



# Examining Psychological Health Among Oregon Migrant & Seasonal Farm Workers

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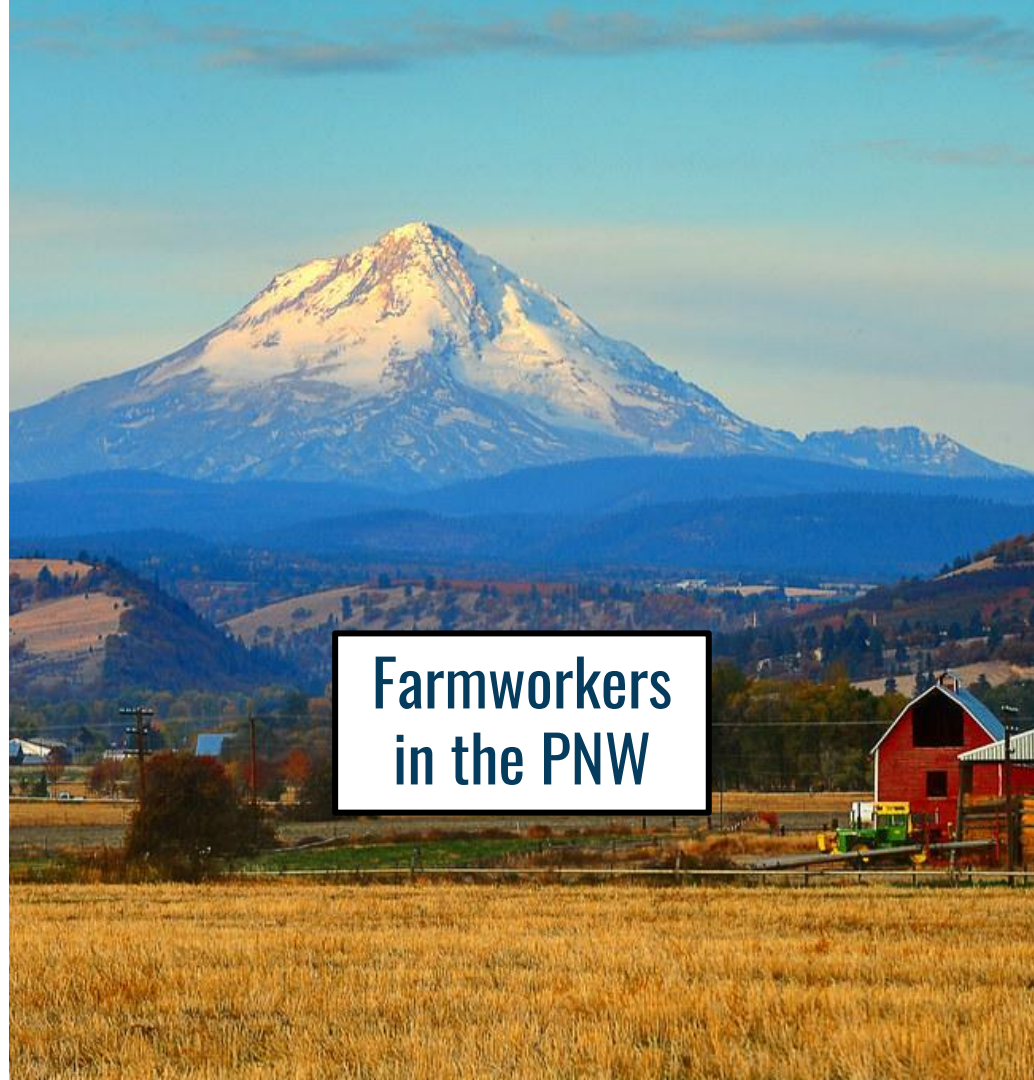
Portland State  
UNIVERSITY

## Agriculture Industry <sup>1, 2, 3</sup> ● ● ●

- PNW's crop yields contribute 12% of the US' crop revenue
- Oregon contributes 6% of the US' crop revenue
- Oregon's agricultural exports total over \$1.8 billion annually

## Migrant & Seasonal Farmworkers <sup>4,5</sup> ● ● ●

- Success of the industry is dependent on migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs)
- Estimated 86,400 MSFW in Oregon



**Farmworkers  
in the PNW**





## Challenges for MSFW

### EXPOSURE <sup>6,7</sup> ● ● ●

- Work long days outdoors
- Physically demanding work tasks

### RISKS <sup>6,7</sup> ● ● ●

- Operate heavy machinery
- Exposure to harmful chemicals and pesticides

### RESOURCES <sup>8</sup> ● ● ●

- Historically have little access to resources
- Job Insecurity

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What motivates MSFWs to work?
2. What physical and mental aspects of work threaten MSFWs health?
3. How do MSFWs cope with the competing motivations to maintain gainful employment and to maintain one's own personal health?

