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Invisible Suffering and the Fight to Prosper: Farmworkers' Intersectional Experiences with Structural Violence

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Land Acknowledgment

As a land-grant university, the University of California, Irvine, occupies land located in the ancestral and unceded territory of the sovereign Acjachemen and Tongva Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge these original stewards of the land where we live, work, and study, who despite the violence of colonialism, including land theft, forced displacement, and racism, still hold strong cultural, spiritual, and physical ties to these regions.

Context: Prior Collaborations with Community Partner

Ayudando Latinos A Soñar (ALAS) was born from the desire to help children and their families to feel proud of their identity and culture and amplify their voices. ALAS is dedicated to working to inspire trust, build safe spaces, advocate for our community, and support the health

A previous qualitative study conducted found that farmworkers experience high levels of violence within their community and occupational settings, especially gun violence, sexual violence, intercommunal discrimination, and harassment based on immigration status (Ruiz Malagon, 2023).



Background

- Farmworkers face several structural determinants of health that limit their social and health well-being, some including immigration policy, limitation of healthcare access as well as environmental racism (Ramos, 2018; Medel-Herrero et al., 2021; Castillo et al., 2021).
 - Many of these conditions can be attributed to structural operationalization of political and social institutions that reinforce structural injustices such as structural racism that can develop forms of structural violence (Williams et al., 2019)

Structural Violence is a form of violence perpetrated through inequities by social structures that can put individuals and populations in harm's way (Farmer, 2004).

- As a force, structural violence has the power to inform the social hierarchy of oppression, which often leads to “death, injury, subjugation, stigmatization, and psychological terror” (Farmer, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aims to inform our broader understanding of the way farmworkers experience structural violence within San Mateo County while simultaneously addressing the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) Objective 5 for Public Safety and Objective 1 of the Agenda for Healthy Work Design and Well-Being through a community cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005).

