



The Pandemic's Impact on California's Farmworkers

Jillian Muñoz, Psychology

Mentor: Dr. Sara Langford

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Pre-Pandemic

Working Conditions

- Exposure to Natural Elements, Wildfires, Pesticides, and Heavy Machinery
- Non-negotiable and fluctuating pay-per-unite prices
- Exclusion from notable New Deal policies such as National Labor Relations Act and most of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)
- Less regulation of child labor
 - Children can work on the fields as young as 12, can work in hazardous conditions at 14

Living Conditions

- Migrant Labor camps, less than 1,000 in California due to regulation
 - May lack running water and insulated walls or sturdy buildings
 - Near the fields treated with pesticides during the work day
- Crowded living arrangements and transportation to the workplace
- Most pickers move seasonally along with the availability of work in different areas
 - Some school districts struggle with retention and English Learning
 - Prone to homelessness

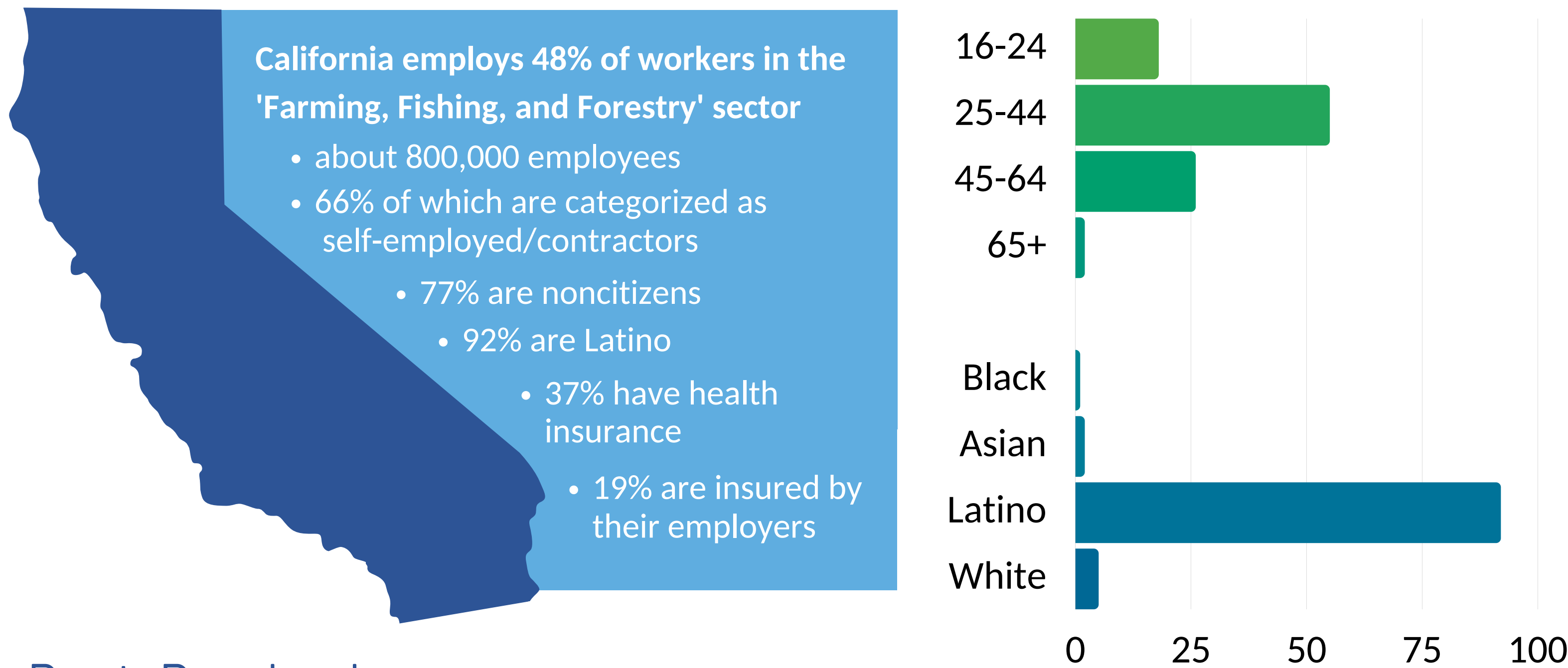
Physical and Mental Health

- Intensive physical labor and repetitive movement
 - Strawberries are notoriously difficult and California grows 90% of the nation's supply
- Heat exposure
 - Legislation was passed in 2008 after 15 workers died from heat, including a 17-year old pregnant girl
 - Dozens of workers continue to die of heat related conditions each year
- Nearly all female farmworkers have experienced or know someone who has experienced stalking, obscene language, and rape by men in positions of authority in the field
- Blood testing is required by law for those working with neurotoxic pesticides
- Discrimination from healthcare staff and medical professionals is common
- Those who don't speak English at home are less likely to use mental health services.
 - Affects both farmworkers and families of farmworkers



Workforce Characteristics and Demographics

Hundreds of thousands of workers uphold California's \$50 billion agriculture industry which is the country's largest producer and exporter of agricultural goods and products.



