Clinical and Applied Sociology

Derrick Snow

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Reichard

**Assignment #3 – Essay**

1. Write a 5-page essay addressing the following:

a. Create a hypothetical project for applied sociology (descriptive problem identification/diagnosis) based on a problem within an organization you either work for/with or with which you are familiar.

b. Extending this project might include a “clinical” intervention to lead to social change. What might the intervention look like, and how would it be implemented?

c. Evaluate ethical considerations for the above two scenarios.

d. Propose means by which the project outcomes could be evaluated or measured for effectiveness.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Introduction**

Heat-related illnesses are a significant health issue for seasonal and migrant farmworkers (Hyland et al., 2024), which could be reduced using cooling shade trailers that are designed and built by community high school vocational agriculture/Future Farmers of America (FFA) programs and purchased by farmers at FFA community auctions. Even though U.S. agriculture has tremendous technological advances, much farm work requires human farm labor, mainly from seasonal and migrant farmworkers. One area of agricultural technological investment that seems to lag behind is in farmworker support, in particular from heat-related illness. As temperatures increase during the farm work summer months due to climate change, it is even more critical that agriculture technology also includes support for farmworkers in cooling technologies; OSHA recommends prioritizing rest in shaded areas (Watson et al., (2019). The agricultural technology product that would be most beneficial could be developed and supported within the local agricultural community with cooling shade trailers.

**Application of Clinical Sociology**

Sociological study is informative in many ways, as it provides a way of uncovering the social dynamics of the social world. This allows for a vision of social dysfunctions, often written in academic sociological journals but rarely acted upon by sociologists. One feature of sociological inquiry that the academicizing of sociology has overlooked is the usefulness of sociological insight on social action by way of clinical sociological intervention. This has not always been the case, and there has been a resurgent of public sociology, applied sociology, and clinical sociology, which provides people with a stake in the social world to make positive social change (Agger, 2007). These areas of sociology are more applicable to society, mainly for a non-academic audience; public sociology is for the people, and so-called “professional” sociology is for academics, which is inaccessible to the larger public (Burawoy, 2021).

Using sociological research and theory to solve real-world problems should be the task of sociology at large, even professional sociology; nevertheless, it is sociologists who are educated in sociology that take sociology outside the walls of academia that could assist in bringing sociological research and theory to everyday life in bringing the understanding of the larger social context to social issues so that the unintended consciences are reduced (Thompson, 2018) in implantation of social solutions. A clinical sociologist identifies the task of applied and clinical sociology as such.

“Applied sociology is the application of sociological research to assist with social problem identification and diagnosis; clinical sociology is the implementation and evaluation of interventions for groups, organizations, and communities using sociological theories and methods. In both cases, the aim is to translate sociological theories into practice for nonacademic audiences.” (Reichard, 2023, p.369)

This means that sociology can be used to help solve issues in people's everyday lives, such as the heat-related illnesses of seasonal and migrant farmworkers. Where sociology is by nature interdisciplinary through the incorporation of sociological research, theory, and application into the larger social, economic, cultural, and environmental context to have a greater understanding of social issues (Nursinah et al., 2023), (Urry, 2011) and to be able to propose and implement solutions. Thus, in seeing heat-related injuries to seasonal and migrant farmworkers as a social, economic, cultural, environmental, and health issue through the sociological perspective, a proposed community solution and implementation are presented to help reduce the increasing danger of heat-related illness to seasonal and migrant farmworkers.

**Heat-Related Illness of Seasonal and Migrant Farmworkers**

Heat-related illnesses are among the top health issues of seasonal and migrant farmworkers in the U.S. due to the heat that they work in, the lack of cooling breaks and the physical exertion of outdoor work, and minimal water intake (Castillo et al., 2021), (Hyland et al., 2024) (due to the lack of cool water throughout the day, and undesirable trips to use the ‘heated’ portable restrooms (porta-potties)). The increasing temperature caused by climate change “exacerbates agricultural-related issues of heat exposure” (Castillo et al., 2021, p. 266). Farmworkers are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Hyland et al., 2024), (Langer et al., 2023). Thus, many recommendations, such as focusing on hydration, lightweight clothing, more frequent rest periods, and health education (Castillo et al., 2021), can only go so far.

The issue is that the temperatures are hot, thus putting heat stress on the workers, where there is a positive association between dehydration and work rate due to more significant fluid loss from sweating (Langer et al., 2023) and as cold drinking water in the morning becomes warm drinking water throughout the day, resting in the heat or small natural shaded areas and using porta-potties (if available (Curl et al., 2020) that are hotter inside than outside in the heat these do not bring down the body heat of the workers, “Participants consistently reported that the frequency and duration of breaks were insufficient to help them cool down.” (Hyland et al., 2024, p. 2), thus maintaining the likelihood they would prone to heat-related illness. In addition to these, individual-focused behavioral changes on reducing heat-related illness there are the structural barriers farmworkers face (Hyland et al., 2024) that also need to be addressed. In addition to the agricultural work and economic structures, season and migrant farmworkers work and live in rural areas with fewer resources, limited access to healthcare and insurance, and occupational health and safety risks (Curl et al., 2020).

