



Latin@ Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence

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Emerging research is capturing the complex realities experienced by Latin@ children and youth exposed to domestic violence (DV). This factsheet presents research on the status of Latin@ children and youth in the United States, general facts on the prevalence and consequences of witnessing DV, unique factors that are present for Latin@ children and youth, and resiliency of Latin@ children and youth who witness DV.

Latin@ Children and Youth in the U.S.

- Nearly 1 in 4 children and youth under the age of 18 in the United States are Latin@ ^[29].
- Latin@ children and youth are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the US and by 2050 are expected to make up 1 in 3 youth in the United States ^[29].
- Many Latin@ children and youth live in mixed status families, that is in which one member of the family lacks the legal authorization to live and work in the United States ^[29].
- Although 90% of Latin@ children and youth are United States born citizens, about half have a parent who immigrated to the United States and 1 in 4 have a parent who is unauthorized ^[29].
- Latin@ children and youth's well-being is uniquely influenced by a political environment including for example anti-immigrant rhetoric and aggressive immigration policies ^[2] that undermines the safety, and stability of families.
- Latin@ children and youth are also disproportionality impacted by larger structural inequities (e.g., systemic discrimination, residential and school segregation) which puts them at higher risk for poorer social, educational, economic, and health outcomes ^[1, 13] as well as a greater number of adverse childhood experiences ^[35]. One ACE that Latin@ children and youth are commonly exposed to is domestic violence.

Esperanza United has chosen to use “@” in place of the masculine “o” when referring to people or things that are either gender neutral or both masculine and feminine in make-up. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that both men and women make to our communities.



Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence

- It is estimated that about 15.5 million children and youth are exposed to DV every year ^[26].
- A study examining over 1,500 police reports of DV in a Northeastern United States community found that 22% of Latin@ children and youth reported having witnessed DV in the past year ^[10].
- Exposure to DV can look differently for different families, children and youth may directly witness violence between their caregivers, they may hear it, or they may witness the aftermath, bruises, and other marks of abuse. Children and youth may even be asked to participate in the abuse of a parent (e.g., to report actions and whereabouts of a caregiver to the other caregiver) ^[14].

Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence

The negative effects of exposure to DV on children and youth has been well documented in research:

- Psychological, physical, and social consequences of exposure to DV are seen across ages, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds ^[15].
- Infants who witness DV have been found to show symptoms related to PTSD such as trouble sleeping, refusing to eat, and having trouble keeping food down ^[4].
- Preschool aged children exposed to DV may have lower self-esteem and poorer social skills ^[15]. Another study found that 46% of Latin@ preschool aged children who were exposed to DV also experienced PTSD symptoms such as reexperiencing the event (e.g. being upset at reminders of the event, repeating statements from the event, reenacting parts the event, etc.), and heightened arousal (e.g. increased irritability, startling easily, and having trouble sleeping, etc.) ^[20].
- School aged children who witness DV, are at an increased likelihood of developing maladaptive peer relations and experience greater difficulties in developing and maintaining friendships. They also have trouble concentrating in school and experience greater internalizing and externalizing symptoms than youth not exposed to DV ^[8, 15].
- Adolescents who witness abuse may act out in negative ways, boys may become more aggressive fighting with peers and parents, while girls are more likely to withdraw and experience depression. Furthermore, adolescents may engage in delinquent and risky behaviors, such as skipping school, and using alcohol or drugs ^[27, 15].



- Overall, children and youth exposed to DV are more likely to have poor social relationships ^[15], and they are at higher risk for experiencing post-traumatic stress, depression, poor emotional regulation, and negative impacts on brain development ^[4, 22, 27].

Increased Risk of DV in Adulthood

- Children and youth living in homes affected by DV are also at high risk for both future perpetration and victimization—that is, they are more likely to commit acts of DV or experience maltreatment in adulthood.
- A review of academic research found 16 distinct research studies that identified a link between childhood exposure to DV and perpetration of DV in adulthood ^[18].
- Research is unclear on exactly how childhood exposure to DV is related to outcomes such as experiencing DV in adulthood. However, some studies have shown that children and youth who grow up in homes characterized by IPV are more likely to develop accepting attitudes towards violence (e.g. viewing violence as a normal way a life and as a viable means of conflict resolution), which in turn increases risk for later dating violence perpetration ^[15, 23, 38].
- Additionally, research supports a mechanism of learned helplessness, whereby individuals who experience IPV during childhood develop a sense of powerlessness, passivity, and negative beliefs about their abilities to control or change a situation even when opportunities to do so become available to them. These learned behaviors and beliefs may in turn lead to an increased risk of experiencing IPV victimization in adulthood ^[33].

