

The Absolute Homeless and Increasing Climate Variability: Insights from Waterloo Region, Ontario

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with

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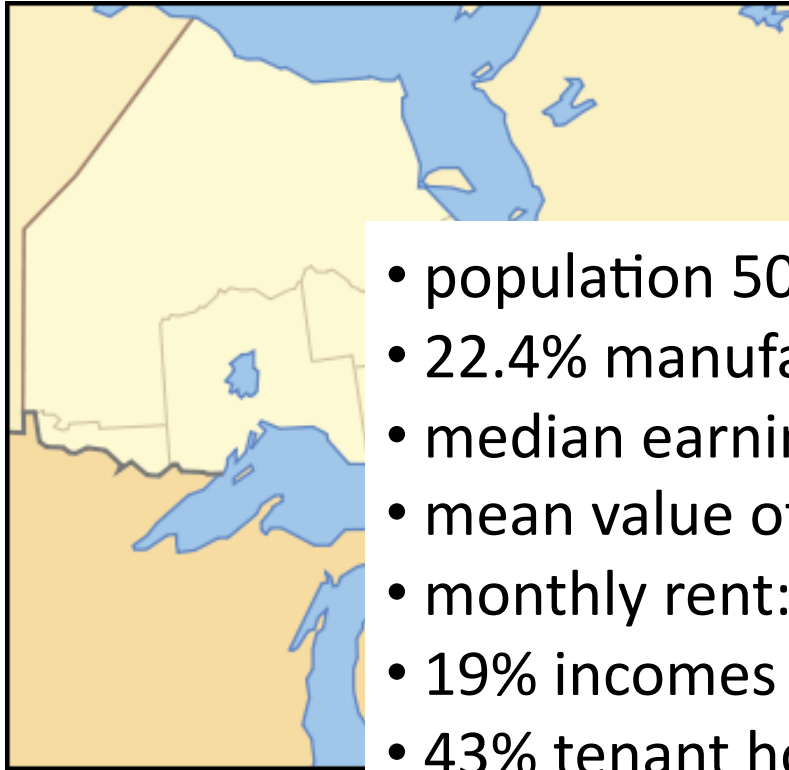


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Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada



- population 500,000 (9% increase 2001-2006)
- 22.4% manufacturing employment
- median earnings \$30,659
- mean value of owned homes: \$264,604
- monthly rent: \$762
- 19% incomes <\$20,000
- 43% tenant households >30% on rent
- 20% tenant households >50% on rent
- 3.3% rental vacancy rate
- 9,700 community housing units (4,500 on waiting list)
- expect 30% increase in community housing demand by 2031



