EXPLORING DECISIONS OF MIGRATION: SUBJECTIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES
OF MEXICAN MIGRANT FARM WORKERS IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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EXPLORING DECISIONS OF MIGRATION: SUBJECTIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES
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This study explores the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers. This was accomplished by examining Mexican migrant farm workers’ perceptions of biopsychosocial dimensions of their ecological contexts such as their living conditions, employment, and available social services in the United States in contrast with what they left behind in Mexico. Limited research has been done to explore the subjective life experience of migrant farm workers. By understanding the challenges, obstacles, beliefs, and culture of Mexican migrant farm workers social workers can become more culturally competent in meeting the needs of this population. This will provide social workers the opportunity to better serve this vulnerable population. This study used secondary data. The original exploratory study consisted of convenience and snowball sampling of Mexican migrant farm workers residing in Yolo, Sacramento, Napa and Sonoma Counties in California. Multiple choice and open-ended questions were asked to (38) participants; however, only (29) participants completed both sections. These questions explored the dilemmas that migrant farm workers face when making the decision to migrate to the United States. Content analysis of the original transcripts was employed to identify emergent themes. The
overall results indicate that migrant farm workers who participated in the study seriously contemplated the decision of leaving their families, culture, friends and home country to come to the United States for better economic opportunities. Participants overwhelmingly believed that they have better economic opportunities in the United States. However, they believed that emotionally, spiritually and psychologically they are more fulfilled in Mexico. With regard to health services, participants believed that they receive more efficient health services in Mexico, but they believed the quality of care is better in the United States. Many participants cited difficulties such as language barriers, discrimination and travel to the United States as substantial obstacles which impact their views about their subjective life experiences, whether or not they believe living in the United States is worth it and if they would recommend that family and friends migrate to the United States. Furthermore, the majority of the participants still considered Mexico to be home. This study will support social workers understanding of the dilemmas and obstacles that Mexican migrant farm workers face in this country. With this knowledge, social workers will be able to provide more culturally competent services to this population.

_______________________, Committee Chair
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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ........................................................................................................................................ vii
Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................................. vi
List of Tables ...................................................................................................................................... xi
List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... xiii
Chapter
1. THE PROBLEM ................................................................................................................................. 1
   Introduction ...................................................................................................................................... 1
   Background ..................................................................................................................................... 2
   Statement of Research Problem .................................................................................................... 5
   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................................... 6
   Major Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 7
   Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................................ 7
   Definitions of Terms ..................................................................................................................... 8
   Assumptions ................................................................................................................................... 9
   Justifications ................................................................................................................................. 9
   Delimitation .................................................................................................................................. 10
   Summary ...................................................................................................................................... 10
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........................................................................................................ 12
   History of Migration of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers ............................................................ 13
   Immigration Laws the Affect Mexican Migrant Farm Workers .................................................... 17
   Using the Ecological Perspective to Explore the Lives of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers .......... 21
   An Overview of the Living Conditions in Mexico ......................................................................... 23
   Housing in Mexico ....................................................................................................................... 23
   Employment in Mexico ................................................................................................................ 25
   Health Problems in Mexico ......................................................................................................... 26
   Health Services in Mexico .......................................................................................................... 27
   An Overview of the Living Conditions in the United States ......................................................... 28
Housing in the United States ............................................................................................. 28
Employment in the United States .................................................................................. 30
The Health Problems of Migrant Farm Workers .......................................................... 31
Health Services ............................................................................................................. 32
Migrant Health Centers ............................................................................................... 33
The Difference Between the United States and Mexico in the Lives of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers ................................................................. 34
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 36

3. METHODS ....................................................................................................................... 37
Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 37
Researcher Design ......................................................................................................... 38
Sampling Procedures ..................................................................................................... 38
Instrumentation ............................................................................................................. 39
Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 39
Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 40
Protection of Human Rights .......................................................................................... 41
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 41

4. THE RESULTS ................................................................................................................ 43
Descriptive Results ........................................................................................................ 44
Qualitative Responses to Open-Ended Questions .......................................................... 47
Dimension of Work ....................................................................................................... 48
Dimension of Living Conditions .................................................................................... 51
Dimension of Health ..................................................................................................... 55
Dimension of the Quality of Ecological Context .......................................................... 59
Thoughts about Migration ............................................................................................. 65
Was it Worth It to Migrate to the United States? ......................................................... 66
Where is Home? ............................................................................................................. 69
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 71

5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND SUMMARY ...................................................... 72
Results ......................................................................................................................... 73
Limitations ................................................................................................................... 77
Implications .................................................................................................................. 78
1. Table 4.1 Number of Years Mexican Migrant Farm Workers Have Lived in the United States ................................................................. 44
2. Table 4.2 How Many of the Participants Migrated with Someone Else ................................................................................................. 45
3. Table 4.3 Annual Income of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers ................................................................. 46
4. Table 4.4 Reason for Migrating to U.S ................................................................................................. 47
5. Table 4.5 Emergent Theme One: Preference for Working in the United States ................................................................. 48
6. Table 4.6 Emergent Theme Two: Preference for Working in Mexico ................................................................................................. 50
7. Table 4.7 Emergent Theme One: Preference for Living in the United States ................................................................. 52
8. Table 4.8 Emergent Theme Two: Preference for Living in Mexico ................................................................................................. 53
9. Table 4.9 Emergent Theme Three: Is it Worth It to Migrate to the United States? ................................................................. 54
10. Table 4.10 Emergent Theme Four: Living in the United States and Mexico is the Same ................................................................. 55
11. Table 4.11 Emergent Theme One: Preference for the Health System in the United States ................................................................. 56
12. Table 4.12 Emergent Theme Two: Preference for the Health Services in Mexico ................................................................. 57
13. Table 4.13 Emergent Theme Three: Limitations of the Health System in the United States ................................................................. 58
14. Table 4.14 Emergent Theme One: The Language Barriers ................. 60
15. Table 4.15 Theme Two: Problems Faced by Undocumented
Table 4.16 Emergent Theme Three: The Hardships of Leaving Family Behind ............................................................... 62
Table 4.17 Emergent Theme Four: The Hardships of Crossing the Border ................................................................. 63
Table 4.18 Emergent Theme Five: Discrimination .......................................................... 63
Table 4.19 Emergent Theme Six: Not Having Enough Resources ................................. 64
Table 4.20 Emergent Theme One: Should Migrants Come to the United States? .......................................................... 65
Table 4.21 Emergent Theme Two: Why Should Migrants Stay in Their Home Country? ........................................................................ 66
Table 4.22 Emergent Theme One: It Was Worth it to Migrate to the United States ........................................................................ 67
Table 4.23 Emergent Theme Two: The Dilemma of Migrating to the United States ........................................................................ 68
Table 4.24 Emergent Theme One: I Consider Mexico my Home ................................. 69
Table 4.25 Emergent Theme Two: I Consider Mexico My Home ................................. 70
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure 1 Goodness of fit model for Mexican immigrant migrant farm workers..........................................................22
Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Papa, Mama, my older brother, Roberto, and I left El Rancho Blanco a small village nestled in barren, dry hills several miles north of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, and headed to California, hoping to leave our life of poverty behind, I remember how excited I was making the trip on a second-class train traveling north from Guadalajara to Mexicali. We traveled for two days and nights. When we arrived at the United States-Mexican border, Papa told us that we had to cross the barbed-wire fence without being seen by la migra, the immigration officers dressed in green uniforms (Jimenez, 2001, p.1).

Dr. Francisco Jimenez, a Professor at Santa Clara University, was one of those hundreds of Mexican people who crossed the Mexican border into the United States looking for a better future. A future in which there is no poverty and plenty of food to feed their families. Many of these immigrants become migrant farm workers as Francisco Jimenez did. The life of a migrant farm worker is hard, and one of the main reasons why I wanted to research Mexican migrant farm workers is because I have a personal connection to their story. Throughout my life I have heard the story of my father, a migrant farm worker who has worked most of his life in the agricultural fields of California. He overcame obstacles, found opportunity, and experienced the successes as well as the hardships that many migrant farm workers find when they come to the United States. As a researcher my main objective is to learn the reasons
why Mexican migrant farm workers leave their country to come to the United States, and to see if, years later, they would recommend to other Mexican people that they should migrate to the United States. I have always wanted to know why my father left us in Mexico to come to the United States. What were the opportunities that he was looking for, what were the things that helped him survive in this country, and in what ways did his work contribute to the economies of the United States and Mexico?

This study attempts to see what opportunities Mexican migrant farm workers, like my father, are looking for when they migrate to the United States. This will be done by examining Mexican migrant farm workers’ perceptions of such biopsychosocial dimensions of their ecological contexts such as their living conditions, available social services, and employment in the United States in contrast with what they left behind in Mexico.

Background

Mexico is a beautiful country with a lot of resources. Many tourists travel to Mexico to visit the Mexican beaches, the mines, and the beautiful historic cities. For this reason, many Mexican people work in the tourism industry and the mining industry. Many people think that Mexico is a good country to live in; however, there are not enough jobs for all Mexican people. This is one of the main reasons why so many Mexican people immigrate to the United States (Moreno, 2003). Another reason why many Mexicans migrate to the United States is that they want to achieve economic security for themselves and their families (Grzywacz, Quandt, Early, & Tapia, 2006). They want to leave behind the poverty in which they lived, so that they
will be better able to feed their families.

Poverty is a driving force that pushes Mexicans to leave their country in search of a better life. Over half of the Mexican people live below the poverty line (Consejo Nacional de Evaluacion de la Politica de Desarrollo, 2009; Romero, 2008). The reasons for this include: Mexico has a high unemployment rate, rising inflation, and the industries that were successful, such as tourism have been affected by the fear of the Swine flu and the drug cartels. Mexican people are struggling to find jobs that can help them provide the minimal necessities to their families. A lot of Mexican people are finding themselves working in jobs that only pay Mexico’s minimal daily wage of 55 pesos, or about $4 dollars a day (Beaubien, 2009). They are living in a country in which a kilo of meat costs 80 pesos ($6) and yet they are only earning 55 pesos ($4) a day. The Mexican government needs to do something to help the people who are living in poverty such as generate jobs and increase access to loans (Romero, 2008).

The stable government of the United States can create laws that are designed to protect people. For example, in the U.S. there are labor laws that are set up to protect workers, wages are more stable and equitable. Social policy protects and provides for better educational opportunities, better access to health services for workers who are here legally and more job opportunities. Such provisions appear to be lacking in Mexico and may be factors in the push of Mexicans northward across the border. Economic problems are indeed reasons why Mexican people migrate to the United States. Economic problems such as, not enough jobs, low wages and the unstable economy caused by the fluctuations on the U.S. dollar create conditions ripe with
poverty. As a result of these conditions in any given year there are 3 to 5 million farm workers working in the United States agriculture industry (Barranti, 2005). In fact, approximately 85 percent of the farm workers are Latino with the majority of them being either Mexican or of Mexican descent (Barranti). Many of these Mexican migrant farm workers work twelve-hour days, in bad working conditions, for low wages. After work they go home to a dirt-floored garage or to migrant camps in which they sleep in crowded rooms with twenty or more people (Jimenez, 2006).

