

Children in unsafe neighborhoods risk sedentary lifestyle and obesity

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Kids living in unsafe neighborhoods face barriers to getting exercise, which could lead to them becoming overweight, a new University of Michigan indicates.

If parents think their neighborhood is unsafe, they tend to restrict their children's outdoor activities, which often leads to a more sedentary lifestyle, said Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, associate professor in the U-M School of Social Work.

"Policies aimed at reducing overweight and [obesity](#) in children should take into account the neighborhood contexts in which children live," Grogan-Kaylor said.

The study used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—and information included children's height and weight as it relates to [Body Mass Index](#) (BMI), neighborhood safety, and the time spent [watching television](#) on weekdays.

The sample included 5,886 children between the ages of 5 and 20, and tracked results in 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2000.

Mothers interviewed rated their neighborhood on a five-point scale from poor to excellent. They also addressed safety, such as rating abandoned buildings to people not respecting the rules or laws.

About 894 kids—or 15 percent of the sample—were overweight, while

another 904 kids were at risk of overweight. Minority children were more likely than whites to be overweight or at risk for overweight, the study indicated.

Nearly 17 percent of children living in unsafe neighborhoods were overweight, compared to 14 percent of children living in safe areas. Children in unsafe areas watched about 1.2 more hours of television daily than [children](#) in safe neighborhoods, the researchers said.

Parents' negative associations of living in an unsafe neighborhood correlated with children's BMI results, but these results were more evident at age 11, the study said.

Grogan-Kaylor wrote the study with Rebecca Cecil-Karb, a student in the joint doctoral program with social work and sociology.

The findings appear in the August issue of *Health and Social Work*.

Provided by University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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