

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

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PROJECT TITLE: Cultural and socioeconomic factors influencing
women's decisions to seek domestic violence shelter services

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

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Date: 5-07-02

Comments (Optional):

An interesting and timely topic - Victoria has made some very good recommendations for shelters on the basis of her research. I hope she puts them to use in the next phase of her career!

Running Header: CULTURAL BARRIERS TO REPORTING BEHAVIORS

Cultural Barriers and Socioeconomic Differences Involving the Reporting Behaviors of
Hispanic and African American Women

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Senior Honors Project

Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the presence of cultural barriers and socioeconomic differentiations in the reporting behaviors of Hispanic women, or Latinas, and African American women. A wealth of information can be found that looks at the comparative rates of domestic violence for Anglo American women and women of color, or minorities, as well as individualized and general rates of abuse. However, there has been little research to date on the help-seeking behaviors of women of color (West, Kaufman Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998). These groups were picked because of the amount of research that exists and their percentage of the United States population, which makes them the top two minority groups. Also, there is a sociodemographic difference of income, education, and level of abuse when comparing the two minority groups, Hispanic or Latina and African American, with Anglo American women (West et al, 1998).

A literature review was done to compile what research had been conducted that was most relevant to the topic. Telephone interviews were also conducted with two area shelters to develop an understanding of what shelters are currently doing to attract and retain Hispanic and African American women. It was found that there are a variety of cultural barriers that exist for each group of women. The barriers exist because of racial history and cultural practice. There was very little research found that discussed any socioeconomic data, but there were some findings that established a connection between income and ethnicity and not specific income levels and reporting behaviors. Indirectly, it can be concluded that women within certain ethnic groups who are low income have a tendency to not utilize shelter services or report domestic abuse. This report also provides suggestions for shelters to use when counseling and creating programs for African American and Hispanic women.

Significance of Research

Studying the cultural and socioeconomic barriers for the reporting behavior of women of color is important because these women live within environments where there is an absence of outlets for emotional release and consultation. These minority women also have to deal with the external societal hurdles that are in place by historical and racial factors. Through research it is known that battering is the leading cause of injury and hospitalization for all women (United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs- USDJOJP, 2000). Broken down by ethnicity, between 1992-1996, on average each year 12 per 1000 African American women experienced violence by an intimate partner compared with 8 per 1000 Anglo women (USDJOJP, 2000). African American women who utilize domestic violence shelters are more like to have been severely abused, and are living below the poverty line or the sole providers for their families (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). About 17.7% of Anglo females and 19.8% of non-white females reported experiencing completed or attempted rape by an intimate partner or family member during their lifetime and 51.3% of Anglo women and 54% of non-white women reported physical assault in their lifetime by partners or family members (United States Department of Justice/ Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996). The Bureau of Justice Statistics and The National Crime and Violence Survey show that African American women (52.3%) are at a greater risk for experiencing violence in their lifetimes than are Anglo American (40.9%) women and Hispanic women (44.0%) (USDJOJP, 2000).

In this project a cultural review and investigation was done on Hispanic and African American women of color in order to create a baseline for understanding where these specific groups of women come from. Various aspects of these ethnicities were

taken into account such as cultural norms, gender roles, the rate that abuse in intimate relationships occurred, socioeconomic standing, and children. The intent was to examine these variables to see how they influenced if, when, and where Latina and African American women reported abuse to shelters or social services compared to Anglo American women.

Because of the region that this investigation took place, East Tennessee, and the amount of differentiation between ethnic groups that was found, the two largest minorities nationally and within the region were reviewed. Also, for application purposes, three of the area shelters' directors or staff were interviewed about what type of women they were used to seeing report and utilize their services, what attempts were being made to increase a woman of color's feelings of comfort and relativity to their staff and their shelter, and what attempts were already implemented to accommodate a women of color's different needs and background. These surveys were taken into account and the information retrieved will be incorporated into the reporting-behaviors section.

