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Good Job, Bad Job: Occupational Perceptions Among Latino Poultry Workers

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Abstract

Objectives—Immigrant workers frequently take jobs that are physically demanding, provide low wages, and result in injuries (e.g., poultry production and processing). Through a qualitative approach, this paper elicits poultry workers' evaluations of their jobs and set them in the larger context of their lives.

Methods—Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 65 poultry workers in western North Carolina. Workers were asked to discuss job characteristics, physical and psychological impacts of their employment, and perceived health risks.

Results—Immigrant workers valued the stability, benefits, upward mobility, and pay offered. They disliked the physical demands, the potential perceived effects of the job on their health, and the interactions with bosses and peers.

Conclusion—Workers' willingness to endure dirty, dangerous, and demanding (3-D) conditions of poultry must be understood in the context of other employment options, structural violence, and their focus on immediate family needs that positive aspects of these jobs can fulfill.

INTRODUCTION

The poultry processing industry has expanded in North Carolina and other southern states over the past several decades [Striffler, 2005]. This expansion has relied on cheap, immigrant labor, particularly labor from Mexico and Central American countries [Smith-Nonini, 2011; Stuesse and Helton, 2013; Griffith, 2012]. Jobs in poultry production and processing are physically demanding, and they frequently result in injury and long term

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disability. The injury rate in poultry processing in 2013 was 4.5 per 100 workers, which is higher than the rate for the manufacturing industry overall of 4.0 per 100 workers [Arcury et al., 2013]. Although those rates are not high compared to other industries and reported injuries have decreased in the poultry industry over the last decade, they need to be interpreted with caution as there is often underreporting. Poultry processing jobs provide low wages, and require limited skills; these characteristics have discouraged native-born Americans from performing these jobs and have contributed to the increase of foreign-born workers. While people from other ethnic groups work in poultry processing, the majority are foreign-born, Latino workers [Quandt et al., 2006]. The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) helped make Mexican immigrant workers an exportable commodity that provides a source of cheap labor for northern multinationals [Smith-Nonini, 2011].

Employment turnover rates in the poultry industry have declined, making Latino ethnicity a stable feature of the poultry processing workforce [Guthey, 2001], and concentrating the health risks of the industry in this population. In the face of the difficult and demanding nature of these jobs, this raises the question of why workers stay in these jobs and whether they consider poultry processing jobs to be “good” jobs. While different disciplines use diverse characteristics to define a good job [Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, 2009; Schram, 2000; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2007], most offer a definition that originates from a white, middle-to upper-class perspective that excludes minorities. Such definitions include factors such as wages, fringe benefits, job security, working conditions, recognition and opportunity for advancement [International Labour Organization, 2004].

Latino poultry processing workers in the South are a vulnerable population. Most lack protections afforded by unions or by rigorous enforcement of labor or health and safety regulations. Factors such as lack of documentation, limited English-language skills, low levels of formal education, and limited work options exacerbate immigrant Latino poultry production and processing workers’ vulnerability to injury and mistreatment [Richardson et al., 2004]. The literature on job perception among marginalized groups like immigrants is limited and often focuses only on precarious employment, such as day labor [Ahonen et al., 2009; Dong and Platner, 2004]. However, large numbers of immigrant workers coming to the US and western European countries have taken jobs with many characteristics of standard employment, but are considered undesirable by native workers. How immigrant workers evaluate poultry production and processing work as “good” or “bad” is important to understand for providing safety training for these workers and for building better occupational safety programs. This paper seeks to expand the literature on how immigrant Latino workers perceive jobs in poultry production and processing using data collected with in-depth interviews.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants were recruited for the qualitative components of three different studies of poultry processing workers in Western North Carolina. There were three poultry processing facilities in the study area; Company 1 was owned by a large multinational corporation, Company 2 was owned by a smaller, national company, and Company 3 was owned by a

small, regional company. The three plants varied in size and mechanization. The study counties were rural and considered “new settlement” areas for Hispanic/Latino residents [Pew Hispanic Center, 2005]. The total population of the six counties in 2010 was 392,558, with 24,707 (6%) of that Hispanic [Pew Hispanic Center, 2010]. Study 1 explored the physical and psychosocial impacts of poultry employment on current and former Latino workers and developed ways of assisting workers individually and collectively in protecting themselves from the demands of this work [Quandt et al., 2006]. Study 2 documented the job of chicken catching on production farms and its health and safety risks [Quandt et al., 2013]. Study 3 assessed the prevalence and incidence of illnesses among current poultry processing workers and their understanding of carpal tunnel [Arcury et al., 2013], skin diseases, and organization of work. This analysis included 65 interviews, 25 conducted for Study 1 in 2004–05; 10 conducted for Study 2 in 2009, and 30 conducted for Study 3 in 2009–10.

