



**A call to action for
inclusive gender-based
violence services for
Black/Afro-Latin@s**



Acknowledgement

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We also want to acknowledge our Black Latina sisters who face the daily struggles in receiving adequate care. We hope that this report highlights strategies that bring forward racially and culturally inclusive services to better serve our Black Latin@ communities.

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Esperanza United has chosen to use “@” in place of the masculine “o” when referring to people 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 people of all genders make to our communities.



A call to action for inclusive gender-based violence services for Black/Afro-Latin@s

Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network) adds our voices to the call for attention to Black Latin@ experiences of gender-based violence. As advocates, researchers, and practitioners, we acknowledge the need for linguistic, culturally and racially inclusive gender-based violence services in the Latin@ community and recommend approaches for building on these services to better represent Black Latin@s. For the purpose of this report we will be using Afro-Latin@ as an umbrella term for Latin@s with African ancestry.

Who are Afro-Latin@s?

“From North America to the Southern Cone, the concept of Afro-Latinidad in the Americas continues to stir deep emotional responses while inspiring local, national, and international movements for racial justice and equality.”

- Women Warriors of the Afro Latin@ Diaspora

Afro-Latin@s, or Latin@s with African ancestry, make up large portions of society in both Latin American & Caribbean countries and the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2014; Manuel 2019) but are largely under-serviced in the field of gender-based violence (GBV) (Parker, 2020; Freire et al. 2018; Montalvo 2005). This report examines why this is the case and presents promising practices and suggestions towards building more inclusive services.

An important step towards building inclusive services for Afro-Latin@s is acknowledging their needs as distinct from other Latin@s and cultural groups. Afro-Latinidad is complex because it encompasses both Blackness as a racial identity and Latinidad as an ethnicity, terms which have historically been represented as mutually exclusive. Afro-Latin@s often do not identify with either term Afro or Latin@ on its own and sometimes they do not identify with Afro-Latin@ as a compound term. They might choose to call themselves Afro-descendent, Black Latin@, Afro-Caribbean, Afro- (country of origin), or multicultural (Vega et al. 2012; Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010; Pew Research Center 2016). Similarly, Afro-Latin@s sometimes do not resonate with the term Latinidad which is often used as a white-facing transnational identifier, and prefer the term Afro-Latinidad as a cultural identifier (Vega et al. 2012; Jimenez-Roman and Flores 2010; Red de Mujeres

Afro-descendants in Latin America

In thousands

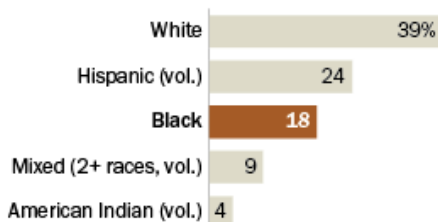


Note: Estimates for the Dominican Republic include the term "indio" and estimates for Venezuela include the term "moreno" as afro-descendant.

Source: For Mexico: 2015 data from Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI. For all other countries: Edward Telles and the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), "Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America" (2014).

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How U.S. Afro-Latinos report their race



Note: Races are based on any mentions of Hispanic, white, black, Asian, and American Indian as single race or multiple-race responses and are not mutually exclusive.

"Mixed race" includes those who volunteered that they were "mixed race" or gave any two responses (including "Some other race" without specifying which race or volunteering "Hispanic" or "Latino" or a Hispanic origin as their race.

Other races and "Don't know/Refused" are not shown. Source: National Survey of Latinos, conducted Sept. 11-Oct. 9, 2014 (N=1,520 Hispanic adults)

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López, G. and Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2016). Afro-Latino: A deeply rooted identity among U.S. Hispanics. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/01/afro-latino-a-deeply-rooted-identity-among-u-s-hispanics/>

Afrolatinoamericana, Afrocaribeña y de la Diáspora). As we work towards building more inclusive GBV services, it is essential to listen and respond to what Afro-Latin@s call themselves and how they perceive their identity outside of white constructs.

