



# Migrant Justice Research in Crisis Times: Developing Reflexive, Ethical, and Responsive Pandemic Research with Immigrant Care Workers

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**ABSTRACT** *Community-based participatory research (CBPR) typically prioritizes community needs in the research process, attempting to link ethical and rigorous investigation with social action. However, balancing community needs and research goals can be challenging when working with marginalized communities in times of crisis. Strategies for engaging immigrant communities in CBPR is also underexplored in academic literature. This paper examines some of these challenges by focusing on a research project with immigrant homecare workers in Manitoba, Canada, who were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, yet largely excluded from government pandemic policy responses. The project aimed to explore these workers' experiences and to contribute to migrant justice organizing through the research process. In this article, we present three interrelated tensions in our shifting research process: reflexive navigation of our research team members' lived experiences and positionalities; community versus academic ethics; and timely responsiveness to shifting community priorities. We contribute to literature on CBPR with immigrant communities by articulating a reflexive migrant justice research approach amidst a crisis. This approach is developed through subversive relationship-building and intersectional solidarity with social justice community partners that disrupt dominant academic research processes.*

**KEYWORDS** immigrant workers; community-based participatory research; COVID-19 pandemic; intersectionality; migrant justice; homecare

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## **Introduction**

In 2021, the Government of Manitoba published an independently contracted report showing that, across Manitoba residents, racialized immigrants working in essential frontline jobs, such as homecare, were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Manitoba, 2021).<sup>1</sup> Immigrant homecare workers remained largely invisible during the pandemic, and were effectively excluded from provincial pandemic responses, such as Manitoba's Caregiver Wage Program and Paid Sick Leave Program (Nicholson et al., 2023). Community-based migrant justice organizing became the primary force supporting immigrant homecare workers and fighting for policy change to improve their work conditions. In Manitoba, this organizing is led by Migrant Manitoba (or Migrante). Predominantly comprised of Filipino immigrant workers, Migrante is a largely unfunded chapter of Migrant Canada and Migrant International and it is integrated into diverse transnational migrant justice movements through various coalitions and campaigns (Migrant Canada, n.d.). Migrant justice in this context is understood as diverse diasporic struggles that forge transnational immigrant-non-immigrant or "intersectional" solidarity (Tormos, 2017) for the rights, safety, freedom of movement, well-being, and collective access to citizenship or legal entitlements for immigrants wherever they live and work (Choudry & Smith, 2016; Gardner et al., 2021; Tungohan, 2023). These struggles range from strategic practices and negotiations, demands for justice, transnational caregiving, and critical hope for more just futures (Tungohan, 2023), and they characterize the migrant justice organizations, campaigns, and movements that inform our project ethics and principles.

In such struggles, community-engaged academic researchers can make key contributions to migrant justice organizing by conducting collaborative, timely, and rigorous data collection and analysis about immigrant workers' experiences and by developing subversive community-academic partnerships that press various governmental and non-governmental institutions for social and policy change. Yet such partnerships have a fraught history of academic opportunism and even exploitation (Adhikari et al., 2020; Alexander & Mohanty, 2010; Celedonia et al., 2021; Tungohan & Catungal, 2022), which has resulted in little positive impact on immigrant communities (Stasiulis et al., 2020). Moreover, the ethics of conducting community-based participatory research (CBPR) with immigrant communities is underexplored in existing literature. In this paper, we contribute to the literature on CBPR with immigrant communities by exploring the processes and ethical considerations necessary for conducting research for migrant justice during a crisis. We draw on a three-year project journal that documents weekly discussions about how our small CBPR team – Justice for Immigrant Home Care Workers in Manitoba –

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, we use the term "immigrant" to refer to anyone born outside Canada.

navigated the challenges and tensions related to developing a migrant justice research agenda with Migrante and immigrant care workers during the crisis conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After reviewing academic arguments about community-based research ethics and processes in research with marginalized and immigrant communities, we describe our research context, as well as the conceptual and methodological frameworks and processes that informed our research. In our analysis, we delineate the central challenges we encountered and the strategies we developed to address them. We articulate three key tensions in our development of a migrant justice approach amidst crisis: reflexive navigation of our research team members' lived experiences and positionalities; forging an ethics of care in research relations; and timely responsiveness to shifting community priorities. Our final section reflects on these strategies, noting the messiness of our approach and the limitations of the research. We argue that a migrant justice research approach must carefully attend to key tensions and challenges through subversive relationship-building and intersectional solidarity (Tormos, 2017), particularly in crisis times.

