

Waves of Change:
The Case of Rape in the Fields

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reporting

I. Introduction

For more than 30 years, The Center for Investigative Reporting has broken investigative stories that spark action, improve lives, and protect our democracy. During this time, CIR's award-winning editorial content, produced in-house for all platforms, together with innovative public engagement efforts, have had far reaching impact.

While in many cases impact has been easy to see, CIR – like many media organizations¹ – is increasingly interested in understanding, measuring, and analyzing nuanced impact that occurs over time. In early 2013, the American Council of Learned Societies presented CIR with a unique opportunity: create a position that would utilize the skills of a recent doctoral graduate in the humanities or social sciences to host an [ACLS Public Fellow](#). As CIR's Executive Director Robert J. Rosenthal tells it, the decision was unanimous: media impact analyst.

Because CIR is the only nonprofit investigative reporting organization to have a full-time media impact analyst, the possibilities were endless – and maybe a little daunting –when I started in July 2013.

I began by immersing myself in a multiplatform series that had broken on June 25, 2013, just two weeks before I arrived at CIR: [Rape in the Fields](#). A multiplatform collaborative project by The Center for Investigative Reporting, Univisión, Frontline, and the Investigative Reporting Program at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Rape in the Fields exposes the widespread sexual harassment of female laborers in the agricultural industry, many of whom are undocumented. The investigation includes a one-hour documentary film, multiple text pieces, radio segments and a graphic animation (most of which were produced in both Spanish and English). I read the stories and watched the documentary and I was shocked; I was horrified; and most of all, I was sad. Then I was outraged.

¹ Nonprofit news organizations like ProPublica and Chalkbeat, for-profit media like The New York Times and The Seattle Times, foundations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, among others, have all been struggling with how to measure and analyze media impact.

While I expected to hear a lot of talk about this story in the newsroom, most of the buzz was instead about CIR reporter Corey Johnson's July 7, 2013, story on [illegal sterilizations of female inmates in the California prison system](#), a powerful and damning piece for the **state** prison system. Of particular interest, this story was having impact: Media across the country were reporting on the investigation. Johnson was invited to give radio interviews, there were many editorials published nationally and internationally, and [California lawmakers responded](#) to the story immediately after it was published, calling for an investigation into the physicians involved and a federal prison overseer's handling of the matter.

I wondered why the response to Johnson's story – which initially ran only in California newspapers and on CIR's website – was so much louder and more immediate than the comparative whisper of a response to Rape in the Fields, which had debuted nationally on Univision and PBS FRONTLINE, as well as online and in local newspapers in California and Washington.

As a comparative political scientist, I assessed the situation as follows: The two cases shared a key similarity in that they revealed injustices committed against women in vulnerable communities. However, there were also important differences. Rape in the Fields was distributed to a national audience on multiple platforms, while the sterilization story was distributed only **to** California newspapers and websites. Yet, the sterilization story appeared to be creating more of a national public outcry. The vulnerable communities in the two investigations were also distinct; Rape in the Fields revealed injustices that occurred in a private sector industry against a largely Latina population, some of whom are not authorized to work in the U.S., while the sterilizations were being illegally performed on women for whom the state was responsible.

I reviewed data gathered by CIR's news clipping service, which verified that very few other media were reporting on Rape in the Fields. And then I had a bit of an "ah-ha" moment: Spanish. I Googled the Spanish title of the documentary, "*Violación de un Sueño*," and at the top of the results list was [El Diario](#), the largest and oldest Spanish-language newspaper in New York City and the oldest Spanish-language daily in the U.S. There was media pickup as well as outrage and a public conversation about the series, but that activity was occurring primarily in Spanish.

Over the course of the next few months, Bernice Yeung, CIR's reporter on Rape in the Fields, and the rest of the reporting team continued to follow the story. At my request, Yeung kept me informed of the emails and calls she received from lawyers, women's advocates, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission staffers, rape crisis centers and others asking for copies of the documentary so that they could hold community screenings and Q-and-A sessions with **Yeung**.

While the public debate about "Rape in the Fields" gained momentum, the conversation about the illegal sterilizations was occurring primarily among public officials who scheduled legislative hearings and prison officials who were scrutinizing a doctor whose practices were at the heart of the story. The juxtaposition of these two similar, yet different, cases presents a difficult question: What is the process of impact that begins with a story that exposes injustices committed against vulnerable, underrepresented, populations outside of the public eye?

