Migrant Workers in the Canadian Cannabis Industry: Exploited or Valued Talent

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Background / Literature Review
- Methodology
- Analysis
- Model
- Discussion & Conclusion
- Questions

Introduction

- Research limited on individual needs and aspirations (e.g. Farndale et al., 2014)

- Envision war for talent on elite, well-paying jobs C-suites but not on more physically taxing work such as migrant workers

- Cannabis legalized in Canada 2019 – deemed essential during COVID

- Little written on migrants in cannabis – lumped into agricultural known for dangerous work conditions, psychosocial issues

- *"Are cannabis workers exploited or valued by their employers"*

Introduction

- Endogenous and exogenous factors important considerations

- Many unknown risks to these workers still to be uncovered

- Limited pool of workers should increase value of migrant workers to employers and shape discourse around workers as talent

- Systematic structural conditions set stage for exploitation

- *"How resilient are migrant workers in the cannabis industry"*

Background and Literature Review: Migrant Worker Recruitment Canada

- Recruited under Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) or Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP)

- SAWP stay in Canada between 8 months and year and must return by December 15 of year they arrive

- Under TFWP – can work here for up to two years

- No chance for permanent residency under these programs

- Cannot move to another employer unless claim abuse under *"open permit for vulnerable worker"*

- Undocumented workers with lack of access to healthcare other protections

Background and Literature Review: Cannabis Industry

- Cannabis industry legalized 2019 – workers may be assigned to this industry regardless of their beliefs or legal status in country

- Mired heavy government regulation, black market influence, unknown financial implications and resource uncertainties – not stable environment

- Illegal operations increasing in Canada with migrants caught, unaware of the illegal status under which they were working

Background and Literature Review: Talent Management and Migrant Worker

- Definition: *"Accelerated development of a <u>deliberately</u> select proportion of employees, distinguished by their above average performance and promotability and who have the <u>potential to make substantial further contributions</u> to the business and alignment of these employees with key (strategically important) roles"* (e.g. Collings & Mellahi, 2009)

- Begs the question of where do migrant workers fit and are they considered talent?

- Silos of talent might be perpetuated in a workplace leaving migrant (worker) vulnerable to exploitation or valued – depends on how treated

Backgroud and Literature Review: Exploited or Valued Talent?

- Definition: *"employees' perceptions that they have been purposefully taken advantage of in their relationship with the organization to the benefit of the organization itself" (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019)*

- Demonstrate emotions of anger and hostility towards an organization and feeling shame and guilt at remaining in an exploitative job (Liven-Ofer et al., 2019)

- Workers hired in precarious work arrangements that are temporary, insecure conditions, inability to join unions (stifled voice), unknown health risks

- Framed in terms of labour trafficking, more recent systemic slavery

- Language barriers, remote work, little knowledge of laws, vulnerability, third party illegal charges

- Some feel valued by employers as noted on pamphlets

- Employers value the help

Methodology

- Qualitative, snowball sample; ethics approved; confidentiality

- Secretive industry – extremely difficult to reach workers and employers

- Interviewing all levels of government, agencies, production workers, employers, utilizing popular press

- Descriptive information at this point – seven interviews (one employer, two union, one mayor, one agency-legal clinic, one scientist dealing with cannabis, one Chamber of Commerce President) – no demographic information (will only collect on the workers)

- One-hour recorded interviews, transcribed through MS Teams

- Grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), utilizing Miles & Huberman (1994) framework and Corley & Gioia (2004) for qualitative data analysis, data reduction, data display, drawing and verifying conclusions