Recruitment

Latino immigrants in the United States are often a complex group to engage in research because they are often a hidden and hard-to-reach population. The research team did not have access to workplaces, and no census existed of Latino manual workers in the area. Therefore, different methodologies were used to recruit the participants for the studies. For studies 1 and 2, participants were contacted through churches, community leaders, and *tienda* owners. Study 3 participants were a subset from a larger study conducted to assess the prevalence and incidence of occupational injuries among poultry processing workers. The larger study used a site-based sampling plan to ensure that a representative sample would be selected [Arcury and Quandt, 1999]. The sampling method reasons that each person is a member of at least one residential household or “site.” Sites can include residential enclaves, areas of high concentrations of workers, or dispersed residences, workers living apart from other poultry workers. If sites that vary across characteristics of the community (e.g., being composed of single men vs. families) are chosen and respondents are selected from a variety of sites, the resulting sample reflects the variability in the community. The study team and a community-based organization partnered to map areas mostly populated by Latino residents (enclaves) in the study area [Quandt et al., 2006]. Lists of enclaves were then assigned proportionately to recruiters. Trusted members of the Latino community were hired as recruiters.

To be eligible for any of the three studies, workers had to be 18 years or older, self-identify as being Latino or Hispanic, and be a former or current worker in poultry production or processing. Study 3 included only current workers. The recruitment frame for studies 1 and 3 called for an even number of females and males and an even distribution across the study area. For study 2, only males were recruited because chicken catching is a job performed entirely by males. In study 3, a total of 30 workers who had clinically-diagnosed carpal tunnel syndrome [Cartwright et al., 2012] or infectious or inflammatory skin diseases [Pichardo-Geisinger et al., 2013] were selected. Eligible participants were approached in random order until approximately equal numbers of men and women, Guatemalan and Mexican, and carpal tunnel and skin disease cases were recruited.

Data Collection

Open ended, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Spanish by native Spanish-speaking interviewers who had experience and training in conducting qualitative interviews and who were trusted residents of the study area. Interviews took approximately 60 minutes to complete. Interview guides were constructed and focused on asking workers to describe their jobs and how the work was organized, how the job they did affected their health, what self-care behaviors they practiced, and what barriers to prevention, treatment, and injury and illness reporting they experienced (e.g., if experiencing a health problem “How do you think that your health problem should be treated”, “Why do you think this problem occurred?”) Workers were also asked about characteristics of their job and what they liked and disliked about their job (e.g., “Some workers have told us that poultry processing jobs are good jobs: what do you think?”, “What makes them good or bad?”) Probes were used to elicit descriptions of their working conditions and any safety training received. For studies 1 and 3, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. For study 2, interviews were recorded, and relevant sections of the interview were transcribed directly into English. Although the studies were conducted at different times, they all used the same questions to assess the positive and negative job characteristics. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, that their participation was voluntary, and provide signed informed consent prior to conducting the interviews. They were given a \$20 incentive at the completion of the interview. All procedures were approved by the Wake Forest School of Medicine Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

An iterative data analysis process was used, with analysis starting as soon as data collection began. Interview transcripts or notes were read by the study team, and topics were identified for further exploration by the interviewers. Once all data were collected, a list of codes was constructed for topics of interest, with mutually exclusive definitions established. The main code used for this analysis was one delineating discussion of what makes a job “good” or “bad.” After a review of the quotations within this code, it was evident that many of the workers had difficulty expressing characteristics that would define an optimal job. Instead, workers talked about both good and bad aspects of their work in poultry production and processing. Hence, sub-codes were created to distinguish good and bad job characteristics. Bad job characteristics addressed themes such as treatment by supervisors and peers, health effects of work, poor remuneration, physical and time demands, job instability, and conformity with the job. Good job characteristics comments addressed good remuneration, stability, benefits, and an adequate work environment.

