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Narratives of Migrant Mothers: Exploitation, Transience, Education, and Resilience

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ABSTRACT: This narrative study provides new understanding about migrant farm worker families in Michigan. Mothers, in particular, are central to the family structure, providing continuity and stability in the migratory process. In 2016, we interviewed five migrant mothers working in Harbor County, Michigan. The women shared their struggles along with their hopes for the future. In this article, we focus on the challenges faced by the women: family obligations, sexism, limited English proficiency, limited income, and work-related demands. In addition to their accounts of difficulties, the interviews also revealed the women's great resilience and their belief in the power of education to change the future for their children. To conclude, we discuss the ways in which our schools and communities can support migrant students and their families.

Introduction

Cuando alguien dice, "Cállate, tú no tienes que hablar," tú vas a decir, "No, lo que yo quiero expresar lo voy a expresar." *When someone says, "Be quiet, you don't need to talk," you're going to say, "No, what I want to say, I'm going to say."* Becky

Becky, a middle-aged woman from Reynosa, Mexico, is a mother to three children. She has been working in northern Michigan for over twenty years, and her children attend public schools in Harbor county. Despite the challenges of language, income, and immigration, her oldest daughter recently graduated from college, a success that brings Becky to tears. Becky and her husband paid for her daughter's college education through migrant farm labor. It is Becky's hope, and our belief, that sharing the lives of migrant families will bring about empathy and understanding. Just as important, these stories can help our readers to consider the challenges of migrant life for the students who attend our schools.

Migrant farm workers are commonly known as the "invisible people" because of their status as one of America's most marginalized and undereducated populations. As Perilla, et al. state, "Despite the dependency of the state on its farm products and, hence, on the migrants who work the land, migrant farm workers are an invisible population" (Perilla, Wilson, Wold, & Spencer, 1998, p. 253). These families' livelihoods are derived from harvesting a variety of crops and relocating frequently in order to remain employed. The federal definition of migrant is "a seasonal farmworker who had to travel to do the farm work so that he/she was unable to return to his/her permanent residence within the same date" (U.S. Department of Labor).

The migrant agricultural working population includes U.S. citizens and both documented and undocumented immigrants, who fall into one of two categories: migrant workers or seasonal workers (Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard, & Hernandez, 2005). The most highly regarded sources of information regarding migrant workers is the Department of Labor's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), a survey of farm workers conducted since 1989 and last updated with data from 2012-2014. This publication provides the most comprehensive national data on farmworkers available. Approximately one fourth of farmworkers in the United States are women (Hernandez, Gabbard, & Carroll, 2014). Beyond this information, however, the NAWS report of 2014 provides data for migrant workers as a whole, not separated by gender.

According to the National Center for Farmworker Health, the average migrant family included five people in 2010, and their income in Michigan ranged from $12,244 to $16,773, a number well below the federal poverty level (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2010). The U.S. Department of Labor notes a more recent national range of $20,000 to $24,000 as the wage for a family (Hernandez et al., 2014). Approximately 75 percent of migrants reported that Spanish was their primary language. The other 25 percent indicated that they spoke English or an indigenous language. An average eighth-grade education was reported by migrants interviewed for the report (Hernandez et al., 2014).

Migrant workers are vital to the success of the nation's agricultural industry. According to a comprehensive state survey, 90,716 migrant and seasonal workers support the economy in the state of Michigan (Larson, 2006). Many of Michigan's agricultural crops are dependent on the physical labor of migrant workers for hand-harvesting or processing. The MichiganCivil Rights Commission (MCRC 2010), explained, "because crops are so perishable, they must be picked at precise times to prevent deterioration and overgrowth." This agricultural need requires long hours of manual labor so that fruits and vegetables can be harvested over the days or weeks in which crops have matured. A large population of migrant and seasonal farm workers fill that need, as produce from Michigan farms is sent all over the country.

Literature Review

Farm worker women, in particular, are central to the family structure, providing continuity and stability in the migratory process. But they also face social, economic, and educational obstacles that have not been studied in depth in Michigan. Mothers also take responsibility for ensuring that their children receive education as they migrate.

In spite of the numbers of migrant farm workers and the critical role they serve in the agricultural community, there has been limited and fragmented research on their daily lives and challenges: family obligations, racism, limited English proficiency, limited income, lack of educational opportunity, and work-related demands. Above all, migrant women are vulnerable on

many levels. The available research focusing on migrant women tends to focus on the following areas:

1. Vulnerability and exploitation
2. Health
3. Education

Vulnerability and Exploitation

Threats of violence are not exclusive to migrant farmworker women, but these women can be some of the most vulnerable due to secluded working conditions in the fields and language barriers. Those who are undocumented are afraid to report rape and sexual assault for fear of exposure and deportation. Without work permits, undocumented women can be isolated and unaware of protections they have under the law. In general, migrant women can be cut off from mainstream culture and so rely upon their employers for support. Specifically, they often face long work hours, substandard housing in isolated work camps, and a lack of transportation. The culture of agricultural work, combined with the aforementioned factors, creates a constant and unrelenting potential for exploitation. Meng (2012) of Human Rights Watch Organization states: "Many of the advocates, government officials and other experts confirmed what other studies have found: Workplace sexual violence and harassment are serious problems for agricultural workers." Research in this area has only begun to be more prevalent and in the public eye. Media outlets have produced documentaries on this issue, including the 2013 PBS *Frontline* special, "Rape in the Fields."

While attention has been directed toward this issue in the public sector, the focus on research has lagged. There were calls for investigation into this issue more than a decade ago, but the response remained static for a very long time. Further, the means by which rape and violent incidents are compiled is fragmented and unreliable at best. In one instance, statistics were compiled based on death certificates. According to Shah and Indu (1997), "Statistics for measuring violence against migrant women are not compiled in a comprehensive or regular manner by the sending or receiving countries. In fact, there is a tendency to minimize attention to the subject by both (p. 6). Raj and Silverman (2002) state that a "review of the published literature in psychology, sociology, anthropology, medicine, and law reveals a paucity of research" on "how immigrant status impacts women's risk for abuse" (p. 368). Access also remains an issue; farmworker women often resist speaking with outsiders. Ethical issues, including fair representation, safety, transparency, and power dynamics, abound regarding ways to conduct research with this vulnerable population.

Health Issues and Migrant Women

Migrant women are especially vulnerable when it comes to their health. Lack of services and readily available medical information results in delayed or no diagnosis. A dearth of research into the health issues facing migrant women "is compounded by the partial and often misleading representations of farmworkers in the popular media, and the distorting effects that Western feminism can have on third-world women,'" states Galarneau (2013, p. 144). Studies have focused on issues related to reproductive, occupational, and environmental health, but there is no overarching focus of research that examines definitively the actual issues facing farmworkers. In fact, research on this has only increased since the early 2000s (Villarejo, 2003).

