Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of interpersonal violence in the United States. Healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs can play an important role in preventing and responding to IPV. However, approaches to identifying and addressing IPV among Spanish-speaking Hispanic participants have not been extensively studied.

To address this critical gap, RTI International and Esperanza United undertook a small case study to gather initial information on approaches to IPV education, screening, and referrals among HMRE programs serving Spanish-speaking Hispanic participants. This case study was conducted in partnership with two HMRE grantees: University of Denver’s Motherwise program (Denver, CO) and Family Services of Merrimack Valley (Lawrence, MA). Primary aims were to: (1) understand current approaches...
taken by the grantees to recognize IPV among Spanish-speaking Hispanic HMRE program participants, (2) describe partnerships between grantees and local domestic violence programs, and (3) identify key resources, assets, and challenges to implementing culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies in IPV identification and response.

This brief summarizes key takeaways from the case study in the areas of disclosure, program partnerships, and service access and delivery. Tips shared in this brief may be useful to HMRE programs serving Spanish-speaking Hispanic populations. However, because this case study included only two HMRE sites, results may not be representative of all programs and participants, and conclusions may not be transferable to other settings.

Disclosure

What challenges exist for disclosure of IPV among Spanish-speaking Hispanic participants?

HMRE and domestic violence program staff and HMRE program participants noted several challenges for disclosure. Specifically, they suggested that participants are less likely to disclose if they:

1. Do not wish to end the relationship or do not feel that they can.
2. Fear potential consequences for their children, including police or Child Protective Services involvement.
3. Fear impact of police involvement on their immigration status.
4. Worry about obtaining employment for themselves if separated from their partner.

“If they have the belief that domestic violence is a personal issue or a couples’ problem that you don’t disclose to others, that may prevent [disclosure].”

“If they’re not aware of their rights and how the system works, they could be intimidated, especially if they’re afraid of the police.”
(domestic violence program staff)
5. Feel IPV is inappropriate to bring up in a family-focused setting.

6. Experience cultural barriers; violence may be considered a private issue, or there may be religious and cultural pressures to stay in the relationship.

What can programs do to encourage disclosure of IPV among Spanish-speaking Hispanic participants?

HMRE and domestic violence program staff and HMRE program participants offered the following tips for promoting disclosure:

1. **Build rapport first.** Participants and staff agreed that it is important that participants have the opportunity to build rapport with program facilitators before being asked to disclose IPV.

2. **Consider timing.** Participants felt that timing was critical for obtaining honest feedback during screening. They suggested that the best time to ask questions about IPV would be during the personal interview with the facilitator with whom they had developed trust.

3. **Screen towards the middle of the program or after a class on IPV.** One participant suggested that IPV screening questions were best suited for the middle of the program. Program staff and another participant suggested that screening should occur just after receiving a class or educational information about IPV, so that individuals have developed a richer understanding of IPV dynamics.

4. **Create opportunities for disclosure in private.** Program staff emphasized that they allowed disclosure to occur at the client’s own pace, and they made efforts to meet with their
Spanish-speaking clients privately to create opportunities for disclosure further into programming.

5. **Use an informal and conversational approach.** Participants reported that they appreciated being presented with questions in a more informal and conversational way.

## Program Partnerships

How can programs effectively partner with local resources to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking HMRE participants?

Both of the HMRE grantees formed formal partnerships with local domestic violence programs since beginning HMRE program implementation. Based on their experiences, they offered the following suggestions for ensuring effective partnerships:

1. **Identify local domestic violence partners or other organizations that can offer culturally sensitive training to support HMRE staff in recognizing and responding to Spanish-speaking Hispanic survivors.** It was important to both HMRE grantees that bilingual staff be available to meet the needs of HMRE clients whom they referred to their domestic violence partners. It was also important that domestic violence partners be equipped to capably address any issues, such as immigration status concerns, that could affect Spanish-speaking IPV survivors’ disclosure, help-seeking, and outcomes.

2. **Invest time to understand one another’s work and develop a sense of aligned missions.** Staff reported that it was important that their partnerships were based on clear and mutual mission compatibility.

3. **Have clear goals for partnerships and explicit agreements with one another.** Domestic violence programs undertook a range of formal responsibilities under the HMRE grants, particularly training, advising HMRE

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3 Federal authorizing legislation requires all HMRE programs to document that they have consulted with a local domestic violence program or coalition and to address domestic violence (Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. 603). OFA guidelines further encourage the development of a comprehensive approach to addressing domestic violence.
staff on how to identify IPV and when to refer, and receiving warm handoff referrals.

4. **Allow for multiple forms of communication between HMRE programs and local domestic violence programs.** Staff reported that communication between programs took three forms:
   - *Formal training and informal opportunities for “cross-training”* for familiarizing one another with available services at each organization, resolving early concerns, and developing a joint approach to serving Spanish-speaking IPV survivors.
   - *Standing meetings* between staff of the two organizations only or as part of larger networking meetings among a wider group of organizations in the community that served Hispanic clients.
   - *Communication about specific HMRE participants* for HMRE staff to seek advice or guidance from domestic violence program staff.

### Service Access and Delivery

How can programs help Spanish-speaking Hispanic participants access IPV services?

Based on their experiences, HMRE and domestic violence program staff and HMRE program participants offered the following recommendations for encouraging participants to access IPV services:

1. **Ensure that staff are prepared.** HMRE grantee staff should know how to recognize signs of IPV and be able to respond and refer appropriately when participants offer disclosure.

