

Amaka Agonsi - Discovery Snapshot



CATAMOUNT

FELLOWSHIP FOR EMERGING CHANGEMAKERS

Exercising the Rights of Temporary Foreign Workers in Meat Packing Plants

Towards Safe Working Conditions, Equitable and Just Compensations

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Background

Canada is one of the countries that admit thousands of temporary foreign migrant workers annually. From the 2020 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, the immigrant population accounted for over 80% of Canada's population growth in 2019; over 400,000 of the immigrant population were admitted into the country under temporary work permits (Government of Canada, 2020). Between 2016 and 2018, the temporary foreign workers who filled jobs in Canadian agricultural sector came from over 100 countries (Statistics Canada, 2020). Temporary foreign workers over the years have contributed to Canadian prosperity (Salami et al., 2015). The meat processing industries in Canada have for years depended on temporary foreign workers who come into the country through the low-skilled occupation stream (Cedillo et al., 2019). Between the year 2016 and 2018, temporary foreign workers came from over 100 countries, filling up 54,734 jobs on farms in Ontario and Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2020). Lu (2020) highlights the distribution of temporary foreign workers across different sectors in Canada as of 2017;

Temporary foreign workers have been subjected to different kinds of injustices such as:

unsafe working conditions

unpaid overtime

inadequate wages

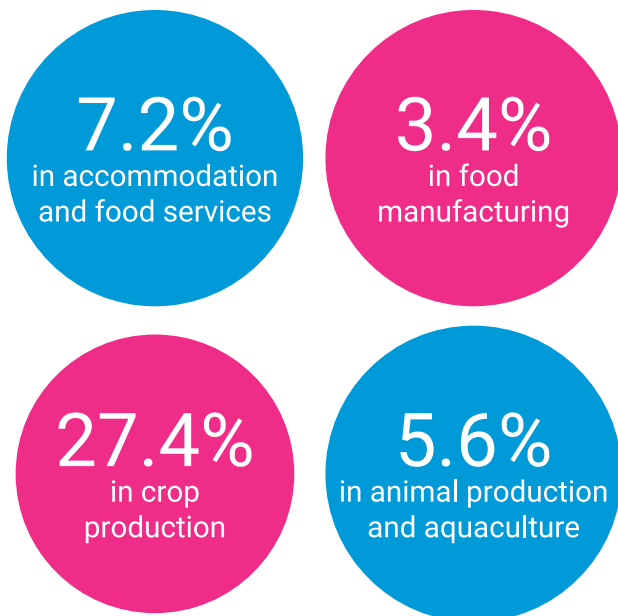
substandard housing

and are unable to report such activities (Elgersma, 2014).

They also experience barriers such as having closed work permits that make asserting their rights challenging (Cedillo et al., 2019). Many temporary foreign workers experience fear of losing their jobs if they speak about the injustices they face. With the recent coronavirus disease (COVID -19) pandemic, unpaid sick leave has contributed to the spread of the virus, especially in the workplace (Decent Work and Health Network, 2020). Filipino workers in a Cargill plant that recorded one of the largest facility outbreaks in Canada reported having no access to paid sick days (Decent Work and Health Network, 2020). Of the approximately 2,200 workers in Cargill's High River plant, over 50% are migrants from the Philippines and Mexico (Cargill, n.d.).

Research Question

How can we empower temporary foreign workers in meat packing plants to exercise their rights to safe and healthy working conditions, just compensation, and equitable policies?



Methodology

Secondary research was conducted using findings and data from academic and non-academic sources to explore challenges faced by temporary foreign workers that prevents them from exercising their rights, in hope of educating them to exercise their rights, including areas for potential change.

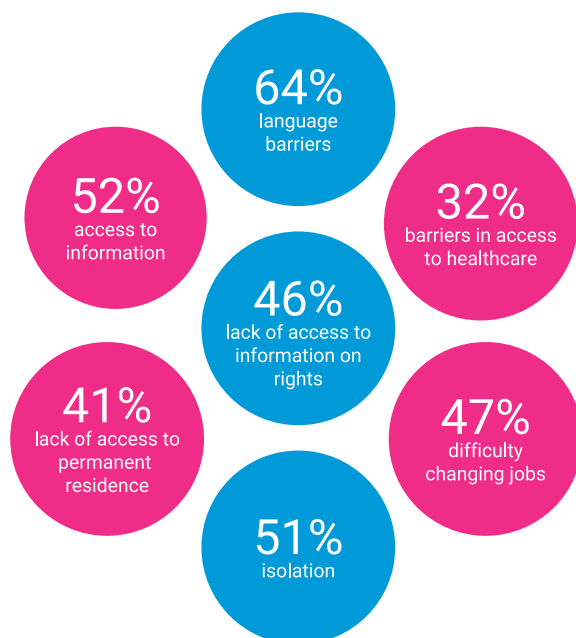
Key Findings

Rights of Workers in the Workplace

- Temporary foreign workers have the right to a safe workplace, to be paid for their work and to keep their passport or work permit (Government of Canada, 2020).
- Every employee in Canada including temporary foreign workers have three basic rights in the workplace. This includes the right to refuse unsafe work, the right to participate in workplace health and safety activities, and the right to be informed about dangers in the workplace (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2021).

