

Self-Reported Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic for People Experiencing Homelessness in Sacramento, California

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic may have substantially compounded hardships for people experiencing homelessness. Shelter-in-place orders and recommended physical distancing has often constrained services for people experiencing homelessness, in addition to their already heightened health risks. Though people experiencing homelessness have surely also been impacted economically, the extent of these impacts remains unclear. This study assesses self-reported disease and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic for experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, California. I analyze survey data from 198 people experiencing homelessness, collected in collaboration with a homeless services agency in October 2020. The article also contextualizes these data with comparisons to Sacramento's point-in-time survey of homelessness and a sample of low-income housed Californians. The results suggest very limited exposure to COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento. Income and employment losses were more common, but still less pronounced for people experiencing homelessness than for low-income housed Californians. However, these relatively limited economic impacts mainly reflect enduring deprivation since before the pandemic. People experiencing homelessness also received stimulus funds at much lower rates than low-income housed Californians. Overall, the study adds to an emerging empirical literature on the diverse impacts of the coronavirus pandemic for people experiencing homelessness.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic may have profoundly compounded pre-existing hardships for people experiencing homelessness. Among the overall population, both the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been much greater for already disadvantaged people. Low-income people and People of Color have disproportionately contracted and died from the disease, and their economic hardships disproportionately increased (Mendez-Smith & Klee, 2020). People experiencing homelessness bear multiple health and economic burdens that make them especially vulnerable to these negative impacts (Culhane et al., 2020; Lima et al., 2020; Perri et al., 2020).

This study documents the self-reported health and economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic for people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, California. I analyze survey data from 198 people experiencing homelessness, collected on October 26–28, 2020, in collaboration with Loaves & Fishes, a homelessness services agency. This survey (hereafter “L&F Survey”) measured both perceived disease impacts (i.e., exposure to the virus, access to testing, congregate shelter avoidance) and economic impacts (i.e., job loss, income loss, receipt of the stimulus payments). These events could not only be especially detrimental for people experiencing homelessness given their constrained resources, they could also perpetuate their experience of homelessness (Paat et al., 2019).

I contextualize these patterns with multiple additional data sources. First, I compare rates of homelessness and COVID-19 cases and deaths in Sacramento to other California cities, the state of California, and the nation as a whole. Second, I compare the sample characteristics to estimates from Sacramento’s 2019 point-in-time survey of homelessness (Baiocchi et al., 2019). Third, I produce roughly concurrent estimates for California’s low-income housed population (Census Bureau, 2020). These comparisons suggest the results from the L&F Survey may apply to most people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento and highlight notable differences from low-income housed Californians. The study’s results contribute to a growing body of empirical work documenting the pandemic’s complex consequences for people experiencing homelessness.

Background & Context

Unequal Impacts of the Pandemic

A wide range of advocates and experts have prominently highlighted high vulnerability to the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes the disease COVID-19, for people experiencing homelessness (Culhane et al., 2020; Lima et al., 2020; Perri et al., 2020). People experiencing homelessness have limited access to sanitation and may not be able to physically distance in congregate shelters or crowded encampments. People experiencing homelessness frequently have health conditions that increase susceptibility to COVID-19. Compared to the housed population, a greater fraction of people experiencing homelessness are older and have disabilities or chronic diseases that make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19. As a result, simulations early in the pandemic predicted the potential for catastrophic rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths among people experiencing homelessness (Culhane et al., 2020).

Widespread transmission of the coronavirus is especially likely in congregate living places, including shelters for people experiencing homelessness (Culhane et al., 2020). Shelter outbreaks were of especially high concern, given the resource constraints many shelters face (Newman & Donley, 2017). By April 2020, coronavirus clusters appeared in shelters in Boston, San Francisco, and Seattle early in the pandemic (Mosites et al., 2020), with many more reported across the country (Finnigan, 2020). In early May 2020, Continuums of Care (local coordinating agencies for homelessness services) across the country still reported shortages in access to personal protective equipment for shelter staff, widespread coronavirus testing, and capacity to quarantine or isolate symptomatic or positively tested people (Rice et al., 2020).

