

**EVIDENCE SUMMARY****APRIL 2021**

# What works to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence among refugees?

**A variety of interventions may be effective in preventing or responding to intimate partner violence (IPV) among refugees.**

- Strong evidence supports the effectiveness of IPV prevention and response interventions that: consider the unique contexts of refugees and immigrants, engage with community members, and are tailored according to participants' lived experiences, needs, and abilities.
- There is strong support for the effectiveness of group interventions among immigrant Latinas. There is suggestive support for this intervention among other immigrant and refugee groups.
- Moderate and suggestive evidence support the short-term effectiveness of dating violence prevention groups for some refugee adolescents.
- Evidence suggests that men's groups may have beneficial effects for IPV perpetrators.
- Evidence suggests that family therapy may be a helpful response for some refugee groups. This is an area requiring further research.
- Refugee service providers, including community-based organizations, should collaborate with local IPV prevention/intervention providers to develop tailored interventions.

**Purpose of this summary**

This document summarizes the state of available evidence regarding interventions to prevent or respond to intimate partner violence among resettled refugees.

## What is meant by “intimate partner violence”?

The term “intimate partner violence” (IPV) describes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.<sup>1</sup>

## What does the evidence show?

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**Strong evidence supports the effectiveness of IPV prevention and response interventions that consider the unique contexts of refugees and immigrants, engage with community members, and are tailored according to participants’ experiences, needs, and abilities.**

- Januwalla et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review to identify existing interventions targeting adverse health impacts of sex stereotypes among immigrant and refugee populations. The studies included in the review primarily addressed forms of violence occurring within the home (domestic violence, IPV), and were largely unique to the Latino immigrant context in the U.S. Interventions took many forms. The most frequent type of interventions were educational programs such as **workshops, classes, or curriculums**. Other interventions provided **group counseling**, either in the form of **therapeutic treatment directed at perpetrators of violence or support for survivors**. There were also **outreach interventions** in the form of mass media campaigns, using posters, brochures, or television ads in the target population’s native languages. **Most of the studies reported to have achieved their intervention objectives.**
- Although this review did include studies with some refugee groups such as Somali and Vietnamese as well as other Asian populations, specific findings for refugees were not reported separately. Nonetheless, common findings and lessons learned from the reviewed interventions included the **importance of considering the unique contexts of immigrants, engaging with community members, especially young males, and tailoring interventions according to participants’ lived experiences, needs, and abilities.**

**There is strong support for the effectiveness of group interventions among immigrant Latinas. There is suggestive support for this intervention among other immigrant and refugee groups.**

- Fuchsel et al. (2020) examined specific group-format programs and curricula for immigrant Latinas conducted at community-based social service agencies across the United States. Qualitative analysis of the 10 articles that met search criteria (i.e., programs must be culturally specific, designed to serve immigrant Latinas, conducted in group-format, and focused on IPV intervention or prevention) generated information regarding the nature of group interventions addressing this issue and population. The 10 group models reviewed utilized four group types: **support, therapy, psycho-education, and workshops**. Many groups focused on increasing social support, self-esteem, and empowerment. Nearly all utilized theoretical frameworks and curricula, and all were facilitated in community-based agencies. All reviewed articles reported generally positive outcomes using a variety of methods. **Studies using quantitative methods found**

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control (2020). [Intimate partner violence](#).

**statistically significant outcomes for reducing depression, increasing self-esteem, and increasing knowledge of wellness.**

- A report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2014) provides suggestive evidence from eight group workshop programs designed to address IPV in refugee and immigrant communities. Most of the programs used a **series of workshops** attended by generally small numbers of participants, with curricula and formats tailored to the particular community. Participants were expected to apply their learning in their own relationships and, in some programs, to educate others in their community. **Most organizations reported positive changes in the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of program participants. They also reported some limited changes in participant behaviors.** The report emphasizes the critical role of community-based organizations that have the local knowledge and cultural competency to create trust and a safe environment for participants to discuss IPV. The report suggests that promoting healthy relationships must occur within the norms of the participating immigrant or refugee community.

