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## **Intimate partner violence in South Texas (Rio Grande Valley): An exploratory research of Latinas of Mexican descent**

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INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN SOUTH TEXAS (RIO GRANDE VALLEY): AN  
EXPLORATORY RESEARCH OF LATINAS OF MEXICAN DESCENT

A Thesis

by

GEORGINA VILLEGAS

Submitted to the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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EXPLORATORY RESEARCH OF LATINAS OF MEXICAN DESCENT

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May 2015



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## ABSTRACT

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This is a qualitative exploratory research study of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among a sample of Latinas from the Rio Grande Valley. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify 12 Latina victims of intimate partner violence. Respondents' ages ranged from 24 to 40 and were born in cities throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Respondents participated in a structured interview process. Respondents' descriptions of abuse included physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional abuse. Interview results produced 12 distinct narrative memos summarizing respondents' intimate partner violence experiences. Interview results were analyzed and revealed several themes and subthemes frequently identified in other intimate partner violence studies. Two themes emerged as being most significant among the respondents: reasons for the abuse and reasons for remaining in the ongoing abusive relationship.





## DEDICATION

The completion of my thesis study would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. To my mother Martha Ocañas, my father Jose Villegas, my sister Kristen Villegas, and my nephews Samuel and Marcel Diaz—everything I do, I do for you. We will always be a “Team!” And to Raul Montenegro, thank you for your unconditional love and support, and more than anything, for always believing in me. Thank you everybody, for all of your love and patience.



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I would especially like to thank the participants of my study. With this thesis study, I hope we can raise awareness and educate others on the issue of intimate partner violence in the Rio Grande Valley. Because intimate partner violence continues to be a significant public health concern, I hope for more public efforts, especially in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, to help combat the issue of Latinas being abused by their partner or spouse. No woman should ever be abused by any of their loved ones.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to study intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst the Latina population from the Rio Grande Valley. This is a qualitative exploratory research study on Latinas of Mexican Descent who have experienced intimate partner violence in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to get 12 Latina victims of intimate partner violence. The respondents were interviewed and answered a questionnaire based on the abuse they suffered from their intimate partner.

#### **Literature Review**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) can be described as physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, and/or sexual abuse between two partners or spouses in a current or previous intimate relationship (National Institute of Justice, 2007; Cummings, Gonzalez-Guarda, & Sandoval, 2013). IPV is a severe public health issue that affects millions of Americans each year (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2014) along various demographic variables, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), sexual orientation, and particularly those of multiple oppressed groups (Hays & Emelianchik, 2009). Studies on racial differences among women who experience IPV are thriving however, few studies have looked at IPV among Latinas and most research has been limited to Caucasian women (Garcia, Hurwitz, & Kraus,



2005; Klevens, 2007). Although there have been inconsistencies in the literature on whether higher rates of IPV exist among Hispanics, studies provide evidence that Hispanics are disproportionately affected by IPV (Caetano, Field, Ramisetty-Mikler, & McGrath, 2005).

The National Institute of Justice website illustrates the issue of IPV as a nation. Approximately 1.3 million women are physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the United States (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Although men can be victims of IPV as well, “women are significantly more likely than men to be injured during an intimate partner assault” (National Institute of Justice, 2007). According to Safe Horizon (2015), more than 4 million women experience physical assault from their partners and 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence during her lifetime.

Empirical research on violence by intimate partners began in the United States in the early 1970’s, and after more than 30 years of prevention and intervention, intimate partner violence remains a significant public health concern (Krebs, Breiding, Browne, & Warner, 2011). The number of women who suffer from IPV is worse among Latinas (Fife, Ebersole, Bigatti, Lane, & Brunner Huber, 2008) and different studies affirm these increasing rates (Lown & Vega, 2001). A study by Ingram (2007) found that half of the Latino population from their study reported being exposed to some form of IPV. Studies that utilized population-based samples rather than crime statistics, noted that Hispanics are at higher risk for IPV than any other racial/ethnic group (Gonzalez-Guarda, Vermeesch, Florom-Smith, McCabe, & Peragalla, 2013). Because few studies have focused on ethnic minority populations (Hage, 2000), insight on Latina IPV may be very limited.

Latinas born in the U.S. are reported to have higher rates of IPV than any other group (Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994). It was found that Latino families are at a greater risk for

IPV than non-Hispanic families (Straus & Smith, 1995), and demonstrate higher rates of violence between an intimate partner than any other ethnic group (Kantor et al., 1994). A study conducted by Lown and Vega (2001) with women of Mexican origin also found higher rates of IPV among U.S.-born Mexicans. Latinas are reluctant to speak about IPV because of shame, guilt, loyalty to their partners and families, and the cultural stigma that is placed on divorced/separated women (Zarza & Adler, 2008). West, Kantor, and Jasinski (1998) found that Latinas underutilize IPV services and are less willing to seek help. Reporting the abuse and even looking for help may place them in dangerous situations such as retaliation from their aggressor (Zarza & Adler, 2008).

### **Types of IPV**

In IPV, one partner attempts to control the other partner's life physically, sexually, psychologically, economically, and/or verbally (Fife et al., 2008). Coker, Sanderson, Cantu, Huerta, and Fadden (2008) stated that IPV has different ranges of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and stalking. Jewkes (2002) mentions the term "intimate partner violence" (p. 1423) can involve sexual violence as well as psychological abuse; these two forms of abuse can, but not always, join physical violence. Those who are victims of IPV are subjected to any of these types victimizations (Krebs et al., 2011). Because IPV is an increasing concern affecting various oppressed groups, these groups may experience more injuries and greater consequences (Hays & Emelianchik, 2009).

### **Physical Abuse**

Hays and Emelianchik (2009) describe physical abuse as including the subthemes of current physical abuse, threat of physical abuse, history of physical abuse, and physical indicators of physical abuse, while Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, and Shelley (2002) define

physical abuse “as the intentional use of force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury, or harm” (p.488). It is argued by Heise, Raikes, Watts, and Zwi (1994) that physically punishing wives is a social norm and acceptable in many Latin American countries. Gonzalez-Guarda, Vasquez, Urrutia, Villarruel, & Peragallo (2011) conducted a study to describe the experiences of Hispanic females on violence and risky sexual behavior and one woman who spoke of physical violence said,

He arrived at night. I complained one moment because all day I was with my son and he cried, and cried, and cried, and I was tired...and once again he hit me. When he lifted me, he grabbed me by the neck, threw on the bed and hit me, hit me, hit me (p.50).

Researchers found the following on physical abuse: of 693 Latinas who participated in interviews, 560 reported experiencing physical violence within the last 6 months by a current or recent intimate partner (Cavanaugh, Messing, Amanor-Boadu, O’Sullivan, & Campbell, 2013); Denham et al., (2007) found that Latinas were more likely to report physical abuse within the last six months; Zarza & Adler (2008) found 80.5% of their participants experienced physical abuse; of 292 Latina women, Hazen and Soriano (2007) found 33.9% reported physical abuse; being pushed or shoved was the common form of physical abuse (Cavanaugh et al., 2013); and lastly, Adames and Campbell (2005) found that the immigrant Latinas from their study identified physical abuse as violent however, did not easily identify sexual and emotional abuse as abusive.

Having a history of physical abuse in early childhood is shown to be a risk factor for victimization and perpetration (Caetano, Schafer, Clark, Cunradi, & Raspberry, 2000). Experiencing or witnessing violence within your family as a child can lead to future behaviors of abuse in an intimate relationship (Zarza, Ponsoda, Carrillo, 2009). Child abuse may lead to learning that violence is an acceptable way to solve conflicts (Zarza et al., 2009). In a study of 73

Latina victims conducted by Zarza et al. (2009) it was found that 93% of the participants reported their intimate partners experienced or witnessed family violence as child and 64.3% of the Latina victims reported they witnessed physical violence as a child on the part from their fathers to their mothers.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Men who engage in physical abuse will most likely engage in sexual abuse, (Coker, Smith, McKeown, King, 2000) and vice versa; sexual abuse can lead to more severe violent physical abuse (Coker et al., 2000). Clinical studies have reported sexual abuse as being common among different ethnic and racial groups (McFarlane, Wiist, & Watson, 1998) but specifically occurring more frequently for the Latino population (Torres, 1991). Several studies have attributed sexual abuse towards an intimate partner to the term *machismo*. According to Mendoza (2009), machismo “is a social behavior pattern in which the Latino male exhibits an overbearing attitude to anyone in a position he perceives as inferior to his, demanding complete subservience” (pp. 2). Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013) state that in Hispanic relationships, machismo is likely to lead to power imbalances, thus influencing sexual risk behaviors among Latina women. Goldberg, Hokoda, and Ramos-Lira, (2007) found machismo to be associated with a strong sexual aptitude.

If a male physically forces sex (rape) or makes his female partner have intercourse without a condom, it is referred to as intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) (Cavanaugh et al., 2013). Cavanaugh et al. (2013) conducted a study examining recent IPSV on 555 physically abused Latinas and found the following: of 135 women who reported forced sex by their intimate partner, 45.9% indicated being raped by their intimate partner six or more times within the last six months of this study. Correspondingly, of 170 women who reported being forced to have sex

without a condom, 62.9% indicated that they were forced by their partner six or more times within the last six months of this study (Cavanaugh et al., 2013). Of the 555 physically abused Latinas from this study, “nearly 40% reported IPSV during the previous 6 months (i.e., forced sex/rape or being made to have sex without a condom) and 30% of the women who reported IPSV reported they were raped at least six times during this time period” (Cavanaugh et al., 2013, p. 130).

Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2011) conducted a study with Hispanic females to describe their experiences with risky sexual behaviors; the majority of these females described their sexual abuse as having sex with their partner because they were obligated. A young Hispanic woman spoke about the abuse from her husband saying,

He violated me in the most brutal way a woman can be violated. In every way possible that they want to have sex, even if you don't want to, destroyed and many times bleeding...and he would say ‘I am your husband, I own you (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011, p. 50).

More than half of the Latinas who were sexually abused by their intimate partner in Cavanaugh et al., (2013) study became victims of sexual violence many times. Because it is common for women to lack control in an abusive relationship, they do not have the capacity to suggest to their partner to use a condom during forced/coerced sex (Lichtenstein, 2005). When sexual abuse is present in a relationship, other types of abuse are likely to happen, thus leading to a more profound abusive experience (Zarza et al., 2009). Although Latino females are disproportionately affected by IPV, the research characterizing the cultural and gender-specific understanding of Latina women with regard to these experiences is lacking (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011).

## **Psychological Abuse**

Psychological abuse can involve verbal abuse, control, maltreatment, disrespect, fear, jealousy, harassment, and stalking (Hays & Emelianchik, 2009); power and control tactics used by a victim's partner (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011); emotional abuse, isolation, and domination (Hazen & Soriano, 2007); intimidation, constant belittling or humiliation, and threats (Stewart et al., 2012). When Hazen and Soriano (2007) interviewed 292 Latina women on their IPV experiences, it was found that 82.5% of these women reported some type of psychological aggression from their intimate partner. Another Hispanic victim described her psychological abuse as an intellectual competition because her ex-husband constantly competed with her on who had the most knowledge (Gonzalez-Guarda, 2011). She said,

Intellectual violence has nothing to do with beatings, nothing to do with screaming, it is a competitive pressure, it is a competition and especially when both partners are professionals. It is a competition based on intellectual power to see who knows more, who wins more, who dominates more (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011, p. 50).

In addition, Coker et al. (2000) found from their study of 1443 women, that more than 33% of the violence that was reported was because of nonphysical psychological battering. These findings demonstrate that women experience defenseless abuse, loss of power and control, and entrapment in the abuse (Coker et al., 2000).

### **Findings on IPV and Latinas**

Violence against women is a demonstration of male power juxtaposed against the lesser power of women (Jewkes, 2002). Jewkes (2002) mentions that where women have low status they often lack the necessary perceptions of self-efficacy and the social and economic ability to leave a relationship and return to their family or live alone, and thus are severely curtailed in

their ability to act against an abuser. Violence may increase in a Latino household when men feel a loss of control over their spouses (Sorenson & Telles, 1991). When a woman does decide to leave a relationship, Stein (2013) found that women are at greater risk after they leave their batterers, and seven times more likely to be killed or seriously injured; about 75% of visits to the emergency rooms by battered women occur after separation.

Intimate partner violence is the leading cause of injury to U.S. women between the ages of 15 and 44; more common than automobile accidents, muggings, and cancer deaths combined (Stein, 2013). According to data from the criminal justice system, hospital and medical records, mental health records, social services, and surveys, thousands of women are injured or killed each year as a result of violence, many by someone they are involved with or were involved with intimately (Gerberding, Binder, Hammond, & Arias, 2003). As the Latina population in the United States continues to expand, it is important to understand who these women are who experience IPV and how their needs differ from other women who are victims of IPV (Denham, Fraiser, Hooten, Belton, Newton, Gonzalez, Begum, & Campbell, 2007).

### **Latina IPV in Indianapolis**

IPV in the Indianapolis Latino community was found to be a significant issue, thus the prevalence of and demographic factors were examined by Fife et al., (2008). An exploratory, cross-sectional study of 100 Latinas attending community health centers, educational presentations, and health affairs was conducted and found the most common forms of abuse to be the following: 37.5% were yelled by a spouse/partner, 32.6% were being followed by spouse/partner, 17.9% felt like one had to ask for permission to do anything, 17.5% were harassed by a partner, 14.6% were name called, 12.8% were blamed for everything, and 11.4% were pushed/shoved/slapped (Fife et al., 2008). Of the Latinas who reported IPV, 70.6%

indicated one to three types of abuse whereas the rest, (29.4%) reported more than three types of abuse (Fife et al., 2008). It was concluded that approximately half of the respondents indicated some form of IPV. Latinas are described as less likely to report IPV, which may underestimate the true prevalence in the Latina community in Indianapolis.

### **Latina IPV in Eastern North Carolina**

A study by Denham et al. (2007) describes the characteristics of Latinas who reported experiencing IPV. A sample of 1,212 women in blue-collar work sites in rural North Carolina completed a questionnaire assessing IPV who reported to have experienced IPV. Of the 1,212 women who completed the questionnaire, it was found that 15.9% of Spanish-speaking Latinas were physically abused since the age of 18, compared to 33.3% English-speaking Latinas; 9.2% Spanish-speaking Latinas were physically abused in the past 6 months, compared to 23.5% English-speaking Latinas; 4.6% Spanish-speaking Latinas had threats of abuse in the past 6 months, compared to 23.5% English-speaking Latinas; and 13.8% Spanish-speaking Latinas had experienced emotional abuse in the past 6 months, compared to 29.4% English-speaking Latinas (Denham et al., 2007). It was concluded that English-speaking Latinas experience double the rate of IPV than Spanish-speaking Latinas and estimates of prevalence of IPV from this study are comparable to prior estimates of rates of IPV among Latinas (Denham et al., 2007).

