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Workplace Experiences of Migrant Workers in Colorado

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Walden University

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College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Lynann Holly Butler

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Workplace Experiences of Migrant Workers in Colorado

by

Lynann Holly Butler

MA, University of Colorado at Denver, 1998

BS, Colorado State University, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

Migrant workers often endure a variety of abuses in the workplace, including financial exploitation, exposure to toxins, isolation, and lack of access to health care. Although researchers have demonstrated that these circumstances exist for migrant workers in other parts of the world, there was a dearth of research on the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to better understand the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado, who are a growing and impactful population in Colorado. The theoretical framework was Rawl's social justice theory, which purports that no one group of people should benefit at the expense of another. Data from in-depth phone interviews with eight participants were analyzed and coded electronically, and thematic analysis was applied. Themes included workplace conditions, the importance of legal status and DACA, and motivation for a better life. This study may contribute to social change by providing information that can help inform treatment agencies, service providers, and policy makers about firsthand accounts of migrant workers and their lived experiences. This study revealed the juxtaposition experienced by many migrant workers between the frustrations and limitations resulting from their legal status, and the motivation for a better life.

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Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to the migrant workers, Dreamers, and DACA students who are striving to better themselves and their families. This research is in honor of your labor in fields, on roofs and construction sites, in restaurants, and in private homes to better your lives and those of your families. Thank you for your resilience.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the support I received on my journey as I wrote this dissertation and earned my PhD. My committee chair, Dr. Avon Hart-Johnson, read revisions of my research so many times that she could probably quote sections verbatim. The feedback and suggestions I received from her and from my committee member, Dr. Jeanna Jacobsen, strengthened my research and writing. I am thankful for your patience and guidance.

My family offered support throughout this endeavor. My husband, Steve, is my rock, bringing me snacks when I spent hours in front of the computer, and listening patiently as I shared what I was learning. It was his encouragement that started this journey. My daughter, Anna, asked thoughtful questions about my research and inspired me with her strong sense of justice and advocacy. Mom and John, thank you for being there “alla time,” and Andy, thank you for being my bestie for sooo many years (and yes, you’re still younger than me).

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Migrant workers are considered laborers who move from region to region to find work on a temporary, often seasonal basis (Simon et al., 2015). This population often experiences high rates of work-related injuries, financial exploitation, and violence (Daly et al., 2018; Moyce & Schenker, 2018; Zeng, 2017). These issues are often compounded by being separated from family, an inability to access education and health care, cultural isolation, and lack of remedy to their exploitation (Hennebry et al., 2016; Loganathan et al., 2019). Due to a multitude of stressors and possible workplace abuses, migrant workers can struggle with high levels of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse (Becerra, 2019; Close et al., 2016).

Colorado has a long and complex history with the migrant worker population. This was illustrated in the 1971 Legal Council of the Colorado General Assembly, which outlined a number of issues faced by this population, including exposure to poor environmental conditions resulting in negative health outcomes, and other discrepancies (Staff Report, 1971). Additionally, in 2006, Colorado passed Senate Bill 90, sometimes called “Show me your papers,” which requires law enforcement to request immigration papers and to report to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) any suspected undocumented immigrants (Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, 2017). This legislation was overturned 7 years later. House Bill 11-34, also designed as “Show me your papers” legislation, was introduced and defeated in 2017 (Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, 2017). This type of legislation can lead to a criminalization and increased marginalization

of the immigrant community (Martinez & Ortega, 2018). According to the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (2017), many immigrants felt a good deal of anxiety and fear about the introduction of such legislation, which speaks to the challenges this population might be exposed to in the state of Colorado. Adding to this complexity, in 2013 several universities in Colorado initiated in-state tuition rates for its Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students, which resulted in a Senate Bill supporting the measure (Colorado.gov, 2013). Prior to the passage of this bill, students who had been brought to the United States as children and attended high school in Colorado could not get in-state tuition rates if they were undocumented, resulting in a significant barrier to pursuing higher education (MetMedia, 2013). Although the bill did eventually pass, it was introduced to the legislature six times over a 10-year period before it was accepted into law in Colorado (MetMedia, 2013). These conflicting messages to immigrants, as demonstrated in the “Show me your papers” and Asset Bill legislation, created a unique environment in which to study the experiences of migrant workers in Colorado.

Colorado is unique from its neighboring western and midwestern states in regard to the cost of living, which has a powerful impact on migrant workers. Colorado has a higher cost of living than neighboring states (World Population Review, 2020), with rent 12.6% higher than the national average (CNN Business, 2017). Farmworkers and laborers in Colorado earn \$34,490 annually, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), and the national poverty level is \$33,383 for a family of four (Connect for Health Colorado, 2020). Additionally, Colorado has diverse commodities not present in many other states. Vermont, for example, relies on migrant workers primarily for dairy farming

(MigrantJustice.net, 2010), and Oklahoma does not have a strong need for migrant workers in industries such as mining or tourism (American Immigration Council, 2020b).

Currently, Colorado has a large immigrant population in which migrant workers are employed in a wide range of industries including construction, recreation, food industry, manufacturing, and agriculture (Colorado Fiscal Institute, 2015; Menger-Ogle et al., 2019). Additionally, Colorado is experiencing a higher rate of growth from the immigrant population than other U.S. states (Colorado Fiscal Institute, 2015), adding to the importance of this geographical region for the current study. Potential social implications of this research include providing a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question, and possibly informing policy change, agency services, and public awareness (see Moon et al., 2016) of the employment conditions faced by migrant workers in Colorado.

In this chapter, I outline the background of the issue and provide the problem statement, purpose, and research question. In addition, I describe the theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, and working assumptions. Finally, I share the scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

In Colorado, immigrants make up 10% of the workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), many of whom are undocumented (American Immigration Council, 2017). Although finding and maintaining employment is essential, this population may struggle with mental health issues complicated by their fear of deportation (Cheong & Massey, 2019). In addition to these challenges, 47% of this population may have PTSD

(Bustamante et al, 2017; Close et al., 2016; Ramos et al., 2016). Compounded stress can result from adverse employment conditions and can be exacerbated by poor and unstable housing conditions (Mora et al., 2016).

Migrant workers encounter challenges obtaining health care and mental health care (Liem et al., 2020), and have been vulnerable to health-related illnesses, including mental health problems during the COVID crisis (Choudhari, 2020; Koh, 2020). Social and cultural isolation are often experienced by migrant workers (Caxaj & Diaz, 2018), which is emphasized by concern for family members remaining in the home country (Kumar et al., 2020). Additionally, migrant workers can face financial challenges (Kumar et al., 2020) and sometimes are unable or are fearful to seek appropriate recompense for their work (I. Campbell et al., 2019). Although there has been substantial research on migrant work conditions in other parts of the United States and other countries, there was a dearth of information on Colorado migrant workers despite the fact that they represent a significant part of the state's economy (Colorado Fiscal Institute, 2017). The current study was needed to examine the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado because they constitute an important part of the state's economic and social framework.

Problem Statement

Migrant workers are often vulnerable to psychosocial stressors resulting from poverty, racism, discrimination, inadequate housing, and work-related adversity (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). Researchers have identified numerous workplace challenges faced by this population, including inadequate housing, low pay, and dangerous employment conditions (Compa, 2016). Migrant workers in the state of

Colorado can face adverse working conditions. Although the research regarding migrant workers illuminated important findings (Bustamante et al., 2017; Close et al., 2016; Ramos et al., 2016), I found no studies that addressed firsthand phenomenological accounts of Colorado migrant workers' experiences.

Unaddressed stressful conditions can contribute to exacerbated mental health conditions. Because migrant workers constitute an important segment of the Colorado workforce, it was important to examine the experiences of migrants in Colorado given the unique sociopolitical context of the state. Other researchers examined the migrant experience in the United States from a particular lens. Lim et al. (2017) focused on the prevalence of obesity in this population, Sanchez (2016) studied alcohol use, and Ordonez (2016) concentrated on labor and economics of migrant workers. Additionally, findings from many studies may not be generalizable or transferable to migrants in Colorado because they included quantitative methods and were not designed to examine the phenomenological aspects of migrant workers' experiences. Given the increase in risk for negative mental health and substance abuse problems, understanding migrant workers' lived experiences may provide social service providers with information needed to tailor services to this population's specific needs. Given the gap in the research, further study was warranted.

I explored Colorado migrant workers to understand the lived experiences and psychosocial stressors that can occur regarding their workplace experiences. My study was intended to extend the focus of Close et al. (2016) who focused on mental health challenges and deportation issues experienced by this population. My study extended this

work by drawing from a sample of migrant workers from Colorado; this was important due to the high numbers of migrant workers who reside and work in Colorado, where a significant portion of the workforce comprises immigrant laborers (American Immigration Council, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of migrant workers in the state of Colorado. I explored the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. The findings extended the body of knowledge specific to understanding the experiences of individuals from the migrant population in Colorado. Opsal et al. (2016) observed that interviews allow for a better understanding of the perspectives of participants and can give a voice to those who share their firsthand lived experiences. My study was intended to fill the gap in the literature regarding firsthand knowledge of the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado. My study also provided a foundation for future research by contributing new insights into the lived experiences of Colorado migrant workers, including how their mental health is impacted by work stressors.

Research Question

The following research question was used for my study: What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in the state of Colorado? I explored the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was social justice theory (Rawls, 1971). Rawls (1971, as cited in Cayuela et al., 2016; Hage et al., 2011) explained how social justice theory is used to understand the distribution of power and resources among people despite race, social class, or background, and has a direct link to suffering and illness caused by injustices. The disparity caused by wealth and power can have a profound impact on socioeconomics, the dispensing of criminal justice, and health equity (Dickman et al., 2017). People in oppressed groups can experience poorer health outcomes (Dickman et al., 2017), which was directly related to my research. Participants in my study may have experienced the repercussions often felt by marginalized populations, including the belief that they are undeserving of the right to health (see Willen, 2011). In the context of this study, I assumed that a person's health and well-being included environmental-based stressors as well as psychological stressors. Understanding the lived experiences of migrant workers may help to inform these issues.

Using social justice theory as a foundation, I gained a better understanding of the lived experiences of migrant workers. The information obtained from this phenomenological study may be used to influence policy and service provision to this population. Social justice theory provided a foundation for exploring the power differences and lack of resources faced by the migrant worker population (see Vanidestine & Aparicio, 2019). Social justice theory also provided a lens through which to view the challenges experienced when an oppressed group attempts to give voice to the

discrepancies they face (see Perry, 2019). A more detailed analysis of the theoretical framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a hermeneutic phenomenological design to answer the research question. Researchers use hermeneutic phenomenology to interpret the lived experiences of participants (Heidegger, 1927/2011). I used this design to better understand the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado. After I obtained ethics approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB), I recruited participants through social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and subsequently used snowball sampling until data saturation was reached (see Laumann, 2020). Participants who met inclusion criteria were invited for a telephone interview. Criteria included English speaking participants 18 years or older who identified as a migrant worker in Colorado (working in fields, factories, private homes, oil and gas extraction, agriculture, tourism, etc.). This modification was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the “Safer at Home” initiatives that required a change in the original recruitment through flyers and the face-to-face interviewing format.

Recording participant comments can be an important element in qualitative interviewing (Goodell et al., 2016). Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent (see Branney et al., 2019) and coded by theme (see Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Quirkos software was used to visually represent the accumulated patterns of data (see Predictive Analytics Today, 2018).

Definitions

The following terms were identified as key to understanding the social problem addressed in this study:

Assimilation: When a social or ethnic group (usually a minority group) begins to act like and become less distinguishable from the dominant cultural group (International Migration Law, 2019).

Environmental hazards: Chemical toxins, pesticides, and extreme temperatures (Moyce & Schenker, 2018).

Immigrant: A person who was born as a citizen of another country and moved to another country during their lifetime (Wadhwa et al., 2007).

Mental health: A person's psychological well-being affecting behavior, cognitive states, and emotional states (MentalHealth.Gov., 2019).

Migrant worker: A person who is employed on a temporary basis and spends the night away from their permanent home (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2019).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): A mental health condition triggered by a traumatic event, causing severe anxiety, intrusive memories, and flashbacks, resulting in interference in relationships and/or work (Mayo Clinic, 2019).

Seasonal farmworker: A person who works as a farmhand and earns at least half of their income in this capacity but is not employed year-round at that farm (Lim et al., 2017).

Status: Having the authorization to legally work and live in a country without fear of deportation (Ortega et al., 2019).

Substance abuse: Using a substance (such as alcohol, cannabis, opioids, amphetamines, cocaine, hallucinogens, sedatives) two to six times a week (Nielsen et al., 2017).

Undocumented: Not having the legal status that affords certain rights and privileges in a country (de Trinidad Young & Madrigal, 2017).

Assumptions

Several assumptions guided my work in this study. I operated under the assumption that participants would be willing to share their experiences in the workplace, and that their accounts would be truthful. I assumed, based on the preponderance of research documented in the literature, that many of the migrant workers I interviewed would have faced adverse working conditions (i.e., environmental toxins, work-related injury, and financial exploitation). Lastly, I assumed that participants would be willing to engage in telephone interviews rather than face-to-face interviews.

Scope and Delimitations

Certain boundaries helped to determine which participants qualified to participate in the study. The study included English-speaking participants age 18 or older who identified as a migrant worker in Colorado (working in fields, factories, private homes, oil and gas extraction, agriculture, tourism, etc.). I included information on migrant health and immigrant health but did not include information on refugees. The study did not include interviews with migrant workers working in other states. Due to the

qualitative nature of the study, results of the research cannot be generalized to other populations (see Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Finally, participants may have been more willing to divulge personal information if the study involved multiple interviews or another form of prolonged engagement.

Limitations

The research was conducted from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective with the aim of interpreting the meaning behind migrant workers' lived experiences (see Heidegger, 1927/2011; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). Although the study illuminated some important findings and revealed similarities in experiences, there are limitations as to the transferability of the results (see Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The lived experiences of the migrant workers interviewed in this study may not represent those of the larger migrant population because participants were recruited using technology and social media. Additionally, it is possible that some migrant workers may have been undocumented and may not have chosen to share their stories, and some workers may not have revealed possible mental health or substance abuse challenges they face.

