

# Culture-Change as a Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy in Fresno County, California

## PRACTITIONERS AND ADVOCATES FEATURED

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Mujeres Poderosas Amoras, a collaborative based in Fresno, California, is a newcomer to domestic violence prevention with a long history of implementing culturally-rooted policy, systems, and environmental change strategies to promote healthy eating and active living. After recognizing the need in the Latino community in Fresno, Mujeres Poderosas Amoras is now developing culture-change strategies to prevent domestic violence and support safe relationships. The collaborative is part of the Safety Through Connection program facilitated by Prevention Institute and funded by the Blue Shield of California Foundation. [Safety Through Connection](#) supports multi-sector collaboratives working on issues outside of the domestic violence field to build their capacity to work on this issue.



## THE FORMATION OF MUJERES PODEROSAS AMOROSAS

Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas grew out of a coalition that initially came together to work on a 3-year Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At the time, the coalition was focused on improving healthy eating and active living in neighborhoods experiencing concentrated disadvantage. The group was successful in enacting policy, systems, and organizational and environmental changes, such as providing children and families a safe place to be physically active by keeping school gates open after school hours.

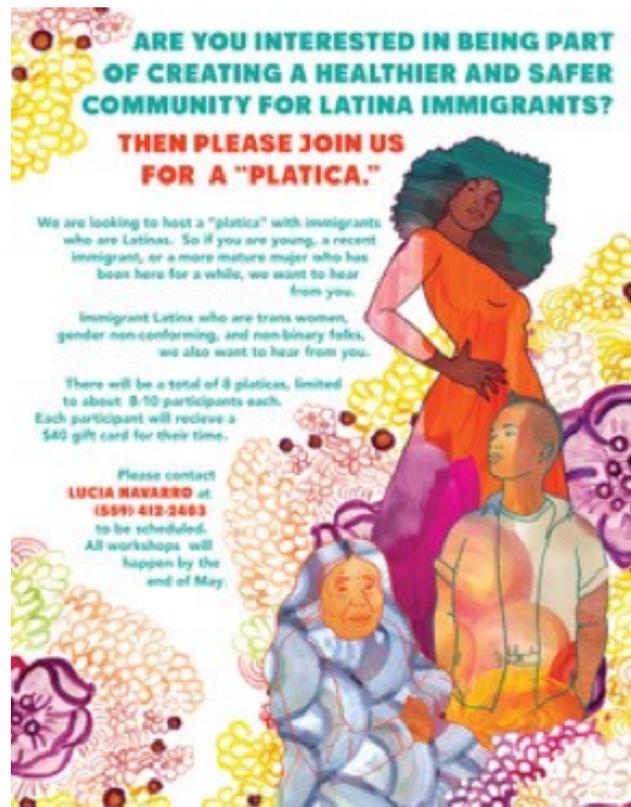
Through work in the community, collaborative members began to see a need to address domestic violence and support safe relationships in the Latino community. While coordinating walking groups, nutrition education classes, and Zumba classes, organizers noticed that a certain participant was starting to miss activities. After checking in with others in the classes, they learned that it was because she was having trouble with her husband. Some participants found their husbands were jealous of their weight loss from engaging in the walking and nutrition classes, and the husbands did not want their wives to continue with the classes. There were other instances where some community members appeared to show physical signs of violence.

When it came time to apply to participate in the Safety Through Connection program, Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas banded together with collaborative partners who had working relationships, a strong grounding in prevention, and experience collaborating with community residents. By participating in Safety Through Connection, the collaborative expanded partnerships further with direct service providers as well as with additional “non-traditional” sectors, such as business development and housing. The collaborative has been working to answer the question, “What is it going to take to build resilience among Latina immigrants who experience a very severe burden of violence?” This has been a particularly important question considering the

anti-immigrant political and social contexts in the Fresno County community and the country.

## ENGAGING IN A PLANNING YEAR

The Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas Collaborative spent 12-months onboarding their members to the issue of domestic violence prevention. The collaborative began their planning year with a kitchen cabinet of approximately five organizations committed to the issue of domestic violence prevention. Together they outlined what the process of gathering data and insights would look like within their community. They brainstormed areas of focus that would be both beneficial and impactful to the community regarding domestic violence prevention.



