



The likelihood of Latino women to seek help in response to interpersonal victimization: An examination of individual, interpersonal and sociocultural influences

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ABSTRACT

Help-seeking is a process that is influenced by individual, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors. The current study examined these influences on the likelihood of seeking help (police, pressing charges, medical services, social services, and informal help) for interpersonal violence among a national sample of Latino women. Women living in high-density Latino neighborhoods in the USA were interviewed by phone in their preferred language. Women reporting being, on average, between “somewhat likely” and “very likely” to seek help should they experience interpersonal victimization. Sequential linear regression results indicated that individual (age, depression), interpersonal (having children, past victimization), and sociocultural factors (immigrant status, acculturation) were associated with the self-reported likelihood of seeking help for interpersonal violence. Having children was consistently related to a greater likelihood to seek all forms of help. Overall, women appear to respond to violence in ways that reflects their ecological context. Help-seeking is best understood within a multi-layered and dynamic context.

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Probabilidad de que las mujeres latinas busquen ayuda cuando sufren victimización interpersonal: análisis de las influencias individuales, interpersonales y socioculturales

RESUMEN

La búsqueda de ayuda es un proceso en el que influyen factores individuales, interpersonales y socioculturales. Este estudio analiza esta influencia en la probabilidad de buscar ayuda (policía, presentar cargos, servicios sanitarios o sociales y ayuda informal) en caso de violencia interpersonal en una muestra nacional de mujeres latinas. Se entrevistó telefónicamente en su idioma preferido a mujeres que viven en barrios latinos muy poblados de EE.UU. Sus respuestas fueron que la probabilidad media de pedir ayuda si experimentaran una victimización interpersonal estaría entre “algo” y “muy probable”. Los resultados de una regresión lineal secuencial indican que los factores individuales (edad, depresión), interpersonales (tener hijos, victimizaciones pasadas) y socioculturales (estatus de inmigrante, aculturación) se asociaban con la probabilidad manifestada por ellas de pedir ayuda en caso de violencia interpersonal. Tener hijos es la variable que guardaba una relación más estable con la probabilidad de pedir cualquier tipo de ayuda. En conjunto parece que las respuestas de las mujeres a la violencia reflejan su contexto ecológico. La búsqueda de ayuda se entiende mejor en un contexto dinámico de múltiples capas.

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Interpersonal violence continues at substantial levels and affects women of all racial/ethnic groups (Black et al., 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Women respond to victimization in myriad ways from defending themselves, avoiding the abuser, seeking social support and using formal resources such as mental health counseling, shelters, and the criminal justice system (Hamby, 2014). Help-seeking is a dynamic process including recognizing and defining the problem, deciding to seek help, and selecting support (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra, & Weintraub, 2005). These processes are influenced by individual, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors according to an ecological-based theoretical model (Liang et al., 2005). While research has identified patterns of help-seeking as well as individual influences, a recent review found that social and cultural influences on help-seeking have been understudied (McCart, Smith, & Sawyer, 2010). Moreover, the review also called for a more comprehensive understanding of interpersonal violence – one that extends beyond intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Given the unique historical and cultural profiles of Latinos (Bean & Tienda, 1987), as well as limited available research on the group, it is important to focus research on this racial/ethnic group. Extant research shows that Latino women are generally more reluctant to seek formal help for their victimizations than White women and face a number of barriers (Rizo & Macy, 2011). The current study therefore examines individual, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors related to the likelihood of help-seeking in response to a range of interpersonal victimizations among a national sample of Latino women.

Individual Influences on Help-Seeking

Individual factors tend to center on the cognitive processes, individual characteristics and resources, and coping styles associated with the help-seeking process (Liang et al., 2005). Variables such as self-worth, self-efficacy, self-consciousness, self-esteem, and locus of control have been examined in relationship to help-seeking (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Norris, Kaniasty, & Scheer, 1990; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996; Walsh, Blaustein, Knight, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2007). An ecological model of responses to intimate partner violence includes emotional strengths and limitations at the individual level (Dutton, 1996). Clearly, violence erodes mental well-being and has been shown to increase depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, anxiety, and dissociation (Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995; Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Cuevas, Sabina, & Picard, 2010; Golding, 1999; Kelly, 2010; Rodríguez et al., 2008). Emotional resources may be especially important for Latino women given that they experience more trauma-related symptoms related to domestic violence than non-Latino women (Edelson, Hokoda, & Ramos-Lira, 2007). Yet, other studies have found increased levels of service utilization when depression was present (Lipsky, Caetano, Field, & Bazargan, 2005; Norris et al., 1990; Nurius, Macy, Nwabuzor, & Holt, 2011). Assessing formal services may serve to increase mental health among Latino women (Cuevas, Bell, & Sabina, 2014), pointing to the interplay between these variables.