Phenomenological research has some limitations, including the inherent power difference between the researcher and the participant. Power asymmetry can be explained due to the predominantly one-way conversation and the researcher's privilege in interpreting the interview content (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions, participants may feel emotionally triggered when recalling difficult or traumatic events (Dempsey et al., 2016; Grosseohme, 2014). It was important for me to address these potential concerns during the consent process. The

design may have presented other limitations such as inadvertent researcher bias. Chapter 3 addresses the threat of researcher bias and my efforts to mitigate it. The use of social media for recruitment, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, may have limited participants who did not have access to technology. Additionally, the use of LinkedIn or Facebook may have skewed the participant pool. Finally, although qualitative interviews are often conducted face-to-face, I implemented phone interviewing as a result of the Safer at Home initiative put in place by the Colorado governor in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance

My study was significant in several regards. Researchers have shown a connection between workplace conditions and psychosocial stressors in migrants (Daly et al., 2018; Kim & Kim, 2017). I contributed original research to the literature by adding to the foundational knowledge of the migrant worker experience in Colorado where there are over half a million immigrants, over one third of whom are undocumented (American Immigration Council, 2020). The information in this study may be used to impact future policy decision making regarding migrant working conditions in Colorado and may help to inform agencies that serve this population, including health-related services. In addition, there is the potential that migrant workers may gain a sense of empowerment through expressing their experiences with their voice (van den Muijsenbergh et al., 2016). Constituent groups that serve migrant workers in Colorado may also benefit from the findings contained in this study, as they may learn how this population is impacted. These groups include legal aid groups, child and family services, farmworkers

associations, and organizations that provide mental health services. Finally, the information obtained may be used to inform policy affecting this population, and results may be used to improve the working conditions and treatment services for the population affected. With a significant percentage of migrant workers experiencing psychosocial stressors as a direct result of their working conditions (Close et al., 2016), there was a need for further study of this population in Colorado where a significant number of migrant workers are undocumented.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. This study was grounded in social justice theory. I conducted in-depth phone interviews and explored themes that emerged from the coded data. Chapter 2 contains a thorough review of the research conducted on related topics.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience and work conditions of migrant workers in the state of Colorado. Andrews et al. (2019) and Ladegaard (2018) suggested that migrant workers often face workplace abuses, discrimination, social isolation, extreme environmental conditions, inadequate housing, poor health care, fear of deportation, and a lack of financial compensation. Negi et al. (2020) and Rock et al. (2016) posed a different viewpoint, suggesting that these abuses and conditions exacerbate mental health and substance abuse problems.

Although the research is growing in this area, there was a gap in the literature regarding understanding the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. This social problems exists despite this population being a significant contributor to Colorado's economy (Colorado Fiscal Institute, 2017). Given the gap in research, further study was warranted. According to the Colorado Fiscal Institute (2015), migrant workers compose a significant segment of Colorado's workforce and contribute billions of dollars in taxes each year. Although researchers have demonstrated the connection between workplace abuses, such as environmental toxins (Moyce & Schenker, 2018; E. Robinson et al., 2011), jobsite bullying (Bergbom & Vartia-Vaananen, 2014), and financial exploitation (Brennan, 2014; Hannan et al., 2016) and resulting mental health and substance abuse problems (Daly et al., 2018; Meyer et al., 2014), these studies have been conducted in geographical areas such as Hong Kong, Australia, the United Kingdom, Israel, North Carolina, South East Asia, and Argentina

(Brennan, 2014; Boucher, 2019; Davies, 2018; Green & Ayalon, 2018; Meyer et al., 2014; Mora et al., 2016; Ullah, 2015). There was a dearth of information about migrant workers' experience in Colorado, which is important given that 10% of Colorado's workforce is composed of foreign-born workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

In the literature review, I focus on the theoretical foundation, migrant workers, and workplace abuses. I pay specific attention to environmental conditions and health, financial exploitation, housing conditions, social/cultural isolation, and the compounding experience of those who are working without legal documentation. I then examine the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado.

Literature Search Strategy

I retrieved information from several peer-reviewed journals that focused on public health, some specific to immigrant and minority health. Migrant farmworker websites were also used for supplemental information for this research. I consulted with a Walden librarian for strategies to increase the number of relevant, current journals in my search and to ensure an exhaustive review. In addition, I used Google Scholar and the databases through Walden University's library, including EBSCO, PsychINFO, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, SocINDEX, and ProQuest. Most searches were limited to 2015 to present. Seminal research was identified when researchers cited foundational or theoretical scholars, usually from the 1970s. In those instances, I looked up the scholars' writings directly. I searched for *migrant workers* paired with such keywords and phrases as *Colorado*, *cultural isolation*, *documentation*, *environmental conditions*, *exploitation*, *financial*, *health*, *housing conditions*, *mental health*, *social isolation*, *stressors*, *substance*

abuse, and *workplace abuses*. At times, the word *Latino* was added to the keywords or phrases to increase the specificity of the search.

Theoretical Foundation

The phenomenological theory underpinning this research was hermeneutic, described by Heidegger (1927/2011, as cited in Mackey, 2005) as a process involving more than describing a way of being in the world, but also involving interpretation. Hermeneutic inquiry entails acknowledging some degree of familiarity with that which is being studied; further, the researcher interprets and revises the understanding of the experience being explored (Lavery, 2003). The goal of my study was to better understand the population of interest through the lens of interpretation, making this phenomenological theory appropriate.

The theoretical framework for this study was based on social justice theory (see Rawls, 1971). This theory was used to describe how the idea of fairness should be afforded to the least advantaged people in a society, where they should not lack access to fundamental rights such as legal processes or health care. Social justice theory pertains to equity and distribution of power and resources, influencing a group's ability to receive legal and political justice, and power in decision making (Rawls, 1971; van den Bos, 2003; Vanidestine & Aparicio, 2019).

Rawls (1971) introduced the idea that one group of people should not enjoy advantage over another based on their social or socioeconomic rank; justice is, by its nature, fairness. The research on migrant workers was viewed through this lens that all people, no matter their country of origin, spoken language, or status in the workplace,

should experience equality in the legal and health systems. Hemphill (2015) posited that increasing equality in social welfare is an important philosophy embedded in social justice theory, while Ruger (2004) and Shearer (2016) focused on the need to provide fair and equitable treatment for citizens, often focusing on equitable access to health care, as a central concept of social justice theory.

The population in the current study often experience unjust treatment, lack of access to adequate health services, and lack of power (see Daly et al., 2018). All of these factors made this theoretical foundation highly applicable to the study. Social justice theory proports that people should experience opportunity for health and justice despite social rank (Rawls, 1971). Researchers have revealed persistent exploitation and abuse of migrant workers due in large part to their rank in society. Migrant workers, for example, are often exposed to dangerous working conditions (including environmental toxins) at a much higher rate than other individuals (Carvalho, 2017) as a result of their rank and occupation. Social justice theory was used to shape the study, including the interview questions and data analysis process. The analytic software that was used helped me capture the themes of participants' lived experiences as well as the connected themes related to social justice theory.

Recent research conducted on a similar population was grounded in fundamental cause theory (Kelly, 2019). The emphasis on health disparity due to socioeconomic status, while appropriate, was not the best fit for the current study. Although socioeconomics is an important element in the physical and mental well-being of the population of this study, other social factors including discrimination were also relevant

(see Taylor & Ruiz, 2017). Another theory that was considered was critical race theory, which includes elements that were a good fit for this research, most notably that race is often a determinant in the experience or absence of equality and power (see Anyon et al., 2017). My research, however, did not address the effects of race; my focus was the workplace treatment conditions as experienced by migrant workers in Colorado. Social justice theory focuses on equity, social justice, fair treatment, and access to health and mental health services for those who are under-resourced, whether it be politically, legally, or economically (Colton & Holmes, 2018). Because my study focused on the lived experiences of migrant workers, social justice theory provided a richer context for this exploration and enabled me to keep social and resource equity in the foreground through each step of the process.

Migrant Workers

The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (2019) defined a migrant worker as a person who works in a state or region other than where they are from, spending time away from home for employment. Some migrant workers are considered seasonal or work for only part of the year (International Migration Law, 2019) and are found in occupations such as agriculture and horticulture, including picking fruit and vegetables (Dun & Klocker, 2018; Rosenbaum & Long, 2018). Migrant workers constitute 42% of the seasonal farm work population (Alderete et al., 2000).

Crawley and Skleparis (2017) and Perez Foster (2001) asserted that migrant workers are typically motivated by financial gain and economic prosperity. Martin (2017), however, reported that employers hire migrant workers to do the work that the

larger population often will not do, at rates lower than they would pay the general public, or due to increased need, such as for domestic workers due to an aging population.

Migrant workers compose an important part of a state or country's economy (Bove & Elia, 2017).

Hunt and Xie (2018) purported that when going through legal channels, migrant workers often obtain a temporary work visa from a specific employer for a specific job. Beck et al. (2019) noted, however, that if an individual who is not a legal resident enters the country without authorization, they are considered to be undocumented; this also holds true for individuals who remain in the country after their visa has expired, or if the visa application process has issues that have not yet been resolved. Migrant workers who are considered undocumented run the risk of deportation (Baum, 2017).

Many industries rely on the temporary work supplied by migrant workers (both documented and not), including construction, transportation, agriculture factory work, fishing, forestry, and services (Passel & Cohn, 2015; Schenker, 2011). U.S. News and World Report (2020) suggested that the services industry, including tourism, is an important component of Colorado's economy. According to the Pew Research Center (2012, as cited in Passel & Cohn, 2015), 33% of the work in the U.S. service industry is being done by undocumented migrant workers, underscoring the importance of this population in the U.S. workforce.

There has been a shift in the migration process due to increasing militarization along the U.S./Mexico border (Hamilton & Hale, 2016; Jones & Johnson, 2016; Lee, 2018). Hamilton and Hale (2016) found that migrant workers used to come into the

United States for brief periods of time to earn money, then return home to their families in Mexico. Lee (2018), however, found that migrant workers, especially those who are undocumented, are bringing their families across the border at increasing rates and are less likely to take the risk of a U.S./Mexico border crossing due to the increasing probability of being turned back. Lee also noted that when migrant workers chance a border crossing, they are now more likely to use smuggling operations, which increases the risk of exploitation and human trafficking abuses. Jones and Johnson (2016) noted that increasing militarization along the border is the result of the process of dehumanizing migrants. Language that describes migrant workers and immigrants as vermin or as a disease further dehumanizes this population (Utych, 2017). When migrant workers are able to find employment in their host country, the challenges do not end there. There are also workplace conditions that may be difficult.

Workplace Conditions

Migrant workers face numerous adverse working conditions including workplace abuses such as bullying, physical and sexual abuse, and environmental hazards with resulting health consequences. This population also encounters racism (Daly et al., 2018), cultural isolation (Zeng, 2017), and inequitable access to health care (Newton, 2016; Socias et al., 2016). Bustamante et al. (2017) and Ramos et al. (2016) explained that these factors can cause increased mental health struggles for this population, resulting in depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance abuse. In addition, Giano et al. (2019) noted the additional stress caused by migrant workers being undocumented and facing possible deportation. The element of documentation is critical, as legal status impacts the effects

of mental health and substance abuse in the migrant worker population (Giano et al., 2019).

Workplace Abuses

Migrant workers experience a wide range of abuses and psychosocial stressors in the workplace. Bergbom and Vartia-Vaananen (2014) found that social exclusion and humiliation are common practices by employers toward migrant workers, as is verbal abuse. Ronda-Perez and Moen (2017) reported migrants' experiences of intimidation and threats, and physical or sexual violence, while other researchers have recorded the presence of overt and covert discrimination and racism in the workplace of migrant workers (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; Perez Foster, 2001). Workplace bullying and discrimination can have direct financial impact. Cheo (2016) found that some employers who hire foreign workers will extend working hours without paying overtime, will delay remuneration for work, and will engage in other exploitive practices.

Migrant women face a myriad of workplace abuses and are much more likely to be victims of interpersonal violence and sexual assault than other women (Meyer et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2015). Green and Ayalon (2017) noted that female migrant workers face an intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism, which affects this vulnerable population in myriad ways. Home-based migrant health workers tend to be isolated and experience a myriad of abuses including inadequate sick or vacation time (Green & Ayalon, 2018). Sukesu (2018) and Ullah (2015) added that domestic workers, who are usually women, often work long hours for little pay, do not enjoy wage protection, and experience high levels of physical and emotional violence and sexual assaults. Further,

Glover et al. (2010) posited that people who have experienced violence, including sexual assault, are at much higher risk for developing PTSD and other mental health issues, as well as substance abuse disorders. Brennan (2014) explained that women who have experienced such trauma are affected in myriad ways including memory loss, chronic pain, and depression, affecting their ability to sleep and eat normally.

The workplace issues migrant workers face may be compounded by being separated from family (Bustamante et al., 2017). The National Agricultural Workers Survey (2018) noted that 40% of farmworkers were living apart from their families. Duke and Carpinteiro (2009) suggested that this separation from families can result in an increase in substance abuse and risky sexual activity, which then affects the family upon reunification. The ramifications on the family can include transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, loss of income, injury or death due to accident or substance use, or abandonment of the family by the migrant worker (Duke & Carpinteiro, 2009). Although this research provided insights related to workplace abuses, it did not account for the lived experience of migrant workers in Colorado, who constitute a large population and contribute significantly to the Colorado economy (Colorado Fiscal Institute, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Environmental Conditions and Adverse Effects on Health

Migrant workers are employed in risk-filled environments, described by some researchers as ‘the 3 D’s; dangerous, dirty, and degrading/demanding’ (Messeri et al, 2019; Moyce & Schenker, 2018). As such, migrant workers often work in fields, factories, or isolated conditions such as private homes; each setting presents its own set

of conditions that can have a negative impact on health. Agricultural work, including farming and working in the fields, exposes migrant workers to a wide range of environmental hazards, including exposure to extreme temperatures and weather conditions (Brennan, 2014; Messeri et al., 2019; Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Culp and Tonelli (2019) found that field workers often work in very hot temperatures during the summer months, many times without sufficient hydration; this can cause a myriad of health-related problems. Working in the field poses other risks. In Colorado, Marx et al. (2017) noted workers' exposure to the Hantavirus due to proximity to the disease-bearing rodents. The Hantavirus is an airborne disease that can cause renal problems, respiratory complications, headaches, vomiting, and death (Jiang et al., 2017).