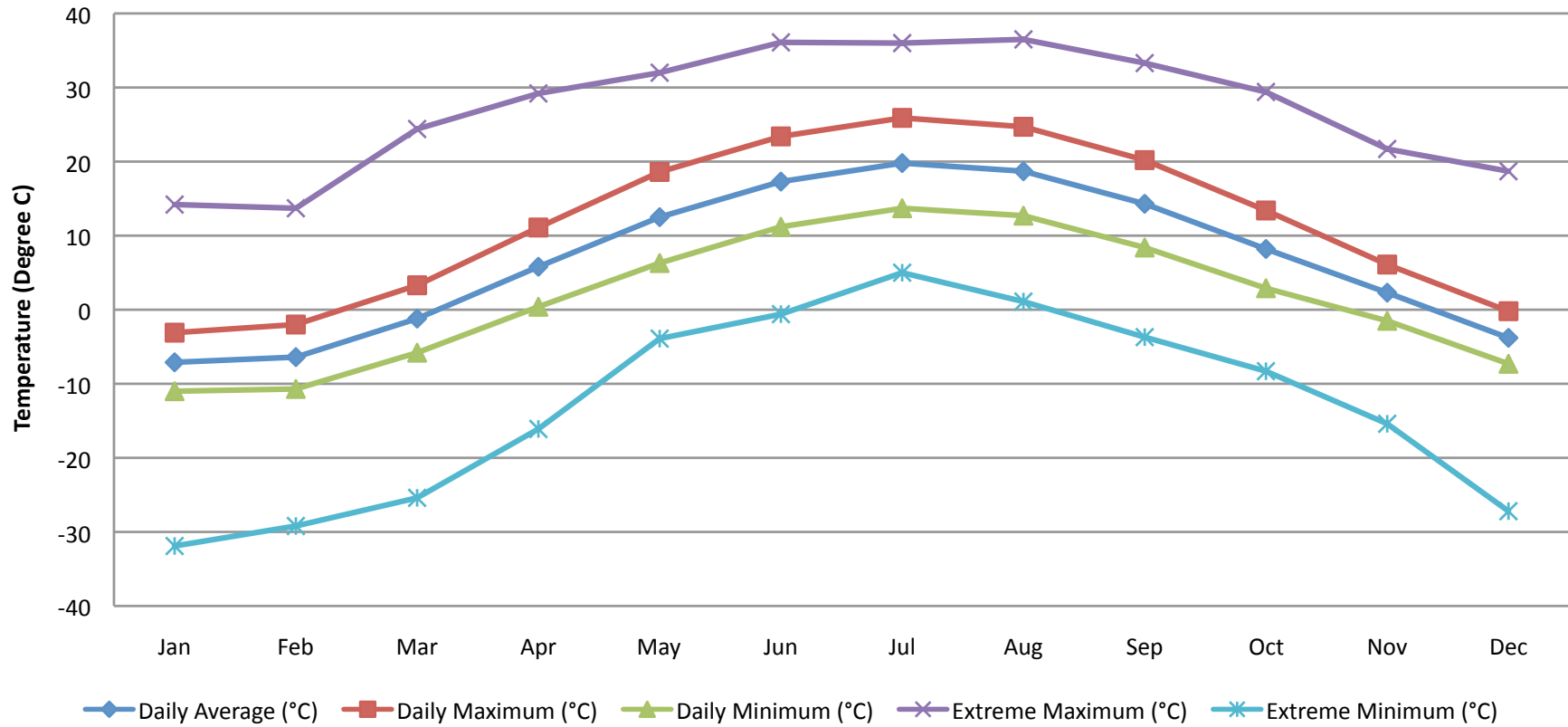


- High income differential, high at risk population
- 2,831 individuals used shelters (2007)
- 50-70 persistently homeless

