

Research Translation

Determining Prevalence and Correlates of Elder Abuse Using *Promotores*: Low-Income Immigrant Latinos Report High Rates of Abuse and Neglect.¹

BACKGROUND

In 2010, Latinos made up 6.7% of the US population aged 65 and older, up from 5.0% in 2000. Of Latino older adults in the U.S., 55% were immigrants, 41% had limited English proficiency and 20.4% lived below the federal poverty level. Barriers to reporting abuse by older Latinos include:

- Often reside with families and rely on them for long-term care. Familism, which emphasizes the needs of the family over the needs of the individual, may conceal mistreatment and inhibit formal help-seeking
- Undocumented Latinos are less likely to report abuse for fear of deportation of themselves or family members
- General mistrust of government exacerbates these fears
- Limited English proficiency may inhibit reporting
- Cultural beliefs about the acceptability of sharing money and resources, economic interdependence within extended families may reduce reporting of financial exploitation

METHODOLOGY

Used local monolingual Spanish-speaking *promotores* (community health workers) to interview a sample of 200 Latino adults aged 66+ in low-income communities of Los Angeles via door-to-door interviews. Respondents with moderate or severe cognitive impairment were not included. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were all conducted in Spanish. The survey instrument developed for this study, the University of Southern California Older Adult Conflict Scale, asked about frequency and severity of five types of abuse. A review of California's statutes and consultation with the advisory committee led to the determination that *promotores* were not mandatory reporters. *Promotores* distributed community resource packets and were trained to help identify appropriate services if needed. Response rate was approx. 65%. Mean age was 72, 56% were female, 50% were married or partnered, 95% were immigrants, primarily from Mexico. 33% lived with a spouse, 46% lived with children or grandchildren and 17% lived alone.

PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE

Overall, 40.4% of Latino adults had experienced some form of abuse or neglect within the previous year; 21% had experienced multiple types. Nearly 25% reported psychological abuse; 16.7% financial exploitation; 11.7% neglect; 10.7% physical assault and 9% sexual abuse. Experiencing physical or sexual abuse before age 65 was a considerable risk factor for elder mistreatment. Latinos who are more acculturated and had more education are more likely to acknowledge abuse.

RISK FACTORS IDENTIFIED

- Younger age, higher education, and experiencing sexual or physical abuse before age 65 were significant risk factors for psychological, physical, and sexual abuse
- Years lived in the US, younger age, and prior abuse were associated with greater risk of financial exploitation
- Years lived in the US was a risk factor for caregiving neglect

CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Results suggest that respondents are more willing to disclose abuse to *promotores* who represent their culture and community. 1.5% of respondents indicated reporting abuse of any kind to APS in the past year, suggesting considerable underreporting by older Latinos. Practitioners' role in identifying and reporting abuse is all the more paramount. The practice of training individuals who do not collect identifying information and are not mandated to report abuse may be replicated to educate victims within an ethnic community.

Our research translations highlight key points of aging- and abuse-related research articles for use by practitioners working with older adults. Visit the National Center on Elder Abuse website and click Library for more information on research <https://ncea.acl.gov>.

¹ Marguerite DeLiema, BS, Zachary D. Gassoumis, BSc, Diana C. Homeier, MD, and Kathleen H. Wilber, PhD, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 60:1333–1339, 2012.