Literature Review

In the research done by West, Kaufman Kantor, and Jaskinski (1998), an extensive look was taken at the Hispanic women and their reporting behaviors. The data the researchers used for the study came from a national survey on the help-seeking efforts of Latinas: Mexican, Mexican-American, and Puerto Rican, and face-to-face interviews with a national probability sample of 1,970 persons. This study did make a good attempt at dehomogenizing the Hispanic racial group and looking at how each individual culture dealt with the issue of domestic abuse and help seeking. The goal of the research was to identify what were the most salient sociodemographic predictors and cultural barriers for

Latinas when seeking help, in comparison to Anglo American women. This research found that there was a significant difference between the reporting behaviors of Anglo American women and Latinas when looking at the age, income, and educational level. The only significant cultural barrier found for Latinas was the language barrier. The research in this study seemed to parallel earlier research on sociodemographic predictors for help seeking, but did not find a correlation between these predictors of help seeking and income level or education. This study does a good job comparing the two groups of women but could still elaborate upon the economic differences between the groups and explore just how much of an influence they have on reporting behaviors.

Sullivan and Rumptz (1994) explored the various needs and the type of adjustment patterns shown in African American women who do utilize domestic violence shelters. Overall the study found that even though African American women have to deal with a variety of obstacles before entering a shelter and during their stay, the women's overall attitude 10 weeks after leaving the shelter was positive. There were 60 women within the study and all were obtained from the same domestic violence shelter in a mid-sized midwestern city. Obviously, the sample size might affect the outcome of the results of this study. The small number and demographics, as well as location of the city, might have influenced the type of responses the women gave. In a metropolitan or rural area, where the resources might have been more sparse or over-used, the women might have had more trouble being able to achieve such a stable equilibrium after leaving the shelter. Also, because of the age range of the study, 17-49, a new area of research might be to explore just how much more difficult it is for older women to report than younger women. There was also a somewhat high rate of educational attainment with about 30%

of the women having had some college experience. This increase in the level of education might influence reporting behaviors due to a connected increase in income level. The results of the study say that African American women, while having a positive outlook after leaving the shelter, were more successful after leaving the shelter when having worked with an advocate to improve education and material goods. The research advises that any type of follow up outreach can influence their access to resources after leaving the shelter. Sullivan and Rumpitz also note that this is not enough due to the institutionalized racism African American women face within shelters and within society and that a good plan of action should be initiated within the African American community.

Gondolf, Fisher, and McFerron (1988) researched the cultural differences among domestic violence shelter residents who are Anglo American, African American, and Hispanic. The data was obtained by using a secondary database of 50 Texas shelter interviews from the Texas Council on Family Violence and the Texas Department of Human Services. There were a total of 5708 interviews used. This study did find a differential relationship between these groups of women along income and marital related variables. The findings suggest that the greatest difference was between Anglo and Hispanic women because of income levels, availability of resources, and cultural barriers. The rationalization behind the similarity of African American and Anglo women in this study is due, according to the researchers, to the fact that lower income African Americans are not as likely to report and are therefore underrepresented in the study. Because of this, the study recommends that shelters do more economic and outreach programs directed primarily towards Hispanic women. It seems that because the research

was done within Texas, where there is a high number of Hispanic people, and the fact that other factors, such as where in Texas the shelters were located and what was the mean age level for the women surveyed, could also affect the results of this research.

Other research that was done on the help-seeking behaviors of Hispanic women took a more ethnically differentiated approach by investigating the differences between foreign-born and native-born Mexican Americans. This research (Keefe, 1982) looks at how women who endure high levels of relationship stress cope with the situation and to whom they tend to report their problems. This study looks at two case studies, one of a foreign-born woman and the other a native-born woman. The results of this study again highlight the significance of language barriers between counselors and clients and the cultural differences Mexican women face when dealing stressful family experiences. There seems to be a differentiation between these groups of women with regard to attitude toward potential sources of help, selection of helping sources in times of emotional distress, and the continuation of therapy or services. Native-born Mexican American women tend to rely on a more internal locus of control. They do not disregard seeking help but and would most likely seek professional assistance versus talking to a family member. For foreign-born Mexican women, they do not follow the same tendencies of seeking professional help and are more likely to talk to a clergymen or family members. Within the two case studies in this research, both women were open to seeking help, the foreign-born woman more so than the native-born, and only continued their therapy if the counselor was also Mexican American. Religion played a crucial role in the foreign-born woman's utilization of effective counseling. This research highlights

the fact that Mexican Americans find strength in their ability to rely on their internal locus of control which usually dictates minimal efforts for outside help.

