

U.S.Latino Migrant Farm Workers: Managing Acculturative Stress and Conserving Work-Family Resources

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on theorizing on acculturative stress (Berry, in press; Berry & Sam, 1997; Bhagat & London, 1999) and conservation of resource views of stress (Hobfoll, 1989) as organizing frameworks, this chapter presents original qualitative data from 79 interviews conducted with low income Latino migrant farm working mothers from five camps in Michigan in the United States. We discuss the migrant's work and family experiences in terms of the demands, opportunities, and constraints they face. We conclude with suggestions for future research on buffers of the stress-strain relationship and resilience for low skill migrant workers.

INTRODUCTION

Rosa, is a 41-year-old mother of five children: a three-month-old male infant, four-year-old boy and girl twins, and two sons ages eleven and twelve. Her husband Juan is 42 years old. They both have been working as migrant workers for the last 21 years, and have been coming to a midwestern U.S. camp in lower western Michigan with their family for the past three years, traveling from Florida in search of work. Both Rosa and Juan work picking and packing squash. Soon the squash season will be over and they will start sorting other vegetables. Their combined weekly earnings for last week were \$175.00. Although this may not seem like a lot, Rosa says, "It is early in the season and the grower is expecting more work later in the season." Rosa does not know exactly how much she makes per hour, but comments that "Some people say that "he" (the grower) take taxes out of our pay checks." Rosa and Juan work very hard, and despite these conditions, Rosa is quite positive and thankful for the opportunity to work. Rosa and Juan's school-age children attend the Migrant Summer School and their preschool children attend Migrant Head Start. Even though Rosa is a new mother, she must work in the fields with her husband. The family cannot afford for her to stay home (in the temporary housing provided by the grower) to care for the new baby. Rosa is happy with

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her children's at the Migrant Head Start, but she is concerned because her baby is so small and has not started eating solid food yet. She is glad that her children have a place to go and learn and be taken care of while she and her husband work. It is really too hot for the children out in the field. Rosa completed the 5th grade in Mexico. After that she started working in the fields.

Large-scale migration of workers with their families is a global phenomenon that has grown dramatically over recent decades. Yet this topic has received relatively little attention in the mainstream work-family literature. Over 150 million people live temporarily outside their country of origin, and of these the International Labor Organization reports that nearly 100 million are migrant workers (Robinson, 2001). The United Nations Convention defines seasonal migrant workers as those who are employed in a state in which they are not nationals and where they are dependent on seasonal conditions (Hune, 1985). Robinson (2001) notes that ironically, many of the stresses that lead migrant workers and their families to see a new homeland in the first place, such as discrimination and poor access to education, health care, and employment, remain as barriers, despite border-crossing.

Recent migrants to developed countries such as the United States often represent two distinct occupational groups: (a) highly skilled and educated professionals and (b) workers with low skills and education. The later group, despite these constraints, still contributes far more to the economy than they receive in social services (Bhagat & London, 1999). Drawing from theorizing on acculturative stress (Berry, in press; Bhagat & London, 1999) and managing stress through conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989) as organizing frameworks, the goal of this chapter is to present an original case study of the unique cultural and work and family stresses facing the U.S. midwestern Latino migrant farm worker. Rosa and Juan, who are from the low-skilled immigrant group, typified the families we studied. We begin by providing brief background on U.S. midwestern Latino migrant workers. The comprehensive social and cultural issues examined may be relevant to other countries that depend on low-skill immigrants in their labor markets and to researchers conducting international and cross-cultural research on the work and family interface. For example, every year, a phenomenon similar to U.S. migrant stream occurs in Europe as Eastern-European workers migrate throughout Europe to harvest crops.

Michigan migrant farm workers are a key segment. The collective of U.S. Latino migrant farm workers is the largest re-occurring cyclical migrant population in the world and a major U.S. Latino migrant worker segment (Martin, 1999). Most (88%) are of Latino origin and come from Florida, Texas, California, and Mexico. Yet they are ethnically diverse with origins in Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America. The migrant work force that comes to the United States from Mexico is equivalent to the size of one-eighth of the entire Mexican workforce (Cuellar, 2002). Although migrant jobs are highly undesirable and under paid, their loss could result in a U.S. farm worker shortage and hurt the world food supply and the Mexican economy (Martin & Martin, 1994).

The migrant farm worker represents the core of the fruit, vegetable, and horticulture industry today (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002). These jobs include the picking a wide range of fruits and vegetables; their processing, grading, and packaging; and other horticultural labor, such as tree trimming and Christmas tree harvesting. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines migrant farm workers as those

who earn over 50% of their wages harvesting or working in agricultural labor and who spend the night away from home in order to seek agricultural work. Comprising 42% of the U.S. farm labor force (U.S. Department of Labor), migrants harvest more than 85% of the fruits and vegetables yielded by hand in the United States (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002). They are also extremely economically disadvantaged (Rosenbaum, 2001b). For example, the U.S. poverty guidelines for officially living in poverty for a family of seven, the size of Rosa's family, is at or below \$27,340 per year, over four times Rosa's earnings noted in the opening vignette (U.S. Federal Register, 2002).