2. **Conduct a warm handoff.** Rather than simply providing participants with information, making a phone call to a domestic violence program *with* participants may increase likelihood of engagement.

3. **Facilitate ease of access.** Offering participants the option to talk with domestic violence program staff over the phone from an HMRE office may be more convenient and make participants feel safer.

4. **Provide specific referrals.** It is important to give participants the name and contact information...
of a specific person to whom they could reach out and from whom they know what to expect.

5. **Address needs for transportation and childcare.** Providing assistance with transportation and childcare may increase participants’ ability to access services.

6. **Establish participant familiarity with the physical spaces to which they might be referred.** Participants may be more comfortable meeting with domestic violence programs if it is in a location they have visited beforehand.

What approaches can programs take to ensure culturally responsive service delivery?

Based on their experiences, HMRE and domestic violence program staff and HMRE program participants offered the following recommendations for providing culturally responsive service delivery:

1. **Create a culturally welcoming physical environment.** Communicate that the organization is culturally affirming and diverse through the display of posters, signage, and graphics that ensure inclusivity. Make sure that Spanish-speaking Hispanic participants can identify the program as a place they will be served by those that speak their language.

2. **Tailor outreach activities and materials.** Conduct outreach work that is proactively inclusive of Hispanic communities. Specific suggestions include to:

   - Work with Spanish-language television stations to run public service announcements.
   - Print a feature in Hispanic magazines or newspapers about IPV and local services for survivors.
   - Work with grassroots organizations that serve IPV survivors within Hispanic communities.
   - Provide education or workshops to local Hispanic-serving groups in a linguistically and culturally responsive manner.
3. **Tailor assessments and safety planning.** Adapt assessments to be culturally responsive to Hispanic communities. Specifically, consider the following:

- Omit questions related to documentation status from intakes or IPV screening processes. State clearly that documentation status has no bearing on services.

- When safety planning, consider participants’ concerns related to documentation status, interacting with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and calling the police, and make provisions for extended family in the home.

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4. **Tailor services provided.** Ensure that services provided are culturally responsive to Hispanic communities. Specifically, consider the following:

- Obtain feedback from participants about their experience with the program and how to address cultural needs or preferences.

- Employ staff of both genders to allow for the option to create single-gender groups within Spanish-speaking couples programs.

- Offer more IPV content, including protections and resources, and opportunities for discussion in order to increase understanding.

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“Hay personas que son golpeadas [por sus parejas] y no llaman a la policía por el mismo miedo, y más aquí [en los Estados Unidos] por el hecho de no ser americanos aun con papeles o sin papeles, y que va a pasar, que va a pasar con mis hijos. Luego hay personas que tienen aún más confianza [en proveedores de servicios] como aquí por ejemplo en Motherwise, y el tener el consejo de que te pueden asesorar legalmente, o igual a la policía, yo pienso que es viable tener el contacto de aquí y tomarlo en cuenta.”

“There are people who get beaten [by their partners] and they don’t call the police because they are afraid to and more so here [in the United States] because they are not Americans, even with papers or without papers, and then what will happen, what will happen to my children. Then there are people who have even more trust [in their service providers], like here for example at Motherwise, and to have the advice, that they can advise you legally, or the same with the police, I think it is feasible to have the contact here and to count on it.” *(HMRE program participant)*
5. **Ensure that staff have appropriate training and linguistic and cultural competency.**
Prioritize hiring bicultural staff, and consider the following:

- Utilize national and local education and training resources relevant to working with Hispanic communities, including education on immigration issues, responding to needs of Hispanic communities, and culturally responsive services.

- Ensure a strong representation of bilingual and bicultural staff in participant-facing positions. Hispanic staff’s connections to Hispanic communities are an asset.

- Employ male facilitators in Spanish-speaking couples programs in order to make it possible to offer single-gender groups. Employing older staff could also be beneficial; staff noted that some participants preferred disclosing IPV to older Spanish-speaking staff.

6. **Provide linguistic and cultural adaptations.** Implement a plan for ensuring that services are accessible across languages, including plans for Spanish-language IPV screening as well as broader, organizational policies that enhance services for non-English speaking participants. For example:

- Be aware of linguistic and cultural preferences. Some participants may prefer to communicate in Spanish.

- Use a bilingual facilitator(s) and speak to participants in their preferred language.

- To ensure language access, create Spanish-language versions of English-language materials, or use Spanish-language documents from other organizations.

“Bueno, yo pienso que siempre sientes más confianza [hablar con alguien que es Latina y habla español]. Aún como por ejemplo, cuando vas al hospital y necesitas un traductor, no sientes la misma confianza o la misma comodidad de hablar, si la persona que está frente a ti es Latina o habla español. Yo pienso que sí influye mucho para que varias, o sino es que todas, estemos aquí: que las representantes sean Latinas también.”

“Well, I think that you always feel more trust [speaking with someone who is Latina and speaks Spanish]. Even, for example, when you go to the hospital and need a translator, you do not feel the same confidence or the same comfort in speaking if the person who is in front of you is not Latina or doesn’t speak Spanish. I think this greatly influences why several, if not all, of us are here: that the representatives are Latinas also.” *(HMRE program participant)*
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The content for this brief is based on “Opportunities for Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure in Adult-Serving Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) Programs” prepared for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) by RTI International.

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