By analyzing the case of Rape in the Fields, I hoped to better understand the complicated processes that have resulted in change during the past year in order to inform future decisions at CIR about distribution and public engagement on projects that share key characteristics.

II. Rape in the Fields

The story

Maricruz Ladino, an agricultural worker from California, has become the face of a phenomenon that, while persistent for generations, has only slowly begun to gain widespread public attention. Many women in the United States face violence, abuse and even rape while working in agricultural industries. Female laborers in fields, orchards, processing plants and canneries, often work in remote areas or isolated conditions. When Ladino courageously looked into the camera and told her story of being raped while working in the fields of Salinas, California, a hidden horror suddenly became public.

Since Rape in the Fields first broke in June 2013, on Univision in Spanish and on PBS FRONTLINE in English, as well as online, in newspapers and on radio programs, new conversations about how communities can address the problem of sexual harassment and rape in the agricultural industry have sprung up in public spaces across the country, especially in California. The documentary film

has been used as a tool both for disseminating information and for creating a space in which community members can share experiences normally kept behind closed doors. Through these conversations, community members are making connections, formulating new and innovative ideas, and exploring ways to address the problems highlighted in the film. This case study will consider Rape in the Fields and its role in the current processes of social, political and cultural changes.

Distribution

"Rape in the Fields," a collaboration of The Center for Investigative Reporting, Univisión, Frontline, and the Investigative Reporting Program at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, aired on PBS FRONTLINE in June 2013 to a combined audience of more than 3.3 million viewers. CIR reporter Yeung wrote an accompanying text [piece](#), which was published on CIR's website and in seven daily newspapers, many of which were in agricultural communities such as Modesto and Fresno, California. The text piece was also translated into Spanish and distributed through Univision's website. CIR produced an animation, "Hidden in the Harvest" / "*Escondida en la Cosecha*," in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#) illustrating the main points of the text piece. "The California Report," a daily public radio program produced by KQED, the San Francisco National Public Radio affiliate, featured a four-part related series by Central Valley Bureau Chief Sasha Khokha, in which she explored the lives of women agricultural workers in California's Central Valley. Radio Bilingue and "The Takeaway" also produced radio segments about the investigation.² CIR and PBS published multiple follow-up articles; these, too, ran in several daily newspapers. "Reveal," an investigative news program for national public radio produced by CIR and PRX, also featured Rape in the Fields on the show's second pilot in January 2014. The documentary aired a second time on Frontline in March 2014. Through all of these outlets, we estimate that Rape in the Fields reached an audience of more than 6 million people.

² Radio Bilingue, National Latino Public Radio Network, is the leading Latino public radio network and content producer for the nation's public broadcasting system. "The Takeaway" is a co-production of WNYC Radio and Public Radio International, in collaboration with New York Times Radio and WGBH Boston.

Intentional Distribution

- Full documentary: PBS FRONTLINE, Univision, CIR's website
- Full text: **cironline.org**, San Francisco Chronicle, The Seattle Times, The Fresno Bee, San Diego Union-Tribune, Monterey County Herald, Bakersfield Californian, NBCBayArea.com
- Television coverage: CNN, MSNBC, *Aquí y Ahora*, Al Punto with Jorge Ramos, *Premier Impacto*
- Radio coverage: "Reveal," "All Things Considered" (NPR), "The World" (PRI), "The Takeaway" (WNYC), "The California Report" (KQED), "Forum" (KQED), "AirTalk" with Larry Mantle (KPCC Southern California), "**The** Ronn Owens Program" (KGO), "*Hecho en California*" (KIQI)
- Full-length reviews: The New York Times, Elizabeth Jensen; The New York Times, Neil Genzlinger; Bloomberg Businessweek; USA Today; Latin BayArea; ABC/Univision; Latin Times; San Diego Union-Tribune; The Fresno Bee; The Huffington Post Latino Voices; El Diario New York
- Twitter: More than 100 tweets included the Spanish language title of the documentary and more than 150 tweets included "cironline.org" and "rape." There were approximately 7.75 million individuals exposed to these tweets.
- Facebook: More than 25,000 eyes on Rape in the Fields posts on June 25, 2013.