Challenges faced by Temporary Foreign Workers

- In a report by Canadian Council for Refugees (2016), a survey of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) perspectives on challenges faced by temporary foreign workers in their communities was carried out across Canada. Respondents from the NGOs highlight the major challenges faced by temporary foreign workers;



- Neglecting standard workplace practices, exposure to unsafe working conditions and lack of adequate personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic are some health and safety violations experienced by most temporary foreign workers in Canada (Brown-McLaughlin, 2020; Klassen & Murphy, 2020; Dryden & Reiger, 2020).

The Impact on Temporary Foreign Workers

- Decreased access to healthcare, unsafe workplaces, poor housing are some challenges experienced by temporary foreign workers that puts them at risk for developing long term health challenges and mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder and substance use disorder (Salami et al., 2015; Otero & Preibisch, 2010; Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020).
- Temporary foreign workers also experience social isolation, are unable to integrate into their communities, and lack access to compensation systems because of language barriers (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020).
- The inequities faced by temporary foreign workers makes them very vulnerable during their COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, several hundreds to thousands of temporary foreign workers have been infected with the virus in Alberta and many others have died from the infection. Growing infection rates within this population are due to exposure to crowded and unsafe workspaces and lack of personal protective equipment (Harris 2020); Mojtehdzadeh, 2021; Faraday, 2021). One example from the spring of 2020 occurred at Cargill's meat packing facility in High River, AB. Almost 50% of employees, including temporary foreign workers, tested positive for COVID-19 (Dryden & Reiger, 2021).

Conclusion- Hope for the Future

Educating immigrants about their rights in the workplace was found to be an important strategy for empowerment because it prevents abuse in the workplace, exploitation, alleviates fears and anxiety experienced by the immigrant population and provides a sense of control (LeVoy and Verbraggen, 2005; Tipler and Gales, 2019). Hence, to address some of the challenges faced by the temporary foreign workers, recommendations from this research include the following:

- Employers should make it a duty to inform temporary foreign workers of their rights during employee orientation.
- The federal government should create a document that summarizes the rights of temporary foreign workers translated into different languages and distributed to

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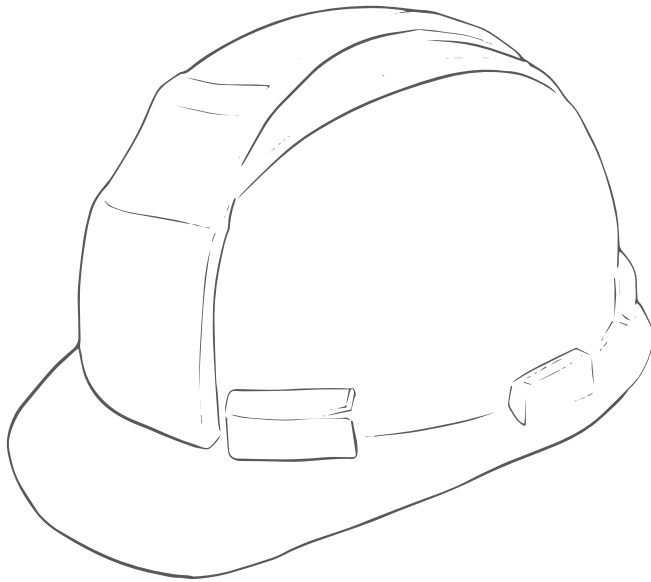
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Amaka Agonsi - Creative Work



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FELLOWSHIP FOR EMERGING CHANGEMAKERS



For support connecting with Legal Services:

- **Women's Centre of Calgary**
Phone: (403) 264-1155
<https://www.womenscentrecalgary.org/>
- **Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)**
Phone: (403) 263-4414
www.ciwa-online.com

For more information about your rights in the workplace

- https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/legisl/three_rights.html
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/protected-rights.html#h2.1>



asikkk/iStockphoto

Educational Tool For Temporary Foreign Workers in Cargill Meat Packing Plant

You have Rights as a Worker!

As a worker in Cargill, there are laws that protect you in Alberta and Canada. It is important that you know your rights in the workplace and the responsibilities of your employer.

As a worker, you have the right to:

- Refuse work that you believe is not safe for you or your co-worker
- Be paid for the work you do
- Be provided training if you need one to do your job safely
- Be free from harassment at your workplace
- Be free from discrimination at your workplace
- Keep your passport or work permit
- Have a safe workplace
- Know about the hazards or dangers present at your workplace

What can I do to be safe at work?

- Participate in scheduled occupational health and safety trainings at work
- Report unsafe conditions or practices at work and not be punished for reporting
- Ask for training if you do not know how to do something
- Use the required safety equipment and clothing for you job
- Avoid violence in the workplace
- Report unsafe work practices

What should you expect from your employer? It is the responsibility of your employer to:

- Pay you for work
- Ensure that your workplace is safe
- Provide any personal protective equipment that you need to be safe while at work
- Respect the terms of your written contract

Your employer cannot:

- Force you to do a job you were not hired or trained to do
- Force you to work if you are sick or injured
- Take your passport or work permit away from you
- Deport you from Canada
- Change your immigration status
- Make you pay the back the fees they paid to hire you

We are here to support you!