Transcripts and notes were entered into Atlas.ti (Version 6.2) text analysis software; codes were applied to segments of text by one of the study team members. The coding was reviewed by two other team members; disagreements were discussed, and changes to coding were made based on consensus. A variable-based, “cross-sectional” analysis [Ragin, 1987] was used, such that all segments associated with relevant codes were extracted, reviewed, and summarized by team members; exemplary quotations were identified. The summaries were reviewed by the lead author for consistency with the codes. Revisions of these summaries were made until they adequately reflected the interview content. Summaries were

subjected to saliency analysis [Arcury et al., 2001; Buetow, 2010]. Saliency analysis explores patterns by evaluating recurrent themes based on their frequency of recurrence, participants' emphasis on the theme, and the explanatory capacity of the theme. Within a group of interviews, salient themes may not necessarily have been discussed by every individual, but they were discussed in detail and with emphasis throughout the sample and provided some insight or explanation of the associated topic. Threats to validity (e.g., focus on extreme cases) were considered in constructing and revising the summaries [Miles and Huberman, 1994].

RESULTS

The 65 participants interviewed were between the ages of 18–68 years, with a mean age of 37 years. A little over half (54%) of the participants were men. The majority of the workers were from Mexico (51%) and Guatemala (42%), with the remainder from other Central American countries. Time worked in poultry ranged from 2 months to 20 years, with an average of 6 years.

Salient themes emerged about what workers perceived to be “good” job characteristics: good pay, benefits, good hours, and stability. “Bad” job characteristics included physical demands, health effects, and interaction with bosses and peers.

Good Job Characteristics

Good Pay—Over a third of the participants stated that a characteristic that makes their job good is being paid well.

It's a good job until you can get something better because there, in that plant, in comparison with others, we are well-paid. ... But that's just until you can find something better that you like. Study 3(Interview 6)

It's good because of the pay. A lot of people who work in restaurants wish they worked here, not because it's a good job, but because of the amount of the checks. Study 3 (Interview 7)

The majority of workers who talked about good pay were those who worked at Company 1. It was well known among workers that Company 1 offered better working conditions and higher pay.

[Company 1] pays better and precisely for that reason, I haven't quit because there are people who quit and they stay gone for a year or two and then, they have to come back anyway. Study 3 (Interview 2)

Benefits—In addition to considering their jobs as well-remunerated, the workers considered their work good because of the benefits it provided. All the poultry companies offered health insurance, paid overtime, paid holidays, and vacation time. Workers stated that having health insurance was desirable because they paid very little when they wanted to see a doctor. Some Company 3 workers obtained insurance when hired, but let it lapse, as they did not want to pay the monthly fee even though they noted it was important to have it. They also talked about paid holidays and vacation time.

The good thing about that job is that it has good insurance that covers a lot when you go to the doctor. You don't pay any more than \$30 when you go to the doctor. Study 3(24)

If you work on the 4th of July, they pay you double. I'm not sure about Thanksgiving, but there are days that they pay you double for.... They call it the holidays. Study 3 (Interview 7)

Our benefits are paid vacations depending upon the time that you've been working. For example, since I started over, I've got three years and I get two weeks of paid vacation. Those are the benefits. Study 1(Interview 2)

Good Hours—Chicken catchers mentioned benefiting from shorter hours. They often have shorter hours because they are paid by unit (number of chickens they catch) which pressures them to finish as quickly as possible.

You have more time to share with your family. That's the ONLY thing that is good about this job. Study 2 (Interview 4)

Stability—Working in poultry processing is considered good because of its stability and the assurance of knowing that there will be a paycheck at the end of the week. Over half of all the workers mentioned stability as a positive characteristic of their job, no matter the company for which they worked.

That it's [the job] always there. It never goes away. In other places, you can't work all the time. Sometimes, you work for three days. Sometimes, you're out for a week and then, you go back the next week. Here, we work and work every day and sometimes, even on Saturday. Study 3 (Interview 10)

Many of the workers who mentioned stability on the job considered it as a very important job characteristic. Workers value stability more than they do higher pay or having a job that is not as physically demanding.

