

# Mistreatment of Latinx Older Adults

## GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

- **Comunidad** – community; interrelations with those who share common culture, customs and personal interests
- **Familia** – the family; a cohesive unit
- **Machismo** – pride in being male; virility; masculinity
- **Marianismo** – matriarchy; a household lead by a female role; femininity; family caretaker
- **Promotores** – advocates that act on behalf of an older adult whose goal is to provide prevention or intervention services and resources (often times from a community based setting)
- **Vergüenza** – shame, embarrassment or humiliation

*Note that due to many different dialects of the Spanish language, the terms used in this fact sheet may be interpreted differently in each country. Several terms have been identified that have interchangeable meanings such as: abuse & mistreatment as well as perpetrator & abuser.*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS: *Mistreatment of Latinx Older Adults*

- Culture can be a protective or risk factor for Latinx older adults. It has an impact on perceived risk and engagement in resources. Which in turn, affects intervention strategies for professionals from advocacy agencies, social workers, and law enforcement.
- Making assumptions regarding behaviors based on cultural heritage increases risk of stigma. If you want to understand cultural values, ask!
- **La familia** is emphasized over the individual in many Latinx cultures. Thus, perception of risk to the family unit decreases likelihood to report mistreatment or seek supportive services.
- The utilization of **promotores** is a culturally informed method of intervention that can be employed with survivors of mistreatment.
- Often interdependency is a norm in Latinx families, thus financial exploitation may be overlooked.
- **Vergüenza** to self and family, may also play a role in an older adult's engagement in reporting and utilization of resources.
- Lack of culturally competent services, language barriers, and lack of awareness of services.
- Sociocultural factors that include the intersection of immigration status and levels of acculturation should be taken into consideration.

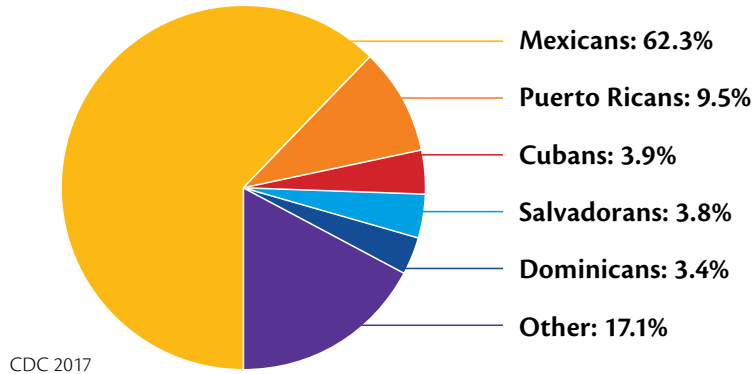


This **RESEARCH BRIEF** synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of Latinx older adults, providing insight into general cultural beliefs, views, norms, of Latinx communities and how they relate to and influence elder mistreatment.

## Statistics

The term **Latinx** is a gender-neutral neologism, sometimes used instead of Latino or Latina, to refer to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity in the United States. Latinx cultures reviewed here include Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. They are the nation's largest ethnic minority and account for about 17% of the total US population.<sup>1</sup> Hispanic can be interpreted as an ethnic term acknowledging cultural ties back to Spanish heritage. Latino refers to Latin American decent blending Native American, African and Spanish heritage.<sup>2</sup>

### LATINO POPULATION SUBGROUPS & STATISTICS

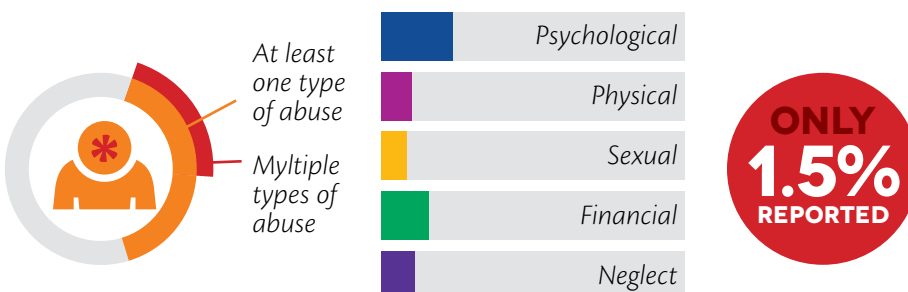


## Research Findings on Prevalence

Due to the limited number of studies of elder mistreatment in the Latino population as well as study design variations, it is difficult to estimate an exact prevalence rate. A study of a nationally representative sample of older adults, found that Latinos were less likely to report both verbal and financial mistreatment than their White counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

### TYPES OF ABUSE REPORTED

A study that specifically looked at 198 Latinx older adults, found that **40% experienced at least one type of abuse** and **21% experienced multiple types**.<sup>4</sup> Among those who had experienced mistreatment, nearly **25% reported psychological abuse**, **10.7% reported physical abuse**, **9% reported sexual abuse**, **16.7% reported financial exploitation**, and **11.7% reported caregiver neglect**. Despite the high rates of reported mistreatment, only **1.5% of respondents indicated they had reported abuse of any kind** to Adult Protective Services (APS) in the past year.



## TIPS TO PROVIDING CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES TO LATINX FAMILIES

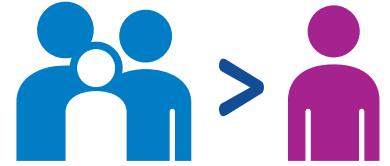
Culture, along with factors such as language barriers, fear of authorities, and living arrangements impact how older adults perceive mistreatment, their knowledge of support services, and willingness to report mistreatment and engage in recovery resources.