If you have any work-related problems, you can contact:

Cargill Food Union Representative, High River
Rep. Joe Attwood & Devin Yeager
Phone: 1- 888- 468- 6466

This is a list of organizations in Alberta that can support you as you settle in Canada.

For settlement needs and support accessing community resources:

- **Action Dignity**
Phone: (403) 263-9900
<https://actiondignity.org/>
- **Migrante Alberta**
Phone: (403) 392-8286
<https://www.migrantealberta.ca/>
- **Centre for Newcomers (CFN)**
Phone: (403) 569-3325
www.centrefornewcomers.ca
- **Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)**
Phone: (403) 263-4414
www.ciwa-online.com
- **The Immigrant Education Society (TIES)**
Phone: (403) 235-3666
www.immigrant-education.ca
- **Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth (CBYF)**
Phone: (403) 230-7745 |
www.cbfy.ca
- **Temporary Foreign Workers Association**
Phone: (403) 452- 8392

Amaka Agonsi - Scholarly Output



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Chiamaka Agonsi • Mount Royal University • Catamount Fellowship
Action Dignity • April 2021



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[Image 1](#)

Summary

This research report was developed in partnership with the Institute for Community Prosperity and Action Dignity to explore how we might empower temporary foreign workers in meat packing plants to exercise their rights to safe and healthy working conditions, just compensations and equitable policies. Action Dignity is a community-based organization in Calgary whose programs are geared towards attaining a just and equitable society for all (Action Dignity, About us, n.d.). My journey as a Catamount Fellow began in September 2020 and on meeting with my faculty mentor and community partners, I had the opportunity to choose what social issue I would like to explore. I chose to explore the issue around labor rights and effective tools that can be used to educate Cargill workers on their rights. During this period, there was an increasing spread of COVID-19 in the meat packing plant, and I had no idea about labour rights, but I took up the challenge, as most of the workers there are immigrants, some of whom have only a temporary status.

These workers are faced with barriers with regards to exercising their rights, which includes lack of knowledge about workers' rights, language barriers, immigration status, labour rights violation, and health and safety violations. Based on these, I created a 2-page document, with information about worker's rights and resources on where to get help when needed.

Introduction

Migration to other countries for economic purposes is a global phenomenon and approximately sixty-five percent of migratory movement consist in temporary migration (Cedillio et al., 2019). Most people who move from their countries of origin do so with the purpose of searching for quality of life for themselves and their families or as an escape from war, poverty, and unemployment in their countries (Salami et al., 2015). However, the percentage of these migrants are not evenly distributed and there is no doubt that countries and cities with greater economic opportunities have more temporary migrants. Canada is among such countries and so records thousands of temporary foreign migrant workers annually. From the 2020 annual report to parliament on immigration, the immigrant population accounted for over 80% of Canada's population growth in 2019; over 400,000 of the immigrant population were admitted into the country under temporary work permits (Government of Canada, 2020). The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and International Mobility Program (IMP) are some of the avenues through which temporary residents are admitted into Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). Within the TFWP, there is the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and Caregivers Program through which foreign workers are engaged in agricultural work and caring for individuals with high medical needs respectively (Kachulis & Perez-Leclerc, 2020).

It is important to acknowledge the impact of temporary workers to the Canadian economy. Temporary foreign workers over the years have contributed to Canadian prosperity (Salami et al., 2015) and they play vital roles in sectors such as agriculture, agri-food, fish, and seafood processing, all of which are critical to ensuring food security (Government of Canada, 2020). The integral role of temporary foreign migrant workers cannot be over-emphasized especially when the unwillingness and 'unsympathetic commitment' of Canadians to precarious jobs is considered (Cedillio et al., 2019). Low wage rate is one of the reasons Canadians refuse to take up these precarious jobs, also employers argue that Canadians are not reliable and easy to train when compared to foreign workers (Fraumeni, 2012). In addition to working in the agricultural sector, migrant workers also fill jobs in food processing, construction, and semi-skilled/low skilled manufacturing jobs (Salami et al. 2015). Temporary foreign workers also work in service producing sectors such as waste management, remediation services, administrative and support services, with the highest proportions in accommodation and food services (Lu, 2020). Consequently, it is improbable that the labour force that provides these essential services are compelled to live through unsuitable working conditions, and experience barriers like having closed work permits, that make asserting their rights challenging (Cedillio et al., 2019). The meat processing industries in Canada have for years depended on temporary foreign

workers who come into the country through the low-skilled occupation stream (Cedillio et al., 2019). Even though these migrant working opportunities are acknowledged, their nature and working conditions remain issues of concern (Brown-McLaughlin, 2020). The Food and Agriculture Organization (2020) reports that a huge percentage of these migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation; they have decreased access to health care, suffer from food insecurity, lack of social protections, and are living in poverty. Their working conditions are related to their inability to access health and social services.