Expanded public health responses by local governments, health care providers, and homeless services organizations may have effectively prevented worst-case predictions in many places. Early and widespread coronavirus testing, alongside the capacity for isolating those testing positive for the virus, helped constrain COVID-19 outbreaks in congregate shelters in cities like Dallas, San Diego, and Seattle (Benavides & Nukpezah, 2020; Marquez et al., 2020; Tobolowsky et al., 2020). Additionally, lower transmission rates for the coronavirus in outdoor spaces, like tent encampments, may have protected many people experiencing homelessness. For example, one study of young people experiencing homelessness in the Los Angeles area found relatively high access to coronavirus precautions, like sanitation and physical distancing (Tucker

et al., 2020). Among the mostly unsheltered people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County, the test positivity rate is lower than among the overall population (Weber, 2020).

In addition to unequal exposure to COVID-19, economic hardships like job loss, housing loss, and food insecurity have grown disproportionately among lower-income people during the pandemic (Mendez-Smith & Klee, 2020). Despite lower-than-feared disease impacts, news reports have repeatedly documented how the pandemic has severely compounded hardship for many people experiencing homelessness (Berry-Jester & Hart, 2020). Some shelters closed due to virus outbreaks and many others reduced capacity to implement CDC-recommended physical distancing (Finnigan, 2020; Mosites et al., 2020). Access to many behavioral health services similarly became more limited (Tucker et al., 2020). Anecdotally, increased applications for services and demands for affordable housing among previously middle-income people may further hamper access to services or housing for those experiencing homelessness (Berry-Jester & Hart, 2020).

Sacramento’s Rates of Homelessness and COVID-19 in Comparison

Sacramento, California, has notable similarities and differences from other areas of the United States in terms of both homelessness and the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 compares Sacramento County to the state of California, the nation, and Los Angeles and San Francisco Counties. Sacramento’s rate of homelessness in 2019 was similar to the state’s overall rate, and both were more than twice the national rate. In comparison, Los Angeles and San Francisco Counties were outliers with extremely high rates of homelessness. Experiences of people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento may arguably better represent those experiences in other cities.

Table 1. Comparison of homelessness rates in 2019 and COVID-19 case/death rates as of October 25, 2020.

	Sacramento County	Los Angeles County	San Francisco County	California	United States
Homelessness Rate in 2019	35.9	58.7	91.1	38.3	17.3
Cumulative COVID-19 Case Rate	162.8	298.6	137.3	229.2	260.7
Cumulative COVID-19 Death Rate	3.1	7.0	1.6	4.4	6.8

Notes: All rates are per 10,000 people. Numbers of people experiencing homelessness from 2019 point-in-time counts. Total populations from U.S. Census Bureau. Cumulative COVID-19 cases and deaths as of October 25, 2020, from <https://usafacts.org/visualizations/coronavirus-covid-19-spread-map>

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Rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths have been relatively low in Sacramento County. As of October 25, 2020 (immediately prior to survey data collection), the cumulative rate of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Sacramento County was lower than in the state overall and much lower than in the nation.

COVID-19 cases among people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County have been especially low. Of the 1,315 coronavirus tests administered across several sites in that time, only nine have been positive (Sacramento County, 2020). The county, in collaboration with local service providers and the state government (i.e., California's Project Roomkey), has been renting hotel rooms and establishing other quarantine/isolation spaces for people experiencing homelessness who tested positive for the coronavirus or were in high-risk groups. Between April 8 and September 9, 2020, 1,073 people received temporary quarantine/isolation housing (Sacramento County, 2020) compared with an estimated 10,000 people who experienced homelessness in Sacramento County at any point in 2019 (Baiocchi et al., 2019).

