

# The Miami Herald

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## Bittersweet memories for moms separated from kids

By Christina Veiga  
The Miami Herald



ALLISON DIAZ / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

In celebration of Mother's Day, Arely Castrejon gets her nails done by cosmetology student Chelsea Cohee at Beauty Schools of America in Homestead on Saturday, May 7, 2011. Castrejon is one of 14 women survivors of domestic/sexual abuse that was honored at the event with a day of free spa services. The day of makeovers was a collaboration between MUJER: Women United in Justice, Education, and Reform, Beauty Schools of America, Coral Gables Congregational Church and Ulta.

Her hair was primped, her nails polished and her lips shiny with gloss.

Yet tears welled up in Leticia Medrano's brown eyes.

Something was missing on this Mother's Day: Her children.

Medrano was among 14 women, survivors of domestic and sexual violence, who were treated to makeovers last week at Beauty Schools of America in Homestead in honor of Mother's Day.

Though the day was filled with pampering, it also served as a reminder of the sacrifices many immigrant women have to make in hopes of providing a better life for their families.

"We have to celebrate," said Susan Rubio Rivera, director and founder of MUJER, an

advocacy group that nominated its clients for the beauty treatments. "That's part of maintaining hope."

Like many immigrants, Medrano, 36, had to leave behind two children with family members in her native Mexico when she came to the United States.

"To be far from your children isn't easy," she said.

But Medrano is tough. She is a survivor.

Too afraid to report it because she was in the country illegally, Medrano suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband. That changed when a neighbor called police — something Medrano had never done — after he attacked her outside their Homestead home.

The two divorced. The husband was deported. Medrano obtained a special work permit given to victims of crimes, and she turned to MUJER for help.

"Thanks to them, I've found a lot of support, and I've survived trauma. I've learned how to give

myself worth," she said.

Now a single mother of three — she had another child while living in the U.S. — Medrano works in a nursery to provide for her children here and abroad.

"It's hard because I'm the head of the family. I know if they eat, or if they have clothes," she said.

Financial reasons often get in the way of immigrant women reporting abuse. Gladys Castillo, 43, left behind seven children in Guatemala when she came to the U.S. five years ago. Her partner was abusive, but she wasn't sure she could make it on her own if she left.

After another violent attack, a police officer handed her information about MUJER and she contacted the organization.

"They told me I didn't have to be a victim," she said.

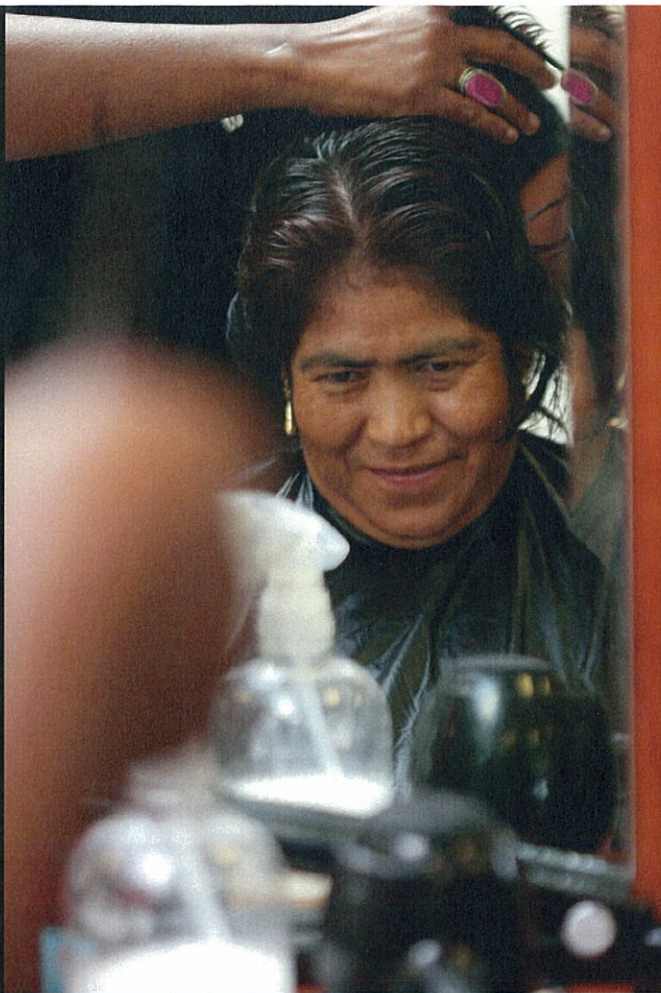
Now, she cooks foods from her homeland and sells about 10 meals a day to customers to earn money. Though she's far from her children, she can provide a better life for them by working in the U.S.

"I can send money to my family," she said. "I earn more here."

With the help of other organizations, MUJER is trying to pull together enough money to bring four of Castillo's children to the U.S.

"They need someone," Castillo said.





