

Chapter 9

¿Que dirán?**Making sense of the impact of Latinas' experiences
of intimate partner violence in New York City***Yolanda Ortiz-Rodríguez and Jayne Mooney*

On 26 September 1999, Gladys Ricart, who was originally from the Dominican Republic, was shot by her abusive ex-partner, Agustin Garcia, on her wedding day – an event that is commemorated each year by the Brides March Against Domestic Violence in which Latina activists march through the streets of New York City in bridal gowns. They march in memory of Ricart, who had been stalked by Garcia after their relationship ended, and to raise awareness of intimate partner violence (IPV) within the Latino community. In the United States (US), IPV claims the lives of at least three women a day, with one in three women being at risk of violence from a husband or boyfriend, including ex-partners, at some point in their lives (Vagianos 2015; Karlsson-Ofori 2015). The individual and societal impact of IPV is immense. It is somewhat of a truism to restate the old adage that this form of violence has ‘no boundaries’ for the level that it cuts across age, social class, sexual orientation, racial and cultural groups and communities is well documented. However, women are not necessarily affected in the same way, and to truly make sense of IPV it is imperative that the specificity of experience is understood. With this in mind, this chapter focuses on the need to be cognisant of ‘difference’ between women and relates the findings of a research study on the impact of IPV on foreign-born Latinas and US-born Latinas in New York City and their experiences in seeking help.

Acknowledging ‘difference’

The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed an intense period of reflection and debate for many feminists and activists on how feminism and the battered women’s movement had conceptualised male violence. A concern with *all* women’s experiences, the centrality afforded to patriarchy¹ and the need for collective

action were seen as having glossed over the significance of other forms of oppression, especially those related to race, ethnicity, immigration status and class, and had marginalised the experiences of women of color.² The need to recognise the often oppressive nature of the state in the lives of women of color was regarded as particularly important. Previous generations of feminists had been highly critical of the lack of intervention by the state in cases of IPV. Yet, the push for increased criminalisation risked more aggressive policing leading to the ‘use of force, mass incarceration, and brutality’ in marginalised communities (Ritchie 2000: 1135), and also the arrest of victims. Moreover, as Natalie Sokoloff and Ida Dupont (2005: 43) comment, ‘as a member of a devalued racial identity’ some women of color ‘may fear that calling the police will subject their partners to racist treatment by the criminal justice system as well as confirm racist stereotypes’ with regards to criminality. Conceptions of the family were seen as overly simplistic and lacking relevance to the lives of many women. For, although the family is undoubtedly a site of male violence, it also functions as a place of sanctuary, support and resistance to racism, and it is the violence and coercion of a racist state in terms of immigration laws and police practices that are potentially more worrisome for women of color (Rice 1990). State intervention remains a contentious area of policy that has the potential to make the situation worse for the women concerned and their communities. Services were additionally found to be seriously lacking when it came to helping women of color, having largely evolved from the experiences of women who did not share the same racial or class background.

In the late 1980s, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to clarify how the lives of women of color are shaped and structured by multiple systems of oppression, especially those based on gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation and religion. Systems of oppression and the inequalities that they generate were not to be seen as acting singularly – as in the patriarchy equals male violence equation – or in isolation from each other, but ‘are multiplicative, inextricably linked, and simultaneously experienced’ (Burgess-Proctor 2006: 31). Whilst the notion of intersectionality is today widely debated and applied,³ it has become one of the most recognised conceptual paradigms associated with contemporary feminism in the US (Fernandes 2010) and has proved a powerful

analytical tool in feminist discourse on the lived experiences of IPV of women of color and women from other marginalised groups.⁴ There is, as a result, a much greater awareness of how the lives of women of color and other marginalised women are affected by IPV. However, significant gaps remain in our understanding, especially with respect to Latina survivors,⁵ their narratives of abuse, the barriers to seeking help that they face, and their needs in specific locales, social and political contexts.

