



FARMWORKER JUSTICE EYEOPENER

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Welcome to Farmworker Justice's electronic newsletter, the EyeOpener, covering recent developments in policy and research relevant to migrant farmworkers in the US. Please feel free to send comments, questions, or suggestions for future issues to the address provided at the end of the newsletter.

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1. Social Factors Play an Important Role in the HIV/STI Risk Behaviors among Migrant Farmworkers from Mexico

Apostolopoulos Y, Sonmez S, Kronenfeld J, Castillo E, McLendon L, Smith D. STI/HIV Risks for Mexican Migrant Laborers: Exploratory Ethnographies. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 8 (3): 291-302, 2006.

The rate of HIV infection is disproportionately higher among Latinos in the US than among the general population. Starting from the perspective that mobility and human migration play important roles in the spread of disease, this article describes an exploratory qualitative research project about HIV/STI (sexually transmitted infection) risk behaviors among migrant workers from Mexico, with a focus on farmworkers. The goal of the study was to better understand the complex factors that make migrant workers from Mexico especially vulnerable to HIV/STIs. Specifically, the researchers looked at the social, cultural and physical contexts of farmworkers and the ways in which they interact with personal and environmental factors to increase risk.

The researchers used snowball sampling in the eastern and western migrant streams to select 23 male Mexican migrant farmworkers, nine in South Carolina and fourteen in Arizona, for in-depth qualitative interviews. Other data collection methods included social and spatial mapping, non-participant observation, personal interviews, and informal discussions. The outcome of the data collection was a more complete picture of the men's beliefs, behaviors and norms regarding sex, substance use, and HIV/STIs that could then be applied to additional research and intervention development among the larger migrant farmworker population.

All the farmworkers from Arizona self-identified as heterosexual while almost half of the South Carolina group self-identified as gay or bisexual. Stated reasons for migrating for both groups were mainly economic, but discrimination against homosexuals in Mexico was an additional factor for the South Carolina farmworkers. Both groups demonstrated general acceptance of alcohol use as well as a tolerant attitude toward drug use and sexual activity with sex workers. Regarding HIV/STI risks, most of the participants knew that transmission occurs from sharing needles and sexual contact, but also believed that HIV was transmitted by kissing, hugging, and contact with clothing. They also believed HIV could be cured. Condom use was not widespread. The Arizona participants were more likely to express conservative views and to have lower levels of risk behaviors, which the researchers attributed to their being less mobile and having stronger social and family ties than the South Carolina group.

Migration creates a bridge for HIV/STIs between rural Mexico and the US, making education and prevention a concern for both countries. An understanding of the role of social network and cultural context such as that offered by this study will aid in the development of future research projects and the implementation of prevention programs. Clinicians can aid in the process by providing patients with accurate information on means of transmission and the role of risk behaviors in contracting and transmitting HIV/STIs.

2. Housing Conditions Create Significant Health Risks for Farmworker Families in North Carolina

Early J, Davis SW, Quandt SA, Rao P, Snively BM, Arcury TA. Housing Characteristics of Farmworker Families in North Carolina. *Journal of Immigrant & Minority Studies* 8(2):173-184, 2006.

Farmworker families have limited options for housing because of their low incomes and the nature and location of their employment. As a result, they often live in housing that is poorly built and maintained, too small for the number of occupants, and located on or near farms where they may be exposed to pesticides. The environment inside substandard and/or inadequate housing can have a profound influence on the health of its occupants. This article presents the results of a research project conducted in North Carolina to document the conditions and resulting health implications of farmworker housing in the state. Data collected included observations of the size and condition of the housing, as well as location and amenities such as air conditioning and laundry facilities. The residents were also asked about behaviors

that can influence the housing environment, such as frequency of cleaning and method of doing laundry. A total of 234 families participated in the study; as required by the study design, all households had at least one child under the age of eight.

The majority of families lived in rented mobile homes, often located adjacent to active agricultural fields. Crowding was a common problem, with many households containing one or more adults in addition to the main householder's nuclear family. Most dwellings had only a single bathroom that might be shared by as many as five farmworkers. This lengthens the time before workers are able change out of work clothes and shower, which increases the likelihood of the transfer of pesticide residues to the house and to other family members. A significant number of dwellings did not have air conditioning, thereby increasing exposure to pesticide drift through open windows if located near fields. Many households used public laundry facilities, so pesticide-contaminated clothing may be stored inside the house for up to a week. Participants reported that keeping their homes clean was a challenge due to the number of residents and lack of equipment such as a working vacuum cleaner. Dusting and floor cleaning are important factors in reducing pesticide exposure; a majority of participants reported sweeping or mopping daily, but very few vacuumed or dusted as regularly.

The conditions in which many farmworker families live put them at risk for a variety of environmental health problems, especially pesticide exposure. Existing regulations need to be enforced that require grower-owned housing and temporary labor camps to follow minimum standards of maintenance, a limited number of occupants, and a set proximity to laundry facilities. Farmworker families, especially those who live near fields, should be provided with information about ways to limit their risk for pesticide exposure in their homes.