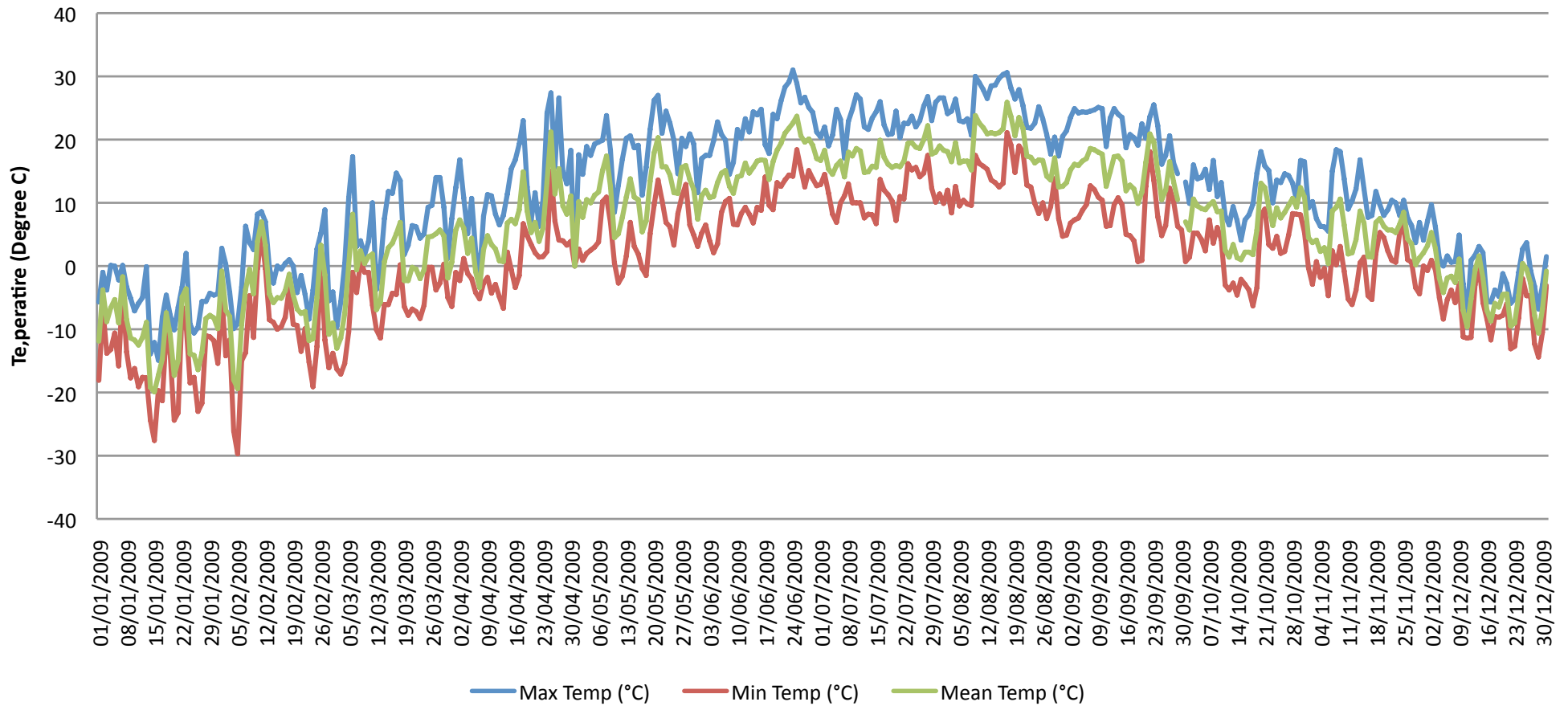
Research Objective: examine vulnerability and adaptive capacity of potentially most exposed, least able to adapt

- n=48 (10F/37M/1TG); Summer 2009

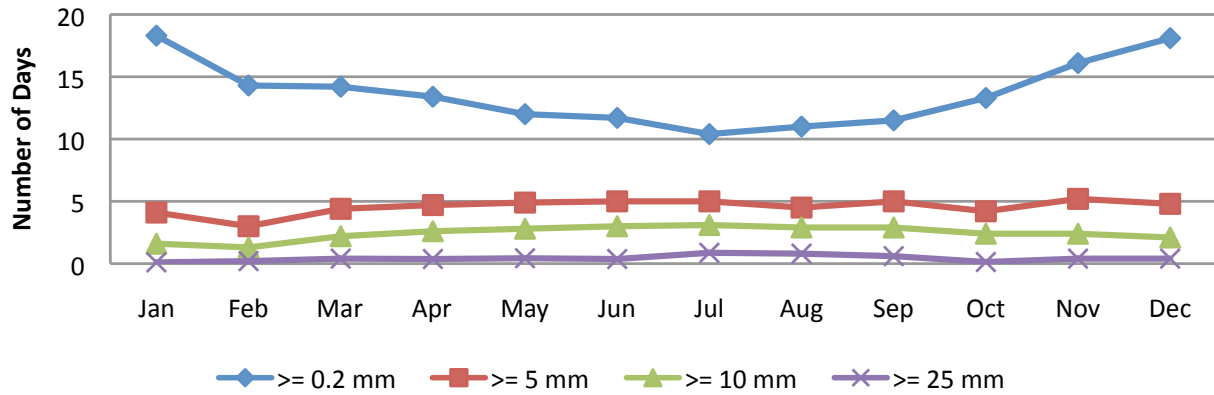
Climate Temperature Normals for Region of Waterloo 1971-2000



