

# Latin-American immigrants 'social climate' is more tolerant to intimate partner violence

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Latin-American immigrants 'social climate' is more tolerant to intimate partner violence. Credit: Olmo Calvo (Sinc)

Spanish researchers have conducted studies to find out if there are any differences between Latin American immigrants and Spaniards who

have been convicted of violence against women, with regard to their attitudes toward, among other things, aggression and the risk of re-offending. The results show significant disparities in their perceptions of the severity of the crime, its acceptance and victim blaming. However, Latin American and Spanish men respond to batterer intervention programmes in the same way.

In Spain, [intimate partner violence against women](#) is a significant social and public health issue. According to data from the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, between 1 January 2003 and 28 February 2015, there were 770 fatal incidents of gender-based violence. Furthermore, a third of the female victims were immigrants and around 25% of those convicted of gender-based violence crimes were not born in Spain.

Numerous studies have been carried out which indicate rates of intimate partner violence against women are higher among Latin American immigrants than Spanish natives.

A recent study carried out by the University of Valencia (UV) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) analysed the differences between male Latin American immigrants and Spaniards convicted of violence against women with regard to their attitudes towards violence, attribution of responsibility, sexism and risk of re-offending at the beginning of a batterer intervention programme. They interviewed 278 men that had completed the programme for domestic violence convicts (211 Spaniards and 67 Latin American immigrants).

"Our results indicate that before the intervention programme started, Spanish and Latin American immigrant aggressors perceived the severity of intimate partner violence differently. The latter group considered some situations involving intimate partner violence to be less severe," Marisol Lila, from the Social Psychology Department of the UV and co-

author of the study published in the journal *Psychosocial Intervention*, told SINC.

In addition to the differences in severity perception, the study indicates that the sample showed differences in age, level of education and salary, factors which were controlled through statistical analysis.

"The Latin American immigrants, in comparison with the Spaniards, were younger, had a higher level of education and a lower socioeconomic status. Additionally, their perception of intimate partner violence against women seemed less severe, they blamed the victim more, were more accepting towards aggression and registered higher levels of benevolent sexism," added Lila. In contrast, no significant differences were found in hostile sexism, attribution of responsibility or risk of re-offending.

These data imply that there is a social climate of acceptance among the Latin American immigrant population as they are more tolerant towards violence, tend to blame the female victims, and consider cases of intimate partner violence against women to be less severe. This, therefore, goes some way to explaining the higher rates of intimate partner violence among Spain's Latin American population.

## **Intervention is equally effective for both groups**

Despite the differences between the Latin American and Spanish aggressors at the beginning of the intervention programme, both groups showed positive signs of change in the majority of the factors evaluated when they had completed the initiative.

"The overall sample shows an increase in severity perception of intimate [partner violence](#) and a reduction in factors that legitimise it, such as blaming the victim and sexism (both hostile and benevolent)," the

researcher pointed out.

These results suggest the programme is equally effective with regard to perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and the risk of re-offending for both groups of aggressors, confirming the conclusions obtained from previous studies - from both Spain and the USA - in which no differences in the intervention's effectiveness on culturally diverse groups was found.

"We have come to the conclusion that the programme is effective for both cultural groups despite their initial differences and, therefore, there is no need to adapt it specifically to Latin American immigrant aggressors or split them up into groups according to their origin," Lila stressed.

## **Nine-month programme for batterers**

The intervention programme for gender-based violence aggressors lasts approximately nine months and consists of weekly group sessions. The various activities focus on the factors that, according to scientific researchers, play an important role in the violent conduct of men who assault their partners.

It is based on the social ecological model; in other words, various levels of analysis and intervention are taken into consideration: personal, interpersonal, social and macrosocial. Therefore, all the activities are related to one of these levels.

"So examples of what we work on are, among other things, accepting responsibility, emotional control skills, self-esteem, anger and stress management, the relationship between partners and between parents and children, social support, gender roles and social attitudes towards [intimate partner violence](#)," Lila explained.

Furthermore, since 2011 a new intervention protocol has been implemented, which includes a personalised motivation plan that aims to promote change and the therapeutic relationship to further increase the programme's effectiveness.

"In general, men that assault their partners use a series of mechanisms that enable them to manipulate their feeling of guilt and justify what they have done. One of these mechanisms is to externalise their guilt, either to the law, the context of the moment, or the victim, arguing, for example, that it was her conduct that incited the violence. We are unable to define the victims by one collective or another from the available data," concluded the scientist.

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