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Learning about pregnant farm working women's challenges

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Abstract

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) is a nonprofit program of legal aid to help California's low-income individuals and communities. The project focuses on Monterey County pregnant farm working women to learn the challenges they face while working in the fields. Like exposure to pesticides and other harmful chemicals that affect their pregnancy and challenges in receiving State Disability Insurance (SDI). As a result of my interviews, the women all worked in the fields while pregnant, and they believe they have been exposed to pesticides. I also asked if they got SDI during their pregnancy 66.7% answered yes, and 33.3% answered no. The same result as if they had any trouble getting SDI. I hope with the information I collected we can bring more awareness to address the issue and give the information to people in power to help make positive changes for the people who shared their stories with us.

Keywords: pregnant, farm working women, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA),

Monterey County

Agency & Communities Served

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California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA). CRLA was established in 1966 to help rural communities because those networks were not getting legal assistance. CRLA is a nonprofit legal assistance program to help California's low-income individuals and communities (CRLA,2020). CRLA speaks to a wide range of people and organizations. CRLA has 18 workplaces to keep on meeting these communities' legal needs, which CRLA serves as low-income individuals in over 22 counties across California (CRLA,202). Throughout rural areas and small California, cities continue to change. CRLA's mission is "To fight for justice and individual rights alongside our society's most exploited communities." Their vision of juices states that "A rural California where all people are treated with dignity and respect and guaranteed their fundamental rights" (CRLA,2020).

Every year, they give more than 43,000 low-income individuals legal assistance and outreach programs across California (CRLA,2020). Today, CRLA serves a wide array of clients while maintaining specialized programs focusing on the farmworker's services (CRLA,2020). CRLA customers include incorporating people with disabilities, migrant people, younger students, lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender people, seniors, and people with restrictions. CRLA staff focus on conducting legal action, outreach, and legal education regarding individual's rights on most urgent issues. The CRLA suit effect has contacted the lives of many low-income people, improving conditions for farmworkers, single guardians, younger students, the elderly, individuals with handicaps, and whole communities (CRLA,2020).

One of all CRLA offices in California is to educate individuals from the local area on their employment rights and help them stand up if their manager is abusing their working rights. CRLA gives a wide range of employment protections, including overtime, time wage claims, retaliation, discrimination, and sexual harassment in the workplace (CRLA, 2020).

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The CRLA office in Salinas serves low-income individuals living in Monterey County. The CRLA local offices are located in Salinas and Watsonville, California. CRLA partners with Alisal Health Center to be able to serve a wide area of legal needs. As mentioned in the article by Aaron Voit, “The staff at CRLA Salinas has generously lent their time and guidance, and the healthcare staff at the clinic has been welcoming and supportive” (Rural Health Equity,2018). The CRLA team is engaged every day to address the dynamic process of innovating incorporated administrations and arrangement models to reach underserved populaces and address neglected necessities (Rural Health Equity,2018).

According to the US Census table, the total population of July 1, 2019, between Gonzales, Watsonville, and Salinas, the highest community in Salinas, has 155,465. Based on race and Hispanic origin, the table shows that Hispanic or Latino percentages for Salinas are the lowest percentage of 78.7% out of the three cities. The highest of the three cities is Gonzales, with a rate of 92.2%.

Different client community requirements form CRLA legal administrations. Through a state-wide organization of 23 offices, the staff conducts prosecution, outreach, and legitimate instruction on the most problems that need to be addressed confronting low-income communities: employment, business; education; work environment safety; separation; income maintenance, and medical services access. Most of their clients' leave of education is very little due to lack of education; it leads to the lack of information about their health or legal rights. CRLA is unique because they only serve eligible populations and qualify as low-income families and farm workers. They are a health and economic issue because their clients have to have a visa card to qualify.

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About 80% of female farmworkers experience sexual harassment, assault, or abuse at work (CRLA,2017). These workers are in danger since they work in remote regions, frequently don't know their rights, and fear the consequences if they speak up for themselves. CRLA's community workers and lawyers teach laborers about their rights, give avoidance training, and safeguard survivors. CRLA works with understudies, guardians, instructors, and schools to make a pipeline to progress for all students. CRLA shields students' privileges and advances better ways for students and schools to cooperate for beneficial results (CRLA,2020).