Pfeifer (2016) concluded that an environmental hazard encountered by many migrant farmworkers is exposure to pesticides and other toxins. Carvalho (2017) added that chemicals have been increasingly used in farming and agriculture to boost the food supply to better meet the demands of an increasing population size. Migrant farmworkers are often exposed to these chemicals through a 'pesticide drift', in which workers are exposed to particulates after spraying the fields; exposure can occur immediately or even weeks after initial spraying has occurred (Pfeifer, 2016). Polledri et al. (2019) studied hair samples in farmworkers in vineyards and noted a 25-100% increase in exposure to chemicals and toxins from beginning to the end of a growing season. Pfeifer and Shearer (2016) both indicated that this exposure is very concerning, as pesticides and other chemicals used in agriculture cause numerous serious health issues, including various cancers, birth defects, infertility, and respiratory problems. Further, Kelkar (2016) found

that the rate of death of agricultural workers was seven times higher than the national workforce average in private industry.

In addition to agriculture, other jobs frequently filled by Latino migrant workers carry unique risks. Schenker (2011) examined jobs in construction and transportation and found that they account for a higher percentage of injury and fatalities than other occupations. Campbell et al. (2014) posited that if a migrant worker who is undocumented experiences an injury on the job, they often face increased barriers to receiving adequate health care, the benefits of health insurance, or access to legitimate pharmaceutical medications. However, Alterman et al. (2018) found that there are limited health-related resources in rural areas, where many migrant workers toil; additionally, because migrant workers are not considered residents in the counties in which they work, they are often ineligible to receive county physical or mental health treatment services. Migrant workers who are undocumented often enter the country with a lack of immunizations or preventative health care, and a higher rate of illness (Campbell et al., 2014); compounding these issues, they have especially high rates of injury and trauma in the host country (Ahonen & Benavides, 2016).

While these risks are high, the access to health care is low. Researchers support this proposition in that individuals who are migrants often struggle to access health care (Ismayilova et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2011; Sweileh, 2018). Hennebry et al. (2016) suggested that as countries tighten control of their borders, migrant workers are even less likely to be provided adequate health care or insurance coverage. While this population needs health services due to workplace conditions, they are often underserved; McCoy et

al. (2015) reported that this is due to a myriad of factors including transportation issues, a lack of health care providers in the geographical areas that tend to use migrant workers, and a reservation to access services by those workers who are undocumented.

Some researchers have found, however, that some migrants experience *fewer* adverse health effects than the general population; some researchers explain this by demonstrating that migrant workers return to their home countries when gravely ill, or to die (Anikeeva et al., 2010; Cheong & Massey, 2019). Beck et al. (2019) indicated that undocumented workers may be healthier than the general US population and have contributed this to the lower age of most workers; the researchers noted that few have adequate health care coverage, however (Beck et al., 2019). Slopen et al. (2016) concluded that children of immigrants, who have less access to health care, displayed better health outcomes on a wide variety of measures, reinforcing the healthy migrant effect. Therefore, while most studies indicated health complications and risks for the migrant worker population, there are outlying results pointing to the health of this population.

Financial Exploitation

Migrant workers are disproportionately affected by unlivable wages, described as sub-poverty level (Boucher, 2019; Hannan et al., 2016), with over 70% of agricultural workers living below the poverty line (National Center for Farmworker Health, 2017), defined by the federal government as only \$12,490 annually for an individual, or \$25,750 for a family of four (HealthCare.gov, 2019). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019)

reported that migrant workers make approximately 83 cents to the dollar when compared to native-born workers.

According to Compa (2016), it is not uncommon for migrant workers to find themselves in positions akin to indentured servitude, to be charged outrageous fees for housing, or to be chronically underpaid. Compa (2016) further explained that migrant workers are sometimes hired under false pretenses or lack an accurate description of what working conditions and expectations entail. It is difficult for documented workers to get relief from underpayment and abusive workplace situations, because the conditions of temporary work visas do not allow for workers to change employment or become self-employed (Hunt & Xie, 2018). Workers who are undocumented find themselves victims of these exploitive employment practices with little or no recourse (Boucher, 2019; Hannan et al., 2016).

The migrant worker population does not enjoy the same employment protection enjoyed by other workers; they are less likely to be safeguarded by a membership in trade unions (Davies, 2018). Many trade agreements protect the flow of goods and services, but not the workers who provide them (Compa, 2016). The Migrant Legal Action Program (2016) reported that some employers deduct social security wages from migrant workers but do not pay the revenue to the government, which is considered to be a financially exploitive practice. Another area of vulnerability for many migrant workers is that of work visas; some employers abuse their power over temporary employees who work under a visa by paying less than a livable wage. Low skilled workers, in particular, are at risk for exploitation (Boucher, 2019; Hannan et al., 2016). Colorado Legal Services

(2018) cited the example of a family who emigrated to Colorado from the Philippines that forced to work for three years without pay, engaging in manual labor on a farm and rental properties.

Waddell (2019) wrote that many Latino families in Southern Colorado are not given financial credit or equal lending opportunities as their white counterparts, leading to discriminatory and unequal monetary practices and opportunities for that population. The findings of Sanchez-Soto and Singelmann (2017) went a step further explaining that migrants, both internationally and in the United States specifically, experience a “downward occupational mobility” (p. 57), or a tendency to find limited job opportunities for lower wages, and often in gender-specific roles.

Researchers have noted that migrant workers are at higher risk for financial exploitation, including being unpaid or underpaid for their work and for being trafficked, or coerced, to provide either unpaid labor or sex (Brennan, 2014; Davies, 2018; Moyce, & Schenker, 2018). Ronda-Perez and Moen (2017) noted that labor trafficking occurs most often in the industries frequently worked by migrants: fishing, agriculture, mining, construction, domestic services, and factories. Workers can also be at risk of having their legal documentation withheld (Ronda-Perez & Moen, 2017). Further, those who have been labor trafficked are at higher risk for severe mental health and substance abuse issues (Ronda-Perez & Moen, 2017).

Housing Conditions

Adequate housing is an important issue for migrant workers. Researchers have noted the link between poor health/mental health and such conditions as housing

instability and overcrowding (Hnuploy et al., 2019; Novoa et al., 2015). Although federal law has health and safety housing and bathroom regulations for temporary workers (Colorado Legal Services, 2019), many employers fail to fulfill this basic requirement. Some reports contain observations of 12 migrant workers living in a 1,000 square foot dwelling (Marx et al., 2017), while the Department of Pacific Affairs revealed as many as eight seasonal workers living in a small room with insufficient beds (Bailey, 2018). Other sources reveal that migrants often live in their cars, in the fields (Migrant Legal Action Program, 2016), or in unventilated box cars, lack proper toilet facilities (Wiltz, 2016) and struggle with food insecurity (Newton, 2016). Further, Mora et al. (2016) also explored the housing provided to migrant workers, concluding that it is often inferior, with overcrowding, and lack of security for personal belongings resulting in depression, anxiety, and substance abuse rates; their study revealed that 64% of participants felt their housing conditions were overcrowded.

Social/Cultural Isolation

Individuals and families often face numerous challenges when they immigrate, including discrimination, isolation, or loss of social status due to differences in culture, ethnic makeup, or language (Bonmati-Tomas et al., 2019; Siemons et al., 2017; Taylor & Ruiz, 2017). Alternman et al. (2018) revealed that being socially isolated, especially for migrant workers who are separated from family, can cause depressive symptoms, although Organista and Ngo (2019) and Steel et al. (2017) also noted an increase in substance use.

Language and culture factor into the migrant worker experience in myriad ways. The invisibility and isolation that is inherent in migrant work pose mental health risks to workers; this feeling of alienation may be due to lack of assimilation as demonstrated by language barriers, accented language, or through the conditions that arise through living in poverty (George et al., 2015; Janisch, 2017). Anikeeva et al. (2010) has proposed that migrant workers experience a higher rate of accidents and injury since many speak a first language other than English, making the understanding of safety features more difficult. Further, researchers have found that immigrants who are least like the dominant group in terms of language and culture, and those with the least amount of job skills are more likely to experience bullying in the workplace (Bergbom & Vartia-Vaananen, 2014; Boucher, 2019). In addition to being at higher risk of bullying inside the work environment, Crawley and Skleparis (2018) found that migrants are also seen as a less desirable group than refugees and struggle to be seen as worthy of protection outside of the workplace.

Psychosocial Stressors: Mental Health

The workplace abuses and conditions outlined above have been found to cause or exacerbate a number of mental health issues in migrant workers. Researchers have demonstrated higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety in this population (Close et al., 2016; Daly et al., 2018; DeCarlo Santiago et al., 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2011), with some studies also indicating PTSD, panic attacks, psychotic disorders, and even suicide (Bustamente et al., 2017; Close et al., 2016; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Meyer et al, 2014). In a study conducted by Daly et al. (2018), 83% of the workers

interviewed had experienced at least one psychosocial stressor in the workplace, resulting in increased levels of anxiety and depression. Some farmworkers experience exaggerated responses to stimuli, psychosomatic reactions, and personality disorders (Alderete et al., 2000); Ismayilova et al. (2014) wrote that many migrant workers do not have access to physical or mental health care, which can further exacerbate their conditions. Further, rates of depression tend to be higher for migrant workers who lack familial support (Alterman et al., 2018).

Lopez et al. (2018) found that migrant workers who are undocumented face compounding stressors, as mass deportations create terror for families fearing separation. The resulting anxiety, hopelessness, social and cultural isolation, and low self-esteem can cause diminished physical and mental health; These effects are exacerbated the more frequent the trips to the host country, and the longer the duration of the stay (Cheong & Massey, 2019). The pervasive fear of separation and potential deportation affect families' experiences at work, at home, and at school (Martinez & Ortega, 2018).

Both immigrants and their children, who are considered second-generation immigrants, suffer from higher levels of psychotic disorders than the general public, specifically from schizophrenia; poverty and discrimination, additional issues faced in the migrant worker population, are thought to be the contributing factors (Bourque, van der Ven, & Malla, 2011). When workers are undocumented, they often face an additional level of helplessness, hopelessness, isolation, fear, anxiety, and lower self-esteem due to the uncertainty inherent in not having the protection of legal status (Cheong & Massey, 2019; Martinez & Ortega, 2018). Adolescents who are undocumented often do not have

the opportunity to practice skills necessary for independence and may experience depression and suicidality as a result (Siemons et al., 2017).

Although there appear to be few studies done on PTSD in migrant workers in Colorado, studies on migrant workers in Denmark and Filipino migrant workers in China have yielded interesting results. Researchers have demonstrated a cumulative exposure to stressors during the migrant experience; the initial migration from the home country, racism and discrimination in the host country, adverse work conditions, and separation from family all contribute to PTSD (Hall et al., 2019). Additionally, migrant workers with PTSD have a higher number of physical illnesses, including infectious diseases as well as neurological and pulmonary diseases (Lolk et al., 2016). However, while migrant workers face health and mental health consequences as a result of living in a host country (Aung, 2019; Bustamente et al., 2017), researchers have found mitigating circumstances. Wu et al. (2018) found that migrant youth fared better when their goal was to integrate into the dominant culture rather than assimilate; in other words when migrant workers learn about and adjust to their new environment, there is a more positive health effect than if they either give up their traditional ways or remain socially isolated in their new environments.

Becerra (2019) and Bustamente et al. (2017) found that many migrant workers also face the fear of workplace raids, deportation, separation from loved ones, and misconduct on the part of law enforcement agents. Martinez and Ortega (2018), however, posed that many families in Colorado are mixed status, so family members who have legal documentation often fear for the arrest, detention, and/or deportation of

undocumented family members; this fear and uncertainty takes a toll in terms of psychological wellbeing. In short, the migrant worker experience can contribute to significant mental health and substance abuse issues.

Psychosocial Stressors: Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is another manifestation of the stressors experienced by migrant workers, with binge drinking and alcohol abuse found to be a significant issue especially for those experiencing social isolation, loneliness, and stress (Alderete et al., 2000; Ismayilova et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2015). According to Sanchez (2015), male migrant workers, especially those living in camps, were at higher risk for binge drinking than their female counterparts. A study in North Carolina revealed that as many as 50% of the male migrant workers interviewed may have been experiencing heavy drinking (Mora et al., 2016). A study of Turkish migrants working in Belgium led researchers to conclude that feeling like an outsider, or ‘between two cultures’ contributed significantly to substance abuse in that population (De Kock & Decorte, 2017). The disparities in access to healthcare only serve to exacerbate the substance abuse problem, as workers have less access to care, including culturally competent care (Newton, 2015).

The consequences of substance misuse by migrant workers are multifaceted. Researchers in Florida found an increase in marijuana use among adolescent migrant workers; often the migrant community does nothing to bring attention to this issue due to some family members being undocumented (Kanamori et al., 2016). Substance abuse has been linked to many health and social problems including transmission of HIV and other diseases through risky behaviors (Zhang et al., 2016), as well as incarceration,

homelessness, family disruption, and negative impacts in the workplace (Meena et al., 2019).

Colorado

The New American Economy (2016) reported that immigrants make up 10% of Colorado's population, with a significant increase in the number of immigrants moving to the state in recent years; there are more foreign-born people of working age than there are native-born in Colorado. Further, according to the US Census Bureau (2018), Colorado's population consists of well over 20% Latino, many of whom are migrant workers. Colorado uses migrant workers for many industries, including oil and gas extraction, agriculture, and tourism (Gourley & Madonia, 2018; Norton, 2018), making this population an essential part of the State's economy.

Migrant workers are impacted by laws and policies in the state in which they work; between 2006-2013, Colorado enforced 'show me your papers' legislation, which increased the power and scope of enforcement agents to arrest, detain, or deport individuals (Martinez & Ortega, 2018). Martinez and Ortega (2018) described the economic and educational effects of these arrests on both workers and their families, as well as "stigma, loss of job opportunities, friendships, familial relationships, and denial of legal and civil rights" (p. 124). Further, Martinez and Ortega (2018) noted that these consequences occurred whether the arrests resulted in convictions or acquittals.

Colorado's economy and industrial output are directly impacted by its migrant worker population. Low wages are especially concerning for migrant workers in Colorado, which has a significantly higher cost of living than the national average

(salary.com, 2019). Further study was warranted to explore the psychosocial stressors endured by this population specifically, as well as any potential associated mental health effects.

Many studies conducted with this community of workers have been quantitative in nature; while providing solid data, these studies did not capture the voice or lived experience of the population of interest, which is an essential element in better understanding a phenomenon (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). Other qualitative researchers in the discipline have focused on a narrower view of the migrant worker experience; diet and the subsequent effects on obesity (Lim, Song, & Song, 2017; Renzaho et al., 2018), or the intersection of substance use and sexual health (Duke & Carpinteiro, 2009; McCoy, et al., 2016). Although this information helps to inform healthcare providers and policy makers, it explores a narrow slice of migrant workers' lives. This study provided a wider lens, examining the lived experience of Colorado migrant workers as they, the workers themselves, have lived it.