### **Latina IPV in Los Angeles**

A cross-sectional survey was administered in five public health care clinics in Los Angeles County. This study consisted of 464 female participants who identified themselves as only Latina or Hispanic. It was found that 63.1% of married participants reported abuse as well as 52.7% of female homemakers (Garcia et al., 2005). 37.6% of Latinas who reported “sometimes” turning to family for social support and 45% of Latinas who reported “sometimes”



turning to friends for social support had an increased prevalence of IPV (Garcia et al., 2005, p. 575). It was observed from this study that Latina victims of IPV were the most difficult to encourage in attaining help or seeking shelter. Latinas who did go to a shelter was for a shorter time and returned to their abusive partner (Garcia et al., 2005). Improving IPV reporting, having more IPV education awareness, and culturally appropriate programs were suggested by this study to address the issue on Latina IPV (Garcia et al., 2005).

### **Latina IPV in New Jersey**

New Jersey is a state with a diverse and numerous Latino population (Zarza & Adler, 2008). Data shows that rates of fatalities by an intimate partner according to race/ethnicity are much higher for Hispanics (NJ Domestic Violence Fatality & Near Fatality Review Board, 2009). A cross-sectional research project among immigrant Latinas was done with the help of community-based organizations (CBO's) who serve the Latino community in the state of New Jersey. This study utilized 12 CBO's and faith-based organizations and recruited 73 Latina victims who were abused by an intimate partner and found the following: 98.6% suffered from emotional abuse, 80.5% suffered from physical abuse, and 53% reported being victims of sexual abuse (Zarza & Adler, 2008).

From this sample, 44.6% were bedridden after an abusive incident, 29.2% used hospital emergency services after an incident, and 12.3% of the women were hospitalized due to abuse at least on one occasion (Zarza & Adler, 2008). Nearly 48% of the women who participated in this study never discussed the abuse with a social worker, clergyperson, doctor, or other healthcare professional at the time of the study (Zarza & Adler, 2008). Women who discuss their abuse generally confide in female friends, relatives such as mothers and sisters, and female neighbors (Zarza & Adler, 2008). This study suggested basing services on the specific needs of Latino

victims (Zarza & Adler, 2008). “It is also important to consider each person and family in its own cultural and situational context at the time of providing social services. One single organization rarely could cover all or even just some of the important needs that their certain communities require” (Zarza & Adler, 2008, p. 37).

### **IPV Among Latina College Women**

Dating violence is a frequent issue among young adults. Any type of partner violence can lead to significant mental consequences but physical and psychological violence has been linked to severe mental, physical, and social consequences (Coker et al., 2008). Coker et al. (2008) conducted a study on the prevalence of IPV among 149 Latino college women and found that 43% of Latinas experienced some type of IPV, 12% of women were physically or sexually assaulted in the past year, 12.1% were stalked, and 9.1% reported being psychologically abused by their partner.

### **Machismo and Latino IPV**

*Machismo* is a term that has been linked to IPV within the Latino population (Campbell, Masaki, & Torres, 1997) and has become a prevalent component of the Latino culture (Kanuha, 1994). Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013) refer to *machismo* as the negative (aggressive) behaviors associated with being the dominant man in the Hispanic culture. Latino men’s machismo can be threatened when gender and power dynamics take over, thus becoming reluctant to accept these roles and resort to other means of power, such as IPV (Adames & Campbell, 2005). Participants from Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2011) study believe that because machismo is so deeply rooted into the Latino culture, Hispanic women continue to accept it however, supporting machismo can lead to an increase in IPV. The way a woman raises her male child (e.g., giving boys more liberty) versus the way she raises her female child (e.g., having more responsibilities) may even

encourage machismo and end up raising a generation of victims and perpetrators (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011).

Machismo plays a significant role in the decision to disclose the abuse to others (Perilla, 1999). Studies have found (Acevedo, 2000) that machismo deters an abused victim from seeking help and Latinas who do remain in an abusive relationship are most likely to have traditional gender role norms (Vera, 2002). The different types of abuse women experience from their intimate partner eventually becomes the norm and reduces the efforts to address IPV in the Latino culture (Adames & Campbell, 2005). Although machismo is a risk factor for IPV, there is limited research on the relationship of machismo with IPV in the Latino culture (Gonzalez-Guardo et al., 2013).

### **Impacts of IPV**

Intimate partner violence is an under-recognized problem that can have an enormous impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women that can lead to significant personal, health, economic, and social costs (Stewart, MacMillan, & Wathen, 2012). Experiences with physical and sexual violence by intimate partners have detrimental effects on individuals' mental and physical health, and their ability to live healthy and productive lives; these adverse consequences may extend to their families, others with whom they come in contact, and society (Krebs et al., 2011). Personal, health, economic, and social costs can be a result of intimate partner violence.

### **Latina Personal Impacts**

A study by Zarza and Adler (2008) concluded that half of their sample of Latina victims did not report their abuse because of perceived impacts to their marriage, legal resident status issues, and the view that IPV is private family matter. A Latina victim of IPV may be

discouraged to disclose her abuse because she may be undocumented and fears deportation and the consequent separation from her children, as well as the fear for her partner's deportation (Zarza et al., 2009).

### **Latina Health Impacts**

Lee, Thompson, and Mechanic (2002) found greater mental health consequences for oppressed groups. Rodriguez, Heilemann, Fielder, Ang, Nevarez, and Mangione (2008) conducted a study on 210 Latinas and found that depression and PTSD were significantly associated with IPV. Latinas who did not have direct access to services had a negative impact on their mental health (Rodriguez et al., 2008). Other health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders like posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic pain, eating disorders, sleeping disorders, psychosomatic disorders, alcohol and other substance abuse, suicidal and self-harm behaviors, personality disorders (borderline and antisocial), and non-affective psychosis, have been listed as leading causes of IPV (Stewart et al., 2012). Hays and Emelianchik (2009) suggest all victims of IPV across cultural groups to attend a thorough intervention program in mental health counseling.

### **Latina Physical Impacts**

Studies have examined the physical impacts of IPV victims and found injuries to the head, neck, face, and abdominal to be common (Sheridan & Nash, 2007). Oral or dental injuries, strangulation wounds, concussions, bruises, and open wounds are also common (Sheridan & Nash, 2007). A study conducted by Zarza & Adler (2008) on Latina women and IPV found that 44.6% of their sample were bedridden after an IPV incident, 29.2% utilized hospital emergency services, and 12.3% were hospitalized due to IPV at least on one occasion. 48% of these women never reported the abuse by their intimate partner (Zarza & Adler, 2008).

## **Predictors of IPV**

IPV can be severe when extreme power inequities between genders are present (Zarza et al., 2009). This oppression can in turn lead to social tolerance towards violence and domination of women (Zarza & Adler, 2008). In the Latino population, violence between an intimate partner may increase when men feel a loss of control over their spouses, thus men will become violent against their intimate partner to attain that control (Zarza & Adler, 2008). Higher rates of IPV among Latinos can be associated with young age (Ingram, 2007; Lown & Vega, 2001; Straus & Smith, 1995), low income (Straus & Smith, 1995), witnessing IPV as a child (Perilla, 1999), psychological stress (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994), mental disorders (Sorenson & Telles, 1991), jealousy (Sugihara & Warner, 2002), and machismo (Campbell et al., 1997).

One of the critical predictors of IPV is the socioeconomic status (SES) of the victims and perpetrators (Zarza et al., 2009). Several studies view poverty and unemployment as a strong predictor of IPV (Field & Caetano, 2003). Caetano et al., (2005) found that the reoccurrence of IPV is common among young couples in which the male is unemployed. These findings have also been supported by other studies (Zarza & Adler, 2009; Klevens, 2007). Having low levels of income could lead to a barrier when seeking services for IPV (Klevens, 2007). Latinos who live in the United States are disproportionately affected by unemployment, poverty, low-paying jobs, and the lack of the opportunity to an education (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Living in a low-income household can contribute to social stressors that can increase high-risk behavior that leads to IPV (Zarza et al., 2009).

Another predictor of IPV is child abuse. Experiencing violence within the family at a young age can influence future violent behavior of abuse against an intimate partner (Zarza et al., 2009). Witnessing violent behavior within family members may give the perception that violence

is acceptable when solving conflicts (Zarza et al., 2009). A study by Ingram (2007) found that Latinos were more likely to witness IPV in their homes than non-Latinos as a child. Caetano et al. (2005) states that the initiation of IPV is more common among Hispanic couples in which the male witnessed childhood physical abuse and parental violence or threats of violence. Zarza et al. (2009) conducted a study of 73 Latina victims of IPV and found that 93% of the participants reported that their partners had witnessed family violence in their childhood and 64.3% witnessed physical violence on part of their fathers to their mothers.

Women from IPV studies stated IPV to be a major problem in their Latino communities that have been rooted in external factors such as cultural norms and stressors relating to Latino immigration changes (Adames & Campbell, 2005). “Despite the equally high rates of IPV among Latinos, there is only a limited amount of research on the factors associated with its occurrence” (Klevens, 2007, p. 113). Zarza et al., (2009) said the following:

Further research is critical in order to establish models that identify risk factors as well as protective factors specific to Latino victims, or subpopulations of perpetrators (i.e., immigrants) that can provide some insight to explain this problem and therefore assist in designing culturally sensitive prevention and treatment programs both for victims and perpetrators.

### **Latinas Seeking Assistance**

It was found by Torres (1991) that Latinas who suffer from IPV return to their abusers more often than do non-Latino White women. According to Acevedo (2000), the welfare of their children is the reason why Latinas return to their abusers. Threats to their children (Garcia et al., 2005), the fear of retaliation against their children (Zarza et al., 2009), the fear of not being able to feed their children (Adames & Campbell, 2005), and the fear the losing custody of their

children (Klevens, 2007) are all reasons Latinas have reported for not leaving their abuser. One of the differences between Latinos and non-Latinos is the knowledge on the community resources available for IPV, therefore, it is essential for community programs and interventions to focus on the resources abused Latinas need (Ingram, 2007). In order for Latinas to become more aware of the resources available, Ingram (2007) suggests developing mechanisms of intervention programs to increase the utilizations of these programs and to increase the skills of social service providers to identify and respond to Latinos who are risk for IPV.

Domestic violence researchers have recognized cultural differences as an important factor in understanding domestic abuse in Mexican American women, especially when implementing intervention practices and policies (de la Torre & Estrada, 2001). Data that is obtained from Latina IPV can be used to develop IPV prevention and intervention programs that are culturally appropriate (Garcia et al., 2005). It was found that if Latinas did go to a shelter for IPV, it was for a much shorter time than any other race/ethnicity and returned to their abusive partners (Garcia et al., 2005). Similarly, Ingram (2007) found that non-Latinas seek shelters more than Latinas do. “Examples like these point to the necessity of knowing what is important for Latinas when developing prevention and intervention programs” (Garcia et al., 2005, p.585). Approaching the Latina female population and informing them about available resources can be an effective way to reach out to isolated victims who fear the consequences of speaking about their abuse (Zarza & Adler, 2008).

### **Barriers to Seeking Assistance**

The barriers Latinas face for seeking help were found to be the following: lack of financial means, fear of deportation, losing custody of their children, beliefs that abuse must be tolerated, being unaware of available services, language difficulties, preferences for an intact

family, and lack of transportation (Klevens, 2007). Murdaugh, Hunt, Sowell, and Santana (2004) identified language, lack of transportation, lack of money and/or resources, fear of spouse/boyfriend, and lack of knowledge of where to get assistance as barriers for Latinas when seeking assistance for IPV. Factors like these can result in institutional barriers; service providers may lack translators, Latinas may be required to travel long distances from their homes, and may require victims to pay large fees, which in turn makes it difficult for victims of IPV to access these kind of services (West et al., 1998).

Literature demonstrates that most IPV survivors hesitate to seek formal social services; instead IPV survivors disclose to informal support systems first such as family or friends (Postmus, McMahon, Silva-Martinez, & Warrenner, 2014). However, Ingram (2007) found that Latinas are less likely to turn to informal sources (family, friends, etc.) than to a professional caregiver. Klevens (2007) found that Latinas who suffered from IPV sought help less often from both informal and formal sources. There is a need to establish the factors that determine how Latinas seek help for IPV. Although socio-demographic factors have been shown to be predictors of health service utilization (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 1999), only few studies have evaluated different factors to be predictors of why Latinas seek assistance (West et al., 1998). Understanding the factors that lead Latinas to seek help is fundamental in developing a culturally and appropriate intervention and policy for Latinas who suffer from IPV (Ingram, 2007). As compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Latinas are less likely to report IPV to formal services (Ingram, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

“IPV is a pervasive public and mental health concern that affects approximately one third of individuals from various demographics, although statistics are somewhat higher for females



and those who lack immediate social, legal, medical, and financial resources” (Hays & Emlianchik, 2009, pp. 150), for example, the Latina population. Some Latinas are less likely to report their abuse because of services that are not available in Spanish (Fife et al., 2008). Because Latinas tend to be particularly vulnerable to certain factors, formal service providers need to be more knowledgeable when it comes to providing and facilitating support for Latina victims of IPV (Denham et al, 2007). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has promoted the development of culturally efficient intervention programs among minorities (Klevens, 2007). The CDC uses part of their funding to help develop programs that are aimed at preventing violence against women (Klevens, 2007). To address the violence attributed to IPV, the CDC gathers information on the magnitude and severity of IPV; identifies populations at risk; develops and evaluates strategies to modify the factors that are associated with IPV; and implements the interventions that prove to be effective (Klevens, 2007).

Based on the findings of a National Violence Against Women Survey, the following conclusions can be found: intimate partner violence should be treated as a significant social problem, women report significantly more intimate partner violence than do men, studies are needed to determine why different national surveys have produced such disparate findings with respect to women’s and men’s experiences with IPV, studies are needed to determine why the prevalence of intimate partner violence varies significantly among women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, IPV is more prevalent among male same-sex couples than female same-sex couples, violence and emotionally abusive and controlling behavior in intimate relationships are interrelated, America’s medical community should receive comprehensive training about the medical needs of victims of intimate partner rape and physical assault, and the U.S. justice

system community should receive comprehensive training about the safety needs of victims of IPV (Reno, Marcus, Leary, & Samuels, 2000).

