DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

Robert Le
Outreach and Prevention Coordinator, Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (ATASK)
Who Are You?
Why we need this training

- 15% of MA residents foreign-born, and 1 in 4 is an immigrant or a child of an immigrant

- Approximately 400,000 immigrant women in MA. Of these, 100,000 estimated abused

- A 2002 Harvard School of Public Health report found people born outside U.S. 3 times more likely to die in DV homicide than U.S. born

- Immigration creates additional barriers; often we are survivors’ only window to hope
What does it mean to be culturally competent?

- The ability... to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different from that of the dominant or “mainstream” society.

- A culturally competent system of care acknowledges and incorporates the importance of culture at all levels, policy, administration, practitioner, and consumer.

What is the problem?
Barriers to seeking help

- Language
- Immigration status
- Social isolation
- Loss of socio-economic status, financial dependence
- Racism
- Lack of understanding of legal rights, system, laws
- Traditional beliefs
- Changing gender roles
- Intergenerational conflicts
- Lack of culturally competent social services
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- History of trauma with authority (police, military)
Power and Control

Mainstream vs Immigrant Wheels
POWER AND CONTROL

VIOLENCE

physical

MALE PRIVILEGE:
Treating her like a servant; making all the big decisions, acting like the “master of the castle,” being the one to define men’s and women’s roles.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE:

ECONOMIC ABUSE:
Preventing her from getting or keeping a job. Making her ask for money. Giving her an allowance. Taking her money. Not letting her know about or have access to family income.

ISOLATION:
Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, and where she goes. Limiting her outside involvement. Using jealousy to justify actions.

USING CHILDREN:
Making her feel guilty about the children. Using the children to relay messages. Using visitation to harass her. Threatening to take the children away.

MINIMIZING, DENYING, AND BLAMING:
Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously. Saying the abuse didn’t happen. Shifting responsibility for abusive behavior. Saying she caused it.

physical

COERCION AND THREATS:
Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her. Threatening to leave her, commit suicide, or report her to welfare. Making her drop charges. Making her do illegal things.

INTIMIDATION:

sexual

sexual
Power and Control

(Immigrant Women)

- **Physica l Abuse**
  - Isolation
  - Emotional Abuse
  - Economic Abuse
  - Sexual Abuse
  - Threats
  - Using Children

- **Using Citizenship or Residency Privilege**
  - Failing to file papers to legalize her immigration status, withdrawing or threatening to withdraw papers filed for her residency.

- **Intimidation**
  - Hiding or destroying important papers (i.e., passport, ID cards, health care card, etc.)
  - Destroying her only property from her country of origin.

- **Isolation**
  - Isolating her from friends, family, or anyone who speaks her language.
  - Not allowing her to learn English.

- **Emotional Abuse**
  - Lying about her immigration status.
  - Writing her family lies about her.
  - Calling her racist names.

- **Economic Abuse**
  - Threatening to report her if she works "under the table." Not letting her get job training or schooling.

- **Sexual Abuse**
  - Calling her a prostitute or "mail order bride."
  - Alleging she has a history of prostitution on legal papers.

- **Using a weapon against her**

- **Threatening to report her to the INS to get her deported.**

- **Threatening to withdraw the petition to legalize her immigration status.**

- **Threatening to take her children away from the U.S.**

- **Threatening to report her children to the INS.**
Survivor Excerpts

I don’t have family here. I had some friends but he didn’t let me see them. I was totally dependant on him. I had no choice but to stay...

Marriage is sacred in my community. That’s why I felt so bad that my marriage fell apart. Back home, you don’t get married again. First marriage is the last...

I am undocumented. It was very hard because I did not have my papers. I couldn’t find a job...

I needed my immigration status so I can legally stay, hold on to my kids, go to school, and get a job...
Talking about ‘It’

- I was thrown out of my house.
- It hurts down there.
- My in-laws are scary.
- The police called us.
What we have learned

- No blaming or judging
- Be patient
- Listen actively
- Step out of comfort zone
- Be clear and avoid technical jargon
- Repeat and rephrase
- Never make assumptions
- Anticipate multiple needs

- Recommend approaches congruent with client’s values
- Speak to client alone
- Do not use family members for translation
- Learn about immigrant specific topics like VAWA, U-Visas
- Get to know resources and referral lists
Key documents

- Passport/visa/other documentation of immigration status for client, children and, if possible, abuser;
- Medical/vaccination records;
- Work authorization card, paycheck stubs;
- Marriage license and/or divorce decree;
- Photographs;
- Social Security Cards;
- Food Stamp Cards;
- Birth Certificates, School Records, and Custody Orders
Documents to Take When You Leave

- Social Security Card
- Insurance Card
- State Driver’s License or ID
- Passport
- Marriage License
- Birth Certificates of your children

Other Items You Should Take

- Medications
- Keys to home and car
- Money
- Pictures of family or abuse
- Clothes
Safety At Home

Call **911** in an Emergency

Have an escape plan a room with windows or doors

Don’t go into rooms without exits or that have weapons

Talk with your children about how they can get help

Tell a friend and ask if they will call the police if they hear noise at your house

Visual Safety Plan—English Version
Be Prepared

Meet with a worker to help safety plan and get resources

Keep copies of documents and some clothing with a friend

Tell your children’s school, your work and/or landlord

Keep proof of the abuse (photographs, documentation, etc.)
CONTACT US!

- ATASK
- Hotline: 617.338.2355
- Lowell: 978.454.3651
- Boston: 617.338.2350
- www.atask.org
- asiandv@atask.org