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“We Have to Fight for Change”: Intersecting and Ongoing Crises Amongst Farmworker Families Along the Monterey Bay Central Coast

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University of San Francisco

“We Have to Fight for Change”: Intersecting and
Ongoing Crises Amongst Farmworker Families Along the
Monterey Bay Central Coast

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

By
Mikayla Feliciano
May 16, 2024

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Before the acknowledgments, I want to state how incredibly grateful, thankful, and humbled I am to be surrounded by such amazing colleagues and friends at the University of San Francisco School of Education. I want to thank the International Multicultural Education department for being supportive throughout my years and journey in the Human Rights Education program. I have learned vastly from some of the country's best researchers, educators, and activists.

The research curated for this presentation thesis came from a multitude of resources about one of the most marginalized communities in the United States, California migrant farmworkers. I would like to acknowledge farmworking families that work hard to provide for their families and the rest of our communities with food and nutrients. As a student and researcher, I have the responsibility to state and acknowledge that I am an outsider looking into the farmworking community, and I myself am not a farmworker. Therefore, I do not understand firsthand what it is like or what sacrifices are made to provide for a family as a migrant farmworker.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and thank my family; without them, I would not be here or the person I am today. Thank you to my mother and grandmother for being such strong matriarchs of our family and for pushing me to pursue higher education. Thank you to my father for encouraging me to continue my education as his first-generation daughter to fulfill any graduation from my entire educational experience. And lastly, Brennen, thank you for inspiring me to be a better person, educator, and activist as your older sister.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the crises farmworkers are experiencing along the Monterey Bay Central Coast. It analyzes and reviews housing insecurity, deficit to basic needs, and the environmental impact of storms and pesticides exposure. In January of 2023, the central coast experienced an immense amount of rain, atmospheric rivers, and a levee break that the Salinas and Pajaro Valley communities' infrastructure could not handle. These storms caused even more financial and economic peril for the already struggling farmworkers and their children. This research aims to highlight the importance of farmworking families in the community and what social barriers they face. Information about the housing crises and environmental impact of climate change in the area is utilized to exemplify how farmworkers and their children's livelihoods are impacted. It is important to state that pesticide usage is a significant issue in the farmworker community, and it is slightly mentioned within this paper but is not the central focus.

Data regarding the deficit to basic needs and community resources are also highlighted in this research. This research uses a human rights lens by analyzing the social injustices taking place within Monterey and Santa Cruz County. A critical race theory and Community Cultural Wealth lens is utilized to further analyze collected data and research. In total, there are four chapters to this study. The original iteration of this study was a conference proposal that I attended in October of 2023.

Since presenting at the conference this research has expanded and evolved. The original presentation was created during a time that I had not collected data, but was presented to inform conference attendees and get their feedback. One goal for this research is for it to remain accessible and useful for researchers and readers. This is an example that conducting research is not a linear experience but a fluid and flexible one. I want readers to know and understand you

will not know everything or have all of the answers to your research at the beginning. It begins with an idea, a passion, or an interest and blossoms into thorough research over time. The final product of the presentation explains the three intersecting crises affecting the farmworker community with data analysis included.

Chapter one includes the description of the conference, theme of the conference, submission guidelines, conference submission, theoretical framework, significance of the research, and positionality statement. Chapter two provides a breakdown of the intersecting and ongoing crises, and an understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Violations,. Chapter three comprises the methodology used to interview two leaders in the community who work to meet farmworkers' basic needs, and the findings and analysis of those interviews. Chapter four reviews the purpose and preparation for the presentation and feedback and connections. It also contains recommendations for action and recommendations for future research, and the conclusion. The appendix can be located at the very end of this research, it contains the presentation powerpoint, interview questions, housing costs, feedback and revisions, and how that feedback is utilized.

CHAPTER I

FRAMING THE ISSUES OF CENTRAL COAST FARMWORKERS

I grew up along the Central Coast of California in Prunedale, which sits between Watsonville and Castroville and is home to many fields of fruits and vegetables that are grown year-round. Every day, I would drive by miles and miles of agriculture. I often thought about what my grandmother told me of her experiences – the stiff, back-breaking work it takes to stand and bend over repeatedly in the strawberry fields. Growing up, I had peers in my K-12 experience who came from farmworking families, and they were often ostracized from other peers at school because of their clothes, personal hygiene, and the language barrier.

Memories of my nana, who used to pick strawberries in the Salinas Valley in the 1960s after the Bracero Program ended, also connect me to the agricultural fields of the Central Coast. She was only fourteen years old when she started working and, along with her sister, brought in the only household income. It was during this time that she and my tia were exposed to pesticides, which had long-term everlasting effects. During the Spring 2023 semester, I had the opportunity to interview my nana for an oral narrative. The stories she echoed from her own experience in the fields were heartbreaking as she described how many of her friends she used to pick strawberries with have since passed away from cancer, and she wonders if it was the fields that took them. She also describes feeling like a number to the system instead of a human being. My nana and tia, like many other farmworkers experienced human rights violations in the fields from pesticide exposure.

She discussed her experience stating:

During the time we worked in the fields, the planes would come by and spray the crops, and we could actually feel the poison. It felt wet; at that time, we didn't know what it was. The pesticides landed on our hands because they were exposed. The conversations

between my sister and I make me wonder if the reasons we lost our friends were because of pesticide exposure working out there in the fields.

When I asked about the scarring on her lungs, she said:

I was also diagnosed with scarring on my lungs, which I thought was from valley fever that I had, had many years ago. So, there is a correlation between what the doctor said: over time, the pesticides affected my sister's lungs. Throughout the years, we've lost some friends who worked with us during that time period to various forms of cancer, and they were in their 20s and 30s.

She described feeling violated by the pesticide usage:

When we were out working, even as kids, we felt like our employer would take care of us; we were kids. And, of course, we were innocent and naive. Now to look back, you feel violated. You feel like you were taken advantage of. You feel like you were not taken care of. You feel like they didn't care. You were just a number, you know, and it's almost a feeling of betrayal.

My grandmother's story of hardship and neglect in the fields is not only a story of the past. As of 2024, a persistent housing and basic needs deficit and environmental neglect continue to affect farmworkers and their families, including their students' educational experience, family integration into the community, and a chance at an equitably sustaining lifestyle. Especially because of my personal experience and family history, I believe migrant farmworker families and their children deserve the human decency of feeling welcomed, respected, and supported by their communities. This research was sparked by the need for advocacy and support amongst the farmworker community and my immense respect and appreciation for farmworkers.

Starting the Research with a Conference Proposal

Due to my commitment to the farmworker community of the California Central Coast, I believe it is important to educate residents and visitors to Monterey and Santa Cruz County about the issues facing farmworkers. As part of my education efforts, I presented a workshop at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) conference in fall 2023. This section gives a detailed description of the conference. It includes a description of The Comparative and International Education Society, a summary of the theme of the conference, and an explanation of the submission guidelines. This section also provides background information on the issues facing farmworkers on the Central Coast.

The Comparative and International Comparison Society

The CIES Western Regional Conference was established in 1956 and is known to be the oldest and largest of forty-seven other comparative and international educational societies globally. CIES is also home to more than 4000 members from 110 different countries and includes analysts, researchers, practitioners, and students who represent more than 1000 universities, non-governmental organizations, multilateral agencies, government departments, and research institutes on a global scale. The society is organized to contribute to an understanding of education, with its mission being “dedicated to increasing understanding of educational issues, trends, and policies through comparative, intercultural, and international perspectives” (About CIES, 2023).

Theme of the Conference

The Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Western Regional Conference theme for 2023 was *Education, Migration & Human Rights: Intersecting the Local and Global* (Comparative and International Education Society, 2023). People from communities

worldwide flee their homelands for various reasons, such as climate crises, political unrest, war, and conflict. It is estimated that 281 million people globally are displaced from their country of origin (Comparative and International Education Society, 2023; OHCHR, 2023). This topic is particularly important to address in California and the context of the Western United States due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the U.S. southern border. The issues and inhumane acts that occur at the U.S. southern border conflict with international human rights laws that protect refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. For example, Article 22 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons 1951 states:

The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education” and that “The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favorable as possible, and, in any event, not less favorable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships (United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, 1951).

The theme of the conference, especially as it relates to the US border, was of interest to me because of U.S. immigration policies that affect many migrant workers and their families.

In order to explore issues within the conference theme, CIES proposed the following questions for applicants:

- What educational realities do migrants and refugees experience? In what ways are policies, systems, schools, communities and educators innovating to bridge the gap between rights held within international documents and disparate realities on the ground?

