

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT AND BUILDING CAPACITY TO
SERVE IMMIGRANT SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

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WE ARE BOUND TOGETHER...

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because our liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

-Lila Watson, Aboriginal Activist

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GLOBAL TO LOCAL

- **Important to understand Rape in it's global perspective when working with immigrant survivors**
- *In all countries (including the U.S.) we must consider that:*
 - Rape is used as a tool of oppression
 - Women's sexuality can be a taboo subject
 - Autonomy over women's bodies may be non existent
- **Lest we believe this happens "somewhere else":**
 - Regulation of women's bodies currently an American Socio/Political Topic
 - Resources for serving survivors of violence against women constantly on the chopping block
 - Existing programs frequently do not serve specific cultural communities
 - Anti-immigrant sentiment is abundant

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SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

- *WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women* (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005) indicated that 15–71% of women experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.
- Studies estimate that between one in four and one out of every six women in the U.S. has been the victim of a completed or attempted rape in her lifetime
- Although victims of intimate partner violence experience significant rates of sexual violence, most sexual violence victims are assaulted by someone they know, such as a friend, colleague, acquaintance, co-worker, fellow student, care provider, family member, etc., rather than by an intimate partner, spouse or stranger.
- Approximately 2/3 of rapes are committed by someone the person knows, ranging from friends and acquaintances to family and authority figures
- Immigrant victims are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault

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SEXUAL ASSAULT BASICS

- Based in Power, not in the act of sex
- Often difficult to identify because survivors are ashamed to talk about it
- Frequently not identified as part of the abuse
- Sexual Assault Laws aren't uniform
- Can include a variety of acts including:
 - Forced touching
 - Forced Penetration with digits
 - Forced oral copulation
 - Use of alcohol or drugs to prevent resistance
 - Forced sex within marriage
 - Forced viewing of pornography
- Uncomfortable to discuss even among friends if at all
- Be aware of cross over legal issues (impact on family/dependency/ immigration or other cases)

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BARRIERS TO GETTING ASSISTANCE

- Not identifying sexual assault
- Cultural beliefs about sex and discussing sexuality
- Fear around immigration status being lost or found out
- Shame and Stigma
- Trauma of sexual assault as a tool of war
- Language and Cultural Access
- Fear of Authorities
- Not understanding their rights and options
- Survivors may participate in “criminal activity” themselves
 - Prostitution
 - Drug Use/Dealing
 - Shoplifting

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BUILDING CULTURAL CAPACITY THROUGH THE EMPOWERMENT MODEL

- Based on the principles in Feminist Philosophy that individuals are the experts in their own life experiences
- Particularly important when working with communities that may not be able to access more “mainstream” resources
- Build on community/survivor strengths and resources to identify options

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EMPOWERMENT MODEL

- Survivor as Expert
- Advocate for what the SURVIVOR says are her/his needs (Survivor's Agenda)
- Supportive, Non-Judgmental, Non-Directive (w/exceptions)
- Facilitate Survivor's Empowerment
- Build/Teach Tools, Identify Options, Support Decisions
- Use of Reflective Listening
- Use Responsible/Ethical Communication
- Maintain Healthy Boundaries with Survivor
- Maintain Confidentiality of Survivor

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DIRECTIVE VS. EMPOWERING

- Empowerment is shown to be most effective for long term healing
- Most service providers have a menu of services
- We are helpers and want to give the right answers
- Directive may be necessary in certain circumstances but not an effective tool for healing. Only to ensure safety in limited circumstances

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EMPOWERMENT MODEL TECHNIQUE

- Listen First
- Then Ask...
 - What Options has Survivor considered?
 - What has Survivor thought about?
 - What has worked in the past?
 - Who has been supportive?
 - What have they Already Tried?
- Offer Options (as choice)
- Explore Pros/Cons of Options
- Options vary based on different systems/experiences/culture of survivors/immigration status
- Support & Respect Survivor's Decisions/Choices

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POTENTIAL CULTURAL ASPECTS TO CONSIDER:

- How is Rape and Sex viewed with the community?
 - How is discussing interpersonal relationships viewed in the community?
 - How is discussing private matters outside of the home/community viewed?
 - What has the communities experience been like with “traditional” systems?
 - Respect for culturally-specific traditions, healing practices, and needs?
 - How does religion or faith community play a role in decision making?
 - Other cultural issues?
- 