I don't care whether they pay me a lot or less. What interests me is a job that is secure. I want a secure job where there is work every week, even though I work six days a week because, sometimes, we had to work on Saturdays. I don't care about the kind of work nor the pay, but I don't like temporary jobs. They are not secure and you can't earn even enough to pay the bills. Study 1 (Interview 22)

Workers noted the limited availability of local employment. All of the counties where the interviews were conducted are rural communities that normally have few sources of employment, making the employment scope for immigrants even smaller.

There are a lot of people out of work right now, and the ones who do have a job have just enough for food. We have work, but there are a lot of people who don't have a job. One of my sisters hasn't had a job for almost two years. Even though they ask for jobs at restaurants, they can't find any. It makes you suffer not having a job because we want to have money. But there aren't any. The ones who are working, even though it might be just a little bit, at least have money, and food, and enough to pay rent, bills and all that. However, if you don't work, it's hard because

you don't have any place to get money from to pay for those things. Study 3 (Interview 14)

Many of these workers experienced injuries or symptoms as a consequence of their job. However, because these workers are in a rural area, they have limited employment options and have to endure the problems that might develop at the only available stable job.

[I]t's hard and you get very tired there. ... In my case, sometimes the chicken comes through cut incorrectly and removing the bones hurts my hands. My hands hurt. And there are days when my hands are numb. Sometimes, I hit them on the side of the bed so they will start to have feeling again. I feel that my fingers swell and go to sleep. Everyone complains about that. But, as I said, that's a secure job. It depends upon each person whether they can stand it or not. Study 3 (Interview 23)

Workers also saw a job in poultry processing as a stepping stone to something better in life either for them or for their families. Having this job gave them the stability to be able to attain home ownership, provide education for their children, and provide stability and a better future for their families in the US and in their countries of origin.

Thank God, my life and my family's have improved. Here I have a job. I can buy almost anything I need and want. My family in Guatemala is able to buy food, clothes, and my siblings could go to school. That was something that was hard for my family to do before I started sending them money. Study 2 (Interview 1)

Well, there's nothing else. When I got here, it was just for a little while that I didn't work [at the company]. But I've been there for 12 years now. I complain about the pain in my arms and back, but I also thank God that we have a job because we've lived off that job for all these years. We don't have a lot, but, look! Thank God that we have this house. And with this job, we are paying for it. Sometimes you complain, but you also have to know how to be grateful because the years that I have working there are the same number that we've been paying on the house. Maybe the job isn't that great, but we have lived off of it. That's the only job we've had for all these years. [My partner]'s been working there for 15 years now. We complain, but we also have to give thanks to God that we have that job. Study 3 (Interview 9)

Bad Job Characteristics

Physical Demands—Workers most often described their job as physically exhausting when they were asked about the worst part of their job. Many of these workers have eight to ten-hour shifts where they are required to stand and repeat the same task over and over at a fast pace.

Ah, where should I start? The worst is hanging chicken on the line—hanging. Packing breast on the line and cutting fillets, wherever, is bad because in fillet, it's always cold and they also check up on your packing time. In the livers, everybody is yelling and on line 4, it's horrible also. Well, it's ugly wherever.... Very hard. Everybody has to work very, very fast. Study 3 (Interview 5)

Overall there isn't a good job [in the whole plant]. All the jobs are hard. Everything, including shipping.... It's heavy, hard, and fast. Study 3 (Interview 20)

The workers talked about physical exhaustion, but they also mentioned the conditions of their work environment. The environment in the chicken houses is dirty and dusty. Areas of the processing plants are dirty and dusty or wet and slippery. It can be hot or extremely cold and humid depending on the point on the production line.

I can't tell you that I enjoy the job because I know how hard and dirty it is. It's dirty because the environment is filled with dust, and the chickens poop on you. When you leave work, you're wet with sweat and have chicken poop all over your body; and furthermore, your whole body is aching all over. I wouldn't tell you it's a good job. I can assure you that if you see me getting home after working, you wouldn't like my job. Study 2 (Interview 1)

Another common theme is the comparison of jobs within the poultry processing plants. Workers agree that all of the tasks within the plant are demanding, but that hanging, cutting, and catching chickens were the hardest tasks, and that packing, bagging, labeling, making boxes, and working as a utility person were the best jobs. Workers made the assessments of task difficulty based on physical demands of the job, but balanced it by the rate of pay.

