

# Power Relations in Poultry Processing Plants: Latino Workers in North Carolina: Evidence for Effects on Occupational Health and Safety

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Supported by a grant from the National Institute for  
Occupational Safety and Health (OH 008335)

# Background

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- Poultry processing: a dangerous industry
    - Injury rate: 5.5/100 workers
    - Illness rate: 2.3/100 workers
  - 250,000 workers: minority, primarily immigrants
  - Substantial potential for worker exploitation—organizational injustice
    - Rural South, non-union, highly competitive
    - Documentation status, language
    - Does it have health effects?
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# Purpose of Presentation

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- ❑ To identify the structure of power relations within poultry plants
- ❑ To demonstrate the association of power relationships and organizational injustice with health outcomes



# Data Sources

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	In-Depth Interview Current/Former N=26	Survey Interview Current Workers N=200
Age	Range: 25-52 Median: 5.5	Range: 19-65 Median: 32
Years in US	Range: 1-26 Median: 10	Range: 1-40 Median: 8
Education	None: 22% Primary: 48%	None: 12% Primary: 55%
Country	Mexico: 58% Guatemala: 27%	Mexico: 48% Guatemala: 33%

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# Three Types of Power Relationships

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- Ethnicity

- American vs. Latino

- Immigration status

- “Good papers” vs. undocumented

- Job rank

- Supervisor vs. worker

# Ethnicity

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- Latinos get worse jobs and fewer breaks than American workers
  - *The Americans are always given the easier jobs and Latinos, the harder jobs. If, for example, you worked in packing where the trays are placed, you would find American women. You would never see a Latina there. The Latinos are always where there is blood, where everything is the worst. [J-4-F]*
  - *If we want to go to the bathroom, they won't let us. If an American asks to go to the bathroom, they let them go quickly. [J-10-M]*

# Immigration Status

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- Those without immigration papers are more likely to be abused by supervisors.
- Threatened firings are used to control workers
  - *[Undocumented workers] don't talk because they are afraid that the supervisor will tell them that if they don't want to work, they need to go home. ...I know [the supervisor] does that because he knows that they don't have papers. [J-7-M]*



# Job Rank

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- Supervisors threaten firing workers
    - *[They have restricted my movement in the plant.] The person who talked to me told me this was my last opportunity. He asked me to please not go around calling strikes...to take care of my own job because they could fire me at any time. Now I am careful to keep my job. [J-6-F]*
  
  - Latino supervisors are particularly guilty of mistreating other Latinos
    - *There was a man named Pedro. It was a horrible experience working for him. He would get behind us with a clock and give us seconds to do a job. [J-4-F]*
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# Two Factors Modify Power Relations

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## □ Kinship: preferences and privileges for family members

- *There are supervisors who have siblings and cousins working there.... They treat [them] well, but they treat the rest of us badly. That's an injustice. [J-6-F]*