- What educational practices, policies, and pedagogical considerations need to be in place to align with the needs of incoming migrant and refugee students in diverse global settings?
- How do we enrich our understandings of migration, human rights and education by examining different factors like multidirectional migrations (South-South, South-North, North-South, and North-North), processes of racialization that influence migration, and/or contestations over rights claims in different global settings including vis-à-vis language and culture?
- What theories, methodologies, and frameworks can help us enrich our understandings of the intersections between migration, human rights and education in the field of International and Comparative Education?
- How do we consider settler colonialism, Indigenous realities across the globe, and the legacies of African enslavement in our approaches to migration and education? How can a pedagogy of or towards decoloniality be implemented?
- How might cross-national and/or comparative case study/multi-level research inform our understanding of human rights, migration, and/or education?

Submission Guidelines

All submissions were submitted in an abstract and connections response format (PDF or Word) to a Google Forms submission. This section gives a detailed explanation of the submission guidelines for the conference. The call for submissions for this conference included a request for:

- Abstract: Word counts do not include references. Abstract Guidelines for individual submission (paper/roundtable): (250-300 words).

- Connections: Explain the connection between your proposed presentation and the conference theme and/or the field of Comparative & International Education (100-250 words).
- Format Sessions: Roundtable, you will have 6-7 participants, each of whom will have 8 minutes to present, followed by a discussion with the audience. Theme and subheading for this selected group roundtable: Impacts of/ and Responses to crisis, pandemic, and lack of security.
- Format for Presentation: Roundtables/Research in Progress (8-10 minute presentations with more time for discussion of projects) (individual or group roundtables will be accepted).

Background and Need for My Conference Submission

The title for my submission was Emphasizing Crises for Farm-Working Families And their Youth Along the Monterey Bay Central Coast Region. The counties within the Monterey Bay Central Coast region presented in this proposal include Santa Cruz and Monterey. The cities highlighted in these two counties are Watsonville, Pajaro Valley, Castroville, Salinas, King City, Soledad, Gonzales, Chualar, and Greenfield because they are centrally located in agricultural areas. This is the primary area where farmworkers and their children face housing insecurity and a deficit in their basic needs.

Due to recent and past storms, many farm-working families were environmentally displaced. These areas experienced mass flooding, which was a significant setback for the farmworking community. Many in the community, including migrant farmworkers, lost their homes, schools, places of work, and personal belongings. The Pajaro River levee broke in March of 2023 due to a large amount of rain in the Pajaro Valley. A population of 1,700 was left in

about 1 to 3 feet of water (Romero, 2023). The rain also caused massive damage to crops. According to Monterey Agriculture Commissioner Juan Hildago, the March 2023 flood damage was more extensive than the flood damage from January 2023, which was estimated at 15,000 acres of lost land worth \$336 million (Romero, 2023).

Workers could no longer work because of the floods, and because there was no work, there was no money. Farmworkers could no longer support their families or afford stable housing. The youth of these families were struggling, too. Farmworker families only sometimes have the necessities: food, clothing, toiletries, and housing. Many of these children go days without clean clothes or even food, and when they enter the education system, they are faced with ostracization from their peers. Juana Juarez, a long-time farmworker and single mother of three living in the Pajaro Valley, stated, “We have nothing. No money. No home,” and “I feel like I’ve reached rock bottom.” Juana had planned on working in the 2023 strawberry harvest season (Romero, 2023).

This presentation proposal stressed the need for additional funding and resources for these families, whether through their employers or communal non-profits. There must be more food drives, toiletry drives, and housing accessibility. It also stressed the importance of meeting the immediate needs of farmworkers and their children who experience ongoing inequities in a food system that relies on poorly paid migrant labor (Costa, 2021). Having farmworker families and their children stay in hotel rooms because of displacement or through their employer is not enough. It is not a stable living for workers or their children. Studies show that housing instability for farmworkers and their youth can be detrimental to their mental and physical health. Farmworkers experience high levels of depression and anxiety due to multiple factors;

one of those stressors is housing. Poor mental health among farmworkers has been documented at about 20%-50% (Mora, et al., 2016, p.327).

According to Marsh et al., (2015), increased stress from social factors such as housing have effects on farmworkers. Effects of poor housing can induce stress related illnesses for farmworkers and their children that can lead to generations of impact. “Housing and neighborhood characteristics affect family formation, access to education, freedom from stress, and sources of reliable health information, which are key for children’s long-term social and physical health and can provide opportunities to break out of existing class constraints. Communities create the conditions for generations-long stability by investing in healthy children who can subsequently invest in their own children (Marsh et al., 2015, p.317). Housing insecurity can also affect health-related behavior and sources of stress such as, “trauma, chronic pain, hunger, fear for personal safety, worry about finances, interpersonal conflict, and excessive caregiver burdens (Marsh et al., 2015, p. 316). According to the research conducted by Marsh et al., (2015) stress can also cause short and long term effects on farmworker health.

People under stress suffer from chronic fatigue, diminished performance, sleep problems, numbness, and diffuse muscle pains, among other issues. Chronic stress gives rise to both immediate and long-lasting physical changes. In stressful situations, humans produce higher levels of glucocorticoids; these affect many physiologic systems via the neuroendocrine system. Negative health impacts of increased levels of glucocorticoids result from their multiple effects on inflammation and the cardiovascular system, inducing chronic pain conditions, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. (pp. 316-317)

Housing affects health through multiple mechanisms, including physical dwelling conditions, housing affordability, and social environment. Inadequate housing has also been

found to affect mental health. Housing characteristics like crowding, dwelling location, structural hazards, lack of control over maintenance, management practices, and fear of crime are linked to poor mental health, such as depression and anxiety (Mora, et al., 2016, p. 327). According to a Farmworker Housing Study and Action Plan for Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley, conducted in 2018, 19% of the respondents reported renting rooms without a kitchen, while 44% of respondents reported issues with basic housing conditions (e.g., plumbing and refrigerator) (M.I.G., 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2018, p.185). Farmworker families and their children deserve more as they are the backbone of our communities, providing produce for our families. They are often dehumanized through inadequate housing and unmet basic needs or portrayed through mass media as “illegal aliens” (Guskin, 2013). Farmworkers and their children are long overdue to be “humanized.”

Connections to the Conference Theme of Education, Migration, and Human Rights

My proposal, “Intersecting Crises of Housing, Climate, and Basic Needs Amongst Migrant Farmworkers and Their Youth Along the Monterey Bay Central Coast,” connected to the conference theme because it fell under the category of migration and education. Migration also affects a child's educational experience. For example, a child can attend up to four schools in two countries in a given year, and their graduation rate is about 10% (Center for Farmworker Families, 2023). Housing is a human right, and it is being violated (UDHR, 1948). As of May 2023, 100 people living in Monterey County, including children, were discovered living in greenhouses provided by their employers. The families living there were said to have paid \$1,000 to \$1,500 monthly for a greenhouse. Many of these families are vulnerable because of their migration and documentation status; they even experience language barriers because some families are from indigenous communities in Mexico (Macias & Tovar, 2023). What has been

happening in Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley, also known as Monterey County and Santa Cruz County, is a domino effect. Families migrate here primarily for seasonal work, meaning their children may be going to school in two, if not multiple, countries, affecting their educational experience (Center for Farmworking Families, 2023).

Language barriers prevent incoming students from thriving in the educational space. Students are sometimes even bullied or ostracized from the community for not speaking English or Spanish. Parents from the Santa Rita Unified School District (in the Salinas Valley) voiced concerns that their children faced bullying and discrimination. As a result, Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indigena Oaxaqueno (CBDIO) created a Mixteco after-school program (Jiménez, 2024). Numerous families speak Spanish, and indigenous communities crossing the border and entering the community speak indigenous languages such as Mixteco, Triqui, Zapoteco, and Otro (Wadsworth et al., 2018, p.154)

The children of indigenous families have a hard time in school because there are not enough interpreters for the ratio of students who speak those indigenous languages, but as of January 2024, CBDIO serves to help immigrants in Monterey County who speak indigenous languages. “They also organize civic participation groups and cultural workshops. CBDIO accomplishes this through some 30 people working in four offices in three counties – Monterey, Madera, and Fresno. Combined, the team is fluent in six indigenous languages and 13 unique variants of Mixtec, Zapotec, Tlapaneco, Amuzgo, Chatino and Triqui” (Jiménez, 2024). This is the only nonprofit organization in the Salinas and Pajaro Valley assisting indigenous language interpretation.

