

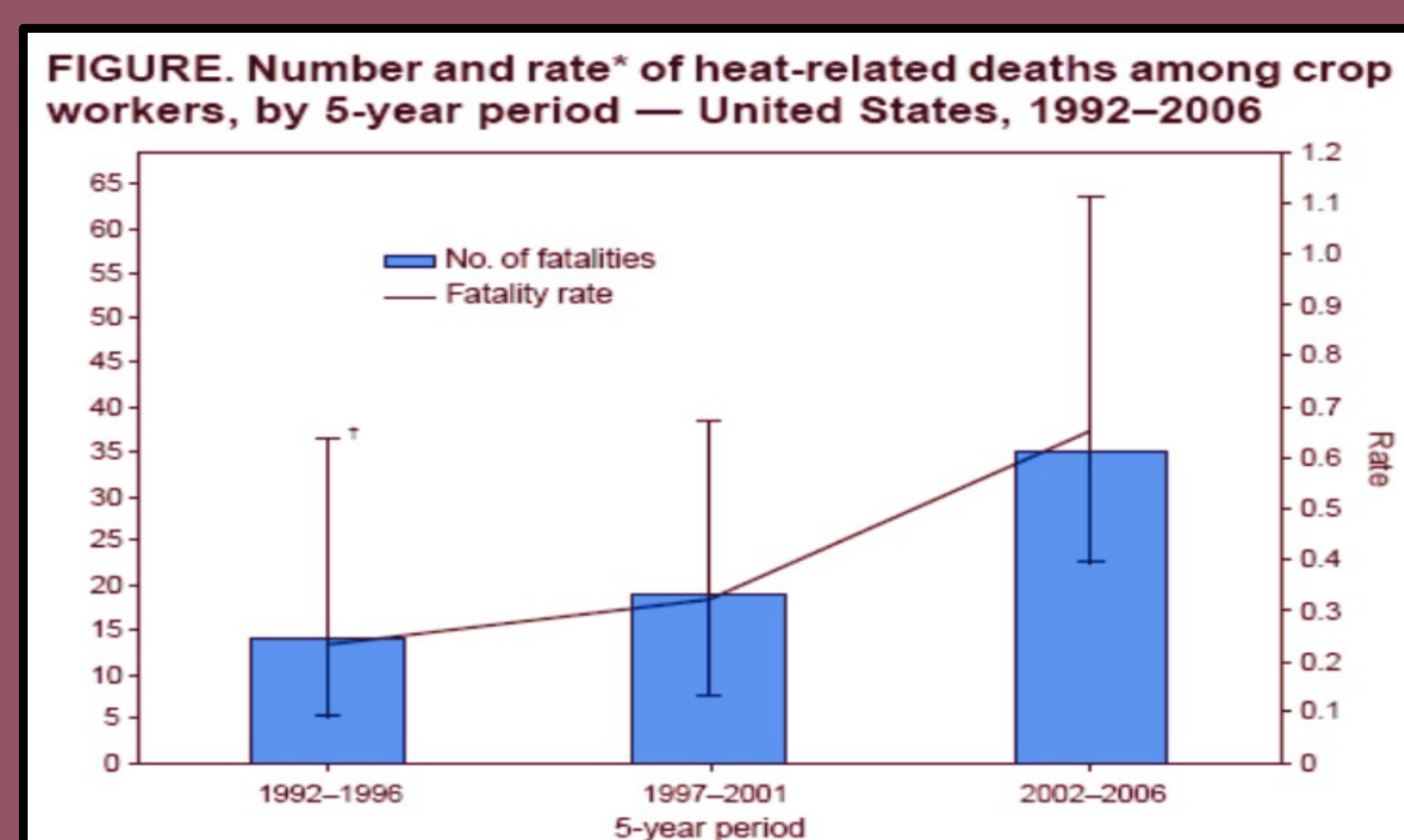
The Politics of Heat: How Farmworker Heat Illness is Framed in Public Discourse

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Introduction & Background

- Farmworkers, many of whom are immigrants from Mexico, face a 20-times higher risk of heat-related illnesses compared to other occupations. Climate change and inadequate workplace protections further amplify these risks. (CDC, 2008)
- There is currently no federal heat standard in place to protect farmworkers, making it very difficult to both prevent heat-related deaths and injuries and record accurate data on them. (Shipley, 2021)
- Common narratives often blame individuals for their illnesses rather than addressing systemic shortcomings, leaving farmworkers vulnerable to further workplace injury and neglect despite their vital importance in modern society.



The graph on the left shows the upward trend in heat-related deaths among farmworkers in the United States. The largest increase is seen between the 1997-2001 period and 2002-2006.

