



## **ANALYTICAL FRAME WORK FOR ALIANZA**

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A SOCIETAL PROBLEM**

Domestic violence is a societal problem; it is not just a family problem or a problem of masculinity, but a structural issue in society. It violates a whole range of fundamental rights—human, civil, political, economic, social, and cultural, and has multiple and far-reaching consequences for whole families and communities. It affects people of all ages, racial, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds.

We live in a society that condones and glorifies various forms of violence. There is also an acceptance of violence and aggression as attributes of manhood both in this country and globally.

Although the primary victims of domestic violence are women and children, abuse and violence also occur in same-sex relationships, and some men are also vulnerable.

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LATINO COMMUNITIES**

Domestic violence is a serious and damaging problem for Latino communities throughout the United States, one that requires an honest look at a range of factors that perpetuate this violence within our communities, as well as outside our communities.

Domestic violence within Latino families occurs in a context of communities suffering from a legacy of multiple oppressions, some of which go back for centuries, both here and in our countries of origin. Among these oppressions are colonization, discrimination, racism, long-term poverty, and governmental oppression and violence.

Latino men who batter are influenced by oppressive patriarchal traditions and models of masculinity and manhood that are widespread in our cultures and in society. In addition, the multiple oppressions that many men in our communities experience intensify oppressive conduct in intimate relationships and complicate the change process for them.

### **CULTURALLY INAPPROPRIATE RESPONSES/INTERVENTIONS**

Over the years, the battered women's movement has come a long way in raising public awareness about the problem, in protecting women and children, and in holding batterers accountable—from shelters and nonresidential services for women and children to intervention by the criminal justice system and batterer intervention programs.

While these efforts have helped to protect and save lives, many programs fall short of meeting the multiple needs of a growing Latino population. Lack of access to many services remains a primary concern for survivors who face diverse challenges and barriers that hinder them from accessing the services they so desperately need.

In some instances, lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge among service providers about the cultural dynamics of the women and families they serve results in discrimination and exclusion from services, alienating and re-victimizing the very people they intend to assist and support. Services that are based on European American values and life experiences often act as a barrier to access even in the absence of direct exclusion or discrimination.

Safety is not necessarily to be found in separation, in sending women to shelters, men into jails or prisons, and children into the foster care system. The disconnection of men and women as the *first* step in the intervention process or as prerequisite for receiving domestic violence services is a culturally inappropriate intervention.

For Latinas, the emphasis on battered women's shelters as the primary means of achieving safety and support acts as a barrier and results in removing them and their children from potential systems of support, often subjecting them to insensitive and discriminatory treatment. While shelters have played an essential and often life-saving role, we need to expand the community based options and alternatives for Latina survivors.

We need to keep in mind that battering is not the only oppression that Latinas suffer. There are multiple external oppressions—lack of educational opportunities, job training or employment; drug and alcohol abuse; lack of adequate and affordable housing or child care services. While also struggling to find providers who speak Spanish and understand their culture, many battered Latinas have to contact multiple providers for emergency shelter, transitional housing, legal advocacy, assistance with immigration issues, employment training programs, mental health, and substance programs, and so on. Negotiating through multiple systems is a formidable barrier to accessing services and to change. It increases risk for victims of violence.

For Latino men who batter, the predominant response to domestic assaults—criminalization and arrest—disconnects them and enmeshes them even further in a system that they and their community mistrust. Furthermore, the criminal justice response to Latinos who physically abuse their families fails to consider/utilize loyalty toward family and the desire to honorably fulfill the role of husband and father as curative and preventative factors. It tends to further disconnect men and women.

## **DEVELOPING OUR OWN SOLUTIONS**

The disempowering legacy of oppression in Latino communities has limited our role in developing responses to domestic violence within our communities and caused our positive values and strengths to be largely overlooked in domestic violence programming.

Latino communities have struggled for a long time to survive and hold on to the positive values and strengths that are part of our histories, cultures, and traditions. Thus, while helping our families and communities to heal from domestic violence, we must at the same time develop our own solutions, integrating our gifts for healing and development. Tremendous potential exists within our communities to create truly transforming, structured methods and models that reflect who we are, and that are respectful of our traditions, our cultures, and our diversity.