In contrast to the relatively low case rates, the pandemic's economic impacts on Sacramento County may have been more pronounced. California was the first state to implement a shelter-in-place order on March 19, 2020. Sacramento County's unemployment official rate spiked to 14.5% in April 2020, similar to the official national unemployment rate. However, Sacramento's official unemployment rate (9.8%) remained higher than the national official rate in September 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Study Aims

This study examines self-reported disease and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, California. Given these patterns described above, one could expect relatively few self-reported disease impacts (i.e., exposure to the disease) but relatively strong economic impacts of the pandemic (i.e., lost income or work). The study also compares these self-reported economic impacts to a sample of low-income housed Californians. Finally, I also compare access to economic relief, specifically the federal stimulus checks from the CARES Act, for people experiencing homelessness and low-income housed Californians.

Data & Methods

L&F Survey

The L&F survey, this study's primary data, were collected through Loaves & Fishes, a large homeless service provider in Sacramento, California. From October 26 to 28, 2020, the author and a small team of volunteers (four to nine at a time, 25 total) conducted face-to-face surveys with adults receiving take-away breakfasts and lunches. Loaves & Fishes is located north of Sacramento's downtown area, close to a temporary shelter, and within walking distance from multiple large tent encampments. The organization provides several services in addition to meals, including sanitation services, clothing, medical services, and a school program for children experiencing homelessness. During the survey collection periods, Loaves & Fishes served 1,363 breakfasts and lunches over five meal services. Based on survey questions about the type and frequency of Loaves & Fishes service usage, the number of unique individuals receiving these meals likely exceeded 700.¹ Of course, the true number could plausibly be either higher or lower.

Respondents typically completed the survey in 10 to 15 minutes. Participants received a \$5 gift card for their time. The survey asked three question batteries: evaluations of Loaves & Fishes services; respondent background information, including demographics, economic resources, and experiences of homelessness; and self-reported impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team collected 236 completed surveys (only three respondents started but did not finish the survey). The analytic sample includes 198 respondents who self-reported currently experiencing homelessness. Item non-response was generally low (less than 8%). In addition to point estimates, appendix Table A1 presents standard errors, observation numbers, and item non-response rates for all key variables.

Multiple selection processes likely influenced the composition of the L&F Survey sample. First, the sample only included people using the service provider's breakfast and lunch distribution by definition. People experiencing homelessness who systematically do not use

¹ In the L&F survey, 88% of respondents said they came to Loaves & Fishes for both breakfast and lunches. Using this percentage and the number of people at breakfast, I estimated the number of repeated persons at lunch. Three-quarters of L&F Survey respondents also said they used Loaves & Fishes services "more than once a week." Though not a response choice, many people I surveyed told me they went every day. Using this percentage, I estimated the number of repeated persons at the second and third days' meal services relative to the previous day. The total number of estimated unique persons across all meals was 732.

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Loaves & Fishes or meal services in general were not represented. Second, people receiving meals in combination with other services, like the county's COVID-19 temporary shelter program, were also likely not represented. Third, the survey only represented people still experiencing homelessness late in the pandemic. It cannot represent people who experienced homelessness earlier in the pandemic but transitioned out of homelessness.

The first part of the analysis compares the demographic characteristics and conditions related to homelessness in the L&F Survey to data on the broader population of people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento and low-income housed Californians. Key demographic variables include: current age in years; gender (male = 1, other = 0); race/ethnicity (non-Latina/o White, non-Latina/o Black, Latina/o of any race, other); and family status (unmarried and without children = 1; other = 0).

I recoded several of the variables measuring conditions related to homelessness for comparison with the point-in-time survey of homelessness (described below). Length of residency in Sacramento was measured in years, months, weeks, and days, converted to a binary variable (at least one year = 1; less than one year = 0). The survey asked respondents where they slept last night, converted into a binary variable for being unsheltered (outside without a tent, outside with a tent, car/bus/vehicle = 1; hotel, friend's/relative's home, temporary shelter, transitional or permanent housing = 0). About halfway through data collection, the survey added a series of questions about difficult experiences or conditions. One of these questions asked respondents if they had ever been diagnosed with a physical disability that limits their work (yes = 1, no = 0). Another asked if respondents had been diagnosed with a serious mental health challenge, like major depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia (yes = 1, no = 0).