Solutions Summit

Through the reporting process, journalists create a network of sources that are stakeholders in the issue being investigated. These stakeholders often come from different sectors of a community, some holding positions in government, others who are community activists and still others who are victims of injustice. Many times, sources do not know each other.

In the case of "Rape in the Fields," Yeung and CIR Senior Editor Andrew Donohue realized that the investigation's sources – including government officials, advocates, growers and women affected by workplace violence – were interested in working toward a solution to the problems presented in the documentary, but in most cases their efforts had been contained within their social and professional milieus.

To bring together key stakeholders concerned with violence against women working in agriculture, CIR organized a [Solutions Summit](#) in Sacramento,

California, in January 2014.³ The diverse group of participants included a survivor featured in the documentary, a sheriff's commander, victims' advocates from the district attorney's office in Monterey, farmworker attorneys, advocates for sexual abuse survivors, a retired New York State Supreme Court justice who is a part an innovative program in Florida,⁴ a legislative staffer, government attorneys who monitor workforce conditions and others.

Over the course of a day, the participants exchanged their unique experiences and perspectives in an off-the-record conversation, considered potential strategies for addressing the problem and formed working groups to continue their dialogue and problem-solving after the summit. In keeping with CIR's role as an information provider and to ensure the firewall between reporting and advocacy was not breached, Donohue facilitated the discussion of this off-the-record summit without advocating for any specific outcome or solution. Real world, on-the-ground engagement and community building through the Solutions Summit initiated new relationships among stakeholders, such as local law enforcement officials and women's advocates.

Public screenings

Rape in the Fields achieved broad reach through extensive and varied bilingual distribution partners and platforms. This reach was extended through more than 100 screenings of the documentary organized by communities, rather than by CIR. These screenings proved to be an essential component for the impact of the series and are discussed in greater detail below.

III. Outcomes

Media impact framework

³ The Solutions Summit was off-the-record to ensure that participants could openly share their experiences, opinions and ideas. For this reason, I do not specify the individuals who participated, nor the specific organizations or local communities represented. However, in interviews, individuals told me that they met others working in sexual harassment and violence prevention, resulting in new working relationships that have continued after the summit.

⁴ [The Fair Food](#) Program emerged from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' successful Campaign for Fair Food. The FFP is supported by a "penny per pound" increase paid by participating buyers for tomatoes grown by producers who are in compliance with the FFP Code of Conduct. The FFP also organizes worker-to-worker education sessions, has a worker-triggered complaint resolution mechanism (including a 24-hour hotline), a health and safety committee on every farm and ongoing auditing of farms to ensure compliance.

If there is one thing that seemingly all media organizations agree on, it is that impact is not any one thing. I define impact as a change in the status quo resulting from an intervention. Borrowing from the social sciences, I suggest that social, cultural and political change happen at three levels, each of which requires distinct methodologies for measurement and analysis.

First, change can be initiated at the top in the form of a new or changed law, regulation or court decision. **Macro** change often happens due to the power of media to hold public officials accountable.⁵

Second, **micro** change can occur at the level of the individual who, through exposure to media, has an increased level of knowledge or a change in attitude, opinion and/or behavior.

Finally, change happens at the level of society. **Meso** level changes are characterized by shifts in discourse, a reframing of an issue in the public debate or a change in public opinion.

These three types of outcomes are clearly related: An increased level of knowledge around an issue in a community at the individual level could result in an electorate that puts pressure on a public official, ultimately resulting in a new or changed law – a fundamental basis of social movement theory. Or, in a different example, local news outlets might pick up a national investigation, adopting its language and framing, thereby shifting the public debate around an issue, ultimately influencing both individuals' opinions and government policy.

Thus, the question is not *whether* different types of outcomes happen, but rather, *under what conditions do they happen?* We know that outcomes happen in a process over time to create impact. But what is more difficult to discern and measure are the ways in which they influence one another and how we, as a news organization, can leverage distribution and engagement strategies to ensure action is sparked and lives are improved as a result of the work that we produce.

Methodology

⁵ The realist school of thought in the social sciences considers the power of media to come from its ability to “name and shame” public officials, thereby forcing them to react in order to retain power vis-à-vis the support of their constituents.

To answer questions about impact's component mechanisms, it is necessary to have data – and especially qualitative data – that span time. CIR gathers qualitative data about what happens after an investigation breaks through our Outcome Tracker.