Summary and Conclusions

Many migrant workers experience a significant number of challenges that affect their mental health and wellbeing, including abuses in the workplace, environmental conditions that cause adverse health effects, financial exploitation, inadequate housing, and social/cultural isolation (Davies, 2018; Moyce & Schenker, 2018). In addition, this population often faces isolation due to linguistic and cultural differences, racial discrimination, separation from family members, and fears of deportation in the case of workers who are undocumented (Daly et al., 2017; Hannan et al., 2016). These factors

may contribute to an increase in the exacerbated mental health struggles that some migrant workers face, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Ismayilova et al., 2013; Taylor & Ruiz, 2017; Winkleman et al., 2013). Colorado has a large migrant workforce (US Census Bureau, 2018) and is directly affected by the issues identified in the studies cited. Chapter 3 will explore the methodology of the study, including the research design and rationale; methodology, including sampling strategy and data analysis; and ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of migrant workers in the state of Colorado. The following research question was used for my study: What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in the state of Colorado? I examined the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado.

In this chapter, I outline the research design and rationale for this study. I describe my role as a researcher, and I explore any bias that may have existed, along with my plan to counter it. Also, I describe my methodology in-depth, including my strategy for identifying and recruiting a population sample I interviewed, along with sampling size. Additionally, I provide the rationale for the interview questions that were used, and how data were collected and analyzed. I explain how I maintained ethical guidelines throughout the study, including the IRB process, treatment of participants, and ensuring confidentiality of all data collected. Finally, issues of trustworthiness are described, including the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Research Design and Rationale

A hermeneutic phenomenological design was used in this study. The purpose of this design was to interpret the lived experiences of the identified group through in-depth interviews (see Seidman, 2012). Researchers have defined quantitative research as something that is measurable (Leppink, 2017; Mertler, 2020). This methodology was not appropriate for my study because I was attempting to achieve a better understanding of

migrant workers' lived experiences in the workplace. Other qualitative designs were deemed inappropriate as well. Ethnography was ruled out because it focuses on studying the culture of a group (see Parker-Jenkins, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and my interest was the individual experiences of migrant workers. A case study frames research as a case and can include a person or historical event (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2009), which was not the purpose of my study. Narratives, or the collection of participants' stories (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Bruce et al., 2016), were also not an inappropriate choice because they would not have captured the substance of the study. Hermeneutic research "focuses on the existential nature of human experience" (Spence, 2016, p. 837); this design fit the purpose of the study and the theoretical framework of social justice theory. Further, the goal of the qualitative interviews was to learn about the individual participant's experience as well as the significance within the larger societal context (see Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology relies on primary sources that contribute to a richer understanding of human experience (Adams & van Manen, 2017). Extracting and interpreting meaning in the lived experiences of participants (while not necessarily providing explanation) are key principles of hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927/2011; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). Following the hermeneutic phenomenological process, the researcher begins with foresight, which in the current study was what it may mean to be a migrant worker, then adds to that understanding by analyzing the lived experiences of participants (Gadamer, 2004). Next, the data are synthesized and analyzed through the larger lens, and the researcher goes through a circular process for better

understanding of the lived experience (Gadamer, 2004; Peoples, 2021). A researcher's goal in qualitative analysis is to explore an experience in depth, with potential outcomes of impugning stereotypes and informing policy change (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Qualitative interviews allow for an in-depth understanding of human behavior and experiences and are frequently used for data collection in health-related decision making (Farrugia, 2019; Rosenthal, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is the instrument in the data collection process (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). My relationship to the topic was more intimate than that of a quantitative researcher. I was an observer of the experience of my interviewees, and as such needed to remain as neutral as possible. It was important to analyze participants' stories and data from their perspective, as opposed to promoting my perceptions, truths, or experiences (see D'Arrigo-Patrick et al, 2017). Researchers should build rapport with participants but maintain a nonjudgmental approach to the information they share (Patton, 2015). As a researcher, I strove to develop a neutral relationship with participants.

Qualitative researchers should acknowledge and make explicit any biases and be aware of any misconceptions they may hold (Peoples, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I was mindful of any negative assumptions I may have had about any of my participants. By characterizing a population as being chronically abused, disenfranchised, and exploited, a researcher brings an inherent bias to the study (Hart-Johnson, 2017). The lens of social justice theory, which posits an unequal or unfair distribution of resources and power, may have contributed to my tendency to view participants as an injured party. I worked to

avoid viewing migrant workers through a victim lens. To mitigate this tendency, I employed a strengths-based approach when conducting this research. Strengths-based approaches help to provide a more balanced view of a population (Myers, 2003) and stem from the therapeutic belief that people have the internal resources to solve the issues they are experiencing, and focus on subjects' strengths rather than limitations or vulnerabilities (Caffaro, 2017; Mirkovic et al., 2016). By maintaining a strengths-based perspective (see Frost et al., 2017), I lessened my tendency to view the population in my study as victims.

Journaling is a recommended technique to keep grounded in the hermeneutic phenomenological process (Janesick, 1999). I used journaling as a means of reflection. Journaling has been found to be beneficial in processing thoughts and reactions so that researchers remain fresh and open to the subject's story; journaling helps researchers acknowledge and release subjective experiences to maintain perspective (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019). Further, journaling provides an opportunity to make explicit any preconceptions and/or biases held, which will encourage objectivity (Oliphant & Bennett, 2019; Peoples, 2021). A heuristic phenomenological approach calls for engaging in bracketing, or setting aside any preconceived knowledge or assumptions during the descriptive process (O'Halloran et al., 2018). A hermeneutical approach, however, requires some level of interpretation on the part of the phenomenological researcher, which allows for some preconceived understanding of the subject (Crowther et al., 2017). Because I engaged in a hermeneutical approach, I did not engage in bracketing

techniques. I worked to remain cognizant of any bias I may have held and used journaling as a means of keeping that bias in check, per the hermeneutic approach.

Due to COVID-19, I was unable to recruit students on a college campus using flyers, as originally planned. Social media are increasingly acceptable and commonly used tool in research recruitment (Bender et al., 2017), so I used tools such as Facebook and LinkedIn (see Appendix A). Although this may have biased my sample due to potential issues related to access to technology and use of social media, it was an appropriate way to address the challenges presented by the COVID-19 situation. I asked a local program that serves migrant workers to provide information about my study (and my contact information) to students in their program, and I welcomed any contact information they may have provided, with permission from prospective participants for me to follow up. Snowball sampling was used to increase the potential pool of candidates. Snowball sampling often works well with social media, as participants can like or share study information with others in the sought demographic (Bender et al., 2017).

After receiving IRB approval (08-12-20-0754223), I conducted phone interviews with participants rather than meeting in person. When interviews are held over the phone rather than in public spaces such as a library, privacy increases for participants (Oltmann, 2016). Some of the subjects, especially in the initial rounds before snowball sampling was employed, may have gone to school on the campus where I am employed. To decrease the chance of a dual relationship, I helped to ensure that potential study participants were not taking classes in the academic department in which I teach. There is

an inherent power differential in the interviewer/interviewee dynamic, whereby the researcher controls the questions asked, the setting, and the interpretation of the results (Sorsa et al., 2015). I remained cognizant of this potential during the interview. It is important to screen for the potential for reactivity, and the use of a recording device may influence what participants choose to share (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Some researchers have noted telephone interviews as the preferred method (over face-to-face, Skype, or email), for reasons including convenience, greater ease of sharing sensitive information, and relatability to the researcher (Heath et al., 2018). To ensure that personal bias was minimized or eliminated, I audio-recorded all interviews to avoid recall bias and standardize interactions with participants to the degree possible (see Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010).

Methodology

In this section, I describe the participant pool and selection process. The sample size, data collection plan, and data analysis plan are specified. In addition, I provide a rationale for the participation pool, selection, and use of data. Before the interviews began, I received approval through the Walden IRB.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Qualitative studies allow researchers to explore a topic deeply; the interview is an important element in this process (Oltmann, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Participant Pool

In the United States, there are programs tailored toward migrant workers who want to seek a college education. These programs provide scholarships, resources, and

support (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Thirty-six percent of U.S.-born children of immigrants graduate from college, which is higher than other Americans (Center for American Progress, 2020). To ensure a fluent, English-speaking participant pool, I recruited from college programs that provide support and services to migrant workers pursuing higher education.

Recruitment

To recruit interview participants, I advertised on social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn (see Appendix A). I sent information about this study to colleagues who work with current or former migrant workers; those colleagues then sent out emailed or social media posts sharing this information. In the online media post, I provided my contact information, which was a phone number set up for the purpose of conducting the interviews. Potential participants then contacted me directly; colleagues were not informed as to who participated in the research.

Inclusion Criteria

Those people interested in participating in the study were screened via telephone to confirm that they met the study's inclusion criteria:

- self-identifies as a migrant worker who works or worked in the state of Colorado (e.g., vegetation fields, factories, private homes, oil and gas extraction, agriculture, and tourism)
- currently 18 years of age or older
- speaks fluent English

Snowball sampling has been found to be an effective method of increasing the participant pool until data saturation is reached (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Mason, 2010), and was used with my initial group.

Informed Consent

The purpose of informed consent is to provide an overview of any potential benefits and risks of participating in the study (Nijhawan et al., 2013; Nusbaum et al., 2017). Drawbacks may include experiencing negative emotions, and benefits may include a feeling of release or empowerment as the interviewee shares their story (Opsal et al., 2016). Interviewees may have the added benefit of learning something new as they share their story by connecting to new themes or attributing meaning to their experience that they may not have previously noted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Additionally, informed consent should include the purpose of the research, the time it will take, the voluntary nature of the research, and contact information for any follow-up questions, concerns, or feedback (Mealer & Jones, 2014). I obtained oral consent from participants covering each of these elements; participants were asked for a verbal consent process over the phone. I documented that participants had been informed of the risks and benefits, that they stated they understood and agreed to the study, and that they agreed to be contacted if further clarifying questions were needed. I confirmed participants' entry to the program with an email, which detailed the date and time of our interview. In the email I stated that I would keep any identifying information strictly confidential.

COVID-19 Impact on Interview Process and Recruitment

The study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, special precautions were taken to avoid any risks of person-to-person contact. Face-to-face interviews are generally the preferred method of qualitative inquiry because it is easier to establish a sense of trust and rapport with this method and to read the body language of interviewees (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017; Oltmann, 2016). Telephone interviews, however, can create a heightened sense of anonymity and privacy for respondents and make note-taking easier for the researcher (Drabble et al., 2016).

In comparison studies, many researchers found no difference in the quality or amount of information gathered when face-to-face and phone interviews were compared (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Additionally, researchers have found broader access to participants because the geographical limitations of face-to-face interviewing are no longer an issue (Heath et al., 2016; Oltmann, 2016). Participants received an emailed confirmation of the time of the interview. I initiated the call to participants.

Scheduling and Conducting the Interview

To confirm that participants qualified for the study, I read aloud the screening questionnaire and verified each qualifier. I read aloud the informed consent information and confirmed participant understanding and documented the response. I then asked for permission to turn on audio recording of the interview; no applicants denied this request. If they had, I would have taken notes as close to verbatim as possible. When permission for audio recording was granted, I activated my cell phone and backup audio-recording

device. I informed participants that they could refrain from answering any questions, skip questions, or request that questions be repeated at any time.

I began with demographic questions, rapport-building questions, and appreciative inquiry. Research has shown this approach to be effective to ensure a successful interview for both parties (Brown & Danaher, 2017). Rapport building may include asking nonthreatening, positive descriptions about something with which the interviewee has knowledge or mastery (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A good interviewer then proceeds with open-ended, semistructured questions with prompts, probes, and follow-up questions to gain clarity, add depth of understanding, or encourage the development of thought (Bell et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). See Appendix C for interview questions. Data were collected in interviews lasting approximately 1 hour, with an additional 15 minutes for debriefing and for any questions the participant may have had. Participants were asked for contact information for any follow-up questions, as mentioned during the consent process, but no postinterview follow-up questions were necessary.

Once the interview was completed, I emailed an eGift card rather than mailing a gift card to collect as little identifying personal information (such as a home address) as possible. While the recruitment information stated that \$20 e-gift cards would be given as a thank you, I could only order e-gift cards in \$25 denominations. As participants thought they would be receiving \$20, receiving an increased amount after the interview presented no ethical concerns. I informed participants that I would email them a list of free or pro bono resources, which I did immediately following each interview; see Appendix C. If

any participant had experienced any discomfort as a result of the interview, I would have contacted Walden's IRB and my supervisor (chairperson).

Debriefing

At the end of the interview, I reminded participants that their confidentiality would be closely guarded. I asked participants if they had any questions and I sincerely thanked them for their time and for sharing their stories and experiences. I informed them that I would share a summary of the research study with participants via email upon their request.

Sampling Strategy

Researchers recommend the use of purposeful and criterion sampling to maintain a homogeneous participant pool (Palinkas et al., 2016; Patton, 2016). Although random sampling is generally used to help avoid bias, qualitative researchers seek specific participants in order to learn about a distinct phenomenon (Etikan, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Due to the accommodations that had to be made during shelter-in-place resulting from the 2020 pandemic, I used social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn to inform potential candidates of the opportunity to participate in the study. Criteria for participation in the study included English-speaking people 18 years of age or older who have worked as a migrant worker in Colorado (in fields, agriculture, private homes, factories, oil and gas extraction, tourism, etc.).

Participants were asked to self-identify as to whether they met the study's criteria. Snowball sampling entails using a networking strategy and chain referral, in which one participant exposes the researcher to others who have similar experiences to share

(Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Patton, 2015). I used snowball sampling with participants, asking them to have family or friends contact me if they could answer the inclusion criteria questions affirmatively.

Sample Size and Data Saturation

Although there are no set guidelines determining exactly how many participants should be interviewed, researchers have found a range of 7-12 participants to be appropriate in order to receive data saturation (Boddy, 2016), which occurs when interviews fail to produce new themes, or when new codes are no longer needed because all of the incoming data fits into existing codes (Hennick et al., 2017; Laumann, 2020; Mason, 2010; Saunders et al, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). I interviewed eight participants, and reached data saturation when I could no longer add thematic entries to the Quirkos bubbles. Each interviewee shared information on overlapping themes, some of which were part of my interview questions, such as workplace conditions, and some that were not, such as their motivation, and legal status and related barriers.