### **The Challenge of Community-based Participatory Research**

While community-engaged research such as CBPR has a rich history of contributing to progressive community-driven social justice struggles (Mata-Codesal et al., 2020; Su et al., 2018), the harms of these research endeavors are also well documented. For example, just recently, researchers have noted that community-academic partnerships can be exploitive when community organizations that help with recruitment are not compensated for their time or involvement, when people living in poverty are coerced into participation (LeBlanc Haley & Pin, 2022), or when research findings are not made accessible or translated into much-needed action (Schroeder et al., 2019). Consequently, researchers have argued that community-engaged research should challenge the academic status quo, or what Alexander and Mohanty (2010) call academe's implicit "cartographic rules" that delineate boundaries between the university and "the community." These rules position academic researchers as superior knowers and marginalize community (or non-academic organizers' and workers') knowledge as inferior and in need of correction. CBPR can blur or challenge these cartographic rules by centring non-academic knowledge and weaving together academic theory and activism in ways that can contribute to widespread social change (O'Flynn & Panayiotopoulos, 2015). This research is also typically uncharted, involving messy (Rice et al., 2019; Thomas-Hughes, 2018) and sometimes risky (Francisco-Menchavez & Tungohan, 2020; Thulien et al., 2022) trials and errors (Oliveira & Vearey, 2020), and the protracted formation of new research relations (Hande et al., 2024).

Our migrant justice research project is a case in point. Reflections on CBPR projects with immigrant care worker organizations are surprisingly uncommon. The relatively small literature on CBPR projects in migration studies (see Mata-Codesal et al., 2020, for a special issue overview) highlights the need to position immigrants as knowledge producers (Arias Cubas, 2020) who can meaningfully co-determine research agendas by renegotiating what is conceptualized as theory and methodology (Ozkul, 2020), and by ensuring that methods are mobile enough to attend to the embodied and sometimes rapidly changing transnational trajectories of immigrant lives (Sotkasiira et al., 2020). Aaron Malone (2020) argues that academic partnerships with well-developed migrant organizations enable more equitable research partnerships. Such partnerships often entail reflexive, protracted, non-linear methodologies that might challenge neoliberal research standards and practices characterized by competitive, individualistic research extraction from non-academic participants (Francisco-Menchavez & Tungohan, 2020; Malone, 2020; Tungohan, 2023).

These challenges related to CBPR were further complicated by the pandemic. Federal pandemic-related guidelines required all researchers in Canada to conduct research virtually (online), except when in-person activities were essential and could not be delayed (IDRC-CRDI, 2024). These guidelines impacted the character of participatory research, which relies largely on close ties and collaboration between researchers and community-based participants (Valdez & Gubrium, 2020). Nevertheless, researchers have documented some benefits to these in-person-to-virtual shifts, such as the ability to reach spatially distant participants (Salma & Giri, 2021; Tungohan & Catungal, 2022), discuss emotionally or politically sensitive topics (Tungohan & Catungal, 2022; Valdez & Gubrium, 2020), and reduce the research burden on time-strapped participants.

Relationship-building in this virtual context, however, was challenging. Researchers with pre-existing connections to participant communities fared much better when shifting to a virtual research context (Duker, 2021; Hall et al., 2021). Moreover, relying heavily on virtual research platforms excluded those participants who lacked digital literacy and access to digital technology or broader social networks. Those who were excluded also tended to be most impacted by the pandemic (Salma & Giri, 2021). Finally, while virtual platforms might better enable participants to discuss emotionally and politically fraught topics in the comfort of their private homes, researchers also struggled to provide emotional support to participants through virtual platforms (Hall et al., 2021; Salma & Giri, 2021). Such tensions raise questions about the ethical concerns around conducting virtual qualitative interviews with marginalized people during a period of crisis and highlight the need for “thoughtful, reflexive, and deliberative approaches” (Newman et al., 2021, p. 8) to mitigate these risks and enhance direct research outcomes for marginalized research participants (see also Tungohan & Catungal, 2022). Hall

et al. (2021) argue that, in times of crisis, research should be relationship- rather than task-oriented and must seriously question whether data collection is necessary with communities that are overburdened and distressed.

