

# Walk this way: Low-income moms could see health benefits

July 22 2016, by Jared Wadley

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Credit: University of Michigan

Low-income urban mothers place a low priority on walking because of their desire to focus on other daily tasks and responsibilities, according to a new University of Michigan study.

Some initiatives aim to educate individuals about [walking](#)'s benefits and have emphasized outcomes, such as [better health](#), [disease prevention](#) and [weight control](#).

But these messages have not resonated with most, including low-income moms, who have lower levels of [physical activity](#) than other groups. People have to believe that walking is sufficiently valuable, says Michelle Segar, who directs the U-M Sport, Health, Activity Research and Policy Center and is the study's lead author.

"Walking in safe areas has the potential to bring real mental and relational benefits to low-income mothers," she said. "Walking promoters need to identify how to make walking more relevant and compelling, especially among socially disadvantaged groups."

Segar, who is a member of the Institute for Healthcare Policy & Innovation, along with colleagues from nine universities, investigated what walking meant to low-income urban mothers and what messages must be promoted to make the exercise relevant in their lives.

About 50 ethnically diverse respondents from seven cities participated in the study from October 2013 to February 2014. Participants averaged in age of 35 with two children in grade school.

Among the questions asked were why they walked, what counts as valid walking, and where exercise fits in daily priorities.

Some of the study's findings were:

- There was little agreement among participants about whether walking "counted" as exercise. Those who disagreed cited walking did not generate sufficient exertion to count.
- Some said that when they walked, they did it for specific reasons

such as losing weight or getting to work. Others said they liked to walk for more immediate benefits such as clearing their minds or having time to share with friends.

- Many did not like walking in their neighborhood because they felt unsafe due to roaming dogs, shootings or drug sales.

Segar said future promotions can help mothers place a higher value on walking by framing it as a way they can connect with others during leisure time or use walking as a way to revitalize themselves.

The study, which was funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Physical Activity Policy Research Network, appears in the Journal of Transport & Health.

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Walk this way: Low-income moms could see health benefits (2016, July 22) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-07-low-income-moms-health-benefits.html>

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