### **Moderate and suggestive evidence support the short-term effectiveness of dating violence prevention groups for some refugee adolescents.**

- An impact study evaluated the preliminary efficacy of a dating violence prevention program for Cuban American adolescents, about half of whom were Cuban-born (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2015). A randomized-controlled experimental design with a wait-list comparison group was used to evaluate the effects on domestic violence victimization and perpetration (N = 82). Self-administrated assessments were completed at baseline, one week, three months, and 12 months after the intervention to assess for psychological, physical, and sexual victimization and perpetration. **The dating violence prevention program had medium to strong effects on dating violence victimization and perpetration for male participants but not for females. However, intervention effects were not statistically significant over time.**
- A suggestive study examined the effectiveness of **“Safe Dates,” an evidence-based teen dating violence prevention program**, in educating 21 resettled Karen refugee youth from Burma. The small group program consisted of nine sessions over a two-day period. Topics included how the youth want to be treated in relationships, examples of abuse, sex stereotypes, and anger “hot buttons.” The youth conferred in small groups, then returned to the larger group to share what each group discussed, which allowed each group to hear the other’s perspective. Some group activities were mixed-sex while others were segregated by sex. The participants also worked in dyads to role-play how to help a friend in an abusive relationship. The youth practiced how to help the victim in an abusive relationship as well as the perpetrator. **Participants were significantly less tolerant toward teen dating violence from pretest to follow-up** (Ravi et al., 2020).

### **Evidence suggests that men’s groups may have beneficial effects for IPV perpetrators.**

- Para-Cardona et al. (2013) conducted qualitative interviews with 21 Latino immigrant men who participated in a culturally informed version of the Spanish version of the Duluth curriculum. The Duluth curriculum consists of a comprehensive Coordinated Community Response model integrated by law enforcement, criminal and civil courts, and various human service providers. Participants complete 26 weekly, 2-hour sessions aimed at promoting a process of change among men who batter.
- Five themes emerged from qualitative interviews with participants regarding their experiences in the group: (a) “Recognizing Change as a Lifetime Challenge,” (b)

“Change Demonstrated Through Actions Rather than Words,” (c) “Group Leaders Help Me to Change,” (d) “Group Helps Me to Change,” and (e) “I Need Help Outside the Group.” The qualitative findings confirm that **the Spanish version of the Duluth curriculum can be beneficial for Latino immigrant IPV perpetrators.**

“Something that is very important about group is that sometimes one gets home all stressed out from work. . . . You feel like yelling at your kids and your wife. . . . And in group we learn many things, one of which is how to respect others and how to communicate. . . . So, when you come to group and talk about your problems, you feel better . . . more relaxed, like you lifted a weight from your back . . . because you can always express in group all that you are feeling inside.”

(Respondent, Parra-Cardona et al., 2013)

## **Evidence suggests that family therapy may be a helpful response for some refugee groups.**

- Kim et al. (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of the “Thank You, Sorry, Love” (TSL) family therapy program in potentially improving the marital relationships and health of North Korean refugee women in South Korea. The participants included 12 married North Korean female refugees in their 20s to 40s. Using a blinded assignment, six received the TSL family therapy program and six did not receive any treatment. Pretests (just before the program), posttests (just after termination of the program), and follow-up tests (one month after termination of the program) were conducted. **The program participants experienced a statistically significant decrease in marital violence.**

## **What are the implications for practice and research?**

### **Tailored group interventions for victims/survivors and for perpetrators are likely effective responses to IPV among refugees.**

- The literature supports the effectiveness of a variety of group interventions including psychoeducation, counseling, and support. Although the strongest studies pertain primarily to Latinx immigrant populations, suggestive studies with various refugee groups are consistent with these findings. All the available studies on refugees entailed ethnically homogenous groups; homogeneity appears to enhance group cohesion.

### **Dating violence programs for refugee youth have potential for IPV reduction.**

- Two studies suggest these group interventions have positive short-term effects. The [Safe Dates](#) curriculum, evaluated in one of the studies, is available for purchase from the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. Further research is needed on the long-term effects of these interventions.

## Family therapy for IPV among refugee couples requires further research.

- One study suggested that family therapy may have a beneficial effect. However, it must be noted that controversy exists about whether couple/family therapy is appropriate, effective, or safe in treating potentially violent couples.<sup>2</sup> Further investigation is needed in this area.

## Refugee service providers, including community-based organizations, should collaborate with local IPV prevention/ intervention providers to develop culturally tailored interventions.