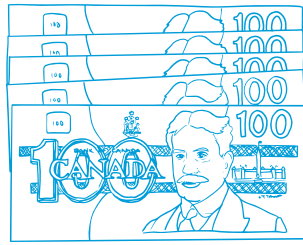
Research Purpose and Methodology

The target sub population for this research are the temporary foreign workers in Cargill meat packing plant in Calgary, Alberta. The aim of the research questions was to understand steps that can be taken to empower workers in meat packing plants. Secondary research was conducted using findings and data from academic and nonacademic sources to explore challenges faced by temporary foreign workers that prevent this population from exercising their rights, in hopes of educating temporary foreign workers as a way of empowerment to exercise their rights, and areas for potential change. A community conversation was hosted during the fellowship to engage the broader community on the issue. The community conversation was advertised using Mount Royal University online platforms. Attendees to the community conversation included individuals from the immigrant population.

What is the Problem?

The demographics of the immigrant population admitted into Canada annually is richly diverse in culture, with people from all over the world. According to Statistics Canada (2020), between 2016 and 2018, the temporary foreign workers who filled jobs in Canadian agricultural sector came from over 100 countries. Having immigrants come into Canada from over 100 countries is not a problem, the problem is with the challenges faced by the immigrant population as they begin their lives in Canada. Elgersma (2014) highlights that temporary foreign workers have been subjected to different kinds of injustices such as unpaid overtime, inadequate wages, unsafe working conditions, substandard housing, and are unable to report such activities. With the recent Covid-19 pandemic, unpaid sick leave has contributed to the spread of the virus in workplaces (Decent Work and Health Network, 2020). For instance, Filipino workers in a Cargill plant that recorded one of the largest facility outbreaks in Canada reported having no access to paid sick days (Decent Work and Health Network, 2020).

Labour Rights



Labour rights are otherwise known as worker's rights and the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines workers' rights as "fundamental principles and rights at work" (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Kolben (2007) defines it as "the sets of rights a human possesses by virtue of being a worker". These rights are considered human rights and describe labour relations between workers and their employers such as workers' pay, benefits, and working conditions (Wikipedia, n.d.). The Canada Labour Code outlines the labour rights and responsibilities of employers and employees in Canada (Government of Canada, 2018). According to the Government of Canada (2020), the rights of temporary foreign workers are protected by the law, and foreign workers in Canada "have the right to be paid for their work, have a safe workplace and to keep their passport or work permit" (Government of Canada, 2018). However, there is evidence from research that argues that the rights of temporary foreign workers are violated. Hastie (2015) highlights exposure of workers to extreme health and safety risk, non-payment of overtime, misinformation to workers about entitlement to benefits and other legal rights, denial of medical care and other benefits, payment of lower wages than agreed upon as examples of abuses experienced by temporary foreign workers in the workplace. The question is why?

The Barriers

An abundance of research has been conducted on the challenges faced by temporary foreign workers and the immigrant population at large as they begin their lives in Canada. Some of these challenges or barriers will be discussed next.

Lack of Knowledge and Language Barriers related to Labour Rights

Research suggests that a lack of knowledge and limitations with native linguistic practices, presents barriers for those under TFWP. The demographics of immigrants in the agricultural workforce is highly diverse; a range of languages and cultures comprise the population. These workers have limited English language proficiency and educational qualifications (Arcury et al., 2010). In addition, a study by Premji et al., (2008) highlights language barriers as a factor that contributes to the inequalities in occupational health experienced by immigrants in a garment factory in Montreal. Immigrants lack proficiency in the official languages in Canada and are faced with communication barriers which impacts their access to information, training, and ultimately occupational safety. Also, lack of awareness of

what behaviour is acceptable from both the employer and employee has been identified as an issue to newcomers in the Canadian labour market of which immigrants are inclusive (Dutil & Sanders, 2005). Some participants in a study by Yanar et al., (2018) when asked about their rights in the workplace, listed their rights from their native country thinking the same was applicable in Canada, some outlined their tasks at work and some others thought it was their responsibility to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) at their place of work. Other challenges faced by temporary workers include non-existence of resources that provide information on employee rights and responsibilities and processes for accessing healthcare and insurance are not available in workers' preferred language (Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group, 2020). Finally, immigrants who participated in a study in Ireland conducted by Murphy et al., (2020) reported that they could not report incidences of labour exploitation because they were not informed of their rights before or on arriving in Ireland. Some signed contracts and documents unaware of the terms because they lacked an appropriate level of literacy. This shows that without adequate knowledge of employee rights, temporary foreign workers are faced with the challenge of exercising or enforcing such rights.

Labour Rights Violation

Labour rights violation is another factor that impacts the rights of workers negatively. The Canada Labour Code (CLC) clearly outlines the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees. In the province of Alberta, the Employment Standards Code (2020) outlines information around hours of work, pay earnings, vacations, overtime, employment termination, child employment and a lot more. In recent news articles, two American companies, Nestle USA and Cargill were alleged to have indirectly profited from child slavery and forced labour in cocoa farms in Ivory Coast and Ghana (Byington. 2020; Arancibia, 2020). Although these reports bring to light violation practices outside Canada, it poses a question to the actions of multinational corporations in countries that have employment codes different from developed countries. It suggests that companies act in accordance with legislation when it comes to protecting workers; they are not guided by taking such protections as intrinsic, not requiring legal guidance.