"CIR's Outcome Tracker" & "CIR in the news" applications

CIR's Outcome Tracker is an application built in our internal workflow content management system (CMS). Reporters – often the individuals who are most in the know with regard to the responses elicited by their investigations – use a Web form to catalogue the follow-up information that flows to them after a story breaks. In the case of Rape in the Fields, Yeung consistently entered all outcomes of which she was aware, including community screenings, contact made by district attorneys offices, requests for interviews, awards and more. I curated all entries in the database, assigning each a type (macro, meso or micro).

The second application, CIR in the news, is used to catalogue where CIR's content travels – both intentional distribution and organic pickup.⁶ CIR's Engagement and Distribution team is responsible for entering the content that it actively distributes. To capture organic pickup of our content, a news clipping service generates a daily email report with every media source (online, print, and TV and radio with closed captioning) that has cited "Center for Investigative Reporting." I then create entries for each relevant hit, tagging it with information such as the story it is citing, the date and the publication.

By April 2014, through our combined efforts, we had created a database of all offline outcomes (to our knowledge) associated with Rape in the Fields – nearly 100. However, this is still a small number of data points, requiring a deep dive into the data to make sense of it.⁷

⁶ I distinguish between intentional distribution – where CIR has actively placed our content and there are clear agreements with partners – and organic pickup – where a media outlet and/or advocacy organization has cited CIR's reporting or localized an investigation independent of outreach by CIR's Distribution and Engagement team.

⁷ A data set of 80 is quite small and not best analyzed using quantitative methods. Furthermore, because the qualitative data collected by CIR includes only that which arrived at the organization, rather than a complete set of the entire universe of outcomes associated with Rape in the Fields, these data cannot be assumed to be representative of the whole. Instead,

Interviews

In April 2014, I conducted 20 interviews. Respondents included individuals who were sources in “Rape in the Fields,” participated in the Solutions Summit, and/or had contacted Bernice Yeung to relay an outcome that appeared to result from the documentary or associated content. In each interview, I asked a series of questions, including questions about how the respondents had first learned of “Rape in the Fields,” where they had first seen it, what actions they had taken since first viewing the documentary, and whether they had encountered the story on another platform, such as the radio or in a local newspaper. I also asked about individuals’ opinions and perceptions of change that may have occurred since the airing of the documentary, and the value of the documentary in the community in which he or she lives and works.

Outcomes: Narrative

The trend in impact analysis has been to talk about analytics (numbers), or anecdotes (narrative). This section presents the outcomes recorded in CIR’s Outcome Tracker as a descriptive narrative.

1. Macro

On Aug. 7, 2013, six weeks after “Rape in the Fields” first aired, Cheryl Mabry-Thomas of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requested 50 copies of “Rape in the Fields” to use “as a training tool” for EEOC employees, as well as for trainings for state and local fair practice agencies and their investigators. The EEOC program analysts also plan to use excerpts from the documentary at events for advocate/employee groups.

In response to the lack of information regarding the prevalence of harassment and rape of female agricultural workers identified in “Rape in the Fields,” the National Institute on Occupational Safety and Health provided a grant to the University of Washington to carry out research in eastern Washington. The university cited Rape in the Fields in the grant application. This research is being used in the creation of a [public health campaign](#), including a *radionovela* on local radio stations in the Yakima Valley featuring a story line of a female agricultural worker who is sexually harassed by her boss and finds the strength

qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, are more appropriate for contextualizing the data and understanding the causal mechanisms at work.

to come forward and report the supervisor. After screening “Rape in the Fields” twice with students and community members, professors at the University of California, Davis, began the process of applying for funding for similar research.

In May 2014, the California Senate passed a bill that would revoke a farm labor contractor’s license if it hires a supervisor who has sexually harassed workers in the past three years, require more employee training on sexual harassment and add questions about sexual harassment regulations to the licensing exam that all labor contractors must take before they can operate in California. This piece of legislation is working its way through the California legislature as of July 2014.