In our project, we struggled to develop a migrant justice research approach that could prioritize transnational solidarity and the rights, wellbeing, and collective liberation of immigrant workers during a period of acute crisis. This goal pushed us to name and attend to academia's implicit cartographic rules that thwart migrant justice in research, and to forge new research relations that subvert these rules. Intersectionality frameworks (Crenshaw, 1994, p. 94; Rice et al., 2019; Tormos, 2017) informed our team-building process, data collection methods, analysis, and commitments. These frameworks draw on Black working-class feminist critiques of interlocking systems of domination – such as cis-heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and racial capitalism – to reveal opportunities for resistance, agency, and even solidarity across diverse (and dynamic) social locations to challenge oppressive systems. In the following section, we outline our specific research context and describe the process we used to iteratively and reflexively form migrant justice research relationships with Migrante.

### **Research Context and Methodology**

Our project was conceptualized with our community partner Migrante Manitoba prior to the pandemic. Migrante's case work, social justice organizing, and advocacy work had largely focused on men-identified immigrant workers employed in Manitoba's agricultural, meat processing, and trucking industries. While women-identified homecare (also known as domestic) workers have a long history of advocacy and organizing in Manitoba, their advocacy and organization has dissipated over the last 15 years. So, Migrante had an interest in developing an analysis of the challenges facing these immigrant care workers. Homecare workers were identified as particularly vulnerable and thus became the project's focus.

Manitoba's homecare system, which provides essential medical care and social supports to disabled people in community-based/non-residential settings, is among the most expansive and centralized in Canada (Marier, 2021), yet data on the experiences of the province's homecare workers remains scant. What research exists shows that a growing majority of these workers are immigrants and that their experiences are rarely scrutinized publicly (Nicholson et al., 2023). Moreover, these workers are generally at the bottom of the health sector pay scale and rarely making a living wage (Lightman, 2019), which is currently less than \$20 per hour in Manitoba (Harney et al., 2023). Cross-Canada research on homecare workers shows that their working conditions are often gruelling and insecure and involve many unpaid aspects, such as extensive on-call time, unpaid travel time, and pressure to provide extra work (Caregiver Action Centre et al., 2020). Work-based violence and social

isolation are common, particularly for those whose immigration status is contingent on their work contracts (Caregiver Action Centre et al., 2020). These challenges became much more visible during the pandemic. Provincial data in 2020 underscored the pandemic's disproportionate impact on immigrant communities in Manitoba, yet immigrant-specific provincial pandemic responses were never formalized (Geary, 2020; Nicholson et al., 2023). Instead, Migrante Manitoba scraped together emergency funding for their Kapit-Bisig Laban program (<https://kapitbisig.ca/about>), which provided food hampers, COVID-19 test kits, COVID-19 vaccine advocacy, personal protective equipment, and case support for approximately 1,000 migrant workers during the pandemic.

In this context, the research team recognized that our research agenda had to shift to support these mutual aid activities. Drawing on Migrante's migrant justice commitments to intersectional solidarity and enhancing the rights and well-being of immigrants, we set out to develop an approach that would (a) document the experiences and working conditions of Manitoba-based immigrant homecare workers caring for older people during the pandemic; (b) review relevant policy, legislation, and organizational contexts of immigrant homecare workers and their shifting nature during the pandemic; and (c) share this research in accessible formats that might enhance Migrante's mutual aid work and broader community organizing and advocacy. In what follows, we summarize how we worked towards these research goals through a reflexive, shifting methodology.

Relying heavily on Migrante Manitoba for recruitment, we collected data through: (a) semi-structured qualitative interviews with 18 immigrants with varying immigration statuses who provided direct care services for people over 65 in a wide variety of different homecare contexts; (b) semi-structured qualitative interviews with seven community leaders (CLs) who were purposefully selected based on their experience of organizing, leading, or supporting immigrant workers in Manitoba; (c) an online anonymous structured survey of 15 immigrant settlement workers; and (d) a review of the historical, organizational, and policy landscape shaping the experiences of immigrant homecare workers in the province.

Following REB approval at Mount Saint Vincent University, participants were recruited through Migrante members' existing networks with immigrant workers in Manitoba, word of mouth, and ads on social media. Recruitment materials were translated from English into Tagalog and Spanish, and modified several times based on community feedback (see analysis below). Susan Rodriguez, a Tagalog-speaking research team member, translated between English and Tagalog in four worker interviews.