According to Alberta's employment standard code (2020), without parental or consent from a guardian, an individual below the age of 15 should not be employed and the ages of the workers in the article were between 12 – 18 years (Arancibia, 2020). In addition, Cargill as a corporation has been penalized for violations like workplace safety or health violation, wage and working hour violation, and employment discrimination amongst others (Violation tracker, n.d). Interestingly, approximately 2000 of the unionized workers Cargill employs in High River Alberta consists of immigrants, temporary foreign workers, and refugees (Frangou, 2020). Cargill High River Plant employees about 2,200 employees

and over 50% of these employees are foreign workers from the Philippines and Mexico (Cargill, n.d.).

According to Davies (2019), the concept of labour exploitation has received little attention as many harmful and exploitative practices are at most times considered regulatory problems rather than criminal. Given this and the efficacious role of regulation, it follows that worker rights are divorced from human rights. From the study carried out in the UK, migrants working in the food industry experienced exploitation practices that included underpayment, substandard accommodation, safety problems and harassment; all of which breaches the commonly accepted labour ethics and principles. In addition, a recent study by Murphy et al. (2020) highlighted the experiences of migrant workers in Ireland who were subjected to exploitations such as non-payment of compensation for overtime, poor living conditions, excessive and irregular working hours, control, and isolation.



Image 2

Migration Status

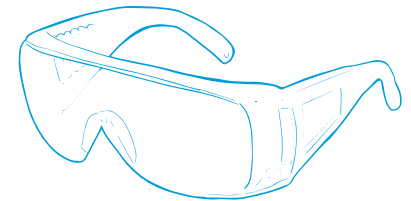
The Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) is an employer driven opportunity for non-resident labourers. It is a closed permit, meaning the program ties foreign workers to a particular employer. Hence, for fear of losing their job, being deported, or not considered for re-employment, workers show little or no willingness to exercise their right to refuse a job for which they lack training (Sargeant & Tucker, 2009). TFWP workers suffer a form of coercion that Canadian citizens are protected from.

A study by Preibisch and Otero (2014) show that immigrant agricultural workers with citizenship status have access to protections, social assistance, and services associated with being a citizen or permanent resident. Also, this legal status, and its concomitant protections, empowers citizens to lay claims against employers and respond to unjust treatment. In contrast, fear of deportation and forced rotation hinders immigrants from protecting their own interests. Indeed, whatever just interests may be, they are, for all practical purposes, unprotected. As a temporary worker in Canada, one does not have access to social assistance (Fudge & MacPhail,

2009). A typical example of how migration status impacts temporary foreign workers is seen in the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

In a news article by Frangou (2020), an immigrant worker named Alfred Gillo recounts his experience. Having experienced life in Canada as a temporary foreign worker, Gillo explained that he understood why his colleagues were uncomfortable talking about the inequities they experienced in the meat making plant they worked in during the COVID-19 outbreak. Since they were not permanent residents, they were faced with uncertainties around their stay in Canada if they voiced their concerns. As a permanent resident, Gillo was not afraid to speak up. With concerns about the rising spread of COVID-19, Gillo requested for face masks but was told they were not necessary because social distancing measures were in place. Gillo decided to buy a disposable mask to use at work. He was able to speak up about the concerns he had because at this time he was a permanent resident and some of his colleagues could not for fear of losing their jobs.

Health and Safety Violations



The second part of the CLC clearly outlines the rights and responsibilities of the employer and employee with regards to workplace safety. The rights of employees include knowing, participating, and refusing work that puts their health and safety at risk (Government of Canada, 2018). Embedded in an employee's right to know is the right to training or supervision necessary to maintain safety in the workplace; the employee has to be informed of known or probable dangers in the workplace (Government of Canada, 2018). Neglect of standard workplace practices was highlighted as a major issue faced by migrant workers (Brown-McLaughlin, 2020). Employers failing to inform or infringing on these stipulated rights are placing their employee at a health and safety risk. Of course, safety at the workplace is of value to both the employer and the employee. For employees, unsafe workplaces can lead to death, loss of income, loss of job or healthcare costs beyond what is covered by insurance. For employers, it can cost their businesses in several ways including decline in production, workers morale, product quality, high turnover, and training new employees (Maine Department of Labour, 2013). McLaughlin et al. (2014) explored the experiences of temporary foreign workers in Ontario around the issue of occupational health and safety. Results showed that this vulnerable population had little or no training to deal with the hazards they were exposed to at their workplace. Evidence from literature shows that before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers in farm, restaurants, meat packing facilities, warehouses and grocery were subjected to poor wages and unsafe working conditions. Of note, workplace improvements were left for employers. In addition, workers

were prevented from working together to protect their rights. With the pandemic, wellbeing and safety of workers are put at risk as benefits offered by employers are temporary or dependent on attendance (Klassen & Murphy, 2020).