The Migrant Clinician Network is one source that aggregates information about issues facing farmworkers, and it serves as a starting point for breaking down the challenges for migrants to receive appropriate healthcare access. Migrants face challenges in actually getting to healthcare sites; transportation problems, language challenges, and unfamiliarity with local providers serve as barriers to receiving services.

En-route healthcare access is one issue; as migrants travel, they are unfamiliar with resources in each new work locale. Further, weather changes of heat and cold can also affect their overall health, with no available services. The actual workplace can be a hazard from which migrants have no option; agricultural sites are rife with dangerous machinery, exposure to the elements, and potentially unsafe working conditions. Along with workplace dangers, toxic exposures—pesticides and agricultural chemicals used in the fields—can cause a variety of health issues.

Another factor that impacts healthcare is the legal and regulatory concerns within the field of agriculture; farms are often exempt from industrial safety regulations, ultimately affecting the health of workers. On these farms, there are extreme issues with housing and sanitation; dilapidated and rundown camp living conditions can cause health issues. Camp conditions can include unsafe drinking water and improper sanitation (e.g., outhouses), overcrowding, and pesticide exposure from nearby fields. Migrants also face food insecurity—they often do not have easy access to food supplies and proper cooking facilities (Kilanowski, 2010). Climate change is also mentioned because extremes of weather are likely to affect migrant farmworkers; as they travel from the south to the north, they may have inadequate warm clothing or insulated housing.

Access to healthcare varies from location to location. While an increasing number of rural clinics are available to farmworkers, the isolated nature of the work may mean that medical care is a substantial distance. Lack of transportation can prevent a worker from seeking and receiving treatment. Clinicians working in clinics may not speak the language or understand the culture of migrants, making communication difficult (Migrant Clinician Network). This list is by no means exhaustive, but it serves to remind us that in general, migrant families, especially women, can face a variety of difficulties in receiving the proper care they need.

Education

Migrant families face challenges with continuity of schooling. Usually, migrant mothers are the ones who ensure that their children attend school; this is often very difficult because of language barriers, unfamiliarity with new communities, and lack of communication by school officials. Students' lives are transitory—many of them leave school in the late fall to travel south as their families seek work—giving teachers often only a brief time in which to work with them (Julian Samora Research Institute, 2009; Salinas & Reyes, 2004) Often, school records and information do not transfer easily (Fagnoni, 1999).

Other factors on the part of the school include administrative pressures to treat migrants the same as other students in the school, standardized testing requirements, and a lack of autonomy, flexibility, and resources for teachers. As a result, schools can, and do, isolate and marginalize students and families with limited English skills. Students with disabilities often do not receive services (Cranston-Gingras & Paul, 2008). Much has been written about what schools and social service providers need to do, but little has focused on the needs as perceived by the migrants themselves (Vocke, Westine, Applegate, & VanDonkelaar, 2016). This became an important aspect of our conversations with these women.

The vulnerability of these migrant women was a focal concern as we conducted our interviews. We asked for their stories because it proved to be the most natural way for them to provide information. We conducted our research in the most ethical way possible, considering issues of fair representation, transparency, confidentiality, and safety.

Methods

Theoretical Framework

Grounded theory, informed by tenets of narrative inquiry, serves as the basis for this exploratory study. Because the research on issues faced by migrant women is so disparate, we chose an approach that would allow themes to emanate from our conversations with our participants. We also considered our own positionality as researchers and how we interacted with the migrant women. The concept of *intersubjectivity*, or "how researcher and researched affect each other," (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 10) is critical in the implementation and interpretation of research. Frequent analysis of emerging themes in our research provided the basis for a grounded theoretical approach, in which theory is generated through discovery (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The grounded model of theory construction is in contradiction to models that emphasize theory verification and *a priori* definitions of concepts and hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In grounded theory, old theories and assumptions are not tested; rather, new theory is generated from the data obtained through a rigorous process of analysis. *A priori* theory is not ignored; rather it serves as a starting point with the goal to establish new theoretical lenses.

The strategy for undertaking such a task is a method of constant comparative analysis in which data from all sources is inductively studied to provide a new theoretical explanation for themes and hypotheses that emerge. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe four stages of constant comparative analysis:

> (1) Comparing incidents applicable to each category. In this stage, themes are generated and coded. This stage allows for an initial picture of the data.
> (2) Integrating categories and their properties. In this stage, categories of data are analyzed intensely and reformulated.
> (3) Delimiting the theory. Grounded theory is strongly based on theory derived from rich data. In this stage, the data should provide an overarching and complex picture of themes.
> (4) Writing the theory. In this stage, the researcher actually synthesizes the new theoretical framework, constantly referring back to coded data when validation is necessary.

The integration of grounded theory and narrative inquiry have served to formulated initial understandings of the challenges facing migrant women.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry serves as the foundation for this study because it "structures experience and gives it meaning" (Kramp, 2004, p. 104). Rather than focusing on a scientific explanation of events, researchers can focus on both the narrative and the individual telling the story (Kramp). Time and place are vital in both the approach to the research and to the stories actually told. For example, place was vital—when we met with these women to discuss their stories, the setting made all the difference. We met at either the Harbor Hispanic Center or the Harbor Middle School, locations familiar to them. They were there to talk about their experiences by virtue of their trust in Mary Monroe, the migrant director who assured them of our credibility and desire to help

migrant women. The women were eager to tell their stories, and we were eager to listen. Their stories focused a great deal on time and place; mobility and transience define the lives of migrant workers, so the stories of these women stretched across boundaries of states and time on the road.

But beyond this obvious scenario in our own research process, it is necessary to understand what narrative inquiry is. A definition of narrative is provided by Riessman:

> Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting…stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, and conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind (*sic*) and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative…it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes, 1982, as cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 4)

One aspect of narrative inquiry, according to Kramp, is narrative knowing: "As a way of knowing, narrative enables the storyteller to organize the story told by linking events, perceptions, and experiences" (p. 107).

The perspective of the teller is communicated by language, and this "narrative fills the space between 'what happened' and 'what it means'" (p. 107). As we conducted our interviews, we were keenly aware of the actual experience created by the interview itself. Our conversations with these women created a space where events and narrative transcended time: as researchers, we were offered a window into the lived experience of our participants. Riessman describes narrative interviews eloquently:

> They do not merely describe what someone does in the world but what the world does to that someone. They allow us to infer something about what it feels like to be in that story world. Narratives also recount those events that happen unwilled, unpredicted, and often unwished for by the actors.... Narratives do not merely refer to past experience but create experiences for their audiences. (Mattingly 1998, as cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 22).

Researchers engaged in narrative inquiry are cognizant of the fact that narratives of any given account will vary, depending on who is telling the story. This idea contrasts with a research perspective that seeks objective, evidence-based conclusions. Narrative inquiry seeks to understand the realities of those telling the story; it considers their perspective in both time and place. As we recorded these interviews, we were keenly aware of our own position as outsiders and the limitations of our own experiences with exploitation, transience, and resilience. The trust placed in us by those women is an immense gift. We tell their stories with care and respect.