Interpersonal Influences on Help-Seeking

Interpersonal influence on help-seeking include the relationships women have with others in their lives including the support they can expect from others and, conversely, the prior negative experiences they have had with others that shape their definition of the problem, decision to seek help, and choice of help source (Liang et al., 2005). For example, treatment by police, staff, and other professionals as well as reactions of informal confidants can hinder or facilitate help-seeking (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Behnke, Ames, & Hancock; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Morrison, Luchok, Richter, & Parra-Medina, 2006; Reina, Lohman, & Maldonado, 2014). Another factor, which has been shown to influence help-seeking behaviors, is prior victimization (Sabina, Cuevas, &

Schally, 2012a). Those with prior victimization experiences are more likely to seek formal and informal help (Sabina et al., 2012a). This association falls in line with the survivor hypothesis – that women that experience elevated amounts of violence are more likely to enact various strategies to confront the violence (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Furthermore, children's welfare exerts a powerful influence on the help-seeking decisions of women. A Latino woman in a qualitative study shared "I only thought about my children... One thinks about their children first and what one has to do" (Acevedo, 2000, p. 263), signaling the pull that children have in women's decisions (Kelly, 2009). In another study women shared that children's exposure to violence was the most painful part of violence and caused them deep anguish (Kyriakakis, Dawson, & Edmond, 2012). Children's exposure to violence could precipitate help-seeking as women seek to protect their children. Ammar and colleagues (Ammar, Orloff, Dutton, & Aguilar Hass, 2005) found that children's exposure to violence significantly predicted immigrant Latinas calling the police in response to battering, which was the only one of four significant factors related to increased levels of reporting.

Sociocultural Influences on Help-Seeking

Most broadly, the social climate that allows or tolerates interpersonal violence complicates the help-seeking process (Barnett, 2000; Browning, 2002; Gracia & Tomas, 2014; Sugarman & Frankel, 1996). Specifically, sociocultural factors are concerned with the economic, political, and cultural context in which women experience victimization and undergoes the help-seeking process. These processes are shaped by gender, class, and culture (Liang et al., 2005). For example, economic resources such as income and employment may shape women's definitions of violence as well as available options. Economic resources may allow women to more easily classify behavior as unacceptable and give women more freedom to pursue options (Liang et al., 2005). Latino women in qualitative studies of help-seeking shared that financial considerations were part of their help-seeking decisions, especially when children were involved (Acevedo, 2000; Kelly, 2009). Over half of women in a sample of Latino women identified lack of money as an important barrier to obtaining services (Murdaugh, Hunt, Sowell, & Santana, 2004). Nonetheless, at least one study of Latino women found it was women with higher incomes who were more likely to stay in violent relationships, compared to women with lower incomes (Lacey, 2010).

Language barriers also influence the way women interact with the world around them. One of the most consistent barriers to help-seeking identified for Latino women is language (Rizo & Macy, 2011) as Spanish-speaking service providers are limited (Fitzgerald, 2003). In fact, it was the most commonly identified barrier to obtaining services for a sample of Latino women with 76% agreeing that not being able to speak English was an important reason for not getting help (Murdaugh et al., 2004). Latino women who spoke no English were significantly less likely to seek formal services than those who spoke some English or fluent English (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2009). However, data from a national sample of Latino women revealed that Latino women with Spanish language preference were equally likely to seek formal help for interpersonal victimization than those with English language preference. Nonetheless, Latino women with a Spanish language preference were less likely to seek informal help than Latino women with an English language preference (Sabina et al., 2012a).

Another aspect of sociocultural context that influences women's help-seeking decisions is immigrant status. Most studies found that immigrant status was associated with lower levels of formal help-seeking (Ingram, 2007; Rodríguez, Sheldon, Bauer, & Pérez-Stable, 2001; cf. Sabina et al., 2012a). Immigrant Latino women may have limited knowledge of formal service systems in the U.S., be unaware that services exist, have difficulty communicating in English, have small support networks, and/or prescribe to values which favor

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