Structural Barriers Influencing Food Insecurity, Malnutrition, and Health among Latinos in the San Joaquin Valley during COVID-19

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Community Health & Innovative Policy (CHIP) Lab

The Community Health and Innovative Policy (CHIP) Lab is committed to advancing community health and policy research to address existing health inequities. The CHIP Lab team engages in applied public health and health services research to promote equitable and community-oriented policy solutions. Our primary aims are:

1. to examine the health policy environment and policymaking process (including policy adoption and implementation),
2. to evaluate the impact of public health and health care policies on individual- and population-level health behaviors and outcomes,
3. to conduct process, impact, and outcome evaluations on health promotion programs and policies, and
4. to increase the translation of research findings into practice.

California Initiative for Health Equity & Action (Cal-IHEA)

Building a Workforce for Health Equity

Improving Health Access for All Immigrants

Advancing Universal Health Insurance Coverage in California

Addressing Social Determinants of Health through Cross-Sector Collaboration

For more information on Cal-IHEA, please visit: https://healthequity.berkeley.edu/

Rural Latino(a) Immigrants in the San Joaquin Valley (SJV)

- SJV region is predominantly low-income and rural
- High food insecurity and obesity/overweight rates
- Latino immigrants in the SJV
  - 1/3 live below the poverty line
  - Limited economic opportunities
  - Limited access to transportation, healthy food, healthcare services, and information
- Pandemic increased Latino immigrants' vulnerability
  - Job and income loss – having to choose between safety and paycheck
  - Employers do not provide PPE so families are forced to pay out of pocket
  - New expenses: broadband internet access, cost of basic needs increased (including food), childcare

The Fresno Bee

VALLEY VOICES

COVID-19 in the Central Valley: Let's not forget immigrant farm workers

BY MYRNA MARTINEZ NATERAS AND ROBIN MARIA DELUGAN

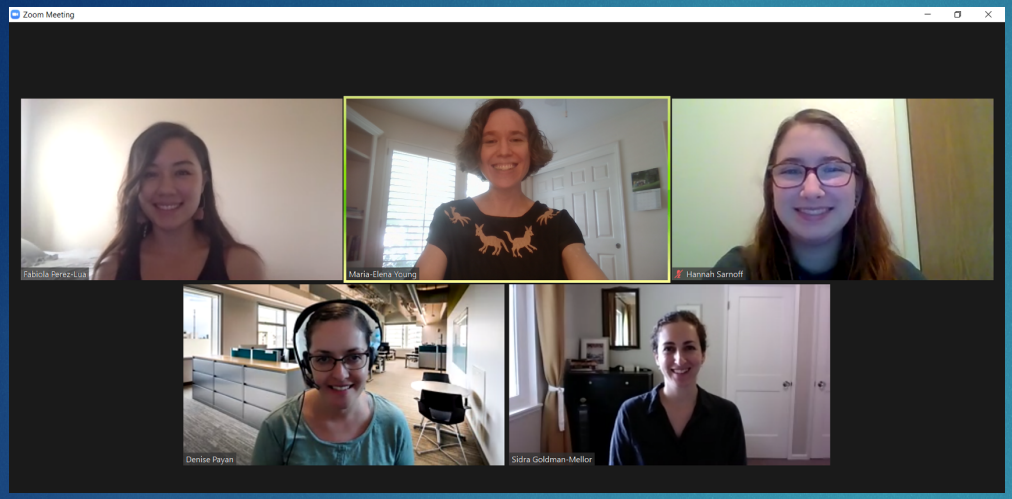
APRIL 03, 2020 06:30 AM

Farmworkers harvest asparagus in a field on Fresno County's west side. MARK CROSSE FRESNO BEE FILE

https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article241701016.html

COVID-19 impact on Latino immigrants in rural California

Immigrants' exclusions from policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic



UC Merced Study Team

PI: Maria-Elena Young

Co-Investigators:

Denise Payan & Sidra Goldman-Mellor

MPI estimates that due to these restrictions, about

15.4 million people in mixed-status families

ARE EXCLUDED FROM THE STIMULUS PAYMENTS

9.9 M unauthorized immigrants

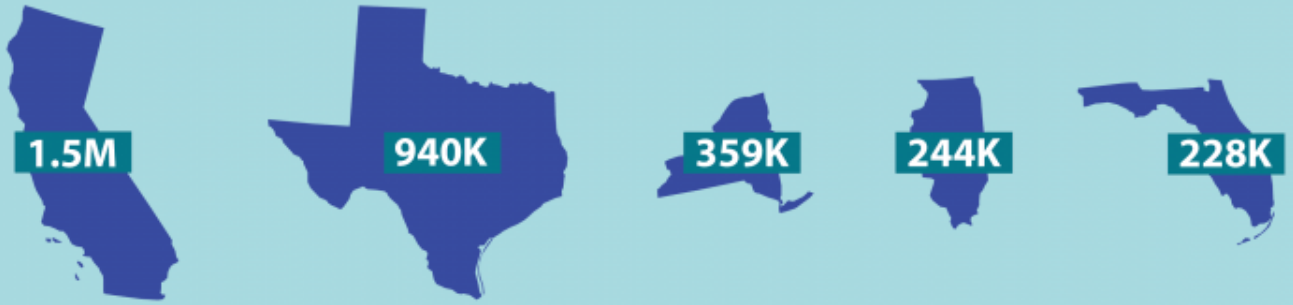
3.7 M children who are U.S. citizens or green-card holders

1.7 M spouses who are U.S. citizens or green-card holders

IN TOTAL, WE ESTIMATE NEARLY

5.5 million U.S. citizens and green-card holders are excluded from this relief

Top 5 States with the Largest Populations of U.S. Citizens & Green-Card Holders Ineligible for Pandemic Stimulus Checks



U.S. Citizens & Green-Card Holders Ineligible for Relief

Source: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/mixed-status-families-ineligible-pandemic-stimulus-checks

Community-Engaged Research Approach

- ✓ We are guided by practitioners and advocates working in rural communities
- ✓ We listen to Latino immigrants to hear their key needs and experiences during the pandemic
- ✓ We uphold standards of scientific rigor for qualitative research
- ✓ We seek to build bridges between research, advocacy, and policy

Advisory Board: Pan Valley Institute, Faith in the Valley, El Comite del Valle, Californians for Pesticide Reform, ACLU, California Immigrant Policy Center, Farmworker Justice, UnidosUS, UCM Community and Labor Center

Interviews: 21 Latino immigrants in Merced, Tulare, and Imperial Counties (July-Sept 2020)

Research brief: dissemination to advocates and policy makers

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October 21, 2020

The pandemic's financial toll on Latino immigrants in California's hardest-hit rural regions threatens their work, families, and health

Maria-Elena De Trinidad Young, Fabiola Perez-Lua, Hannah Sarnoff, Denise Díaz Payán, Sidra Goldman-Mellor

Rural Latino immigrants: A vital population

During the pandemic, Latino immigrants in the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys have continued to provide essential services in communities confronting the state's highest SARS-COV-2 infection rates.[1] A majority of California's agricultural workforce in these rural regions are Latino immigrants who help supply the nation's food – including over a third of vegetables and two-thirds of fruits and nuts grown in the U.S.[2] Latino immigrants also account for a high percentage of service sector employees, such as domestic and home health workers. Although these sectors have been deemed essential during the pandemic, there have been few targeted policies to protect workers, their families, or their communities.

This research brief describes the financial insecurity that Latino immigrants in rural California are encountering during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continues, Latino immigrants living in regions such as the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys are

Policy actions needed to protect rural Latino immigrants

- Prioritize income support – regardless of legal status – to alleviate financial stress.
- Mandate workplaces adhere to COVID-19 safety guidelines.
- Alleviate household expenses through programs such as rent moratoriums and utility payment support.
- Provide free broadband internet services to rural communities.