Problem Description

At my agency CRLA office in Salinas, the problems directly related to my project are helping people with health care, and social services affect communities at my agency. By assisting clients by intervening in large systems that may seem beyond the reach of the individual. The problem statement in my project needs to be to learn about pregnant farm working women exposed to pesticides and other harmful chemicals that affect the health of their pregnancy.

CRLA connects with my project because it helps with social problems affecting the clients. In my agency, they see many community members denied services such as State Disability Insurance (SDI) for simple mistakes in the application and documentation process. CRLA also helps by helping community members know their legal rights.

This project's need is to learn about pregnant women's conditions exposed to pesticides and other harmful chemicals that affect their pregnancy's health. What is known about the problem is that pregnant women will eventually need to apply for SDI. Most people don't know that some jobs are considered a higher risk for pregnant women than others, which means they

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will need to file for SDI much sooner. The purpose of this project is to learn about the challenges pregnant farm working women have faced throughout pregnancy. Such as being exposed to harmful chemicals that affect their health well during pregnancy, if they received SDI or receiving any support to apply, and if they worked well while pregnant.

The population that is most affected by this problem is Hispanic pregnant farmworkers. Although this might be a problem in many different countries, my main focus is on Monterey County. There was a study done called "CHAMACOS" that mentions that "Unfortunately, pregnant farmworkers haven't been able to access SDI early in pregnancy, when the developing brain is most vulnerable to teratogens like pesticides" (CRLA, 2020). This could lead to having an unhealthy pregnancy.

After the women are distinguished, clinicians should take a presentation history to decide their danger level. The article states, as long as a woman qualifies for state disability insurance – meaning that she has at some point paid into the system – she can receive her weekly benefit amount for up to 52 weeks, regardless of how much she's paid into the system. "Even so, we still do individual assessments so that women can understand how much paid and unpaid leave are available to them, and to make sure that their paid leave is available to them when they most need it," Voit said. Few families can take much unpaid leave due to economic pressure. Each state varies in how much unpaid family leave is permitted – additional factors to consider" ("Protecting Pregnant Agricultural Workers: Medical-Legal Partnership in California," 2017).

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Contributing Factors

The contributing factors would be that CRLA has seen many community members get denied SDI services for simple mistakes that the clients have made on their application and documentation processes.

According to the article “Disability Benefits Help,” states that millions of people apply for Social Security Disability benefits each year, and they receive millions of applications, but “only thirty percent are approved at the initial level of the disability claim process” (Chris,2018). Some common reasons that could lead to being denied Social Security Disability benefits claims are the following Lack of Hard Medical Evidence, Prior Denials, Failure to Follow Treatment, Failure to Cooperate, Approval Rates For Denials, and the list goes on (Chris, 2018).

Consequences

As stated in the article Protecting Pregnant Agricultural Workers: Medical-Legal Partnership in California, the association's primary goal is for the most vulnerable in the fields: agricultural workers and women who are pregnant. The Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas (CHAMACOS), "which studied the health impacts of pesticides in Salinas Valley for years, has put out a longitudinal study that found that seven-year-olds whose mothers experienced pesticide exposure. In contrast, pregnant women had impairment in cognitive functions and verbal comprehension, among other health complications like decreased lung function" ("Protecting Pregnant Agricultural Workers: Medical-Legal Partnership in California," 2017). According to Protecting Pregnant Agricultural Workers: Medical-Legal Partnership in California, this is important because it is important that pregnant women file for

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SDI earlier in pregnancy. Pregnant women being exposed to harmful pesticides can have a significant and lasting impact on their health and development.

