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"Trabajando Duro Todos Los Días": Learning From the Life Experiences of Mexican-Origin Migrant Families*

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Abstract: The agricultural economy in the United States has relied heavily on migrant farmworkers and, in particular, on Latinos. However, migrant families remain one of the most disadvantaged groups in the United States. This research focuses on a subsample of migrant families of Mexican origin ($n = 13$), who participated in the *Rural Families Speak* multistate study. Qualitative findings described numerous challenges that Mexican-origin migrant families continue to experience. Results were also illustrative of the resilience of migrant families, which is influenced by specific Latino cultural values and is reflected in the successful adaptation of these families to the challenges associated with a migrant lifestyle.

Key Words: cultural strengths, Latino families, migrant families of Mexican origin, resilience.

The agricultural economy in the United States relies heavily on migrant farmworkers, with Latinos accounting for the largest proportion of this occupational group (Lacar, 2001; Marotta & Garcia, 2003). According to the National Center for Farmworker Health (2002), 81% of all U.S. farmworkers in the Year 2000 were of Latino or foreign origin. Of this group, 95% were of Mexican origin, 2% from Latin America, 1% from Asia, and 2% from other foreign nations. In contrast to seasonal farmworkers settled in one location, Latino migrant workers tend to live in Southern states during the winter and migrate North during planting and harvesting seasons (Hovey & Magaña, 2002). Moreover, recent migration patterns consist of entire families rather than individuals (Dalla & Christensen, 2005).

Michigan, as the forth largest employer of migrant labor in the nation, with an agricultural force of approximately 45,000 workers (Gold, 1996), has seen a circular migration of multiple generations among its labor force (Rosenbaum, 2001). Interestingly, although Latinos only represent 3.3% of the total population in Michigan (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b), migrant families of Mexican origin constitute approximately 95% of Michigan's migrant agricultural labor force (Gold, 2004). Despite the important role of Mexican-origin migrant families to Michigan's economy, these families continue to be one of the most economically disadvantaged and underserved groups in the state (Rosenbaum).

Diverse studies in the social sciences have explored the patterns of migration as well as the challenges experienced by Mexican-origin farmworkers

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(Griffith & Kissam, 1995; Krissman, 2000; Vélez-Ibáñez, 2004). There is, however, a need for longitudinal studies capable of providing a better understanding of the transitions experienced by Mexican-origin farmworkers and their families over time (Roeder & Millard, 2000), especially studies that focus on the experiences of circular migration that impact or contribute to resiliency. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the life experiences of a group of migrant families of Mexican origin, who lived in the state of Michigan during harvesting seasons. Specifically, the focus of this study was to reach a better understanding of the challenges that these families perceived to be associated with migrant life, as well as the ways in which Latino cultural values were associated with indicators of resilience in these migrant families. Participants of this study completed three annual interviews, which allowed examination of changes in their life experiences over time.

We recognize that the Latino culture is not monolithic and comprises multiple cultures. Thus, we use the term *Latino* whenever referring to research conducted with the Latino migrant population in general and use the term *Mexican origin* whenever referring to studies involving migrant farmworkers whose cultural origins can be traced to Mexico.

Sensitizing Concepts and Theoretical Framework

Challenges Faced by Latino Migrant Families

Research indicates that Latino migrant families face challenges such as financial difficulties, language and cultural barriers, health and mental health needs, legal and documentation issues, and discrimination (Dalla, Villarruel, Cramer, & Gonzalez-Kruger, 2004; Vélez-Ibáñez, 2004; Wirth & Dollar, 2004). In addition, scholars have indicated that migrant farmworkers and their families also face unique problems associated with the lack of a permanent location of residence (Rothenberg, 1998). Examples are educational challenges stemming from enrollment in different school districts, overcrowded schools, lack of culturally appropriate support programs after relocation, substandard housing conditions, and physical isolation (Roeder & Millard, 2000; Rothenberg). These challenges further contribute to migrant farmworkers' economic disadvantage, poor working conditions, and marginalization.

Economic disadvantage. The demand for low-cost agricultural services in the United States can be traced back to the early 1900s (Griffith & Kissam, 1995). Furthermore, some scholars have suggested that agribusiness employers in the United States have adopted practices aimed at evading government protection and inhibiting unionization of migrant farmworkers (Krissman, 2000). These actions have resulted in gross economic disparities for Latino migrant farmworkers and their families (Hovey & Magaña, 2002). Specifically, the median annual income of Latino migrant farmworkers is approximately $7,500 and has remained relatively unchanged since 2002 (Lacar, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a). Such an income greatly differs from the median household income of Latinos in other professional fields (i.e., $34,200) and even more from the median household income of non-Latino Whites (i.e., $49,000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Given the relatively unchanged income earned by migrant laborers, the opportunity to gain upward social mobility is extremely unlikely simply by *trabajando duro* (i.e., working harder).

Working conditions. Research has documented working conditions that jeopardize the health of Latino migrant farmworkers, such as repeated exposure to toxic pesticides in the fields (Napolitano & Goldberg, 1998). Despite state and federal regulations that have been designed to ensure a safe working environment for migrant farmworkers (Gold, 1996), Latino migrant workers in Michigan continue to suffer health consequences, including death, as a result of dangerous working conditions (Gold, 2004; Marotta & Garcia, 2003).

