

Josie Miller; Gina J. Hill, PhD, RD, LD; Gina Alexander, PhD, MPH, MSN, RN; Anne VanBeber, PhD, RD, LD
Texas Christian University

Background

- In 2022, 9.1% of households with adults ages 65 years or older were food insecure at some point during the year.
- Adults aged 65 and older are a rapidly increasing segment of the population, which is predicted to represent roughly one in six Americans by the year 2060.
- Therefore, it is imperative to better understand why and how food insecurity impacts older adults as this population within the United States continues to increase.

Methods

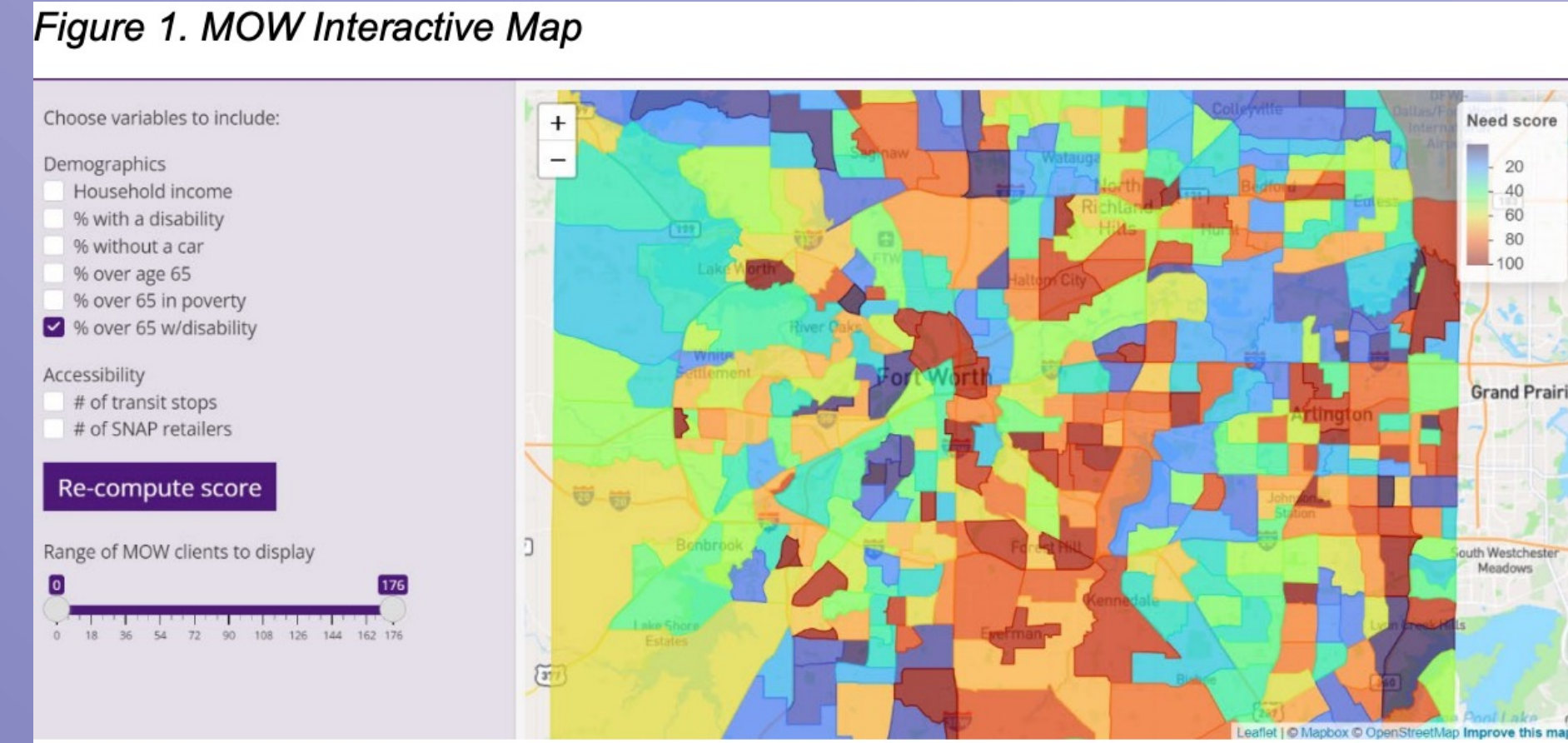
This cross-sectional descriptive design study was approved by the Texas Christian University (TCU) IRB and supported by a TCU College of Science and Engineering Research (SERC) grant and funding from Meals on Wheels (MOW) of Tarrant County.

A geospatial analysis was conducted to identify priority areas for food insecurity (FI) with gaps in MOW service. Data was collected from US Census Bureau repositories and included household income, >65 years with a disability, and >65 years in poverty. A composite score ranked neighborhoods by priority. Researchers overlaid this data with de-identified datasets of MOW clients' addresses to determine MOW service at neighborhood levels. See Figure 1 MOW Interactive Map.