Many of the Mexican migrant farm workers who came to the United States looking for a better future end up living in deteriorating migrant camps, in small houses with many family members, old apartment buildings, and camping tents (Barranti, 2005). The housing that farm workers live in is often substandard and unsafe (Holden, 2001).

The reasons why Mexican migrant farm workers live in substandard and overcrowded living conditions are many. Often employers agree to provide housing and meals as a condition of employment. However, the housing conditions can be insufficient and employers will over charge workers for these benefits (Holden, 2001). In exchange for these inflated benefits, workers are paid below minimum wage. Additionally, workers are often under paid because of their undocumented status. Therefore, when workers choose to provide their own their housing, many times they cannot afford the rent by themselves because they earn below minimum wage (Holden, 2001). As a result, they feel that they must share housing costs with other workers. Many times, whole families will be forced to share housing in order to be
able to afford the high cost of rent. The lack of social services agencies contributes to this problem as migrant farm workers have no place to look for assistance.

Mexican farm workers are one of the lowest paid employees in the United States. On average they earn less than $20,000 a year (Barranti, 2005). This means that they live below the poverty level according to the United States Census (Arendale, 2001).

In addition to their low wages, Mexican migrant farm workers are at a higher risk of being injured on the job. Some of the common causes of injuries among farm workers are use of equipment and chemical exposure (Larson, 2001). As a result many of the farm workers who are injured can suffer from chronic pain, falls, cuts, amputations and some of them could die as a result of the injury (Larson, 2001). The majority of these injuries go untreated because the majority of these workers do not have health insurance or access to health care.

Mexicans immigrate to the U.S. in search of a better life. Yet, given the substandard living conditions, poor working conditions and the tougher immigrating laws, it is a wonder that they still come to continue working in the agriculture fields of the United States.

Statement of the Research Problem

Mexican migrant farm workers are faced with the dilemma of migrating to the United States to find a job or staying in Mexico where they do not have enough resources to survive. Despite hardships encountered in the receiving country of the United States, Mexicans continue to choose migration away from home as an attempt
to improve the quality of their lives and the lives of their children. Yet, the subjective perceptions of migration experiences have not been well documented, especially in the social work literature. There has been very little research that has explored the subjective experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers who are faced with the dilemmas of migration to the U.S. (Barranti, 2005). This population has been practically invisible to the large society. Giving voice to the Mexican migrant farm workers is an important process of empowerment as well as a way to help inform more culturally competent social work practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the subjective experiences using the biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment, healthcare and health services experiences among Mexican migrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Yolo and Sonoma counties as these dimensions relate to the experience of migration. Gaining increased understanding of the subjective life experiences of migration for this population first may help increase understanding where gaps in the literature have remained. Giving voice to a mostly unheard subjective experience may add insight and knowledge that will increase culturally competent social work practice with this population. It is also the hope that findings from the study will inspire further research concerning the subjective life experiences of migration for Mexican immigrants who come to the United States.
Major Research Questions

The primary research question that guides this exploratory study is: *What are the subjective life experiences of the migration decision for Mexican immigrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Sonoma and Yolo counties, California?* Further questions include:

· What are Mexican migrant farm workers’ perceptions of such biopsychosocial dimensions of their ecological contexts as, housing, employment, and healthcare and health services in the United States in contrast with what they left behind in Mexico.

· Given their experiences would they recommend migration to the U.S. to family and friends living in Mexico?

Theoretical Framework

This study explores the subjective life experiences -- particularly those involved with the migration decision-- of Mexican immigrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Sonoma and Yolo counties, California, through the lenses of the ecological and biopsychosocial perspectives. The ecological perspective (Green, 2009) looks at how an individual is affected by the environment, and how the individual interacts with that environment. It assumes that humans and the environment shape each other reciprocally and that there are forces that support or stop that exchange. Some forces that can affect an individual’s behavior are oppression, poverty, and unemployment. The ecological perspective also looks at how people interact with others in their environment to see how these interactions affect them. Mexican migrant farm workers left their country to come to the United States to look for jobs that could
help them support their families. They came to a country that has a different environment than the one in which they are accustomed. Many times there are forces that prevent them from successfully adapting to this environment such as poverty, poor working conditions, low wages, poor living conditions, the lack of health insurance, and discrimination.

A primary concept of the ecological perspective is that of the goodness of fit (Greene, 2008). The goodness of fit occurs when an individual interacts successfully with subsystems within their environment; subsystems such as employment, housing, health services and social relationships with friends and family. If there is a positive transaction between the individual and their environmental subsystems then they have a goodness of fit. In order to have a positive transaction, the individual must adapt to the environment and the environment must adapt to the individual and this creates a nurturing environment (Greene, 2008). In order to explore if migrant farm workers have a goodness of fit in the environment in which they live, the biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment and health services can be explored. This study uses these biopsychosocial dimensions as a way of assessing the nurturing quality of these complex environments and their relationships to each other. If one is to have a healthy life all these subsystems have to work together in unison.

*Definition of Terms*

Poverty- the official poverty definition uses monetary income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps) (U.S. Census Bureau).
Migrant Farm workers- those who do not return to their homes at the end of a day’s hard work. They may be living in a migrant camp, sleeping under a tree, or living out of their car as they move from one harvest to another (Barranti, 2005).

Mexican- a person who was born in Mexico or is a descendent of someone born in Mexico.

The Goodness of Fit- is a reciprocal person-environment process achieved though transactions between an adaptive individual and his or her nurturing environment (Greene, 2008).

The United States Poverty Level-dollar amounts the Census Bureau uses to determine a family's or person's poverty status (U.S. Census Bureau).

Assumptions

The researcher is conducting this study with the assumption that Mexican migrant farm workers believe that there are differences in the living conditions between Mexico and the United States. Because of these differences, they migrated to the United States to look for better opportunities for their families. However, here in the United States they are faced with many obstacles that stop them from succeeding. Mexican migrant farm workers contribute to the United States economy but they do not get many benefits in return.

Justification

This study attempts to explore the dilemmas that Mexican migrant farm workers face when they come to the United States. Many of them leave behind their families and their culture to come to the United States to look for better economic
futures for their families. Upon arriving in this country, they are faced with
discrimination in their workplace and in their communities. The researcher will use
secondary data collected from Mexican migrant farm workers to ascertain their
subjective experiences in the United States in contrast to their experiences in Mexico.

The primary goal of a social worker “is to help people in need and to address
social problems” (Boyle, Hull, Mather, Smith & Farley, 2009, p.35). The mission of
social workers is to assist their clients in finding solutions to the problems that they are
having, and to identify the main social problems that are affecting their clients in order
to address those problems. This study will help professionals understand migrant farm
workers and the issues that are impacting their lives. The results of this study will also
help improve cultural competence for those working with this population. Mexican
migrant farm workers could benefit greatly from social workers that can understand
them and help them acquire social services and health services.

Delimitation

There is not a lot of information about the subjective life experiences of
Mexican immigrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Sonoma and Yolo counties,
California, or how they view their decision to migrate. This study analyzes secondary
data that was collected from a convenience sample using a snowball sampling
procedure. Due to this sampling method as well as the sample size of the original
subject pool, results from this study cannot be generalized.

Summary

The researcher is going to use secondary sources to explore the subjective life
experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers. This exploration will include how they view their living conditions, employment, healthcare, and health services in the United States in contrast with what they left behind in Mexico. In order to explore the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers the researcher is going to use the ecological perspective.

This study is important because it will help social workers understand the subjective life experiences of migrant farm workers. This can help social workers provide better services to them.

In the following chapters the study will be detailed. In Chapter Two, a review of the literature will discuss the history of migration of farm workers from Mexico, the impact of programs such as the Bracero program, and agricultural and labor industry laws that were aimed specifically to address the working conditions of migrant workers. Additionally, Chapter Two will compare and contrast their experiences in the United States and Mexico regarding housing, health services, and employment. The research methodology used to carry out the study is described in Chapter Three. The results of the study are analyzed and explained in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, the conclusion and potential solutions to the problems that have been raised are described.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is little information about Mexican migrant farm workers’ subjective experiences of migration and their decision process to leave Mexico to come to this country (Barranti, 2009). Additionally documented articles and other information sources about this process are limited. Mexican immigrants have been recruited to work in the fields of California since the 1870’s and in any given year there are approximately 5 million migrant farm workers working in the U.S. agriculture industry (Hovey & Magaña, 2002). About 85% of those migrant farm workers are Latinos with the majority of them being Mexico or from Mexican descent (Barranti, 2009).

Estimating the number of migrant farm workers working in the fields of California is a difficult task because many of them are undocumented. Others variables affecting the ability of researchers to obtain exact statistics of migrant farm workers include the mobility of migrant farm workers who move from one place to another looking for seasonal work, and thus many do not have a permanent address where they could be included in census data. Additionally, many of them are unauthorized to work in the United States and as a result they are reluctant to participate in the census survey (Martinez, 2009). What we do know is that hundreds of migrant farm workers have migrated to the United States for many years looking for better futures for themselves and their families.

Historically, many of the Mexican migrant farm workers have migrated to the
United States illegally or through programs such as the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program and other similar programs allowed migrant farm workers to work in the United States agricultural fields legally. But many more still come here undocumented and both documented and undocumented Mexican migrant workers face many challenges here in the U.S (Romo, 2009).

The following literature review provides a summary of current studies important in understanding the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers, particularly those experiences detailing the decision to migrate to the United States. In this chapter, a review of the literature will also explain the history of migration for farm workers from Mexico, the impact of programs such as the Bracero program, and agricultural and labor industry laws that were aimed specifically to address the working conditions of migrant workers. Additionally, the Mexican migrant farm workers experiences in the United States and Mexico regarding housing, health services, mental health services, and employment are compared and contrasted. It is important to understand the experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers because they make up the majority of the people who work the agricultural lands of California. Increased understanding will add to the knowledge base and hopefully, increase culturally competent social work practice with this population.

*History of Migration of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers*

Mexico is a beautiful country with a rich landscape and many industries such as mining and tourism; however, there are not enough jobs for all the Mexican people (Moreno, 2003). Unstable governments of the past caused many Mexican people to
migrate to the United States. The government did not have regulations that protected people from being fired, specified how much people got paid or that protected the rights of people in the work place. Additionally, the government put more power and resources in the hands of the wealthy at the expense of the working people. Due to these reasons, many Mexican people immigrated to the United States, both legally and illegally (Moreno, 2003).

In the 1820’s and 1830’s the Mexican government gave permission to an American group of people to settle in what is now Texas. One of the conditions that the Mexican government placed on the settlers was that they practice Catholicism. However, most of them were not Catholic but claimed to be, in order to gain access to land. The Mexican government did not have authorities supervising the Texans and as a result, many of the settlers got used to being independent and grew to want independence from Mexico (Fernandez, 2002). By 1835, the American settlers wanted to be free of Mexican rule and in 1836, they fought the Mexican Army and won their freedom. For nine years, Texans established their own country; The Republic of Texas. In 1845, the United States Congress declared that Texas was a State of the United States (Zinn, 2003). This angered the Mexican government because they never saw the Texas territory as being independent.