As stated, the farmworking community experienced a significant setback due to the floods; most farmworker families financially struggled before the storm; the aftermath has been

worse because there is no money for housing, basic needs, school supplies, and school clothes. This area also lacks the funding and resources to combat this issue. Therefore, this proposal was connected to the conference theme because farmworker families experience a deficit in their children's housing and education and either migrate or immigrate to the United States.

Theoretical Framework for the Research

This scholarship utilizes two theoretical frameworks, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). The research uses CRT and CCW to analyze the structural and systemic barriers that prevent farmworkers from gaining access to basic needs. Community Cultural Wealth, also known as CCW, will be applied within the farmworker community. These two frameworks are specifically used in this research to gain further understanding of the intersecting crises and how it connects to CRT and CCW in a way that does not "other" individuals, does not see them through a deficit lens, and does not fall into the white savior complex.

CRT is an expansive theory that was originally utilized in the law. Gloria Ladson-Billings is credited with analyzing how CRT applied to educational spaces and the educational world (Mahari de Silva et al., 2018). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2023):

The critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group, self-interest, emotions, and the unconscious... critical race theory examines the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory,

legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.
(p.3)

CRT is used to understand the systems and structures that serve to deny farmworkers and their families of their basic human rights.

Tara J. Yosso (2005) conceptualized Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as a challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital shifting the lens from a deficit perspective to an asset-based lens using CRT. She wrote:

CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. Various forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital. (p. 69)

The various forms of capital are described as:

Aspirational: refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. (p.77)

Linguistic: includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style (p.78)

Social: can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. (p.79)

Familial: refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (p.79)

Resistance: refers those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality. (p. 80)

Navigational: refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. (p.80)

I used CRT and CCW to understand the farmworker community. The reason I use critical race theory is to draw attention to the racially driven systemic barriers/ issues put in place. Farmworkers along the central coast are continuously exposed to pesticides, as well as their children. I further discuss the environmental impact and pesticides in the section that follows. As of 2024, The People's Tribunal on Pesticide Use and Civil Rights in California conducted an Advisory Opinion and decided pesticide exposure qualifies as an ongoing civil rights violation for agricultural communities (Chacanaca et al., 2024; Santos, 2024). The pesticide and chemical usage occurring in Monterey County is a prime example of structural racism because the structures put in place are meant to continually and negatively have impacts on an already marginalized community.

A study titled A Critical Race Perspective on Environmental Microaggressions Toward Latinx Farmworkers (Areguin, et al.,2020), using a CRT framework found “that because structures are inherently racist, the environment communicates negative messages to marginalized individuals. Therefore, the instances of discrimination we uncovered provide insight to the nuanced experiences of farmworking Latinx who live and work within racist structures” (p. 945). This relates to Monterey and Santa Cruz counties because of the warning from the advisory opinion, conducted by The People’s Tribunal on Pesticide Use and Civil Rights California. It also speaks to the experiences of my grandmother and tia who were directly

affected and sprayed with pesticides, which is a practice that continues today and continues to affect vulnerable communities and populations with approximately 20,000 agriculture workers reporting pesticide poisoning annually (Earth Justice, 2021, NP).

The discussion of community cultural wealth was relevant to analyzing the Interviews I conducted. Using a CCW lens, readers can view and acknowledge farmworkers along with their humanity. Often, the farmworker community is susceptible to negative public discourse and viewed with a deficit lens rather than CCW lens. Folx within the farmworker community carry knowledge that some of us will never even begin to understand or know, and this knowledge needs to be recognized.

For example, linguistic capital is robust in Salinas and Watsonville where the farmworker community is large and most speak Spanish while some speak an indigenous language. The influx of farmworkers from indigenous communities of Mexico only began a few years ago. However, recently in June of 2023, indigenous parents at an elementary school in Salinas became concerned as their children became targets for discrimination and bullying. This was brought to the school board's attention and it resulted in a Mixteco after school program to "create a sense of belonging and pride" (Jiménez, 2024).

Unfortunately, when there is a deficit view, discrimination, racism, or harassment can result. But, when a CCW lens is utilized, the community can be nourished. Farmworkers carry each form of capital to some extent. I utilize CCW to ensure readers understand the cultural wealth and knowledge farmworkers and their youth bring into the community, in efforts to shift a deficit lens to a humanizing one.

Significance of the Research

Migrant farmworkers from our southern borders are often left unheard and unseen in their experiences and struggles of crossing borders throughout the year. Our U.S. political climate has made it unsafe to hold spaces and conversations about immigration and immigration policies amongst undocumented communities. Being unable to hold spaces for undocumented folx can lead to isolation and segregation from the new communities they are entering. The farmworkers in Monterey and Santa Cruz County do not have spaces to talk about their trials and experiences with other folx in the community. In some areas this may look like a town hall, or a community meeting but, the Monterey Bay Central Coast area does not have them. Farmworkers often also do not have basic necessities for themselves or their children due to affordability. The farmworking families in Monterey and Santa Cruz County have access to food, toiletry, and toy drives a few times a year. This is usually in partnership with Celebration Nation and other non-profit organizations that serve farmworkers. Therefore, it is essential to identify the factors that can lead to isolation and segregation of farmworker families as they are important members of many US communities.

Positionality Statement

I am a 25-year-old multi-ethnic woman born in Watsonville, CA and raised in Monterey County. I have a Bachelor's degree in Social and Behavioral Sciences with a concentration in Anthropology from California State University Monterey Bay. I bring knowledge and experience to this research because I am from the area where this research takes place. In the mid-1960s, my grandmother began working in the fields at age 13, as did her sister, my tia, at 11 to help their family financially. Both have experienced lifelong health issues from pesticides sprayed over

them while working. My other experience comes from attending school in the community with many of my peers from farmworker families. Growing up, as a child, I always wondered why Carmel, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Marina, and Seaside were more affluent when compared to Salinas, Chualar, Greenfield, Gonzales, King City, Soledad, Pajaro Valley, and Watsonville.

I realized it was due to our differing demographics as I got older. I began to understand that farmworker communities were devalued when compared to their white counterparts. It became evident that Latinx and farmworker experiences and voices did not matter, and once I realized this, I began to prioritize this in my own research and writing. It is my duty and responsibility to acknowledge the privilege I have in academia to access resources, content, and knowledge. It is critical that I mention that the conference that sparked my research took place in a very affluent area, but also in Monterey County, one of the central locations discussed in this thesis. Needless to say, I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity to do this research to support better living conditions for the community that deserves the most giveback: California farmworkers.

CHAPTER II

INTERSECTING AND ONGOING CRISES

This chapter highlights and explains the intersecting and ongoing crises along the Monterey Bay Central Coast. The crises include (a) environmental impact, (b) housing insecurity, (c) basic needs, and (d) Universal Declaration of Human Rights Violations. It is important to add that the environmental impact also includes the impact pesticides has had on the community. The purpose of this chapter is to bring awareness to the intersecting and ongoing crises within the farmworker community in Monterey and Santa Cruz County.

Environmental Impact

The environmental impact is a product of the domino effect caused by atmospheric rivers and a levee break that worsened the housing crisis and the deficit of basic needs. Listed below are issues created or worsened by the environmental impact:

- a) Housing loss/ housing damage
- b) Road/ infrastructure damage
- c) School closures
- d) Personal belongings destroyed
- e) Increased food insecurity
- f) Job/ income loss

In January 2023, the entire central coast experienced an immense amount of rain, creating flooding on main roads and millions of dollars in damage to local businesses and agricultural fields. According to *The Pajaronian*, the Monterey County Department of Management had estimated the agricultural industry suffered losses between \$40 and \$50 million (Miller, 2023). The losses experienced in January 2023 do not include the damage that occurred later that same

year in March when the Pajaro levee broke in Pajaro Valley, California, a small town neighboring Watsonville. Both of these cities are lower-income Latine communities (Romero, 2023). Global climate change is intensifying and creating an urgent public health crises, especially for farmworker communities. The Farmworker Environmental Justice’s Symposium (2022) stated:

The interplay between environmental stressors and social determinants of health—the social, economic, and environmental conditions that impact people’s health and well-being— creates unique challenges in addressing the gaps in care and outreach to farmworker communities impacted by climate change. When natural disasters hit, emergency awareness and response capacity among farmworkers is often low due to lack of transportation, geographic isolation, and a dearth of culturally appropriate information. (p.1)

After experiencing mass amounts of rain, the Pajaro levee overflowed, creating mass runoff into the surrounding agriculture. According to industry experts, they estimated about a fifth of strawberry farms in the Watsonville and Salinas areas became flooded after the levee rupture (Associated Press California, 2023). The Pajaro Levee was built in 1949 as flood protection but failed multiple times. The levee also broke in the 1990s, causing \$100 million in damage and the death of two people (Chalhoub, NP, 2023). The Pajaro Levee breach was a direct result of negligence because it was a known risk for decades. According to local news KSBW 8, “For decades the Army Corps of Engineers continued to focus their flood protection plans on more affluent communities, leaving areas like Pajaro to fend for themselves” (Cortez, 2023), and it was around midnight on March 10, 2023, the Pajaro Levee broke, causing a mass evacuation of 8,000 people (California Department of Water Services, 2023; Chalhoub, 2023).