Research done by Coley and Beckett (1988) provides a very detailed plan of practice when counseling and understanding a battered African American woman's perspective. This study did parallel other research findings concerning the fact that there is a lack of general research on African American battered women and that African American women tend not to report domestic abuse to social service agencies but are more likely to seek medical attention. Also, there was no mention of any socioeconomic indicators of interethnic variances in economic standing, but according to Neighbors (1984) there seems to be a low significance when looking at African Americans as a population who are lower income and the amount they utilize professional care services. It might be an avenue of interest to see if lower income African American women follow this same trend. This study does support the fact that there are a variety of culturally sensitive areas that should be considered when counseling African American women who are battered. The research is not empirically derived but based on social work practice experience, which could be a weakness concerning the generalization of these findings. The areas that the study highlights that should be considered when working with these women were community outreach, shelter services, shelter environment, shelter policies, staff training, and counseling.

Hispanic or Latina Women- The Cultural Barriers

Even though there is differentiation between various Hispanic cultures, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, etc., there is a strong current of distinction that runs through these

ethnicities on a cultural basis. Latino culture ascribes to a patriarchal family system. The women allow the men, in both the family of orientation and procreation, to oversee the most important decisions and financial aspects. Because of this, the women express more tolerant attitudes towards abuse (West et al, 1998). Latina women also tend to be in marriages or relationships where the male is a heavy drinker, which has been found to have a relationship with domestic abuse (Kaufman Kantor, 1997). This information still needs to be empirically proven to influence reporting behaviors.

There is also an external locus of control for Latina women, in which a heavy religious influence encourages women to go to their male religious counsel for help or advice before seeking help from social services (Wilson, 1997). This external locus of control also shifts feelings of power away from the individual and to outside-designated figures, which, within this culture, are primarily men. Many women have identity formation through their family ties. A Latina woman exists for and because of her family and this unit of support and identification is of the utmost importance (Wilson, 1997). So it is understandable how hard it would be, and almost unrealistic, for a Latina woman to leave all of her friends and family with her children and seek haven in an unfamiliar shelter or agency. There is also a cultural taboo against divorce based on the heavy Catholic background of most Hispanic people. Perhaps the most common deterrent for Latina women to utilize shelters is the language barrier. This is not as troublesome for second- and third-generation battered Latina women but there is still the communication barrier for many shelters in areas where the Mexican immigrant population is rising but the amount of bi-lingual counselors is not (Kanuha, 1994).

African American Women- Cultural Barriers

Due to the tumultuous history of African Americans in America there are more hidden barriers and institutionalized beliefs due to racism and discrimination. Many African American women understand this and have experienced it during their lifetime, which, over time becomes a part of the cultural norms expressed. Because of these beliefs many African American women have trust issues with the police and authorities. They believe that the police will treat them wrongly, unlawfully and unnecessarily punish their mates, or not believe their complaint (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Along with these feelings of mistrust there is also a loyalty to family, friends, and community. Much like for Latina women, to leave a social support network and go to a place that is unfamiliar can be very hard. An African American woman might feel that her community and also the church will reject her.

Not only is there a loyalty to community and family, but there also is loyalty to African American men. African American women sympathize with the plight of African American men and tend to not want to report abuse (White, 1985). These women feel that African American men feel burdened by societal, economic, and systematic discrimination and do not want to abandon their mates. These feelings of shared responsibility and loyalty could also be due to how African American families are typically egalitarian when it comes to gender roles and family responsibilities.

Turning to friends or family is not uncommon for African Americans and usually is the first resort women use when looking for support and help in troublesome times. African American women are socialized to be strong and keep the business of the family

private; if they were to turn to a shelter for help, it would seem that they were a traitor and weak.

It all comes down to an issue of trust, which has been constantly tested because of negative experiences with police, authorities, counselors, and other figures outside the safety net of the African American community.