Unfortunately, the current pandemic has also exposed the inequities faced by temporary foreign workers and immigrants at their workplaces. In a news article published by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), employees of the largest meat plant in Canada (Cargill) complained about practices by the company that put their health and safety at risk during the COVID-19 outbreak. For fear of losing their jobs, and the threat that their status in Canada may be jeopardized, these vulnerable immigrant workers are forced to work in precarious conditions at their workplace (Dryden & Reiger, 2020). Employees have reported pressure placed on them to come back to work despite contracting COVID-19. They have reported a lack of personal protective equipment, crowded breakrooms, crowded and filthy locker rooms, and ineffective communication with their employers. These violations of worker rights were experienced by employees in other meat packing plants across Canada and the United States. These violations were suspected to be responsible for the COVID-19 outbreaks reported in meat packing plants in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, with Cargill being the site of the largest outbreak in North America (Dryden and Rieger, 2020; Slack, 2020). Sadly, violating the right to a safe workplace has led to the death of some workers, more than 600 immigrant workers and community members infected with COVID-19 during the outbreak and 4913 infected workers in meat packing facilities across Canada and the United States (Nikiforuk, 2020; Frangou 2020).

The Impact on Temporary Foreign Workers



Within the temporary foreign workers program, there exists numerous systemic factors that fuel the ongoing inequities faced by temporary foreign workers. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased the exploitation of this population, heightened the disparities they face and increased their exposure to labour rights violation by their employers (Landry et al., 2021). Some of the challenges faced by temporary foreign workers could also have an impact on their health. It is concerning that temporary foreign workers are at an increased risk of developing long term health challenges because they have decreased access to health care and are not able to access services to improve or maintain their health. Exposure to occupational hazards, unsafe workplaces,

poor housing, and sanitation also impacts their health (Salami et al., 2015). Furthermore, in addition to physical injuries and poorer health outcomes experienced by this population, evidence from research shows that there is a greater chance of developing mental disorders such as anxiety disorder, substance use disorder and depression within this population (Otero & Preibisch 2010; Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020).

According to Landry et al, (2021), a key indicator of social inclusion is one's fluency in the predominant language of that culture. To bring this home, Canada's official languages are English and French and for one to be socially inclusive means they should be fluent in English or French or both languages. Hence, social exclusion becomes the experience of temporary foreign workers that cannot speak or understand Canada's predominant languages. In a report by Migrant Workers Alliance for Change "Unheeded warnings" (2020), temporary migrant agricultural workers complain of their experiences of social isolation, lack of integration in their communities, lack of autonomy, lack of access to compensation systems because of language barriers. Temporary foreign workers also report lacking social support because they are socially isolated from the rest of the community. As such, they are not able to learn about their rights from interacting with other people (Robillard et al, 2018). Finally, the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the lives of temporary foreign workers is disheartening. That is not to say the rest of the population are not affected by this pandemic, but the inequities faced by temporary foreign workers make them very vulnerable during this pandemic. As a result, several hundreds to thousands of temporary foreign workers have been infected with the virus in Alberta and many others have died from the infection because of growing infection rates within this population due to exposure to crowded and unsafe workspaces and lack of personal protective equipment (Harris 2020; Mojtehdzadeh, 2021; Faraday, 2021). An instance was in spring of 2020, almost 50% of employees at the Cargill High River facility tested positive for COVID 19 (Dryden & Reiger, 2021).

What can be done?

Exploring the challenges faced by temporary foreign workers through a systems lens, there are leverage points that can be acted upon to bring about change to the current trends. Some of these leverage points include empowering the immigrant population by educating them about their rights, exploring gaps in immigration policies, increasing access to healthcare, and enforcing employer compliance to labor rights. The different stakeholders in the system such as the government, employers, employees, and society at large have vital roles to play.

In addition, employers have the responsibility to provide safety training in a language that workers can understand and not discriminate against employees who exercise their rights (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, n.d.).

They also have the right to refuse unsafe work, be informed about dangers in the workplace, and participate in workplace health and safety activities (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2021).

Role of Employers

One of the major challenges faced by temporary foreign workers in relation to exercising their rights as explained above is the lack of knowledge or awareness about their rights as an employee which can lead to labour rights violation or temporary foreign workers working unsafely. This challenge can be a ripple effect of language barriers or a lack of access to the information needed. To address this, employers have a huge role to play. Employers are obligated to do everything possible to protect every employee while they are working by complying with the Canada Labour Code (CLC) and meeting the standards set in the Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (Human Resources and Skills development Canada, 2015). The duties of employers in Alberta are outlined in Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Legislation. It is the responsibility of employers to ensure their employees are protected at work by providing employees with trainings on how to use equipment safely, prevent workplace violence and harassment, set up safe workplace practices, ensure that employees abide by occupational health and safety standards and ensure workers have the needed skills to carry out their job safely (Alberta, n.d.). In addition, employers have the responsibility to provide safety training in a language that workers can understand and not discriminate against employees who exercise their rights (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, n.d.).

