

AMERICA'S INVISIBLE WORKERS:
A STUDY OF MIGRANT OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

The steady stream of new immigrant labor into the Midwest has clearly begun to change the very fabric of rural life. Mostly male, Latino, single, childless, highly mobile, and with limited education, migrant out-of-school youth (OSY) between the ages of 18 through 21 face a whole host of economic and social obstacles that often hide and isolate them from the mainstream society. The concentration of migrants into a few jobs, such as agriculture, is a direct result of the demand for a particular skill set that is not dependent on the worker's English language ability. The target population for this study is migrant OSY in southwestern Kansas. Seventy-five migrant youth were identified between 1 January and 30 April of 2008.

The plight of migrant agricultural workers is well documented, however, very little research has been done on the perceptions or expressed needs of migrant youth. While migrant youth are willing to do the jobs rejected by natives, many often aspire to achieve something greater than their present condition. According to the study's data, the majority of migrant youth indicated that they would like to receive their GED, learn English, secure a better job, and develop additional life skills. If programs of support such as the federally funded Migrant Education Program do not provide migrant OSY with educational opportunities that will enable them to achieve and give them access to higher paying jobs, they will be relegated to the unskilled, low-paying jobs of previous immigrant generations.