

Domestic Violence and Immigration

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The issue of deciding between deportation and abuse is a reality for many immigrant women across the nation. Antonia, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, describes the experience of facing this decision: "I was afraid every time he did something to me, because I couldn't call the police because he'd say to me that if I called the police, they're going to deport me... I regret this now, because this is how he got away with the abuse, he just kept doing the same thing."

Antonia's story¹ is simply one of thousands of immigrant women living in the United States, trying to decide between an abusive partner and the threat of deportation.

The exploitation of a victim's immigrant status by an abusive partner is not; however, with policies becoming stricter, it makes life for immigrant women much more difficult. Archi Pyati, Chief of Policy and Programs at the Tahirih Justice Center states: it creates "an impossible choice for [the victims]: they must either stay with their abusers or risk deportation."

Although this has become an increased concern since January of 2017, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has been working to address domestic violence for immigrants since its conception in 1994. Originally, it included valuable protections for immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, including a self-petition process to help victims with abusive spouses. Subsequently, when VAWA was refunded in 2000, Congress created the U and T visas. The U visa assisted noncitizen victims of crimes if they were willing to move forward with legal proceedings; the T visa established assistance to victims of human trafficking. Under Congress' rulings again in 2005 and 2013, VAWA further invested aid for immigrants facing intimate partner violence.

Despite the severity of the immigrant DV situation, there are resources to help.

- The National Network To End Domestic Violence has begun a program, www.WomensLaw.com, that offers legal information and resources in both English and Spanish to immigrant women, including assistance with U visas or T visas.
- Casa De Esperanza offers two webinars to teach safety planning to immigrant survivors at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyEZglim13g> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-uvnQMrHIU>.
- The National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild is a non-profit that provides legal and technical support for immigrants available at <http://www.nationalimmigrationproject.org/>.

These resources are valuable for any victim looking for help or support.

Visit The Battered Women's Justice Program at: <http://www.bwjp.org/search.html?query=immigrant> to learn more about what you can do to help immigrant survivors of DV.

¹ "I Was Afraid of Him and Immigration" <http://www.wbur.org/news/2017/09/12/increase-u-visa-applications>