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

This study is a qualitative exploratory research based on grounded theory. Grounded theory is commonly used in qualitative research (Neuman, 2003). Strauss and Corbin (1990) define this theory as “a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon” (pp. 24). Grounded theory was used to develop a theory based on the evidence found from Latinas of Mexican Descent who have been victims of intimate partner violence. The goal of exploratory research is to explore all sources of information and develop more questions that future research can answer (Neuman, 2003).

#### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research produces findings not attained by any statistical means (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data can be gathered by means of interview or observation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study is a qualitative study that constructed cultural meaning from the Latino population, focused on interactive interviews with Latinas of Mexican descent that are 18 and over who have been a victim of intimate partner violence, consisted of 12 respondents, and formulated representations based on detailed knowledge acquired from cases (Neuman, 2003). Latina victims of intimate partner violence were given an open-ended questionnaire where they described any prior history of abuse by their intimate partner, the type of violence/abuse they

suffered from their intimate partner, the circumstances surrounding the abuse, and their personal perception from their abuse (if given by the respondent).

## **Population**

This sample is derived specifically from Latinas of Mexican descent from the Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande Valley has a unique culture with a merge of Mexican and American values that create a distinct population with varying acculturation. The Rio Grande Valley consists of four counties—Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron. As of 2013, Starr county's population was 61,693, Hidalgo county's population was 815,996, Willacy county's population was 21,921, and Cameron county's population was 417, 276 (United States Census Bureau, 2014), totaling a population of 1,295,235 for the entire Rio Grande Valley. Starr county is 95.7% Hispanic or Latino, Hidalgo county is 91% Hispanic or Latino, Willacy county is 87% Hispanic or Latino, and Cameron county is 88.5% Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

The Rio Grande Valley is located in the tip of South Texas, which separates Mexico from the United States. It is spread throughout the entire Rio Grande River starting in Roma and ending in Brownsville; a distance of roughly 115 miles. The Rio Grande Valley population consists of bilingual U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, as well as undocumented residents and is a combination of American and Mexican cultures. In total, the Rio Grande Valley consists of 91.73% Hispanics or Latinos, 7.7% whites alone (not Hispanic or Latino), and 1.15% Blacks or African Americans.

**Demographics of RGV.** The Rio Grande Valley is an area that is under educated and has low employment. According to Teach for American (2014) for every 100 students entering a public school in South Texas, only 12 will earn any type of degree within six years of

graduation. 16% of Latinos in the Rio Grande Valley have an associate's degree or higher compared to 37% of White non-Hispanics (Excelencia in Education).

In Hidalgo County as of 2013, 61.8% had a high school degree and 15.9% had a bachelor's degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In 2012, Hidalgo County had 175,195 employed citizens out of 815,996 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In Starr County as of 2013, 45% had a high school degree and 8.6% had a bachelor's degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In 2012, Starr County had 9,876 employed citizens out of 61,693(United States Census Bureau, 2014). In Cameron County as of 2013, 63.7% had a high school degree and 15.4% had a bachelor's degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In 2012, Cameron County had 2,630 employed citizens out of 417,276 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In Willacy County as of 2013, 62.2% had a high school degree and 8.8% had a bachelor's degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In 2012, Willacy County had 2,630 employed citizens out of 21,921 (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

### **Sampling**

This qualitative study used nonprobability sampling to select Latina's who had been victims of IPV. This specific content of the case determined whether they were chosen to participate in the questionnaire. To select a case of IPV victims, purposive and snowball sampling was used. Purposive sampling allowed the use of judgment in selecting unique cases with a specific purpose in mind and the use of several methods in locating as many of these specific cases as possible (Neuman, 2003). This study specifically chose Latinas of Mexican Descent who have been victims of IPV and used as many resources as possible to find other Latinas victims. Once these specific cases were chosen for this study, snowball sampling was used to get more respondents. Snowball sampling is based on the referral of the respondents.

12 Latinas of Mexican Descent were interviewed for this study. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions—questions 1 through 5 asked about their background and questions 6 through 14 asked about the abuse they experienced from their intimate partner (see appendix for instruments). Different methods were employed to interview the abused victims. Respondents who were open and willing to discuss their abuse were interviewed face-to-face; and the respondents who no longer lived in the Rio Grande Valley or were too busy to meet, were interviewed via phone or the questionnaire was sent via email. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at several locations that accommodated to the respondent—Barnes and Noble, Coffee Zone, and Starbucks. The other respondents submitted their questionnaire via email.

The respondents' ages ranged from 24 to 40. The respondents who participated in study were from Hidalgo and Cameron County—three were born in McAllen, one was born in Mission, three were born in Weslaco, two were born in Brownsville, one was born in Donna, one was born in Edinburg, and one was born in Harlingen. All respondents' who were interviewed have at least some type of college education—one respondent has an associate's degree, two respondent's are getting a bachelor's degree, five respondent's have a bachelor's degree, two respondent's are getting a master's degree, and two respondent's have a master's degree. The occupation of the respondents' varied—administrative assistants, educators, research assistants, law enforcement, restaurant, and social services.

It was found that 9 respondents were abused by their Latino male intimate partner, 2 were abused by their African American male intimate partner, and 1 was abused by their White male intimate partner. The education of the male abusers was the following: 7 had no higher education; 2 had a bachelor's degree; 2 had some college; and 1 one had a master's degree. The

following were given as the occupation of the abuser: unemployed veteran, unemployed, computer science technician, oil field, bartender, postal service, and educator.

## **Analysis**

For the analysis of my study, I used three types of coding: open, axial, and selective. Open coding consisted of naming and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) into themes and initial codes to condense masses of data (Neuman, 2003). Data obtained from Latina victims of IPV were broken down and conceptualized by taking apart observations, sentences or paragraphs from the questionnaire and giving each idea something that represents a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once the data was broken down, data was put back together to make connections between categories, known as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The use of grounded theory allowed the data to emerge. The research findings of this qualitative study “constituted a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation, rather than consisting of a set of numbers, or a group of loosely related themes” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 24). The findings allowed a theory to be developed that was faithful to Latinas who have been victims of IPV.

Once the questionnaires for this study were complete, the data was summarized into a narrative for each respondent. Each question was reviewed individually and a comparative chart was constructed to study the responses of each respondent. General themes and subthemes were extracted and they are the following: abuse; abuse while dating; abuse after cohabitation/marriage with a subtheme of pregnancy; patriarchal relations with the subthemes of dominance, machismo, and control; economic/educational insecurity with the subthemes of education, occupation, and economic/income; jealousy/emotional insecurity; infidelity by male partner; shame and guilt with the subtheme of family; importance of family with the subthemes

of Mexican familism; the role of Criminal Justice with the subthemes of pressing charges and females vs. males; leaving the abuser; and justifying the abuse/victim blaming were all general themes and subthemes used in this study



## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY OF DATA

Once all 12 respondents were interviewed, a narrative memo was created for each individual to summarize their intimate partner violence experience. Each story was developed by reviewing the responses from the questionnaire, reviewing each question and answer independently, and composing a unique story to the respondent's abuse. In general, certain types of characteristics of abuse were identified.

#### **Abuse**

All of the 12 respondents were abused by their intimate partner but along with the physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, the following types of abuse stood out: one respondent was spit at by her intimate partner; a respondent ended up with a broken wrist from being pushed by her intimate partner; during an argument, the intimate partner of a respondent threw their six month old baby to the bed to charge at her and physically abuse her; and a respondent ended up with a sprained neck and a scar on her lip.

#### **Abuse While Dating**

Some respondents experienced abuse while dating—some were abused while they were dating and prior to having children and some were abused before they married their male partner. One respondent said, “My ex-husband first hit me before we got married. He would hit me when he would get stressed out.”

### **Abuse after Cohabitation/Marriage**

Several respondents were not abused by their intimate partner until after their marriage. The following responses were given from the respondents: “I have been with my husband for almost nine years. Throughout these years I had never experienced any form of abuse”; “I was dating my ex-husband for nine years before we got married and there was never any abuse in those nine years. We got married and that was the first time I experienced physical abuse”; and “The abuse started after we got married and he became possessive, jealous and controlling.”

Few respondents did not experience any abuse from their intimate partner until they started living together. The stress of living with each other for the first time exposed the respondents and their male partners to stress. The respondents said the following: “We were good and we never had problems until we lived together” and “The abuse started once we were living together as a couple. We were planning our wedding and had several bills to pay.”

### **Pregnancy**

Two respondents were abused by their intimate partner while they were pregnant. The first respondent said, “I had a doctor’s appointment the next morning and I asked my ex-husband if he could come with me. I was in my closet and I remember him kicking me and pushing me into the closet; I hit my stomach with the closet bar”. The second respondent said, “Our last physical incident was when he grabbed my neck. I was 8 months pregnant and I could not retaliate against him so I called the police.”

### **Narratives**

#### **Respondent #1**

A 24 year-old mother of two, working as a graduate assistant, and is studying for her Master’s degree. She was born in McAllen and is currently separated. The respondent has been

with her husband for nine years and had never experienced any type of abuse until a few months ago. They first met when she was 15 and he was 18. She described herself as “a young studious girl who fell in love with a gangster.” When they met, the abuser and future father of her children, was going through court proceedings for attempted murder that was gang related.

The respondent described how her partner became insecure when she was in the master’s program. The respondent went back to school to get her Master’s degree and became close to her peers; this caused her intimate partner to become jealous. He did not like that she had friends and would talk to people other than him. The respondent experienced verbal and slight physical abuse when she entered the Master’s program. “He tried to restrain me, causing bruising along my arms.”

My husband’s insecurities about me and my school drove him to another level. One night while I was driving we got into an argument, which ultimately led him to break my windshield. Apart from that, he made a scene at school.

After the respondent and the abuser discussed that incident, he assured her everything was okay however, his insecurities about her attending school did not end there.

He ensured that I would not be on campus when he made a surprise visit. He attempted to confront an individual he assumed I was having an affair with. He showed up to my class when I was not there and said that he wanted to talk to him, however my husband was not alone. He and the other individual sat at one of the tables in the building on the floor where we have class.

The respondent’s husband saw one of the respondent’s classmates get out of the classroom to use the bathroom—he asked the classmate to let the individual know that he wanted to speak to him after class. The respondent’s husband was waiting for the individual to get out of

class on the first floor while his friend was keeping a look out on the second floor of the building.

He kept insisting that I was having an affair, when in reality there was nothing more than a friendship. I truly believe my husband's secret goal was to try and take everything from me. He wanted to take away my friends, my school, my job, so that I would be solely dependent on him.

Although the respondent did not experience any major physical abuse, the respondent was able to save herself from any future physical abuse. Her partner wanted to take everything from her, so that she would have nothing but him. He had been cheating on her for years and the respondent stayed with him. She was not even allowed to have any friends. The respondent never reported the abuse to the city police department. She asks herself, "If he was not afraid to act his way with a police officer, what was to keep him from hurting my children or me?" The respondent is currently separated from her partner. "Fortunately, I have been able to escape with my life and the lives of my children. We are currently living away from him, and are getting by day by day."

## **Respondent #2**

A 33 year-old mother with a Bachelor's degree. She was born in Mission, is divorced, and works for law enforcement. She comes from a family with strong family values and has never experienced any types of abuse in her life.

The respondent dated her ex-husband for nine years before they got married; she had never experienced any type of abuse from him. When they started dating, he would always buy her flowers every time he got paid. They were always together and would do everything

together. She described him as a very polite individual. Her family welcomed her husband with their deeply rooted family values.

The first time the respondent experienced physical abuse was when they got married. She was seven months pregnant and her ex-husband had two jobs and she had a small business store. She describes her first physical incident and says she remembers him being so frustrated one night; he was exhausted and frustrated from his two jobs. The respondent had a doctor's appointment the following morning and she asked her ex-husband if he would go with her.

He started yelling and it shocked me because he had never yelled like that and was saying things I had never heard before. I was in my closet getting clothes and I remember him kicking me and pushing me towards the closet; I hit my stomach with the closet bar.

The respondent was frightened and began crying. They were living in the respondent's parent's guest house—she could have called for help but she did not want to. The ex-husband made it seem like nothing happened and the respondent would make excuses for her husband and the incident. She would tell herself, “No, it is not going to happen to me, I am educated. It just happened and it happens to everybody.”

The respondent described another incident they had. “We had an argument because he did not like the dinner I had made. Our baby began crying and he got frustrated. He said, ‘Quiet that baby, I am tired and look what you made me for dinner.’” The respondent took their baby to their bedroom and he followed her only to begin punching her arms while she was holding their baby.

He took out the shotgun and pointed it to my face while I was holding our baby boy. I started running with our baby. I did not want to tell my family, I always had their support with the father of my children and I was afraid of losing it.

A cousin of the respondent lived on her street, so she went to her cousin's house with her baby to cool off. When the respondent returned home that same day, her and her ex-husband did not speak to each other for two weeks.

We never talked about it and I never questioned it. I remember his face being so angry. Right away, I knew something else was going on. I never left him because my family never talked about divorce and I did not want to disappoint my family.

Her ex-husband did not like the way the respondent would dress. She could be dressed conservatively and he would always have something negative to say about her revealing too much skin. Her ex-husband also did not like it when she wore make up. The respondent mentioned how she had to secretly buy make up and hide it from her ex-husband.

The respondent described another incident that occurred. She was in the police academy and her ex-husband borrowed her car and said he would pick her after she got out of her shift. After being picked up, they needed to pick up their son but her ex-husband wanted to go to a BBQ. The respondent said she would wait for him at home. "You are going to start again?" he said. The respondent kept saying they needed to pick up their son, but her ex-husband did not care to pick him up. "He always wanted things his way and he wanted to go to the BBQ." The respondent was worried he would drive to the BBQ anyway without picking up their son. She was worried because nobody else would be able to pick him up. As they were driving he called her a "bitch" and accused her of being in the police academy to only be around men. They picked up their son from daycare and he continued arguing with her in the car. As they got to her business to close it for the day, the ex-husband got off the car and went to where the respondent was sitting in the car, grabbed the seatbelt and began chocking her with it while their child was in the car. She was screaming and pushing him away. "You are going to get it bad when we get

home” he said. The respondent managed to get him out of the car and she locked her door. However, he ended up getting in through another unlocked door and drove home. He said he was going to call the police on her to get her in trouble with the police academy. When they got home the respondent was too scared to go inside. She waited inside the car until the police arrived. If the respondent would have gone inside with their child, she and her son could have suffered severe physical abuse.

Eventually, county officers arrived to their house and the respondent was in uniform because she had just gotten out of the police academy before this incident. The respondent described this incident as her “breaking point”. She did not press any charges on him, she just wanted him out of their house. After this incident she filed for divorce.

