STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WOMEN COME FORWARD TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES LIVING IN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATIONSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

by
Yadira Diaz
Fall 2012
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Yadira Diaz

Stepping Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Immigrant Women Come Forward
to Share Their Experiences Living in a Domestic Violence Relationship in the

United States

William A. Nericcio, Chair
Department of English and Comparative Literature

Irene Lara
Department of Women’s Studies

Norma Iglesias-Prieto
Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies

OCTOBER 30, 2012
Approval Date
Copyright © 2012
by
Yadira Diaz
All Rights Reserved
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the brave women who shared their intimate stories and made this study possible. It is also dedicated to my parents-Guadalupe Diaz and Javier Diaz. I am forever grateful and thankful for their sacrifices, hard work, and dedication. Finally, this thesis is for my grandma (mi abuelita), Maria Luisa Sandoval, her memory lives on.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Stepping Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Immigrant Women
Come Forward to Share Their Experiences Living in a Domestic
Violence Relationship in the United States

by

Yadira Diaz

Master of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences
San Diego State University, 2012

This study analyzes the relationship between domestic violence (DV) and women’s vulnerability and shows how this relationship is directly impacted by an individual’s immigration status. This study is done from a qualitative perspective using interviews to conduct the research and was conducted in a DV center. All participants being analyzed were undocumented immigrant women (UIW) living in the southwestern region of the United States, near the U.S.-Mexico border. This thesis provides insight into the hardships and obstacles UIW face when they are in a DV relationship. The benefits of this study will be substantial not only for educational purposes, but for those working with DV victims. This will allow for a better understanding and, most importantly, how to address these obstacles and better serve UIW in a DV relationship.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT .......................................................... v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................... vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 TRENDS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS ...................................................... 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY: STUGGLES OF APPROACHING HUMAN SUBJECTS AND CHOOSING CASES .................................. 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FINDINGS PART ONE: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WOMEN SHARE THEIR STRUGGLES WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, IMMIGRATION STATUS, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ................................................. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 FINDINGS PART TWO: HOPE, EMPOWERMENT, AND STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE ...................................................... 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 CONCLUSION .............................................................. 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES ............................................................. 72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was made possible through the guidance and help of supportive people that surrounded me during my journey. I would like to recognize and thank the chair and members of my committee—William A. Nericcio, Irene Lara, and Norma Iglesias-Prieto, for the advice and knowledge they provided. I am grateful for their guidance and patience throughout the years. I offer my deepest appreciation to Sharon Carr and TJ Carr for the support they provided. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family for always believing in me. Especially, to my parents and sisters who have given me their unconditional love and support.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2005 I had an opportunity to be a part of an organization that was dedicated to helping victims/survivors of domestic violence (DV), sexual assault (SA), and stalking. I had just recently obtained a Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology with an emphasis on Social Problems, so I felt prepared to enter a field of which I was familiar. I soon realized the social issues surrounding DV and SA were far more complex. I was confronted with the harsh reality that DV and SA are phenomena that occur far more frequently than I could have ever imagined. It was not long before I became fully dedicated to and passionate about working with victims/survivors of DV and SA.

Working directly with victim/survivors of DV and SA, I encountered something that needed immediate attention. There was something I could not ignore. My daily interaction with DV and SA victims/survivors, made me aware of the inequity undocumented immigrant women (UIW) face in this country. Living in a violent relationship creates hardships and instability for women, but the challenges are compounded for UIW. They are less likely to seek help because they are in a foreign country, where language becomes a barrier, and trust is hard to establish due to their marginalized position in society. Addressing the challenge of living in a DV relationship in addition to looking at the limitations society has placed on UIW is imperative because it allows for a greater understanding of how and why UIW are at higher risk of vulnerability. In this study I analyze the relationship between the social condition of being undocumented and the level of vulnerability UIW face when living in a violent relationship.

In addressing those issues, I hope to contribute new insights to the field of DV. Recent research opened the door to a new approach of viewing violence against women. Acknowledging that differences indeed do exist among women allows for a broader understanding of the unique challenges each woman faces. Creating research that is more inclusive allows for real change, not only for one group of women, but also for all women. In Chapter Two, I analyze the current research trends on DV and its effects on women of color.
with a focus on UIW. Recognizing that DV affects victims in different ways can help our communities find different strategies to adequately provide support and services for women of color and UIW.

It is important to reach out to the undocumented community because their position in society makes them more vulnerable to violence. Taking the proper steps to ensure my research project did not further contribute to these women’s vulnerabilities was a priority. In Chapter Three, I describe the logic and procedures used to understand the relationship between DV and women’s vulnerability depending on their immigration status. This research study addresses the vulnerabilities UIW face living in a violent relationship, the challenges UIW face being undocumented, and the impact agents of social/law enforcement control have on UIW living with DV. Addressing these issues in a responsible and ethical manner will allow for a better understanding of why these women’s fears might increase their vulnerability.

Recognizing the diversity that exists among women and how social categories affect victims/survivors of DV is critical. My research analyzes DV through the eyes of five women: Ana, Angelica, Lorena, Maria, and Veronica. These women narrated their experiences with no boundaries. In Chapter Four, these women walk us through the unforgiving trauma they experienced living in a DV relationship, the challenges they faced in this country, and the obstacles faced when it comes to law enforcement. These women share their intimate realities in order to stir consciousness about their struggles in this country. The obstacles they faced are unfortunate and unforgiving. Despite their negative experiences, their strength is unquestionable and their passion to move forward is evident. In Chapter Five, these women conclude with words of hope. They speak words of encouragement to women that are in similar situations and addressed their community asking them to try to comprehend their situation.

These five women were faced with challenges that could have paralyzed many; however, they are now slowly taking back control of a life that was once subjected to violence. After living their lives in the dark they have stepped out of the shadows to confront their harsh realities with the hope that their stories will reach those who are living with similar challenges. These women’s experiences illustrate the importance of addressing the multiple differences that exist and prevented them from speaking out. These women
embarked on this painful journey and re-lived their painful experiences for a greater cause. My research, *Stepping Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Immigrant Women Come Forward to Share Their Experiences Living in a Domestic Violence Relationship in the United States*, provides insight into the lives of these five courageous UIW with the ultimate aim of participating in creating constructive social change that will benefit other UIW survivors of violence.
CHAPTER 2
TRENDS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH
AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter seeks to analyze the current research trends on DV and its effects on women of color with a focus on UIW. The scholars’ positions on the topic help to illustrate the current research trends within the field of DV. These scholars’ contributions to the field are huge because it gives a voice to women who are generally overlooked. The theoretical perspective seeks to understand why some women are more vulnerable than others. This chapter will give us insight into the obstacles underrepresented women face when living with DV, which contributes to their vulnerability.

Today violence against women continues to affect women at a global level. According to Guadalupe T. Vidales in “Arrested Justice: The Multifaceted Plight of Immigrant Latinas who Faced Domestic Violence,” “1.5 million women in the U.S. annually experience domestic violence” (533). Women living in this country experiencing DV face many dangers. Joanne Klevens suggests in “An Overview of Intimate Partner Violence Among Latinos” that, “violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV), is a leading cause of death, disability, and hospitalization in the United States” (111). Klevens further writes that violence against women affects women from all walks of life and although DV affects women from all ethnic groups, research on DV has largely been limited to White women. Research that excludes other ethnic groups cannot adequately represent women throughout the country. Klevens’ findings show how “IPV might be different among other racial and ethnic groups, and, thus, the relevance of the extant research on IPV for these other groups is unknown” (112). Klevens’ research is pertinent to my research because Klevens’ points out that not all women face DV in the same way. Women are faced with different obstacles depending on race, gender, class, language, and immigration status. Limiting research to white women distorts the reality of women of color. My research will suggest that UIW living in a DV relationship are more vulnerable than women who have legal immigration status. Vidales further states that, “Although scholars have presented many theoretical
perspectives regarding domestic violence in the general population, few have addressed the
issue of domestic violence in minority communities” (533). Research in this area has been
growing; however, efforts must continue to address issues that are pertinent to women of
color.

Violence affects women from all walks of life, but research on women of color is
limited. Christine E. Rasche writes in the article “Minority Women and Domestic Violence:
The Unique Dilemmas of Battered Women of Color” that, “literature on women and other
racial/ethnic backgrounds is virtually nonexistent” (87). Rasche further states “Minority
women belong to a devalued race and devalued gender, by dominant American values, and
are therefore of little intrinsic interest to members of the dominant class” (86). Rasche points
out that the dominant class is generally not interested in issues affecting minority women. I
feel that as a woman of color it is important to look at issues directly affecting our
communities. In order to establish differences among Latino subgroups and the effects of
IPV more research must be made (Klevens). Research has given insight into the hardships
women face in a DV relationship; therefore, it is important to take into account that among
women there are differences that affect how they struggle to survive in a DV relationship.
Being aware of these differences can help society more effectively serve these women, get
them proper help, aid them in making informed decisions, and help survivors heal from a DV
relationship.

Domestic violence affects women of color differently depending on culture, class,
and race. In Antifeminism and Family Terrorism: A Critical Feminist Perspective, Rhonda
Hammer uses bell hooks work to explain the complexity and differences among women:

There is much evidence substantiating the reality that race and class identity
creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that take
precedence over the common experience women share-difference which are
rarely transcended. The motives of materially privileged, educated, white women
with a variety of career and lifestyle options available to them must be questioned
when they insist that ‘suffering cannot be measured.’ (140)

As asserted by Hammer and hooks, and as established within Women’s Studies, the
intersection of race, class, gender, and other social categories affect women’s experiences
differently. I agree that women’s experiences are shaped by many different factors and a
conclusion cannot be drawn from looking solely at one group of women to apply solutions to
all women.
The significance of including other ethnic/racial groups when analyzing violence against women is crucial. Kathleen Malley-Morrison and Denise A. Hines looked at Asian American issues when it comes to DV in *Family Violence in a Cultural Perspective: Defining, Understanding and Combating Abuse* and describes that “Battered Asian American women may be more concerned with their partners and families than themselves, and may act to protect their abusive partners—particularly if they are socially isolated within a racist community” (202). While this country values individual independence, it is important to note that this dominant cultural model does not fit all people and it is important to value a collective approach as a means to describe different cultural values. Malley-Morrison and Hines explain that in Japanese culture, protecting and maintaining relationships when conflict occurs is deemed more valuable than seeking help for themselves. Looking at Asian American issues is important to my research because these concerns are similar to those in the Latino community. In doing my research I have found that DV does not discriminate against race, class, and education; however, some factors, such as gender, class, immigration status, and language, may, in fact, put women at a disadvantage. These disadvantages not only force women to remain silent but women isolate themselves because they cannot trust their partners or their community.

Tina U. Hancock looks at women’s interaction with the American culture and suggests that women’s perspective on family collectivism continues to be valued among certain communities as opposed to the view of individual gratification. Hancock further explains in “Sin Papeles: Undocumented Mexicans in the Rural United States”:

> In keeping with the women’s culture-of-origin values, gaining awareness of an individual self with personal agency did not diminish a strong family orientation. Nor did the number of years the women had lived in the United States weaken their view of the family as being a priority in their lives. Newfound personal opportunities were regarded as avenues to enhancing family well-being rather than to achieving higher levels of individual autonomy and independence. (176)

Hancock’s research is very important and valuable to my research because Hancock focuses on undocumented Mexican families in this country. The fact that the number of years in this country did not affect their view towards family orientation may be an explanation as to why it is hard for women in a DV relationship to leave their current situation. Hancock’s analysis shows that as individual undocumented women’s vulnerabilities increase, undocumented women’s vulnerability also increases collectively.
Recognizing the importance of cultural differences among women of color is the first step towards creating awareness of obstacles these women are facing. Klevens moves a step forward by suggesting:

Based on in-depth interviews, the main factor influencing Latinas’ decisions about seeking help or leaving or staying with the abuser appears to be the welfare of their children. Barriers to seeking help include lack of financial means; fear of deportation, of losing custody of their children, or of their situation worsening; beliefs that abuse must be tolerated or that police, health care providers, and other institutions are oblivious to IPV or will discriminate against them; being unaware of available services; language difficulties; preferences for an intact family; and lack of transportation. (118)

It is important to note that a cultural characteristic that is shared among Asian Americans and Latinos is the importance of family values. Keeping one’s family intact is valued and many times it might be the only support system that the affected women have.

Apart from sharing strong family values, Kimberle Crenshaw explores the language barriers these women face in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality and Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” Crenshaw suggests, “Language barriers present another structural problem that often limits opportunities of non-English-speaking women to take advantage of existing support services” (285). Crenshaw’s focus on violence against women of color is important to my research because it is necessary to understand how language has an impact on women’s life in a violent relationship. Women of color are faced with hardships that increase their vulnerability and when immigration status is taken into consideration their vulnerability increases dramatically.

Immigrant women living in the United States are among the most vulnerable in a DV relationship due to immigration status, acculturation, sexism, racism, discrimination, and socioeconomic disadvantage. Klevens’ research looks at these issues and further elaborates on barriers that affect the Latino community:

Latinos may also be at a special disadvantage for accessing and utilizing services. In addition to the language barriers, low levels of education and income, and poor knowledge of existing services, many Latinos are undocumented, which may add real or perceived barriers to utilizing services. Culture and immigration experiences might affect beliefs and make the experience of IPV different for Latinos. (117)

Battered immigrant women are faced with many difficulties because they are unaware that services are available and they are unfamiliar with the language. Language presents a huge
barrier when it comes to women seeking help. In, “The Legal Status of Battered Immigrant Women,” Lydia Brashear Tiede illustrates this point by suggesting “many immigrant victims do not speak English and are uninformed about U.S. criminal and immigration laws and systems” (57). Dylan Foley further writes in “The Importance of Tailoring Social Services to Specific Populations” that, “Immigrant Arab women…encounter problems arising from intense cultural isolation, language barriers, and racial or religious discrimination” (88).

Cultural differences define the complexities many women of color face. In *It Could Happen to Anyone: Why Battered Women Stay*, Alyce D. LaViolette and Ola W. Barnett explain that multiple barriers can cause greater vulnerability and “it seems obvious that language barriers, racism, employment stress, cultural beliefs, isolation, and immigration status compound a woman’s vulnerability” (74). These researchers believe that language increases vulnerability, putting women of color and immigrant women at greater risk. Language barriers are one of the many factors that women of color face in this country; this issue will be further explored in Chapter Four.

Common factors women of color share in this country are discrimination and racism. The historical trauma that many communities of color have faced has had profound effect on women of color. A common effect that historical trauma has had on communities of color is the lack of trust in the criminal justice system. This, consequently, prevents women of color from seeking help when they are in danger. Mallley-Morison and Hines suggest that unequal treatment in the criminal justice is due to:

- Maltreatment of their batterers by members of the criminal justice system, especially police, keeps many women of color from filing criminal reports.
- Unequal treatment by police and judicial officials may reflect the devalued status of Black, Asian American, and other immigrant victims of violence, while at the same time contributing to further violence. (237-238)

This suggestion is important to my research because the recent trends and policies towards the immigrant community forces UIW to remain silent because they cannot trust a system that is constantly working against them.

According to Natalie J. Sokoloff in “Domestic Violence at the Crossroads: Violence Against Poor Women and Women of Color”:

One of the major issues for battered women from marginalized communities is that outside help is feared because there is so much individual and institutional discrimination against her from ‘outsiders’- police, courts, doctors, domestic-violence agencies, etc.-in mainstream communities. So while it may be true that
she will face violence in her family or community, it is just as true that if she goes outside her community, she will face another set of hostilities. (143)

The distrust in the criminal justice system increases women’s vulnerability. Women of color are often times discriminated against in this society and unequal treatment by the criminal justice system further victimizes these women. According to Crenshaw, “Women of color are often reluctant to call the police, a hesitancy likely due to a general unwillingness among people of color to subject their private lives to the scrutiny and control of a police force that is frequently hostile” (289). Rinku Sen further contributes to the issue in “Battered Women in Communities of Color,” that communities of color would avoid the criminal justice system to protect their own:

African Americans are often hesitant to report cases of domestic violence because they do not want to contribute further to the high rate of incarceration of black men. Because many American Indian tribes function as sovereign nations, Sen explains, these communities are reluctant to involve outside authorities and instead try to develop their own programs for helping battered women. (34)

It is important to be able to understand why communities of color have lost faith towards the criminal justice system. In my research, especially in Chapter Four, I will further explore this from the perspective of why UIW do not trust the criminal justice system.