The study

Over 2.4 million Latinos⁶ reside in New York City, representing just under 30 per cent of the total population. This is more than in any other city in the US. The majority are of Puerto Rican (53 per cent), Dominican (25 per cent) and Mexican (13 per cent) descent (Department of City Planning, NYC, 2016). This research explored the stories of 32 help-seeking Latinas⁷ who were receiving services in six domestic violence programmes.⁸ Our approach is located within the theoretical framework of intersectionality. The women's countries of origin included Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. The majority of women reported an annual income of less than \$10,000 a year, which put them below the federal poverty levels for New York State (New York State 2016) and had dependent children under the age of 18 years. Both poverty and cultural factors are recognised as having contributed to the social invisibility of Latinas in the US (Vidales 2010). Although all the women in the study identified with being Latina, differences were found based on sub-group identity and immigration status (foreign-born vs US-born), which speaks to the importance of considering how social locations impact and shape Latinas' experiences of IPV.

Narratives of abuse

The participants were asked about the behaviours that they associated with IPV and what it was they had experienced. As their narratives unfolded, the women's disclosures of abuse, cultural beliefs and descriptions of violent behaviours revealed both similarities and differences between foreign-born Latinas and US-

born Latinas. The study uncovered the degree to which coercive control tactics were used against the women and the impact of stalking behaviours.

Defining ‘violence’

The vast majority of the participants saw physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse and other controlling behaviours as aspects of IPV. However, the women’s utilisation of broad definitions of violence was largely the result of having lived through such abuse experiences. Thus, Irma⁹ talked about how she used to think that ‘domestic violence was only when your partner hit you, not yelled at you’, but by the time of the research she associated it with ‘aggression, jealousy, possessiveness, checking your phone and not letting you go out with anyone’. The difficulties that the women faced in making sense of the violence were acknowledged: Giselle referred to it ‘as a complex situation where one may not even realise they are in it’ due to being ‘focused on alleviating the situations and living day to day’.

The range of violence experienced

Women reported having experienced a wide range of violent behaviours, with most describing physical violence as having occurred alongside other types of abuse, such as sexual, emotional and economic. The violence included verbal abuse, which made them feel ‘devalued’ and ‘worthless’, in addition to being threatened with objects and weapons, hit with objects, physical violence in the home, on the street and/or in front of family and friends, as well as sexual abuse. Physical and emotional violence were experienced by all of the women across the sub-group categories, with the foreign-born women, especially those from Mexico, recounting higher rates of sexual violence. The majority of foreign-born women also reported economic abuse, in comparison to half of the US-born.

Given the gendered patterning of IPV, it is not surprising that, in terms of the nature of violence, many of the participants’ descriptions bear a similarity to those of women from other social and cultural backgrounds (see Mooney 2000; Liang *et al.* 2005; Yoshioka *et al.* 2013). However, to be ‘cognizant of “difference”’ means to begin from the position of being ‘Latina’, and in this

case the lived experiences of Latinas in NYC, regardless of similarities with other women.

Coercive control tactics

In line with women's definitions of 'violence', participants reported that their experiences formed part of a pattern of controlling behaviours; this is commonly referred to in the literature as the use of 'coercive control' tactics on the part of the abuser. Raising awareness of the extent of coercive control and the effect that it has on women is an important feature of feminist research on IPV in the contemporary period. The concept of 'coercive control' was developed by Evan Stark, who described it as 'the most widespread and devastating strategy men use to dominate women in personal life' (2007: 8). Coercive control attempts to destroy women's sense of their autonomy and to secure men's privilege in the private sphere (2007: 8). 'Coercion' tactics of intimidation are used to 'compel a particular response' (Velonis 2016: 1036) and 'control' tactics are used to 'compel obedience' (Stark 2007: 228–9). To underscore the impact that this ongoing pattern of intimidation has on women's lived experiences, some advocates and scholars have adopted the term 'intimate terrorism' (Velonis 2016). Some of the women recalled the level of coercion and control that characterised their violent relationships and the isolation that resulted from this:

He prohibits ... from going out with friends, is always checking the time, the one who yells, you know, aggressive.

(Jessica)

Humiliate you, dominate you, tell you what you need to wear; how to dress yourself.

(Thalia)

He didn't trust me, he would go through my things. Would call me all of the time ... I don't know. I couldn't breathe. Even to go get my children he would say, 'No, no. I will bring them to you ... I will buy you the milk...' Everything, do you understand? You couldn't even step outside.

