



PO Box 311020  
Atlanta, Georgia 31131  
404.344.9629 (Office)  
404.346.7517 (Fax)  
Email: [info@SisterSong.net](mailto:info@SisterSong.net)  
Website: [www.SisterSong.net](http://www.SisterSong.net)

## **Immigrant Latinas' Domestic Abuse Undocumented**

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Originally published in *Collective Voices* Vol. 1 Issue 3, Fall 2005

Domestic abuse among immigrant women occurs at high rates and is rarely reported. Latino immigrants make up the vast majority of immigrants. Undocumented immigrant women are most vulnerable because their status as a citizen more than likely depends on their husbands. In order to control them, abusers refuse to apply for legal status for their wives. In 1994, Congress implemented the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which granted battered undocumented immigrants married to U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents the right to apply for legal residency without their spouses' aide or knowledge. In September 2005, the VAWA will expire. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the National Task Force has assisted Congress in drafting a reauthorization bill.

Under Title VIII – Immigrant Issues, provisions of the act include:

- Stopping the Department of Homeland Security from seizing domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking victims at domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers and protection order courts
- Protecting children of immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking
- Granting employment authorization to adult victims who have filed valid VAWA immigration cases
- Allowing organizations funded by the Legal Services Corporation to represent all victims of domestic abuse, trafficking or sexual assault, regardless of immigration status
- Removing barriers that make immigrant victims wait 5 years before they can access public benefits

Domestic violence advocates are pushing to reintroduce the Women Immigrants Safe Harbor Act, which was originally presented in 2001. The bill states that any legal immigrant woman, including those who filed for legal status under the VAWA, who have suffered domestic abuse, will be eligible for welfare benefits like food stamps and Medicaid.

This bill, along with the reauthorization of the VAWA, can empower immigrant women victims to leave their abusive husbands and have means to support themselves and their children.