

Unveiling socio-environmental-economic influences within young adult outmigration from rural



Kansas

Danielle Larson, Landon Ochsner, Abigail Schmidt, Mackenzie Waggoner
 Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences Capstone, Kansas State University, Manhattan KS, USA.
 Spring 2024



Introduction

Outmigration in rural Kansas:

Outmigration is a migratory movement that frequently pulls young people from small rural communities to large metropolitan or regional cities. There are numerous social, environmental, and economic factors contributing to young adult outmigration.

Social: Rural place attachment – such as place dependence and place identity. Having weak social ties could influence outmigration.

Environmental: Climate change and decreased water availability. These factors make living in rural areas more difficult.

Economic: Entrepreneurship, industry growth, and education. Lack of these resources could push people to bigger areas with more opportunities.

Methods

This study investigates how, if at all, social, environmental, and economic factors influence and/or interact concerning young adults' outmigration choices.

Qualitative Approach

- Survey of K-State college students from hometowns with less than 30,000 people.
- Survey comprised of open-ended questions relating to social, environmental, and economic factors.
- Results were analyzed using thematic analysis and qualitative description.
- Trustworthiness ensured with Krefting (1991) *Rigor in Qualitative Research outline*

Figure 1. Trustworthiness criteria. Modified from Colburn et al, 2021.



Results

Topic	Parent Code	Theme	Quote
Social	Family Rural Life/Values Community	Rural Social Network	I love my hometown because I felt a sense of ownership and belonging. Within my school, church, and various groups, I got to know many people and find out just how many people I am related to! Everyone knows everyone and was involved somehow in my life. The rural community I was raised in does not represent my morals in any way. The people in my hometown, believed in last names rather than individuality. What I mean by this, is that if one has a parent or grandparent, with good standing in the community, then they are automatically at a better advantage for everything.
		Aspirations	There simply aren't enough people. My community grows smaller each year and the few existing economic opportunities are continually outsourced to larger towns and cities.
		Community Impact Community Opportunities Economic Impact	Presence of Personal and Professional Growth I think that pay will be less competitive from the rural area I am from, and opportunities are very limited and will be very hard to earn. However, the close proximity of family and the lower cost of living may make the income more comparable and may provide important resources that would otherwise cost (ex: childcare, cheaper groceries/rent).
Economic	No Influence Aesthetics	Perception of Resource Use	Environmentally I think a lot of things have improved back home. The city council has put more of an emphasis on parks and green spaces, though urban sprawl has threatened that quite a bit with endless new suburbs spreading out from the city and eating up old fields and farmland. I miss the dark skies and stars from when I was young. Many of the forests I used to roam as a kid have been torn down for low-density housing and new farmland to replace what was taken over. Climate... lack of rain in the past two years have seriously affected the wheat production that last year it was cheaper for farmers to just let their fields go than to harvest it.
		Water Farming Practice Ecological Issues	

Table 1. Parent codes and major themes were identified in each topic. The major themes represent the overarching finding from each topic, while parent codes allow for a more granular understanding of the findings. Respondents' thought on each topic varied significantly, as shown in the included quotes.

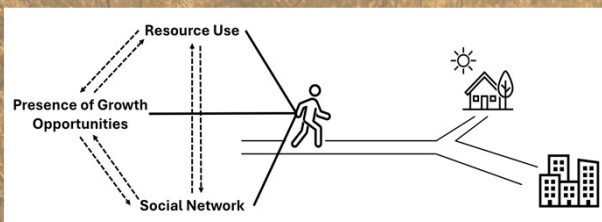


Figure 2. Social networks, the presence of growth opportunities, and resource use are complex, interrelated drivers of outmigration decisions among survey respondents. The varied responses among participants indicate that there is no single driver of outmigration.

Discussion & Conclusions

Overall themes that emerged from the survey were rural social networks, presence of personal and professional growth, and perception of resource use.

Social Networks:

Split feelings of family, community, and rural life values, with some respondents having strong connections, while others did not.

Presence of Personal and Professional Growth:

Despite respondents noting a lack of jobs, economic opportunities, and people in rural areas, these costs could be outweighed by lower costs of living and being close to family.

Perception of Resource Use:

Some felt high concern for environmental issues pertaining to native ecosystems and agroecosystems, while others valued increased development as more important to their rural community, even if it was at the cost of the environment.

Limitations & Implications

Limitations

- No in-person surveys conducted.
- Limited survey audience – only studied K-State students, not other young adults.
- Researcher bias – conclusions are influenced by the ways in which researchers see the world.

Implications

- Communities can better understand the role of these social, environmental, and economic factors may have in young adult decisions to migrate out of their rural community.
- Community leaders, policymakers, and researchers can fine tune the ways in which they help their rural communities prosper.

References

- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in Qualitative Research: The Assessment of Trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214–222. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.45.3.214>
- Colburn et al, NRES Capstone Project, Fall 2021