

Lilliana's Story — A Survivor Composite Story  
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Lilliana, age 18

Lilliana's parents forced to marry when she was 14, and she legally couldn't file for divorce until she turned 18. Lilliana was rushed to a hospital after a severely violent encounter with her husband when she tried to run away with her two children. Nurses connected her with a local DV shelter.

Lilliana's case worker at the shelter informed her that to continue staying there, she needed to do a workforce training program and that she had the option of two tracks. One track was in a warehouse, and the other track was working in a restaurant. Lilliana's ex-husband was frequently violent toward her in the kitchen, so she knew she didn't want to work in a restaurant. Lilliana chose the warehouse track.

On her first day of work, Lilliana learned that she would not be earning any money in the job training program because it was called an internship. Lilliana didn't like that she couldn't save money for an apartment and a divorce attorney, but she needed to be able to stay at the shelter where her kids could be safe. The alternative was being homeless on the street with two young children.

Lilliana's supervisor at the warehouse trained her to do inventory. One day he asked her to help him organize an isolated corner of the warehouse. Something about the supervisor creeped her out, but she followed him anyway out of fear that she and her kids might lose their beds at the shelter if she didn't comply with whatever he told her to do. The supervisor told her that he would let her go home early for the day but sign off on her participation accountability paperwork if she performed a sexual act for him. Lilliana told him that she didn't need to leave work early, that she didn't mind doing the work. She asked him what he needed her to organize. He told her that he didn't need her to do anything except the sexual act. Lilliana complied because she knew that she and her children might get kicked out of the shelter program if the supervisor at the job training program reported back that she was refusing to do as he told her.

This abuse went on for months until a state audit of the shelter program sent an auditor to the warehouse to inspect working conditions. The auditor found the supervisor choking Lilliana in an isolated corner of the warehouse and called the police. The warehouse supervisor was arrested. Lilliana is now speaking with the district attorney's office to determine whether she wants to

press charges. She is still afraid of how this might impact her housing for herself and her children. She is also afraid that her ex-husband might kill her if the case becomes public and he finds out where they are living at the shelter. The district attorney's office told Lilliana that they cannot help her with housing and other safety concerns, but they are pressuring her to press charges and testify against the warehouse manager. Lilliana feels trapped and like she has no way to keep herself and her children safe.