Resiliency and Social Support Networks in a Population of Mexican American Intimate Partner Violence Survivors

Prepared by:
Martha Roditti, MSW, PhD
Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
New Mexico State University

Encuentro Latino
National Institute on Family Violence

www.latinodv.org   1-888-743-7545   mail@latinodv.org

Encuentro LATINO
www.latinodv.org

What are the dynamics of social support and resiliency among Mexican American IPV Survivors?

LATINO
www.latinodv.org

SURVIVORS, NOT VICTIMS

Victims = powerless and at the whim of perpetrators, helpless

Survivors = strong, assertive, and above all, despite the risk factors, survivors are resilient

LATINO
www.latinodv.org

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

Through repeated battering:
- Lose the ability to respond assertively
- Becoming hopeless and passive
- Resigning themselves to abuse
- Do not seek assistance

(Walker, 1977; Wallace, 2005)

Criticism: survivors systematically seek assistance over long periods of time

(Gondoff & Fisher, 1998)

LATINO
www.latinodv.org

LONG LASTING EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- The hostage syndrome (Stockholm Syndrome), traumatic bonding, and post-traumatic stress syndrome, along with depression and anxiety, similar to what many crime victims experience

- Exacerbated by the length of the abuse and the victim's history of past abuse with partners or family

- Women experiencing IPV are at risk for depression and that depression in Hispanic women is significantly higher than in Anglo women

(Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2005; Caetano & Cunradi, 2003)

LATINO
www.latinodv.org

Yet women persist in seeking support and help out of violent relationships

LATINO
www.latinodv.org

SURVIVORS – RESILIENCY EXPLORED
Resiliency is a health affirming, positive outlook on life

- Resilient people bend rather than break during stressful conditions, and they return to their previous level of psychological and social functioning (some may even thrive) following misfortune
- Being resilient does not mean that life's major hardships are not difficult and upsetting, but are ultimately surmountable

(Butler & Hobfoll, p. 1)

RESILIENCY

Barnard (2004) explains that resiliency is the manifestation of personal strengths and can be labeled as social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose

---

RESILIENCY - SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Involves:

- Responsiveness or the ability to elicit positive responses from others
- Social communication skills involving the process of interpersonal connecting and relationship building
- Empathy, compassion, altruism, and forgiveness

RESILIENCY – PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Involves:
- Planning
- Flexibility
- Resourcefulness
- Critical thinking
- Insight

RESILIENCY - Autonomy

Involves the ability:

- To act independently and feel a sense of control over one's environment
- An internal locus of control, a sense of self-efficacy and mastery
- Adaptive distancing and resistance by emotionally detaching from dysfunction and negativity
- Self-awareness and mindfulness
- Humor by transforming and distancing pain to absurdity

RESILIENCY
A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND BRIGHT FUTURE

Involves:
- Future oriented goal direction
- Achievement motivation and educational aspirations
- Special interests and creativity, including hobbies, art, and satisfying experiences
- Optimism and hope which involves positive cognitions and the creation of positive personal, pervasive and permanent explanation of events

STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE

- Rather than focusing on problems and past events, the strengths-based approach focuses on a person's resources and coping abilities, viewing the client as an active participant in the change process
- There is a shift in focus to current behavior and feelings and allowing exploration and discovery of client resources that can be used in change

HELP SEEKING – THE PERSISTENT SURVIVOR

Help seeking involves:
- Defining a problem
- Deciding whether to seek help
- Choosing a support provider

Liang, et al, (2005)

THE DECISION TO SEEK HELP

Influenced by:
- Prior positive or negative experiences with friends, family, or formal support
- Access to sensitive services
- Cultural factors
- Loss of privacy
- Stigmatization

CHOICES OF FORMAL OR INFORMAL HELP

Choices may be determined by her weighing of the relative benefits and costs of each one:
- Whether the violence is severe enough
- The invasion of privacy-- too intrusive
- The requests affects her immigration status
- The helper compromises her in one or more ways
- Whether the socio-cultural context of her life even promotes help seeking

When a woman seeks help and it is not there, she continues to seek help rather than desist

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support consists of social exchanges within a social network that provide (or are perceived to provide):
- Emotional encouragement
- Information and advice
- Concrete, tangible help

(Gottlieb, 1983; Thompson, 1994; Unger and Powell, 1980)

3

SOCIAL SUPPORT

- *Emotional support*
  - social relations in which someone listens to their feelings, offers comfort, encouragement and support
  - builds on their kin network and their own family strengths

- *Informational support*
  - providing education, information and referral
  - information about job training, job availability, and other service availability

- Concrete services
  - childcare, food and housing, parenting classes, drug treatment services, practical housekeeping services and jobs

(Gottlieb, 1983; Thompson, 1994; Tracy & Whittaker 1990)

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are the web of human interactions or linkages between persons or a group of persons that their influence behavior

- The patterns that make up social networks and the interactions within the networks aid in understanding the social behavior of the persons involved

- Different ties provide different support and individuals must maintain a wide variety of relationships with many individuals to insure that they receive all types of needed support

(Fraser & Hawkins, 1984; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Walker, Wasserman, & Wellman, 1993)