President James K. Polk offered to buy the territories north of the Rio Grande River but the Mexican government refused the offer. In 1848, President Polk convinced Congress to declare war on Mexico. Congress passed a bill that provided money to volunteers who signed up to fight the war. In 1847, Mexico lost the war and
as a result, lost their territories (Zinn, 2003).

The Mexican culture became immersed with the United States culture in 1848 after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This treaty obligated Mexico to sell Alta California and New Mexico for 15 million dollars and pay the Mexican people any damages that were cause by war (Fernandez, 2002). During this time, the Mexican people who lived in these territories were given the choice of becoming citizens of the United States or selling their land and returning to Mexican territory. Many of them chose to stay on their lands and become U.S. citizens.

From 1850 through 1880, 55 thousand Mexican immigrants emigrated to the United States. Many of these immigrants migrated to escape poverty in Mexico and many worked in the agricultural, railroad and mining industries of the United States. These immigrants found themselves working in poor working conditions and underpaid jobs.

Porfirio Diaz, who was president during this time ruled Mexico from the late 19th century to the early 20th century (Fernandez, 2002). During Diaz’s presidency, the Mexican economy improved, railroads were built and mines were developed. However, only a small majority of wealthy people had power and control of resources. The poor people were ignored and were kept in poverty. Due to these dire conditions, the Mexican people became dissatisfied with the government.

In 1910, land owner Francisco Madero, ran against Diaz in the election because he did not agree with what Diaz was doing to the Mexican people. The poor people supported Madero in the election and as a result, Diaz put Francisco Madero in
jail. After jailing Madero, Diaz was successful and won the 1910 election (Fernandez, 2002). When Madero was released from prison, he saw that nothing had changed. Madero told the Mexican people that the only way to change the government was through a revolution. Many people thought the same way as Madero and in 1910 they started a revolution. The country became an unsafe place to live because of the revolution and as a result, many families migrated to the United States.

Many of the families that migrated to the United States during the Mexican Revolution wanted better lives for their families. Many of these families wanted to save money and then go back to Mexico to buy land. Because many of these immigrants did not speak English and did not have any special skills, it was difficult for them to find jobs in the United States. However, in 1917 World War I started and more jobs opened up for immigrants. Farmers and owners of ranches needed farm workers to work in the fields to produce food for the soldiers and the American people (Moreno, 2003).

California was an area in which there were many jobs in the agricultural industry. Migrant farm workers were following the crops, and moving from one area of California to another to pick fruit and vegetables from the agricultural fields. This allowed them to work all year round. The nomadic lifestyle of moving was hard, not only to the people who worked in the fields, but also for their children, who many times moved from school to school. During this time period, it was not uncommon for people to work more than 12 hours a day for just a few cents (Kiddler, 1990; Moreno, 2003).
In 1941, more Mexican immigrants came to the United States to work in areas outside of the agricultural industry, such as factories and shipyards. Most American males were fighting in World War II overseas and as a result, there were more jobs for immigrants.

Between the years of 1942 to 1964, the Bracero Program brought approximately 5 million Mexican migrant workers to the agricultural fields of the United States (Martin, 1995). The program was implemented by the Mexican and the United States governments. The program allowed Mexican workers to come to the United States to work legally for a certain amount of time. Bracero workers could only work in the fields, and if they sought other work elsewhere, they were deported. The workers were paid low wages, had poor living conditions, their bodies were often showered with DDT and they were treated as prisoners. Mexican Bracero workers also faced discrimination from the U.S. workers who thought that Mexican workers were taking their jobs away from them (Suarez & Paez 2002).

Immigration authorities in the United States feared that immigration was expanding. They also feared that, after the war, there were not going to be enough jobs for the immigrants and the soldiers who were returning from war. For these reasons, the U.S. government created stronger immigration laws.

*Immigration Laws that Affect Mexican Migrant Farm Workers*

After the war there was still a need for additional labor. Between the 1942 and 1964 Mexican immigrants were recruited to work in the agriculture and railroad industries (Romo, 2009). Because of these labor shortages, programs such as the
Bracero Program were implemented. As a result, the restrictions on Mexican immigrants who migrated to the United States were loosened. In 1966, Mexican immigrants were again subjected to limitations of immigrant visas (Romo, 2009). In the mid 1980s, congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which attempted to control undocumented immigration and to legalize most of the undocumented agricultural workers (Romo, 2009). This program’s aim was to improve working conditions in the fields and increase wages and benefits for farm workers (Martin, 1995).

In the 1990’s, the American public became concerned about the perceived problems of immigration. The American people feared that the Mexican immigrants who came from the southern border of the United States were taking jobs, receiving government benefits and causing the U.S. citizens to pay more in taxes (Zinn, 2001). As a result of this concern more border patrols officers were added along the 2,000 mile border between the United States and Mexico to prevent illegal immigration. Border patrol officers also patrolled the streets of big cities, such as Houston, where there were high numbers of immigrants. Immigrants who live in those cities fear being deported and because of this fear, they stop doing their everyday life activities, such as going to the store, taking their children to school, and participating in community activities. (Suarez & Paez, 2002).

In 1994, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the United States was implemented. While this agreement was heralded as a positive step for international trade relationships, the Mexican economy was
negatively impacted and the value of the Mexican peso plummeted. As a result, massive numbers of Mexican immigrants left their native country to come to the United States in search of employment. This influx of immigrants led to the implementation of programs such as the Gatekeeper which attempted to prevent illegal immigration. President Bill Clinton, was instrumental in developing this program (Romero, 2008).

In 1994, in an attempt to save the state money, Californians passed Proposition 187. The main objective of the people who proposed this proposition was to control illegal immigration. This proposition denied public services, such as welfare benefits and Medicaid, to undocumented people. Additionally, Proposition 187 required that public agencies report any person that they suspected to be undocumented to immigration authorities. This proposition passed by a narrow margin with 58.8% of the vote and there were many on both sides of the political fence who opposed it. This was immediately challenged in the court system and was subsequently ruled as unconstitutional (Lennon, 1998).

In 1996, the Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act was implemented. With this act, undocumented people who enter the United States several times and are caught can face felony charges (Romo, 2009). As a result, there was an increased fear among immigrants who now faced jail time rather than simply just being deported. Additionally, crossing the border became more expensive and more dangerous because smugglers were force to take longer and more treacherous smuggling routes in order to avoid border patrol officers (Fanestil, 2008).
Other policies that have contributed to the issue of immigration have been created by law makers and high powered politicians who have attempted to make it harder for undocumented immigrants to utilize social services and to become legalized. In 1997, millions of undocumented Mexican immigrants lost their welfare benefits. Many of these immigrants included children, the poor, the elderly and the disabled. As a result, many Mexican people who left their country because of poverty were now facing harsher conditions here in the United States because of the stronger Welfare policies and immigration laws.

Another strategy that was created to prevent illegal immigration was the building of a wall along the United States and Mexico border. In 2006, the United States Congress approved the building of a 700 mile wall between Mexico and the United States (Romero, 2008). The main purposes of this project were to prevent illegal immigration, to fight organized drug and human trafficking and to deter potential terrorist from coming to the United States (Romero).

Throughout history Mexican migrant farm workers have come to the United States in search of a better future. While there are many opportunities here in the United States for them, there are also many obstacles. Since the 60’s, immigration laws have placed more and more restrictions on immigrants access to social services and other services, and have attempted to curtail the migration of immigrants into the U.S. This has created a hostile environment which impacts Mexican migrant workers in many aspects of their lives. In order to see how these laws and programs have impacted migrant farm workers, this researcher will examine the impacts of these
programs using the ecological perspective (Green, 2008)

*Using the Ecological Perspective to Explore the Lives of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers*

The ecological perspective looks at how people interact with their environment and how these interactions affect them. Individuals are in a constant transaction “with their physical, social, political, and economic environment, all which occurs within a dynamic cultural context” (Barranti, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the ecological perspective looks at the goodness of fit (Greene, 2008). The goodness of fit occurs when there is a transaction between the adapting individual and a nurturing environment. For this to occur there needs to be adequate resources so that the individual can meet his life demands. Applying this perspective to this study of migrant workers, this study examines if their demands outweigh their resources and if this then creates distress in their lives. In order to explore if migrant farm workers have a goodness of fit in the environment in which they live the biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment and health services are going to be examined. This model of exploration is depicted in Figure 1 below. By using the biopsychosocial dimensions, the subjective life experiences of migrant farm workers are explored in order to see if they have available resources and to gain a better understanding of nature of the fit between the migrant worker and his or her ecological context. Additionally, this study will explore the socio-economic pressures such as, the ability to provide for their family, to send their children to school and to live in a clean and a safe home that migrant farm workers experience within their environment.
Understanding how these critical dimensions and aspects affect the lives of individuals will enable practitioners to better understand the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers.

Figure 1

*Goodness of fit model for Mexican immigrant migrant farmworkers*

In the following sections, the ecological context of life in Mexico is presented as is the ecological context of life in the United States. More specifically, the
dimensions of housing, employment and healthcare are discussed as a way of capturing the quality of the person and environment fit.

An Overview of the Living Conditions in Mexico

The degree of poverty is severe in Mexico and 47.4% of the Mexican people live below the poverty line. As a result, 18.8% of the Mexican people do not have enough food to feed their families (Consejo Nacional de Evaluacion de la Politica de Desarrollo, 2009). Additionally, many Mexican people live without basic necessities such as running water, electricity, and effective sewage systems, etc. Twenty percent of the Mexican people do not have sufficient income to cover their basic needs and the poor people of Mexico do not have access to services such as, education and health care (World Bank, 2004). Often times in areas where there is employment, the housing close to these areas consist of make shift housing. Such housing may be constructed with cardboard, pieces of wood and a few nails. There is very rarely electricity and running water is non-existent. There are no sewage systems and there is no garbage pick-up in these informal neighborhoods. The severity of overall poverty is the single most important factor that drives Mexican immigrants cross the border looking for better futures for their families.

Housing in Mexico

There is a high demand for housing in Mexico; however, there are not enough homes for all Mexican people and the Mexican population is growing. As a consequence, in the next few years there will be a need for an additional 802,775 new homes to accommodate this increase in population (Centro de Investigacion y
Documentacion de la Casa (CIDOC) and Sociedad Hipotecaria Federal, 2005). Some of the housing options that are available to the Mexican people are developer-built housing which requires a bank loan, self-built housing and rentals.

According to SOFTEC (Centro de Investigacion y Documentacion de la Casa (CIDOC) and Sociedad Hipotecaria Federal, 2005), about 50% of the homes in Mexico are developer-built. Those who can afford these homes usually live in urban areas where the income is higher than for those living in rural areas. People who qualify for these homes have to have well paying secure jobs, and it helps to have insurance from organizations such as Insituto Mexicano Del Seguro Social (IMSS). This is a type of insurance provided through an employer which makes it easier for employees to qualify for a bank loan. These bank loans are often 20 year loans with interest and the loans themselves can take years to be approved. Even so, for those living in poverty, home ownership is completely out of reach. For example, the average cost of single dwelling home is $39,000 dollars (Lyons, 2004).