Discrimination and exclusion. In addition to economic disadvantage and poor working conditions, research has noted that Latino migrant farmworkers experience racial and ethnic discrimination (Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Wirth & Dollar, 2004). The effects of racial and ethnic stereotypes depicting Latinos as "defective" are particularly deleterious at the level of service delivery (Dalla et al., 2004; Jackson, 1995). For instance, research indicates that in contrast to reports from human service providers, who do not tend to report discrimination as one of the primary concerns of Latino consumers, Latino migrant farmworkers report fear of discrimination as an important concern in their lives (Wirth & Dollar). In addition, Latinos who have experienced discrimination by service providers are less likely to request services because of the fear of repeat and or harsher discrimination (Blanchard & Lurie, 2004).

Educational obstacles faced by migrant students further marginalize Latino migrant families. A clear example involves the difficulties associated with having to adapt to the educational requirements established by the different states in which migrant families reside. Rather than being offered opportunities to engage in learning environments that could be designed based on the transitional nature of their lifestyles, migrant children and youth are often grouped with "special needs" students because they are unable to reach "acceptable" educational standards (Tatto et al., 2000).

In summary, it is critical to consider that the challenges faced by Latino migrant families are not merely transitional but rather associated with an experience of marginalization resulting from contextual and structural factors such as racial and ethnic discrimination, lack of bilingual services, and health and economic disparities (Hovey & Magaña, 2002). Unfortunately, these challenges also appear to have contributed toward the systematic exclusion of Latinos from research, program design, and service delivery (Alderete, Vega, Kolody, & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2000; Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004; Castro & Garfinkle, 2003).

Developmental Systems Theory

Developmental Systems Theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992) considers that development results from the multiple and continuous interactions between individuals and their context. According to this theory, there is no single or ideal developmental trajectory for any person because the nature of interactions between the individuals and the diverse environments in which they live result in multiple developmental paths (Ford & Lerner). Thus, the study of processes associated with individual and family development should always include a consideration of variability across contexts (Lerner, 1995). For instance, Latino migrant families face contextual challenges such as long working hours, low wages, social isolation, and racial discrimination in the workplace and community (Alderete et al., 2000; Blanchard & Lurie, 2004). It has been reported that members of the Latino migrant families who are socially isolated and experience discrimination tend to report higher rates of substance abuse, sadness, and depression (Organista & Kubo, 2000). Social context can also prevent Latinos from accessing the services they need. For instance, Latinos living in states characterized by strong anti-immigrant legislation have reported reluctance to obtain medical care because of their undocumented status (Berk & Schur, 2001).

In contrast, contextual factors can also promote the mental health of Latinos. Research has shown that having access to social support networks or living in a community open to cultural diversity is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression among Latino immigrants (Hovey & Magaña, 2000; Magaña & Hovey, 2002). Despite these findings, further research is needed to explore additional characteristics of social contexts that promote the well-being and successful development of Latino migrant families (Magaña & Hovey).

Resilience

Resilience refers to the capacity to overcome challenges and rebound from adversity, strengthened and more resourceful (Walsh, 2003). Walsh stated that an alternative for achieving resilience consists of families being able to change their belief systems in order to make meaning of adversity. Research has confirmed that a positive perception of adversity can act as a precursor of resilience among Latinos (Bender & Castro, 2000). For example, recent Latino immigrants tend to report that despite economic limitations and discriminatory practices, living in the United States offers them opportunities that they could not obtain in their country of origin (e.g., better incomes, education). Unfortunately, research describing indicators of resilience among Latino migrant families continues to be scarce (Alderete et al., 2000; Vega & Lopez, 2001).

Latino Cultural Values

Culture constitutes a powerful influence for organizing experience, evaluating reality, and determining strategies of action in everyday life (Swidler, 1986). For example, *familismo* is a Latino value that emphasizes the importance of being rooted in the family and ensures that one's actions contribute to the welfare of all family members (Falicov, 1998). *Colectivismo* refers to the relevance of experiencing a sense of cohesion with groups other than one's family of origin (Toth & Xu, 1999). *Personalismo* highlights the importance of establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships in a variety of social contexts (Falicov).

It is also important for researchers, practitioners, and policy professionals to become cognizant of

the ways in which cultural values are expressed and transmitted in the Latino culture (Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999). Because *language* has a critical function in the transmission of Latino cultural values and traditions (Erkut, Alarcón, García Coll, Tropp, & Vázquez García, 1999), it is relevant to investigate the extent to which Latinos, whose preferred language is Spanish, consider whether this language is valued in the diverse social settings with which they interact (Pantin, Schwartz, Sullivan, Coatsworth, & Szapocznik, 2003).

Informed by principles from Developmental Systems Theory, as well as theory on resilience and Latino cultural values, the present study sought to understand the experiences of a group of migrant families of Mexican origin who lived in the state of Michigan during harvesting seasons. Specifically, we were interested in two research questions: (a) What are the challenges that these families perceived to be associated with migrant life? and (b) What are the ways in which Latino cultural values are associated with indicators of resilience in these migrant families?

