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HISPANIC/LATINO IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES: OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH DISPARITIES

FLYNN, M.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Hispanic/Latino immigrant workers in the United States: Occupational safety and health disparities Historically, most Latin Americans immigrating to the United States for employment settled in southwestern states, areas that were once a part of Mexico and which have existing Hispanic/Latino communities. In the last decade, there has been a plateau in immigration to these areas. However, areas of the United States, such as the Midwest and South, which have not historically been destinations for these immigrants, have experienced explosive growth in their Hispanic/Latino populations. Compared to Hispanic/Latinos immigrating to “old settlement” areas, immigrants in the “new settlement” areas face many significant challenges related to the lack of an established Hispanic community. These challenges include the lack of a Spanish-speaking infrastructure and both community service agencies and employers that were virtually unprepared to cope with the sudden influx of Hispanic immigrants. This presentation will provide an overview of the occupational safety and health disparities experience by Hispanic/Latino immigrants working in the United States, with emphasis on issues related to recent immigrants. In particular, the demographics and the geography of the large influx of Hispanic/Latino immigrants to new settlement areas and its impact upon occupational safety and health will be highlighted. Hispanic/Latino immigrants to the new settlement areas are challenged to build a social community and identity in the United States. By definition, new settlement areas lack “pioneers” or “old timers” who can share their understanding of the culture of the United States or their experiences negotiating with and through its institutions – including the workplace. In turn, many of the employers of recent immigrants are challenged as well. Many are small businesses with limited resources to devote to occupational safety and health training, much less attempting to provide it in Spanish or one of the Native American dialects spoken by Hispanic/Latino immigrants from more rural areas. This presentation will conclude with a brief discussion of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health partnerships with community agencies and Hispanic/Latino organizations to facilitate research and outreach with the immigrant community.

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Editors
Scott McIntyre
Jonathan Houdmont



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EDITORS Jonathan Houdmont (University of Nottingham)
Scott McIntyre (Unidade de Investigação em Desenvolvimento
Humano e Psicologia/ Instituto Superior da Maia)

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ISMAI – Instituto Superior da Maia
Av. Carlos Oliveira Campos
Castelo da Maia
4475-690 AVIOSO S. PEDRO
E-mail: info@ismai.pt