

The increasing toll of racism and discrimination on California agricultural workers and their families under the Trump administration

Ethnicities

0(0) 1–26

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DOI: 10.1177/14687968211018255

journals.sagepub.com/home/etn



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Abstract

Over 800,000 Mexican agricultural workers are employed in California each year, of which approximately 400,000 are estimated to be undocumented immigrants. Previous studies have found President Trump to be distinct in his anti-immigrant rhetoric and explicit verbal attacks of immigrants and refugees, which predicts hostile community attitudes towards immigrants and minorities. We convened 19 focus groups (FG) in diverse regions of California to gather information from Latina/o agriculture workers on the potential impact(s) of the Trump administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration policy on this population. Widespread racism and discrimination were overwhelmingly noted in all FG sessions. Participants reported being the targets of increasingly hostile behavior, including hate crimes, that they attributed to anti-immigration rhetoric. Therefore, participants also reported an increasing sense of fear and psychological distress that led them to avoid community participation. Perceptions of racist and intentionally harmful policies contributed to reduced interactions with healthcare facilities and prompted both documented and undocumented participants to withdraw themselves and their children from public programs. For FG participants, the Trump administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration policy severely impacted their community resulting in profound negative impacts on their economic well-being, education, and physical and emotional health.

Keywords

Racism, minority rights, immigrants, Latina/o population, racist policies

Introduction

The United States (US) has more immigrants than any other country in the world, with more than 40 million foreign-born people. Mexico is the top origin country, accounting for approximately 25% of all US immigrants. Migration and the rapid growth of the Latina/o population have had a profound effect on the ethnic and national-origin composition of the US population (Villarreal, 2014) and workforce. The Latina/o population makes up 16% of the current US labor market and will account for one out of two new workers entering the workforce by 2025 (Coulombe and Gil, 2016). Currently, the Latina/o workforce is concentrated in two industries at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, construction and agriculture.

While not as heavily excluded from economic and social integration as African Americans, Mexican origin persons, and Latina/os in general, face severe historical racial barriers (Ortiz and Telles, 2012) and have been consistent targets of immigration restrictions and deportations in the US for centuries (Young, 2017). The impact of these racial barriers and immigration policies on opportunities available to Latina/o origin persons in US society has been debated (Ortiz and Telles, 2012). Some argue that the barriers are similar to those faced by European Americans centuries ago when arriving to the US and that they only slightly delay integration into US society. Others believe that Latina/o origin persons suffer persistent discrimination that limits social and individual opportunities and prevents integration into the middle class even after generations in the US. Continued economic, health, and educational disadvantages even after several generations in the US support the latter (Ortiz and Telles, 2012).

Despite being a country of immigrants, immigration policies have historically been highly disputed and influenced by racism and xenophobia (Ortiz and Telles, 2012; Young, 2017). Ethnic and racial inequities in the US are largely the result of historical and contemporary policies and practices of exploitation and exclusion towards minorities. In the 1950s, the US allowed entry of approximately half a million Mexican workers a year. A resurgence of nativism and xenophobia resulted in drastically reduced opportunities for legal entry of Mexican workers into the US in the mid-1960s and ensuing decades (Chavez, 2001; Chavez et al., 2019; Young, 2017). Despite this change, established migration flows simply continued due to employer demand for low-paid workers, culminating in an unprecedented growth of the undocumented population in the US (Massey and Pren, 2013). Mexicans made up half of all these undocumented immigrants. The number of undocumented immigrants peaked at about 12 million during the 2007 Great Recession and has declined since that time (Villarreal, 2014). In fact, more Mexican immigrants have returned to Mexico from the US than have migrated from Mexico to the US since the end of the Great Recession due to worsening living and working conditions (Villarreal, 2014).

Immigration and immigrant roles in the US economy and society were heavily debated in the 2016 and 2020 US elections and media (Chavez, 2001; Chavez et al., 2019). These elections highlight that US citizens are deeply divided and increasingly concerned about immigration and immigrants, with many opposed to immigration (Chavez et al., 2019). The growing nativism and stigmatization of immigrants was exploited and exacerbated by former President Donald Trump to attract the vote of social groups with racist and negative perceptions of immigration, including White supremacists and other far-right extremists. These groups perceived former President Trump's racist and xenophobic rhetoric as open endorsement (e.g. former President Trump refused to explicitly condemn White supremacist groups during the first presidential debate in 2020) (Gabbatt, 2020).

The Trump administration used anti-immigrant rhetoric, attributing criminality and cruelty to immigrants, to emphasize the idea that immigrants (particularly Mexican immigrants) are a threat to the US economy and way of life (Warnock,

2019). President Trump repeatedly dehumanized immigrants and refugees, as he famously said at the beginning of his campaign (Phillips, 2017):

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (June 17, 2015)

Former President Trump was not alone in his xenophobic political discourse. Other relevant members of the Republican party gained notoriety in the right-wing alternative media in recent years for their controversial and openly racist comments on immigration. For example, on Sunday, 12 March 2017, Steve King, Republican Representative from Iowa, tweeted that 'We can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies' (Bump, 2017; Chavez et al., 2019) in support of the idea that immigration threatens American culture and Western civilization. Despite his inflammatory racist comments and controversial immigration policies (including the family separation policy at the Mexico-US border) along with the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, former President Trump maintained extraordinary support from much of the electorate during the November 2020 election (74,222,958 votes, or 46.8% of votes cast).

