological and physiological characteristics of women and men, including reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones.<sup>1</sup>

**Gender.** Refers to socially defined characteristics of men and women, as well as their roles and relationships. What is expected according to gender varies from culture to culture and it may change over time. Also, gender includes social concepts of functions, behaviors and attributes that each society considers appropriate for men and women. Different functions and behaviors may generate inequalities between genders, meaning differences between groups that may systematically favor one group over others. In Latino societies, this may result in power imbalances with men usually holding positions of power. These inequalities may also result in inequities between men and women with respect to their health, access to services and experiences of violence. In terms of identities that may not fit in the binary categories of male and female, norms, relationships and roles that are associated with gender also impact health outcomes among such groups including transgender and intersex groups and other sexual identity minority groups.<sup>1</sup>



**Gender (Cont).** Traditionally, the concepts of *marianismo* and *machismo* have been used to describe gender roles among Hispanics and Latinos.

*Marianismo* makes reference to the Virgin Mary and has been associated with motherhood as a central role and prioritizing the family's needs over a woman's own needs.<sup>2</sup> *Machismo* makes reference to family protection and provision. It is important to highlight that acculturation processes have a direct impact on the meaning of these concepts and that their meaning changes across generations. Also, some have used the term *machismo* to justify violence whereas they are different concepts.<sup>2</sup>

Seen from a strength perspective, *machismo* and *marianismo* may contribute to a person's resiliency.

**Domestic Violence (DV).** Violence that takes place within a household and can be between any two people within that household. DV can occur between a parent and child, siblings, or even roommates. The traditional view of violence in a relationship focused on a crime of abuse involving two individuals in an opposite-sex (heterosexual) marriage, with men being identified more frequently as the aggressor and women as victims/survivors.

Statistics indicate that men are more frequently the aggressors and women victims/survivors. Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 99% of female rape victims were raped by male perpetrators and 94.7% of females that experienced other sexual violence, were victimized by male perpetrators.

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DV has also been described as a form of violence that takes places within a domestic relationship, not necessarily a heterosexual or marriage relationship. In more recent years, societal views expanded to better understand the types of violence that exist within relationships, as well as the reality that the roles of abuser and survivor are not gender-specific. As a result, the term "intimate partner violence" was introduced to encompass a broader understanding of violence in relationships.