African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American communities have all experienced harsh discrimination and racism in this country. Many times women in these communities have no other option than to remain silent while their violent realities go unreported. A reality that is frequently shared by women of color is a fear to report violence to law enforcement. Malley-Morrison and Hines study found the following:

A number of factors appear to contribute to the underreporting of wife abuse in Asian American communities—and many are similar to factors operating in Hispanic and Native American Indian communities. These factors include language barriers, experiences of institutional racism and discrimination, lack of information about available services, the view that wife-beating is a private matter, unwillingness of victims to initiate discussion of abuse with medical personal, fear of ‘losing face,’ and fear of deportation. (209)

In addition to the distrust on the criminal justice system the lack of knowledge when it comes to services also prevents women of color from seeking help. Sen further suggests:

Women of color are between a rock and a hard place: perhaps at greater risk for domestic violence than white women because [they are] unable to trust the police for themselves or their partners [and] less able to rely on internal community resources because of low awareness of domestic violence. (38)
The lack of trust in the criminal justice system and lack of knowledge on DV puts women in a position where options become limited. The options become even scarcer when women have unclear immigration status.

An added challenge immigrant women face is the growing anti-immigrant sentiment that is currently destroying their community. Andrea J. Ritchie illustrates how this was affecting immigrant women in “Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color” and writes:

> the current anti-immigrant climate, the absence of societal responses to violence that does not rely on law enforcement agencies, increasingly more concerned with detecting and deporting undocumented women than protecting them, increases immigrant women’s vulnerability to violence. (151)

Historically, people of color and immigrant communities have been discriminated against and mistreated by law enforcement; sadly it puts women at greater risk when they cannot trust law enforcement.

Immigrant women are faced with challenges and obstacles that are unique. According to Sen, women who have unclear immigration status experience DV differently due to their further marginalized position. It is important to illustrate the disadvantages that UIW face because their challenges are unique and can only be experienced by immigrants. This is also illustrated by the U.S. Government in *Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act 1999* that suggests that immigrant women “suffer even more fear, threats, intimidation and isolation than their American sisters” (Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act of 2000 66). The greater fear suffered by immigrant women is caused by multiple factors. Some of these factors are analyzed in the article written by Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo in “Medical Violence Against People of Color and the Medicalization of Domestic Violence,” which gives some insight into risk factors and suggests that “Immigrant women already face the sociocultural stresses present in experience of migration and displacement, in addition to struggling to survive an encounter with a white American hegemonic culture, all factors which exacerbate the lethality of domestic violence” (187-188). Sen and Durazo illustrate important issues that are faced first hand by immigrant women. This research will provide valuable information that I will further explore.

Deportation is a big fear factor for many women because it separates families and disrupts daily life. In “Violence Against Immigrant Women: The Roles of Culture, Context,
and Legal Immigrant Status on Intimate Partner Violence” Anita Raj and Jay Silverman illustrate that, “Recent research indicates that among immigrant women, those who have more recently immigrated, who are undocumented, and who have no family in the United States are less likely to seek social and health services due to isolation and fear of deportation” (385). While it is hard to seek help in a DV relationship, UIW in particular have a difficult time obtaining help due to their position in society and lack of awareness when it comes to laws in this country. Rasche explores Latina immigrant women and DV and suggests “If there is truth to the notion that rates of domestic violence may be higher in Hispanic cultures anyway, the Latina immigrant (especially the illegal alien) may be one of the most abused but underreported battered women in America” (93). Rasche’s suggestions are in fact very important because these women are living on the margins of our society. Some never escape the ravages of DV because unfortunately DV claims their lives.

Undocumented women who are victims of DV are more likely to have additional challenges such as fear to contact law enforcement and are more likely to be unfamiliar with their rights, which results in greater vulnerability. Klevens explains “Culture and immigration experiences might affect beliefs and make the experience of IPV different for Latinos. Many immigrant women may fear seeking help from authorities because of negative experiences in their home countries or fear of deportation” (117). The dynamics of DV with undocumented women creates added hardship and instability. Undocumented women face greater instability than those that are residents or citizens. This point is elaborated further by Tiede:

Some victims lead very isolated lives in the United States; if they are undocumented, they live secret lives in which they literally have no legal identity and few if any ties to social services, friends, or family. Abusers often compound their abuse by threatening to call the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and have the victim deported is she dares complain about the abuse. The impact of such threat is not exaggerated; undocumented victims know that they are constantly at risk of deportation and fear leaving their children in the United States with the abusing spouse and facing a hostile society upon return to their home country. (57)

Undocumented women have added hardships when it comes to violent relationships. Undocumented women are less likely to seek help because they are in a foreign country, where they do not know the language, and are afraid of being deported.
Law enforcement can be a determining factor as to why many women of color do not call and report incidents. This is because of the uncertainty of what will happen to their partner’s and themselves as well as the fear of having their legal status questioned (Sen). While women of color and immigrant women live isolated lives, undocumented women are further marginalized and forced to live secret lives. Renee Saucedo further analyzes the issue of immigration in “INS Raids and How Immigrant Women are Fighting Back.” Women in abusive relationships often do not call the police because “most of the time the police ask the batterer and the women about their immigration status” (Saucedo 136). The fear of having their immigration status questioned plays a major role in reporting to police. Sen further explains, “Immigrant women tend not to call the police because they fear that they will be deported,… [and the] current criminal justice strategies do not adequately address the needs of the minority women who are battered” (34). The unclear responsibilities of the criminal justice system prevent immigrant women from getting help.

Undocumented women are further oppressed when their partners are residents or citizens of this country. Hancock writes “Undocumented Mexican women who were in relationships with men with legal status were at a decided disadvantage, since they became more, rather than less, dependent after they had migrated” (178). Undocumented women become highly dependent on their partners because their legal status is non-existent. Undocumented women are unrecognized by our society and as a result their partners use this to control and keep women subservient and often times threaten to contact INS if women seek any type of help (Malley-Morrison and Hines). Furthermore, Hancock suggest the “unremitting fear of deportation, undocumented women are hemmed in by increasingly stringent requirements that block them from legal personhood” (177). Undocumented immigrant women victims of DV are at a loss when it comes to seeking help because their abusive partners create roadblocks that prevent them from seeking help and the current system that is in place intimidates undocumented women. Living in a DV relationship in conjunction with a system that does not recognize them, forces women to remain silent. After analyzing the recent research trends in DV and communities of color it is important to note that there are current efforts to broaden our knowledge in the field of DV; however, efforts must not stop here because this is only the beginning. We as advocates must continue our efforts and not forget the importance of analyzing the many social categories that exist.
Within the undocumented immigrant community and DV it is imperative to continue to analyze the multiple social categories from a broader lens to include same sex couples because when it comes to same sex couples and DV this area is largely understudied because of our heteronormative culture. In “Three Movements in a Minor: Lesbians and Immigration” Grace Poore explains:

I wonder how many lesbians realize that closets are not identical, that different realities define our closets, and that the difference in our closets defines the ways in which we choose to Come Out. For instance, with non-immigrant lesbians—women who carry their homes with them, some in exile, some on the run, and others who are simply, yet not merely, travelers—non-immigrant by virtue of our choice not to become citizens, not to immigrate but to temporarily reside, live, love, work in one country, pay taxes, join community struggles, contribute art and thought, women who reject the term, “illegal” and “alien,” and like all other lesbians contend with the risk of hate violence and housing or job discrimination, but unlike other lesbians, also contend with immigration. (12)

Analyzing DV through a broader lens will allow the inclusion of marginalized groups that are forced to remain silent. It is imperative that research includes same sex couples because they are faced with additional barriers that further marginalizes and isolates UIW due to their sexual orientation. Reaching out to marginalized communities will allow for a broader understanding of what strategies will help these women’s safety and well-being.

A collective effort of those advocating for healthy relationships will open the door to a greater understanding on what silences women. As Roger J. R. Levesque suggests in the book, Cultural and Family Violence: Fostering Change Through Human Rights Law:

Although progress continues to be made in efforts to recognize, document, and respond to a broad range of abusive situations, this area of research remains limited in its investigation of the various ecological contexts in which violence occurs. The role of cultural forces in family violence and the cross-cultural manifestations of such violence continue to be neglected in the study of family violence. The United States, for example, contributes to the pool of ‘authoritative knowledge’ exported to countries around the world. Even though the United States is multicultural, exported concepts and research generally draw from the ‘mainstream’ population (typically White with European descent) or fail to delineate cultural variations. More problematic, even empirical investigators who acknowledge the need to recognize that homogeneity in cultural groups migrating to the United States still use measures that homogenize the ‘American’ culture and use those measures to determine risks of family violence without determining whether the measure have the same functional meanings outside the host culture. Health and social services professionals continue to transfer accepted concepts from one culture to others and generally ignore the need to develop theoretical
and empirical evaluations of the phenomenon within culture-specific contexts. (39)

Because women from all cultures are vulnerable to DV it is important to analyze how violence affects different women and what can be done to prevent the cycle of violence. Exploring DV and its effects on immigrant women will give insight into an area of study that has been largely neglected. The current contributions have opened the door to a community that is quite often overlooked. I will continue to explore issues such as gender, immigration status, language, and class. As we have seen, all of these issues increase women’s vulnerability, compelling undocumented women to remain silent. The results will be significant and valuable to the academic world, but more importantly, they will benefit those working with immigrant women in a DV relationship.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: STUGGLES OF APPROACHING HUMAN SUBJECTS AND CHOOSING CASES

This section is a reflection of the logic and procedures used to understand the relationship between DV and women’s vulnerability depending on their immigration status. In this chapter I seek to explain the pertinence of doing qualitative research, as well as the procedures I followed to obtain this information. Furthermore, I will include my personal reflection about the researcher process and the challenges I faced during this process.

OVERVIEW

This research was conducted to give insight into the lives of UIW who were living in a DV relationship. The importance of analyzing the experiences of UIW living in a violent relationship is to help us understand why undocumented women’s vulnerability increases not only behind closed doors, but also in society as a whole. Consequently, these women are at greater risk of violence, isolation, and family separation. My hypothesis seeks to analyze the relationship between DV and women’s vulnerability as it increases depending on immigration status. In order to test my hypothesis I conducted interviews from women who have been the direct victims of DV. These women have suffered first hand from violence in their intimate relationships and as if that was not enough, they are forced to live at the margins of our society because they are undocumented.

Due to the complexity of this issue and recent attention focused on UIW and DV, I plan to contribute insights into the hardships and obstacles UIW face when they are living in a DV relationship. The benefits of these findings will be substantial not only for educational purposes, but for those working directly with victims/survivors of DV. This will allow for a better understanding and most important how to address these obstacles and better serve UIW in a DV relationship.
RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is done from a qualitative perspective. Earl Babbie suggests in, The Basics of Social Research, that, “Qualitative data are richer in meaning and detail than are quantified data” (20). This methodology was used to examine how these women construct their realities as UIW who are victims of DV. This method allowed me to go directly to the meaning DV has for these women. This study was focused on a small sample of case studies. My contribution is modest, but substantial because it gives voice to women who are generally silenced by different agents of oppression. I am conscious that my work does not reflect the realities of all UIW. This is an analysis of five significant cases that will make an important contribution to the overall comprehension of DV.

Before I could contribute to the understanding of these women’s realities I had to learn a strict protocol that I followed throughout my research project. Research involving human subjects cannot move forward before complying with the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB process is set to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects in accordance with federal regulations to ensure researchers are conducting their study in an ethical manner. Diane Kholos Wysocki describes the role of the IRB in Readings in Social Research Methods. She states, “The IRB is made up of a panel of people, usually faculty, who review all research proposals to make sure that the rights and interests of the subjects are protected, that the research is ethical, and that no harm comes to the subjects” (59).

Complying with the IRB is necessary in order to make sure research atrocities do not occur like they have in the past. In order to conduct my research I had to get approval from the IRB.

Once I determined that my research required approval from the IRB, the next step was to determine under what review category my research fell. There are three different review categories to consider: exempt, expedited, and full committee. The review procedure is determined by federal regulations. According to federal regulations, my research review type was considered full committee review. A study that does not meet the requirements for exempt or expedited review will fall under full committee review. Studies that fall under this review type involve more than minimal risk to participants and those who are involved are considered vulnerable population. The participants in this research project are among the
most vulnerable populations in this country. Therefore, research involving vulnerable populations will most likely fall into this type of review.

This research project seeks to answer the following questions: Are UIW living with DV more vulnerable? What impact do agents of social control have on the UIW living with DV? What can be done to create consciousness of UIW’s needs? Once these questions were explored, I found conditions that explained why these women’s fears might increase their vulnerability. These women present unique challenges that may only be faced by undocumented women, which in turn, results in greater vulnerability.

The oral history part of this project seeks to examine how UIW affected by DV are at higher risk of vulnerability. There are many factors that can make women more or less vulnerable, but in this study I am analyzing the relation associated with their condition of being undocumented and the level of vulnerability when they are victims of DV. That is to say, that women’s immigration status, whether legal or illegal, affects their level of vulnerability when it comes to DV. The oral stories of UIW and their experience with DV is an area in the academic field that needs further attention. Many questions come to mind when trying to explain the reasons behind why this issue has not been fully studied in academia until recently. By leaving these women in the shadows, do researchers feel that these women are safer? Or do they simply believe that UIW do not suffer DV? Another possibility is that researchers may not feel they have easy access to undocumented women’s stories for various reasons. For example, researchers coming from White middle class backgrounds and only speaking English may create barriers that make researching UIW more difficult. Most researches are socially and culturally different from the communities they study. The Latino community historically does not trust law enforcement. Factoring in that these women are here without legal permission can make researchers even more intimidating to UIW. Most researchers are White males with authority fitting a profile that makes it very difficult to obtain trust.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Protecting the identity of research participants in this study was crucial. According to Babbie “A research project guarantees confidentiality when the researcher can identify a given person’s responses but essentially promises not to do publicly” (58). There are some
exceptions to the confidentiality rule. As the researcher I explained that there was special
considerations for maintaining confidentiality. However, I explained that under certain
conditions I would disclose to authorities any information I receive from participants about
intended physical harm to self or others and disclosure about injuries to a child caused by
other-than-accidental means. This was explained verbally as well as on the consent forms
provided to the participants. Procedures to prevent violations of confidentiality are limited by
state law reporting requirements and mandatory disclosure laws apply to researchers.

The primary aim of the study was to analyze how immigration status increases
women’s vulnerability when they are involved in a DV relationship. Because the population
analyzed is among the most vulnerable in our society, getting approval to move forward was
difficult. A study of this nature has to be confidential. Taking extra precautions was my
priority because I did not want to further contribute to their vulnerability. I had to take
appropriate safeguards into account to guarantee participant’s confidentiality.

To ensure confidentiality, identification numbers replaced all identifying information
and later I provided pseudonyms. I took every precaution to ensure confidentiality when
storing all hard data and electronic data; therefore, all data was secured and protected and can
only be accessed by entering a password. I was the only one who had access to the password.
All hard copies and electronic data were stored in secure storage, either in locked cabinets or
restricted areas on my computer. During data analysis all identifying information with the
exception of the subject identification numbers was removed. To further guarantee their
confidentiality, the voice recordings will only be used to create an accurate transcript of the
interviews. No identifying information about the participants will be published or presented
at conferences. The information gathered from this study will be used only for scientific,
educational, or instructional purposes. This study seeks to learn how these women’s
vulnerability affects them in a DV relationship. My responsibility as a researcher is to protect
the identity of these women and to take all necessary precautions to prevent further
vulnerability.

**CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION**

Setting guidelines for inclusion was important because participants had to meet the
criteria set forth in order to participate. The screening process for inclusion was described in
a flyer written in Spanish. I recruited participants by using a flyer and the snowball method. The flyer was posted at a non-profit organization that focuses on providing services to victims of DV and SA. It indicated the importance of contacting the researcher from a safe and private location due to safety. The research interviews were also conducted at this non-profit organization, located in the Southwest Region of the United States.

The participant screening process followed a strict guideline for inclusion because I was looking for participants who fit specific criteria. I determined the screening procedure used to determine participant eligibility. Criteria for inclusion was as followed: participants had to be immigrant women from Latin America, victims of DV, and age 18 and older living in the Southwest Region of the United States. The standard for inclusion was important because the study was looking for immigrant women who have experienced DV first hand. Those who did not meet the criteria were excluded. It was important to include only those who met the criteria for inclusion in order to test the hypothesis.

INFORMED CONSENT AND PROCEDURES

Informing participants about their rights gave participants the opportunity to make an informed decision about whether or not they wanted to participate in the research study. As a researcher my priority was to ensure the well being of all participants by following ethical rules of research. Ethical considerations were critical. Due to the nature of this study, I looked at potential risks and discomforts that might arise and negatively affect participants. Potential risks and discomforts were closely looked at in order to ensure that participants did not suffer any harm as a consequence of this study. For this reason, all participants were required to read a detailed consent form before participating in the study.