The L&F Survey measured monthly income with two questions. Total income for October included the following categories: none, \$1–\$100; \$101–\$250; \$251–\$500; \$501–\$,1000; \$1,001–\$2,000; and over \$2,000. The survey also asked respondents which income sources they had in October: full- or part-time work; unemployment benefits; TANF or CalWorks; General Assistance; SSI or SSA (Social Security); child support payments; SNAP/CalFresh; or other. The main income variables for comparison with the survey of low-income housed Californians are whether the respondent works (income from full- or part-time work = 1, no = 0) and whether the respondent receives SNAP/CalFresh benefits (yes = 1, no =

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0). The remaining income variables are not directly comparable with the comparison surveys, so I only describe them in the text.

The second part of the analysis estimates self-reported impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Four questions asked about potential exposure to COVID-19. The first asked whether respondents believe they have been sick with COVID-19, and the second asked if they believe they have been exposed to someone who was sick with COVID-19. The third question asked if respondents have been tested for the coronavirus. The fourth asks respondents if they have avoided staying in shelter because they were afraid of the coronavirus.

Three questions asked about economic impacts of the pandemic. The first asked how respondents rate their income in October compared to their income in February 2020: much lower, somewhat lower, about the same, somewhat higher, much higher. The second asked respondents if they have been laid off or lost a job due to the pandemic. The third asked respondents if they received a stimulus check from the federal government.

Sacramento Point-in-Time Survey of Homelessness

I compare the demographics and conditions related homelessness in the L&F Survey to published estimates from the 2019 point-in-time (PIT) count and survey of homelessness in Sacramento County (Baiocchi et al., 2019). The PIT count was an approximate census of homelessness conducted the nights of January 30 and 31, 2019. Shelters counted the number of residents on January 30 while teams of volunteers canvassed 168 sites across the county over two nights. The face-to-face survey of a random sample of people experiencing homelessness provided demographic information (with sampling weights applied). Like all PIT counts, the Sacramento count likely missed some people experiencing homelessness on the count nights. The number of people experiencing homeless at any point during the year may also be twice as high as the number counted on just January 30 and 31 (Baiocchi et al., 2019).

The demographic and homelessness variables in the L&F Survey are coded as similarly as possible to the PIT survey. The race/ethnicity measures are a notable exception. The Sacramento PIT survey includes both Latina/o and non-Latina/o as White or Black. Also, the PIT survey's question on work disabilities included both physical and mental disabilities. The PIT survey included a small number of people under age 18.

Household Pulse Survey

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The Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey (HPS), collected September 30 to October 12 2020 (Census Bureau, 2020), provides a comparison sample of low-income housed Californians. The HPS is a short online survey conducted every one or two weeks by the Census Bureau to track the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. A very large, random sample of adults was invited to take the survey (based on addresses), but the overall response rate was only 9.2%. I treat the HPS estimates cautiously as a result.

The HPS is a national survey also designed to represent states and several large metropolitan areas. I limit the analytic sample to respondents in California who reported less than \$25,000 of annual income in 2019, the lowest income category in the survey. The survey is not able to identify or represent Sacramento residents, specifically.

I code key demographic variables in the HPS as similarly as possible to the L&F Survey. To assess access to resources, I examine whether the respondent worked for pay in the past week (yes = 1, no = 0) and whether the respondent or someone in their household received SNAP benefits (yes = 1, no = 0). I also estimate the fraction of that received free food from community organizations: food pantries/banks, shelters or soup kitchens, or "other community programs" (yes = 1, no = 0). This measure helps assess the extent to which low-income housed Californians use meal services similar to the ones provided by Loaves & Fishes.

To measure economic impacts of the pandemic, I analyze the HPS's question asking if the respondent or anyone in their household lost "employment income" since March 13, 2020 (yes = 1, no = 0). Finally, I estimate stimulus payment receipt (yes = 1, no = 0) using an earlier wave of the HPS (collected July 16–21) because the latest wave no longer asked this question.

