

Latina Cultural Context and Advocacy

Cultural context shapes everyone's life. It is critical for domestic violence advocates working with Latinas* to be knowledgeable of Latina cultural context and to allow that context to inform their advocacy.

The cultural context of Latinas' lives includes three components: experience, reality, and psyche.

Experience

This component addresses a Latina's daily experience.

Factors:

- A critical factor: her age when she immigrated here; or if she was born here.
- Education level and socio-economic level—here and in her country of origin.
- Language ability in both Spanish and English.
- Immigration status in the United States.
- Past experience with mainstream systems and individuals.

Reality

This component addresses her "way of living."

Factors:

- Family comes first, regardless of good or bad, triumph or turmoil.
- Family is made up of nuclear and extended members as well as close friends.
- Daily decisions are based on the good of the "whole," not the "individual."
- Religion is a fundamental influence.

Psyche

This component addresses the "way of thinking."

Factors:

- Socialized with an extended family structure.
- Interdependent, highly relational.
- Communication method is story-telling.
- Great importance is placed on traditions, cultural celebrations, sharing of food, music, art, and dance.
- Living in the moment—not in the future.

This cultural context gives Latinas a “cultural lens” through which they see the world. The lens informs their successes, challenges, goals, and needs. Placing priority on family and community, the lens affects how Latinas understand their personal situations and make decisions.

Cultural context and lens shape the type of support, advocacy, and services that a Latina seeks as well as the choices that she makes. These cultural realities must, therefore, influence how domestic violence advocates work with, support, and advocate for battered Latinas; develop new initiatives; and work within Latino communities.

Effective Latina advocacy—what best serves Latinas—requires that both advocates and domestic violence organizations understand Latina cultural context and how it affects a Latina’s reality and decisions; and shape their work accordingly.

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* The term Latinas, represents immigrant Latinas and those raised in the United States with strong ties to Latino cultures, customs, and traditions.