(Nancy)

The majority of women talked about being constantly on the receiving end of negative comments about their appearance, which were aimed at diminishing their self-respect, as well as criticisms of their 'performance' as wives and especially as mothers. The acceptance of gender and cultural scripts regarding what it means to be a 'woman' and a 'mother' frequently affected the form of the behaviours and the impact they had on the participants. All of the women had been subject to such patterns of violence. However, foreign-born women were more likely to emphasise being deprived financially or prevented from accessing basic necessities such as food and clothing; they were also more likely to be subjected to death threats and surveillance behaviours, especially stalking. Larissa said, 'He used to say he would kill me if I left him', Jenny's husband frequently threatened that he would 'put a bullet' in her head, and Lissette's partner threatened both her son and elderly mother when she had him arrested. Threats of this nature enabled the abusers to exert and maintain control over the women, even when they were not physically present. Lissette described her experiences as 'terror in my own home'.

Stalking

This chapter began with the case of Gladys Ricart, who was stalked and eventually murdered by her ex-boyfriend. Stalking behaviours emerged as a consistent theme throughout many of the participants' narratives. For some of the women, stalking was used as a surveillance tactic whilst in the relationship; for others, it began after the relationship ended.

Esperanza described her experiences:

I broke up with him because he showed up at my house unexpectedly, unwanted; he was not invited. At that point was that he became very aggressive, stalking, threatening, very erratic and, um, very unpredictable. Multiple texts, calls, um, non-stop.

At times, the constant stalking behaviour made it hard for the women to find a safe place to stay:

I was actually moving from house to house with my kids, and he was finding out everywhere I was. He was watching me; he had other people watching me.

(Taylor)

The constant state of fear, and of being followed and watched, helped to create unsafe and non-secure spaces for women and their families, making it hard for them to move on and away from their abusers.

Compounding the impact of violence

The role of culture and the family

In considering culture and the family in this context, we are acutely aware that this is difficult terrain to navigate due to the potential for negative stereotyping about Latinas and Latino families. Caution must be exercised, especially given the current political situation in the US, and the degree to which those from non-white backgrounds are ‘othered’ and demonised and the way that this demonisation is being played out in immigration policy. Nevertheless, we would not be true to the voices of the women in our sample if the impact of culture and the family on their lived experiences was not explored. Culture and cultural factors play a significant role in how women define and describe their experiences of violence (Vidales 2010), how they disclose violence, and why some women see it as a ‘private matter’ (Erez, Adelman and Gregory 2009).

In Latino cultures, women are socialised into gender ideologies that help to promote and perpetuate IPV; many have also been socialised to accept violence as a normal occurrence (Perilla 1999; Adames and Campbell 2005). In addition, it has been documented in the literature that many Latina victims of IPV are ‘encouraged’ by family members to endure the violence in their relationships for the sake of their family (Postmus *et al.* 2014). The majority of the foreign-born participants, and this was particularly true of Mexican women, spoke of being socialised to accept violence in their relationships for the sake of maintaining the family unit, as is evident from the comments below:

My mother was one of those that used to say that marriage is for life.

The son-in-law that walked in first was the only son-in-law. ... When

I was a child, my mother would say to me, ‘(If) he hit you, he hit you. If they (partners) hit you it’s because they love you. If your partner doesn’t hit you, or yell at you, well he doesn’t love you’. I was raised that way. My father used to hit my mother and she would always take it.

(Nilsa)

In our country [Mexico] unfortunately, we have to, like our parents and grandparents used to say, ‘You get married, it’s for life. You have to be a good wife, you have to do this, you have to do that. I used to think, ‘I married him so I can’t leave him ... it’s for life’ ... that’s how we are raised over there (Mexico). If I were over there, I would not be able to leave him. My mom used to tell me, ‘You married him, you have to stay and deal with it’.

(Jarisbeth)

Some of the participants’ narratives revealed how any attempt to deviate from cultural gendered scripts, especially leaving or attempting to leave an abuser, would put them at risk of being criticised and ostracised by friends and family. Indeed, the shaming and threats of (and actual) ostracising that occur should be seen as further examples of coercive control tactics that are utilised by the abuser, and also by families and community members. The use of coercive control tactics by extended family members, as well as the abuser’s perception of the benefits of these behaviours, is currently the subject of further research by Ortiz-Rodríguez (forthcoming 2018).

Concerns were further raised by many of the women over what people will say – ‘the gossip’:

Qué dirán? ... What will people say? In my situation, well, my family turned their backs on me [when she left her abuser].

(Irma)

Sometimes, women think, ‘What will people say? My relatives say? My friends? My neighbors?’ You know, ‘*hablarias*’ [gossip].