Post-Pandemic

COVID-19 and the Workplace

- California has had nearly 9 million reported cases and 84,000 deaths as of February 2022, more than any other state
- All steps of food production is considered essential, making all farmworkers essential employees
 - This work cannot be done remotely and many pickers and packers work in teams and assembly lines where they must come in contact with their co-workers
- Employees must buy their own protective equipment, pandemic-related or not

Economic Factors

- Most farmworkers could not receive the benefits included in stimulus packages due to their citizenship status
- COVID related labor and wage policies do not apply to contractors the same as employed workers
- Policies enacted to give financial support to POC- or family-owned farms face challenges in approval and implementation

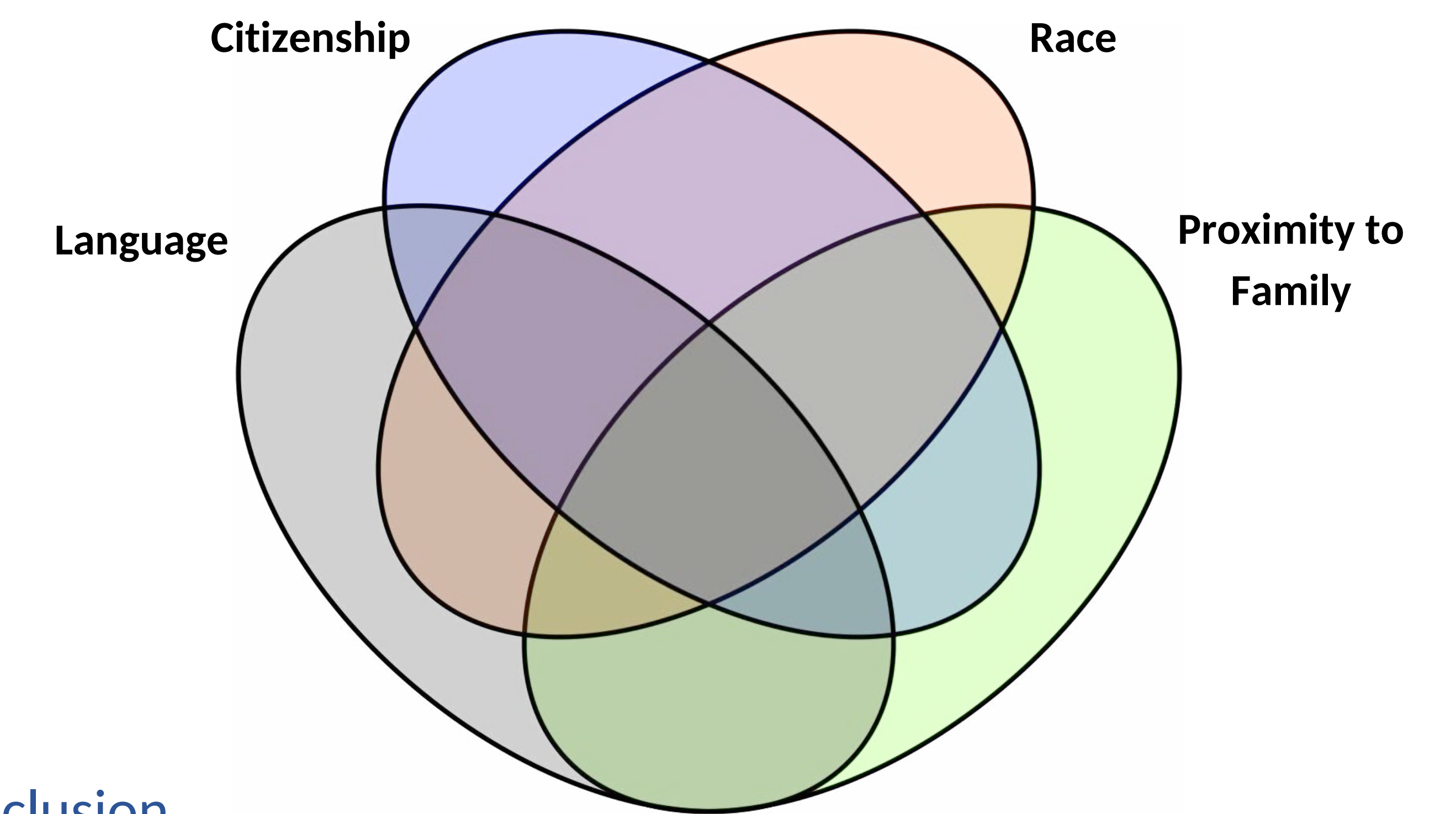
Physical and Mental Health

- Cramped living conditions make social distancing and self-quarantining near impossible for many families
- Preventative illnesses and pre-existing conditions run rampant in the workforce, weakening their capability to fight viral infections
 - This is exacerbated by record-breaking wildfires and their smoke and pesticide exposure

Immigration

- Temporary immigration policies that prioritized the agricultural workforce are not extended despite new variants and rises in infections
- In recent years, immigration policies have gotten much stricter, meaning immigrants stay longer in the U.S. and sometimes away from their family
- Methods to cross the border are increasingly high-risk, costly, and dangerous
 - When points of entry close, immigrants are more likely to stay nearby than return home
- Experienced workers are getting too old to work, but less able-bodied or younger workers are taking their places
 - Increased violence against indigenous communities in Latin America has led to more indigenous immigrants who may not know Spanish

Intersectionality of Discrimination



Conclusion

Intersectional Discrimination

- These four categories represent forms of privileges or oppression that occur commonly in existing research and literature
- Exist within the social context of California in the 3rd calendar year of a global pandemic

Agricultural Exceptionalism

- The phenomenon of exclusion from usual political, economic, and social norms is called 'Agricultural Exceptionalism'
- It's codified in state and federal labor laws and is ingrained in American work culture

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