

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Neighborhood Race, Poverty, and Access to Parks and Green Space

Introduction

Blacks, Hispanics, and lower-income adults are less likely than Whites and adults with higher incomes to meet aerobic physical activity guidelines. Neighborhood poverty and residential segregation can result in environmental inequalities (e.g. inadequate parks and open spaces) that prevent these communities from being active. This study examined the relationship between neighborhood social disadvantages and access to parks and green spaces nationwide.

Key Findings

In urban areas, Black, Hispanic, or lower-income communities tended to be located closer to parks than areas that have higher incomes or were predominantly White. However, areas with higher levels of poverty and greater concentrations of Blacks and Hispanics had less green space (i.e. the percentage of vegetated land within a census tract, including developed open space, grass, shrub, and forests).

Methods

We used census data on neighborhood racial and ethnic composition and poverty rates and obtained measures of urbanization levels (i.e. population density, city size, location in or outside of metropolitan area) from the ESRI Tapestry Segmentation Database. GIS data was used to estimate neighborhood park access, and the National Land Cover Database was used to measure neighborhood green space access.

Other Findings

Rural areas had access to greater amounts of green space, compared with urban areas. The median percentage of green space in rural areas was 55 percent, in contrast to only 2.8 percent in central urban areas. Rural areas were also located much further away from parks than urban areas: the median distance to parks was 6.2 miles, as opposed to 0.5 miles in urban centers.

Implications

Parks and green space can provide opportunities for adults to be physically active. In urban areas where parks are located closer to Black, Hispanic, and lower-income communities, efforts should focus on improving the social environment (e.g. cleaning up graffiti, preventing vandalism, improving perceptions of safety) and park quality to increase park utilization and physical activity. In contrast, in rural areas where parks are located further from communities, green spaces could be used for physical activity.

SOURCE

Wen, M., et al. (2013). Spatial Disparities in the Distribution of Parks and Green Spaces in the USA. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S18-S27.

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<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9426-x>

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