(CDC, 2008)

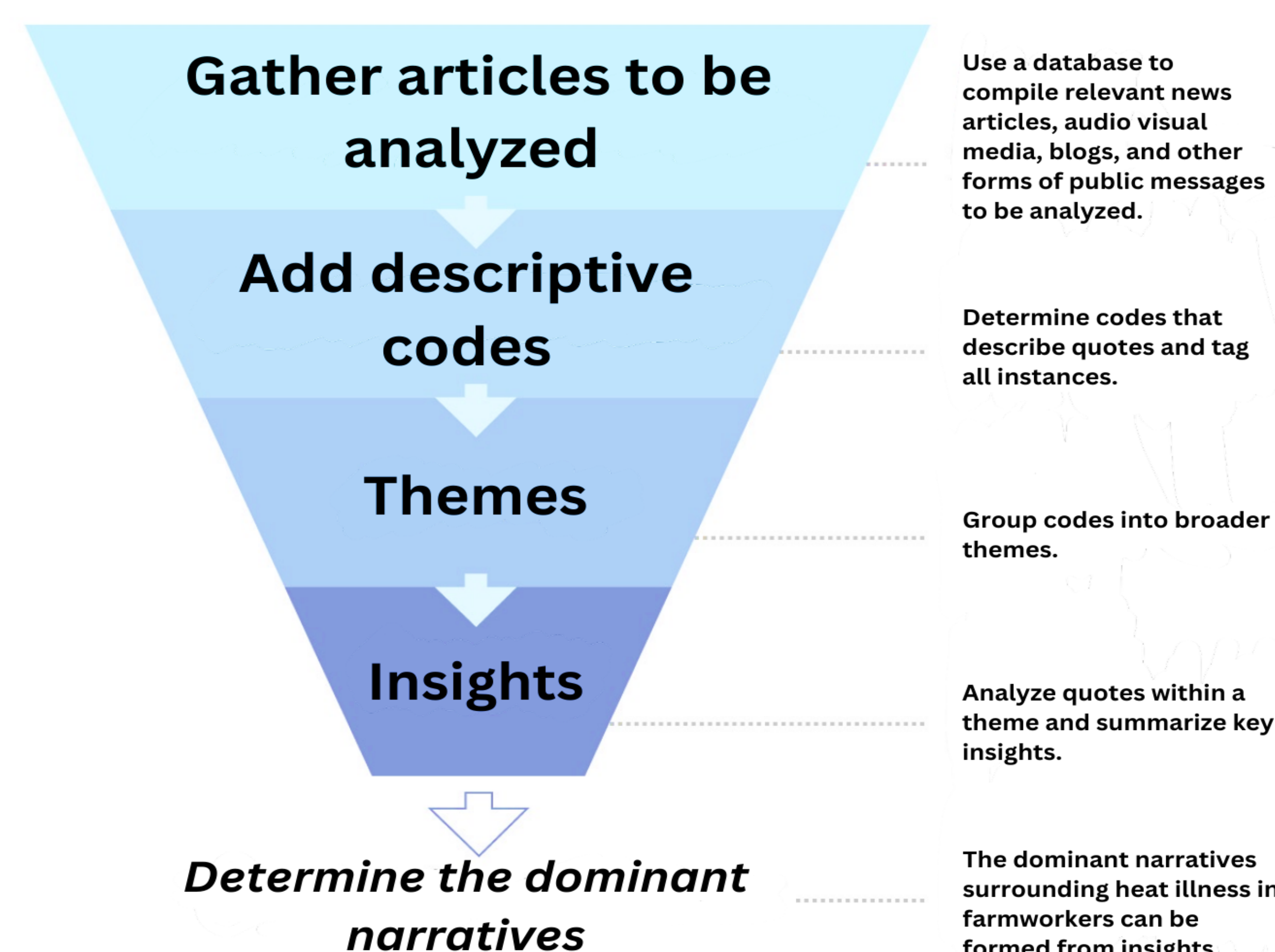
Objectives

- This study aims to determine the dominant public narratives about heat-related illnesses, identify themes, and understand how these narratives influence policy decisions.
- To recognize which themes most frequently appear together and how they are used to push their desired narrative.
- Analyze how different media sources frame responsibility for heat-related illnesses, whether through individual blame or systemic factors.