Reporting Behaviors

Help seeking is affected by ethnicity (West et al, 1998). When looking at reporting behaviors, being white tripled the probability of help seeking while age also played a factor with a relationship being found with young age and high reporting behaviors (Gondolf, & Fisher, 1998; O'Keefe, 1994; Strauss, 1990). Gondolf, Fisher, and McFerron (1988) found within their study 32% of Hispanic women stayed within their abusive relationship for 5 years or longer while only 21% of African American and Anglo American followed this trend. This could speak to the fact that divorce and separation are very uncommon within the Hispanic culture. It was found that Hispanic women are significantly less likely to report rape than non-Hispanic women but there is no significant difference when looking at reporting physical assault or stalking victimization (USDJOJP, 2000). This could be due to the fact that the Hispanic community would be more compassionate and believing when dealing with outright physical abuse and therefore the women would feel more comfortable reporting this type of abuse versus rape within a relationship. It could be suggested that many people do not believe that marital rape does exist under the belief that a husband has a right to sexual intercourse with his wife at his own discretion. This could be the reason that Latina women, who are statistically the most economically disadvantaged (Gondolf, Fisher, and McFerron,

1988), are more likely to seek police support before family or clergy even though the family support network is important in their culture (West et al, 1998; Harris & Dewdney, 1994). In saying this, those Latina women who did seek help were significantly more assimilated to the majority culture and more likely to have alcoholic or heavy drinking husbands (West, Kantor, Jasinski, 1998).

For African American women, they usually have experienced more severe abuse than other minorities (Sullivan and Rumpitz, 1994). Research shows that, African American women had a weapon used against them 48% of the time in comparison to 39% for Hispanic and Anglo (Gondolf, et al, 1988). This finding does parallel other research that shows a prediction of help seeking behaviors when potential lethality of abuse is considered (Harris & Dewdney, 1994). These women still tend to get less comprehensive services and rely more on friends and family (Gondolf, et al, 1988). This fact has been repeatedly found throughout the research literature (e.g. McKinley, 1975; McAdoo, 1978; Neighbors, 1984; Warren, 1981). This pattern follows along the lines of what is usually expected within the African American culture. An African American woman is expected to utilize her social support networks and not turn on her loved ones by reporting her abuse to the police, which could possibly alienate her partner or husband. Another possibility is the image that African American women are seen as pillars of their family and are strong and durable. It might be seen as a sign of weakness, on a societal and community level, if she reports being abused by her partner. This image has been portrayed through the media and through literature, for example, the character Sophia in Steven Spielberg's cinematic rendition of Alice Walker's novel "The Color Purple". This character faced the abuse she received from her husband by in-turn abusing

him and was seen as being the more righteous and strong for it. Even though her mother-in-law, Ms. Seely, shouldered the abuse of her husband for more than two decades without fighting back was seen as quiet, “ugly,” and un-womanly, she still carried the respect of the viewers. There could be a relationship between the way African American women are portrayed as being more strong and diligent than any obstacle and their reporting behaviors.

Anglo American women tend to be the most economically well off and have the least amount of children, which is a deterrence for reporting abuse because it is harder to leave what financial stability is present within an abusive relationship when children are involved. These women are usually older and have their own cars- 62% of white women compared to 40 % of non-whites (Gondolf, et al, 1988). Anglo women were more likely to use social services than African American or Hispanic women (Gondolf, et al, 1988). Anglo women can relate, more so than minority women, to the counselors and staff within the shelters. This makes it easier for them to utilize domestic violence shelters or another forms of social service. On the other end, many times Anglo women feel as if they do not belong in the shelters and can not relate to the other residents because of their economic positions (interview, 3/2002).

Socioeconomic Characteristics in Reporting Behaviors

The research on the connection or relationship between socioeconomic standing and reporting behaviors is slim at best. Much of the research focuses on the cultural barriers to women of color. What the research does show is that the trend for this relationship is not as clear as that of cultural characteristics and reporting behaviors. West, et al. (1998) found that for slightly less than half of abused women in their study,

the poorer the woman was the less likely she was to seek help, especially for minority women. There is just too much instability, for some women, to leave with children, no transportation, no continual source of income, and weak social support networks. The women tend to be overwhelmed with all of these new burdens and the stress can lead them returning to their abusive partners. Socioeconomics plays a role in the flexibility lent to domestic abuse victims. Among welfare recipients, it was found that they are three to three-and-a-half times more likely to suffer from domestic violence than are nonrecipients (Columbia University, 1996). Being on welfare can cause societal stigmas and negative emotional results, like depression. All of these factors taken into consideration, minority women might feel more secure within their abusive relationship than outside of that tumultuous comfort zone.