Impact of DV Exposure on Parent-Child Relationships

Researchers have found some evidence of the impact of DV on parent-child relationships:

- Caregivers directly receiving violence are likely to experience higher levels of stress and poorer mental health outcomes ^[16] which in turn has been found to impact caregiver's full potential to engage in effective parenting practices ^[22].
- DV exposure is also associated with diminished quality of caregiver-child relationships ^[9]. In addition, DV exposure in childhood predicted poor parent-child attachment with both mothers and fathers in adolescence ^[36].



- DV may create a context in which the abused parent's physical and emotional availability to the child is jeopardized ^[21]. This in turn undermines the child's sense of trust in the caregiver's capacity to provide support and protection ^[37, 32].

Structural Risk Factors to DV Exposure

It is important to understand DV and its effect on Latin@ children and youth's well-being within the context of the pervasive structural inequities in housing, education, employment, health care etc., that Latin@ and other minority communities of color continue to face.

- Due to discriminatory redlining, residential and school segregation practices Latin@ communities experience higher rates of poverty than non-Latin@ White groups (e.g. 4,695,000 Latin@ children and youth live in poverty compared to 3,930,000 non-Latin@ White children and youth which places them at higher risk for maltreatment ^[39, 30, 31].
- Insurance cost barriers, transportation challenges, and lack of culturally and linguistically competent resources limit Latin@ families ability to access and utilize quality medical and mental health care services ^[1, 13].
- In 2018 alone 374,100 Latin@ children and youth were uninsured making them the largest uninsured racial group in the U.S ^[3].
- Due to documentation status, many immigrant families do not have access to assistance programs such as food stamps or Medicaid ^[5].
- Fear of deportation may prevent utilization of DV support services as studies find that Latino youth are less inclined to call the police in cases of emergencies related to DV ^[34].
- A study examining determinants of trauma in children and youth who have been exposed to IPV found that poor neighborhood quality such as the presence of assaults and muggings, gangs, open drug use and dealing was a strong predictor of trauma symptoms for Latin@ children and youth^[6].

Resiliency in Latin@ Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence

Despite risk factors faced, Latin@ children and youth in the U.S. demonstrate several strengths:

- A meta-analytic review found that four constructs: self-regulation- the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve a desired goal, family support, school



support, and peer support were the most robust predictors of resilience among children and youth exposed to different forms of violence such as witnessing DV ^[40].

- Other important protective factors that contribute to resiliency among DV exposed children and youth, include building connections (e.g., mentoring), developing personal strengths - such as social competence (e.g., communication), and autonomy (e.g., adaptive distancing), and enhancing maternal monitoring among Latin@ youth ^[24].
- A study on DV and PTSD, found that the amount of social support to the mother, inclusive of friends, relatives, and religion, was a protective element for their children ^[11].
- A secure attachment to a non-violent parent or other significant caretaker has been cited consistently in the literature as an important protective factor in mitigating trauma and distress from DV ^[11, 28]. High self-esteem is a critical element underlying children's ability to develop successful coping strategies, and as a significant distinguishing factor between resilient and non-resilient adolescents ^[7, 25, 17].
- A study examining coping skills and acculturation (as measured by language use) among Latin@ youth exposed to violence found that youth acculturation was positively associated with active coping (i.e. acknowledging stressors, confronting stressors or emotions, problem solving, or help seeking) ^[12].
- Despite the detrimental consequences of exposure to IPV a substantial portion of children and youth exposed to domestic violence can overcome negative effects to their well-being. In a review of 118 research studies, authors found that ultimately 37% of youth did not go on to experience poorer outcomes after being exposed to domestic violence ^[19]. This promising finding underscores the need to identify the paths that lead to healing for Latin@ children and youth exposed to DV.

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