As researchers, we are aware of our responsibility in disseminating these narratives of migrant mothers. The stories they shared with us are poignant and profound. In them, we found themes of exploitation, transience, education, and resilience.

Research Overview

Our guiding question was, "What challenges do migrant women report about various aspects of their lives?" This question led us to consider the following issues:

1. What do migrant women report about their work situations?
2. What do migrant women report about their lives in camps?
3. What do migrant women report about their challenges to family life?
4. What do migrant women report about their experiences with education?

We invited five women to share their narratives on the topics of family life, everyday challenges of living in the camps, work experiences, and the impact on their families, all resulting from living a life of mobility. Mary Monroe, migrant director at Harbor Public Schools and board member at the Harbor Hispanic Center (*El Centro Hispano de Harbor*) facilitated introductions. We interviewed two women in English, and the other three in Spanish, at Harbor Middle School and the Harbor Hispanic Center over a two-month period. Each interview lasted about one hour.

Prior to each interview, we explained in detail the purpose of our work, assuring each participant that she was free to conclude the interview at any time. Our actual consent form did not ask for a signature, but rather stated that by taking the form, the participant understood the project and consented to participate. We did this primarily to assure confidentiality and anonymity; migrants are particularly vulnerable to immigration and labor exploitation. The following questions guided our interviews:

1. Could you tell me about your own story as a migrant worker?
2. What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a migrant, especially as you travel between Michigan and your home?
3. How have you balanced your work life and family life?
4. If you could name the one biggest challenge, what would that be? Some examples might be education and your children, balancing your role as a mother with working, things like that.
5. Tell me more about this challenge and how you have dealt with that?
6. As a mother and/or grandmother, what do you think the biggest challenges are in raising your children? How have you dealt with that issue?
7. When your children were in school, how did you handle the transitions from one school system to the next?
8. Usually, when migrant parents enroll their children in different schools, a staff member will help with details. Tell me about your experiences with migrant staff and how they have helped you.
9. When you do have free time, what do you like to do? How often are you able to take time for your own interests?
10. How would you describe the support or friendship of other migrant women in your community?
11. What would you like people to know about your experience as a migrant woman?
12. What are your dreams for the future? What are your dreams for your children or grandchildren?

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and each Spanish-language interview was transcribed in Spanish with English translations.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall and Rossman, 2011) requires that the researchers constantly return to the data to compare preliminary themes to the data collected. As we read the transcripts, we began to develop categories, constantly returning to the scripts of the interviews to consider and reconsider the ways in which the women's stories might organize themselves into significant themes. Individually, we began to determine themes based on repeated issues brought up by the women. Primary themes emerged: sexism, discrimination, exploitation, housing difficulties, transportation, childcare difficulties, and schooling.

We both used constant comparative analysis to compare interview transcripts to emerging themes, developing categories, and then comparing our categories. For example, when we asked the women about their challenges, many spoke of issues related to housing. Three of the women also discussed difficulties of travel and relocation. Most of the women also told a story in which they had clearly been discriminated against or taken advantage of as a woman or as a migrant worker. We found that our initial categories were similar; discrimination and sexism as initial categories fit within a larger theme of exploitation, and the categories we had established as transportation and housing difficulties fit into a larger theme of transience. Throughout their conversations with us, the women all demonstrated a keen sense of resilience across all topics, leading us to also establish resilience as a theme, even though none of the women specifically discussed resilience as a trait.

We returned often to the transcripts of the interviews to analyze whether a participant's experience fit better into one theme or another, reconstructing our themes as we returned to our notes, listened to recordings, and re-read the interview transcripts. This constant comparative analysis is also characteristic of research that develops grounded theory.

Creswell noted that a more constructivist approach to grounded theory draws attention to the role of the researcher, who makes decisions about themes throughout the process, bringing the researcher's personal values, experiences, and priorities into the equation (2013, p.88). Certainly, our role in analyzing the data cannot be ignored. While the researchers must "set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas or notions" so that the theory can emerge, the researchers must also recognize that outcomes of the study are contextual and may not be generalizable (p.88). As we read interview transcripts and our notes, we prioritized themes and ideas that occurred in multiple interviews, making the decision that those themes and ideas were more significant because they were repeated by multiple participants. Typical of grounded theory, our findings reflect the values of the participants as well as the researchers.

Grounded theory allowed us to develop theory based on extensive interaction with data. In our study, the data detailed the individual experiences of migrant mothers, bringing forth their identities, priorities, opinions, and stories. As Creswell noted in his description of narrative inquiry, this method sheds light on the identities of the individual participants and how they see themselves (p.71).

Participants

Our participants were all migrant women who spent much of their time in Harbor County. They spoke proudly of their lives and work. In the following paragraphs, we introduce each of these five women to provide information about their backgrounds, work lives, and families.

Olga: "I had to break that cycle." Olga, a fourth-generation migrant worker, was born in Rio Grande City, Texas. Olga's work in Northern Michigan has included harvesting fruits, vegetables, and pine trees, as well as work at a local packaging company, where she packaged locally-grown asparagus, carrots, zucchini, cherries, and blueberries. Olga described her work as doing a job that, "a lot of people don't want to do" but she does the work, "because we have kids to support; we have to put food on the table." She explained that migrant workers provide food for many people, but she felt that her work was taken for granted. She also spoke about the negative views of migrant workers. "We're undocumented. We're illegal. Send those Mexicans back to Mexico. Put them in prison." She wished migrant workers were appreciated and "treated as human beings." Without migrant workers to work the fields and pick the crops, the food industry would falter. Still, Olga wished her job was appreciated and respected.

Though Olga's great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents were all migrant workers, Olga had recently decided to "break that cycle" of migrant work for her own daughters because she valued their education. For the past two years, Olga has stayed in Harbor County, Michigan, instead of migrating. At the time of our interview, Olga's two daughters were sixteen and thirteen years old, and Olga specifically noted that her oldest daughter was in tenth grade, "the year I dropped out of high school." Olga dropped out of school at the age of sixteen, barely finishing her sophomore year. She explained,

> I couldn't handle the stress anymore of going to two or three different schools in one year. Michigan was far ahead, Texas was far behind, so we could never get caught up in the school system because…okay, we have credits here, but they won't take those credits in Texas, or vice versa. So one of my older sisters is the only one that graduated high school. Everybody else [all of Olga's siblings] dropped out because of the same issues. And then come season time, we couldn't do our homework because we were either picking asparagus, picking apples or peaches, or doing other things.

When Olga talked about her dreams for her daughters, she said,

> I want them to go to college. And I told them it's not going to be…it's not by choice. You guys have to go. I didn't graduate high school. If I decided to break the cycle it's because I want you guys to be better. I don't want you guys working out in the fields like I did. I don't want you guys working in factories. I want you guys to have a 9-5 job, if that's possible, have a decent paycheck. You don't have to work from sun-up to sun-down and only get paid $400 a week.