Results

L&F Survey Comparisons

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the L&F Survey, with comparison to the 2019 PIT count of homelessness in Sacramento and the HPS of low-income housed Californians. The L&F Survey's demographic composition was generally similar to the 2019 PIT survey, but slightly older on average. Black people are around a third of the L&F Survey sample and of all people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, nearly three times their representation in Sacramento's total population (Baiocchi et al., 2019). White people (both Hispanic and non-Hispanic) were nearly half of all people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento. When limited

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to non-Latinas/os, White people were less than one-third of the L&F Survey. In both surveys, Latinas/os were underrepresented compared to Sacramento’s population.

Table 2. Comparison of L&F Survey with Sacramento’s point-in-time (PIT) survey of homelessness and the Household Pulse Survey (HPS) of low-income housed Californians.

	L&F Survey (Oct. 2020)	Sacramento PIT Survey of Homelessness (Jan 2019)	HPS of Low-Income Housed Californians (Sept.–Oct. 2020)
<u>Demographics</u>			
Mean Age	50	39	50
% Male	69%	62%	34%
% White ^a	30%	47%	32%
% Black ^a	31%	34%	7%
% Latina/o ^a	16%	18%	57%
% Single Adults without Children	79%	73%	41%
<u>Conditions Related to Homelessness</u>			
% Lived in Sacramento at least One Year	93%	90%	
% Unsheltered	78%	70%	
% Homeless at least One Year	74%	59%	
% Physical or Mental Disability	53%	26%	
% Severe Mental Health Condition	46%	21%	
<u>Access to Resources</u>			
% with Work for Pay	6%		26%
% Receive SNAP/CalFresh	42%		38%
% Receive Food from Community Org. ^b	100%		16%
Sample Size	198	525	478
Estimated Population ^c	633	5,570	2,803,409

Notes: The main study sample is unweighted. The Sacramento PIT survey and HPS apply survey weights. “Low-income” in the HPS includes less than \$25,000 for 2019 annual income, the lowest income category in the survey.

^a The surveys differed in their race/ethnicity measures, as described in the main text. The low estimated % Black for the HPS may be affected by response bias not accounted for by the survey weights.

^b The entire L&F Survey sample received free food by definition.

^c The population for the L&F Survey is the estimated number of unique individuals across all meal services during data collection (footnote 1) multiplied by the percentage of all survey respondents who identified as currently homeless. The population for the PIT Survey is the total PIT count for Sacramento County. The estimated population for low-income housed Californians is the sum of the HPS survey weights.

Most notably, the L&F Survey included a higher fraction of people experiencing homelessness for at least a year compared to the PIT survey, and higher fractions in the L&F

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Survey reported a work-limiting disability or severe mental health condition (e.g., major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia).²

Unsurprisingly, both the L&F Survey and 2019 PIT survey compositions substantially differed from the HPS of low-income housed Californians. For example, Latinas/os are the majority of low-income housed Californians but are underrepresented among people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento. The very low fraction of Black respondents in the HPS sample is likely inaccurate, suggesting the HPS does not fully represent Californians when also restricted to the lowest income stratum.

Two comparisons with the L&F Survey are particularly useful. First, any work for pay was much less common in L&F Survey (6%) compared to low-income housed Californians (26%). However, rates of SNAP/CalFresh receipt were remarkably similar. Second, 16% of low-income housed Californians reported receiving free food from some form of community organization, which would include organizations like Loaves & Fishes. That estimate implies over 450,000 housed, low-income people in California used similar food services as the population in this study.

Self-Reported Pandemic Impacts

Table 3 presents results for self-reported impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the L&F Survey, along with 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes for each estimate.

Table 3. Self-reported impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in the L&F Survey, with [95% confidence intervals (CI)] and sample sizes (N).

