EXPLORING THE CONTEXT OF LABOR EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA: LIFE NARRATIVES OF MIGRANT WOMEN WORKING IN DOMESTIC AND LABOR SECTORS

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INTRODUCTION

- Recent reports indicate that there has been an increase in the number of individuals forcibly displaced from the "Northern Triangle" countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

- This increased mobility across Central America (CA) north to Mexico and the US, driven by the growing violence, forced recruitment and human rights abuses mainly perpetrated by transnational organized crime groups and local criminal gangs, is feeding human trafficking and labor exploitation.

Source: Google maps

- According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) it is estimated that globally 21 million people have been trafficked for forced labor (mostly females), with domestic servitude and agriculture work among the sectors of most concern.

Looft C et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2015; The International Labor Organization 2017

Source:

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Courtesy: T. Rocha

Courtesy: A. Servin

INTRODUCTION

- As labor exploitation of Central American migrant women has been increasing in the Southern border of Mexico, physical assault and rape are also increasingly reported.
- Limited studies have assessed the risk or prevalence of sexual violence in the context of labor exploitation and subsequent health outcomes among Central American migrant women in this region.

The International Labor Organization 2017; UNHCR 2016

Source: J. Kurtz

OBJECTIVES

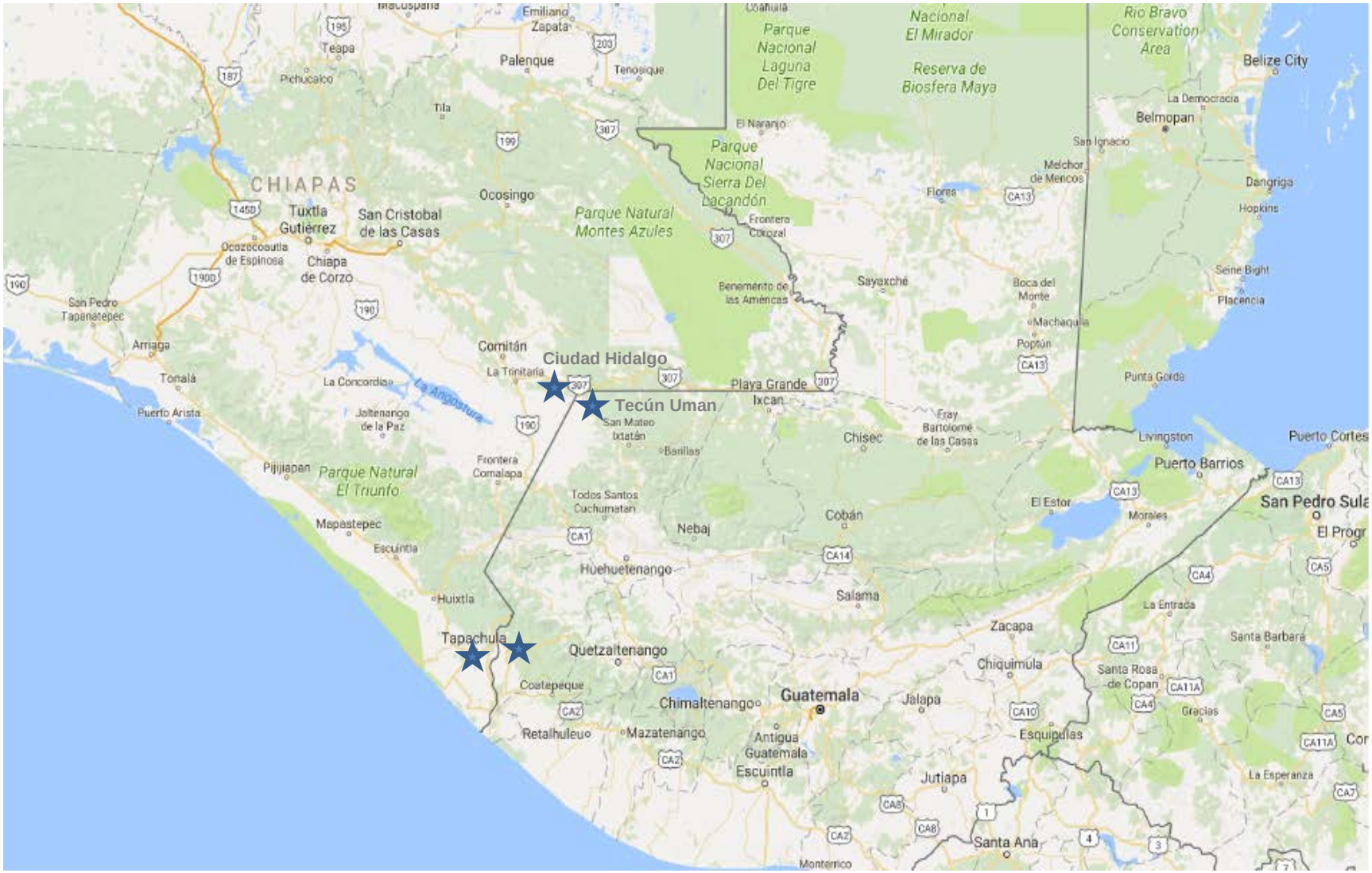
- To describe the nature and types of labor exploitation (e.g., physical, sexual, economic and psychological) experienced by Central American migrant women in Mexico.