Because of the magnitude of the problem and its far-reaching effects on our families and communities, we need the involvement of multiple sectors of our population. Families and members of our communities have crucial roles to play in preventing and ending domestic violence.

In that spirit, we affirm these principles as guidelines for our work:

- ▶ Women and men need to work together to prevent and end domestic violence and to jointly promote healing in our families and communities. We need to reestablish connection and healthy interdependence. To work separately is to divide and diminish our strength and to deprive ourselves of our mutual wisdom, knowledge and skills.
- ▶ Programs directed at Latino communities must acknowledge that family is at the center of our culture. For most of us, family and community are the foremost sources of identity and continuity. Family includes not only blood and marriage relations, but also enduring relations based on

*compadrazgo* and *comadrazgo*.<sup>1</sup> Our capacity to create extended relationships and to be bound by them is one of the gifts of survival and this is a resource that must be used and encouraged in interventions within our community. Family relationships can be a source of strength, help and healing.

- ▶ Comprehensive programming is essential in order to address the legacy and reality of multiple oppressions that affect women and men. Programming for both Latinas and Latinos should involve a systematic and culturally based effort to address issues such as poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, housing, child care as well as risk factors such as alcohol and drug abuse. We also need to acknowledge our history of resilience.
- ▶ Our communities need culturally based programming. This means that programs should reflect not only our language, but also the cultural strengths and the protective factors that exist in our communities.
- ▶ Culturally based approaches should also encourage a critical and honest look at *la cultura* –its positive as well as negative aspects. We need to look at elements of our culture that have been used to defend violence, to reinforce secrecy, and to allow abuse. We also need to acknowledge that many aspects of our culture, our traditions, and our beliefs can serve as protective factors; can provide guidance and positive influence.
- ▶ This calls for identifying and critiquing traditions and values that make women more vulnerable to abuse and that support men’s oppressive relationships with women, on the one hand, and for acknowledging and supporting practices and values that are protective and that model and support healthy and functional relationships between men and women. Failing to do so weakens domestic violence programming in our communities and minimizes the impact of such programs.
- ▶ Culturally appropriate programming should also take into account the diversity-within-diversity of “the Latino community.” Failure to respectfully embrace both our differences and commonalities places us at risk of division. We have many nationalities; we have race and class differences, internal racism, and privilege; we have mixed nationalities; we have gay and lesbian families; we have recent immigrants as well as those whose ancestors lived in North America prior to the founding of the United States; we have monolingual Spanish speakers, monolingual English speakers, bilingual Spanish/English speakers; as well as individuals and families whose mother tongue is one of the dozens of indigenous languages of this continent. We have different religious/spiritual beliefs and practices; we have people with disabilities; and we have young and old. Embracing our internal diversity challenges us to confront our own racism, homophobia, classism and other forms of internalized oppression and privilege.
- ▶ We need to develop systems of support for victims/survivors within our communities. Latina survivors need to be recognized as experts in meeting these challenges; they must be involved in program design and service delivery at all levels. Programs need to include services that will give survivors better options and opportunities for becoming independent and more able to create relationships and homes free from violence.
- ▶ Whereas we recognize that Latinos who batter are internal oppressors and victimizers who need to be held accountable (sometimes through the criminal justice system), it is important to develop and promote services and programs that help them to stabilize their lives and enhance their chances of remaining non-violent. We have to go beyond viewing them only as “perpetrators” as is often the case in mainstream domestic violence programming. They are not the “other”; they are part of our families and communities, men who need help being with women, elders and children. Healing from oppression and recovering positive aspects of our cultural traditions, men can find real balance in their lives, recapture a sense of belonging, and become productive

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<sup>1</sup> Enduring relationships created through godparenting, marriage relationships, or long-term intimate friendships.

members of their communities—nurturing fathers, good husbands/partners, role models for other men, and advocates for nonviolence.

