

HOWARD UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON 1, D. C.

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
DEPARTMENT OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE  
AND PUBLIC HEALTH

November 17, 1960

HEALTH BEHAVIOR OF MIGRANT FARM WORKERS

During the summer of 1960, a Student Summer Fellowship was created, drawing one-half of its funds from Research Project 381, (N.I.H., R.G.6704) and one half provided by a special contract with the Program Development Branch of the United States Public Health Service and Mrs. Dorothy Watts, Principal Investigator of the first study. The purpose of this program was to conduct a study of the health behavior and attitudes of Migrant Farm Workers and contrast this data with similar data collected from residents of Washington, D.C.. The Washington group is comprised of a low income Negro population sample which is already under investigation in the first study mentioned above.

Two junior medical students served as interviewers in the Migrant Labor Camps. During this period they moved out and lived in a private residence in a township in the general area. The following represent their individual narrative reports. A statistical analysis of the data is now being conducted, and attached also are some unofficial preliminary hand tallies of results. The final comparison with the Washington D.C. residents will be made as soon as all the data from this group has been collected.

  
Dorothy D. Watts  
Investigator

Report of  
Elvin O. Onley

The Eastern Shore of Maryland is part of the peninsula bounded eastward by the Atlantic Ocean and westward by the Chesapeake Bay. The lower half of the peninsula is Eastern Shore, Virginia; the upper part is longitudinally split, the eastern half is Delaware, the western is Maryland. The economy of this section is primarily agricultural, though products from the water which surrounds the neck of land constitute a second and less important source of income.

The land of Caroline and Dorchester Counties, in which the study was carried out, is divided by the natives into "light" and "heavy" soil. The "light" soil, which has a large admixture of sand, can be planted earlier and yields earlier, in late June. The heavier soil begins to yield in mid-July. Thus, the soil characteristics explain two separate waves of migrant workers to be found in the summer months dotting in small camps the entire peninsula as well as these two counties.

The first wave of workers comes in late June to begin the harvest of cucumbers and snap beans. By the third week of July, the tomato crop is picked and the numerous tomato canneries which have been idle since the previous October swing into operation. It is the manpower need for harvest and canning, a brief and accelerated period as compared with the period of planting, that makes the migrant worker necessary to both farmer and community. The region has, thus, received the migrant worker at once gratefully and with dismay for about seventy years. At present all the crews of workers - men and women and adolescents, married and single, pickers and factory workers, the veteran and the adventurer, the church-going and the "wino" - originate in Florida. Some few crew members may be picked up en route in Georgia or the Carolinas as the crews come north - in trucks and buses to the camps of Maryland. The pickers finish in early September and move northward to apples in Pennsylvania or New York, some return to Florida in late October, others pick late crops in Massachusetts until November, returning to Florida in time for the citrus crop.

The means by which crew leaders obtain work, the ways in which he selects his crew and their personal interrelations are varied and interesting. The minimum that he guarantees the worker is work and transportation from his home and back. The worker tacitly agrees to work when it is available. This may mean an eight or ten hour day six or seven days a week; though when picking is poor, it may mean work for only a few days of the week. Thus his income depends on his own initiative, the weather, the quality of the crop and the crop itself. From his earnings he must pay for his food and lodgings.

The camps to which these migrating folk are "committed" are within all memory the most miserable; that is, inadequate housing to be seen in the nation. The units are almost without exception wooden, some of which are converted chicken houses. The outside is white-washed or painted red; this covering is cracked and flaked showing the wood beneath whitened from years of exposure. Inside, the walls and ceiling are unfinished. In these camps, there will occasionally be running water, sometimes both hot and cold. There may be no bathing or washing facilities. There is electricity. There will be cans for trash and garbage alike - usually full with as much refuse as the can contains scattered about on the ground. There may or may not be screening. A step or two will place one into one of these units in which the migrant lives. Frequently the original (?) wooden step is replaced by a large stone or cinder block and thus one enters a room about six feet by ten feet which may house as many as three people or more if children are present.

The character of the camps themselves largely depends on their population; that is, the nature of the crews living there, but also to some degree upon the physical characteristics of the camp itself. Indeed, the camps present varied pictures; each having its own character, as individual as a person.