African American women who are lower income are not as likely to report and, with Hispanic women, are more likely to receive and tolerate more severe abuse than Anglo women (Gondolf, et al, 1988). In comparison to Anglo women Hispanic women who reported the assaults were more educationally and economically disadvantaged and had less access to resources, like transportation and telephone services (West et al, 1998).

Even though the socioeconomic differences are there when looking at reporting behaviors there have been alternative findings within the research. It has been speculated that the difference between Anglo, or white, versus non-white is not as indicative of the influence that income plays on whether women report as is the difference between Anglo and African American versus Hispanic (Gondolf et al, 1998). This conveys that there is a similarity between the income characteristics of African Americans and Anglos. The boundaries that are drawn for the relationship between SES and reporting behaviors does

not lay strictly within one racial group(s), like poorer African Americans or middle class Anglo women, but more along income characteristics (Gondolf et al, 1998).

It seems that what little research has been done on SES and reporting behaviors states very simply that there is not a direct relationship between the SES of certain racial groups and their reporting behaviors. The research does say that, regardless of race, certain socioeconomic groups do have a tendency to underreport (Gondolf et al, 1998). There is no clarification on which socioeconomic groups report more or less.

Interview Questions

Two area shelters that service the metropolitan area of Knoxville, TN and the rural area of Morristown, TN, were surveyed in order to better understand and evaluate what type of programs were already installed within some domestic violence shelters to aid women of color. The following questions were asked of the agencies:

- 1) What programs do you presently have implemented for women of color (black, Latina, and other)?
- 2) What is the rate of black, Hispanic, and other women of color who come to your shelter?
- 3) Do you have access or have employed bilingual counselors?
- 4) Do you provide or refer out transportation services for women?
- 5) How do you feel that your staff has been trained in a way that helps them to relate to a variety of women?
- 6) What kind of differences would a counselor have to take into account when counseling a middle class African American woman without children versus a poor Hispanic women with children?

- 7) Are there any support groups affiliated with your agency that constitute an external support network for the women of color you service?
- 8) In what ways does your agency motivate the staff to relate to women of color?
- 9) How does your agency make the necessary provisions or adjustments to the environment of the shelter for women of color (i.e. dress code, room décor, and channels of communication with kinship or family systems, variety of food available)?

The shelter from Morristown, #1, seemed to be making the most strides towards increasing the utilization of services by women of color. They have a fairly high Hispanic population of women who come into their shelter, which may be due their rural location in an area where many migrant workers might pass through. The shelter does have a bilingual counselor and provides Spanish literature for the women to read and educate themselves. The counselors there have undergone a wide range of diversity training over the years because of the increase in the number of Hispanic women who come to their shelter. The director of the shelter did say, though, that they are not necessarily prepared for women of other cultures who might come to the shelter, such as Muslim or Asian women. There are not very many African American women who come to their shelter (only about 2% of the clients) and the flow is very sporadic. It seems that most of the attempts by the shelter to accommodate a minority woman are made towards Hispanic women. In fact, there are no counselors within this shelter who are of any other race than Anglo American, which makes it more difficult for the women to relate. A serious issue the shelter has to take into consideration when dealing with this population of women, according to the director, is the "fear factor." Many Hispanic women in this

area are undocumented and are within the country illegally. They do not want to report abuse because of a fear of deportation. The director said these fears are hard to overcome for the women and they have outreach programs in place to help. The counselors also consult the women's dietary preferences and culinary necessities and try to accommodate these needs. As far as providing resources to the women outside of counseling, the shelter does link any woman who needs transportation up with a service who can provide help.

Concerning SES, the shelter does see some differentiation in the utilization of services. For middle class women it is harder to communicate with the other residents because they feel as if they do not belong in a shelter and cannot relate. The agency also noticed that the women sometimes feel guilty for utilizing services they feel might be more beneficial for others without the resources. The director pointed out that the women are afraid and need help regardless of money, but it does make a difference whether they come to the shelter or not. Many times, for women with more access to resources, i.e. cars, independent income, food, housing, it is hard for them to leave their belongings. Regardless of these differences, though, the shelter does not see any basic differences in the issues and problems that the women are dealing with.