Instrumentation

Pandey and Chawla (2016) recommended using a semi-structured interview format, with open-ended questions and several follow-up prompts in order to help to ensure content validity. I used this format during my interviews (see Appendix B). Questions were based on the research question and the literature review, and informed by the guiding theory. In Chapter 2, I explored literature specific to understanding the adverse employment challenges in the workplace (i.e. environmental toxins, work-related injury, and financial exploitation) and resulting psychosocial stressors experienced by

migrant workers. I shared the interview questions with an expert who works with immigrants to ensure that the questions were appropriate before engaging in the actual interview process. He suggested adding a question asking how the migrant work experience impacted family members. However, since this was not the topic of my study, I refrained from using that question.

Researchers have recommended that the last question to ask participants is what else the interviewer should have asked, and follow up accordingly (McMahon & Winch, 2018). This was my final question, and it did prove fruitful. Interviews were audio-recorded through a cell phone and secondary recording device, with full consent from participants. These instruments were sufficient to answer the study's research question.

At the end of the interview, interviewees were reminded that any identifying information would be kept confidential and were sincerely thanked for their participation in the study. Participants were reminded that they might be contacted with any follow-up or clarifying questions, if necessary. I engaged in empathy, rapport-building, and reflection as I conducted the interviews. Such micro-counseling skills are an important element in the qualitative interview process (McCarthy & LaChenaye, 2017). Debriefing has been found to be effective in working with populations who may be experiencing distress (Zazzarino & Bridges, 2019). If needed, I would have consulted with my dissertation chair regarding the interview experience. Debriefing has been identified as a beneficial practice for phenomenological researchers, to highlight any gaps in the collected data (McMahon & Winch, 2018).

Data Analysis Plan

I began to listen for themes during the interview, as it is recommended that qualitative researchers begin the coding process as they collect data rather than after the final interview (Saldana, 2016). I took notes during and after the interview, as researchers Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) have found that such documents add great value to the data analysis that occurs later. Additionally, I self-transcribed the audio recorded interviews, as it has been noted that self-transcription allows the researcher to connect more intimately with the subject material (Saldana, 2016). I then hand coded the data, employing thematic analysis. Coding was done in segments, looking for developing themes and patterns as they emerged (D'Arrigo-Patrick et al., 2017).

Themes were viewed through the lens of social justice theory. I listened as participants described any challenges to obtaining fair pay, a healthy working environment, and adequate housing, for example. I used social justice theory constructs to focus on the thematic categories that arose. I anticipated the possibility of such a priori codes as the distribution of power and resources among people despite race or social class; access to health; access to wellbeing; access to economic wellbeing. These constructs are directly related to the components of social justice theory. Further, I incorporated the hermeneutic circle, examining the bits of data collected in individual interviews, then stepped back to reflect on how those pieces informed the broader issue being researched; how the comments within individual interviews added to or contradicted what has been known about the Colorado migrant worker experience. For example, researchers have noted that many migrant workers endure difficult, and at times

exploitive, working conditions (Bustamante et al., 2017). Using the hermenutic circle helped to illuminate the experiences of migrant workers in Colorado, where the policies, socioeconomics, and industries create a unique experience for this population.

I planned to use certain aspects of Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step approach for data analysis, which begins with carefully scrutinizing the transcripts for themes, distilling significant statements, and giving form to the meaning within the statements. In further steps, rather than providing a description of the content, as purported by Colaizzi, I intended to employ a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an appropriate choice for hermeneutic phenomenological research as it allows the researcher to describe and interpret participants' lived experiences by analyzing their own words (Cassol et al., 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). By categorizing the codes into emerging themes, the researcher is able to identify the overarching concepts, patterns, and underlying meaning (Bogitz et al, 2017; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

As themes emerged, I then recorded them in a codebook to be analyzed, organized, and (sub)categorized. All participants were assigned pseudonyms (see Appendix B) to ensure confidentiality. I then organized the data using the qualitative data analysis software Quirkos, which provided a visual representation of textual coding using Quirks, or bubbles, which can be color coded and enlarged as the researcher adds more data (Predictive Analytics Today, 2018). This software platform allowed for identification of themes in a highly visual way, allowed for categorization and organization of collected interview material for a fuller comparison of themes that ran throughout participants' lived experiences, and provided a visual representation of the

tenets of social justice theory as they emerged. Using these strategies, I sorted through the data to draw conclusions and interpretations.

Employing interpretation is a basic tenet in hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). The use of the software program Quirkos to organize broader themes of lived experience within the context of social justice theory was a valuable way to employ the hermeneutic circle. The examination of smaller pieces of information contained in the interviews, and reflection on their contribution to the larger themes being explored across participants and within the theory, reflects the circular process of hermeneutic phenomenology (Debesay et al., 2008). It is important to derive the essence of the phenomenon through exploration of the themes that arise in the data (Cassol et al., 2018).

I journaled as a means of processing the feedback received, storing my notes and printed transcripts in a locked file cabinet within a locked office. All electronic data were password-protected; appropriate protocol dictates that researchers retain the data for five years, and destroy all data after that timeframe (Princeton Research, 2020).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Participants of qualitative interviews are often given the option to receive a synopsis of the study to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's perceptions (Thomas, 2017). My plan was to offer to provide a synopsis of the interview to participants for that purpose. Additionally, I made explicit during the consent process that participants would be contacted for follow up questions if I had need of clarification. Participant feedback

can be an inherently important step to minimize researcher bias and to accurately represent the data gathered (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Laumann, 2020). I planned to use the voice of participants in my research, and conduct interviews until saturation occurred.

Transferability

To help ensure transferability, my goal was to use thick description. This technique shows rather than tells participants' stories and providing plenty of detail and description of the interview (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Additionally, it is important that researchers have a thorough understanding of how the data was gathered and analyzed (Hadi & Closs, 2016). I therefore intended to provide sufficient detail about the population sample, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and data collection and analysis methods. Further, my aim was to share any issues that arose that might hinder efforts of transferability for future researchers.

Dependability

I proposed that the data collected from interviews with participants would answer the research question being put forth, as described by Korstjens and Moser (2017). Further, I fully expected my process of analysis to be congruent with the research design being used. Both of these elements would help to ensure dependability. The methods of this study were expected to be appropriate to collect the data needed to answer the research question.

Confirmability

Maintaining objectivity is important (Lawton-Sticklor & Bodamer, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I intended to use my journal as an audit trail, as hermeneutic phenomenology allows for and encourages self-reflection to examine researcher bias and organize interpretations. Maintaining neutrality is a key component in confirmability, and includes being transparent in decision-making processes, methods of data management, and research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Ethical Procedures

I made every effort to treat participants respectfully. This included beginning and ending with informed consent, building rapport, and maintaining strict confidentiality both during and after the interview process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; van Liempt & Bilger, 2018). Additionally, I worked to ensure that I represented the voices of participants, rather than my own.

It is possible that some of the migrant workers I interviewed may be experiencing workplace psychosocial stressors. There is also a possibility that some of the migrant workers I interviewed are undocumented. The latter was not a question I asked participants, but most shared willingly during the interview. Transcripts were kept separate from the participant contact list, and transcripts have been de-identified. The contact list will be immediately destroyed upon completion of research. The de-identified transcripts, however, will be kept used as a data source and kept for 5 years. No incriminating information has been or will be shared with anyone, at any time. As a researcher, I first ensured that participants felt comfortable to withdraw from the

interview at any time. I provided a list of free resources upon completion of the interview. Further, I assured participants both at the start and the conclusion of the interview that their information and data would remain confidential. Assuring confidentiality is one of the most important ethical considerations for which a researcher is responsible. I further informed participants that all information would be de-identified, and once the study was concluded this information would either be discarded (i.e. audio tapes) or destroyed after the required amount of time. Any hard copies of data would be stored in a personal safe until such time as they may be destroyed.

Baker et al. (2016) cautioned researchers from revealing gender through use of pronouns, if that disclosure compromises anonymity in the study. Although gender is a salient feature in one's identity and may influence the interpretation of experience (Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017), it is not the primary focus of this research. Further, it is advised to not allow quotes to identify participants (Grossoehme, 2014). It is also essential to maintain a professional distance to the (sometimes emotionally difficult) information being collected during the interview process, while still establishing rapport and creating a feeling of safety and mutual respect with the participant (Dickson-Swift et al., 2004).

Researchers have drawn distinctions between procedural ethics, such as getting the appropriate permission from an IRB for a research study, and practical ethics, or the treatment of subjects during a study; this includes any possible relived trauma that subjects may experience during the retelling in a qualitative interview (Baker et al., 2016;

Reid et al., 2018; Varpio & McCarthy, 2018). All interviewees have been given a list of appropriate local resources that offer free or sliding scale services (see Appendix C).

Finally, ethical procedures also include researchers protecting participant identity by using a pseudonym (Mack et al., 2005). I maintained a separate document cross-reference using a pseudonym and unique identifiers as a number that matched the interviewees' first names and corresponding numbers (see Appendix B). For example, I used a combination of month/day/year, sequential number, and format of interview (i.e. In person or by Telephone); where 06= month; 01= day; 20= year; 01=sequential number; T= telephone); the first participant would be identified only as 060120-01-T (see Appendix B). I stored this information on a secure, password-protected laptop. In doing my own interviews, transcription, and data analysis, no one outside of my dissertation committee has had access to sensitive information. Further, during the process of transcription, a verbatim transcription of participants' words helped to ensure fidelity to the data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

I was aware of the perception of a power differential between interviewer and interviewee. There were several objectives I kept to the forefront at all times. These include the principals of non-maleficence or doing no harm to participants; protecting the autonomy, or decision-making right of participants; and not benefitting at the expense of my participants (Bourdeau, 2000; Reid et al., 2018).

Compensation

Finally, I offered an incentive of \$20 gift card as a token of respect for participants' time and effort. Monetary rewards have been shown to increase the

willingness of participants to engage in research (Kelly et al., 2017). While there is a risk that interviewees may have participated only for the monetary gain and may be less than truthful (Robinson, 2014), the reward was hopefully low enough to prevent that occurrence while being high enough to demonstrate my gratitude. Participants did not know the e-gift card was actually in the amount of \$25 until the interview was completed. Participants were informed that the information they shared might benefit the public, as well as service-providing agencies and policymakers, of the challenges faced by migrant workers in Colorado.

Summary

In this qualitative study, I utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviewing techniques to better understand the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado. Using social media as a recruitment forum, I worked with a specific program in Colorado to recruit participants for this study. This partner was asked to share information about the research participation opportunity. A solid research study involves obtaining informed consent (Oye et al., 2016; von Unger, 2016), interviewing until such time as data saturation has been reached (Nelson, 2017; Tran et al., 2017), and working to ensure an openness to the information collected, with a minimum of bias or preconceptions, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of participants (Roth & von Unger, 2018). Data collection and coding were conducted in a rigorous manner, following ethical protocols and IRB guidelines, as outlined by Anderson (2017). In the following Chapter 4, I provided the setting of the interviews and demographics of participants and explored the

data collection and analysis. Additionally, I summarized the findings of this qualitative research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. I focused on the essence of the phenomenon of migrant work experience, with the goal of identifying themes that emerged. In this chapter I describe how data were collected and analyzed, and present the results of that analysis. I was purposeful in not providing identifying information about participants.

Based on the research question and information ascertained during the literature review, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix B) for telephone interviews. The original plan to conduct face-to-face interviews was modified in response to the pandemic and subsequent stay-at-home initiatives. I was guided in my study by my research question: What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in the state of Colorado? I explored the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. The findings from my study revealed that the shared phenomenon and lived experience among participants who were migrant workers entailed experiencing the tension between fear and opportunity. Participants expressed that they felt held back from certain opportunities because of their legal status and not wanting to draw attention to themselves for fear of repercussions. On the other hand, they realized that the DACA program provided opportunities for a better way of life, for which they expressed strong motivation. The themes underlying the essences of this phenomenon are further explained and interpreted in Chapter 5.

I followed the procedures outlined in Chapter 3 to conduct recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. This included transcribing and coding the data and employing thematic analysis. I used the software program Quirkos to provide a visual representation of the coded data.

Setting

Data were collected via telephone interviews that were audio-recorded and backup recorded with the express approval of participants. Eight interviews were conducted during the fall of 2020, with interactions averaging 30 minutes and the longest taking 45 minutes. Conversational interviews included reading and obtaining consent, including an explanation of the voluntary nature of involvement in the study. Participants were informed that there were no conditions for their engagement and that they had the right to end the interview at any time. I had no previous relationship with any of the interviewees, and there were no budgetary connections outside of the small e-gift card I emailed as a token of my gratitude. I then gave a brief explanation of how the interview would proceed (using the informed consent), asked demographic questions (to determine whether the participants met the inclusion criteria), and asked the interview questions, prompts, and follow-up questions.

Demographics

Participants self-identified as a migrant worker, confirmed that they were at least 18 years of age, and confirmed that they spoke fluent English, per the inclusion requirements. Five participants identified as women, and three identified as men. Participants were not asked about the country of their birth or the circumstances of their

arrival to the United States. As Moore and Miller (2001) stated, “vulnerable individuals are therefore more like to experience real or potential harm and require special safeguards to insure [sic] that their welfare and rights are protected” (p. 1034). Rubin and Rubin (2012) maintained that no participant should be harmed during the course of research. Further, Walden University’s IRB takes into consideration activities in which a research participant may have participated that may cause harm or incrimination, including illegal immigration (Walden Center for Research Quality, 2020). As a result, care was taken to not ask any incriminating questions of participants. All participants identified as migrant workers who served in industries including restaurants, construction, roofing, warehouse/factory, and as janitors, nannies, and babysitters. Participants also worked in grocery stores, car repair, retail, fast food, cleaning houses, and selling burritos.

To maintain participants’ confidentiality, I used pseudonyms rather than their names. For example, the first participant was referred to as 08282001T. This referred to the date the interview took place, August 28, 2020, followed by the numerical order of the interview (01), and ending with a T for telephone interview. Given the sensitivity of protecting participants’ identities, I did not provide information regarding ethnicity, specific places of work or educational institutions, or other identifying demographic information.

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics of participants while omitting the pseudonyms and any identifying information that might compromise confidentiality. The participant number is the sequential number of the interview. I used seven colors to identify the following: patterns in demographics and type of jobs;

status/DACA/language; working conditions/pay; discrimination/racism;

Colorado/university; motivations; and access to health care/mental health care. The color categories were chosen based on themes that were repeated in multiple interviews, and major themes were determined based on the frequency of the color categories.