The people themselves were quite as individual as one's friends though statistically they are on the whole poorly educated (6th grade or below), in the lower income group (less than two thousand dollars per year) - a rural southern group. They were, however, resentful or hostile or friendly or fawning as all people are everywhere. Our task as interviewers was to overcome those psycho-

logical factors and the educational breach which at first separated us. We succeeded.

The first stage of the study and our first task was making contact with some eight or ten people who were to be key informers. By the use of open-end questionnaires, the team in Washington gathered the information to be used on the construction of an interview schedule best adapted to elicit the information sought in the study. Many of these original contacts were made with the help of Mr. Veazey, the migrant minister and a student at the Howard University School of Religion.

For the next two or three weeks the pre-testing stage of the project was undertaken. This involved the location of all migrant labor camps in Caroline and Dorchester Counties. The purpose of this stage was to get an estimate of the population that we would be working with, to establish our "universe" so to speak. Since the early estimate was two hundred head; i.e. workers, it was agreed to single out 50% of these for interview by a random sample technique. Concurrently, we were trying out a tentative interview schedule in those camps or crews which would be omitted in the final interviewing. On the basis of the pre-testing a final schedule was completed and the project entered its third and final stage, gathering the diverse data by interview upon which some conclusions or findings might be based. The good relations established up to this time stood us in good stead and without one refusal we conducted the people through the complicated and demanding interview. The schedule has five parts, some of which have as many as six divisions. The five parts include an identification section, a type of psychological test, a health inquiry, a modified medical inventory and a personal data sheet. The interviews took place out of doors, indoors, in the day or evening, as was convenient for the informant, for a period of two to three hours.

Apart from the privilege of participating in this project, one must add invaluable insights gained into the minds of educationally deprived people which show us not only how much they differ from the urban and the educated but also how much they are the same.

E. O. Onley

REPORT OF SUMMER FELLOWSHIP

submitted by

Sam O. Atkins

"EASTERN SHORE MIGRATORY WORKERS PROJECT"

submitted to

Mrs. Dorothy D. Watts  
Department of Preventive Medicine  
and Public Health

In an effort to acquaint the interviewers with other projects, past and present, and problems of migratory workers as a population group, we spent three days in the downtown office of Miss Helen L. Johnston, Public Health Service, U. S. Health, Education and Welfare building, reading and discussing recent and previous migratory studies. We were very fortunate in having the opportunity to read before publication the thesis of Dr. Atwater, wherein he deals with migratory problems in the area where we were to work. The thesis was enlightening and familiar with respect to areas with which we were somewhat acquainted.

An effort was made to introduce us first hand to the various facets of public health practices and services. Several division heads spoke briefly to us and listened attentively as we expressed our newly collected observations. The time was well spent.

The first stage of our first two and one-half weeks' task was making contact with eight or ten people who were to be key informers. By the use of open end questionnaires the team from the District gathered the information to be used in the construction of an interview schedule adaptive to elicit the information we were intent upon collecting. Many of the original contacts for these interviews were made with the help of the migratory minister, Mr. Carlton Veazy, a representative of the National Council of Churches.

For the next two or three weeks the second stage, the pre-testing of the project, was undertaken. This involved the location of all migrant labor camps in the immediate vicinity in Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot counties. We were aided in the effort by Mr. Veazy and by a neighbor, Mr. Townsend, who is on the local migratory labor committee. We discovered three or four camps by driving around and were directed by migrants to others. Some we noticed had been closed since last year because of inability to comply with new state requirements. It should be noted that some of the so-called camps had as few as eight to ten people in them.

The purpose of this second stage was to have some estimate of the population that we would be working with, and from this to determine the percentage of the population we would question. Since, the early estimate was 200 head.

Originally it was thought that the crew leader would be consulted, the names of all his crew members would be obtained and a random selection made of fifty percent of these persons. We later learned that the formation of a crew is a relatively haphazard thing so that some crew leaders are not well informed about their crew members or they know them only by nicknames. In the end fifty percent of the dwellings were visited by beginning with the first unit of the right as one enters the camp and skipping or omitting every other house. When the interview schedules were completed and the sampling procedure established we entered into the third stage - administering the schedules.