As of January 2024, a small number of repairs have been made to the levee, however, not quick enough, as residents were being warned to prepare for the impact of more storms.

Another part of the environmental impact on farmworkers is the use of pesticides. Pesticide exposure is and continues to be a significant issue within the farmworker community, especially in Monterey County. As of February 2024, The People's Tribunal on Pesticide Use and Civil Rights in California conducted an Advisory Opinion report about the ongoing effects of chemical use in agriculture fields, which they claim is an ongoing civil rights violation for agricultural communities (Chacanaca et al., 2024; Santos, 2024). California is a large agricultural state, and Hispanic children in California are 91% more likely to attend school with high pesticide use (Santos, 2024). An organizer with Californians for Pesticide Control stated, “The state of California uses more harmful pesticides than any other and allows farmworker communities like this one in Watsonville to be exposed to highly hazardous pesticides that can permanently damage brains, lungs, and even cause cancer” (Gross, 2024)

Studies have shown that overexposure or long-term exposure to pesticides can have extreme effects on an individual's health, even going as far as altering DNA. According to Kaur and Kaur (2018), pesticides:

also generate free radicals producing reactive oxygen species (ROS) which can disturb cellular pathways by inhibiting various enzymes or receptors. Pesticides also induce oxidative DNA damage, DNA adducts, and single or double strand DNA breaks. Various mechanisms of DNA repair deal with such damages and help to maintain cell integrity. Alteration in DNA repair genes modulates the individual's susceptibility towards DNA repair and various diseases. (p.74)

Kaur and Kaur (2018) also note that “Large numbers of evidences show that occupational exposure to pesticides in agricultural workers has been associated with an increased incidence of various diseases such as cancer, Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease, reproductive disorders, and birth defects” (p.74).

Housing Insecurity

California is ranked the 4th most expensive state to live in, according to the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (2023). As of 2020, an estimated 161,548 people were unhoused in California, which accounted for 28% of the nation’s total homeless population (The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020). The data in California alone depicts the issues with housing. In 2016, approximately 91,433 farmworkers are said to have lived in Salinas and Pajaro Valley and in 2018 only 1,207 units of year round housing were available for Santa Cruz and Monterey counties combined (M.I.G, 2018). Therefore, there is a large gap of farmworkers in the community compared to how much year round housing is actually available.

Atmospheric rivers and the Pajaro Levee break created even further housing insecurities in an already expensive and almost impossible housing market. Farmworkers were already experiencing crises before the flooding. However, the devastation increased uncertainty. According to the U.S. Department of Social Services (2023), about half of California’s farmworkers are undocumented, which means they are ineligible for unemployment (Romero, 2023). The storms and levee break left many residents wondering what was going to be done to support and repair the community. Unfortunately, Pajaro residents were left with feelings of frustration, anger, and anxiety after the levee break forced them from their homes and into shelters, motels, or even their cars (Cortez, 2023).

Prior to the storms and flooding, farmworker communities in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties were experiencing housing shortages. A study conducted in 2018 found 1,207 units in year-round housing complexes for farmworkers in Monterey and Santa Cruz County; these consisted of twenty-two rentals and four cooperative ownerships (M.I.G, 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2018). Residents from the study mentioned the reality of living in overcrowded conditions and issues with basic appliances. Eighty-nine percent of respondents rent (40% rent houses, 30% rent apartments, and 19% rent rooms without kitchens). The remaining respondents rent/ live in other dwellings, such as motels, barracks, or boarding houses (M.I.G, 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2018).

Many respondents and farmworkers live in multi-family and overcrowded homes out of necessity and not choice. A common and consistent theme throughout farmworker housing is the consistently high rates of overcrowding. On average, farmworkers in Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley (Monterey and Santa Cruz County) live in crowded quarters with two people per bedroom and often more than five people per bathroom (M.I.G, 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2018). According to the M.I.G (2018), “Most farmworkers interviewed lived in homes that included non-family members, generally other farmworkers. This was not due to “cultural preference” – the unrelated people were outside their family budgetary unit and sharing housing due to economic necessity.”

Basic Needs

For context, basic needs are considered to be the bare necessities: food, water, shelter, sleep, and clothing (Conway, 2024). Migrant and seasonal farmworkers are one of the most vulnerable populations within the United States and often lack access to information for resources, English language proficiency, legal status, and equitable access to health care and opportunities (Ramos, 2018, p. 25). As of 2016, there was a total of 91,433 farmworkers in the Salinas and Pajaro Valley alone and in 2018 the Farmworker Housing and Action Plan for

Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley found that 92% of respondents surveyed were not born in the U.S (Wadsworth et al., 2018, NP).

Approximately half of the respondents had children under the age of eleven that were born in the United States. Farmworker children are at a disadvantage when it comes to education. According to the Center for Farmworking Families (2023), state run camps only house about 1.5% (12,000 farmworkers) of the state's farmworker population and migrants can only live there from the beginning of May to the end of November. If they wish to return for work, farmworkers must move at least 50 miles away during off season, causing an interruption in the child's educational experience.

The issue in the region is not that there are no resources, because there are such as Medical, food assistance (not EBT), WIC, and non-profit groups. The issue is there are not enough resources to go around for the farmworker community because the number of farmworkers outweighs the available resources. Farmworker children in schools may often feel left out or ostracized from their peers due to a basic needs deficit. For example, shoes, backpacks, and school supplies are often donated to drives to be distributed to farmworker children. A non-profit organization that serves Monterey County by the name of Nancy's Project collects and distributes:

- Gently used clothing, furniture, household goods, baby equipment, toys and shoes
- Christmas gifts labeled by age and gender
- Non-perishable food, rice, and beans
- New diapers
- New underwear for back to school
- Backpacks full of school supplies (Nancys Project, 2024).

Non-profit organizations such as Nancy's Project and Celebration Nation are contributors to the community by hosting distribution drives or drop offs. Non profit organizations and foodbanks that assist with food insecurity and distribution help farmworkers gain access to food that may otherwise be inaccessible. During the pandemic food became hard to access because drive up orders also known as curbside pickup was only available to folx with vehicles and many farmworkers carpool. This barrier created hardship for many people in the farmworking community because most did not have a vehicle.

The median income for farmworkers in the Salinas and Pajaro Valley as of 2018 was \$12.79 an hour which is approximately \$25,000 a year (Wadsworth et al., 2018, p.146). The average spending cost in California is \$53,171 a year which includes housing, health care, taxes, food, and transportation (Walters, 2024). California has an extremely high cost of living which is beyond the reach of farmworkers and their families. Most farmworker families were already struggling financially prior to the flooding, but after experiencing enormous setbacks from the 2023 floods they are experiencing even more financial peril.

Some were without work weeks or months. One individual was without work for two weeks, which totaled to about \$1,100 of lost income in January 2023 (Foy, 2023). According to a farmworker quoted by Foy (2023), "Many farmworkers aren't here legally and they don't get government support. Many of us workers have families. We worry (because) we have very little. We can't afford our bills and everything is expensive" (Foy, NP, 2023). With high costs of living, minimal government support, and not enough community resources farmworkers and their children in the Salinas and Pajaro Valley are in extreme need of support.

UDHR Violations

This research uses a human rights and social justice lens, therefore it is important to understand the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the articles violated. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is considered to be a “milestone document in the history of human rights” (United Nations, 2024). The UDHR is composed of thirty articles, the one focused on in this research is Article 25(1). Article 25(1) states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” (The General Assembly, 1948). Even though this is clearly stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and it is an international document, it is not legally binding, and it is not a treaty, which means it hold no legal weight for the United States. As of 2024, the UDHR is still not meaningfully recognized in the United States and the U.S. is one of the only countries to have ratified the fewest international documents and treaties (OHCHR, 2024).