Worst would be hanging live chickens ... and trimming also, but not in breasts but in thighs because you also have to do a certain number of pieces per minute there. I really don't know how that job is, but people say it's very stressful.... Study 3 (Interview 6)

Workers rate as better jobs those that are not as physically demanding but pay well, such as "heavy utility."

The best jobs there—because they pay a little better—are the ones who work the floor. That's called "heavy utility".... The person who works the floor—the heavy utility—doesn't have to rush around packing chicken or doing stuff. I've worked in heavy utility. That job is placing the [Styrofoam trays] on the line and also, when the workers go on break, cleaning everything up. In my opinion, that's why those are the best jobs. Besides that, they pay 25 cents more [per hour] than in the job I have. Study 3 (Interview 2)

Present and Future Health—Workers expressed concern about their health. Many processing plant workers reported pain in their hands, wrist, and back. These workers, particularly those who work on the line cutting and deboning, performed repetitive movements with their hands throughout the day. They reported pain in their hands that resulted from the line speed and the tools, such as knives and scissors, that they used. Chicken catchers generally reported back pain from bending to lift chickens, as well as concern for the strong odors and dust found in the chicken house. Regardless of the tasks the workers performed, most of them worried that its strenuous nature would have negative repercussions on their future health.

The worst thing is that you harm your body because you get hurt whether you want to or not. Your body is being hurt and whether you want to or not, you have to do

your job...Everyone has a problem in their arm, hand, back, or feet. It depends upon which department you work in which [body] part is going to bother you. Then, you're working, but it's going to wear you out. That's not good. If I had the opportunity to move to another job where it wouldn't wear out my body or make me suffer, I would move. Study 3 (Interview 5)

I'd say that my job is very hard; and I think that in the future, I might be sick with something. I think that in the future, I may have surgery on my back or my knees. I think it might also affect my lungs because, by doing that job, you're swallowing dust all the time you're inside the chicken houses. Study 1 (Interview 4) But a lot of people say that working at the chicken plant is for killing people.... The work is really hard, and it's killing you. Study 3 (Interview 31)

Boss and Peer Interaction—In an environment like poultry processing, employees have little autonomy. Workers reported being reprimanded by their supervisors if they could not keep up with the speed of the line or if work was piling up. However, some workers recognized that the interaction with the supervisors was complicated as the supervisors were forced to meet quotas. Workers justified mistreatment from their supervisors by recognizing the pressure from management to meet those quotas.

You always hear [the supervisors] yelling because they want us to do the job quickly. Study 3(9)

A supervisor comes and demands that you do your job even faster. Even though you're doing your job fast, they say that you aren't doing it fast and they want it even faster. Study 3 (Interview 20)

Workers noted that they generally provided support for each other. At the same time, workers described pressure from their co-workers to keep up with the speed of the line. Workers felt that if they did not keep up with the pace of the work, their co-workers would be angry with them or think that they were lazy and did not want to do the job. One of the workers recognized that the work is stressful and having to interact with the same people in that work environment causes friction among co-workers.

It isn't a good job because even my own people, my compatriots, tell me to hurry and they want to boss me around. Imagine what that makes you feel like. Study 3 (Interview 30)

DISCUSSION

These poultry production and processing workers were realistic about the good and bad characteristics of their jobs. Across all employers, the characteristics deemed good were benefits, and stability. Stability was the most valued characteristics for poultry production and processing work. The literature consistently indicates that those who perceived their jobs to be secure report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of psychological stress [Ferrie et al., 2002; Morassaei and Smith, 2011; Probst and Ekore, 2010]. This study further validates these findings by showing that poultry production and processing workers are satisfied with their jobs because they offer them stability, particularly compared to other

options largely held by Latino immigrant workers (e.g., construction, farm work). Fringe benefits are positive and significant determinants of job satisfaction [Artz, 2010; Uppal, 2005]. Workers who would otherwise have limited access to health insurance describe this characteristic of the job as a valuable one. Good pay was also valued as a job characteristic, but only the employees of one poultry processing company (Company 1) consistently reported receiving good pay. To these workers, poultry processing has relatively good wages compared to other jobs [Ashford, 1999]. Lastly many of the workers see this secure job as an opportunity to provide their children and their family with the “American Dream,” including access to valued outcomes such as education, a house, and financial security.

