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Special Issue: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury

2019-01-21 09:26:25

By Anna Zogas

The December 2018 issue of [Anthropology of Work Review](#) is a special issue titled, "[An Injury to One is an Injury to All: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury](#)." Here are the abstracts.

[Workers' Decomensation: Engaged Research with Injured Im/migrant Workers](#)

Dvera I. Saxton, Angela Stuesse

[excerpt] This special issue brings together ethnographic perspectives on the intersections between structural violence and vulnerabilities, workplace inequalities, and occupational injuries among im/migrant workers in North America. It responds to calls for increased ethnographic attention to the relationships between im/migration and health (Castañeda 2010), as well as attending to the troubling gaps in health?care provision, accessibility, and quality (Castañeda and Mulligan 2017; Horton et al. 2014).

[When They're Done with You: Legal Violence and Structural Vulnerability among Injured Immigrant Poultry Workers](#)

Angela Stuesse

"When they're done with you," an impassioned union representative once cautioned me, "they'll crumple you up like a piece of paper, throw you out, and reach back for your kids." Industrial poultry production is horrific work, reliant upon the expendable bodies of Black and Brown workers, many of whom are immigrants. While anthropologists have increasingly employed the concepts of structural violence and vulnerability to understand the experiences of migrant health, few have focused on the workplace. Over several years, as the coordinator of the Mississippi Poultry Workers' Center's Workplace Injury Project, I documented the lengths to which this industry will go to avoid reporting and treating injuries via the workers' compensation system. From obstructionist plant nurses and company doctors to surveillance, retaliation, and termination, injured undocumented workers' experiences underscore the failings of workers' compensation as a medico?legal project. Drawing on scholarship from legal and medical anthropology, public health, critical legal studies, and healthcare economics and policy, this article employs the framework of

legal violence to scrutinize the ways in which immigration and workers' compensation laws work together to produce layered precarities among injured immigrant poultry workers, considering the role of occupational injury and the repression of injured immigrant workers in reproducing a docile and exploitable labor force for a capitalist economy that places profit over people.

[What the Doctors Don't See: Physicians as Gatekeepers, Injured Latino Immigrants, and Workers' Compensation System](#)

Carla G. Castillo

Workers' compensation systems require injured employees to overcome cumbersome requirements in order to obtain health care and salary replacement benefits. The structural vulnerabilities of Latino immigrants put them at greater risk for workplace injuries and further complicate their search for redress. As a medico-legal system, workers' compensation relies on medical professionals to interrogate the bodies of injured low-wage immigrant workers. This article aims to clarify how workers' trajectories are impacted by interactions with health care system. Utilizing activist research methods, I collaborated with Fuerza Laboral, a worker center in Rhode Island, from the fall of 2013 to the end of 2014, to survey and interview injured Latino workers, physicians, and legal professionals. I bring together worker narratives and physician reflections to identify how the compensation system's reliance on biomedicine contributes to poor outcomes for injured immigrant workers. Considering the medical "gaze," prejudice against injured workers, racial and ethnic bias in medicine, and the pitfalls of cultural competency training, I outline the mechanics of how the medical-legal system corrodes the patient-physician relationship. Evaluating the risks of positioning physicians as gatekeepers, I advocate for uncoupling medical evaluations from compensation cases, the importance of healthcare system reform, and medical curricula that emphasize structural analysis. Such reforms may liberalize access to health care for injured workers as well as stymie bias in medical education.

["No One Cares if You Can't Work": Injured and Disabled Mexican-Origin Workers in Transnational Life Course Perspective](#)

Alayne Unterberger

What happens to injured immigrant workers as they age? What effects do their return migrations have on families, communities, and labor dynamics back home? This paper takes a composite of five immigrant families who participated in a long-term binational study between Mexico and Florida, along with a separate cohort of Latino immigrant workers engaged in construction and warehousing in order to contextualize workers' health through Life Course Theory (LCT). This article specifically explores the

lives of injured im/migrant workers and demonstrates the syndemic effects of Florida's lax workers' compensation (WC) system and intersecting health and labor policies and practices that exacerbate structural vulnerabilities on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. Syndemics combined with LCT highlights the intersecting and synergistic effects of place/environment, timing, timeline, and equity on health over the lifespan. Work-related injuries, illnesses, and fatalities across different sectors of Florida's pro-business economy exacerbate vulnerabilities and traumas, creating disability, and further inequalities in both the sending and receiving communities. The lack of effective workplace safety and health regulations perpetuate cycles of injury, illness, addiction, and precarity in both the United States and Mexico. These phenomena, combined with existing morbidities, fuel a binational disability syndemic that robs communities on both sides of the border of their economic, human, and social capital. Suggestions for different kinds of engagement and involvement by anthropologists and other social and health scientists are proposed, including discussions and examples of promising social movements attempting to hold Florida's food and agribusinesses accountable.

[Im/migration, Work, and Health: Anthropology and the Occupational Health of Labor Im/migrants](#)

Michael A. Flynn

[excerpt] This special issue of the Anthropology of Work Review, the first of its kind dedicated to the occupational health of im/migrant workers, reminds us of these common roots in social medicine and the potential that the intersection of im/migration, work, and health offers collaborative opportunities for anthropologists and occupational safety and health professionals and researchers. The articles herein demonstrate the value that anthropological theories (e.g., structural vulnerability), ethnographic methods (e.g., participant observation), and intersectional approaches (e.g., “studying?up”) add to our understanding of the ways everyday experiences are structured by individual positionality within broader socioeconomic processes. By rooting occupational injury in the social context and lived experiences of im/migrant workers, the authors account for complex social, political, and economic interactions that contribute to occupational health inequity for im/migrant workers. In so doing, they expand and complement the reductionist view of cause and effect by accounting for those interactions that contribute to occupational health inequity for im/migrant workers. The articles in this special issue suggest that the topic of occupational health is a powerful lens through which to understand the im/migrant experience and move us toward an anthropology of im/migration, work, and health.

AMA citation

Zogas A. Special Issue: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury. *Somatosphere*. 2019. Available at: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=15241>. Accessed January 21, 2019.

APA citation

Zogas, Anna. (2019). *Special Issue: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury*. Retrieved January 21, 2019, from Somatosphere Web site: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=15241>

Chicago citation

Zogas, Anna. 2019. Special Issue: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury. Somatosphere. <http://somatosphere.net/?p=15241> (accessed January 21, 2019).

Harvard citation

Zogas, A 2019, *Special Issue: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury*, Somatosphere. Retrieved January 21, 2019, from <<http://somatosphere.net/?p=15241>>

MLA citation

Zogas, Anna. "Special Issue: Immigrant Workers, Structural Vulnerability, and Occupational Injury." 21 Jan. 2019. Somatosphere. Accessed 21 Jan. 2019.<<http://somatosphere.net/?p=15241>>