Olga finished our interview by saying, "I do want eventually for my girls to go to college, get married, have grandkids. I just want a better future for my girls." She was adamant that her daughters break free of the migrant life, tearing up as she talked about her hopes for them.

Rosario: "Es duro para una mujer." ***It's hard for a woman."*** Rosario, a migrant worker from Tamaulipas, Mexico, has traveled between Texas and areas of northern Michigan every year since 1998. The travel is difficult. Rosario has had trouble with her car over the years, and she recounted a scary night spent on the side of the highway when her daughter was a baby. She has also struggled with the route, explaining, "No tenemos ni teléfono ni GPS ni nada de eso. *We don't have a phone or GPS or anything like that."* In her first years, she often got lost driving back and

forth and looking for work. Now, Rosario begins her work in Michigan each year with asparagus. Though she has enjoyed harvesting asparagus, Rosario tells me that the weather makes it difficult.

> A veces, estaba todo bien congelado, congelabas tu cara y tus manos. Y luego de repente llovía, y luego de repente salía el sol, y luego de repente…todo en un día. Me gusta pizcar el espárrago. Lo que no me gusta es el clima." *Sometimes, everything was pretty well frozen, you would freeze your face and hands. And later it would suddenly rain, and then suddenly the sun would come out, and then suddenly…all in one day. I like picking asparagus. What I don't like is the weather.*

Along with asparagus, Rosario has harvested zucchini, apples, pears, corn, cherries, and grapes. Rosario described the work as "pesado" (heavy, difficult, tiresome) with very long hours. When cherries are ready to be harvested, they have to be picked as soon as possible. If they get too heavy or it rains too much, they break open. So the migrant workers work very long hours to harvest all of them when the timing is right. Rosario also described the harvesting of the asparagus and zucchini as "no puede parar; *you can't stop"* because once the vegetables grow past a certain point, they're no good. They must be harvested at the right time. She described starting at four o'clock in the morning and finishing past midnight, working in the dark with flashlights, to harvest asparagus and zucchini. Like Olga, Rosario also wished that her work was appreciated.

> Me gustaría que la gente supiera apreciar que lo que se come...Yo digo bendita las manos que pizcan estas manzanas porque es muy duro. Bendita las manos que pizcan este espárrago porque también es tan duro pizcar el espárrago. Yo digo que pienso que la gente apreciara este…que no persigue tanto a los indocumentados porque son los que trabajan más. *I would like for people to appreciate that what they eat…I say bless the hands that pick these apples because it's hard work. Bless the hands that pick this asparagus because it's so hard to pick asparagus. I think people should appreciate this…that they shouldn't persecute so much the undocumented workers because they are the ones that work the most.*

Rosario also hoped that her children could break free from migrant work through education. Rosario has never allowed her children to work with her; instead, she tells them that studying should be their priority. When Rosario spoke about her daughter, who was fifteen, she said, "prefiero que estudie para no esté como yo. *I prefer that she study so that she's not like me.*" She continued,

> Quisiera que [mis hijos] estudiaran, pues que tuvieran una vida más mejor, más desahogada. No los quisiera ver en el campo, pero al mismo tiempo que aprendan que eso es trabajo duro, que comprendan la gente que trabaja en el campo" *I want them [my children] to study, so they can have a better life, a more comfortable life. I don't want to see them in the fields, but at the same time I want them to learn that this is hard work, to understand the people who work the fields.*

Angie: "When you're here, it's work, work, work." Angie was born and raised in Brownsville, Texas. Both of her parents were also born and raised in Brownsville, and most of her family still lives there. Angie and her husband decided to pursue migrant work in Michigan after

her husband lost his job in Texas eighteen years ago. At the time, their son was only four years old, and they had just purchased a house in Texas. Angie had heard that work was available in Michigan, and they decided to "take a chance" doing seasonal labor to try to pay off their house. She, along with her husband, her son, and her husband's parents, travelled to Michigan to look for work.

Angie's first experiences in Michigan were difficult. They struggled to find an appropriate place for a family to live since Angie didn't feel comfortable raising her little boy in the migrant work camps, which were populated mostly by single men. According to its (2010) report, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission found that this was not uncommon. The MCRC reported,

> Couples will live with a lot of single guys, leaving one or two women to share a space with a lot of men. The workers are told how many hours they have to work which is generally 12 hours a day. Then they don't have time to cook or shower by the time they get home because they have to share facilities with so many others.

Angie's story was similar. When she spoke about arriving in Michigan and finding work and housing, she explained,

> My guy was little, barely four years old, but I noticed that in a migrant camp, I see a lot of people, a lot of guys, you know, they don't have their family. They like to drink after they get out of work. At that point I told my husband that we can keep the job but we gotta rent because I don't feel comfortable being at the migrant camp.

Eventually Angie and her family moved into a single-family home owned by their boss, and they stayed in Michigan for three years, working year-round to earn enough to make their house payments in Texas. They picked asparagus, plums, apples, cherries, peaches, and pears. In the off season, she and her husband found work at Burger King, and she counted on her in-laws to care for her son while she and her husband worked as much as possible. After three years, they began to migrate back and forth, spending about seven months working in Michigan and then migrating back to Texas for time off from November until March.

At the time of our interviews, Angie and her husband worked as supervisors in packaging, and her oldest son operated a forklift and acted as an assistant supervisor in shipping and receiving. Angie said that her three boys "love coming and going." She continued, "They tell me that when they grow up and get married, that's the first thing they're going to tell their wife. We're going to be migrants, we're going to be coming and going." Though Angie would prefer that they attend college, she also understood why they wanted to continue migrant work. She clarified that they've never picked; her sons have always worked in packing.

Angie's oldest son expressed interest in an automotive degree, but the program would cost him almost thirty thousand dollars. Instead of going into debt for college, he preferred to continue to work in packing, driving a forklift and earning money. He explained to Angie, "You make good money. You go to work, you make money, you save money, and you come back [to Texas] and you're full time at the house, spending time with us, and you don't gotta pay any student loans or anything." Angie agreed that he didn't have a compelling reason to pursue education, especially since he would be responsible for his own tuition. She hoped eventually her sons might decide to pursue more education, but was also reassured that her boys were happy with the life she and her husband had provided for them.

For Angie, the working hours and time away from her kids has been difficult. In Michigan, Angie and her husband work 12-14 hours a day. But in Texas they take time off, collecting unemployment and spending time together. They own a home in Texas and a small fishing boat, so they choose to delegate the winter months as family time, returning to Michigan to work once the snow has melted. Angie explained, "when you're here [in Michigan], it's work, work, work; you're distracted too much from your kids. I do work a lot, but when I go back to Texas I cherish the time with my kids."