Methods

The Rural Families Speak Multistate Study

In order to explore the effects of welfare policy on rural low-income families, which included Latino migrant families, researchers from several universities with Agricultural Experimental Stations created a multistate research project in 1998. The longitudinal study was carried out across 14 states, resulting in three waves of data collection. Data for the current study were reduced to Latino migrant families who were part of the original Michigan sample. The first wave of data collection was conducted in 2000, the second in 2001, and the third in 2002/2003. Participants were recruited through a variety of approaches across and within states through community programs and organizations, community contacts, and or by word of mouth through a snowball approach. The reader is referred to the original research report for a detailed description of the multistate study (Bauer, 2003).

Participants

This study focuses on a subsample ($n = 13$) of migrant families of Mexican origin who participated in the Rural Families Speak study ($N = 43$). Data analysis included information from participants who (a) reported that they were of Mexican origin, (b) identified themselves or their partners as migrant workers, and (c) participated in three consecutive years of data collection. As a result, the subsample of participants for this study consisted of only 13 women. Because we wanted to have a better understanding of the life experiences of Mexican-origin migrant families, this selection criteria increased the likelihood of answering the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

These 13 women participated in three annual interviews. In one case, both husband and wife participated in all three interviews. The majority of participants expressed that their husbands were not able to participate because of conflicting work schedules (e.g., double shifts). Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of participants during data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of the information. Table 1 contains a description of participants based on age, marital status, household composition, self and spouse/partner's occupation, hours worked per week, number of weeks worked per year, combined family income, and interview language chosen by the participants. Number of weeks worked per year should be taken into consideration when analyzing weekly household family income because only three participants in Wave 1 of data collection reported having a permanent source of income for at least 36 weeks per year. This situation slightly improved over time as seven participants in Wave 3 of data collection reported being able to work 36 weeks or more on an annual basis.

Procedures

Grounded theory methods were used in this investigation because this qualitative tradition produces explanations of phenomena that are "grounded" in data provided by participants (Fassinger, 2005). Thus, a grounded theory approach allowed us to reach a better understanding of the challenges that research participants perceived to be associated with migrant life, as well as the ways in which Latino cultural values were associated with indicators of resilience in these families.

Semistructured interviews were conducted every year of data collection and included two sets of qualitative questions. The first group of questions explored specific issues associated with a migrant

Table 1. *Participants' Characteristics (n = 13)*

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Mean age (in years)	32.7	33.5	34.5
Marital status			
Single	1	1	1
Married	10	10	10
Living with partner	2	1	2
Separated	0	1	0
Household composition			
Families with ≤2 children	6	6	6
Families with >2 children	7	7	7
Language of interview			
Spanish	4	4	4
English	9	9	9
Participant's occupation[a]			
Did not work	2	3	3
Child care/childcare teacher	2	1	1
Processed	4	5	6
Fieldwork	5	3	2
Medical aid/clerical	0	1	2
Partner's occupation			
Processed/supervisor in processing plant	6	7	7
Fieldwork	7	2	3
Christmas trees	0	2	3
Commercial floor cleaning/store clerk	1	1	2
Carpentry/mechanic/ construction/plumbing	2	3	5
Combined household wages per week			
<$300	2	2	1
$300–$500	4	3	3
$501–$700	6	3	5
>$700	1	5	4
Combined hours worked per week			
≤40	0	2	0
40–99	7	5	7
100–120	4	4	4
≥130	2	2	2
Weeks worked per year			
≤26	8	5	2
28–35	2	3	4
≥36	3	5	7

Note. [a]In Wave 1, two of the partners held more than one job. In Wave 2, one participant and two partners had more than one job. In Wave 3, two participants and four partners held more than one job. Processed refers to work done in a produce packing plant, which can include sorting, washing, and packaging produce. Fieldwork refers to planting, hoeing, and harvesting crops in the fields and orchards.

lifestyle (e.g., living and employment conditions, access to services). These questions were previously defined by the interstate research team in an effort to have a uniform interview protocol applied across the participating states in the study. These questions were asked in an open-ended format (e.g., When you move or migrate for work, what are the changes that you have to make in your life?; What are the biggest challenges for your family as a whole?; Who do you rely on when times are difficult?).

In order to allow participants to elaborate on themes that they considered relevant (Morrow, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a second set of open-ended questions was included in the interview guides. Special consideration was given to formulate these questions in a way that participants' experiences could be explored and analyzed over time (e.g., Last year, you said the thing you were most looking forward to was__________. Tell us more about that).

All interviews ranged from 1 to 3 hr. Participants were encouraged to use their language of preference (Spanish, English, or a combination of both languages) during all interview sessions. A bilingual woman, herself a former migrant worker, conducted all interviews in Spanish across the three waves of data collection. Her experiences as a former migrant worker and her current position with a human service agency working with migrant families facilitated the development of trust between the participants and the interviewers and researchers. She was trained by two Anglo-female doctoral students to conduct the interviews in English and Spanish. The two doctoral students also administered interviews in English. All interviewers were supervised by a senior faculty researcher. Transcripts from interviews conducted in Spanish were checked for accuracy by a bilingual faculty researcher who is a Mexican native. In addition, a senior bilingual Mexican-origin scholar assessed the accuracy and quality of translations. Inconsistencies in translation were discussed between the two Mexican-origin researchers until agreement was reached. A total of 39 transcripts were coded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative data management software (Bazeley & Richards, 2000).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the tenets of grounded theory, which refers to the creation of theory "that is 'grounded' in data collected from participants on the basis of the complexities of their lived