CHAPTER III

MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS

This chapter documents research done as a follow up to the conference presentation and goes more in depth about meeting the basic needs and describing the research I did to better understand what it looks like to meet basic needs while respecting the dignity of farmworkers and their families. Within this chapter you will find the methodology utilized as well as findings and analysis of interviews with leaders of community organizations working to meet the basic needs of farmworkers and families along the Central Coast of California.

Methodology

I utilized a qualitative approach and conducted two semi-structured interviews with experts from nonprofits that support farmworkers and their families. One participant, Patty, is from Monterey County and the other, Lydia from Half Moon Bay. Both of their organizations focus on providing supports for the basic needs deficit within the farmworker community. Each interview was conducted via Zoom for a total of one hour each, and both participants were asked the same twelve questions that can be seen in the appendix. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and analyzed for underlying themes. The themes pulled from the data are documented below in the findings and analysis sections.

Patty works with Nancy's Project (Monterey County) where a majority of the board is White and Lydia works with Ayudando Latinos A Soñar (ALAS) (Half Moon Bay) where a majority of the board and volunteers are of Latine origin. Despite the difference in demographics the themes stayed the same but differed in approach and delivery. Both of the participants are kept anonymous and I use pseudonyms to refer to them.

Findings and Analysis

Once both interviews were complete, I analyzed the data collected and began coding. I was able to identify four key themes across both interviews. The main themes identified were: (1) Wellness, (2) Make No Assumptions, (3) Access, and (4) Community. Each theme is further explained below and I utilize quotes from the interviews conducted to illustrate the themes. Any quotes within this section, unless cited otherwise are from the two interviews conducted on February 20, 2024 with Patty and March 5, 2024 with Lydia.

While reading through the findings you may notice there is a duality within the responses, the themes highlighted came up in both interviews, but on different ways and carried different meanings. For example, wellness in Patty's interview focused on nutrition while Lydia's focused mainly on mental health. It may seem obvious, but it is important that I as a researcher state it is understandable that there are different perspectives when it comes to their experiences, because their realities are different.

Wellness

Throughout the interview process, I did not presume that "wellness" would come up as a theme. Wellness in this context refers to mental health, overall health, societal and economic stressors, drug and alcohol abuse, and trauma. When interviews were conducted, both participants discussed different forms of wellness amongst the farmworkers; however, wellness was seen as something lacking in the farmworker community. Many California farmworkers do not have access to health care or mental health services due to their documentation status or because of cost (Cha & Collins, 2022). Due to these barriers, farmworkers have a difficult time receiving the services and care they need.

On January 23, 2023, a tragic incident took place at two separate farms in Half Moon Bay. Unfortunately, a previously employed farmworker opened fire and killed seven

farmworkers while injuring one (The Associated Press, 2023; Miracle & Tucker, 2023). This incident was one of the deadliest shootings in San Mateo County and sparked national attention about the effects that mental illness can have if left untreated. It also sparked concern and outrage amongst the farmworker community because they should have access to mental health care services. Lydia, discussed the impact the shooting had on their community. Around Christmas time, ALAS and other volunteers got together to celebrate with tamales. In December, 2022, Lydia and others in ALAS and the community had a wonderful time singing, cooking, and sharing stories and laughter. Lydia stated:

Last year we went all out and we went out to the mushroom farm on the 92, and we saw the kids. Some of them got bikes and everybody was getting their tamales and we took photos and it was so beautiful... There was probably about forty of us, and then, going out to this farm, we sat there for a bit, singing and talking and just being there with the kids. Then that January is when we had the mass shooting here, and it was at that farm. So those volunteers that had gone with us had all those memories of being there, you know. And so it just brought about a lot of activism, community building, you know, during such a tough time. It was a hard time, but they came back again this year, and they're just so committed because of what we went through with the farm.

After speaking with Lydia about the Half Moon Bay shooting it is important to understand the realities of many farmworkers and those involved in the community. Rural communities often lack the ability to serve the mental health and other needs of large populations of migrant farmworkers. According to a study conducted on depression, social factors, and farmworker health, "Rural health care providers need to be prepared to recognize, screen, and treat mental health problems among Latino farmworkers" (Georges et al., 2013, p. s7).

Unfortunately, for many rural communities, like Half Moon Bay, farmworkers struggle to gain access to mental health services. Which is why Lydia from ALAS came up with an idea to help alleviate some of the societal stressors placed upon the migrant farmworker community. ALAS started a project, to build farmworker housing for farmworking seniors on 555 Kelly Avenue in Half Moon Bay (Nelson, 2023, NP). ALAS also saw the need for mental health support, and they have The Farmworker Equity Express Bus that “is a mobile resource center that brings wifi, telehealth services, tutoring, and mental health services to our farmworkers on the Coast” (ALAS, NP, 2024).

Lydia and I further discussed mental health during her interview and what impact it is having on the farmworker community. ALAS saw the need for mental health support and created its own space for support. Talking about the farmworkers, Lydia explained:

I mean, they don't even get insurance, like they don't get retirement. They don't get medical. They don't have employee packages, you know. So mental health is like a luxury, really, if you think about it, but also like a stigma. And I think if people don't really go to them, then they don't have an opportunity to really engage around that. And the reason I know is because ALAS has a free mental health program, and we started a farmworker mental health program that goes out into the field. So we see and hear what they say, and we see the difference. But we also see the disparities in the literature and everything that talks about the mental health of farmworkers are worsening, but they're not getting the resources. There's addiction, there's anxiety, there's fear, there's isolation, depression. But yet there's nothing to address that.

Differing in response but also falling under the same theme of wellness, Patty discussed the unmet nutritional needs of farmworker families and their children. As discussed in the

interview, Monterey County and Nancys' Project receive a plethora of donations of rice and beans. This is great because it is filling; however, Patty stressed the importance of the youth having what they need nutritionally. When I asked, "What made you decide to go into this line of work?" Patty mentioned that it was the founder, Nancy, who inspired her, and she stated:

And then once I went and saw with my own eyes and was able to help realize what a discrepancy there was in our central coast and in Monterey County between people who plant and tend and pick our food and the people who buy it, it was just a no brainer. I just wanted to do something that would improve the well-being and lives and nutrition of especially the children. I am a pediatric nurse practitioner, so I have a real soft spot for kids. And I know how important nutrition is when you're growing and developing, especially a good protein source so that your brain develops appropriately.

Patty also mentioned, "They have trouble, I mean, getting access to adequate food and adequate nutrition. You know, there are people in the farmworker community where the kids are going to go in hungry." After speaking with Patty about the lack of protein farmworker youth are getting, it resulted in my own reflection from when I was a student. I grew up in North Monterey County, which was extremely underserved and under-resourced when I was a student. I knew some of my peers that did not come to school with lunch because their parents could not afford groceries or snacks for lunch, so instead my peers whose parents were farmworkers would have the free and reduced school lunch. Free and reduced school lunch, especially in North Monterey County was not healthy or nutritious, so I knew my peers were not getting an adequate meal, let alone adequate nutrition. Because of the need for protein for children, Patty is hopeful that this year local agencies will help donate sources of protein to Nancy's Project.

Make No Assumptions

Make No Assumptions was a theme brought up heavily through both interviews. Each participant shared stories regarding their own or society's assumptions of the farmworker community and their children. It is common for people to make assumptions, especially about a group they may not know much about. In her interview, Patty mentioned that there is a disconnect between the larger community and the farmworker community, which creates room for assumption. For example, many people would assume everyone owns at least a pair of socks and a pair of underwear. However, this was not the case in the story Patty shared with me. She shared about a time when she needed to collect school apparel for some farmworker students. She shared:

We were supplying the school uniforms for kids. And when we asked our community partners, all of the girls wanted trousers, pants. You could get them jumpers or skirts or pants, but they all wanted pants. And when we asked why did they all want pants, it was because they didn't have underwear. So they couldn't, they didn't feel comfortable playing on the playground in a skirt with nothing under it.

Unfortunately, the story Patty shared with me is not uncommon in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties when it comes to farmworker children and youth. Most of the donations needed are clothing, shoes, socks, underwear, backpacks, and school supplies. Luckily, Nancy's Project can provide these donations to farmworking families because of the partnerships they have created within the community. When I asked Patty how she knows what farmworkers and their children need, she stated it was because of their community partners, that they are the ones who hear the stories and then relay it to Patty and Nancy's Project.