U.S. migrant farm working families typically follow one of three main crop corridors. The eastern corridor originates in Florida and extends up the east coast and tends to have Haitian, African American, or Puerto Rican workers. The western corridor, comprising Mexican Americans, originates in southern California or Mexico and extends up the west coast. The Midwestern corridor is also primarily Mexican-American and originates in Texas or Florida, extending to the Great Lakes and plains states (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2000; Barger & Reza, 1994).

This chapter focuses on migrant working mothers in Michigan from the third corridor. According to Michigan Agricultural Statistics, nearly 45,000 migrants farmed 45 Michigan crops in 2000 (Lansing State Journal, 2003), making Michigan the fourth largest migrant employer state in the United States (Michigan Commission on Spanish Speaking Affairs, 1997). Unlike other streams where there is greater movement following different crops, most Michigan migrants typically stay in one location and sit out various crops. In Michigan, migrant work can begin in February with the pruning of cherry trees, followed by the planting of early season crops such as asparagus, apples, and sugar beets, and ending with the farming of Christmas trees in December.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Acculturation research arose from study of how immigrants change as a result of resetting in a new culture. Berry and Sam (1997) define acculturative stress as "a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation, which is the process of cultural and psychological change as the result of cross-cultural contact." Building on this theory, later work by Bhagat and London (1999, p. 353) viewed acculturative stress as resulting from uncertainties associated with changing to the new culture and included the process of adopting to the dominant values or culture of the host country. Although Bhagat and London's model (1999) focused on professionals, their theory of acculturative stress can be used to understand the stress-related demands, opportunities, and constraints faced by migrants and their families. Demand stresses relate to perceived or real conflict with the cultural values of the mainstream society of the culture. Opportunity stresses relate to the ability of immigrants to achieve at a higher level than possible in home country. Constraint stresses are those that constrain individuals from integrating in the mainstream. These three factors influence cognitive appraisal of how well one and one's family are able to manage stress and assimilation.

Berry (in press) argues it is likely that the migrant may adopt acculturation strategies that are cognitively seen as minimizing resource losses. One of the most common

strategies adopted by migrants is marginalization in which the family holds on to its old heritage in ways that preserve the family resources, but may at the same time be dysfunctional in taking advantage of opportunities in the new culture, thereby limiting full assimilation. The belief that individuals act based on their cognitive appraisal of the optimal way to conserve resources is aligned with Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory of stress. This theory holds that when an individual perceives or experiences environmental circumstances that threaten or cause depletion of resources, he or she psychologically responds in ways that minimize loss of resources. For example, resources might include self-esteem, and employment (Hobfoll, 1989). Migrating to a new land, acculturating oneself and family, and handling new work and family role integration demands can threaten or actually deplete resources and increase stress.

Hobfoll (1989) and Bhagat and London's (1999) theories are aligned and can be easily integrated. For example, opportunities often relate to resources, such as child care, and employment. Constraints and demands typically involve factors that can threaten or actually deplete resources, such as poor working conditions, language barriers, or high family mobility. We integrate these theoretical concepts to organize our case study along the themes of (a) resources and opportunities, (b) demands and potential for resource losses, and (c) constraints.

METHOD

Sample

This dataset was collected in 2001–2002 from users of Migrant Head Start Centers located at five different migrant work camps in the central and southern parts of Michigan. Face-to-face interviews lasting one to two hours were conducted with 79 low-income migrant working mothers. All interviews were conducted in Spanish by a Latino interviewer. All mothers had at least one infant. The study was part of a larger research project entitled The Michigan Child Care Partnership (Barratt, Meece, & Kossek, 2000). It was funded by the Gerber Foundation to assess child and infant care for low-income working mothers.

Measures

The data used to develop the themes in this chapter are mainly qualitative. They were drawn from an interview protocol designed to assess work experiences, social and cultural integration, child care, individual well-being, educational background, health care, transportation, and work and family stressors. We also collected some quantitative data on demographics and some exploratory Likert scales were used to measure work-family conflict and job quality (reported elsewhere because of space restrictions and the fact that the purpose of this chapter was to develop substantive qualitative themes; Meece, Barratt, Kossek, & Hawkins, 2003).

Analysis

This case study following an inductive, grounded theory development process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as opposed to a priori hypotheses. In the results section, we give descriptive statistics and then we analyze our data by the main themes noted above, which we drew from Hobfoll (1989) and Bhagat & London (1999).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Eighty-two percent of the sample reported Mexican ethnicity, whereas 18% reported Hispanic. Approximately two thirds were legal immigrants. Nearly all (97.5%) were married. The age range of the mothers was from 16–48 years. Most were young—nearly 70% were between the ages of 19 to 29 years old. All had children. Two thirds (53) had one or two children. One fifth (18) had three children. One fifth had four or more children. Nearly all (93%) of the infants were cared for at Migrant Head Start with the rest (7%) in relative care. Most (96%) were poorly educated with only a grade school education of sixth grade or less. Only one had completed high school and two had no formal education. Self-reported household income ranged from \$70.00 per week up to \$600.00 per week. The mean was \$284.93 with a standard deviation of \$123.01. Two thirds (70%) earned less than \$300 a week. Most households had two or more employed members. Eighty percent of our sample had worked in their jobs at least four years. Over a third had their schedule change every week, and over a third were called into work at the last minute or had to work after 6 p.m. Ten percent sometimes brought their infants with them to the field.