The schedule has five parts, some of which are divided into as many as six parts. The five larger sections include an identification section, a psychological-type section, a health inquiry section, a modified medical inventory section and personal data sheet which all three studies were using in common.

The test was administered sometimes indoors, sometimes outdoors, in the day or evening as was convenient for the interviewee. The time varied from one to three hours.

In thinking about our experiences in this project, I have to admit I have been forcibly struck by the number of persons who are addicted to drink and others with varying psychological abnormal symptoms and concepts all of which indicate to me an enormous number of persons suffering from mental problems.

Somehow I cannot help wondering if some people in the camps are not lonely and if certain programs were instituted to give them organized activities when not working, it may improve many of their mental states.

In looking at such situations, one cannot keep from thinking or attempting to find a reason for such behavior. This task we found both interesting and strange. Strange because oftentimes we would receive one impression or story



of their plight and later we would be bombarded with a different one. This in itself is significant in that it shows their inability to report factual material and perhaps, in many cases, a desire to enlarge their situation in an attempt to gain attention and sympathy. This I suppose follows since most of them are basically insecure persons.

In many of these cases which end in hysteria, delerium tremors and uncontrollable violent acts the non-participants viewed these occasions as either everyday occurrences or took the attitude that these people were of a different class than themselves. This attitude points to the conclusion that few have a concept of mental problems as a disease that should be treated.

With these experiences in the back of my mind, I am well aware that such problems may not arise from being in the migrant stream but may have arisen elsewhere and the persons turn to the migrant stream for refuge and a place to hide.

Therefore in looking at most of these problems any such program to institute cures and improvements should be aware of the time required and the additional cost of trained personnel in the field. Also there is the problem of having the person concerned actually face his problem squarely himself.

I have classified the problems which I saw as follows:

1. Paranoid tendencies - one person\*
2. Paranoid schizophrenic - one person\*
3. Manic depressive - one person\*; religious persons who use wine
4. Persecution complex - children by half sister; white race haters
5. Prostitution
6. Color problems among themselves - mother "dark"; "light" children and father; fair-complexioned persons who think for some reason they are better - "She does not work", "She got her husband because of hair".
7. Too easily satisfied desires - in terms of wages, food, rent, sex
8. Ideas of Grandeur - \$400 - \$500 per season, \$5.00 a day, apples in New York.

9. Tertiary syphilis - 20 years ago, central nervous system affected.
10. Senile person - inability to raise funds to send him back home.

\*Names in confidential file

Generally, the past summer's work with Mrs. Dorothy D. Watts, Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, has been energy consuming and knowledgeable and I hope, helpful to these migratory workers in the Eastern Shore area sometime in the future, if not during the immediate summer, although we saw some on-the-spot fruits of our labor such as:

1. Showers for one camp which previously had never had any
2. Better use of the provided prenatal clinic
3. Increased concern for dental and hygienic problems
4. Establishment of some communicative pathways so as to lead to better local and coastal migratory relationships.

Thank you for the opportunity to be of service.

Respectfully submitted,

Sam O. Atkins

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS BY LENGTH OF TIME IN MIGRATORY WORK  
(unofficial hand tallies)

<u>CAMP</u>	One year	Two-nine years	over ten years	Total
Alimes Bros. at Federalburg	-	5	8	13
Friendship	1	5	4	10
Hurlock - small	-	-	3	3
Hurlock - Wright Bros.	2	1	3	6
Lloyd	-	2	3	5
Preston	8	15	1	24
Spencer - Jones	-	1	-	1
Waddell's Corner	2	10	-	12
N.A., N.A.N.	-	-	-	-
				<u>74</u>

CREW

Fred Lawson	3	10	3	16
Talley McNeil	1	8	4	13
Mans Riggins	1	5	3	9
Charles Sims, Simmons or Sharp	-	4	6	10
Willie Spitzer	1	3	1	5
James Talley	4	2	2	8
None - independent worker or				
N.A., N.A.N.	3	7	2	<u>12</u>
				<u>73</u>

