“What relief will you be seeking?”: Exploring How Health Emerges in Cleveland Immigration Court Observational Data

Aria Wanek, M.A.

CWRU Dept. of Anthropology, Pop. Quantitative Health Sciences

Organizational Background

Cleveland Jobs With Justice (CJWJ) is a labor organizing group in the greater Cleveland area that has mobilized for immigration reform and justice for over a decade. One of their long-standing projects is observing public hearings in immigration court in downtown Cleveland, the sole immigration court in Ohio. Observers with CJWJ serve a dual advocacy and public research goal; to bear witness and to document. **Court observations provide an important empirical record of what is *actually* happening inside immigration court hearings**, something that is opaque when relying upon government records alone.

Migration, Bureaucracy, and Health

Migration has been framed in much of the contemporary literature as a social determinant of health. While we should not accept and naturalize migrating as inherently harmful to health, it is **important to explore the mediums through which migration becomes embodied as poor health.** Immigration courts, specifically removal and bond proceedings, are a crucial site for shaping both acute and long-term health trajectories for the respondents moving through them, as well as having ripple effects into their families and communities. However, this process often looks mundane and bureaucratic, necessitating a more critical eye in how seemingly small or flippant decisions have enormous consequences.

Learning Objectives

1. Learn and apply the basics of data cleaning in mixed-methods collection to organize and clean approximately 4,300 immigration court records.
2. Analyze quantitative and qualitative immigration court data to identify patterns in hearing outcomes and documented health concerns, and interpret these findings within the context of changing immigration policies and their potential effects on (im)migrant health
3. Create a report of the court data outcomes for public dissemination.

Deliverables

1. Cleaned and coded dataset with hearing-level data from observed master calendar, bond, and merits hearings.
2. A corresponding codebook and data log
3. Formatted qualitative data ready for analysis, with entries of high interest separated based on health-related data.

Activities

Data-Cleaning Activities:

- Building out a data cleaning process that was appropriate for the size of the dataset
- Cleaning and coding the data; Keeping a detailed data log to ensure it can be reproduced
  - Learning VBA and Python to accomplish this
- Interpretive work of quantifying qualitative data
- Extracting qualitative data into a format where it can be analyzed and triangulated with its corresponding quantitative component

Secondary Activities:

- Supervising an intern from Oberlin College
- Participation in court observation
- Starting a preliminary public-facing report for CJWJ for dissemination

66.22%

People **without** representation in court.

Selected Qualitative Data

“He is a cancer patient still in treatment. He has had three serious surgeries and is currently in chemo treatment and requires follow up care he cannot get in detention.”

“Respondent opts to withdraw application and opt for deportation. Says he is becoming ill from being incarcerated and would rather suffer in Nicaragua.”

“Respondent explains that his daughter is suffering from claustrophobia and panic attacks due to the stress of his incarceration so he would like to be removed as soon as possible.”

“Respondent requests them to expedite his removal as he is having kidney pain and not getting health care while incarcerated.”

“Respondent’s spouse cannot drive a car due to her medical condition. She has never worked and cannot work. Respondent has minor children born in U.S. - ages 4, 2, and 1. This is a hardship case. If Respondent is deported his spouse and the minor children will be homeless as there are no family members who could take his spouse and children and help them. They are nearly out of money now.”

“The respondent's lawyer explained to the DHS attorney that her client is a nursing mother and has been held for a month. She asked if the DHS attorney might ask the jail to give her client a pump. DHS responded that the client should ask the jail. The lawyer responded that her client has been asking the jail for a pump every day and that they have denied her requests and that she is enduring incredible pain because she cannot expel her milk.”

Bond Outcomes	Count of outcome_bond
Bond denied	28
Bond granted	35
Bond hearing reset	14
Bond outcome to be ruled on at a later time	50
Bond withdrawn	29
Lacks jursidiction to grant bond	53
Observer asked to leave	2
UNK	2
Grand Total	**213**

outcome_removal	Count of outcome_removal
The judge continued the matter for another master calendar hearing	2145
Removed in abstentia	593
The judge scheduled a final/merits hearing or placed the case in trial queue	417
No show - Outcome Unobserved	367
The judge ordered removal with the respondent present (removal order)	243
The judge granted voluntary departure	178
Change of venue	119
The judge gave respondent time to respond to pretermission motion	48
The judge pretermitted the case	26
Case terminated	13
Place on Status Docket	10
Case vacated	4
Asylum Granted	2
Cancellation of Removal	2
Administrative Closure	1
Special Circumstance	1
Case dismissed	1
Grand Total	**4170**
(with UNK, N/A, and No Order removed)	

Methods

Before My Involvement:

- All data collected by volunteers from CJWJ using a form for each case on a docket – attending primarily master calendar and bond hearings
- Data inputted to a Google Form and exported as an Excel spreadsheet

My Involvement:

- Sorted entries by date and de-identified each row; performed quintessential cleaning techniques to start: 1.) identifying and removing duplicates, 2.) removing and/or remediating incomplete entries, 3.) standardizing the format of each column and addressing errors/typos, 4.) merged case-level data if there were riders attached, and 5.) assigned IDs for each entry.
  - Had assistance from Julia (intern) for standardizing some columns
- Pulled out and merged qualitative data columns into single entries attached to the corresponding ID for the case; best format for coding in most QDAS.
- Assigned numerical codes for the quantitative data to run analysis more efficiently.

Country of Origin	Percent of Total
Haiti	19.50%
Venezuela	15.34%
Mexico	14.02%
Guatemala	8.03%
Honduras	5.33%
Colombia	4.28%
Ecuador	3.57%
Nicaragua	3.15%
Uzbekistan	2.46%
Mauritania	2.31%

Lessons Learned

- Manual data cleaning takes MUCH longer than initially anticipated, especially in this sort of community-derived mixed methods work that has been collected by 20+ people.
- It is easier to track data cleaning decisions in R; Excel worked ok for mixed methods data but was tedious to document all changes without that script feature– would explore different options in the future.
- The participant observation component of the work–going in person to court along with the cleaning–greatly aided my ability to work with both the quant and qual data.
- First time directly overseeing an intern; learning about my management style and balancing my priorities for the project with what can be productive/reasonable for them to achieve, as well

Public Health Implications

- Groundwork for more **empirical evidence of migration as a determinant of health**, with particular attention to the court as an important site for the production of health outcomes
- Move **beyond traditional notions of what “health policy”** is–other types of policy in the national immigration bureaucracy have strong effects on health without directly legislating anything explicitly about health itself
- There is great **possibility for future community-involved data collection** for these sorts of advocacy-research integrations; lots of people interested in the work and bring a different eye than researchers in their notes.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first acknowledge and thank all the volunteers at CJWJ for their dedication to bearing witness and documenting immigration court hearings during this vitally important period to keep public records. Without them, there is no data to clean. I also thank Deb Kline, Director of CJWJ and the Courtwatch project, for her trust in me to work with this data freely and her dedication to demanding dignity and justice for immigrants in Ohio. Thank you to Julia Xu from Oberlin College for their work on weeding through the gritty parts of the data and having grace with me while I also figured things out. Finally, I would like to thank my preceptor and dissertation advisor, Dr. Bridget Haas, for all her support and guidance throughout this project and beyond.