Role of Employees

As mentioned earlier, the task of addressing the issue faced by temporary foreign workers lie with all stakeholders involved and the change is possible if all parties play their roles. It is important to acknowledge that while employers have their duties and responsibilities in the workplace, employees have theirs as well. As outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Legislation in Canada, employees have a responsibility to report workplace hazards to their supervisors or employers, use required personal protective equipment, and work in a safe manner. They also have the right to refuse unsafe work, be informed about dangers in the workplace, and participate in workplace health and safety activities (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2021). It is important that employees know their responsibilities and can exercise their rights.

Impact of other stakeholders

In Alberta, provincially funded settlement agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), ethno-cultural, and faith-based organizations provide different kinds of support to migrant workers, with the aim of closing the gaps migrant workers are faced with in the system. Some services include legal support, assistance with workers compensation, and settlement services (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2016). However, there is more work to be done as there are still needs that temporary foreign workers have that have not been fully met some of which include increased information sessions on migrant workers' rights, support counselling, more community connection programs to decrease social isolation and advocacy. NGOs and other settlement organizations request more funding from the government to ensure settlement services are sustainable and available to migrant workers (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2016).

Rights Education - A Means of Empowering Temporary Foreign workers



Lack of knowledge about workers' rights put newcomers to Canada including temporary foreign workers in a vulnerable position, hence, contributing to empowerment vulnerability (Yanar et al, 2018). If temporary foreign workers are not aware of their rights in the workplace, they cannot exercise their rights. Tipler and Gales (2019) explored the impacts of rights education on undocumented immigrants in the United States. The participants acknowledged that attending the workshop gave them a sense of control, alleviated their fears and anxiety, provided a form of social support, and was a source of empowerment (Tipler and Gales, 2019). Educating migrant workers about their rights has shown to prevent further abuse in the workplace and exploitation (LeVoy and Verbraggen, 2005).

There are different strategies or avenues through which temporary foreign workers can be educated on their rights as workers in Canada. A report by LeVoy and Verbraggen (2005) "Ten ways to protect Undocumented Migrant Workers" explains several media used by various organizations in

different parts of the world to increase access to information about workers' rights. Some of the media used include printed materials (booklets and leaflets, websites, articles in ethnic media, comic books), help desk, group information sessions aimed at gathering workers in support groups, and using popular education approaches such as skits and drawings. LeVoy and Verbraggen (2005) found that printed materials provided ease of distribution among undocumented workers, comic books and popular educational approaches were useful in addressing language barriers and group information sessions provided support and information between workers.

According to Yanar et al. (2018), "early access to information could empower workers with the knowledge of their rights in the workplace". The creative output from this research is a resource document created in collaboration with Action Dignity that provides temporary foreign workers in Cargill meat packing plants with information about their basic rights as an employee, the responsibilities of their employers and a resource list of organizations that provide immigrants with settlement services. This document will be translated into the first languages of the temporary foreign workers in Cargill meat packing plants in Calgary and area. The hope is that this document helps to address some of challenges such as lack of knowledge about labour rights, decreased access to information and language barriers experienced by temporary foreign workers working at Cargill meat packing plant in Calgary, Alberta.

Conclusion- Hope for the Future

Canada continues to be a country with increasing diversity as she opens the door to immigration through different streams. This increasing diversity brings with it a richness in culture. However, as newcomers settle in Canada, they are faced with unique challenges depending on the stream of immigration. Exploring issues around labour rights and the challenges migrants who come to Canada through the Temporary Foreign Workers Program are faced with was both challenging and enlightening.

Yanar et al. (2018) highlights that some migrant workers were fortunate to get support from settlement organizations but very few organizations informed migrant workers about their rights in the workplace. Some only knew about their rights when they left their jobs or were penalized for speaking up. Considering these, I would recommend that education about employee rights and employer responsibilities be included in services settlement organizations offered to migrant workers. Employers should also make it a duty to inform temporary foreign workers of their rights during orientation. The federal government can create leaflets that outline the rights of

workers in Canada, what employees should expect from their employers, a summary of the occupational health and safety standards; these leaflets could be given to immigration officers to handout to temporary foreign workers as part of their welcome package at the point of entry into Canada. This information should be translated to languages the employees can understand.

Also, the provincial government should create strategies to ensure employers comply with the Canada Labor Code and occupational health and safety standards. For instance, regulatory bodies could show up at workplaces unannounced for inspections. In addition, anonymous calls can be made to temporary foreign workers who work in precarious jobs to find out if they experience any labour violations or abuse. This will address the fears that temporary foreign workers have which prevents them from speaking up about abuse or rights violation when they experience such issues.

Finally, it is important to address the challenges of lack of awareness about rights, language barriers and decreased access to information. The barriers faced by temporary foreign workers are interwoven. The issue of migration status poses a huge challenge and if not addressed, temporary foreign workers might not be able to exercise their rights for fear of losing their jobs or deportation. Hence, it is expedient that policy makers in the federal level of government review the policies guiding the TFWP to address the power imbalance that exists between employers and employees. Policies that give temporary foreign workers an open permit should be explored so they can change jobs if they want to. This could reduce abuse of temporary foreign workers and labour exploitation.

