

# ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS SERVING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT IN ECUADORIAN AND ELDER POPULATIONS

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## BACKGROUND

Central West Justice, Inc., a subsidiary of Community Legal Aid (CLA), and New Hope have collaborated to perform a needs assessment of domestic violence in underserved communities, specifically in Milford's Ecuadorian community and the elder communities in the Towns of Bellingham, Medway, Upton, and Hopedale. According to New Hope, DV is a pattern of intimidation tactics used to gain power and control over someone. DV may include emotional and verbal abuse as well as psychological abuse. These tactics can be built up over time and unfortunately may seem standard to the person abused, but they are in fact in a position with no control. These two agencies have recognized that immigrant and elder populations are less likely to report DV cases, and therefore less likely to gain access to non-profit agencies or law enforcement. These underserved communities often face additional barriers when seeking safety from DV (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, National Network to End DV).

### COMMUNITY LEGAL AID AND CENTRAL WEST JUSTICE

Community Legal Aid, Inc. (CLA) provides free civil legal services to low-income and elderly residents of central and western Massachusetts.

### NEW HOPE

New Hope is a non-profit organization working all throughout Massachusetts to end sexual and domestic violence. They are dedicated to understanding the inequality and injustice present in our society in an effort to create violence-free communities. Their overall vision is "every person has the right to live a life free of violence and exploitation."

## POPULATION OF INTEREST

### ECUADORIAN POPULATION

- Ecuadorians are among one of the largest Latino groups of immigrants to re-settle in Milford, MA.
- Men mostly work in the roofing industry while the women mainly stay home to care for the house and children.
- Immigrants who are survivors of domestic violence, both documented and un-documented, are less likely to report domestic abuse for fear of being deported or being reported to federal immigration authorities.
- Besides the language barrier, there may also be cultural differences in the process of reporting domestic violence in other countries.
- In many Latin American countries, women are required by law enforcement to undergo a medical examination and receive a certificate before they can file an official complaint of domestic violence.
- Latino immigrants may feel less motivated to report DV cases in the U.S. due to lack of knowledge in the process of reporting.

### ELDER POPULATION

- Elders may experience all forms of abuse including physical or sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, emotional abuse, abandonment, or self-neglect.
- The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that one million Americans 60 years of age or older are abused in their homes each year, and only 1 in 14 cases are reported to authorities.
- This large disparity can be due to various factors, including age, poor health, stigma, limited access to medical care by the abuser, lack of knowledge of one's situation, dementia-related abuse, and much more.
- One of the unique aspects of elder abuse is the issue of cognitive capacity of the abused or the abuser. Defining cognitive ability has many ethical ramifications and therefore is a critical point of obscurity in understanding as well as reporting elder abuse.

## SERVICE PROJECT - GOALS, PROGRESS, OUTCOMES

### SERVICE PROJECT GOALS

#### Project Goals:

- Research domestic and sexual violence (DV) in the Elder and Ecuadorian communities
- Assess the barriers to seeking help and support for DV in the aforementioned communities.
- Establish possible steps and best practice to overcome said barriers.

#### Student Goals:

- Learn the complexities of domestic violence among the aforementioned vulnerable populations, in order to gain an understanding of the barriers to providing assistance.

### SERVICE PROJECT PROGRESS

- Milford Ecuadorian Population:** We performed research on this population to gain insight into the perspective of DV in Ecuador. We also established communication with Latino Insurance Program, an organization that serves the Milford Ecuadorian community to help them gain access to medical care and food in MA.
- Elder Population:** We attended two stakeholder meetings, one at Milford Senior Center and the other at Tri-Valley Elder Services, where we discussed the experiences of each community partner and their thoughts on the barriers to serving the population.

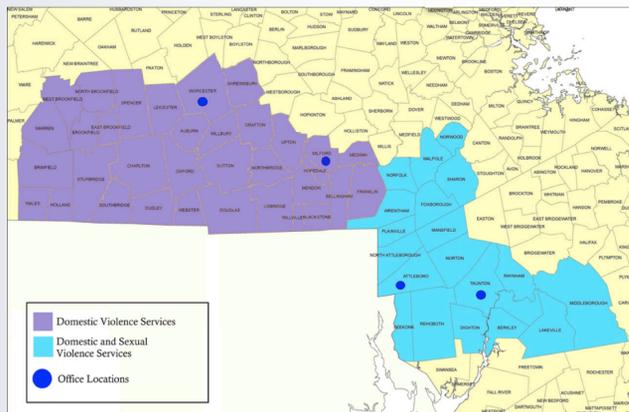


FIGURE 1: Map of the communities in Massachusetts served by New Hope

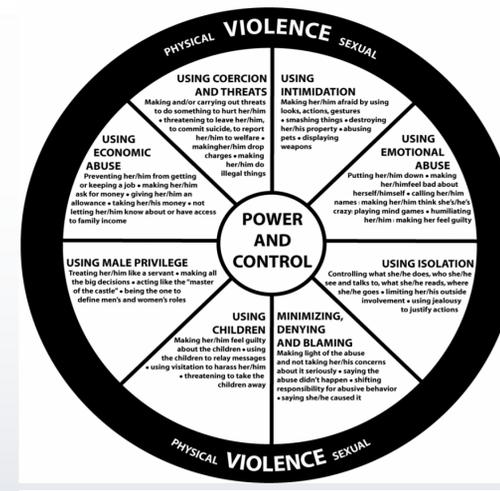


FIGURE 2: Wheel of Power and Control

### SERVICE PROJECT OUTCOMES

Through independent research, stakeholder meetings, and data analysis, we have identified the following barriers...

#### Ecuadorian Population

- Language barrier
- Cultural differences in the process of reporting domestic violence in other countries. (In many Latin American countries, women are required by law enforcement to undergo a medical examination and receive a certificate before they can file an official complaint of domestic violence.)
- Differing definitions of domestic and sexual violence
- "Machismo"/ gender roles still present in Ecuadorian culture
- Immigrant DV survivors, both documented and un-documented, less likely to report domestic abuse for fear of being deported or being reported to federal immigration authorities

#### Elder Population

- Dwindling resources or resources not appropriate for the elder community
- Clients refusing services
- Lack of coordination among interprofessionals
- Fear of violating HIPAA policies
- Nature of the relationship of the abuser/victim
- Inadequate outreach
- Lack of training in reporting/ Lack of appropriate geriatric medical screening/ different presentations of abuse among elders
- The complexity of elder health. Ie: issues with mobility, oxygen, dementia
- Misconceptions of the prevalence of elder abuse
- Safety concerns: for self or animals
- Culture/ Gender roles

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- One important point to address is the definition of domestic abuse. Inconsistent views on what defines domestic abuse is a preventable barrier for people seeking assistance. Many people think first of physical abuse and sexual abuse, but situations can be much more complex than that, especially when it involves family members. For this reason, one can be left confused and seemingly hopeless.
- The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence defines DV as "the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another."
- However, it is important to note, that there is no "typical" situation nor a "typical" victim of DV. DV can affect any age group, any community, any education-level, any economic level, and any culture.
- With the serious issue of abuse, victims concerns need to be seriously addressed, not downplayed, not denied, and not blamed.
- It is not enough just to ask "are you safe at home." Further questioning can unearth further details that can help develop the most effective treatment plan for victims
- As future physicians, we should be working towards a care model where no provider says the word "but." There should be no excuse not to provide the utmost care to victims of DV.

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