This year, Angie's plans were changed by an April snowfall. She returned to Michigan to begin work and encountered an unexpected snowstorm. When her family arrived at their trailer, they found that the roof had caved in over the winter and the floor was covered with ice. She was unable to hook up the water pump, and it was still snowing, so she and her family stayed in a hotel for five days to wait for spring weather. The five days at a hotel was an unexpected expense, and she was also faced with having to replace the furniture and flooring in the trailer where her family will live until November. By the time of our interview, she had usually begun planting, but this year the weather has prevented her from beginning to work. Fortunately, Angie's sons have been working to fix up the trailer, and Angie was saving money to replace it at the end of this season. Angie said the weather forecast was sixty degrees by next week, so she hoped to be able to begin working soon.

Dina: "Me quedo aquí. *I stay here."* Dina was originally from Reynosa, Mexico and had been working in Michigan for fourteen years. She crossed the border and came to Michigan because she knew some nephews and in-laws that had been working here. Though Dina's nephews and in-laws have travelled back and forth between Michigan and Texas, Dina remained in Michigan because she felt it was better for her children. Most of her five children were now married and living in Michigan, though her youngest was just ten years old and attending school.

Most of the year, Dina described working from 7:00 am until 5:00 pm as one of only three women who worked in pine trees. Dina began work each year in April with the asparagus harvest before the pine tree season. Like Rosario, she described harvesting asparagus as very difficult. The hours for asparagus start at 6:00 am and she worked until 9:00 pm or later. After a day picking asparagus, Dina said she has to be helped out of the truck because she cannot walk from the pain in her hips. "Yo llegaba con las dolidas de las caderas, que me tienen que ayudar a bajar de la camioneta. No podía caminar. *I arrived with such pain in my hips that they had to help me get down from the truck. I couldn't walk.*" After the asparagus, she worked in pine trees, trimming and later packing, which she described as scary in bad weather.

> Teníamos que trabajar haciendo frío, aunque esté lloviendo…estamos trabajo mientras había rayos, truenos, o que estuviera muy fuerte el aire. Con los truenos y los rayos, al mismo machete les da la electricidad, y nos puede electrocutar. *We had to work in the cold, even though it was raining; we work during lightning, thunder, strong winds. With the thunder and lightning, the machetes can transfer electricity and electrocute us.*

Though Dina said that the workers were given yellow raincoats and plastic boots, they continued to work despite the dangers of working in pine trees during a storm.

We interviewed Dina in February, when there was no work for her. Dina and her husband were typically unemployed from mid-December until April, so the family had to live on whatever they managed to save during the season. Dina talked about the difficulty and amount of homework

brought home by her youngest daughter, but she has been grateful for the Focus program that her daughter has attended after school since kindergarten. Despite their difficulties, she said they have had a good life here, staying in Michigan and renting a small house year-round. There is help through food stamps and Medicaid for those who need it. As long as they are able to work, their daughter can finish school here.

Becky: "Siempre hemos tratado de hacer la mejor para la familia. ***We've always tried to do the best for the family."*** Becky arrived from Reynosa, Mexico, twenty years ago with her daughter, who was under two years old. Her husband had arrived one month earlier and had found work, but his group did not accept women migrant workers, so Becky had to find a different place to work. Becky told us the story of her grandmother, an inspiration to her. Her grandmother left her grandfather to come to the United States with her ten children. She worked in various states as a single mother, caring for her children on her own. Now, she is ninety years old and a U.S. citizen. Becky was proud of her grandmother for raising the children on her own, explaining, "ninguna mujer en la época de ella hacía lo que ella hizo de separarse de su esposo. *No woman at that time did what she did, separating from her husband."*

After Becky arrived, she eventually found work with Christmas trees in northern Michigan and continued to work there for eight years. In the first few years, she and her husband travelled back to Mexico when there was no work in Michigan, but it was very difficult, and they decided it was better to stay in Michigan. Later, Becky worked in grape vineyards and also harvested cherries, cucumbers, zucchini, and pumpkins. They worked from April until December each year.

Like the other women, Becky wanted her children to gain an education. She told us, "Pues, la meta de mi familia es que ellos [los hijos] terminen sus estudios. *The goal of my family is that they [the children] finish their studies."* Becky has a son and another daughter still enrolled in public schools. Throughout our interview, Becky was clear that family is her priority. She explained,

> Yo pienso que no saber inglés no es un obstáculo, o no tener documentos no es un obstáculo para sacar a la familia adelante. Es lo más importante que yo quisiera recalcar. *I think that to not know English isn't an obstacle, or to not have documents isn't an obstacle for families to get ahead. It's the most important thing that I want to emphasize.*

Becky was not alone in her resolve to put her family first. Each of the women expressed their motivation for the work, and it was always for the family. These mothers worked incredibly hard in order to put their children within reach of better opportunities. We are grateful to these women for sharing their stories. As researchers, we have been incredibly humbled by the trust placed to us as we heard stories of exploitation, transience, and resilience.

As we read the transcripts of our interviews, we began to note commonalities in the women's stories. Some of the women told a story of exploitation and how that experience had influenced them. Many spoke of transience as a struggle which influenced their children and the children's education. The women all emphasized the importance of education. Often, the women made decisions about work based on education for their children, putting the future opportunities of their children first. In some cases, prioritizing education meant giving up the transient life, settling in one place and saving for the winter months without work. The women also showed remarkable resilience. Most of the women were committed to long days of physical labor, but were

adamant that their children stay out of the fields. These mothers believed in the power of education to "break the cycle" of migrant work, and they traded their hours of manual labor for their children's future opportunities. The following paragraphs tell their stories.

Our Findings:
Struggles of Exploitation and Transience, the Importance of Education, and Evidence of Resilience

Exploitation

While all migrant workers are exploited as a workforce, migrant women are exploited even more: on two levels, as migrants and as women.

When Becky arrived, she found that she was unable to gain employment with her husband because his company would not hire a woman. It was more difficult for her to find work because some companies did not accept women as workers. Olga also reported that women were treated differently, earning different salaries for their gender. When she spoke of her work, she said, "It's been tough, especially being a woman in the field, because they teach you differently, [and] the pay rate is not the same." Olga said that working for the packaging company was a little better, because she received an hourly salary, but women who worked in the fields "still get paid less than guys do." The gender discrimination encountered by Becky and Olga was also reported in Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) forums held throughout the state of Michigan in 2009. Workers reported farmers refusing to hire women or not accepting employment applications from workers with families (MCRC 2010). Women also reported that they were refused housing because it was "for men only."

According to Olga, women also experience harassment at work, both in the fields and in the factory, due to racism, sexism, and language barriers. She explained,

> It's the same when you work in the factory or you work outside in the field because a lot of the farmers...they see you're Hispanic, that doesn't necessarily mean you're from Mexico, could be Central America or somewhere else, but how is she going to say something? She doesn't speak the language. You see a lot of that….then if they [the women] did [speak up], they would lose their job. Of course, not having documents in the United States of America, it's her word against the farmer or the supervisor or somebody else. That's the hardest part of being a Hispanic migrant worker.