2. Meso

As noted earlier, more than 100 screenings of the film have been held to date by: the California Department of Public Health; the U.S. Navy in Southern California; the Monterey County district attorney’s office; the Mexican Consulate in Fresno, California; California Rural Legal Assistance; the California Institute for Rural Studies; Líderes Campesinas; California Female Farmworkers’ Conference in Tulare, California; Policy Summit of National Latin@ Network in Washington, D.C.; Center for Employment Training in Salinas, California; Sacramento Press Club with Dolores Huerta; Oxfam America; National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UC Berkeley; Defensa Mujeres (now Monarch Services); and the ACLU of Southern California, among others.

A series of op-eds ran in The Seattle Times following the broadcast, noting that: “Rape in the Fields” is an extraordinary piece of journalism that sheds light on vulnerable women who are put in harm’s way by a willingness to do hard work to support themselves and their families.” There was also an op-ed in the widely read Zócalo Public Square that stated: “We need to change society’s view of farmworkers. Schoolchildren should learn about the contributions farmworkers make to our economy and society and the problems farmworkers face. An effective media campaign –funded by the agricultural industry and the government – should be launched that educates the public and humanizes farmworkers in the public eye. And while some news organizations – such as the Center for Investigative Reporting, Univision, and PBS/Frontline – have done commendable work on the sexual harassment of farmworker women, more needs to be reported.”

Many advocacy groups have shared CIR’s report (published in Spanish on Univision’s website) and “Hidden in the Harvest” animation. A sampling of these

groups includes the Women's Justice Center of Santa Rosa, California, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health and the Monterey County Rape Crisis. Other groups, such as California Rural Legal Assistance Inc., the California Institute for Rural Studies, Líderes Campesinas and numerous attorneys expressed their intention to use "Rape in the Fields" and/or "Hidden in the Harvest" as educational training tools.

On Aug. 9, 2013, California Rural Legal Assistance reported that it had experienced increased interest and questions regarding sexual harassment in rural communities. It further stated that it views the documentary "Rape in the Fields" as a great tool for making these challenges more visible, both in the media and among (potential) clients. A representative of the California Institute for Rural studies also lauded Rape in the Fields for bringing the sexual harassment of agricultural workers into the spotlight and hopes that there will be training sessions on farms regarding sexual harassment, saying, "I have been sharing your work a lot!"

On Aug. 13, 2013, an attorney in Iowa who represents immigrants and victims of crimes of violence asked permission to use the "Rape in the Fields" documentary as a teaching tool in upcoming conferences in Washington, D.C., and in Minnesota, as well as on her website so that "advocates across the nation can use it during their training of volunteers."

On Sept. 14, 2013, CIR reporter Yeung published an article titled, "A Problem of Evidence," on The Huffington Post, outlining the challenges of reporting on issues impacting vulnerable communities.

On Sept. 19, 2013, Univision was given a Leadership Award by Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, for its work as a leader against violence against women, as exemplified by "Rape in the Fields." Rosie Hidalgo, director of public policy of Casa de Esperanza, wrote to say that her organization showed a clip of "Rape in the Fields" at the awards reception on Capitol Hill in Washington. At this meeting, Hidalgo and Rep. Illeana Ros-Lehtinen were present, as well as Vivian Huelgo, head of the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence. Huelgo said she would propose screening "Rape in the Fields" at the ABA midyear meeting in Chicago, as well as a panel.

Rape in the Fields also was awarded the 2014 Alfred I. DuPont-**Columbia University** Award, an Edward R. Murrow Award for Audio Investigation, and the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Justice and Human Rights. In July 2014, “Rape in the Fields” was nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Journalism – Long Form.

After seeing “Rape in the Fields,” the executive director of Monarch Services (formerly Defensa **de** Mujeres), an advocacy organization for people who are victims of sexual assault or domestic violence in California’s Santa Cruz County, realized that by keeping normal business hours, agricultural workers were unable to take advantage of the services the organization provided. Monarch Services changed its hours to be open in the evenings when women could visit. The organization also began a new project, *Campos Seguros*, persuading growers to allow their staff to speak with workers in the fields to train them on how to spot and report abuse. After the airing of the documentary, Monarch Services reached more than 2,000 workers through this innovative program in the second half of 2013.