YEARS WITH CREW

One	8	9	7	23
Two	-	16	1	17
Three	-	1	-	2
Four	-	1	1	2
Five	-	4	-	4
Six	-	1	-	1
Seven	-	-	1	1
Eight	-	-	-	-
Nine	-	-	-	-
Ten	5	-	2	2
N.A., N.A.N.	5	7	10	<u>22</u>
				<u>74</u>

WHAT DOING NOW

Picking, harvesting, field work	10	31	20	61
Canning, processing	1	2	-	3
Housewife, child care, etc.	1	3	1	5
Not working	1	2	-	3
N.A.	-	1	1	<u>2</u>
				<u>74</u>

## SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS (cont.'d)

-2-

<u>POSITION IN CREW</u>	<u>One year</u>	<u>Two-nine years</u>	<u>over ten years</u>	<u>Total</u>
Leader	-	3	4	7
Assistant leader	-	1	-	1
Worker, member, picker	11	31	11	53
Checker	-	-	2	2
Leader's wife	-	-	2	2
Non-worker - housewife, etc.	1	2	1	4
Other or N.A., N.A.N.	1	2	2	<u>5</u>
				74
<u>SEX OF RESPONDENT</u>				
Male	8	19	14	41
Female	5	20	8	<u>33</u>
				74
<u>WHY LEFT PREVIOUS WORK</u>				
Money reasons - more, less	1	7	8	16
Work reason - no work in Florida, too hard, end of season, etc.	5	15	9	29
Travel - as reason	3	3	2	8
Family or friends as reason	3	11	3	17
N.A.	3	3	-	<u>4</u>
	1			74
<u>WHAT LIKE ABOUT SEASONAL FARM WORK</u>				
Nothing, it's o.k., alright	6	12	2	20
Good money or regular income - <u>money</u>	2	11	16	29
Work easy, simple, has variety - <u>work</u>	2	10	-	12
Like to travel, new places - <u>mobility</u>	1	4	2	7
Good friends, company, family - <u>people</u>	2	2	2	4
N.A.	-	1	-	<u>1</u>
				73
<u>AGE OF RESPONDENT</u>				
10-19	4	1	-	5
20-29	4	10	1	14
30-39	3	10	7	20
40-49	-	10	3	13
50-59	2	6	5	13
60-69	-	2	5	7
70-79	-	-	1	1
D.K., N.A.	-	-	-	<u>-</u>
				73
<u>STATE OF ORIGIN</u>				
Florida	8	30	13	51
Maryland	1	6	1	8
Virginia	1	2	3	6
Georgia	-	-	2	2
N.A.	3	-	3	<u>6</u>
				73

<u>WHAT DISLIKE ABOUT SEASONAL FARM WORK</u>	<u>One year</u>	<u>Two-nine years</u>	<u>Over ten years</u>	<u>Total</u>
Nothing, no complaint (ie. neutral)	2	19	8	29
Poor pay, e.g. emphasis uncertain - <u>money</u>	2	3	4	9
Bad housing, no fun - <u>living conditions</u>	4	4	3	11
Hard work, dislike of work - <u>work</u>	1	8	4	13
Interpersonal tension, conflice- <u>people</u>	3	3	3	9
Too much traveling - <u>mobility</u>	-	-	-	-
N.A.	1	2	-	<u>3</u>
				74

TYPE OF INSURANCE (MPP)

Sick	6	15	9	30
Accident	-	1	1	2
Hospitalization - Blue Cross	-	2	1	3
Liability on truck, car	-	-	1	1
Life	1	7	3	11
Burial	-	1	1	2
Industrial	-	-	-	-
Can't remember, not sure	2	-	8	10
D.K.	-	-	-	-
N.A., N.A.N.	4	13	4	<u>21</u>
				80

RELIGION

Baptist	4	19	7	30
Other major protestant (Methodist, etc.)	1	8	9	18
Holiness, other fundamentalist group	2	5	3	10
Roman Catholic	-	-	-	-
None	5	3	2	10
N.A.	1	4	1	<u>6</u>
				74