Language barriers certainly contribute to exploitation of the migrant labor force. MCRC reported that 81% of season farmworkers were Spanish-speaking in 2010, and only 24% of migrant laborers categorized themselves as speaking English well (2010). Olga explained how this language barrier led to other forms of exploitation when she noted that a woman may not "say something" because she doesn't speak the language, she fears losing her job, or because it's her word against a farmer's word.

Rosario also described an experience of exploitation as a new employee, "una mala experiencia, *a bad experience,"* with a man who robbed them and refused to allow breaks. She recounted,

> Nosotros siempre hemos sido legales, de un estatus legal, pero mal informados. Entonces, nos robó mucho el señor, a todos. No quería que salíamos ni a comer. Entonces mi hermano le dijo que nosotros no éramos máquinas y necesitábamos comer. Y nos dejó ir a comer

> porque no quería que comiéramos hasta que termináramos. Es un señor que estaba encargado de allí. No era el dueño. Fue mi primer experiencia aquí... Todos tienen sus problemas, pero si uno no se mete, todo está bien. *We've always been legal, of legal status, but not well-informed. So, one guy robbed us a lot, everyone. He didn't want us to leave [the field] even to eat. So my brother told him that we weren't machines and we needed to eat. And he let us go eat because he didn't want us to eat until we finished. It was the guy that was in charge there. Not the owner. That was my first experience here. All of them have their problems, but if you don't meddle, it's okay.*

Unfortunately, the experience described by Rosario is also not uncommon, and the MCRC also reports several cases of wage theft in their 2010 report. These cases were often not reported due to language barriers, fear of job loss, or because workers were undocumented. One worker reported to the MCRC that he had earned $46 for 12 hours of work, well below the minimum wage in Michigan in 2009 (MCRC 2010).

Transience

Housing is another major difficulty of migrant families. These families continually relocate based on the season and availability of work. Therefore, owning a home or signing a lease is not an option. Due to the nature of their work, many migrant and seasonal farmworkers depend on provided housing. The MCRC report (2010) explained,

> Agricultural employers commonly offer free or reduced cost employee housing to attract migrant farmworkers for the harvest season. Alternative housing is typically not available to migrant farmworkers, as their poverty, the rural location of their work sites and the short duration of their stay in a given area make traditional housing impractical or unattainable.

MCRC goes on to explain that this housing must be inspected by the Migrant Labor Housing Program. Unfortunately, budget cuts have decreased the number of sanitarians able to conduct inspections, and just five licensed sanitarians were responsible for inspecting over 800 migrant camps in 2002 (MCRC 2010). During their 2009 forums, the MCRC heard multiple reports of overcrowding in migrant housing, as well as reports of broken toilets, sinks, and refrigerators; dirty water; insect and rodent infestations; and hazards for children, such as exposed wires. In one case, a trailer with one bathroom was occupied by nine adults, three children, and one baby (MCRC 2010). One mother from northern Michigan reported to the MCRC,

> There is no running water, I have to go somewhere else to get it. I used all my work money to buy water. There are mattresses on the floor, too many people. I live with men I don't even know. There isn't even a door on the room and I am afraid to sleep because I don't know who will come in.

Another mother reported living with her four children in a unit without a working toilet, without screens on windows, and with exposed wires. She told the MCRC, "We need the work. If we complain, the camps will be shut down and people will have no housing at all" (MCRC 2010).

Angie found a similar situation when she arrived in Michigan. She saw an ad for seasonal workers and called to inquire about work. Upon arriving, she found that the conditions of the camp were very poor. Everyone shared one bathroom and shower, and it was mostly single men. Angie

was with her husband, her in-laws, and her little boy, and she felt uncomfortable staying at the camp. She explained, "it's different when you have a family." Because she was uncomfortable at the camps full of single men, Angie paid $1200 for a deposit and first month's rent on a trailer. When the owner found out that her in-laws would be living with them, he insisted that the trailer was "for one family only" and kicked them out after one night, refusing to refund the deposit. Eventually, the Salvation Army helped Angie and her in-laws, providing them with shelter until one farmer offered them an empty house on her property. Angie and her family worked for that farmer for several years, and she recalled how grateful she was to the farmer for understanding their needs and providing another, more family-friendly, option.

Olga also experienced difficulties finding housing as a child of migrant workers. She spoke about needing to find shelter for a large family.

> What my parents used to do, when we were growing up, is sometimes farmers would put in the local newspaper we need so many people for such and such and we'll give you housing. Of course, my parents would make the plans that we'll stay with this farmer this year because he needs twenty or thirty workers, and then we would get there, and they would say, "Sorry, we're already full," and we would have to find another place. My parents have six kids. We're a family of eight. Six out of eight could work, but they still wouldn't take us because they didn't have space, so sometimes we would sleep in the car, or sleep in a church, or sometimes out of different places until we found a farmer that would actually give us work. So it was bad.

Later, as a single mom with two daughters, Olga continued to struggle with transience,

> It was hard because you never knew where you were going to be. If this camp closes down, where are you going to stay this time? You're out of luck because asparagus season has ended. Of course you had to find somewhere else, but sometimes you had to live with other couples. I need a roof but I cannot leave my kids alone because I don't know everybody. That was always a challenge. At other camps mostly everyone was men by themselves, maybe two or three families. So it was hard finding a camp where there were families. If you stay home and watch your kids, who is going to put food on the table and pay your bills?

As these women worked hard to provide opportunities and education for their families, their most basic needs for shelter were not always met. They felt uncertain about the safety of their children in shelters that were provided.

Rosario stated that not having a home was her biggest challenge in her life. "El desafío más grande es no tener una casa...No tener donde vivir casi siempre. Eso es mucha batalla. *The biggest challenge is not having a house. To almost always not have a place to live. That's really a battle."* Rosario explained that now, after many years of working in the same place, she has friends to help her, but she finds herself without a place to stay too often. It was very difficult when she first began the work.

> Al principio llegar y dormir en los carros porque pues es de noche y ¿adónde vas a llegar? Al día tener que buscar los trabajos porque a veces no eras tan seguro que llevas a trabajar adonde mismo, y con los niños. A veces no saber los caminos para ir a la tienda a

> comprar la comida. Y eso. En ese tiempo sí fue difícil. *At first to arrive and to sleep in cars because, well, it's night and where are you going to go? In the day to have to look for jobs because sometimes you weren't so sure if you would have work at the same place, and with the children. Sometimes to not know the roads to go to the store and buy food. All that. In that time, yes, it was difficult.*

Rosario said that she generally worked in Harbor county and sometimes moved north to work with grapes later in the season. Until this year, she also migrated to Texas in the off season. She said there are places where she could earn more money, but, "me siento seguro aquí, *I feel safe here."* The rest of Rosario's family was in Texas, working, and she and her daughter missed them, but she expressed that she felt safer here, that the air was cleaner, she liked the small, quiet town, and she felt that she could look after her daughter better. Though she was struggling to make it through the winter months, and she wasn't sure she could continue to stay in Michigan year-round, the feeling of security was important.