Low-income pregnant farm working women rely on SDI so that they don't need to pick between their family's health and financial stability (Voit,2020). As stated in the article, "Unfortunately, pregnant farmworkers haven't been able to access SDI early in pregnancy, when the developing brain is most vulnerable to teratogens like pesticides" (Voit,2020). This is because the Employment Development Department (EDD), the state office that controls SDI, offered no direction to providers about when they could certify their patient for benefits preceding a month before the assessed due date (Voit,2020).

Problem Model

| Contributing Factors | Problem | Consequences |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Simple mistakes that they made in the application and documentation process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● To learn how many pregnant women are exposed to pesticides and other harmful chemicals that affect the health of their pregnancy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Health problems● Picking between their family's health and financial stability |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lack of Hard Medical Evidence● Prior Denials● Failure to Follow Treatment● Failure to Cooperate● Approval Rates For Denials | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Not being able to access SDI early in pregnancy● Providers knowing when to certify their patients with benefits |
| | | |

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project & Project Purpose

State Disability Insurance is a wage replacement program that most California workers pay. Suppose a worker has paid into the program and is otherwise eligible (SDI is available for undocumented workers). In that case, the worker may receive 60-70% of the average of their base-period earnings' highest trimester as a weekly benefit amount (SDI,2020). CRLA has helped ensure that SDI is available to pregnant farm working women based on pesticide exposure during pregnancy as early as a positive pregnancy test if the medical provider believes it is medically advisable.

Most farm-working women are not aware that SDI may be available earlier in pregnancy than SDI's misconception only at seven months into the pregnancy. Many doctors are not aware either that they MAY disable pregnant farm-working women earlier in the pregnancy. The project will provide a learning experience based on the challenges pregnant farm working women face, such as if they worked well pregnant if they received SDI, trouble getting SDI, and exposure to pesticides. Many pregnancies and non-pregnancy-related SDI claims are denied or canceled. An overpayment demand is usually sent to the claimant, usually due to missed appeal deadlines, not providing the correct information to EDD, and not providing EDD with updates. For example, for continuing disability, starting a new claim for a second disability, EDD considers seasonal workers to not be available to the job market during the off-season (and therefore found ineligible) and identity issues.

The project's goal is to know about the different challenges pregnant farm working women face, as listed above. Another goal of the project is to know how many pregnant farm

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working women have been denied SDI. By implementing this project, CRLA wants to learn how many pregnant farm working women have faced different challenges through their pregnancy.

The project is focused on the pregnant farm working women in Monterey County and learning about their experiences. I have partnered with Lideres Campesinas to survey their members. The project consists of creating a survey and interviewing women who have been pregnant while working in the fields. I had three surveys completed from pregnant farm working women who did a brief survey over the phone due to the language barrier. The purpose is to learn about pregnant farm working women who have worked in the field and have been exposed to pesticides that could affect their health.

Project Justification

As stated above, the project's goal is to be aware of how many pregnant farm working women have faced different challenges. Such as being denied SDI, if they had trouble getting SDI, if they worked well pregnant, and if they have been exposed to any harmful chemicals that could have affected their health well pregnant. Pregnant farm working women filing for SDI or EDD and being approved is very important to them. It increases positive health outcomes by having money for rent, food, medicine, benefits of resting, and healthier babies; avoid overpayments that may affect credit scores, result in tax intercepts, force claimants to borrow money to pay, and then be in debt. As stated in the article "Monterey County Medical-Legal Partnership," many low-wage farm workers often live paycheck to paycheck "many can't afford to stop working during their pregnancy because they need money for rent, food, medications, clothing, school supplies, the list goes on" (Voit,2020).

Most states don't offer any financial support to help pregnant workers when they can't work anymore due to their pregnancy (Voit,2020). The article mentions that "a growing number

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of states now offer a state disability insurance program, where workers pay into a fund that they can then draw from if they become unable to work due to a qualifying health condition, like pregnancy" (Voit,2020). CRLA has made huge strides in increasing SDI policy in Monterey County, for example, by persuading SDI to include pregnancy eligibility. CRLA assists each client by providing proper support, sending appeal and position papers to EDD, calling analysts to learn what is needed, and providing the right information to EDD by going to CUIAB hearings. As a pregnant farm working woman, they need to receive SDI that way they stop working at the appropriate time "(SDI) can provide up to 52 weeks of partial wage replacement (60-70% of normal wages). Workers can only receive benefits if they have paid into the system" (Voit,2020).

