

## Community Lideres: A Qualitative Study

**Introduction:** Latina women, like other ethnic-minority women, may be at increased risk for experiencing the negative psychological and physical effects of domestic violence (DV) (Gonzalez-Guarda, Diaz, & Cummings, 2012). To address this issue in communities, various outreach programs have emerged to help (DV) victims. However, Latina victims may hesitate using assistance programs due to language barriers, social isolation, or fear of deportation (Bauer, Rodriguez, and Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000). Women who experience DV are usually seen as victims, but the purpose of this study was to evaluate a leadership development program (*Lideres* program) that highlights strengths of Latina survivors of DV focusing on qualitative interviews with Latina *líderes*. The *Lideres* program was developed by Casa de Esperanza, a Latina-based organization in Minnesota, and adapted for use in Atlanta, GA.

**Method:** Using a mixed methods design, Latina immigrant survivors of domestic violence (n=4) responded to a follow-up questionnaire two years after completing the *Líderes* program as part of a larger evaluation. One-on-one qualitative interviews were conducted with 3 women. Data were transcribed and analyzed using a phenomenological qualitative approach. The analysis was conducted in Spanish to preserve their original meaning.

**Results:** Three community leaders identified themes that capture their experience working to develop workshops, raise funds, and even becoming advocates and support group facilitators. These themes include: knowledge and skills gained, building community, and experiences of satisfaction with the adaptation. Through this program, women expressed that they were able to increase their strengths as individuals and leaders within their community.

**Discussion:** The qualitative data presented here, collected as part of a larger study, provide insight for leadership development programs and complements previous quantitative findings showing an increase in leadership skills gained by Latina survivors of DV. The small number of trainees in the *Líderes* program is a limitation, and findings cannot be generalized beyond this group. Nevertheless, these findings can inform the work of community outreach programs that work with victims of DV. Further, the program can represent a larger shift in how women who have experienced DV are viewed: from victims to survivors, and eventually leaders in their community.