- NVIVO 12

- Workers will be reimbursed $50 for their time during interview, with option to withdraw, no penalty
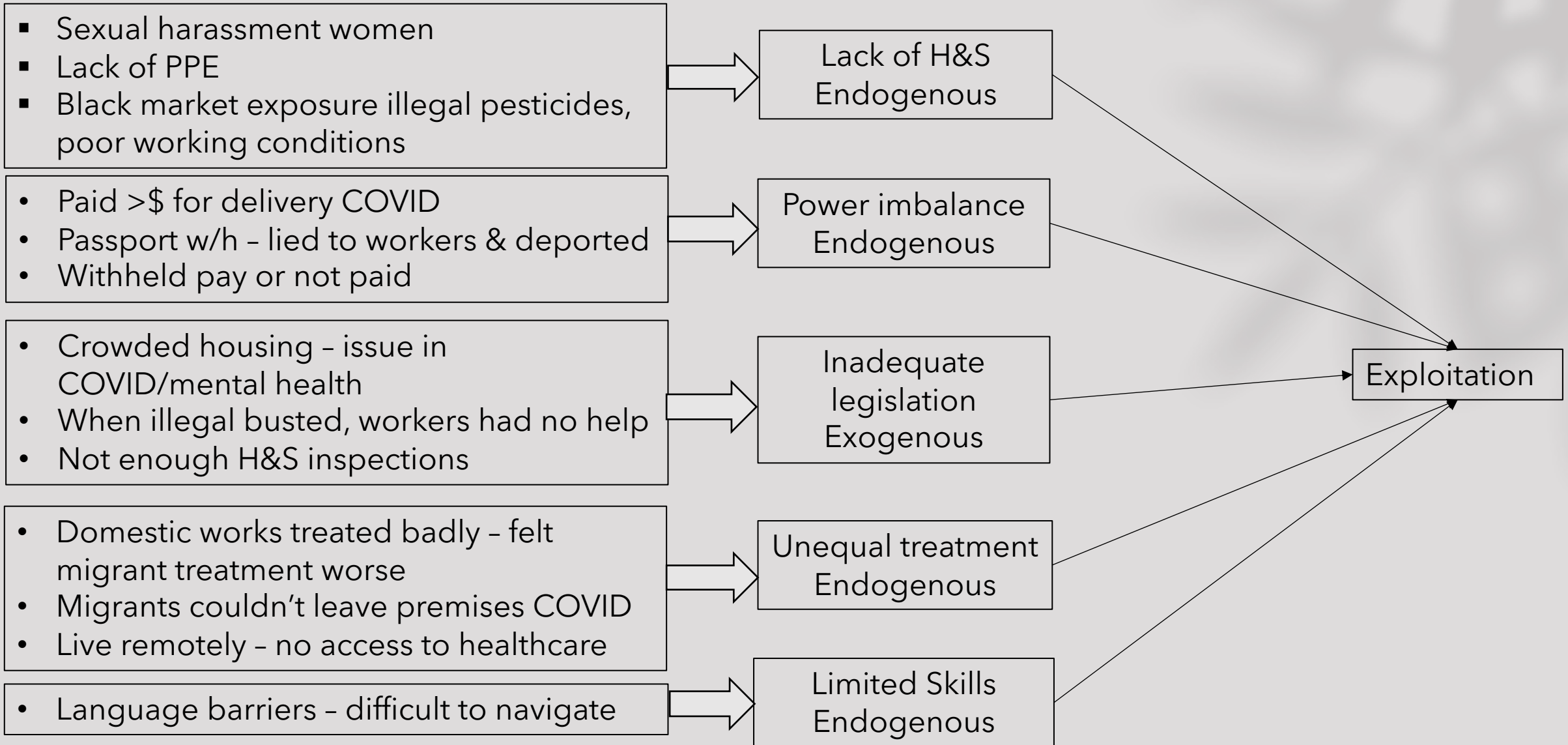
Figure 1: Data Structure