3. Micro

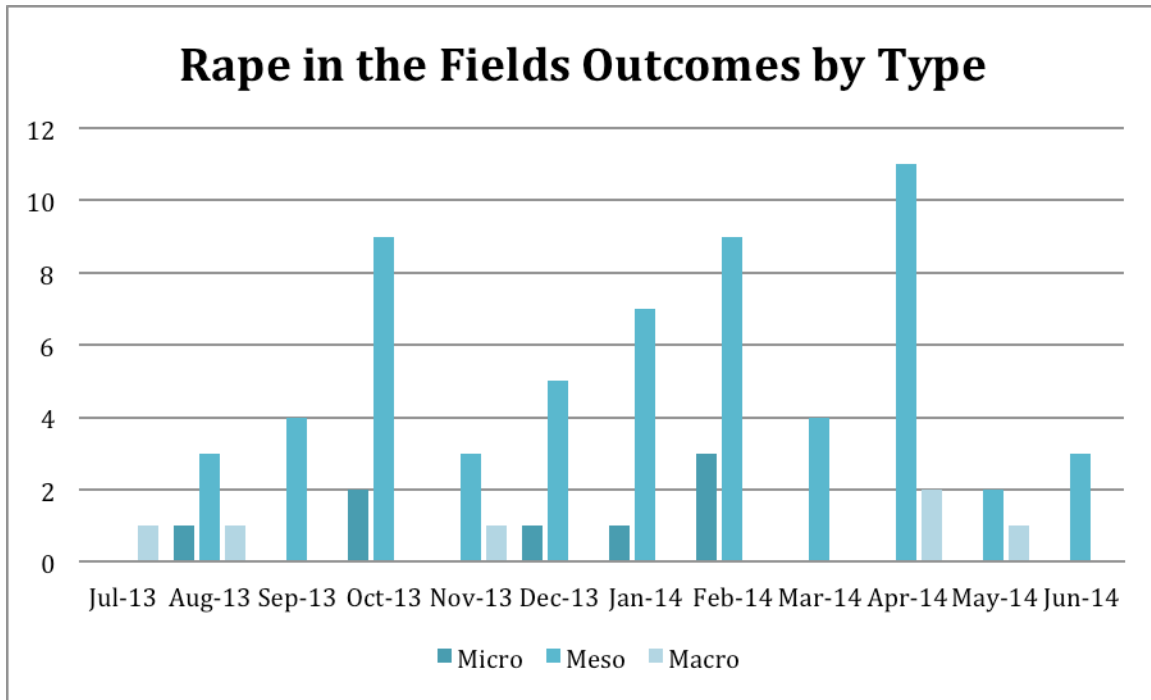
More than 50 individuals have contacted members of the reporting team to say they found Rape in the Fields moving, infuriating and inspiring. One filmmaker said, “The film deserves to be recognized as a great achievement.” More than 90 “toolkits” consisting of a CIR-produced article and [resource guides](#) were distributed in both Spanish and English to female farmworkers at the largest conference of female farmworkers in the country in Tulare, California, in early November 2013, and more will be distributed through the advocacy organization Líderes Campesinas.

IV. Analysis

I converted the outcomes detailed in the narrative above to data points in order to see what types of outcomes happened over time and to identify patterns.⁸ Chart 1 (below) makes clear that the initial airing of the documentary in June 2013 did not immediately result in community screenings or, in fact, many outcomes at all. This is a pronounced difference from much of CIR’s reporting, like that of the story about female prisoners being illegally sterilized, in which

⁸ Each entry for an offline outcome in the Outcome Tracker is reduced to a number and a type. For example, in August 2013, there was one macro outcome, three meso outcomes and one micro outcome. By reducing outcomes to their type, we can see trends over time more clearly.

government officials, advocacy organizations and others immediately react to an investigation – sometimes before the story even breaks. However, upon closer consideration of the sensitive nature of the issue area and the vulnerability of the affected population – women agricultural workers, many of whom are not authorized to work in the United States, and the heavily politicized nature of the discourse around immigration in the U.S. – it is perhaps unsurprising that no politician chose to take on this issue of his or her own volition.