- ▶ We strongly support enhanced domestic violence responses directed at men, such as culturally based prevention campaigns, well-thought-out cultural content in batterer intervention programs and an enriched post-conviction process. These measures are not meant to supplant accountability or the role of law enforcement in that process. It is rather to provide a continuum of support and services by reaching out to men in meaningful ways *prior* to arrest and to structure responses *after* arrest and conviction that enhance men's capacity to remain non-violent.
- ▶ Culturally-based prevention campaigns directed at men in our communities are essential. The criminal justice response impacts only the few men who are arrested. It does not promote an effective community dialogue among men that encourages them to connect with aspects of our cultural values and models of manhood that support respectful and egalitarian relationships. We believe it is extremely unwise to rely solely on the criminal justice system.
- ▶ Domestic violence efforts should enhance community. There should be coordinated community-wide anti-violence campaigns whose goal is to enhance protective resources for victims of violence and to enhance the community's capacity to restrain and educate physically abusive Latinos and others who are at risk of escalating in a similar manner. It is important to encourage comprehensive campaigns that (a) bring together separate agencies, disciplines, professions (including artists and performers, for example), and the private and public sectors, and (b) pool together segmented funding such as substance abuse, youth crime prevention, child protection and law enforcement monies to create family and youth-centered educational and preventive approaches to domestic violence. Failing to do so would maintain a fragmented approach that overlooks multiple oppressions and the protective strengths and resources of our cultures and communities.
- ▶ Programs should also take into account the importance of spirituality in our culture. There are many differences among Latinos, but regardless of particular religious beliefs, there is often a pervading sense of connection and of having a common belief in something greater than our individual selves. This is reflected in our profound emphasis on respect and on the essential value of every person. Domestic violence programs that fail to make room for spirituality that embraces (encourages) functional, respectful and egalitarian relationships in the process of healing and change miss an important source of support and strength for both victims/survivors and batterers.
- ▶ Latinos are the fastest growing population in our nation and 40 percent of our population is under the age of 18. Attending to the impact of domestic violence on our children is a critical priority for our community. Consequently, domestic violence programming should address the needs of children, the heart of our families. Whether as victims or witnesses of the violence perpetrated in their homes, children are deeply affected and suffer greatly. Reestablishing and supporting strong, nurturing and safe families is a fundamental need for children and offers the best opportunity for healing. Children's healing is supported by a strong cultural identity and by practitioners who understand the children's cultural background.
- ▶ We need to invite and support national Latino organizations and community based programs to address domestic violence issues within their children and youth programming. We also need to look at approaches such as mentoring programs that help to connect the different generations and pass on positive cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions. We need to involve youth in developing new and relevant approaches and programs that serve them.
- ▶ We need to partner and collaborate with allies in the domestic violence field who have shown they want to understand and respect our culture and with other systems and fields that need to interact in order to develop effective intervention and prevention strategies.

- ▶ We need to create greater awareness in our communities about the devastating effects and consequences of domestic violence and promote greater discourse among influential institutions, including universities, schools, churches, and the media.
- ▶ In order to develop culturally-based programming, we need a more in-depth and culturally relevant research about the elements that enter into the reality of abused women, children, and batterers among Latino populations. To date, the knowledge and thus the theories that guide policy and intervention have been developed primarily from what is known about Western societies. We need culturally competent research on domestic violence that gives us a greater understanding of both protective and risk factors that are significant for different Latino communities. This knowledge will help us to design and implement more effective prevention and intervention strategies and treatment programs in Latino communities. To this end, we need to encourage support for new Latino/researchers.

We need to close the gap that exists between applicability and relevance of research findings to the day-to-day programmatic work of service providers. This requires ongoing productive dialogue and a closer collaboration between researchers and community service providers and advocates that will result in research designs that are responsive to the needs and realities of Latino communities.

- ▶ We need to monitor both the positive and negative effects of domestic violence legislation and policies on our families and communities; increase our participation in formulating and promoting relevant and beneficial policies; and we need to ensure that adequate funding is allocated for services that serve our communities.

We offer this document with the hope that it will promote understanding, spur discussion and generate new solutions to domestic violence and other oppressions which trouble our communities. It represents our best understanding, our *conocimiento*, the wisdom of our communities, and expresses our faith in the sacredness of all relations and communities.