The changing status of Syrian women migrant farm workers: from seasonal worker to refugee and worker

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1. Background
Research has shown that many women agricultural workers are marginalized in the workforce—i.e. in terms of employment, work hours, pay rate, contract type (Habib et al., 2014). Women engage in many of the same tasks as men workers, and suffer many of the same health consequences, yet much of the existing literature on farm workers has made invisible the work- and life-related wellbeing needs of women workers. Also absent from the occupational health literature on farm workers are discussions of conflict settings, in general, and the experiences of refugee workers, more specifically.

Lebanon's migrant farmer workforce includes many Syrian women refugees, who currently hold intersecting identities as migrants, women, farm workers and refugees. Understanding the interplay between work, gender and health for these populations requires our understanding of the intricate dynamics of occupational setting and practices with these women farm workers' legal frameworks and access, their access to resources and services, and the social and political context that their lives are embedded in. A legal reality affecting this population is that the Lebanese government has not signed the UNHCR Refugee Convention of 1951, which would legally grant Syrian refugees basic rights and protections under the law, including national labor legislation (UNCHR, 2014). While Lebanon has signed several other international treaties that guarantee some protections for refugees, these are "rarely observed by the courts, and there is no domestic legislation or administrative practice to address the specific needs of refugees and asylum-seekers" (UNCHR, 2014). This has helped foster de facto discrimination and prejudice against Syrian refugees in the country.

These facts are significant for Syrian women refugee farm workers for a number of reasons: as workers, their ability to advocate for fair pay and workplace protections are compromised by a lack of legal frameworks. Moreover, refugee women's limited access to women's health services (and other preventive care) are likely to impact their basic health, and, therefore, their ability to participate in the labor force. There have also been vocal concerns by social workers about gender-based violence against Syrian refugee women, including physical, verbal and sexual assault (Anani, 2013). These concerns should be acute for women farm workers among the refugee population, as their work takes place in the isolation of fields.

2. Methods
This research will explore the intersectionality of Syrian refugee women farm workers in Lebanon's agricultural sector. The author will conduct a desk review, identifying academic and gray literature, as well as news items relevant to this population and the topic. Texts will be identified that engage issues related to Syrian refugees, Syrian women refugees, Syrian agricultural workers, refugee legal status, discrimination and prejudice against Syrian refugees, and other topics that may be explored over the course of this research. Data gathered from these sources will be synthesized into a comprehensive report on the work and health of Syrian refugee women farm workers.

3. Results
The results will report issues relating to workplace setting, hazards and exploitation, health outcomes, access to resources and social services, gender-based violence, discrimination and prejudice, and legal realities. The author will seek to highlight the interrelatedness of the information/experiences reported in these categories, demonstrating, for example, how workplace matters are shaped by discrimination and prejudice, and vice versa.
4. Discussion

Evaluation and discussion of the interrelated social, political, economic, work, and health factors are presented to begin uncovering the policies and interventions needed to address the wellbeing needs of this vulnerable population. This analysis will focus on the necessities of the Lebanese government and international agencies to play a more active role in developing legislative frameworks and economic and social policies that reach Syrian refugee women farm workers. Additionally, the author will propose a research and practice agenda that may aid civil society organizations working to improve the living and working conditions of this population.

Keywords: women, migrant, farm worker, refugee, health, wellbeing

References