The respondent was afraid to tell her parent’s about everything that had been going on since she got married. After dating for nine years and never suffering any types of abuse, she suffered physical abuse 7 months into their marriage; 3 severe physical incidents. Her parent’s supported her and she moved back home with her son.

It has been four years since this happened but I have moved on. I was educated and I knew better. I am not ignorant and I am educated. He was not my provider and I was always independent. I told myself he would change. He was never like this throughout our nine years of dating. What did I do wrong? Was I not pretty enough? I do not hate him but I feel sorry for him. It is hard for me to be in a relationship again. What if this happens again? Being in the police academy helped me recover. I wanted to stay home and cry but I did not want to fall into a depression. Seeing my son and being in the police academy kept me busy. As a law enforcement officer I see many domestic disputes.

Women may think they are alone but they are not. I always carry “Mujeres Unidas” pamphlets with me to let them know they are not alone.

### **Respondent #3**

A 35 year-old mother of two, has a Master’s degree, has taught at college level but is currently unemployed. She was born in Weslaco and is single but cohabitating with her boyfriend (not the partner that she was abused by).

The respondent said she experienced all types of abuse from her partner with the exception of sexual abuse. The father of her kids who she is no longer with abused her physically, mentally, and psychologically. “I was with the father of my kids for nine years and he physically abused me a few times.” The respondent said, “We were good and we never had problems until we lived together, which I believe is when everything started to come out.” The respondent and the abuser mainly argued about external family problems and she said they argued over small things.

A time he got physical with the respondent was when they had family over at their house. The abuser’s brother and sister in law went over because they wanted to have a day out in the pool. The respondent did not want to go to the pool and because of that, her partner punched her in the head; she was bruised and had a bump on her head. The respondent started experiencing physical abuse the same year she started dating him. After the abuse, she tried to leave him but he would psychologically abuse her by telling her, “No guy is going to want you,” “You are too fat,” and “I am the best guy you will ever have.” The respondent said, “I believe he mentally messed me up in the head and I have major trust issues because of him.”

The respondent never reported the abuse because she thought their arguments were always small. They would argue about small things and would escalate towards physical abuse



on her. She had been wanting to leave him for a while but she never could because he would continue psychologically abusing her. “He would tell me that I should might as well stay with him because I was fat and ugly and nobody would ever want me.”

I took my kids and I moved in with my parents. When I had my second child my mom told me I needed help. If it wasn't for my mom, I might have still been in that relationship. Being in my parent's home with my mom, dad, and sister, it really helped me decide to finally leave the father of my children. When I lived with him, I would leave him but it never worked because he would just come back home and we would make up. I had to get out of that house to finally leave him.

The respondent made it clear that she had to move out of her own house to leave him. If she continued living in her own home, it would make it easier for her and her abusive partner to reconcile and get back together.

#### **Respondent #4**

A 31 year-old mother of two boys, born in McAllen, and has a Bachelor's degree. The respondent suffered from verbal, psychological, and physical abuse.

The respondent met the father of her children two weeks after he was released from serving two years in state prison for two counts of aggravated assault.

The first day we met was at a park and he was well mannered and talked about GOD.

By day two he called me a bitch because I had said hi to his friends. Since then, there was no respect in our relationship. Every word that came out from him were cusswords full of insults to belittle me to the point to where I felt ugly, used, and worthless.

The respondent was asked to describe the relationship she had with her partner. She said he would constantly go out with his friends and he would purposely go to her house and leave his car blocking her driveway so that she would not be able to leave to go look for him.

If I was to dare ask him where he had gone, he would get upset and blame me for making him upset. When that happened, he would take a shower and just leave again. I got to the point where I honestly thought it was my fault. I would cry and apologize to him for making him upset and he spit on my face, pushed me to the ground, and laughed at me. In another incident, he pushed me and I fell to the floor because I had not cooked dinner the night before. As a result of this, I broke my wrist because I tried not to land on my back when he pushed me; I used my hand to keep me up. I did not tell anyone it was him that pushed me because I did not want the state to pick up domestic violence charges on him.

The respondent recalls experiencing abuse from him since the first day she met him. After 10 years of being in that relationship, she reported him to the police after he went after her, punching her body and head with his fists. The police did not do much when they arrived. “Not surprisingly, the police said they would not arrest him. Either I had to leave or him. So I left to my grandma’s house.”

### **Respondent #5**

A 32 year-old mother, junior in college, and currently works in a school district. She was born in Brownsville and is single. The majority of the abuse she has experienced is emotional and psychological; she states that was her upbringing.

The relationship with her partner started off with emotional abuse. The respondent recalls one incident that turned violent, which she says led to the end of their relationship. “He was very

mean spirited and abused me verbally many times. He referred to me as a wet coat, something nobody wanted on them.” She recalls standing in the middle of the doorway because she did not want her partner to leave. Her partner reached for her neck specifically trying to get one of her pressure points and he pulled her hair to remove her from the door so she could leave.

The respondent reported their past physical incident to the police. She was eight months pregnant when her partner tried choking her. She said she was not able to fight him back because she was so close to having her baby; if not, she would have retaliated on him. Because the respondent called the police on him, he lost his teaching license and eventually she felt guilty for making him lose his job: “I was not bloody or anything, so I felt bad for calling the police.” The respondent said her partner pulled her hair because he thought she was trying to get to get to phone.

We had plans as a couple and he left me when I was eight months pregnant. He developed an abuse with me over the years that we would have never been able to fix. He walked out on me and I tried to make him love me. I would have wanted to make our relationship work if he did not leave me. If it was up to me, I would have tried to make things work between us but he closed that door for me and now I see it as the best thing that could have happened to me.

### **Respondent #6**

A 27 year-old with a six month old baby, lives in Edinburg, graduated with a bachelor’s degree, and is employed in a correctional facility. She was born in Weslaco and has been in a common law relationship for seven years. She currently remains with the partner that abused her.

The respondent described the verbal abuse she experienced and mentioned it started with cussing, disrespect, and emotional abuse. She has been with her partner for seven years and he

began by putting her down and saying, “You won’t amount to anything,” “You won’t find anybody,” “You will beg for me.” The respondent said she was fearful because he was able to find somebody else. “I experienced all types of abuse. He would hold off on physical abuse, but verbal abuse has always been there.” She caught him talking to another woman and also caught him in the process of being unfaithful. Verbal abuse became apparent seven months into their relationship.

Abuse happens in our culture. The man is very sexist and I am feminist and independent. He would control my mind and control what I was doing, and he was doing what he wanted. It was like a turf war, he did not want to abide by our rules.

Her partner makes a lot of money and threatens her by saying that she cannot sustain herself because she does not have money.

The respondent did not experience much physical abuse. “I would tell him that if he physically abused me, that would be the end of me. He has only slightly pushed and shoved me, but he never actually physically abused me.” In one incident, the respondent was giving their six-month old baby medication and her partner did not like the way she was doing it. He began to pick a fight with her, charged at her and practically threw their baby on the bed. He grabbed her by the wrists and started to shake her. “He is ashamed and does not want to talk about it. Hours later after the incident, he claimed I had provoked him and that was his trigger.” When asked whether she had ever reported the abuse she said,

No, between women you don’t want to tell people out of shame, especially if you end up back in the relationship. You don’t want to experience the shame of telling your family. I did not want them to know the reality of how things were. I did not want my family to see him as a negative person, because he is not a negative person. What I learned was to tell

my mom and sister because I would want somebody to know if something happened to me. He is an amazing father and our issues are more with anger and our characters. We are planning on going to anger management and counseling. We love each other and we need to learn to respect each other and learn our boundaries.

### **Respondent #7**

A 29 year-old teacher, born in Donna, has two kids with the partner that abused her, and is re-married to another man. She graduated with a bachelor's degree and is currently working on her Master's degree. The respondent never experienced abuse from any of her past relationships.

My ex-husband first hit me before we got married. He would hit me when he would get stressed out. I would blame myself and I found myself justifying on why he would hit me. He would tell me I was fat and stupid and that nobody would want me. I would put my education on hold for him to graduate instead.

The respondent confronted him about cheating and her ex-husband said she needed proof. When she confronted him again about the cheating, he ignored her, stood up and punched her in the face.

“I was head over heels for him and I did not care about his flaws; I would overlook them. I believed he walked on water and I did not notice anything when we got married.” When she would go visit him at work, she stated he would act as if he did not know who she was. As her husband, he never stood up for her. After their two kids were born, there were no connections between them.

I would get calls from other females at four in the morning saying that my husband did not love me. One time I got home from work and there was another woman sitting on my bed. My husband never did or said anything to defend me; he never even tried to make

me feel otherwise. My ex-husband was always sweet, charming, and caring, but he was never a giver; I was the giver.

The respondent said she was abused throughout their entire nine-year relationship, but it became most intense before their son was born. “I put up with cheating for five years and physical abuse for three years.”

She described one incident when her ex-husband was playing video games and they had plans to go out. She confronted him about playing video games and he went to the refrigerator, opened a bag of ice and dropped the entire bag of ice over her head telling her she needed to “cool down.” She justified that by making herself believe it was her that pissed him off.

Another time they were arguing, she tried leaving their home with their kids and he said, “If you take my kids I will fucking kill you.” He started breaking things all over their house. He started pushing her face into the tiles of the kitchen floor and their two year-old son walked in and saw everything.

She is no longer with the abuser and they both agreed to date other people. One night she decided to go out and met her current husband. “He was very confusing and he was good at it. He would throw punches and I would fight back, but the more I fought back the harder he would hit. I would try to validate why he would act the way he did. He would always put on a good show.”

### **Respondent #8**

A 40 year-old single mom with three boys, born in Weslaco, has a Master’s degree, and works for a mental health institution. The respondent never experienced abuse as a child and had a “nice childhood”. She did not experience any types of abuse until she became involved with the father of her children.

When the respondent first started dating the father of her children, they had a nice relationship just like any other couple. The abuse did not start until they started living together. The respondent described her relationship with the father of her children as “a toxic and volatile relationship”. The abuse began one year after their second child was born, nine years into their relationship. The abuse began once they started living together as a couple, paying bills, and planning their wedding.

The respondent experienced physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse from her partner. As for physical abuse, they would get into arguments and she would always end up hurt. “His temper would get out of control and he would throw objects at me to hit me”. In one incident, the respondent ended up in the hospital with a sprained neck. In a second incident she described, she ended up with a scar on her lip because her partner broke a dry erase board on his own knee and got a piece metal that broke from the dry erase board and threw it at her.

She described her partner as a manipulator; he would manipulate her emotions by getting her to do things. He would convince her mind into believing things that were untrue and she would think she was going crazy.

He would tell me he didn't know why I would look for things that would only hurt me. I would see phone calls on his phone and he would delete them before I questioned him.

When I did question him he would show me his empty call list and tell me I was going crazy. For a moment I thought I was going crazy.

Her partner never wanted her to see anybody else. He could cheat on her but she was not allowed to cheat on him. When the respondent would leave out of town for work, he would FaceTime (video call) her and he would check her hotel room to make sure nobody was there

with her. One night that the respondent got home late from work, he pulled out a knife on her and said, “If I ever catch you cheating on me I am going to cut your arm off.”

I was manipulated into doing sexual things with him I would have never in a million years think I would ever do. He wanted to experiment sexually and I did not want that relationship with the father of my children. He said if I did not give it to him, he would go find somebody who would.

The respondent did report the abuse to the police a couple of times. She called the cops when she sprained her neck but the cops just told her to stay away from each other.

The cops are a big part of the problem. They do not understand what is going on and they are in no way trained to give advice like that. I stayed at home and in the relationship that night like the cops told me to.

The respondent worked for the state and the abuser threatened her by saying he would call the police purposely so she would lose her job. She described how she was trying to build a career.

After all the abuse, she remained with her partner because she stated “the love was still there” and her and her partner wanted a third child. She was willing to give their relationship another try and she wanted to make it work. Her partner promised they would be back together and he never returned to her after their separation.

### **Respondent #9**

A 25 year-old, single, born in McAllen, has a Bachelor’s degree, and does research in a biomedical lab. The respondent has experienced emotional and sexual abuse from an intimate partner. She has known the partner that abused her from High School and began dating him her junior year of College.



She dated the abuser for three years. They both shared an interest in science and were pursuing a career in academic research. He was a biology undergraduate and graduate student. Approximately six months into their relationship, the respondent began experiencing abuse from her partner—sexual assault and coercion, and emotional abuse.

If for some reason I did not want to have sex, he would become upset and coerce me into it. Or, if he thought he could convince me into having sex with him when I was not willing, he would continue to make physical contact after I had instructed (verbally and physically) him not to do so. He would also manipulate me emotionally. I eventually began to think I was “crazy” and had little value as a person in his life.

The respondent is no longer with the abusive partner. She described how she was able to stop pretending nothing was happening and stopped rationalizing reasons to stay in that relationship when she finally removed herself from that situation.

### **Respondent #10**

A 30 year-old, graduated with a bachelor’s degree, and is working as an administrative assistant. She was born in Edinburg and is a single parent but has two children with the man who abused her. She had two boys after she was abused by her intimate partner. The respondent has experienced physical and emotional abuse from two intimate partners but she was interviewed on the abuse that was most severe—the abuse by the father of her children.

When the respondent first met her intimate partner, she fell in love right away with his charm, his looks, the manners he had with her family, and his “admirable” personality. As the weeks went by, they started seeing each other more and eventually started dating. Prior to dating him, the respondent had close friends she would go out with on the weekends. Her intimate

partner began getting jealous as she kept going out with her friends on the weekends. His jealousy towards her made the respondent distance herself from him.

The respondent dated her intimate partner for about one year and a half before their major physical abuse incident. The respondent broke up with him for those reasons and started dating somebody else. The ex-boyfriend saw the respondent with another man and picked her up and threw her to the floor and began kicking her—kicking her ribs, legs, and arms. The respondent recalls being kicked in the ribs the most. The man she was dating got frightened, left the respondent's apartment and went running outside to get help from the police. He did not like seeing her with another man other than him. The abuser picked up the respondent and held her against the wall; he started choking her and would not let go. The respondent lived in an apartment complex and she purposely screamed loud so somebody could help her but nobody showed up to her door for help. Eventually, the police arrived.

When the police officers were trying to figure out what had happened, the abuser denied everything. In front of the respondent's face, the abuser said nothing had happened. He said he had not hit her and that they were fine. The police looked at the respondent and was making facial expressions to let the police know that nothing was fine between her and the abuser. The police took the report of the abuse and they took the abuser to jail. He was not a legal citizen so he was deported to Mexico. The respondent described how she blamed herself for having him deported to Mexico.

