



Sexual Harassment of Immigrant Women

Possibly due to a fear of deportation and/or a lack of knowledge of their rights, many immigrant women suffer sexual assault, sexual exploitation and ongoing sexual harassment by perpetrators who view them as easy prey. Unfamiliarity with the English language, with its limitless supply of pop culture jargon may also make it difficult for immigrant women to even know when they are being verbally degraded by co-workers.

For many Spanish monolingual and limited English-speaking workers along the border, quid pro quo, salary "adjustments," and constant verbal and physical sexual harassment are commonplace.

Types of Sexual Harassment Suffered by Latinas

Verbal Harassment - Female employees are called racist and sexually vulgar names. References are made to body parts and sexual acts in a very hostile atmosphere. Managers "dare" female employees to report or threaten to fire them if they report sexual harassment.

Physical Sexual Harassment - Women report being fondled (breasts and buttocks touched) by male employees at the dishwasher line at a major cafeteria chain.

Quid Pro Quo - A hotel manager continuously offered a female employee "free hotel rooms" in exchange for having sex with him.

Latino Victim-blaming & Survivor Response Considerations

Victim blaming is not unique to any one particular culture. It is universal; it serves the purpose of rationalizing and shifting the blame from perpetrator to victim, and is intended to minimize the effects of sexual violence. Each culture has its own set of victim-blaming messages that may affect individuals to differing degrees. Latin@ culture is no exception. In offering the following information our intent is not to generalize or presume that all Latin@s hold these beliefs or assumptions. It is meant to help broaden the advocate and counselor's awareness of possible primary survivor internalized messages and secondary survivor attitudes that may impact a Latina survivor's healing process.

"The girl who starts her period before age 13 will be promiscuous." (A temptress)

"She already weighs 40 kilos." (88 pounds is the weight associated with children 10 - 12 years of age) This is a reference to the weight of a girl as presumed evidence of sexual maturity and justification of sex with underage girls.

"Girls are flirts and they can seduce older men."

"Women tease and tempt men."

"A man is not always responsible for what he does if the devil or alcohol gets in him." "Diablo" a popular song by *Los Fugitivos* released in 1994 reinforces this idea.

"The sexually experienced woman is a whore, she cannot be raped."

"Men cannot control themselves once aroused, be careful not to tempt them. The lyrics of a Salsa song released in 1999 by Adalberto Álvarez y su Son "*Si no vas a cocinar...*" reinforces this idea: "*¿Si no vas a cocinar mamá pa que tu enciendes la candela?...Estás jugando con fuego y un día te vas a quemar.*"

Translation: If you are not going to cook mama, why do you turn on the fire?...You are playing with fire and one day you will get burned"

Cultural fatalism appears to be strongly related to socioeconomic class and ethnic identity. The greater the sense of being marginalized - the less control one feels. Ross, Mirowsky, and Cockerham (1983)

Possible Latina Survivor Responses "*Es una prueba de Dios*" (This is a test from God.) "It was God's will, this happened to me for a reason." "It's my fault"

Emphasis on Virginty In many Latino communities, if a woman or girl loses her virginity to rape, incest, or molestation, her sexual status is equated with that of a single "promiscuous" woman.

Examples of Spanish phrases that reflect the "damaged goods" assumption: "*pan comido*" eaten bread "*naranja podrida*" rotten orange "*cancha reglamentaria*" vulgar reference to the genital area as a regulation soccer field

Possible Latina Survivor Responses to loss of virginity:

"I'm damaged and dirty." "I have brought shame to my family." "No man will ever want to marry me."

Special attention should be taken to address the needs of survivors who come from families that place a high importance on virginity, and have lost their virginity through rape. It is important to emphasize that virginity cannot be taken; it can only be given. No matter the physical condition of the survivor, she is still spiritually and psychologically a virgin, for this was not a sexual act but an act of violence.

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