- To identify vulnerabilities associated with sexual violence in the context of labor exploitation among Central American migrant women working in agricultural and domestic sectors in in Mexico.

METHODS

- Funded by the Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) (5P30AI036214-21) and the World Bank.
- Nested in a longitudinal NIH funded mixed-methods study R01 (R01DA029899, PI: Brouwer) focused on exploring the context of rising drug use along the Mexico - Guatemala border and defining its relationship to the local epidemiology and phylogeography of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- **Quantitative Methods:**
  - ✓ N= 400 migrants recruited via respondent-driven sampling (RDS)
  - ✓ Biological testing for HIV, STIs and Chagas disease.
- **Qualitative Methods:**
  - ✓ Between August 2015 – September 2016 in-depth interviews were conducted with Central American migrant women (n=35; 18 in Mexico and 17 in Guatemala)
  - ✓ Screening positive for working in agricultural or domestic sector in Mexico in ≤5 years.

METHODS


Ciudad Hidalgo
Tecún Uman
Tapachula
CHIAPAS
Tuxtla Gutiérrez
San Cristobal de las Casas
Chiapa de Corzo
Ocozocoautla de Espinosa
Ocosingo
Palenque
Teapa
Pichucalco
Tila
Tenosique
Emiliano Zapata
Comitán
La Trinitaria
La Concordia
Jaltenango de la Paz
Frontera Comalapa
Huixtla
Mapastepec
Escuintla
Pijijiapan
Tonalá
Arriaga
San Pedro Tapanatepec
Puerto Arista
Parque Natural El Triunfo
Parque Natural Montes Azules
Parque Nacional Laguna Del Tigre
Parque Nacional Sierra Del Lacandón
Reserva de Biosfera Maya
Nacional El Mirador
Rio Bravo Conservation Area
Belize City
Belmopan
La Democracia
San Ignacio
Melchor de Mencos
Dangriga
Hopkins
Seine Bight
Placencia
Punta Gorda
Livingston
Puerto Barrios
Puerto Cortes
San Pedro Sula
El Progr
Flores
Frontera Corozal
El Naranjo
Benemérito de las Américas
Sayaxché
Boca del Monte
Machaquila
Poptún
Playa Grande Ixcan
Chisec
Fray Bartolome de las Casas
San Mateo Ixtatán
Barillas
Todos Santos Cuchumatán
Nebaj
Cobán
El Estor
Morales
Huehuetenango
Salama
Zacapa
La Entrada
Santa Barbara
Quetzaltenango
Coatepeque
Chimaltenango
Guatemala
Jalapa
Chiquimula
Santa Rosa de Copan
Gracias
Esquipulas
Retalhuleu
Mazatenango
Antigua Guatemala
Escuintla
Jutiapa
La Esperanza
Santa Ana
Monterrico
Coahuila

METHODS

Eligibility Criteria

- Biologically female
- Aged 18 years or older
- Being an international migrant
- Speak Spanish
- Have worked as a domestic or agricultural sector in Mexico in ≤5 years
- Provide voluntary informed consent
- Agree to receive treatment for STIs & HIV referral, if applicable

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at UCSD and the Bioethics Committee of the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala.

Courtesy: T. Rocha

METHODS

- Interviews where conducted in Spanish, digitally recorded and identified audio files using unique ID numbers
- 45-60 minutes and conducted in private rooms in our study offices and/or in the fincas by female research assistants
- Key themes explored included nature and type of labor exploitation, sexual violence in the context of labor exploitation, vulnerability factors related to previous social and economic circumstances, and access and barriers to health and legal services.

