

# Study finds keys to working with Latino church to fight domestic abuse

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Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States and have relatively high rates of domestic violence coupled with social and linguistic barriers that can make it difficult for Latino families to access relevant social services. But a new study from North Carolina State University finds Latino religious leaders willing to help address the problem, and identifies cultural factors that may help social-service providers and others form partnerships with these leaders.

"The Protestant Latino church leaders who took part in our study were interested in learning more about what they could do to prevent domestic violence and intervene in situations where domestic violence is already taking place," says Dr. Natalie Ames, an associate professor of [social work](#) at NC State and co-author of the study.

However, the researchers found several cultural factors that [social workers](#) and other helping professionals need to understand in order to work effectively with Latino church leaders. For example, it is important for outreach efforts to acknowledge the religious and cultural importance of keeping families together, as well as recognize traditional male and female roles in Latino cultures.

"If these things aren't taken into consideration," Ames says, "you run the risk of alienating these leaders – making it difficult to form an effective partnership that can reach families in need.

"This is important for social workers, public-health professionals and

domestic-violence agencies, because these church leaders can reach families experiencing [domestic violence](#) who might not otherwise receive any assistance," Ames says. "Church leaders are trusted in their communities and have more access to Latino families than outsiders."

Forming partnerships with church leaders could significantly boost outreach efforts by social workers and others because, while the Latino community is a diverse one, there are some shared characteristics that can pose challenges. For one thing, language can be an obstacle if public agencies or nonprofit groups do not have bilingual employees or access to interpreters. This is a particularly difficult problem in rural communities, many of which have seen significant growth in their Latino population.

Another obstacle that can make outreach to Latino families difficult is concern among undocumented immigrants that taking advantage of community resources could lead to deportation. Working with church leaders in Latino communities could help to overcome this concern.

"Gaining the trust of these church leaders, and making sure they understand that you respect their cultural and religious beliefs, is essential to creating a successful partnership," Ames says.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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