Research participants were selected, in part, based on their lived experience of racialization and immigration in relation to Canadian immigration systems, immigrant settlement processes, and frontline care work. Workers participated in semi-structured interviews led by one or two members of the research team.

Our interview guide covered topics related to their entry points into the homecare sector, education and training, scope of duties, reflections on safety, violence, and harassment in their work, comparisons between different homecare jobs, relationships with care receivers and employers, and their goals for their future. CLs were identified in consultation with Migrante Manitoba. All interviews were conducted online, to comply with previously mentioned pandemic restrictions, and efforts were made to enable participants' choices in this online environment. For example, audio-recording and videoconferencing were optional, and CLs had the option of rejecting anonymity. One grassroots organizer asked to remain anonymous, and one NGO worker asked us to anonymize portions of her responses that did not reflect the views of the organization. Interviews with workers were strictly confidential and every worker was assigned a pseudonym.

The research team created various materials to support workers after the interviews were complete. These materials included income support factsheets developed by the research team and a digital, cloud-based community resource guide with information on pandemic-related income supports, food, and other services, as well as other more general services around Manitoba. These materials aimed to address potential distress caused through the interview process, and support participants and their networks who were struggling during the pandemic. Workers were given grocery gift cards worth \$40 each as an honorarium for participating. They were reminded that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without losing the honorarium.

To contextualize this primary data, we analyzed historical records, government statistics, and policies related to immigrant workers in Manitoba. In keeping with our CBPR approach, the scope and focus of this analysis was guided by input from Migrante Manitoba through three focused meetings and weekly research discussions, at which at least one Migrante Manitoba member was present to provide feedback on data collection and analysis. We attempted to implement a responsive, iterative approach (Reyes et al., 2021) to analysis that attended to the volatility of the pandemic and enabled us to nimbly respond to the shifting priorities of our community partner.

Our shifting methodology was documented throughout the research process in a cloud-based project journal over three years of active research. During this time, we met weekly as a team to discuss progress and challenges. To further hone and clarify our migrant justice approach, we presented our methodological reflections at two academic conferences (Hande & Yavuz, 2021; Hande et al., 2023) and a critical methodology workshop co-organized with academics working with similar or the same communities (Hande & Yavuz, 2022). Following writing guidelines that were agreed on as a team, this manuscript was co-written by Mary Jean Hande (Principal Investigator) and Mehmet Yavuz (Project Coordinator) and discussed extensively with Susan Rodriguez (Community Researcher) in team meetings. We shared multiple versions of the manuscript with Migrante Manitoba members so that they could provide verbal feedback on the accuracy of our empirical analysis.

Forging intersectional solidarity (Tormos, 2017) and subversive relations in our research team were critical pillars of our migrant justice approach, which we achieved by intentionally building solidarity across diverse immigrant-non-immigrant research team members and strategically prioritizing Migrante's migrant justice goals in our research agenda, despite institutional pressures to prioritize academic outputs and normative research processes. Here we discuss how we aimed to address power inequities, centre migrant experiences, and respond to the priorities of Migrante Manitoba by consciously untangling the ways in which race, class, sexuality, disability, gender, religion, ethnicity, and immigration status structured our research team and our collaboration with Migrante Manitoba. The project team comprised the Principal Investigator (PI), a Community Partner, a Project Coordinator, two Community Engaged Researchers, and a Research Assistant, who collectively drew on many decades of lived experience in homecare work, research, and migrant justice organizing. The PI, Mary Jean Hande, is a white settler cis-gendered woman, former homecare worker, Migrante Manitoba member, and academic. "The community partner representative, Diwa Marcelino, is a working class, Filipino cis-gendered man who was born in the Philippines and is well-known for his migrant justice organizing with Migrante and other organizations. Also representing Migrante, Susan Rodriguez, a cis-gendered Filipino immigrant woman, joined the project as a community engaged researcher. She contributed her extensive experience as a homecare worker, newcomer support worker, and leader in various women's and domestic worker organizations. Rodriguez played an integral role in supporting the project's participant recruitment, interviews, and community engagement activities. The project coordinator, Mehmet Yavuz, is a queer immigrant of colour and a doctoral candidate in Manitoba who has over six years of experience in social services. As a racialized researcher, he was able to facilitate engaged discussions with the workers regarding immigrant experiences of racism. Leah Nicholson, a cis-gendered white settler woman, joined the project later as a Research Assistant based on her undergraduate research experience in immigration and care policy and her professional background working in Canada's immigration settlement sector. In the final months of the project, nelli agbulos – a Canadian-born, second-generation Filipino cis-gendered woman and Migrante-affiliated migrant justice organizer – joined the project to facilitate non-academic knowledge translation activities.