Many Mexicans live in homes that they build themselves with the help of family members and neighbors. While these homes are being built, the families live on the same lot in temporary homes made out of pieces of wood, cardboard, sheets of tin, and other scraps. These homes are gradually built and this process can take place over the span of several years. According to Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografia, INEGI’s, 51% of the homes in Mexico are self-built (Centro de Investigacion y Documentacion de la Casa (CIDOC) and Sociedad Hipotecaria Federal, 2005). One of the major reasons why Mexicans choose to build their own homes is because it is
dramatically less expensive. Additionally, Mexican people do not have to wait years to get a mortgage loan and they do not have to pay high interest rates. Another housing option available to Mexican people is to rent. According to the National Household Income Survey (Centro de Investigacion y Documentacion de la Casa (CIDOC) and Sociedad Hipotecaria Federal, 2005), 13.2% of the Mexican people live in rental homes. Of those who do live in rental homes, 70% have a low or a median income which ranges from $35,868 to $37,752 pesos or about $5,837 to $6,143 U.S. dollars (Mexico Average Salaries & Expenditures, 2008). Many of these rental homes are only available in larger Mexican cities. Additionally, renting is not always profitable for the home owners, and many times the rentals are in bad condition. Furthermore, there are often not enough rentals to support the demand.

*Employment in Mexico*

The employment rate in Mexico is very low (Romero, 2008). As previously mentioned, there are not enough jobs for all Mexican people and those that have jobs are paid minimally. The Mexican minimum wage is 55 pesos, about $4 U.S. dollars. This is not enough to provide adequate housing and food. For example, in Mexico a kilo of meat cost 80 pesos; however, a Mexican worker is only paid 55 pesos for a whole day of work. (Beaubien, 2010). The Mexican industries that employ a large number of workers are the mining and tourist industries (Moreno, 2003). However, working conditions within the mining industry are high risk and these facilities are only located in certain areas of Mexico. In addition, the tourist industry has been negatively impacted by factors such as natural disasters, drug cartel violence, and
swine flu. Other industries that the Mexican people work in such as animal raising, farming and factory work are low wage or have been affected by policies like NAFTA (Lee, 2008). These jobs do not help the Mexican people *salir adelante* (do well for themselves) (Lee, 2008, p. 2).

NAFTA has had a negative effect on employment in Mexico and this negative effect has been felt most by the small rural farmers (Romero, 2008). Two million rural farmers have been displaced from their lands which have contributed to a higher unemployment rate in Mexico. Additionally, NAFTA has created an environment where small farmers have had to convert their agricultural products from food to illegal drugs to sell to drug cartels in order to make a living. NAFTA is making criminals out of the people who used to feed the Mexican people (Romero, 2008). Romero (2008) reports that one of the major agriculture products in Mexico prior to NAFTA was corn which was grown by most Mexican farmers. After the implementation of NAFTA it was less expensive to buy the corn from the United States than to grow and harvest in Mexico. As a result, the cost of growing and maintaining corn as an agricultural product was too great and many Mexican farmers were forced to stop raising corn as a source of income (Romero, 2008).

*Health Problems in Mexico*

Mexican people face many health problems, such as heart problems, diabetes, liver problems and obesity. Seven percent of the Mexican people have type-2 diabetes and in 2009, the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS) (The Mexican Institute of Social Security) reported that 21,632 Mexican people died because of diabetes
complications (IMSS, 2009). The IMSS also reported that 68.6% of the Mexican population is considered overweight and Mexican children are considered to be the most overweight worldwide, and Mexican adults are the second most overweight population worldwide (IMSS Press Release, 2010, para 1)). Additionally, there is a high number of elderly people that have different health problems such as heart and liver problems (Romero, 2008). In 2009, the IMSS reported that 75,874 people between the ages of 60+ died because of heart problems, diabetes, liver problems, etc. While these health problems also affect populations in the United States, Mexican migrant farm workers are faced with additional health risks in the United States due to their working conditions and their surrounding environment.

Health Services in Mexico

There are not enough health services for the Mexican people and the health services that the country has, many times, are expensive (Romero, 2008). Even though a doctor visit only cost around 200 to 300 pesos ($25 dollars) in Mexico, this is four days of work that many times Mexican people cannot afford to pay. To help those who could not afford health care in 2006, President Vicente Fox, gave to 20 million Mexican people free health insurance (Romero, 2008). This insurance was targeted especially for those people who had chronic or terminal illnesses. Only five Mexican states have Universal Insurance for people living within those states; however, there is still the need for more programs that can help all Mexican people, especially the elderly who many times can not afford the high cost of healthcare (Romero).
An Overview of the Living Conditions in the United States

Mexican migrant farm workers cross the Mexican border looking for better opportunities; however, 52% of them find themselves living in deficient or overcrowded housing (Holden, 2001). Additionally, they find themselves working in jobs that pay below the minimal wage and in dangerous jobs that contribute to health problems such as asthma and cancer (Holden). Furthermore, due to family poverty, the average age that a migrant child starts working in the fields is four years old (Barranti, 2005). Even though most migrant farm workers live below the poverty line they still do not qualify for social programs such as Medicaid and as a result, many times they face many challenges to get health care for themselves and their offspring (Romero, 2008).

Housing in the United States

Substandard housing is very common among migrant farm workers who live and work in the United States (Burch & Harry, 2004). In addition, motor homes, cars, tents, garages, apartments and trailers are some examples of housing where migrant farm workers live (Barranti, 2005). Many times this housing lacks adequate sanitation and working appliances. Under these conditions, migrant farm workers cannot cook a proper meal, take a shower, wash their clothes, drink clean water and store their food safely. As a result of living in deficient sanitation conditions, Mexican migrant farm workers are at a higher risk of developing tuberculosis and parasitic diseases (Holden, 2001). Additionally, this puts them at a higher risk of developing hepatitis and gastroenteritis diseases (Holden). Broken and inadequate appliances are not the only
problems that migrant farm workers have to contend with. Many of the substandard houses that migrant farm workers live in, have broken windows and peeled paint which can contribute to health problems (Holden, 2001). The houses can also have foundation damage, sagging roofs and/or holes in the roofs and walls (Barranti, 2005). Sometimes these substandard houses also lack working toilets and running water (Hovey & Magana, 2002). Furthermore, many times the migrant farm workers must live near the fields where they work. This puts them and their families at a higher risk of exposure to chemicals, such as pesticides or other bio-chemical hazards which adds to their health problems (Barranti, 2005).

Overcrowded housing is common among migrant farm workers and a study by The Housing Assistance Council, found that 52% of migrant farm workers live in overcrowded conditions (Barranti, 2005). One of the major contributors leading to deficient and overcrowded living conditions for migrant farm workers is a lack of economic resources (Larson, 2001). A study by Larson (2001) also found that migrant farm workers believe that it is really difficult to live in a house with a large number of people. However, many migrant farm workers are low income and feel a need to share the cost of rent, due to their “inability to afford even the least costly rent” (Barranti, 2005). Another reason why they choose to live this way is because many times they have to send money back to their families in Mexico. Holden (2001) explains that 61% of migrant farm workers are married, but only 16% of them migrate with their wives. This means that many of them have to pay their rent and send money back to their home base-household.
Employment in the United States

Many Mexican migrant farm workers are responsible for bringing fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products to the tables of the American people, and yet migrant farm workers are one of the lowest paid workers in the United States (Magana, 2002). Mexican migrant farm workers are underpaid for the work that they do (Hovey, 2001) and “in California, farm workers help sustain the states’ 27 billion dollar ‘agriculture industry’” (Burch & Harry, 2004, p.559). However, the average annual income of migrant farm workers is only between $6,000 to $7,500 a year (Barranti, 2005; Hovey & Magana, 2002). This makes them one of the most economically deprived groups in the United States.

Migrant farm workers working conditions are among the most hazardous in the United States. They work in the fields and often times even basic necessities are not provided for them. For example, bathroom facilities and drinkable water may not be readily available (National Center for Farmworkers Health, Inc. [NCFH]). Additionally, they work in environments where they are exposed to pesticides that can affect their health and the health of their families. Furthermore, the agricultural industry often requires that workers use heavy equipment and machinery and training is seldom provided to migrant farm workers. This can lead to accidents and injuries, and health services are often not available when this happens. There are groups that are aware of this situation and are fighting to improve working conditions for migrant farm workers. The United Farm Workers Union, an advocate group form to help
protect the rights of migrant farm workers, argues that farm workers are treated unfairly because they are one of the lowest paid groups and because they work under the worst conditions (Burch & Harry, 2004).

The Health Problems of Migrant Farm Workers

Mexican migrant farm workers face many health problems, physical and mental, due to their employment in the United States. These workers are at high risk of developing health problems because they are prone to be exposed to chemicals and to experience harsh working conditions (Burch & Harry, 2004; Larson, 2001). Often the work that they perform involves heavy lifting and working in comfortable body positions. This combined with the repetitive work that they do, puts them at a higher risk of developing musculoskeletal injuries. Farm workers are also at higher risk of experiencing traumatic injuries such as cuts, amputations and falls. Additionally, farm workers work long and stressful days, and many times work with equipment that they have never been trained to operate (Larson, 2001). All of the above combined with the exposure to chemicals, puts them at higher risk for developing health problems such as cancer, eye problems and respiratory problems (Larson, 2001).

Cancer is common among migrant farm workers who are exposed to chemicals that are known to cause brain tumors, breast cancer, leukemia and lymphoma in agricultural communities (Larson, 2001). Migrant farm workers are also at a higher risk of developing skin cancer because they work long hours under the sun (Larson).

Eye problems are another health problem that migrant farm workers face (Larson, 2001). Workers have a higher risk of developing eye problems because they
work around dust, chemicals and pollens that are known to cause injuries to the eyes. Other eye problems such as abrasions, are caused by tree branches and agriculture equipment. Untreated eye injuries can lead to serious health problems (Larson, 2001).

As a result of their constant exposure to chemicals, pollen, dust and mold migrant farm workers many times have respiratory problems. While working, farm workers often must be in close contact with chemicals which they inhale causing them to have respiratory problems, such as asthma, bronchitis and allergies (Larson, 2001).

Mental health problems are another concern of Mexican migrant farm workers because of the difficult lifestyle that they are face with- in the United States. Migrant Farm workers are at higher risk of having anxiety and depression because of poor living conditions and because of the stressors associated with their lifestyle (Hovey, 2001). Stressors such as, difficult physical labor, language barriers, emotional isolation, being away from family and long workdays contribute to anxiety and depression among Mexican migrant farm workers (Hovey). Some other factors that contribute to psychological distress are physical illness and prolonged stress. Furthermore, middle age migrant farm workers (40 to 59 years) have a higher risk than younger workers of experiencing psychological distress because their occupation and life vulnerabilities start to diminish their physical health and function capacities (Hovey, 2001).