SOCIAL NETWORKS

- *Network size* measures networks
  - can be insensitive to the supportive nature of social networks.
  - A large social network does not necessarily imply better social support as some large kin networks can be critical and non-supportive.
  - It is the quality of the network that makes the difference, not the size

- *Reciprocity*
  - pertains to the extent to which social support in networks is mutual or unidirectional and is key to understanding the process of giving and taking assistance

(Thompson, 1994; Tracy, 1990)

SOCIAL NETWORKS

- *Density* is the extent to which network members are associated with each other.
  - While dense networks are useful, it is important to consider what Granovetter (1973) titled *The Strength of Weak Ties* and the function that more casual relationships play in obtaining social support in the form of information, support and services.
  - Many poor families live in domestic networks that require an intense density of reciprocal relationships (Stack, 1974; Thompson, 1994)

- *Social embeddedness* relates to the frequency of contact with network members.
  - Good measure of social isolation
  - Frequency of contact does not indicate an emotional involvement (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1994; Polansky, 1981)

SOCIAL NETWORKS

- *Dispersion*
  - Ease with which individuals can contact and communicate with network members.
  - Is a special problem for poor families who can be isolated, resulting in fewer contacts with network members (Coohey, 1996)

- *Stability*
  - consistency of a network's composition over time

- *Homogeneity*
  - the extent to which network members share common attributes such as employment or educational goals, childrearing practices, and socio-economic status

NEGATIVE NETWORKS IN IPV

Not all support is positive

A study of Mexican women indicated that family itself can be a negative network that supports abusive behavior towards women

(Agoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007)

4

NEGATIVE NETWORKS IN IPV

- In an environment of poverty, isolation, and generational and gender inequality; women are especially vulnerable

- In this context the members of the woman's family do not condone spousal abuse but understand it as deserved punishment for noncompliance with certain expectations of the female role

---

A STUDY OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

A convenience sample was collected from interviews conducted in two domestic violence shelters along the Southwestern U.S. Border area in a two year period between September 2006 and June 2008

- Graduate and undergraduate social work students placed in the agencies as part of a federal domestic violence grant were trained and supervised in the administration of three instruments.

- Participants were recruited from women over 18 years old currently living in the two shelters.

- They were provided a small incentive for engaging in the interviews.

- Students conducted 78 interviews.

- Written informed consent was obtained from each participant.

INSTRUMENTS:

1. Questionnaire
   - demographic information about participants.
2. Resilience was measured using the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young,1993).
   - This 25-item self-report questionnaire measures psychological resilience, the capacity to withstand life stressors, and to thrive and make meaning from challenges.
3. The degree of psychological disturbance or mood was measured by the Profile of Mood States Brief Version (POMS-B).
   - The identifies six mood or affective states, tension-anxiety, depression-dejection, anger-hostility, vigor-activity, fatigue-inertia, and confusion-bewilderment.
4. Social support was analyzed using the Social Network Map, (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990)
   - Identifies forms of social support and social network factors using the technique of social support network mapping.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Demographics	n= 78 women
Ethnicity	
White	6 (8%)
Hispanic	72 (92%)
Mexican	60 (83%)
Mexican American	12 (17%)*

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Mexican American Women	72
Age	31.2+9.3 years (18-59)
Language in home Spanish	57 (79%)
Country of birth	
Born in the US	12 (17%)
Born out of the US	60 (83%)
10 yrs or more in US	25 (42%)
9 years or less in US	35 (58%)

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Mexican American Women	72
Marital status	
Married	39 (54.2%)
Single	16 (22.2%)
Divorced	11 (15.3%)
Living with significant other	6 (8.3%)
Time in Shelter	
Less than a month	32 (44%)
1-3 months	36 (50%)
More than three months	4 (5.6%)

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Mexican American Women	72
Income - Less than $5000/year	50 (70%)
Education	
Less than high school	45 (63%)
High school graduates	14 (19%)
Some college or graduates	13 (18%)
History	
Violence as a child	36 (50%)

ANALYSIS

- *Univariate*
- *Bivariate:* Dependent t-test
- *Multivariate:* OLS Regression

FINDINGS

- Increased resilience score is associated with reduced mood disturbance
- Spanish in the home associated with higher resilience score (NS)
- History of childhood violence is associated with higher mood disturbance scores

Size does matter; increase in the network size of formal support and friends/neighbors is associated with higher perceived social support

Size of family network is not associated with an increase in perceived social support

Perceived help was significantly greater from formal services, as compared to friends & family

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

While it is recognized that an extensive social network lessens the impact of IPV:

- Mexican-American women who seek assistance from a battered woman's shelter may receive greater benefit from formal services in their social network than from informal social support networks.

- The nature of the social network that provides the best environment should be explored.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Help seeking is a strong factor in resilience and survival

- Many of the women in this study (56 women) appeared to have perceived themselves with the strength to "find their way out of difficult situations"

- The study women appeared to receive help more from other sources than family. This either means that the shelter programs were succeeding or the families are more non-supportive than we anticipated.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

- This research found that friends/neighbors and formal network members were more supportive than family

- We cannot dismiss the positive effect of family, but must consider that not all social support from families adds to resiliency, but may contribute to the perpetuation of violence

Encuentro Latino
National Institute on Family Violence

www.latinodv.org   1-888-743-7545   mail@latinodv.org

7