**Shade Trailers**

Shade trailers are designed to be trailers pulled by a farm crew vehicle and parked on the side of the field with a sitting area and a shade cover, figure 1. There is a lack of available information on the frequency of use and history of shade trailers. The agricultural use of shade trailers originated in what could be derived from the early to mid-2000s in California, and it is unknown how many are being used throughout the U.S. However, what has been observed is that the use of shade trailers where farmworkers are working is very few and, in many areas, uncommon.

Figure 1



There may be several reasons for this, and further research needs to be done to identify the frequency and reasons not in use. However, there may be three main factors: 1) not widely accepted as needed, 2) the cost, and 3) the inability to provide an efficient cooling spot. The current design for shade trailers seems to lack the needed components to make it a cooling rest space. The current design is simple and lightweight, which is good, but when placed near a sunny field, it becomes an artificial shade area with very little relief from the sun and heat, an ineffective cooling space.

**Community Developed and Community Utilized Cooling Shade Trailers as a Community Solution for Community farmworkers**

Given the dynamics of increased summer temperatures due to climate change and the fact that the suggested individual protections are not enough due to the workers not being able to cool down enough to reduce heat-related illness using current strategies, the clinical sociological intervention proposed is a rethinking of the design and development of shade trailers as well as rethinking the promotion and distribution process to support the work and health of farmworkers. This rethinking could be done at the agricultural community level with the involvement of seasonal and migrant workers and represented organizations, community vocational agriculture, FFA programs, and farmers.

The proposal would be for the sociologist to connect with the community partners, gather information on what would help support the health of seasonal migrant workers and research the number of heat-related illness in the community and the utilization of shade structures. Then reach out to the vocational agriculture programs in the community, present the information, and see their interest in progressing the project. The idea is for them to see the need and desire to be part of the solution by way of promoting the idea of farmworker health and the creativity of designing, developing, and building these cooling shade trailers to be auctioned off at FFA auctions or purchased through the vocational agriculture programs by community farmers and then used in the fields by the farmworkers.

The concept of cooling shade trailers would be to design them with not only the structure of a shaded rest area but also bring about cooling features such as internal fans, mist spray, refrigerated space for cold water, etc., perhaps solar-powered and may include an attachment for a way to cool the inside of the portable restroom. The vocational agriculture students would need to visit farmers and seasonal/migrant farmworkers to get ideas on designing cooling shade trailers that would work in the practical farm environment. This would help the students with ag machinery experience and provide community collaboration experience as well. It would help farmers support their farmworkers' well-being and help support seasonal and migrant farmworkers.

**Ethical and Legal Considerations**

Given the high rate of heat-related illness among farmworkers and the increased risk due to the impacts of climate change, finding more effective ways to protect farmworkers from heat-related illness is ethically the right thing to do. However, caution must be taken to design and construct cooling shade trailers that would effectively provide a cooling space for farmworkers without causing unintended harm (physical or financial) to the farmworkers or the farmers. The primary concerns would be legal considerations with patents and ensuring quality products are delivered. More research would need to be done regarding the patents to ensure that vocational agriculture programs could build cooling shade trailers. An inspection protocol would need to be established to ensure the safety of the cooling shade trailers.

**Evaluation for Effectiveness**

To evaluate the program for effectiveness, one would need to measure heat-related illness within the communities before and after implementation, as well as the current and future shade trailer use within the communities, to see if there are correlations and significant reductions in heat-related illness. Farmworkers, farmers, and vocational agricultural programs would need to be surveyed to measure the utilization of cooling shade trailers and field surveys would be needed to observe the use and functioning of the cooling shade trailers in the farm fields.

**Conclusion**

As long as human farmworkers are laboring in the field during the summer growing season, agriculture technology should also support the farmworkers and their work environment. As heat-related illnesses are already a known major health issue to seasonal and migrant farmworkers and will increasingly worsen due to increasing climate change temperatures, more must be done to protect seasonal and migrant farmworkers from heat-related illnesses. As it is difficult to cool the body temperature down in the farm fields in the hot summers, a community agriculture technology of cooling shade trailers could significantly improve farmworkers' lives and productivity. Cooling shade trailers designed and built by the high school community vocational agriculture programs to support their local agriculture industry, farmers, and farmworkers would benefit the community at large using this clinical sociological intervention of community-developed cooling shade trailers for seasonal and migrant farmworkers.

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