

Area safety may play role in obesity

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A Pennsylvania study suggests mothers of young children are more likely to be obese when they perceive their neighborhoods as unsafe.

Researchers from The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Mathematica Policy Research and the University of Pennsylvania analyzed perceived neighborhood safety and obesity in women with young children. Connection with one's neighbors, characterized as neighborhood cohesion, did not have a significant relation to the mother's obesity.

"The characteristics of neighborhoods can influence how and where people spend their time, and unsafe neighborhoods are often thought to contribute to the obesity epidemic by decreasing outdoor activity," said study leader Dr. Hillary Burdette, a pediatrician at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "Despite a hypothesized link between neighborhood safety and obesity, this was the first study to evaluate this association among adults."

Using data collected in 20 large U.S. cities for the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, researchers focused on 2,400 women and found mothers who perceived their neighborhoods to be safer were less likely to be obese.

The percentage of obese mothers increased from 37 percent in the safest neighborhoods to 46 percent in the least safest.

The research appears in the journal *Obesity*.

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