Left column (grouped observations):
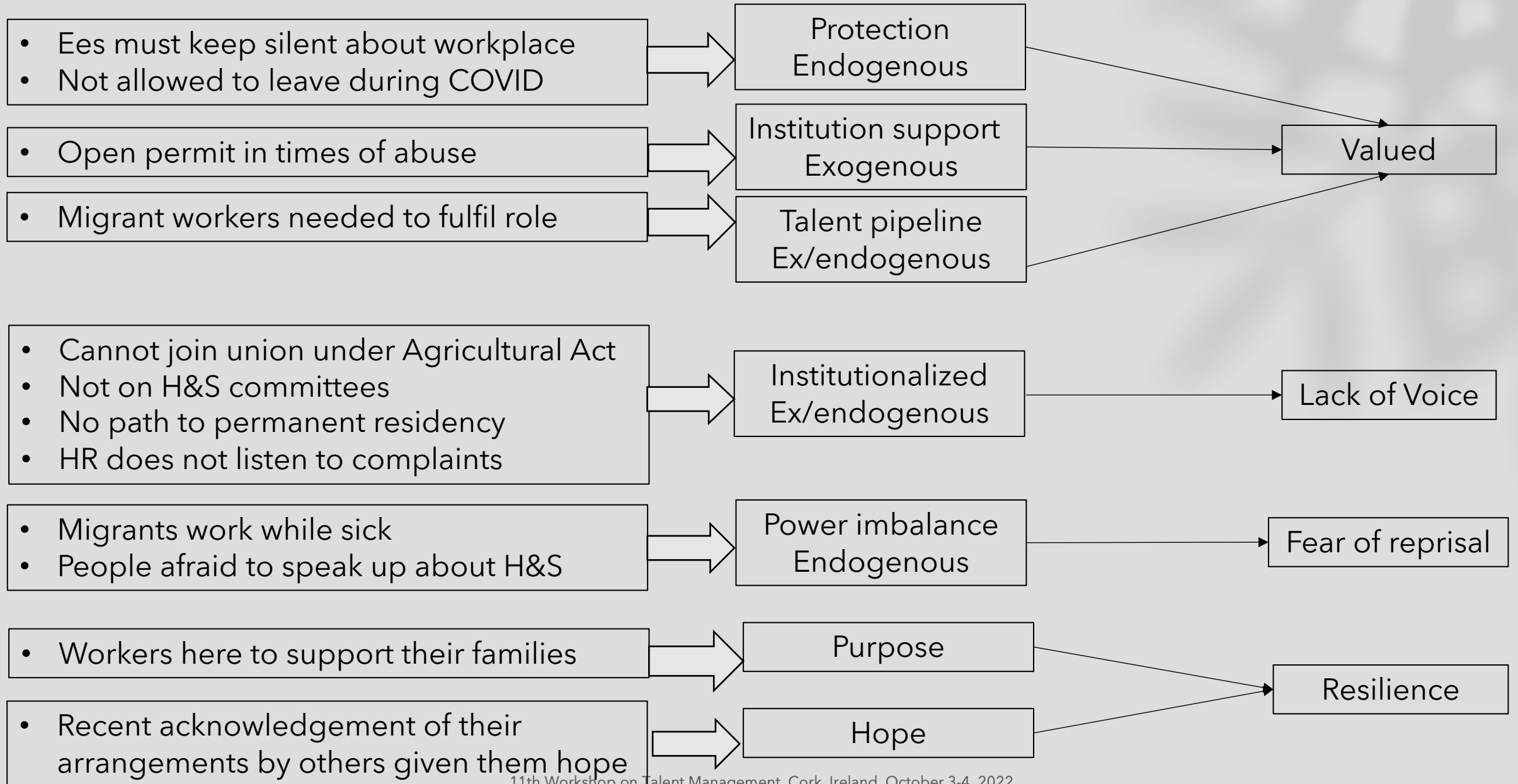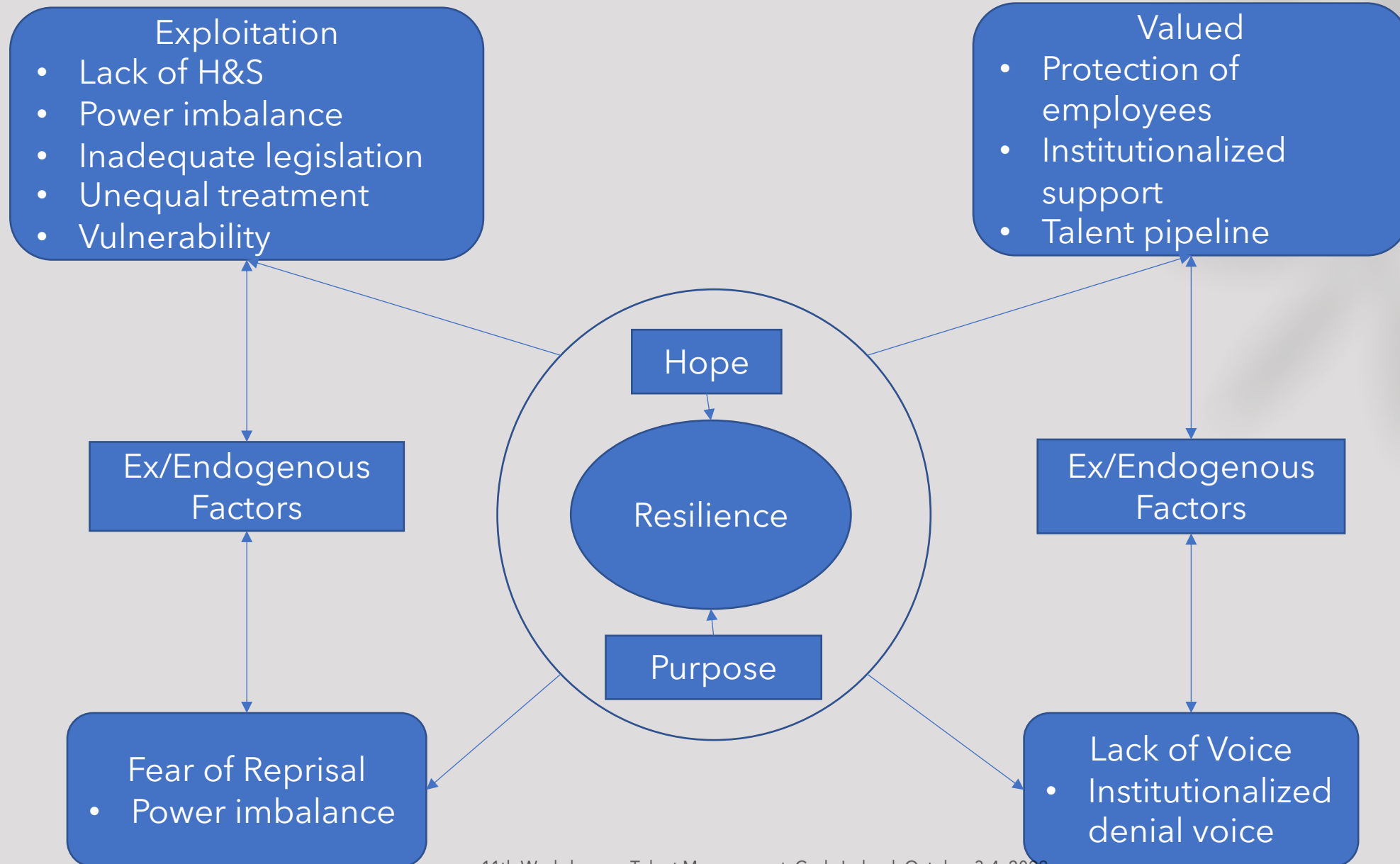
- Sexual harassment women
- Lack of PPE
- Black market exposure illegal pesticides, poor working conditions

