

More Domestic Violence Awareness Needed in Hispanic Community



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

Whether directly or indirectly, domestic violence affects us all. My office recently sponsored a study by the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV). According to their research, three quarters of all Texans report that they, a family member, friend, or co-worker have experienced some form of domestic violence.

The study focused particularly on Hispanic families in Texas, to determine what special issues that group might have. The study found that unique barriers affect this community.

Isolation. It is a common tactic for abusers to isolate their victims, but in the Hispanic community, the victim's isolation may be intensified by a language barrier. In addition, recent immigrants may be far from a family network that could help support them.

Fear. Another common tactic of abusers is the use of threats to keep the victim from getting help. Among families of immigrants, abusers may use the threat of deportation. For the victim, this could mean separation from the victim's children.

Shame. Hispanic culture places great value in maintaining family integrity. While this a wonderful cultural value, it can mean that the victim of domestic violence will remain in the

family at great cost. In some cases, it could be at the cost of the victim's very life.

Lack of awareness. The study indicated that Hispanic victims, even more than other groups, tend to be unaware that resources exist to help them escape and rebuild their lives. They may be unaware, for example, that information and assistance is available in Spanish as well as English.

It is not just the Hispanic community that lacks awareness, however. The study found that Texans in general were susceptible to out-dated ideas and assumptions. For example, many still tend to blame the victim for not simply leaving an abusive situation. Many still do not understand how extremely dangerous it can be when a victim tries to escape.

Today, domestic violence programs in Texas have the resources to serve only a small portion of our state's domestic violence victims. Local shelters need our support. We need to build a Texas community that will not tolerate abuse in its families.

The TCFV study showed that 40 percent of all Hispanic Texans who suffered or knew about domestic violence took no action to get help. Our first and foremost message to these victims and family members must be: We are here to assist you!

Victims of domestic violence may qualify for assistance from my office under the Crime Victims' Compensation Program. Benefits, which are paid for entirely by court costs and fines collected

from criminals, may include relocation costs and loss of support for dependent children of the victim.

All of our agency's program information, in both printed form and on the Web at www.oag.state.tx.us, are available in both English and Spanish. Spanish-speaking operators are also available on all of our telephone lines.

I encourage you to educate yourselves on the issues that surround domestic violence. We must not remain silent when we suffer or witness abuse.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-7233

Domestic Violence Prevention
(800) 876-4808
(24 hours/day)

NOVA
National Organization
for Victim Assistance
(800) TRY-NOVA (24 hours/day)

National Center for Victims of Crime
(800) FYI-CALL
(8:30 am- 8:30 pm EST)

Family Violence Legal Line
(800) 374-4673
(Recording announces
operating hours)

Crime Victims' Compensation
Office of the Attorney General
(800) 983-9933



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Information on this and other topics is available on the
Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.