Health Services

Farming work is considered one of the most hazardous jobs in the United States and there are not enough health services available to Mexican migrant farm
workers (Barranti, 2005). As a result, they are more likely to develop health problems or go untreated for the health problems that they have. Migrant farm workers are also less likely to get health services because they are mobile and one of the poorest populations in the United States. They earn 100% below the poverty rate (Barranti, 2005). This means that they can qualify for Medicaid services; however, only 20% of them apply for Medicaid. One of the reasons why this number is so low is because of the confusion created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (Arendale, 2001). The Act specifies that only legal residents and U.S. citizens can qualify for Medicare services. Therefore, many immigrants who are eligible believe that they are ineligible to qualify for public funded health care and as a result, many are discouraged from applying for Medicaid. Often times those who will qualify will not apply for Medicaid because of their high mobility which prevents them from enrolling in these programs. Another reason why migrant farm workers are ineligible to get Medicaid is because of their undocumented legal status which excludes them from getting benefits from this program (Arendale, 2001). There is a need for programs that take into consideration that migrant farm workers are mobile and undocumented, and as a result they need programs that can help them overcome barriers to access to health services.

**Migrant Health Centers**

Programs such as the National Center for Farmworkers Health, Inc. and the Migrant Health Centers have responded to the need for health care that reaches migrant farmworkers. The organizations have 500 centers throughout the United
States where they provide health services to migrant farm workers and their families. The National Center for Farmworkers Health, Inc. was founded in 1975. Their main mission is to improve the health status of migrant farm workers. They provide services to hundreds of migrant farm workers; however, because of their capacity and the lack of funding they can only serve 20% of the migrant farm workers in the United States (National Center for Farmworkers Health, Inc.).

The Migrant Health Centers also provide health services to Mexican migrant farm workers. These centers provide preventive and primary health care to low income migrant workers who work on the agriculture industry. Because of their limited income many times farm workers go without health care for this reason the Migrant health centers provide it at a sliding fee regardless of their immigration status in the United States. In order for them to qualify for this health services they had to be working for the previous 24 months in agriculture. In 2007, approximately 826,000 migrant farm workers receive health services in the migrant health centers (Farmworker Justice).

The Differences Between the United States and Mexico in the Lives of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers

In Mexico there are not enough jobs for all Mexican people and as a result, they migrate to the United States where they are able to find jobs in the agricultural and other industries. In the United States, Mexican immigrants earn four times more than what they earn in Mexico (Romo, 2009). However, in the United States migrant farm workers still face challenges finding proper housing. Many times migrant farm workers
workers must live in deficient and overcrowded housing. Similarly, in Mexico people face challenges finding housing because there is a housing shortage. It is especially hard for Mexicans to find housing because many times they cannot afford the high cost of rent or a mortgage. In addition to the high unemployment rate in Mexico, those who are employed are paid very low wages which makes it difficult for them to cover their most basic needs such as food, housing and healthcare (National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.). As a result they migrate to the United States, where they find employment in factories, hotels and primarily in the agricultural industry.

It is within the agricultural industry that Mexican migrant farm workers face some of the worst working conditions, are paid poorly and are often exploited (Barranti, 2005). Additionally, environmental exposures Mexican migrant farm workers face put them at risk to develop health problems such as cancer, eye problems and respiratory illnesses (Romo, 2009). This is further complicated by the fact that access to health services is limited for migrant farm workers for a variety of reasons such as their high mobility, their inability to qualify for Medicare programs and a lack of healthcare resources (Romo). In Mexico, the most common health problems the population faces are related to obesity, heart problems and diabetes. While some Mexican states provide universal health insurance, there are still many people without universal health coverage who cannot afford the cost of healthcare. When migrant farm workers come to work in the United States they face additional health problems due to their work environment. Migrant farm workers face many challenges in their home country and as a result, they migrate to the United States where they are
confronted different challenges, but they earn more and for this reason they are willing
to take risks to try and make a better life.

Summary

Since the 1880’s, Mexican migrant farm workers have migrated to the United
States in search of opportunity to improve their lives. In the last decades, this has
become harder because of tougher immigration laws. This chapter explores the life
contexts of Mexican migrant farm workers using an Ecological Perspective. The
biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment, healthcare and health serves
were used to explore the goodness of fit of migrant farm workers in their ecological
context. These biopsychosocial dimensions of life experiences were compared by
looking at some similarities and differences between Mexicans living in Mexico and
living as immigrants in the United States.

In Chapter Three the research methodology used to carry out the study is fully
described and the main research questions are explained. The research design and the
instrumentation are described and a data analyses details participant particulars.
Finally, the protection of human rights as they relate to the participants of this study,
are addressed.
Chapter 3

METHODS

This study will utilize secondary data from 29 interviews and demographic data from the entire sample of 38 Mexican migrant farm workers who participated in the original study conducted by previous researchers Chrys Ramirez Barranti, Guillermo Gonzalez-Lopez, and Norma Lara-Flores. Multiple choice and open-ended questions were asked to (38) participants; however, only (29) participants completed both sections. A letter granting permission to this researcher to use the transcripts of the 29 interviews for analysis is in Appendix A. The transcripts have been analyzed to explore the socio-cultural, economic, health and mental health issues among Mexican migrant farm workers as they relate to migration. This chapter describes the research design, research questions and interview process used in this study.

Research Questions

The primary research question that guides this exploratory study is: What are the subjective life experiences of the migration decision for Mexican immigrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Sonoma and Yolo counties, California. Further, questions included:

• What are Mexican migrant farm workers’ perceptions of such biopsychosocial dimensions of their ecological contexts as, living conditions, employment, family relationships, and education in the United States in contrast with what they left behind in Mexico.
• How do Mexican migrant farm workers view their contributions to the economies of both the United States and Mexico, and what benefits they receive in return?

• Given their experiences would they recommend migration to the U.S. to family and friends living in Mexico?

*Research Design*

The research design of the original study was exploratory. It was an exploratory study because there is little information that explores why Mexican migrant farm workers migrate to the United States and what individual decision process they used to make this decision to leave Mexico to come to this country. Open-ended questions were asked to allow the researchers to document the perspectives of the participants while also giving them voice so greater understanding of the subjective experiences could be shared.

*Sampling Procedures*

The total sampling size consisted of 38 Mexican immigrant farm workers living in Sonoma, Yolo, Sacramento and Napa counties. The requirements were that they had to be employed as migrant farm workers, migrated from Mexico and be 18 years of age and older. A convenience and purposive sampling methodology was used. In particular, the snowball sampling method was employed to recruit participants in the original study. Only 29 participants completed both sections of the study and therefore there is interview data for only 29 of the 38 study participants.
Instrumentation

This is a secondary analysis of data collected from 29 interviews of Mexican migrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Yolo and Sonoma counties. Eighty-one transcript pages of interviews of Mexican migrant farm workers were analyzed to identify the socio-cultural, economic, health and mental health issues among Mexican migrant farm workers in Sacramento, Napa, Yolo and Sonoma counties. Fourteen open-ended questions were asked to see what are the subjective experiences of migration of Mexican migrant farm workers. The questions are included in Appendix B. Data available from the demographic questions for all 38 participants is reported.

Data Collection

This study uses secondary data collected from the 38 participants of the original study who were recruited as a convenience sample using the snowball sampling method. The only requirements were that participants were employed in migrant farm work, immigrated from Mexico and that they were 18 years of age and older. The participants were recruited in the Northern California counties of Sacramento, Yolo, Sonoma, and Napa. A team of 8 bilingual interviewers were trained to use the interview guide by the original researchers of the study. In the original study, all interviews were one-to-one and were audio-taped and transcribed in Spanish. Interviews were conducted in safe places chosen by the participants such as participants’ homes and church or agency meeting rooms.

The research interviewers gave consent forms to participants. The consent forms were available in both Spanish and English. Each participant gave their consent
to be part of the study and the researchers answered any questions and concerns that
the participants had. Participants received a copy of the consent letter and a list of
resources in their communities. The option to participate in either Spanish or English
was offered to all participants, however all participants chose to participate in Spanish.
The researchers were completely fluent in the Spanish language. Of the 38
participants, only 29 agreed to have their interviews audio-taped.

Data Analysis

Demographic data for all 38 participants was analyzed using descriptive
statistics. Transcripts of 29 interviews conducted with Mexican Migrant farm workers
in Sacramento, Yolo, Sonoma and Napa counties were analyzed using content
analysis. All 29 interviews were audio-tape and then transcribed by the original study
authors who are native Spanish speakers. This researcher then transcribed the Spanish
transcripts into English. Content analysis of the transcripts using the theoretical coding
method as developed by Auerbach and Silvertstein (2003) provided the methodology for
organizing the interview data and identifying patterns of themes or concepts that
emerged. Emergent themes were identified to understand the subjective life
experiences of the Mexican immigrant farm workers in northern California, and
whether or not they believe their decision to migrate was the right choice. The
transcripts were examined fully with the research questions and biopschosocial
domains in mind. Significant text that was connected to the research questions,
experiences of migration and dimensions of ecological context were identified and
selected out of the transcripts. Repeated emergent themes in each participant’s transcripts were identified and organized into large categories.

Protection of Human Rights

A Protection of Human Subject application form to use secondary data was submitted and approved by the Division of Social Work Human Subject Review Committee, California State University Sacramento, confirmation number: 09-10-005. This study exclusively used secondary data and was deemed to be exempt. Permission has been granted by the researchers who originally gathered the interview data for this researcher to use the data (see Appendix A). The CSUS University Committee approved the original research project from which this secondary data comes for the Protection of Human Subjects, confirmation numbers: 04-05-123.

This researcher protected confidentiality of the participants in the following manner. All personally identifying information has been removed from the transcripts with the exception of age, gender, occupation, marital status and race. This researcher kept all data in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home.