Table 1

Demographic Table

Participant number	Self-identified age	Vocation/employment as migrant worker	Gender	DACA recipient	College student or graduate
1	26	Retail, auto work, manufacturing, janitorial	M	Yes	Yes
2	25	Domestic worker	F	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
3	32	Restaurant, construction, auto work	M	Yes	Yes
4	23	Retail	F	Yes	Yes
5	21	Restaurants	F	Undisclosed	Yes
6	30	Restaurants, domestic worker	F	Yes	Yes
7	23	Warehouse, retail	F	Undisclosed	Yes
8	19	Construction	M	Undisclosed	Yes

Note. Data gathered from the interview transcripts.

Data Collection

I interviewed eight participants, all of whom reside in Colorado. Each interviewee spoke fluent English, so there were no language barriers. Purposive and criterion sampling are recommended to maintain a similar pool of interviewees (Palinkas et al., 2016; Patton, 2016), and this was employed to recruit potential participants. Snowball

sampling is often used to increase the number of respondents from the initial pool (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Patton, 2015). The aim in the current study was to employ snowball sampling, but no new participants were obtained in this manner. After receiving IRB approval through Walden University on August 12, 2020 (#08-12-20-0754223), I contacted several members of a local organization to post the recruitment flyer, based on the approved IRB protocol. These organizations were noted for serving the population I sought to recruit. I emailed them the IRB-approved recruitment flyer that included my contact information. When potential participants contacted me, following the instructions on the flyer, I sent them the informed consent form, which I also read aloud during the start of the interview to obtain verbal consent from each participant. Written consent via email was not sought to help ensure participant confidentiality.

The interview format involved open-ended, semistructured questions, as recommended by Pandey and Chawla (2016), and I often followed up with clarifying or additional questions based on the information that participants shared. Each interview ended with a sincere thanks to participants for their time and sharing of their story, along with providing them with the next steps. These steps included that (a) they would be contacted with any follow-up questions, (b) a summary of the research would be provided upon their request, and (c) all identifying information would be kept strictly confidential. All interviews were recorded on an iPhone capable of password protection, and on an Evista voice recorder. Following transcription, the Evista device was stored in a locked cabinet for storage. A coded file was created for each participant to help ensure confidentiality. To maintain confidentiality, interview information was de-identified by

assigning each participant a pseudonym that included the date of the interview, the numerical order of the interview, and the method by which the interview took place.

The themes emerged as early as the second interview indicating data saturation, and remained strong throughout the interview process. No new themes emerged during my later interviews, indicating that data saturation had been reached. Ideally, interviews should continue until the researcher sees recurring patterns, sometimes referred to as information redundancy, or until there is sufficient information to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis

One phenomenological method of data analysis is Colaizzi's seven-step approach, the underlying purpose of which includes examining transcripts for themes, isolating significant statements made by participants, and unearthing the meaning or context (Wirihana et al., 2018). Although Colaizzi's approach is geared toward heuristic research (Abalos et al., 2016), my study was hermeneutic. I therefore incorporated a hybrid approach that fit my study. I followed Steps 1–4 as outlined by Morrow et al. (2015). Step 1 (familiarization) is manually transcribing the interviews, allowing for a refresh of the material and a more intimate examination of the discussion. Next, I completed Step 2 (identifying significant statements) by color-coding each transcription. This use of descriptive coding was defined by Saldana (2016) as summarizing the main topic of a passage to examine emerging themes. Parameswaran et al. (2019) described using keywords in written (transcribed) text to help identify emerging themes. While reading through my transcripts, I noted keywords and concepts and assigned a color to each

overriding theme that emerged. I used seven colors to identify the following: patterns in demographics and type of jobs; status/DACA/language; working conditions/pay; discrimination/racism; motivations; access to health care/mental health care; and Colorado/university. Colorado and university were combined as a theme because participants often intertwined the two when discussing the politics of the state and the opportunities afforded them by institutions of higher education, especially as they related to state funding for education.

The color categories were chosen based on themes that were repeated in multiple interviews, and major themes were determined based on the frequency of the color categories. Step 3 (formulating meanings) encourages the researcher to bracket the preconceptions, a tactic that is better geared toward heuristic phenomenology (Morrow et al., 2015). I then used the software platform Quirkos, which allowed for a visual representation of emergent themes (see Figure 1) that is called for in Step 4 (clustering themes). The remaining steps in Colaizzi's method are heuristic in nature and were not appropriate for this study because they call for exhaustive description rather than the thematic analysis preferred in hermeneutic research (see Cassol et al., 2018).

To counter any bias I may have had, I worked to enter into each interview with a fresh perspective and without an agenda, allowing the participant's unique story to unfold. Further, journaling is recommended as a way to explore bias (Oliphant & Bennett, 2019; Peoples, 2021). I found that journaling provided an opportunity to refocus using a strengths-based perspective, which helped to process any bias I may have held. Caffaro (2017) and Mirkovic et al. (2016) promoted a strengths-based perspective in

which the researcher focuses on the strengths of the interviewee rather than their vulnerabilities. I used journaling and a deliberate focus on the strengths-based approach to enter into each interview open to what the participant would share. To remain grounded in the hermeneutic phenomenological process, I acknowledged any bias I held and processed it so that I could remain as neutral as possible with participants and allow the data to speak for themselves.

A key element of hermeneutic research is the use of the hermeneutic circle in which researchers consider the words and descriptive contributions of individual participants, reflect on that experience as a collective, and reconsider the individual parts with an eye toward a deeper understanding of the underlying meaning (Suddick et al., 2020). In this way, the unique experiences and worldviews of interviewees are considered and measured in relation to the overarching themes and groupings. I utilized the hermeneutic circle by analyzing the color-coded passages of each interview, reflecting on the larger pattern of experiences and narrowing my focus to the individual interviews. For example, in the literature review I examined the workplace abuses experienced by many migrant workers as described in other studies. I then was able to narrow my focus to the individual accounts as shared by participants in my study, which afforded me an opportunity to learn about their unique experiences. By examining the color-coded trends, I was able to reflect on the larger, overarching patterns before delving once more into the nuances of individual interviews. This approach helped to make clear which elements enhanced or diverged from previously researched themes, and to systematize newly emerging themes. Data analysis was conducted through the lens of social justice

theory, including access to resources, equity, justice, and power of decision making (Rawls, 1971; van den Bos, 2003; Vanidestine & Aparicio, 2019).

Discrepant Cases

A discrepant case is one that may be considered an outlier, or whose results yield information that are different from the predominate themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I examined the data in aggregate and viewed discrepant cases as important examples that not all migrant workers share the same experience. Discrepancies were not ignored but were not weighted as heavily as patterns of experiences. These differing stories can help to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (FitzPatrick, 2019).

One outlier interview in my study included a migrant worker who also identified as a refugee. This was notable in that although many of the predominant themes were similar, such as the participant not feeling they had a choice and voicing a strong motivation for education and meaningful work, this participant did not discuss the impact of legal status. Although many other participants discussed their need for secrecy regarding their immigration status or their fear of deportation of their family, these issues were not represented in the candidate who also identified as a refugee. Further, this participant did not discuss the impacts of DACA, which may indicate they were not involved with the program. Although I could not assume that this candidate enjoyed benefits and protections not afforded other participants, the difference was evident.

Additionally, although most participants described their feelings of exhaustion/overwork, humiliation, or being threatened, some participants had a different experience. For example, one interviewee described having felt well treated by their

employer, and regarded that employer as a mentor. Another participant said one of their employers could be kind and even provided food to workers.

Finally, although I was anticipating 60-minute interviews, one interview was shorter than average, at under 14 minutes. The participant answered all of the interview questions and valuable data were obtained. This interview was completed after data saturation was achieved; therefore, I was certain that the insights gleaned from this interview also added value and reinforced the themes identified thus far.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There were 4 criteria used to demonstrate trustworthiness in this study, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Demonstrating these features in qualitative research is important (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Each of those four areas have been addressed here.

Credibility

Credibility involves a conscientious description of the phenomenon and the production of believable research findings (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). By sharing quotes taken directly from participants (see Results section in Chapter 4), I described the phenomenon, the lived experience of the migrant workers through their own voices. According to Chenail (2011), this method also helps to minimize researcher bias. I then worked to ascribe meaning and interpretation to those experiences in a way that best characterized the phenomenon, in the hermeneutic style described by Sohn et al. (2017). Much like a braid that is created by weaving together individual strands, so does a phenomenon gain strength from the collection of individual, yet related, experiences.

Researchers have added that credibility is enhanced by explaining outliers in the data, also called negative case analysis (Amin et al., 2020; Haven & Grootel, 2019). This was explored in the previous section. Credibility was further demonstrated through purposeful sampling, which is intended to produce a deep, comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Additionally, criterion sampling allowed me to focus on those who have had the lived experience being studied.

Finally, data saturation was reached early on, with strong themes emerging as early as the second interview and continuing throughout. For example, themes emerged as early as the second interview, including the importance of DACA status, and motivation for an education and better future.

Transferability

Transferability can be demonstrated by using thick description, which is accomplished through the use of participant quotes as well as critical analysis, all related to the original research question (Squires & Dorsen, 2018). Thick description is used to describe, interpret, and give context to the collected qualitative data (Kostova, 2017), and is used by qualitative researchers to describe the interactions and characterizations of the participant population (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). While I used thick description to provide context to what participants were sharing, I did not do so when describing my sample population. I chose to generalize or obscure some information about participants to offset any risk of identifying them through description. In this way, I have provided sufficient information about the population sample without threatening confidentiality.

Additionally, I have demonstrated clear inclusion/exclusion criteria, and data collection and analysis methods. Transferability may be limited due to the recruitment process as a result of the need for technology, specifically social media, being used for recruitment in response to COVID-19. The agencies that provided the researcher's contact details to potential participants serve college students, so the resulting pool of interviewees is not necessarily transferable to the larger population of migrant workers in Colorado, as they tended to be younger and most are benefactors of the DACA program. Additionally, results may not be transferable to non-English speaking migrant workers. Additionally, themes may not be transferable to migrant workers in other states, as states and universities among different states may implement the DACA program in unique ways (Lacomba, 2021). It is possible that if this study was repeated verbatim, a different researcher may obtain different results. Therefore, the degree of transferability is limited due to the nature of qualitative study and is not designed to be exactly replicated.

Dependability

Forero et al. (2018) have underscored the importance of maintaining an audit trail to help ensure dependability. I have kept a record of the data collection process and stayed within the parameters of the established recruitment protocol for participants. Additionally, there was no need for data transfer, which may have compromised its security, as I transcribed the interviews. Another important element of dependability in qualitative research is consistency (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). My study demonstrated consistency throughout the research process, including use of inclusion criteria, use of interview questions, and during the process of data analysis. I chose not to engage in

member checking but utilized the information I gathered during the interview with each participant, as I had the data I needed. My study upheld congruence among the qualitative methodology, sampling procedures, data collection, and the underpinning theory. Further, my process of data analysis was congruent with the research design. All of these elements helped to ensure dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the process of ensuring that the data are authentic, accurate, and able to be confirmed by other researchers; in other words, the research comes from the data, not from the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Forero et al. (2018) discussed the use of reflexive journaling as one method of helping to ensure confirmability. As indicated, I used journaling as a way to record and examine biases, preconceived notions, potential conflicts or ethical issues, as well as striving to record, analyze, and interpret the phenomenon before me. The use of direct quotes from participants helped to capture the essence of participants' experiences and aided in my analysis. The audio recording and transcript of each interview was also reviewed by my dissertation chairperson. Additionally, I used direct quotes from interviewees during data analysis to capture the essence of participants' experiences and minimize sharing the data solely through the lens of the researcher.

Results

Moustakas (1994) described phenomenological qualitative research as an integration of individual experiences into a collective experience. In order to achieve this goal, I conducted telephone interviews to explore the phenomenon of migrant workers'

lived experiences. The singular research question for this study was, ‘What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado?’ Specifically, this study explored the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado.

Participants in my study were asked to describe their migrant work experiences and workplace conditions. The data emerged from the analysis of their responses of the essence of what it means to be a migrant worker in Colorado.

Essence of Migrant Work Experiences

The essence of this study entailed the opposing forces of limited choices in jobs or educational opportunities, and the strong motivation for a better life. Participants shared their strong inclination to work and become educated and described the barriers that existed that limit the options many migrant workers have, despite the longing to create a better life for themselves and their families. In addition, the essence of migrant work appears to have been influenced by the temperament of the employer, the language spoken by the migrant worker, and the state and federal laws in place at the time. This nuanced dichotomy of protection and vulnerability, relative privilege and scarcity, provides context to the lived experience of migrant workers, specifically those who are benefactors of the DACA program. Participants described feeling sad, angry, emotionally drained, and frustrated at not being able to move forward with their dreams and goals as a result of the barriers they faced. They also shared their fear and mistrust of others as a result of policies directly affecting migrant workers in Colorado.

Themes

As participants in this study described their lived experiences as migrant workers in Colorado, patterns emerged in the data. The thematic outcomes of the study included 3 major themes, entitled *workplace conditions*, *status/DACA*, and *motivation*. While many of their responses were consistent with themes described by migrant workers researched in the literature review, such as working long hours, exposure to extreme temperatures, and at times enduring dangerous environments, new information was gleaned as well. This information is also listed in Themes 1–3 and interpreted in Chapter 5. This study provided supporting quotes in order to give voice and context to the participants' experiences. Because of the recruitment methods used, participants were younger, attending college, and were recipients of the DACA program. The findings from this research served to corroborate previous research results and added new context to younger people who identify as migrant workers.

A visual representation of the major themes and sub themes that emerged during the interviews is captured in Figure 1. The software tool Quirkos allows the user to 'nest' subcategories within the dominant, or main, category.

Figure 1*Quirkos Visual Representation of Themes*

Throughout the interviews, participants described the workplace conditions they faced, and the challenges presented to them as a result of their legal status in this country. Additionally, participants shared their feelings, which may help to shed light on the impact of migrant work on mental health. What follows are the themes that arose during the course of those interviews.

Theme 1: Workplace Conditions

A major theme that emerged over the course of the interviews was workplace conditions. Participant comments portrayed emotionally toxic work environments,

humiliating experiences, and low pay. As multiple participants discussed the same or similar topics, subthemes emerged under the workplace conditions category. Under this theme, participants described experiences of extreme temperatures, physical injuries, and positive conditions experienced as migrant workers.