	Percent of L&F Survey	95% CI	N
<u>COVID-19 Exposure</u>			
Believes has had COVID-19	3%	[1.4, 6.6]	198
Believes has been exposed to someone with COVID-19	11%	[7.1, 15.9]	196
Has been tested for the coronavirus	61%	[54.0, 67.7]	195
Has avoided shelters due to fear of coronavirus	27%	[21.2, 33.8]	192
<u>Economic Impacts</u>			
Income in October much/somewhat lower than in February, 2020	33%	[26.5, 39.8]	192
Been laid off or lost a job because of the pandemic	16%	[11.5, 22.0]	193
Received a stimulus check from the federal government	45%	[38.1, 52.0]	198

² Though not formally measured, the author encountered very few respondents who seemed incapable of understanding or completing the survey. Only three apparently incoherent respondents did not finish the survey and were excluded from the analysis.

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Consistent with Sacramento's relatively low COVID-19 case rates, very few respondents believed they had COVID-19 or were exposed to someone that had it. Though the three percent of the sample translates to 300 cases per 10,000 people, it also represents only six survey respondents.³ The 95% confidence interval also includes the percentage that would result from Sacramento's overall cumulative case rate. While administering the survey, many respondents emphatically replied that they had not encountered COVID-19 in any capacity. A few also said that the coronavirus was "not a problem around here."

Most people in the L&F Survey were tested for the coronavirus at some point. Relative to all people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, the L&F Survey sample likely had especially high access to testing because Loaves & Fishes also administers coronavirus tests.

More than one-in-four respondents answered "yes" when asked if they had avoided shelters because of the coronavirus. Many respondents elaborated on their answer beyond the survey question. Some answered "no" but said that they avoid shelters for many other reasons anyway, like being too crowded or having too little privacy (consistent with other surveys about shelter usage, e.g., Applied Survey Research, 2019). Others answered "no" because they felt the risk of COVID-19 was preferable to remaining unsheltered. For example, one middle-aged female respondent told me she continued to use shelters because, "I just can't be out there in all that."

Self-reported economic impacts of the pandemic were more common than self-reported disease impacts. About one-third of the sample reported that their income was lower in October than in February 2020. One-quarter said their income was "much lower" and 8% said "somewhat lower." Only 5% of the sample said their income had increased between February and October. Most of the sample, 62%, said their income remained "about the same."

About 16% reported losing a job due to the pandemic. Of those reporting job loss, 65% said their income declined between February and October. In comparison, only 27% of those who did not report job loss said that their income declined. Overall, 39% (95% CI: 32.3, 46.3) in the L&F Survey reported a job and/or income loss since February 2020.

³ Of those six, one described symptoms to me that are inconsistent with COVID-19. Another described having symptoms similar COVID-19 but in November/December of 2019.

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These economic impacts were much more pronounced in the HPS of low-income housed Californians, in which 59% (CI: 54.0, 62.9) said that they or someone in their household “experienced a loss of employment income since March 13, 2020.” However, the lower fraction reporting income/job losses among the L&F Survey largely reflected very low employment and incomes in the first place. Very few people in the L&F Survey (6%) reported any earnings from full- or part-time work (Table 2). The most commonly reported income types in the L&F Survey, “SNAP/CalFresh” and “SSI or SSA (Social Security),” were not contingent on the pandemic.

Many people in the L&F Survey did not report declines in monthly income because there was little room to fall. Two-thirds in the L&F Survey reported a monthly income of \$500 or less in October and 31% reported “none.” Some respondents explicitly told me their income did not change during the pandemic because they “never really had any anyway.”

Finally, most people in the L&F Survey did not report receiving a stimulus check from the federal government. Those with October incomes over \$500 were more likely to say they received the stimulus (70%, CI: 59.1, 81.5) compared to those with incomes of \$500 or lower (31%, CI: 23.2, 39.3). In contrast, 86% (CI: 82.9, 88.5) of low-income housed Californians reported receiving a stimulus check in an earlier wave of the HPS (collected July 16–21). These patterns suggest that the pandemic relief funds failed to meet those with the lowest incomes both *between* the housed and unhoused and *among* the unhoused.

Discussion

This study examined self-reported impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, California. In collaboration with Loaves & Fishes, a homelessness service provider, I administered a face-to-face survey of almost 200 people experiencing homelessness on October 26–28, 2020. The survey captured self-reported impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to disease exposure and economic resources.

