

PSIMH Research Report

The Relationship of Migrant Farmwork Stress to Depression and Hopelessness:
Preliminary Findings in the Standardization of the Migrant Farmworker Stress
Inventory (MFWSI)

by

Joseph D. Hovey, Ph.D.
University of Toledo

Cristina Magaña, MA
University of Toledo

Victoria Booker, MPH, MSW
Migrant Health Promotion

Author Information:

Joseph D. Hovey, Department of Psychology, The University of Toledo; Cristina Magaña, The University of Toledo; Victoria Booker, Migrant Health Promotion, Saline, MI.

Correspondence should be sent to Joseph D. Hovey, Ph.D., The Department of Psychology, The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH 43606; or e-mail to jhovey@utoledo.edu

This report is published by The Program for the Study of Immigration and Mental Health (PSIMH), The Department of Psychology, The University of Toledo, OH 43606. Phone 419/530-2392; Fax: 419/530-8479.

These findings were previously reported in the *Migrant Health Newslines* (July/August 2001).

Resource ID: 5297

**PSIMH Research Report: The Relationship of Migrant
Farmwork Stress to Depression and Hopelessness: Preliminary
Findings in the Standardization of the Migrant Farmworker
Stress Inventory (MFWSI)**

Our previous research (e.g., Hovey & Magaña, in press) has identified--through interviews--stressors that are commonly experienced by migrant farmworkers in Michigan and Ohio. Table 1 lists the percentage of migrant farmworkers who experienced each stressor. In response to our qualitative data, we developed a quantitative scale called the Migrant Farmworker Stress Inventory (MFWSI). Although two migrant farmworkers may experience the same stressors with equal frequency, they may not experience the same level of stress. This is because one of the farmworkers may cognitively appraise the stressors as relatively more threatening, thus inducing more stress. The MFWSI therefore measures not only the type of stressors experienced by farmworkers, but the *severity* of stress that results from these stressors. This paper reports preliminary findings in our beginning efforts to validate the MFWSI.

Methods

The sample consisted of 13 female and 10 male migrant farmworkers attending a health fair in Lenawee County, Michigan. Their ages ranged from 18 to 54 ($M = 27.4$; $SD = 9.6$) and were equally distributed (7 individuals aged 18-20; 6 aged 21-25; 4 aged 26-30; 6 older than 30). Seventeen individuals were born in Mexico; 6 were born in the United States. Sixteen were married or living together; 7 were never married. Nineteen were Catholic.

Participants completed Spanish ($n = 18$) and English ($n = 5$) versions of the MFWSI, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), the Beck Hopelessness Scale, and a demographic form. Each participant was given \$5.00 for her or his participation, which took approximately 10 minutes.

Results

The mean score for the MFWSI was 67.9 ($SD = 23.9$); the mean for the CES-D was 16.7 ($SD = 8.2$). Fifty-seven percent ($n = 13$) reached caseness (score over 15) on the CES-D, which indicates a potentially significant risk for depression.

ANOVAs were used to analyze the associations among the demographic variables and migrant farmworker stress. Those individuals born in Mexico ($M = 72$; $SD = 24$) reported greater stress than those born in the U.S. ($M = 56$; $SD = 21$) [$F(1,21) = 2.2$, $p = .08$]. Those aged 18-20 ($M = 48$; $SD = 20$) reported lower stress than those older than 20 ($M = 77$; $SD = 20$) [$F(1,21) = 10.2$, $p = .002$]. There were no gender differences on migrant farmworker stress.

Because we are attempting to measure a new psychological construct called migrant farmworker stress, it is important to assess its validity by comparing it to measures of other psychological constructs that hypothetically relate to it. We thus decided to examine the relationship of migrant farmworker stress to both hopelessness and depression. As expected, Pearson correlations indicated that greater levels of migrant farmworker stress were associated with higher levels of hopelessness ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) and depression ($r = .34$, $p = .05$).

The Cronbach alpha for the MFWSI was .91, which indicates excellent interitem reliability and suggests that the 39 MFWSI items appear to be measuring the same construct. Finally, we analyzed mean scores for each of the individual MFWSI items [possible response for each item ranged from 0 (have not experienced), to 1 (not at all stressful), through 4 (extremely stressful)]. We found mean scores greater than 2.25 for the following items. It bothers me that other people use drugs. At times I have to work long hours. It bothers me that other people use alcohol. It is difficult to be away from family members. It is

difficult to be away from friends. I worry about not having medical care. I worry about not having a permit to work. I have to work in bad weather. I worry about my children's education.

Conclusions

To our knowledge, this is the first study to quantitatively examine the correlates of migrant farmworker stress. In our sample of migrant farmworkers in Lenawee County, Michigan, higher levels of migrant farmworker stress were related to immigrant status, adult status, greater hopelessness, and greater depression. Our preliminary data suggest that the MFWSI has excellent interitem reliability and construct validity. In the effort to standardize the MFWSI, research should further explore its psychometric properties. This includes research that measures migrant farmworker stress in relation to other psychological constructs, and research on a larger scale that uses representative sampling techniques. Once the MFWSI's psychometric properties are fully established and normed, the MFWSI may also be used as a clinical screening device to help identify those who may be at risk for migrant farmworker stress and other mental health problems.

Reference

Hovey, J. D., & Magaña, C. (in press). Suicide risk factors among Mexican migrant farmworker women in the Midwest United States. *Suicide Studies*.

If you would like a copy of the MFWSI and/or more information about this and similar studies, please contact Dr. Joseph D. Hovey at jhovey@utoledo.edu or visit www.utoledo.edu/psychology/psimh.html.

Table 1

Stressors	Percentage
Language Barriers	47.4%
Unpredictable Work or Housing / Uprooting	45.3%
Being Away from Family or Friends	45.3%
Rigid Work Demands	42.1%
Low Family Socioeconomic Status / Poor Pay / Poverty	38.9%
Poor Housing Conditions	34.7%
Hard Physical Labor / Physical Pain Related to Farmwork	33.7%
Education of Self or Children	28.4%
Lack of Transportation / Unreliable Transportation	26.3%
Discrimination from Society / Exploitation by Employer	24.2%
Lack of Daycare and Supervision of Children	18.9%
Undocumented Status	17.9%
Worries about Socialization of Children	15.8%
Acculturating to New Environment	15.8%
Limited Access to Medical Care / Paperwork for Social Services	15.8%
Geographical and Social Isolation	14.7%
Immigration Stressors (during act of immigrating to U.S.)	12.6%
Loss of Spouse (due to death, abandonment)	6.3%
Domestic Abuse / Poor Spousal Relations	4.2%
Emotional Isolation (diminished capacity to express emotions)	4.2%