

Results of a Pilot Survey of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Farmworkers about Cancer in General and Cervical Cancer in Particular

RESULTS OF A PILOT SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES OF FARMWORKERS ABOUT CANCER IN GENERAL AND CERVICAL CANCER IN PARTICULAR

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ABSTRACT

A pilot survey of knowledge, attitudes, and practices of migrant and seasonal farmworkers regarding cancer in general and cervical and skin cancer in particular was conducted in four mid-Atlantic States — Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. The surveys were collected through a convenience sample design using one-to-one interviews. There were 578 completed surveys in both English and Spanish. Most of the Spanish speakers had immigrated from Mexico and several Central American countries to do farmwork in the United States.

Three general questions on cervical cancer were asked of both men and women respondents and were followed by more specific questions asked of only the women respondents. The results of the general questions, as well as the more specific ones, suggest that knowledge and understanding about cervical cancer and Pap smears are fairly low among the farmworkers surveyed. A follow-up

¹ PATH is a nonprofit, nongovernmental international organization dedicated to improving health, especially the health of women and children.

² Telamon Corporation is a private, nonprofit agency whose purpose is to serve those in need.

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dy to this pilot and an educational intervention are needed.

BACKGROUND

The Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH),¹ Telamon Corporation,² and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) are working together to help reduce illness and death associated with skin and cervical cancer in farmworker populations in the States of Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. The project is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under a CDC/NIOSH cancer control initiative aimed at helping to meet the health promotion and disease prevention objectives of the U.S. Public Health Service's "Healthy People 2000" plan.

This 3-year demonstration project is organized into three phases. During phase 1, a baseline assessment was conducted and collaborative relationships were established with community health organizations. Phase 2, the intervention phase, consists of administering pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, observing and recording pre- and post-intervention behaviors, and implementing a health navigator outreach model. In phase 3, the results of the project will be documented and disseminated.

SETTING

Beginning in the spring and ending in the fall of each year, an estimated 15,000 migrant agricultural workers (and sometimes their family members) travel to the mid-Atlantic United States to work in plant nurseries, vegetable farms, and fruit orchards.

The situation analysis conducted during phase 1 demonstrated that working with farmworkers presents great variability and many unknowns. It became clear that the project's success would be affected by the migratory nature of a significant proportion of the target population; the lack of knowledge regarding feasible and appropriate mechanisms for access to farmworker communities within the context of this project; the need to determine the validity and practicality of draft research instruments and processes; and the need to assess the local situation, political climate, and prospects for formulation of collaborative efforts with regard to cancer prevention and control

SAMPLING METHODS AND SURVEY DESIGN

During phase 1 and following the situation analysis, a pilot study was conducted to collect baseline data on farmworkers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) that would be used to design an appropriate educational intervention on skin and cervical cancer. Adult migrant and seasonal farmworkers employed in Delaware, the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia, and West Virginia were sampled for the quantitative portion of the study. (Telamon/North Carolina collected only qualitative data during this phase.) Eighty percent of the farmworkers in these four states were employed in the study area, and all types of agricultural labor with which these states' farmworkers were involved were present in the study area.

It was decided that the farmworkers would be sampled according to where they lived, so the labor camps or other housing on or near growers' property served as the unit of intervention. During the baseline data collection, staff sampled the population according to the unit of analysis (i.e., housing locations), taking into consideration a combination of the following criteria:

- An appropriate and representative variety of group housing where large numbers of farmworkers in the specific catchment area lived and where systematic random sampling would be feasible
- Smaller housing units such as trailers, small individual houses, and farmhouses where families, including women (every effort was made to survey as many women as possible), lived and where it was possible to obtain a sample of everyone in the housing unit
- Locations where access was granted to Telamon staff by growers and crew leaders
- Likelihood that farmworkers living in these places would return the following year
- Other criteria such as language and/or ethnicity

RESULTS

A total of 578 people completed the KAP questionnaire through face-to-face, verbal interviews. Some of the people who were given the questionnaire lived in randomly selected housing units and others lived in units selected by convenience.

Sample Characteristics of All Respondents

Nineteen percent were seasonal farmworkers and 81% were migrants. Sixty-seven percent were men and 33% were women. Latinos comprised 55% of all respondents; the remaining 45% consisted of African Americans, Haitians, and white Americans. Fifty-five percent of respondents reported that they prefer to speak Spanish; 41% reported that they prefer English; 2% reported that they prefer Haitian Creole; and 2% reported that they use Spanish and English equally.

Characteristics of Latino Migrants Only

Of the Latino migrants sampled, 72% were men and 28% were women. The average age of respondents was 33. Sixty-five percent were born in Mexico, 18% were born in other Latin or Central American countries, and 17% were born in the United States or Puerto Rico. Fifty-six percent of the men and 37% of the women were neither married nor living with a partner. Forty-six percent had no children. Of those who had children, 62% had between one and three children, 20% had four to six children, and 15% had more than six children. Sixty-four percent reported that their 1993 household income was less than \$10,000, with a mean of approximately four people dependent on that income. The mean number of completed school years was four, with 60% reporting a 10th-grade education or less.

Knowledge Regarding Cervical Cancer

When asked, "What do you think a Pap smear is?" 85% of men and 44% of women were unable to answer correctly. Responses considered acceptable ranged from "a test for female problems" to "a test for cervical cancer."

When asked if they had ever heard of cervical cancer, 74% of men and 65% of women surveyed said they had not. Women were then asked several other questions regarding their experience with pelvic exams and Pap smears. Among women who had not had a Pap smear in the past 3 years, most said the reason was that they did not know they needed one. Those same women were asked if anyone had ever advised them to get a Pap smear, and the majority answered "no."

All of the women surveyed were asked how concerned they were about getting cervical cancer. Forty-one percent said they were very concerned,

12% were somewhat concerned, and 35% were not at all concerned.

Discussion

The findings from this survey further document that migrant and seasonal farmworkers have low incomes and low educational levels. Because the majority of the farmworkers in this study were Spanish speakers, it was evident that they confronted barriers related to language and culture as well. These conditions predict that members of this group would face knowledge, access, and financial barriers to prevent or detect early any

illness, including cancer.

Specifically, the study confirmed that the majority of Latino respondents had a low level of knowledge about prevention, early detection, and diagnosis of cancer in general and cervical cancer in particular. Additionally, it showed that the majority of Latina women who responded had not received health messages encouraging them to get Pap smears, and these results suggest that educational campaigns might prove effective in reaching this population.