experiences in a social context" (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157). An analytical method of sequential, open, axial, and selective coding was implemented to achieve such a goal (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In the present study, each wave of data was analyzed separately. The use of NVivo software (Bazeley & Richards, 2000) was particularly helpful for analyzing and organizing the data because it allowed classification of each code according to the number of interview and year of data collection. In other words, analysis was conducted first on an annual basis and then compared across years to examine trends longitudinally. Data analyses led to the final identification of six major categories that provided a comprehensive explanation of the life experiences described by participants. Table 2 summarizes these categories, their operationalization, and the number of participants who addressed each category across the three waves of data collection.

Coding procedures consisted of open, axial, and selective coding. These procedures are considered the most accepted phases of data analysis in grounded theory (Fassinger, 2005). In addition, the constant comparative method was employed, which consists of comparing similar and contrasting data among participants as well as analyzing data provided by one individual over time (Charmaz, 2000; LaRossa, 2005).

Open coding consisted of breaking down data into discrete parts or units of analysis, labeling different units as *concepts*, and analyzing the phenomena embedded in such data (LaRossa, 2005). Concepts were labeled often times using the words expressed by participants, a procedure known as in vivo coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For instance, when talking about the challenges associated with working in the fields, a woman said, "It is so hard to work in the fields . . .. We just went last Sunday, and we still feel sore." Similar comments expressed by other participants were coded as "How hard is to work in the fields."

In order to monitor researchers' biases during data analysis, the two researchers who conducted the process of open coding continuously cross-checked their codes and kept individual journals that included entries of the various reactions experienced by them as they engaged in coding procedures. The codes generated by these investigators were shared with other members of the research team for revision and discussion.

The second analytical phase (i.e., *axial coding*) consisted of reaching a higher level of conceptualization of the data by creating *categories* (LaRossa, 2005). For example, concepts such as "Not being allowed to rest at work," "Getting sick with pesticides," and "Being penalized by employer" were integrated into a higher level of conceptualization labeled as "Exploitation at work." Axial coding allowed identification of relationships among categories based on their *properties* (i.e., characteristics

Table 2. *Coding Category, Definitions, and Number of Participants Who Addressed Specific Categories (N = 13)*

Coding Category	Definition	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
We are satisfied with life	Interpretation of hardship by considering the benefits associated with migrant life	8	10	10
Trabajando Duro	Descriptions of participants' efforts to secure and maintain job opportunities, as well as reflections on the cultural value of work ethic	13	13	12
Experiencing discrimination and exploitation	Experiences of discrimination and exploitative working condition	13	12	11
Move fast! . . . and wait	Challenges associated with permanent transition, rapid relocation, and mobility	8	8	7
Moving up in life	Gradual success associated with a migrant lifestyle, as well as participants' testimonies of resilience and perseverance	6	7	10
Estando Todos Juntos	Description of the centrality of family and interconnectedness with others	12	12	13

Note. Wave 1 was collected in 2000, Wave 2 was collected in 2001, and Wave 3 was collected in 2002/2003.

of a category) and *dimensions* (i.e., location of a category along a continuum). For example, the category "Experiencing discrimination" had variations in the type of discrimination experienced (e.g., discrimination in the workplace, discrimination when interacting with social agencies) as well as the intensity in which discrimination was experienced (e.g., being discriminated by being ignored when asking a question or being discriminated by being told a racist remark).

The final phase of analysis consisted of *selective coding*, which refers to the process of integrating a theoretical schema of the phenomena under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding consisted of selecting the main story underlying the analysis that most accurately described the participants' experiences (Fassinger, 2005; LaRossa, 2005). This phase of analysis involved several hours of discussion among members of the research team. The diverse composition of the research group (i.e., race, gender, age, professional degree, scholarship) was particularly valuable when integrating final categories. For instance, whereas some members were captured by the adverse experiences lived by participants (e.g., experiences of discrimination), others tended to focus on family dynamics that were indicators of resilience (e.g., family rituals that promoted cohesiveness). These differences in perspective helped in generating consensus about the selection of final categories, as well as the way these categories were integrated to reflect participants' experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the standards that should be met in order to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data (Morrow, 2005). In this study, trustworthiness was strengthened by conducting annual interviews with the same participants over the course of 3 years, which allowed us to explore life events that participants considered relevant as well as the way such experiences progressed over time. In order to monitor researchers' biases, individual journals were used by the researchers who conducted data coding and data analysis (Spradley & McCurdy, 1988), and codes were triangulated with co-investigators. Finally, an audit trail (Morrow), which included methodological notes, was employed during the analysis and was discussed in research group meetings.

Results

Data analysis revealed the complexity of experiences associated with the lives of Mexican-origin migrant families. In addition to detailed narratives of multiple challenges faced on a daily basis, participants also offered testimonies of their sense of resilience, which seemed to be informed by specific cultural values. Six final coding categories were identified: (a) "We are very satisfied with life," (b)"Trabajando duro," (c)"Experiencing discrimination and exploitation," (d)"Move fast! . . . and wait," (e)"Moving up in life," and (f)"Estando todos juntos."

