Mental Health Assessment: Breaking New Ground in Colorado

by

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Our previous research (Hovey & Magaña, in press d; Magaña & Hovey, 2000) identified stressors that are commonly experienced by migrant farmworkers in the Midwest. However, due to the qualitative nature of our data, we were not able to assess the severity of stress that results from these stressors, nor were we able to directly examine the relationships of migrant farmworker stress to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

We developed the Migrant Farmworker Stress Inventory (MFWSI) to address these limitations. The MFWSI items were based on our qualitative data cited above. Although two farmworkers may experience the same stressors with equal frequency, they may not experience the same level of stress. These stressors would have a greater negative effect on the farmworker who cognitively appraised the stressors as more threatening. The MFWSI thus measures both the *types* of stressors experienced by farmworkers and the *severity* of stress experienced as the result of these stressors.

We piloted the MFWSI in a sample of migrant farmworkers in Michigan (Hovey, 2001). Our pilot data suggest that the MFWSI is a reliable and valid tool for the measurement of migrant farmworker stress.

The purposes of the present study are threefold: (1) to further examine the internal reliability and construct validity of the MFWSI in a sample of farmworkers in Western Colorado; (2) to assess the prevalence levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors; and (3) to examine the predictors of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behavior.

Methods

The sample consisted of 100 migrant farmworkers from the Montrose area in Colorado. The mean age of the sample was 33.4 ($SD = 12.1$); the age range was 14 to 69 years. Ninety-six percent of individuals were of Mexican descent; 3% were of Central American descent; 1% was of South American descent. Ninety-six percent were first-generation (immigrant status); 3% were second-generation; and 1% was third-generation. Sixty-seven percent were married or living together; 22% were never married; 9% were divorced or separated; and 2% were widowed. Seventy-five percent identified as Catholic. Fifty-four

High depression was related to greater migrant farmworker stress ($r = .55, p < .0005$), greater hopelessness ($r = .58, p < .0005$), lower self esteem ($r = -.54, p < .0005$), lower level of agreement to live a farmworker lifestyle ($r = -.15, p < .10$), and higher anxiety ($r = .77, p < .0005$).

We conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis of depression. In step 1, religiosity, education, and agreement to live a farmworker lifestyle were entered into the equation and captured 7.2% of the variance in depression ($F = 2.47, p = .07$). Migrant farmworker stress was entered in step 2 of equation and captured another 32% of the variance in depression ($F = 15.18, p < .0005$). Self esteem, hopelessness, and anxiety were entered into step 3 of the equation, which captured 34% more of the variance in depression. The overall equation captured 73% of the variance in depression ($F = 34.68, p < .0005$). Migrant farmworker stress remained a significant independent predictor ($B = .26, p < .0005$), even after controlling for the other variables (after step 3). Other independent predictors of depression were religiosity ($B = -.15, p = .01$), education ($B = .11, p = .06$), self esteem ($B = -.11, p = .01$), hopelessness ($B = .19, p = .008$), and anxiety ($B = .49, p < .0005$).

Finally, in our effort to assess the differences between those participants who reported a history of suicidality and those who reported no suicidality, we conducted a series of analyses of variance (ANOVA's). Here, we report the significant ANOVA's for two of the questions. In regards to the question of "Have you ever wished that you were dead?"--those who reported "yes" revealed less agreement with the decision to live a farmworker lifestyle ($F = 4.6, p < .05$), higher education ($F = 4.9, p < .05$), higher migrant farmworker stress ($F = 6.0, p < .01$), lower self esteem ($F = 8.1, p < .01$), greater hopelessness ($F = 12.0, p < .001$), greater anxiety ($F = 19.1, p < .001$), and greater depression ($F = 24.2, p < .001$) than those who reported "no." In regards to "Have you ever thought of taking your life?"--those who reported "yes" revealed less frequent church attendance ($F = 3.1, p < .05$), less agreement with the decision to live a farmworker lifestyle ($F = 7.8, p < .01$), higher education ($F = 8.6, p < .01$), higher migrant farmworker stress ($F = 2.4, p < .05$), lower self esteem ($F = 11.4, p < .001$), greater hopelessness ($F = 7.6, p < .01$), greater anxiety ($F = 20.2, p < .001$), and greater depression ($F = 33.5, p < .001$).

Summary & Conclusions

The high Cronbach alpha found for the MFWSI suggests that the scale has excellent internal reliability. Because this study measured a new psychological construct called migrant farmworker stress, it is important to assess the validity of the MFWSI by comparing it to measures of other psychological constructs that hypothetically relate to it. As expected, high migrant farmworker stress was associated with lower self esteem, greater hopelessness, high anxiety, high depression, and the presence of suicidal thoughts--thus suggesting good validity for the MFWSI. The results of the multiple regression analysis provide further support for the validity of migrant farmworker stress. When the other possible influences (e.g., anxiety, hopelessness) on depression are controlled for, the migrant farmwork concept was still a significant independent predictor of depression. This suggests that migrant farmworker stress has a significant, unique influence on depression, separate from the influence of other explanatory variables. In sum, based on these and previous findings (Hovey, 2001), the MFWSI appears to be a sound tool for the measurement of migrant farmworker stress.

As expected, the present sample revealed overall elevated levels of anxiety and depression. These findings are consistent with our previous research (Hovey & Magaña, in press a, in press b, in press c) that found high levels of anxiety and depression among migrant farmworkers in Michigan and Ohio.

