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Coping and Mental Health among Documented and Undocumented Mexican Migrants in a New Frontier Settlement

Latino immigration in the United States has shifted over the past 20 years from traditional urban settlement areas like California, Texas, and Arizona to rural areas such as Southwest Montana. In these non-traditional rural and frontier settlement areas, there has been minimal research on the mental health of Mexican migrants. The purpose of this study was to examine the context of how Mexican migrants cope in a non-traditional rural-frontier settlement area and if coping strategies differ as a function of documentation status. This study utilized secondary data gathered from a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project called "Salud y Comunidad: Latinos en Montana." For this study, the results of 120 interviewer-assisted survey questionnaires focusing on mental health correlates and migrant coping were analyzed. Findings revealed that migrants experienced different mental health outcomes and utilized different coping strategies as a function of documentation status. Undocumented migrants experienced significantly more depression symptoms as compared to their documented counterparts. Undocumented individuals also reported using significantly more negative coping strategies than documented migrants, including self-blame, self-destructive patterns and substance abuse. This research suggests that documentation status matters for migrant mental health and coping and holds important implications for intervention efforts in rural and frontier settlements.