After the incident in which I was so close to death many times in a matter of 10 minutes, I still loved him and I still wanted to be with him. All I wanted was to go back to him, marry him, and be with him. I blamed everything on myself. The abuse, the violence, and him being deported was all my fault. Eventually, we got back together and we now have

two boys. At the moment we are not together and I have not seen him for a couple of months, but I do have minimal communication with him because he is the father of my two children.

As time went by after the abuse, the respondent had to decide if she wanted to press charges on him. The respondent dropped all charges on the abuser. "I still loved him and I did not want to press any charges against him that I felt were my fault."

### **Respondent #11**

A 28 year-old, separated but currently going through a divorce, has two girls with her abuser, and works at a restaurant. She was born in Harlingen and is a Junior at the local University. The respondent has experienced all types of abuse from her husband whom she is currently separated from but going through a divorce.

The respondent started dating her husband in 2006; they dated for four months but broke up because he was cheating on her. She kicked him out of her house and did not see him until 2010. When she kicked her boyfriend out of the house, the respondent found out she was pregnant, but she was young and did not want to have a baby yet so she had an abortion. When she saw her partner again in 2010, she told him about the abortion she had while they were broken up. They got back together in 2010 to plan their first baby and they got married in June 2011 but were separated by July 2014.

Before the abuse, everything was perfect and I trusted him. While we were married, he was unemployed for two years and I had two jobs but that was fine with me because I was happy and in love with him. But in 2012, I found out he was cheating on me again.

The respondent began experiencing abuse in 2012 when she found he was cheating on her again. He started physically abusing her when she would bring up the cheating.

Prior to the physical abuse, it was mostly verbal. He would tell her things like, “you are fat and ugly”, “nobody wants you”, and “you are so fucking stupid”. The respondent said he would tell her anything that could degrade her. “It makes you hurt more when you are the one supporting the family”. The physical abuse did not start until December 2013. The respondent talked about an incident when a friend of her husband showed her messages from another woman on his phone. The respondent brought it up to her husband and said, “You need to talk to me about this person”. She asked him things like: “Are you still seeing her?” “Have you ever invited over while I am at work?” and “Has she ever been here?” and He said “I don’t need you in this house,” the house the respondent was paying for. The husband pushed the respondent and she fell to the ground. She got back up and slapped him, only to cause him to grab her and start choking her.

The following month, the respondent experienced another physical abuse incident. It was 8 AM and her husband was not home yet from the night before. She saw that he was in his truck parked outside their home and she helped him inside because he was drunk and his phone began to ring. As she grabbed his phone to hand it to him, he grabbed her by the neck and pushed her all the way to the door and said, “Give me my fucking phone you bitch!” She threw his phone and she felt his hand grab her throat even tighter. The next morning, the husband said he did not remember a single thing that happened. In their last argument they decided to separate. She had gone to a work event and her husband had gotten really jealous. Her husband did not like the fact that she made more money than him and would socialize with more people other than him. When she got home from her work event, he questioned her and got in her way and did not let her inside the house. The respondent tried pushing him and he pushed and she fell to the ground. She got up and walked away and realized her husband was calling the cops on her. The police got

there and they both pressed assault charges on each other. The respondent is no longer with her abusive partner and is currently getting a divorce.

### **Respondent #12**

A 36 year-old, is remarried, and was born in Brownsville. She has some college education and is an administrative specialist at a University. She describes herself as an extrovert who is “independent, self-reliable, and fun.” She never gives herself the “luxury to be weak, sick, sad or tired.” The respondent experienced physical, emotional, and verbal abuse from her ex-husband.

She met her first husband (ex-husband) through a mutual friend when she was 18 and married him when she was 19. The respondent and her ex-husband were young and “did not really think things through. It was all fun and partying all the time. We just wanted to be together all the time”. The abuse began after they got married and her ex-husband became possessive, jealous, and controlling.

The respondent’s ex-husband was jealous of other men that he did not know. “He did not trust me talking to anyone that he did not know and did not want me to go to school because I would meet men”. The respondent experienced physical abuse when she did not want to get intimate with her ex-husband.

He also became physical a few times while we were intimate because I was not in the mood so he would tell me that I had to have sex with him because I was his wife. So he forced himself on me.

The respondent did not report the abuse to the police, but did tell her ex-husband’s mother and his sisters. Her ex-husband’s mother threatened to call the police but she never did. His mother wanted to help the respondent keep her away from her son (for her own safety). The

respondent is no longer with him; she left him in December 1995 and got a divorce in 2000. She was able to leave him when her ex-husband went to prison. Afterwards, she went to counseling with the support of her parents.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

To analyze the responses from each question by each respondent, a comparative chart was constructed to compare and contrast their answers. This chart enabled the facilitation of analyzing each question and response individually. The questions were in a horizontal column and the individual responses were written down vertically. Each question and each of the responses that were given by the respondents were compared and the similarities and differences across each question were examined.

Each question and response was reviewed individually and was given codes to the type of responses each respondent could have given. Once the codes were extracted from the comparative chart, general themes and subthemes were given to each respondent to determine what was the most important theme of each response. The same was done for each respondent and similar themes and codes continued to appear across each respondent's story.

To analyze the questionnaires and find the similarities and differences of each response, the comparative chart was used to look at each response independently. Some respondents had similar responses while some responses varied. To analyze the data from the questionnaire, questions 6 through 14 were used to compare each response.

**Question 6: Can you tell me about the types of abuse you have experienced throughout your life?**

Question 6 asked, “Can you tell me about the types of abuse you have experienced throughout your life?” 3 out of 12 respondents had experienced abuse in their lives before they were abused by their intimate partner. Another 3 out of 12 respondents each had a different response: one respondent stated she was molested as a child, one respondent stated she had an abusive father who suffered from alcohol and drug abuse, and one respondent witnessed constant abuse between her mother and her sister. The rest of the 9 of 12 respondents experienced abuse for the first time from their intimate partner.

**Question 7: Can you describe the relationship when you first met your intimate partner?**

Question 7 asked, “Can you describe the relationship when you first met your intimate partner?” The respondents were asked to describe what their relationship was like before they began experiencing abuse. Each of the respondents in this study had a different response to this question—“I was 15 and he was 18. I was a young studious girl who fell in love with a gang member with criminal charges”; “He would buy me flowers every single time he got paid and everybody loved him”; “We had a good relationship until we started living together”; “The first day we started speaking he was well mannered and he talked about GOD”; “Our relationship started off with emotional abuse and he was always mean spirited”; “My partner has always verbally abused me, cussed at me, and disrespected me”; “He was a ticking time bomb and eventually he would snap”; “We were just like any other relationship and the abuse did not start until we started living together”; “We were classmates in high school and casual friends in college”; “Everything seemed perfect and we always spent a lot of time together”; “We first



dated in 2006 but broke up because he cheated. We got back together in 2010 and the cheating continued”; “We met when I was 18 at a friend’s apartment and got married.”

The similarities that were found from this question are the following: 2 out of 12 respondents started experiencing abuse once they started living together, 2 out of 12 respondents would always receive “nice messages” and flowers prior to experiencing abuse, and 2 out of 12 respondents were verbally abused from the start of their relationship.

**Question 8: Could you please tell me about the relationship you have/had with the intimate partner that abused you?**

Question 8 asked, “Could you please tell me about the relationship you have/had with the intimate partner that abused you?” The responses consisted of the following: “He had an extramarital affair and I stuck around. His insecurities flared when I became close to two peers at school”; “We were always together and we did everything together. There was nothing abnormal while we were dating”; “We currently have no relationship at all. He left when our second son was four months old and I have not had contact with him since then”; “Our relationship has always been unstable”; “Our relationship was always surrounded by alcohol and the night life”; “There has always been verbal abuse”; “I was head over heels for him and I did not care about his flaws even though he was a ticking time bomb”; “Toxic and volatile”; “We shared an interested in science and pursuing a career in academic research”; “He was always jealous and he was an alcoholic”; “Before the abuse everything was perfect and I trusted him”; and “My ex-husband and I were young and did not think things through. It was all fun and partying all the time.”

The similarities that were found from this question are that 6 out of 12 respondents mentioned their intimate partner had cheated and all 6 respondents stayed in the relationship. Few respondents had a baby after they found out their intimate partner had cheated.

**Question 9: When did you start experiencing the abuse?**

Question 9 asked, “When did you start experiencing the abuse?” The responses were the following: “After nine years of marriage”; “Nine years into dating”; “A few months into dating”; “The second day of knowing him”; “A few months into our relationship”; Within seven months of our relationship”; “One year into our relationship”; “Nine years into marriage”; “One year and a half into dating”; Two years into our marriage”; and “As soon as we got married.” Two respondents experienced abuse before their marriage and 5 respondents experienced abuse after their marriage; the other respondents only dated their intimate partner.

**Question 10: What types of abuse did you experience?**

Question 10 asked, “What types of abuse did you experience?” The abuse the respondents experienced were either verbal, physical, or sexual. The following types of abuse were given by the respondents: kicking, pushing, pointing gun to respondent’s face, choking, jealousy, spitting on respondent’s face, laughing at respondent while on the floor, broken wrist, punching body, pulling hair, finding pressure point on respondent’s neck, shoving, neglect, shaming, punching, threatening, throwing objects, withholding sex from respondent, sexual assault and coercion, sprained neck, scar on lip, and kicking ribs. Two respondents were pregnant when they were physically abused by their intimate partner; one respondent had a gun pointed to her face by her ex-husband; two respondents were choked by their intimate partner; two respondents were spit on; and two respondents were sexually assaulted and coerced into sex

by their intimate partner. All 12 respondents that were interviewed for this study experienced some form of physical abuse.

**Question 11: What were the circumstances surrounding the abuse, can you describe a situation or an occasion?**

Question 11 asked, “What were the circumstances surrounding the abuse, can you describe a situation or an occasion?” The goal of this question was to have the respondent tell their story of their abusive incident. The following were the responses given:

R#1: My husband’s insecurities about me and my school drove him to another level. One night while I was driving we got into an argument, which ultimately led him to break my windshield. One time he attempted to restrain me, causing bruising along my arms.

R#2: I was pregnant and I was in my closet getting clothes and I remember him kicking me and pushing me into the closet. I hit my stomach with the closet bar. Another time, he took out a shotgun and pointed it to my face while I was holding our baby boy.

R#3: We would fight over the smallest things. One time he got physical was when his brother and sister in law came over. They wanted to go to the pool but I didn’t. Because I did not want to go, he punched me in the head; I was bruised and had a bump on the head.

R#4: I got the point where I believed it was my fault. I would cry and tell him sorry that I did not mean to upset him and he spit on my face, pushed me to the ground and laughed at me.

R#5: He snapped and reached for my neck to get to my pressure point and he pulled my hair to move me out of his way. In another incident I was eight months pregnant and he grabbed my neck as if he was going to choke me.

R#6: He would push me around but it was mostly verbal abuse. He would push and shove and try to pull my hair.

R#7: When I confronted him about his cheating, he ignored me and stood up to punch me.

R#8: We would have horrible physical fights and I would always get hurt. His temper would get out of control and he would throw objects to hit me. I ended up in the hospital once with a sprained neck and another time with a scar on my lip.

R#9: If I did not want to have sex, he would sometimes become upset and coerce me into it. Or, if he thought he could convince me into having sex with him when I wasn't willing, he would continue to make physical contact after I had instructed (verbally and physically) him not to do so.

R#10: He got me, picked me up and threw me to the floor and started kicking me—my ribs, my legs, and my arms. He picked me up, held me against the wall and started choking me.

R#11: He pushed me and I fell to the ground. He grabbed me and he started choking me.

R#12: He became physical a few times while we were intimate because I was not in the mood so he would tell me that I had to have sex with him because I was his wife.

Several respondents were verbally abused by their intimate partner. The following are examples of how the respondents were verbally abused:

R#2: As we were arguing, he said I was bitch and that I had only joined the police academy to be around men. He told me I was going to get it bad when I got home.

R#3: He would tell me that no guy would ever want me. That I was too fat and that he was the best guy I would ever be with. I believed him.

R#4: By the second day of knowing him he called me a bitch.

R#5: He referred to me as a wet coat—something nobody wanted on them.

R#6: He told me I would never amount to anything and that I would never find anybody. He said I was going to beg for him back.

R#7: He would tell me I was fat and stupid and that nobody would want me.

R#11: He told me I was fat and ugly and that nobody would want me.

### **Question 12: Did you ever report the abuse?**

Question 12 asked, “Did you ever report the abuse?” 4 out of 12 respondents did not report the abuse. 2 out of 12 respondents reported the abuse to the police but only because the intimate partner had called the police on the respondent. 5 out of 12 respondents did report the abuse and only one respondent called the police only to be escorted out of her house. One intimate partner who physically abused the respondent called the police to get the respondent in trouble with law so she could lose her job; one respondent felt guilty for calling the cops after her intimate partner had choked her; one respondent did not want to report the abuse out of shame; and one respondent filed charges against her intimate partner but ended up dropping them out of feelings of guilt.

**Question 13: Are you still with your intimate partner? If so, why do you remain with your partner?**

Question 13 asked, “Are you still with your intimate partner? If so, why do you remain with your partner?” All of the respondents were no longer with their abusive intimate partner with the exception of one. She is still with her intimate partner but she attempts to plan for the future if she ever leaves him:

I want to be two steps ahead of him to know what would happen to my son and I if I leave that relationship. He makes a lot of money, so he says I would not be able to sustain myself if I ever leave him. I have a plan in my head in case I have to walk out on him. We want to get legal advice in case our relationship does not work out because we do have a son together, but I do not want him to know too much information because I want to be two steps ahead of him if I ever leave him.

**Question 14: If you are no longer with your abusive partner, how were you able to leave the situation?**

Question 14 asked, “If you are no longer with your abusive partner, how were you able to leave the situation?” Only one respondent remains with her intimate partner. The following responses were given on how they were able to leave their abusive relationship: “Fortunately, I have been able to escape with my life and the lives of my children”; “My parents would tell me that if I was going to get a divorce, I was going to go all the way. I wanted to stay home and cry but being in the police academy helped me keep busy”; “If it wasn’t for my mom, I might have still been in that relationship”; “He got on my nerves because I knew he was never going to change”; “He walked out on me and I tried to make him love me. I would have kept trying if he didn’t leave me but he closed that door for me and now I see it as the best thing that could have

happened to me”; “We both agreed to date other people”; “He left me and I was always willing to make it work. He left one day and never came back”; “I was able to stop rationalizing reasons to stay”; “He was deported to Mexico”; and “I was able to leave after he went to prison and I went to counseling.”

