

Do Homeless Persons Living in Merced County have Geographical and Relational Ties to Cities within the County?

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The primary purpose of this paper is to gain perspective regarding transiency among today's homeless population in Merced County, California. Homelessness has assumed a variety of characteristics over time in the United States. One such characteristic is transiency which, for the purpose of this paper, is defined as not having geographical or relational community ties to cities within Merced County.

This paper examines "geographical and relational community ties" that 104 homeless persons have to the County of Merced based on their answers to the questions asked during the week after the 2016 Merced County 2016 Homeless Count which took place on January 28. Most surveys were completed on the day of, or the day after, the count.

A geographical community tie for each survey respondent was based on answers to the following two questions:

- In what city did you first become homeless?
- What city do you consider to be your home?

Relational community ties were based on their answers to the following six questions:

- Do you have family who live in Merced County?
- Do you have friends who live in Merced County?
- Have you ever worked in Merced County?
- Are you currently working in Merced County?
- Have you ever attended school in Merced County?
- Are you currently attending school in Merced County?

Geographical Community Ties

A geographical community tie was based on whether a survey respondent first became homeless in a city within Merced County and whether they considered a city within Merced County their home.

Table 1 notes 79% or 82 of the 104 persons who completed the survey stated that they first became homeless in a city located in Merced County.

Table 1 also notes 83 or 80% of the 104 persons stated that they consider a city within Merced County to be their home. It should be noted that the 53 persons who first became homeless in the City of Merced also consider the City of Merced to be their home. The same is true for Atwater, including Winton and Dos Palos—15 persons who first became homeless in Atwater including Winton also considered Atwater (including Winton) to be their home; also, the one person who first became homeless in Dos Palos also considered Dos Palos to be their home. There was one exception. There was one person who considered Los Banos to be his home even though he first became homeless in the City of Merced.

Table 1. Location by City

City:	In what city did you first become homeless?		What city do you consider to be your home?	
	#	%	#	%
Merced	53	51	53	51
Atwater including Winton*	15	14	15	14
Los Banos	13	13	14	14
Dos Palos	1	1	1	1
Livingston	0	0	0	0
Gustine	0	0	0	0
Sub-Total:	82	79	83	80
Other cities	22	21	21	20
Total:	104	100	104	100

*Winton is a census-designated place that immediately borders the City of Atwater to the north.

Relational Community Ties

A relational community tie was based on having family or friends who live in Merced County, whether the person ever worked or was currently working in Merced County, and/or if the person ever attended school or was currently attending school in Merced County.

Of the 104 survey respondents who had geographical ties to Merced County, two-thirds have family living in Merced County (68%) and worked in Merced County (65%). More than half (54%) attended school in Merced County as noted in the next table.

Table 2. Relational Community Ties

Social Connections:	#	%
Do you have family who live in Merced County?	71	68
Do you have friends who live in Merced County?	90	86
Have you ever worked in Merced County?	68	65
Are you currently working in Merced County?	5	5
Have you ever attended school in Merced County?	56	54
Are you currently attending school in Merced County?	4	4
Total # of Survey Respondents who had Geographical Ties to Merced County:	104	100

A large majority (86%) have friends living in Merced County and very few survey respondents were currently working (5%) or attending school (4%) in Merced County.

Merging Geographical and Relational Community Ties

In this section, geographical and relational community ties were merged together in order to establish a range of ties that survey respondents had to Merced County.

1. Persons who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County

Table 3 notes that there were 86 survey respondents who had a geographical tie to Merced County because they considered a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home.

Table 3. City Considered to be Home.

Groups	Survey Respondents	
	#	%
Survey respondents who consider a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home	86	83
Total:	104	100

These survey respondents also had relational ties to Merced County. Relational ties were grouped into four categories based on the six questions noted as three through eight on page 1. The four categories of community ties are:

- Do you have family who live in Merced County?
- Do you have friends who live in Merced County?
- Have you ever worked or are you currently working in Merced County?

- Have you ever attended school or are you attending school in Merced County?

Of the 86 survey respondents,

- 35 or 41% answered “yes” to all four questions;
- 24 or 28% answered “yes” to three of the four questions;
- 19 or 22% answered “yes” to two of the four questions;
- 4 or 4.5% answered “yes” to one of the four questions; and
- 4 or 4.5% did not answer “yes” to any of the questions.