The Trump presidency spotlighted how anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies can greatly influence the social perception of immigrants, aggressive anti-immigrant behavior and immigration policies (Warnock, 2019). Many US citizens supporting former President Trump's views or who were swayed by his words have, or developed, negative attitudes toward immigrant farmworkers (Becerra, 2020) especially since more than 90% of these workers are reportedly born in Mexico (Medel-Herrero and Leigh, 2018). President Trump's election was associated with a statistically significant surge in reported hate crimes across the US (Edwards and Rushin, 2018), and the US Commission on Civil Rights reported a growing number of hate crimes in the US as well as hate incidents in US schools (United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR), 2019). For example, the xenophobic manifesto written by the perpetrator of the massacre in El Paso, Texas, on 3 August 2019, that left 20 Latinx people and immigrants dead was similar to the language used in 2018 by the president when describing an imaginary 'invasion' at the US-Mexico border (Fernández-Campbell, 2019; Romero et al., 2019).

Anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric can not only fuel hate crimes, but also threaten the socioeconomic and physical health of immigrants (Edwards and Rushin, 2018). Individuals who self-report exposures to racism have greater risks for mental and physical illness (Becerra, 2020; Gee and Ford, 2011). Negative perceptions have harmful effects on psychological distress, self-concept, esteem, and intergroup perceptions (Chavez, 2001; Chavez et al., 2019) to both immigrant adult and children (Chavez, 2001; Chavez et al., 2019). Immigrant farmworkers are especially at risk.

Although the strenuous and long work hours of farmworkers allow society to have abundant food at low costs (Becerra, 2020), full-time farmworkers earn low pay: approximately \$30,000 a year in California in 2015 (Kitroeff and Mohan, 2017). Furthermore, many are temporary workers or are not full-time employees. Therefore, the agricultural worker community is mainly comprised of a population with low family income, with many living in poverty. Additional challenges they face include pesticide exposure, legal-status concerns, limited access to healthcare services and public programs, as well as limited educational opportunities. Thus, federal policies that dictate whether farmworkers have access to health resources and basic need programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, have a major impact on their lives, and the lives their children (many of whom are US citizens). Actions like the Trump administration's attempts to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and change the way states determine who qualifies for public programs, including Medicare, dramatically impacted Mexican agricultural immigrants' welfare. Indeed, the COVID-19 made healthcare disparities in racial and ethnic minority groups starkly apparent, with agricultural workers having high rates of morbidity and mortality (Abedi et al., 2020; Centor and Essien, 2020; Crampton, 2020; Laurencin and McClinton, 2020; Smith and Judd, 2020).

Previous studies suggest that nationality and socioeconomic status moderate the relationship between race/ethnicity and discrimination (Findling et al., 2019). To better understand the effects of the Trump administration's policies on the health, well-being and daily lives of Latino/a farmworkers, we conducted a qualitative study as part of the California Agricultural Workers Stress Project (CAWSP), a multicenter study project aimed at better understanding stress and social stressors in agricultural workers and their families. There are an estimated 3 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the US; California accounts for between one-third to one-half of all US farmworkers, with roughly 800,000 agriculture workers working in California each year (Medel-Herrero and Leigh, 2018). Focus groups and narrative inquiries were conducted between July 2019 and January 2020 in regions of California where agriculture is a predominant industry to understand the views and experiences of agricultural workers and their families in the context of current anti-immigration rhetoric (Becerra, 2020). Because studying subgroups within a broader racial or ethnic group can lead to important findings that might be otherwise be overlooked, demographic information was collected where possible and is associated with quotes throughout the paper. For example, women agricultural workers often live in fear of violence, experience a continuum of gender-based violence throughout their lives (Hill and Kearl, 2011), and are harassed more frequently than women employed in other types of work (Dominguez, 1997). Additionally, women farmworkers are less likely than men to speak English fluently and work legally in the US; therefore, women agricultural workers are more likely to experience labor exploitation than men. Children are also a focus of the study, which documents the participants' experiences of how President Trump's campaign and election has had a markedly negative impact on Latino/a

farmworkers' social perceptions, social mobility, education, family economics, as well as mental and physical health.

Data and methods

Following approval by the University of California, Davis, institutional review board (IRB), we convened 19 focus groups (FGs) involving 130 participants (95 women, 35 men) in order to gather information about the impact(s) of the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies on Latina/o agricultural workers and their families. FGs were carried out between July 2019 and January 2020 in regions of California where agriculture is a predominant industry: Northern California (FG 1–6), the San Joaquin Valley (FG 7–12), and the Sacramento Valley (FG 13–19). All participants were adults (18+), and the vast majority were agricultural workers (125 out of 130); only five participants were not agricultural workers, but were rather family members of agricultural workers (Table 1).

A convenience and snowball sampling method was used to recruit FG participants. Co-investigators and staff from community-based organizations serving agricultural workers in the study areas recruited participants. The FGs were conducted in non-work settings, including public libraries, motels, and offices of

Table 1. Characteristics of focus group (FG) sessions.

	Area	Date	Number participants	Length of interview (min)
FG 1	Northern California	July 2019	5 (M = 0, F = 5)*	26
FG 2	Northern California	July 2019	6 (M = 1, F = 5)	38
FG 3	Northern California	July 2019	4 (M = 2, F = 2)	15
FG 4	Northern California	August 2019	7 (M = 1, F = 6)	58
FG 5	Northern California	August 2019	8 (M = 3, F = 5)	47
FG 6	Northern California	August 2019	9 (M = 0, F = 9)	43
FG 7	San Joaquin Valley	October 2019	5 (M = 0, F = 5)	45
FG 8	San Joaquin Valley	October 2019	3 (M = 3, F = 0)	46
FG 9	San Joaquin Valley	October 2019	5 (M = 4, F = 1)	35
FG 10	San Joaquin Valley	October 2019	4 (M = 1, F = 3)	26
FG 11	San Joaquin Valley	October 2019	5 (M = 1, F = 4)	60
FG 12	San Joaquin Valley	October 2019	4 (M = 1, F = 3)	33
FG 13	Sacramento Valley	November 2019	10 (M = 5, F = 5)	34
FG 14	Sacramento Valley	November 2019	10 (M = 2, F = 8)	42
FG 15	Sacramento Valley	November 2019	11 (M = 2, F = 9)	48
FG 16	Sacramento Valley	November 2019	9 (M = 2, F = 7)	54
FG 17	Sacramento Valley	November 2019	4 (M = 0, F = 4)	49
FG 18	Sacramento Valley	January 2020	9 (M = 3, F = 6)	54
FG 19	Sacramento Valley	January 2020	12 (M = 4, F = 8)	56
Total			130 (M = 35, F = 95)	809