## SAMPLE • • •

- 41 MSFWs in the Pacific Northwest
  - 54% Women
  - 47 years old (34 - 76)
  - Spanish speaking, Hispanic, Immigrated from Mexico & Central America
- Recruited through local labor union

## PROCEDURE • • •

- 1 hour semi-structured interviews
- Recorded in Spanish, translated in English
- Meet weekly to discuss emergent themes

## ANALYTIC PLAN<sup>9</sup> • • •

- 4 trained RA's code for common themes using Grounded Theory
- 21 interviews have been coded



**METHODS**

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your job.**
  - a. ¿Hábleme un poquito de usted y de su trabajo?*
- 2. What are some of the hardest parts of your job (physically/mentally/emotionally)?**
  - a. ¿Cuales son las partes más difíciles de su trabajo? (físicamente/ mentalmente/ emocionalmente)?*
- 3. What factors make you worried about losing your job?**
  - a. ¿Cuales son los factores que le preocuparían si usted perdiera su trabajo?*
- 4. How would losing your job impact you and your family?**
  - a. ¿Cómo les afectaría a usted y a su familia si usted perdiera su trabajo?*
- 5. How do you manage the aspects of job (in)security, job hazards, family/financial concerns all at once?**
  - a. ¿Cómo usted maneja los aspectos de (in)seguridad del trabajo, los peligros del trabajo, familia/ preocupaciones financieras, todo al mismo tiempo?*
- 6. What would be the best change that could make your job/life easier/more fulfilling/safer (better)?**
  - a. ¿Cual seria el mejor cambio que haría su trabajo/ vida/ mas facil/ completa/ o segura (mejor)?*





## RESULTS

### Emerging Themes • • •

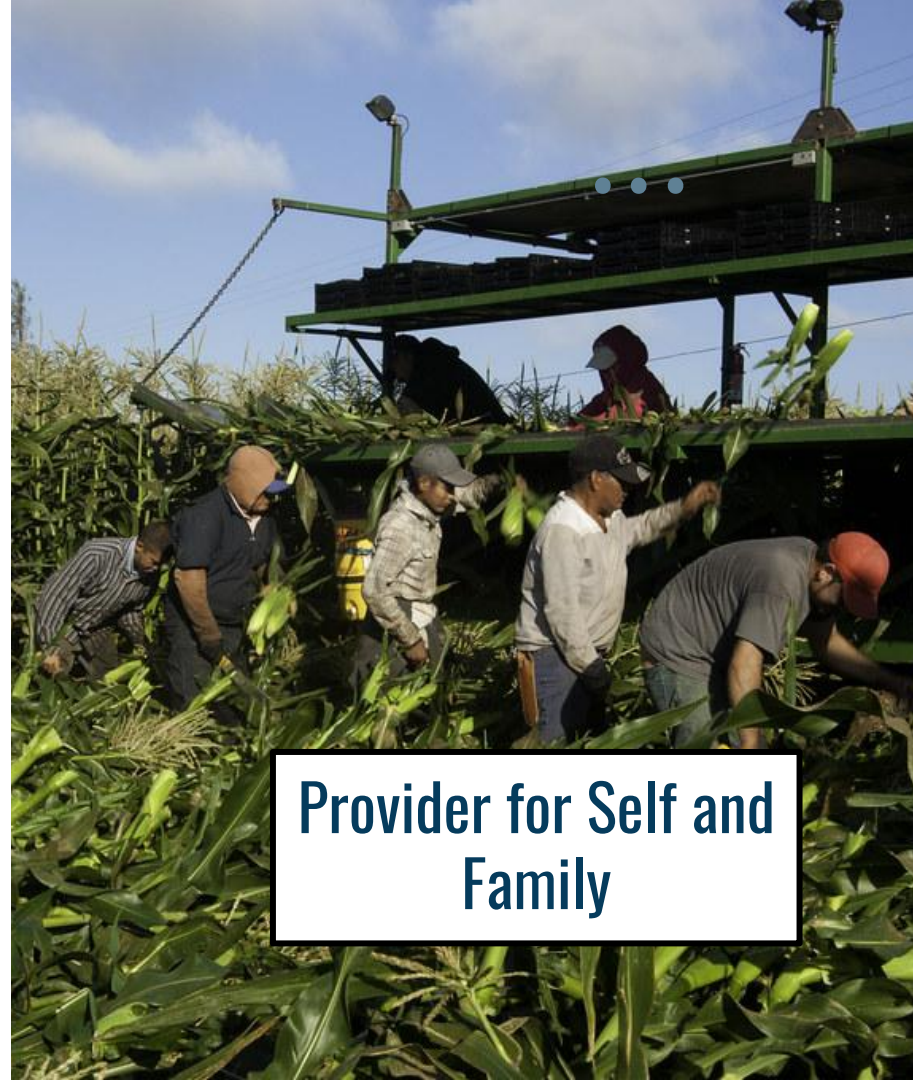
- **Theme 1:** Provider for Self and Family
- **Theme 2:** Hazardous Work
- **Theme 3:** Coping Strategies
  - Family Support
  - Seeking Comfort in a Higher Power

## Personal Financial Concerns • • •

- Many expressed the feeling stressed about paying their monthly bills, finances, and debts:
- “...month after month I have to be thinking about how I am going to do it, what am I going to do, or where am I going to get (money) to pay for this and that.”