→ **Lack of H&S** Endogenous

- Paid >$ for delivery COVID
- Passport w/h – lied to workers & deported
- Withheld pay or not paid

→ **Power imbalance** Endogenous

- Crowded housing – issue in COVID/mental health
- When illegal busted, workers had no help
- Not enough H&S inspections

→ **Inadequate legislation** Exogenous

- Domestic works treated badly – felt migrant treatment worse
- Migrants couldn't leave premises COVID
- Live remotely – no access to healthcare

→ **Unequal treatment** Endogenous

- Language barriers – difficult to navigate

→ **Limited Skills** Endogenous

All themes → **Exploitation**

Figure 1: Data Structure

- Ees must keep silent about workplace
- Not allowed to leave during COVID

→ Protection
Endogenous

- Open permit in times of abuse

→ Institution support
Exogenous

- Migrant workers needed to fulfil role

→ Talent pipeline
Ex/endogenous

Protection Endogenous → Valued
Institution support Exogenous → Valued
Talent pipeline Ex/endogenous → Valued

- Cannot join union under Agricultural Act
- Not on H&S committees
- No path to permanent residency
- HR does not listen to complaints

→ Institutionalized
Ex/endogenous → Lack of Voice

- Migrants work while sick
- People afraid to speak up about H&S

→ Power imbalance
Endogenous → Fear of reprisal

- Workers here to support their families

→ Purpose

- Recent acknowledgement of their arrangements by others given them hope

→ Hope

Purpose → Resilience
Hope → Resilience

Figure 2: Building Resilience Against a Backdrop of Exogenous and Endogenous Factors

Discussion and Conclusion

Still more data to collect so nothing yet conclusive

Will be among first paper on migrant worker in cannabis in talent literature

Might develop paper based on popular press if interviews don't emerge

Thank you for your attention

Questions? Advice?