*A flyer for pláticas held by Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas. The collaborative held pláticas throughout Fresno County as a way to gather information during the planning year. Credit: Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas Collaborative*

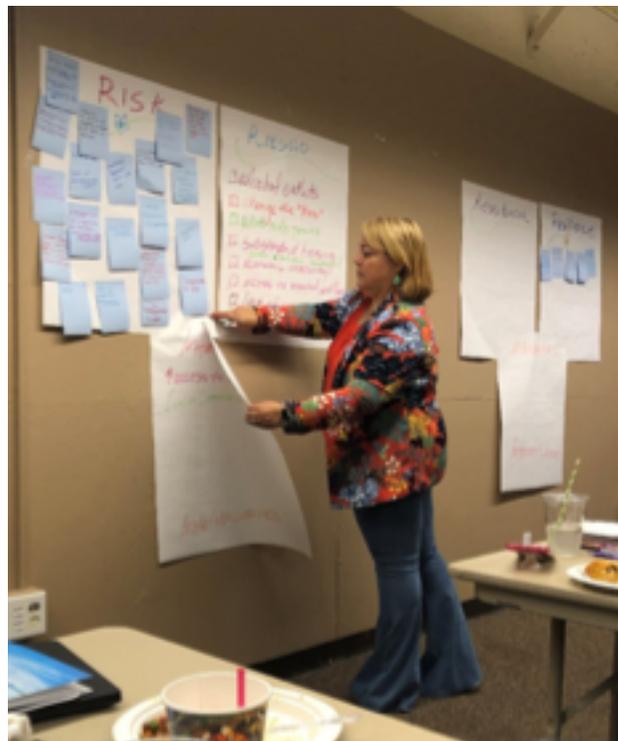
Collectively, the collaborative decided on a three-pronged approach for gathering data around domestic violence affecting their population of focus-- Latina immigrants living in Fresno County. This approach included conducting a survey exploring risk and resilience factors related to violence, pláticas (focus groups), and key informant interviews.

A goal of the pláticas was to ensure that they were representative of the diversity within the Latina immigrant population. In order to meet this goal, the collaborative conducted focus groups with Latinas under the age of 30, over 30, in urban settings, in rural settings, and with Indigenous Latinas. The focus groups were translated into both Spanish and Mixteco, an indigenous language. Key informant interviews were conducted with sectors and groups the kitchen cabinet believed to play an important role in domestic violence prevention. These groups included the housing sector, LGBTQ advocates, education experts, business development experts, immigration advocates, and others.

After gathering information within the community, the kitchen cabinet digested it and shared it back with stakeholders within Fresno County for input on what factors should be prioritized moving forward. The proposed prioritized factors were grouped into three domains—people, place, and equitable opportunity. Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas has now begun to move into its first year of implementation. Their overarching strategy, based on what residents communicated, will be to establish a network driven by Latina immigrants to serve as a safe space for community organizing and building influence and power.

**THE LEARNING CURVE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

While collaborative members understood the need to address domestic violence affecting Latinas, there was a need to help the community understand the idea and need for prevention. For many, it's easier to make the connection between domestic violence and direct services. Genoveva Islas, Executive Director of Cultiva



*A stakeholder meeting held by Mujeres Poderosas Collaborative domestic violence risk and protective factors were discussed. Credit: Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas Collaborative*

La Salud says, “When we talk about building resilience in community, it’s hard for people to understand what it looks like.” It’s a multi-step process to understand the root of the issue. Take for example the importance of livable wage employment. Genoveva explains how for a woman to have a decent paying job to provide for her family and community, she needs to have access to educational opportunities. Going a step further, it’s important to consider how English literacy can serve as an entryway to that opportunity. Backtracking even further, one can begin to consider the opportunities afforded to those who immigrate to the United States from countries where educational opportunities are not accessible and who struggle with learning the English language. Many times, this results in women accepting low paying jobs where they’re exploited and results in them being dependent on somebody else to support their children and themselves.

Genoveva goes on to say, "People may not be able to understand building resilience, but when you break the factors down that are causing the vulnerability, it's easier for people to understand that yes, economic opportunity is a part of domestic violence prevention."

### **FOCUSING ON CULTURE CHANGE IN FRESNO**

Building power among Latinas and changing cultural norms in Fresno County is of great importance to the Mujeres Poderosas Amorasas Collaborative. This is because deeply rooted patriarchal or "machismo" values continue to linger in the community. Mujeres Poderosas Amorasas is working to encourage community members to dismantle and change what is celebrated and uplifted as "machismo." The collaborative

plans to influence ideas about what it means to be a woman. For example, friendliness is valued as a feminine trait, but sometimes this is conflated with passivity or non-assertiveness. The collaborative would like to promote the idea that women can be feminine, friendly, and assertive. Genoveva says, "We want women to love themselves and care for themselves because ultimately when they do, they are in a better position to care and love their children." As Mujeres Poderosas Amorasas continues to engage their community throughout the next two years of implementation for Safety Through Connection, they hope to dismantle aspects of the Latino culture that have become oppressive intergenerationally, and that contribute to domestic violence.

### **PRACTITIONER AND ADVOCATE BIOGRAPHIES**

Genoveva Islas is the founder and executive director of Cultiva La Salud. Genoveva is a child of Mexican immigrants and farm laborers. She is the first in her family to graduate from a University. Genoveva received her Bachelors of Science degree in Health Science with an emphasis in Community Health from Fresno State and her Masters in Public Health from Loma Linda University. Genoveva is a nationally recognized Culture of Health Leader by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and a 2020 Aspen Fellow..

### **RESOURCES**

- [Web conference recording and slides](#)

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