In opposition to these good job characteristics, these poultry production and processing workers understood that the physical and social environments of their work were bad and could result in poor physical and mental health. They understood that the negative health consequences of these jobs were chronic as well as immediate. Similar to an analysis focused on beliefs about carpal tunnel syndrome, these poultry production and processing workers know the causes of ill health (repetitive motions, speed of the line, use of tools such as knives and scissors, pain in the back from bending down and concern for the strong odors and dust), and that changing jobs would relieve their pain and other symptoms, but keep to their jobs because the positive characteristics apparently outweigh the negative. As one participant noted, “...you earn money by suffering pain” [Arcury et al., 2013].

The negative characteristics of these jobs, and the workers’ acknowledgement that they have no options but to keep these jobs (that while they believe that these jobs are providing upward mobility for their families, they themselves do not have job mobility), indicates the structural violence of these jobs [Galtung, 1969; Farmer et al., 2004]. The concept of structural violence argues that the violence experienced by those with a particular status results from unequal distribution of power and resources, rather than from specific individual acts [Weigert, 2010]. Structural violence is dictated by economic markets and is channeled through racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination, exclusion, and oppression [Holmes, 2007]. Unlike slavery where men and women are given hard jobs and can be physically punished by their owners, modern workers are not being hurt by direct physical violence. Rather, they are being slowly injured and disabled through the structures that are put in place by automated industries. Structural violence is channeled through globalization and the ways in which work is organized. Poultry processing is an occupation that is demanding, harmful, and exposes workers to unsanitary conditions [Quandt et al., 2006]. Through the narrative of the characteristics of their job, workers identified a list of their occupation’s attributes. Worker perceptions were primarily dictated directly by their experiences at the worksites—poultry processing plants and chicken houses. However, other content of their narratives shows that their perceptions were indirectly dictated by structural norms specifically within the communities where they live (e.g., lack of employment opportunities) [Lipscomb et al., 2006; Ahonen et al., 2009].

Jobs dangerous to workers’ health are not randomly distributed through the population [Ahonen, 2009]. Rather, they are often held by workers with other characteristics that predispose them to poorer health. Among immigrant workers, these often include limited access to healthcare prior to immigration, low educational attainment, inability to speak the

dominant language, and lack of eligibility to access government services. This study supports the association of physical demands on the job and perceived health: those who report job pressure and ongoing stress at work are more likely to report negative effects on their health [Sloan, 2012]. The workers in this study perceived that the job they performed affects their current and future health and also reported hostile treatment from both supervisors and co-workers. The result is a focusing of risk [Schell, 1997] in these workers. This focusing predicts that holding jobs in the poultry industry may have eventual health consequences even more serious than would be caused by the job alone.

The harsh physical and social environments of poultry production and processing, the physical demands, and the immediate and long-term health consequences of this work are characteristic of jobs that are often referred to as 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous, and demanding) [Quandt et al., 2013; International Labour Organization, 2004; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2007]. These jobs pose a high risk of injury due to the physical difficulty of the job, the equipment utilized to perform the job, and the harsh environments in which the job is performed. Innovations in breeding, mass production, contract farming, vertical integration, and marketing have made chicken a widely available and affordable commodity [Buzby and Farah, 2006]. The mechanization of the poultry processing industry has led to jobs requiring few skills, and making workers easy to replace. All jobs in the processing plant are physically demanding, but those that involve repetitive tasks (e.g., cutting, eviscerating, washing, trimming, and deboning) have been shown to have a higher risk of injury [Cartwright et al., 2012]. Throughout this process, workers are also exposed to different chicken byproducts, including feathers, carcasses, blood, and grease, as well as to water and chemicals used in processing. These agents make the job dirty and dangerous. Along with these exposures, workers are at risk for injuries caused by repetitive motion [Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013] and awkward postures [Sagransky et al., 2012]. Pressure to work long shifts, usually at the same task, make the jobs demanding. As 3-D occupations become even more heavily occupied by immigrant workers, it is important to understand workers' experiences and perceptions of job quality, and the impact these jobs have on worker health.