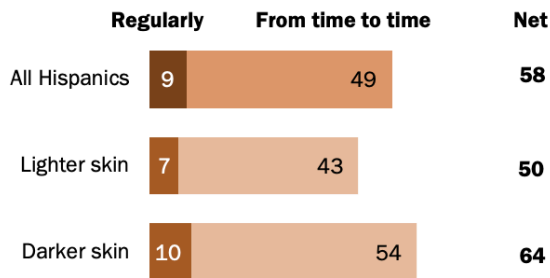
Representations of Latinidad as white-facing is a symptom of colorism, or prejudice towards individuals with darker skin tones. This prejudice can be seen in all parts of the world, including Latin America and the United States, and has origins rooted in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade of the early colonization period, also known as the African Diaspora (Vega et al. 2012). It is a common misconception that the majority of slaves were sent to the United States during this period (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy African Diaspora Program 2007). According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, of the 12 million Africans forcibly taken to the Americas, the majority of slaves (91%) went to Latin America and the Caribbean while only a small portion went to the United States.

In the first nationally representative U.S. survey where Latino adults were asked whether they considered themselves Afro-Latino, about one quarter (24%) of U.S. Latinos self-identified as Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-(country of origin), while 18% identified their race or one of their races as Black (Pew Research Center, 2016). Larger portions of Afro-Latinos (39%) identified as white alone or white in combination of another race. The results of this survey suggest that when it comes to race, there was a preference among Afro-Latinos to emphasize white aspects of their identity, even if they also identify as Afro-Latino. Afro-Latin@s individuals commonly express that they feel excluded from Black or Latin@ communities, sometimes both. Colorism can explain, in part, the lack of support and acceptance in the broader Latin@ communities where long-standing prejudice exists against darker skin tones. The unique sociopolitical experiences of Afro-Latin@s in the United States have important implications for GBV practice.

The colorism that Afro-Latin@s face, as a result of an unconscious centering of whiteness (anti-Blackness) in Latin American and U.S. societies, leaves them reluctant to enter spaces where they will experience these harmful biases. Afro-Latin@s, like Latin@s in the United States as a whole, are less likely to turn to established domestic violence organizations when they face a crisis. It is a commonly shared feeling among some Afro-Latin@s that neither a Latin@ domestic violence organization that is ethnically focused nor a Black domestic violence organization that is racially focused can adequately meet their

Experiences with discrimination more common for Hispanics with darker skin

% of Hispanics who say they have personally experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity



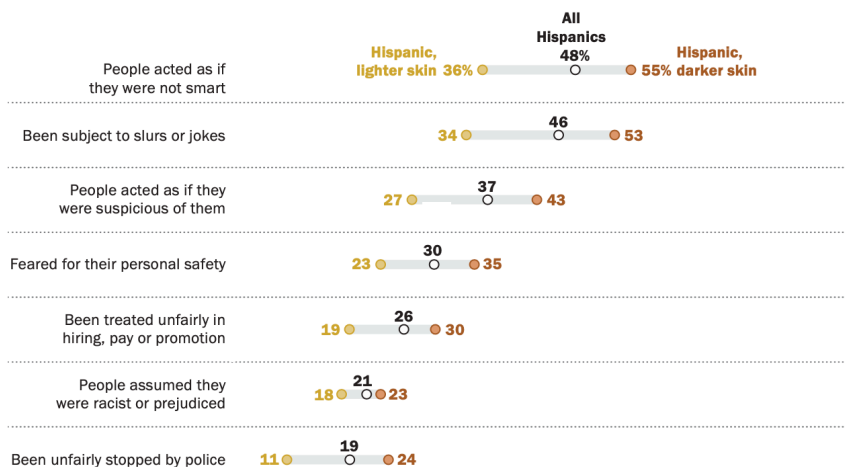
Note: Hispanics are of any race. For more on methodology, see text box, "How we asked about skin color in the survey."

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019.

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Hispanic experiences with discrimination can differ depending on skin color

% of each group saying each of the following has happened to them because of their race or ethnicity



Note: Hispanics are of any race. For more on methodology, see text box, "How we asked about skin color in the survey."
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019.