Research Brief Link:
https://sites.ucmerced.edu/mariaelenayoung/climabrief

"Right now, we either die of hunger or die of the virus."
– Participant, Tulare County

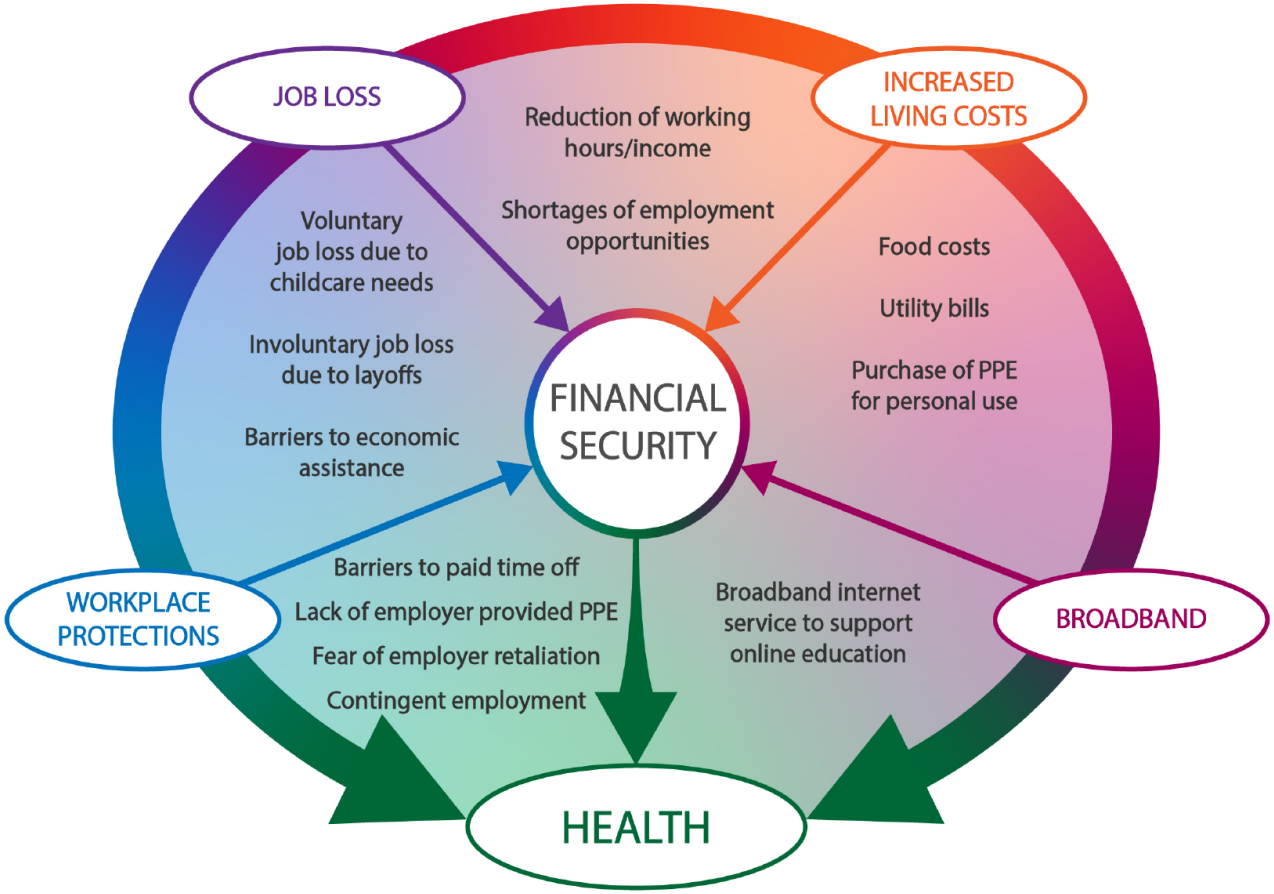

Figure 1: Multiple factors are contributing to the financial insecurity impacting rural Latino immigrants' physical and mental health.