Relationships between Hande, Marcelino, and Rodriguez pre-existed and transcended the research project because Hande joined Migrante Manitoba as a member more than a year before the project received funding. These relations helped to anchor the project in community and provided a foundation for trust and shared decision-making. Migrante's extensive history of working with academic researchers and well-developed decision-making and organizational structure amplified their capacity to articulate clear community goals for collaboration and to navigate assertively and productively challenges that arose

in the research process. Other researchers have emphasized that working with a well-developed organization like Migrante is critical for leveling inevitable power differences in immigrant-oriented participatory research teams (Malone, 2020). This reflexivity was the foundation for the shifting, iterative, and often messy process of navigating challenges through our migrant justice research approach. Migrante Manitoba indicated a need for our research to be timely and readily accessible, as well as tangibly supportive (rather than straining) of their community organizing and community service initiatives with immigrant workers. In the next section we reflect further on how we navigated challenges, highlighting concrete examples of how we negotiated new strategies for supporting migrant justice relations during this volatile time.

### **Navigating Challenges through Reflexive Community-responsive Research**

As we mention above, the pandemic ushered in new research ethics policies. For example, federal research policies were modified to protect researchers and participants by limiting COVID-19 exposures and infections. Yet these new guidelines did not necessarily address the potential harms of continuing research with communities that were experiencing crisis during the pandemic. Here we outline three central challenges we encountered as we determined how to ethically continue research with a strained community organization during such a fraught time. First, unsurprisingly, online-only research activities challenged relationship-building and rapport. Pre-pandemic, we had planned numerous in-person research team meetings and interviews. Based on previous research with immigrant homecare workers in Manitoba (Kelly et al., 2021), in-person contact was deemed crucial for fostering trust and a sense of safety for workers who are isolated and have few, or relatively weak, pre-existing relationships with community partners or other research team members. Early research findings also revealed that workers' experiences of isolation from other workers and their families deepened during the pandemic, as did their sense of invisibility, often due to their effective exclusion from government pandemic responses and the private, "behind-closed-doors" nature of their work (Nicholson et al., 2023). Traditional qualitative research methods, specifically the one-on-one semi-structured interview, seemed to exacerbate these feelings rather than ameliorate them.

Given this context, it was not hard to appreciate workers' hesitation to participate in one-on-one interviews that offered little tangible or immediate benefit to workers. Despite our attempts to reassure workers that interviews were strictly voluntary, confidential, and anonymous, the research process was not initially inviting. Rodriguez, one of our community researchers, had many conversations with workers about their reluctance to participate. Participants confided to her that they experienced interviews during such a time as reminiscent of immigration surveillance. They may also have surmised by the

surname Hande that Mary Jean was not an immigrant or racialized person, which no doubt was a further deterrent. Thus, we modified our methods, research team composition, and recruitment language to better reach and assure workers. Reflexive and intersectional team building (described in detail above), which prioritized shared experiences of racism and xenophobia, became integral to our research relations with participants (Yavuz & Hande, 2023). Additionally, we leveraged telecommunications and virtual research platforms (i.e., conducted interviews by phone or via videoconferencing) to reach workers who were geographically isolated or confined to their clients' or employers' homes during the pandemic. We also pivoted to increasing the points of contact with each participant through various following-up communications about project- and Migrante-related advocacy efforts, which we discuss in the "Prioritizing Responsive Research" section below.