The unique thing about both interviews is the location of where they are. Both ALAS and Nancy's Project are near or part of very affluent communities, and both noted the disconnect

between the farmworker community and the rest of the county community. For example, Half Moon Bay is considered to be a more affluent area and is located a little over 30 miles south of San Francisco and Carmel is only about twenty-five minutes east of Salinas (both Salinas and Carmel are in Monterey County). Carmel is home to million-dollar homes and a primarily white community. So, one would assume the county tax dollars or at least money from the surrounding areas would help support farmworkers and what they need. But that is not the case for Nancy's Project or ALAS. When I spoke with Lydia, she mentioned it was surprising to her that there is not more support for farmworkers, because of its location. She stated:

It is a very farmworker community and one that's hidden which is shocking because we're in the backyard of the Silicon Valley and the tech companies and all that. And here we are, 30 minutes from San Francisco. But yet, we're so isolated and so our farmworkers have really not had a lot of resources and my nonprofit that I founded has been able to help fulfill a gap to support these efforts.

Based on the data collected, quotes analyzed, and my own experience, what I am hearing and witnessing using a CRT lens is this direct way of society expressing structural racism. It's as if it's saying, "Hey there is this really large issue with farmworkers and their children's needs not being met, as well as a struggle for access to basic needs" but, we also do not really care since they're a marginalized community. Especially, when it comes to government officials and folk that hold high positions of office. Unfortunately, societal systems are inherently and structurally racist as well as the continuous and constant violation human of rights.

When I spoke with Patty, I mentioned that farmworkers and their families do not live an equitable sustaining life and that I've seen this as a social issue and a growing one, one that everyone knows about, hears, and sees. But not much is being done at a higher level, why is that?

She declined to answer because she considered it too political of a question but what she did tell me was shocking. Patty spoke with our local U.S. representative, who served the 20th district and currently serves the 19th district. Patty said:

I've had experiences where we've talked to our local congressman, and he just looks at me like I've got two heads and says, "I don't know what you're talking about. Those people are making \$19 an hour." And I know that's not true, but you know, it's like he said, she said, and there's a real disconnect.

It was disheartening that our district U.S. representative, who I've seen in parades waving at the people of the community and making it his life's mission to help support the people of the community believe such incorrect information. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2022), the hourly mean wage for farmworkers working greenhouses, crops, and planting in California is \$16.42. Farmworkers in Salinas, CA earn \$17.47 hourly, putting the annual average at \$36,330 (data on Watsonville, CA was not present). According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator (MIT, 2024), the median income to afford to live in Salinas, CA for a single person is \$57,334 after taxes. For a household with two adults and two children, it is \$101,247 after taxes. Therefore, the data prove \$17.47 hourly is not an equitable sustaining livable wage. But it goes to show, as Patty stated, the assumptions that can happen when there is a real disconnect within the community.

Access

Access was another theme brought up throughout the interviews. Farmworkers are one of the most marginalized communities in the United States (Burnette, 2024). They often struggle with systemic barriers, language barriers, and the locality of where they reside which can prevent them from gaining access to basic needs. As discussed through this research, the Monterey Bay

Central Coast struggles to provide the farmworking community with access to basic needs at times. Monterey County has a large influx of indigenous farmworkers entering the community that do not speak either English or Spanish.

Language barriers have proven to be an issue within the community, for both English speakers and Indigenous language speakers. A study conducted by the California Institute of Rural Studies (Wadsworth et al., 2018, p.i), showed there were multiple indigenous identities in the Salinas and Pajaro Valley, including Mixteco, Triqui, Zapoteco, and Otro; but the primary indigenous dialects spoken are Mixteco, Triqui and Zapoteco.

Language barrier issues came to light during the COVID-19 pandemic because the primary way folx were getting information about community food banks and donations were through flyers. The flyers were printed in English and Spanish, but not available in any indigenous dialects. This was the case for Nancy's Project, which had printed flyers but did not realize until after that folx receiving the flyers may not be able to read them due to illiteracy and language barriers. If members of the community cannot read the flyers, then it could result in them not receiving access to crucial information.

Throughout the interview Patty referred to language barriers that limited access. When I asked Patty why she thinks basic needs deficits occur amongst the farmworker community in Monterey County she gave insight into her personal experience.

If you are functioning in another language, it's difficult to ask for the help that you need. It's difficult to find out what help is available to you if there is any. Or it may be that there just isn't any help for you if you are undocumented. Although there's always help, you know, but sometimes the system is really hard. When I was working as a nurse practitioner, I spent a lot of hours on the phone fighting for my patients for services they

were entitled to. And then when you add that language barrier to that, and people just give up. So, you know, I think it's a huge barrier.

Other barriers identified by Lydia were more systemic than language. Farmworkers and their children often face a significant amount of economic, social, and legal barriers (Goldman et al., 2021, p.17). Systemic barriers can be defined as, “attitudes, policies, practices, or systems that result in individuals from certain population groups receiving unequal access to or being excluded from participation in employment, services, or programs (e.g., through discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc.)” (Government of Canada, NP, 2023).

The United States is considered a first-world nation, yet many struggle with access to housing, health care, feminine care, childcare, mental health services, as well as food and nutrition. Both Lydia and Patty stated gaining access to nutrition for farmworkers and their children is a struggle. Farmworkers and their children in Half Moon Bay struggle to gain access to services and healthcare because of these systemic barriers. Lydia discussed the struggles of gaining access in our interview.

I mean, we talked about how medical is important, how food is important and veggies. The same veggies that they grow are not what they can buy. You know, it's so expensive. But yet they just grew that. So, really healthy foods, I feel like getting access to fresh veggies and foods, good medical, mental health, free mental health counseling is so hard to get. And housing, really good housing, having access to a good home is really important.

Migrants in the United States tend to “exhibit lower dietary quality than the general population” (Tiedje et al., p. 2, 2014). Farmworking families do not receive nor do they have

access to healthy nutritious meals along the Monterey Bay Central coast and in Half Moon Bay. For students to be fully present in school, nutrition is essential. Some studies report nutrition and diet can be beneficial factors to student behavior, academic achievement, and physical well-being (Stratton & Charlton-Seifert, 1982). Gaining access to basic needs for the farmworker community and their children is long overdue.

Community

A common misconception of the farmworker community is that no one wants to help support them; but, the issue is not that people do not want to support, the issue is people do not know how. The theme community had the most amount of data and some of the subthemes found were: disconnect, community cultural wealth (CCW), grassroots organizations, and the lack of advocacy from folx in the community. As stated above, the board for Nancy's Project consists of mainly white individuals while ALAS is mainly of Latine origin, with many speaking Spanish. Patty identified some challenges during the conversation around community. She said,

One of the challenges we face as a community of volunteers that's largely Anglo is most of us do not speak Spanish, and we don't have direct input because we don't speak Spanish to the farmworker community. So, the way we've gotten around that is by developing community partnerships at all of our distribution points. We have community partners every place that we distribute who know their community, who are Spanish speaking, who recruit the volunteers from the community so that the community is serving their own community... That's one of the ways we've tried to breach the Lettuce Curtain, is by using community partners.

The Lettuce Curtain is a term specifically used to describe the split between the Monterey Peninsula from the rest of the county. The Monterey Peninsula contains mainly the middle and

upper class; Carmel an extremely affluent area falls within the Peninsula. According to California State University Monterey Bay, the lettuce curtain can be described as:

a phenomenon in which many residents from Monterey Peninsula and other coastal cities avoid going to the Salinas Valley. This fear and feeling of disconnect worries environmentalists and social change advocates. Why does it happen? There is just not one cause, but one very big reason is Salinas has a bad image. While the city does have many serious social justice, economic, and environmental issues, what is often not conveyed on the nightly news are the wonderful people, culture and beautiful parts of the city. There is a lot more to Salinas than crime and lettuce. (California State University Monterey Bay, 2024)

When I spoke with Patty about the lettuce curtain, I had no idea there was a term coined for it. I reflected on my own experience of going to an under-resourced and under-represented school in North Monterey County during a time we were not allowed to wear red, blue, or green because of gang activity. For us students, the gang activity was not really seen around campus, it was there but not prominent. However, there were a few times when schools from Carmel (the other side of the Lettuce Curtain) refused to come to our school for their away games and instead forfeited because they were afraid someone would be “shot or injured.” My own experience and Patty’s mention of the lettuce curtain is one of many examples that shows what can happen when there is a disconnect within the community and amongst community members and leaders.