Three sites were chosen by MOW with input from researchers, based upon having a high population of older adults who should qualify for MOW but with less participation than expected. The community sites where interviews took place were located in three different zip codes: Site 1 Fort Worth (76104), Site 2 Bedford (76021), and Site 3 Arlington (76012).

Trained researchers conducted and recorded semi-structured interviews at the sites in both English and Spanish and then used a professional transcription service to transcribe the interviews, which were then reviewed for accuracy by researchers using their field notes from the interviews. Two members of the research team conducted thematic content analysis and used NVivo software to detect patterns and themes related to FI. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 29. Subsequently, researchers compared frequencies of qualitative themes between the three sites.

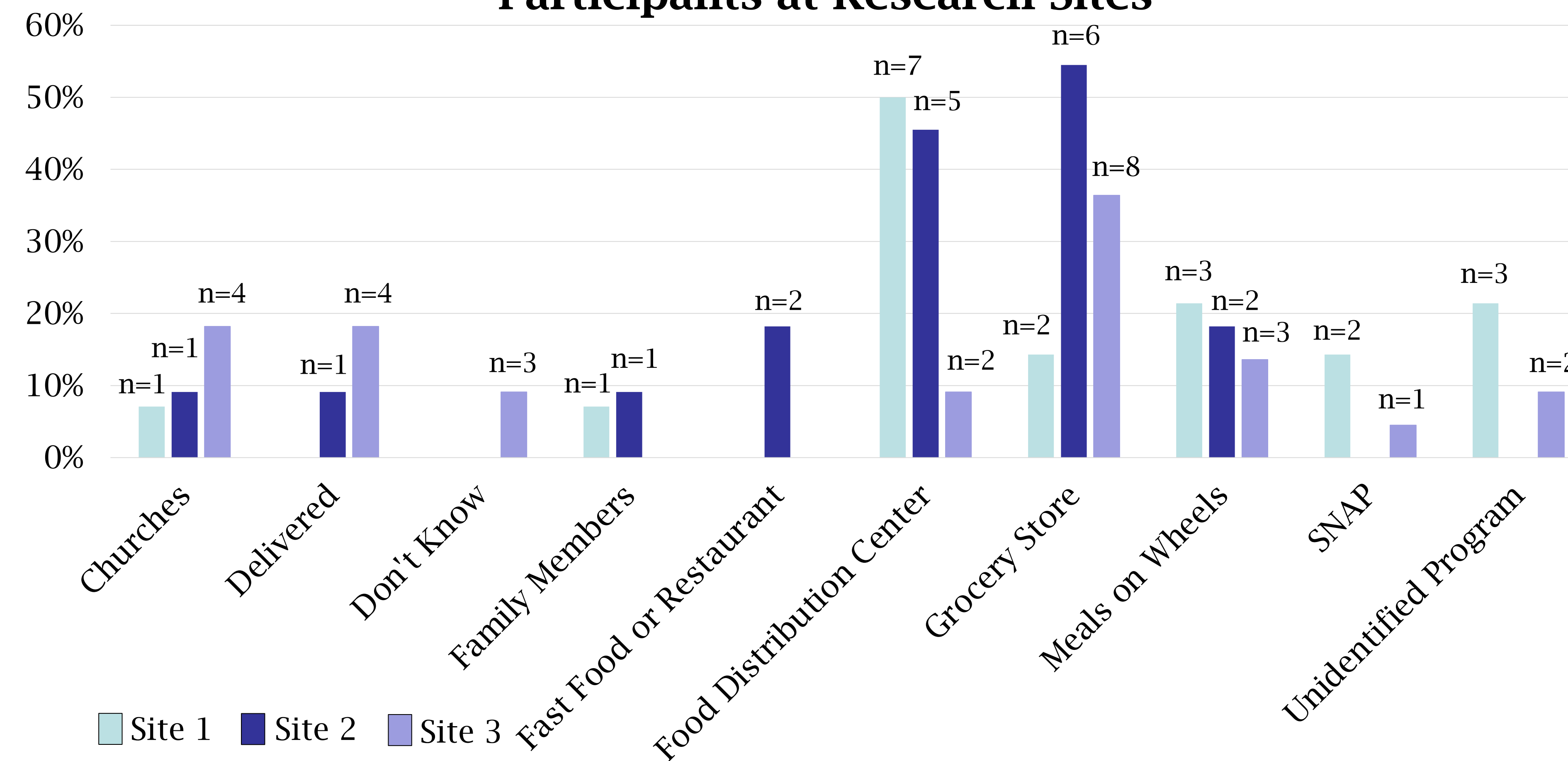
Figure 1. MOW Interactive Map



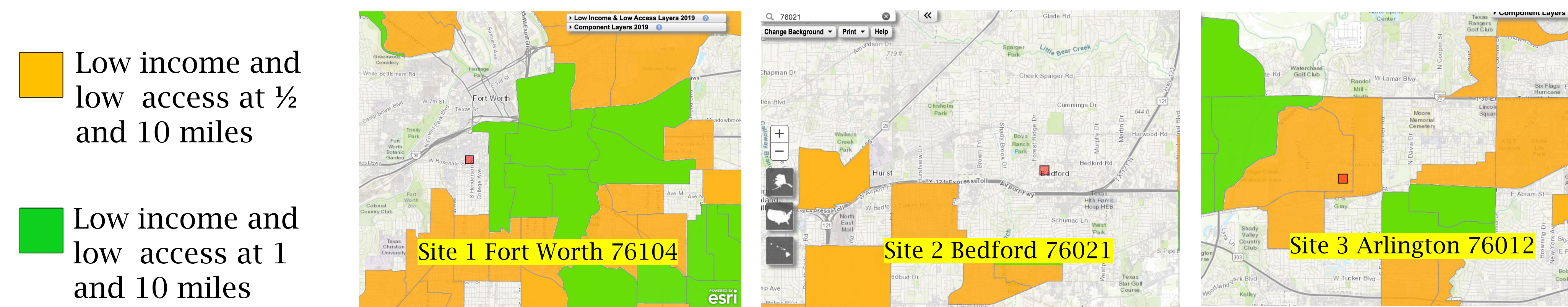
Objectives

- Identify factors leading to food insecurity (FI) among older adults in Tarrant County.
- Analyze causes of FI and barriers to resources to help facilitate solutions.
- Compare causes of FI and barriers to resources between three high risk areas.

Reported Food Sources for Older Adults among Participants at Research Sites



USDA Economic Research Service Income and Food Access Data of Research Sites



Causes of Food Insecurity among Older Adults: Qualitative Responses

FI Cause	Examples	% (n=x)	Sample of Participant Quotes Related to FI Cause
Financial	Low income, lack or loss of jobs, inflation, lack of limited access to government assistance	67% (n=32)	<p>"I get a card from my social security, with that I pay my light. If I have (money) leftover, I buy (food)."</p> <p>"Older adults rely on social security benefits for their daily expenses. With a rise in prices, utilities, gas, and housing and medicine, or course, not to mention clothing and other essentials, food has become a non-priority over all of those expenses."</p>
Health Related	Despair, poor appetite, illness, excessive hospital bills, and dietary restrictions	20% (n=10)	<p>"Usually, old adults sometimes because of health reasons, they are not able to prepare their food. Or they're not able to-- because of medication, some food they can't eat."</p> <p>"I just eat because I have to. I don't have an appetite. I just eat."</p>