Opportunities and Resources

To assimilate into the new culture and also earn a living, child care is a critical resource. When Migrants come into a migrant camp, local childcare often is not accessible, nor is it affordable. An exception is when there is a Migrant Head Start Center located at or near the camp. A unique aspect of our sample is that nearly all relied on Migrant Head Start for infant and toddler care. This enabled us to examine the lives of migrant workers under conditions in which there was public support for child care. This chapter focuses on migrants who did not have to search for childcare in order to work and who had access to quality care and additional resources to aid acculturation.

Serving over 30,000 migrant children annually and operating in 33 states, Migrant Head Start is sponsored by the U.S. government to provide child care for low income families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). This federal program is run by local contractors to provide free childcare and comprehensive developmental services for children from 2 weeks to 5 years of age. It can operate from 6 weeks to 10 months a year, depending on harvest schedule. Many sites are open 12 hours a day, 6 to 7 days a week. In Michigan, and 10 additional states, it is run by Telamon Corporation, a private nonprofit organization whose purpose is to provide human transitional services to improve the lives of migrant and other low-income workers (www.telemon.org).

Migrant Head Start not only provides high quality child care, but also provides other services for the whole family. These services include English literacy training; employment assistance; an AIDS/HIV education program; parent training in education, health, dental, and mental health; immunizations; help for children with disabilities; meals; transportation; and social services (www.telamon.org). Migrant Head Start childcare can be seen as an acculturation resource providing a first step toward setting up roots in a community. This linkage is illustrated by the following observation made by our interviewer about a 22-year-old married farm laborer with an infant and toddler:

...is so happy over the fact that in this state there is free childcare for...(the family's) children and that wasn't the case in Florida. The family is considering settling down around here, if they can stand the cold winter months.

Although Migrant Head Start is publicly funded, the fact that it is located at or near the migrant camps led many workers to see it as part of employer support for quality childcare. We found that the more that migrant workers perceived that their employers or supervisors were supportive of childcare, such as providing childcare information, for example, the higher the care quality was rated and the lower the turnover intentions.

Child care is also important for ensuring labor force participation and economic opportunity. Following Hobfoll (1989), the lack of access to Migrant Head Start could result in perceived or actual resource loss. An illustration of this linkage comes from the situation of a young 23-year-old mother with an 8-month-old baby. With a high school diploma, she was the most highly educated individual in our sample. Yet she was unemployed and separated from her husband. Although she lives with her mother, father, grandparents, and uncle who could ostensibly provide care, our interviewer commented she was waiting for a Head Start opening:

The mom seems very upbeat even though she hasn't been able to work because of childcare. I don't work because there isn't an opening at the Head Start school. She sits at home with her baby while her parents and brother go to work in the field harvesting or weeding celery.

The potential loss of family resources resulting from a shift of other members toward care-giving may be another factor. When Head Start is not available, if another family member provides care, then some of the potential wages earned for the family are threatened

Not only are there potential economic losses if the resource of child care is not available, but also there are family health risks. If there is no room at Head Start, family members may decide to take children with them into the fields. This exposes these children to chemical pesticides, extreme heat, dangerous equipment, and hazardous conditions. A married 18-year-old mother with two children (13 months and 3 years) works in the fields picking blueberries. Soon the season will be over and she will begin picking apples. She has completed ninth grade and comments about her life as a migrant worker and when she gets to spend time with her children:

Usually after school, they spend one hour by her in the field. I realize that I married very young and it has been hard but I want to get out of this kind of life. I want my children to attend one school and not have to leave in the middle of the school year.

Despite these hardships, this work experience also provides opportunities and resources. Working allows the mother to enhance multiple life role accumulation, by adding a work role to her repertoire (Lerner, 1994). Our interviewer commented on the mother's raised expectations:

This young mother has a lot going for her. She's educating herself with the help of the Catholic Church (nuns) that visit her home four times a week. She wants to graduate so badly. She wants to get more education to be able to help her family with a better job.

Demands and Perceived or Actual Resource Losses

Resource losses include job demands and exposure to health risks that threaten livelihood, employer mistreatment because of immigrant status, and family demands resulting from separation and loss of family time.

