

Mistreatment of Latino Elders

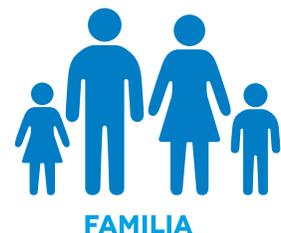
GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

- ▶ **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 care taker
- ▶ **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 Latino Elders**

- Culture can be a protective or risk factor for Latino elders. It affects how they perceive abuse and seek help and so should also affect how professionals and authorities engage, assess, and intervene.
- Don't assume a Latino elder will behave a certain way because of their cultural heritage. If you want to understand their beliefs, ask!
- La *familia* is emphasized over the individual in many Latino cultures affecting an elder's willingness to admit abuse or seek help.
- The utilization of *promotores* is a culturally informed method of intervention that can be employed with mistreated Latino elders.
- Latino elders may not perceive financial exploitation as abuse because interdependency is common in Latino families.
- Some reasons Latino elders may not want to seek help are: the *vergüenza* it brings to their family, cultural or religious ideologies. Lack of culturally competent services, language barriers, and lack of awareness of services.
- An elder's willingness to report abuse and understand the services available to them may be influenced by where they were born (U.S. vs. outside of the U.S.), English proficiency, and level of acculturation to U.S. society.

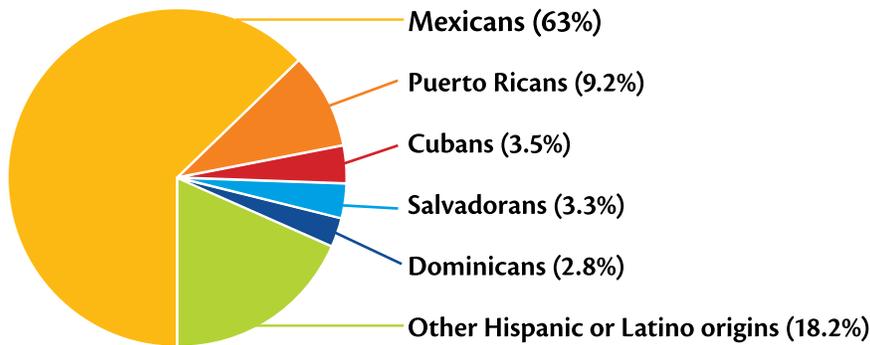


This **RESEARCH BRIEF** synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of Latino elders, providing insight into **general cultural beliefs, views, norms, of Latinos and how they relate to and influence elder mistreatment.**

Statistics

“Hispanic or Latino” refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). They are the nation’s largest ethnic minority and account for about 17% of the total US population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). *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 (Franco et al, 2000).

LATINO POPULATION SUBGROUPS & STATISTICS



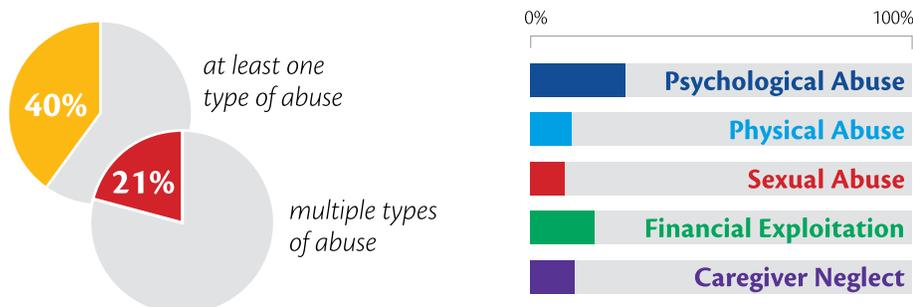
CDC 2010

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 (Laumann et al, 2008).

A study that specifically looked at 198 Latino elders, found that **40% experienced at least one type of abuse and 21% experienced multiple types** (Deliema et al, 2002). Among those that have 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.

TYPES OF ABUSE REPORTED



TIPS FOR WORKING WITH LATINO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

There are various sources of risk and protective factors for an elder. Culture, along with factors such as English proficiency, fear of authorities, and living arrangements impact how elders perceive mistreatment, their knowledge of support services, and if they report or seek help for mistreatment (Moon, 2012).

Make no assumptions- the elder is the expert on their own culture and beliefs. Steps to consider when assessing mistreatment of Latino elders:

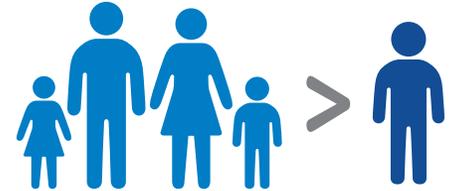
1. Explore the elder’s degree of collective self or commitment to the abuser (e.g. how much of their resources do they share and how do they feel about it?).
2. Explore the cultural context of elder mistreatment (e.g. how elders are perceived or treated, what is culturally acceptable and unacceptable?).
3. Assess the likelihood of outside intervention. For example, Latino elders may not allow an outside practitioner into the family circle because of the *vergüenza* it will bring to them and their family.
4. Look for subtle behaviors that are indicative of psychological abuse and neglect.

Research Findings on Cultural Values & Risk Factors

Language barriers and lack of cultural competency can impede services and create barriers to understanding the context of abuse for older adults from other cultures (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2005; Henderson, 2011). To better understand the occurrence of elder mistreatment in Latino groups, and to provide appropriate services to diverse elders, it is important for intervening professionals to learn about the impact of culture upon behavior and the practice environment.