Project Implementation

For my project, several methods were used to conduct outreach, such as phone calls to establish a partnership with Lideres Campesinas to connect me with the women who were willing to respond to the short survey. The outreach aspect of the project was content development, creating the survey, outreach, calling the women, and holding a zoom with 20 women.

Participants

My role and responsibilities in carrying out the project at CRLA are to call the clients and get their responses to the short survey. The reason why I would be calling the clients would be to avoid any language barriers. I have connected with Lideres Campesinas and used some of their clients who have been pregnant and working in the fields to answer a short survey. All of the

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information will be anonymous; therefore, we will not need the clients to agree with me calling them to answer a short survey because they will be calling me. There will be no client names in the data, only numbers; that way, we can learn about the different challenges pregnant farm working women have faced.

Resources

My primary resources are Lideres Campesinas and them connecting me with clients who have worked well pregnant in the fields. I will also be using google forms to create the survey. The clients will be calling me to avoid any confidentiality and language barrier, and I will be filling out the survey for them based on their responses.

Supplemental

The project's need is to make pregnant farm working women exposed to pesticides and other harmful chemicals that affect their pregnancy's health fill an EDD application without making mistakes. As we have completed the first step--direct, the next step is helping pregnant women know about this right. Additionally, SDI claims for other disabling conditions. According to Adam, my mentor, he states that he sees many community members denied services for simple mistakes in the application and documentation process, such as some EDD mistakes. Education a representative group on best practices to apply for and document their SDI claims will empower community members and have a broader impact than one-on-one legal representation. Plan to involve community members in developing the project and bringing in EDD rep and partner organizations to participate in the workshop.

COVID-19 Accommodations

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The actions that must be taken to follow state and county safety will be to keep social distance during the project period and work remotely, such as email, zoom meetings, and phone calls.

Potential Challenges

I experienced challenges while doing the outreach by setting up a phone call to ask them the survey questions and the women not answering the phone at the scheduled time. I also experience challenges based on clients not calling me to ask them the short survey questions. When the women called me, they did not understand some of the questions I was asking, so I had to explain to them more so that they fully understand the question that is being asked. Another challenge presented during the project's implementation was that I didn't get enough surveys due to the clients not reaching out to me.

Scope of work Overview

Throughout my capstone project, I will learn about the different challenges pregnant farm working women face. My capstone project aims to learn more about the difficulties that pregnant farm working women face, such as being denied SDI. If they had trouble getting SDI, if they worked well, pregnant, and if they have been exposed to any harmful chemicals that could have affected their health well pregnant. This project objective is to make aware of the challenges that pregnant farm working women face. Many tasks will take place throughout this project, as well as collecting data. I will be calling the clients to ask them a few questions from a survey that I created.

The chart below gives a breakdown of the timeline of the task that will be done to complete my capstone project.

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| Phases | | Activities/Tasks | | Deliverables | Timeline/deadline s |
|--------|-------------------------|------------------|---|--|------------------------|
| 1 | Select capstone project | 1.1 | Discuss capstone project ideas with my mentor. | Discusses different options of capstone project ideas. | Sept 2020 |
| | | 1.2 | Discuss ideas with meteor | Phone call with my mentor to discuss possible ideas for capstone and get feedback. | Oct 2020 |
| 2 | Plan project | 2.1 | Doing research and getting familiar with my capstone project. | Making sure I understand my capstone project | Nov 2020 |
| 3 | Implement project | 3.1 | Questionnaire about experiences with EDD | Finding out what clinics that are/are not supportive of disabling farm-working women earlier in pregnancy, stats from EDD. | Nov 2020 |
| | | 3.2 | SDI claims in the past, how many patients have been denied by doctor or EDD | Finding out how many have been denied and for what reasons | |