Consent forms focused on the fully voluntary nature of their participation and right to withdraw from the study at any time. Consent forms also described that all data relating to the participants would be removed from data analysis. After the consent forms were reviewed I made myself available during the study process to answer any concerns. The consent forms were translated into Spanish for the monolingual Spanish-speaking participants. Participants were informed that taking part in the research would not result in any cost to the participant. I verbally stressed the importance of having the participants express their experiences from their point of view. I explained in advance that the interview
would be recorded with a digital voice recorder for accuracy. Consent was given to record the interview. After consent was given I was ready to begin interviewing.

When discerning possible discomforts, I looked at the nature of the interview questions and was aware that some questions could present discomfort to some participants. Because of the personal nature of the questions asked, a participant may have expressed discomfort or distrust while participating in the interviews. The well-being of all participants was a priority. As a result, prior to the interview, participants were informed they could choose to skip any question or procedure that made them uncomfortable. Reiterating the importance of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any time was essential.

Being respectful and showing interest towards participants during the interview was very important because participants were sharing sensitive information. I was aware of demonstrating my interest by using my interpersonal skills throughout the interviews to show my interest in what they were sharing with me. According to James P. Spradley in *The Ethnographic Interview*:

> Interviewing informants depends on a cluster of interpersonal skills. These include: asking questions, listening instead of talking, taking a passive rather than an assertive role, expressing verbal interest in the other person and showing interest by eye contact and other nonverbal means. (46)

This method gave participants the freedom to express their culture in their terms. In speaking with the participants it was important to listen to what they had to say. Expressing to them in a non-verbal way that I was interested in the information they were sharing with me was important because these women were sharing their memories and I was very fortunate to be capturing their experiences in hope of creating change in the lives of others like them. Spradley emphasized the importance of showing concern and respect because all cultures are important.

The interview questions were all open-ended. This method gave the participants the opportunity to interpret the questions in their own terms. Asking participants to tell me about their experience living in a violent relationship gave insight to what violence meant to them. Spradley further explains the importance of such questions when he emphasizes:

> Descriptive questions form the backbone of all ethnographic interviews. They will make up most of the questions asked in the first interview and their use will continue throughout all subsequent interviews. (91)
Open-ended questions also gave participants the freedom to provide their experiences in their own way. Wysocki explains open-ended are “where the respondents are asked to provide their own answers to the questions” (109). An open-ended approach allowed the participants to start wherever they felt was important to them and not to the researcher. Spradley suggests, “descriptive questions are especially useful to start the conversation and keep an informant freely talking” (80). These types of questions gave participants the opportunity and freedom to share their realities in their own way.

I conducted a total of eight interviews; all interviewees were UIW from Mexico. The interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder that was displayed next to the interviewees. After each interview lasting approximately 40 to 75 minutes, I transcribed them verbatim. I obtained eight interviews; however, only five interviews were used. Due to technological malfunctions and environmental effects, such as, voice recording volume and background noise, I was unable to transcribe three of the eight interviews. The interviews used gave irreplaceable insight into the daily realities of UIW living in a DV relationship.

Due to participant’s vulnerability it was necessary to take into account the participant’s emotional state. As a researcher, I had to be prepared to deal with crisis if a participant became overly distressed during the interview. I did not encounter any participant in distress, but confidently felt prepared to provide crisis intervention in the form of emotional support and appropriate referrals. It is important to note during the interview process all participants did show emotion while describing their lived experiences. At that moment I took the proper steps to ensure the individuals well-being. They explained that they were aware of their rights and wanted to continue to share their realities.

For over six years, I have worked directly with victims of DV and SA. In addition, I have attended over one hundred fifty hours of extensive trainings on DV and crisis intervention. I have assisted and supported victims/survivors of DV and SA by providing advocacy and referrals to a wide range of services including counseling. My role as an advocate was to support, educate, explain the court process, provide options, create a safety plan, and provide court accompaniment to civil and criminal hearings. My overall role was to advocate on behalf of victims/survivors and give appropriate referrals in order for them to be able to make informed decisions and seek appropriate help. Therefore, due to my experience, I felt confident addressing any discomforts that may have emerged.
REFLECTION

Before embarking on my research I was faced with unexpected challenges. When I learned that I had to get permission from the IRB to conduct my research, I quickly learned that I was entering an area of research that was new to me. The process I embarked on was an experience that I would describe as confusing and difficult. I felt that I entered a labyrinth of many surprises. I was not able to predict what was ahead of me. I felt that my training in this area of research was not sufficient. I was not an expert when it came to the IRB; for that reason, I felt I was confronting new challenges that were unforeseen.

While going through the IRB process I realized that the IRB is extremely rigorous when it comes to working with vulnerable populations. It made researching these women very difficult because these women are among the most vulnerable in our society. Their position in society forces these women to remain in the shadows. As I began my research it was clear that these women are in fact kept in the shadows. This rigorous process can indeed prevent researchers from studying vulnerable populations.

Confidentiality posed some challenges for me as a researcher because these women have been victimized not only by their partners, but also by a system that criminalizes UIW for not having legal immigration status. Therefore, trust is an issue and hard to establish. Generally, having women feel comfortable enough to share their intimate stories and agree to be interviewed is challenging. I was able to establish trust in spite of the challenges because I had an opportunity to work with these women in the past. Working in the field of DV and SA for many years gave me the experience and compassion to advocate for victims/survivors rights. Advocating for people’s rights is a passion I developed at an early age.

Not only did my experience help me establish trust with the participants, but my identity as a woman of color who shares a native language and a similar background also helped. Being born in this country with the constant fear of having my parents deported to their native country also facilitated my opportunity to interview these women. I am a proud Chicana that was raised in a Spanish-speaking household and I grew up in low socio economic neighborhoods near the US-Mexico border. This physical border was well known to my parents because they risked their safety crossing the border multiple times after being deported. In search of better opportunities, my parents came to this country when they were teenagers. My parents were undocumented immigrants trying to raise three daughters in this
country. They also had the responsibility of maintaining their extended family back home. My parents are hard working and are devoted to the collective effort of providing for their families on both sides of the border. The sacrifices they made in order for us to have the opportunities they were denied are admirable. My passion stems from my parents courage to continue to fight for their dreams despite all the challenges they were confronted with. Being part of the undocumented community helped me reach out in good faith to provide these women with a safe space to share their reality.

Understanding the obstacles and multiple aspect of these women’s struggle enhanced my opportunity to be able to conduct my research. Being an insider facilitated my opportunity to study these women because women are generally more likely to trust those that have similar cultural backgrounds. Doing this research was not easy and I was faced with challenges that led to frustration. The challenges I faced only re-emphasized the importance of moving forward with this study. I learned that my passion and dedication to this project were stronger than the challenges I faced. Everyday I look forward to making a positive contribution to this community that I strongly identify with, the undocumented community.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS PART ONE: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WOMEN SHARE THEIR STRUGGLES WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, IMMIGRATION STATUS, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

This chapter seeks to analyze the challenges Ana, Angelica, Lorena, Maria, and Veronica face living with DV and being undocumented immigrants. The narratives contained in this study work to eloquently reflect the challenges these women face in a DV relationship, problems related to immigration status, and the uncertainty these women face when dealing with law enforcement. Exploring their experiences in relation to these three categories will allow for a further understanding of the obstacles these women face which in turn increase their vulnerability.

CRUEL REALITY: UNDOCUMENTED WOMEN FACE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Somehow, they survived. Escaping the ravages of DV, the women interviewed for this study found that their new beginning in this country became a living nightmare. They left their native country, Mexico, in search of opportunities and new dreams for their family; instead, they were faced with challenges and obstacles that changed their lives forever. The hardships they faced in their native country did not compare to what would follow in the upcoming years. Living in terror of violence in a foreign country, these women also faced a system that increasingly criminalizes them for not having the proper immigration documentation to live in this country. As time went by, their dreams became increasingly threatened by the violence inflicted by their partners and by a system that further alienated them. The obstacles faced by the participants could have resulted in tragedy; however, they are among the fortunate ones who were able to escape the violence, becoming survivors and defying the odds.
The morning they came to share their intimate stories they all shared a common nervousness as the interviews began. Living with fear will do that to a person. The problems faced by these women were twofold: they lived in the shadows as victims of violence and they were undocumented immigrants. Their reasons for coming forward to participate in this study varied. However, all had a common desire to reach out to women who are facing, or will face, a situation similar to their own.

So it began: I initiated the interview by asking participants about their experience living in a violent relationship. Among the women I interviewed was Lorena who has been in this country for five years. She is a college educated woman in her thirties, and single mother of three girls who fell in love with a legal permanent resident (LPR) of the United States. Lorena, filled with sadness, began by describing her experience living in a DV relationship:

 Ла experiencia que yo pueda revelar aquí es poca a la semejanza o magnitud de la realidad. Es una experiencia frustrante, deprimente donde se vive controlada todo el tiempo debido a que se llega hasta esta situación. Algo que no le deseo a alguien por nada del mundo por que es cortar los lazos de la libertad hacia un futuro de mejor calidad de vida como persona. Es una experiencia más fuerte y profunda cuando se tiene hijos...es un miedo aterrador el que estás viviendo. No solamente que te mantiene controlada si no hostigada psicológicamente... acaba tu vida físicamente, moralmente, espiritualmente... todos estos años que estuve bajo la presión y controlada fue terrible.

The story that I share here does not truly express the magnitude of my experience. It is a frustrating experience; it is depressing when you live controlled all the time, as a result, you end up in this situation. This is something that I would not wish upon anybody for anything in the world because it is to cut the ties of freedom towards a future with better quality of life as a person. It is a stronger and more profound experience when you have children…it is a terrifying fear that you are living. Not only does it control you and harass you psychologically…it ends your life physically, morally, spiritually…All these years that I was under pressure and controlled were terrible.

Living day to day with a partner that controls every movement would make anybody fall into a state of depression and frustration. Their realities confine them to live like prisoners in their own homes and for many women freedom may seem far from reach or unattainable.

Living in a DV relationship has multiple effects on women’s lives. A recent study by Jody Raphael, Saving Bernice: Battered Women, Welfare, and Poverty, makes this all too clear. Raphael writes of the recognized effects of DV, including:
invasion symptoms, or reexperiencing of the traumatic events; avoidance symptoms, which function to reduce awareness of the traumatic experience and its aftermath; anxiety; agoraphobic symptoms; sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, physiological reactivity, and anger or rage, all of which share a common dimension of autonomic arousal; depression: grief; shame; lowered self-esteem; suicide ideation; suicide gestures or other self-destructive behavior; somatic complaints; use of alcohol and other addictive behaviors; and impaired functioning in occupational and other social roles. On another level, battered women can also be said to suffer from feelings of shame, self-blame, subjugation, morbid hatred, a sense of defilement, resignation or broken will, and revictimization, as well as feelings of bereavement, grief, and mourning. (83-84)

Raphael’s summary is bracing; and it goes without saying that DV has profound effects on women’s mental state. The women interviewed described their experience in a DV relationship as: horrible, unpleasant, uncomfortable, depressing, frustrating, hard, and difficult. As Lorena was describing her experience she got very emotional and started to cry. After a few minutes, Lorena continued to describe her experience “con él era mi vida [fue] muy oscura así lo voy a describir...Yo jamás voy a decir que tuve un momento feliz” (“with him my life was very grim, that is how I am going to describe it...I will never say I had a happy moment”). For Lorena, recalling her experience brings many painful memories that will remain with her throughout her life. Living day to day in a DV relationship is very difficult because the effects take a toll on the victims mental state.

In relationships where there is DV there is an evident unequal distribution of power that is used by abusers to control and terrorize their partners. Often times, women that are in a DV relationship feel powerless. Ana, a mother of young children in her twenties, recounts that when she was pregnant her experience was “muy incomoda por que te hace sentirte menos preciada. Te hace sentirte que no vales nada, de muchas maneras” (“very uncomfortable because it makes you feel unappreciated. In many ways it makes you feel that you are worthless”). Women are extremely vulnerable in DV relationships and for some women the vulnerability increases during pregnancy. Ana recalls a stage in her life “cuando estuve embarazada de mis niños me tumbo y después que nació mi niño también me siguió golpeando” (“when I was pregnant he knocked me down and after my child was born he continued to be physically abusive”). It is evident from scholarly research that pregnancy does not prevent a perpetrator from battering. In “Diverse Faces of Domestic Violence,” for example, Tanya R. Anderson and Ann M. Aviles point out “Several studies have shown that pregnancy can act as a trigger for new incidences of domestic violence or an exacerbation of
an existing problem” (130). Pregnancy is a period in a women’s life that is a special and memorable time, but in Ana’s case it was the opposite. Her memories will forever be violent and painful. Ana is not alone; abusers pose a threat to not only their partner, but their unborn child as well. In “A Qualitative Exploration of the Nature of Domestic Violence in Pregnancy,” Loraine Bacchus, Gill Mezey, and Susan Bewley, explore the issue of DV and pregnancy, “It has been suggested that domestic violence may commence during pregnancy, although in some cases it represents a continuation of violence that preceded the pregnancy, and is likely to continue following the baby’s birth” (588). Women who experience DV during pregnancy have an added challenge of not only protecting themselves, but an unborn child. The stress and anguish these women have to go through is unfortunate.

The reality women face in DV relationships is brutal and unforgiving. The attacks suffered result in visible injuries that only time can begin to heal, but the emotional trauma suffered will always remain in their memory. Most women interviewed displayed multiple signs of abuse ranging from physical, verbal, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse. Anderson and Aviles analyze the impact of DV on health and explain “Domestic violence manifests itself in many ways. The health consequences of domestic violence are extensive having both physical and psychological effects on victims” (129). Violent relationships have multiple effects and negative consequences to women’s mental health and physical wellbeing. Veronica, a young woman in her twenties and mother of young children, was in a relationship with a LPR. In Veronica’s case she states that verbal abuse came first then her husband started to physically abuse her “en empujón, que un jalón de pelo y al rato ya son golpes más fuertes” (“a push, then he pulled my hair, and later more severe physical abuse”). Often verbal abuse is present when there is physical abuse. Women living in a violent relationship are likely to be experiencing multiple types of abuse. Their abusive relationship has profound effects that are difficult to overcome.

Ana’s pregnancy did not stop her abusive partner from being physically and verbally abusive. As a result, Ana’s self-esteem suffered. Ana states she was constantly blamed for everything and her partner would tell her “tú no sabes nada” (“you do not know anything”) and “porque tú no vales nada” (“you are worthless”). Women’s self-esteem is constantly under attack by their partner’s controlling behavior.
Maria, a mother of teenage children that lived in a long-term DV relationship for seventeen years, also suffered from her perpetrator’s daily attacks to her self esteem. Maria recalls, “él siempre me humillaba…Que yo no podía hacer nada [y] que yo era como un cero a la izquierda” (“he would always humiliate me…That I could not do anything right [and] that I was useless”). The constant attacks affected how these women viewed themselves. According to Beverly Engel in *The Emotional Abused Women: Overcoming Destructive Patterns and Reclaiming Yourself*, “When someone is unrelentingly critical of you, always finds fault, and can never be pleased, it is the insidious nature and cumulating effects of the abuse that do the damage” (17). The multiple effects of DV are detrimental to a women’s well-being and will forever be ingrained in their memory.

In Lorena’s case she was a victim of emotional and sexual abuse by her partner. As she was trying to contain her emotions, she described that “estuve hostigada psicológicamente, como fui abusada sexualmente, como fui amenazada de muerte continuamente” (“I was psychologically harassed, like I was sexually abused, like my life was continuously threatened”). Living in a patriarchal society women are raised to believe they have to fulfill their partner’s sexual needs. Allan G. Johnson in, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy*, looks at patriarchy and explains how:

> cultural ideals of masculine manhood and feminine womanhood are organized on a heterosexual model. This means that a real man is someone who can act out core patriarchal values by orienting himself to the task of controlling sexual access to women…A real women is one who accepts and relates to men on these terms, who subordinates her reality and sense of self to male control (such as by having sex whether she wants to or not) and defines sex from a masculine point of view. (148)

Rape and sexual assault is under reported in society and many times spousal/partner sexual assault/rape is overlooked. Like Lorena, Ana was also a victim of sexual abuse. Ana explains she would repeatedly tell him she did not want to have sex with him, but he would end up forcing her to have sex. Loraine Bacchus, Gill Mezey, and Susan Bewley further explain, “In many abusive relationships, sexual access is obtained through threats and the use of physical force” (589). Women who are victims of sexual assault/rape by a partner/spouse are more likely to be re-victimized over a period of time because they are living under the same roof as their perpetrators. As a result, women may end up with mental health issues that impact their wellbeing.
The unfortunate results of DV have negative effects on women’s health. Anderson and Aviles looked at research that has “demonstrated a direct link between domestic violence and increased rates of depression, trauma symptoms, substance abuse, suicide attempts, anxiety, self-harm and sleep disturbances” (129). In Lorena’s case, we are confronted with a woman who was living in a constant state of hypervigilance; in her own words, “Era estar con un sobresalto en mi corazón todo el tiempo” (“It was like having palpitations in my heart all the time”). Being terrorized in their own home by their partner can increase anxiety. Women are forced to live their life in survival mode constantly watching their back. Engel further reveals:

The reason this behavior is damaging is that it causes you to feel constantly on edge. You are always waiting for the other shoe to drop, and you can never know what is expected of you. You must remain hypervigilant, waiting for the abuser’s next outburst or change of mood. (17)

Women living in a DV relationship are living in a war like environment trying to survive the terrorist actions and threats of their abusers. Ana describes that her partner would “me amenazaba, me decía que si yo iba andar con otro que yo no iba a vivir para contar lo, que me iba matar, y que donde me encontraría con otra persona o otra pareja el iba hacer algo” (“threaten me; he would tell me if I was going to be with another man I was not going to live to talk about it, that he would kill me, and if he found me with another person or another partner he was going to do something”). Lorena is forced to live her life with the constant reminder of her partner’s death threats. Women in DV relationships live in constant fear and their lives are constantly threatened.