ANALYSIS

- Interviews were transcribed verbatim, read and coded in the language in which the interview was conducted (Spanish)
- We analyzed the interview transcripts based on principles of grounded theory and the constant comparison method to identify themes related to labor exploitation and sexual violence in the context of labor exploitation.
- Team members initially read three complete interview transcripts to identify initial coding themes. We then met to discuss themes and develop an initial coding scheme of key themes.
- A final coding scheme was created based on coder consensus.
- Using the final coding scheme, we assessed inter-coder reliability and achieved greater than 80% consistency between the coders
- The research team coded interviews independently with coding revisions agreed upon by research team members

Courtesy of: Fray Matias

Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Miles and Huberman 1994

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

- Average level of education 3rd grade
- Median current age: 30 years old
- Country of origin:
  - ✓ Guatemala: 60% (21)
  - ✓ El Salvador: 10% (4)
  - ✓ Honduras: 30% (10)
- Indigenous and undocumented
- Domestic sector → 74%(26)
- Agriculture sector →17% (6)
- Both sectors → 9% (3)

- Prevalence of child labor: 98% of participants entered domestic and/or agriculture sector between 12-14 years old.
- Majority of women reported experiencing some form of labor exploitation (e.g., physical, economic or psychological) including sexual violence by either a co-worker or supervisor.

RESULTS

Domestic Workers (DWs)

Characteristics of the domestic labor (trabajo doméstico)

- They live/eat in the homes were they work
- They work schedules are long – women work 6 days a week, with Sundays off, sometimes more than 12 hours a day (from around 6 am to 11 pm)
- There is no written contract, sometimes there is a verbal agreement

Emerging themes related to labor exploitation identified:

→Deceptive recruitment/deception about the nature of the work

→Verbal and physical abuse / less often sexual abuse

→Long shifts without compensation or previous agreement

→Discrimination

→Confiscation of identity papers or travel documents

→Isolation/limited freedom of movement and communication (e.g., employers do not let them go out on Sunday or communicate with family)

→False acusations about theft / unexplained termination

→Non-payment or withhold of payments arbitrarily, threatening to report their illegal status to the authorities

RESULTS

"Antes ahí donde trabajaba no me pagaban horas extras, hasta tuve que trabajar hasta las once [de la noche] a veces, el señor tenía un carácter, así que no me atrevía a decir algo" **[Flor, 18 years old, interviewed in Tapachula]**

"A la otra muchacha la trataban muy mal, dijeron que robaba y además se burlaban de su idioma [indígena], tampoco le pagaban a tiempo. Se pasaban las hijas de la maestra [maltrato extremo] de como la trataban, mal… botaban las cosas a propósito para que ella las recogiera" **[Claudia, 29 years old, interviewed in Quetzaltenango]**

"La señora qué me dijo, me dijo, 'tú me estas robando quieres ir'. Y le dije, sí, sí es cierto [me quiero ir] pero no, no tengo por qué robarle. Esa señora me debía como un mes [de paga] porque todo el tiempo me decía que no tenía dinero. Entonces la señora se dio la vuelta y se metió al cuarto donde, donde yo tenía guardada mis cosas porque yo allí no dormía. Agarró mis cosas y las aventó a la calle. Aparte de eso, ni me pagó ni un peso y me quitó la cartera"
[Elisa, 20 years old, interviewed in Cd. Hidalgo]

Source: Fray Matías

RESULTS

Agricultural Workers (AW)

Characteristics of the agricultural labor (trabajo agricola)

- Some women live in the fincas were they work (they share *galeras* with other co-workers)
- All women eat at the fincas and the employeer discounts food from their pay
- The *contratista* applies for a visitor permit (FMTF) on their behalf, this way they enter legally the country
- Contratistas recruit them at the Puerta Roja (El Carmen–Talisman) or in their community
- They work schedules are long and they are paid by activity or by the amount of product they crop (weight)
- There is no written contract, sometimes there is a verbal agreement
- Work varies by season
  - ✓ Coffee – December /January – April
  - ✓ Sugar Cane – December – February
  - ✓ Plantain – All year

Source: Prensa Libre

RESULTS

Agricultural Workers (AW)

Emerging themes related to labor exploitation identified:

- Degrading living conditions (e.g., unsanitary, overcrowded)
- Deceptive recruitment (e.g., job description, wages, living conditions)
- Sexual violence and sexual harrasment by employer, supervisor and/or co-worker
- Low wages
- Non-payment or late payment of wages due
- Discrimiation based on country of origin /ethnic background
- Debt Bondage
- Some women have been living for years in Mexico without any legal documentation or form of identification
- Because there is no written contract there is no proof of them working in Mexico