Summary

The original researchers interviewed 38 Mexican migrant farm workers to study their subjective experiences of migration and their decision process to migrate to leave Mexico and come to the United States. The interviews were conducted in Sonoma, Yolo, Sacramento and Napa counties. This researcher used secondary data from the open-ended questions for the 29 participants who agree to be audio-taped. All transcripts were translated from the original Spanish to facilitate data analysis.
Auerbach and Silverstein’s (2003) methodology for analyzing qualitative data was used to identify emergent themes. Chapter 4 describes the results and has the results of the qualitative data analysis.
Chapter 4

THE RESULTS

The demographic information in this study represents 38 participants who were originally interviewed by previous researchers. Therefore analysis for this study is conducted on secondary data. While there is demographic data for the 38 participants, only 29 participants completed all aspects of the interview process. The transcripts of the 29 interviews conducted with Mexican Migrant farm workers in Sacramento, Yolo, Sonoma and Napa counties were analyzed by this researcher using content analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). All 29 original interviews were audio-tape and then transcribed by the original study authors who are native Spanish speakers. This researcher then transcribed the Spanish transcripts into English. Content analysis of the transcripts using the theoretical coding method as developed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) provided the methodology for organizing the interview data and identifying patterns of themes or concepts that emerged. Emergent themes were identified to understand the subjective life experiences of the Mexican immigrant farm workers in northern California, and whether or not they believed their decision to migrate was the right choice. The transcripts were examined fully with the research questions and biopschosocial domains in mind. Significant text that was connected to the research questions, experiences of migration and dimensions of ecological context were identified and selected out of the transcripts. Repeated emergent themes in each participant’s transcripts were identified and organized into main categories.
Descriptive Results

The participants in this study were all Mexican migrant farm workers who lived and worked in Sacramento, Yolo, Sonoma and Napa counties. A convenience and purposive sampling methodology was used. In particular, the snowball sampling method was originally employed to recruit participants. A total of 38 participates completed the multiple choice and demographic portion of this study. However, only 29 completed the study in its entirety including multiple choice questions and open ended questions. A total of 24 males and 14 females between the ages of 19 and 76 years of age, with an average age of 42 years old, participated in the study. There were 17 participants that reported that they have been working in the United States between 6 to 15 years and the other 20 participants have work between 1 to 55 years in the United States (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Years Lived in the U.S.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1-5 yrs:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 yrs:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 yrs:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 yrs:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 yrs:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The education level of the participants ranged between a total of 0 to 13 years with the average being 5 years. Thirty two of the participants reported that they know how to read and write Spanish and 6 reported that they cannot read and write. Eleven of the participants migrated by themselves to the United States and 27 migrated with a friend or a family member (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrated with Someone</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alone:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanied:</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family:</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thirty-three reported that they knew someone in the United States and 5 reported that they did not know someone before moving to the United States. The majority (18) of the participants reported that they worked in agriculture in Mexico prior to coming to the United States. In the United States, 28 of the participants reported earning $20,000 or below and 14 of the 28 earned between $5,000 to $10,000 annually (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

*Annual Income of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5,000 or less</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5001-$10,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,001-$15,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,002-$20,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,001 or more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty-six point nine percent of the participants reported that they migrated to the United States because of poverty in Mexico (see Table 4.4). Thirty one point six percent reported that they migrated because they wanted a better future for themselves. Other reasons why Mexican migrant farm workers reported that they come to the
United States were that they wanted a better future for their children, financial necessity, they had friends in the United States and their parents migrated first.

Table 4.4

Reason for Migrating to U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because of Poverty</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a Better Future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Future for My Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Necessity and I have Friends Here</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Parents Migrated Here</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Using the data coding methods of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), this researcher first identified the relevant text in relation to each of the major interview question areas that explored the basic concerns of the study. Relevant text was then analyzed for repeating ideas. Repeating ideas were then grouped into what Auerbach and Silverstein define as level one text-based categories that reflect the generalized meaning of the repeating ideas. These level one text-based categories were then analyzed for larger emergent themes.

Qualitative results are organized here according the biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment and health services. Each of the relevant interview questions are identified and the results of the qualitative analysis follows.
Dimension of Work

This dimension of work was explored using the following question: Where can People Find Better Working Conditions in Mexico Or the United States? Two emergent themes were identified.

Emergent Theme One: Preference for working in the United States. Of the participants, 20 or 68.9% believed that they have better working conditions in the United States. Their reasons ranged from having a job here, getting paid better wages, that living in the United States is like living in the glory, and that living in Mexico is a battle every day. These themes and the related level one text based categories and repeating ideas are described in Tables 4.4 below. Repeating ideas include: there are jobs in the United States, they pay me better wages, living in the United States is like living in the glory and living in Mexico is a everyday battle.

Table 4.5

Emergent Theme One: Preference for Working in the United States,
Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Preference Working in the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. There are Jobs in The United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.-“I have a better job than in Mexico.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“Here in the United States, here I work!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.-“Here because there are more jobs here…you are going to work more here.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.-“Here because there is more work.”

5.-“Everyone works“.

6.-“There are more job opportunities than in Mexico.”

II.-They Pay Me Better Wages

1.-“In the United States I get paid better wages and everyone works.”

2.-“People earn more and work less.”

3.-“Here because I can earn more.”

4.-“They pay me better wages.”

5.-“Wages are higher.”

6.-“Working conditions are better here in the United States because of the working wages and we have more money than in Mexico.”

III.-Living Here is Like Living in The Glory (i.e. Heaven).

1.-“People here have a higher possibility of advancing in everything.”

2.-“They consider me better and give me opportunity to learn about everything.”

3.-“As a woman I have more opportunities.”

4.-“Here working is better and when people get into older age they are not forgotten.”

IV.-Life in Mexico is a Battle For Survival
1.-“In Mexico we work little” therefore it is hard to provide basic necessities for my family.

2.-In the United States I get tools and equipment to work with. “In Mexico they only give us work. What equipment do they give us?”

3.-“In Mexico, I had my own harvest of corn, wheat and my father had cows, like 60 cows… and even with those things I still did not have enough to live on.”

Emergent Theme Two: Preference for working in Mexico. There were 31% (9) of the participants who believed that in Mexico they had better working conditions. Some of the reasons for this are that they felt that they have more freedom in their jobs, they worked less and they did not face discrimination. The level one text based categories include: I feel more free, the working environment is more relaxed and hardships about working in the United States agricultural fields. These and related repeated ideas are identified here in Table 4.5.

Table 4.6

Emergent Theme Two: Preference for Working in Mexico

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.-I Felt More Free

1.- “I have not been discriminated. I felt more free. I go to my house to eat and then I go back to work later.”
2.-“At any hour that we wanted we could go to break or to lunch.”
3.-“In Mexico I am a stay home mom and I am my own boss.”
4.-“In Mexico because people are not discriminated against.”

II.- The Working Environment is More Relaxed

1.-“I work less hours and I have not been discriminated against.”
2.-“In Mexico we had better working conditions and no one made us work more.”
3.- In Mexico we had better working conditions because [in the United States] the mayordomos (the bosses) worry more about the products than about the employees.

III.- The Hardships About Working in the United States Agricultural Fields

1.-“I work in the harvest of the tomatoes, it was really hard, but we are used to it.”
2.-“Right now you can work slower, but it is still hard work.”
3.-“Here people work hard. We have to do it because of necessity.”
4.-“We work longer hours, the work is harder, we work under the hot son, and in the winter it is very cold.”

**Dimension of Living Conditions**

This dimension of living conditions was explored using the following question:

*Comparing your living conditions in the United States and those in Mexico, where do*
you think are better?. Four emergent themes were identified from the analysis of the relevant text.

**Emergent Theme One: Better living conditions in the United States:** There were 24% of the participants that reported that they believed that in the United States they have better living conditions than in Mexico. They argued that in the United States they have more comforts, and that everything is cleaner and healthier. These themes and the related level one text based categories and repeating ideas are described in Tables 4.7, 4.25 below.

Table 4.7

**Emergent Theme One: Preference for Living in the United States**

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.-Here We Have More Things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-I have “a good bed, a good sofa, a good television to see.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-I have an “air conditioner.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II.-Here Everything is Cleaner and Healthier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“Here there are air and heating systems and it is more hygienic than in Mexico. In Mexico people live more rural lives.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emergent Theme Two: Preference For Living in Mexico:** There were 31% (9) participants who felt that in Mexico they had better living conditions than in the United States. They felt that in Mexico they live a more peaceful life and most people
own their own home. The level one text based categories include: Life in Mexico is more tranquil, in Mexico most people own their own homes and I am happier in my own country (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

*Emergent Theme Two: Preference for Living in Mexico*

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II.-Life in Mexico is More Tranquil.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“In Mexico the living conditions are better, over there I feel free, and I do not have a lot of worries.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“I feel more relaxed in my home and I feel that my home is in Mexico.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.-In Mexico Most People Have Their Own Homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.-“I live more freely in Mexico, here I pay rent. In Mexico I do not have to pay rent” because I own my house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“In Mexico I have my own house and I do not have to pay rent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.-“In my house we had everything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.-“I have my own room and I do not have to sleep in a room with four other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.-I Am Happier in My Own Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.-“Even the air that I breath is better.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Theme Three. It is worth it to migrate to the United States?

Participants felt a dilemma when asked if it was worth it to migrate to the United States. They felt that in the United States they have more comforts; however, they have to pay more for rent every month (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9

Emergent Theme Three: Is it Worth It to Migrate to the United States?

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.- The Cost of Rent vs. Comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.- Here when they rent you an apartment they rent it to you with everything [a freezer, stove, heating and air conditioner]. However, you pay rent every month.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.- “In the U.S. the living conditions are better because of comforts. However, when we start talking about prices of homes, Mexico is better.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of housing is less expensive in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emergent Theme Four. Living in the United States and Mexico is the same.

Some of the participants reported that living in the United States in the same as living in Mexico. Participants felt that they have the same comforts in the United States and in Mexico (see Table 4.10).
Emergent Theme Four: Living in the United States and Mexico is the Same

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.- The Living Conditions in the United States and in Mexico are the Same.

1.- “I have the same comforts here and in Mexico.”

2.- “Housing is the same here and in Mexico, it has the same services, I do not miss anything, I feel the same here and over there.”

3.- “Everything else like furniture and appliances are the same here and in Mexico.”

Dimension of Health

This dimension of health was explored using the following question: How do you solve your health problems in Mexico and how do you solve them here in the United States? Three themes emerged from the relevant text analyzed for this dimension.

There were 44.8% (13) participants who argued that they get better health services in Mexico and 27.5% (8) who believe that they get better health services in the United States. However, 27.5% of the participants either did not answer the question, felt that there was no difference, or that there was some kind of trade off between the cost and the quality of health services.
Emergent Theme One: A Preference for the health system in the United States:

In the United States participants felt that they could be treated without the necessity of having insurance or cash and they were able to utilize Medicaid services. The level one based categories include: in the United States you have a better opportunity to be treated and you can apply for Medicaid (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Emergent Theme One: Preference for the Health System in the United States

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.-Here You Have the Opportunity to be Treated.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“With your work you pay insurance” and this makes it easier to get treated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“If you go to the hospital in the United States they have to treat you.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I.-In the United States they Treat Me Without the Necessity of Having Money.

| 1.-“In Mexico in order to go to the doctor you have to have money.” |  |
| 2.-“They cannot deny you health services because of your legal status.” |  |

II.-In the United States You can Apply for Medicaid.

| 1.-“I have been here so many years and because of this I qualified for Medicaid.” |  |
Emergent Theme Two: Preference for the health services in Mexico: Some of the arguments that participants used to explain their preference for health services in Mexico are that in Mexico they were able to be seen faster by the doctor, they could go to free public clinics, and there is no language barrier. The level three and theme two text based categories include: it is easier to see a doctor in Mexico, you see a doctor in a more timely fashion and you can go to public clinics (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Emergent Theme Two: Preference for the Health Services in Mexico

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. In Mexico It Is Easier to Go to the Doctor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“Because I speak the same language”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“There is El Seguro [public clinic] where I can go and get health services” for free or at a reduced cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.- “Even if I have a small amount of money I can go to some clinics where they will see me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.-“ It is easier to find a doctor but you have to pay.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.-In Mexico “I pay for the medical attention, but I believe that it is better.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. In Mexico We Can Be seen By the Doctor In a More Timely Fashion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-When I went to the doctor, he “saw us every time that we needed it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.-“In Mexico I could go to the doctor without making an
appointment, and here I have to make an appointment one month in
advance.”