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| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-----|--|--|----------|
| | | 3.3 | Literacy rates, languages is spoken (such as indigenous languages) | Making sources available for all languages | |
| 4 | Assess project | 4.1 | Establishing partnerships with Farmworker Orgs to survey their membership - Developing survey protocol | I will be calling clients who have worked well pregnant in the field to learn about the different challenges that are faced. | Feb 2020 |
| 5 | Report on project findings | 5.1 | Get all requirements together to be able to repot | Finalis with mentor about capstone reports | |
| | | 5.2 | Making sure everything to put together for capstone presentation selected format | Prepare to present at Rehearsal for grading | |
| | | 5.3 | Final preparation for Capstone Festival | Final Capstone Festival presentation! | May 2021 |

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Assessment Plan

The expected outcome that my mentor and I want to achieve as a result of the capstone project is to gain knowledge about women who have worked in the fields while pregnant and have faced challenges such as being denied SDI if they had trouble getting SDI, if they worked well pregnant, and if they believe they have been exposed to harmful chemicals that could have affected their health well pregnant.

My capstone project's expected outcome is to survey women who have worked in the fields while pregnant to learn about their experiences. I contacted Lideres Campesinas to help me get some of their members to participate in my survey. I will know whether or not I was successful when I complete the phone interviews and learn the challenges pregnant farm working women face. Hopefully, with the information that we get, we can bring in more resources to address the issue and give the information to people in power to help make positive changes for the people who shared their stories with us.

The method I will be using to gather evidence to measure the outcome would be a phone survey and Zoom. Lideres Campesinas was my main contact to help me get some of her members to participate in my survey. I held a zoom with 20 women. Throughout the zoom, I introduced the women to my project and how I wanted to learn about their experiences working in the field well pregnant. I shared some of the questions that I would be asking them over a scheduled phone interview. I asked them questions such as if they worked in the field well pregnant, what month did they stop working due to their pregnancy, what challenges they faced working in the fields while pregnant, were you able to get SDI during your pregnancy, and did

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you have trouble getting SDI and if they believe they had been exposed to pesticides while working in the fields.

Expected Outcomes

My capstone project's short-term outcome is to know about pregnant farm workers who have faced challenges while working in the field. Once we have the survey and analyze them, we will be able to gain knowledge. The intermediate outcome of my capstone project is to improve access and bring in new resources to the rights and benefits that could help pregnant farm workers avoid pesticide exposure. My capstone project's long-term outcome will be to see an improvement in the pregnant farm worker's health and reduce exposure to pesticides.

I believe my capstone project will help us learn about the challenges pregnant farm working women go through. I hope with the information I collected; we can bring more awareness to address the issue and give the information to people in power to help make positive changes for the people who shared their stories with us. The project's outcome was three phone surveys and hearing about the experiences the pregnant farm working women have faced.

Project Results

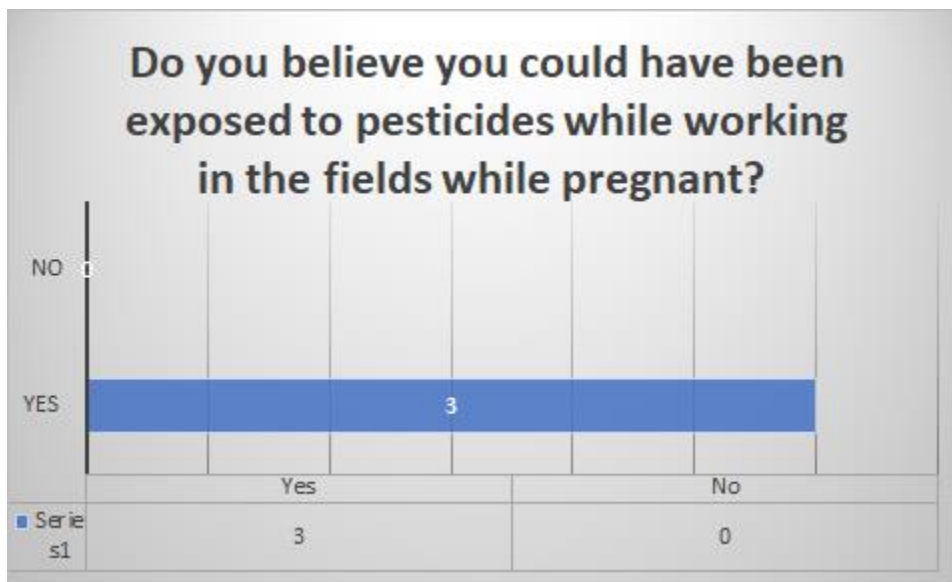
| |
|--|
| Scope of Work Template (<i>Sample phases, activities, deliverables, timeline</i>) |
| Title: Learning about pregnant farm working women's challenges |
| Project description: Throughout my project, I focused on Monterey County pregnant farm working women. The project is getting to learn about pregnant farm working women exposed to pesticides and other challenges that affect their pregnancy. |