There are no community groups that work with the agency, like churches, clubs, etc. The agency has not made any special adjustments to the actual environment of the shelter that might make women of color feel more comfortable and encourage usage of the shelter. The director could offer up no real plan of action for remedying or adjusting this problem.

The Knoxville metropolitan shelter, #2, lacked, to a greater deal, the amount of effort they were implementing in conducting outreach to clients of color for their shelter in comparison with shelter #1. The overall strategy for the shelter was that everyone, no matter of their culture or ethnicity, was the same based on the unifying basic reason they were at the shelter. For cases in which the women might have specific needs that are different the agency refers them to other area agencies or services. For example, there is no in-house bilingual counselor, but they will bring someone, if available, to accommodate her need. The shelter did say that there is not a significant population of non-English speaking woman who utilize the shelter. There are usually more white women than any other population, and of the minorities who do utilize the agency's services most are black or Hispanic. The counselors are trained to consider cultural differences, but not to gain a clearer understanding of the specifications of various cultures or how to understand the interaction between minority socialization and majority socialization. The usual process is that each woman's needs are assessed and then a referral is made to best help her meet those needs. Still, there are no specific programs for minority women at this shelter.

Program Recommendations

Working with a population of women who under high amounts of emotional and environmental distress is hard. The situation is made even more complex when you have to take into consideration cultural barriers and socioeconomic factors, which can complicate the women's situations even more. That is why domestic violence shelters need to implement more in-house programs that help target impoverished and minority

women, such as the services provided in Multnomah County in Oregon¹ and the efforts of the Asian Task Force². In San Francisco, CA in October of 2001 the African American community as a whole came together to protest domestic violence sponsoring the *It's Your Business Campaign*. The campaign hosted festivals in the park and called on African American men to come together and take a stand.³ Most of the programs that are provided today focus on national campaigns for women but do not look directly at the shelter services provided. The programs do not utilize these avenues as a way to reach and retain the victims of abuse. These women are not utilizing shelters at a rate that is equal to the amount of abuse they sustain and the best way to help combat this problem is from the inside out, starting with the shelters and their staff

The following are a variety of recommendations for programs and adjustments that shelters can implement. These suggestions are based solely from the literature reviewed.

For Hispanic Women:

- Do not ignore the fact that formal and informal networks are very important to women in this culture. Policies that are implemented for the women's protection also limit their comfort in the shelters. If shelters would brief the women on what the policies for confidentiality are and then allow a phone conversation with family members, then some of the feelings of alienation might become less. Also,

¹ The Multnomah County, OR Department of Community and Family have a variety of referral services for those who speak different languages and live different lifestyles. They also work with other nearby counties to assist minorities. <http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/dcf/dv/dvman/victims.html>.

² The Asian Task Force is a group centered in Boston, MA that works with shelters and organizations to elevate Asian women from the depths of domestic abuse. In 1994 they opened up a shelter directed solely towards Asian women. www.atask.org.

³ These activities and others on the web page of the Family Violence and Prevention Fund at <http://endabuse.org>.

if clergymen were allowed to visit the women, especially immigrants, so that they could have a connection with some form of their religious practice.

- Do not assume that all Latina or Hispanic women are immigrants and live uncontemporary lives. The assumption that they cannot speak English and were not born in the United States can result in a rejection of the services offered by the agency. Also, do not assume that the Hispanic culture is a homogenous group of women who all live the same way. There are interethnic differences, much like there are intercultural differences within Americans.
- Learn to speak Spanish. Because our society functions on a xenophobic interaction system, many people do not want to try different things. It is imperative, even for those Hispanic women who do speak English, for counselors and staff members are able to communicate and relate to the women. Employing a racially diverse staff is also necessary. It is much more beneficial to the women if they are able to talk to someone to whom they can physically and culturally relate.
- Make a point to train staff members, or at least familiarize them, with a variety of cultural practices. For example, machismo is a part of Hispanic culture that is interpreted on a continuum, for some men that means being a tyrant and overpowering and for other men that means being a loving, caring, and protective provider. If the staff members gain an understanding of these differences in culture then they will be better prepared to understand Hispanic women's interpretation of abuse.
- Provide Spanish literature, games, and Hispanic literature for the women and their children. When the women come to the shelter or see information about the

services they might be prone to utilize the services if they can relate to the information. If they choose to bring their children with them, then it would be beneficial for the family to be able to watch movies or play with games that facilitate their way of living. Also, by providing ethnic food products, or being capable to provide these products if necessary, could allow all residents and staff to learn about different cultures and facilitate comfort for the Hispanic women so that they will be more likely to disclose.