(Isabelle)

More than anything the ‘what will people say?’ ... That’s how it is in my country [Mexico] the woman has to be a homebody, and only in the house, can’t go out, can’t have fun because that is bad and the people will criticise her.

(Jarisbeth)

Given the high value placed by Latinos on the family and preserving the family, the fear over what people will say serves to silence the woman, ensures her compliance and renders the violence a ‘private’ matter. This is underscored by the importance of cultural concepts such as *familismo* (familism) and *marianismo* (marianism) in shaping the lives of Latinas. These two concepts have been explored in previous studies on Latinas and IPV (Gonzalez 2010; Postmus *et al.* 2014). *Familismo* is one of the core elements of Latino culture. Antshel discusses how familism refers to the strong identification Latinos make with families and how they ‘consider the total family system as a supportive, integrated network [where] as a group [family] has precedence over individual interests’ (2002: 439). This identification ‘is characterized by strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity’ (Yoshioka *et al.* 2003: 172), but can effectively create a barrier to women seeking assistance from services (Vidales 2010). Although familism may be perceived as ideal or noble, it can also serve to help perpetuate IPV as the women may be reluctant to leave the abuser in order to keep their families intact or because they fear reprisals from their families. *Marianismo* refers to the ideal of women’s virtue and spirituality within Latino culture, which lends itself to women engaging in self-sacrificing behaviours for their children and spouses (Altarriba and Santiago-Rivera 1994: 394).

Moreover, the Latino cultural concepts of *personalismo* (personalism), *confianza* (trust) and *respeto* (respect) are found to have important implications for effective and culturally competent service delivery for Latina survivors of IPV. *Personalismo* refers to relationship and spatial closeness, which, in Latino culture, facilitates the disclosure of uncomfortable topics. *Respeto* refers to the behaviours expected by Latinos and is determined by ‘age, gender, and authority’ (Antshel 2002: 440). *Confianza*, on the other hand, is not a given – it is

established by showing a genuine interest in the life of the person, and being personable and supportive (Belknap and Sayeed 2003; Denham *et al.* 2007). The significance of these concepts was evident in the statements made by some of participants when they discussed whether or not they felt able to speak freely about their experiences with the staff at their respective domestic violence programmes and their level of satisfaction with these programmes:

They aren't judging me. I feel that I can trust them with what I wouldn't trust anyone else with.

(Thalia)

They make me feel like I am in my house.

(Irma)

Given the emphasis that Latinos place on these cultural ideals, it is imperative to consider how they impact and/or influence the help-seeking behaviours of Latinas, particularly when help-seeking is perceived as a threat to the family unit.

Language proficiency is, likewise, important when exploring the impact of cultural factors on the help-seeking behaviours of Latinas. The literature speaks to the disadvantage some Latinas in the US face as a result of being limited and/or deficient in the English language (Vidales 2010; Reina and Lohman 2015). Language proficiency is considered paramount given that language is the mechanism used to convey and help shape our experiences (Trinch 2001, 2003; Cruz *et al.* 2008). As such, being able to communicate with others in our native/preferred language is essential. This was especially true for the majority of the study participants as they needed to be able to express exactly what happened to them in order to access services. Overcoming language barriers, however, is only part of what is needed: having an understanding of and incorporating cultural concepts into service planning are key to the provision of culturally competent services to Latina survivors of IPV.

The socioeconomic context

As previously indicated, the majority of women in this study had an income of less than \$10,000 a year. The low living wages of Latinas foster financial

dependency on their batterers, ‘constrain [their] safety strategies’ (Reina and Lohman 2015: 480) and contribute to their invisibility in society (Vidales 2010) – this is especially true for immigrant Latinas as they may not have access to resources available to US-born Latinas.

The majority of the foreign-born participants, more so than the US-born participants, in this study reported economic dependence as the main reason why women remain in abusive relationships. The need for financial security over safety was discussed by Jenny, who was living in a domestic violence shelter at the time of being interviewed. Jenny’s comments were similar to those made by many of the participants and are indicative of the degree to which financial concerns impinge on decision-making in terms of help-seeking:

When I thought about going back it’s that ... ‘Oh, he wasn’t that bad’ ... if I have money to eat; but if I don’t have money to get to my son’s appointment, or the simplest thing, like to celebrate my son’s birthday ... like, I start feeling bad. My son has nothing to do with this, and he doesn’t deserve to suffer. So I’ll go back and I know that in a week or so I’ll have like a hundred twenty or hundred and fifty dollars in my pocket. That’s what gets me thinking.

