

# Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity  
and Create Active Communities

## ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

## Do Pleasant and Safe Neighborhoods Promote Walking and Biking?

### Introduction

Walking or biking to work, school, or to do errands (“active transport”) can help people be more physically active. Even short bouts of physical activity, such as walking briskly for 10 minutes, can improve health. Neighborhood environments can either promote or hinder active transportation. This study examined whether neighborhood aesthetics (e.g. sidewalk cafes, street trees, clean streets) and safety factors (i.e. homicide rates and pedestrian-auto fatalities) were related to the likelihood of active transport in New York City (NYC).

### Key Findings

People living in neighborhoods with at least one sidewalk café were 10 percent more likely to walk or bike for transportation than people living in neighborhoods without any sidewalk cafes. Also, among people who reported any active transportation, a 20 percent lower frequency of active transportation was reported if they lived in neighborhoods with high homicide rates. A surprising finding was that among people living in areas with higher pedestrian fatality rates, the frequency of walking or biking for transport was 10 percent lower than residents of neighborhoods where pedestrians were less at risk of being fatally struck by a car.

### Methods

We used data from the 2003 NYC Community Health Survey (N=8,034 adults) to get information on how often people walked or biked a distance of more than 10 blocks as part of traveling to and from work, school, or to do errands. GIS data was used to gather information about environmental characteristics related to safety (e.g. traffic hazards; violent crimes) and aesthetics (e.g. presence of sidewalk cafes, street trees, and clean streets) on 164 different NYC Zip codes. We also examined the consistency of associations in high- and low-poverty areas to assess potential effect modification.

### Implications

Neighborhood aesthetic amenities or homicide prevention may help to promote active transportation. Further work is needed to understand how residents perceive and respond to neighborhood aesthetic or safety features, and to understand what strategies for neighborhood change could be most effective for promoting healthy active lifestyles.

### SOURCE

Lovasi, G.S., et al. (2013). Aesthetic Amenities and Safety Hazards Associated with Walking and Bicycling for Transportation in New York City. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S76-S85.

Open access to the full text article is available at:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9416-z>

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### CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Gina S. Lovasi  
Mailman School Public Health  
Columbia University  
722 West 168<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10032

Email: [gl2225@columbia.edu](mailto:gl2225@columbia.edu)

Phone: 212-342-0446

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