



# Center for Worker Health

Wake Forest School of Medicine

## POLICY BRIEF

### Latinx Child Farmworkers in North Carolina: Occupational Injuries

#### Summary

Children as young as 10 years old are hired to work on farms in the United States (US). These children are most often Latinx. Agriculture is a hazardous industry, and Latinx children hired to do farm work are at risk for injury, illness and death. This policy brief provides information on self-reported occupational injuries experienced over the previous year by 202 Latinx child farmworkers aged 10 to 17 years interviewed between May and November 2017 in North Carolina.

A quarter (26%) of the child farmworkers reported a traumatic injury from agricultural work in the past year, with 43% reporting a musculoskeletal injury, 44% reporting a dermatological injury, and 67% reporting any injury. Older child farmworkers and migrant child farmworkers more often experienced each type of occupational injury. Few reported receiving medical care (5%), missing school or work (5%), or being put on light duty (7%) due to an occupational injury.

Applying the child labor regulations to agriculture that apply to all other industries in the US, such as limiting the number of work hours and eliminating involvement with hazardous tasks, is key to reducing injuries among child farmworkers.

#### Why does it matter?

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous industries in the US. Children as young as 10 years of age are hired to work on US farms (children of any age can work on their parents' farms). Restrictions on hazardous work applied to children in agriculture are less stringent than those in other industries. Many children hired to work on farms in North Carolina and elsewhere in the US are Latinx and are at risk for injury due to language, training, and pressure to work. Yet little research has documented the immediate or long-term effects of farm work on the health and development of Latinx child farmworkers. Information on the types and prevalence of injuries experienced by Latinx child farmworkers is needed to inform policies and procedures to improve children's safety and well-being.

#### What did the researchers do?

In 2017, researchers recruited 202 Latinx child farmworkers aged 10 to 17 years working across North Carolina, with the help of community partners. These child farmworkers completed interviewer-administered questionnaires in their preferred language (English or Spanish). The interviews addressed the child farmworkers' personal, educational, and work characteristics. The interviews also collected information to describe the types of occupational injuries these children experienced while engaged in agricultural work over the 12 months preceding their interviews.



Photo courtesy of NC FIELD

Research for this policy brief is reported in: Arcury TA, Arnold TJ, Quandt SA, et al. Health and occupational injury experienced by Latinx child farmworkers in North Carolina, USA. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2019 Dec 30;17(1):248.

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## What did the researchers find?

### Participant Characteristics

- Most of the 202 study participants were boys (62%), but 38% were girls.
- Child farmworkers ranged in age from 10 to 17 years; 21% were 10-13, 32% were 14-15, and 47% were 16-17.
- 18% of the child farmworkers were migrant workers; they changed their residence for seasonal agricultural employment.

### Occupational Injuries Experienced in the Previous 12 Months while Engaged in Agricultural Work

- Two-thirds of the children (67%) reported an injury resulting from agricultural work in the past year (Figure 1).
- Traumatic injuries (e.g., head blows, eye injuries, or cuts) were reported by 26%; musculoskeletal injuries (e.g., shoulder, ankle, or knee pain) were reported by 43%; and dermatological injuries (e.g., rashes, burns, or sunburn) were reported by 44%.

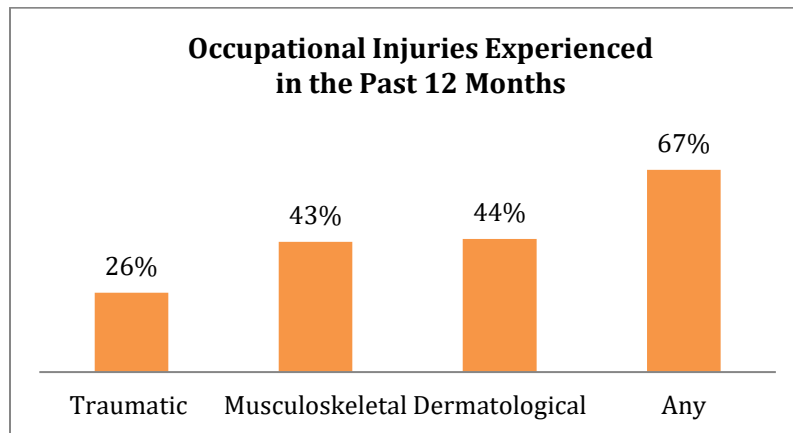


Figure 1. Prevalence of occupational injuries reported by child farmworkers.

- Few reported receiving medical care (5%), missing school or work (5%), or being put on light duty (7%) due to an occupational injury (Figure 2).

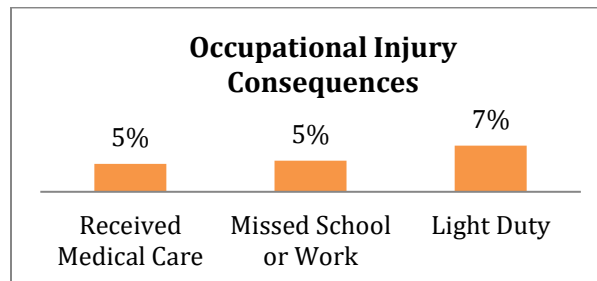


Figure 2. Occupational injury consequences reported by child farmworkers.

### Variation in Occupational Injuries by Personal Characteristics

- Boys and girls experienced the same rates of occupational injury from agricultural work.
- Older child farmworkers experienced more of each type of occupational injury than younger children.
- Migrant child farmworkers experienced more of each type of occupational injury than seasonal workers.

### Recommendations

- We can reduce child farmworker agricultural labor injuries by (a) limiting work hours for child farmworkers, and (b) eliminating their involvement with hazardous tasks. Applying the child labor regulations to agriculture that apply to all other US industries would accomplish these goals.
- We should develop alternatives to agricultural work for these children, including educational and recreational programs.
- Efforts to reduce agricultural labor injuries are particularly important for migrant child farmworkers.

### Additional Reading

- Arcury TA, Arnold TJ, Mora DC, et al. "Be careful!" Perceptions of work-safety culture among hired Latinx child farmworkers in North Carolina. *Am J Ind Med.* 2019;62:1091–1102.
- Quandt SA, Arnold TJ, Mora DC, et al. Hired Latinx child farm labor in North Carolina: The demand-support-control model applied to a vulnerable worker population. *Am J Ind Med.* 2019;62:1079–1090.