

Research explores social determinants of health disparities for obesity and related chronic diseases

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The Mid-South Transdisciplinary Collaborative Center for Health Disparities Research has adopted a novel conceptual framework that considers the social context in which people live in order to understand the pathways and mechanisms that generate different health outcomes in obesity and related chronic diseases for people in vulnerable populations.

The Mid-South TCC published its findings to date in a special supplement to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

The study examined the relationship between street connectivity – a measure of walkability for the local environment – and obesity risk using electronic health records. Linking [electronic health records](#) with social determinants of health and environmental measures could help researchers understand the causes of obesity and chronic disease and suggest strategies for addressing the disparities in these conditions.

It also studied the association between perceived discrimination and obesity among African-Americans, clarifying the role of perceived stress and [health behaviors](#). The authors report that health behaviors lead to suppression, rather than mediation, between perceived discrimination and weight status and between stress and weight status.

The study provided a clarification of the contributions of race, income,

education and perceived discrimination to systemic inflammation measured by four biomarkers. The findings suggest that inflammation-reducing interventions should focus on African-Americans and individuals facing socioeconomic disadvantages, especially low education levels.

The work of the Mid-South TCC bridges biomedical and psychosocial research. This transdisciplinary approach places biological and behavioral factors in a [social context](#), with the ultimate goal of identifying key intervention points for specific populations.

"The Mid-South TCC investigates the complex issue of [health disparities](#), specifically focusing on the social, cultural and environmental factors driving the heightened vulnerability of racial/ethnic minorities and disadvantaged people to obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other health conditions," said UAB Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center Director Mona Fouad, M.D. "The Mid-South TCC uses a 'team science' approach, bringing together investigators from numerous scientific backgrounds to facilitate a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of [health](#) disparities and the best mechanisms for combatting them."

More information: *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, [www.ajpmonline.org/issue/S0749-3797\(16\)X0017-7](http://www.ajpmonline.org/issue/S0749-3797(16)X0017-7)

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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