In regards to the third purpose of our study, high anxiety was associated with elevated migrant farmworker stress, high education, less agreement with farmwork, lower self esteem, and greater hopelessness. High depression was associated with elevated migrant farmworker stress, less agreement with farmwork, lower self esteem, greater hopelessness, and elevated anxiety. Finally, suicidal thoughts

Migrant Farmworker Stress Inventory (MFWSI)

Overview
The Migrant Farmworker Stress Inventory (MFWSI) is a 39-item self-report instrument that assesses the quality and severity of stress inherent in migrant farmwork. This instrument was developed for adult migrant farmworkers.

Testing Condition
The MFWSI is user friendly and thus presents few difficulties with respect to test administration. The MFWSI requires a 6th grade literacy level and takes between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. For those participants who have difficult reading, the MFWSI can be verbally administered.

Self-Administration
Respondents are asked to rate how stressful they find the experience described in each statement. Respondents rate each item that they have experienced on a 5-point scale ("Have Not Experienced" to "Extremely Stressful"). If respondents have not experienced that statement, they circle "Have Not Experienced" under the statement.

The following administration instructions appear on the MFWSI form:

Below are a number of statements that migrant farmworkers have reported as stressful. For each statement that you have experienced, **circle only one** of the numbers, according to how stressful you find the situation.

If the statement does not apply to you, circle number 0: Have Not Experienced.

Scoring & Interpretation
Each item is scored from 0 to 4. The total MFWSI score is obtained by summing the scores for all 39 items. Possible MFWSI scores range from 0 to 156, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of stress related to the migrant farmworker lifestyle. The notion of caseness signifies potentially significant symptomatology that may impair an individual's functioning. The caseness threshold for the MFWSI is a score of 80, which represents approximately the upper 25% of scores. Individuals who score 80 or greater may be experiencing relatively high levels of migrant farmworker stress. These individuals may be at greater risk for the experience of psychological difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal behavior.

STATEMENTS

19.	There is not enough water to drink when I am working.	0	1	2	3	4
20.	I worry about not having anyone to care for my children while I am working.	0	1	2	3	4
21.	Because of farmwork, I do not have time to get things done outside of work. .	0	1	2	3	4
22.	My life has become more difficult because my partner is no longer with me (because he or she has moved or has died).	0	1	2	3	4
23	It is difficult to be away from friends.	0	1	2	3	4
24.	I worry about the values that my children are being exposed to in this country.	0	1	2	3	4
25.	It bothers me that other people drink too much alcohol. .	0	1	2	3	4
26.	I sometimes worry because I do not have reliable transportation.	0	1	2	3	4
27.	There are no stores nearby.	0	1	2	3	4
28.	I have experienced discrimination in this country.	0	1	2	3	4
29.	Sometimes I have difficulty finding a job. . . .	0	1	2	3	4
30.	I worry about being deported.	0	1	2	3	4
31.	Migrating to this country was difficult.	0	1	2	3	4
32.	Sometimes I feel that the conditions of the bathrooms are bad.	0	1	2	3	4
33.	I worry about who my children are spending time with. . . .	0	1	2	3	4
34.	I have been physically or emotionally abused by my partner. . . .	0	1	2	3	4
35.	It is difficult to complete the paperwork necessary to receive social services.	0		2	3	4
36.	I do not get enough credit from other family members for the work I do. .	0	1	2	3	4
37.	I have difficulty understanding other people when they speak English.	0	1	2	3	4
38.	I worry about my children's education.	0	1	2	3	4
39.	It bothers me that other people use drugs. . . .	0	1	2	3	4

SITUACIONES

18.	Me es difícil hablar con otras personas acerca de mis sentimientos.	0	1	2	3	4
19.	Cuando estoy trabajando, no hay suficiente (mucha) agua para tomar. .	0		2	3	4
20.	Me preocupo por no tener a nadie que cuide a mis hijos mientras yo estoy trabajando.	0	1	2	3	4
21.	Debido al trabajo del campo, no tengo tiempo de hacer otras cosas.	0		2	3	4
22.	Mi vida se ha puesto más difícil porque mi pareja ya no esta conmigo (porque se mudó o se murío.).	0	1	2	3	4
23.	Es dificíl estar lejos de mis amistades.	0	1	2	3	4
24.	Me preocupo por los valores que mis hijos estan siendo expuestos en este país.	0	1	2	3	4
25.	Me molesta que otras personas toman demasiado alcohol.	0		2	3	4
26.	A veces me preocupo porque no tengo transporte seguro.	0	1	2	3	4
27.	No hay tiendas cercanas. . .	0	1	2	3	4
28.	Yo he sido discriminado(a) en este país.	0	1	2	3	4
29.	A veces me es difícil encontrar trabajo.	0	1	2	3	4
30.	Me preocupa el que me puedan deportar de este país.	0	1	2	3	4
31.	Fue difícil emigrar a este país.	0	1	2	3	4
32.	A veces siento que las condiciones de los baños son malas. . . .	0	1	2	3	4
33.	Me preocupa con quién mis hijos están pasando tiempo.	0	1	2	3	4
34.	Yo he sido abusado(a) física o emocionalmente por mi pareja.	0		2	3	4
35.	Es difícil completar (llenar) los papeles necesarios para recibir servicios sociales (estampillas, Medicaid, Welfare).	0	1	2	3	4
36.	Mi familia no me da suficiente mérito (credito) por el trabajo que hago. . . .	0	1	2	3	4
37	Me es difícil entender a otras personas cuando hablan inglés. . .	0	1	2	3	4
38.	Me preocupo por la educación de mis hijos.	0	1	2	3	4
39.	Me molesta que otras personas usan drogas.	0	1	2	3	4