The first major theme was workplace conditions. Interviewees discussed experiences such as enduring extreme temperatures, which were experienced at both ends of the heat/cold continuum. Specifically, many participants described the intense heat involved in certain jobs, especially roofing and warehouse manufacturing, and extreme cold when working construction. Participant 1 described the temperatures in a manufacturing job as “30-40 degrees over what the ambient temperature was, so if it was 80 degrees, it was probably like 120”. Participant 3 described “being under the sun... I had sunspots on my chest... it was a pretty terrifying experience.” Participant 8 described the commute to the jobsite: We “didn’t have heaters so in the winter, we were like an hour away, we’d be freezing most of the time... (due to) not being able to afford a heater in the car... it was so cold”.

A number of participants noted that indoor jobs (such as working in a restaurant) offer significantly more comfortable working environments than outdoor jobs such as construction or roofing, which expose workers to extreme temperatures. Several also noted the difference in work for those in the ‘front’ of the restaurant vs. the ‘back’, where the dishwashers work. “Being inside helped, but it was still a lot of work”, reported Participant 3.

Physical injuries were commonly described by participants when discussing workplace conditions, including individuals who described experiencing burns, scrapes, exhaustion, and exposure to noxious fumes. For example, Participant 1 explained, “I’ve been burnt, but not as severely as... (when) a pipe exploded and the workers got burnt really bad”. This participant continued, describing “emotional stress... especially from management”, “exposure to fumes”, and that they “did suffer a few burns, cuts... and scars” at work.

Many participants commented on working long hours as required by managers at the restaurant or jobsite, resulting in exhaustion. For example, Participant 5 discussed their work at a restaurant, and wanting a different job but knowing “that was the only option”. Additionally, the same Participant indicated, “they would just work us longer, and we couldn’t really say no to it... we would have to sacrifice our family time... my energy was really gone.” Participant 7 corroborated those sentiments by adding, in reference to their job in a warehouse, “I worked 12 hours a day... I was crying a lot... inside I’m dying... this job is not for me! ... They don’t treat you as human...” Interviewees, then, discussed the issues of long work resulting in exhaustion and a feeling of dissatisfaction in jobs ranging from restaurant work to employment in a warehouse. This was corroborated in each interview, which revealed a pervasive theme of lack of choice that was often the result of participants’ legal status. Throughout the interviews there was an undercurrent of frustration and feeling stuck. Participants shared a range of emotions related to their work experience that included stress, being emotionally drained, moody, and mad about the way they were treated. The lack of care provided to migrant

workers was apparent as well. Participant 5 noted that there were “not going to be any benefits... it didn’t come with any health insurance”, and Participant 3 added, “I didn’t have any access to health care, didn’t have any access to mental health care- I kind of wished I had those options.”

Not all of the employment experiences were negative. Some interviewees described positive conditions in the workplace, as described by Participant 6, who shared that the people they worked for were “so lovely... sweet people... turned out to be mentors”. Participant 8, who worked on construction projects in private homes said, “They would always give us food. They were really nice to us.” Participant 2 described feeling advocated for in the face of an injustice when their employer “apologized and said, ‘don’t ever say anything like that again’” to an individual who had demeaned them at work. Participant 3 said of the receptionists they encountered while selling food in an office building, “they would treat me so well”.

Participants, then, struggled with certain workplace conditions and subsequent emotions and identified positive, even nurturing experience. This complex relationship with work and employers was further affected by the legal standing of each interviewee, explored in the following theme.

Theme 2: Status/DACA

There was a strong theme shared by the majority of participants, each of whom identified as a migrant worker, regarding the powerful impact of having *status*, or having legal documentation to be in the United States. Interviewees shared their experiences as migrant workers before DACA was implemented, as well as the impact the program had

on them once it passed. Participant 1 shared, "...when President Obama passed DACA... I qualified and was able to start working." This was not an easy fix, however, as Participant 1 goes on to explain. "When it comes to having a work permit that expires, your employers, they don't really say it out loud, but they are kind of (wary of asking) whether they need to replace you, in case you aren't granted a new work permit." This comment exposes the fact that even with legal protections such as those provided through the DACA program, workers still face barriers in the workplace. Some participants discussed their fear of asking for anything from employers, knowing that they, the participants, were vulnerable and may face repercussions due to being undocumented.

Many of the interviewed migrant workers described a sense of isolation due to their status. Participant 4 explained, "as a migrant worker I feel sometimes like I'm the only one in that situation... I don't feel like I'm in the right place... I just didn't belong." This feeling of not belonging, of feeling different, was pervasive throughout this interview. In addition to facing challenging workplace conditions and feeling powerless to effect change on their circumstances, some participants also discussed the cultural barriers they faced. Participant 6 explained the following.

How difficult it was, moving to this country. Not knowing the language, not knowing the culture and always knowing in the back of my mind that there was something wrong or not right about being an immigrant... My mom never spoke of it... she told us, 'Don't tell anyone', and of course that was the way of keeping us safe, because we didn't have any status... it was definitely traumatizing, and it felt like I couldn't really trust anyone...

The feelings of traumatization were shared by several participants, with one individual explaining the culture shock they experienced when coming to the United States. Participants discussed feeling safe when DACA was in force and scared when it was threatened under the Trump administration. Interviewees also discussed feeling ashamed, unsafe, afraid to trust others, and judged as a result of their migrant status. The following quote, shared by Participant 5, exemplifies the underlying fear experienced by many migrant workers, in his case of not having a financial fallback in the event of becoming unemployed, coupled with the terror of a Customs Officer taking away the worker or a loved one. “Your immigration status... can put you in more danger... I would just hear about ICE raiders so I was kind of like, keep on the ‘low... nothing’s secure for migrant workers... we’re not gonna have a check when we’re unemployed...” Many participants also made reference to current events, citing their feelings of anxiety and fear under the Trump administration, and its efforts to rescind DACA protections. Participant 6 shared their fear in the following excerpt.

helping me heal from all of the trauma, and from the shame that’s come of being an immigrant, and the feeling like not worthy, not good enough, and like I don’t belong here. Especially in these last 4 years, with Trump in office, it’s been a really, really scary and anxiety through the roof, thinking that he could take the program away, the only program that’s kept me safe, you know....

[migrant workers who do not qualify for DACA] don’t have those same protections... the stimulus check that came out was only something that was given to people with a social security number.... If you get sick with COVID or if

you have to take care of someone that has COVID [you're not protected by federal laws].... [it's] like slavery”.

Participants talked about the lack of opportunity and challenges to education and employment, without DACA. There was a feeling of frustration during the interviews on the part of participants, of the strong desire to do meaningful work and to earn more, but to be denied opportunities because of the lack of legal status. This essence of running in place, of living in the shadows, was pervasive. For example, Participant 5 said, “You *can't* just apply for a work permit or a social security number, and so many things are not available to you and to sort of live with this lingering fear...” Participant 1 explained, “Even though I do have DACA and that provides me some sort of protection from deportation, we're not allowed to get any sort of federal funding or services.”

Participants in this study, while ‘allowed’ to live in this country due to the DACA program, often faced limitations, restrictions, and fear. A duality of experience surfaced during the interviews, as participants often expressed both their gratitude for the ability to go to college, and their frustration at not be eligible for federal aid to support that education; their relative safety from deportation, and their terror of having family members rounded up by ICE ‘raiders’. Participant 3 answered the question about what challenges they faced as a migrant worker with the following response. “...having options, I guess... we always stuck to the jobs that we had because we knew that it might be difficult to obtain a new one.” Participant 3 put it this way, “I didn't really see a way out”, Participant 5 said, “I knew that was the only option”, Participant 6 shared, “I had no other choice”. Participant 7: “They don't have choice, they don't have any choice. They

don't have no choice...". And Participant 8, whose family was wrongfully accused of stealing from an employer, said, "They were threatening to call ICE and everything, and we literally couldn't do anything... we were immigrants, you know. It's not like we could deny anything." This strong theme was pervasive in each interview.

Language proved to be an important factor for participants, as they discussed being treated better due to their ability to speak English, a skill many of their parents do not have, and for which their parents experienced negative consequence. Participant 2 stated the following.

I guess there was some racism here and there occasionally. The way my mom was mostly treated was different from what I experienced, because I speak fluent English so I didn't have a hard time communicating... people... not having as much respect for her.

Participant 8 stated, "I didn't speak English so it was hard for me to talk to the owners... because my dad- I spoke more English than him- so I would translate for him... but it wasn't good enough... we would never really communicate right." This underpinning idea of living on the edges of society continued with the subtheme of language, in that participants enjoyed the benefits of being able to speak with their employers in ways their parents could not but were not fluent enough to truly fit in to the mainstream culture. There was some thematic overlap, as knowledge of English proved to be so critical to success in the United States it was mentioned as a motivation as well as a component of status. These major themes throughout each interview will be further described in Chapter 5.

Theme 3: Motivation

Participants discussed their motivation and drive to get a job, earn money, and either help support their family (parent/s and siblings) or be able to purchase items they needed but could not afford. The following quote from Participant 8 demonstrates the pressure felt by many migrant workers to help support themselves and their families, as well as the drive and motivation for a better life.

I started working ‘cuz we needed money... I wanted to buy myself a laptop... ‘cuz my parents didn’t really have money to buy me stuff for school... I was able to get a fake social security card so I could start working... but they had found out my social security was fake so after 2 days they let me go and I never worked for a year...I don’t want to end up like my family right now... we’re still always struggling... I want to be able to support myself in college, and I don’t want to struggle, seeing the way my parents struggled when I was little. It was just so horrible... We were always behind on bills... we always got food stamps but it wasn’t enough because they would only give [them for certain family members] and not for me, or anyone else in the family cuz we were all immigrants and food stamps are only for the ones actually living in America.

The following quote from Participant 2 reveals how exposure to a better way of life served as a strong motivating factor, as the interviewee described their experience as a domestic worker.

It was interesting to see the beautiful, luxurious homes some people owned- it was definitely eye-opening... I guess it motivated me to go to school and do better for

myself. I guess being able to see what I could do with my life, being able to see what other people have done with theirs, and how much they acquired... I had always lived in not the nicest part of town, and I didn't realize that there *were* nicer parts of town.

Each participant discussed their drive and motivation for a better life and are pursuing this goal through education and hard work. As Participant 8 proudly stated, "Yeah, I'm an immigrant, and like I work 2 jobs, I have a full ride, I'm getting a scholarship... I don't use charity, I pay my bills, like I'm a good person." Participant 7 added, "I want to make my community proud... I want my college degree, and I want to work in a better place."

Motivating factors ranged from financial reasons, to being exposed to a different way of life, to being able to visual being on the other side of an experience, as described by Participant 3.

I was going office to office building breakfast burritos, meeting all kinds of business professionals- actually motivated me to be in that place one day... I would also meet high executives buying breakfast burritos- I mean., everyone has to eat, right?... I would just picture myself being one of those people buying the burrito on the other side, instead of selling- I just feel it was very motivating.

Some participants noted that taking part in the interview was helpful and empowering, including one individual who shared that the process helped to feel more comfortable referring to themselves as a migrant worker. Participant 5 used the interview as an opportunity to encourage people to be aware of their privilege and to be a voice for

people in more powerless situations, adding rhetorically, “how can you be an ally for those people?” Participant 7 expressed gratitude for the opportunities made available through the DACA program and shared, “I want to be successful in life and show my gratitude to my parents and I’m thankful to get this opportunity to be educated.” It should be noted that the opportunity to attend college was a powerful theme throughout the interviews. The opportunity to work, to become educated, and to achieve more were themes woven throughout. As participant 6 commented, “This is why we came here, right?”

Summary

My research question was ‘What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado?’ This study explored the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. Interviews were conducted to help answer this question and after completing eight interviews, several themes emerged. The importance of status in a country, eventually provided for most of the participants in this study through the DACA program, was a pervasive theme running through the interviews. This theme emerged in myriad ways, including the participants sharing the profound effects they encountered while working without a legal standing in the country. They shared such conditions as the inability to obtain work in a desired field or to apply for federal aid or scholarships, and a lack of legal protection. Participants referenced current events unique to our interview, including the fact that people without legal status are ineligible for COVID relief stimulus checks, and are not protected if they (or a loved one for whom they provide care) need time off work. They reflected on the effects of federal administration on their

DACA eligibility, and related anxiety. The interviews built upon information derived in the literature review and added nuances and new information to the pool of information on the migrant worker experience. In this chapter I explored the data collection and analysis. In Chapter 5 I will provide the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado, specifically the phenomenon of the migrant work experience of migrant workers in Colorado. In this chapter I provide interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. Additionally, the implications for social change are explored.

I used qualitative data collection to focus on the phenomenon of being a migrant worker in Colorado. The participant pool focused the study on younger, English-Speaking, DACA recipient workers. My research addressed the workplace conditions, challenges, and emotional experiences of participants. Face-to-face interviews were not an option due to COVID-19 Stay-at-Home initiatives, so interviews were conducted over the phone. The data were collected and analyzed to answer the research question: What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in the state of Colorado? The phenomenological answer to this question revealed the tension between the barriers to employment and education faced by migrant workers in Colorado, and the desire for a better life. Additionally, participants shared both positive and negative working conditions, as well as the tremendous impact of legal status or DACA protections on migrant workers, motivating participants to pursue a college education and well-paying employment. The crux of the findings was the participants' experiences negotiating both the lack of available options and the prevailing desire for access to the opportunities that lead to a better life.

Migrant workers can face a number of adverse working conditions, including financial exploitation, exposure to harsh chemicals and extreme temperatures, housing inequity, and other factors often resulting in physical and emotional injury (Hargreaves et al., 2019; Mucci et al., 2020). Although researchers had demonstrated many work-related stressors in the migrant worker community nationally and globally, few studies had been conducted in Colorado, where the sociopolitical climate warranted further review. The current study contributed to closing the gap in the research.

Interviewing multiple research participants allows for different perspectives to help answer a research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The current study was conducted using hermeneutic inquiry. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry involves focused interviews for the purpose of developing understanding in partnership with the participant (Gadamer, 2004; Lauterbach, 2018) and involves both capturing the lived experience and interpreting the findings (Mackey, 2005).

Data collection in my study involved in-depth interview with eight participants over the age of 18 who identified as having worked as a migrant worker in Colorado. Each participant was asked the same interview questions (see Appendix C), and each interview ended with the question, “What else should I have asked you?” This final question yielded rich additional information that included migrant experiences in Colorado, the lack of access to health care or mental health care for migrant workers, how people can be an ally to this population and be aware of privilege, what motivates migrant workers to succeed, gratitude for the DACA program, how there is an assumption that immigrants are somehow bad people, and participants’ desire for people

to know that they are just trying to pay their bills. Several interviewees took this opportunity to express gratitude for the opportunity to participate (have a voice) in the study, and some added that the interview helped them to view their status as a migrant worker more positively.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I provide interpretations of the findings as they related to the conceptual framework of the study. I identify common themes among participants during data analysis, indicating similar experiences. Findings from this study revealed the pressure felt by participants as a result of the barriers faced to employment and education, despite their desire and motivation for a better life. During the course of the study, themes emerged, including the workplace conditions experienced, the powerful impact of legal status on migrant workers, and motivation, including the desire on the part of participants to be able to work and go to school. Findings further showed the benefits and protections experienced by participants who are involved with the DACA program and the vast difference that made in terms of reducing psychosocial stressors.