Migrant farm-working jobs are physically and emotionally demanding with hazardous working conditions from exposure to chemicals to risks of injury from accidents. Two thirds of our sample agreed that they had daily health concerns about their safety on the jobs. Health losses from unsafe work are a critical job demand that hurts family well-being and future economic livelihood. Migrant work is dangerous and creates health concerns for workers and families (Slesinger, 1992). The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 300,000 farm workers suffer acute pesticide poisoning each year. Many of these workers do not seek treatment or are misdiagnosed because symptoms can mimic a viral infection (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002). Migrants' lack of education and economic desperation can also contribute to health concerns. One study of 460 hired farm workers in Washington State found that 89% did not know the name of a single pesticide to which they had been exposed, and 76% of workers had not received any information on appropriate protective measures (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002).

According to Nixon (1996), pesticide exposure represents the greatest health threat to the children in agriculture. He notes children are more susceptible to pesticides because they absorb more per pound of body weight and because of their developing nervous system and organs. Exposure to fertilizers and pesticides on a daily basis had the workers from our sample concerned. This 26-year-old married mother of two children was finished picking blueberries and beginning the apple picking season. She has been a migrant worker for the last 5 years and has a seventh grade education:

Yes, we could fall off the ladders and hurt ourselves. Our clothes are dirty because of the dust that remains on the leaves of the plants. We breathe that dust daily.

Dermatitis and respiratory problems are a common occurrence (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002). Additional occupational health hazards of farm work include tuberculosis, diabetes, cancer, and HIV. All these conditions, which require frequent medical treatment, are difficult to treat because of the mobility of the population.

Yet many migrant workers are fearful of losing their jobs and therefore do not ask for the needed medical attention.

Another example comes from a mother of two children who does not work because she just had a baby and her husband has been ill. She is concerned about the financial implications her husband's illness can have on their family:

My husband was so sick, he had a fever, but was afraid to take time off because the farmer gets very angry when they miss work. His younger brother got hurt by a machine and had the tip of his finger cut off. They expect him to go back to work soon.

Unfortunately, migrants are dependent on their incomes and have no choice but to stay, despite the health risks. We also spoke with a married, 37-year-old migrant mother of three, who picks and packs squash and has a ninth grade education. Her family has been coming to this same farm for the last 7 years. She is concerned about her family's economic problems because of her husband's injury:

My family is struggling. My husband had an accident while pruning apple trees. The branch from the apple tree didn't hold the ladder and he fell to the ground and broke his ankle. He had some type of surgery but his ankle and whole left foot were all swollen.

Job demands also create demands for family. Families spend little time together because the work hours threaten *family time*, which can be experienced as a cultural loss associated with migrant work. Often asked to work 50 to 60 hours per week, these migrant mothers rarely see their children. A 29-year-old married mother of five children ages 1, 2, 6, 7, and 14 years old was concerned about the lack of family time. Her highest level of education completed is sixth grade. She had been working for 4 years as a migrant worker and will return to Florida in the fall. This season she is picking and packaging tomatoes. Our interviewer comments:

This family doesn't say much because they need the jobs and have to feed their children... They have started harvesting the tomatoes. The women work together with the men picking the tomatoes. At 5:00 p.m., the men can go home and then the women are asked to work in the shed to sort and pack the tomatoes. Some of the women that I've interviewed have told me that soon they'll be starting to work from 6:00 a.m. until 9:30–10:00 p.m. They say that they are so tired at night that they don't even get to see their children.

Thus, at times the women are asked to work longer hours than men because of their skill in packing produce. They must go back to work at night after the picking shift is over to start packing. This structuring of the timing of work in which various family members may work longer and differing shifts may result in a loss of family time, an important family resource. We conducted some coding of family hours of the time that the mother and father are spending together. We found that the average amount of time spent together was only *1 hour* a week. This is in contrast to our findings from our other research on low-income mothers. For that sample, the average time parents spent together

was 37 hours a week (Meece et al., 2003). Although migrant families may appear on paper to have the same or even higher number of adults living in the household, what appears to be happening is that after working in the fields, migrant mothers may come home only to work a separate shift of domestic chores alone.

A recent report from the Institute of Agricultural and Natural Resources indicates that family obligations are of great importance to Latino farm working people (Zanner & Stevens, 2001). The family is honored by both a strong work ethic and strong family obligations in the dual prevailing beliefs that although family should take precedence over work, work is also seen as an obligation to meet family responsibilities (Zanner & Stevens, 2001).

Consequently, some migrant workers travel north for a better wage and work to support family even if this sometimes means leaving some older children and family members behind. This hardship of family separation is a common occurrence in the migrant life. Our interviewer noted the emotional challenge this created for a 35-year-old farm laborer with a sixth grade education who works as a laborer doing various jobs such as weeding, pruning, and packing fruit. The migrant mother has three children from 11 months to 4 years here and several other older children she left behind:

The family works very hard to take care of their family. They are separated from some of their children that are still in Mexico. Their main concern right now is arranging some kind of a plan to complete their immigration papers. Their wish is for their children to be able to come and live with them soon. Then they will all be together as a family once more.

