

Less weight gain found among African-American women in dense urban areas

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Researchers from Boston University School of Medicine's (BUSM) Slone Epidemiology Center have found that African-American women who live in more densely populated urban areas gain less weight than those in more sprawling auto-oriented areas. The results, which appear in the current issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, were based on data collected in the Black Women's Health Study, an ongoing study of the health of 59,000 African American women conducted by the researchers since 1995.

While studies conducted at a single point in time have found higher levels of [obesity](#) among residents of sprawling areas compared to residents of more [urban areas](#), there has been little information on this topic from studies that have followed residents over time.

The researchers assessed the association of women's residential environments with weight change and the incidence of obesity during a six year period of follow-up in the Black Women's Health Study. They focused on nearly 18,000 women who lived in the New York, Chicago or Los Angeles metropolitan areas. The women's residential neighborhoods were characterized by an "urbanicity score"—considered dense urban neighborhoods.

They found that both six year weight gain and the incidence of obesity were lower among women who had high urbanicity scores as compared to those with low scores. Women who lived in suburban or rural neighborhoods were considered to have low urbanicity scores.

According to the researchers, a previous study of these women, found those who lived in denser neighborhoods walked more than women in more sprawling areas. "Policies that encourage more dense and urban residential development may have a positive role to play in addressing the obesity epidemic," said lead author Patricia Coogan, MPH, D Sc, a senior epidemiologist at the Slone Center and an associate professor of epidemiology at Boston University School of Public Health.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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