Second, the pandemic unevenly impacted our community partner and community researchers. While most research team members contracted COVID-19 and were required to engage in family caregiving, immigrant community researchers had the added stress of directly supporting family and community members in severe crisis, as well as grieving and navigating job precarity, burnout, or other forms of distress related to the pandemic. These circumstances limited immigrant team members' capacity to engage in research in ways that shifted depending on power dynamics and intersecting positionalities. For example, team members engaged primarily or exclusively in online academic work were relatively insulated from the COVID-19 virus and its effects, whereas community team members, Rodriguez in particular, were pulled in many directions, navigating family death, separation, and caregiving, as well as working in casual, public-facing, and high-risk jobs that were excluded from most governmental pandemic support programs. A significant shift in the project was our decision to pause worker recruitment so that Rodriguez could attend to pandemic-related family and health priorities. During this time, Migrante's capacity to engage in planned research activities was also severely restricted because they were overburdened with supporting immigrant workers and communities in crisis. We determined that research activities must pivot to support Migrante's advocacy and mutual aid work. These shifts gave us time to reflect on the ethics of our recruitment and to decide to interview community leaders who were less vulnerable and able to document the vital work of activists and organizers who were supporting workers during the pandemic.

The sheer volatility of the pandemic and the magnitude of crises that affected immigrant worker communities also prompted us to shift our planned outputs to ensure that community needs were prioritized. Our research project was just one of many partnerships Migrante Manitoba was involved in during the pandemic, and their focus was much broader than that of immigrant homecare workers. Thus, it was necessary for us to broaden our advocacy efforts to immigrant workers more generally, rather than just immigrant care workers.

Despite these challenges, we believe the community-responsive migrant justice research approach we employed enhanced the community impact of our research and deepened our commitment to subversive relationship-building. In what follows, we discuss some of the concrete strategies we developed that achieved these ends.

### *Forging an Ethics of Care in Research Relations*

We strengthened our community relations through the intersectional team building described above, as well as implementing weekly, rather than monthly check-ins as originally planned. While this degree of reflexivity may be discouraged as a messy drain on time and resources (Francisco-Menchavez & Tungohan, 2020), it strengthened both the ethics and pragmatic responsiveness of our research process. Given the hesitancy of research participants to join the project and the significant challenges they encountered during the pandemic, it is hard to imagine how the research would have been possible without reflexive attention to these shifting and intersecting positionalities and relationships. These meetings were critical for debriefing and discussing our recruitment strategies, ongoing and upcoming interviews, and feedback from workers and community partners. Moreover, scheduling this extra virtual meeting time enabled us to practice an ethics of care in our research team (Tungohan & Catungal, 2022); it was an opportunity to get to know each other better and talk through various pandemic-related personal and organizational challenges in ways that shifted dominant research relations by prioritizing relationships over academic outputs and timelines.

To forge migrant justice research alliances, we also expanded our collaborations with other research and community organizations who were navigating similar ethical challenges. In collaboration with other Migrant-affiliated academic researchers, we aimed to support and honour direct care workers across North America through a worker-oriented video (Tungohan et al., 2021a) and webinar (Tungohan et al., 2021b) to discuss the “common struggles and solidarities” among immigrant care workers in North America. The video was shared with all research participants, and workers were invited to participate in the webinar. We also worked with the Filipino Domestic Workers Association of Manitoba to help facilitate a workers’ social event to address the isolation immigrant homecare workers repeatedly mentioned in interviews.

### *Prioritizing Responsive Research*

As we contemplated ethical ways forward, we learned very quickly that the workers we were speaking with urgently needed basic things like food, income supports, emotional support, personal protective equipment, access to basic

healthcare, paid sick leave, and practical information about vaccines. We aimed to develop nimble and responsive research methods that enabled the systematic collection of data,<sup>2</sup> as well as practical and timely supports to Migrante and workers more generally. To do this, we helped to establish an ad hoc coalition that enabled us to coordinate timely research initiatives and outputs with other relevant organizations and academics that were not initially named in our research project. We used our research resources to document changing policies, timelines, and pandemic-related resources, not only so that we could contextualize our interview data within the volatile pandemic policy environment, but also provide timely feedback to community organizations about how pandemic policies were shifting over time. Given that we were restricted to online research activities, we used cloud-based platforms to share information and invite real-time collaboration with community partners.