*M = Male, F = Female.

non-governmental organizations. Participants were paid \$20 in compensation for their time. All participants were Spanish speakers. Each FG session was audio recorded and later transcribed in Spanish; a selection of statements that were most significant to the study goals were then translated into English and are included in this article.

Table 2 describes the demographic characteristics of participants in FGs 7–19. Unfortunately, demographic characteristics were not collected for FGs 1–6 due to an error in the planning of data collection. Participants were distributed relatively equitably among the different age ranges. Women (69.2%) and those born in Mexico (75.8%) accounted for nearly 75% of the sample. Most participants had significant experience in agricultural work (77.9% spent 4+ years in the fields) and few (9%) arrived in the US for first time within the last 9 years (2010–2019). Relatively few participants spoke fluent English (24.2%). Academic studies after the age of 18 were reported by relatively few participants (18.7%).

Because this study focused on participants' discourse on racism and discrimination, an open, broad question, 'How has the current administration's immigration policy, including the DACA program, affected you and your family?' was used to begin exploration of the topic. This initial question was broad enough to engage participants in discussion of a wide range of topics. While participants were not asked about specific themes, moderators were free to inquire more deeply into topics that arose during the FG sessions. Because the topic of stress was universal to all FG sessions, the broad question, 'What other factors contribute to creating stress in agricultural workers?' was asked at the end of the FG sessions. Open coding and thematic analysis based on the themes that emerged from the participants' narratives was undertaken. Open coding led to multiple codes that captured perceptions, feelings, and recurring experience(s). Subsequently, the coding process was discussed, revised, and refined within the research team before a second round of focused coding was conducted. Through the coding process, individual codes were grouped into categories (Table 3). We identified three broad thematic categories: 1) Increasing hostile behavior and differential impact on the Latina/o agricultural community; 2) Individual and societal domains affected and; 3) dehumanization. Qualitative analysis software (QDA Miner Lite) was used for content analysis.

Results

Increasing hostile behavior

Participants frequently reported experiencing intense forms of widespread racism and discrimination during the FG sessions. Racism is not a new concern among agricultural workers. The feeling of being excluded and socially marginalized existed prior to the Trump Administration. However, agricultural workers

Table 2. Characteristics of the participants in focus group sessions 17–19 (FG 7–19).

Age	
18–29	22 (24.2%)
30–49	35 (38.5%)
50–69	22 (24.2%)
Missing*	12 (13.2%)
Gender	
Male	28 (30.8%)
Female	63 (69.2%)
School-leaving age	
<13	22 (24.2%)
14–18	39 (42.9%)
19+	17 (18.7%)
Missing	13 (14.3%)
Country of birth	
Mexico	69 (75.8%)
US	13 (14.3%)
El Salvador	2 (2.2%)
Missing	7 (7.7%)
Spoken English	
Not at all/bad	37 (40.7%)
Intermediate	21 (23.1%)
Fluent	22 (24.2%)
Missing	11 (12.1%)
Years at agricultural work	
1–4	19 (22.1%)
5–9	10 (11.6%)
10+	48 (55.8%)
Missing	9 (10.5%)
N/A**	5
Year first entry in the US	
1968–1989	12 (15.4%)
1990–1999	21 (26.9%)
2000–2009	27 (34.6%)
2010–2019	7 (9%)
Missing	11 (14.1%)
N/A (US-Born)	13
Go out of US in the last year	
Yes	18 (19.8%)
No	63 (69.2%)
Missing	10 (11%)
Total	91

*Number of missing cases.

**Not an agricultural worker but family member of agricultural worker.

Table 3. Categories and codes used in text analysis.

Increasing hostile behavior and differential impact on the Latina/o agricultural community
Race discrimination
Gender discrimination
Age discrimination
Discrimination based on social or legal status.
Individual and societal domains affected/discrimination settings
Workplace
Stores/shopping activities
Healthcare settings
Schools
In restaurants and during leisure activities (fairs, theaters, etc.)
Racism in the media
Dehumanization and perceived racist administration and racist policy
Participants' perceptions on the Trump administration policy
Dehumanization
Police abuse, lack of trust in authorities, lack of the resources to cope with problems, helplessness

experienced a significant increase in fear, racism and discrimination, after Trump's election—which was evident in the participants' narratives.

They say, '[racism] has always been there.' Yes, it's always been there, but since he [President Trump] has been there, it's like he's dedicated himself to that. He has promoted the fear, the racism. (FG11, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Before, I could go out and I'd feel completely normal and now I can't, I can feel, like, the gazes of other people. And I feel uncomfortable. (FG19, Woman, Mexican immigrant, unknown legal status, 30–49 years old)

Experiences of verbal and physical violence came to light frequently during the FG sessions. In addition to fear and discrimination, a significant rise of violence, hate incidents and hate crimes expressly attributed to the Trump administration and its anti-immigrant rhetoric was recurrently reported by study participants.