Angelica was among the women I interviewed. When Angelica, a young mother living in a DV relationship, first came to the non-profit organization to obtain information on DV, she was pregnant with her second child. In Angelica’s case her partner would threaten to “me iba a buscar y se iba a vengar de mí” (“look for me and he was going to take vengeance out on me”). Threats are used to control and must not be taken lightly because abusers may act on their threats. The impact of DV on the individual over time creates a permanent scar that will forever be ingrained in these women’s memories. The damage is irreparable and the effects of DV not only affect these women, but their children are also suffering the damaging effects of DV.
Domestic violence has profound effects on women and children. According to Renee L. DeBoard-Lucas and John H. Grych who analyze the impact of DV on children in “Children’s Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence: Causes, Consequences, and Coping,” “Intimate partner violence is a pervasive problem that affects the lives of millions of children” (243). Veronica explains living in a DV relationship with her children “es algo muy feo... para la mujer pero más para los hijos porque es algo que se queda en la mente y a veces hay cosas que hay siempre que lo hacen recordar. Es algo muy desagradable y feo” (“it is a very ugly situation...for women, but it is worse for children because it is something that remains in your mind and sometimes there are things that will always remind you of the situation. It is a situation that is very unpleasant”). Lorena was subjected to a cruel reality and sadly her children were also affected by his controlling behavior. In “Intrafamilial physical victimization and externalizing behavior problems: Who remain the ‘forgotten’ children?” Lynette M. Renner writes, “Exposure to IPV (intimate partner violence) creates stress, fear, and learned helplessness by the child and results in behavioral and emotional problems” (164). Children who are exposed to DV are more likely to suffer mental issues affecting children’s developmental process. Lorena knows her daughters love and support her, but she expresses that she also feels they are not going to forgive her. Lorena states her daughters have not been the same since their exposure to DV because “Mi hija la del medio está sufriendo más que las otras dos. Ella lo resintió más, le dolió más, sufrió mucho” (“My middle daughter is suffering more than the other two. She resented more, it hurt her more, and she suffered more”). Exposure to DV has negative consequences on children’s well-being and the effects vary from one child to another.

Their partners’ controlling behavior led these women to cut ties with their family. For many years Maria lived isolated and controlled by her partner. Maria described her experience when she explains “no me dejaba salir a la calle. No me dejaba ...[ir] con amigas, o ir a visitar a mi mamá... no tenia libertad ... de salir [y] luego él nunca me daba dinero” (“He would not allow me to go out. He would not allow me ...to go with friends, or go visit my mother...I did not have freedom...of going out [and] he would never give me money”). Controlling behaviors strip women from being free. Women are subjected to follow orders and obey on demand. Angelica states living in a DV relationship has been very difficult because “tenía miedo principalmente de dejarlo porque no podía manej, no
Anita Raj and Jay Silverman in “Violence Against Immigrant Women: The roles of Culture, Context, and Legal Immigrant Status on Intimate Partner Violence,” propose “batterers often use economic abuse to control their immigrant partners…[and prevent their partners from] working or from having access to money” (381). Not having equal financial means forces women to become more dependent on their abusive partners. Women become dependent on their partners and leaving becomes even more difficult in cases where one does not have support from family or friends.

Their partners possessive behaviors not only forced these women to cut ties with their family, but they were also forced to cut ties with a community they were slowly trying to get familiar with. These women, like many women living in their situation, were isolated from their family and friends. Forced to maintain themselves unnoticed and disconnected from the world makes them feel like they have no support. Lorena expressed her experience of having no moral support:

Esto de la violencia doméstica es muy fuerte para mí también por la situación de que estoy sola en el país sin familia solo con mis hijas y ...la cuestión es que si me siento que es más fuerte todavía esto para mí por la situación de no tener un apoyo moral de una familia, de alguien que me apoye.

This domestic violence situation is very hard for me because I am alone in this country without family with only my daughters and ...In this matter I do feel that this is more difficult for me because of my situation, from not having family, moral support or someone that could help me.

In Lorena’s case she finds her situation very difficult because she does not have a support system she can count on when in need. Undocumented women are faced with the fear of being alone in this foreign country. In addition to Lorena’s struggle with her fear, Lorena was forced to remain silent during the entire relationship: “No me sentía libre de expresión. No podía hablar con la gente. Si estaba a un lado de él siempre [tenía que] estar callada [y] restringida de tener amistades, restringida de salir a un lugar o salir a una piñata...[estábamos] restringida[s] de todo” (“I did not feel I had freedom of expression. I could not speak to people. If I was next to him I always [had to] be silent [and was] restricted from having friends, restricted from being able to go anywhere or go to a piñata party...[we...
were restricted from everything”). While she was prohibited from going to functions such as piñatas she was in fact treated like a piñata. Women quickly learn how to survive in such a war like environment. Lorena’s compliance was used as a form of survival. Lorena explains she had to give in otherwise the consequences may be lethal:

*Tratar de darle por su lado para que no fuera haber golpes...tratando de darle todo por su lado para que no nos gritara o explotara de la nada y estar tranquilas...Es muy horrible, es muy feo vivir así porque te frustras, te pones de nervios y eso te acaba la vida, te la consume.*

I would try to side with him so he would not hit me...trying to side with him so he would not yell at us or explode for no reason and we tried to remain calm and serious... It is horrible, it is horrendous to live like this because you get frustrated, you get nervous and it diminishes your quality of life, it consumes you.

Not only was his controlling behavior consuming her life with fear, but her children were quickly being absorbed into this violent lifestyle.

Lorena lived as if she was always walking on eggshells; unable to escape from the terror that inundates her life. His abusive behavior alarmed Lorena to the point where she would hide in the closet “sinceramente, hubo un momento en que yo me llegaba a esconder en el closet ...aterrada en el día esperando [a] mis hijas” (“honestly, there was a moment where I ended up hiding in the closet...terrified during the day waiting for my daughters”). The constant nightmare Lorena was living was greater than her; she lost control of her life “Hasta qué grado te imaginas tú que te estrellen tu vida y acaban con tu vida. Porque, sí, está persona acabó con mi vida...definitivamente siento que me...absorbió mi alma, yo ya no era dueña de mí misma” (“Imagine to what degree someone can crush and end your life. Because, yes this person took my livelihood...I definitely feel he...absorbed my soul, I was no longer an owner of myself”). Lorena is not alone; women are forced to walk on eggshells with the fear of further violence. While living in a DV relationship, many women go through great lengths to protect their children and themselves.

The women interviewed lived their lives controlled to the point where they lost themselves to the violent terrors of DV. Lorena described this pain as being forever present in her life:

*[El] daño es irreparable, puedo llegar a ir con una consejera o apoyo con una psicóloga...pero es como una herida, como una operación, te rajan...la cicatriz va a quedar aquí de por vida, así va a quedar en tu corazón por vida. Eso jamás se repara, ni con dinero, ni con alguien que te de amor. Jamás se va a reparar,*
The damage is irreparable, I could go to a counselor or get support from a psychologist… but it’s a wound, it is like an operation, where they cut you open…the scar will remain there for life and that is the way it will remain in your heart forever. That will never be repaired. Not with money, not even with someone that gives you love. This will never be repaired and it will forever remain in my head. My daughters will never forget … nobody forgets these types of issues.

These women experienced brutal attacks and psychological abuse at the hands of their loved ones, their partners. The effects are unforgiving because the pain caused to these women and their children will accompany them for life, like a shadow. The trauma experienced by the women interviewed will never go away. Their experiences will forever be ingrained in their memories.

**IN THE SHADOWS: UNDOCUMENTED WOMEN COME FORWARD**

Illegal immigration from the South has been a phenomenon that has been occurring in the United States for years. Immigrants encounter more challenges now than ever before. According to Lawrence A. DeLuca, Marylyn M. McEwen, and Samuel M. Keim in “United States Mexico Border Crossing: Experience and Risk Perceptions of Undocumented Male Immigrants”:

> Concern has been raised on both sides of the border about the increase in deaths that have occurred among this population during their crossing attempts. Undocumented immigrants are at risk from environmental conditions, traumatic injury and encounters with wild animals. (112)

The disparities and lack of economic opportunities force many to leave their native country and immigrate to the United States, despite the increasing dangers on the U.S.-Mexico border. In search of better opportunities, immigrants are faced with challenges in a foreign country making them among the most marginalized and vulnerable people in this country. Olivia Salcido and Medelaine Adelman in, “‘He Has Me Tied with the Blessed and Damned Paper’: Undocumented-Immigrant Battered Women in Phoenix, Arizona” find:

> Legal and illegal immigration to receiving countries such as the United States continues to grow exponentially as the global economy rewards capital’s desire for cheap, flexible labor from the South. The U.S.-Mexico border acts as the conduit for workers who, in turn, seek to establish stable homes for themselves and their children. Clearly, domestic violence diminishes home security at the
individual and family level. However, the structural contraction of the state’s responsibility for the public through the reduction of assistance to the economically marginalized has resulted in the feminization of poverty among immigrants specifically, and among the stigmatized, nearly invisible population of illegal crossers especially. Still, undocumented-immigrant battered women seek safety and security through such strategies as border crossing. Despite immigration reform and intensified border patrol, women...continue to survive, albeit as members of one of the most marginalized communities. (170)

Crossing the border to provide a better future for their family comes with new challenges and obstacles. As a result of their immigration status, women find themselves in a vulnerable position in society and those living in a DV relationship face added challenges that further marginalize them.

Living in a DV relationship is difficult, but it becomes more challenging when one is undocumented. The present concerns of deportation, family separation, and a growing anti-immigrant sentiment isolates and further marginalizes UIW. These women’s doubts raise many concerns. In Lorena’s case her concerns raised many questions in the event that she was detained by immigration:

¿Qué voy hacer con mis hijas? ¿Qué va a pasar con mis hijas?... ¿Dónde van a quedar mis hijas? ¿Si las van a separar? ¿Si ya no las voy a ver? Cómo me voy a contactar con ellas? ¿Cómo le hago para regresar? ¿Cómo hago para que me las lleven? Son varias serie de preguntas que me he hecho varias veces. Es estar cuidándome en la calle, cuidándome en mi trabajo, [y] cuidándome en donde quiera que me encuentre...Estoy tratando de hacer mi vida. Me cuesta mucho en este país porque no me siento libre; ¡no soy libre!

What am I going to do with my daughters? What is going to happen to my daughters?...Where are my daughters going to end up? Are they going to separate them? Am I ever going to see them again? How am I going to contact them? What do I do to come back? What can I do to have my children brought to me? There is a series of questions I have asked myself several times. I have to be watching over my shoulder on the streets, watching over my shoulder at work, [and] watching over my shoulder everywhere I go...I am trying to make a living. What a high price to be in this country because I do not feel free; I am not free!

Immigrant women give up certain liberties in order to provide their family with a better future. A common reason people immigrate to other countries is lack of opportunities in their own country. In Maria’s case she explains she immigrated to this country “porque uno quiere tener una mejor vida. Quiere uno vivir bien y tener una vida nueva...para los hijos que tengan un buen estudio y que vivan mejor” (“because one wants a better life. One wants to live well and have a new life... for our children to have a better education and for them to
live a better life”). When seeking a better future, what mother would not sacrifice her life for her children? There is no limit to what a mother would do for her children including risking her stability to enter a foreign world. Lorena sacrificed her life because “mis hijas tendrían mayor calidad de vida aquí en todos los aspectos y ámbitos de su vida hacia delante en un futuro” (“my daughters would have a better quality of life here in all aspects of their future”). While they struggled with multiple obstacles, women like Lorena and Maria also have many concerns and fears that could only be experienced by someone like them, UIW.

Undocumented women face the risk of deportation each and every time they step out of the shadows. Undocumented women struggle daily in this country because they are forced to remain invisible. Eben M. Ingram analyzes the barriers Latinos face when it comes to DV in “A Comparison of Help Seeking Between Latino and Non-Latino Victims of Initiate Partner Violence” and suggests:

To account for differences in the willingness to utilize formal services such as the criminal justice system and mental health services, immigrant status has frequently been cited in the IPV literature as a contributing factor…Immigrant Latinos, many who may be undocumented or have unstable residency, believe that to seek help from social services may lead to their deportation. (168)

Seeking services for women that are undocumented or those that have unclear immigration status pose different challenges that make it difficult for women to seek help. Lorena expresses her daily struggles and fears:

Para mí ha sido muy difícil estar aquí sin papeles, por el hecho de mis hijas, porque estoy pensando en darles una mejor calidad de vida aquí. Estoy tratando con mucho esfuerzo sacarlas adelante [y] tratar de darles algo para un mejor futuro para ellas adelante. Me frustra pensar que me tengo que cuidar en este país por no tener papeles [y] que me saquen y yo tener que llevarme a mis hijas de regreso y la depresión y la enfermedad que les pudiera ocasionar a mis hijas… Esto no es cualquier cosa, esto es algo muy difícil, algo que se tiene que tomar muy en cuenta, muy en serio.

For me it has been very difficult being here without documents, because I am thinking of giving my daughters a better quality of life here. I am putting a lot of effort to have them succeed and trying to give them a better future. I get frustrated to think that I have to watch my back in this country because I do not have documents [and] if I get deported I am going to have to take my daughters back to Mexico and the depression and illness it could cause my daughters…This is not to be taken lightly this is something very difficult that must be taken into serious consideration.
Women’s undocumented status prevents them from reaching out because the more they live their life undetected the less likely they are to get deported.

Undocumented women who are victims of DV are often faced with a cruel reality. They live in a country that criminalizes them for being here “illegally” and they live with the terror inflicted by their intimate partners. These conditions increase a woman’s vulnerability. Any one of these conditions alone will marginalize women, but when combined these conditions augment the vulnerability of these women. Society has criminalized these women and marginalized them making it very difficult for them to seek help. Salcido and Adelman point out:

Immigrant battered women struggle to obtain safety and simultaneously avoid detection by the state…women who cross illegally from Mexico into the United States are considered criminals by the U.S. government, whether they did so to seek safety, reunite with family, or feed their family. (169)

When has seeking help or trying to make a living become a crime? The moment these women set foot in “America” they become criminals. These women risk their lives crossing a border where countless injustices have occurred and many dreams have been lost forever. The women I interviewed were faced with obstacles when coming to this country; however, their challenges were not over when they crossed a physical border—a physical border that creates an atmosphere of inferiority. Once on this side of the border or what many would say “en el otro lado” they are confronted with different challenges. These women will continue to cross and face imaginary borders even when their safety is constantly threatened because it is worth the risk of obtaining economic stability that unfortunately does not exist in their country. These women indicated that they were afraid of their abusive partners, but they were also afraid of seeking help in a country that makes their existence “illegal.” It is clear that multiple factors victimize UIW who are facing DV.

While these women began to explain their experience in this country, I witnessed the overwhelming sadness that their faces expressed. Lorena got emotional during the interview and paused for a minute. When Lorena resumed she stated with difficulty and sadness “es muy difícil estar… aquí sin libertad, sin tener papeles… [y siendo] madre de tres niñas estoy más bajo presión en este país por no tener papeles” (“It is very difficult being…here without liberty, without having documents [immigration status]…[and being a] mother of three daughters I am under more pressure in this country for not having documents”).
pressure of being in a foreign country and the hope to prosper must be very frustrating. They leave their native country in search of a better future for their children and then they are faced with obstacles that make their experience even more challenging.