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Goal: This project goal is to be aware of the challenges that pregnant farm working women face.

Primary objective of the project: The project's objective is to learn about the different challenges pregnant women face while working in the fields.

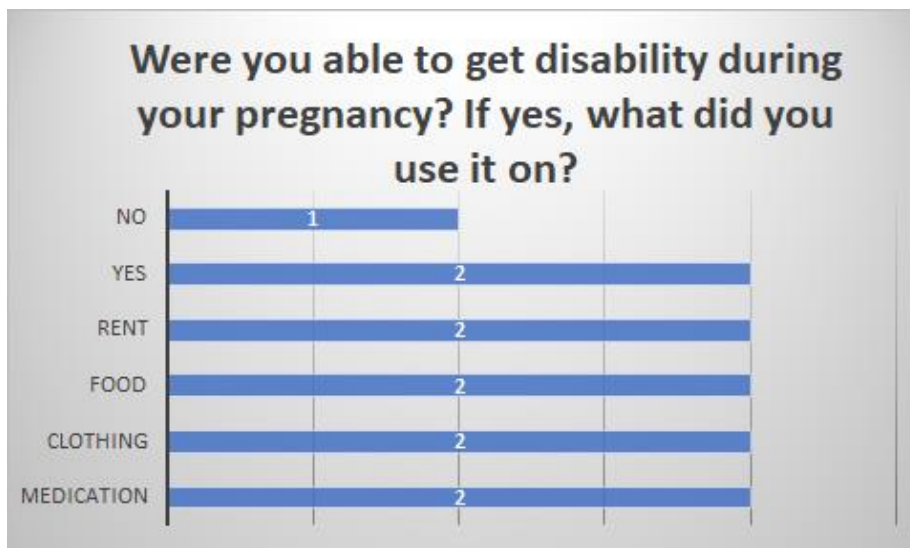
I, unfortunately, did not achieve the expected outcome due to the number of surveys I got and had originally planned to do. An example of one assessment that explains the result of my project was learning from the women I interviewed that yes, they do believe they have been exposed to pesticides while working in the fields while pregnant. Below you will see a bar graph that shows the result.



