In this poster we describe the cultural model of risk and injury prevention that guides the practice of orange pickers in South Florida. Orange pickers are migrant workers from Mexico and Central American countries. Data for the model were collected through in-depth interviewing and observations conducted by the authors in the orange groves. The model describes workers’ indigenous knowledge regarding sources of risk in the workplace and strategies of accident and injury prevention.

The findings of the study are represented in a set of semantic representations of what workers conceive as meaningful. Each domain of knowledge is constituted by sub-domains, all of which are related to each other in a holistic manner. The prevention model is represented similarly.

Methods

Data were collected in the summer of 2007 through fieldwork conducted in orange groves and in workers’ homes in Hendry County, Florida. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 14 cultural consultants, all of whom had received training as health promoters to educate co-workers on eye safety, usage of glasses, conducted eye washes, and helped to report accidents in the grove. The ethnographic study upon which this poster is based was conducted with the purpose of collecting data in support of an ongoing acculturation program aiming at the adoption of protective eye glasses by citrus pickers by the Florida Prevention Health, an eye safety prevention program implemented by the Florida Prevention Research Center in partnership with the University of Florida. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (see note below). The ethnographic study upon which this poster is based was conducted with the purpose of collecting data in support of an ongoing acculturation program aiming at the adoption of protective eye glasses by citrus pickers by the Florida Prevention Health, an eye safety prevention program implemented by the Florida Prevention Research Center in partnership with the University of Florida. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (see note below).

Conclusion

Workers in this study have a complex understanding of the occupational risks associated with picking oranges. Likewise, they have developed complex accident and injury prevention strategies to protect themselves.

1. Workers identify the following interrelated domains of risk factors related to picking oranges:
   - External risks: These risk factors have an indirect effect on workers’ safety in the grove. For instance, the pay and contract structure that characterizes orange picking in South Florida leads to high productivity; this increases the risk of accidents and injury.
   - Environmental risks: Workers identify different risks related to the handling of the equipment they use in the grove in the ways in which they pick oranges. The risk associated with equipment and ways of picking are often intertwined with external and environmental risks, but can be untangled by experience and picking strategies.
   - Work-related risks: Risks that workers face in their daily lives and that affect their exposure to accidents and injury in the grove. For instance, the pay and contract structure that characterizes orange picking in South Florida leads to high productivity; this increases the risk of accidents and injury.

2. Workers identify accident and injury prevention strategies in association with each one of the risk domains. These strategies are rooted on experience in the grove and on social learning. Although all participants in the study had been exposed to an eye safety curriculum that promoted usage of protective glasses, workers justified and explained the continued usage of glasses from a frame of reference that did not necessarily connect with the educational material to which they had been exposed.

3. As a result, workers only felt the need to wear safety glasses for eye protection in situations when their methods of injury prevention were perceived as inadequate to protect their eyes. This had serious consequences to the intervention that promoted safety glasses adherence.

4. A major motivation for accident and injury prevention is the need to maintain the social and economic status that workers create to support their nuclear and extended family members in Mexico.

5. A critical contribution of this study is that effective interventions aimed at injury prevention need to take into account both risk and prevention models and understand how they are integrated. An understanding of indigenous domains of risk and prevention can lead to the development of culturally appropriate occupational injury interventions.

References


Notes

Supported by Cooperative Agreement Number U54-DP-000052 funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prevention Research Centers Program. These contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At the time of the study, the authors were employees of the Florida Prevention Research Center.