In search of better opportunities immigrants leave behind loved ones. The women interviewed made a sacrifice leaving their native country, Mexico, in search of new opportunities. Despite the challenges immigrants faced on their journey, many feel that leaving was worth it in hope of a better life. Maria describes the benefits of living in this country by stating “vive uno mejor, no sufre uno… para la comida” (“one lives better, one does not suffer… for food”). However, Maria explains she has encountered limitations that do not exist in her country when she explains “Allá… uno tiene más libertad. Puede salir donde uno quiere y no tiene miedo que la migra… [puede] salir uno libre a donde uno quiera salir” (“In Mexico one has more liberty. We can go wherever we want and you are not afraid of the Border Patrol… [you can] freely go anywhere you want”). Giving up their freedom is a sacrifice many immigrants give up in order to provide their family with better opportunities. Ana explains that her children will have a better life because “Hay mejores estudios para los hijos. Hay mejores oportunidades para ellos” (“There is better quality of education for our children. There are better opportunities for them”). While this country offers many like Maria and Ana a greater quality of life, the sad reality is that they live confined to their violent partners and in constant fear of being deported.

These women are not valued at home or in society. They are forced to remain silent at home for multiple reasons. Women are isolated and controlled by their partners; therefore, seeking help places these women at greater risk of future violence if their partners find out they are reaching out for help. Stepping out of the shadows also places these women at risk of being detected by a system that criminalizes people who do not have legal immigration status. It is unjust that UIW are re-victimized by a system that is supposed to protect the well being of those in need. Instead UIW are faced with the uncertainties of a system that is unclear and unpredictable. Maria further explains her fear “a veces hay redadas aquí… uno no puede salir a la calle… La migra anda en la calle… [y] uno tiene miedo de que lo agarre inmigración y saquen a uno para afuera” (“sometimes there are checkpoints here… one cannot go anywhere…the Border Patrol is on the street… [and] one is fearful that
immigration will capture us and deport us”). Deportation is a fear that accompanies UIW the moment they arrive in this country.

Their fear of being deported threatens their dreams for a better future. Many uncertainties arise when it comes to deportation. One of Maria’s fears is being deported to her country, Mexico, because of the current wave of violence that is affecting her country “porque hay mucha violencia...El secuestro...[y] narcotráfico. Porque allá de donde yo soy, ahí secuestran mucho” (“because there is a lot of violence...kidnapping...and drug trafficking. Because where I am from, there is a lot of kidnapping”). Maria further describes her fear “Más por ello, porque yo ...vivi la vida... pero ellos están chicos y no me gustaría que nada les pasara” (“Is more for my children, because I...lived life...but they are young and I would not like anything bad to happen to them”). Violence in Mexico has many living in fear because the drug violence has increased in the last decade. According to David A. Shirk’s article, “Drug violence in Mexico: data analysis from 2001-2009,” “from 2001 to the end of the decade, it is worth noting that the total number of drug related killings exceeded 20,000 deaths” (168). The current wave of violence in Mexico has claimed many lives creating added stress and concern, which had Maria worried. Women like Maria leave their country in order to provide their children with better opportunities. Getting deported threatens their safety, as well as their children’s safety. These women’s fear of deportation is one of multiple stressors they are faced with living in this country.

Seeking a better future, UIW quickly learn that achieving their goals is more complex than expected. Women described their experience as being stressful because they are not able to obtain good employment. Salcido and Adelman add, “to survive while eluding deportation, women may work illegally,...[and] drive without a license” (169). Not having a driver’s license or social security creates roadblocks that make obtaining a good job even more difficult. In Maria’s case she emphasizes “uno no puede sacar [una] licencia, ni tener un buen trabajo seguro” (“one cannot get a driver’s license, nor have a secure job”). This is a common concern among UIW because this is an added barrier that adds stress to their lives. Ana adds that “donde quiera que vayas como mujer que no tiene papales... no donde quiera te dan un trabajo. Te cierran la puerta. Es algo que también es un obstáculo para estar aquí en Estados Unidos” (“everywhere you go being a women that does not have documents...it is difficult to get employed. There are no open doors. This is something that is also an...
obstacle being here in the United States”). After all the sacrifices these women have made to come to this country in search of a better future, it is very discouraging that their opportunities are limited and obtaining a job is very difficult.

While opportunities are limited and obtaining a job is extremely difficult, the probability of giving their family a better future is greater in the United States than it is in Mexico. According to Barbara Moynihan, Mario Thomas Gaboury, and Kasie J. Onken in “Undocumented and Unprotected Immigrant Women and Children in Harm’s Way,” women “come seeking a better life for themselves and their children” (123). It is important to reiterate the reason these women left their country is to provide a better future for their children. Ana describes the opportunities in the United States as greater because:

_Aquí con poquito que ganes puedes sacar a tus hijos adelante y en México no. En México tienes que trabajar diariamente, más horas, más días, más tiempo y no ganas lo suficiente para sacar adelante a tus hijos; sin embargo, aquí con una, dos, tres, cuatro horas tienes para cubrir…un par de zapatos y en México no lo es._

Here with the little you earn you can provide for your children and in Mexico it is not possible. In Mexico you have to work daily, more hours, more days, more time, and you do not earn enough to provide for your children; nevertheless, here with one, two, three, four hours you are able to cover…a pair of shoes and in Mexico it is not possible.

These women left their country to venture out to the unknown in search of economic stability and even though they are faced with challenges that may be discouraging, their drive to succeed in this country is impressive. Angelica describes that in this country “tienes dinero para comer…te da muchas oportunidades, pero a veces uno tiene miedo de salir…tienes ese temor de que pueden estar los de inmigración ahí y eso da miedo y ese era mi temor… y no saber inglés también” (“you have money to eat…there are many opportunities, but at times one is afraid of going out…you are fearful that immigration might be there and that is my fear as well as not knowing English”). The challenges these women face increase their vulnerability. According to Jana L. Jasinski’s article, “The Roles of Acculturation in Wife Assault,” “Previous research established that factors such as low income, unemployment, and part-time employment, all indicators of economic instability, are associated with increased violence” (177). It is evident that these women are here because there are greater opportunities; on the other hand, they give up their freedom, enter a world that is different from their own, and are faced with challenges that make their dream harder to obtain.
Obtaining a job in the current economy is challenging in general, but it is even more difficult for those who are undocumented immigrants. Undocumented women that are able to obtain employment are faced with discrimination in the workplace. Kimberly D. Bailey in “Lost in Translation: Domestic Violence, ‘The Personal is Political,’ and The Criminal Justice System” suggests “Employment discrimination issues are compounded for women of color and immigrant women” (1284). Women encounter discrimination in the workplace. However, women of color and immigrant women are confronted with multiple categories of discrimination, increasing their vulnerability. Veronica shares the challenges in her job when she explains:

*Muy difícil para poder agarrar trabajo y siempre como que nos miran diferente. Ahorita tengo trabajo, pero siempre como que uno está muy abajo por lo mismo que uno no tiene papeles... es algo muy difícil y triste a la vez porque a veces no se nos da la oportunidad como otras personas que tienen papeles.*

It is very difficult to obtain a job and people always look at us different. Right now I have a job, but it seems like we are way beneath them because we are not documented…it is something very difficult and sad at the same time because sometimes we do not have the same opportunities that documented people have.

Not only is Veronica working in an environment where she is being discriminated against, but she also has to deal with co-workers’ verbal abuse:

*Que no vamos a salir de donde estamos...porque somos unos mexicanos, y indocumentados...La verdad si se siente uno como triste y muy por debajo de los demás porque... a veces les dan preferencia a las personas que tienen papeles, que saben inglés,...[y tienen] un trabajo más fácil y a uno siempre nos toca [el trabajo]...más duro, mas difícil, eso es algo bien feo.*

That we are not going to pull ourselves out of where we are …because we are Mexicans and undocumented…The truth is one does feel sad and way below others because...sometimes they give preference to those that have documents, speak English,…[and they have] an easier job and we always end up with [jobs]…that are harder, more difficult, and that is something very unpleasant.

Undocumented women living in a DV relationship are not only living in a relationship where there is unequal distribution of power at home, but they are also subjected to discrimination at work. Having no sense of control these women’s perception of self is affected. Their self-esteem is attacked from many different angles; however, it is impressive how they manage to have the skills to keep themselves safe and hopeful for their children.

Another huge barrier for UIW is not being able to communicate in the English language. Guadalupe T. Vidales in “Arrested Justice: The Multifaceted Plight of Immigrant
Latinas who Faced Domestic Violence,” asserts that “The inability to speak fluent English often prevents Latinas from communicating their needs to determining what services are available” (536). Not being able to speak the language poses a challenge for immigrant women making it difficult to reach out and obtain services. Maria explains not being able to speak English is an obstacle because it is difficult to communicate with people and she received negative reactions when she “iba a la tiendas, la clínicas...te ponen mala cara [por no saber inglés]...a veces las personas como que se molestan [cundo no hablas inglés]” (“would go to the stores, the clinic...they look down on you [for not knowing English]...sometimes people get bothered [when you do not speak English]”). Being discriminated against for not knowing the language can be discouraging. In Maria’s case she further explains if nobody is available who speaks her language she will leave and will return at a later time when there is someone that can speak Spanish. It is important to note that it takes courage for UIW victims of DV to seek help and not being able to get help can be discouraging for these women. Lorena agrees that language is a barrier that discourages UIW from seeking help when she explains:

Hay lugares donde tu llamas y nomás tienen acceso en inglés y si no sabes inglés no te pueden dan información. Estas desesperadamente intentando buscar ayuda...si alguien te puede ayudar, asesorar, aconsejar y...la persona definitivamente no entiende nada lo que va hacer, [uno] es colgar y se va a frustrar más. Es bien difícil deberas que si porque te frustras más y dices ‘¿ahora a quién le llamo?’Si no eres bilingüe, no puedes ayudar a estas personas y van a seguir con su violencia doméstica.

There are places you call and they are only accessible in English and if you do not know English they cannot give you information, you are hopelessly trying to look for help...if someone can help you, give you advice, counsel you and...if the person definitely does not understand you, you are more likely to hang up and you will get more frustrated. It is very difficult, it really is because you get frustrated and you say to yourself ‘who am I going to call?’ If you are not bilingual you are unable to help people like me and people will continue living in a DV relationship.

Not knowing the language adds pressure to UIW and isolates them further. In Veronica’s case she explains “mi esposo nunca me dejó estudiar y hay veces que uno va a lugares y te piden inglés ese también es un obstáculo para mí de no saber inglés porque no se puede uno comunicar, siempre anda uno buscando como una tercera persona” (my husband never allowed me to get an education and there are times that one goes to places and they want you to speak English and not knowing English is an obstacle because one cannot communicate
and one has to look for a third party in order to communicate). Not knowing the language increases these women’s vulnerability because they become dependent on others in order to communicate. Being dependent in order to communicate with others not only gives their partner greater control, but it creates a barrier that may prevent women from seeking help. Women like Ana, Angelica, Lorena, Maria, and Veronica are isolated. Their isolation makes them more dependent on their abusive partners, in turn, putting these women at risk of future violence. Angelica states her experience living in a DV relationship “Ha sido muy difícil porque tenía miedo principalmente de dejarlo porque no podía manejar [y] no podía... valorarme por mí misma... Miedo a estar sola más en este país porque no se inglés” (“has been very difficult leaving him mainly because I did not know how to drive and I was not... self sufficient...Afraid to be alone especially in this country because I do not know English”). Not having a support system makes it very difficult for women to leave their abusive partners especially if all they have in this country is their abusive partners. In Maria’s case, she was in a relationship for over seventeen years in which he was very controlling and he “nunca me dejó ir a una escuela de ingles y por eso mismo a mí se me hace difícil estar aquí” (“never allowed me to go to school to learn English which is why it is difficult being here”). Abusers prevent their partners from learning English in order to control and isolate them from accessing resources and building relationships in this country. Language is one of the many barriers that further confines women to remain in the dark.

In search of a better opportunities UIW feel the pressure of being in a foreign country. In addition, they have to tackle multiple obstacles and unexpected challenges. One challenge these women have experienced is due to racial discrimination. Racism in this country is not a new phenomenon. Vidales’s recent findings with regard to the workings of racism seem key; his words here, summarizing the cultural terrain with regard to race in the U.S. are sobering:

With the changing nature of legal restrictions on legal immigrants in the 1990s, and the passage of anti-immigrant measures, such as California’s Proposition 187...most recently Chavez (2008) describes truthfully the contemporary Latino situation as being marred with anti-immigrant sentiment and nativist views. By creating a negative perception of Latinos as illegal’s, or criminals, and being viewed in this negative light, the hardships they experience when seeking public and legal services are justified...This environment creates a new obstruction for immigrant Latinas seeking help as more uncertainties cloud the situation they face attempting to extract themselves from violent relationships. (539)
The growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States has made it even more difficult for women like Veronica to seek help. Moynihan et al. further explain:

Given that the recent climate in the United States has become extremely hostile to individuals attempting to work and live in the United States who are undocumented, the abuser’s threats regarding the victim’s undocumented status become even more credible and are a more salient disincentive. (124)

The current anti-immigrant sentiment further forces these women to remain invisible. Veronica explained that when she was looking to obtain information on DV and counseling she encountered a negative experience:

\[Me \text{ tocó una persona digamos racista... [cuando fui] agarrar una consejera lo primero que me dijo ... ‘tienes tu seguro y tu ID?’ Le dije que yo no tenía nada y me dijo ‘o es que solamente se lo damos a personas que tienen papeles y no para indocumentados’ yo le dije ‘o es que yo pensé que ayudaban a todas las personas’ y me dice ‘no eso solamente es para las gente que son nacidos aquí, que son residentes.’ Entonces yo como que me senti.}

I would say I encountered a racist person ... [when I went to the] counselor the first thing they said... ‘do you have your social security and ID?’ I told her that I did not have anything and they told me ‘we only assist people that have documents and not undocumented people’ I told them ‘I thought that help was for everyone’ and they told me ‘no, services are only for those that were born here or that are residents.’ At that point I took it personal.

Veronica had the courage to seek help. One would think that victims regardless of immigration status would be able to reach out for supportive services; however, many like Veronica might not be eligible for services because they are UIW. Women that have negative experiences when seeking help are less likely to reach out in the future. According to Daniel J. Whitaker et al. in “A Network Model for Providing Culturally Competent Services for Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence,” “Issues related to lack of resources and cultural isolation may be even more salient for undocumented Latinas who are abused by their partners. Undocumented women also live with fear of deportation” (191). Unfortunately, UIW seeking help can threaten their stability in this country because they become at risk of getting deported. These women are living in constant fear and seeking help should not be an added barrier that threatens these women’s peace of mind. No one deserves to live in a violent relationship; therefore, all victims of DV should have equal access to services without having the fear of further persecution. Creating services that were all inclusive would in fact be beneficial for UIW because they are less likely to have moral support in this country.
Many times women who immigrate to the United States leave their extended family behind. The journey to this country is painful and difficult on many different levels. Many leave family behind due to necessity in search for a better future; on the other hand, there are women that have family in this country but are completely isolated as the result of the abuse. According to Anderson and Aviles, “Immigrant women are also more likely to lack a social network, making it easier for the abuser to isolate and control them” (130). In Lorena’s case she explains she only has her daughters in this country. Vidales further reiterates:

Latinas find themselves lacking a supportive family network. Immigrant women, in particular, may be in this country without their extended families, including the aunts, cousins, siblings, and close friends who may otherwise support them emotionally or economically. (537)

Not having a support system increases women’s vulnerability in a DV relationship. In addition, not having extended family makes these women more dependent on their partners and making choices becomes more difficult when you have children.

Lorena’s case is different from Ana, Veronica, and Angelica because they have family in this country. However, even when they do have family in this country it is clear that these women are isolated and controlled preventing them from seeking help from their family. In Ana’s case she explains she has a sister in this country, but:

*En California no la tengo por eso antes yo creo que si se hacía difícil acudir a un lado o no sé porque no sabía. Hubo un tiempo que me corrió de la casa y yo estuve viviendo en un hotel con mis niños, pero decía ‘¿quién me va ayudar? ¿A dónde voy a ir?’ Yo no sabía que había estos lugares…Si yo hubiera sabido desde antes yo creo que no hubiera pasado lo que pase, a ir a la cárcel porque me defendí…tantas cosas que he pasado con mis hijos [y] yo creo que ellos no hubieran vivido lo que hemos vivido.*

In California I do not have family, which is why I think it was hard seeking help because I did not know how. There was a time that he kicked me out of the house and I was living in a hotel with my children, but I would ask myself ‘who is going to help me? Where am I going to go?’ I did not know that there were organizations…If I would have known this before, I think I would have not gone through what I have gone through, like going to jail for defending myself…I have gone through many things with my children [and] I think that they would have not lived through what we have gone through.

