

Study finds differences in how domestic violence victims seek help

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A recent study of how victims of domestic violence access help found that Hispanic women use legal resources more often than non-Hispanic white women. It also found that Hispanic and non-Hispanic white

women reported different reasons for remaining in abusive relationships.

The study, led by Ana Bridges, associate professor of psychology, was published February in the journal *Violence Against Women*.

Bridges said she was surprised by the finding that Hispanic women made more use of legal remedies such as filing criminal charges and obtaining protection orders, given widespread fear of deportation.

"At first I found it confusing," she said. "It turns out that if you have been a victim of a crime, and [domestic violence](#) is a crime, and you are cooperating with law enforcement, you can solicit protection from deportation via a U visa."

The U visas allow victims of certain crimes, along with their family members, to qualify for temporary immigration status, including work authorization, and can lead to lawful permanent resident status. The shelter where Bridges performed her research had legal assistants to counsel victims of domestic violence, likely increasing the number of women who accessed such help, Bridges said.

Bridges also studied the reasons that women give for staying in abusive relationships. She found that Hispanics cited child care needs and fear of social embarrassment as the most prevalent barriers to leaving [abusive relationships](#). "It's almost like double jeopardy," she said. "Latinas have more [social support](#), but they are more worried about being stigmatized."

Non-Hispanic whites accessed informal sources of help, such as family and friends, significantly more often than Hispanics. They also reported lack of social support as the most prevalent barrier to leaving a relationship, according to the study.

Bridges interviewed 76 [women](#) who sought help at the Peace at Home

shelter in nearby Springdale between February 2010 and June 2013. Of that total, 31 identified as Hispanic and 30 as non-Hispanic whites. The mean age of her sample group was about 34 years old. The work is part of her ongoing research to understand how access to social services is influenced by socioeconomic factors.

"I'm trying to understand and eliminate barriers to [mental health services](#)," said Bridges. "Pretty much all my research relates to what happens when people try to get help."

Provided by University of Arkansas

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