Make no assumptions – the elder is the expert on their own culture and beliefs. Steps to consider when assessing mistreatment of Latinx older adults.

1. Explore the survivor's degree of collective self or commitment to the abuser (e.g. how much of their resources do they share and how do they feel about it).
2. Review with the older adult the cultural context of mistreatment (e.g. how older adult is perceived or treated, what is culturally acceptable and unacceptable).
3. Assess the likelihood of reception to outside intervention. For example, an outside practitioner may bring *vergüenza* to the victim and the *familia*.
4. Observe subtle behaviors that are indicative of psychological abuse and neglect.

## Cultural Values and Risk Factors

Familism emphasizes that the need of the family unit supersedes the need of individual family members. This value of *la familia* can have its benefits but can also create certain risk factors for older adults.



### RISK FACTORS

#### 1) Favoring a Family Caregiver and In-Home Care

- High levels of interdependence: Language barriers, lack of financial resources, limited insurance, and isolation<sup>5</sup>

#### 2) Help-Seeking Behavior

- Unaware of the option of reporting abuse anonymously<sup>6</sup>
- Fear of a retaliation from an abuser<sup>7</sup>
- Concerned that they will not be treated with respect by professionals<sup>8</sup>
- Feeling the need to defend the family member abuser<sup>9</sup>
- Fear that reporting will lead to incarceration, which is stigmatized due to poor experiences with law enforcement, resulting in a sense of distrust<sup>10</sup>
- The Latino elder may not want to be brought to a place where prosecution is inevitable, because it may impact la familia<sup>11</sup>

#### 3) History of Domestic Violence

- Experience with domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse before age 65<sup>12</sup>
- More likely to be victims of intimate partner violence compared to Whites<sup>13</sup>

#### 4) Machismo

- Strongly linked to domestic violence<sup>14</sup>
- If a male elder is being mistreated, he may not want to reveal the loss of respect and status expected in his position<sup>15</sup>
- Plays a role in self-neglect by prioritizing the needs of the family above their own as a sacrifice they made for their family members<sup>16</sup>

#### 5) Acculturation

- The disconnectedness from cultural identity can influence family roles and affect traditional values<sup>17</sup>

## REPORTING BEHAVIOR

- Caregivers who identified as “Mexican-American” as opposed to “Hispanic” said that people in their culture would be less likely to report abuse, even though many were more cognizant of abuse.<sup>18</sup>
- However, one study showed that most Puerto Ricans would contact authorities if an elderly person was mistreated by a family member.<sup>19</sup>
- Immigrants considerably underreport mistreatment due to the family’s preference to seek resolution on their own. Involvement of authorities is feared to cause harm to not only the victim but also the family.<sup>20</sup>



## Perception of Mistreatment

### PSYCHOLOGICAL

- **62.5% of Puerto Rican respondents considered psychological neglect** (e.g., excluding from activities, isolation) **among the worst things** that can be done to an elderly person by a family member.

### ACTS OF AGGRESSION AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

- A Latina elder who is abused may believe that she should have the ability to endure abuse and that violent partnerships are commonplace. A Latina abuser may become abusive because she takes on more responsibilities than she can handle.<sup>21</sup> Abusive marital relationships may be precipitated by gender role expectations of marianismo, mandating women to tolerate abuse and focus on serving others, economic dependence, and societal expectations disapproving of marital dissolutions.<sup>22</sup>

### EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT

- Deliberate acts of aggression, such as, taking money without permission and striking or yelling at elders were also perceived to be forms of mistreatment.<sup>23</sup> Refusing to provide basic and emotional needs of Latino elders has been reported as one of the most frequent forms of elder abuse.<sup>24</sup>

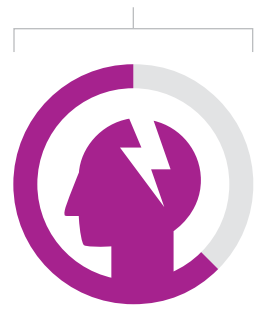
### FINANCIAL ABUSE

- Latino elders often do not identify financial abuse as a form of mistreatment and may not consider providing adult children or grandchildren with money or other resources to be exploitative.<sup>25</sup> Many financial exchanges are rooted in familial and cultural expectations of support for *la familia* and *la comunidad* at large.<sup>26</sup>

### LONG-TERM CARE

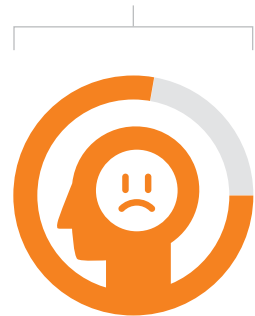
- Caregivers may be misinformed about what constitutes abuse. One study found that some caregivers believed physical abuse to be the only reportable type of mistreatment.<sup>27</sup>
- Latinas identified putting an elderly relative in a nursing home as being an abusive act.<sup>28</sup> In the study of Mexican-American caregivers, **78% indicated they would feel guilty if they did not care for an older relative in need** and **57.8% thought that it was assumed that the women would care for aging relatives in their families.**<sup>29</sup>

### Puerto Rican respondents



*Considered psychological neglect among the worst things that can be done to an elderly person*

### Mexican-American Caregivers



*Would feel guilty if they did not care for an older relative*



*Assumed that women would care for aging relatives*

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