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Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2020). Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan 22-Feb 25 2019. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/02/hispanics-with-darker-skin-are-more-likely-to-experience-discrimination-than-those-with-lighter-skin/>

multidimensional needs. Herein lies the opportunity for advocates and decision makers to address Afro-Latin@ GBV needs in a more holistic way that is both racially and culturally attentive.

Experience of an Afro-Latin@ advocate

In order to meet the cultural and racial needs of Afro-Latin@s, it is important that GBV organizations prioritize models that center anti-discriminatory practices. Afro-Latin@s encountering domestic or sexual violence oftentimes do not seek institutional help due to the anti-black discrimination they encounter. Afro-Latin@s of all complexions face anti-blackness in distinct ways however, the effects of this discrimination are most clearly represented among darker-skinned Afro-Latin@s. For example, Afro-Latin@s with darker skin might choose domestic violence services that cater to Black women

to avoid the racial discrimination they expect to encounter from Latin@ organizations. A report by the Pew Research Center found that two-thirds (64%) of Latin@s with a darker skin tone experienced discrimination and were more likely to experience discrimination compared with half of those with a lighter skin tone (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2020). In this same report, 55% of darker skinned Latin@s perceived that people treated them as if they were not smart because of their race or ethnicity as compared to 36% of lighter skin color Latin@s. The discrimination Afro-Latin@ survivors and advocates encounter in shelters is a barrier from experiencing the potential benefits of services.

Discrimination is frequently experienced by Afro-Latin@s in domestic violence shelters, even among advocates. Yvette Modestin, an advocate working in shelters and hospitals, reflected on her own experiences as an Afro-Latin@ in her essay 'The Whispers of the Ancestors: Development of a Black Proud, Panamanian Voice':

"Many of my clients were immigrants whose needs the system was not set up to deal with. I found myself doing more court and housing advocacy because the stigma they experienced as battered women, immigrants, and women of color. There was no proper translation or explanation of the available resources."

-Yvette Modestin

Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora



Marta Moreno Vega • Marinieves Alba • Yvette Modestin

Modestin's experience as a shelter advocate highlights the need for increased awareness of racial bias among shelter staff and survivors. Even subtle, unintentional discrimination can create barriers to the delivery of quality services and exacerbate existing stressors.

“When I entered these settings, before I was able to identify myself as an advocate, the staff also acted negatively towards me with a dismissive and judgmental attitude. Some of it had to do with the color of skin, but also with the preconceived notions placed on families of color who seek government assistance. This allowed me to better understand my clients' experiences.”

-Yvette Modestin

Modestin's essay can be found in the book, *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latin@ Diaspora* (Arte Publico Press, 2012). As we move toward providing improved, comprehensive GBV services for Afro-Latin@s, developing practices that expand culturally specific services to be racially inclusive will be of utmost importance.

“It is important to understand that the Afro-Latina experience is shaped by race which at times is in conflict with her cultural identity. Her Blackness is not diluted through language”

-Yvette Modestin

Promising practices on-the-ground

“We cannot wait to address gender violence until after we address racism and genocide, because it has been through gender violence that racism and genocide has been successful”

-Incite! Women of Color Against Violence

While culturally specific services are founded and grounded in the ethnically diverse communities they serve, they often lack racially inclusive representation and strategies vital to servicing Afro-Latin@s. The work Afro-Latin@ activists perform on the ground provides helpful insights in tailoring domestic violence service fit for holistic inclusion.

Community accountability

One New York-based Afro-Latin@ organization, Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, advocates for community-based strategies to address sexual violence. With an emphasis on ending police and sexual violence against Black Latin@s, this group uses a community accountability model as their organizing framework. Their model aims to achieve the following:

- Develop sustainable strategies to address community members' abusive behavior
- Transform political conditions
- Provide safety and support to survivors of violence in a way that also respects self-determination

This community accountability model from Incite! Women of Color Against Violence's toolkit can provide a starting point for developing racially inclusive responses and safety planning models that center Afro-Latin@ voices. State violence is an intersecting form of oppression for Afro-Latin@s, so advocates should consider the survivor's voice and reality when calling on the criminal justice system to seek support. Biases towards Black and brown communities have deep roots in the criminal justice system, and Afro-Latin@ survivors who already feel unsafe at home may not want to seek support from the criminal justice system as it could lead to potentially additional harm. Afro-Latina women in these moments