Farmworkers have gone unappreciated in the United States and with political tensions rising regarding immigration and reform, things are anticipated to get worse. Leaders such as Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida have proven his dislike for farmworkers and views them as a deficit. In February and March of 2024, lawmakers and DeSantis proposed and passed bills that

affect the farmworker community, like SB1082 which limits regulation on farmworker housing, The Florida senate also passed a bill to ban local jurisdictions from passing measures protecting farmworkers from heat exposure (ActionJax News Staff, 2024; Moran, 2024). Even though this does not affect farmworkers in California, it is a clear example of viewing a specific community as less than human rather than human beings.

I would like to highlight the wealth, specifically community cultural wealth that was discussed in my interview with Lydia. She talked about the community built amongst farmworkers and volunteers, but to her, they are also family. Speaking with her about the wealth of knowledge and culture brought me so much joy, because deficits are so often highlighted while community cultural wealth goes unnoticed. Lydia said:

We have so much strength among our Latine community. The cultural wealth that exists is so rich and abundant when we recognize that it's there. And I think in so many communities like we're just seen as a deficit... They're so much bigger than that description as a farmworker. We see them as artists, healers, and teachers, and songwriters, and poets, and all these beautiful things. What we've seen with ALAS is it's really grown because of the community coming together to do this work.

Community cultural wealth was a term originally coined by Tara Yosso (2005) and she uses a CRT lens to conceptualize what community cultural wealth is. As stated in the theoretical portion of this research, CCW is a challenge to “traditional interpretations of cultural capital.” It is intended to shift the researcher lens from a deficit view of communities of color and instead focuses on “the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts” owned by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized (Yosso, 2005, p.69). The farmworker

community and their children carry such cultural knowledge and should be celebrated as Lydia stated.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATING THE LARGER COMMUNITY ABOUT FARMWORKERS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Migrant farmworkers are often the most marginalized group of people. The Monterey Bay Central Coast region, including Monterey and Santa Cruz County, are counties that receive a large influx of tourism and tend to be wealthier areas. A few miles east tells a different story. Families, including migrant farmworker families, are left houseless and in a state of isolation. Resources in the area are provided; however, they are scarce compared to the ratio of farmworkers to available resources. Unfortunately, few spaces are held for farmworking folk and their families to voice their concerns or need for assistance. This presentation is essential to help community members bridge the gap between them and the farmworker community to ensure further support into the community.

I have created a PowerPoint on the different subtopics that fall under crises for farmworkers along the Monterey Bay Central Coast. The purpose of this presentation is to educate others about the ongoing social justice issues and systemically racist barriers engraved into our societal structures within the farmworker community. This conference presentation reviews the ongoing housing crisis, basic needs deficit, and the environmental impact on the farmworking community and their children from the Monterey Bay Central Coast. The issues highlighted in this research are not “new” issues, but, instead are ongoing and growing issues within Monterey and Santa Cruz County. The goal is for this presentation to highlight the magnitude of issues the farmworker community and their children are facing. The intended audience is anyone who is willing to listen, read, reflect, and advocate for farmworkers.

The presentation can be accessed at the following URL: [Final Thesis Powerpoint \(1\).pptx](#)

The presentation I created for this research utilizes a human rights lens and continues to explain the intersecting and ongoing crises relative to the Monterey Bay Central Coast region. The PowerPoint also breaks down the crises on separate slides. It begins with the table of contents: background information, data analysis, theoretical framework, geographic overview, basic needs deficit, housing insecurity, environmental impact, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recommendations, and references. I organized the presentation with a clear view of the issue, my data collection/ analysis, and the theoretical framework at the beginning of the presentation so that readers are able to understand and connect CRT and CCW to the intersecting and ongoing issues. The remainder of the presentation ties back to the issues of basic needs, housing insecurity, and the environmental impact and gives a shortened clear breakdown for readers to better visualize. I conclude the presentation discussing the UDHR and Article 25 (1): standard living provision and recommendations for action and future research.

Presenting in Pacific Grove

The CIES conference was held in October of 2023 in Pacific Grove California, which is in Monterey County. I thought it to be very important for me to present at this specific conference not only because of its theme “*Education, Migration & Human Rights: Intersecting the Local and Global*,” but also because of its geographic relationship to the problem being studied. The way I presented was through a round table talk and my room did not have AV (audio/video), so I printed out the PowerPoint to use as a guide and point of reference.

Feedback and Connections

Once the presentation was concluded, I received some feedback in the form of questions from other individuals in the room. These questions were about the identity of farmworkers and

what is being done in the area as a form of relief. Even going as far to ask about the tax bracket and what taxes are allocated specifically for farmworkers and their children. The room I presented in was full of individuals from all over the globe, which sparked my curiosity and I asked “Is anyone from the area?” or “If you are not from here, whether you flew or drove in, did you see the agriculture fields on your way?” In response, many of the individuals in the room had been to the area and had seen the agricultural fields but did not think much about it. Since, a majority of the participants in the room had not heard of the ongoing social and environmental issues in the area, I found it to be my way in.

Throughout this section I want to be extremely intentional. In no way am I a farmworker, nor do I have farmworking parents. I acknowledge that I am an outsider, and by no means is this research about me and my experiences. But, my experiences have influenced my entire educational career, and I think it’s important for readers to understand the importance of this topic. Reflecting on my childhood and young adolescence always brings me back to the same place, and that is continuing advocacy by pushing boundaries and barriers. I once was young girl, driving past miles of agricultural fields on my way to and from school and I remember feeling like no one cared about my community and what social injustices are happening because, why would they when they get to vacation at one of the most beautiful destinations? Monterey and Pacific Grove specifically accumulate a massive quantity of tourists, that came from far and wide. Deep down I always knew this overshadowed the actual issues happening along the Monterey Bay Central Coast. For me presenting in Pacific Grove, came full circle and it was a place I knew I needed to be when I presented on the social and environmental impact on the farmworkers from my community.

Recommendations for Action

Based on my research, I propose several recommendations for community activism and awareness regarding the farmworking community. These recommendations include: (a) get out and learn about your community, (b) check with your local grassroots organizations, non-profits, translators, local legislation, and environmental agencies, (c) ground yourself in empathy because your personal experiences do not reflect the reality of others.

For recommendation (a), folks in the community should get out and explore. Understand the water you swim in, because the more we understand one another the better for you and your community. There is less likely to be a disconnect in the community if we understand the people in it. Individuals in the farmworker community are their own persons; they have their own families, hobbies, interests, and stories – their Community Cultural Wealth. Farmworker communities are painted from a deficit perspective by modern day politics and the news media and they do not really get the chance to show who they are otherwise. So I encourage you to speak to them, in classrooms, back to school nights, the grocery store, or even just in passing. Drawing from the data collection, there was a story of a mother that utilized the food bank, the little money she was able to save and set aside was money that paved her way into education. She had since graduated and now her oldest child is entering college as the first in their family.

Concerning recommendation (b), I encourage readers to check in with local grassroots, non-profit organizations, translators, local legislation, and environmental agencies. Most of the time grassroots organizations and nonprofits have reached their bandwidth to be able to support their communities, sometimes it can be due to short staff or not enough funding. But, with that being said, you can reach out and show your support, and ask if there are any donation drives or any flyers you can share. Monterey and Santa Cruz County do not have enough interpreters/translators for the indigenous languages spoken in the community. Therefore, I encourage

readers to reach out because they may have linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) and may be able to support their communities. Or there are other ways of communicating such as translation resources, apps, AI, or people in the community.

The latter part of the recommendation suggests folx get involved with the local government and local environmental protection agencies. Members of the community deserve to know what affects them and their neighbors. The local government has the power to form policies which can mean more protections for farmworkers and the environment. I mention local environmental agencies because pesticide runoff and pesticide exposure do not just affect the farmworker community, but affect everybody. Based on evidence alone (Gross, 2024; Santos, 2024), folx in the community need to apply pressure on these agencies because direct human rights violations are continuing to occur, with no mention or accountability.

Lastly, recommendation (c) ground yourself in empathy because your personal experiences do not reflect the reality for others in important one. This recommendation was created to break the assumption of documentation status and illegality. You may have heard others say, “Well my family got their papers this way...” or “My family came here the legal way.” I will reiterate that your personal experience is not the reflection of the reality of others. But also, folx need to understand that everyone they see, including farmworkers, has a life just as complex as their own.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the research conducted, I propose a few recommendations for future research/future researchers. The farmworker community is often seen as a marginalized community, some may even see or describe only its deficits. However, I encourage future research and researchers

to use a different lens, a humane one. Farmworkers put nutrition in our system and food in our bellies, but they are also so much more than just farmworkers. The recommendations I propose are: (a) see farmworkers for more than meets the eye and (b) include farmworkers in your research.