Graph 1

By graphing outcomes as data points (Graph 1), I was able to identify the wave-like pattern of outcomes associated with Rape in the Fields over time. In particular, I observed that the meso outcomes, such as screenings of “Rape in the Fields,” occurred in waves and in geographic clusters, made evident in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Visualizing the data set compiled through the tracking of media that organically reported on Rape in the Fields⁹ together with the data of where community screenings were organized reveals that the two phenomena are nearly mirror

⁹ The organic media pickup does not include the intentional distribution of any of the components of the multiplatform Rape in the Fields series, such as the documentary, which aired nationally on PBS Frontline and Univisión, or the Reveal Radio and The Takeaway segments, which aired on public radio stations in more than 140 markets across the US.

images (Figure 1).¹⁰ While one might expect that typically there would be more media pickup of a story than there would be live community events, in fact I observed the opposite; there were more community screenings in more places than there were media outlets that organically reported on Rape in the Fields after the story broke.

Organic Pickup in Media

Organic Community Screenings



Figure 0

Screenings in California

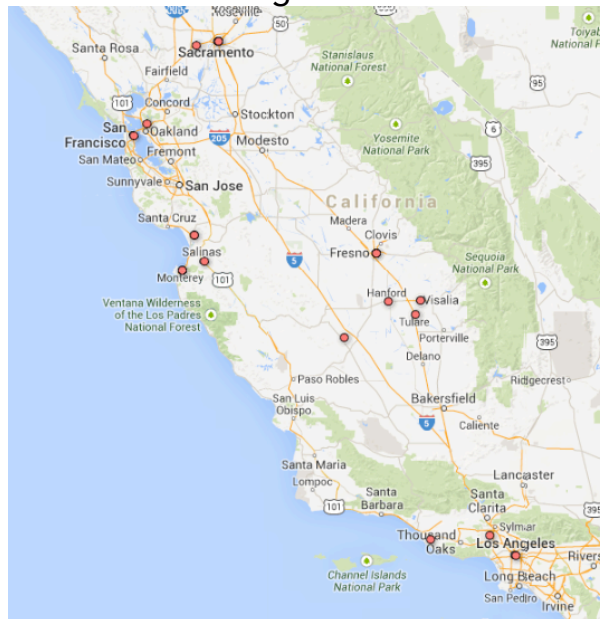


Figure 2

¹⁰ These maps were made by exporting data collected through CIR's Outcome Tracker and CIR in the News applications in xls format, then importing the data into Google Fusion Tables.

In interviews, respondents emphasized that the series has served as proof of a lack of information around the actual rates of sexual harassment and rape of female agricultural workers. As noted earlier, *Rape in the Fields* was cited in the grant proposal by the University of Washington to NIOSH, resulting in funding for research and a public health campaign. Individual women have also communicated that the documentary serves as a validation of their experience and provides information not previously made public.

In interviews with organizers of screenings of “*Rape in the Fields*,” I found that rape crisis centers and women’s advocates in district attorney’s offices were key connectors for bringing together agricultural workers, growers, law enforcement and others in communities. Respondents asserted that they had not, in fact, first seen the documentary on Univision or FRONTLINE. Rather, more than half of these organizers initially learned about “*Rape in the Fields*” via the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault listserv, where a link to the full documentary was shared on multiple occasions.

Key connectors in rape crisis centers and DA’s offices further communicated that the community screenings they organized were usually countywide events. Individuals who either attended or heard about one of these larger screenings organized additional screenings in local settings. And so, through a contagion effect, screenings spread in waves through communities.

DA’s using their institutional power to convene different segments of their communities at screenings was of crucial importance for attendance. However, individuals emphasized that the documentary was important for creating a neutral space; the shared experience of watching the independently produced documentary put all participants on an equal level. Furthermore, by introducing a sensitive topic – which for some was an open secret, and for others completely new – the documentary “*Rape in the Fields*” stewarded the issue of sexual harassment and rape into a public conversation, laying out the complicated nature of the problem and providing language for civil dialogue.

The availability of the documentary in both Spanish and English (available on the websites of CIR, FRONTLINE and Univision or on DVD by request), together with the text articles and Spanish and English language “tool-kits” produced by CIR to be distributed at screenings, ensured that all community members – regardless of their preferred language – could participate in screenings and easily access the information presented.