These real-time contributions produced two factsheets that focused on vaccinations, workplace rights, and income entitlements and resources that immigrant care workers could access during the pandemic. They were distributed digitally through Migrante's social media accounts. They were also printed and distributed in hundreds of Migrante Manitoba food hampers that were delivered to workers around the province as part of the *Kapit-Bisig Laban* mutual aid program. Our cloud-based resource sheet was updated regularly and given to workers at events and after research interviews. As the project wrapped up, Migrante requested that our project report (see Nicholson et al., 2023) be translated into more worker-friendly materials that could be distributed at community organizing events. A project zine and pamphlet (see Figure 1 and <https://maryjeanhande.ca>) were developed and Migrante continues to use these printed materials in ongoing campaigns and initiatives.

These resources helped us support Migrante's community mobilizing and advocacy work, while also replacing the more traditional policy analysis and outputs that we had planned to conduct prior to the pandemic. Such activities also helped create a sense of collectivity in the research process, giving workers a sense that they were not alone and that other workers struggled with similar issues.

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<sup>2</sup> We use the term "nimble" to challenge, rather than reify, racialized and gendered notions of laboring bodies that can be exploited for their "nimble-fingered dexterity" (Mills, 2005, p. 117). It indicates a focus on responding swiftly and effectively to changing contexts and community needs during the pandemic.

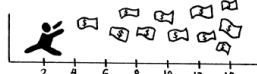
MIGRANTE Manitoba partnered with Mary Jean Hande at Trent University to learn about the working conditions of home care workers during COVID-19. We talked to 18 Manitoba-based immigrant home care workers and 7 community leaders who supported these workers' communities during the pandemic. Here is what they told us.

**ABOUT THE CARE WORKERS WE SPOKE TO**

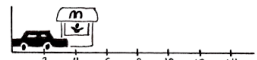


Of the 18 care workers we interviewed, 83% were women and 17% were men.

**14/18 NEED TO HAVE MORE THAN 1 JOB**



**5/18 HAVE JOBS IN OTHER SECTORS**



**PROBLEMS WITH WORK**



- Difficulties and delays in getting the vaccine
- Some forced to use their vacation time and/or sick day hours to get paid for their quarantine time. No pay while waiting for COVID test results
- Working longer hours (more than 40 hours a week) when other staff got sick
- Many did not know about or did not have access to paid sick leave

According to MIGRANTE Manitoba, almost all the workers they met continued sending money to the Philippines because their families' survival depended on it. Workers discussed eating just rice and/or eggs for long lengths of time.

**ISOLATION FROM FRIENDS & FAMILY**

Lawin is a 55 year old Filipina live-in caregiver who cared for an older couple with mild dementia at the beginning of the pandemic. The family she worked for did not allow her to leave the home or interact with anyone they did not already know, saying that it was a COVID risk.

She worked 12 hours a day for at least 6 days a weeks, because she said there was nothing else to do. She was promised a phone to keep in touch with family, but never received a phone account. She repeatedly said she felt like she was "going crazy with all these things." She was finally allowed to go to the doctor when she injured her foot on a rusty nail. She was diagnosed with hypertension and told to take some vitamins.

**LOSING OUT ON MANITOBA'S CAREGIVER WAGE SUPPORT PROGRAM**

From November 2020 to January 2021, the Manitoba government offered a \$5 wage top-up for care workers. But, home care workers were not eligible.

An additional \$5 per hour can (help) pay for



Based on a 40 hour work week, care workers who were not eligible for the Caregiver Wage Support Program missed out on approximately \$10,000.

While the prices of groceries rise, workers' wages remain stagnant. Some workers we spoke to have not seen a pay increase in the past 3 years.



For more information about the project, contact Mary Jean Hande at [mjhande@trentu.ca](mailto:mjhande@trentu.ca)

Figure 1. Project Pamphlet

**Reflections and Commitments for Future Migrant Justice Research**

While the pandemic presented challenges to our research team's initial approach – especially to our timeline and methods for recruiting and interviewing workers – it prompted us to develop a migrant justice approach that involved reflexive and sometimes subversive research policies, methods, and relations that enabled us to prioritize Migrante's migrant justice agenda. This approach had numerous advantages. It helped us to develop new possibilities to address community vulnerability during COVID-19 by centring the immediate needs and pace of our community partner. This approach also engaged community members as active partners in the research process, recognizing that they are experts in addressing the challenges they face in their daily lives. Such reflexivity around community-based (rather than institutional) ethical considerations also enabled us to challenge the temporality and sometimes basic logics of dominant research processes (Francisco-Menchavez & Tungohan, 2020; Su et al., 2018), such as slowing down or pausing traditional research activities and speeding up community responsiveness.