Besides fragmenting families, another family demand that creates cultural stress stems from long term separation from one's permanent home. Our interviewer interviewed a young mother with a baby 4 months old, whose job was weeding young plants. The interviewer commented:

The mother is very young but she seems to know the needs of her baby. She said that she and her husband work hard to be able to earn money for their family. She gives so much of herself to her baby. I thought that she seemed to miss her home down south but understood that they had to venture up north to work for better wages.

Constraints and Daily Life Hassles

Migrant farm working families have to cope with many daily life hassles, which pose serious structural constraints to cultural assimilation and the family's ability to manage stress and improve long-term overall social and economic well-being. Notwithstanding the health and employer concerns noted in the demands section above, the biggest constraint faced was *extreme poverty*, as our entire sample's household incomes were far below U.S. federal poverty guidelines. Seventy percent made less than \$300 a week. Migrant workers tend to be poorer than the typical poor in the host country and Latino immigrants have higher poverty rates than overall U.S. Latino population. U.S. Census Bureau (1999) statistics show that whereas 28% of Latino families lived at or below the U.S. poverty level, the rate jumps to one third (34%) for Mexican immigrants, for

example. National data show that one half of all farm working families earn less than \$10,000 per year (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002). This income is well below the 2002 U.S. poverty guidelines for a family of four of \$18,100 (U.S. Federal Register, 2002). Under good working conditions, instead of an hourly minimum wage or lower, employees over age 16 can be paid for how much they pick ranging from .55 cents to \$1.25 for a bushel of apples in southern Michigan (Lansing State Journal, 2003). Although these wage rates have increased in the past decade, when adjusted for inflation, wages have actually decreased by 5% in that time (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002), and a minimum weekly level of work hours is not guaranteed. Given this limited income, it is not surprising that two thirds of our sample agreed or strongly agreed that with the statement, "If I stopped working, my family could not cover expenses."

Besides being poorer, migrant families tend to be *atypical from other low income families* in the U.S. host country in a number of other ways. Consistent with their high value on family grounded in their Latino heritage, migrant working mothers are also more likely to be married. Although ironically marriage is usually a vehicle for rising from poverty in the United States, the incomes of migrant families do not seem to significantly benefit from the marriage effect. (For an overview of U.S. low income working families, see Heyman, 2000.) All of the migrant families we studied lived in poverty yet were married, despite the fact that the majority of poor U.S. families are headed by single parents (Heyman, 2000). Migrant workers tend to be more dependent on their employer for social and community linkages than other low-income families. Their employment situation is the truly larger context in which their family is embedded as their childcare and housing are all in camps often located at or near the employer.

High mobility and transience are unique constraints emanating from migrant families' dual cultural ties. They serve as barriers to accumulating human and social capital and to assimilating into either dominant or minority host country cultures, constraints also faced by other migrant families around the globe.

Constant mobility creates a less stable work and family environment and has limited migrant workers' socioeconomic circumstances. Research by Roeder and Millard (2000) suggested that the cyclical mobility of migrant workers exacerbates their poverty, which makes migrants more susceptible to psychological problems, causes greater difficulty integrating into the community and establishing social ties, and creates educational challenges. These issues create difficulty into assimilating into either Anglo or Latino communities.

Mobility has a large constraint on human capital accumulation, especially its negative effects on immigrants' *education and skill levels*, which are well below the national average. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in March 2000, only 15.9% of persons 25 years and older did not graduate from high school. Latino farm workers have less education than their nonfarm working Latino counter parts. Although educational attainment varies by ethnicity, (Hispanics, Cubans, and other Hispanics), the breakdown of educational levels for this population is remarkably different from our sample. Of the Hispanics 25 years and older, 57% of the population in the United States have at least a high school education. The Mexican population is at 51%, Puerto Rican 65.3%, Cuban 73%, and Central and South American is at 64.3%. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This lack of education also increases the division between year-round Latino families and the migrating Latino families and Anglos. Because migrant farm workers have less education

on average, they are less able to compete for jobs outside the agricultural arena not only because of low skills, but also because of language barriers. It was surprising to us that not only Anglos, but also nonmigrant Latinos were rarely mentioned by our interviewees.

Children's education is often neglected or inconsistent because of family economic pressures and the mobile life. The children usually start the school year in the farming location and then travel back to their home base to continue their school year for the winter months. Often these children are then taken out of school in early spring to make the journey back northward so the family can start to work on the early crops. This struggle for economic family stability forces the migrant lifestyles to revolve around working, moving on to find other work, and perhaps then migrating south at the end of the season. In our Latino sample, 5% have moved four or more times within the last year, 47.6% have moved two to three times within the year, and 40% have moved once. Consequently, children find themselves enrolled in different schools each year; in fact children of migrant farm working families may attend 14 to 15 schools by the time they reach high school (McCloskey, 2000). As a result, up to half of migrant children are behind their grade level, and one third of the children are retained by second grade (Morse, 1988). Many children need 3 years of education just to advance one grade level of skills (Kuperschmidt & Martin, 1997).