"Race to the bottom" policies [Smith-Nonini, 2011] have resulted in laws and institutions that safeguard the well being of transnational industries but ignore the safety and health of workers. Poultry processing is one of those industries. Recently, the United States Department of Agriculture proposed a "Modernization of Poultry Slaughter Inspection" rule, which would increase poultry processing line speeds from 140 to 175 birds per minute and place inspection of chicken carcasses for disease in the hands of the company. Allegedly, this would safeguard the health of consumers because companies would be able to inspect chicken carcasses for disease better [USDA, 2012]. Although the rule was not approved, it was predicated totally on quality of the product and completely ignored the safety and health of the workers.

Immigrant workers, like other workers, perceive both good and bad aspects of their jobs. Even though some of the job characteristics are not beneficial to the workers, they stay in these jobs because the jobs are available and because, in the short term, they benefit the workers. Research on work safety climate has shown that, even though safety climate is

important to vulnerable workers (e.g. farm workers) [Arcury et al., 2012], they often do not complain about working conditions because they fear losing their job or, if they are undocumented, the possibility of being reported to immigration authorities. Without change in labor policies to mandate changes in the workplace to reduce the risk of worker injuries, the situation these workers describe is likely to continue. These workers weigh the benefits of the job with the likely repercussions of complaining in a situation without the protections of organized labor [Marín et al., 2012].

The limited literature of job perception among marginalized groups often focuses on precarious employment; however, our results show that immigrant workers have jobs that could be categorized as “good” jobs but have characteristics of precarious employment. Precarious employment is characterized by eight dimensions: (1) low degree of certainty of continuing work; (2) limited control over work processes; (3) few legal and institutional protection; (4) low income and benefits adequacy; (5) perceived inferior work-role status; (6) negative sociocultural environment at work; (7) risk of exposure to physical hazards; and (8) limited training and career advancement opportunities [Tompa et al., 2007]. Unlike precarious employment, jobs in poultry processing are stable, workers have access to benefits and a set number of work hours. Like other precarious and “3-D” jobs, workers in poultry processing lack control over work processes; although there are some legal and institutional protections, these workers do not have access to these protections, due to a lack of power and enforcement of labor laws; they perceive an inferior work-role status; they have a high risk of exposure to physical hazards; and they lack appropriate training and career advancement opportunities. The similarities and differences of these “good” jobs to precarious employment provide insight about the job satisfaction of immigrant marginalized workers who take standard jobs that are not desired by native workers.

The results of this study have to be considered in light of study limitations. Participants were recruited in different studies and from different jobs in the poultry industry, so the objective characteristics of jobs may vary among workers. Since the data were gathered from a hard-to-reach population and the study team lacked access to workplaces or a census of Latino workers in the area, there is a potential for selection bias. Because the interviews were conducted among present or former poultry workers, there was no comparison group. Another aspect that may affect the results is that the workers were employed by different companies, and variability may exist between companies in the work culture that might or might not be reflected throughout the interviews. Although little variability by company is reflected in the themes that emerged in these interviews, a previous study does show variability in injuries by company [Rosenbaum et al., 2016]. Lastly, these data are based on workers’ perceptions of job quality with no objective measures. Nevertheless, this study expands the literature on perceived job quality among immigrant workers. It provides a rationale for attempts to reduce the risk of occupational injury and illness among these workers.

Conclusions

Immigrant poultry processing workers described the good and bad aspects of their job. Workers perceived their jobs as generally good even though they are dangerous, dirty, and

demanding. Workers are well aware of the negative aspects of their jobs. However, the jobs provide stability and fulfill their immediate family needs. Being immigrants, not speaking English, and sometimes lacking proper documentation makes it difficult for these workers to find better employment. Within a framework of structural violence, these workers will continue to accept employment in these 3-D jobs to meet their basic needs regardless of the consequences, as long as alternatives are unavailable. To improve the safety and health of these workers, governments and society need to enforce existing rules and regulations protecting worker health. Regulations should be extended to include factors inherent in the work that perpetuate the violence against workers, such as recommended ergonomic standards to protect workers from repetitive motion injuries. The negligence of the government to enact and enforce existing regulations has led to the emergence and strengthening of grassroots organizations that have led and enacted changes in policy essential for the health and safety of these workers. Hence researchers and workers' rights advocates should support these organizations to bring about enforcement and change of the existing worker safety and health policy.

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