Lack of Transport	Lack of transportation, lack of support, or insufficient information	12.5% (n=6)	<p>"Not having transportation or not having anybody to help them. Sometimes you might have a way to go, but then there's nobody to go in the store with you to help you. I'm blessed."</p>
Meal Prep Challenges	Cooking, preparing meals, mobility issues in kitchen, knowledge deficit	12.5% (n=6)	<p>"They need somebody to come and help them out with fixing food sometimes. Some of them can't do it themselves."</p> <p>"When you're used to fixing for a family and then it's just you, it's hard to come up with little small amounts or really a health meal."</p>

Results

Forty-eight individuals completed the survey. Sites 1, 2, and 3 had 29.2% (n=14), 22.9% (n=11), and 47.9% (n=23) of participants, respectively. Participants were 74.1+/-7.7 years of age with a range of 61-93 years. Over 83% (n=40) were female, while 16.7% (n=8) were male. Participants were 58.3% (n=28) White, 33.3% (n=16) Black/African-American, and 6.3% (n=3) Asian. Over 29% (n=14) of participants identified as Hispanic. Five primary themes were identified as FI causes; finances, health related causes, lack of transportation, meal prep challenges and lack of support. Over 77% (n=37) of respondents knew someone who received MOW, while 20.8% (n=10) did not know anyone who received MOW. Almost 60% (n=28) of participants reported a lack of knowledge regarding MOW. Approximately 67% of participants reported that financial difficulties cause FI. Approximately 54% (n=26) of participants responded accurately that those who are not US citizens are able to receive meals from MOW. Approximately 35.4% (n=17) of participants said that a community organization or partner is best to support MOW outreach. About 33% (n=16) of participants said that face-to-face communication is best for outreach.

Conclusions

Economic and health-related hardships are the main drivers of FI in older adults in Tarrant County. The most common food sources for older adults include food distribution centers and grocery stores. Confusion about eligibility for MOW is evident. Participants preferred word of mouth or outreach through partner organizations to learn more about MOW. Differences were detected for the most common causes of FI and/or sources of food at the different research sites. From the analysis, it is clear that MOW has a positive reputation within the community.

Causes of Food Insecurity Identified by Participants at Research Sites