Methods

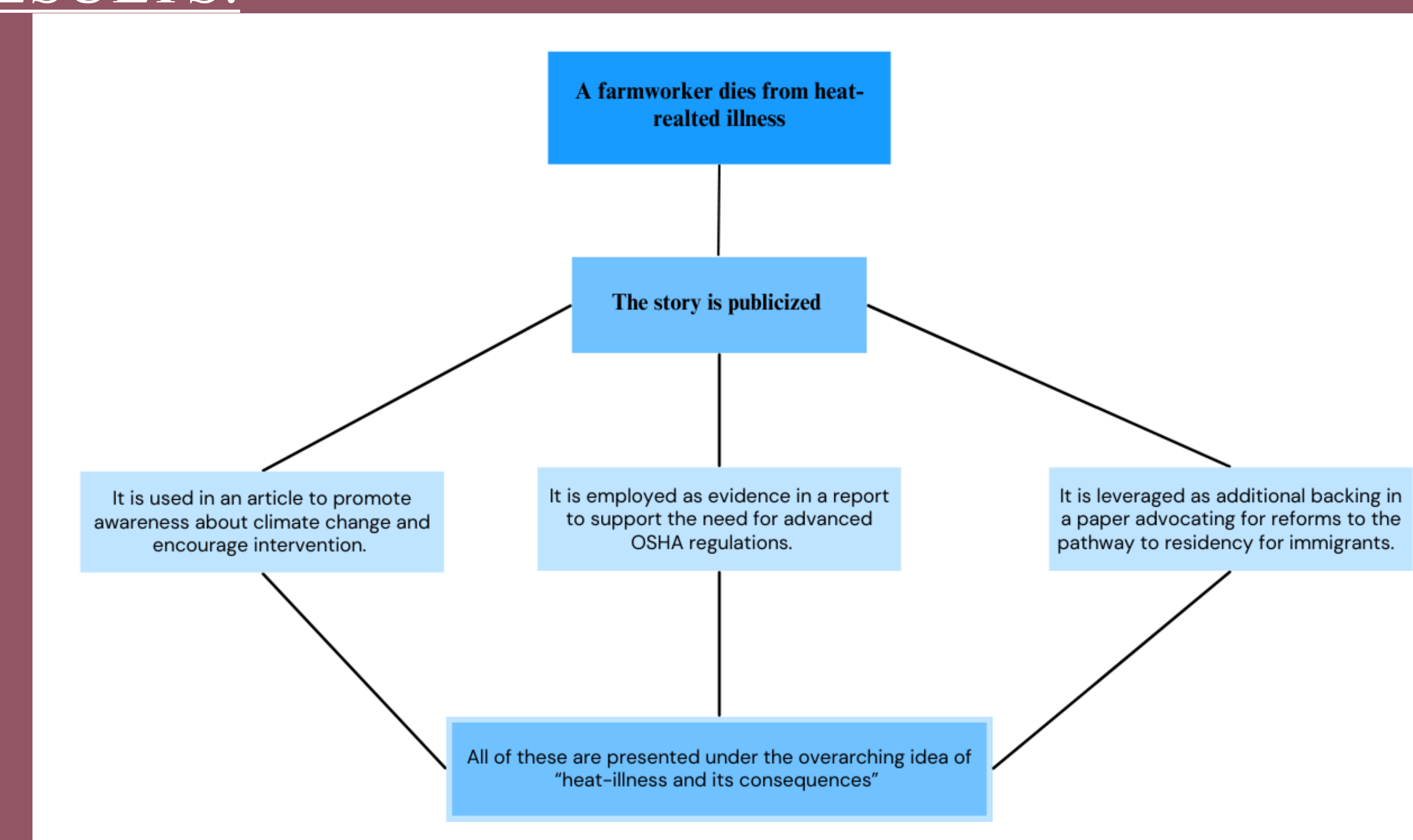
- The study employs a systematic content analysis of public messages, including news articles, blogs, and audiovisual media, related to heat-related illnesses among farmworkers from 2017 to 2022.
- Data is sourced from the Newsbank database using tailored search terms.
- Articles were manually reviewed, with key terms highlighted and categorized based on predefined coding themes. This involved identifying recurring patterns, language cues, and contextual framing to determine how narratives around heat-related illnesses were constructed
- This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how heat-related issues are framed in public discourse.

Manual Coding Thematic Analysis Process



Results and Discussion

RESULTS:



- There is not one single origin of responsibility for heat-related illness/death, however this topic is often used as an avenue to promote indirectly related topics (e.g. climate change, governmental regulations, immigration processes).

DISCUSSION:

- The variability in how this issue is framed highlights the numerous contributing factors to the prevalence of heat-related illness and death among farmers. Future research could use this study as a multi-faceted call to action to advocate for stronger farmworker protections.
- Limitations of this investigation include a restricted selection of databases for sourcing articles and a narrow timeframe for published articles (ex: 2017-2022) that were used.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2008, June 20). *Heat-Related Deaths Among Crop Workers --- United States, 1992--2006*. www.cdc.gov. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5724a1.htm>
- Shipley, J., Edwards, B., Nickerson, D., Benincasa, R., Chavez, S., & Thompson, C. (2021, August 17). Heat is killing workers in the U.S. — and there are no federal rules to protect them. *NPR.org*. <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/17/1026154042/hundreds-of-workers-have-died-from-heat-in-the-last-decade-and-its-getting-worse>