

THE ACT AGAINST AIDS LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE LATINO PARTNERS IN RECOGNITION OF



National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

PRESENT **LATINA STORIES OF HIV**

HIV can infect anyone, if given the chance. It crosses borders and doesn't discriminate based on education, socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity. However, some people have a higher risk than others. HIV/AIDS is a serious health concern for women and girls; they account for [approximately 24% of all HIV diagnoses](#). HIV can infect young girls, moms, working women, daughters, and even older women and grandmothers. It is [actually easier for women to get HIV during vaginal sex than men](#). There are certain things that can put women more at risk for HIV like injecting drugs, having unprotected sex with more than one partner, sexual violence, or alcohol abuse.

Below are stories that highlight risks some women face on a daily basis. These stories are not true stories but are stories based on true experiences. It can sometimes be hard for women and girls to protect themselves from HIV or to get care and treatment after they become infected. National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is an opportunity to talk with the women and girls in our lives about HIV/AIDS and help them get the facts in order to make safe choices and get the care and treatment they need after becoming infected.

Lourdes

Lourdes had always been faithful to her husband. She was now 66 and he was 70. He was a good man, and she had never complained about his Friday nights out with his friends. Lately, after years of having sex rarely, their sex life had become more active because her husband had begun to use Viagra on occasion. But Lourdes had never talked with anyone, even her closest women friends, about her sex life. Lourdes began to feel ill – sometimes without energy and colds lasted longer. At first, she thought it was simply her age, but her children urged her to go to the doctor. The doctor ordered a full blood panel and when the results came in Lourdes was HIV positive. She was devastated and embarrassed and angry at her husband. She didn't even want to share the news with her children. The treatment was expensive and Lourdes and her husband did not have a lot of money. She didn't know what to do.

Reyna

Reyna left Mexico to find work in the US when she was 17. Jobs were hard to find and she ended up working in the fields cutting and packing lettuce. The work was excruciating. The days were long and her hands hurt from the repetitive actions of cutting and packing. What made it even more unbearable was the sexual harassment she had to deal with on a daily basis. Her supervisor would constantly touch her, call her names, and openly proposition her.

Reyna continued

The abuse got worse every day and although Reyna refused her supervisor's propositions, he was getting more and more aggressive. He kept asking her to dinner, offering her rides home, or following her to the bathroom. One day as she was finishing her shift, he forced her into his truck and drove her to an isolated location where he raped her. After he finished he dropped her off and told her goodnight, like they had just returned from dinner. That night Reyna cried herself to sleep. She felt so alone. She didn't want to tell her family back in Mexico because she was afraid they'd worry, and she didn't want to report the rape because she was afraid of losing her job or being deported. So she kept quiet and returned to work the next day. The abuse continued but Reyna felt she had to deal with it, her family in Mexico needed the money she was making and there were not a lot of jobs around. It wasn't until she became pregnant and went for routine testing that she found out she was HIV positive. She was devastated. The physical and mental pain of being subjected to sexual harassment and abuse on a regular basis was agonizing enough, but she had never even thought about the risk of contracting HIV. She was pregnant, HIV+, and undocumented. What now?

Blanca

Blanca was infected approximately 13 years ago by her husband when she was 41 years old. She is the mother of five children. She had only had two sexual partners in her life when she learned that she was infected with HIV. She commented, "how was I going to ask my husband to use a condom?"

On a fateful day, her husband called and asked her to go to his parents' house to pick up a folder with medical documents that belonged to him. Prior to giving him the documents, she read them. It was then that she found a document indicating that he was HIV positive. She cried out in anguish and fear and angrily thought "I'm going to die soon."

Initially, when Blanca got tested for HIV at a lab the results were negative. However, in 1997 she developed a serious cold and was hospitalized. The hospital ran an HIV test and it came back positive. The day she found out her status, her life changed forever. When she confronted her husband, he replied that "if he had the disease, it was her that infected him." He spread this untrue story amongst their neighbors and left their marriage.

At first, Blanca turned away from many people and isolated herself but gradually came to terms with the diagnosis and learned that she could live with the virus. Today she is 58 years old, receives support counseling and takes about 20 medications a day. She goes to a clinic with other women and together they provide support to one another. All of the women in her support group were infected by their husbands.