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Accessing Faith-Based Organizations using Public Transportation: A Qualitative and GIS Study

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| Authors | Maley, Olivia |
| Download date | 2026-06-06 20:13:41 |
| Link to Item | https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/7765 |

TITLE: Accessing Faith-Based Organizations using Public Transportation: A Qualitative and GIS Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Faith-based organizations (FBOs) provide a wide breadth of services for community support. In previous research, Metropolitan Atlanta hotel residents described use of several FBOs in their communities to obtain important resources and remain in livable conditions. However, navigating the community to access these services was a problem. This study explores the importance of faith-based organizations to adult residents in extended-stay hotels in Gwinnett County and determines the impact of public transportation routes on residents' abilities to access resources at nearby FBOs.

Methods: In this study, I employed qualitative and GIS methods to explore residents' descriptions of FBO use and available transportation routes. First, I analyzed secondary qualitative drawn from three larger studies of residents' experiences in extended-stay hotels. For data selection, inclusion criteria were that hotel residents (1) be aged 18-64, (2) reside in an extended-stay hotel for more than three months, and (3) report not owning a car, with the final sample for analysis being 22 participants. Data analysis consisted of conducting a categorical content analysis of data in two apriori categories: (1) use of FBOs to obtain resources and (2) facilitators and barriers for navigating public transportation to access FBOs. Additionally, I used geographic information system (GIS) techniques to construct a map of Gwinnett County to overlay extended-stay hotel, nearby FBOs, and public transportation routes data.

Results: Overall, qualitative findings suggest that hotel residents relied on two sources of FBO support while attempting to remain housed and meet basic needs: material and spiritual. Participants also identified three issues related to navigating public transportation to access FBOs: proximity, selection, and route misalignment. GIS mapping techniques revealed discrepancies between available public transportation routes and needed transportation routes to access FBOs from hotels.

Discussion/conclusion: The results of the study suggest the need for more coordinated accessibility of FBOs to adults who are precariously housed in Gwinnett County hotels. Bus routes must be effectively planned in the county to enable fuller access to these community resources.

Keywords: faith-based organizations, extended-stay hotels, public transportation barriers, GIS