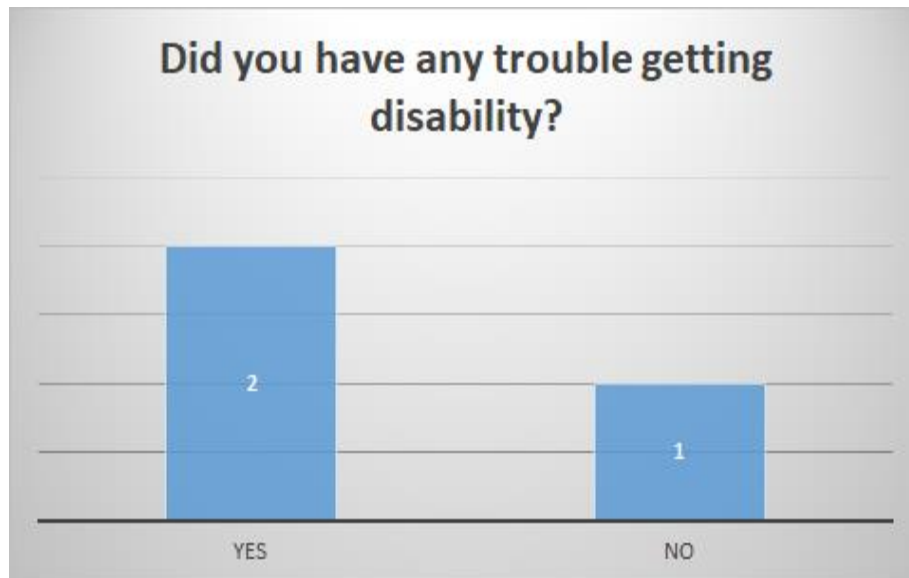
What is known about the problem is that pregnant women will eventually need to apply for SDI. Most people don't know that some jobs are considered a higher risk for pregnant women than others, which means they will need to file for SDI much sooner. When a woman receives SDI, positive health outcomes include money for rent, food, medicine, benefits of resting, and healthier babies. This project aims to learn if pregnant farm working women were able to get

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SDI. From the interviews, I found that 66.7% answered yes, and 33.3% answered no. The women were also asked if they faced any challenges getting SDI. From the interview, it was found that 66.7 % answer yes and 33.3% answered no. Below you will see a bar graph that shows what the women spent their money on if they received SDI. You will also be able to see the bar graph of the women who faced challenges getting SDI. It is important that women get SDI because they rely on it for essential things such as rent, food, clothing, and medication that the insurance does not cover.



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Conclusion & Recommendations

The outcome of the project was three phone surveys. I was grateful to get three phone surveys done and hear the women talk about the challenges they have had working well in the field while pregnant. All three women shared similar experiences with me, such as working in the fields while pregnant, being afraid to go up and down on the machinery and lift heavy boxes, and believing they have been exposed to pesticides while working in the fields. I was able to learn about the challenges pregnant farm working women face. The reconstruction to the agency CRLA would be to host a zoom meeting with women who have worked in the fields while pregnant. That way, they could provide them with the right resources to support the women who share their experiences.

Personal Reflection

Overall, I was very honored to have this experience and learn about pregnant farm working women and their challenges. I was able to learn a lot throughout my capstone project.

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However, I faced multiple challenges throughout the year, such as a lack of communication. The lack of communication made me fall behind, and towards the end of the semester, I had to rush to wrap everything up, not getting the result as I had planned. I also faced challenges with getting in contact with the women I was planning to interview. Not many women reached out to me as I hoped, which decreased the number of surveys I had originally planned to do to three surveys completed. I also faced a challenge with my mentor leaving the agency at the end of December and getting a new mentor, and adapting at the end of January. At the beginning of this semester, I changed my capstone project due to COVID and confidentiality and not access to CRLA's information.

The experience that I had that was the most important insight that I was able to gain from the year-long research was challenging to do everything remotely and not being able to go into the office to get that one-on-one support. The report writing process helped me gain professional growth from designing a project, planning what I wanted to do, and writing all this down as I go. The implementation part was a challenge due to constantly emailing and sending reminders that I have deadlines for each step throughout my project, not to fall behind. Unfortunately, I did fall behind due to the lack of communication, but that was a learning experience because I had to find quick solutions to get myself back on track to complete my capstone project.

The experience that contributed the most to my learning goals was creating a project and completing it. A lesson learned was that anything could happen at an unexpected time. Throughout my capstone project, I was pushed out of my comfort zone to achieve unexpected personal experiences, having to speak up, ask questions, and be straightforward. Professional growth that got me out of my comfort zone was having to reach out to Lideres Campesinas, having no idea who they are but asking them to help me get women that would like to participate

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in my interview. I also had to hold a zoom with 20 women I did not know and tell them who I am and my project. What I would remember most about this project in 10 years would be the story's about the challenges that pregnant farm working women have faced. My advice for future interns is always to be yourself and don't be afraid to ask questions. Also, always be prepared for the unexpected because you never know what can come your way.

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