3. Farmworkers Draw on Personal Experience to Understand Risks Posed by Pesticides

Flocks J, Monaghan P, Albrecht S, Bahena A. Florida Farmworkers' Perceptions and Lay Knowledge of Occupational Pesticides. *Journal of Community Health* 32(3): 181-194, 2007.

A number of studies have been conducted to document the perceptions and beliefs held by farmworkers in the US about pesticide exposure and related health risks. Federal requirements for pesticide safety training for workers cover a range of technical issues, e.g., re-entry intervals and application notifications, but do not address the personal concerns of workers about their own and their families' health. This study conducted in Florida concerning farmworkers understanding of occupational pesticides found that the knowledge gaps are frequently filled using personal experience. While much of this "lay knowledge" is in agreement with generally accepted medical science, some of it is inaccurate in ways that may lead to increased exposures.

Over 100 farmworkers participated in a series of focus groups in which they discussed a variety of topics related to pesticides in the workplace, including classification,

means of exposure, routes into the body, and adverse health effects. Farmworkers generally did not know the names of pesticides they applied, and often referred to them using the Spanish words for “poison” or “medicine.” They included an array of agricultural chemicals in the category of pesticides, some of which, such as fertilizers and growth enhancers, were not considered dangerous. The workers had generally accurate knowledge of the ways they could be exposed in the fields as well as in enclosed settings such as nurseries. They were aware of the various ways in which pesticides could enter the body, and spoke of pesticides “going to the brain” after being inhaled. Because workers usually did not know about applications at their worksites, they tended to rely on their sense of smell to determine whether pesticides were present. The odor itself was considered the source of some of the negative reactions, e.g., dizziness or headaches. Workers were least confident of their knowledge of the long term health effects of exposure, especially with respect to reproductive health. Children and women were considered more vulnerable to adverse effects due to being “weaker” than adult males.

These findings demonstrate that although farmworkers have accurate knowledge on certain aspects of pesticide safety and exposure risk, important gaps remain. Requirements that workers have timely access to information about applications, including the name of the pesticide, need to be more rigorously enforced since this information is crucial in case of an exposure. Workers also need to be reminded that odor is not a reliable means of detecting the presence of pesticides. They should be provided with appropriately detailed information on the long term health effects and possible reproductive health effects so they are better equipped to protect themselves and their families.

4. Complaint Against State Plan Administration of Oregon Resolved in Farmworkers’ Favor

Decision of Richard S. Terrill, Regional Administrator, OSHA Region 10, May 21, 2007.

Farmworker Justice (FJ), Oregon Law Center and Legal Aid Services of Oregon filed a Complaint Against State Plan Administration (CASPA) challenging a regulation and enforcement practices of Oregon’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OR-OSHA). OR-OSHA is the Oregon agency that administers pesticide and other occupational health and safety laws in that state. The farmworker groups charged that: (1) Oregon’s Agricultural Labor Housing and Related Facilities Standard is not as effective as federal OSHA’s temporary labor camp standard; and (2) OR-OSHA does not enforce its standard in a manner that is as protective as that of federal OSHA. Under federal law, states can only adopt and enforce their own occupational health and safety laws if they are at least as effective as those of federal OSHA. In contravention of federal law, Oregon: (1) allows workers to sleep in their own pup tents, cars or pick-up trucks, (2) does not require growers to provide laundry and drying facilities if there are public facilities within five miles of the camp; and (3) only requires heat in living areas from October to May even though many farmworkers are housed in labor camps at high elevations where average low temperatures in September are 40 degrees. Similarly, OR-OSHA does not characterize as “serious”

violations that include: missing smoke detectors, non-potable water, the lack of bathing, handwashing or laundry facilities, filthy toilets, and putting workers in sheds or barns with dirt floors. As a consequence, penalties for these significant health hazards are minimal. Based on its investigation, federal OSHA's Regional Administrator Richard S. Terrill concluded that this complaint was valid and recommended that OR-OSHA adopt new regulations, issue an improved enforcement plan and provide additional training to enforcement personnel. The state has agreed to begin a rulemaking proceeding to formulate new regulations and to issue a final standard no later than March 31, 2008.

This complaint should result in fewer farmworker injuries or illnesses due to inadequate housing standards. It shows that advocacy is an important tool in improving the health status of migrant workers.

The *Farmworker Justice EyeOpener* is an electronic newsletter covering important recent developments in research and regulation on issues affecting the health and safety of migrant farmworkers. It is a joint project of Farmworker Justice and Migrant Clinicians Network, supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Primary Health Care. Each issue includes summaries of recent articles and reports, as well as advice on using this information to help health professionals, outreach workers, *promotores de salud*, and advocates strengthen their efforts on behalf of farmworkers and their families.

The contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of Farmworker Justice and Migrant Clinicians Network and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Bureau of Primary Health Care or the Health Resources and Services Administration.

Please send comments, questions or suggestions for future topics you would like to see covered to prao@nclr.org, or contact Shelley Davis or Pamela Rao, co-authors, at 202-293-5420.

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