I think it's wrong what the president is doing because he has raised a lot of racism towards the Latinos. Wherever we go, the [US-born white population] look at us . . . , they look at us poorly and it feels really bad. And that's what happened in Texas, the . . . the attack towards the Latinos, and that was all because . . . because of the current administration, the president. (FG16, Man, unknown legal status, 30–49 years old)

Participants' narratives suggest that the Trump administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric impacted and shaped social perceptions of immigrants, legitimating racist social conduct and stigmatizing this community by reinforcing, encouraging and perpetuating stereotypes.

The ones that used to say they weren't racist but in their homes were racist, they now are racists in the open because they feel supported by everything that the president says. (FG19, Man, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

And well, we came to work here, we didn't come here to [engage in criminal behavior]. . . for one person that does bad, they judge us all, that we're all criminals. (FG10, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

It causes much racism in saying that we take away the jobs of the Americans [US-born white population]. (FG 15, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

The increasing hostile behavior illustrated in the above quotes impacted participants differently depending on social identities and individuals' characteristics.

Differential impact on the Latina/o agricultural community

Race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, country of origin, legal-status, gender and age were all associated with discrimination in the agricultural workers' narrative. Social identities and individuals' characteristics combined to create differential degrees of impact and exposure to the growing racism and discrimination during the Trump administration. The effect of the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies on agricultural workers was strongly linked to participants' legal status. The most vulnerable populations in terms of legal status (undocumented populations) suffered a clear and great impact; however, as described below, a growing discrimination and racism strongly affecting documented immigrants and US citizens participants in different ways was also reported.

I think, with the political situation, it affects you one way or another. Whether, you know, if it's for some. . . like, for some of us it doesn't, some of us it does. But in a way, it really does, because you have family members that. . .that, you know, not all of them are legal in the US. (FG05, Woman, unknown legal status and age)

Mixed-status families (family members of different citizenship or immigration statuses) were common among study participants. Some of the few US citizens reported a strong impact on documented and undocumented family

members (including DACA recipients) or loved ones as illustrated by the quotes below.

It does not affect me and my family but seeing a close friend who is affected and how she sees her...how she gets frustrated, how she is crying, that she does not know what to do... Seeing that person who is suffering also affects us in a certain way. (FG18, Woman, DACA recipient, 30–49 years old)

I am not in any of those situations, but I have friends, friends and family members who do look affected with the fear that they will remove those programs. Because their children would find themselves in a situation in which it is not known if they will continue studying. (FG07, Woman, US citizen, 30–49 years old)

I don't have a family with the problems that you have. My family is all citizens. So... but I also have friends and I see them very worried...and they say: 'Oh, my friend, I'm going to order my children to be under your custody in case they arrest me', 'I will give you my children custody', they say. Making papers for the arrangements, that is. (FG11, Woman, US citizen, 50–69 years old)

Citizens and documented participants not only reported being affected emotionally as a result of the impact on their loved ones. As illustrated in the next section's quotes, citizens and documented participants were impacted in a variety of ways, e.g. some documented participants withdrew themselves and their children from public programs to prevent any potential future problem with obtaining legal status; some of the few US citizens who participated in the FGs were afraid of losing their nationality as a consequence of the new immigration policy. In addition, a strong psychological impact on agricultural workers' children, in a wide range of legal statuses, including US citizenship, was frequently reported.

Race-based fear and discrimination also emerged prominently in the participants' discourse. Not only documented and undocumented immigrants, but also the US citizen participants reported suffering racism. Moreover, participants described an increase in discrimination, racism and hate incidents not only against agricultural workers and their families, but also against other members of the Latina/o community or the Latina/o community as a whole.

One feels fear just because of having Latino parents. (FG16, Woman, US citizen, 18–29 years old)

...the racism of the farmers against the Hispanic people.... (FG03, Woman, unknown legal status and age)

Reference was made to a rise of racism against other minorities during the Trump administration.

We are going back to the times when African-Americans were put on different buses. (FG15, Woman, unknown legal status, 18–29 years old)

However, interminority racism, as prejudice or discrimination between racial minorities, was expressed by a few participants.

And those blacks who do not work have all the services (health insurance, food-stamps, they pay their rent...), and they [African Americans] do not work. (FG16, Man, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

And also give thanks to the undocumented Mexicans, all of them allow us to eat. Because a black man, they are not going to do the work as Mexican does. (FG16, Woman, DACA recipient, 18–29 years old)

The Americans [US white population] attack everyone. But what can we do? The majority... yes, the majority are Hispanic. Either Hispanic or African American. The Muslims are hiding. But as a Hispanic, yes, we have our attitude, why do I say no? We do try to defend ourselves. Muslims don't want it, okay. But, if you've seen the news, Hispanics and African Americans get together. Because we are almost of the same attitude to defend ourselves. We want a change. And we want to do something about it. (FG17, Woman, unknown legal status, 18–29 years old)

Many agricultural workers face discrimination due to a combination of different factors. In addition to legal status and race/ethnically-based discrimination, many participants reported a perceived discrimination based on socioeconomic status. The participants' narratives suggest that legal status and socioeconomic status moderate the relationship between race/ethnicity and discrimination.

A lot of bullying at school too. And then they look at the [clothing] brands, if there are... Girls who have good brands are followed by girls who have money. And the others are poor [...]. They ignore those who do not have good brand shoes. (FG15, Woman, unknown legal status, 18–29 years old)

Intersectional and overlapping social identities emerging from the agricultural workers' narratives demonstrate different levels of vulnerability and marginalization processes. Interestingly, discrimination against hired agricultural workers, predominantly Latina/o population, was reported to not only come from the

non-Latina/o population, but also increasingly from the Latina/o population itself based on legal and social-economic status.