A few respondents found themselves justifying the abuse. Some felt bad, some guilty, and some blamed themselves for the abuse they experienced. Although they may have justified the abuse at one point in their relationship with the abuser, they openly admitted to purposely justifying the abuse to find reasons on why they were being abused by their intimate partner. The following responses were given by some respondents:

No, it is not going to happen to me, I am educated. It just happened and it happens to everybody. Maybe he will change. What did I do wrong? Was I not pretty enough? My ex-husband always made it seem like nothing happened and all I did was make excuses for him.

He grabbed my neck as if he was going to choke me. I was 8 months pregnant so I could not retaliate, so I called the police but I felt bad afterwards. It was not like I was bloody or anything.

He would hit me when he was stressed out and I would blame myself for stressing him even more. I found myself justifying reasons on why he would hit me. He also told me would kill me if I take our kids away from him.

He was deported to Mexico because of the domestic violence charges. For so long, I blamed myself.

## Themes

After the interviews the questionnaires were studied carefully to determine which themes were found for this study; several themes and subthemes were relevant. The questionnaire addressed two main areas: reasons for the abuse and reasons for staying or leaving. The following themes and subthemes were found: patriarchal relations with the subthemes of dominance, machismo, and control; economic/educational insecurity with the subthemes of education, occupation, and economic/income; jealousy/emotional insecurity; infidelity by male partner; shame and guilt with the subtheme of family; importance of family with the subtheme of Mexican familism; the role of Criminal Justice with the subthemes of pressing charges and females vs. males; leaving the abuser; and justifying the abuse/victim blaming were all general themes and subthemes used in this study.

### Reasons for the Abuse

#### Patriarchal Relations

Patriarchal relations were found to be in place among the relationships and marriages of the 12 Latinas. Their relationships and abuse was centered among being dominated or controlled by a man. The male abusers wanted to dominate the respondents. Some of the intimate partners' of the respondents appeared to demonstrate traditional masculine characteristics towards the respondents of this study—having a tough persona and masculine pride in holding primary power in their relationship. Three central subthemes of patriarchal relations were found among the abuse of the respondents—dominance, machismo, and control.

**Dominance.** The intimate partners' of the respondents wanted to demonstrate power and influence over the respondents. When the male partners would become abusive, the respondents would try to fight back, thus resulting in the male partner fighting back and hitting their female



partners harder. Although the male partners of the respondents would cheat on them, the male partners would make sure their female partners could not cheat on them. One respondent said, “He got a knife and pointed it to me saying he would cut my arm off if he ever caught me cheating on him. He would cheat on me all the time but I could not do it to him.” This demonstrates dominance by their male partner because he is showing that only he can cheat but his female partner cannot.

Other male partners dominated and influenced what their female partners could and could not do. One respondent said, “He would take off with his friends and purposely go to my house and leave his car blocking the drive way so I couldn’t go out to look for him.” The male partner demonstrated dominance by assuring that he had more power in their relationship than the female partner; he didn’t want her to go looking for him so he made sure he found a way to stop her. Another respondent said,

If I did not want to have sex, he would sometimes become upset and coerce me into it.

Or, if he thought he could convince me into having sex with him when I wasn’t willing, he would continue to make physical contact after I had instructed (verbally and physically) him not to do so.

This male partner demonstrated by dominance by forcing his girlfriend to have intercourse with him *because* she was his girlfriend.

**Machismo.** The theme of machismo was brought up by the respondents who made comments regarding the culture in the Rio Grande Valley. Respondents mentioned that they were expected to follow particular female gender roles, which included traditional activities such as cooking and serving the man. The respondents had to comply with the expectations of traditional feminine roles. Machismo was demonstrated twice when the male partners’ complained about

the dinner the respondent had or had not cooked. One respondent said, “We had an argument because he did not like the dinner I had made. He said, ‘I am tired and look what you made me for dinner!’” Another respondent said, “He was upset and he pushed me because I had not cooked dinner for him.” These two male partners were upset because the respondents had not appropriately fulfilled the traditional gender roles.

The respondents blamed the RGV culture for these machismo characteristics and mentioned that the machismo characteristics can be explained by the Mexican culture that is demonstrated in the Rio Grande Valley. One respondent said, “Abuse happens in our culture. The man is very sexist. My boyfriend would control my mind and control what I was doing while he was doing what he wanted.” Another respondent said,

He became physical a few times while we were intimate because I was not in the mood so he would tell me that I had to have sex with him because I was his wife. So he forced himself in me.

This respondent mentioned that her partner thought she was obligated to have sex with him *because* she was his wife and it was part of her female gender role.

**Control.** Since all 12 respondents were abused by their intimate partner, they were all controlled by their male partner in some manner. They were controlled in the ways they dressed; they were controlled in their sexual relations with each other; and they were controlled in where the respondents could and could not be. One respondent was not allowed to dress up or wear make up. She said,

My ex-husband would make a show for the way I dressed and when I wore make-up; he would make a show over anything. I was not allowed to wear dressy shirts or make-up. I had to secretly buy make-up and hide it from him.

Two respondents were controlled in their sexual relations with their male partners and said the following,

He wanted to experiment sexually and I did not want that relationship with the father of my children. He said he would go get it from somebody else if I did not give it to him. I was manipulated into doing things I would never in a million years think I would ever do.

He would manipulate me into doing things. If he wanted something he could not afford he would make me buy it and if I didn't buy it for him, he would withhold sex from me and we would be moody until he got what he wanted.

Two respondents were controlled by their male partner when it dealt with school and the education of the respondents. One of the male partners assured that his wife would not go to one of her master's courses because he wanted to confront one of the respondent's classmates. The respondent said, "He ensured that I would not be on campus when he made a surprise visit." Another respondent said, "He did not trust me talking to anyone that he did not know and did not want me to go to school because I would meet men." The male partners' of the two respondents controlled their female partners by not letting them go to school and get their education.

#### Economic/Educational Insecurity

Several male partners become insecure with the education, occupation, and income of the respondents. The male partners felt intimidated by the their female partner's education and occupation and purposely attempted to interfere with their education and occupation by calling the cops on them, by not being supportive, and by making false and insecure accusations.

Education. Some male partners felt intimidated by the female's education and specifically, one male partner wanted to purposely interfere with the respondent's education. The respondent,

who is studying for her master's degree, said that her partner became very insecure when she became close to two peers in her program. She was accused by her husband of having an affair with one of her classmates. The respondent said, "He made a scene at school" when he showed up to her school campus for a "surprise visit". The uneducated male partner, who was insecure of the respondent getting an education and meeting other people, "attempted to confront the individual" whom he accused of having an affair with his wife. The respondent stated the following:

There was nothing more than a friendship. I believe that his secret goal was to try and take everything from me. He wanted to take away my friends, my school, and my job, so that I would be solely dependent on him.

A similarity that the respondent shared in regard to their education was that the respondents placed their own school priorities secondary to their male partner's. Three respondents said the following: "I would put my own education on hold to help my ex-husband with his education"; "I would hold off my school work to help my ex-husband with his school work"; and "I would put my education on hold for him to graduate instead."

**Occupation.** Some of the male partners were jealous and insecure because of the female's job or profession. The intimidation of the male partners' would lead them to purposely call the police on the respondent to get them in trouble with law and affect their job. One of the male partners was insecure and jealous of the respondent entering the police academy and purposely called the police on the respondent so she could lose her job.

I told him I was going to start the police academy and he said he would not help with anything. After he pushed and chocked inside the car with my seatbelt, he said he

was going to call the police when we got home so that I would get in trouble with the police academy.

Another respondent had a state job which she had worked very hard for:

It took me 14 years to get an education. 12 years for my bachelor's degree and 2 years for my master's degree. I did not want to lose any of my hard work and my ex-husband wanted to call the cops on me so I could lose my job. All I've wanted was to build a career.

Another respondent said that her husband physically abused her and got jealous when she would go to work events.

**Economic/Income.** Some of the male partners were insecure because their female partner's were making more money than them. One male partner would control his female partner because he was the one who would work to sustain the family. One respondent said,

He works in the oil fields and makes enough money to support us and he tells me that I would not be able to sustain myself if I were to ever leave him because I don't have any money.

Her male partner manipulated her into staying in the relationship because she did not have money to support herself. Another respondent said, "He started getting jealous with me because of my job since I was making a lot of money; it led him to begin getting physical with me again."

The male partner felt intimidated that his wife was making more money than him, thus leading him to physically abuse her.

## **Jealousy/Insecurity**

Several male partners were insecure about circumstances that were not related to the respondent's education, occupation, or income. Three male partners were insecure about their female partners meeting other people and talking to people the male partners were not familiar with: "He called me a bitch because I said hi to his friends"; "He was jealous of other men that were not in his circle"; "His insecurities flared when I became close to two peers in my class"; and "He would get jealous when I would spend time with my own friends." These are examples of the male partner's jealousy and emotional insecurity.

## **Infidelity by Male Partner**

Several similarities were found across the questionnaires in regards to the respondents being cheated on by their male partner. It was common among the respondents for their male partner to cheat yet the respondent would get pregnant for the first or second time after becoming aware of the cheating. One respondent said,

At the age of 18, my son was born. Throughout that whole time, he was having an extramarital affair, and I stuck around. At 21, my daughter was born and I found out he was *still* having an affair with the same woman.

The cheating of the intimate partner would result in physical abuse towards the respondent. When the respondents attempted to ask about the cheating, the male partner would physically abuse the respondents because they did not want to speak about it.

If I was to dare ask him, he would blame me for upsetting him for asking and he would take a shower and leave again. I would cry and tell him sorry, that I did not mean to upset him and he spit at my face, pushed me to the ground, and laughed at me.

I told him he needed to talk to me about the woman he cheated on me with. I asked him if he was still seeing her and if he had brought her over to our house. He pushed me and I fell to the ground.

One respondent was cheated on several times by her male partner however, her partner demonstrated dominance in their relationship several times by making it clear to the respondent she was not allowed to cheat on him.

He would cheat on me all the time. When I would go out of town for business trips he would video call me to make sure I was not cheating on him. He would make me show him the bathroom and under the bed of the hotel room to make sure nobody was in my room with me. One night I got home late from work and he was sitting quietly in the couch. He pulled out a knife and said he would cut my arm off if he ever caught me cheating on him.

### **Reasons for Staying or Leaving**

#### **Shame and Guilt**

The respondents' reasons for staying or leaving their abusive relationship varied but were all were similar in some manner. They experienced shame and guilt and wanted to cover up their abuse for personal or family reasons. One respondent said, "I didn't report the abuse because between women, you don't want to tell people out of shame, especially if you end up back in that relationship."

The respondents' feelings of shame were expressed explicitly and implicitly. The respondents experienced shame and did not want their family to become aware of the abuse though they had supportive families. "My ex-husband was very welcome in my household.

Everybody liked him. I did not want to leave him because my family never talked about divorce and I did not want to disappoint my family.”

**Family.** When dealing with the abuse, some of the respondents had a difficult time talking to their parents about it. The following similarities were found across the questionnaires: respondents did not want their parents to know about the abuse; respondents did not want their parents to think negatively about their boyfriend/husband; respondents felt as if they had to cover up for their male partner because they did not want to lose the support of their family; and most commonly found, the respondents felt ashamed in admitting to their parents that they had been either verbally, physically, or sexually abused by their intimate partner. One respondent said,

You don't want to experience the shame of telling your family and getting back with him. I did not want them to know the reality of how things were. I did not want my family to see him as a negative person, because he is not a negative person. What I learned was to tell my mom and sister because I would want somebody to know if something happened to me.

Another respondent said, “I did not want to tell my family. I always had their support and I was afraid of losing it. I also did not want to hurt my mother.”

### **Importance of Family**

Respondents were able to leave their abusive relationships with the help of their family—mom, dad, sisters, children etc. Without the help and support of their family, it would have been difficult for the respondents to leave their abusive relationship.

My parents were always supportive. My parents would tell me that if I was going to get a divorce, I was going to go all the way. I wanted to stay home and cry but being



with my son helped me. My sister told me not to cry in front of my son and that also helped me a lot. I had my family and I knew they would be there for me.

When I had my second child my mom told me I needed help. If it wasn't for my mom, I might have still been in that relationship. Being in my parents' home with my mom, dad and sister really helped me decide to finally leave the father of my children. When I lived with him, I would try to leave him but it never worked because he would just come back home and we would make up.

**Mexican Familism.** Respondents described their family values and their family expectations within their culture. One respondent said, "I never left him because my family never talked about divorce and I did not want to disappoint my family." The respondent felt as if she had no way out of her abusive relationship because of the Mexican family values her family holds. Another respondent said, "My parents are Mexican and have a lot of family values. As a child, I did not experience any types of abuse with or between my parents. My parents never argued in front of me."

### **The Role of Criminal Justice**

When police officers arrived for a domestic dispute call made either by the respondent or their male partner, some respondents felt negatively on the role law enforcement played. The respondents felt as if the police officers did not do anything to alleviate the dilemma: "When the police arrived they did nothing about it; they said they would not arrest him and that either him or I had to leave the house." Another respondent felt as if the cops are big part of the problem when they try to interfere with an intimate partner violence problem.

When I sprained my neck because of him the cops came to my house and said to just stay away from each other. Another time I called the cops for help they sided with

him because they thought I was being irrational. The cops told us to just work it out and stay with each other. Cops are a big part of the problem. They do not understand what is going on and they are in no way trained to give advice like that.

One respondent who is a law enforcement officer wants to make the victims of intimate partner violence aware that they are not alone.

Even in my job right now, I get calls on domestic disputes and I have to show up to their location. I have been in that situation and these women may think they are alone. I always carry “Mujeres Unidas” pamphlets with me to let them know they are not alone. Helping abused women in my job makes me feel good because I know what it feels like to be there and I am glad I can help them. I am not allowed to give them my personal phone number, but I do give them my name and let them know they can call me at the department at any time.

**Pressing Charges.** When police arrive at the call of a domestic dispute and ask whether they would like to press charges on the abuser, not all of the respondents wanted to press charges. In this study, females and males varied in whether they wanted to press charges on their abusive partner. The respondents who did not press charges settled with having their abusive male partner escorted out of their house.

**Females vs. Males.** The majority of the respondents did not report the abuse to law enforcement. It was common for respondents to feel as if “the arguments were too small” to report to the police. All 12 respondents in this study experienced abuse at least once before they reported it to the police. It was common for the respondents to not want to press charges on their intimate partner. Two respondents said, “I broke my wrist but I did not tell anyone that it was him who pushed me because I did not want the state to pick up domestic violence charges on

him” and “I did report the abuse to the police but I ended up dropping charges. I loved him and I did not want to press any charges against him that I felt were my fault.”