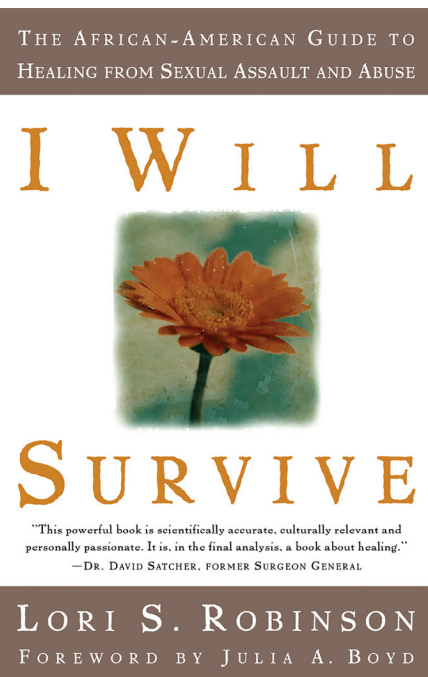


Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. (n.d.). Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color & Trans People of Color; An Organizer's Resource & Toolkit p.69

are on the receiving end of negative stereotypes that Black women regularly encounter. Advocates have an opportunity to better cater to Afro-Latin@s by creating safety plans that include a community, organizational, and systems response if appropriate. It is important for domestic violence organizations to devote equal attention to linguistically, culturally, and racially responsive support and interventions.

Restorative story-sharing

One promising framework to consider incorporating in shelters is Restorative Narrative, a strength-based approach developed by New York-based media nonprofit Ivoh, that aims to foster empathy in the media and share the deeper stories of people experiencing adversity. Ivoh published an article in 2017 highlighting the resilience of one Black journalist and rape survivor, Lori Robinson, entitled "How one journalist is on a mission to tell stories of healing in Black communities around the world". In this article, Robinson



shares about her experience with sexual violence, referencing her book, *I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse* (Seal Press, 2002). In Ivoh's article she shares:

"I think it's so important to tell stories of healing, of restoration, of inspiration, of moving forward. Both to provide people practical information that can help them with their lives, but also for our emotional and spiritual well-being individually and collectively."

-Lori Robinson

Robinson is the founder of Vida AfroLatina, an organization with a mission to "connect diverse resources, including philanthropic funding and capacity support, with Black women's groups in Latin America, with a specific focus on organizations that provide healing services for sexual violence survivors and that create and lead systemic change to end sexual violence."

Workshops and personal practices

Afro-Latin@ activists often offer workshops that align with the personal practices they use to heal from trauma. Healing sometimes takes the form of spiritual practices, writing, performing arts, political activism, lineage tracing, historical education, public policy, organizing, and teaching. Community workshops are a promising healing tool across many Afro-Latin@ organizations and often include anti-Blackness education, conflict resolution, cultural competency, colonial trauma, unmasking unconscious bias, and art therapy. Domestic violence shelters can create more welcoming spaces for Afro-Latin@s by encouraging free expression, and by incorporating healing workshops that dismantle anti-Black biases.

In their "Unmasking identity" trainings, Encuentro Diaspora Afro, a community organization in Boston, challenges attendees to address the question, "How do you identify racially and how do you think others see you?" This question is often challenging to answer for those who associate Latinidad, an ethnic identifying term, with their racial identity. The work then becomes both an internal and external conversation that leads to healing and a deeper understanding of anti-Blackness and Black identity.