- Resettlement staff bring expertise on the cultural nuances of particular refugee groups, while IPV staff contribute their knowledge of effective IPV treatment.

## How did we identify evidence for this summary?

### Included Studies

The Switchboard evidence database includes the following types of studies, categorized by their strength of evidence:

#### Strong Evidence

**Meta-analyses:** systematic analyses of sets of existing evaluations of similar programs

**Systematic reviews:** syntheses of the best available evidence on specific research questions that use narrative synthesis focused on evaluations of the impacts of at least one specific policy, program, or intervention.

#### Moderate Evidence

Published individual **impact evaluations** using randomized controlled trials (RCTs/C-RCTs), natural experiments, quasi-experimental techniques such as difference-in-difference (DID), instrumental variables (IV), regression discontinuity design (RDD), propensity score matching (PSM) or other forms of synthetic matching, as well as fixed effects techniques with interaction terms.

#### Suggestive Evidence

Published studies using methods including non-systematic literature review, uncontrolled before and after tests, post-test only, interrupted time series (ITS), cross-sectional regressions, longitudinal panels, cohort and case-controls, as well as purely qualitative techniques.

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<sup>2</sup> Karakurt, G., Whiting, K., van Esch, C., Bolen, S. D., & Calabrese, J. R. (2016). [Couples therapy for intimate partner violence: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#). *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 42(4), 567–583.

## Excluded Studies

The Switchboard evidence database excludes case studies, unpublished suggestive research, opinion papers, descriptive studies, and unpublished literature reviews.

## Search Protocol

Studies included in the database focused on high-income or upper middle-income countries, including but not limited to the United States. Studies included must have been published since 2000. To identify evidence, we searched the following websites and databases using the following population, methodology, and target intervention terms:

| Websites and Databases                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Population Terms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Methodology Terms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Target Intervention Terms                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Campbell Collaboration<br>Cochrane Collaboration<br>Mathematica Policy Research<br>Evidence Aid<br>Urban Institute<br>Migration Policy Institute<br>HHS OPRE<br>Medline<br>ASSIA<br>Social Services Abstracts<br>Social Work Abstracts<br>PsycInfo | refugee<br>OR<br>immigrant<br>OR<br>“unaccompanied<br>minor”<br>OR<br>asylee<br>OR<br>“temporary<br>protected status”<br>OR<br>“victims of<br>traffick*”<br>OR<br>“traffick* victims”<br>OR<br>T-Visa<br>OR<br>U-Visa<br>OR<br>Cuban<br>OR<br>Haitian<br>OR<br>Amerasian | evaluation<br>OR<br>impact<br>OR<br>program<br>OR<br>intervention<br>OR<br>policy<br>OR<br>Project<br>OR<br>train*<br>OR<br>therapy<br>OR<br>treatment<br>OR<br>counseling<br>OR<br>workshop<br>OR<br>review<br>OR<br>meta-analysis<br>OR<br>synthesis | “intimate partner<br>violence”<br>OR<br>“domestic violence” |

For databases or websites that permitted only basic searches, free-text terms and limited term combinations were selected out of the lists above, and all resultant studies were reviewed for relevance. Conversely, for databases or websites with advanced search capability, we made use of relevant filters available. All search terms were searched in the title and abstract fields only in order to exclude studies that made only passing mention of the topic under consideration.

After initial screening, Switchboard evidence mapping is prioritized as follows: First priority is given to meta-analyses and systematic reviews, followed by individual impact evaluations when no meta-analyses or systematic reviews are available. Evaluations that are rated as impact evidence are considered before those rated as suggestive, with the latter only being included for outcomes where no evidence is available from the former.

## Studies Included

506 studies were identified through database and website searching. After removing duplicates, 357 studies were then screened. Of these, 317 were determined to be irrelevant to this search. 40 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. 33 full-text articles were excluded due to not meeting one or more of the inclusion criteria pertaining to resettlement country, year of publication, population, methodology, or target problem. 7 studies were eligible for inclusion. A list of studies included may be found below, with hyperlinks to the abstracts or full text (when available).

### Meta-Analyses and Systematic Reviews

Fuchsel, C. L. M., & Brummett, A. (2020). Intimate partner violence prevention and intervention group-format programs for immigrant Latinas: a systematic review. *Journal of Family Violence*, 1-13. [Full text](#).