Working closely with a marginalized community during the pandemic added messiness to our research process and thwarted our initial research plans. Following the guidance of Thulien et al. (2022), we engaged this messiness as

generative and ultimately necessary for conducting ethical migrant justice research that could deepen migrant justice relations and support rather than strain Migrante's critical mutual aid work during this time. As mentioned, this messiness required prioritizing Migrante's commitments to the rights and wellbeing of immigrants in our pandemic research agenda. Forging intersectional solidarity and subversive relationship were necessary to prioritize this migrant justice agenda over traditional academic outputs and processes. Our best compass for navigating this messiness was honouring and prioritizing our ongoing and longstanding relationship with Migrante and their affiliated researchers, workers, and community organizations. Supporting these relationships through the research process helped foster a kind of intersectional solidarity across privileged researchers and immigrant communities to develop more appropriate research responses to communities in crisis. We made shifts in our research team, hired community researchers or people with lived experience, and, when possible, adjusted task allocation to mediate power differences and enhance workers' comfort and sense of connection with the project. Moreover, an emphasis on *subversive* relationship-building with Migrante held us accountable to their advocacy goals, which enabled us to stay closely attuned to community demands and priorities, guiding us to where researchers' efforts and resources were most needed.

These relationships also prompted us to learn about and draw on principles of immigrant-led community-based knowledge production in ways that might decolonize research while building coalitions and consciousness among migrant workers. These collectivizing methods challenge not only traditional research methods, like the one-on-one extractive interview, but also traditional ethics frameworks that prioritize individual anonymity. That such traditional and commonly used methods were alienating for many immigrant workers points to the historical legacy of Western research methods facilitating violent colonization and the pressing need for community-driven and decolonizing methodologies when conducting research with immigrant care workers.

The project was not without failures and limitations. For example, in following an intersectional approach, we had aimed to examine how non-normative sexual identities are navigated in homecare relationships. Yet we were unable to recruit any queer-identified workers to participate and thus we were unable to understand how queer sexual identities may have complicated or even intensified the various racialized and gendered forms of discrimination and harassment we uncovered in our interviews. Moreover, relationship-building and rapport with worker participants was generally strained, recruitment was challenging, academic project outputs were slow to develop, and research methods sometimes reproduced uneven power dynamics that could be disempowering for workers. We strove for an inclusive and participatory research environment, and noted examples of worker "self-exclusion" (Cornwall, 2008) from the research project because of negative past

experiences or concerns about wasting their limited time with a project that might result in minimal (if any) tangible benefits. Nevertheless, explicit and continual discussion and negotiation of these issues facilitated transformative learning, relationship-building, and trust with our community partner, ensuring that their concerns were heard and that we collectively developed ways to improve future research.

Such ethical considerations and negotiations of academic versus community priorities prompt questions around our responsibilities as researchers. We echo the insight articulated by Hall et al. (2021) that sometimes researchers' most ethical response during a crisis is to halt the research altogether. Yet academic researchers can play a powerful role for transformative change when they are closely connected to a community organization and accept the responsibility to work in alliance with and take direction from grassroots activists (Hawthorne-Steele et al., 2015; O'Flynn & Panayitopoulos, 2015). In the final reckoning, we needed to ensure that the research enriched more than detracted from community organizing efforts. While this determination is somewhat subjective, we are encouraged by community feedback that our collaborative research enabled the community (rather than specific individual participants) to build new transnational and local community relationships, provided much desired and needed data and contextual information to inform Migrante's mutual aid work, and contributed institutional legitimacy to Migrante's critical organizing during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic thrust migrant justice organizers and immigrant homecare workers into crisis. Without shifting gears in our research process and attending to these crisis conditions, continued research with these communities would not have been possible let alone ethical. In this research project, shifting research gears required recommitting to CBPR principles of relationship building and community leadership in research, as well as attending to tensions around the reflexivity, care ethics, and community responsiveness throughout the research process. By prioritizing relationship-building with our community partner and with research participants, as well as embracing messiness and failure in the research process, our research disrupted dominant academic research processes, timelines, and traditions. Such messiness, mistakes, slow academic outputs, and community responsiveness are rarely rewarded in academia, yet such research norms need to be challenged if truly just research is to be conducted with immigrant communities, especially in times of crisis.

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