

# INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE & IMMIGRANT WOMEN



## OVERVIEW

Under the new administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are increasingly using legal processes to find and deport undocumented individuals. This exacerbates a culture of fear and mistrust between undocumented immigrants and the government. Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo disclosed that the number of Latinx individuals reporting sexual assault in Houston is down 42.8 percent from last year, and those reporting other violent crimes has registered a 13 percent drop. For undocumented survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the U.S., this backdrop of rising deportation fears leaves them with an impossible choice: to report their abuse and risk arrest or continue to live in a violent household. As a result, undocumented immigrant women are dropping their domestic violence charges to avoid deportation.

## IMMIGRATION AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Immigration adds another layer to the complicated, expensive, and emotional process of escaping a domestically abusive environment. Perpetrators of domestic abuse use the undocumented status of their partner as a means of control. IPV survivor Julieta Garibay immigrated to the United States from Mexico at the age of 12. When she got married to a U.S. citizen in 2010, her husband emotionally abused her and threatened to withhold petitioning for her legal status. At least 41 percent of surveyed Latinx individuals believe that the main reason undocumented survivors of IPV don't seek help is because they fear that their undocumented status will be uncovered or exploited in the legal process. Furthermore, economic and social factors that can make it challenging to report IPV are amplified for undocumented women given that resources, economic support, and legal support are often contingent upon citizenship.

## UNDOCUMENTED INTIMATE PARTNER SURVIVORS

Unfortunately, the current political climate heightens barriers for undocumented women in the domestic violence reporting process. After a video circulated of ICE agents waiting to arrest an undocumented immigrant at a Denver courthouse, four undocumented immigrant women withdrew their domestic violence cases. These women stated that "they were not willing to proceed with the case for fear that they would be spotted in the courthouse and deported." For undocumented victims of IPV, these fears are far from unfounded. In El Paso, Texas, an undocumented, transgender woman--Irvin Gonzalez-- was detained at a courthouse and taken to a detention center. She had just been granted a protective order for domestic abuse. The El Paso Times reports that ICE officers acted on a tip from live-in boyfriend and alleged abuser. He was detained by ICE earlier that week.