Education

The women all emphasized the importance of education, and they were appreciative of extra programming provided to support their children. Dina's daughter has attended an after-school program called Project Focus for several years. Dina explained that her fifth-grade daughter got a lot of homework. "Yo miro los problemas que le ponen a mi niña, bien grandes y mucha tarea le encarga….y con mi hija es muy despacio. *I see the problems they give to my daughter, really big and they assign a lot of homework….and with my daughter it's very slow."* She went on to explain, "Ella, en el programa, le ayuda. Le ponía nivel de kinder, de primer año, ahorita está en quinto, y todavía está ayudando. *In the program, it helps her. She started in kindergarten, then first grade, and right now she's in fifth, and it's still helping."*

Olga also spoke about the importance of education and said that she was happy with this area of Michigan because opportunities for Hispanic women were increasing, and young girls were encouraged to stay in school. She was also impressed by the resources offered through the school. She recalled,

> When we moved back [to Harbor county], we started filling out our paperwork to enroll kids in school, and they said since you moved from another state you'll be considered migrants for a few years, so they said that there is a really good program that you want to get involved in, and they started talking about other programs that could help my daughters eventually graduate from high school, and I'm like, "Wow. Where was this when we were young?"

Of course, transience affects educational opportunities for the children of migrant workers. Though many workers return to the same regions in Michigan and Texas each year, their children change schools regularly. Migrant workers generally enroll their children in Michigan in August, but need to relocate after the fall growing season ends in November. Most of the women travel to Texas for the winter months, enrolling their children in schools there until early spring. In late March, the families return to Michigan. Migrant work is dependent on a somewhat nomadic life, which is difficult for students in an educational system that is based on local and state control. Every district is distinct.

Despite the need for seasonal employment, the women who spoke with us made decisions about work based on the priority of education for their children. In some cases, prioritizing education meant giving up the transient life, settling in one place and saving for the winter months without income. Rosario had recently made the decision to remain in Michigan through the winter. She told us, "este año me quedé aquí, no sé más adelante. Es por mi niña. Cuando vamos a Texas es bien difícil para ponerlos en escuela. *This year I stayed here; I don't know going forward. It's for my daughter. When we go to Texas it's pretty difficult to put them in school."* Rosario's daughter, at fifteen years old, had begun to experience difficulties transferring schools between Michigan and Texas. Rosario said that it's not too difficult when the children are young, but in the past three or four years, it had become more difficult to get into the schools in Texas mid-year. She explained,

> Cuando están chiquitos todo está bien. Pero como van creciendo es más difícil. Ha sido que como unos tres o cuatro años que ha sido más difícil en Texas que los niños batallan para entrar. Nos dan muchas vueltas… *When they are young everything is fine. But as they grow it's more difficult. It's been like the last three or four years that it has been more difficult in Texas and the kids fight to get in. They make us go around in circles…*

Rosario also described that the schools in Texas were so large that she didn't feel as though she knew what was happening. In Harbor county, "hay menos gente, más familia, pienso que puedo ver todo como hay una ventana, y puedo ver lo que hay. *There are fewer people, more family, I think I can see everything as if there is a window, and I can see what is there*." For Rosario and her daughter, it was more comfortable to stay in Michigan year-round, but there was no work during the winter months, and housing was a struggle.

As a teen, Olga dropped out of school because she "could never get caught up in the school system" due to their constant relocation. When her daughters began to complain that they were struggling in school due to the migrant lifestyle, Olga decided to stay in Michigan for their benefit. Dina made a similar decision. Although her relatives were all working in Texas at the time of our interview, she had stayed behind, choosing to remain in Harbor county through the winter months because her ten-year-old daughter struggled in school and needed the support offered by Project Focus at the local school.

Like the women in our study, a recent study by Gabriel, Roxas, and Becker (2017) found that Spanish-speaking immigrant parents placed a high value on education and "expressed clearly their hope that their child's education would lead to a professional career." The immigrant parents in their study expressed a deep desire to support their children in school and acknowledging that they were making sacrifices now in order to ensure better opportunities for their children. Gabriel, Roxas, and Becker note that there is a history of findings that immigrant parents value education because many have risked their lives to offer educational opportunities for their children. The parents in their study discussed having limited access to formal education as children and adolescents (Gabriel, Roxas, & Becker, 2017), much like the migrant women in Harbor county.

Along with transience, some migrant workers also struggle to help their children gain education because of language barriers. Only 24% of migrant workers in the Michigan Civil Rights Commission's study (2010) classified themselves as speaking English well. Gabriel, Roxas, and Becker point out the cultural gap between "a homogenous teaching force" of White teachers and the diverse student population (2017). Due to language and cultural barriers, they wrote that "the voices of immigrant students and parents are often unheard, unnoticed, or unsolicited" (2017). One

parent stated that she felt unable to communicate with teachers, and other parents felt that they did not have "access to the school" (Gabriel, Roxas, & Becker, 2017). The parents in their study wanted teachers to know that they immigrated to "help our children get ahead" despite cultural and language gaps (Gabriel, Roxas, & Becker, 2017).

How we can increase parent involvement in schools from culturally and linguistically diverse families and help immigrant parents feel that they have access to schools, teachers, and programs? Gabriel, Roxas, and Becker (2017) recommend that schools "recruit and hire bilingual and bicultural school personnel to be bridges for communication between home and school and to address the cultural mismatch found in public schools." Harbor county employs a full-time migrant director to work with their high population of migrant families. We believe this to be one reason why so many families have decided to settle in Harbor county over the past few years, sacrificing winter income in Texas to keep their children enrolled in Harbor county schools. Olga spoke of the importance of having a voice, someone to communicate with through the schools, and the migrant director is that person. The women communicate with her through social media and use word of mouth to make sure Spanish-speaking parents know about events. The migrant director also works closely with the Hispanic Center, which informs the families about opportunities and resources.

Gabriel, Roxas, and Becker (2017) also recommend that schools honor and welcome home languages. Noting that "immigrant parents have often overcome insurmountable challenges to offer their children what they deem to be a prestigious education," they encourage schools to provide more opportunities to get to know the families. Their *Photovoice* project invited parents to tell their own stories through digital photography, bringing parents together through a shared creative project (Gabriel, Roxas, & Becker, 2017). While a formal project did not exist in the Harbor school district, the women here meet sporadically with Mary Monroe to discuss concerns about their children in school. Those meetings involve food and sometimes a storied discussion, a narrative of their immediate lives. This in and of itself honors the language and culture of these families. Mrs. Monroe simply provides the venue and opportunity; the migrant women themselves create their life narratives. In this research, we provide what we hope is an opportunity for these women to have their voices heard and respected by a larger audience. We do so in a cautious, humble, and respectful way.

