Stress among farmworkers of Mexican descent in the Northwest United States

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Background
- > 5 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers employed annually in US.
- Majority are immigrants and of Mexican descent.
- Migrant workers move from one locale to another. Seasonal workers live in one place year-round and work on a seasonal basis.
- Workers are exposed to chemicals, pesticides, dangerous machinery and frequently do not have access to medical or social services.
- Work is frequently unpredictable and low-paying and workers are often exploited and discriminated against.
- Farmworkers of Mexican descent face many potential ‘stressors’, however little is known about the perception and impact of stress in this population.

Methods
- Used data from a previous PNASH study
- Participants were asked 6 questions about particular stresses including:
  - Health worries
  - Difficulties with their partner
  - Stress at work or at school
  - Financial problems or worries
  - No one to turn to when have a problem
  - A recent bad event.
- Analysis (Pearson Chi-Square) of associations between demographic characteristics and stress.
- Analysis of associations between stress and a mental health diagnosis.
- Analysis of associations between stress and sexual assault and domestic violence among the women.
- Analysis of responses to the question, “What is the most stressful thing in your life right now?”

Research Objectives
- Describe stressors reported by adult farmworkers of Mexican descent.
- Explore relationship of different stressors to demographics and other personal characteristics.
- Explore relationship of different stressors to mental health concerns and trauma.

Sample Characteristics
- 299 farmworkers: 145 male and 154 female.
- 11 locations in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.
- Majority reported were married or living with partner.
- Average of 2 children, range of 0 to 8 children.
- 53% earned ≤ $12,000 a year, 18% earned > $12,000.
- 96% born in Mexico (mainly in Oaxaca and Michoacan).
- 95% identified as Mexican, 3% as Mexican American, .01% as Chicano.
- 82% speak mostly in Spanish, 1% in English, 5% Trique, 6% Mixteco.
- Lived in U.S. for average of 7.4 years, range of 1 month to 32 years.
- Majority of workers reported little or no stress. This may indicate resilience in this population or may reflect flaws in the questions.
- Few workers reported being “bothered” by work/school stress, however the majority identified work as the most stressful thing in their life.
- The results confirm previously documented associations between stress and mental health concerns and trauma.

Conclusions
- Majority of workers reported little or no stress. This may indicate resilience in this population or may reflect flaws in the questions.
- Few workers reported being “bothered” by work/school stress, however the majority identified work as the most stressful thing in their life.
- The results confirm previously documented associations between stress and mental health concerns.
- Study substantiates the need to develop programs and policy that aim to improve the working and living conditions of farmworkers of Mexican descent, increase their income and access to social services, and work to reunite separated family members.
- More research, using qualitative methods is needed to explore the self-identified stressors in this population.

Table 1: Percent of workers who reported feeling “not bothered”, “bothered a little”, or “bothered a lot” by six stressors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Not bothered</th>
<th>bothered a little</th>
<th>bothered a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health worries</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner difficulties</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/school stress</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial worries</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent bad event</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Statistically significant associations between demographic characteristics and stressors and stressors and a mental health diagnosis or a report of sexual assault (SA)/domestic violence (DV). Stress classification: ‘not bothered or bothered a little’ to ‘bothered a lot’.

Association of Health worries and Stress at work or at school:
- Depression, Anxiety, SA
- Depression, Alcohol, SA, DV

Association of Partner difficulties and Work/school stress:
- Depression, Anxiety, Alcohol, SA, DV

Association of More children, Mexican identity and Financial worries:
- Depression, Alcohol, SA, DV

Association of Camp, female gender and Recent bad event:
- Depression, Anxiety, SA, DV

In response to the question, “What is the most stressful thing in your life right now?” 32% responded “nothing.” Many people cited work, the lack of work and the lack of stable work as stressful. A significant number of workers reported their family or children as stressors and others reported that they were stressed about being separated from their family members, including their children, partners and parents. Respondents also indicated that they were worried about their health or the health of a significant. A number of respondents reported financial problems and the relationship with their partners as stressful.