Two male partners called the police on the respondent. The male partner was more willing than the respondent to call the police. One respondent said, “He called the cops on me and we both pressed charges on each other.” Another respondent who is a law enforcement officer, said her male partner wanted to call the police on her so she could get in trouble with the police academy.

### **Leaving the Abuser**

Leaving the abuse was a difficult process for the respondents. A few had attempted to leave the relationship several times but were stopped by their male partner. For the respondents who did try to leave several times, their male partners manipulated them to make them stay by saying: “I am the best guy you will ever have”, “no guy is going to want you”, “you are too fat”, and “you might as well stay with me.” One respondent who is recently separated said, “Fortunately, I have been able to escape with my life and the lives of my children.”

For another respondent, leaving the abuser was not easy. If her male partner had not left her, she would have remained in the abusive relationship.

He walked out on me and I tried to make him love me. I would have kept trying to make the relationship work if he did not leave me and if it was up to me but he closed that door for me and now I see it as the best thing that could have happened to me.

It was common for the respondents to stay in the abusive relationship because they had children. “There was so many red flags along the way and I never left the relationship because I thought it was going to get better and I was staying in it for my children.”

## **Justifying the Abuse/Victim Blaming**

Respondents attempted to justify reasons on why they were abused by their intimate partner. One respondent said, “No, its not going to happen to me, I am educated. It just happened and it happens to everybody. Maybe he will change.” This respondent felt that just because she was educated she would not be abused by her intimate partner. Another respondent realized she was justifying her partner’s abuse. “My ex-husband would hit me when he got stressed out. I would blame myself and I found myself justifying on why he would hit me.”

Another respondent felt guilty for calling the police on her partner and tried to justify reasons on why she felt bad.

I was 8 months pregnant and he tried grabbing my neck to choke me; I could not retaliate so I called the police and he lost his teaching license. I wasn’t bloody or beaten so I felt bad for calling the police. He only pulled my hair because he thought I was trying to get his phone.

Several respondents blamed themselves for the abuse they experienced from their intimate partners and attempted to justify reasons. One respondent questioned herself when she was abused: “What did I do wrong? Was I not pretty enough?” Respondents were convinced that the abuse was their fault.

It got to the point where I honestly thought it was my fault. I would cry and tell him sorry and that I did not mean to upset him and he spit on my face, pushed me to the ground and laughed at me.

The police took the father of my children to jail and he was deported to Mexico. For so long I blamed myself for being physically abused because I cheated on him. I still loved him and I still wanted to be with him.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: REVISITING THE LITERATURE

According to the literature review of this study, intimate partner violence (IPV) can be described as physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, and/or sexual abuse between two partners or spouses in a current or previous intimate relationship (Cummings et al., 2013). Of the 12 Latinas that were interviewed for this study, the respondents experienced at least one type of intimate partner violence from their boyfriend or husband. Because few studies have looked at IPV among Latinas and most studies have been limited to Caucasian women (Garcia et al., 2005; Klevens, 2007), this study focused specifically on abused Latinas from the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) in South Texas.

#### **Re-visiting the Literature: IPV and Latinas**

The respondents resembled the IPV that other Latinas are suffering as well. Similar to the findings of this study, Zarza & Adler (2008) found that Latinas are reluctant to speak about intimate partner violence because of shame, guilt, loyalty to their partners and families, and the cultural stigma that is placed on divorced/separated women. One respondent said, “I didn’t report the abuse because between women, you don’t want to tell people out of shame, especially if you end up back in that relationship.” Respondents felt ashamed of their abuse and did not want family to become aware because they were afraid of what their families would think of their partner.

You don't want to experience the shame of telling your family and getting back with him. I did not want them to know the reality of how things were. I did not want my family to see him as a negative person, because he is not a negative person. What I learned was to tell my mom and sister because I would want somebody to know if something happened to me.

Respondents also felt as if they had to comply with the idea of a "family" and a "marriage." A respondent said, "I never left him because my family never talked about divorce and I did not want to disappoint my family." This respondent was raised with strong family values and was afraid of what her parents would think if she was to get a divorce.

### **Types of IPV**

In IPV, one partner attempts to control the other partner's life physically, sexually, psychologically, economically, and/or verbally (Fife et al., 2008). In this study all of the respondents experienced at least two forms of abuse from their partner or spouse. The most common form of abuse was found to be physical and verbal abuse—all 12 respondents experienced physical and verbal abuse from their intimate partner. The least common form of abuse found was sexual abuse—only 2 respondents were sexually abused from their intimate partner.

### **Physical Abuse**

Saltzman et al. (2002) define physical abuse "as the intentional use of force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury, or harm" (p.488). All 12 respondents in this study experienced some form of physical abuse—kicking, pushing, choking, punching, pulling of hair, and shoving with intentions to injure or harm the respondent. A study conducted by Cavanaugh, Messing, Amanor-Boadu, O'Sullivan, & Campbell (2013) found that the most

common form of physical abuse described by their participants was being pushed or shoved. Of all the types of physical abuse the participants experienced from their partner or spouse, being pushed or shoved was found to be the most common.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Clinical studies have reported sexual abuse as being common among different ethnic and racial groups (McFarlane et al., 1998) but specifically occurring more frequently for the Latino population (Torres, 1991). These studies attributed sexual abuse towards an intimate partner to machismo characteristics. The two respondents who experienced sexual abuse from their intimate partner can partially be attributed to machismo characteristics and the female gender role of being intimate with their male partner or spouse. One respondent said,

If, for some reason, I didn't want to have sex, he would sometimes become upset and coerce me into it. Or, if he thought he could convince me into having sex with him when I wasn't willing, he would continue to make physical contact after I had instructed (verbally and physically) him not to do so.

Gonzalez-Guarda et al., (2011) conducted a study with Hispanic females to describe their experiences with risky sexual behaviors; the majority of these females described their sexual abuse as having sex with their husband because they were obligated. One respondent was forced to have sex with her husband because she was his wife.

He became physical a few times while we were intimate because I was not in the mood so he would tell me that I had to have sex with him because I was his wife. So he forced himself on me.

## **Psychological Abuse**

Psychological abuse can involve verbal abuse, control, maltreatment, disrespect, jealousy, and harassment (Hays & Emelianchik, 2009); power and control tactics used by a victim's partner (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011); emotional abuse, isolation, and domination (Hazen & Soriano, 2007); and intimidation, constant belittling or humiliation, and threats (Stewart et al., 2012). All 12 respondents of this study experienced some form of psychological abuse.

Examples of verbal abuse were “bitch”, “no guy is going to want you”, “you are too fat”, “I am the best guy you will ever have”, “you are like a wet coat, something nobody wants on them”, and “you are ugly.” These verbal statements towards the respondent can be considered as maltreatment, disrespect, harassment, belittling, and control tactics so the respondent would not leave her partner. One respondent was threatened by her husband when he said, “if you take my kids I will fucking kill you”.

## **Findings on IPV**

Violence against women is a demonstration of male power juxtaposed against the lesser power of women (Jewkes, 2002). Sorenson & Telles (1991) found that violence may increase in a Latino household when men feel loss of control over their spouses. This was found to be true in this study. The majority of the respondents were abused by their intimate partner because their partner or spouse felt a loss of control with the respondent's education or job occupation. “My husband's insecurities about me and my school drove him to another level.” Another respondent said, “...He didn't want me to go to school because I would meet men.”

Jewkes (2002) found that where women have low status they often lack the economic ability to act against an abuser. Although all respondents of this study are educated and more than half have a steady job occupation, they still experienced some form of abuse from their



intimate partner. One respondent, who is currently with the intimate partner that has abused her, is aware she is not economically stable to leave her partner. She said,

He works in the oil fields so he makes a lot of money. I want to be two steps ahead of him to know what would happen to my son and I if I were to leave the relationship. I have a plan in my head in case I have to walk out.

Latina IPV studies that were conducted in Indianapolis, Eastern North Carolina, Los Angeles, New Jersey, and among college women, demonstrated similar findings to this study that was conducted in the RGV.

### **Latina IPV in Indianapolis and Rio Grande Valley**

IPV in the Indianapolis community was discovered to be a significant issue by Fife et al., (2008). A study was conducted in Indianapolis on Latinas and IPV and found that the most common forms of abuse were being yelled at by a spouse/partner, being name called, being blamed for everything, and being pushed/shoved/slapped (Fife et al., 2008). All 12 respondents of the RGV study experienced at least two of the following: being yelled at, name calling, being blamed on, and being pushed/shoved/slapped. The most common forms of abuse similar to the Indianapolis study were being yelled at and being pushed by their intimate partner.

According to Fife et al., (2008), Latinas are described as less likely to report IPV, which may underestimate the true prevalence in the Latina community in Indianapolis. All 12 respondents of this study hesitated to report the abuse. It took more than one abusive act from their intimate partner for the respondent to report the abuse to their family or to law enforcement.

### **Latina IPV in Eastern North Carolina and Rio Grande Valley**

A study conducted by Denham et al., (2007) had a sample of 1,212 Latinas complete a questionnaire regarding IPV. The study conducted in Eastern North Carolina showed that

English-speaking Latinas were physically abused more, had more threats of abuse, and had experienced more emotional abuse (Denham et al., 2007). It was concluded that English-speaking Latinas experience double the rate of IPV than Spanish-speaking Latinas and estimates of prevalence of IPV from this study are comparable to prior estimates of rates of IPV among Latinas (Denham et al., 2007). All 12 respondents of the RGV study spoke English. However, it was not asked whether the respondents spoke English or Spanish with their intimate partner.

### **Latina IPV in Los Angeles and Rio Grande Valley**

Garcia et al., (2005) conducted a study in Los Angeles on Latinas and IPV. It was found that the majority of their participants who experienced abuse were married (Garcia et al., 2005); similar to the RGV study, half of the respondents were married to their intimate partner when they were abused. Garcia et al., (2005, p.575) also found that 37.6% of Latinas who reported “sometimes” turning to family for social support had an increased prevalence of IPV. The RGV study contradicts this finding; turning to family for social support did not result in an increase prevalence of IPV.

### **Latina IPV in New Jersey and Rio Grande Valley**

A study conducted in New Jersey by Zarza and Adler (2008) showed that women who discuss their abuse generally confide in female friends, relatives such as mothers and sisters, and female neighbors (Zarza & Adler, 2008). A respondent of the RGV study who told her family about the abuse after she experienced it a few times said, “What I learned was to tell my mom and sister because I would want somebody to know if something happened to me.”

The New Jersey study stated that 98.6% of their participants experienced emotional abuse. Adding to the New Jersey conducted by Zarza and Adler (2008), all 12 respondents experienced some form of emotional abuse.

## **IPV among Latina College Women**

Dating violence is a frequent issue among young adults. Coker et al., (2008) conducted a study on the prevalence of IPV among 149 Latino college women and found that 43% of Latinas experienced some type of IPV. These findings are relevant to the respondents who experienced dating violence.

## **Machismo and Latino IPV**

*Machismo* is a term that has been linked to IPV within the Latino population (Campbell et al., 1997) and is prevalent component of the Latino culture (Kanuha, 1994). Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013), refer to *machismo* as the negative (aggressive) behaviors associated with being the dominant man in the Hispanic culture. Latino men's machismo can be threatened when gender and power dynamics take over, thus becoming reluctant to accept these roles and resort to other means of power, such as IPV (Adames & Campbell, 2005). Participants from Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2011) study believe that because machismo is so deeply rooted into the Latino culture, Hispanic women continue to accept it however, supporting machismo can lead to an increase in IPV.

Machismo characteristics were demonstrated in this study when the male partner expected the respondent to conform to female gender roles, which included traditional activities such as cooking and being intimate. One respondent said, "We had an argument because he did not like the dinner I had made. He said, 'I am tired and look what you made me for dinner!'" Another respondent said, "He was upset and he pushed me because I had not cooked dinner for him."

Two other respondents experienced machismo characteristics from their partner when their partner expected to be intimate. A respondent mentioned that her partner thought she was obligated to have sex with him *because* she was wife and it was part of her female gender role.

He became physical a few times while we were intimate because I was not in the mood so he would tell me that I had to have sex with him because I was his wife. So he forced himself in me.

One male spouse threatened the respondent that he would look for sex somewhere else if his wife did not give it to him. The respondent said, “He wanted to experiment sexually and I did not want to. He told me he would go look for it from somebody else if I did not give it to him.” Studies found by Acevedo (2001) conclude that Latinas who are in abusive relationships are most likely to have traditional gender role norms. When the respondents were in their relationship or marriage, it was found that their partner or spouse expected traditional female gender roles.

It was found that the intimate partners of the 12 respondents were not all Latinos. Nine out of twelve abusers were Latinos, two out of twelve were African American, and one was Caucasian. Thus, it cannot be generalized that Latino Machismo is the reason for Latina IPV. Instead of machismo, patriarchal masculinity is present in the abuse experienced by the respondents of this study. Because it was found that other ethnic groups are part of IPV, further research needs to be done on what is causing IPV among Latinas in RGV.

### **Impacts of IPV**

Intimate partner violence is an under-recognized problem that can have an enormous impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of women that can lead to significant personal, health, economic, and social costs (Stewart et al., 2012). Although the respondents of this study

were not asked how they were specifically impacted by the abuse, few respondents mentioned it throughout the interview.

### **Latina Personal Impacts**

Zarza and Adler (2008) concluded from their study that Latina victims did not report their abuse because of perceived impacts to their marriage. One respondent was personally impacted by her abuse because her family never spoke of divorce and she was afraid of disappointing her family. She was afraid of how her family would view her marriage since everybody liked her ex-husband. After the respondent got a divorce she continues to be personally impacted by the abuse from her ex-husband. The respondent said, “It is hard to be in a relationship again. What if this happens again?”

A Latina victim of IPV may be discouraged to disclose her abuse because she may fear for her partner’s deportation (Zarza et al., 2009). One respondent was impacted with feelings of guilt for having her partner deported back to Mexico when she pressed charges on him for physically abusing her. The respondent said,

The police took the report and they took the father of my children to jail and was deported to Mexico. For so long, I blamed myself. After this incident where I almost died, I still loved him and I still wanted to be with him. I blamed myself for having him deported to Mexico and all I wanted to do was to just be with him again. I wanted to marry him.

### **Latina Physical Impacts**

Studies have examined the physical impacts of IPV and found injuries to the head, neck, face, and abdominal to be common among victims (Sheridan & Nash, 2007). In this study, respondents faced injuries in the head, neck, face, or abdominal. Three respondents were injured

on their head by their intimate partner. “He punched me in the head; I was bruised and had a bump on my head”; “He went at me punching my head with his fists”; and “He opened a bag of ice and dropped the entire bag of ice over my head telling me to ‘cool down’” are statements that the respondents gave. Two respondents were injured on their necks and said the following: “He snapped in the middle of him trying to leave the house and as I was standing by the door he reached my neck to get to my pressure point” and “In one incident, the respondent ended up in the hospital with a sprained neck”. And one respondent was severely kicked on her ribs and abdomen by her partner.

