

Public Health Social Work & the Home

Scientist and scholar, **Patria Rojas, PhD** (SSW '99, SPH '00) is the director of a women's study examining health disparities among Latinas at The Center for Research on US Latino HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse, a national center of excellence (www.crusada.fiu.edu). For Patria, public health social work starts in the home. As she investigates the intergenerational link between Latina mothers and daughters who suffer from substance abuse and domestic violence, she meets most of them where they're at: home. "I start with the population in mind first," she shares, "not a research instrument. The woman is the most important thing, not a code, not a number, but that woman in front of me, who has legal issues, socio-economic challenges. [The data collection] is done at a time that's best for the participants, usually when there's nobody in the house, when the kids are at school, or on weekends."



Patria Rojas

Patria explains that part of her work has been creating new tools to fit the population. "Due to the lack of research on Latina women, there aren't that many [data collection] instruments out there that are valid and reliable." Getting input from the women themselves is a key part of the work. "I was very vocal about taking this instrument to women in the community and getting feedback on the language and the scales, and if the questions really made sense for them. Sometimes, public health has that expert approach. But we know that the community is the expert. The definition of the problem coming from an epidemiologic or ethnographic point of view may be very different from how a community defines it."

The Campaign for Public Health Social Work
www.publichealthsocialwork.org

Meeting her research participants where they are at, in their homes, has been, says Patria, "a lot of fun but very challenging. That's the nature of doing community-based research."

