

**Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth:**  
*Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

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**Celebrate our cultures**  
Apoyar a nuestra juventud  
**HEAR OUR VOICES**  
Reconocer nuestra fuerza  
**HONOR OUR TRADITIONS**

# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

## Introduction

Immigrant Latin@ youth affected by domestic violence are in a unique position to provide researchers insight to the needs of their communities. This study engaged youth in participatory action research. Youth at Caminar Latino, a comprehensive, community-based program for Latin@s affected by domestic violence, conducted a study exploring the effects of current immigration laws on Latin@ families in which violence had occurred. We present qualitative narratives by Latin@ adults and youth on how immigration has threatened Latin@ family's well-being and physical safety.



national  
latin@  
network  
casa de esperanza

*Casa de Esperanza has chosen to use “@” in place of the masculine “o” when referring to people or things that are either gender neutral or both masculine and feminine in make-up. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that both men and women make to our communities.*

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# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

*Youth participants of Caminar Latino who are part of a youth research team called La Voz asked to conduct a study to explore the effect of current immigration laws and climate on Latino families affected by domestic violence.*

## **Background**

### *Immigration & Domestic Violence*

Domestic violence occurs in immigrant communities at the same rates as non-immigrant US groups. However, the complex social, economic, and legal realities of battered immigrant Latinas create specific contexts that result in additional barriers and challenges.

Immigrant Latinas experiencing domestic violence have been found to be less likely to report abuse to authorities (Rennison, 2010) and contact domestic violence services (Ingram, 2007) than U.S.-born Latinas.

Missing from this research are the first hand experiences of Latin@s living in the intersection of changing immigration laws and experiences with violence.

## **Current Study**

Youth participants of Caminar Latino who are part of a youth research team called La Voz asked to conduct a study to explore the effect of current immigration laws and climate on Latin@ families affected by domestic violence.

### *Participatory Action Research (PAR)*

PAR is a method that values community members as experts of their lives and as such, examines research the community identifies as important. Community members, involved in PAR, participate at every level of the research process from defining the problem to presenting results. PAR has been used in previous research with marginalized groups including immigrant and refugee communities as a research method that is socially valid, democratic and addresses the researcher-participant power imbalance (Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; van der Velde, Williamson, & Ogilvie, 2009).

# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

## *Youth as Researchers*

Youth from Caminar Latino were involved in all aspects of this study including conceptualization, generating interview questions, recruiting participants for the study, interviewing participants, transcribing interviews, data analysis, and interpretation.

**Collaborators:** 7 youth ages 16-22 participating in a young adult weekly group at Caminar Latino.

**Time involvement:** June 2011 – May 2012; weekly group meetings for 1- 2 hours; additional time for conducting interviews, transcription, discussion

**Incentives:** One time concert; weekly snacks/pizza

Youth collaborators and researchers jointly developed a semi-structured interview guide around 4 themes: migration, domestic violence, immigration, and myths/realities of Latin@ immigrants. The study examined the responses for two of those areas: domestic violence & immigration.

## *Procedure*

Youth announced the study to men, women, and youth participants of Caminar Latino. They were also responsible for obtaining consent and interviewing interested participants.

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# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

## *Constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)*

This method of data analysis uses the entire data set to identify underlying themes in the data. This study used the following steps:

- 19 interviews were translated and transcribed
- Each interview was read by all team members
- Interviews were coded into themes emerging from data
- Emerging themes and similarities across interviews were discussed and agreed upon

## *Participant Characteristics*

### 10 adult participants

- 6 female
- 4 male
- 26-45 years old (M = 34)
- Birthplace:
  - » Mexico 80%
  - » Bolivia 10%
  - » Guatemala 10%
- Average years in the US: 14.75

### 9 youth participants

- 6 female
- 3 male
- 11- 20 years old (M = 15)
- Birthplace:
  - » US 45%
  - » Mexico 45%
  - » Honduras 10%
- Average years in the US: 13.4

# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence

## Findings

- **Fear of police:** both adults and youth stated they would think twice about calling the police for help.

- » Some described prior negative experiences with calling police for help:

*I was scared because I was thinking ‘what if they take me and not the person that was causing the problem? ...’ my kids were scared asking ‘are they going to take you daddy?’ I would tell them no but inside of me I felt like they were going to take me because he [the police officer] was taking the questions farther than were necessary [...] At this moment I wouldn’t call them if I saw a similar case like that happen out of fear of being deported for a problem that I had nothing to do with - just a bystander trying to help... – Male adult*

- » Almost all youth (80%) reported being scared to call the police regardless of their own documentation status.