### **Predictors of IPV**

IPV can be severe when extreme power inequities between genders are present (Zarza, Ponsoda, Carrillo, 2009). This oppression can in turn lead to social tolerance towards violence and domination of women (Zarza & Adler, 2008). In the Latino population, violence between an intimate partner may increase when men feel a loss of control over their spouses, thus men will become violent against their intimate partner to attain that control (Zarza & Adler, 2008). Several partners resorted to abuse and violence when they felt a loss of control over their female partner or spouse. Since all respondents had some education and were employed, the abusers felt a loss of control thus leading to abuse and violence.

Higher rates of IPV among Latinos can be associated with young age (Ingram, 2007; Lown & Vega, 2001; Straus & Smith, 1995), low income (Straus & Smith, 1995), witnessing IPV as a child (Perilla, 1999), psychological stress (Perilla et al., 1994), mental disorders (Sorenson & Telles, 1991), jealousy (Sugihara & Warner, 2002), and machismo (Campbell et al., 1997). Similar to these predictors, the RGV study found that IPV among the respondents was

associated with jealousy and machismo. The questionnaire did not include questions regarding socioeconomic status, psychological stress, and mental disorders.

One of the critical predictors of IPV is the socioeconomic status (SES) of the victims and perpetrators (Zarza et al., 2009). Several studies view poverty and unemployment as a strong predictor of IPV (Field & Caetano, 2003). Although the socioeconomic status of the respondent was not asked, 11 respondents were employed. Caetano et al., (2005) found that the reoccurrence of IPV is common among young couples in which the male is unemployed. These findings have also been supported by other studies (Zarza & Adler, 2009; Klevens, 2007). Less than half of the abusers were unemployed at the time of the abuse. However, being unemployed cannot be said to predict IPV.

According to Ramirez & de la Cruz (2003), Latinos who live in the United States are disproportionately affected by unemployment, poverty, low-paying jobs, and the lack of an opportunity to an education. This RGV study contradicts these findings. With the exception of only one respondent being unemployed by choice, the respondents were employed by occupations ranging from school districts, Universities, law enforcement, hospitals, and restaurants. All 12 respondents had at least some college education; the majority of the respondents had already received their Bachelor's degree.

Another predictor of IPV is child abuse. Experiencing violence within the family at a young age can influence future violent behavior of abuse against an intimate partner (Zarza et al., 2009). A study by Ingram (2007) found that Latinos were more likely to witness IPV in their homes than non-Latinos as a child. Only one respondent was abused by her parent as a child thus it cannot be determined that witnessing IPV as a child leads to higher rates of IPV among Latinos.

### **Barriers to Seeking Assistance**

A study conducted by Klevens (2007) found that the barriers Latinas face for seeking assistance are the following: lack of financial means, fear of deportation, losing custody of their children, beliefs that abuse must be tolerated, being unaware of available services, language difficulties, preferences for an intact family, and lack of transportation. In this study, the barriers Latinas faced for seeking assistance were: the well-being of their children, the fear of putting their job at risk, the respondent felt the argument was too small, the respondent did not want to press domestic violence charges on their partner, blaming alcohol for the abuse, the partner would control what the respondent would do, shame of telling their family, shame of exposing the abuse and then returning to the abuser, and self-blame.

Literature demonstrates that most IPV survivors hesitate to seek formal social services; instead IPV survivors disclose to informal support systems first such as family or friends (Postmus et al., 2014). However, Ingram (2007) found that Latinas are less likely to turn to informal sources (family, friends, etc.) than to a professional caregiver. Klevens (2007) found that Latinas who suffered from IPV sought help less often from both informal and formal sources. This study on Latinas in the RGV contradicts the findings of Ingram (2007) and Klevens (2007). This study found that the respondents were most likely to turn to family support than to formal social services. Only one respondent turned to formal social services for counseling.

### **Concluding Remarks**

“IPV is a pervasive public and mental health concern that affects approximately one third of individuals from various demographics, although statistics are somewhat higher for females and those who lack immediate social, legal, medical, and financial resources” (Hays & Emlianchik, 2009, pp.150), for example the Latina population. In this study, the respondents



thought they would lose family support once they became aware of the abuse from their partner or spouse. Respondents were afraid of telling their family about the abuse because they thought they would lack support but all respondents received positive social support from their family.

Empirical research on violence by intimate partners began in the United States in the early 1970s, and after more than 40 years of prevention and intervention, intimate partner violence remains a significant public health concern (Krebs et al., 2011). Because intimate partner violence continues to be a significant public health concern, there should be more public efforts, especially in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, to help combat the issue of Latinas being abused by their partner or spouse. Because the majority of the population in the lower Rio Grande Valley consists of Latinos/Latinas, it is important to determine who these abused Latinas are, why they are being abused, and why they are not reaching out for support.

Other research studies that utilized population-based samples rather than crime statistics, noted that Hispanics are at higher risk for IPV than any other racial/ethnic group (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2013). Because few studies have focused on ethnic minority populations (Hage, 2000), insight on Latina IPV may be very limited. More studies should be conducted in lower South Texas to determine what are the predictors behind the abuse and make more efforts to provide more services to Latinas who being or have been abused.

West et al., (1998) found that Latinas underutilize IPV services and are less willing to seek help. Improving IPV reporting, having more IPV education awareness, and culturally appropriate programs was suggested by Garcia et al. (2005) to address the issue on Latina IPV. A study by Zarza and Adler (2008) suggested basing services on the specific needs of Latino victims. “It is also important to consider each person and family in its own cultural and situational context at the time of providing social services. One single organization rarely could

cover all or even just some of the important needs that their certain communities require” (Zarza & Adler, 2008, p.37).

### **Future Recommendations**

As an exploratory study, this research has provided the opportunity to consider new strategies for future research. It is important to develop a survey which can be distributed to the Latino/a population in order to develop generalizations about this particular group. A larger questionnaire can be developed to construct a well-rounded interview process; more questions regarding previous abuse as a child or with previous partners can be included to determine if previous abuse is a predictor. It is important to get the demographics of the abuser in order to fully provide a comprehensive explanation of predictors for the abuse. Socioeconomic status, education, and occupation of the respondent and the abuser are all important.

While conducting the interviews, a few barriers were confronted. First, not all the respondents were interviewed face-to-face; thus limiting the complete story of their abuse. Four respondents were interviewed face-to-face, five interviews were conducted over the phone, and three questionnaires were filled out by the respondent and sent back via email. For the questionnaires that were done over the phone or sent back through email, the responses were short and did not cover the story of their abuse in full detail. Also, the respondents experienced shame and guilt when discussing their abuse. Their shame and guilt refrained the respondents from discussing their abuse to a full extent. Instead of interviewing via phone or having questionnaires be sent back via email, it is recommended that a face-to-face interview be conducted.

According to the National Institute of Justice (2009), “domestic violence shelters are meeting the needs of abused survivors and their children, providing services like housing, mental

health housing counseling, and legal assistance.” There are services in the Rio Grande Valley that can assist victims of abuse. Mujeres Unidas/Women Together has an office in McAllen, Texas that provides shelter and programs for women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault (Mujeres Unidas). The Family Crisis Center of the Rio Grande Valley (2015) provides services to abused victims of sexual assault in Cameron and Willacy County. If the victim is a student at the University of Texas at Pan American, University of Texas at Brownsville, or South Texas College, the Counseling Services Office can provide assistance. These services are already pre-paid by the students through service fees.

According to Ramirez and de la Cruz (2003), Latinos who live in the United States are disproportionately affected by unemployment, poverty, low-paying jobs, and the lack of the opportunity to an education. The Rio Grande Valley is an area that is under educated and has low employment. According to Teach for American (2014) for every 100 students entering a public school in South Texas, only 12 will earn any type of degree within six years of graduation. In this RGV study, all 12 respondents were educated and had an occupation. This contradicts the findings that undereducated and unemployed women are more likely to be exposed to intimate partner violence.

The result that all 12 respondents are educated and employed was an unintended outcome of purposive and snowball sampling. This was likely a result of my own position as a college student. Future research needs to be done on educated and employed women who have been victims of intimate partner violence. Because it cannot be said that undereducated and unemployed Latinas are more like to be abused, further research needs to be done to determine what the predictors are.

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## APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT

- Can you please tell me about yourself:
- What is your age?
- What city were you born in?
- What is your marital status?
- What is your highest level of education?
  
- Can you tell me about the types of abuse you have experienced throughout your life?
- Can you describe the relationship when you first met your intimate partner?
- Could you please tell me about the relationship you have/had with the intimate partner that abused you?
- When did you start experiencing abuse?
- What type of abuse did you experience?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the abuse, can you describe a situation or an occasion?
- Did you ever report the abuse?
- Are you still with your intimate partner? If so, why do you remain with your partner?  
If you are no longer with your abusive partner, how were you able to leave the situation?

## APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B

### The University of Texas at Pan American

#### Informed Consent Form

#### Intimate Partner Violence in South Texas (Rio Grande Valley): An Exploratory Research of Latinas of Mexican Descent

Investigator: Georgina Villegas

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rosalva Resendiz, Associate Professor

Background: I am conducting a research study to interview Latinas who have been abused (physically, sexually, emotionally, etc.) by their intimate partner(s).

Procedure: You will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss the abuse you experienced by your intimate partner. Your responses will be written down by the investigator. If you do not feel comfortable discussing details about the abuse in the interview, you can write your responses directly to the open-ended questionnaire.

Risks or Possible Discomforts Associated with the Study: There are no anticipated risks associated with your participation in this study. Participants might experience some minor psychological discomfort when remembering abuse. If at any time you feel discomfort or become upset, please call UTPA Counseling and Psychological Services at 956-655-2574 or Women Together at 956-630-4878.

Benefits of Participation: By speaking of personal experiences with intimate partner violence participants will benefit by raising awareness in the Rio Grande Valley, where no prior research exists.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, you may skip them without penalty. If for any reason you decide that you would like to discontinue your participation, simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop.

Anonymity and/or Confidentiality: The data generated from the study will be kept confidential and anonymous. You will be using a number, instead of your name and none of your responses will be identified directly. Your questionnaire will be kept separate from the consent form. The data will be kept in the investigator's office under lock. The data lists will be kept until the completion of the research (April 2015).

Who to Contact for Research Related Questions: For questions about the research itself or to report any adverse effects during or following participation, please contact Dr. Rosalva Resendiz by telephone at 956.665.3566, or by email at [resendiz@utpa.edu](mailto:resendiz@utpa.edu).

Who to Contact Regarding Your Rights as a Participant: This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956.665.2889 or [irb@utpa.edu](mailto:irb@utpa.edu). You are also invited to provide anonymous feedback to the IRB by visiting [www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback](http://www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback).

Signatures: By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. If you are under 18, please inform the researcher.

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

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The University of Texas - Pan American

Forma de Consentimiento

Violencia intrafamiliar en el Valle del Sur de Tejas (Rio Grande): Una Investigacion Exploratoria de Latinas de descendencia Mexicana

Investigadora: Georgina Villegas

Historial: Estoy conduciendo un estudio de investigacion para entrevistar Latinas que han sido abusadas (físicamente, sexualmente, emocionalmente, etc.) por sus parejas.

Procedimiento: Se les pedirá participar en una entrevista para hablar de el abuso que han vivido con su pareja. Las respuestas serán escritas por el investigador. Si no se sienten cómodas para hablar detalladamente sobre el abuso en la entrevista, pueden escribir sus respuestas en el cuestionario.

Riesgos o Incomodos con este Estudio: No hay ningún riesgo anticipado asociado con su participación en este estudio. Los participantes pueden sentirse incomodos al recordar el abuso. Si en algún momento se siente incomoda, por favor llame a UTPA Asesoramiento y Servicios Psicológicos al 956-655-2574 o la línea de emergencia Nacional de Violencia Domestica al 1-800-799-7233.

Beneficios por Participar: Si hablas de tu experiencia personal de la violencia con tu pareja, los participantes se beneficiaran creando conciencia en el Valle del Rio Grande, donde no existe investigacion al respecto.

Participación Voluntaria: Tu participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Puedes discontinuar tu participación en cualquier momento sin ninguna penalización. Si hay preguntas que te hagan sentir incomoda, las puedes omitir sin ninguna penalización. Si por cualquier razón decides no continuar con tu participación, solo dile al investigador que ya no deseas continuar con el estudio.

Anonimato y/o Confidencialidad: La información que ha sido generada de este estudio será confidencial y anónima. Usaras un numero, en lugar de tu nombre y ninguna de tus respuestas serán directamente identificadas. Tu entrevista o cuestionario será conservado por separado de la forma de consentimiento. La información será conservada bajo llave en la oficina de el investigador. Las listas de información serán conservadas hasta la terminación de la investigacion. (Abril 2015)

A quien Contactar sobre Preguntas Relacionadas con esta Investigacion: Para preguntas sobre esta investigacion, o para reportar cualquier efecto adverso durante o siguiente participación, Rosalva Resendiz, Ph.D., at 956.665.3566, [resendiz@utpa.edu](mailto:resendiz@utpa.edu), 1201 W. University Dr. Edinburg, TX. 78539

The University of Texas - Pan American

Forma de Consentimiento

A quien Contactar sobre tus Derechos como Participante: Esta investigación ha sido revisada y aprobada por el Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). Si tienes preguntas acerca de tus derechos como participante, o si sientes que tus derechos como participante no han sido adecuados por el investigador, por favor comunícate a IRB al 956.665.2889 o [irb@utpa.edu](mailto:irb@utpa.edu). También estas invitado a proporcionar tu ampliación anónima a IRB a [www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback](http://www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback).

Firma: Al firmar abajo se indica que estas de acuerdo de participar voluntariamente en este estudio y los procedimientos implicados han sido descritos a tu satisfacción. El investigador te dará una copia de esta forma para tu propia referencia. Para poder participar, tienes que tener mínimo 18 años de edad. Si eres menor de 18 años de edad, favor de informar al investigador.

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Firma del Participante

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Fecha



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Georgina Villegas was born on May 4, 1990, in Edinburg, Texas. She attended McAllen Memorial High School from 2004-2008 and attended the University of Texas at Pan American (UTPA) that Fall. She double majored in Psychology and Criminal Justice and graduated from UTPA with Cum Laude Honors in the Spring of 2013. She applied to the UTPA Master of Science in Criminal Justice program and graduated with her Master's in May of 2015 with Summa Cum Laude Honors.