

Utilizing Social Capital and Ego Resiliency Theory to Assess the Influence of Social Support and Spirituality on Ego Resilience of Youth in Haitian Farmworker Communities

INTRODUCTION

The intensification of global migration patterns underscores the urgent need for adapted strategies to meet the needs of migrants working in agriculture, including their youth and families. Research indicates that many newly arrived immigrants often find employment in agricultural labor, particularly those with limited formal education (Farmworker Justice, 2015). In fact, unlike previous trends, the agricultural labor workforce today faces greater stability, often due to limited educational opportunities that hinder transitions to other sectors. Also, with the significant number of migrants of reproductive age and the sequelae of their migration process, host countries must prioritize programs conducive to nurturing the potential of young migrants to contribute to and positively integrate into society. To this effect, the land grant system has traditionally focused on positive youth development (PYD) programs such as 4-H to improve the lives of rural agricultural youth. However, migrant youth, coming from increasingly diverse countries and cultures, lack social capital and access to Extension programs and can face significant barriers to their human developmental process and resilience.

Given the diversity of cultures expected to form the agricultural labor pool from this growing migrant population, it is important to understand how influences on migrant youth affect them. Traditionally, farm economy has been a primary driver when studying agriculture and the agricultural labor pool (Dimitri et al., 2005). For example, the Federal Labor Standard Act of 1938 still upholds the concept of agricultural exceptionalism, which exempts agricultural employers from many labor laws and protection standards regarding protecting workers' health, safety, and interests. Notably, it permits children as young as 12 to engage in nonhazardous farm tasks with parental consent, grants unlimited field work at age 14, and allows children as young as 16 to work in any capacity, even during school hours (NC Farmworker, 2018). This study, based on a youth resilience framework, takes a development lens to examine the association between farmworker youths' subjective socioeconomic status (SSS) and their ego resilience (ER) while considering perceived social support (PSS) and spirituality (SPI) as two potential moderators of this relationship.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study employed Social Capital Theory and Resiliency Theory to examine the relationship between the different factors. Social Capital Theory argues that social relationships are resources generated from social connections that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital (Hawkins & Maurer, 2010). Specifically, bonding social capital theory emphasizes the importance of connecting people for a better good. On the other hand, ego resiliency theory posits that individuals with higher levels of ego resilience demonstrate greater capacity to adapt to changes in their environment and navigate challenging situations (Taylor et al., 2014). Conversely, individuals with lower levels of ego resilience are more susceptible to experiencing difficulty in coping with shifting environmental circumstances.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study followed a mixed method sequential explanatory design with the quantitative preceding the qualitative arm. In the quantitative phase, data were gathered online via Qualtrics and analyzed using SPSS (version 29) and the PROCESS MACRO. Subsequently, in the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, and NVIVO was employed for data analysis following Yin's (2016) five-step approach.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

A total of 191 young adults (18-29), all of Haitian descent, participated in the first phase. However, 8 people were engaged in the second phase with 4 participants carried over from the first phase and 4 new ones who shared similar profiles. SSS was assessed using the 10-rung ladder MacArthur scale (Adler et al., 2000) ($\alpha = .749$), PSS was measured using the multidimensional scale of perceived social support (Zimet et al., 1988) ($\alpha = .888$), and SPI was evaluated using the 13-item spiritual support scale (Reinert & Bloomingdale, 2000), ($\alpha = .905$). Additionally, ego resilience (ER) was gauged using the 11-item version of the ego resiliency scale (Alessandri et al., 2012) ($\alpha = .852$).

Quantitative results indicated that only PSS ($\beta = .5246$, $P < .001$) and SPI ($\beta = .2973$, $P < .001$), exhibited significant relationships with ER, whereas SSS ($\beta = -.0046$, $P = .7800$) did not show neither a significant main effect nor a significant interaction effect with PSS and SPI. The qualitative phase complemented and supported the quantitative findings. It suggested that the participants' levels of ego resilience were more influenced by the hardships they faced in conjunction with their perceived social support and spirituality, rather than their SSS alone as opposed to literature, which establishes a positive correlation between the two.

CONCLUSION

Assessing SSS, PSS, SPI, and ER, quantitative results showed significant relationships between PSS, SPI, and ER, contrary to existing literature as SSS did not significantly affect ER. Qualitative findings supported this, highlighting the influence of perceived social and spiritual support alongside hardships on participants' ego resilience. This underscores the need to consider social and spiritual factors in fostering resilience among young Haitian adults.

IMPLICATION/RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPACT

These findings carry significant implications for stakeholders in agricultural education and extension, emphasizing the need for more culturally targeted support programs. Specifically, enhancing perceived social support (PSS) and spirituality (SPI) among farmworker children, particularly those of Haitian descent, is crucial. These factors were found to be significantly related to ego resilience (ER), essential for coping with challenges. Culturally sensitive educational materials and support services are essential to maximize effectiveness. Recommendations include integrating social support and spiritual practices into existing PYD and 4-H Extension programs and fostering supportive environments among peers and mentors. Additionally, resilience-building strategies in agricultural education and extension are vital, involving providing resources and training to help young adults cope with adversity in their agricultural pursuits. Implementing these measures can enhance support for farmworker youth, promoting their personal and professional growth in the agricultural industry.

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