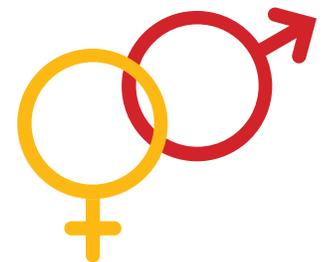
Familism emphasizes that **the need of the family unit supersedes the need of individual** family members. Imbued with a sense of pride for *la familia*, a Latino elder may avoid seeking help or reporting mistreatment to avoid *vergüenza* (Montoya, 1998; Vazquez & Rosa, 1999).



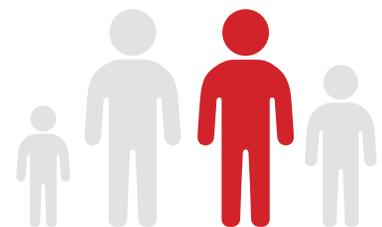
Latinos may have a **preference to receive in-home care** and rely on family caregivers. Latinos have low utilization rates of long term care (Cox & Monk, 1990; Johnson et al, 1997; Herrera et al 2008). This is most often the case among Mexican Americans (Crist, 2002; Lim et al, 1996; Wallace & Lew-Ting, 1992; Herrera et al, 2008). However, high levels of interdependence may place elders and their caregivers at risk for abusive situations. Language barriers, lack of financial resources, limited insurance, and isolation are factors that may facilitate interdependence (Montoya, 1998; Franco et al, 2000). Some adult children caregivers may be financially dependent on their elderly parents and become abusive because they resent their own dependency (Franco et al, 2000).



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 (Vazquez & Rosa, 1999; Dakin et al, 2009). 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 (Vazquez & Rosa, 1999; Parra-Cardona et al, 2007).



The patriarch is the family provider and protector and expects to be included in communications when outsiders are involved with the family. If a male elder is being mistreated, he may not want to reveal the loss of respect and status expected in his position (Montoya, 1998; Vazquez & Rosa, 1999). **Machismo may also play a role in self-neglect.** In a small study of Latino custodial grandfathers who neglected their own personal or medical care, the elders discussed prioritizing the needs of the family above their own as a sacrifice they made for their family members (Bullock & Thomas, 2007).



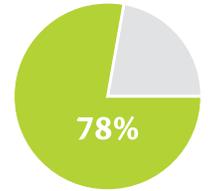
Research Findings on Perceptions of Mistreatment

When asked to define elder mistreatment, 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**. Deliberate acts of aggression, such as, taking money without permission and striking or yelling at elders were also perceived to be forms of mistreatment (Anetzberger et al, 1996). Refusing to provide basic and emotional needs of Latino elders has been reported as one of the most frequent forms of elder abuse (Sanchez, 1999).

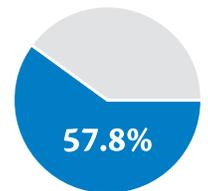
Latino elders often **do not identify financial abuse as a form of mistreatment** and may not consider providing adult children or grandchildren with money or other resources to be exploitative (Sanchez, 1999; Dakin & Pearlmutter, 2009; Bullock & Thomas, 2007). Many financial exchanges are rooted in familial and cultural expectations of support for *la familia* and *la comunidad* at large (Sanchez, 1997).

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 (Herrera et al, 2008).

In a study of older women, Latinas identified putting an elderly relative in a nursing home as being an abusive act (Dakin & Pearlmutter, 2009). 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** (Herrera et al, 2008).



Caregivers that feel guilty if they did not care for an older relative



Caregivers that assumed that women would care for aging relatives in their families

Research Findings on Domestic Violence

Elders may be at considerable risk for mistreatment if they experienced domestic, physical or sexual abuse before age 65 (DeLiema et al, 2012). In a national study of adults aged 55 and older, researchers found that **Latinos were more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence** compared to Whites (Jasinski & Dietz, 2003). Female victims are likely to have abusers who are husbands or former husbands (Grossman & Lundy, 2003). The *machismo* ideology in Latino culture has been strongly linked to domestic violence (Enguidanos et al, 2014).

Violent domestic partnerships may be common within the cultural setting and Latinos may prefer interventions that preserve and strengthen the family unit (Dakin & Pearlmutter, 2009).

Research Findings on Help-Seeking Behavior and Beliefs

In a survey of Mexican-Americans, some elders were **unaware of the option of reporting abuse anonymously** and reluctant to contact authorities out of fear that a suspected abuser would retaliate (Herrera et al, 2008). 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 (Franco et al, 2000). However, one study showed that most Puerto Ricans would contact authorities if an elderly person was mistreated by a family member (Anetzberger et al, 1996).

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 (DeLiema et al, 2012). Some Latino elders may be concerned that they will not be treated with respect by professionals (Blanchard & Lurie, 2004; Herrera et al, 2008).

An elder may feel the need to defend the family member abuser or may **fear that reporting will lead to incarceration**. There is a stigma associated with incarceration because of poor experiences with law enforcement, resulting in a sense of distrust (Enguidanos et al, 2014). The Latino elder may not want to be brought to a place where prosecution is inevitable, because it may impact *la familia* (Dakin & Pearlmutter, 2009).

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