I have friends...yeah, I have [...] Mexican friends that started to express too, the same ideas, that they believe that well, that the Mexicans that come from Mexico have MediCal, they have Food Stamps and things like that, but what they don't know is that they can't...get, get it. They well, are convinced that what the administration tells them well, Trump and his people, that, 'Those people are stealing our jobs and they're taking away our, well, welfare, food stamps, well everything.' And...and it's a lie that they've created. (FG03, Man, unknown legal status and age)

There are people in this country who came to this country as immigrants, and they believe they are from this country...They even tell them [immigrants from Mexico] to go back home because they are not from this country or because of 'x' things. And they are people who are from there [Mexico]. Just because they are citizens and speak English, they humiliate [immigrant] people. And that is discrimination between ourselves, not even from the gringos. (FG09, Man, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 50–69 years old)

Study participants also frequently reported perceived discrimination based on gender and age.

And they decided to study construction, you don't see that very much, a woman working in construction. I too, I said, 'Even here. I'm not going to enter the [agriculture] field. I need to get ahead because if I return to that, I'm going to stay there again,' [...] Woman in construction? (FG16, Woman, Mexican immigrant, legal status: documented immigrant, 18–29 years old)

In some cases, discrimination based on a combination of both gender and age came to light.

Listen, I'm old already, look, I'm the eldest of us all. They don't give you work just anywhere and tell you, 'Fill out the application.' You fill out the application. 'We'll call you later.' 'We'll call you later on.' And they don't call! And that, that's a stress because you say, 'I'm no longer good for anything.' You wake up. And yes...they do that in the sheds [rudimentary structures used as agricultural offices]. An elderly lady will go, and they won't give her a job. A younger and prettier one will go, and they give her the job. Hmm, yes, they give her the job. I had to go through that. (FG15, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 50–69 years old)

The above quote, in which an undocumented woman suffers discrimination based on gender and age combined is a classic example of how intersectional

and overlapping social identities contribute to increased marginalization and vulnerability in this community. Participants' narratives during FGs sessions on topics other than racism, including labor abuse and sexual harassment, provided additional evidence on the dramatic vulnerability of certain subgroups, particularly women and undocumented agricultural workers.

They know that you are there out of necessity and they abuse. (FG02, Woman, unknown legal status and age)

There are foreman, bosses ... like some of us women, go to work alone, and sometimes we are even abused. So, they treat us like that, they want to speak badly, more than anything, speak badly or want to touch you. Yes, that makes you uncomfortable. It makes you uncomfortable. Actually, yes. Yes, there are sometimes simply with their eyes, it is not necessary for them to touch us, but how they see you and how they speak to you, you feel uncomfortable. You can't even focus on your work because of the fear. And then also, if you are brave enough they send you ...Uh, well, they grab you and they send you back to your country, that is...Because there are many of us who do not let them..., right, but also getting in trouble..., and you are going to go back to the ranch there. [...] And then one does not have a way to defend oneself. And well, there are low-income people, that I have had to see..., who fall into their traps. I mean, there are innocents, there are girls who... Sometimes out of desperation too. Out of desperation to grab money, and they fall into their traps. Hmm. (FG8, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Participants' narratives provide evidence that, in addition to creating a general sense of distress, the Trump anti-immigrant rhetoric fueled prejudice, discrimination and aggressive behavior against agricultural workers and Latinas/os in general. Latina/o child and adult citizens, documented and undocumented immigrants were all strongly impacted. Individual and societal domains affected by the Trump administration rhetoric and immigration policies are discussed below.

Individual and societal domains affected

As illustrated in this section quotes, participants described experiences of racism, discrimination and violence in the US in a variety of social domains (involving family economy, health and social participation) and settings including stores –

Even in the stores you're disrespected. Yes, since the president entered [into office]. I was once called, 'You fucking Mexican'. (FG6, Woman, unknown legal status, 30–49 years old)

as well as in community environments with a strong potential for social interactions, such as festivals, restaurants and theaters.

Now you can no longer go safely to the stores because you fear that something bad could happen. I'm also scared when I go with my girlfriend, I'm going to...like to movie theaters. I am also afraid there. I just look over my shoulder so that it doesn't...just to make sure something strange isn't going to happen. She also does not like going to the movie theaters for the same reason, fear. (FG14, Man, unknown legal status, 18–29 years old)

Many of the participants complained of discriminatory and unequal treatment at healthcare facilities and in public programs. Both immigrant agricultural workers and US citizens reported unequal treatment at healthcare facilities or participation in public programs.

I feel that...and I've seen it, that if you have good health insurance and if you arrive with MediCal at a hospital, and you're Hispanic and the other person is White...um...and [they] arrive with good insurance, they first attend the person that has good health insurance and is White, and afterwards they attend the Hispanic that comes with MediCal. That's discrimination there. (FG13, Woman, undocumented Mexican immigrant, 30–49 years old)

I'm born here [in the US]. [...] because you're working in the fields they think you don't have papers. And it is more stress for oneself, even to ask for assistance. For me...for many years they haven't wanted to provide me with assistance in, in...neither MediCal, nor food stamps, nothing. And I see how other people receive assistance so easily. And I ask to myself, 'But why? Why one, whom tries to overcome?' It's been...it hasn't been too long since before I started this job, it happened to me and I got frustrated and was about to... I went, yes I went to receive therapy because I didn't know what else to do. (FG16, Woman, US citizen, 18–29 years old)

The increased pressure on agricultural workers due to the Trump administration's changes in immigration policy and the increasing pressure on deportations, had a strong impact on the agricultural workers and forced them to withdraw themselves and their children (including US citizen children) from public programs. In particular, changes in the public charge policy used to determine legal status or legal entry into the US and the impact on access to vital public benefits among documented agricultural workers and citizen children was a recurrent theme during the interviews.

