

Elder abuse affects Latinos disproportionately

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A sobering new study by researchers from the University of Southern California Davis School of Gerontology finds that elder abuse in low-income Latino communities goes largely unreported. More than 40 percent of Latino elders told Spanish-speaking interviewers that they had been abused or neglected in the last year — yet only 1.5 percent of victims said they had ever reported the abuse to authorities.

"Our study has revealed a much higher rate of [elder abuse](#) among the Latino community than had been previously thought," said Marguerite DeLiema of the USC Davis School of Gerontology, lead author of the study in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. "This indicates that family solidarity within the Latino community does not necessarily protect older Latinos against elder abuse, as some research has suggested."

The researchers examined elder abuse that included physical or sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial exploitation and caregiver neglect. Based on interviews conducted in Spanish in low-income Latino neighborhoods in Los Angeles, the researchers found that 10.7 percent of elderly Latinos had been physically abused and 9 percent of elderly Latinos said they had been sexually abused in the last year. Of those reporting physical abuse, more than half indicated they had been severely physically assaulted.

In addition, 16.7 percent of Latino elders said they had been exploited financially and 11.7 percent said they were neglected by their caregivers.

Elderly Latinos who had been in the United States longer were more likely to be abused or neglected, the study found.

"Recent studies suggest that more than one in seven older adults is a victim of some type of elder abuse each year. We hope that these findings will bring greater national attention to the troubling issue of non-institutional elder abuse, particularly in areas with fewer community resources," said senior author Kathleen H. Wilber, Mary Pickford Foundation Professor at the USC Davis School of [Gerontology](#).

With limited English proficiency, ethnically segregated neighborhoods and cultural traditions that include reluctance to discuss problems outside the family, Latino elders are often overlooked in aging research, despite making up 6.7 percent of the U.S. population aged 65 and older. Across all demographic groups, more than 5 million cases of elder abuse are estimated to occur annually in the United States.

All interviews in the USC study were conducted in Spanish by local promotores: Spanish-speaking community health organizers who were recruited and trained to interview Latinos over the age of 65. The promotores went door-to-door on randomly selected blocks in predominantly Latino neighborhoods.

"The findings could lead to the development of more community interventions to raise awareness about and prevent elder abuse within Latino communities — culturally competent programs that disseminate information about elder abuse and provide older Latinos with links to services in their communities," Wilber said.

Provided by University of Southern California

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