

## Outsiders or Victims?: Addressing a Rural Community's Perceptions of Latino Migrant Workers



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### Abstract

Across various communities in the United States, Latinos are increasingly settling in areas unaccustomed to an influx of immigrant or Latino residents. This demographic change can complicate typical problems surrounding enforcement of housing and public health code. Furthermore, perceptions and attitudes towards Latinos and immigrants can complicate the way a community responds to the new settlement of Latinos, making it especially hard to enforce any sort of intervention. In one rural setting, service providers and community leaders have struggled for almost five years to deal with one case dealing with a substandard housing complex owned by Latinos and rented to Latino migrant workers and their families. This project used public records, interviews with individuals, and neighborhood observations to understand how perceptions affected the way this case was dealt with. The perceptions data was then organized into either positive, negative, or neutral categories. The results showed that language barriers, perceived economic threat and criminal threat, and negative perceptions of racial minorities in general act as a barrier for Latino inclusion into the community but that exposure and empathy from service providers allow for prompt and effective interventions for Latino issues. Neutral perceptions were mostly due to unfamiliarity with Latino issues and the Latino community.