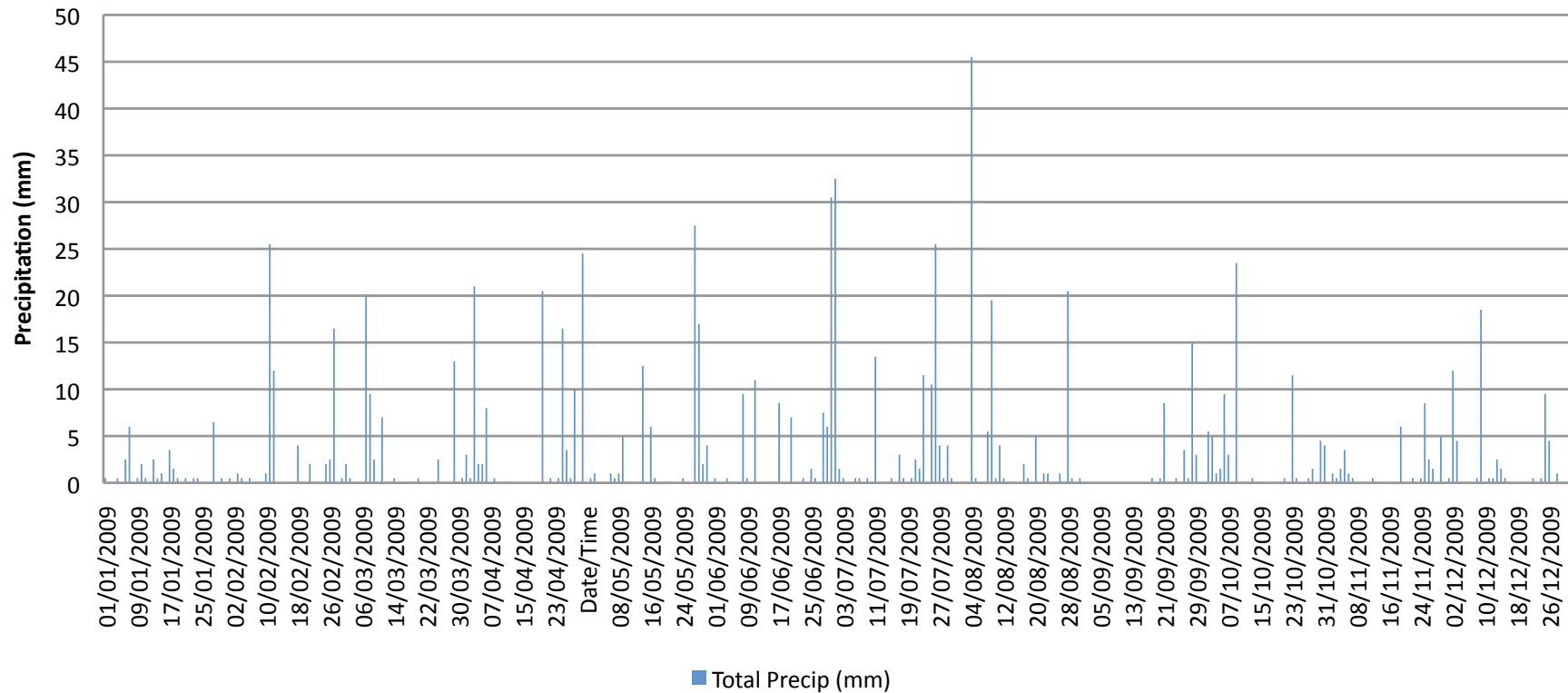
Daily Maximum, Minimum and Mean Temperatures for 2009, Region of Waterloo Airport