Many people stopped asking for help, SNAP assistance, welfare, because they see there's a threat that you'd be a public charge and instead they stop getting [the support] because of fear. They'll be sick and not go to the doctor because, oh, they are afraid that they will have a public charge put on them and they won't be able to gain

residency one day. And because of that people instead stay sick in their home. Or if their children are US citizens... , no, no...they won't even ask for MediCal now. Because the children even now, supposedly, it will affect them if they ask for MediCal for their US citizen child. (FG10, Woman, Mexican immigrant, legal status: documented immigrant, 30–49 years old)

Discrimination at workplace and statements about discrimination that limit employment options also came to light on a recurring basis during FG sessions.

And I, in reality, have never seen an American person [US-born white person] in the agricultural fields, [...], if they are born here, they get an office position. [...] And that... that is very unfair to me. One, as a Hispanic, sometimes they exploit you and don't pay you. Look, if we start to see how much they pay the Americans [US-born white population] and how much they pay us, there is no comparison. And what do they do and what do we do? Moreover, they always say that they have more [social] benefits. (FG17, Woman, unknown legal status, 30–49 years old)

Instead, if there was a bit of equality, it'd be different. Because one could be in jobs that are better paid and not necessarily [need to] work in the field. (FG17, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Education was mentioned frequently as a form of social mobility, and poor educational opportunities were perceived as perpetuating this racial/ethnic inequalities in job opportunities by the participants. Concerns about the Trump administration's attempts to rescind the DACA program and how these concerns impact children's academic achievement and future job opportunities were recurrent themes during the FG sessions.

And then those that have DACA are very concerned because, they say, 'If they get rid of it, what are we going to do?' A lot of people are working with DACA. They're the ones that bring food to their home right now because they have that permit through DACA. (FG07, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Our children are also scared...my son would give up. He'd say 'Well, I'm never going to get a license, I'll never do anything, because I don't have...'. But when that [DACA] program came it was like a light for thousands of students and then suddenly again now the threat. (FG11, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

In addition, much of the participants' discourse on education focused on a rise of bullying and hate incidents in schools that participants attributed to the Trump administration.

I feel that like, for me, the Trump administration has planted much racism. I have been more afraid of sending my daughters to school with as much violence as I have seen. [...] they say that we want to steal their jobs, but our jobs are something those that are able don't want to do. (FG14, Woman, unknown legal status, 30–49 years old)

And the schools, you see. So much hate now, against the Latin people. So much hate. (FG07, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Moreover, some participant narratives included consequences of children's acculturation to hatred and suggests the importance of addressing racist attitudes held by minors and schools.

Children are the future of this country...That's why there must be change there. In the schools. Starting with schools...Yes, the hate that...the parents that support that man [President Trump] are transmitting it in their children, and they [the children] express all that hate in the school and are worsening everything. I don't know why they still can't...they haven't changed the president. (FG17, Woman, unknown legal status, 18–29 years old)

As illustrated in the quotes above, participants became more insecure and fearful during the Trump administration. Study participants felt that the perceived harmful policies and the rise on discrimination, racism and hate incidents had a tremendous psychological impact on their families.

The psychological stress and impact of fear

The impact on mental health, psychological distress and fear among agricultural workers and their family members (adults and children alike with a wide range of legal statuses) was overwhelming, as illustrated by the quotes below. The increasing psychological distress and fear along with the rise of hate violence was strong enough that some community members retreated from society, 'into the shadows,' and were staying at home. Some participants reported limiting time spent in the community and reducing commuting/traveling for work-related activities and contact with public institutions. Most relevant social domains, including family economy, education, and health, were consequently impacted by the increased fear. In-store shopping for essential products, such as food or clothing, participation in recreational activities and festivities in public spaces and taking children to school were also an increasing concern among agricultural workers. Therefore, a process of increasing marginalization preventing the community from full participation in social, economic, and political life emerged in the participants' discourse on psychological distress and fear.

Yup, you're with fear then. They don't go to work. Many people don't go. No, you just don't go out of your house. (FG09, Man, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

The fear of going out to the street, like what happened in Texas a few months ago. An attack towards the Hispanic community. [...] it's the Trump administration. He involved so much hate [...] Because of those attacks there are many Hispanics that don't even want to leave their house. (FG17, Woman, unknown legal-status, 18–29 years old)

Fear and a clear sense of threat by the Trump administration with the connivance of part of the population emerged during the FGs. Participants not only associated President Trump and the Trump administration's anti-immigration rhetoric with an increasing social stigma and a rise in hate incidents and hate crimes, but they also perceived a growing institutional racism and identified the Trump administration immigration policies as intentionally harmful, discriminatory and racist.

This president is racist, racist, especially with Mexicans, he doesn't like us. . .It's such a hate that. . .wow! When you hear the news you are like. . .wow! What have we done to that man [President Trump]? (FG07, Woman, immigrant from El Salvador, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Since his campaign started, since before he became, he became the president, he was already instilling fear, instilling fear in [the public]. . .and even then I don't know how the people voted for him when. . ., when he was already treating us poorly from the beginning. (FG11, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

He [President Trump] is seeking by all means to harm us. (FG11, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

A growing fear and institutional racism was also related to police abuse, lack of trust in authorities, lack of resources or the ability to cope with problems, and a feeling of helplessness (particularly among undocumented participants) in the participantss narratives.

