

Mexican women who work as migrant farmworkers in Canada endure difficult living and working conditions to provide opportunities for their children back home.

What is this research about?

Poverty and a lack of employment opportunities in developing countries have caused many people to migrate to high-income countries for work and to send money back home to help support their families. In Canada, migrants often come to work in the commercial agricultural sector through the SAWP (Seasonal Agricultural Work Program). This provides work permits for people from developing countries to temporarily work on farms in low-paying, manual labour positions that most Canadians with other job opportunities do not want. These workers are not allowed to stay in Canada once their work permit is over and they cannot become Canadian citizens.

Work permits only apply to one employer and workers risk being deported if they quit or get fired from their job. While most temporary worker programs hire men, certain jobs that are assumed to be better for women such as fruit production and packing, have led to an increase in female employment. The researchers focus on the experiences of Mexican women that have migrated to Canada to work in commercial agriculture.

What did the researchers do?

The sites of the research were regions in Ontario that employ workers from the SAWP. The researchers spent many hours in the field interacting with participants and observing their working and living situations. Their study focuses on the lived experiences of women who have left rural communities in Mexico to work as migrant farmworkers in Canada. The researchers wanted to examine how the gender, race, and citizenship status (as non-Canadians) of the women impact their working situations and relationships with employers.

What you need to know:

Migrant farmworkers are vulnerable to exploitation by their employers which they often tolerate for fear of losing their jobs and being deported if they complain. However, Mexican women migrant farmworkers in Canada cite maternal love and the ability to provide better futures for their children back home as the main reasons that they migrate and brave working conditions.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers can use this research to gain a better understanding of the realities of temporary migration programs for the migrants who participate in them.

This research should impact policy decisions about restrictions on work permits and conditions for eligibility for temporary work programs. The research is important because it explains the power inequalities involved in growing food in Canada.

This is significant because it may impact the way that **consumers** think about food production. This research is beneficial to **other researchers** who wish to study migrant farmworkers and the impacts of SAWP in Canada. It is also helpful for **individuals, activists and organizations** who wish to advocate for an improvement in the treatment of women

What did the researchers find?

To qualify for SAWP, women must come from rural areas and have dependent family members staying in their countries. This is to make sure that workers will return home. Despite the precarious nature of these jobs, the opportunity to access Canadian wages is highly valued by migrants and there is a long queue of applicants.

Positions designated for women are even more limited and therefore highly desirable. This leads to a situation where employers can demand increased productivity from migrants since there is strong competition between the workers to obtain and keep jobs. The women are often forced to work in poor conditions and live in overcrowded, homes with many other women. They often do not seek attention for illness, injuries or pregnancies and do not complain about working conditions or harassment by employers because of the risk of being sent back to Mexico if they are fired. Therefore, inequalities are created and maintained by temporary migration programs since employers have a large amount of power and control over the migrant workers.

The researchers found that these programs give employers access to people who have little opportunity to make money in their own countries. Therefore workers are very vulnerable because of a desperate desire to stay and work in Canada. In rural Mexico, women are often without employment opportunities and are at a disadvantage when they migrate to Canada to work in commercial agriculture. Women have no say over what type of job they will be doing and it is difficult or even impossible to change employers. The programs that employ them do not lead to permanent residency or Canadian citizenship.

However, the reason that the study participants gave for enduring this situation was to provide for their families. The opportunities that the women believed they would be able to provide for their children with the money that they were sending home, made migrating to Canada to work worth it for many women.

About the Researchers:

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