Days with Precipitation Norms per Month for Region of Waterloo 1971-2000



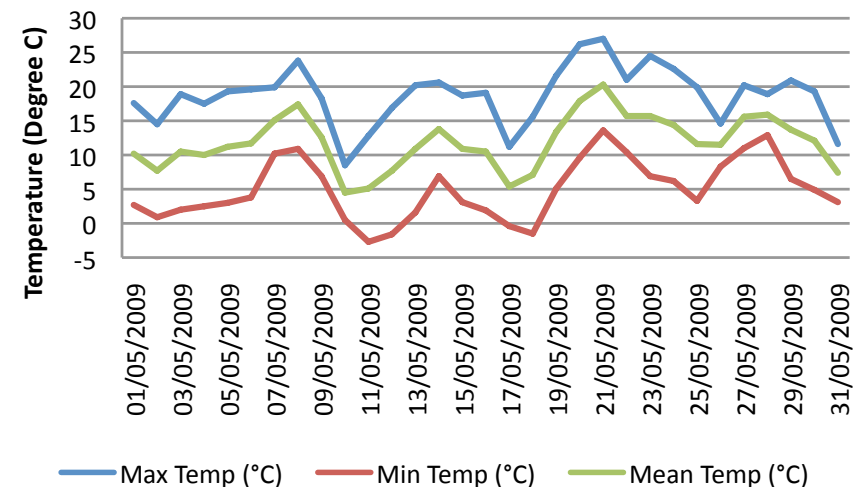
Total Precipitation per Day for 2009, Region of Waterloo Airport



Key Exposures for Homeless

- Extreme winter cold
- Winter precipitation (particularly slush)
- Heavy rain events in summer
- Summertime cold

Daily Maximum, Minimum and Mean Temperatures for May 2009, Region of Waterloo Airport



Management Strategies

- Shelter use / “Out of the Cold” program
- Heated / roofed public spaces, drop-in centres
- Stairwells, abandoned trucks, parking garages
- Public buses, coffee shops, shopping malls, jail

- ***Waterloo Region has well-developed social service system to serve homeless, but system relies on volunteers and is strained during extreme events***

“You just do what you got to survive. You learn from the people who are doing it ... The people who are experiencing (this) prior to you, you learn from them and they show you the ropes kind of thing”

“there actually has been a lot of people who have been very kind and helpful and pointed me oin the right direction and show me how to have access to showers and food”

- More experienced have better-developed management strategies, knowledge of where to get clothing, bus vouchers, meals...
- But – most strategies rely on social services, goodwill/tolerance

“you just hope on the bus and bus drivers are pretty good if you don’t have a bus ticket, you know, and it’s really bad out, they’ll tell you just ‘ok, we’ll let it go this time’ “

“you just find a place. If it’s raining and a neighbour reports that you’re sleepin’ and the cops come and check to make sure you’re alright, but if it’s raining, they won’t send you out in the rain”

- Older/more experienced security guards / bus drivers / police more tolerant
- Some services can disappear without notice (e.g. Thrift store which provided free clothing in late 2009)
- Shelter use requires documentation (social insurance number, social assistance); some fear volunteer programs on basis of religious conversion

Conclusions

- **GECHS definition of human security: “freedom to take action on one’s own behalf in response to changing environmental conditions. In particular, it focuses on the ways that environmental changes contribute to (or exacerbate) pervasive threats and critical situations, while at the same time undermining the capacity to respond to these threats. It interprets environmental change in the context of ongoing social changes, which together may affect the security of some individuals and communities.”**
- High differential adaptive capacity even among absolute homeless
- Adaptive capacity relies on provision of services and informal goodwill / voluntary sector -> not necessarily ability to take action on one’s own behalf
- Ongoing social changes increase pressure on social system; changing demographics may not support current voluntary sector
- Climate warming would have overall positive impact, but key exposures are extreme events (expect increased frequency)