Many schools and communities lack understanding of the mobile migrant culture and the social supports required for effective acculturation. The constant interruption of their school year creates the inability of the school to meet their needs, although California has a policy that makes it easy for school records to follow these transient children (www.mnaonline.org/pplmi.htm).

Regular transportation to Head Start during the fall and spring bridge seasons is another constraint. A mother who picks blueberries and apples is married with two children ages 11 months and 3 years old. She is 19 years old and has a sixth grade education and complains:

I can't work. There isn't any transportation for my kids to get to the Head Start School. We don't own a car. It's hard for my son, he really liked school. Most of the bus drivers went back to their original jobs with the public schools. According to a Telamon contract, he said, that this happens almost every year. The funding (for transportation) starts to dwindle, even though the parents will stay to work through the month of October.

Chronic social and school mobility also places migrant children at higher psychological and economic risk (Kuperschmidt & Martin, 1997). One study found two thirds of the children of migrant farm workers had one or more psychiatric disorders with anxiety being the most prevalent (Kuperschmidt & Martin, 2003). Because of their economic circumstances, children also may face additional stress because working can be expected of them. Boys begin to be treated as adults at age 15 or 16 when they can earn as much in the fields as their fathers. Girls are treated as adults when they are capable of having children and managing a household. Because there is no tradition of mandatory education in their culture, children are allowed to drop out of school to work and help support the family (Velazquez, 1996).

Low educational attainment keeps families in poverty. As noted, most (96%) of our sample only had no more than a grade school education. This lack of education creates

additional language and social barriers to these families ability to adapt to a different culture. In order to assimilate, migrant workers need to adopt the language, values, and behaviors of the dominant U.S. culture and abandon the home culture and language. Yet many migrant workers have not been able to readily adopt the culture and have had difficulty adapting to the Anglo culture. They have a strong traditional background of beliefs and practices and ethnic identity (Zanner & Stevens, 2001), which is reinforced by physical isolation. The lack of English-speaking families in the camps fosters isolation and marginalization. Approximately, one in four (24%) Latinos over the age of 5 live in linguistically isolated houses compared with only 1.6% of non-Latinos, and over one third of Latino adults report not speaking English “very well” (Zambrana & Dorrington, 1998).

Because of low wages, migrant farm workers face significant difficulties finding *housing* and paying over 30% of their monthly income for housing or using substandard “free” employer housing. One national survey reports that less than one third of migrant workers nationally have adequate housing (McCloskey, 2000). Of the units that were substandard and crowded in a national farm worker housing survey (www.ruralhome.org), 74% had children. The average number of rooms in a single family dwelling for a migrant family is between 1 and 2.6, and the dimensions of the rooms are approximately 10 by 12 feet or 12 by 15 feet. Indoor running water is only available in 64.8% of the camps, and laundry facilities are generally not available (U.S. National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, 1995).

One campsite worker was a 17-year-old married mother of an 8-month-old. She picks squash in the fields where she wears long sleeves and gloves to protect herself from the plants and sharp knives she uses to cut the squash off of the plant. She has had no schooling. The interviewer comments on the living conditions:

Their living quarters are in very poor condition. She keeps her child on top of the bed most of the times because the floor (rug) is so dirty. They are preventing the baby from crawling. The furniture was so old and I mean rickety old, I think that I can find better furniture along side people’s front yards when they discard them.

These deplorable living conditions can exacerbate existing health risks issues for this already struggling population.

A final set of constraints we examined was migrants’ general *lack of social power in relation to government and their employers*. Paradoxically, while Migrant Head Start was valued and was the main point of governmental and community contact, our sample accessed other forms of public assistance at much lower rates than other families living in poverty (Boswell, 1996). Only 13% of migrant farm workers used Medicaid, and only 10% used WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and food stamps (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2002).

Many were afraid or unable to access government services because they do not want to draw attention to themselves or do not meet the minimum 6-month residency requirements many states have put in place to qualify for welfare. Estimates show that 50% of the seasonal agricultural work force is undocumented; that number rises to 70% during the harvest time (Aleinikoff, 1999). The high mobility of migrant workers also makes applications for health services very difficult for this population. By the time the information is processed, the crop is harvested and the family is moving on.

This could be one explanation why this population has remained invisible to the public and to policy makers. The lack of information about the magnitude of the number of workers is a problem with regard to policy implementation. Yet overall, 80% of migrant farm workers are U.S. citizens or in the country legally (Fix & Pascal, 1994). They often pay taxes and reflect an important part of the national and global economy.

Another constraint is migrants' lack of power in dealing with their employers. Migrant workers are dependant on crop performance, and they must share the economic risk with their employer. The welfare of the migrant farm worker depends on the value of the crop, which can sometimes be wiped out by bad weather. Their income is based on the quality and quantity of produce. We also found evidence of threats and mistreatment by some supervisors who use their higher power in the U.S. culture to take advantage of the workers. Below are our interviewer's observations based on her interview with a mother of five children who had been picking and packing tomatoes for 4 years. The family will return to Florida in the fall:

Several of these families have been threatened by their employer, that if they don't do the work the way that he wants it, he would deport them by calling the immigration department. Some of the families don't understand English but the few who understand have told the rest that he had threatened them. (The employer) has also gotten very angry when someone has been injured because he has to pay for the hospital for his injuries. This family doesn't say much because they need the jobs and have to feed their children.