RESULTS

"Me acuerdo que me llevo un contratista – nos llevó porque éramos como cuatro niñas…nos dijo que había mucho café y que la finca era bien bonita… Al llegar allá, la finca era echa un desastre, no había donde dormir, no había donde bañarse, no había baños y no pagaban lo que era [debían]… Nos engaño y mintió en todo" **[Victoria, 19 years old, interviewed in Tecun-Uman]**

"Una vez si me castigaron pero porque el encargado de allá, tuvo malas intenciones conmigo [quiso violarme] y por ese motivo fue que me castigo y no me recibieron en el trabajo. Le conté a mi mamá y me dijo que ya no podía regresar a trabajar ahí jamas" **[Lupita, 25 years old, interviewed in Tapachula]**

"Me despidieron del trabajo porque no acepte sus condiciones, no quise meterme con el viejo [tener relaciones sexuales], era el encargado y me despidieron del trabajo y no me pagaron lo que habia trabajado" **[Carolina, 20 years old, interviewed in Ciudad Hidalgo]**

"Nos venimos con él [contratista], y cuando nos quisimos regresar porque no era lo que nos prometió, pero ya después de llegar al rancho donde nos llevó…No teníamos como venirnos, no teniamos dinero – no llevábamos. Como ellos nos pagaron el pasaje y todo. Al llegar en ese lugar, no nos dieron donde dormir ni habia donde comer. Era una casa abandonada… No había agua para lavar, para bañar… Nos arrepentimos, la verdad sí nos llevaron con engaños y ya no había como regresar" **[Mariana, 30 years old, interviewed in Tapachula]**

RESULTS

Emerging themes related to access and barriers to health and legal services experienced by women in both agricultural and domestic work

- Lack of knowledge /information regarding what healthcare services they can access for free as a migrant/undocumented person living in Mexico
- Difficulty accessing medical services or other public services available, since they only have Sundays off
- Difficulty enrolling children in school (not given personal time off or don't know education is free)
- Lack of knowledge about legal aid that can be accessed if an employer abuses them → none of the women who had been victimized had reported their employer to any authority
- Lack of knowledge about their labor rights as well as their human rights

RESULTS

"Si he querido ir [al doctor] pero como no tengo papeles, me da miedo ir. Si le he dicho siempre la señora [patrona] que me ayude para sacar mis papeles allá y todo pero no me lo quieren sacar [permiso residente] " **[Erika, 18 years old, interviewed in Ciudad Hidalgo]**

"Qué vamos a tener derechos?, porque nos dicen toda la vida que no tenemos derecho a nada y no nos dan nada… A veces pienso que tal vez por ser migrantes, uno no tiene derecho a nada" **[Veronica, 23 years old, interviewed in Tapachula]**

LIMITATIONS

- Although our findings provide insights into experiences of labor exploitation and sexual violence reported by Central American migrant women in this region, this qualitative study has inherent limitations.
- As a small qualitative study, findings cannot be generalized to other migrants or regions.
- Subsequent border studies should include a larger, representative sample.
- Due to the hidden nature of labor exploitation/sexual violence and migration status could be under-reported.

CONCLUSIONS

- Central American migrant women working in domestic and agricultural sectors in Mexico have a highly vulnerable profile and easily exploited, because of lack of governmental support, resources, age, desperate need to find work of any kind, and discrimination on the basis of indigeneity and gender.
- All the women in our study reported experiencing some form of labor exploitation (e.g., physical, economic, psycological), including sexual violence by either a co-worker or supervisor.
- The capacity to mitigate labor exploitation and sexual violence improved with increased age, control over working conditions and experience.
- Child labor was very comon (normalized).

CONCLUSIONS

Source: Fray Matias

- Intersecting concerns related to immigration status, negative interactions with authorities during their migration (e.g., extortion) and compliance with labor regulations (e.g., work permit) were identified as barriers to accessing health and legal services.
- Understanding the living conditions in Central American countries before tackling the multi-causal reasons driving migration is greatly important, especially in the case of women, who may also seek to escape a close-knitted, patriarchal community or situations of gender-based violence.

Next Steps

- These study findings were recently presented to key policy stakeholders in the Mexican Federal government
- Report that we hope will provide preliminary empirical evidence to guide Mexico's federal trafficking and labor exploitation prevention efforts
- Mexico and Guatemala are in a political crisis
- Proposing to adapt intervention to reduce risk for GBV and increase educational attainment among indigenous girls in CA (Guatemala)

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