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In celebration of Mother's Day, Alta Garcia gets her hair cut and styled by cosmetology student Rose Griner at Beauty Schools of America in Homestead on Saturday,







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In celebration of Mother's Day, Leticia Medrano has her hair styled by cosmetology student Esther Moore at Beauty Schools of America in Homestead on Saturday,







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In celebration of Mother's Day, Elizabeth Lara, right, has her hair colored to a blond hue and put under the dryer with the help of cosmetology student Erica







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In celebration of Mother's Day, Margarita Hernandez has her hair styled by cosmetology student Maria Fanny Renteria at Beauty Schools of America in







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In celebration of Mother's Day, Dilma Gonzalez gets her hair colored and styled by cosmetology student Yudsona Gonzalez at Beauty Schools of America in







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In celebration of Mother's Day, Leticia Medrano, sitting, has her hair styled by cosmetology student Esther Moore, top left, and cosmetology instructor Regina







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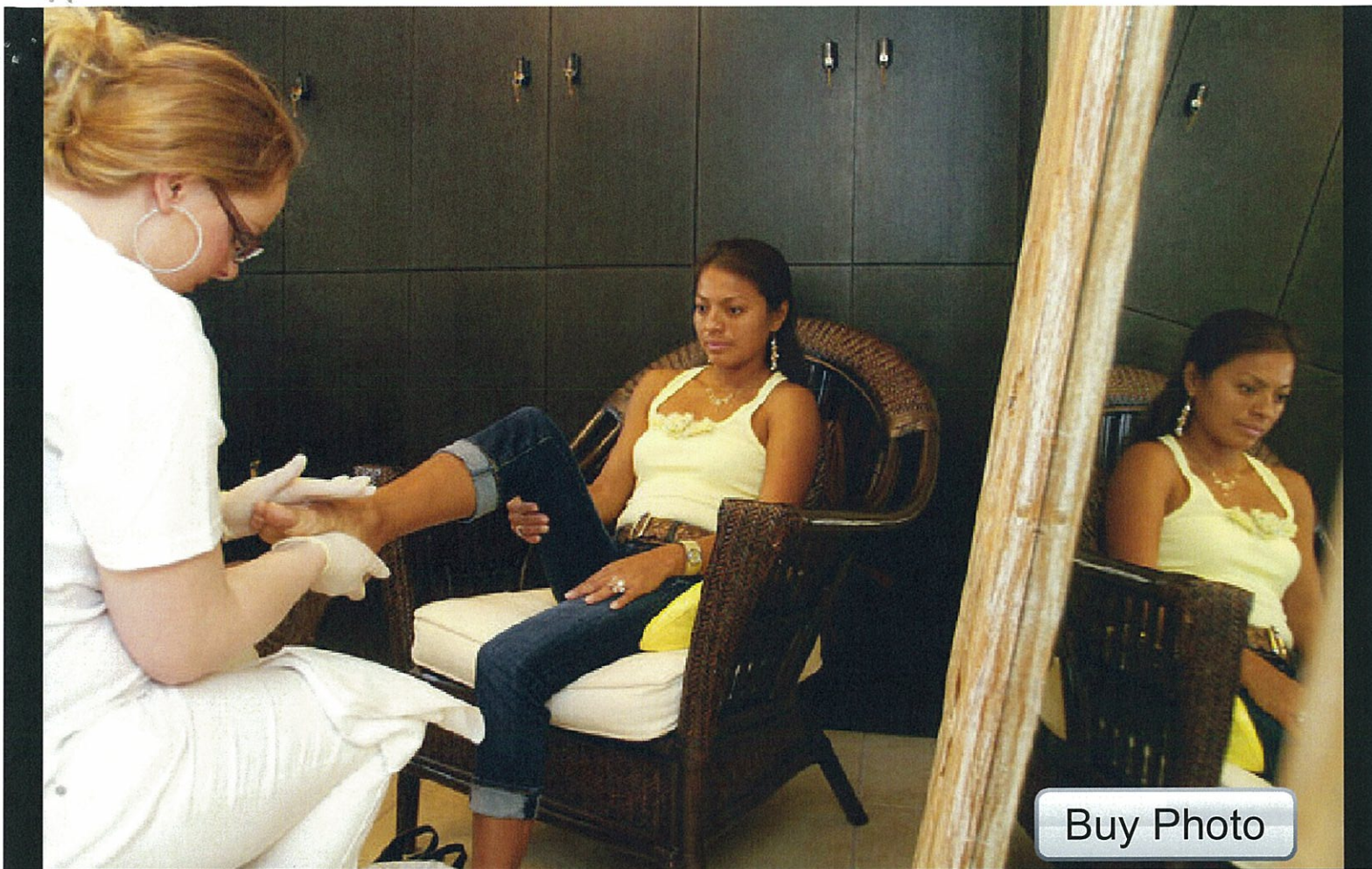
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