Lot of abuse, abuse of [police] authorities. . .how they grab you, they burst you, like, . . .you believe that, they kill you, suffocate you. (FG18, Man, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

The participants' children was a cross-cutting topic that appears recurrently within different themes. Therefore, much of the participants' discourse on psychological distress and fear focused on children. As emerged during the FG sessions, psychological distress, trauma, fear, significant disruptions in schooling,

behavioral problems ('they become rebellious') and mental health issues ('my daughters are in therapy') were experienced frequently by the participants' children. Study participants reported increases in hostile behavior against their children with a wide range of legal statuses, including US citizenship. Study participants felt that the rise of discrimination, fear and hate incidents (including bullying and hate incidents in schools) had a tremendous psychological impact on children contributing to worsening their vulnerable emotional situation(s) and negatively affecting their behavior and their studies.

I think there hadn't been as much fear as there is with this administration. There'd never been so much fear before... like, one would go to work peacefully, without concern. Now one, like before... before going out, one pulls the curtain and first checks outside. One first checks outside before stepping out and wait [to make sure there is no danger]. Similarly, one's children will ask you, 'But you're going to go back?' or, 'What are we going to do if you don't come back?' (FG11, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

This new president that we have. The discrimination, the racism, it's all affecting our families. Our children are more stressed. I have two daughters and I have both in... therapy, because of the the stress. And so... mine are the same. (FG15, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Importantly, the participants themselves related this increase in fear and lack of opportunities with processes of marginalization in children and young population.

All of these things affect the emotions of people. The youth because the youth have dreams. And also, with the... like, the negativity of, of...or the discrimination that is seen in the migration policies. Um, I feel that that invites more violence [...] I'm old now but the youth, um...no...it's like they lose track more easily and still some can go...they feel like, frustrated, and they're inclined more towards drugs, alcohol... (FG16, Women, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Rising racism and hate violence, perceived racist and intentionally harmful policies and a variety of social domains impacted were described as creating a cumulative and amplifying effect that marginalized this vulnerable community. Participants responded in many different ways; as described by the participants, increased fear and the consequent worsening of living conditions have led many families into dire situations and to consider returning to their home countries.

My friend was paying for her house in [US city] and she came here, because of the fear of everything. One day she packed her suitcase and came here and left her house that she was paying for there. She lost everything. (FG11, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

A lot of people [...] wanted to leave [the US] because of the fear they have of him [President Trump][...] And that they were going to kick you out and that you weren't going to take anything with you. And many people thought, everything I've done here and I'm going to leave it here. And that's psychological abuse [...]. That's violence, nevertheless, emotional, verbal, physical, whatever it be. It's pure violence. (FG12, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

A host of dire situations, such as those illustrated in the quotes above, emerged during the GF session and often led participants to talk about experiencing deep dehumanization feelings.

Dehumanizing Latina/o agricultural workers

A sense of dehumanization was one of the most emotional topics discussed. The agricultural workers frequently stated that the Trump administration perpetuated dehumanization through cruel and inhumane rhetoric towards and treatment of Latina/o immigrants.

I sometimes think they see us as animals. . .or rather, I think the dogs, the puppies and all of those have more value than us. . .that's how I've felt. [...] The way they look at us. . ., I don't know, perhaps like a pig. Because I think they like puppies over us. (FG11, Woman, immigrant from El Salvador, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

Well, we can't visit our families. Here we are enslaved, just like that. Work, work and just leaving the money here. Because what you work, well, here it stays. (FG14, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 18–29 years old)

Participants' narratives contrasted with the anti-immigrant narrative presented by the Trump administration and the lack of social appreciation for their work and contributions to the US economy and society. Therefore, having a sense of dignity in their work (e.g. participants often ask to be filmed while working) frequently arose in the FG sessions.

More than anything, there's also a lot of Americans [US-born white population] now that. . ., that attack us and tell us, 'They're getting things that belong to us.' But they never see that one, as a Mexican, is working harder than they are. They don't see that. And we are paid much less. (FG15, Woman, Mexican immigrant, undocumented legal status, 30–49 years old)

A call and desire to be treated as human beings with increased social appreciation for hired agricultural workers contributions to the economy were frequently stated.

But yes, we have a right to be respected and be treated like human beings, that's it.
(FG02, Woman, unknown legal status and age)

Discussion

This study explored Californian Latina/o agricultural workers' and their families' perspectives on the impact that Trump administration policies had on their daily life. Racism and its consequences were recurrent key themes. California employs over 8,00,000 Mexican agricultural workers each year, of which approximately 4,00,000 are estimated to be undocumented immigrants. Study participants suggested that pre-existing discrimination and racism were exacerbated by President Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and resulting political climate. Consistent with empirical research and the US Commission on Civil Rights (Edwards and Rushin, 2018; USCCR, 2019), agricultural workers participating in this study reported an increasing number of hate incidents and hate crimes during the Trump administration, including hate incidents in schools. Participants' narratives suggested the Trump administration's rhetoric impacted and shaped social perceptions of immigrants and legitimated violence and hate crimes. These hate crimes are part of a broader national epidemic. During the writing of this article, intense protests took place in US cities to support the Black Lives Matter Movement after the arrest and death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. The wide scope of the protests was unprecedented and spread across cities all over the world. The broad reach of the protests marked a significant shift in recognition of the importance and scope of institutionalized racism and racist conduct of authorities in the US. The storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 by far-right groups and White supremacists and the strong support of these groups for President Trump are also clear indications that these groups felt empowered during the Trump administration. On 13 January 2021, President Trump was impeached (for the second time) on the basis of abusing power and obstructing justice when inciting the mob attack of the Capitol. Significant increases in racism and hate crimes against other minorities (including Muslims and Asian Americans) in the US have been attributed to the rhetoric of the Trump administration (Key, 2020; Nakamura, 2021).

