

WOMEN OF COLOR AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: LATINA WOMEN

Reproductive justice, at the most basic, is a woman's right to control her own body and life. Contraception, maternity, forced/coerced contraception and sterilization, emergency contraception, family planning, abortion, and reproductive health (including issues of HIV/AIDS and other STIs) are all important parts of the broad topic of reproductive rights.

It is estimated that by the year 2050, one out of every four women in the United States will be Latina. Yet in many areas of reproductive health, Latina women fare comparatively worse than their white counterparts. Barriers to reproductive health include poverty, a lack of insurance, inadequate access to health care, language barriers, and limited awareness of health risks. Many of the problems outlined below stem from a lack of health insurance. Latinas have the highest uninsured rate among women, at 42%. In addition, under federal law, legal immigrants who arrived after 1996 do not have access to federal public health care programs such as Medicaid for their first five years in the United States.

Abortion

Though legal, abortion continues to be inaccessible for many poor and uninsured Latinas. Twenty-four percent of Latinas live below the poverty level. Thus the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding of abortions, makes abortion seem like an "abstract concept with little bearing their reality". At least 20% of women having abortions are Latinas, and at least 59% of Latinas use some form of contraception. Furthermore, many catholic hospitals that are in low-income areas refuse to perform abortions or even offer Emergency Contraception to patients.

Pregnancy and Maternal Mortality

More than 25% of Latinas do not receive prenatal care during the first trimester. Consequently, the rate of maternal mortality among Latinas is 1.7 times higher than for white women.

HIV/STIs

According to the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, research has shown that interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of STIs among women of color would be effective if they are culturally relevant. Latinas account for more than 20% of the AIDS cases among women, and the HIV infection rate among Latinas is seven times higher than for white women. Latinas have the highest rate of cervical cancer caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Latinas have higher rates of syphilis than non-Hispanic women.

Sexual Health Education

The unintended pregnancy rate for Latinas is nearly two times the rate for white women. Also, the Latina teen pregnancy rate is more than twice the rate of white women. Much of this can be attributed to a lack of comprehensive sex education. Evidence shows that comprehensive sexuality education programs that provide information about both abstinence and contraception can help delay the onset of sexual activity in teenagers, reduce their number of sexual partners and increase contraceptive use when they become sexually active.*

Unless otherwise noted, all statistics originated from the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, <http://www.latinainstitute.org>

*Dailard C, Abstinence promotion and teen family planning: the misguided drive for equal funding, The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, 2002, 5(1):1-3.

TAKE ACTION!

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective

- This coalition of local, regional, and national grassroots organizations representing Black/African American, Latina/Puerto Rican, Native American/Indigenous, and Asian/Pacific Islander women was formed with the shared recognition that, "as women of color, we have the right and responsibility to represent ourselves and our communities."

www.sistersong.net

Recommended Readings

- Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice By Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena R. Gutiérrez
- Latina Realities: Essays on Healing, Migration and Sexuality By Oliva M. Espin

Famous Latina Feminists

Gloria Anzaldúa (1942 – 2004), self-described "chicana dyke-feminist, tejana patlache poet, writer, and cultural theorist."

Linda Chavez-Thompson (1944-), executive president of the **AFL-CIO**. An ardent pro-choice advocate, she is the highest-ranking woman in the labor movement and the first person of color elected to an executive office of the AFL-CIO.

Sister Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648 – 1695), nun, author, poet, and intellectual who wrote on women's rights and equality. She entered a convent to avoid the necessity of marriage and to be able to continue her intellectual pursuits.

Dolores Huerta (1930-), co-founder of the **United Farm Workers** and member of the **Feminist Majority Foundation** Board of Directors.

Dr. Antonia Coela Novello (1944-), the first woman and first person of Latina background to become **Surgeon General** of the United States.

Olga Vives, Action Vice President of the **National Organization for Women (NOW)**, and a skilled grassroots organizer.

RESOURCES

MANA, A National Latina Organization

<http://www.hermana.org/>

A primarily membership site with resources and programs for Latinas.

National Latina Health Organization (NLHO)

<http://www.latinahealth.org/>

Works for bilingual, culturally appropriate health care. Also provides information on health-related information and events.

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health

<http://www.latinainstitute.org/>

Comprehensive site for Latina health.

Red Informativa de Mujeres de Argentina

<http://www.rimaweb.com.ar/>

Spanish-language site covering a wide range of women's issues.

National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence

<http://www.dvalianza.org/>

Dual-language site on domestic violence in Latina/o communities.

National Council of La Raza

<http://www.nclr.org/>

Political advocacy group working for Hispanic Americans.

Produced by the Feminist Majority Foundation's Choices Campus Campaign

For more information, please call toll free (866) 444-FMLA (East Coast) (866) 471-FMLA (West Coast) or visit our website at www.feministcampus.org