



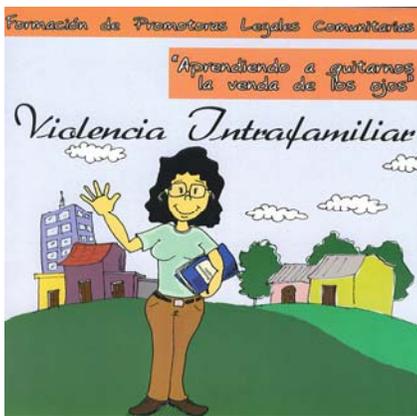
USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GUATEMALA

SUCCESS STORY

Paralegal Manual Helps Communities

New resource aids victims of domestic violence



MANUAL ON INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE DEVELOPED BY
PARALEGAL COMMUNITY LEADERS IN VILLA NUEVA

PHOTO: KARI GOETZ

The manual is useful, accessible, and easy to read. It includes material that will improve women's lives. Many copies of the manual should be printed and used throughout the country.

U.S. Agency for International Development
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Troubled with gangs and high crime rates Villa Nueva, a suburb of Guatemala City, is one of the most violent neighborhoods in the country. The number of cases involving domestic violence, sexual crime, and murder of women continues to rise, but few are reported or investigated. Criminal justice and civil society groups lack the understanding and capacity to raise awareness of the problem and help women access the justice system.

Under the leadership of Vilma Dinora Morales, a family therapist, the USAID-supported Women's Legal Rights Initiative is increasing awareness of women's legal rights and creating resources to help victims of violence. Morales, a graduate of the project's Gender and Law Diploma program, and another graduate, Julissa Baldetti from the Institute of Comparative Criminal Studies, developed a program to train community leaders as paralegals. About 50 women and men then established a network to give legal services to more than 500 women from 15 communities across Villa Nueva.

The paralegals use a manual on intrafamily violence that they developed to assist victims of violence. There are few materials on this topic and the paralegals saw the importance of developing a useful tool. The manual uses colorful graphics and easy to read text that low literate audiences can understand. One section describes violence and its effects on women and the home. The second portion teaches readers how to help victims of violence and discusses understanding rights, legal mechanisms and community resources.

Now the paralegals are implementing a monitoring and evaluation system to evaluate use of the manual. They record each case and follow-up with justice sector institutions and community organizations like the police to make sure that services are delivered quickly.

Once little help was available to victims of violence. Now the paralegals help nearly 150 women every day lead safer and healthier lives." Consuelo Nineth Echeverría, a community paralegal, notes, "I was one of those women. I didn't know anything about my rights or the law. I used to see my neighbors suffering from violence, but now I can assist them. I carry my diploma around to show that I have an education and can help."