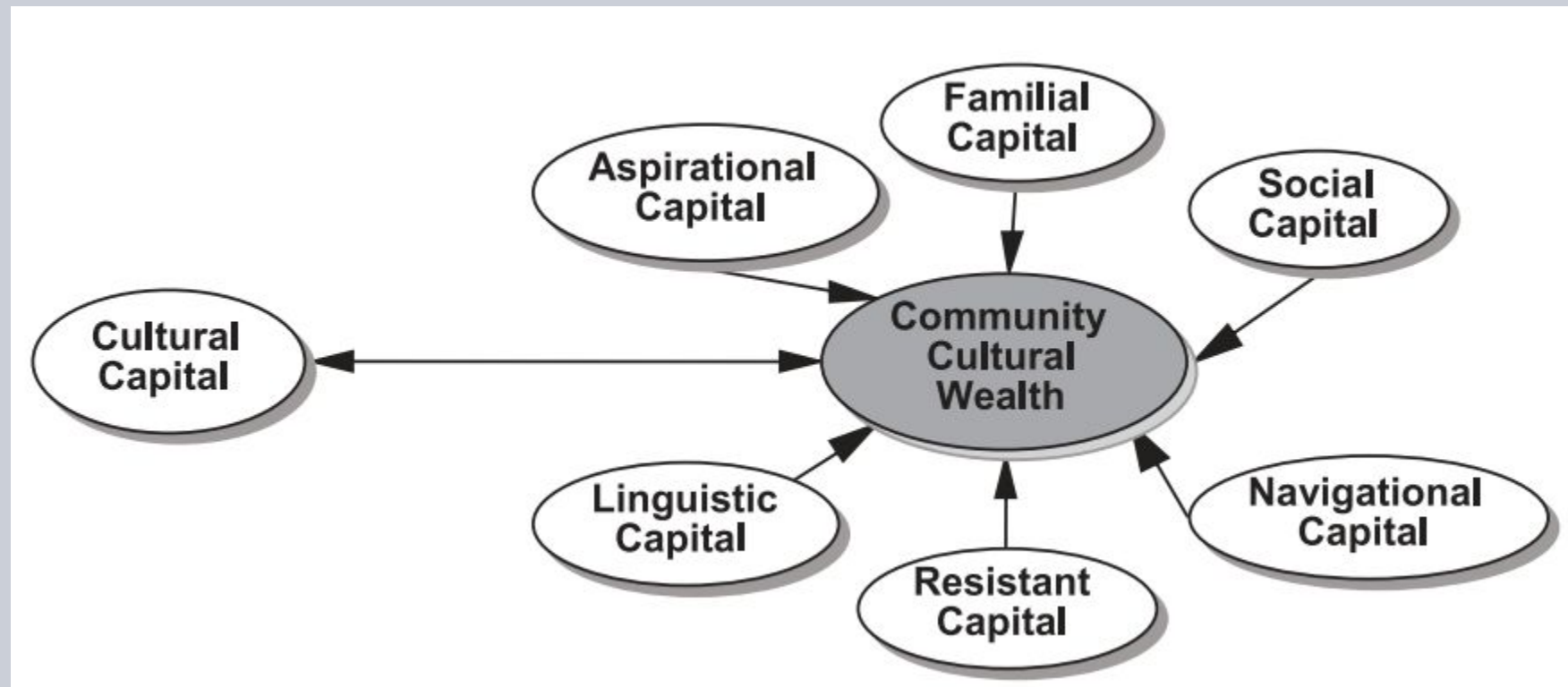


Qualitative Objectives/Aims

1. To evaluate the structural violence occurring within farmworkers' occupational settings and beyond in the community which will provide stakeholders with the information needed to develop interventions to reduce the violence occurring, and provide adequate support to those affected.
2. To determine what strengths and protective factors the farmworker community holds against structural violence through a community cultural wealth lens.

Theoretical Guidance

Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). Originally adapted from Oliver & Shapiro (1995)

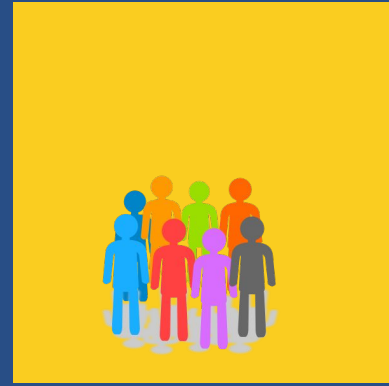


Methodology



Data Collection:

- Semi-Structured *Platica*- Style Interviews (Fierros & Bernal, 2016; Gonzalez, 1998).



Eligibility and Recruitment

- Farmworkers within San Mateo County, California, of age 18 years or older.
- Word of Mouth Recruitment



Recruitment Sites

- Community Partner's Farmworker Programs
- Directly in community spaces where farmworkers engage.



Participant Demographics

- 18 total participants
- All self-identified as Latino/a
- Home Countries Represented: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras
- 2 LGBTQIA+ Farmworkers
- 4 Documented and 14 Undocumented Farmworkers

Preliminary Data Analysis

- A) The initial data is being analyzed utilizing a constructive grounded theory approach that allows for the development of themes in an iterative process (Charmaz, 2014).
- B) Use of Atlas.ti 24 Software
- C) The primary author (Juan Carlos) conducted an open coding process to develop the initial code book. The code book was further developed through a flexible coding approach (Deterding & Waters, 2021) with the undergraduate research assistant (Sarah) to solidify the codebook used on the first five interviews.

Preliminary Findings

3 Initial Themes Found

1. Mechanisms of Labor Exploitation under Capitalistic Systems
2. Racialization Mitigates Communal and Labor Dynamics
3. Structural Injustices are Entrenched throughout Processes of Migration

Theme 1

“Sometimes we are not paid for our overtime, the bosses have us work for multiple hours past our contracts and we are not paid for those overtime hours. Sometimes they tell us that we do not work fast enough and that is the reason why our overtime is not paid. Sometimes we would hear the boss say that we are undocumented and he can easily replace us if we kept complaining about our pay.”

Participant 4 Mexican Undocumented
Farmworker (Crop Harvesting)

Theme 2

“Sometimes even the foremen don’t speak Spanish, and we don’t know English, and they tell you, “You’re in the United States, you’re in the United States of America; you have to speak English.” But for some people, it’s just not that easy. Other workers also discriminate against us. They use hurtful words like “mojarra” (a racial slur for Indigenous people). They say things like, “Come on, hurry up, you mojarra,” or, “That’s what you came here for to work mojarra” I’ve had to hear a lot of that myself.”

Participant 18, Mexican Undocumented
Farmworker (Horticulture)

Theme 3

"In the detention center, we only had a tarp to sleep on, so it was very cold, and my child was very cold and very sick. The agents didn't try to help us; they only gave us aluminum blankets. I tried to get help from the immigration agents, but they wouldn't help us—they gave us expired food."

– Participant 16, Father from Guatemala, Undocumented, Farmworker (Crop Harvesting)

Discussion and Future Steps

A. Participants are drawn from a specific geographic region within California's Bay Area, limiting the extent to which findings may be applicable across California's farmworker population and, by extension, to farmworker communities nationwide.

B. It is critical to examine how pre-migration experiences and the conditions of the migratory journey may intensify inequities foreign-born farmworkers face once integrated into U.S. society.

C. Finalizing data analysis across all interviews will deepen insights into the pervasive effects of structural violence within occupational environments and inform strategies for addressing these impacts.

References



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