

HISPANIC/LATINO IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES: BRIDGING THE CHASM BETWEEN ANECDOTE AND SURVEILLANCE

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Hispanic/Latino immigrant workers in the United States: Bridging the chasm between anecdote and surveillance A large chasm exists in the data regarding Hispanic/Latino immigrants working in the United States. On one hand, there are epidemiological studies suggesting the existence of significant health disparities that need to be addressed. On the other hand, there are papers theorizing that the effectiveness of health and safety interventions aimed at Hispanic/Latino immigrant workers could be increased by attending to a handful of hypothesized Hispanic/Latino cultural traits. However, no field studies have been conducted testing these suggestions. This paper will present the findings of a study that has started to bridge the knowledge chasm between speculation and surveillance. The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, in collaboration with researchers from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, collected data from a convenience sample of nearly 500 Hispanic/Latino immigrants at a local Hispanic/Latino festival that typically draws between 20,000 – 30,000 attendees. This sample represents approximately 1% of the Greater Cincinnati area's estimated Hispanic/Latino population. The study participants were administered a survey touching upon the following areas: demographics, language fluency, acculturation, personal health, employment, occupational safety and health training, and workplace injuries. Analysis of the data indicates that the overwhelming majority of participants in this sample were newcomers to the United States. Over 90% had arrived since 1987 and nearly 60% since 2000. Most reported a low level of acculturation with approximately 80% reporting a preference for Hispanic/Latino social environments and the Spanish language. When questioned about the job they have held the longest since coming to the United States, slightly over 13% of the sample reported being injured on the job, almost 30% reported receiving no occupational safety training, and of those who did receive training, approximately half were trained in English. Further analyses found no differences in injury rates for those individuals trained in English or in Spanish, even when respondents indicated very low or no fluency in English. This finding supports criticisms that have been leveled at current occupational safety and health training practices as having fallen far short of the mark with Hispanic/Latino immigrant workers. These findings will be discussed in relation to a current National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health field study that is investigating methods to better tailor occupational safety and health training to meet the needs of Hispanic/Latino immigrant workers.

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