

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Barriers to African-American Girls' Physical Activity

Introduction

African-American girls from lower-income families are especially at risk for obesity. They are also more likely to be physically inactive compared with girls who are more affluent and White. Where children live can either help or hinder their ability to be physically active. This study examined the relationship between perceptions of the environments surrounding schools and physical activity of African-American adolescent girls.

Key Findings

Girls were more likely to be physically active when they perceived having places to go within walking distance of school and when they lived in neighborhoods that actually had places to walk to (e.g. food stores, parks, fitness facilities). This supports the hypothesis that built environments characterized by mixed-land use and a diverse number of destinations close enough to walk to are ones that encourage physical activity. A surprising finding was that girls who perceived environments surrounding schools negatively (i.e. not having many places to go within walking distance) were more physically active.

Methods

This study collected questionnaire data from 224 African-American adolescent girls living in low-income, urban neighborhoods in Baltimore, Md. on their perceptions of the built environment surrounding their schools (i.e. presence of sidewalks, parks, and interesting destinations; crime; traffic). Objective data included physical activity measured by accelerometers and a neighborhood audit using a modified version of the Active Neighborhood Checklist.

Implications

The findings suggest that environments that deter other populations from being active may not necessarily deter children living in lower-income, urban areas from being active. The authors believe that children in under-resourced environments may perceive negative aesthetics (e.g. graffiti, trash, broken glass) as normal and are thus not prevented by them from being physically active.

SOURCE

Hager, E.R., et al. (2013). The Perceived and Built Environment Surrounding Urban Schools and Physical Activity Among Adolescent Girls. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S68-S75.

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<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9430-1>

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