We Are Very Satisfied With Life

Participants expressed positive perceptions of their lives despite numerous challenges. Although overall life satisfaction was a recurrent theme, at a minimum of 11 participants at each wave of data collection conveyed stress and dissatisfaction associated with issues such as a lack of health benefits and challenging working conditions, which impacted their overall levels of satisfaction. Thus, when asked to rate dimensions of life satisfaction, health benefits and working conditions were viewed more negatively as compared to other dimensions of participants' migratory experiences (e.g., sufficient income to cover basic needs, familial cohesiveness, educational opportunities for their children), which were perceived more positively and optimistically (see Table 2).

Participants described that a major determinant of life satisfaction was having a secure source of income that allowed them to cover their families' basic needs. Therefore, when considering these results, it is important to keep in mind that many of these families experienced extreme hardships and poverty prior to their migrant experiences. For instance, Carlota and Nazario emigrated from Mexico and constantly made reference to the high satisfaction in life they had experienced as a result of living in the United States. For them, migrant life was a clear contrast to their lives in Mexico where they lacked assurance that they could provide for their family's needs on a daily basis. In this regard, Nazario mentioned, "I think we're doing good . . .. I got more than other people, who don't have a life. I got a place to live, and somebody else doesn't have a place." Carlota provided greater clarity when she described how she supported her brother to come to

the United States when he experienced extreme hardship in Mexico:

> My brother had his wife there [Mexico] and their children. I brought him here because they went hungry a lot and didn't have anything to live on there . . . life is very hard in Mexico . . .. I brought him here with the intention that he improves himself . . .. Here there is work . . .. The children study . . . there's something to eat . . . to live.

Despite the challenges and hardships associated with migrant life, a common finding among participants was reflected by Tomasa, a 31-year-old woman with one child, who migrated between Florida and Michigan each year. When Tomasa was asked about her worst experience in the United States, she expressed, "Well . . . sure Michigan was a little hard this year . . . but we are hanging in there and it is working out great . . .. Slowly, but we are getting by . . .. Everything has been working really great."

Trabajando Duro (Working Hard)

Participants expressed the importance of "giving their best" whenever they had an opportunity to work because not only did it provide a stable income for them (and their families) but it also reflected a cultural value of pride and investment in what one does with available opportunities. This theme was frequently addressed by participants at each wave of data collection. Having a job was considered by participants as an opportunity that had to be secured by giving their best effort. Mercedes expressed, "They [employers] note that I work hard and I do whatever they tell me to do . . .. I do my best . . . even though I only went to fourth grade." Mercedes was a 42-year-old woman who had migrated since her childhood. She was a widow at the time of the interviews and had two adult children living outside the home and two children living at home.

Participants also described the challenging nature and time demands associated with migrant work. Serafina, a 40-year-old woman with three children, expressed, "It is so hard to work in the fields . . .. It is very, very hot . . .. We went last Sunday and we still feel very sore." Serafina's husband worked two jobs each summer, totaling approximately 96 hr a week. The working demands associated with migrant labor also imposed challenges upon migrant families. For instance, Francisca was a 34-year-old woman and mother of three children, who worked washing produce in a processing plant. She described a typical day in her family's life:

> We start working at 5:00 AM in the morning . . .. So, we have to wake up at 3:00 or 3:30 AM in the morning . . .. The children dress up the night before, so when they wake up they wash their faces, comb their hair, tie their shoes, and get ready to take the bus.

Despite these challenging routines, participants considered the opportunity to work extra hours as highly desirable. As Queta expressed, "Well, right now we're not working at all . . . when work is good we work up to eighty hours per week." Queta was a 17-year-old woman with one child. She and her husband were finishing high school and planned to attend college at the time of the Wave 1 data collection.

According to participants, trabajando duro also conveyed a special meaning associated with who the participants are and the type of values they hold. Participants frequently expressed the virtue associated with hard work, as well as the importance of not being perceived as passive or dependent. Carlota commented, "I think that many people are a problem to the government, but there are still many others who like to work . . . we do need to work . . . but we don't want to harm the government . . . that's why we work hard everyday . . . everyday."

Experiencing Discrimination and Exploitation

Participants reported experiences of discrimination and exploitative practices in the workplace. Those who emigrated from Mexico and whose primary language was Spanish ($n = 4$) described the most intense discriminatory experiences. However, failure of employers to adequately compensate participants with previously negotiated salaries or to offer them medical coverage was commonly reported. Specifically, only two participants in Wave 1 reported receiving medical coverage from their employers. The number of participants without health coverage remained the same in Wave 3 of data collection. Ines described her husband's situation, "Some days they paid him [overtime], and other days no . . .. He worked years for them . . . they never gave him

insurance . . . the company never wanted to give him anything . . .. But he keeps working with his hernia and it hurts him a lot." Ines was a 47-year-old woman who was not able to work as a result of a medical condition. Her husband worked full time to support their family, despite a hernia condition.