The migrant workers are forced to take what money they can or face losing their job to another who will. In summary, migrant workers are constrained by the fact they are more dependent on their employer for survival than are other poor workers. They are less likely to be able to find another job and they may not utilize welfare or other established government programs aimed at helping the working poor.

Government regulators report many farmers find ways to short workers on their wages. A frequent practice is to shave a couple of hours off each workday as a way to lower the daily wage. It appears that little can be done about the treatment of the workers. Often it is never reported for fear of recourse.

A married 24-year-old mother of two children ages 3 months and 3 years was concerned about the family income because she had just had a baby. Her husband had been sick and had missed work. He used to pick and pack tomatoes. There is no sick pay or compensation for this family:

The farmer is not paying them by the same pay scale each day. If he feels that a lot of the tomatoes have spoiled, he won't pay them as much. The tomatoes have to be good for the market, otherwise their pay scale goes down.

Although poor treatment by employers is common, there are exceptions. Many migrant workers relocate back to the same farm every year, especially when they have good employer relations. Social support for family from supervisors was less prevalent, as two thirds of our sample felt they could not share work and family concerns with their supervisors. Across the five camps, there was a marked split in our sample about

employer support for children at work, perhaps reflecting cultural tensions on whether to bring children to work when care was not available. Although 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “My employer does not mind if my children came to work,” 55% agreed or strongly agreed that their employer did mind. There seemed to be some cultural tensions over preferences on how to manage care.

Summary of Results: Implications for Cognitive Appraisal

Overall, the demands and constraints faced by our sample far outweighed their resources. The more an individual had a difficult job that was of low quality or had a constantly changing schedule, the higher their depression and intention to turnover. Yet these factors seemed to be kept psychologically separate and unrelated to their attitudes toward childcare. In fact, the more positive the individual felt about childcare, the better they felt about their job and family performance and the less negative they were about the demands and constraints we have noted, regardless of job demands.

Migrant Head Start and its quality childcare were bright spots in their lives and seemed to provide positive buffering social psychological effects that go beyond the mere instrumental provision of care services. What was surprising was that our sample generally felt very positive overall about juggling work and family and about the U.S. culture despite its hardships. Even with extreme poverty and other serious life constraints, less than half (42.6%) reported that they were worried about issues such as family and income. Even in the face of difficult working conditions, 90% did not find health a problem for holding a job. The workers in our sample had horrible jobs, yet a strong work ethic. They often got dirty on the job. Most did not know their work hours until that day, and they did not have any “sick leave” for themselves or their children. They did not have health care, yet they did manage. This is really amazing and more research is needed on the social and cultural work and family identities of migrant workers, especially women. More research is needed on how low-income working families living in extreme poverty develop resilience. The traditional work and family literature is silent on this theme. We believe the positive resource effects of Migrant Head Start did buffer families. We also note several other resources and acculturation mechanisms that seemed to buffer families from stress.

Clearly, the high value placed on family and maintaining two-parent households was beneficial. Consider our interviewer’s comments on how a 24-year-old young married mother with an infant was doing. The mother has a first grade education and works packing pickles:

The family is so supportive of each other. Their family’s strength comes from the support that they all seem to have for each other. They like this country and its people very much. They said that most Americans are very nice people toward their child as well as toward them.

The family ethic of our sample was strong and had positive affect: 86% percent believed their family thinks they fulfill family responsibilities. It was noteworthy that 83% of our migrant mothers saw their identities as equally attached to both work and family, which means they highly value both work and family roles. Even though the role quality of most of our migrant mothers’ jobs was what the U.S. culture would deem as poor, the

additional role accumulation seemed to have positive benefits for the mothers' well-being. Two roles, even of poor quality, seemed to be better than just one.

Although both a constraint and a resource, one strategy often used by migrants to manage acculturative stress is to maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity. The acculturation process can be (a) one way, integration, in which the minority group assimilates into the host culture, (b) two way in which the minority group becomes bicultural (Manaster, Chan, & Safady, 1992), or a third path of marginalization in which the minority group does not fully fit into either culture, in this case the host Anglo or Latino cultures (van de Vijver, HelmsLorenz, & Feitzer, 1999). Young Latino children are likely to have a bicultural identity rather than reject their home ethnic origin (Zanner & Stevens, 2001). As each generation begins to learn English, they do not give up their use of Spanish in the home. Although this impedes assimilation, it also helps them develop pride in their cultural identity. Their strong identity and use of marginalization acculturation strategies allows them to feel good about themselves.

