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Indigenous Female Migrant Fieldworkers in Northwestern Mexico: Perceptions of Working Conditions and Health

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SUBJECT OF THE PRESENTATION

Approximating female agricultural dayworkers' perceptions of their own health, work and living conditions.

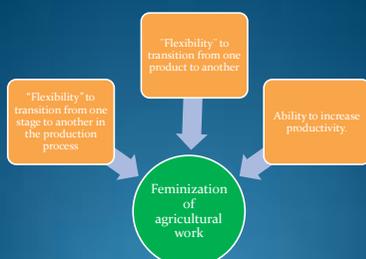
OBJECTIVE

To identify the working conditions and health of female indigenous agricultural dayworkers

THE INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURAL DAYWORKER POPULATION

Studies of the indigenous agricultural dayworker population have been mainly carried out on males, even though female participation in the workforce has increased dramatically in recent decades.

FEMALE INDIGENOUS DAYWORKERS



In 1985 the number of female agricultural workers was around 20%. Today the total agricultural day worker population is estimated to be 42.6% female.

77% of all female migrant dayworkers are under 29 years of age, 28% are illiterate and 40% belong to some ethnic group.



LOCATION OF THE STUDY



THE SAN QUINTIN VALLEY OF BAJA CALIFORNIA

•The San Quintín Valley is located 300 kilometers from the México-US border along the Pacific coast. The mid-census period count of 2005 showed its population to be 76, 096 inhabitants.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

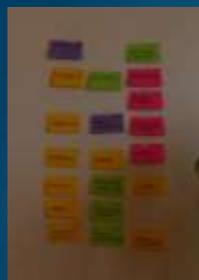
This study used a qualitative methodology that employed:

- Workshops based on techniques used for educating illiterate adult populations;
- Group interviews;
- and non-participant observation

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We also used techniques such as the free listing of work activities in order to identify the agricultural tasks that can affect these women's health. The work was accomplished with a total of 50 women, mostly mixtec and all agricultural dayworkers.

RESULTS



We asked women to list their fieldwork activities

RESULTS

Work Activities:

Pollinate flowers

Cut strings using knives

Tie the stakes that support the plants

Carry buckets on their shoulders

Shovel soil onto the plastic ground cover

Replant

Lift buckets full of product from the ground and carry them by their handles or rope handles, to dumping points.

Climb up and balance on the buckets (as stools)

Drag sacks of product

Climb up and down ladders

Carry buckets of product to trucks

Push carts and ladders with wheels Sharpen and disinfect scissors

Apply agrichemicals to plant leaves with a small paintbrush

Wash the pails containing agrichemicals,



Once the women described all the work activities they could think of, one of them volunteered to be the model for a human body traced onto drafting paper. This figure formed the background for identifying and localizing the health effects of each work task.



The aches and pains related to the activities carried out in the course of agricultural daywork were identified as:

- Pain in the areas of: Neck and back, knees, hands, arms and waist.
- Health risks such as respiratory illness, varicose veins due to carrying heavy buckets and standing for hours, fractures from falling, rheumatism, exhaustion, diabetes and anemia due to poor eating habits.

Discomfort and irritation of: Nose, eyes, throat; burning eyes

Vomiting, diarrhea and stomach ache; headache

Body rash and eruptions on hands; cracked skin; allergies

Falls, bruises, blisters, cuts

Pain in knees and calves; lower back problems and shoulder pain

Group Interviews

- Revealed problems with access to health services due to not being incorporated into the social security healthcare system for various reasons including:
- Lack of knowledge about how to affiliate themselves when their employer doesn't do so, lack of proper documentation such as birth certificate or personal identification card

- Other reasons include discrimination, lack of translators at the health centers and discordance between health center hours of operation and the work schedules of these women.
- Lack of ambulances and medical specialists in the local health centers.

Working Conditions

- Salary is a problem since it fluctuates between 90 – 120 pesos (approximately \$8-10 USD) a day, for 6-10 hours of heavy work
- They are also paid by piecework during a particular harvest season, measured by the number of 20-liter plastic buckets filled to overflowing with fruit, averaging 50 pesos a bucket (about \$4.00 USD). They usually work 3-6 days per week; some only work by the day and some work by the season.

- Most employers require the women to take their own tools (shovel, hoe, scissors), as well as protective gear such as bandanas, gloves and hats or caps.
- The fieldworkers mentioned that posted rules are meant to protect the plants more than the workers.

They also described their work conditions as difficult, partly due to the grueling schedule, since they are required to be away from their homes sometimes for up to 13 hours a day; they have to get up at 4:00 a.m. to catch the bus that takes them to work.

They spend the day engaged in heavy chores -- some say men's work -- sometimes for over 8 hours a day.

At the end of their work day they have to wait to get paid and arrive home late to finish up their housework when by all rights they should be resting.

CONCLUSIONS

These women are subjected to health vulnerabilities due to:

- long work hours requiring uncomfortable postures, little time to rest and lack of protective gear in the workplace,
- Exposure to risks and illnesses

They all say that most of their work activities are heavy and risky for their health.

Most perceive that the characteristics of their work requirements make it impossible to take care not to get sick.

In general, these women are subject to temporary work conditions or unemployment.

They have no employment security because they are contracted by the day or by harvest season.

Added to their risky working conditions, are the physical wear and tear experienced due to the nature of the work. This wear and tear leads to precarious living conditions.



Thank You