Financial (In)Stability and Food (In)Security

Latino immigrants face food insecurity and barriers to access nutritious meals due to financial constraints

"We were just trying to limit ourselves in what we can eat ... even if it was beans every day ..." **~Rosa**

Many participants struggled to access PPE for personal use and turned to charitable and community assistance programs (e.g., food banks, churches) for PPE donations

Policy Recommendations

- Provide income support (regardless of legal status)
- Support employment security measures and enforce OSHA regulations on employee safety
- Ensure basic needs are met by protecting housing, utilities, and food access
- Improve outreach efforts, communication, and enrollment in federal nutrition assistance programs, such as CalFresh
- Expand access to free broadband and PPE
- Expand access to tele-mental health services

Next Steps

- Complete qualitative data analyses with a focus on key themes, including food insecurity (Payan) and mental health (Goldman-Mellor)

- Obtained additional funding for a second wave of data collection (Jan 2021) - include 2 additional counties and dig deeper into specific topics

- We will further explore the interrelated issues of food insecurity and obesity during the pandemic to address a critical gap in our understanding of the pathways linking food insecurity and excess weight among Latina immigrants
  - Pandemic-related stressors (i.e., physical school closures, sheltering-in-place) may have reduced food availability and increased psychological distress among Latina immigrants (particularly mothers)
  - Role of structural and intrapersonal barriers on food access and diet (immigration-related policy exclusions, stigma, lack of program knowledge, and competing time demands)
  - Explore the impact of psychological distress on food insecurity-obesity

Examining the Nutrition Environment of Food Pantries in the SJV during the Pandemic

Kimberly Sánchez, MPH, is a Public Health PhD student at UC Merced and a 2020 CARE-UC Innovation Fellow

Approach

- **Objectives**
  - To examine the nutrition environment of food pantries in the SJV during the pandemic
  - To pilot test an adapted version of a nutrition environment assessment tool that captures emergency distribution modalities

- **Sample**
  - Food pantries in the San Joaquin Valley
  - (currently) N=7 sites from Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties

- Remote data collection
  - Self-administered by a key staff/volunteer or with assistance over the phone

Data Collection

- Nutrition Environment Food Pantry Assessment Tool (NEFPAT)
  - Six objectives:
    - increasing client choice
    - nudging healthful foods
    - diversifying fruit/vegetable (FV) forms
    - diversifying FV types
    - promoting additional resources, and
    - accommodating alternative eating patterns

- New Objective 7: Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Different distribution modes
  - Expanded donation options
  - Capacity and personnel changes
  - Partnerships
  - Crisis/pandemic-related challenges
  - Open-ended questions about main challenges and successes

Nikolaus CJ, Laurent E, Loehmer E, An R, Khan N, McCaffrey J. Nutrition Environment Food Pantry Assessment Tool (NEFPAT): Development and Evaluation. J Nutr Educ Behav. 2018 Jul-Aug;50(7):724-728.e1. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2018.03.011. Epub 2018 Apr 24. PMID: 29703515.

Preliminary Results

- **Classifications**
  - 71% are silver (16-31)
  - 29% are bronze (0-15)
  - None at the “Gold” standard (32-47 points)

- **Key Challenges**
  - Decrease in volunteers
  - Increased number of clients served
  - Lack of cold storage for fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Limited or no funding for increased demand

Current (Nutrition) Research Portfolio

Examining State Obesity Prevention and Reduction Policies in California

Funded by the UC Merced Senate Committee on Research

Global Food Initiative Campus Collaborative (UC Merced)

In collaboration with Dr. Karina Díaz Rios

Funded by the UC Global Food Initiative

Building an Academic-Community Partnership to Advance Telehealth Implementation for Low-Income Californians in Response to COVID-19

In collaboration with Dr. Hector Rodriguez (UC Berkeley) and Dr. Lorena Garcia (UC Davis)

Funded by CITRIS and the Banatao Institute

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