Serafina described the negative consequences employers enforced whenever workers requested permission to leave work for a medical condition, which affected them or their family, ". . . If it is an emergency they let you go home . . . but they say that if you go home early you can't come back the next day . . .. If you go home because somebody is sick, you can't work the next day." Participants also made reference to not being allowed breaks at work. Gitana was a 28-year-old woman with four children. She and her husband worked opposite shifts in a produce processing plant when they migrated to Michigan each year. She described such practices, which took place on her husband's night shift:

> There have been times that they treat them [workers in the night shift] bad . . . they leave them without a break up to eight hours . . .. In the morning shift they give them two breaks . . .. I think that they treat Americans different . . . they give them a half hour for lunch and in addition they give them their break, fifteen to twenty minutes.

Participants also reported discriminatory practices associated with the use of pesticides. Tomasa described how workers affected by pesticides went to Mexico because their employers offered no health services:

> I know a lot of people that it's related [their illness] to their work because of the sprays that they spray on the tomato . . .. Sometimes it's like there's water always running down their nose . . . a lot of problems, and some, they go back to Mexico to get treated down there.

Tomasa also referred to her employer's refusal to take any actions to ensure the safety of his workers, "Our boss would spray something on the field that made you have headaches . . .. Once, my brother told him 'Stop, it's making us feel sick' and he said, 'It doesn't hurt you . . . If it would hurt you, I wouldn't be spraying.'"

Participants who reported Spanish as their primary language also described experiences of perceived discrimination in their interaction with social agencies. A clear example refers to an accusation of child neglect against Gitana for failing to take her child for medical consultation. Gitana reported that her inability to take her child to the medical appointment was because of exhaustion she experienced after working a night shift. Thus, taking her child to the appointment would have involved driving a significant distance and she decided not to drive because she was worried of falling asleep and getting into an accident. Gitana described this experience:

> I told them that I did not dare to drive because I did not sleep a lot . . .. Then my social worker called me, and told me if I knew that they were going to take my daughter away. And I asked why are they going to take my daughter away from me? . . .. Then she told me that there were complaints about me, that my child is sick and I did not want to take her to the hospital . . .. Then I worried a lot and explained to them what was taking place. And the one who complained spoke only English. Then she told me that she did not understand me. And I went to complain to her director and she told me that she did not understand. And both told me that none of them understood what was happening. Then later the nurse, who spoke only English, told me that she only wanted to pick on me, that she never thought that it would go that far.

The preceding experience reflects the various ways in which participants, particularly Mexican natives with language barriers, suffered diverse experiences of discrimination. Such experiences were characterized by being silenced in different ways and or blamed by those in a position of higher power.

Move Fast! . . . and Wait

Approximately half of the participants at each wave of data collection reported challenges associated with rapid relocation (see Table 2). Because these participants were required by Michigan's employers to report to work almost immediately, they reported

challenges such as having to leave their homes on a moment's notice, disrupt their personal lives, or interrupt the schooling of their children. These participants also affirmed that they never refused to relocate because of the importance of having an opportunity to work in Michigan. Tomasa described the financial challenges that her family experienced as a result of rapid relocation:

> Sometimes he [Michigan employer] calls us too early . . . he wants us to come and we're working here [Southwest] . . .. He might give us only like three days and then we have to wait [once they arrived to Michigan] like two weeks until the asparagus is ready and we lose all that time when we could have been working down there [Southwest] . . .. This year I spent $400 just to get here.

An important relocation challenge referred to school-related problems in Michigan, particularly for children whose primary language was Spanish and who were enrolled in schools in the southwest that offered bilingual services. Challenges associated with Michigan's schools referred to shortage of bilingual staff and teachers, children being assigned to "special education" classes, or being placed in a lower level grade than in the previous state. Francisca described the educational challenges her children faced shortly after they enrolled at a school in Michigan:

> . . . Here it's just White people [in the schools] . . . the girls hear more Spanish in Texas. They come here and it's difficult for them . . .. Just pure English . . .. Last year I had problems with the middle daughter because they wanted to return her to kindergarten because she didn't know how to read . . . but she was going to first grade [in Texas].

Moving Up in Life

Despite the challenges associated with migrant life, participants expressed that the opportunity to engage in migrant work was a positive event in their lives. However, rather than referring to social class mobility, moving up in life was used by participants to describe the way in which they gradually improved their living conditions, earned higher incomes, achieved English proficiency, improved reading and writing skills, obtained driver licenses, pursued professional degrees, and developed plans to support their children's higher education.

For instance, Mercedes migrated between Florida and Michigan during the course of this investigation. In Year 1, she reported a desire to continue her education, which was interrupted as a child because she had to work in the fields in order to support her family. She also reported in Year 1 that her life situation was particularly challenging because her husband had recently passed away. As a result, she had to request welfare assistance in order to cover her family needs. In her second interview, Mercedes reported that she had obtained a permanent job in a food processing plant. Shortly after being hired, she was promoted and received a raise. She also received special training through her work. This life event was particularly important to Mercedes because she wanted to demonstrate her value to others through her "hard work." In Year 3, Mercedes continued to report positive life events such as remaining stable in her work and being able to buy a new car. She described the sense of satisfaction she experienced:

> I had very little schooling . . . It seems like I have accomplished a lot. I'm learning a lot. I'm learning how to spell words I never did. I can write out a sentence now . . .. When I first came here, they [Government] helped me with Medicaid and all that. But I tried to find a job and to get credit . . .. I've accomplished a lot and I've left all that [welfare assistance].