Future steps: Inclusive services for Afro-Latin@s

Esperanza United recommends the following to GBV advocates and decision makers:

- 1. Acknowledge that anti-Black racism has contributed to the exclusion of AfroLatin@s**
 - Recognize that anti-Black racism is felt by Afro-Latin@s in distinct ways both locally in the United States and globally in their home countries and this is a significant barrier in seeking domestic violence services.
 - Incorporate workshops for Latin@ staff and participants to examine their own internalized racism and understand how colorism in the community fuels anti-Blackness.
 - Provide healing opportunities for Latin@ staff and participants to acknowledge, identify, and embrace their African heritage and strategize how to improve racial representation.
- 2. Build holistic and inclusive GBV services**
 - Analyze GBV prevalence and factors among Afro-Latin@s to develop effective interventions.
 - Fund Afro-Latin@ grassroots organizations that are on the forefront of political organizing to develop their research capacity.
 - Encourage collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and anti-violence stakeholders to develop holistic services and intersectional frameworks that center Afro-Latin@s.
- 3. Expand the culturally specific demographic to include Afro-Latin@s**
 - Dialogue with members of your organization and Afro-Latin@s activists to determine if and how you can provide quality service delivery for Afro-Latin@s.
 - Consider expanding the advocacy demographic to include Afro-Latin@s/Black Latin@s by recognizing the group as distinct among Latin@s.
 - Equip advocates to address Afro-Latin@ needs using racially, linguistically, and culturally responsive strategies.



Esperanza United calls for action to build inclusive gender-based violence services for Afro-Latin@s/Black Latin@s.

Our bodies
have been bridges.
We are the sons
and daughters,
el destino de mi gente,
black
brown
beautiful.
Viviremos para siempre
Afro-Latinos
hasta la muerte.

-Lines from Elizabeth Acevedo's poem "Afro Latin@"

Relevant Terms

The following are definitions of terms used in this report.

Afro-Latin@ - A general identifying term for Latin@s with any amount of African ancestry in juxtaposition with “Black Latin@s” which is a term commonly used to identify darker-skinned Afro-Latin@s. According to *The AfroLatin@ Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010), “the term ‘Afro-Latin@’ as applied to people in the United States emerged in the early 1990’s when it became clear that race matters in the Latin@ community and that these racial realities make it a grave distortion to think of Latin@s as a monolithic group”. For more information on the term Afro-Latin@, refer to *The AfroLatin@ Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010).

Afro-Latinidad - Defined by Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribenas y la Diaspora en Guatemala (RMAAD) as the combination of race and ethnicity, Afro-Latinidad is inclusive of a range of skin complexions, unlike Latinidad which is often represented as a white-facing ethnic identifier. This definition is complex because it encompasses both Blackness as a racial identity and Latinidad as an ethnicity, terms which have historically been represented as mutually exclusive

Anti-Blackness - Defined by RMAAD Diaspora as a lack of empathy, humanity, opposition and violence towards Black people or blackness.

Colorism - Defined by RMAAD Diaspora as embracing those of lighter complexion more than those of darker complexion within a group of people. LatinoLEAD defines colorism as prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group

Culturally Specific - The term “culturally specific” means primarily directed toward racial and ethnic minority groups (as defined in section 1707(g) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 300-u-6(g)). Culturally specific services means community-based services that are founded by and for the racially and ethnically diverse communities which they serve. They offer culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate services and resources that are grounded in cultural values specific to the culturally specific communities they serve.

Gender-based violence (GBV) - Gender-based violence is used as an umbrella term to cover domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and violence against women. In this report we use GBV as the use of violence to breach the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, dignity, equality between people, non-discrimination, and physical and mental integrity.

Domestic violence - A pattern of abusive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners. Domestic violence is not an isolated, individual event, but rather a pattern of multiple tactics and repeated events. Additionally, domestic violence can happen to anyone of any age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, religion, education level, or socioeconomic background; regardless of whether couples are married, living together, dating, or hooking up. For more information, go to [Ujima, Inc.: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community](#) and [Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence](#) for their definitions.

Racially Inclusive - Racially inclusivity is about ensuring representation of the communities served and broader marginalized communities in all aspects of work. This looks different for each organization. For us, that means looking at our mission, who we are, our service

area, and how we can better serve our community. Given that we are a Latin@ organization and our staff is predominantly Latin@, we work to ensure that we reflect our community ethnically and racially and use a co-advocacy approach, which is outlined in the Latin@ advocacy framework.

We also recognize that we have a commitment to serve all communities in our area, i.e. Hmong, Somali, Karen, African American, and as such, we have built strong, long-time partnerships to ensure that we are racially inclusive, culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate.

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