Although isolating them from the rest of the mainstream U.S. culture, the rural migrant camps that serve as temporary homes for our sample, paradoxically also may buffer them from recognizing how seriously less well off they are from the American dream and other cultural assimilation tensions. They socially construct their family situation as better off than what they left in Mexico. They reevaluate the family resources they have in the new cultural context. Yet they remain a marginalized minority from other nonmigrant Latino groups and may be viewed as a minority within a minority group.

DISCUSSION

This chapter begins to unpack and embrace the complexity of the work and family worlds of the U.S. midwestern Latino migrant worker. Little theorizing or qualitative empirical work in the work-family integration field has drawn on migrant farm workers, who are in shifting employment and social systems and face multiple concurrent demands and constraints on work and family well-being.

The issue of mobility and, in particular, cyclical mobility in work and its negative implications for the development of social and human capital is rarely integrated into work-family theorizing. An exception is research on mobility that has been conducted on international expatriates and executives or family relocation (cf Eby, DeMatteo, & Russell, 1997). Cyclical mobility creates temporary social systems and forces families to have to manage constant and additional transitions and additional risk factors emanating from frequent moves and the lack of social stability. Our study also has relevance for low-skill jobs in other cyclical industries such as construction, hotel, or restaurant.

Although migrant's annual migration allows for the family to survive economically, it is made with great sacrifice, stress, and suffering, and the high mobility makes it difficult for subsequent generations to rise from poverty and acculturate into the U.S. majority or Latino minority cultures. This mobility creates a physical isolation that supports a marginalization acculturation strategy as a means to manage stress, yet also feeds into language and cultural constraints that inhibit and stall future social prospects. Thus, migrant workers are a minority within a minority. More research is needed to develop measures that tap into the resources, demands, and constraints we have identified and to

assess possible stress buffers and identify resilience factors. If quality employer childcare, strong family bonds, dual work and family attachment, and bicultural identity do provide the buffering effects we have noted, then more studies are needed to document these resources and follow children and families longitudinally. Study is needed on how to help migrant workers ameliorate demands from jobs on self and family, help them effectively conserve meager family resources, and develop mainstream acculturation strategies that promote greater stability and social advancement.

Hovey (2001) reports five primary stressors for migrant workers: (a) migrant journey and physical environment stressors, (b) social and cultural stressors, (c) language and communication stressors, (d) social support and isolation stressors, and (e) work environment and conditions stressors. This research can be reviewed with the conservation of resources frameworks in which social support serves as a moderator of cognitive appraisal of well-being. Stressors can be understood as demands or constraints on the net accumulation of family resources.

Our study also reinforces the fact that the face of the low-income global work force is changing. In the United States in particular, we must increase research to enable greater understanding of work-family issues for Latino families, who are now the largest U.S. minority. Study is needed on how to develop interventions that promote breadwinning and caregiving. Research on how to improve the integration of impoverished minorities within larger cultural majority and minority ethnic groups is rarely considered in traditional work and family theorizing.

The chapter highlights the need for more research to countervail migrant stereotypes that support discrimination and the inability to fully tap social services and manage employer relations. For example, despite prevailing stereotypes, we found that most migrant families did not necessarily return to Mexico. Many migrant workers see leaving agriculture and the migrant lifestyle as the main ways to move out of poverty. Increasingly, migrant workers may live in the United States all year, although they may still have family in Mexico and visit. Another misconception is that migrant farmers keep moving all season—instead most of these families stay in one place for the whole season and work in different crops as the season progresses.

Our migrant families were atypical poor and had characteristics challenging many existing assumptions in the current research on families living in poverty. Many poor mothers are single, and we presume (and research shows us) that having a partner makes life easier. However, these are struggling two-parent families. More research is needed on how to overcome the barriers of mobility and transience and to better link to educational and cultural systems as a way to accumulate social and human capital and improve the integration of these families.

A unique aspect of migrant workers' challenges, which can help foster innovative thinking in work and family theory and practice, is that their problems are not due to a lack of public policy programs. There are some excellent whole family programs such as Migrant Head Start. The problem is some migrants are illegal workers who do not want to draw attention to themselves or adopt dysfunctional acculturation strategies out of necessity to conserve family resources. They also do not have the support of growers or the government. They may encounter prejudice when they access services if they do not speak English well. Migrant Head Start works to link families with health-care, child care, and parental education. It is a whole child and family program. More research is needed how this intervention might expand and improve its effectiveness in the United

States and around the globe. Yet even with public supported high quality childcare, migrant families have a very difficult life. It takes more than free high quality childcare to make migrant families' lives work well. Some of the programs we studied operated 7 days a week or many hours a day. The lack of research on a personal level with the migrant population is evident as many of the reports we examined bemoaned the lack of quality data or statistics. Future work family research should triangulate qualitative and quantitative methods to enable better understanding of the work and family issues faced by unique populations, such as migrant families. The constraints migrants face such as extreme poverty, cyclical mobility, and low education; the multiplicative effects of resources such as quality free childcare; the measurement of job and family demands; and linkages to acculturation strategies need to be considered in models of work-family stress.

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