One would assume that having family in this country would help these women because they would have a support system, but the reality is that DV isolates women from family, friends, and society. Domestic violence isolates women from society; however, some women have family near which can be comforting and makes them feel less lonely. In Veronica’s case
she also has family in this country, but not locally. Veronica explains “*se desespera uno al estar sola acá y sin nadie... y a veces pues por la misma situación que tiene uno...no tiene amistades, no conoce uno gente*[y] si hace sentir a uno bien solo” (“one gets frustrated being here alone without anybody...and sometimes due to the situation one is in...one does not have friends, one does not know people...[and] it does make one feel very lonely”).

Victims of DV are isolated and seeking help from loved ones becomes very difficult due to their extended family dynamics.

In addition to all the challenges UIW already face in a DV relationship, another challenge is that they remain silent due to shame. In Angelica’s case she explains “*sí, tengo una hermana pero...no los visito...no quería que los demás supieran...mis familiares que había problemas entre nosotros porque me sentía más que nada sola” (“Yes, I do have a sister but...I do not visit them...I did not want others to know...I did not want my family members to know that there were problems between us because more than anything I felt lonely”). Women living in a DV relationship are fearful of involving their family members due to embarrassment and shame. Angelica did not want her family to know she was living in a marriage where her husband was abusive towards her. One can understand the difficulties Angelica expresses:

*Yo no quería que supiera mi mamá que estábamos en una relación de que ya llegamos a golpes [desde el primer día que se casó tuvo problemas]. Entonces yo al venirme para acá...pensé que iba a ser distinto y pues si fue así, pero nomás por un tiempo pero ya después fue muy difícil para mí, por eso no quería que supiera mi familia.*

I did not want my mother to know that I was in a relationship where there was physical violence [there was problems since the first day she got married]. Then when I came to the United States...I thought that everything was going to be different and it was for a while but later things became very difficult for me, that is why I did not want my family to know.

Multiple factors prevent women from speaking out about their living nightmare. Seeking help in a DV relationship becomes very difficult and complex due to fear and shame among other factors.

The barriers that UIW victims of DV face are larger than the border they crossed. As these women were telling their stories, I understood why their struggle was so painful and for many there was no end in sight. While their partners physically and psychologically abused them they were also legally persecuted by a system that criminalizes undocumented people.
They are persecuted by a system that separates families and forces many undocumented people to remain at the margins of society and at times completely in the shadows. When a system is working against UIW it makes reaching out very difficult for victims of DV. They are living in a foreign country with minimal to no family support, different languages, customs, traditions, cultures and laws. Laws that are not in their favor keep these women tied to a DV relationship creating additional obstacles that become paralyzing for UIW.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT: PROVOKING UNCERTAINTIES AND FEAR**

A major issue for women living in a violent relationship is seeking help due to fear, immigration status, racism, and discrimination. In “Domestic Violence at the Crossroads: Violence Against Poor Women and Women of Color,” Natalie J. Sokoloff examines:

> One of the major issues for battered women from marginalized communities is that outside help is feared because there is so much individual and institutional discrimination against her from ‘outsiders’-police, courts, doctors, domestic-violence agencies, etc.-in mainstream communities. So while it may be true that she will face violence in her family or community, it is just as true that if she goes outside her community, she will face another set of hostilities…This is seen most profoundly in immigrant and non-English speaking communities, but is also prevalent wherever poor, marginalized populations are involved. (143)

The unequal treatment communities of color have encountered in the past sets the tone for how these communities respond when in need of a system that has consciously and openly worked to oppress their communities. Therefore, seeking help is a challenge in itself due to the experiences marginalized communities have face and are currently facing. For UIW the challenges are exacerbated due to their immigration status.

When it comes to law enforcement many UIW are afraid to have contact with police officers. An even bigger fear is having any contact with Border Patrol agents. Having contact with law enforcement puts these women at greater risk of deportation. Analyzing the concerns of UIW, Salcido and Adelman write:

> Women are concerned that calling the police may lead to their own arrest (or deportation) or that of their family or friends…Immigrant women also may be concerned that engaging the justice system will affect the state’s assessment of their moral character. More generally, a police officer or any state agent may report an immigrant to the BCIS, now in the Department of Homeland Security. Inviting state agents into the home may increase the overall level of surveillance of immigrants and their families. (169)
Seeking help for UIW comes with some level of risk that can have severe consequences not only affecting them, but also their family. Some of the women interviewed stated they would trust police officers to a certain extent; however, the unclear and questionable involvement of police officers with Border Patrol creates distrust with the police. Police threats to report to immigration agents may prevent UIW from calling police officers to their home when they have a DV incident because of their fear of deportation.

One would like to believe the duty of the police is to serve and protect the communities they serve, but many communities of color have been affected negatively by law enforcement and trust is very difficult for some to regain. In communities of color, trusting the police may be hard due to historical factors and current abuse of power that continues to affect these communities today. Bailey examines this issue and writes, “women of color and immigrant women often want to limit the amount of interaction they have with the criminal justice system because of the history of poor interactions between this system and communities of color and immigrant groups” (1291). Law enforcement’s mistreatment towards people of color has and will continue to affect how these groups respond when in need. In Lorena’s case she explained that she would trust law enforcement only under certain conditions. Lorena explains she has had several encounters with law enforcement when she was a victim of DV and “la verdad sinceramente no me dio miedo, me aterré. Sí, me aterré porque yo decía ‘Wow, estoy en este país sin un seguro, sin papeles, ¿Qué va a pasar? ¿Qué va a pasar conmigo? ¿Con las niñas? ¿Me van a sacar del país?’” (“the honest truth is that I was not afraid, I was terrified. Yes, I was terrified because I would say ‘Wow, I am in this country without a Social Security Number, without documents, what is going to happen? What is going to happen to me? What is going to happen to my girls? Are they going to take me out of the country?’”). All of Lorena’s concerns are legitimate and would have any parent terrified of the thought of being separated from their children. Lorena had many fears before contacting police for help when she was being physically abused by her partner and after seeking help she found that, “Ellos fueron muy lindos conmigo, muy accesibles y vi que hubo justicia” (“They were very nice with me, very accessible and I saw there was justice”). Lorena felt she received fair treatment and had a positive experience, but her fear of deportation was still present despite the positive experience she had with police officers. Lorena explained she would contact police if she needed help; however, if police
officers showed up to her house unannounced she would not open the door, “Yo no les tendría confianza por nada del mundo, jamás!” (“I would not trust them for anything in the world, ever!”). Her distrust towards law enforcement prevented her from having faith in a system that was designed to protect its citizens. Communities of color are generally less trusting towards law enforcement due to the extensive history their neighborhoods have had with law enforcement.

While some victims have a positive experience and felt they can trust the police to a certain extent, there are other victims that have mixed feelings when it comes to the police. In Ana’s case she explains that her experience with law enforcement has been:

"Pues en parte es una experiencia buena porque ...me han ayudado, aconsejado, me han dado palabras de aliento, pero a la vez el día que pasó el incidente no me dieron tanta oportunidad para hablar ...A él si le dieron tiempo para hablar y ellos a mí no me dieron la oportunidad de hablar más simplemente me dijeron ‘te van.’"

In part it was a good experience because...they have helped me, given me advice, they have given me some words of encouragement but at the same time the day the incident occurred they did not give me an opportunity to talk...they gave him (perpetrator) an opportunity to talk and they did not give me the opportunity to talk and they (police) simply told me ‘you need to leave.’

Not only did Ana feel that she was not taken into consideration, but Ana was arrested and re-victimized by a system that was not working in her favor. Ana further explains:

"No me dieron tiempo para hablar... Entonces pienso que el derecho se lo dieron casi a él en esos momentos y a mí no me dejaron hablar más...Me sentí mal porque dije ‘Si él es el que tiene ...record con la policía y siendo que yo me estaba defendiendo ¿Por qué a mí me llevaron? ¿Por qué no vieron antes primero el record que el tenía?’"

They did not give me time to talk...I believe that they gave him the right to speak and they did not allow me to talk...I felt bad because I would have said, ‘He is the one that has...a record with the police and I was defending myself, why did they arrest me? Why did they (police) not check his criminal record ahead of time?’

The way police treated Ana will affect her future perception and trust towards police. Not only was Ana re-victimized by the police, but her arrest could have had greater consequences. Bailey notes that “arrest of immigrant women have also had disastrous effects because, not having proper legal counsel, they often plea in order to avoid jail time, which can result in deportation” (1290). Ana felt at that time “no hicieron justicia. Creo que fue injusticia” (“There was no justice, I believe it was an injustice”). The injustices that occur
re-victimize women of DV and place them in a very dangerous situation because they can no longer trust police officers when they are in need of help.

In Maria’s case she describes several negative experience she encountered with police officers, “tuve una mala experiencia…me pararon y me quitaron una troca por no traer licencia” (“I had a bad experience…the [police] stopped me and they took my truck away for not having a license”). This negative experience changed Maria’s perspective towards the police because Maria states that she did trust the police, but not anymore. To add to Maria’s negative experience, she recalls an incident where the police responded poorly when she said, “cuando mi esposo se peleó con mi hijo, llegó la policía y nada mas lo buscaron poquito y él se había escondido en la casa del vecino. Nomás lo buscaron poquito y ya se fueron. Ellos no siguieron buscandómas, estos están peor que en México” (“when my husband fought with my son, the police arrived, they only looked for my husband briefly and he was hiding at the neighbors house. The police only looked for him briefly and they left. They did not continue looking for him, they are worse than in Mexico”). When Maria was asked if she trusted police officers she stated, “No, yo pienso que no…cuando yo llamé a la policía cuando tuve el problema con mi esposo…el policía no lo saco a él [policía le dijo a María] ‘saca tus cosas, lo más necesario y vete a donde tengas que irte’” (“No, I think I do not, I called the police when I had a problem with my husband…the police officer did not make him leave [the police officer told Maria] ‘take your things, the most necessary and go wherever you need to go”). Maria like many other victims of DV are not given an opportunity to speak and in Maria’s case it is unfortunate that she was displaced from her home. Maria like many victims feel that there is no support or empathy for victims of DV. While some of the interviewees described their experiences as negative, Veronica considers her experience neither negative nor positive:

¿Negativas? no creo, aunque con muy poquito entusiasmo si porque hace tiempo que tuve problemas con mi esposo porque me golpeó a mí y golpeó al niño que le estaba dando pecho. Llamé a la policía, fueron pero él se echo a correr …[me preguntaron] qué estaba pasando pero no me preguntaron mi nombre ni como era [él] para que lo buscaran o que si regresaba que yo les volviera a llamar, nada…No sabía mucho de eso pero si yo pienso que ahora que ya se y conozco un poquito más, yo siento que ellos me pudieron ver pedido más información para poder buscarlo. Esa es mi única experiencia.

Negative? I do not believe so, but with little enthusiasm yes because there was a time when I had a problem with my husband because he hit me and my baby boy
as I was breast feeding. I called the police and when the police arrived he (perpetrator) left running... [the police asked me] what was going on but they did not ask for my name or what he looked like in order to look for him or if he returned back home for me to call the police, nothing...I was unfamiliar on how the police would respond but now I know and feel a little more familiar, I feel that they could have asked me for more information that would help identify him in order for the police to look for him. That is my only experience.

The police response to Veronica’s call for help undermined the severity of the problem.

Bailey further analyzes the impact law enforcement has on victims of DV:

If a victim has found the system to be nonresponsive in the past, she may determine that it is not worth her time to contact the police on future occasions. Moreover, if a victim fears that her partner may retaliate once she contacts the police, she certainly is not going to report the abuse if she believes that she is not going to be protected from that retaliation. For these reasons, domestic violence victims cannot be expected to engage with the criminal justice system if they cannot rely on it for adequate protection. (1280)

These women are less likely to contact the police if they feel powerless. A system that continues to undermine the security of UIW places these women at greater risk of future violence. Veronica further explains that she would not call the police because, “miré como que no les interesaba” (I saw that the police showed no interest). Veronica felt that if law enforcement would have responded differently “yo siento que él hubiera... respetado porque iba a ver que la ley está a favor de uno y que no estamos solas, pero yo siento que él se creyó más o algo así porque él siguió haciéndolo después” (“I feel that he would have had to show... respect because he would have seen that the law is in my favor and that we are not alone, but I feel that he believed he had more power or something like that because he continued his same behavior”). Not only did the response from the police affect Veronica’s view toward police, but the response from police placed her in greater harm. Sokoloff further describes that:

Typically, Black and Latina women often do not want to call the police because they want the battering to stop, not to have their partners arrested and incarcerated. The discrimination in the criminal justice system in the U.S. is deep and profound... In short, the advice to either ‘leave’ the situation or to ‘call the police’ may actually harm rather than help certain groups of battered women. (143)

For undocumented women calling the police may harm the stability of their family.

In addition, UIW are fearful of calling the police because of their undocumented immigration status. In Veronica’s case she explains she has:
Miedo, miedo porque a veces el ser indocumentado…la otra persona si tiene papeles nos dice ‘si tú llamas a la policía’ o ‘si tú haces eso yo voy a llamar a migración y te van a sacar’ entonces si llega el momento que se siento uno sola porque dice ‘okay llamo a la policía, a él lo van a detener, tal vez lo tengan un tiempo pero a mí me van sacar’ uno se pone a pensar en los hijos y yo no quiero... que mis hijos se queden con él porque yo lo conozco como es y a veces se aguanta uno y soporta cosas así por miedo que haga más cosas.

Fear, fear at times because I am undocumented…the other person (partner) if they have legal immigration status tells you ‘if you call the police’ or ‘if you do that I will call immigration and they will deport you’ then there is a moment when you feel lonely because you say ‘okay, If I call the police, they will detain him, perhaps they detain him some time but they will deport me’ one starts to think about our children and I would not like my children to stay with him because I know how he is and that is why I have to tolerate and endure things of that nature due to fear that he will do more things.

The fear and uncertainties UIW face when reaching out to law enforcement places them and their children at risk of future violence. Angelica explains she is fearful of calling the police because “los que somos inmigrantes siempre tenemos el temor de como cuando te pega, cuando hay pleito llamar a la policía porque a veces dice uno que ellos le llaman a los de inmigración y tiene uno miedo” (“those of us that are immigrants are always fearful when there is DV to call the police because sometimes they say that the police will call immigration so one is fearful”). These women’s apprehension prevents them from seeking help because they may jeopardize the “stability” of their families. Getting help may also open the door to a system that is known to separate families.

Similar to Veronica’s case, Ana was afraid to contact police because her husband would threaten that:

‘Si tú le llamas a la policía, a tí es la que te van a llevar, te van a quitar a los niños, y ¿tú quieres perder todo?’ entonces por eso yo me detenía hacer algo...a hablar, porque el miedo que tenía que me decía ‘si tú hablas te va ir peor’ y ‘tú vas a caer primero que yo’ entonces es un temor. Temor a decir algo porque no sabes lo que va a pasar.

‘If you call the police, you are the one that is going to get arrested, they will remove your children, do you want to risk everything?’ That is the reason I held back from doing anything…from talking, because the fear that I had was that he would tell me ‘if you call the police it is going to be worse’ and ‘you will be the first to fall’ that is my fear. Fear to speak out because you do not know what is going to happen.

The constant threats instill fear that further prevents women from seeking help. The threats made by their perpetrators have so much power that they keep these women controlled. For
Veronica and Ana seeking help, as well as others in their position, may mean they will never see their children if their perpetrators follow through with their threats.

Distrust towards the police can further put women at greater risk. When Angelica was asked if she trusted the police she stated “en parte si les tengo confianza de que si hay un problema o algo me vienen ayudar y todo pero también mi temor es de que ellos mismos vayan a llamar los de inmigración, ósea casi no tanta confianza en ese sentido” (“in part I do trust that the police would come and help me if I have a problem, but my fear is that the police will call immigration, for that reason, I do not really trust the police in that sense”).

The unclear collaboration with the Border Patrol puts these women at greater risk of future violence because they are fearful the police will get the Border Patrol involved. In Angelica’s case she explains her fear prevented her from calling the police because:

Primer lugar no sabía inglés...pero igual también mi temor fue siendo siempre de que la policía iba llamar a inmigración...hubo dos ocasiones cuando él me golpeo fuerte que yo quise llamar a la policía pero como le digo pensé en todo más que nada en que me iban a deportar...Ese era mi miedo y nunca llamé, nunca he tenido contacto con la policía.

In the first place I did not know English...but at the same time my fear was always that the police would contact immigration...there were two occasions when he physically abused me that I wanted to call the police but like I explained, I thought about everything and primarily that I was going to get deported...That was my fear and I did not call, I have never had contact with the police.

