

6-13-2022

A Community-Informed Exploration of Immigrants' Pandemic Experiences with Pronoy Rai

Pronoy Rai
Portland State University, rai@pdx.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pdxplores>



Part of the [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Demography, Population, and Ecology Commons](#), and the [Social Welfare Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Repository Citation

Rai, Pronoy, "A Community-Informed Exploration of Immigrants' Pandemic Experiences with Pronoy Rai" (2022). *PDXPLORES Podcast*. 11.
<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pdxplores/11>

This Podcast is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in PDXPLORES Podcast by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Pronoy Rai

Welcome to PDXPLORES, a Portland State research podcast featuring scholarship innovations and discoveries, pushing the boundaries of knowledge practice and what is possible for the benefit of our communities and the world.

My name is Pronoy Rai. I'm an Assistant Professor of International and Global Studies in the College of Urban and Public Affairs at Portland State. I'm a human geographer and a South Asianist. I study migration, global development, gender and sexuality, and social dimensions of climate change in rural India. And more recently in the Portland metropolitan region.

Community engaged participatory research, fosters co-learning and unsettles the idea of the researcher "as expert". We make it clear to our participants that we are not the experts in this field. We are there to learn from them. And they're the ones who would guide us and answer the questions that we have. We are there as students and they are the experts.

The involvement of the community in all aspects of the research process produces results that don't just have strong validity, but are useful for policy makers. I would argue that the method is truly empowering and meaningful, especially when these questions are about marginalized communities and their experiences.

The Metropolitan Engaged Research Initiative, which funds the project, is one way PSU lets knowledge serve. The grant program aims to foster faculty and student engagement with community partners in ways that furthers PSU's mission. This project is about frontline workers, the parents of our students, our students, the people who make restaurants and grocery stores run and who were the first people to return to work during the pandemic. We are excited to be learning with and about their struggles and resilience.

There were three things that led to the metropolitan engaged research project that I'm working on. First, is the once in a century pandemic and an understanding both in the academy and in the political world that it had disproportionate impacts on segments of our population. We found that while there was quite a bit of focus on BIPOC communities in that context little to no attention was being paid to immigrants. Immigrants for the most part made up close to 14% of Portland's population. And between 14% and 21% of frontline workers in various industries. Many have limited English proficiency and they lack health insurance.

The second inspiration was the existence of a migration studies collective here at PSU consisting of faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and CUPA (College of Urban and Public Affairs). And there was substantial interest among colleagues to collaborate.

Our project addresses three research questions. The first is about immigrant livelihoods. How do immigrants and refugees in the metropolitan area participate in the formal and the informal economy as individuals and as transnational households, meaning both as individuals, as well as families that are spread across the world. The second is about the impact of COVID-19. We wish to understand how the pandemic lockdowns and the loss of

livelihoods or social and familial support impacted immigrant households. And the third is about recovery. We want to understand how, what does recovery mean? What should a recovered future look like from an immigrant standpoint and what structural constraints are inhibiting progress toward that future?

This community engaged research project involves community partners and members of the immigrant communities in multiple ways. First, one of our co-principal investigators is a community-based organization called Division Midway Alliance. They are a place-based organization focusing on the needs of immigrants in the farther Southeast neighborhoods of Portland, which is home to several immigrant groups.

Second, our project is advised by a committee of advisors made up of representatives of immigrant serving organizations, the city of Portland and academics that advises on everything from our research instruments, to recruiting participants, to helping contextualize our findings.

Third, this project is operationalized over two rounds. We are currently interviewing representatives of immigrant serving organizations that were active with their community during peak pandemic. It will follow this up with focus groups with two immigrant groups, one established, meaning communities that have been living here for more than 10 years, and one that are more recent arrivals. These focus groups will be coded by members of the community organizations themselves.

We are toward the end of the first phase of the data collection process. What we have learned is a lot more about the struggles of immigrant serving organizations. We know that these organizations received significant funding during the pandemic from the government at the same time as needs from immigrant communities were skyrocketing. We have some insights into how immigrants have been coping and recovering. We have learned that things like homelessness and food insecurity are areas of concern for immigrants, but they don't play out in the ways that make them as visible. All of this points to preexisting structural vulnerabilities that have the potential to land immigrant workers in a cycle of poverty when the next calamity strikes. With the support of the community engaged research academy, I will assess the impact of our project to examine COVID-19 recovery in selected immigrant communities in the Portland metropolitan region.

I propose to conduct a summative participatory evaluation of the project using qualitative methods and tailored guiding questions developed by the centers for disease control, to evaluate community engagement and projects among the different types of evaluations. I intend to conduct a summative evaluation, which informs conclusions about whether the program goals and objectives were met. It necessitates clarifying the criteria and evidence used to make summary adjustments. The results of this project would strengthen a future application to Oregon based foundations to fund long-term research infrastructure at PSU to study global migration, in particular, how it is weaving a new fabric of social life in Oregon through immigration.

The project and the one I seek to assess support two PSU presidential strategic initiatives, namely pivoting engagement to advanced revitalization in the immigrant communities ravaged by the pandemic and advancing racial justice by illuminating the challenges faced by

BIPOC immigrants who suffer multiple marginalities going to their social locations of race and citizen.

My name is Pronoy Rai and my research aims to improve our understanding of immigrant communities recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the response to the pandemic as they move toward post pandemic lives and livelihoods, and the underlying conditions that produce the vulnerabilities these communities experience. We hope to leverage the project and the community partnerships that we are currently building to find philanthropic support for long term immigration research infrastructure at PSU.