PRIVATE COMMUNICATIONS ARE KEY

- All survivors have experienced a loss of power over their person
- Often during the process of disclosure their story isn't heard
- Even if all facts are portrayed accurately, the feelings and experiences of survivors may be the only power they maintain in the process

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION

- All information about the survivor, stated or inferred, belongs to them
- The role of the SA advocate is unique
- Strong policies around privileged communication support the empowerment of survivors
- The survivors decision to disclose information must be voluntary and free from pressure

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CONFIDENTIALITY AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

- Frequently disclose and seek assistance from community members without privacy protections
- Service providers ask family members and others to act as “interpreters”
- Advocates serve as “interpreters”
- Harm beyond what is seen by the provider
- ***COLLABORATION IS KEY!***

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SCREENING FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT

- Because of the shame associated with sexual assault it is important to build rapport with survivors
- It is critical that survivors **understand** all of their options and the range of potential outcomes of their decisions (i.e. What may happen when reported to the police? Are the civil legal remedies available?)
- Listen to the survivor and reflect words that she is using to describe her experience. Be aware of your own words and if they will translate well to the survivor.
- Be aware of potential cultural issues that may be presented-
- Be aware of your own cultural bias/assumptions about the person you are working with
- Check your own feelings about sexual assault and any of your own trauma

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HOW ARE YOU ASKING QUESTIONS?

- Often when asked about sexual assault survivors report that they have not been raped
- However, when questions are phrased in ways that describe behavior, identification of sexual assault increases.
- “Were you forced into intimacy with anyone?”
- “Did you ever feel like you were unable to refuse the advances of someone?”
- “Has anyone ever touched you in places that made you feel uncomfortable?”
- “Are there times when you’ve felt uncomfortable being intimate with anyone?”
- Taboos and shame associated with sex, talking about sexuality outside of the family, and the stigma and potential repercussions of rape all make sexual assault difficult to identify for survivors and their service providers.

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HYP0 #1 SONIA

Comes into legal service because her husband is filing for divorce and wants the children. She is undocumented, he is US citizen. She is afraid of losing her children and he has told her that she will be deported. She reports no physical abuse nor “emotional” abuse and asks for your help. He has family resources and a well paying job, she has family ties to her country of origin.

How do you help Sonia?

What types of questions would you ask to assess for sexual assault?

Full story:

While her husband has never been “physically” abusive to her, after a thorough assessment we were able to determine the following additional facts:

He forces her to sleep naked on the floor next to the bed each night.

He will come onto the floor and have sex with her whether or not she was sleeping.

He forces her to walk past his brother in the living room each night to retrieve a glass of water for him

He allows the brother and his friends to come in and have sex with her and collects money for it.

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HYP0 # 2 MARTA

Your organization provides services in an area where there is a large population of Migrant Farm Workers. Marta's husband is emotionally abusive to her yelling at her, calling her names and claiming she is cheating on him. She is very distracted and cries a lot, and her production has dropped. Marta's supervisor in the fields has told her that he will send her and her husband "back" if she doesn't "get it together".

How do you help Marta?

What types of questions would you ask to assess for sexual assault?

Full story:

Marta's supervisor has been forcing her to have sex with him and threatening she and her husband's deportation if she doesn't cooperate or tells anyone.

Marta's husband suspects she's "sneaking off" with a man, when in fact it's her supervisor.

Additional issues: Marta is a migrant farm worker and must follow her work. Her supervisor suspects that she may have sought help. He is moving her to another location.

Are there any organization policy changes you may need to make in order to assist her?

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CONCLUSION

- We must understand the global use of rape to understand the reality of rape experience for immigrant survivors
- While we have become accustomed to nuancing our questions related to domestic violence, we bring our own biases and cultural values around sex and sexual violence to our work
- Sexual Assault like Domestic Violence uses power as a tool, however, the very autonomy of the body of the survivor is challenged due to cultural and political beliefs about sex and women's sexuality
- Empowerment Model is key in working with Sexual Assault survivors generally, and specifically from varying cultural communities
- Ownership of stories and the privacy of survivors bodies are intertwined in the discussion
- We need to explore our own cultural values around individuals who have different cultures and religious than ours.

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