III.-In Mexico You Can go to the Government Clinics

1.-The clinics will see you “even if you do not have insurance.”

2.-In these clinics “you pay less to see a doctor.”

Emergent Theme Three: Limitations of the health system in the United States:

Some limitations that migrant farm workers face within the health system in the
United States occur when they are undocumented which makes them ineligible to
qualify for government health programs. Additionally, they are often discriminated
against and health insurance can be difficult to obtain. The level three and theme threw
text based categories include: Undocumented immigrants can not apply for Medicaid
programs, immigrants that go to the emergency rooms are discriminate against and it
is hard to get insurance in the United States (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

Emergent Theme Three: Limitations of the Health System in the United States

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.-Undocumented Immigrants Can Not Applied for Medicaid

1.-“They cannot get health services.”

2.-“They are discriminated.”
II.- Immigrants that Go to The Emergency Room Are Discriminated

1.- In the Emergency room “[immigrants] have to wait for longer periods of times.”

2.- “[Immigrants] sometimes are send home without being treated.”

III.- The United States It Is Hard to Get Insurance As a Result You Do not Go to the Doctor

1.- “If you do not have a job that gives you insurance it is hard to get insure.”

2.- “It is to expensive to pay for you own insurance.”

3.- “In the United States you go to the hospital until you dying.”

4.- “You hold your pain.”

5.- “You use house remedies.”

*Dimension of the Quality of the Ecological Context*

The dimension of the quality of the ecological context was explored using the following questions: *Tell us what you think are the main problems that you have face as an immigrant living in the United States. What have you done to solve these problems?* Six emergent themes were identified.

Some of the problems that participants reported that they are having here in the United States were not been able to speak English, being undocumented, not being able to see family members in home country, crossing the border, discrimination and not having enough resources. The themes are discussed in greater detail below.
Emergent Theme One: The language barriers: There were 34.4% (10) of participants who reported that the main problem that they face in this country is the language barrier. They reported that because of this many times they are discriminated against. One participant explained, “discrimination is something that is never missing, even if you speak English. They will tell you not to speak Spanish.” Another participant reported that the biggest problem they have confronted in the United States was due to “the language [which] is the hardest one that I have had [to learn].” In order to overcome this problem, participants learn the language as best they can and use their children or friends as interpreters (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

Emergent Theme One: The Language Barriers

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.- Not Being Able to Speak English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“The language is the hardest [problem] that I have. In order to solve this problem I study English and I try to use it the most I can.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-The main problem that I face is “not being able to speak English.” In order to solve this problem “my friends help me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.-“When I came here I did not know English, now my children translate for me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.-The problem is the language after this everything is fine if you put your effort into it. In order to solve this problem I just try to “speak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Theme Two: Problems faced by undocumented immigrants: Another problem that immigrants face in the United States is their undocumented status. There were 37.9% (11) participants who reported that one of the problems they face in the United States is not having their legal papers which allows them to live in the United States legally. In order to solve this problem, some of them apply for their legal residency, get married to a U.S. citizen or run and hide (see Table 4.15).

Table 4.15

Emergent Theme Two: Problems Faced by Undocumented Immigrants
Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.- Living An Undocumented Life

1.-“I was going from one placed to another until I got my papers. Now I get paid more and I have more.”

2.-“The main problem is to live an undocumented life.”

3.-“I empathize with those who came illegally, I was also undocumented, until this day I empathize with them because they are in the bottom.”

4.-For me being undocumented means “[living] like a rat hiding here and running over there.”

5.-“I have not done anything because as an undocumented person in
Emergent Theme Three: The hardships of leaving family behind: One of the problems that many immigrants face when they come to the United States is that they leave behind their families in their home country. In order to compensate for this problem, immigrants write letters and call their family members (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16

Emergent Theme Three: The Hardships of Leaving Family Behind

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.- Leaving My Family Behind and not Been Able to See Them.

1.- Leaving My Family Behind and not Being Able to See Them.

I feel sadness for “leaving my father, my mother, my siblings, over there in Mexico. And to not see them for years. [In order to compensate for this] I wrote them letters and talk to them by phone.”

Emergent Theme Four: The hardships of crossing the border: Ten point three percent of the participants that reported one of the problems that they face in the
United States was crossing the border. In order to solve this problem, they worked hard to pay the people who brought them across the border (see Table 4.17).

Table 4.17

*Emergent Theme Four: The Hardships of Crossing the Border*

Level one Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.- Crossing the Border</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“The only problem was crossing the border, I work to pay everything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“Mainly we suffer the most when we cross the desert to get here.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Emergent Theme Five: Discrimination:* Another problem that Mexican immigrants face is discrimination. There were 17% (5) of the participants who reported that they were discriminated against because of the way that they look and for their undocumented status. The level one text based category and repeating ideas are identified below in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18

*Emergent Theme Five: Discrimination*

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

| I.- The Way That I Look Puts Me at a Higher Risk of Being Discriminated Against |

1. “One time I went to look for a job and a Mexican women did not treat me good only because of my physical appearance.”

2. One of the main problems that I face is “being discriminated against because of the way that I look and because of my skin color.”

3. “Even other Mexicans discriminate against us and do not help us.”

4. “They discriminate against you if you do not have papers.”

Emergent Theme Six: Not having enough resources. Participants reported that one of the obstacles that they face in the United States was the lack of resources. They reported that they feel sad and that sometimes they did not have what they needed (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19
Emergent Theme Six: Not Having Enough Resources
Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

1.- The Lack of Resources

1.- “We are sad because we do not have transportation, we have to depend on someone else.”

2.- I believe that there is a “lack of help” and that even other Mexicans sometimes do not want to help you.
**Thoughts about Migration**

This dimension, thoughts about migration, was explored using the following question: *Will you recommend to a friend or a family member living in Mexico to migrate to the United States?* Two themes emergent from the relevant text analyzed for this dimension.

**Emergent Theme One: Why should migrants come to the United States?:** Only 8 participants responded question number five, of those 62.5% (5) reported that they would recommend to a friend or a family member to come to the United States. Some of the reasons why include that they will live a better life here in the U.S., that there are more jobs, that there is the opportunity for a better future and that there is a better situation in the United States than in Mexico (see Table 4.20).

**Table 4.20**

**Emergent Theme One: Should Migrants Come to the United States?**

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.-They Should Come to Look for a Better Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“In the United States people live better.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“Looking at the [bad] situation in Mexico, it is worth it” to migrate to the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.-In the United States there are more employment opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Theme Two: Why should migrants stay in their home country? Some of the participants reported that migrating to the United States is not worth it. They argued that the United States economy is in a bad condition, that migrating illegally is hard and that leaving the country means leaving their family (see Table 4.21).

Table 4.21

Emergent Theme Two: Why Should Migrants Stay in Their Home Country?
Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.- Leaving my Family for a Dream of a Better Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“The reasons [that you should not come to the United States] are that we are separated from the family, [we] forget our traditions, we remember little about our past lives, we separate from the world we know in Mexico. What we had lived stays like a dream, your heart, your family, and your love, everything is lost.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-In the United States there is a bad situation right now economically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.-I believe that for “someone who is illegal it is difficult” to migrate to the United States.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Was it Worth It to Migrate to the United State?

The dimension of whether or not participants felt their migration to the U.S. was worth the sacrifice of leaving one’s home was explored using the following
question: *Tell us if you think that it has been worth it for you and your family to migrate to the United States?* Two themes emerged from the relevant text analyzed for this dimension.

_Emergent Theme One:_ Eighty two point seven percent (24) participants that reported that it was worth it to come to the United States. Some of the reasons why they believe this are that in the United States they have better living conditions, they earn more and their children have an opportunity for a better future than they do in Mexico (see Table 4.22).

Table 4.22

_Emergent Theme One: It Was Worth It to Migrate to the United States_

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.- In the United States We Earn More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.- We “at least earn more than in Mexico.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II.-Living Conditions are Better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“I live better here than in Mexico.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“I think that since we came here we live better.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III.-For a Better Future for my Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“For me [it was worth it], because I have my children studying [here], that is my only hope that one day, [my children will have a better future than me]. I am sure that if I were still in Mexico, because of the economy, they would not be studying.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Theme Two: Thirteen point eight percent (4) of the participants who reported that in some areas it was worth it to migrate to the United States, but in others, it was not worth it. They reported that it was worth it because in the United States they have more employment opportunities and because of this they are better off economically. However, they are not better off socially, psychologically and spiritually (see Table 4.23).

Table 4.23

Emergent Theme Two: The Dilemma of Migrating to the United States

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.-Why Should I Come and Why Should I Stay?

1.- If you are illegal in the United States and you do not have a drives license, the police can impound your car and you will not be able to get it back because of your undocumented status. “It was worth it [to come to the U.S.], it's hard to be here, you have to be careful.”

2.-I believe that “economically it was worth it, socially, psychologically and spiritually” it was not.

3.-In the United States you lose things that you had in your own country such as family, traditions and friends. However, here you have a better opportunity to get a job.
Where is Home?

Participants were asked about their experience of home. This dimension was explored using the following question: *When you think of home, do you think of Mexico or the United States?* Two themes emerged from the relevant text analyzed for this dimension.

**Emergent Theme One:** I consider Mexico my home: There were 44.8% (13) participants that reported that they consider their home to be in Mexico. Some of the reasons why they believe this are that in Mexico they have their families, they own their own homes and they feel more comfortable (see Table 4.24).

Table 4.24

**Emergent Theme One: I Consider Mexico My Home**

Level One Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.-Mexico is More Beautiful Because the People that We Love are There</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“I have the family over there.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II.-In Mexico I Feel More Comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.-“You feel that you do not have any stress, you feel good, it could be because it is your land, it could be also because you are with your family, you feel good, you are able to breath easier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.-“In Mexico, because we live in trust, and tranquility with the family, there is no racism, discrimination, in Mexico we are more humble,”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Theme Two: I consider the United States my home: There were 20% (6) participants that reported that consider the United States their home. These participants felt that because they have been here for so many years this was like home and that American people were good to them and this made them feel accepted (see Table 4.25).

Table 4.25

Emergent Theme Two: I Consider Mexico My Home

Level one Based Categories and Repeating Ideas

I.-Longevity in the United States

1.-“I think of the United States as home because I have so many years living here. I do not have a lot of things in Mexico and the house that I have is falling down.”

