

SOWING AND HARVESTING WELLBEING

CENTRAL WASHINGTON FORUM REPORT



Introduction

Sexual violence in the agricultural industry is a pervasive problem. Farmworker women are subjected to sexual harassment or assault, usually from male supervisors who control whether they get or keep their jobs. The extent of this exploitation ranges from rude comments and propositions to groping and rape.



Farmworker victims of sexual violence often suffer in silence. They may have profound fears of losing their jobs, adverse action by law enforcement including immigration officials, and other forms of retaliation against them or their families. Victims may not know their legal rights. They may have no one to reach out to in an unfamiliar community, isolated by language, distance, culture and lack of transportation. They may experience deep shame if the community and family members learn about the sexual violence. Perpetrators, including employers and supervisors, use these fears and conditions to exert power and control over their victims.

Vision

The Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center collaborated with farmworker attorneys, therapists, government offices and advocates for sexual assault survivors to organize a Spanish-speaking forum for immigrant farmworker women and community leaders who reside in the lower Yakima Valley region.

Goals

- ✿ Address sexual harassment of agricultural workers in Washington State with legal education;
- ✿ Break the silence through the use of art, poetry, music and traditional dance;
- ✿ Develop an expanded network of Latinas to address what needs to change in terms of training and education to foster an environment for victims to come forward;
- ✿ Brainstorm preventive strategies to increase visibility of farmworker sexual harassment and create cross-agency coordination to address this crisis.

Outcome

One hundred farmworkers from seven counties attended the forum that took place in Granger on March 4, 2017.



Participants reported that sexual harassment and assault are commonplace in the agricultural industry. Due to lack of statistics it is a difficult problem to quantify.

Participants stated that farmworkers often don't report sexual abuse for the same reasons other victims don't—shame and fear of not being believed. In addition, many of the farmworkers are undocumented immigrants who are worried about losing their jobs or being deported.



After hearing from several experts in the field, participants joined one of three workshops to continue to raise their voices and strategize for action. Using different artistic mediums they came up with the following recommendations:

"It hurts me that there are no answers to my filed complaints. I suffer from depression, stress and anxiety. I am angry at myself for staying at this job. I want women to report the abuse. I want organizations to listen to us and not expose us to continued suffering. Why don't you believe the victim? Today I am Paula but I am also Lupe, María, or anyone who doesn't dare to speak up."

✿ Paula, Yakima



FARMWORKERS IN WASHINGTON

- There are more than 150,000 agricultural workers in WA.
- It is estimated that more than 70% are undocumented.
- More than half are monolingual Spanish speakers earning less than \$17,000 a year.
- Approximately 28,000 of them are women (18.7%).
- 4 out of 5 farmworker women experience some form of sexual violence on the job.

Sexual harassment is unwelcome, severe and pervasive. It is not about sexual gratification. It is about power and control.

Source: Northwest Justice Project

Recommendations

- ✿ Employers must develop and enforce strong policies prohibiting sexual harassment.
- ✿ Provide robust and frequent sexual harassment training to employees and supervisors.
- ✿ Establish an effective complaint or grievance process to report harassment, along with taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee submits a complaint.
- ✿ Educate farmworkers on the protections of the U visa—a program designed to encourage immigrant victims of crime to come forward by offering them temporary legal status.
- ✿ Pass legislation that would mandate supervisor training based on a more concrete, uniform curriculum.
- ✿ Teach spouses and partners how they can be supportive when a victim comes forward.
- ✿ Investigate vigorously all complaints of sexual violence, regardless of immigration status.
- ✿ Assure undocumented immigrants that people who report crimes will not be reported to immigration authorities.
- ✿ Support coworkers who are being harassed by encouraging them to talk about it and to file a complaint.



Adilene Caballero

Partners and Participating Agencies

IPJC partnered with Northwest Justice Project in Yakima and Radio KDNA in Granger and invited presenters from seven organizations including:

- Comprehensive Healthcare, Yakima
- Lower Valley Crisis and Support Services, Sunnyside
- Northwest Justice Project, Yakima
- Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Granger
- Washington Human Rights Commission
- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Mujeres del Fandango, Seattle

"It was an honor to be part of Sowing & Harvesting Wellbeing. It left all of us inspired and energized to come home to our communities and continue organizing and networking with women, helping them find their voices and share their stories"

✿ Celia, Walla Walla