Related to recommendation (a), we need research and researchers that see farmworkers for more than just farmworkers. They have stories, voices, and experiences that are often overshadowed by a deficit framework in research. Similar to recommendation (a), recommendation (b) mentions including farmworkers in your research in some capacity. Do not just write about them but understand them and their community. Farmworkers are also: mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, poets, writers, performers, chefs, artists, musicians, etc., who all have stories that deserve to be heard.

I will state, that I did not use farmworkers as my source of data collection for a few reasons. I am an outsider to the farmworker community, I do not speak the language, and I am conducting research. The reason I am viewed as an outsider is, even though I grew up in the community and witnessed the struggle, it was not my struggle. I also do not speak Spanish fluently, nor do I speak an indigenous language. Most farmworkers along the central coast are undocumented making them even more vulnerable. If I were to come in with a consent form, as an outsider, who does not speak the language, that would perpetuate the continuous cycle of what I consider, intrusive research.

As a researcher, I chose to get information from organizations that work alongside farmworkers that share stories of a broader issues rather than personal details about farmworkers. I hope this encourages young minds and students from the farmworker community to use their voices as researchers one day. If I were to speak with farmworkers as a form of data collection,

the research would be different. Instead, I would utilize a form of *conocimientos*/ oral narrative and I would want them to speak freely and openly about who they are as individuals, parents, and members of their communities.

I find there is great value in storytelling and knowledge sharing. The reason I conducted this research was due to my own personal experiences of growing up in the central coast of California and seeing a need that was not being met as well as ties to my own family. Years later, after I received my degree and continued on my path of education, I knew I needed to write and research this topic specifically because I was tired of seeing the intersecting crises not being addressed.

Conclusion

The intersecting crises for farmworkers and their youth along the Monterey Bay Central Coast is an ongoing one. But, with emerging themes from the interviews I am hopeful for the future of farmworkers as I am not the only one seeking advocacy and support for the community. There is much to be taken away from this research. There are ongoing crises in both central coast communities, but the farmworker community is a strong resilient one.

Farmworkers put food and nutrients on the table for many, while at the same time sacrificing time spent with their families because rain, storm, smoke-filled air from fires, or sunshine they continue to work under. But I want to leave readers with this: farmworkers are essential to our life, our economy, and to our communities. They endure so much, but bring with them their own identities that are often overshadowed by assumptions. These folk are not just farmworkers, but they are human beings: sisters, mothers, fathers, brother, aunts and uncles. They are artists, storytellers, retainers of ancestral knowledge, musicians, cooks, and much more.

In addition, I will continue to advocate for the farmworker community by keeping up to date on farmworker legislation, what bills are being introduced and excluded, sharing advocacy campaigns on social media platforms, continuing my own journey of Spanish language learning, as well as volunteer with farmworker advocacy groups. After conducting this research, I learned about the small but important nonprofits and grassroots organizations that maintain resources for the communities in Half Moon Bay and Monterey County. I also was able to learn and hear stories through data collection. My hope and follow up after conducting research is that there will be more resources allocated to areas in Santa Cruz County.

To conclude, I want this research to reach far and wide, I want folx from the community of the central coast to read this, but also folx in Florida that are dealing with some of the most harsh farmworker legislation to date. Throughout this research process I have learned more about the nonprofits that support farmworkers located inside and outside of the Monterey Bay region. Following this research I plan to personally continue educating others using the presentation I created as well as reiterating the importance of community cultural wealth and the human rights lens that should be included in all academia. I would like to remind readers to, be kind and come from a place of empathy because your personal experiences do not always reflect the reality of others. Be intentional about how you support the farmworkers in your community and make no assumptions.

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[Supports-Flood-Fight-Efforts-at-Pajaro-River-Levee-Break#:~:text=A%20drone%20provides%20a%20view,midnight%20on%20March%2010%2C%202023](https://water.ca.gov/News/Blog/2023/Mar-23/DWR-Supports-Flood-Fight-Efforts-at-Pajaro-River-Levee-Break#:~:text=A%20drone%20provides%20a%20view,midnight%20on%20March%2010%2C%202023)

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your connection to work and the migrant farmworker community.
2. How long have you worked in/with/for the migrant farmworker community?
3. What made you decide to go into this line of work?
4. What is the best and most challenging part of your job?
5. What do farmworkers need the most to live an equitable, sustaining life?
6. How have you been involved with food, toiletries, clothing, and toy drives for the farmworker community?
7. What are the benefits of these drives/drop-offs?
8. What are the challenges of these drives/drop-offs?
9. What advice do you have for individuals and organizations hoping to implement such drives/drop-offs?
10. What basic needs do farmworkers and their families have trouble getting access to?
11. Why/ How do you think these deficits occur?
12. Beyond drives for food and basic needs, what can communities do to help support their local farmworkers?

Housing Costs



Carmel, CA (Cite)



Salinas, CA



Watsonville, CA
(Rockethomes.com)



Chicken coop converted into
a home for a farmworking
family (Wu, 2017)

Homes in Monterey, Seaside, Carmel, and Marina all have relatively decent housing units (these cities also fall under Monterey County). However, there is a drastic difference when you compare homes in those cities to Salinas, Greenfield, Chular, Pajaro Valley, and Watsonville (Santa Crzu County). I argue that areas in Carmel are more ideal and paid closer attention to than those in Salinas or Watsonville because Salinas and Watsonville have a higher Latinx and farmworker population. According to Data USA, as of 2021, Carmel contains only 1.61% of a Latinx population, 91.8% of the population is White, and the remainder of the population is multi-racial or Asian. Salinas contains 79.8% of the Latinx population (mainly from Mexico), while White makes up 12.2% of the population (Data USA, 2021). In Watsonville, CA, most of the population is Latinx at 84.3%, and White makes up 11.9% of the population (Data USA, 2021).

Feedback and Revisions

This section summarizes the feedback I received based on my in-class presentation. It also includes a detailed description of my plan for using this feedback to make necessary revisions and edits to my presentation, prior to the CIES conference.

Appreciations

- I appreciate the geographic overview of the area because I am not completely familiar with northern California areas so it gave me a more clear understanding.
- Thank you for... talking about basic needs insecurities that are faced by migrant workers. your presentation demonstrates how there is systemic discrimination in the United States
- Your consideration of policy
- I appreciate the background and facts for presentation.

- Thank you for facts and stats for your study. They were helpful in contextualizing the impact by volume.
- Thank you for highlighting the children inside this issue.
- I appreciate you for focusing on a local human rights issue. 91,000 people is a big number and their work is essential to our survival!
- I appreciate the map and explanation of how the resource allocation works on the ground.
- I appreciate your personal connection to the environment and community.
- Thank you for the infographics and videos. The videos and news items also gave a better picture to put the issue in direct context.

Clarifications

- How are the funding and resources currently being allocated?
- How can housing be prioritized?
- What's one thing you would "fix," about the farmworker issues?
- What is the reference for the source of the rent stats slide?
- Are there any other countries that have not ratified the UDHR?
- What is the name of the Flower in Spanish contact? Some attendees may want to connect with her if she is a "major player" in getting aid to the correct people effectively.

Thoughts to Consider

- I wonder what kind of policy reform do you think needs to take place in order to give more access to this community?
- I'm thinking it's interesting that the majority 51 identify as indigenous --> highlights how there is a lack of support for indigenous populations
- I'm thinking it's good this is a relatable topic for you because you can see both sides.

- From my perspective you can ask the audience a question for engagement of the room.
- You might consider asking the audience if them or their family members are/were farmworkers?
- I wonder if you could show a map specifically showing the different zoning for counties.
- I'm thinking that the theoretical framework could be closer to the beginning.
- From my perspective, it really infuriates me that these issues have not been effectively dealt with since I moved away in the early 1990s.

Using Feedback to Make Revisions and Edits

This presentation was presented in October of 2023, it is currently Spring of 2024. The research I conducted has altered, changed, and evolved therefore so has the PowerPoint. The final PowerPoint is much more clear and concise than the original that was presented last fall. It includes examples from my data analysis, theoretical framework, a geographic background, the intersecting crises, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights violations, and recommendations for action as well as future research. Regarding feedback from the original presentation, I chose to change the theoretical framework presented at the time and moved the data analysis and theoretical framework towards the beginning of the PowerPoint rather than the very end.