

Rural homelessness during COVID-19: Implications for health service delivery

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36eiL1LWZaU>



Background

- Impact of COVID-19 on individuals experiencing homelessness outside of major metropolitan areas remains poorly understood
- Compared with individuals experiencing urban homelessness, rural/semi-rural homelessness more likely to be unsheltered or “hidden”.
- Project Roomkey launched in April 2020
- Provided funding for temporary housing for individuals experiencing homelessness across the state of California
- In collaboration with Tulare County Department of Health and Human Services and the CWRU GIS Health and Hazards lab we aimed to explore the impact of COVID-19 and the experience of Project Room-key on residents of Tulare County experiencing homelessness.

Population

- Tulare is a semi-rural county located in California.
- Total population of 466,195
- Highest proportion of residents experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the country.

Activities

- Review and transcribe interviews with residents experiencing homelessness in Tulare County
- Clean and analyze data from previous Tulare County Point in Time Homelessness surveys utilizing geospatial analysis techniques
- Analyze transcribed interviews to determine key impacts of the pandemic on residents of Tulare County experiencing homelessness

Deliverables

- Dataset of transcribed and analyzed interviews
- Manuscript
- Shapefiles highlighting perceived safe and unsafe spaces within Tulare County (Figure 1)

Learning Objectives

- Apply knowledge of geospatial analysis techniques to translate survey data into an appropriate form for further statistical analysis.
- Analyze qualitative interviews and identify key themes and narratives
- Create a manuscript communicating key findings from analysis to the wider scientific community.

Results

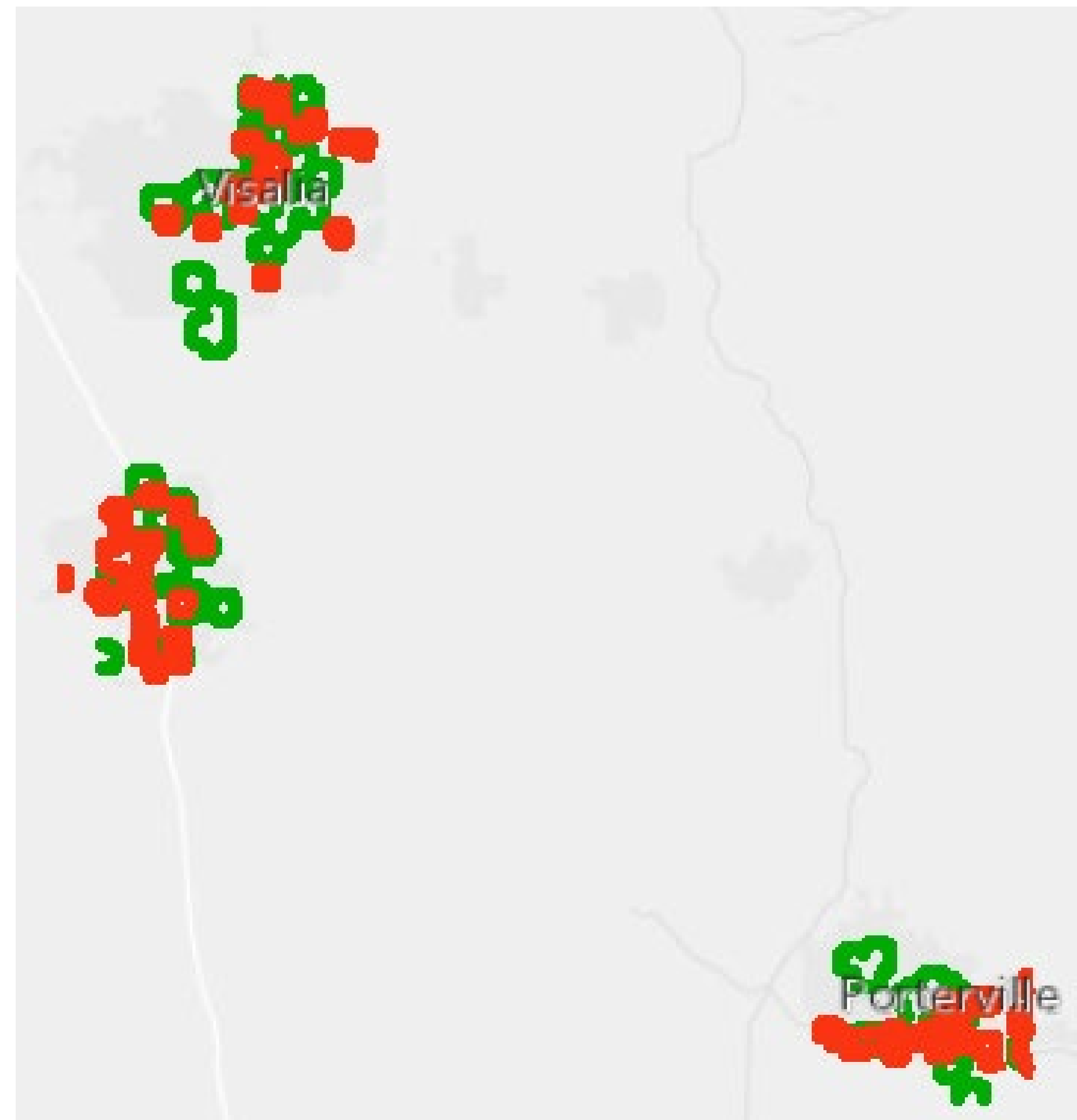


Figure 1. Map of Tulare County Highlighting perceived safe and unsafe spaces as reported by homeless residents

Several key themes emerged during the interview process (Figure 2).

- All participants were aware of the COVID-19 pandemic, though they obtained their information and healthcare through a variety of sources.
- Similarly, almost all participants reported that COVID-19 had impacted their access to locations perceived as “safe”, and required them to change how they accessed services and income.



Figure 2. Themes that emerged from interviews with participants

Methods

- Throughout 2020 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals experiencing homelessness in Tulare County who had been successfully homed via Project Roomkey
- Interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes in duration, conducted by a Case Manager in the Tulare County Department of Health and Human Services with lived experience of homelessness
- Interviews were reviewed and transcribed utilizing automated transcription software, then manually reviewed and corrected.
- Iterative thematic analysis performed.
- Open coding followed by axial coding.

Lessons Learned

- Unsheltered rural homelessness represents a growing section of the population
- COVID-19 has significantly impacted the ability of individuals experiencing homelessness to access traditional safe spaces and resources.
- Housing initiatives such as Project Roomkey have the potential to significantly alter the trajectory of homelessness

Public Health Implications

- Individuals experiencing chronic unsheltered homelessness represent a vulnerable population during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Providing COVID-19 outreach and services to this population will require dedicated, specific approaches

Acknowledgements

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References

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