

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Perceptions of Park Quality Can Impact Physical Activity and Health

Introduction

Parks can help children and families be more physically active. There is significant interest in why some parks are more effective than others at facilitating activity, but little is known about how people's perceptions of park quality are related to their physical activity and health. We surveyed people who lived near parks and examined whether their perceptions of neighborhood park quality were associated with their overall moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA), physical activity occurring in parks, and body mass index (BMI).

Key Findings

Residents' perceptions of neighborhood park quality were related to physical activity and health outcomes. Residents most strongly agreed that parks are a benefit to people living nearby. Those who had higher ratings on this tend to participate in higher levels of overall MVPA, were more active in parks during the week, and had a lower BMI. Residents with a higher BMI tend to perceive their parks as more heavily used. In addition, more active users perceived their parks as less clean.

Methods

Participants were adults living near parks in Kansas City, MO. The average age was 51 years old and 60.7 percent of participants were female. Ethnic groups represented in the sample included non-Hispanic White (67%), non-Hispanic Black (24.5%), and Hispanic/Latino (4.7%). Most participants had an annual household income under \$50,000. We surveyed participants' perceptions of neighborhood park quality, including their views on park maintenance, safety, cleanliness, accessibility and attractiveness of park facilities, how well-used the parks were, and the extent to which they felt that the parks benefited the neighborhood. We also surveyed participants about their physical activity behaviors, past park use, and demographics.

Implications

This study provides evidence that improving park quality could be an effective way to increase physical activity and promote health. The quality scale tested in this study could be used to gain perceptions information from both users and non-users of parks. Researchers, city planners, and others concerned with the relationship between parks and health should consider the effects of residents' perceptions of parks, in addition to objective park characteristics.

SOURCE

Bai, H., et al. (2013). Perceptions of Neighborhood Park Quality: Associations with Physical Activity and Body Mass Index. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S39-S48.

Open access to the full text article is available at:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9448-4>

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