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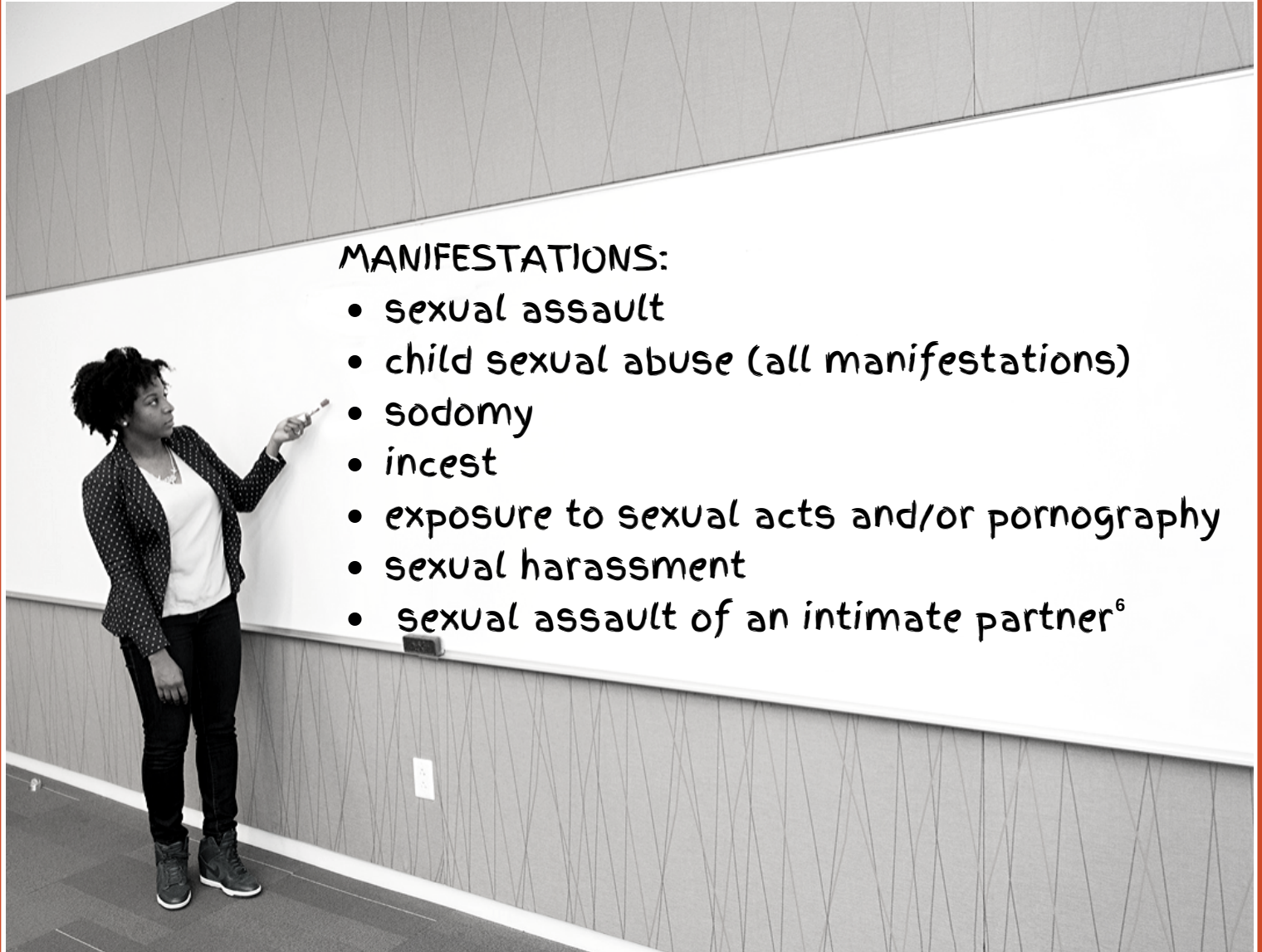


**Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).** Includes any behavior that one intimate partner (current or former) uses to establish power and control over another intimate partner. This may include physical or sexual violence and/or financial, emotional/psychological, cultural, spiritual, and reproductive abuse, as well as other forms of controlling behavior. This term has been recognized as more inclusive, recognizing violence in same-sex relationships and other gender minority relationships. In fact, the CDC defines IPV as a serious, preventable public health problem that affects millions of Americans.

Although the terms IPV and DV have been used interchangeably, it is important for providers to note differences. Both terms refer to violent events based on power and control that exist in interpersonal and intimate relationships, and that are sometimes the manifestation of inequities between genders and promoted by culture.



**Sexual violence.** A sexual act committed against someone without consent.



Consent is an agreement between individuals to engage in sexual activity. When you're engaging in sexual activity, consent is about communication—and it should happen every time. The laws about consent vary by state and situation.



**Polyvictimization.** Experiencing multiple victimizations that may include sexual and physical abuse, bullying, exposure to violence and intimate partner violence. This term emphasizes that the person experienced different types of victimization rather than prolonged periods of a type of victimization. It may result in increased and generalized vulnerability. The literature points to higher prevalence of polyvictimization among women.<sup>7</sup>

The literature also points out that women and girls are more vulnerable to experience certain types of violence and victimization. This is true for Latinas, as evidenced by the Sexual Assault Among Latinas (SALAS) Study.<sup>7</sup> This is due, in part, to inequalities that result from gender constructs and the gender role expectations associated with them. In terms of gender-based violence and substance use disorders (SUDs), the literature indicates that among women with SUD there is a high rate of IPV and sexual violence.

A national sample of Latinas found that more than half of the women surveyed (53.6%) reported at least one victimization over a lifetime, and about two-thirds (66.2%) of those women had more than one victimization.