When the DACA program was implemented in 2012 (Georgetown Law Library, 2021), it transformed the experience of participants in this study. The experience of DACA recipients is not consistent, but rather depends on state laws and the policies and financial support of individual universities (Lacomba, 2021). Because all participants in my study attended universities in the state of Colorado, the experience of college as a DACA student is further explored.

In this study involving telephone interviews, participants were asked about their work experiences, working conditions, challenges, differences between or among jobs, and emotional experiences. This study was viewed through the lens of social justice theory, or the distribution of power and justice, and access to resources (see Rawls, 1971; van den Bos, 2003; Vanidestine & Aparicio, 2019). Each participant in my study discussed their desire to work, to go to school, and to help support their family, but also stated that their options were limited due to their legal status, impacting their ability to obtain a driver's license, social security card, or federal financial aid. Although no interviewee was asked about their legal status, it was information participants shared freely, and social justice theory remained a strong theme throughout the interviews.

Workplace Conditions

Researchers have uncovered the high levels of workplace injuries experienced by migrant workers (Biering et al., 2017; Sweileh, 2018). This is consistent with the first theme in my study: workplace conditions. In my study, participants shared that migrant workers' employment environments often expose them to dangerous toxins, chemicals, and high-risk conditions. My research also confirmed studies by Messeri et al. (2019) and Wagoner et al. (2020), who found that migrant workers are often exposed to extreme temperatures, especially heat. Participants in my study described manufacturing and roofing jobs that entailed exposure to temperatures far exceeding ambient temperatures.

My findings, in part, are also consistent with Arici et al. (2019) and Thinyane and Sasseti (2020), who indicated that migrant work can be codified into three categories: dangerous, dirty, and degrading/demeaning working conditions/environments.

Interviewees in my study, in addition to describing their cuts, burns, and exposure to noxious fumes, also shared their degrading treatment and verbal abuse by supervisors, as well as working with toxic colleagues and being falsely accused of stealing. My study confirmed the findings of Chamroen et al. (2020), who highlighted the migrant experience of stress. In my study, participants also shared feelings of fear, shame, and not feeling able to trust people.

Boucher (2018) highlighted that migrant workers experience exploitation and mistreatment perpetrated by employers and systems. Additionally, Figueiredo et al. (2018) showed that migrant workers can be the victims of abuse, harassment, and violence at the hands of their employers. Ladegaard (2018) suggested that workers can experience psychological trauma as a result of this treatment. Wickramage et al. (2017) indicated that mistreatment is often seen in female domestic workers. Some of the participants in my study had lived experiences that deviated from these findings, however, and described their relationship with their employer as positive, nurturing, or akin to a mentor. The findings in my study may have been different because my participants are bilingual, and several interviewees indicated that they had an easier time communicating with employers due to their ability to speak English. Research conducted by Pot et al. (2018), however, demonstrated challenges faced by migrants who had difficulty communicating due to a language barrier, often resulting in a decreased support network.

Results from my study also differed from Koh (2020) and Li et al. (2017), who uncovered overcrowded housing conditions for migrant workers. Participants in my study

were living with their parents, not in overcrowded dwellings designated for migrant workers. Data gathered in my study were also consistent with the research by Liem et al. (2020) that revealed barriers faced by migrant workers in accessing health care or health insurance, with many participants in my study saying they did not have access to health care or mental health care services. Additionally, researchers have identified the inability of many migrant workers to seek appropriate monetary compensation or legal protection (Bal & Gerard, 2017; Bressan & Arcos, 2017). My study confirmed these findings, as participants cited examples of low pay and the inability to file discrimination or other legal claims. Additionally, participants in my study revealed the additional burden experienced by migrant workers who contract (or need to care for a loved one who contracts) COVID-19, but do not benefit from federal protection requiring pay when missing work. Federal protections factored in during other parts of the study as well.

Legal Status/DACA

In 2012, legislation was passed creating the DACA program. This policy, outlined by Ortega et al. (2019), protected individuals who were brought to the United States as children, illegally, permitting them eligibility for renewable 2-year work permits and exemption from deportation. To be eligible for DACA status, candidates must have graduated from high school in the United States, among other criteria (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020). The implications of DACA status were referred to often by participants throughout the interviews in my study.

Ellis et al. (2018) examined the complicated standing of young people who are in the United States as undocumented individuals, including the fear, shame, and barriers

associated with this status. My study supported these findings, with legal standing being a critical issue for every participant who was interviewed. Although documentation status was never asked of participants, it was freely shared, along with DACA status, barriers faced by not being a citizen, and opportunities that were available as a result of the federal DACA program. Participants frequently expressed gratitude for the benefits and projections afforded through DACA.

My study highlighted the lack of choice experienced by migrant workers, especially in terms of employment and educational opportunities. This theme was consistent with the social justice theory lens, which emphasizes “the principle of fair equality of opportunity” (Rawls, 1971, p. 82). Social justice theory addresses inequity and unfair treatment (Shearer, 2016). Interviewees in my study frequently referenced their inability to get a well-paying job, file a work complaint, or be eligible for federal financial aid as a result of not being able to obtain a legitimate social security number.

Castrejon (2020) found that migrant workers often experience a profound fear of deportation as a result of their immigration status. My study aligned with this observation, with participants sharing their fear of ICE raiders and the lack of trust and peace of mind that resulted. My study further underscored the feelings of shame, frustration, anger, and traumatization that can be experienced by migrant workers. My findings also aligned with those of Schwegel (2021), who found that migrant workers who are undocumented are not eligible for stimulus checks. My study reinforced the significance of DACA status or legal standing in the United States, as participants discussed related benefits such as the ability to obtain a social security number for better

work opportunities or the ability to apply for federal financial aid. Additionally, my study aligned with Giuntella et al. (2021), who confirmed the positive effects on mental health when DACA protections are implemented and the stress when those protections are threatened.

Motivation

Interviewees discussed their drive for a better life than that experienced by their parents, and their frustrated attempts to do so due to their legal status. This concept of keeping one group down, especially at the benefit of another, is in concert with the underpinnings of social justice theory. This perception is summed up well by Valtorta et al. (2019), who stated that the social construction of an outgroup is “a powerful means of creating social hierarchies that are politically used to subordinate low-status social groups or certain workers” (p. 3).

My study differed from that of Farcas and Goncalves (2017), who explored what motivated migrant workers to move countries (e.g., the pull of work and pay or the push of limited options in the home country). Participants in my study frequently defined their motivation in terms of their desire to get a job, or a higher paying job, as well as attend college, earn scholarships, and be able to help support their families. Their experience of barriers, fear, uncertainty, and the feeling of being in a second-class status was prevalent throughout the interviews.

Limitations of the Study

This research took place during the Safer at Home initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring me to change the data collection plan from face-to-face

to telephone interviews. I had limited engagement with participants as I conducted one interview with each. Because of the interview recruitment methods, the sample was biased toward younger people ages 19–32, college students, many of whom were DACA recipients. Results may not be transferable to the broader migrant worker community. Qualitative research is conducted to help explain meaning and experience, with generalizability being less of a focus (Carminati, 2018), and smaller samples allow for more homogeneity (Kindsiko & Poltinae, 2019). My study allowed me to analyze the data relevant to a specific population, although the sample size was limited.

The inherent power differential between researcher and participant may affect the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher defines what questions and topics to ask, and the participant determines what and how much to reveal (Reid et al., 2018). Additionally, the perspectives and any inherent bias on the part of the researcher may affect the study (Wadams & Park, 2018). In my study, participants' legal status, while never asked about, may have resulted in feelings of fear, reticence, or ambivalence about participation. Additionally, I engaged in one interview with participants. Future researchers should consider prolonged engagement or member checking to enhance confirmability and dependability.

Finally, language and access to participants was a limiting factor, as finding English-speaking migrant workers reduced access to the broader migrant population in Colorado. When snowball sampling did not produce results, it was my intention to engage a Spanish-speaking interpreter to increase my access to a larger pool of migrant workers. When the IRB denied this request, citing difficulty in understanding nuance in

cross-lingual interviews, I redoubled efforts at outreach through the organizations in contact with younger migrant workers. Although this narrowed the scope of the study, it also provided for a richer analysis of a particular demographic within the sample population.

Recommendations

This study was designed to be an exploration of the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado. The essence of the research depicted a tension between the struggles often faced by migrant workers due to legal status, creating barriers to employment and education, and the strong desire for a better life. These challenges can create feelings of shame, fear, mistrust, and a sense of being second class among migrant workers in Colorado. The themes that emerged from this study included the workplace conditions faced, the motivation experienced by participants, and the importance of status (including DACA status) to interviewees. The findings generated in this research may provide a foundation for other studies to build upon. This may be especially relevant given recent federal policy changes creating greater pathways to citizenship for undocumented residents in the United States (DiMaggio & Furman, 2021).

The experiences of migrant workers in Colorado that were examined in this study were biased toward younger, college-age students. The findings from this study may contribute to the wider body of knowledge about the barriers, goals, and efforts made by this population to overcome the environmental conditions and barriers they face as migrant workers. This data could be used for service providers who serve this population, including educators, health and mental health care providers, among others. Future

researchers may choose to explore how new opportunities for pathways to citizenship affect older migrant workers. Additionally, researchers may want to focus on young migrant workers' relationship with their parents, as several participants alluded to that relationship in connection with migration, finances, and language/familial translation issues.

Implications

Understanding the challenges and barriers faced by migrant workers in Colorado can help create positive social change in myriad ways. The information gleaned from this study can be used to rectify employment policies, or unjust working practices, including forcing workers to put in exceptionally long hours, or management practices that increase the stress of already difficult and sometimes treacherous work. It can provide valuable data to service providers of migrant workers, including institutions of higher education, and the research results can help inform policy change regarding access to documents that allow migrant workers wider opportunities to work. Additionally, the experiences shared by participants can serve to heighten awareness of migrant worker conditions in Colorado, especially those who are DACA recipients.

Researchers have stated that participants often feel a sense of empowerment when given the opportunity to participate in qualitative research (van den Muijsenbergh et al, 2016). This proved true in my study, with multiple participants saying that they were grateful for the opportunity to tell their story, and some adding that they felt more comfortable saying they are a migrant worker as a result of sharing their experiences.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study was conducted to better understand the lived experiences of migrant workers in Colorado. The findings of this study corroborated previous research that exposed unfair, uncomfortable, and unsafe working conditions often faced by migrant workers, such as exposure to extreme temperatures or having to work long hours, often for inadequate pay. This study added to the literature by demonstrating the feeling of many migrant workers of having few options and underscoring the drive and motivation for equitable access to college and the workplace. This research revealed the significant role that the DACA program can play in the lives of migrant workers, opening access to legitimate job and educational opportunities. Overall, the study demonstrated both the challenges faced by migrant workers in Colorado in terms of working conditions and limitations imposed by legal standing, as well as the motivation for a better life.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Research Flyer for Social Media Posts

If you answer 'yes' to all of the following questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

Have you ever worked as a migrant worker in Colorado (in fields, agriculture, private homes, factories, oil and gas extraction, tourism, etc.)?

Are you 18 years or older?

Do you speak fluent English?

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the lived experience of migrant workers in the state of Colorado who may be at risk for psychosocial stressors.

Please contact Annie Butler at ___-___-____ or Lynann.butler@waldenu.edu for more information.

Participants will receive a \$20 gift card for their time.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Hello. My name is Annie, and I am the student researcher for a study named Workplace Experiences of Migrant Workers in Colorado.

Introduction:

Research Question: What are the lived experiences of migrant workers in the state of Colorado?

The following form is called informed consent. Before we proceed, I will read this form and receive your written or verbal consent. If you agree to volunteer for this study, we will proceed.

After Approval:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. If I have your permission, I would like to audio tape our discussion to ensure accuracy. If you approve, when we talk on the phone, I will be recording our conversation. I will not ask your family name, and will keep your first name and any information that can be linked directly in separate, locked and password protected files to protect your confidentiality. I appreciate your willingness to share your story. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?

1. **Demographic Questions:** I'd like to start with a few demographic questions to

learn a little about you.

- a. Please confirm that you speak English
- b. Could you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older? How old are you?
- c. Please confirm that you self-identify as a migrant worker who works /worked in the state of Colorado (e.g. work in vegetation fields, factories, private homes, oil and gas extraction, agriculture, and tourism)

2. **Opening Question to Build Rapport:** Please tell me about your work

experiences as a migrant worker.

- a. **Probe 1:** Please describe what the working conditions were like.
- b. **Probe 2:** If you held more than one job, what were the differences in work place conditions?

Appendix C: Resource Guide

Coalition for Immigrant Health Information and Resources,

<http://coalition.centerforhealthprogress.org/resources/>, Information and Resource guides like: Guide for the uninsured, communications toolkits, how to ask for emergency Medicaid and FAQ's (Free service)

Colorado Crisis Line offers mental health support 24/7, 1-844-493-8255 (Free service)

Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC), (303) 922-3344,

www.coloradoimmigrant.org/index.php CIRC is a statewide, membership-based coalition of immigrant, faith, labor, youth, community, business and ally organizations founded in 2002 to improve the lived of immigrants and refugees by making Colorado a more welcoming, immigrant-friendly state.

CU Denver Student and Community Counseling Center provides free counseling on

Auraria campus. 303-315-7270 Tivoli 454 (4th floor) 900 Auraria Parkway
Denver, CO 80204 <http://www.ucdenver.edu/life/services/counseling-center/appointments/Pages/default.aspx>

Maria Droste Services (MDS) provides mental health counseling services, regardless of

ability to pay (provides pro bono if needed). 303-756-9052 1355 S Colorado
Blvd, Denver, CO 80222 <http://www.MariaDroste.org>

Appendix D: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certificate



Completion Date 12-Apr-2020
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 36245498

This is to certify that:

Lynann Butler

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Student's	(Curriculum Group)
Doctoral Student Researchers	(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course	(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?we989dca0-d7ca-45cd-83eb-f29dbafd15ef-36245498