The women identified feelings of insecurity as resulting from a loss of familial support, being homeless or forced to live in a shelter, a lack of healthcare and financial need. Equal proportions of the foreign-born (25 per cent) and US-born (25 per cent) participants pinpointed insecurity as a negative consequence associated with seeking help for their situations. However, Mexican women were much more likely than women in any other sub-group to identify ‘increased insecurity’ as a negative consequence of help-seeking.

Homelessness/shelter living is a not an unpredictable outcome of help-seeking as many of the women were financially dependent on their abusers and did not have family nearby or living in the US who might have been able to provide them with temporary accommodation. For other participants, relying on family was not an option as they were ostracised for breaking with traditional norms and expectations around marriage. Thus, they were left with limited housing options and, among the participants who had left their abuser, they were

living in a shelter, living in someone else's home or renting a room at the time of the interviews. Not surprisingly, women placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of achieving security and stability in their lives, in the form of suitable and affordable housing, safety and 'peace of mind'.

I need a little care to take my son to school, a job ... basically, just peace of mind.

(Lisette)

For him, just him, to keep away from me and not bother me or tell my children that he still loves me and wants to be with me; or have people watching me.

(Taylor)

Institutional factors: 'fairy dust does not exist in the judicial system'

The study drew attention to the frequently difficult relationship that Latina survivors had with the state, in the form of state-run agencies such as the police, District Attorney's Office, courts and the New York State Administration for Children's Services. As part of any research on help-seeking populations, the procedures used by the police – as the first agency on the scene in most cases – need to be carefully examined. Gaining an understanding of how the police response is perceived by those experiencing IPV can highlight what is working, what is not working and the improvements that need to be made. Despite there being some provisions in place within the NYPD to assist those experiencing IPV, for example, in the form of specially trained domestic violence officers, participants were overwhelmingly critical of police, especially of the police officers called to the scene following a 911 call.

When my parents got there they started calling the police with me. My father told them everything and they told him that they are on their way. We called three times. We saw cop cars drive by but didn't stop and the ones that did stop didn't even come out of the car.

Taylor, likewise, expressed her frustration at the poor response time:

The police, I think they should just not wait until the person is laying there bleeding, practically dead, to actually do something. They should actually, if a person calls and says, ‘You know this person is violating an order of protection’ make it, you know, a matter of minutes instead of hours.

When the police did arrive on the scene their response was frequently criticised for being ineffective. Jarisbeth, who had an order of protection, found that after the first time she called she was not given a report of the incident; and the second time they arrested her abuser but did not charge him – ‘They told me “NO”. “No physical aggression, no violation”’. The difficulty facing women in NYC is that they typically have to document their victimisation via a police report in order to be eligible for support services, including shelter or alternative housing. Women felt that the police did not take them or the danger they were in seriously. Thalia related how the police ‘laughed at me’ and ‘they came and they took him out and said to him, “Oh, you will come back later”’. Hence, it was hardly surprisingly to then hear her say, ‘I swore to never call the police again’. The lack of police action heightened women’s sense of vulnerability and fear – ‘I felt hopeless’ (Maribel).

The next stage in the criminal justice process following arrest of the abuser is progressing the case through the District Attorney’s Office: here, again, some women felt let down by the response. Esperanza reported that they (staff at the District Attorney’s Office) were ‘very cold, very dismissive’ and ‘there was no confidentiality ... I had to say my story at the front desk and I think that is very disgusting’. The women’s lack of control over what was happening was cited as a particular problem, especially for those who had difficulty with or spoke no English. The need to rely on the services of an interpreter meant that conversations were often held between the lawyer and interpreter, with the decisions simply being relayed back to the woman. As Irma was told in her case, ‘This is what is going to be done and this is how it is going to be done’, with next to nothing in the way of input from her.

As a result of their experiences, some of the women reported feeling deceived by the appearance of ‘good’ support services or ‘promises’ of help for women in their situation:

It’s a disappointment to see the resources that they claim that is out there, but it’s not as easy as they think. They’re quick to [say], ‘Oh, here’s this number’; ‘Oh, contact this person’. But when you go through those channels sometimes they don’t even help you. It’s like you’re just another number; just another case.