A rise in racism, increasing fear, and a clear sense of threat from the Trump administration were major themes brought up by agricultural workers and their families during the FG sessions conducted for this study between July 2019 and January 2020 in regions of California where agriculture is a predominant industry. Participants described how their precarious situations were further complicated by an increasing social marginalization during the Trump administration and contributed to increased hardships. The increase in racism and institution of anti-immigrant policies caused emotional trauma and forced participants to isolate and hide themselves, exacerbating their vulnerability, economic hardships and health risks.

In addition to racial discrimination, participants reported suffering discrimination based on gender, age, and legal and socioeconomic status. Social identities and individuals' characteristics combined to create differing impacts and exposures to growing racism and discrimination during the Trump administration. Undocumented immigrants within this large community were particularly vulnerable and suffered a clear and great impact; however, documented immigrants and US citizen participants were also greatly impacted. Both groups suffered social discrimination and an increasing fear and experience of family deportation during the Trump administration. Research found that Latina/o US citizens and legal immigrants were increasingly being questioned publicly about belonging in the US (Fleming, Lopez, 2019). Significantly, some of the few citizens who participated in this study reported experiencing discrimination and feared losing their US citizenship. Moreover, according to the participants, their children, regardless of their legal status, were also greatly impacted by hate incidents, racism, and discrimination in schools. Therefore, consistent with previous studies (Findling et al., 2019), not even being born in the US prevented members of this large Latina/o community from the increasing fear and discrimination reported by the study participants.

As reflected by the participants' narratives, in addition to the undocumented population, women within the farmworker community were especially challenged. Often raised in violent countries and households, female agricultural workers are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, widespread violence in their communities, and gender-based abuse in the workplace (Balos and Fellows, 1999; Dominguez, 1997). As many participants reported, women agricultural workers frequently suffer sexual harassment by employers and coworkers. Many of these women come from countries with a culture that tends to socialize them to be submissive, and as a result, they may not be willing to speak out of fear of stigma and possible repercussions, including economic repercussions (National Public Radio, 2013; Warrick, 1996). This makes women, in particular undocumented women, vulnerable to negative attitudes and actions against the Latina/o agricultural worker community.

Increasing discrimination was reported to have a strong adverse impact on multiple key settings and domains, including mental health, educational opportunities, family economics, participation in public programs, and access to healthcare facilities. As reported by study participants, discrimination in employment and education were prevalent, preventing this community from improving their economic and social status. Education was talked about frequently as a form of social mobility in the FG sessions, and educational opportunities occupied most of the participants' discourse on DACA. Agricultural workers highlighted the negative impact that ending the DACA program could have, including deportation, canceled work permits, limited medical insurance and government benefits (such as food stamps, unemployment compensation, housing assistance, and child care assistance), as well as limiting educational opportunities. Access to health care and participation in public programs, such as nutritional programs, is of utmost importance for this community. Therefore, any fear or hesitation to contact

healthcare services due to perceived discrimination or racism severely impacts the health of this community as well the larger community as a whole (e.g. reduced vaccination program participation; increased spread of infectious disease, such as COVID-19 and tuberculosis, etc.). In addition, increased discrimination put up barriers to social mobility, social well-being, and personal health.

FG results highlighted how increasing fear and discrimination brought on by the Trump administration combined to create a long-term cumulative and amplifying effect of marginalizing agricultural workers. By worsening health and reducing job and educational opportunities in this community, the increasing racism during the Trump administration is expected to have long-term, adverse consequences. Based on participants' narratives, the political climate during the Trump administration played an important role in persistent poverty and in the perpetuation of health inequalities in this vulnerable community. Moreover, the anti-immigrant rhetoric not only fueled discrimination and hate crimes, but also created a strong and long-term barrier to integrating this community into society in the coming decades as it negatively influences social perception and policies on immigrants and immigration.

The participants' narratives opposed the above-mentioned anti-immigrant rhetoric. Significantly, simply being treated as human beings was a frequent demand in the participants' narratives. Dehumanization is frequently combined with policies that deprive and exclude large social groups from fundamental human rights (Ames, 2019). Not surprisingly, the study participants perceived immigration policy under the Trump administration as intentionally harmful. In particular, participants were worried about the increasing number of deportations, the recent change in the public charge policy (used to determine legal entry into the US and legal status), and access to vital public benefits for documented agricultural workers and citizen children.

Conclusion

Structural racism and social mechanisms that prevent US immigrants and minorities from thriving and improving their social and economic status have not been studied extensively despite increased national attention (Findling et al., 2019). A deeper national debate about racial and ethnic discrimination in the US is needed. The Latina/o community, the largest minority group in the US, and agricultural workers, should have a voice in this debate. Campaigns to counter the growing negative social perception of immigrants and Latina/o populations and changes that can re-establish hope and reduce stress and fear among agricultural workers are urgently needed. We call for comprehensive immigration reform to protect immigrant and refugees' basic human rights and improve life quality and labor market opportunities of migrant workers and their families.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP), California Human Development (CHD), California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLAF), California Rural Legal Assistance Inc. (CRLA), Center for Farmworker Families (CFF), Cooperativa Campesina de California (CCC), Cultiva la Salud (CS), Mi Familia Vota, Education Fund (MFVEF), National Compadres Network (NCN) and Proteus Inc. (P. Inc) for their support and partnership in the funded research proposal. We are grateful to Marc Schenker, Deliana Garcia and the Migrant Clinician Network Team for critically reading the manuscript.

Authors' note

The work described here has not been published previously, it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and has been approved by all authors.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: WCAHS Seed Grant 2018–2019. WCAHS Seed Grant 2019–2020.

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