Another indication of moving up in life referred to receiving promotions at work after years of consistent effort. Serafina, who migrated between Texas and Michigan, reported in Year 1 the difficulties associated with having to relocate to Michigan on a short notice as well as how challenging language barriers and living conditions were for her and her family. Though no important improvements were reported in Year 2, Serafina did report in Year 3 that her husband, Alfonso, was promoted at a food processing plant. She attributed this to the fact that he started to work in the field and showed his employers a strong commitment by working 70 hr per

week. According to Serafina, Alfonso did not expect to be promoted, but his employers expressed to him that he was the ideal candidate for a position of supervisor based on his past performance and knowledge of the company. She expressed, "His employer is so happy with him . . .. Now he just does one shift, and they pay him like $9 an hour . . .. Now he gets better pay and we're doing pretty good on that side."

Moving up in life also made reference to the ways in which, in spite of the challenges associated with a migrant lifestyle, participants considered that migrant life allowed them to achieve specific life goals. For example, Calandra was born in Texas and started to migrate when she got married. In Year 1 of data collection, she expressed a desire to continue her education as well as the challenges of being a mother and having to work in the fields. She obtained her General Equivalency Diploma (GED) that year and reported that the money earned by her and her husband allowed them to pay for the construction of the home they were building in Texas. In Year 2, Calandra reported that she started to attend college because she wanted to become an administrative clerk. In Year 3, Calandra and her husband were about to complete the construction of their home in Texas. She received her clerical certificate, stopped working in the fields, and obtained a job as a secretary. She was particularly pleased with her new job because her employer would allow her to go to Michigan during harvesting season and would continue to hire her upon her return. When describing her feelings as she reflected on these positive life changes, Calandra expressed, "I'm really proud of myself because I'm a parent, a mother of four and I got to go to college and take these classes . . .. Now I work through 2 pm, that's all . . . and I'm here at home with my kids."

Estando Todos Juntos (Being all Together)

Participants identified the central role of family in their lives. Although it is critical to highlight that Latinos are not the only ethnic group that places high importance on family, participants in this study repeatedly described the diverse ways in which their lives and major life decisions revolve around family. For instance, Serafina expressed that her ideal job would be one that would pay her enough to cover the basic needs of her family. However, she would not like a job that would demand that she be away from her family for long periods of time. She expressed her reasons for not working a second shift:

> In the afternoons I just spend time with my kids because they need me . . . last year, I was working a second job and I got complaints from them . . . they say, 'Mom, we need you.' . . .. And I'd always say, 'Well, you know you guys need things . . . so we need to work so hard, so we can get those things' . . .. If we get a better job, we don't have to work that hard.

An emphasis on family was also described by participants as they reported that the well-being of their children was their priority in life. Carlota expressed, "Thanks to the Lord we both have been able to work . . .. Now our mission is to provide for our children . . . that they may not lack anything and that they go to school . . .. That is our goal."

Another area that highlighted the importance of family was the commitment to help relatives in need, as well as the conviction of knowing that extended family would always be a source of support. Afra was a 37 year-old married woman with two children. She and her family migrated from Texas each year; however, she had critical health problems during Wave 2 that interfered with migrating on time and required urgent surgical intervention. She described the way in which reaching out to family members was crucial when facing extreme hardship, "When I got here I didn't have money to eat or anything and they [relatives] started giving me money and buying me some food . . .. They helped me with the bills . . .. They would help me out."

However, helping others not only referred to supporting family members. Participants also made reference to the importance of thinking about neighbors or members of the community. Ines commented on her family's acceptance of limited governmental assistance, but only when it was truly needed. Specifically, they perceived that requesting more assistance than needed deprived others, who possibly had greater needs, of critical assistance, "We feel that the food pantry has helped us but we don't like to take advantage of that . . .. There's other people that are in more need than we are . . .. We like to just attend when we really need the help." In summary, participants provided several examples of the ways in which family life and a sense of

interconnectedness with others informed their everyday lives.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the life experiences of a group of migrant families of Mexican origin who lived in the state of Michigan during harvesting seasons. Present findings provide descriptions of discriminatory and exploitative practices similar to those reported in other studies of Latino and Mexican-origin migrant workers across the nation (Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Ruiz, 2002; Wirth & Dollar, 2004). For example, participants' reports indicate that despite existing legislation aimed at ensuring safety in the workplace for migrant workers, the working conditions they continue to face are frequently distant from such legislative standards (Gold, 2004). Of particular concern are practices that can lead to serious health problems, physical injuries, or even death (Quandt, Arcury, Austin, & Cabrera, 2001). Thus, present findings confirm the historical lack of compliance with regulations aimed at ensuring a safe environment for migrant workers (Luna, 1997; Quandt et al.).

Another area of concern refers to dissatisfaction experienced by migrant families resulting from their interactions with health care settings, social agencies, and schools, which lack bilingual service providers. These reports confirm previous studies that demonstrated that language barriers lead to an experience of marginalization of Latinos (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002).