Januwalla, A., Pulver, A., Wanigaratne, S., O'Campo, P., & Urquia, M. L. (2018). Interventions to reduce adverse health outcomes resulting from manifestations of gender bias amongst immigrant populations: A scoping review. *BMC Women's Health*, 18(1), 1-11. [Full text](#).

### Impact Evaluations

Gonzalez-Guarda, R. M., Guerra, J. E., Cummings, A. A., Pino, K., & Becerra, M. M. (2015). Examining the preliminary efficacy of a dating violence prevention program for Hispanic adolescents. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 31(6), 411-421. [Full text](#).

### Suggestive Studies

Kim, H. J., Kim, J. Y., & Kim, D. G. (2016). "Thank You, Sorry, Love" (TSL) Therapy with North Korean refugee women: A pilot study. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 26(7), 816-824. [Full text](#).

Parra-Cardona, J. R., Escobar-Chew, A. R., Holtrop, K., Carpenter, G., Guzmán, R., Hernández, D., ... & González Ramírez, D. (2013). "En el grupo tomas conciencia (In group you become aware)": Latino immigrants' satisfaction with a culturally informed intervention for men who batter. *Violence Against Women*, 19(1), 107-132. [Full text](#).

Ravi, K. E., Black, B. M., Mitschke, D. B., & Pearson, K. (2019). A pilot study of a teen dating violence prevention program with Karen refugees. *Violence Against Women*, 25(7), 792-816. [Full text](#).

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2014). Strengthening what works: Preventing intimate partner violence in immigrant and refugee communities. [Full text](#).

### Supplemental Resources

The following studies did not meet the criteria to be included in the evidence summary but may provide additional context, guidance, or understanding of the topic.

Ahman, F., Driver, N., McNally, M. J., & Stewart, D. E. (2009). "Why doesn't she seek help for partner abuse?" An exploratory study with South Asian immigrant women. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(4), 613-622. [Abstract](#).

Choi, Y. J., Phua, J., Armstrong, K. J., & An, S. (2017). Negotiating the cultural steps in developing an online intervention for Korean American intimate partner violence. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment*

& *Trauma*, 26(8), 920–936. [Abstract](#).

Critelli, F. & Yalim, A. (2019). Improving access to domestic violence services for women of immigrant and refugee status: A trauma-informed perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 29(1-3), 95–113. [Abstract](#).

Dalgaard, N. T., Thøgersen, M. H., & Montgomery, E. (2019). Interdisciplinary treatment of family violence in traumatized refugee families. *International Journal of Migration, Health, and Social Care*, 15(1), 77–92. [Abstract](#).

Fineran, S. & Kohli, H. (2020). Muslim refugee women’s perspectives on intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 23(3), 199–213. [Abstract](#).

Hancock, T. U., Ames, N., & Behnke, A. O. (2014). Protecting rural church-going immigrant women from family violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 29(3), 323–332. [Full Text](#).

Hancock, T. U. & Siu, K. (2009). A culturally sensitive intervention with domestically violent Latino immigrant men. *Journal of Family Violence*, 24(2), 123–132. [Full Text](#).

Ozturk, B., Li, Q., & Albright, D. L. (2019). Coping strategies among immigrant women who have experienced intimate partner violence in North America: A narrative review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 48, 17–23. [Abstract](#).

Sabri, B., Nnawulezi, N., Njie-Carr, V. P. S., Messing, J., Ward-Lasher, A., Alvarez, C., & Campbell, J. C. (2018). Multilevel risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence among African, Asian, and Latina immigrant and refugee women: Perceptions of effective safety planning interventions. *Race and Social Problems*, 10(4), 348–365. [Full Text](#).

Serrata, J. V., Hernandez-Martinez, M., & Macias, R. L. (2016). Self-empowerment if immigrant Latina survivors of domestic violence: A promotora model of community leadership. *Hispanic Health Care International*, 14(1), 37–46. [Abstract](#).

Shakur, A., Avondet, C., Sin, K., Panahi, S., Griffiths, A., Izampuye, E., & Kamimura, A. (2019). Piloting an interactive theater program to promote intimate partner violence awareness among refugees resettled in the United States. *Diversity and Equality in Health and Care*, 16(4), 61–65. [Full Text](#).