## Family Financial Concerns • • •

- Others reported the need to purchase food and clothing for the family members
- “the children are not going to school, they are with us so we have to buy more food.”



**Provider for Self and Family**



A photograph of a rural scene shrouded in thick fog. In the foreground, there is a green lawn and a white propane tank in a metal cage. In the background, a white barn with a dark roof is visible on the left, and several trees are scattered throughout the scene. The overall atmosphere is hazy and dimly lit.

## Hazardous Work

### Injuries • • •

- Many participants reported that they had been injured on the job
- “I felt like something exploded inside my arm and I definitely couldn't move my arm anymore.”

### Exposure • • •

- Workers stated they were exposed to many harmful conditions including COVID, extreme heat, pesticides, and smoke
- “I am not working because of the chemicals from where I used to work, they harmed me and I am diseased in the lungs.”

## Family Support • • •

- Participants described they found the will to keep working from their family members
- “This is how I am surviving and they are the ones who give me emotional support, they do not leave me behind.”

## Seeking Comfort in a Higher Power • • •

- Workers expressed how their faith motivated them to keep going
- “[God] knows where he puts each one of us in different situations, and so you keep going.”



**Coping  
Strategies**

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS<sup>10</sup> • • •

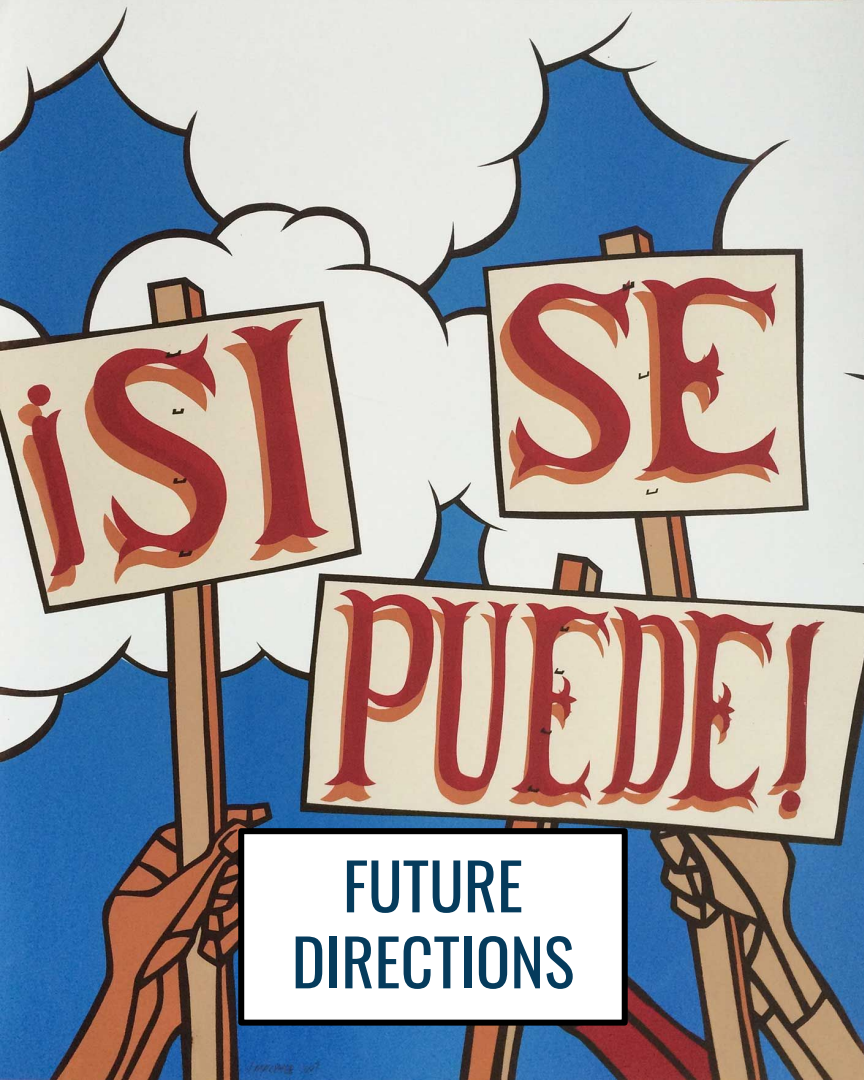
- This workforce manages stressors and unsafe work conditions by relying on their families, community, and religion
- Religion should be considered as a holistic part of work

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS • • •

- Results reflect what happens when other institutional support systems (e.g., employers, OSHA, low-income programs) fail workers







## NEW QUESTIONS . . .

- How will worsening climate impact this population?
- How do religious beliefs affect employee work experiences?

## INTERVENTIONS . . .

- Create space where MSFWs voices are heard and listened to
- Work with organizations and lawmakers to advocate for worker protections
- Intervene at the community level to support and empower these populations

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**Northwest Center for  
Occupational Health & Safety**



**W** UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

**NIOSH** National Institute for  
Occupational Safety and Health





... **THANK YOU**  
... Questions?



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