In addition to the challenges experienced by participants, the present research also provides detailed accounts of the sense of resilience of migrant families, which seems to be associated with specific cultural values. For instance, although Latinos are not the only ethnic group that highly values family, descriptions provided by participants demonstrates the centrality of family in the lives of Latinos. Such a finding corresponds with the value of familismo, which emphasizes the importance of being rooted in *la familia* (family) and ensures that one's actions contribute to the welfare of all family members (Falicov, 1998). Some examples of familismo in the present investigation were the ways in which parents considered their children to be a source of inspiration when facing adversity and extreme hardship. Participants also considered that the hardships of migrant life were bearable when recognizing that their efforts would ensure the well-being of their children. However, once their children's needs were covered, participants highlighted the importance of spending sufficient time with their children. Finally, participants provided examples of the ways in which support from extended family was critical in times of crisis, as well as their conviction of the importance to support family members in need.

An additional indicator of the resilience of these migrant families was their capacity to adapt their belief systems in order to make meaning of adversity (Walsh, 2003). This was demonstrated by participants' high level of perceived life satisfaction despite the challenges of migrant life. The challenges of migrant life were also associated with the opportunity to improve their quality of life as well as to financially secure the future of their children.

Also important was the cultural meaning conveyed by participants when they used specific expressions such as trabajando duro. According to participants, trabajando duro not only refers to the importance of hard work but also reflected their commitment as parents and their sense of community and solidarity with others. Specifically, participants repeatedly reported a sense of satisfaction associated with not having to depend on welfare assistance because they felt that such an independence also benefited people in greater need. Such concern for the welfare of others can be interpreted as an indication of colectivismo (Vázquez, 1998), which is a cultural value that highlights the importance of maintaining a sense of connection and solidarity with the larger community (Falicov, 1998).

Overall, consistent with Developmental Systems Theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992), this investigation provides evidence indicating the need to recognize that the well-being and successful development of Mexican-origin migrant families should be understood as a result of the multiple interactions of these families with the environments in which they live. Specifically, those participants who reported more successful experiences over the course of the investigation also described key positive events in their environments that allowed them to maximize their own strengths and resources (e.g., recognition by employers through promotion and salary raise).

Implications for Practice

The present findings highlight the need to adopt "cultural competence" as a guiding principle for the provision of services to migrant families of Mexican origin (Vega & Lopez, 2001). Cultural competence refers to "the providers' and institutions' ability to incorporate in the provision of mental health services a respect and understanding of consumers' socio-cultural context" (Vega & Lopez, p. 195). Thus, it is particularly important to promote an understanding among service providers that behaviors that might be perceived as lack of cooperation on the part of migrant families (e.g., not showing up for appointments) might be related to contextual factors that prevent them from functioning at adequate levels.

Second, research findings confirm that Latino values, such as personalismo, inform the experiences of Mexican-origin migrant families as they interact with diverse social institutions (Pantin et al., 2003). Therefore, social service providers need to examine the level to which their intake procedures and provision of services transmit to clients the importance of establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships. Specifically, practices such as phone contact with participants rather than solely relying on communication by letters, devoting sufficient time to initial greetings, and informal conversations prior to provision of services are examples of practices that have been reported as useful for engaging Latino and Mexican-origin populations in service delivery and research (Pantin et al.; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004).

Finally, this study confirmed the importance of language when working with Latino and Mexican-origin families (Miranda, Nakamura, & Bernal, 2003). Inclusion of full-time bilingual staff in institutions serving these populations is necessary. However, the skills of bilingual personnel should not be limited to translation abilities, particularly because language in the Latino culture is an avenue for communicating relevant cultural values, such as the importance of experiencing warmth in interpersonal relationships (Chahin, Villarruel, & Anguiano Viramontez, 1999).

Implications for Policy

Scholars have urged policymakers to create legislation based on a thorough understanding of the lives of migrant workers and their families rather than on ideological principles that do not correspond to reality (Tatto et al., 2000). Such a need is particularly relevant if lawmakers' ideologies are guided by deficit-based perspectives (Hussain, 1996).

For example, a policy requiring employers to provide a monetary compensation to migrant families to assist them with moving expenses would address the challenges reported by participants. Employers should also provide migrant families with the necessary support for accessing diverse community resources.

There is also a strong need to monitor the adequate implementation of existing policies. Despite federal and state regulations that have been designed in order to ensure a safe working environment for migrant farmworkers (Gold, 1996; Leon, 2000), migrant workers continue to get injured or killed as a result of dangerous, yet preventable working conditions (Gold, 2004). Finally, it is imperative to attend to the educational needs of Mexican-origin migrant children and youth. Social policies are needed to establish collaborative agreements among states and school districts in which migrant families live. These efforts should focus on the promotion of the educational achievement of migrant children and youth based on a thorough understanding of the challenges associated with migrant life.

Design and implementation of polices are particularly relevant for enhancing the lives of Latino and Mexican-origin migrant families. Participants' reports of moving up in life should not be understood based on the myth of "free will," which considers that success in life results exclusively from individual effort (Kozol, 1992). In other words, participants were able to maximize their strengths and sense of resilience when interacting with nurturing environments.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the present results support the need to understand well-being and successful development as culturally informed processes that do not depend exclusively on individuals or families. Rather, the well-being and successful development of Mexican-origin migrant families can be ensured if their strengths are recognized, valued, and enhanced within nurturing environments (García, 2005; Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004).

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