Reflection

As an immigrant, I never knew such inequities existed within the immigrant population. It is clear to me now that there are inequities and systemic issues that I may not experience because of my migration status but that is not the case for migrants with temporary status and closed work permits. Coming to Canada, I had access to settlement organizations that eased my transition into the society and helped to develop my understanding of Canadian culture, in a way. I remember being coached on how to write resumes, provided with information on how to apply for jobs and be prepared for interviews. However, I was not informed on the responsibilities of employers or my right as an employee for when I get the job. Being a participant of the 2020/2021 Catamount Fellowship Program introduced me to the world of systems thinking, gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into this systemic issue and empowered me to take a stance for change in my community and the world at large. Change is possible one day at a time.

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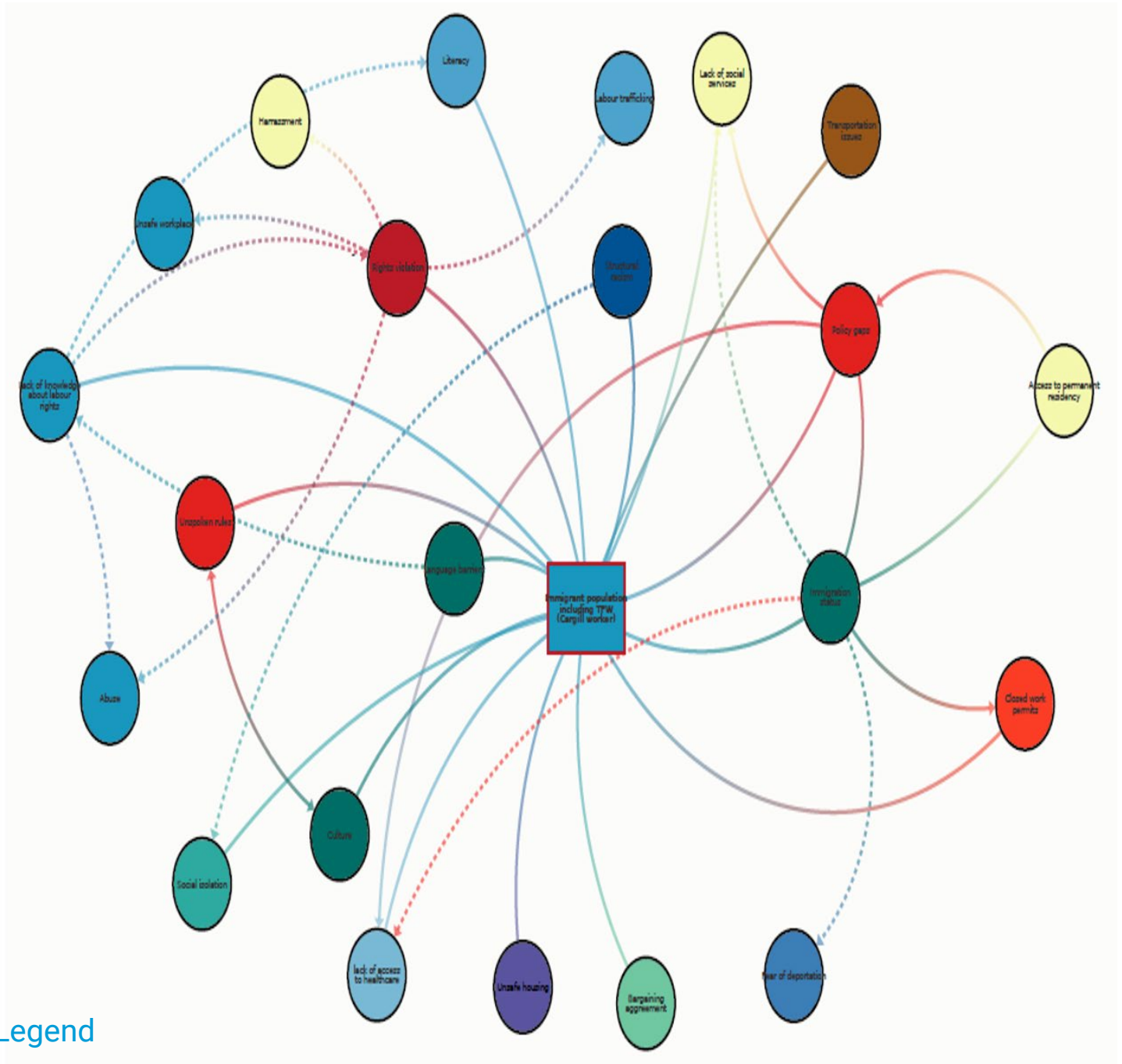
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Appendix A

Systems map of the challenges faced by temporary foreign workers using the Kumu systems mapping software.



Legend

- Challenges faced by TFW
- Directly impacts
- - Leads to

Appendix B

Insights from Community Conversation



Appendix C

My Research in a Picture