You’re like, ‘Okay, another one to the big pile that’s there’. So many people that need help but there’s nothing actually being done. And only one out of ten actually get the help that they need. The rest go through frustration and they lose the hope and just pull away.
Maribel

Exacerbating personal insecurity: fears of deportation

From our discussion of the impact of cultural, socioeconomic and institutional factors on the lived experiences of IPV among Latinas, a picture of precariousness thus emerges, with women expressing their feelings of insecurity due to the ever-present threat of violence; worries over money, housing, their children, and losing family and community support; language barriers; and the poor treatment by state agencies, which left them ‘isolated’, ‘unprotected’ and ‘abandoned’. For undocumented foreign-born women, feelings of personal insecurity are exacerbated by concerns over their immigration status and the threat of deportation – fears that are often exploited by men. As one of the participants, Julia, stated, ‘I was afraid, because he used to tell me that if I called the police that he would call immigration and I wouldn’t see my children again’.

The Mexican women in our study were most likely to voice their fears over deportation. Previous research has shown that threats, such as those made against Julia, are common and work to prevent the woman from leaving the relationship and seeking help (Erez, Adelman and Gregory 2009; Lockhart 2017). In Erez, Adelman and Gregory’s study, 75 per cent of the women interviewed noted how abusers, especially if they are documented or in the

process of becoming so, use women's immigration status to 'force them into compliance' (46). These authors also make the point that 'an immigrant woman's dependency on her male partner elevates his position of dominance over her' and, 'at the same time, legal dependency represents a macrostructural vulnerability that systematically marginalizes immigrant women by limiting their access to goods and resources, such as work, social services, protection under the law and so on' (46).

The present research was conducted during the presidency of Barack Obama, which saw unprecedented numbers of undocumented immigrants deported: over 3 million between 2009 and 2016, mostly to Mexico (Barros 2017). Although there are protections in place for immigrant women under the *Violence Against Women Act of 1994*, allowing for self-petitioning for immigrant visas, the granting of temporary legal status and assistance with work authorisation, this did not seem to significantly alleviate women's concerns, which was not unexpected given their poor treatment by state agencies.

Under Donald Trump's presidency the situation facing undocumented women has become more worrying. As the self-proclaimed 'law and order' and protector of 'national security' candidate, Trump made deportation and restrictions on immigration a central pillar of his campaign and administration's policy. Certainly, his anti-Mexican rhetoric and pledge to build a wall along the border with Mexico, which dominated his campaign, is likely to have compounded the fears of Mexicans living in the US. In February 2017, memos released by the then Secretary of Department of Homeland Security, John Kelly, gave, as Matt Ford wrote in *The Atlantic*, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) 'sweeping latitude to target "removable aliens" for deportation, effectively making most of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. priority targets'. The guidelines are so broad that 'almost any brush with the American law-enforcement system' potentially makes 'an undocumented immigrant a target for removal'. There is little mention of the situation of victims of crime and confusion exists over what protections remain in place (Lockhart 2017).

The recently published 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors, which collected responses from over 700

advocates and attorneys from across the country, has underscored the impact that the new administration is already having on immigrant survivors of IPV, sexual assault and human trafficking. It found that 78 per cent of those surveyed said that survivors expressed concerns about contacting the police due to fears that they might be deported; 75 per cent reported that survivors were reluctant to go to court for a matter related to their abuser, and 43 per cent said that many of the survivors with whom they had worked had dropped criminal or civil cases related to their abuse because they were frightened of potentially exposing themselves to law enforcement (Tahirih Justice Center 2017). The survey report also documented the case of a teenage survivor of IPV who attempted suicide because she feared that the offender would report her family to ICE (Tahirih Justice Center 2017). Even though New York City is a designated Sanctuary City for undocumented immigrants, which means that local police and officials will not automatically cooperate with ICE agents, people can still be picked up by ICE in a number of places, including outside court houses (Lockhart 2017). As one former prosecutor in the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, Wanda Lucibello, said,

If the perception is that there is a greater risk if you go to the police, you are going to be less likely to do so, and you are more likely to stay in an abusive relationship until you need to seek treatment at a hospital.

She added that 'It's really the opposite of what anyone should want. All of this strengthens the abusive partner' (Medina 2017). And, as we have seen, this is in the context of a local police response that has been identified as problematic. There is, of course, a certain irony that the moral panic that has occurred over terrorism in the US and the ensuing argument for the need to tighten up national security has left undocumented women at greater risk of intimate 'terrorism' and heightened their feelings of personal insecurity.

Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding of the lived experiences of Latina survivors of IPV in New York City. It focused on how women make sense of the types of violence they encounter, the degree to which cultural and socioeconomic

factors impinge on them, and the obstacles they face in terms of managing their risk of further violence and seeking help. Fears of being ostracised by families and communities, a lack of both financial means and control over their situations, and the poor response of state agencies all contribute to their feelings of personal insecurity and worries over achieving stability for themselves and their children – factors that were especially pressing for the foreign-born women in the sample. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the specifics of policy but, needless to say, it is imperative that proposals for change must start with what women themselves are saying. Feminists have long advocated that support services should be women-centred. Yet, Latinas in NYC report a lack of control over their help-seeking and are not only disempowered by state interventions but are also sometimes rendered less safe as a result. By exploring what the women themselves had to say, this study has revealed that it is women who know what is needed to alleviate their situations and what amounts to effective service provision. Throughout this research, women stressed the importance of culturally competent services that address language challenges and take account of the cultural and gender scripts that shape the lives of Latinas/os. The specificity of their experience must be understood and caution needs to be exercised to ensure that the approach to policy is not that of ‘one size fits all’.

However, women-centred and culturally competent services are typically short-term solutions, which frequently lack an appropriate level of resourcing. What is needed is a substantial political commitment at both a local and national government level in order to effect real social change. Unfortunately, President Trump’s emphasis is not on the ‘domestic’ situation of women – whether related to violence, healthcare or reproductive rights – but on the shoring-up of US borders and advancing an aggressive policy of deportation.

Notes

<en>1 It should be noted that patriarchy has not been utilised in either political (Pateman 1988) or feminist theory in a simple or unified manner (Walby 1990). And, as is implied here, its usefulness as a term has been questioned, particularly in relation to our understanding of how other systems of oppression are conceptualised. However, in her 2015 book *Radical Feminism*:

Feminist Activism in Movement, Finn Mackay underscores the continuing relevance of the concept of ‘patriarchy’ for understanding the history of women’s oppression.

- <en>2 We have tried to largely keep with the language used by the authors and activists that we cover. In the US, it is common to use ‘people of color’, which is seen as encompassing ‘all/any peoples of African, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian or Pacific Island descent’, with the intention of being all inclusive (Malesky 2014). Yet, it is necessary to be aware that inclusive language can prevent discussion of ‘difference’ – a theme of this chapter.
- <en>3 See Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012).
- <en>4 As a conceptual tool, intersectionality has been informed by multiracial and multicultural feminism and critical race theory (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996; Burgess-Proctor 2006).
- <en>5 There is debate within the feminist literature over whether to refer to women as ‘victims’ or ‘survivors’ of men’s violence. The term ‘victim’ can be seen as implying a passive response to violent incidents and their aftermath (Kelly 1988; Mooney 2000). In this chapter we choose to use ‘survivor’ as many of the women had left or were in the process of leaving their violent partners, and in acknowledgement of the resilience shown by the women in the face of such difficult circumstances.
- <en>6 ‘Latino/Latina’ and ‘Hispanic’ tend to be used interchangeably in the literature. However, we reject Hispanic for – whilst often seen in policymaking circles and in mainstream academic journals – it recalls the colonisation of Latin America by Spain and Portugal and the violence associated with this time. But, as with the term ‘people of color’, we need to be aware that ‘Latino/a’ potentially obscures ‘difference’ for its usage conceals the ‘different cultures and sociopolitical histories’ between the people and different regions and countries of Latin America (Garcia-Preto 1996: 142).
- <en>7 We are aware of the limitations of this study in terms of sample size. It was primarily designed to give an indication of Latinas’ lived experiences of IPV in NYC and to pave the way for future research in this area. Nevertheless, we argue that the women interviewed are experts in all that embodies being a Latina victim/survivor of IPV; they have a unique knowledge that can help to inform policy and the development of appropriate services.

- <en>8 The six domestic violence programmes were located in three of the five boroughs of New York City: Manhattan, Bronx and Queens.
- <en>9 Pseudonyms are used throughout.
- 10 For conditions of New York State orders of protection see New York Courts, available from www.nycourts.gov/faq/orderofprotection.shtml (accessed 10 June 2017).

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