What is noteworthy is that more than two-thirds (69%) of survey respondents answered “yes” to three or more of the questions.

2. Survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County

Table 4 notes that there were 82 survey respondents who had a geographical tie to Merced County because they first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County.

Table 4. City First Homeless

Groups	Survey Respondents	
	#	%
2. Survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County	82	79
Total:	104	100

These survey respondents also had relational ties to Merced County. Once again relational ties were grouped into the same four categories based on questions three through eight noted on page 1. The four categories of community ties are:

- Do you have family who live in Merced County?
- Do you have friends who live in Merced County?
- Have you ever worked or are you currently working in Merced County?
- Have you ever attended school or are you attending school in Merced County?

Of the 82 survey respondents,

- 32 or 39% answered “yes” to all four questions;
- 25 or 30% answered “yes” to three of the four questions;
- 15 or 18% answered “yes” to two of the four questions;
- 7 or 9% answered “yes” to one of the four questions; and
- 3 or 4% did not answer “yes” to any of the questions.

What is noteworthy is that more than two-thirds (69%) of survey respondents answered “yes” to three or more of the questions.

3. Survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) and who consider a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home

Table 5 notes that there were 76 survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County and also considered a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home. In other words, they stated a city in Merced County when answering both questions.

Table 5. City First Homeless and City Considered to be Home

Groups	Survey Respondents	
	#	%
3. Survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) and consider a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home	76	73
Total:	104	100

These survey respondents also had relational ties to Merced County. Once again relational ties were grouped into the same four categories based on questions three through eight noted on page 1. The four categories of community ties are:

- Do you have family who live in Merced County?
- Do you have friends who live in Merced County?
- Have you ever worked or are you currently working in Merced County?
- Have you ever attended school or are you attending school in Merced County?

Of the 76 survey respondents,

- 32 or 42% answered “yes” to all four questions;
- 22 or 29% answered “yes” to three of the four questions;
- 15 or 20% answered “yes” to two of the four questions;
- 5 or 6% answered “yes” to one of the four questions; and
- 2 or 3% did not answer “yes” to any of the questions.

What is noteworthy is that nearly three-fourths (71%) of survey respondents answered “yes” to three or more of the questions.

Table 6. City First Homeless, City Considered to be Home, and City First Homeless/City Considered to be Home

Groups	Survey Respondents	
	#	%
1. Survey respondents who consider a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home	86	83
2. Survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County	82	79
3. Survey respondents who first became homeless in a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) and consider a city or census-designated place (unincorporated area) in Merced County to be their home	76	73
Total:	104	100

Conclusion

Combining the questions that served as indicators concerning geographical ties with the questions that served as indicators concerning relational ties, created a unique set of answers. The answers are unique because they are combined in a way that allows a third party or those in the community at large to gain perspective in regards to the transiency of homeless persons in Merced County.

Combining the answers to the indicators reveals that a large percentage of the homeless persons surveyed in Merced County had community ties to the cities within the county. Not only did a substantial percentage of these persons have geographical ties to the county and a hefty

percentage have relational ties, but a significant percentage of the homeless persons surveyed had both geographical and relational community ties.

Another report compiled by the Institute for Urban Initiatives revealed similar findings (see <http://www.urban-initiatives.org/Merced/images/PDFS/Zip%20Code%20Report%20-%20for%20distribution%20at%20Dec%202%20CoC%20meeting.pdf>). The report was based on answers provided by homeless persons who obtained shelter at one of the year-round shelters and transitional housing programs in Merced County between 2013 and 2015. They were asked the following question—what was the zip code of your last permanent address?—and their answers were entered into the CoC’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Of the 547 unduplicated homeless persons who entered a year-round shelter or transitional housing program in Merced County during the period of 2013 – 2015, more than two-thirds (69.6%) of homeless persons provided a zip code for their last permanent address that matched the City of Merced. Approximately 10% provided a zip code in Atwater (10.2%) and Los Banos (9.5%). Nearly 11% (10.8%) provided a different city or an unincorporated area in Merced County.

Both of these reports make it increasingly clear that a large majority of homeless persons in Merced County have geographical and relational ties to cities in Merced County.