Resilience

One of the core values of these women, resilience, was demonstrated both implicitly and explicitly by these women. Despite the many challenges of migrant work, the women all expressed pride in their labor and determination to help their children attain education and better opportunities. Olga wanted people to know that migrant women are very strong, and the work they do is important. She has committed to changing the circumstances for her own daughters, staying in Michigan through the winters for the past two years despite the financial difficulties of weeks without income. She has also committed to changing the circumstances of migrant women, describing herself as "the person a lot of women go to if they don't speak both languages." Olga has reported injustices to her supervisors when other women are afraid to speak up. Becky has also said that she gained respect by speaking up. She told us,

> Cuando alguien dice, "Cállate, tú no tienes que hablar," tú vas a decir, "No, lo que yo quiero expresar lo voy a expresar." Porque muchas veces dicen, "Yo soy el patrón, yo soy el mayordomo, tú tienes que callar." No. Primero se me tomaba más mi trabajo, pero yo

> pienso que yo gané con eso. Porque me gané respeto de esas personas. Cuando yo no podía trabajar cierto horario de trabajo porque yo tenía algo que hacer por mi familia, llevarlos al doctor o a la escuela, yo perdí esas horas. Pero en adelante yo gané que ellos me dejaban trabajar después, a mi sola, ellos reconocieron mi trabajo y que iba a cumplir con mi trabajo. *When someone says, "Be quiet, you don't need to talk," you're going to say, "No, what I want to say, I'm going to say." Because many times they say, "I'm the boss, I'm the supervisor, you have to be quiet." No. At first they took away my work, but I think that I won with this. Because I earned respect from people. When I couldn't work a certain schedule because I had something to do for the family, bring them to the doctor or to school, I lost those hours. But going forward they allowed me to work after, just me, they recognized my work and that I would finish it.*

Becky earned the respect of her employers through her determination and hard work. She added, "Tienes que buscar lo mejor para ti y para tu familia...he trabajado donde se me permite mejor para cuidar a mi hijo más pequeño. *You have to look for what is best for you and your family...I've worked where they've best allowed me to take care of my youngest child.*" Later she explained that she has had both good and bad experiences as a migrant worker, but in more recent years, she works where she is treated best, not where she gets the most hours, because the wellbeing of her family is her priority. In Becky's words, "En los últimos años, trabajo donde me tratan mejor, no donde hay más horas. Estoy más contenta, yo y mi familia, porque anteponemos el bienestar de todos que el trabajo. *In the past years, I work where they treat me best, not where there are more hours. I'm happier, I and my family, because we put the wellbeing of everyone above the work."*

Rosario also said, "Uno sabe que trabajar en la labor es pesado. Pero al mismo tiempo pues alguien lo tiene que hacer. *You know that physical work is difficult. But at the same time, well, someone has to do it.*" She hopes that her children will not work in the fields, but she also hopes that they understand the people who do. In the future, Rosario thinks that she would like to study massage because there are people working in the fields that could really use it. She'd like to offer massages that aren't expensive so that field workers could afford them.

Olga, Rosario, Angie, Dina, and Becky were willing to tell us about the challenges faced by migrant families in our communities. While hardships were evident, we also heard determination and resilience in their stories. As educators and mothers ourselves, we were impressed by the sacrifices made by the women for the sake of education and future opportunities. We hope that educators in our country understand how much educational opportunities are valued by these migrant families.

We have an immense responsibility to share these narratives to a broader audience. As we have indicated previously, there is limited research on the impact of migrant mothers on their families and communities. Within the conversations we had with these women, themes of exploitation, transience, and a desire for education emerged. And all the while, these women demonstrated an intense resilience as they dealt with their life challenges. What we learned can form the basis for a number of recommendations or considerations for school systems and communities hosting migrant families.

Implications for Schools and Communities

Schools have a responsibility to educate migrant students in fair and equitable ways; services and curricula are dictated by government mandates. Communities have a responsibility to welcome and support migrant families, who are the mainstay of the agricultural economy. Education and community support does not have to be complicated, but it does have to be genuine. We offer some basic recommendations for both schools and communities.

Schools can:

- Include migrant parents in local decisions by facilitating their inclusion in local meetings; transportation and translation may be needed, but this could be the case for other families as well;
- Establish parent groups at all levels of the school; ask migrant parents to visit the school to share their knowledge;
- Provide educators with training to understand the needs of migrant students. Often there are implicit biases at work in the classroom; the question becomes how can teachers affirm all of their students. They need knowledge to do this;
- Educate teachers and administrators about the legal issues related to the schools and immigration; misconceptions abound;
- Provide consistent availability of translation services. Community and local church volunteers can often serve in this capacity;
- Create inclusive, parent-participant school events;
- Allow flexible work time or additional compensation so that teachers can meet with migrant parents at convenient times, often evenings and weekends;
- Establish a migrant community liaison position and committee; often this is a *de facto* responsibility of the district migrant director or staff. Including more educators in this process leads to greater acceptance and understanding of farmworker needs.

Communities can:

- Establish solid relationships with local schools;
- Support community programming that has appeal to all constituents;
- Network with area religious institutions and nonprofit organizations to develop a master list of supplemental services not provided in official social service networks;
- Create a community advisory committee representative of all constituencies;
- Link with area schools, nonprofit organizations, and religious institutions to offer English-as-a-Second-Language classes.

The migrant women we interviewed chose to share their stories because Mary Monroe, the migrant director of Harbor Schools, initially convinced them to trust two researchers who cared about migrants. These women placed great trust in us, and we, in turn, have assumed the immense responsibility of disseminating their stories. The themes emerging from our conversations were profound: sexism, exploitation, transience, childcare difficulties, schooling, and resilience. These women are resilient in every sense of the word. Their strong commitment to family and work ethic are foundational qualities of migrant mothers.

These qualities, too, are the foundation of the migrant family structure. In our conversations with these women we ourselves understood better the nuances of migrant life. Migrant farm workers live all over the United States, and opportunities for inclusion and services vary

dramatically. Here in Michigan, there is great disparity in support to these individuals (Vocke, Westine, Applegate, & VanDonkelaar, 2016). The community of Harbor is recognized for its willingness to provide services holistically for families, including them in both school and community life.

Two of the women we interviewed served on a school advisory committee with Mary Monroe. One of these women had also established an informal network to support newcomers to the community. One lesson we learned from our conversations from these women is this: because an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion was evident in the community, organic and grassroots efforts to support migrants inherently became a part of life. These women networked a great deal with other migrant mothers and set the stage for community involvement without fear.

As researchers, we have attempted to portray the lives of these women in honest, compassionate, and truthful ways. As educators, we, ourselves, now understand a bit better the needs of migrant children, because the mothers confided in us about the realities of a nomadic life. Because of the current political climate, we feel it is especially important to show support for migrant—and immigrant—students and their families. We have been privileged to hear and disseminate the stories of these five women.

When we asked Olga, she wanted people to know, "that we're human…At the end of the day, for a lot of people, we put food on their table, and a lot of people take that for granted." Rosario ended her interview by saying, "es duro para una mujer. *It's difficult for a woman."* She added a wish, "que sale algo bueno de esto, *that something good could come of this*." We also reiterate this wish.

Notes

- Pseudonyms have been used for all names of places and people.
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