

IMMIGRANT WOMEN & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
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**BACKGROUND**

Immigrant survivors of domestic violence confront unique hardships because they are particularly vulnerable due to their immigration status. Many noncitizen victims encounter obstacles to escaping abusive situations because they fear law enforcement, deportation, and separation from their children. Cultural and language barriers amplify these fears. Abusers often refuse to file immigration paperwork for their partners, leaving them susceptible to removal and dependent upon the abuser. Abusers tell immigrant victims that a court would never give them custody of their children and that they have no parental rights due to their immigration status. Additionally, abusers use a victims' lack of immigration status to exert financial control over their victims, creating dependencies that compel victims to stay in abusive relationships.

**IMMIGRANT WOMEN FACE UNIQUE HARDSHIPS IN ESCAPING THEIR ABUSERS**

**Juanita** is an undocumented woman who is the mother of three U.S. citizen children. The father of her children, a U.S. citizen, has always been abusive. She called the police one night in 1999 after he beat her while she was pregnant with their second child. **When the police arrived, she told them that she didn't want him to be arrested; she was scared because he had papers and she didn't. She feared being deported and separated from her children.** Juanita still lives with her abuser but is now working with NIJC to obtain a U-Visa, which is a visa that provides temporary status for victims of crimes. She lives in a rural area and struggles financially and fears she could not support her children on her own. Once approved, her visa will provide her with protection from removal and employment authorization. These important tools may empower her to finally leave her relationship without fear of legal reprisals and poverty.

**ABUSERS OFTEN CONTROL THEIR PARTNERS BY REFUSING TO FILE IMMIGRATION PAPERWORK FOR THEM**

**Alexandra** came to the United States legally as the spouse of her U.S. citizen husband. However, after she arrived, he became abusive and refused to complete the paperwork to make her status permanent. He told her she didn't "deserve" to be a legal permanent resident (LPR). **When she finally obtained LPR status, he hid her green card from her.** He called her a piece of garbage in front of their son and threatened to put her in a trash bag and throw her away. She stayed with him for over 3 years, but after an incident in which she ended up in the hospital, she finally left the abusive household. Having legal status empowered Alexandra and gave her the security to leave.

**ABUSERS OFTEN ISOLATE THEIR PARTNERS AND THREATEN TO MANIPULATE THE LEGAL SYSTEM AGAINST THEM**

**Christina** and George, a U.S. citizen, have three U.S. citizen sons together. George became abusive immediately after their marriage. After their first son's birth, he would not allow Christina to work even though they were struggling financially. He also forbade her from contacting family or friends or leaving their home. **George has threatened to take their sons away from her; to lie to the police and tell them that she is an abusive mother; and to have her deported and separated from their kids.** George gives Christina \$30 a week with which he demands that she feed and care for their children. He is abusive to their children and has pulled a gun on them and Christina. Christina recently came to NIJC for assistance and was able to obtain a U-visa. Now that the threat of deportation is gone, Christina will hopefully be able to escape her husband's abuse.

**VICTIMS OF ABUSE OFTEN FEAR LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DECLINE TO SEEK HELP BECAUSE THEY FEAR DEPORTATION**

**Elena** and her five children were brought to the United States from Mexico by their LPR husband/father, Jorge. Jorge abused the family almost daily. He forced his young daughters, at the time 12 and 14 years old, to work in his restaurant. He sexually abused one of his daughters. He warned his family not to tell anyone about the abuse and threatened to take the entire family back to Mexico, where "cops don't care about women," and to kill them. In addition, he threatened to have the police deport his wife and children. **One of the daughters finally called the police after the family suffered from at least 10 years of horrific abuse. They have all received VAWA self-petitioning relief,** a form of temporary relief for victims who have faced domestic violence at the hands of an abusive LPR or U.S. citizen spouse. Securing VAWA protection allowed Elena and her children to finally break free from Jorge's abuse.