*I’m scared my parents will be taken away. I don’t want that to happen. – Female youth*

- **School is not safe:** Youth stated they would not ask school counselors or teachers for help with violence.

*I would most definitely wouldn’t [sic] go to the school counselor, teachers, unless there was a teacher that I really trusted but there are very few of those. I wouldn’t go to them because they start getting too many people involved. They start getting DFCS (Department of Family and Children Services) involved [...] – Female youth*

*Both adults and youth stated they would think twice about calling the police for help.*

# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence

- **Discrimination:** both adults and youth shared experiences of discrimination and felt there was a general sense of acceptance of discrimination due to immigration policies.

- » For youth this occurred in school:

*Well personally, in school, people are a lot more open to being racist in school...because with the new laws, they think it's ok. – Female youth*

*At school we were talking about immigration and I don't know where it came up but someone asked me what it felt like to be an illegal alien. – Female youth*

- » For adults this occurred at work and in everyday living:

*They have insulted me in the street. I was just crossing the street and someone stopped and they followed me. I was walking with my kids and they yelled at me. – Female adult*

*They want to humiliate us and lower our self-esteem, because of the laws right now they feel like they can just step all over us, that's an effect of the laws[...] – Adult male*

*Both adults and youth shared experiences of discrimination and felt there was a general sense of acceptance of discrimination due to immigration policies.*

- **Immigration and violence:** There were two common themes regarding the intersection of immigration and DV.

- » Women stated that stress from immigration can increase domestic violence.

*There are a lot of people who cannot do what they used to be able to do, there's the stress of going to jail and being deported that many people worry about. I have lived that, when somebody experiences stress they are more likely to say and do things that they don't want to do. – Female adult*

# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

- » Men reported that violence would be less.

*I believe that people begin to think about the consequences before they act, because they know that the police once in jail will turn you into immigration. – Male adult*

- » Youth reported that violence would be less and it would be more.

*Yes because the abuser might take advantage or the victim knowing they wont call the police because deportation might happen and no because they are just scared of the laws. – Female youth*

*People interviewed felt that immigration laws are negatively impacting the day-to-day functioning of Latin@ families and for some families, especially those affected by domestic violence...*

## **Conclusion**

People interviewed felt that immigration laws are negatively impacting the day-to-day functioning of Latin@ families and for some families, especially those affected by domestic violence; the laws have placed them in additional danger by hindering their ability to call the police and from the youth's perspective, the lack of a safe place to discuss violence and discrimination. Efforts should be made in documenting the unintentional impact of immigration enforcement policies on individuals and families being significantly impacted by such policies.



# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

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# **Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth:** *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

## **National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities**

The National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities is a project of Casa de Esperanza, an organization that has pioneered efforts to create and implement culturally and linguistically relevant support and advocacy for Latinas and their families for over 30 years. The project is an official partner of the U.S. Office on Violence Against Women and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that uses public policy, training and research to enhance the field's capacity to work effectively with Latinas experiencing domestic violence. Over the past year, the National Latin@ Network led efforts to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act; trained 600 organizations in 48 states and 4 countries; and conducted a national survey to identify barriers to support for Latinas. To learn more, visit [www.nationallatinonetwork.org](http://www.nationallatinonetwork.org).

## **National Latin@ Research Center on Family and Social Change**

The National Latin@ Research Center on Family and Social Change is the research division of the National Latin@ Network, which engages Latin@ community members to generate accurate, relevant, valid, and reliable research using unique and cutting-edge approaches. The research center is directed by Dr. Julia Perilla, a clinical community psychologist and faculty member at Georgia State University and is guided by an advisory council of nationally recognized researchers and academics. As one of the cornerstones of the National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, the research center seeks to increase academic and practitioners' knowledge about Latin@ communities' experiences in the U.S.A. and promote the training and mentoring of Latin@ researchers.

# Participatory Action Research with Latin@ Youth: *Exploring Immigration and Domestic Violence*

## La Voz Juvenil of Caminar Latino

Undoubtedly, the effects of domestic violence are deeply felt by child witnesses, who are often labeled as “at risk” youth. At the same time, there is increasing recognition about the potential strength and resilience often found among these children and adolescents. In 2006, in partnership with the Department of Psychology at Georgia State University, members of the adolescent group at Caminar Latino began to conduct their own research about domestic violence and their experiences. Shortly after the work began, the youth created their own research group entitled “La Voz Juvenil de Caminar Latino” meaning the voice of Caminar Latino. Since 2006, the youth have conducted five different studies about issues of relevance and interest to them.

## Recommended Citation

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