Even women that have had no contact with the police are fearful of getting the police involved because they might contact the Border Patrol. Sonia M. Frias and Ronald J. Angel looked at factors that may prevent women from seeking help in, “The Risk of Partner Violence Among Low-Income Hispanic Subgroups” and described that, “Other factors related to immigration and citizenship status not only influence levels of stress and economic opportunity but probably also affect the reporting of abuse because noncitizens may be afraid of potential negative repercussions” (554). The uncertainties and the unanswered questions that UIW face when it comes to the police lead many to remain silent. Angelica was afraid of being separated from her son and explains that her son was born here and “qué tal si lo dejan aquí y a mí me mandan solita para allá...pensaba y pensaba en mi niño, sí pensaba en él” (“what if they leave him here and they send me back to Mexico…I would think and worry about my boy, yes, I would think about him”). Fear of family separation prevents many
women from seeking help. It is unfortunate that women have to sacrifice their safety because law enforcement cannot set aside social categories for the sake of safety.

The fear, that the police collaborate with the Border Patrol, is valid, because in some cities near the border region the police have coordinated checkpoints that clearly target Latino communities. Maria explains that the Border Patrol sets checkpoints in her community “la patrulla fronteriza…anda allí en las calles agarrando gente… donde hay mucho latino” (“the Border Patrol…is on the streets detaining people…where there are a lot of Latinos”). The collaboration that Maria is referring to affects communities of color because law enforcement is using racial profiling to detain people that look “illegal.” Veronica further adds that checkpoints “me afecta porque… yo como madre y sola en este país me da miedo y presión por mis hijos e igual otras personas tienen sus familias y que les quiten su carro, si me da tristeza, me deprime mucho…es un poquito triste y incomodo” (“affect me because…as a mother alone in this country I am fearful and under pressure for my children, and other’s like me that have their family. When their cars are taken away, I am saddened, I get very depressed, it is sad and uncomfortable”). Veronica is saddened because she struggles and makes sacrifices just like many families in her situation. These women are confronted with roadblocks and it is very challenging to establish trust towards law enforcement. In Ana’s case she personally knows people that have been affected by checkpoints:

Conozco unas personas que les han quitado los carros en los retenes de policía…[y] dicen que la policía no trabajan con inmigración. Hay veces que no tienen papeles, no tienen licencia y les quitan los carros y los deportan entonces…pierde uno…ellos dicen que no están trabajando con migración pero pienso que si.

I know people that have had their cars removed at police checkpoints…[and] they say the police do not work with immigration. There are times people do not have documents, do not have a driver’s license and they take their cars away and then they deport them…one loses everything… they say they do not work with immigration, but I think they do.

The unclear relationship the police has with the Border Patrol has re-defined how law enforcement is viewed in immigrant communities.

Angelica has had no direct experience with the police; however, she is influenced by a collective memory of women of color and immigrant communities. Findings by Moynihan et al. show that, “Help seeking is also limited by the systemic biases and discrimination often
faced by these individuals” (124). The treatment UIW have faced limits their opportunities to get help. Angelica describes her fear based on what she has heard:

I did not feel safe because at times we get fearful, fear that they can include the Border Patrol and deport us. At times one is fearful of reporting a problem. There is discrimination with the police and more when they know that one is Mexican, Hispanic. Yes, there is racism I would say…and at times there is that feeling of distrust, fear of calling and seeking help for the same reasons.

Community members and the media impact how women like Angelica will respond to the police. These women’s distrust in the system will prevent them from seeking help.

In some communities, primarily communities of color, the Border Patrol’s presence is more visible making the undocumented community feel terrorized and harassed by their presence. Veronica describes a very unpleasant experience when the Border Patrol detained her:

This was a very ugly experience because when we were coming to this country they detained us, they took us to a room, they took our fingerprints, pictures, and the room was very cold, ugly because it looked like a room but in reality it was like a bathroom because there were people using the bathroom, right there in front of everybody…[it was] very ugly, ugly because…when they were getting us in the car again they told us ‘go back to your country and don’t waste your time coming back’…One feels very sad because if one had a job in Mexico, we would not come to this country… In my experience I witnessed a lady that was pregnant with her big stomach. She was crying because she was having pain and they ignored her and did not pay attention to her, she (pregnant women) was telling
them she felt sick and she was crying…I felt bad because there were men, women, and everything in that room and yes it was very unpleasant…We are not doing anything bad. We simply come to this country to work and we are faced with a humiliating experience.

Veronica’s experience is not uncommon because undocumented immigrants, when detained, are often not treated with respect or dignity. Human rights violations are being perpetrated against one of the most vulnerable populations in this country. Veronica’s testimony, chronicling the feelings that Border Patrol agents provoke in her when she sees them in her community, is moving:

Se pone uno nerviosa, nerviosa y a la vez da tristeza mirarlo porque tal vez ellos no andan buscándonos específicamente a uno pero se siente uno ese miedo, nervios, nomás al mirarlos cerca o saber que están cerca. Uno dice ‘yo no me quiero ir.’ Oséa es miedo más que nada, miedo.

One gets nervous, nervous and at the same time one gets sad seeing the Border Patrol because perhaps they might not be looking specifically for us but one feels that fear, nervousness, just to see them near you and knowing that they are near. One says ‘I do not want to leave.’ More than anything that is my fear.

The feelings that the Border Patrol provokes in these women are unique to undocumented people because their actions can threaten this population’s stability in a matter of seconds. The Border Patrol threatens to separate families and shatter dreams. The Border Patrol can change an undocumented persons’ life forever.

Even though some of the women interviewed have had no contact with the Border Patrol, these women’s fear is present everyday. Maria, Ana, Lorena, and Angelica have not had any direct contact with the Border Patrol; however, the uncertainty of being deported is a fear that haunts them daily. In Lorena’s case she suggests, “No he tenido ninguna experiencia hasta ahorita, gracias a Dios. Ni quisiera tenerla” (“I have not had any experience, thank God. I would not like to have any experience”). Just like Lorena, Angelica states she has had no experience with Border Patrol. These women are thankful for not having any contact with the Border Patrol. Maria explains that she is afraid that the Border Patrol can deport her due to her situation with DV, “me da temor de que vayan por mi por eso del problema que tengo, o que nos miren en la calle y meparen, me quieran sacar para fuera. Ese es el temor que tengo y es el [temor] que siempre he tenido, ese temor” (“I am fearful that the Border Patrol will deport me due to the problem I am facing with DV or that the border patrol will see us on the street and detain us, they would deport me. That is the
fear that I have and it is the [fear] that I have always had, that is my fear”). Maria feels that being in a DV relationship exposes her to being deported. Maria further states that her fear of getting deported is because she has children, “Por mí, yo si estuviera sola, yo mejor estuviera mejor allá que aquí” (“For me, if I was alone I would be better off in my country than here”). It is evident that Maria’s children are her priority and her sacrifices are all worthwhile because her children’s wellbeing takes precedence over her individual needs. Therefore, taking precautions to remain under the Border Patrol’s radar is important because that means her children will have greater stability if she remains undetected. Sadly, these women feel forced to remain silent because of the fear of deportation and the lack of support when it comes to law enforcement. Unfortunately, the current system does not work for all people; therefore, once again this is a contributing factor that adds to the multiple factors that make these women vulnerable.

The challenges Ana, Angelica, Lorena, Maria, and Veronica face are unfortunate and unforgiving. Living in a DV relationship is even more difficult when these women are not free to set foot outside their home because of the fear of repercussions. The fact that they are UIW places these women at greater risk of violence because they do not have a voice at home or in this country. Despite all the challenges and obstacles faced living in a DV relationship, being undocumented, and the constant threat of deportation, these women are driven to strive for their children. These women are willing to take these risks and challenges for a cause, hope for their children’s future.

Life’s necessities pushed these women out of their country. Their circumstances forced them to immigrate to this country in order to provide their family with new opportunities. These women have faced very challenging situations that would be paralyzing to many; however, they managed to continue to follow their dreams in order to give their children the opportunities they did not have. It is unfortunate that some immigrants in this country are not respected or treated with human value. All people are unique and regardless of their differences should be treated with respect and dignity. Women should not be confined to live in the darkness because they are undocumented. Even with all the barriers these women faced they had the courage to step out, in hopes to expose their realities in order to create change.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS PART TWO: HOPE, EMPOWERMENT, AND STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

This chapter illustrates the courage Ana, Angelica, Lorena, Maria, and Veronica had to speak out and share their experience after living in a DV relationship. The narratives contained in this chapter reflect the courage and strength they needed to move forward. The challenges they faced led them to share suggestions that can make seeking help less challenging when living in a DV relationship. These women also reach out to their community in hope of gaining understanding and support.

STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS: UNDOCUMENTED WOMEN SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHARE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

A life that once was very grim begins to look hopeful for these women. Their aspiration for a better future came along with many challenges, but even then they never lost hope of a brighter future for their children. After a rocky and painful past these women’s courage to continue their journey is admirable. These women now walk us through a different stage of their life where they are able to talk about their previous experiences without fear.

In Lorena’s case she described many painful experiences, but today she describes how she is trying to rebuild her life after living in a DV relationship for many years:

*El antes, fue mi vida negra. Ahora estoy tratando de recuperar mi propia vida. Estoy tratando de salir adelante con mis hijas y nadie me va a obstruir ese paso, a nadie se lo voy a permitir. Mi vida ahora es diferente y la quiero recuperar. Quiero que sea mejor. No estoy pidiendo cantidad si no calidad de vida par mis hijas y para mi. Esa es la diferencia de antes en mi violencia, a la de ahora.*

Before, my life was dark. Today, I am trying to recover my own life. I am trying to move forward with my daughters and nobody is going to get in the way, I will not allow it. Today, my life is different and I want to recover it. I want my life to be better. I am not asking for quantity, but rather quality of life for my daughters and I. That is the difference from the past living in a DV relationship, from today.
As mentioned previously, Lorena’s hard battle to keep her children and herself safe came with many challenges, nevertheless, today she is trying to regain what they once had, a life without violence. Lorena is slowly regaining control of her life and has had to confront her harsh memories in order to begin the healing process.

Taking back control of a life that was controlled by their partners is indeed very difficult because these women were restricted and controlled in multiple ways, including being financially dependent on their partners. Taking this into account allows for a broader understanding of why seeking services was challenging for these women. Consequently, it made it very difficult for these women to begin the healing process. Maria points out that seeking counseling was challenging because, “cobran y a veces uno no tiene el dinero que ellos están pidiendo...No vamos a las terapias... porque uno no tiene el dinero para pagar” (“organizations charge and sometimes we do not have the money that they are asking for... We do not go to therapy... because we do not have money to pay for services”). It is unfortunate that lack of financial means, prevents women like Maria from seeking help. Maria reflects back on her experience and she sees the benefit that therapy would have had on her mental health. For that reason, Maria sets forth a proposition that would give all women an opportunity to seek services when she explains, “que hubiera lugares como Alcohólicos Anónimos ...van y no te cobran” (“that there would be places like Alcoholics Anonymous... you attend and they do not charge”). The importance of offering free services would be substantial because service providers would welcome all victims/survivors regardless of economic status. Maria further points out the benefits would be for “todas las personas que ocuparan ayuda” (“everybody that needed help”). Eliminating cost for DV services would get rid of the roadblocks, which confront women. They would get the support they need and also be able to make informed decisions based on their options.

Eliminating fees would provide victims with new alternatives. The proposition set forth by Maria would help victims of DV, and also benefit people like her husband. Maria explains her husband like many perpetrators would benefit from therapy because “esas personas son violentas porque ellos vivieron en su infancia violencia domestica con los papas” (“these people are violent because in their childhood they were exposed to DV by their parents”). Providing comprehensive services such as therapy would be beneficial to all who have been exposed to DV. For children, the benefit of having parents that are mentally
stable to provide love and support is priceless. Services that are accessible and inclusive to all who have been exposed to DV will help prevent the recurrence of the cycle of violence.

As previously described in Chapters Two and Four, language was a clear obstacle that prevented women from communicating with service providers. For that reason, it is imperative that services be offered in multiple languages. Services offered only in English makes it inaccessible for women like Angelica because she points out, “el temor de uno es que hablas y a veces te contestan solo en inglés, no sabía como expresarme” (“my fear is when you call and they answer in English, is that I did not know how to express myself”). Not being able to speak English silences women, preventing them from accessing services. Offering services in various languages will encourage women to seek help and it will empower them to speak out. Eben M. Ingram points out in “A Comparison of Help Seeking Between Latino and Non-Latino Victims of Intimate Partner Violence” that “These interventions should be linguistically and culturally appropriate and take into consideration factors facing abuse victims in general and cultural minorities specifically” (169). Language is a powerful tool that can facilitate and encourage women to come forward. Lorena emphasizes the importance when she explains “en este país, todos los asesoramientos de este tipo de cosas de violencia doméstica…absolutamente todos [los servicios] sean bilingües. Es muy importante” (“in this country, all of the services in regards to DV…absolutely all services should be bilingual. It is very important”). Providing services in multiple languages is essential because it encourages DV victims/survivors from all walks of life to come forward and communicate their needs in their own language.

The women interviewed also stated that having a common language made them feel more comfortable to communicate their needs. Angelica proposes that DV organizations should provide information and resources in places like clinics because “en la clínica siempre hablan en español” (“at the clinic there is always people who speak Spanish”). Organizations working in collaboration with community members to determine safe spaces within the community will be beneficial for victims of DV. Coordinating services with multiple service providers will make services more accessible. In addition, Lorena adds it would be a good idea if schools and libraries would offer workshops on DV, “que hubieran cuatro juntas al año de violencia doméstica….Eso sería para mí un lugar muy bueno[para obtener información]…La escuela es un lugar público y las bibliotecas” (“where DV is
addressed four times a year … That would be a really good place [to obtain
information]. . . schools and libraries are public place”). Providing free services would give
victims of DV an opportunity to reach out and obtain services. Working towards eliminating
barriers would give victims of DV an opportunity to seek services in their native language
and in multiple public locations. Moynihan, Gaboury, and Onken further elaborate on
additional methods of intervention. They write:

Placing materials in Spanish or the language of the dominant immigrant culture is
an important step; however, this assumes that people can read. The person-to-
person interaction is the ideal vehicle for intervention. Conducting workshops in
churches as well as in the school can reach these victims. (128)

While it is important to provide services in their native language, it is also important to
consider person-to-person assistance in situations where victims/survivors are illiterate.
Redefining how organizations reach out to assist victim/survivors in need is essential because
the traditional method of providing services does not always work for everyone.

It is important to take the proper steps to provide culturally adequate services that
address DV. Analyzing the importance of developing culturally competent services, Raj and
Silverman address the need to “develop alliances with culturally specific service agencies,
organizations, and/or community leaders from diverse immigrant communities.” They
elaborate:

Staff members from immigrant community-based organizations and mainstream
domestic violence organizations should engage in cross-training, sharing
expertise, and developing formal plans for collaboration to serve immigrant
communities. These alliances provide a context for the collaborative
development of outreach and education strategies, access to translators trained in
IPV, and development of protocols and materials to provide culturally tailored
services to the major communities in their area. All such programs should also
provide referrals to lawyers and advocates with knowledge of battered immigrant
women’s legal rights in the areas of immigration, family, criminal, and benefits
law. (392)

Providing training to service providers and community members on how to address the
diverse needs of their communities will allow for a better understanding on how to provide
adequate services. Understanding and respecting cultural differences will allow providers to
respond effectively to the differences that exist among victims/survivors of DV. In addition
to creating awareness, it is also important that DV agencies collaborate with community
organizations in order to have a similar response of empathy and respect. Addressing the specific need of victims, Vidales points out:

In order to better address the unique challenges faced by Latina immigrants who are survivors or face domestic violence, governmental, medical, and social institution should collaborate in developing community based cultural-competent programs and policies that integrate the intersecting needs of Latina women in these circumstances. (533)

Service providers that collaborate with community members are more prepared to address challenging situations as they arise. Understanding the importance of offering culturally competent services is essential to building trust with victim/survivors of DV. Understanding cultural differences and respecting cultural diversity will send a supportive message to all victims/survivors that cultural differences are valued and embraced.

**SPEAKING OUT FOR CHANGE: ADDRESSING CONCERNS TO LAW ENFORCEMENT**

These women stepped out of the shadows despite their immigration status to address obstacles that prevent victims from having faith in law enforcement. After the negative encounters with law enforcement, these women come forward and confront their fears by voicing alternative ways to serve their communities. Addressing the needs of diverse communities will create a place where DV victims can reach out and feel respected. All communities regardless of race, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status deserve to be treated with dignity. Establishing trust after the long history of injustices is not an easy task; however, it is not impossible. The hope remains that these women’s courage will serve as a positive step toward building an understanding and trust towards law enforcement.