- Providing transportation services for the women is a must, as well as job skill training. By making these options available, either through the agency or through community referrals offers the women a chance to elevate themselves out of the situation.

For African American Women:

- Community Outreach is of the utmost importance (Coley and Beckett, 1988). If shelters publicize their existence in areas where African American women frequent, then they will be more aware of their options. Churches, hair salons, housing projects, community centers, and the like are all places that could reach African American women (Coley and Beckett, 1988).
- Because of the tumultuous relationship between the police force and African American women a program that involves both of these groups interacting would be a good way to relieve some of the mistrust. A possible option is starting a buddy program with the police and all of the women in the shelter. This program could involve a police officer that is assigned to the shelter every night. Each woman is given a pager number so that she can reach this officer if anything goes

wrong or if she needs help. This pager buddy system could also help a domestic violence task force evolve within the department that is comprised of officers and counselors who go to homes where violence has been reported, as well as service area shelters with the pager buddy program. This way both the shelters and the police force are working together to create awareness in the community and create stronger links of trust for the women.

- Because of the “trap of loyalty” issue for African American women it is imperative that shelters make an effort to get the husbands or partners of these women involved in the counseling process. Even if the end result were that the relationship is dissolved, it would be easier for African American women to seek help if they felt that the police and the social service system would not alienate the African American men in their lives. Safeplace meeting areas could be established, under the supervision of the police and the counselors, in order for the problems of the couple to be discussed. The police force could also agree to this as a method of rehabilitation for the offender.
- Providing a shelter environment that is inviting for all women is important. Much like the problems of Hispanic women, African American women need to be able to relate to their surroundings, especially if they are in an unfamiliar environment. By providing pictures and literature that features images relative to their cultural background, African American women might feel more apt to utilize the services.
- Again, like the efforts made for Hispanic women, the counselors and staff must undergo sensitivity training so that they can better understand the cultural differences each woman faces. African American women have different hair

textures, home environments, skin care needs, and cultural backgrounds then other women and if the staff at shelters were aware of these differences any confrontation that is created can be handled in such a way that no feels belittled or misunderstood.

Conclusion

In summary, it has been found that there is a relationship between ethnicity and reporting behaviors. There is also a relationship between ethnicity and SES (West et al, 1998). These findings, in an indirect manner, lead one to believe that the lower a women's income the less likely she is to report and that being a woman of color also decrease the likelihood that shelter services will be utilized. The stringency and significance of certain cultural barriers does vary, but the fact that there are some issues that discourage minority women from seeking help is an issue that is real and needs further research. Shelters need to consider if the accessibility of their services is known to women within their whole service area and if they are utilizing all the resources in the community to help increase the awareness. Directors of shelters should also make attempts to educate their staff on the variance between cultures and ethnicities and how women respond differently. By providing sensitivity training and reconstructing the environment of the shelter, social service providers can better meet the needs of all the women within their community who live within situations of domestic abuse. Yes, these women all have basically the same problem, but how they interpret and rationalize their situation, whom they contact for assistance and consultation, and how they function socially, do differ.

Because there is so little research on socioeconomic status and the reporting behaviors of all women, it is highly recommended that this factor be studied. Many times

researchers include income in along with other sociodemographic factors like age, sex, and education. Our society puts so much weight on the resources a person has access to and this is a reflection of being categorized as upper class, middle class, working poor, or impoverished. How do women in each of these socioeconomic strata interpret using social services? Is there one group who reports abuse more than another? Is this trend independent of race? These are the questions that have yet to be thoroughly investigated and answered, but these are also the answers that can help shelters and counselors better help all women escape from a situation of abuse.

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