## □ Gender

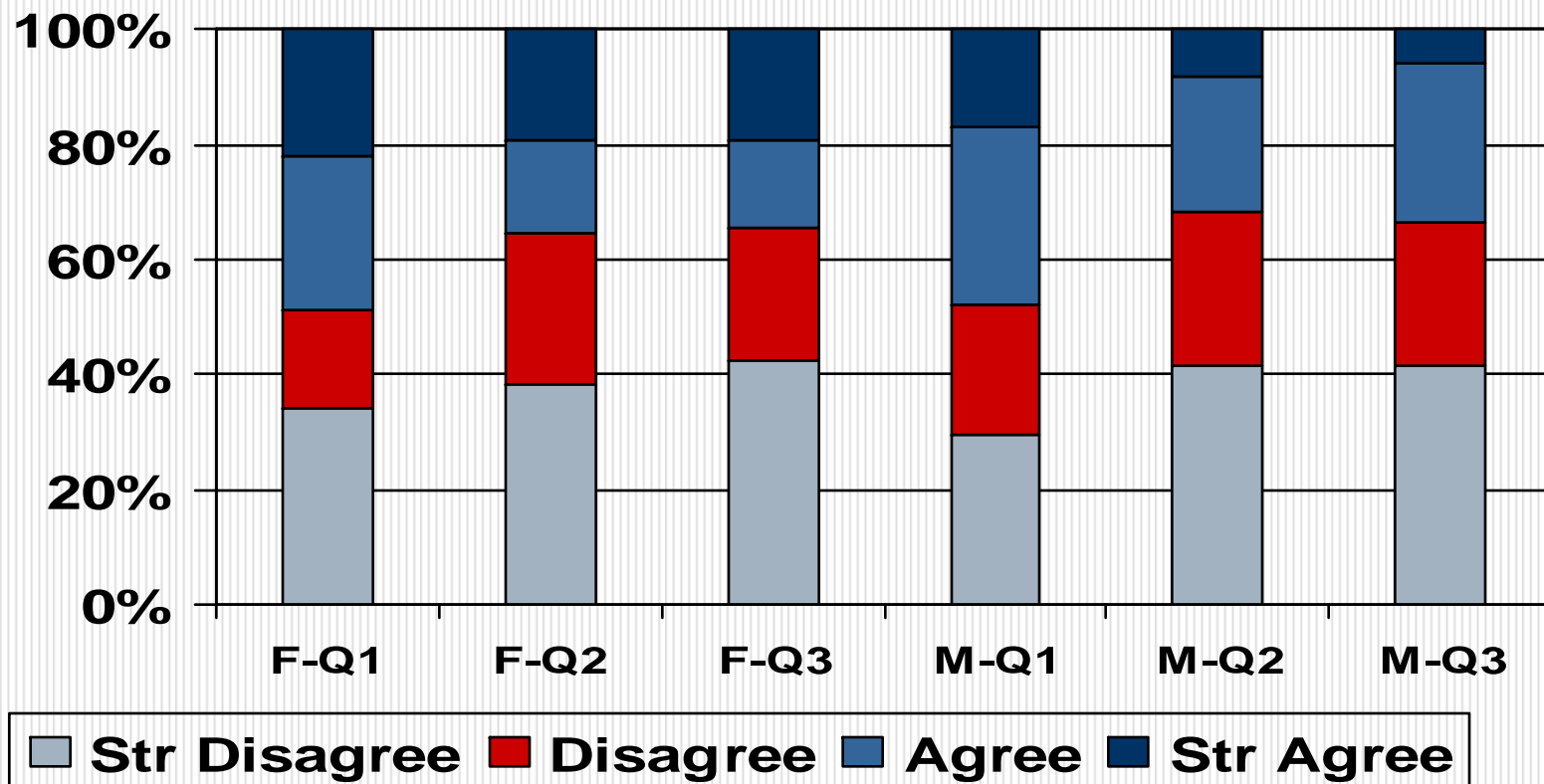
- *If you're a young girl and flirt and smile at the supervisor, he will give you permission to go to the bathroom or to the doctor...or not doing certain jobs because your hands hurt. [J-26-F]*

# Do Power Relations Promote Injuries?

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- Latinos have the worst jobs in the plants
    - Exposure to chemicals, birds, water, cold
  - Line speed, repetitive motion, no breaks
    - Musculoskeletal effects
  - Fear of reporting abuses and injuries
  - Limited knowledge of workers' rights
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# Retaliatory Supervision, by Gender



"My supervisor could...  
(1) give me undesirable job assignments.  
(2) make my work difficult for me.  
(3) make things unpleasant here."

## Association of Retaliatory Supervision and Health Indicators, Adjusting for Depressive Symptoms

	Women, n=99		Men, n=101	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
<i>Specific Health Indicators</i>				
Skin	1.06	.92-1.23	1.23*	1.00-1.51
Neck/back pain	1.32***	1.14-1.53	1.34**	1.10-1.63
Arm/hand pain	1.25**	1.09-1.43	1.13	.95-1.34
Lower body pain	1.24**	1.06-1.44	1.11	.92-1.34
Eye problem	1.30***	1.12-1.51	1.16	.96-1.39
Injury/illness	1.33***	1.15-1.55	1.16	.97-1.39
<i>Summary Health Indicators</i>				
Fair/poor health	1.21**	1.05-1.38	1.18†	.99-1.41
1+ problems	1.19*	1.03-1.38	1.24*	1.01-1.52
Musculoskeletal	1.25**	1.08-1.44	1.18†	.97-1.44

† p < .10; \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed)

# Discussion

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- Power relations: documentation status and kinship differentiate these workers from others
  - Provides evidence that power relations and organizational injustice have direct effects on physical health
    - Abusive supervision leads to injuries
    - Previous studies have focused on stress and health
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# Limitations

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- Non-random samples
- Only represents western North Carolina
- Reliance on self-report data

# Conclusions

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- Additional research needed to test association of organizational injustice and worker injuries
    - Stronger measures
    - Other populations
  - Policies and practices to improve working conditions needed to provide adequate safeguards for workers
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