Law enforcement’s approach when addressing communities of color has to change in order to begin to build trust. Maria explains she would trust the police if “*ellos miraran bien el caso e investigaran de quien es el problema y…miren quien es el que tiene la razón*” (“they would look at a case closer and investigate who’s problem it was…see who is right”). Closely investigating DV cases would prevent unjust arrest and would send a message to perpetrators that the system is vested in ensuring the safety of all victims of DV. In order for that to occur law enforcement must start by listening. Being heard is important to Ana because “*yo pienso que deben dejar que uno hable, que ellos investiguen más …no nomás*
conmigo, yo no soy la única, hay muchas mujeres que son abusadas físicamente y verbalmente” (“I believe they should allow one to talk, they need to investigate further…not only with me, I am not the only victim of DV, there are many women that are physically abused and verbally abused”). If law enforcement adopted a different approach when responding to DV, victims/survivors would be less hesitant to seek services when in need.

When addressing how to better serve communities of color the concerns and fears of the undocumented community must also be taken into consideration. Angelica adds that women “no tenga uno el temor de que te van a deportar” (“should not be fearful of getting deported”). All victims of DV should have equal access to obtaining help from the police without being fearful of being deported. Building a relationship of trust and respect may take time. However, it is never too late for law enforcement to begin to reach out and build a healthy relationship with the communities they serve. The benefit of engaging diverse communities is a step towards giving all victims equal access to services.

Understanding the communities and knowing the differences among cultures is essential. It is important for law enforcement to be fully trained on the dynamics of DV because understanding the effects of DV will allow them to better meet the needs of DV victims/survivors. Vidales suggests that “a training session held for police officers to educate them about domestic violence and racism, may help them respond more appropriately in situations where they may encounter these scenarios” (542). Training law enforcement on the diversity that exists within the communities they serve is vital for the safety of these women. Understanding and respecting these differences will help law enforcement build strong relationships with community members.

Getting proper training on the dynamics of DV will give law enforcement the proper tools to assess for safety when responding to a DV incident. Veronica suggests that police officers responding to a DV incident should provide victims of DV with general information and referrals:

*de violencia domestica porque a veces viene uno tan cerrado que no sabe lo que es violencia domestica…dejarles como un folleto o algo que puedan ver las personas que lo que esta ocurriendo es violencia domestica.*

on DV because sometimes one does not know what DV is…leaving a pamphlet or information people can read will help victims understand they are experiencing DV.
Providing victims with information on DV will give victims the tools to make informed decisions when they are ready to take action. Evaluating for safety is essential before the police provide information on DV because victims’ lives are at risk. Veronica describes that police should be able to determine if providing information and referrals is for the victim’s best interest and if so, the police should use “un poquito de discreción” (“a little discretion”). Veronica further adds that police response to a DV incident should include follow up visits, making themselves more visible, and “que anden chequeando mas seguido para evitar mas problemas de ese tipo” (“doing welfare checks more frequently in order to avoid more of these kinds of problems”). The ideas set forth encompass the importance safety has in their lives. Victims of DV must constantly plan for their safety because their lives depend on it; therefore, it is important to educate law enforcement on the dynamics of DV so they can effectively respond to incidents of DV.

Searching for alternate solutions will allow those living in DV relationships to have options that are culturally competent. This country is very diverse and looking at the many factors that contribute to the marginalization of these women is essential. Efforts to shed light on these issues have begun to give voice to the voiceless. Establishing a relationship of trust will pave the way to healthier communities. Kimberly Huisman, Jeri Martinez and Cathleen Wilson in “Training Police Officers on Domestic Violence and Racism: Challenges and Strategies” point out:

[I]n addition to building trust and addressing institutional discrimination, both police departments and advocacy programs need to diversify their staff to improve relationships with diverse communities. In doing so, we will increase opportunities for law enforcement and advocates to interact with immigrants and people of color in a professional, collaborative atmosphere although simultaneously strengthening ties with marginalized communities…We owe it to the diverse communities that we serve. Such a partnership between diverse advocates and officers would help to chip away at the barriers that continue to marginalize battered immigrant women and women of color. (818)

Establishing a relationship based on trust and understanding takes time, but it is worth the effort. Being proactive in addressing the diverse needs of DV victims will allow communities to be prepared to provide supportive services to all victims/survivors of DV.
WORDS OF HOPE: SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADDRESS THEIR COMMUNITY

After being in the dark for many years, these women reflect on their past experiences and courageously step out of the shadows to share words of hope to those currently living in the dark. Upon reflection Angelica recognizes the challenges she has faced in her violent relationship when she states:

"El compromiso hacia la gente y no pensaba en mi. Yo nunca pensé que me iban a golpear. Lo perdone como dos veces. En una ocasión dijo que ya no [iba a ver] mas [golpes] pero después fue lo mismo. Ahora...ya saben mis papás y pues dicen que...es lógico que me iban apoyar pero mi miedo era del ¿el que dirán?"

The commitment towards the people was greater and I did not think about myself. I never thought that he was going to be physically abusive. I forgave him twice. On one occasion he said he was no longer [going to be] physical abusive. Today...my parents are aware and they said...it is logical that they were going to be supportive, but my fear was, what are people going to think?

Multiple factors make leaving an abusive relationship very complex and it becomes very challenging to leave. Many times victims of DV feel hopeful that their relationship will improve. In Angelica’s case, she found it hard to reach out because she was embarrassed of what others might think. Angelica now understands the importance of coming forward and for that reason she encourages UIW to speak out:

"Que no tenga uno tanto ese temor y decirlo... si hay personas que te pueden ayudar...investiguen y pidan ayuda. Que se lo digan a otras personas porque a veces uno no quiere que sepan los de mas y te quedas callada. Decirle a otras persona, a lo mejor otras persona te... [pueden decir] donde hay centros donde te pueden ayudar... aquí hay la oportunidad de que abecés encuentras trabajo y ya sale adelante. Dificil pero si."

Do not be afraid to speak out...there are people that can help you...investigate and ask for help. Tell other people because sometimes you do not want to share with people and you remain silent. Telling other people, perhaps other people can...[tell you] where there are organizations that can help you...in this country there is opportunities of moving forward and obtaining a job. It is difficulty, but it is possible.

Angelica’s words acknowledge the difficulty of reaching out; however, she gives hope that there are other options for those living in a violent relationship. Veronica further adds:

"Al buscar ayuda, tenía miedo a muchas cosas. Pero ahorita mi situación me da mucho gusto de que pude recibir ayuda de muchas personas que me ayudaron siempre y que gracias a dios yo ahorita puedo decir que tengo una vida digamos mas tranquila porque mis niños ya no ven violencia."
When seeking help, you are afraid of many things. But today, I am pleased with my situation because I was able to get help from many people and thanks to God I can say today my life is calm because my children are not seeing violence. Everybody deserves to live a life free of violence. These women have first hand experience of the challenges DV victims face; for that reason, they felt the need to address the importance of reaching out for help because other possibilities do exist.

These women felt the need to address their community in hope of gaining understanding on the challenges UIW victims of DV face. Ana begins by asking her community to “que entienda que no porque somos inmigrantes ilegales...no por eso no nos van ayudar, al contrario somos mujeres...que podemos salir adelante y que podemos darles una mejor vida a nuestros hijos” (“understand that not because we are illegal immigrants, should not be a reason not to help us, on the contrary we are women that strive to move forward and want to give our children a better quality of life”). Ana’s courage to speak up gives a voice to many UIW that are living in a DV relationship. In hope of bringing awareness Maria would like her community to understand “los problemas que uno pasa con el esposo... y por la razón que estamos en este país (“all the problems that we go through with our husband… and understand the reasons why we are in this country”). These women are faced with many challenges and having the support from their community is important because regardless of their immigration status they are members of the community.

Being conscious of the struggles that occur within ones community is important because the issues are not confined to the private setting of these women’s homes. Indeed DV is a broader social issue that affects our society as a whole. Lorena describes the importance of having the support of her community:

Si alguna vez encuentran a una persona que tenga violencia domestica les sonrían, no las miren mal, que traten de ser accesibles a esa gente y tratar de ayudarlos, y tratar de darles motivación. Yo le diría a esa gente que tiene papeles y que están ajenas a todo esto que traten de acercarse a la gente ... No que ayuden económicamente si no … que se acerquen a la gente a platicar a darle la mano porque es muy importante porque a veces no tienes a nadie...y uno esta añorando una sonrisa, un abrazo o que te digan ‘te quiero mucho si te puedo ayudar en algo aunque sea moralmente cuentas con todo mi apoyo’ es muy importante.

If at any time you find a person that is a victim of DV smile do not look down upon them, try to be accessible to DV victims and try to help them, and motivate them. I would tell people that have documents and are not victims of DV to try to reach out to DV victims…I am not asking for financial help, but… to reach out to
victims of DV and talking to them is very important because sometimes you don’t have anybody...we need someone’s smile, a hug or someone to tell us ‘I love you and if I can help you even if it is only moral support you can count on me’ it is very important.

Lorena asks her community for understanding and compassion towards those that are living in a violent relationship. Understanding the challenges DV victims face brings awareness of the challenges that our communities are facing.

Stepping out of the shadow was not easy. Despite these women’s fears they spoke out in hope of creating change for all victims of DV. By speaking out Ana feels that if “si corremos la voz ... yo creo que va a ver cambio. Yo creo que si hay apoyo, hay más cambios” (“we spread the word...I believe there can be change. I think if there is support there will be more changes”). Speaking out against DV and bringing awareness of the obstacles UIW face are steps taken towards creating services that are more inclusive and accessible to those living in a violent relationship. Victims of DV should not be confined to live in a violent relationship because society does not recognize its cultural diversity. All victims of DV should have equal opportunity to seek services and speak out without fear.

These women’s reflections of their lives will bring insight to the experiences and challenges they encountered in a DV relationship in this country. Even though they struggled to survive in this country, they continue to have faith that one day this country will be more tolerant and inclusive to change. William V. Flores in “New Citizens, New Rights: Undocumented Immigrants and Latinos Cultural Citizenship” adds to the vision of hope by suggesting:

While Latinos may not fully belong to America, their hopes and frustrations do. Their dreams help us to conceive of a different America, one that is perhaps more just and egalitarian. The Latino vision of America may be an alternative one, but like all such visions, it has the potential for reordering, restructuring, and renewing. (305)

These women seek an “America” that embraces social justice and safety for all.

Their concerns are shared by many UIW in this country living in a DV relationship. The participants did not want to appear in a prominent place in our society; however, they do want to share their experiences and reach out to victims of DV. For these women sharing their experiences was of critical importance; even though they had to re-live their cruel realities. Forced to remain at the margins of our society, their stories gave them a voice to express and validate their existence. Flores adds:
Undocumented immigrants live out their lives in the shadows. Their masks of anonymity conceal their hopes and aspirations to be subterranean-like their lives, hidden from public view—but they are emerging from the shadows as new subjects with their own claims for rights. (305)

And yet, even “from the shadows,” this unique population of immigrants in this country works to re-define what it means to be an “American.” Many view this country as a place where new opportunities flourish. Lorena with confidence shares a message of hope to those in her situation:

Que definitivamente este es un país que le va a dar mejor calidad de vida como persona a ti, a tus hijos, y qué pase lo que pase nunca dejes de acercarte a grupos. No permitas la violencia en este país ni en ningún otro lado... Es muy difícil no tener papeles pero que un papel no te detenga para hablar. Que un papel no te detenga para salir adelante en el futuro... Te cuesta mucho trabajo, te cuesta mucho dolor en el alma, mucha tristeza nadie la sabe más que uno que lo lleva, pero que nada, ningún obstáculo te detenga en este país. Si tú quieres salir adelante en este país lo vas a lograr... con fe, con amor, con esperanza, con los grupos, con todo esto uno puede salir adelante. Va a costar mucho trabajo, como me está constando a mi. Mucho trabajo, me está costando, mucho trabajo con mis hijas...Entonces yo te diría a la gente que siga adelante, que luche, que intente hasta el final...[y] nunca, por nada del mundo, pienses que un papel los debe de detener. Cuando alguien quiere salir adelante no importa tener un papel.

Definitely this is a country that is going to give you a better quality of life as a person to you, your children, and no matter what happens never stop seeking help from organizations. Do not allow violence, in this country or in any other place...It is very difficult not having documents, but do not let a document stop you from speaking out. Do not let a document stop you from succeeding in the future...It will cost you a lot of work, it will cost you a lot of pain in your soul and a lot of grief that no one knows or understands more than you do. Do not allow a single obstacle stop you from succeeding in this country. If you want to succeed in this country you will achieve it...with faith, with love, with hope, with organizations, with all of this, one can succeed. It is going to cost a lot of work, like it is costing me. It is taking me a lot of effort with my daughters...therefore; I would tell people to carry on, to fight till the end and not to give up ...[and] never think that a document can stop you. When somebody wants to succeed there is no single document that matters.

The reason that these women risked stepping out of the shadows to share their stories is so their painful experience of unjustified violence will bring relief and justice to someone else. These women took us through their journeys, which were very painful at times, but despite the traumatic events, they had the strength to move forward. Their stories welcomed us to an intimate part of their life with the intention of providing a platform that will, in turn, help
other victims of DV. They choose to convey their message by using their voice to reach victims/survivors of DV, community members, organizations, and law enforcement. Their voices will not go unheard. Their courage serves as encouragement and inspiration to continue to create positive change and a safe environment for all victims of DV.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

It is evident that violence against women continues to be an open wound that we as a global community have not been able to heal. Violence against women has been accepted and normalized as a private issue in our society for far too long. Violence against women is not an issue that should be left to be resolved behind closed doors, rather it is a public issue that affects our children, our neighbors, our communities, and our world. Changing perceptions might be difficult; however, it is not impossible. Efforts to address DV as a social issue are now underway, stirring consciousness in hope to give voice to those that have been silenced.

While the current efforts are underway to provide a safe environment for UIW who are victims/survivors of DV, it is important to note there are some agents of social control that are still attempting to keep these women silence. The anti-immigrant climate in this country makes efforts at establishing trust more challenging. This is clear and visible in states such as Arizona with the Senate Bill 1070. The result of Arizona’s anti-immigrant law exacerbates the problem of racial profiling and further marginalizes women victims of DV. Not only does this sentiment further marginalize women, but it also forces them to remain silent. The current situation in Arizona and the current distrust of law enforcement throughout the country is an unfortunate set back to the anti-violence movement, but more importantly UIW are less likely to seek help to a system that has other priorities. Increasing tension caused by law enforcement in communities of color and immigrant communities creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

To add to the historical violations of human rights, the Border Patrol and the police have been involved in unjustified uses of force and racial profiling. In some cases the abuse of power of the Border Patrol has led to the murder of innocent people. Joseph Nevins points out in “On the Boundary of Abuse and Accountability” that “U.S. federal agents brutally beat, tased, and ultimately killed [Anastasio] Hernández Rojas in May 2010” (65). The
unjustified use of force that has resulted in Anastasio’s death is unacceptable and hopefully this case will bring justice and change for undocumented immigrants.

While states such as Arizona have chosen to ignore the cry for help from the undocumented community, it is important to note that some cities in this country have been working to create a space where differences are welcome by declaring their cities sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants. In “Negotiating Place, Space and Borders: The New Sanctuary Movement,” Gregory Freeland illustrates that:

Los Angeles is similar to the Bay Area and Ventura County in having a strong commitment from the religious community to offer support and even sanctuary. Also, in both Los Angeles and San Francisco, police officers are not allowed to inquire about immigration status, in order to encourage victims of crimes to come forward without fear of deportation. (500)

Cities that are creating a space for all members of their community are helping immigrant communities move forward with less fear and allowing them to build a relationship of trust.

How does society begin to create a world where differences are seen as strengths rather than weaknesses? Can a collective effort help shape opportunities that are accessible to all women instead of a selected few? These women benevolently stepped out to share their experiences in hopes of creating change for all women. These women’s experiences will contribute to bridging and connecting women’s unique experiences. A recent movement against DV has opened the door to the many social categories that exist when looking at victim/survivors of DV. Using a broader lens to analyze DV is allowing for a better understanding of how to better serve all women. Moving away from looking at DV from the perspective of a dominant culture will permit a deeper understanding of the diversity that exits among victims/survivors of DV. Addressing the complexities that exist will be a positive step towards giving a voice to the multiple concerns that prevent women of color and UIW from speaking out.

In conclusion, Ana, Angelica, Lorena, Maria, and Veronica opened their hearts and private lives to share their wisdom and experiences in hope of bringing some positive change for those that are living in a DV relationship. This study was possible because these women’s passion to help prevent future violence against women gave them the courage to speak out. It is now our responsibility as academics, service providers, and community members to use these experiences to create a safer environment for families. The opportunity to contribute to this study was not an easy task for these women. They shed many tears in
their quest to bring to life their painful past in order to vividly describe their experience publicly. Their courage has proven to be a powerful motivation to proactively continue to create change that is inclusive of all victims and survivors of DV.
REFERENCES

Ana. Personal Interview. 29 October 2009.


Lorena. Personal Interview. 2 April 2010.


Maria. Personal Interview. 8 October 2009.


Veronica Personal Interview. 5 November 2009.