In a sample of over 300 pregnant Latinas, IPV during pregnancy was reported at **10%** for physical abuse and **19%** for emotional abuse. In addition, **26%** of Hispanic mothers living in urban areas experienced IPV.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the variables that may contribute to added vulnerabilities among Latinas for gender-based violence in the United States include:

- **Immigration**<sup>8,9</sup> - Some Latinas report experiences of violence pre, during or post immigration processes. Exploring these areas may be valuable for mental health providers. Also, immigration status may be used by perpetrators as a control mechanism.
- **Anti-immigrant environments**<sup>10</sup> - Strict immigration enforcement policies and increased rates of deportation have impacted many Latino communities.
- **Economic factors** - Women could experience unemployment due to a lack of education or immigration status. On the other hand, women that can usually work present inequities in wages as another manifestation of gender-related power imbalances. Women who experience IPV have more work-related disruptions due to physical, sexual, and other injuries.<sup>11</sup> These factors influence women's job stability and economic status.
- **Cultural values** - Such as *familismo*, the value placed on family structures, gender-based roles and spirituality should be understood and incorporated into therapy.

**Acculturation** - The process of adapting and adjusting to new surroundings while maintaining a cultural identity, more than any other factor impacts stress levels. Studies have researched acculturation as it relates to violence experiences among Latinas. Studies indicate that Latinas with stronger bonds to their culture of origin experience less IPV, whereas higher levels of acculturation have been associated with poorer mental health outcomes among survivors.<sup>12</sup> Other studies suggest that survivors with higher levels of acculturation tend to report incidents of violence more frequently.<sup>7</sup> These results highlight the importance of exploring acculturation processes among Latina survivors of IPV.





# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE- IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Survivors of gender-based violence experience consequences on their physical and mental health. For Latinas, there are added barriers to receiving culturally responsive services such as language, access, stigma, transportation, childcare and lack of Spanish speaking providers.<sup>13</sup>

Latina survivors may experience:

- posttraumatic stress disorder
- depression
- generalized anxiety disorder
- suicidal thoughts and behaviors
- alienation
- substance use disorders

## Clinical Recommendations

- Conduct initial assessment to determine level of acculturation, development and identification of ethnic identity, and worldview.<sup>14</sup>
- Provide clients with opportunities to identify and express feelings about their heritage and self-perception.
- Encourage exploration of strengths in their cultural backgrounds, histories, and heritages, including opportunities to explore ways to incorporate spirituality into their lives.
- Develop opportunities to build alliances and relationships with women (including staff and other clients) from other groups and cultures.





### Recommendations for Organizations

- Invest in culturally sensitive staff, and provide training that promotes an understanding of common cultural beliefs, worldviews, customs, spirituality, and religion.
- Explore the possible relational needs of many Hispanic women or Latinas.
- Recognize the centrality of family/familismo and knowledge approaches for incorporating family in treatment.
- Acknowledge the immigration experience and effects of acculturative stress on roles, responsibilities, family life, substance use, mental health, and recovery.<sup>15</sup>

### Apps that May Help Increase the Safety of Latinas at Risk<sup>16</sup>

1. **Circle 6** - this app can help clients to inform their friends or family members about their location and what they need.
2. **SafeNight** - is for community members who are concerned about domestic violence and looking for a creative way to support programs and survivors. The app alerts individual donors when local domestic violence shelters are full or unavailable and allows donors to donate funds that will support a hotel night for survivors.



3. **OnWatch** - clients could benefit from this app because it can alert people they trust when they need help. The client could alert friends, the police inside university campus, and 9-1-1, among others.



### **Other Resources to Share with Clients**

- National Domestic Violence Hotline provides a 24-hour online chat for individuals experiencing violence.
  - Phone number: 1-800-799-7233
  - Website - <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- They also have a Spanish speaking website and services: La Línea Nacional Contra la Violencia Doméstica - <https://espanol.thehotline.org/>



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