Results from the survey generally suggested limited exposure to the coronavirus for people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, and most had access to testing. Concerns about shelter safety due to the coronavirus were non-negligible, but various other orientations toward shelters were qualitatively as or more important.

Self-reported economic impacts (i.e., income and job losses) were more pronounced than disease exposure for people experiencing homelessness, but these economic impacts were even

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greater for low-income housed Californians. However, these relatively muted economic losses reflected persistent economic deprivation since before the pandemic. Compared to housed Californians, fewer L&F Survey respondents lost jobs or income because they frequently had nothing to lose in the first place. Moreover, far fewer people in the L&F Survey received an economic stimulus check compared to low-income housed Californians, perpetuating their economic deprivation.

The L&F Survey may have important limitations that affected these results. First, the sample likely did not include anyone participating in the local government's COVID-19 temporary housing program, potentially biasing estimates of perceived exposure downward. This bias may have been small though, because Sacramento County reported extremely few positive cases among people experiencing homelessness (Sacramento County, 2020).

Second, sampling people through a homeless service provider could have systematically missed people experiencing homelessness but with more resources. For example, the L&F Survey included more older people and people with disabilities or mental health challenges than the 2019 PIT survey for Sacramento. The L&F Survey also included a higher fraction of people experiencing homelessness for at least one year compared to the PIT survey. This difference could be due to higher rates of disabilities and mental health challenges, greater service use with chronic homelessness, or real growth in typical lengths of homelessness during the pandemic. Employment rates might also be higher for people that were systematically not observed in this sample. I cannot know how self-reported impacts of the pandemic may differ this unobserved portion of the Sacramento population experiencing homelessness. But if this unobserved portion of the population was slightly more economically advantaged than the study sample, their pandemic impacts may have been somewhere between those in the L&F Survey and the HPS of low-income housed Californians.

Finally, this study's results have implications for future research and practice. Consistent with experiences in other cities, like Dallas (Benavides & Nukpezah, 2020) or San Diego (Marquez et al., 2020), proactive and widespread coronavirus testing and isolation may have been crucial for protecting people experiencing homelessness. However, these results also suggest that economic and housing supports for people experiencing homelessness should not treat the pandemic as a new set back, as it might be for many otherwise middle-income people. Instead, the pandemic mainly compounds the enduring marginalization that many of the study

participants experienced, particularly given the complex recovery needs for people high rates of disabilities and mental health challenges (Padgett et al., 2016). This marginalization calls for long-term, not short-term, support.

Consistent with that goal, California's short-term pandemic housing program, Project Roomkey, is transitioning to a longer-term transitional housing program, Project Homekey. The California Department of Housing and Community Development will spend up to \$600 million for local governments to obtain vacant hotels, motels, and other housing units for people experiencing homelessness (HCD, 2020). However, the program would be far more effective for this study's participants if it expanded the earlier Project Roomkey's limitations to those at high risk of coronavirus infection (Berry-Jester & Hart, 2020), as well as considering a broader definition for how people experiencing homelessness have been impacted by the pandemic, overall.

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Pandemic Impacts in Sacramento

Table A1. Point estimates, standard errors, sample sizes, and item non-response rates for key variables in the L&F Survey.

	Point Estimate	Standard Error	Valid N	% Non-Response
Mean Age (years)	50.1	3.6	192	3%
% Male	69%	3%	195	2%
% White	30%	3%	195	2%
% Black	31%	3%	195	2%
% Latina/o	12%	2%	195	2%
% Single Adults without Children	79%	3%	192	3%
% Lived in Sacramento at least One Year	93%	2%	194	2%
% Unsheltered	78%	3%	198	0%
% Homeless at least One Year	74%	3%	196	1%
% Physical or Mental Disability	53%	4%	127	7%
% Severe Mental Health Condition	46%	5%	84	8%
% with Work for Pay	6%	2%	182	7%
% Receive SNAP/CalFresh	42%	4%	182	7%