Interestingly, the macro outcomes (detailed above) mostly followed the waves of meso outcomes (see Graph 1), suggesting that the legislative action in California in April and May of 2014 was a result of an energized public debate within constituent communities.¹¹ [Senate Bill No. 1087](#), which would revoke a farm labor contractor’s license if it hires a supervisor who has sexually harassed workers in the past three years, was introduced by Sen. Bill Monning, representative of Monterey, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Cruz counties. These are the same counties where advocates from Monarch Services have been doing direct outreach to agricultural workers in the fields and where there were multiple community screenings. This lends further support to the hypothesis that grassroots organizing (meso outcomes) led to structural change (macro outcome). A representative from Monning’s office said Monning and his staff had all seen “Rape in the Fields,” heard the series on KQED’s “The California Report” and were aware of the community organizing in counties that the senator represents.¹²

V. Conclusion

Sexual harassment and violence against agricultural workers is a problem that has been known for some time – an open secret within agricultural communities and an issue that has been on the radar of organizations such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. However, for the most part, this atrocious injustice has remained tucked away and out of the public eye and

¹¹ Sen. Bill Monning introduced [SB 1087](#) – An act to amend Sections 1684, 1685, 1690.1, 1694, 1695, 1695.55, 1696.2, 1696.5 and 1697 of the Labor Code, relating to farm labor contractors and making an appropriation therefor, to hold agricultural labor contractors accountable for sexual harassment and rape that happens among their employees and increase training required for contractors.

¹² Monning’s office said the legislation was the result of a proposal by the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation prior to the end of January 2014 and constituent support for the legislation in Monning’s district. An attorney and community outreach person from CRLA were participants in CIR’s Solution Summit.

public debate, even in communities where there are sizeable populations of agricultural laborers.

Rape in the Fields does not solve the problem – but through the analysis presented here, three important points become clear. First, the investigation makes public an issue that public officials, employers and other stakeholders had been able to willfully ignore or avoid. Given the credibility of CIR, PBS, Univision and the Investigative Reporting Program at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, the fact-based investigation was recognized as trustworthy. Further, because the documentary “Rape in the Fields” included native Spanish speakers and was produced in both Spanish and English, it proved to be a credible source of information within Spanish speaking communities. This credibility was heightened by the fact that the reporting team spent more than a year engaged with sources in the Spanish-speaking agricultural community in California, as well as in Washington.

Second, the documentary is an extremely effective tool for creating a neutral space for new community conversations. Introduced into an existing movement of activists organized in opposition to sexual harassment and rape of female agricultural workers, “Rape in the Fields” was important because it presents a sensitive issue delicately and compassionately, providing shared language for a new conversation. As noted, key connectors from DA’s offices and rape crisis centers were able to use the documentary to bring together disparate sectors of their communities, start a new conversation about ways to address the issue and put unified pressure on public officials.

Finally, impact is not immediate, and it is not always initiated from above. Community organizing, consensus building and problem-solving – whether resulting in a government-based solution or otherwise – take time. Had CIR tracked outcomes only in the first weeks following publication of the series, much of the impact presented here would not yet have occurred. Further, had we not systematically collected qualitative data, I would have been unable to graph and map these points in order to see the relationships between and among outcomes.

The analysis of Rape in the Fields provides findings for future projects.

First, distribution strategies should include outreach to trusted stakeholder organizations that have deep roots in communities. Organizations that are

already invested in an issue and which have trust amassed in the communities where they work have the capacity and social capital to make the most of the investigations. In order to reach stakeholder communities, stories may need to be produced in languages other than English or distributed proactively to community-based organizations.

Second, the form a story takes – text, radio, documentary, etc. – is important not only in terms of which platform allows for a story to be most effectively and artfully told in order to convey information to an audience, but also in considering how the story might be used as a tool in a process of change. In considering platform and distribution, considerations should be given to which actors have the motivation and (potential) capacity to initiate change, how the piece of media can travel organically and the overall political opportunity structure for change.

Third, change is not always initiated at the top. Grassroots organizing *is* impact and can lead to lasting structural change. Closely related, the community organizing that led to impact for Rape in the Fields has proven to be an iterative, nonlinear and long process. The continued involvement of a reporting team is a crucial component of this process.

Finally, the process of impact can only be understood by tracking outcomes over time, analyzing data and tailoring research methods to meet the needs of the specific case. This undertaking is undeniably labor intensive. Even with a full-time social scientist on staff, CIR is unable to provide this depth of analysis for all of its many projects. However, by implementing systems to make qualitative data gathering more lightweight and user-friendly, we're streamlining the process in order to make analyses like the case presented here more feasible. We will continue to share our findings and invite others to do the same.