II.-Americans are More Accepting of Me

1.-“ The United States welcomed me and there were a lot of American people that were so good to me, that help me with what they could and that never discriminated against me.“

3.-In Mexico I own my house and in the United States I rent.
Summary

Over all the participants seem to have a dilemma about their subjective life experiences when reflecting on their lives in the United States verses their lives in Mexico. Participants overwhelming felt that they have better economical opportunities and opportunities for a better future in the United States. However, they felt that emotionally, spiritually and psychologically they were more fulfilled in Mexico. With regard to health services, participants believed that they received better health services in Mexico, but they felt that the quality of care was better in the United States. Many participants cited difficulties such as language barriers, discrimination and travel to the United States as substantial obstacles which impacted their views about their subjective life experiences, and whether or not they felt living in the United States was worth leaving their hometowns, their culture and their families. Likewise, such difficulties influenced whether or not they would recommend that family and friends migrate to the United States. Furthermore, the majority of the participants still considered Mexico to be home. Conclusions of the results of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND SUMMARY

There is an opportunity for social workers to become more culturally aware of the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers as they navigate their way through customs, obstacles that they face moving to the United States in order to provide better services for Mexican migrant farm workers. They leave behind economical difficulties in Mexico and exchange them for other challenges both economic and personal such as wage discrimination, legal difficulties and loneliness due to the lack of family support in the United States. This research will enable social workers to better contextualize the subjective life experiences of Mexican Migrant farm workers.

Chapter 1 provides the focus of the study, which is to examine the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers in Napa, Solano, Yolo and Sacramento counties. This is done by using the ecological perspective and by examining the biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment and health services. Chapter 2 provides a historic background about immigration and the laws that impact Mexican immigrants in the United States. Additionally, this researcher examines the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers in the United States and in Mexico, compares, and contrasts them using the biopsychosocial dimensions of housing, employment, and health services. Chapter 3 describes the research design, research questions and interview process used in this study. Chapter 4 summarizes the data from this project and shows that Migrant farm workers face a
dilemma of staying in Mexico where their families and friends are or migrating to the United States where they have more economical opportunities. This dilemma indicates a need for social workers to be more aware of the complexity of issues faced by this vulnerable population.

Results

Mexican migrant farm workers identified that in the United States they have better working conditions because they are able to get employment, and wages are higher whereas in Mexico employment opportunities are scarce and wages are low. However, while most participants were happy to be employed, they expressed dissatisfaction with the discrimination and longer work hours in the United States. Additionally, because the study uses secondary data this researcher was unable to determent if there was a correlation between income level and job satisfaction.

When people experience discrimination in their places of employment this can impact the way they interact within their jobs and the rest of their environment. Discrimination can make people feel socially isolated, overwhelmed, dissatisfied with their jobs and angry. Many Mexican migrant farm workers spend long hours working. Consequently, their jobs greatly impact the Goodness of Fit in their lives. Having to continuously face discrimination can lead to depression and anxiety. This in turn can lead to other physical health problems and affects all other aspects of their lives because everything is relative to the Goodness of Fit. People have to have a balance between resources and the demands that society expects of them. Discrimination and the subsequent resulting symptoms such as depression and anxiety can overload a
person’s resources which then takes away from other aspects of his life creating an imbalance. To help Mexican migrant farm workers overcome these obstacles, social workers can provide counseling to address depression and anxiety. Additionally, social workers can refer individuals to different agencies, church groups, support groups and other social organizations where Mexican migrant farm workers can receive help and interact with others who face similar challenges in their lives.

Thirty one percent of the participants reported that in Mexico they have better living conditions. Some of the arguments that they use for this are that in Mexico they live a tranquil life, that have their families there and that they own their own homes. However, participants reported that in the United States they have more comforts and that everything is cleaner and healthier. Twenty four percent of the participants felt that in the United States they have better living conditions because they have more comforts such as an air conditioner, a stove, refrigerator and other appliances. Yet, 44.8% of the participants said Mexico was home explaining “Mexico is more beautiful because the people that we love are there.” While most participants reported that they have more comfortable living conditions in the United States, being close to family and friends is what makes them feel closer to home. This is all relative to the Goodness of Fit because having a support system that includes family and friends can ease feelings of isolation and loneliness. Therefore, it seems logical that participants reported that home is where family is and for many of these participants, their family and friends are in Mexico. With this information, social workers can better empathize with their clients’ feelings and situations. Additionally, social workers can provide a
safe environment where migrant farm workers can discuss their feelings about being in the United States by themselves, and leaving their families behind. Additionally, social workers can empower Mexican migrant farm workers to create changes in their lives by establishing relationships with other people and teaching them to seek help utilizing other resources and services within the community.

Forty four point eight percent of Mexican migrant farm workers reported that in Mexico they get more efficient health services; however, they believe that in the United States the quality of health services is better than in Mexico. Some of the reasons that they believe this are that in Mexico they are seen by a doctor faster, they are able to go to public clinics and they are able to communicate with their doctors in their own language. Twenty seven point five of the participants reported that in the United States they get better health services because they do not need to have money to be seen by a doctor and they are able to apply for Medicare program.

Most survey participants felt that the quality of health services was better in the United States. However, they also felt that the inefficiency of the system was frustrating because of referral requirements, long waiting periods and language barriers. One of the participants reported that it was easier to get health services in Mexico because she spoke the same language as the doctor who was treating her. This shows that there is a need for bi-lingual health personnel. Additionally, survey participants felt that it was hard to get insurance, and for those who are undocumented, it is even more difficult. In order to combat some of these issues, social workers can lobby government agencies, raise awareness, write grants, help create local, regional
and federal policies and create more programs in the agencies that they work for to help address the needs of this population.

Eighty two point seven percent of the participants reported that it was worth it to come to the United States. They argued that in the United States they have better living conditions, they earn more and their children have an opportunity for a better future. In previous questions, participants reported that they felt that their home is in Mexico; however, in this question they reported that there are better economical and educational opportunities for themselves and their children in the United States. When asked if they would recommend that friends or family migrate to the United States, participants had mixed feelings. Some participants reported that they would recommend migration if immigrants come legally to the United States. However, others felt that the current United States economy was unstable and leaving behind family and friends was not worth migrating. This study helps social workers understand that family is very important in the lives of Mexican migrant farm workers. With this information, social workers can work with Mexican migrant farm workers to help them find alternative support systems and social networks where they can share their experiences and get support from others who are in similar situations.

When participants were asked about some of the problems that they face in the United States, they reported that not being able to understand the language, not having enough resources, discrimination and crossing the border were serious concerns. One third of participants reported that the main problem they face in this country is the language barrier. Additionally, participants reported challenges with finding resources,
with facing discrimination and with their legal status. The inability to speak the native
country’s language makes it difficult to find a good paying job, to communicate with
healthcare professionals and school personnel. This can also make it hard to search,
find and utilize resources. The ability to use resources can be important in fighting
discrimination. This is especially true for this vulnerable group who is more prone to
experience discrimination because of language barriers, a lack of knowledge about
community resources and their undocumented status. With knowledge of these
challenges, social workers can better understand some of the problems that are
affecting the lives of their clients. Social workers can then refer clients to other public
agencies that can help them overcome those obstacles, and empower them to explore
other options that can help.

Crossing the border can be a very traumatic experience for Mexican migrant
farm workers. Participants reported that it is expensive and that it is dangerous to the
point where people can die. This creates anxiety among undocumented immigrants
who fear being apprehended and deported by immigration authorities. Social workers
can help Mexican migrant farm workers deal with the anxiety and fear through
counseling, hearing their stories and helping them learn different coping skills.

Limitations

This study was conducted using both multiple choice and open-ended
questions; however, while all 38 participants answered the multiple choice questions,
only 29 of the participants completed the survey in its entirety allowing the original
researchers to audio-tape the interview. Because everyone did not complete the open-
ended questions or allow for the interview to be audio-taped, this made it difficult to contextualize the answers. Additionally, this researcher used secondary data that was already broken down and this made comparisons of demographics and individual answers impossible. Another limitation was that the participants were not randomly selected. Because of the difficulty in accessing a typically invisible population, convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit the participants. Thus, because non-probability sampling was used it is not possible to generalize the findings to a larger population. Another limitation is that there is a lack of research that currently exists on the subjective life experience of Mexican Migrant farm workers with which the results of this study can be compared and contrasted.

**Implications**

Social workers can become more culturally sensitive of the needs of this vulnerable population by understanding the many challenges Mexican migrant farm workers face as they make their decision of whether or not to migrate to the United States. This study helps social workers understand the dilemma that Mexican migrant farm workers face as they come to the United States looking for a better economical future. With this understanding, social workers can better explain to Mexican migrant farm workers why this situation can lead to feelings of frustration, loneliness, isolation and depression. Social workers can then empower Mexican migrant farm workers to create changes and to find solutions to some of these problems. For example, social workers can help Mexican migrant farm workers find support groups, refer them to counseling or other health services. Additionally, by understanding these subjective
life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers can lobby government agencies to provide better access to services such as educational, health and counseling programs.

Summary

Overall, this study indicates that Mexican migrant farm workers seriously consider the decision of leaving their families, culture, friends and home country to come to the United States for better economical opportunities. Participants in the study overwhelmingly believe that they have better economical opportunities in the United States. However, they believe that emotionally, spiritually and psychologically they are more fulfilled in Mexico. With regard to health services, participants believe that they receive more efficient health services in Mexico, but they consider the quality of care better in the United States. Language barriers, discrimination and travel to the United States all impact the subjective life experiences of Mexican migrant farm workers and influence their views of whether or not they believe living in the United States is worth it. Additionally, this has some bearing on whether or not they would recommend that family and friends migrate to the United States. Furthermore, the majority of the participants still consider Mexico to be home. With this knowledge, social workers will be able to provide more culturally competent services to this population.
APPENDIX A

Permission Letter

To: Human Subjects Review Committee
   Division of Social Work

From: Chrys Ramirez Barranti, PhD., MSW

Re: Use of data for Leticia Meza’s thesis project

I am writing to confirm that I have given consent for Leticia Meza, MSW II student to use data that I and my colleagues collected for the study, *The Perceived Value of Migration for Mexican Immigrant Families*. This study had been approved by the University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (#04-05-123) in August 2006. Data collection for the study occurred over the period of one year. Leticia will be using transcribed data from 29 participants and demographic data from all 38 study participants. This data reflects responses to 14 interview questions that explored migration experiences related to biopsychosocial dimensions such as working conditions, economics, housing, health, mental health, etc. There are 81 pages of transcriptions that Leticia will be able to use in her analysis.
APPENDIX B

Research Questions

1.-Were your working conditions better in the United States or in Mexico? Explain.

2.-Comparing your living conditions in the United States and those in Mexico, where do you think are better?

3.-How do you used to solve your health problems in Mexico and how do you solve them here in the United States?

4.-Tell us what you think are the main problems that you have face as an immigrant living in the United States. What have you done to solve these problems?

5.-Will you recommend to a friend or a family member living in Mexico to migrate to the United States? Give your reasons?

6. You think that it was worth it, for you and your family have come to live in the U.S.?

7: Please tell us if you believe that contributes to the economy of the United States and Mexico. In what way?

8.-Are you living permanently in the United States? If yes, why? If no, why?

9.-How frequently do you visit Mexico? How much time do you stay there?

10.-When you think of home, do you think of Mexico or the United States?

11.-Do you have more close relatives in Mexico or in the United States? Here, I only have an aunt over there, I have all of them here.
12.-How often, and how, do you communicate with your family members in Mexico?

13.-Has it been difficult for you to raise your children in this country? Why or why not?

14.-What has been your experience with your children’s school in the United States?
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